

Vagaries of war united this Lawren

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.

The Desert War in North Africa reached a turning point at El Alamein, just west of Alexandria, Egypt, on Oct. 23, 1942, as the British Eighth Army struck Rommel's Afrika Corps with the full force of its artillery and armor. Seventeen days later, on Nov. 8, the Americans entered the fray as Operation Torch opened a second front with amphibious landings at Morocco and Oran and Algiers in Algeria.

At Arzew, 20 miles west of Oran, Lt. "Hut" Hutsinpiller waded ashore leading his Second Platoon, Sixth Armored Infantry Regiment of the First Armored Division. Morocco and Algeria were defended by the French army and navy under an

agreement forced upon them earlier by the Germans, to save France from further destruction at the hands of the Germans.

On the following day, D+One, Lt. Mildred Hustak, an Army nurse, landed at the same beach at Arzew with the 38th Evacuation Hospital, a field hospital set up near the front lines to treat battle casualties. Although they had regularly corresponded, Hut and Mildred would only have one brief meeting after the invasion, and not meet again until after the Tunisian Campaign seven months later.

Herschel H. Hutsinpiller was born in Devil's Lake, North Dakota on Aug. 9, 1917, moved with his family to Washington, where he attended a one-room country school until he was 13, and then moved back to North Dakota. He attended North Dakota State University and the University of Minnesota, graduating with a de-

VETERAN PROFILE

Nicholas Loveless

gree in journalism.

He enlisted in the U.S. Army on March 18, 1941, and after basic and advanced gunnery training, was assigned to a tank battalion at Ft. Lewis. In February, 1942, he graduated as a second lieutenant from officer candidate school and was assigned as a platoon leader with the Sixth Armored Infantry Regiment at Ft. Knox. In April, 1942, his First Armored Division moved to Ft. Dix in preparation for overseas shipment. It was here that he met Lt. Mildred Hustak, a ward nurse caring for some of his men who had been hospitalized. It was a casual meeting with long-lasting effects.

In May, part of the First Armored boarded the Queen Mary for its maiden voyage as a troop ship. Hut and his Sixth Regiment left in a convoy of smaller transports, all destined for Northern Ireland where they would receive additional combat training. They later moved to England, and by the end of October, joined the assault convoy bound for the invasion at Oran. At that time it was not known whether or not the French would resist the invasion.

"There was little opposition when we landed at Arzew," Hut began. "We went ashore at dawn and moved a short distance inland to organize. Our weapons were 75mm howitzers and 81mm mortars mounted on half-tracks, and they had been loaded separately in Macacaibo landing craft and we didn't get them until the following day, Nov. 9. Our objective was Tafaraoui Airfield, south of Oran, and we secured it by the end of that day."

After three days of fighting, a cease-fire was declared and the French, who had little desire to fight the Americans in the first place, capitulated, and Northwest Africa was now in the hands of the Allies. In the meantime there had been heavy fight-

ing at Oran itself, and although there were many casualties, the overall operation had been a success.

"We bivouacked for several weeks near Oran," Hut continued, "and then left in a vehicle convoy with Tunis as our objective. The weather was miserable that time of the year, and we lost one of our guns in an accident in the Atlas Mountains. We advanced to Beja, Tunisia and the city of Tunis was our objective, but the Germans had other plans for us. One of our first bivouacs was in 'Stuka Valley,' named for the frequent Luftwaffe attacks."

For the next six months Hut and his Sixth Regiment would be fighting the Italian and German armies in Tunisia at such places as Mendjez-al-Bab, Sidi bou Zid, Djebel bou Aoukasm Sbeitla, Faid Pass and Kasserine Pass, where 200 tanks were lost in a German offensive and the First Armored Division suffered over 1,400 casualties.

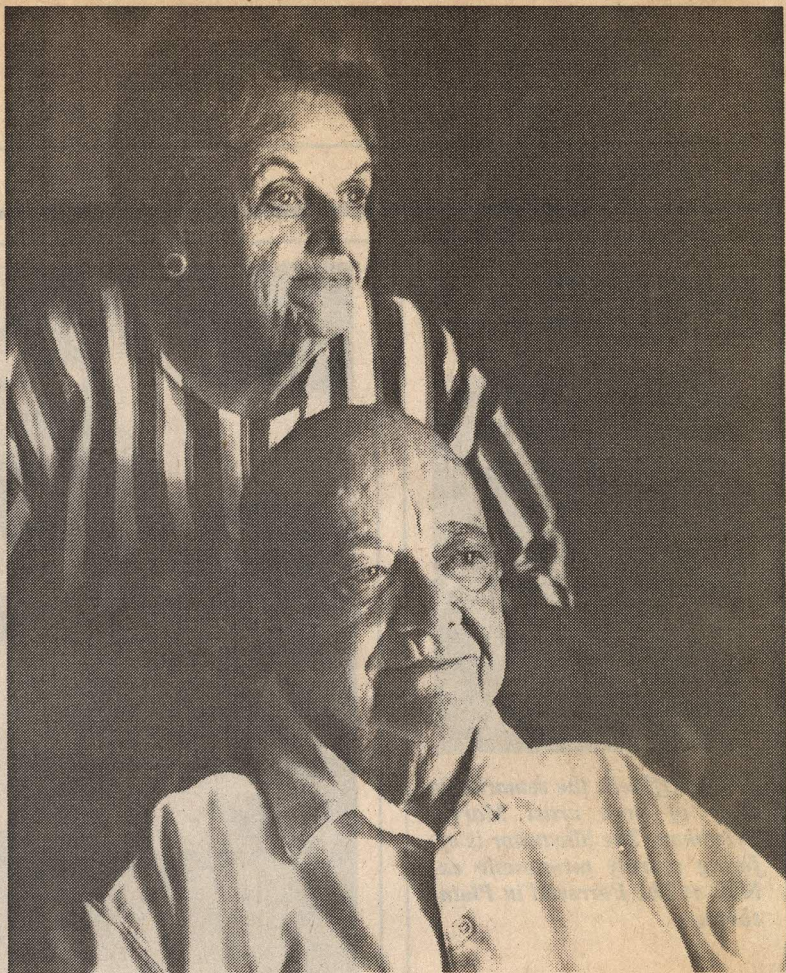
"The Tunisian Campaign was coming to a close," Hut continued, "and we were making our final drive against the Germans near Mateur on May 6, when three German tanks zeroed in on our unit and we were forced to withdraw, abandoning some of the vehicles. We were still under fire, when I took one of my men and we made our way back to within 50 yards of one of the tanks, and retrieved our half-tracks. One of the tanks was then hit by one of our own guns and knocked out, and the other withdrew. In the meantime I had been hit by shrapnel and put out of action."

For his actions that day, Lt. Hutsinpiller was awarded the Silver Star Medal for gallantry in action, for "courage, daring and devotion to duty, with complete disregard for his own welfare." He was also awarded the Purple Heart for his injuries and the Bronze Star Medal for other action during the campaign. On May 31, the campaign ended with the surrender of the Germans, and the First Armored was sent to Rabat, Morocco, for much needed rest and recuperation. Hut was then returned to the U.S. to become an artillery instructor, which were needed to train new re-

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ce couple forever



Staff photo by Mark Czajkowski

The Army and World War II brought Mildred and Herschel Hutsin-
piller together and they have been working as a team ever since.

cruits.

Mildred Hustak was born in Trenton, N.J. on April 12, 1920, attended local schools, graduating from Trenton High School. She went on to graduate from the Mercer Hospital School of Nursing in the first graduating class.

In answer to the Army's desperate call for nurses, she enlisted in the Army Nurse Corps on April 1, 1942, and was assigned to the base hospital at Ft. Dix. It was here that she met her future husband, Herschel Hutsinpillar. Shortly after he left for overseas, Mildred followed with the 38th Evacuation Hospital to England. Although they exchanged letters regularly, it was difficult to locate each other, and by the time they did, and she went to visit him she arrived just a few hours after he left for North Africa. As fate would have it, the 38th Hospital also left for the same destination, and Mildred landed on the same beach at Arzew the day after Hut landed. This time they were able to meet briefly, but would not see each other again until the end of the Tunisian Campaign seven months later.

"Our hospital was a forward field hospital," Mildred began, "and we

were always up near the front lines. We lived and worked in tents and under combat conditions with no luxuries. Our job was to receive wounded and treat them until they could be moved to the rear where they would receive better and long-range care. There were times when we worked around the clock and other times when there was not that much to do, and we would treat the native Arabs for sickness and injury. Early treatment was important to survival, and we treated thousands of cases all through the campaign in Tunisia."

Mildred was also returned to the U.S. from Africa, and spent a period of time convalescing in a hospital in Atlantic City, N.J. from health problems developed in Africa. While she was there, she became a war bond salesperson and traveled throughout New Jersey promoting the sale of war bonds needed to finance the war. When she was fully convalesced, she returned to her nurses duties and was lucky enough to be assigned to Ft. Benning, Ga., where Lt. Hutsinpillar also happened to be stationed. The war no longer kept them apart, they resumed their relationship, and on Oct. 23, 1945, were married in Phenix City, Ala. Mildred then opted to

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change her status from Army nurse to Army wife, and left the Army.

The day after their wedding, Hut left for the Pentagon to join the Military Intelligence Service. It was an assignment that took them both to many fascinating parts of the world over the next 17 years.

As Army attaché in Romania for 3½ years, it was difficult to adjust to being under constant surveillance by the secret police, and to be without many of the conveniences taken for granted in the U.S. On one occasion Hut developed appendicitis, but feared going to a Communist hospital, so a trusted friend who was a Romanian physician, removed his appendix on his kitchen table using only a local anesthesia, assisted by Mildred as the nurse. Their duty ended there when the Communist leader, Anna Pauker, declared Hut a persona non grata for no apparent reason, and they were compelled to leave.

Other assignments took them to Hawaii; Greece, where they adopted a baby girl; and various stations in the U.S., always accompanied by their pet dogs. While Hut concentrated on his various assignments over the years, Mildred's role involved her in a great many volunteer programs, including Red Cross blood banks, leading Girl Scout troops, nursery school, entertaining dignitaries and holding office in women's clubs.

Hut retired from the Army in 1963 as a Lieutenant Colonel and Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Army Intelligence and Security at Ft. Dix, and then launched a new career as administrative officer with the State of New Jersey Air Pollution Control. They settled in Lawrence in 1964, and have resided at 9 Brandon Road ever since. In 1984, Hut retired again, this time for good. Their daughter Donna, is now an Air Force wife with two

children, living in Colorado Springs, Colo.

The Lawrence Senior Center has opened new horizons for the Hutsinpillers, who serve in a variety of roles. Mildred is not in her second term as president of Senior Club 2, and both have held various positions and remain active in all aspects of senior life in Lawrence. There appears to be no end to the energy that this dedicated couple devote to the community. Their wartime love affair has endured and lives on, and on Oct. 23 they will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary, marking another milestone in their long, adventurous and fulfilling lives.

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.

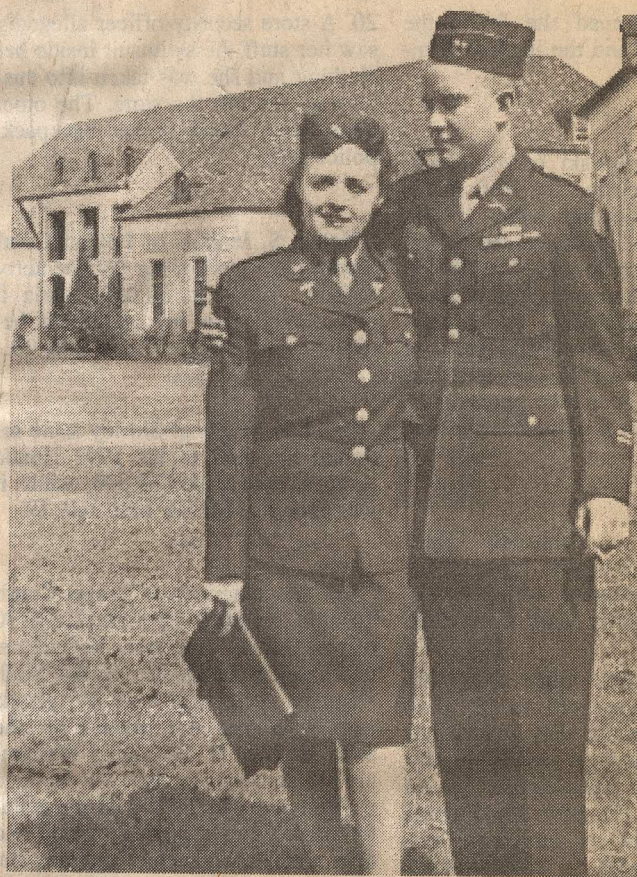


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Herschel Hutsinpiller and Mildred Hustak, in a photo taken in the mid-1940s, after their return from the African campaign. He was an Army soldier, serving as a platoon leader in the Sixth Armored Infantry Regiment of the First Armored Division. She was a front-line Army nurse.