

Reminiscence: Cassidy & Teschek

By Brian Murphy
For the Beacon

From the firestorm of the Pacific Theater to the quiet shores of Highland Lake, Ed Cassidy and Donald Teschek lived a life of hardship and sacrifice, good friendship, and shared memories. Although Teschek passed away 25 years ago, their unique relationship lives on in a piece of lakefront property that three generations of family continue to cherish as a treasured summer retreat.

A single, tree-shaded driveway serves as the lone access to a pair of cottages that the two men built in 1954 and 1955. Beyond the paired structures, a sloping, grassy hillside leads to a shared beach below.

Somewhere in between is an invisible property line that neither side seems to care too much about. The fact that no one can say exactly where the land is divided is proof of an enduring bond between the two World War Two veterans, and a unique, good-natured relationship between their families.

"We used to say, if we got mad at each other, they [the Cassidys] weren't going to let us down the driveway, and I said that they weren't going to use the water," jokes Eleanor Teschek, 84, Don's widow. "We have a saying, 'If you get the Cassidys, you get the Tescheks—we come together.' It's just kind of always been that way."

Work And The Call Of War

The friendship of Ed and Don began in 1938. Cassidy, a reconciler in the accounts department at Employers' Group Insurance Company in Boston, had been on the job for a year and was asked to provide training for Teschek, a new recruit. The two also became quite friendly with Bob Williams, another Employer's Group colleague who worked in the same department.

The three hard-working young men poured their energy into their careers and set their sights on making a good living. They took classes three nights a week at Bentley College after work often getting home after 10 PM. They paid their tuition and expenses out of their own pocket, but they also managed to find time to hang out and enjoy each other's company.

"The three of us spent a lot of time together camping, going to Canada," says Cassidy, at age 93 still alive and well and living in La Mirada, California. "We were all single then." Cassidy got married in June 1941, and he and Williams later transferred to another office, but the trio remained good friends.

But their personal and professional lives would soon be interrupted by the drum roll of war. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Eleanor, then a high school senior, was stunned along with the rest of the country.

"We had no TV and I can still remember President Roosevelt and his



Don Teschek (l) and Ed Cassidy on Leyte in the Pacific during World War II

words over the radio, 'Today the Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor,' she says. "We were all shocked."

Not long after in early 1942, Cassidy and Don Teschek were alerted by the draft. The three men knew that it was only a matter of time before they'd be drafted, so in order to avoid a poor assignment, they enlisted. On a Saturday morning, Cassidy and Williams took the Air Force pilot written examination and passed. But when they got called in for the physical, Cassidy flunked the eye test (he had 20/30 vision in one eye).

"I told them I worked at night, so they told me to rest up, try again in a couple weeks. I even went to a specialist, but it didn't help," Cassidy says.

Cassidy later tried to enlist in civilian pilot training under jurisdiction of the Army but was again denied entrance. Shortly thereafter he was drafted into service as an Air Force quartermaster in the fifth Air Force, reporting to Fort Dix in New Jersey. His 100-man unit was responsible for feeding and supplying 10,000 troops, so there was no downtime. In fact, in three years in the service, Cassidy says he had only 10 days off on a short furlough back to the states.

In April of 1942, Teschek reported to Fort Devens with the 14th Anti-Aircraft Command. Williams meanwhile became a pilot of a B-25 bomber.

In The Thick Of Conflict

In 1943, Cassidy left from San Francisco on a ship to Australia. Teschek's unit was assigned to New Zealand, and he saw action there and on Guadalcanal. After Australia, Cassidy went on to New Guinea following the ladder as US forces fought and regained Japanese-held territory in the Philippines. Though he was serving as a quartermaster behind the lines, combat was swirling all around him.

"We were lucky, in the type of outfit we were in, we were sort of in back of what was going on," Cassidy recalls.

But sometimes the action drew close. The Japanese frequently attempted to get at the US supply lines and ships in the harbors of the Philippine Islands. On New Guinea, Cassidy says that the Japanese bombers would come in every night at 11:30 PM for a bombing run. "You could almost set your clock by it," he says. "That's what they were after, the harbor and all the ships there."

During the day, Japanese fighter planes flew in low and fast on strafing runs. "They had a lot of Zeroes, very fast and maneuverable," Cassidy says. "You might shoot at them, but they were going so fast and so low, the chances of hitting them were rather remote."

Teschek kept a copy of *The Guadalcanal Herald and Examiner* that showed that the US was winning the battle in the air. The June 21, 1943 issue recaps a battle for air supremacy over the island in which the Japanese suffered 94 planes destroyed, 17 of which were knocked down by anti-aircraft guns. In comparison, only six US planes were lost.

Cassidy recalls seeing a number of heavily damaged US planes limping back to the runway during these hard-fought days in the Pacific. "I'd see fighter planes half shot-up, you wondered how they could fly," Cassidy recalls. "The planes that we made were not as

maneuverable as the Japanese planes, but our planes were made to protect the pilot, the Japanese planes were not. So those planes would take a hell of a lot of punishment."

An Unlikely Reunion

Cassidy's next stop was the East Indies where the US forces staged for the invasion of Leyte. When he got to Leyte, Cassidy wrote home and asked his wife, Kay, and his family to see if they could find out where Teschek was stationed. "I had an idea he was in the Pacific, but I didn't know where," he recalls.

With their aid, Cassidy tracked down Teschek's APO number (a number used by the Army for mailing purposes). It was 72, the same as Cassidy's. "I figured there was a good chance he was in the area somewhere," Cassidy says.

As it turns out, Teschek was very close—barely a mile away, in fact. One sunny day, Cassidy strode up to Teschek's tent and tapped him on the shoulder. It was a highly improbable reunion of two friends, who—thousands of miles from home and in the midst of the largest war the world had ever seen—were now standing face-to-face on an island in the midst of the war-torn Pacific Ocean.

"It was just a case of walking over to his
See Cassidy on page 23

The brain transmits information through one billion neurons in the spinal cord.



At New London Hospital, we're always thinking about your well-being.

When Judy Wallace started having extreme pain when she walked, she made her way to New London Hospital. Neurosurgeon Dr. Joseph Phillips discovered that a spinal cyst was blocking the nerves to her legs. He put Judy at ease, saying the words she most wanted to hear, "this is treatable." The day after surgery Judy was walking comfortably, grateful for having Dr. Phillips and New London Hospital in her community.



Comprehensive care including surgery, neurology, and pain management.

For a complete list of services visit www.newlondonhospital.org

Sign up for our e-newsletter, **Discover Health**, by sending your email to discover.health@newlondonhospital.org