**It’s all about May**

As we are down to the last few days before Memorial Day, and yes it is early as there is still six days left in May after Memorial Day. So like everyone else we are pushing hard to have the cemetery in tip top shape.

You know that these articles have been on those laid to rest here at Forest Hill Cemetery. Interesting people, people with a great story, stories that need to be told and retold for decades to come, and I hope that I have done that and made it interesting in learning some of their history.

Nevertheless, in this one I felt I needed to turn the tide a little and I wanted to write about interesting people in my life that I have met or have been honored to listen to their stories. So here we go!

I guess this all started from the few stories that my father who left us several months ago told me got me thinking. These are their stories from those that served in World War II as well as a few of the memories I have of those who served in Vietnam. There is no particular manner or order in which I tell these stories and of course their entire stories cannot be written here, as there would not be any room left in the paper to write about.

I will start by saying; “no I did not serve my country” I turned of age at the end of the Vietnam Conflict so my life turned in another path. But I never lost that feeling that I really wanted to go and be a door gunner, to me that was something to look forward to, hanging outside a door on a UH-1 helicopter.

So here are a few bids of information from those I have met or knew during my life.

My dad was a B-25 crew member stationed in the China, Burma, and India Theater during WW II. He got that job when a group of new inductees were going through a building and he noticed a Monarch Machine and stated he had run one of those during his high school years. The officer in charge of the men turned around and stated “good that’s your new job the rest of you men follow me.” That was his path during WW II and working on B-25’s.

Did you know that we have a gentleman laid to rest here that was a member of the Tuskegee Air Man during WW II? By the way they started off slow with little hope of getting anywhere and later found themselves in P-51’s and owned the skies as they flew escort for bombers. He was killed during the war and was returned to Piqua for burial. I did not know this gentleman but met several members of his family.

I have met and listen to stories from several pilots of B-29’s; in fact one of the pilots has never flown since leaving the Army Air Corp after the war.

One summer many years ago I had the pleasure to speak with Paul Tibbett, the pilot of the B-29 that dropped the first atomic bomb. I had a large picture of the B-29 in which he and several remaining crew members signed it and now it hangs on a wall. Paul is buried in the Columbus, Ohio area in an unmarked grave. He does not have a monument for fear that it will be damaged, yet because of what that crew did actually save the lives of hundreds of thousands.

While I have sat a listened to many more WW II stories from those who were there I’ll leave them out of the paper, some of these stories need to be told and not written in a paper, maybe a book.

A good friend of mine whose father was one of the first soldiers to step foot on Omaha Beach and came home to a soldier who slept in holes in the ground that were made by German bombs. He said that the sleeping bags smelled really bad and most the time they slept with their heads inside because it was to &%$\* cold outside. And he also stated he hadn’t taken a bath or shower in maybe 6 months.

I even had the privilege of taking my father to Washington D.C. to see the WW II Memorial. We flew up on a plane from the Honor Flight with over one hundred WW II veterans and escorts, they all had stories.

I listened to stories from pilots who flew A-10’s in Iraq to a pilot and a crew member of A-1 Skyraiders in Vietnam.

Did anyone know that there are family members here in Piqua that their father and grandfather flew in a plane that followed the B-29 Enola Gay and he was to take pictures and more pictures of what was to happen. They had no idea what was going on but in the end he got many pictures.

So the one day that I will never forget is the day that a large number of us were playing football in the park and we stopped to watch several cars pull up to the house across the street. Military personnel stepped out and one of our players ran home as it was his house. He soon ran out a disappeared as they informed the family that their son and his brother had been killed in Vietnam.

As I close I want to say that May is a great time of the year for me, I met many great people here in the cemetery but the month of May for all my years meant listening to and now watching the “the Greatest Spectacle in Racing”, as a kid I would tape an AM radio to my bicycle and listen to the race and even today I have to hear the beginning of the race on the radio and then I close out the day with NASCAR’s Coke 600.

But truly this Memorial Day let us all give thanks to those that gave the most for us and to those that gave years out of their lives to serve us. THANK YOU!