One Story From The Greatest Generation

World War II From The Eyes Of Edwin Brown

Foreword

When my grandfather announced that he planned to retrace his naval career and pen as many of his thoughts down as he could remember I must say that I was elated. Not only would I have a personal account of my grandfather's sacrifice for this country, but I would also be able to share his story with friends, family and generations to come. As I read thru the sixty or so pages of handwritten notes, I sensed the pride and passion my grandfather has in the fact that he defended this great country.

Unfortunately in today's society our history is skewed and misrepresented. Our moral standards as a whole are on the decline and true patriotism is dying. While God continues to be pushed aside and our Godly heritage is constantly suppressed in our secular classrooms, the generation of today is being reared without regard for American pride and patriotism. Many of today's generation cannot recite the Pledge of Allegiance or even repeat the tune and lyrics to My Country 'Tis of Thee. God Bless America has become an ancient and outdated anthem and any reference to Jesus Christ in the public arena as the founding cornerstone for our government is strictly scorned. As I watch the teen generation of today, I see a lack of respect for this country and those that gave their all so that they could be extended the same freedoms today. Instead of respecting the older generation they ridicule and even in some cases accost them. Instead of pledging the flag they burn it. Instead of singing patriotic hymns they sing songs that degrade and diminish our country while worshipping the artists that perform them.

I recently took a train trip that traveled near Oak Ridge, TN where the technology for the Atomic Bomb was designed that was used during World War II. As the train conductor passed the site, he made a very profound statement. He said, "There will never be another generation like the World

War II generation in America. They are the best generation we will ever see." While many may debate this statement, I would tend to lean towards the accuracy and truthfulness of its content. My grandfather was part of a generation that probably will never be duplicated. They were willing to leave everything behind to defend the freedoms of their time and times to come. While there are still men and women today that are willing to make the same sacrifice and are making that sacrifice, I sincerely doubt we will ever experience national unity that equals or surpasses that of the World War II generation. I am deeply indebted to this generation and I am proud of my legacy and heritage that was made possible by my grandfather's actions.

When I think of my grandfather a certain Bible verse immediately comes to mind.

1John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

I remember as a teenager receiving the call from a girl I was dating who I had given my class ring to wear. She called me late Friday night to inform me that she had lost my ring in my front yard. It was fall and leaves covered my front yard which made it virtually impossible to find an item as small as a ring. I went to bed that night knowing it would be daylight before I could start searching. In the morning I was wakened by a swooshing sound. I looked out my window and there was my grandfather raking the yard looking for my ring. He had heard that my ring was lost from my parents and was there early Saturday morning to begin the search. That is the type of man my grandfather is. He is a man of few words but you know how he feels about you by his actions. He loves "in deed and in truth". This is the same approach that he took in World War II. His country called upon him and he answered the call without hesitation because he loved his family and wanted to prove his love by defending their country for them.

I hope you enjoy this short sketch of my grandfather's life and that it touches you as deeply as it has touched me. I hope that it kindles in you a spark of patriotism that is much needed in today's society. If only men and women today were of the character of the World War II generation. I have typed out my grandfather's words almost verbatim by how he has them represented on paper. None of the actual stories or facts has been altered in any way from his original writing. I have even chosen to leave his spellings of certain locations as they were penned as well. I will not take for granite the freedoms that I have today and I will forever be indebted to the World War II generation for their service and sacrifice.

Edwin Brown's Only Grandson,
Jeffrey M. Brown

My navy career started April 30th, 1944. We left the Ringgold court house early on the morning of April 30th and went to Atlanta to the army camp there, or nearby. We spent part of the day taking physicals and finished the next day. I was pronounced fit for military service. The next and last thing before returning home and being called for regular service was to personally choose the branch of the service I would like to serve in.

There was something strange that happened that morning. I have never figured it out. Either the Lord performed a miracle or the military made a mistake. I could have also been that the army and navy officers did it to play a trick on the next man coming through the navy door. I had a desire to serve in the navy and see the world. I also was persuaded by the testimonies of my Bro. Don and others that the navy was known to get their men on the water and overseas quicker than the other branches of the service.

So I stepped through the door to the naval officer and was greeted with a few cuss words and the statement that, "You fellows must believe the navy is easy because it seems every one is asking for the navy. Well, the navy has met its quota for the day so pick which branch of the service you had rather have next." I went in the hall and debated which I would pick between the army and marines. I finally settled on the army. I stepped up to the army office door and I was never met with such a cordial smile. He took my papers, looked them over and said, "I welcome you into the army." He then stamped the front of my papers and handed them back to me, thanked me again, and out into the hall I went. I went out of there as a full fledged army man, but in the hall I happened to glance down at my papers and to my surprise across the length of the page was a great big U.S.N. stamped on it. In my mind I have decided to believe the Lord changed that as I walked out.

Well, I had 42 days of a naval career at home. Not really, as this was due to the fact I had not been sworn in yet. It would be 42 more days before that

event would take place. Finally, after long wait, the dreaded and expected day arrived when I would be leaving behind a wife of four years and a baby boy two years and nine months old. The morning of May 17th I arose at 5:30 in the morning, had breakfast and trudged off to the Ringgold court house for the second time, this time for the real thing.

There were 36 young men assembled that morning in front of the court house. Preacher Cummings stood on the court house steps and read form the 91st Psalms, which was comforting for my entire term in the navy. He prayed a prayer and we boarded the awaiting bus and left Ringgold at 7 a.m. for Atlanta. At the Atlanta post office, we were sworn in and put on a train to a destination that neither we nor our folks at home knew of until we were sworn in. Then we found out that we were going to Great Lake Wisconsin. Our folks at home didn't know until they either received our civilian clothes or a letter from us, which ever one might arrive first.

On the train, it was plenty warm on this particular day and most of us spent the evening and night with shirts off. The next morning, I stepped out onto the platform between the cars and I didn't tarry long as it was cold. We were somewhere in Ohio. We arrived in Chicago shortly after lunch to find that to get to Great Lakes we must catch another train. The station was a mile or more away so we had to walk to the other station. The heaviest apparel any of us had was a sweater. Two in our group were in their short sleeves. It was snowing hard and lying on the ground.

We arrived at Great Lakes in late evening, had an evening meal and headed to a warehouse for our new clothes. By this time, the crowd of recruits had swelled to 138 which made up our troop or company that we would be living with. As our stay here began it was the coldest night I would see for 20 months. We then were herded into a supply depot and were told to disrobe and place everything into a box provided to us for shipment home.

We were then issued clothing close to the sizes we indicated. Naturally, we clothed ourselves, packed the rest into a sea bag and marched into our new home away from home. Here we lived 8 weeks before our 1st leave. I won't try to put too much space into the boot camp ordeal. (There was lots of competition and I enjoyed that)

It didn't take much time to become acquainted with our commanding officer. I don't know how long, but it was not too long before he stood on a table in the middle of the room and said, "I weigh 262 pounds and I cover every inch I stand on. If there is any of you *%$*#*@'s that think you can whip me, just step up here and I will beat you into the ground." I heard that several times during this stay here. He would come in at bedtime some nights, step upon that table and cuss a while, then stomp his feet on the table while scraping his steel taps on it. He would say, "I'll be back in 2 minutes and I want this table steel wooled until it sparkles." No wonder I found myself hoping that some day I would be stationed aboard the same ship and he would come into my sights between me and the enemy.

Before I leave this train of thought, I will explain how that I became an admirer of Mr. Swogart, my commanding officer. We had one man from Ringgold named Bud Wilson whose weight matched our company commander's. When boot camp was beginning to come closer to the end than the beginning Bud said, "Mr. Swogart, I would like to battle you sometime at the gym." Bud worked out some with wrestlers at Memorial. (Bud didn't talk very plain) Our whole company was living in expectation of this match which never came to pass. In time, we all decided that it wasn't going to happen.

Well, while sitting on the steps of the barracks one evening near the end of boot camp, someone thought about the wrestling match and asked Bud when it was to take place. Bud said there would not be a match. Mr.

Swogart had spoken with Bud and said, “I have been in this camp since the war started. I turn out sailors every 2 months. I have all kinds and shapes of men. I have to put fear in them because if they don’t learn discipline here they could disobey somewhere in the war and cause someone to lose their life and possibly the life of their buddies. It is my duty to train them the best I know how in hopes they will return home safe. When you boys leave and the next company comes in, if I should wrestle you and lose, and word got out to that company, my reputation of being tough would be gone.”

During boot camp, I had the good pleasure of striking up a friendship with a fellow Catoosa County citizen who was also a fellow believer. Every Sunday, which was our day off from all training except those who happened to be on guard duty or patrol, we would line up and march off to Chapel for a song or two and prayers by the chaplain. This was performed regardless of your belief. The chaplain would bring a sermon from pager number so and so from a hymnal or prayer book. These services were very formal and nothing like what most of us were used to (that is what Christians are used to). But you would be surprised at the blessings that could be obtained from this service by worshipping in our individual hearts.

A fellow serviceman named Barney Callahan and I would slip out from the barracks, between breakfast and church time, and go to a little patch of trees on the edge of the base. One of us would perch on a log that we located and alternating Sundays we would read from the little New Testaments that had been issued to us by the navy. Then we would have a time of testimony and prayer.

Now back to boot camp, we went through many drills such as pushups, jumping jacks, chin ups, climbing over ten foot walls, and hand walking on 50’ ropes hanging over 10’ sawdust pits. We also received many shots and vaccinations that were sandwiched between these events.

Before moving on, let me inset the fact that after hours of studying the type and shapes of the enemy planes as well as our own, knot tying and many other skills that must be acquired, we had a couple hours of free time. Some would use this time to go to the ball field for a game with some other company (I always chose that). Some would go to the gym for boxing, swimming or almost any other activity they desired. From dark until 10 p.m. (lights out) we would share the big table that the commanding officer stomped on to write letters home.

Finally, the magic day came June 28, 1944. We loaded our ditty bags with enough gear for a ten or twelve day journey (the navy always sent our belongings to our next unknown location that was kept hidden from us, unless it was a charge made after we were assigned from ship to ship). We were then given a short time to return home for family time before departing overseas. We reported to the train station in groups according to our home destination. My time at home passed so quickly. I won't have time to barely mention it. My time was put in with my wife Dorothy and baby Mike. Of course, this time was also shared with my father, mother, Dorothy's folks, aunts, uncles, cousins and many, many friends from church.

On July 6th I left the southern depot in Chattanooga for a ride back to Great Lakes. I had a bad experience to think upon for quite a few days afterward. We had said our goodbyes as the porter yelled, "All aboard" and I went inside, the train delayed its start and I decided as I looked out the window and saw Dorothy standing there to go back to the platform for one more of what could be our final kiss. For a while, as this took place I heard the couplings on the train make the normal loud noise as the slack was taken up between the cars. As the train lurched forward and left Dorothy behind I saw her as she stumbled back a little bit toward the train and then regained her balance. I could see her just long enough to see that the Lord had saved

her from a catastrophe. I think of it even today as I write this thinking except for the grace of God what could have happened and I get chills.

I arrived at G.L.'s outgoing unit on July 7th and the next day shipped out to Washington, D.C., in route to Solomon, Maryland. I reported in at Solomon on July 19th, 1944 where I was assigned to a landing craft for training with 12 more sailors and 2 officers from all parts of the U.S. whom I had never seen before. We were from Georgia (myself), Texas, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Michigan, Massachusetts, Ohio and some I don't remember.

In boot camp, we were all of the same rank (blue jackets). But upon our return to the outgoing unit, each one received our specific classification. This classification was derived from the aptitude test we were given in boot camp. There were several pages on various subjects. I can assume that they could tell you your answers where you were best suited for service. I had worked with my dad for 2 summers helping in a filling station and auto garage. They asked many questions about many subjects. When they asked questions about subjects that I was not familiar with I failed miserably. But questions that related to firing order gear ratios and other mechanical problems I passed with ease. I said all of this to explain why upon my return to my outgoing unit I was assigned to the black gang, as it was termed, or as a Fireman 3rd class. All above deck personnel were seaman 3rd class. So, in my crew there were 4 black gangs and 8 seaman, all 3rd class, and 2 ensigns for executive duties.

In the black gangs I was the only one that was straight out of boot camp. The other three consisted of one man that had boot camp combined with 4 months of electrician school and the other two had boot camp combined with four months of machinist school. One of the M.M. graduates was appointed as the head over the black gang. He was a Jewish boy.

Training at Solomon was routine. We would make routine trips daily up and down the Potomac River familiarizing ourselves with the operation of an LCT (landing craft tanks). We made one overnight trip into the Chesapeake Bay and into the open Atlantic and made a mock landing onto a Virginia Beach. All this took place with no mishap except for the fact that I tore the dock down while attempting to enter the dock to tie the landing craft down. We were coming up river about middle ways out and as we neared the dock at the proper angle the skipper gave orders to the seaman on the wheel to give a hard right to line up with the dock. The seaman always handled the wheel and a member of the black gang handles the throttles and the gear shift levers to the engines. We were idling in and as we approached the dock the rear end of the boat needed kicking in a little. The skipper's order to me was to reverse the port engine (left engine) which I did. Nothing changed, any by this time we were heading for the dock at a sharp angle. Skipper hollered, "Full speed reverse." I shifted all three levers to reverse and all three throttles to full speed. By then, nobody had time for nothing. We hit the dock at full speed force. Naturally, we stopped. An inspection below showed a pin had fallen out of the linkage and since we had not had to use reverse all day it could have been out all day. Then I remembered that the shift levers moved without any resistance. Nothing else of importance happened while at Solomon except a movement by me toward being in charge of the engine room unknowingly and without any ambitions on my part.

The toilets on an LCT have a pump with a long handle which when pushed back and forth pumps sea water into the bowl. Well, ours quit working. I asked the skipper if he cared if I tried to fix it and with his permission I took the pump off that was held on by about 4 bolts. I took it to the base repair shop and they fixed the problem. I then put it back on and it worked like new.

I had a 3 day weekend and leave while here and was able to visit home. What a leave! I had 22 hours travel time both ways and 2 hour travel time to a train in D.C. plus at least 1 hour to the southern station on the Chattanooga end. That doesn't leave a lot of home time.

I left Solomon on August 25th, 1944 by way of D.C. going through Chattanooga at 11:30 p.m. We stopped at the old union station just to take on passengers and no one was allowed to get off. Cell phones had not been invented and being 7 miles from my family when no contact could be made was tough.

I arrived in New Orleans on August 26th, 1944 and at the first chance I called Dorothy and said to get to New Orleans as soon as possible. I informed her that I had a few days to stay there. I don't remember the in between chatter between us, but I do remember that I met her at the train station on a Saturday morning. We got a room in a downtown hotel and we were able to spend the night then I had to go back to the base across the river at Algiers Island. I got back to the base early Sunday Morning receiving the information that we were leaving the base the next day for Shell Mound which was a gunnery practice range to practice 20 millimeter gunnery at sleeves pulled behind airplanes. I pleaded my case at the base for a few hours leave back to New Orleans to either find a suitable place for my wife to stay or either to get her on a train back to Chattanooga before I was to leave for Shell mound.

I went back to the hotel, looked at the want ads in the paper and was no closer to an answer of finding a place for Dorothy to stay. I told Dorothy that if we didn't get an answer right away she must get a train for home before nightfall. I happened to remember that I had a good experience with the Red Cross in Evansville, Indiana on both trips to Chicago. I don't remember whether it was the U.S.O or the Red Cross, but we packed her suitcase and found the nearest U.S.O. or Red Cross. They made a few calls for us and it

was not long before that had us on a street car headed for Canal Street for shelter. We arrived and it was a nice two story house with rooms in the basement. Dorothy got one of them. The woman that owned the house had 2 sons in the navy and she had turned her house into a boarding house for sailors and their wives who boarded off base. There were a few of these ladies who were also there by themselves so she made friends with one of these. They went together to downtown New Orleans and ate out a time or tow during my 4 days at Shell mound. After I returned I got to leave the base every night around 4 o'clock and spend nights with Dorothy until we received orders to ship out.

While at Shell Mound, I took my first turn at firing at a sleeve pulled by a plane. The 20 millimeter gun that I was firing had what you would call the stock on a shot gun two contour supports coming out from the butt of the gun. These fit snuggly against your shoulders in the front with a belt going under the armpits and around your back. Well, the instructor buckled me in and I don't know whether I was standing wrong or he just failed to tighten my belt but as the plane flew by with the sleeve tailing behind about 1,000', I got the sleeve in sight and squeezed. The ammo is loaded in the canister on the side of the gun so that every other bullet is what you call a tracer. This tracer leaves a red streak so you can adjust your fire toward your target. When I squeezed the handle which was the trigger, I got the jolt of my life. The kick of the gun bounced me back a little from the butt of the gun and between the shot of each bullet the gun recoil would jerk me back toward the gun. I fired 10 to 15 rounds before I could release the trigger so naturally I had several bounces. In the meantime, the steel helmet strapped under my chin bounced down and the rim of the helmet was on the bridge of my nose. I was real happy when the gun quit firing and I pushed my helmet up where I could see to realize that the plane was still flying. Well, that is enough for Shell Mound and now we can revert back to New Orleans.

We were to report to the ship that would take us to our next destination, which we later found out was to be San Diego, CA. We made arrangement for Dorothy to catch a train the next evening back home. As luck would have it I could not get off the base that evening and I asked two of my crew members that had liberty that night to drop by the station and make sure that she got off o.k. which she did. By the way, while on the base we were assigned to work details each day. My first day I was assigned to a detail that dug a ditch for something pertaining to water but I don't remember what it was.

The next morning when the officer came in I was busy. I don't remember why I had a pair of pliers but I was working on a bunk bed. In our barracks there was our crew and a handful of Russians who had been crippled by a German submarine and put into port at New Orleans while making repairs. In the barracks there were many of the bunks of which some were not usable due to missing parts such as the cross wires and springs that held them together on each end. They were composed of just a flat surface to hold up the mattress. I was working on a bed by taking wires and springs from the most dilapidated bunks and restoring the ones that needed the best repairs. The office came in and said, "Everybody fall out for work detail." I and my crew began to fall out and as I was leaving he said to me, "You hang around and continue what you were doing."

Now getting back to our departure from New Orleans on September 11, 1944, we were transported from the base at Algiers to the Camp Pendleton ship yard and boarded an L.S.T. (landing ship tanks), which was to be our home for the next 37 days. Before leaving the states we went 35 to 40 miles up the Mississippi River to an ammunition depot and loaded 20 mm and 40 mm ammo. The ammo chamber was on the left of the ship and as we each carried a case of ammo up the gang plank we passed right by the stern and I noticed that there was a clump of willows hanging over the water's edge.

I don't remember how or why but some way I had came into possession of some line and hooks. I got a small piece of meat from one of the cooks and in a few minutes I was in business with 2 or 3 lines under the willows I described earlier. I tied off the rails up toward the willows and the results were 4 nice catfish. The skipper asked if he could get the cooks to fix them for the officer's mess that night. I was invited to eat in the officer's mess hall that night with the officers. This made me feel a little uncomfortable but the fish was good.

The next day we went back down river to Pendleton Shipyard where we took on 5 pieces of L.C.T. segments of which 3 segments were to make up the 120' flat bottom craft (too small to be called a ship). Now the L.S.T. our craft was loaded onto was only 378' long so we had very little deck space to use. On September 18th, 1944 we arrived from Pendleton Shipyard to Gulfport Mississippi and had a 2 day uneventful layover there. Then on September 20th, 1944, late in the evening, we left Gulfport sailing into the Gulf of Mexico. As I looked back toward Gulfport, seeing the sun set on the U.S.A., I resigned in my heart that it would be at least 18 months. No more rumors of false hope that we were going to get another short leave home for quite a while.

Our trip across the Gulf and then continuing across the Caribbean Sea was uneventful except for the experience of seeing the most beautiful water in the world and every species of sea life. We saw large turtles lying on top of the water, sharks, flying fish and all kinds of sea going birds. We arrived in Panama on September 26th, 1944 and the next evening we had liberty in the little town of Cristobel Colon. We arrived in a town of about 3 or 4 blocks at that time. All of the store fronts and windows were boarded up with one entrance. We wandered around the neighborhood, bought a four pound pineapple for 16 cents and were stuck until 10 o'clock until we could get an excursion back to our ship. At dark, the doors of these little store fronts

opened and this place turned into sin city. There was no room on the sidewalks for us non-participants to walk. My buddy and I walked in the middle of the street just marveling at the sights.

We headed into the Canal the evening of September 28th, 1944. We pulled in the first lock and was hooked onto two small locomotives one on either side of the Canal. This was repeated 3 times in another dock until we were at Canal level. Our present day larger ship must go all the way around as was so with our battleships and aircraft carriers at that time due to their size. We had to wait at one point in the Canal as there was a considerably larger vessel than ours trying to navigate the bend in the Canal made between two mountains. They nosed around as close to one side as possible, directly heading into the land on the far side of the Canal, then backing up turning the wheel to kick the back end around. After 2 of 3 maneuvers of this fashion they hit straight with the Canal on the other side of the pass. We reached the other side early the next morning and stair stepped through four more locks in the same fashion as we did no the Atlantic side. The difference was the Pacific is 4' higher than the Atlantic, so we only stepped down in the locks 4' less than the step up. Now we were on our way to the Hawaiian Islands.

By the way, the reason we are on our way to the Hawaiian Islands instead of San Diego, CA is because we picked up a company of Marines headed to Guam via Honolulu as we learned a month or so later. They were on an L.S.T. headed for Honolulu when a storm damaged the boat. Since we were the next conveyance coming through, we got orders to change our destination. Our plans being changed only changed our position but our records didn't change as quickly. We were without mail and pay for right at 60 days.

We arrived in Pearl Harbor on the outskirts of Honolulu on the island of Oahu on October 18th 1944. Pearl Harbor has a mouth coming in form the

ocean about one quarter of a mile wide, about one half mile from the entrance it branches in to 3 inlets approximately the same width. They are called the east lock, the center lock and the west lock. We entered through the harbor into the east lock on the Honolulu side of the harbor. Here they offloaded their 5 pieces of our L.C.T. and ours was tied securely together in the position that would accommodate fitting them together. Then a tug boat towed our boat pieces along with crew members and all our gear up into the west lock far enough that there was nothing in sight but the banks of the stream and the mountain apparently a mile away.

We lived on the middle section because that was the part with the sleeping quarters on it. The other two sections had nothing on them that could be useful. We had no power or water and nothing to eat but what we could scrounge up. There was a small boat that came through our place in the middle of the morning and back again in the middle of the evening. Some of us would go to Wapio landing and pick up what supplies that could be consumed without cooking. We lived under these conditions for the most part of a week. The skipper got impatient and went over to Wapio landing to the base to find out why they had pulled us way up there and had sent no construction crew to fit us together. He came back a very unhappy warrior. They told him the crew would have to put it together. He said, "We will just sit here till they send someone." I told the skipper that if I could get some help we could put it together. He was a little hesitant but reluctantly he agreed. Out of a crew of 12, two came up with me and one seaman named Spillman and we started on a Monday morning piecing the vessel together. I will now explain what we had to work with.

Looking at the boat from the right side we had the stern or rear section which housed the engines making this section tilt to the back causing the front of this section to barely clear water in the front. The center section had the crew's quarter on the port side and officers on the starboard side, both to

the rear of this section. They front section sat just to the opposite direction, the front part of the bow was dipped down in front and the rear end of this section stuck up out of the water. Each of these sections had an angle iron near the bottom about a foot from the edge of the sections to be bolted together. These fixtures had a large hole to be line up completely when they finally came together. We also had a couple of 1" thick rods threaded on both ends that were about 3' long. The three sections had 61 air compartments total. Each of these 3 sections contained a row of half sections on the open ends which had to be sealed with an asbestos gasket and bolted together top, bottom and sides. The bolt holes were in 6" centers. Now the work begins. We pumped sea water into the front part of the rear section (engine room until it was touching water). We then pumped water into the middle at the back of the center section until it came up on the rear to the top of the water line. Now it was time to put the rods into the lugs on either side of the two sections and the same procedure on the port side of the boat. As we tightened the nuts on the bolts we pulled the bottom of the two sections together. When the bottom part of the two sections came together, the next thing was to get the gasket between them.

In order to do this, we had already put the gasket with a bolt and nut on the ends of the bottom of one of the sections and this had the bottom pulled together but they had a nut on each end of the gasket between them that had to be removed. So we put the bolts across the bottom loosely & tied the two sections together. Then we pumped into the section until the top came together and forcing the bottom to loosen up enough to get the nuts out. Now we are working in water that is deep enough that you would have to turn your head sideways to reach the nuts on the bottom. Remember these bolts were not tightened. So when we pumped water out the back section it raised both sections up to from a crack on the sides and top. Then the gaskets on the side and the top were put in starting at the bottom to stop

pulling the seams together by tightening the bolts from bottom to top and adding water to the rear section to help stabilize the two sections.

The other section was much easier than the other two because the front of the boat only drew about 18" of water so we had very little water to work in. But we used the same procedure as before mentioned. The last step was pumping all the water out. The boat was now all intact except we still had no power and no engine hooked up, but we are able to move around a little.

I was promoted from fireman 3rd class to fireman 2nd class after Solomon, MD. I don't remember when this took place but my German friend had been head over the engine room and black gang. That is where we stood on Friday evening as the boat become afloat. The Jewish boy came to me that evening and told me that the skipper was going to ask me if I would accept the role of head of the engine room and he said, "I know the engines but my hands won't do what I know to do. If you take it, I will help you." Sure enough, the skipper called me into his quarters and made me the offer and I accepted. Now I am stuck with 3 main engines and 2 generators all packed down in cosmoline (a type of grease). So I got out my gray marine manual for the three main engines and I began to read.

Saturday morning I had all four of us degreasing the engines. Then, the electrician started putting the connections together to connect the wiring between the sections to each other so they would be ready when the engines were ready to run. Actually, the engines were all intact except connecting the line from the main storage to the 50 gallon tank in the engine room. Also, the water had to be connected as the fuel and the water were both in the center section and the only place we needed water and fuel was in the rear section. Before night, the engines had been started, the generator was purring and we had lights, a refrigerator, a stove and water. We started eating cooked meals the next day. The cook we had at Solomon got seasick

every time we started the engines so he was replaced by another cook who was a cook 3rd class. His rating only called for plain cooking, no baking, but that made him no difference. He cooked biscuits, light bread and all kinds of pies. One thing for sure, we didn't go hungry. By the way, our compliment for staffing the boat was a petty officer in each of the following: quartermaster, motor machinist mate, gunners mate, electrician boatman's mate. Our cook and boatman's mate were the only 2 petty officers aboard. So that left the rest of us who were firemen and seamen a wide open shot at petty officer.

I think the putting of the boat together would have been on or about November 1st. So we sat in the west lock about 3 weeks. The only trips we made into Honolulu were about 2 or 3 on liberty and, of course, our trip to the naval depot for anything that we might need for the upkeep of the boat. During this time we were in the west lock all alone as far as we knew and we were the only L.C.T. in the whole Hawaiian chain.

The day before Thanksgiving we left Oahu and traveled all night to Maui. We reached there on Thanksgiving evening about 3 o'clock. I experienced my first and only dose of sea sickness. I didn't stand a regular watch in the wheel house because I stood on a 24 hour call in case of engine trouble. At midnight, I got my turn as the transmission on the center engine was filling the engine room with diesel smoke. With the help of the Lord, the first thing I checked was the oil level in the transmission and found oil covering all the gears. That was a no, no. There was an air breather at the top and every rotation of the engine would rotate the gear above the oil and this helped to cool the transmission. I drew out a little oil and it cooled off immediately but the damage had been done. In addition to the smoke, it was hot down there and I was sick before I got into fresh air. I had to crawl back to the quarters and into my bunk. This lasted from then until we anchored off shore a Maui.

At Maui, we just played around, swam, and caught fish. One day I actually lay on my back for two solid straight hours in the water. The water was so salty that it held me up no problem. On a bright sunny morning we could see these big red fish swimming around straight behind the rear of the boat and you could see them take the hook 50 to 60 feet down. I talked the skipper into letting one of us go back to Honolulu under the pretext that we needed oil filters for the engines. I was told at the base that was a scarce commodity and I would have to make shift. Now I need to explain the real reason for coming. By the way, I didn't tell you how I got there. I went to the airbase on the island and hitched a ride on a naval plane to Honolulu. This was a 45 minute trip compared to the 22 hours we used by boat. I went to the post office and picked up a large sea bag with 60 days of mail. Remember we were scheduled to go to San Diego and our records transferred to San Diego. It took that long for all this to get straightened out. Well, I had one more chore that I didn't know if it would be as successful or not. Since I was there, I went by the payroll office and told them our plight, no pay since we had left the states. Now this is unbelievable. If somebody else told me I probably wouldn't believe it knowing how strict the navy is with its rules. I don't remember how much but they gave me, in cash, a small amount of money for myself and the same for each enlisted man aboard the ship. This would go against what we would receive the next payday and by this time it would be January 1st, 1945.

We moved onto Hawaii, the big island. Here we anchored about a mile off shore. We had brought some underwater demolition men from Maui with us and each morning we would put them closer to shore in a rubber raft in a remote part of the island and leave them to go in and set off explosives. We would go back at a designated time, circle by and they would tie onto our boat on the move and pull their raft in.

We left Hawaii December 28th (now in present time the date of my grandson's birthday) and went back toward Oahu. On the way we stopped off at Kahoolawe, a small island that was only inhabited with rocks and wild goats. We took some frogmen here onto the beach to allow them to explore. While here we were planning on going hunting. The first party killed a goat which happened to have a baby goat follow them to the beach and as they pulled away it cried so that they decided to take it back to the boat with them. The little fellow cried all night and they were made to row him back to the island to the rest of his flock. Needless to say that ended any and all of our safaris.

Now we need to get back to the story at Oahu on January 5th, 1945. Then we went to Kauai on January 27th, 1945 which was about 100 miles straight away in the opposite direction of Maui, from Oahu. This was the most beautiful island in the chain in my opinion. Here I had an experience that affected my future. I was in the engine room changing oil in the main engine. Each engine had 8 gallons that had to be drained and then filled. The skipper called down and said, "Brown, we have to go to sea and dump some dud ammo." He wanted to leave immediately and I told him I was changing the oil in the engines and I would be through shortly. He said, "I want those engines running in 15 minutes". We lost a little time, I hit the ladder and went top side to see the skipper standing beside a Lieutenant Commander. As I approached them the skipper said, "This is Lieutenant Commander Giesler, he is the commander of our flotilla." The skipper then said, "I'm sure you can get the engines going in 30 minutes" to which I replied, "I'll do it as quick as I can sir." I didn't use the "sir" term often, just when other officers were around. Skipper said, "I'm sure you can get them going in 45 minutes and that is an order." By that time I was beginning to feel a little hot around the temples so I waved my hand pointing my thumb across my shoulder toward the commander and said, "I don't care if it is an order from him. I'll do it as quick as I can sir." Then I headed back to the engine room. We were

rolling in about 15 minutes, picked up our load and returned to Anchorage. This is my first knowledge of another L.C.T. in the vicinity, much less a flotilla of them. The skipper told me that night he had to do a lot of talking to keep the commander from giving me a captain's mass (this is a trial before a jury of officers). This incident will haunt me later.

Well, we have been ordered to go into the base loading dock on the first stop toward making history. Since the beginning of the war, the L.C.T.'s in the Pacific were sent to their specific islands of invasion fully assembled. They were carried to their destination on the deck of a larger ship on skids that could be knocked out on one side. By water ballast they would tilt the larger ship, remove one side of the skid and let it slide into the water. The navy decided to experiment with our flotilla to see if it was possible for the L.C.T's to be turned into an ocean going vessel. Later I will tell you how dangerous they suspected it to be.

So we pulled into the naval supply depot at a dock where we could take on extra fuel and water. The normal fuel tank held 1100 gallons which running continuously day and night would only last a little less than 4 days. In the meantime, we had to clear up the inside of 2 rows of air compartments the full width of the boat, one for diesel fuel and the other for water. We loaded on 10,000 gallons of fuel and a lot of water but I don't remember who much water we loaded. We mounted a hand pump onto the side rail and the black gang took turns of 100 pumps of the handle until the main tanks were refilled every 3 days. Now we are ready on the morning of February 15th, 1945 to begin to form our flotilla which I had never seen nor known that it existed. We took our positions as ordered into six lines with six in each line. We were about 3 football fields apart in every direction. Since we were a flat bottom blunt nosed craft that was tossed from one position to another there was no way we could have steered a course and made any kind of a trip such as this and expected to find the island we left much less the actual harbor we were

expected to pull into. So we had two sharp nosed gun boats that chartered the course.

At no time could you see a large number of the other crafts. This depended on how many of the other crafts were on top of a wave at the same time as we were. At night, due to being in enemy waters, most of the time we ran with no lights except inside the crew's quarters and one running light on the right side of the craft at the top of the back gun rail. This running light was about the size of a large flashlight and about 18" long. Its light was red and sat back into the housing about 12". It could not be seen except you were directly behind it. The man on the wheel did not see this light all the time but would make adjustments with each wave when the light came into view.

Well, for the next 61 days everything flowed normal. Later in our trip we passed 300 miles off Truk, the main naval base for the Japs and had no kind of mishap. So I'll just mention the route we took. We arrived at Johnson Island after 5 days on February 20th and left there February 22nd. We crossed the international dateline on February 27th which was on Tuesday as we crossed this imaginary line it became Wednesday February, 28th.

We arrived at Majuro on March 14th, 1945 and left March 7th, 1945. Majuro was in the Marshal Island Chain. It was actually an atoll. It was less than one quarter of a mile wide and made up of narrow strips of land surrounded by water and in this case tied together by bridges. We left Majuro on March 7th, 1945 and passed real close to Kwajalein. Then we were on to Eniwetok, still in the Marshal Chain on March 12th, 1945. Eniwetok was a little bigger than any we had seen since the Hawaiian Islands. It had apparently been a very lush island because it was well cluttered up with nothing but palm tree stumps about 2 feet high and anywhere you walked you could not step without stepping on lead or shell casings.

One little mishap could have happened as we were in a row boat wandering around about 1 mile offshore. Two decided to jump boat and swim into shore. As the rowboat got further away, I also noticed that the shore was also getting farther away. The fellows left in the boat noticed the same thing and came back and picked me up. I later heard that they had lost two or three sailors as foolish as I was due to the terrific riptide going out.

We left Eniwetok on March 19th, 1945 and arrived in Guam on March 26th, 1945. This was in the Mariana chain. We spent Easter Sunday on Guam. Anywhere I was I always tried to find an airbase if possible because they had the best food. I guess they could fly it in. So some of us went ashore and at lunchtime we went into this base expecting a real feast. They had cold cuts, bologna sandwiches and such. Some of the men said, "If you can come back tonight we have our big meals on Sunday nights." Well, when time for the night meal came we were close to an air base on the other end of the island. We went in for their big meal and they had the same cold cuts the other base had for lunch. We were told, "You should have been here for lunch as that is our big meal on Sundays."

We left Guam on April 4th, 1945 and arrived at Ulithe on April 7th, 1945. This is in the Caroline island group. One incident to mention that did transpire while in Ulithe. The skipper had given strict orders not to swim while at Ulithe. Well, one of the boys walked up to me and dared me to jump in. I said, "It will cost you." Before long many other of the sailors were chipping in and when the pot reached $5.00 I jumped. Shortly after that, the skipper called me in his office and said, "I thought I told you not to swim!" I humbly replied, "I'm sorry skipper but I had no choice…..I fell in." We left Ulithe on April 10th, 1945 and arrived in the Philippines in San Pedro bay. This bay, I was told, was 13 miles across. We tied up in nest of 6 about 1 mile off the island of Samar. The 1st night there we rowed ashore at a little group of

straw huts. We got close to shore and we kept bumping into large rocks just under the water and after several attempts an old gentleman approached us wearing a knife (bolo) on his side and took hold of the bows of the boat. He pulled us this way then that way until he finally weaved us ashore.

It was eerie to see a large fire going and a tribe of people sitting around it. They invited us to eat rice. They put on the dog (not literally…this is simply an expression meaning they brought out the best for us). Somebody from the family went and got a fork with USN stamped on it. They passed this huge bowl around and everyone it passed took a fork full and passed it on. The 2nd time around I scooped into the bowl and got a handful and began to eat. This old man with the long knife got up, walked around the circle and stood behind me. I didn't know if he was going to use the knife on me or not. I was very wary of him. He then put his arms around my shoulder from the rear and said, "Me like you very much. You are Pilipino Joe."

When we arrived in the Philippines, we received two commendation letters, one from Admiral G.W. Nimitz, head of the southern fleet. We were under his command on most of the trip. The other one was from Admiral A.T. Clay under his command in this part of the Pacific. The commendations which I have misplaced were similar to this: "I wish to commend you on a job well done. You have accomplished a task that was set before you with the expectancy of a possible loss of 20% of boats and men. This was accomplished without the loss of any personnel or equipment. They were both dated 3/28/1945 and the one from Admiral Nimitz was probably at Guam as that was where we were at the time it was written. The other was dated 4/16/1945 by Admiral Clay. This was the date we reached the Philippines.

We worked with aircraft carriers and battleships carrying liberty parties ashore. These were really drinking parties. Nearly every day we had to hose

them down to stop fights. When that 60 pound to the inch water hit them all the fight departed from them.

On June 28th when we came back with our passengers, the captain of the carrier told us there would be no liberty the next day. At that time there were close to 1,000 ships of all kinds and sizes in San Pedro Bay. A large part of the whole Pacific fleet was there. On June 29th when we woke up, the bay was deserted by all the battleships, carriers, cruisers and destroyers. They had slipped out in the night. They came back in a week and the carrier scheduled a liberty party ashore. The pilots of aircraft off this ship told us that the war was over. They said they flew over Tokyo bombing the airfields in airplanes. They said they took no antiaircraft fire and not a single Japanese plane got of the ground because there was no fuel to fly them. Sure enough, just a few days later the two atom bombs were dropped.

On August the 4th about 8 p.m. me and one of the crew who was standing watch was abroad. All the rest were on the last ship in our nest of six boast watching a movie. The man on watch came in the quarter and told me that Japan had surrendered. My thoughts were of disbelief and we didn't get the least bit excited. I went back up into the wheel house to listen in on the news. The broadcast came in again that Japan asked for unconditional terms of peace.

It sunk in and I took off across 4 crafts to the one with the movie going on. They announced it to the crowd on board and nobody moved at first then in about 10 minutes everybody was back on their respective boats. By then, you could begin to see tracer fire here and there. It didn't take long until the skies were filled with flares and every kinds of ammo being shot into the air. There has never in the history of man been the display of fireworks that went on the next day and if there had been a need for the things shot that night San Pedro Bay would have been helpless.

I forgot to mention as I went along that I was promoted to fireman 1st class when I was promoted to head of the black gang. Somewhere while we were at one of our stops, the commander had all that were being promoted to come aboard the flag ship for testing for whatever position they had been recommended. Skipper turned my name into become a petty officer motor machinist mate 3rd class. The test was a snap but, uh oh! Commander Giesler (remember him?) asked the skipper if that was that smart aleck and the skipper had to admit it. He suggested that he hold me off for a month. At the time of the test the requirement was 3 months between 3rd class and 2nd class and four months between 2nd class and 1st class. But before I put in my 4 months the navy made the rules a little more stringent. They raised the time from 3rd to 2nd to six months and from 2nd to 1st to nine months. So 2nd class was all I had time to make.

We left the Philippines on September 17th, 1945 and arrived at Okinawa on the 24th of September just in time for the typhoon on September the 28th. Early morning we headed into a cove back into the shore line to anchor down. We had to travel an hour or more to get to this place. By the time we arrived the edge of the typhoon was picking up se water and you could not tell if it was rain or seawater as they both folded together. Normally, when going into a beach we would drop anchor about 150 feet from shore and let the cable out until we beached then use the anchor to pull us off the beach. But for this occasion I dropped anchor and ground it around until it had really dug in. I kept the boat pulling until I had all the cable off the wench except about 2 or 3 rounds (approximately 450'). This caused the anchor, at this distance, to have a tendency to dig deeper rather than pull up on the anchor.

It was a terrible night. We had stretched 1 ½" rope between our quarters and the toilet and the engine room hole going down below deck. You could not see across the deck you would just hold onto the rope and actually pull

yourself from point to point. I had all three engines backing down toward the anchor. The back end was actually under water and the front end was reared up out of the water. I think I couldn't see it nor did I attempt to. An opening going down into the engine room had a 6" bar welded all the way around it. I wouldn't want you to think that sea water was continually flowing into the engine room because if that were the case we would have been standing on end. But it was continuing to lap against the bar and over. This even could have stood us up had it not been for a bilge pump in the engine room pumping 90 gallons of water a minute and a handy billy pump, as it was known, pumping 60 gallons per minute from below.

By midnight we were half way through it because we were sitting 180 degrees from where we were when it started. We made a full circle by the time it was over. That means the anchor had twisted in whatever soil it was in all the way around and still held. I don't remember how many L.C.T.s were anchored in sight of us at the beginning but there were none in sight the next morning as the weather cleared but thankfully none perished. I didn't ask but I am sure the others anchored as if to pull off the beaches.

The next morning the 300 tents on the side of a hill nearby occupied by a group of soldiers were completely gone. Later back at home I ran into a buddy of mine, Walter Wade from Midway Avenue, who told me that he was housed in one of those tents and before it struck they moved into burial caves in the side of a nearby hill and rode it out. The wind gauge broke the 150 miles per hour mark. The post office blew away so we couldn't send mail or receive any for about 2 weeks. The folks at home ceased getting mail and it caused great concern because I had about two weeks of silence. There were about 300 vessels sunk or grounded. At one place I saw three hotel barges the size of a football field sitting sideways to each other. Two of them were high and dry in a rice patty field along the shore while the other one was half in and half out of the water nesting against the other two.

I think I got the message to report to the base on Okinawa along about mid November. I probably boarded a transport ship around December the 20th, 1945. I know we came to the international dateline on New Year's Eve because we skipped January 1st and jumped from December 31st to January 2nd. We landed in San Francisco on January 11th, 1946. I spent one night at Treasure Island Naval Base and had liberty that night in San Francisco. Here I put a 191 pound body into a 151 pound suit. I went to a club and a nice lady sewed my petty officer striped onto a boat camp suit, making it possible to travel without being picked up without proper identification.

I left San Francisco January the 12th and traveled with many other sailors on a cattle car as it was known to us but was actually a troop train for the service. I arrived in Jacksonville on January 16th, was examined and discharged on January 17th, 1946. I traveled home on a greyhound bus at 5:30 on January 18th. I arrived at the bus terminal in Chattanooga and I asked a cab driver what he would charge me for a trip about a mile down Cloud Springs Road. He told me it would be $5.00 to Cloud Springs Road but he wouldn't drive down it for $100.00. The road was dirt then and there has never been a road anywhere before now or since with so many pot holes in it. I arrived home to find my wife up and waiting. Besides the thrill of seeing them both after this long period of time, it was a great joy to know that my boy recognized me. That was one of my worries in that he would not remember who I was after so long of a time with him at such a young age of 2 when I left. I thank God for protecting me and my family while I was away.

I must mention one more thing because of so many wild tales about the awful things that the Red Cross and the U.S.O. did at some places during the war. They have my deepest gratitude. They befriended me on two trips in passing through Evansville, Indiana and in New Orleans. They provided a good show in the islands with free coffee and doughnuts in Okinawa. Back in

San Francisco, even though I offered to pay the lady, she would not accept anything. Never was I asked for any pay for any service I received. This is a 100% turnaround of some of the stories that circulates from time to time.

One more piece of monkey business that occurred while I was in the Philippines. Two of my crew members had bought a small monkey. He was a very mischievous little fellow and I didn't love him very much anyway. As I crossed the deck one day he was sitting on his behind with about a half dozen eggs scrambled on the deck between his legs. Using his hands, he was really mixing them up. I grabbed him up by the neck and looked around to see if anyone was looking. In the meantime, I spotted a small row boat manned by some Philipinos close by. I held up the little fellow and motioned them to move in. As they came closer I looked to see if anyone was looking. Not seeing anyone around I committed the perfect crime. I threw him as far toward the approaching boat as I could. The minute I turned him loose he spread out all fours and let out a scream that lasted until he hit the water. He was picked up hurriedly by the occupants of the boat to be sold to some other sailors. But I believe that all my crew members heard his cry and saw his rescue. I finally go back into the good graces of my crew.

Figure 1 Picture of my boat LCT 1105 beside LCT 1198

Figure 2 My naval photo in 1945

Figure 3 My son Mike when I left for the war

Figure 4 Me and my wife Dorothy

Figure 5 The future I was fighting for..My only grandson Jeff Brown...

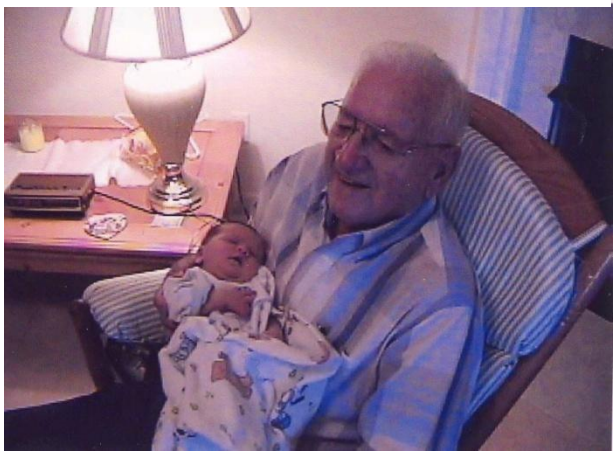

Figure 6 And the freedom of future generations...My only great grandchild Colton Brown...