

## MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: AL CHIVERS

Treemont has its share of World War II heroes, and among them is Algernon Lee (Al) Chivers (D213).

Al was born in Beeville, Texas, the middle child of five born to an Irish mother and a father whose ancestors arrived on the Mayflower. Except for his mother, who died when Al was 10 years old, the family must be noted for longevity: Al is in his early 90s, and he has a surviving sister, age 96, and an 85-year-old brother.

He went into the Army out of high school at age 17 and reported to Ft. Sill, OK. His first assignment after Basic Training was to the motor pool at Camp Barkley at Abilene, Texas. His next orders were to have a lasting impact on the rest of his life, as we shall see.

He was sent to Des Moines, Iowa, to prepare housing for the newly formed Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. The Army had acquired three hotels which were to be outfitted as barracks for the women coming into the Army, and he was in the outfit assigned to accomplish this.

He got to know COL. Oveta Culp Hobby, first commandant of the WAACs. Asked to describe her, he says she was a "really nice lady, and a great pingpong player." It seems that at times when she needed a break she would challenge the young sergeant to a game of pingpong and his commanding officer went along without question. After all, what young Lieutenant wants to argue with a lady

Colonel? In any case, while he was in Des Moines he learned a great deal about housing and food service for large numbers of people, and his next assignment was to report to Ft. Dennis, Massachusetts. He found that assignment less attractive than the last and chose what appeared to be the best way out—he volunteered for the paratroopers and headed to Ft. Benning, GA for training.

From the time he completed training and was assigned to the 503<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Regimental Combat Team, 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne, he spent the rest of the war in almost continuous front line combat. There was the landing on the Island of Leyte in the Philippines, followed by Mindoro where the Team made a major amphibious landing for the purpose of securing air strips for forward Air Corps bases. These were needed to support the Allied forces' inexorable march toward regaining control of the Philippines. The Team was subjected to intense air and naval actions during this operation. At one time they were shelled for 25 minutes by a Japanese Naval task force.

The Combat Team jumped onto Fortress Corregidor on 18 February 1945 to liberate that island from the more than six thousand Japanese then in control. This was the most vicious combat action of the war for them, and resulted in the loss of 169 brave Americans killed and many others wounded. Only fifty Japanese survived

to surrender. The 503<sup>rd</sup> was proud to have the honor of recapturing this key position, and for it they were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

Almost immediately after returning to Mindoro the 503<sup>rd</sup> was called upon to bolster the 40<sup>th</sup> US Division which was bogged down on the Island of Negros in the central Philippines. There they engaged in fierce battles against frantic Japanese resistance in the mountain area for more than five months. Finally higher headquarters, thinking there were only a few Japanese left there, moved the 40<sup>th</sup> on to Mindanao and left the 503<sup>rd</sup> to mop up. When the war ended in August 1945 about 7500 surviving Japanese surrendered to the 503<sup>rd</sup>.

Sgt. Al Chivers came through all that with three Bronze Stars with oak leaf clusters, plus two Purple Hearts for wounds of which he is to this day reminded by his body.



Sergeant Al Chivers, 503<sup>rd</sup> PRCT

Recovered, he recalled his time with the WAACs and decided on a career in hotel management. He graduated from Hotel Management School in Washington, DC, and was

hired by the Hilton Corporation and sent to Abilene, Texas as manager of their hotel there.

From here the story takes on a magical, mystical aura which I cannot explain. I can only pass on the facts and let you, gentle reader, decide whether you agree with my take on them.

After the War, a young Belgian model named Alice, on her return to Europe from work in California, decided to see something of the US by taking the southern train route back to the East Coast. When the conductor announced they would soon be pulling into the station at Abilene, Texas, Alice made a sudden decision. She got off the train to have a look at Abilene and at Texas, of which she had heard a great deal. She walked into the local bank and the bank president was soon involved in conversation with this lovely stranger.

At that moment the manager of the Hilton Hotel, none other than Al Chivers, walked into the bank. He saw the two talking and thought "Who is that? She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen!" The banker, a happily married man, spotted his bachelor friend and beckoned him to join them. As a courtesy Al invited them both to join him for lunch at the hotel. Alice found a job in Abilene, and one year later Al and Alice were married.

Fate? Fairy tale? Coincidence? My own sense is that some things are just meant to be, and that sometimes



Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Chivers, newlyweds

we can only define coincidence as “God—working anonymously.”

When the Hilton Corporation wanted Al to transfer to a California location he declined and switched to country club management, which enabled him to provide a good living and luxurious lifestyle for his family without the frenetic stress of hotel management, and without having to move to California!

The marriage lasted until Alice’s death in September 2011, and produced three beloved children: Angelee Alice Chivers, a teacher in Clear Lake; Cecilia (Mrs. Thomas) Gooch of Katy, mother of Al’s two granddaughters, and Algernon Lee Chivers III, who lives in Houston with his wife Lori. They have one son, A. L. Chivers IV.

.Al’s piercing blue eyes, which have seen so much of the tragedy and horror of war, grow gentle and perhaps a bit misty as he speaks of his wife and children. He describes himself now at 91 as fulfilled and contented at Treemont, having had a “wonderful wife, wonderful life, wonderful family.”



Al Shivers at Treemont 2012  
“May his tribe increase...”

*A THANKSGIVING PRAYER*

There are loved ones who are missing  
from the fireside and the feast;  
There are faces that have vanished,  
there are voices that have ceased;  
But we know they’ve passed forever  
from this world of grief and pain,  
And we thank Thee, O our Father,  
for the blessings that remain.

Thanksgiving, oh, thanksgiving,  
that their love once blessed us here,  
That so long they walked beside us,  
sharing every smile and tear;  
For the joy the past has brought us  
but can never take away,  
For the sweet and gracious memories  
growing dearer every day.

For the faith that keeps us patient  
looking at the things unseen,  
Knowing Spring will follow Winter  
and the earth again be green,  
For the hope of that glad meeting  
far from mortal grief and pain—  
How we thank Thee, O our Father,  
for the blessings that remain.

*Author unknown*