

John Andrew Glendinning, POW 1500

1922 ~ 1986

John Andrew Glendinning (known variously as Jack or Glen) was born 10 January 1922 in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He was a twin to sister Elizabeth, younger brother to Richard, Jr., and son to Richard E. and Alice M. Glendinning (nee Summers). John's father was a brick mason by training and operated a building company in Elizabeth; his Mother was a housewife.



John pictured left, as a cadet at Howe Military Academy

At age 9, John entered Howe Military School, Howe, Indiana, from which he graduated in 1940, having been Captain of the basketball team, a varsity football player, and where he excelled at track and gymnastics and was a senior cadet leader. Following graduation from Howe, John attended Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida but left following his sophomore year to join the Army after the nations' declaration of war in December 1941. Based on his Howe ROTC training, John was commissioned a 2d Lieutenant and trained as an Armor Officer. On 18 August 1942, he shipped out for England with the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion (TDB) and spent the next three months training with what he described as his "WWI-era" weaponry.

On 1 January 1943, Lt. Glendinning and the 805th TDB departed Glasgow, Scotland in a convoy aboard the Dutch merchant vessel *Alcinous* for Algiers where they were to await combat orders. As their convoy traversed the Mediterranean, closing to the Algerian coast, they were attacked by German submarines and the Luftwaffe, sinking one of the ships and leaving others damaged and with casualties. The *Alcinous* was untouched but for John and most, it was their first taste of the war. On landing in Algiers on 17 January, the 805th was attached to Allied Force HQ



John, brand new 2LT



805th TDB patch

pending assignment, which came as orders to the front and they departed for Tunisia on 8 February 1943, attached to the 2d Corps Reserve. Lt. Glendinning was designated C.O. of 1st Platoon, Co. A, 805th TDB. On 14 February, the German's Afrika Korps launched an intense offensive against the Allied line and Lt. Glendinning and the 805th were ordered to move out against the 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions in support of the United States' 168th Infantry, 3d Battalion, which had become trapped in the fighting. John and Co. A were then redeployed to support the attack on Sidi Bou Zid, attempting to protect the US left flank. John's call sign was Charlie One Baker and over the following days, he and his four-halftrack unit, as well as the whole of the 805th, were engaged in heavy fighting, taking severe losses against the

superior firepower of the German tanks and Luftwaffe air bombardment. On 17 February, as the Allied forces were ordered to retreat, Lt. Glendinning and the members of his platoon were among the last line to hold back the fast-advancing Afrika Korps at Kasserine Pass and with his mobile gunships having been immobilized or destroyed, he and his remaining men were hiding in scrub bushes about 2 miles northeast of Sbeitla when they were discovered and captured by German Infantry.

Following is a section of the official 805th TDB report of operations for the period.

ANNEX #2

RESULTS OF ACTIVITIES COMPANY "A" 805TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION AT SBEITLA

ACTIVITIES:

Company "A", 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion, with one Reconnaissance Platoon was detached from the battalion on 14 February 1943 and sent to SBEITLA. It took up successive positions east of the town as part of a force under command of a Colonel Kerns. Two platoons were detached from the company and occupied independent positions south and east of SBEITLA under other commanders. On 16 February 1943 company withdrew to west under enemy pressure along with remaining American forces in front of and behind it. On 17 February 1943 it reverted back to the battalion at KASSERINE.

Casualties:

February 17, 1943 - SBEITLA

PERSONNEL

2 Officers & 8 Enlisted Men - Captured
37 Enlisted Men - MIA

Vehicles

4 - T.D's
2 - P.G.
3 - AA
5 - $\frac{1}{2}$ T
2 - Mchls.

The thousands of US military prisoners of war taken in the Battle of Kasserine Pass, including Lt. Glendinning, were sent first to Naples, Italy for processing. There, a Vatican representative took names and sent official notification to servicemembers' families. John's mother Alice received notification from the Vatican that her son was in German custody at the same time the Army was listing him as Missing in Action, such was the intelligence capability and organization on the ground for those remaining after the German assault. On 5 March, Lt. Glendinning was moved from the internment base at Capua, Italy into Germany, arriving at Stalag 7A, Moosburg and then, on 13 March at Oflag IX A/Z, Rotenburg where he remained until 7 May when he was moved, with some 300 other ground officers from the North African campaign, finally to Oflag 21B, later designated as Oflag 64, in Szubin, occupied Poland.



John's POW ID photo



John, at left, in Oflag 64 Little Theater production, "Seventh Man" - 1944

During the ensuing 19-plus months at Oflag 64, John formed lifelong friendships with fellow "Kriegies" and was active in arranged and pickup sports but found a calling in "The Little Theater," a home-grown enterprise involving scores of his fellow captives who wrote, directed, staged, and performed in concerts, plays, extravaganzas, and similar entertaining

distractions on a self-built stage with instruments provided by the Swedish YMCA and costumes pulled together from discarded fabric. On 21 January 1945, in the face of advancing Soviet forces, the Germans moved the men of Oflag 64 out and toward Germany, Lt. Glendinning among them. They carried what they could in packs and rolled blankets through the deepening Polish winter, trudging through the incessant snows and sleeping with animals in barns along the way or in huddled groups to maintain warmth. On occasion, friendly Poles risked their lives to slip the prisoners a scrap of bread. On 23 January, many of their guards fled, though were quickly replaced by an SS detachment. By the 26th, nearly frozen and without even their meager POW rations for sustenance, the sick among them were transferred to boxcars, each holding 50 men, and moved without water for days toward Berlin. Whichever, or combination, was his fate¹, Lt. Glendinning ended his journey 700 km later at Stalag 3A, Luckenwalde, in late February 1945, there to await the end of the war. In his diary, John noted a visit to the camp while there by the famous boxer, Max Schmeling, who had served in the German Luftwaffe. Liberation of a sort came on 21-22 April, when the Russians entered camp but no release was offered until US forces arrived in May. On 6 May, 1945, nearly 27 months after capture, Lt. Glendinning left Stalag 3A with others on trucks through Germany and then by ship, arriving home through New York on 3 June 1945. Throughout the rest of his life, John stayed active with reunions and events involving his Oflag 64 brothers, even helping organize a special fund-raiser in 1966 in support of fellow Oflag 64 POW Tom Finan, who was running for re-election as Attorney General of Maryland.

¹ Diary entries are unclear whether Dad was shipped by boxcar or marched on. His two diaries suggest different paths; in one, he passed out from weakness and was put on the train while the other provides a daily log of continuing the march with the larger group. It is more likely he marched as, in his "Wartime Log" book he drew a map of what he called "Travels of a Child at Arms", which included everything from departing Glasgow through the march and ending at Stalag 3A, whereas medical evacuees were supposedly transferred elsewhere..

Following the war, John enjoyed some R&R, completed his Reserve service, and got back to life, putting to use his new love of the stage, broadened by his Oflag 64 Little Theater experiences. Soon after he returned from German captivity, John auditioned for and joined the USO in New York, and was soon thereafter shipped back to Germany and Italy as an actor entertaining (again) the troops. He played supporting and starring roles in a variety of road shows, taking time aside to visit sites such as Hitler's Eagles Nest and Hermann



John and Lorraine on their wedding day

Goering's house (both in ruins), and attending a session of the Nuremberg Tribunal. Returning to the United States in late 1946 to build on his acting career, John settled in New York and, in April 1947, married a USO touring colleague, actress Celia Lorraine Pressler. In between jobs that paid the rent, John and Lorraine continued seeking opportunities in the theater, radio, and film. In addition to some industrial films, public relations assignments, and car shows around the country, among other not-so-glamorous roles, in 1948 John grabbed the part of a reporter in the film *The Babe Ruth Story* and in 1949 was playing on Broadway in *Metropole*. That year



John as a boxer, at left, in the TV drama "Man Against Crime" with Ralph Bellamy

he also appeared as a Naval investigator in the film *Lost Boundaries*, with Mel Ferrer, winner of the Canne Film Festival. He entered the 1950's in television roles, playing in *It Takes a Thief* and *The Big Story*, both at NBC, and on Broadway in *Julius Caesar* and *Twentieth Century*, still also working in public relations and filling in with odd jobs as salesman, including door-to-door, and waitering to keep

the rent paid as he and Lorraine began raising a family. John ultimately gave up acting for a more stable occupation and a house in the suburbs, taking on the job of Executive Director for the March of Dimes in Queens, NY. In 1961, he was named Executive Assistant to the Chairman of the State Assembly's Ways and Means Committee, following which John held a variety of State



John in later years

appointments including Assistant to the NY State Superintendent of Banks, as the Deputy Industrial Commissioner, and as Secretary of the State Insurance Fund. John also devised and ran The Governor's Club for Nelson Rockefeller and was Gov. Rockefeller's party finance director in the 1970's. John Glendinning concluded his career as Director of Public Relations for the Carrier Corporation, retiring in the early 1980's to personal projects at home in Bellerose Village, NY.



POW Medal

As a final legacy and tribute to his Oflag 64 brothers and all POWs, it was a comment by John in 1984 that inspired Senator William Roth of Delaware to create the United States Prisoner of War Medal, which recognizes the sacrifices and special condition of service of all who have honorably served as American POWs. Roth introduced the bill within the year. It was passed by the Congress and, on 8 November 1985, signed into law by President Ronald Reagan. John Andrew Glendinning passed away after battling lung cancer on 3 March 1986 at age 64.

Written by John's son, David Glendinning, with photos from the Glendinning family file and the POW Medal from Google images.