

In this corner: OTTO ALIFFI

BY RON LAURETTI

On October 11, the Italian Society of Savannah celebrated Columbus Day at the Westin Savannah Harbor. Octavio (Otto) Aliffi, the society's president in 2007 and 2008, is a military veteran with 24 years of service, a lifelong Savannahian, and a local athletic icon.

Otto's parents, Carmella and Antonino Aliffi, emigrated from Siracusa, Sicily, to Savannah in 1909. They named the youngest of eight sons Octavio – an allusion to the number eight in Italian. With all those boys in the house, Otto's sister Grace, the family's eldest child, helped Momma raise her rambunctious brothers.

Otto attended Cathedral Day School in Savannah, where he took up boxing in the seventh grade. Continuing his education at Commercial High School, he soon was boxing with the Union Bag Athletic Club. In 1948, while in 10th grade, Otto won the regional Golden Gloves tournament in Jacksonville as a 118-pound bantamweight. Following his victory, the Commercial High headmaster forced Otto to choose between school and boxing. The young pugilist resented the ultimatum, and headed to the Marine Corps recruiting office the next day.

Otto's mother had to sign her son's enlistment papers because he was only 17 years old. The Aliffis were accustomed to being military parents, as all eight of their sons served in the various branches of the military. Otto estimates more than 100 years of collective military service among the Aliffi eight.

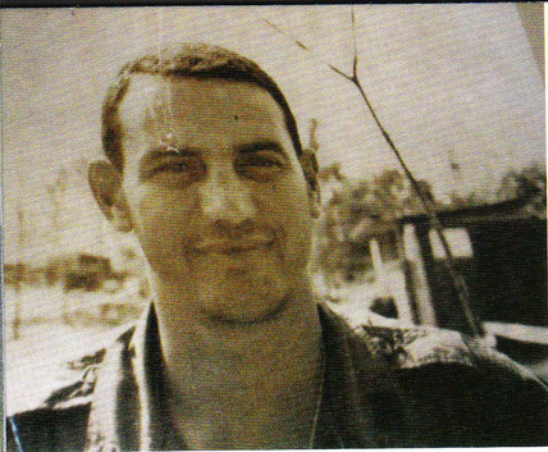
Eventually, Aliffi earned his GED certificate from Benedictine Military School three years after enlisting.

During his first week at Parris Island, where he trained as a Marine recruit, an officer recognized the Savannah boxer and arranged daily training sessions for the young private. Aliffi welcomed the opportunity to sharpen his skills in the ring during the 15-week boot camp, despite the extra harassment he received from his less-than-thrilled drill instructors. He won the base boxing championship in his weight class after boot camp and earned a promotion to private first class. He was transferred to the championship base boxing team at Quantico, Virginia, where he was a welcome addition. He defeated every contender from other branches of the military except one during his three-year enlistment. This defeat by the Navy's 6th Fleet champion was avenged five months later in a rugged rematch. Aliffi attributes his boxing success to lightning quick hands, constant body movement and dedicated training.

Aliffi married Savannah native Margaret Glynn after his discharge



Otto Aliffi during his boxing days



Otto Aliffi during the Vietnam era

from the Marine Corps. He also reenlisted. This time, Otto chose the Army, a career move that would stick for more than two decades. Unfortunately, he was unable to continue boxing when he joined the Army.

Aliffi entered the Army as a sergeant on the heels of his stint as a Marine. His first assignment was as a training instructor at Ft. Lee, Virginia, followed by three years in France as a supply/logistics S-4 specialist. Next, came assignments in Tennessee and California. In 1958, he served in Korea, where he was responsible for the heavy load of equipment in Army warehouses, attaining the rank of technical sergeant (E7). In 1966, prior to deploy-

ment to Vietnam, Aliffi, now a warrant officer-1, was sent to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma to train with a regiment of big guns – 175-mm M107 howitzers, 155-mm M126 self-propelled howitzers, and 8-inch howitzers. It was his job to replace the worn out gun barrels and to maintain an adequate supply of ammunition.

The Army's 1st Battalion, 83rd Artillery was deployed to Nui Dat, Vietnam, on the southern tip of the war torn peninsula. In addition to his duties with his own regiment, he ran daily supply convoys to the 5th Australian Infantry Regiment just a few clicks east. His vehicle was always armed with heavy machine guns to suppress enemy fire. Aliffi remembers the Aussies were great to work with, and he established some good friendships.


Aliffi returned to Hunter Army Airfield after 13 months in Vietnam for a short stay, before returning to Korea for a second rotation of 18 months. He was promoted to warrant officer-3 while stationed in Korea. He was responsible for the supply/logistics operations for all Army units in Korea, normally an assignment for a lieutenant colonel. His final stop on his military world tour was Germany. He retired in 1973 with a chest full of awards, including the Bronze Star for bravery and the

Army Commendation Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster.

As he finished his tour in Germany, a good friend who was a doctor, guided Otto toward the General Medical Company. He began a trial run with the company just a few days after his discharge, and was officially hired after 45 days. He remained with the company (now the McKesson General Medical Corporation) for the next 24 years, retiring in 1997. His territory ranged from Charleston to Jacksonville, where the personable Aliffi established a solid customer base for the company.

On May 3, 2010, Aliffi was inducted into the Greater Savannah Athletic Hall of Fame. With a boxing record of 132 wins, five losses and one draw, the honor certainly was well deserved.

At the end of our interview, Aliffi summed things up thoughtfully. "I've had a good life, lots of success in the ring when I was young, a very rewarding military career, the good fortune to have had an enjoyable career with a solid company, good health, good friends and, last but not least, a wonderful wife and a great family (eight children and 24 grandchildren)."

Sounds pretty good to us, amico. 

TEN YEARS AT THE LANDINGS

My husband and I had been living at The Landings for years. We weren't just on speaking terms with our neighbors, our neighbors were our *friends*.

ONE VISIT TO THE MARSHES

I knew all about this retirement community on Skidaway Island. I knew we would eventually move there . . . when we needed to. Then I visited The Marshes.

AND I FELL IN LOVE WITH IT

I realized that I only knew the facts, not the feeling – the feeling of belonging, of comfort, of style. I recognized so many faces! My neighbors and friends from The Landings were already there!



What had I been waiting for? Trust me, call 912.226.7226 and schedule a visit today.



the
Marshes
OF SKIDAWAY ISLAND

SAVANNAH CHARM, ISLAND STYLE.

95 Skidaway Island Park Road
Savannah, Georgia 31411

www.MarshesofSkidaway.org



Managed by Life Care Services™



695423