



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team



PARACHUTE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

MailCall No. 2428

December 1, 2019

*517th Parachute Infantry Regiment
460th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion
596th Parachute Combat Engineer Company*

MailCall News

Hello,

My name is Roy Roberts and I am a 98-year-old veteran. I'm trying finish a book which will have the 162 letters that I wrote to my wife and my war experiences and pictures I took while overseas.

I also add my war experiences which I could never write in the letters at that time as it would be censored. If possible, I would like to use this picture because it depicts the mail call experiences that I had. Would I be able to include this in my book?

I am attaching the cover I plan on using for my book—that is a picture of me writing a letter to my wife in Germany.

Thank you.

Roy Roberts
Apt. 309
2000 E. College Ave.
Normal, IL 61761

DEAR CHRISTINE



A World War II Soldier's War Experiences
which includes the
162 Letters He Wrote to His Wife

By Roy Roberts

Hi Roy,

Sounds like a wonderful book. What unit were you with?

What picture are you looking to use?

Bob Barrett



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Hello Bob!

I was in 47th Tank Battalion and 14th Armored Division. *

The picture that I would like to use is attached to this email.

Thank you for a quick response.

Roy Roberts



* The 14th Armored Division landed at Marseille in southern France, on 29 October 1944. Within two weeks some of its elements were in combat, maintaining defensive positions along the Franco-Italian frontier. The division was assigned to US 6th Army Group on 1 November. On 10 November, the division was assigned to US Seventh Army. On 12 November the Combat Command Reserve (CCR) was detached, and ordered to the Maritime Alps by 6th Army Group to relieve units in defensive positions there. On 15 November, Combat Command A moved north from the area of Marseille to [Epinal](#) to take part in the VI Corps drive through the Vosges Mountains, and was followed by Combat Command B five days later. Hard fighting at [Gertwiller](#), [Benfeld](#), and [Barr](#) helped VI Corps to crack the German defenses, the division was on the [Alsatian Plain](#) in early December. On 17 December the division attacked across the Lauter River into Germany itself, along with the other units of VI Corps, it fought its way into a heavily defended portion of the German Westwall. Due to the growing crisis in the Ardennes, General Eisenhower, the supreme commander, ordered the Seventh Army to stop its attack and withdraw from the Westwall, where its units assumed positions south of the Lauter River. The order was poorly timed as elements of the 14th Armored Division had penetrated deep into the German defenses, and were poised to break out into the enemy's rear.

From: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/14th_Armored_Division_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/14th_Armored_Division_(United_States))

Hi Roy,

As far as I am concerned, you are more than welcome to copy that image. Here is a direct link to the full-size image (792 x 554 pixels): <http://517prct.org/images/mailcall3.jpg>

Unfortunately, I don't own the rights to this image and it's not from one of our 517th troopers. I'm sure I copied it years ago from other sites. You can still find it on many other internet locations, and my MailCall audience is small and informal, so I didn't worry too much about attribution, especially when it was borrowed from someone else. Being a war-time image, it is most likely from Army photographers, and I believe that these government records are typically described as open rights. (Your tax dollars paid for them.) Almost all of them are noted as "National Archives". For your book, you'll have to make your own decisions, or maybe find in in the National Archives.

See similar examples at: <https://p47koji.com/2016/01/21/wwii-packages-from-home/> and <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/mailcall/3.html>

Bob Barrett



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From: <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibits/past/the-art-of-cards-and-letters/mail-call/v-mail.html>



V, or Victory mail, was a valuable tool for the military during World War II. The process, which originated in England, was the microfilming of specially designed letter sheets.

Instead of using valuable cargo space to ship whole letters overseas, microfilmed copies were sent in their stead and then "blown up" at an overseas destination before being delivered to military personnel.

V-mail ensured that thousands of tons of shipping space could be reserved for war materials. The 37 mail bags required to carry 150,000 one-page letters could be replaced by a single mail sack. The weight of that same amount of mail was reduced dramatically from 2,575 pounds to a mere 45. The blue-striped cardboard containers held V-mail letter forms.

The system of microfilming letters was based on the use of special V-mail letter-sheets, which were a combination of letter and envelope. The letter-sheets were constructed and gummed so as to fold into a uniform and distinctively marked envelope. The user wrote the message in the limited space provided, added the name and address of the recipient, folded the form, affixed postage, if necessary, and mailed the letter. V-mail correspondence was then reduced to thumbnail size on microfilm. The rolls of film were sent to prescribed destinations for developing at a receiving station near the addressee. Finally, individual facsimiles of the letter-sheets were reproduced about one-quarter the original size and the miniature mail was then delivered to the addressee.

The first large Army operated V-mail station overseas was opened on April 15, 1943 at Casablanca, North Africa. Hastily set up in a field following the Allied invasion of North Africa, this makeshift station continued to operate until September 15, 1943. Between June 15, 1942 and April 1, 1945, 556,513,795 pieces of V-mail were sent from the U.S. to military post offices and over 510 million pieces were received from military personnel abroad. In spite of the patriotic draw of V-mail, most people still sent regular first class mail. In 1944, for instance, Navy personnel received 38 million pieces of V-mail, but over 272 million pieces of regular first class mail.



[A short, 1944 newsreel describing V-Mail produced by the Office of War Information.](#)



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PREPARE BY TYPEWRITER IF POSSIBLE OR PRINT IN PLAIN LETTERS USING BLACK INK
DO NOT PREPARE CARBON COPIES

TO— MRS. EMMA DEL CARLO
ROUTE I, Box 610
MERCED, CALIFORNIA

FROM— PFC. LA. DE/CARLO
ASN. 3969 6120
Regt. Hq. Co. 517 PI
% Pm. N.Y.C. N.Y.

FOLD HERE

Dear Mom:

Effective immediately and until further notice please do not send any more mail to me at the address given below. I will advise you promptly when mail should be resumed and will give you my proper address. I cannot do so now for military reasons.

Lenard A. Del Carlo
(Normal Signature)

PFC. LA. DE/CARLO 3969 6120
(Grade) (Name) (Serial No.)

Regt. Hq. Co.
(Company or similar unit)

517 Pacht. Inf.
(Regiment, group or similar organization)

A. P. O. No. 333 % POSTMASTER
NEW YORK NEW YORK
(City) (State)

FOLD HERE

INSTRUCTIONS

(1) This form will be used by personnel in order to discontinue mailings to them. It will be mailed to:

- a. Each individual with whom they correspond.
- b. Each publisher of a newspaper or magazine received.

(2) Do not enclose anything with this form.

W. D. A. G. O. Form No. 971-1
19 August 1945

V...-MAIL

This form supersedes W. D. A. G. O. Form 971-1, 9 October 1945, which may be used until printing stocks are exhausted.

V-Mail from Lenard Del Carlo:

Dear Mom: Effective immediately [...] do not send any more mail to me [...] for military reasons." August 2, 1946 (Sent a few weeks before he arrived home.) –

submitted by Robert S. Del Carlo





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From: <https://p47koji.com/2016/01/21/wwii-packages-from-home/>

The Journey of a WWII Package



During WWII, a package sent from home took weeks if not months for a soldier to get it... Or in the worse possible scenario, the young man would never receive their package from home because they were either killed or missing as this photo below graphically shows. It would exponentially worsen for the family as they would have likely received the infamous telegrams only to have the battered package marked “DECEASED” left at their doorstep many weeks later:

The packages from home would make their way via ship. For the European Theater of War and before D-Day, a number of supply ships were likely attacked or sunk by U-Boats. After surviving the voyage and unloading at a European port (permanent or man-made like at Normandy), the packages, along with sacks of mail, would be transferred to trucks.

Europe did have mapped roads making delivery somewhat more certain but the trucks were subject to destruction via enemy air attacks, shelling or road mines. I understand mail pieces were primarily sorted at battalion headquarters then filtered down to a company or OP level which could be moving in the course of battle.

Making it to the individual soldier was not a sure thing. The package would have to make its way to the platoon then to the individual soldier's last known position. Perhaps there was a makeshift “post office” but if the front was fluid, their location would be a question mark. Communication with a unit on the move was by field radio with an average range of five miles or so until actual phone lines could be reeled off (above).



These soldiers were lucky to be able to use a jeep to reel off phone line. My thought would be the area was pretty secure. Otherwise, foot soldiers would have to work through the combat zone and quietly lay down then cover up the phone lines. Signal Corps photo.



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All of these packages – many for Christmas of 1944 – were returned as they were undeliverable. All are marked “Deceased” or “Missing”, visible if you enlarge the picture. I cannot imagine how the sender felt having the package being returned. National Archives.



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Dear Bob:

Happy Thanksgiving to you and all of the 517 families. Thank you for another excellent Mail Call.

Happy birthday to **Zoot Snyder** and a WOW award to his granddaughter on the birthday cake she made. It is impressive how she decorated it. So glad they took pictures. Thank you for sharing them with us.

Congratulations to **Joe Bail** on receiving France's highest award. Please tell him thank you for representing the 517 family for Le Muy celebration. That community is so appreciative. Hearing the description of his family's visit reminded me of when we visited for Bastille day with my Dad in 2005. Such fond memories of that community and its appreciation for the American sacrifices.

And the pictures and story about the **Van Ness family's** tradition of pinning their grandfather's jump wings on each successive generation was very moving.

Thank you for on the most faithful Belgian remembrances of the 517 sacrifices. Blessings on the Targnions.

Pat Seitz

Hi, Bob, and Happy Thanksgiving to all!

What a great Mail Call you just sent - so happy to see the report of **Zoot Snyder's** 95th birthday, with a cake that is the envy of any 517 trooper! Wow!

Also lovely to see the piece on Joe Bail from years ago - and always great to hear from **Tim Curtis** and **Pat Seitz**.

Thank you to **Denis Sura**, who helped so much on the patch project! Greatly appreciated!

And our dear friends in Trois Ponts **Irma and Arnold Targnion** - thank you so much for continuing to remember the service of the men of the 517. We so appreciate your enduring friendship.

Dad, **Kaare Allan Johnson**, 596, was 95 in May and still going strong. He continues to work a day a week and just last week got hearing aids - his first pair - from the VA. We found the local VA facility at Lyons to be wonderful and the audiologist especially to be great. He's still getting used to them but we're optimistic!

Happy Thanksgiving to all!

Claire Giblin



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Subject: My son Chris' battle with cancer - helping his kids

Dear Friends and Family,

As many of you know, my youngest son, Chris, was diagnosed with stomach cancer earlier this year. He has fought valiantly but unfortunately the type of cancer he has is very aggressive and he is losing his battle. His biggest concern is for his two young children, Lily and Cody, ages 5 and 9. My daughter Maya is creating a trust to help with the kids medical and dental care, school expenses and extracurricular activities. We are hoping to create a fund that will get the kids through their school years. If you are able to contribute please click on the link below. We would also be grateful if you could share the link with any of your friends or on social media.

gf.me/u/wvc58c

Wishing all of you a very happy, safe and healthy Thanksgiving. I am grateful for your friendship.

Phil McSpadden

From: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/movies/ct-jimmy-stewart-book-mov-1202-20161201-column.html>

How Jimmy Stewart's war service affected 'It's a Wonderful Life'

By NINA METZ

NOV 30, 2016 | 6:49 PM

As we stare headlong into the approaching holiday season, the 1946 James Stewart classic "It's a Wonderful Life" is set to make its annual television appearance Saturday on NBC. It was the first movie Stewart made when he returned home after serving as a pilot in World War II, an experience that left him adrift and not without psychological fallout.

Author Robert Matzen writes about this postwar period in the actor's career in the new nonfiction book, "Mission: Jimmy Stewart and the Fight for Europe," and said that during the course of his research, he spoke with "the guys that flew with



James Stewart, center, and Donna Reed in "It's A Wonderful Life."
(RKO Radio Pictures)

him, who told me about the fact that he went flak-happy on a couple of occasions — which means shell shock, battle fatigue, what we now know as PTSD. He wasn't afraid of bombs or bullets. He was afraid of making a mistake and causing someone to die. That was his endless stress, and that's what ended up grounding him."



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Which is to say that much of George Bailey's angst was, to some extent, Stewart's own. Before agreeing to do the film with director Frank Capra (recently back from the war himself), he considered quitting acting altogether.

"It's a Wonderful Life" (which will screen several times this month at the Music Box in a double feature with "White Christmas" starting Dec. 10) helped set him back on a path in Hollywood.

"The war had changed Jim down to the molecular level," Matzen writes in the book. "He could never begin to articulate what those four-and-a-half years, including fifteen months in combat, had done to him. One thing he could do was express a bit of it on-screen."

Once he committed to doing his first film as a veteran, Matzen paints a portrait of what it was like on set:

"Now he was running for his life, Jim Stewart, former squadron commander of the 703rd. 'Merry Christmas, Bedford Falls!' he called into the hot air of Encino. 'Merry Christmas, you old Building and Loan!' Suddenly, he wanted to be a part of Hollywood where he felt comfortable and safe."

The following is an edited conversation with Matzen about Stewart and "It's a Wonderful Life," which will also screen at Symphony Hall on Dec. 9-11 accompanied live by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra with the Chicago Symphony Chorus.

Q: When did Stewart return stateside after the war?

A: He flew his final mission at the end of February 1945 and he was grounded because of his PTSD issues and then he came back at the end of August.

He returned to Indiana, Penn., where his parents lived and he's home for a week or 10 days and realizes, "I have to go back and face Hollywood. I've been away for five years, other people are taking my roles." There's a whole new generation of leading men that are younger or more vital, and he didn't know where he fit anymore.

So he goes back to Hollywood and has no place to even live — he lives with Henry Fonda, who offers him a room. Fonda had just come back from the Pacific, and they both just sort of unwound and didn't get any job offers. The only job offer Stewart had was, Louis B. Mayer, his old boss at MGM, said, "Let's do 'The Jimmy Stewart Story' — we can show you flying over Frankfurt, we can show you as a military hero." And Stewart said no. He wouldn't talk about it.

Q: Why wasn't he getting job offers?

A: He came back looking like hell. There's a before-and-after photo in the book that shows him in 1942 looking all youthful, and then in 1944 looking like hell. And now there were stars like Gregory Peck who were getting roles he might have gotten.

But it was only a couple of months until Capra called with this idea of "It's a Wonderful Life."

The back story here is that Stewart, very publicly, when he got back from the war was asked, "If you're going to make a picture now, what do you want to make?" And he said, "A comedy, I have to make a comedy. The world has seen too much trauma and horror and suffering."

So when Capra calls, Stewart gets his agent, Lew Wasserman, and they sit down with Capra, who tries to tell them the story, telling him about this role and how only Stewart can do it and it's about a guy who wants to commit suicide. And Stewart's like, "Well, wait a minute. That's not what I want to do."

Capra had a diary where he jotted down notes about how that went, and the meeting went so bad that Stewart got up and walked out. He just couldn't even wrap his head around, "You want me to do what?" Stewart was not happy with the idea and was not open to it — until, I guess, Wasserman must have said, "You've got no other offers."

Q: What was it like on set, since it sounds like Stewart was a reluctant participant?



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A: Capra had supreme confidence in this story. Stewart not so much, but he got on board with it. It was this sense of, "This is our last shot. Hollywood went on without us, we're not getting any younger, and if this bombs after we've both been away for five years ..."

But if you watch that performance by Stewart, there was a lot of rage in it and it's an on-the-edge performance because that's what those guys were feeling — they were scared that this wasn't going to work. That the audience wasn't going to buy it. Donna Reed (playing Stewart's wife in the film) is one of the eyewitnesses who said, "This was not a happy set." These guys were very tense. They would go off and huddle say, "Should we try this? Should we try that?" And it proceeded that way for months.

They started shooting at the beginning of '46 and it was a long shoot, it went into June. It was a very expensive, exhaustive production. It cost \$3 million to make the thing.

Q: Was Stewart also on edge because he was still working through some of his PTSD?

A: Oh, absolutely. At this point, he had just started to eat again. He always had a high metabolism and always had trouble digesting food, and during the war it got worse and worse. He himself said that the only thing he subsisted on was peanut butter and ice cream. He just hadn't been able keep food down. Now he's starting to gain weight. But he's still having nightmares and the shakes and the sweats. He's got some hearing loss now, from the sound of the bombers on those seven-, eight-hour missions. So now you have an actor who, it's not easy for him to hear his cues.

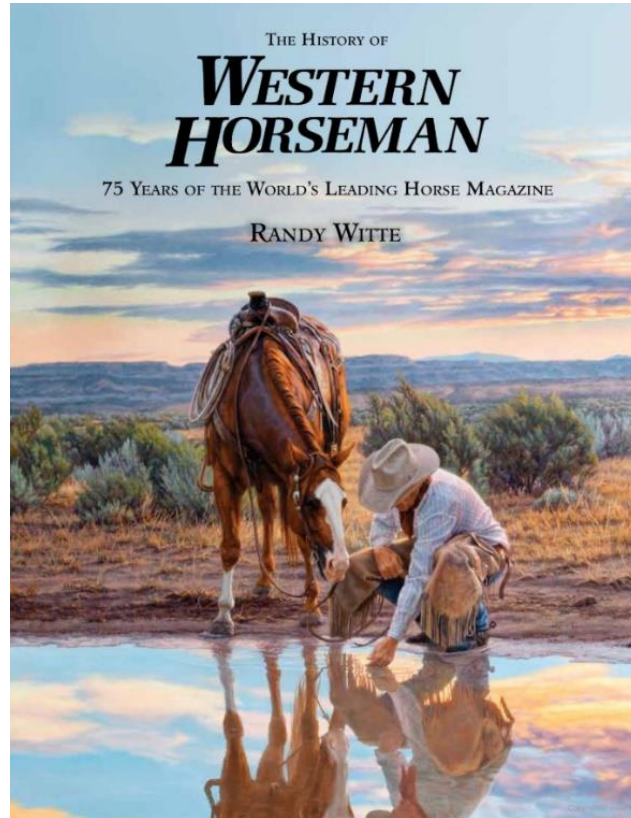
Q: He wasn't of the Method actor generation, but it sounds like he was, intentionally or not, drawing from his life in that performance, especially those scenes that reveal how untethered or frantic George Bailey is feeling.

A: It was a personal and professional risk, playing that role. While he was making that film, he was questioning the superficiality of Hollywood and acting in general, and Lionel Barrymore (who plays Mr. Potter) said to him, "So, are you saying it's more worthwhile to drop bombs on people than to entertain them?" And that really hit Stewart and was one of the things that turned him around and made him think, "OK, I do have an important role and there are things to be done."

There's a scene in the movie where he questions his sanity and he's got this wild look about him. That's one scene that really struck me, watching it on the big screen. And the other scene that always made me uncomfortable, but now means so much more to me, is when he's in his living room and he's throwing things and screaming at his kids — and his wife and children look at him like, "Who is this man? Who is this monster?" And that is so reflective of what millions of families faced, looking at these strangers who came back from the war with this rage. Stewart played it beautifully. He just lets it out.



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In doing some research on the V-Mail, I found several V-Mail examples from the 57th, including some seasonal ones with Dick Spencer's illustrations. You'll see these in the next issues leading up to Christmas.

I then happened to look for some info on **Dick Spencer**, and I found this book, "*The History of Western Horseman*". For those who don't know, after University of Iowa (with **Howard Hensleigh**) and his war years with the 517th, Dick moved to Colorado to become the editor of *Western Horseman* magazine.

The following pages are excerpts from parts of the book that discussed Dick Spencer's background and work at *Western Horseman*.

https://www.amazon.com/History-Western-Horseman-Magazine-Hardcover/dp/0762777532/ref=sr_1_3?qid=1575090626&refinements=p_27%3ARandy+Witte&s=books&sr=1-3&text=Randy+Witte



3

DICK SPENCER

He WAS The Western Horseman

Don Flint and Harry Bunker made arrangements to meet Dick and his wife, JoAnne, for a job interview at Denver's Brown Palace Hotel, which was roughly halfway between Colorado Springs and Boulder, where the couple lived. Dick and Jo (everyone calls her Jo) had recently purchased a house in that town, and Jo remembers (1) she was "very pregnant" with their second daughter, Debra, at the time, and (2) that the interview for the editor's job went very well. Still, by the end of the meeting, there seemed to be something else on Don's mind as he looked at the slim, fair-skinned Dick Spencer III, who had a boyish grin and full head of hair, all of which seemed to hide his recent past as a battle-hardened World War II veteran. Don eyed him in silence for a moment. "I've got just one more question," Don said, finally.

"Yes sir," Dick said. "I'm 30 years old."

Don smiled, obviously relieved. "That's all I wanted to know." Both Dick and Jo looked younger than their years, and at that time Don wondered if the man who would be editor was really old enough to vote.

Run It Without Me

Dick Spencer's full-time career at the magazine began with the September 1951 issue. He started work in Colorado Springs that July and left Jo in Boulder to get the house sold, which she did within a month. In the interim, Dick camped in *The Western Horseman* office building; he pulled a cot out of the ladies restroom into the hallway to sleep at night.

Don told Dick, early on, that he wanted the magazine "to run without me." And Dick eagerly assumed the responsibility. As the years unfolded, Dick became synonymous with *WH*. He did what the readers did—went on trail rides and round-ups, packed into wilderness using horses and mules, helped at brandings, raised and trained horses, even bought first one ranch, then another, and lost money on cattle (like so many others). He was also a popular master of ceremonies around campfires at night, a great storyteller and entertainer when it came to telling jokes. He was an avid history buff, soaking up anything to do with cowboys, Indians, mountain men, horses and ranching. He filled the magazine with all the things he enjoyed and was interested

A youthful-appearing Dick Spencer III, during his earliest days at the magazine, is alongside Clarence Colbert, who relocated to Colorado Springs to oversee first the circulation department and later advertising for The Western Horseman.

WESTERN HORSEMAN ARCHIVES

Copyrighted material



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THE HISTORY OF WESTERN HORSEMAN



John Ben Snow and Dick Spencer appear to be talking business in this 1953 photo taken at the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs. The scene followed the annual banquet that JBS hosted for Speidel officials from publications across the country.

COURTESY SPENCER FAMILY

in, and the readers identified with him, lived vicariously through his articles and looked forward to every issue, whether purchased off the newsstand or from the counter in the local feed-and-tack or western wear store—or taken from the mailbox each and every month, thanks to a paid-up subscription that often got renewed by a loved one every year at Christmas. When it came to putting out the magazine, Dick could do it all in the editorial department—writing, editing, cartooning, photography, page layout... and he made it look pretty easy.

Dick's Background

Dick was born January 28, 1921, to C.R. (Clifford Raymond) and Jessie Spencer, in Dallas, Texas. Dick had a brother, Bill, born a few years after he, and the two grew up together playing “cowboys and Indians.” Dick became a man of many interests and talents—cartoonist, combat paratrooper

during World War II, journalist and historian, jokester, master-of-ceremonies and, of course, a horseman and successful magazine editor and publisher.

His father was also a man of varied accomplishments. He was art editor of *Collier's* and *Field & Stream* magazines, wrote instructional manuals for Army and Navy pilots under the pen name Ace McCoy, and even tried his hand at barnstorming with his own airplane. C.R. never cared for his given name and decided to change it to Richard, after his father. Thus, C.R.'s oldest son became Dick Spencer III, to eliminate confusion. And still later, Richard II became intensely interested in the history and culture of American Indians, adopted the Indian name Shatka Bear-Step, and became a masterful silversmith, making Indian jewelry and trophy belt buckles.

Dick was 7 years old and Bill was 4 when their mother suddenly abandoned them and



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DICK SPENCER



A photo of three generations of Spencers was used in the September 1989 issue, a tribute to Dick. From left: C.R. Spencer, who later changed his name to Richard Spencer II, and still later adopted the Indian name of Shatka Bear-Step; Richard Spencer III; and R.E. Spencer.

COURTESY SPENCER FAMILY

moved to Europe. The family was living in New York City at the time, while C.R. was working for the magazines. The boys didn't see their mother again until they were grown. At the time of abandonment, however, C.R. thought it best to take his sons to live with his father and stepmother, R.E. and Nettie Spencer, in Des Moines, Iowa. Two years later the boys rejoined their father in the Lake Worth area of Texas, and it was there the youngsters lived real-life adventures, living in a semirenovated chicken coop, roaming the woods and hunting small game with guns and live ammunition, and attending a country school in a clearing in the woods. It was also during this time that Dick developed an interest in horses, riding, cowboys, ranches and rodeo.

Attracting Attention

Throughout his life, Dick had a penchant for attracting attention. An early example: En route to school one day, Dick saw a nonpoisonous snake in the wooded path he was traveling. He did what comes natural to a lot of boys—made a lunge for the snake and caught it behind the head, thinking the reptile would make a dandy pet. That he had to put in a full day at school before he could cage the snake at home made little difference; Dick stuffed the creature into his lunch sack and continued on to school.

At the beginning of class, Dick placed his lunch at the edge of his desk, as did all

the other students in class. The teacher was beginning the day's lesson when Dick's sack began to shake and crinkle. All eyes were riveted on the sack when the snake suddenly got the top untwisted and sprang straight up in the air. Pandemonium ensued, even though Dick recaptured the snake and dropped it out an open window. One student was bitten during the melee, however, and Dick earned a two-week "sabbatical." His dad never learned of the incident—Dick departed for school each morning, only to spend the day prowling the woods.

R.E. and Nettie grew increasingly concerned about Dick and Bill. They knew C.R. was away from home a lot, covering the country by motorcycle to book barnstorming shows with his airplane. They arrived at the Spencer home at Lake Worth, surveyed that situation, and simply gathered up the boys then drove back home to Des Moines. Dick and Bill had picked up Texas drawls, which sounded a little foreign to the Iowa Spencers, so arrangements were made to enroll the boys in a remedial speech class. It was a class Dick thoroughly enjoyed, because the speech therapist taught a variety of dialects (in addition to Midwestern speech), and these included British, Irish, Scottish and German. These dialects, in latter years, enhanced Dick's stories and jokes, which made him a popular campfire entertainer for groups large and small.

"Spence" on Campus

Dick met his future wife, 16-year-old JoAnne Nicholson, at a Methodist youth organization in Des Moines. The year was 1937, and such groups provided a lot of social activities for young people in the Great Depression. "We'd go roller skating, ice skating, swimming, and he was in the Methodist Boy Scout troop, too," Jo recalled. During his high school years, Dick also learned the fundamentals of horsemanship and polo by joining the Civilian Military Training Corps in Iowa.

"Spence (the name Jo and others often used for Dick in those days) was a half-year ahead of me in school, at Theodore Roosevelt High," Jo continued. "He was supposed to graduate with the January '39 class, but got sick with staphylococcus pneumonia the fall of '38 and nearly died. He had gone from 155 pounds down to 82 by the time he got out of the hospital. I was just a friend then, but



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THE HISTORY OF WESTERN HORSEMAN



During halftime ceremonies at a 1959 University of Iowa football game, Dick was honored for creating Herky the Hawk 10 years earlier.

COURTESY SPENCER FAMILY

wrote to him every day. Anyway, he needed time to get his strength back, and put on some weight, so he wound up falling back in school and graduating with my class the following June. We dated that summer and I went to Iowa State University. He enrolled at the University of Iowa, where he also signed up with the school's ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) program.

"We didn't see each other very often," Jo said. "Summers, he always found a job somewhere, preferably at a camp as a horse wrangler. But he did other things, too. He once ran a canoe rental place on the Iowa River, worked as a lifeguard at a gravel-pit swimming hole in Des Moines; even worked in a hospital lab section feeding the experimental rats. He was always working and worked his way through college. But we dated for four years, and each time I'd get enough money together to go to Iowa City, or when he found time to hitchhike the other way, we would get together."

In college, Dick worked for board at the student union, and was paid to paint backdrops for the bands that toured college campuses for big dances in those years. He and a roommate, who had worked for a florist, even went into the corsage business, selling cut-rate corsages for guys to give to their dates when they picked them up for the dances. This enterprise involved gleaning flowers from a local cemetery, and the business literally fell apart during one of the dances. Dick and his roommate had failed to find any fresh flowers at the cemetery, so they settled for the freshest old flowers available. Before the

dance was an hour old, the floor was covered with flower petals from deteriorating corsages.

In those days, Dick also participated in a few rodeos, riding bareback broncs and bulls for "mount money," and working as a clown-bullfighter. He even found time to compete in college wrestling and diving, and was a cheerleader. He was art director for *Frivol*, the school's humor magazine, and worked part-time for the *Daily Iowan*. He began college as an art major, then switched to journalism. That combination—art and journalism—would serve him well for the rest of his life.

Combat

World War II for the United States had begun December 7, 1941, and in the fall of 1942, Dick's ROTC class was told they would be sworn into active service around Christmas that year. Dick and Jo became engaged on Christmas Eve, and Dick left the next day for Fort Benning, Ga., and Officer Candidate School. Dick and Jo were subsequently married in July 1943, right after 2nd Lt. Dick **Spencer** and his troops had completed parachute jump training at Camp Toccoa, across the Chattahoochee River on Fort Benning's Alabama side.



Lt. Dick **Spencer** III in his combat gear was ready for World War II.

COURTESY SPENCER FAMILY



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

DICK SPENCER

Jo, meanwhile, had secured a small apartment at the main base area, on the Georgia side of the river. Dick, always a problem-solver and a strong swimmer, too, made unauthorized arrangements to visit his bride at night. He would "borrow" a jeep from the Alabama side, drive to the river, park that jeep and swim the river, holding his clothes with one hand above his head. A sergeant had a jeep waiting for him on the Georgia side, and it was easy to get dressed and drive to the apartment, where the newlyweds would have four hours together. Dick would then reverse course, swim the river back to Alabama, and be in his barracks bunk before the sound of reveille.

"We had till May 6, 1944, to be together," Jo remembered. "That's when Dick shipped out of Newport News, Va., with his company and battalion. We personally knew so many of the guys and their wives; they had been together through jump school and training at Fort Bragg, when we lived in North Carolina,

and it proved to be tough on Dick to give orders to men on dangerous patrols behind enemy lines, knowing which ones had wives back home, and which wives were pregnant. Most of his original guys didn't make it back."

Dick was a prolific letter-writer to Jo, and did his writing on a portable typewriter he managed to keep throughout the war. The typewriter was given to him in 1939 by his grandparents. Dick kept a log for his outfit, the 517 Parachute Combat Team, and later became a correspondent for *Stars and Stripes*, writing about the 517th's exploits; after the war, he published a booklet on the 517th for all the men who served in the outfit.

It was on the Italy-France invasion one day that a bomb hit the jeep Dick was riding in, killing the driver. "Spence said he was riding along and a small, still voice told him to put on his helmet, which he did," Jo recalled. "He was wounded, but that helmet saved his life—and the typewriter survived as well."

Right after the war, Dick wrote and illustrated this booklet on his 517 Parachute Combat Team.

COURTESY SPENCER FAMILY





517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

THE HISTORY OF WESTERN HORSEMAN

He was wounded two other times. He took grenade fragments in his face, and a sniper shot him in the buttocks. Dick would come home a captain, following Germany's surrender, having earned the Silver Star and a Purple Heart with two oak clusters. In all, he made 22 fighting jumps in the invasions of Italy, France, Belgium and Germany.

Dick related some of his war experiences, often over coffee breaks at *The Western Horseman* office. The stories weren't filled with gory details or heroics, but usually involved a bit of humor or irony. He told of the troops, during the battle in Italy, fighting through olive groves while suffering from severe dysentery. "It got so bad," Dick recalled, "that men had to cut out the seats of their pants. There wasn't a clean pair of underwear in the whole battalion."

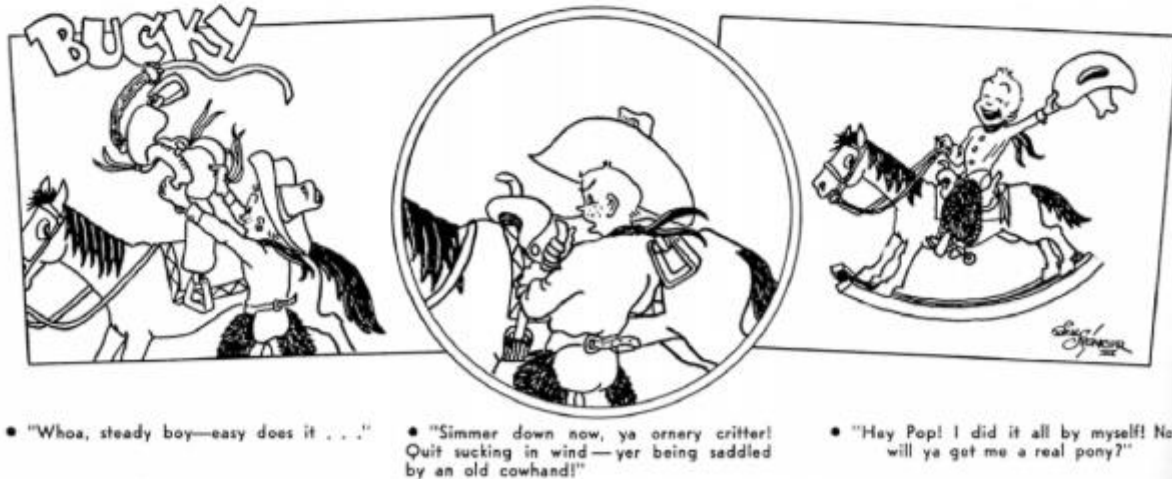
When Dick's jeep blew up, he was incapacitated with injuries. Fellow soldiers hid him in a straw-manure pile inside a stable, while the fighting raged on around them. The men fashioned an air hole for Dick using a jacket sleeve that protruded inconspicuously out of the pile. That afternoon, Dick heard troops from both sides coming and going through the stable. Then there was quiet. One of the guys who helped hide him, an old college pal named Pinkston, walked up to the straw pile and shouted down the sleeve: "Spence! Are ya still there?"

Dick was sent to a recovery unit near Nice. His arm had been injured and was

swollen with tetanus from the manure when he arrived. A doctor asked where he had been. "I've been in a lot of deep crap," Dick replied. He recovered and made it back to his outfit in time for a railroad trip to the Battle of the Bulge. "They put us on some old box cars called 40-and-8s, built for World War I to haul 40 men and 8 horses," Dick said. "And I don't think the straw had been changed in those cars since World War I." The men were quickly covered with tortuous little parasites called scabies, which were in the straw. That itching was terrible, and to get rid of them the men eventually stripped, doused themselves with sulfa powder, and were given new clothing. "We all stood on the ground on sections of newspaper, and when that powder came, you could hear those little buggers when they fell off and hit the paper," Dick said. His feet froze during the Battle of the Bulge, but at least he didn't lose any toes.

After the War

Dick's outfit returned home in September 1945. The men took a train from Boston to Chicago where they were to officially muster out of the service. As soon as the train slowed, going through the Chicago rail yards, most of the men simply jumped off. They were close to home and didn't want to go through any formalities. Dick and Jo had a daughter by then, Bobbi Jo (whom Dick had not yet seen), and Mom and daughter were living in Des Moines. Bobbi Jo stayed with



This cartoon strip, titled "Bucky" for the little kid in the ongoing series, was among Dick Spencer's earliest work in the magazine. This particular cartoon appeared in the January 1949 issue.

WESTERN HORSEMAN ARCHIVES



517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team

DICK SPENCER



Here's Dick in the "wild cow riding" on Santa Catalina Island in 1964.

LES WALSH PHOTO/WESTERN HORSEMAN ARCHIVES

family while Jo took a train to Chicago to meet her husband.

They returned to Des Moines and Dick got a job with Steinel Publications, which produced several law enforcement periodicals. Then he landed a job with *Look* magazine, starting at \$35 a week in salary and later increasing to \$55. The Spencers were working their way up. They built a small house in town in 1947 and the following year their son, Rick, was born, and Dick took a job at his alma mater, the University of Iowa.

He taught magazine production plus a new class, editorial cartooning. He had some great students, including Paul Conrad, who went on to win a Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning. During the nearly three years Dick was at the university he wrote a couple of books—*Pulitzer Prize Cartoons* and *Editorial Cartooning, the Techniques and Tricks of the Trade*. Dick also created the school's mascot—Herky the Hawk—which is still in

use today. Dick enjoyed his post-war stint in college; he even served as head cheerleader and was voted Big Man on Campus, a real honor in those days. The move to Boulder came next, and then employment with *The Western Horseman*. Thirty days after Dick started work at the magazine, he and Jo, and children Barbara Jo (Bobbi Jo), Richard Craig (Rick), and soon to be followed by youngest daughter Debra Jean (Debbie), moved to a house on a hill less than two miles from the office building.

The house, Dick recalled, was perfect for the family, and they knew it as soon as they saw it. They built a stable out back, overlooking several large valleys filled with interesting rock formations and pine trees. For years, the Spencers had permission to pasture horses in those valleys; they rode in them, the kids camped out in caves located on some of the rock ledges, and the scenic area often served as photo backdrops for pictures that

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