

A LETTER TO OUR YOUTH

“As we honored the World War II veterans with assemblies, later with homecoming activities, we truly witnessed a victorious moment in the presence of the Greatest Generation.” These were the words of Martha Rabon and Leah Overstreet, Principals, Pine Grove and Delta Elementary Schools in a recent letter to the Editor Baldwin Register. For Honor Flight II (South Alabama) allow me to thank and commend you for your thoughts.

Too, it has reminded me to ‘get crackin’ on my packet of letters –each of us received many expressions of thanks for our WWII service- from the youth of our county and some overlap for greater Mobile and environs. Hereto will be the gist of my thoughts and experiences in WWII as a young teenager.

I enlisted on 6 Feb, 1943 in the US Army, 10 days before my eighteenth birthday and worried since the Navy had turned me down earlier, “you don’t see well, your spine is crooked, and one of your legs is shorter (or longer) than the other; You’ll no doubt be 4F (unfit for service). When the Army accepted me I had ‘evened up my posture with lift in one of my shoes’. And this skinny little fellow carried 100 lbs on his back onto the beach called Omaha 10 days after the invasion. Will wonders ever cease?

From Normandy to the Elbe, I roll along with the 113th Cavalry Group of two Cavalry Squadrons and in my case I was in Tank Company, fighting in a light tank of four men, with a big gun, like a 37mm and ended the war with my own tank and the rank of Sergeant. For the history buff, one may recall the attack against Baghdad in the Iraq war. Here, an army division and a Marine division fought on separate axes with a cavalry screen forward. This cavalry was similar to our mechanized WWII unit only with a bigger tank and Bradley fighting vehicle, to move against the enemy, screen and protect the flanks and prepare the way for more tanks and infantry to follow. Relatively, a similar organization using the same tactics, with better tanks and fighting vehicles. Take a ride with us from Normandy.

In retrospect, it is a war of many scenarios and sketches. We breakout of Normandy, we are surrounded we escape, we again take up the chase. We glorify in the liberation of others, and reap the benefits of their long wait: the flowers, the foodstuffs, the wine and kisses. We become oblivious to fear and take on the aura, not of conquerors, but of concerned warriors who aiding others, share with them our bounty. Then we face reality again. The German stops, consolidates

and begins his last fight for fatherland and honor. We attack, we flounder, we lose our leaders and our tanks and we taste momentary defeat. Recovering we continue on with the great armada against a faltering German, who beset from all sides, starts to give in and come apart. We reach the Elbe River, so near Berlin, and we sense it is over. We meet the Russians, and it is. No longer a teenager, I am proud, thankful and humble. It is a feeling of immense satisfaction and a performance worthy of praise, and an appreciation of fighting for something worthwhile.

Duty, honor and country was my credo and has served me well as a professional soldier and officer in the United States Army and sustained me in a total of 28 yrs service to include combat in two more wars.

Using the foregoing as a reply to the many who wrote to me, and the promise to address as many of your questions as I can, I will remind you that serving one's country is an honorable profession and cause.

And we hope like Principal Rabon and Overstreet others would see the legacy of our generation and sense the pride we feel and wish to share. Our example is one you may believe is worthy and a tonic for the young.