

THOSE BROTHERS WHO BONDED TOGETHER

On his way to the Dardanelles – a prelude to the ill-fated Gallipoli operation in WWI- Rupert Brooke, a commissioned officer in the British army died in 1915, and is buried there. Brooke is remembered for his poetry of that war: “Asked about their officer”, a SgtMajor retorted to a young recruit, “they will show you how to live, and how to die.” We lost a fabled officer, recently, who led this way, a legend of Easy Company, 506thAB 101st Airborne Division, remembered in story and mini-series(Band of Brothers):Dick Winters, age 92, middle Pennsylvania. Bill Guarnere (Wild Bill) called Winters ‘the soul of Easy company’ who led his boys, took care of them and was the inspiration for the book/series by the late Stephen Ambrose.

Ironically, I learned of Easy Company via a high school classmate, as we reminisced about mutual experiences in war, sitting on the curved, stone benches of the Arc de Triomphe, Paris, in the summer of 1945- soon after the end of our war in Europe. Burr Smith was one of the ‘brothers’. He spoke of Bill Guarnere, Skip Muck, Don Malarkey, and, of course, Winters. I felt like I was one of them as in Burr’s vivid memory. He believed they were, in the real sense, brothers, and would not hesitate to save them or even die for them. Soon we would return to California, the beaches, and the life style of the young and the restless, war, a defining moment for us, but new pursuits beckoned.

My way took me along a more mature path- a hope for a college education despite my abysmal high school record, ultimately via, make-ups and a short trek at a business college, then to UCLA and a surprise selection as a distinguished graduate and military student as 2nd Lieutenant, US Army. Military reserve reinforced this moment and marriage enhanced. Burr, after marriage, moved north and joined Eastman Kodak, following his father, then back in Army Reserve. Suddenly, the Korean War was upon us and I headed to Fort Benning, the home of the Infantry. After the

Basic course, I was reassigned as a Tactical Officer, OCS(Officer Candidate School)to train/select new Lts. A lovely letter, reeking with good advice, perhaps a recall of Lieutenant Winters, how one should lead and treat the troops under your command. I savored it and it was placed in the OCS graduate book giving my ideas but relishing Burr's. I went to war again, in Korea.

Years passed and while in charge of two junior ROTC programs, Alameda, California, found Burr again. He was back jumping in a Spec Force unit and aided my kids in ROTC. Vietnam was a hot topic and I volunteered and left. Burr, soon a part of CIA would go to Laos on a special tour with the Hmong, people of the bush. Burr would cap a career with the CIA as the agent with Delta Force preparing them for the attempt to free US hostages in the Iran revolution. While there in the eighties, he would soon join Ambrose and the story of Easy Company, tragically to die soon from cancer. I remember Burr's tribute to Winters in the book and series:

Training with Charlie Beckwith's Delta Force- alleged best unit in the Army- reminded Burr of Easy of the 506th. He wrote Dick Winters and told him about being left behind when Delta Force left-a fear of too much info as a CIA operative- as he remembered Dick always wanted to be up front and with the troops. He said, "You were blessed(some would say rewarded)with the uniform respect and admiration of 120 soldiers, essentially civilians in uniform, who would follow you to certain death. I've been a soldier most of my adult life. In that time I have met only a handful of great soldiers and of that handful only half or less came from ol'Easy -you and Bill Guarneri. The rest of us were OK..good soldiers by and large and a few were better than average, but I know as much about 'Grace Under Pressure' as most men, and a lot more about, than some. You had it."

Not only a banding but a bonding...God laid his hand on Easy Company, and sent them Dick Winters.

