

FAREWELL TO THE KISSING SOLDIER

It is with heavy hearts we share the news of the passing of our friend and shipmate, George Mendonsa – “The Kissing Sailor”. The impact of his time on that destroyer cannot be overstated. He is survived by his wife, Rita, who was his wife and companion for 72 years. They are an amazing couple who truly represented our greatest generation.

George fought in WWII’s Pacific Theater, fished a lifetime on Rhode Island’s Narragansett Bay, remained married to the love of his life and raised two children. These attainments accounted for more than a single kiss photographed in the middle of Times Square on the day World



War II ended, and he spent decades making his case for a coveted part in an iconic photograph. For George, that pursuit was all about due acknowledgment, and a larger than life story to be told.

During WWII, George was a quartermaster on USS The Sullivans, a destroyer in Admiral William “Bull” Halsey’s third fleet. With George stationed at her helm, USS The Sullivans shot down diving kamikazes, and survived Typhoon Cobra, unlike three other destroyers that sank during the deadly storm. In the summer of 1945 George dreaded a looming invasion of Japan.

Fortunately, Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945. George was on leave in Times Square that day. Shortly after learning of the war’s conclusion, he couldn’t contain himself! Relieved and jubilant, a war memory caused him to kiss a woman he thought to be a nurse. Alfred Eisenstaedt - Life magazine’s renowned photographer - stood within feet of the soon to be famous kiss. Acting more on reflex than reflection, Eisenstaedt snapped four photos of the couple’s brief encounter. He did not ask for their names and after the kiss, the couple parted without speaking a word.

The next day Life editors had much to say, as that black and white photograph showcased perfect symmetry, stark contrast, and a surreal quality. George did not even discover the photograph until decades after Life first printed the picture on their oversized magazine page. Despite a somewhat modest debut, that photograph became one of history’s most beloved images.

On February 17, 2019, at the age of 95, George Mendonsa - The Kissing Sailor – passed to the great beyond. The United States lost a national treasure and a symbol of the happiest day - when quite by chance and against long odds - two survivors communicated for the ages what the end of a long, costly, and triumphant war feels like. George loved to tell his amazing story about that day. He shared it at every opportunity, deservedly so.



May God hold George, his wife Rita and their family in the palm of His hand, and lovingly shine upon them. Shipmates forever.