



HOLIDAY ISSUE

AN E-MAIL SITUATION REPORT (SITREP) OF THE PUTNAM COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY

Christmas in the Trenches

Christmas in the Trenches

by John McCutcheon

My name is Francis Tolliver, I come from Liverpool.
 Two years ago the war was waiting for me after school.
 To Belgium and to Flanders, to Germany to here
 I fought for King and country I love dear.
 'Twas Christmas in the trenches, where the frost so bitter hung,
 The frozen fields of France were still, no Christmas song was sung
 Our families back in England were toasting us that day
 Their brave and glorious lads so far away.
 I was lying with my messmate on the cold and rocky ground
 When across the lines of battle came a most peculiar sound
 Says I, "Now listen up, me boys!" each soldier strained to hear
 As one young German voice sang out so clear.
 "He's singing bloody well, you know!" my partner says to me
 Soon, one by one, each German voice joined in harmony
 The cannons rested silent, the gas clouds rolled no more
 As Christmas brought us respite from the war
 As soon as they were finished and a reverent pause was spent
 "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" struck up some lads from Kent
 The next they sang was "Stille Nacht." "Tis 'Silent Night'," says I
 And in two tongues one song filled up that sky
 "There's someone coming toward us!" the front line sentry cried
 All sights were fixed on one long figure trudging from their side
 His truce flag, like a Christmas star, shown on that plain so bright
 As he, bravely, strode unarmed into the night
 Soon one by one on either side walked into No Man's Land
 With neither gun nor bayonet we met there hand to hand
 We shared some secret brandy and we wished each other well
 And in a flare-lit soccer game we gave 'em hell
 We traded chocolates, cigarettes, and photographs from home
 These sons and fathers far away from families of their own
 Young Sanders played his squeezebox and they had a violin
 This curious and unlikely band of men
 Soon daylight stole upon us and France was France once more
 With sad farewells we each prepared to settle back to war
 But the question haunted every heart that lived that wonderous night
 "Whose family have I fixed within my sights?"
 'Twas Christmas in the trenches where the frost, so bitter hung
 The frozen fields of France were warmed as songs of peace were sung
 For the walls they'd kept between us to exact the work of war
 Had been crumbled and were gone forevermore
 My name is Francis Tolliver, in Liverpool I dwell
 Each Christmas come since World War I,
 I've learned its lessons well



Each year our Christmas Issue opens the same way. The message is so powerful and universal it should be read each year.

In 1914 there was an unprecedented and unofficial Christmas truce between the British and German Troops. The US had not entered the war; in fact the war was only a few months old. Perhaps the troops knew that it was going to be a long and bloody war, they were the people who were doing the actual fighting after all. There was never another Christmas Truce during the War to End all War. Garth Brooks, in his classic song "Belleau Wood", created an American Christmas Truce. The only problem is that the Battle of Belleau Wood took place in June of 1918 not Christmas time. Also as mentioned earlier the US was not in the war at the time of the truce.

Notwithstanding creative history let each of us embrace the spirit of that Christmas Truce and pray for peace and keep close to our hearts those who even now guard the gates of freedom.

From the Veterans Service Agency Staff,

Kiana Steve, Art & Karl



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December 14, 2022

Dear Veterans,

It is with mixed emotions that I send this greeting to you, our Veterans. For the eleven years that I have been Putnam County Executive, I have sent you my best wishes every year at this time. Since I am stepping down at the end of the year, this is my last official holiday greeting as County Executive, but you will always remain in my thoughts.

You are the reason we live in security and comfort. Thank you for the sacrifices that you made to protect us and defend our freedoms.

In my tenure as a public servant in our county, I have tried to put Veterans first, to keep you in the forefront of the conversation and in the minds of a public that, too often, forgets.

As part of that effort, Putnam County displays the Row of Honor twice a year in your honor. Few sites are as grand as seeing hundreds of American flags waving along the shores of Lake Gleneida. I will always cherish that sight.

For one last time, let me wish you all a Merry Christmas, a Happy Hanukkah and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Sincerely,

MaryEllen Odell
Putnam County Executive




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AT THE VETERANS RESIDENCE AT
9 DREWVILLE LANE, CARMEL
DECEMBER 26, 2022 1-3 PM
HORSES AND OXEN COURTESY
ROCK HILL FARM**

**BRING THE CHILDREN
HORSE DRAWN WAGON RIDES
HOT COCO AND TREATS**

**Make Your
Christmas
Brighter**

**Stop by and
Spend Some
Time with
VETERANS**





A Christmas Story: 1st Lt. Paul L. Schwartz

1st Lt. Paul L. Schwartz, an MIA service member from the World War II European Theater, is forever memorialized in the 1983 holiday classic, *A Christmas Story*, by Jean Shepherd. 1st Lt. Paul L. Schwartz is believed to be the same Schwartz who triple-dog-dared Flick to lick a frozen flagpole — with predictable and memorable results.

The movie is based on a collection of stories by radio personality and humorist, Jean Shepherd, compiled in the book *In God We Trust: All Others Pay Cash*. In the movie, Shepherd narrates a story about Ralphie Parker. Ralphie is a 9-year old growing up in Hammond, Indiana, who wants nothing more than to get an “official Red Ryder, carbine action, 200-shot, range model air rifle” for Christmas.

Shepherd claimed all his characters were inventions of his imagination, however his stories are also known to be semi-autobiographical. Shepherd’s brother Randy, once told a friend that his brother’s characters’ were based on real people, but were so exaggerated as to be imaginary. LTC Steven Glazer (Ret.), a self-described “desk-chair” military researcher, is credited with researching and separating truth from fiction in *A Christmas Story*.

In the movie, Ralphie Parker is broadly understood to be based on Shepherd (or Shep), whose middle name was Parker. Randy Parker, Ralphie’s whiny, runny-nosed brother, is believed to be based on Shep’s real brother, Randy. Jean Shepherd also had two childhood friends named Flick and Schwartz. Flick was short for Jack N. Flickinger, and Schwartz’s full name was Paul L. Schwartz, who was one year ahead of both Shep and Flick in school. Schwartz comes up in at least three places in Shepherd’s writings. The first and most memorable is in *A Christmas Story* scene when Schwartz ‘triple-dog-dares’ Flick to lick the frozen flagpole. The results are unforgettable. The second is when Ralphie blames Schwartz for teaching him the offensive version of “Oh fudge.” Although he has heard it multiple times from his ‘old man,’ Ralphie describes it as “inexorable official justice” for the flagpole incident. In the movie, both Ralphie and Schwartz are pun-

ished soundly by their mothers. The third, and most relevant to our work at Project Recover, is on page 263 of *In God We Trust: All Others Pay Cash*. This time, Ralph and Flick are owners of a local bar later in life. (In real life, Flick assumed ownership of Flick’s Tavern after his Dad passed away in 1950. “I turned back to Flick, who was checking the cash register. “Too bad Schwartz couldn’t have been here,” I said. Flick grunted, busy with his change counting. We both knew that Schwartz had been shot down over Italy. They never found him.” (*In God We Trust: All Others Pay Cash* by Jean R. Shepherd, page 263)

This is where real life intersects *A Christmas Story* once again. Like virtually all young men of their time, the three friends enlisted in the military to serve during World War II. Jean Shepherd joined the US Army and served with the Signal Corps on July 20, 1942. Jack N. “Flick” Flickinger joined the US Army on November 11, 1942. He was sent to North Africa for anti-aircraft duty. Paul Schwartz enlisted in the US Army on January 29, 1942. He completed training as an aviation cadet and was commissioned as a navigator. Initially, he was assigned to the 772nd Bomb Squadron of the 463rd Bombardment Group (Heavy) in Europe. By early 1944, however, he was flying strategic bombing missions in B-17s with the 341st Bomb Squadron of the 97th Bombardment Group out of Italy. In March 1944, Lt. Schwartz’ Squadron was participating in Operation POINTBLANK, an Allied strategic bombing offensive to cripple the German Luftwaffe and lay the groundwork for a successful Allied invasion of France. The RAF and US Army Air Force were conducting bombing raids on aircraft, u-boat, and transportation infrastructure. Coordinated in an effort called the Combined Bomber Offensive, the RAF conducted bombing missions by night and the US during daylight hours. On the morning of March 19, 1944, 1st Lt. Paul Schwartz and nine other crew members took off in a B-17 from Amendola Air Field in Italy, part of the massive Foggia complex of airfields. They were one of 234 heavy bombers, including B-17s and B-24s, escorted by more than 100 fighters. The original target was the Ball Bearing Plant at Steyr, Austria. There was cloud cover at Steyr, however, and the armada headed for Klagenfurt, Austria to bomb the air depot where the Germans produced Messerschmitt fighter aircraft. Schwartz’ B-17 took off with the 97th Bombardment Group.

They were the last group to take off, but not the last plane. A B-17 from the 429th Bomb Squadron, 2nd Bombardment Group was delayed. A pitot tube cover had not been removed, and the pilot taxied the aircraft back to have it done so. When B-18 rejoined the fleet of aircraft, they were 15 minutes late and the 2nd Bomb Group was too far ahead. They decided to join the 97th Bombardment Group’s formation. At 10:35 am, as they slid into formation, the wing of 2nd Bomb Group’s B-17 hit the wing of the 97th’s B-17, Schwartz’ aircraft. The 2nd Group’s B-17 immediately broke in two, caught fire, and crashed into the Adriatic Sea, according to eyewitnesses. Schwartz’ B-17 banked sharply left. Then it, too, crashed into the sea. The Air-Sea Rescue arrived at the scene at 11:25 am. They located the bodies of four crew of 2nd Group’s B-17 and confirmed there were no survivors from the collision. All of the crew of Schwartz’s B-17 were declared MIA and remain so today. In all, seventeen bombers were lost that day. We remember our MIAs every day through our work and research. Still there are few more poignant times to reflect on our MIAs than at the holidays. With every story, we remember not just the service members who sacrificed their lives, but also their families who never again would be all together for the holidays. We are grateful for *A Christmas Story* for bringing us together for cozy joyful gatherings in the present and for reminding us of the that connect us with our past.

LAUREN TRECOSTA, PROJECT RECOVER





Diary of a Horse Skeptic

Dear Diary,

It has been some time since I have communicated with you. I thought going into the Holiday Season it would be a good time for some reflection. First thing saying Holiday Season sucks-Christmas Season. So Merry Christmas Diary!!!!

Well on to the reflection. I am still spending time at Pegasus Farm and working as a horse handler with Equus Effect. The experience is overwhelming. We recently had a cohort that seemed far apart in that they would never mesh as a group. By graduation they meshed beyond all expectations. They ended with a group hug first time ever. With any cohort. Cool stuff.

Diary for the edification of all going into this special season I believe

that we should turn back the pages to the conclusion of 2018. That was indeed a dark period of time for me. I have tried not to speak of it. The utter horror of it all almost renders me silent. I did write of this incident in a New Year edition of the Sitrep and it is time for me to come to grips with this dark incident.

In Buffalo New York while visiting with my son and his family I was tortured. Yes you heard + correctly I was tortured! The horror! I was forced to sit through a 2 hour performance of the "Nutteracker". The horror. I asked my family why they would make me suffer this way.

There are dancing cupcakes in this ballet. Yes dancing cupcakes. This was the most unbearable...dancing cupcakes. However I did perk up a bit, perhaps I thought Diary they would be serving us cupcakes while the multi colored cupcakes did their

pirouettes or turney things or what ever the hell you call that move. The final ignominy...gasp...no cupcakes were served. None, nada, nyet. It wasn't bad enough that I had to watch pastry dance but there would be none to savor.

To this day Diary a little tear comes to my eyes and a rumble in my stomach every time I hear the sugar plum fairy music. In fact I have it as a ringtone for a very close friend and it does trigger me a bit but I will work through it. And some day I will not fear dancing cupcakes.

Diary this tale is not to make light of PTSD and those Veterans who suffer from PTSD. This can be a very stressful time of the year.

Be understanding and help people understand you!

Karl



My favorite horse, Hondo, being pet by my grandson Charlie had to have his eye removed due to an infection. Please pray for his recovery!



Hanukkah In Iraq

A well-known fact among the international Jewish community is that sometimes observing Jewish traditions and a Jewish lifestyle can be difficult. For Jewish American military service members overseas, this difficulty stems from a variety of sources. It can come from anti-Semitic fellow service members, from being in a country that is hostile to observers of the Jewish faith, or to simply not having the right items needed for Jewish holidays and customs. One place where being a Jew in the military would likely have its fair share of difficulties is Iraq. Yet, as this story demonstrates, Jewish U.S. military personnel often find a way to express their Jewish faith and traditions even in potentially unfriendly environments.

In October 2005, an idea amongst several Jewish American service members took shape- to plan and hold a successful Hanukkah party or two in Iraq. It had been several years since the last Hanukkah party, and they believed it was due time to celebrate the festival of lights. Calls were made to various organizations that would likely help with the efforts to carry out the party, with Colonel Nelson Mellitz contacting the Jewish War Veterans of the

USA. His association with the JWV would continue for years and into the present, with Col. Mellitz eventually becoming the Department Commander for the state of New Jersey, as well as the National Quartermaster.

Calls were made through the U.S. Embassy in Iraq, through the chaplain's services, through the JWV, and as the word spread, the trickle of Hanukkah memorabilia sent their way turned into a flood. Col. Mellitz soon found his desk and surrounding space in the Baghdad embassy had enough Hanukkah memorabilia for parties far into the future. The effort to celebrate Hanukkah in Iraq was not without a few hiccups. Hesitation amongst some of the captains and lieutenants involved in carrying out the plans for the parties provided some difficulties. The hesitation was rumored to be anti-Semitic in nature, but any issues were resolved by the generals, as well as on an ambassadorial level, allowing the plans for the festivities to proceed. As if the Hanukkah celebrations being held in Iraq were not unique enough, the specific location of the parties is noteworthy. The celebrations of the festival of lights for this year and for several after were held in the former palace of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. His opulent palaces, once the seat of power of a tyrant, was now being repurposed for good- for beautiful Hanukkah celebrations. Hanukkah parties at the

palace featured music, dancing, and no small number of latkes and chocolates. Included in the agenda were more serious notes like speeches from dignitaries, including Zalmay Khalilzad, at that time the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. Initial questions of whether he would be able to attend or not were eventually answered when embassy security staff began posting troops around the area and combing the area with their dogs.

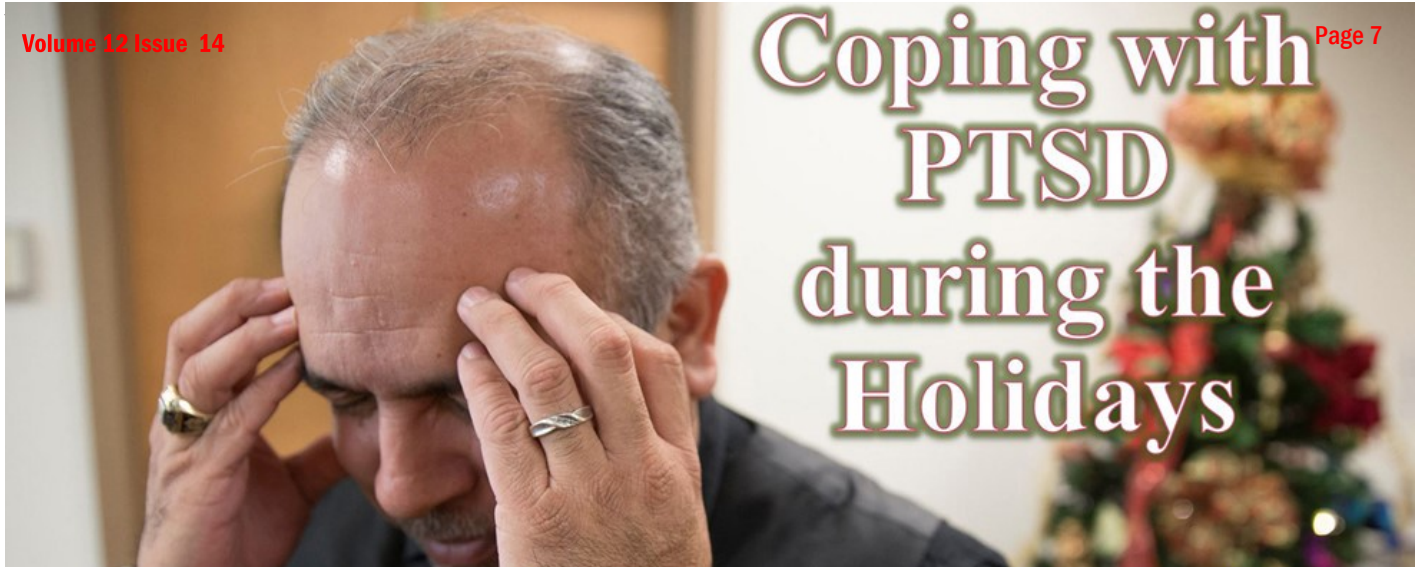
A focal point of these celebrations was the colossal menorah that was designed by LT. Laurie and constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers and the military contractor KBR. Humorously, the Army Corps of Engineers Captain who was tasked with overseeing construction efforts had no idea what a menorah was until then. The menorah soon became synonymous with the Hanukkah parties at Saddam's Republican palace and was on display whenever a Hanukkah party took place there.

Many, but not all, of the attendees were Jewish, Col. Mellitz said, creating a heightened sense of camaraderie between service members of different faiths that hopefully has lasted long after the celebration and deployment ended. The Hanukkah parties at the palace and at nearby Camp Liberty, represented by the towering menorah in the palace and at Camp Liberty, served as symbols not just of the overthrowing of tyranny, but of the resilience of the Jewish people and their ability to honor Jewish traditions and customs anywhere in the world.

By Ben Kane, Programs Assistant Jewish War Veterans Organization



Coping with PTSD during the Holidays



The winter holiday season is regarded by many as a wonderful time of the year. However, the holidays can be a painful reminder of past times when life seemed better. Large groups of family and friends are often part of the holiday festivities, but this and other things may be stressful for someone with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Groups may tire a person out or make him or her feel overwhelmed. People may feel pressure to join family activities when they're not up for it, or believe they must act happy when they're not. People with PTSD may already find it difficult to get enough sleep or to relax and these added pressures can worsen those symptoms.

Someone with PTSD may be very sensitive to losses around the holiday. Veterans and military families, in particular, tend to remember at the holidays those who did not make it home from war. They may not know how to celebrate the holidays knowing those fallen heroes are no longer present. There may also be recent losses: the death of a loved one, an emotional divorce, or separation from one's children. All of these circumstances may cause someone to feel melancholy about memories of holidays past.

Family and friends might ask the Veteran questions about his or her life or about PTSD. The person with PTSD may not feel comfortable answering these questions, but it is important that he or she keep in mind that their family may

feel some of the same pressures, and may only be asking because they have a genuine concern for their wellbeing.

The holiday gathering may also be one of the few times family or friends are able to physically see the person with PTSD, and they may feel it is more appropriate they ask such questions in person rather than over the phone or online because they may think that is too impersonal. In either case, the person with PTSD has the power and right to not answer any questions.

Responding to sensitive questions

A polite way of handling these types of situations is by taking a few slow, deep breaths and calmly responding to someone, "I think it is nice of you to show you care by asking, but I'd rather not talk about that right now," or "thanks for your concern, but I'm not comfortable answering questions about that." Then take the opportunity to redirect the conversation. Ask that family member about work, their children, or their favorite sports team, and steer the conversation to safer ground.

Both people with and without PTSD can cope with holiday stress by following these tips:

- Talk with your family about how you feel. Your family can help you. This does not mean you have to tell them everything, but let them know you're feeling stressed.

- Be honest about your stress level and let your friends and family know your plans ahead of time, especially if you are planning to take some time during the season to relax and de-stress by spending time away from home, work or people that bring stress into your life.
- Set limits. Don't join activities for longer than you can handle. You can choose when you want to be a part of the group.
- Take breaks. Go for walks, or set aside a place where you can be alone for a while. This can keep you from feeling overwhelmed.
- Get plenty of rest. You may already have difficulty sleeping, but do your best to maintain your usual bedtime or wake-up. Naps should be taken sparingly, as they may further disrupt your nighttime sleeping patterns.
- Keep up with exercise routines. If you normally do yoga, go jogging, or lift weights, try to keep up those healthy routines. These activities are all healthy ways to relieve stress.

Fake it 'til you make it. Sometimes people who are feeling depressed find that if they go through the motions, they just might catch themselves having fun. While the pain from the past hasn't gone away, this is a chance to begin making new positive memories one step at a time.

BY
Dr. Jessica Grogan is
a VA PTSD
psychologist





The recent untimely death of a friend who served in the Navy reminded me of this piece I wrote going into 2020. Although not as poetic as the annual Christmas greeting that is part of the Sitrep every Christmas it is an apt lesson for the New Year and thus warrants repeating:

"Often I hear my Navy friends wishing people calm seas. A comforting wish indeed. Recently while on Route 17 motoring to the western side of New York I saw a billboard advertising a therapeutic center. The center was called "Calm Seas Therapeutic Center". Again giving people hope for life to be calm for all their journeys to be calm. As is often the case my mind started to play with the words calm seas. Tumbling them over and over, altering the context, wondering if there could be another reality to what those words were meant to express. Yes that is how my mind works and I seemingly have little actual control of the workings. Another expression from my Navy friends sailed into my mind if you will. You can never become a good sailor if you have only sailed on yes-calm seas. Wow. My mind then churned out other things related to the Navy analogy about the nature of becoming a good sailor. Could a soldier in the Army or a Marine become good at what they do if the never encountered a battle? Could an airman become proficient if they never encountered turbulence in the air? Part and parcel of that is a play on the words. To survive the turbulent waters or the hell of battle you have to remain clam because "Calm Sees". A person must remain calm to see how to survive. The analogy is valid in many pursuits. Vividly in sports the good hitter in baseball sees the 100 mph ball with a calmness that makes it seem slower and hittable the quarterback being blitzed remains clam to see the best route to score. The analogy breaks down with golf where there has to be total silence while the golfer attempts to hit a ball that is not moving but it works in all other sports. Other analogies work as well a firefighter running toward a fire sees beyond the flames a police officer assessing a hostage situation uses his calm to see an assessment. A nurse in an ER experiences calm sees.

So as we move toward New Years let me wish you "Calm Sees". My wish is calm for you so that you may see during the insuring year and perhaps for life. "

Karl

