

War Era Story Project 2012

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Current home town: Beachwood, Ohio

Age: 95

I served from Feb. 4, 1941 until July 15, 1945. Until I made rotation in November of 1944 I was with Ohio's 37th Infantry Division. I was stationed in Fiji, the New Hebrides Islands and Bougainville for 30 months. I am now 95 years old and pleased to report that I feel well.

After the combat ended on Guadalcanal, and in the central Solomon Islands, at the end of 1943, I rejoined the 37th Infantry Division on Guadalcanal, which was to follow a Marine invasion at Empress Augusta Bay on Bougainville, Northern Solomons. Because the area was a vast swamp, the Japanese only had about 1,250 men stationed there, assuming that the Americans would not land there. A week after the Marines landed, there were only about 250 of them left. The island has a mountain of six or seven thousand feet height separating it, and the Japanese had about 20,000 men on the other side of the mountain.

The day I remember so well we boarded ships on Guadalcanal by climbing up rope ladders with a full pack and a rifle. I was struggling about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up when the man above me fell on my backpack and took me with down him. The wind was knocked out of me but I was not injured.

I was a cook, so when the ship got to Empress Augusta Bay I stayed on the ship until it was loaded. There were a few Japanese planes flying around while we were unloading. Then it was down the rope ladder into a small boat that took us to shore. When we got to the beach, someone pointed and said rejoin your company 1,600 yards up ahead. It was swamp almost from the start and we trudged through mud half-way up to our knees, each step worse than the last one. When we thought we were there, we still had more than 500 yards to go. When we thought we were there again, we had about 200 more yards to go.

At that point, it was time to dig a foxhole in the mud. The foxhole started to collect water at less than one foot, so I stopped digging. It was nightfall so, fully clothed, we just went to sleep. In my dream, I met the only Jap I encountered during the war. He was standing over me with his rifle pointed at me when I awoke.

We probably moved inland about a mile a day for a week, digging new foxholes each time. At this point we set up our kitchen and served some hot meals. I was almost exhausted and decided to dig myself a foxhole deep enough to sling a hammock in to get some decent sleep. Two of my crew said they had enough of digging foxholes so I found a good spot to dig one and started digging right after lunch. Hammocks, one of the army's best equipment, were truly great. The hammocks had a plastic roof and mosquito netting with a zipper so that soldiers would have a minimum likelihood of getting malaria or dengue fever.

The roof had to be taught so that the water could roll off when it rained, which ordinarily was no problem. But at about three o'clock, Art had second thoughts and I invited him to join me; we could dig a foxhole for two by dark, but he would not have been able to complete his own by dark, so he joined me. At about an hour before dark, Tony had second thoughts. He was a very good friend so we invited him to join us, planning to expand the hole the next day. We remained in that location for a week or more and never expanded the hole. The three hammocks being so close to each other, we were not able to pitch the roofs for the water to roll off.

One night we got a torrential rain and the roof started to collect water. I lay on my back until the weight of the water on my belly made me very uncomfortable. I then rolled onto my side and it was OK for an hour or so until the weight of the water was more than my belly liked. At some point, Jap or no Jap, I was going to get rid of that water. Our own men might have taken a shot at me but enough was enough. I got out and scooped 14 helmets full of water off of the roof. A helmet holds close to a gallon of water. That totals 100 pounds or more.

On Thanksgiving of 1943, the army made sure that as many as possible would have turkey. We had no facilities for roasting turkeys, so we wound up making turkey a la king. I guess it was better than C rations. We had Thermos-type carriers with three separate servings in each and I carried two Thermoses to the front line. The supply sergeant and the artificer shared a foxhole and during the previous night, hearing sounds that might be Japs, each one shot a hole in the netting of the other.

Not long after, I was part of a group to carry ammo to some of the men in our company who were tied down by the Japs. Due to a lieutenant, who was going to show the Japs how great Americans are, he and two men in our company were killed.

Bulldozers enabled us to establish a fighter landing strip in about three weeks, and a month later, a field for bombers.

The real fighting took place about four months later when the starving Japs on the other side of the mountain climbed the mountain with artillery (a superhuman task) and attacked us. A few broke through our lines but they were repulsed. More than 5,000 Japs were killed in a front normally occupied by a company of 200 our men.

Below are two letters written by Maurice A. Silverman, then 21 years old, the second letter one month before he was wounded in the Battle of the Bulge. He was one of six brothers who served in the Army or Navy during the war. At 17, he was concerned that the war would be over before he got a chance to serve. He Died in 2004 at the age of 81. These letters are included in WAR LETTERS WWII, by Sanford S. Silverman, available to ebook readers at Amazon.

Holland
October 18, 1944

Dear Folks,

I'm living off of the fat of the land. Today for dinner I had two big hunks of good ham and some fried potato chips I made myself. The ham I gave a pack of cigarettes for, and the potatoes we dug out of the Dutch soil. Then I ate a big dish of macaroni and meatballs at the company kitchen. We eat at the kitchen all the hot meals we can, and I tell you the food is really good and quite a difference from C or K rations, though I like K rations because of the candy bars or caramels that are in them.

We get four packs of cigarettes a week with Nestle or Hershey bars, sometimes four bars a week or less. It doesn't cost us anything. In fact, the only money I spent in Europe – France, Belgium or Holland – was the two Zilerbon for six glasses of Dutch beer. I was with two other boys, so that that made two glasses apiece. I still don't smoke, so I use cigarettes for bartering purposes only. But I do indulge in a glass of beer when available, which hasn't been often.

Maybe you are wondering where I got this variety of money. I can tell you it wasn't easy. In fact, the German I got it from won't be interested in money for quite a spell. In fact all he wanted when I left him was a doctor. I also got a Belgian 38 cal. pistol, which doesn't work.

I can tell you now that I'm in the 7th Armored Division. We were bivouacked next to a beehive one day and the boys raided that and we had some swell honey. We got to take a shower in a factory bathhouse, and I mean to tell you it was as modern as anything you could hope for: tiled floors and private shower rooms. It was grand.

It hasn't been too cold yet and I hope it doesn't get too cold in the months to come. As far as the war being over, it might be back in the states, but it's just begun for me October 1, and I give it a good three months to go.

Chocolate candy could buy anything in Europe, cigarettes and soap running it a close second. The candy I get I wouldn't trade for the whole European continent.

Love to all,
Moish

Somewhere in Holland
November 24, 1944

Dear Folks,

Well I've just recovered from my turkey dinner so I thought I might write you a letter and tell you how much I enjoyed it. It was good; sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce and canned corn, two packs of Camel cigarettes, hard candy, celery and apples.

I have been enjoying a wonderful rest period, sleeping in hay lofts and having nice houses to write letters in. One of them has hot water and we kibbitz with the folks that live in them. These

Dutch people have been very nice to us. It's a shame, though, that we don't understand their language nor they ours. But language barrier be damned, we still get along swell and have a grand time with sign language.

I witnessed yesterday what you wouldn't believe if you hadn't seen it yourself. A German shell killed one of these people's cows and the town butcher informed the people that meat would be for sale under the town rules. They weighed the meat and the ration was 1 kg (2.2 lbs.) for a family, if you had an extra-large family you might get a kilo and a half or two. The butcher showed no favorites and there were no complaints. They all seemed happy to get any meat at all. That was rationing plus.

This is Saturday night Dutch style, which means you stay at home, blackout your windows and write letters, play cards, etc.

With love,
Moish