

Marine Diary From World War II Offers Brief Look At Life Cut Short



By JANET McCONNAUGHEY 5/27/13 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/27/marine-diary-world-war-ii_n_3342217.html

NEW ORLEANS -- Before Cpl. Thomas "Cotton" Jones was killed by a Japanese sniper in the Central Pacific in 1944, he wrote what he called his "last life request" to anyone who might find his diary: Please give it to Laura Mae Davis, the girl he loved.

Davis did get to read the diary – but not until nearly 70 years later, when she saw it in a display case at the National World War II Museum.

"I didn't have any idea there was a diary in there," said the 90-year-old Mooresville, Ind., woman. She said it brought tears to her eyes.

Laura Mae Davis Burlingame – she married an Army Air Corps man in 1945 – had gone to the New Orleans museum on April 24 looking for a display commemorating the young Marine who had been her high-school sweetheart.

"I figured I'd see pictures of him and the fellows he'd served with and articles about where he served," she said.

She was stunned to find the diary of the 22-year-old machine gunner.

Curator Eric Rivet (rih-VET) let her take a closer look, using white gloves to protect the old papers from skin oils. It was the first time in his 17 years of museum work that someone found "themselves mentioned in an artifact in the museum," Rivet said.

The diary was a gift to Jones from Davis. They had met in the class of '41 at Winslow High School. "He was a basketball player and I was a cheerleader," she said.

Jones had given her his class ring but they weren't engaged, she said. They had dated through high school. They went to the prom together.

He made his first diary entry while a private at Camp Elliott in San Diego, a little less than a year before he was killed. He described it as "my life history of my days in the U.S. Marine Corps ... And most of all my love for Laura Mae for whom my heart is completely filled. So if you all get a chance please return it to her. I (am) writing this as my last life request."

A sniper's bullet between the eyes killed Jones on Sept. 17, 1944, the third day of the U.S. assault on the Pacific island of Peleliu (PEL-uh-loo), in Palau.

Peleliu was where U.S. forces learned the Japanese had changed their island defense tactics. Instead of concentrating units on the beaches and finishing with reckless banzai charges, the Japanese holed up in bunkers, trenches, pillboxes and caves – many of them blasted into the island's hills and mountains – that had to be taken one at a time.

Jones, nicknamed in high school for his blond hair, was in the 1st Marine Division's L Company, 3rd Battalion. He was among 1,794 Americans killed on Peleliu and nearby islands in a 2 1/2-month assault that Marine Maj. Gen. William Rupertus had predicted would be over in a few days. Another 7,302 Americans were wounded. An estimated 10,900 Japanese were killed; 19 soldiers and sailors became prisoners of war. Another 283 POWs were laborers, mostly Korean.

Burlingame said she didn't know why she never got the diary. It apparently went first to a sister of Jones whom she didn't know well, she said.

Robert Hunt of Evansville, the nephew who gave Jones' artifacts to the museum in 2001, told her

he had received it several years after Jones' death and worried that passing it on to Burlingame might cause problems with her marriage. It wouldn't have, she said: "My husband and Tommy were good friends."

When she learned Hunt was collecting mementoes for the museum, Burlingame said, she gave him photographs and the class ring.

Jones's last entry, written aboard the USS Maui on Dec. 1, 1943, described winning \$200 at craps. He had a total of \$320, he wrote, and if he were back home "Laura Mae & I would really have a wonderful Xmas." He wondered if he could wire the money to her as a Christmas present.

That didn't happen, Burlingame said. She said she was touched by the number of times he mentioned getting letters from his parents and her.

Burlingame's tour group had to leave but the museum scanned the diary and mailed a copy to her.

The diary's 4-by-7-inch back cover was nearly filled with her photograph. The picture itself was black and white, but the photographer had tinted her cheeks pink and her lips dark red.

She had signed it, "Love, Laurie."



Laura Mae Davis Burlingame

In this Thursday, May 23, 2013 photo, Laura Mae Davis Burlingame, 90, holds a photo of herself from high school, in her Mooreseville, Ind. home. The photo filled the back cover of a diary she had given to a Marine Cpl. Thomas "Cotton" Jones, a 22-year-old machine gunner, who died in the bloody assault on a Japanese-held island during World War II. Burlingame didn't know the military diary she gave Jones had survived him. She saw it and read, "If this Diary is lost and if it is Possible please return it to Miss Laura Mae Davis. Address. Winslow Indiana." (AP Photo/Michael Conroy)



This photo provided by the National WWII Museum shows a photo of 22-year-old Marine Cpl. Thomas "Cotton" Jones, who died in the bloody assault on a Japanese-held island during World War II. Before Jones died, he wrote what he called his "last life request" to anyone who might find his diary: Please give it to Laura Mae Davis, the girl he loved. Laura Mae Davis Burlingame _ she married an Army Air Corps man in 1945 _ had given the diary to Jones, and didn't know it had survived him until visiting the museum on April 24. (AP Photo/National WWII Museum)

World War II Marine's Diary

This photo provided by the National WWII Museum shows a page of photographs from the diary by 22-year-old Marine Cpl. Thomas "Cotton" Jones, who died in the bloody assault on a Japanese-held island during World War II. The diary includes his writings as well as photos of himself and his high school sweetheart, Laura Mae Davis. Before Jones died, he wrote what he called his "last life request" to anyone who might find his diary: Please give it to Laura Mae Davis, the girl he loved. Laura Mae Davis Burlingame she married an Army Air Corps man in 1945 _ had given the diary to Jones, and didn't know it had survived him until visiting the museum on April 24. (AP Photo/National WWII Museum)



Shirley & Tommy
Burlingame

Redonda Beach Lodge



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SLOANVQ 2 78 Govt

Washington D.C. 904 PM 3
Mr and Mrs Eliza Jones,
(Parents)
General delivery
Winslow, Ind

Deeply regret to inform you that your Son Corporal Thomas P Jones USMC was killed in action in the performance of his duty and service of his country. No information available at present regarding disposition or remains temporary burial in locality where death occurred probable. You will be promptly furnished any additional information received. To prevent possible aid to our enemies do not divulge the name or his ship or station. Please accept my heartfelt sympathy. Letter follows.

A.A. Vandegrift Lt Col General USMC Commandant of Marine Corps Commandant

Inducted Oct 12-1942
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 THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

NOVEMBER 30 *Tuesday*

Dear Diary
 Went on Guard duty at 8:00 this morning for 4 hr. Got down its hot now. Must be getting used to the equator again. Played cards all after noon in Union you got all set now. Played Black Jack and that's my game. Don't wish I did have to spend this 100 bucks on a woman I be there for some of it not this time. I'll don't know where we going but to good enough that I think.

Don Good Chew on this boat. All you see and but the hell of it all you only get a meal a day but we hardly make up for it.

Went to allow in mess hall near Duke Cas for good show. Went to don't get they be 7 or more hours night. *Diary*

Tommy

DECEMBER 1 *Wednesday*

Dear Diary
 You for really on the ball I won 200 to night shooting craps. But what the hell's money good for you can't spend it. I'd like to be back in the states with a lot much money on me total 300 bucks. I'm a real good gambler. I really have a wonderful time and I get much more really. I bet a little but may be I can win many more times here. I hope you for it will be a good present for me. I just got off for 4 hr watch a little of morning a hell of a black night out. I'm going to this point to day something to you now. Good Night *Diary*

Tommy