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SERVING



Five **EAGLE SCOUTS** Who Served During World War II

THEIR COUNTRY

By Mark Ray / Photo Illustration by Sarah Hanson

Some 16 million Americans served in the armed forces during World War II. Among them were countless Eagle Scouts who waded ashore on D-Day, endured the Bataan Death March and island-hopped across the Pacific. Others worked behind the lines, organizing armies, delivering supplies, and providing essential medical and moral support to the men in combat.

Some Eagle Scouts achieved fame — men like Brig. Gen. Robert Lee Scott Jr. of the Flying Tigers and Medal of Honor recipient Col. Mitchell Paige. But most didn't. Instead, they returned to workaday lives or long months of recuperation or (for many African Americans) the racial prejudice they thought they'd escaped.

Seventy years after VJ Day formally ended hostilities, more than 850,000 World War II veterans are still with us — but we are rapidly losing them. Nearly 500 die each day, according to the National WWII Museum, taking with them stories of the triumph and tragedy that marked the war.

To honor the contribution of those Eagle Scouts who traded their Scout uniforms for fatigues, dress whites or flight suits, *Eagles' Call* talked with a few men from the Greatest Generation.

JIM HARRELL AND FRED NORMAN/ELKIN, N.C.

Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Elkin, N.C., is the sort of town Andy Griffith memorialized in his iconic 1960s TV series. Among its 4,000 citizens live two nonagenarians who epitomize the service of Eagle Scouts during WWII.

Fred Norman and Dr. Jim Harrell were actually born in the same room about a year apart — Harrell's family briefly rented a house from Norman's family — and they've remained close ever since. They went through Scouting together, played on the same high school football team, shared family vacations and served their hometown throughout seven decades.

In fact, their service during WWII probably constitutes the longest period they were away from each other and from their hometown. That service also illustrates the range of jobs it takes to win a war: Norman served in Europe as a gunner on a tank, and Harrell worked stateside as a dentist.



FROM THE PACIFIC TO THE 'FATHERLAND'

Norman enlisted in the U.S. Army right out of high school and ended up at Camp Cooke, Calif., in February 1943. Every other week his unit rotated to the Pacific coast, about five miles away, to sleep in tents and guard against a potential Japanese invasion. It was there he first realized how handy his Scouting background would be. "Some of those guys didn't even know how to pitch a tent," he says. "They had a tent-pitching contest, and I won that."

In February 1944, Norman went overseas with the 6th Armored Division of Gen. George Patton's Third Army. The Super Sixth

Fred Norman, who served as a gunner on a tank during World War II, holds a round named "Elkin Special" after his North Carolina hometown.

came ashore a month after D-Day and fought its way across France and Germany. “We fought from July until May 8 and were never relieved — didn’t sleep in a building that whole time,” he says. “You started digging those foxholes through 6 inches of snow. You had to get the snow off, and then the ground was frozen about 4 inches, and you had to get that out and then dig a hole you could sleep in.”

Norman also spent time as a forward observer. Once, an American P-47 fighter crashed nearby, just after its pilot bailed out. To rescue the pilot, Norman began running toward his position, stopping only when he realized the pilot had a gun pointed at him. “Anytime that gun went one way, I went the other,” he says. “I kept hollering, ‘American, American!’”

Norman finally reached the pilot, avoided getting shot and administered first aid to the man until medics arrived.

On the final day of the war in Europe, Norman fired the last of 6,000 rounds from his tank’s 105 mm gun. He was about 7 miles from Berlin and 800 miles from where his European tour began. “They told us we were going to fire two more rounds on a

bridge, and that would be all we would fire,” he says. “I’ve got that last shell I fired out of the 6,000. I’m looking at it right now.”

That July, Norman stood at attention beside his tank as motorcades carried Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Harry Truman to the Potsdam Conference.

For his service, Norman received two Bronze Stars and lost the hearing in his left ear. (“I’ve got a solid roar as I speak to you that never goes away,” he says.) He left the Army on Nov. 4, 1945, and returned home to Elkin.

SERVICE ON THE HOME FRONT

About the time Norman was heading west to Europe, his friend Jim Harrell was heading south to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot at Parris Island, S.C., as a newly minted dentist in the U.S. Navy Dental Corps.

Harrell earned a doctorate in dentistry from the Medical College of Virginia in 1944 and promptly joined the Dental Corps, serving until 1946. He returned to Elkin to start his own dental practice — where he still works four days a week — then returned to the Dental Corps during the Korean War, this time serving at Olathe

Naval Air Station in Kansas.

Asked about his service during either war, he quickly points out that the glory belongs to men like Norman. “I don’t have any real story other than I just served my country,” he says. It might be more accurate, however, to say that his real story began after he hung up his uniform for the last time.

From the 1950s into the 1970s, Harrell served three terms as Elkin city commissioner and three terms as mayor. As mayor, he led the development of a new water plant, sewer plant, fire station, airport, regional library, hospital and two bridges. “I just happened to come in after the war when the city really needed stuff,” he says.

He’s been there when other groups needed “stuff” as well. He has raised millions of dollars for the University of North Carolina, the Medical College of Virginia School of Dentistry and the University of Alabama School of Dentistry. During the recent financial downturn, he raised \$5 million for a new wing at Hugh Chatham Memorial Hospital. When donors he’d lined up for a new helicopter pad fell through, he gave the money himself. He named it in honor of Fred Norman.

OTHER EAGLE SCOUTS IN WORLD WAR II



George Maher, lower left, shares a moment with fellow shipmates serving aboard the USS *Prichett*. Maher was officially made an Eagle Scout (below) in 2012. His 1944 board of review was delayed by his father’s death and Maher’s deployment.

GEORGE MAHER REDWOOD CITY, CALIF.

George Maher served as a fire controlman on the USS *Prichett*, a destroyer in the Pacific, from the fall of 1944 through the end of the war. During his service, he saw action in the Philippines, Saipan, Iwo Jima, Okinawa and the South China Sea. “The ship itself earned eight battle stars for the various affairs it was in,” he says. “I myself got five stars on my Pacific Service Medal.”

He probably got a few gray hairs the day a Japanese plane dropped a torpedo just as the *Prichett* blew it out of the sky. He and the captain said quiet goodbyes to each other as the torpedo streaked toward the ship. “The two of us stood and watched as the torpedo came right at us — and we saw it go under the ship, and we thanked God,” he says. “That was one experience that I have never forgotten and probably never will.”

As a Scout, Maher learned both Morse and semaphore code, knowledge



that came in handy one day when the *Prichett's* signalman was below deck. Maher noticed a nearby ship flashing the *Prichett's* designation, DD-561, and alerted the officer of the deck. He then began decoding the other ship's message while someone called the signalman. After the signalman arrived, he watched for a few minutes and then said, "Why'd you call me? You're doing all right." Eventually, the signalman took over but asked Maher if he wanted to pass the message along to the next ship. "I might have been able to do it, but when you have the experts there, you might as well let the experts do it," he says.

Although Maher completed his Eagle Scout requirements before joining the Navy, he never had a board of review. It was not until 2012 that Mark Manchester of the Pacific Skyline Council learned Maher had never received his Eagle badge and made arrangements for him to officially be named an Eagle Scout.

**JOE ROSENER
NEWPORT BEACH, CALIF.**

Joe Rosener became an Eagle Scout in 1937, the same year he attended the first national Scout jamboree in Washington, D.C. Scouting, he says, "helped convert me from being very introverted to becoming a real part of the organization."



Eagle Scout Joe Rosener (above) flew B-24s like the one at right, in addition to B-25s, during his service in the 820th Bomb Squadron based in Hawaii.



As a junior at Cal Tech, Rosener faced a decision: "Did I want to be an infantryman and sleep on the ground in the mud, or did I want to live like an exotic human being and join the Air Force?" he says. "As a result of that decision, I joined the Air Force and went through the whole flying system to become a pilot."

Rosener trained on B-24s in Riverside, Calif., but transferred to the 820th Bomb Squadron, which flew B-25s, once he arrived in Hawaii. Eventually, he flew both: bombing missions in B-25s and resupply trips in B-24s. "I had the pleasure when I'd come back from a combat mission of flying this cargo B-24 to the Philippines from Okinawa, then return to Okinawa to fly more missions," he says.

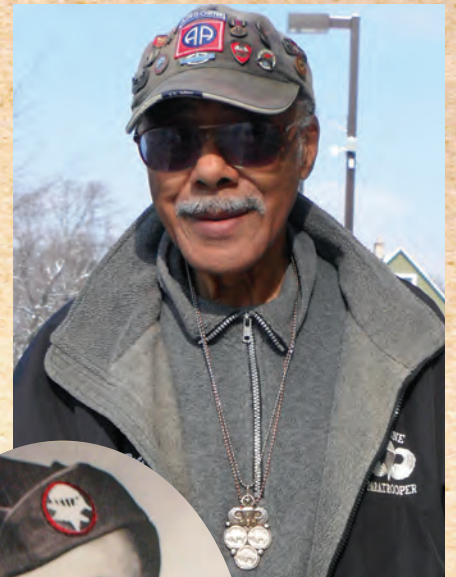
All told, the first lieutenant flew 13 missions, not including all those supply runs to the Philippines. He was in the air heading toward the Japanese island of Kyushu when the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

**WILLIAM WEBB
BUFFALO, N.Y.**

Eagle Scout William Webb joined the war in Europe in January 1944. As an African American, however, he wasn't allowed to fight. Instead, he drove a cargo truck as part of the Red Ball Express, the convoy system that kept the Army supplied as it raced across France and Germany.

Before long, Webb jumped at the chance to see action. He volunteered for the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion, better known as the Triple Nickles. Made up of African American men, the battalion parachuted into forest fires in the Pacific Northwest. The military connection? Government leaders were worried Japanese balloon bombs would spark massive fires.

When asked if it takes bravery to parachute into a fire, Webb doesn't hesitate. "You have to be brave to jump out of a plane, period," he says. "I've seen several fellows when they jumped and their chutes didn't open; that's something you'll never forget."



A member of the "Triple Nickles," retired Sgt. Maj. William Webb still wears a pendant (right) to symbolize his service in the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion during World War II.

At the end of the war, the Triple Nickles were transferred to Fort Bragg, N.C., where Webb faced the realities of Jim Crow laws. "German prisoners of war could go through the front door of a restaurant where Afro-Americans still had to go in the back door. And we didn't know if they'd spit in our food or what. That was another war within a war," he says.

Despite this maltreatment, Webb re-enlisted not long after the war ended. He served in the 2nd Ranger Company in Korea and in the Green Berets in Vietnam before retiring in 1974 as a sergeant major.

Last year, New York State Sen. Timothy M. Kennedy presented Webb with the Liberty Medal. In a speech on the Senate floor, Kennedy said, "Sgt. Maj. William Webb is justly deserving of praise for the bravery, heroism and true grit he displayed in service to our nation." 