

Tribute to Orson D. Potter

1921 - 2009

In time of War,
My dad was true:
Fighting for the
Red, White, and Blue.

In time of Peace,
He took the Lead
In community, Church, and home,
Building a better tomorrow,
Wherever we may roam.

In time of death
We look beyond
This world of pain and woe
To Mansions bright and full of light
Where God planned for us to go.

By Donald L. Potter - March 17, 2009

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I wrote this "Tribute" to read at my Dad's funeral.

Don Campbell, the preacher, invited me to have a short sermon with insights about dad that only his son would know. I was proud that Brother Campbell invited me to speak. I talked about what an incredibly wonderful life I had on the farm. Dad was very unique man with a real zest for life. I remember that he loved working the ground. He would often pick up a handful of soil and let it sift through his fingers, saying, "This is the best life on earth." Almost every afternoon in the summer, he would take my brother Ronald and I swimming at swimming hole in a nearby creek. He also taught me to hunt coon, squirrel, and rabbit. We had twenty Guernsey dairy cows that required a lot of our time. I always had a horse to ride.

Dad was an elder at the Pleasant Ridge Church of Christ. His faith wasn't just a Sunday thing. He trusted God every day and often would sing hymns as he plowed he fields or milked the cows.

My dad was a great man of prayer. I heard him praying often for my family. He had a habit of praying every evening before going to sleep. It didn't matter who was there. When we would travel, I often heard him saying his prayers, seemingly oblivious to the fact that I was even there.

He was always concerned about my family. He treated my wife Gail as a beloved daughter. He would always play cards with my kids and their friends.

I do not recall ever hearing him say an unkind word to anyone. He had a wonderful sense of humor. Usually he would have several new jokes to tell when he came to Texas to visit us. My mother passed away in 1990. Dad took it pretty hard but went ahead with his life thanks to his abiding faith Christ.

Dad was very active in our community of Rising Sun, Indiana. He served on the school board several years. He served on the Pate Water Board, which brought water to the farmers of that area. He served with distinction on the Fair Board for a number of years.

I was with him practically every day until I went to college. I always had a profound respect for my dad as far back as I can remember. He was kind of like a brother because of the cordial relationship we always had.

He was always proud of me becoming a Preacher of the Gospel. Later when I became a bilingual public school teacher, he always showed great interest in my work with children. He used to visit my classes and even play Santa Claus for my kids.

Dad served in North Africa and Italy during WWII. I got to go to one of his Army reunions. I met his very best friend, Nicky Ortiz. Being of Mexican decent he spoke fluent Spanish. He was surprised was surprised to discover that Orson's son spoke fluent Spanish; and I was equally surprised to learn that Dad's best friend was Hispanic. I never made the connection! Dad always pronounced his-name "Ortéz" instead of "Ortéz." I learned a lot about the war and my dad's part in it at that Reunion in Corpus Christi, TX. He was in communications for most of the war, laying communications lines between 40MM Antiaircraft guns. He told me they were stationed around airfields, especially B-17 and Spitfire. They would count the planes when they left and when they came back to see how many made it and how many didn't. He also drove a jeep and weapons carrier. Later in the war he was in 81 MM Mortar. He tells about how they would fire rounds to sight in on targets where enemy soldiers were likely to show up. He watched the bombing of Casino through binoculars. He told me that he was never sick during the war. He thought that was strange given the primitive living conditions. He said he was fortunate that he wasn't in on any of the invasions.

I read a book entitled, *Return to Casino*, by Harold L. Bond (1964). Dad read it too, saying it was very accurate and would help me understand better what it was like for soldiers during the war. I always figured the freedom that I have enjoyed all my life in America was a gift to me from my father and the men alongside whom he fought against the forces of serfdom.

They tell me that my dad's father, Walter Potter, would listen to the news every evening to learn what he could about dad's theatre of war. My aunt Gertrude Potter wrote dad almost every day about family events. It was support like that that helped the soldiers to know that while they were doing their duty to God and Country, they were remembered back home.

My dad always told me that Psalm 91 was the "Soldier's Psalm." I am including it at the ends of the "Tribute." May the Lord bless all the soldiers as they go about the terrible but necessary business of protecting our freedoms!

Dad was born on June 14, 1921 at East Enterprise, Indiana. He passed away on March 14, 2009. I was visiting my wife's parents in Bremen, Indiana when dad passed away. I deeply appreciate all of my family that was there to comfort dad in his final hours.

Psalm 91: The Soldier's Psalm

Psa. 91:1 ¶ He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Psa. 91:2 I will say of the LORD, *He is* my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

Psa. 91:3 Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, *and* from the noisome pestilence.

Psa. 91:4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth *shall be thy* shield and buckler.

Psa. 91:5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; *nor* for the arrow *that* flieth by day;

Psa. 91:6 *Nor* for the pestilence *that* walketh in darkness; *nor* for the destruction *that* wasteth at noonday.

Psa. 91:7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; *but* it shall not come nigh thee.

Psa. 91:8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

Psa. 91:9 ¶ Because thou hast made the LORD, *which is* my refuge, *even* the most High, thy habitation;

Psa. 91:10 There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

Psa. 91:11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

Psa. 91:12 They shall bear thee up in *their* hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Psa. 91:13 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

Psa. 91:14 Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.

Psa. 91:15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I *will be* with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

Psa. 91:16 With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

Remembrances of Word War II

War Memories of My Grandpa: Orson D. Potter

By Sarah Potter

I was born on a dairy farm in Southern Indiana. I grew up hunting and working hard. They said country boys made good soldiers because they were used to hard work and knew to handle a rifle. We hunted raccoon, rabbit, squirrel, and even skunk. I did make Marksman in the Army. When the war began, I was working for a farmer near Indianapolis, Indiana. I enlisted because I figured I was going to get drafted anyway. I was trained in Texas for Communications. I fought in the 532 Automatic Weapons, 40 mm anti-aircraft. The last six months of the war I fought in the 473 Infantry Regiment, 81 mm mortars. We were part of the Fifth Army formed by Mark Clark on the beaches of Oran, North Africa.

I was nine days crossing the Atlantic. A German submarine sank our supply ship, leaving us without equipment for a month or six weeks. The delay caused us to miss out on the first major American engagement of the war, the [Kasserine Pass](#). I guess I was lucky because we lost that battle and a lot of Americans either died or spent the rest of the war in German prison camps.

We were first told that we were going to Sicily, then to the bloody beaches at Anzio, but we didn't. I landed at Naples about nine months after arriving in North Africa. This was well after the bloody Salerno invasion. The boys who invaded Salerno they were going to have a picnic because they heard that the Italians had surrendered. They were shocked to find that the Germans had taken over the beach defenses and were prepared to fight for every inch of the beach.

We were in position around a graveyard by Easter of 1943. We were mainly station with our 40 mm anti-aircraft guns around airfields. We protected B-17 heavy bombers, beautiful British Spitfire fighters, and the tough American P38 fighter. We were fortunate to have radar. The 532 Automatic Weapons was credited with downing eighteen German planes. Our main job with the 40 mm artillery was to keep the enemy planes from coming in low. When they had to drop their bombs at a higher altitude, it really hurt their accuracy. We would count the fighters and bombers as they left, and count them again when they returned to see how many made it.

My part in the war was to maintain communications between our anti-aircraft batteries and the Command Post. We used radio and telephone, mostly telephone. In North Africa, we were always having to reel out new telephone lines because the Arabs would use the wire for clothes lines and other things.

I never saw hand-to-hand combat. I did watch the USAF bomb Monte Casino. Monte Casino was an ancient monastery that Germans used for an observation post to direct artillery fire on the Allied positions. The Germans had the higher ground so they always had the advantage. We suffered terrible losses, so did the Germans. I was near the lead car that went into Rome. That was the first time Rome was ever taken from the south.

The last six months of the war, after the German Air Force had been cleared from the skies, we were trained for infantry. The 473 Infantry Regiment saw some difficult action. I was trained for 81 mm mortars. I was a Forward Observer for mortars. I would go about a mile from enemy lines and direct fire for the gunners. We lost more soldiers that six months than the previous three years. The infantry had it rough. My best friend Nicky Ortiz, was trained in Water Cooled Machine Guns. He would cook soup with the water in his machine gun. He kept a diary of his experiences in the war. One time he left his ammunition depot for just a few minutes. The Germans hit it with a round of artillery fire and blew it to pieces. If he hadn't left when he did, he would have been blown to pieces. Lots of strange things like that happen in the war.

Later I went as far north as Switzerland. After the war in Europe, I guarded German prisoners. I and a few other soldiers took thousands of them in cattle cars to camps in Southern Italy. We had only our M1 Carbines. They could have jumped us at any time, but they were just as glad the war was over as we were. The German cooks make great chefs. German prisoners would mend our uniforms and sew on insignias.

The war was pretty bad. I hope there never is one here on American soil. You never quite get over the war.

I am proud to have fought for my country. The Army was good to me. Every year, I get together with my war buddies. We are close, even after so many years.

Don Talking with His Dad About the War

Christmas 1988, Odessa Texas

I was in the army 3 years 16 days. Four months in the states.
Mark Clark formed the 5th Army in N. Africa on the beaches of Oran.
473 Infantry Regiment (not a Division), communications sections, land line.
53 Automatic Weapon 44 mm anti-aircraft. Kept bombers from coming in low.
18 months in Italy.
Dad landed at Naples maybe 2 months later. (Armistice Day)
Left in February. 9 days going over.
Landed 9th of March 1943, Casablanca N. Africa.
Equipment ship got there late on 1 month or 6 weeks.
In position around Easter of 1943. Stationed around a graveyard.
Raining, pup-tent fell in.
They were around airfields Spitfire, B17, P38
Left Bizerte n. Africa to...
They thought they were going to Sicily, but didn't, and then to Anzio but didn't.
Staging area.
532 credited with 18 German Planes (Unofficial)
Batteries A, B, C, D.

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Labor day 2001: Dad and I flew from Odessa to Corpus Christie for his Army Reunion. I met Nicky Ortiz his best friend during the war. I also met other buddies of his. I was deeply impressed with his commanding officer, Lieutenant Coronel Donald Stevens. Mr. Stevens showed us the picture of the German Commander at Genoa, Italy surrendering in his spiffy uniform and a white flag. Stevens stayed in the Army and served in NATO after the war.

Last edited on 9/4/2016.