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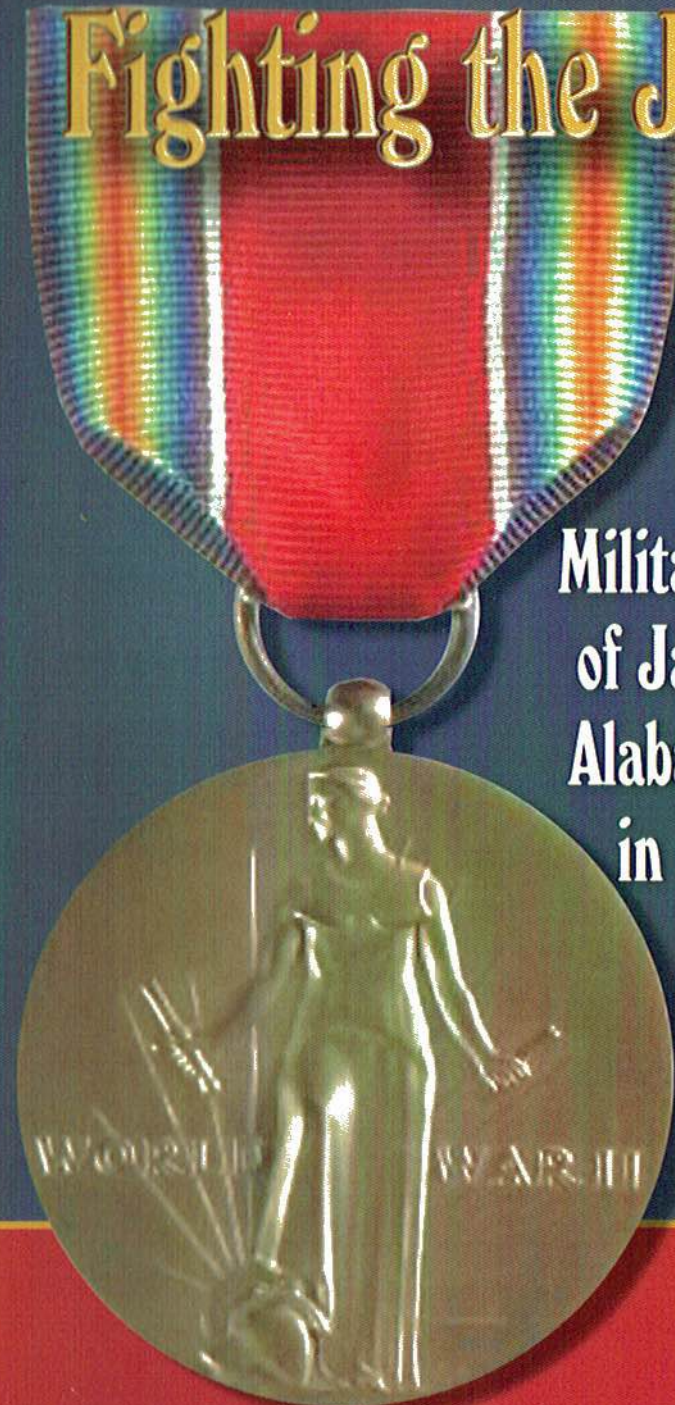
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FIGHTING THE JUST WAR

R. H. DYKES



Fighting the Just War



Military Experiences of Jackson County, Alabama, Residents in World War II

By Ronald H. Dykes

Books by Ronald H. Dykes:

*James O. Haley—
Lawyer, Judge, Teacher, Advocate*

*Growing Up Hard:
Memories of Jackson County, Alabama, in the Early
Twentieth Century*

*Fighting the Just War:
Military Experiences of Jackson County, Alabama,
Residents in World War II*

FIGHTING THE JUST WAR

**Military Experiences of Jackson County, Alabama,
Residents in World War II**

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Ronald H. Dykes



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This book is dedicated to the millions of soldiers who participated in World War II and particularly to the ones interviewed on the following pages. We will be forever indebted to them for their valor in the war and for preserving the democracy and institutions of the United States.

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INTRODUCTION

The appellation “hero” is bandied about pretty freely nowadays, sometimes making it seem not so special. Nevertheless, I would like to add some names to the honor roll of heroes, and I am convinced that each one fits into the classic definition.

Over the past few weeks I have had the distinct pleasure of talking at length to a number of World War II veterans who are residents of Jackson County, Alabama. They were either born in the county and lived here most of their lives or were born elsewhere but settled in the county years ago.

Why do I think they are heroes? To put it as succinctly as possible, they and their fellow soldiers saved our country from being defeated in that war. Otherwise, the Axis powers would have succeeded in their objective of essentially taking over the world, including the United States, irrevocably changing our country from democracy to some other kind of government, probably some form of fascism. Now, as far as I am concerned, whoever helped save the United States from such a fate is a hero to me. These veterans, though, will certainly be embarrassed to think that I am calling them as such. They do not look on their accomplishment in that way—almost all of them told me they had a job to do over there, so they went and did it.

The year 2005 marks the 60th anniversary of the end of the war in which they so valiantly fought. The United States has been to war several times since then, and some have been controversial, particularly the one in Vietnam and the current Gulf War. In none of the conflicts since 1945, though, has the United States itself been in imminent danger of attack. In this regard, WW II was different, which may be the reason the country was almost completely united over the necessity of the war, at least after Pearl Harbor. Patriotism was in the air, and soldiers lucky enough to survive the war were proudly welcomed back home. Nowadays, though, the war and the sacrifices of the soldiers have been largely forgotten.

I talked to these veterans for two major reasons. First, I wanted to

record their memories of the war while it was still possible to do so. As time goes by, more and more of these memories are lost, either to death or old age, and can never be retrieved. Second, on the 60th anniversary of the end of the war, I hoped to rekindle some appreciation of the importance of the war itself as well as the contributions of those who fought in it.

When I began this project, I was concerned about whether enough WW II veterans could be found to make it worthwhile. Also, I was aware that veterans are often reluctant to talk about their war experiences. Neither problem materialized, however. I wound up with more leads than I could possibly follow up on, and almost all of the veterans I contacted seemed pleased to have the opportunity to talk with me. Only two informed me that they did not want to participate, and I didn't include the stories of several others because of time or other constraints. Overall, though, the WW II veterans whose experiences are included on the following pages would seem to be only a fraction of those who were potentially available in Jackson County.

The variety of their experiences is remarkable. About half fought in Europe and about half in the Pacific, and one was with Merrill's Marauders in Burma. These Jackson County residents participated in some of the biggest, bloodiest battles of the war, including Iwo Jima, the Normandy invasion, Okinawa, the liberation of the Philippines, the Battle of the Bulge, Burma and others. They went for months on end without a break, were shot at, were the targets of bombs and artillery fire, fought off insects and diseases in the jungles of the Pacific, were POWS, survived extremely cold winters, and were injured in battle. Despite the dangers and hardships, they all take pride in having served their country when they were needed the most.

I taped our conversations and reworked the transcriptions into a narrative form except in three instances. Two of the veterans had extensive memoirs which they let me use. The third was deceased, and the family generously allowed me to use a long newspaper article about his war experiences. All except the latter had an opportunity to review the rough drafts. In preparing the narratives, I made an effort to maintain some sense of how the individuals talked in normal conversation.

Hopefully, someone reading one of the stories will say, "That sounds just like so-and-so talking." I was surprised about one aspect of our conversations that is not evident from the transcriptions. All but two of them related their stories in an unemotional, almost clinical manner, as if they were talking about someone else's experiences.

The men I talked to have quick minds and fairly acute memories. However, aficionados of WW II history should be gentle with them to some degree. Even the sharpest of memories can become a little fuzzy after 60 years or more. In every case, though, I have verified the main thrust of their stories, either by additional reading, over the internet, or through books related to their experiences that they loaned me.

As some of the veterans indicated, they were not told much about the "big picture" during their time in the war. In the heat of battle, they were only interested in their well-being and what was going on right around them. Therefore, most of their stories have an added page or two of "bigger picture" information in an effort on my part to put their experiences in some sort of context. I have also included military and current photos when available.

As with most of us, my knowledge of WW II was sketchy at best, but I have learned a lot during this project. More important, however, is the appreciation I gained for the accomplishments of the 12,000,000 American soldiers who fought in the war. I realize that soldiers from most counties in the United States played essential roles, but I seriously doubt that any contributed more to the effort than those in Jackson County, Alabama.

Some acknowledgments are in order. My wife Jane complained less than I expected about our unkempt lawn during the time I was working on this project. Toby and Melanie and wonderful little Katy (the only perfect grandchild, ever) gave me unquantifiable pleasure and needed respite. My mother Alma, as usual, thought I would be beyond reproach in this endeavor as in everything else. My sister Glenda, however, knows better and lets mother know. Delbert Shelton, Bernie Arnold and Herschel Boyd were most helpful in providing names of veterans to talk with. The Jackson County Historical Association and Lynne Carver of the Paint Rock River Press made the book possible.

Finally, and most important of all, I would like to thank the WW II veterans who so graciously welcomed me into their homes and taught me so much.

Part A.

Jackson County Residents in the Pacific Theater and Burma

Charles Bynum

I was born December 5, 1924. I went into the military January 8 of 1942 when I was 17. I volunteered for the navy and had to get my parents' permission since I wasn't 18. We were on the golf course in 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed. I had never heard of Pearl Harbor but I went down and joined the next day but they didn't take me until January. I was living in Chattanooga. I had just passed to the twelfth grade.

I did my basic in San Diego for about eight weeks. It was mostly calisthenics, marching, carrying a rifle. For a 110 pound boy, boot camp was hard.

After boot camp they sent me to Chicago. They had an aircraft mechanics school on Navy Pier. I went to aircraft mechanic school for six months. They just sent me there, I didn't volunteer. I had to take an aptitude test for it. I was pleased because I wanted to fly and eventually I did. I learned how to repair aircraft engines and how to do general repair on the rest of the aircraft. We learned a lot. We stayed on Navy Pier, the whole thing was navy, and our barracks were there.



Then I went to Hollywood, Florida to be trained as an aircraft gunner. They had asked for volunteers. We actually flew and actually fired at a target being towed by other aircraft. The target was a sleeve behind the plane and sometime we would hit the cable pulling it, but I learned how to shoot pretty good anyway. On that particular plane we had a 30 caliber machine gun. I was training from land, but the basic idea was to go aboard a carrier later on. During training

there the plane was an ASNJ, the army called them AT6s. They were a two man plane, pilot and gunner. The gunner was located right behind the pilot and rode backwards. It was an open cockpit and the gun would swivel. I could turn around and look at the pilot's neck. Our bullets would be marked with paint and the paint would come off on the target if you hit it. We'd fly out to sea.

I was there about six months, then I went to Pongo Field, Virginia, where we started training in the actual airplanes we would fly in the war, which were torpedo bombers. There were three of us in that plane, a pilot, radioman, and a gunner. I was a turret gunner. The gun was built into a moveable turret that would turn around and up and down. The turret was behind the pilot and above the radioman who was down in the hulk of the plane, and he had a 30 caliber machine gun pointing down. My gun protruded from the turret. We would fly out to sea and shoot at targets like we did for the other training. This lasted about four months.

I didn't know where I was going at that time. I knew that I would have gone aboard the USS Yorktown but the day before they shipped we had a little boxing match and I got knocked down and broke my left wrist. The boxing was just an intra-squad thing, not general. I couldn't go with them so they assigned me to what they called Hedron 5 in Norfolk waiting for somebody to come by that needed a gunner.

I was there waiting about two months. During this time, I was mostly standing watch. They always had somebody on watch with rifles. The USS San Jacinto came by and wanted a gunner. It was an operating carrier and was built by the people in Houston with war bonds. Not only that, they wanted several gunners and radiomen. I was just one of many. Our squadron was the first one aboard the ship. We were number 51 group, followed by 47 and 49. I was in the 38th fleet.

We went aboard and went around Cape Hatteras. It was storming and everybody got sick, it was really storming. We went on through the Panama Canal to Hawaii and we got more training. We went through Pearl Harbor and there was still a lot of damage. This was in May of 1944. I had had training for over two years. We were in Hawaii for two days.

From there we went to a little island in the Marshall group called Majuro. We went there for a beer party. This was just prior to getting me into the war. Afterwards, we got aboard the ship and went to Wake Island. We had some idea we were going there but we weren't sure. That was getting into the war.

The San Jacinto carried nine torpedo bombers and twenty four fighter planes which were for escorting the torpedo bombers on their missions. We didn't have any dive bombers. Our torpedo bombers could carry one torpedo, four 500 pound bombs, two 1000 pound bombs or twelve 100 pound bombs. We could also carry depth charges but couldn't carry both bombs and depth charges at the same time.

The mission of the torpedo bombers was to bomb Japanese targets. I flew on 35 of these missions. We usually flew at eight thousand to nine thousand feet, and sometimes we would get up to twelve thousand feet. Then we would glide dive until we got down to about a thousand feet and then we would drop our bombs. We would also strafe them, too. Our fighter planes kept the Japanese fighter planes from us. We had some real good ones to protect us. We got a few bullet holes in our tail section, but we never got any big hits while I was on a mission.

We also went on anti-submarine missions. If a sub was at periscope depth you could see its shadow in the water but not if it was deeper. If we saw one, we would drop depth charges on them. Depth charges are really a bomb. When you drop it so much pressure gets in it and then it explodes. You can set them for certain depths. The pressure of the water is what explodes them. If you want it to go deeper, you set it to go off deeper.

Our first bombing mission came after we got a report there were six Japanese radio ships afloat and operating and we went out and bombed and strafed those six. They were radio boats but they were disguised as fishing boats. That was our first encounter with the enemy. I wasn't afraid because we weren't being attacked by any aircraft or anything. Of course, the boats were shooting at us. They were sampans. We sunk them all. We probably went about a hundred and fifty miles to where they were. We came back and landed on the ship.

Our next mission was Saipan, two or three days after the fishing boats. We went about 200 miles to get there. We carried four or five bombs that weighed one hundred pounds each and were about four to five feet long and about one and a half feet in diameter, and we went in and bombed with them. What we were doing was softening Saipan up for the invasion. We encountered a lot of Japanese fire there. If you could have walked down to the ground on the shells, you could have done it, that's how much there was.

We were busy bombing. We did make four trips in one day to different places. After Saipan, we bombed Guam, Tinian, and Peleliu. We were softening these up for an invasion. The battleships were also firing on these islands from a distance. We also bombed Leyte in the Philippines. The battle was going on there. We would bomb ahead of the troops. The marines would go in first, and after it was partially taken, the army would come in.

Peleliu is where my pilot and radioman were killed, shot down. I didn't happen to go on that mission. We had already made two trips over there that day. We were just starting to go back again and there was a chief ordinance man that needed to get some flight time. If you flew as much as four hours a month, you got time and a half for it. He come up to me and said he wanted to fly over there today. I said the first time it was awful but kind of slacked up the second time. He didn't say can I take your flight, he said I am taking your flight. He was with them when they got shot down. I had been with this pilot and radioman since the beginning, we were with the same crew all the time. I found out they got shot down when one of the planes radioed back to the ship and said they had lost two or three planes. I kept looking for them to come back but they didn't. I cried like a baby. I don't know what hit the plane. The Japanese were firing something like 40 mm and five inch shells. You could actually see the five inch shells come at you. The shells sometime burst before they hit something, if they got so high they would burst or if they hit something they would burst. This may have been what happened to them.

It was about a week before I flew after that. They got a replacement pilot and I started flying with him. His name was Milt Moore and he

was a close friend with George Bush. I probably made about 20 flights with my first pilot and about 15 with the second.

I knew George well. He was a pilot in the same squadron I was in. We would all be briefed in the ready room. We would go in there when we were being attacked. That was where general quarters were. We would play board games, and George would be there. Everybody knew his family was rich but he didn't act like it, he was real nice and a good pilot.

I was flying in the plane next to him when he got shot down. I reported to my pilot, "Chutes." I saw one chute come out and blossom. Then I saw another come out, it streamed but it didn't open up. The other chute I did not see, so one never got out of the plane. George's opened but we didn't know whose it was until we got back to the ship. A sub had radioed the ship and told them who it was.

Our aircraft was often under attack. The Japanese planes would come in right down through the middle between ships after they made their bomb runs. The ships were shooting toward each other, and I guess some of the bullets hit our own ships. I had a big old helmet that I painted yellow. During that "turkey shoot" I went up on the flight deck to see what was going on and shells were going everywhere. I was watching a gunner load 40 mm shells, and I saw him reach back and scratch his shoulder. He had been hit but didn't know it. Those planes were real close. We absolutely encountered kamikaze pilots. Once we had two that came in and hit on both sides of us in the water. Parts of a plane and pilot blew back up on our ship and we had a man, this is gruesome, he grabbed an arm and said, "Look what I got." Usually the fighters got the kamikaze pilots before they got near our ships. Our ship came out real good. It stayed out there till the war was over, never docked and never anchored anywhere. It was refueled from tankers.

Our squadron was not part of the ship. We had no duties on it, and we didn't have battle stations, but we got along well with the sailors. We slept in little bunks that were three together that you could barely get in. The officers had rooms that had two or three in a room.

Once we hit the water after we took off from the carrier. We usually made catapult take offs. At this particular time they wanted us to make

a fly away take off. Fly away is when you are back here and you rev up as fast as it will go with the brakes on, then you let off the brakes and take off. Catapult is your induced take off. Well, we went right off the front of the boat and we hit the water. We just didn't have enough power to get off, but the pilot had enough sense to veer to the right.

At that time in my turret was an escape hatch. You pull a lever and the whole side would fall off. I got out first. The plane was floating and would float until it filled up with water. The radioman's belt broke and he was knocked unconscious and was floating in the water that had gotten into the plane. The pilot was outside trying to get the life raft and I tried to help him get it out and we didn't see anything of the radioman so I looked in where I had just come out of and he was floating in the water there. His head was down. I reached in and pulled him out, I was pretty strong at that time. We pulled him into the raft. The plane had been loaded with depth chargers and we actually heard the depth chargers explode. They were deep enough so they didn't make a big gusher. A destroyer, the USS Healy, came by and picked us up and we stayed on it four days. I injured the right index finger, it cut a ligament.

This kind of thing didn't happen too often, but I think every pilot had a torpedo bomber to their credit. They would come in to land. The signal officer would wave them off. They would have cut their engines and just couldn't get back.

I spent from May to November on the ship. I didn't use my mechanics training any at all. We had no breaks but all the ships were like that. We went to Guam and were waiting for our group 45 to relieve us but no one had heard anything from them. So we were told we would have to go back aboard because 45 couldn't be found. We were getting ready to board and 45 radioed and said they were on their way. Then we left Guam on a little carrier called the Bougainville and we came home on it. It was a carrier but it just carried troops and planes. Man, yeah, I was glad to get back to the states.

I was regular navy, not the reserves, because I had joined up for four years, so I couldn't get out of the service. The war was still going on. When I came back we had one or two choices of what we wanted to do

so I chose patrol bombers. They sent me to San Francisco.

We had a crew of thirteen people. I was the plane captain on this patrol plane, PBM was the name of it. This was when the UN was first forming there, and all the dignitaries would come in by ship from overseas. We would fly out of Alameda and go out and escort these ships. We would fly out about 300 miles and we would circle around these ships escorting them in to the country. We were afraid subs would try to sink some of those ships. The war was just ending. My job on the plane was to see that the men got fed. We would eat on the plane. We took thirteen steaks every time we went up. We cooked about six of them and I took the rest over to my girl friend's house and ate them over there.

I came out in 1945. I had enough points to have gotten out if I had been a reservist. I got the Asiatic-Pacific Medal, the Presidential Unit Citation with One Star twice, the Southeast Asia Medal, the American Theater of War Medal, and the ship itself got some. I got Wings for flying in three major battles, mostly around the Philippines.

I got married while I was in the navy. After I got back I learned to be an electrician at Alcoa. I moved to Scottsboro in 1967 to work at Revere as an electrician and retired in 1986. I am now married to Josephine Goff. I have three children by my first marriage, she has two and we have one.

We have a reunion every year, and I go. Bush goes to some. He has given me four pens, two sets of cufflinks, three gold balls with seals, and my wife a brooch with a seal.

Charlie Bynum was in the same squadron and often flew in the plane alongside the plane piloted by future president George H. Bush, and the material below is taken from a book written about Bush's war experiences (Stinnett RB. George Bush: His World War II Years, 1st ed. Missoula, Montana: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company; 1991). Mr. Bynum is referenced ten times in the book and is pictured several times.

In mid-March of 1944 the battle plans for their squadron were drawn up by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington. The strategy called for a

direct assault by Allied Forces on Japan's inner defenses which were protected by an 1800 mile island barrier, which included the Bonin, Mariana and Palau groups. Capture of key islands in the groups would open up the Philippine Sea and permit direct penetration of the Japanese home islands by the United States.

The 51st Squadron, to which they were assigned, was based on the aircraft carrier *San Jacinto* and flew the TBM Avenger bomber, the biggest and best single-engine bomber in the Navy's carrier-based air arsenal. Carrier landing procedures called for a counterclockwise circle beginning parallel to the starboard side of the carrier's 70 x 300 foot landing deck. A landing signal officer guided the pilot the final 500 feet before landing, and the pilot could not see the flight deck during this critical phase, so a split second miscalculation could result in a disaster.

In early April of 1944 the *San Jacinto* arrived in the Pacific combat zone. On May 8, the *San Jacinto* joined the greatest fleet the world had ever known at Majuro Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The fleet was known as Task Force-58 (TF-58). The strategy called for feints over a vast area of the Pacific to dilute the military strength of the Japanese.

As Mr. Bynum recalled, his first mission was to sink six Japanese radio boats, which they did. This was followed by numerous bombing raids over Saipan, Guam, Tinian, Peleliu and in the Leyte Gulf area of the Philippines.

Stinnett describes in some detail the "Marianas Turkey Shoot" mentioned by Mr. Bynum. On the morning of June 19, over 400 Japanese carrier planes swarmed in on Task Force 58. The fighter planes on the *San Jacinto* and other carriers were ordered to climb to 24,000 feet and form an umbrella over the fleet. By sundown that day, over 395 Japanese planes had been shot down in the largest air battle of the Pacific War. During this battle, Bush was forced to make a controlled water landing and was picked up by another ship. From his vantage point on this ship, he saw a bomber veer off the starboard side of the *San Jacinto* and crash into the Philippine Sea. He didn't know it at the time, but it was the plane that Charlie Bynum was on when it went into the water. In the book, there are two pages of pictures depicting the crash of Mr. Bynum and his two fellow crewmen, noting that the series of photographs illustrates the technique of



escaping from this type of mishap. Bush was shot down September 2 during a raid on Chichi Jima, an island in the Bonin Group. Bynum was in the wing plane, flying next to Bush. The book indicates that Bynum had a clear view of the incident and could see Bush's frantic maneuvering as he attempted to level the crippled bomber. Stinnett quotes Bynum as follows: "I knew he was hit because he leveled off. He came out of his dive, leveled his plane momentarily,

then the plane started going down. About this time he bailed out. By trying to keep his plane level he was giving his crew an opportunity to bail out. The bombers were at dive speeds of 300 miles per hour, and Bush had to gain level flight to permit successful exit from the plane. It's kind of hard to bail out of an airplane while in a 300 mile per hour dive."

Mr. Bynum is also quoted as he described the efforts to save Bush from the Japanese small craft heading toward him: "I saw those small boats heading his way and thought, oh he's a goner. But at that instant Moore, who was my pilot, and Melvin in the adjoining plane took the initiative. Our two planes went down and strafed the boats and drove them off."

Mr. Bynum cherishes the mementoes given to him and his wife by former President Bush, and it would seem that he certainly earned them.

CHARLES HELTON

I was born in Bridgeport, Alabama, and am one of nine children. My father had three children by a previous marriage and there were six of us born after my mother and father married. Five of us boys served in World War Two.

I went into the military on March 2, 1943, one day after my twentieth birthday. I got up early in the morning, Mom cooked my breakfast, and afterwards I told them goodbye and left for the war. There were seven of us from our town who left the same day. We went to Fort McClellan, Alabama, and were sworn into the U. S. Army.

From there, we went to Fort McPherson, Georgia, where we stayed a few days, then shipped out on a train. Most of the seven were split up, some going one way and the others another. Glen Allen was the only one left with me when we reached Indian Town Gap near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on March 16. Glenn was killed later in New Guinea. There were about 14 inches of snow on the ground at Indian Town Gap and it was really cold. We had cold weather back home in Alabama, but nothing like that.

The army organized a new group called the 495th Port Battalion. It consisted of four companies A, B, C, and D. I was in Company C. Each company was made up of four platoons, and each platoon had four sections. A tech sergeant was over each platoon and a staff sergeant was over each section. The purpose of the battalion was to unload and load ships.

In basic training, we were getting organized, getting ready to fight the enemy. During this time, I met a lot of people. There were Yankees



and Rebels but we learned from each other and became as one family because we knew that we would eventually strive to help each other on the battlefields. We also took time out to have fun. We were just a bunch of young fellows, and I suppose we didn't realize what we were getting into.

The army had issued us green fatigues. One of the boys from New York said he looked down the company street one day and saw this group of men coming and he thought they were convicts from a prison somewhere. When I received my clothing, they were really running us through the line. We were told that if they didn't fit to exchange them later, and it was later. I was six feet tall, had a 32 inch waist, and wore size 9 shoes. They gave me size 11 shoes, 34 size pants and size 17 shirt. Boy, was I something. We had to hike 20 to 30 miles and the blisters on my feet were rough. I finally got my shoes exchanged and my feet felt better.

We were in a new company starting out so the company commander was interviewing us to see just what we could do. When he came to me, he saw on my record that I had experience in cooking so he put me in the kitchen and told me to start cooking right away. I was glad to hear that because the guy cooking had tried to cook for 300 men and had given us cold asparagus, burned black toast, and something he called coffee. The next morning was the same with what seemed to be stained water.

I went down to the kitchen and looked around. I had never seen such a large stove in my life. It was about 10 feet long and 3 feet wide, and we could grill 40 or 50 steaks at a time. The oven and the other equipment such as mixers, coffee makers, etc., were the largest this little country boy had ever seen. We always had 5 men on KP. Two would clean up the dishes and the mess hall and the other three would have to start peeling potatoes and have them ready for cooking by 10:00 AM. I made my first cake using the big mixer. I started with 5 pounds of butter, 40 eggs, 5 quarts of sugar, 10 or 12 tablespoons of vanilla, 5 quarts of milk, 6 quarts of flour, 12 to 14 tablespoons of baking powder and 3 hands full of salt. I mixed it in just a few minutes, and it made enough for 300 men. It tasted pretty good.

When our officers came into the kitchen, we had to call everybody to attention. There was one officer, though, who didn't want us to salute him because he was a doctor and loved us so much that he felt like an enlisted man. He would come down to the kitchen every morning and drink coffee. We had one guy, Bill Brock, who was off the goat farm in Ringgold, Georgia. One morning he decided to have some fun, and he told the kitchen crew to get ready to jump up from what they were doing when the doctor came in and that he would call attention. So here comes the doctor, bursting into the kitchen as he always did. Brock shouted real loud and all of us jumped to our feet. I thought the doctor was going to have a heart attack. He went over to Brock and said, "You s*n of b**ch, don't you ever do that again." We all laughed. Brock got killed later in New Guinea.

My mess sergeant was a huge Russian who couldn't speak English too good. He always called me Chardie. One Friday he came up me and said, "Chardie, I am taking you to Pottsville this weekend." The first thing he did when we got there was to eat and then buy a bottle of White Horse whiskey, which he told me to put in my overcoat pocket. He instructed me not to let him have it until we got back to camp because he would need it to sober up on. He could "thrank," as he called it, more than any person I have ever seen. Midnight came and we slept on the floor of the YMCA.

He woke up early and called me, saying, "Chardie, wake up, we are going to church." I told him I wasn't familiar with the churches in town. He didn't know the difference between a protestant and a Catholic church. Since he was my sergeant, I had to follow his orders, so we started out to find a Baptist church. I told him we couldn't take the whiskey into the church, but he won again. They had communion, and he wanted to know what they were doing. I had to explain to him that it represented the Lord's body. They passed the wine, and that is when I caught it. I told him it was for the blood Christ shed on the cross. He said, "Open up that White Horse and give them a thrank from our bottle." I ran out of words to say, so I told him the service was over and ran out. He went out yelling that it was not over and that he wanted to give them a "thrank". The usher knew that I had a prob-

lem and told me he was glad we came. So much for that weekend.

We had learned to cook on the big stoves and also on field ranges because that was the only way to cook when we got out on the battlefields. When we finished with basic training and headed out to California, we cooked our meals on the train. We would stop at different cities to get milk, vegetables and other supplies that we needed.

We went to Wilmington, California, and stayed there a few weeks. Some of the company had to go out to the desert for a couple of weeks, and I had to go and cook for them. It was hot in the day time and cold at night. We had a good time in Wilmington. We got passes to Long Beach and Riverside.

We left for overseas on September 25, 1943. We went over on the West Point. Gosh! It was a big ship. There were 13,000 aboard, not counting the ship's personnel. We were already getting a taste of war in that there was not much on the ship for us to eat.

We arrived in Sidney, Australia, on October 10, 1943. It was cold at night. We had to sleep on canvas bunks at night, and the cold air would come up through that canvas and almost freeze you. They issued us some wool blankets after a couple of days and that was much better. The milk out there was delicious. Hugh T. Richey, a fellow from Fyffe, Alabama, would volunteer to be on KP just so he could get some milk from me. We got fed a lot of lamb. When we cooked it, you could smell it all over the camp. It gave most of us the GIs, so we had to stay in the john most of the time. We got a pass every night and went into town, where the streets were made of brick. The main dish in the restaurants was steak and eggs. When we went into one, the waitress would say, "Steak and eggs, Yank?"

On Nov. 14, 1943, we left Sydney on the ship USS John Astor. We got to Milne Bay, New Guinea, on November 23, the day before Thanksgiving. We had to hurry to set up the kitchen. Air raids were coming one after the other, but our planes took care of most of them. Long after the war I met a guy at the VFW and he told me he was a pilot. He went on to say where he was on a certain day, and we found out that he fought the planes off that were attacking us. Boy, I thanked him over and over. His name is Jim Gentle of Scottsboro.

President Roosevelt had announced that he wanted all the servicemen in Europe and the Pacific to have turkey for Thanksgiving, and we did. We just did get the meal over with and here came the Japanese. The bombs missed us, but that didn't keep us from being scared to death. What a scary feeling it is to have those planes fly over you. You are lying there, face down in a muddy foxhole, and it sounds like the plane is in that foxhole with you.

The mosquitoes were really bad at Milne Bay. We had to take 5 Atabrine tablets at once to keep down malaria. One of the officers would stand by while we swallowed them. They were a substitute for quinine, and they were bitter and yellow. Our bodies got yellow from taking those yellow tablets.

We stayed at Milne Bay until we finished loading and unloading the ships that were in the harbor. We left there on December 16 and sailed to Ora Bay, New Guinea, on the USS Dodge. Our ship ran aground on the Collingwood Reef. Now that was more hell. There we were, out in the middle of the ocean, near the equator, stuck on a reef. What a target for the Japanese we were. Our escort, the destroyer USS Smith, pulled up beside our ship, and we loaded it in a hurry. That was one more fast sail when we left.

We got to Cape Sudest, Ora Bay, New Guinea, on December 17. It got worse every time we got closer to the Japanese army. Not much sleep, many bombs and bullets to keep you awake. Right about then, we began to realize that we were in a hell, called a war. We went out in the bay to unload and unload the ships while the Japanese were flying over us. Picture yourself out on this big ship and the planes over you, dropping their bombs. Somehow we survived, but some of the guys didn't make it. Our US planes did do their job, but some of the Japanese planes did get away and would come back soon.

We headed out for Cape Gloucester, New Britain, on January 30, 1944. We were on LST #475. What a time, those LSTs are right on top of the water, and we called them tin cans. The water was really rough, and all of the troops got sea sick. I had to cook breakfast the next morning on the ship. I cooked hot cakes but very few of them were eaten. By the way, we sailed on 18 ships during the war and I got seasick 18 times.

We landed at Cape Gloucester on February 1, the day the US invaded it. The navy had shelled the beach and ran some of the enemy back into the hills. There were dead men all around. Some had been dead for a time, and you couldn't hardly get your breath. The smell of dead human bodies is terrible.

We got there in the rainy season, and we didn't get our tents for some time. We had to sleep in our hammocks, and it was really raining. The first night I had mine ready and I was in it, talking to my two buddies, Newman "Big Eddie" Kirkland from Grant and Hugh Richey from Fyffe. The hammock had a mosquito net built into it with vinyl under the bedding part and the net over it. All at once I felt water and I was in a pool. There wasn't much I could do about it, so I just lay in the water and didn't get much sleep.

Our camp was located on the beach, the ocean on one side and a high mountain just on the other side. The mountain had a volcano at the top which was smoking and looked like it could explode any minute. We were trapped there. The Japanese would come over the mountain, and our radar couldn't pick them up because they would be on us so quick. We couldn't even light a match at night because that would give our position away.

One morning, I had just started the gas burner under a 35 gallon GI can to boil water for coffee. Here came this Japanese plane right over us. Three or four of the cooks and KPs started running to our foxholes, which were 50 to 60 feet away. It was too late. The bombs had already been dropped. All of us jumped in one fox hole, on top of each other. A couple of us suffered some bruises, and one of the boys got a purple heart for it. He received five points for it. We kidded him for it, but when the war was over he had more points than we did and he started home before we did.

Afterwards, we went around the camp. Six marines had been in one tent. The bomb landed in the center of it, and all we found of them were part of a leg on the beach and maybe a foot but not much more. What a horrible sight! I don't know how many were killed because they wouldn't tell us. All of us were ready to crack up because we were hungry, ringing wet and scared to death. Some of the boys were

wondering how to kill themselves, and one boy shot himself in the foot to get a section 8, which is playing crazy.

We were attached to the 5th Marine Division, but you might say we were a port company all alone. The 5th issued rations just to their own outfit, so we had to steal most of our food from our own country. What we had was corn beef hash made into patties for breakfast, hash meat loaf for lunch, and cold cuts and corn beef hash for supper. That was corn beef hash three times a day. I had enough of this starving. I told the boys that if they would bring in the food they unloaded off the ships, I would cook it. They got busy and brought in fresh meat and things. I started cooking and baking and we started eating. One day one of the boys, Charley Franks from around Birmingham, came in with a bunch of dressed frozen turkeys. The poor little fellow had put those frozen turkeys next to his bare stomach, jumped off the ship, and swam ashore with them until he had enough for us to have a meal. Charley died in 1999. What a wonderful friend he was.

I cooked the turkeys and the boys really enjoyed them. They had already brought in some canned fruit, such as peaches, pears, pineapple and others. I made three pans of peach cobbler. Each can was about 18 x 24 inches so we had enough. We were issued some fresh eggs, or so we thought. So I got the grills ready and broke about 1-1/2 cases. Every one of them was rotten. Big John said, "Chardy, don't break any more, throw them away." I was really glad to hear that because at 3 o'clock in the morning I was running outside, trying to get my stomach settled.

Bombs, bombs, bombs. We had 46 alerts in 16 days. Four of our boys were wounded. Jackman was the worst with a head injury. The famous hill #660 was just up the beach and it was rough.

About this time, the mailman brought some mail for us after a long time. My sister Ruby, who was good to write to me, brought me up-to-date on my brothers. Woodrow was in the 8th Armored Division and J. C. was in the 11th Infantry Division, under General Patton. John was in the navy in the South Pacific. So my mother and father had four sons in combat and the baby boy, Howard, was in the states ready to go overseas. Ruby told me that J. C. and Woodrow were having it rough.

We left New Britain on April 8, 1944, on the British cargo ship *Annui* and arrived at Finschhafen, New Guinea, on April 10. The heat was really hard to take. It was rough because the Japanese gave us a hard fight. Glenn Allen, one of the fellows from Bridgeport, was killed there. That was a sad day, he was just like a brother. We stayed there until April 30 when we left on the LST #41. On the way, we really did get the bombs and shells from the Japanese planes, but our Air Force managed to fight them off each time. We got to Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea, on May 1. This was more hell, fighting off the Japanese and trying to unload ships. We left there on June 3 aboard the LST #469.

On June 1st, we landed at Biak Island, Ewick Bay. It was rough there and got worse by the hour. We were glad to get out of that place. Our next stop was Aitape, New Guinea. On the way, one of the ships in our convoy got hit. The ship was real close to shore and the boys on it swam ashore. We arrived at Atiape on June 7. You could see dead soldiers under the water, and it was not a pleasant sight to see. Our tents had been lost and it took awhile before we got new ones. We needed them because it was raining and hot. For a time we just had K-rations and C-rations. The K rations had a can of bacon, a real rich candy bar, a pack of coffee, and some dog biscuits, also known as hard bread. C-rations had a can of peaches, meat and a vegetable. Malaria had really begun to work on us. We had to increase the Atabrine, and some of the boys were having to go to the hospital. They told us that we might not get the malaria until we went back home in colder climates. I got it bad, but it didn't show up until I was on the train coming home.

We had it rough there as usual. There was a huge ammunition dump right across the road from our camp. One morning it was so hot that the ammunition started blowing up, it was as bad as the enemy. Bullets started passing us and gasoline drums started blowing up. All of us ran as fast as we could up the beach. Bullets would hit the trees we were hiding behind. That went on a long time. When we got back to camp our tents looked like a large woodpecker had been there.

A few days later, some of the ammo started going off again. We

were ready to start running. William Brock, the one from Ringgold, Georgia, was going up the beach. There was a big blast and the mortar flew over and hit Brock. It laid his head open and it looked just like a coconut. Poor fellow, it was just like seeing my own brother lying there in the sand. We buried him the next day in a cemetery down the road from our camp. We wrapped him in a blanket and threw sand over him. While we were there, I mentioned how bad it was, and an attendant told me I hadn't seen anything yet. He took me in a tent and I saw nothing but bloody legs, arms and maybe other parts of bodies all in a pile. There was no identification whatsoever, they just buried them.

In July, I received a letter from a girl back home I used to work with. She wrote, "Well, I never was one to give much sympathy, but I'm sorry." That was all she said, and I had to go on wondering what had happened. Three weeks later my sister Ruby told me our dear brother was killed in action. I didn't read any more for a few minutes, but something just told me it was J. C. When I started reading again, it was him and he had been killed in France. That was hard to take. The boys in my tent were sorry but didn't say much. I went out on the beach and when those big waves came in I felt like my heart would go out with them, but I had to go on living.

Things didn't get any better here. Bombs were still dropping all around. The rain would come, then the sun would come and was it ever hot. Mosquitoes were bad, and more guys were coming up with malaria every day. We didn't think we would ever see home again. We had been there long enough.

Late December we left on the ship LaSalle headed for Luzon and the invasion of the Philippines. Our troops had just taken Leyte. There were thousands of ships of all kind in our convoy. The Japanese were bombing our ships and some suicide bombers were diving on us, too. One was coming toward our ship but our gunners hit him just before he hit us. They hit his left wing causing him to hit the water to our right. It was getting worse every minute. Were we scared? Yes!!!

On January 9, 1945, we landed on western Luzon at Lingayen Gulf. Gen. MacArthur was with this invasion force, and I have a couple of pictures of MacArthur with me in the background. We had every-

thing we needed for days in our backpacks. They were heavy, and to get off the ship we had to climb down a net rope on to a landing craft. That boat was going up and down fast from the big waves, and we had to drop off the net into the boat as best we could.

We hit the beach at 9 o'clock AM on January 9, and it was rough. The Japanese were bombing and diving down toward us shooting bullets while we were still on the beach. There was one big plane strafing us, the bullets were all around me. I was standing there, frozen. Big John yelled at me in a loud voice, "Chardy! Get down." I came to my senses and fell to the sand in a hurry. We went on inland about three or four hundred yards and started preparing lunch, watching the sky all the time. We got our lunch ready but didn't get to eat much of it for the bombs were really coming down. We started digging our foxholes. Night came and the moon was shining bright, but here came the enemy. They dropped their bombs and left, but we knew they would be back the next day. We started digging those foxholes deeper, because when you hear those planes right over you, it seems like they are in the hole with you.

Our first sergeant was bald, not a hair on his head, and every time the planes left you could see his shining head go up and down as he would dig his foxhole deeper and deeper. We didn't get our tents for quite a while, and we had to put our bunk beds in rice patties. That was something. It rained constantly and the water stayed in the patties. I still don't know how we survived, wringing wet all the time even when we were in bed because we used our ponchos for shelter. One boy took a picture of me standing by the bunk in water. I sent it home and it like to have killed my folks. We finally got our tents and a mess hall, which we used for recreation and playing cards.

One day we had just finished our evening meal and were watching a movie when here came a Japanese plane. It dropped its bombs around us, and then more planes came. We ran down the beach a ways and came back around midnight after it was clear. Some of us got scratches and bruises, but we were lucky because that first bomb hit real close. I don't know how close the others were because when you are scared to death you lose track.

By now, we were close to San Fernando. It was a big place but had been destroyed by bombs. Mostly just walls were left of the buildings but the natives still lived in these gutted buildings. From our camp near here, you could see this large mountain. One morning those big mortars started flying over us, coming from the mountain, but they landed just on the edge of the ocean. Boy!!!, that was a loud whooping noise. They missed us, or I wouldn't be here today.

We stayed there about seven months. It settled down two or three months before the war ended in August. When it did end, what some happy men we were. We would get to go home soon.

We went to Manila on September 7 and stayed there just long enough to get ready for Japan. When we got near to Japan, the Japanese sent a pilot ship to take us in Tokyo Bay, which was full of mines. I'm glad the war ended before we had to try to go in there on our own. We arrived in Yokohama on 15 September. We got to see Tokyo and some more of the country before we left. We would get on one of those fast trains and ride until we got tired and then come back to camp.

I came home in November of 1945. We landed in Tacoma, then went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and on to Birmingham. I left Birmingham about 9 o'clock at night on the train and had one of the hardest chills I ever had. I thought I was dying. I had malaria and it didn't hit until I got to a colder climate. I continued to have chills for a long time but finally got over it.

I married Kathleen Beavers on September 16, 1946. I worked at Dupont in Chattanooga and went with TVA in 1952. I worked with them as a machinist for thirty years and retired in 1982. We moved to Scottsboro in 1987. We don't have any children.

The above narrative by Mr. Helton is taken from his written memories of World War II. He gives a vivid description of what it was like to be a soldier in the midst of battle. Mr. Helton also allowed me to borrow a book written by Sy Kahn, a comrade in his outfit. The book is actually his extensive diary entries during the war. Such diaries were not allowed by

the authorities but Mr. Kahn kept one anyway. The book is titled "Between Tedium and Terror: A Soldier's World War Two Diary, 1943-1945" and was published by the University of Illinois Press in 1993. It is an extensive account of his experiences and would reflect those of Mr. Helton as well. Mr. Kahn was a professor emeritus at the University of the Pacific when the book was published. The following information is taken from his book.

The main function of a port company was to move supplies off ships to the frontlines. Their members had undergone basic infantry training and were, on occasion, used as infantry troops. Port companies were usually where ports were except in the South Pacific. After Australia, the 495th did not have a single deep-water pier. Instead, ships were anchored offshore and their cargoes were off-loaded into amphibious vehicles or smaller boats. The work was back-breaking, especially in the hot deep holes. (Note: Mr. Helton had cooking duty in addition to the unloading of supplies.)

These anchored ships were prime targets, and they were frequently bombed and occasionally strafed and even torpedoed several times. During their time in the Pacific, the 495th endured between 300 and 400 air attacks. Since they camped on shorelines, they were frequent targets for attacks there as well. Since they did not have weapons to fire on hostile aircraft, they had to run or take cover.

However, the enemy did not cause the greatest number of casualties. Instead, the culprit was the harsh conditions of the jungle, where the 495th spent most of its time. Temperatures were high and rain was frequent and often heavy. Skins were infected with "jungle rot" which in the worst cases ate away the skin down to the bone. Insects stung incessantly, and malaria and other fevers were endemic. There were few diversions and little chance of a furlough. Even if one got a furlough, there was no place to go. Only severe wounds or serious mental disorders qualified for a ticket home. Some men did run amok, attacking others or harming themselves. By the end of the war, about 50% of the troops had gone because of accidents, breakdowns, diseases, wounds or death. Nevertheless, the 495th did its work well and was often at the cutting edge of general advances and, unbeknownst to the members of the outfit, had been selected to participate in the anticipated invasion of Japan in November of 1945.

The invasion of Lingayen Gulf was the beginning of the end for the Japanese and was critical in recapturing Manila. In his diary, Kahn describes the invasion as follows: "We woke at 3:30 AM on January 9 for an early breakfast. There were hundreds of ships dotting the Gulf. Gunboats were firing at the shore installations. At dawn, four planes tried to attack, but they were beaten off by a terrific barrage from the ships. There were so many tracers that the sky seemed filled with red rain. The boat teams

pushed off all morning (note: 175,000 troops landed during the invasion). We unloaded a LCT, then started for shore. As we were halfway to shore, a single plane attacked the harbor and made a crash dive of a destroyer but I couldn't see if he hit the ship. The ack-ack started falling around us, and then several small shells exploded about 20 feet away.

"We went through rough surf and waded with full equipment through waist-deep water to get to shore. We carried ammo from landing craft to shore through waist-deep water all afternoon. For the next few days, we worked along the shore unloading landing craft. There were so many raids that I couldn't possibly keep track of them. I heard many bombs whistle down and explode." Charles Helton, serving with Kahn, had similar experiences during these few days.

The 495th spent most of the time in jungle areas. Charles Helton and a friend of his, Ted Myers, wrote the following poem about the jungles of New Guinea, and it pretty well sums up their experiences there.

*In the jungles of New Guinea,
Where the ants and lizards play,*



*Where the weather in December
Is the same as in May.
Where the sky is always cloudy
And the grass is always green.
Where your tent is always muddy
And your clothes are never clean.*

*In the jungles of New Guinea,
Where no trains ever blow,
Where you never see white women,
And the natives wear no clothes.
Where the buzzing of mosquitoes
Rob all men of their sleep.
Where you never see a drug store,
Though the Atabrine is cheap.*

*In the jungles of New Guinea,
Where it rains most every day,
Where no church bells ever ring
For Sunday's just another day.
Where the air is always stuffy
And your head most always hurts,
Where there's no civilization,
And the women do the work.*

*In the jungles of New Guinea
Where the mail is always late,
Christmas cards that come in April
Are considered up to date.
Where the sun is ever shining
And the moon's not made for love.
The sky is streaked by searchlights,
Spotting Tojo's planes above.*

In the jungles of New Guinea,

*So happy we will be
When at last the war is over
And our nation once more free.
Then take me back to my old home,
The state I love so well,
For this God forsaken outpost,
Is a substitute for hell.*

JOHN NEELY

I graduated from high school in St. Clair County, Alabama, in June of 1943 and turned eighteen in July of that year. I wasn't reluctant to go into the military. I had volunteered but I had to order my birth certificate from Montgomery. It didn't get back in time for me to go in with a couple of guys I had planned to go in with, so I just waited. The man I was working with wanted me to wait until I had to go.



I was inducted through Fort McClellan, Alabama, and reported for active duty in St. Augustine, Florida, on October 9, 1943. I was just going to let them put me wherever they wanted, but this boy from Chandler Mountain in St. Clair County told me he was going in the Coast Guard. He said you ought to go with me because you will have a clean place to sleep and you won't be out in the mud and the rain like you would be if you were in the army.

He also told me it was kind of like the navy, the biggest ship they had was a destroyer escort, they had Coast Guard cutters and sixty footer patrol boats, and they did a lot of port guard duty. So that was why I chose the Coast Guard. I didn't know anything about it until he told me.

I found out later that the Coast Guard also did a lot of fighting. In fact, later on in my service career I volunteered for the amphibious force which was always right in the forefront of the fighting in Europe and the Pacific. They were the first on the beach, and like in the South Pacific where I was there were quite a number of LSTs, which stands for Landing Ship Tank. We were all over the South Pacific and in the first wave at Okinawa.

But anyway, that is how I wound up at the Coast Guard Station in St. Augustine, and that was where I did boot camp. I always kid people about getting a bad place to stay. It was in the Ponce de Leon Hotel, which was a famous hotel and resort area, and the station was actually in the hotel. So the boy from Chandler Mountain knew what he was talking about, but he didn't know it would be such a nice place.

At boot camp we learned to march and to handle a rifle. We also had to learn how to handle boats, which I had not had much experience with except for fishing boats and other small craft. Each company had a rowing team that competed on weekends, and we all had to row lifeboats and that sort of thing. Once we went out to sea on a sixty foot submarine patrol boat, which is a sub chaser. But overall it was a lot like a marine boot camp. We had an obstacle course and the same kind of things to get you in shape like other branches had.

While I was at St. Augustine I was not assigned to any kind of permanent role, that came later. Each company at the station had about one hundred men, and they took rotations having work week. They trained so many weeks then had work week. There were different kinds of assignments, working on the base or in the carpenter shop or disposal or kitchen. I was lucky enough to be assigned to be a messenger and that wasn't real hard work.

Boot camp was supposed to last for three months but it lasted five. They had so many people they didn't know what to do with them. I was at St. Augustine from October to February, and then I got to come home for ten days. When I reported back to St. Augustine, I was sent to Ellis Island in New York, and I got there in March. The first or second day I was there they put me to walking the perimeter with a wooden gun through the snow and sleet. The wooden part was just for affect. The island was well guarded but it gave people something to do.

I was only at Ellis Island for a couple of weeks and then I went to Sheepshead Bay on Long Island. After two or three weeks, I was sent to water tender school. The Coast Guard and the navy both had steamships that were still in operation. The ships had a steam room with a boiler and they had to have a person in the engine room called a water tender to keep an eye on the water to make sure the boiler didn't run

dry and blow up. The water had to stay at a certain temperature. That was an easy job. We were in water tender school for about six weeks. Ironically, then, when I was assigned it was to a ship that had diesel engines.

Before I left New York for good, they sent me to the Philadelphia Naval Yard. We were there just for a couple of weeks as observers. We didn't do any work at Philadelphia, we just went down there to see what was going on. They still had so many people they didn't know what to do with them. Though we were in the middle of a war, island hopping was going on in the Pacific, taking one island at a time. There were only a certain number of soldiers who could participate at one time. A lot of them were being left in reserve. While at Philadelphia, though, we did go to sea for a couple of days on one of the ships.

I went back to New York and was sent to the Jersey City Naval Barracks in the port area of New Jersey. The Guard there guarded the port. I didn't like doing that, so when they were looking for people to be in the amphibious force, I volunteered. I wasn't in Jersey City even long enough to pull watch. They sent me to Camp Bradford in Norfolk, Virginia, where the LST crews were being formed. We were there about eight weeks while the crews were being organized. During this period, we did all kinds of things. We had an obstacle course we had to run ever so often, and we even had a beach where they let us go swimming.

When we were in Norfolk, there was a pistol range and a rifle range. Being from the south, I was real familiar with guns. When they sent us to the rifle range they gave us three rounds for firing at a target about one hundred yards away. It was probably about ten feet by ten feet and had a big bull's eye on it. They put me flat on the ground so that I could rest my elbow under the rifle and shoot. A lot of the boys who went to the rifle range had never shot a rifle and didn't know anything about them. One boy wanted to know if I knew how to shoot a rifle and I told him I did. I told him to hold it tight against his shoulder so it wouldn't hurt. He didn't, and it did, causing big bruises on his upper arm. His excuse was that it would have broken his shoulder if he had held it tight.

Anyway, I took dead aim on the target and shot. The guy told me I missed the whole damned thing. I didn't say anything to him but I said under my breath that I couldn't believe I missed the whole thing unless there was something bad wrong with the rifle. The guy gets on the phone and says that we have a smartass here. But he rechecked the target and I was about one inch off dead center. He asked if I could do it again and I put two more in there. When he left, he didn't apologize but he did tell me I had done some pretty good shooting.

After the crews were formed, mine was sent to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, where we picked up our LST. Our LST had about 150 men on board, which was the complement on all of these ships. It was 320 feet long, 60 feet wide and had a 40 foot freeboard, which was the height from the water up to the main deck. The purpose of the ship was to land at a beach. The bottom was flat so that you could come up close or even could go right up to the beach in some places. The bow made a V for breaking waves when it was underway. The bow had doors that opened and closed for loading and unloading supplies or whatever. You could open the doors and let the ramp down and go out on dry land.

After we got underway, you know being a country boy, I asked how we were going to get to the ocean from Pittsburg. I found out that we were going down the Monongahela to the Ohio and then down the Mississippi to New Orleans. They had a ferry crew that came aboard for piloting the boat down the river.

We went into dry dock when we got to New Orleans. Small propellers had been used on the ship to keep from stirring up the mud on the river, and in New Orleans they put the big propellers on. We went on our shakedown cruise from New Orleans to the Panama City, Florida, area, and we were there about a week to get everybody acclimated to their job of running the ship and also for gunnery practice.

The first couple of months I was on that ship the engineering officer put me in charge of looking up every motor on the ship and recording the serial number and the model number. Believe you me, there were a lot of motors on the ship. After that, I was assigned to be one of four people to be in the main engine room. When we were on

general quarters, which is when everyone is on alert at their battle stations, I was not in the engine room but was a loader on a 20 mm on the deck.

We went through the Panama Canal and on over to California in early 1944 where we had a lot of supplies brought on board. We also picked up a small landing craft that was put on our main deck, and we picked up pontoon boats, too. A crew of thirteen navy people came aboard to go with their landing craft to the Pacific. We knew then we were going to the Pacific but we didn't know where. I thought that going there was to be an adventure for me, and I was not particularly alarmed by the prospect.

About the middle of 1944 we left California with metal pontoons on both sides of the LST, not all the way down but about sixty feet up, and on the top deck was the small landing craft which was used for moving men or one tank from place to place. We had a lot of supplies, and three decks down was the tank deck, which is where we loaded tanks to be used for invasions. It was a big place, about thirty feet tall and almost sixty feet wide. It ran about two thirds of the length of the ship.

We left California with two other LSTs but no other escorts. That is the way we ran most of the time. Sometimes we would be by ourselves depending on where we were going and how far it was and the need. In the war areas, we might have an escort vessel, like a destroyer.

We knew we were headed for Honolulu first. That was our first stop after California, and we were at sea for about twelve days. We went to Pearl Harbor and the carnage was still there. The Oklahoma, Arizona and some other ships were still out of service. Of course, the Arizona was never raised and is still there. We were in Pearl Harbor just a couple of weeks, just long enough to pick up supplies.

From Pearl Harbor we headed to the New Hebrides Islands. We dropped off supplies at some of the individual islands, and we took some passengers to Espiritu Santo Island. What we were doing mainly at this time was resupplying places that the marines had taken from the Japanese. We probably did this for a month and a half to two months.

Then we went to the Solomon Islands where we carried supplies to Guadalcanal and other islands. Then we began to practice for the landing at Okinawa which was on April Fool's Day in 1945. The marines had secured Guadalcanal, and they had had a dogged time there.

After we finished carrying supplies to and from different islands there, we started to practice loading and unloading. Our biggest load there was we had seventeen LVTs, an amphibious tractor that could go on its own in the water. We practiced putting them on the beach at some of the islands and putting them back on board and that sort of thing. Then when we got ready to go to Okinawa, we loaded five inch 38 shells. Each shell was in a case, and they were two and a half to three feet deep on the tank deck. On top of that they laid about a foot of spruce lumber of all sizes and on top of the lumber we had the seventeen amphibious tanks. Plus we had a couple of hundred marines. Some of them had been in the battle at Guadalcanal and in the battles on some of the other islands as well.

By then we knew we were going to Okinawa but we didn't know anything about it. We couldn't write home about it or anything. We were at sea probably for four or five days before we got there. As on every time we were underway, I was on watch in the engine room. I went up there every hour and then went back to the bilge part of the ship where the main shaft of the propellers went through. They had bearings that we had to check to make sure they weren't overheating or anything. We had salt water we could use to cool them down and we had to pump grease into the bearings.

On the ship we had two vacant bunks in our compartment. Two of the marines who had been in several invasions came down and saw them. They said we know it is against the rules to be in your compartment but if you will let us sleep there we will get up and get out of your way and nobody will be alarmed about it. So we said sure. I had an unusual conversation with one of them before we got to Okinawa. He was sitting on his bunk cleaning his rifle and I said you must be getting ready for them and he said don't you worry, I'll be ready for them. And I said you've been in a good bit of combat and he named off two or three places he had been. I asked if he had ever been hurt,

and he said he got his collarbone broken and he didn't have any bone there. His arm did just kind of drop down. I said it looks like they would have sent you home with a wound like that and he became pale as a sheep with tears running down his cheeks.

He said they tried to send me home but that he wasn't going until he killed all those bastards. He said he saw what they did to his friends. They cut their hands off if their legs were damaged and cut their feet off if their hands were damaged, and they cut their private parts off and stuck them in their mouths. He said he was going to kill every one of them before he went home. I told him it was going to be OK and he calmed down and went back to cleaning his gun.

It was a funny thing after we got to Okinawa. No Caucasian had seen Okinawa for about a hundred years, so we didn't know much about the island. So somehow they picked up the idea that there was a bluff on one side of the island that was a sheer rock cliff.

I don't know what day of the week it was, but it was April Fool's Day and we got close to the beach on the western side of the island about four or four thirty in the morning. Our marines thought they were going to have to climb the sheer cliffs so they had brought hundred foot extension ladders. When we got there, the cliffs were present but a half mile down the cliffs had played out and there was a sandy beach. So we just moved down, but in the process of moving down we found there was a coral reef between the ocean and the island. They were afraid to put in the LSTs because they were afraid of getting hung up and becoming sitting ducks for the suicide bombers, and they would have been. I never found out if we could have floated above the reefs, since we stopped about fifty to a hundred yards off shore. We could see people walking around on the beach but there wasn't any fighting going on there. We were on battle alert for suicide planes because we still had all that ammunition on board.

We let the ramp down and the amphibious tanks went ashore on their own and the rest were ferried by the two small boats we had on board. Launching these was kind of exciting. We pumped the ballast out on one side and pumped it into the other side. The ship tilted to about a forty five degree angle. The boats were on skids and they cut

them loose and they went sailing off on their own. One of my friends on the ship was assigned to be the motor machinist for one of the small boats, and he came back with eyes about the size of eggs. They had drawn some machine gun fire from a Japanese pill box that was on the beach, but those marines had knocked it out about two seconds after they got there.

An incidental thing that I didn't know for years was that they were trying to figure out how to unload the ammunition on board since we were not on shore. The captain of our ship, a level headed fellow who did not get easily riled, recommended that marines on shore with amphibious trucks be used. We also had a lot of lumber to unload. The Seabees welded pontoons from several ships together and made a dock.

The first three or four days we were at Okinawa we were up day and night. If we were not unloading, we were standing by our positions for planes or anything else. I guess I didn't have sense enough to ever feel danger. I don't think we were ever in any imminent danger. We did have a couple of people on our ship who went nuts. But it never concerned me all that much. I knew it was dangerous but I think that having been raised where I was and gotten my first rifle when I was about eleven or twelve and hunted until I went into service, guns didn't scare me much.

The objective of the marines was to take the air base on that side of the island in seventy two hours. The marine with the broken collarbone wrote us about what was going on after they hit the beach. He said they took it in about thirty minutes. The Japanese had thought we were going to land on the east side of the island. He also wrote that after they took the airfield that he waited until the Japanese landed and when the pilot stood on the wing he blew him away and waited for the next one. I lost his address so I don't know what happened to him.

I saw lots of kamikaze bombers. Ironically, though, the first plane I saw shot down was an American observation plane shot down by Americans. It was on the morning of the invasion, and we had not disembarked the fighting people. The plane was flying down the coast where we were to land. Up high above were Japanese planes. Ships

were all around us and between us and the island, and they began to open fire on the Japanese planes that were up high. In the 40 mm and 20 mm guns they were using, every third bullet is a tracer. So you could see these shells. Apparently the pilot of the American observation plane saw the tracer bullets going by and thought somebody was shooting at him, and he made a tactical error. He turned toward the fleet, thinking they would recognize friendly aircraft. He jettisoned his two wing tanks. They looked just like bombs, and he was shot down. The admiral was yelling over the phone but that didn't stop them from shooting. I had seen him drop his tanks and I told the gunner on our 20 mm that it looked to me like he had dropped bombs. Our captain didn't join in the shooting because he was not one to take chances or anything. We never did fire our guns.

A couple of days later I was up on the deck. I don't know whether you have ever watched "Mash" but they had this Charlie who flew over them going guck, guck, guck. A plane was coming down near the island and I said that is a Japanese plane. I was at my gun station so I threw the magazine open. You had to crank up a magazine to keep the shells coming right, expecting any minute that the captain would call for general quarters. The plane turned toward our ship. The pilot was having engine trouble and it wasn't running good. There was a destroyer escort off our stern, which was the biggest ship in the area. It was an old navy ship that had steam power. They had steam up but they were anchored. Their captain ordered full speed ahead, and they were digging out and left a trail of mud as they moved out dragging their anchor.

Anyway, ships opened fire at the Japanese plane but some hit our ship and injured four of our guys. Our captain ordered us to get into the lower deck because he said we would be safer down there. The plane was a suicide bomber and probably had a 500 pound bomb. The plane bumped the side of the destroyer but its speed had been spent. The ship's momentum going forward was such that it just kind of twisted the plane around and it sank just like that.

A dive bomber did go right through the main deck of one of the LSTs and went on down into the tank deck. They had a load of trucks

and the bomb set the whole business on fire. Funny things happen but they were not funny at the time. The captain ordered them to abandon ship. So the admiral looks over there and sees all these guys abandoning ship, so he called over and told them to get their butts back on that ship and put that fire out. They went back and got it put out but it burned up the trucks. When they were cleaning everything off, guess what kind of little present they found? A 500 or 1000 pound bomb was stuck in the bottom of the tank deck. It hadn't gone off and they got it disarmed.

After we got everything unloaded, we left on about the eleventh of April to go to Saipan and get another load of ammunition. It took about six days to get there. When loading the ship, they loaded until we were below the draft we were supposed to have. We were supposed to pull about twenty four feet aft but we were at twenty eight feet. So we unloaded all the ballast we could, and when we got back to Okinawa and unloaded we were sitting right on top of the water. They were having a big naval battle off from us. The coxswain of the watch was walking from the wheelhouse area on the main deck and saw the trail of the torpedo coming. He hollered but there was nothing we could do. LST also stood for "large slow target" so there was no way we could get out of the way. I don't think the torpedo was aimed at us, it was probably a runaway, but it went right under us. If we had been loaded or had all the ballast, I wouldn't be here now. I credit our captain for this. He was a unique person. He saved our neck a lot of times, I think. I thought he was an old man at the time but it turned out he was just twenty nine, only ten years older than I was.

We made several trips to the Philippines, including Subic Bay and Leyte, while the fighting to liberate the Philippines was going on. When we went to Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines, there were two other LSTs with us, and they had navy personnel. Our boat had what is called a stern anchor and as you went into the beach, you used the stern anchor. This was to hold the ship straight, not to anchor it. This kept it from turning left or right while it was on the beach. We were there about four hours waiting for those other ships to land. I was in the engine room, and we had been circling at slow speed. So when the captain rang down full speed

ahead, which was kind of unusual, I rammed it down full speed. We had been going full speed just for a few minutes when he ordered stop down. I could feel the ship sliding and everything. When I secured the engines, the four of us in the crew went up on deck and there was a palm tree hanging in our number one gun tub. They had to get a bulldozer out to move the tree before we could open the bow doors and the ramp, but we certainly did not slide off the beach.

Shortly after the Japanese gave up Okinawa, we were assigned to pick up Japanese prisoners of war from Kyushu Island and carry them back to the main island of Japan. The first load was about 990 prisoners. We didn't have any place to put them, so they were on the deck. We built a latrine for them there. The prisoners were small, and they were hungry. You see Japanese today and they don't look anything like those prisoners. The next island up was Kyushu, where our ship was scheduled to go for the next invasion. About 360,000 Japanese troops were on this island compared to about 150,000 on Okinawa, where about 135,000 were killed and only about 12,000 gave up. Most of those who gave up, though, were Okinawans who did not like the Japanese very much.

After we carried the Japanese back home, we picked up Chinese slave laborers who had been imported to work in Japan and took them back to China. Then we picked up Koreans in Japan and took them back to Korea. The war was over in August and we picked up prisoners and others until December. We then went to Guam, where we spent Christmas and New Years. Then we went to Honolulu and got to California in February of 1946. My dad got real sick and they thought he was going to die. I thought he was an old man but he wasn't, he was in his sixties. They gave me a ten day leave. My dad quickly recovered when I got home. Then I went back to California and was discharged on April 24, 1946.

When I got out, I was a motor machinist third class. I had gone in as an apprentice seaman, and I got to be a seaman second class when I finished boot camp. When I was in water tender's school, the two highest in the class got promoted to first class fireman which is the same as first class seaman, and I was one of them. Then they closed promotions until about the time the war was over when I got promoted to motor machinist third class. Just before I was to get out, a

captain wanted to promote me to second class motor machinist but I had not been third class long enough. The awards for my military service include the American Area Campaign Ribbon, the Asiatic-Pacific Area Campaign Ribbon with One Bronze Star, the Philippine Liberation Campaign Ribbon, and the World War II Victory Ribbon.

I had never thought much about the military as a career. Once, though, they had awakened me early one morning and told me I had to take a test. Hell fire, I said, what kind of test? They said they didn't know what it was for, but just get ready. I went with two other boys to take it. It turns out it was a test for entrance to the Coast Guard Academy. One of the other boys had been given a copy of the test, and the man who gave him the material told the engineering officer never to tell me about this. So he didn't tell me, and the second guy taking the test didn't know about it, either. So Gross, the one with the material, got the appointment. At a reunion several years ago, I saw the engineering officer and he asked me how I did on the test. He told me what had happened and said that they didn't do me right.

Before I got out, they told me they would put me in the active reserve and I said no. Then they said they would put me in the inactive reserve. I said no and asked them to where I needed to sign to get out of everything.

When I got back to California, another guy and I bought a Model A Ford, and we were going to drive back on Route 66 and on to Tennessee. If we made it, one of us would keep the car and the other would catch a bus home. He got to leave two days before I could, so he said that I could have that car because he couldn't stand to be there two more days.

My dad was a country merchant and his idea was to put me up in a store near our farm which was about fifteen miles from his store. I wasn't too thrilled at that, so I went to the University in Tuscaloosa and graduated from there. After college I worked in Birmingham for several years. I started to law school and finished at the Birmingham School of Law. I then went to work for State Farm Insurance and worked as a claims adjuster, including here in Scottsboro, for a number of years. I married Helen Brown in 1949 and we have two chil-

dren. I retired in 1988 after almost thirty years with State Farm and moved from Florence back to Scottsboro.

Our LST crew had our first reunion sometime in the eighties. About thirty six could be contacted and eighteen showed. I knew all but one of them. Our last reunion was two years ago.

John Neely was on an LST that delivered marines and ammunition for the initial invasion of Okinawa. He witnessed the invasion as well as more Kamikaze suicide planes than he would have preferred.

Capture of Okinawa was considered essential for several reasons. It was the last barrier to the planned invasion of Japan and was the dominant island in a chain that protected China and the Yellow Sea. With Okinawa, all of southern Japan would be within striking distance of U.S. planes, and blockade of Japan's shipping lanes would be enhanced.

Okinawa was heavily fortified with thousands of caves and heretofore sacred cemeteries and well over 100,000 Japanese soldiers were there to protect it. In addition, the Japanese used the feared Kamikaze suicide planes and Baka bombs. The latter were even more effective than the Kamikazes. It was a small plane with a wing span of only about fifteen feet. It and the pilot within were launched from another plane. After being launched, a jet device propelled it at high speed toward its target.

As Mr. Neely related, the invasion occurred on the western coast of Okinawa on April 1, 1945, an Easter Sunday morning. The first assault forces met little opposition, since the Japanese forces were entrenched on the eastern side of the island. Over the next three weeks, the entire northern half was secured with surprisingly little resistance. This was not to be the case in the lower portion, however. The Japanese had decided to make their stand along a line north of Naha, which is on the west coast, and extending to the east coast. They fought viciously, and the largest big gun battles in the Pacific war occurred on Okinawa. By April 18, the navy had lost 989 killed, 491 missing and 2,220 wounded, most from the Kamikaze and Baka planes. Ground troop casualties were heavy as well, and 10,000 Japanese had already been killed.

The U.S. opened a general offensive on April 20. Small gains would

be made and the Japanese would counterattack. Some positions changed hands several times. On May 2, the 7th Division broke through to the east coast, having gained only 2400 yards since April 19. On May 7, the war in Europe ended but the battle in Okinawa was still intense. Progress was slow and costly, and ground positions changed very little. Finally, during the tenth week of fighting, the Americans gained important victories that indicated the end was near for the Japanese. Resistance began to crumble, but the Japanese rejected an offer to surrender. Their defenses grew less and less, and the Battle of Okinawa ended on June 21. That morning, the Japanese commander-in-chief ordered a special breakfast. That afternoon, after the surrender, he and his chief of staff walked to a ledge facing the ocean and committed suicide by hara-kiri.

The cost was heavy to both sides. The Japanese had about 110,000 troops at Okinawa. About 103,000 were killed and the rest taken prisoner. U.S. casualties were almost 50,000 with 12,000 killed and missing and 35,000 wounded.

(Note: The above information is from Miller, FT., History of World War Two: Armed Forces Memorial Edition. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Universal Book and Bible House; 1945.)

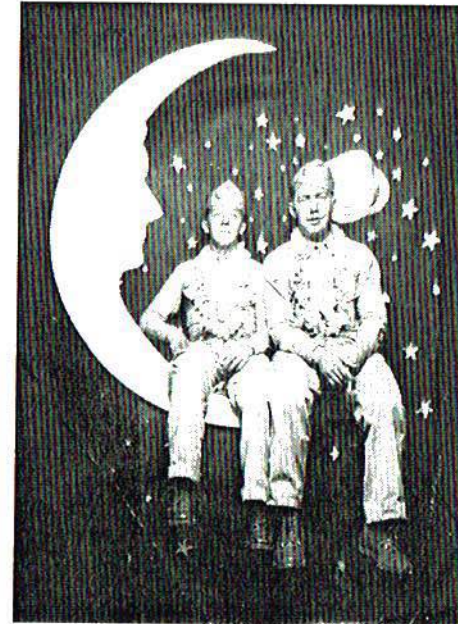


JIMMIE FAY TANNER

I was born in Section, Alabama, in 1919. I was 24 or 25 when I went in. Before I went in, I was working in a shipyard as a certified welder in Brunswick, Georgia. I was drafted out of Jackson County in 1944.

They carried me to Oglethorpe, Georgia, to take the examination for the military. They give me ten days to come home and get my business straightened up since I had a wife and two small children. When the ten days were up they carried me to Birmingham where we were sworn in the military.

I was in the Marine Corps. I wasn't supposed to be, I was supposed to have been in the navy. When I got examined up in Fort Oglethorpe, they said that they were needing welders in the navy and I was a certified welder. They put on my papers US Navy. When I got down to Birmingham they had us lined up calling out Coast Guard, Navy and all and the names to be in them. That marine lieutenant called out my name and I didn't answer. And he called it out again and I walked over



to his desk and I said, "There must be something wrong, I'm supposed to be going in the navy, I'm a certified welder and they told me they needed certified welders in the navy." He said, "What is wrong with the marines?" and I said, "Feller, I don't know what's wrong with nothing, I don't know nothing about none of it. I just know what they told me where I took that examination." And he said, "Out of 165 men that come

Jimmie Fay Tanner at right

down here this morning, only sixteen of you are qualified for the marines, and you are one of them," and he picked up a pencil and put US Marines on my papers. After we got squared away I told him it don't make me that much difference.

Sixteen of us went together for boot camp training in San Diego. Boot camp lasted about two months. They give us a ten day furlough before we were getting ready to go overseas. I caught a train and it took me five days to get home and I figured it would take me five days to get back and I wouldn't have any time to stay with my family, so I stayed five days at home and then I went back to California. I got penalized for being a little late returning. It didn't amount to nothing, I just had to report ever so often by going to headquarters and telling them I was still there. Then they shipped me to another base and I didn't have to report any more. They put that I was AWOL for five days on my discharge.

Boot camp was bad, bad, bad. I went to the rifle range. Everyone was shooting with an M-1 rifle. I just lacked one bull's eye in breaking the Marine Corps record. The record was 365 and I shot 364. I used to squirrel hunt and bird hunt around here, I knew how to handle a gun. The sergeant over me at the rifle range said, "Come here colonel, I want to show you something." He come over there and looked at my scoreboard and said, "How in the world did a fellow from Alabama learn how to shoot like that?" I said, "Shooting squirrels out of them tall sycamore trees down there."

After boot camp, we loaded to head to Maui, Hawaii, where the 4th Marine Division was in training. We landed over there in about seven days and they sent us up to where the marine base was. Now we had to shower, son, in water that was ice cold. The water was from those springs up in those hills, and you would just about freeze to death. We went through training for about two months. It was hard physical training. We learned how to shoot weapons of all kinds. In fact, I layed down and let a big tank run over me and they picked me up through a trap door in the bottom to illustrate how to pick up injured soldiers in the battlefield. They reached down there and got me and pulled me up in that tank and that thing was noisy and vibrat-

ing and they headed to the beach and there was some oil drums sitting in the edge of that water and they could shoot that 75 mm gun and knock the oil drum out every time they fired. That gun was floating and stayed level all the time.

I never kept up with dates so I'm not sure how long we were in Hawaii. Then we loaded up the ships and went to Saipan and Tinian. I left in May of 1944 and this must have been in about August. They didn't tell us anything about where we were going. You got on the ship and got off where they told you to get off.

I was in Company G in the 23rd Marines, 4th Marine Division. I guess there were about 200 to 300 in my company. I was an M-1 rifleman. I was a private then and I stayed one the whole time. I went in a private and came out a private. What happened was I had two or three fist fights and I didn't make no points with that, either.

Several marine divisions had hit Saipan and Tinian, and the 4th Marine Division was participating in it and I was in the rear echelon. We more or less stayed on the ship near the shore. The islands had been secured before we were needed, I guess, that was the only way I could think about it.

Then we come back to Maui to regroup and get ready for the next beach landing, which we found out later was Iwo Jima. We were back in field training in Hawaii for two or three months. We fired all kinds of weapons and did maneuvers and learned how to do hand-to-hand fighting and all that carrying on. Yep, we took some hard training. We knew we were going back over there somewhere.

We traveled 30,000 miles with the navy going all over like that. I even fired those guns on the navy ships. The sailors showed me how to shoot them. The airplane pulled a big old yellow sleeve way back behind it where you could target practice as the plane went by. They even used some 40 mms to shoot at that sleeve, which is as long as this room.

We were on the liberty ships, troop ships they called them. Then we overboarded on the Higgins boats, the ones where the ramp falls down in front and you run out on the beach. After we left Hawaii again, we knew we were going to Iwo Jima. When we pulled in there,

we sat there for three days and the navy pounded that island with everything they had and it looked like it was totally burnt up. That old general told us we were going to secure this island in three days. But he said, "I tell you what, when you get to that beach you get you a good hold because you're not coming back here." Well, I fought 19 days, it wasn't no three day operation.

The 4th and 5th marine divisions hit the beach, the 4th the blue beach and the 5th the red beach. We got to the beach on the Higgins. The one I was in they run it out on the beach and I when got out of that boat and hit that beach, volcano ash was so deep we couldn't hardly maneuver at all. I wasn't in the first wave but in the fourth. When I got there dead men were every way I looked, at least fifty yards away. I could have walked on them without touching the ground. The Japanese opened up with everything they had. They would bring the guns out of the caves and shoot, man it was awful. There was lots of firing. The tanks had trouble getting traction in that ash on the beach. After they got a hundred or so yards off the beach they could go by their own power. We laid metal tracks for them to come in on that beach. Trucks, too, they couldn't move on that ash. Further inland the soil was pretty solid.

We was told the reason they took Iwo Jima was for the security of the crippled airplanes making emergency landings, the ones that were being shot over Japan when they would go on a bombing raid. I was dug in at that first airport and I saw one coming down, one of them big B29s, he couldn't get his landing gear down. He hit that airport on his belly and he slid plumb to the other end and you never seen such a dust storm in all of your life. Twelve men were on that plane and they all walked off of it.

The 5th secured Mount Suribachi, a volcano on one end of the island, and I was dug in at the edge of the first airport. They began raising the flag at the end of the airport. I saw them raising that flag, the one with the famous picture. I was wondering what they were raising it for because we were still fighting. Now the first flag they raised was shot down.

After the first airport and Mount Suribachi were secured, it was

just crawl inch by inch. The front line might reach all the way from one beach to the other, and all the front tried to move at the same time. There weren't no big trees the way we have here, just some big bushes. When we advanced we were pretty much in the open, we couldn't hide behind trees. A lot of the time we would crawl on our belly maybe fifty or seventy five yards and the next day advance maybe fifty yards or maybe less. The Japanese were bigger men than I was, all of them. They were Imperial Marines is what they were. They were their best fighting force.

We had Captains who gave orders. When we got ready to move up they'd say call the order out, "Men we are moving up now. Get ready, get all your gear on, let's get ready." When they got ready to move, they'd say "march" or "advance" or whatever they said and we would all move up together and we might move up a hundred yards or we might move ten feet. It depended on how hot the fire was. If the Japs were far enough away, we'd have to dig more foxholes or get in some bomb craters. It was something, boy.

Sometimes it takes a long time to make a friend except in a foxhole. You can make a friend right quick in a foxhole. We would shoot flares all the time at night, they would light up everything, you could see movement out in front of you. This helped keep the Japs from getting in the foxhole with you at night. There was a lot of fighting at night. We didn't have any artillery at night.

They had a sulfur mine on that island. I don't know how often they operated it. You could dig a foxhole and get about two or three feet deep, that ground would burn your hand it was so hot going through the heat. You would have to wait a while and then shovel some more to get down deep enough. Three men stayed in one foxhole at night and we would keep watch two hours each. That would give you four hours sleep if you could sleep, and that is all the sleep you had. All of us could serve one watch and it was time to get up and go back to war. You had to watch them Japs, they would crawl into a foxhole with you at night. That was why you had to watch out.

A fellow ain't never been scared no worse than when he is scared in combat when you see your buddies falling on both sides and in front

of you and everywhere. I had one man who kept my watch one night. He broke the band and couldn't find the pieces. When my watch came due he handed the pieces back to me and he said he couldn't find nothing to fix it with. We got orders to move out and we had a Sherman tank ahead of me and him right in front of our foxhole. That tank was shooting into the mouth of a cave. He ran and got in between the tank and the cave they was shooting in and a 75 mm shell from the tank hit him dead center and it busted him and all I saw was one foot with a shoe on it. Now that is the truth. And you think you ain't scared? You are scared. I didn't get hit then because I was behind the tank.

We got into one mess there. I could see the other end of the island, we were shooting white phosphorus in our front lines. I don't think any of our men got hit with it. We finally got on the radio and got them stopped and told them they were hitting our front line with it. That stuff would hit you and burn and you couldn't put it out. They thought they were shooting at the Japs but it was hitting at our front line. It burned everything it hit.

One time they told me, they said, "Tanner, why don't you pass out some juice for the men to drink." I had two gallons under each arm. I left my rifle in the foxhole but I had the pistol on my belt. I was pouring them a canteen full of juice. I got about three or four foxholes from mine and they opened fire on me with a machine gun and man I headed back to my foxhole. When I got in that foxhole my bayonet caught me on my pants leg and went up and cut my belt without scratching me. If that had hung in me it would have killed me.

I had an M-1 rifle and a 45 pistol on my hip and 18 pounds of demolition on the other hip. I think I had two or three hand grenades but mostly it was the cartridge belt and that rifle. We would throw the hand grenades in the caves. I had a 22 pound demolition bomb. It is like Okay washing soap, yellow, and if you fold it and wrap it around a tree and put a dynamite cap in it, it will cut that tree into but a bullet won't explode it. Now you hit dynamite with a bullet, it will blow up. What I did when I used it, you could put it on an extension pole and run it back into those pill boxes and you had a wire you pulled to set off a dynamite cap and it would blow that pillbox wide open, buddy. I mean it turned it wrong

side out, 22 pound of it would. I used that some.

We had some good officers and then we had some bad ones. Before we would go into combat we would get new officers, every time, a brand new lieutenant, brand new captain, brand new major. Of course, what they were a doing was switching from one company to another company because they was getting too many of them killed. This was because the mistreatment some of these officers did to the troops. I knew what was happening and most everyone else did and that is why they began switching the officers. So we didn't get to know them too well.

One incident where I had a close call, I refused an order from the captain. I want to explain to you why I did and I explained it to him. Me and this guy were moving up and the captain kept telling us to get over that little rise. The other man was ahead of me, and when he stuck his head up over that little hill, they shot him and he fell back on me and I drug him back to the foot of the hill and hollered for the corpsman. The captain kept yelling, "Tanner, get over that hill." I kept shaking my head at him that I would go around, and I went around. That night he come to my foxhole and he said, "Tanner, do you know you could get court-martialed for disobeying a order?" and I said, "Yes sir. Now I want to tell you something, captain, I'm still alive and you can do whatever you want to do and it don't make me no difference. If I'd gone like you told me too I'd got shot just like that man did and I didn't intend to stick my head up over that little rise because there was a machine gun nest right there and those Japs know how to use it." Now they had a machine gun that shot so fast it sounded like birds a-chirping, a whole lot faster firing weapon than we had. And they had smokeless powder so you couldn't see where it was coming from, so you couldn't locate them. By the time I went around that rise they had a tank in there and it got that machine gun nest. When I got there, a half dozen dead Japs were around that machine gun.

Every one of our troops was trained. They were fighting men. They would fight with bayonets or hand-to-hand or whatever, they were trained to do that. You got enough training here in the states to know how to fight. We had plenty of equipment and supplies. I don't know

how we got those things after we hit the beach. The navy brought them in but I don't know how they done it.

From the beach inland I guess we progressed about three miles before I got hit. We were about one good mile from getting across the island and plumb down to the other beach where the Japs made their last stand and finally surrendered. It took them about ten more days after I got hit. I was there for 19 days fighting, and I want to tell you something. The human body can stand a lot more than you think it can when it has to. Most of the time I slept with my steel helmet on my head. There was a callus wore across the back of my neck bigger than my finger when that battle was over.

I got hit on the nineteenth day. I was digging when that happened. A picric acid shell fell as close to me as that wall right over there. They were green when they would blow up and had old green stuff. A piece of shrapnel hit me right in the arm here and in my chest. It cut that artery in my arm and I was about to bleed to death. This captain told me I'd better get back to the beach hospital. Well, I was holding it to keep it from bleeding so bad. I threw all my gear down, everything, and I went back toward the beach hospital. When I got down there, they put me on a stool and two doctors were trying to get that shrapnel out of me. There was a man sitting on a stool in front of me, and they were trying to get a piece out of his back about as big as a quarter, and they had tweezers on that thing and it pulled his skin way back before that thing came out. And I thought, my God, if he can stand that I shorely can stand this. They didn't have any deadening. They got most of it out of me. There is still some in my arm but they got it out of my chest.

I got a purple heart out of that deal. That got me on an airplane and sent me to Guam. When I got to Guam, a corpsman met me at the door and said, "Come on in here rebel, I'll give you a bath and put you to bed." Well, I had this arm in a sling and they had my chest taped up. I said, "I'll take care of my bathing myself but I don't care if you put me to bed." I went in and took a shower and I hadn't had a shave in two weeks or longer. They put me in a bed right down at the end of the hospital. There was a big window with a big palm tree and

man I died on that bed and I had a nightmare and two doctors and two nurses had to hold me on that bed when I woke up. They said, "My good fellow, what's the matter with you?" I said, "Man, I had a dream and them Japs had us captured and had us lined up and were cutting our ears off smooth with our heads, and when I got up pretty close to them, I rebelled, I was getting out of there."

But the doctor told me that if that arm wasn't any better in the morning he was going to have to take off. I said, "Oh no, man, don't tell me that, I would like to go back home whole anyhow." He said it had gangrene set in it and he was giving me some kind of medicine, it might have been a sulfa drug. He came back the next morning and said he thought it was better, and it finally healed up. When I was in the hospital I helped serve dinner when I got to where I could do anything. Some had both legs shot off, some had eyes put out, both arms were missing. That ward stunk like dead people. I finally recuperated and got out of there and went back to Maui to join the division. Then they dropped the bombs on Japan and they yelled calf-ropes and I was glad of it.

Iwo Jima was the worst battle ever fought in history for the length of time it was fought. We lost over 6,000 dead and way in the thousands wounded, arms shot off, legs shot off, eyes put out and all that. I lost some close buddies there. It was terrible there. I tell you, war is hell, it is hell on earth, I don't care where it is.

They claim that 35,000 Japanese were killed but they didn't have a head count because those caves we blew shut there's no telling how many were in them. I doubt if they even know today how many were in those caves. The Japs had been taught that if they died in battle they would go to heaven, kind of like the Muslims, that religion they got. If you killed an American, you had done God a good deed. Those suicide planes, they knew when they flew they were given just enough gas to get where they was going, not enough to get back. Either he killed himself by flying into a ship or he dumped himself in the ocean and drowned. We never saw one at Iwo. I had a brother-in-law in the navy who was at Okinawa and he had to contend with the suicide planes there.

They dropped the bombs on Japan while I was back at Maui. They

showed us a film of that bomb. It looked to me like that atomic bomb was about the size of a softball or maybe a little bigger and they put that in the nose of a 500 pound bomb and they put that on a B-29 Super Fortress and they got it as high as it would take it and they had several fighter planes with them. When they got over Japan and said "bombs away" that thing hit the ground, son, and that thing burned everything in the city. Nothing left. The only thing you could identify was a lavatory out of a barber shop.

We saw a film of when Japan surrendered out on one of the aircraft carriers. We knew the war was over for us and all we were doing was waiting to get back to the United States. They brought an aircraft carrier and we loaded every man that was eligible on there and they brought us back to San Diego. I had enough points to get out.

We got back to California and I got down and kissed good mother earth. And they carried us up in the hills to a camp up there for a short time then shipped us to Parris Island, SC, to be discharged. When I went in to get my discharge papers that captain said, "Once a marine, always a marine." I said, "Whoop, hold it a minute, not this old boy. I been through three major campaigns as a private and never no rating of no kind. If you'll give me that piece of paper there in front of you I ain't no more marine." The three campaigns were Iwo Jima, Guam, and Saipan. That was the three I got credit for but I didn't do much fighting at Saipan or Tinian or Guam.

My wife had two children and had to make out on \$50 a month while I was gone and I was drawing about \$21 a month in the military. Of course I sent her all that I could spare, about all I had to spend for was cigarettes, tooth paste and minor stuff like that. But she made out with that. It is ridiculous that the government would take a man making \$1.20 a hour, put him in the military and pay him nothing and expect his wife and children to get by on \$50 a month. Somebody asked me if I was drafted or volunteered I said I was drafted. I said the first six weeks I was in the military I was in the hospital. They was picking the splinters off me where they had to pull me off the front porch. They had to drag me in there since I had a wife and two children.

After I got home, I worked with my brother operating a bulldozer

in Kentucky for a year or two. Then I went to work for TVA building Widow's Creek as a welder, then worked in sheet metal in Chattanooga. I have been married 63 years to Betsy Evon Brown and have four children. I retired as an ironworker foreman in 1984 at Bellefonte.

I got two purple hearts. The other was for a stray bullet that hit me and hurt me pretty bad, it must have been a ricochet because it didn't have any penetrating power. We found the bullet and they gave me a purple heart. I also got a campaign medal, expert rifleman medal, three major campaign medals with three battle stars and the purple hearts.

Jimmie Tanner spent 19 hellish days fighting in Iwo Jima before he was wounded. The reason why he and 60,000 other Marines landed on this small volcanic island was that its capture was necessary to end the war more quickly.

There were several reasons why it was essential. Japanese planes based on two air strips at Iwo Jima were bombing our bases and big planes. Japanese fighters from Iwo were attacking our B29s on their long missions to Japan, and these bombers had to fly without fighter escorts since the latter could not make the 1500 mile round trip without running out of fuel. Besides, our B29s had no place to land on the bombing trips to Japan in case of damage or trouble. Finally, Iwo was a vital link in the chain the U.S. was attempting to close around Japan itself.

Iwo Jima is about five and one half miles long and two and a half miles wide. At the southern end is Mt. Suribachi, a dead volcano 556 feet high. Just north of Mt. Suribachi the island narrows down to about a mile wide. The beaches stretch about 3500 yards north of the volcano. Running lengthwise near the beaches are terraces five to twelve feet high, making natural bunkers. From here, the ground slopes upward several hundred yards inland to a tableland, where the two Japanese air strips were (a third was being constructed).

From Suribachi northward the ground consists of black volcanic sand which provides little traction for machines, and men might sink one to two feet into it. North of the second airfield the terrain changes into a series of rocky ridges that give overviews of the beaches and airfields and gave the enemy excellent observation posts.

The Japanese had planned well to defend the island. Every square

yard could be covered by weapon fire. There were extensive underground caves and tunnels, and in some cases they could go half a mile through tunnels connecting various positions. All the caves had at least 35 feet of overhead cover and were a minimum of 5 feet wide, 33 feet long and 5 feet high. All had multiple entrances and multiple turns up to 90 degrees. All of these characteristics helped safeguard them from bombardment and flamethrowers.

The pillboxes and blockhouses were constructed of concrete two to five feet thick and were reinforced with steel and rock. They were overlaid with five to fifteen feet of volcanic rock and then covered with sand. The top of the structures was level with the surrounding ground, making them difficult to spot by eye or aerial photography. The Japanese had 23,000 troops defending the island, which they thought were adequate, considering the extensive fortifications.

The U.S. bombed the island for 72 consecutive days, from December 8, 1944, until D-Day, which was February 19, 1945. Battleships joined in on January 24. The intensity increased during the three days before the landing, precipitating extensive return fire from the island. All this bombardment did some damage to the heavily fortified island, but it was up to the ground troops to destroy the bulk of the enemy in the extensive caves, tunnels and pillboxes.

More than 800 naval vessels, 220,000 troops and 60,000 marines had closed in on Iwo Jima. The assault was to be made by the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions with the 3rd to be held in floating reserve. Each battalion was assigned a 500 yard stretch of beach. The 28th was to seal off Mt. Suribachi, the 27th was to move directly across to the west beach, and the 23rd, including Jimmie Tanner, was to seize airfield number one.

At 0830 the first wave went in, followed by six more. By 1000, all seven assault battalions had come ashore. Surprisingly, resistance gunfire had been much less than expected. Then the beach, Suribachi, and all the ridges and hills came alive. The Japanese had taken refuge in their underground fortifications and had now crawled out to begin heavy firing. Their strategy was to limit the assault to the beach while their guns wiped all of them out. As Mr. Tanner so vividly described, dead and wounded were everywhere on the beach area. Advancement was slow, a yard at a time.

(the above information is from: Lucas JG, et al. *The U.S. Marines on Iwo Jima*. New York, New York: Dial Press: 1945. Three of the authors were war correspondents at Iwo.)

The following summary of the remainder of the assault is taken from: Miller FT. *History of World War II: Armed Services Memorial Edition*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Universal Book and Bible House: *Armed Services Memorial Edition*. 1945: 900-909.

Despite the resistance, by the end of the first day the Marines had isolated Suribachi and had a toehold on Airfield #1. The entire field was occupied by noon of the second day. The next two days were marked by a series of violent counterattacks by the Japanese. On February 23 part of Airfield #2 was occupied by the 3rd Division, which had been called in as replacements, and the 4th. On the same day, the 28th Marine Regiment raised the flag on top of Suribachi, which has been immortalized in the famous photograph.

Mr. Tanner describes what the fighting was like in the trenches. Progress was slow and resulted in many casualties, but the Japanese finally began to break under the land, sea and air battering. Organized resistance finally ended on March 16. The marines had lost 4189 killed, 15,308 wounded, and 44 missing. The cost was high, but the objectives had been accomplished. Within three months after Iwo was taken, over 850 bombers were able to make emergency landings there, possibly saving the lives of over 9000 crew members.



MARK SCOTT SKELTON

I entered the army June 11, 1942, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I had just graduated from Auburn University with a degree in Agricultural Engineering and a ROTC commission as a 2nd lieutenant in the U.S. Army Field Artillery.

Fort Bragg was the field artillery training center for the eastern part of the country. After completing a four weeks refresher course, I was temporarily assigned to a training regiment before being ordered to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to attend a three month Battery Officers course. Upon completing the course, I was assigned to the 31st Infantry Division at Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

Then I was assigned to the 116th Field Artillery Battalion which gave support to the 155th Infantry Regiment. I eventually wound up in Battery B of the 116th. The artillery is behind the front line and supports the infantry with field artillery fire. As the infantry progresses, and as they run into resistance, they call on the artillery to fire rounds on the enemy to try to weaken this resistance so the infantry can continue their advance.

The 31st Division had been depleted, and there was just a cadre left because the other personnel had been shipped out as replacements. This training cadre was made up mostly of noncommissioned officers who trained the incoming troops. Then new recruits would come in to rebuild the division and they would have to be trained. As this training progressed in the summer of 1943, we went to Louisiana for maneuvers. After this, we went by train, along with all of our equip-



ment, to Camp Pickett, Virginia, where we had advanced training in preparation to going overseas.

We went to West Virginia for advanced mountain training, then to Camp A. P. Hill, Virginia, which was a large artillery firing range where we perfected our skills. Next we went to Camp Bradford, Virginia, for amphibious training on Chesapeake Bay. Upon returning to Camp Pickett, we were issued wool clothing. Then, on the spur of the moment, we were ordered to turn in our wool clothing and were issued khakis instead, which meant we were headed for the Pacific.

We shipped out from Hampton Roads, Virginia, in March of 1944 and went through the Panama Canal and crossed the Pacific to British New Guinea. We were in the ship for forty days and landed in Oro Bay, New Guinea. We did not have escort ships as we crossed the ocean because at the time that area was relatively safe. By the time we got to New Guinea the battles had already moved further north from there. Of course, in the earlier stages there had been battles in New Guinea, where the Japs had been stopped trying to get to Australia.

This would have been 1944 when we got to Oro Bay. I had been promoted to captain just before we shipped out and was a battery commander. An artillery battalion has three firing batteries A, B, and C, and I was commander of the B Battery. There was also a service battery which as the name implies serves the supplies to the other batteries. Each firing battery had four 105 mm howitzers and the necessary supporting equipment. The howitzers and ammunition trailers were normally pulled by trucks, but in the jungle these were replaced by track-trailers. There were approximately 100 men in my unit. We had people all the way from the Bronx to Florida. It is amazing how people can get along together. We had common interests of staying alive and fighting the Japs.

We were at Oro Bay for four to six weeks. We started getting acclimated to the jungle, which was much different from the maneuvers we had been doing in the states. There had never been a major war fought in a jungle. Visibility or the lack of it is one of the main things in fighting there. The dense overhead makes radio communication difficult.

When we left Oro Bay, we went to the Wadke-Sarmi area, and that

was just for another step in our training. That area had basically been taken but there were still a few Japs in the jungle, and that was the first taste of combat the division received.

We were at the Wadke-Sarmi area about a month and then were given the assignment of invading the island of Morotai, which is northwest of New Guinea and north of the equator. Some of the division was at various parts of New Guinea but they all loaded up from these various places.

We loaded our battalion on an LSD (landing ship dock), which is a large ship with a long open area several decks deep inside the ship. Big gates are across the rear end of the ship. We loaded the tractors and howitzers on smaller LCMs (landing craft motorized). The interior of the LSD was filled with water, then the gates were opened allowing the LCMs to come inside. After the LCMs were properly aligned facing the rear of the ship, the gates would close and all the water pumped out. To disembark at the invasion site, the LSD would pump in water, head out to sea, open the rear gates and the LCMs would make a mad dash to the beach.

The landing at Morotai took the Japs by surprise. They were expecting a force to land on Halmahera where they defended with some 50,000 troops, and Morotai was lightly held. Once the Morotai beachhead was established, the infantry established a fortified perimeter from which they used frequent patrols to keep track of the Japs.

The technique for warfare in the jungle was not in books—lack of visibility was a matter of fact. The use of infantry scouts did not work so combat patrols were used. A patrol usually consisted of an infantry platoon and a field artillery forward observer party of three to five people. Communication to the outside world was by radio to an artillery spotter plane which relayed the message back to headquarters. Thus if the spotter plane was not in the air there was no communication. To adjust artillery fire the spotter plane first had to locate the patrol in the jungle by talking to the radio operator on the ground as the plane flew in from several different directions. Once the spotter pilot had marked the location of the patrol on his map, he would have an artillery round fired a safe distance from the patrol on the ground.

The ground observer, by communicating with the air spotter, would have the round brought closer until sometimes the shrapnel would be clipping leaves off the trees overhead. Using some previously adjusted calculations, rounds would be fired during the night at random times to discourage the Japs from attacking the patrol.

The whole mission on the island was to take about thirteen square miles so the air force could come in and build a fighter strip and a bomber strip so they could bomb the Borneo oil fields. Once the 31st moved in, they set up a perimeter as soon as they were able. There were some attacks and things like that but there no major military encounters. Our PT boats kept the Jap troops on Halmahera from coming over at night. The main thing was that the Japs would bomb almost every night for several months. They had some air fields at Halmahera. Our bombers would come in, load the bombs at night and leave before dawn the next day. I mention that because the Jap night bombers hit one of our bombers on the ground that had already been loaded. It caused quite an explosion.

A strange thing happened to me at Morotai. In high school here in Scottsboro there was a teacher named Mr. Couch. Somehow he was kin to Dr. Hodges, and he stayed at the hospital and taught at the high school. When we were in Morotai, before we got set up, we would have to send our sick call patients down to an evacuation hospital at the beach. When they went down to the hospital, as battery commander I had to sign the sick book, which I did every morning. Men kept coming back saying the doctor down there knows you. So I went down there and here was Dr. Couch, who had gone to medical school and became a doctor. He came out to the battery a time or two. Once things settled down, he moved on to another assignment. It was a real coincidence seeing him there.

After Morotai, we moved on up to Mindanao which is the southernmost big island in the Philippines. Different parts of the 31st Division landed at different places. We landed on the western side at Parang. Our purpose was to move inland and go north on the Sayre Highway. They had already occupied the island of Leyte up in the northern part of the Philippines. The overall plan was to occupy all the Philippine

Islands, particularly those with any size and use.

There was no resistance until we got into the interior. The infantry was doing the fighting, and our mission was to support the infantry with artillery fire. Back then you had what was called a triangular division. You had three regiments of infantry, and each was broken down into three battalions of infantry. Then a battery of artillery was assigned to each battalion. If our battalion that we were assigned to, which was the 2nd Battalion, moved along, then our battery went along just to give support to our 2nd Battalion. In some instances, when the three regiments were fighting as a whole, we would all stay together and we would be under the control of the artillery battalion commander. We could fire about twelve miles with our 105 howitzer, which was our main firepower. Of course, each individual was equipped with his own weapon.

Each of the three battalions had the 105s, then there was a fourth battalion which was not assigned to any regiment because it had 155 howitzers. They would be used in the big attacks. They could go almost anywhere because they had more firepower, and its shell was almost a third bigger.

You had liaison officers who worked with the regimental commander, and he was the commander's connection to the field artillery. Each battery would sometimes send out a forward observer party that would actually go with the infantry and be in combat with the infantry. The forward party would radio us back and fill us in. They might be gone four or five days on infantry patrol.

Once, while we were in the Philippines, I was ordered to move forward and pick out a position and move the battery into it. So I took the jeep driver and a radio operator and we went up to this area and thought it was a good one, so we radioed the battery. It was on a rise and there was a little cut where the dirt road passed through the rise. When the battery came and started making their positions, we flushed about three or four Japs. Of course, everything broke loose and there was a lot of firing, and this is when another strange coincidence occurred.

It so happened that an evacuation hospital was moving up the road. Some of the machine gun fire was crossing the road. As their convoy was

moving up, some of the fire was going through the tarps on the tops of their vehicles. The skirmish didn't last long, and we got the Japs out early with all the firepower we had. When things quieted down and people were walking around, who came walking across the field? It was, believe it or not, Dr. Couch. He recognized me and I recognized him, and he said, "Mark Scott, your boys really shot up my truck."

We were shelled in the Philippines several times. One funny thing, you know, we went into position in a rice paddy. You can dig a hole in a rice paddy but it immediately refills with water. I remember one night we were being shelled while we were in the paddy. I had been sitting there brushing my teeth with water from the canteen. I jumped in my foxhole and when the shelling got hot, I completely submerged myself, but I continued to hold my toothbrush above the muddy and slimy water.

Another experience I had was when they wanted the artillery to go along on a probing patrol. The mission of the patrol was to go out in the jungle where there was a trail intersection and dig in and monitor the activity there. We had dog sniffers, and it was real interesting watching a dog handler take care of his dog. He would dig his foxhole big enough for him and his dog. When we moved, the dog would be up front to sniff Japs out, that was what he had been trained to do, which was really useful in the jungle. One of our people came back and said there was some movement coming down one of the trails. Everybody waited for the Japs to come by. But the dog must have smelled them and he barked. Of course, the Japs heard it and dispersed. There was a small firefight that followed. The dog had been there for a couple of days and had so much pent up energy he couldn't keep from barking.

By the summer of 1945 Mindanao had been secured and mopping up exercises were going on. The war in Europe was over and I thought we might be getting more supplies because of that. Of course, the plan was that the next thing would be the invasion of Japan. I was fortunate enough to get orders to come home for rest and recuperation and then go back for the final preparation for the invasion of Japan. I had been gone eighteen months without any leave. On my way back to the states they dropped the atomic bombs, and when we got off the ship in California they told us the war was over. So I didn't

have to go back. Otherwise, I would have had to go back to my outfit for the final preparations for the invasion of Japan. I did consider making the military a career, but didn't. I was a captain when I came out. I was fortunate enough not to get wounded, so I didn't get a purple heart, but I did get a Bronze Star. Our unit has a reunion every year, but I think I have only been to one.

After the war, I went back to Auburn, then worked a year down there. In 1947 I married Vesta Lou McLemore, and we have two sons. I served in Korea in that war. I am retired from a business in Scottsboro.

Mark Scott Skelton was in the 31st Infantry Division, 116th Field Artillery Battalion, 155th Infantry Regiment, Battery B. Although involved in some fighting earlier on, their major battles occurred after April 17, 1945, when they invaded and ultimately liberated Mindanao, the lowermost Philippine island.

The war in the Philippines actually began three days after Pearl Harbor when the Japanese took over Manila. The possession of the Philippines was vital in the Japanese strategy. They stood as a barrier to more southerly islands and India and were a plentiful source of food and raw materials. After Manila fell, the Japanese concentrated on capturing the remainder of Luzon Island, the location of Manila. Their efforts were centered on the "Bataan Line," stretching from Subic Bay to Manila Bay, and Corregidor, a small rocky island at the tip of Luzon.

While the battle was going on, General MacArthur left to organize the grand scale strategy for the Southwest Pacific, leaving General Wainwright in control. After some of the fiercest fighting of the war, the American troops were surrounded, and on April 10 the infamous Bataan "March of Death" began.

In the summer of 1944 American air forays over the Philippines began, and in October carriers began penetrating deep into Japanese waters. On October 20 the invasion of the Philippines began with heavy bombardment of the Leyte shore, north of Mindanao Island. The Japanese were caught unawares, but fighting was severe. After a little over a week, however, the Americans controlled nearly 2,000 square miles of Leyte.



The famous Battle of Leyte Gulf occurred on October 24-26. The Japanese strategy was to completely annihilate MacArthur's troops in the area. The Japanese sent three different fleets into the gulf and almost prevailed, but in the end the Americans won an overwhelming victory, causing tremendous loss of morale for the Japanese. However, skirmishes continued in the area for some time.

MacArthur's troops invaded Luzon at Lingayen Gulf in January of 1945. Resistance was stiff, but finally, in the second week of March, Manila was cleared of the Japanese. Other islands still needed to be taken, however, and this is where Mark Scott Skelton and the 31st Infantry Division enter the picture. Their mission was to liberate Mindanao, the lowermost island. Troops landed there on April 18. Progress at times was rapid, but resistance was fierce. It took a month to capture Davao, a major city, followed by mopping up activities. On July 5, 1945, MacArthur was able to announce that the Philippines were liberated. (The above information is from Miller FT. History of World War II: Armed Services Memorial Edition. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Universal Book and Bible House; 1945)

In the History of the 31st Infantry Division, the 116th Field Artillery Battalion, of which Mr. was a part, is praised as "the prize Artillery Battalion in the Army."

JACK LIVINGSTON

I was born in Centre, Alabama, August 14, 1926, and went into the navy in July of 1944. A friend of mine who graduated from high school with me and I went to Auburn for a couple of quarters before we went into service.

I was seventeen when I went in. If you were 18 you were drafted. In those days, you didn't want to be drafted, you wanted to volunteer, which I did. At that time they would do anything to accommodate people who wanted to get into the service. My mother and my father both signed. She reluctantly signed because I had two older brothers and they were both in the service at the time and I was the last one. My oldest brother was a naval officer at the time, and I guess that was the main reason I went into the navy although I had no experience with boats at all. My middle brother was in the army, and I just thought I had rather be in navy than in the army.

We went up to Great Lakes, Illinois, for boot camp for about four months. I can remember several things about boot camp that may be of interest. We still had our civilian clothes the first night we were there and there were about 17 or 18 of us from Alabama who had left on a train from Birmingham. We were all housed together in a big barracks, and the next morning we got up pretty early and we went to breakfast and had beans and corn bread. That was my initiation into the navy. And all dur-



ing the first day it was getting rid of the clothes you brought and putting them in a little bag you might have and shipping them home and getting shots and getting issued uniforms. I can remember there must have been three or four hundred of us standing in this big building without a stitch of clothes on. We were just going down a line and doctors were examining you and checking on about everything. They looked at your teeth, made notes, checked for hernias and other things. They shaved your head and you could tell how long a person had been in boot camp by how much hair they had on their head. Then after we finished that, everybody was assigned to a company. We had a barracks with four companies in it. It was a quad, two upstairs and two downstairs. We had a drill instructor who lived in the barracks with us.

When we finished our boot camp, most of the people in my group were assigned to the amphibious corps. We were transferred over to Camp Bradford, Virginia, near Norfolk. At Camp Bradford there were schools they would send people to for specialties, and I was sent to radar school to learn how to operate radar that was on an LST, that was a landing ship tank. The LST was the largest amphibious vehicle that was manned at that time.

Once I was in radar school there I just learned how to operate the radar but not to repair. We learned some basic things. Every ship equipped with radar was given two sets of tubes. If you remember, old radios operated on vacuum tubes. By trial and error we would find out if something went wrong, which tube was good and which was bad. Some you could look at and see and others you couldn't. We had two backups at all times. We did have problems later on with our radar and we had to have a technician to come on board.

There were approximately one hundred and twenty five men and officers on an LST. We formed a crew at Camp Bradford and we trained as a crew. There were a lot of categories on the ship itself. I was on what was called the communications division. We were in the wheel-house where my duty station was. That took in the signalmen, quartermasters, radar men and radio men.

We were at Camp Bradford about four months. Radar school lasted about three months. Then we got the crew together getting to know

each other and the jobs we were going to do and the officers who were going to be in charge of the communication division. Then they put us on a ferry and took us up to Chesapeake Bay near Baltimore. It was an overnight run and all the officers and crew were on it. When we got to Baltimore we got on a train and went to Pittsburg.

The LST was a flat-bottomed ship and was designed to go up on the beaches. It had large bow doors that would open up and we had a tank deck that would hold tanks, or vehicles or anything. They used forklifts for unloading. It was a huge transport, that is what it was. We could carry a company of men and their equipment, and the marine's and army's companies had about 200 men.

At this point in our training we were certain we were going to the Pacific. At that time the war in Europe was winding down. We were getting some veterans on our crew who had already been to Europe. And some had been in the Normandy invasion. So we had some experienced people on there, at least enough to know how to run the ship and to teach us how.

The ship was actually built inland, on Dravo Island near Pittsburg. There was a shipyard there called Dravo Corporation. They made LSTs, and they could make one in about two weeks to a month. The LST was 328 feet long and 50 feet wide. It had a bilge deck and a deck where the engine room was. The engine room was in the back of the ship. From the engine room forward was the tank deck. It was open, just a big open area.

I was on ship 1048. We didn't have a name, we had a number. The numbers were on each side of the front of the ship and also on the stern. A total of 1051 were built during the war but the number on the boat did not signify the numerical order.

We were in Pittsburg two or three weeks. We stayed in the dorms at Carnegie Tech. These were different quarters than what we had in Virginia, we had lived in tents there. It seemed like a luxury. It was February and it was extraordinarily cold in Pittsburg. People in Pittsburg were very kind to military men in Pittsburg. You couldn't buy anything because somebody was always picking up your supper and paying your tab.

From Pittsburg we down the Allegheny River to the Mississippi and on to New Orleans. The mast on the ship was actually made in Pittsburg but was lashed down on the main deck until we passed the last bridge in New Orleans. After the last bridge we went ashore and docked there and erected the mast. I forgot how tall it was, about 65 feet. The radar antenna was on top of the mast.

When I went into the military I had been to Auburn and to Birmingham a time or two and maybe to Atlanta once but I hadn't traveled much. Pittsburg, Great Lakes, Virginia, and New Orleans were all new places. We got our eyes opened quickly.

We did a shakedown cruise in the gulf and then came back to Mobile Bay. There was an ammunition dump in a little town called Theodore. They loaded three LSTs there with 20 mm and 40 mm shells. We had the tank deck absolutely filled with those things which we were carrying to the Pacific. We were supposed to be going to Okinawa. We went through the Panama Canal. We got to go ashore there for about two or three hours. It was an interesting world. We saw poverty there we'd never seen before.

The LST was a very slow ship. We could go about 12 knots at flank speed but we would cruise at about 8 knots, so it took us about 21 days to get to Pearl Harbor from the Panama Canal. We were with the same three ships as when we loaded but no other ships. The ship's crew stayed in the very back of the ship above the engine room in a fairly small area. The hammocks were four high and there was a metal pole and on the other side were four more. You were living in pretty tight quarters. You got to know people pretty well to even exist on those circumstances. There was no air conditioning so it got pretty warm. We had some that snored and some that just bathed occasionally.

We went on watch four hours and eight hours off. We did that for 21 consecutive days. It was a wound up crew by the time we got to Pearl Harbor. Everybody was ready for a break.

We knew we were going somewhere in the Pacific. To be honest, I was apprehensive about where we would be going and what we would be doing. Nearly everybody on our ship was a reservist. We didn't have

any regular navy there except for two chief petty officers who were regular navy. The veterans from the European war helped steady your nerves a lot because they could tell you what to expect and what not to expect. When you volunteered you were put in the naval reserve, you didn't go in for a six year term. I just enlisted for the duration of the war.

We were not in the area of the destruction of Pearl Harbor. Our executive officer was from Sewanee, TN, and he was a pretty good sailor. Our captain was not a very good sailor but he had been near to Pearl Harbor before he came to our ship. Ammunition is like fuel, it is explosive. Navy regulations at that time said that if you approaching a dock or pier you would fly a red flag, which was called Baker. Then everybody would know you had the potential to blow up. So when we got in sight of land the executive officer told the signalman to raise the red flag Baker. We were the lead ship so we raised the flag and the other two ships behind us did the same thing. The captain came out and saw that flag and he instructed the executive officer to haul it down. He said the hills around Pearl Harbor are full of spies and they will know what we have on board. So the executive took the flag down, and so did the other two ships.

It was late afternoon and dusky dark when we arrived. We tied up at a dock, not anchored, all three ships in a row. The captain and the executive went ashore, nobody else got off. Sometime during the night they came back and before daylight the next morning we were up and leaving Pearl Harbor. They threw us out of there in a hurry. So we went around to the other side of the island and anchored. We stayed there a couple of days and got to ride the buses across the island back to Honolulu and visit there a couple of days.

After there, we went to Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands. We anchored there. I'm not sure why we stopped there. When you are low man on the pole, you don't know many things. But since we were in the wheelhouse, we got to know more than most of them. Perhaps we got new directions. Originally we were to go take the ammunition to Okinawa but I think that at Eniwetok we got our route changed to Guam in the Mariana Islands.

My brother's ship was anchored within a quarter of a mile from where we were so I got to visit with him. He was on an APA which was a much larger ship than ours. It could carry a battalion of men, 500 or so. They had been in the initial invasion of Okinawa and they were on their way back to the states. Just a few years ago I was talking to the person who had notified me about my brother, and he actually remembered coming down to wake me up and tell me my brother was on a nearby ship.

Guam was our next stop. Guam was a beautiful island. All the hostilities were over there. We stayed there for a week or ten days. Then we went to Saipan, north of Guam. We still had the same ammunition. We thought we were going to unload there but that is not what happened. We always ran at night. In the Mariana Islands, there was a small island Rota between Guam and Tinian and Saipan. It was still occupied by the Japanese and we would just bypass that little island. We would go about eight or ten miles away from it. We could see it on radar at night, which is when we always ran, and we were always traveling blackout. There were no lights on the ship at all.

We stayed at Saipan a while and then back to Guam, then back to Saipan. We still had the ammunition, nobody wanted it. Eventually we went to Tinian, which was just a few miles from Saipan. We finally unloaded the ammunition at Tinian, which is where the B29s were flying from to bomb Japan. The last time we were in Tinian was probably two or three days before the war ended. We took our unloaded ship over to Saipan. The war ended on August 14, 1945, which happened to be my birthday. I was nineteen years old.

There were three radar men on the ship. The radar was made by Raytheon. You were looking at a small screen like a computer screen. It was round and about ten inches big. The screen would search out to the horizon, about twenty miles. If there was anything out there, it would pick up a little blip. That blip would tell you there was something there, you just couldn't tell what it was. By that time, during the war, they had put on ships even our size an identification device called IFF which stands for identification friend or foe. The radar was equipped so you could hit a switch and send a signal out to that blip

and if you got the proper response you knew it was friendly and if you didn't you knew you had to tell somebody. Radar was used particularly in convoys for navigation purposes because you could tell exactly how far you were from the ship behind you and on either side of you or the one in front. We used it extensively for this purpose to keep from running into each other. You could see convoys on it. If they were lined up you could see the blips and know the distances between each ship.

Nobody ever shot at us. We had one night air raid when we first got to Guam. Some people said it was a practice run but it was enough to make you think they might be here. I was not disappointed when the all clear went on. One of the things the veterans would tell us was that our ship was too small for the Japanese to waste a plane on. They gave us a little bit of comfort. But they did sink some of the LSTs at Okinawa with the kamikazes.

We separated from the other two when we got to Guam. Sometimes afterwards we would go along and sometimes we would have other ships with us depending on what was needed there.

When the war was over, there was a big celebration in all the ships around there. We had stored a lot of beer in our chain locker where the bow anchor was. That day you could look around and see that the men on the other ships were having a good time, some were even shooting their guns up in the air. It got a little bit dangerous from that standpoint. Our executive officer went to the captain and said he wanted to break out the beer. The captain said no because regulations prohibited drinking aboard but we could take it ashore. So word was passed around the boat, and one of the seamen took a sledge hammer and broke the lock off and we all had a can of beer. The captain didn't say a word, he went to his stateroom and stayed.

After that, on the 22nd of September, we were in Sasabo, Japan. We had taken a company of marines from Saipan and these marines had guard dogs. We used to say every dog had a marine. The dogs were lashed out on the main deck, topside, and the ship began to smell pretty much by the time we got to Sasabo. We went to the lower end of Kyushu, an island in Japan, in September. When we went into Sasebo we had fighting ships with us we did not go in escorted that time. We

went in not knowing what to expect. When we went into the harbor, everybody was at battle stations, manning the guns and we had large combat ships and cruisers and they were at battle stations as well. September in that part of Japan is still warm but not as warm as course as in the Marianas.

What impressed me the most being a farm boy were the hillsides, they were very steep. Mountains came out to the water. There was not one level place not in cultivation, they were trying to raise something to eat. There were a lot of terraces. They were starving, the war had gotten so adverse for them that the average person was not having enough to eat.

We were there a few days. We were beached there. When the marines went ashore, they did not have a kitchen. The marines would come back and our kitchen crew would cook for them until they could get a kitchen setup ashore somewhere.

When we left there we went to the Philippines. We went to Manila and picked up a load of troops there, then went back to a place called Kure which is on the lower part of the eastern side of Kyushu. It was a huge naval base that the Japanese had at that time and we unloaded our troops there. That was not far from Nagasaki, where the second atomic bomb was dropped. Anybody who wanted to was given the opportunity to go over and look at Nagasaki but for some reason I didn't want to go. Part of our crew did go on buses and stood on the hillside looking over the city. They couldn't go into it.

Then we went back to Guam and picked up another company. This time we went a little further north to Matsuyama, not too far from Hiroshima. When we got there, it was cold weather by then and the Japanese were intuitive people and they had begun to open little restaurants and bars not too far from the dock where we were tied up. They served a Japanese saki which tastes like Coca Cola or something like that but it had a strong alcoholic content that would slip up on you and hit you in the back of the head after a little while. Some of our fellows found out about that the hard way. I did taste it.

We beached there the last time we went there. Our LST beached in an area where there was a concrete area for sea planes the Japanese

had used. Usually when a big ship like ours would hit the sand, it would stop. The engines would run at full speed to try to get us as far up as we could get. This time, we hit concrete and just kept going. When the tide went down, you could get out and walk all around our ship. We had to wait until the tide came in and we had to have ocean-going tugs. We lost our stern anchor and almost run out of cable. We also lost our captain for they relieved him after that. There had been other incidences similar to that. The executive officer became the captain and he was very, very good. I thought he was a lawyer from Nashville all those years but it turned out he was a cotton broker from Memphis. He has been dead for a long time, his brother told me some years ago. His brother also told me he had never recovered from the war and had become an alcoholic.

They sent us back to Manila. We started moving supplies and equipment and troops from one island to another in the Philippines. We went from end to the other on small missions. The war was over in August and our last trip to Japan was in late November or early December so it was getting close to the end of 1945.

At that time they had developed a point system. If you had so many points, they let you come home. The point system consisted of how many months you had been overseas, whether you were married, had dependents, in combat, had medals and things like that. I think you had to have 23 points to get out and I think I only had two. I didn't have a lot to forward to.

We stayed on the ship. We no longer had to man the guns. We didn't have to be so strict at night. We could run at night without the lights on. But we still needed the radar to navigate. Any time the ship was cranked up, someone was sitting at the radar station to make sure you kept your distance. We navigated at night in getting around the Philippine Islands.

Toward the end of our tour, we did that for three or four months. Then they sent us down to Mindanao, which is the lowest island in the Philippines. We went to a place called Zamboanga which as at the tip of the island. It was filled with a lot of natives who were still head-hunters, we were told, but we didn't see any. We went there for fresh

water. Then we became a mother ship. We went down into the Sulu Sea between Mindanao and Bornea. Several small mine sweepers went with us. With our big tank deck, we could carry supplies for them. The sweepers could not stay out for a long time, so we also carried fuel they could pump off. We really became a supply ship for about two or three months. We would go into one of those islands and anchor. There was nothing for us to do. We would open the bow doors and let the ramp down and swim a lot. The water was crystal clear and you could see the bottom in many places sixty or seventy feet deep. We never had any concern about sharks. I don't know why no one thought about it then. That was about the only recreation we had. That and playing cards and reading and any other way you could kill time. Things had relaxed a lot by then.

When we left there, we took our ship to Subic Bay which was about 50 to 100 miles north of Manila. This bay became a resting place for a lot of World War II ships, especially LSTs. We anchored our ship there and the crew got off and we began being processed to come home. This was in June of 1946. We had to wait our turn to get on a troop. We were more crowded in the living quarters on the troopship than on the LST. We were about 17 days getting to San Francisco. At that time I was a radar man third class which is what you call a buck sergeant in the army. I never considered making the military a career.

When we got to San Francisco, most of us not been paid for a long time and we had no money. So I made a collect call home, of course. When we got into the barracks, there was a big bank of pay phones at one end. You had to get in line. I didn't realize the time difference between California and Alabama. I can distinctly recall we all stood in line to make our calls. It was about midnight at home. At that time, the long distance operators would call say to Dallas and then to Houston and so on and in to Gadsden and Gadsden to Centre. The Gadsden operator couldn't wake up the telephone operator at Centre. She rang and rang and finally got Miss Lola up and told her that she had a collect call to my parents and Miss Lola said is that you Jack. My other two brothers were home by then.

After I got home, I went back to Auburn for two and a half years

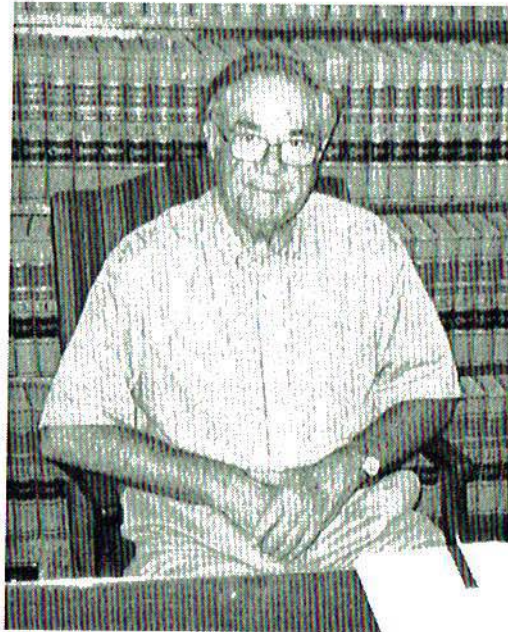
then went to law school over at Alabama. I moved to Scottsboro in 1966. I had been practicing in Centre. I am still busy maintaining a practice. I have two children and two grandchildren. My first wife Ann died in 1981. Sue is my current wife.

While in law school I signed up for advanced ROTC to get money for the last part of law school and was in the reserves afterwards. In 1950 I got called up in the army and served two years during the Korean War, but I didn't go to Korea.

We have been having LST reunions the past several years. The next one will be the last. We are down to eleven who come now. My wife and I are still close friends with two others and their wives.

Jack Livingston served on an LST in the Pacific during the last months of the war with Japan. He was never in any battles per se, but the LSTs served an absolutely vital function in the Pacific Theater. These ships transported a large portion of the materials and ammunition used by the troops in the battlefields. Besides, they took troops to the beaches so the islands could actually be invaded. The men on the LSTs may not have gotten as much glory as those on the front lines, but without them there could have been no functioning military.

Jack recently went to a reunion of his outfit. Sadly, only eight attended, so the decision was made not to have any more. Jack says that the eight of them were sitting around a table talking about the 44 in their unit that they know have died. Every one of the 44 ei-



ther died from cancer or had been diagnosed with cancer. Amazingly, all eight at the table had a history of some kind of cancer as well (Jack had a small skin cancer). As Jack mentioned in his recollections, their group was near Hiroshima and Nagasaki shortly after these cities were bombed. Naturally, they speculate as to whether there is a connection between the cancers and the possible radiation exposure.

WALTER WATSON

I was born in Jackson County, Alabama, in Boxes Cove in 1923. I was a farm hand. I went in the military on August 19, 1941. I was drafted. They were drafting people before Pearl Harbor. They were taking them in and giving them a year's training and then releasing them. This was in case of war.

I was in the army infantry. I went to Camp Croft in South Carolina. I was supposed to be there thirteen weeks but two weeks before my basic was over they shipped me out. At that time basic was very strenuous. They crammed everything in, all kinds of training with weapons, close order drill, extended order drill, everything. I had already had as much experience with a rifle as I could get. I had always liked guns and rifles and I liked to fire them and I was always good at them.



I started out to be a rifleman and then went into the 60 mm mortars. After I trained on the mortars I was transferred to machine guns. We left the United States on December the third and Pearl Harbor happened three days after we left. We never knew where they were shipping us, and we didn't have any support ship. The closest land was the Panama Canal Zone and that is where they dropped us off. They put us in the jungles training there doing all kinds of things, how to get through the jungles, how to survive in the jungle. We didn't know where we were going because we were hit so hard

at Pearl Harbor nobody knew what they were going to do. I was there about 15 months. After the jungle training, they put us to guarding the Panama Canal because that became a vital thing during the war. There was one place on that canal that they said if it were blown it would be impassable. We did that for several months. They trained us and brought us together as an outfit and we were getting ready to go someplace in the war but we still didn't know where. Two days before we were supposed to be shipped out, I contacted malaria fever and was in the hospital when my outfit got shipped out. They went to Iwo Jima later on.

When I got out I was sent to a different outfit. They sent us back to the states and they started mountain training us out west at Colorado Springs. This consisted of snow and ice and cold weather and climbing mountains and carrying everything on your back and learning how to survive. Everything we needed would be on our back and we would have to survive that way. By this time it was 1943. I spent about six months there in Colorado Springs. When we were there I had so much training I thought I was going to die from training. They came in and asked for volunteers for a parachute outfit. I thought well, to get out of some of this training, I'm going to join the paratroopers, so I went and signed up. Of course you have to be in tip-top shape to be in the paratroopers. I went and passed the physical and was ready to be shipped out. The colonel came down and told us we couldn't go and that is when they shipped us to California for more training out there. It was rain and mud in the mountains there.

Then they come around asking for volunteers for a secret mission and I signed up for that. They offered me a promotion if I'd stay where I was and I told them I had all the training I needed and I needed to go somewhere else. Since this was a secret mission the colonel couldn't stop it, so I shipped out. They wouldn't tell us what the secret mission was and even when we got on the ship to go across they still didn't tell us what it was. It was supposed to be only mountain and jungle trained troops, but it came out later that a lot of them were not mountain trained, didn't know how to fire their weapons, did not know a lot of things about weapons.

Going over on the ship, I met a young lieutenant who kept asking me to go in the machine gunners and I said, "The average life of a machine gunner is about 20 minutes," and he said, "Don't pay no attention to what you hear, that is all hogwash." Every time I saw him on the deck he would keep saying he needed me on the machine gunners. We landed in India. We went to this big camp in India and they organized us into companies, platoons, and squads. Still every time I would see that lieutenant he would ask me to be a machine gunner. One day they called my name and they put me in mortars and I come back and that lieutenant looked at me and said, "Watson, I need you as a machine gunner," and I said, "Lieutenant, they put me in mortars," and he said, "If you will be a machine gunner I will take care of you." I guess, I don't know, I just looked at him and said, "I guess I will be a machine gunner if that is the way you feel about it." Then he said, "The next time they call you, just call me and I will take care of it," so I became a machine gunner. All the training I had had with machine guns was basic, learning how to assemble and disassemble and fire them. He wanted me because he knew I at least knew how to do that and a lot of the people didn't know how to.

I don't know exactly where we landed in India but it was on the tip. From there we got on a little train and rode all the way across India to Burma. We rode the train as far as it went in India and then we got off and caught little planes and hedge-hopped over into Burma and landed at the Myitkyina airport.

The secret mission was to be a member of Merrill's Marauders. When I volunteered my company of about 200 people were replacements for the first Marauders. They had already started on the Burma Road and had lost so many people they needed replacements.

We went into an airport that was under fire. The airport had already been taken but was still being attacked. Myitkyina itself hadn't been taken. We had not been under fire before and didn't know what it was. We didn't have our guns with us, they had been put on the plane and hadn't been issued to us. We got off the plane and took our packs and dropped them off and went back to the plane to get the weapons and ammunition and went back to where we left the packs

and they opened up artillery on us. That was my first experience in battle. We had our weapons but we didn't know who was who. We were at the airport but we couldn't see the enemy, we didn't know which way to look for them. This was in the jungle. The airport was just a strip of land where they could land a plane. The Jap's artillery was probably several miles away but the front was closer because their artillery was shooting over their infantry.

I was a farm boy and didn't really know what war was all about, I guess I did a lot of praying. I guess I looked to God to get me through.

After the artillery firing was finished, we went back and they issued us our machine guns and ammunition. The idea was to go and relieve some of the people on the front line because the battle for Myitkyina was still going on. One company was ahead of us and we were the second company. The first company had left in the afternoon. We went about a mile and a half from the airport and we stopped and I happened to see an old boy that I knew. I yelled at him and he came over to talk and I asked him where he was going and he said he was going for a rest and that he sure was glad you guys showed up, we been having a rough time up here, so-and-so company relieved us up there and we are going back to rest.

We sat there that night by the road, we didn't move. Next morning I saw my buddy Sam coming back. I hollered at him, "Where you going, Sam?" He didn't say nothing. He walked over to where he could talk low to me and said, "We going back to the front lines." I asked why. "Those people that relieved us, ninety percent didn't know how to load their weapons." I said, "You're kidding." He said, "No, they didn't know how to shoot the weapons, either, half of them got killed last night. We are going back up there to relieve them." I thought he was joking. But they pulled us back to the airport and put us to training those people how to use weapons. But it was easier than training them anywhere else because they knew they had better learn how. They studied and they learned over the next two weeks. There was artillery fire all the time which was far enough away that you could hear them once in awhile.

After we trained the other troops, we went up and relieved the

troops on the front and went back and regrouped and got a little rest and then went back to the front. We were still in the battle for Myitkyina. Merrill's Maudaders main function was to free the Burma Road from the Japs so there would be an inland route for supplies to China, and the capture of Myitkyina was important in this mission.

Most of the time when you were on the front line you fired if you saw something moving. Yes, you had an officer and he would tell you what target to put it on but it was up to the gunner. It was a 30 caliber machine gun. Back then they had air cooled ones which is a light machine gun. You also had water cooled. They shoot the same ammunition but the water cooled lasted longer because the water kept the barrel cooler and it doesn't warp as bad and that is why it lasts longer. When I first went up I used a water cooled machine gun, that is what we used most of the time.

When we set up a machine gun, we used a big bomb crater if we could find one. We would dig in on the inside of that. You would have a machine gunner, an assistant gunner, four or five ammunition guys. When I first went in I was the assistant gunner. When the gunner got killed, I was the gunner.

It was two months after we got there before Myitkyina fell. Before it fell, we were fighting day and night, moving up a little bit and then they would push you back, up and back. You had to have somebody watching all the time. They would attack day or night, it didn't matter. Sometimes they would get behind our lines at night. One night there was a big commotion about fifty feet from me and I came to find out that one of the Japanese had gotten behind our lines and had gotten lost and had fallen in a hole with two riflemen.

We were worn out. We didn't have a change of clothes, we didn't have nothing, we didn't have nowhere to take a bath. If a river was close by, if we had a chance we would run down to the river with our clothes on. We had C rations most of the time. For a while we got water from a dug well but it began to have an odor. Somebody got a flashlight and looked down into the well and saw a dead Jap in it. He wasn't in the water, though.

The time the gunner got killed they brought in a fresh company

and the first sergeant came into the crater where the machine gun was and I asked what was going on and he said, "We are going to make an attack," and I said, "When you get ready we will open up with the machine gun and spray that area good," and he said, "No, not this time, we are going to have an element of surprise. We are going to walk out there across from the island." I said, "Sarge, that place is full of Japs, I think you should spray that before we go out there," and he said, "No, we are not going to do it." A bunch of soldiers came and got in the crater and then they all got out and walked out about fifty yards and the Japs opened up on them. They got pinned down. Of course we couldn't fire the machine guns because our men were in front of us. We found a place where we could move the machine gun to and we grabbed it and we ran out there and put the machine gun down and started firing it. They moved up again and got about fifty yards further and got pinned down again. This time there was no place to put the machine gun and where they were was at the edge of a drop-off like down in a gulley, and the Japs were in a big wooded area down in that gulley, if they went down in there they would pick them off. The gunner, my buddy, he had a little carbine, he stood up to shoot over the riflemen's heads and I hollered at him, "Get down, get down." You know, he stood up, you can't do that. He shot two or three times. He finally squatted down and that kind of relieved me a little bit. I looked toward the front and then I heard him say, "I'm hit," and I looked around and he was on the ground and so I ran for him. I got to him and got behind him and got his head on my shoulder and tried to drag him back to where the machine gun was. I got about ten feet back and his head went limp on my shoulder. When I saw that I looked to see where he was hit and he was hit on his right side and then I saw it had gone through the other side. I just stepped out from under him and went back to the machine gun because no one was on it. The ammunition boy had gone for more ammunition, I only had about fifteen boxes there. I went back on the machine gun, they were hollering fire.

I told the riflemen, "The furtherest one on the left hold up your hand," and he did. I told him, "I'm going to open up the machine gun to your left. I'm not gonna hit you. As soon as you see the tracer bul-

lets, you jump and go to your right, I won't hit you." Every fifth round is a tracer that you can see so you can tell how far the shots are from you. I had to talk to him for a few minutes. Of course, everybody would be afraid of a machine gun. I got him to where he said he would do it. I opened up the machine gun and he saw the tracers and jumped up and run to his right, and I kept following him with the machine gun fire. The machine gunner on the right saw what I was doing. He couldn't talk to me, we didn't have any communications and he started crossing fire with me in front of the rifleman and we got all the riflemen back behind where the machine guns were. All the area was covered by machine gun fire when the other machine gun started firing in front of him. By that time the ammunition carriers had got back. I had used about all the ammunition I had. We got the machine gun back to the bomb crater where we started from and we got the shot gunner back in there.

We lost a lot of people in our company. That day about fifty per cent were either killed or wounded. That was the whole outfit, not just my company. I would say about three thousand were in the front line and 50% were wounded or killed that day. That was the beginning of the end of the big battle. Starting the next day we began to move forward. Until then it was a little up and a little back.

A little scare I had once was right after we got that rifleman back. We were short-handed that night because we had lost so many and we had to scatter out and we took a machine gun squad and me and another guy went into a hole. He layed down to sleep first. I'm standing in the deep hole alongside the road. The weeds in the drainage ditches were high. I saw the weeds start shaking. Of course, I thought it was a Jap. It kept coming closer to us. I got a hand grenade and waited for him to get closer. Then the weeds quit shaking and then it come up again. It was a monkey. I had to throw the grenade because I had pulled the pin. When it went off, it woke everybody up and they started throwing hand grenades too.

Two days later we were really moving, then I got wounded. We had moved up to some woods. A big rice paddy was on one side. It was getting dark and we stopped for the night and I was setting up the

machine guns so I could cover the rice paddy. There were big weeds there so I went out to the edge of that rice paddy and let the weeds be a cover for me. We set up the machine gun, just dug in enough to have a place to get down. I looked around and the riflemen had their machetes out cutting the weeds down behind us leaving us sticking out like a sore finger. I walked out to tell them not to cut the weeds and the Japs opened up their machine guns and one of the bullets got me. It got me on the shoulder and across the back and between two bones. You couldn't have laid it in any better. When I got shot, I never thought about death. I didn't know where it was at. Somebody came to help me and give me half a dose of morphine and put gauze in it. We run back about a mile and a half where they had a little old hospital set up. I had to go back to the hospital in India and got back in six weeks.

The day after I was wounded Myitkyina fell. It had been the biggest battle in Burma. More troops were involved and more were lost. We never knew how many Japanese were killed because they would get rid of them, like the one in the well.

The time I was in the hospital they did a reorganization of the whole outfit. It wasn't Merrill's Marauders any more, they changed it to the MARS Task Force. I don't know what MARS was or why they changed. That's what it was from then on.

We went on down the Burma Road. The fighting was not over. They were opening the road back up. About 350 miles later it was open. We weren't really on the road, the Japs still had it. We were out in the jungles pushing the Japs. They were in the jungles too. They also had access to the road until they were pushed back. There was intense fighting going on. It was mountains and jungle and rivers, depending on where you was at. The Japs had been in Burma so long they had had time to dig in, and that made it harder.

There were three major battles after that. Nothing compared to Myitkyina, though, they would last three or four days and then we would push them on. Most of the time when we had a major battle like that we'd secure the place and the Chinese would come in and keep it secure and we would move on. The road was to get supplies to China.

It was all mountains or jungles, depending on where you were. We just cut our way through the jungle. Our machine guns disassembled, and one carried the tripod, one the barrel and each of the ammunition guys carried two boxes of ammunition, 250 rounds per box. Mules helped carry them. Of course, we were left open to be fired at when the machine gun was being moved. We had elephants, too, to carry things, and sometimes we would put them through to make trails. Our supplies were dropped by parachute, food and everything. The worse thing I hated was crossing the rivers because I wasn't a very good swimmer. The hardest thing was getting your things across the river. The mosquitoes were terrible. I had already had malaria fever and I was lucky I didn't get another case of it.

We wound up at the end of the Burma Road about March in 1945. I fought in Burma about seven months. After we wound up in Burma we were shipped on into China and trained the Chinese on how to use American weapons. This was a liaison outfit. This was after the road was opened up. I'm not sure where in China we were. It was little towns, I can't even pronounce them.

The Chinese welcomed us with open arms. We went to a little town two days walk from where a jeep could get. They sent eight Americans there. Six were going slow, so another guy and I decided we would walk on ahead. We got into this Chinese town and the Chinese hollered, "American soldiers, American soldiers," and ganging around us and they took us right to the Chinese headquarters. It was like we were a big somebody.

We stayed in China about five weeks. While we were out there we had a cook who didn't know how to cook, he couldn't cook nothing. He went and got some chicken and let it spoil. He had some dried fruit, peaches, apples and things and I asked him what he was going to do with them and he said he couldn't do nothing with them, they all dried up. I told him they were dried, that's the way they are supposed to be. He said you can't cook nothing with them, and I asked if he had any flour and he said he did. I told him I could do something with them if you don't care and he said he didn't care. So I started making dried apple pie and dried fruit pie. I learned from watching my mother.

I started cooking them things and I couldn't cook them fast enough.

I kept telling them I was supposed to go home because they were sending them home based on points and I had way over enough points to come home. I never did get a notice. After five weeks, the captain in charge got orders to send two guys back.

I talked the captain into letting me be one of the two guys going back. When I got back to the regimental headquarters I went in to see the first sergeant to see why I hadn't got orders and he saw me coming and he started cussing me out. I asked him why and he said, "You were supposed to get here three weeks ago." I said, "I didn't get a message." He asked where my stuff was and I said I didn't have it, I didn't know I was supposed to. He said, "Get back up there and get it, you're supposed to go home." It was about fifty miles and I had no way to go. I hitched a ride up there to get my stuff and hitched a ride back. When I got back there were five of us who hadn't come when they were supposed to. We finally got back to India where we were to be shipped from. We could go by boat or plane. I said, "I'm going by plane," and the other guys said, "You may get shot down." I said, "Look at it this way, if I go by plane you don't have long to worry about it, if you got by boat you got thirty days to." So I thumbed a plane and landed in New York the day that it was over with the Japanese, not the day they signed but the day they quit fighting.

That would have been about the middle of August. I was discharged on the 19th of August, 1945. I had been gone from home over four years.

It was a rough time. I wouldn't want to see anybody go through it, but for the experience I'm glad I had it and what I did for my country I'm proud of and I wouldn't take anything for the experience. I would like to go back and see some of the places I was at. I know I would never recognize any of them.

I got a purple heart, a bronze star, a Combat Infantry Badge, three stars for the three major battles after Myitkyina, and a Ruptured Duck when I was discharged.

When I got home, I started looking for work. I had dropped out of school after the seventh grade and started working on the farm. I

signed up for the GI bill and learned to be an auto mechanic. People had cars but didn't have money to get them fixed. I went to Chicago and worked for the steel mill. I was married then and had two kids, I had married Juanita Webb in 1946. After ten months, I came back here and still couldn't find work. I went to Woodville to finish high school and opened a little gas station. After the eleventh grade I took a special test and passed it to finish high school. Then I went back to Chicago as an oilman in a steel mill and worked there from 1951 to 1981. I started at the lowest job and finished in the highest job as a foreman. I retired in 1981 and wound up back here. My wife died in 1995 and I married Norma Bradford almost four years ago. I have three children and two stepchildren.

Walter Watson fought in Burma with Merrill's Marauders, opening up the Burma Road to China. The history of this road goes back to 1937 when Japan invaded China and effectively closed off its seaports. In order to establish another supply line, Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek ordered a road built from China through northern Burma (now Myanmar) to Lashio, which connected to coastal Rangoon by railroad. In 1942, the Japanese invaded Burma and closed off the road. This left China with a desperate need for supplies (Webster D. Burma Road. National Geographic, November 2003: 84-103).

In order to push the Japanese out of China, General Joseph Stillwell felt that the road should be reopened to supply the poorly equipped Chinese military. In the meantime, however, flights carrying supplies were made by flying "The Hump" over the Himalayan Mountains. In addition, U.S. troops built a 500 mile road spur from Ledo, India, to connect with the Burma Road, undergoing extreme hardships to do so.

Since there were no U.S. ground troops in the area, volunteers from the Pacific region and in the states were requested for "a dangerous and hazardous mission," but, as Mr. Watson indicated, many of those who responded were poorly trained. They were sent to India to be trained and placed under the command of Brigadier General Frank Merrill. On February 24, 1944, the Merrill Marauders began their way through the jungles

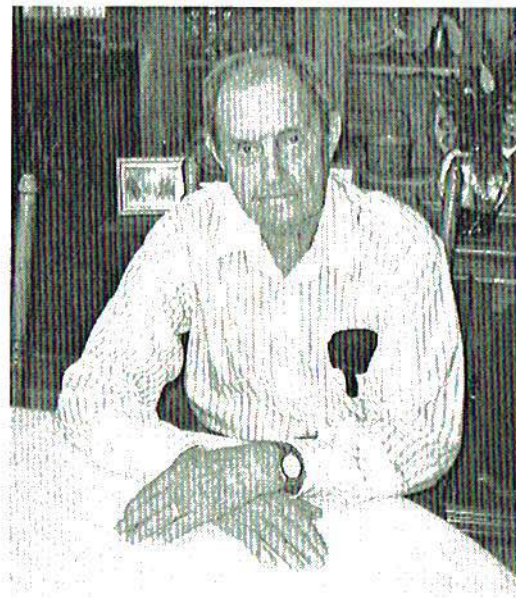
of northeast Burma. After a long and grueling journey, they accomplished their objective of capturing the airport at Myitkynia on May 17. The force had been reduced to 1400 from the original 3000. They then attempted to take Myitkynia town but were surprised to encounter a much better and well equipped Japanese force and fell back to the airport and laid siege to Myitkynia. It was at about this point that Walter Watson entered the fray as a replacement in the Marauders.

The Marauders' light infantrymen were not prepared for siege warfare. Conditions were poor and by May 25 they were losing over 75 men a day to malaria, dysentery and typhus. Still, on June 17 they cut the supply line to Myitkynia, and the city fell two weeks later to a Chinese contingent.

In August what remained of the Marauders, the 475th Infantry and the Texas National Guard were combined to form the MARS Task Force which continued the fighting deep in the jungle. In early October they reached the Burma Road where it connected with the Ledo Road. In January 1945, after the hard jungle and mountain fighting described by Mr. Watson, the Burma Road was opened and supplies could be sent into China. For their hardships and accomplishments, the Marauders were awarded

the prestigious Distinguished Unit Citation.

The above information is from the Michigan Historical Center at Michigan.com.



O. G. MACHEN

I was born in 1927. I went into the military in October of 1943. My father had to give me permission since I wasn't 18. At first, he said I couldn't go but I cried for about for about a week and he gave consent. I was the next to the oldest boy. Two of us were in World War II.

I volunteered for the navy. I did this because I wasn't big enough to be a soldier. I went to the Great Lakes Naval Base for basic training. I took boot camp there for about five weeks. They didn't assign me to anything special. The military had so many ships and they needed the men. After we left boot camp, they would come out every morning and tell you to look at the bulletin board to see where you would be assigned to. I was looking at the board a couple of days later and saw my name, and it had BB63 by my name. I asked what kind of assignment was that, and I was told I was to be on the USS Missouri. One of the sailors told me how lucky I was to get that ship, you know. I don't know why they picked me, I was just lucky, I guess. But they didn't have any sailors that weighed over



200 pounds on it. I weighed 105 pounds at the time.

After we shipped out, I was assigned to the number one boiler. They had eight boilers. The boiler room I was assigned to was three decks below. What I had to do in the boiler room was to change a little thing in the boiler about the size of a nickel. I had to change that to make the boiler hotter if the engineer or officer got orders to get more speed. I had to do watch as well as work in the boiler room.

I was told that President

Truman had a stateroom on the boat that had three beds and a wash bowl that was 24 carat gold. I was also told that there was an expensive Persian rug given by India. Margaret Truman broke the bottle of champagne on it.

We slept on a canvas cot held on to metal pipes by rope, and it had a little mattress on it. The cots were four high, and in one department we would have thirty or forty men.

There were nine 16 inch guns and twenty 5 inch guns. The 16 inch guns were 16 inches in diameter and they shot a shell that weighed 1350 pounds. The 16 inchers were in different places on the ship. They were on elevated turrets and would swivel. The powder bags were about the size of a five gallon can and were wrapped in burlap. We were deadly at bombardment at 22 miles. We could sit at 22 miles and blow up what we wanted to. But each time the big gun was shot, it would shorten the range so much. Say if after you shot 500 rounds, a repair ship would come alongside and press those rifles out and put new rifles in. The rifles had little grooves inside the barrel. The heat enlarges the rifle diameter by wearing down the grooves, shortening the distance they could shoot.

We couldn't go in close in many places because we would run aground. We would get to about a mile and a half from the shoreline. Most of the bombardment would be from about 10 miles. We would bombard mostly at night and drift several miles out during the day. We always had ships guarding us. We were like a big whale with little whales all around to keep someone from coming on and hitting us. We were real well guarded.

We didn't just shoot, we had to know what we were shooting at. We had these helicopters and planes that would spot the enemy for us. They would give us the bearing and we would fire, say at a factory. Our gun would leave a hole half as big as this room, maybe. At first we had two sea planes to spot for us, and when these got washed off the ship, they gave us helicopters. We got a lot of bridges and factories and things like that. The ammunition was stored in a room at the bottom of the ship. It came up on conveyers, the powder the same way. If we ran out of ammunition, we would be gone for a few days and people

wondered where we were going. We were going for ammunition. Sometimes a ship would bring it out to us. They also brought food and fuel.

You couldn't stand outside when they were shooting, so we looked through portholes. You would get the percussion from the firing three or four decks below. Everybody wore ear plugs. My hearing problem is probably caused by the percussions.

I also have asbestosis from being on the ship. In the engine room, the vibrations from the guns would cause all the layers of paint to come off. All the pipes were wrapped in asbestos.

I was on the ship in Tokyo Bay when MacArthur and the Japanese signed the peace treaty. I was up high and could see the ceremony but could not hear it.

After I got out, I worked in heavy construction in Chicago. Then I got my own contracting business here and in Chicago, too. We did paving. Later on, I built the Hollywood Shopping Center. I am retired now. My wife Edna and I live in Hollywood.

As Mr. Machen indicated, he was on the USS Missouri, the last battleship built and probably one of the most famous ships ever. The ship was launched 29 January 1944 at the New York Naval Shipyard in Brooklyn, where it was christened by Margaret Truman. The Missouri was commissioned on June 11 1944.

The Missouri was 887 feet, 3 inches long with a beam of 108 feet, 2 inches. The draft was 37 feet, 9 inches with a displacement of 57, 500 tons. The ship had 8 boilers and 4 sets of turbines which could generate 212,000 horsepower and a maximum speed of 33 knots. The armament included nine 16 inch guns and 20 five inch guns. It held 2,500,000 gallons of fuel oil.

The "Big Mo" was chosen by Admiral William Halsey to be his flagship, and it was active in the last months of the Pacific campaign. On 16 February, it screened for Task Force 58 during air strikes against Japan, and its guns provided support on 19 February for the Iwo Jima invasion. Then on 24 March, it began bombardment of the southeastern area of Okinawa. This drew attention away from the western beaches, which is



where the invasion occurred on 1 April. The ship also shot down five planes during the Okinawa battle. It survived a severe storm off the coast of Okinawa in early June, then made multiple bombardments against Japan during the summer.

The Missouri is most famous, however, for what transpired on its deck on September 2, 1945. That was the date when General Douglas MacArthur as the

Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers and Admiral Chester Nimitz as the United States Representative along with their Japanese counterparts signed the Instrument of Surrender officially ending World War II in the Pacific. Representatives from China, the United Kingdom, the USSR, Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, and New Zealand also signed. Mr. Machen is proud of the fact that he had the privilege of serving on the ship and being present at this momentous occasion. Perhaps his most prized possession is one of only 5,000 replicas of the USS Missouri.

The Missouri received additional fame and a well-deserved honor on January 29, 1999, when the USS Missouri Memorial opened at Pearl Harbor. Since then, the Missouri has been one of the favorite attractions in Pearl Harbor.

Note: The above information is from battleship.org, hnsa.org (which is the Historical Naval Ships Association web page), pearl-harbor.com, and enwikipedia.org.

PART B.

**Military Experiences of Jackson County Residents in
the European Theater**

CHARLES BRADFORD

I was born in Hollywood, Alabama, on May 28 1920. The story of my military experiences begins on December 11, 1941, when I was sitting in the parlor of the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity house at Auburn one Sunday afternoon. I heard that the Japs had attacked Pearl Harbor. I was a senior taking R.O.T.C. and I knew that upon graduation I would be called to active duty. Six months later this did occur.

In the army, I attended many schools and held various jobs until 1944. That summer, the 106th Division, to which I was assigned, was on maneuvers in Tennessee. The 106th had two claims to fame. One was that it was highest numbered division in the army, and the other was that in its first battle it was almost destroyed.

In the summer of '44, the war seemed to be going well in Europe and the Pacific. Our division was stationed at Fort Attebury, Indiana, and had just finished taking all the tests that were normally given to units to find out if they were ready for combat. In July, the division received orders that all persons who were corporal and below would be taken from the division and sent to the European theater of operations as replacements. This was about 60% of our total of about 16,000 in the division. Immediately we received about 8,000 new men. They had all signed up for the army air force but the army decided they were



*Charles and Ruth
Bradford in 1943*

excess, reclassified them, and sent them to the 106th.

They were a fine, high class of young men but their attitude had a lot to be desired. One month later, with little training, the division was ordered to prepare for overseas shipment. We arrived at the Boston port of embarkation on November 1st. We boarded two ships, the Wakefield, which formerly had been the luxury liner Normandy, and a smaller ship, the New Amsterdam. There were no escorts for these ships, since they were fast enough to outrun submarines. We landed at Liverpool and went directly to a camp near Gloucester, England, and within three weeks had processed our equipment. On December 2nd, the division departed for South Hampton on a LST, which can best be described as a large bathtub about 300 feet long and 50 feet wide. It had two doors that would open in front so troops could get off at a beach during invasions.

We crossed the English Channel. The ships collected outside of Le Havre, France, and the next day proceeded up the Seine River. The second night after disembarking, the division was in bivouac just east of St. Vith, Belgium, in the area between the artillery and the front lines. That night we experienced our first real sound of war. All night long we heard artillery shells passing over us on the way to the front lines of the Germans. I guess I was about as scared as I have ever been, not knowing what to expect and always thinking the worst. Getting accustomed to combat is a progressive thing—each day you get more into it.

That night we received orders that we were to replace the 28th Division. The division was occupying a front of 27 miles. Since there were three regiments, that meant that each regiment would defend a 9 mile front. Three battalions per regiment meant that each battalion would protect three miles, and each of the three companies in each battalion would defend one mile. What it amounted to was that we had about one man per 40 feet with no one in reserve. We were told not to worry about this because the war had settled down for the winter and there would be no large engagements before February or March. It was extremely cold with a temperature of 8 to 10 degrees with about 10 inches of snow on the ground.

So on December 11th, the 106th occupied this 27 mile front, which consisted of a bulge extending into Germany. Our infantry headquarters was in one of the bunkers of the Siegfried Line. I cannot speak for the infantry, but all was not well with the field artillery. Ammunition was in short supply and what we had was in many lot numbers.

Our infantry occupied the forward slope of a ridge, something like a backbone ridge, and the Germans occupied a similar ridge about a mile away. During the following four days the division settled in, sending out and receiving the normal numbers of patrols, establishing our fire patterns, and improving our defensive positions. Through prisoners we captured, we learned that we were being opposed by units made up by the German national guard. We also noticed that there was an unusual amount of motor activity not normally associated with this kind of unit. Beginning about 12 PM and continuing with increasing intensity until it reached a climax about 6 PM, we received what we thought was pretty intense artillery barrage, but we had nothing to compare it with.

The next morning I was with one of the frontline infantry companies preparing to send out a patrol. The patrol left before daylight so they could cross the open area more easily. They had been gone about an hour when they were attacked by what appeared a company in strength. The patrol turned around and the German attacking unit was caught between two forces. We took about 70 prisoners. Along with the prisoners, we captured orders signed by Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt exhorting the units to do their best, because this was the battle that would win the war for Germany. We also captured orders giving the whole battle plan for our area. These orders along with some of the higher ranking prisoners were sent to the rear to be evaluated and interrogated. We were made to believe that this was nothing but a skirmish and that because of our inexperience we were not able to assess the situation properly.

By mid-morning on December 16 the Germans had broken through the 14th Cavalry Group on our left and the 424th on our right. By noon, these two German outfits had combined forces about

two miles to our rear and were attacking our artillery. The 422nd and 423rd regiments, which had been cut off by the Germans, formed a circle and were told to await further orders. I was with the artillery battery that supported the 422nd, so I was cut off, too. By nightfall the Germans had forced our artillery to retreat. It was muddy and some of the guns could not be moved and had to be destroyed. Also by nightfall, the two regiments that had been cut off were surrounded. I was the ranking artillery officer, so I collected all the artillerymen. We cast our lot with the infantry.

Now let us go to the 18th of December. The 1st battalion of the 422nd Infantry dug in on a ridge. We, the 422nd, had no food and were completely cut off. The German artillery would just pull out in the open and fire at us at will. Three days later, on the 20th, about 3 PM, the battalion received an order by radio to move to the vicinity of Schoenberg and attack the town at daybreak the next morning. The orders said that an armored battalion would be there to help. The 422nd left their prepared positions and with much difficulty arrived about 2 AM one mile from Schoenberg. At daylight, the 422nd attacked the town only to find that the town was occupied by an armored unit of the 2nd SS Panzer division, and no armored showed up to help. It was almost a suicide mission, and we later thought the orders to attack came from the Germans.

Finally, the Germans stopped shooting and asked if the group wanted to surrender. Most did, but a small group just walked away in the fog. About 30 of us, mostly artillery, began to dig in and wait for the Germans to look us up. I cannot tell you how hungry we were. We had had very little to eat in five days. We had only slept standing up or sitting, and we were frustrated, confused, and, I guess, just trying to survive. The foxhole I dug that day was with an entrenching shovel because I could not pick up a whole shovelful of dirt. Someone had killed a cow and we tried to dress it so we could cook some meat.

Meanwhile, the 422nd was packed into an area of less than two square miles. They were sitting ducks, and the Germans fired into them at will. They had no defense and were taking more and more casualties. The 423rd was in a similar situation. When we heard that

Colonel Descheneaus, commander of the 422nd had surrendered, we had to make a decision whether to surrender as well. We did not have to follow his orders since we were actually artillery, not infantry. We had with us three jeeps with trailers and were guarding 15 German prisoners. We decided that we would leave our dug-in positions and try to find the 423rd Regiment because we had heard they were still operational. At that time, we did not know that the 423rd had already surrendered.

We pulled out and traveled a mile and came to a little village and a fork in the road. We took the fork to the right, and as we topped a hill artillery started firing at us. We turned around and went back to the village and tried the other road, traveled a very short distance and ran into a minefield. We went back to the village and parked on a little bridge crossing a creek. We were being fired on from one of the houses in the village.

At the age of 24, on the afternoon of December 20, 1944, I had to make one of the hardest decisions of my life. Just 10 days after we arrived in Belgium, it all ended on a bridge in a snow covered village, about two miles from Schonberg. We knew that we had done about all that we could and decided to surrender to the prisoners we had with us. I disassembled my pistol. I had all my clothes with me, so I opened my footlocker, put a hand grenade in it, pulled out the pin, and lowered the top on the grenade handle and closed the lid so that whenever someone opened it the grenade would go off. That is the way it happened to me.

We were taken to a small village that night and put in a cemetery with a rock wall around it. There were some things I especially wanted to keep, such as my watch and my Auburn ring. I put them in my underwear so that they would be between my legs. I had about 40,000 Belgian francs that I put in the secret compartment of my billfold. We had been told that if we were able to escape, the money would come in handy. I had a pair of gloves that I valued very much. I wore one of the gloves and put the other inside my clothes. This did not work. A soldier saw the glove and asked for it. He also wanted the other one. He told me he would kill me if I didn't give it up. This I did. I did manage

to keep the watch, ring and money until I was liberated.

Then for two days they marched us toward Germany. A friend of mine had managed to keep a pound box of sugar, and the four of us lived the next two days eating that. On the night of December 23rd, we were loaded into boxcars and moved to the railroad yards at Koblenz. There was a British Air Corps sergeant in our car who had been captured while visiting his brother. Just after dark we heard planes directly above us, and the airman told us we were in trouble. What we had seen was a British pathfinder plane marking the target for the British bombers. The raid lasted for what seemed like an eternity. I have often said since then that movie makers can imitate almost anything, but their imitation of a falling bomb is nothing like the real thing. Part of the roof of the boxcar was blown off along with one of its doors. We could have gotten out, but we decided it would be best to stay where we were. I understand that 57 POWs were killed that night.

On the night of the 24th, late in the afternoon, we arrived in the town of Bad Orb and were walked up a long hill. On top was a prisoner of war camp. This was Christmas Eve, and as we walked past the German homes the smell of sauerkraut filled the air. I never know it could smell so good.

The first night at Bad Orb we couldn't sleep, it was too cold and we were too hungry. So to pass the time away we would sit in groups and each would go into great detail about what he would eat if he were at home for Christmas Eve.

We stayed at Bad Orb about a week. The officers were shipped out and separated from the enlisted men. I and the other officers were put into boxcars to go to Hammelburg. The trip took five days. In the book "The Raid" (by Richard Barron, Abe Baum and Richard Coldhurst) the conditions in the boxcar are described. "The men had to stand the entire journey and sleep standing up. There was an opening at each end of the boxcar for relieving themselves. They defecated in their helmets and passed them hand-over-hand to one of the soldiers at these openings for emptying. The steel boxcar was so cold that if a man put his hand against the metal he left skin behind."

However, Hammelburg was not all that bad, at least when com-

pared to the boxcar. We were allowed to take a shower once. We were housed in large rooms, about forty to a room. We slept in wooded triple-decker beds with excelsior or straw in them. Sleep was ravaged by the infestation of fleas, lice and bedbugs. We would wake up each morning with whelps on our hands, face and neck. When it was warm enough to sit outside in the sun, bugs would crawl out of our clothes and up to our neck. The cold was terrible and we would sleep two to a bunk to keep warm. We primarily had two meals a day such as a watery soup of dehydrated rutabagas with worms floating in it, and occasionally we would have some horsemeat. Once a day a piece of bread was made from potato flour, acetic acid and sawdust.

As many as five times a day we would have an appell, which was a formation of the prisoners. During this time, dead POWs were carried in crude wooden caskets between rows of soldiers on the way to the burial ground. Usually, 20 to 40 would die each week from exposure or malnutrition.

In the same camp, in a compound next to ours, were about 1,000 Serbian officers. When Hitler marched into their country he told the Serbs that he had nothing against them and that they should go home and live a normal life. When he had them all disorganized he rounded them up and put them in prison. At dark the German guards left the interior of the camp and the Serbs took charge. They would come over to our compound to visit us. We would talk and sometimes play bridge. They always seemed to win.

Two of the Serbs, Leon Mitec and Drogimier Standkorich, became friends of mine. We corresponded after the war. Because of our relationship, I was investigated by the FBI as being a communist agent. The well-being of my three friends and me was enhanced by our relationship with the Serbs. They had been in prison for a couple of years. They were not only allowed to receive packages from home, they were receiving Red Cross parcels regularly. Also, there were enlisted men in the camp with them who were allowed to work on the farms, and they would bring food back to them. This food they shared with us. Leon worked in the camp hospital and brought medicine back to me when I was sick.

Our camp was commanded by a Colonel Good who was the senior American officer. The colonel always carried a bagpipe and I often wondered why. One day I found out that the bagpipe contained a radio, and each day we got the news from the radio in the bagpipe.

The second in command was a man by the name of Colonel Waters who just happened to be the son-in-law of General Patton. On the night of 25 March 1945, General Patton gave orders that a task force be formed for the purpose of going 60 miles into Germany and bring back his son-in-law. The book "The Raid" is about the preparation and execution of this exercise. The task force was made up of 250 soldiers who broke through the front lines about midnight and on the afternoon of the second day arrived at the camp. The task force was commanded by a 1st lieutenant, but in the force was a major with his own jeep. The major was there because he knew Colonel Waters personally and was sent only to recognize him and bring him back. Colonel Waters was injured during the battle and was taken back to the camp.

About dark the camp was liberated and the prisoners were assembled in a parade ground outside the camp. Then we were told that the task force was supposed to receive fuel and ammunition by air drop but had received none. They were out of fuel and ammunition, cut off, and had no way to get back. The lieutenant said we could fight our way out with them, we could go back to camp, or we could take off on our own. There was some shooting back at the camp, and we figured they were rounding up all the prisoners they could find and shooting them.

So fellow officers Cox, Crowley, Clousson and I took off on our own. We headed west generally in the direction of the front and walked all night. About daybreak we reached the Mainz River. We looked for a crossing without any success. At daybreak we took off our clothes and waded in an effort to cross the river. Just as we did we were challenged by someone from the other bank, so we walked back up the bank. We worked our way down the river looking for a crossing for three days and nights. During the days we would hide in the woods because the days were particularly dangerous. The Germans came to the forest to cut wood, and there were boys with their rifles and dogs

who came into the woods each day to hunt for escaped prisoners.

Food became a problem. We had none with us, and we were so weak that we could walk only a short distance at a time. We would gather from the fields something at night that looked like alfalfa. We would build a fire at daybreak while the haze was still close to the ground and boil and eat the plants. Each farm had piles of what looked like large beets which were boiled and fed to the hogs. We would steal some of this and eat it raw. I don't remember what it tasted like but I do remember it made our mouth break out.

By the fourth night we must have been getting close to the front lines because we ran smack into a German engineering company building a roadblock. We were taken prisoner once more and were walked back to Hammelburg and loaded on a train and sent to Nuremberg. We arrived there on Easter Sunday morning, and they marched us to a prison camp just outside of town. The camp was a sports plaza where Hitler had made many of his speeches.

After a few days they began to march us south toward Munich. It became apparent that they were trying to get all the officer prisoners together, probably to hold as hostages. We would walk during the day and sleep in barns at night. We were now guarded by the national guard, the older people who didn't have much interest in the war. We felt fairly safe as long as we were in their hands. We were on the road for about 30 days to the town of Moosburg and put in a prison camp. We were soon liberated by Patton's third army.

I shall never forget the first day we were liberated. For six months I had dreamed of eating hot cakes and bacon. That night a mess sergeant heard about this and made some for me. I ate so much I couldn't walk home. They had to carry me in a jeep. When I passed through the hospital in France on the way home, I weighed 105 pounds. We boarded a ship in Le Havre, France, and I discovered the most wonderful stuff in the world—food. The ship served two meals a day, breakfast from 6 until 10 and dinner from 2 until 6. Well, I ate breakfast at 6 and 10 and dinner at 2 and 6. When I arrived in the states, I weighed a respectable 135 pounds. A big crowd was waiting for me in Hollywood when I returned home.

I had married Ruth Moody of Larkinsville in 1943. She died in 2000. We had two children. In 1956 I bought an interest in a tractor company and helped operate it until I retired in 1985.

Back in the nineties, Ruth and I went to Germany, and I visited some of the places from the war. As a POW I had spent time in three prison camps but decided to visit only the one in Hammelburg, which is where the attempt was made to liberate Colonel Waters. We drove up the hill and as soon as we reached the top I was able to recognize the group of buildings that were used to house the prisoners. It is still a military base but is now used for NATO training. The Sergeant of the Guard escorted us through the facility. The buildings had been reworked but still looked somewhat the same. I was also able to find the large room I had shared with 30 other American officers. The Sergeant took us to the camp museum where we found pictures of the camp personnel, and I was able to recognize most of them. I also found the church just across the woods where we hid at night after the four of us decided not to return to the prison camp.

We then went to the small town of Andler for a special reason. During the war, a German family, the Peter Maraites, in Andler had befriended Eric Fisher Wood, a true war hero (he was written up in *The Saturday Evening Post* on December 20, 1947) who was a very close friend of mine. Peter was dead and his wife was in the hospital but we bonded with the family who now lived in their old house, and we had to tear ourselves from their embraces when we left.

Next we drove to the ridge that had been our forward position when the Battle of the Bulge began. It is something like Backbone Ridge here in Scottsboro except not quite as steep and much higher. About two miles east was the ridge occupied by the Germans. As we drove along the top of the ridge, I could find generally where our observation post was. The panoramic view looked almost exactly as it did then. It appeared not to have changed at all. During the Battle, we left these positions and moved some three miles to our right and gathered on the highest hill in the vicinity, prior to attempting to capture

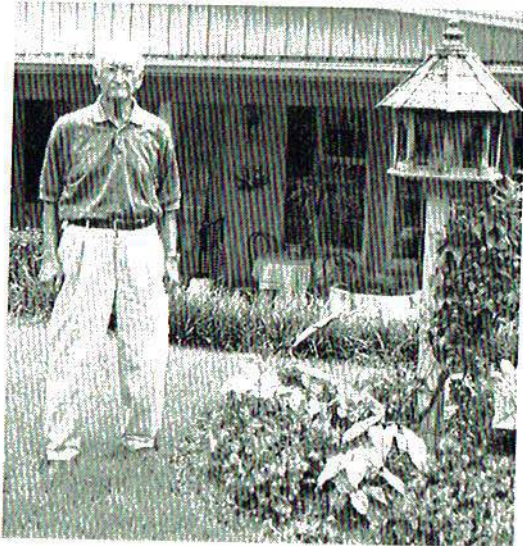
the town of Schoenburg. I was able to find the same road we had used during the war and follow the road to the bottom of the hill. I found a small creek with a bridge across it—the same bridge I was standing on when I surrendered.

I have never been proud of being a prisoner of war, and somehow I had never been able to resolve to my satisfaction that I did surrender. But that night when we left Belgium I finally felt an inner peace that had evaded me through all those years.

(Note: The above information is taken from memoirs written by Charles Bradford. The information below about the Battle of the Bulge is from Miller FT. History of World War Two: Armed Services Memorial Edition. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Universal Book and Bible House; 788-797.)

The Battle of the Bulge was Germany's last attempt to come back from the Allied victories in Europe. It was December, snow was in the air, and the ground was frozen. The Americans, as indicated by Mr. Bradford, assumed the war would slow down somewhat until the worst of winter was over, but the Germans had other ideas. The German commander, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, had aligned a large force along a 50 mile line in very western Germany, stretching from Monschau Forest to Trier. On December 16, 1944, von Rundstedt ordered local attacks along the entire line. These were diversions, however, because the main force struck in the area of St. Vith, Belgium, a vital road junction.

Within 2 days, the Germans had penetrated deeply, controlling an area 12 miles deep and 20 miles wide. It was during this earliest phase of the battle that Charles Bradford was surrounded and cut off. On December 18, the Germans opened a critical phase of the battle, threatening to isolate and destroy all the 1st Army and part of the 9th along with cutting off all the British forces, which were further north. They were eyeing the 3,000,000 gallon of gasoline the Americans had stored in five gallon containers near the lines, gasoline that the Germans desperately needed. However, as the Americans evacuated threatened areas, they left with columns and columns of trucks loaded with the containers.



The Americans badly needed reinforcements, and until Patton's tanks and other troop arrived, they used all available arms, particular bombs dropped by their planes, even though the weather was cloudy. But after a few days, the entire Allied line was in danger of being eliminated, and the Germans reached as far as 50 miles into Belgium. The Germans had counted on bad weather to hinder US

fire power, and to some extent it did. On the 20th, though, the weather cleared and the planes could come out in full force.

Patton's division arrived on the 22nd, and the Americans went on the attack. Under pressure and without adequate supplies of gasoline, the Germans began to withdraw. The Bulge became a confusing picture of attacks and counterattacks, but on New Years day of 1945, the Germans tried a desperate move at the Americans but were blunted. By January 6, the Americans were back on the offense, and the Germans no longer had the power to mount an effective counterpunch. On January, the Allies cut off the Germans in the bulge from their comrades in Germany itself. And on January 29, they broke back into Germany from the "bulge," which was the beginning of the end for the Germans. In the Battle of the Bulge, the Americans had over 40,000 casualties and the Germans lost 20 of 24 divisions.

HOUSTON KENNAMER

I was born March 12, 1920. I lived in the Woodville area and went to Woodville High School. I went to Jacksonville State Teachers College for two years, got a class D teaching certificate and taught for two years in 1941 and 1942 at a little two teacher school on Cumberland Mountain.

I was drafted in 1942. School was over one Friday and I left Scottsboro from in front of the old Hodges drugstore on a bus the next Friday. We went to Fort McClellan where we were inducted into the service and given some tests, aptitude tests if you will. They didn't ask us what branch of service we wanted to be in, but they put us in different services depending on those tests. As a result, I was assigned to the Army Air Force.

We took our basic training at Biloxi Army Air Base. Our basic training was like you see in the movies, with drills and all of those things. We went out on hikes for a few miles and then when we got back to about half a mile from the base we had to do double time, we had to run you might say. It was summer and sometimes we had to put on our gas masks and those things would almost smother me to death. I also learned how to use a rifle there. I was assigned to the 66th Air-drome squadron, which is the ground force of the army air force.

My designation was as an airplane and engine mechanic. Some-time that fall we went to California to Lockheed Factory School for mechanic training. After that, we were sent down to San Diego and serviced planes that were flying coverage for the navy. We were there for several months, living in a hangar. We did go out on the Mojave Desert on some maneuvers, that is some deserty place.



After that, we got on a train and traveled up through California to Portland Army Air Base, and we stayed there a number of months. We were servicing planes. At that time, we were shipping some planes to Russia across the straits.

After Portland, we spent a little time in Pierre, North Dakota, then took a train to New York City. We didn't get to visit any there, we just sat on a pier and waited on a ship. We went to England on the Queen Elizabeth, which is a huge ship, over one thousand feet long. There were 17,000 boys on the ship. They were sleeping on the deck and everywhere. Our outfit drew KP and we only served two meals a day. We had so many people we couldn't get them all though the mess hall.

We went to Braintree, which is a suburb of London, at an army air base. I was still an airplane mechanic, and we could do work on the body as well as the engine. We were working on aircraft used for flying missions over Germany and France. We sent out planes by the hundreds. If they were going to bomb a place, a few days before they would drop leaflets there, and if the people there thought much about their life, they would get out. They would start at one end and go to the other end, it would be saturation bombing. The planes would drop 500 pound bombs solid and there wouldn't be anything left of the town.

Being at the airfield, we would go out and begin counting the planes to see how many did not come back. A lot of planes were shot down. If we were expecting German opposition, we would send out escorts. One of these was the P51 which was a single engine plane and was very fast for that time. The bombers were B17s primarily. We also had P38s which were twin engine fighter planes that had an Allison straight line engine like in a car. Most of our planes had props and radial motors. I didn't know many of the pilots.

This was in about 1943. I was aware that there was going to be an invasion. You just had to look around, it was not a secret. You could see from all the materiel that there was going to be an invasion. It just amazes me to think how we in the United States built all the battleships, landing craft, airplanes, tanks, guns and things for the war in such a short time.

We were at Braintree until the invasion. The Germans were still

bombing London while we were there. I have a little incident about that. Another boy and I got a forty eight hour pass and went up to Edinburgh, Scotland. During the time we were gone, the Germans bombed our barracks and we lost eight boys in the bombing. It was just fortunate that I was away on leave. The thing that was beginning to happen prior to the invasion was that the Germans had what they called a buzz bomb, which was a little rocket that had just so much fuel in it. When it ran out, it fell, and it was programmed to hit London. It didn't have a pilot. That was the nearest thing to jet propulsion we had ever heard of.

During the buildup just before the invasion, the area was covered with troops and equipment and we were aware the invasion would be very soon. We did not know how soon. But on the morning of June 6, 1944, the first wave hit the beach at Normandy. We immediately got on a boat. The boats were LCTs, which hauled tanks, and LCIs, which hauled GIs. They were basically flat-bottomed raft-like boats that let the front down and you ran to the beach if you didn't get shot down.

I think we went down the river from Braintree and then got on the LCI. We didn't know where we were going, we just knew we were going across the channel. I was struck with awe. I thought we were going with battleships and everything around us for protection, but we only had a little cabin cruiser with a flagship that led our outfit across the English Channel. While we were crossing, I was scared to death. My knees were knocking together. If a fellow says he has never been scared, he hasn't been in the right place. Everybody else was scared to death, too.

It didn't take long to get across the Channel. It got so rough they decided not to let us off the evening of the sixth. We sat on our little boat off the beach a little ways until the next morning. Bombs were dropping everywhere and I remember seeing the battleship Texas. It was huge sitting out in the channel blasting the beachhead. We could see other LCIs getting hit all around us. We were all seasick enough to die. We were so seasick, and I am serious, we didn't care whether we lived or died, it was so bad.

The next morning, which was the seventh of June, we went to

dock. Our boat did not get involved in the obstacles the Germans had put up in the water near the beach. They had all kinds of things that would hang up the boats and deter the landing. We didn't dock right at the beach, though, because the pilots were afraid to get so close they couldn't back out, so we walked. I remember it distinctly. We walked off in water up to our necks, carrying all the supplies we had to live with for days.

We went ashore at Omaha Beach. I didn't see many dead Americans, they had cleaned the place up pretty good by the time we got there. We were told that we were to go to the top of the embankment, dig in and stay put. That was the steepest place. We were drenched with sea water which weighed I don't know how much and you had your backpack and your rifle, you could hardly walk up it. But I got to the top. We had a little army pick and shovel in our backpacks, and we were ordered to dig a foxhole and get in it. I thought that was the hardest dirt I had ever tried to dig in. The first night my foxhole wasn't deep enough and the next day I went deeper.

We were fairly secure in the area where we were but you could hear the fighting going on all around us. The Germans had caves and the guns on our ships would knock one out and then out would roll another, it was just repetitious. The first night, though, word got out that the Germans had dropped chemical gas and it was expected to get to the beach. I slept in my gas mask all night and it didn't bother me at all like it had in training exercises. It didn't smother me or anything. Situations change and your attitude changes.

Our job was to service airplanes as soon as we were in a situation when we could. The engineers built an air strip right on the beach. It didn't take them long to build it. They laid down wire mat for them to land on. The fighter planes would fly a mission and land and we would do any repairs. This is pretty much what we did as the front lines moved inland. They would build another strip right behind the lines and then we would move up and service the planes. The way we traveled was in a truck, like a dump truck you see around here, with a canvas cover on top. There were bench-like seats on each side of the bed that would fold up or let down.

We eventually got to Paris, but it took us about six months to get there. We went through a lot of places on the way. We kept on up behind the lines as the lines kept moving up. We saw one town that had been blown off the map, so to speak. In another place, General George Patton had come up from the south and his outfit was stationed right around from where we were. By the time we got to where the air fields had been constructed, the area was fairly secure.

We slept in little tents. I remember once we were in the Argonne Forest, it must have been in the winter of 1944/1945. We had a six man tent pitched and it was snowing and we had these little foldup cots and army blankets. I remember that for a week or more there was snow on the leaves under our tent, so you can imagine we didn't have any heat on or anything. Our food was C-rations. We didn't clean up much. You got some water in your helmet and that was your wash basin. It didn't take as much bathing then as now to get by. I've thought about this a lots of times, how we did anything really.

When we did get to Paris, they put us staying in a hotel, the Chateau, I believe, and we were still servicing planes. New replacement planes would be flown over to Paris where we sent them on to where they were needed. Our outfit didn't have any pilots of our own, but there were what we called ferry pilots who flew the planes to where they were needed. I was a line sergeant, and I would have to jump on the wing of the fighter plane and show the ferry pilot how to crank it. I would shake my head and ask myself how he was going to fly it if he didn't even know how to start it. They might be in a P51 or a 47 or whatever to take to the squadron. It's like getting into a new car today. You might not know which button to push to get it started, but they were good pilots.

In Paris, you carried your rifle on your shoulder everywhere you went. When we went in somewhere to eat we would lay our rifles down on the table. It would scare the waitresses to death. We didn't have any breaks until we got to Paris, and we did have a chance to visit around different places while we were there. Versailles was a beautiful place. I've been in the Eiffel Tower and eaten in a restaurant there. I also saw some of the cathedrals. I was amazed there and also in Lon-

don at the churches, how at that point in time did they build such beautiful ones. Our bombers made every effort not to bomb them. The architectural structure was amazing to this old country boy.

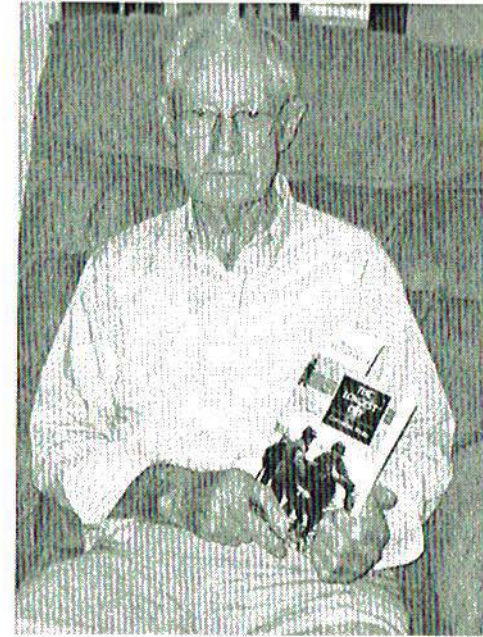
We were in Paris for several months. I was there when the Germans surrendered, and we felt really good. When we left from Paris, we went to Marseilles and then on the Mediterranean Sea. They were getting ready to invade Japan and all our stuff had been shipped to go there. We were all praying, so to speak, that they would drop the bombs and we wouldn't have to go, because we thought we were on our way there. We were about two or three days out in the Atlantic and then they told us we were going to the states and you don't know how happy all of us were.

After we got to the states, we went to pick up our pass for a fur-
lough home. I didn't have one and I wondered what in the world was the matter. So I wanted to know why, and they said they were counting the points and that I may be getting a discharge. Points depended on your length of service and where you had been. Sure enough, I went up the next day, and I was discharged before I even knew it. I had about seventy points, which was enough. I wasn't disappointed at all. All our supplies and all my personal things had been shipped on, so I got home with only what I carried on my back, so to speak. I never did think about making the military a career.

I got out in September of 1945 and taught in a two teacher school in Fackler and finished out the school year. Rose Thompson and I got married during AEA vacation that school year. The next year I taught junior high English at Woodville, then I taught a GI training class on farming. Eventually I bought several farms and entered politics. I was elected to the county commission for five terms and served as chairman for three. Rose and I have two children.

I received the European Theater of Operations Service Ribbon with Three Combat Stars, a Good Conduct Medal, and a World War Two Victory Medal.

Houston Kennamer participated in the Normandy Invasion which began



on June 6, 1944. Planning for the operation had begun in the summer of 1942 but had to be delayed for several tactical reasons. By late summer of 1943, however, detailed planning had been completed and significant materiel and personnel were already in England.

General Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander, had given orders for the invasion to begin on June 5, but inclement weather postponed it for a day. Before the beach invasion began, air-

borne troops were landed behind German lines and bombers dropped tons of explosives on the enemy's defenses. Meanwhile, crossing the English Channel were 7,000 warships and amphibious craft protected by hundreds of antisubmarine escorts and patrol planes.

The 50 mile landing area was divided into five beaches-Utah and Omaha, assigned to the Americans, and Gold, Juno and Sword, assigned to the British-led Eastern Task Force. The landing at Utah Beach began at 0530 and went pretty much according to plan as the U.S. 4th Division advanced rapidly. The landing at Omaha, however, was much thornier. Underwater obstacles bottled up the landing craft, making them easy targets for the Germans, and it was noon before the 1st and 29th Divisions crossed the beach in significant numbers. Meanwhile, the British landings proceeded fairly smoothly. Almost 133,000 Allied troops landed on these five beaches at Normandy on D-Day, and the casualties during the landing process totaled 10,000.

By June 10, the beaches were safely secured and the invasion forces had fought their way inland, and by June 11 had established air bases on these beaches (Mr. Kennamer's job was to help service these planes). This was

important because it allowed Allied supply planes to land and take-off in France instead of in England, freeing up English bases to be used for bombing over Germany. By June 30, about 850,000 men, 148,000 vehicles, and 570,000 tons of supplies had landed at Normandy. After heavy fighting, the Allies were established enough in Normandy by July 25 to begin the liberation of France, in which Mr. Kennamer participated.

Note: References for the above discussion of the Normandy Invasion are

- 1) www.history.navy.mil*
- 2) <http://www.eisenhowerarchives.gov>*
- 3) Miller FT. History of World War Two: Armed Services Memorial Edition. Philadelphia, PA: Universal Book and Bible House; 1945.*

WALTER PROCTOR

I was born in Scottsboro. My father had a farm here. I went in the service in November of 1942. I was twenty years old at the time. I had spent one spring and fall term at Jacksonville State Teachers College. I wanted to go in the army but waited until I was drafted. Most of my friends had already volunteered and gone. My father wanted me to stay and help him on the farm.

I was sworn into the army at Fort McClellan on the eleventh of November. I went home for a week and then reported to Fort McPherson in Georgia. From there we loaded on a train and went to Camp Adair in Oregon. It was close to the coast and it stayed cloudy and foggy all winter long. I was there from November to July. I was in the 104th Infantry Division. We had the head of a wolf on our shoulder, and we called ourselves the Timber Wolves. I was in the 929th battalion, A Battery. This was a light artillery unit firing a 105 mm howitzer.

All the sergeants were a cadre from another unit, and they were the



ones who trained us. Basic training involves getting into good physical shape. We did obstacle courses and chin ups and we did piggyback. This is when you carry another soldier piggyback. Once I had one on my back who weighed 175 pounds and I just weighed 140 but I got him back all right. I had it pretty easy on the exercises.

We had a platform and I got to be the demonstrator on the platform, like on one you do this and on two you that and so on. Then I would help the leader to see if everybody was doing it right. Then whenever we had payday I'd go get the money with another guy. I had a loaded rifle, and they said if anybody tried to steal the money, I had to shoot them. I don't know whether I would have or not, I probably would have had tried to catch him. I had gone in as a private and then got promoted to private first class, but that didn't keep me from standing guard or out of KP, so I worked hard and made corporal.

We went across the mountains into the Idaho desert where we trained, often at night, since we were going to be night fighters. I didn't volunteer to do this, that is what the whole division did. This is where I was made gunner corporal on the 105 howitzer. The gunner aims the howitzer. I had a PFC who pulled the lanyard and shot the shells. There was a sight on the howitzer and you shot indirectly most of the time. You couldn't see what you were shooting at so fire direction had to figure out the elevation to get the target which may be several miles away. We could shoot seven miles but we shot only a few miles most of the time.

After our basic training was over, we took a train through the mountains into California and on into Arizona to do some more desert training. We slept under the stars with the rattlesnakes. We were at Blythe, Arizona, and we got to go to Phoenix one time on the weekend. We stayed and trained in Arizona for a long time. Since we were doing desert training, we thought we would be going to North Africa, which is where the desert fighting was. We figured we would meet Rommel over there. But by the time we got our training, that part of the war was over.

Then we went to Camp Carson in Colorado Springs in the spring of 1944. From there, we went to New York and caught a ship overseas. It was a troop ship and had thousands on it. It was part of a convoy of 56 ships. We would go zig-zagging and at night because of the German submarines. Earlier on they would send just one ship but the Wolf Pack, which is what the German subs were called, would get them.

On the boat, we slept on layers of canvas where you just slipped in

under the next guy, and this went almost up to the ceiling. We were on the E deck way down below water level deep in the ship and it felt like we were going in circles. Everybody got seasick and I laughed at them, but it caught up with me after two or three days.

We went directly to Cherbourg and were the first troops to land in France instead of going to England first. We got there in late August or early September of 1944. D-Day had happened on June 6. The Germans had already been pushed back toward the Germany border so they made truck drivers out of our outfit. Three of us drove two trucks night and day supplying Patton's army. We would load up at the beach, you might have food, clothes, ammunition or whatever. We went in a little convoy with a jeep with a radio in front and a wrecker behind. The wrecker was for if a truck quit. We could hear the big guns and got strafed a few times.

Our biggest problem as truck drivers was the French people. They would kill you for what you had on the truck. We had loaded carbines, and if you got stranded, we had been told to stay with the truck and they would send back for you. The wrecker could only pull one, so you just had to stay with yours. It was called the Redball Express, we had a red ball on our front and back bumpers. We went way past Paris on these convoys, but we came back at night.

After about two weeks of this, we joined the British and Canadians up in Holland and Belgium. On the way there, we were sitting in the back of a truck and we were pulling the howitzer behind. The truck was a 6 x 6 which is a deuce and half with a double axle behind and the front wheels pull, too. We had a tarp on it and we were riding on seats on each side in the back. It was night and we had stopped at a crossroad. This private said to me that he could see somebody pulling on a cigarette in a culvert across the street. He told me that I was the corporal and that I needed to get out and see if it was a German. I told him that I was a corporal and that I was telling him to get out and see. About that time we started moving on and we were both glad. It probably was some GI who had the heebie-jeebies.

After we arrived in Holland, we found out that the British and Canadians had to take time out about four o'clock in the afternoon for

tea. I didn't know they would just quit fighting for this, but the Germans didn't stop for tea and this is where we got our first taste of combat. But we weren't right with the British and Canadians, they were on our flank. We had a whole division, fifteen thousand of us. We had our own MPs, medics, engineers and everything. An infantry division can operate by itself pretty well.

We were up close where you could hear the big guns a-booming. We were getting close to going into combat. Our thoughts were that we were afraid. My training had been mostly in the desert and night fighting. We had gotten to where we could even see better to fight at night. We got to the combat area in the first part of October before the Battle of the Bulge, which started on December the 16th. October was when we had our first casualties and took our first prisoners. We were backing up the 415th Infantry. We were holding about twenty miles of line spread out during the part of the Battle of the Bulge that was in Belgium. We had lost a lot of men and didn't have replacements and couldn't have stopped them if they had come across. You can't stop two or three hundred tanks with a bazooka and a little bit of artillery.

We didn't see the Germans face-to-face there, but we got a lot of artillery fire and we got a lot of strafing and whatever. They had little planes like cubs or what not, they would fly around us at night. They would drop two flares. One of them would hang in the air and the other, which was on a little parachute, would drop to the ground. If they saw you move, they would drop some mortar shells on you. So you didn't want to run. Some of our people got purple hearts for getting hit while they were running but they should have kicked their butts instead. We called these nightly visitors Bed Check Charlies, and we were not allowed to shoot them down. Kind of like this in a way, the British had a big light they would shine up against the clouds when they were low, and it would reflect back down into the Germans' eyes and they couldn't see for being nearly blinded. That was the first time I ever heard of that.

Sometimes we were as close behind the infantry as a mile. We could shoot our howitzer up to seven miles but we were accurate only

up to five miles. We had telephones and radios and could communicate with the people in the OP, which were observation posts. Some of our guys would be forward with the infantry, up in a tree or a steeple so they could see the enemy. We had to guess how many hundreds or thousands of yards the Germans were from us so we would know how far to shoot. You had to elevate the howitzer so the projectiles would drop down. You could see the projectiles going out with just a little bit of powder behind them. They were about thirty three inches long, I think. This was the length of the brass and the projectile.

The fighting went on day and night. The nights were worse than the days sometimes. Like I say, we were trained to be night fighters, and instead of jumping off at six in the morning, we jumped off at ten or eleven at night. We would let the Germans settle down and get their boots off, then the infantry would slip up on them. After not sleeping much, you get tired and wore out and go to sleep standing up. That is what the German sentinels would do, too.

We dug holes and we dug gun emplacements. We had de-handled shovels instead of the little picks you see on the backs of infantrymen. We dug in and put up a camouflage net. We had to dig an ammunition pit, too. We also had to dig our own private slit trench. We didn't use foxholes. These were trenches that you would dig one this way and one that way and were ninety degrees to each other. This was in case tanks came this way and you could get in one that went that way. We did a lot of digging.

When the Battle of Bulge began on December the 16th, we were near the German border, close to Aachen, Germany. That was near where the Siegfried line was. It was a pretty day when it started but then it snowed and it froze. If you were in a hole there was ice in the bottom of it. Some lost their toes and I guess some of them froze to death, but I don't know.

When the Battle began, we got hit pretty heavy. They pounded us with mortar and artillery, it was pitiful. Like I said, it was a pretty day. The sun was shining and I had a pup tent over my trench or over part of it anyway. I was sitting outside and I had my old tin hat lying on the ground and I was reading some mail I had gotten from home. A shell

came in and hit behind us. Then one hit over here in front of us. I should have known what was coming, because that was the way we directed our own fire, one too far and one too short. The next time we would make it land about where we wanted it to. Sure enough, their next shell hit between me and the howitzer and the concussion blew me over backwards. It knocked the top of my tent over, too, making a mess and tearing it.

It was pieces of shrapnel and the shrapnel was deflected back the way it came from and knocked the sight off the howitzer and flattened both tires and hit the barrels and set the ammunition stack afire. All that powder was burning. Our crew had made themselves a big hole and had put timber over the hole and dirt on top of that and they wouldn't come out, they figured they thought they were safe in there, I guess. So me and the sergeant grabbed that ammunition and threw it into a bomb crater that had water in it. We got a bronze star for this, but we didn't know we were going to get one until the war was over. They called it above and beyond the call of duty. We could have run and let it blow up but that wasn't what we were supposed to do. We tried to do what we were supposed to, and we did.

Like I said, we got hit really hard when the Battle of the Bulge began. We thought they were coming through us. Usually when they really blast you, that is when they are coming, and that is the way we did it, too. We would fire our artillery and the infantry would be ready to go just as soon as the artillery fire quit so the Germans wouldn't have time to get reorganized. After that first salvo, we really didn't do anything much, we just spread out to see if any more came, but they didn't. So I wasn't actually in the main Battle but on the edge. It was mostly to the west of us where the Germans made that big bulge on our lines.

If they had made their big move on us, they would have gone on and recaptured Antwerp, which was their objective so our supplies would have to go all the way through northern France. What would have happened to us was what happened at the Bulge. You can't stop two or three hundred tanks with a little artillery, especially artillery that is not very moveable. You would get knocked out while you were

getting set up. In the main battle, the planes couldn't fly because it was foggy and Patton was way off with his tanks and it took him a while to get there. That is why those troops down there got surrounded and some had to surrender.

After the Battle of the Bulge, we relieved the Big Red One infantry in Aachen, which is where the Siegfried line was. We were headed for Cologne. We went through Eschweiler and Weisweiler and all kinds of little villages. See, over there, they all lived in little villages, they didn't live in the country like we do. They went out from the villages and worked their farms. This goes back to when the Huns came along and they would fortify and defend themselves. We didn't meet much resistance at times. The Germans would back up and fortify where they had backed up to, and that is when they really resisted. Some of them didn't want to be taken prisoner, that was a shame, they would just fight to the last man. You had to kill them all, they just wouldn't give up.

We had a time going through these towns. You had to take each one separately. They fortified and they would get down in basements. They would get up on top of steeples, and we hated to but we would blow the top of the church steeple off because they could see what we were doing. Of course, they would do the same thing to us. If they saw one of our observers on top of something, they would blow it down.

All the time we were out, we had K rations and C rations and D rations. D ration was a chocolate bar. You would chew on that to give you something to do while you were on guard. It was hard and would last all night. Sometime the kitchen crew would find a sheltered place and would cook up a bunch of stuff, and half of us at a time would go back after dark and eat and have a good meal. Both the K and C ration were in a box and had four cigarettes and bouillon cubes or some powdered lemon for lemonade or coffee and other goodies. One time we got ten-in-ones, a big box with enough for a meal for ten men. But we ate the German food sometimes. They had kraut in their basements, that is why they were called krauts. They had cabbage fields, and that kraut was good. And we would find chickens which we would chase or yearlings or such. We had a fellow from King's Ranch in Texas and he

could skin one of those yearlings and cut it up in no time.

We got to the Roer River and some of the infantry went across in boats. The Germans controlled the dam up the river. They turned the water loose from the dam and washed the boats away. The river wasn't very deep but it was wide after they let loose the water. Then the Germans hunted our men down over across the river. We had one guy from Stevenson that I knew. He came back with a big dent in his helmet. He didn't know how he got back across the river, but a bullet had bounced off his helmet. Some of our men on the other side hid in stacks of sugar beets. We shot smoke shells so some of them could get back across the river without being seen, but the Germans captured a lot of them. We had an engineering group in our outfit, and they made pontoon bridges for us to cross. All the bridges had been blown, either the Germans did it or we did.

We stayed on the Roer River for two to three weeks. It was winter-time. There was kind of a lull, but we didn't go to Paris on a break or anything. After we moved on, we went through the Roer Valley where the Germans were doing a lot of manufacturing. We captured and blew up the plants. We found where they were making the V1s and V2s, the rockets the Germans sent over to England. They were back a mile under a mountain and they had little carts of them just ready to shoot. You could set your watch by them when we had been over there in Belgium and Holland. You couldn't catch them with a plane, they went pretty fast. The V1 wasn't very big but the V2 was a big one and they could shoot it up into the atmosphere and it would go pretty far because it wouldn't meet much air resistance up that high. Werner von Braun was involved in making rockets. I thought they should have shot or hung him and all the others. He wasn't involved in the slave labor, he said, but we got something good out of him. Something good came out of something bad. I don't know what he thought about Hitler, but he probably knew that if he didn't do what he said, Hitler would have had him shot. That is how he got rid of the people who didn't like him. You can see these rockets in the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

We went through several towns between the Roer River and Co-

logne. They really put up a fight but they knew we were getting the best of them. It was hard all the way from the Siegfried line to Cologne. When we got to Cologne, the bridge was partially blown up. While we were there some of the USO came. Marlene Dietrich, a German actress, performed but I didn't see her. There was a little resistance in Cologne. They would occasionally strafe us or shoot a few shells at us to let us know they were still there. They were on the other side of the Rhine. Maybe they had gotten back across the bridge and then blew it.

Anyway, the Allies had captured the Remagen Bridge down in Bonn. The Germans had tried to blow up the bridge but not all of the explosives had gone off, and the Allies had put up two pontoon bridges below the old railroad bridge. So we went down there and had to wait two days before we crossed on the pontoons. The Germans would try to sink this bridge. Planes would come in and I never saw so much anti-aircraft fire in my life. The allies would blow them out of sky, they couldn't even get close. Germans with snorkels would come down the river and our men up on a bluff would spy them and capture them, they were going to blow up the bridge and pontoon bridges.

Before we crossed the Rhine River at Bonn my sergeant let two privates go back up the road to see some buddies. They had no more than gotten gone until we got marching orders. We pulled up and left and they were about a week catching up with us. When they did, they had on old hats and had a guitar and were drunker than a hoot owl. My sergeant got "busted" and I got his stripes.

Afterwards, we teamed up with the 3rd Armored Division and we went 193 miles in nine days. We had a little resistance. Along the way we liberated the concentration camp at Nordhausen. It was a concentration camp for "political prisoners." We saw about 5,000 corpses among the 6,000 inmates. All were just skin and bones. You won't believe all the dead bodies we saw there. The Germans would take a bulldozer and make a trench and just push the dead bodies off in the trench. The prisoners were all skin and bone. They said the Germans would boil potatoes and give them the water they boiled them in. While they were working they got a little more to eat but when they

could no longer work they were ready to dump them and just let them die. We pulled several who were still alive from under the dead. They were too weak to move. I'll never forget the smell. The people in the city said they didn't know anything about it, so we marched a bunch of them out there and made them see it. They were crying and everything else. They may have been telling the truth, I don't know.

A lot of the common people got killed, too, but some got out of the war zone. We would meet them with a cow pulling a wagon with mattresses and pots and pans and kids and old people. They wouldn't look at you. Our observation planes dropped leaflets asking them to get out. They really dropped a lot of leaflets when the Russians were closing in on the German army. The Russians weren't taking prisoners, they were killing them all.

The 1st Army and the 9th made a pincer movement and captured 335,000 prisoners. We had cut their supply lines and they gave up. I was involved in that. The 3rd Armored Division and the 104th were spearheading the drive for the 1st Army. That was about the time the war was over. The Germans had cut our supply lines but we didn't know it until other troops came in. The war was over in May, so this was in April or so. I was in Leipzig when it ended. We were on the front for 195 days, or six and a half months, without a break. Our division lost 1441 dead and 4,776 wounded. We had 76 that nobody knows what happened to, whether they went over the hill or got blown to bits.

We were 53 miles from Berlin when it ended and they put a stop to us and let the Russians take it. They came in there and blew Berlin to pieces. Our little cub planes were flying over the German soldiers who were running from the Russians. Our people dropped leaflets and told the Germans to drop their weapons and ammunition and come to us. But they had to cross a river and we weren't going to go across the river and get them. I don't know how they got across the river, they may have swum. We put them in 6 x 6s and took them to prison camp and kept them until they found out who was SS (elite German troopers) and who were plain soldiers. You could tell because the SS had their blood type tattooed under their left arm. The rest of them they

turned loose to go home, if they had a home. That was the awfullest time for them.

After the war was over we went back to the same old grind, reveille every morning and all. We had houses we billeted in and people would come in and clean the houses while we were marching around. We got some clean clothes but they were those ODs, or old drab wools. We thought we would have summer weights but we didn't. We just had those old woolens, they were so hot. We washed them in low octane gas we had, and they would turn red and draw up. We wore leggings and at the very end they gave us short boots that had two little straps just above the shoe tops. We also got Eisenhower jackets.

One morning the first sergeant came in the house we were billeted in and told us to put on the best things we had and fall out into the street. Then he said all but you, pointing at me. I had been out too late the night before and I was afraid they were going to court martial me. I could see them all lining up out the window. So after a while the first sergeant came in and there was my old sergeant and I wondered what he had done wrong. Then they pinned the bronze stars on us.

I got injured twice but never did get a purple heart. Once at the front we were standing around talking. It was a pretty day and nothing was happening. All at once we looked out there and the ground was a-hopping and it was coming toward us. They were strafing us from a jet and we hadn't heard it coming, plus the sun was in our eyes. Man, I hit my trench, and when I hit it, I banged the back of it and it like to have broke my nose. It did skin it up pretty good and the medic doctored it a little bit. And another time in Germany they found a big cask of red wine. It was up in town and it was sitting on a windowsill that was slanting. It had a hose coming out of it and you could just walk up there and sip all you wanted to. Once while I was sipping the window sash fell on my head. I didn't have anything on my head but an old woolen cap. Our old medic stayed drunk just about all the time on that high grade alcohol that he used in his business. But he operated on me and got the glass out. I didn't get any sleep that night. The medic and I bunked together and he didn't dig. He said they don't kill medics, and I said you better start digging, and finally he did.

When we left Germany, we caught one of the forty and eight box-cars, they would hold forty men or eight horses. They have a forty and eight club in Huntsville. We had enough room to lie down and sleep, and we had two meals a day on the way back to the coast of France. Coming back on the ship from France was different from going over. We had cabins. We even had oranges and ice cream and things like that.

I had thirty days at home before being sent to the Pacific. The war was still going on out there. All of us who didn't have 85 points were going. You got a point for every month and an extra point for every month overseas. For decorations you got five points and if you were married you got a lot of points and if you had kids they would fly you home from France.

I stayed home thirty days. While I was at home they dropped the first atomic bomb and while we were on the train back to California they dropped the second. This was in early August and we were out there in California until November. If the war hadn't ended, we were to invade Japan after some amphibious training. Instead, they were discharging us a few at a time. We had to go see a captain, those of us with stripes. He tried to get us to sign up in the reserves. He said you already got three years in and you will draw a pension if you stay in so many more years. I told him I was going home, and I did. A good friend did sign up and got killed in Korea, so it didn't pay off for him. I didn't want to be in another war, to tell you the truth. I lacked six days staying in three years.

I was awarded five medals when I was discharged on November 6, 1945—the Good Conduct, American Campaign, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign with three battle stars, Victory, and Bronze Star medals. Since then, I have commemorative medals from Holland, Belgium and France as well as a Certificate of Recognition from the Secretary of Defense for helping win the cold war with U.S.S.R. I was also awarded a Warrior's Medal of Valor from the Native American Nations of the United States of America for valorous service to a grateful nation.

I had not learned a trade while in the service, so after I got out I



signed up for "52-20," which was 52 weeks of unemployment at \$20 per week. Then I went to work as a laborer for TVA, digging transmission tower footings and power pole holes. I tell people I got my Ph.D. with TVA (Pole Hole Digger). After 8,000 hours of training I became a journeyman lineman. I worked for TVA for 38 years and retired at the beginning of 1985. I was foreman of a crew here in Scottsboro. I have been a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers since 1948.

I married Myra Opal Bellomy in 1950. We eloped to Mississippi to get married. We have four children. Dale, wife Paula and daughter Sarah live in Huntsville. Robert Daniel, wife Nan and daughters Ruth and Rebecca live in Knoxville. Walter Phillip, wife Shelly, twin sons Jack and Sam along with daughter Maggie live in Mobile. Myra Alice and her husband David Hamilton and son Christopher are in Cummings, Georgia. All my children graduated from college. My wife Myra died in 2001.

I am active in the VFW and American Legion. Two of my sons and I went to Washington, DC, for the unveiling of the World War II monument in 2004. It is wonderful, and I am proud to be one of those that it was built for. I am glad I served my country during the war.

ELVIN KENNAMER

I was born in Kennamer's Cove, near Woodville, Alabama, on July 18, 1924. I went into the military July 29, 1943. Prior to that, I lived on the farm with my parents. At this time, I had three older brothers who had already gone to service.

At the time, in order to get a deferment from the military, your parents could make an application for a farmer's deferment. It was based on a point system depending on the things you did on the farm. My twin, Melvin, and I made the application for a farm deferment. Based on the point system, we had a big enough operation to have two deferments, but the local board did not go along with deferring two people. This came down to a very hard decision. The board asked my parents which one of us they preferred to stay on the farm. My father said he couldn't make a decision like that. Actually, I was drafted and Melvin got the farm deferment. He volunteered anyway and we went into the service together.



I hadn't finished school when I went in. Back in the thirties when the schools were short of money, people who lived out in the country didn't have the chance to come in to Woodville, so we didn't get credit for a school year, but I finished high school at Woodville when I got back from service. There were nine boys in my class who came back from service and seven of

At left, Elvin Kennamer with his twin brother Melvin

us finished high school after we got back.

I was drafted in the army. We took our basic training at Camp Wallace in Texas. With the army, twins could serve together if the twins so desired. With the navy, five Sullivan brothers went down on the same ship, so they wouldn't allow it any more. Our basic training was in the artillery field. Then we were sent to San Diego, California, in an anti-aircraft unit. At that time, in the latter part of 1943, the American government was afraid that the Japanese were going to invade the Pacific coast. We were with a searchlight unit. We stayed there for a couple of months. We had 90 mm anti-aircraft guns, which were considered to be part of the artillery but we were not connected with any other group of any kind. We were just a unit of anti-aircraft artillery. I didn't volunteer for this. They assigned us when we went in the military.

While we were there, we had to learn the different sounds of airplanes to make sure we could detect which planes they were, ours or the Japanese. We were more or less stationed in a rural area near San Diego to watch for planes. The fear of an invasion decreased, so we went to Fort Bliss, Texas, to take some infantry training as replacements.

Then we were put on a train and went to Camp Miles Standish in Boston, and this is where we left to go overseas on June 6, 1944. We were already out on a troop transport with 7,000 troops when they announced that the Normandy invasion had happened. We were about eight days in transit to near London. When we got there, we were still in what they called replacement status. We were assigned to a small anti-aircraft unit on the White Cliffs of Dover. The Germans were sending over the buzz bombs and hitting England. These were planes that had no pilots, they would put just enough fuel in them to last until they got over London. Our object, even if we couldn't hit them, was to get close enough to them so that when our shells exploded, they diverted the course of the buzz bombs so that they would miss London. While we were at the White Cliffs, which was only twenty two miles or so from France, we could detect when a German shell was coming in from the cliffs on the Normandy side. You could detect a

flash when it was shot and you could count so much time and know when to take cover. The Germans were shooting these shells at us. That went on until the latter part of 1944.

As the Allied troops pushed inland, the buzz bombs were being pushed back, too, and this stopped the bombing of London with them. So there was no need for our anti-aircraft 90 mms or our searchlights, so we were placed into a replacement camp and were sent over to near Paris at a place called Fontainebleau, which was a replacement center. We crossed over from England and landed at the Normandy beach. We were in a troop carrier and came down rope nets on the side into a Higgins boat to get on the beach. When we got to Fontainebleau, we still had not been assigned to any kind of unit.

Before the Battle of the Bulge, we were moved up to Liege, Belgium, along with thousands of replacement troops. Somehow, they figured the Germans would make some kind of drive there, so we were moved from Liege back to a camp in Paris just before the Battle of the Bulge because if they hadn't we would have been cut off.

The Christmas of 1944 we had terrible winter weather. About the first of 1945, we were assigned to the 10th Army Division. This division had been in Metz, Germany, and had a hard time and lost a lot of troops. At about this time, either Melvin or I would get orders to move to a different unit, and all we had to do was go up to the commander and tell him we didn't accept this, we were going to stay together. It took two or three weeks before we were both assigned to Company A, 61st Battalion, 10th Army Division, Armored Infantry. We only had about three weeks of infantry training in Paris before we were joined the 10th Division.

We had what we called half-tracks, and this is what we went in. The front wheels were just regular but the back wheels had tracks like a tank. The half-tracks were wide open except for metal sides for protection. There was a 50 mm gun up on the top, and somebody would be manning it. Tank units were with us, too. There were places the half-tracks couldn't go, so we just hit the field like the infantry. At that time, the 10th Army was in the Saar Valley, and that is where we actually joined them. The area in Saar Valley where we were in battle was

in Trier, the oldest town in Germany. Our first actual combat was there.

On February 25, Melvin was killed the first morning we actually went into battle. Our company A was cut off and surrounded by the Germans. They dropped us some K-rations and ammunition from the Piper Cubs that would get in low. We were cut off for a couple of days, and during that time we were under a mortar attack. That is when Melvin was killed. At that time, there were three of us on the 30 mm machine gun. One was an ammunition carrier and Melvin was the gunner. I carried the water tank cooler, which was a cylinder filled with water. The barrel of the gun fit inside this, and it helped cool off the barrel. We had kind of dispersed, or spread out, because of the mortar attacks. At that time I did not know he was killed. I was not injured in the battle, but my helmet was knocked off. Since we were dispersed and not in a group, I was not with him. I tried to make myself believe that he was captured. I did not know until about March 15 that he was killed. I had gotten frost bite on my feet and had to be airlifted to Paris. I had an army officer who came to me at the hospital and he told me what had happened. Melvin was buried in Europe but his remains were moved to Kenamer's Cove Cemetery after the war.

After we were surrounded about two days, the tanks and half-tracks came near by so we could make a break. We had to make a run, and we got in a half-track. The half-track I was in got hit in the right front wheel by an 88 mm German shell, and it knocked the half-track out of operation. We had to disband from the vehicle. I lost my pack and everything else I had but my gun. I suppose the rest of the boys on there with us did the same thing. We jumped off near where the tanks were and jumped on the back of one of them and rode out of where the German artillery was coming in.

Just after that happened, five of us were on a mission. We took a bazooka. There was a German tank we couldn't see because of the trees all around it. This tank was knocking out our tanks as they would come around a curve. We had gone up this vineyard. I only knew one of these five because if you are replacements one day you are here and the next day you are gone and another one comes in. Three were in

front of me and another one was behind me. The Germans called for our surrender. The other three in front of us, they just lay flat. I told the boy behind me, "Let's run for it." The boy behind me, I didn't even know his name, said OK, and we took off running. The thicket was so thick you couldn't stand up. You had to crouch down to run. The German tank shot point blank and missed us. We got back to a little town at the edge of the vineyard, but our Company A had been moved out and another company was coming in to replace us. Our unit had gone to Trier. This other boy and I walked I don't know how far to Trier because the battle had progressed on beyond there and the area was secure.

The boy that I had gotten to know, Marvin Harvermale, was one of the three in front of me. Before we went into the battle zone, he had my parents' name and address and I had his. If anything happened we would try to contact the other's parents. I knew he and the other two had been captured. I had Marvin's address and I wrote his parents, and they let me know he was in a hospital in Denver convalescing from TB. I contacted him, and in 1948 he and his wife came to see me and my wife. I learned that he was a POW for four weeks and got TB while he was a prisoner. Then we lost contact with each other for 40 years. A friend helped me locate Marvin after all that time, and for the past ten years we have gotten together every year.

I was actually in the combat area from about the middle of January until the middle of March. We were not under fire all the time, but there was a period of time when we were being hit heavy. One time we were moving and the boy in front of me stopped and said he was going to eat some rations. He asked if wanted to as well, and I told him no. There was a kind of path between us. A mortar came in and blew him up. We were advancing all this time, but I never got to the Siegfried Line. The later part of February and in March the Germans were very dispersed. They were surrendering. I could just see what seemed miles of them surrendering.

My foot problem occurred during a time we weren't able to change socks or boots. We had snow, the ground was covered with it, and this is why my feet froze. On March 15, I went to what they call a battle



hospital. They had a C-97 converted to a hospital carrier plane. I was not able to walk. I was in Paris a month or six weeks. Then I went to England and later on to Daytona Beach for further convalescence. During the time I was in the convalescent hospitals, I saw boys who had lost their feet from the cold and snow. It was just my feet that had the problem. I get disability for it.

I was discharged in September of 1945. My three other surviving brothers and I all got home the same week. My medals were a Rifleman Award, the European Combat Medal, the World War Two Medal, the Honorable Service Medal, and a Marksmanship Rifle Medal.

I got married in 1948 to Marie Henson from Grant. We have three children and four grandchildren.

I went to a business college at Gadsden State. I decided that the education field would be better so I went to Jacksonville State and got a degree in elementary education in 1955. I taught at Macedonia nearly eight years, including several years while I was going to school. In 1958 I was appointed postmaster at Section. I retired in 1984. I served as mayor of Section from 1984 until 1987. After that, I was appointed Business License Inspector and served in that position for eight years. I have also served on the Section water board and the Jackson County Hospital Board.

BERLIN BEEMAN "BARTO" MCKENZIE

I was born July 12, 1924, in Section. I went into the military August 20 when I was 19 years old. There was this boy I knew who got his call to go in the army, so I just told them to send me too. I went to Fort McClellan to take the test, then came home for three weeks. Then 25 of us got on a bus in Scottsboro and went to Fort McPherson, Georgia, for seven or eight days, then to Fort Rucker.

I was in a chemical warfare battalion. Each company had 4.2 mortars. We were attached to an infantry division. I trained in chemical warfare at Fort Rucker. It was mostly high explosives with white phosphorus every third shell. The high explosive shells came out as shrapnel and the white phosphorus came out as white phosphorus. When it landed, it caused a fire. It wasn't chemical warfare like spraying deadly chemicals such as nerve gases.

From Fort Rucker, we went to Tennessee for maneuvers. We went to Camp Forrest and got in there with some other boys. They had already turned in their guns and clothing and everything to go overseas. Then we got on a train and went to Camp Shanks, New York. We left from Brooklyn on the Queen Elizabeth, that big ship. There were 23,000 soldiers on there. Winston Churchill had been in the United States talking to President Roosevelt and they said he was on the ship, but I don't know if that was true or not.

We landed in Glasgow, Scotland, then got on a train and went down to Tiverton, a little town about forty miles from Plymouth and about twenty miles from Exeter. We stayed there a few weeks. The headquarters were down at a football field. We had bunks in those big old houses there.

Then we went on this amphibious practice for D-Day, the one where hundreds of troops got killed when the boats were attacked by German U-Boat submarines. The military wouldn't talk about that until a few years ago. We were practicing for the invasion. When we got down to Plymouth to practice, we got on the nastiest little ship you ever saw. We went so many miles and landed, you know. When we

landed on the beach, we had those guns on two-wheel carts which were broke down. The barrel weighed 125 pounds, the base plate weighed 140 pounds, and the tripod weighed 40 pounds. We had to pull them over the hill, they wouldn't even let us get close to a vehicle. We went up there on a hill and I was laying up on that hill one night and the Germans were bombing the beach, but they wouldn't tell that, either. I was afraid to show my face over the top of that hill.

They didn't tell us what had happened. I wasn't in the water when the German U-boat got our ships.

We stayed around those hills for a few days, then they loaded us up and we went back to Tiverton and got everything we had and went down to barracks just outside Plymouth. They were one story wooden barracks. We stayed there about three weeks getting ready to for the Normandy landing. A part of the 4th Division was there in the barracks. We thought they were old men. Soldiers were marching up the street getting ready to load up for D-Day. I'll never forget, there weren't many other people on the street.

We got on the ship and stayed until Eisenhower turned us back because of the weather. Then the next day we went for the real thing. This was June 6, 1944. They took us over for the invasion in a brand-new Liberty ship. You see, we were on this ship with infantry guys. We went down the ropes to get in the landing boats. Of course, they dropped our guns down in the two-wheel carts. It was several miles out when we got in the landing boats. I remember we were getting ready to get off the ship and there was this infantry officer, a big old boy, and I thought, "My goodness, what a man." The next morning he got caught in machine gun fire and got killed. The water was green and rough as it could be when we unloaded, and I was wet by the time I got in there. Most of the boys got seasick.

About 12 or 15 boats got loaded and we took off to the beach. I was in the first wave. There were obstacles in the water but we missed them. As we got close to the beach, I remember the lieutenant, who was from Oklahoma, told us to get down because shells were dropping. As we got close to the beach, we fanned out like you were spreading your fingers, and we all hit the beach at the same time. I was at

Utah Beach. Omaha was the one with the bluff. Little Teddy Roosevelt was in one of the boats. Van Fleet was the regimental commander of that 4th Division. I was in the 7th Corps of the 1st Army. It was the one that went across Utah in the center. The 5th and 13th went in on the sides. The 7th was led by a General Collins from New Orleans, he was a good general.

When we got to the beach we set those mortars up there. We set up four mortars. Van Fleet was standing there and he was calm with real green clothes on, and I wonder if they had had been impregnated, you know they treated our clothes in case we ran into chemical warfare. Three shells came down, one short, one in the water and one on the beach. We only lost one man on the beach. Medics were working on guys out there in the water. Some other guys came in from the boats and said there was a dead guy in the water. Like I said, most of the boys got seasick, and a boy from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, said that that poor bastard won't be seasick no more.

When I was down there on the sand at the beach, some paratroopers come through there with thirteen German prisoners, mostly officers they had found hiding under a bridge. I watched them and counted them, and boy they were stepping on. Generally, them German prisoners would drag and drag around, but these were ready to get out from there. The paratroopers had landed the night before. The paratroopers were the 101st and the 82nd, but they were all mixed up and scattered everywhere. They had done a lot of good and had made a lot of progress coming back towards the beach.

We stayed on the beach a couple of hours. They had some mines there, and we tore them down and started out. We went across an apple orchard. The apples were in full bloom. We fired on a church steeple up there. It was a German observation post. We were told the Germans had a teenage boy, a member of the Hitler Youth, up there, and the German troops had left and told him to stay there. We fired on the steeple and knocked it out.

We came out here to this road, and there were a bunch of wounded Germans they had captured. We went on through a town a couple of miles from the beach and on down to a crossroad. We didn't meet as

much opposition as they did at Omaha.

The afternoon of the landing, we got down there and some tanks they come in. This was after we left that little town. They pulled us off the road so the tanks could get by. The Germans had some fortifications there. The tanks pulled in and a paratrooper colonel or something, he was the commanding officer, wanted to send a tank down to check on the fortifications. He told a jeep driver to drive along with the tank. We were by a creek behind them. They started out and a German dud shell, they had a lot of them, hit the jeep and the jeep hit the tank and knocked the tread off the tank. It made the awfulest racket you ever heard.

About four in the afternoon, the sun was shining, and the gliders started coming in. I was standing up there watching them and one of them landed perfectly, but a lot of them usually wound up in the trees. Anyway, I was standing there watching and a dadburn machine gun opened up on me and I got in a ditch. So the Germans were right there.

Like I said, I was in a chemical warfare unit with mortars. The range for the mortars we had was about two miles but we mostly shot them about a mile because we would move up. Our shells could hit places going down on the other side of a hill when the artillery shells couldn't. There were seven of us on the mortar. I loaded the shells. There was a pipe that came out and the shell went right in it. We weren't back with the artillery but with or right behind the infantry. Sometimes, the infantry would get somewhere and the artillery couldn't get there yet, so they would rush us over there until the artillery came. We had observers up front who would spot the Germans and radio back and tell us where to fire our mortars.

We went on a road to Sainte-Mere-Eglise. Paratroopers and the infantry were already there but they were scattered out. We were on this little road. The Germans had some old wagons with horses. Some GIs came by on the wagons. They had on stovepipe hats and had German prisoners walking with the horses. The infantry had gotten word we were coming and they waved us on in. The Germans saw all the equipment, they thought they were all tanks, but they weren't. So they

backed up into the hedgerows.

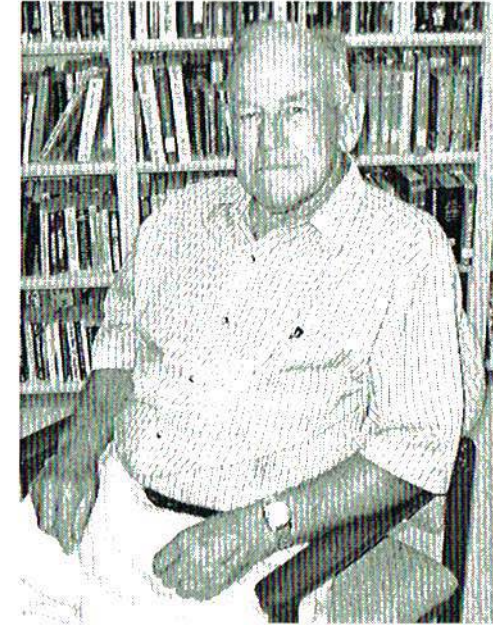
We kind of started from Sainte-Mere-Eglise, and it was three or four weeks before we got to Cherbourg. There was a lot of fighting going on to get to Cherbourg. The Germans had a lot of fortifications in the area. A lot of these were concrete with thick walls. A lot of people said they wouldn't have fired white phosphorus at the Germans, but they fired wooden bullets at us. We would be behind one hedgerow and they would be behind another. We'd knock them back and move up and they would have left a machine gun with wooden bullets. They cause a nasty wound. They claimed they used them for target practice but they used them against us in combat, too. They were probably short of regular ammunition. We really shouldn't have been in those hedgerows in Normandy. They should have sent Patton and his tanks to that area first, before the invasion.

About the 20th of July they brought about 2500 bombers over from England, and after that we got started across France. I saw three of those planes shot down. Of course, some of their bombs dropped short and they got one of our lieutenants. A General McNair visiting over there from the states got caught up in it too, and they buried him in a cedar casket.

I was in combat from June until October 8. For days to start with I didn't wash my face, but the longer you stay out there, you learn how to keep yourself clean better.

We moved through France pretty quick after they dropped all those bombs. We went through some old World War I battle areas. Some of them hadn't been cleaned up. I slept in one of the old seesaw trenches in Belgium. The Germans were retreating and we would hit them in the afternoon and the next morning they would be miles away. We had an ammunition truck that got blowed up one time. I was out checking the guard. I was standing there and some white phosphorus came over and blew up the truck and killed 12 guys.

We got into Germany to the Siegfried line. We were miles ahead of the others. They told us four miles but the history books say seven miles. We were one of the first ones to get into Germany. We were near Aachen, Germany, just across from Belgium.



One day, we had been held up and we had an ammunition shortage. We had this big old bluff right in front of us. I got caught in an artillery barrage, and that is how I got hit in the left arm and shoulder. This was on 8 October. It was shrapnel, and it had that dadgum poison in it. I had to stay in the hospital for three months. My war ended then. I said I wanted to go back to my outfit but they wouldn't send me. I helped some around the hospital. I

was ward master in the neurosurgical ward. They had about 40 patients in there, they operated on their heads, you know.

I got a Purple Heart and three battle stars. They were for Normandy, northern France and Germany.

After the war was over, I came back to Section. I moved into Tut Fann Veterans Home here in Huntsville over two years ago.

RICHARD PATRICK

Note: Richard Patrick is deceased. The following is from an article by Byron Woodfin in the Scottsboro Daily Sentinel on April 19, 1990.

For an 18-year-old boy from Scottsboro, the biggest fear during the last years of World War II was the fear that the war might be over before he could see combat.

Such were the fears of Richard Patrick when he graduated from Jackson County High School in 1943 and set out for eventual duty as a pilot in the U.S. Army Air Corps.

Patrick, president of Patrick Lumber Co. in Scottsboro, does not often reminisce about his wartime experiences. But in a recent talk to a Presbyterian Church youth group, Patrick related his experiences which include his training as a pilot and his six weeks as a prisoner of war in Germany during the waning days of the war.

After his 18th birthday, in January 1943, Patrick went to Courtland, Alabama, to take the Air Corps entrance exam, and the day after graduation from JCHS was sent to Biloxi, Mississippi, for eight weeks of Army basic training.

Patrick had qualified for aviation training, and following his basic training was sent to Ohio to the University of Toledo for six months of college training. Ironically, the route of the troop train took it right through Scottsboro, "And it didn't even slow down," he said. It would be the last time Patrick would see his home for over a year.

Patrick's dream was to be a pilot and was close to realizing that



dream after qualifying as an aviation cadet. The first phase of his aviation training took him to Corsicana, Texas, to a civilian aviation school.

"During the war," he explains, "The U.S. had to develop a massive training program." Part of this training program took advantage of civilian pilots who served to introduce the trainees to flying.

From Corsicana, he went to Sherman, Texas, for basic flight training and from there he was shipped to Houston for advanced flight training.

Finally, following a full year of training and the only furlough he would have before going overseas, Patrick was sent to Lake Charles, Louisiana, for assignment to a flight combat crew and an additional 10 weeks of training.

"This was in August, 1944," he said. "The war was close to being won and here I was still not in the war."

At Lake Charles, Patrick was assigned to a B-26 bombing crew as co-pilot. In Patrick's words, the B-26, a medium range tactical bomber, was considered a "widow maker" and "a flying coffin" because of the plane's design. It was not until near the end of the war that a redesign of the plane's wings stabilized the 200 mile-per-hour bomber and added to its safety.

Patrick was sent to New Jersey where he arrived on Christmas Day, 1944. It was while on a trip to New York during this time that Patrick witnessed his first television broadcast.

Patrick celebrated his 20th birthday as he was boarding a converted French luxury liner in Boston harbor. The converted liner was carrying 14,000 American troops bound for the European theater of war.

The ocean crossing to England took the ship five days to complete, and Patrick landed just as the Battle of the Bulge was coming to a close. From England, the young Patrick was sent to France to join the 322nd, 9th Air Corps bomber group stationed outside Paris.

Patrick's bomber group was stationed at an airfield which had been recaptured from the Germans. Patrick said the airfield resembled a "county road with potholes" caused by Allied bombing runs.

Patrick said the rough airfield presented pilots with a dangerous

challenge in trying to lift the bomb-filled planes into the air, and on his first day at the base he witnessed a bomber go up in flames, killing the crew when the pilot was unable to lift from the runway.

According to Patrick, the 322nd bomb group consisted of four squadrons of 12 planes each. Patrick describes his first few missions of the bomb crew as "just like we were driving to work."

The crew, however, was unaware German radar, located some 100 miles behind enemy lines, was tracking the plane's movement. "They knew when we were coming," he said he later found out.

Patrick said during the last months of the war, the German air force, the Luftwaffe, was all but destroyed. The danger to Allied aircraft at that time came from heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire from German ground forces.

On a bright and sunny March 14, 1945, co-pilot Patrick and his six-man crew were on their eighth bombing mission over German territory. With their bomb load dispatched, the plane began the return flight home at about 3 p.m. Patrick clearly remembers seeing the Rhine River which at that time was the front line of the war, with the Germans occupying the east side of the river.

Just before crossing the Rhine and still in enemy air space, the squadron's group leader, believing the planes to be in safe territory, stopped taking evasive action. The evasive action maneuver, a defense against anti-aircraft flak, consisted of the entire squadron of planes changing direction every 15 seconds.

Within one minute after ceasing the evasive action, Patrick's plane was hit by a single burst of anti-aircraft fire. The exploding shell tore the right engine and wing away from the plane and blew the nose of the plane away back to the pilot's cockpit, killing the bombardier who rode in the plane's nose compartment, and sheared off the top of the plane over the pilot's compartment.

A piece of the flak struck Patrick's helmet, stunning him. "The only thing I can remember was undoing my seatbelt," he said.

The mortally wounded plane immediately rolled over and at an altitude of some 13,000 feet, about two-and-a-half miles, while the plane was upside down, Patrick was dumped unconscious through the

open cockpit and began to fall to earth.

The unconscious Patrick did not see what became of the plane, but following the end of the war he learned it had crashed, killing the remaining crew members.

After a fall of nearly one-and-a-half miles, Patrick regained consciousness and with a reflex action pulled the ripcord of his parachute. It was at this time that Patrick realized he had been wounded, and his heart sank as he saw his flight suit covered with his own blood.

Fearing he may have been seriously injured, he was relieved to discover that a flak fragment had struck him on the cheek and passed out through his open mouth. The wound was not life-threatening but now he faced another—his parachute was full of holes from the flak which had struck his parachute pack while still in the plane's cockpit. In addition, he could see German troops gathered on the ground below to give him a less than pleasant welcoming to German soil.

Patrick, remembering his training, was able to maneuver his parachute away from the town below and landed in an open area and was immediately taken prisoner by German infantry, and in Patrick's words, it was good fortune to be captured by the German military instead of by German civilians.

"If you could have seen the destruction (of Germany), and realized that hundreds of thousands were killed because of the bombing, no one in the air force was safe if captured. The civilians had no respect for us," Patrick remembers.

Patrick recalls one incident while being transported by German guards when he was attacked by a civilian whose child had been killed during the bombing. Patrick said it was the two American prisoners with him who saved him from being choked by the man as his German guards stood by and watched.

After landing the parachute and armed only with a .45 caliber pistol, Patrick was quickly taken captive and was sent with a lone guard to a nearby town. Arriving at the town, the apprehensive 20-year-old was put through a town spectacle. "It was a town smaller than Scottsboro," he said, "but it had a town square like Scottsboro. Apparently, I was a prize for him (the German guard) because he paraded me

around the square about three times as the whole town turned out.”

Within the next couple of days, Patrick was taken with two other POWs to the German town of Wetzler near Frankfurt. A POW induction center was located at Wetzler and there Patrick received a Red Cross blanket and a Red Cross parcel of food. The only medical attention for the wound he had received was a tetanus shot.

At Wetzler, the POWs were divided into groups of 100, and Patrick was loaded onto a supply train being used as a troop transport for the trip to Nuremberg. It was during the trip that Patrick came into contact with the “political” prisoners which he now realizes were Jewish and other civilians on their way to death camps.

At one point in the trip, the POW train was stopped alongside two other trains, one carrying anti-aircraft guns and the other made up of a number of closed boxcars packed with “political” prisoners. Aboard the boxcars, the dreaded SS troops were perched as guards. While at the stop, a group of American P-47 fighters passed over and the German anti-aircraft opened fire. “That was like stirring up a bunch of bees,” Patrick said, describing the Allied planes as they prepared to attack the rail cars.

The POWs had an agreement with their German guards that in the event of attack they would seek cover until the attack was over and then regroup with their German guards. As the P-47 dive bombers began their strafing attack, Patrick and the other POWs huddled in a ditch some 100 yards from the railcars. Though the S.S. guards abandoned their positions on the boxcars, the civilian prisoners were not given any opportunity to seek shelter and for 30 minutes the American fighters strafed and bombed the train, including the locked boxcars. Following the attack, Patrick said he recalls seeing the mangled bodies remaining in the boxcars when they were opened.

Patrick finally ended up in a POW camp in Moosburg, Germany, near Munich. Unknown to him at the time, a fellow Scottsboro native, Charles Bradford, was also being held at the same camp after being captured during the Battle of the Bulge. (Note-see chapter on Charles Bradford).

“There were about 30,000 Allied POWs in the camp, all nation-

alities. And at this time, there was tremendous chaos in Germany. In the distance we could hear artillery coming nearer and then on the morning of April 29, 1945, all the German guards were gone.”

Patrick and the Allied POWs were liberated by an element of George C. Patton’s army on April 29, 1945, and Patrick’s six weeks as a prisoner came to an end. And so the boy’s fear of being left out of the war had turned into the man’s experiences with the realities of combat.

After his return to Scottsboro in June of 1945, Patrick was given a 90 day leave before being assigned to another Air Corps unit. Before the 90 days were up, however, Japan surrendered and World War II came to a close.

He was discharged in October of 1945, and in 1946 resumed his work in the lumber company his father, R.C. Patrick, Sr., had started in 1926. Patrick took over the business when his father died in 1964.

Patrick was recalled to active duty in 1951 during the Korean War and was assigned for two years duty at a strategic air defense station in Wisconsin. In comparison to his duty in Germany, the Wisconsin tour of duty was “like a country club,” he said.

And for Patrick, what is the value of his experiences? “It is a part of history, but it is also an appreciation of so many and the many sacrifices to keep our nation, our lifestyles, and our freedom, which we still have.”

GEORGE FOSHEE, JR.

I was born January 8, 1926. I was sworn into the military April 6, 1944. I was eighteen in January and was sworn in three months later. The draft board was in Scottsboro. I was a student in school. I hadn't graduated but I did when I came back in 1947.

I was drafted into the army. I went to Fort McPherson, Georgia, to be inducted. From there I was shipped to Camp Sibert near Attalla, Alabama. It was named after General Sibert.

I was taking basic training in chemical warfare at Camp Sibert. They assigned this to me, I didn't volunteer. We had poisonous gas in World War II. The government says we didn't, but we did. We had mustard gas, nitrogen mustard, chloropicrin and phosgene. One of them smelled like new-mown hay. We had to learn how to identify the gases by smelling them. They had these vials, and they would break them and you would smell it. If you didn't identify it, you didn't get a pass. We had to do this every Saturday morning, and if you identified it and everything and didn't have any strikes against you, you got a pass until Monday morning. If you didn't pass that test, you stayed there and practiced some more.

We learned how to saturate stuff with this nerve gas, like the terrain and so on. We had gas masks on, and we hiked with them in place. It was God hot with them on, particularly in July and August. I have a MOS number, which stands for Military Occupational Specialist, that proves I was in chemical warfare.

We had the 4.2 inch chemical mortar. The mortar was 4.2 inches in diameter and had a rifle bore in it that made that thing traverse and make it more accurate than the old teardrop which had a smooth bore and might make it go the wrong way.

I got some of those chemicals on my foot. We had impregnated clothes we wore when we fooled with that gas. They had an impregnating plant, they called it, and it made your clothes stiff kind of like you had starch on them. It was supposed to repel that gas. Somehow I was pouring some of the gas out and it dripped off the bottom of the

bucket and got on my foot. The shoe wasn't impregnated good, and it made a blister on there and they put me in the hospital. Later on, I wrote Kansas City to get my medical records, and they told me I had never been in the hospital.

That is one reason I got transferred to Fort McClellan to be in the infantry. If you miss so many days of training they pulled you out of your company and put you in the one behind you so you can catch up. So I went into this other company. They picked a battalion of us and sent us over to Fort McClellan over near Anniston and put us in the infantry. It didn't make a whole lot of difference to me that I had been in the chemical warfare company.

I trained with the infantry at Fort McClellan, then left for Fort Meade, Maryland, on Christmas Day of 1944. They gave us new clothes and everything and then sent us to Virginia Beach. From there I went overseas on the General William S. Black. There were about 5,000 on there plus the ship's crew. We only had two meals a day unless you had extra duty. Our company commander volunteered our company for KP duty. We had to work every other day, but we did get to have three meals a day.

We landed in Naples, Italy, and got on a cattle truck with sideboards on it. We went to a little town in Italy called San Agata de Goti in the province of Benevento, up in the hills. It was about thirty miles from Naples. I was in the 5th Army under General Mark Clark, in the Leadership and Battle School. We trained those who were going to be officers. I was a private, you know, but that was my job. I didn't volunteer for it, and I don't know how they chose me to do it.

We had these boys who might get a battlefield commission and go to OCS, which is Officers Training School, and that is what the leadership school was. We took them out on the machine gun range and the 100 inch range and taught them how to search and traverse with a machine gun. We used the 30 caliber water cooled machine guns. They probably knew all this anyway, but we still had to teach them. Fighting was still going on up in northern Italy and there was some where I was but I didn't participate in it because I was at that training school. That is why I got a battle star, because fighting was going on the area.

Some of the people I trained did go into combat.

When the war was about over they sent me to what they called a replacement camp. It was on a big farm. They would send some of them some place and some others somewhere else. I could have gone on into combat if they had chosen to send me. I did get a couple of furloughs and got to go to Rome.

The war in Europe was over in May and I left Italy in July. When I got back to the States, I was a low pointer. You see, you got 5 points for each battle star, 5 for each dependent and I wasn't married, 2 for each month you were overseas and 1 point for each month you were in the states, and so on. I only had 30 points and some of them boys had over 100 points, so they started getting out first. I got a thirty day furlough and they flew me back, and it took two or three days. The pilots would fly eight hours and then lay over. We flew into Miami and got into Stevenson in August of 1945, and that is when the war ended. When it did end, the train started blowing and the sirens went off. I lived right across the street from where I live now. I was taking a bath and mother came in and told me the war with Japan was over. They had planned to send us to Japan for the invasion.

After my 30 day furlough just as the war ended, I went to Camp Polk, Louisiana. I stayed there for a few weeks, and that was another place they shipped them out everywhere. I went from there to Camp Hood, Texas. Now it is called Fort Hood. The military facilities in the war that were temporary were called camps and the ones that were permanent were called forts. At Fort Hood, I trained trainees on all the infantry things, like guns and close order drills and so on. I was discharged May of 1946 as a PFC. I got a Bronze Star, a Good Conduct Medal, the American Victory Medal, a Combat Infantry Badge and a Ruptured Duck.

After I was discharged, I went back to school in the fall of 1946 and graduated the next spring. Then I went to work at the ice plant here in Stevenson. My dad ran it but he didn't own it. I peddled ice with a mule and wagon, then drove an ice truck after they got one. I left that in 1949 and worked in construction for thirty nine years and retired in 1988. I was a millwright and have belonged to the carpenter's



union out of Chattanooga for 56 years.

I got married to Jane Evans. She passed away in 2001. I have two sons.

Mr. Foshee trained in chemical warfare at Camp Sibert, which is near Gadsden, Alabama. During the war,

there were several chemical warfare training facilities around the country, but Camp Sibert was the largest at 38,000 acres. After the war, the airport area was transferred to the city of Gadsden with all other property returned to private ownership. The Corps of Engineers is working an ordnance and explosive wastelchemical warfare materiel cleanup project on 16 sites within the former camp. Currently, the materiel that is removed from these sites is stored at an Interim Holding Facility adjacent to a runway at the airport.

In 2002, a phosgene-filled shell was found at the former training center. The shell was treated with an Explosive Destruction System, a specially designed mobile system.

Note: The above information is from cma.army.mil and hq.environmental.usace.army.mil.

GENE AIRHEART

I was born in 1922 in Tennessee. When I was nine months old my family moved to Scottsboro. My family owned a farm where Goosepond Colony is now. Back then it was known as Larkin's Landing. I was drafted in 1944 while I was at the University of Alabama, where I had gone for a year and a half. I was 22 years old and went in as a private.

I was assigned to the infantry and was sent for basic training at Fort McClellan in Anniston. I was in good physical condition when I went in. I hadn't had much experience with guns and had never owned one. Basic training was about three or four months. It consisted of getting up early in the morning and staying until dark. Basic training in the infantry was kind of rough. They taught us a lot because it might save your life. Afterwards, I stayed there and helped train others for a few months.

I knew even then I would go overseas. I knew I was not training for a Sunday School picnic, I knew I was training for something special. After basic training, I was shipped to Newport News, Virginia, and then on to France. They took us over in a troop carrier. I got there after D-Day. They took us to a headquarters, which was near the coast, where they gave us our assignments. The front was on further up. Some of our group went to different divisions, such as to artillery or other branches. I was assigned to the 7th Army, 36th Division, and the



141st infantry, which was a heavy weapons company. I went in as a replacement. They used us to replace young men as troops in the field who were sick or whatever who had to be replaced. I was one of those.

The 36th Division is a Texas activated old line T-Patch division that has been in Texas since WW I. The gun I was trained on was considered a heavy weapon. It was a water cooled .30 caliber machine gun. I was a gunner in a machine gun crew. One member of the crew was a tripod carrier, and one carried the gun, which is what I did. Then you had ammunition carriers, you have seen those little metal boxes. The shells were in a belt and kept in those boxes. Every tenth round was a tracer that allowed you to see and zero in on your target. There were five men who carried the ammunition. The tripod man was in front of us. When he put his tripod down, I put my gun on the tripod. Then I squatted down ready to go, and the carriers came around with the little metal boxes with the belts that had the shells. The artillery backed the infantry up.

At the headquarters they didn't ship you out until they needed replacements on the line. I was probably at the headquarters for two or three weeks. Then they trucked us to our division, and we joined Company D, a heavy weapons company. They assigned me to my platoon and that is when I got to be a professional water cooled machine gunner.

I got into combat very soon. I was in combat 105 days. We had a lieutenant who gave us our orders. Sometimes, we were told where the Germans were. A lot of times we weren't told, so we just ran the belt through and started firing. We had them come out of the woods sometime when this happened with their hands up, surrendering. So I was right on the front line.

If I told you that I wasn't frightened, I would not be telling you the truth. You just handled it as well as you could, as far as my feelings were. I wrote some letters I didn't mail. I felt like I would never get back. You needed to be frightened, but not too much. There is nothing as uncertain and dangerous as a soldier who is scared to death. You didn't want to work with him because he might go off the deep end and he might think you were a German instead of somebody else.

Our infantry was moving forward. We would get the order to move and hope that we had the space to do so. Some days we made good progress and some days we didn't. The resistance was heavier at times than at others. There was hedge fighting and woodland fighting and you couldn't tell who was there. Everywhere you stopped, even if it was twelve o'clock noon, you began digging a fox hole. I had my own hole. I just dug my own bed. If you left after 30 minutes, you left the trench. If you were there an hour, you dug more. They told us to dig every time we stopped because it was your life you were saving. I dug quite a few trenches. I'm glad I wasn't any bigger. I didn't take up much room. It was a trench that you could stretch out in, but it wasn't very deep. You could take that steel helmet off and lie in there. You had a little knit-like wool cap. You wore that cap all the time under your helmet. At night you would take the helmet off and work your scalp with your fingers. Talk about something that felt good!

At night we had patrols. Night could be a dangerous time because the Germans were ruthless soldiers. The SS troops did not care whether they lived or died. Life meant nothing at all to them. They were indoctrinated with the idea that in the German way of life you gave your life to the Fuhrer. They were brainwashed. We ran into some SS troops and you had no choice but to kill them. I didn't have a hand grenade but we had them in our unit. They were very effective, and I have heard Germans cry and scream from them. I knew when they exploded, I heard them. Although I didn't have grenades, I did have a carbine, but they were just good enough to get you killed. They were not much of a defensive weapon.

I was shot at quite a bit. When we advanced, I just ran wide out, letting the hot water from the machine gun pour all over me, sometimes burning my back and causing blisters. We were fighting mostly in the forest, so we couldn't really see the Germans, but they couldn't see us either. Over there, around those mountains, it is very dense and that helped. We were skirmishing or something, we were at our business every day. We didn't do a whole lot of night fighting except for the patrols. We did not get much rest, though. There was something else we didn't get. We didn't get a bath and we didn't get to shave. We did

have plenty of supplies and ammunition, though.

We were in France but were advancing toward Germany. We moved up pretty far while we were there. We were moving and didn't have much artillery behind us. This was good in a way because artillery can be dangerous if you are moving up pretty fast and they are shooting from behind you. We didn't have many tanks, either. Ours was just foot work. You have heard of the foot soldier, you are looking at one. We were on our own. The Germans were foot soldiers just like we were.

We were approaching the Vosges Mountains in France. There was no resistance and we were moving like there was no tomorrow, we thought we had this thing made. However, our battalion went too far and the Germans surrounded us on a knoll. That is when we became known as the "Lost Battalion." We were there over a week, pinned down. The Germans would try to crawl up the knoll. We had one water hole, and they would crawl up and try to poison it. We ran out of water, we ran out of food, we ran out of everything. We were in touch with headquarters, though. They dropped chocolate and medical supplies in to us, and they assigned us positions around the knoll. I shall never forget when we heard that the 100th Battalion of the 442nd Japanese-American Regimental Unit was fighting through to relieve us. They had a commander named Marty Higgins, and we had the high privilege of meeting him last May at the WW II Memorial Dedication in Washington. The 100th Battalion was composed of second generation Japanese-Americans. They had been taken out of internment camps in Arkansas and trained, and they turned out to be the "greatest soldiers the world has ever known."

I shall never forget this. I was in position at my gun when they fought through and secured us after six days. They were such good soldiers they could be ten feet from you before you could see them. I remember a statement that was made by the Japanese that came up to my station. He said, "Do you have a cigarette?" They had developed a slogan, "Go for broke." That is when I knew they were there. We had heard they were coming through. But the sad part about that, they lost 800 men saving our 200 men. I was fortunate enough to be one of the 200 or so they saved. As we were going out, Japanese-American sol-

diers were loading their dead as if they were logs. We were fortunate that our battalion didn't lose many men. This was because the Germans didn't fire on us very much, but they were sneaky. They would try to crawl up but we managed to kill some of them when they would get close to us. We were on top of the knoll so we were in a pretty good position. They didn't bring in planes to attack us.

After the "lost battalion" was rescued, we got two or three days off. We went a few miles back and they fed us. I got a bath but I didn't shave, it was too cold, it was the dead of winter. After the break, I was assigned to go back and hit it again.

I was wounded on November 28, 1944. I don't remember how long it was after I went back. Early one night we found a farmhouse that the family had vacated. They had taken their animals with them. On the lower side of the house the Germans had put barbed wire entanglements on a slope to keep glider pilots away. The barn was on one side of the house and the family had lived on the other. The hay was stored in the attic. The manure pits were just behind the house. The manure was used to fertilize the fields. We were bedding down in that house one night. The next morning the Germans shot into that house and set the hay on fire. I ran out and went just as square into that manure pit as anyone could go. I lost my gun, but I managed to get out so I started running. The snow and ice were about a foot deep. The Germans were shooting at me. I managed to leap one or two of those entanglements. On the third one my feet slipped and I went down. I didn't try to get up because the bullets were hitting around me and I rolled toward a clearing on the lower side. I got to about 15 feet from safety and I felt something shatter. They had hit me in the right arm and the left leg. I kept right on rolling, but the left leg was just going the way it wanted to go. I rolled off an embankment of about 15 feet. I was there until a Lieutenant Yancey came up. I never shall forget him, I had seen him play football at Mississippi State. Yancey came up through a draw and he found me. He covered me with his field jacket and he said he would leave a red marker for me. I was picked up 48 hours later. There were two things that saved my life. The Lord was one of them and cold, cold weather was another. I was bleeding and evidently it just stopped, it was so cold it just quit bleeding. A jeep came down that had litters on

it and they found me. I wasn't conscious all that time. The guys in the house went in another direction and they got away.

I was taken to a field hospital which was so full they had to put me in a hall. I lay in the hall seven days. They put me in wire splints that telescoped. The ones I had must have been made for a man 12 feet tall. They stretched me like you wouldn't believe. The doctors would take you as they could get to you because there were many other soldiers in there, too. They gave me some pain medication while I was waiting.

The bullet that went through my right arm broke it. I had compound fractures in the lower part of my left leg, and all the bones in that part of my leg were exposed. I was hit by bullets, not shrapnel. The bullet did not go all the way through my arm. It must have been pretty well spent because they were able to dig it out. I didn't know my arm was broken until they took me to the operating room. My leg was hurting so bad I guess I just didn't know about my arm. The bullet in my leg passed all the way through.

I took eight shots of penicillin a day for thirty days. When they needed to treat my wound, they took me to the slab room. They took gauze and poured alcohol on it and went in there and just did what they had to do. They didn't deaden anything, you just held on. After a total of two months in the field hospital they shipped me back to the coast of France. They came in one night and said, "We are taking you to surgery in the morning at five o'clock. We have looked at the x-rays and there is no way to save your leg, so we are going to take it off below the knee." I said, "Will I get to go home?" He said, "You will." I woke up at 11 o'clock the next morning and those "old rusty toes" were staring me in my face. I remember the doctor's name, Captain Crouch, from St. Louis. He said, "We decided to take a chance on your leg. We put twelve screws in, but you will always walk with a bad limp and you won't be able to lift anything." But he also said, "The only positive thing is that you won't have to stand it up in a corner by the bed."

I was shipped back on the Ernest Hines Hospital Ship to Charleston, SC. We sat out in the bay for a week. They were waiting on the ambulances to transport us. They took me to Lawson General in Atlanta. There I had multiple additional surgeries on my leg.

I was a corporal when I got out. I was awarded a Purple Heart, four or five combat ribbons, and the army rifleman badge. I'm proud of all of them, particularly my Purple Heart.

I didn't make a career of the military but I could have handled it. I feel so strongly about my country that I could have. I was mentally okay after I was discharged from the service. When I got back home, everyone was extremely nice to me. I was the first boy to come back wounded, and they all spoiled me. My wife says that is what is wrong with me now.

I went back to the University of Alabama on crutches and finished there. I married Joy Page 56 years ago. We have one daughter. After I finished at the University my daddy and I went into business together, and that was one of the greatest privileges of my life. He taught me to love people. I. E. Airheart is an agricultural business, and I still operate it.

The 36th Division was a great division and I was privileged to be a part of it. They have all the reunions in Texas, so I haven't been able to attend.

The 442nd Japanese-American Regiment that rescued me has awarded me a lifetime membership. For anybody who has saved your life, that gives you a warm feeling in your heart. I went to Washington last May for the opening of the WW II Memorial. The 442nd Regiment invited us up as their guests. We were invited to everything they were involved in. One of the highlights of my life was shaking hands with three Congressional Medal of Honor winners and they were all Japanese-American. Someone mailed me a picture that was on the front page of the Honolulu Times. The picture showed me shaking hands with one of the Medal of Honor winners. You have no idea of the special feeling that you get when you meet the people who saved your life.

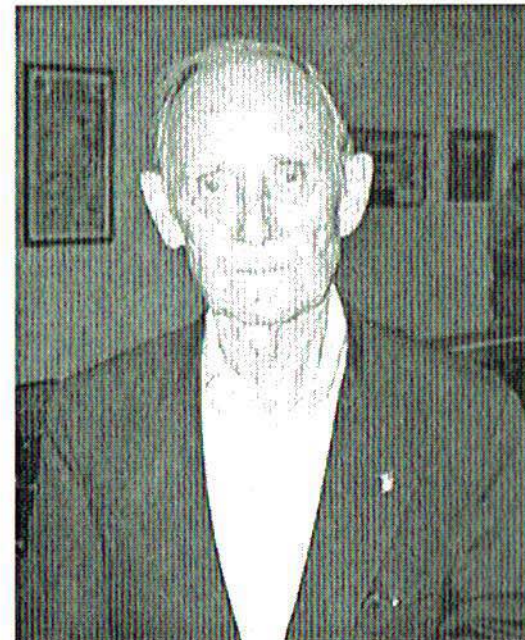
I am proud of my military service and the privilege of fighting for my country. I live those days every day of my life. I was never bitter, it just made me more proud to be an American.

The Texas Military Forces Museum has a website devoted to the 36th Division in World War Two, including information on the "Lost Battal-

ion," and the following material (supplied by Mr. Airheart) comes from that source. The winter during which the Vosges campaign was fought was severe, and there was nothing ahead but another mined and defended mountain. There was nothing across the next barrier but another barrier, with nothing seemingly ahead but mud and deep minefields. No rest came. Savage battle followed savage battle, but the men fought on, struggling as much for personal survival as fighting an impersonal war.

Every yard of the Vosges—not merely the roads, not just the towns—had to be wrenched from the enemy, and he possessed every advantage and had been ordered to hold as long as he could. Every rifleman and machine gunner was dug in. The Germans' foxholes were deep and well camouflaged. The bloody business of beating against the stronghold and taking it by frontal assault was abandoned and was replaced by patrol warfare. There were pitched battles lasting for hours when the patrols met.

Finally, the 141st Infantry Regiment and the 442nd Japanese-American Regimental Combat Team, which was attached to the 36th, advanced wearily into the still higher mountains. Then the 141st Infantry Regiment sent its First Battalion (which included Gene Airheart) forward to take



the high ridge, and they got cut off by the Germans. On top of a thickly wooded hill, this battalion of 275 soldiers was spread out in an area of 300x350 yards, digging their foxholes deep, using knives to whittle down trees to use for a cover, folding blankets around the trees so they wouldn't make so much noise when they came down. They were quiet because they knew they were a lost battalion, and they did not want the

700 Germans surrounding them to know it. They were cut off with only so much ammunition and no water, no food, no nothing.

Quickly, they spread out in a complete circular defense so there would be no surprise attack. Each soldier emptied his pack so the battalion could pool everything. But these things didn't last long. Very soon, the water situation became critical, more so than the food shortage. Finally, they found a mud puddle which was dirty and stagnant.

They starved for five days. Some of the men grubbed for mushrooms but had very little luck. There was absolutely no food at all. The shelling got heavier, and on the third day they buried three more dead. Still, morale was high.

They were able to keep in contact with headquarters by radio and received the message: "Hold on—heavy force coming to relieve you." The 100th and 3rd Battalions of the 442nd Regimental Combat Teams along with the 2nd Battalion of the 141st were sent, but the first attempted breakthrough was thrown back. The first effort to drop food-loaded shells, medical supplies, rations and batteries missed the target, but on the afternoon of the fifth day they began hitting in the proper place.

Finally, on the afternoon of the sixth day, after intense firing, the Japanese-American unit broke through, thus ending the saga of the "Lost Battalion."

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