

## PREFACE

*These voices, these quiet words, these footsteps . . . behind me recall me at a bound from the terrible loneliness and fear of death. . . . They are more to me than life, those voices . . . and more than fear . . . they are the voices of my comrades.*

—Erich Maria Remarque

Here they are by the hundreds, those voices: World War II accounts from men and women of the Reserve Officers Association of the United States (ROA). Their stories were submitted for the series “Remembrances of the War Years,” featured monthly in ROA’s magazine, *The Officer*, from December 1991 through September 1995, to coincide with fiftieth anniversaries of the events described.

The idea for the magazine’s World War II commemoratives was that of Colonel Norman S. Burzynski, USAF (Ret.), editor of *The Officer* from 1976 to 1995. Since I was freelancing for the magazine at the time, Colonel Burzynski asked me to serve as editor of the series.

In late 1990, when *The Officer* first began soliciting material for the series—challenging ROA’s WWII veterans to provide accounts of their most memorable moments and to “tell it as it was”—neither the colonel nor I had any idea what the response would be. Slowly at first, and then steadily, the material began to arrive. More than 350 ROA members responded, with their own reminiscences and photos or with diaries, letters, or stories from family members. A sampling from that outpouring is reprinted in this volume.

Among the first communiqués to arrive was a postcard from Major Michael H. Quinn, USAR, of Columbus, Ohio, asking whether we might be interested in the POW diary of his late father, Colonel Michael A. Quinn, AUS (Ret.), who served as chief of motor transportation on the staff of Lieutenant General Jonathan Wainwright in the Philippines and became a prisoner of the Japanese with the fall of Bataan in April 1942. For forty months as a POW, Colonel Quinn kept detailed, near-daily accounts of his life in seven POW camps, written as letters to his wife and seven children.

Along with Colonel Quinn, those quiet voices of his comrades include the twenty-two-year-old ensign who escapes from the USS *Cassin* minutes before it explodes at Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941; the nurses who minister from napa huts on Bataan, from aboard the hospital ship *Shamrock* in the Mediterranean, and from field hospitals behind frontlines in France; eight of the D-Day invaders

of Normandy, including then–Lieutenant Colonel J. Strom Thurmond, paratrooper; and the twenty-five-year-old officer who loses 117 of his men in one day at Bitburg, Germany.

Among their other stories, contributors describe involvement with around-the-clock repair of aircraft at Burtonwood, England; the early days of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP); construction of Wideawake Field on a lava rock called Ascension Island in the Atlantic; work of the Railway Operating Battalion in the European Theater of Operations and of the Seabees in the Pacific Theater. They write of the sinking of the *Leopoldville* when 750 men die on Christmas Eve 1944 in the English Channel; of marching fifty miles through snowstorms and sub-zero temperatures while being transferred as a POW of the Germans; of the horrific discovery of the extermination camps in Germany; and of the bombing of unmarked Japanese ships transporting U.S. POWs from the Philippines to camps closer to Japan near war's end. Stories range the globe from the Aleutians and Australia to Normandy and Guadalcanal, from the Bulge and Burma and Iran, to Berlin and Tokyo, with most points in between and all of the military services represented.

In the introductions that precede their stories, contributors are identified by their latest rank in the military. In the index, they are further identified by branch of service and last known place of residence. In cases where published books or an unpublished manuscript were provided, material is excerpted from these sources. Those authors and their works are acknowledged at the back of this volume.

Chapters usually begin with an introductory story featuring the most significant event, the most interesting story, or a theme for that month of the war (holiday, victory celebration, et cetera). If for the European Theater, for example, this introduction is followed by recollections from that theater, then from the Pacific Theater and, in last place, from the States, with each group in near-chronological order. To assist readers in easily perusing the Colonel Quinn diary in sequence, his entries, when included, are usually placed at or near the end of chapters.

As you read the WWII recollections, please consider the following:

- If a significant battle or event was not written about by a contributor, a summary at the beginning of chapters provides that information, besides giving an overview of the all-inclusiveness of the war.
- The use of certain appellations is retained in letters, journals, and retrospectives, reflective of writers' rage at the enemy they fought. To censor their words would be unpardonable revisionism.

- Military style for date and time is retained for the purpose of simplicity.
- While reasonable efforts have been made to ascertain accuracy of facts and figures, dates and spellings, each story is essentially the contributor's own, and written from his or her point of view.

As you read, take note also of certain themes that echo from among the contributors: Their youthfulness (average age of WWII participants was nineteen); longevity of service (average length of WWII service was thirty-three months); familial history of military service, as sons and daughters follow parents' paths; and their devotion to military service. By the nature of this volume, the contributors were U.S. Reserve officers. This means that after years of commitment during World War II, they also chose to dedicate additional years in service to their country as members of our nation's Reserve forces.

To all of the ROA members who generously shared their WWII stories, first in the magazine and now in this compilation, and to friend and colleague Norm Burzynski who entrusted the series to me: my heartfelt appreciation for this extraordinary privilege. As the title to one WWII song says, "Bless 'Em All."

As yet another of their war songs suggests, those valiant men and women of World War II who "did it before" in wartime duty will now give you a small idea of how they managed to preserve freedom for an entire world as they "do it again" by recounting their stories and by sharing with you the voices of their comrades.

—Carol Adele Kelly

*The Reserve Officers Association of the United States (ROA) was founded 2 October 1922, when several hundred military officers met with General of the Armies John Joseph Pershing in Washington, D.C., to discuss the general's concerns about losing the officer corps, plus growing isolationism and post-World War I complacency. Public Law 595 of the 81st Congress chartered ROA to "support and promote the development and execution of a military policy for the United States that will provide adequate National Security." The charter was signed 30 June 1950 by President Harry S. Truman, an early member of ROA.*

*ROA's national headquarters is located at 1 Constitution Avenue NE, Washington, D.C.*

