

MY HEROES

Perhaps you didn't know the ones that I knew but you knew some. From WWII, the few that are still living are the oldest men you see everyday, all around you, working, playing, guiding families, and proud to be Americans. I want to tell about four men who changed our world when they were young. Uncle Sam early in WWII drafted all four. Three came home and one almost made it back.

The 1st Hero in this story: Uncle Amos Allison

When the war began, young Amos lived near Elgin, Texas on a farm, having been lucky to find work for an immigrant German family, the Schroeder 's. Amos married their daughter and planned to save enough money to buy their own place someday. To be farmers -- that was their dream.

He didn't want to go to war but he didn't hesitate to report for duty. After basic training, he got a short few days furlough and held his new baby for the first and last time.

Along with many others, he sailed across 'the big pond' and began his fighting in North Africa. Then to Italy, France, and on and on, until Germany. He had slept on the ground more than in any buildings and he ate 'food' that could hardly be called 'good' to a country boy. A lot of his buddies were killed along their way to end the war. Amos saw it all and yet his mind and heart kept going with one objective: coming home and buying his farm.

Even with only a private's pay, he saved almost every cent. He didn't smoke, didn't drink, and held his money while waiting for victory. Soldiers talked of their future between fighting and his story wasn't so different. They all left the Great Depression years and went straight into war, yet Amos kept his dream alive. He wanted a farm, a mule, or maybe a tractor, with a house that he

would build. He pictured a barn, maybe a cow and everything good on a place for himself and his family.

The time finally came. The War in Europe ended and Amos looked forward to being back in Elgin, Texas to his waiting wife and a son. Amos counted his wad of cash from back-pay and mustering-out money, having more than enough to buy the farm.

Overjoyed Soldiers packed into troop trains in New York to go home. When their train came into Chicago, somebody called out that the men could step-off into the train yards to stretch for ten minutes.

Parts of this story can't be told because nobody knows exactly what happened. The news sent to Amos's wife only stated that after that brief train stop, her husband didn't get back on the train; and later his bloody beaten body was found shoved under some abandoned rail cars. His money wasn't found.

A true American hero was coming home and had asked for no hand-outs, no special favors, and no undue welfare from his country. He only wanted to get on with his life. Uncle Amos was one soldier who almost made it home.

My 2nd Hero

Osborne Eastwood

Osborne had been married about three months when Uncle Sam drafted him in the spring of 1941 – before the war. He left his home town of Pine Bluff, Arkansas to become a soldier in Louisiana. He had more training in Maryland before being sent to Alaska. The war had just begun when he was transferred to Virginia, with about three days furlough home, before a ship to England. He did not come back for five years.

Osborne said, “They fed us pretty good but you must remember, I didn’t have much to eat at home. They let us eat all we wanted a lot of times. I didn’t mind wearing army clothes and army boots. It was better than anything that I ever had.”

He continued, “I might be a bit mixed-up about the timing, but I haven’t forgotten most of what happened. We were supposed to be in the first wave, first day into Normandy but we rammed a ship in front of ours that got hit by German shelling. The bow was standing high out of the water and we couldn’t miss hitting it. Bodies, materials, and everything was everywhere. Our ship groaned and strained trying to back off the other ship. After some welding or cutting away, we finally made it to shore the next day. We had some tanks onboard, and our men needed them really bad.

*(This hero of mine is in his upper 80’s now, and about as bald as a pool ball, a bit bigger around the middle, and slower in moving around – yet, his soft smile is the same as I loved over sixty years ago. He looked straight into my heart and I saw him reflecting back in his memory. He said, “Yes, I did get five major battle stars along with a bunch of other metals. Never thought much about that. We went through Sicily and Italy and the Battle of the Bulge. One time, in that fighting in the Hedge Rows, we rested on one side of thick bushes and some Germans were resting on the other side. We were close. We heard them talking. Then we began to talk to each other. One of them spoke English and he suggested we toss some of our K-rations over the top and they would toss some of their cans to us. Everything went okay until a cuss fight started and that broke-up our visiting. We had 50 caliber machine guns and some 76 mm tank guns. They didn’t seem to have anything but small arms. It got over with.

“We made it into Germany twice. Got pushed back on the first try. But we stayed there the last try and the war in Europe ended. But I didn’t get to come home -- they kept me for six more months. I figured I might just stay in since they kept me so long. Later when they shipped us back home to put us in the war against Japan, it was over. I was mighty glad I didn’t stay in that Army any longer.” I agree with Osborne. He did his part and then some.

And, then another Hero:

Jack Fleury

Jack was the oldest boy in our combined families of nine boys and one girl. We were welded together as one family – closer than just neighbors. He played with us younger kids, and had a real job at the Alamo Movie Theater. Jack was drafted just before Pearl Harbor, December 1941.

Like other soldiers, he got one short leave early and then he was gone until 1946. He wrote home that he was a cook. His outfit made it all the way through Indo-China. Then into Africa and, yes, you guessed it, on through the war. The family didn’t hear much from Jack. He didn’t write often.

He came home quietly in 1946 and never talked about the war. My hero smoked his pipe every day, smiled, and loved us all. Jack was one of the big hearts of all time. The few photos that he brought home said more about his war experiences than anything he felt like telling.

He took a job as night watchman. Two no good, low down, jobless crooks sneaked-up on Jack one night, after he received his pay in cash for two weeks work, and they beat him to death. They got-off with little jail time because they were “underprivileged and just didn’t know better”. That was a long time ago but I miss his tender ways to this day. Another real American hero – my friend and brother, Jack Fleury.

My 4th and last hero in this story:

Bill Sprouse

Even though he was about ten years older, Bill was my buddy for the last 30 years of his life. As a young boy, he sold Grit Newspapers around the Capitol Building in Little Rock. His mother died when Bill was a baby. His daddy married again and Bill had several stepsisters and two stepbrothers. His early life story was similar to many during the 1930's. There seemed never to be any money, and what little came to them, mostly went to his daddy's new family.

Bill literally never had a new pair of shoes, only cast-offs or worn-outs, or going barefooted during the summers until he was drafted into the Army in 1942. Same story as my other heroes, he left poverty, shipped overseas, and into a war to end all wars.

From time to time, I reminded Bill that I had been a tough Paratrooper. After he laughed, he read an article to me about a 'girl' becoming a paratrooper. I quit my popping-off. He said, "Boy, let me tell you, the Airborne guys I knew were tough. I never had such a bad time as they did." But he did. Throughout the war, he was there. He liked to joke about anything in life except his WWII days of near unspeakable memories. He got mad when he listened to do-gooders, liberals, and the Hollywood crowd complaining about this country. Bill was my hero but I never told him. Now, he's gone.

All four men are American Heroes.