



AN ISSUE OF THE DAY



What's in a Name

By Clarence M. Hatcherson

March 2017

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED why or who a road or a building bearing someone's name came to be associated with it? With our current president being the exception, has it occurred to you why and how a person's name became attached to a structure or roadway.

Take CA-47 as an example; if you travel southbound on I-110, the last exit that you are able to take before the freeway ends in San Pedro is CA-47 - the **Vincent Thomas Bridge**. The ramp that leads to this 1,500 ft. span takes you eastbound across the Los Angeles Harbor into Long Beach. On average, 45,000 cars travel across the Vincent Thomas Bridge every day, but I wonder, how many of those commuters know who Vincent Thomas was.

Vincent Tomasevich-Thomas was a Democratic Party politician who represented San Pedro's 68th and 52nd Districts in the California Assembly from 1941-1979. Originally slated to be called the "San Pedro-Terminal Island Bridge, in 1961 the California Legislature passed Concurrent Resolution 131 naming the suspension for Thomas in honor of his foresight and untiring work that culminated in its construction. Thomas died in San Pedro, California in 1980, aged 72.

I did not personally know Vince Thomas but I did spend more hours than I'd care to admit in **The Fisherman's Cove**, a bar and café owned by Vince's sister on Terminal Island across the street from the cannery where her brother worked his first job.

I presently receive my medical care from the V.A. Loma Linda Healthcare System. Prior to receiving services there, that was the name known to me; however the name on the building is **Jerry L. Pettis Memorial V.A. Loma Linda Healthcare System**. So

being of an inquiring mind, I looked to discover who Jerry L. Pettis was.

Jerry Lyle Pettis was a California Congressman. In 1966, he was elected as a Republican to the U.S. House of Representatives. He represented California's 33rd Congressional District until January 1975 and its 37th Congressional District thereafter. He served in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II and was a pilot for United Airlines.

Mr. Pettis was killed on February 14, 1975, when plane he was piloting crashed near Cherry Valley, California. He is buried at Montecito Memorial Park in Colton, California.

The Jerry L. Pettis Memorial Veterans Administration Hospital in Loma Linda was so named in his honor. I'm not sure why the facility bears his name since his legislative districts were in the L.A. Metro area and I could not find any legislation related to the hospital bearing his name, but he was a veteran of the greatest generation and he is interred nearby, so all else notwithstanding I'm sure that is appropriate.

Prior to relocating to the Inland Empire I received medical care from the **V. A. Long Beach Healthcare System**. This past December, **President Barack Obama** signed into law, legislation introduced by California State Congressman Alan Lowenthal, renaming the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Long Beach, California, as the **Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center** in honor of Holocaust survivor and **Medal of Honor recipient Tibor Rubin**.

In my April 2016 newsletter I shared with you a book that I'd recently read, **Single Handed** by **Daniel M. Cohen**, the

biography recounting the life of **Army Corporal Tibor “Teddy” Rubin**. Several years ago during the early to mid-2000’s, the State of California Employment Development Department in Torrance, my former employer, hosted annual Veterans Appreciation ceremonies. Our **Montford Point Marines** were invited guest at several of these events. On one occasion “Teddy” Rubin was a special guest and I had the distinction of meeting him; the first time that I had the honor of meeting a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient.

*Mr. Rubin was born in Hungary on June 18, 1929. He survived fourteen months in a Nazi concentration camp in Austria during World War II, where his parents and sisters died, and was eventually liberated by the U.S. Army. Inspired by the American soldiers who rescued him, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, eventually being deployed in early 1950 as a member of the **U.S. Army’s 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division** during the **Korean War**.



Despite facing religious discrimination from his sergeant—who sent Mr. Rubin on the most dangerous assignments and withheld his commendation—Mr. Rubin fought valiantly in several notable engagements. In one such engagement, Mr. Rubin enabled the complete withdrawal of his fellow soldiers by solely defending a hill under an overwhelming assault by North Korean troops.

On a later assignment, Mr. Rubin was severely wounded and captured. During his interment in a POW camp, he disregarded his own personal safety and immediately began sneaking out of the camp at night in search of food for his comrades. Risking certain torture or death if caught, he provided food to the starving Soldiers and desperately needed medical care for the wounded of the POW camp using improvised medical techniques. His brave, selfless efforts during his captivity were directly attributed to saving the lives of as many as forty of his fellow prisoners.

For his gallantry in close contact with the enemy and his unyielding courage and bravery while a prisoner of war, Mr. Rubin was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in 2005. Mr. Rubin’s wartime heroism, both during combat and later as a prisoner of war, are true examples of the Medal of Honor goal to recognize “... *conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty.*”

Mr. Rubin was a long-time resident of Garden Grove, California and received services from the Long Beach VA Medical Center. He passed away on December 5, 2015.

There are many reasons, I suppose, why bridges, buildings and sometimes even steaks and airplanes bear the names of people, and if you’re the curious sort like me, you seek to find out why. But from now until it stands, when veterans go to the **Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center** for services, they can know that **Medal of Honor recipient, Cpl. Tibor Rubin** lived and walked the same halls that they walk now and was an exemplary representative of the very best humankind has to offer.

**Everything Long Beach.com*

◆ ◆ ◆
Clarence Hatcherson is a life member of the
Montford Point Marine Association L. A. Chapter