

Emotional Recollections

Mr. Constant tells a story of running into his hometown Catholic Priest on board ship. Father Mullens and he became good friends on board even though Constant attended a different church at home. There was a job opening posted as driver for Admiral Halsey, and Constant was surprised to see that the Father was on the interview committee. During the interview Mullens led Constant into a little white lie by asking whether he hadn't seen him driving for another officer once. Constant, following his lead, said "yes." He was chosen for the cushy job over many other applicants. The Father advised him afterwards that they both needed to go to confession for the transgression.

Years later, he tearfully recalled, that after his son was in a terrible car accident, he was visiting the intensive care unit at Benedictine Hospital and thought he saw an orderly wheeling Father Mullens down the hall. He went to the desk to inquire if he had, indeed, seen the Father and was he a patient at the hospital? "No!" was the reply. It was not Father Mullens and he was not a patient. It was Monsignor Mullens and he was doing visitation. By this time in the interview, Mr. Constant was quite broken up and was excusing himself. The former Father Mullens apparently visited his son every day in the hospital and ministered to him after learning of his shipmate's son's accident. It seemed to him that every time he was in need or in a jam, that Father Mullens was there for him.

Mr. Gillette gave a riveting account of combat on the front lines fighting the Nazis in Europe. He said that war reduced man to below animal status. He made it a point to explain that they were replacements, and that meant that they were replacing someone who had been killed or wounded. He saw a fellow American soldier's nose and eyes shot off and the man having to be led away. They had to run everywhere they went. He spoke of the fear that caused sweat to pour off the men even though it was freezing cold. After hours of this hell, he was in need of mental relief and was about burned out. As they began to dig foxholes, a pine bough brushed his arm while he was digging and he took it as a sign from God. As he lay down in the hole, he took some branches and placed them over the hole even though he knew full well that they provided no protection from the German artillery. He said, "It provided the mental relief I needed so desperately in those moments. I think He (meaning God) was there with me."

Joe Millman brought us all almost to tears with the story of his encounter with an Italian woman, as he was lying injured by the side of the road. His plane had been shot down but, miraculously, he escaped. He had several very bad injuries. The Germans guarding him had told the people to stay away from the prisoners. There was one courageous woman who came to him and offered him her shawl. As he described her draping the shawl over him

with tears streaming from her eyes as she saw how badly he was injured, he started to cry. He said that he started to cry in the street as she was crying. He was also apologizing to us for crying. He explained how he wanted to thank her, so he asked John Austino his Italian-American friend, also wounded, to thank her in Italian. He laughed at the fact that his friend couldn't speak a word of his parents' mother tongue. As the woman wiped the tears and blood from his face, he said the only Italian words he knew, "mille grazie." Then the Germans chased her away.

Humorous Relief

Artie Horowitz told about some trouble he had with an aviation cadet who, as his superior, ordered him to "police" the area, including some cigarette butts under a barrack. Horowitz refused, telling the cadet that a good officer would not order his men to do anything that he would not do himself. If the cadet would go under to pick up the butts, then so would he. Needless to say, the officer didn't – and Horowitz ended up on KP.

Ed Finklestein recalled landing on one island as American troops yelled, "Tojo is a bastard." He said the Japanese replied, "Babe Ruth is a bastard."

Sol Albert evoked images of a prototype for Sergeant Bilko as he told stories of stolen Jeeps, motorbikes, and booze as his group of combat engineers traveled from town to town across Europe building bridges. The men were carrying their stolen booty in commandeered civilian vehicles until General Patton got wind of what was going on and ordered the men back into their trucks.

Mr. Van Etten had a running debate with best friend Scantlebury about the relative merits of Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller. Towards the end of the interview I just had to ask. (It was Miller.)

It Was a Time for Romance

Dawes became an American war bride as she met her future husband – a GI named Don Dubois.

Maurice Tartakoff met the love of his life, Sipporah, in a Jewish enclave in Calcutta, India.

Thomas Murray was assigned to the separation center and he went to the office to see if a friend of his had been discharged yet. His friend hadn't been, but Murray felt he had to keep checking. He checked a lot at that office after that, but not for his friend. It was to see the woman who was working there. It was Dolly, his future wife.

Margaret and John Bradley actually met before the war but he was in the service when they decided to marry. The honeymoon was a short weekend pass. After that she felt like she wasn't doing enough and so she joined the Army, too. He ended up in England and she in Hot Springs, Arkansas. There were many love letters that traveled between Hot Springs and England in 1943. ➔

JOHN VERDINO
JOSEPH VERDINO



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