

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Can you go home again?

Novelist Thomas Wolfe famously wrote, "You can't go home again." Life is constantly changing, and we can't return to the happy times and places in the past that we've sanctified with nostalgia.

But former Mercury reporter Frank Warner gives it a good try in his recent book, *Tumbleweed Forts*, about three years growing up in Fort Huachuca, Arizona, where his father was a master sergeant in the Army.

Although Warner moved 13 times in the first 13 years of his life in an Army family, and has lived as an adult the last four decades in the Pottstown area, Warner's three years at Fort Huachuca, from 1960 to 1963, age 7 to 10, were the ones where he felt most at home.

Warner's three brothers and classmates felt completely secure growing on an Army base.

All the kids enjoyed two-parent families, with most mothers staying home and all the fathers working close by and sharing the same employer and culture.

Houses were arranged in neighborhoods ranged by military rank, a street for sergeants, for example, and a "colonel's row."

Unlike the rest of society, the military was fully integrated. President Truman signed the desegregation order in 1948, and President Eisenhower made sure it was carried out in the 1950s.

Army schools had students of all races, and kids hardly noticed the difference. Warner's best friend, Flavio Garcia, was the son of a Mexican father and a Japanese mother.

With soldiers constantly being reassigned to different bases, kids learned to make friends in a hurry. The sociable, self-confident personality of the Frank Warner I know reflects that life.

Warner's book is amazingly detailed, especially for events that happened 60 years ago. The numerous anecdotes are complete with dialogue that Warner reconstructed from memory and the help of his brothers.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

He recounts his fourth grade teacher bringing her Zenith clock radio to class so students could hear dispatches about astronaut John Glenn orbiting the earth for the first time.

Warner was inspired to write President Kennedy to ask for a photo of Glenn, which he received in two weeks. "Wow, President Kennedy made a phone call," Warner remembers thinking.

A few weeks later, Warner wrote Kennedy again asking for a photo of the president himself, which he also received.

The stories include family lore like his 3-year-old brother releasing the emergency brake on the family car, which rolled down a hill and smashed their neighbor's car (no one was hurt); hiking expeditions with his father and brothers; dressing up for Hell-dorado Days in Tombstone, Arizona; jumping in a lake that was a lot deeper than he thought and flailing about until his friend Flavio pulled him out.

The halcyon days ended in 1963 when Warner's dad got orders to go to Vietnam. Without telling his father, Warner again wrote to President Kennedy, this time asking him to keep his dad at Fort Huachuca.

He received a reply addressed to Master Frank Warner from an Army colonel in the Pentagon. It read in part, "The job a soldier must do, or the country he must go to, depends upon the needs of the Army at that time. Although the particular job or the place may not be within the wishes of the soldier or of his family, the defense of the country must be given first consideration."

Warner's father survived Vietnam. Warner has kept up his friendship with Flavio, who retired as a mailman in California.



JOHN GLENN



JOHN F. KENNEDY



VIETNAM