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Private Bill Handrahan readies for action.



The GI Merry Macs entertaining the troops. Handrahan is on the far left.

Hingham Veteran Recalls WWII Theatrics and Federal Career

By Jim Rose, FOW News Editor and Historian

As Bill Handrahan approaches 90 in the new year, he reflects back on a life of not only sacrifice for his country but also a world of entertainment, humor, and good sportsmanship.

Born in Hull on August 2, 1924, Handrahan went to Hingham High School along with his five sisters and six brothers. Hull didn't have a high school then.

As a stand out athlete, he excelled in football, baseball, hockey, golf and tennis.

At the Hull Gala Day Tennis Tournament, Handrahan and his sister Lucille defeated future U.S. President John F. Kennedy and his sister in a hard contested doubles match. Handrahan thinks JFK's sister was Kathleen. The Kennedy summer home was located in Hull at the time.

"Jack was a nice kid and a good sport," said Handrahan. "Let's say we got along famously, even though I wipped him. We were both twelve years old at the time."

To further hone his jock skills during his senior year in high school, he played baseball for the Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot's team.

"Depot coach Tim Leary recruited us right out of high school to play for his team," said Handrahan. "He thought we had the talent to help his team. We jumped at it. We loved the game."

When World War II started, he was drafted out of high school before graduation to fill in the ranks for Uncle Sam.

Handrahan ended up fighting in the Ninth Air Force as an anti-aircraft chief gunner. His job was to protect the airbases from enemy attack.

"We were strafed and bombed several times," said Handrahan. "A couple of times we were attacked by German ME-262 jets. We shot down two of them. Our unit suffered no casualties. The closest we came to death was during leave in England. After a night of us GIs raising hell at this pub, we decided to stagger back to the barracks. No sooner we were five minutes down the road from the gin mill, a German V-1 buzz bomb blows the place to bits."

Handrahan fought in the Battle of the Bulge, crossed the Rhine River in Germany and liberated the Dachau concentration camp.

"Reflecting back on it, Dachau was one of the most gruesome experiences

of the war," said Handrahan. "I'll never forget the crematorium and mass graves. During the Battle of the Bulge, I also will never forget that cold snowy winter...let alone being shelled constantly. The Germans had us on the run for awhile."

When the war ended, Handrahan was asked by a U.S. Army theater group if he would like to join them as a stage hand to entertain the troops.

"I nervously said 'yes' not knowing what I was getting into," said Handrahan. "It was the best experience of the war I ever had. We went everywhere in a confiscated German bus. I met Bob Hope and Mickey Rooney at USO shows. After awhile I got to act in a few skits myself. I can recall *The Merry Macs*, *Odds and Ends*, *The Horse with the Hansom Behind* and *The Andrew Sisters*."

After his discharge Handrahan ended up earning his high school diploma at Thayer Academy. From there, he was accepted at Ohio State and played full-back for the football team. "I played for two years, then was injured in a pile up," said Handrahan. "My brothers

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Dachau crematorium.



Handrahan sits atop ME109 German fighter.



Hitler's compound in Berchtesgaden. GIs attached sign "Hitler's Home" on outhouse.

Annex Veteran Recalls WWII Theatrics and Federal Career (continued from page one)

fares better. "Two of them made All-American with the Dartmouth College football team."

After college Handrahan worked at the Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot as an ordnance inspector.

"I really enjoyed working at the depot," Handrahan said. "I'll always remember the laughs there. We had one funny experience when a loudmouthed worker backed his forklift off the dock into the Back River. That quieted him down quick.

"One thing I'll always remember is watching the pros play golf at the South Shore Country Club from the depot scale house. In fact, Arnold Palmer and Gary Player played each other there in 1962. Golf is another one of my passions. I could average in the low 80s then. My record is 78.

"You could always recognize the people who worked at the depot in Hingham. Their skin was dyed yellow from the "D" powder (ammonium picrate) they used to pack shells. My

neighbor, Einer Olsen, always carried that coloring. He loaded the 5-inch 38-caliber projectiles." Olsen happens to be Bare Cove Park ranger Scott McMillan's late grandfather.

After the ammunition depot closed in the summer of 1962, Handrahan worked for the U.S. Defense Contract Administration Service as a quality inspector at Hanover, Massachusetts gravel mine project. His job was to check safety and performance specifications for land mines destined for the Vietnam War.

Tragically, a mine accidentally exploded killing one employee and injuring 15 others.

"That was a sad day for us," said Handrahan. "But it was also a sad day for the Cohasset Annex because it was producing the weapon, and the Army shut down the operation and laid everybody off. The mines ended up being disarmed at the Annex."

"That wasn't the only accident at Hanover. One day, for some reason, all

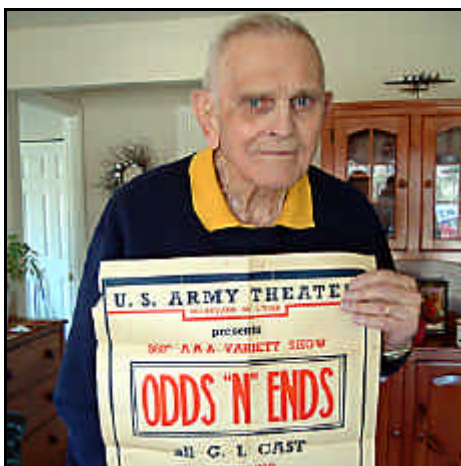
the stored tear gas canisters suddenly exploded. They flew all over the production yard spewing out the fumes. The Hanover Fire Department ended up evacuating half of the town because of the gas. This time no one was injured...thank God.

"After my Hanover job shut down, the Defense Contract Administration relocated me at the Boston Army Base as a claims investigator.

"My last job was with the Department of Defense as a Quality Assurance Representative Supervisor.

"I retired in 1987 with 40 years under my belt working for the federal government. The experience was well worth it. It supported my wife and I and our seven kids. But unfortunately, I'm too stiff to play golf anymore.

"I come from a patriotic family. Five of my late brothers have their names etched on the World War II veteran memorial on Nantasket Avenue in Hull. I'm the only Handrahan left." ■



Handrahan holds up poster of WWII show he performed in.



Photo of Arnold Palmer warming up at the South Shore Country Club.



Hull veteran monument with the five Handrahan brothers.