

Memories of World War II and the Korean War



FLAG RAISING ON IWO JIMA, FEBRUARY 25, 1945

Lifescapes Writing Groups

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Introduction

War is one of the principal actors on the stage of human history. From localized, minor clashes in various countries, to the agonizing horrors of wars which involve the whole world, such as we have witnessed in the past century, the art of war has been honed and perfected. Each year the human race is presented with more efficient means of destroying, torturing and denigrating itself. As war begins to cross the footlights bearing the new trappings of more modern, and technologically efficient armies, the audience cannot bear to look upon it in full face, but takes glimpses in horror, yet in anticipation. Yes, humanity denounces war, but is so fascinated by it that soon it is drawn into it and it contributes its gold and natural resources to support it, even to placing its youth in the path of the juggernaut in hopes that the destruction will not reach the core of the homeland. Leaders promise that the latest war is the one to end all wars, yet the seeds of war are already implanted in the soil of the peace treaties they sign. It is a very serious question as to whether humans can live together without conflict.

It is in this framework that we decided to invite members of the Lifescapes Writing Group to share some of their wartime experiences, whether they were actual combatants or not. In this anthology living authors recount their own experiences of war. They bear witness to the nobility of the human spirit, and the gallantry and humor with which they have participated in World War II and the Korean War. Here we find humor, bravery, honor, respect for their fellows, as well as sorrow and regret. Some scars have been revealed, physical as well as emotional. Reading these stories will bring to light some new aspects of war and help everyone to share in history making events.

In some stories these authors allow us to glimpse the intensity of living under the threat of war and death. Annette Sprecher, a young British girl during WWII, gives us a vivid account of what it was like to flee from Gibraltar to Spain to France and back to England where she was evacuated the countryside along with some of her family to escape the intensive bombing of London. Their home at one place was actually hit by the dreaded "Doodle Bug" or German V1 rocket. Bob Stelle wrote piece rich in humor, one of which recounts the exoneration of a soldier accused of murder. Dominic Licata recounts the many changes in his life and those of his family when he joined the armed forces and goes to Europe. The story of "Uncle Slugg" recounts the many changes in his life and those of his family when he joined Patton's tank corps and spends sixty days in combat in Europe.

All the stories are well written and spell binding. They illustrate the amazing ability of the human spirit to live through war and prevail in spite of the emotional and physical scars they carry. Old memories will resurface as you read them. Hopefully they will also give some perspective on the conflicts we are experiencing today.

Esther Early
Margo Daniels
ElderCollege Lifescapes Leaders

Christmas Eve 1944

Robert Stelle

Marseille, France

On Christmas Eve, the Germans dropped a number of paratroops into Marseille. All were dressed in American uniforms and could speak English. Their mission, I found out later, was to locate a previously hidden cache of arms and free all the German prisoners that were held in a prison stockade in Marseille. The mission failed completely. All were killed or captured.

That very night I was sergeant of the guard. T-5 Danny Dingle, Daniel J. McCole was his real name; he was corporal of the guard and about half drunk as always. I stopped in the mess hall about midnight to get some coffee and try to sober up McCole. There was a fuss going on near the coffee pot. A sergeant from the 326th had captured one of the German paratroopers. Sergeant Charlie Spell was loud and drunk. His right hand held a Belgium .25 automatic pressed just above the German's nose. His left hand held a cup of coffee.

"I'm gonna kill this son of a bitch soon as I finish my coffee," he yelled out. My helmet, web belt, and .45 automatic indicated that I was on guard duty. Danny carried a shotgun.

One of the 326th guys recognized me and ran over.

"Jesus, Stelle, Charlie's gonna kill this guy. You better do something."

Yeah, I thought. I better do something. What? Charlie Spell is in another outfit and



outranks me by three stripes. Even if I am on duty, will he listen to me drunk as he is? Is the guy really a German?

I walked over toward Charlie. McCole followed.

“McCole,” I ordered. “Sober up! Level that gun!” McCole was suddenly sober.

“Charlie,” I said, very quietly, “Come over here with me for a minute; McCole will watch your guy.”

Charlie hesitated for a few seconds, pushed his prisoner down onto a bench, and walked along with me to the back of the mess hall.

“Listen, Charlie,” I said. “I know you outrank me, but you can’t kill this guy. Give him to me and I’ll get him to the Provost Marshal and he’ll be taken care of.”

“I’m gonna kill the SOB!” he started back still carrying the Belgium .25.

“You do and you’ll get a court martial and go to Leavenworth for life.”

“Life?” he asked.

Robert Stelle

“Take the SOB then.” He said and went

back to the coffee pot.

“McCole, put him in the jeep.” I said. When the prisoner was seated in the front and McCole in the back with his shotgun, I turned to the German kid.

“If you try to jump or grab the wheel or me, McCole will blow you in half. You understand?”

“Yes, sir,” he answered in perfect English.

“How old are you?” I asked. “Are you scared?”

“Seventeen years. Yes, I am afraid. I think you will kill me,” he answered.

“We’re taking you to the Provost Marshal. He’ll put you in jail. Now be quiet and don’t move.”

Thank God the Marshal’s office was only a block away. I just saved another life.

When World War II ended, Robert Stelle enrolled in Southern Illinois University. After graduation, he bought a retail furniture store in northern Illinois, and in ten years, he owned three stores. Later he worked in a variety of national corporations and also purchased a number of apartment buildings. He retired and lives in Nevada, where his hobby is writing novels.

Last Christmas with Dad

Monica Greco

If we could only know what future holds many things would be handled differently, but as things stand, the element of surprise and unanswered questions trail along our lives, leaving us regretful, sorrowful or even, sometimes, grateful for our ignorance.

That Christmas, veiled in the literal and psychological darkness of the last years of the Second World War, the last one with my Dad, was actually the first one I could remember. The memories of that slow moving late afternoon keep themselves crisp, colorful and parading in front of my mind's eyes with such rich details as yesterday's events. Now I feel more inclined to call them back for comfort when holidays are coming near.

Looking over that long past day, I have the feeling that I see it more like an out of body experience than a recollection. I see every detail from above rather than from inside. I see my little self examining everything about me with intense joy and curiosity. My Mom and Dad are in the room with me. The focus of my attention is the newest thing in the room, a huge fir tree decorated with globes and burning candles, and candies wrapped in

sparkling covers. I was just told that because I was a good girl, Santa, who knows every child, brought me that tree. I was beyond surprised hearing and seeing all that, I was fascinated

I must have been a bit over two years old, a chubby child in my young parents' life, exhibiting a small copy of my father's face, and, at the time, totally overtaken with wonder at the twisting movement of the colorful transparent globes hanging from my first Christmas tree. My favorite was a pale green globe, which kept turning and twisting in the flickering light of the candle under it. Its iridescent silvery patterns were a mystery to me. I still could see my Mom and Dad smiling and talking to each other and watching the surprise in my wide-open eyes. For once I did not want to speak, nor to be held. I was content to watch this interesting newcomer in our living room, the tree and its moving globes.

I was sitting on the soft sofa, just opposite the tree, with one leg folded under me and the other one dangling halfway down. I had a pretty little dress made of the same material my Mom's dress was made of but

mine had a lot of lace and little ribbons on the chest and on the fluffed up sleeves. The feeling of contentment, the smell of scented burning candles, and the fascinating movements of the colorful transparent globes made the room mysterious, and I truly wanted to sit quietly on my own and stare at the beautiful, new view.



Monica's Father, Eugene Grecu

My Dad came over and jokingly picked me up, set me on his shoulders, and brought me near the tree. From up there I could not see my favorite green globe. I wanted to be set free; I twisted my body and tried to slide down from his shoulders. Dad set me on his knees as he sat down in the armchair with his back to the tree. Sitting on my Dad's lap was the most cherished place in the world for me, but not just then, as the green globe was twisting back and forth, and I could not see it from there. To escape from Dad's embrace, I did the only thing I knew would make him let me go: I stuck his crisp, beautiful upper pocket-handkerchief completely into the pocket with my little right hand. He pretended to scold me for it, shaking me high up in the air. I used to

laugh loudly every time we played that game, which made my parents laugh, too. That time though, I truly wanted to return to the sofa and just stare at the green globe's dance. So, I ran away from my Dad to the corner of the sofa and climbed up on it—not an easy task, believe me, when one had short legs, but I did it with determination. My Dad was disappointed I knew, but how could I have missed that new show?

Next thing I can remember was seeing my Dad open the door of his wardrobe. He wanted to take his winter coat out, and planned to go with Mom for a walk in the snow. Usually, I would have asked to be taken along, but not that time! I had my new show in the warm room. The door flung back and hit the fir tree, pushing some of its branches against each other. One burning candle got under a branch and in seconds the tree was ablaze. Globe after globe exploded in hundreds of pieces, my favorite green globe, too. From my remote place on the sofa, I saw my parents trying to put out the fire. The room was filled instantly with the smell of burned fir tree needles. In minutes the fire was out, but there was



Monica and her mother.

nothing left of the beauty by which I had spell a few moments before. Warm tears ran down my cheeks. I could not open my mouth. I did not know till then that one can cry without a sound, but then, there were so many things I didn't know at that time . . .

That was our last Christmas with my dear Dad, and also, as I mentioned, the first one I could remember.

The Romanians believe that if a Christmas tree goes on fire somebody dies, or a major misfortune will happen to the family that has

that tree. In our case it definitely was proven to be true. My father died in the Second World War soon after. That was his last Christmas on earth.

Monica Grecu was born in Romania and experienced the War there. See her related story about the death of her father on page 18 in this collection. Monica emigrated to the United States, where she is presently a Lecturer in the English Department at the University of Nevada, Reno. Monica is one of the co-founders of the Lifescapes program.

An English Schoolgirl's War

Annette Sprecher

Running for the train in the blackout, the bright yellow doll's beret, finished just hours before, crocheted tearfully, was lost forever. I have not crocheted since.

That was the beginning of my war, leaving aside carrying a gasmask around for the previous two months, and probably an identity card, too, even at ten.

My stepfather was the manager for Shell in Gibraltar, our home since 1937. So, since this war would "be over by Christmas!" we were traveling there by ferry, train, and car, not by sea this time. I was on my way home to Gibraltar with my mother (eight months pregnant), my nineteen-month old sister, and the new nanny, since my much loved Olive was not coming this time. Olive had been with us, first at age fourteen, to care for me in the afternoons, then full time, but never trained as a nanny. We still correspond.

I remember barrage balloons over Paris, a delay of a day or more on the Spanish side of the border, and a train trip which must have been hell for all but me. The Spanish Civil War had just ended, track was being laid as we went, food was more than scarce,

and whatever food we had brought was heated over some sort of solid fuel. We spent a night in Madrid with friends. I recall enjoying rice pudding with cinnamon. Even I could feel there was something tense and secretive about it and now, looking back, I think these friends were doubtless anti-Franco, not a good thing to be. Then on to Seville where my stepfather met us, and we drove the rest of the way.

My sister Judy was born in early December. The war continued and in 1940, women and children were evacuated to various places. I had already seen flotsam from torpedoed convoys, even a dead dog, washed up on the beach. Women and children were evacuated here and there to various places. Not the local Gibraltarians, as their turn came later. So, leaving Daddy on the Rock with the cannon and the apes, we sailed with the family to Casablanca in Morocco. We were with another family who were good friends: mother, son Antho (Anthony), my age, a younger daughter and nanny. We lived in a small hotel, run by M. Benoit, with a pool well patronized by crabs, into which the son of our friend pushed me. After that we got on better! In fact we remained so until well into the 1960s. His parents came to my

wedding and we were friends with him and his wife Maggie; then he decided he wanted to start a new family with a new wife.

I loved the dining room across the road on pilings over the sea, and I enjoyed my introduction to diluted wine. No sea bathing due to an enormously dangerous undertow. Antho and I went into the city by bus several times a week for private lessons in French, or maybe just French lessons.

Another quotable wrong prediction: “France won’t fold this time.” When it did, and Italy joined the Axis, our bus trips could be quite unpleasant. It must have been that way for some reason. Before, if we lost our tickets, for instance, the conductor would just say, “ça ne fait rien” (no matter), since we were children and regular passengers from terminus to terminus. Afterward they acted quite differently, and we couldn’t understand it at all. Now I realize that the French North African possessions were part of the Vichy Government in France, which was formed by German sympathizers like Pierre Laval and Marechal Petain in Southern France and existed until 1944. Of course the Allies invaded North Africa in 1942 and made Casa Blanca theirs so the Vichy Government lost control there.

In late July or early August, we had to return to England, transferring from a freighter to a P&O liner at Gibraltar—no shore leave, though—crowded with mainly Polish soldiers who had escaped the Germans and were going to England to fight again. It was after Dunkirk, and Plymouth, in the west, was being bombed frequently, day and night. It was decided that in order to stop getting the passengers on deck only to go below again, which had happened several times, we would be landed by tender. That ship was too big a target, loaded with 500 or so soldiers, soon to fight against the Axis. Amazingly, we got our entire luggage back

and the sewing machine still worked.

We descended on my charming Chilean step-grandmother and other family members near Windsor for a month or so. The family had come to England after the failure of the copper industry in Chile. My stepfather and his father had been in that business. One day I was riding my bike round and round a tree to reach 100 miles on the milometer—which promptly broke!—when up the drive with one suitcase came Francesca, our Gibraltarian cook and my good friend. Somehow, with just an address on a piece of paper and speaking no English, she had found her family! She was welcome help in cooking for such a houseful.

In September I was shipped off to an evacuated boarding school in the country. Many, maybe all, schools in the southeast—Bomb Alley—and other prime targets were lodged in various accommodations such as hotels and manor houses away from London and other industrial areas. I hated it with a passion and spending most of the Christmas holidays there in quarantine, and Chicken Pox didn’t make it any better. I was so pleased when my mother discovered that the head mistresses were lesbians and pulled me out. Naturally, I had no idea why; that was certainly not acceptable, or mentionable, in the 1940s.

By now the family and Francesca had moved to Devon in the west of England, renting a charming four-hundred-year-old thatched cottage from friends. It was three thatched cottages knocked into one—warm in winter and cool in summer, and with front and back doors in a straight line. The ducks would sometimes take a short cut, even stopping off at the downstairs toilet en route!

The next two terms were fun, though

schoolwork did get done, going to another evacuated school, a boy's prep school. Just three girls and the eight- to thirteen-year-old boys! In the summer I rode my fat lazy pony even though walking was quicker. It was, after all, a status symbol. No one else took a pony to school, and I didn't gain any points with the boys for my lack of prowess playing cricket. It made me feel important. I would often go off, sandwich in hand, for the whole day, alone or not, riding around the area. Danger to children was not a concern then.

Before the winter term, we moved south of Exeter to a bigger house, as Daddy was coming home. So I was accepted, reluctantly, by yet another displaced school—both boarding and day. I cycled the two or so miles back and forth each day, hoping not to be caught dishonoring the school colors of my blazer by eating the occasional jam doughnut en route. After Christmas 1941, I stayed on as boarder when the family moved closer to London to be closer to Daddy's office, a few towns away. I spent the rest of my school days there, the last year back "home" in Kent, leaving in 1946.

But we had our excitements: Plymouth was still bombed and was close enough for the warning to be sounded. Hearing that sound down to the last gasp is horrible.

The house my parents rented from other friends was large and rather plain except for its leaded windows. It had a bedroom, sitting room, and bathroom for a maid, several outhouses and a large garden. There were two small fields, a copse with a stream running through it down to the village and beyond, a small orchard, big lawn, lovely herbaceous borders, and a fine vegetable garden.

The whole was wonderfully cared for by a

surly old man who came as part of the deal and from whom we bought vegetables. He didn't like small children on "his" turf, and much later on, when David was born in 1943, wherever his pram was placed on the lawn while he napped, that lawn had to be mowed.

We kept chickens and ducks in one field and my mother and I cycled quite a distance to bring home goslings to get ready for Christmas. The ducks would disappear downstream to the village until we dammed the stream with chicken wire. In the copse we had hutches for a great many rabbits to supplement the meat ration and be available for the unexpected guest. The one field was not cut in the summer but was contracted out for grazing.

I spent the spring term of 1943 home from school to help out before David was born in April. I was mainly in charge of the rabbits but also did the shopping in the village on my bike and probably twice a week went into town early by bus—no cars then—to shop. I would join the fish queue with instructions as to what to try and buy. People were really kind and helpful since I knew nothing about fish, which was not rationed. If my mother got there before I was served, she took my place and I went on to the dog-meat shop. For our meat, we had to register with a specific butcher, and ours was in another village not too far from home. In fact that butcher shop only closed a couple of years ago, and the other, and original, shop is still thriving about twenty miles away.

Despite being away from Bomb Alley, we still had our excitements at school. I remember spending a good part of a night, gas masks to hand, underneath dining room tables while the Luftwaffe made a random raid on Exeter, a mere two miles away, as they did on many cities at that time. But we

had to go to class in the morning. No giving in to Hitler! Our classrooms were in an old mill house with assembly and other functions in the adjacent stone barn. It was a steep nature walk until we were considered old enough to ride bicycles. It was downhill in the morning but a stiff walk back in the afternoon, carrying books, and for lunch in between. You had to push a bike, too, as a three-speed was the most there was and few of us had that.

So it was school as usual after the raid, but homework was replaced with bucket brigades carrying water up from the river by a steep path, across the road and up to the bathrooms. We filled the baths way above the black painted five inch bathing allowance line and added some wildlife, too. We set tables with as few serving pieces as possible and washed up after cold meals with cold water for a few days. We thought it was fun. Burnt paper from the city library blew all over the place and there was a big influx of day girls from the bombed city schools.

When my mother visited a few days after the raid, despite knowing Exeter very well, she had trouble figuring out where she was. Few, if any, historic places were lost, but the organ loft of the cathedral received a direct hit. Listening to a grand piano under a high tarpaulin in such a lofty building was really eerie. Later on, the choir school performed "The Mikado" to raise funds, and I'll always remember the three little maids in their kimonos and black boots.

Then there were the military maneuvers. Apparently our layout of river, canal, and railroad was very similar to a key area in Normandy, so in the weeks before D-day, on June 6, 1944, there was always the possibility of turning a corner and finding a soldier crouched there waiting for the enemy. One Sunday the school was closed

but the church was not, but our hopes of not having to attend the school's evening service—after all, we had already been to matins!—were dashed when the officer in charge gave us safe conduct.

On and off for more than fifty years I wondered where the Normandy launch location might have been. Then I heard Stephen Ambrose talking on the radio about his short book *Pegasus Bridge*, and after reading it I am convinced that a small part of it covered the maneuvers around our area. We also had quite a lot of American troops in the area. The powers that be apparently considered them a danger to unsophisticated English schoolgirls, so the order went out that we must only venture forth in groups of four or more. That probably made them seem much more interesting as we watched them pass by from our windows!

In the early summer of 1944 the "Doodlebugs" or V1 rockets were being launched against the southeast and London. These were, I suppose, the first guided missiles and were followed later by the V2s, which were being sent over to southeast England and London. The V1 Doodlebugs often carried incendiary bombs under their wings, and when the engines cut out you knew one was nearby, knew it was on its way down to explode. Many people said the V2s were worse, because you didn't know they were coming until after the impact. I never had any first hand knowledge of those. My parents wanted me to stay in school for at least half the summer holidays but I flatly refused. As it turned out, I was home for our personal Doodlebug. These were not very accurate, and two hit our village in the daytime after we had left, one on the school and one on a block of flats just up the road. I don't remember if we ever knew about casualties and damage. There was an important factory in the area

and I am not sure whether it was ever hit.

However, ours was at night and, since the house was well back from the road, we were saved by the roadside trees. Daddy was out with the dog and heard the engine cut out so he ran to warn us and got cuts on his head from falling roof tiles. No one else was hurt, but a chest got wedged against the door into the maid's room. We had a nice lady and her son living there to be closer to her husband stationed at an anti-aircraft battery not far away. She was also a great cook and did wonders with the rations. Daddy finally managed to get the chest clear of the door, and then, I suppose, an ambulance must have come to take him to hospital. I very definitely remember that he was not best pleased to wake up the next day between two German prisoners of war. Somehow, my mother and I walked all over the house that night in bare feet and never got cut. We must have had guardian angels. We were also lucky that the air raid warden on duty that night was a good friend and we all ended up in the big shelter they had built, just in case, because they had six children and other residents. Nanny was away at that time, and we had a Spanish refugee staying overnight who went into hysterics. The dog ran away but turned up again a couple of days later. Next day my mother and I in borrowed clothes cleaned up the mess, rescued clothes, and other items, while other people, presumably sent by some authority or other, did the heavy work.

We were really surprised at the extraordinary things blast can do. The lead from the windows was balled up like a handkerchief stuffed in a pocket. We found it even at the far end of the field, together with other things from the house. My stamp collection was all over the garden, which I didn't mind since I was bored with it anyway. My philatelist godfather, however, was very unhappy at my attitude. As we sat on the

doorstep surveying the rubble, broken china and other things, I'll always remember my mother remarking that now no one would know what we or the V1 had broken.

A day or so later, if I remember rightly, I went to stay with old friends, while the rest of the family descended on Abuelita, my step-grandmother, again. I joined them after a week or so, and then we all moved into a very nice private hotel in Chepstow, on the Welsh border on the Wye River, near a ruined castle. At the now uninhabitable house, I had often escaped my annoying younger sister by going onto the garage roof with books, holiday homework, and yellow tomatoes. Now, in this new place, there was a huge Cedar of Lebanon which I could climb into for the same purpose. In September it was back to school for me, and shortly after Daddy was posted to Lisbon, Portugal, and in December the rest of the family followed. I spent Christmas and Easter holidays with the family who had taken us in after our V1 episode.

For me and for my classmates school life was concentrated on the upcoming national exams in June. All the students around the age of fifteen took these exams set by Oxford, Cambridge, or London universities. These were scary and very important, being a stepping stone to university entrance. In fact, if you did well enough, you could bypass the next step. That meant work, work, endless trial papers and revision, revision, revision. But on May 8, 1945, it was VE (Victory in Europe) Day and the whole country celebrated. Who cared what Hitler thought or about exams that day!

That morning some friends and I cycled the two miles or so to Topsham, where I had lived when I went to Ashford School, and we were allowed to ring the bells of the ancient church. No church bells had been rung in the country for nearly six years, but

that day they were heard in cities, towns and villages all over the land. In the afternoon, everyone went to Exeter to the cinema. We were supposed to get to a film on the life of Woodrow Wilson if we hadn't already seen it. It was amazing just how many seniors seemed to have done so. For us, Deanna Durbin in "A Hundred Men and a Girl" was far more appealing. But no matter which cinema one might be at, there was no escaping the devastating and unbelievable footage shown by the newsreel, the first pictures from a concentration camp, Bergen-Belsen. But that evening there was dancing and singing in the village streets, pupils, staff, and villagers together, and we could forget those scenes for now.

The two weeks of exams came and went and we waited until some time in August for the results, a nail biting time. Usually that class didn't do a great deal more in the way of formal lessons before the term ended in July but this year we were co-opted to help pack up and prepare for the return to Ashford itself in Kent, where I spent my last year. Life was more circumscribed and "proper" there as compared with the relative freedom of the country.

I flew out to Lisbon to join my family for the summer holidays in 1945 before spending that final year in England. Civilian air travel was a far cry then from what it became later on—it was neither comfortable nor glamorous. When it became better, I wanted to be a stewardess but was too young, too short, and wore glasses. How things have changed. At that time passengers were given 24-hour notice and took a train

to Bournemouth on the south coast along with towel and soap in their luggage. Until you reached the airport the next morning you didn't know whether the flight would be by land or seaplane. In my case, it was by land plane and my nervousness—after all I was on my own—was not improved on hearing gravel from the runway hitting the fuselage and thinking something was wrong. I was also responsible for several circuits over Lisbon while they tried to clear my blocked ear. That ear is still suspect.

On the way we refueled at Bordeaux and wonderful French bread was brought on board such as we hadn't seen in Britain since 1939 and wouldn't for some time. In fact, some rationing was still in effect though largely ignored as late as 1954.

So, my war was over, and I, together with everyone else, got on with life in this new world. As I said before, the sound of an air raid siren still turns my stomach, but any other hang-ups I may have had have long since been forgotten.

I did, however, keep a couple of good habits which I still practice: I'm careful with water use and also with electric lights!

Annette was born in Essex, England, and spent her early years in wartime England and traveled to Gibraltar and Spain. She married an American in 1956. They resided in England until 1981, when they came to the United States, finally settling in Reno because they liked the scenery. She says this was a good decision.

Military Service: 1942-1945

Dominic Licata

I grew up in California—Pomona—and was working in a garage as a mechanic apprentice learning how to paint cars and work on electric motors and gas car engines.

On that Sunday, December 7th, I'll never forget—we heard on the radio that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. We all thought it was a joke. Then we went across the street where we got our soft drinks and were told again that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. There was a lot of confusion among the people all around. No one knew what to do or what to say.

When I went to school the next day, President Roosevelt gave his speech, which we heard on the radio in the Assembly Hall. We were all energized, and six of my best friends decided we would go down and sign up in the army or navy. At the Army recruiting station in downtown Pomona, we found out we were all too young, except one named McMillan. He was already eighteen so he went ahead and signed up.

I went down to the recruiting office again when I was eighteen in 1942. I joined the army, but maybe I was lucky because they put me in the Army Air Corps and told me to report to Arlington, California, which was an induction center. We were given our first

army meal, which consisted of steak, potatoes, beans and milk or coffee. This was a great meal, because many of us never ate this well at home. We went to some temporary buildings, which were two stories and held 64 men (32 on each floor). I slept on a top bunk on the first floor. This was my first night in the army.

The next day we were awakened at 5 a.m. in a rude manner. After eating a hearty breakfast, we marched to the supply depot and received our uniforms and other clothing, which were stuffed in a duffel bag. We received two pairs of shoes, which were not my size, and the uniforms weren't my size either. This made me feel like an elephant walking down the street. Then we marched to the infirmary where we received our shots. Later we went to take our intelligence test. After a week, I was put on a troop train, heading for Miami Beach.

It was quite a sight to look out from the station and to see all those hotels in Miami! We all thought we were going to some swamp area or something. They didn't tell us we were going to live in hotels! Our group was billeted in a hotel known as The Tides, a twelve story building. There were lots of hotels all around. We met our top man real quick, a Private First Class from

Tennessee. At that time, a PFC was almost like a general. He taught us the ropes for almost five weeks. He was pretty good, but I don't know why they never did promote him. He always stayed a PFC. Everybody else got to be sergeants. We went through our basic training and I couldn't believe this was really the Army, because the food was out of this world there, and everything we did we thought was fine.

One thing I remember about Miami Beach was the movie star Preston Foster, who was a rookie like the rest of us. We were assigned KP duty one morning and Preston Foster was very determined he would not do KP duty.

The PFC said, "Are you sure you don't want to do KP?"

He said he didn't, and the PFC said, "Fine."

We didn't know what happened to him until we got back and saw him out front of the Victor Hotel, which was next to our hotel, and they had him scrubbing the sidewalk. He was scrubbing the sidewalk (six or seven feet wide and fifty feet long to the street curb) with a hand brush and some GI soap that really hurt when you used it. They wouldn't let him stop until he reached the end of the street.

After six weeks of basic training, I was assigned to Lowry Field in Colorado, an aerial gunnery school, where I learned how to operate a gun turret and how to shoot 50 caliber machine guns and do other operations. I was there four weeks and then assigned to Langley Field, Virginia, to the 3rd Sea Search Attack Squadron, made up of B-24 bombers. All we really did at that time was patrol the Atlantic Ocean for German submarines, but we never did see one. A couple of times we thought we did but found out we had been mistaken. That was

my tour at Langley Field.

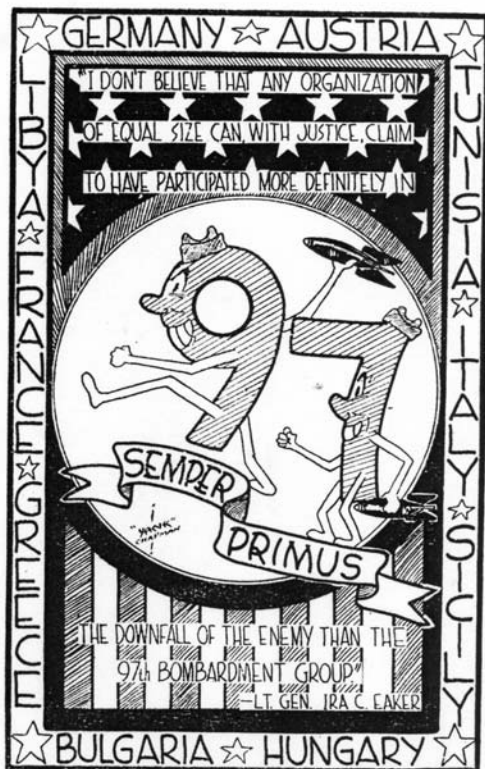
After about six months, I went to Greensboro, NC, for overseas training. This was the first time I realized I was in the army, for this was mainly infantry training. We had a 30-mile hike one time with a 25-30 pound pack and I've never been so tired in my life. We had a lot of guys that fell out. We were all in the Air Corps but they taught us how to jump off bridges, how to use jujitsu, and judo. We got all types of weapons training, such as rifle, Garand, Springfield, 45 pistol, Thompson sub-machine guns, and training in hand-to-hand combat. We spent about three weeks there. We all had to check the bulletin board daily to see if we were on the shipping list. On completion of the training, you had to be on standby with your bags packed. They told us what kind of uniform to put on. When we found out we had the greens, the OD, we were all guessing where we were going to go. After a day of waiting, my name was up there and I had to report to a certain area. It took us about three hours to get on the ship. All of a sudden, you could feel the ship swaying. We were under way, but we wouldn't know the destination until later.

We talked to a couple of sailors, and they said we were going to be with a convoy and we were just moving out to the ocean. We were just out of the bay. That is the first time I ever got seasick. I could fly in a plane and do loops with no problem, but when we got out in the ocean with the big swells, I got the first signs of seasickness.

After another day, they let us out of the bottom of the ship and we found out we were on a troop ship, the United States. It had been a luxury liner at the time, trying to compete with the French ship, Normandy, and the Queen Mary that the British had built. However, it sure wasn't a luxury liner when we got on it. The area I was on used

to be the gym, but no matter where I was on the ship, I was still seasick. Meals were served two times a day, and by the time you got through the line, it was time to get in line again. I'd say there were about 20,000 soldiers on board. I was unable to keep food down, so my buddy suggested I try some candy. He handed me a Butterfinger, and that stayed down so at the PX I got a box of Butterfingers and lived on that for about three days.

In the North Atlantic we ran into a bad storm. The ship vibrated like you were trying to move the ship with your stomach and couldn't do it. The rumor was we were going to England, but when we saw land, it was Casablanca in Africa. After a day and a half waiting to get off the ship we were transported by truck from Casablanca to Tunisia. We left Casablanca in the middle of the night when it was half decently cool, because we knew during the day it would be awfully hot.



We were on 6 x 6 trucks to our destination in Tunisia. It was a very dusty ride but not much we could do about it. Anyway, I was glad we didn't need to hike to where we had to go. The roads certainly were not like the ones in the U.S. As far as eating on the way, we stopped at British camps to get rations. Very few American camps were there at that time. It seemed like the British had only lamb for breakfast, lunch and supper. It tasted pretty good after getting off that ship, though. We had to sleep in the desert at night and it was cold but the minute the sun came up it was hot.

Finally we reached our destination and we went to our bivouac area, which was made up of tents—the pyramid-type they had in the army. We had six guys in each one of them. The guys who got there before us had gotten wood from the Arabians—the “Arabs” as we called them.

Our first night we found out about war. Four German planes that hit our food storage warehouse, so we didn't have much of anything. We still had our C rations with hard biscuits and everything. So we got baptized our very first day.

In conversation with the guys there before us, we found out General Patton was invading Sicily in the area of Licata. We didn't know if we would be involved in that or not at the time. The Air Corps was using B-24s for strategic bombing at that time. They did use them occasionally to bomb the forces of the German Army that were located in Southern Italy and Sicily.

This is when I had a great experience. I had been advised to report to the Squadron Headquarters. I couldn't imagine what for. I was asked if I had any relatives in Licata, Sicily. I told the major I didn't know but I didn't think so. The reason that was asked was because our next mission was to bomb

the area of Licata. I was told if I wanted to fly that day I could or I didn't have to go. However, I decided to go. The mission was completed on that day. The American 5th Army and the British 8th Army invaded Italy and soon we were right behind them.

They started opening up the airfield near Foggia, which was mainly where the Italian Air Force had many of their bases. I was very happy at that time to be picked to go to the 341st bomb squadron, 97th bomb group, 5th wing of the 15th Air Force because we had the B-17 bombers. The other wings of the 15th all had B-24s. Really, they didn't compare well at all to the B-17s. We started flying missions and our first target from Foggia was Vienna, Austria. The only thing I can remember about that is we flew through Brenner Pass in the Alps,



which was one of the most beautiful scenes you could ever see. They had many anti-aircraft guns situated in that area and we lost a plane on the way to bomb a gun

manufacturing plant in Vienna. That was our first loss.

We flew many other places around Europe. We bombed a plane manufacturing factory in Regensburg, Germany, and that was a very rough target. We bombed the Schwinfurt Ball bearing Plant and also the Polesti oil fields but we didn't do as well as we wanted on that.

We also had one highlight that stood out. They had what they called a shuttle mission. The planes from the 8th Air Force would take off from England and bomb their targets in Germany and land on our fields in Italy. I still don't know what they did that we couldn't have completed from our bases.

I flew eleven missions and then got sick with yellow jaundice. I was in the hospital in Bari, Italy, for about two months. I never realized how many soldiers were sick with jaundice, caused by the lack of eggs, vegetables and milk in our diet.

When I came back to the base in Foggia, I had to go to the Flight Surgeon of the 97th bomb group and he gave me a physical and informed me they wouldn't let me fly anymore. That was quite a shock to me as I was looking forward to going home after twenty-five missions. It was hard to get that number; I believe in our wing we only had two planes that made it.

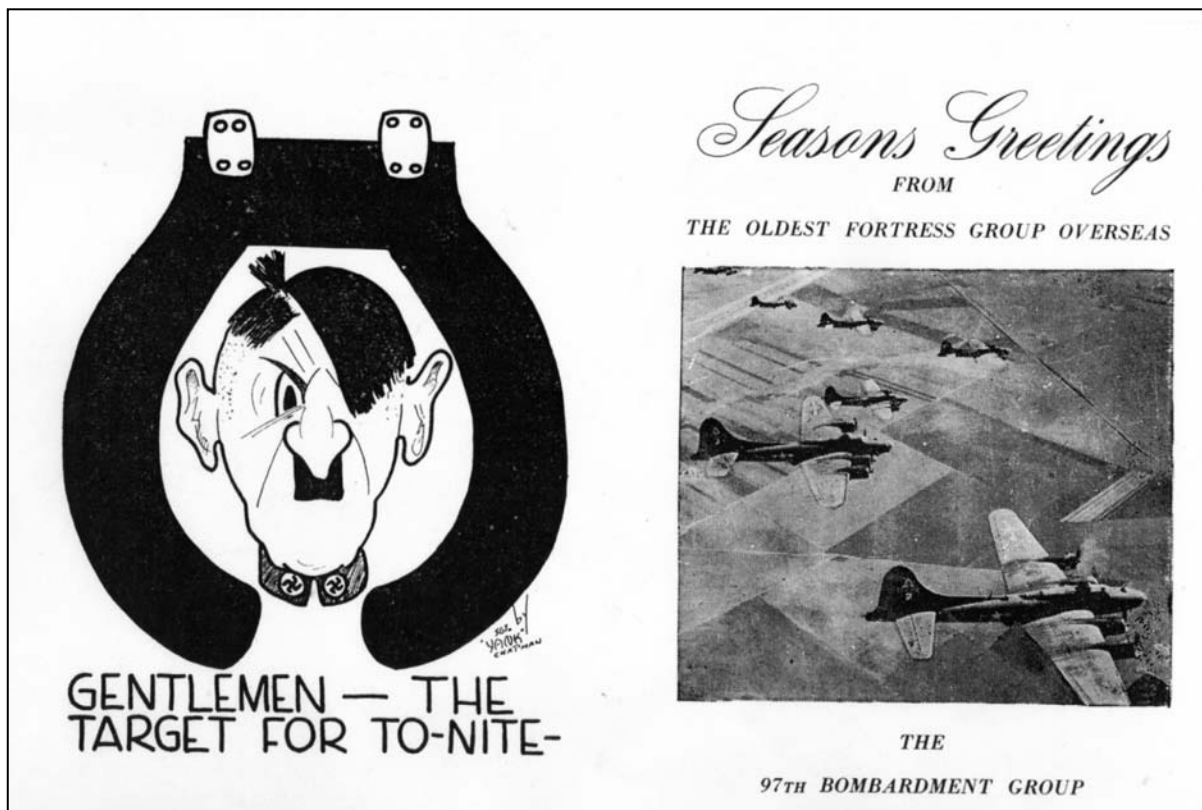
We didn't get the publicity the 8th Air Force got. To this day I don't think the 15th got as much acclaim as the 8th. I finished my tour of duty on the ground crew as an armorer, loading bombs, fixing machine guns, fixing turrets. I do believe I was lucky because the crew I had been assigned to originally was shot down about a week after I got out of the hospital. After that you start

thinking and realize “Somebody Up There” was looking out for me.

Dominic Licata lived most of his life in southern California working for General Telephone and Electronics, where he continued to be promoted within the company until his early retirement in 1981. Due to his macular degeneration, he moved to Reno in 1999 to be near his family. He has enjoyed classes in ElderCollge, and with the help of the Military Lifescapes Class, he was encouraged to write this autobiography.

Right: Dominic on the tarmac during a unit reunion.

Below: Christmas greetings from Dominic’s unit, the 97th.



Waiting

Monica Greco

I consider punctuality a virtue, not just because it was instilled in me by my maternal grandfather, but because the dawn of my life was spent under the mark of waiting, futile waiting!

Since I can remember, I was waiting for my father to return from the front and give me what I longed for: his love, time and protection. I wanted his arms around me as they were in an earlier picture of both of us I kept staring at every day. I wanted to see for myself the resemblance between him and me my Mother was talking about. I wanted to hear his happy laugh and listen to his stories, his knowledge and family history my Mom so much admired.

The long, painful, hopeful waiting came to an end when, one evening, a knock at the door brought in a tall, skinny, dark man; later I found out he was a former colleague and dear friend of my father's. Mom screamed when she saw him, and looked hopefully behind him in the dark corridor, but then her face turned pale. She asked him in. I and my brother were sent with our nanny in the next room.

Maia was very quiet and held us both very tight in her arms. I felt something bad was happening and I wanted to run to my mother's side. I was not allowed. I heard my Mom crying in the other room, and instantly I felt that my Dad would never hold me

again, would never play with me, and would never be with us. What would we do? I looked at Maia; she was crying, too. Tears without sound filled my eyes and rolled down making me feel very cold. The room seemed larger, darker, and colder. I heard the door, the man left, and minutes later Mom came in. She seemed taller, skinnier, and distant. Her eyes were red.



Monica's father's military group.

"I have to call my parents-in-law, Genu is not coming back. We are alone. Alone!"

She looked at us as if she were gone, too.

That's when I heard my voice between sobs: "I want my Dad; you told me he's coming back. That is a bad man, if he says that Dad is not coming home. I know that Dad loves us."

The true pain came when I understood that my Dad wanted to come home as much if not much more than I wanted him to be with us.

The story my Mom heard that unfortunate night was shared with me only when she considered that I could take it rationally. Is there anything rational in listening to a story about your father's death, ever?

My father and his close friend (who visited us that night) spent their formative years together as colleagues in high school, at the university studying law, graduated together and attended each other's marriage ceremonies. Their wives were friends, and the children they got were of the same age. When the Second World War started, it found them as close as ever, and shattered all their plans and ideals. Their country was torn by Hitler's decision to pay Hungary's professed loyalty to fascism with the northern half of Transylvania, my family's native place. Suddenly my parents and their compatriots found themselves as refugees. Cluj, my native city, fell under the new rule.

The German government gave Romania twenty-four hours to surrender to the German army, requesting corridor over the territory of Romania in their attack on the Soviet land, or, if opposed to their demands, to be smashed by the German war machine. Antonescu, the then Prime Minister, in his intention to save the country from annihilation, allowed the passage, but he was misled. Once the Germans had that permission, they took half of Transylvania and gave it to Hungary as payback.

The SS robbed Romania of everything they wanted, and ordered the Romanian army to fight as shield in front of the German army against the Russians. Romania, a small kingdom, totally unprepared for war, who has never waged war on any of its neighbors,

but who was famous for defending its own territory against Turks, Austrians and Russians along history, found itself forced to face the Russian army and the Russian winters in poor uniforms and with old fashioned weaponry. The Germans were blocking their retreat, shooting the Romanians on sight if they did not fight to death.

The situation in which my father and his friend found themselves was atrocious. They could not refuse to respond to the "call of the country," as they were young and healthy. They were forced into a war that was not theirs. When their battalion was massacred, and a few survivors were thrown into a Russian extermination camps, my Dad and his friend were wounded, sick, frozen, hungry and utterly demoralized. Diseases erupted in the camp due to the lack of water, hygiene, medical care, shelter and food. The rate of deaths daily was frightening. My Dad and his friend survived the Typhus Exanthematicus, Scurvy, and Rickets, the abuses and hunger for months. Their body weight was cut in half. I learned that my father used to make fun of their skeletal looks to encourage the survivors, to make them laugh, and to keep their hopes up. His colleague said, "Eugene joked even about death, or talked about our pitiful return home, when our wives might not even recognize us." Not even for a moment did Eugene lose hope to see his family again, stated his friend.

The end for my father came one morning, when, after months of hunger, cold, suffering of final Avitaminosis, he started losing blood from his gums, eyes, ears; the pain in his emaciated body couldn't be borne any more. On June 11, at 4 am, my dear father died, along with other twenty Romanian and German prisoners.

The Russians came a few hours later and removed the bodies from the camp; then they threw them in a large hole dug by the other weakened prisoners. My father's friend was among those forced to dig. He watched how the Russians undressed them, took their boots and clothes for their own use, tore my father's gold chain and cross from his neck, and dumped him in that common grave. Then they poured lime over the bodies and ordered the prisoners to cover them with dirt. No cross was placed at the head of the burial ground, not even a marker. It was somewhere at the edge of a village called Bekerskaia, deep into the Russian territory, ended my father's friend his dreadful story.

Based on our friend's deposition in testimony in front of a judge, my mother was served a death certificate; she was officially declared a "War Widow," and we, Eugene's children, were declared "War Orphans." We stepped into the street stripped of our previous identity, bearing our new "titles" as a heavy burden. Words cannot describe the desolation our whole family went through. We lost everything we ever owned in that war, and especially our father, in a war that nobody in my family or in my native land wanted.

Romania was swept by the Germans twice, and then by the Russians in pursuit, then

was mutilated by the Hungarians for about five years, and when the war was over, the Russians stayed in the country to continue their pillage and abuses for years. They took not only the little that was left but also the dignity, hopes and faith of the people in a better future. The communist regime imposed by the Russians after the war persecuted the survivors, who were educated, declaring them "enemies of the people." Our father's sacrifice was never recognized by the communist government.

We could never find my father's remains and bring them home, though we asked the American Red Cross to help us. My paternal grandfather died untimely of a broken heart soon after the testimony of my father's friend. I lost my father, my grandfather, and all the history of my Greek descent within a year. Darkness and misery descended upon us. Both of us children became powerfully attached to our mother, who worked to support our family. We grew very responsible and hard working.

What a dawn of life for my brother and me. What a life for my dear, brave mother. I still wonder how life might have been if Dad could have returned home.

See Monica's biography in "Last Christmas with Dad."

The Survivor

Esther Early

*And they utterly destroyed the city, both men and women, young and old,
and oxen and sheep and asses, with the edge of the sword.*

Joshua 6:21

He had to fight for everything from the time he was born. At least that's the way he felt about it. His first fight was for his life when he came into the world in 1910 on a small farm near Pocatello, Idaho. He was born much too early, so frail and tiny that many would have just left him to die. But farm women have always been among the best nurses for orphaned and premature babies in the world. This includes both humans and animals. Warm nests for countless chicks, puppies, calves, colts and wild things have been built behind kitchen stoves where the occupants can be kept warm, nursed and fed until they are able to live outside. The women develop the skill to nurture these little ones as a craft handed down from one generation to the next.

His mother, assisted by her eldest daughter, made a bed of soft cloths and cotton batting in a shoe box which they placed in the oven of the wood burning kitchen stove. It takes great skill to maintain a constant temperature in such an oven. A few degrees one way or the other could mean death for such a tiny creature, so they watched him day and

night in his make-shift incubator.

He was too small to suck, so his mother drew her own breast milk and they fed it to him with a medicine dropper until his little mouth became large enough to grasp the nipple and he had the strength to nurse. Their skill and devotion, along with the great will to live within his tiny heart made him thrive. He survived.

His mother was my grandmother, and his elder sister was my mother. No wonder he was so special to them: we always value most the things we work hardest for. I seemed to inherit their love for him. He has always been one of my favorite people.

They named him Charles, a name he felt was "sissy," and he refused to use it. If any man wanted to have a fight all he had to do was call him by his proper first name. He insisted upon being called *Chuck*. Chuck Chambers. In later years we called him *Uncle Slugg*, which delighted him and seemed to fit very well. Charles H. Chambers did, indeed, seem too formal and too pretentious. He

could never abide insincerity or people who tried to present themselves under false colors.

Starting out in the harsh times when the land in Idaho was just being cleared of lava rock to produce some of the finest farming land anywhere, where the winters were bitter and summers hot, it became clear to him that life was hazardous and that he would have to fight for whatever he wanted or needed. Life was hard for a young boy, but that just spurred his dreams of something better. He was short and thin—better yet, wiry, tough as a piece of rawhide. Nobody gave him slack; nor did he ask for it. His father died when he was twelve, and he left soon after to do a man's work to help support himself and his family.

He worked one winter as a shepherd, an unbelievable responsibility for a youngster, but he completed his job. However, it left him with no taste for mutton in any form. He went to Los Angeles where he worked and put himself through high school. He became intrigued with the business of horse racing. It must have been very exciting for a farm boy, and when he was sixteen, he decided he wanted to be a jockey. However, his mother would have had to give consent for him to do this since he was underage. Even though she was a country woman in Idaho, she had heard of drugs and other dangerous practices on the race tracks and refused to sign for him. As a widow she clung to her children as long as she could. Rebellious but loyal he made the best of his circumstances.

My mother and father moved to Contact, Nevada in 1923. It was a copper mining town and thought to be destined to become a prosperous city. Grandma Chambers moved to Contact soon after and went to work as a cook for the miners on China Mountain. Uncle Chuck and his brother,

Jack, came also and went into the mines.

I loved him from the time I first saw him. He was wonderful with children and I remember how he used to show me how strong he was by making the muscles of his arm stand out. He worked as a mechanic and laborer. He did whatever he needed to do to make a living.

Another of my earliest memories, however, was standing in great fear and horror as a group of men carried him from a car into our house. He was a peculiar bluish color, unable to stand or and talk. He had been buried alive in a cave-in at the mine where he and Jack were mucking out the ore that had been blasted down that morning. He lay under the rock for over eighteen hours and was only saved by a timber which lay by his head and made air available for him to breathe. He could hear the men calling his name and shoveling the dirt and rocks. He yelled, but they could not hear him. At some point he felt that he left his body, and he would have welcomed going on, but then he remembered his mother and refused to leave because he wanted to stay and be able to care of her. His brother died and he was left partially paralyzed. Again, Mother and Grandma nursed him back to health. He used to sit at the kitchen table laboriously picking up kitchen matches and squeezing a rubber ball with his disabled hand. This was physical therapy in those days in a mining camp and it worked. He recovered full use of his arm and hand. He survived.

Next he moved back to Idaho where he became a foreman in the Kraft Cheese Factory. Over the years he had become an expert mechanic, which stood him in good stead for that job and all the work he encountered from then on in his life. He married the woman who was the love of his life, and they had two children. They had a good home and were a devoted family, but

not destined to be together for long.

When World War II came he joined the army, where he was assigned to the Fourteenth Armored Division of the American Third Army commanded by General George S. Patton, Jr. This was the famous tank corps which served so brilliantly against Field Marshall Von Rundstedt and other German divisions across Africa and Europe. It was activated at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, then moved to maneuvers in Tennessee and on to Camp Campbell, Kentucky. While in Kentucky he was able to visit my brother John and his wife Veronica in Louisville from time to time. He was notorious for his drinking bouts and they laughed about how Uncle Slugg, as he had come to be known, would get lost trying finding their place when sober, but would go directly there when he had been drinking.

He must have been the perfect type of soldier to be under the command of Patton,



Chuck and Marr Chambers.

who was famous for his ruthless tactics with the enemy as well as his own troops. Chuck was tough, intelligent, adaptable, inventive, and absolutely patriotic, believing that they were fighting a war for the survival of his country and his people. And due to him and the thousands of men and women like him, not only did he survive, but his country and his country's allies as well.

The history of the 14th Armored Division shows service in Africa, but mainly in Europe. It landed at Marseilles, France on October 30, 1944 and sent elements to guard the Franco-Italian border on November 14th. It moved north to Rambervillers on November 20, 1944, and the next day it cut German escape routes. It blocked exits from the Vosges Mountains and battled through Erstein to capture Barr after heavy combat. Next day they cleared St. Pierre and then entered the Alsatian Plain. He served through the Battle of the Bulge and in Normandy after the invasion.

By March 14th, they had moved to a position where they attacked the West Wall, encountering unusually heavy resistance. They crossed the Rhine on April 1st and followed lessening fire from the retreating German forces. They moved rapidly, always under heavy fire, never giving an inch, regardless of the intensity of the desperate German resistance. On April 26th, they reached the Danube and crossed two days later. At one point a German major met with representatives from the Allied forces and proposed the creation of a neutral zone surrounding Moosburg. This was rejected by the Allies. The German SS troops moved outside the city and resumed hostilities. This was a suicide mission; shortly the SS troops were lying dead, with the American tanks roaring into the city. Then they fought through Moosburg and into Landshut. They took the bridge intact at Aschau on May 2nd, which was probably

their last day of active combat. They were kept there to process prisoners as hostilities were declared ended on May 7, 1945. When they approached the prison camp near Moosburg, known as Stalag VII, they raised the American flag. Uncle Chuck remembered how they cut down the barbed wire that surrounded the huge camp site and then seeing the starving prisoners running free. Official estimates of the total Allied prisoners freed were 110,000 including an estimated 30,000 Americans, officers and men. Besides a series of seven prisoner of war camps, the Division captured a German garrison of 6,000 men at Moosburg.

“Scenes of the wildest rejoicing accompanied the tanks as they crashed through the double 10-foot wire fences of the prison camps. There were Norwegians, Brazilians, French, Poles, Dutch, Greeks, Rumanians, and Bulgars. There were Americans, Russians, Serbs, Italians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Australians, British, and Canadians—men from every nation fighting the Nazis. There were officers and men. Twenty-seven Russian generals, sons of four American generals.” (<http://www.moosburg.org/info/stalag/14theng.html>)

There were women prisoners as well, including three Russian women doctors. There were war correspondents and radio men, and around the city were thousand of slave laborers of both sexes. Naturally they received an incredible welcome. Liberated prisoners pressed around the tanks as they tried to move forward, surrounded by shouts, tears of joy, cheers, flowers and kisses. They even kissed the tanks themselves.

Among the captured German prisoners were boys of nine, fully uniformed and armed, and girls of 17 and 18, also uniformed and armed. Thousands of German prisoners

were marched past their dead fellow soldiers while the Allied forces just released celebrated, pillaged and raped German citizens. Was this a glorious victory? Of course it was, but it was soiled and tainted by death and horror. Years later, my uncle would call me up in the middle of the night in his private hell of memories and alcohol and ask me, “What right did you good people have to make me go over there and do the things I had to do?” He said they were under orders to kill anything that moved as they drove through villages, towns and countryside. That included people, regardless of age or sex, and animals. I could not respond to that. I don’t think anyone can, even today. Especially with the example set by Old Testament commandments on rules of war, which advised sowing the land of the enemy with salt and killing them all, even to the last child in some instances.



Chuck in Germany

Uncle Chuck served in various capacities in the tank corps, from mechanic to tank driver when needed. His rank went up and down from private to sergeant according to his behavior, but he was listed as Staff Sergeant in his discharge papers. He went AWOL

once in a while when he was on an alcoholic bender, but apparently he was so valuable that they punished him but took him back. He and his brother Larry, who was in the Air Force, met once in Europe and had a great time on the money they got from selling an army jeep, which made for a lot of laughs when they met to reminisce after the war.

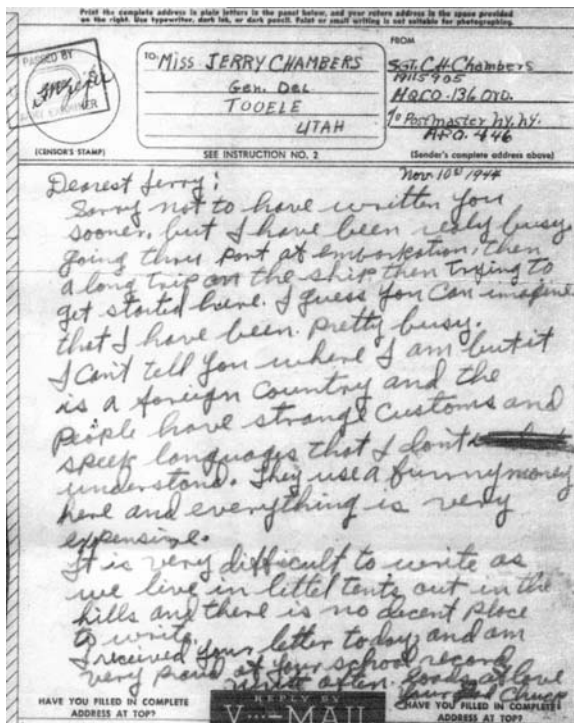
He also drove a huge machine called a tank retriever that was used to bring back damaged tanks, even within range of German guns. This was dangerous because the Germans knew they would come for tanks that had been tipped over or otherwise put out of commission, and they would wait for the retrievers to approach the tank and then try blow them all up. It was on one of these missions in which he and a young soldier went to retrieve a tank that they were fired upon and lost their vehicle. The boy was wounded, so Uncle Chuck carried him back to their lines. When he dragged him into the medical arena they asked if he, too,

shortly afterwards he went to the latrine and found that he had been gravely wounded in the abdomen internally. Again, he survived. For this action he received the Purple Heart and the Medal of Honor. At one point they had been in constant combat for ninety days.

An incident that caused him to have terrible nightmares after the war was when he was manning the machine gun turret on a tank as they swept through a village. People came out to wave in friendly fashion, and one little boy about the age of Uncle Chuck's own son, Jack, came running out to the tank. One of the men below handed him a candy bar, but at that point the little fellow drew a pistol and started firing into the tank. Uncle Chuck had to shoot the boy, which, in turn, caused an emotional wound to himself that would cause him to scream and start doing battle in his sleep.

One of dreams was of a German soldier pointing a bayonet at his eye. (Oddly enough, this is the very eye that years later became blind and had to be removed.) His children would have to awaken him at their peril for he would come out fighting, so they would use a broom to touch him as they called his name.

When he returned home he found that his own world had been destroyed as surely as if German artillery had shelled it. The wife he knew and loved was gone down the black hole of alcoholism. His son and daughter had run away and were leading an existence like little refugees going from one place to another with relatives. His health was broken and from then on he fought alcoholism himself and the results of the terrible damages done to his physical and emotional bodies through the years. He gathered up his children and moved to Carlin, Nevada where he worked for years as a mechanic on the Southern Pacific railroad.



V-mail from Chuck to his daughter.

He lost the sight of one eye due to glaucoma, and he suffered terribly with slipped disks in his back. When they graduated from high school he moved to Reno. Eventually he had several operations on his back and he joined AA where he was able to remain sober for years. He married again twice but seemed unable to maintain a serious relationship.

His posture told it all about him. He always walked as tall as he could, with head thrown back, and his chest out, looking everyone in the eye. When drinking, his favorite pastime was to go to a bar and offer to fight anyone in the place. He was frequently obliged by one or another of the customers. He spoke loudly with a hoarse voice that could be heard far away. He was the worry of his mother's life, and he and my mother heartily disapproved of each other but were bound by a family love that couldn't be broken. His children got married and raised grandchildren to his great delight.

He eventually moved to Mexico, where he went parasailing at the age of sixty-five. He rode his motorcycle and Dotson pickup following the buses down the country roads because he only had tunnel vision in his remaining eye and he didn't want to run into animals or people. He traveled back to the U.S. every six months for years, where he would go to the V.A. hospitals for treatment and get his visa renewed. Back in Carlin he

would tell the men there about the beautiful Mexican girls and how wonderful it was to play rich American with them. Naturally, the women in Carlin hated him. Unfortunately he started drinking again.

When he was seventy five years old he fought his last battle. He came home from the cantina one night and found thieves in his house. They had a tremendous battle, according to the police afterwards, but he was outnumbered. They strangled him. This one he did not survive and it left a very large vacancy in our hearts. But I am so proud of him. Yes, he was a flawed hero, but that makes the odyssey of his life so much more meaningful. He never surrendered. Like mythological warriors of old, his faults were huge as well as the ordeals he endured and overcame. Death was a fellow traveler whom he knew very well, and would have welcomed readily when he was threatened with blindness. He fought death and won many times. I wonder if they became friends after the final battle when he was captured by the angel of death at last, defending his precious life. I hope when it was over he found that he had not lost but had gained a greater life.

He will always be our hero.

Esther Early is the co-leader of the Lifescapes/ ElderCollege writing group that produced this anthology.

War Memories

John La Voy

I was on my first combat tour in World War II, and just one week after we had occupied the island of Engibe in the Marshall Islands, we were being bombed and shelled on a regular basis. For most of us it was a new and frightening experience. We had all experienced anti-aircraft and machine gun fire, but this was different, because we weren't fighting back, just hunkering down in our foxholes and hoping that a shell didn't have our name on it.

We were told in advance to dig a foxhole as soon as we arrived, and some were pitiful, done half-heartedly, but after the first night of shelling many improvements were made without anyone's telling us to do so. A bombing is no picnic, as it lasts for a few minutes, but a shelling is terrifying, as it can last for hours, and you can sometimes hear the shell coming before it explodes, especially if it passes over you.

One night the shelling lasted over three hours. They hit one of our bomb dumps, and I thought the whole world had exploded. They also had a hit our quartermaster supplies tent. The quartermaster stocks and stores shoes and all the necessary types of clothing for a given area. The brighter side of that hit was a free issue of shoes and clothing for all hands. His supply tent was hit and partially burned,

destroying most everything, yet there was quite a bit that had only smoke and water damage but was still usable if laundered. Rather than sort out the whole mess, it was all surveyed (declared unusable), and we were told to come and pick up two of everything if our sizes were available: shoes, socks, trousers, shirts, underwear, etc., more than enough to last the rest of our tour.



John La Voy

Our squadron didn't lose any aircraft, but a fighter squadron and another attack squadron lost several planes. Thank God the enemy didn't have any means of someone

spotting for them or they would have really devastated us.

We were kept busy during the daylight hours flying patrols looking for enemy ships and submarines, but some still slipped by our best efforts.

Our navigation equipment was very primitive compared to the electronic navigation that modern aircraft have. I say this in defense of my piloting, because at one point, I was leading a patrol on a long search, and while we were out flying, someone moved the island! At least it wasn't there when we came back to land. That becomes a bit disconcerting when there is nothing in sight but water. We did a square search: That is a procedure that is used at sea to locate something or someone. It is done by flying for a given number minutes each major heading of the compass 360—90—80 and 270 degrees making three 90 degree turns, and holding each heading for an equal number of minutes, which brings you back to the starting point. You then turn to the next major heading and repeat the process. We did this with no results, and the island was still missing. My trusty radioman/gunner, a young man by the name of Stribling said, "Lieutenant, let me see if I can spot the island with my radar." This was some new equipment that had recently been installed in the aircraft, and we had very little experience with it. However at that point I gave him a positive, and sure enough, he reported that he had a blip on his screen not too many miles past the area we had searched. Lo and behold it was our island and a beautiful sight even if it was a hell hole. The problem had been caused by a change in the wind direction and velocity that we failed to notice and while flying our headings on the patrol. Feeling the wheels hit that solid runway was very comforting, as a landing at sea is very unproductive.

After a few weeks working around the clock, we had transformed the island into an American base. The fallen coconut trees and war debris were all cleaned up; all of the bomb and shell holes were filled with fresh coral; a control tower was built; permanent camp sites were established; mess halls were built; and even a small dock was constructed in the lagoon to tie up and unload boats bringing in supplies from ships in the harbor.

The island was home to a Marine Air Group which consisted of two fighter squadrons and two attack squadrons plus a headquarters and supply squadron. There were also anti-aircraft batteries that had their guns strategically located around the island. This was home as well to an Army B-25 bomber Squadron. They made constant sorties to the Island of Truk, which was too far for the range of our smaller aircraft. Two bastions in the Pacific that were like Pearl Harbor was to the U.S. were the islands of Truk and Ponape. Both were occupied by the Japanese and heavily fortified but not considered strategic to our plans for the eventual invasion of Japan. They were, however, a threat to our security if left untouched. Thus much effort was exerted to neutralize them, but they were never invaded by our troops. Our squadron made bombing runs to Ponape, but it was hazardous and not cost effective because it was at the extreme limits of our operating radius and we had to sacrifice bomb load for gas.

One particular mission I shall not forget, not because it was scary, but because it fell into the category of being ridiculous. One of our cruisers had been severely damaged by a Japanese submarine and was limping back to Pearl Harbor for major repairs. It was scheduled to pass to the north of our atoll. We were asked to meet it as far out as our

radius of action would permit and to fly submarine patrol for it, accompanying it as far as we could operate. That was right up our alley, as we had sub patrols out constantly protecting the ships coming and going from our atoll.

The demand on escort vessels must have been heavy elsewhere, because this cruiser limped all alone. It had taken a couple of torpedoes and had about a thirty degree list and was able to make only five to seven knots headway. It was really a sitting duck for another attack, and I heard later that it *was* being pursued. We assigned two aircraft at a time to accompany it from first light until dark. We carried three depth charges on each aircraft and flew cover for it for about three days.

On the second day another aircraft and mine were sent out to relieve the two on station. We had in our aircraft a device called IFF Identification—friend or foe—and it sent out a radio signal that could be detected from a long distance and told the receiver that you were a friend. The code was changed every day, and on the first hop each day we would check with the tower to see if we were squawking the right code. (I explain all this because it is crucial to understanding our dilemma.)

We checked in with the crippled cruiser and the two aircraft we were relieving and gave them our call signs. About two hours into our mission, the ship suddenly began shooting at us with anti-aircraft guns. These guns make black puffs of smoke with an orange ball of flame and are a lot more harmful than they look. The shells began bursting all around us, and we immediately took evasive action by diving near the surface of the water and heading out of their range. No radio calls from them! No signals—just gunfire.

I finally raised someone on the radio and was a little blunt; like “What in the hell are you trying to do?”

Long pause.

“One of you was squawking the wrong IFF signal and we thought you were enemy aircraft.”

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I was so angry at the stupidity of it all that I didn't answer any more of their calls and joined up my wingman and headed back to base. By the time we arrived back at our base there were several messages of apologies and a request to please return, which we did. We found out later that a sailor who had just come on watch to man an anti-aircraft battery was all shaken up because of their harrowing torpedoing experience and thought he saw the wrong signal and started shooting without permission. It didn't make me feel a bit better, though maybe a little more understanding.

Before we left there wasn't a single person in the squadron who had any combat experience, but after months of combat and stress making our way up through the Gilberts and Marshalls all those young marines who came out as boys went home as men.

Well, on to more pleasant aspects of this war. First, I must relate to you the story of our homemade washing machine. I can't take any credit for its design, but I was instrumental in building it. We took a fifty gallon steel barrel and cut the top off and then mounted it up on a frame so a fire could be built under it. Now the washing mechanism: We fastened a small propeller to a crankshaft and mounted it over the barrel. With a connecting rod poking down into the barrel, we fastened a couple gutted headlights that acted as plungers when they

went up and down. There was always a gentle ocean breeze blowing, so the washer was used from morning until night. The only drawback was the clothes had to be rinsed by hand then hung up—or I should say thrown over a fence made for drying. Somebody even made a sign for it reading *Engebie Do It Yourself Laundry*. The alternative had been to use a couple of buckets, cold water and lots of soap and lots of elbow grease. After it was well used and enemy action cooled down, a group laundry was set up, which made our machine a little obsolete.

In our lagoon, there were always several ships bringing supplies and ammunition, and on this one occasion the group commander asked the captain if his paymaster could come ashore and pay some of the men who wanted money. Now there wasn't any place on any of these islands that one could spend money, for most of it was sent home, automatically done by allotment before leaving the States.

There was one exception: You had to have cash on the barrelhead to gamble, and that is the group that wanted to be paid. Pilots always had money on the books because we couldn't allot our flight pay. Any Marine base or camp that had a PX always had their own paymaster, but in our case we had neither. Well, the good paymaster came ashore and there was a greater demand than he had expected, so he ran out of money and had to go back to the ship for more. This time he brought a suitcase full. As he was going down the Jacobs ladder, he slipped and fell into the lagoon and the suitcase sank to the bottom. He was immediately rescued, but goodbye suitcase and all the money. The accident was very understandable as a Jacobs ladder is a rickety narrow ladder going down the side of a ship to allow personnel to get in and out of a small boat.

Some sailors made a valiant effort to grapple for the bag but without any luck as the water was very deep. The next day some pilots who wanted some money and didn't get any, made arrangements to go out to the ship and lend a hand grappling. The process entails fastening a three-prong hook to a rope long enough to reach the bottom and drag it, hoping to snag what you are looking for.

After many hours and the loss of three hooks and ropes, probably snagged on coral, the effort was going to be abandoned when lo and behold they hit pay dirt and up came the suitcase! It was taken aboard the ship with great cheers and jubilation. No problem in drying out some good American money that had been soaked in a little sea water; the only problem was when the suitcase was opened they found the money had turned into some pieces of scrap iron and a couple old wrenches.

A little embarrassed at such a "miracle," the paymaster was returned to the States in irons, and the grapplers never did get paid because of the ensuing investigation and the departure of the ship.

On our island—Wallis, in the southern Gilbert Islands—were some large lizards: some were over a foot long and as fast as greased lightning. When chased, they always took refuge by running up a tree. Our tents, or "fallies" as we called them, adopting the native name for hut, housed four officers. One of our tent mates by the name of Gus Daskalakis absolutely abhorred the lizards, even to the point of shuddering when he saw one. For others of us, this was an open invitation for some devilment to bring Gus and a lizard into close proximity to each other. On a morning when no flight was scheduled, we exerted no little effort in capturing one of the big lizards.

Each fallie was screened in on all sides, and as additional protection to keep mosquitoes and other varmint from attacking at night, each bunk had a frame over it in a "V" to hold mosquito netting. After making up our bunks in the morning, we would carefully tuck netting under the mattress to keep out any interlopers out during the daylight. Gus was meticulous in making his bed. We took the frightened lizard and carefully lifted the netting of Gus's bunk and released it under the covers, then carefully tucked everything back in place. Everybody in our tent and several tents around knew about the lizard and all were waiting that night in anticipation for Gus to go to bed.

The Greek was very faithful in writing to his wife every night, and this particular evening he wrote a very long letter, so everyone was kept at high alert waiting for his entry into his bunk. Finally the letter was finished and everything around his area was put in proper order for the night. He climbed into his bed, but just in the sitting position, while he meticulously tucked all the netting in place under the mattress. The lizard stayed at the very foot of the cot. When Gus slid under the covers his feet, he and the intruder promptly came into contact with one another. The first indication was a blood-curdling scream from Gus. The lizard came out and started running around inside the net looking for a place to escape. Gus tipped over his bunk and literally tore the net to shreds making his escape, all the while screaming like a banshee and shouting epithets that won't be in print. I laughed so hard my sides ached, and another of our bunkmates, a Charlie Hitch, fell out of his bunk laughing. Our end of the camp was in a hilarious uproar. To save our skins and protect our innocence, we pranksters came to Gus's aid and helped restore his bunk, accusing him of not tucking in his netting properly.

"But I did, I did, I always do!" was his reply.

With so many gathering around laughing and pretending to ask what was going on, his fear turned to suspicion, and if he could have proved who had perpetrated this act, he undoubtedly would have done us bodily harm.

On my second combat tour in World War II I was in the Philippine Islands. Two other pilots, Jerry Fink and Terry Therault, and I were given orders to catch the next transport and to go south to the island of Los Negros to pick up some new planes to replace some of our losses. It was an island that was designated as an aircraft depot for all of the Navy carriers and the Marine squadrons in the South Pacific. There was another island right next to it separated only by a channel of water that looked like a large river. It was actually an ocean channel but flowed like a river because of the change of tide, and the Seabees built a bridge across this channel to connect the two islands.

When we arrived and checked in, we were informed that it would be several days before our aircraft would be ready for delivery to us. With that bit of information we sent a dispatch back to our headquarters, then looked for some activity to fill in our days of waiting. Terry was an avid reader, so he settled in for some serious book time. Jerry and I decided to do some exploring, and we borrowed a jeep and went to visit some of the native villages.

I'll never forget what simple lives they lived and always seemed to be happy. They spent most of their time keeping body and soul together, but at a very leisurely pace. Money was not part of their lives, for all business and trade seemed to be done on the bartering system. Their clothing was very simple and everybody went barefooted. I don't believe they would have accepted a

pair of shoes as a gift. They did love knives of any variety and pipes and smoking tobacco. Undershirts were a hot trading item and were worn as outer garments by both men and women. You could always tell if they had been trading with navy or marine personnel because the navy issued white under garments and the marines were the jungle green variety.

On one of our trips over the bridge that the Seabees had built to connect the islands, we noticed a couple of small homemade boats. Upon closer examination we found they had oars and some hand held boxes with glass bottoms for looking under water. What a find! What fun! We spent hours looking at sea life and the under water spectaculars.

The most astonishing thing there was huge schools of fish that plied their way back and forth through the channel. The following day we decided to borrow some fishing gear and try our luck. After asking a special services clerk about checking out some fishing equipment, which he was glad to give us, he said, "Heck, if you want some fish, why don't you get a little dynamite from the Seabees and blow a few to the surface. It's a lot easier than sitting there waiting for them to bite."

This sounded like a great idea. I had done a lot of pole fishing but never had the opportunity to try dynamiting them before. By the way, I was a self-proclaimed expert on handling explosives, because several months earlier I had taken a course at Quantico and we had been shown how to handle different types of explosives, of course with the idea of destroying and blowing things up. This was a bit different, as we just wanted to bring a few fish to the surface.

We borrowed a jeep and went to look for some Seabees; we found a gang of them

working on a road a couple miles from the bridge.

"Hey do you guys have some dynamite that we could use?"

"Sure, right in that little hut near the bridge. What do you need it for?"

"We want to blow up some fish."

"Oh, help yourselves; there is some wire, blasting caps and some blasting machines there too."

"Thanks," and off we went.

It was all there in a little shed just as he had said, so we helped ourselves. I took a few sticks, eight to be exact, put an electric blasting cap in the center, and taped it into a nice bundle. I *was* the self-proclaimed expert.

Our plan was to go upstream a little ways, connect the wire to the bundle, and lower it to the bottom; then we would bring the other end of the wire to shore. That was accomplished.

Jerry asked how we were going to tell when a big school came by, since we didn't want to waste our charge on just a few.

"That's easy," I said, "you take one of the boats out and keep watch, and I'll be on shore getting everything ready."

He agreed, on condition that I would not hook up the plunger until he got onto shore.

"OK! OK!" I said.

So Jerry took off in one of the small boats and was checking here and there saying, "No, just a small school; no another small school."

Then there was a shout of exclamation, “Holy Mackerel here comes a thousand of them.”

“Hurry,” I yelled, “Come on to shore,” as I began hooking up the plunger.

“Now John don’t you blow that until I get on shore.”

I waited until he was just about five feet from shore and said, “You’re close enough” and pushed the plunger.

The whole river bed literally lifted, and Jerry’s boat came out of the water, straight up about three or four feet. He started screaming from the instant he was airborne until he splashed back into the water and made his way to shore.

“John ! You son of a bitch!! You promised to wait.”

He was just livid with rage but suddenly calmed down when we saw myriad fish boiling to the top. We each grabbed a boat and started filling it. About that time a group of natives arrived and with sign language asked if they could have some, and we indicated to help themselves. It was a real show watching them gather fish. They would dive in and thread a fish thru the gills on each finger and hold a couple in their teeth, thus coming ashore each time with about a dozen fish.

About that time a couple of Seabee officers showed up and yelled, “What the hell you guys trying to do, blow up our bridge?”

“No! We were just getting a few fish.”

“How much dynamite did you use?”

“Only eight sticks.” was my reply.

“Eight sticks!. It’s a wonder you didn’t take our bridge down; a half of one stick is plenty.”

Well about that time I felt I wasn’t the expert I thought I was, but we learned how to destroy things not jiggle them a little. The brighter side of it all—the whole maintenance squadron, the Seabee unit, and the native village all had a wonderful fish fry that evening.

The next day our planes were ready for fly-away. I often wondered if they put a night crew on the aircraft to get them ready to fly just to get us off the island and save the bridge from our fishing expeditions.

Back we went to Malabang with the new airplanes, and the very next day were put on the strike schedule. Would you believe our planes were armed with more than eight sticks of dynamite? They were 1000 pound bombs, and we were sent after some big gun positions that were well dug in and giving our forces a bad time.

John LaVoy is Native Nevadan, born in Sparks, who attended University of Nevada. He entered the Armed Services in December 1941 following the attack on Pearl Harbor, graduating from Naval Flight School Corpus Christi Texas as a Marine Aviator, Second Lieutenant in May of 1943. Had two combat tours in WW II, one in Korea, and one in Vietnam and retired in 1970 as a Colonel. He has four children all married with children of their own. He and his wife Marian reside in Reno

Curley and Mose

Bob Stelle

Marseille, France, 1944

Curley, the black guy who drove the QMC wrecker and was in and out of our shop every day or so, told us one morning that his buddy, Mose, was up for murder.

“What happened?” I asked.

“Cook,” Curley stammered, “He woke up this morning with a butcher knife stuck in his chest, dead as hell! They took ol’ Mose down to the jail.”

Curley was too excited to be detailed. We went on with our business.

First Lieutenant Hoskins came back from headquarters early that afternoon. He sat down in the office and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief.

“The major is convening a court martial for some guy named Mose. Seems he is accused of stabbing the cook out at the black quartermaster barracks and killing him. Mose and the cook had a fight that night. I am appointed counsel for the defense,” Hoskins said, “and you’re gong to help me.”

“What can I do, Lieutenant?” I asked. “I don’t know anything about being a lawyer.”

“Neither do I, but I’m gonna learn, and you are, too. Tell Cantrell we’re going down to the Provost Marshal’s office and talk to this Mose. Get the jeep and we’ll go.”

“Yes, sir,” I said, wondering what I was getting into.

At the jail, Mose was in a cell. He was a big man, about twenty-seven to thirty. Well built, like Joe Louis. Black as ink. He sat on his bunk with his head in his hands, elbows on his knees.

“Ten hut!” the MP bellowed. “Yer lawyer’s here. Get up!”

“That will do, Sergeant. Open the door and get out.” Hoskins had a quiet way about him that exuded authority, unusual for a first lieutenant.

“Sit down, Mose. I am Lieutenant Hoskins of the 1718th and this is my first sergeant, Duff Stelle. Now, tell us about this thing.”

Hoskins sat on the opposite bunk and motioned for me to do the same.

“Ain’t nothin’ to tell. They gonna hang me or gimme life. I ain’t got no chance, and you knows it.”

“Who told you that?” Hoskins asked.

“All my white officers. You a white man. Officer, too. You knows it.” Mose leaned forward and put his head back in his hands.

Hoskins said, “I’m going to visit with the Provost Marshal in the office. You tell Stelle the whole story of what happened. He is an enlisted man and he is going to help me get you off. You hear that, Mose? Get you off!”

Hoskins walked out. Mose picked up a little.

What was I going to do? Hoskins said we were going to get him off. How? I felt like putting my head in my hands, too. I looked at Mose and said, “I talked to Curley this morning. He told me about the cook. Tell me what happened from last night on.”

“You knows Curley?” he asked, surprised. “How you know him?”

“He drives the wrecker. He’s up at our shop almost every day,” I said.

“You the man up at the 1718. I heard a you. You supposed to be all right.”

Mose told me the whole story. On the way back to our shop, I told Hoskins what he said. It seemed that he and the cook had a row over an extra piece of cake that night. Mose wanted to take it to his girl friend, and the cook accused him of stealing it. A fight started. The boys in the day room got the fight stopped. Mose and Curley took off and went into town to their favorite whorehouse and spent the night. Mose was arrested in the morning when they returned. Cook was already dead and carried away.

“I don’t think he did it,” I told Hoskins.

“That’s the way we gotta think if we get him off. Keep your mouth shut about it. Pick me up early in the morning and we’ll go out to

the QMC and talk to the officers and men. Maybe we can verify some of his story.”

Hoskins met with the first lieutenant, commander of the QM outfit, and his second lieutenant. I met their first sergeant, an older man, a six-striper with a diamond inside, two hash marks. A regular army soldier. He gave me a wet-fish handshake.

“Ah heard you was up at 1718th. You da buck private with acting first job. Man, that’s tough duty. You musta fuck up somewhere big time.”

“Well, that’s the way it goes,” I said. “If I can talk to some of your men, maybe I can help get ol’ Mose off. I don’t think he did it.”

“Most of the boys clam up. They scairt to death. You know they don’ know nothin.” We walked out to the motor pool where eight or ten drivers were standing around smoking. Curley was there, too. They stopped talking and a few field-stripped their cigarettes. They had respect for the sergeant.

“This here is the man from up at 1718. He be a private but he still the man, just like me. He gonna help his lieutenant get Mose off. You tell him what happened that night. No bullshit. I gonna know if you try to feed him bullshit.”

The sergeant turned around and walked off toward the orderly room. Here I am, I thought, in the middle of a forty-acre field with two hundred trucks and a dozen black soldiers in fatigues, afraid of and suspicious of all whites. I backed up to a truck fender and jumped and sat down.

“I talked to Mose yesterday in his jail cell. He told me what happened. Now I need you guys to tell me again. Every guy who sees a movie will see it a little different. I need to hear every guy’s story so I can get Mose off.

So my *lieutenant* can get Mose off. You know about that.”

“Amen,” one guy said. The others laughed. Curley told how he and Mose spent the night in a house. He got a lot of kidding from that. “Hey, man, that gal, she playin’ you. She eat the cake and you slep’ on the sofa.”

More laughs. This went on for about an hour. I got the name of the house, the street, and the names of the girls. Curley and two others agreed to repeat their stories if called on.

I told the story to Hoskins on the way back. Their first sergeant told me the guys “don’t know nothin’ ‘bout nothin’” when talking to their own officers. In the army, enlisted men were second-class citizens and treated so by the officers. I tried to think of what it would have been like to be a black soldier accused of a crime. A third-class citizen. Nobody to back him. In this case their own officers didn’t stand by their own men. They didn’t seem to care if the guy got off or not.

Hoskins got Jacques, the liaison between our military and the French government, and I told him where we had to go. He knew the street and the house and the madam.

“Easy,” Jacques said. “We go in my car. We don’t want a military jeep parked on that street.”

I never ceased to be amazed at Jacques. He

knew everything that went on in Marseille. He parked his car and we walked up to an old frame house. Inside were a sofa, four or five big stuffed chairs, and a sort of a bar with a couple of bottles of wine on top. Two girls were loafing next to the bar. The madam greeted Jacques like an old friend. They carried on in rapid-fire French for a while. I caught the word *morte* and *conteau* once or twice, and that was all too fast for me. *Oui*, she knew Mose and Curley. She sent for Babbette and Marie. They were sorry that Mose was in jail. Their soldier friends brought them cake and stayed all night. Sometimes they would bring soap and cigarettes. Mose and Curley were regulars, we concluded. We left as soon as Jacques was satisfied with what they told him. Neither Hoskins nor I spoke a word. On the way back, Jacques told us that all of the women would testify and in his opinion the defense was on solid ground.

Several days later, a court martial was held. I did not attend. With the evidence and witnesses that Lt. Hoskins presented, Mose was found not guilty. He was transferred away, and as far as I know, the real killer was never found.

Hoskins and I had done the job because we were ordered to it and we finished what we started. We all had a war to win. It was soon business as usual.

Robert’s bio and photograph appear with his other story, Christmas Eve 1944.

Here Come the Balloons!

Monte Haines

I was on the threshold of one of the best kept secrets of World War II. This involved the use of bomb-carrying balloons by the Japanese. There were some intelligent Japanese military leaders who understood air currents much earlier than the people of the United States. They devised large balloons that could carry half-dozen small bombs to float on the air currents that flowed from Japan east to west, and with a timing device drop the bombs on the United States mainland.

The balloons were designed to drop incendiary bombs on the forests of northern United States in an effort to disrupt manpower from the war effort to fight the fires. The balloons were seen floating from Washington and Oregon state (where the only fatalities were recorded) to central California and Nevada and as far east as Omaha, Nebraska. It is unknown how many balloons were launched, but it is believed to be in the hundreds.

Perhaps I saw one of the very first balloons which actually reached Carson City. Some of the balloons were trapped by the air currents in the Lake Tahoe basin and escaped down Virginia City canyon. In order to not give

the Japanese any information on where the balloons were flying, there was a nationwide media ban on reporting them. Information about the balloons was relayed by the military to high school students who then told their parents. The people of the United States have to be credited for never violating the media ban that would give the Japanese the necessary information that would make the bomb-laden balloons more effective.

In 1993 I wrote to a fellow in Wyoming requesting information about the balloons, and telling my story—the letter is reprinted following. He also referred me to Bert Weber, the author of the book *Silent Siege* to whom which I also sent a copy of my letter. Weber thanked me for my letter and said he was considering a second printing of the book and would include my experiences. In *Silent Siege*, the background of the Japanese balloon warfare is totally revealed.

As noted in my letter, it is a wonder that I did not get my head blown off because I know that I would have not left those bombs alone if I had hiked up that mountain that weekend. Read the letter and *Silent Siege*.

20 September 1993
2243 Apache Ct.
Ft. Collins, CO 80525

Jim More
215 E. Washington
Riverton Wy 82501

Dear Jim,

Reference is made to the August, 1993, *Wyoming History Notes* requesting information about the hot air balloons that Japan floated across the Pacific hoping to create forest fires and other labor diversions to the U. S. during World War II. While my story does not take place in Wyoming, it is pertinent to that part of the Big War, and it also provides me an excuse to record the event for my posterity.

I'm sorry that I cannot pinpoint the dates, but perhaps in conversation with you I could. It happened either in the Spring of 1944 or 1945 in Carson City, Nevada, where I was either a Junior or Senior in High School.

We lived at 41 5 Corbett St. on the northeast edge of town, and like any other curious and adventurous teenager, I felt that I knew all the countryside around Carson where I would take the trusty .22 rifle plunking jack rabbits or 20 gauge single shot shotgun for quail to supplement the food ration stamps for Mom and Dad.

On this particular Spring day, during the week, as I went out the front door heading for school, when I noticed a white spot near the summit of the hill (in the Virginia Range) north of town that I had never noticed before. With curiosity I made a promise to myself that I must investigate that new and unaccounted for spot on a coming weekend.

The first weekend passed without me climbing the mountain, (It would be about a five mile hike from home.) and what really baffled me was that the spot disappeared the middle of the next week. That really appeared strange to me, for at that time we lived virtually on the last street on the north side of town and there were very few homes between us and the hill, plus the fact there were no roads in that area. The flume that provided water from the Sierra to Virginia City was further up the mountain and on the other side. The comings and goings of that spot completely baffled this teenager.

About two weeks after that, the High School Principal, Donald Robertson, called a special assembly for all the students . . . all 125 of us. There was no usual announcement preceding this, which was most unusual. After we were all assembled in the large study hall, the Principal entered with an entourage of local law enforcement officers plus two men in Naval officer uniforms. Mr. Robertson made a brief announcement that the Military Department had requested this special assembly

and then passed the time over to the Naval officers.

The officers announced that the Japanese were creating hot air balloons that carried a dozen five pound incendiary bombs (I believe those logistics are correct) with a timing device to release the bombs over the western part of the United States to start forest fires. The forest fires, besides burning natural resources, would cause labor demands from the war effort plus create fear for the American populace.

These balloons, made of paper, were being launched from a northwest Japanese Island and could catch the trade winds of the Japanese current and fly to the United States.

The officers then announced that it was our patriotic duty as students, and our contribution to the war effort, to tell our families and friends of the impending danger. The press (radio and newspapers at that time) were sworn never to say or print a word of this Japanese action for it would give the location of the flight of the balloons and the Japanese could make adjustments in the launch sites and ballast to direct the balloons to more opportune targets. The law enforcement officers also emphasized this point . . . to tell everyone verbally, but not a word in the press.

It was also emphasized that if we found a balloon that had landed to leave it alone, but to call the authorities to disarm and retrieve the bombs! The officers also reported that, so far, the balloons had not yet caused any damage to the forests.

That must have been what the white spot on the mountains was . . . a Japanese war balloon! What would have happened if I had hiked up that mountain on that weekend and discovered the bombs? Would I have been smart enough to leave them alone? Wow, what a souvenir that would have made for a teenager, carrying all those bombs to school to show off! Knowing my personality I still sweat over the probabilities of that one!

It was not long after this, the action began. The balloons started coming!

In studying a map, you will discover that Lake Tahoe, directly west of Carson City, creates a huge basin for the westerly winds, and the low point in the mountains is directly west of Carson City in VC Canyon or just to the south at Spooner's Summit that empties out onto Stewart, the Indian boarding school, just five miles south of Carson City. Anything caught in the winds would swirl around in the Lake Tahoe basin and empty down one of those two canyons.

A perfect funnel action. Stewart and Carson City were targeted for the bombs!

It seemed that noon was always a good time to see a balloon coming down VC canyon and head for the Capitol dome. I suppose that Spring I saw a half dozen of those balloons and heard of nearly the same number in the Stewart area.

When the balloons came down the canyon, some one would alert the authorities at the Reno Army Air Base (now Stead field) north of Reno, and pursuit planes would come (I believe they were either P-47s or P-51s). The planes would buzz the balloons traveling from west to east, slipping around them as close as possible, making a draft to suck the balloons out over the Pine Nut Range and then shoot them down.

I remember one balloon was particularly low and it seemed as though it was going to strike the Capitol dome, but the rest of the balloons were relatively high. When the planes came and buzzed the balloons, it created quite the show for the populace of Carson City. I never heard of any bombs released or exploding from these balloons.

About five years after this and married to my beloved Elaine, we were deer hunting on Mt. Rose, between Carson City and Reno, when we discovered what we believed to be the remains of one of the balloons. It was draped over either a small juniper tree or a large bitter brush. The fabric was dark and very fragile to the touch, and there were several nylon cords wrapped with it. We did not find any part of the bomb carriage. In fact, the only souvenir we did find was a GI can opener that was common for the K or CD rations that the military used. Somewhere in our boxes of slides there are one or two pictures of this balloon.

Well, Jim, that is the extent of my story. I hope some of it helps you in your project. I have enjoyed recalling it, and will keep a duplicate copy of it in my journal so that some day one of my progeny may read this part of a very unknown part of World War II. I would be curious to any other information that you may obtain.

Best wishes,

Monte Haines

Basic Training and “Goofus”

Jon Otis

Note: This story takes place in 1948, following World War II

One routine that took place early in boot camp was the visit to the medical and dental departments. This building was called Sickbay, and we marched there even though we weren't sick. We lined up single file with shirts off and took our turn stepping from one Navy corpsman to the next as they punched dull needles in our arms. I don't know all the shots we were given, but I remember that tetanus hurt more than the others. Next, we deposited a little blood into small vials, and I'm sure some of it was for Dracula, the name we had for one of our Drill Instructors (DIs), to drink.

Then we went to see the Navy dentists who were officers and gentlemen. They were quite young and probably inexperienced. One of them, peering in my mouth, called to another one. “Come take a look . . .”

“See these three cavities in his molars? The only things left are the walls of the teeth. It looks like the decaying has stopped.”

The other one stared and asked me, “When did these cavities happen?”

They forgot to take the instruments out of

my mouth, so my answer was garbled.

“What was that? Speak up.”

Then they remembered the hardware in my mouth and removed it. “It really got bad when I was fifteen and I had to have one tooth pulled,” I answered.

“Why didn't you have these other teeth filled?” they asked.



Jon Otis in 1948

“I didn’t have any insurance and I couldn’t afford it.”

“Well you’re lucky. I think we can put fillings in because it appears the remainder of these molars have ebonized.”

The other dentist said, “I think you’re right. Why don’t we build crowns and strap them in?”

These two fellows were young, but they were really good. They worked for hours over three different visits and repaired my teeth perfectly. Only one time in the next fifty years have I had to have one of the crowns reset.

Physical conditioning was of paramount importance in boot camp. Constant close order drills, in which the manual of arms was practiced daily and for hours on end, strengthened your hands, shoulders and arms. The M-I weighed 9 1/2 pounds without ammunition. As you marched, you were continually ordered to go from right-shoulder to left-shoulder arms, then to port arms and back to one of the shoulder arms. Later we learned how to spin our rifles like an airplane propeller, while marching at port arms.

All maneuvers had to be done with precision and in complete unison. Any slight mishap--and they were numerous--meant constant drilling until our DIs were satisfied. At first the rifles felt very heavy and cumbersome. It was very tiring and our hands became sore from slapping the rifles as we went through these routines. At the end of the day we were exhausted and aching. The next morning, hands, arms and shoulders were sore. But after many weeks of drilling our hands and bodies toughened and the rifles began to feel quite light.

Running was a big part of conditioning.

Often we would run double time with our rifles at port arms with full field packs. The backpacks contained clothing and field rations. Of course we had our water canteens hooked to our belts that added to the burden.

The obstacle course was another grim conditioner. You started by running through old truck tires placed flat on the ground but spaced a few inches apart and side by side. You had to run with your legs wide apart in order to put your feet into each opening. The length of this section was about fifty feet. Next, a run through deep sand until you came to a rope that was grabbed so you could swing over a ten-foot body of shallow water. Quite often you couldn’t get up enough speed to swing all the way and you would land knee deep in the water that slowed you down considerably.

Another tricky assignment was running on wooden beams that were six inches wide and twenty feet long. They were raised about two feet above the ground. If you fell off, it was back to the beginning to start over. This could be very time consuming.

One of the most difficult obstacles was the wall. It was eight feet high and made of wood, with no handholds. To get over it required a running start, and using one foot on the wall, lunge for the top. Then you had to pull yourself up and over. This wouldn’t have been so bad except that it was toward the end of a half-mile course that required leaping over ditches and waist high railings.

Totally exhausted, and at the end of the course, we would look over at the DI, who held a stopwatch, and he would be shaking his head.

“You girls are too soft and slow. In five minutes I want to see a better time,” he demanded.

The other DIs were placed around the course so there was no chance you could take short cuts or fudge a bit—like run around the wall or the water trap. Of course, our time probably didn't improve that day but after some weeks we were competing against each other and getting faster and stronger. The DI would have each squad run separately and comment, "Squad two, you beat squad one by thirty seconds and squad three by a full minute."

In order to improve our squad's time, we were encouraged to help the weaker members get over the wall or by pushing them hard on the rope swing in order to clear the water. This could work against your personal time if you weren't careful.

Another part of conditioning included instruction and contests of judo. None of us became very good but at least we learned a few basic moves and throws. Bayonet training was not complicated but we practiced many hours lunging forward and sticking hay bales, then more running and killing more bales.

Gas mask training consisted of the proper placement of the mask on your face, then going into a large Quonset hut where tear gas was pumped in. After a few minutes, we were quite confident that our masks were working. Then the instructor told us to remove our masks. When we did, it became difficult to breathe and our eyes burned and watered profusely.

"OK put your masks back on," the DI said after a minute or so, which we did without any hesitation.

Water survival consisted of two separate drills. In the first one, we were taught to jump from a twenty-foot tower into a swimming pool without injuring ourselves. We were told to always remove our helmets

to prevent head and neck injuries when we hit the water. The second was to cross your ankles to prevent discomfort in other regions. Once in the water we would remove our shoes and trousers. We could tread water much easier without shoes while we knotted each leg of our pants. Then taking the waist, we would pull the pants rapidly over our head to capture air in the legs as we brought the waist into the water, while making sure the waist was cinched tight with its belt. Voila, Marine Corps water wings.

Some of the recruits couldn't swim and were put in special classes. It was a crash course in conquering the fear of water and learning the breaststroke. A few boots in the platoon had real trouble jumping off the tower. They would stand there looking down like zombies and could not jump. The instructors would yell at them to jump or be tossed off by boots standing behind them. Eventually, all did jump of their own accord.

Next, we were taught how to swim in water where oil was burning on the surface. First, we would swim towards the flames using the breaststroke but also to splash the flames away from us. Then we were shown how to swim under the flames. When we needed to surface for air, we would look up at the burning fluid and splash a hole in the flames as we surfaced. Fortunately, none of us got burned or had any of the fuel get on our skin. Our instructors were all in bathing suits and would rescue anyone that looked like they were about to get into trouble.

One of the toughest parts of our training, believe it or not, was watching various films. Sitting in a hot, stuffy, dark Quonset hut without dozing off was pure torture. As we watched the horrors of venereal disease or graphic depictions of toes being removed because of trench foot, the overpowering urge to sleep usually won out—but not for long. DIs would walk up and down the

aisles and bop anyone ready to snooze. The bopper was a long fishing pole with a golf ball on the end. The DIs were proficient whacking any head that was beginning to nod.

The basic training finally came to an end and we were off to camp Mathews (a few miles north of San Diego) and its numerous firing ranges. There were four or five other platoons there in various training stages. Some were in their first week like us and were given instructions on the proper stances to be used when firing our rifles. Our DIs would march us to a range and turn us over to Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) who were specialists in this activity. They were the range masters and all were expert marksmen.

The first position we were taught was the prone position. I thought it was a form of torture, because your left arm was strapped by the rifle's leather sling very tightly, then pulled hard until your left elbow was directly under your rifle. That would have been OK except laying flat on your stomach put a lot of stress on your left shoulder. After lying there for some time doing "dry firing," which means no ammunition, your shoulder and your elbow would start to hurt.

The other positions we would use on the range, were standing, kneeling and sitting. While learning these techniques, we were shown how to use our rifle sights. Each click of elevation or wind age would have significant effect depending on the distance to the target.

The big day occurred when we were taken to the range to fire with live ammo. At 200 yards, we fired in standing position. Some boots missed the targets and were given, "Maggie's Draws," a red flag on a pole that was waved across the target by the spotter sitting in a trench. Eventually we all had to

perform as spotters. It required you to pull down the target that was on a chain-operated track. Then the target was examined after each shot. If the bullet hit the black bull's eye, a white round marker was placed at the hole and the target was raised for the shooter to record the shot. Black markers were used for the white parts of the target. They carried lower scores than the bull's eye but were important in tallying your total.

As you went back to longer distances on the range, the windage and elevation settings on your sight became crucial. It was imperative that you log the settings in a small booklet. After each shot you could determine what adjustments were needed to hit the bull's eye. At 500 yards, windage calculations were a real problem, especially in the afternoon when the wind would often increase. By studying the flags at the 400, 300 and 200 yard markers, you would make the best estimate on where to set your sights. The bull's eye at 500 yards is 20 inches in diameter but looking at it through your rear peep sight, it looked like a flyspeck. If you looked at it too long it had a tendency to blur or disappear. If it was in the afternoon, (and this was August), the heat waves would further complicate things.

After much practice, the day to qualify was upon us. It was at the end of all our preparation and everyone was very nervous. A Marine must qualify with a rifle. There are no exceptions. The qualifying level is called Marksman. Next is Sharpshooter and the highest is Expert.

If a Marine does not qualify on his first try, he continues until he succeeds. Some individuals are never able to make the grade and are given a discharge from the Corps.

That happened to one fellow in our platoon. He had a deathly fear of firearms. The first

day firing live ammo, the range master noticed he was closing both eyes and jerking each time he pulled the trigger. One of the instructors told him to assume the prone position and carefully focus on his target, number 27. Then carefully squeeze off a round to see if he could hit the target.

“Be sure to sight it with your right eye and gently squeeze the trigger,” he was told.

Directly in front of “Goofus,” as I’ll call this recruit, there was a wooden board with the number 27 painted in white. That indicated his position and his corresponding target. After all this careful instruction, he was told to fire one shot. He promptly squeezed off eight rounds rapidly, blowing apart the number peg 27, to smithereens. The instructor stared at the destroyed number peg that was not more than two feet in front of Goofus and said, “What the hell!” Then he looked at Goofus, “Son I think we have a real problem here.”

There was no question that Goofus had some deficiencies. He seemed happy enough even when being screamed at by our DIs. He was usually the last man to fall in formation outside the barracks and usually with his shirttail not tucked in. Shoe laces sometimes not tied and over all, one mistake or another.

One time at inspection, he didn’t pull back his rifle bolt all the way; it barely managed to catch, but not securely. The DI took the rifle from Goofus, and as he looked inside the slide chamber, he put his thumb inside to see if there was excess oil on the mechanism. Suddenly, the spring activated bolt slammed forward smashing the DI’s thumb. As he struggled to pull back the slide, he got redder and redder, but he finally rescued his thumb. His silence was amazing as he worked the slide back and forth. He finally

was satisfied that the bolt would stay back. Then he told Goofus, “Put your thumb in there.” Goofus stared at him in disbelief. “I said, put your thumb in there, you clown.” Goofus finally obeyed and the DI slammed the bolt forward smashing the sinner’s thumb. Goofus bellowed out, “Dern it, why’d you do that?”

The DI replied, “I wanted yo to see how it felt. Now we both have throbbing thumbs.”

As time went on it became obvious that Goofus was having quite a problem fitting in. The rifle range episode was the last straw, and he was sent back to the recruit depot in San Diego.

We all suspected he would be issued a general discharge that was given to misfits. That was a lot better than getting a medical (Section 8) discharge that was given to individuals who went nuts or who were a little loony.

This was confirmed when we returned from the range and took our turn doing mess duty for a week. My assignment was to be a baker’s helper. This particular baker was a sergeant with many years service. He was mild mannered and quite patient.

“Go into cold storage and get six dozen eggs and break them into that large steel tub. Now let me show you how to make sure we don’t get too many egg shells in the mix.”

Taking the egg in each hand, he cracked them on the edge of the large kettle and expertly opened each egg in one swift movement. I stared at him and thought, he’s had years of experience, and I know I’ll make a mess.

He smiled as if to read my mind and said, “It might be a good idea if you used two hands

on each egg. But remember these eggs are going into my famous chocolate cakes—so no shells.”

In addition to breaking thousands of eggs and freezing my hands, my other duties consisted of lugging tons of flour and sugar to put in various caldrons.

And guess whose job it was to clean all these containers? I worked hard to make sure the stainless steel kettles were spotless. Not only that, but I had to take the large metal garbage barrels outside and scrub them with soap and water.

About mid-week of this duty, I was outside with my head inside a garbage barrel when I heard a voice.

“Hi Jon, how you doing?” I looked up and there stood Goofus eating a candy bar. He was dressed in a neat Marine green uniform. His shoes were shined; his pants had a nice crease and a fore and aft cap placed smartly on his head. The only thing spoiling this picture was that he had candy bars and chewing gum stuffed in the breast pockets of his jacket. This was cardinal sin Number One. Nothing was ever put in your jacket pockets. They had to be pressed flat—no bulges allowed. The second sin was that boots were not allowed to eat candy or have chewing gum. After thirteen weeks and graduation, you could rot your teeth as

much as you wanted.

It was strictly forbidden to talk to someone outside the platoon. I told Goofus, “Go away, you know I can’t talk to you.”

He answered, “Why not? Do you want some candy?”

“No, now beat it.”

Goofus ignored me and informed me, “I’m getting discharged on Friday and they are giving me train fare to go home. I’m real happy they are not going to give me a bad conduct discharge, it wouldn’t look good back home.”

It was obvious he wanted to talk and wasn’t about to leave, so I said, “It looks like you really made out. Good luck in civilian life. I have to get back to the kitchen. See Ya.”

I often wondered how he made out. All the brutal treatment he had received didn’t seem to dampen his sunny attitude. What really made me ponder was how did he get in the Corps? Some recruiting office must have been desperate to fill its quota.

Jon Otis survived basic training and served with distinction in the Marines in the years following World War II. He is now retired and living in Reno and is co-leader of the Lifescapes program at the Sierra View Library.

