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World War II

Born in West Texas, I moved to Bosque County in Central Texas at the age of nine. My parents were farmers and ranchers, and I worked with them until finishing high school. After that, I lived in New Mexico. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, I was a member of the New Mexico State Guard. Our unit was sent to Early, New Mexico, that day to guard the copper smelter. We remained there until the owners of the smelter could provide their own security. Married and 22 years old at the time, I realized I could be drafted and decided to volunteer in order to serve in the military branch of my choice. I enlisted in the Navy in May 1942.

In July 1942, I reported to Camp Allen in Norfolk, Virginia, for boot camp. I don't know that I had any particular reason for choosing the Navy other than knowing that they needed people with industrial experience. A month later, I was sent to Camp Bradford at Providence, Rhode Island, and assigned to the Fleet Marine Force.

In order to complement the Marine battalions, my unit (the 18th Construction Battalion) was sent to San Diego as a replacement group. Soon we were sent back to Camp Allen. We were issued Marine uniforms and instructed to send our Navy uniforms home. On September 19, 1942, we boarded our ship for overseas duty. We knew what would be asked of us. Not only would we be building airfields, Quonset huts, etc., but we also would assist in various invasions.

We finally docked in New Caledonia on November 11th soon after the invasion of Guadalcanal had begun. Two weeks later, we sailed for Guadalcanal and the Solomon Islands to unload supplies for use on the frontlines. That was different from serving on the frontlines, but we still had to contend with the enemy. Pockets of Japanese soldiers remained in and around the beachhead. That created a problem as we attempted to move the supplies inland. Trained primarily in new construction, our first assignment after delivering the supplies was to build two airstrips for Navy carrier planes in Guadalcanal. Once that assignment was completed, we handled the maintenance for all three airfields in the area.

By April 1943, the 2nd Marine Division had reached full strength. My unit was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 18th Regiment, 2nd Marine Division in New Zealand and soon was participating in the Invasion of Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands. Following that campaign, we spent four or five

months on the Big Island in Hawaii — Hilo. We then departed for the Marianna Islands for the Invasion of Saipan. Primarily, we built roads and Quonset huts in Saipan. We never used locals to help with construction. Most of them were confined to camps. Later we participated in the Invasion of Tinian.

We were there from the beginning for the invasions of Saipan and Tinian. Of course, the Navy always tried to soften up the landing area with their heavy guns, as did the Air Corps with their bombs. But we never really knew what we would find until we actually landed on the beach. We would be so busy doing our jobs that there wasn't time to contemplate what might happen in the next day or so. Instead, we were concerned about the here and now.

By then, we had been overseas for 32 months and had earned a 30-day leave in the States. Of all the weeks I was at sea, other than possibly one week, I was seasick. A person has never been sick until they've been seasick. After our 30-day leave, we assumed we would stay in the States. As it turned out, the battalion as a whole did stay there; but 19 of us for some unknown reason had to go overseas again. My division was said to be the oldest combat outfit in the Pacific at the time. In Hawaii, we were removed from our ship and assigned duty at the Navy Depot there.

We remained in Hawaii until after the Japanese surrendered. That was a time of great joy because it meant we would soon be stateside again. The point system was in effect by that time; so on October 12, 1945, I returned to the States and was discharged at Camp Wallace just outside of Houston.

It was good to be back home with my family, though I wondered what I was going to do. Like many others, I elected to use the GI Bill to go to college. That was a great opportunity for the returning veterans.

During my time in the service, I learned to depend on God completely. My faith gave me the strength to meet my responsibilities and deal with the fear of dying in combat. I shared my testimony with men who were not Christians. When we had the opportunity to attend religious services on Sunday, I encouraged others to join me. In everyday conversations with men, I found that some of the non-Christians were undecided about what would happen if they met with death on the battlefield. I think it helped them to hear my testimony about feeling secure that in the event of my death, I knew where I was going and didn't have to worry about it.

The men who served in World War II can appreciate what we have today because of their service. Though I can't speak for the younger generation, it seems to me that patriotism has been lacking in many instances over the years since World War II. There was little interest in the Viet Nam War, though my two sons who served there. However, I think our young men and women today would be willing to do whatever is necessary to defend our country and protect our freedom.

Serving in the war was a challenge. I was grateful to get back home alive. While serving overseas, we were kept busy all the time. But our military service resulted in more opportunities for us as young men back in the States. Most of us probably learned to face life a little differently after our war experiences.

Without any reservation at all, I can say America is a great country. I love this country, its people and what we stand for as Americans. If I was much younger than my 82 years now, I think I would serve again. There is no question that God watched over me personally and my buddies as well during the war. My prayer at that time was that my friends would depend upon the Lord for the things they had need of at the moment; but if they were not a child of the King, their experience would bring them to the point of accepting Christ as their personal savior.