

## OCTOBER 19, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

**The Real Heroes:** From 1942 until 1946 I was in the Army Air Force, but in no way was I a hero. After the war nearly all young men my age had been in the service (many of them took advantage of the GI bill, allowing them to further their higher education). Veterans of World War II were everywhere; it was no “big deal”. However, I have known at least four REAL HEROES. Two survived the war; two did not. Here is the story of one of them.

When I went to Mercersburg Academy in 1941, my roommate was John K. Chapman of Broadalbin, NY, who had been at Mercersburg since the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and was a “big man on campus”. He was a good athlete, a member of the student body’s “Senate”, and president of the Washington Irving Society. This latter position was equaled only by the President of the John Marshall Society, Irving’s competitor. All Mercersburg students had to belong to one or the other, and friendly in-house contests were held throughout the year, culminating in a great Debate in late February. John and I enjoyed each other, and we both served during World War II, but so did everyone else and at reunions and the like no one discussed his wartime service. It was not until very recently that I learned John had been just off the Normandy beaches on D-Day, June 6, 1944!

From his daughter, I have been able to learn the following: John was with a Medical Unit assigned to go ashore with the first wave of Infantry and Artillery, and they sailed on LST #314 from Portland-Weymouth Harbor on June 4, only to return because of rough seas. The next night the invasion was on, and as they crossed the Channel, ships of all sizes were everywhere. About 2 A.M. just off shore at a beach called “Omaha Red”, troops were being loaded onto Higgins boats (the actual landing craft). Each LST carried six Higgins boats. The bombardment started about 4 A.M. John and his friend Jim Averill, knowing that they might witness history in the making, went up to the superstructure of their LST to take in the sights, as no casualties had come to them as yet. The Higgins boats were unloaded into the water at daybreak. Many of them sank before reaching shore; the seas were rough, their loads were too great, and their pumps couldn’t keep up. By late morning, the casualties started arriving; most injuries coming from rifle wounds. Several bodies of men who never reached shore were turned over to them. The original plan had been for the LST to land on the beach, but the sea was too rough, and it would have been suicide. After what seemed like a very long time, the LST headed back to England with its casualties. As soon as the boat was unloaded, it started back to Normandy with an Army Maintenance Outfit (trucks and drivers) and was accompanied by four other LST’s and a Destroyer-escort. About 15 miles off the coast, LST #314 was torpedoed by a German E-boat (similar to our PT boats). In a few minutes the LST began to sink, and fire and explosions followed. The German E-boat pulled alongside and prepared to continue shooting, but for some unknown reason, they sped off and threw off a life raft. As John’s ship sank, he tried to swim away in the icy water but the suction of the ship going under made it impossible to make headway. Slightly injured, he caught up to a life raft and was able to climb aboard. Those who had not drowned were picked up by a British ship and taken back to England, and John soon returned to the States to recuperate. He took part in several of the Pacific island campaigns before the war ended and he was discharged. I knew a real hero. Ruth and I had dinner with the Chapmans during our week at Saratoga Springs in July.

Poor weather last Thursday caused us to postpone the visit of Lex duPont to Auburn Heights. He plans to be with us tomorrow night, Tuesday, October 20, at 7 P.M. (in the Museum) to educate us on how to run a Mobile Steam Car. Lex bought our 1901 Mobile from the original family in Wallingford, CT, when he was about 17 years of age (1945). His father, E. Paul duPont, president of the Indian Motorcycle Company at that time, had Goodyear make new single-tube bolt-on tires, and Lex got the car running soon after World War II. He showed it at AACA meets before and after 1950, kept it in good condition, and sold it to FAHP in 2005. Knowing little about its early technology, we have been reluctant to attempt to get it running, without the benefit of Lex's knowledge. Those of you interested in very early steam cars will want to hear Lex's answers to our many questions. We hope you can attend. Our work session will be abbreviated for many of us so interested.

Continued cold and wet weather discouraged us from taking cars to the Fall Meet of the Historical Car Club of Pennsylvania yesterday. There is a possibility we may have our own mini steam car tour this coming weekend, either Saturday or Sunday, October 24 or 25, but nothing definite on this at this time. Walter Higgins showed an interest and possibly has a good route for such a tour. If anything further develops, active volunteers will receive an E-mail with details a.s.a.p.

Last week the Events Committee met on Tuesday evening, and several jobs were accomplished in the shop. In addition to Auburn Valley R.R. work by railroad volunteers (Jerry Novak pressure-washed the turntable), Art Wallace and Bob Jordan removed additional hardware from the frame of our Stanley Model 607, Jeff Pollock and Emil Christofano pulled the Model 740's vaporizer cable (with ease!), after it had been pumped full of grease that set for two weeks. Ted Kamen and Art Wallace removed most of the grease from the vaporizer and I made a new cable. The valve job on our Model 76 moved along, with Jim Personti refacing the valve edges where the rods come through and fabricating new/old stock rods with the proper end clearance. These were installed by Steve Bryce and myself over the weekend. We are ready now to test the engine under steam.

Again, we are attempting to keep our white board in the garage up-to-date with current work projects. Unless you have a definite project in mind for a work session, check this board when you come in and see if there is something thereon that interests you. Project chair people are encouraged to list projects on this board, in addition to those that may be listed by Steve Bryce, Bill Schwoebel, or myself.

Our Annual Appeal letters will be going out soon, and we hope you will consider giving as liberally as you can before the end of the year. Our Development Committee, chaired by Dee Durham, has prepared several grant applications, but our financial success depends on each one of us. FAHP can't do without the generous support of our members, for which we've been very grateful in the past. Thank you, in advance.

Tom