



WOMPATUCK NEWS

Issue Number 24

Friends of Wompatuck State Park

Summer Edition, 2012



Lester Gammon during World War II.



Recent photo of Lester Gammon.



"Our front yard."

Icon of the Greatest Generation

By Jim Rose, FOW News Editor and Historian

Park supervisor Steve Gammon's father Lester R. Gammon Sr. passed away May 8th at age 96 in Scituate surrounded by family members.

He was married to Dorothy (Bates) for 66 years. Lester was born in Middleboro and raised in Brockton. He served in the Army from 1939 to 1945, earning five battle stars. He worked for 33 years for the New Haven Railroad as a freight agent. Lester was a talented artist and a member of the North River Arts Association. He loved to sail and was a member of the Catboat Association.

I first met Lester April 22, 2008 during an interview for the Library of Congress Veteran's History Project.

When I set up the video equipment in his living room that day, I was

spellbound by the beautiful paintings he created.

My first reaction to the art work was a flashback to the Museum of Fine Arts when I first viewed the works of Claude Monet and Winslow Homer.

I asked Steve to explain his father's many talents.

"My dad's favorite artist was the French Impressionist Claude Monet," said Steve. "He always loved drawing, painting and cartooning, so after the war my father decided to study art along with my mother Dorothy at the New England School of Art. They first met each other shortly before at the Scituate Playhouse.

"Yes, dad was a gifted guy with many interests. Besides painting, he also built a model sailing ship out of scrap wood from the tool shed. He named it "Dorothy E. Bates" after mom, of course. It took two years to build.

"Upon retiring from the railroad, he discovered time to do what he loved. Besides art, there was sailing. He owned an 18 foot catboat named

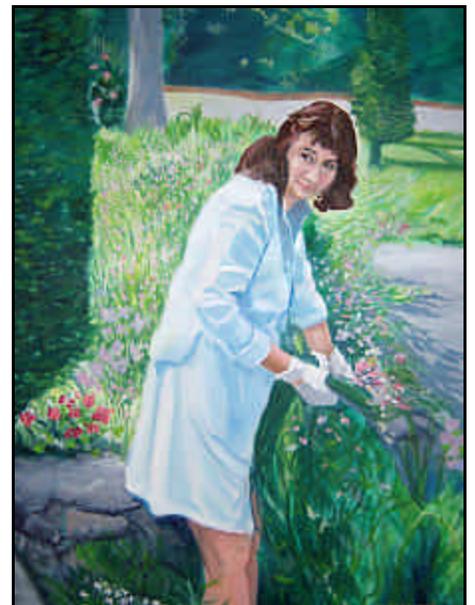
"Cricket." In 1976 he sailed out to greet the Tall Ships on their way into Boston Harbor. He got a lot of mileage out of "Cricket." It ended up being sold to Joe Kennedy, Jr.

"Dorothy knew some of the Kennedy clan. They gave us a finger painting created by Joe Kennedy III who now is running for a congressional seat. We still have it.

Continued on page 2



Train Called "Mogul."



Lester's wife "Dorothy."



Christopher O'Neal and Captain William Bates (Steve's great-grandfather).



"Purple Majesty."



South Hanson train station.

Icon of the Greatest Generation (continued)

"Although a quiet and creative type, he did generate some laughter. There was a time at a catboat celebration in Marion, Mass. where dad drank a little too much vodka. To begin with, he hardly ever drank. So, the fire water hit him pretty quickly.

"After listing 10 degrees starboard for a few minutes, he went right up to the commandant of the Catboat Association and said, 'You know sir, you don't have any character in your face. Do you realize that?' Of course, he was thinking of him in artistic terms.

"Then dad hauled off to take a pram out in the water for a spin and fell in. That sobered him up... big time."

During the World War II interview, Lester described the combat he endured in North Africa fighting General Rommel; in Italy taking Mount Casino; in France storming the beachhead; in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge and in Germany crossing of the Rhine River.

After the interview, he said he wanted to forget as much as he could from the war. He didn't want to join the VFW, American Legion or go to any GI reunions.

Lester surely went to hell and back. From ducking artillery fire and V-1 rockets to fending off with his anti-aircraft gun attacking ME-262 jets and diving Stukas, he experienced it all. Lester was one of the first GIs to see the aftermath of the Malmedy Massacre during the Battle of the Bulge where the German SS troops murdered 84 GIs. His unit was also the first to cross the Rhine River at the Remagen Bridge which hastened the war's end. His unit shot down 14 enemy planes at that battle.

I asked him if outside of all the tragedy in the war he experienced, was there any humorous event he could think of.

"During the Battle for Mount Casino in Italy there was a funny event," he said with a smile.

"The Germans had this huge cannon mounted on a railroad track. I think it was 280 millimeters. The shell was over 500 pounds. It scared our pants off.

"While it was lobbing rounds at us, I was on the phone talking to my buddy for an assessment of where the fire was coming from. Suddenly the phone went dead.

"I feared he got hit. It turned out that when the shell came in, he dove into his foxhole. But there was another GI already taking cover in it.

"He ended up diving on him. However, being on top, he got hit in the rear end by the shrapnel. Our dive bombers tried to destroy the gun, but it survived the war. It's now in a museum. We called it 'Anzio Annie.'"

Another member of the Greatest Generation passes on. Lester was truly an icon of devotion to his family, sacrifice for his country, and a gift of many talents for us all to appreciate and remember. He'll be missed. ■



Venice canal.



"The Grand Canal" after Monet.



Wooden ship model "Dorothy E. Bates."