

Fundholder Spotlight – Shoemaker-Bond Home Association, Inc. Fund



Members of the Shoemaker-Bond Home Association, Inc. Fund with form LVCF Executive Director, Carol Henn.

Norman Kramer. Harold Reppert. Luther DeLong. Charles Radcliffe. Vernon Kercher. George Jarrett. Carl Fegley. More than fifty years ago, these men left the farms and small towns of western Lehigh County to serve their country in places as far away as Italy, Germany, France, Poland and the South Pacific. They became part of what journalist

Tom Brokaw has compellingly labeled “The Greatest Generation.”

Now in their 70s and 80s, these men were ‘country farm boys’ when they left towns such as Topton, Mertztown, and New Tripoli to serve in the Army and Navy in World War II. “We were so young,” says Norman. “We went to one-room schoolhouses for grades one through eight. Then you went to to Emmaus stopped.” Virtually all of their fathers and grandfathers were farmers, with some working in the mills as well. They may have been boys when they left their family farms, but they became men on the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific.

Norman was a field artillery gunner who saw action in five battles including the Battle of the Rhine, the Battle of the Bulge, and the invasion of Normandy. “Sometimes we didn’t even have time to dig a foxhole,” he recalls. “The gunfire never let up.” Luther helped to build bridges in France and Germany and runways in Iceland. Vernon served on a tanker sailing from the Panama Canal to the Pacific and into the Leyte Gulf for the U.S. invasion of the Philippines. George served as a medical pharmacist in the U.S. Navy, aboard the U.S.S. Oriskanny in the waters off Korea. After three years he was discharged with severe frostbite. Carl served in the A93 bomb group as a radio operator on B-24s and B-12s. Shot down on his 20th combat mission, he was taken as a prisoner of war. After being locked in a crowded boxcar for eight days, he spent eight months at POW camps in Germany and Poland.

Charles was close to the action in Europe as a member of the Infantry and as an anti-aircraft gunner. He focuses on the pleasant memories of seeing the Andrews Sisters and McGuire Sisters when they came to entertain the troops. For Harold, the memories are not so pleasant. Assigned to a then-secret



department of the Army, he operated sound equipment on tanks and trucks on the front lines. “We put 4’ x 5’ speakers at the front lines at 2:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m.,” he says. “We were there to simulate sound and make it seem as though there were tanks firing away. But we were out there, night after night, with no real way to defend ourselves.” Many years after the War, *Parade Magazine* featured the work of these servicemen and their ‘secret sounds’, but Harold grows quiet when he remembers the vulnerability of rubber guns on fake tanks.

After the war, these men and their compatriots, some of whom are now long gone, returned home with jobs at Caloric and Mack; to work as insurance salesmen and shoe factory workers. Some even continued to farm the land their grandparents settled. They also began a VFW Post in memory of two who did not come back – Lt. Earl Bond of Topton, killed in England while landing his B-47 after his 49th combat mission, and Sgt. Raymond Shoemaker of Maple Grover, who list his life in combat on June 4, 1943.

Today, the remaining members of the Shoemaker-Bond Post enjoy the pleasures of retirement, of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They still enjoy most of their hobbies – golf, travel, country and western music, hunting and fishing. The funds they raised through the years to establish a community center for their VFW Post have now been converted into a permanent charitable fund – the Shoemaker Bond Home Association Fund at the Lehigh Valley Community Foundation. Programs and organizations in the Toptown/Metztown area will benefit from the foresight and generosity of these men in perpetuity, for as long as we will remember the service and sacrifice of this Greatest Generation – forever.

UPDATE:

In 1999, the surviving veterans who were members of the Post recognized that their numbers were decreasing over time. They gave the assets of the Home Association to the Lehigh Valley Community Foundation to establish a charitable fund that would perpetually support community organizations important to them, so long as those organizations exist. Grants from the Shoemaker-Bond Fund are made to the Longswamp Township Cemetery Association, Longswamp Boy Scouts, Longswamp Campfire Girls, Topton Boy Scouts, Topton Campfire Girls, the Scotland School, and Brandywine Heights High School. Grants to the latter support awards for class valedictorians and salutatorians as well as winners of citizenship essay competitions.