

R · FRIENDS OF THE · ROBESONIA



Winter 2016-2017

Volume 37 Issue 1

Friends of the Robesonia Furnace, Inc. PO Box 162 • Robesonia, PA 19551-1230

AN AMAZING STORY OF TWO ROBESONIA MEN IN WWII

Randy Gartner

Charlie Putt was from a large family who lived in the west end of town. Like some of his siblings, he enjoyed sports, especially baseball. He entered the Army after the start of WWII and was destined to be a part of an elite group who would operate behind enemy lines in Burma. His outfit went through training in Trinidad which was supposed to simulate the jungle conditions into which they would be fighting. The unit was designated the 5307 Composite Unit also known as unit Gallahad. Later, it was to take on the name of their Commanding Officer, Frank Merrill and be known as Merrill's Marauders

The men were first sent to India arriving in Bombay on 31 October, 1943 to train. The 970 men who traveled from the State was to be supplemented with 674 battle tested jungle troops who had already fought on Guadalcanal and New Guinea. Here they were reinforced with Air Corps and Signal Corps personnel, as well as an animal transport company with mules and experienced mule drivers. The mules were used to transport their supplies. The men, the mules and their equipment were dropped behind Japanese lines by glider. Charlie told me how one of the mules went berserk while in the air and they had to shoot him to prevent the glider from crashing. He also told me how on occasion one of the mules and the equipment it carried slipped and slid off the side of a narrow trail and fell hundreds of feet below to their deaths. He also talked about how one of the mules broke its leg. The mule handlers became very attached to their animals and the man begged them not to shoot it. He said he would carry the equipment himself. The men received all their supplies by air drop. The Army supply officers had deemed that one K-Ration, which supplied 3 meals, would be sufficient to operate on. However, it was later found to be inadequate because the K-rations just didn't supply the amount of calories the men needed when trudging through the jungle and over mountains thousands of feet high. Occasionally, they were supplemented by drops of dry rice, jam, bread, candy, and C rations. When The Marauders encountered Chinese troops, many men bartered their K rations and cigarettes for rice and other foods.

The main work of the Marauders was to cut the Japanese supply and communication lines by blowing up railroad tracks and cutting telegraph lines. The men were faced with many tropical diseases like malaria, scrub typhus and dysentery. It's bad enough having any of them in a hospital, but having them and having to fight for your life is something else entirely. Charlie ended up being hospitalized himself with malaria.

CONTINUED PG 5

Membership Renewal Form
(Check your mailing label for your current date of membership)

Date _____ Telephone Number _____

Name _____ Spouse _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Yearly Amount Level		One Time Amount Level	
\$ 10.00 ____ Individual	\$ 25.00 ____ Contributing	\$ 100.00 ____ Life Member	
\$ 20.00 ____ Family	\$ 50.00 ____ Sponsor		
*Memberships for 2016 expired Dec. 31, 2016		*All donations are tax deductible	

Please make checks payable and send along with Membership Form to Friends of the Robesonia Furnace, P.O. Box 162 Robesonia PA 19551-0162

Sign Up A Friend! How about sharing with a friend or sending them a gift membership?

Annual Dinner Meeting

Reserve your spot for the Annual Dinner/Business Meeting. We will have a few articles requiring voting members to be present please. Our guest speaker is resident Tracy Rice speaking on the Furnace Operation from 1885-1927. As most of you know this was a period of significant activity of the operation, ultimately with its sale and closing in 1927.

Email Randy Gartner RGartner@verizon.net or 484.955.7381 Randy Gartner

Artisans at the Firehouse
August 19-20



Find them on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ArtisansattheFirehouse>

Summer Show

AT ROBESONIA

August 19 & 20, 2017 • 8:00 am to 3:00 pm



FEATURING TRADITIONAL
& CONTEMPORARY ARTISANS

VISIT

FriendsOfTheRobesoniaFurnace.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Friends of the Robesonia Furnace
430 Freeman Street • Robesonia, PA



Friends of the Robesonia Furnace 2017 Annual Dinner



Ozgood's Restaurant
5:30 P.M.
Tuesday March 21, 2017

- 5:30-6:20 Cash Bar
- 6:20 - 7:15 Dinner
- 7:15 Speaker: Tracy Rice
- 8:00 - BUSINESS MEETING
 - . PRESIDENT'S REPORT
 - . TREASURER'S REPORT
 - . ELECTION OF OFFICERS

OFFICERS:

PRESIDENT : ABBY WERTZ
VICE PRESIDENT : RANDY GARTNER
TREASURER : BILL WILLIARD
SECRETARY : FRANCES YOH
BOARD : CALVIN YOH
 NORMAN BRUNNER
 DENNIS RENTSCHLER
 BARBARA BREININGER
 KATHRYN SCHWEIZER

NEWSLETTER: KEITH RENTSCHLER
COMMITTEE CHAIR-
LONG RANGE PLANNING- CALVIN YOH

Registration Form

Name _____ Phone _____

_____ Chicken Cordon Bleu	\$22.50
_____ Black Diamond Steak	\$26.00
_____ Roast Turkey w Gravy	\$21.00

All meals include salad, vegetable du jour, Roasted Rosemary Potatoes, Fresh Baked Rolls, Fountain Soda, Coffee, Tea and Dessert

REGISTRATION DEADLINE TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 2017

Please make checks payable and send along with form to:

Friends of the Robesonia Furnace, PO Box 162, Robesonia, PA 19551

TWO ROBESONIA MEN IN WWII CONTINUED

Paul Gartner's father immigrated from Germany in 1925. Paul's mother, along with his 2 sisters immigrated 2 years later. His brother Rudy, my Dad was the only one of the children born in America. Paul attended school in Wyomissing. He quit before he graduated to take a job at Textile Machine works alongside his father. Paul made good money at textile and was able to buy a brand new 1940 Oldsmobile. Like Charlie Putt, Paul entered the Army not long after the US entered WWII. After boot camp, Paul underwent training as a medic. His unit, along with others embarked on a troop ship from Norfolk, Va in November, 1943. It arrived in Oran, French Algeria on 25 November 1943. It was there his unit transferred to the HMS Rohona, a British Troop ship. The Rhona, along with four other ships left Oran. Three hours later, they joined Convoy KMF 26 which was passing on its way from Britain to Alexandria, Egypt. About 1630 hrs the next day, the convoy was attacked by about 30 Luftwaffe Heinkel He 177A heavy bombers escorted by Junkers Ju 88 aircraft, followed by between six and nine torpedo bombers. A Henschel Hs 293 radio-guided glide bomb was launched at Rhona. The bomb tore a large hole in the side about 15ft above the water line. It knocked out the engine room and all electric equipment including the pumps. Many fires broke out on the ship. Men poured onto the deck, many of whom were wounded. Paul Gartner was at his station in the medical quarters below decks. Most of the wounded brought in suffered from severe burns. Gartner said there wasn't much they could do for them with their limited equipment. With the number of wounded, it was decided to move their quarters to the main deck. The ship was already listing heavily. Gartner said with the ship sinking, he and 3 other men made the decision to go over the side. He slide down a long rope into a very rough sea. He swam about a 100 yards away from the ship where he spied a mine sweeper which appeared to him to be 10 miles away. He began swimming towards it. Huge waves lifted him into the air where he could see hundreds of other men swimming for the same boat. After about 45 minutes, he neared the ship which had lowered a crane over the side. Gartner was able to grab the crane's cable and it pulled him out of the water. But because he had used so much energy in his swim, he couldn't hold on and dropped back into the water. He then swam to the other side of the ship where he spotted a buddy of his who threw him a rope. This time, he wrapped the rope around his arm and was pulled on board. The minesweeper which Gartner landed on was the USS Pioneer. It ended up taking on almost 500 survivors. Gartner helped pull other men on board and was eventually assigned to help the injured. The men reached port later the next day where they were given British uniforms. He spent Christmas and New Years in North Africa before starting out again for India. Paul arrived in Bombay, India January 30th, 1944. On June 7th, they went by truck to Shindburan, Burma where they stayed in a staging area until the rest of his unit arrived.

TWO ROBESONIA MEN IN WWII CONTINUED



PAUL GARTNER- SECOND FROM RIGHT NAMTO BURMA APRIL 1945 AT KACHIN CEREMONY



PAUL GARTNER- LEFT AT TNKIVA BURMA DEC 1944. PAUL WAS AN ARMY MEDIC PICTURED WITH MULVAHEY SHELTON AND PAWLAK

TWO ROBESONIA MEN IN WWII CONTINUED

During this time Charlie Putt and his fellow Marauders were in a hell of a fight with the Japanese in Myitkyina, Burma. On 17 May 1944, after a 62 mile march over the over the Kumon Mountain range the approximately 1,300 remaining Marauders, along with elements of the 42nd and 150th Chinese Infantry Regiments attacked the unsuspecting Japanese at the Myitkyina airfield. The airfield assault on 17 May 1944 was successful, however, the town of Myitkyina could not be taken with the forces on hand. Finally, after being reinforced by a Chinese division, the town fell. About 3,800 Japanese died while 187 were captured and while an estimated 600 escaped with their commander. Paul Gartner's medical unit arrived on the scene about this time. The Marauders suffered 272 killed, 955 wounded, and 980 evacuated for illness and disease. Charlie Putt was one of those who was evacuated back to India with malaria where he spent several weeks in the hospital.

Paul Gartner stayed in Burma until his unit was ordered to go to China by way of the Burma Road where they set up a base to treat Chinese soldiers who were wounded. On October 18th, 1945, Gartner flew back to India on a C-54. On November 14th, the unit moved to Calcutta. Two days later they boarded a ship to begin the journey home.

Gartner returned to his home in Wyomissing and his job at Textile Machine Works. He built a home on East Lincoln Ave where he lived with his wife Elva and his 4 boys. Charlie Putt also returned home and eventually started RichCraft Kitchens along with his brother Harold (Jake) Putt. He bought a home on West Lincoln Ave where he lived with his wife Nancy and his 3 sons.

My Uncle Paul passed away in 1989.

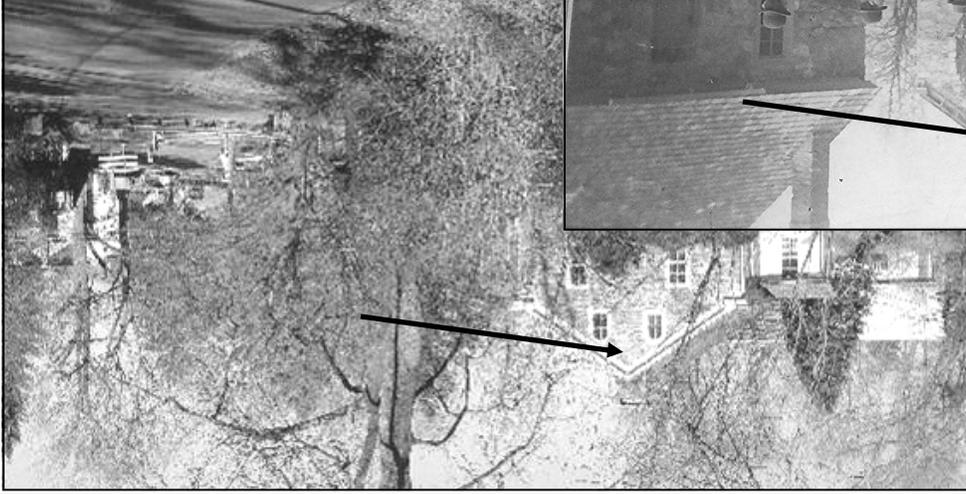
In 1998, the theme of The Furnace Festival was "Robesonian Serves it's Country". It was about the men and women from Robesonia who served in WWII. While preparing for the festival, I interviewed a number of WWII Veterans one being Charlie Putt. I showed him my Uncle's diary and Charlie saw that my Uncle Paul was in Myitkyina, Burma at the same time he was. Two men who grew up 10 miles away from each other traveled half way around the world to fight for their country and ended up living on the same street 4 houses away from each other for 30 years .Neither of them suspecting they were in the same place at the same time so many years before.



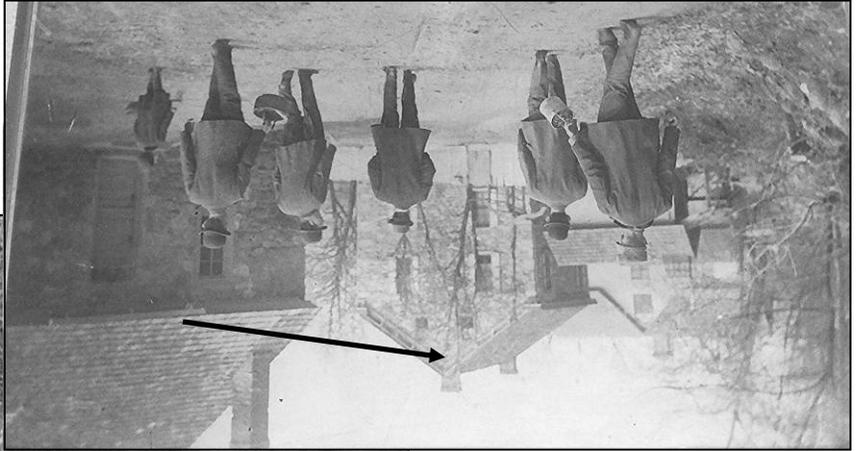
**BURMA ROAD— AMERICAN CONVOY HEADING TO
KUNMING CHINA FROM LEDO INDIA**

Friends of the Robesonia Furnace
P.O. Box 162
Robesonia, PA 19551-0162

Image looking N on Furnace St just above the Falls Bridge. Former Grist Mill building on R.



AND NOW . . .



THEN . . .