

## War Era Story Project 2012

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*Note: The following was written when the author was 16 as a school assignment. She received an "A+."*

### **Walter Lewis Brown: A WWII War Veteran**

by Shacorra Crosby

WWII was a time in our country's history where all were united to stand for a common cause. The war had been going on for some time while America sat back and tried their best to stay uninvolved. When we finally did enter the war, the cause for fighting was other than what we had expected. It wasn't because we felt obligated to prove our allegiance to another country, or because our help was greatly solicited, even though these may be some factors that contributed to our entrance. But we fought for the safety of our own country. We fought to honor the lives of those lost and to console the remaining family members of the victims at Pearl Harbor. We fought for everything this proud country stands for. Many men battled to protect this nation, and I am proud to say that my Grandfather was one of them.

His full name is Walter Lewis Brown, and was born in 1923. He was raised in the southern state of Mississippi. Grandpa entered the war promptly after he graduated from Port Gibson High School in June, 1940. "I volunteered to take care of my mother," he says. "She would always write me and send me boxes...and those other soldiers, they would beat me to eating it." Grandpa was not a big man, and he never has been for as long as I can remember. There were many other men that surpassed him in size. "When I went in I weighed 153 lbs. and I was 5'4". There were some guys, you know, big guys, taller than I was and they were heavier than I was." Soon after entering the war, he was sent to basic training. "I got my basic training in Fort Grad North Carolina in the 155 housing, field artillery...those big guns. We could hit a target...at least 20-25 miles. The gun sat on the ground. We had to dig a hole and put it in there. Then we had to get a big sack and put it up on top of the gun [because] every time it shoots, it would raise up."

Life in the army was very strict and precise. Everything had to be done correctly, or you would do it over again. Grandpa told me about making the beds every day. "We had to make the beds so tight, when they'd come around inspecting in the morning...the guy would take a quarter and throw it up and let it hit the bed. If the quarter hit and bounced, they'd tear it up and you'd have to make it over again. But if your bed was real tight, and that quarter hit it, it's gonna hit and stay there." I'd asked if his bed had ever been torn up, and he quickly answered yes, with a smile.

As I was talking to Grandpa about the war, he casually brought up the imprisonment of the Japanese that I had heard so much about. He told of his personal experience, and I felt almost as if I was there. "We left North Carolina and went to California. And we had to put those Japanese in those

concentration camps out there. They were screaming, but we put them in there anyway. And everything they had in the house, we had to put out there on the front lawn...the people out in the street [came and got it]. I really felt sorry for those people. They may have known we were coming, but they couldn't do anything about it."

I asked grandpa about the trenches. I've read that they were rodent infested, and life in them was really unbearable. But Grandfather seems to have been lucky. "I didn't see any rats in my [trench], but they had some over there. Rats and snakes too. But I didn't see any of them. Just like when we went to South Africa. You see all those wildcats and things on TV now, but when we were [there] we didn't see any of them. They must have been up in the mountains I imagine. I don't know. I'm glad I didn't see them. But I heard some guys say that they'd been in the [trench] and a big snake would roll over in there with them. Now see, I'm glad one didn't roll in on me, cause I'd have come out of that fox hole." He told me that the Germans would throw grenades into their trenches. Though the weapons were used in the same way, the U.S grenade was shaped slightly different from that of the Germans. "The United States hand grenade...looked like a baseball. So when you pull the pin out of it and throw it, you'd had to fall too. That way it didn't hit you when it exploded."

Soon, it dawned on me that I didn't know exactly what the uniform of a U.S soldier looked like, so I asked Grandpa Walter. He briefly described it as "light brown...cotton to keep you warm." I told him that cotton didn't seem thick enough to protect a soldier from the changes in weather, and I asked him if anyone ever got sick. The answer surprised me. "That's what we don't understand," he said. "We took those shots when we were over there. It'd be cold and we'd be out in the rain. It'd be sleeting and snowing, and nobody got sick. We were taking those shots. You walked long at night, in the rain, with your rifle. It'd be so dark you couldn't hardly see your hand in front of you...and nobody ever got sick."

Wonder what type of food they fed these hard working soldiers? "We had different kinds of food. When you're behind the front lines, you know, way back, we had good food. Chicken, dressing. But when we're up on the front lines, we had sea food, and canned food." He told me something that shocked me, and I couldn't imagine ever having to do it myself. "The Germans cut our supply line off, and we didn't have any food. So we had to go down to the ocean and kill some of those water buffalo and eat them. That tough meat. But it tasted like steak and pork chops cause we were hungry!"

When asked what the most memorable battle he fought in was, he replied simply and with ease. "D-Day, when we invaded France. That water...the ocean...was red. So many soldiers got killed. You could see them out there floating in the water. Those Germans were sitting up on a hill like, the United States tried to ease in on them, and they had those machine guns pointed right down there. I was in the field artillery then...with those big guns." He'd fought on the front lines in many battles, and he says that it was the worst part about being in the service. "Fighting up on the front line...On the front line, you can't talk loud. You have to whistle. You're in a hole, in a foxhole. You have to keep your ears open, and keep your eyes open if you're up on the front lines, and there's a dead soldier, you have to crawl over them. If you stand up and walk over, you get your head blown off. You have to crawl over them, and crawl in a hole somewhere."

Grandpa returned home from the war in 1945, but volunteered to return a mere three months later. The army needed men to drive U.S. trucks from France to Germany. 'When I went back overseas they wanted some truck drivers to bring the trucks from France back to Lunenburg Germany. We brought thousands and thousands of trucks back...[U.S.] trucks. They had parking space...we would park thousands and thousands of trucks out there. "We'd carry something from France back to Germany. We'd get back to Germany and stay there for maybe, 6 or 8 hours and sleep, then we'd get up and go back to France. Half the time, there was two drivers."

Grandpa had a lot to say, and it amazed me how many details he could remember. It seemed as if he didn't forget a thing. "[I remember] all of it. You know, I remember from the first time I went to the army, until I got out. And now I can't remember something that happened yesterday." Grandpa told me stories of the people he'd met and the things that he did.

I was surprised when he told me he'd met Joe Lewis. "I met Joe Lewis over there." he told me. "In Italy. He came over...something like a red cross, he'd just go around. He'd go from outfit to outfit. If somebody wanted to spar with him, they'd get up there in the ring and they'd spar with him. But I never did spar with him. He was the champ anyway. I boxed over there, but not him." Grandpa was a good boxer, and he told me about some of his sparing matches. "I remember I knocked out a Japanese boy in California. He thought he was good. He got in there hopping up and down. I'm just weaving and ducking, weaving and ducking. I'm waiting for him. I just kept my hand up in his face. So when he'd try to switch, I'd switch. So finally I got a shot at him. And that's all she wrote." He even told me about a match that he still thinks about to this day. "I remember Tyrone. I remember I knocked that boy out. I didn't mean it...I always think about that. He was tall, skinny...and one day he was talking about he was so good. I just looked at him. So he said you wanna spar with me, I said I don't care. We got out there in the ring, and he ducked. And when he ducked I hit him with an upper cut. I think about that all the time. I was good. I should have kept going, but my Mama told me [boxing] was dangerous."

My grandfather learned many things during his time in the service. He was a quick learner, and he could remember things easily. 'When I came out of the army I spoke some Italian, a little German, a little French, and a little Turkish. But now, out of all of that...when you're not around it, you forget. I used to could speak good German, but I was never around it. I'd just pick it up, just like that. A lot of guys ask me...did you go to college, I'd say no. I just picked it up just like that."

I asked Grandpa Walt if he had any regrets, and if the war caused any downfalls in his life. He stated, "I had a good life. I was taking care of my mother, and when I came out the army she had all my money saved up for me. Well, number one she was praying for me. Every time I'd hear from her she'd say brother, she called me brother, you gon' be all right. Ain't nothing going to happen to you. And it didn't. Nothing happened to me. She was praying for me." But he did tell me, "I don't remember no funny things. Everything I remember was hard...You had one feeling, to kill."

WWII was an experience that no one will ever forget. Even if you weren't a soldier. But Grandpa was. It's amazing what great history lies in the minds of your elders. I have learned so much more from him, and to write it all would result in the usage of endless sheets of paper, and I can only imagine how much

more he has to offer. My Grandfather is a wonderful, extraordinary man. His years in the service show that he is strong, courageous, and heroic. I am proud to say that he is my Grandfather.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Walter Lewis Brown was born in 1923. He entered the United States Army directly out of high school and began serving in 1940. In 1942 he was sent overseas to fight many battles against rival armies. Upon the war's end, Walter returned home to Mississippi in 1945, but only was only able to stay for a short while. Three months later he went back into the service to be a truck driver and bring army trucks from France to Germany. He did this for approximately three years. In 1948 he returned back to Mississippi and drove a taxicab for many years. When he tired of this, Walter moved to Cleveland Ohio to be with his other siblings who had come to this city prior to him. Years later, in 1984, he met Sally Brown, who is my grandmother. They are now married. Walter is not my father's real father, but rather his stepfather. Walter Lewis Brown will be eighty years old on his next birthday.