

Walter Clifton Robbins

A few years ago the news commentator Tom Brokaw wrote an award-winning book entitled "The Greatest Generation." Today we say farewell to a man whose life story would have fit very comfortably within the covers of that book. As fate would have it, I was honored to be at his bedside when Walt passed. And today, I am honored to read the following tribute at the request of his son, and my best friend, Walt, Jr.

Walter Clifton Robbins was born to a farm family and loved the farm life. His parents, Oscar Clifton and Grace Gertrude Foulke Robbins, both came from farm families and they ended up with a total of 6 children. Walt was the 4th of these children and the 2nd of 3 sons.

When Walt was born on March 19, 1918, the family lived on a farm in Hamilton County. By the early 1920's the family had purchased a farm in Henry County near Cadiz. The house on this farm burned and they moved to several locations nearby until their home could be rebuilt. In about 1930 the family moved back to Hamilton County living on and operating the farm of Grace's Mother. The year 1937 found the family living on a farm near the small town of Fairview in Randolph County.

On December 1, 1942 Walt was inducted into the U.S. Army. His first assignment was to Camp Adair in Oregon. On his first furlough he came back to Muncie and married Norma Louise Haas on May 29, 1943.

After Camp Adair, Walt spent time in training camps in Arizona, California, and Colorado. On the 27th of August 1944 his unit boarded the USS LeJeune in New York for the voyage to Cherbourg, France. During the voyage they encountered a huge storm that, according to Walt, tossed this big ship around like a toy. Most of the men got seasick, but Walt managed to stay well. On September 7, 1944, they arrived safe and sound on French soil.

They did not stay long in France but moved quickly to Belgium and then into Holland. Walt often remarked that he did not like France but fell in love with the people and the countries of Belgium and Holland. He talked about the farm families in both countries and how neat, tidy and organized their farms and homes were. He was amazed by the fact that the homes and barns were all one big building and that you were able to go out the kitchen door and step into the barn and milk the cows.

Holland was not *all* good because, of course, the Germans were always around the corner. Holland was also where Walt and his unit had to wade the canals because the Germans had blown away all the bridges. Try to imagine wading across several canals filled with waist-deep water in November. Many of the men were frozen and suffered permanent damage. Walt's feet were frozen and instead of going to the hospital as many had done, Walt chose to leave his wet shoes and socks on and "walk it off". This adventure left him with a bad case of trench foot which bothered him greatly during the last several years of his life.

Walt and his unit entered Germany around November 9, 1944. They fought their way across Germany and were involved in many battles, large and small. On 28 Nov 1944, at the small town of Inden, Germany, Walt was hit by shrapnel and suffered a wound to his left arm. He was removed from the battlefield and sent to a hospital in Paris, France. Later he was moved to a rehabilitation center in England.

Walt *re-joined* his unit in Germany about March 1945. On April 26, 1945, he felt fortunate to be a member of the unit that met up with the Russians at Torgau, Germany. He said, once they knew their unit was going to be meeting up with the Russians, they spent a week preparing. When this *perfectly* groomed group arrived at the river to meet their allies, the Russians arrived all ragtag and dirty on motorcycles that would barely run and looked like they and their passengers had just come from cleaning up a dump. Walt would laugh and laugh about this and the fact that the Russians could not understand why the Americans wanted to look so outlandish. All in all he found this experience to be one of his proudest moments.

After the fighting had ended he became a member of the occupation force. They soon moved back to France and left LeHarve, France on June 26, 1945 and arrived in New York on July 3, 1945. The men in his unit were all given 30-day leaves once they arrived back to the U.S. They then re-assembled at Camp San Luis Obispo, California to begin training for the feared encounter with Japan. Of course the war ended with the atomic bombing of Japan, the training was suspended, and the men were quickly discharged and sent home. Walt received his honorable discharge on October 9, 1945 and came home as quickly as the trains and buses could carry him. Walt's final rank was Staff Sergeant and he had been awarded a *Purple Heart* and a *Bronze Star* for his service.

Once back home he quickly got a job in the Chevrolet Muncie plant. The new family lived in houses in Muncie but soon the yearning for the farm life came along and they bought a 26-acre farm north of Eaton. By this time the family had grown to 2 sons and a daughter. In 1952 they moved to a 110-acre farm northwest of Eaton. This farm adjoined the farm of Walt's parents and he operated *both* farms *along with working in the factory* at night. *Talk about having a work ethic!*

In 1958 Walt became ill and they decided to sell the farm and became the owners of a small motel south of Muncie. Unfortunately, this was not a good time for the motel business because the big motels chains were on the rise and the *little* businesses began to suffer.

The motel was sold and the family moved to their *first new* home north of Daleville. In 1966 they had a home built south of Yorktown where they lived until after the death of Norma in 2004. In 1977 son Phil passed away and this was a devastating event for the family. Walt moved back to Muncie in 2006 so he could be near his favorite bowling and golfing facilities and his many friends.

Walt loved to bowl with his friends at Munsee Lanes. He and Norma had begun bowling shortly after Walt retired from Chevrolet. Walt also found golfing to be an activity he enjoyed. He played mostly at Ayco a par-3 course south of Muncie, where he achieved a hole-in-one. Walt was known as an expert mole catcher and the owner of the golf course provided him a free membership in exchange for keeping the moles off the course. He would spend hours chasing and capturing the pesky little critters and was proud of this skill.

Walt always was one to exercise, eat right, and do whatever was required to lead as healthy a life as possible. After some bouts of illness and hospital stays he decided it was time that he hang up his spurs and let others do the cooking and cleaning so he could concentrate on what was important – bowling, golfing and his friends. He moved to an assisted living facility where he *instantly* made new friends.

Walt was diagnosed with prostate cancer and for many years it remained in the background and caused little effect. But early this year, it began to rear its ugly head. He had a very bad episode and was essentially bed-ridden. Later, he rallied and was able to rebound to the point that he was able to rejoin his friends in limited activities. Walt spent the *last* month of his life living in the home of his son. He loved to go outside and watch the activities in the neighborhood, the birds, the squirrels and even just the fresh air. Unfortunately, the cancer continued to take its toll and shortly after what he termed "the best party he had ever had" he began to rapidly decline. He left us on Sunday, July 1, at 3:55pm. The kindness and excellent care he received from Hospice was invaluable to the family and will be forever appreciated.

Walt never knew a stranger and loved to be with and talk with people. He was generous to a fault and would help virtually anyone in need. He loved mechanical things – cars, mowers, bicycles – He always said that his preferred career would have been to be a mechanic. He would help anyone with their cars. He later would buy old lawnmowers and bicycles, rebuild and repair them and give them away, if he found someone in need, or sell them so he could have room to buy some more.

Those of us here today have lost a father, grandfather, brother-in-law, Uncle or a true friend. Certainly representative of The Greatest Generation, Walt was one of the Good Guys. This man will be sorely missed by all that knew him, and the world was a much better place for him having been a part of it.

Thank you.