

R.H.P.

Age: 87.
Service: United States Navy. Lieutenant, junior grade. Served on a destroyer in the Pacific Ocean near Korea

Did you see any combat at any of the places you went? What was that like?

One of the nicest experiences in life is to be shot at and missed.

Do you remember what some of the most difficult parts of the war were?

The environment was difficult at times, especially during the winter. Being off the coast of Korea in the winter was like being in Nome, Alaska, or something. The wind came out of Siberia. We had salt water freezing on the topside of our ship, and it was really miserable. I took my hat off to those carrier pilots that were flying during World War II in those carriers, which were not really designed for jets yet. Occasionally we'd have some experience where there would be a loss of life: Not on our ship, but a pilot shot down, or maybe one of the mine sweepers had hit a mine. There were some difficult times.

Do you have any specific memories that stand out to you?

I remember the excitement and challenges of meeting your duties, whatever it was with (carrier fleets) Task Force 77 and 95. Another interesting thing that happened to us was after we got back from our second cruise back to Pearl Harbor, we were almost immediately sent down to the Marshall

Islands, for a thing called Operation Castle. You know about Bikini and all the atomic bomb tests? We were in Operation Castle, which was the 1954 hydrogen bomb. The hydrogen bomb in '54 was four or five times bigger than the engineering people, the scientists, had thought it would be. We were about 20 miles away from the bomb site - Blast Bravo. Blast Bravo was about a thousand times bigger than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima or Nagasaki. What happened, unfortunately, was the weather: Wind was blowing from one space which was

safe on the lower stratosphere, and the upper stratosphere was going the opposite direction, and the atomic debris fell onto all of us and the Marshall Islands. The islands had to be evacuated. Our ship was the most heavily radiated ship ever in the history of the Navy. Some of our crew were burned. I wasn't affected, but I'll tell you, the bomb blast was ... *spectacular.*

What was it like?

Frightening. It turned night into day. Everything was illuminated. We weren't supposed to look, to turn away and (use) goggles, but you had to look at some point. You would just think, "Anybody who would propose nuclear warfare would be totally demented."

Where were you? I'm assuming you were inside, because you didn't get burned.

I was on the bridge. I did not get burned, but some of my crew mates did, who were exposed. We had wash-down systems, kind of like sprinkler systems, to pump salt water on the ship exterior to wash away anything, and we used that. The Navy wasn't very good about that, about (the) aspects of atomic radiation exposure, for a long time. People were suffering, and not just in (the) Marshall Islands and so forth, but military people down in the desert that were exposed to some of those atomic tests were also suffering. It took a long time for the Veterans Administration to recognize that illness that some had had. It was kind of like the handling of Agent Orange in Vietnam. They denied that Agent Orange was a problem, and then they finally admitted it was terrible problem.

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G.M.D.

Age: 97
Service: Maritime Service as a radio operator, Army, trained as mountain ski troops. Europe

What were some of the most difficult moments during service?

When you're face-to-face with Germans, and they're shooting at you, and you have to shoot back. It's either they're going to kill you, or you're going to kill them. I have an aversion to killing people. I tried to wound them, but sometimes you can't. They're shooting right at you, right at your face, (and) you have to shoot back, and you don't know whether you're going to kill them or not. That is the most horrible thing to me. I have a conscience, and I still have nightmares about that.

When did you learn about German prison camps like Auschwitz?

We knew what was going on while we were there. After the war was over, I was still in the hospital. They brought in a lot of the American boys that had been in prison in Germany. They were starved almost to death. They brought them into the hospital I was in, and some of them were so thin they couldn't lay them on a bed. They used straps and suspended them from the ceiling. One of the nurses that was supposed to take care of these boys fainted when she saw them, and then she refused to go in that room again. I would walk by and I should've gone in and talked to them. All they could do was - their eyes would follow you. They were so far gone; they were merely skeletons. It was horrible looking, the look in all of those American prisoners they brought into the hospital after the war.

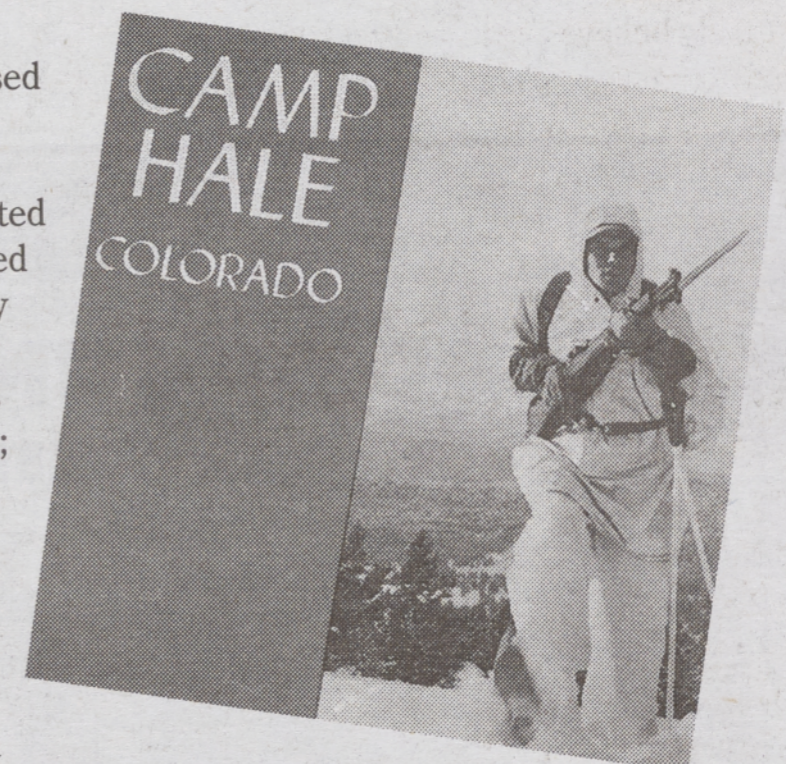
I knew what was going on. I went to the graveyard where all of our boys were, the 50 that got killed the first day. And there was something like 500 airmen that had gone out and never came back.

They had no record of whether they were in prison, or whether they were dead. That really hit me. Of the original planes that took off, only 50 percent of them ever came back - the bombers. We lost a lot of young boys flying those airplanes. Every morning I'd see the planes take off, and go over to bomb the oil fields. At night, we'd see the planes come back. We never counted them, but we (know) their casualties were huge.

Do you think there is anything the general public should know about war?

I think the general public should know that it's people like you and I that are killing each other, and it's the big manufacturers that started the war. (They're) the ones that are profiting from it. Just think of all the airplanes that Boeing sells. Just think of all the rifles that Winchester sells. Those companies cause war. You and I don't cause wars. I've met German people over there that supported their soldiers, just like we supported ours. The fact that we're killing each other, that's the biggest crime there is.

I feel people all over the world are the same. All they want is security for their families, they want a home to protect their families, they want a job so they can support their families. It's the same all over the world. Why are we allowing the politicians to put us in war? I look right now at our president. He is not doing anything to prevent a war. He's just showing off and doing what he wants, not what he feels the nation should want. We don't want war. We've spent money we should've spent on education on buying fifty-million-dollar war weapons. One of our fighter planes costs \$4 million to \$5 million a piece. Just think what we could do for our education, for our kids in school, if we'd spent that money on education. I am very, very angry at all of our politicians. Big money buys them off, and they vote for things that they want. That's what's so bad. I grew up a Republican but I am not OK with what the Republicans are doing now. I think it's all wrong.



G.M.D. on the cover of Camp Hale magazine.

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