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A Legacy of Service

Frannie Litchfield

I am closing my 52 years of military service. When I joined the Army, even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfillment of all of my boyish hopes and dreams. The world has turned over many times since I took the oath at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have all since vanished, but I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barracks ballads of that day which proclaimed most proudly that old soldiers never die; they just fade away. And like the old soldier of that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away, an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty, Goodbye

—General Douglas MacArthur

AS A BOY SCOUT I WAS PRIVILEGED TO HEAR General MacArthur make that speech, not the one before the joint session of Congress, but rather when he was on a speaking tour in Seattle.

Old soldiers become old Veterans, young soldiers become young Veterans, but all too soon they also become old Veterans, and they too eventually fade away.

An older gentlemen friend tells me that he remembered when he was a young boy seeing Civil War

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Frannie Litchfield

veterans riding in a horse drawn wagon down Front Street one Memorial Day many, many years ago. Think of all the tales those veterans could have told about their service, Bull Run, Antietam, Gettysburg, but there was no one there to memorialize those memories. They just faded away.

Today our old soldiers, our old veterans are fading away. The number of World War II veterans marching in the Memorial Day parade dwindles each year. We need to preserve their memories.

One such “old soldier” is Frannie Litchfield of Scituate.

“I served from June of 1942 to November of 1945,” Litchfield said speaking of his service as an aircraft mechanic/electrician with the then U.S. Army Air Corp stationed at an airfield in Cha Bua in Northern India at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains.

“The runway there was the only paved spot in the whole area. We serviced C-87s, which were four engine B-24 bombers converted to carry cargo. Their mission was to fly over the ‘Hump’ at an altitude of thirty-two thousand feet to get over the Himalayan Mountains. They carried supplies, munitions, and gasoline from India to China.”

According to Litchfield his outfit carried so much material in one month that it received a Presidential Unit Citation in December of 1944.

“There were two seasons, the monsoons and the dry season, but it was always hot. Inside the aircraft the temperature averaged 108 degrees. During the monsoons you wished it was the dry season and during the dry season you wished it was the monsoon season.”

Litchfield wanted to fly but an ear infection kept him on the ground.

“We lost many aircraft,” Litchfield said, “mostly on takeoff and landing. At one time, out of a contingent of thirty-two aircraft we were down to three on the ground and three still flying; all the rest had crashed. Some crews survived by being able to parachute out. One crew who bailed out took forty-two days to make it back to the base. We also had some fighter planes there, Spitfires, I think, and one day one pilot crashed all three.”

The men lived in mud huts with thatched roofs—ten men to a hut.

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“One day one of the aircraft belly landed. All the crew got out except the pilot whose foot was caught in the wreckage of the cockpit. We were always afraid of fire, so I grabbed a fire ax and began chopping away at the airframe so that I could get into the plane to free the pilot’s foot. I guess it might have been the first version of the ‘jaws of life.’ While I was chopping away at the fuselage, a major came by and reprimanded me. I don’t want to say what I told him, but needless to say I continued chopping to create a space large enough for me to crawl through, and free the pilot’s leg before the plane caught fire.”

Litchfield represents a long line of military men with a grandfather who served in the Civil War, a father who was in the First World War; sons who served during the Vietnam era, a submariner grandson, and another relative who just returned from Iraq.

“I would not trade my service for a million dollars,” Litchfield said, “but I can’t say I would want to go through it again.”

A Man for All Seasons

Clyde Gurney

EARLY IN THE MORNING THREE TIMES A WEEK he brings freshly cut long stem red Amaryllis for display to the French Memories in Cohasset. There he commandeers his favorite table for his morning coffee and pastry. Long time Scituate resident Clyde Gurney also delivers his flowers to Oro's Restaurant, and the South Shore Hospital cardiac center. He is well known as a gardener and bird lover. It takes patience and dedication to nurture a virtual green house of over a hundred bulbs and plants at various stages of development in your home during the long winter months. But there is another side of his life, of his patience, not chronicled. He longed to serve in the Navy during World War II; a goal denied him almost half a decade.

"My father was from England and my mother from Scotland and that is how I got the name Clyde—for the Perth of Clyde in Scotland."

Gurney attended Rockland high school where he was a straight A student because, as he puts it, "I had an excellent memory." Gurney graduated from high school in 1935.

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Clyde Gurney

“I was lucky to get a job,” Gurney said. “It was with the HH Arnold company in Rockland manufacturing weaponry. I was working on brass casings for shells. The owner of the company actually got involved in teaching me the necessary technical skills to do the job.”

In 1939 while working for the company Gurney received a draft notice, and he tried to enlist in the Navy.

“The building where we worked in Rockland had all the windows painted black. We would work all night long. Because the company was fulfilling a War Department contract, they wanted to keep me deferred.”

The months at the plant turned to years while many of Gurney’s mates went off to serve in the war. “I was

wondering how I would answer the question ‘What did you do during the war?’”

“I finally pleaded with my boss to let me go. I told him all my buddies were in the service and I wanted to serve.”

In 1944, his employer finally granted him leave to go and serve on active duty. He had waited nine years.

“I joined the Navy in 1944 and went to boot camp at Sampson in New York.” After boot camp, Gurney was selected for a top-secret research project that the Navy was working on in conjunction with Harvard and Columbia.

“I was assigned to the USS *Babbitt*. It was a World War I destroyer. We were carrying out scientific research in sonar under battle conditions.”

According to Gurney, at that time Harvard and Columbia had taken a lead in the study of underwater sound—sonar.

“We would sail from Port of Spain, Trinidad to Greenland, and there would be a submarine shooting dummy torpedoes underneath us so we could check the sonar readings under cold/warm water conditions.”

The stark contrast of the ship’s route still impresses him.

“So we would be down in Port of Spain listening to the workers singing ‘Rum and Coca Cola / Working for the Yankee dollar,’ and then we would go up to Greenland where we would be surrounded by huge icebergs that towered over our ship.”

Gurney admits to bouts of seasickness.

“I did a lot of cooking on ship as well. When we were in port, I would do the cooking so that the cooks could be able to get off the ship.”

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After three years of service in the Navy, Gurney was honorably discharged in 1947. He returned to the same company where he been employed since 1935. He became highly skilled in the craft of precision cylindrical grinding.

“When I first went there we were working to a thousandth of an inch, and when I retired we were working at a millionth of an inch.”

Part of Gurney’s work took him to Switzerland where he would buy advanced machines for the company.

“I bought a 1790 home in Middleboro on sixteen acres for \$12,000, and spent five years restoring it. It had four fireplaces. I married in the early ’70s. My bride, Mimi Cohen, was from Casablanca. Her brother was a chef at some of the top French restaurants in Boston, and introduced me to that world. I built a barbecue. I put in a swimming pool.” It was there that he hosted Sunday barbecues for the Boston restaurateurs and guests.

Gurney retired in 1970. “I worked in the same place for 65 years—from 1935 to 2000—with a three year stint in the Navy. When I first came to Scituate in 1972, I went to Widows Walk and over to Marshfield Country Club and put in birdhouses. I have always been into birding.”

By April his oriental lilies will be ready, followed by the tulips. As the seasons change Gurney changes his flower deliveries.

A Red Cross Volunteer in World War II

Estelle Adler

UNLIKE THE MANY WHO JOINED UP TO SERVE in World War II right out of high school, when long time Scituate resident Estelle Adler made the existential decision to serve, she had already had a successful career in communications in both the private and public sectors—a career that began in Boston right after college in 1938.

“In 1938, I became the traffic manager for radio station WORL in Boston. I transferred to WBZ,” Adler said. “The WBZ station manager was named the Director of Radio, Press and Advertising for War Bonds in a newly created special branch of the Treasury Department.” According to Adler, this new position took him to Washington D.C., and before long Adler followed.

“From October 1942 to January 1944, I worked for the War Savings Division of the United States Treasury Department in the Radio, Press and Advertising section.”

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Estelle Adler in World War II serving as a Red Cross volunteer.

There could have been few places in the world as adult as Washington, D.C., during World War II. Adler was right in the middle of it.

“One of my responsibilities was to serve on a round table comprised of some of the leading generals’ wives. I would coordinate coffees for them, including Mrs. Eisenhower, Mrs. George Patton, and Mrs. Mark Clark.” Adler’s job was to interact with people—especially with those who could help raise War Bond money.

“We interacted with the ‘Hollywood Canteen’ and I worked with celebrities including such stars as Paul

Henried, Loretta Young, and Groucho Marx,” Adler said. But the out-reach extended beyond Hollywood to world famous artists such as Italian Conductor Arturo Toscanini, and to world statesmen, such as when British Prime Minister Winston Churchill came to the United States to address a joint session of congress.

“Young men—friends of mine from New England—kept showing up in Washington...[they were] writers from the Office of War Information, and I became even more concerned and interested in the war,” Adler said. “So I approached the Marines. Anyway, no one would send me anywhere outside this country. Then I heard about the Red Cross, and sure enough early in 1944, I joined and I left Washington to go overseas.”

Adler was part of a contingent of “125 Red Cross girls” who sailed unescorted and unaware of their destination out of New York on the Queen of the Cunard Lines—the *Mauritania*. “It was a fast ship, able to outmaneuver German U-boats. Off the shores of Ireland, the ship suddenly started wild gyrations, and I soon found out we were outrunning German submarines. At that moment I asked myself: What am I doing here?”

“We sailed to North Africa—Oran and Algiers. We met with soldiers at the canteens and worked with Army Special Services at dances and other events,” Adler said.

“From Algiers I went to the island of Corsica, which was my first actual assignment. There I opened and closed three different clubs. We would take over a building and wash it down. Get coffee pots, magazines, a piano and it would become a focal point for the soldiers. In Corsica we were serving veterans who had

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served at Anzio. I was in Corsica when the Allies invaded southern France. I watched ‘Wild’ Bill Donovan’s OSS troops working out at the beach at night prior to the invasion.”

In the midst of the war, there was still glamour. “While I had to ‘DDT’ my way to my mosquito netted bed in my quarters, my Red Cross friend stayed at the palatial Napoleon Bonaparte Hotel. I used to go to lunch with her. We would see Randolph Churchill, who was reputed to be a spy, and Douglas Fairbanks Jr., who was with the Royal Navy. I was present with a contingency from a French hospital relocated from Paris the night Paris was liberated.”

Following another assignment in Naples, “I was reassigned to Florence as the resident director of the Apollo Theatre, a 4,200 seat theatre and movie house,” Adler said. “I would order films. I booked the best USO shows. Our most popular show was a baseball show with Stan Musial and ‘Lippy’ Leo Durocher, famed manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. The service men loved the baseball show.” During this period we created our own theater company and I starred in two shows, ‘Margin for Error,’ and ‘Love Rides the Rails.’

“The war ended for me May 8th in Florence, Italy. In July 1945, I married a British officer, who served in the Indian Army. We came to Scituate in 1946.”

Adler had five children, two boys and three girls, and has eight grandsons, three great grandsons, and one great granddaughter. She has been active in civic endeavors, including the “Scituate Dramateurs.” She retired as Public Relations Director from Massasoit College. In 1989, Adler served as a Public Information Officer for the Federal



Estelle poses in her Red Cross uniform while holding a photo from her time in service during World War II.

Emergency Planning Administration (FEMA) out of Region One headquartered in Boston. Among the disasters she worked on-site were the San Francisco earthquake in 1989 and the Los Angeles earthquake in 1992.

Adler is the granddaughter of Thomas Murray who served with the Massachusetts 5th Infantry in the Civil War. Recently at a meeting of the Scituate Sons of Union Veterans, she donated her grandfather's military papers and other civil war memorabilia to Satuit Camp 3188.

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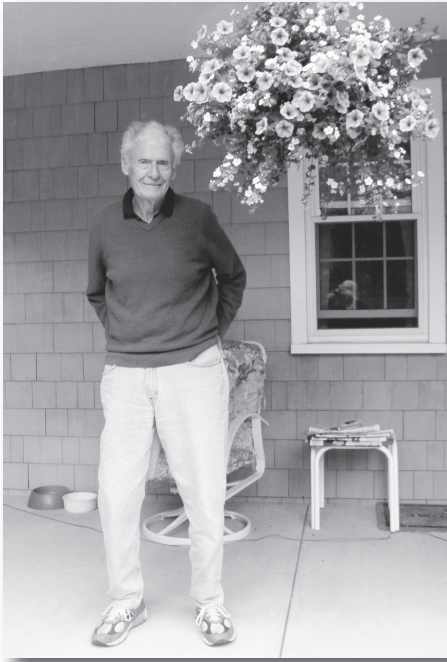
A Tradition of Service

John “Jack” Whitney

A CONTINENT AWAY, AND ALMOST TWO YEARS before that fateful shell “screamed and fell,” there’s a story to tell. It is the story of one of the members of the entire sophomore class at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, who enlisted in the armed services about a year after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Early in his Army training, this then young man volunteered to become an Army Ranger. This is his story.

“We landed on the beach at Marseille at night, said John “Jack” Whitney of Scituate. “I was a tech sergeant in charge of a platoon of about thirty Army Rangers. I was in charge of “Easy Company” comprised of members of our group, the 63rd Infantry Division, and joined by some members of the 3rd Army Division. It was around the end of 1943 when we went in. The Vichy French who were in control of the City had scuttled boats in the harbor to hamper our landing, but we made it ashore. Our mission was to pursue the Germans who were leaving the area.”

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John "Jack" Whitney in the spring of 2008
at his home in Scituate, Massachusetts.

Whitney led "Easy Company" in pursuit of the Germans north toward the German border. "There was heavy fighting all the way," Whitney said. The Germans had occupied Colmar and were waiting. "When we reached Strasbourg, we thought we were going to cross the Rhine, but no, we were sent south to near the German border."

He recalls one village that they went through along the way which the Germans occupied. “We fought a three day house-to-house battle and we took many casualties.” Whitney modestly admits his group was awarded a Presidential Unit citation for that battle. After that battle Tech Sergeant Whitney was awarded a battlefield commission as a second lieutenant.

As if things weren’t bad enough, according to meteorological data, the winter of 1944 was one of the coldest on record in Europe. Whitney and his men fought on in some of the harshest conditions on their long march.

“I ordered the men to keep two dry pair of socks under their jackets so if their feet got wet they could change into dry socks to prevent frostbite and trench foot.”

As orders changed, Whitney’s objective became a section of the Siegfried Line where the Germans had used French slave labor to build cement abutments called “Tigers’ Teeth”—Jersey barrier type obstacles—designed to stop tanks from entering Germany from France.

“As we approached our objective we had to march up toward a ridge line though an area of heavy forest. At the top of the ridge, the Germans had built pillboxes with overlapping fields of fire.” As Whitney led his company up the snowy hill, 105 millimeter shells pounded the forest sending lethal shrapnel and sharp tree shards in every direction.

“I heard the 105 coming, and I had the time to roll myself into a ball.” The shell slammed into a nearby tree and Whitney was hit by the shrapnel. Whitney’s twenty-three month military career was over.

“I was evacuated to a field hospital and then onto another hospital in Birmingham, England. While I was

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there, we heard the war in Europe had ended.”

His Division suffered about 3,000 casualties during the long and arduous march. As a result of his injuries, Whitney was put in a body cast, and eventually shipped home to an Army hospital where he spent about a year.

He “retired” from the Army as a first lieutenant. For his action in World War II, Whiney was awarded the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star, among other medals.

Whitney, who lives in Scituate, and his late wife, Jeanne, raised their family here, and he remains close to his daughters, Dianne and Sharon, and his son, John.

His family boasts a proud tradition of military service with his father, John, having served in World War I, and then contributing to World War II by working in the Quincy Shipyard. His son, John, followed in the family tradition serving with distinction in Vietnam as a member of an elite team of Long Range Recon soldiers. For his services, like his father, Whitney junior was highly decorated.

Following his World War II military service, Whitney returned to college and received a master’s degree in history and government. He had a long career in Weymouth with the Minnesota Mining Company.

A Triumph of Spirit

Mary Regan Quessenberry

“**W**ORLD WAR II BROKE OUT IN DECEMBER 1941, and I was in uniform by July of 1942. I joined with the very first group of women to enter into the military. We were called the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (“WAAC”). There was prejudice against women serving in the military,” said Mary Regan Quessenberry, a longtime resident of Scituate. She is pictured with her group in the coffee table book published by *Life* magazine entitled “Our Finest Hour, The Triumphant Spirit of America’s World War II Generation.” The caption to the picture reads: “WAAC’s soon to be WAC’s practice close order drill across parade ground at Fort Des Moines.”

Daughter of an MIT graduate engineer father, John W. Regan, and mother, Mary Veronica Sullivan, a graduate from Radcliffe, Quessenberry was raised in Boston. She praises her parents for instilling in her the desire to learn and helping her attain a fine education. By the time America entered the war Quessenberry had graduated from Radcliffe majoring in fine arts, traveled around the world as part of fellowship to study in China and Japan,

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Mary Regan Quessenberry

and had earned a master's degree in Fine Art from Harvard. Both her older brother, John, and her younger brother, Robert, trained as physicians at Harvard and Tufts respectively, and served with distinction in World War II.

"In July of 1942, we were sent to Fort Des Moines," she said. "We were the 'Six Week Wonder Girls' and I was commissioned a third officer WAAC. Upon graduation I stayed on to train the 'new girls.'" Following that stint, "I volunteered to return to Boston to recruit for what had become the Women's Army Corps (WACs). I had learned that Winston Churchill was coming to receive an honorary degree at Harvard. I was standing on the steps of the Fogg Museum. I saw a couple of big black limousines

pull up. Prime Minister Winston Churchill exited one car with his wife—later to become Lady Churchill—and their daughter, Mary. Lady Churchill saw me standing there in uniform, approached and she commented on being delighted to see women in uniform. I have a picture posing with Mary Churchill there.

“Not long after that, in 1943, I received orders to go overseas. I was so happy,” Quessenberry said. “I was ordered to attend a photo interpreter school near High Wickham (headquarters of the British Bomber Command), up the Thames from London where I was trained to assess bomb damage from aerial photographs following bomb raids. While there, I was part of the United States Army 8th Air Force which then was commanded by Three Star General James ‘Jimmy’ Doolittle.

“After training, I was sent to the Royal Air Force (RAF) Base at Medmenham near London.” The Central Interpretation Unit was located there and it was involved in almost every operation of the war, including almost every aspect of military intelligence. “We operated twenty-four hours a day, and had to assess the damage to German aircraft from the bombing raids. Our reports were of an urgent nature and had to be provided to the commands that would be flying the next day so they would know what to expect as to fighter opposition.

“Late one evening, I was called to report to Twickenham, the highest headquarters led by General Carl Spaatz who commanded the strategic bombing campaign against Germany. General Spaatz’ command by then included the 8th, 9th and 15th Army Air Corps and he reported to General Eisenhower. I served there

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for two years. I was company commander of 550 WAC's who ran Spaatz Headquarters."

Quessenberry's service during that time is best summed up by the citation that accompanies her Bronze Star, which states in part: "For meritorious service in connection with military operations as commanding officer of an Air Force Women's Army Corp detachment...during the critical period of enemy flying bomb attacks in Southern England. Her leadership and devotion to duty facilitated to a great extent the rapid and efficient move of headquarters to France and establishment of full operations at the new location. Her commendable services reflect great credit upon herself and the Women's Army Corps."

At the cessation of hostilities, Quessenberry participated in the Victory in Europe (VE) Day parade in Paris. Following a brief Rest and Recuperation at home, she returned to Berlin for two more years to serve as head of Intelligence in a newly created Division under the command of General Lucius D. Clay, in a new kind of war to rescue and repatriate precious works of art. These art works were looted from German occupied countries such as Italy, France, and the Netherlands by the Nazis' special squad of art advisors established by Adolph Hitler—the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR). Quessenberry's work included travel to salt mines, abandoned factories, and bombed cities, in Germany, Austria, Poland and other countries. The responsibilities of the command were also to identify monuments, and buildings that needed preservation.

Following that period, Quessenberry returned home

to lecture at the University of Florida where she met her husband to be, Tim, and they married in 1965. Widowed in 1978, Quessenberry resides at her ancestral home in Scituate.

“I always felt that the Bronze Star I was awarded should have gone to a nineteen-year-old soldier in a foxhole near Bastogne (during the Battle of the Bulge),” Quessenberry said.