

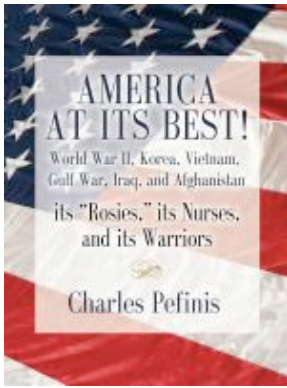
The background of the entire image is a close-up, slightly angled view of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes in detail. The flag is draped, creating soft folds and shadows. The colors are vibrant, with a deep blue field for the stars and bright red and white stripes.

AMERICA AT ITS BEST!

World War II, Korea, Vietnam,
Gulf War, Iraq, and Afghanistan
its “Rosies,” its Nurses,
and its Warriors



Charles Pefinis



This book chronicles the memories, events, and happenings told in their own words by veterans, both men and women, who lived them in our nation's conflicts. Also features the "Rosie" the Riveters describing their work during those epic years. One story told by a Marine Corps pilot cites his fellow pilots, George H.W. Bush and Ted Williams, his bunk mate John Glenn, Tyrone Power, Ed McMahon, and Admiral Sidney McCain, who was John McCain's grandfather!

AMERICA AT IT'S BEST

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**World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Gulf War,
Iraq, and Afghanistan - its "Rosies," its
Nurses, and its Warriors**

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First Edition

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**THESE WERE MY BUDDIES IN THE MARINE AIR CORPS IN WWII JOHN
GLENN, TED WILLIAMS, JERRY COLEMAN, ED McMAHON, GEORGE
H.W. BUSH, TYRONE POWER, ADMIRAL SIDNEY McCAIN**

**A MEMOIR BY D. "ROCKY" DEMOPOULOS WHO ALSO FLEW 134 MISSIONS IN
KOREA!**

As the song goes, "in a lonely shack by a railroad track" (Wayward Wind.) I was born in a railroad section house on a frigid February morning in 1924 between the railroad tracks and the banks of the Missouri River in Montana. Dad was a Great Northern Railroad section foreman. Our section house was far from lonely, however, with five sisters and a brother.

Growing up in Montana during those Depression years, daily chores included a huge amount of gardening in the summer time as well as caring for livestock throughout the year. Fishing and hunting were a way of life in Montana. I graduated from Great Falls High School in June of 1941, and this turned out to be the last peacetime graduating class in our time. With a small scholarship, I continued my education at Reed College in Portland, Oregon.

The war began that December. I was at that critical age: join up or be drafted! My roommate and I joined the V-5 Naval Aviation program and I was called to duty in October 1942. Intense training flying Stearman's and SNJ's followed.

The big day came in 1943 at Corpus Christi, Texas where ten percent of us were will be dropping a few names, luminaries, who crossed our paths that year. The first was Admiral John Sidney McCain, grandfather of the current presidential hopeful; George H.W. Bush, a classmate, Ensign, Greenwich, Connecticut; and 2nd Lt. Marine Corps, Tyrone Power, Hollywood, California.

Operational Flight training followed. I was assigned to a dive bombing base, Cecil Field (Jacksonville, FL), flying SBD's Dauntless dive bombers and SB2C's Hell Diver's. I was proficient in both dive bombing and blind instrument flying, mostly the latter. When you are good at one thing, you are earmarked to teach others. Consequently, I stayed at Cecil training hundreds of pilots how to fly the "gauges." The war ended and the survival of my "buddies" killed in action are too numerous to mention, including my college roommate.

WHAT? I DID NOT KNOW THAT MOTORS KNEW HOW TO SWIM!

"CAPTAIN YOU ARE IN CHARGE OF THE MOTOR POOL"

After my tour of Viet Nam I thought I had completed my Reserve obligation and I found out that I didn't – even though I had fulfilled my obligation to the US Army I hadn't fulfilled my obligation to the US Army Reserves.

In the Army's wisdom they assigned me to be in charge of a motor pool when I knew nothing about anything automotive. That was so typical.

I'm at the Armory on Hillen Road and just by chance it turned out right after I took over the motor pool, I was told that we were going to have an IG in three weeks and that we should prepare for a triage in a couple of weeks which we did. I had a Sergeant there by the name of Sgt. Sauer who I think had served almost his entire seven years in that unit and he was ready to leave. I knew I was in good shape as far as this fellow was concerned. He seemed to have it together.

At the pre-IG the Commander of the Unit who was a full bird Colonel and a doctor. This was a medical unit. We were doing an inspection of the Motor Pool at this particular time and the Colonel walks through the Motor Pool with me and Sgt Sauer at my side and was asking me different questions about our preparations.

One thing I have to explain is that there were other unit's equipment in there which I did not realize. This Motor Pool shared equipment that belonged to other units that were the Armory. Being so new I didn't know this, I thought at first that everything belonged to us. The Colonel looked at a particular piece of equipment which had a lot of hoses connected to and around it.

He too wanted to know what kind of vehicle was with all the hoses. I didn't want to say, I did not want to say "I do not know Sir." "Well" continued the Colonel, "it looks like a fire engine to me" Then I thought "Well, with the Army's way of thinking, everything is O D - olive drab - instead of red." I said, "Colonel, that's our fire engine." He said, "Very good Captain, it looks like you all are in good shape here" and then he was gone.

As soon as he left the area, Sgt. Sauer turned to me and said, "Captain, I don't believe what you just said to that man." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "That's a field Laundromat unit."

Well, tell me about that Colonel.

He was a full bird colonel from Hagerstown and a doctor. The rumor was that he was trying to get another star and he was going to hang on for another year and then retire. The good Colonel never corrected me so I guess he did think that was a fire engine and probably still believes that to this day.

What about any good times you had in Viet Nam? Were you stationed there every night?

We were at the 91st Back Hospital, in a place called Tuyhoa. There's a little village near it in the South China Sea, near Nathrang. We were at a base in Tuyhoa, the 91st Back Hospital. Our living quarters were right on the beach. We had pallets in front of us so we'd walk on the pallets rather than on the sand which was all around us. It was really pretty. We played volley ball every day.

Charles, I'd like to say it was a tough assignment but I've never eaten so well and drank so much as I did in that year in Viet Nam.

We were in this Medical Unit and there were approximately 60 doctors about 40 nurses and 12 Medical Corp officers, of which I was one.

The Army recognized my lack of Vietnamese language capability since I didn't know one word of Vietnamese and put me in charge of 180 Vietnamese workers.

I had to depend on one interpreter who was very nice, but you can only use your imagination about what and when went on when people were hired and fired. I had no clue. But the officers there always got a promotion and always celebrated. We had about 110 officers and someone was always being promoted. Naturally that called for a celebration. Someone was always rotating or going back to the States. Of course there were new officers coming in and that always called for a celebration.

We had a house our compound that housed a helicopter unit which always gave us great access to any and all kinds of food stuffs and beverages. Whenever we had a party it was always supplied by these helicopter pilots. I'm really talking about lobster and steak. It was absolutely the best. You didn't have a party over there for promotions without providing lobster and steaks for the guests... Where it came from, I have no idea. It wasn't on our menu, but I have feeling it came from the Air Force because those guys were treated well. I had more lobster and steak than I ever had in my life.

Did you ever have entertainment for the troops?

We had a lot of Pilipino bands at the Officers Club, but I don't think Bob Hope ever came there.

How about women? There were a lot of nurses there, right?

There were 40 nurses, about 30 were women, and ten were men.

Was there a lot of romancing going on?

Oh my God, yes. First of all, you have to remember that most of these guys had gotten their degree through the courtesy of Uncle Sam who was paying for their medical school. Now, Uncle Sam said it was time for paybacks.

Remember, these guys were almost all in their 30's and right at the height of their practice, all with families, mostly with smaller, younger children, so they were not happy campers about being there. Unlike myself, I took a little reduction in pay, but these guys really took a bump when they left their practices and went into the Service because they had been making pretty good money on the outside.

How did you happen to get in the medical services?

When I was in Loyola College in ROTC, I had decided that I wanted to go into advanced ROTC. When the Colonel, a Colonel Dunn, looked at my record it turned out that I was the anchor man in my class of 40 applicants. I was dead last. They said the only way you can go into advanced ROTC was to go to summer camp, So I went to summer camp and did very, very well. Then I was accepted in the fall at the beginning of my junior year into advanced Corp of ROTC. I didn't do very well in that, my heart wasn't in it, but I wasn't the anchor man I knew I was going to have to go in the service and I knew that I didn't want to go in as an enlisted man. So I got passing grades. Always over our heads

was the threat that you had a choice of seventeen branches and basically you had to have a combat branch as one of your three choices. Invariably the ones who had the highest marks would always stand the best chance of getting your first choice.

I knew my chances of getting my first choice weren't good. In a state of naiveté I thought I'll go into the Medical Corp and learn something maybe about first aid and something that I could use at a later date in life. This was my first choice. I probably had Artillery as a second choice, but I don't really remember.

It didn't matter though, because I went to Law School after I graduated. I didn't graduate – I was in Law School for 2 ½ years. In the beginning of the second half of my first year my dad passed away. I was running a small business at the time when I was stationed at Fort Meade and returning home in the evenings running this business. Any time I had off, I was running the business. I was the sole support of my mother and myself at the time.

I never did graduate from Law School. I dropped out and eventually got a letter from Uncle Sam saying that they were ready for me now and was going to go on active duty.

That's an interesting story in itself. When I was growing up there was a fellow who lived next door. He had been there for about ten years. He was a Master Sergeant in the Army. His name was Joe Young; a real good guy who knew my situation. I asked him if he thought there was any possibility when I went in the Service if I could go to Fort Meade. He said, "Let's go to Office of Personnel Operations in Washington DC. I'll go with you and put in a good word."

So, one day we went over and low –and- behold the gentlemen we got to talk to plead my case was named Captain Drill; just a super nice guy. When I heard his name, my mouth dropped and I thought "This is not going to be good."

But he knew my situation with my mom and all and made sure that I was assigned to Fort Meade for the first year. At that time almost everybody had to serve in Viet Name if they were in for two years. There weren't too many who escaped it. If anyone had a brother over there – you remember the Sullivan's in the Second World War - and I ended up going there.

One nice thing about it was the fact that I got such a good job in Viet Nam. The promotion policy at that time, I graduated from ROTC as a Second Lieutenant but because of my three years in inactive duty when I went into active duty I was promoted to First Lieutenant and in a year from that I was automatically promoted to Captain.

How old were you when you were made a Captain?

I was 25.

Again, it wasn't anything great; it was just automatic unless you screwed up. As a result of that I was fortunate in getting a very good assignment in Viet Nam and I was there a year and that was it.

You told me about a bad guy who was held by the Warrant Officer and the Warrant Officer gave up on him.

That was back in the States. This in the 92nd Field Hospital where I served for two years in the active Reserve Duty which meant you went through drills basically one weekend a month or a couple

of nights a week. I knew a lot of fellows in the unit – they were from the same geographic area. I knew a fellow in there by the name of Jim Boyd who had a carpet business. He couldn't wait to get out of the Service but like everybody he was doing his bit. We became pretty good friends and our Unit went to summer camp for two weeks down in Virginia.

We played some tennis from time to time – he was a PFC. One day we had made up our minds that we were going out early to play some tennis. A Warrant Officer came up to me and asked me if I had had any trouble with Boyd. I said, "Not really." The Warrant Office told me this, that and the other of what he had done and said that he wanted to discipline him. I said, "Tell you what Warrant Officer Johnson; let me take care of this for you." In his words he was a screw up and so Jim and I had a very long tennis match that day, and so he was taken care of real well.

One amusing story was when we were in Viet Nam, again all the officers would rotate. The group wasn't there together for any length of time/ The Colonel who took over when I got there took over from the old Colonel, a Colonel Burgin who was of East European extraction who was an ophthalmologist and spoke with a very heavy accent. He was a full bird Colonel and his big thing was that he really liked things to look good, especially his headquarters and outside his headquarters. Now of course that's all grass, but it was all sand there. So he had dirt brought in and they planted grass around his headquarters. Not a lot of it, but a fair amount and it did look very nice when it was finished. I don't know where he got the grass seed from because if anybody knows anything about the service, you don't requisition grass seed for a beach.

He got grass seed and got the grass in there. Now the problem was how are you going to cut the grass? Well we had 180 Vietnamese in our little pool of labor and the OR had a lot of surgical scissors – they were our cutting tools. So the surgical scissors were used to cut the grass by a number of the Vietnamese. One thing Colonel wanted to do to spruce it up was to get some palm trees to plant by the entrance to the headquarters area.

Now there were no palm trees in our compound but in a near-by village the Colonel evidently found that there were some palm trees so he commissioned a duce and a half (a truck) and a driver and a couple of workers to dig up some palm trees. In so doing, unbeknownst to the Colonel he must have stumbled upon a Vietnamese grave yard site that did have some nice palm trees in and proceeded to instruct his laborers to dig up some of these palm trees so he could replant.

An irate Vietnamese at some point into the excavation process comes running and screaming at the Colonel with his hands up in the air. The PFC driver, I think the only other person involved in this altercation - if you want to call it that - was there to protect the Colonel. The Vietnamese was running towards the Colonel who proceeds to duck in back of the PFC who is wielding a shovel to fend off the approaching irate Vietnamese employee. When he got close enough the PFC cocks the shovel like he was ready to swing a baseball bat over his right shoulder. Unfortunately the Colonel was a little too close and took the shovel in the mouth knocked a tooth out and took a severe gash. He was, in fact, hospitalized in his own unit for several days after that. I don't think the trees ever got planted.

While over in the 91st evac hospital on a rotating basis, all the Officers, maybe every two to two and half weeks were in charge of the hospital from 5:p.m to 7: a.m. the next morning in order to give the regular staff their time off. You were called AOD – Administrative Officer of the Day, you had all the decisions of the day. If something really major came up you had to get in touch with the Colonel or the Exec. Officer. But, basically you had to handle everything because they wanted their time off.

One particular night I was on and I'll never forget it. There was a young Vietnamese boy; I'd say he was about ten years old, rather frail looking except for his head. His head was enormous because of burns received when one of the gasoline lines was broken open. A lot of children over there suffered. They broke open the gasoline lines above grounds to steal the gasoline for heating purposes or whatever. Evidently he was involved in one of these, it went bad and he was severely burned.

The young boy's in the hospital. His face was so swollen from the burns and his breathing was much labored and almost impossible. The nurse said something to me and I had to run get a doctor. They did a tracheotomy right there and my job was to hold the boy down. He probably didn't weigh 79 pounds but it took all my strength to hold him down while they performed the trach – no anesthetic or nothing. The boy did make it, but I'll never forget that as long as I live; the power of life when you have someone that small that strong when he's fighting for his life. No anesthetic or anything to help.

Along those same lines, an assignment that I had certainly found not humorous at all but shows how things were run over there in some cases. On a number of occasions I was asked to give out purple hearts to the GI's that were recovering. We were at a back hospital so they were there just a short time and then they went down to Camron Bay or to rehab in the States depending on their injuries. While they were in the hospital for maybe a week, I would be asked from time to time to give out purple hearts. The reason I felt bad about it was because here I was not a combat troop, I was not the commander of the hospital, and I felt like it was grossly inappropriate for some one of my rank and background to give out that important an award. I felt very awkward about it and still do to this day but, when you are given orders, you do it. That was not a good job.

I remember the surgeon who had a new drink; a large tumbler filled with ice and then subsequently filled up with gin and then a little cherry juice. That was his drink of choice. It was called the Smith drink because his last name was Smithwick. His name was Ollie Smithwick.

I said, "Ollie, what is in that drink?" He said, "Well, I fill a tumbler with ice first and then I top it off just a little south of the top with gin." I said, "Ollie, it's ready." He said, "Well, I put a little cherry juice in it." Cherry Smith is the name of the drink, but I'll guarantee you won't get that drink anywhere in the U.S.

I was there from August of 1968 to August of 1969 so that means I missed the Tet Offensive which was in February of 1968, that was when all hell broke loose.

September 1, 2010

These are some of my recollections while in Viet Nam.

Joe Enoch St. Michaels, MD.

ABOARD THE DESTROYER USS HOBSON IN WWII - FIRST CLASS PETTY OFFICER HAROLD T. THOMPSON

Harold's ship followed closely behind the mine sweeper as they both entered the waters of Normandy to offer support to the ground troops at Utah beach. The Hobson was the first destroyer in leading the armada!

He was watching it as it plowed thru the water and wondered out loud to himself, "Man, I'm sure am glad I am not on a damn mine sweeper, dodging all those mines. Wow they are everywhere!"

Blam!!! "What an explosion!!! Our whole ship shuttered from the blast. I was almost knocked down by the force. The sweeper was gone . . . all gone not a trace! Fallen debris from the sky clattered on our decks." That was Harold Thompson's first taste of war.

Harold had just turned 18. He had volunteered to keep from being drafted and maybe winding up in the infantry, "No way, give me the Navy anytime", he thought. Now he had mixed emotions. . . "Hmmm it might have been good to have some good old dirt under my feet."

Their sister ship, the U.S. Corry, hit one of the mines. It went to the bottom immediately. The bottom though was shallow enough to allow it to sit there wounded but not dead.

On one occasion near Okinawa, the USS Hobson's gun crews shot down a Jap plane, a Kamikaze Zero. They blew it apart. The motor flew like a bomb ramming itself in the ship's structure. Excited sailors raced over looking at the smoldering metal ready to dump over side once it cooled down. A few hours later the process began but not before parts of the motor were removed as souvenirs to take back home as a reminder of these dark yet exhilarating days of war.

Suddenly one of the scroungers yells out. "Hey guys lookit here! This son-of-a-bitch engine was made in America. See here, it says, Pratt & Whitney!" It was! (Pratt & Whitney today is one of the three top manufactures of aircraft engines.)

At one time Harold did "join" the Army. They were in Plymouth England to escort an ammunition ship the Nitro (!) while training for the invasion. The area was surveyed and protected by cable anchored blimps floating in the air to warn of incoming German aircraft.

Harold and a bunch of his buddies were on shore leave. Suddenly the roar of aircraft engines caught their attention. ME 109's were entering the ports air space. Standard procedure was for any moored ships to move out immediately so as not to block the harbor if sunk. The guys rushed to the landing to board their ship...great move! but they went to the pier! By then the ship had left moving rapidly out to clear water. "Damn! What do we do now? Our ship has left us; we are stranded! No telling how long before it comes back maybe a day or two. Damn!"

Well, they "joined" the Army! Wearing the countenance of lost sheep, they trudged to the Army base where they were welcomed to stay for a few days suffering the derisive chuckles of a group of GI's.

As they entered a large barracks type building, they were surprised to see the room full of Army officer's playing cards. Harold whispers to his buddies, "What the hell kind of war is this, officers sitting around playing cards all day!?"

Oran, a large port on the Mediterranean coast of northeastern Algeria was the next place of Harold's adventure. Their ship was docked there; he was mess cook and could not go on liberty until he cleaned the place up perfectly. This took some time. When finished, he was all by himself, so he sauntered down a street taking in all the sight . . . a typical American tourist. One had to take a bus which went thru a tunnel bored thru the mountains to get to the town. So innocent 18 year old ex farm boy, Harold Thompson saunters into the town of Oran on a sightseeing tour.

Suddenly a jeep pulls up alongside him, one of the SP's yells at him saying, "Where the hell do you think you are going sailor and why the hell are you here? It is 2 hours past curfew time!" Well, that sort of pissed me off. "Where the hell did do you think you are going?" "I was going into town that is where," I replied. "Man, he said, "you are one a dumb son-of-a-bitch! Where is your ship?" "I said back in the harbor. "Give me more of a description." he continued. "So I told him it was a destroyer, the USS Hobson back at the port.

"Sailor you are lucky we found you. If you went to that town those Arabs would have picked your ass clean. I mean it! They'd take your watch, your money, and your clothes, strip you naked, even taking your underwear." So I happily got in the jeep and they took my trembling ass back to my ship.

Guess what I did after that, I got a job cleaning up the petty officers club right there on the beach. Man that was great. I'd get there at 8 in the morning get off at 3 and have all the beer I could I drink. .no job is better than that!

Harold was very well thought of by the officers. Even though only 18 years old, he was often given the duty to go ashore on payday to get the payroll from the paymaster. His buddy Max accompanied him. Max was sort of loose, not given too much discipline; a goof off. Well, they picked up a very large cloth bag containing \$400,000 . . . \$4,000,000 in today's dollars. Max's eyes were wide with excitement. He was almost giggly. "Hey Harold old buddy; man we have got it made for life. Let's just take off with this stuff!" I thought he was off his rocker for sure this time. He was serious!

So I said, "O.K. if you want to, go ahead, but you gotta think twice; you ain't gonna get very far." He asked why. So at that moment, I pulled up my blouse and pulled out a 45 I had hidden there before. He was stunned and said, "I did not know that you had a gun on you!" "I said do you think that they'd send someone ashore to get the payroll without their giving him a gun. Man you are one dumb ass!" "Well, why didn't they give me one too?" he asked. I said, "I don't know," I said "but why don't you look at your record, you being in the brig, maybe that is why."

Fast forward to 1948, Harold born and reared on a farm – a true farm boy – still has the sea in his blood. He goes to work in Baltimore as a seaman for a tug boat company. There he worked up his way to Captain, then to Pilot. One day after being there for a short time, Harold observed an action by his shipmates that befuddled him. The Brinks truck driver would deliver the weekly payroll to the office, in cash. Transferred to a launch, it'd go out to the tug boats in the rivers and the Chesapeake Bay paying the crew members handing out their salaries in good ol' hard cash. Harold is stunned, "Damn, here we go again, he thinks, "just like the Navy".

"Boss, I don't think that is a good idea paying people that way," he states. The response; "Why the hell not? We have been doing this way for years." "Well think for a minute, Harold continues, "Some smart guy sees this going on. After a while he gets a bright idea. "Hmmm, I want that payroll myself.

All I gotta do is get myself a really fast speedboat, go in the office knock the guy in the head and take off out to the Bay and disappear. . . perfect!”

The next payroll and all the other ones after that were paid by check. This time ol’ Harold was armed not by a 45 but by his brains!

At times as young fresh sailors we had to work in the kitchen. The Army vets call that K.P., kitchen police, I guess. Well, one day it was my time and I really hated it. I had to get up at 4 o’clock in the morning. That is too damn early for any sane person.

This big boatswain first class (a Master of Arms) shakes me and says. “Wake up Thompson! Get your ass out of bed!” I said, “What the hell you think you are doing! Getchoy goddamn hands off of me!” Well I think that was the wrong thing to say. He grabbed me by my clothes and hit me upside my face and knocked me out cold as a cucumber. (His last name was Phill; he was from Texas, I’ll never forget that name.)

So when I woke and came out and went into the mess hall he looked at me and shook his fingers, so I walks sorta wide away from him. He yells, “Come here Thompson, I want to talk to you. Do you think I’ll have any more trouble with you waking you up in the morning?” I said, “You won’t have any more trouble with me as long as you are on this ship!

Well that’s where I learned that from now on I’ll keep my mouth shut; no more wise guy. We had some guys that got into trouble on the ship and were sent to prison Italy. So when we got home to Norfolk, would you believe that they were waiting for us at the dock helping to tie the ship up?! Here we were in the war. These guys were already home. I guess it shows it don’t pay to be good all the time.

We had another guy; you know the type always futzing around doing strange little things. We paid him no mind; there were many strange guys on the ship except for me, of course. This guy got caught taking the gauge off of one of the pumps in the engine room removing the mercury. Well we thought he was in deep shit. They sent him take him to the Captain. You know what he does; does he put him in the brig? No, the Captain tells him, “If you are smart enough to experiment with mercury and stuff like that, we need to send you to a school.” Ain’t that some shit! And they did! In other words, to get out of this place, just screw up and out you go!

Harold T. Thompson is 87 years old vigorous and healthy lives in a high rise building in the suburbs of Baltimore, Towson, MD

To the reader, this is transcribed exactly as spoken by Harold and recorded.

WHAT! A SUBMARINE WHICH SUNK A TRAIN!?! NO WAY!

Thirty-nine years ago, an Italian submarine was sold for a paltry \$100,000 as scrap. The submarine, given to the Italian Navy in 1953, was originally the U.S.S. Barb, an incredible veteran of World War II service, with a heritage that should not have been melted away without any recognition.

The U.S.S. Barb was a pioneer, paving the way for the first submarine to launch missiles and it flew a battle flag unlike that of any other ship.

In addition to the Medal of Honor ribbon at the top of the flag identifying the heroism of its Captain, Commander Eugene ‘Lucky’ Fluckey, the bottom border of the flag bore the image of a Japanese train locomotive.

The U.S.S. Barb was indeed the submarine that *SANK A TRAIN!* - July 18, 1945 in Patience Bay, off the coast of Karafuto, Japan.

It was after 4 A.M. and Commander Fluckey rubbed his eyes as he peered over the map spread before him. It was the twelfth war patrol of the Barb, the fifth under Commander Fluckey. He should have turned the submarine’s command over to another skipper after four patrols, but had managed to strike a deal with Admiral Lockwood to make a fifth trip with the men he cared for like a father.

Of course, no one suspected when he had struck that deal prior to this fourth and should have been his final war patrol, that Commander Fluckey’s success would be so great that he would be awarded the Medal of Honor.

Commander Fluckey smiled as he remembered that patrol. Lucky Fluckey they called him. On January 8th the Barb had emerged victorious from a running two-hour night battle after sinking a large enemy ammunition ship. Two weeks later in Mamkwan Harbor he found the mother lode, more than 30 enemy ships.

In only five fathoms (30 feet) of water his crew had unleashed the sub’s forward torpedoes, then turned and fired four from the stern. As he pushed the Barb to the full limit of its speed through the dangerous waters in a daring withdrawal to the open sea, he recorded eight direct hits on six enemy ships.

What could possibly be left for the Commander to accomplish who, just three months earlier had been in Washington, D.C. to receive the Medal of Honor? He smiled to himself as he looked again at the map showing the rail line that ran along the enemy coastline.

Now his crew was buzzing, excited about bagging a train! The rail line itself wouldn’t be a problem. A shore patrol could go ashore under cover of darkness to plant the explosives – one of the sub’s 55-pound scuttling charges. But this early morning, Lucky Fluckey and his officers were puzzling over how they could blow not only the rails, but also one of the frequent trains that shuttled supplies to equip the Japanese war machine. But no matter how crazy the idea might have sounded, the Barb’s skipper would not risk the lives of his men.

Thus the problem – how to detonate the explosives at the moment the train passed, without endangering the life of a shore party.

PROBLEM? If you don't search your brain looking for them, you'll never find them. And even then, sometimes they arrive in the most unusual fashion. Cruising slowly beneath the surface to evade the enemy plane now circling overhead, the monotony was broken with an exciting new idea: Instead of having a crewman on shore to trigger explosives to blow both rail and a passing train, *why not let the train BLOW ITSELF up?*

Billy Hatfield was excitedly explaining how he had cracked nuts on the railroad tracks as a kid, placing the nuts between two ties so the sagging of the rail under the weight of a train would break them open. "Just like cracking walnuts," he explained. To complete the circuit (detonating the 55-pound charge) we hooked in a micro switch and mounted it between two ties, directly under the steel rail. "We don't set it off, the TRAIN will." Not only did Hatfield have the plan, he wanted to go along with the volunteer shore party.

After the solution was found, there was no shortage of volunteers; all that was needed was the proper weather – a little cloud cover to darken the moon for the sabotage mission ashore.

Lucky Fluckey established his criteria for the volunteer party; 1) no married men would be included, except for Hatfield; 2) the party would include members from each department; 3) the opportunity would be split evenly between regular Navy and Navy Reserve sailors; 4) at least half of the men had to have been Boy Scouts, experienced in handling medical emergencies and tuned into woods lore. FINALLY, Lucky Fluckey would lead the saboteurs himself.

When the names of the eight selected sailors were announced, it was greeted with a mixture of excitement and disappointment. Members of the submarine's demolition squad were:

Chief Gunners Mate Paul G. Saunders, USN

Electricians Mate 3rd Class Billy R. Hatfield, USNR

Signalman 2nd Class Francis N. Sevei, USNR

Ships Cook 1st Class Lawrence W. Newland, USN

Torpedoman's Mate 3rd Class Edward W. Klingsmith, USNR

Motor Machinists Mate 2nd Class James E. Richard, USN

Motor Machinists Mate 1st Class John Markuson, USN;

Lieutenant William M. Walker, USNR

Among the disappointed was Commander Fluckey who surrendered his opportunity at the insistence of his officers that as commander he belonged with the Barb, coupled with the threat from one that "I swear I'll send a message to ComSubPac if the Commander attempted to join the demolition shore party."

In the meantime, there would be no harassing of Japanese shipping or shore operations by the Barb until the train mission had been accomplished. The crew would "lay low" to prepare their equipment, practice and plan, and wait for the weather.

July 22, 1945 Patience Bay (Off the coast of Karafuto, Japan)

Waiting in 30 feet of water in Patience Bay was wearing thin the patience of Commander Fluckey and his innovative crew. Everything was ready. In the four days the saboteurs had anxiously watched the skies for cloud cover; the inventive crew of the Barb had crafted and tested their micro switch. When the need was proposed for a pick and shovel to bury the explosive charge and batteries, the Barb's engineers had cut up steel plates in the lower flats of an engine room, then bent and welded them to create the needed digging tools. The only things beyond their control were the weather...and the limited time. Only five days remained in the Barb's patrol.

Midnight, July 23, 1945

The Barb had crept within 950 yards of the shoreline. If it was somehow seen from the shore, it would probably be mistaken for a schooner or Japanese patrol boat. No one would suspect an American submarine so close to shore or in such shallow water. Slowly the small boats were lowered to the water and the eight saboteurs began paddling toward the enemy beach. Twenty-five minutes later they pulled the boats ashore and walked on the surface of the Japanese homeland.

Stumbling through noisy waist-high grasses, crossing a highway and then into a 4-foot drainage ditch, the saboteurs made their way to the railroad tracks. Three men were posted as guards. Markuson was assigned to examine a nearby water tower. The Barb's auxiliary man climbed the tower's ladder, and then stopped in shock as he realized it was an enemy lookout tower...an OCCUPIED enemy lookout tower. The news from Markuson caused the men digging the placement for the explosive charge to continue their work more quietly and more slowly. Twenty minutes later, the demolition holes had been carved by their crude tools and the explosives and batteries hidden beneath fresh soil.

During planning for the mission, the saboteurs had been told that, with the explosives in place, all would retreat a safe distance while Hatfield made the final connection. BUT, IF the sailor who had once cracked walnuts on the railroad tracks slipped or messed up during this final, dangerous procedure, his would be the only life lost.

On this night, it was the only order the sub's saboteurs refused to obey, and all of them peered anxiously over Hatfield's shoulder to be sure he did it right. The men had come too far to be disappointed by a bungled switch installation.

1:32 a.m. –

Watching from the deck of the submarine, Commander Fluckey allowed himself a sigh of relief as he noticed the flashlight signal from the beach announcing the departure of the shore party. Fluckey had daringly, but skillfully, guided the Barb within 600 yards of the enemy beach sand.

There was less than six feet of water beneath the sub's keel but Fluckey wanted to be close in case trouble arose and a daring rescue of his bridge saboteurs became necessary.

1:45 a.m. –

The two boats carrying his saboteurs were only halfway back to the Barb when the sub's machine gunner yelled "CAPTAIN! There's another train coming up the tracks!" The Commander grabbed a megaphone and yelled through the night, "Paddle like the devil!" knowing full well that they wouldn't reach the Barb before the train hit the micro switch.

1:47 a.m. –

The darkness was shattered by brilliant light...and the roar of the explosion! The boilers of the locomotive blew, shattered pieces of the engine blowing 200 feet into the air. Behind it the railroad freight cars accorded into each other, bursting into flame and adding to the magnificent fireworks display. Five minutes later the saboteurs were lifted to the deck by their exuberant comrades as the Barb eased away, slipping back to the safety of the deep.

Moving at only two knots, it would be a while before the Barb was into waters deep enough to allow it to submerge. It was a moment to savor, the culmination of teamwork, ingenuity and daring by the Commander and all his crew. Lucky Fluckey's voice came over the intercom. "All hands below deck not absolutely needed to maneuver the ship have permission to come topside." He didn't have to repeat the invitation.

Hatches sprang open as the proud sailors of the Barb gathered on her decks to proudly watch the distant fireworks display.

Members of the sabotage team pose with the Ships flag. The train mission is noted at the center bottom of the flag.

The Barb had sunk a Japanese TRAIN!

On August 2, 1945, the Barb arrived at Midway, her twelfth war patrol concluded. Meanwhile, United States military commanders had pondered the prospect of an armed assault on the Japanese homeland. Military tacticians estimated such an invasion would cost more than a million American casualties.

Instead of such a costly armed offensive to end the war, on August 6th the B-29 bomber Enola Gay dropped a single atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan. A second such bomb, unleashed four days later on Nagasaki, Japan, caused Japan to agree to surrender terms on August 15th.

On September 2, 1945 in Tokyo Harbor, the documents ending the war in the Pacific were signed.

The story of the saboteurs of the U.S.S. Barb is one of those unique, little known stories of World War II. It becomes increasingly important when one realizes that the eight sailors who blew up the train near Kashiho, Japan, conducted the ONLY GROUND COMBAT OPERATION on the Japanese homeland during World War II.

(Footnote: Eugene Bennett Fluckey retired from the Navy as a Rear Admiral, and wore in addition to his Medal of Honor, FOUR Navy Crosses; a record of heroic awards unmatched by any American in military history.)

In 1992, his own history of the U.S.S. Barb was published in the award winning book, THUNDER BELOW. Over the past several years, proceeds from the sale of this exciting book have been used by Admiral Fluckey to provide free reunions for the men who served him aboard the Barb, and their wives.

P.S. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1935, and lived to age 93.



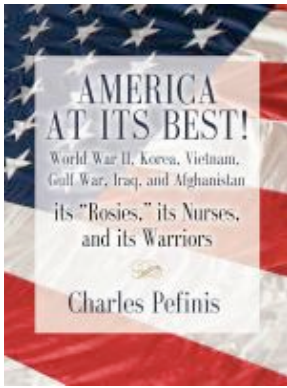


GERMAN GENERAL IS EXECUTED BY FIRING SQUAD

Major General Anton Dostler is tied to the stake before his execution by a firing squad in a stockade in Aversa, Italy on December 1, 1945. The General Commander of the 75th Army Corps was sentenced to death by a United States Commission in Rome for having ordered the shooting of 15 unarmed American prisoners of war in La Spezia, Italy, on March 26, 1945.



Major General Anton Dostler after execution



This book chronicles the memories, events, and happenings told in their own words by veterans, both men and women, who lived them in our nation's conflicts. Also features the "Rosie" the Riveters describing their work during those epic years. One story told by a Marine Corps pilot cites his fellow pilots, George H.W. Bush and Ted Williams, his bunk mate John Glenn, Tyrone Power, Ed McMahon, and Admiral Sidney McCain, who was John McCain's grandfather!

AMERICA AT IT'S BEST

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