



Taft, California

Greetings from Pete Gianopulos. Class of 1942

The Taft Newsletter

News alert: Last night the Taft High Wildcat Varsity football team won their game against Templeton from the coast by a score of 28 to 3.

Boom Town Taft , California

by Eddie Coffee

(Twentieth and the final of this series)

Eddie Coffee came to Taft in about 1920 and was very knowledgeable about early Taft. This continuation of his memories in an unpublished form of early Taft. This will be the last in the series.

First Automobile

I remember when we bought our first automobile, a 1923 Star. First we bought the 1923 Star and drive it for a few months. My Dad thought hat it was a little bit light, so he traded it in on the Durant. Gosh we drove the Durant for years. We drove it over to the coast and I remember a trip to Visalia . There was a barbecue at Moony's Grove that we would go to. In those days, Moony's Grove was way out in the country. It is almost down town now.

I remember when we would leave the house at 4:00 in the morning with a jug of water and visit my Aunt. She lived in Lincoln Heights .

My cousin Betty went to high school down there. That's where she met Bob Young (the TV and motion picture star). She also met a little world champion prize fighter names Fidel La Barba.

Well, I'm getting ahead of myself. We would leave Taft at 4:00 a.m. and arrive in Lincoln Heights on Rolli Street at noon. That was quite a trip. We'd visit all afternoon and get up the next morning and head back. I counted 364 curves on the Ridge Route . If you drove over 15 to 18 mph you would squeal the tires.

Getting back to the Durant, it was a heck of a climbing automobile. It could climb up 36-Hill without any problem. That hill was a test for any automobile. Many of the cars couldn't make it.

South Taft

I mentioned earlier that we had a barber shop in South Taft with the baths. It was built in those days in what was known in those days as Christian City . O.P and G. D. Christian families had the garage across the street and all the other buildings built. The gentleman that built those buildings was named, believe it or not, Carpenter. He built Christian City .

On the other side of the street was Duffy's Bakery, the barber shop, the big grocery store, and there was a soda fountain there. I guess you could call that the first shopping center in Taft for sure, and maybe in Kern County .

Eventually these families graduated down to Taft. We paid \$15 a month and you could get a little better house downtown for \$17 a month. During the depression, those houses were cheaper than that.

I'm putting all these thoughts on a tape recorder. So if I jump around it's because I don't want to forget to mention different things.

Well, I'm going to shut this off for now. As I remember things I'll make another tape. It's the 13th of January 1989. (This tape was transcribed in December 1992.)

Reader's Responses

(NOTE: Attachment: Tex Walter is holding son Jim's hand and other boys at the Natatorium. It was sent in by Nancy (Walter) Doss, class of 1968, of Idaho Falls , Idaho . Tex Walter was her father and her brother was Jim who is deceased. The picture was taken about 1948 or 1949. Tex was considered an old timer in Taft and very well liked.)

From Elizabeth A. Clark , Class of 1957

Thank you Pete, for sharing this. I had no idea that you had experienced battle. And I wonder how many others there were in Taft who had war experiences that we never knew about, because it was not spoken of. In the office where I now work (part time) there are three skilled counselors who work with veterans from all of the wars-- at least with those who can muster the courage to come in to talk. I don't think that anything like that was available in 1945. Would it have been helpful?

. . . . And thanks for your response. I remember some close family friends who, home on leave would visit our house out near Maricopa and head straight for my father's garden. They didn't get fresh vegetables while on duty. I remember seeing newsreels when I was in kindergarten of the men serving in the Philippines and South Pacific. It was scary, thinking that people I knew might be there, in the jungle and who might die.

But I have never been in the service and have never had to fire a weapon except just for the practice and have never had to think about killing or being killed. You are so right that one cannot know what it might be like except if caught in the middle of it. Thank you again for sharing your story at least the part that you have written.

Elizabeth

From Gary Alexander, Class of 1966, of Gainesville , Texas

Pete,
Good story...

Funny isn't it how a great deal of combat consists of such small dramas? I've always said that most of us fight anonymous, individual battles that will never be remembered by historians.

In July of '69 my company had encircled a small village at night and waited to sweep through it at first light. About 1 or 2 a.m. my friend Don and I heard loud "thuds" to our immediate front at the edge of the village.

It was a typical NVA/VC ruse to throw rocks to draw our fire so we would reveal our positions to the enemy firing from concealed positions.

We prided ourselves for not failing for such an old trick and waited for dawn.

As we were to begin the sweep, the first dim light revealed three enemy hand grenades--duds--which had failed to do their work. The 'frags' were no more than 10 meters away; we had no cover, and had forgone "digging in" in order to maintain the

element of surprise.

It strikes me as a great deal more important now than it did at the time.

Thanks for letting us in on your experiences.

Semper Fi,

Gary

(NOTE: Gary Alexander is a journalist who writes an interesting blog by e-mail on current events several times each week which he sends out to a large group of people. He has met all of the recipients of the Medal of Honor and travels to their convention where ever it is held. He was able to hold the convention in his city of Gainesville , Texas a couple of years ago. Gary was Marine and was wounded in Vietnam during that war.)

Glennita (Clearwater) Harrison, from Fortuna , California in Humboldt County

Dear Mr. Gianopulos:

I was raised in Cuyama Valley and went to school in Maricopa, so spent a lot of time in and area the Taft area. My family on both sides was also raised around Taft and Fellows. My Grandfather was working in the oil fields in Maricopa when it burned down in the 1800's and my Mother attended school in Fellows. My father went to Taft High School in the early 30's. I am very much interested in your articles of research for the area. From time to time my husband and I are in the area (I live in Humboldt County) and it is very interesting to me to read your articles while we're there. I would like to read more but don't know how to access your archives or receive any current issues of your Remember When articles. I do read the Midway Driller online, but can't access your column. Could you please tell me how I can? I understand that the local Museum may have archives of your articles, is that correct? I would really appreciate your response to interest.

Glennita (Clearwater) Harrison

Our losses

Mitch Byers -- Gone

Sorry to hear of the death of one of my former counselees -- Mitch Byers. He could always be counted on to volunteer to head a committee for the every-five-year Taft Oildorado celebration. We all will miss him.

Howard Knost, Jr. -- Gone

A long-time Taftian, who moved with his family to Colfax after retirement, has passed away. Howard and his wife Sally were teachers for many years in the Taft City School District . He was on the list of recipients of the Taft Newsletter for many years.

Agatha "Aggie" Sellman -- Gone

From Larry Bonner, Class of 1964, from Red Bluff, California

Hi all,

This is the lady (Aggie Sellman) that cleared all your absences when we were in high school. I was raised across the street from her, her son Lloyd and her daughter Janet.

(NOTE: As the Director of Guidance at Taft Union High School , I worked very closely with Aggie for years. She was the registrar of the school and a secretary. Before the school went to computers Aggie would program all of the students into classes by hand as she would developed the Master Schedule of the high school. She would also record their grades in all classes on the student's permanent record with pen an ink. A former graduate of Taft Union High School , Lawrence Ritter, the employee that issued student lockers and ran the school's print shop, used to say, "Aggie has been at Taft High longer than the flag pole.")