

“If you’re a survivor, you have an obligation to tell what happened.”

— World War II Veteran Chuck Tatum, who served with B Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Marines



War from the inside

Stockton man’s experience on Iwo Jima part of HBO’s miniseries ‘The Pacific’

By Lori Gilbert
Record Staff Writer

In 40 years of married life, Evelyn Tatum complained to her husband, “You never told me anything about Iwo Jima.”

Like a lot of World War II veterans, Chuck Tatum didn’t talk to anyone about his experiences.

“How could you tell anyone what happened that wasn’t there?” asked Tatum, who served with B Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Marines. “They’d think you were lying if you told them half of the truth.”

The Stockton native finally shared his remembrances in his 1995 self-published book, “Red Blood, Black Sand.”

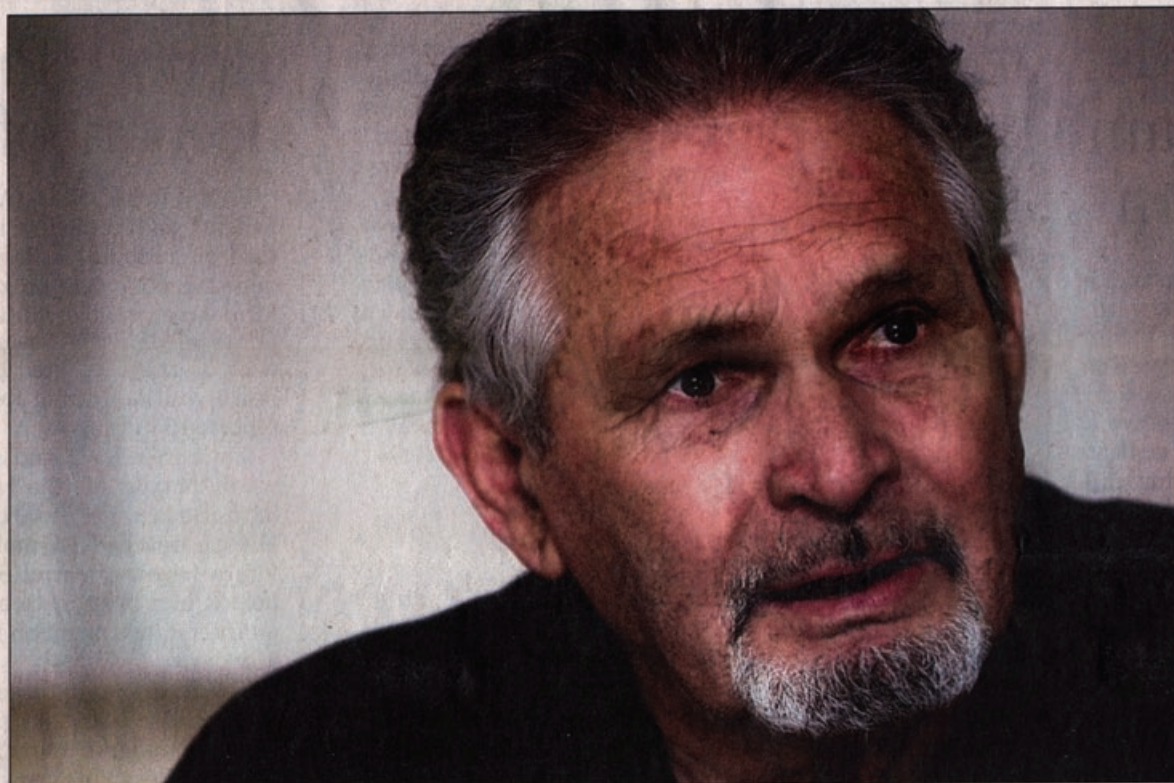
About 10,000 copies have been printed, but Tatum’s story will gain a much larger audience when Home Box Office debuts “The Pacific,” a miniseries about the United States’ World War II campaign against Japan, beginning tonight.

Material from Tatum’s book is used to tell the story of the battle for Iwo Jima, the eighth episode in the 10-part miniseries that follows the campaign across the Pacific through the true life stories of Marines John Basilone, Eugene Sledge and Robert Leckie.

“Chuck’s book is really an important historical document,” said Bruce McKenna, co-executive producer and head writer of the series, who spent hours interviewing Tatum and obtaining the rights to his book. “His recollections, his memory is so sharp about the minutia of being a Marine. He was helpful in getting a handle on what it was like to be a Marine.”

Tatum’s personal account of the war is rich in detail, raw in

SEE WAR, PAGE A6



CLIFFORD OTO/The Record

Chuck Tatum, 82, wrote about his time on Iwo Jima in his 1995 book “Red Blood, Black Sand.”



HBO

Actor Ben Esler, right, portrays Chuck Tatum in HBO’s “The Pacific.”

2 of 5 city manager candidates identified

Stockton Council plans on more interviews next week

By David Siders, Daniel Thigpen and Kevin Parrish
Record Staff Writers

STOCKTON — A former Fresno city manager and the manager of National City were two finalists for Stockton city manager interviewed by the City Council on Saturday at a secretive meeting in which the city locked the building where the meeting occurred, restricted access to the adjacent parking garage and shuttled candidates to interviews from outside places where they parked.

A third candidate shielded his face as he was driven away in a BMW.

The council is likely Tuesday to interview two more finalists. The five finalists all are men. They are from out of state, said Eric Middleton of Alliance Resource Consulting LLC, the company conducting the recruitment for the city.

Alliance and city officials have declined to identify the candidates, and the measures taken Saturday were to protect their identities.

Mayor Ann Johnston and council members began arriving about 8:20 a.m. at downtown Stewart/Eberhardt Essential Services Building where they had been given pass cards to enter the parking garage. The council convened at 9 a.m. and about 10 minutes later Debbie Shipp, a supervising human resources analyst, drove out of the parking garage, past City Hall, and to the Lexington Plaza Waterfront Hotel, where she collected Chris Zapata, the city manager of National City.

He identified himself but otherwise declined to comment.

SEE CANDIDATES, PAGE

Tough economy sparks rise in insurance fraud

By Tony Pugh
McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — The sour economy is producing a bumper crop of cash-strapped consumers, business owners and shady agents who are fueling a wave of insurance fraud that’s keeping regulators and law enforcement officials busy from coast to coast.

Whether it’s worthless health plans peddled over fax, staged auto accidents, arson or slip-and-fall accidents at the local mall, insurance fraud of all kinds is booming in the recession and consumers are paying the price in higher premiums.

To keep it in perspective, roughly 48 million insurance claims are made each year in the United States and less than one-quarter of 1 percent are referred to the nonprofit National Insurance Crime Bureau for investigation of possible fraud.

Last year, that amounted to just more than 85,000 questionable claims. That was up 14 percent from nearly 75,000 in 2008, however.

SEE FRAUD, PAGE

ON TELEVISION

“The Pacific”

When: 9 p.m. Sundays starting today
Where: HBO

WAR: Iwo Jima fight raged for 36 days

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

emotion and brutal in its honest portrait of one of the fiercest battles of the war. The fight for Iwo Jima — best remembered by Joe Rosenthal's photograph of the flag being raised on Mount Suribachi — raged for 36 days and resulted in the death of 6,825 American and nearly 22,000 Japanese soldiers.

Tatum, who pestered his mother every day for two years for permission to join the Marines and finally gained it in 1943 when he turned 17, was a machine gunner.

His account of his 15 days in battle on Iwo Jima is unflinching, with vivid details of the confusion that reigned as he arrived with the first wave of Marines and was separated, along with his buddy Steve Evanson, from their company. The two eventually fell in with Basilone's company.

Tatum was confident, and honored, to follow Basilone, his hero, who'd won the Medal of Honor for his actions on Guadalcanal. In the opening hour of the fight, Basilone led a successful assault on a Japanese pill box.

After napalm had been blasted into the bunker, Basilone grabbed Tatum's machine gun from its tripod and told Tatum to follow him with the ammunition belt. Tatum stood in stunned awe as Basilone fired the weapon from hip level at Japanese soldiers attempting to escape through the back of the bunker.

The group's next objective was the first airfield, and Basilone returned to the beach for more men. Tatum watched as Basilone and five soldiers he'd rounded up were killed by a mortar explosion.

Days later, the 17-year-old Tatum would see his friends Evanson and George Van Conkelberg hit by bullets. Evanson's wound was fatal.

"That irritates me," Tatum remembers. "I've just seen two of my friends almost killed. I think they're dead. I grab a machine gun and turn on a cave like Basilone did. I ran (the gun) until the belt ran out."

That reaction, which earned him a bronze star, was just one



Chuck Tatum, center, visits with his family before shipping out in 1944. From left, stepfather Orvil Sheaffer, brother Dale, brother John and stepbrother Bert.

COURTESY

of the memories Tatum tucked away for years and years. It wasn't until he began attending Marine reunions in the 1980s that he talked about them.

That eventually led him to make a documentary about Basilone, and to pen the book that was published on the 50th anniversary of the battle on Iwo Jima.

"If you're a survivor, you have an obligation to tell what happened," Tatum said.

Getting into their heads

Tatum's inclusion of Basilone's actions on Iwo Jima made him a logical source for McKenna, who helped write the World War II epic "Band of Brothers," and has spent seven years working on "The Pacific."

"He was fortunate enough to serve with one of the most famous Marines in history," McKenna said. "He has such insight. He was a tremendous help to the production."

Tatum was written into the story, and 27-year-old Austr-

MORE ONLINE

View segments from staff writer Christian Burkin's interview with Chuck Tatum.

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lian Ben Esler was cast to play him. Esler journeyed to Stockton to meet Tatum before filming in Australia began.

"He's very open about these things, happy to talk about his experiences," Esler said. "That was a big part of my research, because there's a real focus on authenticity in this series."

"I guess the big thing for me, the big takeaway, is that he still seems a lot like the guy I get the impression of his having been. He still, more or less, seems like an 18-year-old kid to me. He's easygoing. Some of the other guys we met, they've kind of got a steeliness about the them. Chuck is



Gunnery Sgt. John Basilone, Tatum said, wore a garrison cap like no other.

always making jokes and he's fun, laid back and relaxed."

That's not to say that those

experiences, now 65 years old, don't still hurt.

"It's clear that it's had a very

serious affect on his life, left a deep impression," Esler said. "When he speaks about Steve he gets emotional. But, he's very open to talking about it. He's a good storyteller."

"I'm detached, now," Tatum said. "Time's a good eraser."

It won't be difficult to see a re-creation of his experiences, he said.

"I'm excited," Tatum said. "It will give a lot of Americans something they don't know about that really happened. Iwo Jima was bad. I'm sure the people at Guadalcanal and Peleliu thought they had it worse. There's no good war."

Especially for those who fight them, which is what McKenna hopes to show.

"The mandate (from producers Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks) was clear: Get inside the heads of these men and take a journey into a terrible place, track them and see how they survive, how they're changed," McKenna said. "We do that in a way that's intensely personal and intimate against the backdrop of a gigantic battle. I hope we succeed. I think we did."

"It's not a history lesson. It's not a pornographic depiction of combat. It's to go, 'Oh my God. How did a person survive that?' That's my agenda. If we send young men to war, even a necessary war, we need to know how they survive it. The cost to the individual soldier is immense."

Only those who have gone through it can truly appreciate its impact on one's life.

"There's no way for me to have any idea what Chuck went through, or any of these guys," Esler said. "At the same time, I think you immerse yourself in something for months on end, your job is to understand it up to a point. I certainly come away from the experience with greater appreciation of what Chuck and guys like him went through, totally. I expect people will get that from watching the series as well."

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