



## OUR HEROES . . .

*Captain Al Dilembo*

*1943 - 72 Years*

*American Legion Post 712 Sr. Vice Commander*

Late at night as I wander through the hallways of my mind, I, too, have something to pass on to the next generation. I consider myself luckier than the generation today. I am too old for the modern world anyway. It's too late for me to change at my age. It's a blessing just to be alive. I still have gripes of course, but in my overall contemplative moments my mind is one of thanksgiving. Looking back when the richness of life lay in fond memories of a growing up boy and flying the world was a different place. I often recall many funny things along with those of my tragic service days. Thoughts that still linger and will never be forgotten.

### Veterans

Why write about them at this hour? Why open the door of a room sealed off in my mind for many years? I choose to walk among my buddies of the past, for we shared many thoughts of the war. I laughed, cried, and drank with them till dawn many times. There was never an official history written of them. No anthologist ever brought back the full savor of their ignorance, valor, or their ultimate skills. The Gulf between veterans of today and their sons was fought in a more complex war which was simply unfathomable. But I write of all ranks, enlisted, commissioned, pastors, rabbi's and priests, who many times without the benefit of artillery, tanks and air cover, charged into enemy positions where they were cut down like new mown hay – badly wounded or died without help. I have avoided as much as possible the traits of professional historians, who would instantly recognize me as an armchair imposter, but I must occasionally sketch the big picture and can only hope that readers will find my words designed to be read and remembered, and not studied. World War II, like all others was a matter for laughter and tears, sometimes too deep for sorrow or tears. We shall never forget these men for they have many untold and unforgettable memories. Today young men lacking wisdom to grasp the tragedy of war, often lack a mature grasp of danger. Only years later will they come to understand, only then will they wake up in a cold sweat, remembering what, like animals, they did without fear. We were the willing, led by the unknown, doing the impossible, for the ungrateful. We have now done so much, for so long, for so many with so little. We can now do anything with nothing.

We, as older veterans, cannot repay those of today who still engage the enemy on foreign soil, for our country and the great nation we have inherited. Remember those who have given all. They no longer share the seasons with their loved ones, hear the laughter of little children, or see and relax with friends. Remember we, too, shall be part of history and the Internet. But, for a lighter side of my service while as a cadet pilot, I wrote this article (**Caught Ya**) for the Military Officer Magazine.

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# Caught Ya

An aviation cadet in the Army Air Corps suspects his roommate is stealing from him and comes up with a creative — and embarrassing — way to prove it.

## Tell Your Story

Submit your service-related adventures (or mishaps) by email to [encore@moaa.org](mailto:encore@moaa.org) or by mail to Encore Editor, 201 N. Washington St., Alexandria, VA 22314. All submissions will be considered for publication.

**Back in the early 1940s** and the days of my flight training as a cadet pilot in the Army Air Corps, life moved at a very fast and regimented pace based on the systems at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY.

In advanced flying school, cadets were billeted two cadets per cubicle with two beds, two small dressers, two small desks, and one large closet. All uniforms hung neatly and in order to wear. All pockets were sewn shut.

To clear my eardrums while flying at high altitude, I developed a habit of chewing Beech-Nut Chiclet gum. Many times while at class or work, in rank, or during close-order drill, I was caught chewing gum like a contented Jersey cow and given demerits or gigs.

As a reward on Saturday after dress parade and room inspections, instead of going on open post, I walked off my demerits. Walking off demerits consisted of wearing full dress uniform and white gloves and carrying a Springfield rifle while walking at attention for one hour for every three demerits. I usually had 15 to 20 demerits for the weekend, so goodbye open post.

I kept my gum in my dresser drawer with my neatly rolled socks, but for some reason, my supply kept going down. The box was nearly empty, so I asked my fellow cadet roommate from Virginia if he had borrowed any. He sheepishly said no and walked away.

A few days later, as I was going to the PX, I noticed a small display sign for Feen-A-Mint. For those who do not know, Feen-A-Mint is a laxative tablet that looks similar to Chiclets chewing gum in size and color. A light went on in my mind; I purchased a box and went back to my cubicle at cadet quarters. I emptied the Chiclets from their container and replaced them with the Feen-A-Mint tablets and then returned the package to its usual place in my dresser drawer.

I waited that evening for the culprit who was taking my gum to reveal himself through the agony he would experience from the laxative.

I was awakened that evening by groans and moans from my roommate, who kept getting up and going to the latrine. I asked him what the problem was, and he said it was the GI food, but I knew differently.

On the following day, after some questioning, he admitted to the theft. It became a big joke, and we both laughed until we almost cried. No one ever took my gum again. *wo*

— **Alfred A. Dilembo** is a retired Army captain. He lives in Pittsburgh. For submission information, see page 18.

