

THE RING

by Gus Dick Andros

When I received the notice telling me that I was nominated for the Cardinal Service Award, presented by the Oklahoma City Historical Society, I was surprised because I knew that no one who did not live in Oklahoma ever won. I hadn't lived in Oklahoma for over 50 years. This award is given every five years to an alumnus that has brought honor to Oklahoma City. I had no idea who nominated me or who was doing the voting. To win I would have to attend the banquet, and I thought that it would at least give me a good reason to visit my family. I never thought I would win.

As I was dressing for the banquet, I put on my gold cuff links with the red stones. I was reminded of the surprise party, given to me when I was in the service after World War II. The men who served with me gave me a party the night before I was to return to the States. I was their sergeant and they thought enough of me to want to send me home with a bang.

When they presented me with a pair of gold cuff links with a stick pin to match, I felt proud and pleased. It never dawned on me then that it was so special. When I tell the story to other veterans, they find it hard to believe. They usually say, "I wouldn't give my son-of-a-bitch Sgt. the time of day." I guess I will never know what I did that was different, but I see now I have a right to feel proud.

The last night in Tokyo my girlfriend, Jennette, a Staff Sgt. in the Wacs, insisted I show her the new "couple's bar" that I had designed and had been talking about. I had gotten permission to build a new band-stand for a new addition.

When we entered the room, I expected to see the mess the workmen had left behind. To my surprise the room was clean and decorated with signs wishing me farewell and a safe voyage home. I was speechless when my men and their dates yelled, "**Surprise.**"

I had mixed feelings about leaving. I had made many friends and worked with them every day for almost two years; at the same time, I was homesick. At the party I realized how much they all meant to me.

It had been only recently that the subject of this part of my past had come up. For a number of years, I had put on an unhealthy amount of weight, and at the doctor's insistence, I had dieted and lost enough weight to wear clothes I thought I would never wear again. I could once more wear a ring that was given to me by the Japanese lady who ran the souvenir shop in *Club Ichiban*. I told my friend Shirley that when I could wear my ring again, I would have my weight under control. With the weight loss I could now wear the ring with pride.

Many of my friends have commented and complimented the design, "I have never seen you wear a ring before. Let me see it. It's beautiful!" Telling my friends the story of the ring has brought the story of my life in the service back to me.

The fact that I was assigned to Special Service for General Mac Arthur's Headquarters Company in itself was a miracle. When I first enlisted in the service in the 1940s, I filled out form after form giving my past experience. I had written that I was an art major at the University of Oklahoma, and my hobbies were dance and drama. When I was in basic training, nothing I had written on the forms applied to what I was learning in a "heavy weapons company." A heavy weapons company meant that I did every thing an infantryman would do, besides learning to shoot a rifle, I learned to shoot a mortar, a water-cooled machine gun, march and run a mile with all this extra equipment hanging off my body (about 50 extra pounds).

Basic training came to an end, and with my orders in hand, I headed to Fort Lawton in Seattle, Washington, to be sent overseas. As squad leader standing at attention I reported "All present or accounted for," at the morning reveille. Imagine my surprise when my name was called, and I had to step out of ranks; I was the only one singled out. My stomach felt queasy.

It was a great relief when I was told I was being sent to a special school. The school for the T.I.P. Transportation Information Program. This program would prepare me to work in Special Service. I didn't even know what Special Service was, or what I would be required to do. In the school I learned how to operate and use the movie projector, the PA system and mimeograph machine.

When I was sent overseas, I was still ignorant of just what my duties would be. The first day on the Army Transport I was assigned to the ship's newspaper as cartoonist. Someone read my form and knew I was an art student. They didn't know if I was good or not -- just that I had studied art. It was amazing that with the thousands of men inducted in the service, someone took the time to read my forms and place me accordingly. I have asked many veterans and they agreed that many were assigned to work that corresponded with their civilian life.

After arriving in Yokohama I was sent to Tokyo and placed in Special Service Division for General Mac Arthur's Headquarters Company; I never had to carry a rifle again.

In the beginning I just painted signs, but one day the Major assigned me to work at *Club Ichiban*, the largest enlisted men's club in the Pacific Theater. The club welcomed all of our allies. I, along with Japanese artists that I would direct, were to paint murals on the walls of "Americana." I had no experience at painting murals and felt the job was over my head. I did my best to learn as I went along and got the job done. I never thought I was doing more than the other enlisted men. I was promoted to program manager, and when the officer in-charge was given his discharge, he recommended me to replace him. The letter he sent to the Special Service Officer read, "During the time Pfc. Andros has been working at Club Ichiban he has done more to insure the successful operation of the club than any other enlisted man employed here."

At nineteen, I found myself in charge of ten GIs, eighty Japanese employees, a four story building with a ballroom half the length of a football field, and a ceiling that was two and half stories high. There was a large crystal ball in the center. Coming from a small city I had never seen anything like it before. There were at least 700 to 1000 men that would frequent the club every night. The enormity of the job, intended for an officer, frightened me. I certainly was not prepared for this position, but I had no choice, so I blustered ahead trying to show no inadequacies.

With the task of director, I inherited the office that the Lieutenant had occupied, which was carpeted, with a oversized desk, a large picture window and fresh flowers (I am sure there were generals that didn't have a nicer office). I was promoted to Sergeant, although I had no power to execute major changes without getting permission from the Special Service Officer. Behind that desk I looked very powerful to those who were not in the US forces. When I procured an orchestra for the Chinese Ambassador, I was sent an engraved invitation to a party that was attended by General Mac Arthur. I was the only enlisted man there. The Special Service Officer saw me as I came in and immediately came over to me and said, "Andros, I don't know how you got here, but watch your back-side, because if you do any thing wrong, tomorrow you're on your way to Korea." I think he was upset that I had a civilian lady for a date, and he had none.

One day Mamasan, the lady that ran the souvenir shop, asked to see me and she was escorted into my office. It was the custom in Japan to present a small gift before you did business (to an American this was much like a bribe). The souvenir shop in the enlisted men's club was there long before I became director, and I had nothing to say about it. As was the custom she presented me with a silver whisky flask -- by this time I was used to this custom and knew that a favor was to be asked of me. This time I was in a position to help and I granted her permission to extend her shop. She then untied a silk handkerchief and it was full of jeweled stones. My eye immediately caught sight of one perfectly cut stone that looked like a ruby. I picked it up and said, "This is beautiful!" She ask me if I would design a ring that would please the Americans, after all I was there because of my art background. I took a pencil and on the spot designed a ring with this stone in mind. The ring I designed was a gold square with the ruby centered. I think I made it more ornate than I would if asked to design it today. Mamasan took the design and bowed backward out of the room.

After two weeks, she again requested to see me. This time she showed me the finished ring that I had designed. It was beautiful. She then presented it to me as a gift. I felt embarrassed to accept such an expensive gift, but it would have been a terrible insult not to. I was so taken aback that I thanked her again and again. All of the men assigned to the club were jealous because to them I was just their sergeant. I was so enchanted with the ring that I told the men I intended to sell my cigarettes on the black market and save enough money to have a stick pin and cuff links made to match.

Because my time in the service was about to end, I was going to have a difficult time making the money. One day Mamasan asked if she could borrow the ring so they could make copies. Of course I gave it to her. I worried that the ring might be gone for good, but in a week she returned it to me. I gave up trying to save enough money to have the stick pin and the cuff links made and totally forgot about my wish.

When I got the okay from the main office to design and build a new couple's bar, in the under-used movie room, I was excited because this was my first big decision to make a structural change. I felt that a space for the Wacs and their dates was needed. We already had a stag bar, and there was no food or drink allowed in the Crystal Ballroom. I felt it was only fair that the women in the service and their escorts have a place to drink and feel safe from the rowdy soldiers. I wanted this to be something I would be remembered for and busied myself in this project.

Before I could get the couple's bar finished I got my orders to return to the States. I was offered a

promotion if I would re-enlist, but after two years I was ready to go home. I wanted to stay long enough to see the bar open, but the army didn't give me a choice. I spent my last few days getting the final clearance from the Headquarters' Company and Special Service Office. Captain Campbell, who had replaced Major Diott, was surprised to hear of my discharge. He knew very little how Club Ichiban operated. He took my recommendation that Butch, who was now program manager, should be my replacement. Getting the red tape finished, I could now relax and enjoy my last days in Tokyo.

At Jennette's request, and knowing it would be my last look at the couple's bar, we entered the room. The party was well on its way. Through the black market, Mamasan procured a bottle of scotch for every four couples. The head of the commissary made sure there was food for all. I sat at the head of the table being roasted by each GI. Butch, my best friend, wanted to make an announcement. When all was quiet he said, "We know we have caused you pain and grief, but we want you to know that you have been a great boss. We have a gift for you from all of us." He handed me a box and I opened it and found the stick pin and cuff links. Now I knew that Mamasan had borrowed my ring to have these copies made.

What do you do at a time like this? If I tried to give a speech I knew I would start to bawl. I hugged Butch and simply said, "Thanks everybody."

I wore those cufflinks to the banquet in my home town and I did win the Cardinal Service Award, but I think the greatest honor I ever got was by the men under my command. I'm not sure I knew at the time how much it would mean to me a half century later.