

BUDGETApril 26, 1999

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BBB

Preface:

This is a war budget!

Over eighteen years ago in an essay about my tour of duty in the Puerto Rican army I observed in passing that every member of our club was permitted one war paper. The following Monday I was taken severely to task for presumption, for my temerity in daring to pronounce, and unilaterally at that, a new rule for our brotherhood. I had been in the Club for only ten years and, at fifty-two, was still what passed for "young" in this assemblage. It was almost as bad as if I had ventured to propose a new member after being elected only ten years earlier or, worse, before I had delivered my first paper.

The rhubarb was resolved to the effect that we may present as many war stories that are in us. So, I guess I was the occasion of promulgating a new rule after all. Accordingly there follows my second war paper.

No, I guess it's my third. That night in December 1981 I had forgotten that my debut paper probably qualified. That was a budget about wartime movies. It was mumbled from our podium, without the benefit of

electronic amplification, by a member who has since passed on to the great engineering shop in the sky. He even skipped a page and only I noticed. Maybe, since nobody heard it, it doesn't count after all.

My current war paper doesn't have the heart-stopping drama of Jim Coates' account of night landings on a carrier during the Pacific War. Nor does it approach the titillating quality of Lee Davis' wrestling (in Cairo, was it?) with a poked harlot on his lap. (and it has nothing to do with Nick Clooney's Sok Wars, even though I'm writing about myself as a teen-ager) Rather, I take for my inspiration John Diehl's fine essay on his experiences on the Second World War Home Front.

I was thirteen that infamous December Sunday afternoon in 1941, just returning home after appreciating Alice Faye as Lillian Russell crooning "After the Ball" at the Lake Theater. The kitchen radio was broadcasting the news, Mother was making fudge, and she announced the bombing. If I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was, the fact that we were going to war was more of a resolution than a surprise. I had been prepared by the ominous radio voices of Gregor Ziemer and Edward R. Murrow, by the drawn face of my Father the day he registered for the draft, and by the knowledge that a man from his powdered milk plant had already been "called up" in the 1940 draft.

My war was experienced in the exempted (I never learned what we were exempted from) village (pop. 4982) of Celina, Ohio, ten miles from the Indiana border and half way between Cincinnati and Toledo. You Cincinnatians regularly drove on its brick Main Street (Route 127) on your way to your thirty-room summer cottages in Michigan.

Celina and the War

First, the background for my war. No new war factories, no Rosie the Riveters, no bustling army camps, no "Victory Girls" disrupted the calm of Celina. Aside from the obvious, such as gasoline and rubber shortages and the absence of young men, my town was little affected by the war. The canning factory worked

full blast, even without its president, who was a dollar-a year man in Washington; he was the father of my best friend. Mersman's furniture factory and, yes, really, the Desoto dealership manufactured pontoons and glider parts. My Father worked long hours at the powdered milk plant.

Briefly, in the summer of 1944, German POWs lived behind barbed wire two miles west of town in the old Boy Scout Summer Camp at Harbor Point. I pedaled by one summer afternoon on my Schwinn and returned their incurious stares. Strangely, Celina was just as incurious. I remember no articles in the Daily Standard, no discussions about the strangers in our midst. Perhaps we were concerned that our loose lips might sink ships. We followed that war, of course, but it seemed to be a very, very, distant thing.

Wartime Sacrifices

Seventeen when the war ended, I had lost no friends or family in the conflict. In our highly stratified High School world, the exalted Junior and Senior boys had virtually nothing to do with us in the lower orders (except to date our younger female classmates). So no friend of mine went off to war. Cousin John was at Annapolis, but he was in the class of '46.

Necessarily powdered milk plants, like my Father's, have close ties with farmers, so our frozen food locker was always filled with meat. The plant also produced butter, so my family never went short. My Father, a farmer's son, had always gardened, my Mother had always canned. I have her plastic folder of ration stamps and tokens, and she must have use them, but I don't remember going without anything. Those of us who remember the stamps and tokens, though, are among the few who comprehend what Bogart means, in that opaque film The Big Sleep, when he tells a police detective where he could pick up "three red points".

I guess the greatest sacrifice was sugar. As I said, my Mother was making fudge when I returned from the movie on December seventh. She had one of the great all-time sweet tooths. Remembering 1917-18, on

December eighth, she bought all the sugar that Merle Casey would sell her from his little neighborhood grocery. To keep it from the hoarders, of course. Stored in five-gallon lard tins in the pantry, it lasted pretty well, especially when stretched with honey or corn syrup. Kate Smith for General Foods and Spry (remember Spry?) shortening's Aunt Jenny provided recipes for the latter, but corn syrup cakes tended to be wet and spongy and corn syrup frosting dissolved into a stocky goo after eighteen hours. Nevertheless my family's sacrifices were neither great nor painful.

Doing Your Bit

Patriotically, my Mother volunteered to free a man for the armed forces and returned to teaching in the fall of 1942. Such a move long ago in 1942 — entailing two working parents of two children, before automatic dishwashers, clothes washers and dryers — presupposed assistance in operating the home base. (My Mother always maintained that no number of labor-saving appliances could ever replace a good maid). But, then, at our house, that assistance slipped out from under us when Althea, our maid, also volunteered to free a man for the armed forces. She went to work at the Goodyear Rubber Factory ten miles away in St. Mary's. My buddies and I, well on the way to being dirty old men, snickered that she must be making condoms.

There remained only one solution to the problem of maintaining the Curry house: the forced labor, the child labor of my sister and me. My Mother, or in this guise, Mrs. Curry, was not an educator for nothing; she was past mistress at training household help. In Dennison, Minnesota (population 300), where I lived until I was nine, she had initiated a series of hired girls from neighboring farms into the proper way to run a household. In the more worldly Celina, hired girls had been transformed into maids, even though the source might be the same. And so, after rigorous instruction, my younger sister and I washed and dried dishes, dusted, polished and Hoovered, cleaned windows and mirrors with Bon Ami and newspaper, used the special Fuller brush on the radiators, scrubbed tile, and scrubbed and waxed linoleum. Mrs. Curry still did the shopping and most of the cooking and the washing, but

the ironing board was up for the duration as the ironing lady provided the only outside help our newly-self-sufficient family unit required.

Such experiences during the impressionable teenage years leave deep imprints, and I remain irrevocably marked by one dictum of Mrs. Curry, the hired girl, maid, children trainer. Wet mops. Wet mops just moved the dirt around; possession of even one was a symptom of sloppy housekeeping. One got down on one's knees and scrubbed. The lasting implications of this rule did not pop up in my life for several years. When I bought my house in 1966 Mrs. Phillips came with it. A 1920s German immigrant, she might as well have been trained by Mrs. Curry. Many, many times she would recount how she had tied cloths to her feet and skated across waxed ballroom floors of some Cincinnati great houses, to give the parquet its final sheen. She was bandy-legged and had housemaids knee from scrubbing floors, including mine. Then, at the age of 76 in 1989, she left me.

It was then that it became apparent that Mrs. Curry's training would not be denied, could not be overcome. As I began courting replacements, applicant after applicant would ask: "Where do you keep the wet mop?" I would show each one where I stowed the sponges and scrub brushes and each one fled. So, My Mother has condemned me at the age of seventy, to go down on my creaking knees, scrub brush in hand, and have at the vinyl and the tiles. Not as frequently as I would if Mrs. Curry were standing over me, but her ghost can't have everything. And it's entirely too frequently for a retired History Professor.

In the summer of 1945 I finally got a chance to do my bit and help deliver a "smack at the Japs". Two buddies and I got rides in a 1936 shock absorber-less Chevrolet and joined Althea at St. Marys Goodyear. Night shift, 11-7. I vulcanized O Ring seals for the shock absorbers of the B-29s that were smacking the Japs. I serviced ten, I think, machines: raising the levers to open the heavy molds, removing the cured rings, cleaning the molds, inserting the raw rubber, closing the molds and VULCANIZING. Round and round for eight hours a night. I earned as much as a lordly \$75

a week. And, as muscles grew, I soon had the right arm of a Charles Atlas, quite at odds with the skinny rest of me.

War's End

One night in August 1945 I was going round and round my vulcanizers when, in the middle of a shift, everyone was sent home. Japan had surrendered. Did the Enola Gay, which really "smacked the Japs" have my O rings in her shock absorbers?

Of course a celebration was in order. That summer my sister and I palled around with (the 1945 version of "hanging out", not dating; there was a clearly perceived distinction), with my classmate Joanne and her younger brother Dick. We had all seen the V E Day news reels and knew the drill. Join the crowd in the middle of town and celebrate. So, to Main Street we betook ourselves on that joyous summer evening. But Celina was not London, or Paris, or New York. No one was there. What to do?

Nothing loathe, we formed a line. But what should we sing, or chant? "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" The Celina High School fight song? Nothing seemed right. And we didn't come up with anything right. . . .

I was embarrassed then, and I'm embarrassed now to admit that the only public celebration of VJ-Day in the exempted village of Celina, Ohio, was constituted of four unimaginative teen-agers congaing down an empty Main Street shouting:

BOSTON BAKED BEANS BOSTON BAKED BEANS BOSTON
BAKED BEANS

Herbert F. Curry

Soren's War

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

So observed Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. He was right on the mark; and for me, never more so than on the occasions I have recalled my World War II Navy experience, and ruminated over the meaning of it all. Rerun and viewed as it was lived-that is, like a movie in linear forward progression-my wartime service will be readily seen to have been privileged by virtue of social circumstance; to have pretty well kept me out of harm's way; and to have seriously inconvenienced me only with the usual snafus and inanities for which wartime bureaucracies are justly famous; whatever their century or nationality.

I was 17 when I graduated from high school in suburban New York late in June, 1942. The next day I travelled up to Cambridge where I enrolled in Harvard's class of '46 and signed up in the Naval Reserve V-I Program. The latter was the Navy's euphemism for stockpiling potential Naval officers before they were greedily drafted for the Army. In June of 1943, after three semesters, I went on active - so to speak - duty as an apprentice seaman, and was promptly re-stockpiled at Harvard for three more. Then, following a few months of pre-midshipman school at the Berkeley-Carteret Hotel on the Jersey shore, I went on to four months at Northwestern Midshipman School on Chicago's near north side. I was finally commissioned an ensign in January 1945, and sent to mine warfare school in Yorktown, VA for the next two-and-a-half months.

At last, having been stockpiled, educated and trained to a keen fighting edge, I arrived at Buckner Bay, Okinawa in early May to assume the post of mine warfare officer aboard a destroyer minelayer. I was finally ready to show my stuff in battle-but it was not to be. After a few weeks we headed toward home, and nine thousand miles later on August 13th, the day before V-J Day, we steamed into Brooklyn Navy Yard.

There, the ship was decommissioned. The Navy had decided it was not worth permanently repairing the extensive damage inflicted by a Kamikaze while the ship was on radar picket duty a few weeks before I came aboard.

In mid October I caught up to my second ship, a destroyer minesweeper, at Sasebo, Japan. I was its new minesweeping officer and assistant navigator. The next six months took us to the Inland Sea, Nagoya, Yokosuka, Nagasaki, the Tsushima Straits and other exotic venues as we performed routine occupation assignments. In May, we proceeded to Alameda, CA where, on July 1st, I bestowed my prized grommetless, salt-encrusted officer's hat on my grateful neophyte replacement, and flew home to the rest of my life.

I had served three months as mine warfare officers on a destroyer minelayer that never laid a mine; and nine months as minesweeping officer on a destroyer minesweeper that never swept one. I had many experiences aboard both that were fraught with significance at the time they occurred. But most were gradually discarded onto the cutting-room floor of my memory. However, one particular situation remained. It unreeled only too vividly in my mind when ever I chanced to think about my navy career. It took more than a few years until, as Kierkegaard suggested would happen, I fully understood its meaning.

It started when I boarded the destroyer minelayer at Okinawa. I did so not knowing the ship had been hit by a suicide plane just a few weeks earlier while on radar picket duty. Twelve of its 300 man crew had been killed and some 40 wounded. I was shocked by the unexpectedly frigid reception I received. Yes, the man I was replacing-the assistant gunnery officer-was tickled silly. At about 6'1" and 125 lbs. he looked ghastly, having lost some 50 lbs. due to chronic seasickness. I was his savior, and he practically ran off the ship as I got on. But to the enlisted men, I was a puny, exceedingly green, college-boy ensign-a useless affront to their dead buddies; and to the officers, I was "George," the usual term for the most junior officer on a Navy ship, who was given the extra jobs everyone hated, like wardroom mess officer, and a

constant regimen of standing watch from midnight to four bells. Besides, I was replacing a greatly liked and highly competent member of the group. The captain was disgusted. "What in the Hell am I going to do with a mine warfare officer on radar picket duty? For Crissake, I requested a gunnery officer!"

As the ship's new assistant gunnery officer-a specialty about which my ignorance was total-my general quarters station was to be in the main battery director as the target spotter. My job was to spot the most dangerous looking Kamikaze, give its bearings to the crew who would then train their delicate optics on the target and lock it in, so the huge computer below decks could aim the ship's five inch guns and down the plane before it hit us. It sounded simple when it was explained to me the morning after I boarded. That same afternoon the ship put to sea for gunnery practice to check out the fire control system following completion of temporary repair of the Kamikaze damage. Shortly after we left harbor bucking heavy seas, the general quarters alarm sounded. I ran to the main battery director tower and clambered up to my post 33 feet above the main deck, closed the hatch and prepared for action with the enlisted men who operated the range and altitude finders in the very crowded space. It took only a very few minutes for me to realize why my predecessor had been perpetually seasick. In the heavy seas the director tower waved around in the air like a conductor's baton. My nausea grew acute, and throwing up became imminently probable. In desperation, I opened the hatch to get some fresh air, and let in what seemed a deluge of water from a particularly large wave. The delicate optics of the range and altitude finders were covered with salt spray-a mortal sin in gunnery circles. And the enlisted personnel let me know it by screaming imprecations at me that are best not repeated. The subsequent wardroom conversation included frequent references to court martial and other dire consequences.

While this was the most dramatic indication of my ineptitude, the first weeks aboard the ship lived in my mind as a continuing series of lesser, but still highly embarrassing, gaffes. Nothing went right. I lived in constant fear of my next foul-up, and in shame for the

previous ones. But somehow I survived it. I gradually improved my level of performance to the point where I had earned sullen toleration by the enlisted men and the officers' grudging acceptance by the time we finally reached Brooklyn.

For some years thereafter, I subconsciously avoided thinking about those very traumatic weeks. However, in due time, I felt compelled to rerun them in slow motion through my mind so I could understand their impact on my life-both then and now. The first time through, it had seemed the most colossal failure in my young life. Yet, ironically, I had been regarded as a very good officer on my second ship-a competent navigator, watch officer and division head. The success I enjoyed on the second ship certainly wasn't due to the training I received in pre-midshipman and midshipman schools. Both were perfunctory by any standard. The mine warfare training was good for a highly specialized role I'd never filled. It certainly couldn't have been due those horrible experiences on my first ship that were so painful to think about-could it?

Why did they treat me as a pariah? I had taken it all so personally at the time.

Why was the Navy so stupid as to put me in a position for which I was so ill-prepared? I could have gotten us all killed!

Ahah-a glimmer of light. That's what the crew of the first ship had been thinking. As I reran my arrival on board through their eyes, it dawned on me that to them I was a symbol-an impersonal personification, so to speak-of the Navy's stupidity. As I ruminated further, it occurred to me that the crew of a Navy ship that has lived and trained intensively together for months, or even years, and then has been bonded through the crucible of heavy action, is very much akin to a living organism. When a part is destroyed or removed, the organism reacts to its replacement as though it were a transplanted foreign body. That is, the replacement is tested, and then rejected if it is incompatible with the health and welfare of the host.

As far as the crew knew when I came aboard, the ship would shortly be out on radar picket duty again. They had to find out immediately whether or not I would be a threat to their health and welfare. In the event, the crew never had to make that decision because we headed stateside. But to this day, I still wonder what the decision would have been had we gone into action.

Why had the Navy put me in this position? It did so because the Navy had not really changed its antiquated Annapolis disdain for reserve officers. It seemed a process of scrambling just to provide enough bodies to fill the commissioned officer complement of its exponentially expanded fleet. It was designed to grab as many healthy male college students as possible; hold onto them until most reached at least a certain minimum level of maturity; school them long enough to weed out the most obvious misfits; and then play the odds that enough of the rest could be trained sufficiently quickly on the job to minimize their threat to the health and welfare of their ships and crews.

The most surprising thing about the system was that it actually worked! I suppose I was as typical a product of it as anyone, and that's just the way it worked with me. And there's no doubt at all in my mind that I can thank that very imperfect system for teaching me so much about responsibility, about organization dynamics and about myself. I believe that whatever success I have achieved in my life is due, in large part, to that experience--thanks to Soren's war.

Walter F. Herz

A Brush with the Grim Reaper

Of more than passing interest to the Amphibian Tractor Battalion, had they known about it, was the decision of the high command in Washington to launch an attack on Balikpapan, the capitol city of Borneo, and the hub of the Japanese source of oil. The battle for Okinawa, begun in April, 1945 and which lasted for 82 bloody days, has been categorized as "the last battle of the Pacific War" in the American Press, a claim that my tractor battalion, the 7th Australian Infantry Division, the Australian high command, and the Australian nation would stoutly deny, contesting that the last great battle, and the last great assault landing of World War II, occurred in July of 1945.

By this time in the Pacific war, Japanese vessels to transport oil and gasoline were few and far between, Jap pilots to man their aircraft were equally decimated as to some extent were their planes. The whole center of the Jap war effort now was focused on the defense of the homeland, which everyone who knew anything about the Nipponese devotion to their Emperor and their cause recognized that it would be fanatic, prolonged, and bloody. Gen. Sir Thomas Albert Blamey, the Commander of the Allied Land forces, took a dim view of MacArthur's plan to land the 7th Australian Division at Balikpapan on July 1st, a concern shared by the corps and division commanders, as well as the naval and air commanders. Blamey, through the acting Prime Minister, J.B. Chifley, suggested to MacArthur that the operation be cancelled. MacArthur in response said that it had to go on because it had been ordered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff; the JCS, however, had only agreed to it because they had accepted MacArthur's word that not to carry it out would produce "grave repercussions with the Australian government and people." When the operation did take place, 229 Australians were killed and 634 wounded. It would seem that this, the last assault landing of the war, could have been avoided, but then our battalion would not have earned our third bronze arrowhead and the dubious distinction of participating in an action that received no attention

in U.S. newspapers, magazines, radio reports, or newsreel acknowledgment.

The American 672nd Amphibian Tractor Battalion, a separate battalion serving under whichever division needed their full track capabilities of moving from the sea onto the land and continuing thereafter in crossing rivers with destroyed bridges, had previously brought the 37th Infantry Division ashore at Lingayen Gulf in MacArthur's promised return, and then had accompanied it all the way to Manila. Halfway through that campaign, half of the battalion had been attached to the 1st Cavalry Division, which had been hastily recalled from Leyte to MacArthur to help in achieving the capture of the Philippine capitol by his birthday on January 26th. Although this failed of its timetable, Manila was essentially in our hands by February 7th and the battalion had been put at rest for a few weeks. It had then been summoned abruptly to be attached to the 11th Airborne Division to serve in the assault landing portion of a combined air, water, and land rescue of 2,100 civilian internees from the Los Baños Prison, at Laguna de Bay, in Southern Luzon, still in enemy territory, on February 23rd. This had proved to be a very successful action. After another breathing spell, the battalion had received a 48 hour notice to move out for a trip on a Landing Ship Dock to Morotai in the Dutch East Indies, where we would stage with our fourth division, the 7th Australian, this time for the proposed assault at Balikpapan.

Some of you may remember from previous papers that the 672nd called themselves the "half a dozen natural craps" and had established considerable favorable attention from the infantry because each tractor was equipped with 4 machine guns, two 50 caliber and two 30's on each corner of the tractor's cargo compartment. In addition, my medical detachment was much appreciated because they were prone to be present where they were needed in action, whereas their own medics were thought to be noticeably somewhere else. In our ignorance of the behind the scenes strategic maneuvering of Command, we entered the action with, if not enthusiasm, at least with the same exhilaration of actually doing something again towards ending the conflagration once and for all.

Eventually, we once more mounted our tractors in the bowels of an old rusted LST, a Landing Ship Tank, fired up the Wright Aircraft Engines (made almost surely at the Wright Aircraft Engine plant in Evendale), breathed the nauseating vapors of the exhaust, inadequately vented by the huge blowers, and then waited some 20 minutes before the bow ramp was lowered, and the square of light opened before us, like the mouth of Jonah's whale. Then the tractors slowly followed, Indian file up to the ramp, and waited in turn poised at the top, then allowing us to pitch forward and downward into the green water of the ocean below. The tractor was sixteen tons of steel, not including the weight of my medical jeep, or the assorted men and equipment, which was to plunge into the water and somehow struggle up to the surface again, and allow us to progress toward the waiting shore.

In the Pacific War, this was the largest attack force, since our landing at Luzon, in January, with two hundred ships and thirty-three thousand troops. The Allied air forces had spent sixteen full days raining bombs onto the steep hillside emplacements, pill boxes, and caves; the Navy underwater units had tried to eliminate as much of the mines, the barbed wire, the anti-tank barriers, and the log barricades under the surface as they could in the last few days; the Navy battlewagons and cruisers had savaged the defenses over and beyond the hills for at least three days, prior to the landing.

The sky was still slightly overcast, as it habitually is over this island in the early morning, but the water was quite rough, the LVT's rolling in the troughs of the waves and the spray breaking over the bows. The bombardment maintained its regularity, and from behind the hills new columns of black smoke billowed upward repeatedly, to burn for hours, as huge oil tanks were struck by shellfire and by air strafing. On the near side of the hills explosions showed up in patterns as Jap gun positions and dugouts were demolished, and the line of coconut palms along the shore became lost in the smoke; at intervals orange flames flickered through the black pall. Jap opposition was slight, but anti-aircraft guns were used, not against our aircraft but as anti-personnel

fire from the falling flak fragments. Occasionally a geyser of water would erupt nearby but no tractors were lost.

Overhead a formation of our bombers droned by, and then we could see the successive explosions as aerial bombs hit their targets, marking their inexorable progress along the beach. As each bomb exploded the black oil smoke furnished a backdrop to highlight the flash, and we could actually see the blast wave as it expanded in ever-enlarging circles. Then the smaller naval vessels near shore began to discharge their rockets, and to the crack of naval shells and the concussion of the aerial bombs was added the swish of the ascending rockets, leaving a faint trail of smoke behind. Penetration of the beachhead by the tractors was impossible except in the very few areas that had been opened, so that the Australian landing troops for the most part dismounted in the surf just off the beach, and slowly worked their way inland.

The tractors moved along paralleling the shore until the designated rendezvous area was reached, when the order was given, and we made a "turn by the right flank" and advanced over the sand to the brush and undergrowth, with palm trees spaced one from another all along the beach. As the tractor commander, I had to dismount and, walking backward guide my tractor driver, signalling with my upstretched arms, to get him through between the trees. As I did so I, of course, turned frequently to be sure of my footing as I backed up. I avoided a clump of brush that was more elevated than most, and when the tractor was far enough in place, I stopped it and we all sat down to rest a bit.

Within a few minutes, an Aussie jeep came roaring up the coastal roadway, which lay about 100 feet inshore from us, and shocked us by bellowing, "What the hell are you guys doing here? This area hasn't been cleared of mines!" Somewhat gingerly, you may be sure, we looked around us and took care to not move very much. Almost at once the Aussie in charge of his sappers stopped in front of my tractor and very carefully uncovered the brush from the "clump" I had avoided, and pointed to a round wheel, sticking up like a mushroom, which looked very similar to the valve on

the top of an oxygen tank. He did not have to tell us that it was the site of something more. In due time, he had defused the thing, and it was dug up out of the coral, disclosing a Japanese aerial bomb which I was told weighed about 250 pounds; I can't vouch for that, I didn't try to lift it. The mechanism involved the wheel at the top with a steel rod going down to make contact with a glass ampule containing a strong acid; stepping on it would break the ampule, and set off the charge. I can't vouch for that either I didn't seem to be too interested.

The bomb had Japanese characters on its sides, and it was propped up against the nearest tree to rest, harmlessly I hoped, overnight. At that moment, we received a radio message that one of our officers had been injured further down the beach, and since the roadway itself had not yet been cleared of mines, I took off with two of my detachment to go down in the tractor, without time to dwell too much on the events and the discoveries just made. The injury that I found when I got to the scene was, if you can believe it, a head injury to one of my Platoon Commanders, who had been struck by a falling palm tree, its roots having been disturbed by the effects of the bombing, and he had been knocked unconscious. He had been wearing his steel helmet, of course, and I think that probably saved his life. I noted on his medical tag, that I put on him before I evacuated him to the nearby Hospital Ship, that he had received this injury in combat, entitling him to a Purple Heart; and to do something to impress the surrounding brass, which included quite a few officers with several stars on their persons, and my own Lt. Col. and Major, we administered a unit of reconstituted plasma. I can report that the Hospital ship sent my Captain back to duty within an hour. Gen. MacArthur, who was already on the shore, was not close enough to observe our heroic actions, unfortunately, but I did subsequently get to take a few pictures of him in the days that followed.

I slept that night in my jungle hammock, stretched between two trees, the one at my foot being the one with the bomb resting against it. I do not claim that my sleep was that of an innocent babe, but sleep I did. What we all dealt with in our minds at the time, was

the fact that on the afternoon of the landing, on the inshore side of the coastal roadway, a small encampment of Aussie troops had established their site, and in the course of time had set up a brazier, and were brewing tea. It included three brothers, left of five, who had served in the 7th Division since 1939, some of whom had been prisoners of war in North Africa, later rescued by Allied forces and they were continued on duty since, finally ending in the South Pacific. Suddenly, we were all startled by a huge explosion coming from their area, which indeed was caused by a similar mine, and all three were among those killed.

In common with most of my fellow soldiers, it took until about 1995, fifty years after the war, before I really felt able to tell anything of my experiences, when I began to put together my letters home and to fashion them into a book, thus far without benefit of a publisher. In any event, I have never lost my feelings about my brush with the Grim Reaper, and am still wondering subconsciously how I can thank our Creator for the supremely good luck to have escaped with my life. I also can add that I have not been sorry that I did not receive a Purple Heart on that occasion.

J. Roger Newstedt

TUSITALA

May 3, 1999

Robert G. Loudon

My subject tonight is Tusitala. I have taken advantage of the Literary Club tradition that the title of a paper may present a degree of uncertainty about the content. Some of the members attending tonight may be unfamiliar with the Samoan language, so I should start by explaining that "Tusitala" means "The teller of tales."