

DOUG PRYOR

WW II Veteran, the Guys Next Door, the Courageous, the Brave, the Heroes, One and All...

This afternoon I had the extraordinary opportunity to spend a number of hours interviewing my new friend, Doug Pryor. Doug and his wife Patt are residents at Collwood Terrace Stellar Care, and Doug has an incredible and inspiring story to tell about his life.

Doug was born in Foster, Oklahoma on December 8, 1921. His parents owned farm land and soon moved to Maysville, living there until Doug was ten years old. The family grew corn and cotton. At harvest time, his dad, grandfather, cousins and a few “hired helpers” picked cotton “the old-fashioned way”, this being years before the mechanized systems employed today.

Doug and his family spent ten years in Maysville, and those years were filled with the adventures of youth! The women of the family couldn’t see Doug and his younger brother JB in the cotton fields, but they always knew where they were because their dogs were ever-present! Wherever the dogs were, the boys would be close behind.

Once during those years, Doug and JB were walking by a neighbor’s field and saw a huge watermelon just begging to be “liberated”. Always willing to comply, the boys harvested the watermelon and together carried it, huffing and puffing and sweating in the noon-day sun, a full mile to their home. They got there just in time to greet the owner of the watermelon, who had arrived on horseback. Mr. Weeks said to Mr. Pryor: “Joe, we’ve got a problem, but I don’t think the boys need to be further chastised. They’ve suffered enough lugging that huge watermelon through the heat of the day!” Boys will be boys, and how wonderful to have understanding parents and neighbors. In another youthful incident, Doug and JB went to the Washita River, which was in flood-stage. They watched as huge numbers of snakes emerged and decided it was time to leave. Next stop was a field, where they spied a rabbit that took off across the field and fled into an available tree-stump. While JB poked the rabbit with a stick, Doug stood on top prepared to catch it as it tried to jump out. The result was what one might expect: the rabbit and the boy caught each other, and the boy was much the worse for wear. Well scratched and bitten, he admitted defeat, while the indignant rabbit took off across the field.

This was the time of the great depression, and Mr. Pryor, having invested in the stock market, lost everything, including the farm. But God never closes a door without opening another and the Pryors moved to Cheyenne Wyoming where Dad, using his skills as an engineer, worked on the Grand Couley Dam, among other significant projects, and prospered.

In Cheyenne, Doug and JB went to high school, played football and participated in all the usual activities of high school students. Doug also worked after school and on weekends for the Wyoming Automotive Parts Co. They taught him to drive so he could make deliveries all over

the state, and the owners promised that they would give him his first Stetson Hat when he entered college. A promise they delivered on. This job with Wyoming Auto Parts provided his initial training in business administration, a skill he was to carry throughout his life.

Doug graduated from high school in 1939, and joined the Army in 1940. He was assigned to the 3rd Engineering, 24th Division, at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii. Doug travelled to Hawaii from Angel Island, off San Francisco, in an old German boat, captured in WW-1, and thereafter used for troop transport. He arrived in Hawaii on July 4, 1940, and took the sugar cane train to Schofield Barracks. Doug stayed with the Engineers at Schofield until Jan. 1942, and was then transferred to Ft. Shafter, which was the main headquarters for the Army, in Hawaii.

That time-table of course meant that Doug was in Hawaii on December 7th, 1941, “The Day of Infamy” as proclaimed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the day before Doug’s 20th birthday. Doug and the men had been on maneuvers for the week before the attack. On December 7th they were awakened at 7:00 a.m. by a huge explosion. A hanger at Wheeler Field, filled the day before with ammunition, was blown up. *“And we knew, absolutely, that we were at war”*. Our orders were to stay calm, and stay in the barracks. Doug was the first to disobey that order. He went outside and saw a Japanese plane flying low, overhead. The pilot smiled at him and continued with his mission: to bomb Pearl. The intimacy and outrage of that eye contact and smile has remained with Doug to this day.

Confusion reigned. The first day, Dec. 7th, was horrible. And the weeks following were filled with anxiety, tension, rumors and false reports. The worst thing was that they all needed something to do—some action to take – and the Brass were still figuring it out. The next day the Enterprise returned with their planes, and things began to stabilize. A return to “normal” was not conceptually possible, but the men rallied. We were at war, and on Dec. 7th the young people of our nation became “men at war”—they faced the totally unexpected and dealt with it. And Doug was one of them. Doug smiled and added, as an aside, “Given the circumstances, our championship football game was cancelled.”

And so went the war. Doug’s job was to prepare the equipment the men needed for combat. What he did gave them the tools to keep them safe, or as safe as could be. Doug was twice recruited for OCS training but turned them down because he didn’t feel he had the experience necessary to be a leader. The rest of his life has proven Doug to be wrong about his ability to lead. He’s a natural.

Shortly after Doug was honorably discharged, President Truman announced that Japan had surrendered. The war was over. Asked what he thought about his military service, Doug quoted another serviceman who said, “I wouldn’t have given a buck to get into the war, and I wouldn’t take a million dollars in exchange for the experience.”

After the war Doug went to college and, by the way, got that promised Stetson Hat! He majored in Business Administration and at the same time earned an EA Degree, qualifying him as an Enrolled Agent with the IRS, and became a tax expert and financial planner.

After that, Doug went to San Francisco and worked for the Emporium Capital Corp. as a buyer in the drapery department. It was there that he met his future wife, Patt -- described by their son Jeff as "the classiest woman he's ever known -- absolutely stunningly beautiful, and so well organized!"

Doug and Patt then embarked on a future filled with travel and adventure, both in the US and abroad. Their three children, Mike, Jan and Jeff were something to behold. All three of them were All Star Football players, active in all kinds of sports, and music - clearly a talented bunch and worthy of familial pride. Mike has a career in music -- "the leader of the band" who travels throughout the Midwest. A huge bear of a man, with flaming red hair and beard (Jeff says that Mike is the "little guy" in the family!) Mike and his music are known and enjoyed far and wide. Jan, the second son, has an MD degree, with accomplishments that are too extensive to detail. He did, however, initiate a caregiver program for countries in the South Pacific, and is now in joint venture with Brother Jeff in a very successful program involving bio-fuel projects.

Now, back to Doug, he got a job with Cohn-Hall-Marx, a large firm which sold "piece goods" (fabrics). Doug was sent to work with the Chinese merchants in Hawaii. His first contact was with a man who "controlled" the Chinese merchants who sold fabric. This man said that Doug looked like an honest man, and told him to select 100 bolts of fabric for him, sight-unseen. Doug did that, the order arrived, and the fabrics sold out within 3 days. With this success, Doug's post-war career was launched and he became the primary buyer for all those Chinese merchants.

Two years later Doug returned to the mainland to work for Cutter's Laboratories in Omaha, and then moved on to Eli Lilly -- "the best deal I ever made!" Doug was a salesman for two years, then a district manager. He often went out as a recruiter, going to colleges and universities through the Midwest, to identify and recruit students with great potential, to work for Eli Lilly. This was a highly rewarding work, as he was selecting people who would be leaders in the arena of medical research and delivery.

In 1982 when Doug "retired-retired," he and Patt moved to San Clemente, and set up shop as a tax consultant and financial planner. Then, in 2002 they moved to Fiji, to be with their son, Jan, who was developing a program for caregivers in the South Pacific. In 2008 they moved again, this time to San Diego.

Looking back at his life, Doug says that the Great Depression, the military and his post-war service made him keenly aware of the needs of people -- the rank and file of humanity.

December 7th, 1941 at Pearl Harbor, was indeed a horrible day but in that 24 hour period, a bunch of kids gained manhood and Doug Pryor was one of them. Heroes, one and all.

A special thank you to Kit Mickelson for this wonderful look into Doug's life.