

Our Lady of Guadalupe

I have just recently discovered a marvelous compact disk entitled **Matines Para Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe**.¹ It is performed by the marvelous group **Chanticleer**, and I am at a loss to explain how this beautiful music was ever lost. Indeed it was Chanticleer who rediscovered and recorded it, for which they will certainly be blessed by Our Lady. It was composed in 1764 by an Italian who lived in Mexico, Ignacio de Jerusalem, and is better, I would claim, than any contemporary music of the day

“Guadalupe” means in Aztec “the one who crushes the stone serpent,” a reference to the thousands of men, women and children sacrificed to their blood-thirsty idols. Within eight years after the apparition, nine million converts were made to the Faith. This great victory of Our Lady was foretold in the prophecy “I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.”

Today yet another group of blood thirsty idols lie in wait to be crushed beneath her heel:

“The Blessed Virgin Mary best reveals herself as Patroness of the Unborn in her advocacy of Guadalupe. In her Image, which she left us in Advent of 1531, miraculously stamped and conserved on Juan Diego’s cloak, she is represented as ‘*with child*.’”¹²

It is just a matter of time till Our Lady crushes this latest seed of Satan, the abortionists, under her heel

The music of the Chanticleer CD is appropriately very martial, with horns, trumpets and drums. It is war music, and it always reminds me of my own war, World War II. What I am trying to say will only come clear, I think, in practically the last paragraph of this essay. Until then I would like to offer a tribute to my three best friends during the war.

I was brought up in a little Catholic enclave in Arlington, Massachusetts. Even at Boston College in the early forties, I never heard a four-letter word. Needless to say the Army was quite a traumatic experience for me. But Our Lady was good. Very early on I fell into the hands of my best friend, Joe Stepan. I was at a Replacement Depot in Brisbane, Australia, when I got the word that my outfit to be, the 336th Air Service Squadron of the Fifth Air Corps, had been alerted to move up to New Guinea. One of the poor guys broke down, and I was sent up to Townsville all by myself to replace him. I tried to stand at attention while my two officers, Captain Pope and Lieutenant Mason, demanded to know

¹ *Matins for the Virgin of Guadalupe*, Ignacio de Jerusalem, 1764, Chanticleer 1997, Teldec Classics International, GMBH, Hamburg, Germany

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A Handbook on Guadalupe, Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, Our Lady’s Chapel, New Bedford, MA, 1996, p.135.

who I was, and what I was doing there. Neither Pope nor Mason had much to do. Pope used to print pornographic photographs and sell them. When they later tried to write a brief history of the outfit, they couldn't think of anything to say about Mason. Later at Wakde in Dutch Guinea, our worst battle, we had two guys killed by Jap anti-personnel bombs, Pope called a formation. He wanted to show us that he had been "wounded" in the attack. He had banged his knee getting into a Jap 20 mm emplacement. Limping in front of us, he yelled: "Now you know what daisy-cutters are!" The next day he called another formation and awarded himself the Purple Heart. We had been told to bring our gas masks, some said because it smelled so bad.



*Bob Staatz, De Verne
Swezey, Joe Stepan, Tom
Sennott*

Later on that same island we had three heavy bombs land right in the middle of our tents. No one was hurt, thank God, but everyone was stunned. We could hear guys sticking their heads out their holes, and calling to the next hole, "is everyone all right?" Then we could hear Pope bellowing: "Able," Able was our cook, "get over to the mess hall" (the officers got fresh eggs) "and see if any of those eggs got broken."

*Wakde Dutch Guinea,
1944*

I don't know how I got off on that, but I was standing at attention before Captain Pope and Lieutenant Mason. When I tried to do a snappy about face, I almost fell down. A staff sergeant sitting at a desk, who turned out to be Joe Stepan, beckoned to me as I went out. He told me to relax, that he would take care of me. I didn't know what he meant, at first, but I soon found out. Joe Put me in his own tent and there I met Bob Staatz and De Verne Swezey who quickly became my best friends. A nice fellow in the outfit, Pat Farrell from Chicago, got drunk one night, and put forty-five against the head of another not so nice fellow. "Wake up Jones, I'm gonna kill you!" Believe it or not, Jones' name was "No first name" NMI (no middle initial) Jones. Jones' only bid to fame was that he could back up a low-boy at top speed into an LST with about six inches to spare on either side. Jones woke up, took the forty-five out of Pat's hand, and fractured his skull. Pat came back a few weeks later with his head all bandaged, and Jones fractured his skull again. I understood then what Joe meant when he said "keep your mouth shut." Pat really had the gift of gab, and thought he could talk himself out of any situation.

After the war I was going to school in Chicago, and from a train I spotted Pat on the sidewalk, waiting for another train. I have been kicking myself ever since that I didn't get off at the next stop and run back to say Hi. Pat was a great talker, and most of his talk was about only one subject. He used to say to me, "I would like to marry your sister." I never told him that if I had a sister, I wouldn't let him within a mile of her. A couple of years later, I read an article in *Time*, that a bartender from Chicago named Pat Farrell, the perfect job for him, had won the "Indie 500."

We arrived at Leyte in the Philippines at the height of the *kamikaze* attacks on our shipping in the Gulf. These attacks were not like the ones you see in the movies, where the Jap plane comes diving down from a tremendous height and crashes into a ship. The Jap planes were very low hiding behind the hills of Samar. Every now and then they would pop up to get lined up on a ship. If the angle was not right they would come back on the Leyte

side. and repeat the same thing. Once they were properly lined up they would just fly into the side of the ship Our own Liberty ship was right in front of us. It got attacked twice, the Navy gunners getting the first one, and the second crashing just off the bow. We had left De Verne behind to protect our equipment from the Merchant Marine The suicide attacks were just diabolic, and also the stupidest thing the Japs did during the war. The minute an American ship came into the Gulf, all the soldiers were rushed by barge to the beach. All the attacks were on largely empty ships. The Americans were piled for miles along the beach. Miraculously these were never the object of concentrated attacks. Of course I don't mean that the Japanese are diabolic today. They are the "good guys" now. My nineteen year old granddaughter, Lauren, is doing her freshman year at International Christian College (ICU) in Tokyo. She had taught herself Japanese, and then appeared before the Rotary Club in Manchester, New Hampshire, to apply for a scholarship. She then had to speak in Japanese before the Rotary Club in Tokyo. She won the scholarship in a breeze. I would be delighted if she came home with a Japanese husband.

We came into the Gulf on a Liberty ship, which I think was the only time we were not on LSTs. Bob Staatz and I were together as we started down the net. The water was choppy, and the LCM would swing out about fifteen feet from the side of the Liberty and then slam back into it with a tremendous crash. There was about a fifteen foot drop at the end of the net. You had to throw your heavy duffel bag into the barge, then perfectly time your jump. Bob and I made it OK, but Sergeant Birdsong who followed us, landed with one foot outside the barge, and was slammed against the side of the Liberty, crushing his leg. With Birdsong writhing on the bottom of the barge, we raced through the smoke screen towards the beach. Expecting the worst, we crouched tensely in the barge, and when the ramp crashed down, charged out, to be greeted by a tremendous cheer from a whole crowd of little Filipino kids.

It was the rainy season and we were always soaked which was why we all had "jungle rot." Our medic, Pearl White, used to paint my hands every day with "Jensen's Violet." The guys had somehow found out that Jensen's Violet, was just pure alcohol. If you think that cowboys are romantic figures, you should try living with them for a few years. We had two, Dick Bannister and Leland Rich, who used to talk about punching cows. They were both welders, and were really something else. They broke into the medicine cabinet one night and drank all the Jensen's Violet. It is a wonder it didn't kill them. Their tongues were purple for months.

As it got dark Bob and I tried to get out of the rain. Just in front of us about a hundred yards from the water, was a company of amphibious engineers. Bob and I crawled under one of the DUKS. (ducks) This was an all black outfit with white with officers. These were the days of segregation. The soldier on duty in the orderly room called to us: "Are you guys alone?" He then got us two folding canvas cots, and set us up in a dry place. In the middle of the night we were awakened by a couple of shots and a lot of yelling. Our benefactor said; "Oh that's just Johnson, He's always like that when he gets back from the font."

The next morning Bob and I tried to find our benefactor to thank him. We tried to figure out what had happened. Johnson we decided must have gotten in from the front, awakened the cook and demanded something to eat. The cook was yelling at him and

Johnson was yelling back. They both must have fired at each other at point blank range, and deliberately missed, probably shooting up into the air. It must have been a regular ritual, because it didn't seem to bother anybody but us.

Bob was the only one of my buddies I got to visit after the war. I was going to school in Chicago, and Bob lived in Fort Jefferson Wisconsin, about an hour's ride north of Milwaukee. It was fairly easy even for me to find. There I met Virginia Stubbs whom everyone called "Stubby" for obvious reasons. Bob had a picture of Stubby hanging in his mosquito net. One night Stubby got hit by shrapnel, and Bob painted a Purple Heart on the picture. They later had seven boys and one girl. Stubby just died this Christmas. Bob is now living with one of his sons in Florida.

They had the most unusual Sunday routine. They would get up early and play nine holes of golf. Then after Mass they would go to a basketball game. Bob's big ambition was to teach history in high school, and coach the basketball team, which is exactly what he did. After basketball we would go to a big German family bar, that was full of kids. Bob and I had been at Aitape, Papua, for a few weeks, which later became one of the worst battles of the war. While we were there Bob looked for some of his friends from Fort Jefferson. They were in the 32nd Infantry Division, a Wisconsin National Guard unit, and were on the perimeter at Aitape. In the bar Bob would introduce me saying: "Tom was with me at Aitape." I could see them looking at me quizzically: "Does this guy really think he was in the war?" I had had this brought home to me during the war in a quite dramatic fashion.

We were on the Island of Morotai, somewhere in the Halamaheras (Moluccas?). Captain Pope, now Major Pope, heard there was an egg plant garden just a short distance from the perimeter. He got up a scratch squad, myself included, and with the Infantry Captain and First Sergeant for guides, went past the perimeter. As we walked through the fox holes, the infantry sang the Air Corps song for us: "Off we go into the wild blue yonder." We soon found the egg plant patch and the guys fell too, under the direction of Major Pope. I went up a notched log against the front of a grass shack. The Infantry Captain had told us, it was the Jap watcher's position. It was full of opened sardine cans and empty cigarette packages. I noticed a couple of long poles leaning against the side of the shack as I climbed up the log. I found out later that I was supposed to go around the shack banging on the thatch to knock the snakes out.

Back on Leyte beach Joe Stepan and I decided to set up our shelter halves and dig in - at the least the sand was easy digging. We were attached to the black engineering outfit in front to us for rations. These men were always cooking in their tents with all kinds of Rube Goldberg contraptions. You could always hear the Jap planes clanking by in the smoke screen. We had variable pitch propellers that made a smooth sound, they had constant pitch and made a real racket. You could always tell them One night the engineers set one of their tents on fire. You could immediately hear the Jap planes clanking toward the fire. I looked and there were converging tracers that looked if they were going to hit me right between the eyes. I used to be on the track team and took off at top speed with the whole beach behind me. I was never much good at Arlington High, but I suspect I broke some record that night. As we stampeded down the beach, we swept the poor Filipinos, chickens and all, along with us. The poor mothers were running out into the ocean, and just holding their babies' faces out of the water. To make matters worse we were running right into the Tannuan strip, and

the Marine Vought Corsairs were coming in with a tremendous racket, and with their lights blinking. The GIs behind me kept yelling at the Filipinos: “Americanos, Americanos,” but it didn’t seem to help much.

I suddenly came to an abrupt halt in my record breaking dash. I had forgotten something – MY GUN! I tried to fight my way back through the pack and finally got back to my hole. There was Joe Stepan sitting on the edge of our hole and trying to write a letter by flashlight. Joe looked a little bit like Gary Cooper, and could imitate him perfectly. Without looking up he said: “Where yuh been Tom?” I was embarrassed to death and said: “Oh I just ran down the beach a little way.”

All that night there were GIs trying to find their ways back to their outfits. We had guards right down to the ocean. I remember one, who m we later called “lifers,” or “someone who had found a home in the Army.” One of these challenged one of these lost souls: “Halt, who goes there?” We heard the classic answer: “It’s jess a pore G ah.” That great answer seemed to sum up the whole war for me.

Joe had always wanted to become a school teacher. He was a Junior High principal in Austin Texas. Joe was very proud of his Catholic Faith, and his Czech heritage. He died just a few years ago, and his dear wife Margie sent me a beautiful letter. ”I know Joe suffered, but he never complained. In fact two days before he died he repeated the following: ‘I’m coming home, very soon – I’m coming home, very soon – I’m coming home, very soon – I’m fine – I’m fine – I’m fine – and as always – I love you, very much.’”

De Verne Swezey was from Patchogue, Long Island, and I regret very much that I never got down to see him. But I could hardly find my way to Boston, let alone Long Island De Verne was the foreman in a dog collar factory, but he wanted in the worst way to have his own work boat. He knew where the eels were running, and even though they were not Kosher, the Jews loved them. He dreamed making a big catch, and then running over to the City to sell them. Whenever I wrote to him after the war, I would always ask, how are the eels running? But he would answer sadly, I’m still in dog collars.” De Verne was a deacon or something in a Protestant Church. But his if Marian die in the Good Samaritan, a Catholic nursing home. De Vern very proudly told me how much the Sisters loved her, and had had all kinds of Masses said for the repose of her soul. I am sure they must have brought her into the Church before she died. De Verne stayed on at the Good Samaritan as a volunteer for years, and his letters were always filled with: “Sister Betty said.” I feel sue that she will eventually bring him int the Church.

De Verne was our real morale booster, and even though he was sick a lot with dengue, he never lost his sense of humor. On our last run of the war, from the Philippines to Okinawa, we were in the most beautiful little convoy I had ever seen. There was a double row of twenty five LSTs, flanked by ten PT boats, which in turn were flanked by three corvettes. It looked so powerful that I almost wished that we were attacked by Jap planes. Instead we were hit by a terrific typhoon. I had always stayed up on the deck under the trucks during General Quarters,. which was strictly forbidden. I was supposed to go below where a sailor would lock us into a small compartment. That same sailor was supposed o come back on Abandon Ship and unlock us. The typhoon kept getting worse and worse, and when the waves started breaking over the deck I decided I better get below. As I went down

the hatch head first, the last thing I saw was a sailor's arm hanging out of one of the gun tubs. He was supposed to be on torpedo watch. It was unbelievable below, with the guys rolling around on the deck, and throwing up on each other. I kept crawling looking for Sweze. I finally found him with his head in the urinal, his chin covered with a green slime. "Tom! Come on in" As it drew near morning I was in a little better shape than most of the outfit. I got up on deck. The ocean was still very rough, but I saw the most inspiring sight I have ever seen in my whole life. There was the convoy still in perfect formation, rolling up and down, and proudly displaying its running lights. In another convoy just before or after us three destroyers had capsized with the loss of all hands. They didn't have enough ballast.

I have finally come to the place where I said I should have heard *Matins of Our Lady of Guadalupe*. Instead I heard Kate Smith belting our "God bless America." It was probably one of the few times during the war that I felt proud to be an American soldier. Now instead of Kate Smith, I hear Chad Runyon of Chanticleer in his beautiful rendition of *Quae est ista, quae ascendit*, "who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, **terrible as an army set in array?**" It makes me proud to be a Catholic.
