

A Son's Recounting of WWII Wartime Accounts of His Deadeye Dad

Revision 2

by Wesley Roland Hillstrom

Background: The Making of a Leader:

My dad, Wesley Rudolph Hillstrom, was a U.S. Army 81mm. mortar platoon sergeant in the 96th Division's (The Deadeyes) 382nd Regiment, H Company, Third Platoon. The 96th Division distinguished itself by being recognized with two highly prestigious awards: the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation (an award of the Republic of the Philippines), for extraordinary heroism during the Leyte Campaign, and the Presidential Unit Citation (an award of the United States) for extraordinary heroism during its subsequent Okinawa Campaign.

Dad grew up in northern Michigan, in Salo, a Finnish farming community on the outskirts of the town of Hancock. He was an excellent student, when 13 years old winning a county-wide scholastic contest and a trip that included meeting the Governor of the state of Michigan. He also enjoyed listening to classical music. He was also a tough farm kid growing up in the Great Depression and that background undoubtedly contributed to his success as a good soldier and an effective leader.

Like many men growing up in the Great Depression, my dad's childhood and adolescent years were not easy. His father, a carpenter by trade, and his older brother, the oldest of nine children, had to travel long distances to find work to provide for the family. That arrangement left my dad, as the oldest sibling, to essentially run the farm.

All through his life he remembered how the Depression had affected his family. For example, he enjoyed going to school and was greatly saddened when he could no longer attend. He remembered one instance, in particular, during the first day of the school year, walking behind a horse-drawn plow, during a light rain, wanting to be in school but knowing it was impossible.



An early photograph of my dad's childhood home that my grandfather, Joshua Hillstrom, built in about 1926.

Later during the Depression, dad found work in Texas digging ditches for electrical conduits. He said the manner in which hiring and firing was done at that time was simple. If one leaned on his pick or his shovel longer than it took for him to light a cigarette, he was fired and the next man hired was chosen from a line of several hundred men waiting for a chance to work. On one occasion, dad had a very bad toothache and asked the foreman for permission to see a dentist. The foreman liked my dad because he was a hard worker so he gave him one hour to see a dentist and return to his job. Dad was in such a hurry to get back to his job, the dentist first pulled the wrong tooth before pulling the right one. Nevertheless dad returned to work within the hour. The job was just too fantastic for dad to give up. It was paying the highly lucrative wage of \$28.00 a week for a ten hour, seven day workweek. To augment his finances he also had a part-time job playing an accordion in a tavern during evenings.



A photograph of the old Hillstrom family homestead taken in September, 2016. The house stands in good condition, has always been lived in and is currently under new ownership.

Before he entered the army, dad was a gear tester at Timkens, a manufacturing plant in Detroit, Michigan. He was so good at his job, that he had been known to take gears out of the scrap bin and work to put them in running order on his lunch hour, just to have something to do. As a skilled machinist, he could have been deferred from military service. He chose not to apply for a deferment with the attitude that he was ready to serve if his country needed him. Not too long after he was established in a well-paying job at Timkens, he married my mom, Madeleine, and not too long after that, was called to serve his country.



My mom and dad in their wedding photograph, May 23, 1942, shortly before dad received his invitation to the U.S. Army and ultimately become a Deadeye in the 96th Division.

When young, dad's favorite poem was *Invictus*, by William Ernest Henley. To him that poem was very inspiring and illustrated sheer courage, ending with "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." During his youth dad lived that poem; it was his creed. However, he later said when he ultimately went into combat, he realized he was not really the one who was in control and began developing his faith in a Higher Power.

He remembered one combat situation in particular, in utter chaos, without communication and everything completely out of control. He said all he could do was sit down by a tree and light a cigarette. Ultimately, little by little, he saw that everything just came together to the point to where order was somehow re-established. He then came

to the conclusion that, with respect to the vast configuration of things, he had relatively little control over anything and could only do his job to the best of his ability and let the chips fall where they will.

Following are various true accounts of wartime experiences as dad described them to me. They may not be in chronological order but are given as he related them.

Account 1:

Dad arrived for basic training as one of a number of green recruits, but he had two distinct advantages: farm-developed muscles and a good knowledge of firearms, since hunting was a large part of his growing up. He won a number of awards for marksmanship and sharpshooting in the army.

He also had a natural sense of humor. On one occasion, he did something wrong in close order drill and was admonished by the drill sergeant. Dad stood at attention and exclaimed in a military manner, "Sergeant, the intricacies of these military manipulations are far too complex for my diminutive mind to comprehend!" The drill sergeant blinked and ordered dad to fall back in line.

Account 2:

As dad was a natural leader and a good student, he rose to the rank of platoon sergeant relatively quickly. He recalled an early address by Platoon Leader Lieutenant James Harvey Short to the men of the Third Platoon. Lieutenant Short was the valedictorian of his class at West Point and had proven himself to be an effective leader. In his address, the lieutenant stated that that he wanted every private first class to know more than every private, every corporal to know more than every private first class, every sergeant to know more than every corporal, for the platoon sergeant to know more than the other sergeants, and that he would make it his business to know more than Sergeant Hillstrom. Dad silently smiled to himself, knowing he thoroughly knew the military manual and thought the lieutenant would have his work cut out for him to know more than he did. Dad said Lieutenant Short actually accomplished that objective by devising a method of firing mortars in a battery configuration.

Account 3:

When dad wasn't taking army correspondence courses to augment his education, he did some boxing. One incentive for doing so was in that a three-day pass was offered after finishing a fight. He had a number of wins; I'm not sure if there were any losses, but he remembered one draw in particular. His opponent was a young fellow from somewhere in the southern states. Before the fight, a friend of his opponent told him that his buddy would take it easy if he (dad) would. This is to say that there would be no attempt to "fix" the fight in any way, but the idea would be that the fight would not be unnecessarily brutal for either party. Dad thought that would be fine. Unfortunately, dad's opponent never made any such remark; his friend simply took it upon himself to make that false statement to my dad. After the end of the first round, dad had to be led back to his corner. Dad was so furious, suspecting treachery on the part of his opponent, that by the end of the second round, his opponent had to be led back to his corner. The entire third round was spent with my dad and his opponent essentially standing before each other, slugging it out, so that by the end of the round both opponents had to be led back to their respective corners. Sometime later dad met this former opponent aboard ship, presumably as they were underway to a campaign. Dad told him that he thought he'd thought he'd lost the fight since he'd had a headache for three days afterwards. The other soldier said "What are you talking about? I couldn't hear for a week!". One might wonder if a three-day pass was worth the effort.

Account 4:

There was one sergeant who had been in the army longer than my dad and felt he should have been selected as the platoon sergeant. One evening while he and my dad were in town, he had been drinking quite heavily and decided to pick a fight with my dad. During the encounter, dad sized up the situation and determined that sergeant's plan was to get both himself and my dad busted, so at least neither he nor dad would be platoon sergeant. That sergeant had previously boxed professionally and landed three punches on my dad's face while dad just stood there with his hands in his pockets. Dad asked if he was finished and the soldier staggered off into the night. The next morning after dad had seen his face in the mirror he was furious. He went to that sergeant's bunk, grabbed him, and threw him on the floor. Dad gave the sergeant an ultimatum: he said he was

going to call the platoon to formation and would give him a few minutes to decide to apologize for his actions from the previous night and if he failed to apologize, dad would call him out for a fight. Dad told the soldier he realized the man had boxed professionally, but that fact would not make any difference in his (dad's) determination to win the proposed fight. The sergeant hemmed and hawed for a while, as dad stood looking at his wristwatch, but then apologized before the platoon for his reprehensible actions.

Account 5:

Dad's platoon had been marching all day long and had come to the edge of a wooded area. Lieutenant Short ordered my dad to set up camp. He then told my dad he had to go to battalion headquarters to get the orders for the next day adding that if he did not return before dark, dad would be in charge of the platoon.

After the lieutenant left, dad started to survey the area with binoculars and thought he saw a glint of light in the distant hills. The moment that happened he had a very bad feeling. As a mortar platoon sergeant, he was familiar with mortar tactics and reasoned that if he were defending the area, he would already have certain areas pre-zeroed in so they could be fired upon with mortar or artillery fire at any time, day or night. He conferred with the section sergeants and expressed his concern but their consensus was that Lieutenant Short knew what he was doing and they should remain where they were.

Dad was in a bit of a situation for if one did not obey a direct order under combat conditions, he could be court-martialed unless he had a good reason for not doing so. Dad could not shake that very bad feeling so just before dark, he gave an order for everyone to move 200 yards into the woods and re-establish their positions. Dad said the air "was blue with cursing" from the men, but the order was obeyed because they had been so well-trained by Lieutenant Short.

When nightfall came and the men slept, they were so exhausted that they had not heard the shell fire that had blasted where they had been. The Japanese had shelled the area all night long; any trees left standing had their barks either blown off or burned off. The next morning, from a safe distance, dad showed the men the area where

they had been. From that time on, none of my dad's orders were ever questioned from any of the men in his platoon.

Account 6:

One of the weapons the Japanese used were "spigot mortars" for demoralizing purposes more than as anti-personnel weapons. Dad said that the shells were so huge they could be seen in the air. I read an account in Donald Dencker's book, *Love Company*, that stated these shells made a crater about 12 feet deep and 30 feet wide. On one occasion, one of these shells had landed by dad's foxhole. Fortunately, it was a dud and failed to explode.

Account 7:

Strange but interesting: One day my dad was walking along a road and then just decided to get off it, probably to have a cigarette. Shortly afterward, a shell exploded in the road on the very spot where he had been. I think it was the next day when he and another soldier were walking down a road and heard an incoming shell. For some inexplicable reason, dad remained where he was while the other soldier dived for a ditch. The shell came in seemingly right after that soldier and blew him out of the ditch. Dad never learned whether the soldier had survived that experience.

Account 8:

In all but two of the patrols that my dad led, he made himself the pointman, the two he didn't lead due to difficulties with dysentery. His attitude was that if he was going to lead the patrol, he should be at the front. On one such occasion, while approaching a hut a Japanese soldier ran outside, drew a bead at my dad's head, fired and missed. Dad, filled with instant adrenaline, emptied his weapon at him. Another Japanese soldier then ran out of the hut and behind it to take a firing position. Dad, out of ammunition, quickly grabbed a grenade and threw it to the side of the hut where the enemy had run but just behind the hut. The grenade exploded and eliminated him.

Account 9:

Once while in the Philippines, dad and Sergeant Kenneth Staver ran across some native tribesmen. One of the natives was carrying a Reising submachine gun. For some reason, dad thought to take the weapon away from the man but ignored his better judgment and

decided not to. He then asked if they had seen any Japanese in the area, The natives went into the jungle and came out followed by an entire Japanese patrol, forcing dad and Sergeant Staver to run for their lives. The Japanese chased the two soldiers a good way into the jungle before they managed to get away. Fortunately, dad stumbled across a battalion communication wire which he and Sergeant Staver followed to ultimately get the two men back to their outfit.

Account 10:

During a heated battlefield engagement, dad once related, enemy fire was so intense that one could not raise oneself too far above ground level for fear of being struck by enemy fire. Two soldiers, one Private First Class Willie Krienke and another soldier modified the basic routine for firing a mortar. The normal procedure for firing an 81mm. mortar was pulling a pin from the round to be shot, placing the round in the mortar tube, then firing it. An improvised procedure Willie and the other soldier devised was the latter pulling the pin while lying on his stomach, then throwing the round to Willie who instantly put it in the tube and fired it. Had the round been dropped, the procedure could have been disastrous. But desperate times warranted desperate measures.

On another occasion, Private Krienke and another soldier came across a hut. A careful observance of the activity inside revealed nine Japanese soldiers engaged in such activities as cleaning their weapons. Without much thought about the matter, Private Krienke emptied a submachine gun clip through the sides of the hut. The other soldier quickly handed him another clip which Krienke proceeded to empty through the side of the hut as well resulting in the elimination of all of the enemies within. When dad asked Willie why he didn't call for backup before eliminating the enemy soldiers, Willie just said that by then they would all have been gone.

Many years later, my dad, mom and I were visiting my dad's older brother Hugo in Minnesota. Hugo was involved in agricultural research and invited my dad to go with him while conducting some business. During one of their stops, dad noticed a boy shooting a BB gun nearby. The boy out of the blue asked dad if he had been in the war and had shot any Japanese. Dad answered affirmatively, then added he knew a soldier who lived somewhere in that area who had

shot nine of the enemy by himself. The boy asked his name and when dad replied Willie Krienke said the Krienke farm was just up the road. Intrigued, dad, my uncle, and the boy went to the farm. A man came out of the farmhouse with a curious expression soon followed by a wide smile; it was the same Willie Krienke. I was told that dad and Willie enjoyed their reunion. This story might sound unbelievable, but it is absolutely true. Although I was not present to witness that occasion, I heard their recounting of it at a following platoon reunion.

Account 11:

My dad's parents had emigrated from Finland. Finnish was spoken in the farm home and he had learned to speak, read, and write Finnish. On one occasion, he was asked by another soldier of Finnish descent to help him write a letter to his mother. That soldier couldn't write Finnish well and his mother couldn't read English. In order for dad to get to that soldier's outfit, he had to cross a large open area. When dad asked who was in control of that area, he was told it was under the control of U.S. forces. Unfortunately, unknown at that time, the Japanese had actually retaken a part of that area, which included the field that dad had to cross.

On the way to the soldier's outfit, a machinegun opened fire as dad was crossing the field. Dad said the instant that gun started firing, he saw that his only chance for survival was to run in a zig-zag fashion, but toward the gun. The machinegun was on a hill and he intuitively realized that if he could get close enough to the weapon, he could get under the line of fire. Dad said that everything suddenly appeared to be unusually bright, also that he never thought so fast nor ran so fast in his life.

As all that was going on, dad's second in command of the platoon, Sergeant Robert Schneider, was overlooking dad's run from atop a ridge. He didn't initially recognize that it was his platoon sergeant who was under fire and thought that "poor S.O.B. was going to get it any minute." He later told my dad as he was running, bullets were churning between his legs. Dad said the bullets came so close to his head they sounded like cracking whips. He successfully got under the line of fire and made his way to the soldier's outfit, where he helped the soldier write the letter and remarked that he had almost got killed on the way there. That soldier was of a spiritual nature and said he

believed when one goes to the aid of one of God's children, no harm could come to him. While dad was running with another soldier on his way back to his own outfit, he might have thought the Finnish soldier's statement had some validity as his and the other soldier's weapons were of course swinging back and forth as they ran. Just as the other soldier's rifle crossed in front of my dad's side, a bullet hit its butt, thus protecting him. Later, Lieutenant Colonel Cyril Sterner, the H Company Commander, stated to my dad, the chances of a trained machine gunner not hitting a single man on an open field were astronomical.

Account 12:

On one occasion, the Headquarters to which dad's company was attached received an intelligence report that a Japanese element was going to attack the company that evening. It was unknown where the attack was to take place so a directive was sent to the company ordering that four of the best men from each platoon were to be stationed around the company perimeter, specifically to draw the enemy's fire and alert the company of the attack. When platoon leader Lieutenant Short read the directive, he ordered my dad to select two of the best men in the platoon and report back to him. Dad obeyed the order and then mentioned to the lieutenant that he had understood the directive specified four men. Lieutenant Short replied, "Well, if you and I aren't the other two best men in this platoon, then there's something wrong with it."

Account 13:

Dad said Lieutenant Short was a man of unquestionable courage. On one occasion when the platoon was attacked by a Japanese banzai charge, the lieutenant without any hesitation grabbed a walkie-talkie and ordered dad to put a mortar into action. Dad said that the lieutenant looked like a football player, weaving through our retreating platoon toward the enemy. He then ordered mortar fire practically on his own position. When the mortar shells began to explode the enemy took cover, enabling everyone in the platoon to get to a safer position. Dad said Lieutenant Short was awarded the Bronze Star for this action.

Account 14:

On another occasion, after dad's unit had orders to shoot to kill anything that moved or spoke, after dark, he felt something bite him in the right shoulder. He could not call out to a medic for aid and thus had no choice other than to wait in silence the entire night until dawn. All he could do was smoke a cigarette every now and then, underneath his poncho. At first light he called for a medic and was taken to an aid station; his shoulder had swollen to the size of a baseball. The doctor cut into the affected area with a scalpel and the pressure was so great in his shoulder that the wound spurting liquid into the doctor's face. In order to counteract the effects of the poison, dad was given one shot of penicillin every hour for 36 consecutive hours. In retrospect, dad considered that episode to actually have been a blessing in disguise. He had a very bad case of "jungle rot," as did many of the men in his platoon, for they weren't able to take their boots off for several weeks. If they did so, their feet would swell and they would not be able to wear their boots at all. Fortunately for my dad, the penicillin not only counteracted the effects of the poison but also cleared up the jungle rot.

Account 15:

My dad was awarded the Bronze Star for helping to dig five soldiers out of a cave that had collapsed during a continuing barrage of artillery fire. He was first to arrive on the scene, followed by Sergeant Robert Schneider who was also awarded a Bronze Star. On another occasion, dad was offered a Purple Heart that he respectfully declined. He was hit by a spent bullet but felt there were too many other soldiers who had paid too dear a price for that medal for him to accept it for such a minor wound. I feel, however, that after what he had gone through during his battlefield service he would have been perfectly justified in receiving that award.

Account 16:

To say the least, my dad was a responsible soldier. However, under certain circumstances, soldiers have been known to do a bit of celebration, even on the battlefield. For my dad, May 23, 1945 was one such occasion as that was the date of his third wedding anniversary.

One of my dad's very good friends was Technical Sergeant Howard W. McGraw, the machinegun platoon sergeant. That soldier had a bit of a sense of humor, as dad often remembered him as poking his head out of his foxhole yelling "Come git me mama, I'm eatin' dirt!" As it happened, dad's wedding anniversary occurred during a time when dad's outfit had been fighting for days for the control of a certain hill in Okinawa. That evening, he and Sergeant McGraw were celebrating by drinking straight medical alcohol mixed with lemon powder making some type of battlefield cocktails. The last thing dad said he remembered about the evening was telling a joke. That next morning with something of a hangover he was arguing with a member of the medical staff in trying to find out what had happened the night before. In exasperation, the staff member finally gave him the choice of either returning to the States to a medical pension or returning to the battlefield to find out what had happened. Being "very brilliant," dad said, he chose to return to the battlefield.

As it turned out, in the middle of the night, dad had run to the top of the hill his outfit and the Japanese had been fighting over, waving a .45 caliber pistol and throwing handfuls of mud in the direction of the enemy while yelling at them to come out of their holes and fight like men. Sergeant McGraw, who was essentially as bad off as dad was, ran up after him and dragged him down. Miraculously, no one, neither American nor Japanese, fired a shot during that episode. After learning about the incident, Lieutenant Colonel Sterner told my dad that had he been sober the colonel would have put him in for the Medal of Honor, then said that as it was he should order him to pick up beer cans.

Dad and I never discussed that incident at length but I'm reasonably certain as to what he was thinking before he singlehandedly decided to charge that hill. He was probably thinking that he should be home with the lady of his dreams instead of on some rock thousands of miles away from home. With that in mind, he probably thought, let's just get this blasted war over with and go home!

In 2007 I had the opportunity to visit Okinawa as an employee of the Naval Oceanographic Office. If I didn't actually find the very hill that my dad and the Japanese Imperial Army fought over, I'm sure that I came very close to it. In any case, I must have crossed his tracks

numerous times. I think that today the word “awesome” is grossly overused, but to be where my dad and the men with whom he served had helped to make history was for me a truly awesome experience.

Account 17:

Dad once remarked to me that anyone who claimed to have been in combat and said that he wasn't scared was either lying or crazy. He related to me an occurrence wherein one of the men in his platoon was temporarily caught up in the heat of a battle and ran for the jungle. Dad took off and caught up with him. Dad then told the soldier that his duty was to be at the front line.

After the soldier had left to go back to the front, dad found himself all alone in the jungle. He said a strange thing then happened wherein he was caught between two inner battles. One side of him was saying that if he chose to return to the front, he would probably be facing certain death and all he had to do was wait until the action subsided, then say he got lost in the jungle. Another side was saying it was his duty to return to the front line. Dad said his feet felt like lead and that he had to physically, with some effort, face in the direction of the front line and start back to it. He added that after he had overcome that fear, it never returned again with that level of intensity.

It was later that day that Lieutenant Short, completely unaware of this episode, asked dad if he would accept a battlefield officer commission to second lieutenant because he liked the way dad handled himself in battle. Dad said he would accept that commission.

Account 18:

Dad said Lieutenant Short always wanted to have a good view of the action and had the habit of getting out of his foxhole and observing the battlefield with binoculars, on one knee. Dad told him of his concern that that one day he would do that and not get away with it. Sure enough, on a later day while observing the action, the lieutenant was hit by machinegun fire. After putting that sniper out of action, dad and another soldier made a stretcher with their field jackets and two poles and took the lieutenant off the battlefield to an aid station, under a barrage of phosphorous shell fire. In the aid station, dad said Lieutenant Short was literally covered with mud and blood and was exasperatingly complaining to him something like, “Sergeant, I have

played football, baseball, and many other sports in human competition and never been hurt, and here I am knocked out of the war!" The last words he said before he passed out were, "You're doing a fine job, men, give 'em hell!" Dad didn't see the lieutenant again until about thirty years later at a platoon reunion, as a retired full colonel.

Account 19:

About four days before dad's battlefield commission was to go through, one of the sergeants under his command was killed while doing the job of an officer who for some reason was unable to perform his duties. Dad remembered the mother of that sergeant pleading with him at a train station when embarking to the Pacific saying "Please take care of my boy", which really got to him. After having a few more drinks than he should have, dad went into the officers' club and strongly admonished that officer for not performing his duty that resulted in the sergeant being killed. My dad's actions that evening lost him the commission to second lieutenant. Lieutenant Colonel Sterner said to my dad that he was probably the best platoon sergeant in the company but if he, Sterner, were to let the commission go through he could never give another order as a company commander because of dad's actions. Instead of being commissioned a second lieutenant, dad was offered a choice of remaining with his outfit as a private or being transferred in grade to another outfit. Dad's answer was that he had trained with his outfit and his choice was to remain with the men he had trained with. He lost the command of the platoon and was busted to a private. Shortly afterward, a captain offered him an assignment as a recon sergeant, because in his words, he needed a good man to fulfill the role, and dad was restored to a sergeant's rating.

Actually, in retrospect it was probably better that dad didn't get that commission. My understanding is that the attrition rate for officers on Okinawa was quite severe. Had my father received that commission, considering the type of take-action leader he was I might have never known him.

Some while later dad received a letter from Lieutenant Short, who was still recovering from his wounds from being machine gunned. He stated in the letter that all my dad had needed to have done was keep

his head and as an officer could have pursued the reason why that sergeant was killed when performing the role of that officer. After Lieutenant Short was hit and taken out of action, he could not offer any assistance in the matter. He then went on to tell my dad that he would be proud to again recommend him at any time for a commission in the United States Army.

Account 20:

Undoubtedly, one of the reasons Lieutenant Colonel Sterner regarded my dad as possibly being the best platoon sergeant in the company stemmed from the following episode: On one occasion, dad and the colonel were in a valley presumably engaged in some type of reconnaissance. Suddenly the enemy began overflowing the ridge in a banzai charge. The colonel desperately radioed for tank support several times, finally saying if it did not arrive in the next two minutes then forget it because they would no longer need it. Dad looked at the colonel and stated "The situation looks rather dubious, doesn't it, sir?" to which the colonel replied "Yes, it does!". Shortly afterward, a tank appeared on the opposite ridge. Dad said it seemed like an hour as the tank turned its turret to point its gun in the direction of the enemy and fired off a few rounds. As those shells exploded, the Japanese hit the dirt, enabling dad and the colonel to get away.

Account 21:

The Japanese had a practice of "booby-trapping" items with explosives, in the hope of injuring or eliminating an unsuspecting GI. Dad noticed a young soldier about to pick up a small trunk on the battlefield and stopped him from proceeding any further. Dad obtained a rope and very carefully wound it around the trunk. He payed the line out to a safe distance, and then he and the soldier took cover. Dad then yanked the rope; the trunk briefly spun in the air before exploding.

Account 22:

Another of my dad's friends was Corporal Mark Sullivan who had been transferred into dad's platoon after washing out of the Army Air Corps on his final physical. He had proven himself to be very capable in combat. I understand that he had swum to a burning landing craft to retrieve supplies for his fellow soldiers. On one occasion he was hitching a ride to Manila with an Air Corps buddy. During the flight the

aircraft developed engine trouble and Mark had to bail out. As luck would have it, he landed in the middle of a Moro tribal baptismal ceremony. The tribespeople assumed he was some type of a god having come to earth to honor the ceremony so in keeping with the situation, the tribespeople named the child Mark Sullivan.

Corporal Sullivan, I understand, submitted my dad's name for a Bronze Star for carrying Lieutenant Short off the battlefield to an aid station when wounded by the machinegun. Apparently, however, no further action was taken at the time.

Account 23:

The fighting between the US and the Japanese was extremely intense throughout the entire Pacific Campaign, but even during the most intense fighting there were rare elements of humor.

On one occasion, dad was interviewing two Japanese prisoners by using a book that contained phrases in both English and Japanese. Communication could be established by one party pointing to a phrase in either English or Japanese, and the other party pointing to an appropriate phrase in the other language. Dad pointed to a phrase that inquired what rank the soldier was, and the soldier pointed to a phrase that indicated that he was a lieutenant. The other Japanese soldier laughed and pointed to a phrase that indicated the first Japanese soldier was actually a private. Dad surmised that apparently the soldier thought that he could get better treatment as a lieutenant than as a private.

Account 24:

Near the end of the Okinawa Campaign, dad reasoned before the atom bomb was utilized against Hiroshima that the Japanese could not realistically continue the war much longer. He saw that the Japanese were mounting artillery pieces on wooden wheels. They would roll their artillery pieces into position, fire off about eight rounds, and be retaliated with an inordinate number of artillery rounds from the U.S. Forces. Dad made a bet with a captain that the war in the Pacific would be over by Christmas. He never collected on the bet but was, to say the least, relieved indeed to be going home.

Closing Comments

I have heard my dad's battlefield accounts since I was a kid. It is easy for history to be forgotten or passed over as inconsequential elements within a certain period of time. I am reminded of an incident that dad related to me regarding comments made to him from a fellow worker at Timkens, following my dad's return to civilian life. The worker told him that while dad was "playing around out there" he paid for his house while working long hours as part of the homeland defense effort. It took a great deal of effort for dad not to clobber his clueless colleague on the spot.

For a while, dad pursued mechanical engineering studies on the GI Bill, but he wasn't able to seriously pursue his studies, being relatively fresh out of combat. He suffered a fifteen percent hearing loss from his battlefield engagements and for some time afterwards developed a severe case of tinnitus. He also had PTSD issues, after five and a half months of battlefield activity. My mom told me about dad's bouts with "battle fatigue" but I don't have any recollection of them. Mom played a significant role in helping dad to adjust to civilian life. Dad tried to deal with the effects of the war by drinking. He ultimately quit drinking and helped a number of other individuals attain sobriety as well.

For a number of years following the end of World War II, members of my dad's platoon would meet at three year intervals, generally coinciding with the Fourth of July. The reunions became occasions wherein the families of former Deadeyes would meet and enjoy quality time together at various towns and cities within the United States. One year, the reunion was hosted at our family home in Detroit, Michigan. I can still recall the genuine camaraderie that the former Deadeyes enjoyed.

Occasionally, dad ran across former Third Platoon members, outside of platoon reunions. On one occasion, while dad was about to pay the bill, after he and my mom had been enjoying some refreshment at a small town Michigan tavern, the cashier said that his bill had already been paid. After dad had inquired who had paid the bill, the cashier gestured to a man seated a distance away and the smiling face of Elwyn (Holly) Hollenbeck, a former Third Platoon corporal.

A sense of camaraderie was enjoyed by relatives of Deadeyes, as well. During a period of time within the Vietnam era male college students were required to take a college proficiency exam, to determine their standing with respect to the Selective Service System. Men from a number of various colleges met to take their exams at the same time. Before the exam, as I was chatting with a fellow Wayne State University colleague, the fellow seated in front of me turned around, smiled and extended his hand. I returned the gesture and shook hands with Tom Schram, the son of Norman Schram, a former sergeant and squad leader in the Third Platoon. At the conclusion of the exam, Tom stated "See you at the next (platoon) reunion". My Wayne State colleague, perhaps concerned with his performance on the exam then stated with some dry humor, "It might be a lot sooner than that".

I believe history should be remembered and heroism honored. I am reminded of comments made by President Ronald Reagan during his Farewell Address regarding the importance of studying American History. For me, dad will always be a hero and my petite, angelic, gentle mom as well for she too was of the "Greatest Generation." I remember my dad, with tears in his eyes, talking to me tenderly about my mom who stood by his side through their nearly 50 years of marriage and ever remained the girl of his dreams. Dad passed away in March, 1992 and my mom followed in July, 2004. To my last day, I will be grateful to God for allowing me the privilege of being their son.

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