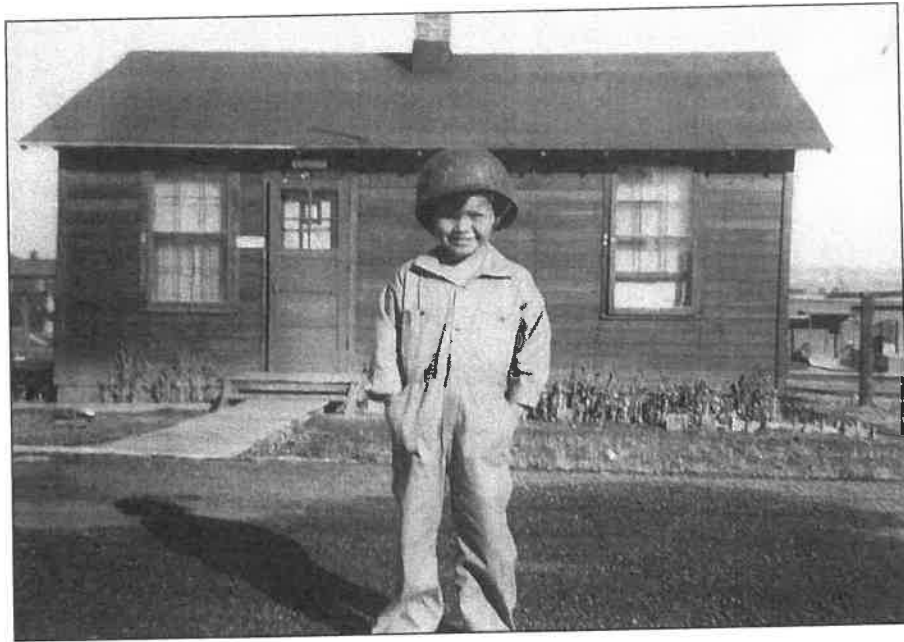


GENERATIONS



COURTESY TOM BROKAW

Tom Brokaw, Igloo, South Dakota, U.S. Army Ordnance Depot, 1944

In the spring of 1984, I went to the northwest of France, to Normandy, to prepare an NBC documentary on the fortieth anniversary of D-Day, the massive and daring Allied invasion of Europe that marked the beginning of the end of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich. I was well prepared with research on the planning for the invasion—the numbers of men, ships, airplanes, and other weapons involved; the tactical and strategic errors of the Germans; and the names of the Normandy villages that in the midst of battle provided critical support to the invaders. What I was not prepared for was how this experience would affect me emotionally.

The D-Day fortieth-anniversary project awakened my earliest memories. Between the ages of three and five I lived on an Army base in western South Dakota and spent a good deal of my time outdoors in a tiny helmet, shooting stick guns at imaginary German and Japanese soldiers. My father, Red Brokaw, then in his early thirties, was an all-purpose Mr. Fix-It and operator of snowplows and construction machinery, part of a crew that kept the base functioning. When he was drafted, the base commander called him back, reasoning he was more valuable in the job he had. When Dad returned home, it was the first time I saw my mother cry. These were powerful images for an impressionable youngster.

The war effort was all around us. Ammunition was tested on the South Dakota sagebrush prairie before being shipped out to bat-

tlefront positions. I seem to remember that one Fourth of July the base commander staged a particularly large firing exercise as a wartime substitute for fireworks. Neighbors always seemed to be going to or coming home from the war. My grandfather Jim Conley followed the war's progress in *Time* magazine and on his maps. There was even a stockade of Italian prisoners of war on the edge of the base. They were often free to wander around the base in their distinctive, baggy POW uniforms, chattering happily in Italian, a curious Mediterranean presence in that barren corner of the Great Plains.

At the same time, my future wife, Meredith Auld, was starting life in Yankton, South Dakota, the Missouri River community that later became the Brokaw family home as well. She saw her father only once during her first five years. He was a front-line doctor with the Army's 34th Regiment and was in the thick of battle from North Africa all the way through Italy. When he returned home, he established a thriving medical practice and was a fixture at our high school sports games. He never spoke to any of us of the horrors he had seen. When one of his sons wore as a casual jacket one of Doc Auld's Army coats with the major's insignia still attached, I remember thinking, "God, Doc Auld was a big deal in the war."

Yet when I arrived in Normandy, those memories had receded, replaced by days of innocence in the fifties, my life as a journalist covering the political turmoil brought on by Vietnam, the social upheaval of the sixties, and Watergate in the seventies. I was much more concerned about the prospects of the Cold War than the lessons of the war of my early years.

I was simply looking forward to what I thought would be an interesting assignment in a part of France celebrated for its hospitality, its seafood, and its Calvados, the local brandy made from apples.

Instead, I underwent a life-changing experience. As I walked the beaches with the American veterans who had landed there and now returned for this anniversary, men in their sixties and seventies, and listened to their stories in the cafés and inns, I was deeply moved and profoundly grateful for all they had done. I realized that they had been all around me as I was growing up and that I had failed to appreciate what they had been through and what they had

accomplished. These men and women came of age in the Great Depression, when economic despair hovered over the land like a plague. They had watched their parents lose their businesses, their farms, their jobs, their hopes. They had learned to accept a future that played out one day at a time. Then, just as there was a glimmer of economic recovery, war exploded across Europe and Asia. When Pearl Harbor made it irrefutably clear that America was not a fortress, this generation was summoned to the parade ground and told to train for war. They left their ranches in Sully County, South Dakota, their jobs on the main street of Americus, Georgia, they gave up their place on the assembly lines in Detroit and in the ranks of Wall Street, they quit school or went from cap and gown directly into uniform.

They answered the call to help save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled, instruments of conquest in the hands of fascist maniacs.

They faced great odds and a late start, but they did not protest. At a time in their lives when their days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventure, love, and the lessons of the workaday world, they were fighting, often hand to hand, in the most primitive conditions possible, across the bloodied landscape of France, Belgium, Italy, Austria. They fought their way up a necklace of South Pacific islands few had ever heard of before and made them a fixed part of American history— islands with names like Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal, Okinawa. They were in the air every day, in skies filled with terror, and they went to sea on hostile waters far removed from the shores of their homeland.

New branches of the services were formed to get women into uniform, working at tasks that would free more men for combat. Other women went to work in the laboratories and in the factories, developing new medicines, building ships, planes, and tanks, and raising the families that had been left behind.

America's preeminent physicists were engaged in a secret race to build a new bomb before Germany figured out how to harness the atom as a weapon. Without their efforts and sacrifices our world would be a far different place today.

When the war was over, the men and women who had been involved, in uniform and in civilian capacities, joined in joyous and

short-lived celebrations, then immediately began the task of rebuilding their lives and the world they wanted. They were mature beyond their years, tempered by what they had been through, disciplined by their military training and sacrifices. They married in record numbers and gave birth to another distinctive generation, the Baby Boomers. They stayed true to their values of personal responsibility, duty, honor, and faith.

They became part of the greatest investment in higher education that any society ever made, a generous tribute from a grateful nation. The GI Bill, providing veterans tuition and spending money for education, was a brilliant and enduring commitment to the nation's future. Campus classrooms and housing were overflowing with young men in their mid-twenties, many of whom had never expected to get a college education. They left those campuses with degrees and a determination to make up for lost time. They were a new kind of army now, moving onto the landscapes of industry, science, art, public policy, all the fields of American life, bringing to them the same passions and discipline that had served them so well during the war.

They helped convert a wartime economy into the most powerful peacetime economy in history. They made breakthroughs in medicine and other sciences. They gave the world new art and literature. They came to understand the need for federal civil rights legislation. They gave America Medicare.

They helped rebuild the economies and political institutions of their former enemies, and they stood fast against the totalitarianism of their former allies, the Russians. They were rocked by the social and political upheaval of the sixties. Many of them hated the long hair, the free love, and, especially, what they saw as the desecration of the flag. But they didn't give up on the new generation.

They weren't perfect. They made mistakes. They allowed McCarthyism and racism to go unchallenged for too long. Women of the World War II generation, who had demonstrated so convincingly that they had so much more to offer beyond their traditional work, were the underpinning for the liberation of their gender, even as many of their husbands resisted the idea. When a new war broke out, many of the veterans initially failed to recognize the differences between their war and the one in Vietnam.

There on the beaches of Normandy, I began to reflect on the

wonders of these ordinary people whose lives are laced with the markings of greatness. At every stage of their lives they were part of historic challenges and achievements of a magnitude the world had never before witnessed.

Although they were transformed by their experiences and quietly proud of what they had done, their stories did not come easily. They didn't volunteer them. I had to keep asking questions or learn to stay back a step or two as they walked the beaches themselves, quietly exchanging memories. NBC News had brought to Normandy several of those ordinary Americans, including Gino Merli, of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, who landed on D-Day and later won the Congressional Medal of Honor for holding off an attacking wave of German soldiers. This quiet man had stayed at his machine gun, blazing away at the Germans, covering the withdrawal of his fellow Americans, until his position was overrun. He faked his own death twice as the Germans swept past, and then he went back to his machine gun to cut them down from behind. His cunning and courage saved his fellow soldiers, and in a night of battle he killed more than fifty attacking Germans.

We also brought Harry Garton of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, who lost both legs to a land mine later in the war. Merli and Garton had both been in the Army's "Big Red One," the 1st Division. This trip to Normandy was their first time meeting each other and their first journey back to those beaches since they'd landed under greatly different circumstances forty years earlier. Quite coincidentally, they realized they'd been in the same landing craft, so they had matching memories of the chaos and death all around them. Garton said, "I remember all the bodies and all the screaming." Were they scared?, I asked them. Both men had the same answer: they felt alternating fear, rage, calm, and, most of all, an overpowering determination to survive.

As they made their way along Omaha Beach in 1984, they stopped and pointed to a low-lying bluff leading to higher ground. Merli said, "Remember that?" They both stared at a steep, sandy slope, an ordinary beach approach to my eye. "Remember what?" I asked. "Oh," Merli said, "that hillside was loaded with mines, and a unit of sappers had gone first, to find where the mines were. A number of those guys were lying on the hillside, their legs shattered by the explosions. They'd shot themselves up with morphine

*Sam Gibbons and Snow Ball
at Grandparents Gibboses' house,
Haven Beach, Florida, 1926*



COURTESY SAM AND MARTHA GIBBONS



COURTESY SAM AND MARTHA GIBBONS

Sam Gibbons, 1927

and they were telling where it was now safe to step. They were about twenty-five yards apart, our guys, calmly telling us how to get up the hill. They were human markers." Garton said, "When I got to the top of that hill, I thought I'd live at least until the next day."

They described the scene as calmly as if they were remembering an egg-toss at a Sunday social back home. It was an instructive moment for me, one of many, and so characteristic. The war stories come reluctantly, and they almost never reflect directly on the bravery of the storyteller. Almost always he or she is singling out someone else for praise.

On that trip to Normandy, I ducked into a small café for lunch on a rainy Sunday. A tall, familiar-looking American approached with a big grin and introduced himself: "Tom, Congressman Sam Gibbons of Florida."

I knew of Gibbons, a veteran Democrat from central Florida, a member of the Ways and Means Committee, but I didn't know much about him.

"Congressman," I said, "what are you doing here?" "Oh, I was here forty years ago," he said with a laugh, "but it was a little different then." With that he clicked a small brass-and-steel cricket he was holding and laughed again.

I knew of the cricket. The paratroopers of the 101st and 82nd Airborne divisions were given the crickets to click if they were separated from their units. As it turned out, most of them were. When I asked Gibbons what had happened to him that day, he sat down and, staring at a far wall, told a harrowing tale that went on for half an hour. In the café, all of us listening were hypnotized by this gangly, jug-eared man in his sixties and the story he was sharing.

Gibbons, a captain in the 101st, was all alone when he landed in a French farm field in the predawn darkness. Using his cricket, he clicked until he got an answer, and then formed a squad of American paratroopers out of other units. They had no idea where they were, and for a time Gibbons thought the invasion had failed because there was no sign of American troops besides his small patched-up patrol.

Gibbons and the other paratroopers with him moved along the country roads between the hedgerows, getting ambushed and fighting back, moving on again, trying to figure out just where they

were. Gibbons even tried to converse with the terrified French villagers, using his high school Spanish. It didn't help. It was eighteen hours before they hooked up with other units.

His original objective, holding the bridges over the Douve River at a village called St. Côme-du-Mont, turned out to have been a far tougher assignment than the D-Day planners had realized. It took a whole division, fire support from U.S. cruisers offshore, and tanks to take control of the river crossings. By the third day, Gibbons was exhausted, he said, and he was one of only six hundred or so of the two thousand men in his battalion still on his feet. The others were all dead or wounded.

As he sat there on that rainy afternoon, describing these scenes from passing images of his memory, Gibbons's tough-guy demeanor began to change. He softened and then began to weep. His wife touched his arm and said he didn't have to go on. But he did, and those of us in his tiny audience were enthralled.

Later, Gibbons told me that he fought his way all across Europe and into Germany without a scratch. His brother, also in the Army, was badly wounded, and when the war was over they both enrolled at the University of Florida law school. They didn't talk much about the war until one Saturday in the fall term when they decided to try to count up the young Floridians they had known who hadn't made it back. Gibbons says, "When we got to a hundred we stopped counting and said, 'To hell with this.'"

Gibbons went on to his career in politics, first in the Florida legislature and then seventeen terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he became a champion of free trade as a means of keeping international tensions under control, a lesson he learned from the politics of World War II. He was also a solid member of the ruling Democratic majorities. He initially supported the Vietnam War but says now, "The sorriest vote I ever cast was for the Tonkin Gulf resolution," the congressional mandate engineered by President Johnson so he could step up the American efforts in Vietnam.

Gibbons's personal war experience rarely came up publicly again, but it did one day in the fall of 1995, after the Republican Revolution of the year before, when a well-organized class of GOP Baby Boomers took control of the House, determined to decon-

COURTESY SAM AND MARTHA GIBBONS



Martha and Sam Gibbons, 1962

COURTESY SAM AND MARTHA GIBBONS



Sam Gibbons, U.S. Army

struct many of the policies put in place by Democrats during their long congressional rule.

Gibbons, now in the minority on the Ways and Means Committee, was furious. The new Republican leadership had cut off debate on Medicare reforms without a hearing. Gibbons stormed from the room, shouting, "You're a bunch of dictators, that's all you are. . . . I had to fight you guys fifty years ago." Gibbons then grabbed the tie of the startled Republican chairman, demanding, "Tell them what you did in there, tell them what you did."

Watching this scene play out on CNN, many of my colleagues were puzzled by the eruption in the normally calm demeanor of Congressman Gibbons. I smiled to myself, thinking of that day in Normandy in 1944 when Gibbons, who was then just twenty-four, learned something about fighting for what you believe in.

When I returned to Normandy for the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, my wife, Meredith, joined me. By 1994, I felt a kind of missionary zeal for the men and women of World War II, spreading the word of their remarkable lives. I was inspired by them but also by the work of my friend Stephen Ambrose, the plain-talking historian who had written an account of the invasion called *D-Day June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II*.

From him I learned that the men told the stories best themselves. So I told Meredith, "Whenever one of these guys comes over to say hello, just ask, 'Where were you that day?' You'll hear some unbelievable stories." And so we did, wherever we went. What we did not know at the time was that an old family friend back in our hometown of Yankton, South Dakota, had played a critical role in D-Day planning.

In fact, we were only vaguely aware that Hod Nielsen had anything to do with World War II. To us, he was the keeper of the flame of high school athletics as a sportswriter and radio sportscaster. In his columns and on the air, he chronicled the individual and team achievements of our local high school, writing generously of the smallest victories, celebrating the stars but always finding some admirable trait to highlight in his descriptions of those of us who were known mostly for just showing up.

What I did not know—nor did any of my high school contemporaries—was that Hod Nielsen, who spent so many of the postwar

WHITE HOUSE PHOTO



President Bill Clinton's presentation to Sam Gibbons,
recalling Gibbons's participation in D-Day—
White House Family Dining Room, May 14, 1994

years making sure our little triumphs received notice, had been a daring photo reconnaissance pilot during World War II. He was in the unit that flew lightly armored P-38s over Normandy just before the invasion, photographing the beaches and fields for the military planners. As soon as they returned from that mission, they were hustled back to Washington to report directly to the legendary commander of the Army Air Corps, General Henry "Hap" Arnold. It's also likely they were spirited out of England quickly to diminish the chances that the identity of their reconnaissance targets would somehow leak.

Hod was one of many in our midst who kept his war years to himself, preferring to concentrate on the generations that followed. He is so characteristic of that time and place in American life. One of four sons of hardworking Scandinavian immigrants, whom he remembers for their loving and frugal ways, Hod doesn't recall a missed meal or a complaint about hard times during the height of the Great Depression.

All four boys in his family were in the service. One brother was killed in action when his bomber was shot down over Europe. The war had been a family trial but also an adventure. Hod had a lot of fun as a freewheeling young officer during pilot training. He managed to avoid getting shot down during numerous reconnaissance missions. He saw a lot of the United States and the world, but when the war was over Hod wanted to return to the familiar life he had known in South Dakota. He says now, "I thought then, If this is the fast track, I don't want any part of it."

Instead, he returned to a career in broadcasting and sportswriting. He's been at it for more than half a century, and he can still get excited about the local high school team's coming football season. He can tell you the whereabouts and the personal and professional fortunes of the athletes long gone from that small city along the Missouri River.

To get a favorable mention in a Hod Nielsen column requires more than a winning touchdown or all-state recognition. He is as likely to write about an athlete's musical ability or scholastic standing or family. As a result, it's always been a little special to read your name beneath his byline. Now that my contemporaries and those who followed us onto the playing fields of Yankton know

COURTESY HOD NIELSEN



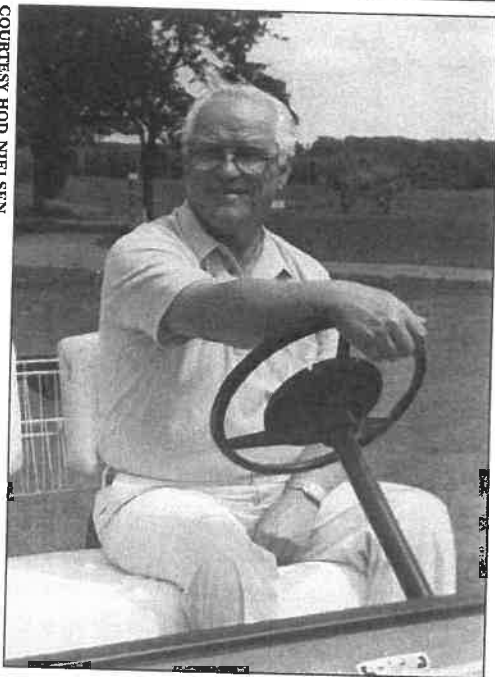
Hod Nielsen, England, 1942

*Hod Nielsen, England, 1943,
returning from a mission*



COURTESY HOD NIELSEN

COURTESY HOD NIELSEN



Hod Nielsen, 1995

more about his early life, I am confident they'll feel even greater pride in recognition from this modest and decent man.

During NBC's coverage of the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, I was asked by Tim Russert on *Meet the Press* my thoughts on what we were witnessing. As I looked over the assembled crowd of veterans, which included everyone from Cabinet officers and captains of industry to retired schoolteachers and machinists, I said, "I think this is the greatest generation any society has ever produced." I know that this was a bold statement and a sweeping judgment, but since then I have restated it on many occasions. While I am periodically challenged on this premise, I believe I have the facts on my side.

This book, I hope, will in some small way pay tribute to those men and women who have given us the lives we have today. It is not the defining history of their generation. Instead, I think of this as like a family portrait. Some of the names and faces you'll recognize immediately. Others are more like your neighbors, the older couple who always fly the flag on the Fourth of July and Veterans Day and spend their vacation with friends they've had for fifty years at a reunion of his military outfit. They seem to have everything they need, but they still count their pennies as if the bottom may drop out tomorrow. Most of all, they love each other, love life and love their country, and they are not ashamed to say just that.

The sad reality is that they are dying at an ever faster pace. They're in the mortality years now, in their seventies and eighties, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs estimates that about thirty-two hundred World War II vets die every month. Not all of them were on the front lines, of course, or even in a critical rear-echelon position, but they were fused by a common mission and a common ethos.

I am in awe of them, and I feel privileged to have been a witness to their lives and their sacrifices. There were so many other people whose stories could have been in this book, who embodied the standards of greatness in the everyday that the people in this book represent, and that give this generation its special quality and distinction. As I came to know many of them, and their stories, I became more convinced of my judgment on that day marking the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day. This is the greatest generation any society has produced.

THE GREATEST GENERATION

THE TIME OF THEIR LIVES

"This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny."

—FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

The year of my birth, 1940, was the fulcrum of America in the twentieth century, when the nation was balanced precariously between the darkness of the Great Depression on one side and the storms of war in Europe and the Pacific on the other. It was a critical time in the shaping of this nation and the world, equal to the revolution of 1776 and the perils of the Civil War. Once again the American people understood the magnitude of the challenge, the importance of an unparalleled national commitment, and, most of all, the certainty that only one resolution was acceptable. The nation turned to its young to carry the heaviest burden, to fight in enemy territory and to keep the home front secure and productive. These young men and women were eager for the assignment. They understood what was required of them, and they willingly volunteered for their duty.

Many of them had been born just twenty years earlier than I, in a time of national promise, optimism, and prosperity, when all things seemed possible as the United States was swiftly taking its place as the most powerful nation in the world. World War I was over, America's industrial might was coming of age with the rise of the auto industry and the nascent communications industry, Wall Street was booming, and the popular culture was rich with the likes of Babe Ruth, Eugene O'Neill, D. W. Griffith, and a new au-

thor on the scene, F. Scott Fitzgerald. What those unsuspecting infants could not have realized, of course, was that these were temporary conditions, a false spring to a life that would be buffeted by winds of change dangerous and unpredictable, so fierce that they threatened not just America but the very future of the planet.

Nonetheless, 1920 was an auspicious year for a young person to enter the world as an American citizen. The U.S. population had topped 106 million people, and the landscape was changing rapidly from agrarian to urban, even though one in three Americans still lived on a farm. Women were gaining the right to vote with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, and KDKA in Pittsburgh was broadcasting the first radio signals across the middle of America. Prohibition was beginning, but so was the roaring lifestyle that came with the flouting of Prohibition and the culture that produced it. In far-off Russia the Bolshevik revolution was a bloody affair, but its American admirers were unable to stir comparable passions here.

Five years later this American child born in 1920 still seemed to be poised for a life of ever greater prosperity, opportunity, and excitement. President Calvin "Silent Cal" Coolidge was a benign presence in the White House, content to let the bankers, industrialists, and speculators run the country as they saw fit.

As the twenties roared along, the Four Horsemen of Notre Dame were giving Saturdays new meaning with their college football heroics. Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney were raising the spectacle of heavyweight boxing matches to new heights of frenzy. Baseball was a daytime game and a true national pastime, from the fabled Yankee Stadium to the sandlots in rural America.

The New Yorker was launched, and the place of magazines occupied a higher order. Flappers were dancing the Charleston; Fitzgerald was publishing *The Great Gatsby*; the Scopes trial was under way in Tennessee, with Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan in a passionate and theatrical debate on evolution versus the Scriptures. A. Philip Randolph organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the beginning of a long struggle to force America to face its shameful policies and practices on race.

By the time this young American who had such a promising start reached the age of ten, his earlier prospects were shattered; the

fault lines were active everywhere: the stock market was struggling to recover from the crash of 1929, but the damage was too great. U.S. income was falling fast. Thirteen hundred banks closed. Businesses were failing everywhere, sending four and a half million people onto the streets with no safety net. The average American farm family had an annual cash income of four hundred dollars.

Herbert Hoover, as president, seemed to be paralyzed in the face of spreading economic calamity; he was a distant figure of stern bearing whose reputation as an engineering genius and management wizard was quickly replaced by cruel caricatures of his aloofness from the plight of the ever larger population of poor.

Congress passed the disastrous Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, establishing barriers to world trade and exacerbating an already raging global recession.

Yet Henry Luce managed to launch *Fortune*, a magazine specializing in business affairs. United Airlines and American Airlines, still in their infancy, managed to stay airborne. Lowell Thomas began a nightly national radio newscast on NBC and CBS. *The Lone Ranger* series was heard on radio.

Overseas, three men were plotting to change the world: Adolf Hitler in Germany, Joseph Stalin in Russia, and Mao Zedong in China. In American politics, the New York governor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was planning his campaign for the 1932 presidential election.

By 1933, when the baby born in 1920 was entering teenage years, the promise of that early childhood was shattered by crashing world economies. American farmers were able to produce only about sixteen bushels of corn per acre, and the prices were so low that it was more efficient to feed the corn to the hogs than take it to market. It was the year my mother moved with her parents and sister off their South Dakota farm and into a nearby small town, busted by the markets and the merciless drought. They took one milk cow, their pride, and their determination to just keep going somehow.

My mother, who graduated from high school at sixteen, had no hope of affording college, so she went to work in the local post office for a dollar a day. She was doing better than her father, who earned ten cents an hour working at a nearby grain elevator.

My father, an ambitious and skilled construction equipment operator, raced around the Midwest in his small Ford coupe, working hellishly long hours on road crews, hoping he could save enough in the warm weather months to get through another long winter back home in the small wood-frame hotel his sisters ran for railroad men, traveling salesmen, and local itinerants in the Great Plains village founded by his grandfather Richard Brokaw, a Civil War veteran who came to the Great Plains as a cook for railroad crews.

A mass of homeless and unemployed men drifted across the American landscape, looking for work or a handout wherever they could find it. More than thirty million Americans had no income of any kind. The American military had more horses than tanks, and its only action had been breaking up a demonstration of World War I veterans demanding their pension bonuses a year earlier.

Franklin Roosevelt took the oath of office as president of the United States, promising a New Deal for the beleaguered American people, declaring to a nation with more than fifteen million people out of work, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

He pushed through an Emergency Banking Act, a Federal Emergency Relief Act, a National Industrial Recovery Act, and by 1935 set in motion the legislation that would become the Social Security system.

Not everyone was happy. Rich Americans led by the Du Ponts, the founders of General Motors, and big oil millionaires founded the Liberty League to oppose the New Deal. Privately, in the salons of the privileged, Roosevelt was branded a traitor to his class.

In Germany, a former painter with a spellbinding oratorical style took office as chancellor and immediately set out to seize control of the political machinery of Germany with his National Socialist German Workers party, known informally as the Nazis. Adolf Hitler began his long march to infamy. He turned on the Jews, passing laws that denied them German citizenship, codifying the anti-Semitism that eventually led to the concentration camps and the gas chambers, an act of hatred so deeply immoral it will mark the twentieth century forever.

By the late thirties in America, anti-Semitism was the blatant message of Father James Coughlin, a messianic Roman Catholic priest with a vast radio audience. Huey Long, the brilliant Louisiana populist, came to power, first as governor and then as a U.S.

senator, preaching in his own spellbinding fashion the power of the little guy against the evils of Wall Street and corporate avarice.

When our young American was reaching eighteen, in 1938, the flames of war were everywhere in the world: Hitler had seized Austria; the campaign against Jews had intensified with Kristallnacht, a vicious and calculated campaign to destroy all Jewish businesses within the Nazi realm. Japan continued its brutal and genocidal war against the Chinese; and in Russia, Stalin was presiding over show trials, deporting thousands to Siberia, and summarily executing his rivals in the Communist party. The Spanish Civil War was a losing cause for the loyalists, and a diminutive fascist general, Francisco Franco, began a reign that would last forty years.

In this riotous year the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, believed he had saved his country with a pact negotiated with Hitler at Munich. He returned to England to declare, "I believe it is peace for our time . . . peace with honor."

It was neither.

At home, Roosevelt was in his second term, trying to balance the continuing need for extraordinary efforts to revive the economy with what he knew was the great peril abroad. Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act, setting a limit on hours worked and a minimum wage. The federal government began a system of parity payments to farmers and subsidized foreign wheat sales.

In the fall of 1938, Dwight David Eisenhower, a career soldier who had grown up on a small farm outside of Abilene, Kansas, was a forty-eight-year-old colonel in the U.S. Army. He had an infectious grin and a fine reputation as a military planner, but he had no major combat command experience. The winds of war were about to carry him to the highest peaks of military glory and political reward. Ike, as he was called, would become a folksy avatar of his time.

America was entertained by Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Woody Guthrie, the music of Hoagy Carmichael, the big-screen film magic of Clark Gable, Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn, Errol Flynn, Ginger Rogers, Fred Astaire, Bette Davis, Henry Fonda.

At the beginning of a new decade, 1940, just twenty years after our young American entered a world of such great promise and prosperity, it was clear to all but a few delusional isolationists that war would define this generation's coming of age.

France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, and Romania had all fallen to Nazi aggression. German troops controlled Paris. In the east, Stalin was rapidly building up one of the greatest ground armies ever to defend Russia and communism.

Japan signed a ten-year military pact with Germany and Italy, forming an Axis they expected would rule the world before the decade was finished.

Roosevelt, elected to his third term, again by a landslide, was preparing the United States, pushing through the Export Control Act to stop the shipment of war materials overseas. Contracts were arranged for a new military vehicle called the jeep. A fighter plane was developed. It would be designated the P-51 Mustang. Almost 20 percent of the budget FDR submitted to Congress was for defense needs. The first peacetime military draft in U.S. history was activated.

Roosevelt stayed in close touch with his friend, the new prime minister of England, Winston Churchill, who told the English: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." And "We shall not flag or fail . . . we shall fight on the seas and oceans . . . we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and on the streets, we shall fight in the hills, we shall never surrender."

Our twenty-year-old American learned something of war by reading *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, by Ernest Hemingway, and something else about the human spirit by watching *The Grapes of Wrath*, the film based on John Steinbeck's novel, directed by John Ford and starring Henry Fonda.

The majority of black Americans were still living in the states of the former Confederacy, and they remained second-class citizens, or worse, in practice and law. Negro men were drafted and placed in segregated military units even as America prepared to fight a fascist regime that had as a core belief the inherent superiority of the Aryan people.

It had been a turbulent twenty years for our young American, and the worst and the best were yet to come. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Across America on that Sunday afternoon, the stunning news from the radio electrified the nation and changed the lives of all who heard it. Marriages were postponed or

accelerated. College was deferred. Plans of any kind for the future were calibrated against the quickening pace of the march to war.

Shortly after the attack, Winston Churchill called FDR from the prime minister's country estate, Chequers. In his book *The Grand Alliance*, Churchill recounted the conversation. "Mr. President, what's this about Japan?" Roosevelt replied, "It's quite true. They have attacked us at Pearl Harbor. We're all in the same boat now."

Churchill couldn't have been happier. He would now have the manpower, the resources, and the political will of the United States actively engaged in this fight for survival. He wrote, "So we had won after all." A few days later, after Germany and Italy had declared war against the United States, Churchill wrote to Anthony Eden, his foreign secretary, who was traveling to Russia, "The accession of the United States makes amends for all, and with time and patience will give us certain victory."

In America, young men were enlisting in the military by the hundreds of thousands. Farm kids from the Great Plains who never expected to see the ocean in their lifetimes signed up for the Navy; brothers followed brothers into the Marines; young daredevils who were fascinated by the new frontiers of flight volunteered for pilot training. Single young women poured into Washington to fill the exploding needs for clerical help as the political capital mobilized for war. Other women, their husbands or boyfriends off to basic training, learned to drive trucks or handle welding torches. The old rules of gender and expectation changed radically with what was now expected of this generation.

My mother and father, with my newborn brother and me in the backseat of the 1938 Ford sedan that would be our family car for the next decade, moved to that hastily constructed Army ammunition depot called Igloo, on the alkaline and sagebrush landscape of far southwestern South Dakota. I was three years old.

It was a monochromatic world, the bleak brown prairie, Army-green cars and trucks, khaki uniforms everywhere. My first impressions of women were not confined to those of my mother caring for my brothers and me at home. I can still see in my mind's eye a woman in overalls carrying a lunch bucket, her hair covered in a red bandanna, swinging out of the big Army truck she had just parked, headed for home at the end of a long day. Women in what



COURTESY TOM BROKAW

Jean and Anthony "Red" Brokaw at the time of their wedding, 1938

had been men's jobs were part of the new workaday world of a nation at war.

Looking back, I can recall that the grown-ups all seemed to have a sense of purpose that was evident even to someone as young as four, five, or six. Whatever else was happening in our family or neighborhood, there was something greater connecting all of us, in large ways and small.

Indeed there was, and the scope of the national involvement was reflected in the numbers: by 1944, twelve million Americans were in uniform; war production represented 44 percent of the Gross National Product; there were almost nineteen million more workers than there had been five years earlier, and 35 percent of them were women. The nation was immersed in the war effort at every level.

The young Americans of this time constituted a generation birth-marked for greatness, a generation of Americans that would take its place in American history with the generations that had converted the North American wilderness into the United States and infused the new nation with self-determination embodied first in the Declaration of Independence and then in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

At the end of the twentieth century the contributions of this generation would be in bold print in any review of this turbulent and earth-altering time. It may be historically premature to judge the greatness of a whole generation, but indisputably, there are common traits that cannot be denied. It is a generation that, by and large, made no demands of homage from those who followed and prospered economically, politically, and culturally because of its sacrifices. It is a generation of towering achievement and modest demeanor, a legacy of their formative years when they were participants in and witness to sacrifices of the highest order. They know how many of the best of their generation didn't make it to their early twenties, how many brilliant scientists, teachers, spiritual and business leaders, politicians and artists were lost in the ravages of the greatest war the world has seen.

The enduring contributions of this generation transcend gender. The world we know today was shaped not just on the front lines of combat. From the Great Depression forward, through the war and

into the years of rebuilding and unparalleled progress on almost every front, women were essential to and leaders in the greatest national mobilization of resources and spirit the country had ever known. They were also distinctive in that they raised the place of their gender to new heights; they changed forever the perception and the reality of women in all the disciplines of American life.

Millions of men and women were involved in this tumultuous journey through adversity and achievement, despair and triumph. Certainly there were those who failed to measure up, but taken as a whole this generation did have a "rendezvous with destiny" that went well beyond the outsized expectations of President Roosevelt when he first issued that call to duty in 1936.

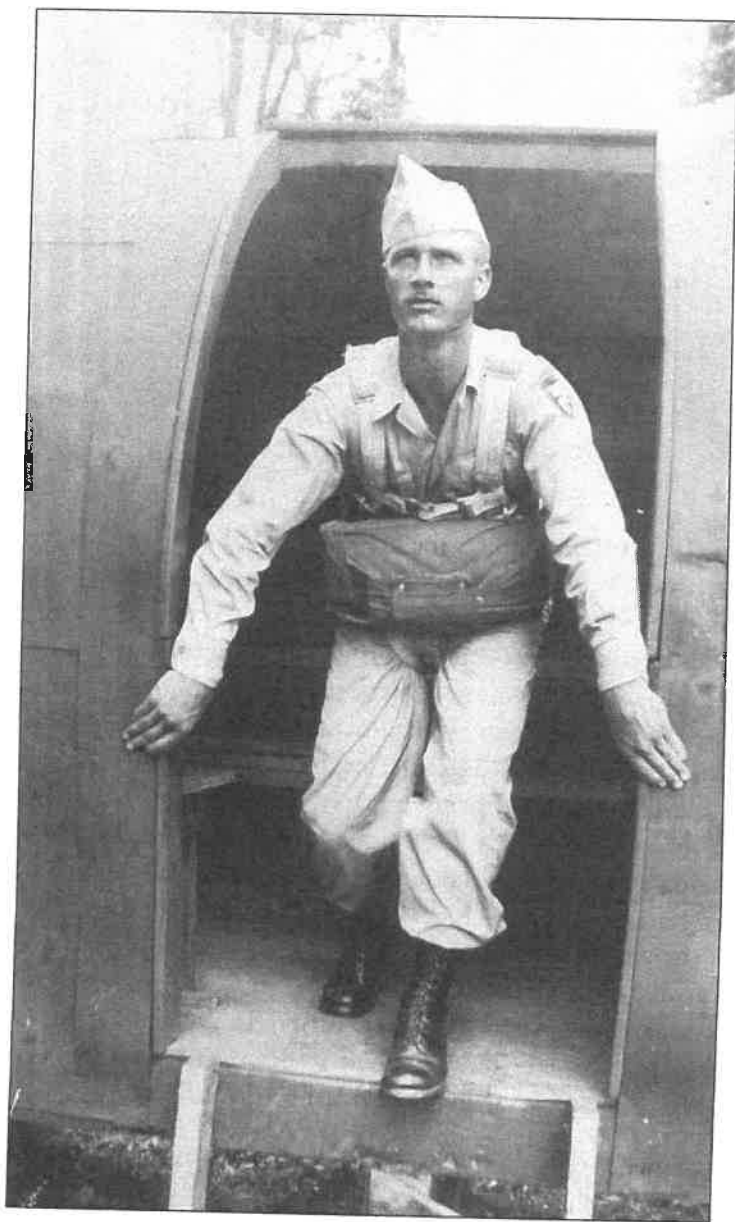
The stories that follow represent the lives of some of them. Each is distinctive and yet reflective of the common experiences of that trying time and this generation of greatness.

•

ORDINARY PEOPLE

When the United States entered World War II, the U.S. government turned to ordinary Americans and asked of them extraordinary service, sacrifice, and heroics. Many Americans met those high expectations, and then returned home to lead ordinary lives.

When the war ended, more than twelve million men and women put their uniforms aside and returned to civilian life. They went back to work at their old jobs or started small businesses; they became big-city cops and firemen; they finished their degrees or enrolled in college for the first time; they became schoolteachers, insurance salesmen, craftsmen, and local politicians. They weren't widely known outside their families or their communities. For many, the war years were enough adventure to last a lifetime. They were proud of what they accomplished but they rarely discussed their experiences, even with each other. They became once again ordinary people, the kind of men and women who always have been the foundation of the American way of life.



COURTESY TOM BRODERICK

*Tom Broderick in paratrooper training,
Fort Benning, Georgia, 1944*

THOMAS AND EILEEN BRODERICK

"What's a handicap? I don't have a handicap."

ON THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF D-Day, I was broadcasting from the American cemetery overlooking Omaha Beach at Colleville-sur-Mer in Normandy, one of the bloodiest battlefields in American history. The cemetery is at once haunting and beautiful, with 9,386 white marble headstones in long, even lines across the manicured fields of dark green, each headstone marking the death of a brave young American. The anniversary was a somber and celebratory moment, as veterans of that daring and dangerous invasion, unparalleled in the long history of warfare, gathered to pay tribute to those whose sacrifices were marked by the simple headstones and to share with the world their own remarkable stories of survival.

In the course of the extended *Today* show coverage on NBC, we concentrated more on the heroics of those who survived, but then the noted historian Stephen Ambrose interrupted to say, "I think we should talk about what was happening to so many men down there on those beaches. They were terribly wounded. Their stomachs opened. Their faces shot away. Their limbs blown off. That was the reality of that day and we shouldn't forget that."

Ambrose brought us back to the savage nature of war that we often overlook on those occasions when wars are celebrated for

what they achieved. For the warriors who live, the consequences of war become a lifelong condition. In its savagery, war strikes at the very idea of a sound and healthy body. In World War II, more than 292,000 Americans were killed in battle, and more than 1.7 million returned home physically affected in some way, from minor afflictions to blindness or missing limbs or paralysis, battle-scarred and exhausted, but oh so happy and relieved to be home. They had survived an extraordinary ordeal, but now they were eager to reclaim their ordinary lives of work, family, church, and community. The war had taught them what mattered most in the lives they wanted now to settle down and live.

Thomas Broderick was a nineteen-year-old premed student at Xavier College in Cincinnati in 1942, trying to decide which branch of the service fit his sense of adventure. This son of a south Chicago working-class family was bright and ambitious, so he enlisted in the Merchant Marine. "They gave us the best deal," he said. "If you didn't like it, you could quit." After ten weeks of training he went on a mission to North Africa on a supply ship. The pay was excellent. The food was abundant. He had a private room on the officer's deck of his ship, the *John W. Brown*, but the trip was long and boring. He wanted out of the Merchant Marine. He wanted to join the Airborne so he could be like those cocky paratroopers he saw stationed in Algiers. "I'd never even been in a plane before," he says, "but it was the challenge I wanted."

His superiors in the Merchant Marine were astonished. Here he was, ready to go back to the security of the Merchant Marine Academy for another eighteen months of accelerated training, and he wanted to quit to join one of the most dangerous outfits in the service. His officer offered him a thirty-day furlough to think it over. Broderick said, "No, my mind's made up." When he returned home, his parents were equally appalled. When he told his draft board what he wanted, the clerk said, "You're nuts. I'll give you another month before we draft you, so you can change your mind." Broderick declined, saying he wanted in now.

Tom Broderick spent seventeen weeks in basic training for the infantry in Mineral Wells, Texas, before heading to Fort Benning, Georgia, to become a member of the 82nd Airborne. When he finished his training, a captain offered him an instructor's job and the

rank of sergeant. Again Broderick refused the safer alternative, saying he wanted to stay with his outfit and go overseas.

Broderick's unit shipped out to England as replacements for the 82nd Airborne men lost in the Normandy invasion. In September, Broderick made his first jump into combat, in Holland. He was in the thick of it immediately, the Battle of Arnhem. It was a joint mission of American and British paratroopers, and their objective was to take the Nijmegen bridge to help pave the Allies' way into Germany and to discourage any German counterattack. "We jumped at about five hundred feet because we wanted to be a low target. It was one-thirty in the afternoon.

"The first German I saw I couldn't shoot, because he was riding a bicycle away from me. I couldn't shoot at him because he wasn't shooting at me. Things were different ten minutes later. There were Germans all over the place—they outnumbered us about forty thousand to twenty-eight thousand. It was combat morning, noon, and night."

On the fifth day Broderick made a mistake that would alter his life forever. "I remember being in the foxhole and . . . I was lining up my aim on a German. I got a little high in the foxhole and I got shot clean through the head—through the left temple."

A Catholic chaplain arrived to administer the last rites, but after slipping into unconsciousness, Broderick somehow managed to stay alive until he awoke a few days later in a British hospital. He was relieved to be out of combat but he had a problem: he couldn't see. Why not? he asked. His doctors told him, "When that hemorrhage clears up, you'll be all right." Broderick continued to believe them until he was sent to Dibble General Hospital in Menlo Park, California, one of the two facilities in the nation treating blind veterans.

Finally a doctor told him the truth. He would be blind forever. "I was stunned. I cried, 'Aren't you going to do anything?'" He rushed to a fellow veteran who had been hospitalized with him in England, a man recovering from shrapnel in one of his eyes. "I just cried and cried, and he said to me, 'We knew the whole time, Tom; we just didn't want to tell you.'"

Broderick was angry and disoriented. When the Army made him take a rehabilitation course in Connecticut, he said, "I rebelled—I

just didn't want to learn braille. I told them I was going to work in my dad's trucking business just so I could get out of there."

It didn't get much better when he returned to Chicago. He enrolled at Loyola University and the Veterans Administration hired a reader for him, but after only seven weeks Broderick dropped out and went to work for his father. His downslide continued. "They didn't know what to do with me. Dad had me taking orders on the phone because I could still write. But then I heard of people having to call back to get the orders straightened out. I thought, 'Hell, I'm screwing up.'" He quit after a month.

Broderick realized he'd have to learn braille. His Veterans Administration counselor also recommended he enroll in a class in insurance sales, a fast-growing field in postwar America. He learned the insurance business by day and braille by night. Before long the VA found him a job with an elderly insurance broker in his neighborhood. Not too long after that, Broderick had established his own insurance business. He was no longer the young man angry at his fate. He was now prepared to accept his blindness and get on with his life.

Broderick worked six days a week. When he wasn't taking orders by phone with his braille machine and dictating them to his secretary later, he was making house calls at night. He quickly developed a very keen audio sense; many customers he dealt with on the phone were astonished when they finally met him. He'd quickly call out their name when he heard their voice. Until that point they had no idea he was blind.

Later, when he and his wife were having children—seven in all—Broderick would tell each of them the same story as they reached the age when they could understand the real meaning of blindness. His daughter, Katy Broderick Duffy: "He'd tell us how he was hurt in the war and that when he came home he went with his mother to Lourdes, the famous shrine in France, to pray for a miracle. He said that before they put the water on his eyes, he asked the Lord for a favor: 'If I can't have my eyesight back, could you find a girl for me to marry?' And that's how he met my mother. When you're little and you hear that story, you really think it *was* a miracle."

Broderick's wife, Eileen, is a little skeptical of the story, but Tom insists it's true, although his version is a bit breezier. "I said, 'I know we don't always get what we want, but what's right for us. I'm

COURTESY TOM BRODERICK

HE 'LOOKS' TO THE FUTURE



Former Pfc. Thomas Broderick Jr., 20, who has been blind as a result of a German sniper's bullet, shows his two sisters, Patricia (left) and Jacqueline, that he is adept at operating a typewriter, an accomplishment he plans to use in his future work.

(Daily News photo)

Tom Broderick, feature in the Chicago Tribune, 1944

really hoping to meet the woman for me—and if you want to throw in the eyes, too, that's okay.' ”

Not long after that, Tom and Eileen met on a blind date, no irony intended. Eileen was a twenty-three-year-old nurse and Tom was twenty-seven. She fell in love instantly. “That night, after the date, I went home, woke my cousin up, and said, ‘I’ve met the man I’m going to marry.’ She told me I’d been drinking too much and I should go to bed, but I knew.

“You didn’t think about his blindness. It just didn’t seem to matter. He was so unique. He ran a business by himself and didn’t need help from anyone, although it was a little tricky when we went out alone. I’d have to take him to the men’s room and ask someone to take him in. I’d stand outside. I think, being a nurse, I was a little more flexible. I understood that it was all just mechanics.

“My father was worried when I said I was marrying Tom. He just didn’t understand how Tom could take care of me and a family. But after three or four years of marriage they became very close. Tom’s mother started him off right. When he came back from the war she would not allow anyone to use the word *blind* in the house. Tom had to be treated with dignity and respect, and anything he wanted to try, he could do it. When he left his father’s business to set out on his own, she was happy.”

Tom and Eileen had common roots as strongly faithful Roman Catholic Irish Americans. They settled into a life of the prosperous middle class on the south side of Chicago, where Tom’s business continued to flourish and their family grew quickly. During one five-year stretch Eileen had five children, and then another two later. Eileen says, “He was very involved in their upbringing. There were things he could do and those he couldn’t. It was kind of trial and error. He couldn’t change diapers but he could give them a bottle. We never talked about how to make things work. It wasn’t easy, but we did what we had to do.”

The Broderick children were part of the equation of making things work. Daughter Katy says, “The blindness was just incidental. I’d see other people who were blind and not well adjusted and think, ‘What’s wrong with them?’ Later I realized not everyone had the strength and determination of my father. When I was little, my friends would say, ‘Your father’s not blind!’ He could just do so many things it didn’t seem like he was blind.”

Dan Broderick, one of Tom’s sons, says his father worked out a system to take care of most of the household chores, including assembling an elaborate stereo system, washing and waxing the car, and changing the storm windows. He refused to succumb to his blindness. He even refused to let Eileen get disability license plates for the family car when they became available. “What’s a handicap?” he’d say. “I don’t have a handicap.”

But then Tom isn’t much for cars. Since he can’t drive himself, he likes to walk, and his family was expected to do the same. Katy remembers, “We walked everywhere. He hated getting rides. He thought it was a waste.”

During his introduction to the world of the blind at the rehabilitation center in Connecticut, Broderick and his friends formed an informal organization to help each other adjust to their new realities. It became the Blinded Veterans Association, and Broderick decided that he should share the lessons of his new life with other veterans who were struggling with their blindness. He began making trips to Chicago-area rehabilitation programs, counseling sightless veterans on the career possibilities in insurance, mortgage sales, and car financing—the hot financial service fields as America exploded out of the cities and into the suburbs.

“I’d tell them about my own struggle—how I was young when I became blind and I knew how they felt. I brought some of them down to my office so they could see the braille machine and what was possible. I don’t feel any special bond with other blind organizations or blind people, but I wanted to help veterans. You have to do it. It was no big deal, really.”

Tom’s son Dan remembers that, during Vietnam, the nearby Veterans Administration office would send over young men who’d lost their sight in that war. “When you first saw them you thought you were at a wake—some of them were suicidal, with their eyes blown out. Mom would go out and get a case of beer, and they’d sit on the porch with my dad and listen to the White Sox game. Then he’d navigate ‘em around our house to show them what we had—five bedrooms, a big house. By the end of the night they’d be back on the porch, drinking beer but laughing now.”

Another son, Scott: “You know how everyone says their dad is the best. Well, do you know how many people I’ve heard that from about *my* dad? Friends, neighbors, clients. Every kid thinks it, but

to hear it from other people is so gratifying. He never let his disability get in the way of anything."

Tom Broderick in so many ways embodies the best qualities of his generation. He was so eager to get involved in the war he enlisted in two branches of the service. He was gravely wounded, but once he got over the initial understandable anger, he set out to be the best husband, father, businessman, and citizen he could be—sight or no sight. He didn't grow bitter and dependent on others. He didn't blame the world for his condition.

A common lament of the World War II generation is the absence today of personal responsibility. Broderick remembers listening to an NPR broadcast and hearing an account of how two boys found a loaded gun in one of their homes. The visiting boy accidentally shot his friend. The victim's father was on the radio, talking about suing the gun manufacturer. That got to Tom Broderick. "So," he said, "here's this man talking about suing and he's not accepting responsibility for having a loaded gun in the house."

Tom knows something about personal responsibility. He's been forced to live as a blind man for more than fifty years, and when asked about the moment when the lights were literally shot out of his eyes, he says only, "It was my fault for getting too high in the foxhole. That happens sometimes."

CHARLES O. VAN GORDER, MD

*"If I had my life to do all over again, I'd do it the same way—
go somewhere small where people have a need."*

IT IS NOT SURPRISING, I suppose, that the horrors of war give birth to a new generation of good Samaritans. Young men and women who have been so intensely exposed to such inhumanity often make a silent pledge that if they ever escape this dark world of death and injuries, this universe of cruelty, they will devote their lives to good works. Sometimes the pledge is a conscious thought. Sometimes it is a subconscious reaction to their experiences. This is the story of a good Samaritan who set out in life to heal, found his greatest personal and professional tests under fire, and returned home to his original calling with a renewed sense of mission.

There had never been a military operation remotely approaching the scale and the complexity of D-Day. It involved 176,000 troops, more than 12,000 airplanes, almost 10,000 ships, boats, landing craft, frigates, sloops, and other special combat vessels—all involved in a surprise attack on the heavily fortified north coast of France, to secure a beachhead in the heart of enemy-held territory so that the march to Germany and victory could begin. It was daring, risky, confusing, bloody, and ultimately glorious.

It will live forever as a stroke of enduring genius, a military maneuver that, even though it went awry and spilled ashore in chaos,



COURTESY CHARLES VAN GORDER

Dr. Charles Van Gorder, wartime portrait

succeeded. It was so risky that before he launched the invasion, gambling that the small break in the weather would hold, General Dwight Eisenhower personally wrote out a statement taking full responsibility for the failure if it occurred. He was grateful he never had to release it.

A new generation of Americans has a greater appreciation of what was involved on D-Day as a result of Steven Spielberg's stunning film *Saving Private Ryan*. For most younger Americans, D-Day has been a page or two in their history books, or some anniversary ceremony on television with a lot of white-haired men leaning into the winds coming off the English Channel as President Reagan or President Clinton praised their contributions. *Saving Private Ryan*, although a work of fiction, is true to the sound, the fury, the death, the terrible wounds of that day.

Charles O. Van Gorder was a special part of D-Day. He was a thirty-one-year-old captain in the U.S. Army Medical Corps in June 1944, a graduate of the University of Tennessee Medical School. He'd already served in North Africa when he volunteered to be part of a two-team surgical unit that would try something new for D-Day: it would be part of the 101st Airborne assault force, setting up medical facilities in the middle of the fighting instead of safely behind the Allied lines. They knew that casualties would be high and that saving lives would require immediate attention.

So Captain Van Gorder and his colleagues were loaded onto gliders for the flight across the English Channel and into Normandy. These were primitive aircraft, made of tubing, canvas, and plywood, with no engines, of course. They were silent—the element of surprise—and they could land in rough terrain.

Van Gorder remembers, "We landed in the field where we were supposed to, but they forgot one thing: when they put the brakes on, it made that glider just like an ice sled and it went zooming across the field. We hit a tree—which ended up right between the pilot and the copilot. Nobody in my glider was killed, but nearly all the other gliders had someone killed or injured."

That was at four A.M. By nine that same day, June 6, 1944, Van Gorder and his fellow doctors had set up an operating facility, a precursor to the MASH units, the Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals

that saved so many lives and, later on television, gave us so much intelligent entertainment.

They were located in a French château; they converted the milk storage room to an operating room, and by late that afternoon the château grounds were covered with hundreds of wounded young Americans. Van Gorder and the other surgeons operated around the clock for thirty-six hours, always wearing their helmets because the château was often in the line of fire. The Army had issued the medical team several cases of Scotch whiskey and Van Gorder later remembered, "The only thing that kept us going was sipping that Scotch. Finally, I got so tired my head fell down into an open abdomen." He was ordered to go back to his tent for some rest. En route, a soldier offered him hot chocolate. When he decided to go back for the hot chocolate, a German bomb hit his tent, demolishing it. It was the first of many narrow escapes for Dr. Van, as he was called.

Altogether, it was a frantic and grisly scene that even now, more than fifty years later, Dr. Van Gorder cannot remove from his memory. "I have flashbacks every day," he says. "All those boys being slaughtered, sometimes two hundred boys and only ten surgeons. The war made me a better doctor because I had to do all kinds of surgery. There were no trauma surgery books before the war to learn from."

Van Gorder's D-Day initiation wasn't the end of his frontline experience; it was only the beginning. His unit stayed with the 101st over the next six months as it fought its way across Europe, headed for the heart of Germany. They were in the thick of the fighting during the long siege in Belgium, and during the Battle of the Bulge.

In December 1944, Dr. Van Gorder and his colleague and friend, Dr. John Rodda, were in the middle of surgery when their makeshift operating room came under heavy fire from German forces. "I was practically lying on my stomach operating on patients," Van Gorder remembers, "because of the shooting coming right into the tent.

"I was the only one who spoke German, so I went to the end of the tent and waved a towel through the flap. I told the German commander we had more than fifty wounded, including German



COURTESY CHARLES VAN GORDER

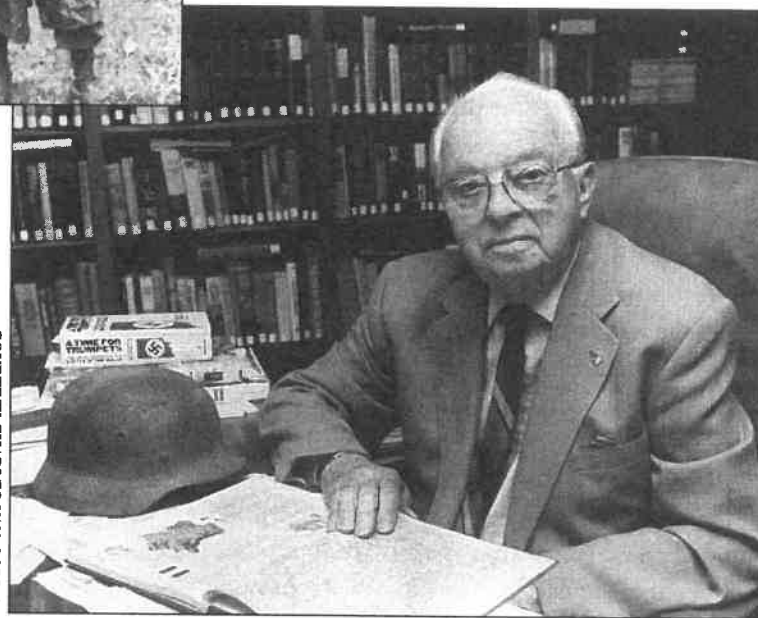
ABOVE: Dr. Charles Van Gorder in the Rodda-Van Gorder Hospital and Clinic, Andrews, North Carolina (left to right): Dr. Charles Van Gorder, Dr. John S. Rodda, nurse



COURTESY CHARLES VAN GORDER

LEFT: "Captain Charles Van Gorder demonstrates what the well-dressed airborne surgeon wears on an invasion," June 13, 1944

BELOW: Charles Van Gorder, MD, 1994



COURTESY CHARLES VAN GORDER

POWs. He told me to load them up. I had to leave one patient behind with his stomach open." They were taken prisoner on December 19, 1944, Dr. Van Gorder's thirty-second birthday.

Van Gorder had suffered shrapnel wounds in his knees while the operating tent was under fire, so his friend Dr. Rodda supported him as they trekked through the snow under the watchful German guns. Van Gorder is convinced that without Rodda's help the Germans would have shot him as a straggler.

He returned the favor when Rodda became ill. Two young American doctors, who had seen more death and suffering than most graduating classes of doctors were likely to see in a lifetime, were now trying just to keep each other alive. Nothing in medical school had prepared them for this primal struggle of being prisoners of war in a bleak winter landscape in the heart of enemy territory. Back home, their families had no idea of what they were going through, and it was just as well.

Van Gorder, Rodda, and the other prisoners were packed into boxcars, and the train moved them to the north of Germany, where they stayed on a siding for three days, locked inside. "Half of us would stand and half of us would sit in rotation because it was so crowded," Van Gorder remembers.

Van Gorder got out of his confinement when the Germans needed a doctor to operate on a soldier needing an appendectomy. It was almost a fatal mission, however. American planes attacked the German train, not knowing there were Americans aboard. Van Gorder ducked beneath a car to avoid the heavy fire and then told the Germans, "I'm going to let the others out." He risked his life to race into the line of fire and open the boxcar doors. The Americans poured out and immediately ran to a small hill and formed a human sign: USA POWS. The attacking American planes wagged their wings to indicate they understood, and broke off the attack.

The German army was fighting a losing battle, retreating deeper and deeper to the east, taking their prisoners with them. Van Gorder and Rodda were taken first to Poland and then to the Russian border. In the confusion, they escaped and started making their way back west, through Poland. Whenever they came upon a Polish hospital they'd stop to do what they could for the patients there, as most of the Polish doctors had been conscripted by the

Germans. Finally they made their way back to American lines in the spring of 1945. Their war was over.

"When I was finally discharged, I had served five years in the war; I was overseas for thirty months straight," Dr. Van Gorder says without a trace of bitterness. During that time his wife, Helen, a nurse from Nova Scotia he'd met in New Jersey during his residency before the war, gave birth to their first son, Rod. The infant died shortly after birth, a victim of sudden infant death syndrome. Dr. Van Gorder was in North Africa at the time, a long way from his wife's side.

When the war was over, Dr. Van Gorder was headed for New York and a fellowship in reconstructive surgery. No doubt it would have been a high-income, prestigious practice. Before going to New York, however, Van Gorder visited his parents, who had relocated to the North Carolina mountain hamlet of Andrews. It's tucked into the Smoky Mountains in that corner where North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia come together. It was a logging community, the very essence of backwoods.

After the turmoil of the war, however, it looked like a little piece of heaven to Dr. Van Gorder. The people were plain and friendly, the village was scenic and tranquil—and there were no doctors. It was the perfect match for a young physician who had experienced enough trauma, turmoil, and uncertainty in five years to last a lifetime. He decided to stay in Andrews and open a practice.

He called his wartime buddy and fellow surgeon John Rodda and invited him to become a partner. Dr. Rodda made one visit to Andrews and saw immediately what had attracted his friend. He agreed to sign on.

They opened a small clinic and mini-hospital above a department store. It consisted of an operating room, X-ray facilities, a blood lab, three examining rooms, and twenty-one beds. For the next ten years they were the only physicians in town. They really didn't intend to stay forever but they quickly came to love their practices, their patients, and their adopted home.

Dr. Van Gorder's son, Chuck, remembers his dad being very busy, and some evenings so exhausted he'd fall asleep at the dinner table. "When the clinic closed at five-thirty in the evening," Chuck recalls, "my mother—who was the nurse—took the names of all

the people who were too sick to come to town. We'd all get in the station wagon with our parents and they'd make their nightly rounds of house calls. They did this every night.

"I don't think my dad ever left town the same time as Dr. Rodda. Andrews had a tough element and someone was always getting hurt in a fight or getting shot. Even so, some of the people in town at first didn't trust Dad and Dr. Rodda because they were so young, and folks around here were used to older doctors. So Dad and Dr. Rodda brought in an older doctor from a nearby town to just be in the operating room when they did surgery. In return, they'd operate on that doctor's patients without charging him."

Chuck Van Gorder remains in awe of his father and what he meant to his neighbors. "Even after he retired," he remembers, "people kept asking for him. A friend of mine was working for the power company when he blew his hands off in an accident. He was delirious. He kept screaming, 'I want Dr. Van. Dr. Van will make this all right.'"

Other physicians returning from similar combat experiences made their contributions to postwar America in other ways. Dr. William McDermott—another combat surgeon who went ashore in Normandy and operated in frontline tents across France, at the Battle of the Bulge, and into Germany—was a product of Exeter, Harvard, and a one-year residency at Massachusetts General Hospital before the war. He says of his war experiences, "It was horrible, but the salvation was that you were doing something—you weren't just sitting there and watching the horror. We were always so damn busy and so tired, but I got an enormous amount of experience. It was like running a full-time emergency room twenty-four hours a day."

McDermott was involved in the liberation of one of the most notorious concentration camps, Ebensee. "You never in your life could imagine what it was like," he says. "When I was treating kids in combat I didn't have time to think, but the concentration camp was different. I went into a barracks and there were two men to every cot. They could barely move, but they got themselves up somehow and saluted me. I just about burst into tears. I stayed there for two weeks treating them, but two hundred died every day."

It was an experience that stayed with Dr. McDermott when he returned to the Boston area and began a long, distinguished medical career at Massachusetts General Hospital, Yale, Harvard, and New England Deaconess Hospital. In his eighties, he remains the chairman of the department of surgery at Deaconess and he's the Cheever Professor of Surgery Emeritus at Harvard Medical School, where he was on the faculty for many years.

Dr. McDermott has written several books, including a war memoir called *A Surgeon in Combat*, which recounts his experiences at Ebensee. That, in turn, led to a Boston meeting with a survivor of the camp, Morris Hollander, a Czech Jew. They may have met in the camp, although they couldn't be sure. They did share the same lessons, however. One a Jewish inmate, the other a Roman Catholic doctor, they had both come to understand something about God and man in the barbarity of Ebensee.

In a *Boston Globe* account of their meeting, Dr. McDermott said, "God is a God of necessity. He sets the morals. If people break them, that's their issue, not God's." Hollander responded, "Exactly. . . . Every nation has the ability to do as Germany did."

Dr. McDermott says he remembers the horror of Ebensee to this day, but it remains for him primarily an intensely personal experience. "No," he says, "I didn't share this much with my medical students; I was a little restrained, but if the war came up during discussions, I would remind them of the levels to which humans can sink. It's important for medical students to know those imperfections of the human race."

He also isn't interested in returning to Germany. On one occasion after the war, he had to change planes in the Frankfurt airport, and he got involved in a typical reservations foul-up. In exasperation he said, "Listen, fifteen years ago we had a helluva lot easier time taking Frankfurt than I'm having getting out of Frankfurt now." Dr. McDermott remembers with a short laugh that he got a first-class ticket back to Boston almost immediately.

IN NORTH CAROLINA Dr. Van Gorder applied the lessons of his war experiences to his family of patients, and his philosophy was shared by his wife, Helen. After the death of their firstborn, Helen

continued working as a nurse even as the family was wracked by the war. Her two brothers, Canadians, volunteered for the American forces and both were killed. Her husband was always in the thick of battle until he became a prisoner of war. Later the Van Gorders' son, Chuck, would be wounded in Vietnam while serving with his father's old outfit, the 101st Airborne. When Chuck asked his mother how she managed all of that emotional turmoil she answered, "Since I was a little girl I've had trust in the Lord. I had faith it would all work out."

It did work out for the Van Gorders because they did keep their faith in their God, in each other, and in the belief that life is about helping others. They passed that along to their two daughters and their surviving son. That's another legacy of the World War II generation, the strong commitment to family values and community. They were mature beyond their years in their twenties, and when they married and began families it was not a matter of thinking "Well, let's see how this works out . . ."

They applied the same values to their professional lives; they never stopped thinking about how they could improve health care for their community. While they were building their practice, Van Gorder and Rodda realized Andrews deserved more than their modest clinic, so they set out to build a hospital. Dr. Van Gorder became a regular visitor to the state capital in Raleigh, lobbying the governor to apply for federal Hill-Burton funds to build a hospital in Andrews. He succeeded. When the hospital was completed in 1956 it was a community triumph. Local residents working in the mills contributed through a payroll deduction program, sometimes as little as a nickel a week, or through bank contribution programs.

Today the hospital has sixty beds and a full range of medical services, from X rays to surgery. It is being expanded to accommodate sixteen more doctors, in a community that had none when the war ended.

As they steadily expanded the health care services available to the rural logging community, they kept up with the advances in medical technology and they were impressed with the progress in patient care. But Dr. Van Gorder laments the bureaucratic and commercial nature of modern medicine.

"The war taught me the importance of integrity in dealing with people," he says. "I worked with some fine surgeons and we helped each other. Medicine was more altruistic. I just wanted to help people. Kids start out now thinking 'How much money can I make?' not 'What can I do, how much can I help?'"

In the early days of his Andrews practice, his patients often paid with produce from their gardens or with freshly killed game. When that gave way to distant bureaucrats rejecting claims because a code was entered improperly or dictating care instructions, Dr. Van Gorder's enthusiasm for what he loved began to fade. A man who began his medical career operating behind the lines and in the line of fire, a physician who learned more in a week of combat than an insurance clerk could know in a lifetime of paper shuffling, had little patience for the system that was overrunning his love of medicine.

In a small town, physicians are often more than the healers. They are the first citizens in every sense of the phrase. Dr. Van Gorder was a member of the Andrews board of education for twenty years; he was president of the Andrews Lions Club, and he was the grand potentate of the Shrine Temple in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was a life of service that hundreds of thousands of other World War II veterans were living in their hometowns across America.

In Dr. Van Gorder's family, one daughter, Katherine, is a librarian in South Carolina; Suzanne is a nurse and a commander in the Naval Reserve in Florida; son Chuck, who when he returned from Vietnam worked for a time as a nurse, is in the real estate business near Andrews.

Van Gorder's friend and partner, Dr. Rodda, died six years ago, and Van Gorder has been struggling with his own health problems—he suffered a small stroke in 1997—but he's still cheerful and grateful for a full life.

His war experiences, however, now more than fifty years in his past, live on in his memory. "I have flashbacks of the war every day. You can't get it out of your mind. D-Day, all those boys being slaughtered. When I was working in our hospital I thought about it a lot. I thought about how the war taught us to handle things. We learned a lot.

"The thing I am most proud of is that hospital," he says. "If I had my life to do all over again, I'd do it the same way—go somewhere small where people have a need, contribute something to people who need it; help people."

WESLEY KO

"In the war I learned to be self-sufficient. . . . I learned to be a leader. When my business failed I was able to move on, whereas my wife was devastated by the loss."

A SENSE OF personal responsibility and a commitment to honesty is characteristic of this generation. Those were values bred into the young men and women coming of age at the time the war broke out. It's how they were raised. There are always exceptions to the common bonds of any generation, but in talking to the men and women whose stories make up this book I was struck by the connective cords of their lives, wherever they lived or in whatever circumstances.

One after another they volunteered how in their families and in their communities they were expected to be responsible for their behavior, how honesty was assumed to be the rule, not the exception. They also talked matter-of-factly about a sense of duty to their country, a sentiment not much in fashion anymore.

Moreover, in their communities there were always monitors outside their own families to remind them of the ethos of their family and community. I've often said I was raised by the strict standards of my mother and father, and also of the parents of my friends, my teachers, my coaches, my ministers, and by the local businessmen who didn't hesitate to remind me "that's not how you were raised."

Those qualities didn't show up in a statistical survey of America's strengths as the country steeled itself for what seemed an unavoidable war, but they were critical to the nation's preparations,



COURTESY WESLEY KO

Wesley Ko, June 1944

for success depended as much on personal resolve as it did on tanks and planes and ships and guns.

The idea of personal responsibility is such a defining characteristic of the World War II generation that when the rules changed later, these men and women were appalled.

Wesley Ko is one of them. In 1988, at the age of seventy, his printing business failed, in part because of government regulations and in part because a relocation deal was seriously flawed. Ko was left with a debt of \$1.3 million, a loan he'd personally guaranteed. It never occurred to him to declare personal bankruptcy. Ko had learned early in life the meaning of responsibility and self-sufficiency.

Ko grew up in the Philadelphia area, the son of a Chinese man brought to this country by an American missionary. His father was educated at Princeton and at Temple University and became pastor of a Methodist church for Chinese immigrants in Philadelphia. His mother was the daughter of a Chinese coolie brought to America to work on the railroads, one of the laborers who in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were subjected to the same vicious racial discrimination that African Americans suffered. They were treated like an alien and subhuman population, restricted to the backbreaking work on the railroad, or to hand laundries in their own well-defined ghettos.

Ko's father hoped to escape that with his education, but the Great Depression was especially hard on preachers, who were dependent on their congregations for financial support. Wesley's father was just able to hold on to the family residence by opening a small laundry. Wesley, a bright young man, had hoped to go to college, but it was out of the question in those difficult times.

He went to work in a printing company, and when the war broke out his boss offered to get him a deferment, but Wesley's buddies were all signing up and he wanted to volunteer as well. He was assigned to the officer's training school at Fort Benning, Georgia, and after ninety days he was a second lieutenant in the 82nd Airborne.

"I was apprehensive," he says, "being the only Oriental in the 82nd. I think the 82nd was apprehensive too; I wasn't assigned right away. I guess they thought Orientals couldn't be leaders. I

didn't make an issue of it. I was born and raised in this country and I didn't think I was any different." Asian complexions were real burdens for American citizens when their country was at war with Japan; too many of their fellow citizens made no distinction between the enemy and the Asian Americans in their midst. In the end, the Army did recognize Wesley Ko's qualities and installed him as a platoon leader in a new outfit: the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment.

It was the daredevil and dangerous new way to transport troops, including Dr. Van Gorder and his medical unit, when D-Day was launched. A pilot and a copilot steered the glider to what was a controlled crash landing in difficult terrain, ferrying thirteen troops and their equipment at a time.

In the spring of 1942 Ko and his outfit sailed for North Africa, for more training sessions in the demanding conditions of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. "It was very, very hot," he recalls, "a hundred twenty degrees. We had to run for twenty minutes with our packs, then walk twenty minutes. At one point the whole regiment had dysentery. We lost more men training in Africa than in our first combat."

It was the beginning of a three-year ordeal for Wesley Ko. After training in Africa he was almost constantly in combat—first in Sicily on Mount Saint Angelo de Cava, then during the occupation of Naples with steady shelling from Germany's big guns. After Italy, it was more hard-core training, this time in Ireland and England, for the Normandy invasion. Ko was promoted to first lieutenant and given command of a mortar platoon.

On June 7, D-Day plus one, he was in a flight of 250 gliders headed for the north coast of France, where the fighting was very heavy. "When we arrived over Normandy," he says, "we started receiving machine-gun fire. We sat on our flak jackets to give us a little more protection, we were flying so low."

Ko was well trained. "I just didn't think of the danger," he says now. "I guess I was too young, too naive. But it turns out we lost twenty percent of our gliders—they never got into battle. They were either shot down or made a bad landing."

As soon as Ko scrambled from his glider, he was in the thick of the fighting. His regiment began fighting its way from village to vil-

COURTESY WESLEY KO



Wesley Ko

COURTESY WESLEY KO



Wesley Ko and grandchild

lage, losing many men along the way. Ko had some very close calls in the hellish ten days following D-Day. "I was standing next to one of the operations officers when he was shot and killed. I remember another time taking my binoculars from their case and shrapnel had blown out a lens." Another time, "for the river crossing, the engineers had set up a bridge and we just ran across. We received tremendous fire but you had to keep pushing forward. Different fellows were hit and you had to keep jumping over their bodies."

After thirty-three days straight of combat without replacements, Ko's battalion of 600 men had lost more than half, 323. And it was just the beginning of the drive for Berlin. Holland and the Battle of the Bulge lay ahead.

In the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge, that desperate but ultimately doomed attempt by Hitler to counterattack against the advancing Allied forces, Ko and his men were deployed in defensive positions, in heavy snow, to keep the enemy from overrunning Allied gains. "It was terrible weather, with snow up to your knees," he remembers, "... we had our olive-drab uniforms, so we stuck out like sore thumbs."

During one withdrawal Ko and his sergeant were the last to leave. They looked to their left and saw a company of men in snowsuits. Ko relates: "The Germans! We were startled. There were only two of us, so we had to get out of there. We ran through a creek to keep out of sight. To this day I can't remember how I ever got dry."

Ko went on to more fierce fighting at close range, in the attack on the Siegfried line. "The concrete pillboxes were so thick that not even heavy artillery was effective, so the only option was for the men to get close enough to drop grenades. But in order to get close you had to suffer a lot of casualties. In my regiment alone, which had a couple of thousand men, we had close to two hundred killed, more than seven hundred fifty wounded, and forty-nine missing in action."

Ko was promoted to captain and given command of a company as his outfit pushed east, participating in the battle for Cologne, Germany, and assisting in the capture of the 21st German army, which was trying to avoid the Russian troops advancing from the other direction. Ko and his men helped liberate the Wöbbelin concentration camp at Ludwigslust. "We dug a mass grave and made every

German citizen in the area who was aware of the situation help us and also attend the burial of the hundreds of dead inmates."

The war was at an end. Captain Wesley Ko had participated in six campaigns in two and a half years, under fire in some of the most important and ferocious battles of the war. He had accumulated enough points for a swift return home. As he put it, "Not many of us made it all the way."

On September 23, 1945, he arrived back in the United States aboard the USS *Constitution*.

When he returned from the war Ko decided to go back to his old printing-plant job, but after a year or so he teamed up with his brother and a friend to open their own business, Komak Printing. They specialized in silk-screening for advertising companies and then began doing custom work for electronics firms. It was hard work but Ko was thriving.

He married his wife, Ruth, in 1950 and they bought a home in the leafy Philadelphia suburb of Chalfont ("James Michener lived there," Ko is proud to point out). They raised a son and two daughters. It was anyone's American dream come true, but especially for the grandson of a Chinese coolie.

It didn't last.

By 1985, when he'd been in business for almost forty years, Ko faced some difficult decisions. The printing business involves a good many chemicals and waste, and the government was cracking down on disposal. His plant was outmoded. Philadelphia was losing business to other metropolitan areas.

He accepted an offer to relocate to upstate New York, in Glens Falls, near Albany. It would be an expensive move—he'd have to personally guarantee the \$1.3 million loan—but the Glens Falls chamber of commerce was offering lots of incentives and his son was interested in continuing the business there.

It all looked good on paper. The reality was a nightmare. Ko says the Glens Falls incentives took longer to get in place than promised. He was forced to shut down the Philadelphia plant before starting the other, so there was loss of income and, worse, a break in the continuity with his best customers. By the time he did get the new plant open it was too late. He went out of business after only a year.

"It was a big decision-making time. I couldn't retire. I hadn't taken out Social Security. So at the age of seventy I had to go get a job and start paying back that million-dollar loan." He adds, "I just didn't feel comfortable with declaring bankruptcy. I just didn't think it was the honorable thing to do, even though it would have been easier."

Lessons learned in training and during the war more than four decades earlier were critical during this trying time.

"In the war I learned to be self-sufficient. I matured. I learned to be a leader. When my business failed I was able to move on, whereas my wife was devastated by the loss."

Ko managed to preserve the plant's assets for his principal creditors, and his lawyers negotiated the settlement of other debts at reduced levels. Continuing to live in the small-town environment with local suppliers still carrying Komak debts on their books wasn't easy, but Wesley and Ruth persevered. He managed to get a job as a quality-control manager at a local electronics company and applied the stock options he earned toward the debts he owed. Finally, at the age of seventy-six, Wesley retired, saying, "I have no regrets."

He and Ruth now live near their daughters, in Massachusetts. He's editor of *The Glider Towline*, the newsletter of the surviving members of the 325th Glider Infantry Association. It's filled with chatty reminders of coming reunions and pictures of grandfatherly men in baseball caps bearing the regiment's insignia. One caption reads, "The youth of World War II are the senior citizens of today." A column called "Taps" gets longer with every issue, as it marks the passing of the glider veterans or their wives.

Ko's only regret is that the lessons of his generation are lost on his grandchildren. He was disappointed when his grandson quit the private school he was attending. Now, however, the young man seems to have found a calling as a carpenter, and Wesley is feeling better about his direction.

However, Wesley Ko reflects the common lament of his generation when he says, "Everything comes too easy. Nowadays you just don't make the effort like you did in our day."

LLOYD KILMER



COURTESY LLOYD KILMER

"My dad's a piece of work. He's the quintessential GI. What you see is what you get."

NOTHING CAME TOO EASY for Lloyd Kilmer, the son of a Minnesota dairy farmer. When Lloyd was eight years old his father lost the farm to the bank and the family moved onto county assistance in the nearby small town of Stewartville. It was a common migration for farm families across the Midwest and it was a traumatic time in the lives of these proud, independent people.

Typically, everyone in the family went to work wherever they could. Young Lloyd sold newspapers, sacked groceries in the local market, and ran the projector at the movie theater. When he wanted to join the Boy Scouts, a county official lent him the fifty cents for the admission fee. He didn't wear shoes in the summer so that he could have a decent pair in the winter.

He never had a bicycle as a kid, but it's not a bitter memory. "That's the way it was. There wasn't much we could do about it." What Kilmer remembers most about those years is that his father was humiliated when he had to apply to the WPA, the government relief program, for work so that he could feed his family. Kilmer says it left such a deep impression on him he made a pledge. "I never wanted to experience that sort of thing for my wife and family. I was driven toward never letting that happen."

Goals in those difficult times were modest by modern standards. Again and again I have heard from this generation, "We really didn't have any expectations." For too many of them, the idea of

Lloyd Kilmer (with his wife-to-be, Marie Beckwith) with his new wings, Pampa, Texas

any real prosperity was simply too remote. Lloyd Kilmer was the first member of his family to graduate from high school, an achievement of considerable pride. He was working as a bellhop at a hotel in Rochester, Minnesota, home of the Mayo Clinic, when the war broke out.

Kilmer, who had never been in an airplane in his life, knew immediately what he wanted to do. He wanted to become a combat pilot. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps on July 22, 1942, and was accepted for officer's candidate school. Suddenly he went from being a bellhop in a comfortable hotel in a small, prosperous mid-western city to the rigors of pilot training in a succession of bases in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Understandably, Kilmer is still very proud that he passed every test along the way and that within one year of the day that he first set foot in an airplane, he was a qualified pilot of a four-engine bomber, the B-24. His girlfriend pinned on him the silver wings and gold bar of a second lieutenant. In return, he gave her an engagement ring paid for by assigning to the jewelry store his ten-thousand-dollar military insurance policy. As he says, "My dreams had come true."

He was assigned to the 448th Bomb Group, 712th Squadron, 2nd Air Division, 8th Air Force, based in England. He was flying combat missions on a regular basis, including D-Day, June 6, 1944. From the cockpit of his plane he could see the first wave of GIs going ashore on those murderous beaches. Kilmer says it is a day that "will live in my mind and heart forever."

Twenty-three days later was another date fixed even more firmly in his memory. On June 29, 1944, his sixteenth mission, Kilmer was on a bombing run over a Nazi tank factory in Germany. He was taking heavy fire from anti-aircraft guns on the ground.

"One shell went through the wing, rupturing the gas tanks, disabling an engine, and starting a fire. Another burst knocked the propeller off an engine. Other planes were exploding all around us. We could see parachutes coming out of some—and others with no parachutes. We were in big trouble."

Still, Kilmer, who was just twenty-four years old, was confident they could make it back home or at least to the North Sea, where, if they ditched, they'd be picked up by an Allied sub or ship. "I

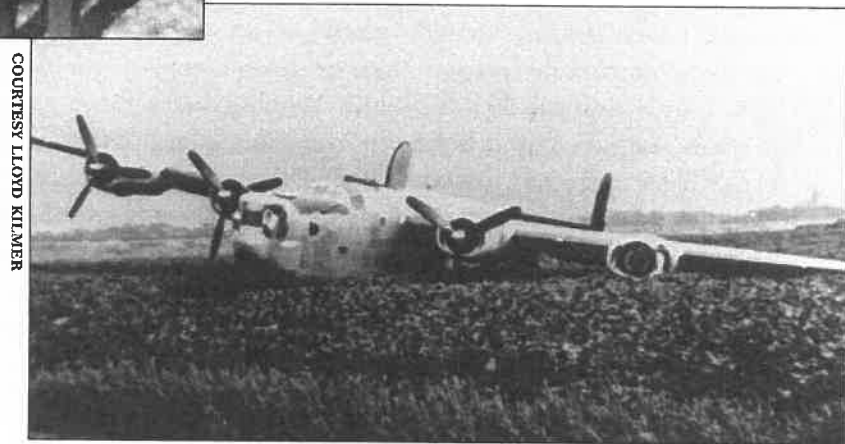


*Liberation Day—Stalag VII-A,
April 29, 1945*



*Lloyd Kilmer,
aviation cadet, 1943*

*Lloyd Kilmer's plane,
June 29, 1944, Beemster, Holland*



didn't have any real question," he says. "I had a wonderful crew. They were superbly trained. There's no doubt we could make it back. But it didn't work out for us."

They managed to put out the fires on the plane by going into a steep dive, but they were losing too much fuel to make it to safe territory. Kilmer was forced to crash-land in a potato field near Beemster, Holland. They all managed to survive the crash without serious injuries but the Germans had total control of the area, and within a short time Kilmer and his crew were all prisoners of war.

For the next ten months Kilmer was an inmate at two German POW camps. One interrogation was especially memorable for him. After days in solitary confinement, he was repeating only his name, rank, and serial number while being pressed at gunpoint for information about the 8th Air Force. Kilmer was taken to see a German officer.

Kilmer recalls, "The officer said to me, 'Mr. Kilmer, you've been very stubborn. You haven't told us what we want to know, so we're going to tell you what we know about you.'" With that, Kilmer says, the officer pulled out a book describing the activities of Kilmer's bomber squadron, its bombing reports, and biographies of the crews. Kilmer was stunned. Then the German officer said, "You think we're pretty smart, don't you? We know ninety-five percent of what's going on in the American armed forces. However, your government knows *ninety-seven* percent of what's going on in the German armed forces."

That was the end of Kilmer's solitary confinement and interrogation and it was the beginning of the long, cruel fight to survive, days of watching other inmates getting shot as they tried to escape, the same meals of watery cabbage or turnip soup, the cold nights with only a thin blanket for cover. When asked if he ever came close to just giving up the fight to live, Kilmer says, "Nope. I had a bride that I was going to marry. My mother and father, family, and great friends. No, I was going to go home." Those same thoughts were in the minds of so many veterans I interviewed. In the worst of combat or other dangerous situations they were sure they were going to survive to return to the girl back home or to their families.

Kilmer was living in squalid conditions with 125,000 other prisoners at a German camp called Moosburg Stalag 7A in the spring

of 1945. He had lost sixty pounds; his weight had dropped below one hundred. He was attending a POW church service on April 29 when the chaplain, a fellow American POW, paused to listen to the small-arms fire that had suddenly erupted around the camp and looked up to see low-flying aircraft. Kilmer chuckles as he remembers the chaplain saying, "Men, we'd better hit the deck."

Not long after that, an American tank rolled through the German barbed wire. Lloyd Kilmer's ordeal was over. To mark the liberation, the American rescuers went to a nearby church steeple where the Nazi swastika was prominently displayed on a flag. Kilmer says the men of Stalag 7A fell quiet as the swastika was lowered and an American flag was raised in its place. In a way he could not have fully appreciated at the time, that became a defining moment in Lloyd Kilmer's life.

When Kilmer got back home he married Marie immediately and the Army arranged for medical and psychiatric treatment at a prisoner-of-war rehabilitation center in Miami Beach. He was eased back into a normal life in time to use the GI Bill and attend the fall term at Creighton University in Omaha in 1946. For a young man who was proud of his high school diploma just four years earlier, this was an unexpected opportunity.

He made the most of it, getting a degree in just three years while selling real estate part-time so successfully that, when he graduated, Omaha's largest firm offered him a full-time job. Kilmer and Marie started a family. Their first son, Lloyd Jr., was born in 1950, and Frank followed four years later. Baby Boomers.

The boys remember Kilmer as a "God-and-country patriot," a stern disciplinarian, and a driven businessman. Kilmer worked long hours in real estate and in a savings and loan company, where he became an officer. He was deeply involved with ex-POW organizations and the VFW. He was a scoutmaster for the local Boy Scout troop and active in his church. He organized a law-enforcement appreciation dinner during the sixties, when "law and order" were fighting words for a new generation.

For his sons, however, Kilmer was a distant figure. Lloyd Jr. and especially Frank had a difficult time relating to him. Lloyd Jr. says his father "always had a rigid set of ethics. He would say, 'This is the way it's going to be.' Other parents threatened to send their kids to

military school. My dad followed through." Both boys went to Culver Military Academy in Indiana for a time, a point of pride for their father but far less so for them.

Frank and his father had some monumental arguments during the Vietnam War, when Frank dropped out of college. "It was a very difficult time in my family. And my father felt betrayed by his sons for not agreeing with his values and views about the war in Vietnam and about that era in general."

Kilmer became such a well-known public figure in Omaha that he ran for county clerk and controller in Douglas County, and he won as a Republican at a time when the courthouse was a Democratic stronghold. But at home he was an intensely private man when it came to his past. He never talked to his sons about his war experiences. As Frank says, "His work habits and his devotion to work were typical of men of that generation who went through traumatic experience, and his relative emotional distance was also quite typical."

The boys took their own paths in life. Lloyd Jr. recently received his PhD in education after a quarter century as a school principal. Lloyd Sr. was in the audience when his elder son received the degree. Frank left college and went into a Buddhist monastery for two years before becoming a plumber in California. Both have been married and divorced.

Their often strained relationship with their father was not unique for Baby Boomers, especially when their two worlds diverged so sharply during the sixties. The fathers were wholly unaccustomed to a permissive society. They were happy simply to be alive and, given all they had been through, they had this nagging fear it could all happen again. Their children came of age at a time when excess, not deprivation, was the rule, when their government lied about a new war, when the concepts of duty and honor were mocked.

Those were the two conflicting views of life and of the world in the Kilmer household. Now that both generations have aged and mellowed some, they're slowly finding more common ground.

For Frank it began when his parents moved to Sun City, a popular retirement community outside of Phoenix. His father noticed that Sun City's main boulevard had no flags displayed on the

Fourth of July. Ever since that day, April 29, 1945, when the swastika went down and the American flag went up near his prisoner-of-war camp, Lloyd Kilmer has looked for the Stars and Stripes. He started a campaign to do something about R. H. Johnson Boulevard. "I devised a plan to attach an American flag to each of the hundred power poles along the boulevard," Lloyd says. It's now known as the Boulevard of Flags. Red, white, and blue American flags flutter every twenty yards or so along the thoroughfare that leads to the spacious retirement homes of so many World War II veterans.

They dedicated the Boulevard of Flags on Presidents Day 1989. Lloyd was honored for his role with the Patrick Henry Award for Patriotism, one of the highest awards of the American Legion.

Frank says of his dad, "He will brag about his involvement with the POWs and the VFW and the flag thing. But what I really appreciate about him is how he took care of my mother for ten years when she was really ill."

Shortly after they retired in Arizona, Marie had a series of health problems—a broken hip, then a stroke followed by Alzheimer's disease. The American dream for the Kilmers turned into a nightmare of emotional and physical pain. Lloyd never complained. He simply took care of the love of his life, hiring a nurse a few afternoons a week so he could go shopping. It went on for almost ten years before Marie died. Frank, who had continued following the Buddhist faith after his earlier feuds with his father, was deeply impressed and, for the first time, felt a real bond with him.

They grew even closer when Lloyd met a widow after Marie died. His new love, Ruth, had been married for half a century to another ex-POW. She was a former schoolteacher and the daughter of a small-town Iowa banker. It was a perfect match, but Frank remembers how his father was worried. "He needed affirmation it was okay," Frank says. "What better person to get validation for something he perceived as unconventional than from his nonconformist son?"

Lloyd and Ruth are married and they think of their life in Sun City as paradise. Since her first husband was also a POW, Ruth knows never to serve *anything* containing turnips or cabbage. She also knows to say Lloyd's name softly if she wants to awaken him

from a nap; an unexpected touch or a loud "Wake up!" startles him still.

Lloyd remains active in the campaign to get a constitutional amendment to make it illegal to desecrate the flag, and he often attends reunions of his old bomber squadron held by the Ex-POW Association.

As his son Frank says, in a mixture of affection and admiration, "My dad's a piece of work. He's the quintessential GI. What you see is what you get."

GORDON LARSEN

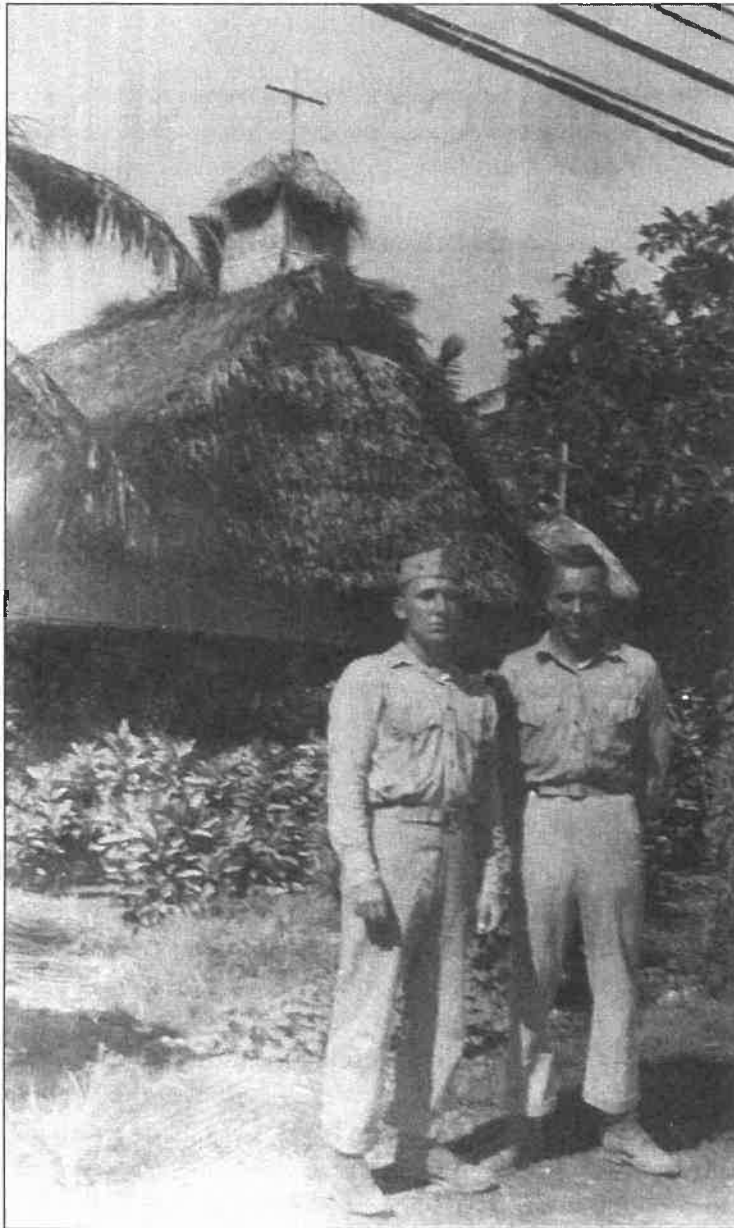
"I didn't talk about the war much. I spent most of my time trying to forget it."

FOR LLOYD KILMER, the war and his experience as a POW was a central theme throughout his life, even if he didn't share that with his family. Other veterans shoved their war experiences to the far corners of their lives and sealed them off as best they could. They could never completely erase the memories or the residual effects of their training, but they were determined to start an entirely new life once the war ended.

In 1953, when I was living in a small town constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers along the Missouri River in South Dakota, I was surrounded by the young veterans of World War II who were busy making up for lost time: raising families, earning a living by building the large hydroelectric dam across the Missouri on this isolated stretch of the Great Plains, trying to forget what they had been through just a few years earlier.

As a talkative kid, friendly to grown-ups, I heard lots of stories about their days during the Depression or their long-ago sports achievements or hunting and fishing lore, but I cannot recall any of the veterans sitting around telling war stories. It just wasn't done.

I do remember one startling comment, however. It came from Gordon Larsen, a popular member of the community. He was a stocky, cheerful young man who worked on a crew that kept the electrical, heating, and plumbing systems going in the town. He had such a lively sense of humor that it was almost worth it to have your furnace break down. Gordon always kept up a lively chatter while he worked on it.



COURTESY GORDON LARSEN

Gordon Larsen (right) at Guadalcanal, 1942

So it was surprising that the morning after Halloween he came into the post office, where my mother worked, and complained about the rowdiness of the high school teenagers the night before. My mother, trying to play to his good humor, said, "Oh, Gordon, what were *you* doing when you were seventeen?"

He looked at her for a moment and said, "I was landing on Guadalcanal." Then he turned and left the post office.

It was a moment that made a deep impression on Mother. She shared it with me when she came home that evening, and we have talked about it often. It was so representative of how quickly times had changed for young people.

Gordon is now seventy-three. He's retired from the Army Corps of Engineers after thirty-five years, having moved on from fixing furnaces to operating the sophisticated control systems in the powerhouses of dams in South Dakota, North Dakota, and Washington. He was surprised when I told him my mother and I remembered that moment in the post office. "I didn't talk about the war much," he said. "I spent most of my time trying to forget it."

Gordon quit high school in Omaha to join the Marines in 1941, following the path of his older brother, Jim. He trained in San Diego with the 3rd Marine Division, 9th Regiment, and immediately shipped out for the Pacific, where he carried the heavy Browning automatic rifle ashore at Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Guam, and Okinawa, participating in some of the heaviest fighting of the war.

He hooked up with Jim, then nineteen, in the 3rd Marines, and they went ashore together at Bougainville. It was a bloody, unforgettable day for Gordon. His brother was hit almost instantly, severely wounded, on the beach. Gordon remembered it vividly. "He bounced around," he said. "He was really hit."

Jim was down in an exposed position, and every time a rescue effort was launched, the Japanese opened up. Gordon's commander told him they couldn't do anything until dark. Jim lay there all day, his life draining from him. Finally, once it was nighttime, they were able to get him back to their lines and transported to a waiting ship.

But too much damage had been done. Gordon's brother died two weeks later in a Denver hospital.

As he told me this story, unprompted, on a telephone call across forty-five years, Gordon's voice grew husky and more distant. "I haven't"—he hesitated and then went on—"I haven't talked about this hardly ever."

He said he still has nightmares about his days in combat, and when I knew him, in the early fifties, when the memories were especially fresh, he said he thought about it all of the time, even when he was entertaining us while fixing our furnace.

There were no psychiatrists in our small community for him to see, even if he had been inclined, which he wasn't. "I just wanted to forget," he said, "I just wanted to get on with my life." Gordon said that when he went into a bar in those days and heard guys talking about combat, it made him sick, so sick he'd just walk out rather than stick around and share the painful memories. Besides, he always figured those who were willing to talk about combat had never really experienced it.

After all the bloody fighting across the island chains leading to Japan, Gordon's outfit was on Guam, preparing to board ships that would take them to the invasion of the mainland. Then word came of the surrender of the Japanese. Gordon's shooting war was over.

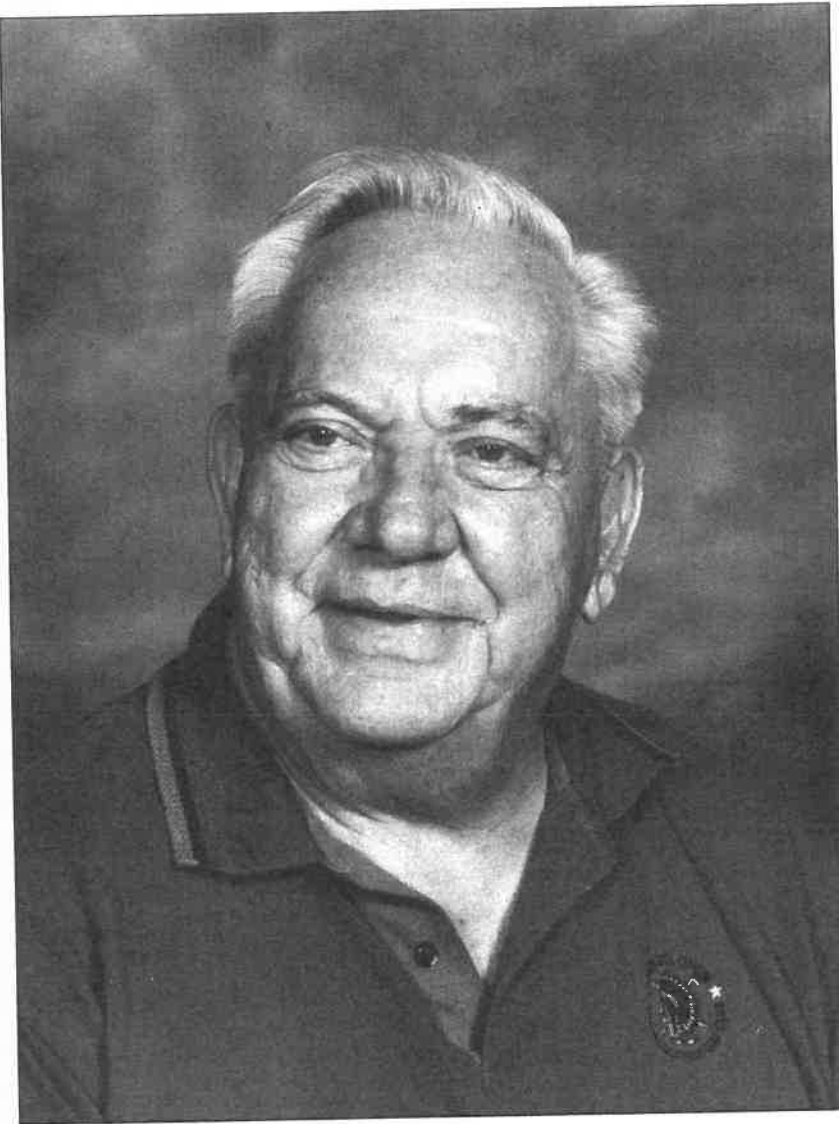
He came home with his unit. There had been 240 men in it when he left San Diego three years earlier. Only eight returned. Gordon says he's never been in touch with any of them. He doesn't want to revisit those days.

He does credit the Marines, however, and that awful experience during his formative years with giving direction to his life. He said he was a wild kid, and he didn't know what would have happened without the discipline of the Marines and the sobering experiences of war.

He came home a man, went to school nights to get his high school diploma, and worked days learning the trade of a furnace-and-heating-system technician. "I was never out of work," he proudly recalled. "I never had to take the 52-20 program"—a government subsidy for returning veterans who couldn't get work—twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks.

Most returning veterans went to work or back to school as swiftly as possible. They were acutely aware of what they had lost in their training years. In fact many of them to this day just subtract three, four, or five years from their chronological age in good humor,

COURTESY GORDON LARSEN



Gordon Larsen

laughingly explaining that those were the years they lost during the war.

Gordon's choice of furnace-and-heating work proved to be a good fit. It was a skill in demand, for America was in a building boom and home heating was changing over from coal to oil. After fixing furnaces on Army Corps of Engineers projects, he stepped up to powerhouse operator on the Corps' big hydroelectric dams in the Midwest and West.

He met his wife, Amelia, on the job in Omaha and they raised six children, four boys and two girls. Gordon reveres his Marine Corps connection but he's also grateful his sons never had to serve. As he said of his Marine days, "It was a million-dollar experience, but I wouldn't give you a plugged nickel to go through it again."

Part of that experience was learning the lessons of loyalty and family. As his Marine buddies had been his family in training and in combat, he carried that attitude into his civilian life. He said, "It's hard to explain, but my friends are like my family. I found out in the Marines what that can mean in life, and I'm still that way today."

Life didn't always work out the way Gordon had hoped. When he already had six children of his own and was working two jobs to make ends meet, he took in a young Sioux Indian as a foster child. He just felt sorry for the tot, whose parents were both in jail. The boy lived with the Larsens for several years but grew increasingly difficult to control, at one point attempting to burn down their house. They were forced to send him back to the reservation and they've never heard from him since. This is not an unusual occurrence when white families try to raise young Indians. The cultural differences often become too great to be successfully managed, but Gordon still feels disappointed that it came to a bad end. It was not what he had learned in the Marine Corps, to lose a family member because there was no common ground.

When I talked to this ordinary man with such extraordinary experiences during his teenage years, I was sorry that he hadn't shared them with the young people in our community during the fifties. I understood, of course, why he didn't want to revisit those nightmare years, but I am confident we could have learned something from him.

World War II left another mark on Gordon Larsen—he's an unabashed patriot. That's a part of American life lost on younger generations, he believes. It's a common refrain among World War II veterans, forged as they were on the anvil of military discipline and the call to duty to defend their country against real peril. "Whenever I hear Taps or see a flag go by, I get tears in my eyes. Even now," he said, "and I'm seventy-three."



COURTESY CHARLES BRISCOE

Charles Briscoe, high school, 1936

CHARLES BRISCOE

"If you've got a job, there's a way to do it. As a farm kid I didn't have anyone to ask; I just had to figure it out. So when I went to Boeing, that's just what I did."

AMERICA WAS a modern industrial power when it entered the war, and so the machinery was already in place for converting production from domestic needs to the tools of war—tanks, jeeps, ships large and small, submarines, small-bore rifles, and artillery pieces large enough to launch a shell the size of a full-grown hog. No industry was as busy or as inventive as the airplane business. Aircraft designers were drafting new fighter planes and long-range bombers almost daily.

All this production required another kind of army—one of workers. There was no shortage of men and women ready to earn a steady wage after the long, lean years of the Great Depression. Moreover, most of them were used to hard work and long hours. Many had grown up on farms where the days ran from daybreak to past sundown, where work meant just that—work—the back-breaking, callus-making kind of work in hayfields and cattle barns, in primitive kitchens and rudimentary laundry rooms.

Charles Briscoe grew up as the son of an itinerant farmer who moved restlessly across the Great Plains, looking for work. Briscoe came of age in the Dust Bowl. "On the fourth of March, 1935," he says, "I was in a car being pulled by my uncle's car. It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining. Then it turned dark as quickly as you can clap your hands. I could see nothing. I got out of the car and felt my way to his car. My mother lit a coal-oil lamp and held it in the window of the house and we drove toward that."

He tells another story about all that dust in those days. "My mother would hang wet sheets over a frame on our bed to keep the dust out of our lungs when we went to bed. The neighbors all around us lost children because they didn't take the precautions my mother did."

And two more stories of those days of poverty:

"One of the happiest days of my life—I was about in the seventh grade—we were farming in Kansas and I was trying to plow with a team of horses, walking behind, trying to keep the plow straight. My dad came home with wheels and a seat for the plow. I'll never forget it.

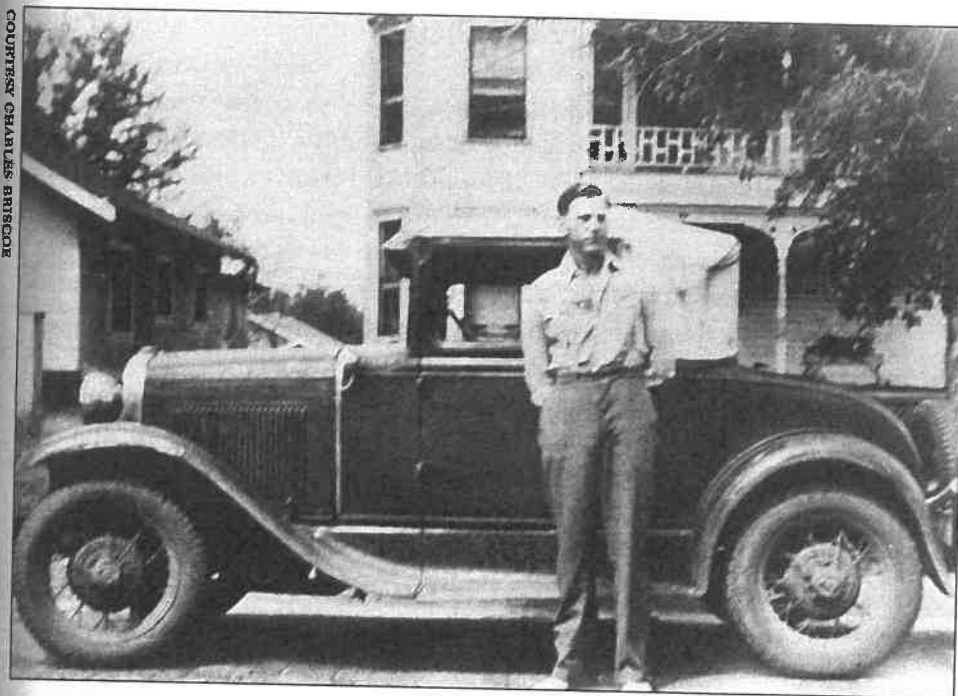
"When my mother had to have work done on her teeth we had no money, so I went to the dentist and offered to work for him in exchange for the work she needed. I washed his car and I did such a good job he hired me to work around the office. I washed the floors and the windows, cleaned the bathroom—anything he wanted. He said I was the best help he'd ever had, and he gave me the keys to the office so I could come and go when I wanted. I told him my mother taught me to clean house."

A neighbor had a John Deere tractor in need of an overhaul. He asked Charles whether he could handle the job. In fact, Charles had never worked on a John Deere, but that didn't discourage him. The neighbor's wife drove him to town to buy the parts. He took the tractor apart, installed the new parts, and put it back together again.

"I had a wonderful dad, but after any of us children got to a certain age we started working and never kept a paycheck. It all went into the family kitty. I could find a job at age fifteen when my father couldn't. I just had natural skills. I got a job cutting broom-corn by hand. The rows were a mile long. The boss told the other men that if they couldn't keep up with me, they could leave. My dad couldn't keep up, so I'd cut his row, too."

His father was having a more difficult time on his own farm, according to Briscoe. "We planted wheat five years straight and only one year the crop came in. We got twenty-five bushels an acre and sold them for twenty-five cents a bushel."

By the time Briscoe was high school age, the family was living on a farm thirty-five miles from Arkansas City, Kansas, where his sis-



COURTESY CHARLES BRISCOE

Charles Briscoe, junior college, 1938

ter was teaching school. He wanted to complete his studies, so he hitchhiked to town to attend the high school. "I studied in the city library until they closed it," he said, "and then I would pick up an abandoned newspaper and go to an abandoned house. I'd sleep on the newspapers. My main meal was salted peanuts because you could get them for a nickel. That went on for three weeks until we sold a pig. Then I could rent a room for a dollar and a half a week."

After graduation Briscoe left for California, where he enrolled in a sheet metal school, learning the ways of this new trade that blended perfectly with his eye for design and his instinct for a job well done. He returned to Wichita, Kansas, in 1940 with his new craft, for a job at the Stearman Aircraft Division, a branch of Boeing. The plant was already gearing up for the possibility of war, turning out light training planes and working on a supersecret project: the development of the B-29, the Superfortress, the long-range bomber the Army Air Corps desperately needed.

Briscoe knew the mission was urgent. "We knew the B-17s and B-24s didn't have the range to get to Japan. We had to have the B-29 to win the war and get the men home from over there. We worked seven days a week, often twelve to fourteen hours a day." He says Boeing tried to find farm boys for their workforce "because we were used to long hours. Out on the farm we got up at four A.M. to milk the cows and then milked them again at eight-thirty that night. So hard work wasn't anything." There was another dividend for Boeing in hiring farm boys at a time when the aircraft industry was in a do-or-die creative phase. Farm boys were inventive and good with their hands. They were accustomed to finding solutions to mechanical and design problems on their own. There was no one else to ask when the tractor broke down or the threshing machine fouled, no 1-800-CALL HELP operators standing by in those days.

My father, Red Brokaw, was a blue-ribbon member of that fix-it generation. My mother learned not to say aloud that she needed, say, a new ironing board, because my father would immediately build her one. She liked to buy something from the store occasionally. When I was a young man in need of spending money I mentioned that I could mow many more lawns if I had a power mower. I had a snazzy new model from Sears Roebuck in mind. My father went to his workshop and built a mower using an old wash-

ing machine motor, welded pipes for handles, a hand-tooled blade, and discarded toy wagon wheels mounted on a plywood platform. He painted it all black and it was a formidable machine. At first I was embarrassed, but then as it drew admirers I was proud of its homespun place in a store-bought world.

During the war, Red and his pals made all of our Christmas toys. Later in life, when I took our daughters home for a Christmas visit, it snowed hard and we were determined to go sledding. By then my parents had gotten rid of all of our childhood sleds, so Grandpa Red took my daughters down to his workshop and turned out a wooden sled in less than an hour. It went down the hill as swiftly as any Wal-Mart model. My daughters, grown now, treasure the memory.

My father and his friends were like Charles Briscoe. They loved to make things work, and although they were not formally trained they had an instinct for design. Briscoe worked in tool design at Boeing. "I had to learn it all on the job because I had no experience like that whatsoever," he says. "We couldn't always get the materials we needed, so we'd make some tools out of Masonite or maple wood. They didn't last long, but then we'd make another one using just a band saw."

Briscoe's parents were also used to hard work, so he got them jobs at the Boeing plant. His father was sixty-five at the time and his mother was in her late fifties.

They were all part of a team effort to build the new, long-range airplane. Nothing like it in aviation had ever been undertaken before. Just four years earlier, Boeing had produced a total of one hundred airplanes from its Seattle and Wichita plants. Now the military wanted more than five thousand a year, including this new, long-range bomber—the first mass-produced, pressurized heavy bomber. It had a wingspan almost fifty feet longer than a modern 737. It would be the single greatest airplane program during World War II.

It was America at its inventive best. "Today you have to have FAA approval," Briscoe says, "but on the B-29 the engineers were drawing plans and we were making parts before it was approved by anyone. Some of what the engineers gave us were just pencil sketches—not even blueprints.

"We started putting beds in the B-29 because we figured the pilots would be in there a long time—but then we decided there wasn't enough room, so we had to redesign and take the beds out."

In February 1943, a prototype B-29 was tested near Seattle with tragic results. It caught fire and crashed, plowing into a building near Boeing Field. All twelve crew members and nineteen people on the ground were killed.

In June 1943 the first production B-29 rolled off the Wichita assembly line. Briscoe will never forget the moment. "All of us went out to the front of the hangar to watch the new B-29 take off, and as it took off, smoke started coming out! We thought we'd lost everything. But it turns out they'd left an O-ring off one of the oil lines.

"The next day it took off and it was beautiful. We knew we had a successful airplane. It looked as big as an apartment house—and I had built it."

What he did not know at that moment was that the B-29 Superfortress would be the means of delivering the bomb that would bring Japan finally to its knees. It was a B-29 called the *Enola Gay*, named after the mother of the pilot, Colonel Paul Tibbets, who dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima—the beginning of the end for imperialist Japan.

Charles Briscoe was not on the job the day the news came of the bombing of Hiroshima. He was in the Navy. "I was twenty-nine years old and I had two sons and I wanted the world to be safe for them, so I volunteered for the Navy in 1945. I was in for just nine months before the war was over. I definitely knew it had to be a B-29 carrying the bomb, because that was the only airplane we had that could make it that far. I was thrilled. I realized it was sad that all those Japanese died, but how many Americans would have been killed without the atomic bomb?"

After the war and his short-lived Navy career Briscoe returned to Boeing and spent the rest of his working life there, helping develop parts for the new airliners that were rapidly filling the skies around the world. Briscoe was an invaluable troubleshooter for Boeing. Going back to the time when they were inventing the B-29 day by day, he had developed a knack for designing and producing airplane parts. After he retired at sixty-seven, Boeing brought him

back at the age of seventy to work on special projects. The company tried to bring him back after his eightieth birthday as well, but there he drew the line.

He's proud of the work he did on the Boeing 737, the world's most popular airliner. The skin of the 737 was first formed by two sheets of metal that met the thickness specifications but exceeded the weight restrictions. So Briscoe and the Boeing experts designed a series of waffle-shaped cutouts on the inside to reduce the weight. It was one of many challenges the former farm boy relished during his long career at Boeing.

It's been a much better life for Charles Briscoe than he expected when he was moving around the Dust Bowl with his parents as a teenager. What he learned then, however, served him well. He learned to work. As he says, "If you've got a job, there's a way to do it. As a farm kid I didn't have anyone to ask; I just had to figure it out. So when I went to Boeing, that's just what I did."

It's a way of life for him. Now in his eighties, Briscoe is still fixing what's broken. "I buy run-down houses and remodel them and rent them. Anything that needs to be done, I do it—the plumbing, the electrical. I roof 'em, I do the Sheetrock, patch the holes, all of that."

Briscoe teaches his children and grandchildren by example. "The kids nowadays," he says, "their parents buy them fancy cars and depend on someone else to keep them running. When all my grandchildren wanted cars I bought five hail-damaged cars—we get a lot of hail in Kansas. I got them for about three thousand dollars each instead of ten thousand or fifteen thousand dollars. I welded a finishing nail in each of the dents, bent it over, ground it smooth, and filled it in with body putty. By the time we finished, the cars looked brand-new. I had my grandchildren help me so they'd learn that if you want something badly there's a way to get it."

“Hero” is a description tossed around lightly these days—like “star” or “celebrity”—another significant difference between the closing days of the twentieth century and the century’s middle years, World War II. During the war the use of the phrase “You’re a hero” was likely to bring on the quick rejoinder, “No, I’m not; I’m just doing my job here—like everyone else.” The fighting men and women were so dependent on each other and shared so many common experiences they were embarrassed to be singled out.

Some acts of heroism, however, were so breathtakingly conspicuous, so daring and vital to the military mission, they could not be overlooked or turned aside. In many instances they changed forever the lives of those who were decorated. Others who were decorated returned to the lives they would have had without the medals and the attention.

If there is a common thread among the major medal winners, it is the same modesty expressed by Army nurse Mary Louise Roberts Wilson when she received the Silver Star. Almost to a person they have said to me, “I didn’t *win* this medal. I merely accepted it for all the people who were with me.” Nonetheless, they *did* win it, and the very qualities that led them to take great risks to save others served them well once they returned home.



COURTESY BOB BUSH

Bob and Wonda Bush, wartime portrait

BOB BUSH

"Everyone should learn the meaning of that famous little four-letter word—work."

BOB BUSH has been married to his high school sweetheart, Wonda, since 1945, when they were both eighteen. They have three grown children and the comfortable lifestyle that goes with Bob's great success in the lumber and building supply business in the state of Washington. He has one blind eye to remind him of that day on a ridge on Okinawa. He went to the aid of a gravely wounded Marine officer that day, one of the deadliest days in the fight for control of the Pacific, for the planned invasion of Japan.

He has something else to remind him of that day: the Congressional Medal of Honor, the nation's highest commendation for battlefield valor "beyond the call of duty." There were 440 Medals of Honor awarded during World War II, 250 of them posthumously.

When Bob Bush earned his medal he was fulfilling a promise to his mother. As he left for basic training as a Navy medic the year before, when he was seventeen, he told her, "Mom, I'm going into the service to help people, not to kill them." Bob knew that was important to his mother, a single woman who worked as a nurse in an Oregon hospital. They had already been through so much together, mother and son.

They lived in the basement of the hospital in which Bob's mother worked and money was very scarce. But at an early age Bob

had a flair for commerce. As a teenager, when he saw how hot and sweaty it was for the men working in the holds of the ships in the harbor at Raymond, Washington, his hometown, he brokered a deal with a local grocer to supply the workers with cold soft drinks. It was a profitable enterprise and Bob learned lessons early in how to fill a need, arrange credit, and most of all, provide good service.

By 1943, however, when he was in high school, the war was raging and he wanted to be a part of it. So he dropped out of school to join the Navy medical corps. He reported for basic training in Idaho, and less than a year later he was on an amphibious assault vehicle loaded with Marines, going ashore at Okinawa for what everyone knew would be a long, brutal battle against the Japanese forces dug in on the island. It was a critical piece of geography for the Allies, as they made their way toward the Japanese mainland.

Bush now remembers shouting at one of the Marines to tell their landing-craft driver, "Slow down! We don't have to be the first onshore!" Getting ashore, however, wasn't the problem. Gordon Larsen, the man who made me laugh when he fixed our furnace, was an eighteen-year-old Marine on Okinawa and he recalls that landing day was the first of April. As he says, "I thought it was an April Fool's joke. There were no Japanese to fight us."

The main Japanese force had retreated from the advance to the south end of the island, where they were well armed and holed up in caves, prepared to make this a very costly campaign for the invaders. As the Americans moved south toward the Japanese positions, the fighting became so fierce and so unrelenting that it has a special place in the storied history of the U.S. Marines.

Thirty-two days into the campaign to take control of Okinawa, on May 2, 1945, Bob Bush was attached to a rifle company of Marines on the attack over a ridge against heavily fortified Japanese positions. Bush was constantly on the move, going from one downed Marine to another to patch them up and get them evacuated.

Then he was called to help a Marine officer gravely wounded and lying in the open on a ridgetop. Bush didn't hesitate. He went directly to the officer's side and began administering plasma just as the Japanese attacked the position. His Medal of Honor citation describes what followed:

COURTESY BOB BUSH



Bob Bush, wartime portrait

COURTESY BOB BUSH



Bob Bush and company

In this perilously exposed position, he [Bush] resolutely maintained the flow of life-giving plasma. With the bottle held high in one hand, Petty Officer Bush drew his pistol with the other and fired into the enemy ranks until his ammunition was expended. Quickly seizing a discarded carbine, he trained his fire on the Japanese charging point-blank over the hill, accounting for [the deaths of] six of the enemy despite his own serious wounds and the loss of one eye suffered during the desperate defense of the helpless man.

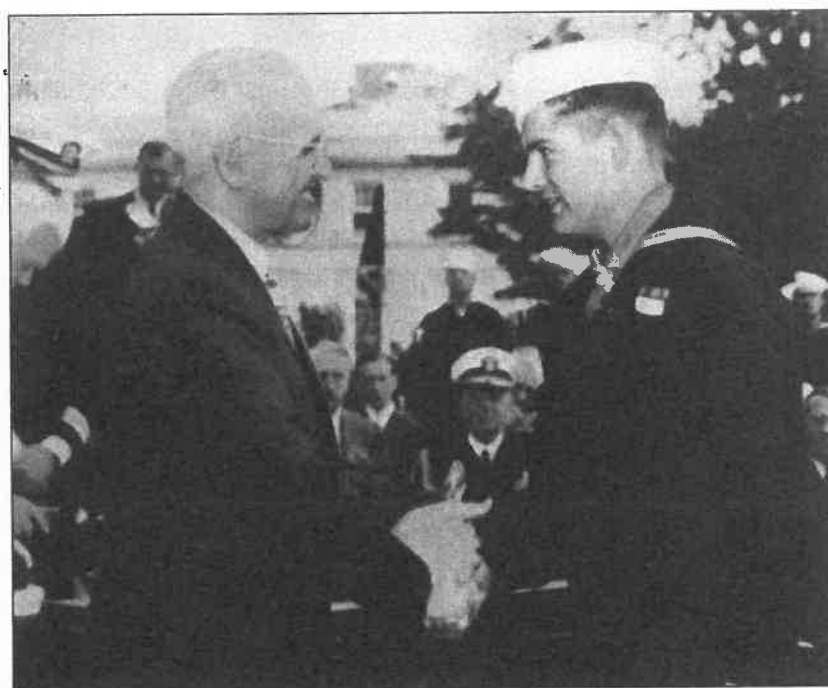
Bush finally drove off the Japanese and made arrangements for the evacuation of the Marine officer. He refused aid for himself until he collapsed from his wounds as he walked off the ridgetop. More than a half century later, he told me in a cheerful tone, "I remember thinking as the Japanese were attacking, 'Well, they may nail me but I'm going to make them pay the price.'"

Bush was shipped to Hawaii for treatment of his injuries and as soon as he was patched up, he was sent home. He'd been in the service just one year, six months, and twenty-two days but he'd seen enough of war to last a lifetime. He'd earned his right to get on with his life. As the Navy plane carrying him back passed over the Golden Gate Bridge, Bob Bush made a pledge to himself. "I was going to put everything west of there behind me. I was eighteen. I had to get back to school in the fall. I had the girlfriend back home in Washington." He knew a lot of young men were interested in Wonda and he wanted to get back to win her hand.

Wonda Spooner, a petite beauty, was eighteen as well when they were married that summer. She quickly got a notion of what life would be like with the charming and ambitious young hero back from the war and ready to take on the world. Their honeymoon was the long cross-country train ride to Washington, D.C., where Bob was to receive his Medal of Honor from Harry Truman, who had been president just a few months, following the death of Franklin Roosevelt.

Suddenly, these two love-struck teenagers were on the south lawn of the White House, surrounded by the president, his cabinet, and the legendary military leaders of the day. Wonda was getting a lot of attention from the generals and the admirals, and one of the White House organizers told Bob as they went on to a re-

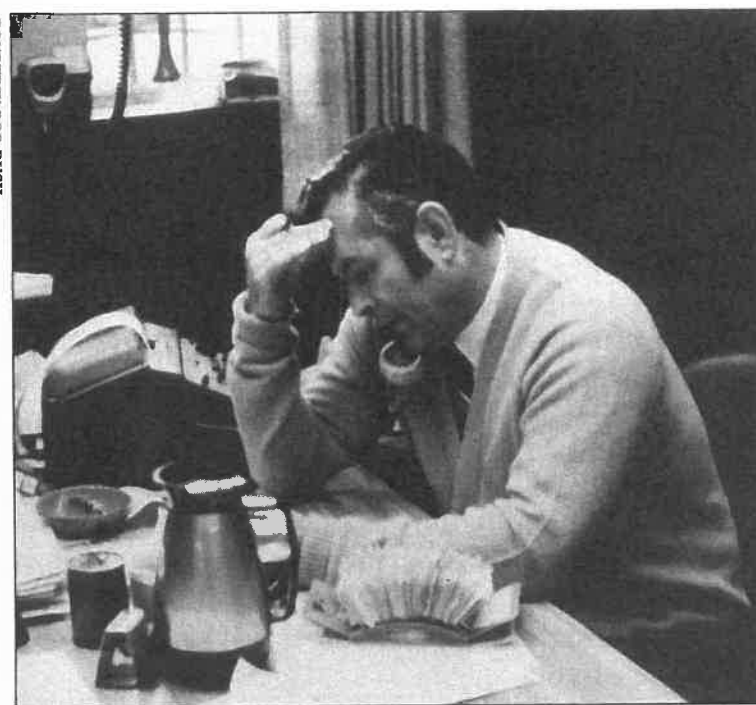
COURTESY BOB BUSH



Bob Bush shaking hands with President Harry S Truman

Bob Bush on the job

COURTESY BOB BUSH



ception at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, "Don't worry about Wonda. The admiral will keep his eye on her." Bob recalls saying, "Yeah, but who's going to keep an eye on the admiral?"

Wonda was excited because after the Washington ceremonies they were scheduled to go to New York for a parade and an all-expenses-paid tour of the Big Apple. "But Bob told me we were skipping that. We had to go back home so he could finish his schooling and get on with his business plans." A frivolous weekend in New York, however tempting, just was not in Bob Bush's plan for life.

Once back in the Northwest, Bob finished his high school requirements, enrolled in a few business classes at the University of Washington, and talked to his friend Victor Druzianich, another veteran, about buying a small lumberyard. Bob figured that with all of the veterans coming home it could be a promising business.

They named their company Bayview and they were off to a fast start in southwest Washington, buying lumber directly from the many sawmills in their area and selling it to contractors and the growing number of homeowners with money to remodel or expand. In fact, business was so good they were working seven days a week and figured they could prosper even more if they could somehow add an extra day.

They had learned in their military training how long they could go without sleep and still function, so they developed a plan. Every other week one of the partners would work a full twenty-four-hour day, driving through the night to Portland to pick up an extra truckload of lumber. That demanding schedule went on for seven years.

It was the essence of one of Bob's favorite expressions: "Everyone should learn the meaning of that famous little four-letter word—*work*." He also lived by the credo of his favorite high school football coach: "Practice as you play." To Bob Bush that meant pursuing his business goals full-time, all the time. It was the rigorous schedule pursued by so many World War II veterans. In the service they had learned the importance of identifying an objective and pursuing it until the mission was accomplished. Also, they felt they had to make up for lost time. These were children of the Depression, with fresh memories of deprivation, and the postwar years were abundant with opportunities to make real money. They didn't want to miss out.

At home, Wonda was in charge of raising the family—three boys and a girl. They later lost one of their sons in a car accident. The surviving children, Mick, Rick, and Susan, say Bob was often an absentee father, but he would tell them he was working so hard to make their lives better than his had been. Now that they have their own grown-up responsibilities they have a better understanding, but the boys still point out that their dad missed a lot of their Friday-night football games.

Summer vacations often consisted of Bob's dropping the family at a cabin on a lake and then returning to work.

Bob also put the children to work in the rapidly expanding Bayview business empire at an early age. Mick laughs now when he says, "If I put my kids in the situation he put us in, I'd be in jail." As soon as they were teenagers the boys were learning to drive forklifts and trucks in the lumberyards. Susan was always Daddy's little girl to Bob, but he didn't spare her his favorite four-letter word, either. As a teenager she had to work cleaning the toilets and other public facilities in the stores.

Wonda was the indulgent parent. She was up before everyone in the morning to get breakfast on the table, pack the school lunches, do the laundry, and act as the court of last resort if Bob refused to back down from "no," his favorite initial response to most requests. That division of family responsibility and the lines of authority were not unusual in the households of veterans across the country.

There were moments of tension in the Bush family, but Wonda smoothed them over and, besides, the kids were the beneficiaries of Bob's wartime heroics. He almost never talked about those awful days on Okinawa, but he belonged to an elite club and the family would be visited by other Congressional Medal of Honor winners, including the famous flier Jimmy Doolittle or the Marine Corps ace Joe Foss, later the first commissioner of the American Football League.

When Rick was in the eighth grade he began to become more fully aware of his father's wartime heroics, but when he asked Bob about what it was like on Okinawa he remembers his father saying only, "Well, you know, it was very difficult. We had to dig foxholes. Hygiene was terrible. We had hair lice but we had a job to do, and mine was to help people hurt in the war. I was happy to do it." Period.

As the business flourished and expanded into mobile homes, golf course construction, and ready-mix concrete—as well as the seven lumberyards and building supply stores—Bob began to relax a little. He took Wonda and Mick to the inauguration of John F. Kennedy, the first member of his generation to be elected president. It was notable for mother and son for two entirely different reasons.

Bob laughs when Wonda, to this day, gets a kind of dreamy expression as she describes meeting JFK at a White House reception. “He looked right into my eyes,” she says, “and even though I didn’t vote for him, I certainly thought he was handsome and charming.”

Mick remembers another reception for the Congressional Medal of Honor winners. Former president Harry Truman was the speaker. Mick was just ten years old but he could hardly believe what he was hearing. Truman was recalling his favorite Medal of Honor recipient. The former president said it was a young man from the West Coast who had promised his mother that he was going into the service to help people, not to kill them. Mick knew Truman was talking about his dad, but Bob did nothing to draw attention to himself, not even when he introduced Mick to Truman as the reception was winding up.

Rick was also struck by the modesty of the Medal of Honor winners. He noticed something else about those common men who acted with uncommon valor. “For them,” he says, “responsibility was their juice. They loved responsibility. They took it on head-on, and anytime they could get a task and be responsible, that was what really got ‘em going.”

Nonetheless, Rick struggled for a time as a teenager when he realized what he’d have to live up to with Bob as a father. He acknowledges they clashed over lifestyle and values for a while, but he always tried to understand what his father had been through in the Depression and the war. As he puts it, “I try to assimilate his values but I also try to show him the difference.” Bob has another way of describing it. “Rick,” he says, “is a Porsche and I am a Volkswagen.”

Now that the children are in their forties, with kids of their own, and Bob and Wonda are in their seventies, they have a new Bush generation as common ground. Bob manages to work into almost

every conversation the success of a granddaughter who graduated from Pepperdine College and immediately got a high-paying job with a Fortune 500 company. Or another granddaughter, a star basketball player, who’s also going to Pepperdine on a scholarship from the Medal of Honor Society, an organization made up of all living recipients of the coveted decoration. His daughter, Susan, a schoolteacher married to a building contractor, says, “Dad is all about family now. He built an extra-large house in Palm Springs so he can take care of all the grandchildren.”

The boys, Mick and Rick, also have a keen appreciation of Bob’s business skills. They followed him into the company, but on Bob’s terms. He sold each of them a lumberyard and building-supply store so they could be independent. As he put it, “I’m not going to give you the business. I am going to give you the opportunity.” He financed the purchases but they’ve had to make the payments.

He’s also available for advice, including the Bob Bush rules for operating a successful business. He told the boys that when they’re asked how the business is going, answer “Good,” never say “Great,” because your customers will think you’re doing too well. Don’t say “Terrible,” because they’ll think you’re about to go broke. He also told them to stay away from personal relationships with women who work in the business, and from stating their personal opinions about politics and religion in the office.

For their part, they’ve gotten him to relax a little more. As Rick says, “He’ll now play nine holes of golf. In the past he’d only play six holes before rushing back to the office.” Susan thinks she’s helped him lower the emotional walls a bit. She says, “He is a lot more loving and he hugs more than he used to, he’s a lot more emotional and openly affectionate.” Bob listens to all of this with a mixture of pride and bemusement.

So does Wonda, sitting just off to the side, looking a little wan. She’s going through a difficult bout with cancer and the prognosis is not encouraging. Bob is spending all of his time with her, consulting with doctors, trying to make her comfortable. She remains the light of his life. Besides, he agrees with their children when they say, as Mick put it, “My mom is the bravest person in this family today.” And Susan adds, “And Dad wouldn’t be where he is without my mom.” Rick chimes in, “I’ll second that.” Bob, the wartime

hero and tough-guy businessman, looks at Wonda adoringly and smiles.

Bob Bush was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for conspicuous valor on Okinawa, but it was the thought of Wonda that got him home alive. Together they have had memorable moments as a result of that medal, and certainly the prosperity that came with Bob's business success was a dividend, but it is their enduring love for each other and for the family they had together that is their greatest accomplishment.

JOE FOSS

"Those of us who lived have to represent those who didn't make it."

NO ONE would ever accuse Joe Foss of slowing down. Even now, at the age of eighty-two, he inhales life in big, energetic drafts. He is in many ways the quintessential World War II hero. He grew up poor on a farm in South Dakota at the height of the Depression. He lost his father when he was a teenager. He was inspired to fly when he saw another midwesterner, Charles Lindbergh, on a barnstorming tour. He worked at a gasoline station after high school to earn money for college and flying lessons. After playing football and graduating from the University of South Dakota, he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1940. He quickly became one of the Marines' most gifted pilots, and when war broke out he spent a year working at Pensacola as an instructor.

In the fall of 1942, Foss shipped out to Guadalcanal as the executive officer of a squadron of Marine F-4 Wildcat fighter planes. Foss remembers they were at sea, with their planes on a carrier, "wondering what it would really be like to finally be in the war." They found out quickly enough when they were aroused from their berths in the middle of the night with the news that Japanese submarines were in the area and the pilots would have to launch their planes early.

Foss, who now lives in Scottsdale, Arizona, remembers that once the squadron was off the carrier and headed for Guadalcanal, "I



COURTESY ROBERT CHAK

Tom Brokaw with Joe Foss, Two for the Money game show, 1957

knew what war was going to be like. As we came in low to Henderson Field on Guadalcanal, we could see bomb craters all around and the anti-aircraft guns were firing at Jap planes overhead. When we landed, the Marines on the ground gave us a big reception, cheering and everything." Those Marines were happy to have the help. They had been fighting steadily since August just to gain control of the field and hang on to it.

Foss said to one of the Marine fliers who had been there awhile, "Well, I guess you veterans will show us around." Foss says the Marine answered, "Oh, you'll be veterans, too, by tomorrow." Actually, it took a week. On October 16, 1942, Foss shot down his first Japanese Zero. By November 19 he had shot down twenty-three, an extraordinary number, but the skies over the Pacific were filled with fighter planes and bombers as the United States and the Japanese battled for control of the air and the sea lanes leading to the mainland of Japan.

In fact, on the day he shot down his first Zero, Foss was nearly shot down himself. In those days, aerial combat was practically face to face. Foss and the other pilots didn't have laser-guided weapons and sophisticated computer systems telling them when to shoot. Those aerial battles were accurately called "dogfights," two snarling high-powered fighter planes twisting and turning, each trying to get the advantage, the pilots hitting the buttons to fire the machine guns, while they continued to fly at speeds of up to 300 miles an hour at altitudes ranging from just a few feet off the ocean surface to high in the clouds.

The F-4 Wildcat was not as quick or as responsive as the Japanese Zero, so when Foss's plane was hit, he knew he was in trouble. He had three Zeroes on his tail as he went into a steep dive and then a big, wide turn, trying to get back to Henderson Field with a dead engine and his propeller free-wheeling. "The Zeroes stayed right behind me," he says, "and as I cleared the hill to land at Henderson they unloaded all their lead at me." Foss landed the plane at full speed, with no flaps and little control in what is called a "dead stick" landing. The F-4 careened across the runway and skidded to a stop just short of some palm trees. Later his ground crew counted more than two hundred bullet holes in the plane. Foss, then twenty-seven years old, sat in his cockpit, badly shaken, thinking,

Why did I ever leave the farm? Suddenly he heard the cheers of the ground crew, "kids eighteen and nineteen years old who had watched it all," he recalls, "and I said to myself, Well, you're a leader, Joe. You're in it all the way now, and from that point on I was just a full blower."

By January 1943, Foss had shot down twenty-six enemy planes, equaling Eddie Rickenbacker's record from World War I. He had been shot down and forced to ditch at sea, swimming through the Pacific waters for twelve hours until he was rescued by island natives in a dugout canoe. Two days later he was back in the air.

His exploits included a breathtaking maneuver in which he dove directly toward a Japanese battleship to deliberately draw fire and make it easier for other American planes to torpedo the vessel. As he started his dive he radioed to the rest of the squadron, "Keep it steep, girls, keep it steep." He figured a plane coming straight down would be a difficult target for the battleship guns. He was right, but it was an extremely risky maneuver. When Foss pulled out at the last moment, he was so close to the ship he could see the Japanese officers on the bridge.

He was indestructible. Though he was knocked off the flight line for six weeks by a bout of malaria, he came back to fly again. Foss, who had learned to shoot pheasants and ducks on the wing as a boy on the South Dakota prairie, was a warrior of the old school, mourning the losses of friends from his squadron but never crying. He carried a Bible and a pair of dice in his flight-suit pockets, wore a leather helmet, and chewed on a cigar when he was on the ground. He had a Marine's vocabulary and a bellowing voice. One of his squadron members would say of him, "All the balls of any man who ever walked the earth."

In the spring of 1943, the Marines decided Captain Foss had done his share and brought him home to a hero's welcome, less than a year after he had shipped out. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor and was put on the cover of *Life* magazine, the ultimate press accolade during the war. He had a hero's swagger but a winning smile to go with his plain talk and movie-star looks. Joe Foss was larger than life, and his heroics in the skies over the Pacific were just the beginning of a journey that would take him to places far from that farm with no electricity and not much hope north of Sioux Falls.

Before the war ended, he returned to the Pacific for another tour, and he was invited to Australia to brief a squadron of British Spitfire pilots. He had just started his talk when he noticed the Englishmen were not much taken with this rough-hewn Marine with the barnyard style of speaking. So, typically, he just confronted them in his direct, take-it-or-leave-it way. "I said to them, 'I know what you birds are thinking right now. You've been up there in Europe flying against the Germans, and you don't need any advice from me. Lemme give you a tip: You're going to underestimate the Zero, and when you do you're going to land on the deck.' Well, they didn't pay much attention," Foss said, "and when they went up against the Zeroes over New Guinea, seventeen or eighteen of them were killed, including their best flier." It was a moment that crystallized Joe Foss's philosophy of skill over style.

When the war was over, Foss went home to South Dakota and opened a charter flying service and a Packard car dealership before getting involved in Republican party politics, first as a state legislator and then as governor in the mid-1950s. Whatever their politics, South Dakotans like me were proud to have such a blue-ribbon war hero as the state's chief executive. We could count on our largely anonymous state getting more attention with Foss in charge.

Besides, Foss, for all of his acclaim, was a South Dakotan through and through. He loved to hunt and fish and he still knew his way around a farm. His speeches were usually rambling affairs, filled with Marine or prairie colloquialisms. For example, he still likes to remind audiences, "Hey, if we hadn't put up a scrap back there during the forties, you'd be living under the Japs or the Germans and I don't think you'd like that very much."

It was during his terms as governor that I got to know Foss personally. When I was seventeen, I was elected governor of Boy's State, a weeklong program organized by the American Legion to expose honor students to the structure of government and the challenges of politics. As governor, Foss came to a lunch in my honor and we hit it off. Later that summer, he invited me to become his partner on a national quiz show that wanted to cash in on his war heroics.

It was a very generous gesture from this nationally famous figure, to reach out to an obscure teenager and offer a spot by his side on *Two for the Money*, starring Sam Levenson, live from New York. All

of the questions were about American politics, and we won \$612 apiece, a small fortune in the preinflationary days of the fifties.

It was my first trip to New York, and when the show was over Joe asked what I was going to do. I explained I had to fly back early the next morning, but there was so much I wanted to see. He said, "I think you should stay a few extra days. I'll get in touch with your parents when I get back and tell them it was my idea." When I called home later that night to tell my folks that the governor thought I should stay a few days more, there was a long pause at the other end of the line. Finally, my father said, "Well, I think you should. You'll probably never get to see New York again."

Now that I've lived in Manhattan for more than twenty years, I often think of that night and the days that followed, when I went to Ebbets Field to see my beloved Dodgers in their final summer in Brooklyn, the trips to Greenwich Village, to the Statue of Liberty, and to the top of the Empire State Building, walking by Carnegie Hall, listening to Dixieland jazz from the sidewalk in front of the old Metropole Café at Times Square. By the end of my stay, I had a better understanding of what appealed to me and what I could handle. I knew somehow that this time my father was probably wrong. I would see New York again. Maybe Joe Foss knew that, too, as he encouraged me to stay.

In the fifties, Foss was busy on several fronts. In addition to his duties as governor, he was still flying as a senior officer in the Air National Guard and he was in demand at Marine reunions and other military gatherings around the country. But there were other challenges outside the public limelight. He had married his South Dakota girlfriend when he returned from the war, but they soon discovered that it was not a perfect union. Foss not only was gone a good deal on political or military trips, he was also an avid sportsman, so he had many invitations to far-off safaris and other hunting expeditions.

The marriage lasted longer than many troubled relationships because one of the Fosses' children suffered from cerebral palsy, another from polio. Although these challenges temporarily united the couple, they also served to put strains on their marriage. In addition, Foss's wife suffered from diabetes, a condition that would eventually take her life. The demands of their life became too much for the couple to endure, so they decided to separate.

The public by and large was not aware of the fissures in the Foss marriage. In those days the private lives of public officials remained just that, unless a scandal became too large to ignore. There was no scandal here, just a troubled marriage. Because Foss was active in the establishment of a children's hospital in Sioux Falls to treat the handicapped, and was also the national president the Society of Crippled Children and Adults, an organization dedicated to the welfare of polio victims such as his son, it was a surprise to many in his home state when the Foss divorce became public knowledge.

By then Foss had left politics, having lost a race for the U.S. House of Representatives to another South Dakotan with a distinguished war record, George McGovern, who had won one of the military's most coveted awards, the Distinguished Flying Cross, as a B-24 bomber pilot in the European theater. McGovern, a history professor, was as self-effacing as Foss was bold, but he was a much better politician, with a strong sense of his political beliefs and an ability to articulate them.

McGovern, who rarely mentioned his DFC or wartime service, went from the U.S. House of Representatives to the Senate before becoming the 1972 presidential nominee of a badly fractured Democratic party. As he campaigned hard for his prairie populist beliefs, against the Vietnam War, and for a liberal economic agenda, Richard Nixon and company portrayed him as a captive of the hippie left. McGovern was crushed in the general election, but his warnings about Vietnam and a budding scandal called Watergate proved to be prophetic. He remains one of the country's most decent and thoughtful public servants. The DFC McGovern won for landing a crippled bomber and saving his crew is much more telling about his courage and patriotism than any whispered innuendo from the crowd that saw their president resign in disgrace.

After losing to McGovern, Foss went on to become the first commissioner of the fledgling American Football League, often appearing at games in a white cowboy hat with a bolo tie around his neck, exuding enthusiasm and sharing war stories or trading hunting tips with the eager men of his age and interests.

When, by mutual consent with the owners, he left the AFL in 1966, Foss went on to a variety of other jobs, including a starring role in his own television series, *The American Sportsman*. His pri-

mary role, however, remained that of being Joe Foss, war hero, or, as he liked to say, "bull in the woods." He was a restless sort, so he liked to keep moving.

Money wasn't all that important to him. He turned down \$750,000 for the screen rights to his story in 1956, a veritable fortune at the time. He remembers the final meeting in the Polo Lounge of the Beverly Hills Hotel, what Foss called "that little café just off the lobby. I was in a booth with John Wayne on one side of me and the producer Hal Bartlett on the other. Wayne was to get a million dollars to play me. They asked me how I liked the script. I said, 'Fine—except for that romance baloney. If you're going to do a story on Joe Foss, you gotta take that out.'" The screenwriter, who had contrived a love story to go with the combat, said, "We need that to make a show for the public." Foss explains, "I just turned them down flat. It wasn't me at all."

After all, Foss knew that what he had been through in the skies over the Pacific wasn't a love story. It was kill or be killed, pure and simple. Or, as he once said, "Combat is dangerous. It tends to interrupt your breathing process."

Foss's breathing process was once almost interrupted in a freak incident, this one connected to his love of the outdoors. In the sixties, he suddenly became very ill, practically paralyzed and steadily losing weight. No one could figure out what was wrong until, finally, his condition was accurately analyzed as arsenic poisoning, probably from chewing on insecticide-soaked weeds while filming his television show.

That experience, and his second wife, DiDi, led him to a life-changing experience. Joe Foss became an enthusiastic born-again Christian. For an old whiskey-drinking, cigar-smoking master of profanity who had been an absentee father and husband for much of his first marriage, it was a complete makeover. As a fundamental Christian who takes the Bible as the literal truth, Joe Foss had found a theology to match his personal philosophy: There is no middle ground in his life.

As president of the National Rifle Association, he was proud to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine with crossed six-guns. He believes fervently in the Second Amendment to the Constitution and thinks "that crew that wants to take the Constitution a section at a time has got it all wrong. The only piece of paper that's out-

lasted the Constitution is the Bible. They both mean what they say."

In Gary Smith's riveting 1989 profile of Foss in *Sports Illustrated*, the journalist said that if Foss were "a traveling campfire, men would form a circle around him and warm themselves by the flame that men have always sought—certainty. And nudge each other in the ribs and grin and whisper, 'Isn't he a pisser.' Because even if they thought he was wrong, he was still ~~that~~ rare thing, an original, himself."

Foss has the same unapologetic attitude toward his religious beliefs. He told me his embrace of the Lord is "the greatest decision I ever made. I made it for eternity. In every speech I give I mention the Lord. I always end with, 'In Jesus' name, Amen.' Now there are those who take me aside and say, 'Joe, maybe you ought to leave Jesus out.' 'No, sir! I tell 'em."

He simply can't understand the shadings of modern life. President Clinton's lawyers arguing about the meaning of his answers under oath triggered strong memories for Foss. "Folks now just don't have an appreciation for what an oath means. When we took the oath when we were sworn into the Marines, it was a contract! That's what we went out there to defend. I can still see my pals sitting around when we weren't flying, guys like Casey Brandon and Danny Doyle, a couple of baseball players from Minnesota, talking about what we were going to do when we got back from the war. Well, they didn't get back. I lost half my squadron. We all knew what an oath was about."

Foss, for all of his strong feelings, isn't a bitter old man. He still roars to life shortly after dawn on the Arizona desert, ready to fly off to give a speech at a Marine base change-of-command somewhere, or share with others what his embrace of Christianity has meant to him. He was pleased recently when a schoolboy member of his church asked him to come to his school for a day set aside to honor American heroes. Joe chuckles when he says, "Well, I got there and I was the only living hero. All the rest were George Washington and those guys. But at least the school was studying history and thinking about heroes."

When I asked him if he thought more about those World War II days now than he did a few years ago, Foss said, "Yes, more people seem to be bringing it up. People seem to realize how the world

would be different if we hadn't put up that scrap." When I ask if he missed the old days, he answered quickly, "Oh, no. I'm not a guy who missed anything from anywhere. I've always been a guy who just gets up and goes."

It's probably that quality that made him such a cool, daring, and effective fighter pilot. It's also what makes him so engaging as a man. His unalloyed views on everything from guns to God to education to right and wrong may not match your own, but you know that he's arrived at them honestly. And if you don't agree with him, Foss, now in his eighties, may think of you as a "bird" or a member of "that crew," his all-purpose mild epithets, but he won't take time to hate you. He's too busy for hate.

As he says of his World War II experience and what it should mean to others, "Those of us who live have to represent those who didn't make it."

The transformation in the life of Dorothy Haener as a result of World War II was distinctive and highly visible, but millions of other women were experiencing their own unique odysseys at home as a result of the gender climate changes brought on by the demand for men in fighting jobs. In fact, there were 350,000 women in uniform and an estimated 6.5 million at work in war-related jobs on the home front. Harder to measure but equally important were the contributions of the women who stayed home, raised the children, taught school, clerked in schools and banks, kept the fabric of society together. At night they went to bed wondering if their sons or husbands were safe in those far-off places where they were fighting for their lives every day. All these experiences—for the women in uniform, for those assembling airplanes or ships, for the women who kept families and communities together—shaped that generation of women as much as combat shaped the men of their time. To this day they are living the lessons of those difficult and instructive times.

Colonel Mary Hallaren,
Tokyo, September 1947



U.S. ARMY PHOTOGRAPH

COLONEL MARY HALLAREN

"You don't have to be six feet tall to have a brain that works."

GENERAL JEANNE HOLM

"Did you ever see an ugly general?"

THE FACE OF WAR is almost always one of a man. The familiar images of World War II are no different: FDR as commander in chief; Eisenhower directing the D-Day invasion; MacArthur wading ashore in the Philippines; Patton astride a tank, pearl-handled sidearms prominently displayed; General Jimmy Doolittle, his smiling face poking out of a cockpit; Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima; B-24 pilots, their caps at a jaunty angle; Navy chiefs at their battle stations; GIs in a foxhole. The male was in his historic role as warrior.

Early in America's war effort, however, it was clear there were not enough men to do all the fighting and to fill all the support jobs such a massive military undertaking required. There was a desperate need for military clerks, drivers, telephone operators, medical technicians, cooks, and couriers. The Women's Auxiliary Corps—the WACs—was created to help fill the need. It was the beginning of a radical change for America's military services that continues to this day.

Mary Hallaren was a natural for the WACs. She was a junior high school teacher in her home state of Massachusetts when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Her brothers all enlisted immediately and she was not far behind. "To me," she says, "there was no question but that women should serve." The Army recruiter wasn't so



COURTESY JEANNE M. HOLM

Jeanne Holm,
Women's Auxiliary Corps, 1942

sure, especially when he sized up Mary Hallaren, who's only five feet tall, by asking what someone so short could do in the Army. She answered, "You don't have to be six feet tall to have a brain that works."

The idea of enlisting in the war effort was really just an extension of her adventurous ways. She was a schoolteacher who, during summer vacations, went on long hitchhiking trips across Canada, Mexico, Europe, and even China—a highly unusual undertaking for women in those days. During a visit to Munich in the thirties she had been present at a Hitler rally. At the time, he was getting little notice in the United States. She was struck by the buildup preceding his arrival, but as for her, "He just didn't make such a strong impression." Little did she know then that he would change the course of history, and of her life, forever.

Jeanne Holm, another woman with a taste for the unconventional life, was living at the other end of the country from Mary Hallaren—in Oregon—when the Army formed the WACs. Jeanne was working as a radio technician for the U.S. Forest Service, the tomboy daughter of a divorced mother. Her brothers were already in the Navy. She signed up for the WACs, never guessing that her life's course was taking a new and rewarding direction. "At the time," she says, "the only reason women went into the military was to serve the country; we wanted to help America win the war and come home. No one thought of a career."

Holm began as an Army truck driver but was quickly accepted to officer's candidate school and assigned to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, where she rose to the rank of captain and spent the war training WAC recruits. One of her brothers, John Holm, a Navy officer, wasn't impressed when she enlisted, but when Jeanne returned to their Oregon home on leave wearing her captain's bars, their common experience of military responsibility was a leveling influence. "I found I really admired her," he said. "She was a person in her own right and very bright."

Other men were no doubt coming to the same conclusion in their one-on-one experiences with women in the military, but it remained a world dominated by men.

It was the world Mary Hallaren was determined to alter. Given her self-confidence and worldliness at such a young age, it was little wonder the Army promoted her swiftly once the Women's Auxiliary Corps was founded.

COURTESY COLONEL MARY HALLAREN

Newsweek

MAY 21, 1951 20c



Wac Col. Hallaren: Boss of the Ladies' Legion

Colonel Mary Hallaren, 1951

She commanded the first battalion of WACs sent to England and immediately began a lifelong campaign for women to be taken seriously in the military. "At first," she says, "they only allowed the WACs to be clerks, telephone operators, cooks, drivers, but by the end of the first year WACs were filling more than two hundred jobs, including the job of cryptographer. The men discovered the women were very quick to pick up new things—they could do many jobs."

During the war Mary served in England, France, and Italy and so impressed the brass that when the fighting ended Dwight Eisenhower asked her to oversee the upgrade of the WACs from the Women's Auxiliary Corps to the Women's Army Corps, which would give women a permanent part in the military establishment for the first time. It was a hard sell in the House of Representatives, especially in the Armed Services Committee.

Mary, who was put out front by General Omar Bradley and other returning heroes of the war, remembers the House Armed Services Committee wanting to rename the bill The Reserve Act of 1948. "They felt," she said, "the cost of integrating women into the service would be prohibitive—because when women reached menopause they'd be worthless!

"We organized men who were now out of uniform to lobby the committee members. After a few weeks I got a call from a staff member of the committee and he said, 'Call off this lobbying and letter-writing campaign. We can't handle it all.'" The committee finally agreed that women should become a permanent part of the military as WACs (Army) and WAVES (Navy). "That was a major step toward the role of women in the military today." It was a profound change for the place of women in American society, not fully appreciated at the time and not fully accepted by military traditionalists even now.

By then Jeanne Holm was back in Oregon, attending Lewis and Clark College on the GI Bill, still uncertain what she wanted to do with her life. A letter arrived from the newly named Defense Department, informing her of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act and inquiring whether she'd like to be considered for regular duty. She left immediately in her car for Fort Lee, Virginia.

"I was flat broke," she says, "so as I drove across the country I had to sleep in my car for two or three nights. When I got to Fort

OFFICIAL NATO-SOUTH PHOTO



Jeanne Holm, AIRSOUTH, NATO, Naples, Italy, 1957

COURTESY JEANNE M. HOLM



Promotion to major general, 1973

COURTESY JEANNE M. HOLM



Jeanne Holm, at the White House with President Ford

Lee for the physicals and exams, I remember that first night listening to the bugle calls and Taps and realizing how much I missed the military.”

Mary Hallaren was promoted to colonel and took charge of the new branch of the U.S. military, the Women’s Army Corps. She was called the “Little Colonel” because of her diminutive stature, but when it came to promoting a wider role for women in the military she was a towering figure, a godmother to the women who continued to struggle to find their places in the male-dominated military establishment. Her assistant, Mary Lever, recalls visiting WACs stationed abroad. “Wherever we went she’d get a standing ovation—the enlisted people adored her.”

Mary Hallaren was the first American woman to achieve the rank of colonel, but under the 1948 legislation that was the highest rank for women in the military, so she decided to retire in 1960. Her seminal work for women in the U.S. military, however, cleared the way for the eventual dissolution of the WACs and WAVES in the 1970s and the integration of women into all branches of the service.

By then, Jeanne Holm was well on her way to a distinguished military career, having served in Germany during the tense time of the Berlin airlift in 1948. She had been assigned to the Air Force, and she was the war plans officer at Erding Air Force Base near Munich, responsible for determining how Erding’s massive supply depot would be protected if war broke out with the Soviet Union. She was the first woman selected to attend the Air Force Air Command and Staff College.

Major Holm represented the Air Force at the Army’s mustering-out ceremony for Mary Hallaren, and they began a long, deep friendship that grew out of their shared sense of adventure, duty, and commitment to an equal role for women in the military and the civilian worlds.

Mary was leaving the military but that did not mean the end of her service to the nation or to women. After her retirement, she heard from a friend about a new organization called Women in Community Service, WICS. It grew out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, when women’s organizations found common ground and common strength in the fight for equal rights for black Americans. Why, they wondered, don’t we have a common cause for women?

Representatives of the National Council of Catholic Women, the National Council of Jewish Women, Church Women United, the National Council of Negro Women, and other organizations began to meet secretly to see what could be done. About that time President Kennedy’s brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, was trying to recruit women for the new Job Corps, one of Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty projects.

Shriver approached the women who had been trying to find a new crusade and asked them for help. They decided it was exactly the kind of mission they had been trying to define, so they helped organize WICS, which became the recruitment wing of the Job Corps. Mary Hallaren was the first executive director.

“I moved right into it,” she said. “The military was good training. I liked the challenge.” One of the officers of WICS has a vivid memory of her first encounter with the Little Colonel. “I heard this sound. I thought, ‘Is there a loudspeaker in here?’ It was Mary. She was saying, ‘*Atten-shun!*’ in that military voice. She looks like a cute schoolmarm with those braids, very cute, but when she barks an order she can stop you in your tracks.”

Mary agreed just to get WICS off the ground. She thought she’d stay for six months; in fact, she stayed for thirty-four years, leading WICS through its formative years, when the primary role was to attract young women into the Job Corps, and into the modern era. WICS is now a full-service organization for women in trouble: it is one of the great success stories to grow out of the War on Poverty of the Johnson years. It’s a vibrant organization headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, where it coordinates a national network of local chapters and their work with poor young women who desperately need help developing job and child care skills.

More than six thousand volunteers work in the WICS centers, some of them graduates of the very programs they now help staff. In the Pacific Northwest they work with women about to be released from jail. In San Diego WICS is a sanctuary for young women who want to get out of the southern California gangs’ way of life and into the mainstream. The New Orleans chapter has a program for moving women from welfare to self-sufficiency.

Mary Hallaren got all of that started. One of her successors as executive director said, “For an organization that was putting together a really radical coalition in 1965, Mary was able to articu-

late the value of putting all those resources together." And, in a tribute to Mary's military training, she added, "And mobilizing; she knew how to mobilize resources for poor women. She's a big-picture person."

This five-foot dynamo, after a lifetime of helping women—first in the military and then in the inner cities across America—was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame shortly before her ninetieth birthday. She reacted with her characteristic modesty. "I just happened to be fortunate enough to have been with two organizations that really did a terrific job for women." In fact, those two organizations—the WACs and WICS—were fortunate to have Mary Hallaren in the forefront in their formative years. One more example of how World War II, in ways no one could have anticipated, elevated the place of women in American society.

While Mary left the service, Jeanne Holm continued to find her challenges in uniform. She returned from Europe to work in the Pentagon as personnel director for the director of the women in the Air Force. The Air Force allowed her to return to Lewis and Clark College so that she could complete her degree.

Still a major, she then spent four years at NATO headquarters in southern Europe as director of manpower. She loved her work, but in the back of her mind she knew there were limits to how far she could go. There were quantitative and qualitative quotas written into the 1948 legislation accepting women into the military. They could represent no more than 2 percent of the total armed forces, and there was that clause restricting their top rank to colonel.

Holm began to bang up against the ceiling when she finished another Pentagon tour and asked permission to attend the Officers College to study management. "No woman had ever been considered and when I asked the two-star general in charge he said, 'You have no future in the Air Force. I'm not going to waste a quota on you.' Well, I thought, that's it for me."

Instead, someone higher up in the chain of command had a better idea. Holm was appointed director of the women in the Air Force and immediately set out to make some long overdue changes. She worked to overturn the Air Force policy of automatically discharging women with children, arguing that the Air Force had no right to make a judgment about a woman's ability to raise

her children by pointing out, "We do not meddle in this fashion in the private affairs of male personnel." She made sure married WAFs (Women in the Air Force) received the same pay and housing allotments as their male counterparts. These were issues she felt personally, for she had never married, knowing that if she did, she'd be automatically discharged.

"It was 1965," she says, "and the women's movement was beginning to hit the fan. What was going on in the country was beginning to be reflected onto the women in the military. Even the smallest gain was an effort; I had two-star generals laugh at me." For a time Holm was so discouraged that she almost retired, but then she got a new boss, Lieutenant General Robert Dixon, who rescinded the standing discharge orders for Air Force mothers.

Holm went to Vietnam and argued with base commanders to accept women in support roles. "Some of these commanders had such a paternalistic attitude. They kept saying, 'What if a woman gets hurt?' But they ran out of nurses, so the first Air Force women to go over were nurses."

There was a breakthrough for women, however. In 1968 President Johnson signed legislation lifting the restrictions from the 1948 act integrating women into the service. For the first time women were not restricted to a numerical quota, and the lid was off on promotions. "It opened up opportunities to women that had been arbitrarily closed before, but no one took it seriously as a threat to the generals and admirals," Holm recalled.

Nonetheless, Major Holm was on a fast track to that most coveted rank, general. By 1971 she was the Air Force's first female one-star, a brigadier general. Two years later she was director of the Air Force Personnel Council and received her second star: Major General Jeanne Holm. "It meant one of the male one-stars wasn't going to be promoted. For the most part, I got a lot of letters congratulating me, but there were a few guys who were ruffled."

She was also developing a new generation of women officers for the Air Force. Wilma Vaught, now a retired brigadier general, remembers, "When I went into the service in 1957 I was told, 'Don't try to influence your assignments, just do as you're told.' What I didn't realize was that General Holm was up there looking out for me and for several other women with good records. She made sure

we got the assignments and schools that would help us move up. She was always so happy to see women promoted and succeed. She was always on the front lines, making speeches and addressing women's concerns when other people would not."

When General Holm retired in 1975 she wasn't out of uniform long before she was called to duty again. President Ford asked her to come to the White House to work on women's issues. Her primary assignment was to prepare an initiative instructing the Justice Department to review all federal laws and policies that discriminated against women.

After her White House assignment she became a familiar figure on Capitol Hill as a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. General Holm was a vigorous advocate of assigning women to combat roles, pointing out that modern wars require brains more than brawn. She posed the questions "To what extent can and should women be involved in defense?" "What are women's rights and obligations?" "Should they be allowed to fight?"

Holm testified on the issue of sexual harassment in the military. This from a woman who was once asked if her good looks didn't contribute to her success in the military. She'd responded, "Did you *ever* see an ugly general?" In her appearance before the House Armed Services Committee in 1992 General Holm opened with a defense of the qualities of the men and women serving side by side in the military. This was after Operation Desert Storm, when so many women served with such distinction in every kind of role, including critical assignments in the combat zones.

She then went directly after those who, in her words, "still haven't gotten the word or just don't want to get it." That included a Navy admiral who'd attended the infamous Navy fliers' Tailhook convention in Las Vegas, where sexual harassment was a crude corridor sport for many of the men in attendance. She recounted how twenty years earlier women in the service were forced to handle similar situations on their own, knowing that if they reported them, they'd be branded as troublemakers.

Now she said, "To change people's behavior requires strong, committed leadership at the top, conveying a message to everyone that sexual harassment or other improper conduct will not be tol-

erated. It requires more than publishing high-sounding phrases such as 'zero tolerance.'" She went on. "It requires setting standards of conduct and enforcing those standards vigorously."

Mary Hallaren fully supports that judgment. She believes the problem is not with the troops, but with leadership.

General Holm continues to monitor the issues affecting women in the military and to celebrate their achievements. Their role remains a work in progress, but Holm is persuaded that the demands of modern warfare will only enhance the place of women in the service of their country. General Holm finds that possibility as exciting and rewarding now as she did more than a half century ago, when she left her home in Oregon to become a truck driver in private's stripes.

Mary Hallaren, at the age of ninety-two, still follows the struggles of women in the various military establishments closely. She was pleased when the Supreme Court forced the Virginia Military Institute to accept women. Referring to VMI's leaders, she said, "They'll grow up after a while. They're afraid of the competition. The women will teach them a few things. Give them a little time and there will be no question about that."

The Little Colonel, ninety-two years old, knows something about what women can do when given the chance. She went into the military to serve her country during a war, and when that fight was finished she began anew, this time serving her country in a new capacity, as the godmother of women in the American military.

MARY LOUISE ROBERTS WILSON



COURTESY MARY ROBERTS WILSON

Mary Louise Roberts (left) and fellow nurses, Anzio, 1944

"I don't much like tents anymore."

THERE ARE SO MANY impressive numbers connected to World War II that it's difficult for one or two to catch your eye. Here are a few that caught me by surprise: more than sixty thousand women served in the Army Nurse Corps. Sixteen died as a result of enemy action. Sixty-seven nurses were taken prisoner of war. More than sixteen hundred were decorated for bravery under fire or for meritorious service.

One of them was Mary Louise Roberts, who was a long way from her Mississippi childhood the day German shells started ripping through the operating tent on the Anzio beachhead in Italy where she was working to save young American lives. But then her life never had been easy.

Mary Louise had just graduated from high school in 1930 when her father died, leaving behind Mary Louise, her five younger siblings, and their thirty-four-year-old mother. The Depression was setting in and the Roberts family had no money, so the family moved from Texas back to Mississippi to be near their grandparents. Mary Louise, a precocious child, graduated from high school early and went to work in a laundry. When the owners discovered she was just sixteen, however, they let her go. The family couldn't lose the income, so her mother took the job and Mary Louise stayed at home to care for her brothers and sisters.

Two years later, Mary Louise entered the nurse's training program at Hillman Hospital in Birmingham, Alabama. "I really wanted to do something to help my family," she says. "I didn't have any aspirations to be a nurse—I just needed to make a living for my family." She was just eighteen.

After graduating, Mary Louise worked at several hospitals in the South before landing a job at Dallas's big Methodist Hospital. After a year she was promoted to operating room supervisor. It was 1941. By then one of her brothers was in the military and two of her siblings had died from childhood diseases. She invited her remaining family—her mother, a brother, and a sister—to live with her in a one-bedroom apartment in Dallas. Mary Louise supported them all on her eighty-five-dollar-a-month salary. That's twenty-one dollars a week for four people.

Mary Louise admits it wasn't easy, but she credits her mother's frugality and the family's willingness to share for their survival. In those difficult times that was the code of survival for an untold number of other families across America. Everyone in the family tried to earn something and they all shared it, however little it might have been.

When the United States entered the war, there was an obvious and urgent need for people who could treat the wounded and comfort the afflicted. Mary Louise Roberts volunteered. "I guess it was a matter of wanting to do my part," she says. "I thought it was my patriotic duty to do it. I know it sounds corny because there's not much of that feeling anymore."

Because of her age—she was almost thirty when she enlisted—and her experience, Mary Louise was made the operating room supervisor with the Army's 56th Evacuation Unit. She trained in Louisiana and Texas for surgery under wholly new conditions—in the field and in combat. By Easter Sunday, 1943, she was ashore at Casablanca and assigned to follow the 36th, 88th, and 90th infantry divisions of the Fifth Army.

The women of the Army Nurse Corps wore helmets, fatigues, and boots. They lived in tents, used latrines, and had to guard their privacy constantly. They were often targets for air raids, and yet they were almost always thought of as girls out of place.

One of them, June Wandrey, wrote lively, newsy letters home regularly and later had them published under the title *Bedpan*

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS



Three Army Nurse Corps officers presented with Silver Star decorations for heroism (left to right): Mary L. Roberts, Elaine A. Roe, Rita Virginia Rourke

COURTESY MARY ROBERTS WILSON



Surgery at Nocelleto: Mary Roberts, second from left

Commando, the derisive nickname a male soldier had shouted at her. In it she describes several occasions when drunken soldiers invaded the nurses' private space. On one occasion, near the front lines, a German soldier wandered into their latrine. He was gone by the time they summoned help.

Fighting in North Africa was intense but it was only an overture for what lay ahead: Anzio, the beginning of the mainland invasion of Europe from the south. Mary Louise Roberts and her medical unit landed five days after the invasion. It was still a combat hot zone. She remembers, "At one point our commanding officer got the nurses together and asked whether we wanted to be evacuated. It was pretty bad, but we decided if the infantry was going to stay, we were going to stay." She also remembers a male officer who was eager to get the hell off the Anzio beachhead. "But he said there was no way he was going to leave until at least one nurse agreed to go—so he stayed, too."

It was a brave decision. The war was all around them and the workload was draining. "We got patients straight from the battlefield," she remembers. The men were terribly wounded, bloody, and dirty. "In the course of the day we had twelve-hour shifts and eight operating tables, with teams assigned to each table. We had all kinds of injuries, from neurosurgery on down. But there were times when I thought, 'How long can this go on?'"

In one of her letters home, June Wandrey, the proud bedpan commando, wrote from "Somewhere in Italy. . . I am too busy and too tired to write but we must keep in contact; it's all that keeps me sane. We're working twelve to fifteen hours a day now, never sitting down except to eat." Then she describes her ward, filled with

such young soldiers . . . nineteen years old. . . They're so patient and they never complain. I won't be able to write . . . often and here are the reasons why:

- Bed 6, penetrating wound of the left flank, penetrating wound face, fractured mandible, penetrating wound left forearm.
- Bed 5, amputation right leg, penetrating wound left leg, lacerating wound of chest, lacerating wound right hand.
- Bed 4, massive penetrating wound of abdomen. Expired.

She ended another letter home, after describing a long, terrifying night trying to hook up with her hospital unit on the front lines of the march to Rome, by saying, "This field-nurse business is not for the faint of heart."

There was another role for the women of the Nurse Corps. They were surrogate mothers. Wandrey writes of working in a shock ward in Sicily and seeing an eighteen-year-old who was just brought in from the ambulance. "I went to him immediately," she said. "He looked up at me trustingly, sighed, and asked, 'How am I doing, nurse?' I was standing at the head of his litter. I put my hands around his face, kissed his forehead, and said, 'You're doing just fine, soldier.' He smiled sweetly and said, 'I was just checking up.' Then he died.

"Many of us shed tears in private," she continued. "Otherwise we try to be cheerful and reassuring." She said she saw doctors working for hours only to have their young patients die on the table. "Some doctors," she said, "even collapsed across the patient, broke down, and cried."

The nurses were not immune to death, of course. All of the nurses were traumatized by the death of one of their own, Ellen Ainsworth, killed by a German artillery shell—one of six nurses to die at Anzio. Mary Louise said they were all tempted to begin to think, " 'It could be me,' but then in the heat of battle you don't really have time to mull things over." On February 10, 1944, the heat of battle was very hot.

As Mary Louise Roberts supervised several operations under way, German shrapnel started ripping through their surgical tent. She says, "We had patients on the table and we wanted to at least get them off. I said something like, 'Maybe we can keep going before this gets to be too bad.' It went on for thirty minutes or so. We just kept on working." Her superiors were so impressed with her coolness and inspirational personal conduct they recommended her for the coveted Silver Star.

Mary Louise and two other nurses were awarded the medal, but because she had senior rank she went forward first and thus became the first woman to win the Silver Star. It was, she says, not an auspicious occasion. "We went to the ceremony in our operating clothes. It took twenty minutes. It was a quickie because we

were needed back at work. Certainly I am proud of it, but others deserve credit, too. Everybody in our group deserved the medal." That's another common reaction from the World War II generation. Those who won medals often say, "I didn't *win* the medal. I just accepted it for all who deserved it."

Later, Mary Louise would also say of that particularly harrowing day, in her understated fashion, "I don't much like tents anymore."

Her unit advanced north through Italy, following the Fifth Army, setting up operating facilities, repairing the wounded, or when they were severely wounded, patching them up enough so they could be transported to more sophisticated medical facilities. Mary Louise remembers the day the good news came. She was in Bologna, Italy. "We had just set up and we were treating patients when we got word the war in Europe was over. Oh, Lord, everyone was so excited. I thought I'd be glad to get home and get a bath, a long, uninterrupted bath."

Her sense of duty had kept her overseas for twenty-nine months, and she says during that time her unit treated 77,025 patients. Mary Louise isn't the first or last veteran of those days to say, "I wouldn't trade it for a million dollars but I wouldn't give you two cents for another day of it. I learned an awful lot about people and how they react under pressure. The war gave me an appreciation for life."

She returned to Dallas in October 1945, and by January the following year she was back at the familiar post as operating room supervisor, this time at the Veterans Administration hospital. She went back to school at the University of Texas medical school and got a degree in nursing service administration. The VA wanted to promote her to a chief nurse's position but she wasn't interested. She wanted to stay in the operating room.

In 1961, at the age of forty-six, she married another veteran, Willie Ray Wilson, a pilot with the 9th Artillery Corps during World War II, assigned to ferrying high-ranking officers from headquarters to the battlefield and back. Wilson, a computer programmer after the war, had three children from an earlier marriage.

Mary Louise Roberts Wilson, who got into nursing to send money to her family, came to love the profession for the opportunity it provided to care for others, but she retained the lessons of

those difficult early years. She stayed with the VA because the chances of promotion were excellent and it had a substantial pension program. She also joined the Army Reserves and served as chief nurse for the 94th General Hospital unit, retiring as a lieutenant colonel.

She keeps her Silver Star in the bottom of a cedar chest, rarely bothering to take it out. Since her husband died in 1993 she's tried to keep busy with Bible studies, church, reading programs for children of Spanish-speaking families, and an art-appreciation course at a local junior college. Mary Louise, who had to be so tough so many times in her long life, now admits that in her eighties, with her husband gone, her nights can be "awfully lonely."

She remains a taciturn woman, tempered by her difficult childhood and the ordeal of combat nursing duty. She doesn't volunteer much when asked to reflect on her life and all that she's seen and done. She simply says, "In some ways I feel I accomplished a great deal. In other ways I feel I've done nothing. I really don't have anything to show for it. I am just an ordinary person."

An ordinary person who as a teenager supported her family, became a highly skilled nurse, won the Silver Star, and lived an exemplary life. In her modesty she typifies so many women of her generation.

The World War II years will forever be testimony to America's collective and individual resistance to tyranny, its awesome and ingenious industrial machinery, and what may be its greatest strength, the common values of its richly varied population when faced with a common threat. Any celebration of America's strengths and qualities during those years of courage and sacrifice, however, will be tempered by the stains of racism that were pervasive in practice and in policy. As it was an era of great glory for America and its people, it was also, indisputably, a time of shame.

One does not cancel out the other, but any accounting of the war years is incomplete without the stories of those who were serving their country while fighting to protect their individual rights and dignity. What they experienced would be shocking enough if the acts of prejudice had been simply the work of a few misguided bigots, but the most shameful acts of discrimination and oppression were officially sanctioned by the highest officials in the land.

Black Americans were called Negroes or Colored in polite company and official documents, but the hateful epithet *nigger* was a common expression, even when referring to black Americans in uniform. They had few champions of racial equality outside their own ranks. Eleanor Roosevelt spoke up for them, but her husband, the president, the great champion of the common man, was mostly quiet on the subject.

Japanese Americans were subjected to even greater discrimination during the war. Their fundamental rights were swept aside in a campaign organized by some of the most distinguished figures in public life. The relocation of Japanese American citizens from their homes and businesses on the West Coast was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in the name of military security. In a contemporary review of that decision, the current chief justice, William Rehnquist, concludes that civil liberties are not expected to have the same standing in wartime as they do in peacetime, but he does believe the courts in the future will review more carefully the government's arguments for curtailing fundamental rights.

Past practices and court decisions aside, the most compelling arguments against the wartime racism and official acts canceling civil liberties can be found in the lives and attitudes of the people who were the victims of those shameful episodes.

JOHNNIE HOLMES

"It is my country right or wrong. . . . None of us can ever contribute enough."

JOHNNIE HOLMES was born in Ohio in 1921, but his family moved to the Chicago area after a few years because there was, well, opportunity: an aunt was involved in the Al Capone bootlegging empire and Johnnie's father could get a job as a driver and deliveryman.

They settled in the suburbs, in Evanston, home of Northwestern University, and life was good. His father had steady work and Johnnie, one of the few black students in Evanston High School, has no memory of any racial discrimination.

At an early age he became enthralled with the military way of life. For a time he even considered joining the French Foreign Legion. So by the time the United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor it had a ready volunteer in Johnnie Holmes, even though the U.S. military was hardly friendly territory for black Americans.

It's not that black Americans were not represented numerically. There were 1.2 million in uniform during the war, almost 10 percent of America's black population at the time. Most were confined to the service areas of the military, however. They were ship's stewards or worked in the quartermaster corps or served as drivers for transportation outfits. Ten percent saw combat. Those who did had distinguished records, but the myths remained. The military establishment was reluctant to acknowledge that black Americans were fully capable of taking their place in the front ranks.



COURTESY JOHN A. HOLMES

Johnnie Holmes, wartime portrait

Holmes was blissfully unaware of what awaited him. As he put it, "I went into the Army to become a man. I told my momma, 'I'm not going to let it break me. I'm going to let it make me.'"

He began his military career at Fort Custer in Michigan but it wasn't until he shipped out to Fort Knox, Kentucky, that he encountered real, bitter racial hatred and segregation for the first time. All of the noncommissioned officers were white southerners, as Holmes remembers it, and they made the trials of basic training all the more difficult for the all-black outfits. Among other indignities, Holmes is persuaded that Fort Knox dentists experimented on the black soldiers. He remembers being strapped in a dentist chair and getting his teeth drilled with no novocaine.

At the end of basic, Holmes was sent on to Fort Claiborne, Louisiana, to begin his training as a tanker. By now Holmes and the other black soldiers had weekend passes, but even though they wore the uniform of the United States Army and even though they were prepared to give their lives in defense of their country and for the cause of freedom and against the fascist juggernaut rolling across Europe, the racial wounds deepened. Whenever they accidentally strayed into all-white neighborhoods they were met with anger and derision: "Hey, boy, what you doin' here? Git outta here, nigger."

When a black soldier friend of Holmes's was found dead on railroad tracks near an all-white neighborhood in Alexander, the other black soldiers were not fooled by the official story that he'd gotten drunk, stumbled onto the tracks, and been run over by a train. They were sure he'd been beaten to death, and they were furious. They were by now combat-trained and they were prepared to go to war against Alexander. They rounded up their tanks, machine guns, and grenades, but Colonel Steele, their commanding officer, reasoned with them and they backed off.

It wasn't long, however, before there was another racial flare-up, this one at the PX. A black soldier was cheated at the cash register by a white clerk. When the soldier protested, racial slurs started flying, and again the Louisiana base was at a racial flashpoint. Holmes recalls with pride that not long after that the PX staff was integrated.

If anything, life as a black soldier became even more intolerable when Johnnie Holmes and his units transferred to Fort Hood,

Texas, to begin the final phase of their preparation as an armored unit. Fort Hood was also home to a stockade full of German prisoners of war. It is one of the little-remembered curiosities of World War II that German and Italian prisoners were often shipped to remote places in the American West to await the end of the war, with more comforts than they would have had at home.

Johnnie Holmes remembers, however, just as Martha Putney remembers. He remembers the German POWs were allowed to go to the PX when Holmes and his friends could not. He remembers white officers saying, "If you boys don't behave we'll have those Germans guard you." What he remembers most of all was an incident involving his platoon lieutenant, a recent graduate of UCLA, where he had starred in three sports. His name was Jackie Robinson.

One weekend Holmes, Robinson, and some of their friends went to Temple, Texas, on a weekend pass. They weren't in town long before Holmes felt a piercing pain in his chest. He didn't know it at the time but it was pleurisy, an inflammation of the thorax membranes that can be debilitating. He could barely walk.

Lieutenant Robinson helped his young soldier onto a bus headed back to the base, stretching him across the front row of bus seats. The white driver would have none of it, telling Robinson to get Holmes to the back of the bus and get there himself. As Holmes remembers it, Robinson said no, he would not move Holmes to the back of the bus and he sure wasn't going there himself. Holmes recalls that they were arrested by MPs back at the base. I was unable to find references to this in biographies of Jackie Robinson, but given the time and place, it may have been too common to warrant attention.

In many other accounts of his life, another Robinson bus incident involved a light-skinned black woman who was the wife of a fellow officer. When Robinson was told by the bus driver to stop talking to her and move back, Robinson refused and was court-martialed. He was subsequently found not guilty and left the service not long after, suffering from bone chips in his ankle from his college playing days.

Holmes and his fellow black tankers shipped out for Europe as the 761st Tank Battalion. They were quickly in the thick of battle in the final drive across Europe toward the heart of Germany.

COURTESY JOHN A. HOLMES



Johnnie Holmes

Johnnie Holmes, with 761st Tank Battalion



COURTESY JOHN A. HOLMES

They were in combat for 183 straight days, including the worst of the Battle of the Bulge, the ferocious fight through the winter of 1944–45 in the forests of Belgium. They were praised by General Patton and the other commanders of the infantry units they were supporting, but they could not fully escape the racial insults, not even there. Holmes remembers coming back from battles, their tanks battered and bloodied by the loss of their comrades, and hearing white soldiers tell Belgian villagers, “Those niggers ain’t up there. They’re just bringing the tanks up for the white boys to use.”

In fact, Holmes and the others in the 761st were face-to-face with death every day. One of Holmes’s chilling memories is running through the woods, on attack, when he spotted a German sniper. He opened fire, killing the sniper immediately, realizing that if he had not seen him, just by chance, Holmes would have been shot in the back as he ran past.

There was a widespread belief that the black soldiers weren’t up to the job. Dale Wilson, a retired Army major and now a military historian, said, “The African American was fighting a war on two fronts. He was fighting racism at home—Jim Crow, segregation—and he was fighting for the opportunity to fight. . . . Here’s a guy who has to beg to get into combat.”

General George S. Patton became a hero to the black tankers when he appeared before the 761st. Holmes thought he was “the most dashing thing you ever saw—standing on a half-track with those two pearl-handled pistols.” Patton said something to the effect of “You guys are a credit to your race. You’re here because I asked for the best. Now go out there and kick some Kraut ass.” Yet there’s also evidence that Patton had his private doubts about the ability of blacks to perform as well as whites in the military.

The record of the 761st, however, was exemplary. Those black soldiers earned 8 Silver Stars, 62 Bronze Stars, and 296 Purple Hearts, according to Trezzvant W. Anderson’s book *Come Out Fighting: The Epic Tale of the 761st Tank Battalion, 1942–1945*. The historian Dale Wilson has no doubt about the effectiveness of the 761st. “This unit saw action with eight divisions, so it was making a significant contribution during the war. It performed in an outstanding manner. I think there are clear-cut cases where guys

should have been recognized, if not with an award he didn’t receive, then with a higher award than what was given.”

Doubts about the fighting ability of the black soldiers were not confined to the American side. Holmes remembers vividly a conversation with a German prisoner of war, a Nazi major who had had been born in Chicago before returning to the fatherland. The major, stunned when he saw Holmes, a black man in uniform, said, “What are you doing here? This is a white man’s war.”

Holmes and his buddies thought otherwise. They thought it was America’s war. One of the veterans of the 761st said more than fifty years later, “When you get over there and the nation’s in trouble you ain’t got no black and white. You only got America.” A simple and profound declaration from a man who, before he went into combat, trained at bases in American communities where the water fountains and toilets said **WHITES ONLY**.

Holmes’s daughter, Anita Berlanga, a Chicago businesswoman, has a different set of sensibilities about discrimination, and she still finds it hard to believe what her father went through. What saddens her most is that racism probably kept him from pursuing a legal career or a career as an artist after the war. As she says, “I learned from my father . . . how ridiculously hypocritical this country is. They took good, honest men and treated them poorly before and after the war.”

They haven’t talked about it much but Berlanga says, “I don’t know what my father’s real expectations were but there was this sense of bafflement: ‘Why couldn’t I have done that?’ The war gave him a sense, for the first time, of what he could do. He was given a job to do and he did it extraordinarily well. Then to come back and find out that didn’t count—that was disappointing, but he kept going. He believed in the essential goodness of man, so coming home to racism was disheartening to him.”

In the rage of combat Holmes often made a deal with God: Get me out of this and I will be a better, decent person. God didn’t have to worry about Johnnie Holmes, but he might have spent a little more time with some of the people who were back in Chicago, far from the front lines. One of them was working at the Foot Brothers factory when Holmes went looking for work, now a twenty-five-year-old battle-scarred veteran, down to ninety-eight pounds as a

result of lingering problems from injuries suffered when he was hit by shrapnel from land mines. It was Johnnie Holmes's first stop after getting out of uniform. As soon as he entered the office, he remembers vividly to this day, the woman in charge of hiring looked up and said, "What are you doing here? We don't hire niggers. Get outta here."

Welcome home, Sergeant Holmes.

Shortly after that, however, he heard about a company that maybe had openings for machinists. He went early the next morning and was startled to find a black personnel director at Doehler Jarvis Corporation. Holmes had never seen a black man in a white-collar job. The personnel director said he didn't have anything at the moment but that Holmes should leave an application and he'd get a call if a job opened up. Johnnie didn't leave it to chance. He showed up early again the next morning and again the morning after that, politely refusing to accept the personnel man's assurance that he would call when a job developed. When it was clear Holmes would do this until he got a job, the personnel man looked at Holmes, sighed, and said, "Okay, report here Monday morning."

Holmes worked as a machinist until the factory closed in 1951. Then he went to work for the city of Chicago in a variety of jobs until his retirement in 1985. It was a good life, he says; he was treated well on the job.

Johnnie Holmes and his fellow black veterans, however, were still living a lot of their days as second-class citizens. Holmes married a white woman during his days at Doehler Jarvis and they stayed married for thirty-eight years, until she died in 1985. It was not always easy, being a racially mixed couple in Chicago. Johnnie can remember many occasions when he sent his wife, Louise, into a restaurant to bring the food out to the car rather than risk the wrath of some bigot who wouldn't approve of their loving but black and white relationship.

For all of his combative ways, Johnnie decided he wouldn't personally bow to the inherent frustration of discrimination. As he puts it today, "If I let all of the negatives intervene, I would have never achieved anything. I kept focused on what I wanted to do, which was to make money, provide for my family."

Holmes, however, did support the civil rights movement through

his church and he recalls with pride meeting Dr. Martin Luther King and joining him in his Chicago marches.

He also set out to advance his station in life his own way, as a real estate investor. His speciality was low-income rental apartments in buildings in black neighborhoods. At one time he owned as many as three buildings divided up into rental units. It was as a landlord and as a black man who had overcome so much on his own that he came to hate the welfare system that grew so fast in the fifties, sixties, and seventies. "It just killed ambition," according to Holmes. "I had all of these tenants who in their late twenties had never worked a day in their life. They just waited around for that government check. No incentive."

Holmes speaks of the welfare system in the same tone of voice that he uses to describe his son's cocaine problems. Disdain. He's plainly disgusted that his son, who makes good wages working in the oil drilling business in Louisiana, gave in to drugs, leaving behind a child in Chicago. Holmes wants nothing to do with his son; he's no longer welcome in his home. What Holmes went through during the war and after strengthened his already tenacious character and he sees no need to compromise his standards for anyone, even family members.

Although Johnnie Holmes's unit, the 761st Tank Battalion, was not involved in the liberation of the notorious concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dachau, according to its own official records it was in the area. There's been some confusion about that over the years and it lingers to this day. The 761st did participate in freeing the fifteen thousand Jews from a branch of Mauthausen, another concentration camp in Austria.

So the 761st soldiers did have firsthand knowledge of the depravity of the Third Reich's racial attitudes. As indefensible as America's attitude was toward blacks, Germany's ultimate solution took racial hatred to its darkest levels. Who better to put all that in perspective than Johnnie Holmes? So he's always willing, when asked by Jewish organizations or schools, to speak about the horrors he saw in World War II.

In his seventies, however, he may be mellowing some. He's much more inclined to help out at his church or take his Lincoln Town Car on long driving trips than to sit around and remember

the bad old days or speak of the two-front battle he was forced to fight, Germans in front of him, racial bigots at his back.

Now he can say with pride and confidence, "I am proud of the way I live my life. I was a good soldier. I served my country. It is my country, right or wrong. I'm still waiting to find out what God really wants me to do. None of us can ever contribute enough."

One of my favorite pictures from the World War II era is of Jimmy Stewart standing with a group of ordinary young Americans, his right hand raised, being sworn into the Army Air Corps. It was everyone's war, from the impoverished North Dakota farm kid to the Ivy League scion, the Hollywood star, the sons of the rich and powerful. Theodore Roosevelt Jr. landed in Normandy on D-Day. FDR's boys were on duty in the South Pacific when their father died, and only Elliott was able to get home for the funeral. Jack Kennedy and his brother Joe were in uniform and in harm's way.

Others we came to know later: George Bush, Richard Nixon, and Gerald Ford, all Navy officers, later presidents of the United States. Ben Bradlee, the most celebrated newspaper editor of his time, was another young naval officer in the Pacific. Art Buchwald, a foster child from the Bronx, joined the Marines at seventeen and emerged to become a universally beloved columnist. Johnny Carson, the master of the television medium, looked like a skinny twelve-year-old in his naval officer's uniform. Julia Child, America's favorite woman in the kitchen, was in the OSS. Byron "Whizzer" White, an All-America football player and Rhodes Scholar, was turned down by the Marines because he was color-blind but was accepted for the Naval Intelligence School. He met John Kennedy in England, and when Kennedy became president, White was his first appointment to the Supreme Court.

Kennedy was just one of scores of World War II veterans to enter the political arena. Their fame grew out of their place in

the great public policy debates of their time and the offices they occupied.

The themes of war have long been the stuff of great literature, and once World War II ended, a new generation of American writers emerged. Some are still at work today. Norman Mailer, Kurt Vonnegut, William Styron, William Manchester, James Jones, Paul Fussell, Shelby Foote, and Joseph Heller all served in uniform during World War II.

So did Pierre Salinger, JFK's press secretary and, later, ABC News correspondent. Al Neuharth, founder of *USA Today*, was a combat infantryman. Andy Rooney, of *60 Minutes*, wrote for *Stars and Stripes* during the war.

William Webster has been a distinguished federal judge, the director of the FBI, and director of the Central Intelligence Agency. During the war he had an unremarkable time as a Navy lieutenant; he was not involved in combat, yet he credits the discipline and organizational skills he learned from the Navy with helping him when he took over the formidable job of reorganizing the FBI after the chaos of the Watergate years.

Cyrus Vance embodies the best of his generation as a private citizen and public servant. Vance, a small-town native of West Virginia who earned Ivy League credentials at Yale as an undergraduate and law student, was a junior officer in the Navy during World War II. He left the military in 1946, but in a manner of speaking, he's never left the service of his country. Now in his seventies, he's still at the top of any list when there's a need for a skilled and tireless diplomat in trouble spots such as Bosnia or Africa. For more than half a century he has moved gracefully and effectively between congressional staff jobs, a thriving New York law practice, and as secretary of the Army during the John Kennedy administration, a major player on Lyndon Johnson's diplomatic and national security team, and, for three years, Jimmy Carter's secretary of state.

World War II, like the Civil War but so distinctly different in origin, locale, and time, was the common denominator and the defining experience in the lives of millions of young Americans, whatever their status before the first shots were fired. Later accomplishments, however grand or notorious, cannot diminish the place of their service in the war years.

GEORGE BUSH

"I learned about life."

WORLD WAR II and the demands it made on all parts of the country was the quintessential American melting-pot experience. It was a great unifying force, requiring sacrifice and imposing new disciplines across the many layers of American society. In a way, America came to know itself better through this common experience.

George Bush was a child of privilege when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. His father had accumulated a fortune on Wall Street and was a member of the U.S. Senate. His mother presided over a large home in Greenwich, Connecticut; she sent her children off to the best private schools and camps in chauffeured limousines, but when they returned home she preached modesty and public responsibility.

So it was only natural that on the day he turned eighteen George Bush volunteered for the Navy. He didn't wait for his draft number to be called. His father, the powerful senator Prescott Bush, didn't attempt to arrange a safe job for his son in the War Department. George volunteered for a relatively new branch of the service, the Navy Air Corps. He wanted to be a combat pilot.

By now, after all of his years in public life, his combat experience is well known. There's even a home movie of him being fished from the sea after his plane was shot down during a bombing run on a Japanese target. He rarely talks about the experience personally; he is more likely to recite his mother's admonition "Don't brag." When he was running for president, he was asked what he thought



George Bush as a young officer

about as he drifted in hostile seas after being shot down, and he answered in that clumsy but endearing way of his, “Oh, you know—the usual things, duty, honor, country.” As a political answer it was a groaner. Nonetheless, it was probably very close to the essence of George Bush.

For a man who spent so much of his life in the public arena, President Bush was curiously inarticulate about those defining moments. He was battle-scarred in a way that the man he served as vice president, Ronald Reagan, was not; but next to Reagan, Bush always looked a little like the younger kid, wide-eyed with hero worship.

Even when invited to expand on his thoughts about how World War II shaped him, President Bush is a reluctant witness. Yes, of course, he considers his years as a Navy combat flier an important experience. He often thinks about the day he was shot down, but when he does, he’s more likely to think about his two buddies who were killed. Could he have done more to save them?

When he returned home and plunged into a college education at Yale, sharing very crowded quarters with his wife, Barbara, and other couples in a New Haven home hastily converted into an apartment building, Bush didn’t look back. He played varsity sports, got his degree, and headed west, to the oilfields of Texas and the opportunities they presented. Did combat make him more willing to take those kinds of risks?

“I do not believe my combat experience was in any way responsible for my coming to Texas,” he reflects now, adding, “The Navy sent us all over . . . so a move away from a home base was not so traumatic.” In that regard, George and Barbara Bush were like many young Americans in their postwar migration to other parts of the country. Kids from the Great Plains who joined the Navy returned to settle down hard by the sea in California. Young black veterans headed north to the good factory jobs in Detroit. World War II rearranged more than the political landscape of Europe and Asia; it was a major catalyst for the shifting population patterns of the United States in the fifties and sixties.

As for business, President Bush agrees that, yes, “both military training and experience were helpful to all of us as we tackled various businesses. Maybe, just maybe,” he concludes, “having taken

risks in the service, we were less concerned about taking risks in business.”

Overall, however, responding to questions about his youthful trials in combat, President Bush likes to invoke what was drummed into him at home even before he enlisted: honor. As he says, his service in the war was “a duty, yes, but truly an honor.” He also feels strongly it was an obligation of citizenship that requires no additional reward. “What are we ‘owed’?” he asks. “Nothing. Not one damn thing.”

However, it is clear President Bush did gain something personally from the war that he would not have experienced if he had gone directly to Yale and then on to, say, a career on Wall Street or even a political career from his home in Connecticut. He saw the other side of life through the eyes and some very private thoughts of his comrades from other classes back home.

As an officer on a carrier, even though he was only nineteen or twenty at the time, one of Lieutenant Bush’s jobs was to read the mail of the enlisted men before it went out so no sensitive military information would be inadvertently compromised. As Bush recalls, “As I did my duty and read the other guys’ mail, I learned about life—about true love, about heartbreak, about fear and courage, about the diversity of our great country. The sailors would ask about the harvest or fishing or the heat in the cities.” Bush goes on, “When I would see a man whose letter I had censored, I would look at him differently, look at him with more understanding. I gained an insight into the lives of my shipmates, and I felt richer.”

As a young man at the controls of a TBD Avenger, flying off carrier decks, dropping torpedoes on enemy targets, and getting back safely, Bush was a long way from those days of privilege in Greenwich. What he learned went well beyond his own involvement, however. He remembers vividly standing on the carrier deck when another plane made a bad landing. As the pilot tried to take off again, the plane veered out of control and its propeller cut a crew member in half. As Bush stood there, stunned, staring at a severed leg, a salty chief petty officer “rallied the shocked sailors. ‘God-damnit, get back to work. Swab the deck, clear the deck, get ready for the next plane.’” More than fifty years later that Navy chief stands out in the mind of President Bush as a man who, under



TOP: *George Bush as a Navy pilot*

CENTER: *Fort Lauderdale Naval Air Station, July 1943, Flight 44: (top row) Bill Donovan, Ralph Cole, Mort Landsburg, George Bush, Louis Grab; (bottom row) Mike Goldsmith, Leslie Mokry, Bill Shawcross, Tom Champion, Tex Ellison*

BOTTOM: *George Bush, in his plane Barbara III*



GEORGE BUSH PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

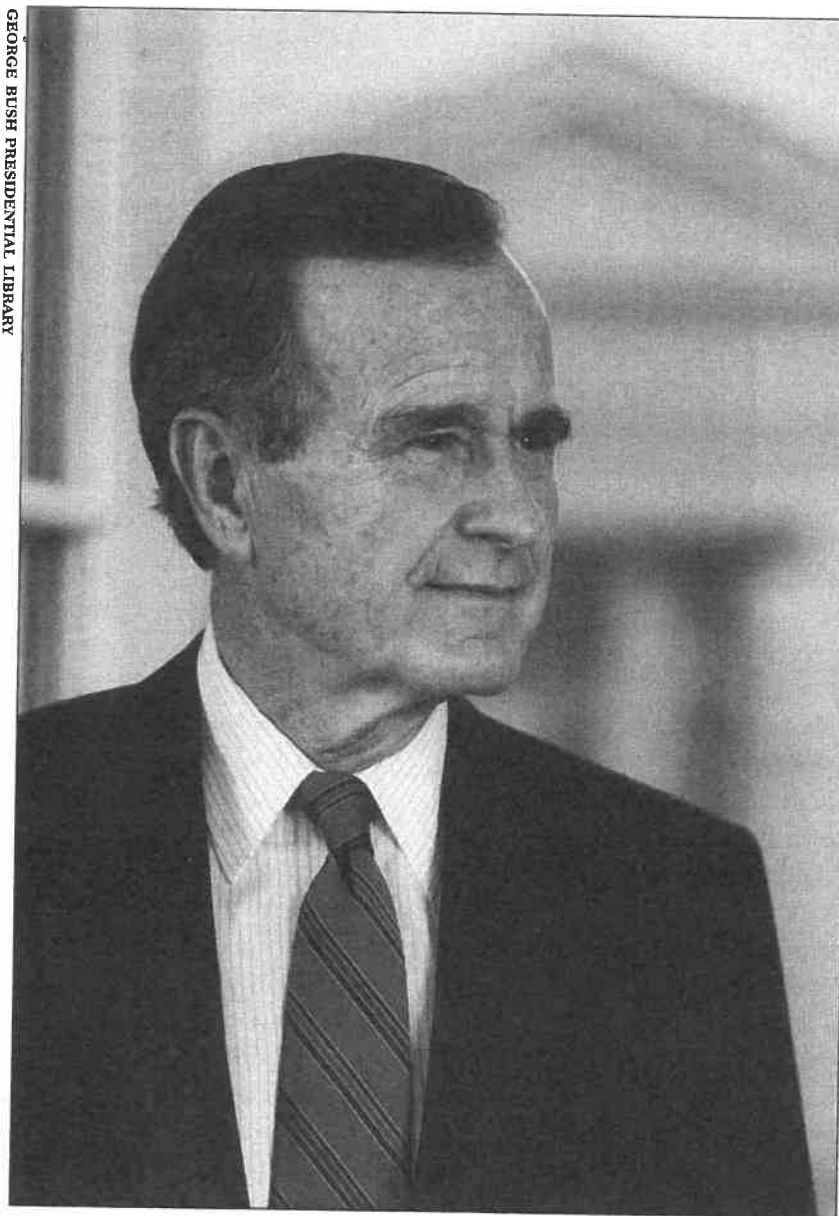
GEORGE BUSH PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY

great adversity, took charge, rallied the men, got the job done—did his duty.

By his own admission George Bush is not a reflective man. It may have to do with his mother's constant counsel not to draw attention to yourself. Work well done and a life lived honorably were reward enough. As a former congressman, ambassador to the United Nations, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, vice president, and then president of the United States, George Bush represents an unequalled record of public service within his generation.

He insists he is owed nothing. In fact, he believes that World War II was such an overwhelming threat that those who served did so out of an obligation that should not require special treatment forevermore. He believes some veterans' organizations are wrong to keep asking for more and more benefits. As he says, "Serving in World War II, I was a tiny part of something noble."

GEORGE BUSH PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY



George Bush, presidential portrait

ANDY ROONEY

"For the first time I knew that any peace is not better than any war."

ANDY ROONEY, the resident curmudgeon of *60 Minutes*, might have difficulty with the sweep of my conclusion. Indeed, he's challenged my premise that his was the greatest generation any society could hope to produce. He believes the character of the current generation is just as strong; it's just that his generation had a Depression, World War II, and a Cold War against which to test their character. When I counter that his generation didn't fumble those historic challenges, that they prevailed, often against great odds, and moved quietly to the next challenge, he listens but I am not persuaded I've won him over.

I wanted to talk to Rooney because his splendid book *My War* is a compelling personal account of his odyssey from a privileged background in Albany, New York, through a phase of pacificism as a student at Colgate, to his years as an adventurous sergeant working as a correspondent for the Army's newspaper *Stars and Stripes*. Beyond Rooney's book, one of the lasting impressions I have of the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day is Rooney's reporting on the *CBS Morning News*. He had covered Normandy for *Stars and Stripes*, and a half century later he was back in Normandy, conveying to CBS viewers what it had been like during that muddy June in 1944. As he led the camera through the hedgerows where the fighting had been so fierce, he seemed to be walking and talking ever faster, trying to stay ahead of his emotions. He talked about the young American troops—just boys, really—who had such a terrible time



Andy Rooney, wartime portrait

there, about how so many died and how the fighting was at close quarters.

Rooney was drafted out of college at Colgate, where he played football and wrestled some after a comfortable upbringing and a private prep school education in Albany. His disdain for convention and authority, now so familiar to viewers of *60 Minutes*, was already well established by the time he arrived at basic training with an infantry outfit.

Regimentation was not his favorite way of life. Besides, during college he had had an infatuation with journalism, so he applied to become a reporter with *Stars and Stripes*. This was the Army's enterprising newspaper that kept troops in the field informed and entertained with dispatches from the front lines, gossip, and Bill Mauldin's incomparable cartoons of the lives of the dogfaces, the combat infantrymen.

Rooney was a daring and resourceful young reporter, writing first about the exploits of the crews of the 8th Air Force flying B-17s and B-24s in bombing raids out of England, across the Channel, and into the heart of enemy territory. When he went on one of the raids for a firsthand account, his plane was shot up and Rooney helped save the life of a crew member. This incident got him a page 1 byline in *Stars and Stripes* and a glowing testimonial in his hometown newspaper, *The Albany Times Union*.

He went ashore at Normandy shortly after the invasion and stayed close to the advancing American infantry and armored units as they fought their way from hedgerow to hedgerow and village to village. He went into Paris with French forces the day the City of Light was liberated, finding himself beside Ernest Hemingway at one point as the remaining German forces tried to slow the entry with artillery fire.

For Rooney, August 25, 1944, the day Paris was liberated, "was the most dramatic I'd ever lived through." When he returns to Paris even now, he rents a car and drives the same triumphal route. Rooney, who is not given to emotional gestures, says simply, "It thrills me still."

He crossed the Rhine with the first American troops and unwittingly took a prisoner of war when a hapless German soldier insisted on surrendering. He still has the German's pistol. He went

to Buchenwald to see for himself what had been only rumors as the Americans advanced across Europe. When he arrived, he was stunned by what he encountered, and embarrassed. "I was ashamed of myself for ever having considered refusing to serve in the Army," he wrote. "For the first time I knew that any peace is not better than any war."

All the while, he was working alongside some of the most gifted names in journalism: Ernie Pyle, the peerless war correspondent who was later killed in the Pacific, the legendary Homer Bigart of *The New York Times*, and Edward R. Murrow, the godfather of broadcast journalism. One of his colleagues became a lifelong friend and a coworker at CBS News: Walter Cronkite, at the time a correspondent for United Press. As Rooney says now, "It was a three-year graduate course in journalism I couldn't have duplicated in twenty years without the war."

As you might expect, Rooney is not an emotional romantic about the war and what came later. He regularly gets in trouble with veterans of armored units for his caustic comments about the place of tanks in the war. He took a lot of flak from old bombardiers when he wrote that their job didn't require much skill. He said they just dropped the bombs when they were told to and often they missed their targets.

Rooney is willing to take on the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, pointing out that most veterans belong to neither organization. He says the Legion and the VFW expect too much. In Rooney's view, the only veterans deserving of special treatment are those who were disabled or seriously wounded.

He figures about 90 percent of the men in uniform didn't get anywhere near the fighting, so he doesn't believe the country owes them anything extra. "I'm not sure I even like the word *veteran*," he says.

That is not to say that Rooney is cold-hearted about the war and the men who fought on the front line or in the cockpits of the B-17s and B-24s on their daring and dangerous bombing raids. He relishes his own adventures across the European battlefields and, briefly, in India and China when it appeared the war would go on longer there. Obviously, Rooney's wartime experience served him well once he returned home and turned to writing for a living.

COURTESY ANDY ROONEY



Andy Rooney (right)

His wartime experiences nurtured his youthful skepticism and disdain for authority, two of the refreshing characteristics of the Rooney voice on *60 Minutes* and in his newspaper column. He says now he believes the U.S. Army was successful in part because officers and men weren't afraid to question authority. "They often improvised, they came up with their own plan, they reacted to what was happening in the field instead of just blindly following orders like the Germans. That's one of the reasons the Germans lost."

Nonetheless, despite his challenges to the premise of this book and his inherent resistance to any thought on the sunny side of skepticism, I think Sergeant Rooney carries more of the war with him than he lets us know. He told me that when he returns to France now he always goes to Normandy, to drive the back roads between the hedgerows, taking a different route each time, remembering when he was there a long time ago.

In *My War*, Rooney describes how he has been to Omaha Beach and the nearby cemetery five times. "On each visit I've wept," he writes. "It's almost impossible to keep back the tears as you look across the rows of crosses and think of the boys under them who died that day. Even if you didn't know anyone who died, the heart knows something the brain does not—and you weep."

Exactly.

JULIA CHILD

"I didn't have anything but an eagerness to help."

ANOTHER FAMILIAR FIGURE on American television had the course of her life changed by World War II. More than anyone else, Julia Child brought the idea of French cuisine onto the American table through her television shows and her popular cookbook *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. Anyone who has seen her on television, all six-foot-two of her, a formidable and commanding figure, may be surprised to learn that during the war she was a sort of spy. She worked for the Office of Strategic Services—the OSS—the precursor to the CIA.

It was an unlikely turn in the life of this product of a comfortable home in Pasadena, California, who after graduating from Smith College in 1934 worked in New York as an advertising copywriter. When the war started, she went to Washington and tried to enlist in the WAVES, the women's branch of the Navy, but she was rejected because of her height. How that could have affected the duties of a WAVE is not clear.

She was so eager to serve that she signed up as a clerk typist, one of an army of women who came to the capital from across America to help with the daily mountains of paperwork generated by the war in those precomputer days. Child hated the job. It was drudgery. "All I did was type little white cards," she says. "Finally, through some friends, I managed to get into the OSS."

She quickly became a senior clerk, supervising forty people, securing office equipment, hiring other clerks, setting up office financial systems and security. This was a big step for her: "I had no



JULIA CHILD (2)

Julia Child, wartime

Julia Child



MICHAEL P. MCLAUGHLIN

training for anything whatsoever. In the mid-thirties a woman was expected to become a teacher or a housewife, take care of the children, and do the laundry. I didn't have anything but an eagerness to help."

She also had ambition. She'd been a clerk about a year and a half when she heard the OSS was going to send people to the Far East. As she recalls, "I knew that someday I would get to Paris and Europe, but not to the Far East." She signed up and, with a dozen other women from the home office, headed for the unknown in Asia.

They sailed on a troopship for India. Child says, "The trip was quite jolly. There were not very many women and lots of boys." They arrived in Bombay just as another ship caught fire and drifted into a nearby ammunition ship, causing a tremendous explosion. Child was a long way from typing little white cards in a Washington office.

As it did for so many women, the war liberated Julia Child. Before going to work for the OSS and setting off for exotic locations, she had no plans for her life. "I wasn't thinking in career terms," she says. "There weren't many careers to have. There wasn't anything really open."

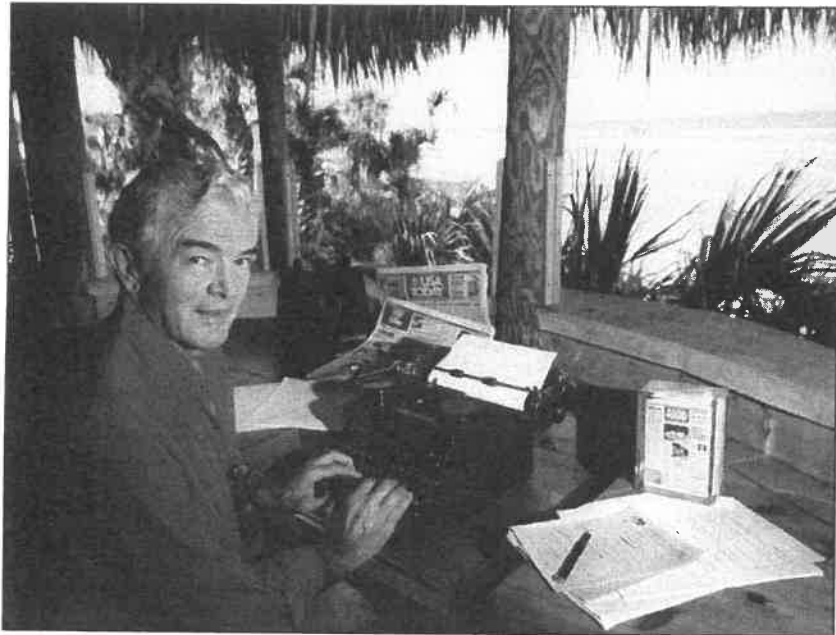
If there had been no war, what would have become of Julia Child?

She's in her late eighties now, but she hasn't lost her sense of the plain thought. She answers, "Who knows? I might have ended up an alcoholic, since there wasn't anything to do."



COURTESY AL NEUHARTH

Al Neuharth, wartime portrait



COURTESY AL NEUHARTH

Al Neuharth

AL NEUHARTH

"If you separate what you did right from what you did wrong, you can learn a helluva lot more from failure than from a big success."

MAURICE "HANK" GREENBERG

"We don't wait until the bridge is built and a couple of tanks go across. We want to be the bridge builders."

IT'S CURRENTLY FASHIONABLE for celebrities to invoke a difficult childhood as a means of getting attention, attracting sympathy, or excusing outrageous behavior. In some instances, to be sure, the stories are authentic and troubling, but so many seem to be either exaggerated or inconsequential. In contrast, the World War II generation, with its roots in the Great Depression, is almost a case study in how to succeed despite a childhood of deprivation.

Consider Al Neuharth, the flamboyant founder and publisher of *USA Today*, and Maurice "Hank" Greenberg, one of the most powerful figures in American business, the tireless boss of an international insurance empire. Both men grew up in rural areas in poor families, and both lost their fathers at an early age.

Neuharth wears a large, gaudy ring signifying his role in changing the face, if not the nervous system, of American newspapers. He has reason to be proud of his vision. *USA Today* is now firmly fixed in the national consciousness, and its enterprising journalism is finally receiving the respect of competitors.

When *USA Today* was launched, there were cries of anguish from newspaper traditionalists. Neuharth was derided as a self-

promoting maverick who lived to tweak journalism's brahmins at *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. In fact, Neuharth didn't shy from publicity, and he did relish his reputation as a rogue. And as president and CEO of Gannett, the highly profitable national chain of mostly smaller newspapers, he was confident of his place in publishing's front ranks.

Neuharth dressed entirely in black and white. He traveled the world in a luxurious corporate jet outfitted with a private office and shower. He had a taste for white stretch limousines and large hotel suites. His oceanfront home in Florida is a sprawling compound he calls Pumpkin Center.

He now runs a news think tank called The Freedom Forum, which is richly endowed with hundreds of millions of dollars realized from the sale of Gannett stock and placed in a foundation once operated by the company. The Freedom Forum has well-appointed offices in Arlington, Virginia, and New York City, and Neuharth regularly leads tours to world capitals for the Forum trustees to discuss press practices.

It is a life well beyond his surroundings in December 1941, when he was the son of a single mother in the Great Plains hamlet of Alpena, South Dakota. His father had died in a farm accident when he was three, and it had been a hard life for young Al, his brother, and their mother. She took in sewing and laundry. The boys worked in the grocery store, for the butcher, and at the soda fountain. Between the three of them, in a good week, they made less than twenty dollars.

Al was always ambitious and self-confident. He thought he'd grow up to be rich and famous as a lawyer—after all, the one lawyer in town had the biggest house. When Al won a scholarship to a local state college he took prelaw courses, but he knew he'd be drafted soon, so in the fall of 1942, just before the end of the quarter, he enlisted in the Army, knowing the college would give him credit for the full term.

Al Neuharth was assigned to the 86th Infantry Division, trained in intelligence and recognizance in Texas and California, and shipped to Europe to join General George Patton's 3rd Army racing toward Germany. He was involved in combat on several occasions and won the Bronze Star, which he now dismisses as a common

decoration. "Hell, everyone got the Bronze Star," he says. "More importantly, we all got the Combat Infantryman Badges, which I think we're more proud of than anything."

Neuharth returned to South Dakota following the war, and after marrying his high school sweetheart, he enrolled at the University of South Dakota. The prospect of spending seven years in pursuit of a law degree, however, was not very appealing: he was a young man in a hurry, and he'd already given up four years of his life to the military.

So, as he says, "What's my next interest? Journalism, because of my high school newspaper work. What's likely to be the easiest curriculum? Journalism was also at the top of that list."

Neuharth breezed through the journalism courses at the university, and after graduation he persuaded a friend to join him in a newspaper startup, *SoDak Sports*, devoted almost entirely to high school athletics, a major interest in that rural state. They raised fifty thousand dollars, "begging, borrowing, and stealing" all they could, as Neuharth now says, laughing. After all, that was a lot of money in the early fifties, especially in a state just a few years out of the Great Depression.

They lost it all in just two years. The weekly newspaper was a big hit with the schoolboy athletes who could read their names in print every week, but when it came to advertising, the paper had a hard time competing with well-established local newspapers and the arrival of local television. Still, as Neuharth says, "I mismanaged it, but I learned the greatest lesson of my life. In the first place, I would not have taken that risk if I had not gone off to war and seen the world. I wanted to be a rich entrepreneur. I thought that because I was such a brilliant sportswriter . . . it would automatically mean the paper would be a success. I found out that wasn't the way it works in business."

Neuharth also learned, however, that "if you separate what you did right from what you did wrong, you can learn a helluva lot more from failure than from a big success." So, with those lessons in mind, he and his wife packed everything they had into a small moving trailer and headed for Miami, where he had lined up a job at *The Miami Herald*.

It was there that he began his climb to the top.

Neuharth moved up fast. Not only was he a deft rewrite man and a resourceful reporter on the streets, but he was a cunning inside operator, working just as hard at sizing up his competition and currying favor with his boss as he did at getting the story. When he got the opportunity, he rarely fumbled.

Years later he titled his autobiography *Confessions of an S.O.B.* It was a how-to manual describing how he'd outwitted his co-workers, adversaries, and even, in some instances, his patrons. He also let his ex-wives and his son offer critical commentary on his style and personality.

He quickly rose from the lowest position in the *Miami Herald* newsroom to executive city editor to assistant managing editor, and then he moved on to the *Detroit Free Press*, because he'd been spotted as a comer by Jack Knight, the owner of the Knight newspaper chain.

Making his mark in Detroit but frustrated by the more conventional managers following in the footsteps of the dashing Knight, Neuharth was approached by Gannett, a chain of small-city newspapers. The rest, as they say, is history. He made a big impression when he launched a new newspaper in the Cape Canaveral area, where the space program was fueling a business and residential building boom as well as flights to the moon.

Before long he was expanding Gannett from a group of what even he called "shitkicker" newspapers into the largest chain in the country—and one of the most profitable. He dismissed critics who said his papers' popular style and breezy look defiled journalistic tradition. That kind of talk played right to his anti-establishment genes.

Besides, no one could fault his personnel practices. Neuharth built a company on the reality, not just the promise, of equal opportunity. He had more blacks and women in senior management positions than any other comparable company. He attributes this to his World War II experience, and calls it his single greatest achievement during the fifteen years he ran Gannett. "I learned largely because of World War II . . . that the strongest possible organization is made up of decision makers who understand people. I used to say, 'Our leadership should reflect our readership.'

"When I first went in the infantry, I met people from Brooklyn who talked funny and people from Texas who you couldn't under-

stand at all. I realized for the first time that the world is not made up of the white Germans and Scandinavians who settled my part of South Dakota. While it was a shock initially, I got to like it."

It was also not a bad lesson for the man who forty years later started the country's most successful all-purpose national newspaper, again to the jeers of traditional newspaper advocates. *USA Today* is now such a fixture in American life that it's hard to remember when it wasn't there. Although it still has its critics, it also has more than a million readers every day and some of the newspaper business's most imaginative investigative reporting of domestic social issues.

Al Neuharth, the self-confessed S.O.B., was always bright and ambitious, so it's likely he would have been a success in whatever field he chose, but his experiences as a combat infantryman taught him he could manage risks. He failed at some, but he always succeeded when the big risks were in play. There is no greater example of this than *USA Today*, in its way another unexpected dividend of World War II.

HANK GREENBERG is another titan of American business who started life with more brains and ambition than promise. He grew up poor on a farm in the Catskills, often getting up in the middle of the night to check his trap lines for mink and muskrat in hopes of making some extra change, then walking four and a half miles to school every day.

Greenberg dropped out of school at the age of seventeen to join the Army. He was assigned to the Signal Corps, and then, on June 6, 1944, he was attached to the U.S. Army Rangers storming Omaha Beach on D-Day. He fought from there across Europe to the end of the war, but it is next to impossible nowadays to get him to talk about what he went through. It simply is not the Greenberg way. He's too busy moving on to his next objective.

In fact, when I tell his Wall Street friends and business journalists that Greenberg landed with the first wave on D-Day and was later recalled to serve in Korea, they're astonished. Most of them have never heard him mention his wartime exploits.

Now in his mid-seventies, a billionaire, Greenberg will admit

that he learned the importance of discipline, focus, and loyalty while in the service. When he emerged from World War II, he was determined to get an education and a job. First, he had to finish high school, and he was accepted at the Rhodes School, an elite private academy in midtown Manhattan. Greenberg remembers now that he lived more than thirty blocks away, in a room on West Twentieth Street that rented for nine dollars a week. "I walked to school rather than spend the ten cents on subway fares," he says. "Now there's an expensive men's clothing store near where the school was located, and when I go in there I am reminded of the old days. That was a tough nine months for me; I almost went back in the service."

In fact, Greenberg did stay in the Army reserves so that he could make extra money. So when he finished law school on the GI Bill, he was recalled, this time for service in Korea. He went back into uniform first as a lieutenant and then as a captain.

In Korea, Greenberg quickly earned a reputation as a highly effective defense lawyer for GI's accused of stealing government property. "No one ever prosecuted officers accused of stealing," he explains. "Why should the enlisted men be the only ones punished?"

It was in another legal capacity, however, that Greenberg had his most memorable—and educational—Korean experience. He was sent to Koje-do, a harsh island off the coast of Korea. It was a POW camp ostensibly run by the U.S. Army and the South Koreans, but the North Korean and Chinese prisoners had all but taken over. By night they were killing prison guards, including American soldiers, and holding kangaroo courts for prisoners who didn't participate in the mutiny.

Greenberg says of Koje-do, "We could have been in the middle of hell." He organized an investigation of the murders and managed to place informers among the ringleaders. It was a dangerous, deadly business. "Any one of the prisoners who didn't cooperate with the ringleaders was thrown up against the fence and killed," Greenberg says. It was anarchy of the most primitive kind, but eventually Greenberg's investigation paid off with more than enough evidence to punish the guilty.

And yet, the trials never took place. Someone higher up put everything on hold because peace talks were about to get under way at Panmunjom, and the Chinese were threatening retaliation

if there were prosecutions at Koje-do. Justice was set aside for other priorities. As Greenberg said later, "War brings out the worst in everyone; no matter how honorable you are . . . things happen that you feel ashamed of later on."

He took from Koje-do a comprehension of how to deal with the Asian culture later in his life. "Our understanding of Asia at the time was very bad," he says. "Americans viewed Asians as little brown brothers and as subhuman, and in return we were not loved."

Greenberg came out of Korea determined to make his mark—and his fortune—in business, but he had no clear notion of what area suited him best. He got into the insurance industry by accident, but in typical Greenberg fashion. After rude treatment at the hands of the personnel officer of Continental Casualty Company, a large insurance concern, he accidentally ran into Continental's president and raised hell about the treatment he'd received. He was hired on the spot.

His reputation as a tough, resourceful manager who was willing to take calculated risks and make them pay off soon attracted the attention of C. V. Starr, a flamboyant Californian who had established a worldwide insurance empire called American International Group—AIG. It was a privately held firm, and already a success by the time Greenberg arrived in 1960.

Now it is a colossus, and Hank Greenberg—nicknamed, by the way, after the famous Detroit Tigers slugger "Hammerin' Hank" Greenberg—is only the second chief executive officer in the history of AIG, a far-flung insurance and financial-services company he has built into an \$88 billion megapower around the world.

When Greenberg took AIG public, he made a fortune for himself, but he continues to run the company, as one observer put it, "like a one-man Lloyds of London." He's famous on Wall Street for his gutsy moves and penny-pinching ways, his demanding management style and his tireless personal schedule. Greenberg, calling on his military experience, has said, "We don't wait until the bridge is built and a couple of tanks go across. We want to be the bridge builders."

AIG insures oil platforms and drilling platforms, cargo ships and a subway system in Hong Kong, as well as a wide variety of industrial pollution risks—not exactly your run-of-the-mill home or car insurance business. It is a complex network, with more than three

hundred subsidiaries, and Greenberg manages to keep track of all the layers.

One of his managers was not exaggerating when he said, "We'll send a man in a dugout canoe up a river in the Philippines to sell some insurance." Greenberg's take-no-prisoners style extends even to his family. Reportedly, he once yelled at his son, Jeffrey, a senior AIG manager, "You either fix your management problem or I'll fix mine." Jeffrey left AIG not long after.

This former Catskills farm boy follows a physical regimen that would exhaust a man twenty years younger. He's within a pound or two of his World War II weight, and he's an expert skier, a tireless tennis player, and a nonstop traveler.

But then, he also personally does business in 130 companies around the world, including in China, where he's on a first-name basis with the notoriously secretive Chinese leadership. He works hard at understanding the future of the Asian societies that were once mistreated, as he put it, as "little brown brothers." He speaks knowingly of the financial and political culture in Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia, and then switches easily into a discussion of the Russian ruble.

What he does not talk about is his retirement, a subject of much speculation on Wall Street, where the analysts love his company but fear the repercussions if anything takes Hank Greenberg out of the captain's chair. He's likely to snap something like "I enjoy what I am doing. Besides, no one's offered me another job."

Hank Greenberg and Al Neuharth, two smart, ambitious, and demanding business entrepreneurs, built highly profitable empires a long way from their humble origins. While doing so, they never lost touch with the lessons of those earliest years, when they worked so hard for so little, when they volunteered for dangerous duty as they came of age and returned home with a new sense of the possibilities for their lives.

THE ARENA

THE TWILIGHT OF THEIR LIVES

"You can't pay in money for what they have done."

As an impressionable adolescent in the postwar years, I spent hours going through Bill Mauldin's book *Up Front*, his brilliant collection of drawings and thoughts on World War II's enlisted men, officers, the people they liberated, and the enemy they fought. He was just twenty-two years old when "Willie and Joe," his representations of American fighting men, first appeared. In his work, Mauldin shared with those on the front lines as well as those at home the hard truths and dark humor of life at war. As is so often the case with cartoons, Mauldin gave us the quick laugh and the lingering insight.

Recently, I read *Up Front* again. Initially I was pleased that I could recite from memory many of the cartoon captions; Mauldin's work leaves a lasting impression. When I began to reread the text, I had an even deeper appreciation of Mauldin's youthful genius. He'd put the book together near the end of the war, when he was just twenty-three. By then he was a sergeant, having entered the Army from the Arizona National Guard when he was eighteen. I can't imagine that anyone knew the minds, the frustrations, the fears, and the dreams of the average combat infantryman better than Mauldin did.

As his cartoons reflected the truth of what it was like to be up front, his writing gave us a vision of the future. Here is what Mauldin wrote of the American soldier before the war ended:

They are very different now. Don't let anybody tell you they aren't. . . . You can't pay in money for what they have done. They need people telling about them so they will be taken back into their civilian lives and given a chance to be themselves again.

There will be some good ones and some bad ones. But the vast majority of combat men are going to be no problem at all. They are so damned sick and tired of having their noses rubbed in the stinking war that their only ambition will be to forget it. They don't need pity because you don't pity brave men—men who are brave because they fight while they are scared to death.

Mauldin wrote those words more than half a century ago, even before the men headed home from the front lines, and it is as true today as it was then. They didn't want pity and they did want to forget. Of course, they could not forget, especially those who'd seen combat. When they couldn't erase the war from memory they simply confined it there, refusing to talk about it unless questioned, and then only reluctantly. That is why I think it's so important for us to hear these stories now, to know what an exceptional time that was for so many and how much they sacrificed to give us the world we have today.

Those stories come to us in so many ways. The heroes, the authors, and the politicians are part of a fixed library of memoirs and accounts, but in the course of working on this book I have realized how many stories still remain unknown to the larger world, confined as they are to the memories of the veterans and their families, or to the recollections of the people at home who made their own unique contributions.

NOT ALL of the stories are heroic or tragic. Many are memorable for the small moments they recall, for a funny line.

When his father died, Steve Friedman, a longtime friend and colleague in television, called to reminisce about what a great guy and inspiration his dad, Sol Friedman, a World War II Army veteran, had been.

Sol Friedman came back from the war and opened a grocery business in Chicago. He worked hard and raised a quintessential Chicago family: they were all active in Mayor Daley's political ma-

chine, devoted fans of the Chicago Cubs and the Bears, and lifelong residents of the same neighborhood. Sol Friedman sent his children to college, and Steve rose through the ranks of network television to become the executive producer of *Today* and *NBC Nightly News* before going to work for CBS.

Steve says, "My old man and his buddies were the best, when you think of all they got done. They were in the Combat Engineers in the Italian campaign, all the way through. Later, when I asked him if he was ever scared, Sol said, 'I wasn't thinking about the bullet with my name on it. It was the one marked "To Whom It May Concern" that worried me!'" Steve and I both laughed hard, recognizing Sol's story as a perfect piece of Chicago street humor, carried to the war and back.

MY FRIEND Jack Hemingway, the firstborn of Ernest Hemingway, was raised in the tradition of his adventurous father, so it was only natural that when the war came along he'd be involved with the OSS. Jack also thought it was natural, when he parachuted into France behind enemy lines, to carry in his pack a tool of his favorite sport, a fly rod. When questioned about it before takeoff, he told a superior officer it was a radio antenna.

In his splendid book *The Misadventures of a Fly-Fisherman: My Life With and Without Papa*, Jack describes the few opportunities he had to use the fly rod in some lovely French streams before he was taken prisoner by the Germans. When I tell this story to other fishermen, they always seem to be more interested in the quality of the fishing than in Jack's fate as a prisoner. He seems to understand.

GENE GLICK was a combat infantryman with the Army's 45th Division and personifies to this day the "dogface" Bill Mauldin so loved: tough, smart, and capable of finding an enduring truth in the worst possible situation. Glick, an Indiana native, was fighting in Alsace-Lorraine during the big push toward Germany, late in the fall of 1944. He says, "I'll never forget November eleventh, 1944, at eleven A.M. I dove into a slit trench. You dig a slit trench when you don't have time to dig a foxhole. It's about the size of your body—

about two feet deep. There was a thin layer of ice. The shells were exploding all around. The ground shakes. You think that at any moment you're going to be killed or maimed for life. I remember thinking, Wouldn't it be wonderful if World War II ended the way World War I did—on November eleventh?"

It did not, of course. Gene Glick spent almost an hour facedown in the freezing water, with shells exploding all around him. He made a vow: "If I get out of this alive, anytime in the future, if it gets tough, I am going to remember November eleventh, 1944."

Glick survived the shelling and returned from the war to start what turned out to be one of the most successful residential construction companies in the United States, the Gene B. Glick Company. He's still on the job at the age of seventy-seven, although he's always willing to take a moment to tell you about his four daughters and his grandchildren. He took them to France in 1995 and had his grandchildren pose next to the headstones at a World War II cemetery so that, in his words, they would be reminded of "the tragedy of men not learning to live together in peace."

And what about that moment, November eleventh, eleven A.M., 1944? Gene Glick says that to this day, "It's like a guiding star. When things don't go right, when people disappoint me and projects don't work out, I think, Hey, Glick, November eleventh, 1944. No problem!"

BILL MAULDIN didn't know Mary Garber. She wasn't a dogface. She wasn't even in uniform. But in her own way, Mary Garber was changed by the war and by what came after. Moreover, what she did changed the world for so many of her gender.

She had a lifelong dream to be a newspaper sports reporter, but in the late thirties and early forties it was unheard of for a woman to cover sports—it was extremely difficult for a woman to be hired for anything except the society pages. That's how she began at the *Winston-Salem Journal* in North Carolina. When the paper offered her the job as society editor, she says, "I didn't want the job, but you had to get your foot in the door." When nearly every man on the paper's staff went off to the war, Mary finally had her chance to cover sports, but when the war ended, so did her dream-come-true. She was sent back to the society pages.

But Mary didn't give up. She volunteered to cover the contests the men in the sports department were ignoring. In those postwar years in North Carolina, the black schools received virtually no attention, so Mary became their champion on the sports pages, covering their games. She reasoned, "The parents of black athletes are just as interested as white parents."

The payoff came when a black policeman stopped her one day and said, "I don't know if you know how much the middle-aged black men in our town admire and love you."

As she quietly made her way as a woman in an all-male environment, she kept a particular eye on Jackie Robinson, who was then integrating Major League baseball. "I watched what he did," she says. "He did his job, kept his mouth shut. That's what I did." Well, not always. When Duke University barred her from the press box during a football game because she was a woman, Mary went directly to her managing editor. In turn, he fired off a letter to all of the local colleges, warning that if the practice continued, there would be no coverage of their games.

Mary went on to integrate postgame interviews, another all-male club, and to set a national standard for women in sportswriting. She was so prolific and so highly regarded in sports-crazy North Carolina that she was inducted into the state's athletic hall of fame, which also includes the legendary basketball coach Dean Smith and golfer Arnold Palmer.

Although officially retired for more than ten years, she still writes for the *Winston-Salem Journal*. To mark her forty years in sportswriting, a longer sports journalism career than any other woman in the nation, the paper published a front-page article on Mary and had it framed to hang on a wall next to the *Journal's* Pulitzer Prize. On the back of the frame there is a note: "This is to hang here as long as the paper exists."

Mary Garber's career contributions are among the innumerable unexpected consequences of World War II, when the men went away and the women stepped in. For her part, Mary prefers that her legacy be measured by the comments of two young boys at a soap-box derby she was covering. Pointing to her, one of the boys said, "Who's that?" The other answered, "That's Mary Garber. If you do something, doesn't matter who you are, she'll write about you."

WARTIME AMERICA was forced by necessity to confront its hypocrisy concerning equality under the law. The war started the country on the road to long-overdue changes that finally came in the sixties for women and blacks. Discrimination by gender and race remains an unresolved challenge in this society, but the World War II experience accelerated the solution in ways large and small.

Dr. Helen Strauss, who was named New Jersey's psychologist of the year in 1997 for her longtime work with children and low-income families, was a WAVE during the war. She recalls Eleanor Roosevelt visiting her unit and observing, "I don't see any Negro faces here."

Shortly thereafter, two black women were assigned to Strauss's department, and as she escorted one of them, making introductions, another white WAVE, with deep family roots in Virginia, deliberately picked up her compact and began powdering her nose, utterly ignoring the new arrival.

Dr. Strauss remained friends with the black woman, Frances Willis Thorpe, until Thorpe's death in early 1998. As for the Virginia woman, so proud of her Confederate ancestors, she, too, was changed by the experience. Dr. Strauss says that years later the woman called to apologize for her behavior, expressing her deep embarrassment.

OTHER MEMBERS of the greatest generation found their life's calling in uniform, continuing to serve in the military after the war and helping it adapt to the changing times. One of these is retired Army colonel Robert Nett, who enlisted in the National Guard in his hometown of New Haven, Connecticut, as a private with no thought of staying beyond the time required.

By the time he retired in 1973, he had been in uniform for thirty-three years; had fought in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam; had been awarded the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry in spearheading an attack against a heavily fortified Japanese position in the Philippines; and had a street named after him at Fort Benning, Georgia, where he continued to teach Army leadership courses after his retirement. And not incidentally, he's been mar-

ried for fifty-four years to an Army nurse, Frances, whom he met while recovering from wounds. Their son, Robert Nett Jr., is a physician who retired as a major in the U.S. Army.

Colonel Nett could have lived on his Army pension and the glories of his distinguished military career when he retired, but instead he became an industrial-arts teacher in the Muscogee County, Georgia, school system for fifteen years. He liked the two fronts of his life, and moved easily between his junior- and senior-high students and his officer candidates at nearby Fort Benning. Nett felt that he could extend the lessons of his military experience by teaching young people "that they should walk proud in the light of what their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers have accomplished. In addition to education," Colonel Nett says, "students must learn to appreciate the views of others." He was so popular that he was named the county's Teacher of the Year in 1985, and one of his students successfully nominated him to help carry the Olympic torch when the Olympic Games were coming to Atlanta in 1996.

At Fort Benning, Nett is such a legendary figure that former Army students who have moved up in the ranks still call on him to help train or motivate their troops. In 1997 he visited eight training sites in Bosnia to boost the morale of forces assigned there to peacekeeping roles.

The colonel's message is built on four points:

1. Every U.S. citizen is grateful for the job the soldiers are doing.
2. The soldiers' job is important because they're preventing war.
3. As Colonel Nett often speaks at religious programs of all denominations, he *knows* that the soldiers are in the prayers of all the faithful.
4. Yes, the soldiers' job can be lonely and frustrating, but it's a lot better than fighting and, after all, they are helping people to establish a democratic way of life.

Nett is deeply impressed by the quality of today's all-volunteer military. As he says, "They're here because they want to be. When we had the Selective Service—the draft—I sometimes had to adapt my leadership to people who were angry and disgruntled. Now the officer candidates are college-educated, and by the time they get to training school they're considered the best."

Nett does, however, have some concerns about the expanding population of women in the armed services. "Even though the policy is not to have women fight," he says, "women have to be ready to fight in emergency situations. We can't have this policy of filling our military vacancies with females, but only males can fight."

Nevertheless, Nett is still gung ho on the quality of the military and the role it plays in American life. Almost sixty years after he first enlisted, he still hears the call to service. After all he's been through and all he's done for the military, you might think he would expect something in return. The colonel has another point of view. As he says, "I will go anywhere in the world to support the troops; after all, I feel so indebted to the Army for what it has done for me."

There it is again, the selfless response so characteristic of members of this generation, now coming into their twilight years. To be sure, they have gotten used to the better life, including the so-called entitlements such as Medicare, Social Security cost-of-living increases, and senior-citizen discounts—but they retain at the core of their being a strong sense of self-reliance and gratitude.

There is a common theme of pride in all that they've accomplished for themselves, their families, and their country, and so little clamor for attention, given all they've done. The women and members of ethnic groups who were the objects of acute discrimination even as they served their country remember the hurt, but they have not allowed it to cripple them, nor have they invoked it as a claim for special treatment now. They're much more likely to talk about the gains that have been achieved rather than the pain they suffered.

They have given the succeeding generations the opportunity to accumulate great economic wealth, political muscle, and the freedom from foreign oppression to make whatever choices they like. For those generations, the challenges are much different, but equally important.

There is no world war to fight today nor any prospect of one anytime soon, but racial discrimination remains an American cancer. There is no Great Depression, but economic opportunity is an unending challenge, especially in a high-tech world where education is more important than ever. Most of all, there is the need to reinstate the concept of common welfare in America, so that the nation

doesn't squander the legacy of this remarkable generation by becoming a collection of well-defined, narrowly cast special-interest fiefdoms, each concerned only with its own place in the mosaic. World War II and what came after was the result of a nation united, not a nation divided.

As for me, I will always keep in my mind's eye a cool, cloudy Memorial Day on the northern plains of South Dakota. I was visiting my father's surviving brother, John, who after serving in the Navy during World War II returned to the small town of Bristol, the family seat. He stayed a bachelor all those years, working at the bank and in the municipal liquor store. He lived with two of his sisters, neither of whom, like John, ever married.

He was a small, quiet man, and on that Memorial Day he asked me to accompany him to the Bristol cemetery south of town, overlooking the broad reach of prairie. He explained that just the year before he had given up the job of placing small flags on the graves of veterans. He was worried that his successor, a veteran of the Korean War, might not know the location of all the graves that deserved to be honored.

So as I stood on a small rise, watching, these two veterans, each clutching a fistful of small American flags, made their way through the cemetery. It came to me then that this was, in many ways, the essence of the American experience. These two men had gone off to war in distant places and then returned to the familiar surroundings of their youth, the small town and farmland where life—as a result of droughts, blizzards, tornadoes, and wages that reflected the uncertainty of agriculture markets—was often difficult.

They came home to resume lives enriched by the values they had defended.

I have been witness to historic events at the U.S. Capitol and on the south lawn of the White House, at Arlington National Cemetery and the Statue of Liberty. None moved me more than the sight of my uncle and his friend, a local farmer, walking among the headstones, framed by the wide steel-gray sky and the great curve of a prairie horizon, decorating the graves of the hometown veterans on that Memorial Day.

I thought of the farmers, the merchants, the railroad men, and all their families who had gone through so much to tame the

prairie and start communities, build schools and churches, and look after one another. They had gone off to war, or sent their husbands, sons, and boyfriends, and they now lay side by side beneath the sod, mute testimony to sacrifice and service. Those whose graves were decorated with the small flags were carrying the colors for all the others.

It was a ceremony of honor, remembrance, and renewal played out in countless other cemeteries across the land by members of a generation that gave so much and asked so little in return.

After talking to so many of them and reflecting on what they have meant in my own life, I now know that it is in those small ceremonies and quiet moments that this generation is appropriately honored. No fanfare is required. They've had their parades. They've heard the speeches. They know what they have accomplished, and they are proud. They will have their World War II memorial and their place in the ledgers of history, but no block of marble or elaborate edifice can equal their lives of sacrifice and achievement, duty and honor, as monuments to their time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TOM BROKAW, a native of South Dakota, graduated from the University of South Dakota with a degree in political science. He began his journalism career in Omaha and Atlanta before joining NBC News in 1966. Brokaw was the White House correspondent for NBC News during Watergate, and from 1976 to 1981 he anchored *Today* on NBC. He has been the sole anchor and managing editor of *NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw* since 1983. Brokaw has won every major award in broadcast journalism, including two Duponts, a Peabody Award, and several Emmys. He lives in New York and Montana.