



**A HOUSE'S KID, A CLASSMATE, AND A
FELLOW MARINE
BY GERALD F. MERNA**

January 24, 2015

HUGH J. (MAC) MC AVINUE WAS A FRIEND AND CLASSMATE OF LONG STANDING. HIS LOSS WILL BE MOURNED BY HIS MANY ST. AGNES AND TAPPAN ZEE HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI, AND HIS BELOVED MARINES HE SERVED WITH DURING THE KOREAN WAR.



**IN MEMORY OF HUGH J. "MAC" MC AVINUE
HOUSE'S KID –CLASSMATE – FELLOW MARINE**



(February 22, 1930 – January 21, 2015)

By Gerald F. Merna (Jan. 24, 2015)

A few days ago I received the following totally unexpected email from a Lady I did not know or had ever heard from before:

On 01/23/15, Bonnie Mathews<email address> wrote:

Dear Mr. Merna,

My name is Bonnie Soha, I am married to Hugh McAvinue's grandnephew Tim Soha. I have come across your name in a search for pictures of "Uncle Mac" in the Marines. Please contact me if Hugh from Suffern, NY is your childhood and marine comrade.

**Thank you,
Bonnie**

To say I was surprised is a vast overstatement—I hadn't seen nor heard from Mac McAvinue for many years. I immediately sent this reply to Ms. Soha:

On Jan 24, 2015, at 3:18 AM, gfmerna-usmc@verizon.net wrote:

Hi Bonnie:

Nice to hear from you.

I not only served in the Marines with Mac but we grew up together at St. Agnes in Sparkill, NY, attended Tappan Zee H.S. together, and were, and I hope still are, very good friends.

Where are Mac and Kay now? It's been years since I've seen or heard from them. Where are you located, Suffern, NY? I'm in Arlington, VA.

Gerald F. (Jerry) Merna

I then waited for Ms. Soha's further reply, hoping I'd get Mac's email address enabling me to renew our friendship. That was not to be however, as this was the very sad response I got instead:

On 01/24/15, Bonnie Soha<email> wrote:

Dear Mr. Merna,'

Sadly, Hugh passed away Wednesday afternoon from complications from open heart surgery. "Uncle Mac" as so many nieces and nephews fondly called him, was always so proud of his connections to the Marines.

As we made funeral arrangements I searched for a picture of him while in service. Thanks to technology today I came across your photo of him on the burro. I recognized him immediately and smiled. It gave great joy to the family to see this photo. Thank you for your very detailed stories of your time at St. Agnes. We knew little about Uncle Mac's childhood. It is unfortunate that it is only after his death that we have connected. "Aunt Sis" (Kay) predeceased Hugh 3 years ago. You can see his full obituary and a video tribute of him on the Scarr funeral home website at: scarrfuneralhome.net

Thank you again for helping us know more about our Uncle Mac. I am sure he would have very fond memories of your many experiences together.

Bonnie Soha

The following concluding emails brought me to where I commenced writing this story:

On Jan 24, 2015, at 2:27 PM, gfmerna-usmc@verizon.net wrote:

OMG! I am shocked--I was not aware of either of their deaths. Can't even think of it right now--will get back to you. Will also see that his Obit gets posted on the St. Agnes Alumni Web Site if it hasn't already--I sure never saw it, or Kay's. Do you have a link to her Obit?

Jerry Merna

Have other pics of Mac I'll send later.

On 01/24/15, Bonnie Mathews<email> wrote:

Dear Mr. Merna,

Thank you so much for getting back to me. So sorry I had share the news with you this way. Please know that we are truly feeling blessed to have found you and the memories you carry with you. I only wish we had the foresight to have sought you out earlier. Uncle Mac would have been thrilled to reminisce about the past. I will look for Kay's obit to send along. I am so sorry for your loss but please find comfort in knowing we will cherish the photos we have found through you.

Thank you!

Bonnie Soha

On 01/24/15, at 6:55:35, gfmerna-usmc@verizon.net wrote:

I am in the process of writing a brief story/tribute about Mac to send to our website including his Obit. I will send you a copy when completed. It will have pictures as well, maybe a few you don't have.

Mr. Merna

This brief and informal exchange of email messages is not the way one would like to learn of the death of an old friend, classmate, and fellow House's Kid and Marine. However, if we weren't all engrossed in the world of internet and high tech technology also mentioned above by Ms. Soha, perhaps we may never have otherwise known, or at least not as quickly, of not only Mac's death, but as in this case, a double tragedy, also learning he lost his dear wife Kay almost three years earlier. I am grateful to Ms. Soha for taking the time to reply and provide me further information concerning the loss of Kay and Mac McAvinue.

Thanks to Ms. Soha, I was able to retrieve both Mac and Kay's Obituaries, and include them here as follows:

“Obituary for Hugh J. (Mac) McAvinue



Hugh J. (Mac) McAvinue of Suffern NY passed away January 21, 2015 at the age of 84. Born February 22, 1930 in Flushing NY to Patrick and Nora McAvinue, he was raised at St. Agatha’s Home in Nanuet, NY. He married Catherine Byrne who pre-deceased him October 12, 2011. After his schooling he proudly served as a Sergeant in the United States Marine Corp. with the 1st division in Oceanside California, and overseas in Alaska, Japan and Korea; he received six battle stars and the Korean service medal besides other awards. He worked for Nestle, New England Freight, and International Paper. He was an avid nature lover, photographer, fisherman, and enjoyed camping in the Catskills and Adirondack Mountains. He also completed the Adirondack canal route from Old Forge, NY via the Fulton chain of lakes to Forked Lake and Eagle Bay. Hugh was a member of the American Legion in Suffern, the VFW in Suffern, the Korean War Veterans, and the Marine Corp Association. He is survived by his sister in law Margaret Martin, and numerous nieces and nephews. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated on Monday at 11:00 AM at Sacred Heart Church in Suffern Burial will follow at the Cemetery of the Ascension in Airmont NY. Friends may call on Sunday from 2-4 and 7-9 PM at the Scarr Funeral Home Rote 202 Suffern.”

“Obituary for Catherine E. (Kay) McAvinue



” McAvinue, Catherine E., a life-long resident of Suffern, NY passed away October 12, 2011 at the age of 85. Born September 10, 1926 in Suffern, NY to Thomas and Catherine Byrne, Catherine was retired from Verizon as a computer manager. She is survived by her Beloved Husband, Hugh, a brother, Thomas Byrne, and sister, Margaret Martin, and several nieces and nephews, she is pre-deceased by 2 brothers, James and John and a sister, Mary Conklin. Catherine's Funeral Mass will be celebrated on Monday at 10:00 AM at Sacred Heart Church in Suffern. Burial will follow at the Cemetery of the Ascension in Airmont, NY. Friends are invited on Sunday from 2-4 and 7-9 pm at the Scarr Funeral Home Inc. Route 202 Suffern. Scarr Funeral Home, Inc., Rt. 202 Suffern, N.Y.845-357-1137.”

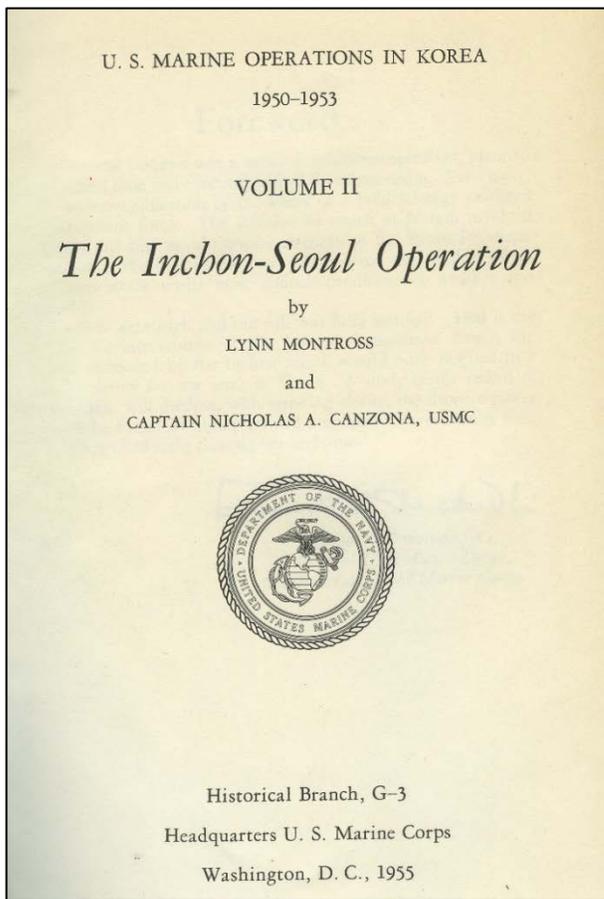
(So to all reading this, please be sure to mention Mac and Kay in your prayers today).

Immediately learning of Mac's death, my first thoughts were of the earlier years when he visited Dot and me, sometimes with my Brother Jim and friends and family, even before he married. It brought to mind all the fun we had during those times—laughing and joking while we shared a few drinks and recalling the time we spent at St. Agnes. Fortunately I was able to come up with a couple of pictures that caught that “spirit” very well:



L: Aug. 1953 -3 Marines and a Lady: Jerry, Dot, Mac and Brother Jim R: Sis Sisolak (Dot's Sister), Dot, Mac, Jim and Al Sisolak

On a more serious note, Mac's Obituary makes mention that in Korea he earned “*six battle stars and the Korean service medal besides other awards.*” In my collection of military books, I recalled one in which Mac was noted, “*The Inchon-Seoul Operations at the Chosen Reservoir during the Korean War.*” That excerpt is shown below:



found to be available to take care of casualties and retain custody of such division supplies and equipment as had not yet been embarked:

MARINE CORPS		NAVY	
Off.	Enl.	Off.	Enl.
224	1,029	11	35

Not included in these figures were 197 noneffective enlisted personnel, a rocket battery, a motor transport company, and the organizational rear echelon of eight officers and 28 men. It was decided that General Noble, as FMFPac representative, would examine MOSs, to determine how many men would be transferred to the 7th Marines or retained for FMF units to be activated later. The need was also foreseen for rear echelon working parties to relieve personnel of units mounting out.³⁰

Staff Groups Flown to Japan

Although the 1st Marine Division had enough problems at Camp Pendleton to keep a full war-strength staff busy, several of the key members were in Korea with the Brigade. The complete Division staff was never integrated until after the landing at Inchon. On 7 August, however, a dispatch from CinCFE requested that the "Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, and planning group capable of developing Division embarkation and landing plans be airlifted" to the Far East.³¹

General Smith decided that this flight could best be made in two echelons. The first, which took off for Japan at 1400 on 16 August 1950, included a group of 12 officers and six enlisted men selected to initiate planning:

	Officers	Enlisted
G-2	Col B. T. Holcomb, Jr.	TSgt W. O'Grady
Ass't G-2	Maj J. G. Babashanian	Cpl J. N. Lareau
G-3	Col A. L. Bowser, Jr.	Sgt G. O. Davis, Jr.
Ass't G-3	LtCol F. R. Moore	
Ass't G-4	LtCol C. T. Hodges	
Ass't Emb Off	Capt R. E. Moody	PFC H. J. McAvinue

³⁰ O. P. Smith, *Notes*, 36-37.

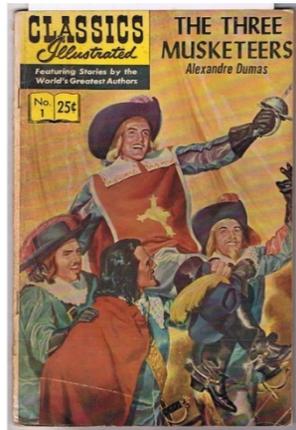
³¹ CinCFE disp to CinCPacFlt, 7 Aug 50, info CNO, CMC, CG 1st MarDiv, CG FMFPac, and ComNavFE.

This book covers one of the *more* if not the *most* famous Marine battles that occurred during the Korean War (also referred to as "The Forgotten War").¹ The above pages show that then Private First Class (PFC) H. J. McAvinue departed for and began his service in Korea on 16 August 1950. Mac and another St. Agnes Alumni and TZHS classmate, Malachy Kevin Murphy, shown below in two Tiajuana, Mexico pictures (and another picture currently the subject of who the Marine is in an historic Korean War photo), arrived in Korea in the 1950-1951 time frame and were both at the Chosen Reservoir before yet a fourth St. Agnes Alumni/TZHS classmate/Marine, Francis X. Hennessy, and I arrived later in separate "Replacement Drafts" in 1952."

Among other new freshmen arriving at St. Agnes in 1944 were three of us who befriended one another before a fourth close friend was added. The first three were Jerry Merna, Hugh J. Mac McAvinue and Malachy Murphy-(note: all "M's as in "Marines). We humorously referred to ourselves as the noted and then popular "The Three Mesquiteers,"² Ultimately we added a "Fourth Mesquiteer," Frank Hennessy.

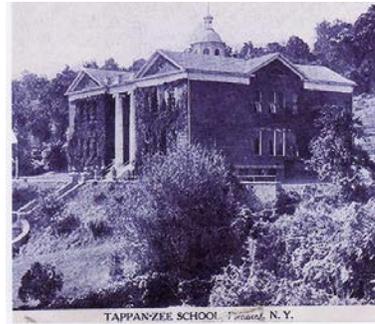
¹ *The Korean War, which ended over 60 years ago, never resonated with the American public in the way that World War II did, despite the fact that nearly 2 million Americans served in theater (as part of a United Nations force) in the three-year fight against the North Koreans and Chinese, and some 37,000 died. Perhaps it was because Korea wasn't a "declared war" and ended in an unsatisfactory stalemate. Korea has been called a "forgotten war" since at least October 1951 when U.S. News & World Report gave it that moniker. In reality, though, Americans did not so much forget the Korean War as never think about it at all. When the war first broke out, people worried that American involvement would usher in the same type of rationing and full mobilization that had characterized the Second World War. That failed to occur and within a few months most Americans turned back to their own lives, ignoring the conflict raging half a world away. Newspapers continued to report on the war, but with the entrance of the Chinese in late fall 1950 and the resulting stalemate in late 1951, few Americans wanted to read or think about Korea. (Source: Why is Korea the "Forgotten War"? By Richard Ernsberger Jr. (<http://www.historynet.com/interview-melinda-pash-why-is-korea-the-forgotten-war.htm>)).*

² Not to be confused with Alexandre Dumas's 17th century swashbuckling version of the three unforgettable "Crusade" characters in "The Three Musketeers" (*Athos, Aramis and Porthos, and their companion D'Artagnan who coined the classic phrase, "All for one, and one for*



Even then we were unknowingly introducing ourselves to what we later learned to be “*Esprit de Corps*,”³ as ironically, within a year or less of each of us getting out in the real world, all four of us enlisted in the United States Marine Corps! (I was the only one who made it a 22-year career and retired, but the other three, as well as many more St. Agnes Alumni, also served tours as Marines, Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen, Coast Guardsmen, National Guardsmen, etc. Later, the two Kee Brother, Dave and Louis, would both also make an almost 30-year career out of being U. S. Marines.

As my above exchange of emails show, reading the sad news of Mac’s death truly stunned me. He was more than a *childhood friend*—he was a fellow “House’s Kid”⁴ and Tappan Zee High School Classmate when we lived together at St. Agnes Home and School For Boys (a Catholic Convent/School run by the Dominican Nuns of St. Agnes in Sparkill (Rockland Co.) NY and someone who was fun to be around.



all).” They were a bit sophisticated for us as we adopted our nickname from that similarly named group, The *Three Mesquiteers*. The latter was the title for a series of 51 Western B-movies, including 8 films starring John Wayne. The name was based on the lead wild horse stallion they rounded up from a wild herd of mustangs, and lead character “Stony” broke it and named it Mesquite. (The name Mesquite ironically might also have reminded us that our three cowboy heroes had the energy and natural nobility of wild mustang stallions coupled with the honour and heroism of the medieval crusaders from the “Musketeer” era). Each western film featured a trio of stars, built on a series of western novels and introduced the characters Tucson Smith and Stony Brooke. The series blended the traditional Western period with more modern elements. (Source: Wikipedia).

³A French phrase that means “the spirit of the Corps. It is the official and unofficial traditions of the Marine Corps that serve to reinforce camaraderie and set the service apart from others. The Corps’ embracement of its rich culture and history is cited as a reason for its high esprit de corps.

⁴“House’s Kid” was an affectionate name attributed to all the young men who were either orphaned or abandoned by their families and committed to St. Agnes Home and School for Boys (St. Agnes Convent) in Sparkill, NY until they attained a certain age and/or graduated from High School. It referred to their residence building at the “House” as the Convent was referred to.

Equally important, Mac was a fellow Marine I served with for a short time, including going on a memorable Marine “Liberty”⁵ with. The ranks of House’s Kids who became U.S. Marines during that historic Korean War Era began to swell. I was quite astonished when researching to write Mac’s “Tribute” just how many, and was able to come up with the below names and pictures, certain there are even more. (Note the several Brothers who became Marines as well; a few pictures are duplicates of one or more of those shown if they are posed with other Marines):

MARINES OF ST. AGNES

Compiled by Gerald F. Merna



Malachy Murphy, Jerry Merna, Hugh McAvinue Tiajuana, Mexico, 1948



Sergeants David Kee and DeSantis

⁵ An authorized absence from duty. Usually the time when not at work or on duty. Liberty is granted by the local commander and may be as long as 96 consecutive hours. It does not count as leave. (Credit: [Unofficial Unabridged Dictionary for Marines](#)).



Jerry Merna- Bob Antonacci – Jim Merna 1952



Korea Dick “Hank” Feldmann – Jerry Merna 1952



Joseph Antonacci



Frank Boyle– Jim Merna – David Kee Camp Lejeune, NC 1950



Francis Boyle



Louis Kee



Malachy Murphy



Wm. Gus “Sarge” Karris



Alpin Rodriguez



Gerald F. Merna



Richard P. Merna



James E. Merna



Manuel Salmon



Jim Cunningham



Joe Wiska



William Bell



No Picture—Luis Reyes



Frank Hennessy



Donald Hennessy



Bill Lehman

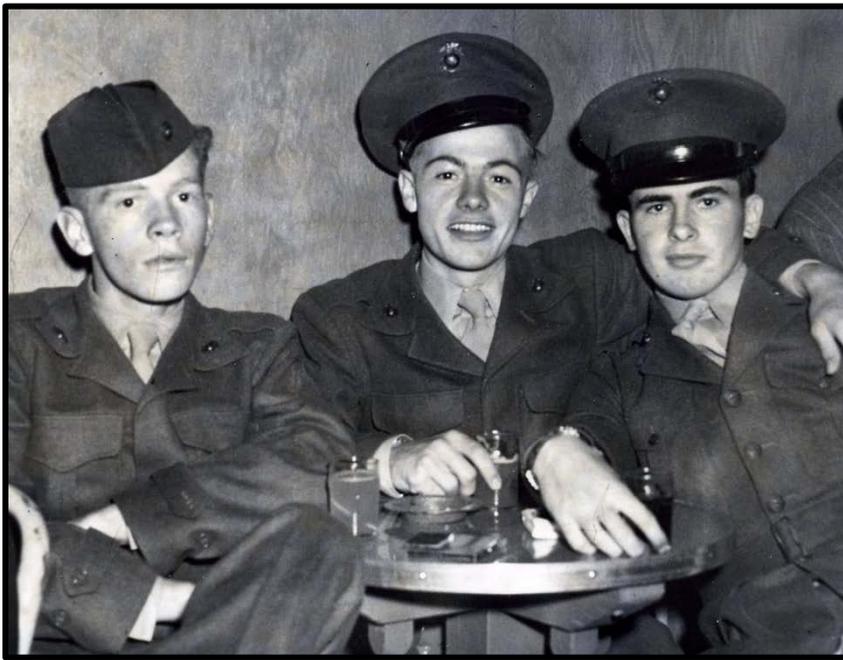


Bob Antonacci



Unidentified St.A Marine

Getting back to that “Liberty” mentioned above, pictures of that occasion are shown below, including the fun with the “burro” picture mentioned above by Ms. Soha that she said was so enjoyed by Mac’s family. We had a lot of fun that day as well.



L.to R. in both pictures: PFC Malachy Murphy, Sgt. Gerald F. Merna, and PFC Hugh Mac Mcavinue on Liberty in Tiajuana, Mexico, 1949

Our former “*Fourth Mesquiteer*” Frank Hennessey is also now deceased. He was a classmate of Dot and mine in the TZHS Class of 1948. Frank is shown below after he finished boot camp in 1950. (I believe I got the picture from his younger Brother Don, also a Marine who served in Artillery with the Marines in Korea). Again, how amazing it is that all these named individuals not only were at St. Agnes and TZ high school together, but most all joined the Marines, all made Sergeant, and all served in the Korean War at different times and in diverse areas of conflict. Frank Hennessey was the only one of the four that wasn’t in the First Marine *Division*—he was an Aviation Electrician with the Pantherjets Squadron, Marine Air Group 33, First Marine Aircraft Wing.



BIG JOB, TALL MAN--In Korea, Marine Sergeant Francis A. Hennessey Jr., 21, of Bridgeport, Conn., gets top billing in this picture of a pair of aviation electricians checking a jet fighter-bomber at a forward airbase of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. Sgt. Hennessey's "other half," like the hard working partner in a TV horse act, is unidentified except as a member of the "Pantherjets" squadron of Marine Air Group 33. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Francis A. Hennessey Sr., 342 Marina Village, Bridgeport, Conn.



DEFENSE DEPT. PHOTO (MARINE CORPS) # A-345132 Sgt. Robert W. Florzak

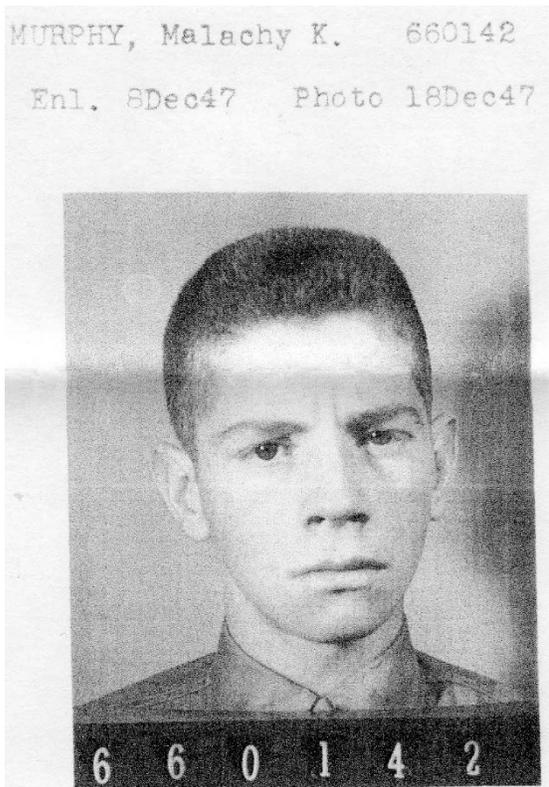
FRANK HENNESSY - KOREA 1952 "TED WILLIAMS JET" (OVER)

As shown in the above excerpts of the *Inchon-Seoul Operations* book, Hugh McAvinue was at the Chosen Reservoir campaign and among the first enlisted Marines following the arrival of the Marine Brigade to enter the Inchon-Seoul Operation. At that time he was working for the Assistant Embarkation Officer to initiate planning operations for the struggles that would follow.

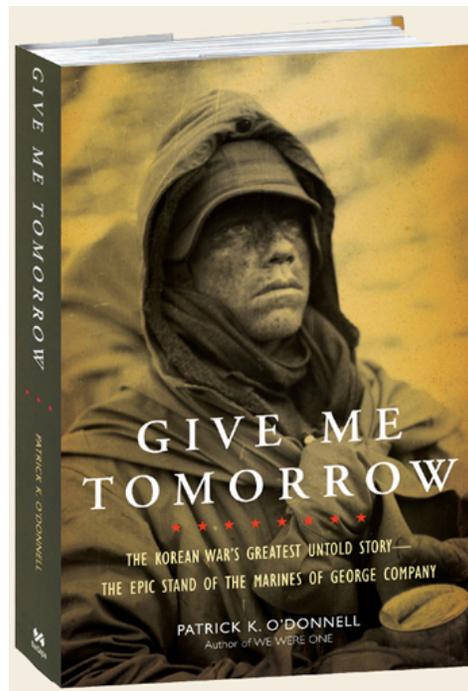
Except for Malachy Murphy, I have limited files and military records for each of these Marines. Malachy had

a “Communications Field MOS” with the Carrier Platoon, Signal Company, 1st Signal Battalion 1stMarDiv. He participated in the Assault and Seizure of Inchon (15-16Sep50), capture and securing of Seoul (17Sep50 - 7 Oct 50), participating in the Wonsan-Hungnam-Chosin Campaign in N. Korea (27Oct50-13Dec50) and other operations in South and Central Korea (16Dec50 – 12July51).

Malachy was not only a close friend to Mac McAvinue, but each also served in Korea at approximately the same time. And while I had lost touch with Mac over the years, I did hear about him from time to time, unlike Malachy who completely and mysteriously disappeared, including any known members of his family. At this time no trace can be found of him. Myself and others have located “Malachy Murphy’s” with a number of similarities and dates of birth, but none that can be identified as “our” Malachy Murphy. He had two Sisters and a Navy Brother none of whom can be located, nor his parents. Numerous internet searches using military records, Ancestry.com and the like, and querying military associations have not yet turned up any clues.



Murphy's Actual 1947 Boot Camp Picture



David Duncan Photo on Book



Murphy in Del Mar, CA 1948

The above cover of a recent (2010) book, “*Give Me Tomorrow*” written by Patrick K. O’Donnell is now playing a major role in my efforts to locate Mac’s friend and classmate, Malachy Murphy, and/or any members of Malachy’s family. (We used to use the nickname, “*Murph*” for Malachy). The book’s inside “flap” has an entry that says the book is, “*An epic story of a legendary Marine Company’s (Company G, 3dBn, 1stMarines) valor and sacrifice in the Korean War brought to gripping, cinematic light by an acclaimed historian.*” And so it is, and does focus on the Chosen Reservoir. A comparison of the books cover with all other pictures shown herein of Malachy further bear out the statements, data, dates, places, and circumstances to a logical conclusion. It’s Murphy!

Copies of Malachy Murphy’s military and St. Agnes Archive records in my possession show the following: He was born Nov. 25, 1929 in New York. After discharge from St. Agnes on August 1, 1947 he enlisted in the Marine Corps on Dec. 8, 1947. After Marine Boot Camp he was a PFC with the 2d Signal Co., H&S Bn, FMF Pacific. From Sep. 15, 1950 to Dec. 3, 1951 he served in Korea after attending a 14-week course as a Field

Telephone communicator/signalman, lineman etc. From time-to-time he was attached to different units in order to provide his services to those units. He was a Corporal with Signal Co., 1st Signal Bn., 1st Marine Division FMF. On 31Jul51 he joined Marine Barracks, U.S. Naval Station, Treasure Island, SanFran, CA. After his original three year enlistment was extended one full year, he was honorably discharged as a Sergeant on Dec. 7, 1951 at Marine Barracks, U.S. Naval Munitions Det., Yorktown, VA.

“Give Me Tomorrow” publisher O’Donnell had written (to that time) six other military-related books; the latter one *after* I had begun my own inquiries searching for Malachy.

According to O’Donnell’s book, another Marine (unknown to me) is quoted as saying, **“Give Me Tomorrow,”** as his answer to a question from a Marine Officer (presumably a General) accompanying the famed Time-Life Photojournalist David Douglas Duncan (a Marine in World War II) during the Chosen Reservoir operations. The question was (words to the effect), **”what would he (that Marine) want if he could have anything he wanted at that moment?”** No doubt that was a very good answer for that question. But, while that may be true for that Marine, it leaves the assumption/presumption that *he* was the Marine in *that* picture, and now the Marine on the cover of that book. However, I have a good deal of information, including statements from other witnesses, that it is *Malachy Murphy* who was asked another question, not the one stated above, and the photographer took Murphy’s picture that is now on that cover, despite claims to the contrary.

Malachy brought this subject up to a fellow Marine Classmate included in the pictures herein soon after he returned from Korea and long before the photo achieved its notoriety in its own right as one of the ten most acclaimed photos of the Korean War. And another witness, a Navy Corpsman who met Murphy at the Reservoir, who is also a St. Agnes Alumni, backs Murphy’s claim as well. And long before book came out. Murphy told the aforementioned fellow Marine about his experiences that day, specifically saying he was stopped on the trail, hooded and holding his “canteen cup,” by an Officer accompanying a photographer. After having his picture taken, the Officer asked Malachy **“How’s the chow (food) Marine? (or words to that effect).** I can assure you Malachy gave a whole different answer--I have his approximate words—and for sure they include a few honest profanities I’ll not repeat here. Needless to say, he wasn’t too fond of the “chow!”

Even a casual look at the several facial photos of Murphy shown above should be convincing in their own right, they are all of Murphy without even considering positive statements from other Marines and Corpsman. I wonder how many of the other “claimants” have similar pictures of themselves, in the same time frame, including similar ages, to compare to the original Duncan photo? Some of the pictures included herein are from Malachy’s original service records, some I took, and others were taken by Murphy’s friends.

Also of interest is that at least a half-dozen other Marines (and even one Army man) have since claimed to be the Marine in that Korean War photo. Sort of reminds you of the hundreds of Sailors who claimed to be the Sailor in that picture kissing the Navy Nurse in Times Square on VJ Day ending World War II, doesn’t it? Along with many of our St. Agnes Alumni colleagues and fellow Marines I am convinced Murphy is **THAT** Marine in the David Duncan photo as displayed on the cover of the **“Give Me Tomorrow”** book.

In a real stroke of irony, in 2014 I MET Patrick K. O’Donnell, the author of that book, at a local restaurant in Arlington, VA. When he introduced himself to me I almost fell over, and couldn’t wait to begin to tell him about Malachy Murphy. When I did, his reaction to what I said, to be fair, seemed quite dubious, yet his very brief replies didn’t answer any of my questions either. When I later mentioned I would really like to get together with him at his convenience to attempt to “sort this all out,” he seemed to acquiesce, but no firm commitments were made and I have not seen nor heard from him since. I still welcome that opportunity.

My claim on behalf of Murphy that he is the Marine in that famous photo are not made in any way to disparage *anyone* also claiming to be the subject of that picture. Nor is my continued search for the truth in contravention of the purpose of this "Tribute," which stands alone to respect the memory Mac McAvinue.

But it is just because Murphy was that friend and fellow Marine of Mac, me and others that I felt it appropriate to make mention of this in this Tribute. I will continue that search to its conclusion. Again, it is not the purpose of these accolades for Mac McAvinue to fully relate Murphy's story, but merely to bring it to the attention of family, friends, Alumni, other Marines and others who knew, grew up with, and/or served in Korea with Malachy Murphy so that they can have first hand information. The search will endure.

My three-year enlistment in 1947 was the earliest of the aforementioned Marines, and in point of fact for all of the Marines mentioned/pictured herein with the possible exception of Alpin Rodriguez. I was honorably discharged in April 1950 and worked both in Piermont (Robert Gair Co.) and Nanuet (Lederle Laboratories). That lasted only a couple of months however as the Korean War began on 25 June 1950 and in August I went back into the Corps. (The war would end 27 July 1953). Certain I would be sent right to Korea I was instead assigned as the Marine Recruiter in Times Square, NY, Hackensack and Paterson, NJ, and then opened a recruiting office in my "home County" of Nyack, NY. After numerous attempts I was successful in volunteering for and being sent to Korea for 13-months (1952-1953) where I served as an Anti-Tank Assault Platoon Section Leader and later as a Platoon Sergeant with two different infantry units.

I wanted very much to attend Mac's funeral two days from when I learned of it, but it was not to be. When I learned of his death I was under doctor's care at home recovering from severe Bronchitis and "walking pneumonia." Another equally serious problem was the weather. Traveling from Arlington, VA to Suffern, NY. would have serious consequences--there were forecasts of major problems with imminent and epic snow storms up and down I-95 and the Eastern Seaboard. So **regretably, though it turned out the heavily forecasted "storms," were bad, they were not quite that severe. Fortunately I made the decision that the best course for me was to stay home, drink a lot of liquids, and write this Tribute to Mac.**

Marriage of Kay and Mac McAvinue



The news of Mac's death was made even worse when I unhappily learned that he had also lost his dear wife Kay several years earlier, and asked Ms. Soha to please send me a copy of Kay's Obit. Neither her or Mac's

Obituaries include the date Kay and Mac were married or any mention of children. Above is a lovely picture of that happiest of days in their lives, their wedding, that I have had in my files for many years.

Mac and I had not been in touch for several years after he, for personal reasons, ceased attending the St. Agnes annual reunions. Nor did he stay in contact with most Alumni even though he lived so much closer to Piermont than a majority of the Alumni, many of the latter attending the reunions traveling from NYC, CT and even FL, VA and MD. (Suffern, Piermont, Nanuet and Sparkill are all in Rockland Co. NY). It was at a St. Agnes reunion many years ago that I last saw Mac and Kay, and while I heard a reason for his ceasing to attend reunions, that is not germane at this time.

As high school freshmen little did we know how close we would become. We were in the same class at Piermont's Tappan Zee High School (TZHS) which we attended while residents of St. Agnes in Sparkill, and were only a month apart in age. Both our wives predeceased us-I lost my Dot (married 60 years) in 2010 and Mac lost his Kay a year later.

In the summer of 1944, together with other orphaned or abandoned children, Mac arrived at St. Agnes from St. Agatha's Home in Nanuet, NY about the same I got there with other 8th grade classmaes from St. Dominic's Convent in Blauvelt, NY. Many of us were to become very close friends at St. Agnes.

When not absorbed in athletics, going to the "swimmin' hole," caddying or bean picking for money, a lot of us kids like to climb out on the roof of our building just to "hang out." We called it going "up on the roof." One hot day in the summer of 1946 there were a bunch of us doing just that. One difference this time was that before we went up there, a few of us "visited" the Nun's refectory (kitchen?) and "borrowed" (okay, "stole") a few watermelons. Stupidly, we started tossing the watermelon rinds off the roof, almost in a contest to see who could toss them the furthest. Unfortunately, at least one of the tossed rinds hit a Nun passing below who, upon looking up, recognized a couple of us, even mentioning several of our names, including mine.

Then she uttered these chilling words, "You will see Coach Faulk for this," or words to that effect. We knew what "seeing Coach Faulk" meant only too well as each of us had on occasion "met" Coach Faulk in the "locker room" previously and knew what was (deservedly) in store for us. Again. That is, unless we did something about it.

HOUSE'S KIDS: "UP ON THE ROOF"



L: DeSantis, Jerry Merna and McAvinue



R: Top: Bro. of Hugh McAvinue's brother, Angelo, Frank Boyle & Jim Merna



L: Jerry Merna



Top: Tom Quinn, Hugh McAvinue
Bot: Henry Kononchuk, Walter Rooney

Coach James (Jim) Faulk was both our pre- and post- World War II Athletic Director at St. Agnes, reverently and affectionately always referred to simply as “Coach.” When WWII began he took leave of St. Agnes to join the Marines and came back from the war as a Marine Major after serving in artillery units in the Pacific theater. (He later retired from the Reserves as a Colonel). This time he was tougher and smarter, and even more dedicated to his “boys.” He is a living legend to an overwhelming majority (if not almost all) Alumni. A recent tribute to him can be seen here:

<http://stagnesalumni.org/pdfs/A%20TRIBUTE%20TO%20COACH%20JIM%20FAULK-V4Pictorial.pdf>



Summer 1945, Coach James Faulk with St. Agnes Alumni now in the military services:
L. to R.: Frank Sutter, U. S. Merchant Marine; Matthew McSherry, U. S. Navy; Coach Faulk, U. S. Marine Corps; Bob Millsbaugh, U. S. Army; Wellington, U. S. Navy

(Photo courtesy of Bob Millsbaugh)



Not wanting to face Coach’s “disappointment” with us yet another time, we decided to “leave” St. Agnes. Since this occurred over some 67 years ago, all the “details” are not fresh in my mind, but I believe we were all age 16 at the time and that it was Mac, Hennessy and myself (not absolutely sure if it was Hennessy or Murphy that was the third person that accompanied Mac—just know there were only three of us) that “hit the road” so to speak, or as the military refers to it, went *AWOL*—*Absent Without Leave* (civilian term for *ran away*).

Leaving the Convent grounds was perfectly normal in those days so we would not have been missed until late in the evening. We hitchhiked rides and walked a good portion of the way on Highway 9W to New York City, (about 25 miles) and “split” when we got to the George Washington Bridge, going our separate ways. To this day I have no idea what the other two did or where they went. But they got caught, and fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, I was not. I knew the last place I should go was to one of my then living two Grandmother’s apartments, one on the East Side and the other the West Side of NYC. Providentially, I had an alternative, but that also turned out to have unwanted results.

The previous year at age 15 I had been taken by ambulance to Bellevue Hospital in New York City following a serious physical accident I had on the playgrounds at St. Agnes. My hospital roommate was an adult Hispanic male (name not recalled) and appeared quite religious (he gave me rosary beads among other things) and we had become quite friendly. After I was discharged and returned to St. Agnes he gave me his name and address and we wrote to each other once or twice. So that’s where I headed.

My hospital roommate worked for a small Manhattan restaurant as a cook and also opened the place each day. Quite surprised to see me showing up at his door he nonetheless unhesitatingly offered me the chance to stay with him even though I was a “runaway.” Looking back at that now I can see where he could have had a lot of police trouble over that if he got “caught” harboring a runaway from a Catholic Home. It later turned out that would have been the least of his problems for reasons I won’t go into here).

While that worked out okay for a very short time I nonetheless had to leave that environment somehow. Unbelievably, considering I was 16, looked 12, was a runaway, broke, etc., I applied for and got a job at Ludwig Bauman (LB) Department Store, close to Macy’s as I recall, and doubling up on the “unbelievability” was then able to convince a Landlord to rent me a one-bedroom apartment with a bath in the hall.

While struggling with these arrangements, having my Dad move in and out of my place, one or two Brothers running away and *visiting* me, and working for LB’s, I desperately tried to join the Marines. And with a neatly forged baptismal certificate from St. Luke’s Parish, in the fall of 1946 I almost made it except for an unbelieving Marine Corps Recruiter who called the Parish and discovered my “alteration.” So I had to wait until I was 17 in April 1947 to legitimately become a U.S. Marine. But that’s another whole story in itself.

I would only see Murphy and McAvinue once again briefly while we were in the Corps, but never saw Frank Hennessy again, and unfortunately learned of his death as well several years later.

So it is my hope that this Remembrance of Hugh J. “Mac” McAvinue and Kay, and the pictures of them, and his fellow St. Agnes Alumni and Marines who knew, grew up, and served with him, will sustain their memories for some time to come.

“Semper Fidelis, Mac”

Rest in Peace, Kay

Your Friend and Fellow Marine,

Gerald F. (Jerry) Merna
Mustang, Retired