

James W. Estes World War II Story

I graduated on May 9, 1945 and was called into service on May 10, 1945. I began the second stage of my life when I was scared to death. I had lost my older brother in the war with the Germans while in the "Battle of the Bulge." I left Jasper, Alabama on a chartered bus at 6:15am on a Saturday morning after graduating from High School on Friday night. We were sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi where we were issued all of our army clothes that would take us through six weeks of basic training.

We left camp Shelby Mississippi the next day on a troop train for Camp Gordon Georgia where we received our training. It was very hot and sandy soil. We went through hell on some parts of our training. We lost some of our guys on two different missions, which I don't like to think or talk about. We were really brainwashed about killing the Japanese who started war with us. I trained with some great soldiers from all over America.

After our six week training we got to go home for ten days before traveling by train to Fort Ord California. We learned how to load on a battleship and get off with a rope ladder. After three days of training we boarded a troop train to Seattle, Washington and left from Fort Lawton, Washington to join the 32nd division somewhere in the South Pacific to fight the Japanese. There were about seven thousand soldiers on this troop ship. This was about the second week of July. We were on the ship for over a month because I remember signing the payroll after we left Washington State. We traveled slowly with an escort. The ocean was very rough. I got so seasick and vomited so hard and so that I must have lost ten pounds. It is the worst sickness you can have.

We were also in a typhoon that lasted two days with the ship knocking and water coming down into our sleeping quarters. We went to bed on a Wednesday night and woke up the next Wednesday morning. We had crossed the International Date Line where we gained a day going and lost a day coming back. We found on the ship that we were going to Leyte, a small Island to fight the Japanese. We had our knives and plenty of ammo.

They dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and celebrated because it killed so many Japanese, in fact, it wiped out the whole town. A few days later as we were nearly 150 miles from Nagasaki, Japan we dropped the second bomb on them, wiping out that town. We had to stop and anchor for two days because of bad weather waves from the bomb. Thank God while we were waiting to go on the Japanese surrendered. Our orders were changed to head for Nagasaki, Japan to join with the 32 division and the 1st Marines to secure the town. The Japanese did not believe the war was over for at least two months.

We traveled as close to the Bay as we could get. There were ships all over the place that had been lost because of the dropping of the atomic bomb. Our commander called out about two hundred of us to get off the ship and help secure the Island. My name was in the first few called and I almost fainted. I was scared to death. I just knew we would get killed.

The bay was full of floating mines which looked like wash pots. If you bumped into one it would explode and sink a ship. We boarded LST boats which would hold about twenty soldiers and we followed a mine sweeper which steered us clear of the mines. We finally arrived at the shore to see a sign that read Kilroy was here first. I don't know what that meant. After the troop ship unloaded us twenty five or more, they turned and headed toward Tokyo. I will never forget how this Island looked like. It smelled awful. There were 15 of us in our squad and we found a little school behind a mountain that the bomb had skipped over. With no electricity this would be our barracks for the next three months or more.

Our mission was to clean up this town. Bury the dead or parts of the bodies that we could find. We had one big bulldozer which we would dig a long trench and pile all we could find, dump them or legs, arms, skulls, into the trench and cover them up with dirt. We had to have scouts out watching out for us because some still didn't believe they had surrendered.

Several times when we would go up in the mountains to haul bombs and rifles out of the caves where they had them stored, a Japanese soldier would shoot at us, but we would find him and put his light out. We would

haul these rifles down to our place, stack their butts on top of each other and pour gas on them and set fire. They would burn all night. The next day we would load the metal part left on a truck and haul it to the bay where we had their army barges and take them out in the ocean and dump them in the water.

We did this clean-up for six months before it was safe to be in this town on this Island. It was a very cold winter; we only had charcoal for our heat. We slept in a circle on the floor with our feet close to the pot so they would stay warm. This was on the floor and not in a bed or on a cot. Our night lights were lanterns burning oil to see by.

Along in early spring, the 32nd division was called back to the states. They had been together fighting Japanese for two years. The army used the point system to see who was eligible to come home. It was one point for every month you were in service and three points for every child you had. Nearly all of them had three hundred points or more and I only had six points.

Our orders were to go to Yokohama, Japan for the 32nd to be shipped back to the states. Three of us did not have enough points to come home, so we were ordered to recant to the 719 M.P. Battalion in Yokohama to serve the rest of our time. We traveled by train to this town about fifteen miles an hour. We had to stop and fix the rails several times. We were in three box cars with the sides half blown off from bombing and the floor was made of long planks. We had a 6" crack all the way down the middle of the box car. That was how we used the restroom- your number one and two jobs. It was not very private or sanitary.

As I said, Japan consisted of three Islands, Hiroshima, Kyushu and I don't remember the other one about Tokyo. We went in a tunnel from one Island to the other, which took a while to travel it.

When we came out of the tunnel which was under the ocean, we came into the city of Hiroshima where the 1st Marines had it almost cleaned up. The bomb completely demolished the city. It was so strange to see a white Catholic church standing in what was supposed to be in the middle of town

without one scratch on it. We stayed for about an hour to eat our rations and rest from the wobbling ride. I walked around looking at the ruins of the city. We saw an image of a person who was burned into the concrete. It was like someone had drawn a picture of a person. The heat from the bomb was so hot that it caused him to look like he was melted in the concrete.

We traveled to Yokohama where I was assigned to the 719 M.P. or military police, until I came home six months later. General McArthur was our commanding General who had his office in Tokyo which was about ninety miles up the Island from us. He came down to our city several times. I got to drive the jeep that escorted him through our town when he went south to visit other troops. He was called back to the states when everything was pretty much under control. General Eichelberger took his place and he was still there when I left for the states.

The occupational army relieved us of our duties in Yokohama. I had a good time while serving with the M.P.s. We were the kingpins over everybody, city, Island and their government. I got to travel all over the city and would go to Tokyo and saw all of it. I had my own private jeep to travel in with the M.P. signals all over it. I got to come home before my time was up over there. I got my order to leave Japan in July of 1946. We came back on a small troop ship of about two hundred soldiers on it. It took us twelve days to get to Seattle, Washington. We were welcomed by a big U.S. army band when we arrived back to the states.

We spent two nights there, and then came to Chicago, Illinois on down to Jasper, Alabama. No one of the family knew when I would get home. I got a taxi about midnight and went to Leon and Adell's to spend the night. They were really surprised to see me. I reported to Camp Lee, Virginia after 18 days at home. I served six months in the Quarter Master's camp then was sent to Fort Meade, Maryland and got discharged there on November 4th.

I rode a train to Birmingham and hitch-hiked to Jasper. Everyone was glad to see me and me them.