

Lend Me An Ear. My Friend Tom.

January 2017 by Harry Zirkelbach
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It can begin with any casual word, but my favorite, "Did you hear the latest about Number 45?" At that moment, the mind tells the ears, don't miss a beat of this gossip.

It is natural to have a favorite friend/enemy. And even more natural to want your inclination sharpened on any word on that relationship.

So it was with my friend I shall call Tom.

He defied comparison with other mortals. I knew he would never die a violent death, having defied that friend in WWII, shot down twice in enemy territory, neither he nor crew receiving a scratch in those violent irregular landings, the B-24, aircraft in pieces, then the subsequent return to base for the next sortie against the enemy.

Later the night Tom stopped drinking he awakened in a Hospital heavily badgered, finally realizing he had fallen asleep while driving home, drunk; his only thought when he looked around, "Who did I kill?" That accident fractured his spine, causing the removal of two of those bones, lessening his height from six foot two, and gave him a natural stoop, and sobriety.

Tom never hid his faults. Luncheons with trusted friends were his confessional. The warts, adventures, intimacies, revealed, described in detail, for he was also a fine linguist, aware of the impact of the perfect word for every moment requiring a florid description.

He squandered money on his library. Never tossed a book. Had read them all; favorites, read many times. Was always shocked in rereading

*a classic, to observe how much he had missed or misread initially.
That quizzical mind.*

On the other hand he was always spotless in his Navy and Air Line uniforms, while in street clothes, might be mistaken for a bum, for he seemed to wear all clothing that was already dirty when donned. He loved to wear that black small greasy cap that had been favored by Lenin.

He had a throng of friends accumulated in a long life, stayed in touch, often at a restaurant; few were ever invited to his home. He used the phone infrequently, seldom wrote a letter. In years of friendship the only letter I saw was to my wife accompanying his gift to her of a small neckless, the Irish Celtic Cross.

At those luncheons or other meals, Tom had prepared a litany of tales to relate, always beginning with something chosen requiring of him a ten minutes continuous narration; exception, where he deliberately left out a fact, demanding that one in audience, ask for clarification, that pre-planned link rekindling his story jump with excitement.

A family man. Began with his early life. The first and only person I heard say, as boy or man, "My Father was the only hero I ever had." Was equally devoted to this children and grandchildren, flawed or perfect, they were his jewels which he loved to display for others to see in fact or story.

On a Spring sunny Sunday morning he had invited his grandchildren to breakfast, at a local restaurant for them to talk and listen after Mass. Food delivered, that conversation in the mouths of the youngsters, Tom, smiling looked down to choose a morsel

while his grand daughter narrated a day in Paris while studying for a
Masters degree, and at the second word of a familiar French
phrase, Tom's ace fell face forward onto his plate of food.

This adventurer died as he parties with his third generation of kin
on a quiet Sunday morning
nor far from his home
an elderly adventurer
of that final day and his youth.

P.S

My I have your ear?

The next time you visit Fort Logan National Cemetery to visit a friend
or stranger's grave take a glance at the foot of each of the
Serviceman's marker
beneath the date of death.

That space is nearly always blank, his final day, no comment.

But on those few, men and women who made a difference,
Usually in combat,
there is mentioned the Awards and Medals awarded
to those who defied the enemy in one or another way,
were recognized by their superiors.

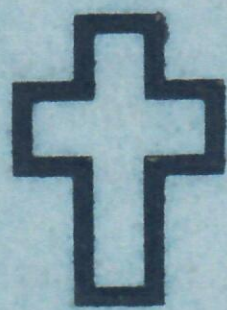
To, them give pause and special honor
for their above and beyond devotion to these United States.

Tom's Marble.

SS, Silver Star.

DFC & 4 OLC, for Distinguished Fling Cross with Fur Leaf Clovers

(Divorced for years the rear of this marble remains vacant.)



THOMAS J
HYLAND

CAPT

US NAVY

WORLD WAR II

KOREA

VIETNAM

APR 19 1916

DEC 14 2003

SS DFC & 4 OLC