

# His service upheld a long family tradition

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

John Potter Stockton III, was barely 17 years old when he left his studies at the Pennington School early in 1947 to join the U.S. Army Air Corps as a private. His rise through the ranks from private to colonel when he retired from the Army Reserve in 1947 was not coincidental. It was achieved by hard work, dedication, and consistent with a strong family tradition of over 200 years of loyal

## VETERAN PROFILE

### Nicholas Loveless

and distinguished service, both civil and military, to the United States. The exploits and accomplishments of the Stockton dynasty would fill volumes.

Jack was born in Battle Creek, Mich., on Feb. 18, 1930, when his father and grandfather attempted to establish a new business there. When the business did not meet their expectations, they returned to Trenton, and

Jack spent his youth in a castle-like dwelling known as the Ivy Tower on the corner of Greenwood Avenue and Hudson Street. He is ninth in direct lineal descent from Richard Stockton II, who purchased 5,500 acres of land from William Penn, which is now a large part of the Borough of Princeton. In 1701 he laid the foundation of what was to become Morven, home of future generations of Stocktons and governors of New Jersey. Richard II's grandson, Richard Stockton III, was a member of the Continental Congress and a New Jersey signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Jack's great great great grandfather, Commodore Robert Field "Fighting Bob" Stockton, and grandson of "The Signer" had an outstanding military career that began when he entered the U.S. Navy as a midshipman in 1811. He served in the war of 1812 and distinguished himself in the war with the Barbary Pirates at Tripoli in 1815. In 1821 he commanded an expedition to Africa and established the first government in what was to become Liberia. In 1846-47 he fought with Fremont and Kearney in the war with Mexico as his "horse marines" conquered California. After his retirement he then served as a U.S. Senator. Jack's grandfather, a veteran of World War I, was wounded in France and was later recalled in World War II to command the military port of Glasgow, Scotland. His father also served with the 44th Infantry Division in World War II, and during the Korean War commanded the aerial port of Ashia in Japan.

"My grades were suffering at the Pennington School in 1946," Jack recalls, "and my father told me it was time to enter the service and straighten out. He took me to the recruiting office in Trenton and convinced the recruiter to take this under-aged student as a new recruit, and it was my father, then a captain, who swore me

in. After basic and electrical lineman technical school, I was assigned to the Army Aviation engineers, and sent to Iwo Jima for the next 18 months. The war had been over for two years and there were still large quantities of equipment there, as it had been a staging area for the invasion of Japan. One of our jobs was to construct a high voltage power line around the island. We were also assigned to remove the bodies of 5,000 marines that were killed and buried at Iwo, and send their remains back to the States. One of them was John Basilone, who had received the Medal of Honor at Guadalcanal and was later killed in action at Iwo.

"On one occasion one of our trucks picked up two apparent civilians we thought were Filipino laborers, but it turned out they were Japanese soldiers that had survived the 1945 battle and had hidden out in caves since then. They found an old Life magazine and saw General MacArthur's picture with Emperor Hirohito, and knew the war must have been over, but they didn't know who won. They decided to give themselves up and were returned to Japan shortly afterward. Ironically, one of them was from Nagasaki.

"Another of my jobs was to occasionally fly as a crewman on a B-17 air-sea rescue plane as a scanner, and to man one of the two .50 calibre machine guns in the waist positions. My final job was to erect an aircraft warning light tower on top of Mount Suribachi."

The Army Air Corps in the meantime became the U.S. Air Force, and Jack was returned to the U.S., trained as a remote control turret technician and assigned to the 370th Squadron of the 307th Bombardment Wing at MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Fla. In addition to repairing electro-mechanical armament systems on the wing's B-29s, he was cross-trained as



Following a family tradition of service to the country that dates back to the founding of the nation, Jack Stockton left the Pennington School to sign on with the Army Air Corps in 1947. He is shown with a .50 calibre machine gun on Iwo Jima in 1948.

an aerial gunner, flying in the tail position.

"The Korean Conflict began on June 25, 1950," Jack continued, "and the 307 was placed on the alert. In August, our entire wing which consisted of three squadrons of 10 B-29s each, flew across the Pacific to Kadena Air Force Base, Okinawa, for 30 days temporary duty. It was almost three years before the wing returned

again. Initially I worked on turrets, gunsights and guns, and loaded bombs at 3 a.m. almost daily with everyone else in the squadron. As the squadron ran short of gunners, I volunteered to fly bombing missions, first as tail gunner, then as central fire control gunner.

"After a few months we ran out of strategic targets and bombed bridges,

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# Veteran

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road and rail lines and troop concentrations. MIG Alley was the area just south of the Yalu River bordering Manchuria, and we would often get jumped by MIG-15 fighters when we flew there. We were prohibited from flying over Manchuria, and yet that is where the MIGs were based, and several of the fields could be seen from the air. On one mission one of our squadron gunners shot two of them down. The gunnery systems on our B-29s were not designed for jets and it was difficult to track them, they were so fast. The North Koreans had some anti-aircraft, which was moderately accurate, and our planes were 'holed' occasionally. We lost seven or eight of our Wing's 30 planes while I was with them at Kadena."

Jack was awarded the Air Medal and three oak leaf clusters for his 38 bombing missions, the Bronze Star for meritorious armament maintenance work in keeping the planes in the air, and the distinguished Flying Cross was awarded his entire crew for their outstanding bombing results as a lead crew. On completion of his tour of duty he returned to MacDill AFB for his discharge with the rank of technical sergeant in 1952, after which he returned to New Jersey to continue his interrupted education.

After his graduation from Fairleigh-Dickinson University, Jack earned a masters of art degree in public administration. He served as a beat reporter, advertising director for electronic companies, director of communications at Thomas A. Edison State College, and as an official in the N.J. Bureau of Construction Code Enforcement. He was also the first executive secretary of the New Jersey Fire Safety Commission, a position he held for 10 years until his retirement from state government in June, 1995. He also served with the

N.J. National Guard briefly and then the Army Reserve until his retirement as a colonel in 1974. Jack and Frances, his wife of 17 years, reside at The Village in Lawrence. Frances is a New Jersey branch administrative manager for a national forensic engineering firm in Princeton.

The living room of the Stockton home is filled with citations, trophies and medals that Jack has earned over the years. Surrounding the Stockton family coat-of-arms are his military medals, including the Legion of Merit award to him on his retirement from the Army Reserve, marksmanship trophies of his days at Camp Perry and other national and regional rifle matches where he earned the Distinguished Rifleman's Badge in Gold and a life master high power rifle

certification and resolutions from the NJ Senate and Assembly and the Fire Safety Commission honoring his long years of dedicated service.

His bookshelves contain over 3,000 books on the military history of the United States, and are all arranged in chronological order. No longer in his possession are two swords and matched dueling pistols that once belonged to Commodore Stockton; his grandfather donated them years ago to the Stockton, California Museum at their request.

Although his marksmanship trophies are highly valued, it is the photographs and sketches of his lineal ancestors in succession, beginning with Richard "The Signer" that is the link from the past to the present day, and a constant reminder of the proud heritage of military leaders, senators and ambassadors that the Stockton family represent. The most recent addition to that in none other than Jack Stockton.

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The 307th Bombardment Group compiled an exceptional record with their B-24s in the Pacific from 1942 to 1945, and were featured in this column several weeks ago. After World War II it was re-designated the 307th Bombardment Wing and took part in the Korean Operations from 1950 to 1953. This writer was a member of the Wing in 1951, and a friend of Jack Stockton, subject of this article.

*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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Jack Stockton and his wife, Frances, at Air Force Association convention in 1993.

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