

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 78

Military Service

I saw Bob Clark when he came home from the war in the Pacific. I was about ten or eleven years old and was fascinated with his dark tan and the knife he made from parts and pieces of Japanese airplanes. Bob took the time to sit down and go over the knife and explain that the handle was made from material he cut from the windshield of a Japanese Zero. The blade was made from another part from the same airplane. I think his son got the knife, and Bob eventually lost the deep Pacific tan I remembered.

My brother-in-law, Roy Goins, was ready to be shipped out to fight in the war with Hitler's Nazi Germany. But, he came down with the measles and was held back for several weeks. He missed any combat at the end of the war, but was a guard at a prisoner of war camp at Stuttgart as a military policeman (MP). German soldiers offered Nazi flags, and daggers and knives to him in trade for chocolate, cigarettes and toothpaste. He traded for a Nazi SS dagger and flag. When he got home and was discharged from the Army, he gave all of this material to his oldest son.

Years later, his son, who got the German knife and flag, joined the Army and did one tour in Vietnam. He stopped to see his grandmother in Greenville, Ohio and I saw him there in his uniform. But then he went back for a second tour and stepped on a land mine and died in Vietnam. His body was returned to his parents, in Eaton, Ohio and I got to see him, in uniform, in his glass-lined coffin. His body was a foot shorter and the things his father had given him from World War II disappeared.

When I was old enough I wanted to join the Navy, but I did not pass the Navy physical exam. I tried the Air Force and was turned down because I had flat feet. They said I would not be able to stand or march with flat feet. I finally joined the Army as a new Army recruit. I took basic training at Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky with the 101st Airborne Division and was shipped to Japan as the company clerk of the Carrier Company Number Two, bound for Korea.

Instead of going on to Korea, my company was broken apart and each of us was shipped out as individual soldiers to duty stations in Korea, Vietnam and Japan. Nobody wanted to go to Vietnam, as the French just lost their war there and we were content to be shipped somewhere else.

Before I left the states for Korea, I ended up at a tattoo shop in Oakland, California, where I got two red roses on my left forearm. I still have that tattoo but the green leaves are now mostly black and the red has left the roses and are now my normal skin color. I can no longer get into my olive green uniform. The wool trousers' waist size was 34, but I have been in the 40s for many years. I don't know why I save them in the cedar chest but that's where they are. I did keep my dog tags and I still like to wear them and

hear them clank together. The information on them remains the same. I wonder what will become of them after I am gone.

I sometimes I think of my best friends who slept in bunks next to mine and who shared coffee and SOS at breakfast with me. I got a telephone call yesterday from John V. Azevedo, my boss—he was a captain back then—who called to say, “Hello.” We enjoyed a few minutes together on the phone. He will be 94 years old and I will be 78. Out of all the men he knew, he calls me. And, honestly, of all my Army buddies, I only know John and where he lives. I looked for Jim DeMarco, my best Army friend in Japan, and found him living with his mother in Chicago. I don’t know where the others are.