

Who were the Deadeyes?

The 96th Infantry of the US Army during WW2 was made up of young men who were farmers, factory workers, carpenters, students – hard-working Americans sent mostly from the Northwest and Midwest including Indiana. Many came straight out of high school, only 18 years old.



After intensive training in 1944, the division was sent into combat. They were dubbed “The Deadeyes” by General Easley for their excellent marksmanship. The 96th would become known for their role in securing strategic islands in the Pacific: Leyte and Okinawa, both occupied by the Japanese. It was vital for these locations to be secured for the war in the Pacific to be won.

The Battle of Leyte was intense, horrifying. Our soldiers fought against the cruelest of enemies and witnessed the worst of humankind. They faced incredible resistance. It was there on Leyte where General MacArthur had promised, “I shall return.” He did return - and with the courage, sacrifice, and tenacity of the 96th, Leyte was secured.

The 96th then fought the battle for Okinawa – the largest land, air and sea battle in the Pacific. The battle began on Easter Sunday, April 1, and was dubbed “Operation Iceberg.” (The movie Hacksaw Ridge (which was actually Sawtooth Ridge) depicts how brutal the Battle for Okinawa was. Intense, grueling battles with the unrelenting Japanese enemy lasted for two months. Flames and bullets, mortars and hand grenades ripped apart, - severed the bodies of their buddies. Our brave soldiers kept fighting among the dead, and near-dead with many screaming and crying for their mothers.

Soldiers were slaughtered and replacements were sent in. Typhoons came and the mud was so deep tanks were useless, and still it rained. Deadeyes, along with other Army divisions and Marines, kept hammering away, day after day, exhausted, and soaked in mud.

Finally, in June, they captured the last of the island and America’s 48 star flag was raised over Okinawa. Victory was secured, The Deadeye soldiers waited, not knowing if they would soon be in battle with Japan on their homeland.

The dropping of the atomic bombs in August of 1945 ended the war. Japanese surrender papers were signed just off Okinawa on the USS Missouri. The 96th would not be invading the mainland of Japan.

There were 15,000 Deadeyes over the course of the WWII. Of those thousands died or lived with injuries for the rest of their lives. Nearly 50 Deadeyes are still Missing In Action. The 96th Infantry men were well decorated with five Medals of Honor, Purple Heart medals, Silver Stars, Bronze stars and very importantly the rare Presidential Unit Citation.

The 96th Infantry soldiers, the Deadeyes, returned to their homes, lived their lives, had families, and became known as the Greatest Generation. They always remembered their buddies and often carried the unseen battle scars of war.

Who was Bill Hill?

He was lots of things to lots of people. His family called him Richard, his friends called him Bill. His kids: Paul, Janet, Joyce and Bill all called him Dad. His grandkids called him Grandad or Granddaddy. To each of these William R. Hill was an incredible person, a loving, kind man. A grandfather who wrote poems about them, joked and played games with them, and took them on walks. He adored his wife Jeane, his bride of 71 years. They raised their family in Roachdale, Indiana. Bill drove 45 miles each way to work in Indianapolis in Allison plants. - for 38 years!



Just after Bill graduated from Tech High School in Indianapolis, in 1944, he was drafted into the US Army. His whole Army experience can be found on his webpage at rememberthedeadeyes.com.

Bill Hill was just a common foot soldier, a Technician 3 who loved the Deadeyes all the rest of his life. He probably did more for the Army in his last twenty years than he was able to do while in service. He was awarded medals for his service. Serving with the 96th Deadeyes, was the most defining experience of his life. The pride he had from being a soldier motivated him toward becoming the man he truly wanted to be.

In his later years Bill, with son Paul, returned to Okinawa for a visit that changed his life. He brought home a small container of Okinawa Mud, which he shared with only a few. After this trip, Jeane told us all, “He is obsessed with everything Deadeye!”



He honored his division by developing his website “Remember the Deadeyes” so everyone would know the contributions the 96th Infantry made in keeping our country free. He spent hours and hours researching every aspect of the 96th. He also flew on an Honor Flight trip to Washington DC to see the WWII monument, and then became a spokesperson for Indy Honor Flight. He helped

many families of the 96th find Army history about their loved one. Like many vets he made presentations in schools. He most enjoyed sharing what it was like being in the US Army, and how it was to be an 18 year old heading off to war in a foreign land, and like all soldiers, not knowing if he would make it home. He made interviews, wrote articles for papers, and rode in parades. He spoke at veteran events and history museums. He made Deadeye website cards and gave them to everyone he met.

Something we can all learn from him, is one of his favorite pieces of advice. “If you can do just one thing, no matter how small, that will make someone’s, day - DO IT.”

