

## War Era Story Project 2012

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### My World War II Experience

Like most young men, I felt the call to duty to defend my wonderful country so off I went to the recruiting office. I had three weeks before going to Ft. Hayes. Then I was off to basic training, from there to Biloxi, Mississippi for Air Force Training after which I was deployed to New Guinea. (Where in the world is that??) We arrived at Brisbane, Australia just after the Japanese bombed the northernmost city, Darwin.

We were shipped on to Port Moresby, New Guinea. Our group set-up the base strip approximately thirty miles north of Port Moresby. Its purpose was to stop invasion of Australia by the Japanese. Our mission was to supply any needs by the ground forces of the United States and Australia. Our base was the only supply base for the area. C-47s were used to transport supplies.

New Guinea was bombed almost every night and we were constantly harassed during daylight hours, keeping us from getting rest or keeping up with our task of supplying our bases. P-40's were trying to stop the Japanese Zero. All supplies (guns, ammunition, gasoline, food and water) had to be distributed, so if one area was bombed and wiped out, other areas would have needed supplies.

After three months in this location, the antiaircraft battalion moved in to establish strategic locations for the protection of our base. Surprise! Surprise! When the Japanese bombers came in, we were warned with three shots by the guards. The lights went out, total darkness. To their surprise, the flood light went on and the 20mm cannons fired, resulting in excitement and exaltation as the Japanese lost a number of bombers by this attack.

On one afternoon bombing, our gasoline "dump" was hit. At least 200 55-gallon drums exploded causing a great loss and explosion. The sergeant in charge of the "dump" crawled out on his hands and knees with severe burns, but survived.

MacArthur's strategy was to keep moving north on New Guinea, isolating the Japanese. The strategy was working as the Japanese were out of supplies. We were heading toward the Philippines.

Since my arrival on New Guinea I had had problems with eruptions on my skin. Being fair-skinned made me more susceptible and my closeness to the Aborigines caused a severe case of what we called "New Guinea Rot." There were many cases among the servicemen, which could be more serious than injuries from the War.

I had been on New Guinea three years when a new colonel came to our squadron. He was assigned to our squadron in preparation for our advance to the Philippines. One day, he took me aside and told me that he had a doctor friend, a dermatologist, who he would like to have me see. He accompanied me north by plane to the field hospital where the doctor was located. When we arrived there we learned that the hospital was quarantined due to a diphtheria outbreak. The doctor made arrangements for me to enter. He saw me, admitted me and after examining me, sent me back to the States via hospital ship.

I remained in the hospital three weeks before the hospital ship arrived in port. It was a Dutch ship. The ship was loaded with all kinds of injuries, both physical and mental, as well as others with skin problems. The ship took 21 days because we had to zigzag our course to avoid being torpedoed. During our trip, two servicemen died on the ship and were buried at sea, causing much sadness. We were turned away at San Francisco because of a dock workers strike. We were signaled to proceed to Seattle. Naturally, we were all extremely disappointed. For one thing the food wasn't fit to eat. Going hungry was the choice of many. We suspected that we might be eating horse meat.

When we disembarked, we were taken to a mess hall where we were fed really well. We were all so happy. From there, each one was sent to a Veterans Hospital fairly close to home. I was a patient at Cambridge Hospital in Ohio two months before my transfer to Miami Beach. I was sent from there to Buckingham Air Force Base at Ft. Myers, Florida. My wife and I were able to have a house at Ft. Myers. She had come to Cambridge Hospital, Miami and Ft. Myers, where my son was born.

I was honorably discharged December 1945, having served my country four years. It was a great privilege to have served this country that I love so dearly.

During my years in New Guinea I took many photographs, some from the air. They were sent to Australia to be developed. Amazingly, four years after my discharge I received the photos while living in Warren, Ohio.

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Robert C. Formet at a Japanese foxhole