

Toopie's: Not just another snack bar

by 1ST LT. MIKE BRIAN, 118 AMS

Most base personnel would not recognize the names William A. Cammuce and Alice Marie unless you referred to them as Toopie and Miss Alice. These two names are synonymous with good food, hot coffee, cold drinks, and occasionally some sage advice.

Toopie was a resident of the WWII barracks which were adjacent to the current airfield in 1953. As a result, Toopie was able to witness the construction of the 721 hangar building which is now composed of offices and maintenance shops, as well as the snack bar.

At that time, the Army National Guard was also close by, however there were no convenient eating establishments, and there was a definite need to provide a snack bar. Several people encouraged Toopie to open a snack bar, serving ready-made sandwiches and Cokes. Toopie began the snack bar that year, serving the sandwich and Coke combination for 20 cents. Later, he got his own grille and made the sandwiches himself, selling them for 15 cents.

As the needs of the base grew, so did Toopie's snack bar. He purchased his original kitchen equipment for a total of \$35, and also purchased the first two air conditioning units to cool the snack bar area. The capabilities of his "snack bar" operation increased also. On one occasion he was asked by General Howard Butler if he could provide 10,000 sandwiches for the airshow to be held at the Nashville Airport. Toopie not only made the sandwiches, but sold 250 cases of Cokes as well.

During his career at the field, Toopie has had the opportunity to meet several distinguished people, including President (then Senator) Lyndon B. Johnson. Regarding Mr. Johnson, Toopie remarked, "He was the most dignified person I have ever seen, the most impressive Texan I have ever met...a John Wayne type of person." Toopie has also met General Swinney (the B-29 pilot who flew the aircraft which dropped the Atomic Bomb on Nagasaki), and the various delegates from the Soviet Union who visited during the Khrushchev regime on a good-will mission.



Alice Marie and William A. Cammuce are the people behind Toopie's Snack Bar. William "Toopie" Cammuce began to serve food to servicemen back in 1953.



The sign for Toopie's Snack Bar is a welcome sight for weary travelers, no matter what branch of service.

He was also well acquainted with former governor Frank Clement, as well as more past commanders and officers of this base than space will permit.

Toopie himself has a past military history. When still a youth, he worked in the stables for the 19th Cavalry polishing saddles and cleaning the barns. When he was old enough, he enlisted and became involved shortly thereafter in the Second World War, where he saw significant action as coxswain on a landing craft. His involvement in the military taught him respect for authority as well as gave him an understanding regarding the needs of those he saw being shipped off to distant places from this airfield.

During the Korean and Vietnam eras, he saw young men being transported from this base. It was his goal to make sure that none of those men left the field hungry. There were occasions when they had no money and Toopie provided them something to hold them over until they could get their next meal.

Once, some Marines were in that exact situation. They told him they would send him the money when they could, but Toopie said not to worry about it. Later, he received the money in reimbursement from the men, as well as a letter thanking him for his gesture of kindness.

For 33 years Toopie operated the snack bar, missing only one drill during the entire time. Illness slowed him down somewhat, and Miss Alice took over the operation, rising at 4:30 a.m. daily to get things going at the snack bar. Miss Alice kept things going during the time Toopie was out, and continues to provide the friendly service we've become accustomed to enjoying.

"She's the most orderly and neat individual I've ever known. I can wear a shirt to the store and back, and hang it in the closet, and the next thing I know she's got it in the laundry. And she's the same way keeping things orderly and clean here" he says.

Miss Alice has worked in other occupations, including being a nurse for 15 years at Vanderbilt.

Although I'm sure he spends time whenever he can with his 17 month old grandson and his 5 month old granddaughter, Toopie says he will continue to operate the snack bar because he loves the people here, and he loves the Guard. If you don't believe it, pay a visit to Toopie's Snack Bar and find out.