



WWII Stories Written by Bro. Raphael Ruffolo, OFM CONV.

MY FIRST COMBAT

On June 25, 1943 orders were issued stating that a combat team would be formed composed of the 1st Marine Raiders Regiment (less two Battalions) with the Army's 3rd Battalion of the 145th Infantry and the 3rd Battalion of the 148th Infantry. These two Army Battalions would be attached to the 1st Marine Raiders, with Marine Col. Liveredge as its leader. This was the first time that elements of the 37th Division were attached to the Marine Corps.

Our mission was to land at Rice Anchorage, New Georgia, in the Solomon Islands. We were to secure Bairoko supply trail, and finally secure Bairoko Harbor.

On July 3, 1943 our beach on Guadalcanal was loaded with guns, ammunition and rations. The soldiers were supplied with multi-spotted jungle camouflage overalls—they were the mode of the day! Our Catholic Chaplain gave all the Catholic boys general absolution. Late that evening we boarded our ships. Company K was on a naval destroyer, the USS Strong. The Navy gave us a nice breakfast, but I myself couldn't eat.

In fact, I had to go on deck for fresh air. I enjoyed being on deck but couldn't help thinking that I might be killed. As our ships were moving into New Georgia's Rice Anchorage in Kula Gulf, the Jap shore batteries fired their naval guns at our ships. During this bombardment, but after we had left it, the USS Strong was sunk.

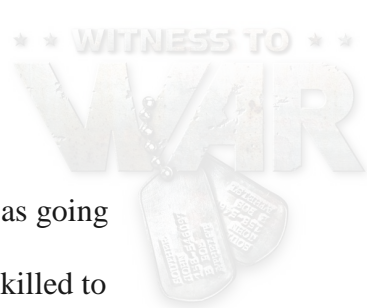
During this time the transports with the troops began to float towards shore. The 3rd Battalion, 145th Infantry landed first, then came the Marines, followed by the 148th Infantry. In this landing, rubber boat life rafts were used to ferry some of the troops. But as the first six-man load bumped towards shore, the backwash from the towing barge soon somersaulted the men into the sea, so the experiment was abandoned. However, our company had no problem with the rubber boat life rafts.

We landed on swampy ground. There were large trees, with huge roots above ground. The roots were used as our walkway. Unfortunately, I slipped and fell right into quicksand! I went down fast, and thank God my buddies pulled me out. I was a mess.

Two separate sections of the task force set out on their missions, the 3rd Battalion of the 148th Infantry to establish a roadblock, and the Marines plus the 145th Infantry set out to attack Enogai. Each group waged a two-day battle with the jungle. Practically all vestiges of the original trails had disappeared, and it was necessary to cut through the engulfing overgrowth as we tried to advance. To make matters worse rain tumbled down throughout the day, intensifying the difficulties as we advanced. We could hear the Marines fighting. Our Battalion moved through the heavy jungle. The 3rd Platoon of Company K was the point.

On July 20, 1943 my squad was the point for Company K. I was a Browning Automatic Rifleman (BAR Man). The Japanese had their machine gun pointed in our direction. Our platoon leader 1st Lt. Reino Ojajarvi was in the lead and was killed. The Thompson machine gun soldier Pfc. Paul Salmon was also killed, and rifleman, Pfc. Johnson was seriously injured.

The scout and I were on the flank of the machine gun. I don't know how we got there. We were laying flat. I whispered to him if I he could see the Japs with the machine gun. He told me he could. I asked again: "Are you sure they can't see us?" His answer was:



“Yes.” It was hard for me to believe him but I took his word. I told him that I was going to get up and attack them with my BAR and to cover me.

For a split second, I said a prayer to my dear God and told him that if I was killed to please make it easy on my family, especially my Mom. I also said a brief prayer to the Blessed Mother. I had a strong devotion to her ever since I was a kid. At that moment I actually felt the presence of Our Lady. I was getting ready to charge the Japs machine gun. As I was about to move an order was given to withdraw and fall back. I heard the order and followed through. I jumped up, ran and dropped to the ground. Then I did it a second time. When I got to safety, one of my buddies told me that it was a good thing he yelled to me. I said to him, “I didn’t hear you!” He also told me, “You should have been dead!”

I paused a moment, the wind knocked out of me, realizing how near death I had just been. I said a prayer of thanks to God and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Making a quick getaway to the Battalion Aid Station, I saw we had a lot of wounded guys. I saw a PBY plane with women nurses moving the wounded into the plane. Silently I asked God to bless them all.

Anyway, my purpose in visiting the Aid Station was to say good-bye to my long-time buddy, Johnson. Sometime earlier, back on Fiji Island, Johnson was mad at me. There were wasps around and I yelled, but he was already among the wasps. He jumped, yelped and threw his gun up in the air. I and the rest of the squad, had a good laugh at his expense. He was convinced that we had let him get caught among the wasps deliberately, and wouldn’t speak to me, or any of us! I located him at the Aid Station. He was shot in both legs. When he saw me his face lit up. I gave him some water and a cigarette; he smiled and thanked me. I was happy we patched things up. Sadly, after he recovered from his wounds, he was returned to combat and was killed.

I went back to my Company shaking in my boots. I am not ashamed to admit it for I was truly scared. War is hell; there is no other way to describe it. However, I realized that I had to live with it. This is what I had been trained for. This is what my country expected of me. This is what I was honor-bound to do.

God was good to me, and the Blessed Mother watched over me—it was clear; only their care pulled me through. Otherwise, I would have been on the casualty list on my first engagement. The Battle of New Georgia ended on September 1, 1943. We were sent back to Guadalcanal for a brief rest. Our next battle was Bougainville, Solomon Islands.



BOUGAINVILLE (SOLOMON ISLANDS)

On October 22, 1943, the 148th Combat Team received instructions from the 1st Marine Amphibious Corps, that we must be ready for offensive action by November 1, 1943. Combat Team 148th Regiment, plus attachments, would embark, beginning November 5, 1943. “Be ready for offensive action on Bougainville.” Those were the orders.

The military importance of Bougainville and its surrounding islands to the Japs, lay in the bomber and fighter strips that furnished support for strikes for Rabaul. To nullify the importance of Rabaul, it was essential that Bougainville be neutralized or taken. Therefore, it was decided to cripple the airfields on Bougainville, New Britain and Bulka by bombing raids, as well as establishing a beachhead in the Empress Augusta Bay area on Bougainville, and lastly, to hold the perimeter, so that bomber and fighter fields of our own could be speedily built.

Four transports and two freighters were assigned to take the 148th Regimental Combat Team to Bougainville. The soldiers clambered on the transports Jackson, Hayes and Fuller, on November 5.

By November 7, all transports and two freighters shepherded by nine destroyers, were rolling northward on the Solomon Sea. It was a Sunday. The attendance at Mass, as well as at Protestant services, was high. As the convey settled in Empress Augusta Bay about 0830, the throaty rumble of big guns echoed ominously across the water.

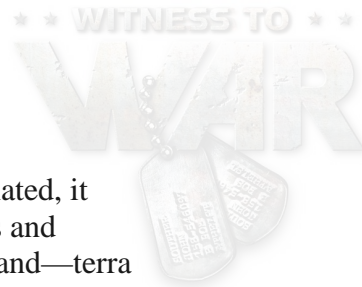
We knew that the original Marine landing had been lightly opposed, but we did not know that the Marines had a perimeter 500 yards long and 400 yards deep at its farthest penetration, and that the Japanese Tarokina Guard Unit, 500 to 700 in strength, had been decisively defeated by the Leathernecks before our regiment arrived.

By 1030 all soldiers were on the beach, except for small unloading details and troop commanding officers.

I was with Harold Vogel and Leo Rosenbech on the Fuller at Hatch #6. The hatch was open. Suddenly, zooming undetected out of the sun, Jap planes appeared. I couldn't believe what I was seeing! A flight of 20 to 30 dive bombers, 12 to 14 twin engine bombers, and 50 zero fighters ripped into transports and warships. All ships immediately pulled anchors and headed for the open Solomon Sea. All anti-craft guns were shooting at the incoming enemy planes. Shipping was the sole target, and the men on shore had a relatively safe but active grand stand seat. The Fuller was the Jap's target, and I really prayed that the ship would not be hit by a bomb.

The Japanese Air Force did drop a bomb on the Fuller, and miraculously enough, it did not go off. Thank God!

I went up on the top deck and I couldn't believe the damage the Japanese planes did. All the big guns were destroyed—the boom poles were all down. There were wounded sailors, as well as dead ones. I saw sailors and soldiers at the forward hatch. I was curious to know what was going on. So I walked to the front hatch. I looked down in the hole, and there was a 500lb Jap bomb that didn't go off. The sailors got a couple of large planks and were able to lift the bomb onto the top deck. They found the fuse of the bomb lodged in the superstructure that prevented the bomb from blowing up. They lifted the bomb and threw it overboard.



The sailors called it a freak accident. I call it a miracle. Had the bomb detonated, it would have sunk the Fuller, and there would have been many more dead sailors and soldiers including me. The Army men went on shore, and I was glad to get on land—terra firma!

I will end my story about Bougainville here, and have Major Stanley Frankal have “the last word,” even though he was in regimental headquarters:

The invasion of Bougainville in early November of 1943, was an outstanding success, and comparatively easy, due to some very astute advance planning, which put our forces ashore, where the Japanese least expected the, and thus, caught them off balance. The Marines did a fine job, and pushed rapidly into the island to the Southeast, while the 37th Division moved to the Northeast. At that time, the Marines caught the rough stuff, while we had comparatively little opposition in our sector. The Marines were pulled out, commencing Christmas Day, 1943, and were replaced by the Americal Division.

There was a comparative lull until March, 1944, when the big Battle of Bougainville took place. This was the attempt of the Japanese 17th Area Army, of which the infamous Sixth Division, of Rape of Nanking fame, was a part, to drive us from our beachhead at Empress Augusta Bay. The Sixth Division was by all odds the finest fighting unit encountered by the 37th Division, in all of its campaigns. Here, the great strength of the enemy was hurled against the 37th's more than seven miles of thinly-held front. Never before, had more frightful or bloody fighting taken place in the Pacific. For more than a month, the Japanese smashed themselves, time after time, against our front, ultimately losing more than 10,000 and an unestimated number of wounded. They ran up against a division of veterans that time...a division that proved as aggressive and powerful in the defense, as it had in the New Georgia offensive campaign. We were beginning to feel the weight of more and better equipment by now. We had more air support, more and better tank support, more artillery, and above all, men that knew the business of jungle fighting from A to Z. We refined our policy of letting machines fight for us, to the maximum. For instance, we shot up more than 450,000 rounds of artillery. The dividends that helped pay, is exemplified in the fact, that we killed Japanese, at a ratio of 33 to 1 of every American soldier lost.

The men had reason to be proud of themselves. They had fought two heavy campaigns within a period of eight months, and they had won the praise of the highest Pacific commanders. Well under four hundred 37th Division men had been killed in both operations, but nearly 12,000 Japanese soldiers. The Japanese hold on the Solomons was finally and completely broken. This, tied in with the success in New Guinea, spelled the end of Nipponese ambition in the South and Southwest Pacific.

It was a job superbly done.

World War II in the Pacific by Stanley A. Frankel
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PONCHO CHAPEL IN THE PACIFIC

With all the fighting going on, jungle warfare as well as urban, house-to-house attacks, it had been at least two months since our last Mass for the Catholic boys.

After Guadalcanal and New Georgia, we were given a much needed rest period. I got a brain storm, and told my buddy: "Rosenbeck, let's build a chapel." A field chapel was built with parachutes for a cover, with logs for walls, altar and Communion rail.

Because of the fierce fighting, Father Heindl was given permission to grant us general absolution. He earned many decorations, the Bronze Star, the Silver Star, the Distinguished Service Cross among others. He was highly respected and we all loved him.

We were desperate for some spiritual support. For example, we were devastated to see that as medics took care of the wounded, the Japs fired on them, and killed the medics as well as the wounded.

The Pacific theatre of war was so appalling, that I made a secret vow, that if God would bring me out of this mess alive, I would become a missionary. The example of Father Heindl was a great part of my burgeoning vocation, I am sure.

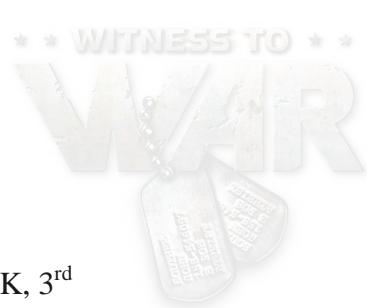
The 3rd Battalion's Protestants had a chaplain traveling with them, but the Catholics were not so fortunate. We made do, with reading Scriptures, saying the Rosary together, which, by the way, I didn't miss one day of the war. My foxhole buddy was a Southern Baptist from Texas, made a comment: "I see you're saying the rosary," and I said, "What do you know about a Rosary, where did you learn that?" And he said he learned it from Mexicans he go to know, since he lived in Texas.

On New Georgia, we didn't have a priest. We were told that they would try to ship in a Navy priest, who arrived with one Marine for protection, through the lousy jungle, in the rain.

Miraculously, both men arrived. All Father had was a stole, no vestments; he had wine, hosts, water and a missal. The barest essentials.

Marooned in the middle of nowhere, all we had was our makeshift chapel, with our ponchos strung together as a covering for Father's altar and sanctuary. One courageous priest, and Jesus, truly present at that Mass. This was one of the most beautiful Masses of my life, that I will remember as long as I live.

Father Heindl, our Catholic Chaplain, is still operational, although he is in his mid-90s. He stills drives a car, has good vision, goes on sick calls. It was great to see him at the 37th Division Reunion, in Manila, 1995. We still keep in touch. He was a hero with many rewards.



A PURPLE HEART FOR THE SOUTH-SIDE SERGEANT

I made Sergeant and was assigned as an assistant squad leader in Company K, 3rd Platoon, 148th Infantry. My squad leader was Leo Rosenbeck, a good friend.

Our Company was up early in the morning, ready to go. Sgt. Rosenbeck was at headquarters, getting orders as to what our mission was for the day. While waiting, the squad was in a circle, chatting quietly among the eight of us. A full squad was 12.

Sgt. Rosenbeck finally arrived and started to give the rundown on our mission, and ‘Lo and behold,’ artillery landed in our area. I felt myself thrown up in the air, and I came down like a ton of bricks. I was stunned by the impact of the artillery attack, and it took a few minutes before my mind cleared. I was wounded on my left arm. I didn’t want to look, for fear of what I would see—I feared that I had lost my arm. Thank God, my wound was relatively minor, but I did have shrapnel imbedded in my arm, which caused some bleeding, but not profusely. All in all, thank God, I was okay.

However, as I came to my senses, I could see a lot of wounded around me. Our entire Company suffered from the artillery. I started a check on my men in the squad. I started with Perry. Poor Perry, he was hit in the head, and part of his brain was hanging out! What a terrible sight. I called for the medics to come quick. I spoke to Perry, but he did not respond. Dead.

Then I went to the Pfc. Alexander. That poor guy was dead as well. Finally, I checked the squad leader. He was conscious, but badly wounded. Both thighs were bleeding and he needed medics who were trained for such serious injuries. I couldn’t do much for him, except to reassure him that the medics were on the way.

Our squad had three casualties, which reduced our small squad to just five men. I looked around and the guys were so badly injured that I could not help any of them. It was a terrible feeling. My buddies in such bad shape.

Our Company commander was at the scene, and barked orders that no one was to leave the front line, unless he had serious wounds. Minor wounds were not allowed to leave the line undefended.

We had to pull out, and it was sad to see our wounded and dead, left behind, unprotected.

I became the squad leader, and I got the men together and told them that our mission was to make contact with the 2nd Battalion of the 148th Infantry. They were supposed to be on our right flank. We had no luck—they were behind schedule.

I was standing against a brick wall, and the next thing I remember was that we heard the burst of Jap machine guns and the bullets were flying into the building I was standing in front of. The barrage was definitely meant for me, but the bullets flew over my head. I made a great target, and they missed me.

What a morning, and the sun wasn’t even up yet. I couldn’t believe that I survived two close calls within an hour. Thank God, I was not killed. By all rights, I should have been.

Badly shaken, I took the men back to our Company. I received the Purple Heart on February 13, 1945, for being wounded in the Battle of Manila on Luzon, the Philippine Islands.



THE BRONZE STAR

I want to tell the story of Private Melvin Patterson.

Melvin was born in Alabama, and never left his home State until he was drafted. He received basic training in the States, and shipped out directly after training to Luzon, the Philippine Islands.

He joined the 37th Division, 148th Infantry regiment, Company K., 3rd Platoon. I was his platoon sergeant. After taking Manila, the 37th Division was sent to fight in the Cagayan Valley. We relieved the 25th Division. The fighting was rough. We fought in the mountains and the terrain was heavily forested.

I can remember when we relieved the 25th Division: we went through this line and there laid an American soldier flat on his belly, face down, dead. I had a bad feeling, because I realized that fighting the Japs was no easy task. We just finished fighting them in Manila. Anyway, we continued the attack, losing several of our men. Evening was upon us, and we started to dig in for the night. All of us had to take two hour watches. The Japs loved to infiltrate the lines. Next morning, we got up and made ready to move on.

One of the rifleman motioned me to come up to his position. I asked "What's up?" He said, "I believe we are in enemy territory." I agreed and said, "Okay, let's make sure they are Japs." The rifleman yelled, "There is one to our flank!" I watched the Jap very carefully. He turned around and faced me. We were not more than 75 feet from each other.

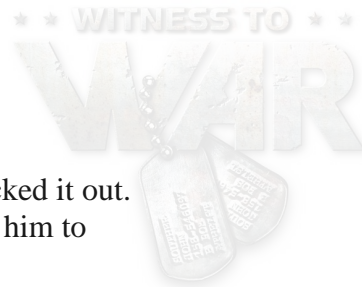
He was a Jap leader giving out orders. I told the men, "Fire at him." The Jap dropped and we lost contact. Our 1st Sergeant sent a message to me to find out what the shooting was about. The Sergeant didn't realize that we were the ones who did the shooting first. Anyway, he gave me an order to send two men out to investigate what was out there. Also, he said I was not to go on the patrol. I picked two men. Patterson was to take the lead. I told them to be careful, "Don't take any chance." They went on their way, and we heard the burst of Jap machine gun fire.

Patterson yelled out, "They go me in the stomach." He was in a lot of pain—a stomach wound is the most dangerous, and usually deadly injury in battle.

I ordered my men to pass the word down to the 1st Sergeant, that I was going after him. I took off and got to the second scout. I asked, "Where is Patterson?" He told me he was about three feet in front of us. I was very careful and crept up to the point where I could actually see him.

I asked him where he was hit. He told me in the stomach, and that he was losing a lot of blood. I assured him I was going to get him out, and that's when I realized that the Jap machine gun was facing me.

I drew back and yelled to the 1st Sergeant that I was going after Patterson. My plan was to throw a smoke grenade to cover myself. I also told the sergeant to be ready to attack. "Do you hear me?" the sergeant said, "Loud and clear!" I took the smoke grenade and lobbed it over so I would not be a sitting duck. The Japs fired in my direction, but thank God, they missed me. I reached Patterson and told him, "I am going to lay flat, and I want you to lay on my back." I would tow him out of shooting range on my belly.



In the meantime, the Company attacked the Jap machine gun nest, and knocked it out. Several Japs were killed. I crawled out with Patterson on my back, and brought him to safety. I called for a medic who would take care of him.

As I pulled Patterson out, I realized that my number was coming up. My life was spared several times when by all rights I should have been killed.

Patterson asked me for a drink of water. I helped him as he tried to take a sip of water. I told him, "The medics will take care of you. I am sorry I have to leave you, but I have to get back to my platoon." He understood. That was the last I saw of Patterson.

Several days later, I heard he died on May 12, 1945.

I attended a reunion of Company K, 148th Infantry, in 1995 in Ohio. Our 1st Sergeant was at the reunion. I asked McMurry, why Patterson died. His answer broke my heart, "They could not get the wounded down to the valley soon enough. The terrain was too rough. There was too much fighting as well."

I salute Private Patterson, and all the men who were killed in World War II. The "war to end all war," was unfortunately not to be. Several conflicts and wars followed, and our forces were undaunted in fighting for our beloved country of the United States of America. God bless them—heroes, all. God bless their families, who have never stopped grieving for them.

Patterson, no doubt, received the Purple Heart. I don't know if he was presented with the Bronze Star as well.

I received the Bronze Star for rescuing Patterson, and drawing enemy fire on myself. I know countless men who did not receive any decorations, but they were heroes with or without the insignias.



END OF THE WAR

August 15, 1945 was a great day for our country, especially for our men and women in the armed forces. It was also a great day for me and the men of my platoon. That day we had experienced a very close call. We were on a patrol in the Cayagan valley. American artillery had fallen short of us landing right in front of our position and we were almost killed. It was very close and very scary. Thank God we had no casualties. It is a day that I will remember until the day I die! All of the experienced men in our company were separated from the 37th Division. We were replaced by new men coming in from the States or from Europe. The non-coms were replaced by men who had been in our division for the last six months. Orders were issued that all of our men from the division who had been in combat the longest were to prepare to pack our bags with our personal things and be ready to leave for Manila, where we would board a ship returning to the U.S. This was good news and it was hard to believe that I was going home!

I had a flashback—it was a month earlier, July 1945, and I took a patrol out. We were moving along with no contact with the Japanese until our scout signaled the patrol to stop and came back to me and told me to move through the brush. I asked him what was up, his answer, “move up through the brush.” There was a drop of about ten feet and a small creek. Much to my surprise there was a group of Japs taking baths in their birthday suits. I yelled to them and they were caught by surprise. There were about twenty of them. I was angry as I had a flashback of our first platoon back in Manila. They went out on a patrol and were ambushed by the Japs. The entire platoon was wiped out except for one medic and a sergeant. Many had been wounded and the Japs went through and bayoneted them all; it was terrible. So when I saw all these Japs bathing I wanted to kill them all and ordered the Browning Automatic Rifleman to shoot but he became unnerved. Very quickly I was happy that he didn’t follow through and I ordered the Japs to surrender. To this very day I thank God we didn’t kill those Japs. Nevertheless the Japs were brutal soldiers.

(Now as I am writing this almost 60 years later, another incident comes to mind. On May 12th we were patrolling in a new area until sundown when we dug in for the night. About 3am I was awakened by a big bang. I jumped up and asked my foxhole buddy what it was. He told me that there were Japanese in front of us and that they had thrown a grenade or something that landed just outside of our foxhole. It really scared me! I told him to be sure to pick up on anything coming at us while I took up the Browning Automatic Rifle and waited until dawn. As the sun rose over the horizon we spotted the Japanese but they got away. In the daylight I could see that whatever it was they threw at us had made a huge hole about one foot from our foxhole. I couldn’t believe my eyes! I was just one foot away from being a war casualty. It was a miracle that we were not killed! Again, I had to thank God and the Blessed Mother for saving us.)

There were ten of us separated out of the company ordered to get ready to go home. It was hard for us to believe that we were going home. Before the Japs surrendered on August 15th our division was notified that it would participate in the invasion of Japan. The rumor was that we would not be making the first landing but that we would go through the beachhead once it was established. This would have been a bloody battle so thank God the war was over! Thank God we used the atom bomb. It saved the lives of many



Americans and Japanese. I don't believe we did wrong in using the bomb as both Japan and Germany were working to produce atomic bombs.

We went to Manila to board our ship. The nice thing about boarding that ship was that we didn't have to climb a rope ladder. Instead we went up the gangplank. The bad thing was that our sleeping quarters were below deck where it was very hot. However, we found a place on deck where we could play cards, sleep or read. There were ten of us from Company K and we stayed together and held our place until we arrived in San Francisco seventeen days later. That night I decided to sleep under tarps that covered the cargo hold. I crawled under the tarp and fell asleep. We were in the China Sea heading for the Pacific Ocean that night and a terrific storm arose. I had never experienced anything like that in three years in the Pacific, and we had made a lot of landings! By the next day the storm had passed and we were in the calm waters of the Pacific.

Looking out over the water on the way home, I couldn't help but think back to the first trip from the United States across the Pacific three years earlier. It was Tuesday May 26, 1942 our four troop ships were easing into the channel in San Francisco harbor awaiting the formation of the convoy spearheaded by the cruiser USS San Francisco, and flanked by two destroyers. We could hear a band playing and one of our men requested, "Goodbye Dear, I'll Be Back In A Year," well, that didn't happen! As we were leaving the port we could see spectators waving goodbye.

On June 4, 1942 we were still in the convoy heading for the Fiji Islands, unknown to us, the crucial naval battle of Midway Island was going on. There was a rumor afterwards that if the naval battle went against us we would have landed on Midway to reinforce our troops there. Thank God our navy won! Japanese strategists later on admitted that that battle was the turning point of the war in the Pacific.

But that was all behind us now; we were heading home! The deck of our ship was swarming with men sunning themselves, playing cards, reading, or dozing. Each day brought us closer until finally one day some of the men spotted the coast near San Francisco. We were all cheering and jumping! Then we heard on the PA system: "Now hear this! All army personnel prepare to leave the ship—get your belongings together!" Never was an order more cheerfully obeyed! The cheering got louder as we passed under the Golden Gate Bridge heading for port. There were some good people welcoming and cheering us. We put our bags on our backs and headed down the gangplank. We touched our own soil—God Bless America!

We were transported to an army base. We were separated into different groups for transit to different army camps across the country in preparation for discharge. Then, guess what? They couldn't find my records! A sergeant asked me, "Are you sure you should be back in the States?" My reply was, "I'm sure! I spent forty-two months overseas!" Well, they found my records at Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

When I was about to call home I found it very difficult to make that phone call. I simply couldn't believe I was back in the States. God was good to me and our Blessed Mother was always with me. I should have been killed several times, especially in the last two months of combat. I called home and they were so happy to hear my voice telling them I was on my way home. I arrived home and rang the doorbell. The same doorbell that at times I thought I would never hear again. My dear mother and pa welcomed me with kisses and hugs and then the whole family descended upon me; it was like Christmas!



I found out that the family said the rosary every Friday during the war, and our dear friend Mrs. Lopasso would join them. Mrs. Lopasso's sons, Jim and Louie, were good friends of mine. My sister Fran told me that GP, a navy man and friend of the family, would walk Mrs. Lopasso home in the evening. Mom was sure that it was the rosary that brought her sons home safely. (My brother Pat was in the Marine Air Force and was discharged a year later.) I had a beautiful visit with the family, then went to bed and was out like a light.

As fall rolled into winter I realized I needed to get back to work so I could do some Christmas shopping. I went back to working for Extension magazine and was placed in the circulation department and learned a little bit about fund raising. Downtown Chicago in 1945 was really ready for Christmas shopping. State Street with all of its department stores was a great sight. All the department stores had Christmas cribs in their windows. Those were great days; we really knew how to celebrate Christmas!

While walking down Dearborn Street I came across a religious articles store displaying all kinds of Christmas cribs in the window. The statues were imported from Italy and I thought that a new crib would make a nice gift for my parents. I entered, and the clerk, an elderly lady greeted me. It was Mrs. Daleidin, the wife of the owner, Laurence Daleidin. We had a nice chat about the service in the armed forces. I asked if she would put aside a particular crib set for me, explaining that I had just started working again and wouldn't have enough money for two weeks. She agreed and I selected the most expensive one in the window. It was \$45 (in today's money it would be at least \$450.) Little did I know then that I would be in contact with her son, Cyril Daleidin, four years later. Within two weeks I had the money and I really felt like Santa Claus, carrying my prized crib home. I hid it until Christmas Eve. That Christmas of 1945 was one of the most beautiful Christmases of my life.

During the next few years I continued to work for Extension magazine and during that time became acquainted with Father Dominic Syzmanski, OFM CONV. This was before I came to Marytown. I knew he needed money for his work. I asked if he had a mailing list. He did; it was a small one of about 5,000 names. One year as Christmas was approaching I offered to help him send out an appeal letter. Since Father had a great devotion to the Infant of Prague, I made the Infant of Prague Novena the focus of the appeal letter and the results were good. Father Dominic asked me on one occasion if I could get some names from Extension magazine for him. I told him yes, but I would have to wait to ask my boss Msgr. Lux at the right time.



FIFTY YEARS LATER

In 1995, the 37th Division had a reunion in the Philippines. With the help of family and personal friends I was able to attend the celebration. I was disappointed that there was no one from Co. K 148th Infantry. However my dear friend and former Chaplain Father Heindl attended the reunion. Father was loved by all the men of the 148th Infantry. We met at the airport and had supper together before boarding the aircraft (Philippines Airlines). Now nine years later he is still active at age 94 and lives in the Rochester, NY diocese. He was not only a chaplain in the field but a good person who always helped the men and received many medals. I still keep in touch with him.

We boarded the plane about 9pm for the twelve-hour trip. After about an hour into the flight I got airsick. I was in pain and my stomach was in turmoil. There was no real help available and I just had to bear with it. Finally I was able to throw up—what a relief! We landed in Manila about noon. I had a strange feeling after fifty years, returning to the city we had liberated. That had been a rough battle. Most of our fighting in the Pacific until then had been jungle warfare; city warfare was different. We fought street-by-street and building-by-building. The worst fighting came while the section of Manila we were in was on fire, and Co. K was in the midst of it. We had many casualties, but thank God we were able to win that battle! We were trapped in a horrible fire. The flames were so close that the pavement burned under the feet of our men and exploding buildings rained debris down on us. Japanese gunfire prevented us from escaping across a bridge to a safe zone.

Our company commander Captain Knipp moved among us issuing orders and encouraging us and boosting our morale. He saw to it that we were all in covered positions behind walls and houses. Then arming himself with a Browning Automatic Rifle and three smoke grenades he opened fire on the Japanese positions and tossed the three smoke grenades. This caused the Japanese to stop firing temporarily and take cover behind the walls of their pillboxes. The smoke obscured the vision of the Japanese observers and enabled the Captain to rush all of us, including our wounded men, across the bridge to safety. In the process Captain Knipp was wounded and had to be evacuated. He was a real soldier, God bless him, and thank God we escaped! One of my buddies, Sgt. Harold Vogel later told me that the captain was not a great believer in medals.

Now fifty years later we were here again and registered at the hotel, which was quite nice. Father Heindl's room was right across the hall from mine. We had Mass every morning in my room with a few of the men and their wives. The meals were good and the service was excellent! The city was rebuilt with a number of skyscrapers dotting the skyline. The people were polite and there was much automobile traffic and also many people traveling on small buses. Many of the people were working people and also quite poor, living in shanty dwellings.

We went on several tours, and our first stop was the U. S. cemetery. It is beautiful and there are hundreds of graves. I visited several of the graves of our men buried there. It was sad here where our men and women were buried. These brave people gave their lives for our country and we should never forget them! I think the cemetery in Manila is more beautiful than the one near Omaha Beach in Normandy. Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord, and may perpetual light shine upon them!



Our second big event was our visit to the Philippine Army's West Point. The cadets paraded for an hour in our honor; it was moving and beautiful. We had dinner with the cadets and afterwards we were all presented with the Philippine Liberation medal. Later we were honored with a dinner party at the Manila Hotel, which was very nice. I had a flashback. My platoon was on the left flank of our regiment. The battle was over and guess what—General MacArthur visited the Manila Hotel. I went up to him and shook hands with him. I did not salute him. He was a good leader. Incidentally earlier I had also met Admiral Halsey when we were in Bougainville. He made an inspection of our troops on the front line in 1944. I also shook hands with him.

Our tour was for one week but I remained for an additional week after my tour with the veterans of my division ended. I enjoyed the reunion but it was hard to say goodbye to our good chaplain Father Heindl. As I said before, I still keep in contact with him. I then went to visit our Franciscan Friars in Manila. The Philippine Custody was started by some of our friars in Italy. It is growing and has numerous Philippine vocations. The MI friary in Queson City is doing a fine job. I was very much impressed with the medical center they operate. They take care of the medical needs of the poor in their area. The Custody also has a theological seminary in Manila, and was building a new building while I was there. It is about one mile from the airport.

My final visit was to their friary out in the countryside. It is a large place and serves as their novitiate and they are getting vocations. On Sunday morning after Mass, I took a walk around the property. I heard a dog barking and spotted her and saw she was protecting her pups. Then she came at me attacking from the rear ripping away at the seat of my pants! I was angry because my new trousers were ruined. Fortunately I had another pair. I remained a few more days with the friars enjoying the time I spent with them before returning to the States. My only regret was that I was unable to stop over in Hawaii to visit the USS Arizona memorial at Pearl Harbor, which the Japs attacked on December 7, 1941.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I was born on March 23, 1919, in Chicago, Illinois, on the 1200 block of South Wabash. I was born in my parents' apartment. My parents were immigrants from Calabria, Southern Italy.

My Father came to the United States when he was 17 years old, with his older brother, Anthony, who was 22. My Grandfather, Gaspard, sent his two sons to the United States to work for one year at the railroad company in Blue Island, Illinois. His cousin was foreman, and when he needed help, he would write to his little town in Italy and ask for reinforcements.

My Grandfather sent his two sons to Chicago, to work for one year, and then to return to Calabria with the money they earned. He wanted the money to buy a piece of land in the village of Murano Pincipato.

I visited this village in 1995, with my brother, Father George, and my sister, Frances. I really enjoyed the visit. My cousins lived on the land my grandfather purchased when my father and uncle worked on the railroad. The money saved was used to buy this beautiful property, and its main feature is mature chestnut trees. Chestnuts are very popular in Italy, so the property was a great investment for the family.

My father had three years of schooling in Italy. When he arrived in the States he went to night school to learn English. He spoke English without an accent!

My mother's maiden name was Tucci, and my father's patron saint was St. John the Baptist. They were married in 1910 in Chicago, at the church of Santa Maria Incarnata.

Six of their children were baptized at the Italian parish where they were married. My folks had a good marriage, and our family was close-knit.

By 1915, my father was able to go into business for himself, hauling freight in Chicago. He started out with a horse and wagon, and soon, he was able to buy a truck. His business grew.

He also had four newsstands in the city, on the corner of Jackson and Clinton.

In 1926, the Eucharistic Congress was held in Chicago, and Pa and my two sisters attended the celebration at Soldier's Field. It rained and rained all day! It was a mess, and people couldn't wait to get home.

My father and sisters, Rose and Josephine, finally got home and my father came down with pneumonia. In fact, it was double pneumonia. Ma feared the worst—she thought we were going to lose him. Thank God we found a doctor who was very conscientious and by following his instructions to the letter, we were able to nurse him back to health. In those days, there were no vaccines, so it was touch and go, until the doctor declared my father out of danger.

I grew up in a nice neighborhood. I had lots of friends, but there were a few kids who were not nice to me. I grew up in the era that Tom Brokaw called the "Great Generation."

One of my favorite hobbies was to identify the make and model of cars. It wasn't too hard though, since there were few models compared to today.

The building of Midway Airport was a big deal, and we were amazed that people actually dared to fly in one of those things. I remember the first airplane crash, which was about 1934. The German Zeppelin actually flew over our backyard in the early 1930s.

We hardly ever heard of murders, not counting Al Capone and the gangsters, of course.



The Great Depression was a bad period in American History. I can remember hearing that people actually committed suicide because they lost their savings. Many banks closed, but thank God my father's bank remained solvent—he banked with one of the major banks in downtown Chicago.

President Roosevelt started the Conservation Corps for young boys, and the W.P.A. create lots of jobs for the men. Every little bit helped. This program didn't pay much but it did provide for food and home.

The year 1933 brought the World's Fair to Chicago, that gave a real boost to the economy of the city. My Pa had a customer that did display work for the World Fair. He would give free tickets to my father for us kids. Ford Corp. had an assembly line for their cars. The Burlington R. R. had their latest passenger train. It was a beautiful train. In fact, after the war, I took a trip to California with my parents and we traveled on the Burlington. How many hours it took to get to Los Angeles, I can't say for sure, but it was fast and comfortable. The World's Fair was very interesting. The highlight for us was to see the Italian Air Force do its stuff, as they flew over our house. We were so proud of the "home team."

There were rumbles from Europe that Germany was becoming stronger and stronger, day by day. Deep down, everyone feared that the military buildup would lead to war, sooner or later.

When Italy joined up with Hitler, our alarm grew. Italian Americans were very proud to be Americans. We had our men in the armed forces of the United States, and becoming a citizen was a big deal. Many decent Italian boys and girls were killed in the Pacific and European theaters.

Americans, as a whole, did not want to go to war. President Roosevelt initiated the draft, although he promised that we would not go to war. We felt that with two oceans, we were safe. Pearl Harbor showed us how very wrong we were.

I refused to volunteer, and I was finally drafted on December 2, 1941. Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japs five days later, on December 7.

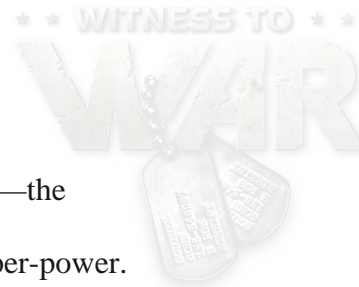
We reached a point of no return. President Roosevelt declared war on Japan on December 8, 1941—what a way for American Catholics to celebrate the Marian feast of the Immaculate Conception!

The next day, December 9, Hitler declared war on the United States. Those who understood military matters were appalled, since they knew we had to fight on two fronts, at the opposite ends of the earth.

Once war was officially declared, sad as we were, Americans were united behind the war effort. Little did we know what it would entail. Our armed forces totaled 16,000,000 men and women. Our people at home got involved in the manufacturing of all the supplies and weapons necessary to execute the war. People were proud of their sons and daughters in the armed forces.

We won the war. At great cost life and family.

Our G.I.s were discharged and they couldn't wait to get home. Many took advantage of the G.I. Bill, went to school, and got college degrees. Armed with the awful memory of war, the Great Generation went to work to build up our country. Not only our country



but in one of the most incredible gestures of humanitarianism in human history—the Marshall Plan—we rebuilt the countries that we bombed during the war.

Due in great part to our behavior as gracious victors, America became a super-power.

Today, the world seems to have forgotten the American sacrifices of 50 years ago.

The country seems to have lost its way, as well. Growing up in the era of the Great Depression, surviving World War II, our culture seemed to be floundering. By the later '60s and '70s, Rock and Roll took over the country and the world. By the early '80s, we were entering a new age, and nobody knew the rules. Prices sky-rocketed. The well-educated Yuppies made money hand over fist without effort, it seemed to us old timers. As I look back on all I have seen I have no idea where we are going. I don't know where all this will end up.

I am confident that the Church, chastised but not beaten, as St. Paul said, will continue to be the voice of moral leadership in the world. The promise of Jesus, that He would be with us always, gives me great hope.

In retrospect, I am grateful for so many things. First of all, that I had such wonderful parents, we knew they were devoted to each other, and to the proper raising of their 10 children. Today, now in 2004, there are four of us left: my brother, Father George, a Claretian priest; my sister Frances, and Betty, who was and remains the baby of the family.

I love my country, the United States of America. I am proud of what we, the boys of the World War II era accomplished, green though we were, we had a job to do, and we did it, with valor and honor. I belonged to the 37th Division, 148th Regiment, Company K. With the draft, we were thrown together with boys from all over the country, a real melting pot. Once we got to know each other, we risked our lives to save each other, because now we were no longer strangers, but buddies, and buddies don't leave anyone behind. We formed a bond that cannot be put into words. Fifty years later at our reunion, we picked up where we left off in the Pacific theater of war. We celebrated for those who lived, we mourned for those who died. We cried.

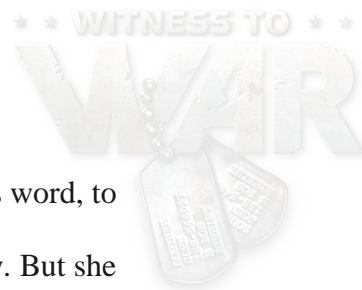
My parents greatest legacy to me is my faith in the Catholic Church. It is taking some lumps just now, but I think God has a plan, and things are unfolding according to His plan.

Then, there is Marytown. The soft spot in my heart. I am so proud of Marytown. I am so blest to have been a part of Marytown. I am so happy that I knew the founders of Marytown—Father Dominic Symanski, and Father Cyril Kita—who made sure Marytown had a solid foundation.

God has been so good to me. St. Francis called me to 'rebuild his church,' a call I have tried to be worthy of. We certainly have done enough building! First, at Crystal Lake, then in Kenosha, where we did everything from printing magazines to milking cows.

Today, we are carrying on our mission in Libertyville, Illinois, where we have added a retreat and conference center. Our Chapel of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for adoration of Our Lord. Our chapel is replicated after St. Pauls-Outside-the-Walls, Rome, Italy.

My devotion to the Blessed Mother was learned from the sisters in St. Dorothy's school (BVM Sisters). They taught me how to pray the rosary and devotion to the Holy Eucharist. We were always taught to visit the church. I learned that going to Mass on



Sunday was as natural as breathing. I learned that a gentleman always keeps his word, to his family, friends, and God.

The Blessed Mother watched over me, as a carefree child of the Windy City. But she really went into overdrive, throwing her Blue Mantle around me from Chicago into battle. This cannot be disputed. There were so many times when I should have been on the casualty list, beginning with my very first engagement. Nothing else can explain it.

As I wind up my meanderings, it has just dawned upon me. And what I have just realized brings me close to tears: World War II started on the Marian feast of December 8, 1941. In the Japanese theater of war, we received the news that the war was over on August 15, 1945, the great feast of Mary's Assumption.

Isn't it just like a Mother, to save the best for last?



DEDICATION OF WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

The weekend of May 27-30, 2004, was a big day for me, and for all Americans, as our country dedicated its new World War II Memorial in Washington, DC. I celebrated this momentous event with about forty veterans of our old 37th Division. We stayed at a Best Western Motel in Arlington, Virginia, Bro. Hugo Lamm, OFM CONV., came with me to help me get around; he was a good caretaker!

The Memorial is beautiful and has a spiritual quality to it. You just can't help remembering these brave people who fought and died for our country. This generation will be remembered in history, and all Americans in the years to come should visit this Memorial. I am proud to be part of this generation; we were simple people. We lived during the great depression and survived it and then fought World War II. Like many others who came from Europe to this country, my parents were loyal to America and proud to be Americans. May God bless my generation!

Fr. James McCurry was my guest and we had a wonderful time. He led the prayer at our banquet. Everyone loved him as he has a way with people. I knew only one of the veterans in our group, but we had a good time reminiscing and telling stories. I also met a lot of Marine Corps veterans and was able to visit the Marine Corps Iwo Jima Memorial. My deceased brother-in-law, Tom served in the battle for Iwo Jima and the men who raised the flag there were from his company, Easy Company. My brother Pat was a Marine also, and served in the Marine Air Corps in China.

Enclosed is a layout of the World War II Memorial; it is most beautiful! The idea for the National World War II Memorial was born at an Ohio fish fry in 1987. A World War II veteran, Robert Durbin, confronted Congresswoman Kaptor at the fish fry: "Mrs. Kaptor, where is the World War II monument in Washington? She replied that it was the Iwo Jima Memorial. As the crowd gathered around Robert Durbin, he explained that the Iwo Jima Memorial was dedicated to one battle and only one branch of the Armed Forces, the Marine Corps. He also pointed out that it was located in Virginia and not in the nation's capital. Congressman Kaptor's staff researched the issue. As a result, she introduced legislation to build the World War II Memorial, which eventually was enacted by Congress. Senator Bob Dole and others subsequently helped to promote it.

Fr. James McCurry pointed something out to me. He said it was built in the right spot. The Memorial faces the George Washington Monument. Washington was our first president and led the American Army during the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) during which 6,824 were killed, 8,445 were wounded with another 18,5000 dying from disease. The Lincoln Memorial is also located in the area. Lincoln preserved the Union during the Civil War of 1861-1865. In both armies, 204,070 were killed, 382,681 were wounded and another 413,952 died from other causes. The new Memorial represents all those who gave their lives in World War II fighting Germany, Japan, and Italy. Over 16 million men and women served in the military from 1941-1945. Thank God we won the war or we might be speaking Japanese or German today. America is great.

Thank you and God bless you,
Bro. Raphael Ruffolo, OFM CONV.



MY LAST WORDS

I want to wrap up my stories with a few more added comments. I come from an era that Tom Brokaw calls the “Greatest Generation,” and as I look back, we were a “great generation.” After WWI things were going well economically. I can remember the days of Prohibition when the beer taverns were not open. During the early 1930s the Depression was awful but somehow the country survived and we were happy. WWII was started and we got through it. Americans were all united. Our men and women went out to war. I met a lot of good men in the armed forces. The majority of them professed faith in a religion. There were very few atheists. The Protestants, Jews, and Catholics all got along. In his book, “The Greatest Generation Speaks,” Tom Brokaw comments:

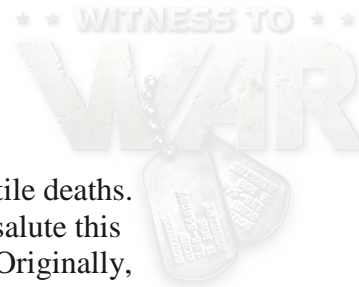
Were members of the Greatest Generation more spiritual or religiously faithful than their offspring or succeeding generations? Spirituality is difficult to quantify, but it's clear from the letters I received, and from anecdotal and other evidence from organized religions, that faith and religious belief were widely and openly embraced.

Certainly the combat veterans with whom spoke were for the most part men who could testify to the truth of the saying that there were no atheists in foxholes.

I'm grateful to God and the Blessed Mother that my life was spared many times and I'm not exaggerating the facts. One instance was when American artillery fell short and hit our company. Our casualties were many. I, myself, was slightly wounded in the left arm after being thrown up in the air and then landing like a ton of bricks. Those all around me were either wounded or killed. I spent 40 months in the South Pacific. Thirty months of the 40 were combat. I served in the armed forces and I am proud of what I did. I did my job as an infantry Browning Automatic Rifleman (BAR). This weapon had a lot of fire power. In the infantry platoon there were three squads. Each squad had ten M1 riflemen and one BAR man. The BAR was the fire power for the squad. The Japanese were always on the lookout for the BAR man. The gunner was the target. I was a BAR man for 30 months.

When I entered Manila, there were a lot of casualties and I became assistant squad leader to the squad leader, Leo Rosenbeck, who was wounded. After he was injured, I became the squad leader. I didn't like the idea of being a sergeant because I knew that I would be a target. Let me say that I had very many close calls as the squad leader. After Manila, Our regiment was sent into the Myoko Mountains to relieve the 25th Infantry Division. Mountain fighting was rough. Sgt. Vogel was our platoon sergeant and he got orders to leave the front lines because he was picked to go home. I became a platoon sergeant. In my stories I have an account of my last day of combat.

I want to make it clear that I'm not a hero. It is true that I received the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star with the Oak Leaf Cluster; however, I want to say that all the men in our regiment and division were heroes. We participated in the campaigns of the Solomon Islands which included New Georgia and Bougainville; and Luzon, Philippines. The casualties for the 37th Division during WWII were 1834 men killed, 8218 wounded, and 18 missing in action. Total Japanese killed by the 37th were 35,000. In WWII, sixteen million men and women served in the armed forces. Our total casualties for WWII in the European theater: 185,179 killed; 498,948 wounded; and 66,805 non-hostile deaths. In



the Pacific theater 107,903 were killed; 171,898 wounded; and 48,380 non-hostile deaths. My opinion is that our real heroes were our men and women killed in action. I salute this "Great Generation." I knew many of the men in my battalion who were killed. Originally, America did not want to be involved in WWII. Most of the people were anti-war and I was one of them. Then after Pearl Harbor was bombed, Americans were surprised and angry. War was declared and we all became united. The armed forces were ready to fight and our Americans on the home front supported the effort. When the war was over, we had won. In my opinion, if it had not been for the United States, Hitler would have had a victory in conquering Europe and the entire continent would be speaking German and Italian.

After the war everything was going along nicely. Many of the men and women who served in the armed forces went to college and got degrees. These people made a contribution to our economy. Our G.I.s bought their own homes. Our Catholic school system was tops. Unfortunately in the late 1960s we started to lose nuns, brothers, and priests who taught in our schools. Our Catholic school system changed. Lay teachers, requiring higher salaries, replaced the inexpensive labor of the religious and priests in the schools. In my opinion, let me say that if our religious and priests had remained in our Catholic schools to the extent that they were before the 1960s, the culture today would have not turned for the worst. After Vatican II our vocations for the priesthood dropped. Religious orders and congregations were low. Then along came the issues of abortion, cloning, and euthanasia. We have to pray for the Church in today's world. Out of sixty million American Catholics, only 25% are actively involved in practicing their faith. Europe is worse; however, Poland is in better shape.

Due to our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, hope lies with the youth and young people in the Church today. In addition to his emphasis on youth, the family unit, and the sanctification of the laity, he had held youth rallies all over the world in many countries. In today's Church one can see that the young people have become more active. Father Frank Pavone, national director of Priests for Life, tells us that the The Right to Life Movement is moving ahead.

I'm proud to be a Catholic. I'm grateful to God for the wonderful parents I had and the beautiful extended family that I have. I thank God for the friends and wonderful people that I have met. We should be proud to be Catholics. Our bishops need our prayers. Pray for them. Pray that America will never fall. I am still proud of being a Catholic American even though our country has faults. But we are still Americans. It is a great country.

I am also thankful for my vocation to the Franciscan order. The Blessed Mother played an important role in my journey through life. There were many stumbling blocks as well as many stepping stones. I am grateful to Our Lady for allowing me to be a part of Marytown where I had been quite active as the guardian for 16 years. Looking back over 50 years, who ever would have known that the friars would get the Benedictine monastery? Mother Abbes Audrey of the Clyde, Missouri Benedictine Sisters was a beautiful soul. She wanted us to have the property and so she allowed us to pay a reasonable price for it.

I am thankful for all the religious community and generous benefactors living and deceased that have helped Marytown to grow. Fr. Dominic, who planted the seed for Marytown, was responsible for my coming here. He founded Marytown in 1948 and died



in 1951. It was a tremendous shock to us when he died because we thought that the place would fold. However Fr. Cyril who was the provincial, guardian and novice master, supported Marytown 100 percent. Today Marytown has an active apostolate with beautiful buildings and a chapel with perpetual Eucharistic adoration. It is the National Shrine of St. Maximilian Kolbe with the Militia Immaculata (MI) apostolate spreading throughout the country. I am happy and grateful that I was able to attend both the beatification (October 10, 1971) and the canonization (October 17, 1982) of St. Maximilian Kolbe. At the canonization, I had the honor, along with Fr. James McCurry, of bringing up the gifts to Pope John Paul II.

Marytown is a beautiful place and it has a good community of friars. In my old age (85 years), I am well taken care of. There are still many old timers around: Br. John, Br. Martin and Br. Camillus. These religious men were here when Marytown was started. They are totally dedicated to the Franciscan Order and their total consecration to Our Blessed Mother through the Militia Immaculata.

I am thankful to God for allowing me to be a part of such a worthwhile vocation as well as for my life's entire journey. Please remember me in your prayers, and I will remember you. Thank you and God bless you. May Our Lady continue to watch over us.