

ECHOES OF HONOR: REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF BILL HALBERT
AND THE GREATEST GENERATION

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Gerald David Mohr

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by

Gerald David Mohr

APPROVED:

Dr. J. Ross Dancy
Thesis Chair

Dr. James S. Olson

Dr. Jeffrey L. Littlejohn

Dr. Abbey Zink, Dean
College of Humanities and Social Sciences

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the men, women, and children of the World War II generation whose faith, courage, and sacrifice not only saved the world from evil and injustice, but also preserved our nation and way of life. It is also offered on behalf of my devoted and loving wife, Rebecca, whose patience, kindness and patriotism are a genuine reflection of her remarkable father, about whom this story is told.

ABSTRACT

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It was called the “Greatest Generation” – an era of Americans venerated for their extraordinary and selfless contributions to the preservation of freedom and democracy during World War II. They were a variegated mosaic of ambitious young adults and idealistic youths just coming of age, couples who had commenced budding families and nascent businesses, factory workers and farmers, manufacturing tycoons and military professionals, and little children who sensed from worried parents that their world was in peril. When the evils of German Nazism, Italian fascism, and Japanese imperialism congealed into a cancerous global cabal, the lives, liberty, and future of all were at stake. Confronting such malevolence accordingly placed unimaginable demands on the courage and character of freedom-loving people everywhere. When victory was finally secured, questions arose as to how it was ever possible against such determined, experienced and well-equipped foes. Certain conspicuous possibilities emerged: exceptional leadership in key positions of the government and military; the nation’s collective fury converted to determination and industry after the outrage of Pearl Harbor; and perhaps even the interposition of Divine Providence. But what was the degree of contribution made by the individual American at home and abroad? Could there have been extraordinary traits possessed by ordinary citizens of this generation that rendered victory certain?

This work is based on the life of Bill Halbert, a U.S. Army Air Force bomber pilot assigned to the European Theatre of Operations when he was only a teenager. It explores and reveals the extraordinary attributes and actions of those citizens – before, during and

after World War II – which distinguished that generation, and thereby rendered their country exceptional in its time.

KEY WORDS: Greatest Generation, World War II, leadership, Exceptionalism, Europe.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1: Background

It was called the “Greatest Generation” – an era of Americans venerated for their extraordinary and selfless contributions to the preservation of freedom and democracy during World War II.¹ They were a variegated mosaic of ambitious young adults and idealistic youths just coming of age, couples who had commenced budding families and nascent businesses, factory workers and farmers, manufacturing tycoons and military professionals, and little children who sensed from worried parents that their world was in peril. When the evils of German Nazism, Italian fascism, and Japanese imperialism congealed into a cancerous global cabal, the lives, liberty, and future of all were at stake. Confronting such malevolence accordingly placed unimaginable demands on the courage and character of freedom-loving people everywhere. This study is directed towards answering the question of whether Americans possessed singular and articulable attributes which distinguished the actions of the United States before, during and after World War II. It is presented through a biography of Bill Halbert, a U.S. Army Air Force pilot assigned to the European Theatre of Operations during the war.

The Americans who labored and fought through this desperate period undoubtedly deserve monumental approbation for their profound sacrifice and their combined efforts in attaining victory against a powerful and pervasive enemy. However,

¹ Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998), xxx.

to have been appointed the “Greatest Generation” is a rather bold declaration given the other paragons of American history. To contrast the varying deeds of all the nation’s heroes over the entire span of its heritage is not the intention here. Most would agree the founders – with their ragtag army of gallant colonial farmers, and the Herculean exertions they made during the Revolution – have no equal. Nor could the prolific sacrifices of the Civil War ever be matched – which produced a butcher’s bill more dismal than any ever conceived, yet removed the scourge of slavery forever. Is there any way to compare the courage and resolve of the heroes who fought and died while resisting communist aggression in the mountains around Chosin Reservoir, or the steaming jungles of Vietnam? The sacrifices and devotion of all veterans – from the country’s birth to the global war on terrorism – deserve to be recognized and honored on their own merits.

One could argue that all of these Americans were exceptional, having shared a common understanding from living in an uncommon nation; they possessed a ready willingness to face long odds in the defense of freedom. However, there was something different about the Americans who lived through World War II. They seemed to bear a certain aura separating them from others. They imbued a character distinct from their allies as well. Yet those intangible qualities that compel people in warfare to expend and risk life and limb are not common only to Americans. Many from the Allied countries accomplished similar feats and paid just as dear a price, and in some cases, perhaps more so. Could it then be claimed that this American generation was more distinct than those of other countries during that time? And if so, what was its impact on the nation’s history unto the present day?

In the years preceding the official declaration of war, America stood flat-footed and off-balance possessing antiquated weapons and aircraft, a skeleton cadre of professional soldiers, and an outdated, aging navy. It faced the well-equipped and combat-tested Axis powers on two broad fronts in Europe and the Pacific Ocean. To prevail, America would need to ramp-up its industrial might and engage its technological acumen like never before. It would have to mobilize a vast military machine with the skill, creativity and resolve to triumph. And most importantly the country would have to pull together and engage all of its instincts of cooperation, sacrifice and teamwork. These things it did with admirable speed and astounding efficiency which undoubtedly contributed to the Allies' overall success. Certainly there were the intangibles: exceptional leadership in key positions; the country's collective fury adeptly converted to determination and enterprise after the outrage of Pearl Harbor; and perhaps even the interposition of Divine Providence. To what degree, however, was the contribution of the individual American, at home and abroad? Could there have been other attributes or extraordinary circumstances of this generation that rendered victory certain?

Within modern historiography there is a tendency to eschew the prospect of American exceptionalism. There are many reasons for this; the term is loaded with political connotations and has been misused and misunderstood.² Certainly when the overwhelming victory sustained by the Allies against the indomitable war machines of the Axis Powers is carefully examined there is cause to wonder if some unique attributes

² Peter Onuf, "American Exceptionalism and National Identity," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, August 1, 2011), 1.

were possessed by Americans of the time. Many factors indubitably contributed to the Allied success, and the enormous contribution of the entire American war effort was certainly first among them. In addition, the legacy of this generation dominated the years that followed, and had a transcendent influence on the culture, as well as the future conduct of American foreign policy and war-fighting. The experience of the Korean and Vietnam wars could be considered an example of this. While the superintendence of those wars has been rightly criticized on many fronts – and they certainly could not be regarded as outright victories – they were assuredly part of the combined efforts which resulted in the ultimate defeat of communism in the Cold War.

In analyzing American contributions during World War II, the understandable inclination is to view military operations as the dominant focus. While the GI offered remarkable service in the fight overseas, there was an equally important effort being rendered by those remaining at home. Harnessing the titans of industry, science, technology, government and military – along with the cohesive contributions of everyday citizens on the home-front – the United States mounted a total war footing never achieved before or since. If the “Greatest Generation” was indeed great, it owes a large portion of that distinction to the enormity of its involvement in World War II and the unity of purpose in its commitment to victory. The broad impact of the war – in time and energy expended, collective and individual sacrifice, funds consumed, people afflicted, and lives

lost – affected every aspect of American life. All Americans took part in the war effort, thereby embracing a vested interest in its outcome and rightful claim to its success.³

To thoroughly understand the way America contributed to this consummate feat, it is necessary to go back and examine the years responsible in developing attitudes and molding the culture. This is accomplished by peering through the eyes of one who experienced that time period firsthand, and by recounting the events as they unfolded throughout the war and beyond. Beginning with the two decades leading up to hostilities with the Axis Powers, this study traces the life and experiences of U.S. Army Air Force pilot, Bill Halbert. From his upbringing in Texas in the 1920s and 1930s, to his service in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, and through his retirement after a full military career, Halbert's life reflects some of the most compelling and controversial events in the annals of American and world history.

Life did not begin easily for Bill Halbert. Born in 1925, he faced privation and difficulty growing up in the oilfields of Texas during the Great Depression. Hardship was met with tragedy at the tender age of five years old, when his mother, two brothers, and young schoolmate were crushed by a train while driving home from school. With petroleum exploration surging in Texas during the 1930s, his father moved to wherever oilfield work was available – from the plains of West Texas at Crane and McCamey, to the East Texas oil boom in Kilgore – taking Bill and his brother, Elzie, along. Upon the outbreak of war with Japan and Germany, Bill volunteered to fight as soon as he was

³ Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 409-411.

able. In 1943, he left high school before graduation to join the Army Air Forces, and as a 19-year old B-26 Marauder bomber pilot, flew combat missions over Italy, France and Germany.

Halbert survived the war to eventually receive his high school diploma and enroll at Kilgore Junior College. He excelled in sports, especially football, and his team played against the Compton (California) Tartars during the first Junior College Rose Bowl at Pasadena, California in 1946. He went on to attain a Bachelor of Science degree in petroleum engineering at the University of Oklahoma. Having remained in the Air Force Reserve, Halbert was recalled to active duty at the onset of the Korean War. His assignments kept him in the U.S. during the war, where he was instrumental in training fighter pilots and anti-aircraft gunners. Eventually assigned to fly the F-86 Sabre and the F-100 Super Sabre fighter jets, he flew a number of missions in and around the Demilitarized Zone in Korea. Halbert supported combat operations during the Vietnam War as a mission planner, pilot, and forward air controller, completing a number of combat flights against the Viet Cong in South Vietnam.

Before his thirty-four years of military service were concluded, Halbert had served during three wars, had flown forty-two bomber missions over Europe, and numerous jet aircraft sorties in Korea and Vietnam. He had also been assigned as a Brigadier General's aide-de-camp, an assistant for the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon, and as Deputy Commander of a U.S. Air Force Base.

In 1977, Bill Halbert retired from the Air Force as a lieutenant colonel, whereupon he began a new, full-time career as a professional golfer. Having been introduced to golf while serving as the aide to Major General Edward J. Timberlake,

Halbert excelled in the sport during his Air Force years and eventually won several large tournaments on the military circuit of competition. One of his notable victories was the U.S. Air Force Seniors Worldwide Golf Championship in 1974. Later as a civilian, Halbert qualified as a PGA (Professional Golfers' Association of America) Golf Professional and for the next twenty-one years served as an Assistant Pro and Head Pro at several golf courses in the Austin and New Braunfels, Texas areas. In the 1980s, he competed in the U.S. Senior Open (United States Golf Association) and the PGA Senior Open, qualifying for each of those tournaments during three different years. As part of these competitions, he played against Sam Snead, Arnold Palmer, Billy Casper and Gene Littler (1961 U.S. Open Champion).

Though Bill Halbert's life reflected many personal achievements, it has also revealed a conspicuous and consistent investment in the lives of others. He has been a dedicated and loving husband and father, spending his time, energy and treasure on his most prized possession, his family. His military career was punctuated with a myriad of civilian volunteer roles such as PTA president, baseball coach, Sunday school teacher and elementary school math tutor. While a PGA professional, he regularly donated his time and skills over many years to encourage young people to pursue and enjoy the game of golf. His activities were comprised of countless golf charity events and youth golf clinics. He was an instructor and mentor for PGA golf professional Jimmy Walker while in his youth. Even today, he serves as a volunteer, aviation museum docent, public speaker and mentor for youngsters. Simply stated, Bill Halbert's life, both public and private, has been dedicated to the benefit and well-being of others.

Through the use of extensive primary source materials, historical documents and a wide variety of subject authors, this project examines how the life of an ordinary man fit into the mosaic of America's extraordinary history. It delves into his early days and impressionable years – as well as the factors and people, who molded, shared and influenced his life – and charts the parallel of his life with the great historical events of the latter twentieth century. This biography explores how one man, along with many others of the “Greatest Generation,” made such an enduring contribution to the nation and the world.

1.2: Historiography

In order to present a foundational background for this biography, it is important to explore the events, culture and character of the nation into which Bill Halbert was born and raised. This would include the dynamics and events of the United States during the “Roaring Twenties,” the Great Depression, and the years of World War II. The project will continue through the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, concluding with Halbert's career as a golf professional through the closing years of the twentieth century. Integral works selected to reflect the history of the Great Depression – and the years leading up to it – include monographs by Niall A. Palmer,⁴ and Eric Rauchway.⁵ Palmer conducts an in-depth assessment of Presidents Harding and Coolidge focusing on their philosophies and governing styles, while Rauchway's work gives a more traditional account of the Depression and the attempts by the Roosevelt Administration to counter its affects with

⁴ Niall A. Palmer, *The Twenties in America: Politics and History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

⁵ Eric Rauchway, *The Great Depression and the New Deal: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

the New Deal. For a more personal insight into the social privations endured by Americans during this era, Studs Terkel⁶ provides a collection of accounts reflecting the humiliation of poverty on a grand scale. He explores how people adjusted their lives to the Depression as best they could, and how they made due under the worst of conditions. This firsthand look at the sudden and seemingly unrelenting scourge for so many people was an indispensable resource.

The works by Michael E. Parrish⁷, Richard Striner⁸, Michael Shally-Jensen⁹ and Richard Sylla¹⁰ add depth and breadth to the story surrounding America's auspicious growth of prosperity from the Great World War to the Stock Market crash in 1929, and on through events just before World War II. Striner explores the final days of President Woodrow Wilson's administration after World War I, and Parrish takes a broader approach contrasting the decades of both 1920s and 1930s leading up to the beginning of the war in 1941. Sylla takes a look back – from the vantage point of seventy-five years hence – at the crash of the 1929 stock market and the devastation it caused. Shally-Jensen provides insightful commentary and primary sources in the form of documents, speeches, letters, editorials and treaties that were part of history in the 1920s.

⁶ Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: The New Press, 1986).

⁷ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*.

⁸ Richard Striner, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I: A Burden Too Great to Bear* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014).

⁹ Michael Shally-Jensen, ed., *Defining Documents in American History: The 1920s (1920-1929)* (Ipswich, Massachusetts: Salem Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Richard Sylla, "The Great Crash of 1929 at Seventy-Five," *Financial History*, no. 82, (Fall 2004): 11-13, accessed October 19, 2015, http://www.moaf.org/resources/magazine/data/82/_res/id=sa_File1/Article_82.pdf.

Robert A. Calvert, Arnolde De León and Gregg Cantrell¹¹ draft a conventional outline of the events leading to the Great Depression, along with its consequences for Texas and the people who lived there. Topics such as the East Texas oil boom, agricultural depression and New Deal politics are addressed, as well as their impact on Texans and Texas attitudes. While information provided in this text is expansive in scope, these broad concepts depicting the influences that affected the United States, as well as the specific interests of Texas are advantageous in understanding the larger historical picture.

Specifically related to the impact of the Great Depression in Texas, Donald Whisenhunt¹² helps highlight that era with an emphasis towards President Herbert Hoover's efforts to staunch the blood-flow of our wounded nation. While much has been written about how the U.S. government did little to relieve the suffering, it was actually too much federal involvement which prolonged the misery. Luckily for Texans, the Great Depression did not impact the Lone Star state as badly as others, but given the negative effects of continued government intervention, the economy lagged for an entire decade. Finally, Donald Worster¹³ describes the agony of the Dust Bowl and its devastating effects on farmers of the southern plains during the 1930s.

Apart from the Great Depression in Texas – and during the early years of Halbert's life – the focus shifts to the oil industry which supplied financial muscle, an

¹¹ Robert A. Calvert, Arnolde De León, and Gregg Cantrell, *The History of Texas* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2007).

¹² Donald W. Whisenhunt, *The Depression in Texas: The Hoover Years* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1983).

¹³ Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930's* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

important natural resource to the nation, excruciatingly hard work for those involved with drilling efforts, and a sense of danger and adventure for all. Julia C. Smith¹⁴ and Robert D. Boyle¹⁵ bring oilfield life to action with their articles depicting the trials, frustrations, and travails encountered by the hardy roustabouts, wildcatters, and drillers who probed the Texas countryside in search of “black gold.” The monograph by Diana Davids Hinton and Roger M. Olien¹⁶ offers a broader, yet enlightening view of how Texas oilmen battled the national oil companies, Texas Railroad Commission, market fluctuations, and the federal government to make the Lone Star state the premier oil-producing region in the U.S. during the first half of the twentieth century.

In documenting the impact of the war years on Halbert’s life, several selections peruse a wide sample ranging from Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen’s¹⁷ classic American history to Maurice Matloff’s¹⁸ collection of insights from a military perspective, and Steven Casey’s¹⁹ analysis of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s struggles to convince a reluctant public the necessities of entering the war sooner rather than later. To better understand the mindset and character of the American soldier during World

¹⁴ Julia C. Smith, “East Texas Oil Field,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed July 24, 2015, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/doi01>.

¹⁵ Robert D. Boyle, “Chaos in the East Texas Oilfield, 1930-1935,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, no. 69 (Jan. 1966).

¹⁶ Diana Davids Hinton and Roger M. Olien, *Oil in Texas: The Gusher Age, 1895-1945* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen, *A Patriot’s History of the United States: From Columbus’s Great Discovery to the War on Terror* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004).

¹⁸ Maurice Matloff, ed., *American Military History* (Washington D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1969).

¹⁹ Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War Against Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

War II, the epic depiction by award-winning author, Stephen Ambrose,²⁰ was consulted. Coming from the opposite vantage point, one of Hitler's top infantry generals, Eric von Manstein,²¹ delivers a convincing perspective of Hitler's futile strategy in engaging a two-front war with Russia and the Allies. It expressly highlights how much of the German war effort was dedicated to the Russian front.

As the focus is distilled to the air war, monographs by Donald L. Miller,²² Richard Overy,²³ Wolfgang W. E. Samuel and James F. Trent²⁴ set the tone for the conduct of bombing operations in the European theatre of operations. Articles by A. D. Harvey²⁵ and Kenneth P. Werrell²⁶ provide a view of the overall air war, as well as the strategic value of bombing vis-a-vis the collateral damages which occurred. In the accounts by Miller, Samuel and Trent personal stories of heroism, courage and sacrifice are depicted as young airmen mounted nearly impossible odds to bring the war to Germany. While many have debated the pros and cons of the bombing strategy, these books contend that it was effective in taking out key bridges, refineries, railroads and industrial centers. Overy gives a more substantive accounting of how strategic bombing

²⁰ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U. S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany, June 7, 1944, to May 7, 1945* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

²¹ Eric von Manstein, *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*, ed. and trans. Anthony G. Powell (Novato: Presidio Press, 1994).

²² Donald L. Miller, *Masters of the Air: America's Bomber Boys Who Fought the Air War Against Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

²³ Richard Overy, *The Bombers and the Bombed: Allied Air War Over Europe, 1940-1945* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2013).

²⁴ Wolfgang W. E. Samuel and James F. Tent, *In Defense of Freedom: Stories of Courage and Sacrifice of World War II Army Air Force Flyers*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015).

²⁵ A. D. Harvey, "Air Warfare in Perspective," *Air Power History*, (Fall 2013): 6-13.

²⁶ Kenneth P. Werrell, 'The Strategic Bombing of Germany in World War II: Costs and Accomplishments,' *Journal of American History*, (1986): 702-713.

fared from a statistical viewpoint comparing the costs verses the effects, as well as the damage and suffering caused when bombs impacted unintended targets.

In seeking the narrowest scope of Halbert's involvement, the published primary source collection by Victor C. Tannehill²⁷ – son of a former 320th Bombardment Group member – included the short version and a more detailed history of the 320th Bombardment Group²⁸ with personal insights, as well as, primary source post-mission records, unit diaries and photos of actual bombing sorties. Perhaps the most prolific repository of primary sources for Bill Halbert's squadron and the 320th Bombardment Group is found within a website edited by Dr. Franz Reisdorf.²⁹ The actual final mission reports of each squadron can be found there, along with details of every mission flown by Bill Halbert and his fellow flyers. These documents provide the most accurate accounts of Halbert's wartime experience by describing his actual missions, including hours flown, casualties sustained, targets engaged, aerial photos and unit diaries.

Lastly, the very personal observations of America's most beloved World War II correspondent, Ernie Pyle,³⁰ provide the eloquent introspection which only someone who was on the frontlines could convey. Though Pyle was imbedded with infantry units for his entire wartime experience, he had a number of occasions to interact with and view the

²⁷ Victor C. Tannehill, *Saga of the 320th: A B-26 Marauder Group in World War II* (Arvada: Boomerang Publishers, 1984).

²⁸ Victor C. Tannehill, *Boomerang!: Story of the 320th Bombardment Group in World War II*, (Racine: Victor C. Tannehill, 1978).

²⁹ Franz Reisdorf, ed., *320th Bombardment Group*, accessed June 9, 2016, <http://320thbg.org/index.html>.

³⁰ Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1944).

actions of Army Air Force flyers during combat in Europe. A collection of Pyle's dispatches was edited by David Nichols.³¹

Once the Allied victory against the Axis powers was secured in 1945, it took only a few short years for the specter of war to return. To understand and trace the roots of the Cold War, a number of texts were consulted. Mark A. Stoler³² produced an article outlining the philosophy and policies of George C. Marshall, his eventual assignment as Secretary of State and the genesis of the Marshall Plan for reconstruction in Europe. James I. Matray and Donald W. Boose Jr.³³ composed a comprehensive study that summarizes the key issues and historical background of Korea, often referred to as the 'Forgotten War.' The use of airpower in Korea, as well as strategy, plans, command and control, and political considerations were addressed in an article by Conrad C. Crane,³⁴ while the mentality and character of individual airmen and soldiers in combat was outlined in a doctoral dissertation by Janet G. Valentine.³⁵

Halbert's service during the Korean War primarily involved training for combat fighter pilots and air defense personnel, however, as hostilities waned and the shaky armistice continued he became proficient flying the F-86 Sabre Jet, as well as the F-100

³¹ Ernie Pyle, *Ernie's War: The Best of Ernie Pyle's World War II Dispatches*, ed. David Nichols (New York: Random House, Inc., 1986).

³² Mark A. Stoler, "From World War II to Cold War: The Emergence and Development of George C. Marshall's Transatlantic Worldview and Policies, 1939-1951," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* (Routledge) 11, no. 3 (September 2013): 308-318.

³³ James I. Matray and Donald W. Boose Jr., *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Korean War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

³⁴ Conrad C. Crane, "Raiding the Beggar's Pantry: The Search for Airpower Strategy in the Korean War," *The Journal of Military History* 63, no. 4 (Oct 01, 1999): 885-920.

³⁵ Janet Graff Valentine, "The American Combat Soldier in the Korean War," (PhD diss., University of Alabama, 2002).

Super Sabre. A book by Peter E. Davies,³⁶ provided an ample history of the transition from the F-86 to the F-100 and the particulars on those two fighter jets including their specifications, technology and combat records during air operations while at war with Korea, and continuing on throughout the 1950s.

There has rarely been a war which has impacted the American psyche in such a profound way as the one in Vietnam. Both air and ground wars were controversial and were criticized on a number of fronts. In 1965, Journalist David Halberstam³⁷ wrote an insightful, real-time account that charts the beginnings of this complex conflict and provides a narrative depicting the intricate political nuances, as well as the military developments at the war's outset. Fredrik Logevall³⁸ published a similar work in 2012, but detailed the earlier history of Indochina before the war, while escorting the reader to a better understanding of the Vietnamese peoples' resolve. Of particular interest, however, is the work by Lien-Hang T. Nguyen³⁹ which takes a look at the war through the eyes of the North Vietnamese power players in Hanoi as they directed military and insurgent operations against American forces.

Keying on Air Force operations in Vietnam, Ronald B. Frankum⁴⁰ provides a well-rounded view of how Halbert and his fellow airmen undertook the difficult task of

³⁶ Peter E. Davies, *North America F-100 Super Sabre*. Ramsbury (Wiltshire, UK: Crowood Press, 2003).

³⁷ David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, Inc., 2008).

³⁸ Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2012).

³⁹ Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

⁴⁰ Ronald B. Frankum, Jr., *Like Rolling Thunder: The Air War in Vietnam, 1964-1975* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

tactical and strategic combat flying. Frankum explains the application of airpower in six distinctive mission areas. By following a chronology of the escalation of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, his book provides one of the best studies from both strategic and tactical viewpoints. The work is informative and precise in its insight, which allows the reader to comprehend how other events evolved in relation to airpower. Containing excellent maps and meticulous detail as to locations of air operations, Frankum also informs the reader with descriptions of virtually every aircraft involved in the war. The overall quality is excellent with sufficient substance to make for an interesting and concise history of the air war in Vietnam.

After retiring from the U.S. Air Force, Halbert bid farewell to flying and decided to pursue his love of golf to the highest level. A better understanding of Halbert's interest in the sport is captured by Richard J. Moss,⁴¹ who traces the rich history and background of golf, how it was introduced in America, and eventually grew to be one of the most popular sports in the country. Moss' work details the growth of golf's popularity from the 1880s and on through the twentieth century. He addresses its many facets, from public interest in municipal courses, to the elite professionals playing at exclusive country clubs. The PGA was founded in 1916 and now has over 28,000 golf professionals who teach and promote the game throughout the United States. The organization reflects the legacy of golf's great sports heroes who spanned the decades and made the professional tour what it is today.⁴²

⁴¹ Richard J. Moss, *The Kingdom of Golf in America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).

⁴² *PGA of America*, accessed June 6, 2016, <http://www.pga.com/pga-america/pga-information/pga-america-history>.

The idea that America possesses an unequivocal élan is a long-held belief which permeates its history, culture and literature. However, as has been mentioned, the expression, “American exceptionalism,” carries a variety of considerable connotations and has been bantered back and forth in recent years among political advocates and detractors making it a particularly difficult concept to objectively consider. Moreover, the long-past decades of historical writings in which Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism domineered the field has become a bane for contemporary historians, and has caused a backlash of revisionist research for both good and foul within the discipline. Nevertheless, the quest is undertaken to determine if American exceptionalism made an impression on the World War II generation, whether by that moniker, Americanism, patriotism, or any other analogous epithet.

It is important to note that during the review for scholarly studies specifically regarding American exceptionalism, a number of authors provided what seemed to be overly adverse or biased accounts of American history. Close examination of these works revealed a tendency to emphasize the negative aspects of human interactions and assign responsibility to America – specifically those of Anglo-European background – for all wrongs that were committed, while failing to assign credit for any actions done right. Veteran historians Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen describe this phenomenon – and attempt to counter its influence. They discuss how this problem has proliferated throughout history textbooks across the nation, chief among them being the incomparable

People's History of the United States, by the vociferous critic of American civilization, Howard Zinn.⁴³

Interestingly, a careful examination of Zinn's work reveals it possesses neither prologue nor introduction, opening with a questionable view of America's beginnings, and continuing in the same vein throughout. In addition, Zinn fails to use any footnotes, claiming only that the book reflects his twenty years of teaching and research. Though it is prescribed scholarly practice for research historians to reference sources which have informed their ideas, Zinn simply states that to indicate every source of information in the text would have meant a book "impossibly cluttered with footnotes..." For an author who enjoys wide acclaim in some historical circles – and his writing to have been used extensively as an alternative textbook in high school and college history courses – failure to offer the customary evidence supporting his assertions seems unprofessional and shoddy at best, and dishonest at worst. Zinn's book is singled out as an example of the most egregious works possessing these enumerated failings.⁴⁴

A text contemporary with the World War II generation that details the notion of a distinctive American ideal is, *The Epic of America* written in 1931 by Pulitzer Prize winning author James Truslow Adams.⁴⁵ As a historian and prolific writer during the influential years which molded the thinking and attitudes of the time, Adams was the first to compose the phrase, "American Dream." Through this idea, he envisioned a land where anyone could find abounding opportunities that would enrich and improve their

⁴³ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present* (New York : HarperCollins, 1999).

⁴⁴ Ibid, 689.

⁴⁵ James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1932).

lives, according to their skills, abilities and determination. He also promoted the view that the American Dream was made possible only by forgoing excessive selfishness, and undertaking the patriotic feeling that calls for self-sacrifice and service for the good of all.

In a salute to the men and women of the World War II era, journalist and popular television news anchor Tom Brokaw⁴⁶ illuminates the common values and contributions of the “Greatest Generation”, which fought, prevailed and restored peace across the globe. Brokaw tells the story of this era through the recollections of several select Americans, illuminating their personal remembrances and experiences. Persons highlighted include a wide swath of ordinary heroes, minorities, women, celebrities and politicians. His narrative supports the contention that Americans responding to the call of duty, as well as those who remained at home, embraced certain common values which made that generation exceptional.

In the interest of projecting a proportional and symmetrical diorama which outlines the juxtaposed positions related to exceptionalism, the provocative, thoughtful, and sometimes animated writings of Godfrey Hodgson⁴⁷ and Peter Onuf⁴⁸ were consulted. American exceptionalism, as conceived by Hodgson, denies that America has exhibited a propensity of singularly positive traits that make it unique. He argues this myth has made Americans believe they are a master race who live in a country superior to all others. He downplays the uniqueness of America origin by pointing out its

⁴⁶ Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation*.

⁴⁷ Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁴⁸ Onuf, “American Exceptionalism and National Identity.”

founding ideas were derived from European philosophers, and that the American Revolution was influenced by the geo-political events occurring at the time in England and France. He further opines that Americans widely believe World War II was fought for the humanitarian reason of saving the Jews, and the victory over Nazism was assured without the contributions of Britain or the Soviet Union. While Hodgson downplays any positive notion of America exceptionalism, he is quick to point out that America is indeed exceptional in many negative ways. He highlights high crime and pervasive economic inequality in the U.S. as examples. Hodgson attributes America's post-war prosperity to the fact that it did not sustain the internal devastation from two world wars, as experienced by Europe.

Peter Onuf addresses the debate over what defines the American experience and national identity. His discourse provides an insightful look into American self-awareness and the nation's dominant role in global interactions. This article sheds light on the traditional views of national identity by America and British influence, and how those perspectives changed through the nineteenth century. It also emphasizes how the debate serves to sustain the nation's continuing understanding of both its legitimacy and capacity in modern times.

In his captivating indictment of modern liberalism, Former Yale Law Professor and Federal Judge Robert Bork⁴⁹ gave a prophetic and intriguing explanation of the rejection of traditional American values by the counter-culture generation of the 1960s.

⁴⁹ Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996).

Harkening back to his personal experiences as a law school professor, Bork outlines the thinking and attitudes of those who were raised by the Greatest Generation, and who aimed to dismantle and discard those conservative ideals their parents had sought to pass-on.

A more complimentary reflection of the American attitude towards exceptionalism was discovered in the writings Dennis Prager.⁵⁰ He details a positive presentment and delineation of the nation's root beliefs and avers that without them the United States becomes one of many countries which would otherwise languish in a sea of indifference and uncertainty with no common national character or international purpose. He admonishes that with a strong foundational understanding of the virtues and ideals which make up the "American creed," citizens and non-citizens alike can appreciate and strive for a life those ideals seek to promote and honor.

A similar theme is emphasized in the writings of Thomas L. Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum,⁵¹ but from the perspective that America has, in the last few decades, temporarily lost its exceptional standing in the world. Friedman, a foreign affairs columnist, and Mandelbaum, Professor of International Studies, portend that America's greatness relies on its future ability to respond effectively to the great challenges facing it in this new century. Those include globalization, information technology, growing deficits, and energy consumption. In their view, as long as America

⁵⁰ Prager, Dennis, *Still the Best Hope: Why the World Needs American Values to Triumph* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012).

⁵¹ Thomas L. Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum, *That Used to Be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World It Invented and How We Can Come Back* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

can influence the world through political, economic and moral leadership, life around the globe may not be perfect, but would be better than any alternative. The authors believe that while America can regain its exceptional standing, doing so does not guarantee it will remain so. They contend exceptionalism is not acquired once and then gets passed on automatically to each successive generation. Neither is it a gift or an entitlement, but has to be earned continually. Once acquired however, that valued status of global leader puts America in a coveted, yet gravely accountable station. In gaining this prominence, exceptionalism becomes more than just a partisan foofaraw or an academic squabble. Friedman and Mandelbaum maintain that all people everywhere would benefit from America regaining its worldwide esteem, and remaining as an exceptional country.

Finally, in the effort to include a more scholarly angle towards the study of American exceptionalism, an article by James W. Ceaser⁵² was examined. In perhaps the most thoughtful examination of the concept's pros and cons, Ceaser looks first at the definition of American exceptionalism and how it is conceived by Americans in terms of perceptions and interpretations. He then critically analyzes the notion of mission, and whether Americans have projected their values to other nations based on religious expression, or from rationalist thought. The values of liberty and republicanism were believed by the founders to be the inheritance, not just of Americans, but of the entire human race. Highlighting the ideas of the Puritans, the founding fathers, and the age of enlightenment – as well as science and Darwinism – Ceaser argues the deepest influence

⁵² James W. Ceaser, "The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism," *American Political Thought* (Spring 2012).

of mission came not from religion, surprisingly, but from philosophy and science. He makes a careful point to attest that religion – while perhaps not the most influential – is yet a powerfully important and growing dimension of the current political landscape in America. His conclusion contends both faith and reason have important roles to play in the American beliefs of liberty and justice; all humankind can and should have the opportunity to enjoy these virtues, with or without the help of America.

The most important aspects of this thesis and its subject are the primary sources of research that yield firsthand accounts of Bill Halbert's life and how his generation approached the immense obstacles of protecting and promoting peace from their involvement in world affairs. They consist of photographs, news and magazine articles, letters, reports and personal recollections of Halbert – and the memories of those close to him – which give testimony to his experiences while living through those illustrious, remarkable and incredibly tumultuous times. The bulk of those sources were bolstered by detailed personal interviews of Bill Halbert, his wife – Avis Franke Halbert; the recollections of Bill's brother – Elzie Halbert, Jr.; and daughters – Mundina Halbert O'Driscoll, Cynthia Halbert Cisco, and Rebecca Halbert Mohr. Other primary sources include letters, photographs, newspaper articles, award citations, official mission reports, and records of vital statistics.

1.3: Thesis Outline

The essence of this thesis examines who the Americans of World War II were, and whether they possessed exclusive attributes that influenced their response to that global struggle. It also explores if the United States, as a country, had inherent or acquired qualities that nurtured, sustained, and motivated its citizens during that era.

These inquiries are addressed through the biography of Bill Halbert, while contemplating the broader effects of politics, education, culture, economics, and military capabilities on the history of the time. Comprised of five chapters, the thesis begins with an introduction which sketches the highlights of Halbert's life and outlines the foundational sources of research.

Chapter two reveals major influences and events of the years after World War I, the decade of the Great Depression, and the occurrences leading to World War II. It describes the genesis of Halbert's family and the concurrent happenings of those years within the state of Texas. The hard lessons learned from the excesses of the 1920s to the privations of the 1930s are credited for laying support for the attitudes, teamwork and broad participation of the entire nation's populous during the war.

Chapter three follows Halbert's introduction to military life, his training as an Army Air Force pilot, and his deployment to the European theatre of operations. His combat experiences are combined with the general impressions of air and ground units as they face down the formidable challenges of the Nazi war machine and the greater world conflict.

The fourth chapter outlines Halbert's post-war experiences as he rejoins his family, attends college and eventually gets recalled to war once again. It tracks his military career through it many assignments, well as his marriage and growth of his family. It concludes with his retirement from the military, peacetime pursuits and accomplishments as a volunteer and mentor in his local community.

The final chapter concludes with a number of examples which weave Halbert's experiences with highlights of events during the years of World War II. It contrasts

modern impressions of American exceptionalism with those of past generations, and discusses the enduring impact of those citizens who are honored as the “Greatest Generation.”

Understanding the roots of the American character helps to explain the bedrock values which undergirded Bill Halbert’s generation. However, it is also essential to comprehend the culture, history, and events – at home, as well as those on the national and world stage – which shaped their formative years and were projected through the rest of their lifetime. In doing so, the historical forge yields the moral and spiritual metal from which this generation was cast. It was because of those early culminating years that Americans possessed the strength and will to overcome the travails of a world in desperate peril, and to endure the fateful episodes in the decades that followed. By knowing the catalyst of its character, the task of recognizing the contributions of this distinctive generation is vastly enhanced.

CHAPTER II

The Early Years (1920 - 1939)

He had overheard his father talk about it, but he had never actually experienced it, at least not until now. At nine years of age, Billy Halbert had been around oilfields for as long as he could remember. Though the country was in the throes of the Great Depression, labor was always in demand in the oil business – if a man were willing to move around to get it – and Crane, Texas was no exception. Now the excitement and relief reflecting months of work and anticipation culminated in a deep rumble from the ground. Amidst the shouts and joy of the oilfield hands, a massive spout of oil burst upward through the rigging and shot skyward as the well came in. Standing on the front porch of the little oil-camp house not more than a hundred yards away, Billy marveled at the spectacle and was a little frightened by the quaking of the ground under him. As he watched, giant black drops splattered the dusty Texas plain near the rig, while a fine oily mist wafted on the gentle summer breeze. Billy began to understand why the men worked so hard under such difficult conditions; this is what made it all worthwhile...

No life, immersed within the course of human events, is a story unto itself. Throughout the ages, each person is born into an already churning current of human drama and is swept into its undertow of ever-changing tides and circumstances. But if ever there were times of fascination and momentous change, one could hardly have been more exciting than that in which Bill Halbert was born. His story began in 1925, during the countervailing influences of precipitous cultural transformation and the staunch adherence to tradition. It was a time of buoyant fiscal growth followed a few years later by the profound and devastating onset of social and economic upheaval in the 1930s that

stunned the country when it had seemingly reached the pinnacle of prosperity. As the financial calamity of the Great Depression gained momentum and rippled around the globe, little Billy (as he was called throughout his younger years), was a carefree youngster growing up with his parents and three brothers in the tranquil western plains of Texas. He could never have imagined what was in store for his future, and what challenges his generation would eventually face upon reaching young adulthood.

2.1: The Legacy of War: A Boiling Cauldron

In the decade preceding Bill Halbert's birth, Americans were tormented by the progression of world events and the contemplation of their country's appropriate role. By 1917, the United States was reluctantly pulled into the Great War, a European conflict which had grown to massive proportions. Despite all attempts to avoid the carnage, the country was nevertheless compelled to fight, especially after Germany's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare enabled a U-boat to sink the British passenger liner, RMS Lusitania, killing 128 Americans. A short time later, additional U.S. merchant shipping fell prey to the U-boat wolf-packs. That – along with Germany's prompting of Mexico to declare war on America via the secret Zimmerman dispatch – was what finally breached America's near impermeable wall of isolationism.⁵³ American troops were sent 'over there,' and when the guns eventually went silent on a cold November morning in 1918, the First World War was concluded at last. Over the course of four years, more than 18

⁵³ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 530-533.

million people had been killed. Of those, 10 million were civilians, and 126,000 were American soldiers.⁵⁴

It was a critical time for both the United States and the world. How the distant future would unfold depended on the Allies' treatment of the former Central Powers around the peace table in Versailles. President Woodrow Wilson authored a generous proposal for reconciliation, which was idealistic by most accounts, but unrealistic and unpopular with both the Allies and Congress. Perhaps far more an ideologue than statesman, he was never to see his Fourteen Points gain traction, nor was it ever included within the Treaty of Versailles. Having repeatedly given very little deference to Congress, Wilson was likewise spurned, and his dream of including the United States in the newly formed League of Nations was forever doomed.⁵⁵

Victory in Europe witnessed thousands of returning American veterans exchange their rifles for plowshares and with their return to farm life, the market became awash in agricultural goods. The unintended glut, combined with the loss of wartime demand and overextension of loans for farm equipment and land, became the recipe for recession. However, America was in better shape than it had ever been before. It was now a world power with a formidable military and the potential for a robust economy. Not having experienced the devastation of hostilities within its own borders, it avoided the arduous necessity to rebuild its infrastructure, as encountered by the war-torn Europeans. Perhaps

⁵⁴ "World War I." *Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia* 1 (2015), 1, accessed November 12, 2015, EBSCOhost.

⁵⁵ Striner, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I*, 188-194.

the most important consequence of America's wartime participation was that it emerged as the only nation to have become stronger from the experience.⁵⁶

Eager to reassume a peacetime footing, Americans seemed ready to jettison the big government attitudes and the progressive policies of the Wilson era and return to normalcy. While such a course mandated an adjustment back to the conservative attitudes of small government, a focus on domestic events, and adoption of policies to enhance business and the economy, there was also an implied expectation that America would continue its role of world leader, as exhibited during the war years.⁵⁷

On the surface, the decade of the 1920s did little to portend the ominous future. America's experience in the Great World War was followed by a dynamic and complex era that harbored an impulse for progress and growth, but pined for its bucolic past. Even though the economy slumped into a postwar recession, it was short-lived and precipitated a vigorous rebirth. All aspects of society began to cultivate and then champion, an ever-enlarging consumer-oriented economy. The best example was the explosion of automobile sales, which prompted an equally vigorous market for a wide array of consumer goods – all promoted by broad advertising and paid for with installment credit plans. Persons from every social sphere were affected and seemingly no class or region was left untouched.⁵⁸

It could be said that America's *raison d'être* in the 1920s was manufacturing, and by extension, consumerism. Having energized its emergent industrial muscle to support

⁵⁶ Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 30-32.

⁵⁸ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 535.

the Allies during World War I, peacetime production now soared. With emphatic reinforcement of mass production, more items could be produced at lower prices. Gross national product grew 2 percent per year and unemployment never rose above 3.7 percent. Annual income increased an average of 30 percent.⁵⁹ Henceforth, more people were able to acquire a wider assortment of goods. That which was once a luxury, now became an affordable commodity, readily available to all. To complete the cycle, higher wages indubitably prompted workers to purchase the newly available items. Never failing to exploit the winds of popular favor, *Advertising and Selling* magazine trumpeted the notion that, “every freeborn American has the right to name his own necessities.”⁶⁰

On the downside, farming and agricultural entities suffered immensely. Having grown accustomed to supplying the American and allied armies’ demand for large wartime provisions, the need for post-war foodstuffs had dropped dramatically, while production thrived from an enlarged workforce implementing all manner of newfangled farm machinery. That – combined with a post-war recession and President Harding’s tariffs – did not bode well for the nation’s agricultural market. In spite of the economy’s advances in nearly every commercial category, farmers were never able to gain a foothold and partake in the nation’s booming prosperity.⁶¹

Having hailed from a large clan of farmers, Elzie Washington Halbert, Sr. knew all too well what that kind of life meant. Better known as E.W., one day he would proudly claim Bill as his third son. As a young adult, E.W. had struggled to eke out a

⁵⁹ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 30-31.

⁶⁰ Rauchway, *The Great Depression*, 14-15.

⁶¹ Shally-Jensen, *Defining Moments in American History: The 1920's*, xi-xiii.

living from working the land. His parents, and their large clan of fourteen brothers and sisters – scattered about the Milam area of east Texas – had tried to do the same, but without much success. While life is always difficult on a farm, it had been especially hard in the years following World War I. It was strenuous and exhausting work with profits from crops dependent on plenty of sun, rain, good fortune, and Divine oversight. The prospect of a new decade did nothing to help the ailing farm industry as it experienced falling prices, the perennial threat of drought, the invasive boll weevil, and other crop pests. It contained all the reasons necessary for E.W. to seek his fortune elsewhere. Just about the time he and Minnie Belle Harris were married in 1919, E.W. glimpsed a new opportunity on the horizon – the growing oil business had begun to range far and wide in Texas.⁶²

In the 1920s, Texas boasted some of the fastest growing cities in the nation, and oil was the reason. However, ready oil discovery and easy production did blend easily. By the late nineteenth century, oil had been found in many areas of Texas, mostly by way of surface ground seepages, or happened upon accidentally while drilling for water. Lynis T. Barrett, the first Texas wildcatter, located, drilled, and produced the state's first oil well – at a depth of 106 feet – on September 12, 1866, just a few miles southeast of Nacogdoches. As prospectors would eventually learn though, all oil is not the same. The oil discovered by Barrett at Oil Springs was high in sulfur and low in paraffin, not good for refining highly desirable kerosene – the only petroleum product in high demand

⁶² Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/1/2016.

during those years. It was only useful as boiler fuel or to produce a number of lubricants.⁶³

When oil speculators hit pay dirt in the vicinity of Ranger, Texas, it did not take long for E.W. to load up his family and head west. They arrived in 1922 and he started work in the oilfield as a roustabout, the lowliest job in the oilfield. A roustabout was required to do any unskilled job, which was usually the hardest, dirtiest, and most physically exhausting. E.W. did not mind though, for he was used to hard work and he always strived to do the best job he could. He regarded himself fortunate to provide his family a regular paycheck, while Minnie stayed at home and tended to their young sons, Clifton and Elbert. By the time Billy was born in 1925, their home in nearby Eastland was thriving.⁶⁴

The decade of the 1920s was an era of firsts in America. The nation was bursting at the seams to invent and grow and seemingly endless possibilities abounded for people and progress. The period also offered potential new gains for women and minorities. Minorities excelled in the arts, medicine, and philosophy, notably in the big urban areas such as New York and Chicago, and for the first time in its history, women were allowed to vote in the United States. While evident this opened a new door of political influence for them and heralded an improved footing in society, women were still impugned as inferior in many areas, especially the workforce.⁶⁵

⁶³ Hinton and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 2-3.

⁶⁴ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/1/2016.

⁶⁵ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 135-137.

This was also an amazing epoch for science, invention, medicine and technology. The first radio broadcasts of news and sports enlivened peoples' enjoyment of leisure time by both educating and entertaining. Radio, along with talking movies, likewise created a boom in the advertising industry. Kimberly Clark invented the disposable handkerchief called Kleenex. Rayon, cellophane, foam rubber and the telephone switchboard were invented. The attendant ripple effect throughout the economy boosted prosperity and growth. The automobile industry launched to new heights – thanks to the ingenuity and drive of Henry Ford – and blossomed at an enormous rate with the development of the assembly line. Sales increased exponentially as cars replaced horse-drawn carriages across the nation, enabling people to enjoy the thrills of travel, vacations, sporting events and family reunions.⁶⁶ With such energy in the economy and the populous, there is little surprise that technological innovation leaped forward as well. Radios and newspapers were extremely popular, and items for the home such as refrigerator, toasters, washers and dryers became commonplace.⁶⁷

As science, technology and innovation reigned supreme in the 1920s, the carapace of traditional American culture sensed the beginnings of fracture – especially in urban areas. Abundant affluence and leisure time, mingled with the influx of jazz, nightclubs, illicit booze and loose morals, succored a sense of devil-may-care hedonism seemingly ready to jettison convention at every turn. Bedrock morals and religious traditions were challenged by cosmopolitan influences and temptations which floated freely across the

⁶⁶ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 33-39.

⁶⁷ Shally-Jensen, *Defining Documents*, 125.

recently tapped radio waves and the novel silver screen. Americans also faced a myriad of dilemmas from the perplexing backlash of the Volstead Act, the law which established prohibition in the United States. The resulting deluge of illegal but popular speakeasies, the role of law enforcement in the blossoming alcohol consumer culture, and the proliferation of powerful organized criminals who fomented violence and corruption throughout the nation's growing cities, were all of increasing and urgent concern.⁶⁸

Religion and community cohesion – once dominate pillars of morality and social fabric – experienced profound disquietude from the nation's attempt to legislate good behavior. That insidious time, known as Prohibition, caused an unintended backlash of crime and corruption that encouraged normally stellar citizens to become common lawbreakers.⁶⁹ Though the Eighteenth Amendment banned the manufacture, sale, or transportation of alcohol in 1919, it seemed that every person, in every walk of life, was complicit. Instead of ridding the nation of “demon rum” as intended, police and government officials were faced with the near impossible task of enforcement, while too often succumbing to the corruptive influences of bribery and graft.⁷⁰ Of the three thousand prohibition agents hired by the Treasury Department, ten percent were fired for corruption during that era.⁷¹ Instead of lowering the crime rate and bolstering morality,

⁶⁸ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 98-102.

⁶⁹ Palmer, *The Twenties in America*, 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 2.

⁷¹ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, p. 99.

Prohibition actually promoted a feeling of defiance for law and order, and made public heroes of gangsters.⁷²

Going hand in glove with the public's disregard for prohibition, were the new-found freedoms of women. This fashionable age of avant-garde was a time when women endeavored to claim their rightful place in American society. "Flappers" – rebellious-oriented young women who were quick to shed the constraints of the former morality – readily indulged in drinking, smoking and dancing as they strove for a new identity. Many felt it was now their time to enjoy the pleasures formerly reserved for men. Jazz bands were becoming popular and fueled the appetite for night life, prompting the genesis of clubs and speakeasies. American life seemed to be roaring along at an incredible pace.⁷³

As oil exploration surged across Texas during the 1920s, growth exploded in existing communities near the activity, and in remote areas boomtowns became a common occurrence. When speculators, investors and drilling companies rushed to the site of a new find, tent towns sprang up, as well as boarding houses, saloons, dance halls and dining establishments. Drilling sites were characterized by unpaved, muddy, and at times impassable roads; these were always joined by great clay-lined earthen tanks filled with crude oil. The Texas oilfield was a rough area, occupied by robust men living a hard and dangerous life.⁷⁴

⁷² Shally-Jensen, *Defining Documents*, 117.

⁷³ Ibid, 169.

⁷⁴ Hinton and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 70.

While urban dwellers were living fast and loose in an unprecedented and booming era, seemingly testing the limits of all things conventional, life in west Texas was still pastoral and placid. In the quiet little town of Eastland, without fanfare or flourish, a baby boy came into the world on March 11, 1925. Billy Halbert was the third of four boys born to E.W. and Minnie Belle. Elzie, Jr. would arrive two years later and become Billy's lifelong friend. Their livelihood at that time was modest, but good for the young family, especially with the steady oil discoveries where they lived. The continuous flow of "black gold" was exactly what E.W. needed to secure his future as an oilfield hand, and the father of a young, growing family.⁷⁵

To accommodate their laborers, oil companies eventually constructed camps within their remote field operations for workers and their kin+. In addition to building comfortable bungalows for individual families, the camps ultimately offered schools, theatres, hospitals, libraries and decent roads. By making life more amenable to workers, the oil companies did much to improve retention of laborers, who were in high demand.⁷⁶

It is hard to imagine the impact the petroleum industry had on Texas during the early twentieth century. The state produced more oil by 1932 than all other oil producing states, and twice as much as the second largest oil yielding state, California, where production was unregulated.⁷⁷ Independents eventually gained control of more than

⁷⁵ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/1/2016.

⁷⁶ Hinton and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 164-165.

⁷⁷ Ibid, vii.

twice as many leases as the major oil companies, and by the end of 1938 crude was selling for \$1.10 per barrel.⁷⁸

Much of the country was experiencing the economic revival during the middle 1920s, and thousands of Americans had migrated to northern cities pursuing industrialism's promise of wealth and excitement. However, the bucolic essence of rural life lent a modicum of familiarity and stability that was comfortable to many during that time of breakneck change. There was a price to be paid for the comfort of the family farm though, as more people began to realize with the drastic drop in demand for goods. While this era marked the first time more people lived in cities than rural areas in the United States, that was not the case for Texas. During that decade, more than 60 percent of people still lived in the country. Cotton was a mainstay crop for Texan farmers, and they felt the negative impact as cotton prices fell by half from 21 cents a pound to 11 cents by 1929.⁷⁹

As times got worse, more and more families found a convenient escape from the farming dilemma. The oil industry had gradually grown from the turn of the century and by 1920, prospectors and drillers were just hitting their stride. In the late nineteenth century, oil was found in Corsicana and other areas, mostly while drilling for water. At first, there had been tepid interest until the Spindletop gusher came in near Beaumont, Texas in 1901. Shortly after that, excited speculators flocked to Texas and the boom had

⁷⁸ Smith, "East Texas Oil Field," 7.

⁷⁹ Calvert, De León and Cantrell, *The History of Texas*, 251-257.

begun. Oil would eventually surpass both cattle and cotton as the keystone of the Texas economy.⁸⁰

Certainly farm life had meant backbreaking labor and an uncertain future, but there was nothing benign or guaranteed about oilfield work either. Work on the rigs was not only taxing and difficult, it was also dangerous. A roustabout was expected to work long hours in a dirty and treacherous environment. Heavy machinery and high platforms required strength, stamina and balance. On an oil derrick, there were many men working separate tasks around a lot of moving parts. At any time, unexpected events and accidents could occur. A roustabout was required to do the toughest jobs, fraught with grime, grease and filth. It was physically demanding outdoor work around mud, oil, and saltwater; often done in extreme weather which featured oppressive heat or bone-chilling cold. Roustabouts repaired worn-out equipment and conducted maintenance on machines, trucks and tools. Often they were exposed to hazardous and toxic liquids, along with gases that were flammable or poisonous. In the early days of drilling, gushers created storage problems and overflow oil was stored in earthen tanks. Oil stored in these open sites was vulnerable to catch fire from any open flame, such as sparks, cigarettes or lanterns.⁸¹

Gas blowouts were a common danger and very serious, causing injury or death to operators, or complete ruin to a well destroying the drilling equipment and choking the well shaft with rocks and debris. A driller could be surprised by tapping into a sudden

⁸⁰ Calvert, De León and Cantrell, *The History of Texas*, 242.

⁸¹ Hinton and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 41-42.

pocket of high pressure gas. In many cases the gas discovered was deadly hydrogen sulfide, a flammable, explosive and poisonous scourge.⁸²

The beginning of 1930 was not only a tough year for the economy, and Americans in general, but it was a time that would turn the Halbert family upside down. All families experience difficult days, but there was scarcely one more tragic for the Halberts than September 22, 1930. It began as a normal warm, sunny day as Minnie went about her routine with plans to make a short stop at the market, and then pick up the boys – 11-year old Clifton, and 9-year old Elbert – from school. The children had been excited for school to start after a long hot summer, but had now been there for nearly three weeks. They were growing tired of rising early to complete chores before school, and then struggling with endless homework assignments each night.

Having worked with the Trans-Continental Oil Company for some time, E.W. had risen to the skilled position of pumper and was now doing shift work. The rig was running around the clock, and his operational crew was manning the midnight shift. To allow E.W. the quiet he needed during the day to rest from his job, Minnie had planned to take her younger boys, 5-year old Billy, and 3-year old Elzie Jr., along on her errands. For some reason, however, little Elzie simply refused to go with her. The more Minnie insisted, the harder the youngster fought. At last, with Elzie crying desperately, Minnie decided to leave him home. She likewise saw no reason to take little Billy along. It

⁸² Hinton and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 46-47.

made sense that if their Daddy had to wake up for one child, he might as well sit with both of them.

The Halbert home was located about three miles northwest of Lake Eastland on the Trans-Continental oil lease. Since it was a substantial drive to town, over rough roads, Minnie had been happy to lend a helping hand to their neighbors, the Mitchells. She had offered to pick up 9-year old L.W. Jr., and 6-year old Mary Louise from school, along with her own two boys. As she hurried on her way, Minnie was secretly happy to have left the younger boys at home, since they would have been a handful at the market, and the Ford sedan was hard enough to drive with the other four children on board.

After purchasing her groceries from the general store in town, Minnie greeted the children after school and asked how their day had been. They were all tired from a long Monday and piled in, anxious to get on home. The return route required Minnie to go over the steep railroad embankment at the Lake Eastland crossing just on the outskirts of town. The track was on a high grade with three tracks; the main line and two switch tracks.

At the time she attempted to cross, two tank cars were on the switch tracks. In addition, noise from running train engines in the yard, along with the nearby gasoline pumping station was deafening. Sadly, she never heard the whistle or bell of the oncoming locomotive. To make the situation even worse, the eastbound Texas and Pacific passenger train had its approach obscured from Minnie's view by the parked tank cars. Ford sedans of that time were notoriously difficult to shift gears, especially if the driver was hurried and scared.

In the final seconds, when she realized her car was in imminent peril, Minnie tried in vain to shift the car in reverse. By a stroke of fortune, young L.W. Jr. had seen the impending collision early enough to get to the door handle. The train collided with the Ford midway on the driver's side, killing Minnie instantly. It continued pushing the car for seventy feet down the track strewing groceries and debris, eventually killing her two boys, as well as little Mary Louise. Only L.W. Jr. survived, though he was injured and also pushed most of the way down the track. The train continued another 150 feet before it finally came to a stop.

An ambulance from Barrow-Hamber was immediately dispatched and hundreds of people from all over town raced to the scene. They frantically viewed the wreckage to see if any friends or loved ones were involved. Mr. Mitchell heard the ambulance going to the scene of the wreck, but only later realized it bore the torn body of his little girl as it passed him on its return. Understandably, the Halbert and Mitchell families were devastated by the accident and, with incalculable sadness and grief did their best to put their lives back together in the coming days.⁸³

Accounting to the mercy of youthful innocence, Bill Halbert remembered very little about the crash that took his mother and brothers. He realized his father was very sad and distraught but, being only five years old, was far too young to comprehend the heartbreak of the family's loss.⁸⁴

⁸³ "Only Survivor Tells His Version of the Accident," *Eastland Telegram*, September 23, 1930.

⁸⁴ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/1/2016.

Just one day later – when the dust had scarcely settled from the accident – E.W. gathered up his boys, boarded the same passenger train involved in the collision, and escorted the bodies of his wife and two sons back to deep East Texas where they were laid to rest at the old family cemetery in Milam.⁸⁵ Realizing that he faced an insurmountable challenge in caring for his two young sons, E.W. leaned heavily on his sister, Bertha Wood, who lived nearby in Eastland. She gladly cared for the little lads, until a permanent arrangement was made for them. Through the years of his long and successful life, Elzie, Jr. became a rugged Texas cowboy and oilman. Though very little could unsettle Elzie in his adult years, Bill has forevermore thanked his younger brother for putting up such a fuss – at least on that one September day long, long ago – so that their mother gladly left them both behind.⁸⁶

Within the year after the accident, E.W. met and married Vera Phelps of Dublin, Texas and they lived in Eastland for several more years. As the stepmother for Billy and Elzie Jr., she was a good as they could have hoped for. She was kind and loving to the boys, while actively supporting them in their church, especially in the youth programs. Bill remembered her efforts to include their neighbors during family gatherings. “She wanted to provide the best home life that she could, and made friends with our neighbors. Our activities with them were a big part of the family’s social life.” As a result, Billy and Elzie Jr. became good friends with three brothers, Ted, Tom and Gene Hogan. “We did just about everything boys could do together, including camping, hunting and fishing.

⁸⁵ “Only Survivor,” *Eastland Telegram*.

⁸⁶ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/1/2016.

The Hogan boys were involved in Boy Scouts, and taught Elzie and I all they knew about the outdoors,” Bill recalled.⁸⁷

2.2: Texas Becomes an Oil Colossus

Although the nation was in a depression by 1931, about 900,000 barrels of oil per day were being extracted from nearly 1,200 wells located in Texas. Pipeline was the preferred method of shipment during this time, with rail tank cars being the alternate choice. Seventeen pipelines were available to pump the petroleum from the various oilfields to the nearest Texas refineries, and five railroads provided transport of all remaining production. The oil was sent to, and refined at any of six local refineries. Most were of the teapot variety, which produced Eastex, a low-octane fuel which sold for eleven cents per gallon. If high-grade oil was procured, gasoline could be skimmed directly from the top. As many as ninety-five of these teapot refineries were eventually built near the East Texas oilfield and they could produce profits of up to \$6000 per month. By the end of 1933, some 11,867 wells had produced 216,291,397 barrels of oil and 7,805,000,000 cubic feet of gas for the best year of production in the East Texas field.⁸⁸

The wildcatters – those engaged in prospecting and exploration in the early days of Texas oil – would need men readily available for short periods at a time to conduct their drilling operations. Accordingly, the enticement of oilfield work became the potential for higher pay. Farmhands, sawmill workers, and other unskilled laborers were

⁸⁷ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/1/2016.

⁸⁸ Smith, “East Texas Oilfield,” 5- 6.

attracted to wildcatter operations with the going wage at \$2.50 to \$3.00 per day, and drillers earning \$5.00 per day. The work commonly lasted from two to four weeks, after which unemployment was guaranteed until the next gusher or drilling boom occurred. Though drilling operations were dangerous, tough, physically demanding, and usually accompanied by hot weather, many men were still eager to do the work. In the early years, oilfield jobs were nonconventional, requiring long days – 12-hour shifts and a seven-day workweek were the norm – where a steady wage was unexpected, and overtime pay nonexistent.⁸⁹

Unfortunately, the nature of the oilfield business required E.W. Halbert to regularly move the family as new jobs became available. In spite of travails brought on by the Depression, oil towns stabilized and became an oasis to many. They had become the Halberts' perpetual home, providing ready work and adequate pay, while ensuring the family never went hungry nor suffered the common deprivations of most during that era. Before long, the oil business began to wane in Eastland, so E.W. and Vera packed up the family and trekked to West Texas, settling in Crane, just south of Midland-Odessa. After about a year of steady employment there, they followed oil drilling to the nearby town of McCamey where they remained for three to four more years. Finally, sometime in 1937 they arrived in what was to become the greatest oilfield town in Texas... Kilgore. Bill lived there with his family through his adolescent years, and he excelled in sports and

⁸⁹ Hinton and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 66, 75.

music. He participated in the sports of football, basketball, track, boxing and wrestling through high school, while playing coronet in the school marching band.⁹⁰

The 1930s were banner years in the history of Texas oil. Of all the fields drilled during this era, however, none were as exceptional in size, nor as monumental in scope and quality, as that which erupted near Kilgore in the autumn of 1930. Within the first six months of discovery, East Texas wells were producing over 350,000 barrels of oil per day (bopd). As oil continued to be located and produced elsewhere during this time, in California and Oklahoma, over-production became a colossal disaster for the petroleum industry. Politicians, conservationists and regulatory agencies tried to weigh in, but to no avail. Oil prices dropped from forty cents, to an incredible two cents per barrel, in just a matter of months. By mid-1931, East Texas was producing one million bopd and Governor Ross Sterling was impelled to step in and control the chaos by activating the Texas National Guard. This remedy, combined with a number of legislative acts, court cases and regulatory prohibitions were finally able to get the industry under control. The benefit was that the Texas Railroad Commission emerged as the premier agency controlling the whims of various interests which affected the petroleum industry.⁹¹

During the initial stages of the oil boom, some of the mineral leases could be measured in feet and were sold to the highest bidder. Land speculators could procure as much as \$1800 - \$3000 per acre for leases. Kilgore, Texas was the center of the five-county oil field, and wells were drilled so close that the oil derricks' legs sometimes

⁹⁰ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/1/2016.

⁹¹ Hinton and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 181-190.

touched. Kilgore boasted of one block within the city which harbored forty four wells. This area came to be known as the “million-dollar acre.”⁹²

The oil boom in Kilgore, attracted all kinds of individuals from all over the country. They were looking for work and East Texas had it. Because so many arrived so rapidly, they slept anywhere they could find room. The courthouse lawn in Longview had more than a hundred sleeping there every night. Landlords complained of losing jewelry and other valuables to boarders who enjoyed free access, and even outsiders would come in the night and take whatever they could easily find. Saloons and honkytonks sprung up everywhere and along Highway 80 you could find watering holes named: "The Barn," "The Salty Dog," "The Spotted Puppy," "The Red Rooster," "Texas Bud's," "The Black Cat," "Mamy's Kitchen," and "Mattie's Place." Many of these taverns sold cheap food and included entertainment such as dancing girls, jazz bands and of course, plenty of beer.⁹³

In one instance, rent paid by the local blacksmith went from \$13 to \$35 a month. When an 8-man oilfield crew requested space there, the old blacksmith moved about thirty-five feet in from the doorway and drew a line in the dirt floor with a nearby stick. He then proclaimed the crew could have that space for \$35 a month. The crew agreed and moved in. They put beds and mattresses along the wall which were attached to pulleys and ropes. The beds were hoisted up to the rafters during the day to make room for work. The space became their office, workshop and home for the operator, his

⁹² Smith, “East Texas Oilfield,” 4.

⁹³ Boyle, “Chaos in the East Texas Oilfield, 1930-1935,” 345.

partner and six workmen. At the end of the day, they would let the beds down and shake off the accumulation of soot from the smithy's forge. They subsisted that way for two months until a lady who owned a boarding house offered them one of the rooms there. The crew moved in to find it almost paradise, with each corner of the room containing a double bed. The other two rooms were occupied by eight barbers in the first, and eight electricians in the second.⁹⁴

As time went on, and drilling progressed across the nation, there was never an area found in the entire United States that was larger – or so flush with petroleum – than the East Texas oilfield. Located in the east central part of the state, it was discovered on October 5, 1930. Its 140,000 acres have yielded almost 5.2 billion barrels of oil from approximately 30,340 wells.⁹⁵ At the conclusion of oil field operations in 1990, after 60 years of operation, the East Texas field boasted an annual production of 35,559,769 barrels of oil. In the beginning of the following year, the Texas Railroad Commission designated the field in East Texas as operating at 100 percent production factor. In January 1993, the total production in East Texas field was calculated at 5,145,562,000 barrels of oil.⁹⁶

2.3: Growing Up, Rough and Ready

With the irregular hours, odd shifts and physical demands of oilfield work, it is understandable that fatherhood could have been relegated to the backseat of familial priorities. However, that was not the case in the Halbert home. E.W. tried to teach his

⁹⁴ Boyle, "Chaos in the East Texas Oilfield, 1930-1935," 343-344.

⁹⁵ Smith, "East Texas Oilfield," 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 8.

sons, primarily through his example, the importance of hard work and dependability. Billy and Elzie would often accompany their father as he made his rounds to the various oil wells to check and maintain equipment. They would play in and among the rocks and hills around the wells, sometimes helping him with his work. Bill recalled, “When I was only about eight years old, Pappy (as E.W. was called by his boys) found work disassembling wooden oil derricks, and he would take me along to help. He would climb to the top of the derrick removing each board, one at a time, and throw them down to the ground near me. He had me take a crowbar and pull the nails out of each board. It was hard work for just a young boy.” Once the derrick was completely apart, E.W. and Billy would load all the wood and transport it to a new well site for reuse. It was rough and exhausting work – especially for an eight-year old – but instilled just the kind of lessons E.W. sought to teach his son, concerning thrift, teamwork and the satisfaction of completing a difficult task.⁹⁷ As Texas oilmen extended their drilling efforts to multiple sites, it became more common and economical to disassemble old wooden oil derricks and move them to new sites rather than have new ones built, or purchase the expensive modern steel derricks.⁹⁸

On another occasion, E.W. was in his work truck making his usual rounds to maintain and check equipment at the well sites. He had forgotten an important tool, and since he was so far from home, he called Billy and had him bring it out to him. The only problem was that Billy was only about ten years old. Undaunted, he got in the truck and

⁹⁷ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/1/2016.

⁹⁸ Hinton and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 171.

drove the tool out to his father. On the way home, he was stopped by a trooper of the Texas Highway Patrol. Bill recalled, “When the trooper walked up to the truck and saw I was just a boy, he was more than a little bit surprised. But when he heard I was helping out my Pappy, he was good enough to follow me home without getting me in trouble. When we got there, he even complimented me on my good driving, but also told me not to do that anymore until I had a license.”⁹⁹

Although E.W. joined the U.S. Army when he was of age to serve in World War I, he was never required to fight. He was on his way to ship overseas, but only made it to Jacksonville, Florida when the war ended. Nevertheless, E.W. was a good soldier. He loved his country and would have done anything necessary to defend America and its citizens, at home or abroad.¹⁰⁰ He endeavored to instill his patriotism and love of country in his boys, and made his faith in God a common practice at home and in the community. He also taught Bill and Elzie the importance and responsibility to exercise their right to vote. He emphasized the necessity of being informed on how events impacted their country. E.W. was dedicated to his role as father and made consistent efforts to teach and model the difference between right and wrong. He was frugal and practical, but never hesitated to provide generous help to neighbors with his time, effort and money. To countervail his stoic dedication to work and family, E.W. was known for his agile sense of humor and perfunctory optimism during difficult times. Bill remembered, “During one particularly rough period with our stepmother when we were teenagers, Elzie finally

⁹⁹ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/1/2016.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

became fed up and told Pappy he had had enough and was moving out of the house. Pappy listened patiently until Elzie finished and quietly said, ‘If you will wait till payday, I’ll go with you!’”¹⁰¹

While E.W. was fortunate to have gainful employment during the entire duration of the Great Depression, its effects and consequences were inescapable to most people and no level of American life was left unaffected. Virtually every person, business, organization and public service experienced the profound economic privations of the time, and thousands were left with only desperate options. The emotional impact was devastating, and in just the first three years, from 1930-1932, the number of mental patients in public institutions tripled from that of the previous decade. The incidence of suicide also increased, especially in the larger cities. In Texas, it was estimated that 100,000 people were indigent. Along with incessant hunger and despair, unemployment prevented basic medical care and afflictions such as malnutrition, pneumonia, and tuberculosis were suffered by thousands. While America had experienced depressions in the past, some severe, there had never been one that lasted so long or inflicted such deep suffering upon so many.¹⁰²

Because of nationwide destitution, hordes of transients moved around the country by any means possible, in search of any type of work. Some moved by automobile, some hitch-hiked, and many hitched a ride on freight trains in an endless search for employment and subsistence. Most were families, but many were youngsters in their

¹⁰¹ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/1/2016.

¹⁰² Whisenhunt, *The Depression in Texas*, 99.

teens and some were even children. This rough sort of existence necessitated a robust self-reliance to survive. It fostered an attitude of resourcefulness making everything count, with nothing going to waste and even discarded items became valuable. Official estimates ranged from 1.5 to 2 million of these transients were present in the U.S. during the 1930s.¹⁰³

As Americans trudged through the Depression years, it seemed for some that their troubles could not get any worse. Like a cruel joke or a nightmare from which they could not awake, a parade of unfathomable circumstances occurred. Beginning with the Stock Market crash of 1929 signaling an abrupt end to the “roaring twenties,” the worsening depression lingered through the end of the Hoover administration in 1932. Even with the frenetic remedies of the New Deal put in place by President Roosevelt, there appeared to be no end in sight. Years of drought and poor farming practices unleashed the scourge of the Dust Bowl in the Midwestern states which was exacerbated by the near apocalyptic plague of locusts that devastated any meager crops, and further parched the remaining soil. Of the more than 100 million acres across the area that makes up the Southern Plains, thousands of families were affected by the devastation wrought during the Dust Bowl years.¹⁰⁴

The truth was, most often people lived under their means. As conditions became miserable, farmers faced a vicious cycle of desperation. Implements, machinery, livestock and seed would have to be purchased on credit, which grew due to falling

¹⁰³ Whisenhunt, *The Depression in Texas*, 117.

¹⁰⁴ Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 15.

prices. Mortgages were taken to pay off debt, and next came farm foreclosures. Neighbors would buy another farmer's goods at auction for rock bottom prices – sometimes ten cents would buy a plow, or twenty-five cents for a horse – and then give the goods back to the farmer. They would try to band together and hold goods from market to force prices up. When some refused to comply, they would empty cream containers, dump eggs, or destroy train trestles to prevent the transport of grain or hay. Sometimes things got violent, but something had to be done or they would lose land that had been in their families for generations.¹⁰⁵

The hopelessness of farm life translated into a large pool of unskilled labor available for the oilfields. They were used to hard work, hot weather, and low pay, and were for the most part homeless, which made them ideal aspirants to fill the demand. If the economy were viewed as concentric circles, with the inner rings consisting of the more affluent segments of society, then oilfield work would be among the outer rings. The difference from other work options was that, with the recurrent discovery of oil in various sections of Texas, employment in the oilfields was regular, ample and sustaining. For men like E.W., who were willing to work – and work extremely hard – the benefits of regular pay and housing were attainable. For a great majority of workers in Texas – and all around the country for that matter – when Wall Street crashed, it went virtually unnoticed. This was because many people were already living in modest conditions, or

¹⁰⁵ Terkel, *An Oral History*, 186, 192-193.

were out of work. If they could follow the oil discoveries, most employees of oilfield operations seemed to escape the eventual lasting and severe effects of the Depression.¹⁰⁶

Though racial discrimination and prejudice were commonplace in many areas of the United States, before and during the Great Depression, a remarkable study showed the unusual effects of the economic calamity on race relations. Conducted in the 1930s by Maury Maverick – later a Congressman from San Antonio, Texas – the study showed that racial prejudice was preempted by the shared conditions among the transients in Texas. He found that there were rarely feelings of animosity among the races, as men and women were thrown together to endure common sacrifices. At least in these narrow circumstances, shared hardships induced a fraternal feeling that overshadowed their suspicions and the usual differences of race.¹⁰⁷

Most historians agree that during the freefall from recession into depression after 1929, economic policymakers were prone to commit many errors. They erred by raising taxes and duties on imports. By making money so hard to acquire they prompted banks to fail, in turn causing consumers and businesses to cut spending. They flubbed by cutting government spending in a quixotic attempt to balance the federal budget. Cause and effect promulgated the understandable result of prices that plummeted, and rates of unemployment that shot to record highs.¹⁰⁸

It is not that the Great Depression was the first of its kind in the United States. The nation had experienced several of these in the past. It was a combination of its

¹⁰⁶ Hinton and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 66.

¹⁰⁷ Whisenhunt, *The Depression in Texas*, 120-121.

¹⁰⁸ Sylla, "The Great Crash of 1929," 11-13.

crippling persistence with no regard for class or privilege that distinguished its malice. These features squeezed once affluent and well-to-do families and clans into circumstances formerly associated with the poor. They prompted a new empathy to those who were previously marginalized. Even those in the upper class who did not feel all the effects of the depression – and who normally would not have paid a great deal of attention to those suffering – now had the benefit of radio and newsreels to behold firsthand the suffering of the nation. As the burdens of the Depression lingered, they nudged the middle-class closer and closer to the circumstances of the poor, and roused a deep empathy that transcended class lines.¹⁰⁹

Avis Franke Halbert, Bill's wife of sixty-five years, had experiences similar to him. Her father worked his whole life as an electrical engineer for Gulf Oil Company, and received a regular and adequate living wage. Avis remembered, "People on hard times would come to the back door of our home in the Gulf camp outside of Kilgore (Texas), and beg for food. My mother always gave what she could out of sympathy for those who had so little. We noticed that someone had scrawled the word, 'EAT' just under the handle of our back porch screen door; maybe as a signal to others in need." For those out of work and hungry, the small inscription was a testament to the kindness and compassion of the residents within, who would provide a meal or handout to those down on their luck.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Rauchway, *The Great Depression*, 38.

¹¹⁰ Interview of Avis Franke Halbert, March 4, 2016.

With the passing years, the heartrending hardships of the Depression became so prodigious that even the most callous parvenu was inclined to commiserate with, and console those destitute souls in poverty and without any means. Scarcely anyone was inoculated from the scourge of the economy, and once well-defined categories of wealth compressed to where the differences became vaguely noticeable. Millions of Americans could relate to the calamity of their fellow citizens and apprehended that, in spite of their present circumstances, at any moment they could also be in that position. They perceived that the hurting and downtrodden had once been much like themselves. While this slow leveling of the playing field might have generated heartbreak for, and despair by, the afflicted, it prompted the genesis of a mindset that served Americans copiously in the coming war years. Instead of the proud upper and middle-class Americans looking down on the poor – blaming them for their own predicament – it rather fostered a sense of brotherhood and understanding. This attitude became an immense advantage to the country within a few short years, as the people ultimately moved to a war footing and the need for absolute cooperation.¹¹¹

The events of the 1930s suggested that the self-reliant individualism of the previous decade gradually yielded to the values of community and cooperation. People made more sacrifices for family and friends – and often for others in their community – due to the shared hardships they endured. Although new emphasis on the welfare of all was evident in the success of workers' unions, the economic reforms of the New Deal,

¹¹¹ Rauchway, *The Great Depression*, 38-39.

farming cooperatives, and public works, there were still debates as to how long that feeling would endure. One thing seems sure, that the fresh desire to work together and the willingness to shoulder collective hardships was still powerfully evident as the war years loomed.¹¹²

The legacy of World War I had inspired Americans to reassume their inclination towards isolationism and nationalism in both commerce and foreign affairs. After the debacle of Versailles and its refusal to join the League of Nations, it was clear America had acquired a posture of cynicism regarding international entanglements. The terrible casualties caused by the war left many determined to let Europe deal with its own problems in the future, and also nurtured a growing distrust of foreigners. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the debate about America's international role was regularly bantered about, as was the idea of what it really meant to be an American.

A clue to people's views of the nation – which revealed a sense of both patriotism and nationalism during the formative years of the World War II generation – is found in the remarks of the country's leaders during that time. During a speech prior to the election of 1920, Warren G. Harding touted the need to safeguard, prosper and stabilize America as a priority before getting too entangled in international affairs. Harkening back to the earliest days when the Pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact, he illustrated how the Constitution reflected the Pilgrim spirit, and that nationality was necessary to preserve those freedoms achieved during the revolution. Though the future president

¹¹² Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 408-411.

agreed America's example of civil, human, and religious liberty would herald the liberation for future nations – and the American conscience commends a moral obligation to promote those birthrights – he also understood that patriotic devotion mandated American interests come first.¹¹³

On September 3, 1939 – after Germany's attack on Poland prompted a declaration of war by Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and France – President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed the nation via radio broadcast to delineate the U.S. position on the unfolding events. He wanted people to be assured that America would do all in its power to promote peace, and to avoid becoming involved. He emphasized that the declarations were significant and the U.S. was threatened simply because peace broken in one area, imperils peace everywhere. Roosevelt warned his listeners that the war in Europe had international implications and that America would be affected, however, he affirmed it had been, and always would be, a country that seeks a final peace for humanity and the eventual elimination of all hostile actions between nations.¹¹⁴

Roosevelt later pressed Congress to consider repeal of the Neutrality Acts of the mid-1930s, legislation which stood in the way of assistance that the United States could make available to nations fighting against the Axis Powers. He eventually succeeded and, in addition to bolstering the morale and confidence of France and England, the law

¹¹³ Shally-Jensen, *Defining Documents*, 8-9.

¹¹⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Franklin D. Roosevelt, Speech from CBS radio broadcast on September 3, 1939," *Defining Documents in American History: World War II (1939-1945)*, ed. Michael Shally-Jensen (Ipswich: Salem Press, 2015), 7-10.

also provided a terrific boost to the U. S. economy, resulting in the epilogue of the Great Depression.¹¹⁵

The two decades leading up to World War II were significant because they molded the attitudes, opinions and culture of those who would eventually be responsible for preserving freedom and democracy. The trend towards isolation was understandable, but it delayed the country's entry into the war, which could have ended hostilities earlier. The prologue of the 1920s signaled great advances in technological development which tapped into American creativity, invention and, unfortunately, overconfidence. The crucible of the 1930s helped to create a measure of humility and societal cohesion that overrode Americans' brash self-absorption and proved vital in creating the work ethic and attitude of cooperation necessary for all fronts of the war.

¹¹⁵ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 463-463.

CHAPTER III

The End of Innocence (1940-1945)

The imposing thunderhead in the east betrayed the optimism earlier experienced by the crew members of the 443rd Squadron. A crisp autumn morning had dawned with a radiant sunrise in the north Mediterranean Ocean, and the flyers were cheerful and confident about the upcoming mission to bomb the Ala railroad bridge in northern Italy. Now, halfway into it, they were beginning to wonder as they struggled to maintain their formation. The flight had gone well for the first hour, but now it had much more than the impending storm to worry about. The flight of eighteen B-26 bombers was currently entangled with nearly twice as many enemy fighters, and they had not yet even reached the target. Attacking from all angles, the German Me-109s scored numerous hits on the bombers, but none fatal. 2d Lt. Bill Halbert was teamed with Lt. Earl Mosby for this sortie, and both strained to concentrate on flying over the urgent shouts of their gunners and the deafening bursts of .50 caliber machinegun fire. Suddenly there was a cheer from back of the craft as one of the adjacent gunners in the formation scored a direct hit on a Me-109 causing it to explode in mid-air. Shortly after that, the fighters disappeared almost as quickly as they had appeared, and the reason became evident. The unmistakable puffs of anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) began appearing to their front directly in line with the target, and they soon engulfed the formation. Several of the bombers were peppered by shrapnel, including Halbert's, but they held on course while the bombardiers took their sightings. After what seemed hours, the bombs were away and the formation turned for home. Just as the AAA tapered off, the flight was again angrily confronted by the same band of tenacious Nazi fighters. Within minutes the American

gunners scored another kill – this time an Fw-109 – as Halbert and Mosby noticed one of their engines had been hit by an enemy fighter or the AAA. Skillfully feathering the big Curtiss propellers to reduce drag, and adding trim to compensate for torque, they struggled to keep the wounded bird aloft. When they finally touched down and taxied to a stop, Halbert exhaled in relief and took a moment to reflect. It was November 10, 1944, and he had been in Europe for just over two weeks. This near calamity completed his eleventh mission, and the war's end seemed nowhere in sight.

Unbeknownst to the world, the vengeful actions borne of Versailles in 1919 spawned a Carthaginian peace and the incubation of a global malignancy that would eventually ravage Europe and the Far East within a mere generation. With the financial meltdown of the Weimar government in 1933, a leader of hypnotic charisma and incalculable malice gained the Chancellorship of Germany, and the Nazi Party reigned supreme. A systematic process of oppression prevailed which closely followed the prescription rendered in Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf* – his rambling tome that illuminated a deep hatred for Jews, the superiority of the Aryan race, and his plans to assemble a vast realm of Germanic dominion.¹¹⁶

Hitler could be considered a political genius by some accounts. He was able to enlarge Germany's land holdings with the annexation of Austria and the subjugation of Czechoslovakia, without firing a single shot. He strengthened Nazi power by remilitarization of the Rhineland. Perhaps most impressive though, was his ability to

¹¹⁶ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 575-579.

brandish immense political pressure over a cowering and desultory Western Europe. It was not until France fell to the German onslaught in the summer of 1940 that the American public began to realize what the Nazis were capable of and to what extent Hitler was as a viable threat to the U.S.¹¹⁷ Politics aside however, Hitler made a series of military missteps from the outset. His invasion of Poland precipitated the entry of Britain and France into the war, and the failure to negotiate an armistice with Britain after Germany's occupation of France, necessitated his attack on the British Isles. Though he had hoped to prevent hostilities with both Britain and the United States the prospect grew seemingly unavoidable.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, when Germany did eventually have to face the Allies, Hitler was confident the Wehrmacht – his imperious armed forces – had superior training, especially the junior officers who knew how to address battle quandaries with independent thoughts and actions. He sensed the American army would be comprised of citizen soldiers who were soft and unaccustomed to the rigors of combat – the pampered sons of democracy who could never match his Nazi professionals.¹¹⁹

Of equal concern in the Far East were the Japanese, who had demonstrated militant and imperialistic tendencies against China and Russia for decades – as evidenced by the Japanese-Sino war of 1895, and the Russo-Japanese war of 1905. From their growing inclination for aggression, spurred by their “Bushido” code of the warrior, it seemed just a matter of time before they would test America's resolve. Italy was possessed with a penchant for fascism and an imperialistic fetish subsequent to the

¹¹⁷ Manstein, *Lost Victories*, 10.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 153-156.

¹¹⁹ Ambrose, *Civilian Soldiers*, 21-22.

takeover by Benito Mussolini as dictator in 1922. To what extent Americans understood the future intentions of these dictators, is debatable. Becoming painfully evident, however, was that their nefarious conduct in the old countries was a genuine threat to freedom everywhere.¹²⁰

3.1: The Coming Storm

By autumn 1938, it had become very apparent to President Franklin D. Roosevelt that Adolf Hitler and the Nazis could devise a way to attack targets in the Western Hemisphere and perhaps America itself. Sensing the German people had an ingrained and historical inclination towards conquest and warfare, he knew they would be a formidable adversary. Furthermore, it was readily apparent that the American people were fixated on extracting themselves from the economic quagmire of the Depression and were none too eager to get involved in problems overseas – especially another war in Europe.¹²¹

Looking back on the years preceding U.S. involvement in the war it seems that, even when the inherent threat of Nazism was understood, there was no inherent desire to become engaged. Patriotism or idealism had little to do with their motivation to fight. That is not to say Americans were not patriotic. They certainly understood that freedom, civility and democracy hung in the balance, not just for America, but for all.¹²² Even when the majority eventually concurred that Hitler and the other Axis powers were forces which needed to be destroyed, and circumstances demanded that all free nations

¹²⁰ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 579-580.

¹²¹ Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 213.

¹²² Ambrose, *Civilian Soldiers*, 472-473.

participate in the process, Americans remained stubbornly resistant to direct involvement. Independence and isolationism seemed to be hardwired in the American psyche and many were quite content to watch events unfold in Europe and the Pacific during the late 1930s, while tending to their own vast troubles at home. The President knew his work was just beginning as he tracked the growing aggression of the Axis Powers against the reluctance of the American people to once again get involved in European struggles. Initially doubtful that Hitler could bring a country in economic and social tatters back from the brink of collapse, Roosevelt came to see what a violent and odious threat the Nazis had become.¹²³

In addition to his massive military build-up, Hitler's unilateral political heavy-handedness with Austria, Czechoslovakia and the Sudetenland all pointed to his future intentions, and served to further alienate the Western European powers, and the United States. Meanwhile, Japan had declared war on China and had taken control of a majority of its largest cities.¹²⁴

The coalescence of the totalitarian Tripartite was initiated on September 27, 1940, and its feculent founding – made official that day with a signed pact – was of no real practical purpose other than aligning for their own self-interests. Sensing an opportunity, Japan hoped to gain British holdings in the Pacific upon victory by the Axis; Germany desired Japan to open a second front against the Soviet Union, but neither of these ambitions materialized. However, the Tripartite Pact did serve to convince the rest of the

¹²³ Casey, *Cautious Crusade*, 5.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

world that the Japanese were of the same ilk as Hitler and his Italian cohort, Mussolini, and they harbored mutual ambitions of world conquest.¹²⁵

Even though America was still over a year away from official participation in World War II, it was evident how the sides were beginning to line up and to what extent U.S. military planners would need to brace for the inevitable conflagration. What was not clear, however, was the role a fifteen year-old boy – beginning his sophomore year at Kilgore High School – would play in the unfolding world events.

Bill Halbert was like most teenagers of his time. He paid much more attention to baseball, football and the nuances of high school pop culture, than the disagreements among countries in Europe and Asia. The Nazis and their encroachments were half a world away and he could not see how that was any great concern to him. Starting in the 1920s and burgeoning through the 1930s, two devices probably did more than anything else to inform, unify and strengthen American's commitment and resolve against the Axis forces. One was the advent and wide accessibility of radios and radio broadcasts. The other was Thomas Edison's invention of motion pictures, resulting in the proliferation of theatres around the country. This pair of ubiquitous media devices provided entertainment certainly, but more importantly they were a frequent and reliable source of current events. From newsreels and broadcasts, to fireside chats from the President, Americans had a direct line that chronicled the extent of Nazi German and Imperial Japanese actions and aggressions around the world.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 592.

¹²⁶ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 72, 431-433.

News flashes of Nazi malfeasance were trumpeted on nearly every radio program, but they somehow did not seem critical as long as America remained neutral. Halbert and his father were boxing fans and loved to tune in to radio station KOCA¹²⁷ in Kilgore. “We really enjoyed listening to matches featuring the great boxers of those days, Joe Louis, Max Baer, and Jimmy Braddock. We also had favorite programs like Edgar Bergen with Charlie McCarthy, Jack Benny, and Bob Hope,” Halbert remembered. Over time he noticed the ever-increasing prevalence of broadcasts warning of new German and Japanese transgressions.

Picture shows had become the rage as well, and once his chores were completed on Saturday or Sunday, Halbert would find a friend and head into town. “We regularly went to picture shows playing at the Strand, Texan and Crim theatres in Kilgore. There were always newsreels depicting world affairs, along with a cartoon or two before the movie,” recalled Avis Halbert. Other than photos in the newspapers and magazines, newsreels were often the only visual source that brought to life the atrocities of the Axis powers. The newscasts, updated and played prior to every new movie, became more foreboding with each new feature. Halbert did not know what would happen, but he felt sure neither Japan nor Germany would ever come to America.¹²⁸

Perhaps more than anything else during those years, Halbert recalled how local citizens would gather at Billy Harper’s Grocery in Kilgore. As a young teenager, he worked at Harper’s for two years leading up to the war. Nearly every person who came

¹²⁷ In operation from 1936 through 1988, KOCA radio station was located in Kilgore, Texas and proclaimed its call letters as “Kilgore Oil Capital of America,” from Mundina Halbert O’Driscoll.

¹²⁸ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/1/2016.

in would stop to discuss all that was happening and then offer differing opinions about what America should do about it. Halbert had heard about the invasion of China, and the brutal actions by the Japanese. He also admired the American fighter pilots who had volunteered to fight on behalf of the Chinese against the invading Japanese. This small band of dashing aviators lead by the gallant Claire Chennault, was called the “Flying Tigers,” and supported the besieged Chinese army of Cheng Kai-shek by flying long odds against Japanese Zeros and other aircraft.¹²⁹ Bill had never flown in his entire life, but pondered what it would be like to soar with those courageous airmen.¹³⁰

Keenly aware of the looming threat to U.S. security, President Roosevelt emphasized that America’s best chance of staying out of war was to provide Britain and France the material means needed to defeat the Germans. Roosevelt successfully pressed Congress to repeal the Neutrality Acts of the mid-1930s, and allow the sale of armaments to the Allies. In addition to greatly bolstering the confidence of France and England, the law provided a terrific boost to the U.S. economy as well. This legislation was the catalyst of perhaps the most illuminating contribution to the war effort – that which came from American industry. While Americans were against sending men to fight overseas, they were overwhelmingly in favor of assisting with equipment and supplies.¹³¹

Regarding its own security, America was initially determined to focus on defense of the Western Hemisphere. However, by the middle of 1940 the amounts of foreign aid it was supplying the Allies had all but evaporated the thinning fog of neutrality. The

¹²⁹ Miller, *Masters of the Air*, 251.

¹³⁰ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

¹³¹ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 463-463.

increasing need for direct U.S. involvement became apparent especially after the remarkable aviation melee between the German Luftwaffe and the Royal Air Force that summer and fall. Standing alone against the German juggernaut, the British slugged away, day in and day out until finally the Germans backed off. The Battle of Britain and the Blitz – a sustained campaign of German bombing of civilian population and industrial centers – ended in October and Hitler’s hopes for European domination vanished. The British miraculously prevailed, all the while displaying a full measure of their customary English resolve and pluck. In the process, however, they had 40,000 civilians killed and 200,000 injured.¹³²

It became evident early on that to make the greatest impact against the Axis, America would need to ramp-up its industrial might and engage its technological acumen like never before. These were done with admirable speed and efficiency, and they contributed to the Allies’ overall success like nothing else could. The combined foresight of Roosevelt and the Congress allocated over \$4.5 billion for national defense by early 1940, and another \$5 billion a short time later. This enabled America to pull out of the Great Depression by 1941, and start on its way to a wartime manufacturing spree that would be unequalled by any comparison. With the passage of time and increasingly favorable public opinion, Congress voted to spend an additional \$7 billion in aid by March 1941. This extra funding promoted the growth and implementation of the Lend-Lease program where billions in dollars were converted to tanks, aircraft, equipment and

¹³² Pyle, *Ernie’s War*, 54.

supplies, and were eventually shipped to Europe, and later Russia, in support of the struggle against Hitler. The U.S. had truly become the “Arsenal of Democracy.”¹³³

The beginning of 1941 accordingly witnessed a surge in the Battle of the Atlantic, as German U-boats dramatically increased attacks on the massive Lend-Lease convoys bound for Europe. Though American lives were being lost while escorting and protecting Atlantic shipping, the country was still divided over direct entry into the war. In large measure, the war supplies being transported overseas were presented to the public as self-defense for the United States by supporting those who would slow the military initiatives of Hitler, while allowing the U.S. time to mobilize its own forces. It is true Lend Lease put American lives at risk and made direct involvement in the war a looming reality; however, it seemed the most appropriate way to confront Germany at that point, since the United Kingdom, America’s sole remaining ally, was taking the full brunt of Nazi aggression.¹³⁴

3.2: Sneak Attack: America’s Response and Call to Action

On the surface, it could be asserted that Japan conducted the most brilliant military operation in all modern warfare with its sneak attack on the U.S. naval base and airfields at Pearl Harbor. In addition to sinking or severely damaging all eight of the 7th Fleet’s battleships while lined up at anchor, Japanese planes destroyed or disabled over 270 aircraft and caused about 3400 military and civilian casualties. This one attack, combined with the follow-on assault in the Philippines, executed a one-two punch that

¹³³ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 465.

¹³⁴ Matloff, *American Military History*, 420-421.

crippled the prospect of any substantial U.S. strike in the Pacific theatre for months to come.¹³⁵

From a strategic standpoint, however, it was a colossal blunder. From that moment, there could be no doubt about America's role in the war with Japan; and Germany, along with Italy, took little time to make official their war declaration against the U.S. While America suffered a devastating blow at Pearl Harbor, it could have been far worse. Yamamoto's forces failed to damage the massive oil storage facilities or the naval repair shops near the base. His oversight meant that all the battleships, except the *Arizona*, would be salvaged and repaired, while still being able to operate from Hawaii, instead of the West Coast. Yet, his biggest miss was the three U.S. fleet carriers, which were away on maneuvers during the attack. Beyond question the most fearsome prospect the Japanese would invariably have to face, was the unequivocal wrath of a powerful country, furiously united and bent on settling the score.¹³⁶

There can be little doubt the countries comprising the Allied fighting forces possessed extraordinarily brave men and women who were committed to defeating the Axis, but as a whole, the American military was singularly distinct. Persistently desiring only peace – and fully content in allowing the world to settle its own problems – Americans were finally incensed to action. The outrage, ire, and indignation aroused by Japanese duplicity exposed at Pearl Harbor, combined with the affront to their sense of fair play, electrified the American war spirit.

¹³⁵ Matloff, *American Military History*, 423-424.

¹³⁶ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 594.

Once pushed into war by the Japanese – with an official declaration quickly followed by Germany and Italy – Americans responded with a tremendous surge of participation, and every person seemed anxious to do their part. In spite of the prevailing spirit, however, many took the time to reflect that here again, after only a span of two decades, millions of American boys were leaving home to fight a war in far off lands that was not of their making.¹³⁷

To help understand why they were fighting, and to counter the powerful wartime propaganda of the Nazis, General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff enlisted the help of Hollywood to apply its skills and answer that question. Creating perhaps one of the most effective mediums to ever influence public support for the war, film director Frank Capra developed a powerfully effective seven-film propaganda series entitled, *Why We Fight*. It was designed to provide that answer to the American fighting man – but also made a tremendous impact on the American public by encouraging patriotism and motivating a fighting spirit. The result was manifested in a unified effort, at all levels of society, with everyone assuming a part to play and a vested interest in victory.¹³⁸

3.3: Answering the Call: The American Soldier and Public Resolve

Men flocked to the recruiting stations in droves where over 16 million signed on. Many of those – in stark contrast to their progeny of the 1960s – lied about their age and physical status to actually get *into* the service. Arriving from farms and factories, they knew how to make their own way and work through their own problems. Many were

¹³⁷ Nichols, *Ernie's War*, xiv.

¹³⁸ Jordi Xifra and Ramon Girona, "Frank Capra's, *Why We Fight* and Film Documentary Discourse in Public Relations," *Public Relations Review*, 38, no. 1 (March 2012): 40-45.

highly educated, and as a whole, possessed an impressive range of skills. They were accustomed to driving all manner of vehicles from farm equipment to freight trains. Americans owned many more cars – a ratio of four people per car, as opposed to Germany's 37 people per car – which translated to a populous who could drive, and often repair and maintain machinery. A great many coming from farming and rural backgrounds were handy with a rifle, having hunted for most of their lives. As civilian soldiers, American GIs had manifest advantages in their individuality, ability to adapt, and their will to live.¹³⁹

It is difficult to fathom the daunting effect which resulted from a combination of U.S. industrial might and a fiercely determined American workforce. The effort was undertaken on such a massive scale it defies explanation. A small, but impressive glimpse can be had with a few astonishing examples.

Renowned car manufacturer Henry Ford – the magnate of industrial America and acclaimed for developing the assembly line technique – plied his skills of leadership and management on a massive scale to aid the war effort. Gaining near perfection in the manufacturing process, in both efficiency and economy, the Ford Company converted to wartime production using those same methods. Notable among its accomplishments, was the company's spellbinding performance in producing the B-24 Liberator long-range bomber. The cavernous Willow Run plant in Michigan joined 67 acres of assembly lines in one monstrous building. Once it was up and running, the plant assembled the

¹³⁹ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 597-599.

bomber's 1,550,000 parts with such acumen that a completed plane rolled off the line every sixty-three minutes. Within months of Pearl Harbor, all the auto manufacturers had joined in. General Motors began making tanks, trucks, guns and plane engines, while Chrysler constructed aircraft fuselages. So total was the shift to wartime manufacturing, that production dropped from a total of three million new automobiles built in 1941, to only 139 civilian models for the entire duration of the war.¹⁴⁰

Another notable example of American industrial prowess came in the semblance of the Liberty ship. With the need to convoy troops, food, munitions, and other supplies to Europe and Pacific operational areas, the design for a small, simple, fast moving freighter was developed. The Liberty ships were constructed by Henry Kaiser, the architect of the Boulder Dam. Opening several shipyards in California, Kaiser eventually churned out ships at an astounding rate of one every two days. He eventually chopped the original construction time from 196 days to 27. One shipyard accomplished a single ship completion record – from laying the keel to christening – of 4.5 days.¹⁴¹

Texas naturally made its contributions to the industrial build-up in the form of oil production and oil refining. Halbert could recall how many of the local citizens in Kilgore regularly talked about the “Big Inch” pipeline that was proposed to take oil from East Texas to refineries in the northeast United States. In addition to being a much quicker, efficient, and cost effective means to transport the oil, it was also considerably safer. The original method of transporting crude oil was by slow-moving railroad tank

¹⁴⁰ “When Things Get Tough, (January 1943-December 1943),” dir. by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), 2006.

¹⁴¹ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 601.

cars, or by having tankers sail through the Gulf of Mexico and on north along the East Coast. Tank cars were in short supply and transport shipping risked being torpedoed by German U-boats.¹⁴² Most of the people Halbert knew were overwhelmingly in favor of the war effort, but some land owners were concerned they would lose under the terms of eminent domain if the pipeline bridged their property.¹⁴³

The Big Inch pipeline was an industrial phenomenon. It was proposed by Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes after nearly fifty oil tankers – having departed from Texas ports en route to refineries in the northeast – were sunk by German submarines within the first four months of the war. By August of 1943, the pipeline – 24-inches in diameter and 1,340 miles long – was pumping 300,000 barrels of petroleum per day from East Texas oil fields to refineries in Philadelphia. A second pipeline dubbed the “Little Inch” was completed in early 1944, which supplied Texas oil to refineries in New Jersey. These were the largest and heaviest projects of this type ever attempted up to that time, and were undertaken with the cooperation of the War Emergency Pipelines Company and a coalition of America’s largest oil companies. It gave vivid testimony to the incredible potential of private-public sector projects.¹⁴⁴

3.4: On a Wing and a Prayer: A Texan Faces the Nazis

In its quest for qualified pilots, the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) searched for “the best young men,” who possessed “precision, daring and coolness upon which would depend in large measure the success of our entire war effort.” It was that rare

¹⁴² Hinton and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 226.

¹⁴³ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

¹⁴⁴ Hinton and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 226.

combination of sound judgment, mental and physical prowess, and an instinctive proclivity for flying that USAAF officials coveted in its pilots, and traits they believed Bill Halbert had in abundance.¹⁴⁵

Prior to America's entry into the war, most citizens in Halbert's hometown of Kilgore were in favor of getting involved, and some – especially those who could remember World War I – were understandably also opposed. That all changed after Pearl Harbor. Every citizen was energized to do their part and Kilgore was no exception. Many of Halbert's friends swarmed to recruiting stations to sign up for the various branches. In considering his preference, Halbert said, "I figured that – between a plane and a boat – if I had to bail out, I could probably walk farther than he could swim, so I joined the Army Air Forces." Since prospective pilot recruits had to be 18-years old before signing up, Halbert had to wait until March 11, 1943. He volunteered the moment he was able, even though it required him to leave high school before graduation. Having worked through a battery of comprehensive tests to determine his flying potential, his father soon received a letter dated April 27, 1943, indicating he was accepted for flight training. Halbert was directed to report immediately to Primary Flight School in Cuero, Texas as an Aviation Cadet.¹⁴⁶

In 1942, due to the pressing need to get pilots trained and into combat, the minimum age for pilot cadets was dropped from twenty to eighteen years. The Army Air Force continued to insist on very strict requirements for pilots, but due to the exigencies

¹⁴⁵ Brandt, G.C. Major General, Commander, Army Air Forces, Gulf Coast Training Center, Randolph Field, Texas, "Letter to E. W. Halbert," April 27, 1943.

¹⁴⁶ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

of war, some had to be adjusted. Cadets that could pass an extensive written exam would be admitted instead of having to complete the formerly required two years of college.¹⁴⁷

To get a prospective military pilot properly initiated into flight training, the Army Air Forces had prescribed a gradual stair-step program starting with Primary Flight School (PFS), progressing to Basic Flight School (BFS), and concluding with training at the Advanced Flight School (AFS). Like all aviation cadets during the war, Halbert began his flight training in the Fairchild PT-19 single-engine, open cockpit trainer. The morning routine at PFS was a bit of a shock for the new Aviation Cadets. Halbert explained, “We were fully expecting to be roused before dawn to reveille, but instead were gently awakened to the sounds of big band leader Artie Shaw’s, ‘Summit Ridge Drive.’ To this day, that is still one of my favorite songs.” Since it was a civilian flight school, that casual routine was a bit more understandable.¹⁴⁸

Upon completion of thirty days in that leisurely environment, Halbert moved on to more intensive flight training at BFS, located in Independence, Kansas. There he flew the Vultee BT-13 Valiant, a more powerful, closed-cockpit trainer. “The BT-13 was also called the ‘Vibrator’ because its large engine caused it to rattle and shake when throttled up for take-off,” Halbert noted. The BT-15 was a wooden variant of the BT-13, reflecting the wartime requirements of steel and aluminum for combat aircraft production.¹⁴⁹ This school lasted 45-50 days and was the first in which cadet pilots began flying in military formations, thinking through emergency procedures, and making

¹⁴⁷ Miller, *Masters of the Air*, 164.

¹⁴⁸ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

¹⁴⁹ Samuel and Tent, *In Defense of Freedom*, 234.

simulated exigent landings. Halbert recalled, “One exercise we performed consisted of a rope suspended about ten feet above the ground and across the landing strip. The student pilot was supposed to get as close to the rope as possible without hitting it on his landing approach, and then rapidly stop to simulate an emergency landing in a field or pasture.” None of the students hit the rope on their approach – which would have caused a catastrophic accident – but it did impress upon them the abundant liabilities of their chosen branch of service.¹⁵⁰

In his last phase of pilot training at AFS at Ellington Air Force Base (AFB), Houston, Texas, Halbert learned to fly the twin-engine aircraft Beechcraft AT-10 Wichita trainer. It was at Ellington that he and his fellow cadets were instructed in basic military protocol, customs and traditions, as well as, advanced flying and aviation tactics. Graduation from AFS meant earning his flight wings, and a commission as an Army Air Force Lieutenant. From there he would spend the next three months learning to fly the Martin B-26 Marauder with the Replacement Training Unit (RTU), in Dodge City, Kansas. He was one step closer in his preparation for deployment as a medium bomber pilot.¹⁵¹

The Marauder was a small, fast and highly maneuverable bomber. It was well-suited for close formations and could easily make quick adjustments. It was powerful, sporting a pair of Pratt and Whitney R-2800-5 Wasp engines with massive electric Curtiss propellers. Its typical bomb load of 2000 lbs. (maximum 5800 lbs.) was jettisoned

¹⁵⁰ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

through twin bomb bays, and it was the only USAAF bomber that could deliver torpedoes.¹⁵² It originally had a bad reputation because of design flaws that made it difficult to handle, requiring a very fast landing speed to prevent a crash-causing stall. Its short wingspan caused recurring issues, and it was affectionately called the “Flying Prostitute” – because it had no visible means of support – and the “Wingless Wonder.” In addition, it was notorious for its engine problems, especially on take-off. During the early days of training, pilots at McDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida often repeated the sullen mantra “one a day in Tampa Bay,” a phrase coined to reflect the frequency of crashes associated with the B-26. Modifications were quickly made to remedy most of the problems, and by the end of the war the Marauder had one of the best safety records of any plane in the U.S. inventory.¹⁵³

Halbert completed the remainder of his instruction and training in the B-26 Marauder at the Operational Training Unit (OTU) in Lake Charles, Louisiana. His final training was concluded by learning how to read and use aviation maps, coordinate bombing missions, and execute advanced emergency procedures. This was accomplished with a crew that was formed and trained together in all disciplines of bomber tradecraft. By October 1944, Halbert was a fully-trained B-26 bomber pilot, preparing to fly halfway around the world to conduct high-risk bombing missions over Europe. He was nineteen years old and, before joining the military, had never travelled outside of Texas.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Jon Lake, *The Great Book of Bombers: The World's Most Important Bombers from World War I to the Present Day* (London: Salamander Books Ltd, 2003), 197.

¹⁵³ Tannehill, *Boomerang!*, 2.

¹⁵⁴ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

The training for U.S. pilots may seem to have been excessive given the need to get pilots overseas and into action, but the extra hours flying is what gave the needed edge in experience. Halbert signed up on his eighteenth birthday in March 1943, and flew his first bombing mission over Europe on Halloween 1944. During this time of the war, fledgling Luftwaffe pilots had only a third of the training hours as those of the recently trained USAAF pilots. As a result, only about half of Nazi pilots survived their first ten missions.¹⁵⁵ Even as a newly-trained pilot and recently commissioned second lieutenant, Bill's maturity and leadership were recognized early. This was evident in his appointment as troop-leader for the train convoy dispatched from Lake Charles, Louisiana en route to Savannah, Georgia where new aircrews departed for the European theatre of operations (ETO). In addition to serving as a point of embarkation (POE) for the neophyte flyers, it was also the departure point for newest aircraft coming directly off the assembly line. Losing no chance to economize by using all available resources, the Army Air Force ferried the pristine Martin B-26 Marauders to Europe using their freshly-trained pilots and crews. Halbert recalled, "When we were assigned our new airplane, we were allowed one short check-flight to test all the systems before departure." That flight would be the last they would get to make any needed adjustments before embarking on a voyage that would take them halfway around the world.¹⁵⁶

Once their aircraft checked out, Halbert and his group started their trek overseas. They were to fly via the southern route, first delivering the new B-26 to Casablanca, and

¹⁵⁵ Harvey, "Air Warfare in Perspective," 11.

¹⁵⁶ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

later reporting to the 320th Bombardment Group in Corsica. The northern route – normally flown via Presque Isle to Goose Bay, on to Greenland and then Reykjavik, Iceland, was considered too hazardous at that time.¹⁵⁷ They began by flying from Savannah to the southern tip of Florida, where they topped-off with fuel and continued to Port Au Prince, Haiti. From there they traveled to the northern coast of South America, stopping three more times until they finally reached Natal, Brazil. It was from this point that the flight got a little precarious. Upon their departure from Natal, the crew had to fly approximately seven hours and navigate 1400 miles across the Atlantic Ocean to tiny Ascension Island, which was about halfway to the African coast. Although the B-26 had a substantial range of 3000 miles, it was nearly that distance to get completely across the Atlantic. If the crew somehow missed the island – which was only seven miles long and about five miles wide – they would not have enough fuel to make landfall in Africa.¹⁵⁸

Most of the flight went well, but as they searched for the isolated island, Halbert recalled, “The sky was filled with small cumulus clouds which cast hundreds of shadows on the ocean below. At our cruising altitude the shadows gave the appearance of islands, just about the same size and shape of our destination.” Being the aircraft’s pilot, he shouldered the responsibility for the craft and crew’s welfare. Halbert remembered wondering, “How – at my young age of nineteen years and having never been out of the United States – was I here sweating out the option of either finding the actual island, or missing it and crashing in the ocean?” With trust in the guiding hand of Providence, and

¹⁵⁷ Tannehill, *Boomerang!*, 9.

¹⁵⁸ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

unfailing confidence in his navigator, they eventually located the minute isle, where they collected their treasured fuel, rested for a day or two, and concluded their travel to Marrakesh, Morocco.¹⁵⁹

Having successfully made the jump to Africa, the transport of the new aircraft would not be complete until they navigated the final leg to Casablanca. Even so, there would be one more twist of fortune before their arrival. Seasoned pilots know that sometimes the best lessons are ones not learned in flight school. It had been uncommon to fly in a hot, arid locale during his flight training, and there could be no better place to experience that setting than Marrakesh. “As I coaxed the aircraft down the runway on that particularly hot morning,” Halbert stated, “I reached the regular take-off speed and found the plane was responding differently than I was used to. Since air is not nearly as dense in dry, high temperatures, aircraft wings experience minimal lift under those conditions.” He suddenly got the uncomfortable sensation the plane would not gain enough altitude to clear a tall stand of trees situated at the end of the airfield. With heart pounding and death-defying determination, he pushed the pair of Pratt & Whitney radial engines to their maximum RPMs. Roaring down the runway with everything he could muster, Halbert just clipped the trees with his landing gear as they soared over. Breathing slightly easier as he leveled the wings and throttled back, he savored that lesson in aviation he has yet to forget.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

At the beginning of the war, when Halbert was back in high school waiting for his chance to join the war effort, American pilots were rapidly winning acclaim abroad, as well as the love and admiration of those back home. There were ample opportunities for distinction, and the best and brightest that America had to offer were coming to the fore. One notable example of American military ingenuity, daring and resourcefulness was the audacious idea to attack the Japanese homeland within months of Pearl Harbor. Navy Captain Francis Low devised the plan just weeks after the Japanese sneak attack. He proposed that Mitchell B-25 medium bombers be launched from an aircraft carrier, flown to Tokyo for a bombing strike, and then navigated on to friendly Chinese airfields. The daring foray – planned and lead by Lt. Colonel Jimmy Doolittle – took place on April 18, 1942 and was a smashing success. In spite of doing little actual damage to Japan, the raid provided a colossal boost to American morale, and a sobering reminder to the Japanese warlords of their homeland's vulnerability. So unconventional and dangerous was this mission, that never again would B-25 bombers be launched from an aircraft carrier during combat operations.¹⁶¹

The 320th Bombardment Group – where Halbert had been ordered for duty – was initially activated on June 23, 1942. It had the distinction of being assigned Lieutenant Colonel John A. Hilger as its commanding officer on August 1, 1942. Lt. Col. Hilger had been second-in-command to Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle during the famous raid on Tokyo just four months prior. In October, the 320th would be assigned to the 12th Air Force,

¹⁶¹ Lake, *The Great Book of Bombers*, 210-211.

which was commanded by the recently promoted General Doolittle, himself.¹⁶² The 320th consisted of approximately 1200 personnel divided into four squadrons; the 441st, 442nd, 443rd and 444th. Its first combat assignment, which began in April 1943, was to support the invasion of North Africa, code-named, “Operation Torch.” By the time Halbert joined the 320th Group in the fall of 1944, it had completed over 350 combat missions.¹⁶³

With the successful delivery of their aircraft to USAAF in Morocco, Halbert and his crew boarded a C-47 troop transport plane, affectionately called the “Goony Bird”, en route to the northeast end of Corsica, the island off the southern French coast in the Mediterranean Sea. They were to report to the Headquarters, 320th Bombardment Group stationed on the island at Alto Air Base. The base had only been established there the month prior and the austere living conditions included tents for the men and fabricated buildings for the unit offices. The runway consisted of steel matting and required the fully-loaded bombers to clear the rocky hills to the north after take-off. With most of their targets in Northern Italy, the 320th struck with regularity against German lines of communication which included rail yards, rail lines, bridges and tunnels. The Germans were very efficient in rebuilding damaged infrastructure, and targets sometimes had to be bombed again and again. By this stage of the war, Luftwaffe fighters rarely appeared, though German anti-aircraft guns were nevertheless, well-placed and ever-prepared to prevent the bombers from striking.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Tannehill, *Saga of the 320th*, 2-4.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 75-76.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 32.

One of the main reasons Luftwaffe fighter appearances were scant during 1944 was due to the success of the concentrated bombing campaign on Nazi oil facilities. Those missions had been the first priority targets of the Air Force strategy to deny the Nazis fuel for aircraft, as well as tanks and land transports. The strategy paid off in big dividends with the gradual attainment of air superiority over the battlefield.¹⁶⁵

Before assignment to a squadron, Halbert was given a number of training flights to check his skills and familiarity of the aircraft. During one of his first days on base, a seasoned lieutenant from the Group took him up in a bomber for a spin around the island, and a view of the base. The pilot thought he would have some fun with this greenhorn, while he showboated his flying skills. “He flew at full speed just a few feet above the water along the coast, probably trying to shake me up,” explained Halbert. He was not rattled by this grandstanding and dismissed the pilot’s brazen manner, but wondered why he was inclined to pull such a stunt. Later it became apparent the pilot’s bravado was as thin as his character. He was so unnerved at flying in combat, that he would get drunk to the point of unconsciousness each night before his squadron was scheduled to fly. His crew would even have to physically man-handle him aboard the aircraft and administer oxygen to revive him. Sometimes the co-pilot would fly the entire first leg of the sortie, with the pilot gaining his composure only in time to take control over the target.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 292.

¹⁶⁶ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

Several months later, that lieutenant flew as co-pilot for Halbert, but fortunately the flight had to turn back due to cloud cover over the target and the bombs were never dropped.¹⁶⁷

Halbert was eventually assigned to the 443rd Squadron of the 320th Bombardment Group. Though he had been fully-trained in flight school as a pilot, he still had to prove his mettle in combat, so he flew as co-pilot for several of his first bombing missions.

Even when an officer had been checked out as pilot, he might still be assigned as co-pilot depending on the particular crew or mission. Halbert's first sortie – flown on Halloween, 1944 – was to bomb a railroad bridge in Italy. Certainly the first time in combat over enemy territory would seem like a gripping experience for a young pilot, yet it turned out that no enemy opposition was encountered. In fact, the flight did not even have a chance to drop its bombs due to the target being obscured by cloud cover.¹⁶⁸ However, it did not take long for Halbert to understand that combat flying was rife with perils, enemy or not.

On only his third mission, engine failure caused one of the B-26 Marauders in the 442nd Squadron to crash on take-off, killing two of the crew and seriously injuring three others. The aircraft, fully loaded with bombs, was destroyed as it burned up at the end of the runway. Even when their fellow flyers perished before their eyes in a fiery conflagration, circumstances required the men gather their wits, steel their nerves, and continue the task at hand. After they returned, their accomplished mission was a tribute to their brother airmen's sacrifice. All other aircraft made it back successfully from that

¹⁶⁷ William Cook, "320th Bombardment Group, Final Mission Report No. 433," November 20, 1944 (declassified).

¹⁶⁸ William Cook, "320th Bombardment Group, Intelligence Narrative No. 387," October 31, 1944 (declassified).

flight, though six of them sustained damage from anti-aircraft fire.¹⁶⁹ Halbert participated in eleven combat sorties as co-pilot, after which he was deemed ready to move to the left seat – the pilot’s coveted position in the cockpit – and be in command of his own crew.¹⁷⁰

The goal of the Allied Air Forces was to establish air dominance over its adversaries and by the autumn of 1944, the German Luftwaffe had been grievously shaken. While Nazi fighters rarely appeared at that point, it did not mean their absence was to be taken for granted. On November 10, 1944, the 441st and 443rd Squadrons of the 320th Bombardment Group mustered twenty B-26 Marauders to conduct a bombing run against a railroad bridge at Ala, Italy. Halbert was flying co-pilot for Lt. Earl W. Mosby with the 443rd. Prior to the formation reaching its target, a group of 25-30 German aircraft jumped the flight and sustained their attack until flak – the Allied slang term for German ground anti-aircraft fire – was encountered approximately one minute before bombs-away. The flak continued through the target until eight minutes after the bombers conducted their breakaway to return home. After clearing the flak, the squadrons were engaged by the enemy fighters once more. Several of the B-26s were damaged – twelve slightly and two seriously – but none were lost. American gunners claimed two victories when two German fighters were shot down – a Me-109 and a Fw-190. In addition, five other German aircraft, all Me-109s, were damaged by American machinegun fire.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Cook, “Final Mission Report No. 394,” November 4, 1944 (declassified).

¹⁷⁰ Franz Reisdorf, ed., 320th Bombardment Group website, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://320thbg.org/index.html>.

¹⁷¹ Cook, “Final Mission Report No. 409,” November 10, 1944 (declassified).

The attacking enemy aircraft consisted of Me-109s, G-55s, Mc-202s and Fw-190s. The Messerschmitt Bf-109 had a number of variants which evolved into one of Germany's premier fighter-bombers. It could fly up to 348 mph and had a range of over 400 miles. It carried armament of two 20mm cannons and two 7.92mm machineguns. The Focke-Wulf 190, and its many variants, was also a common fighter-bomber for the Luftwaffe. Its top speed was 382 mph, and maximum range was 497 miles. It was armed with four 20mm cannons in its wings and two 7.92mm machineguns in its fuselage. The Fiat G.55 Centauro and the Macchi MC.202 Folgore were both fighters of Italian design; they flew with the Aeronautica Nazionale Repubblicana (air force of the revised Fascist state) alongside the Germans, since an armistice had been signed by Italy and the Allies in 1943. The Macchi MC.202 was an excellent single-seat fighter that could range to 646 miles and fly at 399 mph. It sported twin 20mm cannons in its wings and two heavy 12.7mm machineguns in the fuselage.¹⁷² Finally, the Fiat G.55 Centauro was a superb Italian fighter-interceptor with three 20mm cannons (one in the engine/fuselage, two in the wings) and two 12.7mm machineguns mounted in the engine cowling of the fuselage. Its top speed was 417 mph and a range of 627 miles. In spite of its excellent design, only 300 G.55s had been produced by the end of the war, compared to 34,000 Me-109s.¹⁷³

The assortment of enemy aircraft encountered in this single mission attests to the wide range of threats encountered by the American flyers, as well as the diminishing strength of the Luftwaffe by their need to employ whatever aircraft were available.

¹⁷² Jeffery L. Ethell, *Aircraft of World War II* (Glasgow: HarperCollins/Jane's, 1995), 65.

¹⁷³ Chris Chant, *Aircraft of World War II: 300 of the World's Greatest Aircraft* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1999), 222-223, 136-137, 218.

During one of his early missions, Halbert flew as co-pilot for the Squadron Operations Officer, Major Lawrence J. Hayward. The flight of 27 B-26 Marauders took off on December 10, 1944, to bomb the railroad bridge at Rastatt, Germany. Major Hayward was the Mission Flight Leader and while they readied the plane, he made it very clear what Halbert was to do. "He told me to take my seat, keep quiet and do as I was told," recalled Halbert. As a relatively new pilot, Halbert had no problem complying with his directions, and was intent to see how the future Group Commander would lead the mission. The Major was a big man who presented an august command presence around the Group Headquarters; however, he also possessed a very prominent under-bite, along with a large protruding jaw. Halbert remembered, "As we prepared for take-off, Hayward pulled his flak jacket up as high as it would go around his neck, and he pulled his combat helmet down so far that all I could see was his huge jaw sticking out." This presented an image so jocular that it sorely tested all of Halbert's attempts at self-composure. Furthermore, that was the countenance Hayward exuded for the entire mission until they touched down back at the base. The typical winter weather obscured the target for that operation preventing a successful bombing run, and although the flight was over Germany, no anti-aircraft flak was encountered, no enemy fighters were observed, and all planes returned to base with their bombs onboard.¹⁷⁴ In spite of Major Hayward's reputation as a good pilot and a battle-tested officer, it was inevitable the image of his farcical caricature during that mission would be recounted time and again by

¹⁷⁴ Cook, "Final Mission Report No. 425," December 10, 1944 (declassified).

Halbert, and serve as a recurrent source of levity at the base officer's club for months to come.¹⁷⁵

Life on the little French island of Corsica was generally agreeable, and the men enjoyed their time off playing football, baseball, or ping pong. There was a gymnasium available during bad weather, and when it was nice out they enjoyed the pastoral scenes of mountains, peaceful woods and pristine rivers. Mail call was a frequent attraction as it was always nice to receive a friendly parcel from home. The Stars and Stripes newspaper kept the men informed of the things going on in other parts of the world and was regularly distributed. Chow was usually nothing to brag about, but during one miserable week the entire commissary shipment was missed. Halbert said, "The only food available was stale Italian bread and orange marmalade. That was the extent of our menu each day until we were resupplied the following week." While the men always had something they liked to complain about, in reality their living conditions were nothing compared to the privation of the infantry soldiers they were flying to protect. However, even to this day, no matter how hungry he may be, Halbert gladly refuses any offer of orange marmalade.¹⁷⁶

There was a considerable difference between the war experience of the U.S. Army infantry in Europe and that had by the flyers of the Army Air Forces. Death was approached in a civil manner as an airman. You were generally well-fed and clean-shaven; and the "front" was visited only a few hours each day, instead of months at a

¹⁷⁵ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

time, in daylight and darkness. Living conditions were quite agreeable, though they were nevertheless austere. Sometimes living in tents, and sometimes houses, flyers invariably had a roof over their heads. They were afforded the chance to go into a nearby town and see American movies. They usually had hot chow and clean uniforms. Their life was not one of luxury, but they generally never suffered the daily privations of dirt, grime and foul weather as did their infantry counterparts. Airmen readily agreed their lot in life was far better than the foot soldiers; however, they witnessed their own brand of hell while flying, two to three times per day. They understood what the ground soldiers were going through and desperately wanted to help them out. The Germans knew the bomber pilots would make evasive actions when over enemy territory and tried hard to anticipate their moves. The pilot's worst concern was that he would inadvertently fly directly into the burst of a random antiaircraft shell.¹⁷⁷

When it came down to the genuine reason that young men risked all in combat – on the ground or in the air – it was neither for patriotism, nor freedom...not even for the family back home. It was done for the airman or soldier with whom he was fighting beside at the moment. While depending on one another for their very survival, they knew there could be no substitute other than the full measure of their attention, dedication and skill. They simply refused to let their fellow countryman down. It was probably said best by the incomparable war correspondent, Ernie Pyle. As he accompanied the frontline Army soldiers through their toughest days of fighting along the North African

¹⁷⁷ Pyle, *Ernie's War*, 200-204.

front, he wrote, “I lay there in the darkness...thinking of the millions far away at home who must remain forever unaware of the powerful fraternalism in the ghastly brotherhood of war.” That brotherhood implied the recognition of a sense of duty and a certain degree of courage. Both of those attributes at a minimum were expected, and prompted a commensurate measure of honor and respect. Everyone experienced fear, but cowardliness and dereliction were neither tolerated nor forgiven. It has been that way in warfare since the beginning of time, and it fostered a sense of camaraderie that only those who had experienced it could recognize.¹⁷⁸

Combat flying missions were frequent occurrences scheduled on average of one per day. When the operational tempo increased later in the war, there could be two or three missions scheduled each day. As the Marauders took flight on their routine bombing runs, it was infrequent to have fighter escorts along. There was sometimes “top cover” assigned where fighters would be in the general area of operations, and would be available to chase off any enemy aircraft that threatened the bombing formations. A debrief was conducted by the Group intelligence officer at the conclusion of each mission, in which all the details were recalled. A thorough report was then drafted which reflected the summary of the flight, each squadron’s accomplishments, and the contributions and mission credit of all who participated. After each debrief, each crewman was given a shot of whiskey and was released to recover and rest. In the meantime, the ground crews would conduct repairs and maintenance, as well as refuel

¹⁷⁸ Pyle, *Ernie’s War*, xii.

and reload the planes for the next assignment.¹⁷⁹ Active bomber units had a high turnover of personnel from both casualties and the system that relieves pilots after they have completed a specified number of combat missions. So many missions were being conducted by bomber units at the time it was not uncommon for an airman to rotate back to the states after less than a year on the front.¹⁸⁰

By 1944, the U.S. Army Air Forces were extremely active in the Mediterranean theatre. Though there were a number of British and French forces flying, it was primarily an American air war. By this time, some of the pilots who had formerly reached their allotted mission count had now returned for a second tour. All of the crew members kept a meticulous record of missions flown, as there were nearly none who wanted to fly a single mission more than was required. Yet even though this was the hope of every airman, almost all would remain on duty if asked to do so, and many actually did. These men, like all humans, had the normal fears of dying and over time some would near the breaking point. However, they rarely talked about it, and often kept their concerns to themselves, while keeping a brave front and living as normally as they could, telling jokes, writing letters back home, and relying on each other for the necessary strength to carry on. They did not want to fly anymore, but felt duty-bound to continue as best they could on behalf of their squadron mates. Perhaps the saddest accounts were those occasions where squadron leaders missed the physical and psychological signs and

¹⁷⁹ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

¹⁸⁰ Pyle, *Ernie's War*, 205.

inadvertently crushed a man's pride by forcing him to request to be grounded, having flown missions well beyond their rotation date.¹⁸¹

The B-26 Marauders of the 320th Bomb Group had a designated crew of seven with a pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, engineer, radio operator and tail gunner – though usually the mission compliment was six. All but the pilots had secondary duties to man the guns, with most of these positions held by sergeants. The gunners would be located with one in the tail, one in the nose, two at the waist positions and one in the top bubble-turret. Although antiaircraft artillery was their foremost concern, the planes had ample gun positions. With more Allied control of the skies, German fighters were not as big of a concern; however, as they moved deeper into France and closer to Germany more attacks were expected, especially from the new jet fighter, the Me-262.¹⁸²

For his first month of flying with the 320th, Halbert and his squadron were involved in striking enemy targets within Italy. The main transportation route through the Alps – and a coveted supply route for the Germans on the border between Northern Italy and Austria – was the Brenner Pass. In an effort to seal that connection off from the enemy, the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces instituted “Operation Bingo.” In the span of a single concentrated day of all-out bombing on November 6, 1944, they were able – with the help of the 320th – to block movement of many German troops out of Italy that were desperately needed in other parts of Europe.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Pyle, *Brave Men*, 223-224.

¹⁸² Tannehill, *Boomerang!*, 92.

¹⁸³ Tannehill, *Saga of the 320th*, 34.

Ultimately, the combination of advancing Allied air and ground units forced the Nazis to withdraw towards their homeland. The Allied airbases advanced as well, to stay within easy striking distance of the most lucrative enemy targets. By November 20, 1944, it was evident that the 320th would be moving from Corsica onto the French mainland. The headquarters moved into a chateau in a suburb of Dijon, eight miles from the Airdrome, while the squadrons moved to nearby suburbs. Dijon Airdrome became the base of operations for the 320th Group. Having been a Luftwaffe base, it had sustained heavy damage from Allied bombers and artillery.¹⁸⁴

That period also witnessed one of the coldest winters on record, making it extremely difficult and dangerous to fly. For much of the time the Marauders were grounded and the crews kept busy just staying warm. In addition, the German counteroffensive in the Ardennes marked the “Battle of the Bulge” on December 16. A few days later there was a breakthrough by German Panzer tanks in Hagenau, near Dijon, which caused serious concern at the 320th Group’s headquarters. However, as much as the 320th wanted to assist in helping contain the Germans, there was little that could be done due to the contrary weather conditions.¹⁸⁵

When they arrived at Dijon, the Headquarters of the 320th was established in an old Chateau in a suburb eight miles from the Dijon Airdrome. Halbert’s squadron, the 443rd, was assigned to the nearby commune of Bessy-lès-Cîteaux. The enlisted men lived

¹⁸⁴ Tannehill, *Saga of the 320th*, 36.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 36-37.

in tents, while the officers were quartered in homes.¹⁸⁶ Halbert and the other officers of his crew were housed with an older French couple in the village. They seemed sincerely grateful of the U.S. contribution to their freedom and made every effort to make the officers comfortable. The Frenchman frequently checked on them, and on a couple of occasions even invited them to share a meal. Their means were modest, but their hospitality unmatched. “The French couple invited us to a special dinner, and to our surprise it was rabbit,” Halbert recalled. In the cold midst of war’s dark embrace, the simple, but friendly gesture made for a warm and unforgettable gathering for both the French and Americans.¹⁸⁷

In February and March 1945, Halbert was dispatched to the Wing Bomber Training Center near Marseilles, on the French Riviera. He was to attend training in the new system of target acquisition employing new technology known by the acronym SHORAN (short range navigation) or “Blind Bat” radar.¹⁸⁸ This new technology used navigation (code named GEE), which involved the use of precision radar signals to allow extremely accurate non-visual bombing, eliminating the need for bombsights. SHORAN prevented the frustrating recurrences of scrapped missions due to weather, low cloud cover, or fog obscuring the target. Halbert was also afforded some well-deserved liberty after his training. The rest of the 320th also experienced increased opportunities for time off during the spring of 1945. Enlisted men were given the chance to visit Nice, France – the beautiful city on the Mediterranean coast, while officers visited Cannes or Paris. Men

¹⁸⁶ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

were also allowed to visit Dijon for movies, occasional hunting, and a newly opened Allied Officers' Club.¹⁸⁹

After his training near Marseilles, Halbert returned to his group to find it had moved again, this time to Dole, France. Newly trained and anxious to try out his skills with the SHORAN system, Halbert and his crew would soon experience the German's version of new technology. On April 17, 1945, the 320th Bomb Group sent up two squadrons of Marauders, consisting of twenty-seven planes, to bomb the Nazi ammunition dump at Neuendettelsau in south central Germany. Halbert was designated as the wingman for the flight leader. After making two bomb runs on the target, the formation was struck with Germany's secret weapon, the Messerschmitt Me-262 fighter jet. While the Nazis had used this jet against Allied forces as early as January 1945, and had been flying combat missions even before that, this was the first encounter by squadrons of the 320th.¹⁹⁰

The jets were first noticed as the bombers turned off their target. The half-dozen dots on the horizon quickly materialized into a blur of streaking hellfire. Closing on the bomber formation at over 500 mph to within two hundred yards – and blazing away with 20mm cannons and machineguns – the jets were like nothing the B-26 airmen had ever seen. On one pass, a Me-262 came in from five o'clock low (from the right rear and below the horizon) with guns and cannons afire. The jet flashed between Halbert and the flight leader at a distance of only twenty-five feet, and then soared up and away. In total,

¹⁸⁹ Tannehill, *Saga of the 320th*, 40.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

the jets made six passes until they were finally chased away by the P-47 fighters that were in the vicinity providing escort cover.¹⁹¹

Presumably, none of the attacking jets were hit by gunfire, since the bomber gun turrets could not turn fast enough to track the jets. The Marauders did not fare as well, however. Three of the B-26s were hit, with one required to make an emergency landing after having its engine shot out. While none of the Marauder crewmen were injured, all were shaken by this new dimension of aerial warfare. Even having been warned to be looking for the Me-262 to appear, the Americans were astounded by the speed and shock effect of the new Nazi aircraft.¹⁹²

At this point in the war, Allied bombing of German airfields had been so effective the Messerschmitt Me-262s were removed by the Nazis from their usual airfields and were deployed near the cities of Augsburg and Munich. They flew off of temporary airstrips located on sections of the Autobahn, with the jets dispersed in parking areas that were camouflaged with removable shrubbery. This only delayed the inevitable as the jet locations were eventually detected and strafed by American fighters.¹⁹³ For the Luftwaffe, the Me-262 was a perfect example of applying too little effort, a little too late. Production of the jet fighter was delayed by Hitler and the effective Allied bombing of its production factory. These factors, plus the lack of adequate fuel and trained pilots

¹⁹¹ Cook, "Final Mission Report No. 570," April 17, 1945 (declassified).

¹⁹² Tannehill, *Saga of the 320th*, 59.

¹⁹³ Tannehill, *Boomerang!*, 295.

rendered German technological superiority unviable in this case, and the aircraft's great potential as a fighter was never brought to fruition.¹⁹⁴

With victory in sight for the Allies during late spring of 1945, Halbert partook in only a few more missions. While serving as the flight leader of a decoy bombing run, he was again jumped by two Me-262s, but they were only able to make a single pass with just one firing a few rockets. No damage was sustained, and the B-26 gunners were unable to hit the jets.¹⁹⁵ Another risky encounter included a close shave with a 2000-aircraft formation of British Lancaster bombers returning from a night mission over Germany. "I happened to be leading the flight out that morning when we were surprised by a large formation of British bombers," Halbert said. "They were coming back from a night mission and we were heading up to altitude. The clouds obscured our ability to detect each other, but I saw them first." Seemingly unnoticed by the British flyers, Halbert's squadron adeptly dodged the collision course just in time to avoid a mid-air catastrophe, while the Lancasters blissfully continued, apparently unaware of the Marauders' presence.¹⁹⁶ Finally, as if needing to assign every possible target, headquarters tasked his squadron with locating and destroying an enemy battleship hiding in an obscure harbor. "The ship captain must have known we were coming, because we could not find it anywhere," Halbert recalled. Perhaps sensing the war's conclusion, and

¹⁹⁴ Tannehill, *Saga of the 320th*, 59.

¹⁹⁵ Cook, "Final Mission Report No. 576," April 24, 1945 (declassified).

¹⁹⁶ Tannehill, *Boomerang!*, 297.

realizing his ship was an easy mark, the battleship's captain absconded and was nowhere to be found.¹⁹⁷

On May 1, 1945, Bill Halbert flew as lead pilot on the last combat mission for the 320th Bombardment Group. Other than running into bad weather and having to remain overnight in Cognac, France, it was largely uneventful; but it did not matter. The war was coming to an end and all the pilots and crews were ready to go home. The assignment was to knockout gun positions at Île de Oléron, France, but cloud cover was heavy and, in spite of two runs with altitude changes to get below it, no bombs were dropped. Poor visibility and low fuel mandated the stop in Cognac.¹⁹⁸ Unfortunately for the bomb crews, the flight of eighteen B-26s (over 108 men) was unexpected, overnight housing was a little scarce. Because of this, some of the men were required to sojourn at a wayside country bordello... sans the entertainment, of course.¹⁹⁹ The final mission report indicates that all the bombers returned to base the following day save for one; curiously having to remain an extra day due to battery trouble.²⁰⁰ The day before Halbert and the 443rd Squadron flew that final mission, Adolph Hitler and his mistress, Eva Braun, had committed suicide. One week later, the war in Europe was over.

The 320th Bombardment Group had an outstanding wartime record. In twenty-five months of aerial combat it recorded 586 combat missions and 13,314 sorties. It dropped more bombs than any group in the 42nd Bomb Wing. It achieved the lowest loss

¹⁹⁷ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

¹⁹⁸ Cook, "Final Mission Report No. 594," May 1, 1945 (declassified).

¹⁹⁹ Interview of Bill Halbert, 2/26/2016.

²⁰⁰ Cook, "Final Mission Report No. 594," May 1, 1945 (declassified).

of aircraft of any other B-26 unit in the war, and was nicknamed the “Boomerangs” because so many aircraft returned from missions. It received two Distinguished Unit Citations, and was one of only a few units that received the French Croix de Guerre with palm, from General Charles de Gaulle. It served in eleven official Campaigns, and saw action in five major invasions during the war. The Group’s casualties included eighty aircraft lost, of which thirty-nine were from flak, seventeen from enemy fighters, and the remainder for other reasons. Air crews lost 266 killed in action, and seventy-six taken prisoners-of-war. Bill Halbert served eight months in the European Theatre of Operations and flew forty-two combat missions.²⁰¹ He was never shot down, but had engines shot out on two different occasions, and numerous impacts from flak.²⁰² By the end of the war in Europe and the Pacific, Halbert’s hometown of Kilgore had lost 118 of its men during the war’s duration.²⁰³

Upon the realization that all hostilities had ceased on every front – and the world was finally at peace – the elation and relief was beyond description for those that experienced it, and beyond imagination for those who did not. So much had been risked, so much had been endured, and so many never came home. A huge expanse of Europe, Russia and the Far East lay in ruins, the threat of the Nazis and Japanese had been vanquished, and while liberty and freedom were available to most, for some it was a gossamer hope. The feelings of many servicemen were captured by one of Ernie Pyle’s last dispatches from Europe. It read as follows: “Our feelings have been wrung and

²⁰¹ Franz Reisdorf, ed., *320th Bombardment Group*, accessed April 25, 2016, <http://320thbg.org/index.html>.

²⁰² Bill Halbert Interview, 2/26/2016.

²⁰³ *Kilgore Junior College*, accessed April 25, 2016, <https://www.kilgore.edu/athletics-organizations/football/facilities>.

drained; they cringe from the effort of coming alive again. War had become a flat, black depression without highlights; a revulsion of the mind and an exhaustion of the spirit. When the war is finally over, all of us will have to learn how to reassemble our broken world into a pattern so firm and so fair that another great war cannot soon be possible...”²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Pyle, *Ernie's War*, 359.

CHAPTER IV

War, Women and Song (1946 – 1990)

The family has always been the cornerstone of American society. Our families nurture, preserve, and pass on to each succeeding generation the values we share and cherish, values that are the foundation for our freedoms. In the family we learn our first lessons of God and man, love and discipline, rights and responsibilities, human dignity and human frailty...the strength of our families is vital to the strength of our nation.

~ President Ronald Reagan²⁰⁵

It was nearly beyond the scope of comprehension. Adolph Hitler, his Wehrmacht and the Nazi Third Reich – having attained nearly total European domination and once touted as invincible – had been driven back to their own doorstep and soundly conquered by the civilian soldiers of the Allies. The fate of Prime Minister Tojo had been the same, as a triumphant combination of U.S. determination, courage, and pure will thoroughly crushed the Japanese juggernaut. The Allies had fittingly earned the world's approbation, and it was reflected in the scale of revelry that followed. However, as the parades concluded and merrymaking ceased, the sobering realization materialized of a world becoming far more dangerous and unpredictable. America, now a superpower and her homeland untouched by war's cruel devastation, was looked upon for global leadership and support. It was clear the former comfort and distance created by two major oceans would no longer allow the Western Hemisphere the luxury of isolation.

Bill Halbert was mustered out of the Army Air Force shortly after the war ended, yet remained in the inactive reserve. By this time he had reached his twentieth year, and

²⁰⁵ Robert Flood, *The Rebirth of America* (Philadelphia: Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation, 1986), 114.

upon his return to Kilgore, became blissfully engaged in the peacetime preoccupations of college life and social endeavors. Like most war veterans of the time, he sought to pick up where he left off, and those pursuits left little time to reflect too deeply on developing world affairs. He expected to go into the oil business, as his family and friends had done, never imagining he would fly again. As is often the case, however, time and providence had different plans. Events unfolding on the world stage would again take his life on a precipitous change of course in just a few short years.²⁰⁶

4.1: Post-War Prosperity: Crossroads and Contrasts

It could be said that the depth of a nation's character – that is, the heart and soul of its people – is reflected through the consistent actions of its government over time. As the Allies consolidated the spoils of victory subsequent to the Axis surrender in the spring and summer of 1945, the events which took place thereafter revealed a clarion contrast of ethics, particularly those of the United States and Russia. Nothing in war, diplomacy or politics is simple, but the obvious implications of Soviet intent during the post-war era marked an errant contrast to the freedom-loving nations of the west.

To promote democracy and counter the developing communist malice around the world, a two-prong strategy was formulated by the United States. The first included formidable financial assistance to their European allies to be sure, but also exhibited a depth of magnanimity towards its former enemies that is unprecedented in world history. Indisputably designed with U.S. security interests in mind, it was nevertheless a profound

²⁰⁶ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

gesture of goodwill and benevolence. The European Recovery Program was offered to ameliorate the heavy economic burdens for friend and former-foe alike. Dubbed the Marshall Plan for its chief advocate, U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall, it provided over \$17 billion – along with business expertise, modernization, and support of every type – to encourage and uplift the war-ravaged European economies. The second prong involved creating a defensive alliance between the U.S. and Western European nations known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The initiative was sealed with a permanent commitment of four U.S. Army divisions that were assigned to Europe indefinitely.²⁰⁷

Though he served only two years as Secretary of State, George Marshall's influence on American relations with its Western European allies endured throughout the Cold War, and helped to promote goodwill and cooperation while preventing communist influence to gain a toehold. This was only possible through the strength of his character, the trust he had earned with the Congress and American public, and the relationships he forged during years of collaboration with British and French Allies throughout World War II.²⁰⁸

In the Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur became the Commander of Japan Occupation Forces and oversaw establishment of a new constitution and new government. In just seven short years the occupation forces departed and returned control of the country to the Japanese. By the 1960's, Japan became an economic

²⁰⁷ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 638-639.

²⁰⁸ Stoler, "From World War II to Cold War," 308-310.

powerhouse and remains a thriving example of postwar prosperity. By way of contrast, over 600,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians who surrendered in Manchuria, North Korea, and other areas were placed in labor camps by the Soviets. During the years that followed, an estimated 60,000 of them perished in the camps.²⁰⁹

In opposition to American leadership and humanitarian efforts across the globe, Stalin made every effort to extinguish any trace of freedom within his ever-growing realm of influence. His scabrous actions against the isolated Berliners in 1948, is an unequivocal example. Surrounded on all sides by the Eastern Bloc, West Berlin was a bastion of liberty and capitalism. Understanding what implications that posed, Stalin endeavored to cut off all lines of communication to the city to force it into the Soviet fold. President Harry Truman refused to allow that to occur, and staged a tenacious rescue effort of the city. From December 1948 until the Soviets relented in May 1949, U.S. cargo planes flew supplies – seven thousand tons per day – into Berlin nonstop. It was a tense display of wills and the one-upmanship that would define U.S. – Soviet relations for the remainder of the century.²¹⁰

Such intrigue and international sophistry were far removed from the personal interests and occupations of Bill Halbert. During the war years, Texas had transitioned from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Petroleum was responsible, and Texas had surpassed California as the national leader in oil production.²¹¹ Upon returning home

²⁰⁹ Yocote Shinji, “Soviet Repatriation Policy, US Occupation Authorities, and Japan’s Entry into the Cold War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 15, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 30, Accessed March 5, 2016. EBSCOhost.

²¹⁰ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot’s History*, 640.

²¹¹ Calvert, De León and Cantrell, *The History of Texas*, 353.

after the war, Bill thought he would employ the benefits offered by the GI Bill and attend nearby Kilgore Junior College. He was one of many veterans at the time who desired entry to the engineering program for a formal foundation in oil production. The requirement to produce a high school diploma for college entrance, however, prompted Halbert to realize he never finished his last semester of school – caused by his abrupt departure for military service. “I located one of my favorite high school teachers, Mrs. Irene Hill, to help me finish the requirements for my diploma. She guided my study and eventually got me through all that was needed to complete it,” recalled Halbert.

Prior to the war, Halbert had excelled in high school football, distinguishing himself in the positions of defensive wingback and wide receiver. While gaining entrance to Kilgore College, he was also able to acquire a football scholarship. He had benefited from some remarkable coaches, who included Floyd Wagstaff at Kilgore High School and Kilgore College; Richard E. St. John at Kilgore High School; and William Walls at Kilgore College – who later coached for the Los Angeles Rams.

One of the sad revelations discovered by Halbert on his return from the war, was that his esteemed high school football coach, R. E. St. John, had been killed while serving in the U.S. Navy. He lost his life while heroically helping to rescue fellow sailors during World War II. Having volunteered to join the U.S. Navy immediately after Pearl Harbor in 1941, St. John was assigned to the veteran WWI vintage destroyer, USS Borie, DD-215. He was killed after an epic battle against the German submarine, U-405. The sub was ultimately sunk, but the damage sustained during the battle required the American

sailors to abandon their ship. Ensign St. John was lost at sea while assisting his shipmates transfer to another vessel during a violent storm.²¹²

Off from college during the summers, Halbert worked as a roustabout in the surrounding oil fields. The summer of 1946, he worked for the East Texas Saltwater Disposal Company, an enterprise formed to deal with the saltwater typically present with oil as it was pumped from the ground. In some instances, saltwater was almost exclusively pumped from the oil wells. It was damaging to crops and wildlife to discard the saltwater on the ground or into streams; therefore the company devised a way to push the saltwater back into the wells, thus creating additional pressure to pump out oil that could not otherwise be accessed. The following summer he again worked as a roustabout, this time for the Gulf Oil Company.

In addition to football, Halbert played basketball, and ran track at Kilgore College. His repertoire of talent also included a position in the college marching band, this time playing baritone, having switched from coronet. During football games, he accompanied the band on the field carrying his instrument while wearing his football uniform. He would march during halftime, while the rest of his team was resting for the second half. If he had been required to make a choice, however, Halbert would favor sports. Naturally athletic, he tried any type of contest, and even excelled in diving. He loved the exhilaration and competed informally at all heights, including the 10-meter

²¹² "USS Borie, DD-215," *Destroyer History Foundation*, accessed May 18, 2016, <http://www.destroyerhistory.org>.

platform. Of all his ventures in athletics, however, perhaps the one most remarkable was his first football season at Kilgore College.

The football squad assembled during the season of 1946 was a remarkable one for Kilgore College. In addition to the team, the college had assembled some of the finest coaches in the state, with Jimmy Parks, Will Walls and Woody Johnson. The school also featured the acclaimed Kilgore Rangerettes – a precision drill team and new sensation on campus since their start in 1940 by Gussie Nell Davis. The Rangers were made up of older players with 85% being veterans returning from the war. Many had superb athletic ability, and all were in exceptional condition. Halbert's brother, Elzie, remembered how much fun it was to watch Bill playing defensive back. With lightening speed, he would shoot around the offensive line with a grin on his face, looking to obliterate the oncoming running back.²¹³ They went undefeated that season tying the school records for most wins in a season at ten, and most consecutive shutouts at five. The team also captured the NJCAA state championship that year.²¹⁴

There would be one final chance for glory as the team was invited to play in a titanic matchup against the Compton Tartars in the inaugural Little Rose Bowl game in Pasadena, California. The entire Kilgore Ranger football team, Rangerettes, and Kilgore College Marching Band made the long trip across country for the big game on Pearl Harbor Day. Taking a chartered "Oil Capital Special" train, were over 200 fans who also made the trip with the team. All had high hopes for a national title, with the help of All-

²¹³Interview of Elzie Halbert, 11/15/2015.

²¹⁴"Ranger Express," *The Flare*, Kilgore Junior College, October 25, 1996.

Americans Alan Neveux and Raymond Stone. Neveux, along with standout Darrell Shaver, would receive All-American honors the following season as well. Also playing were John Hickman – older brother of future Green Bay Packer, Larry Hickman – and future Philadelphia Eagle, Adrian Burke. Even though the team had some exceptional individual players, their collective success was attributed to superb organization, leadership and teamwork.²¹⁵

December 7, 1946 was a cool day in front of a sellout crowd of over 51,000 – larger than any in junior college football history to that point. While the excitement of playing in such an esteemed event boosted the Rangers' confidence, they suffered their first defeat, 19-0, against the Tartars. Even with that fateful loss in Pasadena, for Halbert, the memory of his first season with the Kilgore Rangers was one for the ages.²¹⁶

Halbert graduated from Kilgore Junior College in 1948 and decided to push on for a bachelor's degree. In researching various options, he determined that the best school for petroleum engineering was the University of Oklahoma (OU), located in Norman. From working his summer jobs in the oilfields, Bill was able to save enough money to buy a 1946 Chevrolet coupe, which he used to drive between his home in Kilgore and his boarding house at the university. While his studies at OU were challenging, Halbert was able to graduate by 1950, anxious to ply his engineering skills towards a new career in the growing East Texas oil industry.

²¹⁵ "Ranger Express," *The Flare*, Kilgore Junior College, October 25, 1996.

²¹⁶ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

As a war veteran, Halbert was treated very favorably by an adoring and grateful public. “Our squadron did not actively organize unit reunions but I, along with my fellow military students, attended an active organization on the Oklahoma campus dedicated to war veterans,” Halbert advised. “The tail-gunner from our crew, John Lenkiewicz, made an earnest effort during the years to produce a newsletter for members of the 443rd squadron. He also tried to keep his comrades in touch by phone and letters.”

Halbert greatly benefitted from his service in the U.S. Army Air Forces during WWII. In addition to learning discipline, leadership and organization, he also understood the importance of chain of command, teamwork and giving all he had to a given task. While he enjoyed aviation, and found piloting an aircraft extremely challenging, he never really envisioned continuing on as a civilian commercial pilot. He was content in pursuing the oil business just as his father had done, and actually worked for him after his graduation from the University of Oklahoma while looking for job opportunities in the field.²¹⁷

4.2: The Communist Menace and a Long Cold War

As the Allies addressed the looming postwar concerns and attempted to find ways to share security responsibilities, their diplomatic efforts succeeded in founding the United Nations on October 24, 1945. Primarily created to address international law, provide arbitration of international disputes, and foster mutual protection of member

²¹⁷ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

countries, this organization was also an attempt to find common ground. While a good first step, the nascent organization would soon be challenged on a number of fronts.²¹⁸

War weary and their economies in shambles, European countries were initially preoccupied with excavating from the rubble and wreckage of war. Efforts by the U.S. centered on ways to bring countries together to enhance peace and prevent future wars. Conversely, Russian leaders seemed bent on exploiting postwar weaknesses to make opportunities for communist expansion. Lowering an “iron curtain” over Eastern Europe, they managed to incorporate Albania, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Eastern Germany.²¹⁹

By the middle of 1947, tensions were growing in U.S. – Soviet relations. It was becoming conspicuously perceptible that Stalin was not just resisting the American tenets of democracy and capitalism, but he had convinced Americans of his intent to destroy the U.S. altogether. The acquisition of the atomic bomb by the Soviets in 1949; and the Chinese civil war victory of communist Mao Zedong over Chiang Kai-shek a few months later, did little to allay those fears.²²⁰

Ultimately a combination of the Soviet resistance to Korean unification, their boycott of U.N. Security Council resolutions, and finally secret support of the North Korean military invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950, placed the Soviet Union squarely in the middle of communist aggression. The initiative taken by the Security

²¹⁸ William A. Taylor, “United Nations,” eds. James I. Matray and Donald W. Boose Jr., *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Korean War* (Farnham: Routledge, 2014), 97, accessed December 3, 2015, EBSCOhost.

²¹⁹ Matloff, *American Military History*, 535-537.

²²⁰ Valentine, “The American Combat Soldier,” 17.

Council – the first time it acted against military aggression – in response to the attack against South Korea, placed the resulting military steps clearly within the United Nations’ purview.²²¹ Though fifteen countries contributed military forces to the efforts to push back the North Koreans – and later, the People’s Republic of China – the United States still provided over ninety percent of the non-Korean fighting forces.²²²

It is important to understand why the United States and the American soldier were so willing to get into another war, when World War II was still fresh in the collective conscience. The Americans who served in Korea often volunteered, and many had deferments but refused to take them. Communism and its spread was certainly something that most Americans wanted to stop, but it has been argued their motivation was more specifically because of a sense of duty. It was the idea that soldiers possessed a strong sense of patriotism in which they shared common national values and confidence in their government, that drove them to willingly engage in that war. Since communism was considered anti-American during that time, it would naturally follow that fighting communism was, in a sense, being patriotic.²²³

Having only just graduated from the University of Oklahoma the previous spring, Bill Halbert was reactivated by the U.S. Air Force. Once the Korean War had begun, activation of all military reservists was a foregone conclusion and while anticipating such an event might happen, he was not expecting the call to come so soon. Since this action was usually taken before military planners could have a chance to analyze the situation

²²¹ Taylor, “United Nations,” 99.

²²² Ibid, 103.

²²³ Valentine, “The American Combat Soldier” 8.

and determine what kind of force buildup was required, many more reservists were called than were initially needed. Unfortunately for his career aspirations, Halbert had been able to work in the oilfields for only a short time with his father before receiving his recall notification. However, he was not overly disconsolate about serving again and understood that having remained in the reserves, it was natural he may get called back. He considered it was his duty to return to service any time his country called.²²⁴

United States military leaders who responded to the North Korean aggression had hoped they could conduct tactical operations similar to those during World War II. However in due time, they realized that limited resources and severe restrictions on their planning would turn the conflict into a plodding, limited war of attrition. The newly formed United States Air Force had been created as a separate branch, including the Strategic Air Command, under the leadership of Lieutenant General Curtis LeMay. From the point of view of the Air Force, the conflict presented a number of new developments. While Korea turned into a proxy war between superpowers of the Soviet Union and the United States, it was the first time adversaries would each have access to atomic bombs. It also was the first war in which the jet fighters would be flown in significant numbers to affect the course of battle. Finally, the limited nature of the hostilities prevented the possibility of bombing enemy factories and industrial centers that manufactured war materials.²²⁵

²²⁴ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

²²⁵ Conrad C. Crane, "Raiding the Beggar's Pantry: The Search for Airpower Strategy in the Korean War," *The Journal of Military History* 63, no. 4 (Oct 01, 1999): 885-886, accessed January 27, 2016, Periodicals Archive Online.

In Halbert's opinion, "If the U.S. was required to heed so many restrictions with the lives of Americans at stake, then we should never have been involved in the Korean War." His views reflected those of many who served during that time. There was an understandable degree of resentment towards the United Nation decision-makers – who lacked a strong commitment to victory – by those who were actually doing the fighting. Also evident were hard feelings, from servicemen and families alike, that the government had let them down by risking lives while simultaneously agreeing to a negotiated armistice.²²⁶ It seemed to many a needless endeavor when U.S. soldiers were sent so far overseas to defend a country where no apparent connection to American interests or security existed. The growing cynicism of American military men towards waste and abuse was not unfounded. Halbert had witnessed earlier actions by U.S. officials that gave him cause to wonder. For instance, after WWII, many U.S. airplanes and equipment were needlessly destroyed, instead of being cycled back to the states or kept for defense in the European country where they were located. He had volunteered to ferry the planes back to the U.S., but was told it would have been too expensive, or that many of the planes were not in good enough condition to make the long trip home. Halbert and his fellow servicemen could detect a number of practices that signaled a trend foreign to their understanding of economy and efficiency.²²⁷

In considering aspects of the Cold War, and U.S. involvement in Korea, Halbert understood communism was a genuine threat to U.S. security, and that it needed to be

²²⁶ Valentine, "The American Combat Soldier," 213.

²²⁷ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

contained wherever possible. He is not certain how much of the country's resources should have been used to accomplish this, however. "I was concerned that the war might escalate to a point where atomic bombs could be used against the United States, or American military targets in Korea and elsewhere," Halbert said. From the war's outset U.S. military planners had anticipated the many assorted problems faced from Stalin, and had expended countless hours and effort towards developing options to respond to Soviet provocation. The gravest concern they harbored, and one shared by Halbert, was knowledge that America and Russia could initiate mutual destruction via atomic warfare at any time. "A hostile gesture from either side could be misinterpreted, and an accidental launch would be initiated with a retaliatory response," Halbert stated. "Another troubling prospect was that of a careless or accidental atomic detonation by incompetent military handlers or pilots." Halbert was particularly privy to the burdens placed on military intelligence, planning and operational personnel – especially pilot friends – who spent long hours, and missed ample important family obligations and occasions, due to the necessity of rapid-response aircraft to be perpetually on strip alert and operational stand-by.²²⁸

Shortly after Halbert returned to active duty, he realized that more pilots were recalled than were needed. Initially ordered to Lackland Air Force Base (AFB) in San Antonio, Texas, he was assigned to a National Guard unit, along with another 4-5 pilots. Since he had experience as a B-26 bomber pilot, he was later assigned to the 4th Tow

²²⁸ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

Target Squadron, Larson AFB in Moses Lake, Washington. Larson AFB was originally activated as an Army Air Force training center in 1942. It continued in that capacity after the World War II, and also became a testing facility and home to the Air Defense Command, a unit tasked with protecting the United States west coast with a number of newly produced jet fighters such as the F-82, F-94 Star Fire and F-86 Sabrejet.²²⁹

Halbert's duties with the 4th Tow Target Squadron required that he and a crew of three, fly to assist both jet pilots and ground air defense artillerymen in honing their gunnery skills. Halbert would fly his plane at approximately 270 nautical miles per hour, while towing a flag target on a steel cable which stretched approximately 100 ft behind the plane. While he flew the tow plane in a continuous racetrack pattern, the pilots or ground gunners would then shoot at the target trying to score as many hits as possible.²³⁰

It was during his time at Larson AFB that Bill Halbert proposed to his sweetheart, Avis Franke, whom he had known for a number of years while living in Kilgore, Texas. She was the youngest daughter of Lee Andrew Franke, an electrical engineer for Gulf Oil. Avis had lived in Kilgore most of her life and met Bill during high school, however, they did not go out until much later while attending college. During their high school years, she worked at the city swimming pool throughout the summer, while he had worked as a lifeguard. When he left for Europe, he asked her to write to him, but it was not until he returned home after the war that their friendship was rekindled. They tried to stay in touch during the years they attended college, though it meant a long distance

²²⁹ "History of Larson Air Force Base," *Larson Air Force Base Guide and Directory*, 1961.

²³⁰ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

relationship over many miles. Avis attended Texas State College for Women in Denton, Texas for two years, while Bill attended Kilgore College. She then ventured to Austin to finish her degree in business at University of Texas, while Bill completed his studies in petroleum engineering at Oklahoma. In spite of the distance, they did manage to visit at times, and on one particular occasion their faces were captured in a photograph of a major Texas newspaper.²³¹

On October 9, 1948, Avis accompanied Bill on a date to attend the “Red River Shootout,” an annual NCAA football game highlighting the rivalry between the University of Oklahoma and the University of Texas. The game has always been played in the Cotton Bowl Stadium during the second week of the Texas State Fair, and has perpetually attracted a sellout crowd. That year was no exception with well over 70,000 in attendance. The rivalry originated in 1900 – before Oklahoma was even a state – and the matchup is still one of the greatest football contests in the nation. During that encounter, Texas fell behind and made a mighty effort to recover during the last quarter, but Oklahoma prevailed 20-14. Avis and Bill were spotted on the front row of the stadium during the last seconds of the game and the photo was published the next day in the Dallas Times Herald. The picture was obviously taken of the Texas section of the stadium as evidenced by the dejected expressions on the faces of the fans. Though his demeanor reflects the same emotion in the photograph – out of respect for his date – it must have been an exhilarating inward moment for Bill, given the nature of the rivalry.²³²

²³¹ Interview of Avis Franke Halbert, 3/15/2016.

²³² “It was a Tense Moment,” *Dallas Times Herald*, October 10, 1948.

While Bill visited Avis as much as possible, the distance from Dallas – where she was employed as an executive secretary with IBM – was onerous for a regular and meaningful relationship. Shortly after assignment to Moses Lake, Washington in 1951, Bill mustered his nerve and proposed. As Avis began making plans for the wedding, they found that Bill was unable to get military leave. Since he could not go back to Texas, they decided to have the wedding at the air force base where he was stationed. Undaunted by the breadth of countryside she would have to travel, Avis boarded a train for the journey from Dallas to the Pacific Northwest. Upon her arrival, she was happy to find that the wives of Bill's squadron mates had done a superb job coordinating the final arrangements for the wedding.

With their new air force friends in attendance, Bill and Avis were married on June 5, 1951 at the chapel of Larson Air Force Base. The wedding was a dignified and traditional service, with Bill's Commanding Officer, Captain Maurice Westerfield on hand to escort Avis down the aisle. Bill's squadron mate, Lieutenant Harold Hall served as best man. Bill and Avis had always been extraordinarily kind and generous to others, rarely lavishing indulgences upon themselves. That was exactly the way they celebrated their wedding night meal, as they happily feasted on hamburgers at a roadside diner. From there they ventured off on a Spokane get-away to celebrate the beginnings of their new life together.²³³

²³³ Interview of Avis Franke Halbert, 4/7/2016.

Eventually the 4th Tow Squadron was moved from Washington to George AFB near Victorville, California. It was assigned an additional training mission acting as aggressor aircraft making simulated attacks on the U.S. mainland. The squadron's "aggressor" planes would fly over the Golden Gate Bridge, and then drop to a low altitude to stay under U.S. coastal air defense radar. Once out to sea for several miles, the planes would turn, gain altitude and then approach the California coast to see if the homeland defense radar operators could detect the incoming formations. Bill was assigned to the squadron for about a year, when he was selected to become the aide-de-camp for U.S. Air Force General Edward J. Timberlake.²³⁴

Usually transfers for military families are frequent and often to an unfamiliar location. However, since the entire 4th Tow Squadron had moved from Washington, all of the Halberts' friends from Larson AFB were with them in California. Many of the wives and pilots were young, and not having children, it was common for them to get together after working hours. This was also during the years that television was a new sensation and only one of the squadron couples, Mildred and David Rostler, owned one. Each night, they would set up folding chairs in their living room and couples would drop by to watch whatever show was playing that night. "The Rostlers did not even bother answering the door, they would just quietly wave the incoming family to a chair, so as not to disturb the ongoing program," Avis Halbert recalled. These casual friendships

²³⁴ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

developed into ones that have lasted a lifetime, and Avis has remained in touch with some of them for over sixty years.²³⁵

General Timberlake had been a World War II bomber pilot who flew B-17 and B-24 bombers throughout the war in Europe. He participated in Operation Tidal Wave, the famous 1943 air raid on the Axis fuel refineries in Ploiesti, Romania. At the time Halbert was chosen as his aide, General Timberlake commanded the 9th Air Force, home of the Tactical Air Command which was comprised primarily of fighter squadrons. It was headquartered at Pope AFB near Fayetteville, North Carolina.²³⁶

By the time he transferred east to assist General Timberlake in June, 1952, Bill and Avis, were expecting their first child. They were excited about the move to North Carolina and happy to make it their new home. In addition to his duties as aide, Halbert served as pilot for the General whenever he needed to visit the various base headquarters of the 9th Air Force. The B-26 was used for traveling because it was fast, roomy and usually available on short notice, however, as time passed and General Timberlake was promoted, he required the larger B-17 to accommodate his growing staff. Since the 9th Air Force included the Tactical Air Command, it was necessary for General Timberlake to call on a number of air bases across the nation. Halbert would fly the General and his staff to these bases in the B-17, and would accompany him to other required meetings and events.²³⁷

²³⁵ Interview of Avis Franke Halbert, 4/7/2016.

²³⁶ "Lt. Halbert Arrives As Aide de Campe To Gen. Timberlake," *Stars and Stripes*, Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina. June, 1952.

²³⁷ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

There were many times General Timberlake preferred to pilot the B-17 himself during their routine flights. Since his pilot status was not kept current, regulations required him to conduct a check ride before flying the plane. In addition to routine flying duties, Halbert was also an instructor pilot, and could sign off on the check rides, making it very convenient for the General. Of all the airfields they visited, General Timberlake was especially fond of flying into Bolling AFB in Anacostia, Maryland. It was a large airfield with easy access, one they flew to regularly, and was about the right distance for a comfortable flight.²³⁸

Serving as the aide to General Timberlake was a very time-consuming and demanding job. Halbert would have to attend to the General at all times, which meant usually working six days each week. It became a substantial commitment for both Halbert and his family, since his assignment with General Timberlake lasted just over 3 years. Though they were in the office on Saturdays, the workload was not usually heavy and General Timberlake would often play a friendly game of golf with fellow officers at the course on base. Halbert soon learned that if he played golf with the General, he wouldn't have to stay in the office to do busy work. As a result, he quickly became interested in the sport and practiced whenever he was able. With natural athleticism, an instinctive sense of competition, and his extraordinary work ethic, Halbert quickly mastered the sport.

²³⁸ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

All U.S. Air Force Commanders during those years were assigned a driver, and General Timberlake was no exception. His driver, Sgt. Cook, was affectionately referred to as “Cooksie Baby,” by the General, his staff, and of course, Halbert. Even though his driver was available around the clock, General Timberlake would frequently ring Halbert at his desk to find out when he was departing for home, and to ask for a ride. “After this routine went on for a while, I realized the General really just wanted to joy-ride in my 1929 Chevrolet Coupe, and he would often ask to drive,” Halbert chuckled. Naturally “Cooksie Baby” liked this custom because he was not confined to the General’s long work hours, and could depart for home at his leisure.²³⁹

Eventually General Timberlake moved his headquarters to Shaw AFB near Sumter, South Carolina. By this time, Bill and Avis had become the parents of two lovely little girls, Mundina while at Pope AFB in 1953, and Cindy in 1955 while assigned to Shaw. Their joy and happiness with their growing family was evident to all who knew them. Bill relished fatherhood and adored his little girls. Though he was not able to be home a great deal during his years with the General, he spent any time he could spare with them, and treasured the outings and events they attended together. He attributed much of the success in raising his family to Avis, who was an abiding and affectionate mother; faithful and diligent in every way. Her skill at parenting and her loving attendance to their family gave him the confidence and reassurance that all was well at home, no matter where he might be assigned.²⁴⁰ Avis remembered, “There was a time at

²³⁹ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

Shaw AFB when a hurricane was predicted to strike the South Carolina coast and all pilots were called in to ferry aircraft inland to avoid storm damage. All the wives were flabbergasted we were left behind to ride out the storm at home with our children, while the men left for safety.” Avis had usually enjoyed being a military dependent, by this could be counted as one of the exceptions.²⁴¹

Since General Timberlake was commander of the Tactical Air Command, his staff officers were all fighter pilots, with some being instructors. Halbert became instant friends with them and they convinced him to train as a jet pilot. The General was onboard with the idea, and the instructors were glad to assist. They found Halbert to be an exceptional pilot, a hard worker, and a quick study in jet aircraft. When the time came for his next assignment, Halbert requested placement with a fighter squadron and was accordingly ordered to Nellis AFB near Las Vegas, Nevada. This six-month tour emphasized gunnery skills and qualified him in the necessary combat standards as a pilot of the F-100 Super Sabre. The F-100, nicknamed, “The Hun,” was conceived a year before its predecessor, the North American F-86 Sabrejet ever soared through the blue Korean skies in search of communist MiG fighters. In their quest to produce a faster, more powerful aircraft, the developing engineers combined a more distinctly swept wing and an afterburning engine. The goal was to create a fighter-bomber jet that could maintain supersonic speed in level flight.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Interview of Avis Franke Halbert, 4/7/2016.

²⁴² Davies and Menard, *North America F-100 Super Sabre*, 4.

After gunnery training in Nevada, Halbert was eligible for future assignment with an operational unit outbound for Korea. He was soon ordered to Foster AFB near Victoria, Texas where he joined the 450th Day Fighter Wing and remained for about fourteen months. While there, he attended Survival, Evasion, Resistance to interrogation, and Escape (SERE) school – training designed to equip pilots who are downed in enemy territory – at Fairchild AFB in Spokane, Washington.²⁴³

The hostilities associated with the Korean War were ended with the signing of an armistice on July 27, 1953. It left the two distinct nations, North and South, in a state of neither war, nor peace.²⁴⁴ When Halbert was ordered to join the 58th Tactical Fighter Bomber Wing at Osan, Korea in June 1957, he was tasked with flying operational missions, but was never confronted by enemy aircraft or anti-aircraft defense artillery. His squadron, the 69th Fighter Bomber Squadron, was not officially involved in wartime operations, but Halbert was, nevertheless, flying in an adversarial posture.²⁴⁵

Osan Air Base, designated K-55, is a major airfield for U.S. forces in Korea. Originally established during the Korean War, it was formerly nothing more than a rural farming area. It is located a few miles from the village of Osan-Ni, and roughly twenty miles south of Seoul. The center of U.S. air power in Korea at the time of Halbert's assignment there, it remains a formidable base of air operations to this day.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

²⁴⁴ Bruce E. Bechtol, Jr., "Aftermath, 1953-2013," *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Korean War*, eds. James I. Matray and Donald W. Boose Jr. (Farnham: Routledge, 2014), 421.

²⁴⁵ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

²⁴⁶ "Brief History of Osan Air Base," accessed May 26, 2016, <http://osan.af.mil/history>.

Missions flown by Halbert included strip alert, weather alert, false radar verifications, and Initial Point (IP) radar verification. Strip alert had different time response categories. A five-minute status required the pilots to be in the cockpit and ready to take-off, with aircraft in the air within five minutes' notification. A fifteen-minute alert required the pilot to be nearby, usually within a small trailer located next to the jet. A thirty-minute alert enabled the pilot to remain inside a nearby building, in a more relaxed state, but still ready to deploy on notice. Weather alert might require the pilot to fly up to a given altitude, near the mission area to determine what weather the responding jets might encounter. If ground radar sensed incoming aircraft or suspicious movements, a flight of two jets would take off and verify what the radar had detected. Jets might also be sent on a mission to verify a RACON (radar beacon) generally used for IP navigation guidance.²⁴⁷

Halbert flew the F-86 Sabrejet during his deployment with the 58th Tactical Fighter Bomber Wing in Korea. The North American F-86 Sabrejet was the first swept-wing jet fighter developed by the U.S. Air Force and was used extensively during the Korean War against the communist MiG-15. It could fly over 600 mph and could exceed the speed of sound in a dive. The F-86 sustained a kill ration of 8:1 over the MiG-15 during the war, even though in some respects the MiG-15 was superior.²⁴⁸

Halbert had only been in Korea for a short time when a pilot from the Wing was killed in a crash. As a result, Halbert was reassigned to assume that pilot's

²⁴⁷ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

²⁴⁸ Davies and Menard, *North America F-100 Super Sabre*, 4.

responsibilities at the Primary Air Command Headquarters. In this capacity, Halbert helped plan missions for all the services' air operations. Even though they did not engage in actual combat while deployed in Korea, the operations flown were about as close to adversarial flying as a pilot could get. They flew many night patrol missions and combat readiness was a paramount priority.²⁴⁹

Halbert's tour in Korea was unaccompanied, and lasted for a full year. While there, he lived in a tent that was emplaced on a wooden frame, and was heated by an oil-burning stove. He shared the tent with four other officers, with a cot in each corner. The winter in Korea was extremely cold with temperatures regularly getting below zero degrees Fahrenheit. The chow-hall food was flavorful and abundant, and the Korean cooks were adept and skilled in their craft. They sometimes made kimchi, a native dish made from cabbage that is stored in the ground until it ferments. Halbert had several opportunities to go on liberty for sight-seeing trips where he visited Japan and the Korean capital of Seoul.²⁵⁰

After completing his tour in Korea, Halbert was assigned to his old alma mater at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. He was posted as an assistant professor teaching aviation science as part of the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program. He instructed college sophomores in military protocol and employment of Air Force assets. Since Halbert has always valued working with young people, he regarded this tour as one of his more enjoyable and rewarding assignments.

²⁴⁹ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

In combat operations, the Army is dependent on the Air Force to provide close air support to infantry operations. The Army artilleryman is responsible for fire support coordination, and must learn what assets the Air Force can bring to bear to provide close air support (CAS) to army troops on the ground. The instruction for this vital skill is taught at the Army Artillery School in Fort Sill near Lawton, Oklahoma. From his posting with the ROTC at the University of Oklahoma, Halbert was ordered to Ft. Sill to teach United States Air Force ground support capabilities to the Army students in attendance there. Often the school would have demonstrations for the students and dignitaries, and Halbert would serve as the Air Force moderator. He carried out these duties for about three and a half years. During his tour at Fort Sill, Bill and Avis were thrilled to welcome their third daughter, Rebecca, to the family.

In 1963, the Halbert family moved again, this time to Headquarters, Tactical Air Command, Langley, Virginia. Halbert was given the duty of command operational briefing officer, and in this role he provided daily briefings to the commander, a four-star general, and his staff. The commander of Tactical Air Command at that time was General Sweeney, who was briefed along with the vice, General Westover, and the other staff officers. Aircraft in the Tactical Air Command included fighters (F-86, F-84, F-86H), reconnaissance (B-57, B-45, F-101), transport (C-47, C-119, C-124), and medium bombers (B-66, B-57).²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/15/2016.

4.3: The American Dream and the Age of Aquarius

Throughout its history, each generation in American has had currents of countervailing inclinations, but rarely has there been such a confluence of jubilant optimism and rancorous turmoil as was experienced during the decade of the 1960's. It was an age that dawned with great hope and idealistic anticipation for worldwide peace and love, but like the decade before it, that popular image was to become the pleasant fiction of a fanciful mirage. During the "happy days" of the 1940's and 1950's – when returning veterans married in record numbers and the "Baby Boom" accounted for an explosion in the nation's birthrate – American culture seemingly honored and nurtured the notion of the stable nuclear family. Women readily embraced the traditional roles of wives and mothers, and men pursued college degrees in record numbers in a quest for higher paying professions.²⁵² With the economy booming and the middleclass suburbs becoming the preferred way of life, it seemed the American dream could be a reality for anyone who had the heart and desire to pursue it. That evanescent image of happiness – so sincerely desired, and for many genuinely achieved – did not last, however, for the culture was about to take a drastic turn.

In his discussion of the "American Dream," during the early years of the Great Depression, James Truslow Adams reflects the thinking of the day, and highlights the values Americans needed to develop and embrace. He emphasized that to have a richer and fuller life, as exemplified in that dream, Americans would have to shun the blind

²⁵² Calvert, De León and Cantrell, *The History of Texas*, 361.

ambition of personal prosperity and nurture a communal character which was distinctly higher, spiritually and intellectually, than in other lands. With unbridled pursuit of the material, at the expense of a nobler vision, Americans would squander the blessings bestowed by God and the founders. He pointed out the danger of rejecting civility and a cultivated mind, which were being wrongly shunned as undemocratic and a hindrance to progress.²⁵³

He urged that those who find themselves within the affluent layers of society are obligated to foster a “Great Society,” while those below must endeavor to get better economically to be sure, but also to advance in cultural pursuits. Values must not be ignored if a nation is to prosper. Those values must be agreed upon or education can have no goal; a great democracy is never characterized by selfishness, physical comfort, or cheap amusements. Above all, he said Americans must work together to make the country better, seeking quality over quantity; while at the same time seeking an authentic individual pursuit of the “abiding values of life.” This is only possible by frequent, enduring, and critical examination of our nation’s erstwhile tendencies, while never forgetting to promote and honor the good it has done. However, the answer comes not from the government bureaucrats or the giants of industry, but must spring from a refined greatness of the individual American spirit. If that greatness is distilled to the mere lust for wealth and power, then we must only expect what history has occasioned for time

²⁵³ Adams, *The Epic of America*, 410-412.

eternal, and that the hope and promise of the American Dream as experienced in self-government and self-fulfillment is forever lost.²⁵⁴

Adams' ability to extrapolate the essence of the American dream reflected the keen insight of a profound thinker, and an understanding of an earlier generation. Indeed this was the common and collective understanding of those who experienced the privations of the Great Depression and the uncertainties of World War II. Those Americans coming of age in the 1960's seemed to sense the beginnings of a new and modern age; while desiring to reap the dividends, it appeared few had the will, intellect, or sagacity to undertake the responsibilities that would insure the realization of that dream. The decade of the 1960's experienced a resonant fracture of societal underpinnings that resulted in acrimony, turmoil, and cultural discord seldom seen in the history of the nation. Profound social change was clearly needed, but the upheaval experienced during that time inflicted wounds on the nation's psyche that are still present today.²⁵⁵

4.4: Quagmires, Quicksand and a Foundering Nation

The American public was enthralled with the inauguration of John F. Kennedy as thirty-fifth president of the United States on January 20, 1961. Along with Jacqueline, his glamorous first lady, he ushered in a "new frontier" brimming with optimism and idealism. At forty-three, he was the youngest man ever elected president and the first one born in the 20th Century. The Kennedy family reflected youthful vitality and casual

²⁵⁴ Adams, *The Epic of America*, 412-416.

²⁵⁵ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 667.

sophistication. His short term in office is frequently remembered as an “American Camelot,” where his administration defended America from the evils of the age and advanced his lofty values and enthusiasm for the good for all. This romantic image belied the reality of the unfolding decade, however, where Kennedy reluctantly, but most assuredly encumbered the United States in the quagmire of Vietnam.²⁵⁶

After World War II, the French were only interested in reestablishing and continuing their traditional pre-war colonial arrangement in Indochina. The Vietnamese were quite savvy to this and knew that any overtures by the French, such as recognition of the Republic of Vietnam as a “free state” within the Indochinese Federation and French Union, were nothing more than attempts at subterfuge to prolong French colonial influence.²⁵⁷ French citizens at home, however, were willing to go only so far to regain their Asian colony, and a prolonged war was not their favorite choice of options. The Vietnamese, for their part, had many advantages. They had fought bravely against the Japanese and under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, and experienced a surge of nationalistic fervor like no other time. They were not going to tolerate the French reasserting control in their country and were willing to undergo extreme privation and challenges to exert their independence. They were even willing to make deals with the Chinese Communists, who they detested almost as badly as the French.

The Vietnam War actually had its beginnings for the United States in the mid-1950s. In seeking and acquiring the support of the Chinese government of Mao Zedong,

²⁵⁶ Logevall, *Embers of War*, 702-705.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 294.

Ho Chi Minh committed a fatal error. While it gave him a powerful ally against the French, it also inspired a formidable adversary which would be his nemesis for the rest of his life. For the United States, his decision was one that could not be ignored. America had been making every effort to buttress European post-war reconstruction, and stem the influence of growing communism. While generally in favor of independence for European colonies, the U.S. was not inclined to obstruct France, an important ally, in its efforts to reclaim Indochina. Once the Viet Minh fully embraced Ho Chi Minh and their new Communist allies in China, the United States had no choice but become fully committed to the endeavors of France in their former colony. France was able to convert its localized colonial struggle into a conflict of international significance pitting the anti-Communist forces of the West against the Communist Red Terror.²⁵⁸ After nine years of bloody warfare, the French lost to the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu. This occurred because the French could not understand that it was a political war where the Vietnamese people refused to be subjugated ever again, and would do anything to gain independence, to include giving full support to the Communist Viet Minh.

Prior to their defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 by Viet Minh forces, the French had appealed to the United States for support and assistance in Vietnam, primarily in the form of air power. President Truman provided a number of B-26 bombers and C-119 transports, but would not risk American pilots. Both he, and subsequently President Eisenhower, desired to help further, but balked at any prospect of a bombing campaign

²⁵⁸ Logevall, *Embers of War*, 198.

chiefly due to the reluctance of other NATO countries to get involved. Shortly after the French lost the battle, they agreed to pull out of Vietnam during the subsequent Geneva Conference, ending over 100 years of colonial rule. Vietnam was temporarily divided into two countries, North and South, until elections could take place. Over time, the Viet Minh struggle increased in the continued quest to reunite the two countries, and the United States was slowly pulled into the imbroglio. By the end of 1962, numbers of U.S. forces in Vietnam had increased from approximately 1000 to over 11,000.²⁵⁹

During these early years in Vietnam, the American military tended to disregard every lesson that had been learned by the French in the Indochina War. By supporting the South Vietnamese Army, it became a pseudo-combatant, providing advisors, aircraft, weaponry and expertise in a bid to do anything and everything – just short of committing combat troops – to insure military success. This was seen by the peasantry as white men fighting Asians on Asian soil; the Americans taking the role of the colonial French, while creating a puppet government that oppressed, taxed, and killed people, all in the name of nationalism. Of course, these dubious acts of volition all played into the hands of the Viet Cong.²⁶⁰

America, having resoundingly prevailed during World War II, was overconfident in its military ability to quash growing Communist influence in Indochina. It failed to learn the lessons of the French; that the war was fought in the political realm in which nationalism was paramount to the Vietnamese; that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese

²⁵⁹ Frankum, *Rolling Thunder*, 4-8.

²⁶⁰ Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire*, 35.

Army were seasoned and skillful conducting guerrilla warfare; and that America represented to the Vietnamese population a surrogate colonial power to which it would never yield. Ho Chi Minh fortuitously predicted that America, like the French, would ultimately suffer defeat.²⁶¹

In early 1965, as U.S. forces experienced rapid mobilization to Southeast Asia, Bill Halbert received orders to the 7th Air Force located in Saigon, South Vietnam. He was to be detached as an Air Force Liaison/Forward Air Controller serving with a U.S. Army unit operating in the field near the Da Nang area of Vietnam. Once he arrived and reported in, he was advised that there was no housing available and that he would need to find his own quarters in the vicinity of Saigon. He found a sardonic humor in this kind of treatment, typical of military administration, but took it in stride. In time, he realized that it was rather serious since Viet Cong sappers were known to target military personnel in the city. He was able to secure an apartment outside of town, on a small hillside overlooking the city. Through the months that followed, he was cautiously intrigued by his hand-picked quarters. They were comfortable, and he felt they were secure for the most part, but late in the late evening he could frequently observe firefights with the Viet Cong in the far distance, as the unmistakable imprint of red tracers flashed against the blackness of the night.²⁶²

Shortly after getting settled in Vietnam, Halbert was contacted by U.S. Air Force General George B. Simler, a senior officer he had served in the past. General Simler was

²⁶¹ Logevall, *Embers of War*, 712.

²⁶² Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/25/2016.

a highly decorated B-26 Marauder pilot with a storied career that began in World War II. As the Director of Operations, 7th Air Force, Tan Son Nhut Air Base,²⁶³ he arranged to have Halbert's orders changed to work for him as a mission planning officer at 7th Air Force Headquarters. In that position, Halbert also served as the command briefing officer for the General and his staff. The majority of Halbert's work in the headquarters entailed the preparation of aviation fragmentary orders for close air support (CAS) missions. These missions supported ground troops within the area of operations of the 7th Air Force. They included aircraft from the U.S. Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps, as well as South Vietnamese air assets.²⁶⁴

The 7th Air Force operated exclusively in the South Vietnam area, primarily in support of ground operations. U.S. forces enjoyed air superiority there and as a result, there were very few dogfights with enemy aircraft. Other assignments included air alert standby and night missions. The primary aircraft used by the U.S. Air Force in South Vietnam was the North American F-100 Super Sabre. Because of its older technology, this aircraft could not defend easily against the North Vietnamese Army's surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), and was therefore used to greater effect in the south. In North Vietnam, where enemy jets and SAM sites were much more prevalent, the Air Force used its more advanced fighters. Though their pilots had respectable skill, the North Vietnamese did not have many aircraft, so they would try to stay hidden until they could acquire a numerical advantage. They flew the Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-17 and MiG 21 fighters

²⁶³ "George B. Simler," Veteran Tributes, accessed June 7, 2016, <http://www.veterantributes.org/TributeDetail.php?recordID=1918>.

²⁶⁴ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/25/2016.

almost exclusively within North Vietnamese airspace, and would use hit-and-run tactics enabling them to lure American pilots into the north and within range of their antiaircraft artillery (AAA). For that and other reasons, the U.S. lost considerable numbers to AAA and SAMs.²⁶⁵

United States military forces used the Republic F-105 Thunderchief and McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom during sorties flown against targets in North Vietnam. With morose affection, pilots referred to the F-105 as the “Thud,” due to the sound it made when impacting the ground and because so many of the aircraft were victims of ground fire. Operations into the north originated from airbases in Thailand, with some coming off of aircraft carriers or from just across the northern border of South Vietnam. One of the unique aviation tactics developed during this time involved the use of aerial refuelers. Aircraft starting missions from Thailand could carry ample fuel to complete the mission within North Vietnam, but did not have enough to get back home. To solve this dilemma, military planners would always have a Lockheed Martin KC-130 tanker aircraft on station to tend returning jets that were in need of fuel. Because these were slow-moving propeller-powered planes, they would operate over friendly territory whenever possible. This capability was exclusive to the U.S. air forces and gave a substantial advantage in bombing operations.²⁶⁶

In spite of his assignment to the headquarters of the 7th Air Force – typically a rear echelon billet with duties rarely exposed to enemy contact – Halbert flew an

²⁶⁵ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/25/2016.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

assortment of missions against enemy forces in South Vietnam during his assignment there. Though it was not a requirement for his position, he convinced his boss that he would be better equipped for his job of planning assorted air strikes, if he had personally flown those types of aircraft under combat conditions. The frontline squadron commanders were delighted that a headquarters pilot would be willing to actually participate in their operations, and they enabled him to fly a broad variety of sorties. In one instance, Halbert was flown to a U. S. Navy aircraft carrier and landed on deck in a carrier-onboard-delivery (COD) aircraft. From there, he observed and operated alongside the Navy landing signal officer as carrier flight operations were underway.²⁶⁷

After spending several days at sea, Halbert returned to partake in numerous other land-based air operations. He served as a forward air controller (FAC) in the Rừng Sác area of the Mekong Delta. As a FAC, he flew in the slow moving Cessna L-19/O-1 Bird Dog, a single-engine, light-weight, high-wing monoplane that seated a pilot and the FAC. The aircraft enabled a FAC to observe the impact of bombs or artillery rounds, and then call adjustment information back to the attacking element to more effectively direct the ordinance on the target. It was a vulnerable platform, however, due to its slow speed, often less than 100 miles per hour. Due to the requirement to stay in the vicinity of the target and adjust or direct fire over a period of time, many of these aircraft succumbed to enemy ground fire. Halbert also conducted FAC missions from a helicopter and the back seat of the F-100 fighter. When flying in a jet, the FAC could mark the target with a

²⁶⁷ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/25/2016.

white phosphorous rocket that left behind a conspicuous white smoke for the following attack aircraft. In addition to these FAC missions, Halbert flew a number of close air support missions in the F-100, in support of ground troops. Due to the duration of these operations, nearly all the sorties required aerial refueling.²⁶⁸

Another aircraft support mission that Halbert joined was with the Douglas AC-47, nicknamed “Puff the Magic Dragon.” This version of the renowned WWII cargo aircraft contained three M134 7.62mm mini-guns that could fire up to 100-rounds per second. It was a rudimentary setup with all three guns on fixed mounts and no gun sites. Their muzzles were all directed out of the left side of the aircraft. Halbert explained, “When the gunners would fire a burst at the enemy, the tracers would direct the pilot as to what attitude the plane needed to fly. He then used a grease pencil on his wind screen to mark a crude aim-point keeping the bullets impacting the location.” The mark would help guide the pilot as he executed a pylon turn keeping the left wing on a specific point, while enabling the guns to fire on a fixed target for a sustained amount of time. Though very elementary, the technique proved quite effective.²⁶⁹

Halbert served a full year during his tour in Vietnam. In addition to his headquarters assignment in Saigon, his missions with the local squadrons required him to work from air bases at Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut. He immensely enjoyed flying with the U.S. pilots and crews there, as well as those with the South Vietnamese Air Force. He regarded them as top-notch pilots who knew and maintained excellent aircraft, and

²⁶⁸ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/25/2016.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

who operated well with U.S. personnel. As a result of his willingness to share the difficulties and dangers attendant to flying combat missions, Halbert developed an outstanding reputation with the squadrons assigned to his headquarters.²⁷⁰

There were few bad experiences remembered by Halbert during his tour in Vietnam. It was dangerous in a number of ways, of course. Men were regretfully lost during combat sorties and accidents, and several personnel in the 7th Air Force had been killed by assassins riding motorcycles on the streets of Saigon – young sappers who drove up and detonated a satchel charge or grenade near an unfortunate bystander. Perhaps his most sobering remembrance, however, was the necessity to pass the base morgue each day to and from work. The journey required him to observe the day's carnage, sometimes in graphic detail. It was a sobering reminder of the high cost of war, with payment accrued in human lives.²⁷¹

When he arrived home to Virginia in 1966, Halbert detected a bothersome change in public attitudes. He witnessed anti-war demonstrations, the hippie movement, and riots in the streets. By far his most disappointing experience entailed the acrimonious reception of his return by parts of the so-called peace movement. Halbert recalled, "I was disgusted by the behavior of this new younger generation, and did not understand how they could defame the military men who were risking their lives and dying in the service of their country." Halbert was thankful his family was close-knit, and as parents, he and Avis did all they could to offset the negative influences that seemed to pervade the

²⁷⁰ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/25/2016.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

culture. Fighting back against their adverse impact, Halbert applied his time and money to local volunteerism. He became a supporter of church and school organizations by helping with Boy Scouting and teaching a Sunday school class for college students. He even tried to teach English to those from foreign places who sought a better life in America. Besieged with the demands of work, however, he regretted having only limited time to donate in these capacities.²⁷²

In some ways, Halbert could understand the war protests. He remembered, “Ho Chi Minh was a shrewd leader, whose followers were highly skilled in insurgency warfare. American forces were having exceptional difficulty in locating and fighting the enemy in Vietnam, especially in the south. The Viet Cong would attack and then just melt away in the jungle.” Moreover, President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara took a tepid approach to the war strategy. They afforded the enemy relief and comfort in northern sanctuaries by refusing to bomb there. They also put pilots in harm’s way by allowing the northern missile sites to continue operating unmolested. Finally, they would not approve interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. North Vietnamese Colonel Bui Tin was convinced of Hanoi’s defeat had these actions been taken by the United States.²⁷³ It was extremely frustrating and hard on the morale of the American forces there. Halbert felt that if the United States government was going to fight a limited war with an enemy like the Vietnamese – who seemed to have an ample number of insurgents, who were dedicated to the cause, and who grew bolder by the day

²⁷² Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/25/2016.

²⁷³ Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, 20.

– then we should never have entered the war in the first place.²⁷⁴ There was a distinctive problem with the young people being asked to fight the war as well. Many were middle-class youths who had been pampered in their upbringing, and for whom personal convenience was of highest priority. Many acted as though it was unconscionable that their comfortable lives be interrupted for them to serve, and even be injured or killed for their country. Cloaked in moral outrage, student groups across the country fomented dissent and confrontation against a war that they openly hoped America would lose. While protesters superficially claimed righteous indignation against the war, they actually demonstrated a genuine hatred for the institutions and ideals of their country.²⁷⁵

Near the end, it seemed two Americas emerged. One was the peace movement, comprised of a very small, but extremely influential number whose basic argument was that the war was morally wrong. They claimed it was unjustified, wasteful, and dangerous – needing to be ended at whatever the cost. The movement was seen by most Americans as counter to the culture's values, and the nation's stability and patriotism. The other America consisted of a large sector of American society, mostly working class people, who saw the war in practical terms and eventually accepted that it was a bad decision and needed to stop. Even President Nixon seemed to realize at one point there was no way to win the war outright, but he had to avoid saying so in order to maintain a modicum of diplomatic leverage.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Interview of Bill Halbert, 3/25/2016.

²⁷⁵ Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, 18.

²⁷⁶ Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, 394-396.

What could be seen as unconscionable, however, were the efforts by the current of protesters who sought to ensure American and South Vietnamese defeat. After the war, North Vietnamese Colonel Bui Tin confided that the comfort provided from visits to Hanoi by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, Jane Fonda, and a number of American ministers gave the North Vietnamese high command reassurances that their strategy – to break American will on the home front – could be successful. The anti-war movement in America was indispensable to North Vietnamese success.²⁷⁷

History intimates the Vietnam War revolved around the political will of the Vietnamese, their love of country and longstanding hatred of the invader, no matter what his good intentions. Close examination of the conflict seems to reveal Hanoi's ultimate success was based, not on military action, diplomacy or the perceived merits of communism, but on the indomitable will of the Vietnamese populous combined with the diplomatic power gained from the residual effects of antiwar movements around the globe, especially in America.²⁷⁸

4.5: Baby Boom Babies

Bill Halbert spent the remainder of the Vietnam War in a variety of noncombat assignments in the continental U.S. and abroad. He served the U.S. Air Force at the Pentagon, as Deputy Base Commander, Ellington AFB, Houston, Texas, and as Chief of Air Force Personnel, Patch Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany. In 1967, he was selected to attend the National War College at Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. A top-level school

²⁷⁷ Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, 19.

²⁷⁸ Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, 311.

for senior officers of all the military branches and career civilian officials, the National War College prepares graduates for executive decision-making in conduct and strategy of American national security policy. The course of study included an extensive ten-month program of advanced readings, lectures, seminars and travel to worldwide locations. Halbert's section traveled to Indonesia, Kuala Lumpur, Australia, Korea, and Alaska. He genuinely relished the experience, especially his associations with the other students. The class included persons who were highly-selected and most had attained very distinguished careers. Two students were Air Force officers from the renowned Thunderbird Air Demonstration Unit. Halbert and his class of 140 students graduated in May 1968.²⁷⁹

Realizing the importance of his children's formative years, Halbert focused his hours at home teaching, reading and playing with his three young daughters. They were the center of his life, and he spent as much time with them as he was able. In turn, they simply adored him and were immensely proud of his service. He would take them to ride bicycles or fly kites. Together they attended baseball games, birthday parties, and other family events. He took them swimming and displayed his skill and love of springboard diving. By passing on his interest in sports, they enjoyed watching football, boxing, and golf together.²⁸⁰

On one occasion in 1972, they attended the Olympic diving trials in Houston, Texas, while cheering U.S. standout Micki King, who eventually won an Olympic gold

²⁷⁹ *The Rotunda*, (National War College, Washington, D.C., 1968).

²⁸⁰ Interview of Rebecca Halbert Mohr, 4/5/2016.

medal that year. He even worked at a department store one Christmas as a part-time sales clerk, hoping to set an example of how hard work can pay off. In spite of an extremely demanding work schedule at the Pentagon and other assignments, he still managed to take them on tours of Washington D.C. to see its museums, air shows, ballets and parades.²⁸¹

Many of these activities with the children he credits to Avis, since she spent summer vacations with the girls at their grandpa's home in Kilgore. From their various assignments around the United States, he would dutifully drive them across country to Texas, return to his airbase for work, and then drive back to pick them up a month or so later. Sometimes, while flying across country, he would fly low by their grandpa's house in a jet and dip his wings, while the girls happily ran around the yard screaming and pointing proudly at their daddy.²⁸²

Through the years, being a military wife often required Avis to display her strength and independence. She was the consummate mother, always tender and loving, and taking her children on frequent outings at home and abroad. Like Bill, she had been accustomed to moving often, and military life seemed to suit her well. Very outgoing and cordial, Avis made friends easily, and while the frequent moves could be taxing – she made 15 moves in 26 years – after a time, moving became an art-form; she welcomed the change of pace, reunion with old friends, and opportunities to see and experience new

²⁸¹ Interview of Mundina Halbert O'Driscoll, 4/16/2016.

²⁸² Ibid.

adventures. Today she spends many joyful hours corresponding by mail and calling their many former neighbors and friends.²⁸³

On September 1, 1977, after over 34 years of military service, Bill Halbert retired from the Air Force with the rank of lieutenant colonel.²⁸⁴ He had served during three wars, piloting B-26 bombing missions over Europe as a teenager, and a few years later as a jet pilot in Korea and Vietnam. He logged over 4000 hours of flying time. His personal decorations include the Bronze Star, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, and Meritorious Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, as well as a number of campaign ribbons, air medals and other decorations.²⁸⁵ Halbert never felt as though he made any great sacrifices during his military career, but he obviously served his country well, and positively impacted those with whom he fought alongside, and worked with during his years of service. He claimed only to be deeply satisfied that he could faithfully serve his country for that long of time.²⁸⁶

When the subject of military life comes to mind, most people immediately think of service and sacrifice. Having given a lifetime towards the protection of his country, spanning the greatest war in the history of human conflict – as well as two others which arguably contributed to the fall of communism and victory of the Cold War – Bill Halbert’s life embodies the essence of forbearance and patriotic solicitude. He would be quick to say that his favorite memories of military service included the thrill of flight and

²⁸³ Interview of Avis Franke Halbert, 4/7/2016.

²⁸⁴ “Retirement Order,” *Department of the Air Force Form 45*, April 25, 1977.

²⁸⁵ Interview of Mundina Halbert O’Driscoll, 4/16/2016.

²⁸⁶ Interview of Cindy Halbert Cisco, 4/9/2016.

the close personal friendships he made with other pilots. Perhaps less obvious – only due to his modest demeanor and quiet professionalism – emerges a solid satisfaction for a consistent, rapid and honorable response to duty’s call, when a grateful country needed him most. Through his years in the Air Force, he was invigorated by the challenges of new assignments, travel to distant lands, new friendships made, and old ones renewed. While Halbert admits that military life was difficult – including family trials, frequent moves, the anxiety of wartime service, and constant separation from friends and loved ones – through it all he took personal pride in giving every assignment the best he had, whether in war or peace.²⁸⁷

It is evident that for Bill and Avis, there is no greater treasure for them than their loving family. That is not to suggest parenting was without challenges, but the abundance of happiness associated with raising their children eclipsed any difficulty sustained in their upbringing. With firm reliance on God, and their complimentary skills and fidelity, Bill and Avis – his soul-mate of 65 years – have managed to raise three extraordinary girls, who in turn have applied the same sound and solid guidance to families of their own. Their common desire to create a close-knit, compatible, and caring progeny has been realized, but only through the consistent application of time, attention and love. Bill’s constant hope is that his example of fatherhood has been an enduring asset to his daughters; that as a mentor, his lifelong demonstration of dependability,

²⁸⁷ Interview of Bill Halbert, 4/22/2016.

honor, and concern for others, reflects some of the highest ideals for which a person can live.²⁸⁸

4.6: A Shining City on a Hill

It is undeniable that Bill Halbert has a deep love for his country, and that he believes its brightest days are still ahead. He is optimistic about the role America can play in world affairs and believes it is still the best hope. When he compares the United States of today with that he knew during the World War II years, Halbert believes America's military is stronger. "Volunteers are a far better way to staff the armed forces, which were manned mostly through the draft during World War II," remembered Halbert. "Soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines have better equipment and technology which give them the edge they need for success." However, he sees a lack of the same dedication by ordinary Americans towards the defense of freedom and the common good. People seem to want more, and expect more for themselves, while doing less in return for the country and their fellow citizens. "During the years of World War II, Americans seemed less self-absorbed, and more willing to give of their time and money to assist others," Halbert surmised. "Authority figures such as parents, teachers and ordinary adults gave the impression of being more responsible, respectable and decent in their personal lives. They lived as an example to be followed, and youngsters readily accepted their guidance. Few seemed to complain about their situation in life."²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Interview of Bill Halbert, 4/22/2016.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

Today there is a sharp divergence in the way many Americans think about their country. The notion of American exceptionalism is a hot topic of contention, and a variety of definitions for it abound, depending on political persuasion. However, broad-minded people can agree that there are unique differences in the history and character of America, as compared to other western European countries specifically, and all countries generally. Those differences center on the founding ideals of the United States. The basic premise is that governments of other countries are usually based on social order and hierarchy, of which royalty or class is paramount, or at least a part. By contrast, America places emphasis on opportunity for all which, when applied to the fundamentals of capitalism, will produce wealth and prosperity.²⁹⁰

Few level-headed people believe that America is without its problems or faults. However, many are convinced it has been, and still is, a shining example of liberty and justice in the world. If the United States can make an impact through honorable leadership in political, economic, and moral issues then, worldwide perfection may not be achieved but, no alternative would be regarded as better. Even if America were exceptional in this sense, however, it does not imply that it would remain so. High regard and a reputation of excellence is not a gift or an entitlement, but have to be continually earned. In doing so, exceptionalism becomes more than just a partisan foofaraw or an academic squabble. People everywhere would benefit from America doing what it takes to remain an exceptional country.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Friedman and Mandelbaum, *That Used to Be Us*, 348-349.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, 350.

During Halbert's time as aide-de-camp for General Timberlake, he was inclined to improve his golf game as much as possible. Pouring himself into regular practice, he studied the best techniques and tips for improving his handicap. He was inspired by the golfing greats of the time, like Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus. He found the variety of courses, equipment, professionals and personalities to be fascinating, and they did much to spur him to excellence. As he refined his game, Halbert realized he was improving enough to compete on an official level. His first tournament was an intramural competition between squadrons and other units within the U.S. Air Force. Hardly anything else could have improved his game more than playing against other outstanding golfers within the armed services. "The more I practiced, the more I came to understand what shots I should not make," Halbert recalled. His swing developed over time and while he became highly skilled in all aspects of golf, his forte became the short game – within 100-yards of the flag. He performed well there because it was about the same distance he focused on in his yard at home, a place where he enjoyed unlimited practice time.²⁹²

Halbert eventually competed in the U.S. Air Force Worldwide Championship for three consecutive years. Beginning in 1972, he placed 3rd, 2nd and 1st respectively. He also finished within the top three places at the United States Inter-service Competition. He placed 1st and 2nd at the U.S. Air Force, Europe Golf Championship in 1973 and 1974; as well as being the club champion at Patch Barracks, Stuttgart, West Germany in

²⁹² Interview of Bill Halbert, 4/4/2016.

1976.²⁹³ His Air Force commanders offered him the time and opportunities to polish his skills and also compete, for which Halbert is profoundly grateful. He did more to hone his ability by using the facilities offered to Air Force personnel, than he could have ever done while working elsewhere. It was not easy competing for championships within the armed services. Competitors were rarely able to practice on the tournament courses ahead of time, and they did not have the luxury of local caddies to provide input on course hazards and distances.²⁹⁴

After retirement from the Air Force, Halbert moved his family to New Braunfels, Texas and soon qualified to become a Professional Golf Association (PGA) professional. The PGA had an auspicious beginning when founded in 1916 by department store owner Rodman Wanamaker. In the early years of the twentieth century, officials in the United States Golf Association (USGA) made a number of clumsy attempts to preserve amateur status in the golfing community. By their inconsistent and hypocritical machinations to define what a golf amateur was not, they managed to disillusion and alienate amateurs and professionals alike. After more than a few years of negative publicity impelled by the USGA, Wanamaker desired to host a tournament for pros only, and promote players who were good enough to be paid for their skills. He created a permanent trophy for the tournament and added a hefty purse. Since the USGA seemed steadfast on disparaging them, professional golfers decided to set up their own association. It was dedicated to promoting the game, organizing championships, looking out for the trade interests of

²⁹³ “Halbert Beats Coakley in Championship,” *Stuttgart Citizen*, September 22, 1975, 7.

²⁹⁴ Interview of Bill Halbert, 4/4/2016.

their members, and creating opportunities for employment. Wannamaker's offer was the perfect catalyst and the PGA came to be.²⁹⁵

Halbert's entry into the PGA afforded him profuse opportunities to engage in tournaments and events throughout Texas and the United States. In addition to numerous tournament titles, perhaps Halbert's most notable golf accomplishments involved his competitions in the U.S. Senior Open and the PGA Senior Open. He qualified for each of those tournaments during three different years. While playing in the U.S. Senior Open at the rugged Oakland Hills Country Club, Birmingham, Michigan, Halbert opposed the golf greats of Sam Snead, Arnold Palmer, Billy Casper, and 1961 U.S. Open Champion Gene Littler. The U.S. Golf Association lowered the qualification age from 55 to 50 that year, specifically so that Littler and Palmer could make the age limit. During the first round of play, Halbert carded a score of 75, which was good enough to match Littler's best efforts that day.²⁹⁶

Even though Halbert was prolifically successful as a military golfer, and later as a PGA professional, his most memorable recollections involve his volunteer work with junior golfers. In 1997, at 72 years-of-age, he was able to single-handedly raise more than \$8000 for junior golf while playing a 108-hole marathon at the Sundance Golf Course in New Braunfels. For his dedicated service, he was crowned Junior Golf Leader and Golf Senior Professional of the Year by the South Texas PGA Section.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ Moss, *The Kingdom of Golf*, 78-81.

²⁹⁶ David King, sports ed. "Pro Earns Spot in Senior Open," *Herald-Zeitung*, New Braunfels, Texas, July 1, 1981.

²⁹⁷ Tom Erickson, sports ed. "Golf Anyone? Halbert plays 108 holes in Monday marathon," *Herald-Zeitung*, New Braunfels, Texas, August 5, 1997.

In 1998, Bill Halbert retired from the golf business, but not before he had spent 21 years as a club professional with Landa Park Golf Course and other links in the New Braunfels area. While the years there included long hours requiring the course to open before daylight and close in the late evening after dark, he loved his work, the people, and the game of golf. Often having to deal with a demanding public and at times a passel of irate customers, he somehow managed to be a friend to all. It was an extremely satisfying second career and perhaps a calling, since it afforded him opportunities to positively influence countless people, and pass on his enthusiasm to youngsters just starting out, on up to seniors who had played for a lifetime.²⁹⁸

One of his most memorable moments had been during the Senior PGA Championship in West Palm Beach, Florida during 1992. During the first day of play, Arnold Palmer had completed the round with a course record of 64. “As I finished up my round for the day and was heading to my car, I strolled by the driving range and noticed Palmer and his caddie,” Halbert recalled. “Always the professional – and refusing to allow the effects of a course record go to his head – Palmer was still practicing and adjusting club grips, even as the sun was going down.” Harkening back on his years of golf, Bill reminisced about how much he enjoyed the friendships of his fellow professionals; friendships based on the common enjoyment of high stakes competition,

²⁹⁸ Tom Erickson, sports ed., “Halbert truly is a pro among golf pros,” *Herald-Zeitung*, New Braunfels, Texas, August 30, 1998.

their uncommon but mutual abilities to excel, and their shared experiences in such a complex and difficult sport.²⁹⁹

If one were to search for where Bill Halbert acquired his zest for living and how this attitude has impacted a lifetime of success and enjoyment, they would find he has made it his personal quest to live for the benefit of others, to instill in people the virtues of honesty, humility, patriotism and respect for law and order. His life reflects the traits of honor, cooperation and service, as well as love and esteem for God. It has been his creed to answer the call of duty, leave no task unfinished, and to strive for excellence in every endeavor undertaken.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ Bill Halbert Interview, 4/4/2016.

³⁰⁰ Bill Halbert Interview, 4/22/2016.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Rebuild in beauty on the burnt out coals...not to the heart's desire, but the soul's.

~ James Truslow Adams³⁰¹

The impulse of this study had been to extract and examine the motivations of the World War II generation and the features which enabled them to overcome the enormous threats they faced from Germany, Italy and Japan. They have been called the “Greatest” and by that, one would infer they were exceptional. It is important to remember that, while there were many exceptional people among them, and their collective contributions were extraordinary, to postulate an entire generation was inherently exceptional tends to confer perfection – and that would misrepresent history. As mentioned in the beginning, the term, “American exceptionalism,” is rife with a variety of implications and misunderstandings. Some have claimed the expression infers hubris and exclusion of the merits of other countries; they would rather regard America to be ordinary and therefore more acceptable to the world.³⁰² The opposite tack is to proclaim a universal standard of right which springs from the “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God,”³⁰³ emphasizing the desire to see the United States as special, and distinct from the other democracies of the world. This view holds the nation in the highest esteem, while possessing a history that is

³⁰¹ Adams, *The Epic of America*, 400.

³⁰² Ceaser, “The Origins and Character,” 2.

³⁰³ Thomas Jefferson, “The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America,” In Congress, July 4, 1776, 1.

without equal.³⁰⁴ One of these separate views – or some variation that combines features of both – is held by most Americans, and recent use of the idea to advance assorted political agendas does not help to understand the concept. Putting liberal or conservative considerations aside, the World War II generation had characteristics that distinguished it from others in this nation’s history. It was not a perfect generation and it did not always measure up to the ideals that Americans like to associate with their country. What this era did accomplish however, was of such importance and consequence, that we naturally venerate their contributions and honor their memory.

The traditional American ideal holds that a vigor and boldness has reverberated through the ages that defined a people and a country. An esprit, uncommon to the old world, was born and nurtured in the hearts of the first explorers, carried forward by the pilgrims, and was immortalized in the exertions of every generation that ever carried the burdens and endured the vicissitudes that freedom requires. Their toils consisted of more than extraordinary courage and sacrifice bound by a common desire to build and unite a unique country where any could come who yearned to be free. They infused that spirit with a sense of character and decency coveted by all. It defined generation after generation, passed on from the founding fathers, to business leaders, statesmen and military officers; through institutions of higher learning, religious organizations, private enterprises, art and literature. Instilled within the entire culture was a sense of fair play, liberty, opportunity, justice, and the importance that all citizens embrace and adopt those

³⁰⁴ Ceaser, “The Origins and Character,” 3.

values. Echoes of honor tolled across the years and each progeny did their part to pass it on. As becoming and patriotic as these principles sound, they are ideals to strive for and no generation has ever completely lived up to them, not even that of World War II.

One of the charitable dispensations of Providence, however, is that perfection is not required for a country to ascend to greatness. America has never been perfect, nor has its heroes, but the country has indeed had heroes, imperfect as they were. Furthermore, the United States has been heroic in spite of its profuse mistakes and darker moments throughout its past. What helped make it so, were the earnest efforts and abundant sacrifices endured by those of that World War II era.

The sum and substance of this study has yielded ample credence the Americans of the World War II generation were convincingly extraordinary – if not solely in their own right, then surely by the uniqueness of their circumstances. The two decades prior to war – as difficult as they were – molded those Americans like nothing else could, and enabled their response to the enormity of the Axis evils. The legacy of the industrial age in the 1920s produced previously unimaginable advances in daily living. Though not always of American origin, ingenuity and innovation were carried forward with an abundance of inventions and technological breakthroughs. Great strides in manufacturing, medicine, and science created prosperity and comfortable living conditions, especially for average, ordinary people. They enjoyed a better quality of life and understood its benefits as work – eased by the proliferation of machinery – became much more tolerable, and leisure, a common pursuit. Yet how this decade contributed most, was in molding skill and creative capacities that would later allow individual resourcefulness and enterprise to gain a winning edge during the war.

With the calamity of the Great Depression, came an attitude of philanthropy and generosity that forced, in large part, the erasure of class and status. In doing so, Americans were willing to pull together for the common good, to help their neighbor and take the time needed to alleviate others' suffering and discomfort. The experience of the Depression fostered a collective attitude where everyone – man, woman and child – was willing to do their part and pitch in to their utmost capabilities; to contribute anything they had, though small or insignificant, to see that victory was achieved.

When war came in 1941, success hinged on active and effective use of these attributes. Examples were abundant and these attitudes were put into action from the outset, on both fronts of the war. In the Pacific, an illuminating example came with the incredible encounter of Admiral Chester Nimitz's American fleet with the Imperial Japanese Navy, under Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto.

Fortunately for the Japanese, it was not necessary to sink American ships to gain a significant tactical advantage in the naval combat arena. Since the nearest facilities for U.S. warship repairs were in Hawaii, combat damaged vessels were required to travel hundreds of miles from their area of operations for major repairs. While the United States had only four carriers operating in the Pacific theatre in the opening months of 1942, that could prove an insufferable liability. At the Battle of the Coral Sea in May, two carriers were hit – the USS Lexington which was lost, and the USS Yorktown which was severely damaged – and only the carriers USS Hornet and USS Enterprise remained to patrol the entire Pacific theatre.

Admiral Yamamoto sensed an opportunity, and planned an attack on Midway Island to lure those last carriers into the open. In executing his plan, the two U.S.

carriers' aircraft actually jumped Yamamoto first, but his fleet ships and aircraft shot down every attacking American plane. While his fighters and bombers were back on the decks refueling and rearming, however, he was surprised by dive bomb squadrons from another unexpected carrier – the USS Yorktown. In an inconceivable ocean-borne overhaul, hundreds of navy technicians had worked around the clock to repair the Yorktown after the Battle of Coral Sea – many flying out to the ship to begin work on its way back to Pearl Harbor. Mobilizing twelve hundred workers, the navy managed to complete the estimated three-month repairs in just forty-eight hours. Yorktown's bombers sank three of the Japanese carriers, and the fourth was later dispatched by reserve aircraft from the remaining U.S. vessels. The Japanese had lost four fleet aircraft carriers and all their 248 carrier-based aircraft – but even more devastating was the death of over 300 seasoned pilots when the ships went down. Yamamoto and the Japanese Navy would never recover. The hopes of the Rising Sun had set forever, during that first week in June 1942.³⁰⁵

U.S. Army Air Force units in the Europe had a burdensome task dealing with the proliferation of antiaircraft artillery faced on nearly every mission. The squadrons which flew the big lumbering B-17 Flying Fortress bombers had little alternative than to fly straight and level while over the target so the bombardier to get an accurate fix on the bomb sights. That mandate made them easy targets for the German gunners on the ground. Finding an alternative which challenged orthodoxy, Bill Halbert's B-26

³⁰⁵ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 611.

Marauders of the 320th Bombardment Group used the plane's capabilities to fly in smaller formations and adjust positions quickly. Their new strategy enabled them to change altitude and speed over the target making it nearly impossible for flak gunners to predict their location. They employed this technique so effectively, their unit achieved the lowest loss rate of an B-26 Marauder unit during the war.³⁰⁶

Another illuminating example of how Halbert's generation pulled together during the war was exhibited by the folks back in the states. While the GIs were on the front slugging it out with the Nazis and the Japanese, nearly every citizen was doing their part on the home-front. Halbert's father and Avis Franke's father grew "Victory gardens" along with their neighbors and they gladly purchased war bonds, endured gas rationing, and conducted scrap drives. A great number of retirees returned to work, and by 1943, women working in defense plants and the civilian work force totaled almost 6 million. Half of those were employed as the renowned "Rosie the Riveter" providing the skill and drive that helped win the war from home.³⁰⁷ There were also over 245,000 women who volunteered to serve as WACs (Women's Army Corps) and WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Services).³⁰⁸

A large number of Hollywood celebrities did their share for the war effort. James Arness, from the TV western, *Gunsmoke* earned a Bronze Star and Purple Heart at Anzio. Movie stars Charlton Heston, Art Carney and Earnest Borgnine, as well as Tony Curtis, Lee Marvin and Charles Bronson all served in uniform. Dallas Cowboys coach, Tom

³⁰⁶ Tannehill, *Saga of the 320th*, 74.

³⁰⁷ Ken Burns, *When Things Get Tough*.

³⁰⁸ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 611.

Landry flew B-17 bombers, and New York Yankee legend Yogi Berra was a gunner with the U.S. Navy.³⁰⁹ The entertainment industry also made other important contributions. Captain Ronald Reagan was in charge of deploying a documentary film company to record the horror of the Nazi concentration and death camps, and as mentioned previously, Director Frank Capra contributed masterfully with his seven-film propaganda series, *Why We Fight*, giving purpose and encouragement to military and civilians alike. The redoubtable war correspondent, Ernie Pyle, lived and died among the GIs on the battle front, sending his dispatches home to be printed and read by an adoring public. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished war correspondence in 1943.³¹⁰

In spite of the obstacles faced due to discrimination, courageous blacks distinguished themselves in combat. The famous 99th Fighter Squadron – affectionately known as the “Red-Tail Angels” from their aircraft markings – fought with discipline and honor earning the respect of their fellow airmen. The U.S. Marine Corps confounded Japanese code-breakers by engaging Navajo Marines to send tactical messages in their native language. Japanese Americans – many recruited from the internment camps – served with high honor in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team which became the most decorated American unit of the war.³¹¹ It was perhaps the finest example of the unofficial American motto, *E Pluribus Unum* (Out of many, one), where the strength of America

³⁰⁹ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 598.

³¹⁰ Pyle, *Ernie's War*, 23.

³¹¹ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 597.

was displayed, not in its diverse identities, but in its diverse origins all working towards a common goal.³¹²

In addition to these accomplishments of the World War II generation, other notable circumstances rendered the era distinct. First, there has been no other time in which the America had been required to fight as part of a genuine alliance. It consisted primarily of Britain, France, Russia and the United States. At the outset of the agreement, leadership of the Western Front was immediately offered to the U.S. Moreover, no generation has ever had to confront such well-equipped, determined, and incorrigible enemies in the entire history of the United States – a feat which was carried out simultaneously, on two broad global fronts.³¹³ The Nazis were formidable adversaries, and under Hitler sought to gain control of all Europe, with future sights on the United States. They had achieved exceptional advances in technology, and their scientists had already accomplished nuclear fission with the goal of constructing an atomic bomb. Perhaps the most chilling aspect of the Reich – as demonstrated by its treatment of Jews and other non-Aryans – was its capacity for unspeakable cruelty.³¹⁴

Similarly, Japan had for years exhibited its warlike tendencies and barbaric treatment of soldiers and civilians alike. In 1933, the military warlords took over the Japanese government, and presided over the subsequent invasion of China and the horrendous rape of Nanking – proving the inestimable evil of America's future foe.³¹⁵

³¹² Prager, *Still the Best Hope*, 375-376.

³¹³ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 589.

³¹⁴ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, 465.

³¹⁵ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 579.

Japan's fanatical and warlike society ranged wide and deep. The Bushido warrior Code – which mandated death rather than loss of face – was deeply ingrained in the Japanese psyche. Towards the end of the war, Tojo's kamikaze pilots illustrated the extent of the country's fanaticism as they pummeled American naval vessels, sometimes 350 planes at one time. In all, more than 4500 kamikaze planes were shot down before the war ended.³¹⁶

Even distinctions between the United States and its allies were evident, though they were much subtler. One was highlighted by the choice between nighttime and daytime bombing missions. Britain preferred the nighttime option which greatly reduced their aircrew combat casualties from anti-aircraft flak and enemy fighters. However, since there was no way to actually see the target, hundreds of bombs were dropped in a certain area with the hope that some would impact the target. This, of course, meant a tremendous risk of non-military civilian bombing casualties and unintended collateral damage.³¹⁷ United States Army Air Force strategic leaders, in contrast, opted for daytime bombing missions using the secret Norden bomb site. It enabled far more accurate bombing, but required daylight to view the bomb targets. One observer who compared bomb damage results estimated the Norden site as being ten times more accurate than the British night bombing.³¹⁸ Of course, American airmen suffered much higher casualties, and many more planes lost as a result.

³¹⁶ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 625.

³¹⁷ Werrell, "The Strategic Bombing of Germany," 704-705.

³¹⁸ Overy, *The Bombers and the Bombed*, 101.

The Lend-Lease program was a distinguishing aspect of prewar contributions to the Allies that continued even after American involvement. It made war materials, weapons, and vehicles available to Allied countries on a massive scale. While it was true America certainly benefited in payments and favorable treatment by sending these materials, its allies' progressive strength, and their ultimate success, was significantly enhanced from this assistance. Britain would have fallen without it, and Russia gained immense advantage. The Soviets prevailed against the Germans in the pivotal 1943 Battle of Kursk, in large part due to the additional supplies and vehicles furnished by U.S. Lend Lease.³¹⁹

After the Axis surrendered, America initiated an array of benevolent actions that were incomparable in their implementation. As the long and expensive process of postwar rebuilding began, the U.S. devised the Marshall Plan to alleviate the associated costly burdens, and to encourage democracy at the expense of communism. It provided over \$17 billion – along with expertise and support of every type – to encourage and uplift the devastated European countries.³²⁰ In contrast, Stalin attempted to wrest freedom from western Berlin in 1948, while President Truman staged a tenacious rescue effort and saved the city.³²¹ In the Pacific, under the guidance of General MacArthur, the Japanese gained a new lease on life as the U.S. presided over the formation of a new constitution and new government enabling an eventual surge in postwar prosperity.

³¹⁹ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 600.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 638.

³²¹ *Ibid*, 640.

For all the accomplishments achieved by America during World War II, victory was hardly certain; colossal mistakes were made and some uncomfortable compromises were required. Having gained the ability to decipher the Japanese radio codes for secret messages, and receiving repeated attack warnings, Admiral Husband Kimmel and General Walter Short were caught completely off-guard at Pearl Harbor. The destruction of the Pacific fleet, with thousands killed and wounded, should have been completely prevented.³²²

The Allies were beset by a quantity of other problems from war's outset. U.S. military forces were undermanned, inadequately equipped and poorly led. Of the first five U.S. Army corps commanders who faced the Germans, three were fired for incompetence. President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill often argued bitterly over war strategy and an uneasy alliance was struck by America, Britain and France with Russian leader Joseph Stalin, a mass-murderer and tyrant. Towards the end of the war the Allies engaged in extensive fire-bombings against civilian populations in Japan and Germany. Finally, President Truman ordered the first atomic bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. On the surface, these are actions not usually paired with the American ideals of justice, liberty and decency.³²³

In recent years, a well-known critic and prolific writer of American Exceptionalism, Godfrey Hodgson, has promoted the idea that American history has been coerced to expound on a singular narrative which is both distorted and selective. He

³²² Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 394.

³²³ Rick Atkinson, "Ten Things Every American Student Should Know About Our Army in World War II," *Footnotes*, 14 no. 15 (May 2009): 4, accessed June 6, 2016, <http://www.fpri.org/footnotes/1415.200905.atkinson.usarmywwii.html>

proclaims it is an American tradition to exaggerate its differences and to excessively tout its uniqueness. The U.S. downplays the values derived and shared with Europe, and its historical connections with the rest of the world. Hodgson acknowledges the nobility of America's distinctive ideals; government of the people, the rule of law, political subordination to the constitution, and protection of individual rights. Hodgson declares, however, that it cannot be good for individuals or nations to believe things that are not quite true. He portends that those who claim America exceptional do so at the call of God, history or some other higher power in order to rule others by superior force. He characterizes exceptionalism as the myth that seems to justify, and even demand, American domination over other peoples.³²⁴

In addition, Hodgson claims any greatness America has achieved was overwhelmingly derived from international historical influences. Like many who criticize the notion of exceptionalism, he fears that if Americans believe they are unique and special, it will adversely affect the way they treat other people around the world.³²⁵ In conclusion, he proclaims that how a country acts in the world is a reflection of what it has become, both abroad and at home. His observation and premonition is that America's current hubris is the indicator of its eventual demise and destruction.³²⁶

Hodgson's take on exceptionalism is one held by many critics of America in today's politically-charged climate, but ordinary American citizens could tell when the country was at fault, and they were not afraid to point it out. Within the combat areas,

³²⁴ Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism*, 14-15.

³²⁵ Ibid, 155-156.

³²⁶ Ibid, 189.

Bill Halbert and his fellow officers, understood that over-confidence by military leaders in Korea – and perhaps even hubris by the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations in Vietnam – were responsible for those wars being waged and extended without ultimate victory. It would be quite a stretch, however, to claim as does Hodgson, those wars were conducted so America could rule over others by superior force.

America made missteps and mistakes in its leadership and foreign affairs from the World War II era and beyond, but it is fair to say that no country has done more for other people than the United States. Whether friend or foe, America has occupied war-torn countries only as long as it takes to ensure their freedom or security. In the wars where America has stayed behind to do this – Germany, Japan and Korea – those countries have prospered and grown into thriving democratic governments, and have become economically prosperous. In countries where America has departed prematurely or has left behind inadequate support – Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan – chaos has ensued. It is instructive to note, that whenever other countries experience great evil, from man or nature, they look first to America for help.³²⁷

In the course of human conflict, the sad truth is that sometimes difficult choices have to be made, especially relating to world affairs. At the very beginning of World War II, the decision by President Roosevelt to relocate Japanese Americans from the U.S. west coast to internment camps was an unfair and regrettable policy, but at the time he had prodigious information to believe Japan was a viable and imminent threat to the

³²⁷ Prager, *Still the Best Hope*, 383.

homeland. He accordingly took the steps he deemed necessary to protect national security.³²⁸

In many instances during the war, it was impossible for the choices forced upon Allied leaders to be distinguished as good or bad; they could only be considered bad or worse. Roosevelt and Churchill understood Stalin was evil incarnate, but support for the Russians meant forcing Hitler to fight on two fronts, while over-extending his resources. At that point of the war, Hitler was regarded a worse threat. Likewise, the decision to drop the atomic bomb had both military and moral consequences; however, the military question was more easily answered than the moral one. Even for religious people who believe in moral absolutes, morality is almost always dictated by circumstances. Bombing Japan with a nuclear weapon – what would normally be considered immoral – became a moral act when weighed against the alternative of continuing a war where millions more, both Japanese and Americans, would otherwise be killed in an assault on the Japanese mainland. When thinking of moral choices, it is important to distinguish that U.S. actions – as bad as they may be viewed by some – were taken to stop the war, not prolong it.³²⁹

The life of Bill Halbert reflects an era when some of the most consequential events in the nation's history took place, and his generation acquitted themselves admirably. A glance back at his time during the twentieth century affirms both the good and the bad; the exhilarating prosperity and the profane exorbitance of the roaring

³²⁸ Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History*, 609.

³²⁹ *Ibid*, 624-625.

twenties; the despair of the Great Depression, which evoked resilience, unity of effort, goodwill, and brotherhood; the trials, agony and uncertainty of World War II, transformed into determination, sacrifice, teamwork, and finally elation in victory and peace. Yet, no matter how bad things got, hope was never lost. Americans of the World War II generation had difficult problems to solve. At times they stumbled, and had to adapt and learn better ways to accomplish the task. Things did not always work out for the better, and people were killed. As fondly as we like to think of this era, it is important to remember that generation suffered immensely, and many would never make it home. Even with all their shortcomings and mistakes, most tried to do the right thing, to reduce suffering and ultimately end the devastation of war as soon as possible. Most displayed a rare form of the American spirit with an equal measure of optimism for their future, and magnanimity towards their former enemies.

When America finally entered the war and began sending troops to Europe, the famous French author of *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry – who was exiled in New York – lavished praise on the United States in eloquent terms:

Friends in America, I would like to do you complete justice; 50,000 soldiers were going to war, not for the United States, but for humanity, for human respect, for human freedom and human greatness...³³⁰

The United States made an unequalled contribution to the Axis defeat, and thereafter, in binding up the world's wounds. Those who lived, and died, through that time are responsible for its success, and deserve our unrelenting gratitude for their

³³⁰ “The Great Landings/The Noose (1942--1943),” 5/6, *Apocalypse: The Second World War*, Directed by Isabelle Clarke, Jean-Louis Guillaud, and Henri de Turenne, Smithsonian Channel, 2009. Accessed June 29, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nn01ZjNlLC8&list=PLudGFkCtFePZz7dufbQCOEjYO_C85uPOT.

contributions. The greatness of the “Greatest Generation” owes to the enormity of its involvement in World War II, and the unity of purpose in its commitment to victory. Its unmatched industrial might – combined with the unceasing contributions of scientists and engineers throughout the war – accounted for the technological edge needed for victory. Perhaps most importantly, however, was a single-minded dedication to preserving freedom, ending the carnage and concluding hostilities, but not before unconditional victory was secured. Once the war was ended, it was Americans’ intent to establish and prolong peace. This was evident in their actions before, during, and after the war, which made this generation shine none other has ever done in history, before or since. Because of the totality of their efforts, their economic and industrial might, their inventive resourcefulness, and adherence to their founding ideals, America displayed an exceptional contrast to other countries that defended the free world during World War II. They have been christened the “Greatest Generation,” an illustrious sobriquet that was seldom claimed, but justly earned.

In following the life of Bill Halbert, it becomes apparent to those who knew and worked with him, that he reflected the exceptional qualities possessed by many of the period. He was inspired by the events happening around him, but took them in stride and did his part as he saw the need and opportunity. Never one to shirk a task, Halbert was ready and able to take on the challenges he faced. He loved the military, but loved his family even more, exerting his energies to raise and nurture each of his children in his own way. He exemplified the attributes of industry, loyalty, creativity and generosity. During his years in the U.S. Air Force, Halbert displayed courage and resilience. By his flexibility and knack for seeing possibilities, he went from being a pilot of aircraft rapidly

becoming obsolete, to fast-moving jets that signaled a new era in aviation. This ability to seek and seize opportunities also served him well after his Air Force career. His natural athleticism enabled him to excel in golf, but more importantly to him, serve as a platform to teach and mentor. Above all, he was always looking for a chance to help others and advance their interests. In looking back, Bill Halbert will never have to worry if he made a difference in this world. He can be assured of the most important things to which any man can aspire...an adoring family, a consistent investment in the lives of others, and an earnest attempt to serve God, who has sustained him all these years.

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APPENDIX

1. Military and Golf Records of Bill Halbert

Military Record of Bill Halbert

WHEN	WHERE	TYPE OF AIRCRAFT	JOB/REASON FOR ASSIGNMENT
Mar. 1943 to April 1943	San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center		Cadet Classification
Apr. '43 to Jun. '43	Cuero, Texas	PT-19	Primary flying school
June '43 to Sept. '43	Independence, Kansas	BT-13	Basic flying school
Sept. '43 to Jan '44	Ellington AFB Houston, Texas	AT-10	Advance flying school
Jan. '44 to Mar. '44	Dodge City, Kansas	B-26	Replacement training unit
Mar. '44 to June '44	Lake Charles, La.	B-26	Operational training unit
Aug. '44 to Sept. '44	Corsica, France	B-26	Combat Tour (flew missions over Italy)
Sept. '44 to Feb. '45	Dijon, France	B-26	Combat tour (flew missions over Southern Germany)
Feb. '45 to May '45	Dole, France	B-26	Combat tour (flew missions over Southern Germany)
Got out of Air Force, remained in the Air Force Reserve, and attended Kilgore Junior College, Kilgore, Texas, and Oklahoma University, Norman, Oklahoma. Graduated with degree in Petroleum Engineering. Then, RECALLED BY AIR FORCE TO ACTIVE DUTY.			
Mar. 51 to June 51	Larson AFB Moses Lake, Washington	B-26. (Douglas)	Tow Target Flight (we got married, at AFB chapel, on June 5, 1951.
June '51 to June '52	George AFB Victorville, Calif.	B-26 (Douglas)	4th Tow Target Squadron
June '52 to Oct. '53	Pope AFB Fayetteville, North Car. Adjacent to Ft. Bragg Army Post.	B-26, B 17	Aide-de-Camp to General Timberlake. (Mundina born here)
Oct. '53 to Sept. '55	Shaw AFB, South Car. (Near Sumter, S.C.)	T-33 and B-17 "Flying Fortress"	Aide-de-Camp to General Timberlake. (Cindy born here)
Sept. '55 to Mar. '56	Nellis AFB, Nevada (near Las Vegas)	F-86 and F-100	Gunnery school
Mar. '56 to June '57	Foster AFB Victoria, Texas	F-100	450th Day Fighter Wing
June '57 to June '58	Osan, Korea	F-86	59th TAC Fighter Bomber Wing (we moved to Baytown)

WHEN	WHERE	TYPE OF AIRCRAFT	JOB/REASON FOR ASSIGNMENT
Aug. '58 to July '59	Oklahoma University Norman, Oklahoma	T-33	AFROTC, Assistant professor of Air Science
Aug. '59 to Apr. '63	Ft. Sill Army Post Lawton, Oklahoma	T-33 and O-1	Instructor in Army Missile School (Rebecca born here)
Apr. '63 to June '65	Langley AFB Hampton, Virginia	T-33	TAC Command Post (Tactical Air Command)
June '65 to June '66	Saigon, Vietnam	O-1	Headquarters 7th Air Force (we moved to Baytown)
June '66 to July '67	Pentagon Washington, D. C.	T-33	HQ USAF (Headquarters, United States Air Force)
July '67 to July '68	Ft. McNair Washington, D. C.	T-33	Student at National War College
July '68 to Apr. '71	Pentagon Washington, D. C.	no flying	Joint Chiefs of Staff
Apr. '71 to Apr. '73	Ellington AFB Houston, Texas	no flying	Deputy Base Commander
April '73 to June '76	Patch Barracks Stuttgart/Vaihingen West Germany	no flying	HQ USEUCOM (Headquarters United States European Command)
June '76 to July '77	Holloman AFB Alamogordo, New Mexico	no flying	Director of Personnel
Sept. 1, 1977...retired from active duty with the United States Air Force.			

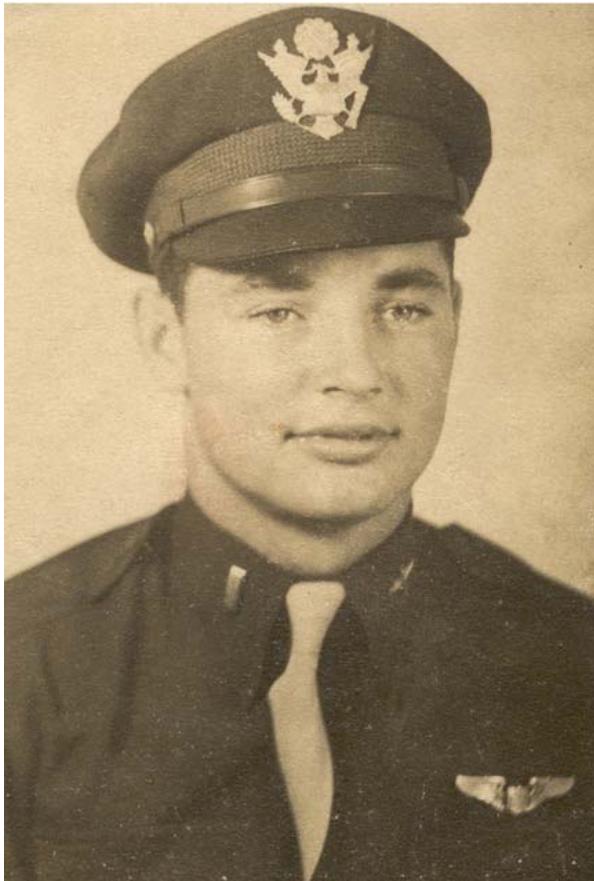
AWARDS:

Presidential Unit Citation	1944
Air Medal (received this award three times)	1944 - 1945
Air Force Commendation Medal	1965
Bronze Star (highest award)	1966
Joint Service Commendation Medal	1971
Meritorious Service Medal (received this two times)	1973 and 1976

AIR FORCE GOLF MEDALS.....SENIOR DIVISION

1972 - 3rd place USAF Worldwide Championship
3rd place Interservice Golf Competition
1973 - 2nd place USAF Worldwide Championship
2nd place Interservice Golf Competition
1973 - 1st place, Continental Sports Conference, Europe
1973 - 1st place, USAFE (U.S. Air Force Europe) Golf Championship
1974 - 1st place, Continental Sports Conference, Europe
1974 - 2nd place, USAFE Golf Championship
1974 - 1st place, USAF Worldwide Championship
3rd place, Interservice Golf Competition
1976 - Club Champion - Stuttgart Golf and Country Club
1976 - City Champion - Alamogordo, New Mexico

Military Photographs of Bill Halbert



2nd Lieutenant Bill Halbert

U.S. Army Air Force Cadet

1944



**2nd Lieutenant Bill Halbert, 443rd Squadron, 320th Bombardment Group,
1944**



B-26 Marauder Crew, Corsica, France, 1944



Captain Bill Halbert, North American F-100 Super Sabre

450th Day Fighter Wing

Foster Air Force Base, Victoria, Texas

1956



Major Bill Halbert, Aircraft Carrier Operations

South China Sea

Republic of Vietnam, 1965



Lieutenant Colonel Bill Halbert, National War College

Fort McNair, Washington D.C.

1968

World War II Missions
320th Bombardment Group
1944-1945

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
HEADQUARTERS 320TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)
Office of the Group Intelligence Officer
APO 650

10 November 1944.

Final Mission Report No. 409

Flight Commander: Captain Cahen.
Lead Pilot: Captain Merrill.

320th Bombardment Group (H).

ALA RAILROAD BRIDGE (H/H) (H) F-668900, GSCS 4164, Sheet 36, Italy.

At 10:55 hours, 20 B-26's took off. 2 B-26's returned early: 1 spare; 1 late take-off due to last minute change of A/C and was unable to catch the formation. No B-26's were lost prior to the target. 18 B-26's were over the target. 18 B-26's dropped 131 x 500# Demolition bombs (1/10 & .025 second delay fuses) and 6 x 500# Demolition bombs (6-hour delay fuses) on the Primary target at 12:46 hours from 11,000' to 10,000' on an Axis of 30°T. 7 x 500# Demolition bombs (1/10 & .025 second delay fuses) were salvaged in the water, having hung up over the target. No bombs were returned to base. 18 B-26's returned to base at 13:57 hours. No B-26's lost or missing. 12 B-26's slightly damaged: 7 by flak alone; 3 by A/A alone; 2 by flak and A/A. 2 B-26's seriously damaged: 1 by flak alone; 1 by A/A.

REMARKS: An excellent pattern covered the target scoring several direct hits.

ENEMY FIGHTER OPPOSITION: 25 to 30 Me-109's, G-55's, Me-202's, and Fw-190's (majority were Me-109's) commenced attacking the formation at Desenzano, and continued attacks until the formation reached the Po River on the return. Markings of Me-109's were dark gray-green with white stripes on fuselage, from the cockpit back, black crosses with white outlines on the wings. G-55's and Me-202's were speckled brown and gray fuselages, light bellies, with German insignia. 2 Me-109's had white spinners and clipped wings. Fw-190's were black with German markings.

Attacks were from all around the clock, but the majority were at 5 and 7 o'clock. The first pass was made at 11 o'clock level, in groups of 8, 4, and 2 in line abreast. Most others came in at 3 and 9 o'clock level, swinging around to the tail. The attacks were not aggressive and were poorly co-ordinated. On the rear attacks, some were low, but most were from level or above. Most of the A/A broke off at 300 to 400 yards, or farther away. Most went down after attack, but a few pulled up, exposing bellies. 6 A/A started to come between two Squadrons at 3 o'clock, but only 2 A/A went through to 9 o'clock.

A/A stayed out of flak, but remained in the area, resuming attacks after the flak stopped.

FLAK: M, H, A, FA, - GP type flak was encountered from the target area, and South-West of the target. Encountered from 1 minute before bombs-away and for 8 minutes into the breakaway, but accuracy decreased on breakaway.

S, L, I, I. type flak encountered from target and East of Cremona at F-1222.

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Route: Base to Moneglia, F-4026; to Fidenza, F-9094; to Desenzano, F-3059; to Veri, F-5978; to San Giovanni Marone, F-8563; to M. Valdagno, F-9077; to target on an Axis of 310°T; breakaway left to Desenzano, F-3059; reciprocal course to base.

Weather:

- a. Enroute: CAVU.
- b. Vicinity of Target: Cloud and storm, 5,000' to 13,000', East of Lake Garda.
- c. Target Area: Open.
- d. Return: As enroute.

Air Observations:

- a. Air Activity: See ARMY OPPOSITION on first page of this report.
- b. Situation: 2 4/2 A/C on East end of runway at Ghedi A/D, F-8957, at 12:36 hours.

Naval Observations: None.

Ground Observations:

- a. General:
 - (1) Battle smoke at F-9201 at 12:05 hours.
 - (2) Bridge at Fiorenzuola, F-7802, being repaired at 12:28 hours.
- b. Communications:
 - (1) 25/30 M/T moving South out of Moneglia at F-5028, at 12:16 hours.
 - (2) 6 M/T moving North at F-7883 at 12:26 hours.
 - (3) 250 AM cars between Fiorenzuola, F-7802, and Fidenza, F-9094, at 12:28 hours.
 - (4) Scattered M/T traffic moving East out of Cremona, F-8825, at 12:32 hours.
 - (5) 60/70 AM cars at Desenzano, F-3059, at 12:39 hours.

Special Comments: Victory claims are: 1 Fw-190 and 1 Me-109, destroyed; 5 Me-109's, damaged.

William Cook,
Major, Air Corps,
Group Intelligence Officer.

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HEADQUARTERS 320TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (M)
Office of the Group Intelligence Officer
APO #374

D-G-2

17 April 1945.

Final Mission Report No. 570.

Flight Commander: Major West.
Lead Pilot : Lt. Mosby.

320th Bombardment Group (M).

ALT. DETTELSBAU AMMUNITION DUMP, AREA "B" (M/R: (W) T-203805, GSCS 4416, Sheet U5), Germany.

At 11:45 hours, 29 B-26's took off to bomb Alt. Dettelsau Ammunition Dump, Area "B" (M/R: (W) T-203805, GSCS 4416, Sheet U5), Germany. 2 B-26's returned early: spares. Total Sorties: 27. 27 B-26's were over the Primary target and 18 B-26's dropped 140 x 500-lb. Demolition bombs (.1 & .025 second delay tail fuses) on the Primary target at 13:25 hours from 12,900' to 11,000' on an Axis of 35°T (briefed Axis - 50°T; drift correction - 04° right; evasive action - loss of altitude) on the first bomb-run. 27 B-26's were over the Primary target and 9 B-26's dropped 70 x 500-lb. Demolition bombs (.1 & .025 second delay tail fuses) on the Primary target at 13:47 hours from 12,100' on an Axis of 38°T (briefed Axis - 50°T; drift correction - none; evasive action - loss of altitude) on the second bomb-run. No bombs were salvaged or returned to base. No B-26's lost. 1 B-26 is missing: reported to have landed safely, though one engine was shot out by E/A, at Y-79. 2 B-26's damaged by E/A. 26 B-26's returned to base at 15:26 hours.

AIR OBSERVATIONS:

a. Activity: F-47's provided escort.

b. Situation:

- (1) 5 T/A and 4 S/A a/c at Amsbach A/D T-1187; others dispersed in woods around field at 13:26 hours.
- (2) 9 S/S and 6 T/A a/c at A/D at T-2196 at 13:26 hours.
- (3) New L/G and 6 S/S a/c at S-9068 at 13:28 hours.

ENEMY AIR ENCOUNTERS: 4/6 Me-262's, some painted dark-gray and some silver, attacked just after the second bomb-run over Amsbach. Three (3) passes were made from 6 o'clock, high and level, closing to 200 yards and 400 yards, with machine-guns and 30 mm. cannon fire. The crews report, that the first attack on their flight, was from 2 o'clock, high, and 3 attacks at 5 o'clock, low, with one E/A closing to 25 feet, passing between flight lead and wing man, then breaking left and up. Gunners in this crew believed pilots to be inexperienced. When attacked by escort, the E/A departed. The last attack was made by a single Me-262, which did not appear to fire. The initial attacks were made in pairs abreast. 4 Pw-190's were seen at the same time, but were attacked by the escort before making attacks.

Losses to E/A: None.

Damaged by E/A: 2.

Claimed E/A: None.

FLAK: None. Losses to Flak: None. Damaged by Flak: None.

GROUND OBSERVATIONS:

a. General:

- (1) Contrails were seen at 18,000' over the target at 13:26 hours (Prior to the first attacks).

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GROUND OBSERVATIONS: (Cont'd)

a. General: (Cont'd)

- (2) Ammunition dump at S-9153 at 13:23 hours.
- (3) Supply dump at T-0157 at 13:25 hours.
- (4) Storage area at T-1573 at 13:25 hours.
- (5) Hospital at T-1380 at 13:46 hours.

b. Communications:

- (1) 30 car train, stationary, steam up, facing South at Grailsheim S-7162, 75 damaged RR cars in M/Y at 13:50 hours.
- (2) 1 locomotive, stationary, steam up, at T-2388, at 13:46 hours.
- (3) 30 RR cars at T-1077 at 13:22 hours.
- (4) 60 RR cars at S-8954 at 13:23 hours.
- (5) 60 RR cars at S-8762 at 13:43 hours.
- (6) 5 M/T, stationary in clearing, at T-2569 at 13:49 hours.
- (7) 4 M/T moving East at T-0984, at 13:26 hours.
- (8) 4 large M/T parked at T-0381 at 13:25 hours.

CASUALTIES: None.

No. of A/C TAKING PHOTOS: 9.

ROUTE: Same as Report No. 569, this date.

WEATHER: Clear; vis. 6 to 8 miles in haze in all areas.

RESULTS: A good pattern reported to have covered the assigned area. Bombs of one Squadron were short, to the South-East.

SPECIAL COMMENTS: This was a "BAT" mission.

Additional Comments: The a/c lost on the last mission of 16 April 1945, was crash-landed, because the a/c was lost and out of fuel. A/C became lost through navigational error.

Correction: Correction on bombs dropped, instead of 140 x 500-lb Demolition bombs dropped on the first bomb-run, should read 138 x 500-lb. Demolition bombs. Add on to bombs salvoed, 2 x 500-lb. Demolition bombs were salvoed in the target area, having hung up.

WILLIAM COOK,
Major, Air Corps,
Group Intelligence Officer.

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HEADQUARTERS 320TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (M)
Office of the Group Intelligence Officer
APO # 374

D-F-3

24 April 1945

Final Mission Report No. 576.

Flight Commander: Major Cahan (of main formation).
Lead Pilot : Lt. Halbert.

320th Bombardment Group (M).

SCHWABMUNCHEN AMMO DUMP, AREA "D" (M/R: (W) Y-318547, GSGS 4416, sheet X-5) Germany.

At 08:21 hours, 3 B-26's took off to drop "Chaff" in advance of the main formation and to bomb Schwabmunchen Ammunition Dump, Area "D" (M/R: (W) Y-318547, GSGS 4416, Sheet X-5), Germany. No B-26's returned early. Total Sorties: 3. 3 B-26's were over the primary target and 3 B-26's dropped 40 x 250-lb demolition bombs (.1 & .025 second delay tail fuses) on the primary target at 10:27 hours from 11,500' on an axis of 227 Deg. True (Briefed Axis - 238 Deg. True; Drift Correction - 10 Deg. Left; Evasive Action - Loss of 1,500' Altitude). No bombs were salvaged or returned to base. 1 A/C (Lead) carried only 12 bombs. No B-26's lost or missing. No B-26's damaged. 3 B-26's returned to base at 12:01 hours.

AIR OBSERVATIONS:

- a. Activity: F-47's provided escort.
- b. Situation: 2 FW-190's were seen below the formation at Y-5883 at 10:24 hours.
- 4 S/E A/C at Augsburg Y-3575 at 10:25 hours.
- 4 S/E A/C at Lechfield Y-3360 at 10:27 hours.

ENEMY AIR ENCOUNTERS: 2 ME-262's made one pass from slightly high at 4 to 5 o'clock and passed under the formation, breaking left and down. One fired a few rockets, closing to 200 yards, and two gunners returned fire.

Losses to E/A: None. Damaged by E/A: None. Claimed E/A: None.

FLAK: S, H, 1, I, CP Type Flak encountered from the Munich Area; very low and left. 12/15 bursts were seen. None encountered at the target.

Losses to Flak: None. Damaged by Flak: None.

GROUND OBSERVATIONS:

- a. General: (1) Supply Dump at Biberbach Y-2896 at 10:12 hours.
(2) 30 warehouses at Pillingen T-0402 at 10:03 hours.
(3) Black smoke to 12,000' from Gnstinger X-1678 at 11:02 hours.
(4) Large boat with one stack at Lake Ammer Y-5347 at 10:30 hrs.
- b. Communications: (1) 10 M/T moving west at X-579- at 09:57 hours.
(2) 7/8 large M/T moving north-east into Ulm at X-6478 at 10:56.
(3) 50 RR cars at Pillingen T-0402 at 10:03 hours in Ammer Lake at Y-5343 at 10:30 hours.
(4) 200 RR cars at Buehlce Y-2242 at 10:37 hours.
(5) 15/20 RR cars at Y-4947 at 10:50 hours.

CASUALTIES: None.

Number of A/C taking Photos: None in this formation.

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R-E-S-T-R-I-C-T-E-DROUTE:

(A) Base to Selestat V-7962; to rendezvous at Offenburg W-1687; to Rentlingen X-0989; to Lauingen S-9901; to Schrobenhausen T-6002; to IP, Odelshausen Y-5773; to target on an axis of 227 Deg. True; Breakaway left to Inning Y-5548; to plassen Y-5133; to Laupheim X-5961; to Rentlinge X-0989; Reciprocal course to base.

WEATHER:

A. ENROUTE: Clear from base to Stuttgart except for 3-4/10ths cumulus over Vosage Mountains, Bases 7,000', Tops 9,000'. Visibility unlimited. Low cumulus start at Stuttgart, increasing and building up to the north and east. From Stuttgart to OP, 7/10ths cumulus, Tops 10,000'-10,500', with altostratus mixed in among the tops and occasional tops building to 11,500'.

B. TARGET AREA & VICINITY: 7-8/10ths cumulus, tops 11,500'. Visibility unlimited.

C. RETURN: General increase in cloud coverage.

RESULTS: An excellent pattern covered the target, causing fires and explosions.

SPECIAL COMMENTS: This was a "BAT" mission.

18 cartons of "Chaff" were dropped from the IP to the target to Inning.

WILLIAM COCK,
Major, Air Corps,
Group Intelligence Officer.

R-E-S-T-R-I-C-T-E-D

Bomb Photos





Permissions

Permission Received for Master's Thesis Reflections on the Life of Bill Halbert and the Greatest Generation



1. On 2/1/2016, Bill and Avis Halbert provided permission to be interviewed and to use their comments, and any photographs or documents related to them.

2. On 4/16/2016, Mundina Halbert O'Driscoll provided permission to be interviewed and to use her comments, photographs and documents.

3. On 4/9/2016, Cynthia Halbert Cisco provided permission to be interviewed and to use her comments, photographs and documents.

4. On 4/9/2016, Rebecca Halbert Mohr provided permission to be interviewed and to use her comments, photographs and documents.

5. Permission to Use Items from the 320th Bombardment Group Website

Date: Wednesday, June 22, 2016 8:10 AM
 From: Franz Reisdorf <reisd002@umn.edu> 
 :
 To: gdmohr@suddenlink.net 
 Subject: Re: SHSU Master's Thesis
 Size: 75 KB

Greetings David,

Yes, go ahead and use what you like from our website. I am pleased that you found the information useful.

It interested, I would be happy to add some of your narrative to our website as it relates to his involvement with the 320th if you would like to supply it.

Take care and best of luck on your thesis.

Franz

Franz Reisdorf, MD
 Chief Historian (volunteer)
 320th B.G. Reunion Association

On Jun 18, 2016, at 2:39 PM, gdmohr@suddenlink.net wrote:

Hello Dr. Reisdorf,

I am currently a graduate student working on a Master of Arts in History at Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas. My thesis is entitled, "Reflections on the Life of Bill Halbert and the Greatest Generation." Lt. Col. Halbert is my father-in-law and was a pilot in the 443rd Squadron, 320th Bombardment Group.

I am writing to ask for your permission to include several of the final mission reports from the 320th's website in the appendix of my thesis. It is really incredible that your website is able to provide these important records and it would be an excellent addition to my thesis.

The thesis research has included many interviews of Bill -- he is 91, but still sharp with details of the war -- which will be cataloged in the SHSU library as oral history. From your website I was able to recover every mission that Bill flew, with all the particular details. This project has been a phenomenal look at the life and times of our World War II flyers, credit for which goes you and those who have labored long and hard to make the 320th website available.

Please accept my warm gratitude for your efforts in perpetuating all the information on the 320th, and extend it to those others who have worked to provide such a worthwhile site.

Very sincerely,
David Mohr
903-574-4805

--

David Mohr
gdmohr@suddenlink.net

VITA

David Mohr was born in Houston, Texas in 1959. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice from Sam Houston State University in 1981, whereupon he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps. After serving four years on active duty, he received an honorable discharge at the rank of Captain.

In 1986, he entered the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a Special Agent serving 27 years, in offices at Atlanta, Georgia, Quantico, Virginia and Dallas, Texas. After his retirement from the FBI in 2013, he entered the graduate studies program at Sam Houston State University earning a Master of Arts in History. He is also a graduate of the National Outdoor Leadership School located in Lander, Wyoming.

Mohr currently teaches leadership, through the application of history, with OMNA, International Inc., an organization of former U.S. Marines. OMNA works with military and civilian organizations to develop exceptional leaders for teams that regularly operate in dangerous, rapidly changing, and uncertain environments. Conference groups include the National Incident Management Organization (NIMO), the U.S. Forest Service, Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, wildland firefighters, smoke-jumpers, military and service academy personnel, as well as other agency hazard response units.

Mohr has been married to Rebecca Halbert Mohr since 1988, and they have three children.