

Marion Carlos Sharp, Jr.

A Biography by His Son, Richard (Sharp) Martin

My father served bravely as a combat soldier in World War II. He was kind to his children and we loved him, but one major weakness overcame all of his noble traits and he was never able to fulfill his potential.



Above left: Junior and his sister, Alice Joyce Sharp, about 1929. Above right: Junior, about six months old, with his mother, Claire Smith Sharp, in 1924. Left: Junior when about eleven years of age. Below: 817 8th Street in Little Rock, Arkansas, where Junior was born. The house is no longer standing.

It might be said that Marion Carlos Sharp, Jr.* (1924-1980) (always called “Junior”), who was born on February 9, 1924, was raised by his grandmother, Cora Bratton Smith (1881-1966). This is because she lived with them for many years and had a major

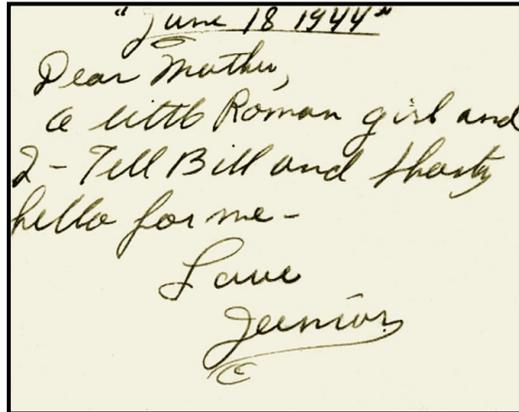
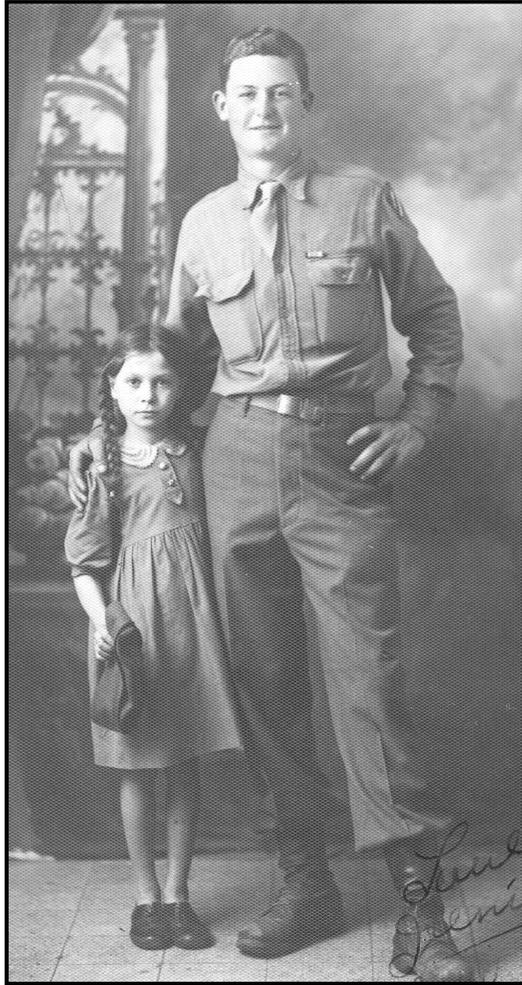


**Marion Carlos Sharp, Jr. had four children by his first marriage to Patricia Bowles: Cathy Sharp, born January 25, 1947; Ronald Sharp, born September 24, 1948; Nancy Sharp, born October 24, 1949; and Richard Sharp, born October 12, 1953. He had two children by his second marriage: Samuel Sharp, born 1962; and Jody Sharp, born 1966.*

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influence on his life. His father, Marion Sharp, Sr. (1905-1988), worked for the Rock Island Railroad and was away much of the time. When he was seven years old his father

and mother, Claire Smith (1907-1991), separated, and divorced when he was ten. It is possible that he never saw his father again, and if he did, it was only for a few brief



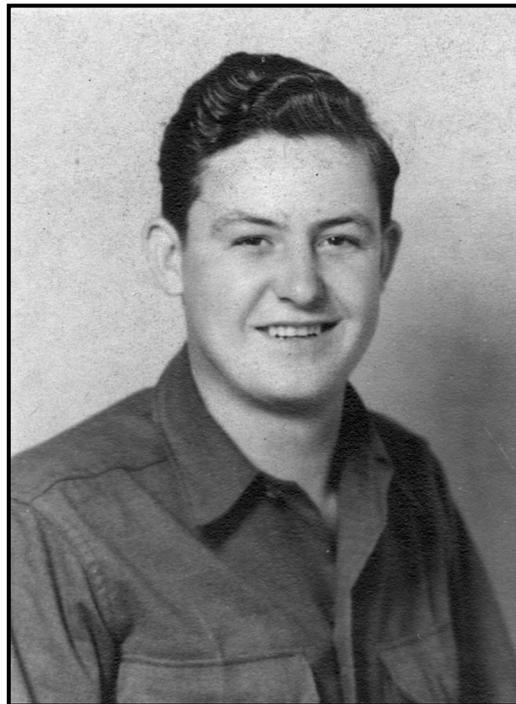
Left: Junior was part of the army that liberated Rome on June 4, 1944. Fourteen days later he took this photograph. Below: Junior when he was eighteen.

visits. He had a brother, named Ronald Sharp, but he was adopted and raised in

Oklahoma by a great-aunt on his father's side. His brother's name was changed to Lincoln Davis. Junior never met his brother, and it's unfortunate because they would have been very close. He and his two younger sisters, Alice Joyce Sharp and Carol Lee Sharp, were raised in Little Rock, Arkansas. His grandmother, mother, and aunts gave him extra love and attention because he was the only boy in the family.

At a young age Junior became interested in horses and he spent much of his spare time around the stables. When he was seventeen he saw my mother, who was fourteen, for the first time. She had come out with a friend

to ride horses. She noticed that he was handsome and she liked him, but they did not date.



World War II began and Junior enlisted in the Army at the age of eighteen on January



Above: Photograph taken on February 16, 1944 (age 20), in Italy. Junior mailed it to his mother from the "Anzio Beachhead" on March 5, 1944. He wrote, "Love to Mother / Jr."

7, 1943. He was inducted at Little Rock and assigned to the 19th Tank Battalion,

Marion Carlos Sharp, Jr.



Above: Junior during tank training in early 1943. Below: Junior fought (left to right) in France, Germany, Africa, Rome, Anzio, and Sicily.



Top: Back reads, "Italy, June 26, 1944. All My Love and Kisses, Junior." Junior is on the right. Above: Back reads, "Taken just before we reached Rome after Anzio, Junior."



becoming a tank commander and sent to North Africa. He saw his first military action in

Africa, but the details of his service in combat are unknown because his military records were destroyed in a fire in 1973. He saw much bloodshed in Italy. At Anzio, Italy, he was pinned down on the beachhead by German artillery for nearly four months (see Notes). The army eventually broke through the German lines and he was part of the liberation of Rome on June 4, 1944. Later in 1944 he was part of the invasion of Southern France. In March 1997 my son, Jonathan, daughters, Sarah and Rebecca, my wife and I visited one of the beaches that my father landed on in southern France. Today the area is part of the French Riviera and one of the most exclusive and expensive places in Europe to live.

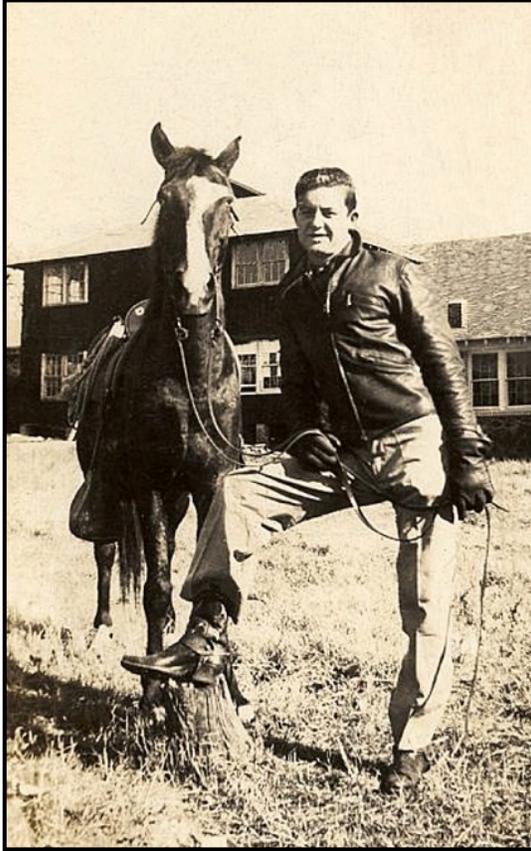
4/ my larger - I got three do-nuts just
 the other night. I guess I could use
 use a shave and clean up a bit. This
 is nothing like home. When you hear
 a fellow say he wish he was over here, just
 pay no attention to him - his probably crying
 of course if you can get one of those
 rear cushion jobs that's all - The best
 way to break him of the habit is to have
 him crawl in mud 8" deep than you back
 about 300 yds and shoot a rifle at him -
 try and hit him - Do this for about
 6 months then ask him if he still want
 to come over - I remember when I was
 hot headed as hell - but time changes all
 will "love" I'll chase for now -
 Write when you have time - Tell my
 love and kisses to all -
 Your nephew
 Junior

While in Germany he wrote a letter to a girlfriend in Little Rock that was published in the *Arkansas Democrat*. The article was entitled, "Vivid GI Letter Received by Area 8 Typist."

Above: Last page of four-page letter written by Marion Carlos Sharp, Jr. (my father) while serving in Italy during World War II. In this letter he wrote, "The best way to break him of the habit (of wanting to be a combat soldier) is to have him crawl in mud 8 inches deep; then you back up about 300 yards and shoot a rifle at him—and try and hit him. Do this for about 6 months then ask him if he still wants to come over." This is exactly what Junior experienced during the war in Italy.

It reads, "Sentiment of the G. I. Joe in the front lines is expressed vividly in a letter recently received by Janet Stewart, typist in the Inspection Office of Area 8 and written by Private Marion C. Sharp, who is now with General Patton's Third Army. He has seen action in Africa, on the Anzio beachhead, Sicily, Rome, and was one of the first to go ashore in the invasion of Southern France, August 14, 1944. A native of Little Rock, Private Sharp attended Little Rock High School. He trained for field artillery at Fort Sill, Oklahoma."

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“Somewhere in Germany—Hello Janet, Just a while back, I received a letter from you that I liked very much. Gosh, I’d say those kind of letters to fellows over here would boost morale one hundred per cent. Thanks a million.”



Above left: Junior loved horses all of his life. Above, left to right: Cathy Sharp, Nancy Sharp, Patricia Bowles (Mother) and Ron Sharp about 1951. Left: Patricia Bowles, age 17.



“Over here when those damned shells come close, we think everyone has forgotten us...that is, all but One, and you know who that is. We ask Him to forgive us of things of the past so fast I don’t know if He can keep up with all of us or not. I’ve been close enough to death to know how a rat must feel in a cage waiting for someone to come and mash his brains out. I and the rest know that you and the people back home do not know the meaning of death until it knocks at your very door; nor do we want you to have to go through that ‘hell.’ If we did, do you think that we would continue this battle?”

“If the people back home could go through a shell torn town and see babies crying,

men shot to pieces screaming for a bullet in their heads to stop their misery, or a woman begging for crumbs of bread so she could exist for just another day—if the people could see these things I think they would stop spending their ‘blood money’ and get this ‘hell’s oven’ off the earth as quickly as possible.”



Above: Junior with his firstborn child, Cathy Ann Sharp, in 1948/1949. (This is my favorite photograph of my father.) Right: Father and Mother about 1951. Junior was a kind father, but because of alcoholism, neglectful. He had a “charming personality” and people liked him. Before the war he never drank and was polite, but he acquired bad habits in the military, the worse of which was drinking. When he came home he kept it hidden from Mother and she didn’t find out until after they were married. She tried to help him, but he lived in denial, and after ten years of breaking his promises they divorced. It caused everyone sadness and unnecessary trauma. He could have had a wonderful life, but instead lost his family and died unnecessarily when he was only fifty-five years old.

a bayonet though us. I’m not talking just to be talking. I know! I’ve all but had the devil shot out of me by those boys over on the other side.”

“Well I’ll lay off my crying about the people back home if you want me to, but I hope they wake up and soon. Take my advice and don’t believe those sharp fellows back



“I’ve heard fellows here wish that some of those non-combat soldiers over there in the States could come here and take their turn at fighting. Maybe that would be a smart move, but I don’t want another man doing my fighting while I stay at home. It isn’t that I would like to keep fighting, but it’s something that we just can’t turn our backs to.”

“Do you know what Jerry would do if he should suddenly decide to strike and we refuse to shoot him? I’ll tell you, honey. He’d blow the living daylights out of us. Or better still, just to be mean, he’d probably shove

home who are always telling about big ‘I,’ or when we get back we’ll punch a few guys in the nose. Love, JUNIOR”

After Grandmother Claire Smith died in 1991 I discovered among her papers a letter written by Junior from Europe to a relative back home during World War II. The first



Top: Jonathan Martin, grandson of Junior Sharp, in southern France where Junior landed during WWII, 1997. Above: Children of Marion Sharp, Jr. Left to right: Ronald, Nancy, Cathy and Richard (Sharp) Martin in 1995.

two pages are missing of the four-page letter. He begins on page three: “Write me and let me know how all is. Mom says the horses are OK. She said Bobby Van got a big kick out of my letter so I’m writing him a lot. I’m in the gun section now. We will probably use the mules as we advance then I’ll go back to my old job. I haven’t seen Jake as yet; but know where he is. The Third Division has its own ‘Rest Center’ now, so I may be one of the lucky ones and get to go back to it. Don’t ask me where it is. Jerry would probably also like to know and he’s a very bad boy at times. I hope none of the family has to ever go through this hell. I’ll be awfully glad when this is all over. Boy I can just see old Billie Boy and Shorty now—Yepeee—that will be the day. Hope you have a hot chev car ‘Unc.’ I’ll have to do a little celebrating when I get back.”

“The do-nut factory must be getting larger—I got three do-nuts just the other night. I guess I could use a shave and clean up a bit. This is nothing like home. When you hear a

fellow say he wishes he was over here, just pay no attention to him—he’s probably crazy. Of course if you can get one of those rear action jobs that’s OK. The best way to break him of the habit is to have him crawl in mud 8 inches deep; then you back (up) about 300 yards and shoot a rifle at him—and try and hit him. Do this for about 6 months then ask him if he still wants to come over. I remember when I was hot headed

as hell, but time changes us all.”

“Well ‘Unc’ I’ll close for now. Write when you have time. All my love and kisses to all. Your Nephew, JUNIOR.”

Junior was in three beachhead landings, on Sicily, at Anzio and in the southern invasion of France



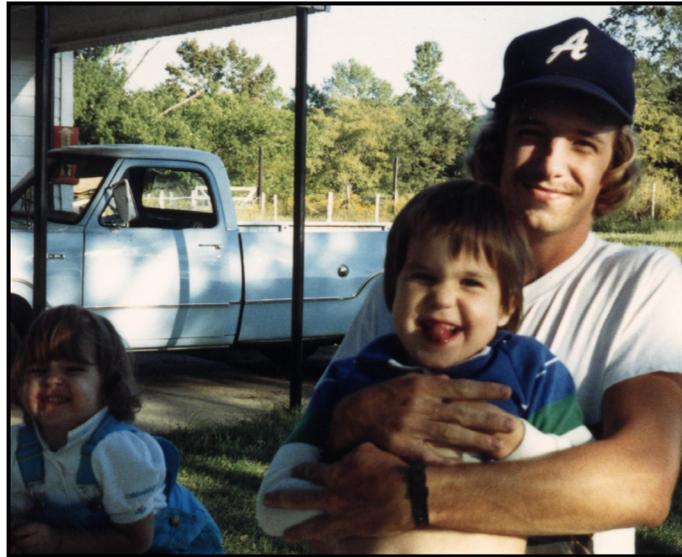
near Saint-Tropez and Saint-Raphael on August 14, 1944. He received seven battle stars and was honorably discharged after the war on October 18, 1945. His name and picture were later published in a book entitled, *Fighting Men of Arkansas and a History of World War II*, prepared under the supervision of The Arkansas Historical Institute.

Top middle: Samuel (left) and Jody Sharp, sons of Marion Sharp. Top right: Mary Holmes, second wife of Marion Sharp in 1988. Left: Sammy Sharp (1962-present) during school days. Above: Jody Sharp with his brother's son in Tyler, Texas, 1988.

When he returned home he thought about the girl he had met three years earlier and called on **Patricia Bowles** (1927-2006) for a date. They dated for a few months and were married on May 29, 1946, at the Second Presbyterian Church located at the corner of 3rd Street and Gaines in Little Rock, Arkansas. They went on their honeymoon to Searcy County, Arkansas, in the Ozark Mountains.

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For the first years of their marriage they lived with Cora Bratton Smith, Junior's grandmother. During this time Mother had three children: **Cathy** (1947-2002), **Ronald** (1948-2012), and **Nancy Sharp** (1949-present). Mother liked Cora. Their first home



Above left: Jody Sharp (1966-present). Above right: Sammy Sharp with Jonathan and Sarah, his nephew and niece, in 1988. Below: Gravestone of Marion Sharp in National Cemetery.

was a travel trailer where they lived for two years. Then they bought a brick home at 2608 Boulevard Street in Little Rock where they lived until 1954. During this time I (**Richard Sharp**, 1953-present) was born. Junior's occupation was that of a farrier.



Also, he had studied leather tooling and had an excellent artistic ability. His skills were in demand, and he made an excellent wage of a hundred dollars or more a day, which was big money in those days. He had some outstanding business opportunities, but none of them were ever realized because Junior began drinking heavily.

Mother had tried to get Junior to quit drinking and for brief periods of time he would stop, but his cravings for alcohol overcame his better senses. Mother suffered a lot and after many attempts to save her marriage, decided to move to Houston, Texas, where her sister, Mildred, was living. So, in 1954, Mother took her four children to Houston to live with her sister in a one-bedroom apartment. Junior followed Pat down to Houston where he talked Mother into making another go of it. They sold their Boulevard Street home to Junior's Aunt, Mary Van Loon, and bought a home in southeast Houston on Keller Street. Nevertheless, the old demons

followed Junior wherever he went and soon his new resolutions were gone forever. In 1957 their divorce was official and after 1959 he never saw his four children again.

In the 1960s Junior married an attractive woman named Mary Holmes. He had two sons by Mary: **Samuel “Sammy” Sharp** and **Jody Sharp**. They lived most of their lives in Tyler, Texas. Junior could always make a living wherever he went because there was always a demand for a good farrier. Junior and Mary divorced in 1967. She also tried to get him to change, but to no avail.



When Junior was fifty-three years old he wrote a letter to his mother from the Mary J. Ranch, owned by his aunt, Mary Van Loon, in Crocker, Missouri. An excerpt from the letter dated April 21, 1977, reads, “Dear Mother, Received clothes...Mother I love you and thank you very much. Sorry to hear about Pedro and am glad you have another Pedro—our dog is some dog. My clothes sizes are: Shirt 16-inch neck, 33-inch arm length. Pants, 34-inch waist, 30-inch inseam in Lees. Polo shirt size 44-46. Don’t go to any expense Mother...miss you and love you. Take care of yourself—hope to see you soon. All my love and kisses. You will hear from me soon. Your son, JUNIOR.”



The National Cemetery in Little Rock, Arkansas. Junior is buried near the entrance across the street from the administration building. Richard Martin (son) and Jonathan Martin (grandson) at the grave of Marion C. Sharp in 1987. The inscription reads: "MARION C. / SHARP JR. / PFC / US ARMY / WORLD WAR II / FEB 9, 1924 / JAN 12, 1980."

Later, Junior moved again to Little Rock. At the age of fifty-five he died in a fire, possibly caused by a gas leak, while living at a house owned by his Aunt, Mary Van Loon, on January 12, 1980. The house was located at 17280 Smith Lane, off Arch Street Pike near the Landmark community (about ten miles south of downtown Little Rock). He was buried in the National Cemetery in Little Rock, Arkansas, with full military honors.

See the biographies of **Richard T. Martin, Nancy Carol Martin, Ronald Marion Martin and Cathy Ann Martin, children of Marion Carlos Sharp, Jr.**



Above left: Jonathan (16) and Michael Martin (10), grandsons of Junior Sharp in 1999. Above right: Close-up of Junior's monument in December 2001. Below: Signature of Marion Carlos Sharp, Jr. on a document dated June 29, 1959, in Houston, Texas.

Sources and Notes

- Personal Knowledge of Patricia Bowles, Claire Smith, Carol Sharp Bradshaw and Richard T. Martin.
- Statement of Service for Marion C. Sharp, service number, 38444676, in the National Archives and Records Administration.
- Every foot of the beachhead at Anzio (Italy) was vulnerable to German artillery on the nearby hills. "Foxholes, the usual refuge from bombardments, were often completely filled by rain water; surface shelters built of sandbags and the few buildings that had not been smashed to rubble were the only protection. Not until May 11, 1944, when a massive assault was launched by both the Fifth and Eighth Armies along the Gustav Line were the men at Anzio able to break out. All told they suffered some 59,000 casualties, more than half of which were caused by disease, exhaustion, and the strain of waiting to see where the next shell would explode" (*The American Heritage History of World War II*, by C. L. Sulzberger, page 388). Junior was part of the Fifth army that liberated Rome on June 4, 1944.