

## Lodi Veterans

Its August already can you believe it? So how's your summer going so far folks? What's that you say? You can't wait till fall? Hey folks there are still a few pounds of hot dogs and hamburgers that have yet to reach your limp, weighed down paper plates. Let's not rush summer along rather waltz into Labor Day with a chili dog in one hand and a Gas X tablet in the other. Soon you'll notice frost on the pumpkins so let's slow summer down if only a little.

My last few columns have opened with tributes to our nation's military veterans. Those who put it all on the line so as to keep the American dream alive. Freedom! This column will find me doing the same. So with that having been said I salute Lodi born and raised Korean War veteran Albert Hook. Born on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April in the year 1928, Albert grew up on 18 Sidney Street and was a 1941 graduate of Washington School in Lodi. He was also a member of the 1945 Lodi High School graduating class. He was drafted into the Army on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, 1950 and was soon based at Camp Polk, Louisiana. During that time, he joined the ranks of the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division "Thunder Birds" where he was promoted to Corporal. In 1952 on his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday, while serving in Korea, Albert was given the title of Battalion Clerk.

After leaving the military, Albert found employment as a beautician at Henrietta's Beauty Salon in Hackensack, NJ. He later became Head Custodian at Lodi High School, where he retired from in 1992. Albert passed away on November 27<sup>th</sup> 1994 at his Sidney Street home. He was 66.

Albert's brother Henry Hook Jr, also Of 18 Sidney Street, entered the Army in December of 1942. He trained with the 100<sup>th</sup> Ranger Division at Fort Jackson S.C. Once in Europe, PFC Hook teamed up with the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the 7<sup>th</sup> Army. Once, during the havoc of a tempestuous battle against a German counter offensive on France's western front, Henry and the 7<sup>th</sup> Army found themselves trapped behind enemy lines. On December 12<sup>th</sup> 1944, Henry was reported "missing in action"

Henry managed to fight his way out of the hellacious battle and finally returned to his company on December 26<sup>th</sup> 1944. PFC Hook succumbed to wounds that he suffered in France on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1945. Ironically enough, the courageous young Henry died on March 25, 1945, his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. During his stay abroad, Henry was awarded the Expert Rifleman's Silver Rifle pin. He was among the first NJ men to achieve this honor. Private 1<sup>st</sup> Class Henry Hook was also the recipient of the Purple Heart.

Henry's brother John Hook Sr was twice a fire chief for Lodi's Hose Company #2. He served for 40 years. John also volunteered his time as a baseball coach for the Lodi Old Timers Little League.

There's another Korean War veteran that I'd like to give a robust salute to - Lodi Resident Erwin Burkert.

Erwin was called to service in 1952 at the age of 19. Destination - Korea. After the rigors of army boot camp at Fort Dix NJ, Erwin was sent to Fort Louis Washington as a member of the Infantry. One month later the young private joined the fighting 24th Division, 21st Regiment Company and was shipped to Camp Schema Phenergan in Sendai Japan. There the soldiers received the necessary training for service in Korea. That July the entire unit traveled north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel in Tague which was 8<sup>th</sup> Army territory. A few months later, the unit was sent to Koje Island where the North Korean prisoners were kept. Eight months later Erwin found himself close to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in a town called Chunchon. At Chunchon, Erwin's unit was stationed near a main supply road where they saw many American soldiers traveling to and from battle. A month later, the 21<sup>st</sup> Regiment was sent to Yang Valley and remained there until a cease fire was called in July of 1953. On October 12<sup>th</sup> 1954, Staff Sergeant Erwin Burkert returned home to America. During his military stay, Erwin was awarded the Korean Service Medal, the Bronze Star, The United Nations Service Medal, The National Defense Service Medal and the Distinguished Service Medal from his home state of New Jersey.

Erwin and his wife Elizabeth got married in 1957 and moved to Lodi in 1963. During that time, Erwin was employed by CBS in New York City as a technical engineer.

I recently had the opportunity to chat with a Vietnam veteran from the town of Lodi by the name of Dan Galdo. Dan was born on September 10, 1940 and grew up in Newark NJ. He was a member of Barringer High School's graduating class of 1959. He was drafted into the Army as a Private in 1963 and was immediately shipped to Fort Dix for 8 strenuous weeks of basic training. Afterwards, Dan was sent to Fort Benning, GA. for advanced combat training on a 105 Howitzer. Eight weeks later, Private Galdo was sent to another outfit called the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division B BATTERY 1<sup>ST</sup> SECTION gun 1. It was during that time that the Army began testing new concepts of warfare with those 105 cannons, loading in and out of the C.H.47 Chinook Helicopter.

Before long Dan found himself on a transport ship called the USS Rose. "Rose was my sister's name" recalls Dan "I knew I was safe." After picking up supplies in Long Beach CA, the USS Rose was then escorted to Vietnam by submarines and destroyers. They sailed to Wake, Guam, Philippines, The South China Sea, Korea and finally a night time arrival to war ravaged Vietnam where on the horizon could be seen the flashing of exploding bombs. Dan's division was met with 130 degree temperatures and the endless rains of the monsoon season." It rained 66 inches in a month." recalled Dan. "It was impossible to stay dry."

Dan's outfit saw action at the IA Drang Valley, Pleiku, Anke, Plei Me, Laos, and Cambodia. Private Galdo was discharged from active duty in 1965 and remained in the Army Reserves until 1969.

Dan moved to Lodi with his wife Constance Broeder Galdo in 1999. The couple has one son and two grandchildren. Dan was employed by the Paper Mill Playhouse, the NJ Symphony, and Channel 47 of Newark. He was a member of Local 21 and retired in 2005 as Head Carpenter. On July 12, 2019 Dan will be honored at The Manor in West Orange for his 50 year membership to the Local 21 Union.

Dan ended our conversation by saying "God Bless America." And I certainly agreed.