

War Stories

Wes Tyler

My father, Parker Tyler, enlisted at the age of 34 in 1942, and often told the story that he did so after seeing a newspaper advertisement. Apparently, the Army Air Corps was looking for businessmen to join and offered immediate commissions as Second Lieutenants. He never spoke of how likely it was that he would be drafted at that point in time, but he was certainly motivated to enlist as an officer rather than be inducted to an unknown rank.

His first assignment was at Bradley Field, the site of today's Bradley International Airport just north of Hartford, where he served as Assistant Base Director for Maintenance and Supply for over two years.

A recurring theme of his stories about this period related to commanding black soldiers in the segregated army. Having spent most of his life in New York City, his eyes were now opened wide to new aspects of racial inequality. First, and obviously, black soldiers were generally relegated to the most menial duties and led exclusively by white officers. Second, the life experience, education and demeanor of black men from the south vastly differed from black men in New York City. Third, although his past had exposed him to other religions and nationalities, he had never worked beside black men. As their commander and as a man with a conscience and religious conviction he was deeply affected.

According to my Mom, Dad was determined to help his black troops "lead a better life", but I don't know what he actually did for them at the time. However, later in life, he sought to recruit blacks into his business, supported a local black Baptist church and, in other ways, showed a commitment to those he saw in need.

When you read From Seattle to Ie Shima, it's difficult to reconcile the Parker Tyler I'm writing about and the one who described men as "colored" and "Japs" and identifies them by religion and heritage. While one has to recognize the context of the era, it's also true that my father was prejudiced. He was prejudiced in that he held beliefs about the motivations and behaviors of other ethnic and religious groups than his own. He did not, however, treat people badly because of these prejudices. Instead, he extended his hand to them first and set an example to his children that diversity was a value in a time before the word became overused.

In November 1944, Dad reported to Bluthenthal AFB and became the supply officer for the 413th fighter squadron with the assignment of assembling supplies for the 413th Fighter Group's trip to Ie Shima.

Dad recognized that as a supply officer that his role was to get his unit what they needed, when they needed it, whether or not they were due it. In some cases a supply officer might be expected to fulfill a desire of a superior officer regardless of need. He alludes to this when, in From Seattle to Ie Shima, he provides a hypothetical situation where a General orders that lumber not be used to build mess halls, but a unit commander expects his supply officer to get lumber to build a mess hall. In actuality, this was not hypothetical and Dad was the one that got his unit's mess hall built before any other on the Ie Shima.

These procurement feats were accomplished through "wheeling and dealing" and Dad arrived on Ie Shima prepared. He often told us that when he shipped out, he had brought a footlocker filled with bottles of liquor for trading purposes. He relished the memory of his bunkmates using the footlocker as a table on which to play cards during the journey, never knowing what was inside.

As the war came to a conclusion, Dad's skill at trading and selling continued. In his letters to my Mom, her Father and his own Mother he pestered them to send him rolls of film as every soldier wanted photos as souvenirs. Dad was selling cameras too, but I don't know where they came from. When after the war he was able to visit Tokyo, Dad seems to have been loaded

with cigarettes, chocolate and booze to trade or give as gifts. As Bert Collison of the 21st Squadron recalled, “Your dad was a great scrounger... always had things to trade... always trading something.”

Parker Tyler Obituary

Hilary Tyler

Obituary: Parker R. Tyler, Jr.
July 4, 1908 – March 11, 2004

Parker Rockwell Tyler, Jr. died Thursday, March 11th, in Rye, NY, at the age of 95. He is survived by his wife of 63 years Gloria, his children Alice Stroup, Jo Tyler, Hilary Tyler, Barton Tyler and Wesley Tyler, ten grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Parker was born July 4, 1908 in Somerville, MA to Parker R. and Alice Phillips Tyler. Parker graduated from The Kelvin School in New York City, and Yale University, Class of 1929. Both his secondary and undergraduate educations were funded by scholarships. In gratitude, Parker established the Tyler Foundation to provide scholarship monies to financially needy students.

Parker married Gloria Bess Brimmer of Cazenovia, New York in 1940. He served in the Army Air Force 413th Fighter Group in the Pacific during W.W.II, retiring in the rank of Major. After the war he founded The Tyler Advertising Agency, which specialized in the plumbing and heating industry. In 1965 he bought control of Gas Consumers Service, later GCS Service, Inc. where he remained active for 35 years.

Parker was an elder and 49 year member of the First Presbyterian Church, Katonah, New York. He served on various committees of Hudson River Presbytery and the national church: Presbyterian Church USA. He served 23 years on the Board of Directors of Religion in American Life. An ardent supporter of civil rights, Parker helped establish NEWCOE – Northern Westchester Council on Equality. He was an active alumnus of Yale University and chaired the Class of 1929 Yale Alumni Fund. In 2001 he established the Gloria and Parker Tyler Scholarship Fund at Yale.