

## AN IMPROBABLE MACHINE-GUNNER

### 71. POST WAR CAREERS

Also unrecognized are the continued contributions of the veterans as the nation developed a flourishing peacetime economy, transformed vanquished nations into economic powerhouses, and held the threat of Communism in check until its major protagonist collapsed.

Sgt. Roland Tuttle (wounded at Lemberg) was working as a technician in a defense plant in 1953 when a 40 mm antiaircraft projectile exploded, tearing up his left thigh and causing multiple other injuries. Treatment required 5 pints of blood and several operations. He writes:

"While under anesthetic that night, I witnessed the appearance of that man called Jesus. He came to me from a background of phosphorescent white, strolling up over a grassy green knoll which descended downward in my direction, then stopping a short distance away, - raising his arms upwards from his waist, left me His Message without a word spoken. I heard clearly that 'All is Well!' As long as I live that experience will be etched in my mind. I cannot explain the significance of that drama, but I honestly feel the hands of those doctors and nurses had divine guidance." (Later Roland is shot in the face by a hunter, and recovered from that too!)

Roland Tuttle wishes to add this quote: "Remember this passage, which I am committed to, in silence, whenever I watch 'Old Glory' wave: 'Let our comrades who failed to return rest in lasting peace. Those of us more fortunate owe them our eternal gratitude for their dedication to the causes we all served.'"

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Most of the men of Company M of the 399th went on to successful careers. Many continued their education, in some cases, encouraged by the ASTP program. To cite only a few examples, the roster includes accountants, chemists, contractors, doctors, dentists, engineers, executives, lawyers, optometrists, veterinarians and teachers.

Some stayed in the Army to fill ranks which include a few generals, a cluster of colonels, several command master sergeants, and many other career officers and noncoms.

Again, Ralph Reeves reports:

"With VA advice, I studied accounting and business administration at college, and hated it. I hungered for action. I went to LA, was a weight lifter, sailed up and down the Baja California and to Acapulco, and drifted to Galveston, Texas, where I became part of an ocean going doodlebug for a couple of years... Which is to say I was a computer operator, observer, and bosun for handling buoys in a seismographic crew that, with prototype revolutionary gear, found much of the oil that has been pumped from the Gulf of Mexico since."

"I quit to go after a major in Geophysical Engineering for it was a fun job, but went broke before I could get in any such college program."

"Instead I went to work as a field accountant and later project engineer for Del E. Webb Construction in Phoenix and bounced around a bunch of states on large projects and finally opted in 1960 to become building construction manager for Kaiser Hawaii Kai, a 6,000 acre new town near Honolulu."

"It was a helluva great executive assignment; I suffered burnout and moved to Lahaina, Maui where there were no tourists, no jobs, nothing but nice people and this new haole beachcomber. I opened a bar/night club for locals (really for my own entertainment) and had a ball. I was there 14 years."

"I did go back to construction as a laborer on a concrete crew among local guys who spoke only pidgin, and I loved it; became a carpenter, superintendent, and project manager for condos as tourism grew, which invasion was even worse than the hippie invasion of the sixties. I figured the party, fun and games had to end or I was going to die much too young, or become a basket case, so my new bride and I moved to Florida where I got my Contractor's License about the time the first big recession struck in 75 or 76. And so I have been an estimator ever since."

"You mentioned 'catching the feel ... of the arrogant swagger of our youth.' You have elegantly phrased what has bothered me for many months. I have felt trapped by life, and totally bored. It is not the good old days that I relish. It is the feeling you mention that I miss - the arrogant swagger of youth. I recall my mindset of many years; me against the world and relishing the challenge. It was a great feeling. I recall April 20 when I was wounded. Earlier that day I took special note of my possessions; all fighting gear, a canteen, knife, pistol, couple grenades, first haircut in six months courtesy of Sgt. Winkles; a sleeping bag somewhere."

"I felt good, unencumbered with any trivia but a toothbrush and I felt - 'Who

needs anything more?' Let's get it on - like the (399th) motto 'I am ready.' There was a similar arrogance back in training days. I had a furlough and returned to St. Louis. There I was, a teenage PFC with a Ranger emblem on my shoulder, feeling proud and tough. For two nights I wandered from bar to bar in the toughest districts or places I could find, spoiling for a fight. They were the kinds of places that I would have feared to enter a year before. I wouldn't pick a fight, and to my chagrin, and probably good luck, I was totally ignored. I was shocked that only a bartender noticed and he never came near until after a yawn."

"I had that same smug self sufficiency in Germany when there was an opportunity for looting. I never really looted anything except that shotgun which was fair game, but it was fun going through houses and apartments and looking around. The best part was being armed with my 45 pistol at my side. I never knew who or what was on the other side of a door, and in fact, surprised people several times, even walking in on a couple in bed. I didn't care who was on the other side. If he had a gun aimed at the door, then I was a goner and I lose the game. If he just had a gun, then I won because I was firmly convinced I could quick draw and shoot more quickly than any enemy could react to me. It's silly but I behaved just like you might see some dude in a Western cowboy movie."

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Sgt. John Aughey writes:

"I was born in 1911..." (Aughey was a sergeant in the 100th Division Cadre at Ft. Bragg.) "I received a direct commission on May 11, 1945 and was one of the very few machine gun platoon members to escape enemy fire. In September, 1945, many officers of the 100th were assigned to Quartermaster Units in Rheims. My unit, manned by POWs, baked bread and roasted coffee. After a short time I was hospitalized with an appendectomy, then reassigned to Stockade 28 which took in 2,000 POWs. We infantry officers resented the QM boys."

"I was an Internal Revenue Agent, retiring in 1972; obtained a license as public accountant and card to practice before the IRS and spent seven years (part time) settling the affairs of the mortgage servicing company that I had worked for previously."

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Following are additional summaries of a few careers pursued by Company M members:

Machine gunner Andy Aisenbrey earned a degree in Civil Engineering and served 31 years with the Bureau of Reclamation in Denver, Colorado.

Mortar gunner Don Brown taught school, served as school administrator, and rose through the Army Reserves to rank of Major General.

Machine gunner Jim Curley graduated from Bentley College (Boston) and worked for 36 years for General Electric.

The company commander, Major Quentin Derryberry became a lawyer in Wapakoneta Ohio, and died in 1992, leaving a lawyer son and grand children...

Jeep driver Len Dembeck became an Optometrist in Chicago.

Messenger Don Galles went to work for the Hawks Oil Company in Casper, Wyoming. He later became a partner and then bought the company.

Squad Leader Roy Kaminski stayed in the Army, graduated from University of Maryland in Germany, and retired as a Major.

Machine gunner, squad leader, and platoon leader, Lieutenant John Langley served as a lawyer for Ralston Purina in Mexico City, Mexico, where he died, June 5th, 1995.

Platoon Leader Lt. Peebles stayed in the Army and retired as an Infantry Colonel, in Yalaha, Florida.

Jeep driver George Thomasson became a lawyer in Kings Mountain, NC.

Platoon Leader Lt. Scott Witt retired after serving 31 years as an executive of the Weyerhouser Corporation in Tacoma. WA.

## 72. EPILOGUE

We might have saved American lives and resources if we had left the Germans and the Russians to annihilate each other. God knows the toll was bad enough for us as it was.

Our absence would have been tragic for Europe. Without strong American opposition, the Russians were ready to invade and pillage all of Europe; as they actually did in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, East Germany, and the Baltic states.

The Western allies would have collapsed; economic recovery by the war torn nations would have been slow or impossible; and there would be no United Nations, no Marshall Plan, - and no NATO to provide a worldwide public forum and to stop the tyranny of Communism from engulfing the entire world.

In spite of our best efforts, the false premises of Communism caused immeasurable suffering to the large populations of Eastern Europe and Asia, and to many small countries such as Cuba, Cambodia, Burma and Viet Nam. If we had not been in Europe, how much worse would it have been?

World War II affected more people than any other conflict in history. It unexpectedly precipitated Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman into roles of world leadership which were unimaginable a few years earlier. Thanks to the efforts of these men and the reluctant cooperation of the allies, a shaky peace has endured in Europe, perhaps for the first time for more than half of a century.

The American presence in the European conflict protected much of the remaining population of the world from Communism. It made possible the establishment of successful democratic economies whose examples are even now hastening the abandonment of Communism.

Our 100th Division made significant contributions to the winning of the war, to the pacification of postwar Germany, and to the establishment of the Military Government; all of which were critical to the building and maintaining of this (so far) enduring peace. We fought and beat a really great army, one that was perhaps equal to or second only to our own.

My Army tour was just a little more than 33 months, but the effects that follow me yet are wildly disproportionate to that short amount of time. I am grateful to be alive, and I think that I am not afraid to die.

The memory of that first shower in the hospital comes to mind every day. My shirts, jackets and coats hang with the "left sleeve showing" for no reason other than they look better that way to me - and the old "Ike Jacket" still hangs in my closet, with the division patch showing and the new Bronze star above the old "salad dressing."

The GI Bill put me through college thus enabling me to achieve a successful career in science and engineering. And perhaps helped me find the skill to write this. Thanks for reading it.

One last quote from Ralph Reeves:

"They were all great guys in our outfit. I hate to think it, but maybe there will always be wars because they are so damn exciting. Let's face it, we had one

helluvan adventure. Often I miss it. In retrospect, getting shot at wasn't so bad as long as you didn't get hit real bad. The living conditions were worse, being so damned cold all the time. Surely there is no sport more exciting than being on the front line in combat, and I become chagrined thinking my big excitement is maybe playing a winning slam hand at bridge say once every six weeks. In retirement, I would be happy to take a long dreamed-of hike from Mexico to Canada on the inland route; or the Appalachian trail; or see the wilderness of the Baja, all those big bays and natural harbors."

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Ralph Reeves lives on, so far, with his wife Gina, on Longboat Key, Florida.

## 73. CONCLUSIONS

We may draw several conclusions, some of which must be learned again and again...

Tyranny will flourish when a few good men do nothing.

Education is the beginning of greatness. The GI Bill paid for the training of millions of veterans; not just in colleges and universities, but also in technical, vocational and on the job training.

These trained men and women provided the skills needed to develop our economy through years of unparalleled growth. Similar benefits continue to be earned by our Armed Forces personnel.

The GI Bill arguably provides a precedence, and financial justification for the Government to subsidize education; a necessary part of any solution to our worsening economic inequities.

The military provided me with excellent medical service, mending me after an automobile accident, an appendectomy, and the shrapnel wounds. I wish all of our children and grand children had access to such good care.

Now we watch in dismay as nearly half of our children and grandchildren brave the world with no health insurance. If the military and VA can provide cost effective health care, readily accessible to their clients, can the Government, in good conscience, do less for our children?

Finally, the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. Sometimes this requires the courage to act quickly. A strong early opposition to Hitler might have prevented - or minimized - the effects of World War II.

The stakes have increased to the point where a major war is not a realistic endeavor. Where both sides are armed with nuclear weapons, neither side can "win" in a survivable mode. We who served in WW II - from every involved country – will continue to pray that such a calamity can be avoided.

THE END