

Grandview During WWII (Notes by Bob “Nero” McNabb ’45)

I would suspect that most of the young men who attended Grandview Heights High School during the “War Years” expected to eventually serve in the military. Over 500 names of Grandview military servicemen were secured and ultimately posted on the outdoor “honor roll” that was erected in a park adjacent to the public library on First Avenue. Homes of servicemen were marked by placards in the front windows of those homes. Blue Star cards indicated the home of a serviceman, while Gold Star indicated a deceased serviceman. There was a very strong feeling within the community for “our boys” in uniform and that pride was felt by everybody. Perhaps the earliest reminder of a war in progress was the arrival of Rita Wells as a new fellow student. Rita’s father had the romantic sounding job of “yeoman of Sherwood Forrest” in England and a number of families in that area had sent their youngsters to the States for safekeeping for the duration of the war in Europe. Rita returned from England for our 50th class reunion in 1995.

As the war progressed, we all learned the names of most of the servicemen. They were the sons, brothers and sweethearts of our neighbors and schoolmates. When one of those men was injured or killed, I recall when one of our classmates would be called to the principal’s office where they would learn of the casualty. When that occurred, it sent a chill through the entire school. When still others were killed or injured, we learned of it quickly as we were a small school where news traveled fast. In the years 1944 and early 1945, the loss of several fine former GHHS athletes seemed particularly devastating. “Pat” Short had been president of his graduating class in 1942 and I recall him as a good football and basketball player. He was killed in action in late 1944. Jean Lindsay, brother of (Rook) Bobby Lindsey and Helen Lindsey Bonney, was killed on Iwo Jima, in March 1945. Many fellow Rooks graduating in the 1942, 1943 and 1944 years served in the military and saw action.

Frank “Dude” Higgs (GHHS’26 and one of the early Rooks), came to a special assembly at our school in 1944. “Dude” had gone to China to train Chinese pilots during the early part of the war. He had been the inspiration for Milton Caniff’s very popular cartoon strip, “Steve Canyon”....(Dude Hennick was our “Dude” Higgs)..... and “Dude” needed little introduction before our group of students. “Dude” was dressed, I recall, in a sharp tailormade tan uniform and sported a yellow silk scarf rather than a necktie. We were treated, that day, to a fascinating talk about his adventures after graduating from Grandview. That program seemed to erase any questions that any of our young men had about what they wanted to do

as soon as they were able to enlist. Tragically, “Dude” was killed in late 1945 while piloting an aircraft in the China Theater.

A couple of times during study hall, aircraft piloted by our alums “buzzed” the high school study hall, which occupied a large portion of the second floor of our school in those days. We would become aware of an approaching aircraft, simply because of the noise, and looking out of the windows towards the football stadium, we saw an aircraft approaching from the North and then skimming the football field and headed straight for the study hall. The stunt was noisy, and it seemed that a “name” could always be given for the pilot who dreamed up the stunt, but it created no trouble. At my neighborhood on Glenn Avenue, the sweetheart of one of the military pilots lived on the next street and would sometimes get “notice” from her pilot boyfriend in the form of a small wrench to which he had tied a silk scarf. By buzzing the neighborhood, all the residents knew what was happening and we would go out into our yards to watch the pilot-boyfriend. One time, the wrench and scarf ended up in our yard and I delivered it to the girlfriend’s home. I never heard a word of criticism regarding the antics of those pilots. I know that there was a special regard towards our military and those young men were always treated as heroes.

When I entered the Navy, three of my GHHS classmates and six pals from Arlington stayed together through Boot Camp. The same thing occurred with a number of our other GHHS classmates who entered the Army. What prompted my enlistment in late April 1945, was the deaths of President Franklin Roosevelt (April 12, 1945) and War Correspondent Ernie Pyle (April 18, 1945) and the resulting shock of their deaths seemed to persuade my father to agree to sign the needed approval because I had not reached my 18th birthday. Within three months of our leaving Grandview, the Pacific War was over. It was our good fortune that my classmates would not be killed or injured in action. For most of us, college followed our return. Our careers have scattered us.

I have always treasured my years in Grandview, as the community was very nurturing. It seemed to almost cater to the young people who went to school there. God knows, our teachers were as good as they come. Our police chief, Bob Livingston, was worth writing about in a full length book. He dispatched problems quickly and most problems

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never made for big news as Livingstone seemed to quickly get a handle on things. As a juvenile, I seemed to have a nose for mischief and Chief Livingston dropped

by our home just before Halloween one year and suggested (to my mom) that I “ride along” with him for the next couple of evenings. Livingston’s family had built our home and it was his home after he graduated from Grandview Heights High School. One of those evening ride alongs, we had to arrest a drunk and take him to the basement jail where Livingston hoped he’d “sleep it off”. The drunk started raising a ruckus and slapping his metal drinking cup along the bars. When we went upstairs, the lights started flickering and when we went downstairs to the cell, we watched as the drunk tore the cup handle loose, then broke his ceiling light bulb and used the cup handle to short out the electricity. It had the magical effect of quieting the drunk and he went to sleep. As I finish that little story about Chief Livingston, I wonder how many mothers would, today, want to seek an attorney’s help for the witness-anguish caused to her 14-year-old son. In my case, that 14-year-old son never caused another moment of worry for Chief Livingston or my mom. Chief Livingston is one of those people who not only made it safe to live in Grandview, he was a friend to many young men who were disposed to mischief.

Everybody seemed to have a favorite teacher in those days so long ago. The most demanding teachers seemed to do the best by me....and I seemed to do my best by them. I was very busy “goofing off” so, as a result, I feel some guilt today for my failure to capitalize upon the storehouse of great minds that we had, for teachers, at GHHS. Dorcus Truckmiller, our English and Speech teacher, along with being our drama coach for school plays, had been teaching for many years before and after we attended GHHS. Donna DeVictor (a classmate of mine) told of her father having been taught by Miss Truckmiller. One early morning as the first rays of sun was showing, I found it necessary to empty Miss Truckmiller’s wooden trash barrel as I needed her barrel staves for the Rook meeting that following night. Very old Rooks will recall that it was the duty of each Skunk, or pledge, to gather barrel staves from which to fashion....paddles....for the active Rooks to whomp Skunks. Those first rays of sunlight was sufficient for Miss Dorcus to spot me from her second-floor bedroom. She actually told the Principal, Dwight Blauser, about what I had done, so in that first class period I was called to his office. Miss Truckmiller, Mr. Blauser and I made a solemn pact that morning which I will now reveal as one of the best lessons that I’ve ever learned in life. Mr. Blauser asked me to tell Miss Truckmiller the truth about what I’d done earlier that morning. I told the truth and Miss Truckmiller’s stern look turned into a lovely smile and she patted my arm. I walked out of that office with justice being handled very gently. I was a “free man” but it did leave a positive mark on me. Miss Truckmiller didn’t have a lot of students who loved her, but I was among that number. News of my

transgression did, however, reach the Rooks and I got several whacks with Miss Truckmiller's wooden staves, so fair justice was finally settled.

Miss Truckmiller, and for that matter, most of our college prep teachers, had earned Master Degrees. Most of our teachers had become a part of a definite feeling of "institution" that somehow marked our school as different than others. The community itself was a solid middle class area where most families owned their homes. There were large church memberships throughout the community. When our class held its last reunion, the principal of the school addressed us and commented upon how the community continued to draw families who wanted their children in Grandview schools. That's so comforting to an old alum. I would still be happy to call Grandview home.

Why does the Brotherhood of Rooks continue to have substance for old guys? It certainly would not generate that feeling for some. I know of a few who claim that they rejected the invitation to join. Still more were never accorded that invitation, and I don't feel altogether good about that, as I had a couple of close friends who never got called. I do not think it's about the exclusivity of membership. There was, of course, the unique ownership of that house. We had some great after-game dances there...always with a chaperone for the girls. It was something more. Consider that we were very young guys and that some of those fraternal feelings that may later develop were, then, only buds on some pretty rough trees. We formed a tight little community within another tight little community, Grandview. While moving around in this world, I have sometimes observed that luck can be a huge card in life. Personally, I'll settle on the fact that members of our Brotherhood are folks that I can happily call friends. Some members are chosen by others to be Rooks, but I've learned to trust the judgement of some. Some, particularly when they're Rooks. I would love to imagine our Brotherhood of Rooks existing forever.