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World War II

At the age of 17, I enlisted in the Army in 1943 as a member of the Inactive Reserves. I was going to school at the University of Texas. As soon as school was out, I was drafted and sent directly to Sacramento, California, on May 18th for basic training in preparation for overseas duty. Though I had grown up in Van Zandt County, Texas, I was assigned to a New York National Guard unit with the 101st Signal Battalion of the 24th Corps, which was comprised of the 77th, 81st and 96th Divisions. We served as part of the rear echelon.

On November 25, 1943, we sailed for Hawaii for unit training. My battalion was headquartered on King Street in downtown Honolulu, near Pearl Harbor. I saw the remains of battleships that had been turned on their sides. That really made me angry and motivated me to want to go after the Japanese.

Five or six months later, we went to Palau to take the islands of Anguar and Peleliu on the way to Japan. Next we went to the Philippines and on to Okinawa. The Japanese didn't want to surrender. They wanted to fight down to their last man and never give up. Maybe they had orders to do that. So we either had to kill them or be killed. Even after we would take control of a particular territory, the Marines would basically have to dig the Japanese soldiers out of their caves. That's what happened in Peleliu. In Okinawa, they fought to the end.

I was a radio operator working with codes (dots and dashes). My battalion operated the communications network between our three Divisions and the 24th Corps. We used considerably larger units than are normally shown in the movies. Our transmitter was a 500-watt SCR399 mounted in a HO17 housing that fit on a 2-1/2 ton Army truck that pulled a generator behind it. We handled communications traffic for Division and Corps commanders. At times we were assigned to some pretty rough areas, but most of the time we stayed close to headquarters.

More than once, I was sent on detached service from the Corps. On Peleliu, another fellow and I were sent to an outpost on the north end of the island to operate a voice circuit for a week or ten days. The 1st Marine Division had taken Peleliu, and the Army had come over from Anguar to help. I made a call to 81st Division Headquarters one day, and a Japanese soldier

answered. Of course, I could tell he wasn't an American. Finally he just shut up and left when he realized I was onto him.

The Japanese often tried to break in on our network, but their English wasn't good enough to fool us when we were communicating in voice. If we were transmitting in code, we had no way of knowing whether or not they were intercepting our message. Radio Intelligence, a special 101st Signal Battalion platoon at Corps Headquarters, did nothing but monitor the Japanese radio circuits. Able to copy Japanese code, they constantly intercepted enemy messages. They had broken the Japanese Navy's secret code previously.

On one occasion, I was operating a circuit at our headquarters on the edge of an airfield. While sitting in my transmitter, I heard an awful commotion. A Japanese rocket (known as a BACA) had landed on a stack of empty 55-gallon gasoline barrels about 100 yards away. That really made me think.

I was a Christian when I went into the service. My first thought was *I don't want to kill anybody*. Then I realized it was our duty to protect our country, and we wouldn't have been asked to do it for no reason at all. I justified it in my mind as self-defense but never really wanted to shoot at anyone. Luckily, I never had to. I don't know what I would have done had that situation arisen. Maybe my decision to accept Christ had influenced me. I couldn't help but think about that. I thought, *If God lets me live through this, and I can manage to operate these radios, maybe I've done my part*. My prayer was, "Lord, take care of me. I'm definitely in your hands."

I guess we American soldiers believed that the men who were issuing orders knew enough to do the right thing. We also had faith in each other and would go out for each other without any doubt. While overseas, my main thoughts were to get the job done and get back home. Normally I'd write home every week or two, though all our mail was censored.

When the atomic bomb was dropped, I was in Okinawa. My lieutenant called me and said, "I wish you'd get ready to put up some circuits for the Philippines so we can handle traffic for General MacArthur. I had to cut a special antenna and mount it so our little transmitters would reach that far. Three or four days later, we were handling all the surrender messages between Japan and General MacArthur. It didn't take long to get it over with. You can't imagine how exciting it was to know the war was over.

After the Japanese finally surrendered, a lot of soldiers began shooting their rifles in the air. Our battalion commander was very unhappy and said, "I hope none of my troops did that." I wouldn't do anything like that, but many of the other guys in my unit did.

When I returned to the States on December 6, 1945, my embarkation point was Camp Stoneman, California. Ten days later, after my discharge at Camp Fannin in Tyler, I arrived home on December 16, 1945. My parents had moved to Kaufman County by then. America was full of GI's by then. Soldiers were being discharged by the hundreds of thousands. Trainloads of them were arriving every day or two at Camp Fannin.

Patriotism has been stronger in America since the September 11th attack, but it has not reached the same level as during World War II. Back then, nearly everyone volunteered to serve his country. Most of the guys enlisted so they could have their choice of the Navy, Air Corps or Marines. Media (radio, newspapers, magazines, movies) coverage of the war was constant, and the "Uncle Sam Needs You" advertising campaign was posted everywhere.

As the old saying goes... War is hell. You see things that you never want to see again, and you have to do things that you really don't want to do. When a soldier is in a foxhole or on the frontlines, he faces some terrible challenges. But I was glad to see democracy win over tyranny.