

## Into the Navy a lad, and out a man

Guy Talbot  
San Pedro

If you can imagine being 18 years old with two years of high school, broke, with holes the size of silver dollars in both shoes, living with your brother in Topeka, Kan., in the dead of winter, then you should know why I joined the Navy in 1940.

It is hard to describe the inner feelings I had when I arrived at Great Lakes Naval Training Center and they issued me all those new clothes and shoes, and started feeding me three times a day. The chief in charge of my company was like the father I never had, guiding, advising, counseling, and trying to make me into a man in a few short weeks. I sometimes felt I was going to burst with all the appreciation I had inside me. It was, therefore, a sad parting

when they put me on a train bound for Bremerton, Wash., to go aboard my first ship, the USS Nevada.

I soon found that life aboard ship was just like the training center. I had dozens of good friends, and there were plenty of chiefs around to teach me the things I had to know to be a man. They taught me everything; how to live in a small area where there were hundreds of other men and how to act ashore in those days when sailors were not loved too much by the local people who put up signs like "Sailors and dogs keep off the lawn." It must have been the training the chiefs gave me, because I felt no resentment against the local people who did those things, and it made me feel even closer to the Navy.

I was still just 18 years old when we left Bremerton and went to Pearl Harbor. It was like a foreign country to me, and the chiefs again had to teach me

how to cope with the way I was treated when I went ashore. So here I was, 18 years old, and the Navy had already taught me more about how to understand other people's feelings than I had learned during my first 17 years.

Then Dec. 7, 1941, arrived and my security blanket was taken away from me, my home was sunk, my friends were laid out on the deck, covered with blankets, and the chiefs could advise me no more because they had no experience in war and death. This day I was really a man and had to draw from within all they had taught me so I could even begin to cope with this sudden change in my way of life. On Dec. 10, I was transferred to the light cruiser USS Phoenix, and we left for Australia with a convoy of troopships.

War. What cannot be said about it? Every man finds his own hell or peace in it. I found more peace than hell, because

I belonged to something: the ship, the other men, and the reason we were there. We fought our way up the island chain, returning to the States only once during the whole war. We were overseas when the war started, and we were still there when it ended.

When we arrived back in Long Beach, there was no one to greet us, nor did we expect it. I loaded up my duffle bag, caught the Red Car to Los Angeles and went into a bar to call my brother in Hollywood to pick me up. "Welcome home" is all he said.

When my enlistment was up I decided to get out of the Navy, and I knew I had enough training to be able to face anything on the outside. Civilian life was harder than I thought it would be; I felt all alone facing the whole world. However, I found a job, got married and settled down. After one year of trivial jobs I knew I had to find a better way,

and here was the government telling me, if you go back to school we will pay you for it. My God, they had raised me, now they were going to educate me. It took me six years to graduate from USC, and they paid me all the way. By this time, I had a daughter and knew I had to buy a house, and there was the G.I. Bill still helping me through life.

Today, 34 years after I got out of the Navy, I still have a big warm spot in my heart for it, and my best friends are still my old Navy buddies. I still give thanks to that day, 41 years ago, when I walked into the Navy recruiting office. Being in the Navy made me the man I am today, happy, secure, with a good job and a wonderful family that I have taught everything I know.

The Navy was my family, it clothed me, fed me, mothered me, fathered me, protected me, educated me and made me a man. How can I give enough thanks?

## 64 years later, patriotism has faded into dejection

By Max Morrison  
Seal Beach

I enlisted in the 2nd Iowa Infantry at the age of 19. The town was teeming with patriotism. . . . It seemed as though all the young men of my age were enlisting and the older ones were buying Liberty Bonds.

I was brought up in North Dakota, loving the American flag and all it stood for.

Now after 64 years, well on my way to a 84th birthday, I wonder just how dejected and depressed a former World War veteran can become — one having never been awarded a pension, government schooling and Social Security benefits — each denied because I was in the wrong war or a notch above the poverty line.

I can't recall the United States government's ever offering me one word of thanks for the full year I spent drilling, marching, hiking and crawling through desert cactus among the snakes and gila monsters. Or for the long-distant maneuver treks such as the eight-day, 125-mile hike in 100-degree temperatures to Pancho Villa's battlefield at Columbus.

The second year of my Army life began with the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean where practically every soldier on board ship during the 14 days was exposed to or struck by influenza.

Our ship was one of the smallest in the convoy, carrying two battalions of machine gun companies; yet from this group, 11 soldiers were pushed overboard into the sea. . . . The "Empress of Russia," also in the convoy, buried 57 soldiers.

More memories: Our unit crossing the treacherous, mine-infested English Channel and debarking at Cherbourg, France. The bon voyage from a Frenchman who handed me a slip of paper bearing a message with an interpretation: "Chacun pour soi, et Dieu pour tout." (Each one for himself, and God for all.)

I managed to keep that piece of paper

throughout the remainder of the war. It seemed to help me in the next eight months as I slogged through the rain and mud, cleaning out — and holing up in — old chicken coops, barns and beneath leaky shelter-halves pitched on hillsides with little protection from almost daily rains.

Twice I was hospitalized in Mayet with influenza in a building which could not be called a hospital. There was no heat and no kitchen.

Upon my discharge I found my unit had moved. I had become a walking casualty without a service record. Bewildered and perplexed, I climbed aboard the first train I saw on the tracks, and after two days and two nights in an already crowded car I arrived in Cadillac, south of Bordeaux.

At 2 a.m. we were taken to an old hotel and billeted on the second floor of an annex. The weight of the 41 men proved too much for the floor — it split and the entire group fell the two flights into a wine cellar. Injured ones, and I was included, were taken to an infirmary.

I included this injury in a claim for a WWI pension in Los Angeles in the early 30s, along with X-ray proof of scar tissue on one lung. To strengthen my case, I added an eye injury received at a machine gun range while at Camp Cody, N.M. . . . A Colt air-cooled machine gun exploded, and a fragment found its way into my left eye as I was bringing up ammunition. The claim was denied.

I have procedural and appellate rights, and I can hire an attorney, but at my age, I'm not about to take on the U.S. government, as the Iranian hostages are attempting to do to improve the \$12.50 a day recommended for their ordeal.

For my ordeal I will do better than that:

I will gladly accept \$1,000 and agree to again display the American flag; and I will also agree not to join Jane Fonda's crusade by carrying banners before recruiting stations, which might read: "DON'T ENLIST. WAIT UNTIL THEY FORCE YOU!"



**Fighting an inferno at sea**

The crew battles to save the carrier USS Belleau Wood. Although heavily damaged, the ship survived. However, after a kamikaze attack in the Pacific in World War II, 10 other U.S. carriers were lost in the war in the Pacific.

Official Navy photo released by Dept. of Defense.

## A reluctant GI, I got back more than I gave

Michael Templeton  
Long Beach

In the spring of 1968, the war in Vietnam was in full swing and requiring record draft calls. Like many students of the time, I supported both the draft and the war, and debated regularly with protesting students who, like me, were safely deferred from both while attending Long Beach City College. Then someone discovered that I was well into my third year of a program that normally takes a serious student only two years to complete, and my deferment was canceled. I began to question the morality of the draft (involuntary servitude). Within two weeks, I was drafted, "physicaled" and inducted.

As a new recruit at Fort Ord, it didn't take long for me to learn the ways of the Army. They promised that those who scored highest on a battery of

intelligence tests would earn the best training and the choicest jobs. I received the highest scores in the company, and in the best Army tradition was sent to the Infantry.

After completing 24 weeks of training, the Army decided that I had become as much of a soldier as I ever would, and gave me my orders. After a short leave, I was to be sent to Panama for jungle warfare training for Vietnam.

While on leave I was married, and, after a two-week honeymoon, I was off to Panama, arriving on my 21st birthday. It was six months before my wife was allowed to join me, and we were frustrated to find the Army unprepared to help us in obtaining a visitor's visa, share moving expenses, or in finding adequate housing. Since the Army provided no housing for lower-classed enlisted men, my wife and I were forced to live off base in the only housing we could afford, a small one-room slum apartment with no hot water or air

conditioning, both necessities in a tropical climate.

I never received the promised jungle training, and served the next 18 months as a military policeman in the Canal Zone. During those months I witnessed a revolution, an attempted coup, and saw three of my fellow MP's killed in the line of duty. In all that time I never heard one GI say he was glad to be in the Army, and many voluntarily left the relatively safety of Panama for the promise of an early out by serving in Vietnam.

Before I knew it, my tour was drawing to a close, and my last 10 days proved to be a fitting end to my military career. For after a year and a half in the tropics, the Army chose to return me to a snow-covered South Carolina dressed in a light summer uniform. I was housed in unheated barracks which also lacked hot water. Within days we all had terrible colds. I went to the company commander and threatened to file a complaint with

the Inspector General. The captain acknowledged that I had that right, but warned me that I would have to stay in the Army until the complaint had been investigated. I withdrew gracefully and spent the next 10 days taking my turn at holding the hot light bulbs that hung from the barracks ceiling to keep warm.

I returned to Long Beach in January 1970, a very happy civilian. I didn't expect bands to greet me or an outpouring of thanks from friends or neighbors, which was a good attitude to have since no one did thank me. But then I had never thanked them for serving, either. It was reward enough just to be home, and I had the future to think about. I was 22 years old, soon to be a father and I had no job.

I immediately began looking for work and found employers willing to take applications once they found out I was no longer draftable. Within two weeks I had a job, and a short time later I went back to school at night.

It was then that the government began to come to my aid in a way they never had while I was in the military. I found that I qualified for GI school benefits which were far in excess of the actual cost of my education. Soon after graduating from Cal State Long Beach, I found that the state of California would help me buy my first home through the Cal Vet Home Loan program. Later that year I was given 10 points for being a veteran when taking a state employment examination. However reluctant a soldier I might have been, I didn't hesitate one minute when it came time for collecting on benefits.

The value of all these experiences and benefits when put to use over a lifetime are impossible to calculate, but I was certainly compensated far beyond my contribution, especially when others gave so much more. My two years in the Army may have seemed like slavery to me at the time, but few slaves have ever been so well rewarded for doing so little.

## Contributors

The Press-Telegram wishes to thank the following readers who also sent essays about their experiences as Veterans.

Dennis B. Krejci  
C. M. Jasper  
William F. Giel  
Cosby M. Newsom  
J. B. Stevens  
Willard G. Clark  
Clarence Sinkey  
James W. Fox

Reith S. Morris  
Joseph Jones  
Phyllis Brewer  
Robert A. Stahl  
Jerry L. Shultz  
Ben Walters  
Jerry Brickley  
R.L. Williams  
Daniel O'Connell  
Geraldine Serle  
Orlen W. Todd, III  
James Moore  
A.M. Langston  
Nick Mekis  
Sam Cabiglo

Tom Witherspoon  
G.D. Tuman  
Frank J. Bomher Sr.  
Harry B. Shorey  
Thomas Urbien  
Ernest N. Holt  
Peter K. Ballou  
Charles H. Kelley  
Howard J. Biddulph  
Bill Saliba  
Allan Dawson  
Harvey Sanders  
A.G. Romano  
Steve Henry  
J. Binney

Steve Henry  
J. Binney  
Stephen E. Martin  
Eugene R. Campbell  
Art Haas  
Richard J. Miller  
Mr. Shirley Blankenship  
Vernon LaBounty  
Joseph F. Geis  
Byrnic F. Birge  
Klaton Chapman  
Noreen Crookshank  
Mariam Game  
Richard P. Sullivan  
Alvin D. Suttle

William E. Peters  
W. J. Hansen  
Frederick R. Baisley  
Hal Johnson  
Glen Bond  
Robert Trinkle  
Tom LaRosa  
Everett Thompson  
Ludwig Pfening  
Rod Stewart  
John S. Dugdale  
Luis J. Franco  
Moises V. Benavides  
David Slayton  
Mr. and Mrs. Royal E. Rounds

## The medals came quite a while later



S. D. MORGAN  
A sailor at 15

By S. D. Morgan  
Long Beach

I was only 15, but if I could join the Navy I could eat. I passed my physical, and on Aug. 7, 1934, I got up about 6 a.m., washed the best I could, put two towels, a piece of soap and my toothbrush in a bag. I headed to the recruiting station in Birmingham. A few hours later, I and other Negro young men who had signed up got in the car and headed for the train station. The guy in charge lined us up at the train car marked "Colored," then said, "When I call your name, get aboard." We did.

When we arrived in Virginia, a little old white woman came up to us and asked if we were the Scottsboro boys. In training they taught us to know an officer's rank by the stripes on his arms and shoulders, how to set up a table in 15 minutes, how to serve from the left, how

to make a bunk in 10 minutes, shine a pair of shoes in five.

After training, I was assigned to the USS Salt Lake City in Long Beach Harbor.

There were four other Negro mess attendants on board. They seemed glad to see me. I asked them how was the thing going. One said, "Man, it's rough. Some folks on this ship don't think we are human. They hand you a plate out of the pantry after the officers finish eating and you have to stand in a corner or stoop and hold your plate in one hand and eat with the other."

We went to sea every Monday morning, and came in on Fridays.

After several months, I was assigned to the USS Nashville in Philadelphia and then the USS Benham in Pearl Harbor. It was on the Benham that I saw action. On one mission we were assigned to go to the aid of the carrier USS Yorktown, which had come under Japanese attack. It was hit bad, on fire

and the flight deck was almost in the water. American planes coming back from missions against the Japanese fleet didn't have any place to land and were setting down in the ocean.

There were men in the oily water all around the carrier and the destroyer, and we began pulling them aboard as fast as we could.

One fellow I was pulling aboard said to me, "Darky, if you could grab my leg, maybe I can make it." I reached for his leg, but he didn't have one. I managed to pull him aboard, but when I checked on him later, he was dead.

A call went out for qualified swimmers. I was one, so they put a kind of line on me and I'd swim out, get a knocked-out sailor, then wait to be pulled in like a fish. The salt water, oil, and blood didn't taste very good, but I kept at it till we got the word to come back aboard.

We stayed in Pearl Harbor for a few weeks for repairs, and cleaning.

Subsequently, I was assigned to the USS Wasp, an aircraft carrier. After what I had seen happen to carriers, I just fell to pieces and wound up at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Oakland instead.

After my discharge, I got a job at the Navy yard, but they let me go, said I was too nervous.

I stayed around Long Beach, and I met a girl from Louisiana. My nerves didn't bother her too much, and she worked while I went to school under the G.I. Bill. Since then, I have worked for the city of Long Beach, on a garbage truck and, until my retirement, as a harbor guard.

A few years ago, some fellows who had been in Vietnam were telling me about medals they had received for fighting. I wrote my sister, who now lives in New York, and she went to the V.A. In about six weeks, I received five medals, including the Purple Heart. And wouldn't you know it! They sent them to me in a paper bag.

## Long road back from Vietnam nightmare

By Mel Monroe  
Long Beach

The whupping sound of the helicopter blades as they clawed the sky for a grip was reassuring to me. I was 2,000 feet over a valley about 20 minutes flying time from a place known as Baldy, South Vietnam. I was seated beside the left gunner looking out the windowless opening of a CH-46 troop chopper.

Intelligence said there was a force of irregular enemy soldiers occupying the villages below. Charlie, as we called him.

The preparatory air strike was underway. Whup, whup, whup, whup. The only sound that could be heard as the A-4 Skyhawks dropped from the sky like eagles to the kill. That sound was reassuring as the silver bird below reached out to the village with its napalm talons. First from one end, then the other, the aluminum canisters tumbled to their destination: the village and the people looking up from below.

Then came flash, the black smoke, and the flames reaching to the heavens with the souls of those in its grasp. Napalm devours the oxygen from around those it captures. It splashes on the hapless target, consuming the flesh, relentlessly consuming.

The Cobras were finishing up the attack with cannon and machine-gun fire as we started down. The change of pitch of the chopper blades told all of us that our turn was approaching soon, very soon.

I was a photographer for the United States Marine Corps. My job was to capture the war in pictures and words. But first I was a soldier, a Marine. We were all Marines as we huddled there.



**BROTHER-TALK:** Mel Monroe, right, takes a break with his brother, Bill, during a reunion at a military post. Memories of home, family, friends.

The bird jerked as it dropped to the ground. Without a word, at a run, two columns fanned out the back to either side into position and flopped to their bellies. The order went out to begin our sweep of the village.

Thirty, maybe forty, men and boys began the longest walk of their lives. Twenty-three charred and torn women and children lay before us. Not one

enemy soldier was found. We did find memories and nightmares to tear at our souls and haunt us in our sleep for years to come.

For our lieutenant it was two 8-year-old boys huddled to comfort each other until the napalm sought them out. His own boy was 7; he had a picture.

For me it was the young momma-san sitting in the smoldering bambo poles

that had once framed her home.

I stumbled upon her almost innocently. It was her eyes. They had some power over me. I couldn't turn away from the agony in those eyes. Even after I crawled back into the helicopter to my seat by the gunner's window, they drew me to turn — to look again at the young woman among the smoking ruins as she ever so gently rocked back and forth, back and forth. I sat motionless, shocked, staring.

Whup, whup, whup, whup. The bird clawed at the air trying to free itself of that place. Shuddering, it grasped the sky and climbed toward the heavens. I sat quietly looking back. I couldn't understand why she didn't put it down. It didn't cry, it couldn't, it was dead. Why was she comforting it?

Something inside me was breaking. No one heard me scream.

It has been more than 11 years since my country called on its young men to defend it. I didn't run to Canada, I wasn't drafted, I answered the call of my country and enlisted. When I came home, they spat at me.

My psychiatrist told me the dreams I had of killing people were an expression of the guilt I felt.

The fact that I couldn't tell the dreams from reality was because I had an urgent need to relieve myself and be free of the overpowering burden. When I told him I wanted to be a psychologist he offered to assist me, if he could.

After seven years developing a sales career, a career I was not happy in, I walked away from it and went back to school. Maybe if I can help to ease the distress for some it will help even the scale. At least it will help me.

After all, I can still hear me scream.

Why does that brief time hang like a drop of clear water in the heavy mist of the past? How can I remember faces I haven't seen in 40 years?

Banzulev, Egan, Ginsburg. Why was it such a great time to go to The Rosebud on payday and get back by eleven?

World War II veterans received a warmer welcome than other returnees because fighting Nazis is more blessed than fighting Commies. If Bogie had made "Panmunjon" instead of "Casablanca," there would not be the cult-following and it would not be on TV every three months.

—Mary Noonan Piotrowski  
Lakewood

I must state my opposition to the widespread notion that all Vietnam vets are bitter, maladjusted incompetents.

To me, readjustments meant not having to worry about a mortar round crashing through the roof at 2 am. I do recall being a bit more suspicious about Things That Go Bump in the Night. All this makes me no different from the millions of vets who returned from World War II, Korea or any other conflict.

—Mike Keville  
Long Beach

## Some wounds take a lot longer to heal

By Chuck E. Webb  
Long Beach

In 1968 I was headed for Vietnam. I was trained in the infantry, because I was still young enough to lack more technical skills. The uniform didn't make me a man, but I did stand taller.

The transition to manhood really began in the jungle. Scared often, but no problem in understanding why I was there. Developing new friends, "sticking together," promising to always keep in touch and hoping we could. Hearing Walter Cronkite report "no casualties," but knowing I had lost a buddy that day. Didn't he count?

Then it started to unravel. It was harder to survive the long days and nights. Losing buddies, thinking you might be next. Being introduced to drugs to get through it. Doesn't anyone know why we are here? We could have won, if they let us.

The John Wayne movies they showed us weren't enough to boost morale. We needed more. Maybe a rally supporting our being there instead of reports that anti-war demonstrators and activists were filling the streets and parks at home. Maybe understanding that my "campus" was the jungle. I was trying to make the world a better place, too.

I was lucky. The physical wounds healed, leaving only some dependence on morphine, which was finally kicked.

I came home and packed the uniform and decorations away. The memories of the people left behind when it was over, the experiences (good and bad) and the idea that I had become a trained killer couldn't be packed away so easily. There is limited job market availability for "hired killers," and now I had to find a job — something that could support my new wife and myself.

Searching for myself, I became, in a succession of jobs, gas station attendant, plumber's helper, carpenter's helper, truck driver, and then it happened.

We had a baby — a boy. What now? I had to make a better life and spend time at home instead of on the road. A VA educational benefit let me learn in two years how to be a "respiratory therapist." Two years of study, tired most of the time, loving my wife for working so I could go to school. Loving my son, even when changing diapers and losing sleep. Finally, school was over. A variety of respiratory therapy jobs and now, six years later, an administrative job in respiratory therapy. Things are looking up. Almost.

Nightmares? I still have them. Some help from a private counselor. Lots of support from my family and close friends. It helped me understand that my part in Vietnam was not enough for me to feel personal guilt or ashamed of being an American.

My efforts on behalf of our country were given freely. I cannot accept thanks just because I expect it. A thank-you not freely given is no thanks at all. I don't support mass demonstrations on behalf

of vets. I believe each individual has a separate need based on separate experiences. Our government should only rehabilitate those who really need it, provide medical care for those with legitimate need, but most important — restore in most of us the pride we might have lost.

Disappointed in our society? Yes, to some degree. There is apathy and lack of patriotism. There are social do-good programs that restrict my ability to do better for myself.

I'm sophisticated and cynical enough now to know that when my son is older he will have my support if he chooses not to serve in the military.

We need a new sense of pride in our country and respect for one another. We need to heal the wounds of the past and we need to unite now to strengthen our individual freedoms, for each coming day and more importantly for our sons and daughters.

## I'd do it again if I could

By Ruby N. Marcum  
Long Beach

From the morning of Pearl Harbor, my struggle to enter the service of my country: First, I was turned down by the pilot service for delivery of planes to the war zones, next by the WAVES, and on three occasions by the WACS.

Finally, after meeting the commanders of the WAVES and WACS through a mutual friend, I was given a special waiver and entered the WACS.

Why would a college graduate and instructor in all office subjects be turned down? I was just 4 feet, 9 inches tall! Thus, I became possibly the smallest G.I. of World War II.

After basic training, I was selected with 130 others from the corps, to serve in Radar and Radio Intelligence with General Douglas MacArthur in the South

Pacific, New Guinea, South and North Philippines.

There were endless jungles, three sieges of dengue fever, three battle stars, Presidential Citation with cluster and other honors — all a part of the experience.

I returned to Long Beach after peace was declared and taught at Poly High for one semester.

Did I have any regrets concerning my choice to serve? Absolutely not! I would not trade the battle area experience at any price. And I proved it by re-enlisting, at request of the government, for post-war duty in Europe.

This time I arrived at Zone Command, Salzburg, Austria, within three weeks.

Again, working and living in a foreign country, extensive travel over Europe on leave and in my work allowed me to become acquainted with the

people, their customs and past times.

I especially enjoyed breaking the peace treaty! After Gen. George Patton saved the famous Lippizaner horses from the Russians, he died — but the horses didn't. So, a lieutenant and I commandeered engines and box cars and crossed into Germany to trade electronic equipment for food for the horses. For this, I was honored with a special performance by the horses at Linz, Austria, while I sat in the emperor's plush box with the head of the Austrian government.

A few gripes about the way the government treated me: After discharge and returning to UCLA, four months passed before I received my GI Bill allowance. During my first enlistment I was refused a support allowance for my mother, but was granted it in the second tour.

More important, I was never

hospitalized in the service for three cases of diagnosed tropical fever; I was just given pills endlessly and continued doing three or four jobs at the same time.

Upon my return to civilian life, my dentist found a deterioration of the mandible bones, and concluded I must have contacted infection, possibly in the tropics. A claim with the Veterans Administration was refused because I had not been hospitalized in the service for either problem. Both conditions cost me dearly for many years.

Nevertheless, I consider the advantages of service far superior to any hardships.

Freedom is not free — we must be willing to defend it. I would do it all over again, even at this time, were I not 60 percent disabled and a little too old.

Continued next page.

## A special tribute to nation's veterans

They found their way into the armed forces because only by joining up could they guarantee themselves three solid meals a day. They joined because in their 17th or 18th year they had still not decided what to do with their lives. They joined because they had no choice: Their nation was at war, it called and they had to heed.

They chased Pancho Villa back into Mexico, huddled in trenches in dark French forests, prepared themselves for death when their ships exploded off the coast of Guadalcanal, froze on a Korean hill distinguished only by an anonymous number, struggled against bitterness and disappointment as they slowly made their way through hostile villages in Vietnam.

They came back. With the memories of buddies killed. With wounds — some physical, some psychological, some severely disabling, others merely bothersome — suffered in distant battles.

The receptions they received varied.

Some called home from the first phone they reached and

heard only a quiet "Welcome back." They marched, to fife and drum, down a thousand Main Streets. Some heard only silence when they stepped off the plane. The government presented them with bonuses, money to get an education, funds to buy homes — and, at times, offered nothing but exposure to cold and uncaring bureaucracies.

But whatever their experiences, they have all melted back into America, to lives not very much different from those led by Americans who, for one reason or another, never put on a uniform.

On Memorial Day and on Veterans Day the nation stirs a bit with remembrance for those who did serve. But we thought more was needed to pay tribute to the men and women who interrupted their lives to serve the nation. And so we asked our readers who also are veterans to write brief essays about their experiences. Scores responded — eloquently, movingly, humorously. On the pages that follow, we share their thoughts with you. We ask you to share their stories with us.

## Service altered my life dramatically

By James Lentz  
Seal Beach

"Oregon Coast Shelled" was the flash that came over the radio one cold spring day in 1942. The gentle people of the Finnish fishing village of Ilwaco, located in southwest Washington, were stunned. Japanese submarines had shelled Fort Clatsop on the Oregon coast less than 50 miles from my home. On that fateful day, my teaching career permanently ended with my enlistment in the United States Army.

Fort Lewis, Wash., the nearest induction center, was ankle deep in mud the day I reported for active duty. Shortly, however, I found myself a buck private at Camp Roberts, Calif.

After tramping the Camp Roberts hills for no less than one thousand times as an infantryman, pushing rank from private to sergeant, I found the physical endurance required there was nothing compared to Infantry Training School at Fort Benning, Ga.

Finally after 14 weeks of specialized study, second lieutenant's bars, 20 pounds lighter and in fighting trim, I was sent to the European Theater of Operation to the 4th Armored Division as a platoon commander. Half-tracking across Europe, pressing ever forward, from LaHavre to my final destination, Strakonice, Czechoslovakia, became one confused compression of time. When our outfit was on the offensive, nothing stopped it. There were few casualties, considering the number of miles covered, the prisoners taken and the devastation inflicted. These memories will never fade.

But the memory of Ohrdruf, Germany, dated April 10, 1945, will never fade either. I wrote this letter home:

"I had an experience that will forever live in my memory. Our combat command vehicles rolled into town in freezing weather today. Suddenly we were face to face with naked bodies, red pancaked mud, and incinerators with 200 bodies stacked, ready to be burned. It is too hard for me to stomach. There is no death smell like it in the concentration

camp North Stalag III. As we walked silently along, the impassive-faced soldiers in my platoon were uncharacteristically quiet. These scenes of death swept over us like an avalanche. We have seen so much death but this is harder to comprehend than the death of war. The horror is inconceivable. As we moved through Ohrdruf and then Gotha, there were the names of Beethoven, Mozart and Brahms set in shining gold letters across the front of the Gotha opera house. How can any part of the human race degenerate to this low?"

In 1946, I jumped down out of my half-track in Nuremberg, Germany, and headed home. Adjustment to civilian life came easily. After six weeks annual leave, I accepted a position in the personnel department of the Veterans Administration Hospital in Van Nuys under the veterans preferential point system.

Panic struck, however, when only four months into my position I was felled by 'parrot virus' from sleeping in German chicken coops. I was hospitalized at Birmingham Veterans Administration Hospital. The treatment, care and rehabilitation were unsurpassable. The doctors and consulting physicians saved my life.

After recovery, I returned to work and entered the Army Reserve, ending my military career with the rank of major.

War service dramatically altered my life, as there are no gains without pains. My location from the remote corner of the Northwest was substituted for the Los Angeles megalopolis, leaving my family behind. My travel interest began while on R&R in Switzerland. I have now traveled on five continents in more than 50 foreign countries. My vocation was traded from teacher to personnel officer, and, with adjustments to hospital environment, it was a rewarding experience. But above all, my attitude toward America is best expressed by Adlai Stevenson:

"To be an American is to be one who loves his country, loves an inner air, an inner light in which freedom lives and in which a man can draw the deep breath of self-respect."

convoy almost totally at the mercy of the enemy U-boats.

Our speed was slow and there was not enough air or sea power to protect us. The tension was so great that several of those aboard jumped over the side, preferring that to the constant nervous pressure of seeing our own ships in the convoy being sunk by enemy submarines.

Even though we were headed for battle on the front lines, it was a relief when we disembarked at Bordeaux, France.

I was assigned to the 3rd Division, which at the time was known as the "Rock of the Marne." We were called on many times to "back up" certain front-line divisions that seemed to falter



### Soldiers: past and present

The image of a Vietnamese Warrior from ancient days behind him, a young U.S. Marine patrols a street in Hue. For many, Vietnam is a thing of the past — as are the

two World Wars and Korea. But for the millions of men and women who served America, the memory and heritage of war is real — especially today, Veterans Day.

## More than duty; it's a privilege

By Marge Ryland  
Long Beach

Veterans Day is not just for those who were in military service. We're all veterans in a sense — just by living through times our country was at war. Times both good and bad, times of hope and despair, our victories and defeats — we survived.

I'm a veteran of World War II, Korea and Vietnam myself.

It seems to me that if a person loves his or her country, it follows that military service is not just a duty but a privilege.

In my case, I joined the Marine Corps "to do my part," as it was so quaintly put in those days. I had never really thought about pride in my country or being patriotic — joining and serving in the military was just the thing to do.

In the Marine Corps, I learned about pride and patriotism. And it followed

that military service was not a sacrifice after all. I learned discipline, responsibility and what being a good citizen was all about. And I gained confidence in myself as a woman when I discovered how much women could do which I had never thought possible and still be women.

I remember attending a Bob Hope show at Camp Pendleton during the Korean War in which he "saluted" women in the service. He said it was no accident that the Statue of Liberty — the symbol of the United States — was a woman. She represents not only the goodness, strength and determination of America, he said, but also its tenderness, compassion and renewal. I agree.

So happy Veterans Day to all veterans and Americans. Let's have pride in our country and in ourselves. Military service is an honor and an obligation; our country doesn't owe us anything — we owe it everything.



MARGE RYLAND  
We're all veterans in a sense

## Old campaigns — a hard life, but a good one

By Martin Devore  
Long Beach

About 63 years ago I was sent into Mexico with the 17th U.S. Army Division, hot on the trail of one "Pancho Villa," a well-known organizer of rebel forces against the Mexican government and U.S. border towns.

After chasing Pancho around for several months, we were called to help in World War I.

I do not believe I experienced a more hopeless and helpless feeling than on that trip overseas on the transport "SS America." With the ship loaded to standing room only, we traveled in

or hesitate, thus giving them the courage to go "over the top."

I served on three fronts, "Aime," "Chateau Thierry," and "Champagne-Marne." At Champagne, I was seriously wounded and evacuated to the base hospital in Paris. I was transferred back to the United States and discharged from the Army on July 12, 1919.

After I was discharged, I went into business for myself in Toledo, Ohio. I had a lot of success for several years. Then the dam broke — the big depression. I lost everything, business, home, cars, bank closed, in fact I was right back where I started from: flat broke.

But, while I had been in the service, I found out that going ahead under fire is a matter of sheer personal grit; if you make the first fire burst, then the next will be easier.

To avoid the soup lines that I could see forming on the streets, I joined the United States Marines on April 4, 1927. It was not long before I found myself in action once again.

A fellow by the name of 'Sandino,' who was a bandit in Nicaragua, was fouling up the La Luce gold mines which belonged to an American. So the Marines were sent, the 5th Marines, which was my outfit.

We landed at Bluefields on the East Coast of Nicaragua. After poling up the Princa-Poca River we landed at Tegucigalpa and chased Sandino out of the gold mines. Then we trained Nicaraguans for a national guard of their own, which they have used since then.

In 1936 I was discharged from the service and started on what you could call the second 40 years of my life as a civilian.

Yes, the service did me a lot of good. I am 86, and work 40 hours a week and am in good shape. My early training in the service did the trick, as well as memories of times in the service — perfect.