

Guest Columnist

By: Everett Griner

Earlier this year, two of Moultrie's young heroes met in Afghanistan, halfway around the world. You can't understand the significance of a meeting like this unless you have experienced it. I have more than once.

Let me first explain my undistinguished but unusual military career. I served just under seven years during two wars. My duties carried me to many places, foreign and homeland, and enabled me to perform military service in all four branches. On multiple occasions, in different places, I managed to run into somebody from Moultrie. Here is my story.

In 1944, I joined the Navy. My first duty station following boot camp was at the U.S. Naval Air Station in Sanford, Fla. My duty was with a Marine Corps security unit. For 14 months, I served under Marine officers and non-commissioned officers. Not once in that time did I serve under a Navy officer. But during part of that time – in the same barracks with me – was a young sailor who I had known in grade school in Moultrie, Seaman Charles Haynes.

In the closing stages of the Pacific War, I was sent to San Francisco, where I sailed directly to Okinawa. My duty assignment was with the 7th Navy Amphibious Fleet whose job was to move occupational forces from various islands into Japan. After three of these trips, our LST (Landing Ship, Tank) was among many that the U.S. was giving to Japan to rebuild their sunken merchant fleet. We went to the Mariana Islands for reassignment. Here is where my first overseas meeting occurred.

I boarded my new LST home shortly after noon. After signing aboard, I was told to report for duty the next day. I spent the next few hours learning my way around.

On the main deck, I stopped to watch a crewmember that was cutting a gun mount



with a torch. After several minutes, he stopped for a break. When he raised the face-plate of his helmet, I was looking into the face of B.F. Young, a former classmate of mine at Moultrie High School. Surprised? No! Shocked.

We spent about three months together before that LST was decommissioned. We sailed into Tokyo Bay where each of us was to be reassigned. As I climbed the ladder to board the ship that would be our temporary home, I heard someone yell, "Hey Griner!" There, on the main deck, stood Jack Reagan, another former MHS classmate. We spent several days together before being reassigned.

My new assignment? Another LST. This one's mission was to help move China's Nationalist Army north to Manchuria to hold Mao's advancing Communist Army. This took me to Shanghai and Hong Kong. One of the most scenic views in all of East Asia was the view of Hong Kong Harbor from atop the mountains that almost circle

the bay. I took the trolley up to the viewing platform. As I enjoyed the view and watched the crowd, I saw the familiar face of a young Navy officer. I walked up, saluted, and said, "I think I know you." Indeed I did. It was Navy Lt. B.F. Melton from Moultrie, Ga.

Not long after that, I was discharged from the Navy and returned home to Moultrie. That was in July 1946.

Fast forward to 1950 and the Korean War.

I was working in Thomasville and facing recall to Navy duty. I chose instead to join the Air Force. Basic training was at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas. I spent 10 weeks there. During that time, two former MHS basketball stars learned that I was there. So, I had a couple visits with Lonnie Brooks and Billy Tillman.

From Lackland, I was sent to the Army's Military Police Academy at Fort Gordon, Ga. This was a 10-week assignment with the Army. I didn't meet anyone from

Moultrie, but I rode home two weekends with a young airman named Weeks from Coolidge.

Out of military police school, I was ordered directly to Wheelus Air Force Base, Tripoli, Libya. This was an 18-month assignment. A few months into that tour, I was in the chow line at the consolidated mess hall. Believe it or not, I saw the face of a man from Moultrie, Ross Thomas Jr. He had recently been assigned to Wheelus Air Base. Ross and I spent frequent Friday evenings at the NCO Club playing bingo and swapping news from home. On one of these warm desert evenings while waiting for bingo to commence, I saw standing in the doorway, his cousin, Bobby Thomas, also from Moultrie, Ga.

Not long after the bingo incident, the Air Force scheduled me to attend the Army's training course at Frankfurt, Germany. I spent another five weeks in the Army. On preparing to return to Libya, I was walking through the Air Force terminal building. In a small, busy snack bar, I stopped for coffee and donuts. With my tray in my hands, I looked for a seat. Only one was vacant. I approached the sergeant seated at the table to ask his approval to sit down. Good gracious! It was SGT. Speedy Murphy, a former police officer, from Moultrie.

Upon completion of my tour in Tripoli, I finished my Air Force tour at Great Falls, Mont. I didn't meet anyone from Moultrie at Great Falls, but while filling out papers for leave time to come home, I stood next to the very man who replaced me on the job I had when I left Thomasville to join the Air Force.

One final thought. It may not sound interesting to you, but all those people that I had met on four continents, I had known every one of them beforehand – in Moultrie, Ga. [M](#)

