

Tribute to Robert E. Lannon

By his son

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In the 77 years that my father lived on this earth he carried many heavy burdens in his heart, none of which an ordinary man should ever have to endure. But Dad did, and that is to his credit. In a different age his life would have been dramatically changed, but that was not to be. Raised by strict, disciplinarian parents he left home at 16 when forced to quit school to attend to farm chores by his father, Frank, who by all accounts was not a friendly man. When asked about his boyhood Christmas memories, he once told us he got "a belt on the bottom" for a present. He did not rebel, he simply made his escape.

Hitchhiking and taking a bus Dad traversed from his native Ohio to the logging camps of the CCC in Oregon in 1937. The intensity and hard labor of life in the logging camps prepared Dad for the rigors of the coming war. Most of the CCC camps and projects were ran by military officers, as they were Federal "make work" projects of Roosevelt's New Deal. It was not an easy way of life. Even so. This chapter in his life was one he always remembered fondly. Especially his going to night school to complete his High School diploma, denied to him back in Cedarville, Ohio. And even here there is heartache, as no record can be found in Lakeview Schools of his attendance there.

After completing his much-wanted high school diploma, he returned home to Xenia, Ohio in 1940. He took a job at the Xenia Farmers Exchange as a millwright and driver.

Upon the outbreak of World War II he resisted his desire to be either a bomber pilot or a paratrooper, due to family pressure and continued his job till being drafted on October 19, 1942. He left for Camp Wheeler, Georgia on November 2, 1942.

After completing thirteen weeks of basic training, he was assigned to the 96th Infantry Division and transferred to Ft. Lewis, Washington where he continued to train till sometime in 1944 when he was moved to Camp White, Oregon.

On a short seven day furlough he married Harriet Jordan of Xenia on June 1,

1943. Except for one other brief leave they were apart for the first 2.5 years of their marriage. They both knew and accepted the risk that they might never see one another again. This devotion kept them together for 55 years.

Training continued for the 96th, nicknamed the Deadeyes for their tremendous fire arms accuracy. Training took the division to Fort Lewis, Washington, Camp White and Camp Adair in Oregon, and also to Camp San Luis Obispo and Camp Pendleton in California for amphibious training.

The 96th left San Francisco aboard troop ships on July 25-26, 1944 bound for further training in Hawaii at Schofield Barracks. In October 1944 the 96th entered combat on Leyte. Upon completion of this mission they briefly trained for the final battle of World War II, Okinawa.

What transpired on Okinawa can only be described by those I have spoken with as "intense and unforgettable." Dad spoke only briefly about Okinawa and always with a far off look in his eyes. He was greatly affected by the fact that only seven of his original platoon survived. Unfortunately Dad was adversely affected by the horrendous artillery fire and extreme combat conditions on Okinawa. He fell apart, and at one point left the front lines out of fear.

Dad left Okinawa on June 5, 1945 suffering from combat fatigue. In addition the series of immunizations left him sterile. He recovered at several military hospitals and was released from Wakeman Convalescent

Hospital, Camp Atterbury, Indiana on the 25th of September 1945. He made a tremendous sacrifice for his country; one that never ended till he died.

The war left Dad an emotionally scarred man. Mom said she barely recognized him when she met him at the train station on his return home, as his face was older and his manners were not the same. For weeks he lay on the floor at nights and had terrible nightmares. Mom said that a wonderful young man left Ohio and a stranger and angry man returned never to be the same. What Dad once enjoyed seemed to just take place mechanically. Perhaps if he had spoken of what transpired and made peace with whatever demon he perceived, maybe he would have lived a better life. In retrospect, we all would have.

He was advised to continue counseling at the VA in Dayton, Ohio but he never followed up on this, which caused him to lose part of his disability check. What we know today as PTSD or Post Traumatic Shock Syndrome was then unheard of. We have all seen how Patton felt about it in the movies. Many considered it as cowardice, which we now understand is the last thing it really is. Dad must have felt he was less than brave; something a proud man can rarely deal with. And surely his ego ached at not being able to conceive. This severely complicated his life, and being a private and quiet man he kept it all bottled up inside. Until he erupted in pent up anger and struck out at those he loved the most with horrifying verbal and physical abuse, the only way he knew to release his pent up frustrations. Sadly this hurt those he loved the most.

I came into the picture by adoption on 5 May 54, Dads' 33rd birthday. Not quite living up to the expectations of my Father, (he wanted me to play football, I liked flying and radio broadcasting) I became the victim of most of the verbal attacks. Perhaps he believed by being hard on me that I would never crack and would be stronger than him. These cruel words Dad used left deep scars on Mom and I both. Regrettably we never understood what Dad was suffering through, for if we had maybe

it would have made a difference, yet there was no excuse for some of his tirades.

For 31 years after the war Dad worked faithfully at NCR on the assembly lines, till one day he was told technology and the new union wages had stripped him of his job. He had a choice to stay and "take his chances" or retire. Again, he was devastated. \$218 for 31 years was his reward. Not even a watch or a "Thank You". This was one more letdown for Dad. He became obviously depressed and refused to even perform minor chores around the house. At this point it became clear he had completely given up on life.

Fortunately I had an idea and found Dad a job, upon which Dad worked for a while in a convenience store part time, retiring once again in 1994. It was from this time on that I actually got to know Dad and understand him better. Of course I was now able to spend time with him. It helped that my second wife is one of those people that no one dislikes and can brighten a room with only her smile. Dad was never one to say "I love you" However, in January 1999, 3 weeks before he died, he actually grabbed my wife's hand and told he loved her. He looked over the hospital room at me and told me to be careful on the icy roads. These were the last words I ever heard Dad speak. It is bittersweet that what I needed to hear from Dad all my life went to someone else, but I did get to hear them. Perhaps I should have told him I loved him that day, but I did not. In conclusion, Dad will never be forgotten. He suffered inwardly, choosing to not talk about what bothered him. He could be combative and terribly cruel from time to time, but Mom and I knew he loved us, although occasionally in a perverse way.

There was a time we did not get along, but Dad you never once gave me the wrong advice. You are still here in our hearts and I miss you so much. And yes, the biggest gift you gave me is that I never miss a chance to express my love to my children and wife. We choose to be positive about your life. We begrudge nothing. We love you eternally and unconditionally!

To My Grandpa

By Brooke Lindsay Lannon

A million times I've missed you,

A million times I've cried.

If love alone could have saved you,

You never would have died.

We all knew that you were sick,

And that your time was very near.

I know that the best is what God had to pick, Now you are in a better place.

Now that you've gone away,

You suffer no more pain.

For eternity, but with God you will stay,

You won't even have to use your cane.

One day I will again be with you

Until then I'll keep pretending that I see you in the sky Until I see you again, I will remain being blue.

I miss you very much, and this is no lie.