

## WHERE DID “THAT” COME FROM?

By Vince Rybel



How does any organization develop its identity? A good football team will take on the identity of the head coach. A successful business enterprise will mirror the identity of the founders. But what shapes the identity of the coach or the founders? Good question. The answer probably lies in their formative years.

### **The Greatest Generation**

In *The Greatest Generation*, Tom Brokaw proposes that the Americans who came of age during the great depression and World War II were forged with extraordinary character traits. Brokaw contends that these included “personal responsibility, duty, honor, and faith.” They had to endure a crushing downturn in the nation’s economy, where everyone had to make do with less. It would have been easy to descend into hopelessness, but these individuals somehow maintained a positive outlook.

### **World War II**

WWII was the most significant and influential event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The total devastation is almost incalculable. Total military and civilian deaths probably fall between 70 and 85 million, 3 percent of the world’s population at the time. Nearly 14 million Americans served in the military, and over 400,000 never returned home. For those who were born after the war, it is a history book whose outcome is known ahead of time. For the Greatest Generation who lived it in real time, the outcome was not certain. For those who served, their experiences shaped their future lives.

### **The Formation of CH2M**

The company we all worked for was started by four members of the Greatest Generation who were also World War II veterans. Many of the first employees also had the same roots. Together, they forged the CH2M identity, which later became our “corporate culture.” Whatever “that” term means, it defined us.

Among the Greatest Generation, individuals share the following traits:

- They have a strong work ethic.
- They are driven and motivated.
- They live modestly and are frugal consumers and prudent savers.
- They are humble, committed, and optimistic.
- They are honest and completely trustworthy.

Among the WWII veterans, individuals share the following traits:

- They are patriotic.
- They are disciplined.

- They understand the value of teamwork.
- They are good organizers.
- They are “mission oriented.”
- They value the importance of leadership (leading from the front, leading by example).

The following is a partial list of CH2M veterans of WWII. If you know of a CH2M veteran who is not on the list, please contact me, Vince Rybel, at rybelgm@gmail.com.

<b>CH2M WWII Veterans</b>	
Jim Howland, USCOE	Austin Evanson, Royal Brit Navy
Fred Merryfield, USCOE	Elmer Seegmueller, U.S. Army
Earl Reynolds, U.S. Navy	Ken Bielman, USCG
Bob Adams, U.S. Navy	Ralph Roderick, U.S. Army
Ralph Martin, U.S. Navy (Submarines)	Sid Lasswell, U.S. Army
Fred Eidsness, USPHS	Burke Hayes, U.S. Navy
Vaughn Sterling, U.S. Navy	Holly Cornell, USCOE
Jack Meier, U.S. Navy	Fred Harem, U.S. Army Air Corps
Bob Schilling, U.S. Army	Alan Hunnicutt, U.S. Army
Harry Teel, USMC	Clair Hill, U.S. Army
George Silkworth, U.S. Army Air Corps	William Crow, U.S. Army
Archie Rice, U.S. Army	Ed Greey, U.S. Navy
Niels “Swede” Norquist, U.S. Army	Carl Ryden, USAF
Gus Pantazi, U.S. Army	Charles Meek, U.S. Navy

All the founders of CH2M HILL were veterans, and their service has been honored in the WWII Memorial Registry. Following are their stories.



Holly Cornell obtained an ROTC commission upon graduation from Oregon State University in 1938. He entered the U.S. Army in early 1941 and took training at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He was stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Then he served as an assistant engineering officer at Fort Benning, Georgia. He then was deployed overseas in the fall of 1944 and served with a combat engineering regiment in Patton's 3rd Army in Europe. This unit won recognition for their actions at the Remagen Bridge over the Rhine River in early spring 1945. When this bridge collapsed after repeated German fire, nearly 1/3 of the one of the regiment's company

was lost. At the time of the German surrender in May 1945, his unit had reached the Danube River in Austria. With the war over in Europe, he was reassigned to Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, in preparation for the upcoming invasion of Japan. With the dropping of the two atomic bombs in August 1945, that invasion became unnecessary; and he was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. His military awards included the Bronze Star.

Jim Howland received an ROTC commission in the Corps of Engineers through Oregon State College (now university) in 1938. Following his graduation from M.I.T. with a Master's Degree in 1939, Jim accepted a job with Standard Oil Co. of California, designing and supervising the construction of refining facilities. He was called to active duty in July 1941. His engineer regiment had loaded their equipment on a troopship destined for the Philippines by December 6, 1941, and was scheduled to sail on December 8. The unit was diverted to Hawaii to construct defense facilities when the loss of the Philippines was imminent. He served in Hawaii as a company commander in an engineering regiment and later as an engineer in the territorial army engineer headquarters. He was then assigned to the engineer headquarters unit for the occupation of Saipan in the Marianas as head of the design section. In May 1944, he participated in the island's capture. While based on Saipan, he also served short tours in the Philippines and on Iwo Jima. He returned to the U.S. in November 1945 after nearly 47 months of overseas duty. He was discharged at the rank of Major. His decorations included the Bronze Star and Legion of Merit.



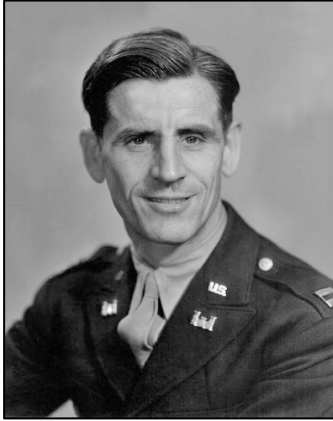


Thomas Burke Hayes graduated from Oregon State University in 1938 with a degree in electrical engineering and applied for a naval reserve commission shortly after Pearl Harbor. He was called to active duty in November 1942 and served as an electronics and radar instructor at the U.S. Naval Training School situated on the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Later in the war, he was assigned to the USS Marblehead (CL-12) that was part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet in the Mediterranean Sea. He was one of four officers that oversaw operations in the ship's combat information center (CIC). In August 1944, the 'Marblehead'

provided naval gunfire support for the U.S. Army's 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during the invasion of southern France. Burke was discharged from the Navy in 1945 and returned to Corvallis, Oregon.

Fred Merryfield was born in England in the year 1900. Near the end of WWI, although underage, he persuaded the Royal Flying Corps (later the RAF) to accept him as a flying officer. Unfortunately, he suffered a crash and was severely injured. After his recovery, he was posted to Canada in connection with the trial of persons who had supplied sub-standard wood for airplane construction. Fred intended to work his way to Australia but got only as far as Oregon where he decided to become an engineering student at the Oregon Agricultural College (OAC), later Oregon State University, in Corvallis. He graduated in 1923 and found employment with the Southern Pacific Railway building what is now the main line between Oregon and California. The chief engineer on the project had a niece, Mildred Berkley, who lived in Pendleton. Fred married Mildred and then returned to Corvallis to teach at OAC. He left Oregon temporarily and took a Master's Degree in Sanitary Engineering at North Carolina after which he returned to OAC to resume teaching.





At the outbreak of WWII, Fred was a professor of civil engineering at Oregon State University when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Despite his prior wartime experience as a pilot in the British Royal Flying Corps (RFC) during WWI, the U.S. Army initially refused to accept his application for a commission in the Corps of Engineers, mainly because of his advanced age. After several attempts, the Army finally allowed him to serve his adopted country. He was given an officer's commission and eventually reached the rank of Captain. He served in the Pacific Theater of operations with an engineering unit. While on duty at New Guinea, he contracted a tropical disease. When his medical condition worsened, he was given a medical evacuation back to the U.S. where he recovered and was honorably discharged. After his recovery, he returned to his teaching job at Oregon State University.

Clair Hill obtained an ROTC commission from the U.S. Army upon graduation from Stanford University. He was called to active duty at the start of the war. Early duty was for 18 months as an engineering officer for improvements to the Benicia Arsenal in California. From there, he was transferred to Aberdeen, Maryland, for explosive ordnance demolition training and then overseas to the North Pacific. He served in the Aleutian Islands, the last 13 months of the war, as the commander of a 400-man ordnance battalion on the island of Adak. After the surrender of Japan, he returned to California and received an honorable discharge from the U.S. Army.



All our veterans have a story. Some were called up, and many enlisted. The following are a few more with excerpts from their biography that we have posted on the Alumni History website.

Born in Hot Lake (LaGrande), Oregon, in 1923, Earl Reynolds was an engineering student at Oregon State University when Pearl Harbor was attacked. He entered the U.S. Navy Seabees in August 1943 and took basic training at Camp Endicott, Rhode Island. He was assigned to the 145<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Battalion in January 1944. Earl travelled with this unit to Camp Parks and Port

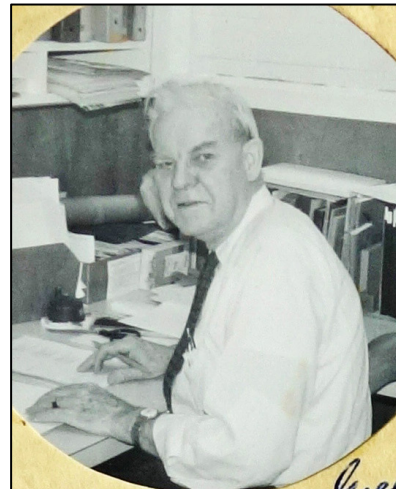


Hueneme, California. He deployed overseas in April 1944 aboard the troopship SS Howell Lykes bound for the Naval Base Banika Island, approximately 60 miles from Guadalcanal in the Solomon Island Group. The 145<sup>th</sup> Naval Construction Battalion constructed an advance base construction camp on this island. In March 1945, the unit left Banika aboard Landing Ship Tank (LST) 581 and LST 672 for Ulithi Atoll, which was the staging area for the 1,400 navy ships that launched the invasion of Okinawa. His unit was attached to the 1st Marine Division. Earl landed on Okinawa on April 3, 1945. They constructed airfields at Machinato and Yonaaru as well as

numerous roads on the island.

After the war ended, he left Okinawa in December 1945. He closed out his naval service at Tongue Point Naval Station near Astoria, Oregon. He was honorably discharged at Bremerton, Washington, in March 1946. He returned to Oregon State in 1946, where he graduated with a B.S. Degree in Structural Engineering (1947). Earl joined CH2M for the summer of 1947 before moving on to Yale where he earned an M.S. Degree in Structural Engineering (1948). He joined CH2M as full-time employee Number 008, in 1948.

Following graduation, Ed Greey joined the Matthews Construction Company in Princeton, NJ. He left Matthews in 1942 when he was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Civil Engineering Corps, United States Naval Reserve and was called to active duty where he served in the South Pacific for 46 months. He returned to Inactive Status in 1946 with the rank of Commander.





On the afternoon of the last day of WWII, Elmer Seegmueller was serving as point scout for the infantry fighting in France when he was shot through the jaw by a sniper. Everything was unsettled that day. In the confusion, the field hospital wired his jaw shut; and there were long delays before he got orders to return to the U.S. He was eventually sent back on a slow ship where all he had to eat was what he could get through a straw. It was a long trip home with some sea sickness. Throughout the entire trip, no medical attention supplemented what the field hospital did for him the day he was shot. The incident ended his active military service and earned him a Purple Heart.

Born in Portland, Oregon, in 1927, Harry Teel joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 1944, at the age of 17, to fight in World War II, turning 18 in the middle of the Pacific. His service took him to Okinawa; Iwo Jima; and Tsingtao, China, before finally returning home to meet the love of his life, who became his wife of 62 years, Delores (Dee), in 1948.



Because of the war, Sid Lasswell elected not to continue his education after completing his freshman year in 1942. Instead, he worked as a Piping Engineer at the Vancouver, Washington, shipyards, which produced Liberty ships and Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs). During his time there, the shipyards were able to launch one ship a day. Sid participated in the trial run down the Columbia River of the first LST ever built; more about the LST later.

Because of his “key role” at the shipyards, Sid received a 6-month deferment at 18 years of age and then was inducted into the Army in early 1943 as a Private.

Because of his vast “engineering and construction experience,” Sid was assigned to a Combat Construction Battalion, the Army’s version of the Seabees. From mid-1943 to fall of 1945, the battalion served in the Pacific visiting the exotic islands of New Caledonia, Espittu Santo, Guadalcanal, and eventually Okinawa in southern Japan. After Japan’s surrender, Sid’s group occupied Korea in late 1945, landing at Inchon less than 5 years before the Korean War. The task force of ships that left Okinawa for Korea encountered one of the worst typhoons of record in the East China Sea. Many ships were lost; but the LST Sid was on survived, although with little fresh water and no food for almost 3 days.

Sid left the army in early 1946 as a Master Sergeant and worked in a sawmill in Yoncalla, Oregon, until returning to OSU in the fall on the G.I. Bill.

This is where “it” all came from. With roots like these, how could CH2M HILL be anything but successful?

### Postscript

#### **Do you have a family member who served in WW II?**

If so, you may find them in the National World War II Registry at <https://wwiiregistry.abmc.gov/>



#### [Home - WWII Memorial Registry](https://wwiiregistry.abmc.gov/)

Honoring the 16 million who served in the U.S. armed forces, the more than 400,000 who died, and all who supported the war effort from home.  
[wwiiregistry.abmc.gov](https://wwiiregistry.abmc.gov)

If your family member is not there, it is a simple process to add them. For a small fee, you can add a photo; otherwise, the process is free. To be eligible, the inductee must have served in the military, or worked in some capacity at home in support of the war effort.

Over 14 million served in the armed forces during the conflict, and countless more in defense-related industries at home. The registry’s goal is to have all honored.