

**James J. Coclanis      # 8**

**Oct. 29, 1919 - June 16, 2001**

**Plot 106 Lot E ½ 7**

Well-known as “Jimmy” or “Coke,” James Coclanis is remembered by many as an accomplished student athlete and decorated war hero. Jimmy was born on October 29, 1919 to John and Kate Constantine Coclanis. While growing up in Glens Falls, he was well-known for his athletic abilities. In his early years, Jimmy enjoyed the youth basketball program at the YMCA and excelled at table tennis, earning a number one ranking and participating in many exhibition matches at the “Y.”

A student at Glens Falls High School, Jim played four sports: basketball, football, track and baseball. He is believed to be the first Glens Falls High School student to be named captain of three major sports in the same year. Named to the Northern Conference basketball team for three consecutive years, he was also high scorer for three consecutive years in the highly competitive City Series games between Glens Falls and St. Mary’s Academy. In each of those years, he was named to the Post Star All City Basketball Team as well. Chosen for the varsity football team the first year that he played, Jim played for three years, serving as team quarterback the last year. In track, he enjoyed the low hurdles, sprints and high jump, and was a member of an 880 relay team that broke the Class B record at sectionals in 1937. A member of the baseball team for one year, he played right field during a season when Glens Falls High tied for the Conference championship.

Upon his graduation from high school in 1938, Jim entered the Bordentown Military Institute (BMI) in Bordentown, New Jersey, where he also excelled in athletics, playing all varsity sports. He was elected captain of the basketball team and set a scoring record that lasted for ten years. He was named to the New Jersey All-State Prep Team.

Awarded a football scholarship, Jim attended Louisiana State University for a semester where he played freshman football. Returning to Glens Falls and his mother’s home on Warren Street, Jim played basketball with a professional team, the Glens Falls Lions, as well as with the Hudson Falls Iroquois. During the fall, he played football with a semi-pro team, the Scholars.

With the coming of World War II, Jim was forced to put aside his athletic interests, leaving with a draft contingent for Camp Shelby Mississippi on May 18, 1942. In September of 1944, he was stationed at Fort Ordway, California before being deployed to the Philippines. In the Philippines campaign, he participated in major battles at Mindoro, Leyte, Luzon and Mindanao

as part of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. During the battle of Mindanao, Jim was wounded in the leg by shrapnel. Moved from the field hospital, he was transferred by air to Fairfield Air Base in California, then to Orlo General Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio. In a letter to a friend during his convalescence in Ohio, Jim reported an unpleasant bout of malaria, contracted while in the Philippines. During his time in the military, he earned the rank of Sergeant and was awarded numerous medals: Purple Heart, Good Conduct Medal, Expert in Rifle and Machine Gun, Combat Infantry Badge, and a New York State Conspicuous Service Medal awarded by Governor Thomas E. Dewey. He earned multiple citations: the Philippines Liberation Ribbon with two Bronze Battle Stars. The Asiatic Pacific Theatre Service Ribbon with two Bronze Battle Stars and Bronze Arrowhead for being in the initial assault wave. In 1945, Jim received an honorable discharge and returned to his beloved Glens Falls. A short time later, he married Ruth Irene Lopen. Ruth, a graduate of Hudson Falls High School, worked at General Electric at the time of her marriage to Jim. They shared a mutual love of sports and were happily married for 50 years until the time of her death.

After the war, Jim continued to enjoy athletics, playing basketball with the Samoa and Iroquois semi-pro teams for a time. Realizing that his war injury would come to prevent his continued full participation in athletics, he returned to officiating, having done a few junior varsity games before his military service. He became a certified official in 1946 and covered games for 22 years at the high school, semi-pro and professional levels.

Jim's post military career was with the United States Postal Service where he worked for 31 years. He also was employed on a part-time basis by Pinkerton's Racing Security Service at Saratoga Race Track and with the Warren County Sheriff's Department as a Court Attendant.

Active in the community, Jim was a member of the American Legion, BPOE Elks, and was a long-time member of the Adirondack Chapter of the Order of Ahepa Lodge, an organization founded by people of Greek Heritage to preserve their history and culture. In fact, he often humorously recalled being part of the Ahepa Olympics at Brown University in 1939, where he won the high jump and beat a then relatively unknown young man named Spiro Agnew in the 120 yard low hurdles.



In 1985, James Coclanis was inducted into the Heritage Hall Sports Hall of Fame. In 2014, he was inducted posthumously into the Glens Falls High School Athletic Hall of Fame. He passed away at the age of 81, on June 16, 2001.

Prepared by Evelyn Donahue using Jim's archival file that was given to the Glens Falls City Historians Office in 2013. It is an amazing historical file which tells the story of an outstanding Glens Falls man.

Questions and comments should be directed to the Glens Falls City Historian at: City Hall 42 Ridge St. Glens Falls, NY [historian@cityofglensfalls.com](mailto:historian@cityofglensfalls.com) 518-761-3871.