

# UCF Veterans Legacy Program



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<b>Lesson Title</b>	Remembering Florida's Lost Boys: Stories of our World War II Fallen
<b>Grade(s)</b>	6-12
<b>Time (Minutes/ Days)</b>	Semester-long with a performance at the end Two weeks if done as a dramatic reading in class

## Lesson Overview and Suggestions for Procedure

The following monologues and dialogues are adapted from the biographies of some of Florida's "Lost Boys," just some of the over 3,500 World War II Veterans from Florida who heeded our nation's call and paid the ultimate price. Our monologues and dialogues are based on the stories of a handful of Florida's Gold Star families whose loved one is buried in St. Augustine National Cemetery. During World War II, families who had a loved one in military service flew flags emblazoned with blue stars to represent their family members in uniform. When a family member in service paid the ultimate price, the blue star became a gold one. For more on the history of the Gold Star Mothers program in World War I and how it evolved during World War II and into the present, see our [Gold Star Mini tour](#) and [teacher notes](#).

To tell the stories of their loved ones' private grief, we have created these fictionalized stories based in historical context to help students understand important historical truths about sacrifice and mourning. It is incredibly hard to find primary sources that capture grief, but these stories capture emotional responses and frame them in the stories of both individual Florida Veterans and important elements of the post war historical context. For example, in one way or another each of these monologues addresses the World War II Return of the Dead Program, an initiative in which the US government repatriated the remains of 171,000 Veterans from cemeteries overseas. This program allowed families to lay their loved ones to rest closer to home.

When possible, we capture the emotions of close family members or comrades. For example, we use the words of Pvt. Harold "Hal" Baumgarten, the best friend of PFC. Robert Leslie Garbett, Jr., who wrote after the war about losing his friend on D-Day, June 6, 1944. But in most cases, we do not have these kinds of first hand sources about grief, so we have imagined the conversations loved ones might have had with their lost son, brother, or friend

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when they visited the cemetery. We have reminded students that Gold Star Mothers spoke at public events, worked for the memory of their sons and for all those who died in war, with a monologue that is a mother's speech at a Veterans of Foreign Wars' (VFW) luncheon. We remind students that even when families brought their loved one back to Florida, the closest National Cemetery may have been hundreds of miles from home in our larger state. We have also brought in the experience of students in the present working on projects like UCF VLP. We have two dialogues that express the emotions students might be feeling as they get to know Floridians who lived over eighty years ago but who the students become close to through this project.

By having students read the biographies of these Veterans in conjunction with the monographs, we strive to give students a glimpse into the way Gold Star families and students remembering Veterans may have felt. Some take place just a few years after the war, when the pain was so raw. Others take place in the present, reminding us that we carry the legacy of those memorialized in our national cemeteries. Each monologue/dialogue begins with a link to the Veteran's full UCF VLP bio. It also has a shortened version of the biography and stage directions (*in italics*). Students and teachers have everything they need to perform these stories in a theatre production or in front of their class.

These could be used in a number of ways, by a teacher of any subject, particularly given Florida's new law. [House Bill 1329](#) (see page 10), in effect since July 2024, requires instruction pertaining to Veterans' history and importance of Veterans Day and Memorial Day. Thus, while these monologues can be used any time of the school year, they may have special resonance as part of Veterans Day or Memorial Day commemorations and activities. They would also work well as part of lessons about World War II, including the historical context of Florida during the war, or in the study of mid-twentieth-century theatre themes. Students could be tasked with drawing comparisons between the monologues and the biographies they're adapted from, which will allow students to discern how we base the stories in historical context and when we bring in interpretation.

To help teachers and students see what a performance of these monologues/dialogues could look like, we have included videos of both a [dramatic reading](#) of the original monologues and performances for three of the monologues. You may view these three monologues below:

- [Walter Battenberg](#)
- [Michael Freije](#)
- [Robert Garbett](#)

These occurred as part of a performance for UCF Celebrates the Arts in April 2024 at the Dr. Phillips Center in Orlando, FL. See the program [here](#).

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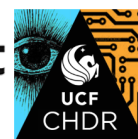
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A note on pronunciation—it is important that students and teachers work to ensure that students learn proper pronunciation of words and terms, including places. Be sure that students, for example, pronounce *corps* as “core,” when talking about the Marine Corps. We pronounce the word as we pronounce the French word for body (*le corps*). The “ps” is not pronounced in French or in English. The closest word in English is *core*, as in “apple core.” It is easy to find pronunciation guides online, just google ‘how do I pronounce x’ and your students will find help. Practicing pronunciation will ensure that the performance is not marred by mispronouncing a term that is important to Veterans.

## Essential Questions

1. How can theatre be a window into the past, into history? What methods do actors use to convey different time periods and themes in their performance?
2. How do we learn about and understand personal grief and mourning without many primary sources that express it? How can historical fiction help us to understand the real experiences of individuals in the past?
3. How do these biographies and monologues/dialogues help us to better understand the experiences of Gold Star Families in WWII?

## Florida State Standards

### *Theatre State Standards*

TH.68.C.3.1: Discuss how visual and aural design elements communicate environment, mood, and theme in a theatrical presentation.

TH.68.S.2.2: Discuss and apply the theatrical production process to create a live performance.

TH.68.S.2.4: Memorize and present a character's lines from a monologue or scene.

TH.68.S.3.1: Develop characterizations, using basic acting skills, appropriate for selected dramatizations.

TH.68.H.1.1: Explore potential differences when performing works set in a variety of historical and cultural contexts.

TH.68.H.1.2: Analyze the impact of one's emotional and social experiences when responding to, or participating in, a play.

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TH.68.H.2: The arts reflect and document cultural trends and historical events, and help explain how new directions in the arts have emerged.

TH.68.H.3: Connections among the arts and other disciplines strengthen learning and the ability to transfer knowledge and skills to and from other fields.

TH.68.H.3.1 Identify principles and techniques that are shared between the arts and other content areas.

TH.912.C.1.2: Create, refine, and sustain complex and believable characters for performance through the integration and application of artistic choices based on research, rehearsal, feedback, and refinement.

TH.912.C.1.4: Research and define the physical/visual elements necessary to create theatrical reality for a specific historical and/or geographical play.

TH.912.C.1.5: Make and defend conscious choices in the creation of a character that will fulfill anticipated audience response.

TH.912.H.1: Through study in the arts, we learn about and honor others and the worlds in which they live(d).

TH.912.H.1.3: Present a design or perform in the style of a different historical or cultural context to gain appreciation of that time and culture.

## *Social Studies Standards*

SS.912.A.5: Analyze the effects of the changing social, political, and economic conditions of the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression.

SS.912.A.5.11: Examine causes, course, and consequences of the Great Depression and the New Deal.

SS.912.A.5.12: Examine key events and people in Florida history as they relate to United States history.

SS.912.A.6: Understand the causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the United States role in the post-war world.

SS.912.A.6.1: Examine causes, course, and consequences of World War II on the United States and the world.

SS.912.A.6.4: Examine efforts to expand or contract rights for various populations during

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World War II.

SS.912.W.7.AP.4: Identify effects of the German economic crisis of the 1920s and global depression of the 1930s, such as closing of businesses and banks, loss of jobs, poverty, and how governments responded.

SS.912.W.7.AP.7: Recognize the causes of World War II and the major events in the war, such as rise of totalitarian governments, conquest of countries in Europe, the Japanese invasion of China; and the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Battle of Midway; and the D-Day invasion.

SS.912.W.8: Recognize significant events and people from the post World War II and Cold War eras.

## Learning Objectives

1. Students will memorize a monologue or dialogue about a WWII Veteran who died during the conflict and present their piece in front of the class or a larger audience.
2. Students will learn about the personal grief of Gold Star families who lost loved ones during WWII.
3. Students will learn how to convey different historical time periods through their acting and interpretation of the monologues and dialogues.
4. Students will understand the stories of WWII Veterans within the larger context of WWII and postwar Florida.

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## Battenberg, Walter

For his full UCF VLP bio:

<https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-142-F.html>

Walter Battenberg was born on August 13, 1925 in Milwaukee, WI. His father, Walter Sr., immigrated from Canada to the US in 1919 after the First World War, where he met his mother Delores. Walter grew up in Milwaukee and attended Rufus King High School; he chose to focus on science courses. On his eighteenth birthday in 1943, Walter registered for the draft. Not too long after, he entered the US Army Air Force, where he trained to become a waist gunner for a B-24 Liberator in the 67th Bombardment Squadron, 44th Bombardment Group of the 8th Air Force. His group, nicknamed "Flying Eight-Balls," completed numerous daylight raids over Nazi-occupied Europe. On March 24, 1945, the crew was part of Operation Varsity, which sought to establish a bridgehead over the Rhine River in Germany. Their mission was to drop supplies to Allied troops near Wesel, Germany. Shortly after their successful drop, their plane, *Kay Bar's* engine caught fire, which caused the plane to stall and nosedive. It crashed into the ground at such a high speed that the plane exploded, killing all those on board. Initially, the Army reported Walter and his crew as MIA, so his family did not know what happened to him until after the conclusion of the war in Europe. The US Army reported him as killed in action in May 1945. Originally interred in a cemetery in Holland, his family participated in the World War II Return of the Dead program to bring him closer to home. He was reinterred in St. Augustine National Cemetery in June 1949.

*The following scene is set at a Gold Star Luncheon held by the American Legion Auxiliary in 1965 in Ocala, Florida. This event honors mothers who lost their sons during World War II. At this event, Dolores Battenburg, Walter's mother, is giving a speech in memory of her son and his sacrifice.*

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### **Dolores:**

You know, for as long as I can remember, my son Walter talked about flying. He was fascinated by the Wright Brothers, the invention of aircrafts, and their newfound use in the war effort. So, his decision to register for the draft and join the U.S. Army Air Force was not a surprise to anyone in our family. Nor was it a surprise when we found out that he quickly rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant with the 67th *Bombardment* Squadron. I did not like that he was being trained as a crew member for the bomber aircraft (*she realizes what she said*) - a bomber aircraft - who

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knew there was such a thing? Well, there was - the B-24 Liberator - also known as 'the flying coffin.' That's what they called it. And my Walter qualified as a waist gunner. Job description? Defend your aircraft. No matter what. We didn't know it, but the then-new B-24 would go on to play a key role in America's bombing effort around the world and become the most produced military aircraft of all time - though it was known as difficult to fly, even lightly loaded. Looking back on it now, I am in disbelief. Thinking of these young boys flying from continent to continent in a tight box formation amidst flack and fighter attacks. Their generation would come to be known as the greatest...*(she thinks on this)* I see why.

So, no, I was not surprised Walter received the honorable waist gunner position. But I was terrified. Because I knew what it meant. I knew the risks. The danger. And many times, the outcome of being a crew member of this "B-24." The *Kay Bar* was its name.

I will never forget the day we received the news that Walter's aircraft had been reported as MIA. For one month, I was in agony - was he alive? Was he not? Had he been captured? Was he being tortured? Every day, every night...just...wondering. Where was my son? What happened to him? But, there was hope. Because I had not been told he was dead.

And I clung to that.

Until I couldn't.

*(She takes in a deep breath)*

Out of the 300,000 US military aircrafts built during the course of the war, 230,000 were brought home. My Walter's *Kay Bar* was not one of them.

In May 1945, I received official confirmation that my son had been killed in action... KIA. We learned many years later that his B-24 had received anti-aircraft fire from enemy ground forces near Wesel, Germany. Observers that day saw it nose dive and explode on impact. It gave me a little peace knowing my son had not suffered.

And he died a hero...flying. Doing what he had always wanted to do. In 1949, his father and I decided to bring our son's remains back to the United States for burial as part of the Return of World War II Dead program. We wanted him buried in St. Augustine National Cemetery, alongside many of his brothers who also lost their lives in war - in *his* war and in others. Often, I will go visit him there. I just sit...sometimes I read, sometimes I write...sometimes, I just sit.

The most curious thing is that once in a while, the quiet is interrupted by a new phenomenon of our modern age - a plane flies overhead. And each time, I look up, and I know it's a message

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from Walter saying “Hi, Mom. Look at me - I’m flying.” And that’s how I remember him - baby-faced, sleek haircut, the kindest smile - sitting in his plane, uniform buttoned to perfection, sunglasses on, white scarf moving in the wind, flying.

My Walter.

Always flying high.



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## **Bowden, Lawrence G.**

For his full UCF VLP bio:

<https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-93-F.html>

Lawrence Gordon Bowden was born on May 11, 1919 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. His parents, Gordon and Edith Bowden, had three children including Lawrence. The family immigrated to the US on December 9, 1925, when Lawrence was six years old, and moved to Jacksonville, FL. Lawrence became a citizen of the United States in 1937, after his father's naturalization allowed his family to also be granted that title. In high school, Lawrence was highly involved in student life; he participated in both the Glee Club and football. On June 16, 1941, Lawrence enlisted in the US Army at the age of twenty-one, and after completing his training, he became a quartermaster in the 16th Cavalry Quartermaster Squadron, Headquarters Troop, 1st Cavalry Division. As a quartermaster, Lawrence oversaw the logistical components for their unit, including supplies for the troops. He served in the Pacific, going to both Australia and New Guinea. His unit participated in the amphibious D-Day attack on the Admiralties Islands, which the US secured in May 1944. While training for the next mission in the Philippines, Lawrence caught malaria and was hospitalized. He died from complications related to malaria on September 26, 1944. He was initially buried in British New Guinea. Lawrence was brought home to Florida and reinterred in St. Augustine National Cemetery on February 15, 1949.

*The following scene takes place in 1949 in St. Augustine National Cemetery. A young woman, in period-appropriate black dress, approaches the grave on the day of her brother, Lawrence Bowden's, reinterment.*

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**Ruth:**

People keep telling me this happened for a reason...

for our country...

for the cause...

for victory.

It doesn't feel like victory.

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It feels like being twenty-four and wondering what it will feel like to be older than my big brother as the years go on. It feels like having to tell people I “had” an older brother - I no longer “have” an older brother.

“Had.”

The short syllable sounds unnatural on my tongue.

I still feel all the what ifs...what if you hadn't shipped out? Stayed here? What if I grabbed onto your leg and refused to let go, threw a tantrum like a little girl and you never left?

During the war, we were so proud to display a blue star in our window - letting everyone know we had someone in service. But, when the blue star changed to gold, well, no one really wants to be a Gold Star family. The family of someone killed in service. I wanted to keep my blue star.

I know I should be brave. The picture-perfect Gold Star sister, who sheds a tear at your memory, but tells everyone I ultimately understand the price you had to pay for freedom. I don't feel brave.

How am I supposed to be, when I lost you?

Now that they have brought you home. Today, I watched dirt placed into your grave. I kept thinking “This can't be real...can't be true.” I think, Lawrence, you're still halfway across the world.

But I am so glad the Army wrote to Dad and asked if we wanted to bring you home. If I can't have you, my brother, anymore, then I am, at least, grateful you are close to us.

When you were gone, and Jack and Norman were still fighting, I pleaded to God to let them come home. I just couldn't sacrifice any more. Watching our mother sob, loud heaving tears into our father's dark suit jacket as he stood stone-faced, looking anywhere but at your headstone. I didn't want to hear the family minister - the one who baptized us all, sat through our confirmations, scolded us when we giggled through sermons - ever do this again. I am so glad they aren't in a grave next to yours.

But we never forget you, Lawrence. We never move on. The pain doesn't go away...it just becomes easier to deal with. And on the tough days, I can now come here - to see you. And talk to you. And tell you how much we miss you - how much I miss you.

I may grow older than you ever had the chance to be, but you will always be my big brother.

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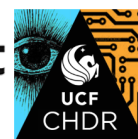
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## Denton, Max Jr.

For his full UCF VLP bio:

<https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-123-F.html>

Max Denton was born on January 10, 1922 in Atlanta, GA. He had a difficult childhood, permeated by domestic violence. By 1925, the courts granted his mother, Hettie, permission to divorce Max's father. She remarried by 1930, but tragedy struck again when she died suddenly from pneumonia on December 5, 1930 at the age of twenty-seven. Max and his brother, John, continued to live with their stepfather and half-siblings after her death. Unfortunately, the struggles of his childhood were not over; in 1932, his half-brother, William, was hit by a car when he was only five years old. Max and John both completed high school in Jacksonville, FL. Max Jr. was actively involved in the Sons of the American Legion since his father was a World War I Veteran. At the age of eighteen, Max enlisted into the US Army in 1940. The Army assigned him to the 4th Infantry Division, and he rose to the rank of Sergeant, eventually becoming part of the Headquarters Company, 8th Infantry Regiment. On June 6, 1944, Max Jr. and his unit were one of the first to land on the beaches of Normandy, France during the D-Day invasions. It was his first time seeing combat. After landing in Normandy, a photo of Max Jr. with a French baby made him a national hero when it appeared in newspapers around the country. He continued with his unit to push through to Germany, reaching Luxembourg in December 1944. Max Jr. injured his hand in the subsequent counteroffensive led by the Germans, known as the Battle of the Bulge, earning him a Purple Heart. Sadly, Max never made it out of Luxembourg. He was killed in action on January 1, 1945. He was initially buried in Luxembourg. Max was reinterred at St. Augustine National Cemetery on March 25, 1949, at the request of his father.

*The following scene is a letter written to Max's brother by the mother of the young French girl who made Max famous as their photo together appeared in numerous newspapers throughout the US.*

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**Mother:**

Dear Mr. Denton,

I heard about what happened to your brother. My sincerest condolences. I'm sure by now you know about our famous picture. That moment meant a lot to us.

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I met Max briefly when the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the US Allied forces advanced during the Battle for Normandy in the summer of 1944. They were coming to liberate Northern France - to push the Germans out. Before they came, we struggled to eat. Our rations were not enough, and the black market, well, it was too expensive and too dangerous. We could've been arrested. Being caught in Nazi-occupied France meant German-led prisons or Vichy's Milice, part of our government that terrorized our citizens. So we did what we could, sharing with other families in our small, close-knit farming community. I am sure we did better than people in the cities.

I am so thankful the Allies arrived before my baby girl was old enough for school. I could not bear the thought of what she may have learned in wartime schools, telling her how she should think about certain groups of people and adhere to their strict ideas of what it means to be a woman. It's a terrible tragedy that so many young lives were cut short - and yet, I am grateful for your brother's sacrifice. Because of people like him, my daughter has gotten to grow up in peace in our new French Republic—a democracy.

I can't imagine how you're dealing with this loss. He shouldn't have had to die for us. I didn't know him, but I could see how young he was. He looked just like the teenage boys I've seen walking home from school with looks of hope on their faces and a youthful bounce to their step. Except his look was... (*she ponders for a moment*) ...despite his kind smile, there was subtle sadness to him. His movements were tired but purposeful and I could tell he was wise beyond his years. He had already been through so much.

Our contact was only for an instant, but when he noticed my child, and held out his hand to her, I saw a flicker of hope return to him. He was her hero. Behind those haunted eyes, I saw a boy who just wanted to do the right thing - he was going to give her what he couldn't have. I saw longing for a time when he was as innocent and carefree as her. Yes, he'll forever be known as a hero. Our picture will immortalize that day and people will praise Max Denton Jr. for his bravery. But I think we often get so wrapped up in the brutality of war that we forget these soldiers are also someone's child. I wanted you to know that when I saw him, I didn't forget.

Forever Thankful

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## Freije, Michael

For his full UCF VLP bio:

<https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-100-F.html>

Michael Angel Freije was born Miguel Angel Freije in the Santurce district of San Juan, PR on July 22, 1913. In October 1940, over sixteen million American men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five registered for the nation's first peacetime draft. On October 16, Miguel registered for the draft in Jacksonville, FL under the name Michael Angel Freije. Despite the citizenship status granted to Puerto Ricans in 1917, many adopted anglicized names after moving to the continental US. Reasons for doing so included the desire to blend in with the majority White population and to avoid insinuations about being an outsider based on racial or ethnic discrimination. The Army called Michael A. Freije to service on March 28, 1944. He enlisted at Fort McPherson, near Atlanta, GA. After his initial training, Michael joined Company L, 101st Infantry Regiment of the 26th Infantry Division (ID). The 26th ID fought in North Africa, and assisted in the liberation of France and Germany. Sadly, Michael made the ultimate sacrifice during this fighting. In early December 1944, Michael suffered a chest injury after he was struck by fragments from an artillery shell. Though he received medical attention at a nearby Army hospital, Michael Angel Freije succumbed to his wounds on December 2, 1944. Along with the 104th Infantry Regiment, the 101st secured Sarre-Union, Alsace, France on December 4, 1944.

*The following scene is a dialogue between a young student doing research on her grandfather's best friend and her grandfather Robert, who served alongside Michael in the 26th ID. The scene takes place at Michael Freije's headstone in St. Augustine National Cemetery.*

*Dialogue in bold is meant to be in sync. In other words, the actors speak together in English and in Spanish. If not bolded, the English is said by Eva first and then Robert reiterates in Spanish.*

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*(Enter Eva and Grandpa)*

**Eva:** Thank you for doing this.

**Grandpa:** Of course. He was a great friend of mine. I'm happy to help. *(Noticing grave)* Oh, here he is.

*(Grandpa and Eva go towards the headstone)*

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**Eva:** Is it hard for you to be here?

**Grandpa:** It is. But it also isn't. I enjoy visiting with my brothers.

**Eva:** I've been thinking a lot about the stories you used to share with me - about your time in WWII, your experience as a soldier, and all the friends you made along the way...it always fascinated me how you remained so positive and kept a smile on your face. (*Eva looks at Grandpa, he smiles*) And the memories you shared about Michael - how he was your best buddy in the 26th Infantry Division" (*she breaks and makes an inside joke*) - "The Yankee Division" -

**Grandpa:** (*smiling*) "La división yanqui" (*salutes*) Mi hermano.

**Eva:** (*cont.*) I chose him for my research project because something about his story resonates with me - particularly that he was one of the "forgotten soldiers" -

**Grandpa:** El soldado olvidado.

**Eva:** The fact he wasn't remembered. Like the other 500,000 Hispanic soldiers. All because he was trying to hide his Hispanic identity just to be treated fairly...

**Michael:** Para que lo traten bien.

**Eva:** He must have felt like an outsider.

**Grandpa:** Even though he was an American, he changed his name from Miguel to Michael.

**Eva:** And the way he was killed? One moment, he's fighting for our country, and the next...

**Grandpa:** He's struck by an artillery shell and fighting for his life. A battle he lost.

**Eva:** I can't help but think of what his wife, Helen, went through when she lost him. I mean, it was so sudden and unexpected. And then, to receive *that* telegram?

**Grandpa:** "El Secretario de Guerra pide que le asegure su profundo pésame por la pérdida de su..."

**Eva:** "The Secretary of War asks that I assure you of his deep sympathy in the loss of your husband..." Helen, just waiting for his letters. Just waiting and waiting to hear something - anything - from him. And then, in the end, the news she received was not what she was hoping

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for. **Michael was killed in action on December 2, 1944. His service to his country will not be forgotten...**

**Grandpa: Michael fue matado en acción el día 2 de Diciembre, 1944. Su servicio a su país nunca será olvidado.**

**Grandpa:** And then we went on and liberated Gusen, a concentration camp in Austria, trying to save the lives of people persecuted just for being who they were.

**Eva:** I will never forget when you told me that you and your brothers were recognized by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum - I could see the memories of liberating that camp in your eyes. I cannot imagine what you saw there.

*(She ponders for a moment)*

Thanks for doing this, Grandpa...I know the rest of your "Yankee Division" - *(corrects herself)* "La división yanqui" - brothers up there are keeping Michael company. Do you need a minute?

*(Grandpa ponders before subtly shaking his head. Eva touches his arm before stepping aside, so he can speak to his friend. She watches on).*

**Grandpa:** Mi hermano, until I see you again...I'll keep you *(he looks at Eva and she mimics what he is about to do - double tapping his heart (their secret gesture) as he smiles and points to his heart and whispers)* Aquí mismo.

See you soon. *(He stands and proudly salutes his comrades of the 26th Infantry Division Salute (Eva follows suit) before walking to Eva and walking out).*

*(blackout)*

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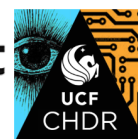
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## Garbett, Robert

For his full UCF VLP bio:

<https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-171-F.html>

Robert Leslie Garbett, Jr. was born on March 18, 1919 in Pleasant Hills, MD. His parents, Robert Sr. and Bertha, moved the family to Virginia, where Robert spent the first part of his childhood. Robert and his family moved frequently; during his childhood, he also lived in Delaware and Pennsylvania. By 1940, Robert moved back to Virginia and worked at the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, placing him at the forefront of American naval production. He registered for the peacetime draft at the age of twenty one, and enlisted in the US Army on May 3, 1941. Robert completed his training and joined the 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, which was part of the Virginia National Guard. After eighteen months of training, Robert and his unit set foot in Europe in 1942. He stayed in England and continued to prepare for an invasion. While there, he met an English woman named Hazel Jean Whitehouse, and the two married in September, 1943. He continued to train with his unit for the Allied invasion of Normandy, D-Day, and on June 6, 1944. He served as a Signal Corps Radio man positioned at the front of a Higgins Boat. His best friend, Harold Baumgarten, found his body on Omaha Beach. He was killed on D-Day just below the seawall. Robert was only 25 years old. He was initially buried in the St. Laurent-Bayeux Cemetery in Normandy, and by June 1948, his body was returned to Florida where he was reinterred at St. Augustine National Cemetery. Harold visited Robert annually for the rest of his life. If you wish to see a short clip of Harold Baumgarten, interviewed as part of a documentary filmed in Normandy, watch [D-Day: Over Normandy](#) on PBS starting at 25:35.

*The following scene is set in 2006 during a fictional interview for a WWII Documentary. Harold Baumgarten, Robert's best friend who fought alongside him on D-Day, is speaking of his memories of D-Day for a recorded live interview.*

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**Harold:**

What do I remember?

I get asked that question often.



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It's hard to pinpoint everything, so I tend to keep it in small details. I remember gunfire - so loud, my ears rang. I remember the moment I was hit by an 88 mm shell that went off in front of me. It felt like I had been hit by a baseball bat...but when I saw my left cheek flapping over my ear, I knew it was much worse than that. I remember washing my face in the water, fighting to keep consciousness. I looked in front of me and saw Bedford Hoback had also been hit in the face, only he wasn't fighting to keep consciousness...he already lost it. I thought, *when will I die?*

But as quickly as the thought came, it was replaced by the instinct to survive. I had to get off the beach. I knew I had to get off the beach. Machine guns were splattering up the sand all around me as I crawled toward the seawall. I could be hit by a bullet at any time.

When I reached the seawall, I found Dominic Surro of Company A, who pushed me down on the flat part of the wall. He told me to stay where I was, but I knew I couldn't because I was still in the line of fire. It was then I took a rifle from one of my dead Company B buddies and ran behind Surro. Suddenly, he went down - he had been struck through his helmet by a sniper.

I closed my eyes, running with a heaviness in my chest, just wondering when I would be struck. But I wasn't. I reached the corner where the wall angled inward and then the area adjacent to D-1, where the seawall towered twenty-five feet above me.

And that is where I saw him.

Robert Garbett Jr. - Bob, as I called him, my best buddy - lying face down in the shallow water, crimson bits slowly crashing against his face. Bob had taken me under his wing, helping me in any way he could. I took his advice because he was an "old man" of twenty-five while I was a "kid" of nineteen. He was the one who told me prior to the invasion to not wear the issued combat jacket - "Hal, it will drown you." I took his advice. I always took his advice.

For a moment, my mind convinced me it was not him - that he was alive - but the walkie-talkie radio slung over his shoulder brought me back to reality. It was Bob - I had just seen him, alive, with the radio slung over his shoulder just like that - there was no denying it was him.

There was another moment when I closed my eyes. I thought, perhaps if I close my eyes, the scene will disappear. I would find that this was not real. That I was not here. But, when I opened my eyes, I was still there, Robert in front of me - the red water splashing around him. I could feel the tears well in my eyes as I crawled towards him, soon running down red as they hit the sand pavement in front of me. When I reached him, I paused...I looked at my hands...do I touch him? And then, I took a deep breath, turning him over as I did. His eyes were closed. I remember

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gently holstering him up. As I sat there, holding him, my face buried in his cold chest, my mind flashed back to the same face I had just seen - though this version was patting me on the back

as we prepared for the invasion, gripping my shoulder as if to say “We got this.” That was Bob - always encouraging. A tough soldier with a gentle spirit. My buddy. My Robert. And that is how I would remember him.

After that moment, I laid him down - I knew I needed to climb up the wall. As I crawled away from his lifeless body, I was reminded that I had to keep moving - had to keep going - because we were in a war, and this is the price we paid for it. When I was a good distance away, I took one last look at Robert - his body still laying there, among many others that I could see...*(he takes a deep breath)* and I said goodbye. I said goodbye to the one I looked up to. The one who should have still been alive.

Bob became just one body lost to the sand that day on the beach in Normandy. In many ways, it was a day of victory, yes...but for those who experienced it, it was also a day of loss. Of grief. A day that we will always remember for completely different reasons than those written in the history books - because, for us, it was the day we lost our brothers.

Our best buddies.

Our Bobs.

June 6th. 1944.

D-Day.

Since then, I visit him every year. I go to St. Augustine National Cemetery to remember my friend - to honor his life and his sacrifice - and to wonder...why am I still here when he is not?

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## Knight, Joseph

For his full UCF VLP bio:

<https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-144-F.html>

Joseph Knight was born on February 14, 1921, in Jupiter, Palm Beach county, FL. After the beginning of WWII, Knight participated in the Third Draft for young men between the ages of twenty to forty-five. Black soldiers like Knight continued to experience racism and discrimination as the military restricted Black soldiers to segregated and largely non-combat units during the war. Typical duties of Black soldiers in Army service units included cooking food, digging ditches, burying the dead, serving white officers, washing laundry, building bridges, roads, and runaways, and repairing engines and radios. Back home, the Double V (Victory) Campaign for civil rights sought equal treatment for African Americans on the home and battle fronts.

Knight served in the 3187th Quartermaster Service Company. Quartermaster Corps (QMC) companies played a key role for General Patton and the 3rd Army. The 3187th and others transported ammunition, food, gasoline, and water to combat soldiers on the front lines. Without the QMC units, the US Army would not have been able to stay supplied or advance. Without units like Knight's, the Allies could not have liberated France or defeated the Nazis.

After the German surrender on May 8, 1945, the 3187th remained in Germany, receiving occupation credit from August 15 to October 31, 1945. A few days into the occupation, Knight suddenly passed away on August 19, 1945. We do not know the circumstances of his death.

*The following scene depicts Georgia, a young journalist from the Pittsburgh Courier, visiting the gravesite of Joseph Knight to tell him about the impact that his service made on this reporter's life and the events during the Civil Rights era. It is set in late 1963, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement.*

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### Georgia:

*The Pittsburgh Courier* mattered so much in the early twentieth century. You know, there were no Black papers down here in the South. So, *The Courier* was a guide for hundreds of thousands of folks who didn't have any other way to know - to spread the word about the struggle for rights. It was more than just a newspaper; it was a lifeline.

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It's one of the reasons I do the work. Being a journalist is not always easy, and I don't always say or do the right thing, but I do something.

*I did something.*

I told your story - Joseph Knight – the story of just one of thousands of black soldiers who gave their lives as part of the Double V Campaign. You fought for the liberation of Europe from the Nazi threat, and you showed America that it needed to live up to its own founding ideals about equality. You are one of the thousands who served proudly and paid the ultimate price. You could not come home and fight for our rights, but your sacrifice - an African-American soldier suddenly lost on German soil shortly after the Second World War - will forever remain in our DNA, though many blatantly forget your sacrifice.

In 1943, when you were called to serve, you did so with honor. You served in the Quartermaster Corps, like so many other black men. It was your desire to fight for equality, to stand up against injustice - even amidst the constant discrimination within the very institution, the Army, in which you served. Your actions speak volumes to your courage and conviction...the irony of fighting for freedom abroad while being denied basic rights at home is not lost on me, on us, who stand on your shoulders to reach your goal.

I admire your unwavering resilience - your ability to persevere in the face of profound adversity. But I find myself still frustrated at the injustices you faced, we face, solely because of the color of our skin. *The color of our skin...*

Joseph, we have made progress. Can you believe, in 1954, the Supreme Court ruled the separate but equal principle that allowed segregated education unconstitutional? These changes are the result of the sacrifices of people like you. Even if most schools are still segregated, we are moving forward. We are demanding change.

I came to visit you here at St. Augustine National Cemetery to thank you, and to show you how far we have come. Just this year, over 250,000 people peacefully marched in Washington DC. We marched with Dr. King for jobs and freedom. We marched for each other. We marched for you.

Joseph, you give me a renewed sense of purpose - to continue the work to bring economic and civil equality, to make desegregation real. You mattered, Joseph. You matter. Thank you for inspiring me - and so many others - to continue the good fight. We will keep marching forward.

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## Mills, Meredith Jr.

For his full UCF VLP bio:

<https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-120-F.html>

Meredith Mills, Jr. was born on April 21, 1923, in Deland, FL. His father's career as a pharmacist likely made it possible for Meredith to complete high school and start his college career at the University of Florida. While at UF, he earned the nickname "Sparky" from his fraternity, Phi Kappa Tau. In October 1942, Meredith joined the US Army Air Corps. He served in the 365th Bombardment Squadron, 305th Bombardment Group of the 8th Air Force in Europe. He reached the rank of Staff Sergeant as a ball turret gunner.

On July 21, 1944, Mills and his crew of the B-17 *Strictly For Hunger* set out with almost 1,000 other heavy bombers to destroy industrial sites in Germany. They dropped bombs on several sites near Munich, Germany, when an anti-aircraft shell struck their plane. Although the plane went down in flames, Mills and his eight crewmates successfully parachuted out of the plane and landed in Southwest Germany.

Initially, the Army Air Forces declared the whole crew MIA. Only after the war did the story of what happened to Mills come to light. Local German guards captured several of the crew. Instead of sending them to a POW camp, these civilians shot and killed the captured American airmen, later burying them in the nearby woods to cover it up. In February 1945, the town pastor led a secret effort to exhume the bodies and rebury them in the local church cemetery. Other Germans, ashamed of their neighbors' actions, told the French occupying authorities what had happened after the war. Mills was finally returned to his family in 1949 when he was reinterred in St. Augustine National Cemetery in Section D, Site 120.

*The following scene is set in present-day St. Augustine National Cemetery. It is a conversation between the two students who researched Mills for the project. They both feel a deeply personal and profound connection to Mills, whom they got to know well through the research process. They visit him every time they are in St. Augustine.*

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*(STUDENT ONE walks up to the headstone, takes a look around, and then sits on the ground in front of it. They close their eyes and take a deep sigh. Then, they pull a penny out of their pocket, and place it on the top of the headstone.)*

**Student One:** Hey, Meredith.

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*(They touch the headstone lightly, hand lingering for a moment on the lettering of his name.)*

Just came to say hi.

*(A sound comes from elsewhere in the cemetery, and STUDENT TWO walks up to the headstone.)*

**Student Two:** Oh, hey. I didn't realize you would be here. I came to see Meredith.

*(STUDENT TWO takes a penny out of their pocket and shows it to STUDENT ONE. Then, they place the penny on the headstone, next to the other coin.)*

**Student One:** Well, Meredith, you're a lucky guy - two visitors in one day. *(STUDENT ONE touches the headstone again.)*

*(STUDENT TWO sits next to STUDENT ONE.)*

**Student Two:** I didn't realize Meredith's story impacted you so much. *(pause)* I mean, enough that you would come out to visit him. *(Student Two smiles)* I wondered who was leaving the pennies.

**Student One:** I know...it's kind of weird, but I like to come and sit with him sometimes. I worried I was the only one. It's nice to know I'm not.

**Student Two:** I know what you mean. I just learned he was an only child. *(After a moment)* And I found his parents' obituaries – they died in the late 1960s. It's probably been over half a century since someone kept him company. So, any time I can, I come to see him.

**Student One:** He died so young. To think - here we are, just graduating, getting ready to start our own lives. And then Meredith - he was younger than we are now. He never got to grow up, graduate from college, start his career, have a family....

**Student Two:** An entire generation lost so much from that war. Meredith's story just reminds us how awful it was. The way he died...

**Student One:** I know. The fact he and his crew survived the bomber crash - they completed the hard part. And then...

**Student Two:** Right. I still think about what his final moments would have been like. . . to suddenly be gone. Nothing more than a memory.

*(pause)*

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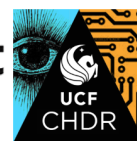
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**Student Two:** I wonder what it must have been like for his family - for the families of the whole crew. To not know what had happened to them until after the war. Nothing but a designation from the Army: MIA. *(STUDENT TWO pauses, lost in thought and visibly saddened.)* Can you imagine not knowing the fate of your son? Your friend?

**Student One:** *(STUDENT ONE shakes head.)* And then learning what actually happened to him and his crew? The headlines of those newspaper articles from after the war still shock me... researching him and getting to know him, just to find out he had such a tragic ending.

**Student Two:** Do you remember the headlines of those newspapers? I think one was, "U.S. Airmen Beaten, Shot by Civilians." It must have been terrifying. To jump out of a falling plane, parachute down behind enemy lines—

**Student One:** – only to be separated from part of your crew and then captured by German civilians...they shot them in the back.

*(pause.)*

**Student Two:** And the Germans tried to cover it up, too - burying him and his crewmates in the forest to try to keep it hidden. For a while, he didn't even have a marker over his grave. People walked over the earth without knowing who they were walking on.

**Student One:** *(Looks at headstone)* And now, thanks to our research, we know this cemetery isn't the only place people remember Meredith.

**Student Two:** Right - the "Atonement Cross." Meredith's parents would have loved to know that the local community in Germany carved a memorial to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the murders. You know, the cross stands near where the civilians initially buried the airmen in the forest.

**Student One:** So many years later, it remembers Meredith and his crewmates.

**Student Two:** I'm so glad that they're being remembered that way. To think Meredith continues to have such a large impact, and yet no one here really knew his story.

**Student One:** That's why our job is so important, right? *(STUDENT ONE looks at headstone and pauses)* A headstone leaves so much unsaid. . . *(A Pause, and then to headstone:)* Thanks for teaching me so much, Meredith. About research, about commemoration, about life... I haven't been the same since I got to know you.

*(A Pause, and then STUDENT ONE smiles lightly)* Hey, what drew you to him?

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**Student Two:** Well, I initially chose to research him because I was naively hopeful that I'd found a woman Veteran to research. Instead, I got Meredith...definitely not a woman, but such an incredible guy.

*(STUDENT ONE and STUDENT TWO laugh lightly)*

**Student One:** Before we leave... *(STUDENT ONE pulls out a photograph from their pocket/bag.)* I brought you some people to keep you company. *(STUDENT ONE places a photograph of Meredith Mills and Crew on top of the headstone.)* This way, you won't be lonely – you'll have your crew with you. *(STUDENT ONE wipes away a tear.)*

*(Both STUDENT ONE and STUDENT TWO turn away from the grave, and walk away solemnly.)*



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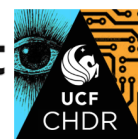
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## Osterreicher, Thomas

For his full UCF VLP bio:

<https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-89-F.html>

Thomas Charles Osterreicher was born on March 29, 1922 in St. Johns County, FL. When he was eleven years old, his parents divorced, and he lived with his brothers and his mother, Vonnie, who was the head of the household. He attended school until the 7th grade and then left to work as a farm laborer to help support his family by 1940. In January 1942, Thomas enlisted in the US Marine Corps. He was stationed in Quantico from 1942-1944. During this time, he met and married his wife, Betty C. Lewis. In April 1945, Thomas deployed to the Pacific Theater, and by the end of May he joined the 1st Marine Division on Okinawa, and helped the Allied forces continue Operation Iceberg to take control of the island. In mid-June, Thomas's Company led the assault on Kunishi Ridge. During the battle on June 15, Corporal Thomas Osterreicher was mortally wounded by enemy fire. On June 22, the US forces finally secured Okinawa after an incredibly deadly few months. Thomas's mother, Vonnie, brought Thomas home and laid him to rest in St. Augustine National Cemetery on April 14, 1949.

*The following scene depicts his mother, Vonnie, holding a stone to place on his headstone at St. Augustine National Cemetery while she visits Thomas.*

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### **Vonnie:**

Memory...it's a peculiar thing, isn't it? We ask ourselves...is it the legacy we carry for others? Or perhaps it's the moments we choose to remember ourselves. I've always found it intriguing how stones seem to embody that concept—they endure, unfazed by the passage of time, bearing witness to our lives like silent Marines.

I was raised with the belief that a stone is living - a tangible link to our memories - a conduit for the essence of those we hold dear.

You are probably wondering why I am talking about stones and memories...well, one of mine lent itself to these thoughts. It was a spring morning, one of those that carries the scent of freshly sliced oranges, a day etched into the fabric of my existence: March 29th, 1922. The day you, my son Thomas, were born. I remember the day vividly.

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Then, eleven years later, I hurled another stone far into the distance, a symbolic gesture that marked the beginning of the end of my marriage. Eleven years after you, Thomas... you were beautiful - my youngest - my baby, just eleven years old. Eleven years—a span of time that can sculpt even the hardest stone, smoothing it with the gentle caress of water, sharpening it with the relentless gusts of wind. And as the stone changed, so did I, growing older, wiser, yet somehow not happier. Thomas, you were eleven in 1933, and I found myself filing for divorce, a single mother of three in the midst of America's harshest times.

But life persisted. I breathed, I slept, I endured. I found solace in the warmth of a home and the laughter of my children. Nine years later, in 1942, you enlisted in the Marines, Thomas. Enlisted. Was I happy? Perhaps not, but Thomas, you were happy. I think. And in your happiness, I found a semblance of my own. You were so proud to become a Marine.

During your initial training in South Carolina, I received letters like lifelines- a way to hear your voice, each one a precious connection to my son so far away. As I read your letters, I could almost smell the ocean in the crispness of the envelopes, feel the rhythm of your words like a comforting melody. And then there was your photo, in uniform, a testament to your pride as a coxswain. You showed me a glimpse into a world I could only imagine. I hoped against hope that as the war dragged on, maybe you would stay in the US.

But war has a way of changing things. When you transferred to Marine Corps Headquarters in Virginia, you met and married Betty. I was so happy to see you happy. I never got to meet her, but she seemed like such a sweet girl. I hoped again you would stay stateside, but then you had to ship out, fight in the Pacific. I took solace in the fact that you had had a great love. I wanted you to have every experience life could offer, even if I could not be with you. It was an unspoken understanding of the dangers that awaited.

Spring of '45 brought a stench of foreboding, like a lime gone bad, saturating the air with its bitter tang, leaving behind a void that I couldn't bear to acknowledge. When I got the letter telling me you were assigned as a replacement in the 1st Marine Division headed to the Pacific Theatre, my heart sank. In my mind, you were a solitary figure disappearing into the horizon.

Only a few letters came, I learned later that the censors had stopped some. The letters I did receive had holes cut by the censors— a testament to your absence, a reminder of my inability to protect you. And then, on June 15, 1945, the truth was laid bare before me in black and white, stark against the crispness of the paper—a name, your name, immortalized in ink. My son had died during the battle of Okinawa - one of the war's worst. My boy was one of nearly 3,000 Marines of the 1st Marine Division killed in that one battle.

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Tom, my boy, you were gone, swallowed by the relentless march of time, leaving behind only whispers carried by the wind. And there I stood, faced with the harsh reality of loss, grappling with the inconceivable notion that my son was no longer of this world.

But rocks don't lie. They bear witness to our grief, our pain, our longing. And so, since 1949, I return often to this cold slab of marble, to pay homage to your life—a life cut short, a future left unfulfilled.

Section D, site 89 of St. Augustine National Cemetery—the coordinates etched into my memory like a scar. I leave you a stone, a silent tribute to my son who lives on through me. And as I write about you, in the shadow of your final resting place, I can't help but marvel at the irony of it all—that in the end, it's just a stone, a solitary Marine guarding the memory of a life lost but never forgotten.

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## Patterson, Clarence

For his full UCF VLP bio:

<https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-92-F.html>

Clarence Elto Patterson, Jr. was born on June 10, 1919 in Adel, GA to Clarence Sr. and Ethel Patterson. Clarence Sr. had registered for the draft during the First World War. In 1938, Clarence's mother died leaving Clarence Jr. along with his siblings: Nicholas, Alonzoretta, and Ashley. In December 1941, the US entered World War II. Clarence registered for the draft in 1943. He likely lied about his age as the draft age had been lowered to eighteen in 1942.

Clarence served in the US Navy as a member of the Quartermaster Corps on the *USS Kasaan Bay*. During the Jim Crow era, the US Navy segregated African Americans to Mess Attendants due to racial discrimination. Despite segregation and discrimination, the Navy promoted Patterson to Steward First Class (St1c.) in October 1944. A few months later, during a short leave, Clarence married Ruth Wells in Jacksonville.

On April 27, 1945, the crew of the *Kasaan Bay* conducted regular training exercises. That afternoon, torpedo bomber pilots completed their landing qualifications. At 1415, the deck log for the *Kasaan Bay* noted the death of St1c Clarence Elto Patterson, Jr due to "unknown causes." The next day, the *Kasaan Bay* brought his remains to the US Naval Hospital in Oahu, HI.

Clarence's family legacy was one of service to their country. Clarence Jr's older brother Nicholas also served in the military during World War II. Clarence's older sister, Alonzoretta married John Lee Monds on April 25, 1944, in Jacksonville. John also served during World War II in the US Army, enlisting at Fort Benning on June 26, 1944. Nicholas lived in Washington D.C. at the time of his death on July 14, 1980. Clarence's youngest brother Ashley enlisted in the US Air Force on December 8, 1948, serving during the Korean and Vietnam Wars until his discharge on June 30, 1971. He lived in Rifle, CO at the time of his death in 1995. He is buried at Ft. Logan National Cemetery in Denver, CO.

*The following scene confronts the reality of the grief families felt with the Return of WWII Dead program. Clarence's sister Alonzoretta leaves the reinterment ceremony for her brother Clarence's remains, having laid him to rest in St. Augustine National Cemetery four years after his death in Hawai'i.*

*Setting is 1949, St. Augustine National Cemetery, day of reinterment. A young African American woman dressed in 1940's mourning black, Clarence's sister Alonzoretta, approaches the newest*

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*gravesite in the cemetery. Clarence Patterson was brought back to Florida as part of the Return of WWII Dead Program at the behest of his wife Ruth.*

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## **Alonzoretta:**

Clarence Elto Patterson Junior. Steward First Class, Florida. It's a fine headstone. I have to laugh though, 1919. You were born in 1925. I remember you coming into my room to tell me you'd registered for the draft. We argued all night before I let you put your name down on that form. The last thing I thought would happen was that you'd end up here.

When you left, Daddy was so mad but I knew he was proud too. You and Nicholas, I don't think I'll understand what you went through. At home at least we had our friends and family but in your letters you talked about the ship and the rules about not mixing with the white crew stifling you. Even in such a small world as the *Kasaan Bay*, you still couldn't move. I saw the picture of you standing proud with the rest of the Stewards, two photos for the same division. It was so good to see your face but there were no names and you looked so serious. How will anyone know that photo is of you? How will they know your smile? Your laugh?

You were so dashing on you and Ruth's wedding day. None of us thought that would be the last time we saw you. Four months later and you were gone. Two days after my first wedding anniversary to John and no one would say why or how or what happened. No one will look me in the eyes and tell me what happened. No one will admit what happened that day. 1415 on April 27th and you were just "dead of unknown causes." And you were buried in a place so far none of us could get to. I know Hawai'i isn't the edge of the world but it feels like it is.

I'm just so glad that Ruth brought you home. Four years and we were luckier than most to have you back so quickly. But they brought you home in a box and I still have so many questions. I wish you were here and I wish you could tell us. Nicholas and John came home so why couldn't you?

Ashley wants to join the Air Force, I know he wants to serve. To him it wouldn't be right not to, all the other men in our family have. I'm just so scared they'll bring him back in a box too. He says the air isn't like the sea, that we're not at war now and it'll be different. I pray that you watch over him. Make sure he makes it home Clarence.

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## Spencer, Frank

For his full UCF VLP bio:

<https://vlp.cah.ucf.edu/biographies/sanc/BD-0-135-F.html>

Frank Luke Spencer was born on October 31, 1919 in Key West, Monroe County, FL. After losing his mother at only eight years old, which was undoubtedly the most traumatic event of his young life, Frank's world changed dramatically. Although his father remarried just a year after Frank's mother's death, the new family did not keep young Frank in the home with them. Frank began living with his adoptive parents Thomas and Blanche Roberts and their family in a multigenerational home.

Frank registered for the draft in July 1941. After completing his training at Camp Blanding, FL, he received orders to join Company C, 39th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division (ID). As Frank and the 39th attacked their objectives in the hills around northern Tunisia, they suffered many casualties. On April 23, 1943, Frank L. Spencer was killed while capturing a strategic position, Hill 382 near Jefna, Tunisia. Frank became the first soldier from Key West, FL to die in World War II. He is buried in St. Augustine near the water, among his fellow Veterans in Section D, Site 135.

*The following scene, set in 1949, is between Blanche Roberts (his adoptive mom) and Dorothy (his adoptive sister) as they are still grappling with his death 6 years later. He was recently moved to the St. Augustine National Cemetery after initially being interred in the American II Corps Cemetery in Mateur, Tunisia, near where he died. Blanche and Dorothy visited Frank's new burial site the week prior for the first time and it is affecting both of them, especially Blanche.*

*Scene: The Living Room - Roberts Family Home - Key West, FL*

*BLANCHE ROBERTS sits in her rocking chair, a shawl draped over her shoulders, gazing out the window. DOROTHY ROBERTS enters the room, her expression tender but strong, carrying a tray with two cups of tea.*

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**Dorothy:** *(softly)* Mom, I brought you some tea.

**Blanche:** *(forcing a smile)* Thank you, Dorothy.

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*(DOROTHY places the tray on the table and settles into the armchair opposite BLANCHE, her eyes reflecting empathy and concern.)*

**Dorothy:** *(gently)* Mom, it's been a week since we visited Frank's grave. It's okay to let it out. I know how much you miss him.

*(BLANCHE'S facade crumbles, tears welling up in her eyes, her hands trembling as she reaches for the tea.)*

**Blanche:** *(voice quivering)* It's just, I can't shake this...grief. He was my son in every way that matters.

*(DOROTHY reaches out, her touch a source of comfort in the midst of sorrow.)*

**Dorothy:** *(voice filled with compassion)* I know, Mom. Frank's absence is felt by all of us. He was the light of our lives...and he was taken from us far too soon. It's not fair.

**Blanche:** *(voice breaking)* He had so many dreams, Dorothy. So much life left to live. And now... he's gone, and when I think of the fact that I will never see him again...I just...I know it's been 6 years since we had his memorial service. So many people here in Key West loved Frank (laughing wistfully.) I remember the church being so small, people had to stand outside. In his last moments, I wonder...I wonder if he felt scared by the end of it? I wonder if he thought of us, his chosen family when he was in those hills, half a world away? He was so young.

**Dorothy:** I just hate how even in death he is still so far from us again. First the cemetery in Mateur, near where he died. Then the American North Africa Cemetery in Carthage— both so far away in Tunisia. Now St. Augustine National Cemetery. Why can't they have a national cemetery in Key West?

**Blanche:** I'm not sure, Dorothy. St. Augustine is so far away. I already want to go back.

**Dorothy:** *(voice steady, yet gentle)* Me too, Mom. But you must know - he will always be with us. In our reflections, in the love that binds us together as a family. He may be gone, but his spirit lives on in each of us. He died for a noble cause - he's a hero.

**Blanche:** *(sniffling, nodding weakly)* I know you're right. I mustn't let grief consume me. Frank wouldn't want that. He would want us to remember him with love...to celebrate the time we had together.

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*(DOROTHY envelops BLANCHE in a warm embrace, their tears mingling in shared sorrow.)*

**Dorothy:** *(whispering)* We'll get through this together. For Frank's sake, and for ours.

*(BLANCHE draws a shuddering breath, her voice trembling with the weight of memories.)*

**Blanche:** *(voice filled with longing)* You know, Frank's life was never easy, not from the start. Losing his birth mother when he was just eight. Being sent to Tunisia. The desert... so completely different from home. His loss has left a wound that never truly healed.

*(DOROTHY listens, her heart heavy with the knowledge of Frank's pain.)*

**Blanche:** *(voice filled with uncertainty)* My only hope is that I was able to fill her shoes well enough. His birth mother... She was an incredible, remarkable woman – taken too soon.

*(DOROTHY'S eyes glisten with unshed tears, her voice a whisper of reassurance.)*

**Dorothy:** You did. You gave him a family, a home filled with love and warmth. You gave him a mother. And you must know Frank cherished every moment with you...every moment. Of that, I am certain.

*(DOROTHY and BLANCHE share a moment of quiet solitude where BLANCHE is finally feeling some sense of complacency.)*

**Blanche:** If only Frank had never registered for the draft. He was young enough that it wasn't required. If only he had stayed a sponge fisherman.

**Dorothy:** *(A moment of laughter to break the tension)* Mom, a sponge fisherman?! You know he wanted to be so much more.

**Blanche:** *(chuckles a little bit for the first time)* I know. But at least he would've been safe.

**Dorothy:** *(voice soft)* He endured so much, but he found solace in your love...in the home you provided him.

**Blanche:** I think you're right, Dorothy.

**Dorothy:** I KNOW I'm right, Mom.



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*(BLANCHE lets out a soft chuckle once again.)*

**Dorothy:** Let's make plans to visit Frank again soon.

**Blanche:** I would love that. Thank you, Dorothy. For everything.

*(As the sunlight fades, casting long shadows across the room, BLANCHE and DOROTHY find solace in each other's arms, their bond unbreakable in the face of loss. In their shared grief, they find strength, and in their memories, they find solace.)*