



American Airlines 



Dear veterans,

On behalf of the 130,000 team members of American Airlines, we are honored to take you on a memorable trip to Normandy, France, to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day and preserve your legacy for generations to come.

Among those traveling with us on this journey are those who stormed the beaches under intense fire, paratroopers who jumped out of airplanes under the cover of darkness and pilots who flew bombing runs while dodging a sky full of flak. We're also honored to welcome Medal of Honor recipients — America's highest award for valor in action — and cadets and midshipmen from our nation's service academies who will accompany the veterans.

American has a long history of honoring and supporting those who have committed their lives to serving our nation. Your bravery inspires us all, and your legacy will forever be etched in our history. We take great pride in honoring you for your service, sacrifice and courage. Because of you, we can fly freely all around the world.

With gratitude,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Isom', written in a cursive style.

Robert Isom
CEO
American Airlines

Returning to Normandy after 80 years

On June 6, 1944, Allied forces embarked on a mission that brought together land, air and sea forces during the largest amphibious invasion in military history. The operation, given the codename “Overlord,” delivered five naval assault divisions to the beaches of Normandy, France.

The invasion force included 7,000 ships and landing craft crewed by over 195,000 naval personnel from eight countries. Almost 133,000 troops from the United States, Great Britain, Canada and their allies landed in France to begin the massive effort. Casualties from these countries numbered over 10,000, and by June 30, over 850,000 troops, 148,000 vehicles and 570,000 tons of supplies had landed on the shores of Normandy. Fighting by the Allied forces on the western and eastern fronts led to the defeat of Nazi Germany. The unconditional surrender of all German forces was officially signed May 7, 1945.

Eighty years later, American Airlines will fly nearly 70 World War II veterans to France to commemorate these historic events. They will fly to Dallas-Fort Worth on May 30 and be honored at a World War II-themed kickoff dinner at the company’s headquarters, complete with entertainment by a 1940s big band and a performance by the Victory Belles of the National World War II Museum in New Orleans.

The group will fly on a chartered Boeing 787 to Paris the next day. There, the veterans will partake in a wreath-laying ceremony at Suresnes American Cemetery, cruise down the scenic Seine River, visit the iconic Eiffel Tower and participate in le Ravivage de la Flamme, a daily ceremony that honors fallen French service members at the Arc de triomphe.

They will then head to the Normandy region for commemorative events, concerts, ceremonies and museum tours. Activities include wreath-laying ceremonies on Omaha and Utah Beaches, lunch at a historic chateau that once served as the headquarters for a German division, a visit to Pointe

du Hoc and a parade for the veterans through the streets of Sainte-Mère-Église. The 10-day trip will culminate with a ceremony at the American Battle Monument Commission’s Normandy American Cemetery, where nearly 9,400 Americans are laid to rest.

For this special journey, 66 World War II veterans from across the United States will be accompanied by two Rosie the Riveters, a British Army doctor whose Army husband was part of the Normandy mission and a Holocaust survivor who never saw his parents again after they were taken to the Auschwitz concentration camp. The veterans going on the trip range from 96 to 107 years old, with an average age of 100.8 years old.

“

*The eyes of the world
are upon you. The
hopes and prayers of
liberty-loving people
everywhere march with
you.*

”

— General Dwight D. Eisenhower

Six Medal of Honor recipients will also join the trip. These men received the highest award for valor in action for their service in Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam, but will join the World War II veterans to honor them for their service and sacrifice.

A joint choir, composed of over 50 cadets and midshipmen from our nation’s military service academies will also be in attendance. In addition to performing along the way, each of these future military officers will be assigned to a veteran. Their mission is to hear their stories firsthand, learn from them and pass those stories onto the next generation of military leaders.

Historic trips like this don’t happen without the support of American Airlines team members, caring volunteers, talented medical personnel and like-minded organizations. Those organizations include TriWest Health Care Alliance, Gary Sinise Foundation, Robert Irvine Foundation, Old Glory Honor Flight, Still Serving Promos and the American Veterans Center. They, among many others, have stepped up to honor these veterans and recognize them for their sacrifices that helped free the world from tyranny.



Monica Agnew-Kinnaman

Monica Agnew-Kinnaman was born in 1918 in a small village in Yorkshire County, England, eight months before the end of World War I. For a couple of years, she went to finishing school, as most women in England did not go to college.

After World War II began, she spent several years in a hospital tending to wounded soldiers and civilians. Her older sister and brother both joined the military, so she decided to follow in their footsteps and joined the British Army in 1942. She was assigned to the 7th Heavy Anti-Artillery Regiment.

New recruits all started as privates, but she achieved the rank of captain after attending an officer's training school. She was stationed at sites between Portsmouth and South

Hampton for several months and directed anti-aircraft gunners against the German bombers and fighters. On several occasions, she witnessed several German planes get shot down and even saw American fighters and bombers crash, which were dreadful sights to witness. She was discharged at the end of 1946.

After the war, she married her husband Glenn, who landed on D-Day with the second wave on Omaha Beach. They eventually settled in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where they have lived ever since. She earned a doctorate in psychology at the age of 69 and worked in that field until she was forced to retire at age 83 after being hit by a pickup truck.

They raised two amazing children and are

all very close. If there is one thing she has been passionate about, it has been her love of dogs. When she was only 10, she started to rescue old, abused and abandoned animals, but her heart gravitated toward the dogs. Her favorite pet was her sweet wolf named Juneau, who lived to be 14.

She has been published in "Chicken Soup for the Soul" several times, and her last story was published when she was 105. Her children and her father are also published authors. ★



Henry Armstrong

Henry Clinton Armstrong was born Nov. 5, 1924, in Covington, Kentucky. He was raised by a single mother during the Great Depression, so his family faced many financial hardships as they relied on government assistance in the form of food and clothing.

Six months before his high school graduation, World War II erupted, prompting him to join the military at 18. Despite the outbreak of war, he made sure to obtain his diploma before embarking on his journey into the U.S. Army.

After an eight-week boot camp at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, he attended pack artillery instruction, specifically about the 75mm howitzer. The training regimen was rigorous, and he found adapting to the drastic change from his life in his hometown to be challenging. Despite the long work hours, he found fulfillment in his service.

He served in D Battery, 607th Field Artillery, 71st Infantry Division, 3rd Army. His unit, known as the "Red Circle Division," was the first company to encounter

the Gunskirchen Lager concentration camp in Austria. His initial role was as an ammunition handler, responsible for distributing ammunition to 75mm and 105mm howitzers.

He served as a pack artilleryman and later transitioned to an artillery spotter, relaying grid coordinates to the fire direction center, which would then relay the information to the guns. He was attacked when a German soldier infiltrated the forest, drew a small handgun and aimed it directly at him. Using his arm as a shield, he was struck in the left wrist by the bullet. Despite the injury, he acted swiftly, utilizing the weapons he had on hand to successfully remove the German soldier from the fort.

He served as an aerial observer flying on a L3 light reconnaissance aircraft known affectionately by the men who flew them as the "Grasshopper." They were tasked with flying over German lines to observe troop movements and report accurate artillery fire. During one mission, an ME109 German

plane began tailing him, firing rounds that struck Henry's aircraft. Employing skilled maneuvering, the pilot quickly tilted his plane downward. As the German pilot followed suit, Henry executed a sharp turn upward, causing the German pilot to collide with the side of a hill. Despite not firing a single shot, they successfully downed the enemy plane.

Henry was in active service until 1984 as a command sergeant major. He continued to serve in the reserves, focusing on military intelligence, psychological operations and combat engineering. His exceptional service was recognized with numerous awards, including the French Legion of Honor, an Army Commendation and Reserve Achievement medal.

Following the war, he took the role of head meat cutter at Kroger supermarket, where he worked with his wife, Pat. They have celebrated 64 years of marriage, a testament to their enduring love and partnership. ★

Photograph by Ron Kaplan



William Balabanow

William H. Balabanow grew up in the farmlands of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He had three sisters, food was scarce and times were tough due to the Great Depression. His mother was a seamstress and his father a laborer, and he got his first job as a newspaper boy. As a teenager in junior high school, all he thought about was playing games and staying out of his mother's hair.

Dec. 7, 1941, was just another day sitting around at home, but the next day at school, one of his friends said, "Hey William, ready to get your gun?" He did not know much about the military but noticed people disappearing from his town, and since all the girls loved a man in uniform, he dropped out of school to join the military. Upon going to the Naval office, he was rejected for curvature of the spine. After being rejected from other military branches, he discovered the Merchant Marines, forged his mother's signature to enlist and awaited his call for boot camp.

After arriving at boot camp, he thought it

was the greatest thing ever. He had never had this many new clothes, and he received three meals a day, a place to sleep and occasionally went to see movies for free. It was during boot camp that the Merchant Marines were asking for people to volunteer to be radio operators, which he thought sounded fun, so he volunteered and was sent to radio school. There, he learned both Morse code and radio theory. In addition, it was important to know how a radio worked so he could build a makeshift one or fix one if it broke.

His first deployment was to southern France, carrying new supplies there and old ones back. This was his first time ever stepping onto a boat and he was seasick all the way to France and back. He only did a couple missions on this ship before he was transferred to a newer tanker, the SS Marine Robin, which transferred jeeps, trucks, airplanes, tanks and anything else that may be needed on the front lines.

He then did various voyages through the Caribbean before making his way to the Panama Canal, the Philippines and Japan.

While he was in the Pacific, he decoded the message that they dropped the atomic bombs that ended the war. From then on, he was on Liberty ships that supported the Marshall Plan in Europe.

When he returned home, he didn't receive the hero's welcome that his fellow service members in the other branches received. Merchant Marines were treated as civilians, so most people didn't understand how crucial they were during the war. It wasn't until 1988 that they were fully recognized for their service.

He reenlisted with the Merchant Marines and served until 1979. His career brought him through World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. He wants people to remember that "our troops sacrificed their lives to keep America free," and to "keep your flag waving for our freedom!" ★

Photograph by Mike Carroll



Charles Baldwin

Born in 1922 and raised in Artesia, New Mexico, Charles Baldwin recalls counting pennies growing up because of the Great Depression. He graduated high school in 1939 and went to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, where he was a sophomore as the war was heating up in Europe. Always wanting to fly, he made his mind up that he would join the Army Air Corps. He enlisted and began training by taking a course offered by the government at the university. He recalls sitting around the kitchen table listening to the radio when the news broke that the Imperial Japanese Armed Forces had attacked Pearl Harbor. He waited for his call to active duty, which happened Jan. 25, 1943.

He bounced around different training bases before finally earning his wings in Victoria,

Texas. He and the rest of the 23rd Fighter Squadron then traveled to Gourrock, Scotland, to begin their European deployment. His normal mission was air-to-ground bombing and strafing, but he remembers flying a few unusual missions. His squadron was tasked with providing air cover to an air base in the middle of evacuation. He recalls, "Our job was just to circle the air base to protect them in case some enemy plane got in while they were flying the wounded out...[it] was some of the roughest weather I've ever been in in my life. I mean, we were beat up from just flying for a couple of hours around in a circle, bouncing around."

He was discharged from active service Nov. 14, 1945, but this would not be the end of his military service. He remained in the Air Corps Reserve until 1982 with the final rank of

lieutenant colonel. While in the reserves, he entered the retail business operating a family department store until his retirement in 1987. He married his high school sweetheart, had three children and reconnected with his unit at annual reunions for several years.

When asked about America's legacy in the war, Charles' words are powerful: "We were united. There were millions of Americans who joined together and individually did as much or more to win the war as those who wore a uniform. We worked together and had pride in being Americans." ★

Photograph by Edward Phillips



Charles Brooking

Charles "Charlie" Brooking was born in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, a small town surrounded by farmland. Growing up, he recalls working to help his family. He first learned about Pearl Harbor when he was in school, and no one knew where it was. Charlie and half of his class joined the military, and unfortunately, many of his classmates would not survive the war.

The day he enlisted is still vivid, as he remembers going with his father to a Wilkes-Barre recruiting station. He was still in high school when he decided to join the U.S. Navy.

He enjoyed his time training in Sampson, New York, since he was used to being outdoors from his time at home. His original impression of military life was that he liked it, stating, "It was really down my line because a lot of men would come there and had no experience with the outdoors at all, whereas I had a whole lot of experience with the outdoors, and on the ground."

When he was asked what type of boat he wanted to be on, Charlie answered, "A small one." In his unit, PT boat testing was rugged and, out of 120 of his fellow sailors, only 21 were selected for PT boat duty. He didn't know much about it, but he found PT boats to be small, fast and expendable vessels for short-range oceanic scouting. The boats were armed with torpedoes and machine guns for cutting enemy supply lines and harassing enemy forces.

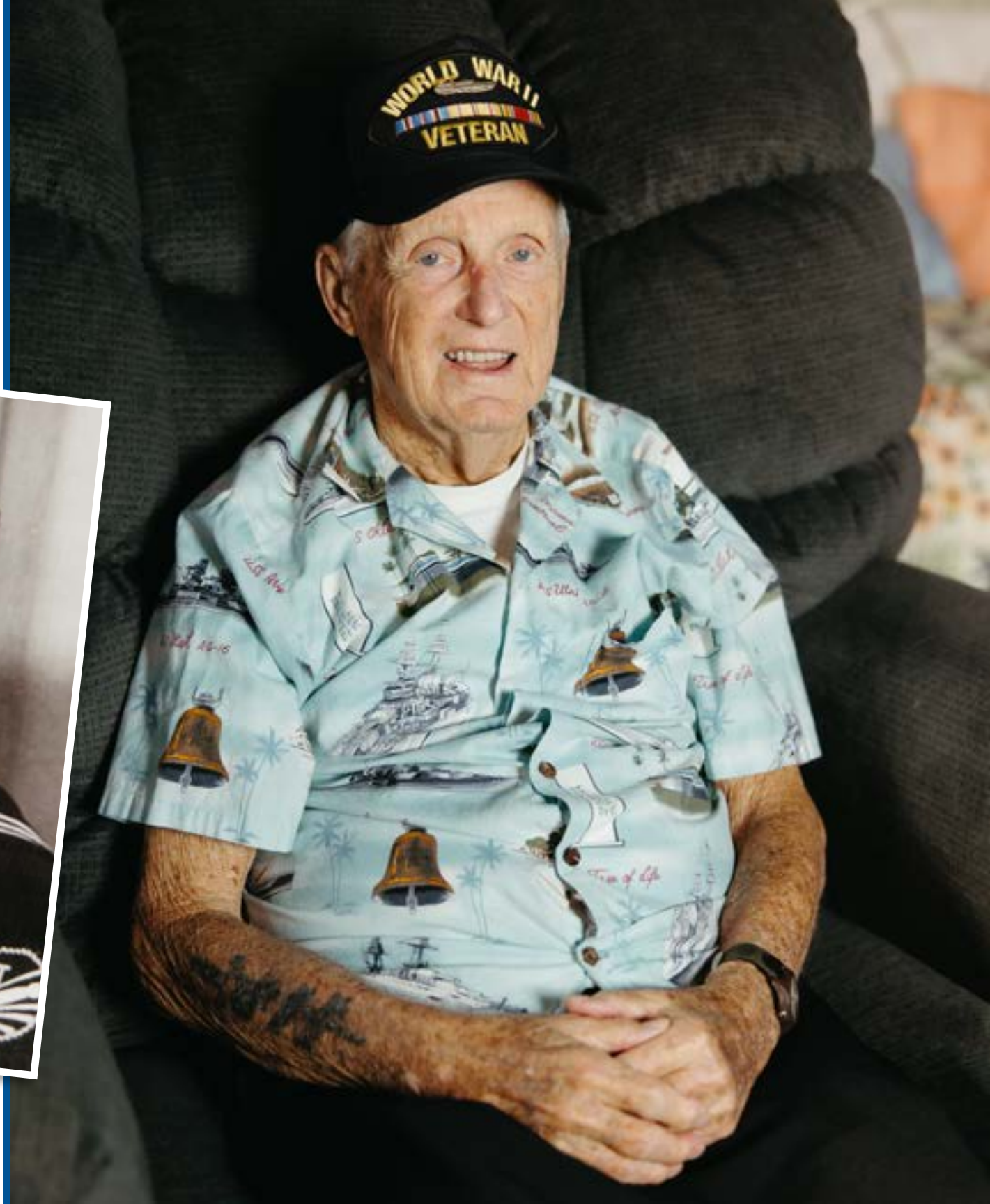
Charlie was a gunner's mate second class on the PT boat, which was used to harass the Japanese fleet, who had referred to PT boats as "mosquito boats." Toward the war's end, he heard about D-Day and wished he could be there to help. Upon hearing that the war was over, he said, "There was great joy and we were so happy."

He continued to serve his country in the Navy until 1954, when he was discharged due to injury. He then worked in Bridgeport, Connecticut, for Vought Aircraft and later

moved to California for a job with Inner Urban Express on the freight platform.

Throughout the years, he continued to reunite with his fellow sailors. He remembers fondly: "In World War II, we fought for the freedom of the people, not only for the U.S., but all the other people throughout the world." He was very proud to do his duty for the U.S., and he would do it all over again to keep the country free. He reminds the next generation: "If you want freedom, you have got to fight to retain it and not let a dictator try to take over our country, because freedom is the thing that keeps everybody together. It allows you to do what you want to do and go where you want to go without any difficulty or restrictions. Fight for what is right." ★

Photograph by Cassandra Weber



Louis Brown

Louis Brown was born in Meridian, Mississippi, to a large, loving family. He had four brothers and two sisters, a father who worked on the railroad and a mother who spent her time taking care of him and his siblings. Focused on making a living, he went through middle and high school without thinking about college. His older brothers were in the military: two in the U.S. Army and another in the Air Force.

He wanted to volunteer and join the Army, but his parents objected. He learned about the attack on Pearl Harbor from the radio while in school and those around him were “shocked and uncertain about the future of America.”

He was drafted in 1944 and was excited for the chance to leave his home and serve. His six-week boot camp was at Camp Van Dorn in southern Mississippi, and although it was

cold at camp, he enjoyed military life.

After boot camp, he became a part of the 4036th Quartermaster, a unit known for driving the Red Ball Express. Running for 24 hours a day, this was a convoy system used to transport supplies as quickly as possible. Drivers had to stay vigilant, only having 10-minute breaks at the top of every hour and a 30-minute food break after six hours. Soldiers had to be careful because of the road conditions.

He operated under perilous conditions against a desperate enemy as they delivered critical ammo, gasoline and supplies. Often coming under fire, these units supported the push across the Rhine and into Germany during the final months of the war.

In May 1945, the European war was officially declared over. His unit was in Czechoslovakia, but they immediately

stopped what they were doing to head to Camp Munich, Germany, to celebrate the victory.

He ended up staying for another year after the war was over until he was out-processed at Camp Shelby and officially discharged May 4, 1946, as a staff sergeant.

He stayed with a family in Meridian for two months before moving to California. There, he continued a life of public service, working for the City of Los Angeles as an equipment serviceman for 33 years. He was married in 1950, had two daughters and is now surrounded by a loving family after leading a life of service. ★

Photograph by Jasen Laks



Richard Canfield

Richard "Dick" Canfield was born in San Diego in 1924, raised during the Great Depression and remembers the frugality of his family throughout his upbringing. His father was a self-employed mechanic who provided enough for the family to get by. Wanting to help support his family, Dick got his first job selling Liberty Magazine subscriptions in high school.

He was a senior in high school when Pearl Harbor was attacked, and shortly after, he enlisted in U.S. Army and volunteered for the Cadet Corps pilot training program. Midway through his training, he was transferred back into the infantry due to the increased number of troops needed on the ground.

In Europe, Dick and the other members of the 86th Infantry "Blackhawks" Division were tasked with traveling from Cologne,

Germany, to Vienna, Austria, cleaning up and repairing phone lines to facilitate vital and secure communication with Allied troops and leadership as troops advanced. In May 1945, he was transferred back to the United States to undergo further training before being sent to Luzon in the Philippines, where he remained until December 1946.

Dick was discharged as a private first class in March 1946. He and his wife married in 1947 and built their family while Dick took over the mechanic shop started by his father. ★

Photograph by Doug Gifford



Manuel Carvalho

Manuel “Manny” Carvalho is a World War II Bronze Star recipient from Fall River, Massachusetts, who served in the U.S. Army as a private first class.

Manny came from a big, caring family and was one of six kids. He credits this environment for instilling in him a family-oriented way of life. He loved his hometown and had never left until he was drafted. His young life involved going to school and work.

After being drafted, he was sent to Fort Devin and completed basic training at Fort Knox before being sent to Virginia, North Africa and Iran, among other places. He started off as a Sherman tank driver and served with General Patton in North Africa, constantly chasing General Rommel, known as the “Desert Fox,” and the Germans.

General Patton was someone Manny admired and respected.

Later, his unit was sent to China, Myanmar and India to supply the army there. He was on board the HMT Rohna when it was bombed, one of the biggest disasters in World War II and the greatest loss of U.S. life at sea due to enemy action. He luckily found one of the very few life preservers on board and, although he couldn't swim, he jumped in the ocean and survived for nearly three hours. For many years, he was forced to keep quiet about this tragic incident, in which over 1,000 U.S. troops were lost.

After the bombing, his remaining unit was sent to supply gas for the Flying Tigers, which was incredibly dangerous. He had to fill up 50 gallons of aviation gas and lead 10–15 truck convoys going through Myanmar and

the Himalayas in a C-47 to give to the Flying Tigers.

He was extremely grateful to come back home alive and go back to his normal job. These days, he can be seen hanging out at his favorite place, The Liberal Club in Fall River, or at the Veterans' Kitchen, enjoying his time. He was an extremely brave veteran who made a great impact on the war effort in North Africa, China, Myanmar and India. Not only that, but he also survived one of the most devastating disasters in World War II, making him a true hero. ★

Photograph by Marc Farb



Edward Cavallini

Edward Cavallini was born May 18, 1923, and grew up in San Francisco with his mother and father. He finished his junior year at University of Southern California, and when military recruiters came to campus, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps. He was commissioned July 30, 1944, at Camp Pendleton and then spent several weeks training in Maui.

As a rifle platoon leader, he was responsible for the lives of 45 Marines and Navy corpsmen. Before heading to Iwo Jima, his platoon stopped at Pearl Harbor to practice climbing up and down the nets.

During the battle for Iwo Jima, he was a second lieutenant in command of 1st Platoon, K Company, 3rd Battalion, 24th Regiment, 4th Marine Division. His platoon landed on Iwo Jima on Feb. 19, 1945. It was an incredibly brutal battle as the beach was made up of fine black volcanic sand, making it nearly

impossible to dig a fox hole for cover. The Marines resorted to using the craters left by the mortars being fired at them.

Three days after arriving at Iwo Jima, he was hit in the chest by a piece of shrapnel, which deflected off his dog tag. It saved his life, but a small piece was embedded in his heart. As he lay on the beach waiting to be evacuated, he was wounded again by shrapnel that hit his knee. He was taken to the Navy Hospital on Saipan, where doctors determined that it was too risky to remove the shrapnel from his heart muscle. To this day, it remains embedded deep in his heart.

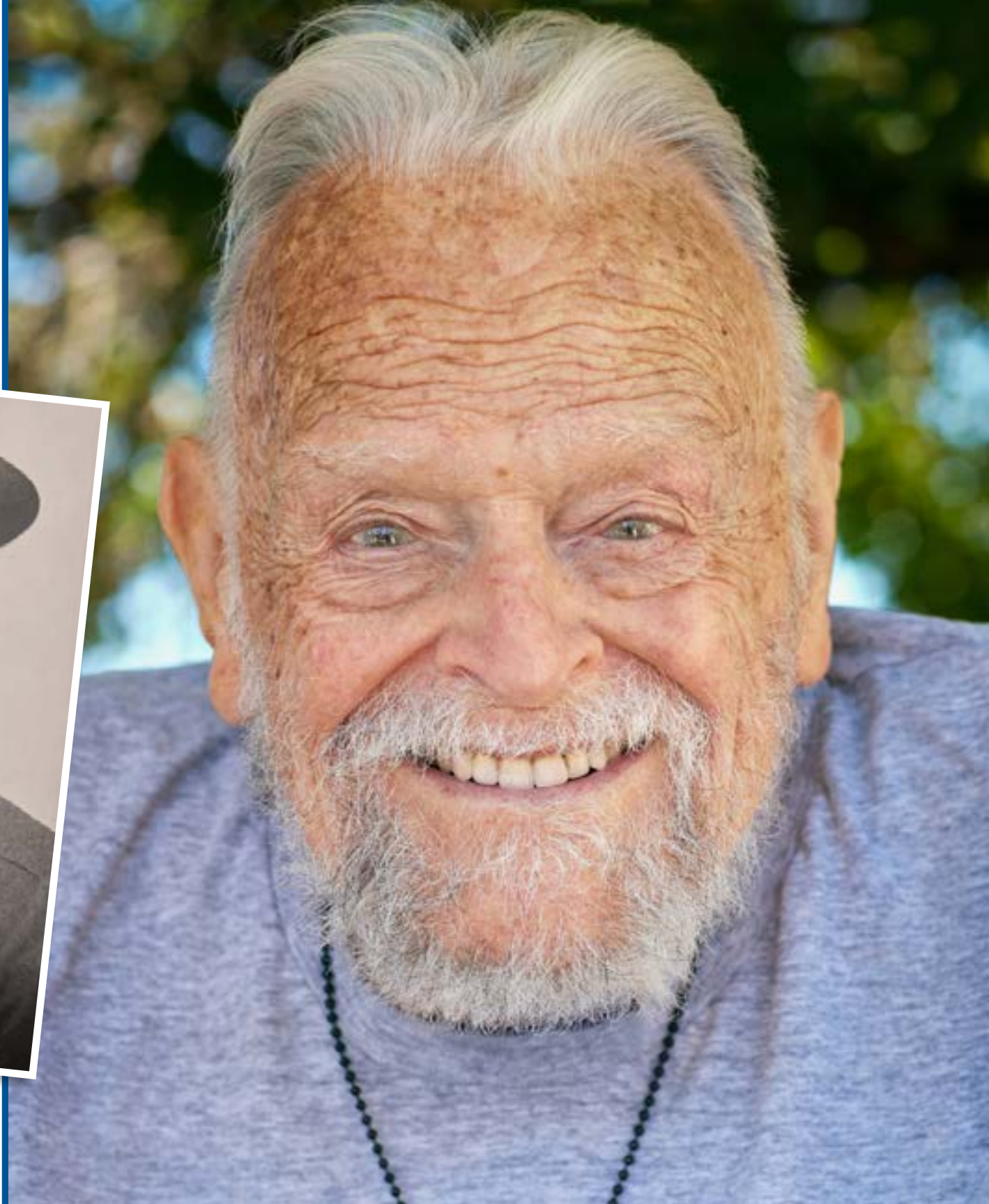
He recovered from his wounds in Okinawa and later rejoined his division in Maui to continue training. On Aug. 14, 1945, he and some buddies were relaxing when sirens went off and the workers ran out of the building. That was how he learned the news about the atomic bombs and the end of the

war.

Upon his return, he was 22 and welcomed home by his parents and many of his hometown friends. During the U.S. occupation of Japan, he was sent to Okinawa for a year, where he served in the military police. On June 18, 1946, he was officially discharged from the Marine Corps, with the final rank of captain, and he also received the Purple Heart.

After his discharge, he worked for the War Assets Administration and then became an engineer. In the mid-50s, his family moved to the Bay Area, where he worked for Lockheed Martin. He earned a master's in library science and ran the Milpitas Library for over 25 years. ★

Photograph by Emily Sandifer



Allan Chatwin

Allan "Al" Chatwin was born Jan. 17, 1926, in Williamsville, New York, as one of six children. During the Great Depression, he had to put cardboard in his shoes because of the holes in the bottoms, and he would often accompany his father to collect the food stamps given out by the government. His mother worked in a department store and his father worked multiple jobs. Al's first job was at a hot dog stand in high school to help earn money.

After Pearl Harbor, his whole neighborhood was in disbelief. They felt a sense of camaraderie and had send-offs for those who had been drafted. Al wanted to enlist in the service, but at 15 years old, he was too young. In 1944, when he was 18, he was drafted and excited for the chance to finally serve his country.

At first, he trained as a radio operator, but could not grasp Morse code, so he went to New Orleans. He became involved in mess cooking and guard duty until sent to California to begin his journey to Guam.

As a member of the U.S. Navy, he was placed on transport ships on the way to Guam. His overseas service began September 1944 and continued to the end of 1945. He was on an Army transit ship called the Sea Corporal, which left Long Beach, California, in the middle of September and stopped in Hawaii for three weeks. As it was a single ship, it had to do S turns to keep from getting torpedoed. The ship finally arrived at Guam on Christmas Eve 1944. He began as seaman third class and was stationed on the Navy Operating Base Receiving Station on Guam. His job was "doing whatever needed to get done."

When he found out the war was over, there were lots of "whoopies" and "a few beers." He had also just earned his promotion to petty officer third class. Al ended up leaving Guam and went back to San Francisco. From there, he took a train to Buffalo, New York, where his family welcomed him.

For his service, he was awarded the American Campaign Medal, Asia Pacific

Campaign Medal and the Victory Medal. After the war, he went to school for electronics, courtesy of the GI Bill. He became chief engineer at the satellite station in Hawaii. There he met his wife, Viola, a widow with two sons and two daughters. They then had two children of their own, Debbie and Cindy.

He strongly believes that the Lord gave him a path to not be involved in any fighting so he could have his own family. He believes that "it is important to do the right thing when faced with adversity because you find out you can do more than you think you can." He wants people to remember that America is the "greatest nation in the world ... ask anybody in Normandy or the Netherlands." ★

Photograph by Jim Wilson



Willie Clemons Jr.

Willie Clemons Jr. was born July 1, 1927, in the small town of Victoria, Texas. He grew up in a poor community, although it didn't seem poor to the young child and his five siblings. His father worked in construction and his mom did day work like babysitting or laundry. To earn 35 cents every two weeks, Willie hauled ice in grade school, making his deliveries before school started.

The attack on Pearl Harbor was a defining moment for many Americans, and Willie was no exception. Listening to the reports on a secondhand radio fixed up by his brother, the attack angered him and his family, pushing them into action. Two of his older brothers joined the U.S. Army, ready to do their part. When he was 17, Willie joined the Navy.

His initial training was at Camp Robert Small in Waukegan, Illinois. Being a Texan, the cold weather and hip-deep snow were foreign to him. The Army sent Willie to California for

more training before he was sent to Hickam AFB in Hawaii and then on to the Philippines. While in the Navy, he was a seaman first class in Company 181 in the Pacific. During the war, he worked as a seabee, unloading goods from supply ships that the soldiers had nicknamed "floating hotels," since these vessels carried amenities similar to what a hotel would have. Stationed off the coast of Japan, he was aware of the constant threat from Japanese kamikaze pilots and used long-range radios for updates about the war.

The first atomic bomb was dropped in Japan while he was serving in the Philippines, and after the second, he knew the war was over. His belief was that if the "bombs had not been deployed, we would have lost a lot more people and we would still be fighting the Japanese."

After 14 months, he returned home, finished high school and continued his education at Prairie View A&M College. From his exposure

to artillery fire and his work near the rudder of the SS Waldron, he unfortunately incurred hearing damage. Otherwise, he was blessed to return from war with few other injuries.

When the U.S. entered the Korean War in 1950, he again stepped up to serve his nation by reenlisting in the Navy. After three years, he returned to the U.S. He would later move to Dayton, Ohio, to raise his family and work as a defense supply contractor.

He has kept in touch with some of his fellow sailors over the years, but formal reunions have been rare. About his role in the war, he states: "We did what we had to do to save many lives. We must preserve our democratic way of living." ★

Photograph by Ron Kaplan



Frank Cohn

Photo-

Frank Cohn was born Aug. 2, 1925, in Breslau, Germany, and lived in a comfortable middle-class home during his young life. His family ran a local sporting goods business until the rise of Hitler forced them to abandon their homeland. They came to the United States to seek refuge in 1938 when he was just 13 years old. Settling in New York City, his family faced the daunting task of adapting to a new language and culture. His determination and hard work led him to excel academically, and he was accepted into Stuyvesant High School, one of the best in the city.

When he was 16, the United States was thrust into war with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. This pivotal moment influenced him to become an air-raid warden messenger. He was drafted into the U.S. Army at the age of 18, and his immigrant background subjected him to some scrutiny, which required him to undergo further screening by the FBI. His experience in ROTC and obvious dedication to the United States helped see him through,

and his service career would span decades.

His military career took him through various stages of training and deployment, from basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, to advanced infantry training in the 87th Infantry Division at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Despite a training accident that left him hospitalized, his dedication to his country remained unwavering, leading him to serve as an infantry replacement, and later as an intelligence agent in Paris.

Assigned to Interrogator Prisoner of War Team 66, he played a crucial role in gathering intelligence in post-war Germany. His fluency in German and keen instincts proved invaluable, leading to encounters with high-ranking German officials. His service extended beyond World War II, and he later served in Vietnam as an officer before retiring from the Army in 1978 with the rank of colonel. His distinguished career was marked by various command and staff assignments, demonstrating his leadership and expertise in military operations and

administration.

Beyond his military career, his commitment to service continued in civilian life. He married his wife, Paula, in 1948 and raised a daughter, Laura, while also pursuing a career in administration at the University of Maryland. His work in human resources and dormitory renovation reflected his dedication to making a positive impact on others' lives.

His numerous awards and honors, including the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, Vietnam Ribbon and Legion of Merit, attest to his exemplary service and contributions to his country. Perhaps his most enduring legacy lies in his commitment to preserving democracy and assisting others in retaining their freedoms. ★

Photograph by Ashlee Glen



Vaughn Collicott

Vaughn Collicott was born in Janesville, Wisconsin, in 1923. Raised in the Great Depression, life was tough for the family. Vaughn describes that “it was the saddest time ever. Nobody had any money or jobs, and we lived with another family to make ends meet.” At 14, he got his first job at Rock County Buick, changing tires and washing cars. In high school, he enjoyed industrial arts and sports and was a star runner on the track team, setting a record on the 200-meter hurdles that remained for the next 26 years.

Life suddenly changed for him when the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces attacked Pearl Harbor. He recalls: “I was in Beloit in a friend’s garage when I heard the news broadcast over the radio. Everyone was surprised and knew a war was coming. A lot of people went to church; others went to recruitment centers. Pearl Harbor was all people talked about for days and weeks after the attack.” Less than one year later, he was sworn into the U.S. Navy when he enlisted Nov. 14, 1942. He remembers during his ceremony that the officer stated

anyone who wanted to back out should take three steps back. No one did.

He traveled to Waukegan, Illinois, for boot camp, which consisted of marching in the wintertime, cold showers and lots of shots. After boot camp, he traveled to Gulfport, Mississippi, for gunnery school, where he picked up the material quickly and graduated. In January 1943, he boarded the SS Henry S. Gibbons transport ship bound for the Mediterranean, where he served as an armed guard protecting the ship and its cargo. He served on various other ships before boarding the USS Meredith DD 726 in early June 1944.

He recounts his D-Day experience: “[I] was on Destroyer USS Meredith DD 726. [Our] first job was to escort 12 LST across the English Channel. We were one of the first to cross [the channel]. Next, an Army personnel spotter called our code number, instructing them to make a run on Utah Beach. Our job was to knock out a German pillbox. I was in the IC room and prepared guns to fire upon the pillbox. Our first attempt [missed], so the

spotter called back and said you are right on, but 200 yards in deflection. Then fire control put in the corrections, and as soon as the dial stopped, he nodded his head to fire all six guns. The spotter radioed back ‘new target.’ We then had to go to the middle of the English Channel for screening duty for the USS Tuscaloosa.”

After D-Day, he was called to serve in the Pacific theater and was in Guam when the Japanese surrendered. He and his unit were called to secure the Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan, which they accomplished in four hours.

On Nov. 14, 1945, Vaughn was discharged. He married his wife, Doris Ann, in 1947 and had two children. He worked as a machinist at General Motors before he retired to his cottage at Legend Lake, where he spent his time hunting and fishing. ★

Photograph by Jim Koepnick



Dominick Critelli

Dominick Critelli immigrated from Catanzaro, Italy, to Queens, New York, at the height of the Great Depression. As an 8-year-old child, he remembers the hardships life in the Depression brought: “No one had any money, but we had a loving family. That was the main thing.” His family ate what they grew in the garden and bartered for other necessities like clothes and shoes. He went to school during the day and worked in the evenings by helping make items like coffins, windows and horse carts at his father’s carpentry business. He left high school after two years and continued to play the saxophone and clarinet, and even formed a band with four of his friends.

He remembers hearing about the early stages of World War II in Europe but felt it was so far away. That all changed when Pearl Harbor was attacked. He recalls, “The attack on Pearl Harbor was a shock. Everyone was very upset. I felt terrible. I knew we would have to go to war, but I didn’t think it would

last long. Everyone wanted to contribute. Even my brothers wanted to enlist, but they were too young.” Shortly after the United States officially entered the war, Dominick received a draft notice, and on Oct. 28, 1942, he was inducted into the U.S. Army. He attended basic training at Fort Dix, where he quickly adapted and began to enjoy military life. He then transferred to Fort Sam Houston to learn desert survival.

He served in the 2nd Battalion, 479th Field Artillery Regiment, 95th Infantry Division, which was famous for actions during the Battle of the Bulge. He began his service as a parachute packer before being taught to fire a howitzer, but he didn’t like that job due to the intense noise the gun made when fired. After he spoke with his superiors, he was sent to mechanic school for 15 weeks. He graduated and began his job as a mechanic on Piper Cubs used for surveillance in northern France, where his company landed on Utah Beach on June 12, 1944. He recalls,

“The scene in the water and on the beach was horrific. The Germans were up on the ridge behind hedgerows shooting at us.”

After facing challenges getting tanks through the thick hedgerows, they “pushed west until the Germans surrendered. By that time, we had been through most of Europe. I was in Nuremburg when they surrendered.”

Following the German surrender, he could not wait to get home. He was discharged Nov. 24, 1945, as a technician third grade. Following the war, he took courses in truck dispatching and was thrilled to be home with his family. He still plays the saxophone and clarinet, noting that the 17-piece band he formed 50 years ago is still playing swing every week, and he still leads the band playing the saxophone.



Photograph by Marc Farb



Dan Dougherty

Dan P. Dougherty was born May 30, 1925, in Hutchinson, Minnesota. His father was a bank manager and then a meat packaging executive, so he never experienced the hardships of the Great Depression that many others did. As a sophomore in high school, he applied for the U.S. Navy V-12 flight training program but was denied due to his poor eyesight. He was advised to join the Army Inactive Reserve.

Only 17 days after graduation, he was inducted into the U.S. Army at Fort Snelling. In September 1944, he sailed from Boston to Cherbourg in Normandy on the first ship to go directly from the U.S. to France during the war. He served as a Browning Automatic Rifle gunner in 2nd Platoon, K Company, 324th Regiment, 44th Division.

For Dan, combat began in October 1944 during the worst winter in Europe in over 40 years. The conditions were cold and poor,

with frostbite and trench foot being constant ailments. It was the worst time in his life.

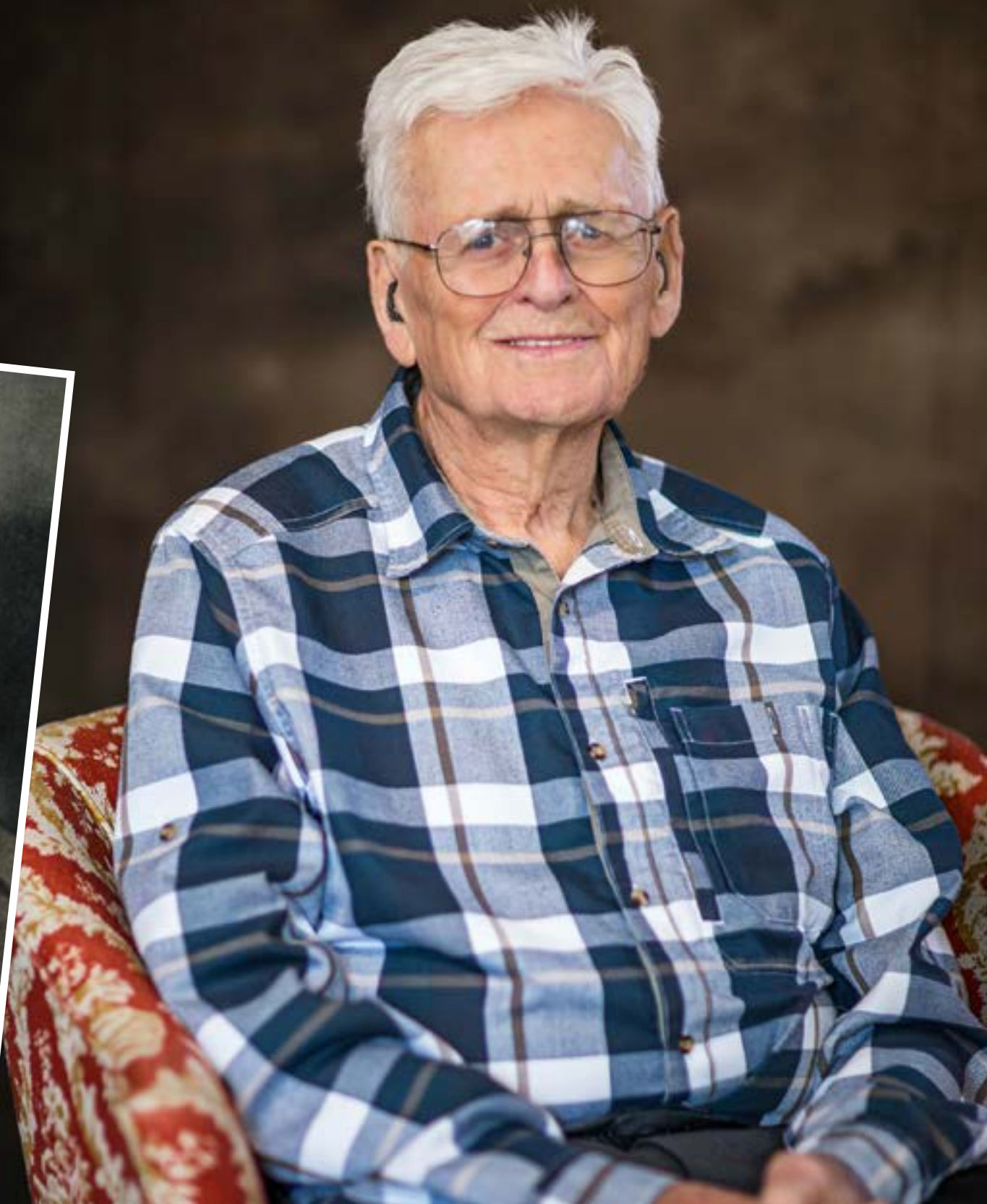
In the middle of December, he was injured and hospitalized, which made him unable to fight in the Battle of the Bulge. After he recovered, he was promoted to staff sergeant and dispatched to the 45th Division. He became a squad leader in C Company, 157th Infantry Regiment, one of the premier units of the war. In April 1945, they surrounded Nuremberg and were then dispatched toward Munich.

On the way to Munich, Dan's division was in the vicinity of the Dachau concentration camp and provided the prisoners rations and candy. They were eventually relieved by another company and resumed their advance toward Munich, where the division occupied the city. The war ended a week later, and Dan had enough points to be discharged Nov. 10, 1945.

After the war, he enrolled at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, and graduated in 1949. In 1953, he started work in insurance sales and eventually concentrated on health insurance. Dan and his wife, Norma, had four children, including fraternal twins. His oldest son, Billy, passed away in 1968 due to a bicycle accident, which devastated the family. His three kids are married, and he has seven grandchildren.

In the 1990s, he started tracking down veterans of C Company and produced a newsletter for them for several years. He still searches for connections with survivors and veterans. ★

Photograph by Sej Saraiya



Lawrence Eckstein

Lawrence "Larry" Eckstein was born June 30, 1924, and grew up in a family of seven. His mother took care of the household and the children. His father worked for the nearby railroad as a section hand and provided for his family. Larry went to high school for three months before he dropped out to work for the neighboring farmers.

He joined the U.S. Army in 1944 at age 20, and after boot camp, he was deployed to Naples, Italy, where he replaced soldiers who had been killed or wounded in action. In March 1945, he joined the 10th Mountain Division in combat, where he proudly fought in two major campaigns in the Upper Apennine Mountains and Po Valley in Italy. His unit, Company M, 3rd Battalion, 85th Infantry Division, was known for rugged

training in harsh conditions that allowed the men to fight for 20 days straight while advancing 120 miles on foot.

While he was in combat from March to May 1945, he and his buddies slept in foxholes and washed and shaved with cold water out of their helmets. His job was to carry the ammunition for a .30-caliber machine gun. He fought with the 10th Mountain Division in combat until the end of the war in Europe.

He was sent home to prepare for deployment to Japan, and in August 1945, he was notified that the Japanese had surrendered. After a 30-day furlough, he went to various camps for more intense training and headed back to Austria, where he drove a 2.5-ton truck for the 3600th Quartermaster Truck Company, which helped rebuild war-torn areas.

Upon return to the U.S., he developed

yellow jaundice and was hospitalized in New Jersey before he went home. He was honorably discharged Feb. 28, 1947.

After the military, he worked as a semi-truck driver, which provided for his wonderful wife and family of six children, eight grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. He was awarded various medals throughout his service, including the Bronze Star for his bravery and heroism in combat.

To future generations, he hopes that "you never have to go to war, but if it ever comes to that point, that you can help fight for our country and be proud of that." ★

Photograph by Jim Koepnick



Sydney Edson

Sydney "Sid" Edson was born Aug. 8, 1923, in Brooklyn, New York. The Great Depression was a tough time for everyone, but the Edson family made it through with the help of others.

His whole family was shocked by the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. Sid was in a movie theater when he heard the news. Boys started signing up for the military, but he was too young to join.

In January 1943, he was drafted into the U.S. Army Air Corps. Although he didn't know much about the military, he was proud to be of service to his country. Boot camp was tough but experiencing it with close friends made it better.

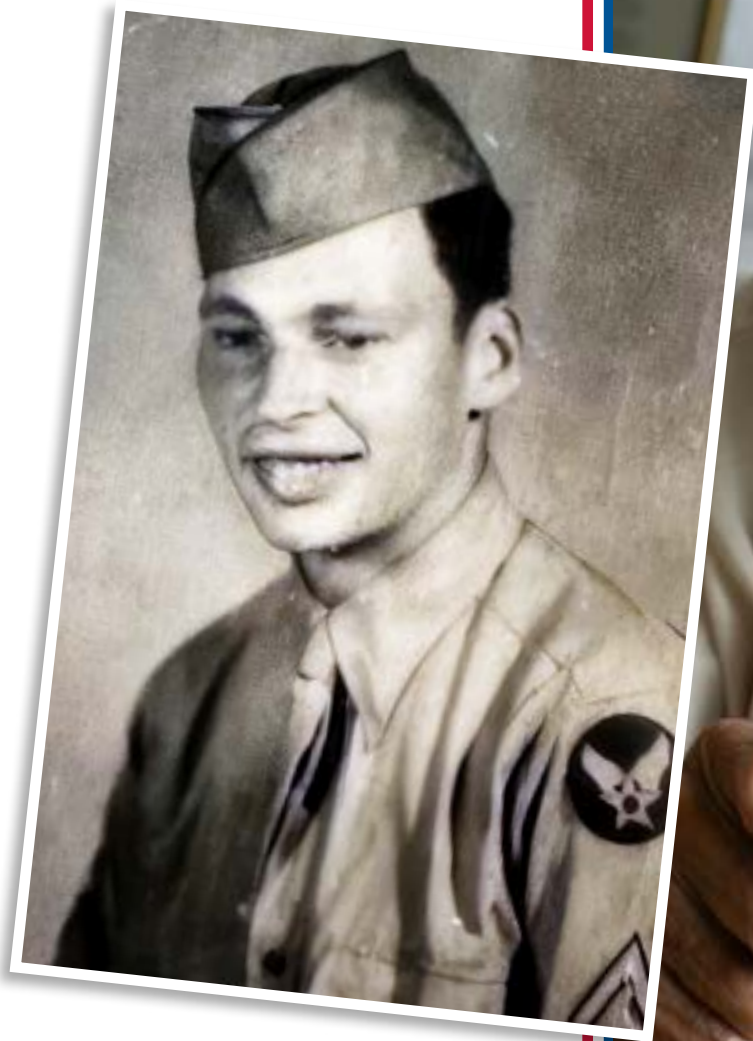
He became a radio operator/gunner in a B-24 Liberator crew as part of the 491st Bomb Group, 8th Air Force. The squadron participated in the European and the Pacific theaters, going on multiple missions across Europe from 1943 to 1945. In one instance, they delivered supplies to General Patton's Third and Fifth armies. The supplies were delivered much faster by air as waiting for ground troops took exceptionally long.

His squadron was an active participant in D-Day operations and across the European theater. A mission to bomb a German airfield resulted in the destruction of barracks and enemy pilots, earning Sid the Distinguished Flying Cross.

On Nov. 30, 1945, he was discharged as a technical sergeant, and after the war, he attended the Art Students League and a welding school under the GI Bill.

He believes that without American's involvement, the outcome of the war would've been different. He would like people to remember that it is much nicer to get along and live in peace. When asked about his involvement in the war, he says it was "a job that needed to be done." ★

Photograph by David Burnett



Raymond Falke

Raymond "Ray" Falke was born Feb. 6, 1927, in Temple, Texas. His mother was a hard-working homemaker and his father delivered kerosene to farmers for a dollar a day. He grew up poor and was taught the value of hard work. His first job was as a delivery man for the Temple newspaper, waking up at 4 a.m. to deliver telegrams and the local newspaper until it was time for school.

At the age of 17, he volunteered to join the U.S. Navy. His brother was a part of the Army Air Corps and had been shot, reported missing in action and ended up as a POW in Italy, so his mother was hesitant to sign the authorization for him to join. However, he was insistent that this was the path he wanted to take, and she knew that serving his country was what he needed to do.

Ray and his buddy made the decision to join the Navy before they could be drafted into the Army. His training was tough, but he adjusted easily to military life, as it wasn't that dissimilar from his childhood.

"Don't screw up now; make me proud!" was the encouragement he received upon his departure to boot camp.

Assigned to the USS Geneva, a transport ship in the Pacific, he was one of five radarmen on the ship. At one point, the ship entered a combat zone with a convoy and was attacked by Japanese torpedoes. The USS Indianapolis was sunk and the Geneva was dispatched to search for survivors. Unfortunately, none were found. As a transport vessel, his ship was never directly in combat, and he considers himself incredibly lucky in that respect.

His ship was docked in Okinawa when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, and he believes that although they were a "cruel instrument of death, they likely saved thousands of Allied lives." Hearing over the PA system that the war had ended, the men on board the Geneva broke out in cheers, yelling and screaming in celebration.

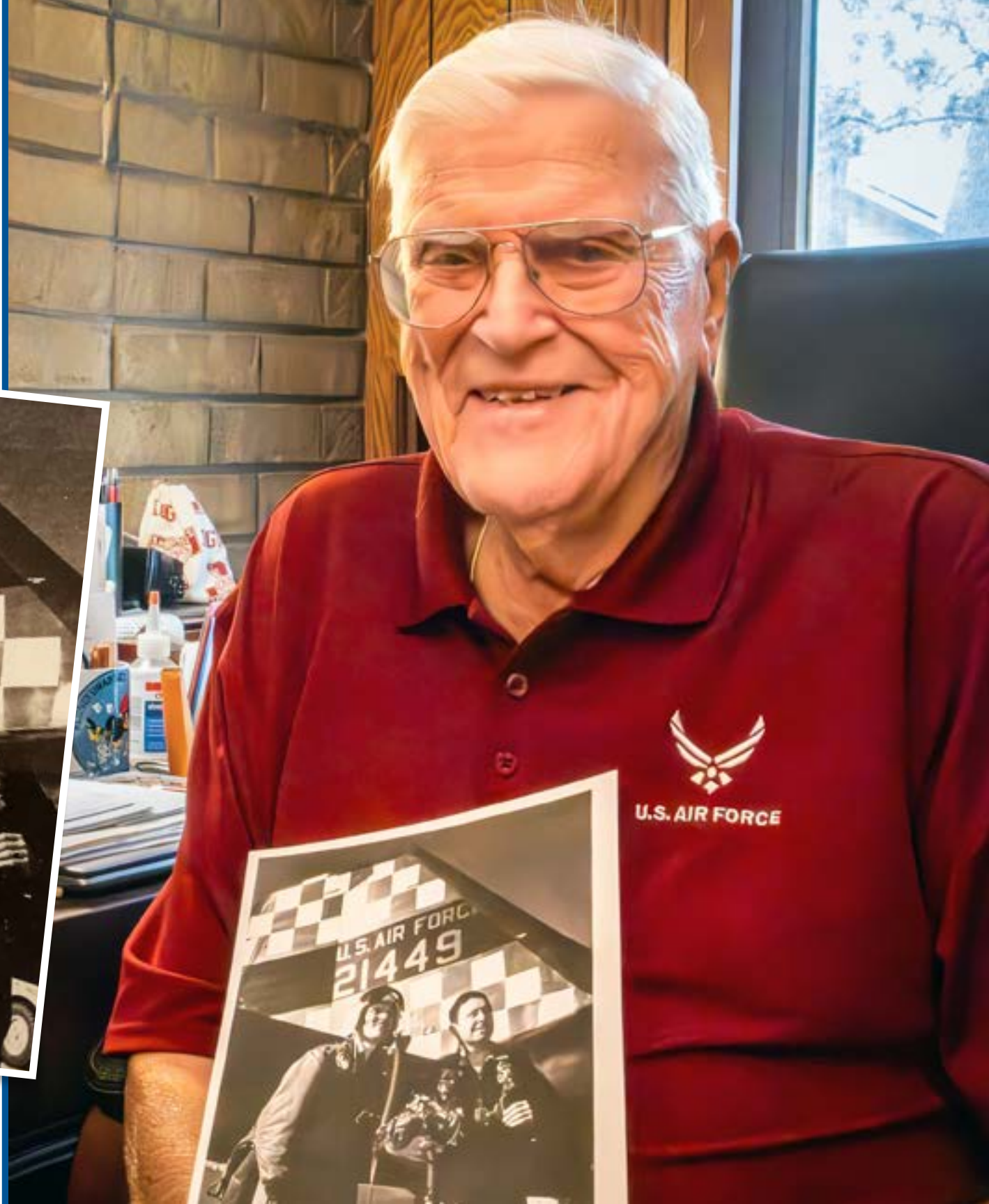
After the war, he joined the U.S. Navy Reserve, finished high school and enrolled

in classes at Texas A&M on the GI Bill. Soon after that, he received a commission with the U.S. Air Force and attended bombardier/navigator school, which he served as throughout the rest of his career in the Air Force, including service in both Korea and Vietnam.

He married before leaving for Korea and has two lovely daughters, Robin and Dawn. He is 97 years old and living a happy life surrounded by family and friends in San Antonio. He continues to meet with the men he served with in Korea and Vietnam, and remembers the buddy he enlisted with during World War II.

Ray is a true American hero, serving his country with distinction and ensuring the freedoms of the current and future generations. He wants people to know that "America's role in the war was ensuring the Allied forces were victorious." ★

Photograph by Jack Fleetwood



Lockered Gahs Jr.

Lockered “Bud” Gahs Jr. was born in 1924 in Parkville, Maryland. He remembers money being tight during the Great Depression, but his father’s salary at Baltimore Gas and Electric Co. was enough to support the family. While in high school, he worked for The Martin Company building B-26 aircraft for \$17 a week. While he was looking forward to going to college, he knew serving his country came first and recalls being fully aware of the war brewing in Europe. He knew war was coming to America due to the increased demand for the aircraft he was building.

As a proud Boy Scout, he volunteered his time as a scoutmaster, and on his way to a meeting, he heard on the radio that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. He recalls the realization that the country was really at war, and things were quickly going to change. The following days and weeks, he

saw all Americans coming together to focus on the war effort.

On April 1, 1942, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and sent to boot camp, well-prepared thanks to his time in the Boy Scouts. He was then sent to the Army Specialized Training Program, where he learned to drive trucks and was assigned to the 222nd Infantry Regiment, 42nd “Rainbow” Division. He was happy to get transferred into a mechanized unit because he did not enjoy working with horses.

In the winter of 1944, he and his unit left for France and then fought their way from France into Germany. He recalls being trapped on the second floor of a house surrounded by Germans. His unit was forced to fight their way out, which they did successfully, earning him a Bronze Star.

His unit anticipated the war would end as they drove deeper into Germany, and the German resistance became weaker. He

stayed in Europe for an additional six months after celebrating VE-Day and served in the Army of Occupation. While there, the atomic bombs were dropped, and he and the other members of his unit were ecstatic to not have to go to Japan.

On March 12, 1946, he was discharged from the Army with the final rank of private first class and attended the University of Maryland, graduating with a degree in horticulture. While in school, he married, and together, he and his wife grew their family. He and another veteran opened a nursery, and they grew and sold plants wholesale. His simple words perfectly describe America’s legacy in the war: “We were all one. We all had jobs. We all did our part, at home and in the service.” ★

Photograph by David Tulis



Harold Gary

Harold G. Gary was born May 28, 1921, in Rush, Pennsylvania. He grew up on a small dairy farm with four brothers and two sisters. Harold endured hard times before the war, including the passing of his father and no electricity. But there were good times as well, including graduating high school and getting accepted into college. He also held a job as a state highway worker.

After hearing about the events of Pearl Harbor at college, he decided to volunteer with one of his brothers. He figured that he'd probably be drafted even if he didn't volunteer, so he might as well get going. He volunteered for the U.S. Navy because of the post-war opportunities the Navy could give him, and he entered service in October 1942.

Training and military life were fine for Harold, just another thing to get up and get through, "much like milking cows." After completing his Navy training and becoming an aviation machinist second class, he was

assigned to Squadron VPB-74, a patrol bomber group flying PBM Mariners over the Atlantic. Based in the states, his unit had the monotonous but stressful job of flying over convoys and looking for U-boats.

He was a tail gunner on these patrol bombers but only fired his weapon once to ensure it worked. While participating in the Battle for the Atlantic, he tried his best to keep his head down and get his job done. He always paid attention to the bombing campaigns in Europe, as his brother was involved there.

His brother, Dan E. Gary, flew B-17s over Europe during the war. While on a mission as group lead, Dan's plane caught some flak after dropping bombs and subsequently caught fire. No one survived. Harold said that Dan was just a 21-year-old farm boy doing his job, and though he may be called a hero, he was just a guy trying to do the right thing.

Harold was discharged from service in December 1945. He and his wife had three

daughters and three sons, and he returned to dairy farming. He drove a school bus, a route truck for a farm supply/feed company and was a parts manager at a Ford implement dealer. He also enjoyed doing some painting, lots of singing and wood carving.

He says that World War II is a blueprint for how to handle tyrants and should not be read as ancient history. He also thinks that even without Pearl Harbor, America would have gotten involved in the war. He also theorizes that even if America never entered the war, the Axis powers would have been defeated or would've fallen apart.

He said that "our 'heroes' are usually doing what has to be done in their chosen field." ★

Photograph by Cassandra Weber



Jeanne Gibson

Jeanne Gibson's Rosie the Riveter story started when she was just 18. In the summer of 1944, she traveled with a friend from Minnesota to Seattle. When they arrived, they got jobs as welders at Todd Pacific Shipyards, where they built destroyers.

In 1945, they continued north to Juneau, Alaska, where she worked for the U.S. Army Transportation Corps' Port of Embarkation. In this port, lumber was shipped from Juneau to the Pacific to build bases on the newly acquired U.S. islands. Jeanne's job was to make copies of the manifests and hatch lists for all the ships before they left the port. Manifests were used to document the cargo and passengers on board the ships, and hatch

lists showed where everything was stored so that offloading was quicker and easier.

She remembers being in Juneau on V-J Day and seeing all the celebrations, including the enlisted men cutting off their ties and the streets being packed with excited people celebrating.

After the war, she moved to the Bay Area, where she has been ever since. She got a job as a bookkeeper at an insurance company and then got promoted to the provisional insurance department. Upon learning that her male coworker received \$5 more a month for the same job, she quit and got a new job. At this job, she received several promotions but was eventually told that she couldn't move up in the company anymore because she was a woman and

was supposed to quit and have babies. Frustrated, she quit and returned to school to earn her bachelor's, master's and doctorate in educational psychology at UC Berkeley before beginning her career as a teacher.

After retiring, she is now dedicated to keeping the story of all the Rosies alive by sharing her experiences at the Rosie the Riveter National Historic Park in Richmond, California, every Friday. In April 2024, she was one of 30 Rosies to travel to Washington, D.C., where she received the Congressional Gold Medal for her great contributions to the war. ★

Photograph by Jane Tyska



Raymond Glansberg

Raymond "Ray" Glansberg was born Nov. 17, 1921, in the booming heart of New York City. His father worked as a salesman for Gimbels department store and his mother was a seamstress. He had two brothers, Sid and Lester. He always showed a special interest in radio and communicative operations and excelled at Roosevelt High School in the Bronx, earning a scholarship to the University of Connecticut.

The U.S. Army pulled him out of college because of his skill in high-speed telegraphy, and he was placed in a more intensive course at a school in New York, where he received the latest training on the equipment. After Pearl Harbor, he says, "Nobody thought there would be a serious war we would get drawn into."

On July 20, 1942, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and was sent to Signal Camp in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, then Camp Edison and Camp Reynolds. After training, he gained technical and adaptive skills beyond that of the average soldier and worked in the Signal

Corps.

After he arrived in Europe, he was placed in Headquarters Company, 50th Armored Infantry Battalion, 6th Armored Division, nicknamed the "Super Sixth." On Aug. 7, 1944, he landed in England and then stayed in France until December 1944. From there, his division moved to Germany and Belgium. He worked as a grade four technician, a highly respected position that was burdened with many complex responsibilities. He was assigned to a halftrack, which was a motor vehicle filled with communication equipment and worked while on the move, often while under enemy fire. He participated in combat in Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge, Ardennes and the Rhineland.

He says he will never forget April 1945: "I was part of the group that liberated Buchenwald concentration camp. By the time we got there, the Germans had already abandoned the place. I was devastated by what I saw. People were so emaciated, they looked like skeletons. They didn't speak. We gave most

of our rations to the survivors. I had a little cheap camera, and I took pictures because I wasn't sure people would believe what we saw.

General Eisenhower later ordered a team of professional photographers to record every detail because he was afraid people would forget the tragedy of the Holocaust.

On Nov. 20, 1945, Ray was honorably discharged with five awards for American Service, European-African-Middle Eastern Service, Good Conduct, World War II Victory and a Bronze Star. Following his service, he designed window displays in stores on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, then took a job delivering milk for a major dairy company. He was introduced to his wife, Muriel, whom he soon married, and they had five children. He has attended many reunions with his unit for many years. ★

Photograph by David Burnett



John Gleeson

Photo-

John Gleeson was born in tough times in rural South Dakota at the height of the Great Depression. Growing up in Long Beach, California, he always found himself in trouble. In his teen years, he spent his time between school, surfing and working in the oil fields. However, this routine ended early into his sophomore year when his mother pulled him out of school to join the Civilian Conservation Corps. He fondly recalls his experience: “It was a great government program for young people. I was 15 at the time. We fought forest fires, built campgrounds and planted trees.”

His life in the Civilian Conservation Corps was short-lived as he was outraged when Pearl Harbor was attacked. He recalls, “I didn’t know where Oahu was. I had never heard of it, but I understood what had just happened to our country. I couldn’t believe someone would do that. We thought we

would never be invaded next, so I wanted to do something for my country.”

The very next day, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and qualified for the Army Air Corps. His first stop was boot camp, then Fort MacArthur for aircraft mechanic school, where he graduated as a flight engineer. On his first mission, his aircraft caught on fire after losing an engine, but fresh out of school, he knew what to do. He remembers: “I went on the intercom and told them to feather [engine] number 2. By the time I got up to the cockpit, another engine had caught fire, so we were burning. Our landing gear had come down below the aircraft and the aircraft was shaking. They asked me what to do so I told them to put the parking brakes on to keep the wheels from spinning and shaking the aircraft. The problem was that we forgot the brake was on during landing as we were too busy with the engines that were

on fire. We completely tore up the runway at Chatham Field, Georgia, on that landing. It was a controlled crash landing ... I got better as a result of that.”

He was in England when he found out the war was over and remembers fondly: “It was a celebration. Everybody [was] firing off rounds and celebrating. We knew we were going home.” Following his service, he met his wife, Barbara, back in California. They married, had three girls and traveled everywhere before eventually settling in Hawaii. He never stopped his love affair with aviation and has continued to fly. He helped start the Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum, where he served as the director for many years. ★

Photograph by Tracie Hunter



Ralph Goldsticker Jr.

Ralph "Goldie" Goldsticker Jr. was born Oct. 26, 1921, and was raised in St. Louis, Missouri. His father had a manufacturing company for ladies' hats, which closed during the Great Depression.

Goldie was a member of the Pi Tau Pi Fraternity, which was a local organization that was created with the intent to promote and encourage Judaism. He was also an Eagle Scout, which required a few years of work leading up to the award and demanded a lot of persistence and leadership.

After two years of college, he went to work for a dry-goods company as a clerk for 50 cents an hour. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air

Corps on July 6, 1942, as an aviation cadet in the First Missouri Infantry.

He arrived in England in May 1944 as a bombardier with the 8th Air Force; afterward, he became a group award officer for the 452nd Bombardment Group. The 452nd flew B-17 Flying Fortresses, which gave Ralph an active role in the U.S. bombings in Europe.

On June 6, 1944, the 452nd attacked coastal defenses before the D-Day landings, where he was involved in two flying missions that day. After the events of D-Day, his unit hit strategic sites in Germany and supported the movement of ground forces across Europe.

The next March, he returned to the U.S. and was formally discharged Oct. 20, 1945,

achieving the rank of first lieutenant.

His accomplishments in the war were recognized with the Distinguished Flying Cross, five Air Medals, French Legion of Honor, French Jubilee of Liberty and Russian Medal. After the war, he became an independent salesman, selling children's clothing to retail stores in Missouri and Kansas for 48 years until he retired in 1994. ★

Photograph by Rick Weinstein



Donald Graves

Donald "Don" Graves was born May 3, 1925, in Detroit, Michigan. Even though his father was a former Marine, Don wasn't interested in the events of World War II when he was in high school. However, after hearing about the Pearl Harbor attack over the radio with his friends, he committed to serving his country in the war. He was only 16 at the time and wasn't allowed to enroll, but within the next year, he had convinced his parents to let him enlist. At 17, he dropped out of high school and went to serve in the U.S. Marine Corps.

In 1942, after eight weeks of hellish boot camp at Camp Pendleton, California, he was assigned to D Company, 2nd Battalion, 28th Regiment, 5th Marine Division as a flamethrower. He received demolitions training while serving in the famous "Fighting

Fifth" Spearhead Division and went on two tours, one of which put him right in the middle of Iwo Jima.

He spent three days fighting against the Japanese to go 540 feet forward to the foot of Mount Suribachi, which he then spent another day climbing. He was part of the division that raised the American flag, although Don himself was just outside the frame of the famous photograph. Despite the five-minute lifespan of the flamethrowers, he persevered and remained uninjured throughout the battle. Of the 355 men who went in as part of the 2nd Battalion, he was one of only 18 to leave and the only flamethrower to live.

He found out about the war's end while singing at an outdoor show when six photographers rushed into the show yelling, "The war is over!" Everyone cheered and

threw their hats into the air.

He was discharged in January 1946 and returned to Detroit. Within a year, he met the love of his life, Rebecca, and they were married for 72 years. They moved to Wisconsin and had four children, six grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren.

He was a man of many different careers after the military, finding work at a refrigeration company before becoming a pastor, an officer for a federal prison and a singer. Now he is a public speaker, sharing his military experience to raise money for veterans. This money provides them with a monthly lunch where veterans can connect and converse with each other. ★

Photograph by Jim Wilson



Maxim Gurney

Maxim "Max" Gurney was born June 10, 1921, in Frankfurt, Germany. Throughout his childhood, he moved with his family across Europe because his father worked different jobs for the U.S. government. As a result, Max was able to pick up many languages throughout grade school, and upon his arrival in New York as a young teenage boy, he was fluent in English, French and Italian.

After the bombing at Pearl Harbor, he and his close school friends immediately went to the U.S. Army recruiting office and were drafted into the service by March. He was inducted at Fort Dix, New Jersey, completed boot camp at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and attended artillery training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

While in artillery training, the language skills that he developed over the years

were recognized by his superiors. He was notified that he was going to be an intelligence specialist and would be joining the intelligence community overseas.

In early 1943, he arrived in Algeria, where he joined the 849th Signals Intelligence Service. He was tasked with collecting, processing and disseminating tactical intelligence in real-time to support those on the front line of battle operations. He would also be responsible for interrogating POWs from Italy and Germany.

The information that was collected in Algeria proved to be instrumental in pushing the Axis powers back across North Africa to Tunisia. That July, he was part of the first Allied landing in Europe in Sicily, Italy, where he continued his work until the end of his service in 1945.

For months, he was stationed near the front lines as the Allies fought back against German

forces in Italy, and even experienced a close encounter with a heavy Allied bombing attack. His role as an intelligence specialist proved to be crucial in the liberation of Rome on June 3, 1944.

As the war ended, he continued the fight against the Germans in the Po River Valley, where his unit remained for several months while the war continued in the Pacific. After V-E Day, he embarked on a military ship in Naples, Italy, that took him home to the U.S. He was discharged Sept. 19, 1945, as a technical sergeant.

He met his beloved wife, Kay, in 1949. They were married three years later and had their son, Nicholas, in 1953. Max worked for Pan Am Airlines for almost 50 years, and he and his wife loved traveling the world until they settled in La Jolla, California after his retirement. ★

Photograph by Justin Erickson



Robert Hartline

Born in 1924 in Reading, Pennsylvania, Robert "Bob" Hartline was the son of a U.S. Navy World War I veteran. His mother stayed home with the family.

He was an athletic child with a special interest in aviation and building model airplanes. His first job was helping build a hangar for Reading Airport.

He was 17 when he heard the news that Japanese forces had bombed Pearl Harbor. This was the push he needed to enlist in the Navy like his father had done before him. His father was proud his son was following in his footsteps and supported him through his recruitment.

In November 1942, Bob was sworn into the Navy and subsequently went through 17 months of training. While training was vigorous, he found great joy in it as his instructors were incredibly good at teaching and helped him become the best pilot he could be. He fell asleep in class, and as his punishment, he was stationed at a baseball

field for an entire night to "guard it from the Japanese." He learned to never fall asleep in class again.

After training, he switched from the Navy to the Marines and became a fighter pilot and belonged for the VRF-1 Ferry Squadron, spending the first half of 1945 ferrying aircraft across the country. During one of those deliveries, he flew over Washington, D.C. on the day of President Roosevelt's funeral and did a slow roll in his plane in tribute.

After joining the VMF-223 Squadron in 1945 out of Okinawa, he continued his training as a fighter pilot, mastering tactics and drills. Though he never fought any battles, he performed many routine patrols and served as a transportation officer of a radar station.

In his travels, he had the opportunity to see many places, including Tokyo when he was given time for R&R. He remembers that visit as the only time he had interactions with Japanese civilians, so seeing the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was difficult for him. The

dropping of the bombs was not a celebration for him and the men in his unit. He continued as part of the occupation force in Japan until May 1946, when he was discharged from the Marine Corps as a captain.

After the war, he married and had two sons. He went on to find work at Western Electric and had a successful career. He still has a fascination with flying and attends reunions with the VRF1 Ferry Squadron.

He wants the people of the United States to know about America's "esprit de corps" during the war and about the cooperative morale of the American people that brought the country through the war at home and abroad. He said that "there were trials and victims of humanity, but the general population's attitude and military stayed positive." ★

Photograph by Mike Carroll



Julian Hilts

Photo-

Julian T. Hilts was born Nov. 26, 1928, in Yakima, Washington. He grew up on a ranch where his parents ran the warehouse and cold storage.

He recalls that he was home when he heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor on the radio. He shares, “So, I told my folks, ‘I’m going too,’ but they wouldn’t take me.” After Pearl Harbor, his dad decided to go back to the U.S. Navy and his brother enlisted, too. His father found out that the Army Transportation Corps would take 16-year-olds, so Julian enlisted in 1944.

The Army Transportation Corps oversaw transporting goods, munitions, troops and other items to support the war. He worked on the engines of Army transport ships in the Aleutian Islands and as a ship engineer in the Philippines before he moved to the Navy as a Merchant Mariner.

The one thing that upset a lot of people

was that the Merchant Mariners were never considered veterans, meaning that they would not receive recognition for their bravery and involvement in the war. He said that the people who lost their lives during the war deserved to be recognized. The death of President Roosevelt was heartbreaking because he told the Merchant Mariners that they would get the veteran rights that they deserved, which didn’t occur until 1988 when a new law was granted allowing the Merchant Mariners who served during World War II to collect veteran benefits.

Julian also served during the Korean War from 1950 to 1953 and stayed in the Navy until his discharge in 1966, working as chief engineer with the rank of captain.

After his service in the military, he worked for two steamship companies until 1977 as a support engineer. He helped build a total of 18 ships in different countries, including

Sweden, Germany, Japan, Korea and China. From 1977 to 1987, he worked for a shipyard company as vice president and stayed in the shipping industry until he retired in 1994.

Congress passed the Merchant Mariners of World War II Congressional Gold Medal Act in 2020 to recognize Merchant Mariners for their contributions to the war. It is the highest honor given by Congress to a civilian. When Julian received this prestigious medal, he said that it made him very humble. His indomitable spirit and selflessness serve as hope and inspiration for us all. ★

Photograph by Aaron Norberg



Clarence Holland

Clarence Holland was born in Marion, North Carolina, on Aug. 7, 1924. He was the eighth of 12 children born to his parents, Frank and Hattie Mosteller Holland. He lived on a farm with chickens, cows and crops such as corn. They did not have electricity, and Clarence vividly remembers his mother putting the milk and butter in the spring box so the running water would keep the items cold.

He went to Glenwood Elementary School but left after completing eighth grade. He then went to work at a sawmill making 10 cents an hour. After working there for a little while, he went on to work for Drexel Furniture Company. He made a dollar a day,

often working eight to 10 hours each day, but to him, this paycheck made him feel like he was rich.

On April 23, 1943, he enlisted at 19 years old and underwent basic training in Bainbridge, Maryland. He recalls those six weeks being extremely difficult, but he got through it. He was sent to Virginia, the Panama Canal, Pearl Harbor, San Diego and San Francisco.

He later returned to San Diego, where he took gunners training before returning to Pearl Harbor, Tokyo, Quan Lan Island and several other islands. From Japan, he went over to China with his fellow sailors and blew up several mines.

His main job on the ship was overseeing

the deck crew. He was stationed in San Diego when he finally got the happy news that the war was over. His final rank before retiring was petty officer third class.

After three years of service, he was discharged March 3, 1946, and he returned to Marion, North Carolina. He wishes he had stayed in the Navy and made it his career. ★

Photograph by John Slemph



Melvin Jenner

Melvin "Mel" Jenner was born in 1922 in rural South Dakota. During the Great Depression, the Jenner family fared better than most due to the father's occupation as a farmer. When he was five, the family moved to Indiana for better farmland, but less than a year later, they moved again to Detroit so his father could go to work for Henry Ford. He has fond memories of this time and his father's Ford Model T. At age 12, he got a job on a local farm weeding onions for a dollar a day. He was a standout athlete in high school, and when he was not at school or work, he practiced football, basketball or soccer.

In August 1940, he dropped out of high school to join the Michigan Air National Guard. He joined the 107th Observation Squadron and was at headquarters at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Shortly after, his National Guard unit was activated into the Army Air Corps, and the next few months consisted of training exercises and gunnery school. Mel graduated at the top of

his class.

In August 1943, he began his journey to England with the 9th Air Force and flew the A-20 Havoc light bomber in missions over France. His squadron suffered heavy losses and was left with only two aircraft at one point. He then flew liaison missions with the Royal Air Force to help crew planes that were short on men before he joined the 8th Air Force. He flew 30 missions over Germany and France with the 542nd Bomb Squadron on the B-17 "Lady Satan."

A few days before D-Day, he was approached by a pilot in his squadron and asked if he would fly a top-secret mission on June 6, which he accepted. He was tasked with flying up and down the French coast photographing the invasion. He recalls, "I remember the rough seas that day and watching everything that was happening. Of the about 25 tanks that left the transport, only four made it ashore. The rest sank."

On July 19, 1944, he was transferred back to the United States to serve with the

military police at Wright Field, Ohio, before he was transferred back to the Michigan Air National Guard in late 1945. A few years later, he was sent back to Europe to drop supplies and chocolate bars over Berlin during the famed Berlin Airlift. He then moved to Biloxi, Mississippi, met his wife, Joyce, and joined the Air Force. He served as a crew chief and load master, earning the rank of chief master sergeant in 1966 before retiring in 1968. In his retirement, he spends time with his family and even founded the Osceola Fishing Club. When asked about America's role in the war, he says, "We did what was necessary, [but] war is unbelievable! As the years go on, it only gets worse. We must find a way to live in peace." ★

Photograph by David Burnett



Joachim Kallist

Joachim "Joe" Kallist was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on May 5, 1927. He was an only child, and he and his family were farmers. When he was 15, he worked in a meat market and as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant. Before the war, he knew nothing about the military and had only read about the events unfolding around the world through the newspapers.

Joe was in middle school when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He heard the shocking news on the radio and knew immediately that he wanted to enlist as soon as he was able. At 17 years old, he enlisted in the U.S. Merchant Marines in October 1944 and completed basic training at Sheepshead Bay, New York. After completing basic training, he sailed on the SS George Abernathy as an ordinary seaman in the deck department, where he handled mooring lines, watched as a lookout and performed maintenance on the ship.

In July 1945, he left the Merchant Marines and enlisted in the U.S. Army, where he

attended basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama, and was then transferred to a heavy weapons battalion at Fort Dix, New Jersey. His battalion sailed from New York City to La Havre, a coastal town in northern France, where he served as a mortarman and carried the base plate for his mortar as he marched across France.

He remembers everyone talking about the D-Day invasion, however, he only heard about the battles at Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima and Okinawa after the war. He also remembers thinking the world was going to end after the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

After the war in Europe concluded, he thought he would be sent to the Pacific, but instead he was assigned to the Army of Occupation in Germany. He served as a truck driver, helping liberate the POWs and concentration camps. He still remembers driving into the camps and seeing the prisoners trapped in 3' x 4' cages made of wire mesh, their faces stuck in small openings

with frozen expressions and their disbelief that they were there to rescue them.

On Jan. 1, 1947, he was discharged from the Army and worked in two different jobs before becoming a construction worker for the Colombia Gas Company, where he stayed for 43 years.

Joe was a great shipmate and soldier, and for his efforts, he was given numerous awards for his service. As a Merchant Mariner, he was awarded Battle of the Atlantic, Mediterranean and the Far East medals. As an Army soldier, he was awarded the American Defense Medal, the World War II Victory Medal, the Occupation Army Medal, the Good Conduct Award and the Marksmanship Award. He is 96 years old and is the sole survivor of his unit. ★

Photograph by Laura Mares



William Kelly Jr.

Photo-

William "Bill" Kelly Jr. was born Sept. 12, 1920, in Elizabeth, Pennsylvania. He spent his early life as a laborer in a boatyard with his father. During his high school years, he took many engineering courses and competed in track and field, where he held the record for the 50-yard dash for over 50 years.

While dropping his girlfriend (and future wife) off at home after a date, her dad told him about Pearl Harbor. Bill left college and began working in a defense plant welding bomb casings to aid in the war effort before enlisting in the U.S. Army Air Corps in June 1943.

During boot camp, he trained with broomsticks for guns and learned how to march. Although he struggled with discipline, he soon adapted, entering the 412th Squadron, 95th Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force.

He wanted to be a pilot but the training was delayed too long, so he and five of his friends entered navigation school to get

commissioned sooner. His squadron was one of the first to fight in Germany, and he continued to navigate 18 missions for the 412th. On one of those missions, he directed the pilot to alter their course after the wind changed direction. While the pilot was reluctant, they ended up being the only plane out of three to return from that mission.

He served in Europe from June 1943 to December 1945. He was on leave in London in front of Buckingham Palace when the announcement came over the radio that the war was over, and all were ecstatic. Before leaving Europe, his crew was tasked with dropping food and other supplies into areas of France and Belgium.

He was discharged as a second lieutenant in December 1945. Although he was pleased the war was over, he believed that the atomic bombs were terrible weapons to end the war.

He remembers being in London on leave touring Westminster Abbey when he and a

friend were approached by a minister who told them the Abbey was being closed for a royal baptism. The priest allowed them to stay, and an entourage that included members of the royal family entered the Abby. He and his friend were acknowledged by the monarchs and proceeded to watch the baptism. Upon completion of the ceremony, the royals walked back out and greeted the men once again. It was an encounter he will never forget.

He returned home to his family and became a welder at Elizabeth Marine Ways. He attended his unit's 50th reunion, celebrating the idea that the U.S. was the deciding factor for victory in the war. He continues to believe that we should continue to "fight against radical dictators and politicians who want to take over and start wars." ★

Photograph by Jim Wilson



Frank Kohnke

Frank Kohnke was born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, on Dec. 11, 1925. His mother was a housewife while his father worked as an army molder at the Gray Iron Foundry in Milwaukee. He grew up with 10 siblings and was the third oldest in his family. The Great Depression was tough for him and his family, so his first job was doing whatever he could to make money.

He enlisted in the military on his 16th birthday. When he filled out the paperwork, he gave his mother's name and signed for her. Both he and his mother got in trouble for this, however, he only lost two months of service time and was then shipped overseas.

As a paratrooper, which he recounts as being "all [he] wanted to do," Frank served in the U.S. Army 101st Airborne, 502nd PIR unit, known as the "5-0-Deuce." They participated

in D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge in 1944 and acquisition of Berghof — Hitler's home in the Bavarian Alps — in 1945. These were all critical moments in World War II and showcased the resilience of the Allied forces. Like many other units, his unit helped initiate the beginning of the end for Nazi Germany's military ambitions.

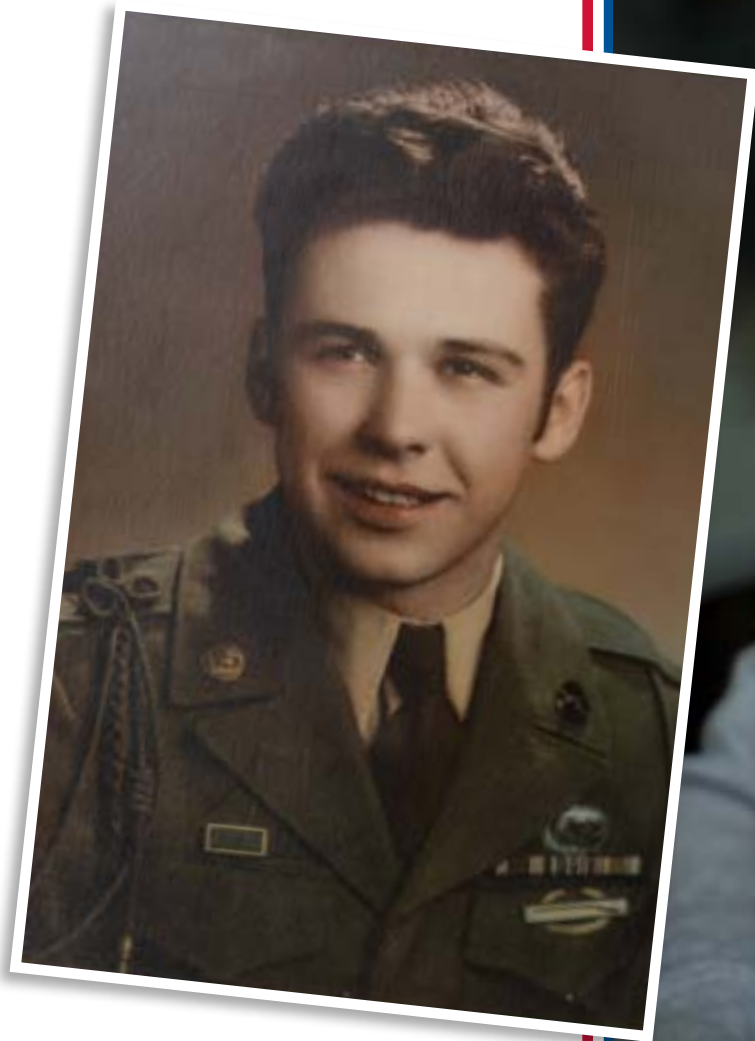
He recalls that his unit never understood when the war was over, as they had heard it several times, and so much was happening around them. He was wounded twice while in battle, and he sustained injuries on both his right arm and left leg. To commemorate the injury, he has a tattoo of wings on his arm in place of the gunshot wound. He received several medals, including Purple Hearts, for his services and would come out of the war as private first class.

After the war, he worked at Allen-Bradley

as a supervisor in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and opened a bar named Ski Hut Lounge, which he ran for 35 years.

He is now 98 years old, but he still remembers the good stuff. His words are ones that we can take to heart when he states, "A lot of the checkpoints of life you forget because they weren't that good. You remember the good times better than the bad ones." ★

Photograph by Jim Koepnick



Henry Kolinek Jr.

Henry "H.J." Kolinek Jr. was born in Gruene, Texas, on July 28, 1925. His father worked at a cotton gin, and his mother was a homemaker. In high school, he was a member of the football team. The post-practice five-mile walk home was brutal, but he could often hitch a ride to get home quicker. He attended Texas A&M University, but he was sent home mid-semester to take more math classes. He returned the next year and stayed until he was drafted into service in November 1943 at age 18.

H.J. was sent to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio and then sent to Wichita Falls, Texas, for basic training. He kept the mindset that, "if you do what they say, you stay out of trouble." This attitude would eventually earn him the Good Conduct Medal. Following basic training he was sent to Kingman, Arizona, to train as a waist gunner. From there he made a stop in Lincoln, Nebraska, before heading on to South Dakota to be assigned a crew and learn how to fly missions. There he met

L.G. Airhart, who convinced him to switch his role from waist gunner to tail gunner, so he could fly with L.G.'s crew.

He served in the U.S. Army Air Corps in the 544th Squadron, 384th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force and flew 37 missions over France, Belgium and Germany. After his time in Europe, he spent two weeks in California to re-adapt to civilian life before heading back to San Antonio to work in a pilot training school. When the need for pilots dwindled, he was sent to Enid, Oklahoma, where he worked with uniforms as a Quartermaster. It was here in Oklahoma where he suffered his one and only wartime injury. While he was swimming, he hit his head resulting in a lot of blood and a "battle scar."

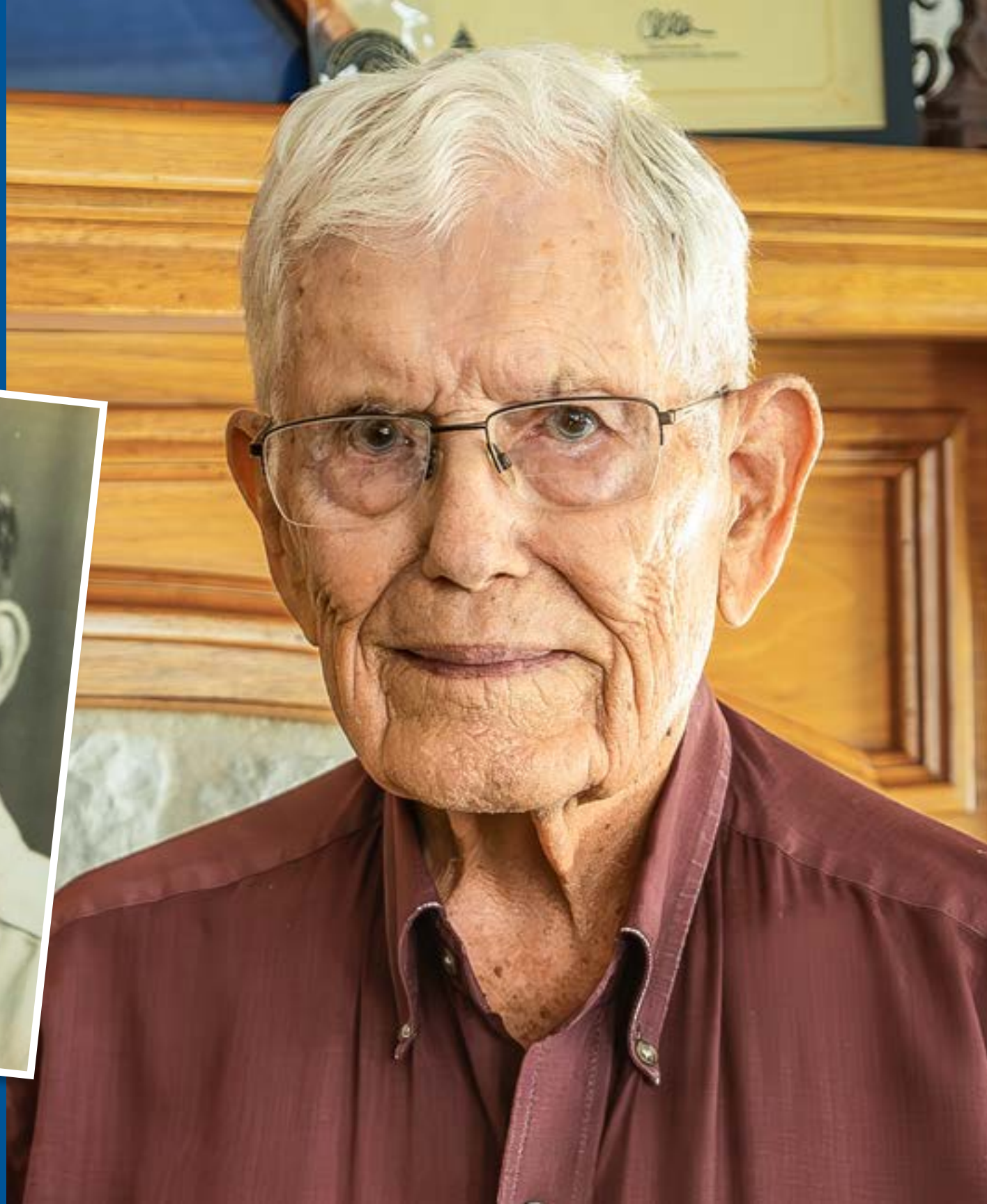
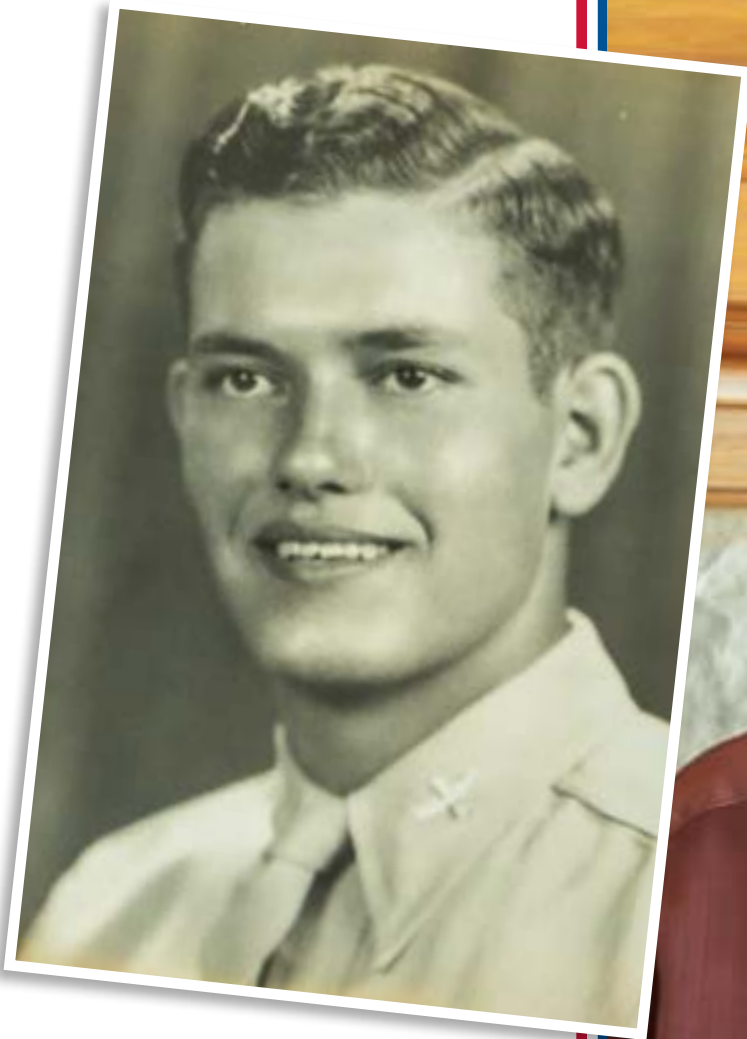
In September 1945, the war ended, and he was discharged at the "convenience of the government." He returned to Texas A&M and married his high school sweetheart, Dorothy, in 1947. The two eventually had a daughter, two granddaughters and two great-granddaughters. After college, he

worked in the Karnes County Tax Office and at Union Carbide, both in Texas City, Texas, and later in Charleston, West Virginia. He eventually returned to Texas and retired in 2006.

In 2019, he attended the 384th Bomb Squadron Reunion. He was the last to sign the panel of a B-17 bomber before it was shipped off to a museum. Today, he is still very active, going to his ranch daily, riding his tractor and getting chores done. He continues to serve his community as president of the Kennedy Rotary Club and his church as deacon, Bible study teacher and chair of the finance committee.

H.J. recalls that "we did what we were asked to do, and that was to defend Europe from the Nazis." ★

Photograph by Jack Fleetwood



Eugene Kraszewski

Eugene "Jack" Kraszewski was born April 15, 1924, and lived on a farm with seven siblings in Pulaski, Wisconsin. His first job was driving trucks to spray orchards at age 14 for 25 cents an hour, working seven to eight hours a day. His next job, at age 16, was for the Larsen Canning Company harvesting peas, spinach and sweetcorn by hand.

While doing chores, he heard on a battery-operated radio that Pearl Harbor was bombed. Jack didn't understand the significance of this event until afterward, when many young men he knew had mentioned they were going to enlist.

He was 18 when he was drafted into the U.S. Army in March 1942. Originally, he thought about being a paratrooper, but he quickly changed his mind when he learned he had to jump out of planes. After boot camp, he was sent to Europe with the 1st Platoon, Battery

D, 553 Anti-Aircraft Artillery, where he saw combat in the Battle of Hürtgen Forest, the Battle of the Bulge and at the Rhine River.

His unit never received any information about the other battles or what was going on in Japan until after the war was over. The only information they received was related to their own missions and travel.

During his time in the war, he was never hit by explosions as he was mainly in foxholes and slit trenches. The soldiers were outside 24 hours a day, seven days a week from the time they got to France until they came home, including six months during the winter.

Jack helped liberate POW camps in several different countries. His unit saw the devastation at the Buchenwald concentration camp. It was full of prisoners in ragged clothes who were dirty and emaciated.

His occupation duty was to clean up guns and ammunition and to load up and guard boxcars. He also drove the chaplain in a Jeep that he could use when it was idle, so he decided to drive around Germany to see the country.

He was discharged Feb. 11, 1946. After the war, he made milk deliveries, became a cheesemaker and loaded stevedore ships at the Schlitz Brewery for 31 years. Afterward, he spent a couple of years painting houses and was a handyman, splitting wood by hand until the age of 96. His family includes his wife, Marjorie, two daughters and several foster daughters.★

Photograph by Jim Koepnick



James Kunkle

James "Jim" Kunkle was born Oct. 16, 1922, in New Kingston, Pennsylvania. As he grew up, he dreamt of becoming a pilot and was inspired by Charles Lindbergh and his flight to Paris in 1927. When he was only 9 years old, his dad passed away from injuries sustained during his service in World War I. He and his mom moved to California, where he went to Beverly Hills High School and graduated in 1940.

As a senior in high school, he was in the California Air National Guard and was released when fighting started in Europe because he was not old enough to be a pilot. When the U.S. entered World War II, the age requirement of 21 was reduced to 18, and he joined the Army Air Corps cadet program immediately.

After graduating from the primary and basic flying programs, he was selected for advanced flight training in a P-38, the aircraft of his choice. He was shipped to Andover, England, in May 1944. He flew his first combat

missions over Normandy in support of the invasion. After flying missions from Andover, his unit was moved to France in July 1944 to the first airstrip that was completed inland after the invasion.

He was shot down Sept. 16, 1944, during his 36th mission over Aachen, Germany, and due to severe burns on his face and hands, a broken back and loss of his front teeth, he spent around 16 weeks in the hospital.

When he attempted to return to flying toward the end of the war, he was sent to Paris, where he received the Distinguished Service Cross from General Spaetz, the commander of Strategic Air Forces in Europe at that time. He was also awarded the Purple Heart, Air Medal, European Theater Medal, European Occupation Medal, French Legion of Honour and the Belgian Croix de Guerre.

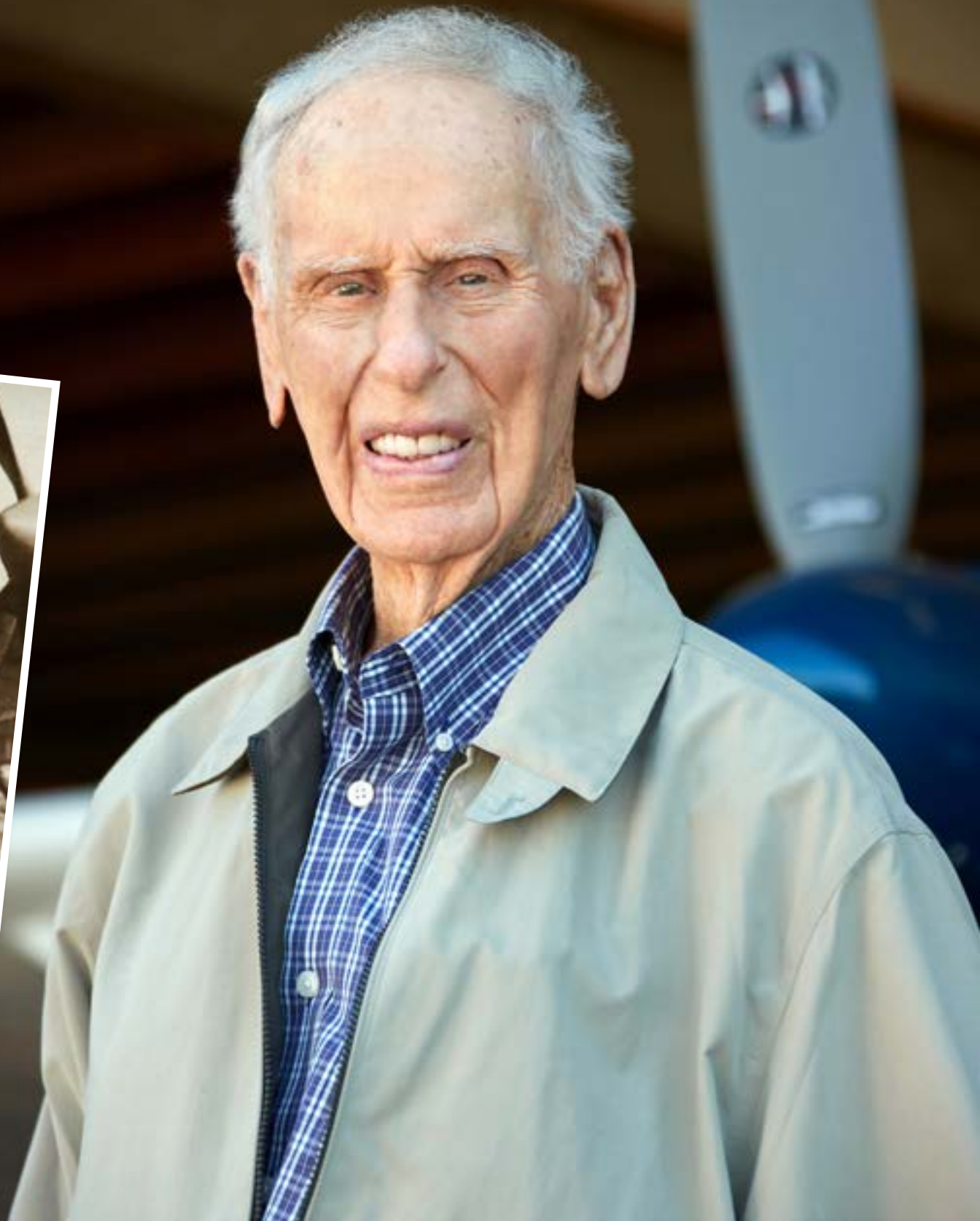
He was credited with five destroyed German aircraft, but after further review from the European operation, he only had two confirmed due to his gun camera being

destroyed when his P-38 went down. He is also a member of the Caterpillar Club, which is an informal association of people who have successfully used a parachute to bail out of a disabled aircraft.

After leaving the military, he went into the paper business as vice president of Paper Products, Inc. in Los Angeles and then went into home construction and developed a subdivision in the Hollywood Hills area.

After some time, he was able to return to his calling in the aviation business. First, he went into aircraft sales and fixed base operations in Van Nuys, Long Beach, Santa Barbara, Santa Maria and Bakersfield, California. He then developed airport facilities across the U.S. and Guam, and he continues to fly to this day. ★

Photograph by Emily Sandifer



Henry Langrehr

Henry O. Langrehr was born and raised in Clinton, Iowa. He came from a modest family and had a strong desire to help them from an early age, so he spent his free time as a child collecting metal scraps for extra money. Before joining the military, he had two jobs — one at a movie theater and the other loading up meat and other foods for the Swift and Co. meatpacking company. He learned of the attack at Pearl Harbor while working at a movie theater. Fueled with patriotism, he dropped out of high school to join the military when he turned 18. Upon joining, he was sent to Campo, California, to receive training as an engineer in explosives, demolition and infantry training.

He joined the 82nd Airborne Division, where his job was to blow up German bridges,

set up mines and explosives and fight in the infantry. His first day of combat was June 6, 1944, when he dropped into Sainte-Mère-Église, France, behind the enemy lines. After weeks of fighting, he was hit by a piece of German shrapnel, taken as a POW, sent to multiple camps and forced to work in a German coal mine. After spending months as a prisoner, he was able to escape, although he spent two weeks in enemy territory before he found an American military unit and was rescued. What kept him going during this time was thinking about his wife, Arlene, who was a Rosie working in a factory making machine gun stands.

Following Normandy, he served in several other campaigns before he retired from the U.S. Army as a corporal after two-and-a-half years of service. He has received many

medals for his service, but due to his humble beliefs, he keeps the specifics of those medals private. When he returned home, he built his first home with his wife, went into general contracting work and built all kinds of buildings.

Reflecting on his time in the service and the wartime in general, he wants people to remember how America pulled together and stood up to fight for what was right. He also wants to highlight not only the soldiers, but also the people at home, like his wife, who worked long and tiresome hours to provide food and machinery for the soldiers fighting abroad. ★

Photograph by Jim Koepnick



Arthur Leach

Arthur “Art” Leach was born in Morris, Illinois, in 1920. Growing up in the Great Depression, life was hard for the family, who lived on a farm. His father was a businessman and had a hand in both the insurance and real estate business. After graduating Morris High School in 1938, Art went on to attend Illinois Wesleyan University, where he graduated in 1942 with a degree in business. While in college, he was well aware of the war brewing in Europe, and during his senior year, Pearl Harbor was attacked. He remembers this moment clearly: he was at his fraternity house eating dinner when the breaking news came over the radio. Art was immediately very concerned for the future of his country, so he and his friends quickly began preparing themselves to go to war.

On June 10, 1942, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy

and recalls the big lifestyle change that came in boot camp. He then went to Navy preflight training in Iowa City, Iowa, and primary flight training in St. Louis before his final string of training in Florida. After earning his wings, he went to the Naval Air Station Illinois for carrier landing practice before setting off for Pearl Harbor on the USS Yorktown.

He participated in many aerial battles while on the USS Yorktown, including operations in Iwo Jima, Okinawa and the Marshall Islands. After the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the war in the Pacific ended. He was on the USS Yorktown at the time and found out the war had ended through his chain of command, although they were given very few details.

He was transferred from the USS Yorktown to the USS Lexington back in the U.S. and

was shortly released from duty. He married his wife, Eileen, and together, they raised three children. The end of World War II was not the end of his service in the Navy. He remained in the Naval Reserve at Naval Air Station Glenview, where he worked in flight operations and was honorably discharged in 1961.

He has attended reunions for the USS Yorktown every year. He believes the war was necessary and that America was in the fight for freedom. He is proud to have played a part in preserving the freedom that makes America what it is. ★

Photograph by Mariano Rosales



Seymour Lipper

Photo-

Seymour "Sy" Lipper was born March 22, 1926, in Monroe Township, New Jersey. His father was a baker, and his mother was a housewife. He attended the Bronx High School of Science, and his first job was selling soda and chocolate in the subway.

During his senior year of high school in 1943, a recruiter offered the boys an opportunity to enroll in the U.S. Army's Specialized Training Program. Sy was the only one of his peers selected into the program, which only lasted a semester due to the need for troops after Allied forces invaded Italy in January 1943. He was then sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to be trained in artillery.

Upon arrival in Gervais, France, Sy and his fellow soldiers were supposed to fill the gaps in the front lines. At 18 years old, he was sent to the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. The Germans had shelled their positions, masqueraded as American soldiers and infiltrated their ranks. He was told to stay with his squad and shoot anyone he did not know. The soldiers were clueless as to what codes the

Germans knew and fired at anyone they could not identify. The American forces were very vulnerable as the weather was fiercely cold, which eliminated their ability to dig foxholes. During the Battle of the Bulge, Sy sustained no injuries other than severe frostbite on his hands and feet.

After the war, he traveled around Europe, met exotic people, experienced cultures he read about in books and saw sites that could not be done justice unless seen in person. He then received orders to return to the U.S. for R&R. There he found out he would go on an additional tour of duty in the Pacific. However, there was a mix up, and Sy was instructed to go with soldiers who were receiving a discharge. In April 1945, he was discharged from the Army with the rank of technician fifth class.

Using the GI Bill, he earned his degree in management and foreign trade from NYU. In 1980, as executive vice president of an electronics company, he helped introduce the personal computer with Apple's Steve Jobs in Las Vegas.

After his retirement at 65, he took courses from Essex County College, Montclair State College and Seton Hall University. He completed pre-med courses before developing macular degeneration at the age of 82.

He is now 98 and lives with his wife, Carol, in New Jersey. His time in military service during World War II led him to believe these words: "The experience I had in the military was invaluable. I learned to be independent and have respect for myself, others and our country. You can't get this experience anywhere else. I think everyone should spend time in the service." As part of this country's bravest generation, his incredibly honorable and remarkable service will always be remembered. ★

Photograph by Mike Carroll



James Lyons

A native of Pringle, Pennsylvania, James "Jim" Lyons grew up knowing the meaning of hard work. Raised by a coal miner during the Great Depression, he went to school during the day and worked in the evenings collecting the eggs laid by his family's 300 chickens. He had a rough go in high school as he recalls being judged for his family's socioeconomic status. This judgement, combined with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, caused him to enlist in the U.S. Navy on March 25, 1943.

Jim recalls the trials and tribulations that came with Navy boot camp, including the

hours upon hours of marching and KP duty. Following boot camp, he became a coxswain, and on D-Day, he and his crew were tasked with shuttling troops back and forth from ships to Utah Beach. Dodging defenses in the water, he recalls not being able to get close enough to drop soldiers on the beach due to a sand bar: "[Sand] clogged the motor, we were having a terrible time ... [we] had to drop the troops in water over their heads, some drowned right away after entering the water, the heavy packs caused them to flip upside down, they could not right themselves."

Following D-Day, he and his unit spent about a year in Cherbourg, France, before returning to the U.S. He was discharged April 7, 1949, but quickly enlisted in the U.S. Air Force that same year.

After his Air Force career, he was married, had five children and embarked on a 30-year career at Pratt & Whitney as an aircraft inspector. When asked about the most important message he could leave for the future, Jim simply says, "Freedom is not free."



Photograph by David Burnett



Leon Malmed

Leon Malmed was only four years old the day that the French police showed up at his door at 5 a.m., demanding that his parents go with them. He remembers gripping his mother's skirt, begging the police not to take his parents away, but on that day, Srul and Chana Malmed were arrested.

His parents were Jewish and had immigrated to the town of Compiègne in northern France from Poland 10 years earlier. They were sent to Auschwitz and were never seen again. Their Christian neighbors, Henri and Suzanne Ribouleau, promised: "Do not worry, Monsieur and Madame Malmed, we will take care of Rachel and Leon until you return."

He recalls often missing school due to roundups, bombings and invasions. He remembers when his city was liberated by the 28th Division of the U.S. Army: "We all ran up the stairs from the basement to the street screaming, 'We are free! We are free!'" A hundred feet away, he saw a column of tanks, trucks pulling long guns and jeeps surrounding soldiers. American and French flags appeared

in windows and in the hands of the crowd lining up the road. "Was it possible? Were we dreaming?" he asked himself.

After the war ended, he and his sister waited for their parents to return, not knowing of the horrors of the concentration camps. One day, his aunt and uncle told them that they must now all live together. When his sister turned 15, their uncle decided that she should live with another aunt in New York, leaving Leon alone. Eventually, his aunt and uncle let him return to the Ribouleau family, and he was at peace once again.

At 21 years old, he was drafted into the French Air Force during the French-Algerian war. He worked as an airplane mechanic, specifically on transmissions. He served for 28 months and later went on to graduate with a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Paris.

He eventually immigrated to New York, where he lived for 18 years. In 1964, he saw his sister again for the first time in 14 years. He ended up graduating from UCLA and

Stanford University after studying business management of high technology companies. He worked in Silicon Valley, where he held executive positions in the chemical engineering field. He has been a resident of the San Francisco Bay Area for over 30 years.

He met his first wife in France, and they had two children together. He met his current wife later in life, and they have three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

At 78, he began cycling competitively, and in 2022, he won the national titles in the men's 85-89-year-old division. He also wrote a memoir of his life, "We Survived...At Last, I Speak." The book is available on Amazon, and all profits go to Holocaust survivors in need. ★

Photograph by Scott Bliss



Felix Maurizio

Felix "Mo" Maurizio was born Feb. 21, 1925, in Springfield, Massachusetts. Growing up in the Maurizio household meant understanding the value of hard work and perseverance. His father held a job with a gas company while his mother dedicated her time to managing the household and caring for the family. Despite the financial struggles faced by many during this era, the Maurizio family maintained a sense of unity and resilience. Mo's first foray into the workforce came during his teenage years when he secured a job at a local grocery store.

He vividly remembers when news of the attack on Pearl Harbor reverberated across the nation. On that fateful Sunday afternoon, he was seated at the kitchen table, diligently working on his Latin homework while listening to the radio. The shocking announcement of the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor prompted him to spring into

action. Determined to defend his country, he immediately informed his parents of his intention to enlist in the U.S. Navy. However, his parents urged him to complete his high school education before embarking on military service, emphasizing the importance of finishing what he had started.

In August 1943, he fulfilled his patriotic duty and enlisted in the Navy. From late 1943 to late 1945, he participated in key battles and campaigns, including the invasions of D-Day, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. His courage and dedication were evident, particularly during the harrowing invasion of Normandy when he landed troops on Omaha Beach and ensured their safe passage amidst fierce opposition.

Assigned to various units, including landing ship tanks in Europe and the USS Talladega in the Pacific, Felix was responsible for crucial communications and navigation tasks. Notably, he was on duty when news of

Japan's surrender reached his ship at 2 a.m. When he woke up Admiral Nimitz himself to relay the message, Admiral Nimitz told him, "Mo, if this is a joke, I'll have you hung!" Once he realized that it was serious, he told Mo to get bottles of champagne and glasses for everyone on the bridge.

He served in the Navy until June 1966, becoming senior chief petty officer. His post-war career path led him to Air Force One, serving under President Eisenhower for a year before transitioning to a role as an instructor at Fort Eustis in Newport News, Virginia. His dedication to serving his country extended beyond his military service, and he retired at the age of 80 after 41 years and seven months of dedicated service to the U.S. Postal Service. He is still proud of his amazing service to our country. ★

Photograph by Ashlee Glen



Arthur Medeiros

Photo-

Arthur "Art" Medeiros was born May 10, 1920, on his family's farm in Fall River, Massachusetts. His love for playing the trombone began at 7 years old. When he turned 17, Art forged his parents' signatures and enlisted in the military. He played the trombone in the U.S. Army band in Panama for six weeks until the service found out that his parents didn't consent to his enlistment, and he was sent home.

While having dinner with his family, the announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbor came over the radio. Everyone in his neighborhood was very surprised, and many of his neighbors went to the recruiting office to sign up. Art worked on his family's farm until 1942, when he was drafted into the military. He reported to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, and completed boot camp at Fort Eustis, Virginia. Although he thought

he would play in the Army band again, he deployed overseas with D Company, 1st Battalion, 309th Regiment, 78th Division, where he traded his trombone for a .50-caliber machine gun.

He arrived in Southampton, England, but was soon shipped to Le Havre, France. He was later assigned to secure assets of the Germans, where many of the Allied forces were exposed. He was awarded a Bronze Star for this mission.

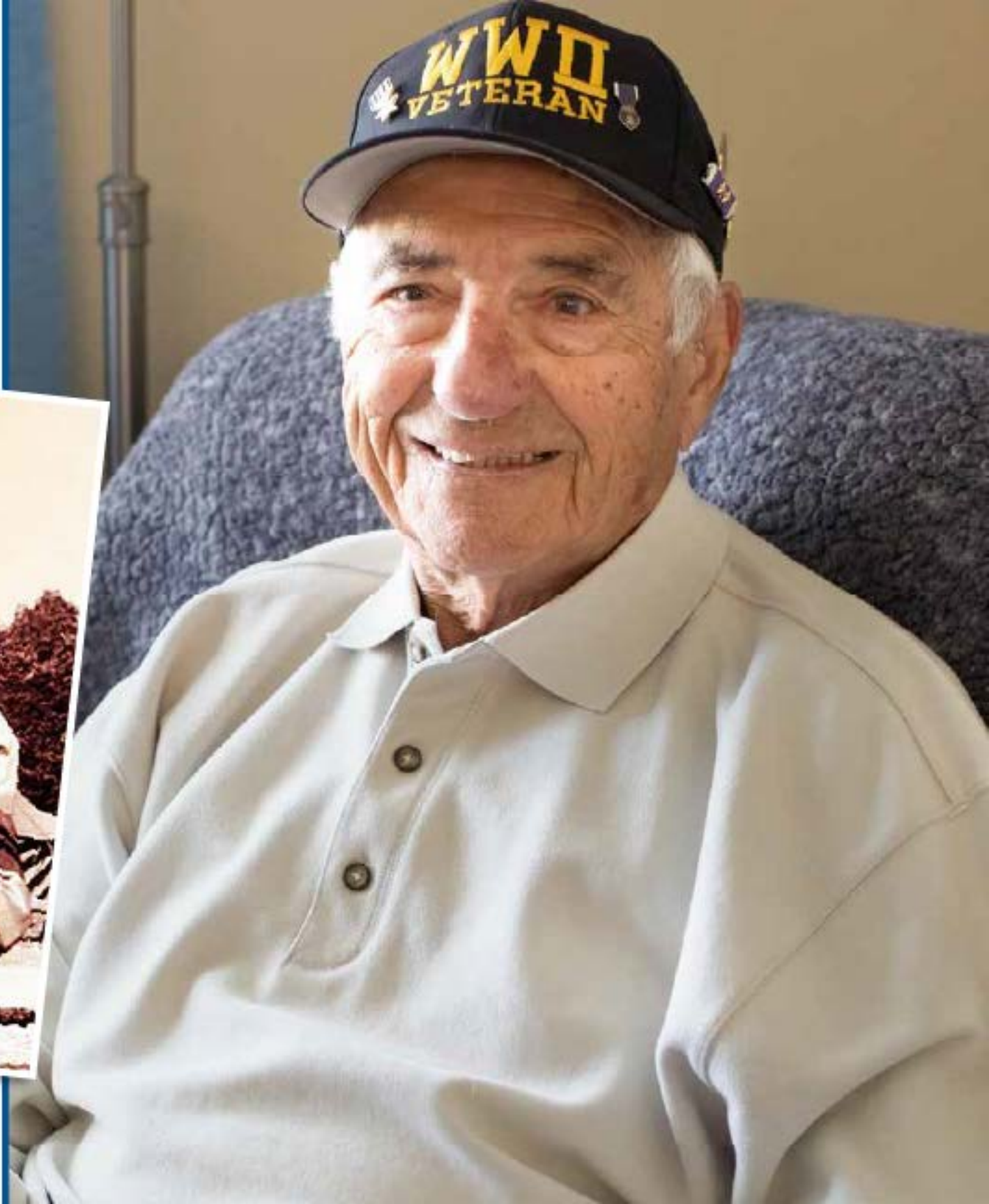
In addition, he was awarded a Silver Star for an operation in the Battle of Hürtgen Forest. In this mission, his machine gun team was assigned to provide security for a bazooka man to take out a tank that was holding up their unit's advance. He remembers the deep snow and bitter cold. He was wounded three times during this battle and the Battle of the Bulge, and was eventually awarded

three Purple Hearts for his sacrifice.

He achieved the rank of sergeant by the time he was discharged in October 1945. Once he returned home, he drove an 18-wheel tractor-trailer for 32 years and was a shop steward for the Teamsters Union. As for his musical career, he continued to arrange his own music and play trombone with different bands.

He can now be found in Bristol, Rhode Island, with his wife and family, enjoying his time by playing golf, listening to big band music and eating breakfast at his favorite diner. ★

Photograph by Rich Dione



Ernest Mitchell

Ernest "Olen" Mitchell was born December 1921 in Oklahoma. When he was 17 years old, he moved to Hutchinson, Kansas, where he resides to this day.

In 1943, he was drafted and sent to Tyler, Texas, for boot camp. From there, he was sent to Newport News, Virginia, for additional training before being deployed to Sicily, Italy.

While in Italy, he was a part of Company L, 337th Regiment, 85th Infantry Division. He worked with his company to clean out railroad tunnels that were often used by the German military to transport soldiers and import equipment. One day while cleaning out the tunnels, he was wounded in the mouth, which destroyed both cheeks and his teeth. He was taken to Naples, Italy, and spent a few weeks recovering from the injury before he was transported on a boat

to a hospital in Charleston, South Carolina. He was sent to Springfield, Missouri, and underwent plastic surgery to reconstruct his cheeks and mouth.

Thirteen days after his injuries, the Allies invaded Normandy, which he remembers vividly. The fighting in Italy was severe, but it was hard to know to what extent as it wasn't until leaving the service that he learned the connection between the severe fighting in Italy and D-Day.

After nine months of recovering from his surgery, he transferred from infantry to military police and served the rest of his time in Springfield, Missouri, and got married. He was discharged in 1946, and the couple returned to Hutchinson.

Back in civilian life, he bought a Texaco distributorship, but upon selling it, learned he was not yet old enough to receive Social

Security. He decided to continue to work and did so in a mortuary for 22 years before retiring at the age of 86. Unfortunately, his wife passed away in 2006 after 68 years of marriage. He lives in an assisted living center in Hutchinson but still drives a car and goes to town.

If there was one thing Olen could instill in Americans today and in the future, it is that "we have a wonderful country and a great life ahead of us. We need to change our attitudes because war is a terrible thing. Nevertheless, there isn't a better place on Earth than America." He is so grateful for his country and the young people in it, and feels very fortunate, lucky and honored to have served America. ★

Photograph by Paul Bowen



Vernon Mitchell

Vernon "Vern" Mitchell was born May 5, 1921, and lived through a tumultuous childhood. At the age of five, his mother tragically passed, leaving him, two brothers and a sister alone with their father and grandmother. Although the absence of his mother continuously pained him, he lived a relatively happy youth growing up on a farm in San Augustine, Texas.

He and his brothers did many of the farmhouse chores, such as picking cotton, gathering corn and plowing the ground. With the Great Depression at its peak, his family had very little money, and he often walked a mile barefoot to school until he had to drop out in seventh grade to help support his family.

At the insistence of his father, his first job was laboring on other farms, planting vegetables, gathering eggs, feeding hogs and taking care of cattle. Later, he obtained a GED and attended a few college courses. Before his enlistment, his only knowledge of the military was from his uncle, who was a

World War I veteran.

In 1940, at the age of 19, he desired a change of scenery. When his friend came by with an opportunity to enlist in the U.S. Army, he took it. After he was assigned to the 2nd Infantry, he began to enjoy military life.

Everything changed when the U.S. declared war on Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Vern was sent to England and eventually crossed the English Channel into Normandy. He participated in the Battle of Normandy as a gunner and participated in the 2nd Infantry Division's efforts during the Cerisy Forest Campaign. He was wounded by a German artillery shell that also killed two of his squad members.

Vern spent six months at a hospital in England before being transported back to active duty. Once the war ended, he was released and spent two months recovering at Fort Sam Houston. After his recovery, he was honorably discharged with a combat disability, ending his career in the service.

He was married to his wife on June 26,

1943, and they filled their home with the light and laughter of two children: one boy and one girl. They now have four grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

He continued to serve the United States by working in the Special Weapons Division at Kelly Air Force Base for 30 years until his retirement in 1978. He received a plethora of awards, such as France's Legion of Honor, the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the World War II Victory Medal and many more.

Nowadays, Vern lives in Fort Worth, Texas, spending time with family and teaching the younger generations the true meaning of bravery. He wants to leave them with one resounding message: "The United States is a shining light on a hill for the world to see. Our country is worth defending and fighting for." ★

Photograph by Jim Wilson



Warren Morrison

Warren Morrison was born in 1924 in Ohio. Growing up during the Great Depression was tough for him. “There were four children in my family, and we lived on home-grown vegetables as much as possible. My father worked several jobs before giving up and working for the government-sponsored WPA. My first job was a paper route at age 9. The cost of the paper went from two cents to three cents while I had the route,” he recalls.

On Dec. 7, 1941, Warren was in high school. He vividly remembers listening to a radio program when it was interrupted with the news that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. On Jan. 29, 1943, Warren enlisted in the U.S.

Army Air Corps. He originally was part of a program to learn meteorology, but as the war raged on, the federal government terminated the program. This meant Warren now had to report to boot camp in Missouri. After graduating, Warren joined the 533rd Engineer Battalion as a demolition specialist.

He would soon cross the Atlantic and head to Belgium to build roads in the Ardennes Forest. Warren worked hard for six weeks before contracting trench foot. He was ordered to board the USS Argentina bound for England before boarding the USS Uruguay hospital ship, sailing unescorted across the Atlantic back to the U.S. He was treated for trench foot and honorably

discharged with a Bronze Star before the war ended.

After the war, Warren took advantage of the GI Bill and graduated from The Ohio State University with a degree in mechanical engineering. He then got a job in the oil and gas industry in various places around the U.S. When asked about the message Warren would leave for those reading this in 200 years, his simple words carry a powerful message: “Don’t let it happen again. Work like hell to find a better way.” ★

Photograph by Edward Phillips



Donald Muncy

Growing up during the Great Depression, Donald "Don" Muncy worked as a paperboy before school, was a full-time high school student during the day, and then worked at the Frost Top as a car hop in the afternoons and evenings. College was not an option, so he enrolled in his high school's vocational program. Graduating high school with a machinist degree, he and his friends decided to enlist in the U.S. Navy to see the world. Don completed boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Reserve Training Center in Great Lakes, Illinois. He remembers that boot camp was cold and tough in the winter. Outside training and marching was done on fields of ice, which made it very uncomfortable.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked, he was stationed at Naval Station Jacksonville in Florida. He recalls: "A buddy of mine and I had just finished our lunch and decided to go to the library. Just as we got there, an announcement came over the radio that

Pearl Harbor was under attack. My initial reaction was that of unbelievable horror. Everyone was in utter disbelief that the Japanese were attacking."

Following the attack, Don worked even harder to become a captain of a Patrol Bomber (PBY) aircraft. His mission was flying nightly anti-submarine patrols between Georgia and the southern islands of the Bahamas, an area called Torpedo Alley.

Given his extensive aviation knowledge and proven work ethic, he was a natural choice for a new position: air traffic controller. He then left Florida and traveled north to Civilian Air Traffic Control School in Kansas City. There he excelled at ATC school, and after successful completion of the 10-week course, he traveled back to Florida and held the position of controller in charge of the tower at Naval Air Station Banana River until 1945.

Being an air traffic controller took him all over the world. After Banana River, he

was transferred to Honolulu, then Kisarazu, Japan, before finally serving as the chief dispatcher at the Tokyo Flight Control Center, where he served out the remainder of his enlistment. In 1946, he applied to be a civilian controller at the Columbus Airport, which started his civilian career in the ATC field. In July 1950, however, he was recalled to active duty as war broke out in Korea. He returned to the Navy and served as chief controller at Naval Air Base Adak in Alaska, teaching approach control techniques to reservists. In December 1951, Don was discharged from the Navy and returned to the tower in Columbus, where he climbed the ladder to become the founder and chief of the world's first TRACON center in Oakland, California. ★

Photograph by Ron Kaplan



Richard Nelms

Richard “Dick” Nelms was born Feb. 17, 1923, in Cleveland, Ohio, and was raised in Niagara Falls, New York. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1942 and was accepted to aviation cadet and pilot training for active duty in March 1943. After earning his wings in December 1943, he was assigned to the B-17 crew in the 447th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force, based in Rattlesden, Suffolk County, England.

Between May 1944 and Sept. 1944, he was credited for having completed 35 missions into Germany and other Nazi-occupied territories. He participated in the diversionary campaign at Pas de Calais in advance of the Normandy invasion but considers his most important missions to be two flown in late July 1944 when the 447th BG was assigned low-altitude missions to bomb German troop concentrations at St. Lo,

helping the Allies break out and drive deeper into France.

Dick helped write and plan the specifications for food and supply drops to the Marquis Freedom Fighters and others. He went through three B-17s during his tour, including Pandora's Box, on which he personally painted the nose art. He and his crew faced opposition and sustained battle damage on 25 of their 35 missions. He is the last surviving crew member from Pandora's Box.

His awards include a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for participation at the Battle of Normandy, liberation of the region of France and Europe, the Distinguished Flying Cross medal for extraordinary achievement and superior airmanship while serving as pilot on high-altitude heavy bombardment missions over Germany and Nazi-occupied continental

Europe, the Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters, a U.S. Presidential Unit citation for accuracy in bombing, the European Theatre ribbon with four battle campaign stars and the World War II Victory Medal. He was decorated Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor in May 2019 and was awarded the Knight in the Honorable Order of St. Michael in 2024.

Dick continues to serve his country by volunteering his time at Seattle's Museum of Flight as a World War II history storyteller and B-17 guide. He continues to love his country and cherishes all those who have served past and present to protect her. ★

Photograph by Jaimie Birtel



James O'Brien

Photo-

James "Jim" O'Brien was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on May 20, 1925. He attended grammar school through the Great Depression, and as he puts it, "lived as a spoiled kid." He grew into a cheerful teenager who sought adventure.

Jim heard about Pearl Harbor while cruising around town with his friends. Adventure was finally calling and two years later, that call was answered when he was drafted into the U.S. Army. He was sent to serve in A Company, 65th AIB, 20th Armored Division, nicknamed the "Armor Raiders." He attended basic training in Fort Benning, Georgia, and later spent time in Gambier, Ohio, and Camp Campbell in Kentucky.

In Europe, he served as a rifleman and ammunition handler. The 20th Armored Division arrived at Le Havre, France, in February 1945, and advanced into Belgium, then Bavaria and crossed the Danube toward

Munich. When crossing into Germany, his division attacked an SS tank school in Munich and sustained several casualties. Fortunately, this incident ended up concluding in his unit's favor.

When the war ended, Jim did not have enough points to return home, so he spent three months on occupation duty. He returned to the United States on Aug. 6, 1945, for 60 days of leave. Upon arriving in New York, he learned that the first atomic bomb, Little Boy, had been dropped on Hiroshima. During his leave, he married Sophie Ciechanowski on Aug. 15, 1945.

He thought that dropping the bombs was great news as he would have been one of the thousands to serve in Japan had they not been dropped, and in his own words, "would likely not have made it back home." An invasion of Japan would have been a tiring, bloody endeavor for both sides.

After discharge, when the war was over, he and his wife had five children — Anne, Joan, James, Michael and Vincent — and he began a business with his father and brother. This business, O'Brien & Sons, Inc., still thrives today as a home center.

Jim retired in 1991 and, in 2007, his wife passed away. He has 14 grandchildren, 24 great-grandchildren and has been living in the same house he and his wife built together. He enjoyed his time in the military, as it was one of the greatest adventures a man can have and would like the youth of America to know one thing: freedom is not free. ★

Photograph by Mike Carroll



Anthony Pagano

Growing up in New Jersey during the Great Depression, Anthony "Tony" Pagano remembers the close bond he shared with his large Italian family. Staying close to their roots, Italian was the main language spoken in their home. He recalls being held back in the second grade due to the language barrier. As one of five siblings, life for him consisted of school until he got his first job at 16, working with his father at the Lionel Train Factory. He recalls walking two miles each way to get his education before joining his father at work in the evenings.

After Dec. 7, 1941, things changed in his small New Jersey hometown. He recalls seeing blue and gold stars popping up in windows all over town, and lunchtime conversation at school evolved from sports to joining the military. The Pagano family's attention quickly shifted to Tony's brother, Joe, an Army captain in the Philippines. By his senior year in 1943, Tony had joined the Army Specialized Training Program, where he trained to be an engineer like his older brother, Tom.

Following the completion of the program, he enlisted in the U.S. Army on Nov. 15, 1943, at the federal building in New York City. After passing all the Army's medical exams, he was off to boot camp in Fort Benning, Georgia. He quickly picked up on the discipline the Army taught, passed his basic training and was transferred to Fort Jackson in South Carolina, where he joined the 1255th Combat Engineer Battalion.

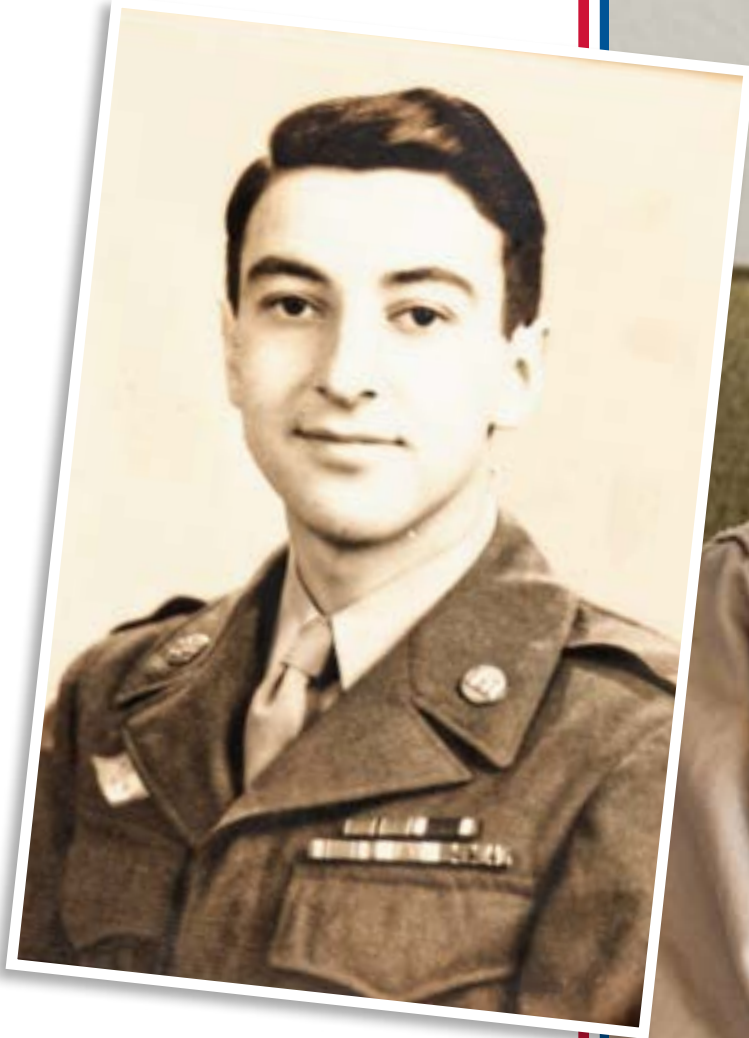
In October 1944, Tony traveled across the Atlantic to Liverpool, where his company patrolled the English coast. Throughout his service, he frequently saw combat in his role as a jeep driver. He recalls hours of driving into enemy fire and picking up wounded soldiers on the battlefield. In 1945, during the Battle of the Bulge, he and his battalion liberated Vianden, the last town in Luxembourg. During the liberation effort, he was injured from heavy scraps of clay shingles falling on his shoulders. This combat injury qualified him for a Purple Heart, but seeing his brothers in arms seriously wounded or dead, he declined the

honor saying, "I could not compare myself to them."

On May 7, 1945, while in Gotha, Germany, he and his company heard the war was finally over. When the atomic bombs were dropped in the Pacific, he was relieved, realizing he would not have to go on and continue the fight. In February 1946, he returned home and was discharged March 8, 1946.

That September, he enrolled in night school at Seton Hall University. He graduated in 1950 and enrolled in medical school in Rome, Italy, where he would graduate as a medical doctor in 1955. He was married in 1954 and had four children. He continued to practice medicine until his retirement in 1990 at age 65. After retirement, he spent time with his family and returned to Luxembourg for the 50th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge. ★

Photograph by Scott Bliss



Connie Palacioz

Connie Palacioz is the definition of a patriot. Born to two Mexican-American immigrants in Newton, Kansas, on Jan. 16, 1925, she and her four sibling grew up poor but enjoyed their life. She recalls her family being active within their church parish and the local Mexican community. Although her father wasn't formally educated himself, he prioritized it for his children, and they each received schooling from kindergarten until high school.

As a sophomore in high school, she remembers her principal coming to each classroom to share the news that the Imperial Japanese Army had attacked Pearl Harbor and that the United States was officially at war. She and her classmates discussed the attacks and the fear that quickly followed: "We were afraid and worried [about] them attacking the mainland United States. The boys expressed interest in signing up to fight

for our country, so when I heard on the radio that they needed workers to build more planes in 1943, I immediately went to the employment office to apply. I wanted to help our country in whatever capacity I could."

Her first job helping the war effort was in laundry, where she would wash, dry and repair Navy uniforms, but as more men were called to fight, more women began doing jobs to help the war front. She took a bus from Newton to Wichita for training and then went to work at a Boeing plant as a riveter, earning a dollar an hour, the highest pay at the time. She remembers facing discrimination from male employees early during her time, but she fought back, and eventually, those who had teased her became her best working colleagues.

After the atomic bombs were dropped in Japan, a new beginning was happening in America, and there was joy in the community as soldiers began coming home. She married

shortly after the war ended and started a family. She taught Spanish language at the local college, helping students perfect their accents until she went to cosmetology school and eventually opened her own shop in 1961.

Facing impossible challenges, these women stood up, rose above and pulled together to support a country that did not necessarily support them back. She reflects on the past saying, "I would encourage [the future women of America] and tell them to always do their best and never give up to achieve their goals. Life is not easy, but if you work hard and are dedicated, you will accomplish your goals in life." ★

Photograph by Brett Schauf



Lewis Patteson

Lewis “Pat” Patteson was born Nov. 24, 1921, in the rural town of Smiley, Texas. Life was not easy for his family during the Great Depression, but no one went hungry. His father started the first car garage in the village and repaired early model Fords. His mother was a music teacher and taught her four children to play the violin, trumpet, saxophone and piano. Pat and his twin brother went to college on music scholarships.

His college life was suddenly cut short when he heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor, and he enlisted in the U.S. Navy on Jan. 2, 1942. Having passed the physical and other tests for the cadet flight training program, he was ready to go. His father put some gas in his old Model A Ford and drove him the 90 miles to Corpus Christi Naval Air Station the following Monday. He let Pat out of the car at the guard gate, they waved goodbye, and then suddenly, Pat was in the Navy.

He liked the flight training and sailed through it in nine months without any problems. As part of his training, he participated in calisthenics, flight skills, navigation, gunnery, power, Navy regulations and seamanship. During the war, he served in Naval Patrol Squadron VPB-135, nicknamed the “Blue Foxes.” He flew the “Empire Express” on 25 bombing missions while also going on shipping and anti-submarine patrols. He was the patrol plane commander and was in command of a medium bomber with a crew of six. Their mission was to bomb enemy targets and conduct photo reconnaissance.

From 1943 to 1945, his primary base was Attu Island in the Aleutians. The battle he remembers most was the Battle of Attu, where he flew fighter cover for U.S. troop landings. He also attacked single plane sorties attacking northern Japanese bases in Kurils. He recalls how hard it was to

communicate with the rest of the world while he was overseas. The censorship of Aleutian activities was very strict, and he couldn’t tell anyone where they were most of the time.

On Nov. 2, 1945, Pat was discharged from the Navy with a final rank of lieutenant. His awards included two Air Medals and two Distinguished Flying Crosses. Pat returned to college and looked for a job as an airline pilot, but there was a lot of competition with so many pilots returning home from war. He flew for an oil company and remained close to the airline industry by marrying an American Airlines flight attendant. ★

Photograph by Virginia Hines



Robert Pedigo

Robert "Bob" Pedigo was a resilient, hard worker in his hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana. Growing up during the Great Depression, Bob and his family all worked to provide for the household. From the age of 7, he had a magazine sales route and sold scrap metal to make extra money.

This perseverance would translate into patriotism and would draw him to enlist in the U.S. Army Air Corps. He went on to serve alongside his older brother, Leland, but the two would follow different paths.

His first assignment was well-suited for him: he was the youngest of 500 to manufacture the then-classified Norden bombsights. These would be a gamechanger for air bomber safety from German anti-aircraft weapons while still allowing for accuracy.

Two years into his service, he became a chief armorer at age 20, which was a testament to his tenacity and intelligence. Overseeing the production and transportation of .50 caliber machine guns, gun turrets and more was not

a job for the faint of heart. He recalled that it was the most stressed and nervous one could feel, but what reassured him of his ability to take on his assignments was his trust in his vigorous training and a focused mentality.

On D-Day, he was a part of the 453rd Bombardment Group, whose briefing officer was Colonel Jimmy Stewart. He was the first to be called into the air and took a B-24J Liberator — the "Silent Yokum" — on a flight over Omaha Beach to drop bombs on a German encampment in St. Laurent. This mission was a success and was one of his easiest missions since the target was caught by surprise.

As chief armorer, nose gunner and air bomber, his health took a toll, and he spent six months in a hospital recovering from both PTSD and combat fatigue.

After 30 dangerous missions, he earned enough points to be discharged. He hitchhiked on his own from Texas to Indianapolis in just 24 hours and arrived home to his lovely wife, Helen, whom he had married in Greenwood,

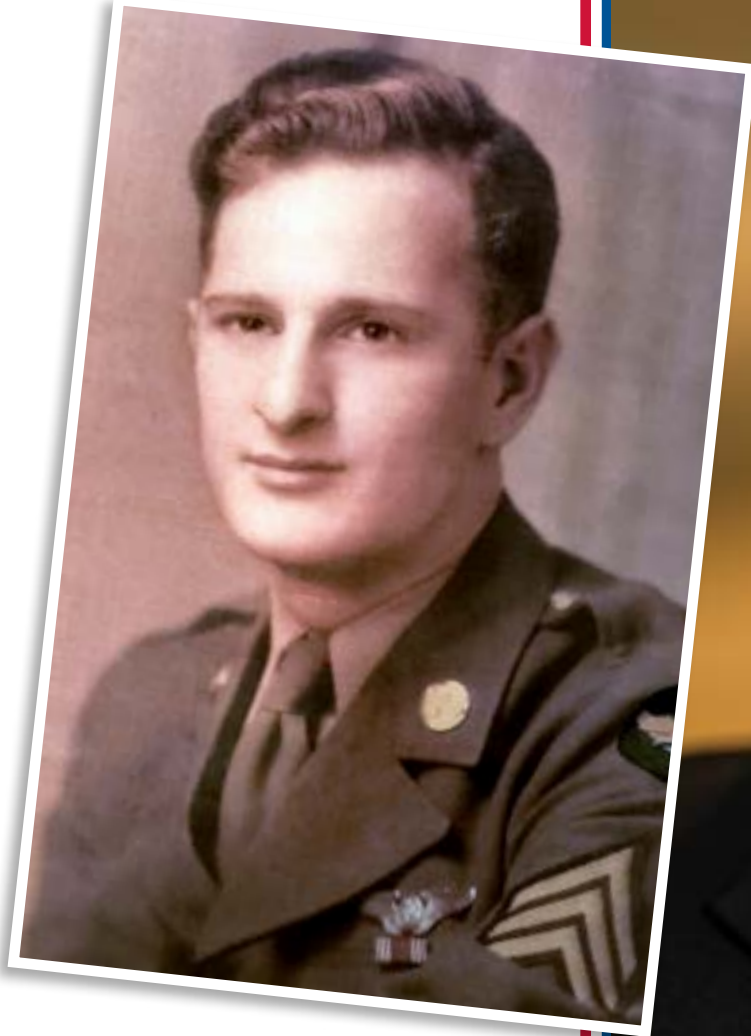
Indiana, when he was 17. The two raised their one-year-old son and had another boy. Just as strong as his courage in the war, the Pedigos' beautiful marriage flourished for over 50 years until Helen's unfortunate passing in the 1990s. He now fondly remembers her loving memory as he lives on for her.

He has spoken about his experiences and earned awards for his bravery. These include the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with three oak clusters, Indiana's Sagamore of the Wabash and many more.

Bob's patriotism and valor is to be admired. Eighty years later and his pride for his country, its freedom and for his ability to have a part in its history is abundant, growing and genuine in nature. At 101, he is a shining role model of a resilient, kind and service-oriented patriot.



Photograph by Marc Lebryck



Frank Perry

Frank Perry was born Feb. 7, 1926, in the small coal town of McAdoo, Pennsylvania. His mother was a homemaker and his father worked for the coal company to support his young family. He had two brothers and a normal childhood for the time. He attended high school, but his ideas about college were put on hold due to the war.

His first job was at the age of 17, driving a gasoline delivery truck. His older brother had served in the military from 1939 to 1941 and shared information about military life with his younger siblings. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, his brother was given orders to return to duty promptly. Frank heard about the attack on the radio while listening to a football game. He had a bad feeling about the turn the war would take and realized that a lot of able young men would be called to serve.

He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Forces

aviation cadet program in September 1943 to avoid being drafted in the infantry the following year. During basic training, the cadets were advised that the military did not need more pilots, so they were assigned to different training schools. He was transferred to a radio maintenance school in Madison, Wisconsin, for six months and then on to an aerial gunner school in the fall of that year. He was assigned to B-24 crew training in Charleston, South Carolina, as a belly turret gunner.

He was deployed in central Europe from March 1944 to June 1945. He specifically recalls having to stay extremely alert looking for German fighter aircraft and was always glad to return to base. After the end of war, he was assigned to a motor pool in Texas for a while and then to a field maintenance group.

He clearly recalls where he was during some of the most notable events of the war,

like the attack on Pearl Harbor, the D-Day invasion of Normandy and being shocked upon hearing the news of the death of President Franklin Roosevelt.

After being discharged from service May 8, 1946, he pursued his dream of getting into aviation by joining an airline training school in Kansas City, Missouri. He joined Piedmont Airlines as a station agent and progressed up the ranks over the next 40 years, eventually becoming a supervisor in flight dispatch.

He was married in 1950 and had one son. His family has grown since then to include two grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. He earned various medals and ribbons for his service, such as a Good Conduct Medal, American Theater Ribbon, European-African-Middle Eastern Theater Ribbon and World War II Victory Ribbon. ★

Photograph by John Slemph



James Rasmussen

Born in Minnesota in 1924, James "Jim" Rasmussen enjoyed a simple upbringing. His father, a carpenter, struggled to find work during the Great Depression, so he moved the family from Minneapolis to Edina, where they raised crops and animals to make ends meet.

In December 1941, Jim was a senior in high school and split his time between school, hanging out with friends and working at the Minnesota Gun Club. He was at work when he heard about the attacks on Pearl Harbor and wanted to enlist immediately, but since he was only 17, he needed his parents' signatures. His parents refused to sign until he graduated high school. After graduation, he worked for a few weeks before his draft

notice came in the mail.

Jim was drafted into the Army Air Corps and entered the cadet program, where he trained to be a navigator. He recalls training being demanding, but enjoyable. Following his training, he boarded the RMS Queen Elizabeth and traveled to the United Kingdom to serve in the 100th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force. His missions usually involved bombing runs over specified targets in Germany or other Axis-controlled territory.

As the war ended in Europe, he flew to England and waited to see if he would be sent to the Pacific. While in England, the atomic bombs were dropped, and Japan surrendered. He and his crew were ecstatic and were tasked with flying their B-17 home.

They flew from the U.K. to North Africa, then across to South America and up into Florida. He remained in the service and deployed to Korea less than two years later, serving 23 years in the armed forces.

After his retirement, he and his wife raised their family. He worked for the Department of Corrections as a maintenance officer in the Stillwater prison camp. He enjoyed this work because it allowed him to take winter off and travel with his wife to Florida, a tradition they had for many years. ★

Photograph by Ken Cheung



Martin Rodriguez

Photo-

Martin “Marty” Rodriguez was born Oct. 30, 1926, in San Antonio. His parents died when he was very young, and he was sent to live with his aunt and her family. He attended school as a boy but dropped out at the age of 13 to work. As the only boy, he was responsible for taking care of his aunt and her daughters. He went to work in the local cotton fields, moved to Michigan and then to Texas to continue to take care of his family. But by the age of 16, he had returned home to San Antonio.

The Pearl Harbor bombing had an impact on him. Knowing that there had been a bombing on American soil by Japanese forces pushed him to join the Civil Service Commission at age 16. He was considered a wartime learner and was taught to repair aircraft instruments.

By 1943, he had joined the U.S. Army and was sent to Fort Sam Houston at the age of 18 for basic training. He later transferred to Fort Riley, Kansas, for secondary training before being stationed at Fort Leavenworth, where he served as a military prison guard for the

U.S. Disciplinary Barracks. He served in Kansas until 1945.

In 1945, he landed in France and was sent to the 11th Engineers Headquarters Company in Linz, Austria. Despite his training, he was used as a gopher, handyman and go-to guy, doing whatever was needed, which he did with pride. After spending a year in Austria, he was sent home.

Returning to civilian life, he went back to work for the civil service, continuing his work on airplanes and traveling to numerous bases across the world to do inspections on aircraft. He specialized in performing vibration analysis on engines of different planes and was responsible for correcting any issues engines might have before they could pass inspection. He continued at this job for about 37 years before retiring.

In 1958, he married his sweet Esther. Their family expanded to include four sons and a daughter, and today includes eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

He has been recognized for his role in World

War II by the Naval Reserve in San Antonio along with five other veterans. He was the only enlisted man in the group; the rest were admirals.

Marty played a part in saving the world. Without the sacrifices of that generation and the actions of the people who served, we would not experience the freedoms that we take for granted. He reflects on the war saying: “It was a great sacrifice, with millions dying, but because of their sacrifice, we are here. I did my share, went when I was called.” ★

Photograph by Jack Fleetwood



Lester Schrenk

Lester "Les" Schrenk grew up on a dairy farm with his family. On his 19th birthday, he joined the U.S. Army Air Corps and began his training across the U.S.

He became a ball turret gunner on a B-17 and served in 327th Bomb Squadron, 92nd Bomb Group, 8th Air Force. Typically, ball turret gunners were men who were shorter than 5'6". Les stood at 5'11", which made it a tight fit.

On Feb. 22, 1944, he was forced to bail from his bomber, which taken down by a German JU-88 and was immediately captured, and he was taken as prisoner to the Stalag Luft IV camp. He faced horrible treatment from the German guards, ranging from intense, life-threatening interrogations to strip searches.

On his first interrogation, after just three days of being held captive, he faced a near-death experience for refusing to fill out a form that asked military-based questions, including targets, briefings, altitude of flight and the bombs his regiment used. This form was a

clear trick to get soldiers to compromise their strategies and skills.

Any questions the interrogation officer asked him resulted in a response of his name, rank and serial number. This infuriated the officer, causing him to draw a gun to Les' head, however, the officer instead kicked him out and sent him to Stalag VI.

At Stalag VI, the treatment of these prisoners was no different. They were taunted and tortured by German guards, who would simply laugh at their suffering. One day, the men banded together and sang "God Bless America" to the German officers, infuriating them, as it showed their dedication and unbreaking spirits.

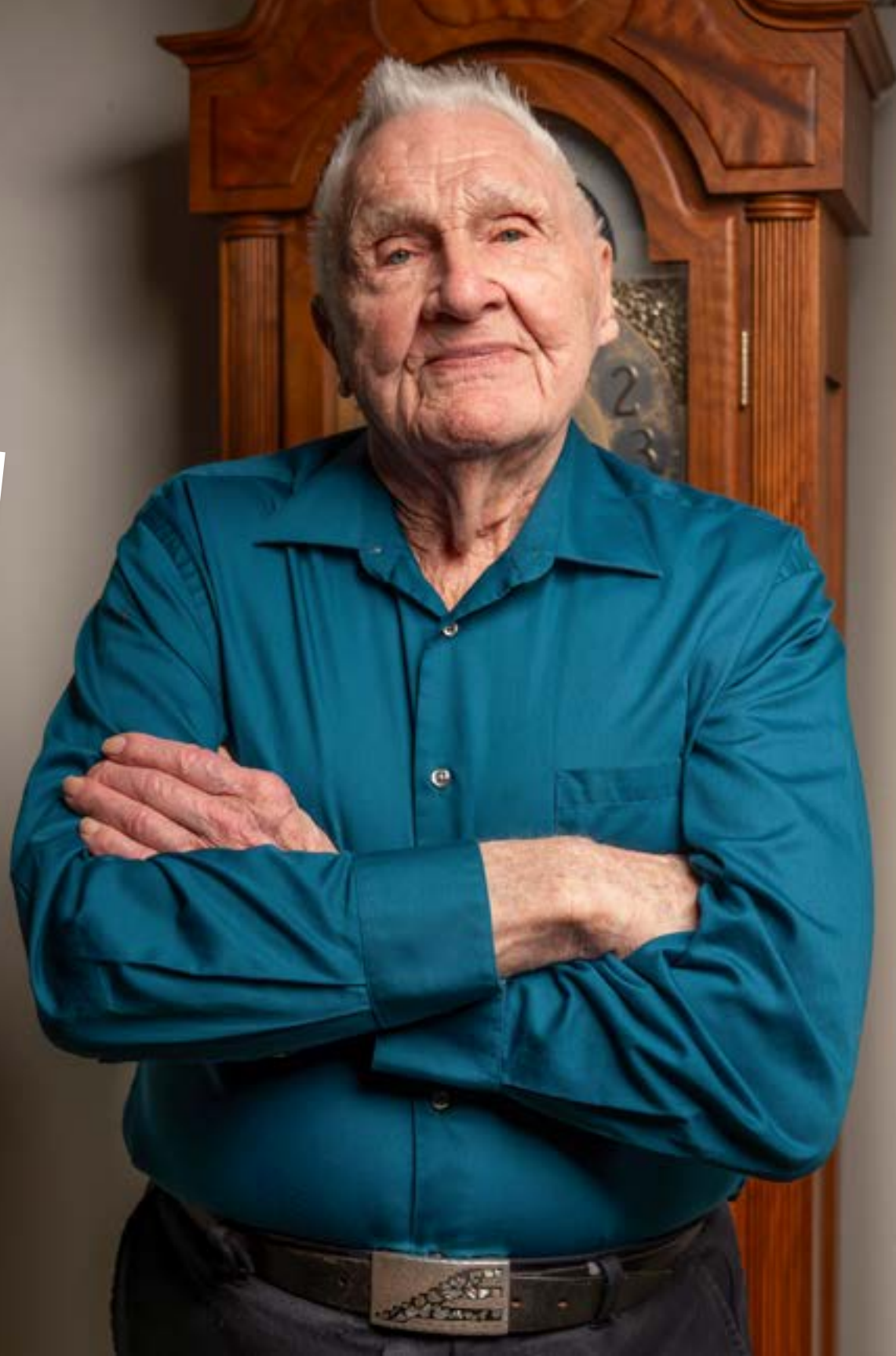
The men at Stalag VI were then sent on a German death march, an infamous way of transferring POWs from one camp to another. His death march lasted 86 days, and he remembers the heat and terrible diseases the men endured. The men were eventually freed by the British Army.

For decades, he wondered why the man in the JU-88 had not simply finished them off. In 2012, he met the man responsible for shooting his bomber down: Hans-Hermann Muller. He informed Les that the reason he had not finished them off was because if the plane had gone into the nearby lake, every soldier would have drowned. The two men became unlikely friends after this meeting.

After being asked what he believed his greatest accomplishment was, Les responded that he was most proud he could preserve freedom, as people never truly appreciate freedom until it is stripped away from them.



Photograph by Ken Cheung



Marion Shipe

Marion "Bob" Shipe was born Dec. 30, 1925, in Long Beach, California. He had four half-siblings, one of whom also served in World War II. Living in the era of the Great Depression, his family did not have enough money, so in his teenage years, he worked on fishing boats.

The declaration of war due to the attack on Pearl Harbor ended his fishing jobs until after the war. At 15 years old when the U.S. entered the war, he entered the draft in December of his senior year of high school and was drafted right after graduation.

Bob was sent to Camp Roberts, where he excelled at basic training as he was a talented and highly athletic football player in school. He was eventually assigned to the 97th Infantry Division as a BAR gunner and was deployed Feb. 19, 1945, just in time for the drive into Germany.

He remembers spending 42 consecutive days in combat in the Ruhr region of Germany. He took shrapnel to the back but never received a Purple Heart because he did

not report it. After victory in Europe and the German surrender, he returned to the U.S. for six weeks before departing to Japan in August 1945.

The freighter that Bob was on spent 72 days at sea, eventually cutting down from three meals a day to two and making it necessary to ration water. It was the second American ship to unload on Japanese soil. In Japan, he was in line for a promotion from private to sergeant but was made a member of military police instead, which was much different from the infantry in a good way.

One Thursday evening, one of his high school friends called asking where he could find beer because he didn't get any beer rations. He told him to take some of the confiscated Japanese beer, and when the military police noticed the entire company was drunk at their inspection, he was called in. The MPs took his stripes and court-martialed him for getting the entire company drunk. However, in November 2023, in front of 600 people, his stripes were reinstated, and he

was promoted to become Sergeant Shipe, toasting with a couple beers.

After the war, he worked on fishing boats, then with Goodyear tires and eventually made a business of publication distributions. He was married, had two children, got divorced, remarried and is now a widower. He retired at the age of 55 and does not like to talk about the war with anyone, including his family.

Up until the age of 95, Bob went golfing three times a week, always carrying his own bags and now walks a mile a day. Through his life, he has learned the true meaning of the American Dream and made a great contribution to preserve the dreams of our founding fathers and the image of this wonderful country. ★

Photograph by Emily Sandifer



Walter Stitt

Walter "Walt" Stitt was born in 1924 in Wheeling, West Virginia. His father struggled to find work during the Great Depression, and his mother, a schoolteacher, moved their family to Bridgeport, Ohio. Despite financial hardship, he enjoyed his childhood by participating in sports and having a lot of friends. When not at school, playing sports or hanging out with his friends, he was at work. Reflecting on the attack on Pearl Harbor, Walt recalls, "My best friend and I had been to the movies and went home to his house. His dad, a doctor and World War I veteran, gave us the news. His comment was, 'This will mean war.' I really [had] no idea of the consequences."

On March 20, 1943, he enlisted and traveled to Camp Polk, Louisiana, for boot camp, which he found to be exciting since it was very different from his previous life, and his first impressions of military life were good. He completed boot camp and went to gunnery school, scoring a 100 on the test to become a loader and gunner. He and the other members

of the 33rd Armored Regiment traveled from the U.S. to Scotland on RMS Queen Elizabeth and then to Omaha Beach in July 1944. Walt was a replacement, so he bounced from unit to unit. His battalion was the first to cross the Siegfried Line after participating in the liberation of Mons, Liege, Huy and Namur in Belgium. On Sept. 16, he was wounded by shrapnel, and on Jan. 6 the next year, he would survive a tank attack. His tank was hit with a Panzerfaust, killing his commander and making him the de facto commander while leading men with shrapnel embedded in his scalp.

He celebrated V-E Day in England and recalls, "I watched the theatre lights come on in Leicester Square. It was very moving." Shortly after, he reboarded the RMS Queen Elizabeth bound for the U.S. to have a 30-day furlough before traveling to the Pacific theater, but Japan surrendered, ending the war. After his furlough, he reported to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where he underwent shoulder surgery before being discharged

Nov. 30, 1945.

In January 1946, Walt enrolled at Marietta College. He married his wife, Betty Bailey, on June 2, 1952, and they would later have three children. In 1960, he received his greatest calling and joined the ministry by attending the Hamma School of Theology at Wittenberg University and graduating in 1965. He served various roles in the church, including pastor and assistant to the bishop of South Bend.

While he is proud to have served his country, his message to future generations serves as a cautionary tale: "There must be a better way to solve our differences rather than killing each other."

Surviving Three Shermans: Into the Battle of the Bulge, a book discussing his experiences in World War II based off his letters to his mother, will be published July 15, 2024. ★

Photograph by Ron Kaplan



Marjorie Stone

Born July 4, 1923, in Brunswick, Maine, Marjorie "Margie" Stone spent her preschool years with her family until her mother died of tuberculosis. At the age of seven, she went to live with her aunt and grandparents in Amherst, Massachusetts, spending summers at her family cottage near Bailey Island. As she grew older, she began working during the summer at Camp Cape Cod and at a hotel on Monhegan Island.

During her senior year of high school, she was at home when she heard President Roosevelt's announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbor over the radio. Soon after, it seemed all the boys were drafted immediately. In 1942, her brother enlisted in the U.S. Air Force to become a radio operator in Guam, and she was eager to join the war effort herself.

On July 5, 1943, Margie joined the U.S. Navy WAVES, the women's branch of the U.S. Naval Reserve during the war. After completing her physical in Boston, she

was sent to Hunter College in New York for indoctrination and then to an aircraft mechanic school in Norman, Oklahoma.

She was transferred to the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida, to be a third-class aviation machinist's mate. She worked in a big hangar reassembling various parts and was confident in hopping up and down off an aircraft.

In her spare time, she often visited Jacksonville Beach to swim, ride the ferry and go to socials for service men and women. At one social, a sailor named Harry H. Stone asked her for a dance, and they were married in just a few weeks. He was then sent to Okinawa with the U.S. Marines, and they wrote letters to each other daily.

On May 17, 1945, with Red Cross approval, Margie was discharged after completing 22 months in the service at the rank of second-class aviation machinist's mate to care for her ill grandmother who had raised her. Later that year, she was relieved at the war's end, knowing that her husband was coming

home.

Following the war, she and her husband wanted to enjoy their freedom, so they bought a Ford convertible and drove to Pensacola, Florida, where Harry found work at the naval air station. They raised three girls, and she worked at Baptist Hospital doing clerical and insurance work. She also joined U.S. Masters Swimming, winning medals in nine national meets and two world meets, as well as two gold medals in the 95-100 age group at her last swim meet. On her 100th birthday, Margie was inducted into the Women's Military Memorial as a Living Legend, sharing her message: "Always strive for peace. It's been said many times and it's so true ... it's easy to get into a war and very difficult to get out of a war. But when you're right, it's worth fighting for your country, for democracy, and everybody must be on the same page." ★

Photograph by Frank Jackowiak



Martin Sylvester

Born in Brooklyn, New York, as the fourth of five children, Martin "Marty" Sylvester came from a humble family. His father was a tailor and his mother stayed home to take care of him and his siblings. Education was important, so he graduated from Boys High School in Brooklyn and later attended Brooklyn College for undergraduate and Florida State University for his graduate studies.

Marty originally tried to enter the military as a pilot, but he was not accepted until he was drafted and entered basic training for the U.S. Army infantry. He received his basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama, and became a member of Company G, 12th

Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division.

Marty landed at Utah Beach during D-Day and fought in the Battle of the Bulge and the Battle of Hürtgen Forest. On Jan. 23, 1945, he was hit by a sniper and taken as a POW in Fuhren, Germany.

During his time as a POW, he remembers getting two slices of bread and a cup of watery soup a day to eat. He would pass the time chopping wood for the Germans. He tried to escape twice and was recaptured both times. On his third attempt, he made it to the American front line and was free.

When the war ended, Marty was in a Paris hospital and remembers learning about it on the news. He returned home on a

military plane and went on to college. When he finished his education, he became a psychotherapist, was married and had three children.

He has received many awards for his service, including a Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Distinguished Service Medal and others. He wants people to remember the difficulties and trials of those who served in combat and as prisoners of war. He is very grateful to have survived because many did not. He also wants to emphasize America's sacrifices to ensure the success of the war. ★

Photograph by Marc Farb



Fredric Taylor

Frederic "Fred" Taylor was born into a hardworking family in Springville, Iowa. He was the second youngest of nine children, two of whom were enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War II. His mother managed the home while his father kept and traded livestock.

After graduating from Springville High School in 1939, he attended Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa, where he studied music. The attack on Pearl Harbor occurred while he was at college. It provided the motivation to enlist in the Army Air Corps Reserve, which he chose due to his love for flying.

When he was called to active duty in February 1943, he left his family, college career and the love of his life, Peggy Newberg, in Iowa. Throughout his service, he was stationed in Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri and Texas. Colorado Springs holds a special place in his heart as it was where operational aircraft training in the

P-40 took place and also where he married Peggy in 1944.

Fred was part of the 52nd Fighter Group, and the 15th Air Force, nicknamed the "Spittin' Kitten." As a fighter pilot, he flew the P-51D Mustang.

In the early spring of 1945, he shipped out of Newport News, Virginia, on a troop carrier and arrived in Fano, Italy, where he was stationed just south of the Tuskegee Airmen. He could see their red-tailed Mustangs as they flew in common airspace. His fighter group had participated in the final securing of the European theater.

His final rank after being discharged from active duty in October 1945 was second lieutenant. He returned home to the United States and to the comfort of his beloved bride, Peggy. He was one of the original members of the Iowa Air National Guard and served in their ranks from 1945 to 1949.

After returning home, he achieved his master's in music education from Drake

University in Des Moines, Iowa. Fred and his family, including his daughter, Linda, later moved to La Mesa, California, where he would encourage talent and passion for music throughout generations in the La Mesa/Spring Valley School District.

In 2019, he and his wife celebrated their 75th anniversary. Sadly, Peggy passed away in 2020. Frederic never lost his love for flying, and on his 80th birthday, he returned to his P-51 Mustang for one last flight.

At 101, Fred walked across the stage at Cornell College with more than 200 graduates. He completed his requirements to achieve a degree before the war but was unable to attend the ceremony due to boot camp. The other graduates welcomed him with open arms and made him feel nothing short of incredible. ★

Photograph by Paul Scherer



Robert Tedesco

Robert "Bob" Tedesco was born in Hartford, Connecticut, on Feb. 12, 1927. He grew up during the Great Depression with his brother and his parents, who were Italian immigrants. His father owned and worked at Nesco Auto Shop as a mechanic, and his mother stayed home until his father fell ill.

Throughout his high school career in Hartford, Bob worked as a newspaper deliverer before and after school and never thought much about college because he only wanted to get a job. At the start of the war, he was a sophomore working at Colts Firearm Defense Plant, helping make machine gun parts.

On Dec. 7, 1941, Bob was at the movies with his mom when the news of the Pearl Harbor attacks shocked the movie crowd, and a wave of fear flooded the people. As the transition from peacetime to wartime began, many changes began to arise within the economy and society. Men in uniforms would stand in the street and plead for others to ration scrap

metals and many other commodities.

In April 1945, he was drafted into the U.S. Army. His experience in boot camp was hard physically, but he received good training and quickly realized how different the military world was compared to the life he knew before. After boot camp, he was put into Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 349th Infantry Regiment, 88th Infantry Division, part of the Fifth Army.

He participated in the Fifth Army's Italian Campaign in 1945 and was stationed in the northwestern part of Italy. His job was to maintain the border from Trieste to Austria during the period of the Cold War. During his service, Bob was assigned many jobs, including being a rifleman and assisting with communications. He was also involved in processing POWs and war munitions that were removed from German camps in northern Italy.

After serving for about two years, he was discharged from the Army with the rank of staff sergeant. He continued serving in

the reserves from 1950 to 1953 as a supply sergeant in a small Army unit at the University of Connecticut, where he attended school.

His first job out of the military was with Terry Turbine, where he later committed to a career in the nuclear power field. He married in 1953 and now has four children, nine grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren.

He is thankful he was to be able to serve alongside some of our nation's most important people and history. For his service, he received the European Theater of Operations medal, the Victory medal and the Army of Occupation medal.

"I want people to remember that we are a strong country with good leadership. We did what we needed to do to maintain peace. We are not a conquering nation," says Bob. ★

Photograph by David Tulis



Joseph Thurmond Jr.

Joseph "Joe" Thurmond Jr. was born in 1926 in western Kentucky. He spent time in Marion, Sturgis and Morganfield. He was one of nine children in a large farm family and left school after sixth grade.

Drawn as many were into the service once the U.S. entered the war, he enlisted in the U.S. Army as a private. He served as part of the reinforcements for General Patton's Third Army and spent time soldiering from the Rhine Valley in Germany to Prague. Patton had led his army on to the continent seven weeks after D-Day and helped decisively win the Battle of Bulge. Joe was called in toward the end of

that battle as Patton moved eastward into Czechoslovakia, and towns like Pilsen were liberated from German control.

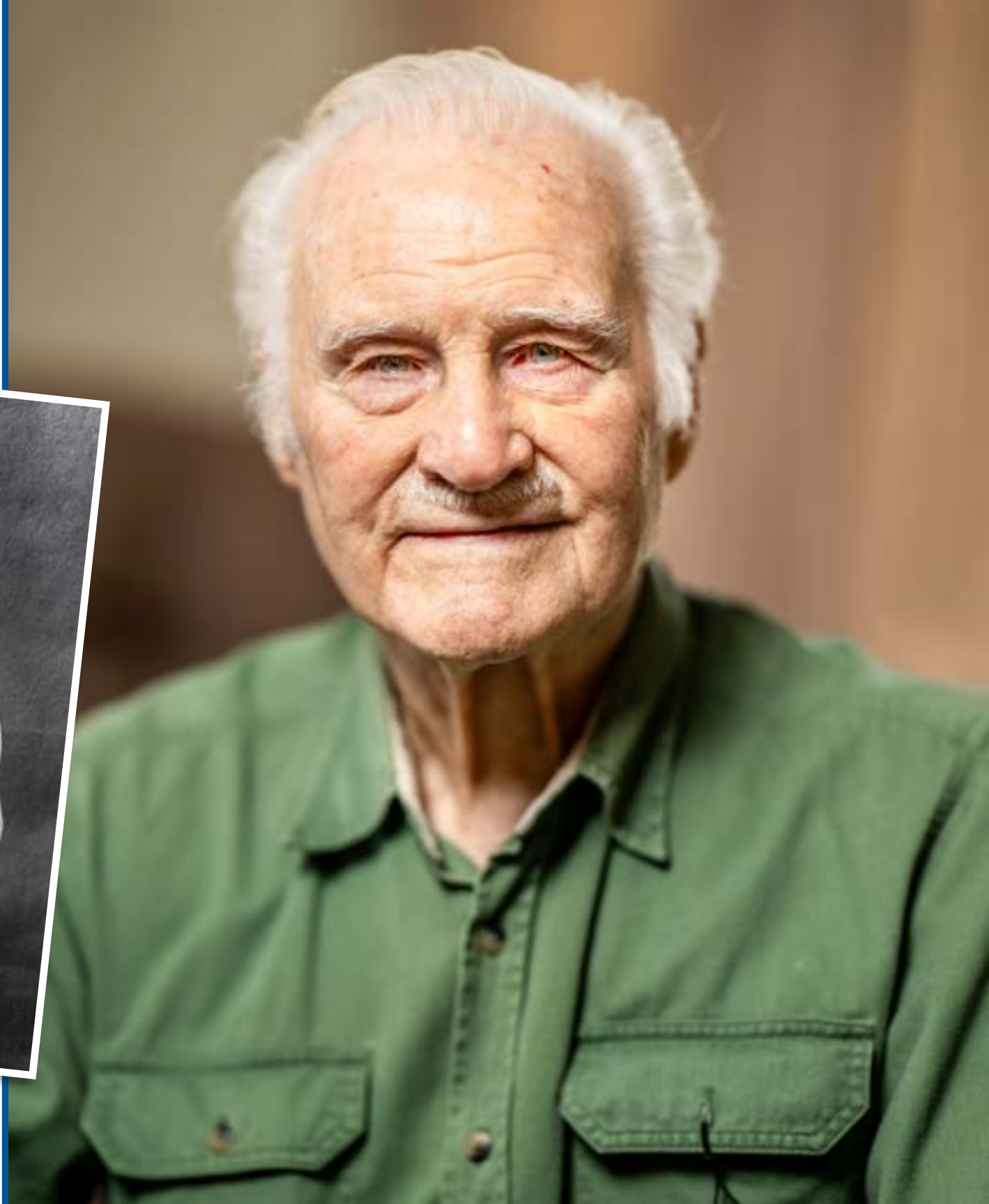
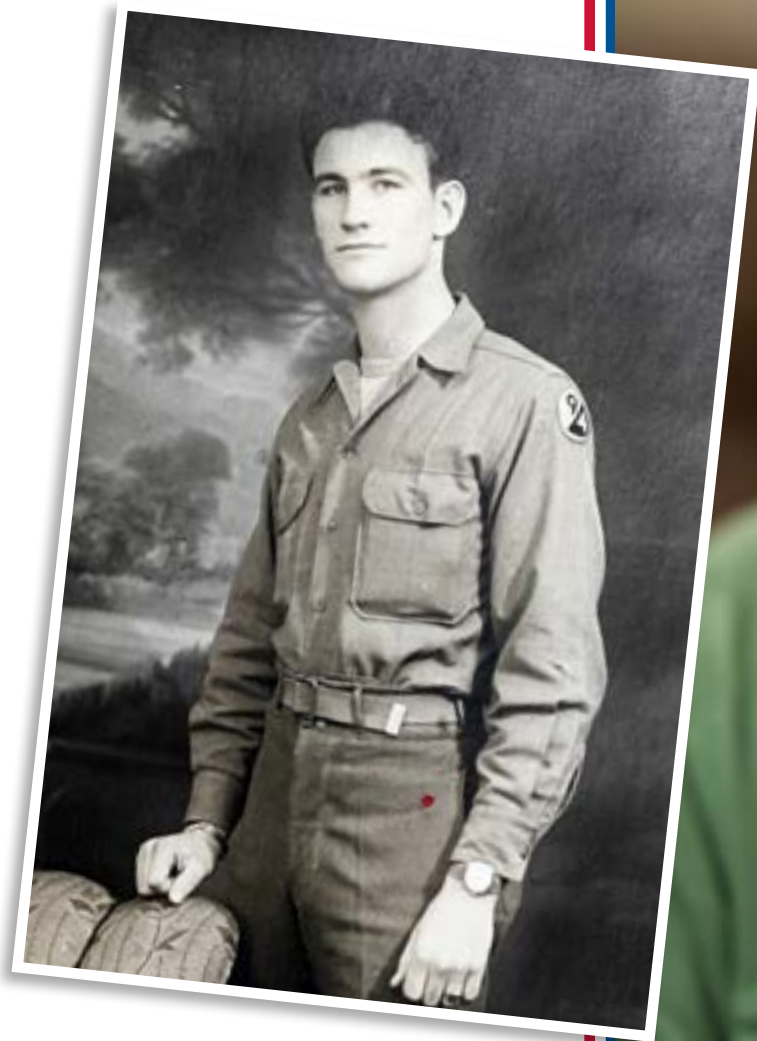
After V-E Day, he was tasked with guarding German prisoners. Soldiers began going home, but many like him were still needed to bring the conflict to an end, and he developed a good rapport with the prisoners. The German captives gave him a camera and some photo frames, which became some of his most cherished possessions from the war. At the end of his wartime experience, he had attained the rank of buck sergeant.

After returning home, he married Norma Jane Spurrier, his wife of 77 years, and they

had four children. He worked with his half-brother at various jobs, including in the sheet metal industry in Evansville, Indiana. He built three homes by himself. He and his wife are longtime members of the Cadel Tabernacle Church and the Bartlett Chapel Methodist Church.

Joe is described as always being willing to help others along the way. His spirit is as strong as ever today. In many ways, he exemplifies that "hard-working, give it your best effort" attitude — an American spirit that helped the military win the war but also led America into a postwar period of prosperity. ★

Photograph by Marc Lebryck



Reynolds Tomter

Reynolds L. Tomter was born in a small town outside of Pigeon Falls, Wisconsin. He grew up as an only child on a farm during the Great Depression and experienced many negative effects of the dust bowl, such as extreme heat, high winds and loss of soil.

He quit high school after his freshman year to help his family on the farm until the age of 22 and was then married. At the time, his knowledge of the military came from what he read in newspapers or learned in grade school. When he heard about World War II, he was mainly concerned about Germany's actions toward other countries and Jewish discrimination in Germany. When he got news of Pearl Harbor, he felt that he would be drafted, which occurred March 7, 1943.

Originally, he planned on joining the U.S. Navy, but when all the spots were full, he decided to enlist in the U.S. Merchant Marines. Although it was scary, he knew that this was the right thing to do for his country.

He completed basic training in Brooklyn, New York, but when they mentioned a need for bakers, he and his friend applied for the position. He finished basic training as a baker and described the whole process as being well-organized. He mainly struggled with being away from family, as his newborn daughter had not even turned one before he left.

Assigned as the role of chief baker and backup aerial gunner, he was sent on five missions overseas, including time in Italy and France. He was pleased with his position because he could set his own hours when he wanted to bake. Every day, he would bake around 22 loaves of bread and several pastries and desserts. It was something he was passionate about and could serve his country by feeding hundreds.

On Aug. 15, 1945, news spread that the war was over. However, Reynolds says that military members were not given

much information besides the fact they were going home. He returned home to Wisconsin about a month after he found out about the end of the war.

Back home, he ran a dry-cleaning business and bought a general store, which he turned into his own business. His wife worked at the local elementary school, and they raised their daughter and a son who was born about a year after Reynolds got home from the war. He owned his store until 1971 and then got his realtor license before he retired in 1980. Reynolds and his wife moved to Clearwater, Florida.

At 107 years old, he is the oldest World War II veteran in his community and the last one from Pigeon Falls. In 2022, he received the Congressional Gold Medal for his service in the Merchant Marines. ★

Photograph by Jim Koepnick



Joe Ventura

Joe Ventura was born and raised in San Diego and was one of seven children. He had a challenging childhood, as his father left the family during the Great Depression when Joe was just 11 years old. He supported his family by working paper routes with two of his brothers and bussing tables. In 1942, his brother was drafted and Joe dropped out of school to financially support his family.

Just a year later, he was drafted into the U.S Army and was both excited and nervous about the new adventure he was undertaking. He believed he would be okay if he followed instructions. He served as a cannoneer in Cannon Company, 30th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division. Though trained for a quartermaster, he was sent to Normandy as a replacement for those killed on D-Day. Joe soon found himself up against the Germans

in central Europe and was in Belgium when news of the surrender broke.

Afterward, he was on a ship heading toward Japan when it was ordered to turn around because the Japanese had surrendered after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Following World War II, he was married in 1947 and had three sons. He finished his education, completing high school and receiving a degree from San Diego City College. He fought in the Korean War and continued to serve in the Army until 1965, when he retired as a sergeant first class.

As a result of his experiences, he suffered from PTSD, which was an imprisoning experience. Nevertheless, he served for another 31 years as a quartermaster for the civil service at the Naval Training Center until it closed in 1997.

He received multiple awards for his service, including the Rhineland Campaign and Central Europe Campaign ribbons and the Bronze Star for "exemplary conduct against the enemy."

He wants people to know that when the world called for America to help with the war, it answered and helped to defeat Hitler's army. He is especially proud of his service to his country through 23 years in the Army and 31 years at the Naval Training Center, and he would certainly do it again. He is very proud to be American. ★

Photograph by Paul Scherer



Lilburn Wall

Lilburn "Bill" Wall was born in Milltown, Pennsylvania, the youngest in a family of six children. His father worked as an engineer for the Lehigh Valley Railroad while his mom took care of the children. He performed in operettas, sang in the chorus at school and worked for Woolworth's before leaving to work for the railroad.

Months after his graduation from high school, he heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. With feelings of patriotism high throughout the country, he joined the Army Air Corps in December 1942 and began his basic training in Atlantic City, New Jersey, before he was sent all over the country for training. He went to Florida, Utah, Arizona and Missouri before he was finally sent overseas aboard a B-24 Liberator bound for Wales. He was then assigned to a B-17 and stationed in Old Buckenham, England.

Bill was assigned to the 733rd Bombing Squadron, 453rd Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force. The group operations officer was movie star James Jimmy Stewart, who helped give pre-flight briefings.

In the war, he was a radio operator and aerial gunner tasked with bombing bridges, roads and numerous other targets over Germany and France. He watched where the bombs hit; if they hit their targets, he radioed the information to the command. They were regularly shot at by the Germans but were never shot down. Bill counts himself lucky to be among the few crews that had the same men throughout the entire war.

Originally expected to fly 25 missions, the officials upped the count to 30. Their crew were the first to make that mark, receiving credit for 32 flights total. Their plane was to be part of the D-Day invasion but was grounded for maintenance. However, the day after the initial invasion, they were back in the air, bombing bridges to force the retreat of the Germans through the rest of 1944.

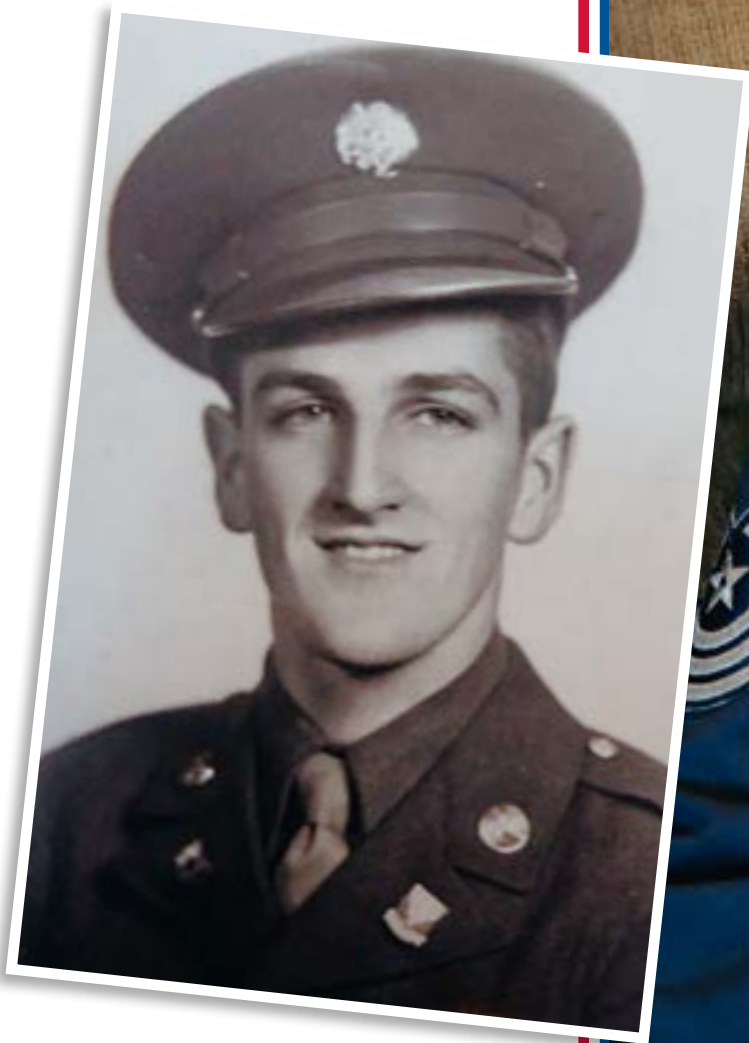
At the end of the war, he returned home to work his way back into civilian life. Within two months, Bill was called back to active duty as part of the U.S. Air Force and was sent to Korea to do record keeping for troops being deployed.

He continued to serve for the next 26 years, assigned with budgeting for the U.S. Air Force all over the country and the world. He was discharged as a master sergeant, but not ready to settle down. He took the civil service exam, scored the highest in the state and went to work for the state of Pennsylvania for the next 18 years.

For his service, he has been awarded several prestigious medals, including the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Force Commendation Medal, Longevity Service Award Ribbon and the World War II Victory Medal, among many others.

He said, "I felt they were giving me an honor that maybe I shouldn't get. All those poor devils that have their names on the stones, they're the ones that really should have it because they're the real heroes." ★

Photograph by Cassandra Weber



Donald Walters

Donald "Don" Walters was born in the small town of Columbus, Indiana, and had five siblings. He helped his family by working with his dad as a plasterer and dropped out of high school in tenth grade to help get food on the table. All he thought about then was learning from his father to take over the family business.

Everything changed one fateful December morning when he heard the news about Pearl Harbor. Feeling shocked and worried from the attack, the ramifications from the Japanese surprise attack were immediate, and he knew war was inevitable.

By November 1942, he answered the call to duty and was drafted after a bout of appendicitis. Because of this, he was put on light duty, but he was eventually given the job as a machine gunner and was shipped off to North Africa. He landed at Oran in May 1943 and helped with the invasion of Italy under Operation Avalanche by participating in the capture of the key port city of Naples and the

logistical town of Foggia. He then participated in the battles of Rome-Arno, pushing past the Italian capitol and moving north to the Arno River to participate in the North Apennines campaign to dislodge German forces from the formidable Gothic Line.

As the North Apennines campaign dragged into the winter, he was transferred to the mainland of Europe. He was assigned to the 935th Field Artillery Battalion, 314th Infantry Regiment of the veteran 79th Infantry Division as a machine gunner. When the Germans launched their surprise attack on Allied positions in the Ardennes, known as the Battle of the Bulge, he and the 314th would retake positions lost by other inexperienced units, which drove the Germans back. He joined the 314th Infantry Regiment in time for the push into Germany. He sustained hearing loss in both ears because of a ruptured eardrum received while fighting near Cologne.

As the war in Europe died down, he was faced with the prospect of being sent to the

Pacific to take part in the invasion of mainland Japan. He felt grateful and remarked that he'd be on the first boat into Japan. However, while in Dortmund, Germany, he contracted polio and was sent home. He was discharged from the Army on Nov. 26, 1945, as a private first class.

As millions of American heroes did upon returning home after the war, he received his GED. He served in the Air Force as a civil engineer from 1950 to 1974, finishing his career as a chief master sergeant. After his service, Don continued to work at a construction company until retirement. He loves to bowl, recently earning second place with his bowling team in a tournament, and he still goes to Sunday Mass every week. ★

Photograph by David Burnett



David Yoho

Photo-

David "Dave" Yoho was born and raised in Philadelphia in 1928. Often described as a fighter, his childhood was characterized by hardship. He remembers growing up in inner city Philadelphia during the Great Depression, which was not an easy task. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, he quickly found a new purpose in serving his country, but he was only 13. This did not stop him from trying to join the fight. "I was going through teenage years, and my circle of friends was mostly guys who were two or three years older. As they grew to 17 or 18, they were going away to the service. I wanted to go, too," he remembers.

At 15, Dave attempted to join the U.S. Navy with a forged birth certificate, but once they found out his true age, they rejected him.

This hurdle did not stop him, and he went to the Maritime Service recruitment center to enlist in the Merchant Marines.

He traveled to Sheepshead Bay, New York, for boot camp and after his graduation, he was assigned to a T-2 tanker, an oil tanker that provided support to combat ships in the Pacific. His primary job on board was in the engine room with responsibility for ensuring the ship's burners were clean and full of fuel and water.

He was on board an oil tanker ship when the atomic bombs were dropped in Japan, and he and his crew mates could not believe the destruction caused by a single bomb. The reaction was mixed, and emotions of both shock and excitement ran high among the crew.

Upon his return home, he earned his GED.

As Merchant Mariners were ineligible for the GI Bill, he worked as a salesman to pay for his higher education and enrolled in business classes at night. He went on to create his own company, Dave Yoho Associates, at 28. While successful in his business ventures, his life was fulfilled when he married his wife at 21 and had four children.

Dave has been an incredible advocate for the Merchant Marines, a feat which has seen media attention and multiple visits to the White House, honoring those he served with and those who lost their lives protecting our freedom. ★

Photograph by Ashlee Glen



Steve Yuhas

Born in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, Steve Yuhas was raised by his parents and surrounded by five older siblings. His parents immigrated to the U.S. in 1913 and opened a small market to serve their diverse neighborhood. He was surrounded by families like his own, with many other European immigrants living right next door.

Following the birth of his younger brother George, his mother contracted pneumonia and passed away when he was only 11. This grief overwhelmed the family, and his father struggled to manage raising all seven of his children on his own during the Great Depression. Steve did his best to help in any way he could and gave his dad every dollar he made working at a gas station.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, he and his brother enlisted in the U.S. Army. On March 3, 1943, he entered active service. He was sent off to New Cumberland, Pennsylvania, for training and while many would have found it grueling, he simply stated: "Boot camp was easy. We just had to follow the rules." He

ended up finding military life just as enjoyable as boot camp and liked the organized lifestyle, food, clothes and health insurance the military provided.

He was assigned to Battery C, 630th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapon Battalion, where he destroyed enemy aircraft and protected the front lines. He spent over two years moving across the front lines, digging in foxholes and helping battalions with heavy casualties.

He vividly remembers arriving in Florence, Italy, to find six of the seven bridges in the city destroyed by the Germans, so he spent time securing and guarding the bridge and directing air traffic. Throughout his time overseas, he participated in numerous battles, including Naples-Foggia, Rome-Arno, North Apennines and Po Valley. While on his way to the South Pacific, he heard that the war was over and that he could return to the U.S. He was awarded the European-African-Middle Eastern Theater ribbon, four Bronze Stars and four overseas bars.

He continued to serve for another 20 years and was stationed in California, where he got married and had three daughters. After his third daughter was born, he was reassigned to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where he served the final two years of his military career.

Even though he was out of the Army, he never stopped working. He took his family to Lompoc, California, near Camp Cooke. He worked for a paint contractor and bought a home. He earned his own contractor's license and continued to work hard for his family until he retired at 80.

Steve continues to profess his great love and appreciation for the country he served. He is incredibly proud to be an American. Despite risking his life, he is proud to have served his country, done his duty and to have fought for the freedom of all. ★

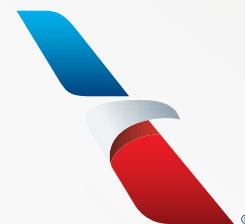
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