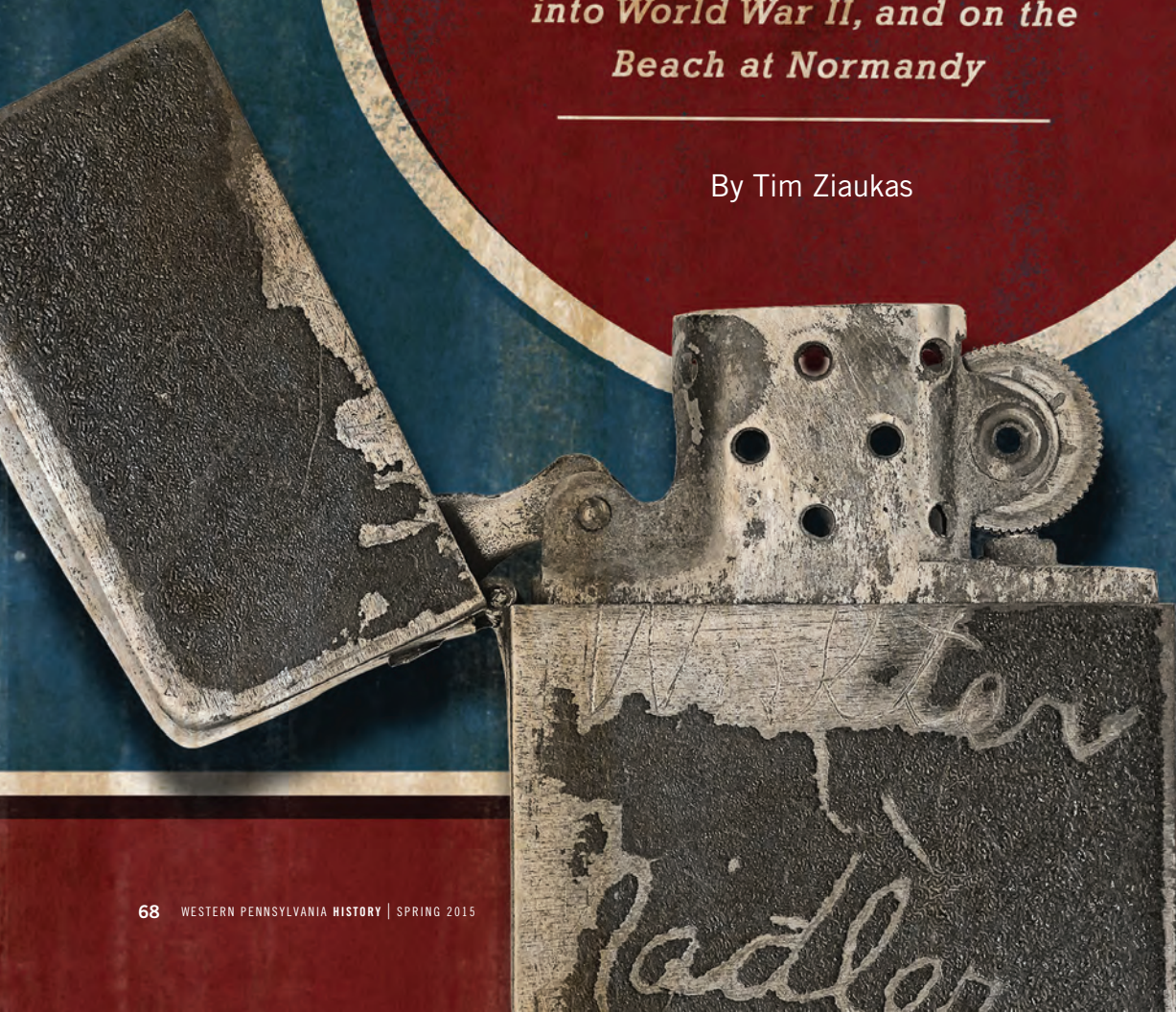




The **CARRYING FLAME**

*Zippo Lighters during the Depression,
into World War II, and on the
Beach at Normandy*

By Tim Ziaukas





Like Hershey or Heinz, Zippo is an iconic Pennsylvania brand, an American institution with a global presence. Yet the family-owned Bradford lighter manufacturer, like America itself, rose to prominence after enduring the Great Depression and triumphing in World War II.¹ Despite the reduction of smokers in recent decades, especially in the United States,² Zippo Manufacturing Company assembled its half-billionth lighter in 2012.³ The next four quarters saw the company's most profitable year ever. And 2014 topped that.⁴ That's a half-billion-plus affirmations by smokers, collectors, and fans from around the world who, with a flick of a finger, opened a rectangle of brass with a distinctive click, thumbed a

flint-wheel, sparked a flame, then shut the device, snuffing the light with a solidly reassuring snap.

Zippo was founded in 1932 by George G. Blaisdell. However, as his daughter Sarah B. Dorn recalled, it's not all been festive clicks and solid snaps. Two moments stood out as make-or-break events in family lore: one was the difficult lesson her father learned as a child about keeping a promise that he carried into his business plan, offering a life-time guarantee on his product. The other was the attachment Zippo lighters had for the men and women who carried them into World War II and, by doing so, helped make Zippo an American institution. "The war made us," Dorn said. "No question about it.... That guarantee—and the war—turned out to be the keys to it all."⁵

The War
MADE US
No question about it.

The SPARK

It began in darkness, at the worst of times for most Americans.⁶ The year was 1932 when the United States was slipping into the bleakest days of the Great Depression. Wall Street's Dow Jones Industrial Average slumped to 41.22, its all-time low. Wages fell, bread lines formed, and soup kitchens filled up all over America. That year, Franklin D. Roosevelt, on accepting the Democratic presidential nomination, said, "I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a new deal for the American people."⁷ Hardly a time, it would seem, to produce and market a lighter for \$1.95 (about \$33 today) when eggs cost 29¢ a dozen, cigarettes 15¢ a pack, or a generic lighter could be bought for a quarter.

Blaisdell, born 1895 in Bradford, Pennsylvania, hardly seemed like someone who would find success in those brutal years. It was not the time or place to launch a novel, pricey product, much less by a man who, early on, showed neither distinction nor ambition. "He had very little formal education," Dorn said of her father. "In fact, he was what might be called today a discipline challenge.... My father hated school. Walked out of 5th grade and told his family he wasn't going back. That was it."

George's father bundled him off to a military academy to straighten him out, but he only lasted there for two years before he was summarily dismissed. Then his father put him to work in his business—the Blaisdell Machinery Company—where he learned metal work, a skill that would come in handy in the germination stages of the Zippo lighter nearly 30 years later. At that time, he earned 10¢ an hour in a 59-hour week. "He even made me punch the clock,"

George would often say about working for his dad.⁸

After World War I, 21-year-old George took over the family business, then in 1920 sold the machinery company and put the money in oil. But that didn't fit right either, Dorn said. "My father hated the oil business. He wasn't particularly good at it.... He didn't have the temperament for it."

Blaisdell rode the oil boom until it went bust. By the early 1930s, U.S. crude came in at 85 cents per barrel (that's about \$12 today).⁹ In the spring of 1933, prices fell to half that and, soon after, the bottom fell out. Some producers touted a "dime-a-barrel" deal just to move product and make anything (and maybe put some smaller competitors out of business). "The market was a mess," writes oil historian Philip Scranton, professor of the history of industry and technology at Rutgers University.¹⁰

Pennsylvania was in an even greater mess. By 1933, the Commonwealth's industrial production had fallen by half and shed a quarter of a million jobs.¹¹ By the following year, voters elected the first Democratic governor of the 20th century, George Earle, who initiated his own "Little New Deal" out of Harrisburg—programs to support and reflect the big New Deal coming from Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Washington, D.C.

"They were hard times," Dorn said, "and [my father] was desperate." In Bradford, where the oil-boom had seemed limitless, the effects of the Depression were deeply felt. People collected pennies for the needy and, breaking a long taboo, Sunday evening movies were shown for the first time, with all the proceeds going to those hard hit by the Depression. "He needed to make this work. He had gambled on

the oil industry and lost.... He had to make a go of something."

The Zippo story really begins in that milieu at a formal event at the Bradford Country Club, south of town on old Route 219, on a muggy night in summer 1931. "Although the Depression was casting its shadow on the Pennsylvania oil industry," lighter historian Kesaharu Imai writes, "many people in the area were still able to enjoy a formal dance. This country club in the woods, now a private home, was a favorite gathering place for the golf-loving luminaries of Bradford."¹² People stood around, probably talking about the upcoming presidential election or movies like *Dracula* featuring Bela Lugosi, or the hilarious

My father hated school. Walked out of 5th grade and told his family he wasn't going back. That was it. - Sarah B. Dorn

Marie Dressler in *Min and Bill*. It's likely the band played "I Don't Know Why I Love You Like I Do," "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries," and Duke Ellington's "Mood Indigo."

At some point, Blaisdell, to escape the heat, the music, maybe even the talk, stepped out onto the terrace where he bumped into a friend who was lighting a cigarette with a 25-cent Austrian lighter.¹³ The two-piece device was elliptically shaped, clumsy, and difficult to maneuver, especially with a pack a cigarettes or a drink in one hand. Its dull, metal surface was also ugly. In a tale now part of Zippo mythology, Blaisdell said to the friend, "You're all dressed up.... Why don't you get a lighter that looks decent?"

“Well, George,” he said, in words that would soon be etched in Blaisdell’s company history, “it works.”

It works!

That simple sentence hit Blaisdell like flint on stone. There was a market that wasn’t being fulfilled: an attractive lighter that worked every time. Blaisdell’s mind raced: he would build a well-designed product with integrity, and success would follow. Soon after the party, he obtained the U.S. distribution rights for the foreign lighter and planned to retool, remarket, and distribute his lighter.

“There wasn’t a lot of money lying about then, but he went to everybody to get the money to launch Zippo Manufacturing Company” and cobbled together \$800, Dorn said. “Nobody had any faith in it. It seemed like a foolish, harebrained idea. And it was. Imagine: manufacturing and marketing a lighter for \$1.95 when that amount of money fed a family.... What kept him going? I think whatever it was, it was tinged with desperation. He had to make this work. For him and his family, as they say now, there was no Plan B.”

During those initial planning months, Blaisdell recalled an epiphany from his youth that was to challenge but seal his fate. As a child, young George had saved his pennies—his allowance was two cents a week—but finally he had enough to buy the dollar watch he had coveted at the general store. He poured his pennies out on the counter, a hundred of them, and said, “Give me one of these guaranteed dollar watches.”¹⁴ George put the watch under his pillow that night and fell asleep to the sound of its reassuring tick-tick-tick. It ticked for ten months. And then it stopped. He went back to the general store and handed it over to the clerk. “It stopped,” he said. “Please have it fixed for me.”

“Just give me 25 cents, and I’ll send the money and the watch back to the factory, and



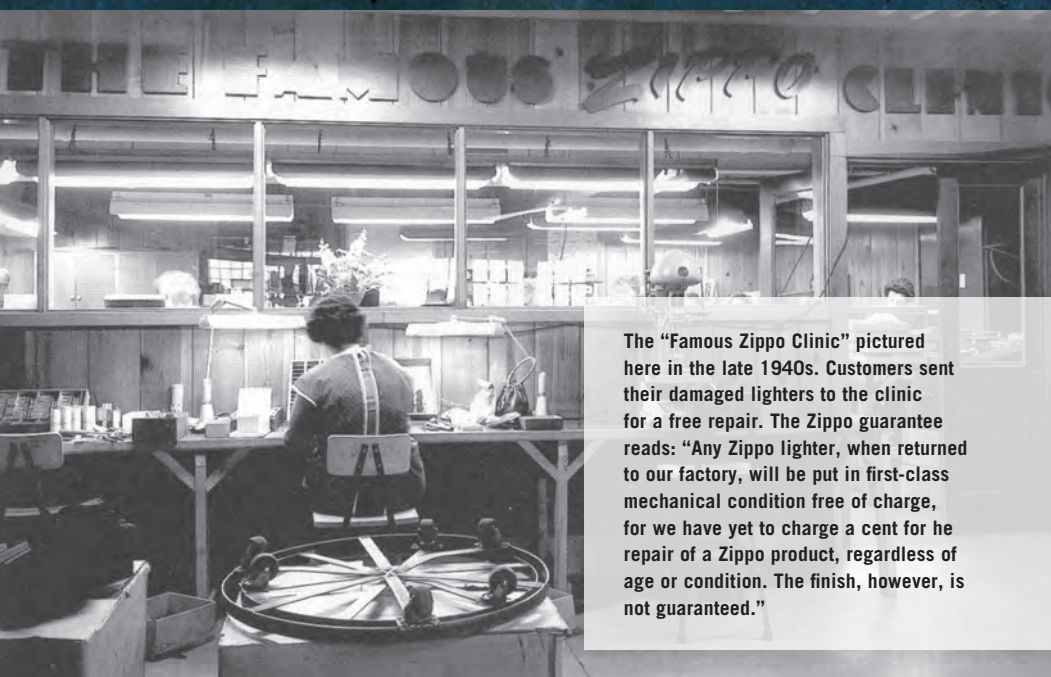
George G. Blaisdell in the late 1940s with a giant replica of a Zippo lighter.

All images from Zippo/Cwase Museum unless noted.



Inside the first Zippo headquarters at the Rickerson and Pryde Building in the 1930s.

It works or
WE FIX IT
FREE!



The "Famous Zippo Clinic" pictured here in the late 1940s. Customers sent their damaged lighters to the clinic for a free repair. The Zippo guarantee reads: "Any Zippo lighter, when returned to our factory, will be put in first-class mechanical condition free of charge, for we have yet to charge a cent for the repair of a Zippo product, regardless of age or condition. The finish, however, is not guaranteed."

they'll fix it for you in no time at all." The clerk was cold.

"What?" George was horrified. "Where am I going to get 25 cents from?"

"That's your problem, young fellow," he said, "but that's what it costs."

"But they said the watch was guaranteed," said George, the lesson sinking in.

"Why sure it's guaranteed," said the clerk, "but you've got to send them a quarter if you want them to fix it or send you a new one." A quarter was three month's allowance, and a fourth of the initial cost of the watch. Ridiculous!

Blaisdell told this hagiographic tale to many people over the years, saying that he walked out of the store in tears, took the watch and smashed it on the ground, shrieking, "Damn no-good guarantee!" He never forgot that, even when he had more money, even when he was working for 10 cents an hour at his father's machine company, and even when he was running his own company. As a result, Blaisdell put a lifetime guarantee on Zippo lighters and the Zippo pledge still reads: "It Works or We Fix it Free."¹⁵

So in late 1932, while the nation's and commonwealth's economies were collapsing around him, George G. Blaisdell took his idea, a business philosophy, a staff of three, a kitchen hot plate, and a hand-solder, and he set up operation in an unplastered room above Rickerson and Pryde's garage on Boylston Street in Bradford. The space filled with the odor of burnt ozone (from his solder) and desperation (from his situation).

He reimagined that Austrian lighter, retooling and reshaping the problems out of it.¹⁶ He refashioned that 25-center, putting it in a larger, rectangular brass case that would fit more comfortably and securely in the hand. Most significantly, he attached the lid of the lighter to the case with a hinge, retaining the chimney that would protect the flame and

make the lighter work under the most adverse conditions. He also bathed the brass in a rich, luminous chrome finish. It retailed for \$1.95, big money in the early '30s, but it was attractive and it worked every time. Guaranteed. For life.

At one point, Blaisdell held the lighter in his hand and, with his work nearly done, moved a finger to open the device:

Click!

Thumb!

Grind!

Flame!

Snap!

It worked! But he needed a name, something that sounded modern. His product combined the ancient need for fire with the modern desire for convenience. After all, his product would work with one hand, with that most modern of gestures—the flick of a finger.

No muss; no fuss.

He liked the onomatopoeic quality of the word “Zip” ... it sounded snappy and quick, velocity being the characteristic of modernity, after all, so ...

“Zippy?” he thought.

No. “Zippa?”

“Zippo!”¹⁷

George G. Blaisdell was in business.

Nine years and a million Zippo lighters later in 1941, America was at war. Lighters had become invaluable to soldiers, not only for the reliability but because matches were in short supply: the sulfur used in match heads was needed as a war chemical, plus workers to make them were pulled to more critical jobs. Even more surprisingly, the matchbooks that were produced were being dropped from the air over Europe and used for propaganda.¹⁸

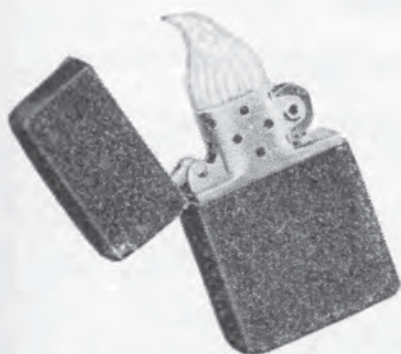
Due to brass and chrome shortages, war-time Zippos were made of steel coated with thick black paint that was baked to a black-crackle finish. “It’s the only lighter I’ve got that will light at all times,” wrote General Dwight D. Eisenhower to Blaisdell on November 24, 1943.¹⁹ Eisenhower, to alleviate the stress, was smoking four packs of Camels a day.²⁰

The pressure on Eisenhower (and his Zippo) would only increase. In the summer of 1944, the greatest assemblage of ships and soldiers in history of humankind secretly gathered on the south coast of England for an invasion of the European continent. Operation Overlord, popularly now known as D-Day, not only changed the world, but added a page to Zippo lore.²¹





She gave me her ZIPPO - - - - and I married her



*

Sales limited to service men located outside continental U. S. or on high seas.

"Pretty swell gal, to part with her precious ZIPPO—she can't buy a new one. I'll remember her every time I light up. In a nor'easter I'll know the ZIPPO will be as dependable as the gal who gave it."

You can't buy a new ZIPPO*, so keep *yours* in good order. Use a fluid that won't gum up the wick—use ZIPPO Long Lasting Fluid—it burns clean. ZIPPO Hard Flints give a bigger spark, wear longer, and fit better (in most any lighter). Package of 4 for 10 cents.

Demand genuine ZIPPO accessories from your local dealer.

ZIPPO MFG. CO., 7 BARBOUR ST., BRADFORD, PA.

ZIPPO *Windproof* **LIGHTER**

—Zippo at— NORMANDY

A soldier palms his black-crackle-covered rectangle of steel. It fits snugly in his moist palm. Comfort. Like the lighter, his face has been darkened for the occasion. Soot, shoe polish, cocoa. He makes a fist and holds the lighter, holds it tight, holds this fire-maker, this thing from home, this talisman. His name is Walter Nadler. He is among the 21,000 men in 4th Division of the U.S. Army, under the command of Major General Raymond O. Barton.²²

Walter is from Rahway, New Jersey, five miles from Staten Island. Back at home, where his wife is, his President prays on the radio:

“Almighty God: our sons, pride of our Nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization.”²³

Walter begins to scratch markings into the black surface of the lighter, letting the metallic surface underneath shine through, like hope at night, to mark this moment, his moment, maybe his last moment.

He carves in cursive: “June 6, 1944, 0630. France.”

D-Day. The greatest amphibious invasion in human history is to land at 6:30 a.m. on the beaches of Normandy, France, and Walter Nadler is one of 175,000 soldiers on, above, in, and under the English Channel.²⁴ He is on a transport-troop ship heading in with the other silent soldiers on 13,000 aircraft, readying to land.

Three American battleships—*Texas*, *Arkansas* and *Nevada*—fire their 14-inch guns simultaneously, a sound so big it feels like the beginning of the world or the end of it, noise that tastes, smells, crushes, preparing the landing site for the one hundred and fifty-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine soldiers.²⁵ And Walter.

His ship lurches towards shore, through five-foot waves.

“They will need Thy blessing. Their road will be long and hard. For the enemy is strong.... Some will never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom.”

Walter blows one side clean, wipes the lighter on his sleeve and turns it over to engrave his

name. He doesn’t know it, but weather delayed the invasion—General Eisenhower, got the report: “rough seas, winds up to force six and low cloud.”²⁶ It’s still rough and the winds push Walter’s ship off course, a bit south. Still, he heads for Utah Beach.

Along with the rest of the 4th Division, Walter is among the first to land in Normandy. Drunk with fear, deaf to death that surrounds him, he runs out of the water and onto the beach.²⁷ And in that moment, in a mad juxtaposition of the great and the small, the tragic and the comic, his lighter falls from his pocket.

He runs on the beach, past the heroic dead and the dying, runs through sand, smoke, and screams.

“With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy. Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogance. Lead us to the saving of our country. Thy will be done, Almighty God.”

Pulitzer Prize winning war correspondent Ernie Pyle reported on the immediate aftermath of the invasion on the beaches: “The wreckage was vast and startling. There were trucks tipped over and swamped ... tanks that had only just made the beach before being knocked out ... jeeps that had burned to a dull gray ... boats stacked on top of each other. On the beach lay expended sufficient men and mechanism for a small war. They were gone forever now.



**He carves in cursive:
“June 6, 1944,
0630. France.”**

The Walter Nadler Zippo lighter, one of the most famous Zippo lighter among a half-billion lighters produced by the Bradford-based manufacturing company. Visitors to the History Center’s WWII exhibit will see the lighter on display.



Out There ZIPPO is a FRIEND IN DEED

The boys fighting in the tropics know that the ever reliable ZIPPO Windproof LIGHTER means more than a sure light for pipe or fag.

Mid winds that blow and blow, and rains that never seem to cease, the windproof, waterproof ZIPPO comes in mighty useful, for lighting lanterns, fires, or as a "guiding light" in inky darkness.

Keep your ZIPPO in perfect order. Buy only ZIPPO Hard Flints (4 for 10¢)—they give a big spark, last longer, fit better . . . and ZIPPO Long Lasting FLUID—it goes farther and burns clean. The "asbestosized" wick should last a lifetime. Ask your dealer.



*ZIPPO
Windproof
LIGHTER

ZIPPO MFG. CO.
Dept. F, Bradford, Pa.

*Sorry we can't take your order, output taken over by the government for armed forces outside continental U. S. and on high seas.



ZIPPO Windproof **LIGHTER**

Vintage WWII-era Zippo lighter ad.

Andy Handke.

"And yet, we could afford it.... We could afford it because we were on, we had our toehold, and behind us there were such enormous replacements for this wreckage on the beach that you could hardly conceive of the sum total. Men and equipment were flowing from England in such a gigantic stream that it made the waste on the beachhead seem like nothing at all, really nothing at all."²⁸

More than 9,000 soldiers were killed or wounded on the beaches.²⁹

But Walter Nadler did not die on Utah Beach that day. He contributed to getting that foothold on the continent that led to the taking of Berlin and victory in Europe. He made it back to New Jersey and to his wife and family and he lived his life ... but without his Zippo lighter.

Then in 1992, more than a half century after it was lost in the sands of Normandy, his lighter mysteriously turned up at Zippo headquarters in Bradford, Pennsylvania. Presumably found on the beach and miraculously sent to Zippo with no return address, the lighter apparently lingered in a holding batch of unclaimed lighters, a Zippo orphanage, until an alert employee, Pat Grandy, recognized its importance.

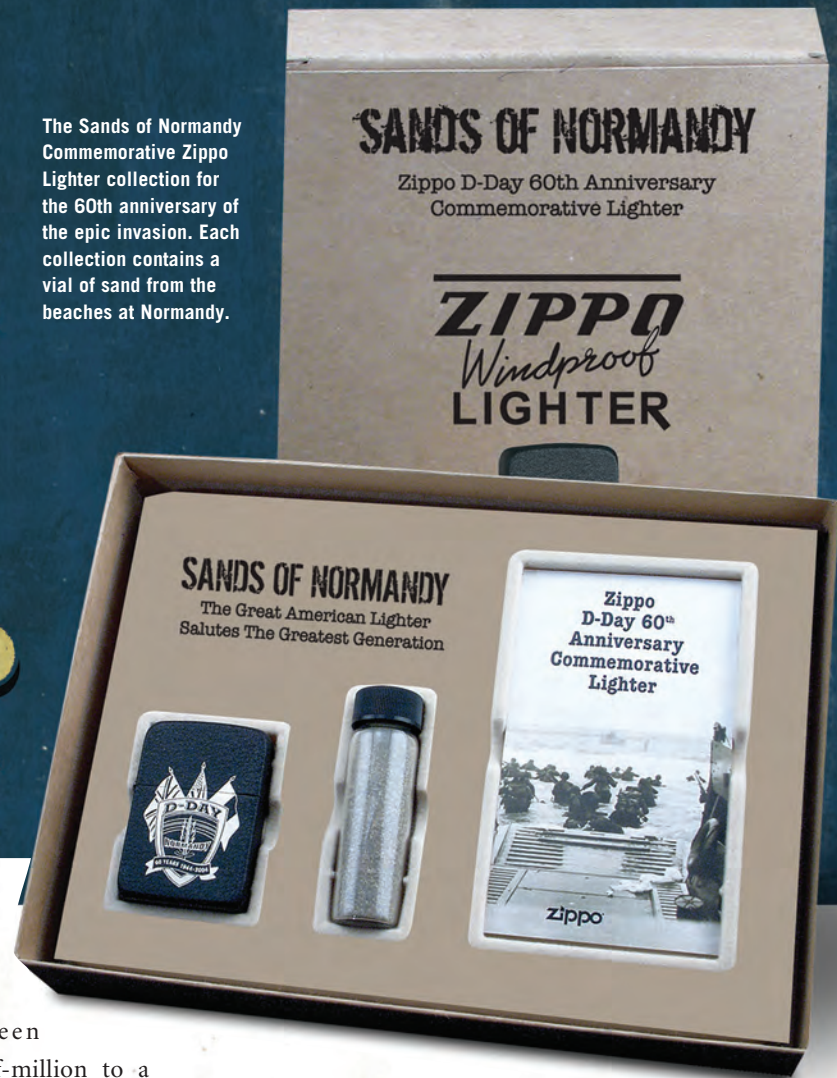
By then, a vintage Zippo lighter from World War II, much less from Normandy, much less engraved with trench art (that is, lighters that have been "theater-engraved"), could be worth perhaps thousands of dollars on the collectors' market.³⁰

The staff at Zippo launched a nationwide search for the soldier who lost his Zippo lighter at Normandy only to discover that Walter D. Nadler had died. His son Bud recalled that his father had talked about D-Day and his Zippo lighter over the years. "If the German people are shooting at you," Walter would drolly say, "you think you'll stop at the beach looking for a lighter?"³¹

The Nadler Lighter is normally displayed in the Zippo/Case Museum in Bradford but is

More than
9,000
soldiers were
KILLED
— OR —
WOUNDED
on the beaches.

The Sands of Normandy Commemorative Zippo Lighter collection for the 60th anniversary of the epic invasion. Each collection contains a vial of sand from the beaches at Normandy.



coming on loan to the History Center for the *We Can Do It* exhibit.³²

The incredible story of his lighter is just one of many World War II tales and artifacts that give insight into those who carried them and the company that made them.³³

The soldiers of the Second World War took Zippo lighters around the world with them, Dorn said, because the lighters worked every time and sometimes even saved their lives. Commanders in high places agreed. In a letter to Blaisdell on Sept. 25, 1944, General Douglas MacArthur wrote that his Zippo “is a real work of art which I shall use constantly.”³⁴ “That made my father proud,” Dorn said.

MacArthur wasn’t alone. From 1942 until the end of World War II, all of Zippo Manufacturing Company’s production was shipped to the PXs for the soldiers in combat around the world. There were no civilian sales. The military bought the lighters in lots ranging

between a half-million to a million. Marketing genius and company-founder Blaisdell shrewdly sent hundreds of Zippo lighters overseas as gifts, not only to top-brass men and women in the service, but free to all enlistees from McKean County (where Bradford is located)—a little piece of home to take with them to war.

“He genuinely wanted to give the lighters to the soldiers,” Dorn said, “but in doing so, by giving them such a personal and useful item at such a crucial time, he bonded them to it. And they remembered that when they came home.” Patriotism marinated in business savvy.

Many soldiers—just like Walter Nadler—customized their Zippo lighters, scratching in names, places, images, and messages of all kinds that suggest their

hopes, dreams, fears, fantasies and longings.

This “trench art” is among the most important and valued in the company’s history, Dorn said.³⁵ Such intensity between product and customer makes for an iconic brand.

Blaisdell clearly had a knack for turning marketing into mythology. Back in 1943, he wrote to Ernie Pyle, “I don’t suppose you ever heard of Zippo lighters but anyway I’m sending you one.”³⁶ Pyle had heard of Zippo lighters.

Pyle wrote back, “If I were to tell you how much these Zippos are coveted at the front and the gratitude and delight with which the boys receive them, you would probably accuse



George G. Blaisdell greets an unidentified Bradford woman in the 1950s during one of his walks along Main Street.

me of exaggeration. There is truly nothing the average soldier would rather have.”³⁷

He may have been only slightly exaggerating. Just about every man and woman in World War II had a Zippo lighter, or so it seemed, Dorn said, and used it for a lot more than firing up smokes. The lighters also started campfires, cooked soup in helmets, and worked as a signal light. One Army pilot says he landed his disabled plane by using a Zippo lighter to illuminate his instrumental panel. Other GIs have had a Zippo lighter in a vest-pocket take a bullet and save their lives.

Pyle’s columns about Zippo lighters were priceless PR gold for Blaisdell, a third-party endorsement that was syndicated around the world and into the heart of the country. Zippo lighters “burn in the wind, and pilots say they are the only kind that will light at extreme altitudes,” Pyle wrote Blaisdell in 1944

after receiving a shipment of complimentary lighters to distribute to the troops. “Why, they’re so popular I’ve had three of them stolen from me in the past year.... Thanks from all of us, Mr. Blaisdell.”³⁸

But that was not Pyle’s greatest Zippo filing. One of his pieces was used as a hand-to-hand Teletype machine when Pyle wrote his shortest and most chilling war story on a Zippo lighter.³⁹ In March 1945, on board the *USS Cabot* in the South Pacific, Pyle was being pressured by a young officer, Donald Hyde, to reveal the ship’s destination. He took the officer’s lighter, opened his knife and scratched, “Tokyo.”

“Stick this in your pocket and promise not to look until the orders are opened,” Pyle said. When the order was given, Hyde pulled out the lighter, looked at the destination and

then carried his Zippo around the ship and flashed it to the anxious crew, announcing the plan to head to the Japanese mainland. (The “Tokyo Zippo” is still owned by the family of Donald C. Hyde of Detroit.⁴⁰)

When Pyle was killed in the Pacific in April 1945, Blaisdell had a special memorial lighter designed and delivered to the 900 men on *USS Cabot*, the ship that took Pyle to his final battle. The lighters were inscribed “In Memory of Ernie Pyle, 1945.”

The war ended shortly thereafter. The soldiers returned with victory in their hearts, notions of integration in their heads, a wanderlust for the big world, and Zippo lighters in their pockets.

America got back to work on the home front and so did George Blaisdell. While the post-war boom began to kick in, he faced a serious

and potentially fatal business problem for his company.

The striking wheel was defective. It required replacement too frequently, disillusioning customers and putting an expensive burden on his lifetime guarantee. "The problem with the striking wheel was extremely serious," Dorn said. "Think about it: he just thought that he had made it, finally, after all the problems in the '30s. With the enthusiasm that the soldiers had for the lighter, it seemed like things were finally coming together. The post-war boom began to kick in everywhere. Then, we discover, the wheel didn't work! Oh sure, it worked most of the time, but my father had a product with a lifetime guarantee."

Blaisdell gathered his forces. He had some of the world's great metallurgists review the problem: some of the wheels simply burned out after too few turns. "The wheel wasn't good enough for a lifetime guarantee. It wasn't good enough for him. We cried. So he shut the plant down," Dorn said. "He continued to pay the employees and spent \$300,000 in 1946 dollars to fix the problem (about \$2.5 million today). That was expensive in every way something can be expensive—in time, in money, and in emotion. But he fixed it. He fixed it right." Blaisdell got the best striking wheel in the business—one that could be struck for nearly 75,000 times without needing replacement—and was able to further underscore his lifetime guarantee. Even today, the operations concerning the knurling of the flint wheel are a company secret.

By the 1950s, when he put the identifying marks on the lighters to see which lots were being returned for repair, he unknowingly helped to assure what would turn into today's

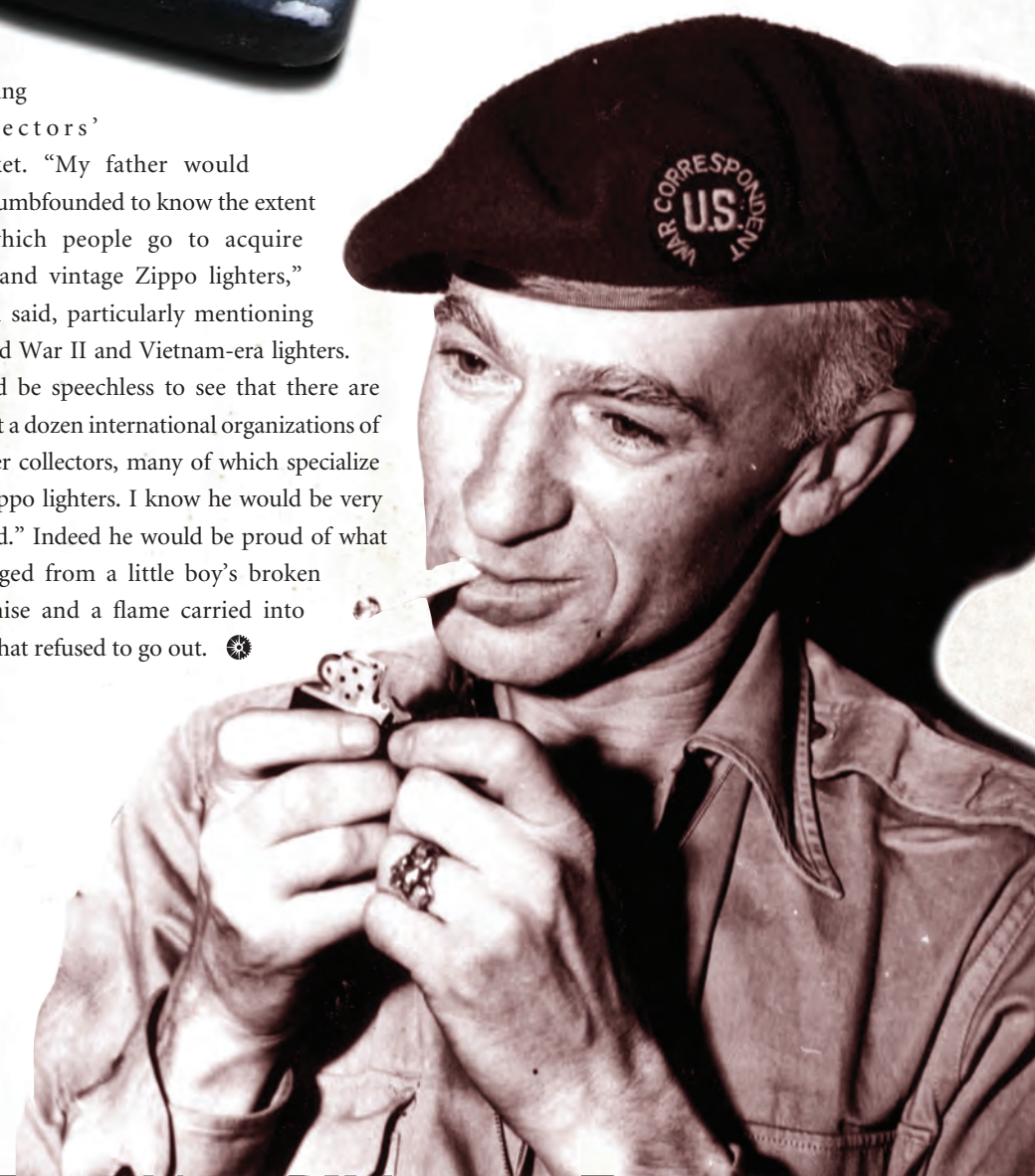
thriving collectors' market. "My father would be dumbfounded to know the extent to which people go to acquire rare and vintage Zippo lighters," Dorn said, particularly mentioning World War II and Vietnam-era lighters. "He'd be speechless to see that there are about a dozen international organizations of lighter collectors, many of which specialize in Zippo lighters. I know he would be very proud." Indeed he would be proud of what emerged from a little boy's broken promise and a flame carried into war that refused to go out. ☀



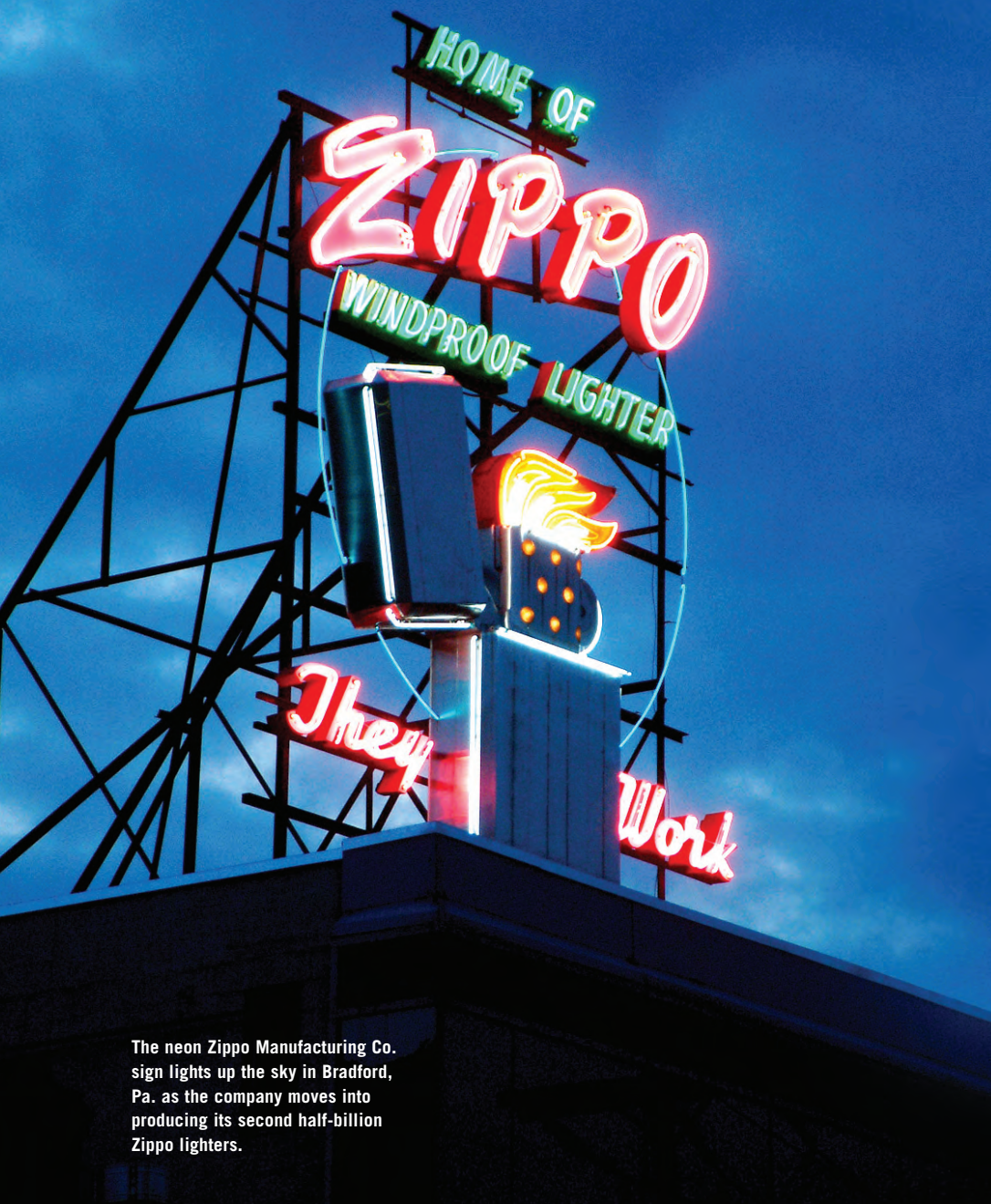
LEFT: One of only 900 Zippo lighters made to honor the death of war correspondent Ernie Pyle who was killed on April 18, 1945 by enemy machine-gun fire on a small island near Okinawa.

Andy Handke.

War correspondent Ernie Pyle fires up a smoke with his Zippo lighter.



Thank you to MSG Steven G. Appleby, U.S. Army, Ret., director, Eldred World War II Museum, for his expertise. Also to Zippo's Snap-Crackle-Click team of Pat Grandy, marketing communications manager, Amanda J. DePrins, assistant marketing communications manager, and Linda Meabon, Zippo archivist and historian, as well as to Robert Bianco, Christopher McCarrick, David Poore, and James Salvo.



The neon Zippo Manufacturing Co. sign lights up the sky in Bradford, Pa. as the company moves into producing its second half-billion Zippo lighters.

- ¹ Linda L. Meabon, *Images of America: Zippo Manufacturing Company* (Charleston, S.C.: Arardia, 2003).
- ² Abram Brown, "American Doesn't Smoke Much Anymore. So How is Zippo Manufacturing Co. Having Its Best Year Ever?" *Forbes*, September 8, 2014. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/abrahambrown/> (Accessed September 10, 2014).
- ³ Marcie Schellhammer, "Zippo marks 500 millionth lighter," *The Bradford Era*, June 6, 2012, 1.
- ⁴ Interview with the author, Zippo Manufacturing Company's marketing communications manager, Pat Grandy, Nov. 18, 2014.
- ⁵ Sarah B. Dorn interview with the author, March 19, 1999. Much of the company history herein is derived from this interview, with material subsequently fact-checked by Zippo archivist and historian Linda Meabon.
- ⁶ Harold Evans, *The American Century* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 218-282. For the prices of the 1930s, see Loretta Britten and Sarah Brash, eds., *Our American Century: Hard Times, the 1930s* (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1998), 29, except the price of a lighter is from Kesaharu Imai. *Zippo Manual 1* (Tokyo: World Photo Press, 1992), 26.
- ⁷ The phrase is from FDR's address accepting the Democratic presidential nomination on July 2, 1932. See FDR Library, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=75174> for the complete speech (Accessed Nov. 16, 2014).
- ⁸ Material in the Zippo archives.
- ⁹ Philip Scranton, *Bloomberg View*, "When the Great Depression Hit the Oil Industry, May 6, 2013, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2013-05-06/when-the-great-depression-hit-the-oil-industry>, (Accessed Dec. 5, 2014).
- ¹⁰ Pennsylvania and the Great Depression, <http://explorepahistory.com/story.php?storyId=1-9-1B> (Accessed Dec. 5, 2014).
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Blaisdell's "It-works!" story is the foundational story of Zippo's corporate mythology and is reprinted and reproduced in a number of sources, including Imai, 24-29, Ed Kenny, *A Guide to Zippo Lighter Collecting*, (Springfield: Latenight Publishing, 1995), 6-8, and Tim Ziaukas, "Fired Up: After 63 Years, the Zippo Pocket Lighter Just Gets Hotter and Hotter," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Sunday Magazine, July 16, 1995, section G. For an examination of the popular culture of the 1930s, see Morris Dickstein's *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression*, (New York: Norton, 2009). The site of the former Bradford Club where the Zippo incident took place is now the private home of John Satterwhite, publisher of *The Bradford Era*.
- ¹³ The friend who inspired Blaisdell with the Austrian lighter has been identified as Dick Dresser, the son of Solomon Dresser, then one of Bradford's prominent business leaders and founder of Dresser Industries. See Imai, 26-27; Meabon, 11.
- ¹⁴ D. J. Cower, "Guaranteed," *Printer's Ink*, Nov. 14, 1947. All of the quotations from the broken watch episode are from this editorial in this advertising trade journal, clipping in Zippo archive.
- ¹⁵ The Zippo guarantee reads in full: "Any Zippo metal product, when returned to our factory, will be put in first class mechanical condition free of charge, for we have yet to charge a cent for the repair of a Zippo

metal product, regardless of age or condition. The finish, however, is not guaranteed.”

¹⁶ Grandy said that while there have been improvements in the flint wheel and minor changes in the case and its hinges, Blaisdell’s original design remains basically unchanged today. Interview with the author, Nov. 18, 2014.

¹⁷ Ubiquitous tales that Blaisdell admired The Talon Zipper Co. in nearby Meadville, Pennsylvania, where another modern miracle—the zipper—had been developed and thus he named his product to honor another Pennsylvanian industry, is, says Zippo historians, apocryphal. Interview with the author, Grandy, Nov. 18, 2014.

¹⁸ “Find Cigaretts? Fine! Now, How About a Light?,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 26, 1944, p. 23.

¹⁹ Eisenhower letter in Zippo archives.

²⁰ Beevor, 2.

²¹ Jim Bishop, *FDR’s Last Year: April 1944-April 1945*, (New York: Morrow, 1974), 68.

²² Gentlemen’s Quarterly, <http://www.gqindia.com/look-good/style-fashion/finding-walter-nadler-promotion>, (Accessed October, 14, 2014); Zippo Manufacturing Company, http://zippocollect.de/fileadmin/pdf/sands_of_normandy_booklet.pdf, (Accessed October 14, 2014), <http://www.gqindia.com/look-good/style-fashion/finding-walter-nadler-promotion> (Accessed Oct. 22, 2014).

²³ FDR Library, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/aboutfdrl/pdfs/dday_prayerdraft.pdf (Accessed Oct. 22, 2014).

²⁴ For background on Operation Overlord, popularly known as D-Day, see *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy*. Antony Beevor, (New York: Viking, 2009), especially chapter one, “The Decision,” 1-14 and chapter eight,

“Utah and the Airborne,” 114-125; Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 505-11; and U.S. Army, <http://www.army.mil/d-day/> (Accessed Oct. 22, 2014).

²⁵ Beevor, 84.

²⁶ Ibid, 12.

²⁷ Joe Silkin, *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, 2nd ed., (New York: Penguin, 1996). The phrase “an ecstasy of fumbling” is taken from Wilfred Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum Est,” 191-192, probably the best-known poem from World War I.

²⁸ Goodwin, 511.

²⁹ U.S. Army, <http://www.army.mil/d-day/> (Accessed Oct. 22, 2014).

³⁰ Zippo lighter collector, dealer, and historian David Poore wrote the comprehensive guide *Zippo: The Great American Lighter*, 2nd ed. (Atglen, Pa.: Schiffer, 2005) and has experience pricing the artifacts. In the 1990s, for example, he sold a 1932 Zippo prototype for a near-record \$60,000. The Nadler lighter is difficult to price, he said, not just in light of market fluctuation—collectibles are currently down—but because it is a one-of-a-kind item with a unique story. “It’s a museum piece,” he said. World War II black-crackle Zippo lighters in general often sell for \$300-\$500. The Ernie Pyle memorial lighter, of which there were less than a thousand produced and inscribed “In Memory of Ernie Pyle, 1945” would be in the \$3,000-\$5,000 range, Poore said. The other one-of-a-kind Pyle “Tokyo” lighter, much more familiar than the Nadler piece in light of the correspondent’s fame, is, in a sense, priceless, yet, Poore said, could fetch as much as \$15,000 on the market. Interview with the

author, Nov. 16, 2014.

³¹ Finding Walter Nadler, <http://www.gqindia.com/look-good/style-fashion/finding-walter-nadler-promotion>, (Accessed Oct. 22, 2014).

³² Zippo/Case Museum, <http://studioshowroom.com/zippo/museum.html>, (Accessed Nov. 14, 2014).

³³ Imai, 97-112; Meabon, 31-36.

³⁴ Letter in Zippo archive.

³⁵ Specifically, trench art, a term from World War I, refers to materials, including lighters, made from the rubble of war on the field of battle, in the trench. In recent years, however, lighters that have been “theater-engraved” or altered in the arena of war are considered trench art by some lighter historians. In any case, pieces of trench art are extremely valuable and historically important. See Jane A. Kimball, *Trench Art: An Illustrated History* (Davis, Ca.: Silverpenny Press, 2004).

³⁶ Letter in Zippo archives.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ernie Pyle, “Ernie Gets those 50 Zippos,” London, May 30, 1944, clipping in Zippo archive.

³⁹ Kesaharu Imai. *Zippo Manual 1*, (Tokyo: World Photo Press, 1992), 120-26. Meabon, 32-33.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 124.

My father would be
DUMBFOUNDED
TO KNOW THE EXTENT TO WHICH PEOPLE
GO TO ACQUIRE RARE AND VINTAGE
Zippo lighters
- SARAH B. DORN

