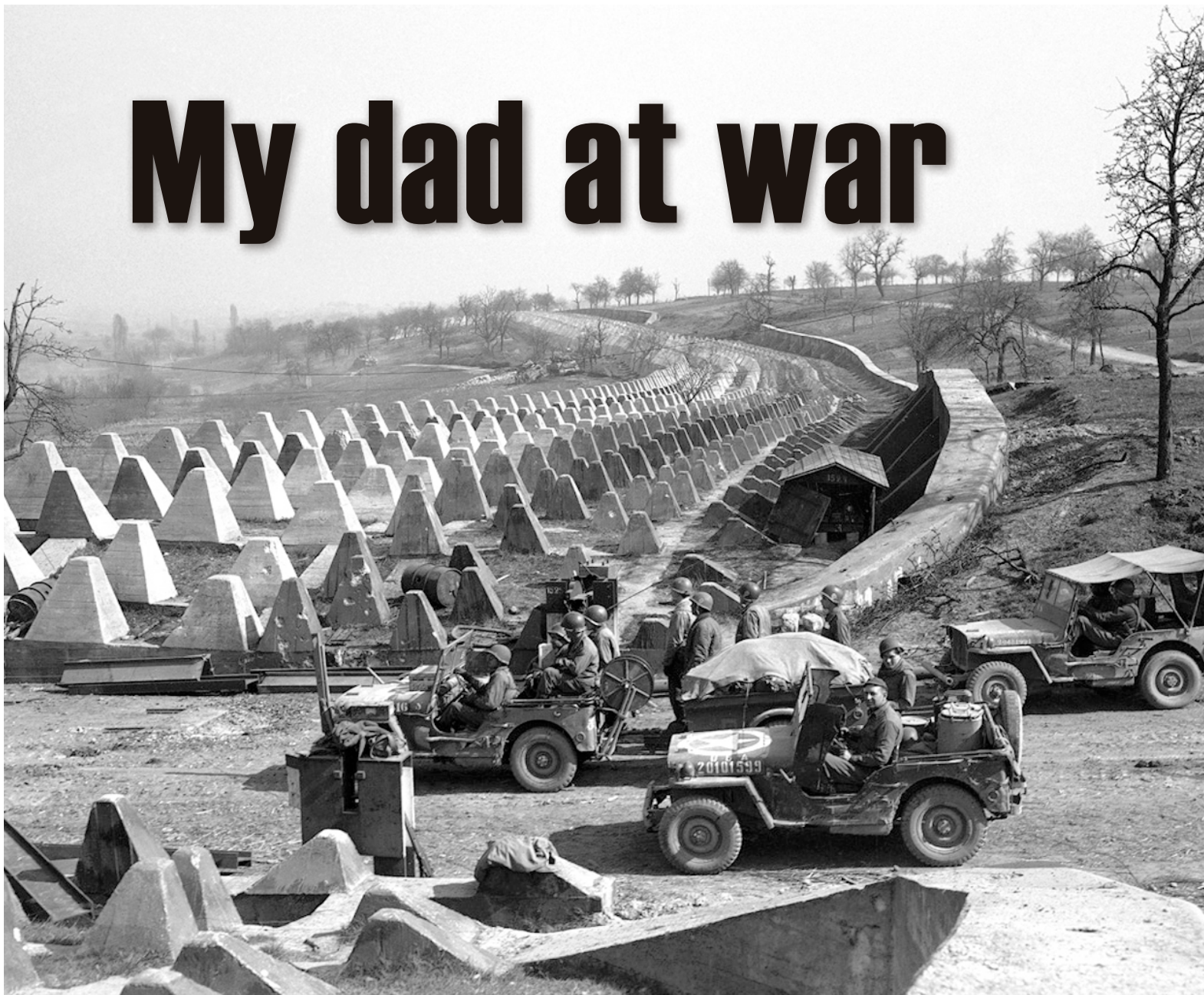


My dad at war



Capt. Sidney P. Kozak, behind the wheel of a jeep on March 27, 1945, never talked much about his five years of service to his country.

Stumbling on a long-ago photo, I saw an America that no longer exists BY WARREN KOZAK

This past Memorial Day, I happened upon a large batch of photographs from World War II posted on *The Atlantic* website. There were hundreds in various categories with titles like “Pearl Harbor,” “The Allied Invasion of Europe” and “The Fall of Imperial Japan.”

Among some of the famous images of the war were many I hadn’t seen before. These were not the iconic

photographs that appeared in *Life* magazine or in newspapers across the country. These were pictures that an editor looked at once before moving on. They were ordinary pictures, almost snapshots of the war.

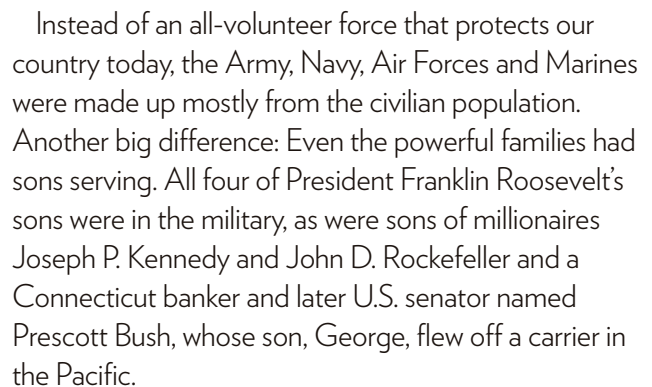
As I scrolled through the category called “The Fall of Nazi Germany,” I stopped at image number 23. The caption reads: “Men of the American 7th Army pour

the home front, and the really bad or disturbing news was kept from the public.

All that my dad ever requested from the government was a flag to be placed on his coffin.

because it is hard to imagine that sort of compliance today. But as they say, it was a different war and a different time.

Most every family had a member engaged in the war effort.



Even movie stars, professional baseball players and congressmen gave up their prestigious jobs to serve. One story that hits close to home: The very popular Milwaukee Mayor Carl Zeidler gave up his office to serve in the Navy and was killed in action in 1942.

The nation's elite along with the very ordinary people like my grandparents were, as they say, all in it together. And I believe that in spite of the hardship, the sacrifice and the terrible loss that so many families suffered, one of the reasons for the nostalgia of that period is the

unified bond that the country felt then and hasn't felt with that intensity since. It was like no other time, with the possible exception of a brief period following the attacks on 9/11.

The all-volunteer military today is perhaps the best we have ever had, but something also is lost when less than 1 percent of the population shares the sacrifice. We've lost the spirit we had in the 1940s.

I grew up with that greatest generation. Although I was born well after the war, I knew them as the fathers of my classmates at 53rd Street School in Milwaukee. They were my scoutmaster (Marines — Pacific), my dad and my uncle (Army — Europe) and my favorite teacher at John Marshall High School (second wave on D-Day). None of these men walked with a swagger. They were quiet and modest, and they never talked about the horrors they experienced.

My father was a perfect example. He went to work every day — he was an insurance agent — and he came home every night. He was a very quiet man. I could fish with him for hours on Cedar Lake, and if he said anything, it was usually about fish. I know that after the war, he remained very close with one of the lieutenants, who lived in Florida. (The other lieutenant in the company never made it home.) Like many in that generation, he saw his five years of service as his duty, and he considered it an honor to live in what he always regarded as the greatest country on earth. All that my father ever requested from the

government was a flag to be placed on his coffin.

I posted the picture on Facebook, and a lot of my friends wrote very nice responses. The most moving came from someone who knew my father. My cousin, Lawry Margolis, grew up down the street. He and his brother, Marv, were like older brothers to me, and I

spent as much time in their house as I did in my own. He wrote:

"I was at your folks' house in about 1952 and several guys from his company came by to visit. They traded some stories, but I can tell you they absolutely loved and respected your dad, who was their captain. I got the feeling that they truly believed they were alive and survived the war and Battle of the Bulge because of Capt. Kozak (Uncle Sid to me)."

No, he wasn't Tom Hanks, and he was as ordinary as every other father that I grew up with. They quietly did their duty. They witnessed horrors that they chose to keep to themselves. They came home and figured out some way to make sense of it all. And they seemed happiest being with their

wives and their children. Oh yes, watching the Packers ... and fishing.

Here's to you, Dad! And thanks for the surprise hello on Memorial Day. ■



The author's parents, Sidney and Gert, during training in South Carolina.

Warren Kozak is the author of *LeMay: The Life and Wars of General Curtis LeMay* (Regnery 2009) and *Presidential Courage: Three Speeches That Changed America*, an ebook published in 2012.

To see *The Atlantic's* World War II photos, go to:
<http://www.theatlantic.com/infocus/pages/ww2/>