

STAN JONES

The Atomic
Veteran



“This is no ordinary time,” Eleanor Roosevelt said as Europe was being engulfed by war. Stanley Gale Jones, a true survivor, has lived no ordinary life. In 1943, when he was a 17-year-old drifter in his own village, Jones resolved to fight for his country and himself. He had wandered across the Tulalip Reservation for years, sleeping in one impoverished household after the other. Family had come and gone with each new roof; poverty had followed him like a faithful companion. Wearing government-surplus clothing and second-hand shoes lined with cardboard, he’d sifted worms from flour at the government commissary and gone hungry staring into barren cupboards. The Indian village still lacked running water and electricity, so he’d caught rainwater off the roof and used kerosene lamps. The reservation was only 30 miles north of Seattle, yet it seemed suspended in the 19th century.

When the surprise assault on Pearl Harbor propelled waves of new recruits into the military, the Indian teenager eventually felt a blend of hope and patriotism. Maybe he’d escape poverty and defend his country as a U.S. Marine.

Seventy years have passed since Jones and 44,000 other Native Americans risked their lives for democracy. The passage of time is etched in Jones’ face. But he remains full of spirit—as proud of his military tour of duty as he is of his Indian blood. The veteran of the South Pacific can recite more Japanese than Lushootseed, the original language of the Salish tribes. His thick black hair is often tucked inside his Marine cap.

The war left emotional and physical scars. Frightening noises that pierced the humid darkness of the South Pacific stirred nightmares for years. Jones still sleeps with a knife and pistol. Occasionally, the memories rouse him from a deep slumber. “Everything comes back to me at night,” Jones says. “I hear something and listen for the jungle noises. Then I wake up and realize I am at home.”

Nagasaki, a city one eyewitness recounted frizzling like a baked apple after the atomic blast in 1945, rarely leaves Jones' mind. He saw something familiar in the dazed expressions of those orphans—the children mourning the abrupt loss of their parents and scavenging trash for scraps. The Japanese word for the A-bomb survivors is *Hibakusha*. For Jones, the kids' faces are indelible.

Jones couldn't believe what he found when he and 27,000 American troops occupied the devastated industrial city.

They were there to defuse what was left of the Japanese war machine. A secret super bomb with unforgiving might had produced a massive fireball and black rain. In some cases, only the soot-like shadows of the victims remained. "We'd be walking around doing guard duty all through the area where the bomb was dropped," Jones remembers. "Then finally we heard, 'Get off the area! Get off the area!' We didn't understand why." Later he did. "The radiation from the atomic bomb eats your legs up. It's eaten my leg up." Jones lifts a pant leg to reveal an old battle scar. The skin is red, rippled with grafts, perpetually swollen. "It's still active," he says, referring to only one injury among a myriad of health problems he attributes to radiation exposure.

Jones first noticed the sore on his left leg after the war. While doctors diagnosed the wound as an amyloid tumor—hard masses or nodules beneath the skin—they never identified its cause. Jones filed a claim with the Department of Veter-



Jones' tour of duty took him from the jungles of Saipan to postwar Japan where he patrolled the ruins of Nagasaki in the aftermath of the bomb. *Stan Jones collection*

ans Affairs. "I have had one large tumor removed and replaced with a muscle off my back," he wrote in his letter to the Board of Veterans' Appeals. "I am now three-quarters blind in one eye, hearing loss in both ears, and have tumors on my legs that will not heal. I do believe the tumors are attributed to the atomic radiation exposure." The board rejected Jones' claim in 2005. "I was pretty angry right off the bat," Jones concedes. "Why don't I get something for that? I was angry for a while. I might have broken some windows." His voice trails off. Jones remains disappointed, but at peace with the decision.

The Tulalip Indian moves his lean frame back in his easy chair in his home on the reservation, which has undergone something of a renaissance, thanks to a first-rate casino and discount shopping mall. He tosses a bone for his golden lab, Champ. All around are photos documenting a rare life remade by war.

STANLEY GALE JONES, "SCHO-HALLEM," was born on July 10, 1926, a descendant of the Snohomish, Snoqualmie, Squaxin, Skykomish, Clallam and Stoc-welee-jub tribes. He grew up as a timid child of the Depression. There was poverty, bullying and worse. His mother, Juanita Giddings Jones, a Klamath Indian from Monroe, died from a gall bladder infection in 1930. Stan was only 3. His father moved the children from Monroe to the Tulalip Indian Reservation to be near family. Jones spent the rest of his childhood missing the mother he barely knew.

His father remarried and fathered 14 additional children. Jones felt like a kind of misfit. He traveled from relative to rela-



Jones' parents, Juanita and George Jones. *Stan Jones collection*



George Jones Sr., a Tulalip tribal member, appears in full regalia in 1914, marking the opening of a longhouse.

Stan Jones collection

Native Americans into white culture threatened Jones' Indian identity. The Tulalip Indian School closed down in the 1930s, and Jones' presence in the Marysville public schools was unsettling to whites who didn't know what to make of a Native American.

When Jones was 9, he was taken to Cushman Indian Hospital in Tacoma. The tuberculosis sanitarium treated Native Americans in the West. "When the invaders came from the north, they gave us the gift of TB, tuberculosis," Jones says sardonically. "So many Indian people had TB and they were dying." After all he'd been through, Jones was lucky to be healthy. But his older brother, Norman, was gravely ill with TB, a disease that wreaks havoc

tive on the reservation, constantly in fear of wearing out his welcome. "It was rough losing his mother at a young age like that," says JoAnn, Jones' longtime wife. "Then not knowing where he belonged afterward—[and moving] from pillar to post. Every time we'd go to a funeral, he'd get up and say, 'Well, I used to live with them.'"

Too proud to accept welfare, the senior Jones—a hardworking logger, fisherman and carpenter—took whatever jobs came his way.

Efforts to assimilate



Decades before he would become a global ambassador for the Tulalip Tribes, Jones bounced from house to house on the Indian reservation. *Stan Jones collection*

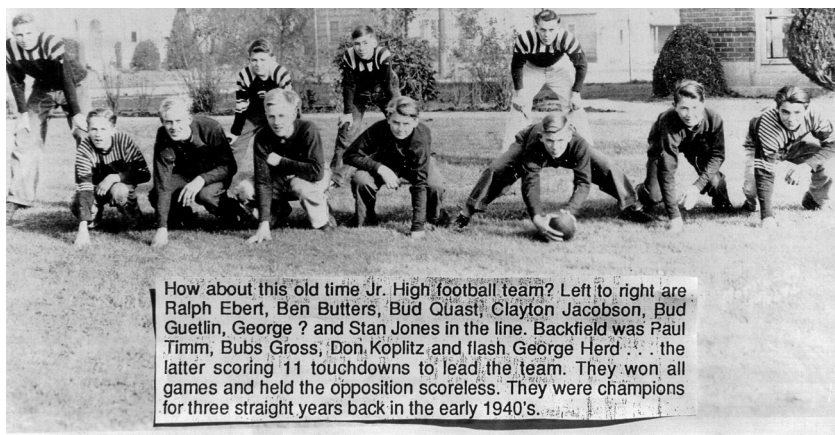


Jones spent three difficult years in Tacoma at Cushman Indian Hospital, which included a tuberculosis sanitarium. *Tacoma Public Library*

on the body when bacteria are inhaled into the lungs.

The compound at Cushman doubled as a school because so many children were in the hospital's care. Jones says assimilation into white culture carried on there too. For speaking Lushootseed, he once had his mouth washed out with lye soap. His tongue cracked and bled. The punishments came often. During another episode, Stan was confined to a closet and overheard two nurses praying for a boy who'd just died. It was Norman, who was only 14. Stan wailed, but the nurses never heard. Norman's funeral brought Jones' only departure from Cushman Indian Hospital in three years.

A couple of years later, Bill Steve, a night watchman, returned the 12-year-old to the Tulalip Reservation. He'd been sent home for splashing water on another student. After several stops at households, Jones was finally heartily welcomed by an



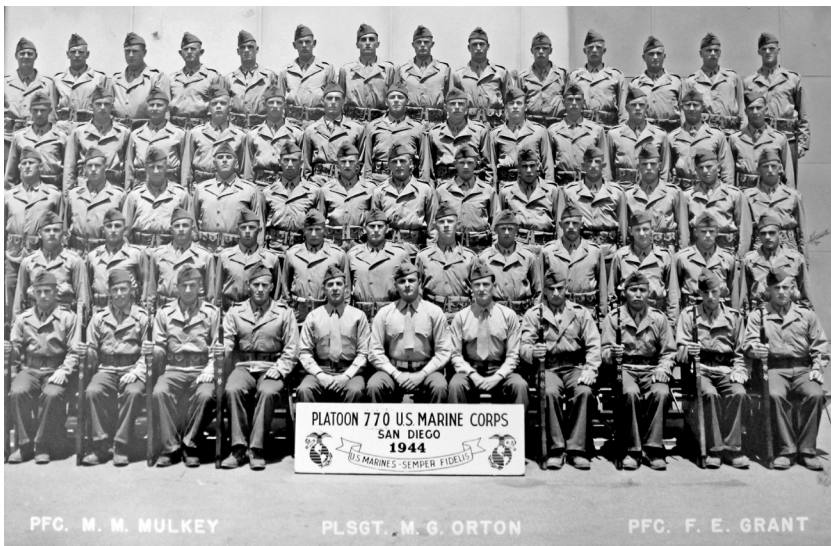
Stan Jones collection

uncle. He spent his time hunting, fishing, swimming and playing sports. After the eighth grade, however, Jones quit school to work in the logging camps.

The attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the date “which will live in infamy,” persuaded Jones to fight for his country. At 17, he lied about his age and joined the United States Marine Corps. He went active duty a year later.

He’d hoped to become a paratrooper, but the Marine Corps assigned him to a tank battalion because of his experience driving a caterpillar tractor at logging camps. In 1944, the recruit was at boot camp in San Diego, running until he couldn’t take another step and tossing hand grenades until his arms went numb. “Your arms would be so sore,” Jones remembers. “There was lots of hand-to-hand bayonet training—full packs and rifles—jumping 40 feet off a ship into the water. We trained day after day. It was really kind of a beating. It was good teaching, though.”

Driving a Sherman tank was like driving a bulldozer for Jones. “I remember to this day how it works—setting the box, turning the dial until the gun quivers, then down a little while you’re running over big bumps, the gun will hold the target and you shoot. We were in twin Chrysler Sherman tanks



The United States Marine Corps gave Jones a strong work ethic and self discipline, strengths he carried with him the rest of his life. *Stan Jones collection*

with smoke launchers and Thompson machine guns with a gyro-stabilizer.”

Jones soon found himself aboard a troop ship with 2,000 Marines, zigzagging across the sea.

DUBBED “JAPAN’S PEARL HARBOR,” D-Day in the Pacific fell on June 15, 1944, among valleys of head-high sugarcane, deep swamps and jagged peaks. Saipan, one of 15 islands in the 400-mile Marianas chain, promised strategic airfields that would place B-29 bombers within striking distance of mainland Japan. Thousands of men stormed the beaches; guns fired from armored amphibian tractors and rockets launched from gunboats. The shells rained down with pinpoint accuracy, one Marine coming ashore recalled. “All around us was the chaotic debris of bitter combat: Jap and Marine bodies lying in mangled and grotesque positions; blasted and burnt-out pillboxes; the burning wrecks of LVTs that had been knocked out by Jap high-velocity fire; the acrid smell of high explosives; the shattered trees, and the churned-up sand littered with discarded equipment. Then the shells really began to pour down on us: ahead, behind, on both sides, and right in our midst. They would come rocketing down with a freight-train roar and then explode with a deafening cataclysm that is beyond description.”

Troops established a beachhead and moved inland. In the jungles, Jones drove *Aloha*, his Sherman tank, and hunted for Japanese stragglers. “It reminded me of hunting deer back home,” he says. “We had to walk silently—tiptoeing through the jungle and trying to catch them. Usually we would go in three-man patrols, but sometimes it was just the two of us.”

“Every day was scary. A lot of the time, we were in tanks. But some of the time we were on foot searching for Japanese soldiers in caves. We got to be an expert in searching the caves and the jungle at Saipan. We never thought we were coming back. We were willing to give up our lives.”

When the afternoon light faded, Jones patrolled the jungle to guard the ammunition tent or attempted sleep with a knife and pistol under his pillow. “Was I scared? Yes. [The jungle was literally alive] with noises, such as birds and other animals moving, and you never knew who or what was out

there. The enemy is all through the area. You'd hear a noise and it would get you alert. Sometimes, you'd have to shoot around the area to find out what it was. Then you'll see somebody else there. They'd come out. But if it was the enemy they'd take off. "I was the only one that had to do guard duty alone. I know they were prejudiced against me because I'm Native American, and my papers said 'Indian.' So, I had my own big tent. There were bunks in that tent, but you wouldn't sleep in the bunk. You'd put something in the bunk that looks like somebody was there, then you'd sleep back on the ground and have your submachine gun and listen for the noise."

Savage fighting erupted around Mount Tapotchau. Eventually, the Japanese were trapped in the northern part of the island. In a final suicidal "banzai" charge, the largest of the war, 3,000 Japanese troops perished. The battle also killed more than 3,000 American troops, but the Japanese fared worse. Of 30,000 troops, only 1,000 survived when the island was secured on July 9. Japanese civilian deaths, the result of mass suicides, were deemed heroic by the Japanese government. General Saito, who died after the battle by ritual suicide, had labeled the Japanese civilians martyrs: "There is no longer any distinction between civilians and troops. It would be better for them to join in the attack with bamboo spears than be captured."



The 2nd Marine Division with a captured Japanese tank in Saipan, 1944. The battle for Saipan in World War II was dubbed "Japan's Pearl Harbor." *U.S. Marine Corps*

In the summer of 1945, as Jones was preparing to invade Japan, he heard the big news: an atomic bomb had detonated over a tennis court in Nagasaki—the second blow to the country in three days. “When they told us Japan had surrendered, and two atomic bombs leveled two cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we felt relief. We were going to make it back home. I felt elated.”

Some of the Japanese were unaware that the war had ended and hid in caves. “When another Marine and I were doing guard duty at night, we were by a river and my partner lit a match for his cigarette,” Jones remembers. “Shots rang out across the water, bouncing next to us. We learned our lesson. I never smoked and if he lit up I stood far away from him.”

THE B-29 SUPERFORTRESS *BOCKSCAR* flew over Nagasaki, its second target, on August 9, 1945. At 11:02 a.m., it let loose a massive hurricane of melted glass, fire and debris. The nuclear blast pulverized buildings, incinerated people and reduced nearly three square miles to ashes. An estimated 76,000 people were killed or injured.

More powerful than *Little Boy*, the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, *Fat Man* was filled with plutonium-239. The to-



The plutonium-filled weapon known as “Fat Man” detonated over Nagasaki at 11:02 a.m. on August 9, 1945, killing an estimated 60,000 people. This picture of Ground Zero captures the aftermath of the blast. *Joe O’Donnell*

pography of Nagasaki lessened its impact, but the horrors were unimaginable just the same.

When the 2nd Marine Division arrived at the industrial center in September, the port city was in rubble. Roughly 70 percent of Nagasaki had been destroyed. Streets were filled with remains of the dead; the dazed wounded walked the rubble in shredded clothing. City hospitals, a skeleton of what they once were, offered no place to die with dignity. Thirty-two first aid stations and 18 of the city hospitals were destroyed in the nuclear blast. Ninety percent of the doctors in Nagasaki were injured or killed. In one of the few remaining hospitals, eight physicians and eight nurses treated more than 10,000 patients. “The people there were no longer the enemy, they were people in need of help, desperate, starving, suffering and dying,” Jones says. “It was like a living hell. We could see the Mitsubishi factory, which was one of the targets. All the steel frames were bent in one direction, with all metal coverings blown away. I saw older people and children with scarred faces and pieces of hair hanging on their heads. Many of the people that I talked to probably died within a year or two.”



Jones arrived in Nagasaki in September 1945. “The people there were no longer the enemy. They were people in need of help—desperate, starving, suffering and dying.”
Joe O’Donnell

Fearful Japanese fled to the hills amid rumors they would be brutalized or killed. “The men were mainly hiding out in the woods. They were really afraid. So, we more or less came in and took over the area. I always said, [speaking in Japanese] ‘I’m Mr. Jones. I’m from the 2nd Marine Division. Don’t be afraid. You will not be hurt. Surrender.’”

The atomic bomb orphans—their lives forever changed—wandered the rubble in uncounted

numbers. Burned and disfigured, they scavenged trash cans for food and slept in the open.

Jones was so haunted by the young survivors that he began delivering his rations to them with any leftovers he could smuggle from the officers' quarters as a military cook. "We'd see a lot of food, dump it into our big sack and go visit the areas. We would give them food like that because they didn't have any. And they were happy. We made a lot of friends."

Yet hostility remained in postwar Nagasaki. One day as Jones returned to the barracks, Japanese civilians clubbed him. The assault left the young Marine with a broken upper jawbone and partial hearing loss in one ear.

After nine months, Jones' tour of duty came to an end. It was the summer of 1946. Jones boarded the troop ship holding a bouquet of flowers, a gift from the Japanese people.

STANLEY JONES RETURNED FROM THE WAR wiser and matured. He'd lost part of his youth, but developed a work ethic that would serve him well the rest of his life. Jones wore his Marine dress blues when he arrived in Marysville by train. He was unsure where to go. Eventually, Jones settled on his father's house and knocked on the front door. "Stanley!" his stepmother cried.

In 1948, JoAnn Barrie, 15, a student at Seattle's Cleveland High School, "hand-picked" Stan after admiring his picture in a friend's wallet. Their 65-year union has produced four children, and a bevy of grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren. Humor is always present in the household.

Jones is perhaps best known for his indelible mark on Indian Country. Prompted by Harriette Shelton Dover, the second woman to



JoAnn and Stan at their wedding in 1950. The bride turned 17 the day after the ceremony. *Stan Jones collection*



Jones, longest-serving board member of the Tulalip Tribes, poses with the late Billy Frank Jr., chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, and Glen Gobin, vice chairman of the Tulalip Tribes. *Stan Jones collection*

serve on the Tulalip board of directors, Jones ran for a position in 1966. Over the course of 44 years, he made history as the longest-serving board member. He spent 26 of those years as a chairman known for his disarming and persuasive leadership style. He became a global ambassador for the Tulalip Tribes, a visionary behind the lucrative Quil Ceda Village retail center in Marysville, a preservationist of Native culture, a crucial activist in the fight for Indian fishing rights and a friend of some of the most notable leaders of our time. He's met Bill Gates, Donald Trump and U.S. presidents. Framed photos of Jones with Jesse Jackson and Bill Clinton hang on the walls of his Tulalip home.



And in the summer of 2015, the proud U.S. Marine prepares to pose for another photograph. He flashes a smile and slips on one

Known for his disarming leadership style, Jones has met some of the most prominent leaders in American politics. The Tulalip notes that he once sat in President Clinton's chair at the White House and felt at ease. *Stan Jones collection*



Jones remains as proud of his tour of duty as he is his Indian heritage. Above, the tribal leader holds a paddle, quipping that it resembled one used by tribal canoeists in the “very first navy” at Everett. *Mate 2nd Class Eli J. Medellin/U.S. Navy*

of his most treasured possessions—a black leather vest with the words *Atomic Veteran* stitched in yellow.

Trova Heffernan

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