

VETERAN'S CORNER

Tualatin Patriot "Al" Turner Passes Away

WRITTEN BY: DALE POTTS

Tualatin has lost a great patriot. Albert "Al" Turner passed away on December 19. He was a highly decorated World War II veteran. His medals include ex-POW, Bronze Star, Purple Heart, combat medic, WWII victory, European Theatre, Presidential Unit Citation, Jubilee of Victory (from the French government), Good Conduct and honorable discharge (known as the ruptured duck). He turned 90 on December 3.

Al had a keen wit. He asked a young friend to read the dates on his driver's license for him. After hearing the expiration date (which was some years in the future), he looked the friend in the eye and said, "Boy, they're optimistic, aren't they?" But overall, he was a humble, very modest gentleman. He rarely discussed his military experiences and if he did, it was primarily with other veterans. Highly regarded in Tualatin and Wilsonville for his patriotic activities, he was responsible for several businesses along Hwy I-5 deciding to display large American flags. Also for the placement of American flags on the previous "Tualatin wall" located on the island between K-Mart and Fred Meyer; personally putting up the flags in the morning on patriotic holidays and taking them back down in the evening. The Tualatin City Council proclaimed him as "Mr. Patriot" on May 26, 2009.

Inducted into the Oregon Military Hall of Fame on April 18, 2009, Al had been selected as "Mr. VFW", a statewide honor awarded annually, in 2005. He served as Commander of Tualatin Post 3452 for six years until 1999 and then Quartermaster for several years where he made all-state.



Fortunately, Al took time to write out his military experiences into an interesting narrative. It is being provided to the Tualatin Historical Society. His story begins, at age 19, hearing President Roosevelt announce the bombing of Pearl Harbor. His family had no idea where it was located so they looked it up on a map.

About a year later, Al was drafted into the Army. He eventually was assigned to the Medical Detachment, 121st Combat Engineer Battalion, 29th Infantry Division. His training was done in England where in a two year period he became a medical aid man and advanced to surgical technician, fifth class. Throughout the two years, Al hiked 27 miles, with a full pack, two days a week and 35 miles on Saturday.

On June 6, 1944, he was 22 years old and one of the more than 160,000 Allied troops that surged into Nazi-occupied France on D-Day. His unit was under fire as their

boat approached the beach. He saw many bodies floating in the water. After landing, he has no memory for several hours, until waking up on the beach with blood in his mouth. There was a lot of confusion as he says "by that time, nothing was going according to plan". Even though nearly deaf, dazed and disorientated, he found his group and they dug in for the night near Vierville Draw (location where "Saving Private Ryan" was filmed). He woke up the next morning with a German pointing a gun at his face. He believes the only reason he wasn't shot was because he was a medic.

As he was marched with other prisoners back into France, "American Air Force was strafing anything that moved." Although everyone ran for cover and dove in ditches, about half of the men captured with him were killed by friendly fire. They were not fed during the march. He spent time in several prison camps and eventually was sent to help in an allied prisoner hospital in Rennes, France, staffed by French doctors and nurse. The food there (which he says was better than prison camp) was a "cup of boiled potatoes and a slice of dark bread per person per day. Everyone was hungry all the time". He recalls volunteering to give blood for a transfusion in exchange for the remains of a cat. "Then transfusions were done directly from person to person. The patient died on the table beside me. I still got the cat and roasted it over a small fire". He said it tasted like rabbit.

To avoid being hit by the constant bombing of Rennes, the hospital staff "made a makeshift American flag to display on the roof using bloody bandages for the red part of the flag" - it worked.



He wrote "as time went by, we started hearing artillery fire getting closer and one morning we found that the Germans had taken off during the night and we were free". Most of the prisoners had not had their clothes or shoes off since shipping off for D-Day so the Army had them "deloused, fed, given clean clothes...interrogated, signed a paper says we would not tell anyone where we had been or what we had done, and shipped back to our outfits".

In 1950, five years after being discharged from the Army, Al was diagnosed with TB. He was hospitalized, in and out of a TB ward behind the old Portland VA hospital, until cured in 1954. Since then Al promoted patriotism and helped others wherever he could - with a big smile.



Dale G. Potts is a Navy Vietnam vet, serving as the Public Affairs Officer of the Aircraft Carrier USS Yorktown. After active duty, he remained in the reserves, retiring as a Navy Captain (same rank as an Army Colonel). His civilian career was primarily as the Oregon Public Affairs Officer for IRS.