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Tony Vaccaro Recalls Taking Photo of Patton

Acclaimed Photographer and Former Douglaston Resident Describes Nerve Wracking Experience with World War II General

By [Nathan Duke](#) | [Email the author](#) | 12:15pm

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Photographer Tony Vaccaro was honored with the Distinguished Patriot award by the committee for the 84th Annual Little Neck Douglaston Memorial Day Parade.

Vaccaro, 90, shot photos across Europe during 1944 and 1945 and in Germany at the end of World War II.

The photographer, a former Douglaston resident who went on to work for Life Magazine, snapped shots of John F. Kennedy, Charlie Chaplin and Pablo Picasso during the course of his career.

This morning, he attended a Memorial Day breakfast at Douglaston's St. Anastasia Church, during which recounted his experience photographing Gen. George S. Patton:

"I had a darkroom at the top of a castle in a town called Passau in Germany [at the border of Austria] in 1945. This was at the end of the war. Gen. Patton had just received a message that it was over.

At the bottom of the castle was a little boutique that the Army wanted to make into a library for soldiers. Gen. Patton was coming to inaugurate it. My newspaper, The Thunderbolt, sent me to take a photo.

I had a Speed Graphic camera. I clicked the photo and the flash went off, but not the shutter. So, I asked [Patton] if he could hold up a book to read. I took two pictures.

The first one, my flash worked but it was underexposed. I apologized to Gen Patton and told him my camera was not working. I said I'd go up to my darkroom and would be right back.

I ran upstairs and I was sweating because it was August. When I came back down, he was standing there with a book in his hand.

He tells me, 'Take it easy, son. I have another chapter to go.'

I started to salute him, but he reached out his hand to shake mine."