

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 12, 2018

The Greatest Generation: Tom Brokaw called us who served during World War II the Greatest Generation. If you were 18 in 1942 as I was, there was no choice. Unless you signed up for a special military program, you knew you would soon be drafted. There was nothing great about that. When the war was over and most of the 15 million men and women in uniform were coming home, it seemed everyone was a veteran. There was nothing great about that, either, except the G.I. Bill, enacted by an earlier generation, which enabled many to achieve a college education.

After more than 70 years, we are scarce. During my four years in the service, I was in several outfits, but in none of them was another Delawarean. Nonetheless, I made many friends and kept in touch by Christmas cards for years thereafter. Here are a few:

Dalton F. Newton of Lakeland, Florida. I met Newton at Oklahoma City in early March 1945 when I joined the B-24 crew of which he was captain. Most of the crew had trained together at Mountain Home, Idaho. We flew training weather missions from Will Rogers Field for 2½ months, then went by troop train to Savannah to pick up a new B-24 weather plane to ferry it to Guam.

Our captain (and pilot) was 28 years of age, when most of us on the crew were about 21. He didn't always make the smoothest landings, but the experience and responsibility of those extra years were invaluable. He brought us through some of the roughest weather unscathed. A graduate of the engineering school at the Citadel in Charleston (SC), he tried at war's end to get a job in engineering. He was offered a job at \$2,400 per year, which he thought was not enough. After a few years as a civilian, he went back into the service, and when I last heard from him, he was a Lieutenant Colonel.

Anthony E. Rippo of San Pedro, California. When I went to Roswell (NM) in June 1944, Rippo was a corporal and the best observer in the weather station there. A slow-mover named Cobb was in charge of the enlisted men (except the two enlisted forecasters) at the station, and Cobb made Rippo do much of his work, in addition to pulling regular shifts as an observer. Open 24/7, observers, like forecasters, worked 8-hour shifts. The 11 P.M. to 7 A.M. shift was the quiet one, and it seemed Rippo and I often pulled that shift together. His job was to take weather observations every hour, send the coded results immediately by teletype, and plot observations from airfields all over the country on a map of the United States (this was done 3 times each day). My job as forecaster on duty was to draw the weather systems on the observer's map, taking into account temperature, wind direction, and barometric pressure, which located highs, lows, areas of precipitation, cold and warm fronts, and the like. Then I had to brief the pilots about 7 A.M. before their training day began. I kept in touch with Rippo over the years. I visited him and his family in California several times, and he was in Delaware at least four times. In 1981, we joined each other at Albuquerque and drove to Roswell to inspect our old air base. It was still there, but the air force had pulled out and very little was recognizable. Anthony Rippo died in 2016.

Wallace E. Sonntag of Philadelphia: Wally came to Brown University in mid-March 1943, along with most of the group, fresh from Basic Training, to form the Army Air Force's Pre-Meteorology training program, which was to last for 6 months. Although none were from Delaware, there were about 6 men from the Philadelphia area in this 150-man unit, and we bonded together, especially when we rushed home and back for a weekend pass that lasted from noon Saturday until Sunday night. Often our train from Providence brought us into Grand Central Station, and we would hail a cab, 4 or 5 of us load in, and rush the several blocks to Penn Station to catch our train for Philadelphia and Wilmington. As we moved on to M.I.T. at the end of September, we enjoyed hunting out reasonable restaurants in Boston to enjoy Sunday dinner. Carl Brandt and Bob White, from Glenside and Yeadon respectively, were in this small group. Once I met Wally in New Mexico, as I think he was stationed at Gallup when I was at Roswell. He married a West Chester girl, Carol Webb, with whom I had played during summers in Rehoboth. They moved to upstate New York, near Syracuse. After two or three

children, Carol died before she was 40, and Wally remarried a widow named Berta. We have seen them a few times over the years, and to my knowledge, they are both alive in a retirement facility in Saratoga Springs. Wally is now 97.

Alfred Clebsch Jr., Clarksville, Tennessee: Al Clebsch was commissioned as a weather forecaster at the University of Chicago at the same time I made it at M.I.T., June 5, 1944 (the day before D-Day). We had parallel careers as forecasters until we were transferred into the 55th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, training at Will Rogers Field in the spring of 1945. He was the forecaster on Oscar Bush's crew (I was on Newton's), and we had many pleasant times together on Guam, especially our daily gin rummy games after lunch on days when neither was flying. After the war, he went back to the Univ. of Chicago and received a B.S. in something related to geology. He worked for the U.S. Geodetic Survey and spent a few years in Greenland. His last several years in government service were spent in Denver, where he headed the Geodetic Survey for about 10 states in the Pacific Northwest. I had lost track of Al for most of these years, but one day about 1998, I had a phone call from him. It seems that our former weather squadron was having reunions, and he took a chance and found me living at the same place as when I was in the service. On a trip east, Al soon visited us, and coaxed me to attend the next reunion that was scheduled in Ohio in a few months. He developed prostate cancer, and he didn't make that reunion. I didn't go, either. We visited him at his home in Lakewood, Colorado, in January 2000. He died a few months later.

None of us were the real heroes of World War II. We were on the fringes and helped to finish it up. Those in the South Pacific from 1942 through 1945, and those in North Africa and in Europe through D-Day and on to V-E Day, many of whom gave their lives, were the true heroes.