

“Shore to Please”  
Local Couple Supported Troops for Years

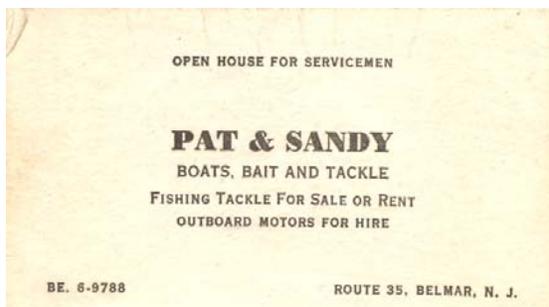
By Melissa Ziobro  
Staff Historian

A version of this article appeared in the 13 March 2009 *Monmouth Message*

A local New Jersey couple answered Army Chief of Staff General George W. Casey, Jr.’s call to sustain the force some 66 years before he formally endorsed the imperative.

Gen. Casey outlined the Army’s path to success during his speech at the annual Association of the U.S. Army Eisenhower Luncheon in October 2007. He stated, “Four imperatives will frame what we need to do.” He identified those imperatives as sustain, prepare, reset, and transform.

The first imperative, according to Casey, would be to sustain Soldiers, civilians and families through recruiting and improving quality of life. This should include, he noted, caring for wounded warriors.



Pat and Sandy Breslin used their Belmar marine basin boating and fishing concession on Route 35 to do all those things for sixteen years (1941- 1957).

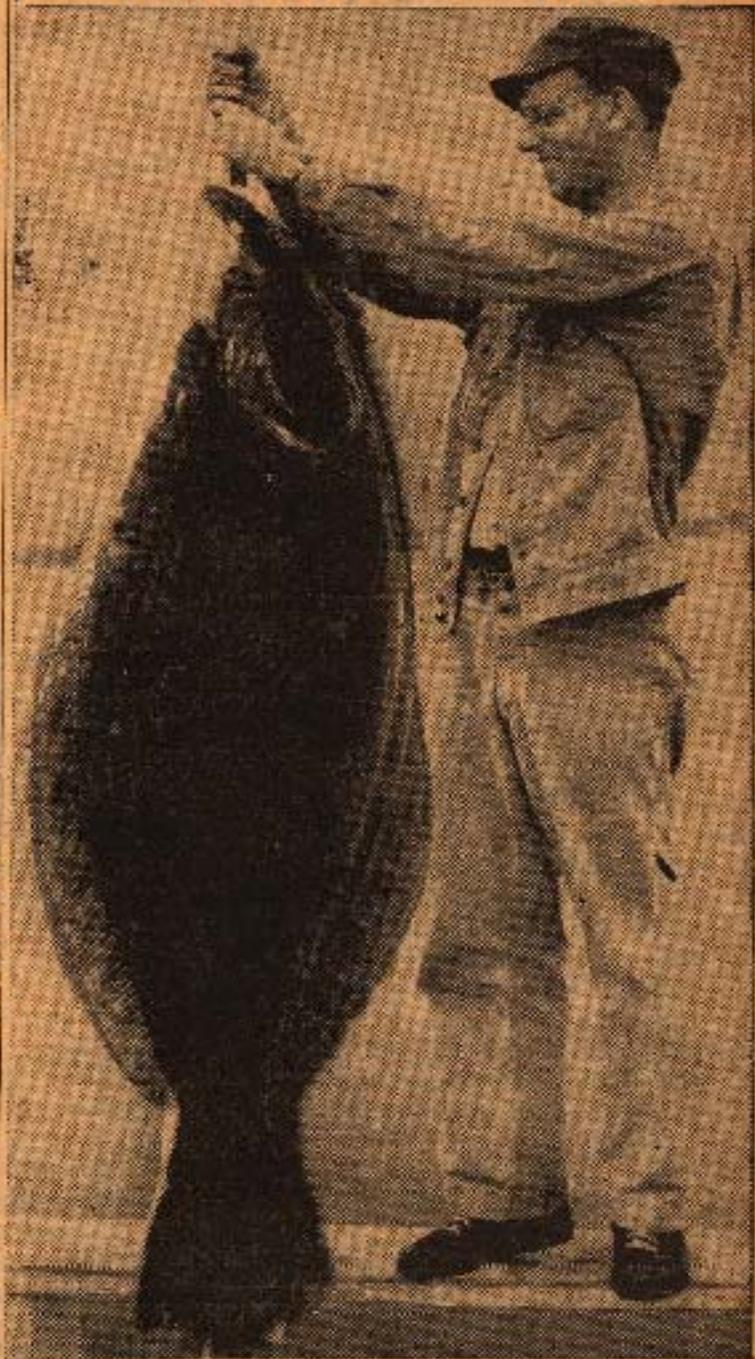
The day after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the Breslins declared their 150 boats, fishing equipment, dock and food free to anyone in uniform, “regardless of race, color, or creed.” The couple often allowed servicemen and women to phone their families at no cost. Many of these young Soldiers served at Fort Monmouth.

When asked in 1954 how they could afford to provide this kind of support, Pat and Sandy explained, “We’ve got a good business. We’ll never be rich, but you couldn’t buy our civilian customers. They’re loyal to us and hope that others show consideration to their friends and relatives in the service somewhere else.”

Pat and Sandy paid special attention to convalescents, hosting regional hospital outings that dedicated the use of their facilities to wounded warriors on certain days of the week.

A 1954 post newspaper article noted that Pat and Sandy “have been credited with healing the broken bones, spirits, and hearts of countless thousands in their morale building work.”

# It's A Fluke!



IT'S A FLUKE!!!! . . . and Sgt. Robert J. Landrigan, Post convalescent patient, has the above 'catch' to prove it! Believe it or not, Sgt. Landrigan says he caught this Shark River saltwater inhabitant off Pat and Sandy's Boat and Fishing Pier at Belmar, N. J., during Regional Hospital outing. Servicemen have free access to all facilities at Pat and Sandy's every Tuesday, can fish, swim, row, or sail "without any charge", are given a free lunch.

The couple gained some notoriety for their efforts. They received the American flag that flew over the Capitol on D-Day. They visited with President Eisenhower in 1953. They received a medal from Archbishop of New York and Apostolic Vicar for the U.S. Armed Forces Francis Joseph Cardinal Spellman in 1954. They garnered mention in the Congressional Record in recognition of their efforts to better the morale of servicemen. Sandy Breslin received the first orchid ever sent out on the "Breakfast in Hollywood" radio show. The couple even appeared on the television shows "Journey through Life" and "Wheel of Fortune."

This version of "Wheel of Fortune" aired from 1952 to 1953 on CBS. The show rewarded everyday do-gooders by telling their stories on national TV and then allowing them to spin a wheel for prizes. Occasionally, the spin afforded the good samaritans a chance to win cash by answering trivia questions. The program also gave people their "secret desire," or something they had been wanting for a long time.

"Wheel of Fortune" accepted the Breslins as deserving contestants in 1953. PFC William J. Ryan and PFC Joseph Ficarotta, both stationed at Fort Monmouth, accompanied the Breslins to their game show appearance on June 17.

Ryan, now a PhD, recalled recently, "The studio was on 57th Street in the city...I spun a wheel associated with questions, they won prizes. It was in the age of the rigged quiz programs; I was given strong hints about the questions to be asked."

Ryan remembered, "They didn't want to bring people up to honor them and not have them go away with anything... Well, everybody likes to be happy with gifts."

The Breslins won prizes that included blankets, a tool kit, and electrical appliances. They even received their “secret desire:” a television set for a veterans' hospital.

The appearance was “a pretty big deal at the time,” according to Ryan.



But the Breslins did not need praise or prizes. As the Hon. James C. Auchincloss (Rep. NJ) said in a speech to the House of Representatives on May 25, 1945:

“Pat and Sandy practice practical patriotism. They do not wear their patriotism on their sleeve; it is deeply entrenched in their hearts and they are setting us all an example as to what we should do to make this country a better place.”

Bill Ryan concurred, “They [Pat and Sandy] were probably two of the most incredible people I think I’ve met. Because they were humble, certainly they were very very sincere. Inside the building that they worked from there was several religious items: there was a statue of St Joseph, and you know, little things like that. Never something that was intended to be showy. Just something that let you know that they had the good faith. And certainly they were patriotic; extremely patriotic. And very generous.”

The Breslins themselves said that they could do without Government citations or even praise from the President himself. They claimed as their real rewards the thousands of letters they received from men on virtually every battlefield in the world.

Photos of these men covered the walls of the Breslins’ building in a “GI Hall of Fame” that knew no rank. A photograph of a paraplegic man fishing from a Red Cross wheelchair reportedly flanked an autographed picture of President Eisenhower. Bill Ryan recalled “pictures that they had of generals that would come and visit and thank them

during WWII. Many of these were color [photographs]. And, you know...color was not really as inexpensive as it is today, and for them to have an 8 x 10, to have a photographer on hand to get an 8 x 10 color print—somebody had to have some pull.”

Sandy told the *Monmouth Message* in 1954, “We promised the War Department in 1941 that the free service for GIs would last thru the duration...We just haven’t decided when the duration is going to end.”

The duration ended in April 1957 when the Breslins lost their lease. Their building was later demolished. The couple lamented their loss, but they especially feared the fate of the war memorial they had erected in 1949 in honor of the servicemen who visited them but did not return. A local store volunteered to house the memorial without charge. Then, the Breslins contacted President Eisenhower. Eisenhower contacted the Department of Defense, which contacted the Army.



Fort Monmouth Commander Maj. Gen. William D. Hamlin agreed to have to memorial placed here. A dedication ceremony occurred on April 25, 1961. The memorial remains here, just outside the Community Center (Building 552).

The fate of the memorial following Fort Monmouth’s pending closure remains uncertain. According to Patricia Melango of the Belmar Historical Council via email correspondence in 2008, “Belmar has an ongoing marina renovation and will be constructing on the same pier area that was once occupied by Pat and Sandy. Our Belmar Historical Council would love to see the monument replaced in that area.”

Dr. Ryan received his discharge in 1954. He last saw the Breslins in 1956, when he and his new bride honeymooned in the area. He next visited the Jersey shore in the early 1970s, when a golf outing brought him to the Lakewood Country Club. He recalled driving from Lakewood to Belmar, telling his golf partner all about Pat and Sandy. Upon arriving and finding that their building was gone, Ryan remembered, “I was crushed...To service men, they felt as though they were parents, I guess. Or family, at least. So that was my recollection of them.”

When asked what he thought inspired the Breslins to sustain servicemen and women as they did, Ryan answered, “They loved this country, and they loved the people, and they felt that since they couldn’t go to war, they could do everything possible for the servicemen that did. That’s the best I can come up with.”

What more could Gen. Casey ask?