



Newsletter

July 2003 Manny Bacon Post 1758

Flag Day

Well what can I say, turn out was lousy. I'm willing to take partial blame due to the bad info in the May newsletter. Having said that, everybody got the correct info at the June meeting as well as Memorial Day. I even called some folks at home so we should have done better.

Somehow the local media dropped the ball as well. We will have to try to do better next year. Thanks to those who did show up and special thanks to Vinny Richards, it adds a special touch when Vinny adds his bugle to our events.

Welcome Aboard

But on the bright side the day wasn't a total loss we got a new member out of it! Please welcome Peter Idema to our post. Also welcome returning charter member George Baily and a transfer in from post 1 William Muller

Post Helps Out Scouts

Post member Dan Briscoe asked the post to donate 100 Flag Etiquette pamphlets to the local Scouts. After conferring with several Officers including Commander Ryan it was agreed that this was something we should be involved in. The cost will be about \$80.00

Next post meeting August 12th 8pm

Still trying to get E-mail address from some of you. If I haven't ever E-mailed you then I don't have it. Send me an E-mail to Post1758@att.net so I can add it.

2004 Dues

Allot of members have responded already to our call to please get those renewals in as quickly as possible. A big thanks to all that have. If you haven't sent them in PLEASE get them in! It is very important! Special thanks to James Brady. He got his in already and he's in Florida!

Another forgotten hero

"I watched them go through the flak, which was murderous. Just as they hit the end of flak alley, I noticed the left wing fall off of one of their ships. The ship went down in flames. Only two men bailed out. One of the men that bailed out probably never reached the ground alive. His chute was on fire ..."

*- From the diary of Joseph Kaufman,
U.S. Army B-24 radio operator/gunner,
May 27, 1944.*

Before undertaking what turned out to be a failed effort to get him help from the Veterans Administration last year, the sons of Joseph Kaufman knew this much about their father's service in World War II.

They knew he had flown 51 combat missions over Europe as a radio operator and gunner in the U.S. Army's B-24 bomber squadrons. They knew the B-24 was a lumbering four-engine plane nicknamed "The Flying Coffin" because so many of its 10-man crews had perished, including several known personally to their father.

They knew that their father, a furrier by trade, a modest man who worked two jobs when his sons were to be bar mitzvahed and while they were in college, had received the Distinguished Flying Cross for service during the war. This is a medal, according to the U.S. military code for medals, awarded for "heroism in aerial combat ... evidenced by voluntary action above and beyond the call of duty." They knew all this before.

What they didn't know until after their effort to get their father admitted to a VA Hospital nursing home in Northport - when he was 81 years old, and ailing from a heart attack - was what their father's sacrifice and heroism really meant to the U.S. government.

"It meant nothing to them," said Malcolm Kaufman the elder son.

After the hero's heart attack in 2001, Malcolm Kaufman pleaded with the VA to admit his father to the nursing home. He was turned down for being not sufficiently "disabled." Then he pleaded with them to admit Kaufman to the rehabilitation program at the hospital, to help him get back on his feet. He was turned down again, this time because he was a poor "candidate," due to early dementia.

Kaufman wrote an angry letter. "Was dad a good 'candidate' when he volunteered for the air force and helped to defeat the Nazis?" he asked. He never got a reply from the VA.

The VA is almost always a worthy villain in any story such as this. But this is not really about the Northport VA, or about the Veterans Administration itself, neither one of which decides how much money America spends on veterans after they come home from war.

That decision belongs to the Congress and the president. And those people have decided, while attending their rallies to "support the troops," that Americans cannot afford to support its aging veterans.

In their most recent budgets, Congress and the president not only continue to cut services that have been steadily cut over the last decade - they would accelerate cuts to veterans benefits at a rate of \$14 billion over the next 10 years. Maybe you have read about this. It was in the news, buried in the coverage of the war in Iraq.

For the record, though, VA regulations are pretty clear on matters of eligibility - and Joseph Kaufman, a war hero who lived his golden years on about \$1,000 a month in pension and Social Security benefits, was not eligible for placement in the VA's nursing home, or in its rehabilitation program, because his problems were not directly "war-related" enough. "We encounter this situation all the time," said John Sparandeo, chief of social work at the Northport facility. "Veterans who have served their country with valor, and who may be getting health services [doctors visits, and in some cases prescription drug benefits] are surprised to learn that there are priority criteria for admission to our nursing home and other programs."

Our ship "Patches" was shot down today ... Fortunately, we were not flying it. They say only three men got out before she crashed.
- Kaufman's diary, June 6, 1944.

The criteria for the nursing home is "70 percent disability," with a

disability originating in combat, Sparandeo said.

But what is a "70 percent disability?" How do they put numbers on this? How does someone who risks his life for his country at least 51 times as a young man count as "ineligible" in his old age?

These are rhetorical questions. The answers are obvious. - A "70 percent rule" is just a bureaucrat's way of translating what the government is willing to spend. It is established not on the basis of an approximate justice, but on the basis of a calculation. Title 38 of the U.S. Code, which governs spending on veterans, sets all these calculations down in black and white, then adds this telling coda: "In the case of a veteran who is not described in paragraphs (1) and (2) [who is not, in other words, eligible for services], the Secretary of Defense may, to the extent resources and facilities are available and subject to the provisions of subsections (f) and (g), furnish [services.]" In other words, to the extent the government is willing to spend money on people who serve their country, instead of cutting dividend taxes on stocks, there may or may not be money in the till for future Joseph Kaufmans.

There was a nice flak-hole between me and the tail gunner ... It flew right in between the nose gunner's head and the bombardier's head, missing both. It ricocheted about three times and made four nice holes in the nose of the ship.

- Joseph Kaufman's diary, June 16, 1944.

After they were turned down at the VA, Malcolm Kaufman and his brother, David, of Queens, arranged for their father to enter a nursing home in Stony Brook, where he lived a short time before his death on Nov. 19.

Returning home, lead navigator went off course and took us over [illegible] Austria. Flak was intense, accurate and heavy. One of our ships received a direct hit and blew apart in mid-air. No chutes. Previously, fighters hit us and we fought them off ... Enemy shot down three B-24s ... My knees were shaking on this one. It was my last mission and I thought today I'd surely get it. Thank God, I'm okay. - Aug. 24, 1944.

In going through their father's papers, they found a diary of his 51 combat missions. They had not known of its existence. It was written in a steady, beautiful script that reflected the nature of the man they loved a man who served his country, who worked hard all his life, raised a family, never asked for help from anyone until the last possible moment.

Was he sorry he asked?