

Dale F. Conde, 99

Phi Kappa's Oldest Living WW II Vet

By Brian R. Bland, Phi Kappa '63

At 99 years of age, Dale Conde is, somewhat ironically, both the oldest living World War II veteran of the Phi Kappa Chapter, and a Brother who spent only about six months at the House on Armory.

Conde chuckles when he remembers getting hired as a bank teller right out of high school in Rockford, Illinois, in 1940. Less than a year later, with war raging in Europe, the government reactivated nearby Camp Grant as a training center for the Army Medical Service. Conde got a job there as an accountant and when his boss fell ill, Conde was moved into the top slot.

"There were several other candidates," Conde recalls, "but they were all women. The bosses thought putting an 18-year-old man in charge was better than giving the job to a woman." He disagreed, but took the job.

Soon afterward, though, Conde took the advice of an older friend, quit his job and headed to the University of Illinois, where he fell in love with a Delta Gama girl from one of his classes, Sylvia Martin.

As a freshman, Conde pledged a fraternity, but soon felt he'd made a mistake. "I knew some really great guys at Alpha Chi Rho, so I switched," he said. His initiation as a Brother came within a few months on May 25, 1942.

During his time in the House, Conde "played bridge a lot," and also found time for intramural basketball. "Five feet eight-and-a-half inches was tall in those days," he recalled.

As for pledge duties, the Brothers "had relaxed the stiffest of the rules. Just obey the orders of the seniors," he remembers. "I looked more mature, and was working part-time, too," saying he recalls few pledge chores. "The food was good -- I remember that."

One of his clearest Phi Kappa memories is sitting in his room listening to radio reports of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941.

"We all knew that...we'd soon be in the service," he said. In fact, Conde quickly enlisted in the Army, with the agreement that he could delay going on active duty. Then he took another big step. "I married Sylvia in 1942, moved out of the House, and we got a small apartment, but I still went to the House once in awhile for various functions. I was pleased with my life there, though it was somewhat brief compared to others."

Too soon, it was time to go on active duty. Having had a variety of first-aid classes, Conde found himself teaching first-aid to fellow soldiers at Jefferson Barracks, near St. Louis. Conde's own training was accelerated as the invasion of France drew nearer. He wound up with one of the most dangerous jobs in the Army -- combat medic.

Not long after the Allies landed in France in June 1944, Conde was shipped to Cherbourg, just northwest of the invasion beaches. He went through months of war, finding himself in Austria in May 1945 when Germany surrendered.

Shipped back to the States from England on the Queen Elizabeth, the 23-year-old soldier had some time off with his wife. He expected to be sent somewhere in the Pacific, but Japan surrendered before that happened.

The new veteran chose Northwestern for finishing his college education, aiming to major in Commerce, but going to law school "because Commerce was full, and the law school had some room." Conde's excellent grades led Northwestern to offer him a teaching slot, and he accepted.

Later, he was a law professor at Drake University and, later still, was an assistant state's attorney.

"Finally, I figured I'd better start making more money," he explained, as his family grew. "I joined an old-time law firm in my hometown of Rockford, as a partner."

He and Sylvia also had a winter home in Naples, Florida, where they enjoyed golf and tennis.

Conde lost his wife when she was ninety, and he's outlived three of his four children, but is enjoying himself in "a beautiful apartment" in Boise, Idaho, not far from his son and daughter-in-law.

His brief time at Phi Kappa worked against the idea of staying in touch with Brothers from decades ago.

"We were sent off to combat and there wasn't any opportunity to stay in touch," he said. But he's delighted to be near his son's family and has "lots of grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

