

An 'enemy alien' who was really a patriot

EDITOR'S NOTE: In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, The Lawrence Township Memorial Committee, in cooperation with The Ledger, will feature a column each week during the anniversary year profiling a Lawrence resident.

If anyone were to identify a resident of Lawrence Township as an enemy alien in our midst, in all probability the last person to consider would be Colonel Joe File, a man who has dedicated his life serving his country, his community, his employer and his family.

Joe File is one of our better known and respected citizens, and a classic example of the heights that a poor but ambitious son of immigrants can achieve in this great country of ours.

And yet, after living in the U.S. for over 12 years, when Joe attempted to enlist in the Marine Corps in February, 1942, his papers revealed that he was not a legal resident of the United States, but of Italy, a country with which we were at war. He was compelled to register as an "enemy

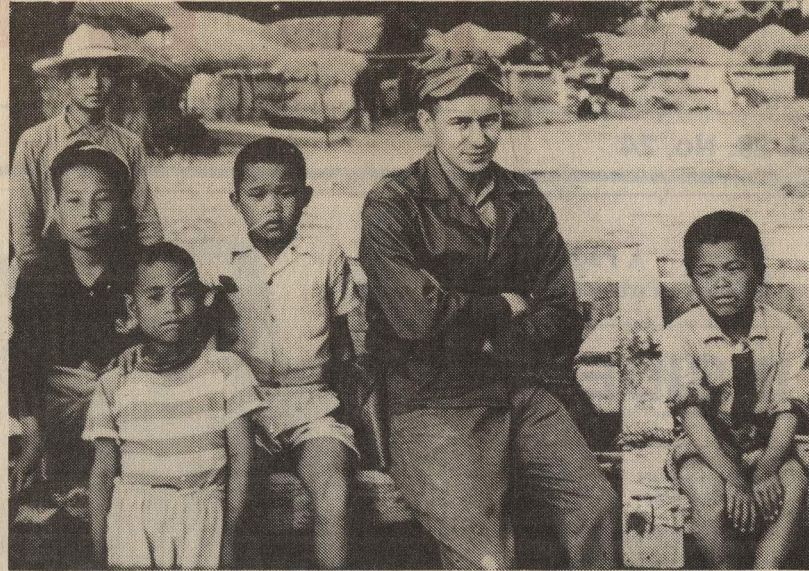
VETERAN PROFILE

Nicholas Loveless

alien," given an identification card with that classification, and warned that he could not travel outside a 50-mile radius without government permission.

Joseph File was born in May, 1923 in Lecce, a city situated in the extreme southern part of Italy in the heel of the boot-shaped country. His father, Carlo, had been a government railroad engineer. As a young man, Carlo came to the U.S. in 1909, but returned in 1914 at the insistence of his mother to fulfill his military obligation. He returned again in 1926, but Joe was not to learn the circumstances until his alien status came to light in 1942 and Carlo's past was revealed.

"Following World War I," Joe be-



Joseph File visited an orphanage in 1951 during his service during the Korean War.

gan, "the Mussolini regime came into power, and my father was an outspoken opponent of the Fascist government, and refused to salute the Fascist flag. In 1923, he joined a strike against the regime and was convicted of treason. He appealed the court's decision and won the appeal, but lost his job with the government in the meantime. When he learned of trumped-up charges planned against him, he dressed in the guise of a priest and entered the United States with a forged passport in 1926. The secret police terrorized our family continually when they would come looking for him. I was only a toddler at the time, but that memory still haunts me."

"In 1929, my father was able to send for my mother, my sister and I, and we entered the country through Ellis Island, and then settled down to live in the Bronx. Over the years we never gave a thought to the fact we were still citizens of Italy."

Joe attended New York public schools where he quickly learned English, graduating from Stuyvesant High School in 1940. In September of that year, he was accepted at Cornell University in Ithaca. When the war erupted on Dec. 7, 1941, Joe's first thoughts were to offer his services to his country. Over the Christmas holidays, he obtained parental consent to enlist in the Marine Corps, and early in January, 1942 went to Syracuse to enlist. It was here that Joe was stunned to learn that not only could he not enlist, but he was considered an enemy of the country he

loved. The Marine recruiters recognized his plight and his sincerity, and within months he became a U.S. citizen. In the meantime, his father was exonerated and allowed to make a legal entry into the U.S. through Cuba.

"On June 19, 1942," Joe continues, "I was sworn in as a citizen of the U.S.A. and the next morning was sworn in as a private in the Marine Corps in its platoon leader program. Those were the two most memorable consecutive days of my life. In October, 1943, just three weeks prior to graduation from Cornell, I was called to active duty. The trustees at Cornell University bestowed on me the degree of bachelor of mechanical engineering even though I missed the final three weeks of of the semester and final exams."

Joe's college background qualified him for officer candidate school, and on completion of that training, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marines. After several other training schools, he was assigned as engineering officer to a squadron of PBJ bombers in the fall of 1944. That program was phased out and replaced with a jeep carrier program with a Marine Air Support Group, along with small aircraft carriers designed to support troops in landings in enemy territory. These carriers were to be used in "Operation Olympic," the code name for the pending invasion of Kyushu in the Japanese homeland, and would have been, had not the atomic bombing of Hiroshima

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invasion of Kyushu in the Japanese homeland, and would have been, had not the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki forced the Japanese surrender on Sept. 2, 1945.

In December, Joe, now a first lieutenant, was released from active duty and reassigned to the reserve forces, where he remained until his recall to active duty in September, 1950, following the outbreak of the war in Korea. The Marines wasted no time in sending Joe to Pohang, Korea, where he served as engineering and supply officer in Marine Air Group 33. The Group's F4U Corsairs and F9F Jets were flying daily missions over North Korea in support of the U.N. forces. Joe recalls that John Glenn, who was later to become an astronaut and U.S. Senator, was a member of the group at the time he was there. In December, 1951, Joe's tour of duty was completed in Korea and he returned to the U.S., and in April, 1952, was released to reserve status once again. As a captain he continued to participate in the reserve program in both air and ground units, and by June, 1970, attained the rank of colonel, assigned to the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. He served in that capacity until his re-

tirement on June 30, 1974, after over 32 years of service.

During the years after WWII, Joe continued his education, receiving master of science and doctor of philosophy degrees from Columbia University, while he worked full-time. For his doctoral dissertation, he chose to study the behavior of a specific type of magnet, a sixth-order magnet, which up to that time had neither been fabricated nor operated. His research later led to magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), a remarkable advancement in modern medicine. Joe's lifetime work as a scientist has made him a renowned authority on energy and research. He was awarded the rank of commander in the Order of Merit of the Republic of Italy in recognition of his achievements, and in 1978 as a Fulbright Scholar for cultural exchange, awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Lecce, Italy. He is also the recipient of many other civilian and military awards. In 1963 he became a charter member of the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation, and became chairman of the board in 1979, a position he held for 15 years. His work over the years has taken him throughout Europe, including two trips to Russia, and to his birthplace in Lecce many times.

Joe and the former Dorothy Richards, of New York City, were married on Sept. 2, 1944 and moved to Princeton in 1956. In 1959 they moved to 10 Millbrook Lane in Lawrence where they have since made their home. In September, 1994 they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary surrounded by their children, Joseph C. and Karen File, of Fairfield, Conn., Laurel and Carl Kreger Jr., of Hamilton, and Jeannette and Craig Lamb, of Lawrence, in addition to six grandchildren. Although recently retired from the Plasma Physics Laboratory of Princeton University, where he served for many years, Joe is far from being idle. He continues a hectic schedule, dividing his time between family, friends, consulting requirements, golf and volunteer work with the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation. He is also active on the local scene, having served two terms on the Lawrence Board of Education.

From his humble beginnings, Doctor and Colonel File has led his life with patriotism, loyalty, love, honor and integrity. He has tried to give back to this country a little of what it has given to him, and it is his hope to make the United States of America as proud of him as he is of the United States. It is difficult to believe that anyone so dedicated could ever have been considered an enemy alien!

The Veterans Memorial Committee is asking veterans from World War II and other conflicts to provide a photograph in uniform, along with their name, present address, branch of

service and unit, where and when they served, their principal assignment and summary of their service. Their individual experiences or unusual stories are also welcomed. All photographs will be returned. Families of deceased veterans are also encouraged to submit articles. All materials should be sent to The Lawrence Township Veterans Memorial Committee, P.O. Box 55966, Trenton, N.J. 08638. Inquires may be made by calling 882-9108.



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The Harle family contributed \$300 for one of the six flagpoles, and flag, to be erected at the memorial. Three are still available and they include a plate for the contributor.

81-10-8802

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Joseph and Dorothy File at a Marine Scholarship Foundation Ball in 1989.