

# Farewell To A Pythian Air Corpsman

by Mark Stuart Ellison

Eli Ellison, a longtime member of Lodge 463, is gone but not forgotten. He was my dad.

I still have vivid childhood memories of him donning his blue, yellow-script-lettered, Sovereign Senators uniform every Tuesday night before going bowling. On Sunday mornings, I'd watch him play softball with Pythian members. He was mediocre at these sports, but he always relished the friendly competition.

His dedication to the less fortunate was evident by the work he chose. A Social Services caseworker from 1968-69, and a home instruction teacher for the last 35 years, he worked in some of New York City's worst neighborhoods. He donated frequently to veterans groups and considered his military service a high point of his life.

From 1943 to 1945, my father was an Army Air Corps radio truck operator in Western Europe. There were plenty of ball games and dances, but there were even more buzz bombs and air raids, especially during the Battle of the Bulge. And Dad didn't always get enough to eat.

But to a twenty-something kid who had barely ventured outside his native Bronx, there was a great sense of adventure. He traveled by land, sea, and air through Britain, France, Belgium, and Germany, making friends and acquaintances he would have otherwise never met. Unlike most soldiers, men in his unit had frequent contact with civilians. Then, of course, there were the women.

In 1944 my father was a trim, handsome six-footer, but you didn't have to be a Clark Gable look-alike to get a girl. An average Joe could walk into just about any bar over there, and after a few minutes of casual conversation, start getting physical with a woman. It wasn't because she was a slut or nymphomaniac. It was because she craved physical and emotional comfort. She was often ill-fed, hadn't heard from her man in years, and feared dying in air raids.

After the war, my father cherished the safety and comfort of America as never before. To him, the peace and prosperity of the United States was blissful compared to the pulverized cities through which he had passed. Whenever I was bothered by a personal problem, Dad always reminded me that no bombs were falling and nobody was shooting at me. To this day, that admonition helps me keep things in perspective.

Another key aspect of Dad's service was that it connected him to all soldiers, past and present, in a visceral way that only those who were in a war zone can understand. He mourned every U.S. troop death in Iraq. Even he, a support soldier, was part of a band of brothers at whose fortitude I can only marvel.

Shortly before his death, my father and I collaborated on *Dear Mom, Dad, & Ethel: World War II through the Eyes of a Radio Man* (iUniverse 2004), a novel based upon his military experience. It is a product of six years of writing and research. I know the subject in my head, but Dad knew it in his heart and gut because he was the man who lived it.



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