

Whippoorwill E-Comment

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Remembering John Uber

by Craig Alldredge

Being a hospice volunteer, every patient leaves an indelible mark. John Uber was no exception. John and I were paired up in April of 2009. The bio sheet that I got said he was a WW-II Navy veteran and suffered from Alzheimer's. As it turned out, he lived closest to me of any patient I've had before or since, less than a mile away in a private adult care facility. And as is often the case, our paths crossed much too late in life to suit me, because we were robbed of the opportunity to know and enjoy each other as younger men and without serious health issues in the way. John had difficulty remembering a lot of things, but even after all the years that had passed he still could remember the numerical designation of the Navy mine sweeper he served aboard as a medic in the Philippines during WW-II, as well as his captain's name. He was a fascinating man who loved chocolate and being around people. I always looked forward to our visits, and he seemed to enjoy them as well despite that fact that he often spent them sleeping in his latter days.

As the months passed, John's condition inevitably worsened, but my visits continued on a regular basis twice a week, Tuesday and Thursday. Usually I took him chocolate. He liked M&M candy as it was convenient for him to handle (melts in the mouth, not in the hand) and was easily portioned out. He always said he needed to test it to see if it was good when I brought him a new bag, and of course just because one piece was good did not mean the next would be so it had to be tested as well. He never lost his sense of humor.

By late October John's condition had

worsened considerably since I first started visiting him, and continued to do so with each visit. Still I went, every Tuesday and Thursday, even when it meant that I just sat by his bedside while he slept. By early November the signs pointed to the fact that his time was drawing near. Still, I went. On Tuesday the 10th of November he was unresponsive, but I sat by his bedside and did what I could to comfort him and let him know that I was there. At one point I laid my hand in his and he seemed to gently respond, or at least I like to think that he did. I happened to have my cell phone sitting on the bedside table and reached over and picked it up and used its camera to take a snapshot of my hand resting in his. By then his hands were thin and bony from not having eaten for a few days, yet they still looked gentle and serene to me. Eventually I withdrew and bid him adieu, saying I would be back again on Thursday.



But Thursday never came. The opportunity for another visit was lost late the next night, Wednesday the 11th of November – fittingly, Veteran's Day – as John's life journey came

to its inevitable end.

They have been called The Greatest Generation, that group of men and women who rallied and defended this country and the rest of the free world from unspeakable tyranny and oppression that was World War II. Surprisingly, many people today do not remember that that great war, or at least our participation in it, lasted only a relatively brief four years, far less time that we spent fighting the Korean War, the Vietnamese War, or the two wars we now find ourselves engaged in. Being a veteran myself, I find this paradoxical, given the strength of the enemies we faced during WW-II and what we've faced since. But John, and others like him, and indeed the entire U.S. population in and out of uniform, worked then for a common goal, unlike the wars we chose to fight since. He truly was one of the greatest generation, a generation that we are now rapidly and steadily losing. I felt honored to know John, even if it was for only a brief time, and I felt a chill race up my spine as I stood at attention and listened to the rifle salute that broke the silence of the early afternoon of November 27th as John was given full military honors at the Veteran's Memorial Cemetery. A life well lived had ended.

E-Whippoorwill Comment is the electronic journal of J. Hill Hamon, Frankfort, Kentucky. I am delighted that Craig Alldredge commemorated John's life by writing this article.