

Notes from a Combat Infantryman's Experiences, as requested by his family

This is not a story of my military life; it is more of specific situations or events that occurred. I joined the U.S. Army in February 1943. I was sent to the 31st Infantry Division (the Dixie Division), 124th Regiment, First Battalion, Company C, First Platoon in Camp Shelby, Mississippi. The infantry made up 10% of the troops in WW II and suffered 70% of the



casualties. Those statistics were about right because in our company of 200 men, we had well over 30 men killed and most of the rest were wounded. Most had Purple Hearts. Two good friends were wounded, and my best friend was killed. I was in the U.S. training for a year and then sent to the South Pacific for 22 months on the islands of New Guinea, Morotai, and Mindanao, in the Philippines. The 31st was an old National Guard outfit from Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, with a small group of “damned

Yankees” from up North, and a few of us from the West Coast who were considered neutrals. All commissioned officers were Southerners. Two non-commissioned officers were from the North.

Training was a lot of close quarter drill marches and two and three day maneuvers of assimilated combat. I was in good shape and enjoyed army life. The maneuvers were frustrating to me because we never knew how far, when, or where we were going, or for how long.

The night before being shipped off to the Army basic training, my mom prepared a steak dinner with mashed potatoes and salad and pineapple upside down cake. I thought about that great meal often overseas. That evening my dad brought home a professional gambler friend to show me how a professional gambler worked. He could do anything with a deck of cards. He said you can suspect an expert, but never ever catch him. Came out a little better winning, but was never a real gambler during my time overseas, but it sure paid off to be knowledgeable as it was how we passed much of our time when not fighting the war. Also learned to make homemade beer on the beaches.

On maneuvers, we were up in the dark, had breakfast, and then a sack lunch of peanut butter sandwich and an apple; one canteen of water had to last all day. You had to be disciplined about how much water you drank. I learned quickly to eat the apple after the sandwich. I used to drink during the day and night, filling up before the maneuvers with one canteen to last all day. We started the maneuvers in a column of over 200 men, carrying a 9-pound rifle, a steel helmet, and a backpack under the blazing sun. The column would stop, and a big gamble was would you lie down and relax or stand; you could move right out or wait a few hours. Really disgusted not knowing ever what our plan was. The officer had a pat answer to the question “How far are we going and where?” The answer was always the same--“A little piece down the road.” You could be told to go a few yards or several miles.



basic training; Neal on right

Medics in training would come around, select a pretend casualty to practice on, and bandage up and occasionally haul someone off in an ambulance. A friend, Bill Bunger, had serious bloody chigger bug bites on his ankles and waist. The medics stopped him and told him he had an arm

wound and bandaged him up. He was angry they would not treat his bloody ankles and more than angry when he had to walk several miles back to camp after the maneuver was over.

The purpose was to train us to follow orders without question. I will relate later to the one soldier who refused to carry out an order.

On one maneuver, Sergeant Grey said come back to the Fourth Platoon, Hook, and I will make you a sergeant. The Fourth Platoon had the mortars and 30 caliber air cooled machine guns. I wasn't overly confident about being a sergeant, with all those experienced guys. I traded my rifle to try carrying a machine gun, but I only lasted a few miles as the machine gun was heavy and awkward to carry. The M1 was heavy enough.

We had to practice attacking an enemy hill position, and our regimental commander was not satisfied the first time. We had to do it again. I was running a short distance when I saw spots in front of my eyes, and I dropped onto my back for a few minutes, but I was able to get up and carry on and never had trouble again with the heat.

Very few opportunities to shoot a rifle on the range. I shot and hunted as a kid in South Dakota, but the army did not like my shooting left-handed. They put a patch over my eye, and I qualified, but it was very awkward and uncomfortable. After that, I always shot my way, lefty always.

I was somewhat of a scrounger in buying tasty chickens and biscuits from the farm wives. Soldiers had been around the area for many years, and the local farmers' wives supplemented their income by selling these great dinners. The officers sent me out on that special food mission. Once I ran across a melon patch on maneuvers; it had orange-colored meat melons, and I thought they were spoiled, but they were delicious. A young boy approached later and said some soldiers had stolen his melons, but he made some good money because of our guilt for unknowingly

Camp Shelby maneuvers, 1943



stealing his melons. I really enjoyed two special weeks in training as they chose two men from each rifle company for Rock Climbing School, and I was one of them. Instructors were men from the Colorado Ski Troops. Rock climbing with pitons, ropes, and mountain climbing equipment, etc. was the best. We trained at Seneca Rocks, West Virginia. We had pup tents and a couple of feet of straw for soft mattresses. That was pretty darn comfortable. We camped in a canyon and raced to the

showers before the sun went down as it was super cold early at night in the canyon, and we wanted to get clean, dry, and warm so we didn't spend the night cold. As the nights were cold for outdoor unheated showers. I was given an instructor's grade and tried to transfer to the climbing division. I had letters of recommendation, etc., but the First Sergeant said all transfers were stopped because we were going overseas.

Company had one 30-mile day march, exhausting but not a problem for me. Surprised how many guys fell out and had to be picked up by trucks and driven back to the base. A few guys had serious blister problems and struggled to complete the march. Infantry is sure better for young men.

We were sent to Camp Patrick Henry on Chesapeake Bay and dock detail for awhile loading ships. One of our guys sneezed on the dock, and his teeth flew out and into the bay, never to be found. He was sooo disappointed, quite sure he would not get a decent fit again for a long time. After seeing troops landing in Europe climbing cliffs, I was thankful we did not have cliffs to climb in our two landings. Men went to the canteen at night to drink beer. Most southerners were real racists and would not stand for a black soldier eating or drinking with them. Several black soldiers were killed, and the base commander sent us immediately to the South Pacific. Rumors had it that we were heading to Europe, but we did not. Instead, we went through the Panama Canal to the South Pacific.

We were crammed on a troopship with canvas bunks stacked high. If you pulled your knees up, it would bother the guy above you. We were served two meals a day, so we spent most of our time in line for chow. The ship had gotten oil in the drinking water tanks. Most of the guys got very ill, and they had a big barrel for all the sick guys...smelled awful. I had managed to improvise and got our water from the crews' quarters. It was cold, and Lucas and I did not get sick. We stopped in the Panama Canal for three days. Lucas and I were able to check out the area for those three days while most of the guys were recovering and the water tanks were being cleaned out of the oil that had made the guys sick. We stayed in comfortable barracks for those three days, bought a lot of food at the PX. My duffle bag was so stuffed it broke dragging it down the ladder and only two cans rolled out. Lucas was so enterprising; he borrowed a needle and thread from a sailor and sewed it up. Could always depend on Lucas to come up with something. They served a lot of beans on that troopship.

We landed on New Guinea at Port Moresby. Camped and organized awhile. One day our battalion lined up on the beach, ready to go inland. We were not supposed to have loaded weapons, when a guy in our platoon shot himself in the foot. It was a serious wound, and back to the States for him. Not much of a morale booster for the rest of us as it was self-inflicted. He hollered his head off, but didn't get much sympathy. We were loaded up with ammunition, hand grenades, and supplies, but because of our inexperience, the heat, and the humidity, a lot was discarded along the way. We moved out a few hours later, finally headed out. One of our Scouts was shot by a Japanese. He was lying down having a smoke. Morale was not improved until later when a dead Japanese was laying on the side of the trail. A welcome sight to us at the time.



Later that day, Company B and our company were advancing in line and started firing at each other. One of our own guys was shot in the head and killed by a 30 caliber; the Japanese used 25 caliber, so it was one of our own. It was estimated 50% of our casualties in WW2 were caused by friendly fire. That included artillery, bombs, small arms fire, etc. This was just about correct according to our experiences. Our company formed a perimeter and dug in for the night. I was in the center area with two sergeants. The outer parameter started firing and kept it up most of the night. I wasn't scared, I was terrified. Tracers were going overhead often enough for us to know rising up or getting out of our foxhole would have gotten us killed. The two other guys were as scared as I was. It is a helpless feeling, and from all the firing, we expected the Japanese to come leaping into our foxholes at any minute. A long night; next morning, not a sign of any Japanese.

Heard a few other green troops firing their first nights like that. No substitute for experience, and after that night, firing usually meant something was going on.

Morning came, and two of the older guys were shell shocked, the term then used meant a mental breakdown. Near the war's end, our mail clerk had a nervous breakdown. He was company mail man and a very jovial guy that liked everyone, but they said he had been very depressed trying to deliver mail to the dead and wounded. The term meant mental breakdown, and I resolved it would not happen to me. Moved on to the Driniumor River where we established a line on the riverbed for well over a month. Dug our regular foxholes for two or three guys; that night I woke up hearing terrible screaming. Thought my hair was standing up. A medic had dug a hole for himself, and a Jap had jumped in with a knife and killed him, slitting his throat. That helped us stay awake at night.

A watch with a fluorescent dial was very, very important in taking turns on watch. Very frustrating taking turns on guard duty when you did not know the time. It was difficult to stay awake, but I managed, and could never sleep beyond sunup, which came way too early. That first afternoon, the river was low and maybe 100 ft. wide; it was fairly shallow but could rise several feet when it rained in the mountains. Sometimes it would rain so intensely we thought we were coming to a rushing river, but it was just rain moving towards us, splashing against the jungle vegetation. Our artillery shells began falling on the other side of the river. Thought that could be helpful if the Japanese attacked until it started towards us and behind us. A couple of our men were killed by the friendly artillery fire.

Our line along the river was going to be held for some time, so we built pillboxes. We dug a hole 2 or 3 feet deep and cut big logs with axes and machetes. It was a foot or so wide and solid on top and three sides, so we could sit up inside. The side facing the river was partially open for the field of fire. Lots of work building but well worth it for security. Even though we had this place, we regularly sent out troops for reconnaissance patrol. Our reconnaissance patrol heard the Japs chopping, and a few minutes later one of our BAR men was shot and killed. Morton, our jeep driver when jeeps were useful, was also a machine gunner. He fired and made a huge cloud of smoke. Later the captain said "Morton, that gun should be fired in bursts." Morton answered, "I did, Captain, in bursts of a belt." 30 caliber air cooled guns would jam if fired continuously and not rested occasionally to cool.



The battalion was camped in a large area and supplied with ammunition, food, etc. by C-47 planes. Occasionally, they missed our area, and the Japs got the supplies. They would fly in low, and the men would push out the items through the cargo door. Notice was given prior to the dropping--"take cover!!!" One guy left for cover too late, and a case of rations hit him in the back and killed him.

A Dutchman would come in from the beach occasionally with a column of black natives. They would carry out our dead and wounded. We were very, very grateful they were available and so helpful.

Our platoon went on patrol, and we found an abandoned Japanese camp. The vines stretched from tree to tree, so helpful as they could move at night. There was the neatest little bamboo house built for their officers. It had steps and a hinged door. The only special quarters our officers had was one for our regimental officer, Colonel Star, who was very well protected. The Japanese had a special odor from their food or whatever, so we knew when they were around. There was a footprint in the ground; we saw it slowly filling with water. Our officer asked "What will we do?" Lucas answered "Fight or get the hell out." The next day the second platoon went out and was ambushed. They had a good officer and two enlisted men killed. A reinforced platoon was sent out to rescue them. We rarely left our dead and never our wounded. But that couldn't be avoided in this bad situation; however, they were recovered by a special burial troop.

A day later a squad was sent out to pick up our dead in body bags. One of our guys took a machete and cut a body in two to make carrying it easier. He was not court martialed, but he got in big trouble for abusing a body. One night we heard a rustling in the leaves that sounded like footsteps. We really were on the alert and discovered a cute little animal in the trees in the morning; we could not have that noise at night, so someone had to shoot it. Mortars not much help with targets because of the trees and vegetation; they were great for sending up magnesium flares with a parachute at night so we could see. We rarely moved on patrol or any other activity at night, but the Japs were often busy. I have not cared for fireworks or firecrackers since then,



Neal bottom row, 2nd from left

but I still like target shooting. Our battalion went on several day patrols; we saw smoke from a breakfast fire, and shelling started on the top of the mountain and was working down the mountain. I had just finished cleaning my rifle, and the shelling was coming very close. The artillery observer was hit by shell fragments, his foot almost torn off, but he got on his radio and stopped the shelling. I heard 11 were killed and several were wounded, friendly fire again. Artillery shrapnel is deadly. We carried the wounded out on improvised litters in very difficult, steep mountainous terrain. We had been carrying our wounded out for a few hours and were really exhausted when a Dutch officer showed up with enough black natives to carry them out for us.

We were really thankful for them. On any kind of lengthy patrol, if guys were sick or slightly wounded, they just had to stay until a patrolman could get back to camp. The medics would give them a tag so they didn't have any kind of extra duty.

I have no memory of the time sequence, but after several weeks on Driniumor River, our unit went back to the large base unit on the beach. Bob Hope came with his troops and put on a great show. Lots of soldiers had white cockatoos on their shoulders. The Red Cross had a couple of tents and served coffee and sold old magazines for 5 cents. The Salvation Army never charged for anything. One of our guys was a miner from Idaho and was familiar with dynamite. He got a little rubber boat, and he would toss out small blocks of dynamite, stunning the fish. I was the retriever, and because of the coral, I wore tennis shoes to protect my feet and collected fish in a gunny sack. We had enough fish to feed the whole company a few times. Really enjoyed that. We moved out to Morotai Island, only 300 miles from the Philippines. We made an amphibious landing, but it was unnecessary as no opposition was met. We landed and moved on. We needed the island because it was necessary for air power in the Philippines. The Seabees made an airbase

with bulldozers, etc. Our job was to set up a perimeter to protect the base. It was a long way to the mess tent, so we were back to two meals a day. The Seabees were well-supplied and had a walk-in refrigerator. Our supply sergeant was a real scrounger and traded whatever for frozen chicken and ice cream. He also managed to get a generator; consequently, our company was the only one with lights. Our trail was nearby, so I picked up a case of pork and beans. A guy shot a pig, and we made a spit and spent all day taking turns, turning it over the fire. All looking forward to a great pork dinner, but it was so tough we couldn't eat it.

landing at Morotai



Constructed our pillboxes again, overlooking a valley we had cleared out, so we had a good field of fire. Expected a big attack, but found out that Halmahera island was only 11 miles away, across the water where all the Japs were. Our PT sunk all of their boats and barges (Louis Grant, a friend, was on that run, a mechanic on the PT boats) so they couldn't come across. At the war's end, 37,000 Japs were on that island and surrendered with all their equipment. Very grateful for our PT boats preventing them from coming across to attack us.

Did some dock detail unloading ammunition ships. Once the harbor was all lit up and I saw tracers coming down instead of going up. A few seconds later, the alert sounded. They dropped some bombs, but did no damage, but missed a great opportunity sneaking in like that. Our platoon was sent several miles away to guard a radar installation. One of the guys moving around at night was shot at by a BAR; the bullet hit his rifle held in front of him, no damage, but splinters from the rifles shattered stock. A very lucky guy.

Some fellas shot a 5 or 6 foot lizard, do not know if they tried to eat it or not. I was on guard duty and saw a Jap in the woods behind us. I woke another guy up to verify it was a Jap, fired a few rounds into the woods, but missed.



Jap planes flew over regularly at night and dropped bombs. One lit close enough to throw dirt over me, but no damage done. Searchlights would pick them up, and Jap planes looked like little bugs in the light. Ach Ach would often follow them with shells bursting behind them. Our guns never seemed to adjust and move shells ahead of the planes, and the shelling would follow them but not seem to catch up to do damage. One of our fighter planes shot down a Jap plane in flames; we were jubilant. But heard our pilot was in trouble as they were not to engage enemy pilots when searchlights were on and the Ach Ach guns were being fired. I swiped a case of beer from the window of the officers quarters. I did not drink beer but resented the

officers' better treatment, but Morton drank it.

We were ready to make another amphibious landing in Mindanao after training with the cargo nets, etc. We were circling in a landing craft below a destroyer. It fired a whole bank of rockets that pulverized a big area of the beach. Enormous sound from the firing really startled us as we were right below that ship. I had a bandanna tied around my head to keep the perspiration from

my glasses. No Japanese attacking us, but artillery did kill a huge pig. The Japs had moved inland, so we camped a few days prior to chasing after them. The Maori lived near, with their famous curved knives and bad reputation and cloth headbands. We were told to beware of them. Natives had a lot of fighting cocks and a lot of guys bought or traded for a fighting cock to tie them outside their tents. When we moved out, we made up for lost time and hurried after the retreating Japanese. We went miles the first day on a road that was made of corduroy poles. Company ahead of us knocked out a couple of machine gun nests alongside the road. A wounded Japanese was lying alongside the road and one of our medics blasted him with a Tommy Gun, a stupid thing to do as our intelligence guys wanted prisoners for information. Live prisoners were very rarely taken. Later that day, Joe Budaj was shot in the face, in the arm, and bayoneted in the



leg. The medic who shot the Jap was worthless in caring for Joe. A couple of us bandaged Joe up. There was no medical field hospital yet, so we helped put Joe in the front seat of the old piper cub observation plane. Joe was in the hospital in the U.S. for a long time in recovery. We got together several times after the war. The bad medic was a rare case. Medics and platoon leaders were the real leaders, and they were always needed at the center of action. Dug our foxholes for the night when Morton came roaring up in his jeeps next to the Japanese lines. He threw out two five-gallon containers of water and then tore out in reverse. Really needed the water and appreciated Morton raking such a risk. That night an 81 millimeter mortar shell fell short in a foxhole across the road from us and killed two men, friendly fire again. Long night and moved out in the morning into an ambush that killed our officer and several men. A replacement whose name I did not even know was killed beside me. Felt a sharp pain in my chest and bullets flying all around. I thought I was shot. I felt my back, expecting to find a hole from the bullet leaving; it was ok, and it didn't interfere with my movement. It was a fragment that hit the center of my chest. Our platoon was ordered to pull back. It is not good procedure to lose a whole squad or platoon wiped out as it is harder to replace.

My friend Ken Lucas was also killed helping some of the wounded, and our chaplain was killed helping Lucas. Lucas and Fr. Colgan were good friends. Lucas always helped him with services and mass. Father Colgan was a wonderful Catholic Chaplain. Lucas was 38 or so and kind of a father figure for me. He was very competent and intelligent. Although he was just a PFC, he was chosen to teach chemical warfare and helped the supply sergeant occasionally.

Lucas had me helping the supply sergeant, typing requisitions, etc. We expected to lose many men, but I was really devastated and demoralized when Lucas was killed. Our dive bombers were called and had panels to guide the bombers. Found out later that Japanese observers in trees had had their troops pull out and move back in quickly after the bombing. The Japanese were great at camouflage and hiding their holes.

Moved in again, but some distance on the flank to avoid the Japs. Day or so later, company moving again. I saw a column of several Japs and opened fire with the tommy gun I had exchanged my rifle for with the medic. It jammed after one shot, so I threw a grenade that didn't go far enough; my backpack strap slipped down my arm and cut off my throw, but fortunately

fell on the other side of a large fallen tree. Lucky for me, it did not harm me. It is very difficult to throw a grenade; they need to be lobbed. Moved out quickly, and as we did, a Jap shot Sergeant Crow in the face. Swollen but no exit hole. Captain had a litter made, and we started to move again, but all hell broke loose with Japs firing all around, even up in the trees. Our company retreated across a field toward the road, which fortunately had a large galvanized culvert we could crawl through. Our Captain was standing on the road firing; he was seriously wounded. Guy running had machine gun fire around him, and suddenly he spun around and fell. He was hit by the machine gun fire, and he was helped to and through the culvert; later after he had recovered, he returned to our company. The Japs were hollering "Toro, Toro" and running around. Almost dark and had lots of casualties, lost several 4th platoon and two machine gun squads. Expected Japs to attack, so were alert all night. Sergeant Grey was shot in the arm, and I remember him talking to me, and he said, "My arm hurts too much to talk anymore." He was sent back to the States to recover and stayed in the army. Later a patrol came out and brought us back to the camp area. The first guy I saw was McBernie, a friend from B Company in Portland, Oregon. He said it was good to see me as they had heard our Company C was wiped out. I started to really tremble and told myself to snap out of it, and I did. Only a few foxholes of Company C men, but many more showed up in the morning. Guy shot himself in the foot that morning. Camp that night had bundles of pants and jackets. I got a new pair of pants to replace mine that had a big rip in them. Rested a day and moved out again. A Jap truck abandoned on the road; intelligence and reconnaissance went out to see if it was booby trapped, but it wasn't.



Early in the morning, Japs made a bonsai attack on B Company some distance away. Their tracer bullets are different colors than ours, so we could see both of the tracers when in combat. Mass attack by the Japs, but the Japs were wiped out. Machine gun crossfire deadly, minor injuries to B Company. A couple of trucks parked nearby were hit by bullets, but were such a long distance that they just pinged when they were hit. Couple of days later, a couple of the guys recommended that I check with the medics to get a Purple Heart. The guys seriously wounded or killed got Purple Hearts. I did not feel that was appropriate for me because those guys really sacrificed, but we went home on points and a Purple Heart was worth ??? Went to the aid station, and they bandaged me up from shrapnel. Still carry those small shrapnel scars today. The miner from Idaho that I went fishing with had a 12 year old daughter die back home from a disease; the child was worth those points to go home, but they took those points away when she died. I thought that was really a rotten thing to do to him.

A couple of machine guns were recovered. The Japanese were really stupid in those mass charges. By our camp area for a few days, the Japs had an artillery piece in the mountain cave; they would put it out for a round or two and then put it back in the cave under cover so we could not spot it. I was near the mess tent when they fired and jumped into a foxhole someone had dug. It was full of water, and I pretty much just floated in there. We moved on before they could take out that hidden artillery piece in the cave. We all took Atabrine as there was not enough quinine available to ward off malaria. Often the guys wouldn't take it because it tasted so bad. Medics would walk by when we were in formation and throw the pills into our mouth so we would have

to swallow them. My skin turned a yellowish hue, and I somewhat resembled a Jap. Days later, we went on our last but eventful patrol. For the first time, we had some Philippine soldiers join us. Didn't really get a chance to talk to them, but they seemed to be good soldiers and took the scouting at one point front and rear. Little firing and one of them was shot. His fellow soldiers made him a woven mat and carried him for several days. It was very sad as he made a guttural sound from his every breath. He lived the whole patrol but died just before we got back. One dark night we were on a road with our perimeter covering both sides of the road; we dug in and later that night heard noises and voices. It was a Philippine group of women, children, men, and water buffalo carts, etc.

Neal on left

We were afraid of the Japanese tricks of infiltrating with the Philippines must have been well over 100 of them. Fortunately, there was no firing, or it would have been a slaughter, especially with our machine guns positioned.

Went up into the mountains and confronted the Japs; they were above us on the hill, but we exchanged positions with them on the hill a few times. They would roll grenades down the mountain and wounded some of our men; the wounded were carried down and replacements needed to fill their positions. It was the first time I knew of a soldier refusing an order. The man was told to go up the hill and replace a downed man, but he refused. I was afraid I would be sent up, but a friend in my foxhole was sent up. No more casualties, and my friend came down safe the next morning. If he had been wounded or killed, the guy who had refused the order would probably have been shot. Instead, he was severely reprimanded. HOW????

Night or two later the company set up our perimeters, and I dug a foxhole with another guy. We were in a little draw, and it started raining really hard. We were given a special spot in a rough circle so we would have supporting fire and location of machine gun, very important for their crossfire. Deadly circle of protection is adaptable to the terrain. As mentioned earlier, the rain came hard and water rose so I sat on my helmet and the water continued to rise to my chest. Very thankful for daylight to come and be able to dry out. The war ended, and we were told we could not have any more souvenirs. Reasoning being we had our chance in combat and everything



taken in now should go to the rear echelon people. Combat is not necessarily a good time to collect souvenirs. We were very frustrated with that order. One fellow collected the souvenirs of gold from the teeth of dead Japs. I saw him brush flies from a body that had white gloves on, meaning he was an officer, and then pulled teeth out with a pair of pliers to get the gold. He had at least two inches of gold in a glass jar. The Japs had surrendered and many of them were in the mountains. They built flimsy rafts for two or three and

floated down the river. Our company was to receive prisoners on the river. Souvenirs of guns, pistols, flags, swords, etc. were collected in a large wooden crate. Morton the jeep driver asked if I would like a few souvenirs; he drove his jeep down the river. We motioned several rafts over to us on the shore, jumped on the rafts, and threw their weapons in the river. Japanese were poorly dressed and undernourished, with few souvenirs. Got a few buttons, flags, etc. Our raft floated down around the bend where they were being interned by our troops. Had to make a quick exit or

we would have been in trouble. Not a good idea having unarmed Japs wandering around the way the Philippine people hated them.

Camped in tents along the beach. We were told we would start training to invade Japan. The longer you are in combat, the poorer the odds were for survival.

Fellow sitting on his bunk accidentally fired his 45, and fortunately the bullet missed the guy sitting across from him. His punishment was to dig a hole 6x6 and 6 feet deep, hard soil; it took him several days to dig.

Really appreciated Harry Truman ordering the dropping of the atomic bomb. The plans were for the 31st to land near Tokyo in the invasion, and we had already been told they figured we would lose thousands of lives, and that would be us.

THE WAR WAS DECLARED OVER AND WE WERE SOON ON A TROOP SHIP HOME.
Don't remember anything about that.



Landed in Fort Lewis, Washington for discharge. Red Cross girls took all information regarding our health. Had malaria and hepatitis in service, and the girls took the information quickly, did their job well. My friend McBernie didn't bother and later contracted malaria again. The Vet hospital told him to come in when he was sick, but he said when he was sick with malaria, he was so sick he couldn't make it; said he would go in next time.

Thanks to Uncle Sam, I went to college and taught school until retirement. Had a wife and four children.

We went back to Tennessee years ago and had a reunion with my old rifle company. It was great to see the guys, but they are all gone now as they were all older when we were serving. Sgt. Gray stayed in the Army and went to OCS, retired as Lt. Col. after serving in Korea. He was a natural

leader and a wonderful man. On a trip back East a number of years later, we stopped to see him, but he had passed on shortly before we got there.

Got together with Joe Budaj several times. His jaw wound left a severe scar, which was quite noticeable. He was a really wonderful man. He returned to his farm, gardening and enjoying life. Shot a deer every year in his yard for his freezer.

Had several foreign exchange students over the years, great young people. One of our students was a lovely Japanese girl. Her family has visited several times, and we still correspond with them.

WW II was necessary, but some of the rest of the wars were not. It would be nice if the politicians served overseas and our young men stayed home.

Our daughter became friends with Joe Budaj, and he told her about his getting badly wounded and my helping him get out.

My great regret, I never wrote to Ken Lucas's family about him. He died helping others and was an exceptional man in so many ways.

by Neal Hook