War Years

A close study of World War II history will show that the United States was involved almost from the beginning in supporting the war in Europe and attempting to contain Japan in the Far East. However, the war for us really began with the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. These are my memories and reflections of my experience during that time in our nation's history.

World War II began when Germany invaded Poland in 1939. This was a surprise attack, even though armies had been marshalling on the borders for days. The attack came on September 1, 1939, and on September 3rd, Great Britain, France, Australia, and New Zealand declared war on Germany. On September 10th, Canada declared war. This was on Labor Day weekend here. I can remember it well, because our family was on a long weekend vacation at New Smyrna Beach. As was typical with my mother and dad, not just our family was there. We brought friends and relatives along for the fun and games.

I don't remember all who were present, but I remember specifically Evelyn, along with C.A. and Frog Morrison. The reason I can remember them vividly is because C.A and Frog said this was the beginning of the war for the U.S. and they would have to go to war soon. I pooh-poohed their remarks since, as a 15 year old, I said the war would never touch me. Retrospectively, I wonder how convinced I was of those statements, since those events and those arguments I made then, almost sixty years ago as I write about them, are still so vivid in my memory. Maybe it was subconsciously my way of trying to convince myself that this would never happen.

The fighting in Europe and also in the Far East between China and Japan developed into a "world war", because all of the major countries of the world were involved. The countries that joined with Hitler in Germany (mainly Italy under Benito Mussolini) and Japan were called the Axis powers. They were opposed by the Allied powers, which included England, France, the United States, Russia, and China. When Germany first invaded Poland and World War II began, many thought that Russia (the U.S.S.R.) would join forces with Hitler and control all of Europe and western Asia. However, this fear was eliminated when Germany invaded Russia. This made Russia an ally of England and the United States, which is ironic when we consider our "cold war" history with Russia after World War II.

In 1939, the economy of the U.S. was still smothered by the withering stagnation of the Depression, but signs were beginning to indicate the changes ahead. Most of these were prompted by a nation boosted by a government beginning to

prepare itself for war. As the war in Europe expanded, our country was beginning to become “the arsenal of democracy”. Our government's Lend Lease Program was providing a boost for our industrial complex. This was a program in which our government said to the Allies, particularly Russia, “We will lend or lease war materials to you, and you can pay us later“. As we all know, later never came.

Many young American men were already joining the war effort. Some were going to Canada to join the Canadian Air Force. Pilots were also joining with General Chenault and his Flying Tigers in China in the fight against the Communist Rebellion taking place there. The U.S. Merchant Marine force was expanding with its delivery of war materials to Russia and England.

With the horrors of the bombings of the entire British Isles and the Battle of Britain underway, our government decided we had better learn from the British and organize a Civil Defense. Civil Defense training began in all disciplines. I cannot remember them all, but most were focused on reaction to bombing raids. These included medical first aid training and disposition of the wounded. As a high school student, I attended a fire-fighting school at a local fire station once a week for several months. I learned many things that have been useful to me all of my life. These included such skills as how to handle a high pressure hose, how to handle a ladder, handling lines, etc. I remember how I looked forward to these classes each week.

The young girls learned how to make all types of bandages and other medical supplies. There were even classes in knitting for making various garments that were in short supply due to the war production. A national mood was beginning to gel before December 7, 1941, but that act by the Japanese crystallized the American people into one homogeneous group who had only one goal - to win the war.

The United States had no compulsory military requirements prior to WW II. Our military was composed entirely of volunteers. In fact, many of the volunteers were young men who had gotten into trouble with the law with petty crimes (generally petty thievery such as stealing a car or shoplifting) and made a plea deal to go into military service, rather than to a reform school. The “service” was also a place that provided a warm bed and three meals a day during the Great Depression. The Officer Corps was made up mostly of either graduates from the military academies or the ROTC. It was around this nucleus that we built the military force that tipped the scales in favor of victory for the freedom of the world.

With the apparent need to enlarge our armed forces, military conscription was ordered by our government. In other words, all males between certain ages could be drafted for military service. This was commonly referred to as "the draft". I believe the ages were between eighteen and thirty-five. All single men

were included and some married men, those without children. The draft organization was controlled on the local level by a draft board. Each draft board was responsible for registering all eligible men in their area. They were also the arbiters of any claims for exemptions or deferments.

After a young man registered, he was classified according to his eligibility to be conscripted (or called up for military duty). The highest classification was 1A. This classification meant that you were ready to be inducted into the service. The lowest classification was 4F. This classification meant that you were ineligible for duty in any of the military services. The most common reason for this classification was due to some type of physical infirmity. Between these two classifications there were other classes, which were determined by number of dependents, your age, and other qualifying characteristics. As I recall, I was classified as 3A because of my student status. I received notification by my draft board in December of 1942 that I was to report for my pre-induction physical. At that time, I was halfway through my freshman year at Rollins College. I petitioned my draft board for a deferment until June of 1943, so that I could complete my freshman year. My request was granted, and that was how I obtained the 3A classification.

This put me in a rather unique situation at Rollins, due to the fact that all reserve students were called up for active duty during the Christmas holidays. This left me as one of the only able-bodied male students on campus, along with the 4F's, when I returned after the Christmas holidays. Don't get me wrong. Regarding the ladies, it was not like returning to a land of plenty. Orlando Air Force Base had opened, and Rollins College was a mecca for the officers from that base looking for attractive young college coeds. Additionally, there were military training programs conducted by Rollins, which brought other able-bodied males on campus.

In retrospect, I am very glad that I made the decision and was granted the request for deferment, since it allowed me to get one full year of college completed before I went into the military service. After the war, I only needed three additional years to get my bachelor's degree. This put me one year ahead of most of the returning veterans who entered college under the G.I. Bill.

When a young man registered for the draft, he then protected the security of his draft registration card with all the resources available to him. It was more valuable that cash. There was no such thing as a credit card at that time. Failure to produce a registration card was a major offense. Failure to register was an even greater offense. Both were federal crimes and were prosecuted by the federal government. There was no was such thing as running off to Canada at that time to avoid the draft, since Canada was also at war.

A young man's classification was, in most instances, a sense of pride. In some cases, it could be a source of embarrassment. Unless an eligible young man

had a physical disability that was obvious, such as being crippled or some other readily apparent malady, being classified as 4F could be an embarrassment. Patriotism was such an embedded value in our culture that no young man could bear the thought of not being eligible to serve his country. I recall that when I was on the bus on my way to Camp Blanding for my pre-induction physical, my biggest fear was that I might not be acceptable. It took a pretty severe physical impairment to be rejected. The old wives' tale of being flat-footed as a cause for rejection was not true. Even the loss of sight in one eye was not a cause for rejection. One of my best friends in my combat unit had lost the sight of one eye in a 4th of July holiday firecracker accident. He remained with our unit until we were on the verge of combat assignment. He was then assigned to a SCU (service command unit). These were units that provided service to the combat forces. They provided such services as supply, planning, personal records, etc. The combat units facetiously referred to them as the “sick, crippled, and useless” for the acronym SCU. This is just one small example of how pride was manifested in the patriotism of the young men of America at that time. Everyone wanted to be a war hero. It is also an example of how you could be ridiculed in the service. Think of how much more ridicule you could receive by being at home with a 4F classification.

My pre-induction physical was a mass of male humanity being checked for mental and physical defects. There was a saying at the center, that the doctors would shine a light in one ear and if they didn’t see light shining out the other ear, you were okay for service. It was many a young man’s first exposure to immodesty. We were given a wire basket in which to place our clothing and, for the rest of the day, we paraded from station to station nude, with physicians looking at every nook and cranny of our bodies.

Another impact of this immodesty was manifested when it came time to provide a urine sample. This was most draftees’ first exposure to the military rigidity of rules. It was a rigid rule that nobody left the latrine until he had a urine sample to turn in. Some would stand in front of a urinal for seemingly an eternity, trying to get that sample. Others would let it flow like Old Faithful. In more cases than the military would like to admit, the Old Faithful producers would share or sell a bottle full to the guy who couldn’t produce a drop. Many recruits passed the urinalysis test with someone else’s urine.

My examination trip was during summer, the middle of July as I remember. Typical of military procedures, everything was a "hurry up and wait" activity. Sometimes this waiting was in lines outside in the sun. Water was at a premium. This made soft drinks sold in vending machines priceless. Vending machines in those days had no coin changers. It was correct change, maybe a dime, or no drink. Many dimes were sold for a quarter, half dollar, and even a dollar. By the end of the pre-induction exams, which generally lasted two days, you knew if you were satisfactory for military service.

My memory is a little hazy on this matter, but it seems to me that those who were physically and mentally okay were sworn in and took the oath of duty at that time.

After being sworn in, we were transferred to an area to be processed as new recruits. This is where we packed our civilian clothes and shipped them home, while being issued G.I. clothing and supplies. We also began the never ending process of getting our inoculations in preparation for being assigned to a basic training unit. Fort Blanding in Florida was a basic training base but could not train all the inductees that were examined there. Most were sent to other bases throughout the United States. For basic training, I was transferred to Fort Hood, Texas, near Waco.

Basic training is just what the name implies. It trained us in the basic requirements of being a soldier. Our training was also focused on how to be a soldier in wartime. Even though we could eventually be assigned to any type of unit, our basic training was always that of an infantry soldier. Discipline and obedience were the benchmarks of basic training. No military unit ever succeeds without enforcing these principles.

During basic training, many tests were given in order to develop a profile of each soldier. This was a rather broad brush, but effective on a grand scale, since the military had so many disciplines to consider and millions of draftees to analyze. Fundamental to all tests was the Intelligence Quotient (IQ). This was a large factor in the final determination of your direction in the military. There were minimums for officer training and minimums for most other specialty training. As a matter of fact, the minimum for Officer Candidate School (OCS) was 120. For Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), the program to which I was later admitted, it was 135. There were many psychological tests, dexterity tests, vocational tests, as well as just about every other test conceived by mankind up to this point in time. These tests were used to assign personnel to perform in the best interest of the war effort. There was, however, one overriding criterion. That criterion was, “What is most needed NOW?” I was to find that out later when I was enrolled as an engineering student in the ASTP at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

The military was trying to make up for lost time, so there was not time to consider the factors that were influencing the results of these tests. Since they were done during our basic training, fatigue was one factor. Many times tests were given after an energy-draining drill exercise, some after a night of guard duty, others after a long day of KP duty. Very seldom was there a time for relaxation while in basic training. Probably the most compelling experience was the feeling of loneliness and homesickness. For most of the recruits, this was their first time away from home. For many, it was the first trip they had ever taken. In almost every case, this was the first time away from home for more than a few days. Homesickness was pervasive. Friendships were difficult to develop, since we knew that these relationships would only last for a maximum of thirteen weeks.

After that, we would be scattered to the four winds to pursue the common goal of winning the war. In spite of loneliness, homesickness, fatigue, and in some cases depression, a spirit of camaraderie developed. This developed since support of each other was the only place to go. I am sure it is that feeling of dependence on others in the same situation that enabled the average G.I. to carry on in spite of all odds and, ultimately, to prevail.

One of the most devastating thoughts every soldier had to confront was that of seeing no end to his situation. The time for our tour of duty was defined “for the duration, plus”. No one knew when that would be. The air corps developed a schedule of rotating pilots after a certain number of combat missions. This created a lot of hard feelings in the other services since, to my knowledge, no other service had such a formal procedure.

Basic training not only instructed us in military procedures and techniques, but it taught us a lot about ourselves. It taught us just how rugged both our bodies and our minds were. Sometimes it was difficult to distinguish between the two, since the mind has such a strong influence upon the actions of the body. We learned that the body can do things we never imagined, and we learned that we can act and react under circumstances we never thought possible. We were being conditioned to win a war, regardless of what would be our ultimate individual assignment.

Top on the list of training activities was knowledge of and protection of our “piece”. This was the army’s term for your firearm. It was okay to call it a rifle or a pistol, or whatever its specific identity carried, but it was never a "gun". We were taught from the beginning that guns were for the artillery and navy ships. Soldiers did not carry “guns”; they carried “pieces”. We were trained in the use of the M1 Garand rifle. This was a semi-automatic rifle which had been adopted by the army a few years earlier. Due to shortages, it was not used for training purposes until 1943. Up to that time, the old Springfield and the British Enfield rifles were used in training. The Springfield was a very accurate rifle and was still being used at the end of the war as a sniper rifle.

Care of our pieces was instructed in many ways. The first was learning the serial number of our pieces. Then we learned the name of every component of our weapons. We learned to disassemble and reassemble it blindfolded. We also learned to do the same in pitch darkness. Weeks were spent learning all aspects of aiming, shooting, and range safety with our rifles before we were allowed to fire the first shot.

That first day on the rifle range was a grueling experience. Generally our first day began early, around 4:00 am. The early time was due to the fact that there was such a demand for use of the range. The beginning shooters were the early morning shooters. As we progressed, we went later in the day. That may sound better, but it wasn't, since the later shooters had to march out to the range. The

early shooters were taken out in 6x6 trucks. The ranges were several miles from the center of the base, since they required a lot of space and a lot of isolation.

Probably the most dramatic rifle training was an obstacle course through which we carried our loaded pieces. This involved rope climbing, wall scaling, and wriggling like a snake under a barbed wire network about one foot high with bursts of machine gun fire over us at approximately 24-30 inches. In most instances, the ground was either sandy and dusty, or muddy. The countless trainees had scoured away any vegetation months, or even years, previously. At the end of this obstacle course was a pit large enough to hold three or four trainees. At the completion of our wriggle through the barbed wire portion, we rolled over into the pit with whoever completed the trip at the same time. While in the pit, a tank rolled overhead and we got to see how the bottom of a tank looked. But that was not the purpose of the exercise. Its purpose was to show us that we could find safety in a hole while being attacked by a tank.

After that event, our final test was to take place. Coming out of the pit, we were directed to another area where we took out our piece and fired it into a safety pit. We had to empty a full clip of ammunition into the pit without any jamming or malfunction of our piece. If we failed, we had to determine the cause of the malfunction (usually it was from mud or dirt), clear it, and get ready for another tour of the obstacle course. We were advised of this prior to the exercise, but this did not prevent many failures.

Weapon handling was not the only training exercise, and weapons were not confined to personal pieces. We covered most of the weapons used by an infantry company in combat. These included hand grenades, mortars, machine guns, bazookas, and flame throwers. We also were given demonstrations of the various types of explosives.

Basic training was also our indoctrination into military courtesy and etiquette, as well as all the other many rules of being in the military. We were taught the general orders and all the requirements of being a soldier. We were literally frightened into what we had to do and what would be the response if we did not comply with all the requirements of being a soldier. Fear and intimidation were a vital part of the indoctrination. Most of all, we learned the absolute requirements of discipline and authority. We were taught not to question the authority and orders of our superior officers and noncommissioned officers. This was the true structure of military order and discipline. It was a known fact that when we got to combat and when the order to “charge” was given, there would be no doubt that we would obey.

Camaraderie was a vital part of our lifestyle. We learned that our very survival depended on our fellow soldiers. Even as early as basic training, we learned that our unit was like a family with a common cause. The largest family unit was generally the company. A company consisted of approximately two hundred

soldiers. The next was the platoon, around forty-eight soldiers, and the smallest was the squad, twelve soldiers. The company consisted of four platoons with service personnel such as cooks and administrative people, which made the total around two hundred.

My basic training in Texas started around the end of July in 1943. It was deep in the heart of Texas and right dab in the middle of summer. Being a southerner from Florida, the hot weather was not as difficult for me as it was for those who were from a colder climate. Many of the recruits in my training company were from the northeast and, for many, the summer weather was almost unbearable. Some were from metropolitan areas like New York City, and the intense hot weather and wide open spaces were foreign to them.

During our training in the middle of the summer, we had several deaths in our training battalion from heat strokes. Efforts were taken to combat heat strokes by requiring everyone to take salt tablets regularly to prevent sodium loss through perspiration. This was contrasted with teaching water rationing by allowing a limited amount of water use during training exercises. Water and liquids were even controlled at meal times. All this was to train the individual in self-discipline and to get the body and mind ready for the hardships of combat.

Basic training taught me many things, but the primary purpose of basic training was to get the soldier in shape, both physically and mentally, for combat. The military initially assumes that everyone will go to combat. It is only after basic training that we were assigned to specialty outfits for further training. At the end of basic training, most soldiers were already assigned to a replacement unit, where they were then disbursed to their next unit for training. It was during this time that I learned that I was being assigned to ASTP. My assignment was to the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. For a Florida boy who had only traveled out of the state of Florida to Georgia, this was really going to "parts unknown".

My trip from Fort Hood, Texas, to Chicago, Illinois, was aboard a U.S. Army troop train. Having been inducted in the middle of July, and with the traditional army "hurry up and wait" at both ends of my basic training, it was late November when I arrived in Chicago. We arrived in the train yards during the night. It was when I awoke and looked out my window that I saw snow for the first time. At that time, coal was the primary fuel for locomotives. The train yards always had coal piles. During the night a light snow had fallen. This was the setting for my remarkable first view of snow. As I looked out my train window, I saw the jet black coal peeking through a small layer of freshly fallen snow. The vivid contrast between the black coal and white snow is a picture that will remain in my memory forever.

I do not remember too much about getting settled, but I do recall that our home was the former location of the 108th Engineers' armory. This was a rather large

building with a basketball gymnasium floor in the middle, surrounded by other rooms. These rooms varied in size, ranging from an occupancy of four up to around twenty. As I recall, my room had eight. In reality, our roommates became our family. They took on the qualities of a squad from our days in training.

The first thing I can identify about this location was the horrible, noxious odor. We were not too far from the Chicago stockyards. The stench from the stockyards was overwhelming. It boggled my mind to think that anyone could live under these conditions. Little did I realize that the physiology of the human body was such that, after a short period of time, it desensitized the organs of the nose against certain odors. It only took a short while until, when visitors complained about the odor, we would say, "What odor?".

The armory in which we were housed was on Wentworth Avenue, directly across from Comiskey Park, the home of baseball's Chicago Cubs. On many occasions, we took our physical training exercises in Comiskey Park. Our days began with reveille at 5:00 am. Our routine in the morning was a jog of approximately one mile. At first, snow on the ground was intermittent. But the deeper we got into winter, the heavier the snow became. It became not uncommon for us to have our outdoor jogging exercises cancelled due to the heavy snow. During those cancellations, we would do in-place exercises inside the armory building, where we had a large basketball court. This is where we held formations and also did intramural sports. These sports activities were a part of our additional training exercises. I became interested in wrestling and became the champion in my weight class. One thing the army would never let up on was the requirement that we remain in top physical condition.

Since I had already completed my freshman year in college, many of the courses I was required to take were repeats. There were, however, many new courses for me, which were very appealing. I can still remember one very specific course that has served me well all my life. It was a course in logic. I often think of it as the “cause and effect” subject matter. Many times you will hear people say they didn't "think it through". What they are really saying is that they didn't consider the effects of their actions. In these instances, their actions are, in reality, the cause. It is just too common, in our culture today, for people to not consider all the effects of their actions.

I will not spend too much time discussing some aspects of my stay in Chicago, since more will be covered in another segment of this autobiography. This time period did, however, generate friendships that stayed with me throughout my entire army career and even some until today. It was also the time period that led me to meet the beautiful young lady, a high school girl then, who became my bride of now more than sixty-four years.

While living in the armory and going to school at the Illinois Institute of

Technology, our lives were totally structured from the beginning of the day until we lay down to go to sleep at night. I would estimate there were approximately two hundred of us enrolled in the ASTP program at our location. All of our meals were served from the mess hall in the armory. The first thing each morning was the usual muster and roll call. Then we had our exercise period, which usually consisted of the one mile jog. This was followed by a time when breakfast began. Some chose to eat early and to dress for classes afterwards; others chose the opposite procedure.

After breakfast we were then formed into groups, and we marched to classes. The distance to our classes was approximately three blocks. This took us about ten minutes to accomplish. In the wintertime, when the snow was falling heavily, it was quite an awesome trip. We made the same trip to and from the armory at lunchtime, and again at 5:00 pm which was the end of our class day. Our evening meal was around 6:00. At 7:00, supervised study began. Every student was required to be in his room and at his desk until 9:00 pm.

From 9:00 to11:00 pm was free time. This was not enough time to travel away from the armory, so most everyone developed some use for this free time. Many would play a pickup game of basketball on the gym floor. Others would spend time in all sorts of body conditioning. It was during that time that many of the students would make their daily phone calls. Getting to a telephone to make a call was not easy. As I remember, there were only about five telephone booths, and many would be occupied for more than an hour. Waiting for a phone booth created more personal confrontations than any other cause. At 11:00 pm, it was “lights out“.

This was our weekly routine Monday through Friday. On Friday nights, rather than having a tortured supervised study, we were allowed free time from 7:00 to 10:00 pm. During this free time, we were at liberty to leave the armory. Since this time was short, very few soldiers left the armory. My experience in finding a local neighborhood bar is covered in another phase of this autobiography. Saturday mornings were spent in traditional army tasks, weekly inspections, and clean-up time. We were then at personal liberty from noon on Saturday until 6:00 pm Sunday evening. At 7:00 pm on Sunday evening, our structured study period began again. We were confined back in the armory, with our structured routine, until the next weekend.

Chicago was truly a serviceman's town. Since it was such a large metropolitan city, the influence of service personnel had little effect on its activities. The city's elect took many steps to make Chicago a pleasant experience for service personnel. Probably the most universally utilized benefit was the offer of free transportation on the streetcars, except during rush hour periods. Most service personnel knew exactly when these rush hour periods began and ended. We would arrange our travel accordingly. There was also a way of beating the system if we were at the beginning or the end of the rush hour. Many of the

streetcars had dividers in the middle where a motor man would collect fares. As we passed this divider, we paid our toll. If we realized we would reach our destination after the rush hour began, we would go to the back of the streetcar. If we knew we would reach our destination after the rush hour ended, we would remain in the front of the streetcar. This was one of the little tricks we learned as time progressed.

There were many additional benefits for servicemen. Not only were there discounted rates for practically all the events in the city, the USO had many free tickets for most of the plays and major activities of the city. The fact that we were limited in pay to fifty dollars per month had no effect on our ability to take part in the cultural and recreational activities of Chicago. As an aside, deducted from this fifty dollars was our insurance, and we were also required to pay for our laundry. Our net disposable income was approximately forty dollars.

It was in Chicago that I saw my first legitimate stage play, my first professional football game, my first ice hockey games, and my first major sports competition between the “Big 10” colleges. I saw Bronko Nagurski play football for the Chicago Bears. I saw Angelo Bertelli play football for Notre Dame. I saw the last competitive sports contest, which was basketball, by Otto Graham of Northwestern. I saw George Mikan play basketball for DePaul. All of these athletes are legends in their respective sports. As I look back on my life now, it is my opinion that my short stay in Chicago and my freshman year at Rollins College changed my perspective of life dramatically. Those two time periods, even though they spanned only a little more than a year and a half, opened my eyes to a bigger world than I had known. Even though I was not conscious of it at the time, they were life-changing times for me.

As the war continued in Europe, and particularly in Africa and Italy, the army realized that it would need more foot soldiers to accomplish its goals both in Europe and in Asia. A ready and ripe source for these foot soldiers was the ASTP program. So those of us in the ASTP program learned in late winter of 1944 that the program was being closed down. We were not sure of our fate, but we knew that we would be assigned to an infantry line organization. After going through the usual shutdown procedures and getting ready for shipment, we learned that all of the ASTP students in the Chicago Corps area were being shipped to the 96th Division in Camp White, Oregon. I don't know exactly how many students this represented, but it was several thousand.

There were several troop trains from the Chicago area departing and arriving in Oregon around the same time. This trip was across the northern states, many of them bordering Canada. It was a beautiful trip, considering it was on an army troop train. As was customary for the army, stops were made where all troops disembarked for exercises. I remember that, being in the early spring of the year and along the northern route, many of the stops had snow on the ground.

Lou's first squad with 96th Division

The 96th Division was an infantry division that had just completed maneuvers in Fort Lewis, Washington, and had relocated to Camp White. It was being brought up to full strength for assignment to combat training operations. Many of the original soldiers that formed the 96th Division were from Texas, and many of them were of Mexican descent. The addition of the students from the ASTP brought the division up to combat strength. The makeup of the soldiers in the division represented quite a contrast in educational and social backgrounds. Most of those from the ASTP program had finished at least one year of college and represented a middle income social class. Many of the incumbent soldiers in the division had never finished high school and were from a lower income class. Privately, I had officers tell me that they were elated to have soldiers who could read and write. I'm not sure it was the intent of the army when they shut down the ASTP program to increase the IQ level of the combat organizations, but that was the end result. When we joined the division in the middle of March of 1944, all of the ASTP students were privates. By the time we were involved in our first combat operation, approximately seven months later, a large number of the ASTP students were in leadership roles as noncommissioned officers (noncoms). By the end of the war, the majority of noncoms in our division were former ASTP students. This was the first revelation to me of the power of knowledge and education.

At first the task of assimilating us former ASTP students into the division was an arduous one. The incumbent soldiers were constantly chiding us about not having been on maneuvers with them. There is no doubt that these maneuvers had been difficult and exhausting. Nevertheless, we newcomers tried to fit in and began our training with the line organization. Naturally, we were not as skilled in combat operations as those who had been training while we were going to school. However, in a short time we began to fit in. Each of the groups, old timers and newcomers, began to recognize what each had to contribute.

Training continued, but now with all the vacant spots filled. All that was needed now was some specific training for the combat operation in which we would be involved. It didn't take too long for us newcomers to start receiving promotions within our respective organizations. Due to the fact that my résumé and subsequent aptitude tests indicated that I was interested in and capable of radio

communications, I was made acting communications sergeant of my company. The acting designation did not bother me initially, since I was now an acting noncom. In that capacity, I did not have to either serve on KP or wall a post on guard duty. In a rather short time I did, however, begin to resent the fact that I was doing the job but not getting paid for it.

Lou on bivouac in Oregon

About six weeks after we arrived at Camp White, Oregon, the entire division was relocated to Camp Callan in southern California. This was a former anti-aircraft training site. It was located in La Jolla, just north of San Diego. As an aside, after the war a championship golf course was built on this location and it became the site of the Andy Williams Open. Even today it is one of the tour stops on the PGA tournament schedule. The purpose of our relocation to this site was to begin amphibious training. The marines at Camp Pendleton were our instructors.

During the early stages of World War II in the South Pacific, the U.S. Marine Corps created and developed the elements of amphibious warfare. It was these elements that we would be taught while we were at Camp Callan. They consisted of every aspect of amphibious operation, from abandoning a ship at sea to landing in an assault craft. Much of the training could be conducted on dry land, but a lot of it required going to sea. Going on simultaneously with the amphibious training were classes for support groups. These classes included such subjects as communications, ship loading, medical care, evacuation, etc. It was there that I began training as an amphibious communications specialist for my company. With this training, I finally became the communications sergeant for my company, and thus I was finally officially promoted.

I was assigned to carry an SCR T300D radio, known then as the "walkie talkie". This radio was essentially for communications between the company commander and the battalion commander. Additionally, we had smaller radios called "handie talkies" which were used by the company commander for communications with his platoon leaders. All of these radios used rather large batteries since those were the days before solid-state electronics. They all used vacuum tubes which required filaments to be heated by the A battery and the higher voltage supplied

Lou on maneuvers in Oregon

by the B battery. Modern technology with solid-state electronics has made communications equipment of that era collector's items.

The training that we received on the base at Camp Callan primarily involved classroom instruction. When we needed training in the amphibious phases of the operations, we would go to the naval facilities in San Diego. This required a motorized trip of approximately one hour. We would travel in convoys, with troops dropped off at key intersections for traffic control. I can remember acting as a traffic controller on many instances. San Diego was the location of some rather large aircraft building facilities. As part of the camouflaged defense for these facilities, they were covered in their entirety with fence netting. False residential neighborhoods were built on top of the netting. The magnitude of some of these camouflaged installations was mind-boggling.

A lot of our time was spent in learning how to properly go over the side of a large ship in order to board the landing craft. This was accomplished by using rope ladders. These rope ladders were, in essence, large rope nets that extended for several hundred feet along the side of the ship. This descent was accomplished with full field packs and our weapons slung over our backs. In my case, I was also carrying a radio. We practiced this for many hours on dry land, but in no way could it truly simulate the wave conditions you would encounter aboard a ship at sea. Even in a relatively calm sea, the movement of the mother ship and the movement of the landing craft which we were boarding were never in sync. The real test was the moment we felt the bottom of the landing craft with our feet, we must immediately release all attachment to the rope ladder. If there was any hesitancy on our part, the next step down might be twenty feet when the landing craft was in a trough, or the converse, we may be struck by the floor of the landing craft when it was on a crest.

We could only practice this under lab conditions. The practical test would come when we were at sea.

Another significant benchmark was going through the “abandon ship” drill. Since there was always the possibility of our transport ship being torpedoed, the abandon ship drill was a critical step in our training. The culmination of this drill was when we were required to jump off a pier into the ocean. The height of the pier above the water simulated the distance of a ship deck above the ocean. This was approximately thirty feet. Everyone was required to make this jump. One of the fundamental requirements was that no soldier could be pushed off. All had to jump on their own. I remember a few timid souls who were so frightened that they were required to stand on the pier ready to jump for almost twenty-four hours.

The correct procedure for abandoning ship and jumping into the ocean was to have our arms crossed in front of us, holding on to our life vests. Then with our legs crossed, we were to jump feet first. Thank goodness we never were required to implement this training. As an aside, I recall an abandon ship drill when we were approaching the invasion of the Philippines. One of the procedures upon abandoning ship was the announcement as to the direction and distance to the closest land. On this specific drill, the loudspeaker announced that the closest land was five miles away, straight down. At that time we were over one of the deepest spots in the ocean.

Lou on furlough, 1944

After approximately two months of training, we were given our port of

embarkation (POE) furlough. After our furlough, we would return to Camp San Luis Obispo, which was in the San Francisco Bay area. From there we would make hard departure to the Pacific theater of operations. We had no clue as to where we might be headed. One night while we were at San Luis Obispo, we encountered a tremendous explosion that shook our barracks and rattled the windows. We later learned that this was the now famous Port Chicago explosion that destroyed a munitions ship being loaded and killed hundreds of sailors. Many of the casualties were black stevedores involved in loading the ship. This explosion was approximately twenty miles away from where our barracks were located. A few days later, we were taken by barges to our transport ships, and we passed the docks where the explosions had occurred.

Lou, Dad, Ken, & Jim 1944

There was no training while we were at Camp San Luis Obispo. All of our activities were focused on embarkation. While our ship was tied up in San Francisco Bay, I witnessed my first contact with seasickness. Our company's first sergeant was extremely sensitive to motion sickness. In fact, he did not finish a plate of food during any of our amphibious training operations while in San Diego. He would become deathly ill the moment he stepped aboard one of the landing craft. When we boarded the transport in San Francisco, he immediately went to his bunk and remained there for the next five days until we arrived in Honolulu. Even when the ship was tied to the dock, he became ill. To some degree, he was able to overcome the extremes of this condition before we landed in the Philippines, but he never was able to overcome it completely. He succumbed to an illness in the Philippines, probably due to his weakened condition, and I never heard of him again.

Sailing out from San Francisco Bay under the Golden Gate Bridge is an experience I will never forget. Most of us stayed on the deck as we departed and remained there until we were out of sight of land. Approximately five days later, we could see landfall and by then we had been informed that our destination was Hawaii. Sailing into Pearl Harbor was uneventful. There were no signs whatsoever of the devastation that had occurred there on December 7, 1941. This was approximately two and a half years later. The port was a beehive of activity. It had become the staging area for all military operations in the Pacific. That is exactly what my infantry division would do while in Hawaii. We would train and stage for a military operation. No one knew at that time that we would make an amphibious landing in the Philippines and, for the first time during the war, recapture territory that had been seized by the Japanese. This would be the invasion of Leyte in the Philippines.

After unloading our troop ship at Pearl Harbor, we traveled by motor convoy to our camp, which was about twenty-five miles from Honolulu. The camp was located near a small town called Wewa. The camp was considered an annex to the Schofield Barracks, which was the main army installation in Honolulu that had been damaged during the attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor.

After a couple of days, we began serious advanced amphibious training. I recall with fond memories our training in a large pineapple field. The purpose of our training was the proper coordination between tanks and infantry in a combat situation. Tanks were a very formidable weapon, but they were at the mercy of foot soldiers for their protection during close combat. This was necessary, since a tank could not effectively protect itself against a foot soldier, who could bombard it with a Molotov cocktail or some other kind of explosive. Protective foot soldiers were their best friends. It was in these large pineapple fields where we conducted our training exercises.

As is the case with many agricultural products, only the prime products are harvested for the commercial market. Such was the case with pineapples. These large pineapple fields contained many delicious pineapples after the harvest. We salvaged many and ate pineapples until pineapple juice was running out of our ears. We even brought them back to our mess halls, where our company cooks prepared fruit cups and made pineapple upside-down cake. All of us were saddened when our tank infantry training was over. An interesting aspect of this training was that I never saw a tank in actual combat conditions, except when I was on Okinawa, where flame-throwing tanks were used in routing out the enemy soldiers who were entrenched in caves and foxholes.

Most of our training was focused on actual marine amphibious operations. No longer were the U.S. Marines our instructors. Our instruction was now conducted by our own leaders, implementing the knowledge we had learned in San Diego before leaving the United States. We were now getting serious. The culmination of all our amphibious training was the simulated invasion of the island Maui in the

Hawaiian chain. At the conclusion of our training in San Diego, we had made a simulated invasion of the island of San Clemente, but this invasion of the island of Maui took on all the characteristics of a real combat operation.

After boarding our transport ship in Pearl Harbor, we headed for the Island of Maui. It was only an overnight trip, but when we arrived offshore of Maui, the wind was blowing fiercely. To have attempted a training operation under these conditions would have been disastrous. The simulated invasion was cancelled, but the high command determined that it was necessary for a small group to go ashore and check out the beach. As a radio operator, I was selected to be in the small group. When we arrived at the shoreline, it required considerable skill by our landing craft coxswain to keep the landing craft from becoming "broached". Broaching is when the landing craft is rotated such that its centerline axis is parallel to the beach. When this occurs, the boat coxswain is unable to move the craft backwards and away from the beach. It only takes a short time for a broached landing craft to be grounded and destroyed by the pounding waves of a rough surf. In our small group that made the landing, there were several craft which were broached. It broke my heart to see those beautiful landing craft with their Chrysler marine engines being totally destroyed by the pounding surf.

The weather conditions did not significantly change during the day, and we were forced to remain on the island overnight. I can recall what an ordeal that was, since we had not brought with us any food or shelter for an overnight stay. The following day we were able to return to our transport, and the simulated invasion was subsequently carried out. This was the last simulation in our training. The next time it would be for real.

Even though our training was intense when we were in the Honolulu area, we did have some time to see the sights and experience a small bit of the culture of the island of Oahu. In addition to the large pineapple fields, there were large sugar cane fields located on the island. I was able to take a tour of one of the facilities where brown sugar was processed from the sugar cane. The brown sugar was then shipped to the United States, where it was refined into the white sugar which we commonly use for cooking and baking. It was there that I learned that they set the sugar cane fields on fire prior to the harvest. This had no effect on the juices and the cane, and it eliminated the chaff from the cane stalks. I also learned that after the juice had been pressed from the cane stalks, the stalks were used for fuel in the factory boilers. This cane pulp fuel was called “bagasse“. It was also a common fuel in the sugar cane fields of Florida. Little did I realize at the time that the term was common with the boiler service personnel who would service the power plant boilers for me later in life when I became involved in power generation.

I also took advantage of several trips into Honolulu. The town was totally focused on being a playground for military personnel. My recollection is that it was like a glorified carnival midway. It did, however, have many prestigious

eating establishments, and it was there that I experienced my first grilled steak. I also made several visits to Waikiki Beach. Many of the hotels along the beach were taken over by the government for the use of officer personnel for recreational purposes. However, this did not preclude the use of the beach by other military personnel. One of my memories of the beach is the presence of coral in the surf. This made the surf a little less pleasant than what I was accustomed to at New Smyrna Beach.

It seems that we were in Hawaii for approximately two months, due to the following analysis. We had sailed from San Francisco the latter part of July and the invasion of Leyte in the Philippines was on October twentieth. The invasion of Leyte was approximately one month after we departed from Hawaii, which means that our training in Hawaii took place during August and September. All of this was in the year 1944.

We boarded our transport ship to leave Hawaii approximately one week before departure. During this week, we were not confined to the ship; we could come and go as our schedule allowed. One of the highlights of this week's activities was a USO show performed there in the shipyards at Pearl Harbor. The star of this show was Eddie Peabody, the banjo king. This was my first USO show, and I was significantly impressed with the quality of all of the performers. This brings to mind another incident that occurred while in Honolulu involving entertainment stars. Our company mail clerk, Roy Sachs, was the first cousin of Jack Benny. While we were in Hawaii, Jack Benny was there en route to a USO performance in the Pacific. Roy Sachs contacted him and spent a few days with him while he was in Honolulu. We all listened in awe at the stories Roy told us when he returned from this visit.

When all the troops were confined to the ship, we knew that our departure was imminent. As I recall, the departure from Honolulu and Pearl Harbor was in the middle of the night. After a few days at sea, we were informed of our destination. This destination was the island of Yap. Yap is located in the Western Caroline Islands and was the location of a large Japanese naval installation. We were informed that it would be necessary for us to eliminate it as a Japanese base of naval operations, in order to control the sea in that part of the Pacific. Daily we would have classes and training on the beaches where we would land. The details of our mission were so complete that we knew the island of Yap like the back of our hands.

A short time before the invasion date, it was announced that the invasion of Yap was off. Our route was changed, and we were on our way to another place to stage for another invasion. I will always believe that this was a diversionary tactic conceived by the military to keep our ultimate destination a secret. There were just too many people who knew our destination was Yap when we departed Hawaii.

Lou with company guidon
Leyete Phillipines

The destination for our staging area for the invasion of the Philippines was Einewetok in the Marshall Islands. This was a very primitive atoll which was a part of the Carolines. It is where the now famous H-Bomb tests were conducted after WW II. It was also the general location of a U.S. military tracking station, which was used during the development of the intercontinental ballistic missiles. It was during this trip to Einewetok that we crossed two artificial boundaries which, by tradition, prompted ceremonies aboard our troop ship. The first was crossing the International Date Line. The second was crossing the Equator. The latter one prompted the most elaborate ceremonies. This ritual was similar to a college fraternity initiation. After it was over, we were considered members in good standing with those who had made these crossings. We were given cards with our names on them in recognition of this event. I remember having mine for many years after I returned from service, but it eventually was lost.

While staging in the Marshall Islands, there were no military facilities available, so we stayed aboard the troop transport, although we were shuttled to the island regularly for exercising and relaxation. As I recall, before we left the area and headed for our invasion, we changed the troop ship we were on. I later learned that this was to facilitate our disembarking from the ship onto our landing craft. Our landing crafts for the invasion of the Philippines would be Amtraks rather than LCVPs (landing craft vehicles and personnel), which had been the norm for amphibious operations up to that time. The Amtrak carried slightly fewer soldiers

then the LCVP. It did not have a bow door, and it was propelled by rotating tracks on each side. In the water it was not nearly as maneuverable as an LCVP. But the advantage of it was that when it reached the shore, it became a self-propelled vehicle, much like a tank.

Vernon, Lou, A.B. Windham
Leyete Phillipines, 1944

I don't know what was going on logistically while we were at Einewetok, but one thing I remember vividly is that no military training occurred while we were there. Even though we were shuttled almost daily to shore, it was almost like a daily picnic. Other than time spent in physical training, the remainder of the time we were playing volleyball, poker, and indulging in other recreational activities. I even remember receiving small rations of beer. On one of these daily visits, I remember seeing a scene provided by a native woman of the island that was indicative of their primitive nature. A native woman was breastfeeding a piglet instead of a human infant. I am sure she also had a baby human to nurse, but the care and feeding of this animal was as critical to her primitive lifestyle as was the care and feeding of her own infant. In contrast to our culture, it was startling to comprehend that such primitive activities still existed.

I would estimate that we stayed at Einewetok around two weeks. When we departed, we were on our way to recapture the first American territory seized by the Japanese at the beginning of WW II. That was the central point of the message that was used in the psychology for the troops involved in the invasion of the Philippines. We were not at sea very long until this message was being hammered home. We learned that our destination would be Leyte. Leyte was an island in the Philippine chain, located about midway between the northern and

southern extremities. Much of our time at sea was spent reviewing aerial photographs of the beach area where we would land. In retrospect, I recall that the surveillance and knowledge information we received for the invasion of Yap was much more extensive than what we received for the invasion of Leyte.

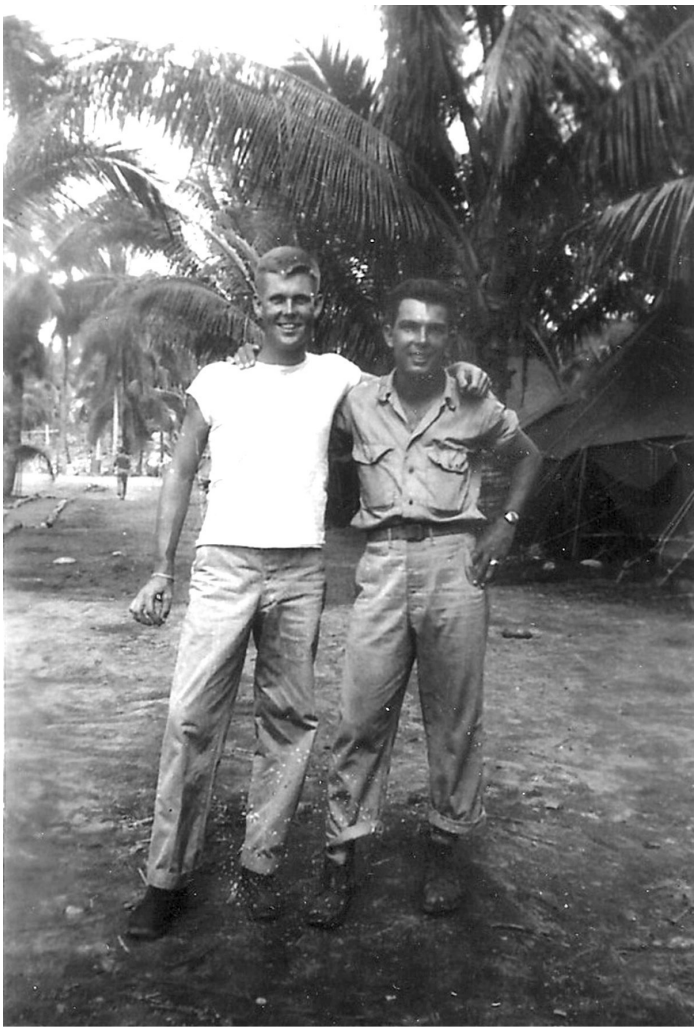
Whether a date certain for the invasion was given us is not clear in my recollection, but I do remember vividly that all of us realized that it was imminent and inevitable. One thing I can say about the American soldiers, most of whom were in their late teens or early twenties, is that I never saw a single one who ever displayed or expressed any fear. Even though we knew without a doubt that some of us would be injured or fatally wounded, I never saw but one soldier who thought it would happen to him. That soldier was our first fatality on Leyte.

One memorable event occurred the night before our invasion. There was a group of three of us leaning over the troop ship's railing, watching the phosphorus in the water light up the wake of the ship. Inevitably, the conversation led to talk about the invasion in which we would all be involved the next morning. One of the group made the observation that the religious diversity of our group was the thing that had made America so great and for which we were fighting. In that group of three soldiers, one was Catholic, one was Protestant, and the other Hebrew. To my knowledge, that was the first time we had ever recognized the different religions among us. It may be significant that we had just completed the various religious services aboard ship. The ship's loudspeaker would announce when and where religious services would be held. The night before the invasion, the attendance was the highest I ever saw. Very few soldiers stayed away. During the war one of the most renowned war correspondents, Ernie Pyle, coined the phrase “There are no atheists in foxholes”. This was a manifestation of that phrase.

Early the next morning, we were awakened, although I seriously doubt that there were many soldiers who slept that night. Unknown to us at the time, we were about to receive our last hot meal for many days to come. During the trip, we had received our ammunition and all the supplies we would carry ashore with us. After we ate, all that was left was for us to do was don our battle gear. Before daybreak we began disembarking our troop ship and loading into the amphibious Amtraks. As the Amtraks were loaded, they began circling in groups off each side of the ship. The groups ultimately contained around twelve Amtraks. Each group represented an invasion wave. Obviously there were many groups in a wave, but the sequence had been previously designed by the military commanders.

To the untrained eye, it appeared that all of these small bustles going around in circles were in chaos. Such was not the case. There was a planned order and months of training behind it all. There was a landing controller who gave the signal for the invasion waves to form. Ultimately another signal was given, and the wave began heading toward shore. While all this apparent chaos was going

on around the troop ships, the shoreline was being bombarded by U.S. Navy planes and ships. This bombardment ceased as the first wave approached the shore. All of our amphibious training was now about to be executed as the kickoff of the "big game" began.



A.B. Windham & Lou
Layte Phillippines

As our company communications sergeant, I was always in the presence of the company commander. Since he went ashore in the first wave of the invasion, I was also in the early waves of an amphibious invasion. The time interval was only a matter of a few minutes. When we landed at the shoreline, we were to proceed inland in our Amtraks until we were stopped by enemy fire. That was a good military plan, but it turned out to be our first lesson in combat. Military plans often do not occur the way they are planned or anticipated. We met no enemy resistance on the beaches where we landed. We were greeted by scantily clad male natives who could not speak English. We shortly learned that they understood Spanish very well. Since we had some Mexicans from Texas in our company, they immediately became our interpreters.

As we began to move inland, we encountered swampy land and the Amtraks became useless. For the reminder of the campaign on Leyte, we would be on foot. We began moving inland without any enemy resistance, accompanied by countless natives. There were no roads in the area, and I only recall walking through marshy fields with very little large growth of trees. Coconut palms were everywhere. The coconuts were the sustenance of existence for the natives. During my stay in the Philippines, I learned how vital the coconut was in every phase of the native's life. In a few days, we would run out of food and water due to outrunning our supply lines, and the coconut provided the food and water for many of us.

Lou in Layte Phillipines

All of the native males wore a large knife on their sides. It was about half the size of a machete and was carried in a scabbard. It was essential to them in their dealings with the coconut trees. Of the thousands of coconut trees I saw in the Philippines, I can't remember ever seeing one that did not have steps cut in it. They would climb the trunks of these coconut trees almost at the pace of a trot. When we ran out of drinking water, they would climb a tree and cut down several coconuts at the right stage of ripeness. They would then take their knives and hack off a section and we would pour out the liquid and drink it. This liquid we drank was slightly turbid; it had not matured into coconut milk.

The natives were very emphatic that we not drink any of the better milk, nor eat any of the dried coconut meat. We later learned that this liquid from the green coconuts was what the mothers fed their infants when they were unable to breastfeed them. They used the dried coconut meat as a source of coconut oil, which had many uses but was used extensively for the care of their hair. Many times I have seen Philippine women washing their hair in a stream and then pouring chopped coconut meat on it and then combing it out. That is the superb coconut oil treatment. As is the custom in all civilizations, the Filipinos also made an alcoholic drank from the coconut. I do not know exactly how they did it, but the operation took place while the coconut was still attached to the tree. It was called "tuba". It had an appearance similar to beer, but tasted nothing like it. It had a slightly tart taste, and I would guess the alcohol content was similar to that of wine.

On the first day, there was only sporadic contact with the enemy as we moved inland. We had no idea what the other troops were encountering, but we knew that we only had minimal resistance. In the late afternoon, we ceased our advance and prepared to dig in for the night. We never, ever advanced at night.

During all of my combat operations in the Pacific theater, we only moved during the day and dug in at night. During the hours of darkness, we shot anything that moved. There were many occasions where close friends were shot by their buddies when one would leave his foxhole to relieve himself. We actually had two occasions of such fatalities in our company. In one instance, a soldier shot and killed his very best friend. As General Sherman said during the Civil War, "War is Hell".

Lou,Vernon, Leyte, Phillippines

After the first shovelful of digging our foxholes, we encountered groundwater. That was indicative of how swampy the terrain was. Nevertheless, we were forced to dig out a trench deep enough for us to lie in. Around dusk and after we had completed our foxholes, the Japanese enemy began to shell us intermittently with mortar fire. This required us to immediately seek the refuge provided by our foxholes, wet as they may be. This was our true initiation to combat. During these mortar shellings our company incurred its first fatality. The soldier, a platoon sergeant, was the one aboard the troop ship who had stated he would not survive. Even though he was a Mexican from south Texas, his grandfather had been a Dutch immigrant to Mexico, and his name was Van Dyke. He was my first platoon sergeant when I joined the division and remained so until I became involved in the communications activities of my company.

I will never forget that first night in combat, sitting in a foxhole waist deep in water. It may sound crude, but I remember how comforting the warmth from urination would feel when sitting in the water-filled hole. When we emerged from the foxholes the following morning, many of us observed leeches on our bodies. When attempting to pull them off, they would break apart, with their tentacles still attached. We quickly learned the proper technique for removing leeches. We would contact their slimy bodies with the lighted end of a cigarette. This would cause them to curl up and release their grip on our bodies. This became the SOP (standard operating procedure) for removing leeches. This encounter with

the parasites of the tropics in the South Pacific was a harbinger of things to come. In retrospect, we encountered more non-battle casualties on Leyte than battle casualties. The non-battle casualties were primarily the results of parasites and fungi which caused dysentery, jungle rot, infections, etc. Most of these problems were disabling, but not fatal.

While mentioning the fact that non-battle casualties exceeded the battle casualties in the Philippines, it is worthwhile to consider the status of medicine and medical care at that time. Even though the survival rate for the battle wounded was the highest in the history of warfare for the United States, it was nothing compared to modern medicine and medical care. The miracle drugs such as penicillin and other powerful antibiotics had not yet been discovered or developed. The only true miracle drugs available during WW II were the sulfa drugs. But one of the shortcomings of the sulfa drugs was the requirement that excessive amounts of fluids be administered along with the drugs. This was a difficult requirement in a combat situation, since water had to be transported to the frontline troops, in many instances on the backs of soldiers. We were adamantly instructed never to administer the sulfa drugs carried in our first aid kits unless adequate water was available. In treating those with fungal diseases, the fungicides available were crude by current standards. Tincture of Merthiolate, which has now been banned by the FDA, was a very common antiseptic. The prostheses available for those who sustained the loss of a limb were very crude compared to those available today. In general, all aspects of medication and medical care during that war was very crude compared to today's standards.

The exact sequence of the battle actions on Leyte is vague to me at this time, but I recall certain meaningful events. We were constantly supported with heavy bombardments provided by the large guns of our naval vessels and by aircraft flying off of the carriers. A few days after we landed and were moving inland, this support ceased. We only speculated that it was due to the fact that our heavy artillery had now landed. It was a considerable time later before we learned that all of the naval vessels had left our area to participate in one of the largest and most significant naval battles of the Pacific, the Battle of Leyte Gulf. It turned out to be a very decisive battle and is worth every reader’s time to read about the history of that battle.

I remember my company, F Company, relieving another company in the mountainous area where they had experienced intermittent contact with the enemy. As we were moving in and they were moving out, a reinforced Japanese patrol appeared on the scene. A fire fight resulted from this encounter. We suffered some casualties, including one or two fatalities. We were confronted not only with rifle fire, but also with mortars. The Japanese had a small mortar which they called a knee mortar. It was not fired from the knee but was held at an angle on the ground. It had no tripod or sighting mechanism like the American mortars. The Japanese soldiers were well-trained in the use of these mortars

and were very accurate with them.

We remained entrenched at this location for several days. It was from there that I was assigned to a reinforced patrol. Our assignment was to move out and attempt to make physical contact with another US division that had landed on the other side of the island, much later than our initial landing. I was selected to go on this patrol as the radio operator that would keep contact with our operations base. As was typical of so many plans, we lost radio contact after the second day. It was only restored when we were one day out from our return. We were gone for approximately one week and never made contact with the other division. I am sure we covered areas where no Americans had ever been. We went into places that I thought no human had ever been, but I was sadly mistaken. There were coconut palms all over the place, but I never saw one tree trunk that did not have steps cut in it. This patrol, however, afforded me the opportunity to see parts of the island seen by no other American soldiers.

I remember being in a rest area for Thanksgiving. It was quite memorable because we received a hot meal that day. By Christmas, the island was secure and we were getting ready with new replacements and new equipment for another operation. I remember that all noncoms were requested to make written suggestions as to how to improve any aspect of the combat operations. My suggestion was that all noncoms be provided with morphine in their first aid pouches. I had seen instances of wounded soldiers lying in pain while awaiting the arrival of a medic. Medics were not a part of an infantry company but were assigned by the medical corps. My logic was that line noncoms could administer painkilling morphine to injured comrades while awaiting the arrival of a medic. Since the use of illegal narcotics was not a consideration at that time, my suggestion, also made by others I am sure, was adopted for our next operation. Little did I realize, at that time, that I personally would be able to administer such a painkilling drug.

The things I remember most vividly about Leyte were first, the lack of involvement in an all-out attack by the enemy, and second, the jungle nature of the terrain. Our combat operations involved only sporadic contacts with the Japanese. I would estimate that the maximum number of fatalities we ever suffered in any one encounter was no more than three. As said before, we suffered more non-battle casualties there than battle casualties. We also learned a little insight into the lifestyle of the natives. One thing that was immediately obvious was that the natives never sat on the ground. They would always sit back on their haunches with their buttocks slightly off the ground. This was probably due to the wet soil conditions throughout the island. I don't know what the rainfall was there, but I remember a comment that was made in the “Deadeye Dispatch“, our division newspaper. It said that the Philippines had two seasons, the wet season and the dry season. The dry season was last Monday afternoon between the hours of three and four. That pretty much described the weather on the island of Leyte.

Another image I will always remember is the native's use of natural vegetation. Since the tropics were overrun with coconut palms and banana trees, these constituted the natural vegetation most used by the natives. They would use the banana leaves as umbrellas. It was more common to see the women using these than the men. The most universally used vegetation were the fronds of the coconut palm. Since bamboo was also very prolific, it was used for the structural elements of their thatched buildings. They would use the sinews of a banana leaf to tie the bamboo elements together. It was astonishing to see just how strong these banana leaf sinews were. I even witnessed them using them in a manner similar to the way our law enforcement people use handcuffs. The natives had a certain element of social structure in their villages. On one occasion, I was doing guard duty at a bridge near a small village. Our guard duty was to protect the bridge against renegade Japanese who had refused to surrender and were involved in insurgent activities by blowing up bridges. Meanwhile, some local natives involved in one of their games, similar to our checkers, became a little too rowdy due to too much consumption of tuba, the alcoholic drink made from the liquid of the green coconuts. In a very short time, the constabulary arrived and took one of them away with his hands bound behind him with banana leaf sinews.

Due to the rugged and impassable terrain, on many occasions supplies for the advancing troops had to be parachuted in by transport airplanes. These parachutes were brightly colored and were made of nylon fabric. The colors identified the contents of the parachutes. Blue was for water, red for munitions, green for food rations, and white for miscellaneous. It didn't take the G.I.'s long to learn that these parachutes were valuable items for bartering with the native women who, after years of occupation by the Japanese, were desperate for materials for garment-making. The soldiers would barter for house(tent)-keeping, clothes washing, and even sex. When these facts became known, the retrieval of the parachutes became more aggressive then the retrieval of the contents. There were instances of soldiers losing their lives attempting to retrieve parachutes while under enemy fire. After being there a few months, it was not uncommon to see native women wearing brightly colored nylon garments that had been made from the parachutes.

With very few exceptions, the natives were shoeless. I am sure my observations were indigenous to the less populated areas of the Philippines. The lifestyles and customs in the larger cities such as Manila were much more advanced than those which existed on Leyte. One thing that was never in doubt was their deep-rooted contempt and hatred of the occupying Japanese and their adoration and love of the American soldier. This will always remain with me as a true example of freedom. I am sure that this was the feeling of soldiers throughout the world as they liberated people from their captors. I believe it was experiences such as this that created such an understanding and appreciation of freedom in my generation.

While basking in the sunlight of having recaptured the first American soil lost to the enemy in World War II, we began our training and outfitting for what was to become one of the most ferocious and deadly battles in the Pacific, the Battle of Okinawa. At the time of our training in the Philippines, we were not aware of what the target would be for our next operation. There was no specific training, only a continuation of the exercises which did not require a lot of support. All of the amphibious training was behind us. In retrospect, I now understand that most of our training focused on military courtesy and discipline. These are the ultimate requirements when leading troops into a battle which will result in the loss of many lives.

Aboard the troopship on the way to Okinawa, I do not recall the tension being as high and the anxiety as great as it was on the way to the Philippines. We were now seasoned combat soldiers who had a combat star to our credit. Little did we realize at the time that a combat star would be worth points to us in determining our spot in line in the rotation back to the states after the armistice was signed. One thing I do remember about that invasion was the large number of vessels involved in it. At sea, headed to the invasion, there were ships everywhere. It was difficult to distinguish between the troop transports and the supply transports, but recognizing the naval vessels was easy. I don't recall seeing any aircraft carriers or battleships since they would have been miles away providing strategic protection. There were occasional cruisers, but the most common naval vessels around us were the destroyers. They were darting in and out and around like ants at the family picnic. I recall watching hour after hour the signalmen on the

Mom with calves,Circa 1945

signal bridge communicating with other ships in the convoy. They were using the signal lights and the semaphore flags. I don't know for sure, but I suspect that was their primary means of communication between ships, since it was likely that radio silence was in effect.

The date of our invasion was Easter Sunday morning, April 1, 1945. As explained earlier in the amphibious invasion of the Philippines, after loading in the landing craft, the naval coxswains would organize their landing craft in circles that would rotate slowly in the proximity of the ship from which we had disembarked. For this invasion we were using the LCVP landing craft which would ground itself on the beach. Then a large steel bow door would hinge down, allowing the troops to disembark from the landing craft onto the beach. All this time, the coxswain was attempting to hold his craft perpendicular to the beach by the use of the twin propellers on the craft. I will always remember the skill of these coxswains in handling their craft. We landed on the beaches of Okinawa around 8:30 am on this Easter Sunday morning. There was no enemy resistance on the beach where we landed. Being a radio operator, I was privy to hearing about small to moderate resistance in other areas. It was nothing like we had been led to expect in landing on Japan's home territory for the first time. Many of us began to think this would be another invasion like the Philippines, but without the impediments of a jungle environment. Little did we realize that the Japanese were concentrating their troops along specific battle corridors for an all-out defense of the island.

Before going any further with these accounts of this battle, it is necessary to interject a few comments and additional information about Okinawa and its people, in order to put my following narrative in perspective. Some of this information is based on my own memory and some from sources that recorded this battle. Okinawa was the largest amphibious invasion of the Pacific campaign, and it was the last major campaign of the war in the Pacific. More ships were used, more troops put ashore, more supplies transported, more bombs dropped, and more naval guns fired against shore targets than any other operation in the Pacific. More people died during the Battle of Okinawa than all those killed during the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Casualties totaled more than 38,000 Americans wounded and 12,000 killed or missing. More than 107,000 Japanese and Okinawan conscripts were killed, and perhaps 100,000 Okinawan civilians perished in the battle. Okinawa was home to about 300,000 civilians. At the conclusion of hostilities, around 196,000 civilians remained. However, U.S. Army figures for the eighty-two day campaign showed a total of 142,058 civilian casualties, including those killed by artillery fire, air attacks, and those who were pressed into service by the Japanese army.

The topography of the island was rather hilly to the south, with low mountains to the north. These hills were composed of a material that was soft enough for the natives to have excavated many caves in them throughout the centuries. These caves were in essence tombs, where the bones of the deceased had been

placed in clay and ceramic pots. There were literally thousands and thousands of these family caves over the countryside. One of the factors that contributed to the ferocity of the Japanese defenses was that these caves became havens for their soldiers. They also became the favorite foxholes for the American soldiers. They certainly were not built for comfort, since they were all occupied with rats, lice, mites, etc., not to mention the bones of dead humans. But they sure provided protection against enemy fire.

Farming was rather common on the island, but the only farm product that I remember were the small bushes of tomatoes. The tomatoes were about the size of a marble. I recall many times harvesting as much as my helmet could hold and then eating them with salt which I had garnered by crushing the salt tablets which every soldier carried along with him. Consuming a fresh vegetable during the height of a combat operation was pure ecstasy. That was the first time I had ever seen those small tomatoes, but they are now common in our grocery stores. Perhaps their ancestors came from Okinawa.

On the first day of the invasion, the weather was beautiful, and we encountered meager resistance in our sector. By the time we stopped moving in the late afternoon and began to dig in, we had moved inland approximately one mile and were located on high ground that provided an excellent view of the harbor. At dusk that day, I witnessed what was probably the most spectacular sight during the war From where we were located, our view of the harbor, which contained more than a thousand ships, was fantastic. All of a sudden, tracer bullets began to appear in the sky from the ships on the perimeter. It didn't take too long before the sky was a brilliant red from the glow of the tracer bullets coming from a thousand ships. This fusillade of tracers in the sky lasted for several minutes. Realizing that tracers only represented a fraction of the total bullets fired, it was incomprehensible how any aircraft could have flown through that curtain of antiaircraft fire untouched. I don't know whether any were successful, nor did I know where the aircraft came from. I suspect they came from a field there on the island which was still operational, in spite of the tremendous shelling and bombing that it had sustained. The vision of that red night sky will remain in my memory forever.

The details of the preliminary military actions are hazy in my memory, but I do recall that our military forces moved in across the island, and we essentially separated the island into two military campaigns, one to the north and the other to the south. My division was involved in the campaign for the southern part of the island. It turned out that this was the most vicious and ferocious of the two campaigns. The area to the north was more mountainous and rugged. It was toward this direction that the U.S. Marine forces turned. The southern part of the island was where the majority of the population was centered and was also the location of the island capital. This was where the intense combat occurred, which became the identifying mark of the Battle of Okinawa. To place the campaign in its proper perspective, after the marines secured their area to the

north, they joined the army forces in the battle for the southern portion of the island.

A few days after our division had made the turn to the south, we received the unsettling news that President Roosevelt had died suddenly, while vacationing at Warm Springs, Georgia. This was on April 12, 1945. I received the news in a division mimeographed newsletter while in a foxhole. If the combat conditions were not too intense, those who brought up our supplies would also bring along mail and other items of interest. Division headquarters would publish a newsletter periodically that kept us informed of those events of particular interest to combat soldiers. The death of our commander in chief was certainly one of those events. None of us had ever heard of Harry Truman. Little did we realize at the time that he would be the one who would authorize the use of the atomic bomb, which allowed countless thousands of American soldiers to survive by avoiding the invasion of Japan. This autobiography is being written by one of those countless thousands of American soldiers who survived. I will never be able to understand the logic or rationale of those who criticized President Truman for that decision.

As we inched our way southward and the island narrowed, the intensity of the battle increased. Fatalities occurred on a daily basis. Added to these fatalities were the ever-present wounded. It was a recognized fact of warfare that a wounded soldier required much more resources in the way of men and equipment than a dead soldier. However, I can say without reservation that the United States Army during World War II had a strong commitment to the proper care and management of the bodies of the soldiers killed in action and proper accounting of their personal items. I will address more about this issue later in this narrative.

As we approached the narrow portion of the island known as the Naha-Yonaburu line, also called the Shuri line, the ferocity and intensity of combat increased. Someone recently asked me what I considered to be the most harrowing and excruciating event of the war for me. I paused for a few moments to collect my thoughts, but I immediately knew it was an experience that occurred during this period of the combat. It happened shortly after we had stopped advancing for the day and began digging in for the night. Most of us would start digging our foxholes immediately, but there were some who would take the opportunity of a lull to just relax for a few minutes and others would take this time to eat their evening rations. All of a sudden, mortar rounds started landing in our area. They were coming down like rain. The barrage lasted for several minutes and it is my perception that we sustained the most casualties in our company of any combat operation during the war. We had many fatalities and countless wounded.

My foxhole, in the general shape of a “Y” and accommodating three soldiers, sustained no physical injuries, but one of the occupants became so mentally distressed that we were forced to physically restrain him during the barrage. He

wanted to get out of the foxhole and run. This psychological affect occurred quite often with combat soldiers. I am sure there is an appropriate medical term for this, but we referred to it as “battle fatigue“. This soldier was evacuated as a medical casualty, and I never heard about him again. During this mortar barrage, one of my very best friends, from when I first joined the division in Oregon, was killed. I still remember his name. His last name was Augustine but his nickname was "Augie". He was considered the “old man” of our company. He was approximately thirty years old. That should give you some perspective of the age of the combat soldiers. Augie was a BAR (Browning automatic rifle) man and loved that rifle with a passion. It has always been my theory that he had chosen to clean and service his rifle before digging his foxhole and was caught on top when the mortar barrage began. I will always remember seeing Augie carried out on a stretcher with a gaping wound on his left side which allowed me to see his heart beating. I knew he had no chance for survival.

I am sure the Japanese chose this time and place for their mortar attack, since they knew that we would be concentrated in a relatively compact area and would also be in a state of disarray in preparing our defenses for the night. After the barrage, we anticipated a counterattack by their infantry soldiers, but that counterattack never came. I have often thought about that, and I have serious doubts about whether we could have withstood a charge by their foot soldiers. I suspect they were trying to inflict as much damage as possible to us without sustaining serious casualties of their own.

All of the U.S. forces were raising stubborn resistance on a daily basis. The following events may not be presented in their proper order. Nevertheless, they represented intense battles in which my company was engaged.

As we were moving forward on one occasion, we encountered heavy resistance from the enemy. This resulted in considerable casualties in my company.

As was the normal procedure, evacuation of the wounded was carried out, primarily by the “medics“. These medical teams consisted of corpsmen who administered the very first echelon of medical care and litter-bearers who would transport the wounded back to the aid stations. We always referred to all of them as medics. The call to them for help was usually done the old-fashioned way, by yelling out loud, “Medic! Medic! Medic!”. When you heard that call coming from several different spots, you knew you were in for a serious fight. Such was the case on this occasion. As the intensity of the battle subsided, the task of retrieving and caring for the wounded increased. As the enemy withdrew, there were always a few well-placed snipers to cover their withdrawal and prevent a counterattack by our troops. These snipers were always a hazard and threat to all those attempting to evacuate the wounded. It was during this battle that I received the Bronze Star for my actions. Since my memory of the events has been shaded by the many years that have elapsed since then, the language of the official citation is printed as follows:

Bronze Star Citation

"Sergeant Edward Stone, 34788469, Infantry, United. States Army. For heroic service in connection with military operations against the enemy in the vicinity of Maeda, Okinawa Island on 22, April l945. While the rifle company was advancing under heavy enemy fire from small arms and mortars one platoon was caught in a cross fire and was pinned down. Several casualties were inflicted, Sergeant Stone, hearing that all casualties were evacuated except one, volunteered to lead a. litter squad to try to evacuate the man even after an aid man had been killed in an earlier attempt, Smoke grenades were used but they did not give the necessary concealment. Thus with utter disregard for his own safety, Sergeant Stone crossed the sniper covered area and was able to evacuate the wounded man to a point where he could receive proper medical attention .His heroic and courageous action saved the life of his comrade and was an inspiration to his company."

This is an exact copy from the yellowed and tattered original citation issued by the commanding general of the 96th Division in their General Orders Number 950, dated 4 October, 1945. My first name Louis was omitted from the citation but my serial number was correct. In the "hurry up and get home" events that occurred at the end of the hostilities, I never received the medal. As was the case of most World War II veterans, we began our lives anew and put our wartime experiences behind us. Such was the case with me until I started recalling these events as a part of this autobiography. The one thing I remember about the conditions under which I received the Bronze Star was that the soldier I retrieved was a medic that had been wounded in the evacuation of our wounded. It occurred right at dusk and I never heard any follow-up on his condition. I never knew whether he lived or died.

Shortly thereafter, I had the occasion to administer my first injection of morphine. We were involved in an intense battle for the highest ground in the area. For us veterans of the 96th Division, it was known as the Battle of Conical Hill. It was probably the most intense fighting we encountered, and it was one of the bloodiest battles of the entire Okinawa campaign. We had been stymied for a few days in our efforts to take the high ground. I can remember the words of our regimental commander concerning the efforts to secure this ground. These words, addressed to the company commanders of our battalion, were as follows: "Gentlemen, you will secure that ridge. This is not a suggestion. This is not a plan. This is not a desire. This is a goddamned order!"

The fighting intensified and continued. As we were inching our way up the ridge, a sergeant from my old platoon was wounded near me with a shot in the leg. He was what we considered a "walking wounded", but he still needed assistance in this condition to be able to make it to the aid station, which was a few hundred

yards behind the front lines. I was to assist him while turning my radio over to a helper. We had only hobbled about fifty yards when we heard a muffled explosion. Turning around, we saw a soldier rolling down the side of the ridge. We recognized him as the platoon sergeant from the same platoon as that of the walking wounded sergeant. He told me to go back and offer assistance to that soldier, and he would continue on to the aid station on his own.

When I arrived back at the side of the fallen soldier, I recognized that he had stepped on a land mine. One foot had been completely blown off at the ankle and the other was mutilated across the instep. He was still conscious and very little blood was flowing from where the foot had been severed from the ankle. This lack of blood flow was due to the body being in a state of "shock". I often saw that condition, whereby a wounded soldier's body would have a difficult time accepting blood plasma being administered by medics. In combat, the traditional manner of doing this was by hanging the plasma bottle on a rifle stuck in the ground by its bayonet. I immediately knew that this was to be my first instance of giving a morphine shot. As I opened my first aid kit to extract the syringe, I recall being more nervous than my patient. I do not recall a moment when there was any sound from him indicating he was in intense pain. Reflecting on my memoirs of the war, I do not remember ever hearing anyone make a sound that would indicate they were in pain. Maybe my mind has erased that memory, but I would like to think of it as being indicative of the manhood of the young men of my generation. Shortly after the administration of the morphine, medics with a stretcher removed this wounded soldier. I never saw him again, but he wrote to our company on two or three different occasions reporting on his care and welfare. One thing, in one of those letters, that I will always remember was his statement, "I don't have anything to kick about, or with". His mutilated foot was also amputated at the ankle. I lost track of him after being discharged.

As an aside to this story, the regimental commander who had given the order to secure the ridge was fatally wounded during a visit to the front lines on that same ridge. Indicative of the intensity and ferocity of the Okinawa campaign is the fact that two other luminaries were killed during the battle. One was Ernie Pyle, the most celebrated war correspondent of World War II. The other was three-star Commanding General Simon Buckner of the Tenth Army, of which my 96th Division was a part and which was responsible for the invasion of Okinawa. General Buckner was killed just a few days before the island of Okinawa was secured. The huge bay, which after the war became the location of a large U.S. Navy installation, was named in his honor, Buckner Bay.

Another harrowing experience for me occurred just a few days later. We had moved forward during the day and, as was our custom, stopped our forward movement and dug in for the night. In many instances the battle line perimeters allowed certain foxhole teams to select caves that had been previously excavated from the sides of the hills. Such was the condition on this occasion for me and my foxhole buddies. They were the company commander, a runner, and

myself. As a radio operator, I was usually always with the company commander. The runner was also with us to carry verbal messages back and forth from the company commander to the platoon leaders. During that night activity had been sporadic, with only an occasional outburst of rifle fire, mortar rounds, and artillery in the distance. As was normal for night operations, our artillery batteries would fire harassing rounds in preselected areas ahead of our front lines. Additionally, they would also fire flares intermittently which would lighten up the area like daylight. This was done since the Japanese committed most of their offensive actions during the night.

At the break of day the next morning, the company commander stated that he was going to make a personal survey of the company's action during the night and would return shortly. The company runner and I remained in the cave, where we made some hot coffee by burning a small amount of the plastic explosive known as composition C. We had learned early in the Philippine operations that this explosive burned with a roaring flame and that a piece about the size of a marble was all that was needed to heat a canteen cup of instant coffee. All combat soldiers carried a lump of this explosive, along with their cigarettes, matches, and toilet tissue, in the web of their helmet liners. This, in many instances, would be the only dry spot on a soldier's body. Shortly we observed, at the foot of the hill where our cave was located, our company commander returning. Just before he arrived at the entrance to the cave, the runner said he would exit in order to go downhill and relieve himself. His exiting before the company commander arrived at the entrance to the cave would eliminate the congestion of two people at the cave entrance at the same time. He exited just as the company commander arrived.

Suddenly, there was the chatter of small arms fire, either a machine gun or a rifle, with one of the bullets striking the cave entrance. Immediately the company commander fell forward with his right arm landing in the mouth of the cave, and I could see the company runner rolling down the hill. The company commander gasped, “I'm okay; I'm hit in the arm”. I rolled him over and pulled him into the cave with me. I immediately noticed the glassy look in his eyes. He was dead. The bullet had gone through his right arm at an angle, but what the captain had not known was that it had entered his body on the left side, at heart level, and then exited on the right side just below his elbow where it hit his arm. He was dead almost instantly.

I then saw that the company runner at the foot of the small hill was already receiving attention. The company runner was named George Resetco from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. When he was evacuated, I had no idea of the extent of his injuries. I learned shortly that his gunshot injury was one of those true miracles of warfare. The bullet had entered his leg in the hip area. As it penetrated his body, it passed through the opening in the pelvic bone and exited his body without touching a bone, an artery, or any organ. He was back to active duty in our company in approximately one month. It is interesting to note that he

was one of the attendees at my division reunion, which I attended in Cincinnati in 1998. As with so many of the veterans of World War II, he entered college after the war. He became an accounting executive with Bethlehem Steel.

The death of my company commander, Captain Larsen, caused me the most grief of my wartime experiences. Not only was he my commander, but we had developed a significant personal rapport, due to being in each other's presence throughout the Philippine and Okinawa campaigns. Since he was about thirty-five years old, I suspect now that he had become a father-figure to me and that I looked to him for guidance, leadership and discipline, all of the qualities that we look for in fathers. Shortly after this incident, when I became the first sergeant for our company, I became privy to the information relating to the soldiers in my company. From that information, I wrote to his wife with my condolences. She was very interested in the circumstances surrounding his death, which I shared with her. We wrote letters back and forth a few times. I never sensed any bitterness in her letters, only pride in her husband's efforts and grief for his loss.

During this time, I was involved in other critical personal activities which I recall vividly. I don't remember the sequence of these events, other than that they occurred on Okinawa. They are as follows:

At nighttime, the usual makeup of a foxhole consisted of three soldiers. One soldier would be the lookout while the other two were sleeping. The order of sequence and the time on duty was up to the members in the foxhole. The normal time on duty was one hour, followed by two hours for sleeping. Lookouts began at dusk. On this particular occasion, our foxhole was in reality a cave at ground level. During the night there had been moderate small arms fire from our company area, indicating the probability that the enemy was infiltrating the area. Such incursions were not unusual, since all of the Japanese offensive actions were confined to night operations.

While being the lookout during the middle of the night, I observed what I thought might be a crawling body. I knew that nerves and imagination could play tricks on us when we were serving as lookouts. Even at that, I felt that I was seeing a human. To confirm my suspicions, I selected a point of reference and remained motionless, in order to determine if the object was moving. In a short time there was no doubt about it being an enemy soldier. I waited until he got close enough to me that I would be sure to hit my target. I fired a couple of shots, and it was all over. I limited the number of shots I fired so as not to give away my position in the event he had other comrades in the area. At daylight, the body lay where I had hit it. As I recall, there were other enemy bodies scattered throughout our company area.

As we made our advances along the main Japanese defense line, the Shuri line, we learned the hard way that, as we moved forward, it was necessary to search and secure every cave and tunnel we passed. We dug in one evening where we

had not been so meticulous. During the night, the Japanese soldiers came out of these caves and tunnels which we had bypassed and wreaked havoc within our lines. As a result they had annihilated some of our soldiers in their foxholes and had taken them over. It was now necessary for us to ferret them out and take back our foxholes. I remember clearly working with some members of our weapons platoon who were Mexicans from Texas. This platoon was almost exclusively Mexicans, but they had been recruited for this activity in order to provide as many groups as possible to clear the area of enemy soldiers. I was thoroughly impressed with their stalking skills. In carrying out our assignment, it was necessary that we move about as quietly as possible. I can still picture them tiptoeing around. They reminded me of cats stalking a bird. Watching them, I became convinced that they were excellent soldiers.

Once, while approaching an area where we felt convinced an enemy was located, we heard a ”tap, tap, pop” sound, followed by a muffled explosion. We immediately knew that the sound we heard was a hand grenade, and we hit the ground. When we heard the muffled explosion, we were relieved. A Japanese soldier nearby, knowing that his death was imminent, had committed “hari kari” (suicide) by activating his grenade and then rolling over on it. One of the characteristics of the Okinawa campaign was that neither side took prisoners. The need for intelligence data from captured soldiers became so acute for the American forces that headquarters offered a reward for prisoners. I do not think that provided much incentive, because the combat soldiers felt that taking a prisoner exposed them to conditions with which they did not want to deal. Postwar data indicated how many Japanese soldiers had committed hari kari during the Battle of Okinawa.

On another occasion, while moving forward through the Japanese defense line, I was part of a group securing a large tunnel and cave which we had passed. It was large and had evidently been an operations headquarters as part of the Japanese defenses. In clearing out the tunnels, we always preceded our advances in them with concussion and phosphorus grenades. Armed with a 45 Colt automatic pistol for close encounters, I cautiously moved around a bend in the tunnel. Instantly I saw a body lying on a ledge, and he began to roll over, facing me. Obviously our grenades had not been one hundred percent effective, but I sensed this soldier was stunned. Otherwise he would have rolled over faster and probably shot me with a handgun. The reverse, however, happened and I hit him two or three times with bullets from my 45 revolver. The impact knocked the body off the ledge onto the tunnel floor. I had witnessed firsthand the tremendous impact of a 45 caliber slug.

It is worth noting here that the 45 caliber pistol was developed for the army as a result of the Spanish-American War in the Philippines. Up to that time, the standard sidearm for the military was a 38 caliber revolver. In the fighting in the Philippines, the U.S. soldiers sustained considerable injuries from enemy participants who were able to kill or wound them, even after they had been struck

several times with bullets from the 38 caliber pistols. The military recognized that they needed a sidearm with more impact, thus the development of the 45 caliber pistol.

Around the time of this event, we learned that the Germans had surrendered to the Allied forces in Europe. We received this news with mixed emotions. On the one hand, we were relieved to know that millions of our fellow soldiers were no longer faced with battle and that possibly we would see some relief or help in what we knew would be the ultimate invasion of Japan. On the other hand, we knew that we were facing a dedicated and entrenched enemy, who would never surrender.

Even though hearing that the Germans had surrendered was a slight sparkle of light at the end of the tunnel, we never lost sight of the fact that we were in the army for the duration of the war. That was probably the most frustrating aspect of all for us soldiers. We knew that we would only go back home under one of three circumstances: (1) in a body bag, (2) severely wounded, or (3) the enemy's total capitulation. As combat soldiers, we had certain classifications for the wounds we received. The first was a $1,000 wound. It was rather superficial and would only take you away from combat for a short time, after which you would have to return. The ultimate was the $1,000,000 wound. It was one that would get you back to the states, but not leave you severely crippled. Additionally, it would preclude you from returning to combat. Almost any wound that fractured a bone or involved a major organ fell into this category. The ideal injury was a fracture of one of your limbs that didn't necessitate amputation. In fact, there were instances of SIW's (self inflicted wounds) that fell into this category. Occasionally one of these would happen in a rest area, and the injured soldier would claim it was an accident that occurred while cleaning his weapon. If there was any chance of proving any of these SIWs were done for the purpose of avoiding combat, the soldier would be court-martialled.

One of the major weapons utilized by the American military forces on Okinawa was the flame thrower. These flame throwers came in two sizes. The smallest and most common was one that fit on a soldier's back, similar to a large sprayer used for dispensing insecticides. Their range was limited to a distance of around fifteen feet. The largest and most formidable size were tanks which dispensed the napalm through a long barrel protruding from the turret of the tank. This barrel looked a lot like the 75 mm guns that tanks of that era contained. Flame throwers became indispensable in ferreting out the Japanese enemy from the caves and tunnels which had formed their main defense line. I never saw the heavy fire bombings or the results of the atomic bombs, but to me the most awesome weapons we utilized in the Pacific were the flame throwers. These, in concert with hand grenades, including concussion, phosphorus and fragment, were the primary implements used in finally forcing the Japanese to capitulate on Okinawa.

The island was finally declared secure around the middle of June of 1945, after two and a half months of the fiercest and most ferocious fighting of the war in the Pacific.

The loss of the first sergeant whom I replaced was not due to battlefield injuries, but due to his incompetence in the handling and disposal of the personal effects of killed and wounded soldiers. The army was very concerned about this issue and had specific and detailed instructions on how they were to be handled. When next of kin began to complain about the receipt of personal items from the killed and wounded of our company, an internal investigation concluded that it was due to the lack of following procedures and protocol by the first sergeant. While in a rest area behind the front lines, I was called in to the new company commander's tent. After asking me a few questions about the administration of the company, he told me that I would be the new acting first sergeant and that I was to form the company for retreat. Retreat is the traditional formation conducted by the military which signifies the end of the normal workday. It is that military ritual when the flags are lowered and cannon shots are often sounded. Even though we were in a rest area, our day began with reveille and ended with retreat. Even though we were in combat, we were still in the army. We were never allowed to forget that.

When I was informed of my new status, I was overwhelmed. Of particular significance was the fact that I was jumped up three grades in the noncommissioned hierarchy to become first sergeant. I estimate that my promotion caused me to leap over about twenty other sergeants in my company. When I stood in front of the company that afternoon and called it to order for the retreat formation, the members were as much in awe as I had been when the company commander informed me. At that retreat, the company commander announced that I was the new first sergeant and that anyone who had any questions about the decision should contact him and not me. He further indicated that he would back me to the limits of his command authority. Privately, he told me that as far as the company was concerned, I could do no wrong, but I would have to answer to him for all mistakes and shortcomings. I do not recall the two of us ever having any cross words.

Shortly thereafter, my promotion was disapproved by the regimental commander, with the explanation that I was too young. My company commander told me not to be concerned, that he would solve the problem. Within a month my promotion was approved, even though I had been in an acting status up to that time. As an indication of the rapport that developed between me and the company commander, one afternoon after retreat he invited me into his tent. He then retrieved a flask of whiskey and we each had a drink. He told me that the flask had been sent to him by his sister, concealed in a baked cake. The baked goods I got from my mother never contained such goodies.

I quickly learned that the primary duties of a first sergeant were more administrative than troop leadership. In combat, his primary responsibility was the proper disposal of the personal effects of the killed and wounded and making sure that letters from the company commander were sent to the next of kin in these situations. These letters provided little detail into the actual circumstances of the deceased soldier's demise. They only provided the date and general location of where the incident occurred. There was “boilerplate” language included in all of them. In many instances, the next of kin would write back requesting more details. In these instances, as well as the original notification, the first sergeant prepared the letters for transmittal.

Probably the most important daily function of the first sergeant was the preparation of what was known as the “morning report“. It was the official document of the company that described the status of the approximately two hundred soldiers that were assigned to it. Transfers in and transfers out had to be documented with written orders. The preparation of the report itself had to be flawless. Flawless meant no erasures or strikeovers of any kind. I can remember sweating for hours over a detailed report, and then making a mistake on the last line. The report was made in triplicate by the use of carbon copies. While in combat, indelible pencils were allowed, but when in a rest area, typing was required. This was before the days of word processors and ballpoint pens. Those were the times that tried men's souls.

At the division reunion in Cincinnati in 1998, which I mentioned earlier, one of the soldiers of my company, being a native of and living in Cincinnati, hosted a cocktail party for the members of our company prior to the general meeting. It provided us an opportunity to reminisce and even to relive some of our experiences. I recall making the comment that I was only one of thirteen original members of our company that had gone through both combat operations without being killed or wounded. One of the fellow attendees corrected me. He said that he had kept a record, and I was only one of eight who had done this.

I have often commented that my only battle wounds were some deep cuts on my right hand from opening a C-ration can. Since I went to an aid station for this wound, the attending medic offered to submit my name for a Purple Heart. Knowing that I had not received this injury due to enemy action, I of course declined the opportunity. Little did I realize at the time that I would be giving up points that would be utilized at the conclusion of hostilities to determine our rotation order back to the United States.

When the Okinawa campaign was over, we knew that we would be moving to another area, probably the Philippines, to prepare for the invasion of Japan. The time interval between the end of the Okinawa campaign and our departure to the Philippines is rather vague. I just remember that, during this time, I was extremely busy executing my duties as the first sergeant. My days were filled with preparing next of kin letters, seeing that the disposal of personal effects was

proper, preparing daily morning reports, preparing duty assignments such as guard duty and others, as well as being the mother hen for a group of two hundred men. I had little time for personal relaxation or recreation.

During that time frame, one of the most popular outlets was the softball competition. Even though I had been a catcher on our team at home and we had won a championship, the demands of my job were such that I was unable to play with our team regularly, but I always attended the games when I could. Another form of relaxation was the first-run movies that were shown regularly at a central point after dark. On occasions, there would be top grade live entertainment sponsored by the USO. That organization, the USO, was worldwide, and the military participants will forever be grateful for the service they rendered during World War II. It and the Red Cross were the two most visible volunteer organizations during the war.

After waiting on Okinawa for probably about six weeks, the division boarded troop transports for relocation and staging to the Philippines. Our destination was Mindora, not to be confused with Mindinowa. The Philippines are made up of numerous islands, with Luzon, the home of Manila, being the largest. One of the aspects of troops being aboard a ship for many days at a time is the necessity of them staying in top physical condition. To this end, we would gather for exercises at least twice a day. Most of them were in-place exercises but, nevertheless, they maintained our aerobic systems in top shape. This was accomplished throughout my many travels in the Pacific aboard ship, not just this relocation to Mindora. Although it had not been officially announced, all of us knew that we were headed to Mindora to stage for the invasion of Japan. Previously secret information released after the war indicated that this invasion was to take place in November, approximately three months after our departure from Okinawa.

I can remember well the exact place, while at sea on this relocation, where I learned of the atomic bomb being dropped on Hiroshima. I was in a lunch line heading to the serving area where food was dispensed, cafeteria style. Just before entering the serving area, there was a bulletin board where current news events were posted. This was the manner in which the troops aboard the ship were informed of current events. I realized that there must be a newsworthy item on the board, since a crowd had gathered around it and the line had stopped moving. It would move forward in bunches as the crowd completed reading the news story and then moved out for the next bunch of readers. The story indicated that the bomb blast was the most powerful force that had ever been released by mankind. As I recall, there were few details regarding its impact and effects, as well as little reaction from the troops who were reading it. The general thought was that maybe now the Japanese would recognize the might of the United States, but I don't recall any of us thinking that the Japanese would surrender and the inevitable invasion of Japan would not take place.

Three days later, under the same circumstances, I learned of the bombing of Nagasaki. All of us then realized that the capitulation of Japan was imminent. Shortly after the bombing of Nagasaki, the Japanese unconditionally accepted the conditions of the Potsdam Conference. The armistice ending the conflict was signed aboard the U.S.S. Missouri in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945. The war was over! However, it would still be a long four months before I was to return home and be honorably discharged from the U.S. Army.

We set up camp on Mindora where we had planned to stage and train for the invasion of Japan, but now all of our activities were focused on efforts to prepare us soldiers for our return to civilian life. The army had spent much effort and time training us how to kill, without any regard for our social skills. An effort was now being made to refresh those skills among us. Almost immediately, a written order came from the high command demanding the elimination of profanity from our casual speech. Profane language had become normal with combat soldiers. One of the most vicious and biting verbal reprimands I ever received came about as a result of that order, even though I was not guilty of using profanity myself. While walking through the company area, the company commander overheard some soldiers in a tent using profanity. He went directly to the tent serving as my orderly room and began chastising me unmercifully. The basis of his reprimand was that soldiers under my leadership were using profanity. Such was the manner of the chain of command in the military.

In addition to the order prohibiting profanity, we attended classes in regaining other social skills. These included such things as the manner in which we addressed seniors, ladies, and other members of society. They also included the proper etiquette for many occasions, including the wearing of proper attire. Can you imagine the soldiers returning from Vietnam, Bosnia, Iraq, etc. receiving such instructions today? But such was the culture of the United States in 1945.

Along with the disposal and handling of all of the material elements of warfare, the military was faced with the task of establishing a fair criteria for prioritizing the return home of its millions of soldiers. A basis for this had been developed for the soldiers in the European theater of operations at the conclusion of the war with Germany. The return of the soldiers from the Pacific created a slightly more complex problem, due to the fact that they were so scattered and the distance was much greater. The basic program for establishing the priority was a point system. Those with the highest points would be the earliest to return and then down the line. Each shoulder's points were calculated on the basis of time in service, time overseas, number of combat operations, number of medals received, and possibly other criteria which I do not remember.

As with any system having so many participants and so many variables, there would be anomalies. Probably the one that was the most irritating to soldiers like me, who had never been evacuated to rear echelon areas due to wounds, was the awarding of points for being a patient in a hospital that was still considered a

combat theater. Even though combat had ceased in these areas, an official end to hostilities had not been declared, and therefore they remained combat zones. There were examples of some of our wounded soldiers, who had returned to duty, passing through as many as three of these "combat zone" medical areas and receiving priority points for each one that hastened their return home. In contrast, those of us who had not missed a day of duty were delayed.

Finally, four months after the armistice had been signed, the point level for my return home had been reached. It was Christmas Day of 1945. What a Christmas present! Prior to embarkation, we were segregated into groups according to the military installation where we would be discharged. My group would be headed for Camp Blanding, the same camp were I had been inducted. It was located in north Florida between Jacksonville and Palatka. In the segregation process, the ranking member of the group was designated the group commander. With no officers in our group, I held the highest rank and was therefore designated group commander.

When we boarded ship for our return, I learned that I was the only noncommissioned officer in charge of a group. This created some confusion among both the navy crew and the other group commanders. The group commanders were given a special location that provided them with certain privileges not offered to the rank and file. The problem was that all of them were officers except me. Maintaining military dignity and protocol would not allow an enlisted man (me) to bunk and live in an area with officers. Wow, what an interesting dilemma. It was finally resolved when I was assigned a berth with the “chiefs” of the ship. That would give me a bunk and living quarters with my peers, since my first sergeant rating and a chief rating are equivalent.

For those who are not knowledgeable about the inner workings of the U.S. Navy, the chiefs are the ones who make things happen and see that they are done. As the Br'er Rabbit story goes, I had been thrown into the briar patch. Not only were their facilities superior to those of the group commanders, our privileges were second to none. There was no rationing of fresh water for our showers and our mess facilities were separate and private. It was almost like being on a cruise ship heading home! I did have one problem, however, that of rounding up soldiers from my group who had been assigned KP. I would post their names, but half of them would not show up, and it was impossible for me to locate them, since they were all strangers to me and none of their peers would admit knowing them. Of the approximately one hundred fifty soldiers in our group, about two thirds were black. Even though the service was not integrated at that time, most of the blacks had been serving in support functions, primarily as quartermasters.

A classic event occurred on the trip home. When crossing the International Date Line, one will either lose a day or gain a day, depending upon the direction in which one is traveling. Westbound travelers lose a day, and eastbound travelers gain a day. It was our fortunate experience to cross the International Date Line

on December 31st, the day of New Year's Eve. This meant that we had two New Year's Eve celebrations. Being berthed with the chiefs, they broke out clandestine bottles of alcohol. You can imagine the frivolity among us with the war being over, heading home, and celebrating the New Year. We did this not only once, but again the second night. Those were New Year's Eve parties which I will never forget.

Until just a few days before our arrival, our port of entry was unknown. With the tremendous amount of returning troops, the infrastructure for handling them was at a premium. The only thing we knew was that we would probably berth at a port on the California coast. A few days before we landed, it was announced that we would land in the Los Angeles area. We had left from San Francisco passing under the Golden Gate Bridge and were now returning to the movie capital of the world.

The details of the arrival and subsequent cross-country trip are hazy in my memory, but one thing that stands out is the gracious welcome we received by young ladies from the Red Cross as we disembarked from the ship. They greeted us with little welcome packages and had stations set up along the pier, where they served coffee, doughnuts, and other confection items. These were instantly devoured, since sweets were very sparse in our overseas rations.

The procedures for our separation and discharge at Camp Blanding seemed to me, at the time, to be excessive. In retrospect, however, I now understand that most of them were done for our future benefit. The benefits afforded to veterans of World War II would require various forms of documentation, and this was being done as a part of our separation and discharge. I was at Camp Blanding for approximately three days, so near and yet so far from home. My final act while there was to arrange for my transportation back to Orlando. My original plans were to take a bus, but on my last day I met a soldier from Orlando whose parents were coming to Blanding to pick him up. He offered me a ride, contingent upon approval by his parents when they arrived. That approval was granted, and we departed Camp Blanding in late afternoon.

If I recall correctly, it was my dad and my brother Ken who picked me up at the bus station. Mother, my other brother Jimmy, and my soon-to-be wife Helen had gone to a movie earlier, in order to help pass the time while they awaited my arrival, which was earlier than all of us expected. I vividly remember the ecstatic feeling of being home and seeing the ones I loved so dearly. I also recall two other special feelings of that evening. The first was how small the house and rooms felt to me. I experienced a strong feeling of claustrophobia, but I overcame it shortly. The other was the awkward feeling when I took out a cigarette and lit it in the presence of my parents. That was the first time they had ever seen me smoke. I was no longer in my youth. I was an adult. And I was HOME at last!