

Remembering Ralph

By Pete Clark

There are many ideas of what constitutes a hero. In my world, truly good people, who rise above and beyond the call of goodness and humanity in dealing with their fellow human beings, are the greatest heroes. While growing up, I had the great good fortune of knowing such a person. His name was Ralph Heasley.

Ralph worked for the Bureau of Reclamation and was transferred from California to Boysen, near the mouth of Wind River Canyon. Boysen was a settlement that housed the personnel responsible for the management and maintenance of Boysen Dam. It is now the headquarters of Boysen State Park.

Ralph had been in the Marine Corps during World War II. He was one of the last enlisted pilots in the Corps. He told me he was a Gunnery Sergeant and flew a Douglas Dauntless Dive Bomber. He participated in many campaigns, but spoke only about the attack on the Japanese supply base at Truk, in the Carolines. As the attack wound down, they were sent out to seek targets of opportunity. Ralph said even if it was just two guys in a rowboat, he would drop his bomb.

After retiring from the Bureau of Reclamation, Ralph moved into town. He built a miniature railroad in his yard. Using plans provided by the Smithsonian and his hobby of machining metal parts, he made a working steam engine and cars for it to pull over rails he created. It was something to see the little train run around his house on its tracks.

Ralph set up NRA-sponsored youth marksmanship training. Single shot .22 rifles, designed for competitive shooting, were provided for our use, as were ammunition and targets. The training was conducted in the local VFW Hall. I didn't become an expert marksman, but I learned even more about gun safety. My dad first taught me to shoot using a Remington .22 single shot, before I finished Second Grade.

My Dad passed away Christmas Eve, 1983. I called my boss at the Dave Cook Sporting Goods Warehouse, and told him I would be gone for an indefinite period of time. I then bought a one-way ticket from Stapleton to Riverton Regional Airport. The route followed the eastern edge of the Laramie Range and I chased a cup of coke from the ceiling to the floor all of the way to Casper.

There was much to do. Ralph stepped forward and brought two friends to the house to inventory my Dad's estate. That was a great help during a terrible time. My mother had passed away in April, 1972 at the age of fifty-eight and now both of them were gone.

The last time I saw Ralph, he was walking across the dry bed of Poison Creek, finishing his walk out to Muskrat Creek and back to town. At the age of ninety-four, he did that ten mile roundtrip, every day that the weather permitted.