WINGS



News

Volume 1 Number 8

Established May 2014

December 3, 2014

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Christmas in Foreign Lands

As we sat around telling war stories, a few talked about where they were on Christmas while on duty abroad.

When John finished his tall tale, he passed the baton to me, and remarked, "What's your story?"

"It was the second week of December of 1946 when the transport ship docked at Yokohama. Soon we were transported to who knows where. Several hundred soldiers and I were taken to a depot twenty or more miles south of Yokohama. This depot/camp had a dozen huge warehouses that each held sleeping quarters for about sixty men. The ceilings were about 30 feet high with about six to eight light bubs hanging down from the rafters. A few noticed that the rafters were not nailed, but they were bolted.

Every morning after chow, many soldiers climbed into trucks and a few weapon carriers and left the depot. Some trucks left in the afternoon. This kept happening every day for about a week. Finally we were officially told that we were being taken to our assignments in Japan. Some went as far north as Kyoto and others further south than the depot. Little by little they kept regrouping us into fewer and fewer warehouses. We were all eager to get sent to our assignments before Christmas.

One day in the early morning a few soldiers in our warehouse were creating a commotion. What's that? What's all the creaking noise? Why are the light bulbs swaying? They were freaking out. A few of us from California had felt earthquakes before and it was no big deal. As the warehouse moved and shifted, we realized why the rafters were bolted together. After the shock was over, the warehouse stood level as before. More soldiers left that day. Our warehouse was the only one housing

hall and disrupted all the festivities.

In a few minutes the Captain asked if he might join us. He sang the loudest. We fed both of them. The Captain praising the event asked, "Who is responsible for this wonderful Christmas party?"

any unassigned soldiers. We were sure that in a day or so we too would leave this depot.

One morning before breakfast the company commander - a 2" Lt- came to our quarters and informed us that someone among us had gotten a contagious fever and no one was being allowed to leave the depot for at least nine days. We went to mess together, we did KP together, we hung around our quarters together. This meant that we would not be at our assigned units until after Christmas.

After a few days of isolation, a soldier called Jersey, a long lanky Texan and I began to plan Christmas not only for us, but also for the dozen or so children in the near by village. Jersey and I asked the company commander for his approval. He was emphatic and very vocal that there would be no such party. So we went ahead anyway and spoke to a few drivers stationed at the depot. They would bring the children and any parent that wanted to come. We decided to use the green gift bags given to soldiers by the Red Cross. We removed the razor blades, a razor, the cigarettes, etc. but we added apples the mess sergeant gave us plus walnuts and other goodies from who knows where. Another driver stationed there volunteered to be Santa. A couple of our guys mimeographed the songs -Jingle Bells, Silent Night, Little Town of Bethlehem, and the First Noel. Two other drivers created games the children could play.

Soon after Christmas dinner we quickly cleaned the mess hall, put up a few decorations, put the green gift bags in a large sack, helped Santa (in fatigues) with his cotton beard, arranged the chairs in a semi-circle for the kids and their parents and waited for the trucks.

The trucks came, the children sat on Santa's lap, they played games, the mess sergeant made a dessert for all of us and we began to sing Christmas songs. Suddenly, a Captain and the 2nd Lt barged into the mess

Jersey looked at the lanky Texan and they both stared at me. Quickly I turned to the 2nd Lt and told the Captain that it was all his idea and his leadership."

Ed Moreno Writer

Happy Holidays to All

Submissions to Wings News no later than the last Wednesday of the month!

By Dennis McCarthy, LA Daily News



WWII Veteran Steven Politis, 97-years-old, tutors advance math to kids at Welby Way elementary school Wednesday, October 29, 2014. (Photo by Hans Gutknecht/Los Angeles Daily News)
Steven Politis walked into Adrian Metson's office 10 years ago with an offer the magnet coordinator at Welby Way Elementary School in West Hills couldn't refuse.

"This school gave my three grandchildren a great education and I want to pay it back," said the then 87-year-old grandfather.

"Doing what?" Metson asked.

"Well, I'm pretty good at math," Politis said. Yeah, not bad. Remember all those lunar experiments astronaut Neil Armstrong had to carry out after he took mankind's first steps on the moon and planted the American flag? Politis was on the elite team of engineers that developed them at Northrop Grumman.

And then there was the guidance-missile systems used in our nuclear submarines and the sonardetection equipment for our U.S. aircraft. He had his fingers in those, too.

Yeah, the guy was pretty good at math.

"I'd like to work with the smartest math students in school and help get them ready for algebra in middle school," Politis told Metson. "I'll give you a 10-year commitment."

A 10-year commitment from an 87-year-old man. Now that was confidence. "When can you start?" she asked.

Well, the 10 years is up, but Politis is wavering. He still feels like he's got a little gas left in the tank at 97, so he may re up for one more year or even two. And why not? That beautiful mind he was born with hasn't failed him yet.

It was the middle of the Great Depression when the kid from Stuyvesant High School in New York City graduated with grades good enough to get him into the best universities in the country, but only had the money to get him into City College of New York. "I was lucky enough to have Ph.D.s teaching me at Stuyvesant High and CCNY because better jobs were hard for them to come by during the Depression," he says. "I went to school at night and made radio sets in a shop for \$9 a week during the day."

In '41, Uncle Sam called and told him to put down the trigonometry books, he had more pressing matters for Politis to spend his time on. The Army Signal Corp needed sharp, young minds like his to help coordinate swift and accurate communications for our air, ground, and naval units.

Politis was serving as radioman on a B-17 bomber in 1944 when it was shot down over Croatia.

"John Wayne bails out and lands in the arms of a beautiful woman," Politis says. "I bail out and land in a tree bleeding.

"The local underground patched me up and hid us for four days, then took us in a fishing boat to a little island offshore where we were reunited with our troops."

There wasn't much work in the Signal Corps after the war ended so Politis took his beautiful mind to the private defense industry. He was working on developing anti-submarine, sonar-detection equipment at Lockheed when he decided it was time to retire and smell the roses.

Fat chance. He didn't realize it, but that beautiful mind of his was just getting warmed up. He met a nun from St. Genevieve's School in Panorama City, who said they were looking for a math teacher.

"I had two engineering degrees and a doctorate, but I didn't have a teaching credential," Politis says. "She didn't care. She said she prayed on it, and I was the one.

"Those were the most rewarding, best years of my life, teaching kids who were struggling in math. Six of those students went on to become National Merit Scholarship finalists."

Word started getting around about this retired math teacher who had helped develop the technology to recover vital information from the moon, and built high tech defense systems.

The Los Angeles Unified School District decided he was the guy it was looking for – a "super" math teacher to help other math teachers in the district who were not up to snuff with their trigonometry. Politis was drafted back into duty. Retirement would just have to wait a little longer. Well, actually, a lot longer.

"He is truly amazing," Metson says. "He just keeps on going and the kids adore him. Every summer I get nervous calling him at home to see if he's coming back for another year. I don't ever want that phone not to be answered."

If he's still looking down at the grass, he'll be back, Politis says. Because the way he sees it the brightest kids often get overlooked in our school system.

"If we're going to keep doing things better than the rest of the world, we need these kids," he says. The 12 students – 11 boys and one girl - in his prealgebra class this year are still munching on the last crumbs of their lunch Wednesday as they walk into room 40 at 11:30 a.m.

They and their parents have voluntarily cut down their lunch hour to 15 minutes two days a week so they can spend the extra 45 minutes with Politis. When they stop chewing and grab their pencils, he picks up his marker pen and starts writing algebra equations on the board, explaining every step along the way.

"Any questions?" he asks, from the walker he's sitting in.

One little boy shoots his hand into the air. "I don't get it," he says.

Politis smiles and walks him through the process until he does get it. If past history holds up, many of the kids in this class are going to be bringing home trophies from math competitions in the future.

"So what do your parents say when you tell them your algebra teacher is 97 years old?" I ask Heather Jung, 10, and Eric Choi, 11. They start giggling.

"They say, 'no way,' Jung says.

Yes, way.

As long as there's still a little gas left in his tank, the man with the beautiful mind will be answering the phone next summer when the magnet coordinator from his grandchildren's old elementary school calls.

Thank You Dennis, Your original 2002 Dailey News Article gave birth to our wondrous growth over these past twelve years. F.R.

December Birthdays

Katherine Frangos-December 20, 1929 Doug Rankin-December-26, 1929 Shirley Andrews December 4, 1936 Judge Donald Foster-December 24, 1920 Lee Auger-December 23, 1929 Howard Swerdlick-December 7, 1936 Juan Cama Cho-December 24, 1945 Alan Hill December 22, 1966 Paul Morrison-December 8, 1924 David Plumb-December 7, 1952 Lee Levitan-December 24, 1923 Brian Anderson-December 12, 1980 Dick Tha Ckson-December 18, 1924 Barbara Wright-December 24, 1931 Bill Turner-December 15, 1944 Roscoe Frazier-December 8, 1939 John Helm-Decen ber 24, 1020 Peggy Jean Bassett-December 20, 1938 Cliff Rose-December 16, 1926



LA City Council Group Picture



Our Visit to the LA Cit y Council Chamber



Another picture in the council chamber



North V alley Military Institute



St. Martens School



Reagan Library



Barneys Flag in the Muesum



Fred Z pointing at picture in Museum



Fred's Day



Pomelo Charter school



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