

Charlie Brown's War

Charles M. Schulz found out firsthand what it was like to fight in a war. His melancholy cartoon boy and friends never forgot.

by Melissa Amateis Marsh

CHARLES M. SCHULZ WAS IN St. Paul, Minnesota, home from the army. He was there only on furlough, but maybe his stay would turn permanent: the United States had just dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima a couple of days earlier, on August 6, 1945.

"The streetcar pulled up in front of my dad's barber shop," wrote the 20th Armored Division machine-gunner. "I put the duffel bag on my shoulder and got off the back of the streetcar. Walked around, crossed the street, and into the barber shop. He was working on a customer."

The creator of Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and the rest of the *Peanuts* gang later lamented not getting a warmer welcome. "That was my homecoming," he said. "There was no party. Nothing.... I look back on it, and I think, 'Well, that was robbery. I didn't get to be in a parade, no one gave me a hug, or anything like that.'"

It was the sort of experience that stays with someone, and it may be no coincidence that Schulz went on to make a point of paying regular tribute to his fellow WWII veterans. His legendary *Peanuts* debuted in 1950, and during the 50 years it appeared in newspapers and other publications around the world until Schulz pub-



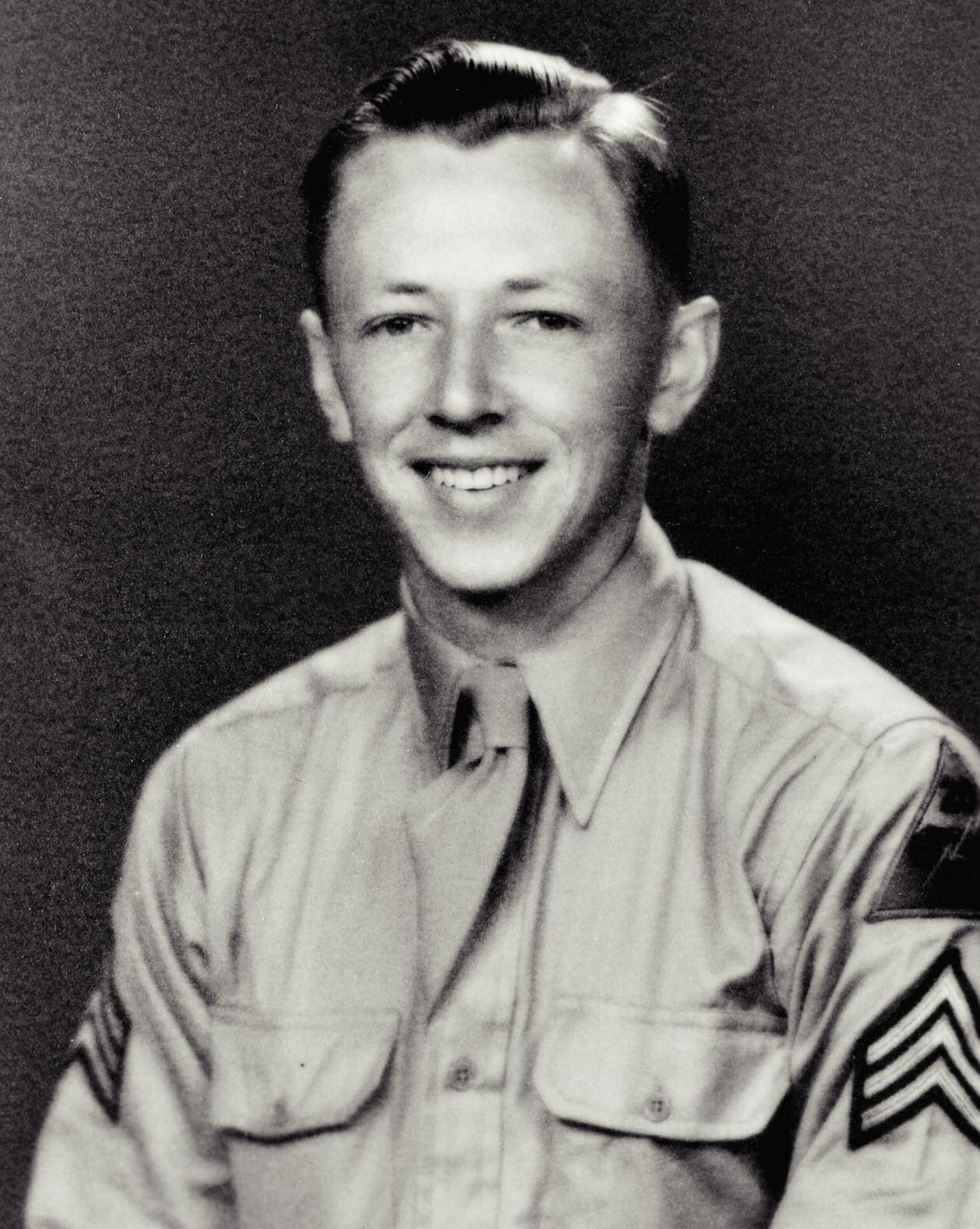
lished his final strip in 2000, he referred many times to what was known as the Good War and to the GIs who fought it.

Though Schulz didn't create *Peanuts* until after the war, he was on the road to being a cartoonist at a very early age, having inherited a passion for comics from his father, Carl, along with a solid work ethic. The grim sense of humor that turned up in his strips came from his homemaker mother, Dena. Charles was the Schulz's only child, born on November 26, 1922. By the age of five, the boy who often went by the nickname Sparky, given to him by an uncle, was drawing well enough to impress. "Someday, Charles," his kindergarten teacher told him, "you're going to be an artist."

When Schulz was a senior in high school in 1940, his mother spotted a newspaper advertisement for an artist correspondence course. His father paid the \$170 tuition in installments, and Schulz enrolled in the Federal School of Illustrating and Cartooning (also known as Art Instruction Incorporated and later as Art Instruction Schools), a 12-lesson home-study program. He earned just a C+ in Division Five: Drawing of Children.

After high school, Schulz worked menial jobs and tried to break into the world of cartooning. But in November 1942 he received

LEFT AND OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF THE CHARLES M. SCHULZ MUSEUM AND RESEARCH CENTER, SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA



Top: Charles Schulz's WWII service helped shape his classic cartoon strip *Peanuts*. He had special reverence for the sacrifices GIs made on the beaches of D-Day, June 6, 1944. This strip for June 10, 1994, was last in a series marking D-Day's 50th anniversary. Above: Private Schulz stands with his dad, Carl, probably at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, in 1943. Schulz's father and mother encouraged his interest in art. Opposite: War interrupted Schulz's art career, but he ultimately thrived in the army. By February 1944 he was a sergeant.