

## War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: Not given

### World War II and Me

I was inducted on February 25, 1943, and began active service on March 4, 1943. I volunteered at the local draft board in Whitehouse. I was then sent to Camp Perry, Ohio, for about three days. During this time, we were given physical exams, shots, and issued new G.I. clothing. We then were shipped by train to Camp Wolters, Texas, for basic training. Here we were taught all about the art of shooting, cleaning and upkeep of rifles and pistols, and taking care of other equipment.

We had to do a lot of close order drill and marching. Our biggest march was fifteen miles with full field packs. We could only have one canteen of water for the whole march. Then there were all different kinds of obstacle courses we had to run. Along with this, there were bayonet training and hand grenade throwing practice. These were usually dummy grenades. Also, we had to crawl on our bellies for several yards while they fired machine guns over us. You learned to keep your head down or else.

After learning all about the Garand M-1 rifle and being able to take it apart and clean it, we were taught how to load it with an eight-round clip of ammo. Then they finally decided we were ready to go to the rifle range. The rifle range had a long area where each G.I. lined up side by side and faced a similar area 200 yards to the front of them. This is where the targets were. This was higher so that the targets could be raised and lowered by a G.I. standing in this trench. The targets were about 4 feet square with a bull's eye painted on.

Back at the firing line, the officers in charge would give the command, "With ball ammunition, lock and load." Then the next command was: "Ready on the right? Ready on the left? Fire at will." After everyone fired a round, the guys in the target trenches would pull down the targets and put a red marker over the bullet hole. The targets would then be raised back up and you could see where you had shot. If you missed the target completely, the target guys would wave a big red flag called "Maggie's Drawers" and everybody would snicker at you.

Camp Wolters was near a small town called Mineral Wells, which at one time had natural springs that were supposed to be healing. I often wondered what happened to this camp after the war and later heard it had been turned into a helicopter training post.

After our basic training was over, we were sent by train up to a replacement depot in Shenango, Pennsylvania. These were called "Repple Depples" and were holding areas for G.I.s to be sent overseas as replacements for other G.I.s killed in action. We were only there for a few days when we were again loaded on trains and started west. Before I left from there, my Mom and Dad drove out one weekend to see me. This was the last I saw of them until November 28, 1945.

The train ride across the U.S. was very interesting. There was lots of wonderful scenery that I had never seen before. The train took what is called the Great Northern Route. It took at least four days. Once in a while, the train would stop at some small town and people would bring goodies for us. We would also do some calisthenics if they allowed us to get off. We had some kitchen cars scattered throughout the train and at meal times we would file through and get our meals.

Our destination on this trip was Fort Lawton, Washington. This was a demarkation depot for overseas. We were only here for a few days. One day, some of us guys took a quick dip in Puget Sound – very cold!

We then boarded a troop ship and sailed north of the Pacific Ocean. We learned after we set sail that we were going to the Aleutian Islands. We were going to be replacements for men of the Seventh Infantry Division that were killed in action. We landed at Adak Island. The Seventh Division had been brought over to this island after the battle on Attu Island.

As soon as our boat docked, we were unloading onto the dock, when I saw Bernard Lanker standing there. He and his wife Beryl were very good friends of my parents. In fact, I was named after him. He was a lieutenant commander in the Navy. I walked up to him and said, “Hi, Bernard”, and never even saluted. The Navy guys standing around there were quite shocked about my un-military greeting. On account of censorship, I was not allowed to write and tell my parents where I was. So Bernard Lanker took care of that.

Back to the troop ship, it was a Javanese ship with some U.S. Navy officers on board. One of them was David Niven, the actor. Also we were warned every night by the Javanese captain to “sleep with your clothes on.” We arrived at the Aleutian Islands August 4, 1943. I forget how long we stayed on the island of Adak. The Aleutian Islands are damp and miserable with no trees. There is a ground cover called tundra.

The Seventh Division was slated to attack the island of Kiska next. As all of us replacements didn’t have any combat experience, some men from the other outfits volunteered to go in our place. When they landed on Kiska, they found that the Japs had evacuated it.

We finally loaded onto troopships again and set sail for Hawaii. We arrived in Honolulu sometime in September, 1943, and started training for our next invasion. We had lots of maneuvers and practice beach landings. We also had to do a lot of close order drill and marching. Although this didn’t train us much for combat, it kept us busy. We had a nice camp about twenty miles outside of Honolulu. It had once been a detaining camp with a lot of small huts instead of the usual big barrack buildings. When we got passes to go on leave, we would usually catch a ride on a truck or some Army vehicle going to Honolulu. Then we would bum around town and goof off in general.

President Roosevelt came over to the Islands and a lot of troops were in a big parade and had to pass in review for him. Our division was in on the parade also. I was on K.P. duty that day and didn’t have to go. All the troops in the parade had their rifles inspected beforehand to make sure no one had any bullets in their guns.

The Army at one time decided that everybody should know how to swim. So once or twice a week they would haul a bunch of us down to Schofield Barracks, where they had a pool. For quite a while, we would get off the trucks and sneak away and go to the big P.X. on the base. After some time, they made a ruling that you had to pass a swimming test before you got a pass to go on leave. So I went and passed the test, because I already knew how to swim.

By this time, I already had four close friends. They were: Red Franklin from North Carolina, Chester Grey from Pennsylvania, Eddie Brennan from Brooklyn, NY, and Guy Runco from Pennsylvania.

After we had been on Hawaii for a few months we again got on a troopship. We set sail for the Kwajalein Atoll. On the way, we stopped at the Marshall Islands and got off the ship. They unloaded lots and lots of cases of beer to give us troops a beer break. My buddy Eddie from Brooklyn thought he was a hot shot at shooting dice. We were issued four bottles of beer apiece and Eddie thought we should sell our beers for a dollar a bottle. He then took the eight dollars and got in a crap game and lost it all.

We landed on a small island that I think was called Carlson. It was only about two miles long. The Navy had blasted it so well that there were not many live Japs. There were a lot of dead and parts of Japs though. This action at Kwajalein was small and didn't last very long. After the battle, we sailed back to Hawaii and had more training and maneuvers. By now I was carrying a walkie-talkie radio and had to stay close to our platoon leader so he could communicate with other units.

We then boarded ships once again and headed for the island of Leyte in the Philippines. We arrived at Leyte Island on October 20, 1944. I don't remember what time of day that we got off the transport ship that day. We had to climb over the side on the rope landing nets and then drop in to the landing barges. Leyte Island was very hot and humid with lots of tall grass growing everywhere; also wet and marshy.

One day as we were advancing, we came across a cemetery. One of the guys noticed a headstone off to our right. At that moment the stone fell over backwards and four Japs jumped out and started shooting at us. That's when Chester Grey was killed, along with Lt. Treppoli and another G.I.

The battle and mop up operation were finally over in February, 1945. After we had some R-and-R we were getting ready to land on Okinawa. We landed on Okinawa on April 1, 1945. The Navy ships blasted the island with tons of big shells and rockets. We used Amtrac's for the landing; These were like tanks only they were made open on top for troops to ride in. Also, they could move in water as well as land. They were carried to the holds of L.S.T.s (Landing Ship Tanks). The sea was rough that morning and everybody was half sick. When we landed on shore, we were pleasantly surprised at the lack of resistance. The climate was much better on Okinawa than in the Philipines. We were much farther north.

After the battle on Leyte, I joined company headquarters as a radio operator. The radio I now carried was a Signal Corp Radio, called S.C.R. 300. It was carried on your back like a backpack and weighed 40 pounds. I followed the company commander so he could keep in touch with other units. After carrying this thing for a few days, I exchanged my M-1 rifle for a carbine, which was lighter and easier to handle.

We had more enemy artillery on this operation than before – very scary. One day, as we were getting shelled, a G.I. in a Jeep came up by us and jumped out and got behind a big rock. The Jeep sat about a hundred feet from us when a Jap shell hit underneath it, and blew it up in the air about thirty or forty feet. When it came down, it was bent completely in two with the rear tires resting against the front tires. An S.C.R. 300 radio in the Jeep flew about twice as high as the Jeep.

The Japs on Okinawa were sometimes hiding in caves. Bombing and shelling couldn't get at them. This is where the flamethrowers worked very well. They were carried like a backpack on a soldier's back. These worked very well when the Japs ran back in the caves. Some of our tanks were equipped with flamethrowers and could blast a stream of fire a long way.

During all the campaigns, our company had about twelve men killed by friendly fire. Some of this was caused by short artillery rounds from our own artillery. One man in our platoon dug his foxhole one evening about dusk and laid down to take a break and fell asleep. Two other G.I.s were walking by at that time and startled the first man, who woke up and grabbed his rifle and killed both G.I.s with one shot. Another time, a G.I. had dug a foxhole about two feet deep, and was disgusted about something, and slammed his BAR rifle down butt-first in the hole. The rifle started firing and killed him.

One night as we were in our foxholes, some Japs came up within forty or fifty feet and started firing rifle grenades. They were coming down very close to me, and I got hit with a small fragment in my shoulder. I then ran down a ways to an empty hole and stayed there the rest of the night. When I came back to my original foxhole in the morning, I found a hole about the size of a pumpkin where my head would have been.

As the operation wound down, we were taken by truck to another area several miles away. For safety's sake, I took the round out of my carbine while going to the new area. That night, I noticed some movement in front of my foxhole. A Jap soldier was walking toward me. I tried to fire my carbine but all I got was a "click". Then our captain fired his .45 pistol and the Jap fell down. He got up, but by this time I had reloaded my gun and finished him off.

This campaign was finally over about July 1, 1945. We then were again loaded on ships and were sent up to occupy Korea. We got there in the first week of October. We were stationed in the capitol city of Seoul. After we were there for about a month or more, we were eligible for rotation home. I had enough points to be sent home. You had to have 85 points and that was figured by time in service and time overseas and being wounded. A purple heart was worth 15 points.

We again got on a troop transport and headed home to the U.S. We arrived in Washington State sometime in November, 1945. On the ship on the way home, everybody was making rings out of half dollars. You held the half dollar upright on the deck and kept tapping on it with a mess kit spoon and turning it at the same time. Eventually it would keep rounding over. When you thought it was the right size for your finger, you would cut out the inside with a pocket knife. I lost mine after I got home and never made another. We were sent to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, and I was discharged from the Army there.