



TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

Tribute To Service was an idea by the editorial & columnist staff at the Northern Sentry to feature stories on Veterans that we may know or touched base with during our journalist careers. We wanted to publish this special section on November 10, the day before Veterans Day 2023. Our thanks to the many merchants who have supported us in our efforts. Also, thanks to those who took the time to share their stories.

By their very nature the many who have served this great country do not brag about the time they spent defending our freedom. Instead they go quietly about their lives as normal citizens. They may be your neighbor, or friend, or just someone you meet at a local Scout or PTA meeting. It is with pride that we at the Northern Sentry publish "Tribute to Service" knowing that these are a very few of the thousands of stories that could be featured.

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TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

Vietnam Molds a Young Soldier

I Was a Pretty Damned Experienced Captain When I Left

RODNEY WILSON, NORTHERN SENTRY

It was the 17th of January in 1966 when a very young Robert (Robbie) Blatherwick entered the U.S. Army. He was 18, and the world focus was on a small coastal strip of land in Southeast Asia known as Viet Nam, and more specifically North and South Vietnam.

The war in Vietnam had been ramping up since the end of World War II, but the U.S. involvement would come to a peak in 1969 when over 543,000 American combat troops were stationed in Vietnam, and Robbie Blatherwick was one of them. "I enlisted as Airborne unassigned. Like everyone else in the military, you take a pretty big battery of tests. They said do you want to go to OCS (Officer Candidate School) and my thought was that if you are dumb enough to send me to OCS, I'm dumb enough to go, so I spent pretty much the first 2 years training" according to Robbie.

My friendship with Robbie would come quite some time after his military career, but I would probably be one of the first to step up and tell you that his assessment of his intelligence at that time in his life was far from accurate. Rob's father was a medical doctor, and a World War II vet who spent time in a German run prison camp. Robbie was active in Boy Scouts and was one of only 3 per cent of all Scouts nationwide to attain the rank of Eagle Scout. It was through Scouting that I would meet Robbie, and it was through Scouting that I learned so much from him. You see Robbie was one of the best leaders of young men that I have ever met. He has a way of bringing out the best in a young Scout working to learn a skill so that they can advance on their Scouting journey. It certainly did not surprise me that he would soft sell getting into OCS, but I can guarantee you that it wasn't because the U.S. Army knew he was going to fail. Far from that. I am pretty sure they saw what I saw, an ability to educate, reason and lead.

There is another side of Robbie that makes him a leader; he will try just about anything. "I managed to get into jump school (skydiving school) before I went to OCS" remembers Robbie "and 4 guys from my OCS company were selected for Special Forces, the only 4 guys who had already gone to jump school." Robbie will then tell you that standards in those days were a lot different than they are now.

But again, I am not buying into that rhetoric. Special Forces is an elite group of combat ready troops, jump school or no jump school.

Basic training for Rob would be at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, AIT (or Advanced Individual Training) for infantry was at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and back to OCS at Fort Benning, which is now Fort Moore in Georgia.

The Vietnam War was now in major escalation mode "I got there just before Tet at the end of 1967 and stayed there for 3 years. I got back in 1971" so a bit of quick math will tell you that the Vietnam experience for Blatherwick would be 3-4 years. "I kept on extending for 6 months. They had a policy that if you extended for 6 months you would get 30 days of leave plus 15 days of travel time that didn't count against your regular leave."

VIETNAM

Army Special Forces was headquartered in Nha Trang "it's kind of the central part of South Viet Nam, right along the coast" according to Blatherwick. There was a short trip to Japan to deal with a medical issue, and when returning to Vietnam the now Lt. Blatherwick asked to be assigned to Command and Control. "Our operational areas were Laos, Cambodia and small incursions in North Vietnam" says Blatherwick. It was special operations. (Robbie pauses) I was an inexperienced 2nd Lieutenant when I got there, and a pretty damned experienced Captain when I left. But then I was a 22 year old Captain. Most guys don't get commissioned until they are well past 22. I can explain by saying they were looking for warm bodies, so things got expedited."

Many of us can remember the nightly news stories about Vietnam, and on one particular evening President Nixon would talk about the U.S. invading Cambodia in an area called the Parrot's Beak. The move was to cut off the supply chain that flowed down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which according to Robbie was a better way than the 6 man Special Forces teams that would operate to slow down supply trains to the south from North Vietnam.

AUGUST 23, 1968

For Robbie Blatherwick August 23rd, 1968, is a date that will never be forgotten. His Special Forces

group was operating out of a base near Da Nang, located on the South China sea. "There are different stories about how we should have known what was coming, that the CIA had actually warned us, and the command had maybe disregarded those warnings. I don't know whether all of that is true or not, but I don't believe it" according to Blatherwick.

Blatherwick's recollection is that about 2:45 AM there was small arms fire "and everybody was 100% alert immediately even though many people were cornered in their hooch." Special Forces had to rely on Indigenous forces to fill out their ranks and they had a real hard time with security. "I look at a Vietnamese and I can't tell whether he's a North Vietnamese or a South Vietnamese" according to Blatherwick "or what his politics are. He could still be a South Vietnamese, but a communist South Vietnamese." On that particular night the guard towers "maybe 4 or 6, or even more" says Robbie, were compromised. The guards were killed in the towers and the main North Vietnamese force came in from the water side. "They were sappers, which were engineers, all hopped up on opium and they had a rifle. Some had grenades, and some had other charges."

There were 300 or maybe even more friendly troops in the camp that night. On the other side, there were 51 intruders. The fighting went on for 2 or 3 hours, and "we recovered our perimeter" Robbie says.

A STORY OF SURVIVAL

As troops inside the hooch that Blatherwick occupied grabbed gear and boots, a grenade would come in the door and hit him in the chest and fell on the floor "and I couldn't see it. I didn't really know what it was and someone else yelled grenade. I just dropped to the floor and swept everything I could find under me, and it didn't go off. One of the occupants in the hooch would go out the door and immediately got shot. When I poked my head out, he said there's a guy right on the corner, right on the corner, but I couldn't see without leaning way out. Travis kept telling me there was a guy on the corner. I yelled that all I could see was a sandbag. Travis yelled shoot the **** sandbag. I jumped out and while I was in the air I fired shots and managed to kill him."

There were several more incidents



of bravery that night by Blatherwick and others in the compound. It could have been worse, but the bottom line was that 51 perished that night, and 17 of them were Americans. Robbie would eventually jump into a bullet riddled ambulance, not expecting it to start, but it did start, and Robbie spent the rest of the night driving around picking up wounded and taking them to the dispensary. "There were a lot more bullet holes in that ambulance when I ended than when I began."

AFTER VIETNAM

As a journalist, I always ask if there is anything my interviewee would like to add to the story. Points I may have missed. "Well, you know me pretty well, Rod. I certainly wasn't expecting ticker tape parades when I returned from Vietnam, but I never expected that someone would walk up to me because I was in uniform and spit on me." After hearing this,

I asked many of my Vietnam era friends about their arrival back in the United States. All of them had dealt with similar experiences. My thoughts would often return to my conversation with Robbie, and the moment where he made the decision to pull what could have been a live grenade under his body to save those around him. Driving around in an ambulance saving others at the risk of his own life. I guess I can understand now why those who serve often serve in silence. Why those who are still alive are determined to give proper military rights to those who pass, because it is what they deserve.

Again, I go back to the moment when Robert Blatherwick made the cut and was sent to Officer's Candidate School. Not sure who decided to send Robbie, but if he was looking for someone to lead and who would readily give his life for his country, as I see it he certainly made the right decision.



VETERANS DAY

HONORING ALL WHO SERVED

We honor those who have given it all, and those who put their lives on the line to serve our country.



TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

Walter Parcels Survives Two Hair Raising Mid-Air Attacks – Comes Home!

EXCERPT FROM "THE HEROES NEXT DOOR" BY MARLAN L. HVINDEN & NANCY BERGESON HVINDEN



Walter Parcels, 1940 Yearbook PHOTO PUBLIC DOMAIN

Walter Parcels. Parcels was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Parcels born in 1922 and spent his youth at Oberon, until the family moved, ending up at Kingston, Washington. Parcels' father, a Benson Co. native, served in the United States Army during World War I. Walter was quick to enlist in the Army Air Corps, doing so December 23, 1941, as he had given his 2 week notice at the newspaper where he worked as a printer on December 8, 1941.

had its share of hard-to-believe stories, but none can surpass the story filed by AP correspondent Wes Gallagher about a B-17 Flying Fortress "Phyllis" and her crew. What began as an ordinary routine flight became a story of one of the most remarkable fights of the war, the homeward journey of a Flying Fortress all shot to pieces high over France, was unfolded today by the crew that survived the venture. The story that follows are Gallagher's and appeared in newspapers worldwide served by the Associated Press News Service.

"The fortress named 'Phyllis' was attacked by forty Focke-Wulf 190 fighter planes during Friday's big raid on Maulte, and when Lt. Charles Paine of Waycross, Ga., the pilot, headed home, this was her plight: Two of four motors were out of Commission, rudder and stabilizer bore three holes a piece, half of



Parcels 2nd from left AAF PHOTO

Komarek; Waist gunner: Sgt Herbert M Peterson; Upper turret gunner: Sgt Thomas J Coburn, Junior; Ball turret: Sgt Ralph L. Sheeder; Tail Gunner: Sgt. Bent Taucher; Radio Gunner: Sgt. Arthur Bouthillier; Radio Gunner: Sgt. Walter Parcels.

turret cutting Coburn's head badly. Blinded by blood. Coburn kept firing until he fell unconscious between the two pilots.

The second motor went out over the channel and Sheeder was wounded slightly by a shell which hit the ball turret. Peterson also was wounded but continued to battle finally the Germans gave up the chase in mid-channel and Paine made for the nearest airfields scarcely 1/3 of the size required for the fortress to land on. Paine saw a larger field and made for it, coming down in a belly landing. Except for Coburn, who is in the hospital, the rest of the crew



Paine joined the squadron the night before the biggest fortress raid yet upon the continent and saw the rest of his crew for the first time when they stepped into the plane. "We're just crossed the target when trouble started," Paine related, "I suddenly heard shouts from every quarter of the plane, 'here they come.' About 40 fighters, including some of Goering's yellow nose squadron jumped us and attacked from all sides, the fortress guns blazed back. Bouthillier's oxygen mask broke away from his face as he slipped to the floor unconscious.

Parcels leaped to take his place at the gun, which jammed, but by the time he got it cleared a cannon shot cut his oxygen tube and he too became unconscious. Then two cannon shells knocked motor out and the fortress began losing altitude. At this point an anti-aircraft shell ripped a hole in the wing and the rudder and stabilizer were damaged. "I was busy shooting at those German fighters coming up at us I didn't notice anything," Taucher said.

When he landed, he found three bullet holes three inches from his head and between his legs. another burst of cannon fire inside the fortress knocked out some controls and Payne said the aircraft almost went out of control. The ship's nose wouldn't go down, he said, we had to stand up in our seats and pushed forward with all our might then the ship slowly nosed down. Nearing the coast an anti-aircraft shell hit the plane and a cannon shell from a German fighter scored a direct hit on the upper

Ark-La-Tex News 3

Riddled Flying Fortress Survives Savage Attack by 40 Nazi Planes

American Craft All But Shot to Pieces During Raid on France

BY WES GALLAGHER.

With the United States Flying Fortress Command. Somewhere in England (AP).—The stirring story of one of the most remarkable flights of the war, the homeward journey of a Flying Fortress all but shot to pieces high over France, was unfolded today by the crew which survived the venture.

The fortress, named "Phyllis," was attacked by 40 Focke-Wulf 190's during Friday's big raid on Maulte, and when Lt. Charles Paine, 27, of Waycross, Ga., the pilot, headed home this was her plight:

Two motors were out of commission, rudder and stabilizer bore three shell holes apiece, half the controls were shot away, the landing gear was smashed, a huge hole was in one wing and there were 200 holes in the fuselage.

Some in Crew Wounded.

But the fortress fluttered back home, some of her crewmen wounded.

Lieutenant Paine's crew included:

Copilot: Lt. Robert Long, 25, of Sweetwater, Texas.

Navigator: Lt. John A. Thompson, 22, of St. Louis.

Bombardier: Lt. Stanley A. Komarek, 27, of Muskogon, Mich.

Waist Gunner: Sgt. Herbert M. Peterson, 21, of Des Moines, Iowa.

Upper Turret Gunner: Sgt. Thomas J. Coburn, Jr., 22, of Fort Fort, Pa.

Ball Turret: Sgt. Ralph L. Sheeder, 22, of Six Mile Run, Pa.

Tail Gunner: Sgt. Bent Taucher, 20, of Rock Springs, Wyo.

Radio Gunner: Sgt. Arthur Bouthillier, 22, of Westcott, R. I.

Radio Gunner: Sgt. Walter Parcels, 20, of Kingston, Wash.

Paine joined the squadron the night before that biggest fortress raid yet upon the continent and saw the rest of his crew for the first time when they stepped into the plane.

"We had just crossed the target when trouble started," Paine related. "I suddenly heard shouts from every quarter of the plane, 'here they come!'"

40 Planes Jump Fortress.

"About 40 FW-190's, including some from Goering's yellow nose squadron, jumped us."

Attacked from all sides, the Fortress guns blazed back. Bouthillier's oxygen mask broke away from his face as he slipped to the floor unconscious.

"The second motor went out over the channel and Sheeder was wounded slightly by a shell which hit the ball turret. Peterson also was wounded but continued the battle.

Finally the Germans gave up the chase in mid-channel and Paine made for the nearest airfield scarcely a third of the size required for a Fortress to land on.

Paine saw a larger field and made for it, coming down in a belly-landing.

Except for Coburn, who is in the hospital, the rest of the crew returned to duty today.

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Parcels was quickly trained and by summer of August 1942 was in England as a radio gunner with a bomber crew, 352nd Bomb Squadron, 301st Bomb Group, 8th Air Force. His first close brush with death was aboard "Phyllis," a B-17 flying out of England.

There are miracles and THERE ARE MIRACLES! World War II

the controls were shot away, the landing gear was smashed, there was a huge hole in one wing and there were 200 bullet holes in the fuselage.

Despite the severe damage to Phyllis, the plane fluttered back home, some of her crewmen wounded.

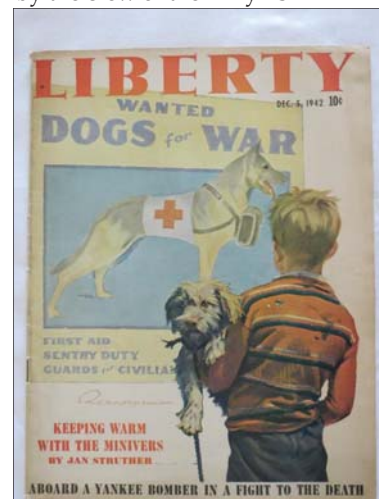
Lt. Paine's crew included: Co-Pilot: Lt. Robert Long; Navigator: Lt. John Thompson; Bombardier: Lt Stanley A.

Glenn Parcels was by now a Tech Sgt., had flown 50 missions, survived two missions which made national news coverage, and wasn't yet 21 years old. He had earned the Air Medal and Oak Leaf Cluster. It was time to go home to Washington on leave.

After the war Parcels returned to Washington state and resumed his career as a newspaper printer. He passed away in 2009 in Washington state.

**Research uncovered since this story was written in 2019: In October, 1943 Parcels was a patient at a Veteran's Hospital in Texas. He was diagnosed with epilepsy and honorably discharged November, 1943.

The story mentioned at the bottom of the magazine cover was the full after the event story chronicled to war correspondent Don Whitehead by the crew of the "Phyllis"



Dirty Girty Purty Happy After Landing On Sicilian Field

By DON WHITEHEAD

With the United States Seventh Army in Sicily, July 7—(Delayed)—(P)—Dirty Girty, from somewhere in North Africa, was the first Flying Fortress to land on Sicily—but it was an unscheduled stop which had the crew thinking that maybe Dirty Girty's sixty-third bombing mission over enemy territory would be her last.

The bomber was in plenty of trouble when First Lieutenant Earl Hammond of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, set her down on an emergency landing strip that invasion troops captured several days ago.

"I'm certainly glad you boys took this strip of land," Hammond told a cheering crowd of soldiers which gathered around the battered plane. "If you hadn't, I'd be floating around in the Mediterranean somewhere."

Dirty Girty was one of a large flight of fortresses which went over the toe of Italy this morning to bomb San Giovanni. The raid was directed at the harbor, from which small boats and ferries have been plying the strait to Sicily.

"When we went in for our bombing run they threw everything but the kitchen stove at us," Hammond said. "There was ample flak and plenty accurate."

One of the happiest members of the crew was Technical Sergeant Walter Parcels of Kingston, Washington, the radio operator, because it was his last flight before going home for a well-earned rest. Parcels has flown on 50 missions over enemy territory and thus qualifies for home leave.

'Dirty Girty's' 63rd Run Almost Her Last

By DON WHITEHEAD

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Another member of the crew was Staff Sgt. John White, New Orleans, the waist gunner.

returned to duty today."

Only 8 months after his close call on "Phyllis," Parcels was radio gunner on a crew taking part in the North African campaign. By now he had 49 missions under his belt, and this was to be his final one, number 50. He could go home on leave after this one. It was the invasion of Sicily, Operation Husky. The B-17's had been bombing German airfields in the boot of Italy and their mission was San Giovanni and small ships in the harbor. Only hours earlier the landing forces had captured the runway.

"Dirty Girty" was hit by heavy fire and forced to make an emergency landing. She became the first Allied plane to land in Sicily.

Capt. Hammond was a young but skillful pilot. He not only brought Dirty Girty safely down with no injuries to the crew, but he went on to complete 50 missions himself with the enviable record of never losing a crew member.

Syndicated story, nationwide release, July, 1943

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MSgt Ed Zilli US Army

TED BOLTON, NORTHERN SENTRY

It was June 6th 1944, D-Day.... As part of the US Army's 4th Infantry Division (known as the Ivy Division), Sgt Edward John Zilli had crossed the Atlantic on the Queen Mary, landed in Scotland, rode a blacked out train to a small village in England, had several months of additional field training, and now found himself crossing the English Channel on an LST heading for Utah Beach in Normandy, France.

Ed grew up on Long Island New York, right on the ocean, and was a great swimmer so he wanted to be as high on that ship as possible. When I asked why he replies "I could swim like a fish, and I figured if that ship got hit and was going down I wanted to be able hit the water and not be trapped inside." He went on "you know a lot of my guys weren't good swimmers, so I told them if you end up in the water dump your gear, everything including your rifle. It's no good to you if you're drowned." It was that kind of common sense thinking that helped him not only survive the war, but to excel in both his military & law enforcement careers. The "Ivy Division" was the first unit to land on Utah Beach. Once his feet hit the beach Ed spent the next twelve months in almost constant motion, involved in some of the most notable

events of the war. After fighting his way off the beaches of Normandy and through the hedge rows of France, he helped liberate Paris. Sgt



MSgt Ed Zilli

Zilli says, "There was no time to enjoy Paris that summer. We were moving and fighting constantly, but I sure had some good times in Paris the following summer!" After

liberating Paris and eastern France, it was on in to Germany, fighting in the Hürtgen Forest, and later the Battle of the Bulge in the frigid winter with only light jackets. He also remembers crossing the Rhine and so many other battles both named and unnamed. Then on May 8th 1945 he and his men were only a few miles from Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, home of the world famous Pilsner Urquell Brewery, when word of the German surrender reached them. When I asked what did you think when you heard the war was over? Zilli's eyes light up and he says "Hell, we were so close to getting that great beer, you know, just one more day and we would have been there! I mean, of course we were all happy it was over, but we had been thinking about that beer for days, and it was just a few clicks away...."

That is just a glimpse of my father in-law's amazing 100 years of life.

God willing Sgt Zilli will celebrate 101 trips around the sun February 8th. He lives across the street from us and I have been his primary care giver since he survived covid in 2020.

I thank God for all the brave men and women who have served our great country, and I'm especially proud to know this one personally.



A Uniform Reality

MSGT JASON LAWYER, 5TH CIVIL ENGINEER SQUADRON



MSgt. Jason Lawyer welcomed home by his family after returning from a 2021 deployment.

Air Force members are part of the "uniformed services", but everyone has a unique experience during their time of service. Specifically, for enlisted Airmen, we can all relate to our rite of passage at Lackland AFB, including our joyous march down the "Bomb Run" during graduation weekend. From that location, we all dispersed into our assigned career fields, and learned from our first supervisor and subsequent chain of command at our first duty station.

These unique experiences build upon an individual's inherited traits, ultimately influencing a person's character. The "uniform" qualities from all levels become a part of our genetics, to include an exclusive objective of a Major Command all the way to a specific installation with a diverse mix of people, and its climatical challenges!

During my upbringing in the Air Force family, I have served with members born from at least 16 different countries and worked alongside members of our sister services, including Airmen who previously wore the uniform of a sister service. Perhaps the

greatest asset of this family is the continuity and experience shared from our civilian counterparts. For example, I recently gained lasting insight and long-range viewpoints from a retired Chief, who in fact also mentored a handful of Chief's currently serving within the civil engineer enterprise. Ultimately, we forge friendships, challenge and develop each other, and at times discipline one another to correct and mold a better professional.

Life as enlisted requires daily calculated tradeoffs. There are more tasks and requirements asked of us than we can skillfully complete. As military professionals, we balance the tasks and constraints to complete the priority. To put things simply, as big "A" Airmen, we execute. A cost is always incurred from any accomplishment or achievement, and we do our best to remedy and reduce those costs. We solve problems and find solutions. As a family, we make it happen and get it done! Thanks, fellow family members for your service, additionally, thanks to our families at home who selflessly give all the support we need in order to serve!

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Minot Bomber Alum: Col (Ret) Jeff Beene

ERIN BEENE

Military service is both a sacrifice and a privilege. Service members of all branches and their families are honored every Veterans Day as a thank-you for keeping America protected against foreign invaders. The US Armed Forces technically erupted during the country's birth in 1776; however, the US Air Force has been honoring its members since 1947 when it became a separate military branch. The Air Force plays a strong part in Minot's history and one small part of that slice of history is Colonel (Ret) Jeff Beene, USAF.

Every service member has a unique story to tell. Col Beene began his military career right here in North Dakota. First Lieutenant Beene- at the time- and his newlywed wife, Carol, arrived in the state on a sub-zero January day in 1984. Both from Texas originally, the weather was "a cold like we had never seen" remarked Col Beene.

Col Beene was assigned to the 23rd Bomb Squadron when he arrived. Back then, at the height of the Cold War, each B-52 crew sat "on alert" for a week at a time, similar to what the 91st Missile Wing members do today in the missile field. While on alert, Col Beene explained that the B-52 pilots and team lived in a facility and could expect to have a "klaxon" - alarm that signals rapid reaction - at least once per week. During these alarms, Airmen had

no idea if the alert was an exercise or real-life situation until they were suited up and ready to take action in the aircraft. Fortunately, Col Beene was grateful never to have carried out a real-world bomber attack mission during his years at MAFB. He said that bombers were on alert status like this until the Soviet Union dissolved and the threat lessened in 1991.

Col Beene recalled that time in his life by explaining how close the squadron members were and how much of their lives - when not on alert - were simply lived on base, which was more robust with services at the time. He explained that back then, the town of Minot was nothing like it is today, and he and his wife spent the majority of their time with the on base community attending First Friday events, squadron functions at the O-Club and church at the North Plains Chapel.

Having visited Minot AFB in the past year, Col Beene commented on the positive growth and amenities now offered in the city. When asked about what he remembers about his time here in the 1980s, Col Beene noted the unique core of community leaders and support the base had from the city of Minot. Col Beene specifically remembered the support of Bruce Christianson. He said Mr. Christianson was always willing to support the base and they developed

a working friendship. Nearly 30 years later, when Col Beene went on to work as Director of Staff at Global Strike Headquarters at Barksdale AFB, he was pleasantly surprised to reconnect with Mr. Christianson, who still remained a dedicated community leader and supporter of Minot AFB.

When asked if he remembered Col Beene and the times spent in the 1980's, Christianson said "Yes!" He recalled Col Beene as a "real fine man." Christianson was a Minot City Councilman back then and said they spent a lot of time trying to make sure everyone felt welcome in the Magic City. He remarked, "times were certainly different, but we had lots of fun forming relationships [with the MAFB Airmen]. We would have golf tournaments and game shooting competitions." Today, Christianson remains a long-time member of Task Force 21, the committee aimed at working with local & state government to represent and lobby for Minot Air Force Base. He plans to continue working on the strong bond between the base and the city of Minot.

Many Airmen have made their way North through Minot AFB's gates, and many will still follow. Their stories are all different. Col Beene went on from North Dakota and served 26 years on active duty in the Air Force before retiring in 2008.

After that, he served an additional decade as a civil servant. He lived at 13 different duty stations and traveled the globe during his active

duty time protecting the United States. Thank-you for your service, Col Beene!



Some of Col. Beene's memorabilia from his time at Minot AFB in the mid 1980's.



1984, 23rd Bomb Squadron crew in Puerto Rico where they were deployed for an exercise. L-R: Capt Drew Hodges, Navigator; Capt Craig Bendorf, Aircraft Commander; Capt Bill Koenitzer, Radar Navigator; SSgt James Lockhart, Gunner; Capt Gary Ergish, Electronic Warfare Officer; Lt Jeff Beene, Copilot

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Hillstead reveals World War II contribution

MARVIN BAKER



Jim Hillstead, Army photo 1943

was told his squad would be setting up radar, a cutting-edge technology in the early 1940s that did indeed change the outcome of the war for the Americans.

Upon arriving in Burma, Hillstead's unit was told the Army Air Corps was losing a plane a day because it couldn't get over "the hump," a Burmese mountain that was a major obstacle in getting supplies in and wounded Soldiers out.

After setting up that initial radar station somewhere on the Burma Road, Hillstead said the United States didn't lose another airplane because the pilots were able to navigate above or around "the hump."

Hillstead and his men were given accolades from the Army for being a critical link in the success of the U.S. mission in Asia against Imperial Japan.

That said, Hillstead's superiors offered him a career option of being a radar instructor at Drew Field,

which is where Tampa International Airport is now located.

He said no for a couple of reasons. No. 1, he didn't get along with one of his officers and said it would be perogatory as long as that man was in the Army. Second, his sweetheart Sylvia, who became his wife for many years, was waiting back in North Dakota and that was more important than an exotic mission in Florida.

Radar wasn't the only thing Hillstead was involved in during the war. He and other Soldiers in his unit surveilled nearby Japanese soldiers and reported their movements back to headquarters.

He said at one point, the Japanese were so close, he could have reached out and touched them. But Hillstead and his buddy were concealed well in the bush and the Japanese passed by without seeing them.

He also talked of another time when his unit was on a move and one of the trucks broke down as the Japanese were advancing. Nobody

knew what to do, but Hillstead said that's when his North Dakota farm boy mentality kicked in. He cannibalized parts from another truck to get the broken down truck operating well enough to retreat.

Hillstead came home from the war unscathed and he and Sylvia lived long and happy lives, until recently when Sylvia passed away. The couple had three children and one of them, Terri, lives in Australia.

Hillstead hauled cattle in the late 1940s with his brother, but became successful as an antique dealer. He carried that out for many years and only recently sold his collection.

Like nearly everyone else from

the Greatest Generation, Hillstead to this day remains a humble man about his involvement in one of the greatest tests the United States has ever faced.

Until about three years ago, Hillstead drove a black Ford Ranger around Kenmare every day and when he became too old to drive, he walked about three blocks each day to the Kenmare Post Office to greet people picking up their mail.

In 2022, Hillstead was named grand marshal for Kenmare's 125th Jubilee parade. He continues to visit the Kenmare Senior Citizens Center to play cards and visit.

In a way, Jim Hillstead's story about military service is much the same as other veterans, but in another way, it is completely different.

Hillstead, who is 103 and lives quietly with his son Kelly in Kenmare, took on a significant military role when he was drafted into the Army in World War II in 1941.

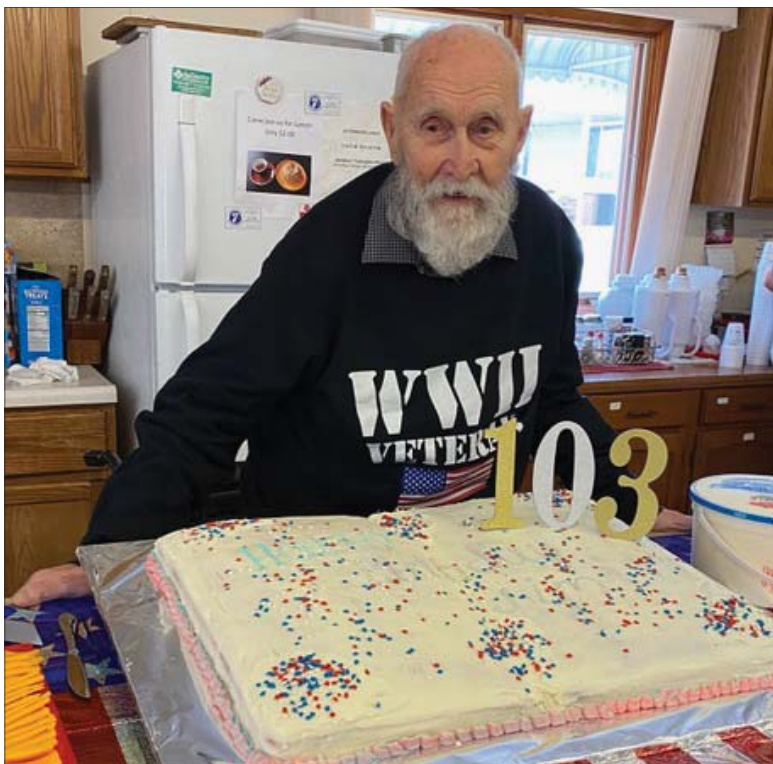
Hillstead, who didn't go to high school, read a lot of books when he was young, learned about the Burma Road and became fascinated with it, an infrastructure project that took 200,000 Chinese workers to build. Little did he know that seven years later he would actually be driving an Army jeep on that very same road.

When the young, "North Dakota farm boy" was inducted, he told his superiors he wanted to be a truck driver. He took the training, but rather than driving truck, the Army made him a jeep driver for one of his officers.

A short time later, his platoon had a meeting about a "secret unit" that was starting up and could change the complexity of the war. As a curious young Soldier, Hillstead signed up.

Because he grew up on a North Dakota farm and later spent some time in the Civilian Conservation Corps, he quickly moved up the ladder, became a private first class and was shipped off to Burma, which is now called Myanmar.

When Hillstead got to Burma he



Jim Hillstead celebrates his 103rd birthday April 28 in Kenmare. Hillstead is Kenmare's oldest citizen and was drafted into World War II in 1941 at the age of 21.

PHOTO COURTESY THE KENMARE NEWS

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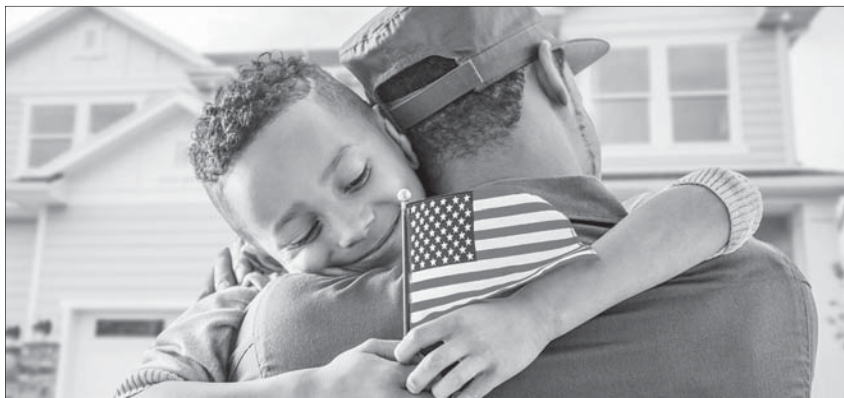
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TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

Someone's Baby in the Battle

AMY ALLENDER

There are many tipping points in life. The one I've most recently reached is that funny point when youth doesn't seem all that long ago, but upon looking at a teenager, you can't help think, "What a baby." Maybe you can relate.

This is a strange thing to reflect upon for Veteran's Day, but this is the exact thought I had recently when I looked at a photo of my grandfather in his army uniform.

It's a photo I've seen many times before. But now, as a mother, I view it differently, searching the photo for a genetic resemblance to my own children. They'll never know their great-grandfather, but they see him in photos. They hear stories. For most of my life this photo was just that, a photo. But now, as I look at it all I can think is, "What a baby."

For much of my life, the word "soldier" implied someone very grown-up. They were men and women, far older than me, doing things that took far more courage than I could imagine. I was a child, unwittingly living in the peace and security hard-fought, and intentionally protected by generations of service members, past and present. My days reaped the benefits of the effort they'd put forth, and the atrocities they'd faced, but I was unable to truly wrap my head around what being

in the military—or fighting a war—actually entailed.

At 23, I remember being dumbstruck when I realized I was years older than my father had been when he served during the Vietnam War. Twenty-three was older than my grandfathers and great-grandfathers had been when they had served in World War II, World War I, and the American Revolution. Suddenly soldiers didn't seem like far off grown-ups. They seemed like peers. That hits differently.

Now, as I creep close to 40, I look at images of these men in uniform and see them as utterly young. When I look at those photos, I think of my own sons and what it would be like to watch them leave for conflict. I wish I would have asked my grandmother how her heart withstood watching my dad enlist and leave. He was her baby, after all.

This new tipping point has impacted my view of veterans. Yes, it's those who go, it's those who enlist—they deserve intentional gratitude every day of the year. But it's also generations of parents who have watched their baby go off to war. It's families setting aside the desire to protect their own, in favor of protecting our way of life. It's spouses who keep home-life intact when a service member works late,

deploys, or moves to a new duty station.

Freedom has a way of quietly ticking away in the background of life. Comforting, constant—often unnoticed or taken for granted. The older I get, the louder it seems. America's legacy of veterans is built on a web of individuals willing to sacrifice their entitlement to freedom in order to ensure it for others. It's built on the courage of those who go, and the loving support of those who watch them leave.

I have no war story of my own. I cannot relay valiant tales told to me by my forefathers. They were rather quiet about what they saw and experienced. I can only tell you that I will do my best to ensure that Veteran's Day doesn't turn into a silent holiday in my home, but rather something that is noticed, discussed, and celebrated. We can all do our best to train our children to notice the comforting tick, tick, tick of freedom running smoothly in the background—and ensure they know it didn't get there by chance. We can acknowledge the legacy of those that have come before us. We can remember that those who serve aren't far-off grown-ups, but rather someone's baby. We can appreciate those who serve, and those who stand behind and encourage them to do so.



This framed photo of my grandfather hangs in the guest room of my parents' home.

AMY ALLENDER PHOTO

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