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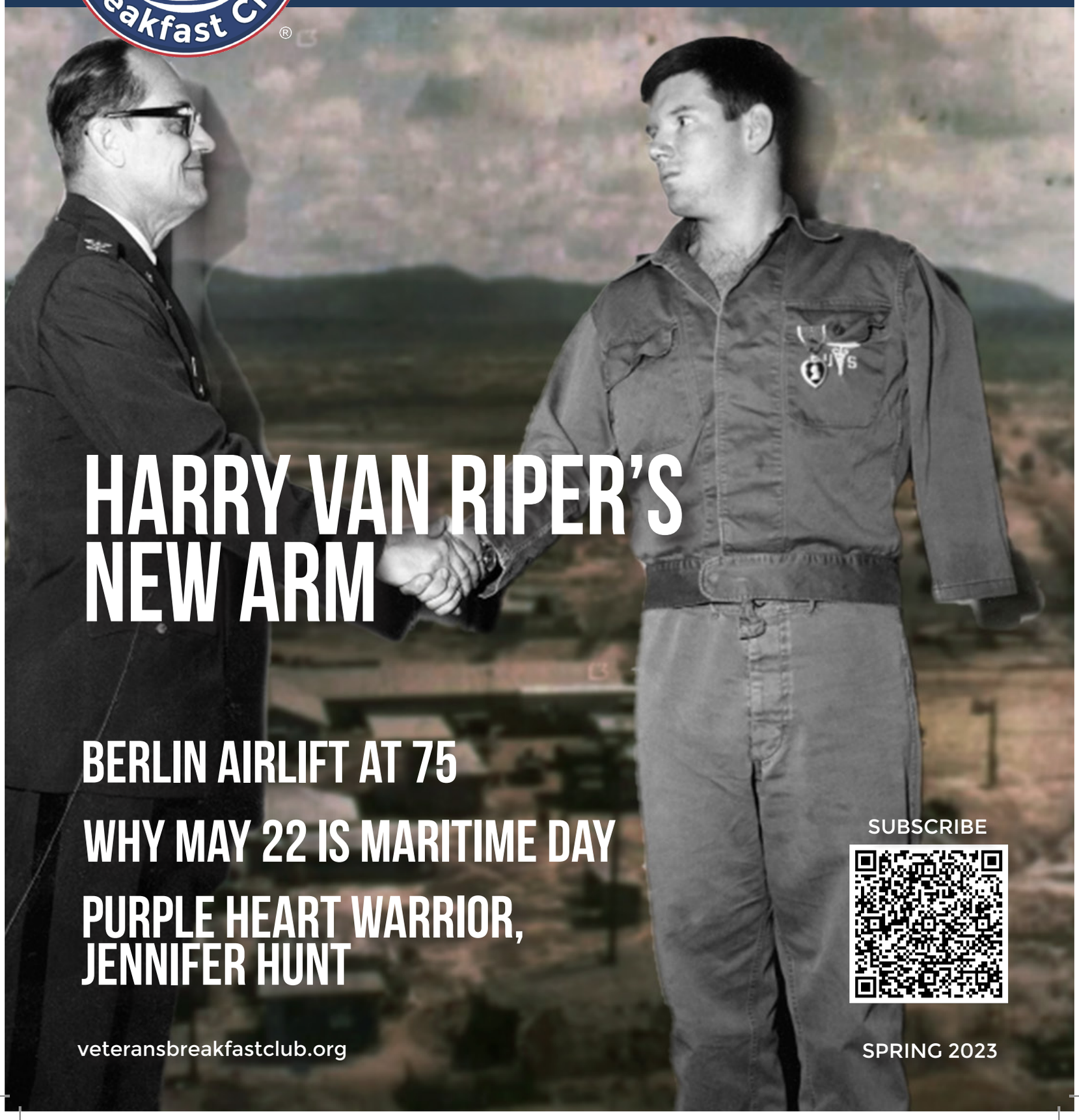

HARRY VAN RIPER'S NEW ARM

BERLIN AIRLIFT AT 75

WHY MAY 22 IS MARITIME DAY

PURPLE HEART WARRIOR, JENNIFER HUNT

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Cover: Harry Van Riper presented with Purple Heart at Valley Forge General Hospital (Harry Van Riper). Image superimposed on photo of View of the Dau Tieng Camp from the lookout tower of Company "B", 125th Signal Battalion (Wikimedia Commons)

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.

200 Magnolia Place, Pittsburgh, PA 15228 (412) 623-9029 veteransbreakfastclub.org For more information, contact betty@veteransbreakfastclub.org

FROM THE DIRECTOR

The VBC is in its 15th year of programming around veterans' stories. We began in 2008 with 30 WWII veterans passing a microphone in a hotel ballroom in suburban Pittsburgh. Since then, thousands of veterans have shared thousands of stories–in-person, online, on video, and in-print. We always have something going on, whether it's a storytelling breakfast or our Zoom *VBC Happy Hour*. Join us and pass along this magazine to anyone you think would like to read it. We send boxes of *VBC Magazine* around the country, and we'd be happy to ship you some. We're also looking to do in-person events anywhere we can. Let us know if you'd like to have the VBC visit your town. As always, you can keep up with our events and activities at veteransbreakfastclub.org.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

IN PERSON, FACE-TO-FACE

For the latest event schedule, scan this QR code!

ONLINE EVENTS

VBC events are held every Monday at 7pm ET on Zoom and simulcast to YouTube and Facebook. See schedule and connect at veteransbreakfastclub.org/events

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All in-person events begin at 8:30am unless otherwise noted and include breakfast for $15pp.
RSVP to betty@veteransbreakfastclub.org or 412-623-9029.

WEDNESDAY, April 5: Seven Oaks Country Club (132 Lisbon Rd, Beaver, 15009)

FRIDAY, April 14, 10:00AM: Beulah Presbyterian Church (2500 McCrady Rd, Pittsburgh, PA 15235), FREE Light refreshments and coffee

SATURDAY, April 22, 8:00am: Medure's Banquet Center (2500 New Butler Road New Castle, PA 16101) FREE breakfast courtesy New Castle Rotary

TUESDAY, May 2: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park, PA 15102)

SATURDAY, May 20: University of Pittsburgh-Greensburg, The Hempfield Room, Chambers Hall (150 Finoli Drive, Greensburg, PA 15601) $5 per person

WEDNESDAY, May 24: Memorial Park Church (8800 Peebles Rd Allison Park, PA 15101)

WEDNESDAY, June 7: Seven Oaks Country Club (132 Lisbon Rd, Beaver, PA 15009)

WEDNESDAY, June 21: Christ Church at Grove Farm (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143)

TUESDAY, June 27: Christ United Methodist Church (44 Highland Rd, Bethel Park, PA 15102)

WEDNESDAY, July 26: Christ Church at Grove Farm (249 Duff Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143)

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-- John Grisham

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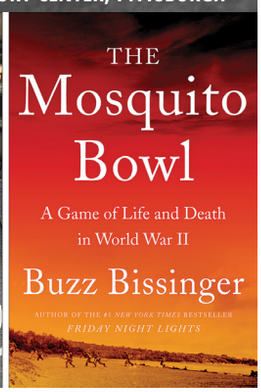


LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Warrant Officers

Last issue, we asked readers to send any comments or corrections our way. We got plenty, especially about our Army-centric article on Warrant Officers. Below are two letters we received.

Although the Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Coast Guard all have warrant officers, each branch has their own qualification and training courses to obtain this unique rank. For the Marine Corps, individuals who are screened and selected for the Warrant Officer Program attend a 16 week WOBC in Quantico, Virginia. The Marines' WOBC is similar to the 28 week course required for new second lieutenants, however it is shortened due to the prior experience gained by the newly appointed warrant officers from their time as enlisted Marines. Regardless of the branch of service, all warrant officers share a common thread–they are highly trained and experienced in specialty areas vital to the success of their organization's mission. Semper Fi!

COL Brad Washabaugh, USMC, Retired

In the Navy, you begin as an E1, and as you advance in rank, you develop your technical skills. You are consistently ranked against your peers as you learn. In my career, I completed over 60 technical and leadership schools. At each level, you must pass a competitive fleetwide exam. It gets harder and more competitive as you rise in rank.

I made Chief Petty Officer Master Machinist's Mate with a Submarine Service designation. Only permanent Chief Petty Officers could then apply for Chief Warrant Officer and only in the technical field you were experienced in.

The competition for the limited openings is even fiercer than the Chief's process. The year I entered the competition, there were 1,300 of the very best Chiefs in the Navy competing for what would end up being 13 slots.

You go through a series of reviews where everything you have done in the past ten or more years is scrutinized.

Thirteen Machinist Mate Chiefs advanced to Chief Warrant Officer Two that cycle. They truly were the best of the best. I was number 11.

I received a full Commission from the President of the United States. To say that I was proud to accept that on July 1,1990, at the Submarine Memorial in Pearl Harbor would be the largest understatement of my life. I had not done well academically before entering the Navy but the Navy gave me a great chance to become a commissioned officer.

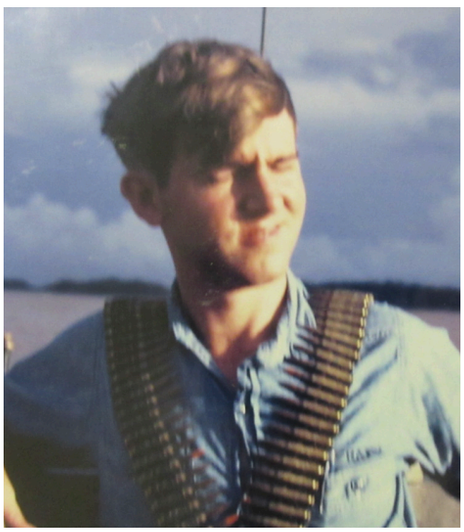
No one is given Chief Warrant Officer. The barriers and obstacles are countless. It is probably why most of us took umbrage at the way this article was written. Mustangs in the Navy have a saying. "I did it the hard way… I earned it."

CWO2 Bob MacPherson, USN, Retired.

Wrong Way Bullets

In last issue's "The Case of the Wrong Way Bullets on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial's Three Servicemen Statue," we stated that no soldier or Marine we'd ever met said they carried bandoliers of ammunition with the pointy end of the bullets facing up. That statement still holds, but we did hear from a sailor, Jim Frank, who said he once wore an ammo belt the wrong way. Jim served as a cook aboard the "Delta Hilton," YRMB (Yard Repair Berthing and Messing) 20 in 1969. He posed for a photograph one day and put the bandoliers on backwards.

Right: Jim Frank



RECENT ONLINE EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Black Vietnam Veterans

Historian Craig Symonds on Chester Nimitz

Jimmy Stewart in WWII

Radar Station Veterans

Space Force 101 with Col. Matt Morand

Tin Can Sailors

"LOSING MY ARM WAS THE BEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO ME."

By Harry Van Riper

Harry Van Riper tells his story at a VBC breakfast in September 2016 at the 911th Airlift Wing

I don't know where I'd be without the Army.

Before Vietnam took my arm, the Army saved my life.

I was a troubled teen, a real hellraiser. I rolled my car five times my senior year in high school and got into countless fights, the kind that would land you in prison nowadays. I was heading full speed down a dead-end road.

I had good reason. My family was what we now call "dysfunctional." My father left us before I turned five. My mother was so poor, she handed my sister and me over to a boarding house orphanage. They fed us three bowls of cereal a day.

I returned to my mother after she'd remarried a violent alcoholic. At age 10, I decided I'd stand up to him and protect my mother. He beat us both.

All that trauma made me angry . . . and wild.

So when the Draft Board called in 1967, it seemed like just another bump in the road.

I entered Basic Training with a bad attitude. But that changed quickly.

I overheard a Drill Instructor saying to another recruit, "You've been hustling. Keep it up, and I'll made you a squad leader, and you won't have to pull guard duty or KP or any of that stuff."

Right then, I decided that I was going to become a Basic Training squad leader. And I did. I became a model recruit. I turned 180 degrees because of Army discipline. It put me on the right path.

I don't know what would have happened to me had I not been drafted. But I know the outcome wouldn't have been good.

After Basic and Advanced Individual Training (AIT), I shipped out to Fort Lewis, Washington. We flew to Japan, then, on April 8, 1968, Vietnam.

The war became real for me even before we even landed. Looking out the plane window on approach, I could see tracers flying. It was the my first inkling of what was to come.

The Army didn't waste much time getting me into action. I joined one of the few mechanized units in Vietnam, the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment attached to the 25th Infantry Division headquartered in Cu Chi.

We covered a lot of ground because, unlike other infantry, we rode into battle in M113 Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs). The M113 was a 12-ton tracked behemoth made of aluminum, the first of its kind. The hull was heavy enough to stop small arms fire, but not heavier weapons.

The "track," as we called it, was manned by a driver and a gunner on a .50-caliber machine gun. Our track was named "Diane," after the driver's wife. The rest of us, as many as 11, rode in the back on benches that lined the hull. Everything smelled of grease and diesel exhaust.

We put a lot of miles on Diane. This was after the initial Tet Offensive, during the time of "mini-Tets" in III Corps in the spring and summer of 1968. Our area of operation was a hot 100km swath west-northwest of Saigon, including Tay Ninh Province, almost to the Cambodian

Harry on his first leave after Basic Training 1967 (Harry Van Riper)

border.

We patrolled exit points for the Ho Chi Minh Trail, trying to stop the transport of troops, weapons, and military equipment from North Vietnam to the South. I only recall one stand down during that whole time.

To be honest, I don't remember much of the fighting. I must have blocked a lot out. I only recall bits and pieces of firefights, but not much is vivid. It's my brain's way of protecting me from bad memories, I've learned. But I do know my Company B lost a lot of men, killed and wounded. I don't remember anyone in my company rotating home at the end of 12 months.

One day, our track was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) that pierced the hull. I wasn't in it at the time, but our driver was. He lost both his arms and a leg.

Our squad needed a replacement driver. I'd been trained on tracks, so I volunteered and got the job.

On August 17, 1968, our base camp at Dau Tieng received hundreds of mortars and rockets, wounding a few of our guys. We went out the next morning on a sweep to the west and were attacked by a battalion of the 33rd NVA (North Vietnamese Army) Regiment.

Harry Van Riper and his track (Harry Van Riper)

These weren't black pajamaed guerillas. They were well-armed, uniformed regulars fighting a conventional battle that lasted all day. We didn't know it at the time, but this was the opening scene of a major coordinated offensive launched by the NVA and their Viet Cong (VC) allies.

The enemy had shifted from attacking Saigon and South Vietnamese forces to targeting us on the northern and western outskirts of the capital.

The fighting was the most intense I'd ever experienced. Our tracks carried a lot of ammunition, but we ran out and had to be resupplied by air. I remember our machine gun barrels bending from the heat. We evacuated the wounded as we could. After nine hours of small arms, artillery, air strikes, and gunship fire from our side, the NVA broke contact. We returned to Dau Tieng for the night and rested as we could. Boots and flak jackets stayed on so we could be ready at a moment's notice to scramble out again.

Early the next morning, August 19, we returned near the site of the previous day's battle, more toward the Michelin rubber plantation near Ben Cui, searching for the NVA. We swept the tree lines for hours with no contact. I drove while the infantry walked in front of and behind my track.

At midday we took a break and powered down the APCs. There was a tree line about 150 yards away and some tall elephant grass in front of it.

The NVA were in the grass and in the trees. They were taking aim, preparing to strike.

The 1st Battalion's After Action Report states that the NVA attacked us from three sides at 1225. We'd just received the signal to power up our tracks. I was in the low driver's position, hands on the steering levers in front of me, right foot on the accelerator. All hell broke loose.

RPGs were bouncing and exploding all around us. I'd never seen so many. I looked in the periscope and saw the tracks in front of me backing up to get out. I reached up with my right arm to put the gear shift in reverse and glanced back.

August 19, 1968, Harry's track is alone, after others had backed up (Harry Van Riper)

Harry's track to the far left on August 19, 1968 (Harry Van Riper)

Other tracks fighting past Harry's track to tree line (Harry Van Riper)

Behind me were the infantrymen sprawled on the ground, taking cover as best they could. In an instant, without thinking, I decided not to reverse. Backing up would mean running over the men. I just couldn't do that.

That's when the RPG ripped into the track and took off my left arm. It happened that quickly. I hadn't even removed my right arm from the great shift. If I had, the grenade would have taken that arm off, too.

Instead, it exploded into my left leg and chest. The heat from the blast blistered my eyes shut. All I recall are sounds, plus the impulses I had and the half-voluntary moves I made.

My first thought was: "I have to get out of this track. No one will find me here, and I'll bleed to death."

With my left arm hanging by skin, and part of my leg missing, I somehow crawled out of the track. Once out, I tried to stand up on the APC. I didn't feel any pain and didn't know my leg was damaged, so I fell face-first to the ground.

People later told me I flopped around like a fish. I was in shock, and my nervous system was going berserk. Again, I thought, "I'm going to bleed to death" and instinctively grabbed my left shoulder tightly to staunch the bleeding.

I was alone out there. Everyone had fallen back. I waited for someone to get to me.

The first voice I heard was that of my buddy, Bob Logan. He shouted my nickname, "Rip!"

Bob dragged me back to the medic track. He saved my life.

I was conscious almost the whole time. A medic said, "Oh my God, Van Riper." They tried to give me blood, but my veins had collapsed. They ended up cutting my ankle and giving me blood there.

Meanwhile, the fiercest firefight I'd ever heard was going on all around us. But I couldn't get up. I later learned my friend Roberto Garcia was holding me down, saving me from my fight-or-flight instinct.

Above the explosions, I heard obscenity-laced shouting from my platoon leader.

"If you don't land that #!@*&% chopper, I'll shoot it down!"

The evac helicopter pilot didn't want to land. It was too hot, too dangerous. But my platoon leader's threat must have done the trick because the chopper landed, and on it I went.

I was conscious for the flight to the 12th Evacuation Hospital at Cu Chi Base Camp, home of the 25th Division. I remember being rushed into an operating room and placed on a table.

"Do you know you lost your arm?" someone asked.

"Yes, I know," I answered.

Harry and Red Cross volunteer B. Flyfe (Harry Van Riper)

Those were the last words I spoke for eight days. After surgery, I fell into a coma.

I later learned the doctors had given me a 15% chance of survival. They'd sent my mother a telegram breaking the bad news. My injuries were life threatening and, if I lived, I'd probably never walk again.

Then, BANG! An enemy rocket hit an ammo dump at our base camp. I jolted awake in terror.

Pulling out my tubes, I sat upright, got out of bed, and tried to run. My bad leg wouldn't hold, and nurses put me back in bed. But I was now awake and could start rehabilitating.

I call that ammo dump explosion, "God's Alarm Clock."

When I was strong enough, they flew me to US Naval Hospital Yokosuka in Japan.

One day in Yokosuka, I awoke from one of my many surgeries to a pretty, smiling face. She was a Red Cross volunteer. She told me that knew a one-armed man back home, and that he was the most interesting and unique person she'd ever met.

That small act of kindness meant so much to me. It gave me hope as I was accommodating myself to my new one-armed life. I asked for someone to take a picture of us. On the back, she wrote her name, "B. Flythe." I've always wanted to find and thank her.

After Japan, it was on to Valley Forge General Hospital outside Philadelphia. All told, I spent 18 months in hospitals before returning home to Pittsburgh.

Throughout my recovery, people hinted or, like one psychologist at Valley Forge, came out and told me that I should be depressed. I was only 18-years-old and severely disabled, they said. To think I could lead a normal life was just denial of the truth.

But I never thought that way. I've never considered myself disabled. Sure, I got frustrated as I re-learned how to do hundreds of things. Did it hurt when I tried to catch a door with my left hand and instead got smacked in the face with it? Of course.

But these were inconveniences, not disabilities.

I was alive. To me, that's all that mattered because I knew plenty others who never made it home.

Nine of my comrades in the 1st Battalion had been killed on August 19, 1968 alone. I was one of the lucky ones. And I've always considered myself such.

In fact, losing my arm has been a gift. It's made me stronger. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" is an adage for a reason. It's true. My wounds might have killed me. But I survived and am better for having suffered them, strange as that may sound.

Having to re-learn simple tasks made me a better thinker, more thoughtful. The world is built for the dual-armed. Having only one means I'm always thinking ahead, giving consideration not only to the next step, but the steps that follow. Having one arm has forced me to be deliberate and intentional in everything I do.

That trait helped me enormously in my career as a physiologist. All through my schooling, I had to think through my lab work, preparing thoroughly before conducting an experiment or test. Professors gave me more time, but the other students were usually two hours behind me, and their work wasn't as thorough.

My original plan was to go to medical school. I was offered a full ride at the University of Buffalo. But, as I prepared to enroll there, I got a call asking if I'd fill in for a biology professor who'd suddenly quit at the Community College of Allegheny County.

In the classroom, I found my calling. I taught for 34 years and loved every minute of my career. I tried to instill in my students not only knowledge of the subject matter, but some of the lessons I learned in the Army and Vietnam. Never give up. Never stop serving. Don't waste time feeling sorry for yourself. Use your abilities to the fullest. That's our mission in life, as I see it.

I think all veterans have a lot to teach. When people see me and learn that I served in Vietnam, they often say, "Thank you for your service."

I'd rather they ask, "What's your story?" I think sharing our stories is the biggest gift veterans can give.

I wouldn't change anything. I'm proud of my service and love my fellow veterans. I see them all as my brothers and sisters. They saved me. And I'd do anything to save them, if they needed it.

Note: Decades after returning home, Harry learned his battalion received a Presidential Unit Citation for its actions for the month starting with the firefight on August 18, 1968. The citation reads, in part, "The 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division and its attached units distinguished themselves by extraordinary heroism in combat operations against numerically superior enemy forces in the Republic of Vietnam from 18 August to September 20 1968. During this period the 1st Battalion Task Force, through reconnaissance in force, ambush, counter-ambush, and reaction missions, effectively destroyed a regimental size enemy force and prevented the enemy from seizing the initiative in its 'Third Offensive.' The officers and men of the task force displayed outstanding bravery, a high morale, and exemplary esprit de corps in fierce hand-to-hand combat and counter offensive action against well disciplined, heavily armed, and entrenched enemy forces. . . . The heroic efforts, extraordinary bravery and professional competence displayed by the men of the 1st battalion, 5th Infantry and attached units are in the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon themselves, their units, and the Armed Forces of the United States. "

FEATURE

HARRY VAN RIPER'S NEW ARM

by Todd DePastino

A brain-controlled prosthetic arm picks up a rubber ball

Twenty years ago, the prospect of a bionic arm controlled by the mind of an amputee was the stuff of science fiction.

But last year, Harry Van Riper volunteered for a VA feasibility study for just such a "smart" limb. If he receives it, Harry will be able to pinch, grab, point, and grip by sending signals from his brain.

The specific technology Harry is furthering is called "osseointegration" (OI) the direct attachment of a robotic prosthetic limb to the bone itself, making it a permanent part of the body and nervous system.

Inside the implant is a sensor that will attach to severed nerves remaining in Harry's shoulder. The sensor transmits signals from the brain to the prosthesis, which will enable Harry to use his hand intuitively.

OI technology is being tested and improved at the George E. Wahlen VA in Salt Lake City, Utah. Scientists there are working to improve socket attachment and reduce complications resulting from the invasive procedure.

Harry has made two trips to Salt Lake City to be assessed as a possible recipient of a new left arm. One big thing makes Harry an especially promising candidate. As a "transhumeral" (above the elbow) amputee, Harry still has active nerve endings in his shoulder receiving brain signals.

Fifty-five years after Harry lost his left arm, Harry's brain still thinks it's attached. In Harry's mind, he can make a fist, open a door, and sip a cup of coffee using his phantom left hand. The down side to such ability has been "phantom pain"—the experience of real pain in the missing limb. In the first years of Harry's rehabilitation, his phantom pain was excruciating. It only got better with exercise.

That those nerve endings are still alive means they can relay neurological signals that can, in turn, be captured, interpreted, amplified, and translated into instructions guiding movement in a bionic arm. It all happens in a flash so that the arm moves naturally, as if it were native to the body.

Think about that. The mere intention arising in Harry's brain to move a finger will cause the micro-computer in Harry's shoulder to run that neural signal through an algorithm that produces action in a robotic finger.

The implications of this technology are staggering. This system has the potential to give movement to the paralyzed and to liberate those with "locked in syndrome"--people who can think, but not communicate.

The technology also works in reverse. Sensory inputs in the fingers and hand can pulse signals from the environment back up the arm to Harry's brain, allowing Harry to adjust his grip or position, just as with a biological arm.

The science behind this technology is, of course, extraordinarily complex. The techniques used to separate thick nerve bundles into smaller fibers enabling precise control, to amplify faint nerve signals, and to employ machine-learning algorithms to interpret those signals are unimaginably delicate.

Given Harry's age and the fact that he's gotten along well for 55 years without a left arm, you may wonder why he's submitting to the demanding battery of tests needed for a bionic arm.

"I don't need the arm," says Harry. "I've never considered myself disabled. I live perfectly without it."

But, as a man of science and a devout Christian, Harry believes his participation in this study is another way to serve.

"I taught college biology for my career, and I understand and am intrigued by the science behind this technology. More important, I know these new prosthetics will help countless people in the future. Children with missing limbs will be fitted with an implant, and then right-sized bionic arms will be snapped in as they grow. If my participation helps these kids in the future, then I'm happy to do it."

THE BERLIN AIRLIFT AT 75

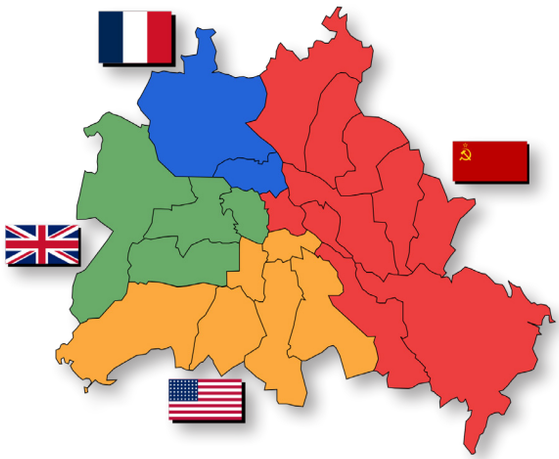
by Todd DePastino

Children watching a U.S. cargo plane landing at Tempelhof Airfield in Berlin, 1948 (USAF Historical Research Agency)

The Berlin Airlift, which began 75 years ago on June 25, was one of the United States Armed Forces' finest hours.

For almost one year, the US Air Force, with the British Royal Air Force, supplied the blockaded city of West Berlin with all the food, fuel, medicine, and other supplies it needed to survive. Experts had declared such an airlift impossible. President Harry S Truman's own military advisors had warned against the folly of attempting it. In succeeding against the odds, the Airlift established the United States' moral authority as a postwar superpower. Not incidentally, it also put Truman over the top in his comeback election victory of 1948.

An inspiring story, the Airlift was also a grim watershed. If the Cold War was a three-act play, the Berlin Airlift was the opening act's final scene. After it ended in 1949, the Soviet Union, a key ally in the war against Nazi Germany, would break irrevocably with the United States and cleave its Eastern European satellite countries from relations with the West. After the Airlift, the Cold War turned serious . . . and deadly.



Map showing sectors of occupation of Berlin (Historicair, CC BY-SA 3.0 via

The crisis that sparked the Airlift grew out of the United States' decision to abandon its original plan for postwar Germany. That plan, named for its chief advocate, Secretary of Treasury Henry Morgenthau, imposed harsh measures on the defeated enemy to prevent Germany from ever menacing Europe again. The Morgenthau Plan called for Germany to be partitioned into two states, North and South, its heavy industry dismantled, and its most valuable lands internationalized or annexed by neighboring countries. The goal was to turn back the clock 200 years and restore the country to its pre-modern status as a pastoral and agricultural land.

The Soviets liked the Morgenthau Plan, as did France. But several US and British officials worried about its humanitarian cost. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden couldn't see how an agrarian economy could possibly support Germany's population of 65 million. Crops and livestock couldn't even keep half that number alive, they said.

Another cold reality was Germany's historic role as the engine of European prosperity. The continent's recovery from war would need a strong Germany as a trading partner. That truth dawned on France as early as 1946. The French realized they would never get their economic footing without a complementary powerhouse to the East.

The budding Cold War with the Soviet Union provided a third reason to reconsider the future of Germany. In February 1946, George F. Kennan, the US *chargés d'affaires* in Moscow, warned his bosses back in Washington, D.C., that Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin was not the amiable "Uncle Joe" of wartime propaganda. The Soviets, he said, were fearful of US influence in Europe and would counter any American attempt to build a free and cooperative postwar order out of the ashes of World War II. Stalin would be happy to keep Europeans cold and hungry until they turned in desperation to Soviet care.

Kennan recommended that the Truman administration resist Soviet expansionism by promising a better future for Western Europe, one crafted under free trade and institutions with American leadership.

A prosperous Germany would have to be part of that promise, its keystone, even. By 1947, the Truman administration was convinced that keeping Germany down-and-out would never work. Indeed, Morgenthau Plan would end up delivering the wartorn German people into the hands of the Soviet Union, with its honeyed promises of food, shelter, and safety . . . bought, of course, with their freedom.

* * *

Rebuilding Germany would be hard because the US didn't have full control over the defeated country. In 1945, the victorious Allies had agreed to divide Germany into four zones of occupation.

The Soviets occupied the largely agricultural East, while the US, Britain, and France (along with Belgium and Luxembourg) each held zones in the largely industrial West. These were intended to be administrative divisions only, not permanent state boundaries. German citizens roamed among them and used a single currency—old Nazi coins and bills--in all the zones. Everyone expected the zones eventually to dissolve into one unified Germany.

The capital city of Berlin was a special case. Though located 110 miles within the Soviet sphere, Berlin itself was divided into four zones, each administered by a different Allied country.

This odd subdivision came as something of an afterthought at a postwar planning conference when the US traded some territory in its Western zone for a slice of Berlin. It was all last minute and not well-considered by the Soviets. The US, it turned out, wanted a foothold in Berlin for gathering intelligence against the Soviets and perhaps capturing a few at-large Nazi scientists before the Soviets could grab them.

Stalin was surprisingly easy-going about the US presence in Berlin and West Germany as a whole. He figured, with excellent reason, that the US wouldn't have a stomach for a long-term occupation in Europe. In 1918, the Americans had sent over 2 million soldiers to fight in World War I, and they were all home within one year of the armistice. President Franklin Roosevelt had committed US troops to a two-year occupation in Europe, no more.

Flight corridors of the Berlin Airlift (Leerlaufprozess, CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons)

Most Americans would have preferred no occupation at all. World War II was barely over before the American people began demanding that Washington "bring the boys home." By 1948, the year of the Airlift, Congress had stripped all but 100,000 US soldiers out of Germany, including 10,000 or fewer stationed in West Berlin. The Soviets, by contrast, had over ten times that number on the ground in Germany, plus another 2 million troops nearby in Eastern Europe. Stalin was nothing if not patient. All he had to do was wait for the US to pull its remaining troops, and the Soviets would install a friendly puppet government in all of Germany.

But by 1948, the American calculus had changed. Getting Germany back on its feet was now a priority, even if the American people didn't quite agree.

One major drag on the German economy was its currency, which the Soviets had purposely inflated by overprinting the old Reichsmark. The bills lost much of their value through early 1948, igniting fears of the infamous hyperinflation of Weimar Germany in 1923.

To counter Soviet monetary maneuvers, the US announced it would introduce a new currency, the Deutschmark, and back it with American dollars. Soviet officials declared they would forbid the new banknotes in their zones of occupation and set up inspection stations around Berlin to prevent US-made Deutschmarks from entering the capital city.

It was too late. American soldiers had already snuck $250 million worth of the new bills and distributed them to banks throughout Berlin. On June 21, 1948, Berliners awoke to find the solution to their woeful purchasing power at their neighborhood banks. Within days, the good money had driven out the bad throughout the city. It looked like the start of Germany's revitalization.

In retaliation, the Soviets announced on June 24, 1948 it was blockading West Berlin. No road, rail, or barge traffic from the Western Zone was permitted. Taking advantage of their control over the city's power plants, mostly in the East, the Soviets also cut electricity to the West.

A half-city of two million people was now effectively under siege and stranded. Food and fuel shipments had been halted. West Berlin had a little better than a month before it began to starve. Any West Berliners not driven to hunger in the summer would no doubt freeze in winter.

Even before the Blockade, 1948 Berlin was a wreck, a lawless wasteland where people stole, scavenged, and prostituted themselves for survival. Hardly a building has been left untouched by the war, and almost none had been rebuilt since Germany's surrender. Berliners still lived in bombed-out basements with no sanitation, no running water. Even before the American arrived, the Soviets had dismantled and trucked away everything of value, including factories and the engineers who ran them. The city's luckiest survivors managed somehow to consume close to the 2,000 calories per day recommended for life.

The Berlin Blockade was therefore a humanitarian crisis, in addition to a diplomatic one. President Truman understood the stakes when he gathered his military Chiefs and asked what his options were.

He didn't like what he heard:

Option 1: The US could go to war. The Soviets' 10-to-1 ground troop advantage made that a frightful prospect.

Option 2: The US could try to negotiate a resolution. But what bargaining chips did the US possess? The US didn't have much leverage in Germany.

Option 3: The US could cede West Berlin to the Soviets and look for better ground to challenge Stalin's expansionism.

This last was, by far, the best option, and the one strongly recommended by Truman's advisors. Turning all of Berlin over to the Soviets would save a population of two million from starvation in exchange for a little loss of face. It was, after all, merely half a city the US would be sacrificing. The western section of Berlin had no military value. It wasn't strategically important even to any possible future West German state. The Chiefs put it starkly: West Berlin wasn't close to being worth the cost of keeping it in US hands.

Harry Truman would have none of it. "We'll stay in Berlin—come what may," he wrote in his diary.

The President's stubborn dissent was seconded by one official only, and not one within the White House. General Lucius D. Clay was Military Governor of the United States Zone, Germany. During the war, he had served as Eisenhower's deputy, keeping food, equipment, and ammunition flowing from the ports of France to battlelines further east. As commander of postwar Germany, Clay strongly advocated the country's economic reconstruction to counter Soviet influence.

After the Soviets imposed the Berlin Blockade on June 24, he sent a message to Truman urging resistance. "There is no practicability in maintaining our position in Berlin," Clay conceded. That is, the Chiefs were right in saying that Berlin held no value as a military objective. But, he said, "it must not be evaluated on that basis." Instead, Clay argued, West Berlin had a powerful symbolic significance. "Our remaining in Berlin is essential to our prestige in Germany and in Europe. Whether for good or bad, it has become a symbol of the American intent."

The US's response to the Berlin Blockade, explained Clay, would signal the seriousness of our nation's commitment to a non-Soviet future for Europe.

While, in retrospect, Clay's strategic position was sound, the operation he had in mind to break the Blockade was little better than crackpot. He advocated having one of the few US Army divisions in Germany launch an armed convoy loaded with supplies to blow through Soviet roadblocks to West Berlin. Truman had the good sense to dismiss this part of Clay's recommendation which, at best, would leave an Army division stranded within West Berlin, unable to return. At worst, it would trigger World War III.

An Airlift wasn't even considered by anyone in Truman's immediate orbit. Rather, it was the British who suggested that relieving West Berlin by air was possible. They pointed out that their agreement with the Soviets had explicitly guaranteed the air rights to West Berlin through the Soviet Zone of Occupation. Air supply was less confrontational than truck convoys and less likely to spark war. The Russians wouldn't dare shoot down unarmed planes on a humanitarian mission, they reasoned. The only question was: could airplanes alone deliver all the cargo needed?

The Brits did the math. They concluded it would take 4,500 tons of supplies per day to keep a city of two million alive consuming 1,990 calories per day.

Truman faced a different question: even if it were possible to supply West Berlin by air, could a severely downsized US Air Force pull it off?

In 1945, the US had about 70,000 aircraft in operation. By 1948, that number had been reduced to 20,000 scattered over the world. In Europe, the US had only 102 transport airplanes, all of them C-47 "Gooney Birds," with a 3.5-ton capacities.

Even if the US flew all these planes round the clock, seven days a week, they still wouldn't come close to meeting West Berlin's supply needs. And where would the US get the pilots to fly these round trips all day and night?

It's stunning, in retrospect, that Truman with the British launched the Berlin Airlift on June 25, 1948, before he had answers to these questions.

The first flights into Tempelhof Airport in West Berlin took off the next day: 32 C-47s, larded with 80 tons milk, flour, medicine.

If this small airlift was to be sustained and scaled, Lucius Clay knew he needed bigger planes, specifically, C-54 Skymasters with 14-ton capacities. With no C-54s in Europe, Clay appealed to the Air Force to send some from Asia. Air Force officials flatly declined. It took a public order from the President himself to get a hundred 4-engine Skymasters diverted to West Germany for the Airlift.

Germans watching supply planes at Tempelhof (USAF Historical Research Agency)

Overruling military commanders put Truman on a limb. Republicans pounced, declaring, with reason, that the operation would both cost a lot of money and fail. Harry Truman now owned the Airlift. The President's fortunes would rise or fall according to its outcome.

By July, the Allies had established regular routes into and out of Tempelhof and RAF Gatow, a British air base on the southwestern edge of the city. Two air corridors, each 20 miles wide, funneled British and American cargo flights into West Berlin. A third middle corridor handled return flights.

C-47 Skytrains unloading at Tempelhof Airport during the Berlin Airlift (U.S. Navy National Museum of Naval Aviation)

At first, all sorts of planes were commandeered for use in the Airlift, including British Sunderland Flying Boats, which arrived in West Berlin via Lake Wannsee. As an airplane designed for ocean-going operations, the Sunderland proved essential for hauling salt, which otherwise corroded the hulls or C-47s and C-54s.

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Under the leadership of Chief of Staff General Hoyt Vandenberg, the Air Force overcame its initial resistance to the Berlin Airlift and tapped one of its own to command the growing operation. Lieutenant General William Tunner was the only person in high command who had experience running an airlift. During World War II, he had commanded the operation to supply the Chinese from bases in India to help them fight their war against Japan. American pilots flew over the Himalayas—"The Hump," as they called it—to deliver weapons, ammunition, and other cargo.

Airlift Hitch by Tech Sgt. Jake Schuffert

Tunner used techniques he'd honed in the China-Burma-India Theatre to bring efficiencies to the Berlin operation. Within a week of his arrival, cargo planes were landing at Tempelhof every three minutes, round-the-clock.

Then came Black Friday. On August 13, 1948, low cloud cover made landings particularly hazardous on Tempelhof's narrow approaches. Tunner himself was in a C-54 circling the airport when a C-54 crashed on the runway below. A second plane crashed trying to avoid the first. A third diverted to the wrong runway. As the control tower and ground crews tried to sort the problems out, planes kept taking off, every three minutes, and entering Tempelhof's airspace. Soon, dozens of planes, Tunner's among them, were stacked from 3,000 feet to 12,000 feet, all awaiting a chance to land.

As the situation grew more dangerous, Tunner came over the radio and quieted the air traffic controllers. From his spiraling perch above Tempelhof, he began dismissing planes from the stack one-by-one, sending them back to their original bases.

By the time the general himself had landed back at Wiesbaden Air Base, near Frankfurt, he had decided that the Airlift required not efficiency tweaks or gradual improvements, but a top-down reorganization to increase tonnage, keep pilots safe, and make the whole operation sustainable over time.

The new rules were dramatic and far-reaching. "All flights in good weather or bad, day or night, will be by instrument flight rules," Tunner announced. "And any pilot who misses an approach at Berlin will bring his load back home. He will not be given another chance to try an approach and foul up the traffic!"

Tunner forbid stacking and banned air crews from leaving their cockpits upon landing. Planes would take off off every three minutes and maintain a 500-foot distance from planes above and below. There would be four planes per formation, with precisely 15 minutes between the nose of the lead plane and the tail of the rear plane. This way, planes could land at Tempelhof every one minute round-the-clock, 1,440 landings a day.

Tunner assigned the unloading of planes to former Luftwaffe ground crews, who also took over airplane maintenance operations. The Airlift was punishing on aircraft. Coal especially wreaked havoc on planes not designed to handle copious amounts of loose dust. Each C-54 required some maintenance every 25 flight hours, serious maintenance every 200 hours, and major overhauls 1,000 hours.

These changes weren't popular among US air crews, demanding as they were, but by August 31, the Airlift was sustaining the delivery of 4,500 tons of cargo via 1,500 flights per day. Tunner had proven that West Berlin could be kept alive by air.

* * *

Shaking off his disbelief at the Airlift, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin did what he could to hinder it, short of war. Soviet fighters buzzed Allied cargo planes. Paratroopers jumped in front of them, and anti-aircraft shells exploded close enough to frighten air crews, but too far to strike the planes. Soviet searchlights aimed for cockpits, hoping to disorient pilots.

Stalin also targeted the recipients of the cargo. He cajoled, intimidated, and bribed Berliners not to support the Airlift. He offered West Berliners ration cards so they could eat, but very few accepted. He tried to pack the Berlin City Council with Communist Party members, but citizens resisted.

On September 9, 1948, Lord Mayor Ernst Reuter declared Freedom Day and spoke to a half-million Berliners rallying at Brandenburg Gate. The spectacle was as much for the US public as for Stalin. Reuter pleaded with Americans to maintain the Airlift. "You cannot abandon this city and its people," he said, as British and Soviet soldiers stood watch, a hair trigger away from violence. Any hint that the United States might retreat back to isolationism after World War II disappeared on Freedom Day.

But winning the Airlift meant surviving the tough winter of 1948-1949. A heavy fog descended upon all of Europe in November and stayed there for weeks. The Allies routinely missed their daily delivery quotas. On November 20, the fog was so thick that only one flight landed in Berlin. The city's coal reserves dwindled to a week's supply. Accidents and pilot deaths spiked, as did the stress levels of everyone on the Airlift.

But General Tunner set an example of stubborn persistence, working hard to keep the morale of his men up until the weather broke.

In January, the fog lifted and tonnage rates rose. By the time violet crocuses began poking through the city's weed patches, Tunner had decided upon a celebratory publicity stunt to showcase the Airlift's endurance and increased capacity.

He chose Easter Sunday for a record-setting 24-hour operation that would deliver twice the amount normally flown into the city. The only cargo would be coal, whose uniformity would increase efficiency in loading and unloading. On April 15-16, 1949, the Allies landed 1,383 flights carrying more than 13,000 tons of coal—almost three times the tonnage required to sustain life in West Berlin. More cargo came by air that day than rail traffic normally delivered before the Blockade.

Air and ground crews of the U.S. Navy Squadron VR-6 at Rhein-Main celebrate the end of the Berlin Airlift, May 12, 1949 (DoD).jpeg

The stunt worked. Western Europe cheered, and Stalin was forced to acknowledge that the Allies would persist in their irrational Airlift. In fact, the US would probably only improve the operation further as time went on. There was no sense, the Soviets concluded, in maintaining the Berlin Blockade.

All rail, barge, and road routes through the Soviet Eastern Zone into the city reopened on May 12. Jubilant crowds of Berliners turned out to greet arriving trains and trucks. Truman ordered the Airlift to continue through September, just in case Stalin had a change of heart. But by mid-summer, it was obvious that Berlin and the West had passed through a world-changing crisis. General Lucius Clay retired in July and came home to a tickertape parade.

* * *

The Berlin Airlift was that rare thing in the Cold War: an unambiguous victory for the West. Blockading the city had won Stalin nothing. The United States, on the other hand, had gained immense global prestige, as well as the enduring gratitude of Berliners. The West as a whole had also preserved a little piece of real estate within the Soviet Bloc.

But there were costs. Seventy British and American aviators lost their lives in 25 airplane crashes. Delivering 2.5 million tons of cargo via 280,000 roundtrip flights covering 92 million miles (the distance of the earth to the sun) was also expensive. The total cost for the United States was $224 million (about $2.8 billion in today's money). Britain and West Germany each shouldered an equal amount.

President Harry Truman's critics howled about the spending, but even before it was half-over, the Airlift turned out to be a winning issue for the President. On November 2, 1948, Truman surprised opponents and supporters alike by handily beating the heavily-favored Republican Thomas E. Dewey, as well as third-party Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond, in the first Presidential election since the end of World War II.

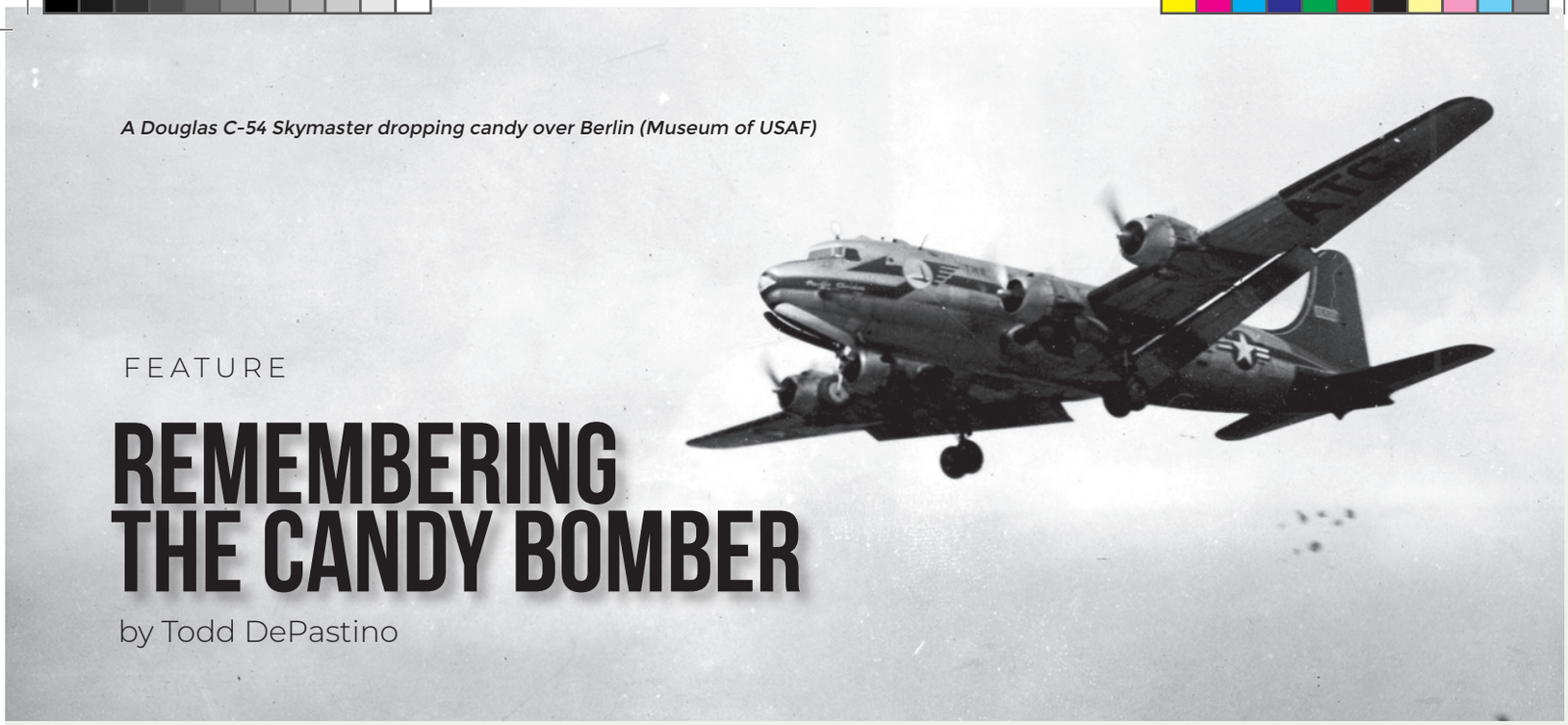
Most important, the Berlin Airlift represented a hard turn in the standoff between the United States and its erstwhile ally, the Soviet Union. No longer could either side pretend that they were cooperating in the rebuilding of Germany and Europe.

Only eleven days after the end of the Airlift, Germany's temporary occupation zones ossified into permanent national boundaries. On May 23, the West German Parliamentary Council declared the Federal Republic of Germany in all but the Soviet zone. The German Democratic Republic—East Germany—would follow in October.

This separation of West from East was mirrored in Europe as a whole, as US-aligned countries in Western Europe coalesced in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Soviet satellites countries came together in the Warsaw Treaty Organization (Warsaw Pact).

The Berlin Airlift's end was actually just the first in a string of Cold War headlines that would blaze across the world over the following year. On August 29, 1949, the Soviet Union detonated its first atomic bomb. A little more than one month later, Mao Zedong's Communist Red Army triumphed over Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist forces, supported by the US. Finally, on June 25, 1950—two years to the day after the start of the Airlift—Communist troops of North Korea launched a massive invasion of the non-Communist South, sparking the Korean War.

The Berlin Airlift lives on in our memory as a moment of high American nobility, ingeniously engineered and bravely executed to inspire the exhausted and defeated peoples of Europe after World War II.



A Douglas C-54 Skymaster dropping candy over Berlin (Museum of USAF)

FEATURE

REMEMBERING THE CANDY BOMBER

by Todd DePastino

All he did was give candy to children. But in doing so, Lieutenant Gail Halvorsen inadvertently launched one of the greatest diplomatic missions of the Cold War.

In November 2020, we welcomed the 100-year-old Berlin Airlift hero and icon to our *VBC Happy Hour,* and he told us about his first C-54 Airlift trip to Tempelhof Airport on July 17, 1948.

He was walking the airport grounds and approached a group of thirty raggedy children standing silently outside the fence.

Dagmar Weiss Snodgrass and Gail Halvorsen on VBC Happy Hour *in November 2020*

"When the weather gets so bad that you can't land," the kids told him, "don't worry about us. We can get by on a little food, but if we lose our freedom, we may never get it back."

The comment stunned Gail, a 27-year-old veteran of World War II. Here they were, young German survivors of that same war, reminding him what freedom meant.

The children never asked for anything, but Halvorsen took out two sticks of gum from his pocket—all he had--and handed them to the older kids. They children carefully sliced the sticks into a couple dozen pieces. Those who didn't get a section got to sniff the wrapper. Halvorsoen's heart broke for the children, and he told them he would drop enough candy for all of them on his return trip to Tempelhof.

"How will we know it is your plane?" the kids asked.

"I'll wiggle my wings," he responded.

The next day, he made good on his promise. Technically, he hadn't broken any regulation. The extra cargo he'd carried—candy scrounged from unused rations—had been dropped before he landed, outside the fence, carried safely to the hands of the gathered children by little handkerchief parachutes he'd sewn the night before.

Gail continued his candy drops the next day and the next, until word spread throughout West Berlin about the magical "Uncle Wiggle Wings," "The Candy Bomber."

Young Berliners sent thank you notes to Rhein-Main Air Base near Frankfurt, where Gail was stationed, and often included instructions on where to drop candy. "My house is the one with the white chickens and red coop," wrote one girl.

Gail's candy bombing caught the ire of his direct commander, who chewed the pilot out for creating a distraction. The commander also reported the incident up the chain of command to General William Tunner himself.

Gail's knees shook as he entered Tunner's office for what was certain to be a severe reprimand, a bust in rank, or worse.

Instead, the General commended Halvorsen for his ingenuity and asked him what it would take to get every Airlift pilot to drop sweets on Berlin.

It turned out that Gail's candy bombing was just what the United States needed as it launched its ambitious Airlift in the summer of 1948. Not only did Gail's mission win the hearts of the city the US was trying to save, it also highlighted the humanitarian, rather than military, nature of the Airlift. The US was in Europe to help, not to chase any imperial ambitions.

Gail Halvorsen greets children of West Berlin (USAF)

In the following months, American pilots were told to pool their ration candy, fashion little parachutes, and throw them down to the children of Berlin. Back home in the US, schoolchildren and candymakers heard about the mini-operation and started sending over boxes of chocolate, gum, and handkerchiefs for Airlift pilots. By May 1949, 23 tons of candy had been dropped on Berlin from over a quarter-million parachutes.

One Berliner who picked up a candy bundle in 1948 was young Dagmar Weiss, who later wrote a book in tribute to Gail titled, *Uncle Wiggly Wings: My Love and Admiration for Berlin's Candy Bomber.* Dagmar joined our program with Gail in November 2020. We got to hear her story, and she got to express her enduring gratitude for the Airlift heroes.

Gail Halvorsen, a poor farm boy from Utah who went on to become a full Colonel in the United States Air Force, died in February 2022 at age 101. The day after he passed, Dagmar sent me an email saying that with the loss of Gail, the world had gotten "poorer and darker." The world indeed was one hero fewer.

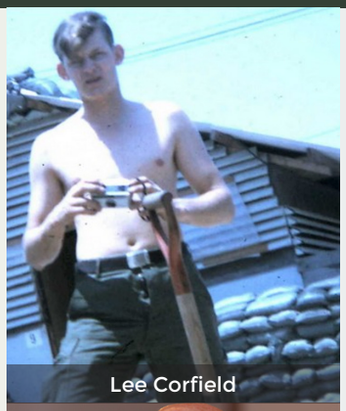
But the spirit of Gail Halvorsen survives, a spirit captured in words he shared on our program:

"My experience on the Airlift taught me that gratitude, hope, and service before self can bring happiness to the soul when the opposite brings despair."

1st Lt. Gail Halvorsen and the 17th Military Air Transport Squadron rig some candy bars to miniature parachutes for German children in Berlin as part of Operation Little Vittles. As his C-54 plane approaches Tempelhof AB, Germany, he drops the homemade parachutes weighted with American candy bars and gum (USAF)

FINAL SALUTE

TO THOSE WHO RECENTLY PASSED, WE SALUTE YOU.



Lee Corfield

George Fritsch

Jack Morrow

Lee Corfield
Vietnam Air Force

George Donges
WWII Navy

AJ Friedrich
WWII Air Corps

George Fritsch
WWII Navy

Paul Kerchum
WWII Army

Bill Lindner
WWII Navy

Lou Mafrice Sr.
WWII Army

William J. Marshall
Vietnam Army

Fran McDonald
Korea Army

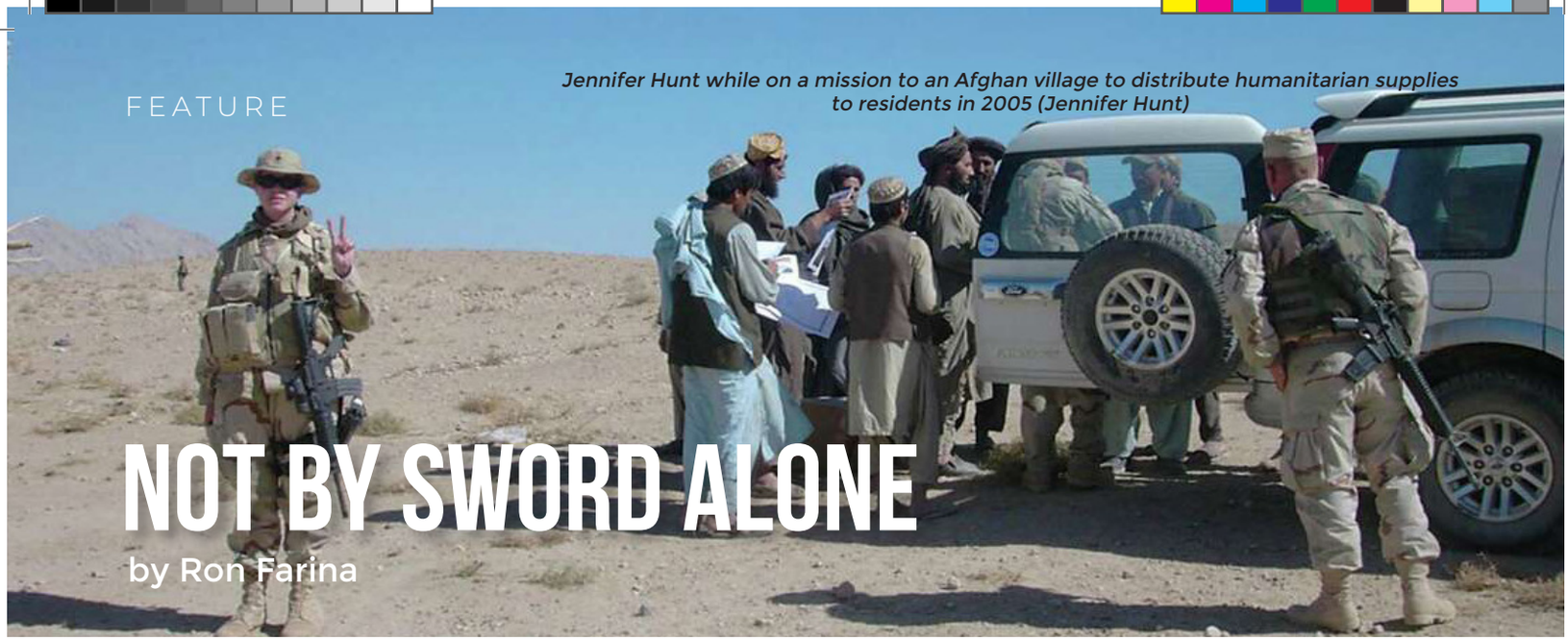
Jack Morrow
WWII Marines

John Mottern
Korea Army

James D. Murphy, Jr.
Vietnam Army

Spencer Radnich
Vietnam Army

Bob Rupert
Vietnam Army



Jennifer Hunt while on a mission to an Afghan village to distribute humanitarian supplies to residents in 2005 (Jennifer Hunt)

NOT BY SWORD ALONE

by Ron Farina

Of the almost 2 million Americans who have received Purple Hearts since World War II, only about 500 have been women. The vast majority of these women earned the award since September 11, 2001. On two VBC Happy Hours *in March, we had nine such recipients join us, along with Marine veteran and author, Ron Farina, who captured their stories in his 2022 book,* Out of the Shadows: Voices of American Women Soldiers. *Below is an excerpt from that book about Army Reservist Jennifer Hunt, a Purple Heart recipient who joined the military to help others around the world and took home scars of war.*

Iraq, 2007: On September 26, shortly before noon, American Army reservist Specialist Jennifer Hunt sat behind the wheel of a Humvee, the third vehicle in a small convoy of five Humvees filled with American Civil Affairs soldiers. She'd been in Iraq since late August, after almost two months of staging in Kuwait, not long after she'd graduated college and married another soldier. They deployed together.

In Iraq, a land where friend and foe are indistinguishable, American soldiers never knew what trouble waited outside the wire. The Iraqi Army, pressed to fight another of Saddam's mother of all battles, had been crushed in 2003. Twenty-eight days after the second American invasion, Iraqi soldiers fled the battlefields, leaving behind a vacuum. By that fall, insurgents, a caustic collection of rogue Iraqis, Al-Qaeda and Isis fighters bent on owning Iraq, filled the void.

Four years later, when Jennifer deployed to Iraq, a blanket of uncertainty still covered most of the country.

Iraq felt different to Jennifer, more dangerous than her year in Afghanistan. Soldiers here, more vigilant than she remembered from her time among the Afghans, stayed alert. She followed their lead – always geared up in full battle rattle, always donning her Kevlar instead of the soft bush hat or baseball cap she wore during her year in Afghanistan. She carried her M4 wherever she went. She kept a Glock M9 strapped to her right thigh.

The small convoy approached a nearby Iraqi Police checkpoint after rolling out of FOB [Forward Operating Base] Falcon, the team's home base. The FOB sat a short distance outside of Baghdad proper, about 13 kilometers (8.1 miles) south of the Green Zone. One of the police guarding the checkpoint spotted the convoy and raised a gate. The convoy slowed to 15, maybe 20 mph. The guard signaled them forward. Jennifer followed the first two Humvees, checked her mirror for the two behind her. The guard smiled, nodded, motioned her through. His arm moved back and forth like the pointer on an old-fashioned metronome. Jennifer smiled back, tipped a gloved hand to the brim of her Kevlar and continued past the guard shack, speeding up once she cleared the checkpoint.

Jennifer Hunt with a truck full of interdicted opium in Afghanistan (Jennifer Hunt)

No signs of trouble.

The Iraqi Police checkpoint sat just outside FOB Falcon. Good or bad, the location was a common practice. Situated in the urban outskirts of Baghdad, it was also common, almost routine, for FOB Falcon to be mortared by insurgents who used the surrounding neighborhoods as cover. Insurgents reserved IED ambushes for convoys and soldiers outside the wire. To remain less visible, to baffle enemy spotters waiting to trigger a roadside bomb, convoys usually moved at night. Daylight put convoys at greater risk. But safe travel was never a guarantee, especially when Iraqi Police – bribed, or in league with insurgents – smiled, raised a gate, and waved convoys into harm's way.

Jennifer kept a safe distance from the Humvee in front of her.

Midday sunlight turned surrounding buildings into shimmering towers of light. The reflection blinded the turret gunners, drivers too. Scanning windows, doorways, and rooftops was almost impossible. Everyone squinted behind sunglasses or tinted goggles. Sun bounced off the Humvee in front of Jennifer. In the glare, she lost sight of the Humvee. She lifted her foot from the accelerator, ready to slide her toe onto the brake pedal. A cloud passed overhead, temporarily blocking the sun. Vehicles dulled by the shadow appeared a safe distance in front of her. She relaxed.

Just a few clicks out from the police checkpoint, someone with mean intention waited. Silent. Invisible. He let the first vehicle pass, then the second, hoping that an attack in the center of the small convoy would inflict the most casualties.

Now, now!

A roadside bomb, a shaped charge IED, exploded. The world spun out of control. Shrapnel blew through the Humvee. Smoke spiraled up toward the clear sky.

* * *

By her senior year, 17-year-old Jennifer Baker had an inkling that helping others, understanding more of the world, and traveling internationally held her interest. These things, she thought, might someday make up her life. Those desires fed her curiosity. College, she knew, would help her.

"We're all for that," her parents said. "Money might be tight, but we'll find a way."

Too young to decide on the exact direction her life would move in, Jennifer knew enough about herself to know that life held more than small-town Shelton, Connecticut. She had no inclination to join the military, never really gave it much thought, even after a plume of smoke rose high in the sky on the morning of September 11th.

In the weeks that followed, the more outspoken students at Shelton High School and high schools across the United States voiced their wrath. The bravado, real or exaggerated, waned quickly. For a few, anger remained. The more impulsive, those wanting revenge, joined the military. Few, if any, understood actual military life.

Jennifer, sandwiched somewhere in that stratum, had been deeply troubled by the 9/11 attacks, but revenge or a rush to enlist in the military didn't fit her reaction. There was no, *oh my gosh, I have to join the Army,* moment for her.

By late November, weeks after the Twin Towers heaped chunks of slag, dust and debris onto streets, buildings, cars, and people below, and just days before the fires at ground zero flickered and finally died, life at Shelton High School had mostly returned to normal. Students who'd rushed into the hungry arms of the Army talked about heading off to boot camp after graduation. Others, fingers crossed for early acceptances into the school of their choice, had sent off college applications.

Jennifer leafed through college brochures, huddled with the school's guidance counselors, and visited a few colleges. On a whim, she'd sent an application to the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She took a shot. *Hey, why not?* The university replied with regrets. Jennifer's escape plan, her getaway from harsh New England winters, disappeared.

Shortly afterward, almost on a whim, she met with a pair of Army recruiters at her high school.

"There is a specialty occupation called Civil Affairs," said the Staff Sergeant, noting Jennifer's interest in international relations.

"Civil Affairs is a liaison role in foreign countries where America might be engaged in military operations. As part of the U.S. military liaison, you'd work with local officials and the people of whatever country you'd be serving in. It's a job right in line with your interests."

That evening, Jennifer explained it all to her skeptical parents. She told them about the Civil Affairs MOS, and explained that she'd have to go in as a Reservist, then return home and start college after Basic Training.

Jennifer's parents signed the enlistment papers. Years later, they would admit that they didn't want Jennifer to go into the military, but they reasoned that their headstrong young daughter would just wait a few months until she celebrated her 18th birthday. After that, no longer needing their consent, she'd simply enlist.

* * *

Afghanistan, 2004: After just a few hours in Germany, the airplane departed, finally touching down at Bagram Air Base. Jennifer's unit, the 450th Civil Affairs Battalion, in limbo for the next two weeks, pulled guard duty, rotated through typical security details, and mostly did the classic military hurry-up-and-wait.

By early September, Jennifer and the soldiers of the 450th flew into Kandahar, stayed a few days, then rolled out to Forward Operating Base Lagman, one of several FOBs in and around the city of Qalāt, in Zabul Province. The 450th, combined with other groups – 80 soldiers in all, just four of them women – would become the area-operating Provincial Reconstruction Team, a PRT. They left Lagman, a combat-ready tactical outpost, and set up a less-threatening compound three miles to the west, next to the Mayor of Qalāt's offices. The move, a deliberate signal of friendship with an intended message, "We are here to help."

The 450th's motto: "Not by Sword Alone.": The PRT, its mission clear – help rebuild the structures of local government and civil society to the point where they can function on their own – tackled a wide range of tasks. Configured into eight-person PRT teams that traversed Zabul Province, they organized health clinics manned by U.S. Army medics, also part of the eight-person PRT team. Beyond medical assistance, they evaluated villages for the build-out of a variety of new construction projects that would better the lives of villagers. To poor Afghans living in the more remote areas, the PRT provided cooking oils, rice, and wheat flour. Farmers and businesses starved for cash, supplies, or inventory, once vetted, could obtain American funding. The PRT did the vetting, processed the paperwork, and qualified legitimate requests.

Too many Afghans could not read or write. The PRT did what it could to increase the education of the locals, including construction of new schools, or refitting old buildings, turning them into classrooms.

This was the role Jennifer had trained for.

In the early weeks of deployment, Jennifer, too new, too young, too inexperienced, usually found herself in the position of lowest-ranking member of her PRT team. She discovered that it really does roll downhill – in military parlance, everything crappy coming from the top of the chain of command rolled down to the lowest-ranking member of the team.

The lines between her role as a Civil Affairs soldier and the duties she was often ordered to perform, blurred. Often nothing more than a tagalong, she pulled security in full battle rattle. While officers took the lead, parleyed with village elders and tribal chieftains, she stood guard outside the Humvee.

Frequently she got tagged designated driver, wheeling a boxlike Humvee or a Toyota Hilux through populated towns or over dirt roads leading to remote villages. And – because she was a woman, Afghan men would not talk to her. Their refusal contributed to her limited role. Of course, that never stopped the Afghan men from offering marriage proposals.

Weeks passed. She learned, settled into the job, often traveling with a woman officer, Captain Hicks. The teams traveled with an interpreter. Communication, a layered process dictated by Muslim custom, demanded that the interpreter relay information through the men that the Captain and Jennifer traveled with.

A typical meet-and-greet, especially with the women of a village, went like this: "Tell the interpreter to ask the women if they need medical attention," the captain ordered. The soldier turned to the interpreter.

"Tell the women the captain wants to know if they need any medical attention."

The interpreter approached the women. An animated exchange ensued. The interpreter turned back to the soldier.

"The women want to know if the husbands of these women soldiers know where they are," he said.

The soldier informed the captain.

"What's that got to do with my question?"

The interpreter would go back, try again, turn to the soldier once more. The captain waited.

"Well?" she asked.

"Ma'am, they want to know if you and the specialist are married?"

Outside the wire, the PRT team members looked out for women soldiers. Things inside the compound, 76 men, four women, were different. Jennifer would get propositioned frequently. The women captains not so much. Rank does have its privilege. Jennifer was careful. She understood that one-on-one prolonged conversations with men, even as little as five minutes, could send the wrong message.

Village elders or chiefs were eager to accept anything the Americans had to offer, particularly since it almost always meant help in the form of cash. A girls' school in Qalāt, a well-attended school, needed supplies. The PRT helped. Later, the school was used as a polling place for elections. The PRT provided security. Hamid Karzai won the election.

By late November, Jennifer and Captain Hicks rolled out with a team escorted by regular Army. The PRT teams traveled in their Toyota Hiluxes. The escort providing security rode in up-armored Humvees. Jennifer looked forward to the mission. An Army veterinarian, compliments of the United States, intended to inoculate the villagers' herds, especially sheep and goats. The mission, planned for two, possibly three, days, also included a medical clinic. Captain Hicks and Jennifer stationed themselves in the women's medical tent. The PRT had women doctors and women interpreters.

Jennifer saw diseases she didn't know existed.

Inside the medical tent, a woman looking for help removed her burka. She revealed a side of her face that looked mummified. The doctor, Captain Hicks, and Jennifer, too, tried to suppress their shock. They couldn't.

Jennifer let out an audible gasp, almost jumping back, her eyes wide.

"Does it hurt?" the doctor asked. The interpreter translated.

"No," the woman said.

"Can you feel anything?"

"No. I have no feeling at all."

The doctor looked at Jennifer, Captain Hicks. They shrugged their shoulders.

"I can't do anything with this. Hell, I don't have any idea what it is," the doctor said. "Whatever it is, it needs surgery, or debriding, or skin grafts. It's not anything that I'm touching, and it's not anything that can be done in Afghanistan."

The doctor spoke to the woman through the interpreter.

"We don't know how to help you," she said. "Do you feel sick? Are you in pain?"

"No," the woman said.

"Then it's best to just leave it alone."

Not long afterward, Jennifer rolled out with a PRT, the only woman member of the team. The mission, a support role on behalf of an infantry unit, required a search of women in several villages, women suspected of hiding signaling devices or detonators underneath their burkas. Only another woman could search an Afghan woman.

The team followed the infantry unit all over a mountainside for two days. Jennifer had her own tent. Relieving herself in private became a ridiculous endeavor. She tried cutting a plastic bottle. Dumb. Tried standing up. Not cool. She finally decided that finding the most private area she could worked as well as it was going to. So, in the lexicon of the modern-day American woman soldier who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, she secluded herself, and "popped a squat."

If it bothers somebody, what are they going to do, send me to Afghanistan?

Deployments in combat zones have an ebb and flow, a rhythm that develops on the ground in real time. A rhythm that soldiers know. The PRTs found a rhythm. To appear more friendly, they wore baseball caps instead of a Kevlar. They rolled out in pickup trucks instead of Humvees and MRAPs. They coordinated with combat commanders to minimize impact to civilians. They were in Afghanistan to help. They made it known, and for the most part it worked. That was what they'd hoped to accomplish. That was what they hoped to leave behind.

By mid-summer 2005, the 450th Civil Affairs Battalion redeployed. But the world is not a perfect place. The 450th, the PRTs, Jennifer, and her fellow Civil Affairs soldiers, had done their jobs, but in Afghanistan there would always be unfinished business.

* * *

Iraq, September 26, 2007: Dust and the smell of burning rubber, charred wire, and hot metal filled the Humvee that Jennifer had been driving. Smoke overcrowded the inside of the cab. Shrapnel that had blown through the Humvee danced wildly, looking for partners. Shards bit into Jennifer's arms, a wrist, her face, burned her neck. Hot steel pierced her cheek, its white-hot point running along her jawline, tearing through flesh just below her chin. Blood, not as bad as it looked, covered her face, dripped down the front of her vest.

A larger bomb fragment gnawed at the turret gunner's leg.

Almost deafened by the blast wave, Jennifer struggled to make sense of the shouting all around her. Mouths opened. Silent shouts. Everything happened like a silent movie. Soldiers pointed, gestured wildly. Jennifer slowed the Humvee to a crawl, then stopped. Stunned by the blast wave, the unfolding chaos, her mind worked overtime.

Process. Use your training. Who's yelling? What? What's that soldier shouting? Go? Go where? Get out of the kill zone? Of course. Damnit, of course. I got it. Roger that. I'm moving. I'm going. I'm going! No bad guys shooting at us now. No secondary attack. How the hell did this happen so close to the checkpoint? We just passed it. C'mon, nobody could plant a bomb

Jennifer Hunt, a U.S. Army Reserve specialist, receives the Purple Heart at Camp Falcon, Iraq (Jennifer Hunt)

this close without the Police seeing them. A spotter. Someone in that guard shack had to see him. Had to. A payoff, I'll bet. If not, then it's police in league with the bombers. Can't worry about that now. My gunner is hurt. I need to get to Al. Oh geezus, it's bad. I need to stop, get the medical kit. It's behind the passenger seat, behind the headrest. Okay. I gotta stop the Humvee. Out. Move. What? Who the hell has got me? Why are you putting me in another Humvee? Leave me alone. I've gotta help Al. Bleeding? I know he's bleeding – What? I'm bleeding? Nothing hurts. In shock? I don't think so. No. Maybe. Al, I need to get to Al. Where are you taking us? Back to base, into the CSH? Okay – makes sense. Stay awake. Of course, I'll stay awake. Sing? Just keep singing? What? Anything. Okay. Ever hear the song that never ends, goes like this:

This is the song that doesn't end

Yes, it goes on and on, my friend

Some people started singing it, not knowing what it was

And they'll continue singing it forever just because ...

Inside the CSH (Combat Support Hospital), medics triaged the wounded. All the soldiers in Jennifer's Humvee sustained wounds. Al, who should have lost his leg but didn't, was stabilized and flown to Germany, to the Army Medical Center at Landstuhl. Shrapnel tried, but couldn't sever his leg, his thigh as big and thick as most soldiers' chests.

The medics cut off Jennifer's uniform, exposing her wounds: burns to the neck and back of her head, shrapnel to her side, a wrist, both arms, and to her face. They cleaned the wounds, picking most of the shrapnel from her flesh. To her relief, the wounds were not deep. She'd have a scar on her face, small, a second dimple. Nerves in her wrist, more likely bruised, possibly nicked by shrapnel, made her hand useless for several days. A headache from a slight concussion disappeared quickly. The obligatory internal exam ruled out any organ damage and internal bleeding.

Dismissed from the CSH, given large men's military boxer shorts, a man's uniform, and plenty of pain meds, Jennifer made her way back to her quarters. Within a week, once again battle ready, she returned to full duty.

* * *

Seventeen-year-old Jennifer Baker had been a girl eager for life. What she found as a young soldier was a surprise. She hadn't set out to fight. She wanted to help. She did. In Afghanistan, as a member of a PRT, she helped build schools, increased literacy, and encouraged cooperation between local officials and the American military. She assisted in the development of health clinics and helped encourage women in more remote villages to seek medical treatment.

She tried to do some of the same in Iraq.

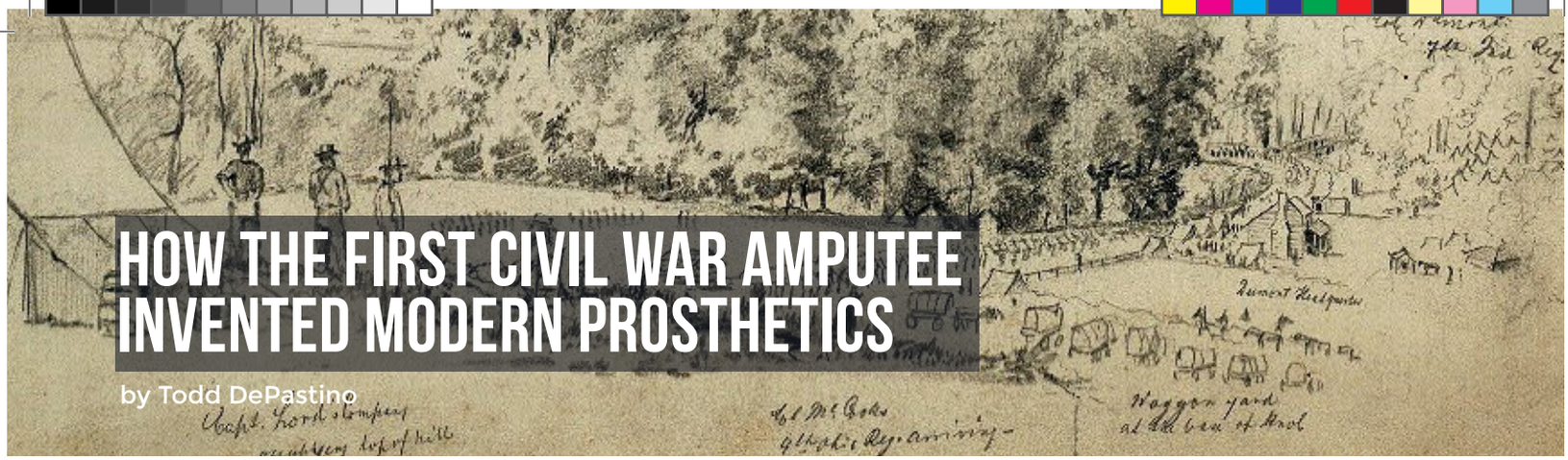
After her second deployment, after Iraq, she returned to a quiet life, children, graduate school, a career with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and a good marriage.

Twenty years have passed. Bits of old shrapnel sometimes poke through her skin, reminders of war. We've left Afghanistan, Iraq, too. Jennifer and others like her, American soldiers, many of them women, left something of themselves behind – the good that they tried to do. They sacrificed, not just for America, but for people around the world.

* * *

Jennifer Hunt's full story is part of the collection *Out of the Shadows: Voices of American Women Soldiers,* featuring the stories of nine wounded American women soldiers. The book is available at Amazon and books stores everywhere. Copyright © 2022, Ron Farina. Published by Lagrange Books, an imprint of Oren Litwin. Printed with permission.

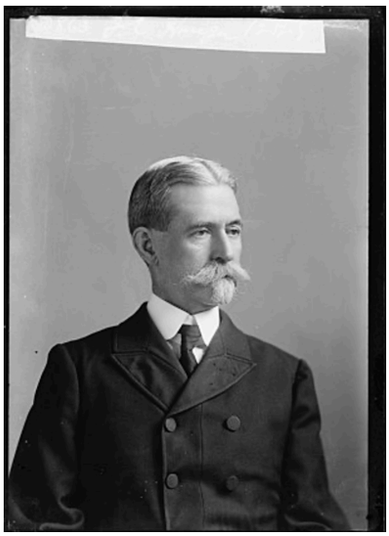
Ron Farina is author of two previous books, including, most recently, *At the Altar of the Past* and *Who Will Have My Back.* He holds an MFA from Western Connecticut State University, served in Vietnam in 1966–67, and lives in Connecticut with his wife and two golden retrievers, Henry and Preacher.



HOW THE FIRST CIVIL WAR AMPUTEE INVENTED MODERN PROSTHETICS

by Todd DePastino

The first amputation of the Civil War came at the hands of a 16th Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regimental Surgeon who removed the leg of an 18-year-old college student from the Shenandoah Valley named James E. Hanger.



James Edward Hanger (Library of Congress)

The operation was conducted in a private home on June 3, 1861, in the western Virginia town of Philippi. Hanger had left Washington College (now Washington and Lee College) to join a local cavalry unit in Philippi.

Union soldiers from Ohio surprised the Confederates in early morning with two blasts of canister shot from cannon. This marked the beginning of the so-called "Battle of Philippi," the first skirmish of the Civil War.

Hanger ran into the stable for his horse and was hit by the third volley, this time of solid six-pounders.

One cannonball tore through the stable, ricocheted off a door post, and struck Hanger's left leg above the knee.

With the leg hanging by skin, Hanger crawled to a hayloft to hide from the Yankees. Soldiers quickly discovered him and carried him to Dr. James Robinson, a native of Wooster, Ohio.

With a saw and chloroform, Robinson saved Hanger's life by removing his left leg seven inches below the hip. It was the first of an estimated 50,000 amputations performed during the Civil War.

Hanger convalesced as a POW until August, when he was swapped in a prisoner exchange. Returning home to Churchville, Virginia, Hanger used a crude peg leg to hobble upstairs to a dark bedroom. He was just 18 years old, and his life was over.

"No one can know what such a loss means unless he has suffered a similar catastrophe," he later explained. "In the twinkling of an eye, life's fondest hopes seemed dead. What could the world hold for a maimed, crippled man?"

Secluded upstairs, Hanger entertained a modest ambition to improve his lot by upgrading his peg leg. He began to design the leg he wanted, then adding little features, here and there. He wanted it to be comfortable, easy to take on and off, and, of course, useful in walking as naturally as possible.

Above: Position of McClellan's Advance on the Heights Round Philippi (Wikimedia Commons).

Descending from the bedroom, Hanger collected oak barrel staves and metal straps, rubber bumpers and nails, and crafted a more life-like limb to replace the crude peg he'd been using. He tinkered further, adding hinges and joints.

By fall, he had articulating knee and ankle joints, the first of their kinds. He called it "The Hanger Limb" and began selling them out of his brother's store in nearby Staunton, Virginia. Sadly, in the wake of Bull Run, there was no shortage of customers.

In 1863, at age 20, Hanger patented his leg with the Confederate States Patent Office and contracted with the Association for the Relief of Maimed Soldiers in Richmond to produce above-the-knee Hanger Limbs for $200 each.

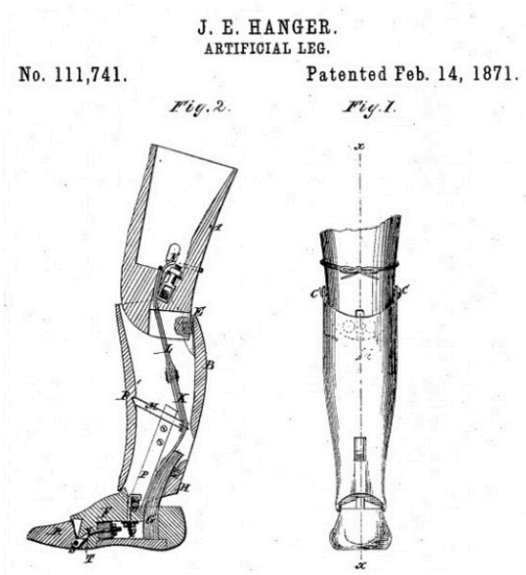
After the surrender at Appomattox, Hanger opened a

(Library of Congress)

shop in Richmond, where he secured a big contract with Virginia to supply the state's wounded veterans with prosthetic legs.

Hanger kept on tweaking and improving his device, which by the 1880s became the world's most desired artificial leg. It was lightweight, comfortable, well-functioning, and didn't cost a fortune. His sons joined the business and helped expand it throughout the United States.

J.E. Hanger, Inc., invented and marketed a range of limbs, wheelchairs, beds, and other devices for the disabled. As the killing fields of World War I got active, James E. Hanger, now 72 years old, traveled to Europe to help wounded French and British soldiers regain their mobility. Hanger would die in 1919, just after the Great War had produced another generation of men in need of artificial limbs.


J. E. HANGER.
ARTIFICIAL LEG.
No. 111,741. Patented Feb. 14, 1871.
Fig. 2. Fig. 1.

U.S. Patent Office

Reflecting on his life, Hanger expressed the kind of wisdom we hear in so many of our veterans, the kind only gained through time and struggle. His worst day, June 3, 1861, now appeared to be his best, the catastrophic moment that inspired the ingenuity which would benefit the world.

"Today," he said, "I am thankful for what seemed then to me nothing but a blunder of fate, but which was to prove instead a great opportunity."

J.E. Hanger, Inc., lives on as part of Hanger Prosthetics & Orthotics, which supplies more prosthetics than any other company in the world. The amazing advances in artificial limbs we've seen since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan all build upon James E. Hanger's innovations and continue to assist our wounded warriors to regain their mobility.

Are you a veteran interested in telling your story of service?

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WHY MAY 22 IS MARITIME DAY

by Todd DePastino

The 3-cent stamp issued on the 125th anniversary of the SS Savannah*'s trans-Atlantic crossing. (National Postal Museum)*

When Congress created Maritime Day in 1933 hardly anyone noticed.

It was in the First Hundred Days of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, and all eyes were upon the alphabet-soup of agencies rolling out like new Model Bs (the short-lived replacement of the Model A) off Ford's assembly line: the AAA, CCC, NRA, TVA, FDIC.

But designating May 22 for the US maritime industry was part of FDR's effort to revitalize the nation's merchant fleet and secure its ships and crews in case of war.

May 22 was an odd choice. On that day in 1819, the SS *Savannah* attempted to be the first steamship to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Sure enough, the ship made it to Liverpool, England. But, by any other measure, the venture was a colossal failure.

The trip was the brainchild of two Connecticut Yankees and distant cousins, Captains Moses and Stevens Rogers. Both were proponents of steam, though the science of steam powered propulsion through water was still in its infancy. Robert Fulton's steamboat *Clermont* had made the first commercially successful voyage up the Hudson River just a dozen years earlier.

The Yankees Rogers believed that if a steam*boat* could run on inland waterways, then a steam*ship* should be able to ply ocean sea lanes.

Backed by investors, Moses bought a three-mast, 109-foot ship of sail under construction in New York, the *Savannah*. Then, he searched for mechanics and metal shops skilled enough to retrofit the vessel with a steam engine, complete with side paddlewheels and smokestack.

The result was something of a *Franken-ship*—a half-sail, half-steam hybrid that weighed 75 tons more than other sailing packets its size. As a prestige project, the *Savannah* boasted 16 state rooms decked out with imported carpets and curtained with mirrors. The steam engine consumed most of the cargo space, so paying passengers were essential.

New York buzzed with gossip about the maritime novelty, and visitors flocked to the harbor for tours. They admired the elegant accommodations but balked at the iron furnace and double copper boilers below decks. The *Savannah* soon acquired a nickname, "Steam Coffin."

Moses and Stevens failed to recruit not only passengers in New York, but also crews. Sailors refused the job, worried about a mechanical failure or boiler explosion at sea. Moses's mother even denied his 18-year-old brother, Ebenezer, permission to serve aboard ship.

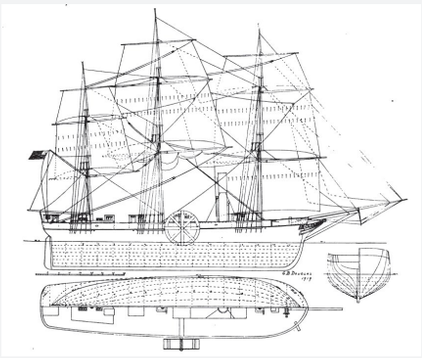

Diagram of SS Savannah *according to G. B. Douglas (1919), showing lines and sail plan. (The Rudder, May 1919)*

Stevens Rogers eventually enlisted seamen from his hometown of New London, Connecticut, and the *Savannah* sailed off—rather than steamed—to its new home in Savannah, Georgia. When the ship arrived at 4:00am on April 6, a large crowd was there to see the Frankenship with their own eyes.

Despite extensive advertising in the coastal South, no passengers stepped forward for the *Savannah*'s maiden transatlantic voyage, scheduled for May 20. The trip would go on, however, if only to make history.

The morning of the scheduled departure, one of the ship's hands recruited from New London returned from a night of drinking, fell off the gangplank and drowned. The accident delayed the shoving off two days, to May 22.

The SS *Savannah*'s 29-day crossing of the Atlantic Ocean from Savannah to Liverpool, England, was largely uneventful. That's because the steam engine was hardly used. The weather favored sail, and despite the piles of coal and cordwood aboard, Captain Moses Rogers feared running out of fuel.

The few times the seas were placid and the paddle wheels were engaged, neighboring ships spotted smoke bellowing from the *Savannah* and rushed to its aid, assuming a catastrophic fire aboard. Almost 90% of the journey came from wind propulsion, rather than steam.

Moses Rogers's new mission, once he landed in Liverpool and bathed in local praise for "Yankee ingenuity," was to find a buyer for the *Savannah*. The ship was a financial sinkhole, and economic depression back home—"The Panic of 1819"—had bankrupted the *Savannah*'s investors.

Secretary of State John Quincy Adams furnished Captain Rogers with letters of introduction for a Baltic tour that took the ship to Sweden, Finland, Russia, Denmark, and Norway to drum up commercial interest. The *Savannah* won admiration wherever it went, but no one was willing to buy a ship that couldn't carry cargo and scared passengers.

A buyer was eventually found back in New York. The first thing the new owner did was remove the engine, smokestack, and paddlewheels and restore the *Savannah* back to its original sailing rigging. The ship then began mundane packet service between New York and *Savannah*. One can almost imagine observers on shore whispering to each other about the once-proud celebrity reduced to commoner.

Perhaps it was merciful that a gale ground the *Savannah* on the southern tip of Fire Island in Long Island Sound on November 5, 1821, less than two years after the ship's return from Europe. Passengers and cargo were saved, and some of the interior was salvaged, but the Savannah itself spent the next few decades being beaten, smashed, and pulled under by ocean waves.

Moses Rogers and Stevens Rogers returned to more prosaic and profitable work, running a steamboat service in South Carolina and serving as tax collector and custom official in New York, respectively.

But the legend of the SS *Savannah* lives on as an "Illustrious Failure," in the words of maritime historian and *Savannah* champion Frank Braynard.

Because of Maritime Day, we remember the *Savannah* as the ship that defied the conventional wisdom that human beings would always remain in thrall to wind and storm, wave and tide.

Before railroads, automobiles, and airplanes, the *Savannah* struck a blow against the tyranny of spatial distance and expanded our dreams of where we could travel.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JULIA PARSONS!

WWII Navy WAVE Julia Parsons turned 102 years old on March 2, and the VBC celebrated with an Open House birthday party. Julia is a national treasure and living legend who served as a code-breaker working to decipher Enigma, the secret German military code. Julia shared her story in the Spring 2021 issue of *VBC Magazine* and in our interviews and live programs.
See veteransbreakfastclub.org.

VBC VIETNAM TOUR

November 27 - December 11, 2023
$3,799 land price
Korean Air Group R/T from Chicago $2039 per person
Details: veteransbreakfastclub.org/travel

Join the Veterans Breakfast Club for a two-week guided tour of Vietnam, highlighting the battle zones of the war while also exploring Vietnam's history and natural beauty. We welcome veterans, their families, and anyone to join us.

Todd DePastino will serve as Historian on the trip, providing the broader history and background of the places we'll see. We'll also learn from the Vietnam Veterans who will be traveling with us, stay in wonderful hotels, and have fabulous meals together.

If interested, contact Todd DePastino 412-623-9029 or todd@veteransbreakfastclub.org. We'll get a travel group discussion going by email, Zoom and in-person.

Land price above includes hotels, transportation, tours, and most meals. Group Air price roundtrip from Chicago O'Hare.

We've designed this trip based on the Vietnam tours we took in 2018 and 2020 with veterans and non-veteran travelers.

ITINERARY

Day 1 Depart USA. Cross International Date Line.

Day 2- 5 Hanoi/Halong Bay

Day 6-8 Hue/Dong Ha/Khe Sanh

Day 9-10 Danang

Day 10-13 Saigon/Cu Chi/Mekong Delta

Day 14 Goodbye, Vietnam

See details at veteransbreakfastclub.org/travel

Veterans Breakfast Club

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