

The theme of TIMEFLASH is how fast the momentous events transpire in one man's lifetime. From an amazing recall of his own life the author captures much that has happened around him, what he's been told, and what he has researched, and woven it into this true story of six generations, and their reflection of the world as they knew it.

TIMEFLASH

**HOW FAST THE MOMENTOUS EVENTS TRANSPIRE IN THE
LIFETIME OF ONE MAN AND HIS FAMILY**

by John Clapham Truesdell

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A Factual Thriller

TIMEFLASH

HOW FAST
MOMENTOUS EVENTS TRANSPIRE
IN THE LIFETIME OF ONE MAN
AND HIS FAMILY



JOHN CLAPHAM TRUESDELL

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Chapter Two - The Amazing Events Leading Up to WW II

Pacific Calm

By the early thirties America's military was a shadow of its former self as the World War I build-down sought peace dividends. The infant Army Air Corps, born in the bloody dogfights over France had found young leaders who would later lead the country to victory over Hitler and Tojo. By 1936 a deceptive calm had settled over the Central Pacific. Both the Japanese and German Navies made periodic "exchange" port visits to Pearl Harbor. As the daughter of the Chief of Staff of the then Hawaiian Division (forerunner of current 25th Infantry Division-*Tropic Lightning*) at Scofield Barracks, Oahu my mother Lavinia Clapham took on hostess duties for the likes of both German and Japanese visiting Midshipmen, and officers. Mom noted how every Japanese had a camera, in fact then great numbers of Japanese tourists all had cameras, and they were taking pictures of everything. It was interesting that she noted the differences between the on ship neatness of the two countries: the Germans being most neat, and the opposite true of the Japanese which surprised me. According to Mom the Japanese had an intense interest in everything military and industrial.

The factors which led to the meeting of nineteen year old Lavinia Clapham, and young LT Karl Truesdell, Jr. were the result of the convergence of infant air power, and Army battle force presence in the central Pacific. My father Karl had graduated from West Point in 1933, and then undergone pilot training at Randolph Army Air Field in San Antonio, Texas. Meanwhile Dad's parents were stationed in Tientsin, China. There the senior Truesdell's mission was to oversee the train-up of *Chiang Kai-shek's* Nationalist Army to ready it to confront

the growing Communist forces of *Mao Zedong*. By the mid-forties Mao had driven the Nationalists from the Chinese mainland to the island of Taiwan.

Mom and Dad were married in June 1936 at Scofield Barracks, Hawaii in the same chapel that our youngest daughter Laura would be baptized in 1977. Dad was an Army Air Force Pursuit Pilot flying at Wheeler Field adjacent to Scofield Barracks. Mom was the only daughter of her widowed father Colonel John (Jack) F. Clapham. Jack was serving as Chief of Staff of the Hawaiian Division, later to be designated the 25th Infantry "Tropic Lightning" Division. Jack would be buried years later right beside his wife Laura on that beautiful little hill in sight of the nation's capital. We had made a tradition of putting Christmas greenery on their gravestones, and now there is a terrific private program called "Wreathes Across America" that ensures every federal military grave has a wreath each Christmas. Just days ago we checked the young Clapham couple out where they were proudly perched on their knoll overlooking Washington, DC.

Over my lifetime there have occurred certain coincidences that have no real explanation; one author calls them *God Winks*.⁵ One such coincidence occurred in 2001 when Diane and I bought a historic property near Hagerstown, MD that we could otherwise not have afforded, nor found in Virginia. I was asked to be Grand Marshall of an annual Memorial Day parade in Sharpsburg, MD. Sharpsburg incidentally is located in the middle of the historic Antietam battlefield where the bloodiest one day of fighting in American military history took place. Among the thousands of dead were nine general officers from each side.

I was involved in a wreath laying, gave a speech, and reviewed the parade; all of this was covered by an article and pictures in the Hagerstown paper. It is noteworthy that the last float of that parade was a high sided buck board filled with bar

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maids, and other friendly ladies of the day from the only bar in Sharpsburg. Many a town husband stared down at his shoes as the float passed. The ladies in that float threw kisses, and called out names: *hey Ed, hey Mike, etc. when ya comin back over to see us?* In the meantime wives jerked their heads towards their innocent looking husbands with most querying stares.

Days after the Hagerstown paper came out with coverage of the Sharpsburg event I received a call from a certain Alice Marquez of Clear Spring, MD located fifteen miles west of town.

Alice Marquez: A Key to the Past

Alice just passed away the other day at the age of 100 in her family estate in Clear Spring. Alice was truly remarkable both in intellect, and clarity of mind at her very advanced age; she was also physically fit; she would climb those steep back stairs in her family's historic mansion, and Diane and I could barely keep up with her. Alice had a keen sense of humor, and an amazing recall of history. When Alice passed away it was not only a loss for her family, but to us as she really was the last link I had to my parents' early years together in Hawaii. She actually drove the forty mile round-trip to her 100th birthday party in her navy blue 80's Cadillac, I know I was there at the restaurant with all of her many admiring friends.

Only eighty years before she had attended William and Mary College in Williamsburg, VA. It was there in college that she met Helen Singer; like Alice Helen was beautiful, brilliant, vivacious and inquiring. Following their graduation the two embarked on a six-thousand mile odyssey to visit Helen's family stationed in Hawaii. The then Colonel Singer was an Army officer stationed at Scofield Barracks, HI (the scene of the academy award winning movie *From Here to eternity* with

Burt Lancaster, Deborah Kerr, Frank Sinatra and Ernest Borgnine). The two young college grads had a glorious life for the next couple of years, considering the large number of eligible bachelor officers on the island, and a thriving Honolulu society.

Helen visited Alice at Clear Spring in 2006, and Diane and I were lucky to have spent time with the two. I happened to have numerous Hawaii photo scrapbooks compiled by Mom and Dad that we left with the two ladies; when we returned to pick the books up they had names, times and stories taped on many photos. In addition to the albums we also brought a framed photo of my parents' engagement party at the Scofield Officers Club. The party was in a cowboy western motif, and it was hosted by a certain Lieutenant Colonel George Patton, Jr...yes the same colorful General we all know and love. It is noteworthy that Patton's daughter Ruth Ellen Patton was Mom's close friend, and would be her Maid of Honor, with Alice Marquez and Helen Singer two of her bridesmaids. Helen and Alice had made special invitations for the affair, in fact Alice had saved her copy which she presented to us that day in 2006.

George had arrived at the party a little late that night, and immediately strode to the center of the ballroom attired in chaps and a ten gallon hat, he drew both loaded pearl handled revolvers from their holsters. After a couple of seconds hesitation in order to ensure everyone was watching he emptied all twelve rounds into a rather ornate plaster ceiling upon which were scrolled beautiful plaster flowers. Even before the din of pistol shots had faded, plaster and dust rained down on anyone near "Cowboy" George. With the smell of cordite everywhere Patton yelled stentorially, but in a rather unexpected high pitched voice: *Let's have a God-damned party!*

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My father's folks had known the Patton's well, especially from the long bridge parties with them at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas in the twenties. It was there in Kansas that Dad, in his early teens rode Patton's horses in the Kansas City horse shows. Patton would stand up at these shows before all of Kansas City society, and curse like hell if Dad, or any of his other riders would miss a jump, or foul up in some way.

George Patton came from a wealthy CA family, and when he was assigned to HI he sailed there on his own yacht, but with the help of a professional navigator. While there in HI *Old Blood and Guts* asked my father to teach him celestial navigation. According to Dad Patton's request came like this: *Young Truesdell since you're a pilot you must teach me navigation so I can get my family back to the mainland without having to pay some Goddamned son-of-a-bitch to do it for me!* Dad did spend nights with him on the roof of the Scofield Officer's Club training the soon to be famous leader. Dad once remarked to me that the old gent was really sharp, and picked up the complex skill quickly.

Alice admitted that she would often feel guilty that she had ever introduced Mom to Dad because he was such a hell raiser. On the Christmas Eve not long after the introduction of the two Dad had gotten pretty high and was seen riding a bicycle around the circle where Mom and her Dad lived singing over and over: *Oh holy night, everybody's tight...*

Alice truly wondered if she had discovered a lunatic for her friend Vinnie.

Sometime after the bicycle event Dad took Mom to a big party at the Ford Island Officer's Club. At some point in the evening Dad had accepted the challenge to ride yet another bicycle, this time on top of the Ford Island sea wall. Mom related to me that she finally was able to get her future husband off the bike, and off of the wall, and convince him to take her home. Since

they were on an island in the middle of Pearl Harbor that night they had to take a ferry back across Pearl Harbor. With Dad driving his rumble seat Ford V-8 he managed to be the first car onto the ferry, thus they would be the first car off when they reached the other side.

During the voyage Dad asked Mom to get a bottle out of the glove compartment. Mom came up with the bottle, and Dad said for her to go ahead and take a drink. Mom refused so he took the pint bottle from her and drank the contents. In a brief time Dad was asleep, and Mom was left to watch the rolling black waters to their immediate front.

After about fifteen minutes the ferry slowed, and began the docking process into the slip with a lurch. Reacting to the lurch the ace pursuit pilot jumped awake, started the car up, and began driving forward. Mom screamed at Dad that he was driving into the ocean as she rolled out of the car door. At the last minute Dad realized what was going down and stopped the car just before the front end went over the front edge of the ferry deck and into Pearl Harbor. After this horrifying experience the couple stopped seeing one another. Soon after they broke up Mom learned that he had planned to propose to her that night. Obviously the two eventually settled, and got back together. Later you will see how I managed to totally screw up my first effort in asking Diane to marry me...maybe it's genetic.

My Father Karl Truesdell, Jr. is Born

Dad was born in government quarters at Plattsburg Barracks, NY in 1908. Many years later the US Air Force Strategic Air Command (SAC) would build a key Cold War B-52 base there. In 2005 my wife and I visited Plattsburg Barracks which had been converted by the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) program to commercial use, and a Department of Homeland

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Security training installation. The quarters Dad had been born in were still there, and in good shape. A bronze plaque that noted Major General Karl Truesdell had been born there in 1908 was affixed to the bricks at the front door. This plaque had been posted many years before by a longtime family friend Major General Winton (Wimpy) Close who had then commanded the new SAC base in the late fifties. When Dad was born the Plattsburg Barracks had housed a Cavalry Regiment.

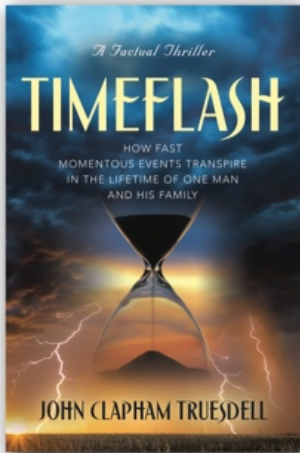
Of note was that Wimpy was married to the former Joanne Milsop. Joanne's Dad Tom Milsop was truly a self-made man. He emigrated from Scotland in the late 19th century, and went west to Carnegie's steel industry country ending up in Weirton, WV where he worked in the then existing steel sweat pits. Later he founded Weirton Steel Corporation, and became one of the key players in the mighty heaves of World War II steel production. Joanne and her sister Betty both married young pilots in the Army Air Corps, and in the flow of things became very close friends with my parents. Wimpy Close would later become a Major General in the US Air Force; Joanne's sister Betty married one George Stinson who would become President of US Steel after the war. These three couples would be at Borinquen Field, Puerto Rico together just before the US entered WW II.

My Fun Mom

I have to mention one of my best friends, and key players in this story: my beautiful, sweet, and humorous Mom Vinnie. "Vinnie" was what everyone called her, and she was the pride and joy of her entire Hathaway and Clapham family. Born in Ellensburg, WA she was the only child that Laura and Jack Clapham would have, but what a beauty she was. In looking at the many black and white pictures of her growing up it was

obvious that everyone just adored the girl as she grew into a young woman.

Mom and her mother Laura were playing golf one morning in Mindanao, Philippines when Laura was struck in the ankle by an errant golf ball. Laura and Mom had teed-off just in front of their neighbor friends who would be playing behind them. That morning the errant golf ball flew over the hill behind them and struck Laura hard. The Clapham's never uttered a word about the incident so as to not hurt their friends who had undoubtedly struck the wounding ball. Laura later died of a blood clot in that ankle when Mom was fourteen years old. Mom returned with her Dad from the Philippines to inter her Mom in Arlington National Cemetery. They buried Laura on a pretty little hill where a few years later Jack would join her.



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