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WHS Class of 1939

Memoirs From World War II

By HORACE R. CORBIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times
Editor's Note: The following excerpts are from the publication in 1994 of the 55th reunion of The Westfield High School Class of 1939. The complete document is available at www.goleader.com/whs1939

December 7, 1941, and our entry into World War II changed the lives of WHS 1939 in ways none of us could have imagined. We will be forever indebted to those who rose to the challenges of the war and gave their lives in the process. Seven of our classmates from the class of '39 fell in the war. They, along with 77 other Westfield servicemen, lost their lives.

In remembrance are: Lieutenant Salter Storrs Clark, 2nd; Lieutenant H. Lester Gebler; Lieutenant William H. Lyman, Jr.; Corporal Lawrence A. Rankin, Jr.; Lieutenant Elefterios V. Stavros; Sergeant James L. Thomas; Lieutenant Archibald L. Williams.

We were the class of 1939 B.C. (before computers). Remember? We were before Saran Wrap and Scotch Tape, before nylon and dacron, before penicillin and polio vaccine, before Xerox and Polaroid, before credit cards and even ball-point pens...

We learned what was going on in the world by hearing or reading about it, not by watching it happen on TV. Pearl Harbor changed all that and what follows are wartime memories and experiences as recalled by some of our classmates.

- Robert R. Hoffman, Editor

GENERAL PATTON EXPRESSES HIS WISHES

by Ed Chatfield

My first meeting with General Patton was when the company failed to cross the river at the Maginot Line due to enemy firepower. The next day, he spoke to us as he stood on the hood of his jeep with both hands at his waist on his pearl-handled pistols and said, "You will cross the river if it takes a boxcar load of dog tags." We crossed the river!

RESCUE IN OSAKA BAY

by Avrel Mason

My most hair-raising experience was my 35th and last mission. It was for air/sea rescue. In plain view of Japan, we located two downed fliers in life preservers, apparently wounded. The Japanese sent out wooden torpedo boats to capture our men. We sank one after another using our eight forward machine guns. Almost out of gas, we saw the most unforgettable, thrilling sight. A rescue sub was approaching on the surface at full speed, spray flying, a large American flag flying and officers on the conning tower waving as we flew past. Years later, I found out the men were rescued. What a heroic submarine crew!

REGENSBURG BOMBING RUN

by Owen McWilliams

The odd thing about flying in combat, you just about go in a straight line, paying no heed to the aircraft batteries. In 1943, we flew mainly on our own, without fighter escort. Our fifth mission, on August 17, 1943, to bomb the Regensburg aircraft factory, was our downfall. We crashed in Germany and were captured. I was interned in Stalag 7A near Munich and later sent to Stalag 17B in Austria. We stayed there until April, 1945, when the flashes of the Russian guns could be seen over Vienna. We were marched west toward the German border, 10 groups of us, 500 men each. We were liberated on May 3, 1945 by soldiers of the 13th Armored Division, part of Patton's army.

Planning Chair Describes Traffic Questions As "Uncoordinated" Between Town and County

I am writing to clarify a statement attributed to me in your article in the August 17 edition of *The Westfield Leader* about the application to the Westfield Planning Board by Tigar Realty for the construction of a medical office building on the 500-block of Springfield Avenue. I did not tell your reporter that my position is that left turns onto busy Springfield Avenue should not be allowed. Instead, I told him that I was troubled by the uncoordinated intergovernmental process on traffic safety that had left the planning board uneasy when it considered the application.

Applications to our Planning Board, such as Tigar Realty's, where traffic issues are paramount and jurisdiction for the off-site traffic analysis rests with the county, present a challenge. The municipal planning board has jurisdiction to decide the application, but, because the site abuts a county road, the county must approve the traffic plan. Lack of communication between different levels of government is common in New Jersey where jurisdiction is split in the review of an application.

In this case, as frequently occurs, the developer conferred on a preliminary basis with county officials, but the municipality was not part of that discussion. The planning board

BLOWING UP THE UNIVERSE

by Bill Lowe

James B. Conant, President of Harvard, spoke on fighting the Nazis: "The forces of violence must be beaten back by superior violence." I was ordered to a classified destination: the atomic bomb project at Los Alamos. Achieving the extreme purity of plutonium needed for the weapon to work was most difficult. We had a process (idea) by September 1944. By July, 1945, we saw the first baseball-sized plutonium hemisphere — half of the atomic bomb. On July 16, two halves were joined in detonating the first atomic bomb in the Trinity test at Alamogordo. The implications were not lost to us.

Publisher's note: This is part of a series on veterans of the region from all eras to archive their stories. If you have a story or photograph, please contact us. On Veterans Day, November 11, there will be a celebration Dinner Dance, open to all, at the Westfield Armory. Be part of the fun. Call Charles Brown at (908) 654-3946.



IN CAHOOTS WITH

Birds of a feather flock together. This fine-feathered colloquialism was probably plucked from the writings of Cicero "Similes similibus gaudent, pares cum paribus facillime congregantur." This maxim expresses the point that people of similar interests and goals are attracted to one another.

It was also said that men who lived together in a cabin were in partnership with one another, perhaps to hunt, trap, mine or for some criminal purpose.

These men were literally in cahoots with one another. Most of our etymological sources suggest that cahoots comes from the French word cahute meaning "a small hut or cabin." According to Funk, this expression dates at least from the 19th century or possibly as far back as the Revolution. Currently, cahoots has the derogatory sense of "collaboration of a questionable nature."

Letters to the Editor

Detective Endorses Captain Tracey For New Role As Town Police Chief

With the impending retirement of Chief Anthony Scutti, the town is in the process of screening candidates for the position of Chief. As an 18-year member of the department, I have worked with and for the two candidates who are being considered for the position. Although I feel that both individuals are good men, I truly believe the person best suited and qualified for leading the department is Captain Barney Tracey.

Captain Tracey is a man of high morals and character who has never asked anyone under his command to do anything that he was not willing to do himself. He is the most highly decorated officer on the police department. He has received three valor awards as well as numerous other commendations during his career. Barney is a family man who has raised three children and put them through college on a policeman's salary, but yet found room in his heart and in his home for two of his nephews who were in need. They were brought into the family and adopted. One just recently married

and has a successful career and the other, still in grammar school, is doing extremely well.

I have the privilege of working many years in the Detective Bureau with Captain Tracey. I have seen his leadership ability first hand. He has never sent any of his detectives on a dangerous assignment without being there himself. That is something I have always admired and respected. He has always treated the members of the department fairly and has always had an open door to those in need. I have seen Barney associate with the most influential residents of the town and I have seen him interact with the neediest. He is the same person for both.

There are many qualities necessary to be a leader and a Chief of a Police Department. I feel that Barney Tracey possesses these qualities and has shown that over his 26-year career. That is why I feel that he is the right individual to be the next Chief of the Westfield Police Department.

Detective James McCullough
Westfield Police Department

Resident Supports New Parking For Downtown Development

On Wednesday, August 30, at 8 p.m., The Westfield Town Council is going to hold a special open meeting on the central business district parking crisis. It is so important for each of us to be there, be heard and be counted.

Ample parking has been a recognized concern since 1914, and the vitality of our central business district is in jeopardy. Convenient retail alternatives surround our CBD, i.e., malls and highway stores. A mammoth shopping center is under construction but a stone's throw from our town.

Our CBD's vitality is owed, in large part, to the courage of our former leaders developing existing lots throughout the CBD. It is time for the members of our council, our leaders, to act. Take the existing parking study and update the courageous acts of former councils. We risk more from inaction than action.

In a full page ad in this publication, two long-time and highly respected residents, Bill Shepherd and

Lee Hale, expressed their frustration over the council's inability to get beyond posturing and move ahead. Both have given many years of their time for the good of our town and have nothing to gain personally by taking such a courageous stance. Their concern is the same as the overwhelming number of the rest of us.

Are we going to continue jeopardizing our vital downtown center? This may be our last opportunity to observe how each council member stands on the issue and to come forward to state we don't want to see this procrastination continue into the fall. This subject should be a non-political and unanimous decision. If an affirmative move is not taken by the council immediately, the subject will surely become a political football this fall. This non-constructive action is already taking place. Let's be there on the 30th and get the facts straight and stop the procrastination.

Carolyn Klingner-Kueter
Westfield

Rialto Accident Victim: Thanks and A Caution

On the evening of Saturday, August 12, I was involved in a near-fatal pedestrian automobile accident while attempting to cross East Broad Street near the Rialto Theater.

I would like to publicly thank the many individuals who provided assistance and the required emergency services that evening, including the Westfield Police and First Aid Squad. Joe Wnek, the theater manager, offered care and comfort to my younger two sons, so they did not have to witness the trauma treatment.

Westfield residents should petition the town for additional safety controls at the busier intersections downtown. A traffic light would have helped provide a much safer crossing at this extremely busy intersection. I hope my unfortunate experience will help serve to prevent any further tragic accidents.

I would appreciate it if anyone who witnessed the accident would please call me at (908) 276-3584.

Martin E. Robins
Chairman, Westfield Planning Board

Albert DiGiovanni
Cranford

Deadlines

General News - Friday 4pm
Weekend Sports - Monday 12pm • Classifieds - Tuesday 2pm

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Submission Formats

Photos - B/W and Color • No Panoramic or Polaroid
Typed, not handwritten • Upper and lower case
Need name & daytime phone

Competitive Sportsmanship: Parents Should Remember It's Only a Game

The story made headlines in July. A confrontation between two fathers at their sons' hockey practice in Massachusetts resulted in the death of Michael Costin, a single father of four. The other dad, Thomas Junta, married, two children, has been charged with manslaughter.

After both men traded words and blows at rinkside, Mr. Junta left the arena, only to return to beat Mr. Costin to a pulp in front of his three sons. The beaten man fell into a coma from which he never recovered.

To those of us who have ever berated a referee, verbally abused a coach, taunted a player or shoved a rival parent, "There but for the grace of God go we."

In their zeal to see Susie's team emerge victorious, in their drive to fulfill their dream of Tommy's major league stardom, some parents turn rabid at the playing field. They assume a posture formerly reserved for that handful of fans at professional ball games who've had one too many big beers.

What happened to encouraging a child's participation in a sport for fun? For the camaraderie?

When did spirited cheers from mom and dad take a back seat to belligerence? When did good sportsmanship from spectators give way to vicious verbal assaults on officials?

Think of the repercussions. Imagine the shame of the daughter whose mom gets tossed from the gym because she barked once too often at the ref. Consider the embarrassment of the son whose fanatical father paces the sidelines, shouting orders because he thinks he knows better than the coach.

If they see it enough, kids begin to believe it's okay to mouth off at someone simply because you don't like what she says or he does. If mom and dad don't show respect to others, why should 12-year-old junior?

Most coaches make an effort to lay down some behavioral expectations for parents at the start of each season. Some institute the 24-hour rule, asking parents who wish to discuss their child's play or a particular game to wait until 24 hours after the event to speak with the coach.

Others simply ask parents to compliment, encourage, or cheer during games — but to refrain from trying to direct their child's play or that of her teammates.

Be it soccer, baseball, basketball, football, hockey, whatever — we must remember our kids are playing a game. By definition, a game is meant to amuse. As a society, we have veered far from that concept to the point where, for too many kids, playing the game just isn't fun anymore.

Sports Illustrated recently cited a Michigan State University study which reported, "Of the 20 million American kids who participate in organized sports, starting as early as age four, about 14 million will quit before age 13." The magazine stated the quitters will say "they dropped out mostly because adults — particularly their own parents — have turned the playing of games into a joyless, negative experience."

How sad. Our kids deserve better. We parents should know better. After all, it's only a game.

Create a Combined Town Authority For Better Ball Field Maintenance

In the past several weeks, *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood* has received three letters about the maintenance of ball fields in Westfield. These hard-used venues provide near-constant recreation for a variety of vibrant leagues and organizations. The letters we received, from Recreation Commission member Melvyn Coren, from the school board's Michael J. Kessler, and from John Russitano, Jr., of the Department of Public Works, all addressed the issue of ball field maintenance.

To put it bluntly, a number of our fields are getting torn up. And there seems to be no fully coordinated strategy for maintaining them.

In large part, that's because two authorities control two sets of fields. The board of education has one set, basically school yards and fields. The park fields fall under the control of the recreation department.

Recreation Director Glenn S. Burrell said, in a recent interview with *The Leader* and *The Times*, that he believes "Our fields are in good shape. Could they be in better shape? Certainly. But with the level of demand and the use they get, it's very difficult" to make the fields better.

But Mr. Burrell also said, "I'm all for increasing the level of maintenance and care, because the demand is never-ending."

Thankfully, some efforts have begun to create a combined authority for the maintenance of Westfield's sporting grounds.

Mr. Burrell and the Recreation Commission have written a number of letters to Robert A. Berman,

School Board Secretary and Business Administrator, proposing some kind of combined authority for playing field maintenance.

Mr. Burrell characterized this effort as "a preliminary dialog."

Mr. Berman, interviewed by this paper, acknowledge receiving the correspondence, and said, "I've sent (a letter) back to (Mr. Burrell) as well. The first thing we probably need to do is to get together perhaps every six weeks so we can keep each other in good communication."

Mr. Berman noted that the school district could gain a great deal from cooperating with the recreation board. The district, he said, has only two grounds workers and much less equipment to work with than the recreation department.

Mr. Berman said the school board has been talking about field maintenance with Town Engineer Kenneth B. Marsh, Department of Public Works Director Daniel Kelly and with Town Administrator Thomas P. Shannon.

Power-sharing always involves some give and take. But, as Mr. Burrell said, "There's a lot of potential there. As with anything involving the town and the board, there needs to be a lot of discussion, and people need to be open-minded in that discussion for any progress to be made."

We urge these discussions to go forward. Coordinated ball field maintenance requires a coordinated authority.

Let's create one.

