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Radio Stories Of The Signal Corps

Jean Shepherd - Signal Corps Raconteur. Each month we try to place at least one article on this page that is purely Signal Corps oriented. It's not always easy. While there is much to write about the broken world around us, especially from the military perspective, interesting stories of Signal Corps efforts past or present are hard to come by. To write one of our articles can easily take us 140 hours or more.

This month we have something special for you. Back in 1939 a future Signaleer and radio announcer was born on the south side of Chicago. His name was Jean Shepherd, and while a modest man his legacy would be every bit as good as, if not better, than those of the President's we discussed above.

Born in Illinois, he grew up in Indiana. If you have ever seen the movie A Christmas Story, it is based on his days growing up in Hammond, Indiana... in the southeast neighborhood of Hessville.

As a young man, at the ripe old age of 16, he earned his Amateur Radio license. Then later, when World War II broke out, he found himself in the U.S. Army Signal Corps.

When the war ended he worked his way into broadcasting. Starting at WSAI in Cincinnati in 1948, he went on to work at KYW in Philadelphia from 1951 - 1953, and after a stint on TV moved on to radio broadcasting at WOR radio in New York City. Occupying an overnight slot he delighted his fans by telling stories, reading poetry and organizing comedic listener stunts.

Of interest to us is that most of his stories dealt with his time in the Signal Corps. Career wise, Shep, as he was known, went up and down the ladder of success... as we all do. Even so, he managed to keep his radio gig going into the mid-1990s... hosting a Sunday night radio show called "Shepherd's Pie," on WBAI-FM... continuing to tell stories of his time in the Signal Corps.

Perhaps you have heard of him... or heard his broadcasts? If not, this is your chance. Grab a beer, find a quiet place away from the kids, grandkids and wife, shut the door, turn the lights off, put your feet up, close your eyes, and make believe you are punching the buttons on that old Philco 48-482 radio that your family had. Travel back to the 50s and 60s... and listen to Shep tell you stories of his time in the Signal Corps. Enjoy!

Broadcast Story #1: The Army Pass. Originally broadcast on WOR, New York, on January 28, 1965, this story deals with the vagaries of an enlisted man in the Signal Corps trying to figure out how to deal with the Officer in command of his platoon, while at the same time he seeks relief from things like KP duty. The segment runs 44:52 in length The entire show is broadcast here.

Broadcast Story #2: The Pigeon Company – An Old WWII Cruiser. Originally broadcast on WOR, New York, on February 4, 1965, this story talks of a carrier pigeon company and how out of place the company was in the world of RADAR. Beginning with a dark yet delightful poem, carrying on to talk of the life of a typical pigeon, the story continues to a fascinating end. Covering everything from pigeon AWOL to the literal secrets of where pigeon companies are assigned... critical in nature, this broadcast is still worth listening to. In the process Shep takes a shot at the Navy. The segment runs 42:12 in length. You will love it. It's a classic, and you should take the time to listen to it in its entirety. Enjoy!

Broadcast story #3: Army Casual – A rambling story recorded at a live performance at the Village Lime Light, New York, on July 2, 1965. A local comedy club, Shep often tried out new material here. This segment talks of how Shep made it through his time in the Signal Corps. The story recalls what it is like to lose control of your life... to wish for enough freedom to date the girl you want, to dress to your best to meet a girl you love, to control your own destiny... and most importantly, to have a pass to leave the base... a simple pass. If you have ever had a pass revoked then you will understand this story... about living through the agony of having your pass "yanked" just before you leave the base. This segment runs 51:46 in length. It cuts itself short at the end, but by then the story is told anyway. Enjoy!



Jean Shepherd
- Signal Corps Story Teller -