



Office of Veteran Success "Success Beyond Service"

An Old Soldier Definitely *Not* Fading Away

Unlike the Famous Saying, World War II Combat Infantryman Dr. Harold Berkman Is Still Making a Big Difference to Many, Including USF Student-Veterans

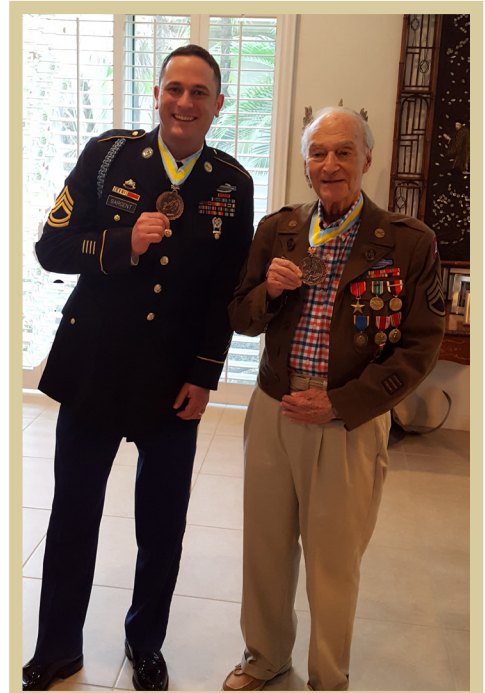
By Dave Scheiber, USF Foundation



More than 70 years later, the stories pour forth rich in detail and dramatic tension – sprinkled with a down-to-earth New York delivery and some well-placed humor. When Dr. Harold Berkman recounts moments from his World War II past, he speaks with an energy and command belying his 92 years. And there is plenty to talk about for a highly decorated former combat infantryman, who served under legendary U.S. Army General George Patton and fought in the brutal Battle of the Bulge, the war's historic turning point in defeating the Nazis.

One tale, in particular, reflects the razor-thin line between life and death that Berkman and his fellow soldiers walked every day as mere teens and young men – carrying the future of the free world on their shoulders. He and several others had used a pontoon boat to surreptitiously cross a river at night in German Army-held territory, then taking refuge in an abandoned barn. But one of the older infantrymen had injured his ankle badly, and the squad leader told Berkman and another soldier to carry the man back to the river and put him on a boat to safety.

"So we did that, picked him up and took him back – and then we walked back to the barn," Berkman says. "The next morning, we woke up and looked outside. And there was a big sign that read, 'Mining, Achtung!' We had walked through a mine field three times – once to get to the barn, once to carry the poor guy back to the river, and then once to get back to the barn. Is that lucky?"



Harold Berkman in World War II – and with USF "Berkman Scholarship" recipient Jeff Sargent, still fitting into his combat jacket seven-plus decades after serving.

That type of good fortune followed Berkman throughout the war with the 80th Infantry Division, with which he earned such honors as the elite Combat Infantryman's Badge, the European Theater of Operations Medal, with bronze stars for the Battle of the Bulge (Ardennes), Rhineland and Central Europe; the Bronze Star Medal for meritorious achievement in ground combat; the Presidential Unit Citation; the Army of Occupation Medal; and a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur or Knight of the Kingdom, awarded by the President of the Republic of France.

And in the decades that have ensued, following a stellar career in business and higher education, Berkman – along with his wife of 68 years, Muriel – has made a point of sharing the good fortune with others through the Harold and Muriel Berkman Charitable Foundation, Inc. The foundation awards nearly 60 \$1,000 scholarships a year at an array of universities and colleges across the United States, as well as funding research grants to marketing faculty members.

More than 80 U.S. veterans have earned those scholarships, and that list of recipients now includes the University of South Florida and its Office of Veteran Success. Thanks to the Berkman Scholarship, four USF student veterans received awards during the 2017-18 academic year – mirroring the couple's longstanding commitment to higher education, as well as Berkman's deep connection to those who have served their country.

“Dr. Berkman is the epitome of what Tom Brokaw called The Greatest Generation,” says Dr. Larry Braue, director of USF's Office of Veteran Success, ranked No. 1 in the nation by *Military Times* magazine the past two years. “When I joined the Army, like my father, Dr. Berkman was the kind of man we always looked up to. And now he's giving back. He's extending a helping hand into this generation of the armed forces, supporting our 21st Century Veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. He's helping them become successful with their education, and making a powerful impact on lives today.”



Harold and Muriel Berkman today



Dr. Karen Berkman

The Berkmans take extra pleasure making their mark at USF. Their daughter, Dr. Karen Berkman, serves as the university's Executive Director of the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) and director of the Learning Academy, which assists young adults diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in determining a career path as well as finding employment after high school. “Obviously, my being here has brought USF to my parents' attention, but so has everything Larry has done to showcase the qualities of the students here in a way that many deans or chairs at other universities don't do,” she says.

Giving back has actually become a family affair for the Berkman clan. In addition to her parents' generosity in creating scholarships, Karen Berkman has created the first USF endowed LGBT Student Scholarship (and the first at any state university in Florida) and worked with community businesses to develop the USF LGBT student mentoring program. “I think this is a family commitment to scholarship and supporting students – paying it forward for others who might not have that support.”

In the case of her father, it all goes back to that good fortune, which he continued to enjoy following the war – starting with tying the knot with the girl of his dreams back in the States. After completing his service with the 571st Anti-aircraft Artillery, rising to staff sergeant, Berkman hurried home to marry Muriel, often telling the story like this: “If I didn't get home, she would have been lying on the beach with somebody and it wouldn't have been with me.”



Muriel Berkman at home in New York circa 1945 near the end of the war – the young woman Harold Berkman couldn't wait to return home to see again – and marry.

Berkman went on to open Valencia Liquor in Jamaica, N.Y., growing into a prospering chain of stores in New York City, Connecticut and northern New Jersey. But he was drawn to education and enrolled at renowned St. John's University, where he earned both a master's degree and PhD in business. Soon, Berkman was teaching business and sociology at C.W. Post College on Long Island. It was the start of distinguished career in academia, leading to a new position at the University of Miami as vice dean of the MBA program. He also authored or co-authored 18 textbooks and many scholarly articles about marketing research. And he founded and served as vice president and director of the Academy of Marketing Science (AMS), in addition to creating the Journal of Academy of Marketing Science.

"He's a very determined person and when he sets his mind to something, it will happen," Karen Berkman says. "When I was in high school, he went back to graduate school and got his M.A. and PhD. And he'll always go full force after what he believes is right."

Berkman didn't retire until age 81, and it was about that time that he began reflecting more about his war experiences. "I don't remember him talking much about it while I was growing up, because he was mostly focused on work," Karen Berkman recollects. "And he kept working until late in life, because that's who he was. I think my mother was concerned about what he would do after retiring – would he just stare out the window all day? But that's when he got really focused on his new identity, which became all about being a veteran."

Specifically, it entwined his service as a World War II combat infantryman. He joined the Battle of the Bulge Association, dedicated to perpetuating the memory of the sacrifices so many made, and promoting friendship among survivors and descendants. He's made many new friends, indeed, and added a custom license plate commemorating the battle that raged from Dec. 16, 1944 until Jan. 25, 1945. The pivotal event was launched by German forces as a sneak attack in the heavy forests of Ardennes region of eastern Belgium, northeast France and Luxembourg. American units incurred heavy casualties, as did the Allies, but Patton managed to guide his Third Army to the defense of the Allies, effectively neutralizing the Nazi's last ditch offensive of the war.

Today, Berkman proudly displays his many medals in a framed case, all meticulously labeled. And he has endless

stories from his years in uniform, like this one, taped by his daughter on a recent visit. “The Germans were shooting artillery shells called 88s – very good guns, better than ours. And they were shooting up flares. In training they tell you, when a flare goes up, stand absolutely still. I see all the veterans were hitting the ground. And I’m standing up, because it’s wet and muddy – and my mother told me, ‘Don’t get dirty!’ So I didn’t hit the ground. But later on, I hit the ground just as fast as anybody else!”



Trim and in shape, Berkman still fits in his Army dress uniform. In fact, not long ago, Braue and some of his Office of Veteran Success staff members drove from Tampa to the Miami area to pay Harold and Muriel a visit. One of the Berkman scholarship winners, former Sgt. First Class Jeff Sargent – a Bronze Star Medal recipient from the Iraq War and a 2016 USF Tillman Scholar – also made the trip. And during lunch at a club restaurant, Sargent excused himself to go to the bathroom. He came back wearing his full dress uniform, and the group presented Berkman with the prestigious yet little-known Order of Saint Maurice medallion, a special award for infantrymen who have served with distinction.

“I knew it was a medal he didn’t have, and I just felt it was the best way to express my gratitude,” Sargent says. To do so, he painstakingly researched the process for bestowing the medal on a veteran and submitted all the needed history and details to the National Infantry Association. A month later, the medal recognizing Berkman’s service was issued – and Berkman would soon be wearing it. “They made him stand at attention,” Karen Berkman says. “And with everybody at the club watching, they presented the award. It was such a surprise.”

Sargent was thrilled to hang the Saint Maurice around Berkman’s neck. “We were both infantry, so there was instant camaraderie,” he explains. “To receive a scholarship from someone of his character and background is a huge honor. Learning more about him – and getting to know him – has been the best part of the scholarship.”

A new class of Berkman Scholars has been selected, recently meeting with USF System President Judy Genshaft and Karen Berkman (pictured at right). Her parents have become an important and much loved part of the Office of Veteran Success family.

“Dr. Berkman’s story really resonates with us,” Braue says, “because we want our veterans to follow his lead – to leave the military, get their education and then make a difference by giving back and helping others.”

The aging veteran, who long ago walked unknowingly through a field of Nazi landmines in the darkness, is just glad to have the good fortune to do so.



For more information about the Berkman Scholarship or how to support the USF Office of Veteran Success, please contact Director Larry Braue at (813) 974-9935 or by email at lbraue@usf.edu