**World War II veterans carry memories of service 75 years after the fighting ended**

Stationed outside London in early June 1944, Lloyd Falk's team was smack in the middle of planning for one of the defining events in 20th-century American history. Yet Falk knew only that he was doing what he always did as a meteorologist for the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force: forecasting the speed and direction of the wind high above the ground where warplanes would fly.

Only later did he learn that his forecasts - along with predictions by other team members about rain and wind at ground level - had gone into preparation for the invasion of Normandy.

D-Day.

When did Falk find out about D-Day?

"When it was announced publicly," he said. Secrecy had kept him out of the loop, although he had noticed the head of the group kept disappearing every few hours. Falk discovered later he'd been stepping out to brief Allied Supreme Commander Dwight Eisenhower and his staff.

"Because of the fact the weather was kind of crummy, they needed to be kept up to date fairly frequently," said Falk, who resides at an assisted-living community in Henrico County and turned 101 on Friday.

Seventy-five years after the fighting ended, Falk is among a fading number of the 16 million Americans who served during the war. Only an estimated 300,000 are still alive, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs says 245 veterans of the war are expected to be lost each day. But once, they were young men and women fighting for a cause that pulled a country together.

Falk was not unlike a lot of other young American men: He was drafted into the Army in 1942 as a college graduate with a degree in chemistry from Rutgers University in his native New Jersey. Falk eventually was trained to repair and maintain Norden bombsights for the Army Air Forces. He saw a notice on a bulletin board for recruits in photography or meteorology. His first choice was photography, but that program filled quickly, so he applied for meteorology and was accepted.

Falk and his team - unbeknownst to them - played a critical role in the planning of the Normandy invasion, as high winds, heavy seas and low clouds could have wrecked the mission across the English Channel. In fact, the forecast of poor weather forced a one-day postponement of the invasion. The D-Day mission was pushed to June 6, when the weather, forecasters said, would be less than ideal but good enough and still within the narrow window of opportunity reliant upon not only decent weather but also astronomical conditions (a full moon and incoming tide) for pre-dawn landings.

Meteorologists of that era did not have the benefit of modern-day satellite technology, making it difficult to predict weather conditions even a day or two in advance.

Meanwhile, German meteorologists relied on even less sophisticated data and models than their Allied counterparts, according to John Ross, author of "The Forecast for D-Day: And the Weatherman Behind Ike's Greatest Gamble." German meteorologists predicted an Allied invasion was unlikely because of the weather, leaving the Nazis less than prepared.

Ross wrote that years later when asked why D-Day had been successful, Eisenhower reportedly said, "Because we had better meteorologists than the Germans."

Falk was honored by the Greatest Generation Foundation at a 2012 D-Day commemoration ceremony in France.

His sister, Bernice "Bee" Falk Haydu, also served during the war, as a member of WASP - Women Airforce Service Pilots - a civilian organization whose pilots tested and ferried aircraft, and trained other pilots to free up male pilots for combat roles. In the 1970s, she served as president of the WASP organization and fought for them to be recognized as veterans. She lives in Florida and will turn 100 in December.

After the war, Lloyd Falk returned to Rutgers, earned a doctorate in environmental science and enjoyed a long career with DuPont, where he combined his expertise in waste disposal and climatology.

Falk and his wife, Eleanor, moved to the Richmond area last year after she suffered a stroke. She needed to be in a health care facility, so he moved into assisted living so he could be near her. Both contracted the coronavirus in March, and Eleanor died in April. They would have celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary in September.

Lloyd survived, spending 58 days in the hospital and then another 64 days in rehab. He said in a phone interview a few weeks ago that he is still going through therapy and feels "reasonably good." When offered sympathy for the difficult year he's experienced, he took a philosophical approach.

"Well," he said, "we have no control of fate."

\*\*\*

James Boehling's first - and last - combat mission came on a bombing raid over southern Germany.

He was a navigator aboard a B-17 that encountered bad weather and stalled on the way to the target.

"I looked at the altimeter, and it was unwinding rapidly," said Boehling, 95, who still lives in the same house in Richmond's Fan District where he grew up. "The plane was spinning down rapidly."

He looked at the waist gunner who was in the nose of the plane with him, pointed at the altimeter and then pointed to his parachute. There was no reaction. Boehling grabbed his parachute, pushed the door open and rolled out head first. He was the only one. The other eight crew members died, the plane crashing before Boehling floated to the ground.

"I think I fell through the clouds for 10 minutes," he said.

It was late morning on April 21, 1945, only weeks before the end of the war in Europe. By then, the Allied forces had pushed into southern Germany, so as he fell, he knew he should be safe once on the ground. He landed in a field and was ignored by a farmer plowing. Several German kids came to him and escorted him to a road where he spotted a car with French military markings. He flagged down the car and got a lift until he saw an American Jeep. He was back at his base in England three days later.

After the Germans surrendered, Boehling helped fly American prisoners of war back to England from Germany. He participated in practice missions over the North Sea, figuring he would be reassigned to the Pacific theater, but the war ended there, too, and he never got to Japan.

Boehling returned home and earned an accounting degree from the University of Richmond. He worked for his father's feed-and-seed business at 18th and Cary streets for a decade, then became an accountant for Reynolds Metals and later got into the commercial real estate business.

Asked how often he thinks about his fortuitous bailout from the spiraling plane, he replied, "I think about it almost every day. I was very lucky."

\*\*\*

When Jo Stonitsch volunteered for the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps in 1942, she had a slight problem: She didn't weigh enough.

Applicants needed to weigh at least 100 pounds; Stonitsch tipped the scales at about 95.

"I ate bananas every day," she said of her attempt to put on 5 pounds.

She reached the magic weight of 100 and enlisted in the WAAC in September 1942, a few months after the women's branch of the U.S. Army was created. It became the Women's Army Corps a year later. More than 150,000 American women served in the corps during World War II, the first women other than nurses to serve in the Army. Most, like Stonitsch, served stateside.

Stonitsch was 28 years old when she volunteered.

"You couldn't get a job," said Stonitsch, who lived outside Chicago. "Nobody could get one. I guess that's one of the reasons I wanted to do something.

"I've got a lot of nerve. Not afraid of going after something. That's me."

She did basic training in Iowa, where the female recruits were "green."

"We were all kind of innocent about everything, and we didn't know what was going to happen," said Stonitsch, who is 105. "We had no clue."

One thing they did was march, she said, "all the time."

"We'd drill every day. Every time we marched, we would be singing songs. I don't remember the songs, but I used to sing them to my children."

Her daughter Clenise White, with whom she lives in western Henrico, laughed. She remembers them, she said.

"All the old Army songs," White said. "We grew up with them."

"Gotta get up, gotta get up, gotta get up in the morning" was one lyric still rattling around in her memory from childhood as well as this one (accompanied by motions placing hands on hair, arm, nose, eye, hip and arm again):

Oh, Chest-er, did you 'ear 'bout Hair-he

Just got back from the Arm-me.

He said he nose eye wear a rose,

Hip-hip-a-ray for the Arm-me

Ultimately, Stonitsch wound up in Kentucky at Fort Knox, where she worked as a dental lab technician. She was part of an honor guard when President Roosevelt came for a visit and arrived in a limousine. "No big deal," she said.

She served more than three years.

"You just did what you had to do," said Stonitsch, who has five children, eight grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren with another on the way this month. "I didn't do anything exciting. I enjoyed being in. It was an experience."

She still stashes her clothes in drawers - rolled up in neat rows, as the Army taught her.

Something else has stuck with her from those days:

She doesn't have much of a taste for bananas.

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Ben Beasley was sweeping the deck of his tanker, the USS Taluga, which was cruising off the coast of Okinawa, heading to fuel ships in the nearby U.S. fleet, when two Japanese kamikazes were spotted coming their way. American forces shot down one; the other hit the Taluga.

The plane hit not too terribly far from Beasley, who thought the ship was about to blow and jumped in the water.

"I went awful deep," he recalled with a laugh of those long seconds under water. "I didn't think I was coming up."

Two other men also went in the water, and the ship's crew threw life jackets to them. Once he resurfaced, Beasley swam to one and fetched an extra life jacket.

"I didn't even put it on," said Beasley, 94, in a phone interview from his Henrico home. "I just hung on to it."

He was in the water about an hour - his ship had kept moving - before a destroyer came by and picked up him and the others.

Once he was safely on board?

"That was a wonderful feeling," he said. "I don't know how to express it."

Beasley suffered an eye injury and was sent to Guam for about a month to recuperate. He eventually reunited with his ship in the Caroline Islands. When he got back to the ship, the first thing he wanted to know was how many of his shipmates had been killed by the kamikaze hit.

"They said, 'We didn't lose a one,'" Beasley said. There had been a dozen injuries, but no deaths.

"I was so grateful. I prayed every day that God would take care of us, and he did."

Once back to his ship, Beasley became a baker. He enjoyed making bread and pastries more than being a member of the deck crew.

Beasley, who received a Purple Heart, returned home to his native Richmond and spent most of his career in the insurance business. He and his wife, Grace, whom he met at the downtown YWCA ("They had a jukebox on the second floor," he said), had two children, two grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Grace died five years ago. They were married for 66 years.

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As the war heated up, Norton Hurd said he "felt like I should be a part of it."

So the Deltaville native visited a recruiting office where a sign for the U.S. Naval Air Reserve that had "a little set of wings underneath" caught his eye.

"Might as well try that," he thought.

Hurd earned his flight wings in May 1942 and was stationed in Minneapolis, training pilots in open cockpit planes. Eager for combat, he asked for a transfer. As he put it in an interview with BaySplash magazine (an interview that was entered in the Congressional Record in 2006): "I don't want to tell my grandchildren, when the war is over, that I fought the battle of Minneapolis."

Hurd became a member of the Hell Razors attack squadron, assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Wasp in the Pacific. He flew in the first group of Navy planes to bomb Tokyo.

On a flight near the island of Chichijima, he shot down a Japanese fighter, but on his way back to the Wasp, his engine failed and he crashed into the water. He jumped out of the cockpit and crawled out on a wing. The Wasp continued on its way, but a destroyer came along and picked up Hurd, his head bleeding from banging it on the top of the cockpit at impact.

The crew of the destroyer stitched him up and readied him for transfer back to the Wasp - which sent over 10 gallons of ice cream in return.

Hurd received the Distinguished Flying Cross, given to service members who show heroism or outstanding achievement in flight.

He returned to Deltaville and operated Hurd's Hardware for decades and continued to come into the store until he was 102, said his son, Jack Hurd, who now runs the store. Perhaps that's not so surprising since he played golf until he was 96.

"He's remarkable," Jack Hurd said. "A freak of nature."

Now 104, Norton Hurd and Alvine, his wife of 73 years, still live in their home. They have three children, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

In 2016, at age 100, he attended a U.S. Navy Band Birthday Concert in Washington, dressed in the uniform he had worn 70 years earlier.

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Thomas Edward "Tom" Story grew up in the Florida Panhandle and worked at a shipyard in Panama City before being drafted into the Army. He served in the 88th Infantry Division's 351st Regiment and saw combat as part of the Allied campaigns in Italy near the end of the war. He was there when the fighting ended and helped transfer German prisoners of war back to Germany. Later in the summer of 1945, he was on a ship headed to the Pacific when President Harry S. Truman gave the order to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The ship then turned around and headed home.

For his service, he received a Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

After the war, Story made the Army his career for 30 years, reaching the rank of sergeant major. He spent much of that time working in a support role with the U.S. Army Band.

Now 95, Story survived a bout with throat cancer last year. He lives in Henrico with Beatrice, his wife of 72 years, daughter Lelia Wirt, and grandson and caregiver Paul Wirt. They have three children, five grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

"Our family got to know many of the vets from the 88th Infantry Division over the last 20 years through the reunions … but deteriorating health, diminishing numbers of members and COVID have put those wonderful trips in our rear view for the most part," said Paul Wirt. "We cherish every moment we have with my grandparents and try to learn from them every day."

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Frederick N. Tucker Jr. served in the U.S. Navy Armed Guard, stationed aboard merchant ships in Navy-protected convoys sailing across the Atlantic and through the Mediterranean during the war. Merchant vessels were always in danger of attack by enemy submarines and aircraft.

Did Tucker ever feel like he was riding a ship with a target on it?

"Oh, yeah," he said with a laugh. "Oh, yeah."

Tucker, 98, was a signalman, responsible for communicating with other vessels with flags and searchlights. He joked that when he enlisted in the Navy, there were two things he didn't want to be: a cook or a signalman, the latter because he never got the hang of semaphore - a system of sending messages by holding flags or arms in certain positions - as a Boy Scout.

But that's where he was assigned.

"After the first month at signal school, another kid and I were the two best senders and receivers in the company," he said.

He made six complete crossings safely on different ships, seeing places such as Casablanca, Sicily and the Suez Canal.

"I got to see a lot of places I would have never seen," he said. "I thoroughly enjoyed what I did, but I wouldn't want to do it again."

A younger brother, Andy, also served in the war, in the Army Air Corps. He lives in Tallahassee, Fla.

Fred returned to Richmond and worked in the business world for several companies until retirement. He lost Betty, his wife of almost 71 years, in 2016. He lives at the Sitter &amp; Barfoot Veterans Care Center, which has been under quarantine because of COVID-19, meaning no visitors and no communal meals in dining rooms. His cellphone tethers him to his children and friends.

"It's a little different, but I manage to make out," he said. "We've got TV and got a couple of libraries. I do a lot of reading. Watch TV. We're OK."

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John V. "Jack" Cogbill Jr. enlisted in 1942 at age 18 and went to what was then known as Camp Lee south of Richmond and was assigned to the Army Air Corps.

The Chesterfield County native spent 16 months in England in a role supporting bombing squadrons before being transferred to an infantry unit when replacements were needed. He was shipped to the continent and joined a weapons platoon, fighting his way across France and Germany. His job was to carry ammunition for one of the big machine guns. He received a Bronze Star and Combat Infantry Badge.

What did he take away from his combat service?

"It made me a believer," said Cogbill, now 96.

In what?

"In living," he replied with a laugh. "In staying alive."

Cogbill stayed in the Army after the war, moving into the intelligence branch and eventually retiring in 1963. He worked another decade or so with the National Security Agency.

He and Patricia, his wife of 75 years, live in Chesterfield. Their oldest son and two of their grandsons also joined the Army.

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A native of Saltville in Southwest Virginia, Paul Gates was 18 when he joined the Navy in 1943. He ran into bureaucratic complications because he doesn't have a middle name. He was the youngest of seven brothers (with two younger sisters) and was told "they just ran out of names," said his daughter, Brenda Spielman. The Navy had him stencil "Paul N. Gates" on his possessions with the "N" standing for "none."

Gates, 96, served in the South Pacific and survived a number of island invasions as a crewman on a landing craft. He never talked much about the war, but he recalled one mission when his landing craft was pulled from an island invasion because of mechanical problems. The craft that took its place took a direct hit during the landing.

After the war, Gates returned home and attended Emory &amp; Henry College on the GI bill and became a mechanical engineer, working in construction, with the Tennessee Valley Authority and even for an engineering firm where one of the projects involved an irrigation system at Arlington National Cemetery. He also spent 20 years in the Navy Reserve, achieving the rank of lieutenant.

He and his wife, Nannie, lived in Kingsport, Tenn., for some years before moving to Lynchburg in the late 1960s. They came to live with Spielman in Mechanicsville in 2013. The Gateses celebrated their 73rd wedding anniversary three months before Nannie died in 2018.

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Frederick R. Jarratt grew up in Stony Creek in Sussex County, where he attended the same school from first grade through high school graduation. He was 19 years old and a student at Virginia Tech when he was drafted. He went into the Navy's electronics training program, which prepared him for working with a ship's radar and communications system, and became an electronic technician's mate 2nd class.

In 1945, he was assigned to the USS Cabot, an Independence-class light aircraft carrier that was docked at Pearl Harbor. It had been more than three years since the Japanese attack, but Jarratt recalled in a family biography that remnants of the surprise strike were still evident, the war effort having taken priority over finishing the cleanup.

"I could see the USS Arizona," Jarratt has said of the sunken battleship that incurred almost half of the casualties at Pearl Harbor. "I would walk over to her and didn't realize she was going to be a big memorial like today."

The Cabot and its crew went for training in the Marshall Islands and were still there when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. Less than a month later, the Cabot was about 60 miles offshore from Tokyo when the Japanese signed surrender papers. After the surrender, the Cabot was among the first ships in the Pacific to venture into the Yellow Sea between Korea and China, Jarratt recalled.

Following the war, Jarratt returned to Virginia Tech, earned a degree in electrical engineering and made a career at Virginia Electric and Power Co. (now Dominion Energy). Now 95, Jarratt, who lives in North Chesterfield, still views his service "as a defining moment in his life," said his son, Ben Jarratt.

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Before the war interrupted his life, John M. "Jack" Frayser went to see the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra at Tantilla Gardens, at one time a social hot spot on West Broad Street. It was a weeknight, and he's pretty sure it was 1940.

He got to talking to members of the band, and the next thing he knew they were asking if he'd like to go with them to their next gig in Virginia Beach.

"Oh, yeah!" Frayser said he replied. He went with them that evening to Virginia Beach, skipping school the next day (he graduated from Thomas Jefferson High and briefly attended the University of Richmond) and helped them get ready for the show the next night.

"I helped them set up chairs and all that kind of doings. The guys were terrific to me, the way they treated me. Like I was somebody," he recalled with a laugh.

He also remembered a good young singer who was performing with the band.

"Frank Sinatra," he said. "Frankie was there. He wasn't the man he became later, but he had a damn good voice."

Soon enough, Frayser left show business behind when he was drafted for the war effort.

Frayser wound up working as a cryptographic technician, decoding messages and such. He was stationed stateside for almost two years and then a little more than a year around the South Pacific in New Guinea and the Philippines, where he was staff sergeant in charge of the code room.

After the war, he returned to the U.S. from Japan aboard an aircraft carrier, and, as he put it, "went to work." He worked a counter job at a supply firm, and his family eventually acquired Shade &amp; Wise, a brick distributor where he was president and CEO. The family still owns the company, and a son, two grandsons and a son-in-law all work there.

Frayser has two children, five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

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Donald J. Hoy couldn't make it to church for his 100th birthday in October, so Fort Lee Baptist Church came to him, parading past his home, blowing horns, waving posters and wishing him a happy birthday.

"I thought it was great," said Hoy, who lives in Sandston with his wife, Marie, and served in the Army in World War II.

Hoy, originally from New Jersey, enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1939. He wound up serving 32 months across the South Pacific for a bomber squadron. He was chief mechanic for the B-24s, B-25s and B-26s, and eventually was a flight chief for four B-24 crews. He completed his six years in service as a master sergeant. He wound up in Richmond and worked more than 30 years for a division of Ford Motor Co., providing supplies to dealers.

Of his World War II service, he said, "I was glad I could do my part. I wouldn't want to sit back here."

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**Lohmann: 50 years ago, Springsteen's band Steel Mill headlined a concert atop a Richmond parking deck**

The idea came to Russell Clem when he went downtown - maybe to pay a parking ticket at City Hall, he can't remember exactly - and he couldn't find parking on the street, so he steered the borrowed car he was driving into the parking garage at Seventh and Marshall streets and experienced a sudden moment of inspiration:

The top floor of the seven-story deck, open to the sky, would be a perfect place for a rock concert.

"I went to the [garage] office and there were some people in there, and I presented the idea to them, and they said, 'Yes,'" he recalled in a tone of voice that says he still can't quite believe it. "I mean, the only pitch I made to them was, 'It's a Friday night, and you're not going to be selling a lot of parking spaces on a Friday night, but if we have a concert up there you probably will.'"

Simple as that. No contract. No permits. Clem wasn't even charged rent (or a fee to plug into the structure's electricity to power the sound system and spotlights).

When I expressed amazement at such a deal, Clem said, "At that time in history, things like that weren't that unusual."

The idea to employ a parking deck as a concert venue was birthed in a bit of desperation. Clem managed a Richmond band called Mercy Flight, whose lead singer was the late Robbin Thompson, and booked shows for other bands, including one from New Jersey, Steel Mill, which had built a devoted Richmond following.

He was tasked with finding a place for Mercy Flight and Steel Mill to play a gig, but one of his usual spots, Free University, near Laurel and Broad streets, had closed so he didn't know what he was going to do - he had little money to work with. (He didn't even own a car at the time, hence the borrowed car he was driving). He couldn't even consider booking a place like The Mosque, now known as Altria Theater.

"Not only could I not afford The Mosque," Clem recalled, "I couldn't afford The Mosque basement."

But the top floor of the parking deck at Seventh and Marshall came at precisely the right price - zilch - and so the concert was scheduled for Aug. 14, 1970, and held under the stars, taking up permanent residency in Richmond music lore. The show included an opening act, Marlo Mays &amp; The Stingers Blues Band, followed by Mercy Flight and headlined by Steel Mill, a band fronted by a dynamic, long-haired young singer and guitarist named Bruce Springsteen.

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"Epic" is how Tom Cool Yolton recalls the show.

"No cooler concert setting that I have seen," he wrote in an email, and he ought to know. He's played for a lot of bands in a lot of concerts, including that one, as lead guitarist for Mercy Flight. He still performs and lives near Lexington, Ky.

The Mercy Flight drummer on stage with him, David Hazlett, remembers looking up at the sky and noting the dark clouds "were just zooming by.

"I mean, it was magical," Hazlett said. "One of the better venues that I've ever done."

Tickets were $2.50 apiece. Concertgoers streamed up the parking deck stairwell and vehicle ramp and stood for the entire show. It wasn't quite elbow-to-elbow, attendees said, but the rooftop was crowded. Clem doesn't remember how many tickets were sold (or how many freebies got around the ticket table), but he's heard others say the attendance was about 1,200, and he believes that could be "approximately right."

"It was pretty much full," he said.

Those who were there remember different things about that night - after all, it's been half a century: how windy it was seven stories up (some recalled microphones being knocked over by the breeze), a storm approaching in the distance (but no rain) and Clem, preacher-like, introducing Steel Mill, against a backdrop of thunder and lightning, "If you're ready to witness, they're ready to testify!"

Oh, and the parking garage started shaking during the show.

"You know when you're in a ball stadium and everybody's jumping up and down and you feel the structure?" recalled Bo Jacob, a young "roadie" with Mercy Flight who has been touring and working with bands and artists, most recently Randy Newman, off and on for 50 years. "That was the sensation I had. It was just flexing from everybody dancing."

Glenn Habel, a student at the University of Richmond at the time who had become a fan of Steel Mill and went on to become a musician himself, recalls the deck "just sort of moving under your feet. But you're 20 years old, and you don't care."

Youth also served Bland Goddin, a student at the Collegiate School, who was 15 then and now figures she must have been the youngest at the show. "My boyfriend and I … kind of thought we were cool," she said with a laugh. The swaying of the building was something she still remembers, but, she added, "When you're 15 years old, it's not really scary."

"I remember going up those steps, feeling that place swaying and the energy of the whole thing," she said. "Those guys really put out some energy."

\*\*\*

Springsteen's connection to Richmond is well-documented. New Jersey, of course, was his base, but Richmond became something of a Southern outpost for him in the 1960s and early 1970s, before he appeared on the covers of Time and Newsweek in the same week of October 1975 and went riding off into the big-time.

In those days, he came to Richmond every few months with his early bands - Child, Steel Mill and The Bruce Springsteen Band - playing small clubs around town, Randolph-Macon College a couple of times (where he opened for Chicago and Iron Butterfly on successive nights) and even a couple of concerts in Monroe Park.

Despite having no record contract or radio play in the early years, Springsteen and his bands became "enormously popular in Richmond," he wrote in his 2016 autobiography, "Born To Run."

"Our voodoo had worked outside of the Garden State!" he wrote, adding that as they tried to spread their geographic reach, "it was our Jersey and Virginia fans who kept us in subs and cheeseburgers."

The community that followed Springsteen around whenever he played in Richmond had an almost Deadhead-like vibe, said Buzzy Lawler, who was a 19-year-old college student and musician when he attended the parking deck show.

"Richmond really took Springsteen and his band into their hearts," said Lawler, who plays today with The English Channel. "There was always a feeling of community because a lot of friends and fellow musicians went out to see them. Just a real feeling of camaraderie."

Without radio airplay, word of mouth and seeing-is-believing built Springsteen's faithful following in Richmond, or as Habel put it, "Anybody who stumbled into [a Springsteen show] once, always came back for another show. They were really good."

Habel was told about Steel Mill by a college friend who had attended Woodstock the previous summer and later saw Steel Mill at one of its Richmond shows.

"He said he saw this group from New Jersey and they were insanely good," Habel recalled. "He said, 'They're better than anybody I saw at Woodstock.'"

Those who followed Steel Mill described the band as "hard-rocking" and threw out such comparisons as the Allman Brothers Band, Santana, Humble Pie and Cream. You can judge for yourself by listening to audio of a dozen songs from the 1970 concert, which is on YouTube. (Go to YouTube and search for "Richmond parking deck show.")

No matter who Steel Mill reminded anyone of, everyone agreed Springsteen - a month shy of turning 21 at the time of the concert - had a manner about him, an extraordinary way of connecting with the audience.

"Everybody knew the guy had the goods," Habel said. "Lots of people are good songwriters, lots of people have good bands and sing well, but not everybody is born with charisma, and he had it in spades."

Mike McAdam, who attended the show, was a young musician whose band had opened for Springsteen earlier at a show at the old Hullabaloo Club near Willow Lawn. He said the first question anyone would ask after seeing Springsteen for the first time was, "Why is this guy not a star?"

He was, McAdam said. It was just that few people beyond Asbury Park, N.J., and Richmond knew it.

"He had star quality … everything about him," McAdam said in a phone interview from Nashville, where he has lived and worked for 35 years as a session and touring musician and who was well-known around Richmond for his time as a guitarist in The Good Humor Band. "He just hadn't been signed to a label yet."

Steel Mill opened its set with "Dancing in the Street," the song written by Marvin Gaye and made into a hit by Martha and the Vandellas in 1964, but most of the other songs on the playlist were written by Springsteen. As a songwriter, he was so prolific in those early days, fans recall seeing him multiple times in a year and often hearing new songs each time.

The makeup of Springsteen's band was evolving: For example, Steven Van Zandt, Springsteen's longtime bandmate, was part of Steel Mill; Clarence Clemons, who became a stalwart of the E Street Band, was not.

The band evolved even more a few days after the show when Springsteen invited Thompson, Mercy Flight's lead singer, to join Steel Mill, which he did within days. Hazlett, the Mercy Flight drummer, also played a few gigs with Steel Mill when the band's regular drummer, Vini Lopez, wasn't available and lived for a time in the surfboard factory on the Jersey Shore where Springsteen resided. Hazlett, who went by Hazy Dave, later showed up in the lyrics of Springsteen's "Spirit in the Night," on the "Greetings from Asbury Park N.J." album, as "Hazy Davy." Hazlett lives in Midlothian and performs with Hazy Dave and the Mission Band.

The poster promoting the parking deck show was on display for a time at the Rock &amp; Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, according to the hall's curator, as part of the exhibit "From Asbury Park to the Promised Land: The Life and Music of Bruce Springsteen."

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Late that night, after the show, Jacob and band members were loading out the gear - a long haul to the street below.

"We were all there, including Bruce, schlepping equipment," Jacob said.

Two days later, Brent Pye, a 17-year-old high school student and fan of the Richmond music scene who attended the parking deck show, went to see an Allman Brothers show at the String Factory, a club at Laurel and Broad that occupied the space where Free University used to hold shows.

"I remember showing up early and hanging around," said Pye, who was a rising senior at Highland Springs High. "The Allman Brothers Band was unloading their equipment, and I see Bruce walking across the street - white tank top, cut-off jeans, barefoot. He walks up to Duane and Greg Allman, shakes hands, looks like he was meeting them for the first time."

It turned out to be a memorable weekend for Pye, who had interviewed Clem and written a three-paragraph news item in advance of the parking deck show that was published in The Richmond News Leader. When he showed up with his date at the show, Clem somehow recognized him and waved him in for free.

"Russell saved me five bucks and gave me great cred in front of this young lady," said Pye, who now lives in Charlottesville, where he works in information technology.

Through the cloud of time, details of the event have grown hazy for Clem, though one thing that remains clear in his mind is the anxiety that washed over him in the hours leading up to the show.

"I remember getting there, seeing the set-up and walking over to the edge [of the parking deck] and looking down and losing it," he said. "I just totally lost it at that moment. I thought, 'Holy Toledo, what have I done!'"

His concern: During a night of revelry, someone would go over the side.

No one did, and you can hear the relief in Clem's voice almost 50 years later.

At age 76, Clem still refers to Springsteen as "Brucie" in a phone interview from Florida. His official residence is North Carolina, but he said, "I basically live in my truck," as he travels around selling T-shirts. The special events where he counts on setting up shop to make a living have all been canceled because of the pandemic. "It's been tough on me," he said.

Some stories have indicated Richmond's parking deck show might have been inspired by "Let It Be," a British documentary starring The Beatles that was in theaters that summer and featured an unannounced rooftop concert by the group. Clem says not so. He had not seen the film, and it "didn't have anything to do with my thinking."

Looking back, he's a little surprised the concept of parking deck concerts "didn't gather more momentum.

"It has certain disadvantages," he said, "but it is a pretty good outdoor venue."

Although, in the words of Lawler, the musician who was there that night and has played countless gigs over the years, "Can you imagine trying to pull off something like that now?"

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**Lohmann: This Richmond-based, award-winning photojournalist - and the great-grandson of slaves - views the protests through an uncommon lens**

The past few days have been a blur - in more ways than one - for Brian Palmer, a photojournalist who was tear-gassed and pepper-sprayed last Sunday evening while covering a protest march on Broad Street.

He's been moving around as part of that coverage - the Robert E. Lee statue, City Hall, among other places - but when he called on Wednesday, he was standing in the quiet of East End Cemetery. He has been involved for several years in the restoration of the historic African American cemetery that had been long-neglected until volunteers rescued it.

"I am taking a break," Palmer said, "and gathering my soul."

If serenity has a sound, I could hear it in the background.

Palmer, 56, brings not only a keen eye and international credentials to the task at hand of covering this historic moment, but also an uncommon perspective as the great-grandson of slaves.

A freelance journalist, he will be a visiting assistant professor in journalism at the University of Richmond in the fall. Palmer was a CNN correspondent and prior to that Beijing bureau chief for U.S. News &amp; World Report. As a freelancer, he has provided words or pictures for The New York Times and Smithsonian Magazine, among many others.

He was embedded three times with U.S. Marines in Iraq, producing magazine pieces, a documentary titled "Full Disclosure" and photo exhibitions. He won a Peabody Award in 2019 for a "Reveal" radio story, "Monumental Lies."

He moved to Virginia in 2013 - first Hampton, then Richmond - while he and his wife, Erin, worked on a documentary about a freedmen's community in York County that his great-grandparents had helped establish.

The residents of the community were uprooted in the 1940s to make way for a top-secret military installation - Camp Peary Armed Forces Experimental Training Activity, a covert CIA training facility. His great-grandfather is buried there.

We met last year when I wrote about an exhibition at UR, "Growing Up in Civil Rights Richmond: A Community Remembers." Palmer provided the portraits of those interviewed for the project.

Over the course of his career, he's covered a lot of civil unrest, which brings us back to the protests in Richmond, sparked by the death of George Floyd at the hands of police who were arresting him in Minneapolis.

Palmer covered his first demonstration more than 30 years ago in his native New York City, which wanted to clear squatters from Tompkins Square Park. Protesters clashed with police, and the ensuing violence led to charges of police brutality as the situation escalated into what Palmer recalled as something of a "class war."

His experience in New York came to mind after what he witnessed - and felt - on Sunday evening as he walked near the front of a group of protesters, photographing the scene as they marched along Broad Street. He heard no warning from police before the first tear gas was fired, scattering the crowd, which he said had been peaceful. Then he was hit with pepper spray.

"I saw no violence, some graffiti but no violence, until the first tear gas canister," he said. "I didn't even see any violence from the demonstrators at that point. I just saw people run, and then I couldn't see much because I had pepper spray in my face."

He staggered to what he thinks was a GRTC bus stop, where he found Roberto Roldan, a reporter for Virginia Public Media (who a few minutes later also would be hit with pepper spray and tackled by a police officer). Roldan said he splashed a concoction of milk and water on Palmer's face to lessen the sting.

"Worked, too," Palmer said.

He added, "It really is kind of crazy. It's like I'm going back to the beginning of my career getting clubbed in the head by the NYPD."

Palmer sensed a lack of "tactical discipline" on the part of police, same as he saw, he says, in Tompkins Square Park in New York all those years ago.

"I'm a grandson of a police officer," he said. "I know what professional behavior is, not because I'm a grandson but because I've dealt with police for over 30 years. I know when dudes are itching to bust heads and when they're being law enforcement professionals."

Decrying a lack of leadership - "I have no doubt they're trying to defuse the situation, no doubt," he says, "but it appears to be quite reactive" - Palmer said he is simply a journalist and a citizen "who doesn't want to see people hurt, who does not want to see a repeat of what happened to George Floyd because individual officers are expressing their biases with their pepper spray canisters and whatever else they have at their disposal."

Police seem to have backed off the use of tear gas since Monday evening when they fired it at demonstrators gathered at the Lee monument. Police Chief William Smith apologized a couple of hours later, calling the action "unwarranted."

Palmer said he has spent "hours and hours" with the protesters, and he has come away impressed with their diversity and their discipline and the way they relate to one another.

He told me about two in particular: a young African American man, directing demonstrators, while telling them, "We're not seeking confrontation"; and a young white woman who climbed atop the Lee monument, saying, "We need to put our white bodies in between police and our African American sisters and brothers."

"I can smile for a few seconds and get emotional in the right way," he said, "because that's the energy I'm hoping will carry us through November 2020 to a different world."

(Since we talked Wednesday morning, before the news broke about the impending removal of the Confederate monuments on Monument Avenue, I called him back to see what he thought of that development. He described the removal of the statues as a "powerful symbolic move" but wonders if there is a "long-term plan for genuine racial justice" that includes issues such as education and police reform.

"My concern now is that we tear down Robert E. Lee and think we've solved something," he said.)

As we talked during our first conversation, Palmer had been walking around East End Cemetery, which straddles the line between Richmond and Henrico County, with his dog, Teacake. He had arrived, he said, at the grave of William I. Johnson Sr., whose life paralleled that of Palmer's great-grandfather, Mat Palmer.

Johnson was born in 1840 and died in 1938. He had been enslaved in Goochland County, just like Mat Palmer. During the Civil War, Johnson walked away from enslavement and a Confederate military camp and enlisted in a segregated regiment of the U.S. Army.

"He served for his own freedom," Palmer said, "as my own great-grandfather did."

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