Dusty

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My Dad, Louis Joseph Luzar, graduated from Purdue University in May 1941. Like most young men his age, he enlisted in the U.S. military soon after to fight in WW II. By August in 1941, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Army Air Corps and soon began training in Colorado to become a bombardier. His inner ear condition, a result of college football, made it impossible to complete that training. He was transitioned into a military intelligence position and shipped out to the Pacific Theatre. He joined a small unit that did advanced assessments of possible landing sites and general reconnaissance.

Dad started his service in the Pacific Theatre in Australia, where he met a war weary Scottish journalist. He told my Dad that he was just too old to cover the war throughout the South Pacific and he planned to retire. He had hitched a flight home but had one small problem. He had a terrier mixed dog that accompanied him on assignment, but the flight home could not take her. Dad volunteered to take her, and he promised not to leave her at the front.

Her name was Dalkeith Destiny, but everyone called her Dusty. The name Dalkeith probably referred to Dalkeith Palace near Edinburgh, Scotland. Dusty and my Dad quickly bonded, and she traveled with him across the Pacific for the rest of the war.

Dad and Dusty moved from Australia to Papua New Guinea in 1942. From their landing point at Port Moresby, they headed inland to the highlands. It's ironic that anthropologists I later studied while in college were doing their groundbreaking research there at the same time. The New Guinea interior was largely unexplored by the west and had active cannibalism. Dad had photos of himself with some little kids who all had their teeth filed down to a sharp point. He was very nervous about Dusty in that environment. Other pictures from New Guinea show Dad standing in front of an anti-aircraft dugout lined with sandbags located in a tropical forest. They were subject to frequent bombing attacks and Dusty developed what today would be recognized as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For the rest of her life, loud noises would cause tremors and crying.

Dad and Dusty moved from New Guinea to the Netherlands East Indies and on to the Philippines. I framed the maps he used of Luzon Island and the Palawan area. They are printed on silk so that if shot down over water, the maps would stay usable. A young Filipino boy made a knife for him in 1944 with a very sharp, curved blade for, as he said, throat slitting. That knife is hanging on my sunroom wall with the boomerang he was given in Australia. A young girl made a dress for Dusty out of a piece of a parachute

bearing the 5th U.S. Air Force insignia. She wore it proudly as the unofficial mascot of the 5th U.S. Air Force.

Dad said that much of the time in the Pacific was a holding pattern while resources were focused on the European Theatre. The battles in the Pacific were brutal and came at a high loss of life. Germany surrendered in May 1945 and the war focus switched to the Pacific Theatre. The Battle of Okinawa occurred from April to June 1945. It was one of the deadliest battles in history, with over 240,000 people killed. The Island-Hopping approach (skipping past heavily fortified islands to take less occupied islands) used in the Pacific Theatre was a slow process with an uncertain outcome. Okinawa's losses (including many civilians by suicide) and the projected time consumed to continue fighting had to figure into the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan. Although over 246,000 Japanese died in the atomic bombings and many survivors suffered radiation poisoning related deaths later, no American soldiers were killed.

After the atomic bombs were dropped in August 1945, Japan surrendered on September 2, 1945. Although the war was over, the U.S. Military had no idea how the Japanese civilian population would respond to American soldiers landing on their shores. Some speculated that massive suicides would occur as had occurred on Saipan and Okinawa. Japanese culture had developed a strong suicide response to Emperor Hirohito's demands for complete loyalty and the expectation to fight to the death against all odds.

The U.S. Military decided to quietly land just a few people near the sites of the atomic bombings to judge the response of civilians to having U.S. soldiers on Japanese soil. My Dad was one of those chosen to do the reconnaissance. He never said which bombed area he visited but he clearly saw some of the destruction. Dad sometimes joked that he might be radioactive. He said the Japanese people he met seemed stunned and just exhausted. In that environment, honorable suicides were a lost priority and not an issue for the Americans.

While on that mission in Japan, he encountered a family anxious for his food rations. In return for his rations, they gave him three figurines and four small dolls. One figurine was an eight-inch brown statue of Hoi Toi, the happy Buddha. Years later, and throughout my Dad's life, Hoi Toi sat on a cabinet shelf just beyond the reach of five little kids. When we were little, Dad would hold us up to Hoi Toi and we would rub his belly and make a wish. For us, Hoi Toi was far more important than Santa, the Tooth Fairy, and the Easter Bunny. Hoi Toi, with his shinny belly, sits in my living room today.

By the end of the war, Dad had been promoted to the rank of Major. With that rank, and the points he had accumulated for his service, he could have flown to Hawaii and then to the U.S. However, he could not take Dusty with him on a flight. She had been his loyal friend and companion all those years during the war, and he had promised the journalist

not to leave her behind. He instead opted to wait for an opening on one of the ships ferrying troops back to the states in Operation Magic Carpet. With the motto “Home Alive By ‘45,” battleships, aircraft carriers, and cruisers were used to bring the troops home from the Pacific Theatre. Dad came back on a crowed aircraft carrier where many troops slept on the deck. During inspections, rows of soldiers would pass Dusty behind their backs as officers passed by them. Dad said that the Naval officers on the ship knew about Dusty and just looked the other way.

Dad had corresponded with his family in Indianapolis throughout the war and they knew about Dusty. As Dad’s arrival became more imminent, his mother decided that Dusty needed her own bed. His Mother was an immigrant from the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Slovenia) who rarely, if ever, left Haughville, the Slovenian enclave in western Indianapolis. After over 50 years in the U.S., she still spoke almost no English. One day shortly before his arrival home, she put on her best hat and travelled to downtown Indianapolis. She managed to find a store that carried pet supplies and bought Dusty’s new bed. When my Dad arrived home, he opened the front door and Dusty jumped from his arms and ran straight to her new bed.

Dusty had only been around men during the war and disliked women. She barely tolerated my Grandma. It wasn’t an issue until my Dad became serious about my Mom. Dusty hated her and I know the feeling was mutual. After they married and set up their own home, Mom was alone all day with Dusty while Dad was at work at Purdue. My Mom was an animal lover, but she said being with Dusty all day and putting up with that “nasty little dog” (her words) growling and snapping at her was a horrible experience.

Dusty had a long, eventful life, and died almost three years after the war, in my Dad’s arms. My Dad had many dogs in his life, before and after the war. I know Dusty was special among them. She was a constant friend and companion during the most challenging years of his life. They clearly shared a special bond created during a world war that stretched thousands of miles around the world.