

Collection shows us 'The Greatest Generation'

By ANGELA D. SYKORA
asykora@pioneerlocal.com

While clearing out her parents' Cicero home after they passed away, Grayslake resident Barbara Vann made a sentimental and valuable discovery — a cedar chest and closets containing a pristine and substantial collection of Army-issued memorabilia from her father Charles Vann's service during World War II.

"It took me three years to clear out their house by myself," she said. "I kept finding more and more things."

As the last living member of her immediate family, Vann couldn't imagine throwing the items away or keeping them in storage any longer. She wanted to share them.

Having been a fan of public television since she was a child, Vann found herself watching a program on WYCC-TV Channel 20 produced by the Pritzker Military Library, which opened in Chicago in 2003. She decided to give them a call and inquire if they would be interested in having her father's collection. They were.

"This collection, which illustrates the life of a young Army Air Corps officer during World War II, will help the library teach future generations about World War II, its Pacific Theater, and what it means to be a good citizen," said Teri Embrey, senior librarian at the Pritzker Military Library.

The non-profit library, which also serves as a research institution, features a collection of books and films on subjects covering the full spectrum of American military history, along with military-themed posters, photographs, medals, uniforms and other artifacts from private donors and the collection of the Library's founder, COL (IL) James N. Pritzker, ARNG (Ret.).

The Charles William Vann Collection, now on display at the library, includes three



Grayslake resident Barbara Vann donated items from her late father Charles Vann's WWII service to the Pritzker Military Library in Chicago. The collection is now on display for library visitors and researchers. Pictured here are Charles Vann's Altitude and True Airspeed Computer; pocket watch; dogtags; Distinguished Flying Cross in Box; Bombardier Wings; Army Air Force Shoulder Sleeve Insignia Patch; and a handmade leather patch. (Submitted photo)

"It took me three years to clear out their house by myself. I kept finding more and more things."

Barbara Vann

boxes of Vann's personal papers, a scrapbook, newspaper clippings, medals, Bombardier wings, an Altitude and Airspeed Calculator, an aviator's kit bag, a leather flight jacket, and an Army dress jacket.

"It's really cool, one of the best (collections) we've had in a while," said Mark Hei-

den, the library's external relations coordinator. Heiden said the library would love for more people to consider donating historical items, as they can be great teaching tools for future generations.

"We find value in a lot of stuff that people don't realize is valuable."

GREATEST GENERATION

Vann said pouring over her father's World War II memorabilia helped her learn more about the man he was and his contribution to his country and his family.

"My dad didn't talk about his service in the war," said Vann, "but I always knew about it and would look at his picture books."

Charles Vann was born Charles William Vyhnanek II, but he shortened his surname for easier spelling and pronunciation.

He grew up in the Chicago area and enlisted in the Army in 1942. At the time, said his daughter, he was hauling luggage as a "red cap" station master at Union Station in Chicago.

In the Army, Vann earned the Distinguished Flying Cross for his service in the Pacific Theater. During the war he also met his wife, Florence, who passed away in 1998.

After the war, Vann worked in the lawn and garden business and was very active with the Boy Scouts and service organizations. He died in 1997 at age 81.

Barbara Vann said she wished she would have asked her father more questions growing up.

"I realized my father was part of this greatest generation."

The Pritzker Military Library is located at 10 N. Fairbanks Ct., in Chicago's Streeterville neighborhood. Admission is free and open to the public 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. The library also has extensive online resources available at www.pritzkermilitarylibrary.org.

Comment: pioneerlocal.com