

COMMUNITY LIFE

Memorial to honor all former POWs

Barbed Wire Buckeyes members work with Cuyahoga Community College

By "SAM" BOYER
Staff Writer

Arnold Green spent 45 months on Wake Island performing hard labor for his Japanese captors. He returned home weighing about 100 pounds.

The Strongsville resident and his fellow prisoners of war were sparsely fed and were forced to work in coal mines and building a dam. The member of the 1st Marine Division was captured the day before Christmas, 1941. While he was interred, 98 of his fellow prisoners died.

William Wazevich of Brooklyn spent his time in Stalag 17B as a prisoner of the Germans. His friend, Paul Tomasko of Cleveland, was also in the Air Force and shot down by the Germans. He was captured in 1943 and was held for 22 months. They flew their bombers before fighter support was provided on bombing missions. Tomasko lost a brother to the war in Japan while he was in the camp.

Jack Lloyd of Medina was on patrol when his vehicle was hit by a shell. It blew out his ear drum and hurt his left knee. His captors took away his and all his fellow prisoners' GI clothing, and gave them old clothes in return including a shirt with one sleeve. Then they were forced to wear wooden shoes and marched all over Germany

throughout the winter. There was no room left in prisoner-of-war camps.

When he returned to a hospital in the States, he and his fellow prisoners had to be taught certain skills again.

"We were wild," Lloyd said. "They marched us all over Germany and if you did or said something the guards didn't like, they hit you in the back with their rifle butts." He now wears braces due to the damage to his spine. He has lost some of his memory and his sense of smell because of blows to his head, the psychological trauma, and the constant stench to which he was subjected.

"We had to learn to be civilized again. We had to learn to ask for food, not just grab for it," Lloyd said. He credits his wife of 51 years, Frances, for helping him make it through life.

Lloyd has never wanted to return to the scene of his interment. "I lost too many friends," he said with his voice breaking and tears welling up in his eyes.

Green paged through a small black book, pointing to the binding. "It was falling apart, so I used some bread to make a paste to glue it back together," he said. "This is where the rats chewed it."

The book chronicled his horror story and that of his fellow prisoners. One of them was having difficulty getting veteran's benefits.

The book was proof of his ordeal.

These men and many other survivors of German and Japanese camps in World War II plus those who survived Korean prisoner camps are members of an organization called the Barbed Wire Buckeyes.

At 2 p.m. May 17, these courageous men and their counterparts from all wars in which Americans fought and were captured will see the culmination of several years of work and fund raising.

A prisoner of war memorial will be dedicated in the Veteran's Garden at Cuyahoga Community College's West Campus, which is on the site of the former Crile Hospital. Crile served returning veterans for many years and, ironically, was also home to several German prisoners of war who were put to work on the grounds. The ceremony is open to the public.

M.W. "Doc" Unger of Lakewood and Rob Von Sternberg of Parma have been involved in the memorial project since they attended the campus' sponsorship of the Vietnam Memorial moving wall in 1994, after which Banks began designing living history courses around Vietnam and the history of Crile Hospital.

The Barbed Wire Buckeyes have thus far been unable to find any local prisoners of war from the Vietnam War.

The widow of the second patient to enter Crile, Mrs. Robert Young of Wooster, attended CCC April 24 when a special open house was held in honor of prisoners of war in anticipation of the May 17 event.

Her husband and Richard Currier were the first two Crile patients (actually before it officially opened) and were featured in a *Time* Magazine article in March 1944 as the two repatriated and wounded POWs made their way to the hospital. Currier died in 1996 but his story was filmed prior to that time.

The Western Campus is offering two courses in public and applied history called "Barbed Wire History." Professor James Banks has designed an oral history project and has assigned each student to a former POW. The 25 students in the class range in age from 17-70 and are meeting with their subjects.

Jan Vina of Brunswick is a former "military brat." She is a student of Banks' history class and has been assigned to chronicle the life of Lloyd as a prisoner of war. While Lloyd has rarely spoken about his experience, he is willing to share this living history.

By the end of the term, each student and POW will produce a 15-minute, focused videotape incorporating the oral and video record of the ex-prisoners experience. A detailed research paper will accompany the video documentary.

Two psychologist-counselors from the VA Hospital in Brecksville, Dr. David Liebling and Dr. Cissie Clower, have talked to each class to acquaint the students with the unique dimensions of post traumatic stress disorder as it applies to older veterans and POWs in particular.

Banks, a Medina resident, has established the Crile Archives at CCC-West. Numerous documents,



SUN PHOTO BY JEANNENE MATHIS-BERTOSA

Paul Tomasko of Cleveland holds a photo of himself as a dashing 20-year-old as well as some of his medals. Tomasko was a prisoner at Stalag 17.

letters, personal items and memorabilia are in the collection.

Now the collection will also include many of the artifacts from former POWs.

Willard Largent was a well-known editor of newspapers in Medina, Brunswick and Berea. He later went on to become a political adviser to Mayor George Voinovich and served for a time as safety director of Cleveland.

His son Jeff, and his daughter Denise, former CCC students, have donated all of his war material to the Crile Archives. Largent's story was videotaped prior to his death last year.

Largent was shot down over France and was found by the French Underground. But his leg was severely infected and they couldn't help, so they left him by the side of the road knowing that the Germans would be interested in an American flyer. He was taken to a small retaining hospital near the Maritime Alps where he said he was fairly treated. But he was the only American — all the other patients were German.

When the Americans invaded the south of France, hospital personnel panicked. They knew they were losing the war and were afraid that once France was free from German rule, the French Underground would seek them out and kill them.

So they sent Largent out in an ambulance to meet the Americans. It wasn't until he was able to talk about the players on the Cleveland Indians, he said, that they believed he was an American.

The ambulance led them to the hospital in Toulon for the surrender. He was one of the few enlisted men to ever accept a surrender from a German Naval Officer. The admiral surrendered his ceremo-

nial sword to Largent. That is among the items now in the archives.

Unger was a prisoner in the now-infamous Stalag 17. In his video segment, he shows his "wings" made from the cans of corned beef hash the prisoners received from the Red Cross.

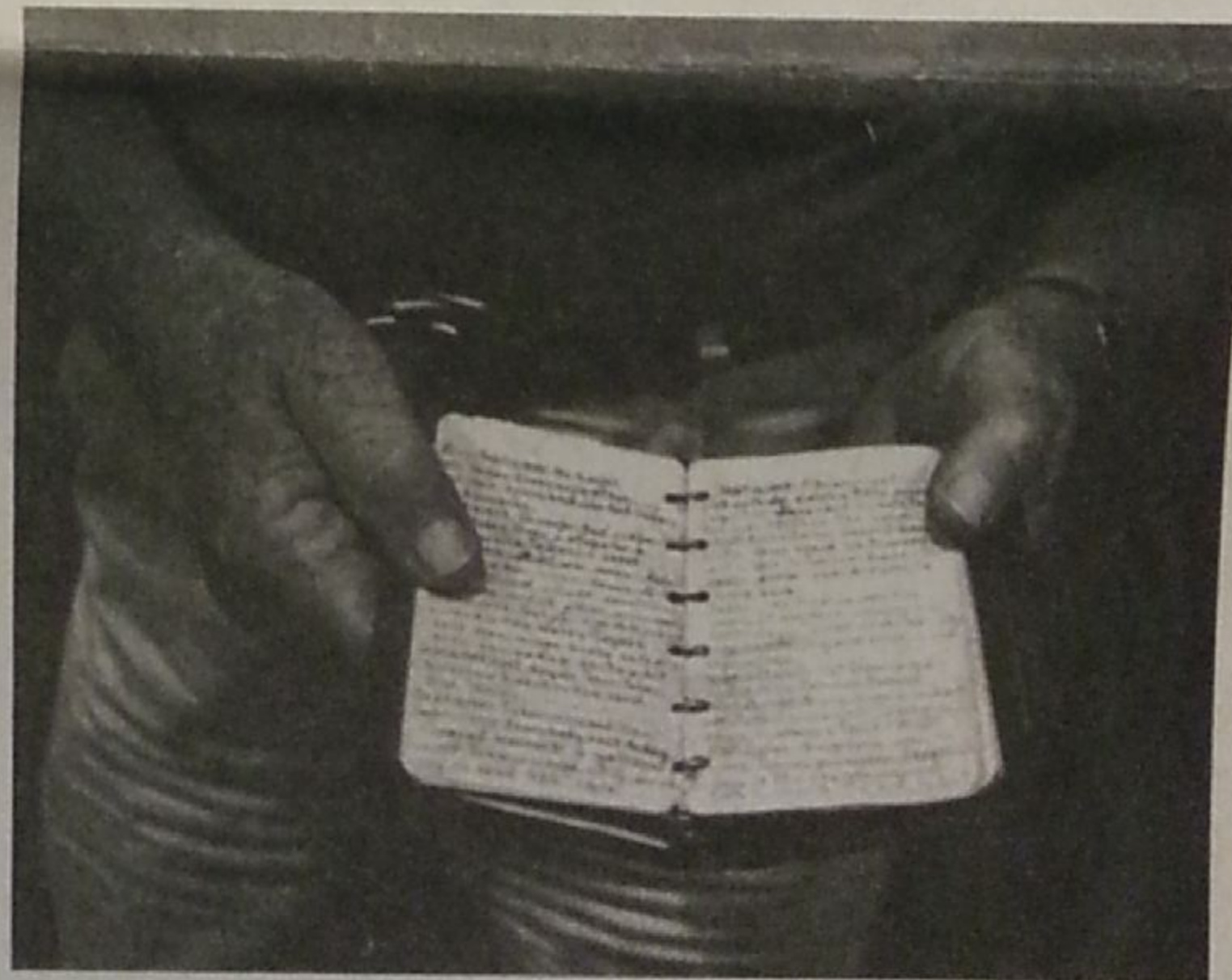
He also has his German dog tags. "Americans wore two dog tags," he said. "If something happened, one was sent home and the other stayed with the body," he said. The Germans took the prisoners' dog tags and replaced them with a single tag, perforated in the middle so it could be broken in two.

"I'm happy I still have both halves," he said.

Richard Macon, a Tuskegee Airman, also has been filmed and will be on hand at the May 17 ceremony.

Cleveland area residents will remember former Channel 3 weatherman Wally Kinnan. He was a B-17 pilot shot down and a prisoner of war, and while interred the talented trumpet player actually started a band. Several members of his crew and band will be at the campus May 17 as will Kinnan.

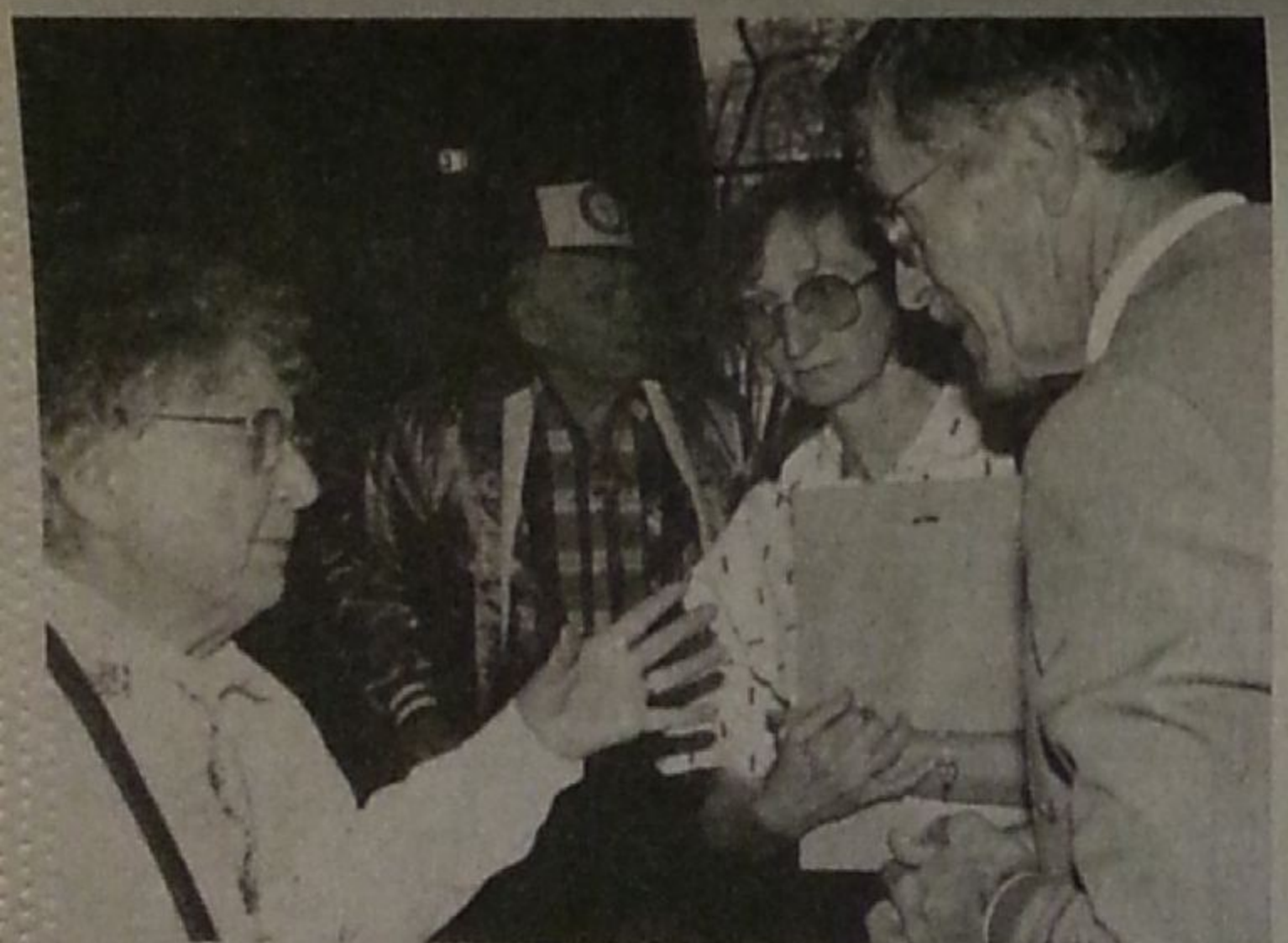
Kinnan's son, Timothy, is a graduate of Rocky River High School and also will be there to introduce his dad. Ironically, Timothy will outrank him. He is now Major General Timothy Kinnan, commander of Maxwell Air Force Base.



The small notebook kept by Arnold Green while he was a prisoner of the Japanese helped his fellow prisoners prove their hardships.



Edward McClelland and Al Pekrul, both of Cleveland, are veterans of the Battle of the Bulge who joined other veterans at Cuyahoga Community College last week in preparation for the May 17 memorial dedication.



Alice Frambaugh of Medina holds the attention of student interviewer Jan Vina and CCC Professor James Banks.