



KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly



For those of us who did not live through World War II, it is difficult to imagine that it ever happened. We studied the dates, the battles, the heroes and the treaties in history class, the study of authors with starkly turned pens stretching details to fiction that only the strongest temperament could follow. How could the enlightened, the cultured, the most "civilized" peoples on earth turn to fighting machines intent on destruction or preser-

vation from destruction? We wondered in our school days how the momentum could continue for years and cause so much destruction and sorrow... but it did.

With all the facts lined up chronologically and eloquently we try again and again to understand this passage of history. Once again it eludes us and sends us back to thoughts of loud bloody battles, of concentration camps, of youths in uniform, eager and resplendent, of gracious ruined buildings nodding goodbye to an era of grandeur and peace.

Many in Provincetown put forth their best in this great history-making fight and we are in their debt. They gave us their youth and would have given their lives so that those of us born after them would not have to do so. Their motives were selfless and all their efforts were for the "unknown citizen"—any one of their fellow Americans from the 1940's on.

One of our local heroes can be picked out on Commercial Street most days. Tall, lean, and with a great swagger in his walk, the proud masculine moves of Al Oliveira draw the attention as he crosses town. His is the walk of a young American Soldier, dutifully serving in the European campaign. How did he get there? What did he do there?

Al Oliveira was born June 2, 1925 in Fall River, Massachusetts. His father, who came from San Miguel in the Azores, emigrated to

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Brazil at the age of four and to the United States at age 13. His mother was French-Canadian. Together they raised four children—two boys and two girls. Albert was the younger boy. On September 13, 1943 Al received mail that would change his life more than he could ever have done as an individual. He was drafted into the U.S. Army. At the time he was 18 years old and working as a bellhop at the Hotel Mellon in Fall River. His uniform would change, his life would change and he would become part of the accelerated changing world.

When I asked him how he felt at the opening and reading of his draft notice he replied, "I was proud, happy. I was looking forward to it. All my friends were in, some of them enlisted. My brother John, three and a half years older, was in the 29th Infantry, a medic." Al showed me a framed display of John's medals which he had prepared for his niece, John's daughter—Good Conduct Medal, European Campaign Medal, American Campaign Medal, Victory Medal and a 50th Anniversary medal. Al lost his brother recently and the wound of that loss seems

more severe than any he endured as a soldier.

Al Oliveira served with the 151st Airborne, assaulting from the air either by parachute or glider—flying machines made of canvas and tubular aluminum. They were made by small manufacturers, Steinway Piano among them. The gliders were 15 feet long, could hold a Jeep or guns and 5-6 men. They could transport the men and equipment into battle as anti-aircraft or troop support. The gliders were towed by C-47 using nylon stretch rope. The C-47 took off slowly and pulled the slack very gingerly to make the glider airborne. Today helicopters perform this function.

Al started out as a cannoneer at Fort Bragg, North Carolina with thirteen weeks of basic training. From there he was sent to Liverpool, England and Pang Bourn, England at Basildon Park. The Manor served as headquarters and the soldiers moved onto the Normandy



Mourmelon France, 1944, soldiers, villagers and their children, awaiting the arrival of Père Noël. Al is the soldier in the doorway holding aloft a beautiful curly-haired child.

lived in Nissen Huts. From there All

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TERRA LUNA

SERVING THE FRESHEST
AND FINEST FOOD
DINNER AT
5:30

ROUTE 6A, N. TRURO
487-1019



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Invasion from June 6th to July 25th, 1944 serving in Glider Battalion C94-A called upon to glide in as part of a machine gun squad that took down Z German planes, an ME 109 and a Fockewulf 190. For these risks, gliders and paratroopers received hazard pay.

On September 16, 1944, Al was glided into Holland to repel the Germans. The task of the Airborne was to keep open the highways which bordered the Netherlands so the British could come through, entering Germany through the Dutch border. A Panzer Division surprised them with tanks and field artillery at Arnheim, Holland. The British were surrounded. Al reminded me that the film, *A Bridge Too Far* relates the story.

His next stop on the continent took him to Mourmelon, France—an old French Army post—where he awaited orders. The American soldiers were preparing a Christmas party for the children of Mourmelon.

But on December 16th all this would change. The Battle of the Bulge, considered the greatest land battle ever fought and won by the U.S. Army, was fought from the 16th of December 1944 to January 25th, 1945. Mourmelon and Christmas were left behind. The city of Bastogne, Belgium was surrounded by Germans. Al explained, "The Germans 'bulged' through—you 'bulge' and don't burst to a certain point. You always maintain your shoulders. It's much less difficult to push around. Going back is never easy. (That's military lexicon.)"

Within Bastogne the troops were mostly Americans with some British. They were inside the encirclement and had to stand their ground and hold tight. The anti-aircraft had infantry support as their main work. "The cold was unbearable, but we bore it. When the snows started to melt, the dead began to show." Soldiers passed the long, cold winter days and nights held up, encircled for six weeks. I imagined them playing cards, letter writing—ignorant guesses.

"You were thinking of staying alive; you were thinking of getting warm; you were thinking about a hot meal; you were thinking about friends you lost. There were no cards, but it was not boring... it was anxious, fearful. The action was so heavy at times and we had to pay attention. You had no time to grieve... grieving needs time... You depend on each other. The long lulls would bring to mind the friends you lost, the gliders that crashed, some into the sea, some with no hope, some rescued."

During the Battle of the Bulge, Al Oliveira was wounded by shrapnel and suffered frostbitten feet. He was evacuated to Bar LeDuc then to Cherbourg, France and west to Southampton, England for hospital treatment and recuperation. Once again able-bodied, he shipped back to LeHavre, France in a non-combatant position. Al sur-

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vived the Battle of the Bulge. He still keeps in touch with the family of his captain, Captain William G. Joe, a Chinese-American, and with the family of his colonel, Colonel X.B. Cox, Jr., Commander of the 81st Airborne Anti-Air and Tank Battalion. Al was discharged May 11, 1946, but a seaman strike begun May 6th prevented them from sailing home until it was settled. So he remained in the service performing guard duty at military warehouses. "The Army can always keep you busy," he smiled.

A wall of mementos and certificates outlines the action Al Oliveira saw and the gratitude of his officers, the European countries where he fought and those from his own country.

One award reads:

101st Airborne Division Association

Life Club # 1931

Albert G. Oliveira

"D" Battery 81st A.A.

Another award reads:

Know ye, by all men, that

Pvt. Albert G. Oliveira 31 420 966

D Battery, 81st Airborne Division
participated, endured and survived the

Greatest Land Battle

(The Battle of the Bulge)

ever fought and won by the U.S. Army

16 December, 1944 — 25 January, 1945

Also hanging...

La Croix de Guerre

(2 from Belgium, 1 from France)

Paternity, the Military Order of Ardennes, Fourragere

Glider Badge

Purple Heart

Good Conduct Medals

American Theater Ribbon *(Europe)*

E AME Ribbon with 3 Battle Stars

Victory Medal

Occupational Medal

Presidential Unit Citation (2)

4 Overseas Bars

As Al explained each honor he added, "The 101st Airborne liberated 2 concentration camps. General Maxwell Taylor marched the Germans from the town to view these liberations." What other powerful statements of war witnessed by these warriors might we also add? War is a long story, but Al summed it up:

"You're a young untested soldier and you have to face your baptism of fire. You don't think you're going to die. Some people call it hopeless optimism. If you don't have that, you're in rough shape. You could get careless. It's a strange phenomenon. You see friends die and you think 'He was a hell of a lot better soldier than I, why him?' It's fate, destiny, terribly difficult to figure out."

Memorial Day should be remembered mainly for those who gave it all, gave their lives for our way of life, for our freedoms and gave each other hell now and then without being demonized. It's a great country!"

How do you thank someone who has done so much for you and is still proud and yet humble about his efforts... so many years later?

You give him respect.