



The latest in our series.. **THE PEOPLE OF THE PARK:** **Paul Thompson**

“Bassoons & Bullets” **By Dale Dauten**

When I stopped in to meet Paul Thompson at his place in Silverridge, the first thing I noticed after sitting down was the bassoon in an open case, along with sheet music stacked nearby. Paul explained that he had a rehearsal later that day with the East Valley Pops Orchestra.

A bit later I got a look at one of the pieces he'd created as part of the Silverridge woodcarving group. He explained that he was particularly drawn to bird carvings.

☒It was easy to see that he's a man thoroughly enjoying retirement.

Soon, though, we got down to Paul's story from a place and time far away, as a young soldier in WWII, literally and figuratively dodging bullets.



He just wanted to get his junior year of college finished, and then he'd go off to war. Paul Thompson was 17, but he was in his third year at the University of Chicago, having won a scholarship at just 15. He knew he'd get drafted as soon as he turned 18 and that would be before he could get his exams out of the way. So he went to a recruiting office and they offered a deal: if he enlisted, they would agree not to call him up till after final exams; plus, he would be assigned to work in radar repair rather than infantry.

He took that deal, but... but... he still got called up before finals, costing him to lose a year of college credit; and then, after a few months in radar training, the program was disbanded and he got shipped off to infantry training.

While he was frustrated about losing out on the radar program, it turned out to be one of those bullets he dodged, saying, "I was ticked off about it at the time, but if I stayed in radar repair I would have been dead a long time ago. The equipment wasn't properly shielded and all the radar repairmen ended up dying of cancer."

But it wasn't long till Paul was dodging literal bullets. His Division, the 106th, was newly created and, lacking combat experience, was sent to what was thought to be a quiet part of the Siegfried Line, along the border of Belgium and Germany. The Nazis had other plans – they'd learned where the green troops were stationed and figured that would be a good spot to launch an offensive. In an article he wrote for the "Ex-POW Bulletin," Paul describes the morning "all hell broke loose" as he awakened in the early morning in the farmhouse where he was billeted:

"Screaming Meemies' were whistling overhead, shells exploding all around. The house shook, the windows rattled. I was certain the very next shell would come through the wall and explode in our bedroom. I snatched my trousers and tried to put them on but for the life of me I could not get my legs into the openings. I threw them aside, jumped into my boots, grabbed my overcoat, helmet and rifle and raced for the bunker. I fought the first battle without trousers. If I had been captured then, the Germans would have caught me not only with my pants down but with no pants on at all."

The American troops managed to hold off the first German assault and Paul managed to retrieve his pants and finish dressing. Then came the second assault. Again, the Americans held. Eventually, though, a mortar shell hit their ammunition store and, deprived of that ammo, the Americans were ordered to evacuate and try to make it to the American line. Paul sprinted away, jumped into an armored car while bullets flew around him, and they took off... or tried t

They'd barely begun their getaway when they encountered a roadblock and, surrounded, were forced to surrender.

That evening, after being herded into a makeshift prison, a fellow soldier pointed to the pants Paul had struggled with hours before. They now sported fresh bullet holes. Running to the armored car, Paul had indeed dodged bullets.

The men eventually joined thousands of others at a massive prison camp, Stalag 11A in Germany. After months of confinement, Paul got the chance to be out in the countryside as part of a work team tasked with railroad repairs. From the flames and explosions, he was able to figure out that they were working very near the front lines. Paul and a fellow American named Carlton were able to slip away from their guards into the countryside and hide overnight. Paul wrote about what transpired the next morning, as they moved toward the front:

"Now came the scary time. I was wearing a German field jacket and a Serbian barracks cap. Carlton wore a French overcoat. As we approached a jeep full of soldiers we worried whether they would welcome us or shoot and ask later. We needn't have worried. They thought we were the sorriest looking soldiers they'd ever seen and they drove us to the company mess."

☒ Paul was soon sent back to the States, arriving in time for his 20th birthday. Although he'd lost his scholarship and a year of college credit, the GI Bill came through for him and he got a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the University of Chicago, then went to Purdue for an Engineering degree



After college, a job offer from Honeywell took him to Minneapolis and he settled there, along with his wife, the former Laura Jones, "the girl across the street" in their childhood home of Chicago, Illinois.

Paul retired in 1985 and says, "We motor-homed for 17 or 18 years." Another couple suggested that Paul and Laura plan to spend some time with them at a planned visit to Silveridge. That was in 1993. They became regular visitors and then, in 2004, decided to buy a place.

Paul, back in the States, in Florida



That brings us back to the present and where I began, my conversation with Paul about his bassoon. He says,

“I’m in three bands and we play at RV parks all around the Valley. I haven’t seen one yet that I’d prefer to Silverridge. We have so much here... it’s less like an RV park and more like a small town.”



It’s time for our Activities Director, Sue Arneson, to head north for the summer and we wish her well. But before closing up the office, she put together a photo collection from the activities in March which can be found on the next page.

Sue will also be sending us an update on next season’s events sometime this summer

and she’ll return in October, but till then, we send her off with this lovely compliment that came in recently...

March Activities

The decorators would like to acknowledge and send out a big thanks to The Canada Day Committee for their generous donation. This will enable us to buy some new outdoor Christmas decorations and lights.



The Farewell Boogie



Paint with Pat Class

Canada Days



Pickleball Tournament Winners



The Variety Show – So much talent and fun!!!



RV Potluck Social and Party Time!!



Sharon and her new Poodle skirt



Sue on the new Quilting machine



Our Marine Drive at Coffee





Appreciation / Thank you Form

Date March 2, 2018

Space # 361

I appreciate: Sue Arneson - what a GREAT
Activity Director she is! Not only does
she plan a variety of fun events for us
here at Silveridge, she does it all with
such a positive approach. Everyone just
loves her. She makes our park the BEST!

Signature Joann Kloos

Name Joann + DuWayne Kloos

Address 8265 E. Southern Ave., # 361

Telephone 612-616-7377 Email joannkloos@gmail.com

You may also mail this form to:
Interstate Investments, Inc.
P O Box 13846, Tempe AZ 85284