

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 66

My Grandfather Walter

It was 1945; I was not born yet. The war in Europe was still going on. My Grandma, Ethel, was working in a hat factory, waiting for her second husband Walter to come home from Iceland, where he was stationed. He was with the combat engineers, building bridges and airports. It would be a long wait for her. My Grandma was used to waiting and hard work, because my real Grandpa had died in 1936 with Typhoid fever. She had kept the family farm going, raised three kids and lost two from smallpox.

Walter had been the handyman when my Grandpa died, and he stayed on to help my Grandma survive. He was a godsend. They got married and he became the sole provider because he didn't want her working. He said a woman shouldn't have to work outside the home – The war ended that. So, she had to work in a munitions plant until he returned.

Walter was a merchant Marine, and he saw his share of battle because the Germans would fire on all transport ships to Iceland, as they wanted that area for the war. He was wounded, but refused to go back to the states, because he said the U. S. needed him and his engineering skills. He was a buck sergeant and he was responsible for all the transportation in and out of Iceland, plus building bridges and airstrips.

He came home in 1945 on the Queen Elizabeth. I was born that next year and, guess what. He wanted my name to be Elizabeth; that is my middle name. Grandma was so happy to see him and they picked up the way things were before the war. She never had to work again, and he landed a good job at the mill in town.

The merchant Marines never quite received the recognition I think they deserved. Without them the war may have taken a different turn. They weathered battles, freezing temperatures in Iceland, hunger and extremely hard work. I'm sure he would just say "oh well, just part of the job," but I think they need to be recognition for their efforts. They should be recognized for the honor, the heroes they were. He died before he could be. He served from 1943 to 1945.

The Merchant Marine was recognized by Harry S. Truman but most of them did not receive pensions or medals because they were considered to be civilians.

(Continued)



WALTER LEACH

To you who answered the call of your country and served in its Merchant Marine to bring about the total defeat of the enemy, I extend the heartfelt thanks of the Nation. You undertook a most severe task—one which called for courage and fortitude. Because you demonstrated the resourcefulness and calm judgment necessary to carry out that task, we now look to you for leadership and example in further serving our country in peace.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Harry Truman".

THE WHITE HOUSE



ARMY SERVICE FORCES
 TRANSPORTATION CORPS
 ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES



NEW YORK PORT OF EMBARKATION

Tec 4 Walter Leach
 215th Engineer Service Battalion
 returned to the UNITED STATES on the
 ship Queen Elizabeth
 which sailed from Southampton, England
 on 26 Aug 1945



Sig. *James M. Alexander*
 Title *Capt. C.I.E.*



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