

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

TRIBUTE TO THOSE WHO GAVE (AND GIVE) THEIR LIVES

Today is Memorial Day. It's a very special day. Memorial Day does not just mark a holiday weekend or the unofficial start of summer. It is a time when we remember and honor military personnel who sacrificed with their lives that we might enjoy life, freedom, and a world of lasting peace—people like my Grand Uncle, Joseph Giardina.

Grand Uncle Joe was my Grandmother's baby brother. He was born in Messina, Italy, which is located in the northeast corner of Sicily. He came to America as a young boy along with my Great Grandparents, Catherina and Joseph Giardina, and his six siblings. They settled in the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn, New York.

Grand Uncle Joe wanted to become an accountant. But when the Second World War broke out, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps, the predecessor to today's U.S. Air Force, where he served as a gunner and, later, a radioman. Grand Uncle Joe was involved in some highly perilous but critically important missions. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross for one of his many missions, which my Great Grandparents' hung proudly in the parlor of their home.

Grand Uncle Joe was taken prisoner in the Philippines. The family did not know what had become of Joe, whether he was alive or dead. The War Department did not know. He was merely listed as MIA, missing in action. Grand Uncle Joe endured thirty-nine torturous months in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. The family suffered, in their way, along with him. They gathered every evening around the dinner table tearfully praying that Joe was alive and well.

I saw photos of Grand Uncle Joe when he first enlisted. He was a big, strong, handsome, young man. He resembled the actor John Gavin of fame in the 1950s who later became U.S. Ambassador to Mexico. I also saw pictures of Grand Uncle Joe taken shortly after he was liberated from the prisoner of war camp following the surrender of Japan. He looked like he was one hundred years old in those photos, having survived brutal internment. (Watch the movie "Unbroken" for a glimpse of the cruelty and deprivation Grand Uncle Joe suffered.)

Grand Uncle Joe's homecoming was a joyful surprise and gift from God to the family. Indeed, it felt like a miracle to the family. He went on to make a career in the Air Force and achieved the rank of CWO 4 (Chief Warrant Officer 4). During his military career, he served two tours of duty in Japan, the nation that had held him captive and treated him and his fellow prisoners inhumanely. But Grand Uncle Joe, like the Giardina family, was a sweet man who held no bitterness towards what were then enemies of his adopted country or towards his captors.

Grand Uncle Joe retired to Stony Point, New York, near West Point, which he and my Grand Aunt frequented. He lived a rich, full life well into his nineties and became a proud grandfather. He was buried in Arlington Cemetery with full military honors. I traveled to attend his burial and pay my respects to him, his family, and his legacy. My Grandmother would have been most pleased that I was there.

Grand Uncle Joe was indeed an inspiration to me. My Grandmother, Jennie Napoli, presented him as a role model to me. When I was a mere boy, she told me stories of his courage, sacrifice, and ability to forgive. It undoubtedly contributed to my serving in the military, albeit another branch of the service (U.S. Navy). Grand Uncle Joe did not hold that against me.

During his captivity, in the darkest hours of his life, he imagined the end of the war. He imagined rejoining his family and marrying his sweetheart, Angelina, who was with him throughout his long life. He imagined a lasting peace.

Take this moment to quiet your mind, salute, and give thanks to Joe and those many military men and women who, out of their love and devotion, have unselfishly paved the way for us to live free and enjoy peace.

Peace and best wishes,

Richard Czerniawski and Mike Maloney

(Lt. Commander) Richard Czerniawski (USNR) and (Captain) Mike Maloney (USAF)



Conducting Pre-flight Inspection



Lieutenant Mike Maloney about to strap-in for takeoff - 1972



Aviation Office
Candidate Czerniawski



Memorial Day Parade
2017



Ensign Richard Czerniawski
with "Ball" in sight for landing on
USS Intrepid - 1970

Richard Czerniawski

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