

This image is adapted from the VA's 1995 Veterans Day poster at the 50 anniversary of the end of WWII. This year marks 70 years since peace was declared in the largest conflict ever fought.

Special Veterans Day Feature

Our WWII Fathers

They were young and they were green. Two-thirds of them had never even fired a rifle. They marched off, 16 million of them, half of all the young men in the country, to the deadliest and most widespread war in history.

They went to stop the Axis powers from carving up the world. And they did it. They were our fathers.

As the last of the WWII Veterans fade from life's stage, we honor all our Veterans this month by sharing three stories, by psychologists, about their WWII fathers.

In this special feature, Dr. Susan Andrews, Dr. Julie Nelson, and Dr. John Magee will share some of what they remember about those in the Greatest Generation.

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Kenneth A. Ring, Jr.

Battle of the Bulge, defense of Alsace, France

Awarded Silver Star, two Bronze Stars

by Susan Andrews, PhD

My father, Kenneth A. Ring, Jr., was one of the thousands of veterans who served our country in the last days of WWII in France, Austria, and Germany. My memories of my father have always pictured him as "larger than life." I knew he was multiply decorated (Silver Star, 2 Bronze Stars) and I guess I knew that meant that he was a hero but I don't think the meaning really sunk in until recently. My son was telling me what he had learned about how his grandfather had earned the Silver Star, and wondered if I knew how my father earned the Bronze Stars.

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"Our WWII Fathers"

by psychologists Dr. Susan Andrews, Dr. Julie Nelson,
and Dr. John Magee

First Place – Best Feature Story, Division 6 2016 Louisiana Press Association

"Wonderfully intimate portraits of men who lived through hell and came out on the other side. Good, solid writing. A great feature and a beautiful tribute to The Greatest Generation." -- judge

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Veterans Day Feature

Our WWII Fathers

continued

Dad never talked about the war to me—or in mixed company, in general. Unfortunately, he died in 1978 at age 53 from a brain tumor. However, my brother knew a lot of his stories from years of hunting and fishing trips with dad and other men, some veterans. In the evenings, they would sit around and trade stories. My brother has an amazing memory and shared some of what I am now sharing with you. Some of it comes from details of two books about the 42nd “Rainbow” Infantry Division (I.D.) published immediately after the war. The first book tells the story of the 42nd I.D. while the second book details the 222nd Regiment of the 42nd I.D., which was dad’s regiment.

The 222nd was part of the Rainbow Infantry Division under the command of Major General Harry J. Collins, and shipped from Fort Bragg to Camp Gruber to Camp Kilmer to Marseilles in November 1944, and in 1945 took part in the Battle of the Bulge.

My father was a leader even before he was pressed into his role in history. He was the Cadet Commander of the ROTC at Texas A&M, in his junior year in petroleum engineering when he was called to active duty. He reported to Camp Gruber with the rank of 2nd Lieutenant.

My mom, newly married, tagged along and rented a room in a house in the little Oklahoma town of Muskogee just to be near dad until he shipped out, sometime before September 1944. I did not meet my father until the war was over and he shipped home. Mother and I lived in Dallas, Texas, where both of my parents were born and grew up a block apart.

My father was on the front lines in heavy combat for 114 days in the thick of those last days of the war in Europe. He was awarded his Silver Star for his heroic defense of Alsace France on January 24, 1945. At that point he would have been in Europe for only 2 or 3 months. Only a few months before he had been a petroleum engineer junior year student at Texas A&M.

As a 21-year-old, green, 2nd lieutenant, he was instrumental in turning the tide in the Battle of the Little Bulge, important in the defense of Alsace, France, for which he earned the Silver Star. He also earned two Bronze Stars in the short 3 or 4 months after that. Dad and his Company made raids behind enemy lines. He found and arrested Hitler’s secretary, and many other high-ranking Nazis, who were trying to hide in the Bavarian Alps, including the infamous Butcher of Paris, SS General Von Oberg, who was posing as a private.

As the Commander of his Company in the 222nd Regiment of the 42nd I.D., they advanced 450 miles from the Hardt Mountains of France to the border of Austria, along the way capturing the towns of Wurzburg, Schweinfurt, and Furth. His was the first unit to successfully cross the Siegfried Line. Dad said that they knew the fighting was going to be intense when the men were given a steak dinner and a new pair of socks the night before. The Rainbow Division captured 51,000 German prisoners. When they were finally in the Tyrol and quartered in fancy hotels, Dad’s men found a cache of \$300 million in gold and art (just like the *Monument Men*). He also served as the



Ken Ring (front right) in combat gear as his Company M of the 42nd Rainbow Division takes Wurzburg. (Courtesy photo.)

Occupational Mayor of Achensee, Austria, in the Tyrolian alps. Finally, his unit was among those who captured Munich.

One of the highest profile things my father did was to command the forces that liberated Dachau through the front gates. I never heard the stories of those days from my father. But, I accidentally—at age 14 while looking for something in the attic—found the pictures my father had taken inside Dachau. Members of my family and myself have occasionally seen captured news footage of my father that was taken during the liberation. I know I had nightmares as a teen and young adult from the photographs. In fact, I can still see the pictures as if they are burned on my brain. I feel sure that my father had more than nightmares from that experience. The concentration camps were among the true horrors of that war. However, that kind of emotional reaction was handled differently by most WWII veterans.

Finally, my father moved to Vienna and became the Aide and bodyguard for General Mark Clark, the general over Austria. Among other things, dad organized and ran the Officer’s Club in Vienna for the General until he was discharged and returned home to mom and me.

In trying to imagine what veterans like my father must have gone through, I have tried to gather as much information as I could find about what my father lived through in the first few months after landing in Europe, the events that led to his Silver Star.

His unit landed in Marseilles in November 1944. It was called the worst winter in Europe in 100 years. The temperature dropped as low as 20 degrees below. Our troops were not prepared for the extreme cold. No one was, even the Germans, who at least had white snowsuit uniforms, were suffering. The bitter cold of that winter is one reason why the Russians defeated the Germans.

The landing and deployment of the Rainbow Division into the Western Front was supposed to be kept a big secret but somehow the Germans found out they were coming and were ready, waiting and actually taunting our young, totally green troops when the Battle of the Bulge started Christmas eve 1944.

The Germans were planning the last major offensive campaign on the Western Front in Europe, called Operation North Wind (*Unternehmen Nordwind*). It began on December 31, 1944 in Alsace Lorraine and ended on January 25, 1945. Hitler, himself, briefed his military command on December 28, 1944, three days prior to the launch of Operation North Wind. Hitler told his command that the goal of the offensive was to break through the lines of the US 7th Army and the French 1st Army in the Vosges mountains and destroy them. He wanted to liberate Alsace but more he wanted to “exterminate the enemy forces wherever we find them...destroy their manpower.” This last Battle of the Little Bulge, as some called it, was a month of some of the bloodiest fighting by the Americans in Europe.

Winston Churchill called World War II’s Battle of the Bulge “the greatest American battle of the war.” Steven Spielberg impressed the 6-week ordeal on the popular imagination with the movie, *Band of Brothers*, which dramatized the attack on the village of Foy by three companies of the 101st Airborne Division, the Screaming Eagles. The 222nd I.D. fought alongside of the 101st.

Imagine the stress these young men were under. It is late days in the war in Europe. Our young troops are underdressed for the extremes of cold and wet. They have never faced combat and now they are facing two very experienced German army groups; one group was commanded by Reichsfuhrer-SS Heinrich Himmler, himself. Our young men sat in their foxholes, wet and freezing, with the foxholes forming a crust of ice on them, close enough to the Germans that they could hear them being whipped up to a battle frenzy with drugs, mostly crystal meth, while waiting for dawn.

Our troops were thinly stretched out over 68 miles, as General Eisenhower had sent any extra troops and supplies north to reinforce the main failing positions of the Battle of the Bulge. The Germans sent in 17 divisions, including several SS and Panzer units; the armored tanks were manned by some of the most fanatical of the SS troops; the 10th Panzer Grenadiers was a crack outfit, composed of some of

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Our WWII Fathers continued

Hitler's most fanatical followers from the Youth Movement.

The fighting, which started on December 31, 1944 was intense and our line had bulged as we retreated. The 222nd had been forced, because of casualties and the delay of reinforcements, to pull back up north from Strasbourg toward Haguenau to the French town of Neubourg where my father set up a defensive position on the south bank of the Moder River on January 21, 1945. Thus, at age 21 my father found himself the leader of Company M (heavy machine gun platoon) of the 222d Regiment of the 42nd I.D. He was a Company Commander because of field promotion after the death of Company M's commander in the earlier battle.

I have seen it written about the events of those days: "Further withdrawal was being planned; had it not been for the brilliant defenses of the 222nd."

At 1800 hours, the Germans began shelling the town of Neubourg, France in the Alsace. Patrols reported a build up of 2,000 Germans moving into attack position. The shelling continued for nearly 2 hours. After a lull, the shelling began again and with it came the German infantry. The first wave bridged the narrow Moder River with wooden planks and struck at the positions of the 222nd.

My father was a crack shot and he had taken up a defensive position in a farmhouse basement, where he was lying on the snowy steps coming out of the basement, surrounded by sand bags with several carbines and several of his men behind him, reloading the carbine rifles and passing them up to him. It was night, about 20 degrees below; the roads were so covered with ice that men could not walk without slipping and falling. And, it was snowing hard. The men were tired from days and nights of almost constant moving and fighting.

My father ordered his men to hold their positions when the Germans penetrated the main line of resistance with a large force. The 222nd had no artillery support or tanks or tank destroyers. It was riflemen against self-propelled guns and armor.

They were trapped in the basement with only turnips and schnaps to eat or drink for three days. The Germans, dressed in white and nearly invisible in a snowstorm, were trying to storm the farm and clear them out so they could bring in the Panzer tanks. But, dad had blown three bridges that the tanks could cross on the Moder toward the Rhine. All night he lay in the snow and shot moving targets in the snowstorm. In the morning light, they saw that the enemy casualties were enormous; the Germans had withdrawn and were never able to capture the town of Neubourg.

During the night, my father had also gone out in the snowstorm, crossed enemy lines and repaired severed communication lines. He led the disorganized Rainbow riflemen in counterattacks in order to re-establish our lines. At one point in the several-day defense of Neubourg, he lost contact with one of his positions and he made his way into enemy territory and moved the machine gun to a new position. In the final analysis, my father spearheaded a defense of what later proved to be the last offensive action ever launched by the German army on the western front in Europe.

For my father, as for so many others, he saw horrors and lived through things that we can only imagine today with the help of movies. He rarely spoke of it. He never went to therapy or claimed any mental or emotional disorder. Most of the true heroes I have met do not ever talk about what they did to be known by others as heroes. Maybe they don't even think of themselves as a hero. I don't know.

My father probably had what was called "combat fatigue" when he returned home. I really do not think he had PTSD. WWII vets did not react in the same way as veterans with PTSD do now. They came home from war, drank a bit too much, had an occasional nightmare but with family support and knowing they won and saved the world, they tried to put it behind them.

They typically did not talk about it much and did not even seek out other veteran groups. They felt that people did not want to hear about it. They did not want people to feel sorry for them. They did not want to be the hero who came back troubled by what he did over there and the people that he had bombed or killed.

Only in recent years have I realized that in my growing up

years, I was often afraid of my father. He would become fiercely protective when his family was in danger and I can remember him spanking me when I came home crying that some kid had hit me. He spanked me and made me go back out and stand up for myself to the bully. He later explained and apologized saying that he saw many European children not know how to protect themselves and that he never wanted to see that happen to us if some foreign power were to invade our country. In those days, late 1940's and 1950's, people thought it was possible that America might be invaded.

I lost my father at the young age of 53. Many of those brave men died young. Some blame their early deaths on the amazing stress and horrors they endured and then mostly buried when they returned from the war. Although it is not easy to "re-member" the events of those days, it is with great love and honor that I remember my father; he was a great influence in my life.

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An unidentified American soldier standing beside the bodies of SS personnel shot by US troops during the liberation of Dachau Concentration Camp, Germany, April 29-30, 1945. Ken Ring commanded the forces that liberated Dachau through the front gates. It was this group that discovered the Holocaust. (Photo from the National Archives, courtesy of C. Peter Chen, *WW II Database*.)

Our WWII Fathers

Gordon Nelson

Master Sergeant

20th Air Force, XX Bomber Command, HQ

China–Burma–India

by Dr. Julie Nelson

I don't think my father, Gordon Nelson, had any romantic ideas about war. Like all true Irishmen he told amusing stories about his experiences, which seemed to lighten what I always thought was a more melancholy undertone. But maybe that's just true of the Irish in general.

Dad (Gordon) was 19 when he signed up for the Mississippi National Guard in 1937. Coming from a poor, single mother family (his own father had taken off when he was small), his options for college were nil. He enlisted in November of 1940, before Pearl Harbor. He probably knew that the coming peacetime draft would pull him in. So, he might have signed up in order to go from the Army Infantry to the Air Corps (later renamed Air Force).

This now seems logical. My kid brother, Kevin, said that Gordon realized that 2nd Lieutenants and Sergeants in the Army Infantry "... were all being shipped to Europe battlefields and killed within two weeks on average. He said he was in line for that, so he switched to U.S. Army Air Corps which later was known as the Army Air Forces."

Gordon's letters home to his mother were significant. "Those letters," Kevin said, "were poignant and fascinating to read. Very telling. I started seeing a change in tone in GN's letters...something along the lines of grim acceptance that he was doomed and there wasn't a damned thing he could do about it."

Gordon had bomber training at MacDill Field in Tampa, Florida, and then went on to Smoky Hill Army Air Field in Salina, Kansas where he had his first experiences in B-29s. The subtext which was to color his war experiences.

In a letter home from Smoky Hill Gordon said that he and his buddies "were all a little droopy" because of a recent crash. A crewmember had come to his office and inquired about a fellow and Gordon said, "Who, that little Dago kid? He was killed in the crash." Gordon wrote that the crewmember "... just slumped in shock and grief because they had become quick friends and poof, he was gone, dead."

The dangerousness of the B-29s would follow him to the other side of the world.

B-29s were the very heavy bombers that were pushed into production by Roosevelt. While considered the most advanced bombers in the world at that time, they were not fully tested by



Gordon "Nero" Nelson on right with buddies Tom McDaniels (L) and "Buzz Speyerer in 1939, Camp Shelby, Hattisburg, Mississippi. The three were with the National Guard.

(Courtesy photo.)

the time they went into service. Because of their size and heavy loads, they were hard for pilots to handle. Takeoffs were risky. Boeing had rushed development and the B-29s had mechanical problems, including engines with a tendency to overheat.

Gordon served with the 20th Air Force, XX Bomber Command, at the Kharagpur Air Field, West Bengal, India. From Kharagpur, the bombers would double as transports and carry their own fuel and cargo, over the Himalayan Mountains, known as "the Hump." There were so many crashes between India and the China air bases that pilots called it "The Aluminum Trail."

But President Roosevelt wanted to bomb Japan and had promised Chiang Kai Shek that the U.S. would bolster the Chinese war efforts, and the B-29s were the best chance to reach the Japanese islands.

So, my father's war stories included the occasional mission with him as a tail gunner, the high jinks of young men, living as best they could in the moment, and dealing with whose plane would be going down next. Toasting their dead and "turning down the cup" of the friend they'd all lost. The imagery Gordon could paint (he was a poet at heart) of India, and the irony he saw in everything, was, I think, how he coped.

The Japanese would strafe the airfield at Kharagpur and the men would dive into the ditches on either side of the runway, Gordon told Kevin. But, it was considered almost as dangerous to jump into a ditch because of the poisonous krait snakes and cobras that were often in the ditches.

The cobras were everywhere. They were so bad that tent members would hire a local "coolee" to bring his pet mongoose in and clear the tents before everyone went to bed.

He joked that he was an overly anxious tail gunner, shooting so many rounds when they were in a fight, that the barrel would heat up, his crewmates yelling at him to stop.

In the latter part of the war, General Curtis LeMay took command and turned a failing B-29 program into a successful one, by flying low altitude missions that had more bombing accuracy, albeit even more risky.

My father liked and respected LeMay, and was part of the group that attended when LeMay inspected the facilities. During one inspection of the cafeteria, the General singled out my father and abruptly asked, "Sergeant! What do you think of this mess?" Gordon, confused about of what LeMay was asking but not wanting to appear inattentive, fudged and answered, "Well, Sir, I guess it's not too good?"

LeMay cursed and said, "I knew it! Get this damn mess up to snuff for these men." And then LeMay walked off in disgust, thinking that Gordon had confirmed that the food, "the mess," was substandard.

At a 1986 Christmas party we held in Baton Rouge, my father came face-to-face with a piece of his past. As the young Sergeant in India, he had spent his money collecting some "stones" that he bought from Indian jewelers. He had sent one, a star sapphire, home as a gift for his baby nephew. Forty years later it had found its way into a dinner ring for that nephew's wife.

Recounting the events, Gordon said that the other stones had "disappeared," which he thought was due to retaliation by a tent member. Gordon had taken the tent member's beer (he had left him "Rupees 18"). He and his buddies had needed the beer—they had drunk all of theirs—because Baldy Van Buren was in the base hospital with the flu and they went to visit him and would never go empty handed (without liquor) to see Baldy.

"In those days we thought we would live forever," Gordon wrote to us. "But now it seems so long ago and far away that the

Could the Stress on WWII Fathers Have Affected the Next Generations?

Dias and Ressler may have found that it does. Traumatic exposure to male rats affected brain anatomy, startle response, and gene expression not only in the animals, but in their offspring for two subsequent generations. Their findings provide a framework for how environmental information may be inherited transgenerationally at behavioral, neuroanatomical and epigenetic levels. The study is in *Nature Neuroscience*.

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little stone and the lives it touched has a strange poignancy about it. After thinking about it I'm reminded of the verse from the *Rubaiyat* that goes: "And not a drop that from our Cups we throw/ For Earth to drink of, but may steal below/ To quench the fire of Anguish in some eye/ There hidden—far beneath and long ago."

"Can't you hear temple bells, Indian children calling 'Bakaheesh, Sahib.' I can. Haven't thought of it for 40 years, but I can see Baldy the practical joker, in the rickshaw race we had in Calcutta flinging handfuls of *appes* at the hundreds of kids running behind to bottle up the rest of us."

"The war was winding down—or sort of," Gordon wrote. "Some of us were being rotated back stateside to form a new 21st Air Corps and go West to Guam. Others were preparing to be flown across occupied China. To do this they flew long, long missions in the B-29s and on one of them to Mukden, Manchuria, Baldy's plane had engine trouble and crashed."

It was this tone, where the story ends in a minor key, that I always noticed. I do think my father was affected by the war, whether it was PTSD or Moral Injury or just the way that a young man would be affected when people around him keep dying.

He was not in regular combat like some—I believe he worked to avoid that. I think that my father flew only the required number of combat missions.

But one night, late, while he was drinking too much, he began to talk about an event I'd never heard him talk about before. While guarding a prisoner, the man escaped. Dad shot at the man's legs to stop him, but missed, and killed him. My dad began to cry, and then he started to sob, and he didn't stop. I was stunned and felt helpless. I said something lame like, "It was an accident." After a while, he finally stopped, wiped his eyes and, embarrassed, told me to ignore him, that he was being "silly." The next day he refused to talk about it and acted as if nothing had happened.

Gordon was not any sort of hero, and would candidly say that he spent most of the war scared out of his wits. He came home in April 1945 and went to college on the G.I. bill and studied journalism and Shakespeare.

He married my mother and contributed four children to the baby boom and was normal, for him. He lived to 91, and was happy.

As far as I know, once he returned to the U.S., he refused ever to fly again. When my kid brother visited Ireland, Dad "treasured the vial of Irish dirt" Kevin brought back for him from Killarney, his hereditary home. Dad always wanted to see Ireland for himself, but he never did.

Dr. Julie Nelson is a licensed psychologist and publisher of the *Psychology Times*. Her parents Gordon and Lynn Nelson published *The Coughatta Citizen*.

"Moral Injury"

by Dr. John Magee

During 1947, approximately 50 percent of hospitalizations of Veterans into VA hospitals were for psychological issues in returning combat Veterans from World War II. A suppressed documentary by film director John Huston from 1946 estimated that as many as 20 percent of casualties in World War II were psychological.

Historically, symptoms of PTSD have been noted in written form for over 2,000 years, dating back to 490 B.C., when Greeks described behaviors of soldiers returning from war. Over the years, various terms have been used in describing PTSD-type symptoms, including nostalgia, railway spine, railway brain, spinal concussion, traumatic neurosis, functional nervous disorder, and neurasthenia; and then "Soldier's Heart" and "Irritable Heart Syndrome" (also known as Da Costa's Syndrome) during the American Civil War.

In the 20th century, there were another series of terms used to describe the debilitating symptoms often seen in combat Veterans returning home, including shell shock (World War I), exhaustion, battle fatigue, battle neurosis, traumatic war neurosis, and even "attitudinal psychosis" (World War II).

In 1980 "PTSD" was formalized as a diagnosis which has been attributed by many to the effects of Vietnam War Veterans who had lobbied for recognition of their psychological problems.

But in spite of the recognition of the sequelae of PTSD, numerous mental health professionals who treat individuals with PTSD feel that the formally recognized symptoms of PTSD by DSM have been too limited. As a result, the concept of "Moral Injury" was introduced.

Most attribute the introduction of the concept of moral injury to Dr. J. Shay, recipient of a 2007 MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship, and a psychiatrist at the VA in Boston from 1987 to 2008. Shay sees three components to moral injury: A betrayal of what is viewed as morally correct; Done by someone who holds legitimate authority (which Dr. Shay calls "leadership malpractice"); Occurring in a "high stakes" situation.

The definition would include those who are witnesses to events or the consequences of moral injury to others, such as those involved in the liberation of concentration camps, first responders (fire, police, military), etc.

Dr. Shay argues that moral injury is an actual "injury," but not a disorder or sign of pathology, and he describes treatment as a healing process that must involve "the whole social process."

He has described his concepts in two seminal books, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1995), and *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (2002). In these books, Dr. Shay describes the far-reaching psychological, cultural, and spiritual effects from trauma.



A B-29 Superfortress crashed during an attempted emergency landing at Iwo Jima, Japan, April 1945. Two of our WWII Fathers encountered the B-29s during the war. (Photo from National Archives and U.S. Army Air Force. Courtesy of *WWII Database*.)

Veterans Day Feature – Our WWII Fathers

Soldier's Heart by John W. Magee, Jr., Ph.D.

My Father, Warren Magee, never once talked to me about his combat experiences in World War II as a Marine Corps bomber pilot. Not once.

Warren Magee was the third of four boys born to Johnny and Vina Magee. His father, "Dr. Johnny," was a true country veterinarian, and, during the Depression, often took payment in fruits and vegetables, and sometimes a chicken. Vina once told me the family history was one of "country folk." It was not an apology.

The family lived on the outskirts of Brookhaven, Mississippi, but every summer Warren stayed on the farm of his maternal grandmother and her family. His Uncle Mac said Warren didn't return home until it was "time for school and a haircut."

My Father's tales are likely typical for a child in the country during those times, but they almost always included Warren, himself, as "the butt of the joke." Several family members told me that the incidents in Warren's stories were just as they remembered them. Warren was a great story-teller, but he was not one for embellishing on the truth.

Warren wanted to be a veterinarian like his father, and a farmer like his Uncle



Lieutenant Warren Magee.
(Courtesy photo.)

Lamar. After high school, he started college in Pre-Veterinary and Agricultural Studies at Mississippi State University.

Warren was 20 years old, a full-time, sophomore-level, undergraduate student on December 7, 1941—the "date which will live in infamy"—when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. He learned of the bombing that Sunday in the small country store of his uncle in Caseyville, Mississippi, less than 100 yards from Uncle Lamar's 400-acre farm.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Warren left college and joined the Marine Corps. The course of his life changed forever, as it did for most everyone in his generation, including his three brothers—one of whom joined the Army Air Corps, another who was a glider pilot involved in the fighting of Europe in 1944, and another who joined the Merchant Marines.

My uncle, W.O., was a child during World War II, but later joined the military, and is a retired Air Force veteran. He married a younger sister of my mother, Billie, and they were very close to my father and mother throughout their lives, including many meals, fishing, and laughter. W.O. and Billie recently shared some of their memories with me for this article.

W.O. himself volunteered and served in Vietnam as a navigator on B-52 bombers during the Vietnam War. He viewed military service as an important duty and source of pride. After my father passed, he drove six hours from Abilene, Texas to Shreveport, for my entry and commission into the Air Force.

Uncle W.O. recalls my Father, Warren, as one of a group of young officers in World War II who were called "90-Day Wonders." After Pearl Harbor, because of urgent need for officers, some were put through an intensive, condensed training period of 3 months. The term was sometimes

used as derogatory, but by others with affection. Of the 90-day training, W.O. says "if you survived it, you went on."

Warren did survive the training, and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant, and then sent to train at Corpus Christi Naval Base, where he became a pilot. Information from "The Slipstream," published by the Corpus Christi Naval Base after the war, indicates Warren was part of Squadron 5A, one of the earlier squadrons to go through Corpus Christi. According to W.O., Lieutenant Magee, at 5 feet, 8 inches tall was the ideal height for a pilot in the smaller bomber cockpits.

While in the Marine Corps, Warren boxed competitively. He won all fights but the last, which he lost on points. Early in that fight, his nose was broken. Warren said the hardest part of the broken nose was not the pain during the fight, but rather the fact that, despite the broken nose, he later had to complete high-dives into water as part of his training.

Warren was sent to the Marine Corps Air Station at Cherry, Point North Carolina, with Marine Air Craft Group 11 ("MAG 11"), 2nd Marine Air Craft Wing ("MAW"), under the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.

Cherry Point had an auxiliary pilot training station at Edenton, North Carolina, a small, picturesque town on a natural harbor from the Atlantic Ocean. Warren was a flight instructor there on B-25 Mitchell Bombers for Marines who would serve in the Pacific.

W.O. recalls Warren telling him about one of the pilots-in-training who was exhausted from an extended wait on the runway in the heat before being cleared, and almost hit the control tower on takeoff.

It was at Edenton that Warren met my Mother, Sarah Russell, who reportedly broke a date with a Major to go out with Warren. Sarah was one of five daughters of Ms. Mamie, twice widowed. Uncle W.O., who grew up



Sarah and Warren Magee, sometime in 1944 or 45.
(Courtesy photo.)

in Edenton, said "Warren got the prettiest girl in town." Sarah used to say she first spotted Warren in church. Although Warren probably attended her church, and she may have spotted him there, they actually first "met" at the USO Club. My mother first told me about the USO near the end of her life. "He was so good looking," she said of my Father, "and a good dancer."

Sarah also told a story that Warren had said that on a specific day and time he'd fly over her family's house. Sarah waited outside, until his bomber appeared and he dipped each wing as his "wave" to her. Warren was a young man preparing for war, but there had still been a little room for romance.

Warren liked to say they were married in December and their daughter, Susan, was born in January, omitting the fact that Susan's birth occurred the following January, 13 months after the wedding.

Only months after their wedding, Warren was sent overseas to Okinawa for the remainder of the war. It was from Okinawa that he and his crew flew bombing missions until the war's end.

My Father only told me one story that had occurred while he was in the Pacific. It was a typical

Warren story, and not a combat story.

Warren was leaving his plane when he saw a group of indigenous people in a circle, just off the runway. Curious, Warren walked over. The group had circled around a snake and one of them was trying to kill it with a long pole.

In college, Warren had earned extra money by catching snakes for the Biology department. He had been taught that the only poisonous snake with round pupils was the coral snake. This snake was clearly not a coral snake, so Warren moved inside the circle and grabbed the snake just behind the head. The people in the circle began yelling, which Warren interpreted as undeserved congratulations.

Then, still holding the snake, he began to think more about that rule. Realizing he wasn't sure if this was the rule for "all" snakes, or just for snakes in the U.S., he walked outside of the circle and tossed the snake into the brush. He continued to receive congratulations, and, of course, later learned the snake was indeed quite poisonous. He said he never engaged in snake-catching on the island again.

Warren separated from the Marine Corps as a

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Veterans Day Feature: Our WWII Father

Soldier's Heart by Dr. John Magee - continued

Captain after the end of the war in February 1946. Several Marine Corps Bombing Squadrons from Cherry Point maintain their own websites which list Marines killed and bombers lost in combat, but I have been unable to find details about the specific squadron in which he served in Okinawa. Uncle W.O. and Aunt Billie both indicate that Warren did not talk about his combat experiences, so the number of combat missions he flew, or specific events he experienced, are unclear.

After his military service Warren intended to return to college to become a veterinarian. But Mississippi did not have a Veterinary school and out-of-state admissions were very rare. An individual at a school in Alabama reportedly asked Warren for \$500 as a bribe for admission, but Warren refused. He never got into veterinary school.

In 1946, he started in the oilfield business, where he worked for 39 years. After his death, I learned he quit one job when they wanted to transfer him to Morgan City because he was concerned that my sister and I would not get a good education there.

Although he never became a veterinarian or a farmer, Warren continued to love animals and the outdoors all of his life. Uncle W.O. sometimes remarked that, if reincarnation really exists, then he wanted to come back once as "a Magee dog," because he believed they were the most loved animals in the world.

Warren grew up Methodist, and Sarah Baptist, but my father did not believe that only one religion had it "all figured out." When we first moved to Shreveport, my parents visited different churches, looking for the right fit. Eventually, they joined the First Presbyterian Church, and more importantly, they became part of a Sunday School Class. For years, I witnessed the importance of that class to my parents. Besides attending Sunday school, they ate together, played bridge, fished, and took trips. I still recall laughter as a regular feature of those times, even as I wondered how religious people could laugh so much.

It was some 30 to 40 years later, ten years after my father died, that I learned more of the "Sunday School" story. In the late 1990's, I recognized the name of one of the men from my parents' Sunday school class. When I met him, I learned he was a former POW from World War II. His plane had been shot down over Germany, but, because of his injuries, he first stayed with a German couple until he was well enough to go to the concentration camp. When he asked the family why they gave him such care,

they shared that their son was in combat somewhere, and they hoped he would receive similar care if he was wounded or captured. The wife of this former POW shared something that I had never known about the Sunday school class—every man in the class was a World War II veteran.

The class was like a family, and I've often wondered about the combat experiences of all of those other men in the class. The laughter that I heard as a child, and their obvious love for each other, means much more now, after learning about PTSD, and my 29 years clinical experience treating combat veterans. Ironically, I know more about the combat experiences of that ex-POW than I know about my own father's experiences in the war.

My father died unexpectedly of a heart attack at age 64, one month before his retirement, and before I had earned my Ph.D.

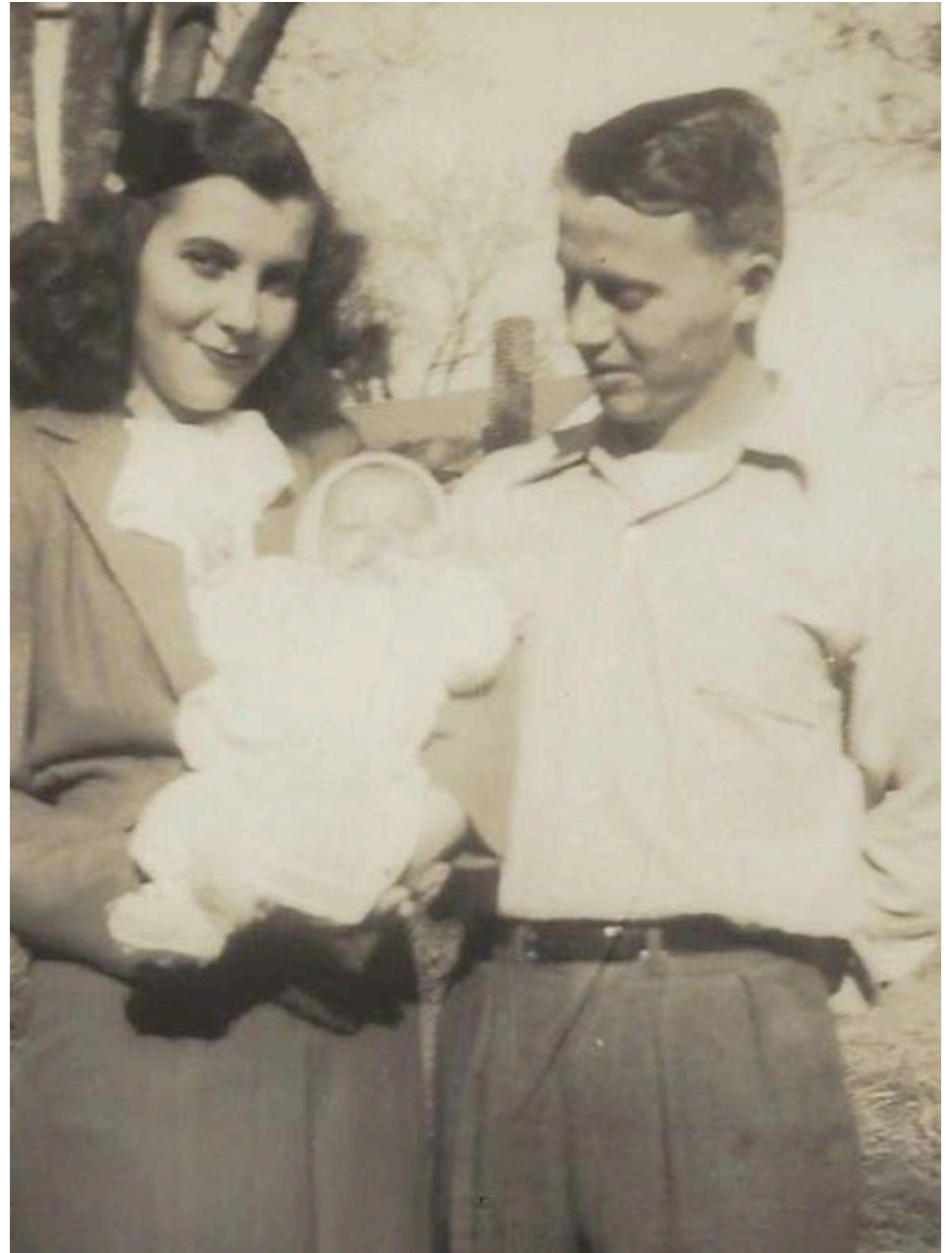
It was only after his death that my Mother told me the one combat-related story she knew, of a time when Warren and his crew almost had to ditch his B-25 Bomber into the Pacific Ocean when returning to Okinawa after a mission. She had no details other than they almost did not make it back.

I think Warren would have been the same person, regardless of his circumstances. I never heard him curse, ever. He never spoke ill of others because of race, age, sex, or religion. He was honest and ethical in all his relationships.

Warren never became a veterinarian, and never had a farm. Despite many reversals of fortune, I never heard my father complain about the unfairness of life, even though his early goals in life were not realized, and even with numerous major stressors and losses involving family and finances.

I don't think my Father had PTSD, but he had a strong sense of doing what was right and facing things directly. He transmitted to me an awareness of his expectations, whether these came from the Marines or the war, or just my Father. These included standing up for what was right, even against bullies, and even at the cost of a fight.

My father softened over the years, though he could still be tough. Somewhere along the way, the tough Marine country boy seemed different. He read poetry books I gave him, even though I know he much preferred other offerings. He did not judge me through my various phases (long hair, beard, leaving school, living with a girlfriend). He was amenable to change, even in himself.



Sarah and Warren Magee, March 3, 1946, holding daughter Susan on her two-month old "birthday." Warren had been out of the military about one month when this was taken.

(Courtesy photo.)

A couple of years before his death, my father and I went fishing. I asked him about his life—it had turned out so differently from the one he had planned before World War II. He told me he was happy and had been happy, and believed things had turned out the way they were supposed to. He talked of the important things of his life—family, friends, the Sunday School Class, daily choices in life. He wondered if my sister and I would have received a good education if we had been living on a farm deep in rural Mississippi. He had once told me that you can "lose" almost anything you get in life, but not education.

After my father's death, Uncle Mac told me a story about Warren's last trip to Mississippi. While squirrel hunting somewhere deep in woods unfamiliar to my Father, he and Uncle Mac separated to hunt alone. Later in the day, Mac realized he hadn't heard Warren fire a shot all morning, and he went to find him.

Mac found Warren sitting on the ground with his back against a tree, looking up at the tall canopy of trees above, his rifle some distance away. Warren said that he had been so struck by the beauty around him that he just sat down to enjoy it, and

he didn't want to spoil it by hunting. Warren told Mac "If heaven's supposed to be better than this, it must be some place."

Two months later my Father passed away.

That day when we went fishing, when I asked about his earlier dreams, as he explained how he had been happy, even though he never got to be a country veterinarian or farmer, my Father also said, "Besides, try and picture your mom living way back in the woods." I realize that Warren had his priorities right—he didn't want to lose the prettiest girl in Edenton.

I'm sure my Father was grateful for the life he had, even if it wasn't the life he planned. As a school boy, he chose his grandmother's farm for the summers. As a young man, he chose to join the Marines, instead of continuing his studies. He chose not to pay a bribe to get into veterinary school. He made the choices he wanted to live with. I know he wouldn't use the words I'm using, but I'd say he figured out what was important. Warren got the big things right, even if others wouldn't see them as the big things.

One of the old terms for PTSD was "Soldier's Heart." In that time, some believed that the

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afflicted soldier was suffering from a form of heart-sickness for his home and family. I don't think my Father had PTSD, but I think he had to overcome more body-blows than the average boxer, and he did so with quiet grace. Maybe for him, the term "Soldier's Heart" would have meant more about the internal and external

resources that helped him overcome life's "slings and arrows" so he did not succumb to them.

After my father's death, my sister Susan said that, even though our Father was often quiet, "You always knew he loved you." I think there may be no greater inheritance to have from anyone.

I've been honored for the opportunity to be part of this process with Dr. Nelson and Dr. Andrews. I hope the stories of our fathers may help us all to pause to think of what was risked, lost, and gained by the efforts of men and women during World War II. I've had and continue to have tears on several occasions for these three men, one of whom I knew, and two of whom I didn't. And there is a certain part of my father's story at the end, when I write about "Soldier's Heart," that is difficult for me to keep reading, which I feel is not just for my father, but for the millions who stood up and risked so much for us all, and then kept so much of their experiences locked inside.

My hope is that the readers here will be touched in some way by these men that we knew, and by others and their stories, whose lives shaped us, and even changed the world.



The BABY BOOM: Warren Magee holding John Magee in August 1952. Lake Charles, Louisiana. Sister Susan is at bottom right and was born in 1946, the first year of the "Baby Boom." More babies were born in 1946 than ever before, 3.4 million. In '47 another 3.8 million were born. In John's birth year, 1952, 3.9 million were born. It wasn't until 1964 that the boom tapered off. The boomers make up 40 percent of the nation's population. (Courtesy photo.)

John Magee has 29 years federal service working with combat Veterans. This includes 5 years active duty in the Air Force and 24 years within the VA, including 22 years at the VA in Shreveport, one year at the VA in Alexandria, and a year pre-doctoral internship at the VA in Memphis. He was Section Chief in Shreveport for 14 years, and his current position is Lead Psychologist. You may communicate with him at johnnym727@gmail.com

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