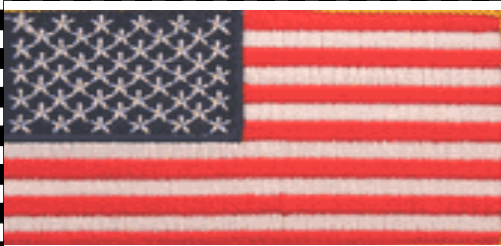


Disabled American Veterans



Chapter #18 Mailbag



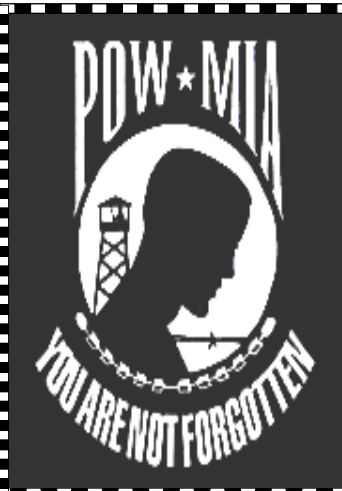
D.A.V Chapter #18 402 N. Michigan Ave. Big Rapids, Michigan 49307 Volume XXXII NO 3 of 3

Commander's Corner

As fall moves in on us, we held our annual cornhole tournament on Labor Day. Participation wasn't what we had hoped for but those who participated had a fun time and won some great prizes. The Auxiliary held a bake sale and was successful at their endeavor to raise funds for the programs. Overall the day went well and everyone was very generous enabling us to increase our funds available to assist veterans. For those who don't know I unexpectedly had to have a total hip replacement. I had surgery on July first and am doing well on recovering. I need to apologize to everyone as this has forced me to put two projects I've started on hold. Unfortunately, I have not been able to meet and assist veterans as I intended as service officer. I also haven't been able to get the "Visit A Vet" program going as I anticipated. I will be actively pursuing both items in the next couple weeks. The surgery also meant I was not able to attend and assist the NSO during the VA seminar at Ferris State University on July 8th. Thank you very much to State Chaplain Rubio for making reservations and informing us of the Veteran Expo at the Wexford County Civic Arena. Junior Vice Commander Tanis, Comrade Burrill, and I spent the day talking with veterans and their families. We informed them of our chapter, what we do and what we are planning. We also met several members of the chapter that have been transferred through the merger and invited them to attend our meetings. We will discuss the possibility of a Past Commander's banquet at tonight's meeting as we previously decided to hold one every other year, which would be this year to have one. Please visit our website: <http://www.dav18mi.org> for mor information and details. I think it would be wonderful to hold it in early November, before our snowbirds begin to migrate, and an opportunity to celebrate an early "Thanksgiving" with all our members and the Auxiliary. I hope this finds you and your family in good health and ready for the change of seasons. Please share this newsletter with fellow veterans and let us know of any veteran that is interested in becoming a member or needs assistance.

Chuck Rathbun

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EDITORIAL

We, the Newsletter staff, very heartily encourage each of our readers to patronize those business establishments which you see advertised throughout our newsletter. They have shown their support for disabled veterans in their community by choosing to place their ads with us. When you shop at any of these establishments, let them know you saw their ad in the DAV newsletter and that we appreciate their support for Chapter # 18.

"Thanks from the Mailbag staff"

An official publication of Big Rapids Chapter #18

Disabled American Veterans, Big Rapids Michigan It is published at regular intervals throughout the year. The purpose of #18's MAIL BAG is to promulgate and disseminate throughout our membership, information from our national and state offices pertaining to the services and benefits which are available to all veterans and their families, as well as to keep them abreast of the many activities and programs of our own chapter #18's past, present, and future. Articles authored by our own members or their families are encouraged and will be accepted for consideration at:

#18's MAIL BAG c/o D.A.V CHAPTER #18

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Nominations, Election and

Installation of Chapter#18 Officers

will be conducted Feb, March, April . Attend our meetings on the second

Tuesday of each month learn how you can help, or you could have ideas on how to help Veterans and their families

"Together we can make a difference"

Labor Day Corn Hole

Labor Day was a good day. Cornhole had about as many as last year but it was a lot of fun. Mat Currie won first in single play. The large gifts were raffled off. The teams prizes went to the younger participants. Our auxiliary had a bake sale that was attacked by wasps. The juniors selling the yummy treats did a good job. they were doing there best to attract customers into our hall.

I must add that many of our sponsors really stepped up and gave wonderful prizes. TV, TV stand, Lg Carpet, 25 gal of gas, and checks. I would like to thank: Gilberts Flooring, Denny's Muffler, A&W, Big Rapids Tire, Bare Furniture, Stratz Heating & Cooling, Michael Oil, Currie's Towing, Lee's Auto wash, Brown's Barber shop, Horizon Bank, Toppings, Johnston's Auto, Big Rapids Roller rink, Farm Bureau Car & House Insurance, JR Customs, Coldwell Bank, The Ole Pioneer store. Our officers also purchased the trophies. Thank you all for helping to make our Labor Day fun also making money for our service funds that is used to help veterans and train service officers to help veterans get the help they deserve.

I want to tell you our officers and members all volunteer the time to do what they do. We don't have paid positions but we do what we can to help Veterans and their families.

The TV was raffled and won by Don Tannis who bought a lot of tickets. The TV stand was won by Carol T. The 10 x 10 carpet was won by Gerald La Forge. I must say I won the 25 gal of gas and gave it to my son who came from Erie, PA to play. And Brandon R, won the Ferris Hockey tickets. I mentioned that Matt Currie won and donated the cooler back to our chapter.

We cant thank you enough for the wonderful prizes and your continued support

I want to mention our Auxiliary is working hard to help our veterans and there families. If you would like to help our auxiliary in any way either becoming an active member, or suggestions for helping in their goal, please contact Alita phone number on the last page. We have our meetings on the Second Saturday each month at 2pm.

Reggie Norris

Dr. Julie Hanson, OD



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September

24th Veterans group 1pm.

25th Family group 11am.

October

1st Monthly Meeting 6pm.

8 Veteran Support group 1pm.

22 Veteran Support group 1pm.

30 Family\ Spouse Support group 11am.

November

5th Monthly meeting 6pm.

11 Veterans Day Parade

12 Veteran Support group 1pm.

20 Family\ Spouse Support group 11am

December

3 Monthly meeting 6pm.

10 Veteran Support group 1pm.

18 Family \ Spouse Support group 11am.

**RSVP required for all new attendees. Contact me at
dav18@gmail.com, address to Jenelle.**

DAVA Auxiliary meets 2nd Saturday each month @ 2pm

Disabled American Veterans

Chapter 18

Service Officer Hours

First and Fourth Thursday

11:00AM - 1:30PM

Second Tuesday

1:00PM — 3:30PM

DAV Hall 402 N Michigan.

A Quiet Life and a Secret, part 2

In the first part of this World War Two story, you met Joe the diminutive accountant who became a scout (point man) for the 109th Regiment of the 28th Division, known from its unit patch as the "Bloody Bucket" division. [I want to correct an error made in Part 1: the 28th disembarked at Omaha Beach on July 16, 1944, not in October.] The 28th was instrumental in the hedgerow battles across France. Joe described to me the utility of Bangalore torpedoes inserted one pipe at a time to persuade the German defenders on the other side of the hedgerow to pull back.

After the breakout from the hedgerow country, the pace of the Allied advance increased rapidly, leading to hope among the soldiers (and the entire US) that they would be 'home for Christmas'. As Joe put it, "The Germans made sure that didn't happen". Enemy resistance stiffened greatly as the Allies approached the town of Aachen and the West Wall or Siegfried Line, the latter figuring so prominently in Joe's personal history as related in Part 1. Allied supply lines lengthened and the push into Germany after the fall of Aachen and the offensive was stalled. Enter General "Lightning Joe" Collins. Brought from the Pacific Theatre to infuse more aggressiveness into the US 1st Army. Collins, who fought in the same region during WW 1, apparently pushed for a direct assault through a heavily wooded area to secure a dam on the Rur River to prevent the Germans from blowing a dam that would cause flooding just on the other side of the woods, impeding the planned advance of the First Army.

This wooded area of about 50 square miles that encased steep ravines was known as the Hurtgen Forest. First sent into what became a bloodbath was the 9th Infantry Division on September 13. In a month of fighting, the 9th had one-third of its soldiers killed, wounded or missing. On October 16th, it was Joe's Bloody Bucket turn. His 109th Regiment had the left flank of the September 2nd advance that stalled after two days. Then for almost a week, Joe was part of unsuccessful assaults and subsequent German counterattacks. Joe bitterly described dealing with artillery tree bursts (such as depicted in the "Band of Brothers") and watching the expert German mortarmen often target, successfully, individual GI foxholes from the high ground across the Kall River ravine. Due to the fall weather, air support for their units was not available. US tanks and other artillery were of little use due to the narrowness of the trails, thickness of the trees, and steepness of the terrain.

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During one of the daily German bombardments that regularly preceded an assault, Joe had had enough. He thought that his foxhole was the next landing site for a German mortar. He jumped out of his shallow hole and the mortar indeed landed just behind him. As he relayed this incident to me, Joe was insistent that he was NOT RUNNING AWAY. He just couldn't take staying in his hole.

Joe was taken prisoner when the German counterattack overran the US forward positions. He was seriously wounded and credits a captured Polish surgeon with saving his life. "I still have metal in me. I picked another piece out just a few years ago..." Joe believed he was wounded on November 10, 1944. The rest of the 28th was pulled out on November 17. And, yes, new units replaced them, primarily the 4th Division along with elements of the Big Red One.

I had asked Joe if he recalled which prison camp he was in. He did not, indicating only that it was for enlisted prisoners. What he recalled the most was the terrible food—remember, Joe was truly of Italian heritage! Every meal was a thin and meager-portioned cabbage soup. "About once a week there was a little piece of meat in it... probably horse...who knows?"

Many military historians are no longer convinced that the push into the Hurtgen Forest that decimated the better part of 3 entire divisions was necessary, let alone advisable. For example, Charles B. MacDonald—a U.S. Army historian and former company commander who served in the Hürtgen battle—has described it as "...a misconceived and basically fruitless battle that should have been avoided." Thirty-three thousand American casualties over 88 days, the second longest US battle during WW2, with very little result to support that hindsight conclusion.

The Hurtgen battle was essentially a German victory. It drained American resources and diverted attention from the soon-to-begin Battle of the Bulge that started in the nearby Ardennes and, of course, was highly successful in its initial stages for the Wehrmacht. Ironically, the survivors of Joe's Bloody Bucket division were placed along the Ardennes to rest and refit after leaving Hurtgen Forest. The supposedly 'quiet' area where the remnants of his division were recuperating were subsequently overrun by the German offensive in mid-December. Was Joe 'lucky' to have been wounded in the Hurtgen ravine? As I only learned later about the role of the 28th in the Bulge, it was a question I never asked.

Joe slowly healed in the prison camp but by spring 1945 he was well enough to plan an escape. The number and quality of the German prison guards were diminishing. He found a place where one night he could slip under the wire. He was without food and wearing only his ragged uniform. He only knew to head west. Before daylight, he came to a substantial and fast-flowing river. "I knew I'd never make it across...it was still damn cold." He found his way back to the stag and crawled back under the fence.

Over 65 years after his POW experience, Joe and I were speaking in his comfortable living room soon after I first met him. He looked out his window describing the animals he liked to view in the woods surrounding his home. Then, abruptly changing moods, he pointed out a chain link fence that ran perhaps 30 yards from his house through the trees. Obviously angered, he asked me, "Why in hell would anybody put up a fence like that? My neighbor had that put in. It keeps the animals from coming into my yard. I can't figure out why anybody would do that..." I admit to being embarrassed about how long it took me to figure out why that fence was so distressing to him.

The prison camp was liberated a few weeks after his semi-successful escape, by an armored unit. Joe didn't go into much detail. He was trucked to a hospital in France, then one in England for a longer stay. He was sent to a military hospital when his ship reached New York. For reasons I do not know, he was not visited by his family at the Army hospital there. Perhaps his stay there was brief and he was just out-processing. At any rate, he took a train to his hometown when he was released and decided to not contact his family about his imminent arrival. He was typically succinct about the effect of his surprise appearance. One sister had a hard time believing it was him. His Italian American mother, after the hugs and kisses, told him he must be hungry and that she had some delicious cabbage soup she would heat up. To which Joe replied, "Thanks Mom, maybe I'll have some later."

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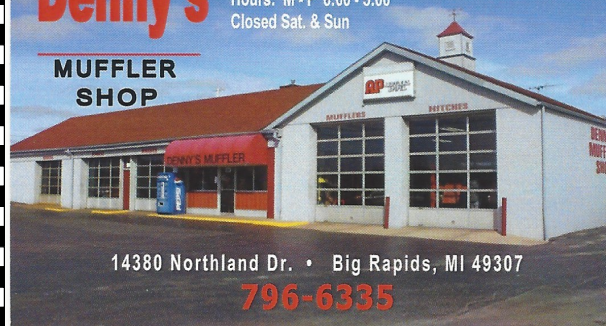
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Ready for Graduation

The end is in sight, after 11 long weeks of around the clock training we have four events to compete in. During boot camp there are four platoons that make up a series. The series train in unison to one another. At pugil stick training platoons, compete against one another. Each platoon competes within the platoon to find the top three recruits. Then, the top three from each of the four platoons compete against one another until one recruit has remained undefeated.

As recruits lose they are reprimanded by their drill instructors for their failure and embarrassment to the platoon. On one of the last Sundays of recruit training, the series has a boxing "smoker." Having boxed in the Golden Gloves and in high school, I volunteered to represent our platoon. Little did I realize with my weight and previous experience I would be matched up with a recruit from Colorado.

To my demise, he was a six-time Golden Glove champion for the state of Colorado. We were the last bout of the day with lots of hype and excitement for the best fight of the day. I even heard a couple DI's placing a bet on the fight. When they introduced us they started with, (The fight of the day with the two most experienced fighters of the series From platoon 2032, two-time Golden Glove city champion for Grand Rapids, Michigan, weighing 181 pounds, Pvt Rathbun). I don't recall my opponent's name; I didn't really hear it much after hearing he was the six-time state champion. I knew I was out-matched when we talked while warming up and he told me he joined to be a member of the Marine Corps boxing team.

Despite being out matched I was very pleased that I made it to the second round before they stopped the fight because he was pummeling me. I was pleased with my ability to block and avoid his punches, but the DI who was officiating realized I could be severely hurt if he allowed it to continue. Myself and the recruit from Flint, who also lost his fight, were PT'd in the classroom by Sgt. Groves for the better part of an hour. The next week we did final drill where the platoon and Senior Drill Instructor are graded and scored among the series platoons. Drill is marching and performing movements as a uniform group, as well as the manual of arms. Each movement is on command and evaluated on both the execution and delivery.

The following day, we did our final PFT (Physical Fitness Test) which is made up of pull ups, sit ups, and a three mile run. Each has a maximum score of 100 points. Max sit ups are 80, pull ups are 20, and an 18 minute run will result in a perfect score. I maxed out the sit ups and actually attempted to set the record, with 140 just short of the company record, 20 pull ups and a run of 16:20. Our platoon had the best PFT score of the series.

We then did the PRAC (practical recruit application, course) which is a series of stations that test the knowledge of Marine Corps history: first aid, weapon maintenance, and other aspects of training such as the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), general orders, and combat operations. Lastly, each platoon has a final inspection by the company commander. The entire platoon is inspected in their dress uniform with weapon. Each recruit is evaluated for his uniform, personal appearance, as well as the maintenance of his weapon and knowledge. The inspecting officer asks the recruit questions while checking his weapon and uniform.

The weekend prior to these final events, recruits are given on-base liberty as well as parents being allowed to visit and spend time with their son. Each recruit is given a portion of their pay so that they may go to places such as the bowling alley, snack bar, theatre, or post exchange (department store).

The following Friday is graduation day for the series. Each Friday at both MCRD (Marine Corps Recruit Depot) San Diego and Parris Island a series of four platoons graduate from boot camp and are finally recognized as a U.S. Marine. The morning of graduation, recruits go to chow for the final time at the dining facility. They then return to the squad bay to complete packing.

Once the entire platoon is packed up they once again get into formation and march with all their stuff (sea bag and clothing bag) to the parade deck and stage their stuff. From there they proceed to the theatre where family members are already seated inside.

The entire group watch "The Sands of Iwo Jima" after a short video of what happens at recruit training. Once the movie is completed, the relatives exit the theatre to go to the bleachers next to the parade deck while the recruits exit out the rear of the theatre. Once everyone is in place, the series is paraded around the parade deck and then graduation is completed per customary ceremony.

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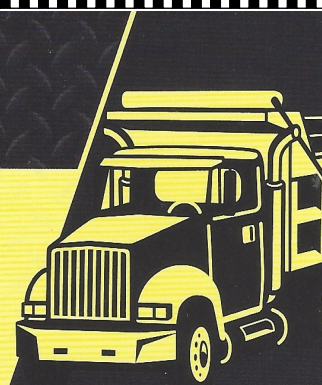
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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