



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

JANUARY - FEBRUARY, 1994

1994 ANNUAL BANQUET!

The Society's annual banquet will be held on Sunday, January 23, 1994, at 1:00 P.M. at the Coach & Four Restaurant located on Route 33 in Hightstown. Social hour will begin at 12:30. The program following the meal will be a history of the 15th New Jersey Infantry in the Civil War, given by Joseph G. Bilby of Wall Township, New Jersey. Mr. Bilby is a veteran author and lecturer whose talks have been well received throughout the state. His book on the regiment, *Three Rousing Cheers*, was published last summer. The 15th Regiment was raised in Flemington in 1862 and saw heavy action in the second half of the war, particularly at Spotsylvania in May 1864. It was a fighting unit that lost more combat casualties than any other New Jersey

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NEW INFO ABOUT 'HIGHTSTOWN' PARACHUTE TOWERS

In the Society's very popular September 1990 program, Robert Baldwin of South Plainfield related his experiences and those of his fellow paratroopers who took their very first jump training—and the first for the U.S. Army Airborne divisions—from recreational parachute jump towers that stood in a field near the corner of Route 130 and Voelbel Road in Washington Township. Called the "Hightstown" towers because Hightstown was the nearest town and the mailing address, they were also used for paratroop training by the U.S. Marine Corps. Recently, more information about the towers has come to our attention. They were built by the Switlik Parachute Company, of Trenton, which built the nation's first parachute jump tower near Prospertown, New Jersey in 1934-35 (on the Switlik farm now occupied by Six Flags Great Adventure). Amelia Earhart, who gave Switlik the idea for the tower from some that she saw in

Russia, was among the first to test jump at that tower. The "Hightstown" towers were built in 1936 after the Prospertown tower was dismantled. The towers were engineered and constructed by a Switlik subsidiary called Parachute Jump, Inc., but when company founder Stanley Switlik and one of his associates, former Navy Commander James Hale Strong, parted company over differences about the direction the tower company should take, Strong bought up the company's stock and reincorporated it as the Safe Parachute Jump Company. The Switlik Corporation maintains an extensive archive related to all facets of the company's remarkable history, including photos of Switlik and Strong and the "Hightstown" towers. ■

PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE AUTHORIZED

At the November Business Meeting, the Society authorized a Publications Committee to be formed, and president Robin Smith named past-president David Martin to chair the committee. David is looking forward to several interesting possibilities for publication, including John Orr's "Reflections from the Shrine" articles as a potential book, Robert Craig's manuscript on central New Jersey in the 18th century, and his own paper on Clara Barton, which was read at the September meeting. However, David will need the help of an effective committee. To reach him, call during the evening at 448-6355. ■

NOVEMBER MEETING A SUCCESS!

Several elements came together to make November's general meeting one of the most successful ever. The high level of public interest in World War II as the events of the war reach their 50th anniversaries, the fine presentations by the several speakers, the outstanding performance by moderator Edgar Thomas, and the hospitality of the First Presbyterian Church which allowed the Society to use its Fellowship Hall, all contributed to make this the best attended weeknight program ever held by the Society. ■



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January

- 3 Business Meeting, 7:30 (Ely House)
- 23 Annual Banquet, 1-5 PM (Coach & Four)

February

- 7 Business Meeting, 7:30 (Ely House)

? QUERY ?

Joan Lewis is seeking information about Charles Allen (1781-1825), his family and descendants. Allen lived in East Windsor and is buried in the Hightstown Baptist churchyard, along with his wife Phoebe (1783-1847). She is especially searching for Charles' parents' names, and the identity of collateral descendants. If you have information, call her at (908) 782-9551 (daytime), or write to her at 45 Water Street, Lebanon, NJ 08833

MY MILITARY SERVICE DURING WORLD WAR II

By John William Orr, Jr.

[Editor's Note: Excerpts from the following paper by John Orr were read at the November general meeting.]

NEW DIRECTIONS

It was in the year 1941, the year of my graduation from Hightstown High School. I was attending evening classes at the School of Industrial Arts in Trenton where I had just begun a course in Chemical Analysis. My full time job, however, was at the Diamond Brothers Upholstery factory on Dey Street, Hightstown, "spitting tacks." I was a young country lad and, you might say, "still wet behind the ears." But that was about to change. During the morning of the first Sunday in December I was driving through downtown Philadelphia enroute to visit a favorite uncle of mine, DeForest Ely. DeForest had been hospitalized there following an unfortunate hunting accident in which he, I and Howard, his son, were squirrel hunting. I was suddenly aware of a news flash, the words being spelled out in running lights ahead of me. Pearl Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese and our fleet lay in ruins! As the meaning of this cowardly and sneaky attack against our country began to sink in, I knew what I had to do. It was soon after, December 19 to be exact, that I and two other Hightstown boys, one of whom was Arthur Scudder, traveled to the Red Bank, New Jersey, recruiting station to enlist in the U.S. Coast Guard.

I BELONG TO UNCLE SAM

The physical exam was such that my two buddies were not accepted, Art later serving in the Army Tank Corps. From there I was shipped to the Third Naval District, 42 Broadway, N.Y.C., to await my train ride to Algiers, La., where I would receive my basic training. While waiting at the station word came that the camp had been filled. As there was no other camp ready to accept us "boots," our commandant

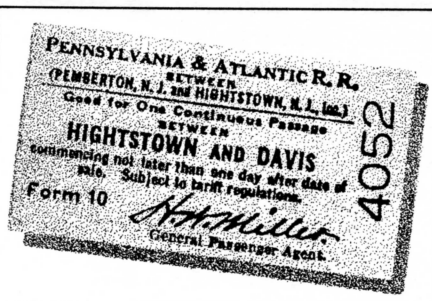
decided to send us to Ellis Island to stand guard duty. We were told that we would receive our boot training sometime later as we would not be able to receive our discharge without it. We accepted his explanation even if it was a lot of hogwash. Who wanted to go to boot camp anyway? We were each given a holster and a 45 automatic (without any instruction whatever) to watch over immigrants who could not understand us, nor we them. It was hard to say who was the most scared. I lost ten pounds on this island in New York harbor and to this day, fifty-two years later, have not regained it. A few weeks later I was given the task of escorting an errant Coast Guardsman from Ellis Island to lower Manhattan to keep a date with the brig. I was still armed with the 45 that I didn't know how to use. The bulge must have looked suspiciously like what it was beneath my yellow rubber raincoat as we brushed shoulders with a good portion of New York City. I remember thinking that my superior must have lost his mind when he gave me this assignment. Nevertheless I followed the orders and soon escorted my handcuffed comrade off the subway and to his new quarters.

FORT TRUMBULL AND THE S.S. BOSTON

From Ellis Island I was transferred to Fort Trumbull, New London, Connecticut, for what was to be the closest experience to boot camp I would ever see. It was a work detachment made up of some of the sorriest Coasties you could imagine, a real houligan bunch. I can still remember some of them: Bill MacKenzie, Eddie Davies, Ernest Bryant, Tony Cello, Joe Bomm, Joe Healer, Eddie Toffler and a holy-roller preacher from Tennessee whose name I cannot recall, but whose homely face still haunts me. We manned the S.S. Boston, a former luxury liner now moored to the dock, where we were trained to clean and polish the heads,

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GET YOUR TICKETS FOR THE "OLD U.T."



The Society has a limited number of early 20th-century train tickets for sale! These are original tickets issued by the Union Transportation Company (the "old U.T.") for passage between Hightstown and each of 10 stops enroute to Pemberton, the southern end of the line. The U.T. was the company that operated the Pemberton & Hightstown Railroad, which linked up with the Camden & Amboy Railroad near where the freight station originally stood. Sets of 10 tickets (one for each stop on the line), mounted and suitable for framing, are available for \$75. Supplies are limited. Unmounted sets are available for \$45. To order, contact Bob Craig at (609) 586-4702. Proceeds will benefit the station restoration fund. ■

decks, brass ornaments, railings and whatever else could be found to keep us confused and exhausted. I later heard that my alma mater, the S.S. Boston, was sunk in the invasion of Africa. Our group leader at Ft. Trumbull was a Mr. "Gee-Gee" Gorman. He was a salty petty officer with a great many years of service behind him. His trousers had extra wide bell bottoms and he almost always had his white sailor hat jauntily cocked over his right eye and part of his nose. He once claimed he had been "busted" more times than he could count. At our first meeting "Gee-Gee" stood us at attention and dared each one of us to dispute his authority in some of the most concise and colorful language my crimson ears had ever heard. Obviously my English teacher had failed to teach me half of the English language. After several months of this life, with no sign of our being sent to boot camp, I decided to try and shuck my apprentice seaman rank for something better. I filled out an application form for the Coast Guard Radio School.

I GO TO SCHOOL IN ATLANTIC CITY

I was accepted for Radio Operator school and entered a new era of my life, one that would eventually influence my civilian vocation. The next six months were spent in Atlantic City, N.J., living and going to school in the Hotel Morton on Virginia Ave. Our day would begin with early morning calisthenics in the lot across the street, which provided free entertainment for the local citizenry. Our schooling consisted of memorizing the morse code and listening to those dots and dashes hour after hour with our radio headphones. We would sit in a little cubicle with a shelf and a blank wall in front of us, while sidewall blinders kept us from distracting our fellow students. We called each other "ditty-dum-dums", undoubtedly out of our fondness for Samuel B. Morse's code. We would type the alphabetic letter representing the sounds we heard over and over again on our typewriter keyboards. It did not have to make sense but it did have to be accurate. This was to prepare us to take messages at sea, as they were almost always sent in five letter coded words. My best friend in radio school was a fellow by the

name of Fred Heckman who came from Silver Springs, Maryland. Occasionally, while on liberty, we would walk the famous Atlantic City boardwalk and enjoy the daytime attractions, or perhaps visit in each others home. I graduated in Class No. 5 of the Coast Guard Radio Operators School as a Radioman 3/c (RM3/c) one year after my enlistment.

WINTER SEA DUTY ON THE "KIMBALL"

My next assignment was to the Coast Guard Cutter, "Kimball". It was in the dead of winter, when the ocean was at its meanest. We operated out of St. George Depot on Staten Island and patrolled the waters of the North Atlantic off Long Island and New Jersey. I remember seeing the lightship "Ambrose" each time we would enter or leave New York harbor. I was sick as a dog for the first week, often finding myself heaving with nothing left to throw up. It was a good thing my typewriter in the radio room was bolted down as I would not have been able to keep it on the table otherwise. One March day, during a northeaster when the superstructure was covered with ice, we found ourselves wallowing on our side with the wind refusing to let us right ourselves. It was just as easy to walk on the bulkhead as it was to walk the deck! By the Grace of God and with the help of a few tons of ballast in the hold, our 125-foot cutter was able to survive and stay afloat. I can truly say that I received my "sealegs" the hard way.

CONVOY DUTY ON THE "THETIS"

In April I received my transfer to the 165-foot cutter "Thetis", also, out of St. George, Staten Island. I soon found myself on coastal convoy duty between New York and Key West, Florida, docking at what was then called Craig Dock. It was here that I used the USO facilities a lot as liberty in Key West was a zero. It was from here that I had the opportunity to visit Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas while on liberty. This was were Dr. Mudd was held prisoner after the Civil War. The waters were very warm and extremely clear. So clear in fact that I almost lost my life in underestimating the depth of the water. One day, from the side of

the Thetis, I tried to swim to the bottom to pick up something that I had seen, and on my return to the surface I ran out of oxygen, my arms stopped working and I barely floated to the surface. It was later estimated that the water where I had dived was 18 to 20 feet deep. In September of 1943 my tonsils became inflamed and I was ordered into the Staten Island Marine Hospital for an operation. With a local anesthetic and my eyes wide open, I submitted to this torture. Then it was ice cream and aspergum for the next several days. After five days of leave I returned to my ship and more convoy duty. We had occasional sub sightings and we dumped many depth charges. I do not recall that the Thetis was ever credited with a "kill" while I was on board. On one of our convoy escorts somewhere off the coast of Southern New Jersey a German submarine was detected. Among our escorts was the Vanderbilt yacht, "Normalhal," which while maneuvering around the merchantmen, was sliced in half by a large ship in the convoy. In the darkened waters of nightfall one could hear the cries of agony as the propellers of would-be rescue ships sliced through those poor souls adrift in the water.

MEANWHILE, BACK HOME

Back home my parents had moved to the Jersey Homesteads, now known as Roosevelt. The War Price and Rationing Board had sharply curtailed their everyday living with their "C7" gas rationing coupons. The Office of Price Administration was busy educating them in energy conservation with their fuel oil rationing coupons. My mother was working parttime for the Hightstown Rug Mill Parachute Division "pulling bastings" on their No. 7 parachute chest packs. My father was working for Mack Motors in New Brunswick as a lathe operator. He became a blood donor in the National Defense program through the Princeton Chapter of the American Red Cross. He was also a civilian Volunteer Observer in the U.S. Army Aircraft Warning Service and was one of the persons manning the observer post on top of Peddie's Memorial Hall. Meanwhile my brother, LeGrande, had graduated from Allentown High School and had enlisted in the Navy Seabees.

RADAR BEACONS ON THE OREGON COAST

My next transfer was across town to the Brooklyn Navy Yard where I again went to school to learn how to maintain Racon sites, short for RADar beaCONs. My ranking was now Radio Technician (RT). I and my seabags were soon on a bus to Seattle with orders to report to the Coast Guard station at Newportville, Oregon. Here I met another man and the two of us divided up the coast of Oregon, servicing several unmanned automatic beacon sites that provided position fixes (when properly interrogated) for our patrolling aircraft along the Pacific coast. We each had our own panel truck, complete with fold-down cots, and operated pretty much on our own. I even had a part-time civilian job where I worked on the "green-chain" of a lumber mill in Toledo, Oregon. I was also responsible for repairing the portable transceivers used by the Coast Guard beach patrols. This was dream duty for a military man but it was not to last.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Someone thumbing through my personnel file must have thought me suitable for a more highly classified technical school. In August of 1944 I was sent back east, this time to the Coast Guard Training Station at Groton, Connecticut. The eight-week course was highly confidential and dealt with a new type of radio positioning equipment. It utilized high power, low frequency pulses of short duration radio energy that could be synchronized between two transmitters, one a "master" and the other a "slave". The pulses were superimposed on each other using dual trace oscilloscopes. The user would have position charts that utilized hyperbola to determine their location. This equipment would be used not only along our shores but in the more hostile areas of the battle front. Loran, more familiarly known today as LOnG RAnge radio Navigation, was then in its infancy. It would play a major role in our offensives against the enemy. Upon graduation I was sent to the Rockaway, Long Island, and Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, Coast Guard stations, which already had Loran equipment, for further on-site training.

A RIDE ON THE WORLD'S LARGEST AIRPLANE

I felt special as I traveled first class on United Airlines enroute to San Fran-

cisco. I enjoyed a delicious pheasant dinner on Thanksgiving Day 1944 high over Salt Lake City. When I checked into the Coast Guard Receiving Station in San Francisco I did not yet know my destination. Within three days I found myself a passenger on the world's largest airplane at that time, a seaplane with an upstairs and a downstairs. It was known as the "Mars." I shivered most of the way to Pearl Harbor as there was no heat and no insulation on the walls of the craft and, as luck would have it, I had left my heavy pea jacket behind figuring that it would be so much excess baggage where I was going. While waiting at Pearl for my next flight, I remember seeing an unusual sight following a shower, something the natives called a "moonbow". I was told that this rainbow was from the reflected light of the bright, full moon.

I CROSS THE EQUATOR

The next leg of my journey was in a C-120 cargo plane. We made stops at Johnston Island and Kwajalein Atoll. I remember looking down at these specks of land from high in the sky and wondering how we could possibly land on something so small. After we had crossed the equator and were approaching the airstrip of the Manus and Los Negros Islands, I remember thinking that I had missed being initiated into the Sons of Neptune, a ritual reserved for those first timers who cross the equator on board a ship. After a short stopover we were on our way back over the equator to Morotai Island, an island off the northern tip of Japanese-held Halmahera Island. This was to be my next home.

THE "MALTA OF THE PACIFIC"

On Morotai I joined Coast Guard Detachment "M", a mobile Loran "master" station unit. A master and slave station always operated in conjunction with each other. As long as both stations were "on the air", a radio fix on their locations could not be made by the enemy. If one station should go off the air, the other "scopie" (an operator who manned the oscilloscope viewer) would immediately begin blinking his signal, followed by a shutdown of the remaining transmitter. My job on Morotai was as a radio technician to service and repair this Loran equipment. Morotai had the dubious distinction of being called the "Malta of the Pacific" because of the incessant bombing by the Japanese warplanes. Every

night at least one "bogey" would fly high over the island and drop an "egg" or two. Our anti-aircraft guns would respond, usually without effect. We would always take shelter from these nuisance raids because the Japanese were so notoriously inaccurate that they just might accidentally hit us. We would usually huddle beneath the coral cliff outcroppings bordering the shoreline across from our airstrip. One night a lucky hit set off the ammunition dump located near the airstrip. It was an awesome sight to see and we were in a grandstand seat. When the shockwave hit us it threw us back against the wall beneath the overhanging ledge. A few men received some coral abrasions. Life near the front was pretty primitive. We had outdoor latrines and showers, many ants, open air tents, mosquito nettings, vienna sausage, dehydrated potatoes and lots of goodies I would just as soon forget. To add flavor to the food we ate some of us would go into the jungle and gather wild hot peppers. We would chop them up and put them in a coke bottle with a little water. Many of us, including me, carried these bottles in our rear pocket as we went through the chow line. One evening, after nightfall, I noticed a low tree near the edge of the jungle lit up like a Christmas tree. Upon approaching this wondrous sight I discovered that the tree was completely covered with lightning bugs! One thing we had plenty of and that was time. We would avoid going far into the jungle however as it was considered a no-man's-land, and might harbor some enemy. Some men would paint scenes of the camp, or write letters, or collect sea shells, or make fancy ID bracelets or go fishing with hand grenades. My special interest was in making a P-38 ashtray. I gathered some 30- and 90-mm brass shell casings with which to build this ashtray. It was patterned after one of our most fascinating propellor-driven fighter planes. I could often see the pilot as he sat in his pod nestled between the twin fuselages as he banked low over our camp. I still have that ashtray.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE
MARCH / APRIL ISSUE OF THE
SOCIETY NEWS LETTER

1994 ANNUAL BANQUET!

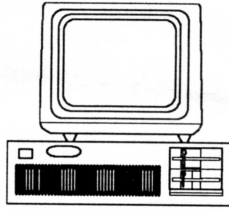
regiment in the war. Mr. Bilby will outline the unit's history and then relate the war through the eyes and words of its officers and men. The talk will be amply illustrated with slides of the individual soldiers.

To make reservations, please complete the reservation form in this newsletter and return it to Dr. David Martin, 147 Canterbury Court, East Windsor, NJ 08520. Please include your telephone number in case there are any last-minute changes. Prices are \$17 for Chicken florentine, \$17 for Baked filet of flounder, and \$20 for New York strip sirloin steak.

For further information, call Dr. Martin (609) 490-7520 (day) or 448-6355 (evening). The deadline for reservations is January 19, 1994. ■

SOCIETY RECEIVES COMPUTER

Thanks to the generosity of one of our members, the Society now owns a personal computer for the first time. It will



be very useful for a wide variety of tasks for the museum and library committees, as well as for many other recordkeeping and word-processing functions. The computer is a Tandy 1000 HD, equivalent to an IBM 'XT', with 640 kilobytes of RAM and a 10-megabyte hard drive. The donation included the central processing unit [CPU], the keyboard, and a monitor. However, database and word-processing software is still needed, and a printer would be very desirable. If any member would like to donate these items, or knows where the Society can obtain them inexpensively, please call Clark Hutchinson, at 448-9543. ■

HIGHTSTOWN / EAST WINDSOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

founded 1971

Serving Hightstown Borough and East Windsor Township

Mailing address: Ely House 164 North Main Street Hightstown, NJ 08520

Officers for 1993-94

- Robin Smith President / 448-8487
- Joel Larson Vice-President
- Clifford Pullen Recording Secretary
- Lois Groendyke . Corresponding Secretary
- George Dubell Treasurer

Committee Chairmen

- Eileen Couturier Museum / 443-3906
- Clark Hutchinson Library / 448-9543
- Robert Craig Newsletter / 586-4702
- Joel Larson Membership / 448-4304
- David Martin Programming
..... & Publications / 448-6355
- Bud Perrine Property / 448-1376
- John Kilbride Train station / 443-4746

BANQUET 1994 RESERVATION FORM

Return this form with check payable to "HEWHS." Mail to Dr. David Martin, 147 Canterbury Court, East Windsor, NJ 08520. Please print clearly! Dinner is at 1 PM on Sunday, January 23, 1994. Reservation deadline is January 19th.

Chicken Florentine \$17 / Baked Filet of Flounder / \$17 New York Sirloin Strip Steak \$20

Name	Meal	Cost
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____

Total number of reservations _____

Total amount enclosed \$ _____

Your address: _____

Town _____ state _____ zip _____

Your telephone: _____

JOIN TODAY, BECOME A MEMBER!

- Membership Individual \$10
- Family \$15
- Booster\$ 25
- Sustaining\$ 50
- Life \$125
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Telephone no. () _____

Membership Type _____

Total \$ _____

Add \$1 if you live outside 08520 Zip Code. Newsletter will be mailed 1st Class

Collectors & Connoisseurship

"A. McNAMEE, HIGHTSTOWN, N.J." BOTTLES



DESIGN #1



DESIGN #2

Have you ever seen a bottle bearing the inscription "A. McNamee, Hightstown, N. J.?" These bottles date from the 1890s and contained soda or beer. On the back of the bottle, near the bottom, is the inscription "This Bottle Not To Be Sold." Two varieties of this bottle have been found. One type is 9.2-inches high with inscription design #1. The base of the bottle bears the inscription "Karl Hutter 47-N New York." The second type is 8-inches high with inscription design #2. The base of the bottle bears the inscription

"Karl Hutter 286[?] New York." Most examples of these bottles retail in the \$9-\$10.00 range. ■

Clark J. Hutchinson
Hightstown Borough Historian

COMMITTEES NEED HELP! HELP! HELP!

Volunteers are needed to help staff both the Library and the Museum Committees. If you're interested in joining, or even if you have archival or curatorial skills that you would be willing to teach or to share, call the chairpersons: for Museum, Eileen Couturier, at 443-3906, and for Library, Clark Hutchinson, at 448-3332 or 448-9543. ■

**Hightstown-East Windsor
Historical Society**
164 North Main Street
Hightstown, New Jersey 08520

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