

KEEPING THEIR STORIES ALIVE

September 2013



Thanks to the Library of Congress, our family's World War II veterans are being honored and their stories shared. The Veterans History Project, sponsored by the Library of Congress, offers us a place to share our fading WWII photos and letters, and encourages veterans to record their oral histories.

For those of us with uncles who did not have children, it allows those dear relatives to share their stories with future generations. Do you have letters, scrapbooks, or photos from World War II, the Korean War, or perhaps Vietnam? You can find a home on the Web for their stories, too.

Antigoni found over 200 letters saved by her mother, Tula Lefteris, from World War II—from Tula's husband, two brothers, and her brother-in-law, who were serving from New Guinea to France to India.

Those letters also tell the civilian story of what hardships people at home endured while their loved ones were abroad. Tula Fekas Lefteris was a newly-wed with a baby on the way, and her letters show the hardships in keeping a restaurant open in the face of food shortages and staff shortages (nearly all the male staff having been recruited).



Brothers Gus (left) and Pete Fekas from Charlottesville, VA

Reading the letters of the soldiers, themselves, we were touched by the brothers trying to stay in touch with one another, when they were thousands of miles apart. One of the most poignant letters is from Tula's brother, Gus Fekas, serving in India, who knew that baby brother Pete was training for the D-Day landings. Gus kept asking why Pete had stopped writing, and wanted to know if Pete survived the invasion. It took months for Gus to get word that Pete did, in fact, survive D-Day, landing safely on Utah Beach, but that he was killed in St. Lô, France by a German sniper a month later.



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*Brothers Bill (left) and Arthur
Lefteris from Westminster, MD*

Meanwhile, in the jungles of New Guinea, Tula's brother-in-law, Bill Lefteris, was setting up the First Field Hospital. Newly-arrived troops had to clear the jungle, set up tents, and build facilities for surgery. Our favorite letter from Uncle Bill was written just after his arrival in New Guinea. The letter is written on toilet paper, since there was no stationery available, and the Army censor had trimmed out any words that might indicate the base's location! A year later, Uncle Bill reported that most of the soldiers' cameras had rusted in the tropical heat and humidity, so hardly anyone could take photos. The troops solved the problem, however, agreeing to share photos from any still-working camera. The camera owner would send rolls of film home to be developed, and then ask family back home to make copies for friends at the field hospital.

Antigoni's father, Arthur, wrote love letters to his wife in Greek, and it has taken many months of translating to get Arthur's story into English. Thank you, brother George for this labor of love!

But our stories are now recorded and saved, and we are proud to share them through the Veterans History Project. We hope you will consider sharing your family's stories, too. Visit the Library of Congress Web page: www.loc.gov/vets.



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