EARLY SUMMER 2021

VBCMagazine

Stories Unite Us | Since 2008

JULIA PARSONS' SECRET WAR

CENTENARIAN CODE GIRL

UNFRIENDLY FIRE

BART WOMACK RECALLS THE EMBEDDED ENEMY ATTACK OF 2003

THE GREAT P-38

MILITARY DESIGN PERFECTION

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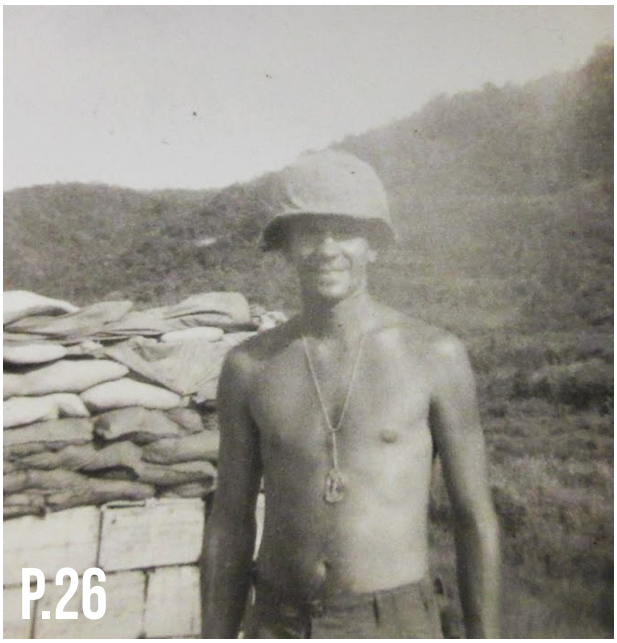


Cover: Julia Parsons, Veteran Voices of Pittsburgh Oral History Initiative (Farkas Collection)

VBC Magazine is published quarterly by The Veterans Breakfast Club, a 501(c)(3) non-profit that harnesses the power of storytelling in order to connect, educate, heal, and inspire.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

As the world enters Year Two of COVID-19, we continue holding our storytelling and story-listening programs online with veterans from every era and walk of life. By my calculation, we've added 800 new participants to our programs in the past year, most of them from outside of Western Pennsylvania. They join us for the stories. On April 1, Command Sergeant Major Bart Womack recounted the horrific "Embedded Enemy" attack on his 101st Airborne Division in Kuwait in 2003. Another 101st Airborne veteran, 99-year-old Jim "Pee-Wee" Martin of the famous 506th Parachute Regiment, joined us to talk about Operation Market Garden and other episodes covered in *The Band of Brothers*. Legendary ace Bud Anderson told us about "the one that got away"—he never shot down a Messerschmitt Me 262, the German fighter jet introduced toward the end of the war. On March 29, Vietnam Veterans Day, former Pittsburgh Steeler and Purple Heart recipient Rocky Bleier led an unforgettable conversation with over 160 of us on Zoom, including about 100 Vietnam veterans. We celebrated International Women's Day with women veterans from all eras, K-9 Veterans Day with military dog handlers, the SeaBee Birthday with SeaBee veterans, and spent much of February talking with the oft-forgotten veterans of Desert Storm for the 30th anniversary of that war. We'll continue our virtual programs through summer and welcome all of you to participate. We expect to sprinkle in some in-person special events as we go, the first on Wednesday, July 14. Join us and stay tuned!

Todd

Todd DePastino, Executive Director

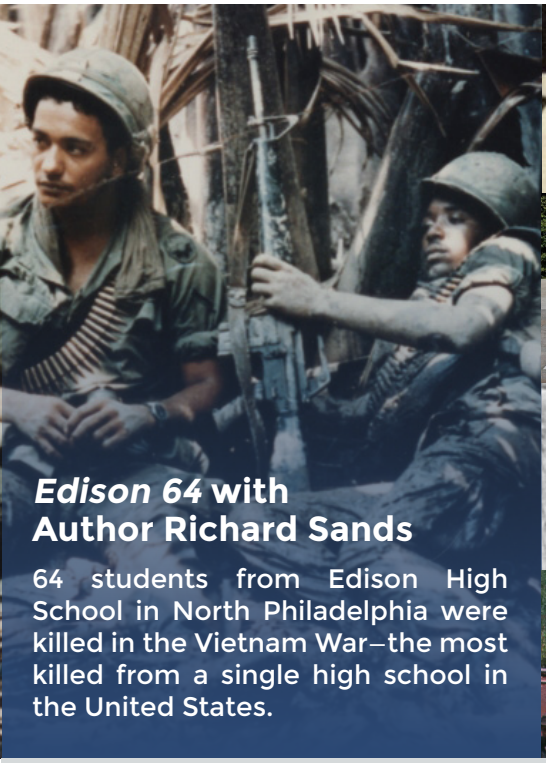
Find the VBC on Social Media!
@veteransbreakfastclub

TELL US YOUR STORY!

If you're a veteran, send us your story and pictures of yourself in uniform. It could be simple details of your service history or an anecdote or event you'd like to share. Email your info to Todd at todd@veteransbreakfastclub.org

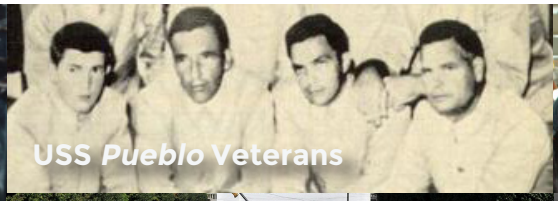
JOIN US EVERY MONDAY EVENING AND WEDNESDAY MORNING!

All are welcome to join our virtual veterans storytelling programs on Zoom! Head to veteransbreakfastclub.org/events to join!



***Edison 64* with Author Richard Sands**

64 students from Edison High School in North Philadelphia were killed in the Vietnam War—the most killed from a single high school in the United States.



USS *Pueblo* Veterans

Maritime Day with the Merchant Marine

100th Anniversary of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier
Talking with former tomb guards

Stories from Drill Instructors

Vietnam Graffiti

Special Memorial Day Virtual Program

Mobile Advisory Teams (MAT Teams) in Vietnam

Japanese WWII Vets

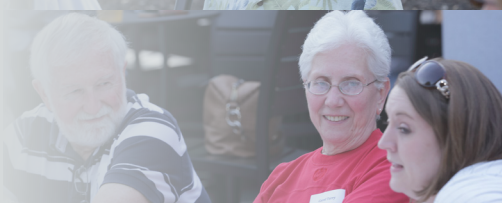
JULY 14

THE VBC'S FIRST IN-PERSON EVENT SINCE THE WINTER OF 2020!

Picnic Lunch Program at Two Mile Run Park in Beaver, PA

Wed. July 14 @ 11am ET • Rain or Shine • Registration required!

Join us for our first in-person event of the year! Catered picnic with veterans storytelling at Two Mile Run Park, 1925 Gypsy Glen Rd, Beaver, PA 15009 (GPS Directions: Latitude, Longitude: 40.712719, -80.320815) . **Registration is limited to 125 people! $15 per person, due June 15.** Pay online at veteransbreakfastclub.org/july-14 or by sending a check made out to "Veterans Breakfast Club" to 200 Magnolia Place, Pittsburgh, PA 15228. Questions? Email Todd todd@veteransbreakfastclub.org or call 412-623-9029.



OUR VIRTUAL PROGRAM LINE UP

VBC HAPPY HOUR Monday nights at 7pm ET on Zoom; simulcasted to Facebook and YouTube. BYOB(everage). Veterans stories, conversations, special topics, and guests.
May 3, 10, 17, 24
June 7, 14, 21, 28
July 12, 19, 26

VETERANS BREAKFAST CLUB Every Wednesday at 9am ET on Zoom; simulcasted to Facebook and YouTube. Just like our usual veterans storytelling breakfasts, but made virtual! BYOB(reakfast)!
May 5, 12, 19, 26
June 2, 9, 16, 23, 30
July 14, 21, 28

GREATEST GENERATION LIVE WWII ROUNDTABLE Every 4th Tuesday of the month at 7pm ET; simulcasted to Facebook and YouTube. Conversations about all things WWII, including the stories of WWII veterans.
May 25, June 22, July 27

GENERATION 9/11 One Monday night a month at 7pm ET on Zoom; simulcasted to Facebook and YouTube. BYOB(everage). Veterans stories, conversations, special topics, and guests.

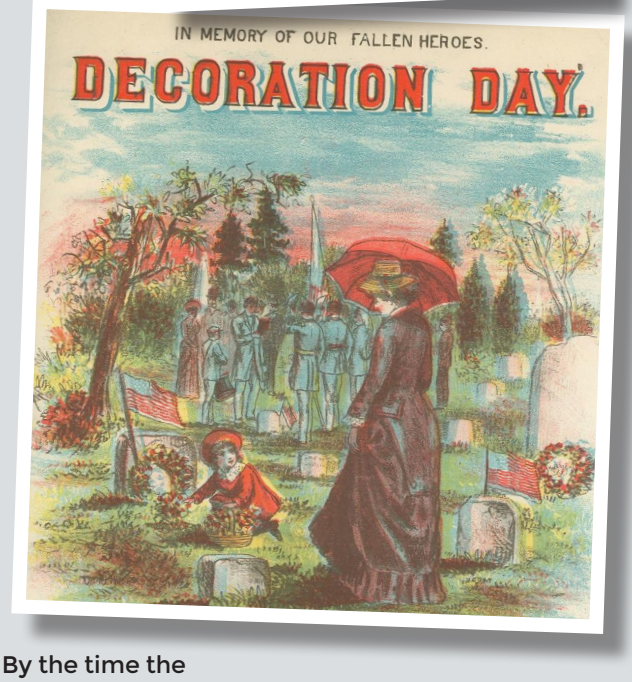
The History and Meaning of MEMORIAL DAY

by Todd DePastino

Decoration Day—now called Memorial Day—is a uniquely American holiday with shadowy origins. We know it began immediately after the Civil War when women came out all over the country to decorate the graves of fallen service men. Over two dozen towns claim title to "Birthplace of Memorial Day," including Boalsburg, Pennsylvania, Macon, Georgia, and Richmond, Virginia. In 1966, President Lyndon Johnson tried to end the squabbling by declaring Waterloo, New York, as the official birthplace. Nobody paid him any attention.

There was nothing like Memorial Day until the Civil War. That's because the Civil War was the first American war with mass armies, large battles, and huge casualties. Over the course of eight years, the American Revolution, for example, saw about 25,000 killed, wounded, and dead from disease. The Battle of Gettysburg caused twice that number in three days! Perhaps as many as 750,000 Americans died in the Civil War, more than all our other wars combined. Nothing had prepared Americans for this kind of carnage.

Take the Battle of Shiloh, an early horror that raged near the town of Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, on April 6-7, 1862. That first morning, 44,000 Confederate forces led by General Albert Sidney Johnston attacked 49,000 men led by General Ulysses S. Grant. Grant's men, not expecting an attack, were sleeping, eating breakfast, and drilling. No trenches, no pickets. Grant's forces would have been annihilated if the Confederates hadn't been equally ill-prepared. One newly arrived regiment from Louisiana arrived in uniforms matching the Union blue. Many of them would die from friendly fire (as did General Johnston himself). With luck and reinforcements, Grant was able to battle back the next day with a ferocious counterattack that re-opened the way to Mississippi and Alabama.



But the real story of Shiloh were the casualties. The Union lost 13,000 men killed, wounded, missing. Confederate casualties were over 10,000. These numbers would amaze and horrify newspaper readers over the next several days. Neither side had an ambulance corps or medical units, so the wounded were loaded in wagons and sent down country roads that spoked in every direction from Pittsburg Landing.

Over a hundred, both Blue and Gray, rumbled 80 miles south to Columbus, Mississippi. By the time the wagon arrived, many were already dead. They were all buried together, Union and Confederate, at Friendship Cemetery. A couple weeks later, some women—the "Ladies of Columbus"--decorated the graves of Confederate dead. They would continue to do so every spring of the war.

Then, the first postbellum spring, April 25, 1866 to be exact, the Ladies of Columbus came out again to Friendship Cemetery and noticed the 40 lonely Union graves undecorated. In a small act of mercy, they placed magnolia blossoms on the enemy graves with the same loving care they gave to their own. CONTINUED ON OPPOSITE PAGE

A group of Union occupation troops saw the gesture and notified Horace Greeley, famed editor of the *New York Tribune*. Greeley wrote a celebratory piece about the Ladies of Columbus and urged Americans to do likewise to foster national reconciliation. Decoration Day was born.

Two years later, our country's first veterans organization, the Grand Army of the Republic, ratified a practice that had already taken hold and issued General Order No. 11, directing that May 30 be the annual date "designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades . . . whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet church-yard in the land."

The Ladies of Columbus took pride of place in our understanding Decoration Day's origins until ten years ago, when the historian David Blight changed our understanding of the holiday's history. Blight discovered a treasure trove of documents detailing a remarkable Decoration Day commemoration a year earlier than the Columbus, Mississippi event, and with a very different purpose.

The location was Charleston, South Carolina, and the date May 1, 1865.

General William Tecumseh Sherman had marched his Army of Georgia first to Savannah before sending a special detachment north to occupy Charleston, the birthplace of secession. The first unit to arrive in the city was the 21st Regiment of US Colored Troops followed by the famous all-Black 55th Massachusetts Infantry. Charleston had been reduced to rubble by fire and relentless bombardment from land and sea.

The white residents of Charleston had evacuated, so the only people there were Black, largely slaves of wealthy Charlestonians. These now freed people lined the streets and cheered as the Union troops marched in. Days later, the all-Black city held a parade with two floats: one carried a vignette of a slave auction, the other carried a coffin labeled "Slavery," with a sign that read "Fort Sumter Dug its Grave, April 12th, 1861."

But the celebratory mood turned grim with the discovery of a mass grave at the Washington Race Course and Jockey Club (now Hampton Park). Before the war, the Race Course was the playground of the rich. But in 1865, it became an overflow facility for the notorious Andersonville prison camp in Georgia. Within weeks of their arrival, 257 Union POWs had died of starvation, exposure, and disease. Their guards had flung them in a mass grave, no names, no markers.

The Black soldiers of the 21st and 55th regiments began the gruesome task of disinterring and separating the remains. After a couple weeks, each of the 257 fallen Union soldiers had his own plot and whitewashed cross. The troops built a fence around the cemetery to prevent animals from trampling the sacred ground.

Then, on May 1, 10,000 people—mostly African Americans, mostly former slaves—marched to the site of Washington Race Course. Over the park's entrance was a sign: "Martyrs of the Course." The procession surrounded the makeshift cemetery to sing hymns, read scripture, and lay wreaths and flowers at the graves of the Union martyrs. Three-thousand children sang "John Brown's Body." Uniformed soldiers performed parade ground maneuvers. Women processed with arms full of roses and crosses to decorate and consecrate the burial ground.

This commemoration was an act of reverence, but also a defiance of sorts. Charleston had been the *de facto* capital of the Old South ruled by a powerful plantation aristocracy. On May 1, 1865, the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery, had been passed, but not ratified. There was not yet a 14th Amendment (securing Black citizenship) nor a 15th Amendment (guaranteeing voting rights). The future of these free Black citizens of Charleston was perilously uncertain.

The one thing that was certain is that they were now, for the moment at least, free. Their Decoration Day at Washington Race Course was meant to define the Union soldiers as martyrs to the cause they saw as animating the entire Civil War: slavery. Just to make sure no one overlooked the point, the celebrants took that empty coffin labeled "SLAVERY" from the parade 17 days earlier and they buried it in the cemetery, along with the martyrs.

So, this May 31, as you take a moment to remember and honor those who died in service to our country, think of the rich history of Memorial Day, a day set aside to share collective grief but also to affirm what's best about our nation, the ideals that guide us, and those charged with the burden of protecting them.

MY SECRET WAR

CODEBREAKER JULIA PARSONS RECALLS HER EFFORT TO CRACK THE ENIGMA CODE

by Julia Parsons

On March 2, we celebrated the 100th birthday of Julia Parsons with a drive-by parade and virtual party. People from all over the country sent their best wishes to Julia, one of our living treasures. In World War II, the Germans encrypted their communications with an ingenious device called Enigma. They believed their code unbreakable. Julia, a Navy WAVE, was one of those who worked to crack Enigma. Here is Julia's story, in her words.

The war came at a perfect time for me. I was a senior at Carnegie Tech about to graduate with a General Studies degree that equipped me to do practically nothing in the real world. After working a few months in the summer of 1942 in an army ordnance lab checking gauges on shells made in Pittsburgh's steel mills, I read a newspaper article about the Navy accepting women into service as commissioned officers for the first time. College graduates could earn commissions by going through an officer candidate program. I signed up right away and became a Navy WAVEWomen Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service.

Some girls—and we were called "girls" in those days—had fathers who weren't too happy about their daughters joining the Navy. But my father, a professor at Carnegie Tech, had no boys, and he was proud of me and proud, too, to hang the blue star service flag in our window to show that we were doing our part. It's sad that I never got to tell him about what I did as a WAVE, which was declassified only after his death. I could tell him only that I did "office work." He'd have been fascinated by the truth. And proud.

I shipped out for officer training on April 13, 1943. We marched from the Keystone Hotel on Wood Street downtown to the old P&LE railroad station across the river. We went straight through the back door and on to a train.


WWII Code Breaker, Who Kept Her Work Secret For Decades, Celebrates 100th Birthday

By SYDNEY ROACH • MAR 2, 2021

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Julia Parsons with her service photo.

Julia Parsons with her service photo.

COURTESY JULIA PARSONS

"Goodbye, Pittsburgh!" I thought, relishing my chance to see more of the world. My first great shock was the sight of white snow in Northampton, Massachusetts. In dirty Pittsburgh, fallen snow merely provided a backdrop for the black soot that rained from the skies without cease. I marveled, too, at the ubiquitous New England evergreens. These trees were rare back home, where poisonous acids polluted the air.

Several hundred of us young women crowded into the dorms of Smith College—"U.S.S. Northampton"—for Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School. We marched to and from classes (the only marching we'd ever do in the Navy) intended to equip us for useful Navy work. The focus of our coursework was cryptology, but we also took classes in physics, Navy history, and identifying ships by their silhouettes. They worked us hard, and those of us who scored high enough upon graduation shipped straight to Washington, D.C. I was among that group, as was my roommate, Sandy.

Sandy and I stayed in Quarters "D"—a naval barracks—with 4,000 other WAVES before finding thirdfloor walkup rooms in Georgetown, a posh area now, but not then. Washington hummed during the war years with important people doing important work, and all of them in uniform, it seemed. There were uniforms from all over the world, a veritable United Nations on the streets, scuttling in and out of buildings, all working hard for the war effort. Everyone Sandy and I knew came through Washington sooner or later, and there was always someone—a friend of mine or a friend of Sandy's—sleeping on one of our pullout couches.

When we arrived in Washington, we reported to the Naval Communications Annex housed in a former girl's school, the Mount Vernon Seminary, located in Northwest Washington on Massachusetts Avenue near Ward Circle. The complex is still there, serving a similar purpose with the Department of Homeland Security. We gathered in a beautiful campus chapel and sat in velvet padded pews, the kind with little doors at the end of the rows, and waited for our assignments. Someone came in and asked, "Does anyone here speak German?" I raised my hand because I'd taken two years of it in high school. They shot me off to the Enigma section immediately, and I began learning how to decode German Uboat message traffic on the job, day one.

The Uboat section was codenamed SHARK (there was a separate ship section, with which I had no contact). Enemy messages arrived all day from all over the North Atlantic, plus the North Sea and the Bay of Biscay. The Allies' receiving towers would intercept German coded radio messages, and operators would transmit them via teletype to Washington, D.C., where armies of technicians like me would begin trying to decode them. Decoding wasn't easy, and it would have been impossible if the British hadn't captured a German Enigma machine and three months' worth of code (and three months only) from German submarine U 559 in October 1942.

The machine they captured was the M4 Enigma, for Uboats only. It looked like a typewriter in a small wooden cabinet. Inside the cabinet is where Enigma worked its diabolical (to us) magic. Each key on the typewriter was wired to a wheel, and each wheel to another wheel, and then to two others—four wheels in all. Each wheel changed the letter that went into it, so that the letter that was typed went through four generations of change before outputting as a seemingly random letter. The wheels were removable and could be rearranged, and their alphabet settings could also be changed, and they were, every twelve hours. The morning code was never the same as the afternoon code. The only rule, and it was one that proved tremendously useful to us, was that the outputted letter could never match the inputted letter. It was a safety measure the Germans had built into Enigma, but it helped us to eliminate plausible but false messages.

We would receive the messages and put them on tickertape in one long unbroken line of letters. Then, using the code captured off the sinking Uboat, we would set our Enigma machine for the morning's or afternoon's code, run the received message through Enigma, and read the outputted message. We got better and better at matching the decoded message with our other intelligence and got so that we could pretty much track Uboat fleet movements throughout the Atlantic.

When the three months' worth of captured code ran out, we were stuck. Enigma became an enigma again. The Uboat traffic became unreadable. To us, decryption was a logic game, but we also knew that many American and Allied lives—indeed perhaps the outcome of the war in Europe—depended on our efforts. From 1939, groups of German U boats—"wolfpacks"—stalked and sank thousands of Allied ships. American soldiers and sailors, as well as millions of tons of supplies and equipment destined for Great Britain and the Soviet Union, went down in the Atlantic, greatly harming the war effort. If we couldn't win the battle of the Atlantic, we might not be able to win the war. CONTINUED P. 10

CONTINUED FROM P. 9

The messages we decoded were specific in directing Uboats to rendezvous with other ships in certain locations. We had a huge map of the Atlantic Ocean on the wall divided into numbered quadrants with pins marking the last known locations of every Uboat. If we didn't break the code for two or three days, we didn't know if the Uboats had changed position, and American convoys leaving New York or Boston or Virginia might just sail right into the middle of a wolfpack.

One of my fellow WAVES in our department, Jean McDevitt, had a husband who sailed every six weeks or so on convoys as a Navy officer. Whenever he'd shove off, Jean would come into our room and say, "Ok, now, get busy. Mac's convoy left today. You'd better break that message traffic. I want Mac to come home alive." And she'd come round every hour or so to see if we'd broken the code. So, this was all very real and immediate for us. We knew lives were on the line. Our effort to do the impossible, to break the unbreakable code, was serious business.

Every once in a while, we'd catch a break. U boats sometimes lost radio contact, and when they'd surface to recharge their batteries, they'd radio their base requesting that missed messages be resent. Sometimes we'd be able to match these recoded messages against messages sent in the old code we'd broken. When that happened, it was like picking a lock and opening a door to a room full of useful information.

We got help from a marvelous machine, entirely new to us, called a "Bombe," a computer. As big as a piano, the computer took the information we fed into it about possible wheel orders and settings, along with the messages we'd received and not decoded, and then worked through the different possibilities. A lot of the work, however, was still done by our fallible human brains.

One week, when we hadn't been able to decode any messages at all, I got the task of creating a huge paper spreadsheet containing information on all the messages we'd received in the past six months: the subject, the time and date, the sending location, etc. The spreadsheet revealed a small detail that we'd missed about the daily message traffic. Every night at 7:30pm, a German control center sent out a weather report for the Bay of Biscay. Every night, like clockwork: the same message sent at exactly the same time.

The wording was virtually the same each night–verboten in any code operationand the sender even failed to use dummy words at the beginning of the messages. Because we knew the message content, we could work backwards and figure out the afternoon code. We'd simply wait until 7:30pm, receive the message, break the code, and then work like mad deciphering the messages we'd received earlier that day. We did this from the time I made the spreadsheet until the end of the war. It was our permanent solution to the problem of the code. Simple human carelessness on the Germans' part. The only time we tripped up was when the message sender accidentally misspelled "Biscay" as "Biskay." That threw us off, but the next day, we were back on track.

My work on Enigma was exciting and fascinating, but it was sad and poignant also. After months of daily eavesdropping on Uboat messages back and forth, we really got to know those German crews, like characters in a book. Not all the messages were official war business. There were many personal ones: "Congratulations, your son was born yesterday" or notes of support from loved ones. These Germans were just people like we were. Many of them probably didn't want to be at war under the ocean. They longed for home like our boys did. When a Uboat went down, I would think, "there goes that little boy's father."

I recall one Uboat commander wondering in a message why American airplanes were always overhead when his ship surfaced. He knew their code was being broken. But no one in Berlin would listen. When our planes eventually destroyed that ship, it bothered me a lot, as it did many of my colleagues. We fought an intimate war in our Enigma section, and our intimacy with enemy crews bred ambivalence about their destruction. We had to sink those Uboats. I just wish we'd have saved more of their crews.

Another difficult part of the job was that we couldn't talk to anyone about it. Not one word. We'd been warned on the first day that we weren't ever to discuss it with anyone outside our section. If we did, we'd be arrested for treason, and the penalty was death. We took that threat seriously and understood the danger of loose lips, which, in my case, really could sink ships. My roommate Sandy worked in the Japanese section, and she never talked about her work either. I met my future husband while I was in Washington (we got married in that same beautiful chapel where I'd received by assignment to Enigma), and he never knew what I did–decades later, he still didn't know.

The war's end was bittersweet for me. I loved my work at the Naval Communications Annex, and the end of the war meant the end of that work. There was nothing to do. Women workers all over America–both those in uniform and civilians–lost their jobs so that the returning servicemen could reclaim theirs, and rightly so, I suppose. But it meant that women really had very few options, except to go back to the kitchen or perhaps find a job as a teacher, nurse, or secretary. World War II was our moment of glory, when we did just about everything, and its memory remained with us and nurtured, I think, our breakout decades later.

I remained completely silent about my wartime work until 1997, fiftytwo years after the war, when my old friend Jean McDevitt and I paid a visit to the National Cryptologic Museum near Fort Meade, Maryland. The exhibits there astounded me. Here was every sort of Enigma machine–early models, late models–on display for all to see with detailed explanations of how they worked. I asked a tour guide about it, and he said that our secret work at the Communications Annex began to be declassified in the 1970s. I shook my head in dismay.

All those year of silence, I think, did a disservice to history. The museum exhibits were riddled with small errors about details that were vitally important to us, such as the string of numbers we entered into our computers (it was 126, not 025, as the exhibit claimed).

It's been good to break the silence. Good for me and for history.

. . . .

IMAGE ATTRIBUTIONS p. 9: "On A Positive Note" screengrab from KDKA.com. WWII Code Breaker screengrab from Military.com

HMS *Petard* 1943 (Imperial War Museum)

THE U-BOAT CAPTURE THAT CHANGED THE WAR

Lt. Commander Mark Thornton was the hardest-charging captain in the Royal Navy. He drove the men of his H.M.S. *Petard* mercilessly with constant drills and severe punishments for those who failed to meet his exacting standards. One favorite exercise was to rehearse the attack and boarding of a German submarine.

"Other destroyers might sink U-boats," Thornton later declared, "but we would capture one!"

Inspiring Thornton's improbable goal was the horrific toll U-boats were taking on Allied shipping in 1942. In the first six months of that year alone, the German sub fleet sank almost 600 Allied ships and destroyed over 3 million tons of badly needed cargo, while losing only six U-boats.

Behind this success was a newly designed four-wheel Enigma machine, the M4, whose encryption the Kriegsmarine (German Navy) considered impregnable. For nine months, the brains at Bletchley Park, the secret code-breaking center in Great Britain, worked on cracking the M4 code. They got nowhere.

The German Navy 4-rotor Enigma machine (M4), which was used for U-boat message traffic (Magnus Manske)

Then, on October 30, 1942, the crew of the H.M.S. *Petard* got a chance to put their training into action in the Mediterranean.

After receiving word of a U-boat near the Nile delta, the *Petard*, along with four other destroyers, pursued U-559 for sixteen hours, bracketing the German sub with as many as 288 depth charges that cracked the U-boat's hull and eventually forced it to surface.

Thornton's men spotted U-559's conning tower rise above the waves, and they opened fire with 20mm and 40mm guns. The submarine began to sink as its crew baled out. Thornton saw his chance.

Some of the *Petard*'s men leaped into the water while others formed boarding parties and lowered themselves in boats. Pushing through the German survivors, they entered the sub and ransacked the radio room, grabbing anything that looked confidential and passing it back to the men in the boats.

Lt. Anthony Fasson, the *Petard*'s second-in-command, tried to wrestle the Enigma machine itself out of the sub as the stern dipped sharply. Before he could emerge from the control room, the gushing water tipped the balance, and the sub slipped beneath the surface, taking Fasson and one other man with it. These two would receive the George Cross posthumously, but the reason for the awards would remain secret for over thirty years.

Among the documents retrieved from the U-559 were two code books used by the Kriegsmarine to report on weather and submarine positions. Once these books reached Bletchley Park, code breakers could track U-boat movements again, and the Allies could begin to fight back and eventually win the Battle of the Atlantic.

In Gratitude

THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING

Ryan Ahl

Pat Andrews

Barry Arbaugh

Bob Arturo

Joe & Sue Babik

Cynthia Baker

Kelly Barber

Martha Barry & Family - In memory of WWII veteran Al DeFazio

Jake & Pamela Barsottini

Chuck & Kimberly Barth - In memory of Paul Eibeck--godfather, uncle, family, veteran

Herb & Joan Baugh

Larry Belcastro

Elaine Berkowitz

Ed Blank

Clem Blazewick

Robert J. Boff

Peggy Bolam

Robert Boyd

Timothy Braithwaite

Elizabeth Breines - In honor of Judy Parsons' 100th birthday.

Margaret Breines - In honor of Julia Parsons' 100th birthday

Jim Bruder

David & Lenore Buchta

Jennifer Carey

Gary Carmassi

Candy Casarella

Daniel Castiglia

Mike Cherock

Geri Chichilla - In memory of Dominic Bucci, Korean War & Vietnam

Joe Cirelli

Bonnie Cornish

Carol Crawford

Paul Cusick

Daniel Keffer Post 75 American Legion - In memory of WWII & Korean War veteran Ray York

Connie Davis

Edward Davison

The Del Bianco Family - In memory of WWII veteran Al DeFazio

Pat Doherty

Morris Dotson

Audrey & Bob Dulski - In memory of Korean War veteran Paul Eibeck

Larry Dunn

Joe Dyga

Donald Ebert

Rick & Donna Erisman

Helen Fallon - In honor of Julia Parsons' 100th birthday

Frederick Farren

Dighton Fiddner

Glenn Fletcher

Stan Foster

Jane Frankel - In memory of Vietnam veteran Alan Frankel

Jay & Carol Galbreath

Larry Gamret

Kathryn L.J. & Rodney M. Gerhart - In memory of Isaac Jacobs, MIA WWII

Suzanne Gilliland

Eugene Glick

Glenn & Donna Goss - In honor of WWII veteran Warren Goss's 96th birthday!

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Rosemary Gregg - In memory of my Dad, Sgt Louis C. Scanga, Army Air Corps

Pierre Haan

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George Kutcher & Karen Moore - In memory of WWII US Navy veteran Florence Mertz

George Kutcher & Karen Moore - In memory of WWII veteran Louis E. Mertz Jr. , U. S. Marines

The Kutcher Family - In memory of WWII veterans, US ARMY: Frank ,Joseph, Anthony, Mary & John; US NAVY: George

George Kutcher

Joe Lagana

Pat Larkman - In memory of Charles Relja

Jean Link

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James Lutz

Jim & Debra Lynch - In memory of Korean War veteran Bob Fritsch

Anne Madarasz - In memory of veteran Alan Poese

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Tom Wilcox

Marian Wild

Phil & Kathy Winowich - In memory of my father and mother, William "Wimpy" Winowich and Jacqueline Winowich

Joe Wisniewski

Thomas Woloszyn - In honor of Julia Parsons' 100th birthday

Ben Wright

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In Gratitude

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO MADE OUR VIETNAM VETERANS DAY CELEBRATION A SUCCESS!

We shipped 175 Welcome Home Boxes to Vietnam Veterans as a Thank You for their often unrecognized service.

Unique Services & Applications with Rich Gromo

The Pittsburgh Steelers with John Wodarek

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Rocky Bleier generously spent two hours with us on Vietnam Veterans Day on March 29 and shared stories from his time in Vietnam and with the Steelers. Thank you, Rocky!

As part of our celebration, we sent out 175 Welcome Home Boxes to Vietnam Veterans for our Vietnam Veterans Day Recognition.

We would like to thank everyone who supported these boxes, especially **Megan Regan at Humana**, who went above and beyond in helping us put the boxes together and ship them. Thank you, Megan!

UNFRIENDLY FIRE

EMBEDDED ENEMY — THE INSIDER THREAT ATTACK OF MARCH 23, 2003

By CSM (Ret.) Bart Womack

This is the true story of the unprecedented deadly attack against the 101st Airborne Division by a fellow American soldier. It is the first of its kind in military history and was the first attack since 911 with the same motive and intent. Command Sergeant Major Bart Womack was there and shares his eyewitness account. These excerpts are from his book, Embedded Enemy.

One benefit of sleeping in the Commander's tent was that I had access to the one television set in all of Camp Pennsylvania in Kuwait. That meant I could watch my favorite sport, golf, and my favorite golfer, Tiger Woods.

The calendar had just barely turned. It was 0100 hours on March 23, 2003, when it happened.

I should have been sleeping, but every swing Tiger made from the tee could be the last one I saw for a long time. We never knew exactly when we would be called up to cross into Iraq.

As I settled in to watch, I heard the canvas of the tent's flap ruffle against the wooden floor. I looked up to see the Brigade Executive Officer (XO), Major Kenneth Romaine, emerge from the vestibule that led into our tent. He was returning from the Tactical Operations Center (TOC), which is the Command Center for Camp Pennsylvania.

"How's everything?" I asked.

"Good," Romaine said. "They're doing good. I'm going to bed. Is Tiger still kicking butt?"

"Yep, six-shot lead with nine holes yet to play."

My eyes went back to the television as Romaine walked behind me toward the end of the table and into his sleeping area.

As I concentrated on Tiger's swing and listened for the sweet THWACK of the ball, I heard the tent flap flutter again and a scraping sound as something rolled toward me. It was almost as if Tiger's ball had made it all the way into our own Kuwaiti sand trap.

But this object was no golf ball.

The hand grenade settled between Tiger and me, at the tent's edge. I was sitting at the far end of the table. Had I been sitting one inch to the left, or leaning forward, I may never have seen it.

Sparks emitted from the hand grenade. I remember wondering why it hadn't just blown. I knew grenades only took five seconds to explode, and I think I wasted two of them coming to the shocking realization of what was happening.

I looked up and saw Romaine staring at me with his eyes open wide. I cleared the blast area and tore to the rear of the tent to wake up Brigade Commander, Colonel Frederick Hodges, who was dead asleep.

"Sir, get up," I said frantically, as I shook him. "There's a grenade about to go off up front."

My five seconds were long up, but the grenade hadn't blown. That's because it was an incendiary type designed to catch things on fire, instead of spraying shrapnel. The grenade worked just fine and started a fire which began filling our tent with thick smoke.

Our disoriented Colonel slipped on his boots, and looked for his weapon. I grabbed him by the arm and yelled, "Ready—Go!"

In the confusion, we didn't hear the second grenade roll into the tent. This one was a fragmentary grenade, the kind that does explode. I continued down the aisle and had to trust the Colonel was a step in front of me because I couldn't see him through the smoke.

The second grenade exploded just as we got near the exit. Shrapnel sprayed the bunk where I would have been sleeping if Tiger hadn't been playing golf. The concussive force knocked the Colonel backward into his sleeping area. Having no idea what happened to him, I kept moving forward.

I burst into the cold, crisp night air. I could breathe. My mind raced to make a plan. I looked behind me and saw Romaine crouching in our tent's vestibule. A second later, Romaine was shot. CONTINUED ON P. 16

Those first five minutes of the assault felt like 30 seconds. My focus turned to arming myself and neutralizing the enemy. I headed toward our Command Post, the TOC or "Tactical Operations Center."

The Brigade area was usually well lit by a powerful generator, but tonight all was dark. The generator had been cut. As I ran toward the TOC, a second grenade exploded.

I flung open the TOC tent flap and shouted an order, "Give me an M4 with some ammo and NODs (night vision goggles)!"

I was now boiling with anger. I kicked a metal folding chair. "How in the hell did the enemy get into our camp?"

A soldier placed my requested M4 in one hand and two full 30-round magazines in the other. I put one magazine in the cargo pocket of my military-issued pants, and I locked and loaded the other magazine into the weapon.

In that short time another grenade exploded and another shot was fired.

With the NODs my left hand the assault rifle in my right, I crouched back to our tent, which was still smoking. I looked for Romaine and Hodges in the vestibule, but they weren't there. Other than the grit of the sand on the bottom of my boots scraping against the wood, there wasn't a sound.

It was eerie. I was alone out there—nothing moved, no sign of life. No training scenario had prepared me to go up against an enemy like this by myself. I left the vestibule and moved back toward the Command Center to get some help to find my desert roommates. I thought there would be success in numbers.

As I got closer, I yelled, "It's me! It's me, the Sergeant Major," as if that was the new running password.

Back at the TOC, Major Kyle Warren had taken charge. He moved outside and began setting up security around the TOC by grabbing soldiers as they came out of their tents. He positioned them along the Texas Barriers (larger than a Jersey Barrier) that encircled the TOC. Our Bastogne Brigade was now in full-on military defensive mode.

But in all of the adrenaline-fueled commotion, we still had no idea how many attackers were running through the camp, where they were, what weapons they had, or how long they could sustain the attack. Inside the TOC, I moved to the radios and barked a dry-throated call for more soldiers, "Any station this net, this is Bastogne 7 . . . we're under attack . . . I say again, we are under attack!"

Battalion Commander LTC Chris Hughes answered immediately. "This is No Slack 6," he replied.

"Sir," I said, immediately disregarding standard call signs. "I need some damn help over here now!"

"What do you need?"

"I need at least a squad. I don't know how many there are or what we're looking for. I haven't been able to ID shit."

"Roger that, they're on the way . . . Do you need anything else?

"Negative. Send them in the vicinity of the TOC."

Just as I stepped away, I heard a call through the radio's speaker. "Do you need a Medevac?" a voice asked.

"Yes," I said.

I parted the tent flaps to exit once again into the darkness.

* * * *

We worked feverishly to uncover the source of the attack and to take care of our wounded. Tent #2 was the hardest hit. Most of its 11 inhabitants had retired for the night, including most of our Majors, a couple of Captains and our two Kuwaiti interpreters. Tent #3 had 16 men bunking there, but several of them had hit the showers or were still on duty. My tent, Tent #1, had only three players.

It was Tent #2 where our team began to house the wounded, despite the fact that it was still smoldering from the grenade blast. Many of the men could not be moved very far due to their injuries. So it became our triage center as we waited for help to arrive. As our comrades were being treated, the rest of us were left to discover what had happened.

* * * *

With the wounded evacuated, I returned to the TOC, and headed straight towards the NCO in charge, and asked, "Where's the Colonel?"

"Right there," he said, pointing behind me. I turned see the Colonel sitting in a chair bleeding, arm in a sling. I walked over to him bending down to his eye level.

"No profession, level of education, ideology or religion is above reproach. There is no profile. The Insider Threat is closer than you think."

CSM (Ret.) Bart Womack

"You knocked me down," he said, staring blankly into my eyes. It took me a second to understand what he meant. I had no recollection of running into anything or anyone at all during my escape from the tent. "It wasn't me," I replied. "It had to be something else."

"Are you all right?" I asked.

"Yeah, my arm is sore," he said. "This other blood is the XO's." He was referring to Romaine.

"What the hell happened?" I asked.

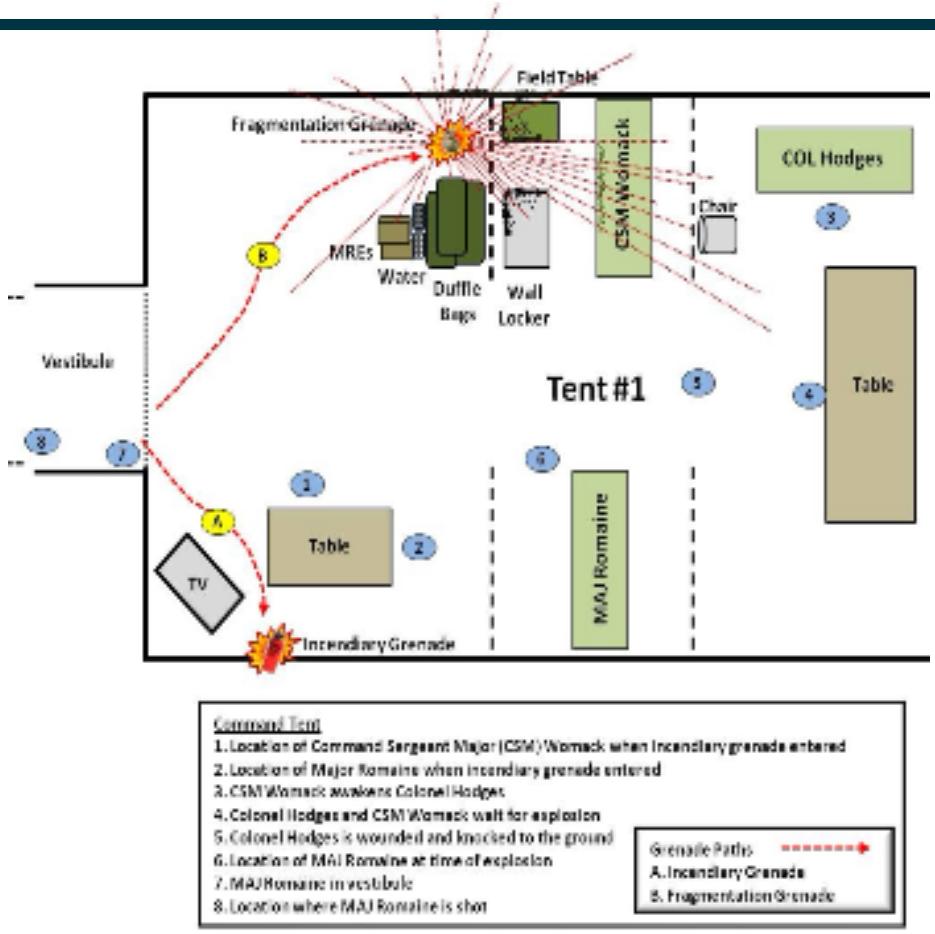
"We're still trying to figure that out," the Colonel said. "Somehow the enemy got into our camp."

He walked with me back to where the staff had gathered. We stood wide-eyed and expectant.

"We need to make a net call to all of our units and get accountability of our personnel," the Colonel instructed.

"I don't understand how the enemy got past our security," I said. "Something had to have changed in the camp."

Major Warren responded, "We had a couple of Kuwaiti interpreters come in last night."



"That's it!" I said. It had to be them, I thought. The interpreters had been thoroughly vetted through the translator process and were approved to translate. But we knew only that they could speak English and were not Iraqi soldiers. The interpreters were last seen with the Chaplain near the barriers outside the destroyed tents. We found them still standing there, amidst the chaos, as if in a daze. They seemed to want to be found.

"Do you understand that people think that you did this tonight?" Warren asked them. They both nodded, "Yes."

The Brigade Combat Team's Military Intelligence Company interrogators were brought to the TOC to question the interpreters. They appeared as clueless as the rest of us. You could see it in their faces. They were shaking scared. But if not these men, then who?

* * * *

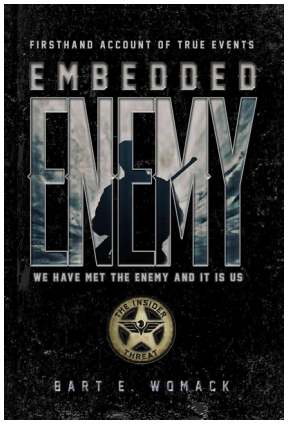
Colonel Hodges was in the Command Center talking to the 101st Airborne Division's Commander Major General David Petraeus on the handset. As I watched our leaders update the General, my focus returned to the mystery of the enemy. How did they get in? How did they create all of this devastation and then disappear, just like that? We were too good of a unit to be attacked and to let them get away. More than 4,500 soldiers resided at this Camp, and no one had seen anyone who looked like the enemy.

As I approached the main command desk, the Colonel stepped in front of me, cutting me off abruptly to gain my attention. "I got accountability from all of the units and everyone is accounted for except one," Hodges said. "There's one soldier missing from Second Battalion. He's with the 326th Engineers. His name is Sergeant Hasan Akbar."

The Colonel's words meant nothing to me at first. I didn't realize he was identifying Akbar as our prime suspect.

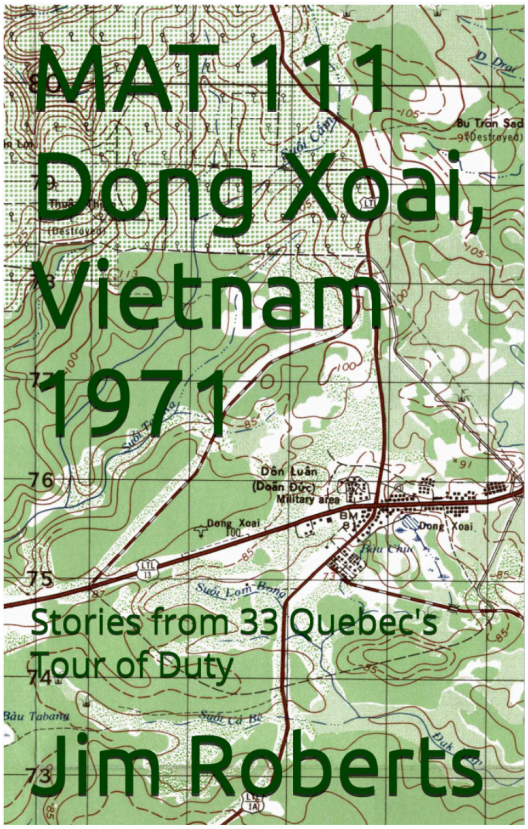
"Their Second Battalion ammunition had been broken into, and there are fragmentary and incendiary grenades missing, along with 5.56mm ammunition," Hodges continued.

I stared in disbelief, jaw open. I had to let the news register. We were about to start a camp-wide search, looking for someone who boarded the plane with us from Fort Campbell, Kentucky. We had met the enemy . . . and the enemy was one of us.



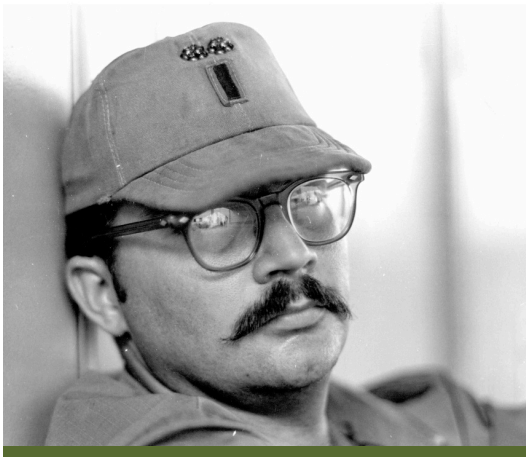
Go to www.embeddedenemy.com to order the book.

JIM ROBERTS' VIETNAM MEMOIR IS PUBLISHED!



In April 1971, Jim Roberts headed to Vietnam as a green Infantry Lieutenant with a special mission. Serving on a five-man Mobile Advisory Team (MAT) 111 in jungles and hamlets along the Cambodian border, LT Roberts prepared our South Vietnamese allies for the "Vietnamization" of the war- the withdrawal of American forces. The stories collected here capture in detail the day-to-day operations of a special unit hardly mentioned in histories of the Vietnam War. They bring to life a sad, rich, and eventful year of a war in which the folks back home had long lost their faith.

Jim is generously donating proceeds from the book to the Veterans Breakfast Club. You can order a copy on Amazon. Also, join us on Zoom Monday, June 7 at 7:00pm ET for a Virtual Book Launch conversation with Jim and other veterans of Vietnam MAT teams!



Jim Roberts, Author of *MAT 111 Dong Xoai, Vietnam 1971:* Stories from 33 Quebecs Tour of Duty. His book can be purchased on Amazon or through the link at veteransbreakfastclub.org/june-7

Humor

DRILL INSTRUCTOR MISUNDERSTANDING

by Jim Lutz

(U.S. Air Force photo illustration/ Senior Airman Riley Johnson)

In the summer of 1956, after completing six weeks of Basic Training at Lackland AFB, San Antonio, Texas, I was assigned to Scott Air Force Base at Belleville, Illinois, to become a Personnel Records Specialist, Airman First Class. We lived in a two-story WWII-era barracks with room for 150 men and a bunch of cooks-in-training who learned on-the-job.

One night, I drew guard duty. My job was to protect the barracks with a sawed-off eighteen-inch broomstick. I patrolled both floors, between the bays of bunks, making sure the trainees were "safe"—lights out and asleep.

After a few passes, I stopped outside the room of our Training Instructor (T.I.), the Air Force's version of a Drill Sergeant. T.I. Fowler was a feisty Air Force brat with curly red hair, fierce temper, and thick Georgia accent. He fit the T.I. profile perfectly. There was always a lot of yelling, cursing, spitting, imaginative obscenities. The accent made him difficult to understand at times. My name is Lutz, one syllable. Somehow, he always managed to stretch it out to "LUU--utz."

On this night, about 0030 hours or so, Fowler was playing cards with three other T.I.s.

"Barracks Guard!" he barked. "Get the $@%& in here!"

Knees shaking, I stepped in the room. "Sir," I announced.

"Get me four cooks, NOW!" he ordered.

"Yes, sir!" I responded.

I quickly headed up the stairs to the bunk bays where the cooks-in-training slept. I hated to wake them. They went on duty at 4:30am to prepare breakfast for 6:00am. But, that was the order.

The four cooks pulled on their pants and staggered down the stairs to Fowler's room. The blinkered men stood at attention before the card-playing T.I.s.

"Airman Basic Jones reporting, sir!" each announced.

Fowler turned his head to the men in astonishment. Then, he leveled his eyes at me.

"LUU-utz, who the %#!$ are these men?!" he roared. "I said get me four COKES!"

Non-Profit Spotlight

NATIONAL VETERANS ART MUSEUM

by Shaun Hall

When you go to the National Veterans Art Museum website (nvam.org), the menu bar up top looks innocent enough. The third tab over says VIRTUAL MUSEUM. Click it, and you get several options. The first is Online Collection. Click it, and you're whisked into a kaleidoscopic visual world that will absorb you for hours if you're not careful. There are photographs, canvases, watercolors, and sculptures. Cartoons with wild colors, installation pieces, woodcuts and sketches. The wild and the beautiful. The hideous and hilarious. It's all about war, and all by veterans.

Chicago's National Veterans Art Museum (NVAM) is North America's only museum focused on exhibiting veteran-created art. Its mission is to share art in ways that generate discussion on the meaning of war.

Over the last three decades, the NVAM has built a permanent collection comprising over 2,500 pieces by those who served on the front lines ranging from WWII to the present.

You can go to NVAM in Chicago and see it all for yourself. But even before COVID-19 struck, NVAM had already curated its Online Collection with high-resolution images of art and extensive biographical material on the artists who created the work.

You can also take a virtual tour of the exhibit space, each customizable with veteran speakers—all executed remotely.

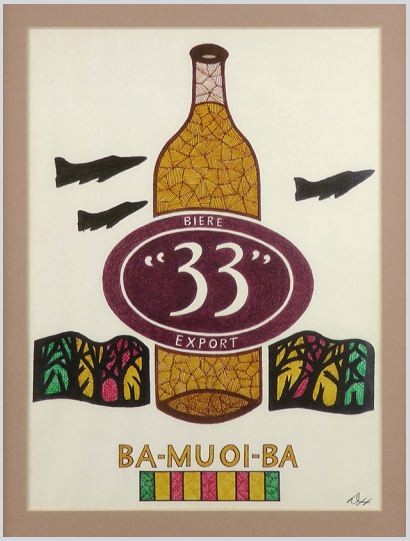
Then, there are the special exhibits. *The Things They Carried* Interactive serves as a visual companion to Tim O'Brien's bestselling book. O'Brien's narratives are illustrated with fine art and photography created by veterans that lived the stories. Much like the book, it explores the concepts of storytelling, and considers how veterans might authentically share their personal stories of the Vietnam experience.

Another popular exhibit is the Vonnegut Collection, art from the famed novelist and WWII veteran Kurt Vonnegut. In addition to writing, Vonnegut sketched, and he turned many of them into limited edition screen prints. Fifty of these are part of the National Veterans Art Museum's permanent collection.

Other recent online exhibits include highlights from the NVAM Permanent Collection of Black Veteran Art and Maurice Costello's *Back to "The Nam."*

So, check out nvam.org and if you like what you see sign up for NVAM's email newsletter, *Transmissions.* You can also become a museum member. If you join the VBC's online programs, you'll be meeting some of the people at NVAM, and the VBC will be working on a custom virtual tour. Stay tuned!

The National Veterans Art Museum
4041 N Milwaukee Ave 2nd floor, Chicago, IL 60641
nvam.org
(312) 326-0270



FLOWING THUNDER
David Helbert
Served in Vietnam, 1966-67
U.S. Army

FROM THE ARTIST

"I served in the 1st Logistical Command in Qui-Nhon as the courier-mailman. This required me to drive from Qui-Nhon twice a day to pick up mail and take care of all correspondence from our company to Battalion Headquarters. When I became short, I became the Company Draftsman,

American beer was scarce, but "33" biere was plentiful and terrible. We drank it anyway and paid the price in horrific hangovers.

In 1985, I drew this lampoon of the fabled brew. The art style is crosshatch. The F-4s are on a run, the forest is alive with explosions and the colors are in sync with the Vietnam service bar we wore on our uniforms. The Vietnamese called the beer "Ba Moui Ba." I dubbed the piece "Flowing Thunder" after the Operation Rolling Thunder.

Us GIs in Vietnam didn't understand the scope of the war. We did our jobs and counted the months, then days 'til we would DEROS (Date of Estimated Return from Overseas). I came to wonder...why are we here? When I shipped out to Vietnam, I was alone. When I came home, I came home alone, at 4 a.m. The only time anyone said to me "Welcome home" was another vet. My folks, my friends, nobody ever asked me about Vietnam, ever."

WAR MADE A NEW ME (DETAIL)
Dominic Fredianelli
Served in Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan)
U.S. Army National Guard, gunner, driver, 2009

FROM THE ARTIST

"I hope to reach new levels with urban art and graffiti. By continuing to try to vent my emotions of war, war injuries, hardship of small towns, alcohol and drug abuse onto canvas, I hope to reach out to those that may be trying to do the same."

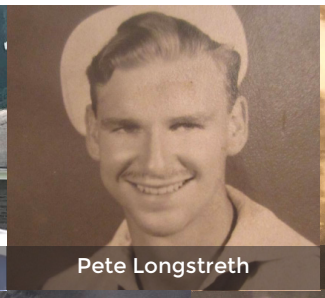
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Fredianelli served as a driver and gunner with the Michigan National Guard in Afghanistan in 2009, where he and his fellow soldiers looked for roadside bombs. In fall of 2010, he completed a 70-foot outdoor mural that was highlighted in a special exhibit at Finlandia University in his hometown of Hancock, Michigan. Dominic Fredianelli is the subject of the documentary "Where Soldiers Come From." "Where Soldiers Come From" follows Fredianelli and his best friend as they join the National Guard after high school, serve in Afghanistan, and return home to Michigan's Upper Peninsula as veterans at age 23.

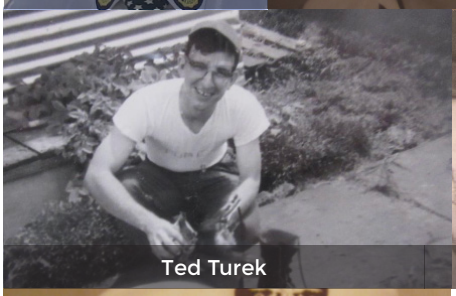
TO THOSE WHO RECENTLY PASSED, WE SALUTE YOU.

John Eastlake, Cold War Army
Tom Eckenrode, Cold War Army
Mel Eiben, WWII Navy
Joe Filloy, Cold War Air Force
George Freas, WWII Navy
Bob Fritsch, Korea Army
Joseph Glad, WWII Army
Clarence "Code" Gomberg, WWII Army
Clarence "Bud" Hall, WWII Air Corps
Gil Huckestein, WWII Army
Pete Longstreth, WWII Navy
Bill Luft, Vietnam Army
Felix Marcello, WWII Army
Ray McKinney, WWII Navy
Dick Richardson, Korea Army
Ray Scalise, WWII Navy
Ted Turek, Vietnam Army
J. Brien Wall, Vietnam Army
Gilbert Whitmer, Cold War Army
Joe Wilson, WWII, Navy
Ray York, WWII/Korea, Army/Navy


Ray York

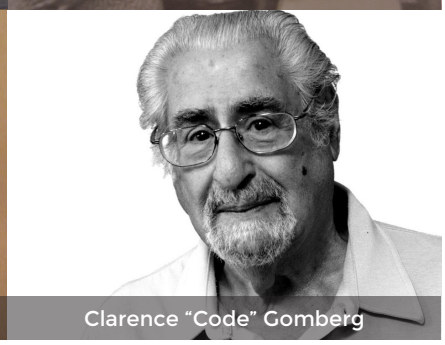

Pete Longstreth


Joseph Glad


Ted Turek


Dick Richardson


George Freas


Clarence "Code" Gomberg

LEFT: Army veteran Terry Q. Burnson left these dogtags at the Vietnam War Memorial Wall in 1987. Note the blackened P-38 also on the metal ball chain (vvmf.org). RIGHT: P-38 is used to open a C-Ration (JW Speaker).

THE GREAT P-38

Next to the Jeep, the most perfectly designed device in military history

by Todd DePastino

Next time you're talking with a Vietnam veteran, ask if they're carrying a P-38. Chances are, they have one in their pocket.

Virtually anyone who served in the Army or Marine Corps--even Air Force--between World War II and the 1980s is well familiar with the P-38 can opener, perhaps the most versatile and perfectly designed piece of equipment ever created for the military.

It came about in 1942 with the mass production of C-rations—canned food sent to feed GIs around the world.

The cans made food transportable and kept it fresh, but opening them on the frontlines was a problem. Soldiers in the field lived with very few pieces of equipment, all of it carried on their back, over their shoulder, or on their waist. Switchblade-size openers were too big and cumbersome. They were also expensive, as were winding keys affixed to each can.

So, the Army's Subsistence Research and Development Laboratory in Chicago issued a challenge to industry: design and manufacture a cheap, small, lightweight, easy-to-use device that wouldn't cut soldiers when they put them in their pockets.

A soldier at the lab, Major Thomas Dennehy, drew up the initial design in thirty days. But he couldn't solve the problem of a locking mechanism that would keep the blade from opening when not in use.

That final design step fell to John W. Speaker, an immigrant from Austria who had watched from afar as Nazis took over his native land. He had two things making him a good fit for the challenge: a passionate hatred for Hitler and a metal shop in Milwaukee that made automobile parts. He used the latter to perfect a special hinge which kept the blade snapped shut when not in use. The former inspired him to refuse any royalties for his invention. He was a patriot and wanted to do his part to win the war.

John W. Speaker,
Father of the P-38 (JW Speaker)

JW Speaker Company would go on to manufacture over 50 million P-38s at the cost of about a penny-a-piece.

Speaker didn't label the device a "P-38." Rather, it got a typical Army designation: "Opener, Hand, Can, Folding, Type 1."

So how did the can opener get its nickname? CONTINUED P. 24

The Great P-38

CONTINUED FROM P. 23

I've posed that question to many veterans and have gotten different answers. Some say it's because it is 38 mm long—true, but Americans didn't use metric then. Others say the name came from the 38 rocking motions it takes to open a C-ration-size can—also true, I tested it. Could it have been named after the Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighter plane or the German P-38 semi-automatic pistol? Possibly, but what's the connection? The larger version, the Type II, became known as the P-51, as in the North American P-51 Mustang fighter plane, so maybe it does derive from military aviation. The mystery remains.

One thing is certain: from 1942 until the introduction of MREs in the 1980s, American servicemen and women have loved the P-38, not only for yielding the fruits of C-rations when they were hungry, but also for its unofficial uses. Soldiers used them as screwdrivers, rifle cleaners, mini-prybars, and knives for cutting fabric. The little hole at the end made putting them on dogtags easy.

Last year, I received a well-used P-38 in the mail as a gift from retired Army Major Kathy Silvia, who graduated from the first West Point class that accepted women. I treasure it . . . and will keep it close in case I need to pry open a paint can in a cinch.

(JW Speaker)

Non-Veterans Want to Know

Q: WHAT IS THE MERCHANT MARINE?

by Todd DePastino

Cadets at the United States Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA)

A: Years ago, a veteran of the Merchant Marine cussed me out for forgetting National Maritime Day, May 22. After the dressing down, the vet gave me a lesson on the Merchant Marine and its history. Yes, it still exists. No, they aren't military. And, no, don't ever call them "Merchant Marines"!

Of all the branches of service, the Merchant Marine is the most puzzling. In fact, the very term means several different things at once. First, it defines all the cargo ships "flagged" or registered with the United States for international trade. Then, the term can also refer to the American men and women who work on those ships.

But, for most students of history, "Merchant Marine" evokes memories of a para-military branch of service made famous by Humphrey Bogart in Action in the North Atlantic (1943) and the astronomically high casualty rates at the hands of German U-boats.

In times of peace, the Merchant Marine—both ships and people—are civilian and (mostly) privately owned and operated. In times of war, however, merchant seamen can be put into government service on behalf of the Navy, and so can the ships. That's what happened in World War II when virtually all US cargo ships were commandeered for wartime duty. Seaman served in war zones with Navy guns and sailors at their side. Almost 4% of the 250,000 Merchant Mariners of WWII died in service, the highest proportion of any branch, even the Air Corps.

While in service, Merchant Mariners held rank, wore uniforms, saluted, and served under military justice. But, they got paid union wages, could choose their ships, and could quit any time they wanted. Because of this, Merchant Mariners of WWII were denied veteran's status until 1988. And they're still fighting for the full benefits of VA recognition.

Merchant Mariners who served in war zones after 1945—think Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf—are not recognized as veterans, but can apply for limited veterans' benefits.

Are you confused yet?

And notice how I'm using the term "Merchant Mariners" rather than "Merchant Marines." That's because some Merchant Mariners HATE IT when you say "Merchant Marines." As usmm.org, a site dedicated to the Merchant Marine, puts it:

What do you call people who are in the Merchant Marine?

Mariners. Seamen. Seafarers. Sailors. Never marines! Mariners is the preferred designation, just like the Seattle professional baseball team. The term Merchant Marines is incorrect.

To make matters more confusing, there's also a United States Merchant Marine Academy, which is a government run service academy that requires graduates to serve in the military after graduation. Some serve on active duty, others in the Navy Reserve. And there are several other state and private maritime colleges that funnel graduates into the military.

Popeye's first appearance "Thimble Theatre" in 1929

The Coast Guard has a lot of authority over the Merchant Marine. The USCG registers ships and overseas training and exams for licensing as officers.

And you may be interested to know, before he joined the Coast Guard and then the Navy, Popeye was a Merchant Mariner.

1ST LT. DANIEL TELEP
Con Thien, Vietnam

RETURNED UN

by Dan Telep

Old mail is a great source of history, and I've been collecting postal pieces—envelopes with stamps, cancellation marks, and any enclosed correspondence—since I was a child.

Some of the most moving pieces I've ever seen are those fully intact because the intended recipients were Killed in Action before they could read them.

On August 4, 1942, for example, eighteen-year-old Lottie Adamczyk from Hamtramck, Michigan, wrote her boyfriend, John Targosz. John had graduated Hamtramck High School in 1940 and had joined the Marine Corps before Pearl Harbor. In February of 1942, he'd volunteered for the first ever US Special Operations unit, the 1st Marine Raider Battalion, an "elite within an elite" of highly trained commandos. For John, it meant a promotion to corporal and an extra $50 per month.

On August 7, 1942—three days after Lottie wrote her letter—John saw his first combat when the 1st Marine Raiders landed on Tulagi, in the lower Solomon Islands, to capture a Japanese seaplane base. John survived a Banzai attack that night, and the mission was successful.

Then came Guadalcanal, the next island over which occupied a key position in the sea lanes between the US and Australia. The 1st Raider Battalion's job was to defend Henderson Field, recently captured from the Japanese.

On the night of September 12, a fresh Japanese regiment launched a frontal attack against the 1st Raiders. By this time, John's Company D had been whittled down to platoon-size. In the two-day "Battle of Bloody Ridge" or "Edson's Ridge" (named after the 1st Raiders' commander), the Raiders managed to repulse the attack, but at a high cost. The battalion had lost 135 men, one of them Corporal John Targosz.

Lottie knew none of this until much later. Her letter of August 4 arrived to the 1st Raider Battalion weeks after John's death. The handstamp "USMC REPORTS UNDELIVERABLE" and the manuscript "Killed in Action" tell the sad story of a young man who never returned to his sweetheart.

Lottie saved this returned letter and never opened it. The envelope remained sealed until I opened it decades later.

John Targosz was the first Hamtramckian to die in World War II, and his name was memorialized in the city's Cpl. John Targosz Polish Legion of American Veterans Post 6.

NDELIVERABLE

CON THIEN, VIETNAM, 1967

After the war, his remains were returned from the Soloman Islands and buried at Hamtramck's Mt. Olivet Cemetery.

I grew up a generation later than John Targosz and a few miles away from his home on Moran Street in Hamtramck. Like John, I'm also a Marine. I served with the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines in Vietnam, where it acquired the unwelcome nickname, "The Walking Dead." Over one-quarter of the men I served with never came home.

From June 1967 to December 1968, I wrote home regularly to my mother Rose in Grosse Pointe Park. She saved every letter.

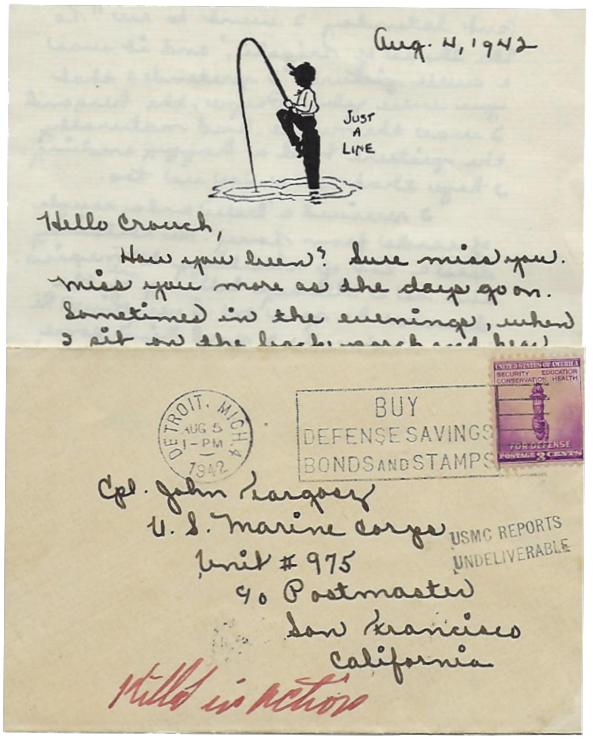
One of my earliest, dated July 4, 1967, reported with remarkable candor:

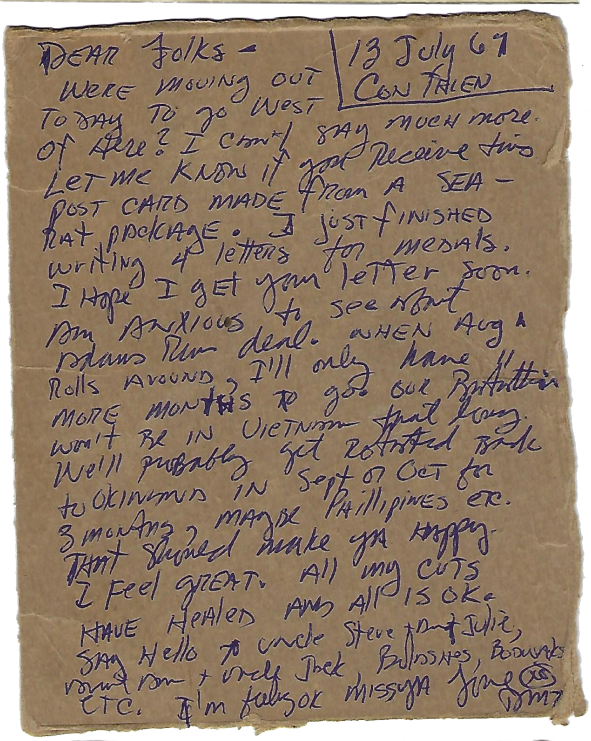
I know you are both scared to death by now, Operation Buffalo should make headlines back home. Alpha and Bravo Companies in my Unit 1/9 were on a routine 'search and destroy' operation when the 324th North Vietnam Army Regiment hit them unexpectedly hard with multiple casualties. Charlie Company, my Unit, went in to rescue and evacuate the dead and wounded. I assumed command of my Company when our Company Commander was hurt.

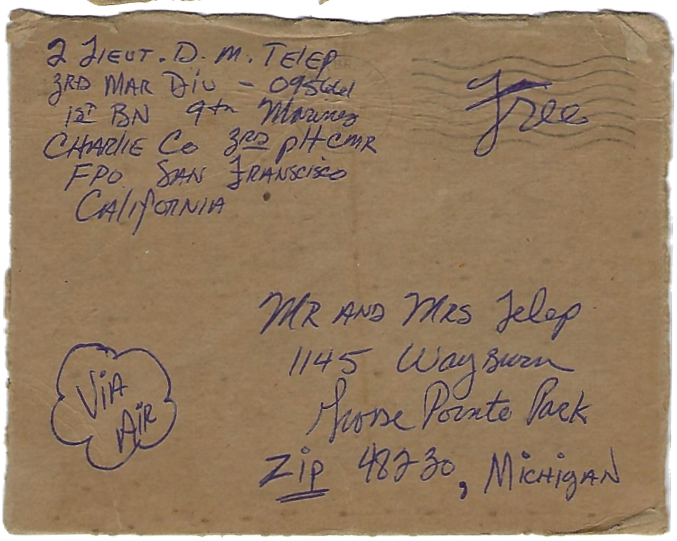
The action I described happened on July 2 near Con Thien in the DMZ. I recall evacuating the remains of 85 Marines that day. And additional 200 were badly wounded. This was out of a total force of 400 Marines. I myself got hit in my hands by shrapnel. Operation Buffalo remains the worst one-day loss for Americans in the Vietnam War. And that was just the beginning of my tour.

A note I sent home nine days later is remarkable more for its form than content. "I am feeling ok and miss you," I said on July 13. But notice the stationery. It's torn from a C-Ration carton.

Probably Ham and Lima Beans.







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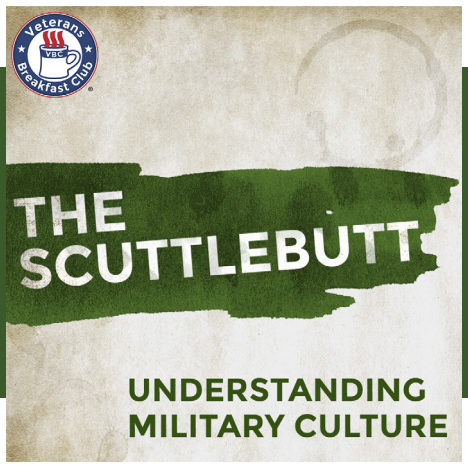

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