

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Milena Miller

Current home town: Athens

Age: Not given

I am the Director of Development at Appalachian Community Visiting Nurse Association, Hospice and Health Services, and have also been the writer/interviewer of many of our clients who are veterans for our newsletter stories. We have made an investment over the years in our relationships with veterans as many become our home health and hospice clients. Many veterans' organizations have been great supporters of ours over the years, working hard to raise funds for hospice through golf tournaments, bingo and other events. In 2001, I designed and built a Veterans' Commemorative Garden here on our property, a place of respite and of tribute to our living veterans and those who have died.

Your project is of special interest to me and I wish I had had more time to prepare for this and to give you more substantial stories and photos. I am sending snippets of some of the stories I have written about our veterans, all of these from the WWII era.

Herbert Ford

Herbert Ford, a WWII veteran born in Logan County, West Virginia, in 1919, was fourth of thirteen children. His father was a coal miner. When Herb quit school in his junior year, he worked in the mines for eight months, just to earn money to buy the new suit that he wore after he returned to school and graduation. Herb joined the Army, serving in the 386th battalion, for black soldiers only. He served in northern Africa, until they were deployed to Italy.

"We wore packs on our backs and were lowered from the boat onto the beach just like pictures in movies of soldiers wading through the water, holding their rifles high above their heads," Herb remarked. "Bombs were going off all around us and we had to march in a single line between land mines." His platoon marched 25 miles in this line, hauling construction supplies to a site where they built a depot. Herb was in charge of the inventory of all items used in building bridges and other structures.

When his company transferred from Naples to Florence, Herb contracted malaria and was in the hospital for two months. While stationed there, he took college courses. "My economics professor was from University of Maine, Spanish professor from University of New Mexico, and business administration professor from University of Georgia," he said. After discharge from the service, Herb worked in a steel mill in Detroit and later, in New York, he schooled in a machine shop. He worked for General Motors from 1952-1985.

Ford was in good health when he went into the service and meant to keep it that way. An avid believer in exercise, he lifted weights until recent health problems began. Mr. Ford died in October, 2011, at age 92.



Herbert Ford and our home care aide John Quine
(Photo by Brian Blausler/B&B Studios, Athens, OH)

Hal Relyea

Raised in Illinois, Hal Relyea was a paratrooper in Swing's Angels during WWII, serving in the Pacific Theater. When U.S. troops were being sent to northern Japan, General McArthur commissioned Hal and some other soldiers to design a booklet explaining the type of clothing to be worn during the invasion. Because the cold temperatures were similar to Alaska and the Arctic, one fellow who had worked with Admiral Byrd lent his expertise. Printed on a newspaper quality paper, the graphics are typical of 1940s cartoon characters. Mr. Relyea lives today with his wife Beth in Athens, OH.

William Kane

William Kane of Athens, OH spent his entire life working in some type of law enforcement. He came by this naturally, as his father worked as a detective for the railroads. Born in Bellaire, OH, William walked seven miles to school every day during the depression. Kane spent WWII in the Pacific theater and saw

conflict firsthand. "I was always a good shot as a kid when I hunted, so I never was afraid of being shot by the enemy," remarked Kane. Kane was hired to work as a security officer at Ohio University in the 1960s and later received a degree in criminal justice.

James Hoisington

James Hoisington from Athens, OH, served for two years during WWII in the South Pacific. He remembered well his time in the Philippine Islands. "We lived in t-shirts while Filipinos wore burlap sacks. My family would send t-shirts to me but I never got them. One day, I saw the Filipino mailman on his bicycle with a big package filled with t-shirts, so I knew what happened to them." Hoisington was in charge of locked explosives and the natives always wanted to get those keys. Said Jim, "The natives used dynamite to explode the water, killing the fish so they could be dried and eaten. That was one of their main food sources." Hoisington continued to serve in the Honor Guard and was active in the VFW, American Legion and Voiture 40 et 8 until two years before his death in 2005. He worked hard to help raise funds to provide scholarships to nurses and other services to his community.

Mary O'Malley

Mary O'Malley and two office mates joined the Navy for the independence and relief from overtime hours at their jobs. Mary sensed she could do more for the war effort than at her work at the munitions factory. She became eligible for active duty in 1945 and signed on for another year. At age eighteen, she experienced a lot of heartache in working with amputees and shell-shocked patients in a Utah hospital, but found the work rewarding. "Many of the gals couldn't take working with the limbless or guys in a stupor. These were sights unknown to average 18-year olds," Mary remembered, "but I felt these fellows needed us." Mary O'Malley was a home health patient for her last years and died in 2008.

Ernest Lanning

Ernest Lanning of The Plains, OH, lost a limb in WWII, having taken a hit from a 31-caliber machine gun in Japan, then rolling into a fox hole where a phosphorus grenade severely burned his back and legs. "When you're 19 years old and something like that happens, you're scared to death," he remarked. "I must have been in shock when they sawed through my bone on the beach; they didn't have time to set the compound fracture and didn't have any pain killers." Lanning developed an infection from his burns and was in an amputee hospital for over one year. "They built me a wooden leg back then for about \$18, while today's prostheses cost around \$8,000." He reflected, "They probably cut off limbs back then rather than set them because there just wasn't time." Lanning was a home health patient off and on, and, after the death of his wife, moved to an assisted living residence where he remains today.



Dsc 553 Ernest Lanning (Photo by Brian Blausler/B&B Studios, Athens, OH)