

Nat Adams

Escape from a watery grave

July 25, 1944

Pacific Ocean near the Palau Islands

From the cockpit of his F6F Hellcat fighter, Ensign Nat Adams, 21, scans endless ocean in search of a Japanese destroyer that is believed to be in the vicinity. Five other aircraft from the *U.S.S. San Jacinto* fly in formation nearby, including a torpedo bomber piloted by George Herbert Walker Bush, at 19 one of the Navy's youngest aviators.



"I FLEW MORE MISSIONS after that and it didn't really bother me ... At that age all you think about is getting the job done. You think a lot about going home."

Adams, (attended 1939-1942), 80, received the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism. He earned a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Oregon and for nearly half a century has been one of Boise's leading architects. Adams continues to work today.

About 130 miles out, the Americans spot the Japanese destroyer, apparently alone and hightailing

it fast. Adams pushes his plane into a steep dive and strafes the vessel at close range with artillery from his six 50-caliber machine guns. The ship, hit repeatedly by the U.S. squadron and loaded with ammunition, explodes. Debris flies upwards and smashes into Adams' plane, badly damaging the wing and tearing away the aileron, a vital control device. Adams feels the plane roll.

Adams manages to regain control, but the damaged plane stalls whenever he attempts to slow it, making it impossible to land on the naval carrier. Adams writes on a pad of paper, "stalls at 85 knots" and holds it to his window. His flight leader, circling nearby, motions him to ditch the plane.

He jettisons his canopy. Near the destroyer the *U.S.S. Healy*, Adams takes a deep breath and cuts the engine. For

an eerie moment, the airplane glides silently downward. Then it hits the water hard, skipping across the swells like a gigantic flat stone. Adams is thrown against his harness straps again and again as the airplane skitters across the water's surface. The wild ride ends when his craft stops cold and the nose plunges downward. Water fills the cockpit as Adams unbuckles the straps, pulls himself out and inflates his "Mae West" life vest, swimming away from the fast-sinking plane.

Sailors aboard the destroyer throw Adams a life preserver and fish him out. They give him dry clothes, a shot of whiskey and escort him to the dining hall. Along the way he smashes his head into a ceiling pipe. "I didn't get one scratch on me during the landing, and then I ended up with blood all over," Adams remembers with a laugh.

When Adams returns to the *U.S.S. San Jacinto*. Bush greets him with a friendly, "It's great to see you again, Blackie." Later, Bush's plane is downed by enemy anti-aircraft fire. As the Japanese attempt to capture the downed pilot, Adams and three other pilots fire artillery to keep them away. Bush is picked up by a U.S. submarine. The action by Adams and other pilots may have saved Bush's life. In 1988, Vice President Bush meets Adams at the Boise Airport during his campaign for U.S. president. It's one of a handful of times the former shipmates meet over the years, including a private inaugural reception when Bush is sworn in as the nation's 41st president.

—Janelle Brown



George Poulos



Living under a constant threat

June 1944
Reims, France

The sky is devoid of fighter jets, the troops have moved inland and the beach is eerily quiet. But littered among the sand and sea grass are an array of bombs, land mines and other reminders of the D-Day assault just three weeks before.

As Sgt. George Poulos, 22, climbs the steep incline from the shore, he can only imagine what it was like to dart up the hill under heavy enemy fire, with nowhere to go but forward or back. In comparison, his job as an ordnance worker loading machine guns and bombs onto Army Air Force P-47 planes is a walk in the park.

The Cascade native is a long way from home — both physically and emotionally. When he first heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, while working at Edith's Cafe, his parents' restaurant in the small mill town, he didn't comprehend the full implications of the event. He didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was — no one did.

Three years later, he finds himself on another continent training for the bomb disposal unit, listening intently to a laundry list of dirty tricks employed by the German forces. Knowing that Americans are suckers for souvenirs, Nazi forces will often booby-trap the dead body of one of their own, attaching a trip-wire to a cunningly positioned Luger pistol. If a soldier goes for the bait, he'll be blown to bits.

Another trick, he's told, is to booby-trap the fuse cavity of "inactive" bombs. Unless the plugs are removed before inspection, the slightest bump will set off a deadly explosion.

"Don't do anything stupid," they're told over and over, "especially if it has anything to do with the Germans." He soaks it in, but doesn't fully understand.

The unit of 60 young soldiers is made up mostly of men in their early 20s, too young and too naive to be scared. Faced with the daunting task of moving dozens of bombs, they get tired and begin tossing them into piles to hurry the work. Or they load them onto the backs of trucks, then speed the trucks forward and back, causing the bombs to slide from the truck, saving them the work of unloading.

Poulos becomes adept at identifying and working with an array of explosives — amitol, TNT, and RDX bombs, the anti-personnel units that would explode just short of impact, spreading deadly shrapnel to anyone within striking range.

Climbing the hill that day, he can't help but feel the effects of all that man-made firepower. Even so, he's unprepared for his first glimpse several

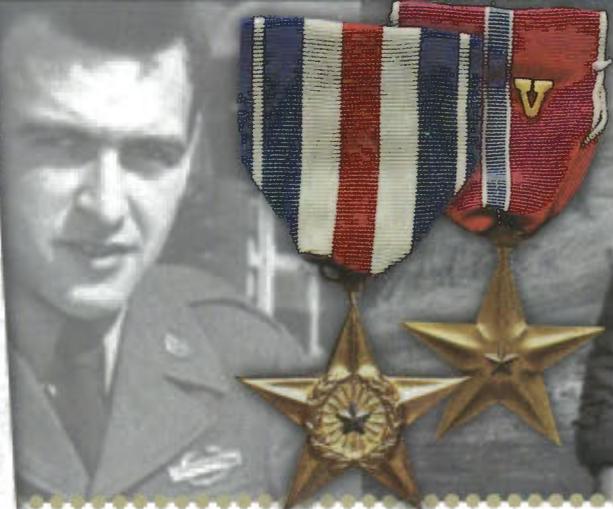
months later of a youngster affected by a bomb. Walking down a street in England, he sees a 9-year-old boy coming toward him on crutches, one leg lost in an aerial raid. "Sometimes we think we have problems," says a friend ironically, watching the child struggle by.

— Kathleen Mortensen



"SEEING THE RESULTS OF WAR and being on the edge of things made you have an extreme amount of feeling for guys who went through things you'd never want to face."

Poulos, (attended '46-47), 80, sang in the a capella choir and played tackle for BJC. After receiving his bachelor's in music education in 1952 and his master's in 1953 from the University of Idaho, he taught elementary school and music in the Kendrick, Dayton (Wash.) and Boise school districts for 35 years. He was also a weekend ski instructor at Bogus Basin for many years.



Mike O'Callaghan

Lives and limb sacrificed in battle

Feb. 13, 1953
 "The Hook," North Korea

The night is bitter cold, as so many winter nights are in North Korea, but Mike O'Callaghan has little time to worry about comfort. The 23-year-old Army sergeant, thrust into the role of platoon leader after three lieutenants are wounded, has a more immediate dilemma.

With Chinese Communist forces on three sides, he and his men are taking a beating at the combat post known to the American forces as "The Hook." Heavy mortar pounds the post, causing serious injury to some of his men, and cutting off a group of others defending a guard post on the edge of the compound. They face almost certain death if left on their own.

O'Callaghan knows there's no time to think, so he does what he's been trained to do, and what he's done before. Fear doesn't factor into it — anger and adrenaline do. Voluntarily exposing himself to enemy fire, he locates his men and leads them safely back to the trenches, carrying a wounded soldier who's been hit pretty hard and can't walk out on his own.

No one thinks it's odd. They're a unit and they take care of each other, no matter what.

Almost immediately, O'Callaghan is back at work directing the action from

the trenches next to his buddy Johnny Estrada. The oldest of 12 kids of Mexican farmworker parents from California, Estrada is one of O'Callaghan's patrol leaders and a loyal friend. Wounded earlier that morning, he reports to the aid station just long enough to be sewn up, and then shows up back at O'Callaghan's side.

Asked why he came back, he says simply, "They're going to hit us tonight, Sarge, and you need me."

The two fight side by side until suddenly an 82-millimeter mortar round screams in, killing Estrada and delivering a direct hit to O'Callaghan's lower left leg. Bleeding profusely but refusing evacuation, he uses a bayonet and telephone wire to fashion a tourniquet and crawls back to the command post, where for the next three-and-a-half hours he controls his platoon's action by phone. Not until the enemy withdraws does he allow himself to be evacuated.

The cold so many were cursing just hours before saves his life, preventing him from bleeding to death.

For his courage and valor, he receives a Silver Star. It joins the Bronze Star with a "V" he earned less than two months earlier for similar action.

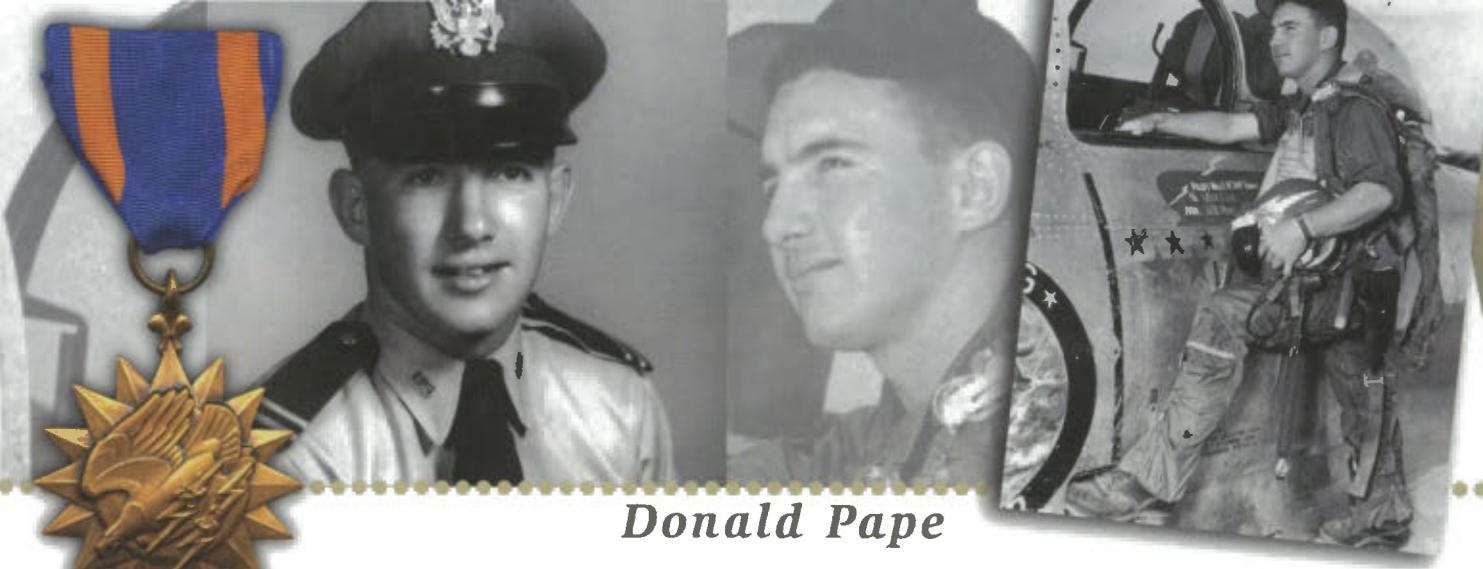
Back home in the States, his left leg amputated below the knee and his hip broken, he has no regrets: "I was just doing what I was supposed to do," he says.

— Kathleen Mortensen



"THESE ARE JUST THE MEN you are with, and you want to bring them home alive. If they're hurt, you pick them up and take care of them."

O'Callaghan (AA, arts and sciences, '50), 72, lives in Las Vegas. After serving in the Marine Corps, Air Force and Army, he received a master's from University of Idaho in 1956. He taught high school government and history before becoming active in Democratic politics. He served as governor of Nevada from 1971-1978. He is now an executive and columnist for the *Las Vegas Sun*.



Donald Pape

Returning from the dead

Dec. 26, 1953
300 miles inside North Korea

It happens so fast, Lt. Donald Pape, 24, barely has time to register fear or panic. With his F-86 fighter jet crippled by enemy fire, he ejects. Bullets from ground fire whiz past him as he parachutes to the ground, where he's met by hostile troops. Knowing that North Korean soldiers will kill him on sight, he's relieved to be captured by Chinese forces.

Taken to a local village, he's placed in a bamboo basket and left in the town square. Angry villagers — men, women and children — stab at him with sticks as if he were a wild animal. The next day he's moved to a mud hut to await transportation to a prison camp. While the guard takes time out to romance a lady friend, Pape uses a spoon to dig through the mud wall. Crawling through the crude hole, he escapes under the cover of darkness.

For three days he heads toward the coast less than 50 miles away, hoping to signal a Navy ship. Weakened by dysentery picked up from contaminated groundwater and hiding in an irrigation ditch, he is eventually discovered by farmers. Afraid they'll kill him, he tries to run, but in his weakened state he doesn't get far.

The farmers finally catch him, throw him in a rice paddy and try to drown him. When that fails, they resort to beating him with sticks until Chinese troops, searching for the escaped prisoner, stumble onto the scene. They tie him

to a tree and beat him while he throws up.

Eventually a truck pulls up filled with captured South Korean soldiers, many as badly beaten as Pape. Each bump over the rutted road elicits pitiful moans from the truck's occupants. One man cries out loudly, and in irritation his fellow soldiers throw him out of the truck, leaving him to die in the middle of hostile territory. Bruised to the soles of his feet, Pape watches in fear and endures in silence.

Eventually reaching Manchuria, China, Pape is in dire straits. Alone when his plane was hit, with no time to send out a radio transmission, he's listed as missing in action and believed dead. His captors show him no mercy. If he'll sign a confession stating that the United States is using bacteriological warfare, he's told, they'll let him go free. If not, they'll beat him and hold him in solitary confinement.

An assistant armament officer, he knows it isn't true and that he will be a traitor to his country if he signs it.

For nine months he endures solitary confinement in cells only three steps by four steps. He has a rice mat, a blanket and very little food. He wraps the blanket around his head at night to keep the rats from nibbling on his ears and nose. Desperate to let someone know he's alive, he scratches his name on the

walls of his prison, or on scraps of paper. But each time his Chinese guards find them and beat him.

In September 1953, the war is finally over. Weighing only 114 pounds, his nervous system is so shot he can't control his shaking. Weakened by his ordeal, he can barely stand. But none of that matters — he's going home and his family will finally know he's alive.

— Kathleen Mortensen



"THE HARDEST THING was the filth — there were bugs, rats and no food."

Donald Pape (diploma, arts and sciences, '49) '72^g was awarded the Air Medal and Distinguished Flying Cross. He received a dental degree from Creighton University in 1959. A retired dentist, he lives in Boise with his wife, Darlyne. The father of six children, he travels to Latin America twice a year to offer dental services to local residents.