

**Recollections of  
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913<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, Company C  
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*Note: Over the years, my father shared additional stories from WWII. For now, I'm including only the words Daddy recorded on a tape recorder in 1995. The dates and locations are as Daddy recalled. Through research, I understand that he may be off on a few specifics, but his story reflects experiences as he remembered at the time.*

*Bobbie Ann Todd Anderson, 13 June 2018*

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, I believe it brought one of the biggest changes this world has ever known. At least it brought a tremendous change in our family. Walter and Ralph had already joined the Naval Reserves and were immediately called up. They were sent to Princeton University where they attended Officers Candidate School and came out as ensigns in the U.S. Navy a few months later.

I was in my first year at Stephen F. Austin State Teachers College in Nacogdoches [now Stephen F. Austin State University], 19 years old, and not really concerned about the war because most people thought that this would end soon. I felt like I would never have to go. By the first of the year in 1942, the war was picking up steam, and many of the older boys in college were volunteering or getting drafted. But, I still felt secure because the draft age of 21 and I was only 19 at the time. About this time, my older brothers, Walter and Ralph, began to learn something of the Reserves programs that were being put into force. They called and suggested I go to Dallas and volunteer for the Reserves. We hoped I'd be accepted and stay in college until I finished my education. I told other friends at SFA about the Reserves, and we got together two carloads, went to Dallas, and took the physical. There was no mental exam, just a physical test, and sure enough, everyone passed it except me. I had a problem because I am color blind. Since the only thing left for me was the regular Army or the Navy, I decided I'd sign up for the draft and take whatever was possible.

In the summer of 1942, I signed up for the draft and was called up on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October along with two busloads of other people from Rusk County. That was a sad day at our house. Ralph and Walter were both away serving as officers with the Navy, and the girls were all at their jobs when Mama and Papa took me to the Courthouse where I loaded on the bus and took off for the Army. In this group were several close friends and relatives – Tatum Brown, Johnny Bateman, Wayne Mills, Franklin Tillison, Virgil Baughman, Clarence Gary, Joe Lewis, and

Creighton MacMurray. After about a week at Camp Walter in Mineral Wells, we broke up and went to different places all over the United States. I was shipped to Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, along with Wayne Mills, Johnny Bateman, Franklin Tillison, Rex Green, and Virgil Baughman. They put us in the 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, a new division that was being trained as fast as possible to be sent overseas. I only got to come home twice, but Mama and Papa, Grace, Erma Jean, and Ethel came to Oklahoma to see me one weekend.

After about nine months, the division was sent to southwestern Louisiana, right on the Sabine River next to the Texas border for maneuvers, the final phase before we were ready to go overseas. One weekend we finished our maneuvers and had the day off. I called home, and my folks came to pick me up. It was raining, and we were living in little pup tents scattered all over the woods. Then Mama saw what was happening to her baby, it was hard for her to take.

After about three months, we were sent to Fort Sam Houston at San Antonio, where we stayed for about a month before we were loaded up on trains and headed to ports unknown. All we knew was that we were going to the final staging area to be sent overseas for combat. Our commanding officer took me to the front of the train and told me we were traveling through Rusk County, but not to tell the others. He wanted me to get a glimpse of my home county before going overseas.

We finally arrived at Hampton News, Virginia, where we stayed for five or six days until they loaded us on Victory ships. We sailed out in a tremendously big convoy, probably as many as 100 ships, and had no idea where we were going until we'd been out about a week. They told us we were going to North Africa to another staging area and would be committed to combat in Italy.

We were on the water for just over three weeks before we landed in Casablanca. From there, we got on what were known as 40-and-8 railroad cars. This term had been handed down from World War I when they shipped 40 men and 8 horses to a car. We traveled on that real slow train for two or three days, and in mid-December of 1943 ended up on the edge of the Sahara Desert at a place called City of Bellabez .

After we'd been there about a week, they called me one day and said that I had been given a great honor. I was selected as one of 50 people from our division of 15,000 to be sent as an advance party into combat in Italy. I told them I appreciated the honor, but I'd just as soon stay with my old outfit. But sure enough, the very next day we left, and I was with people I had never seen before. We landed in Naples Harbor a few days later. The purpose of sending these 50 people in combat was for us to see what combat was like; then we would be back with our outfit and try to teach them what really happens in combat. On the way to the front, we saw our first action: a German plane dive-bombed us and killed one of our people before we ever got to the front lines.

I was chosen to join the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which was the Oklahoma National Guard. At that time, they were at Monte Cassino, where some of the bitterest fighting of the war in Italy took place. I was assigned to what was called a listening patrol. The next morning before daylight, we started up a mountain to relieve some more people and set up a listening post. Sure enough, when we got almost to the top of the mountain, three of us were sent to relieve

observation post personnel. When we finally reached the post, there were a number of bodies, soldiers who had been killed but not moved off the mountain yet. You can imagine how it affected me to see my first combat in this manner. Finally, we got up to the place where we were supposed to be, and there was a hole there about six or eight feet long and probably four feet deep, half of which was covered with timbers. All we could see was a soldier's legs, from his knees on down. He was a bad looking fellow with mud in his hair, and when we finally got him out, he said, "You know, I wish that ya'll had been a German patrol and you had shot me in the foot, not kill me, but I would get to go home." It just about paralyzed me to run upon a situation like this.

After I had spent probably a week there, they put me with the 36<sup>th</sup> Division, which was just east of where we were, a little closer to Cassino. The 36<sup>th</sup> was the Texas National Guard, and we did about the same thing at this place that we did with the 45<sup>th</sup>. Then I was called back to be with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, an old regular Army outfit. We were told we were going to have an invasion (they called it an end run) in which we would get on amphibious vehicles and go ashore at Anzio. But, when our amphibious vehicle was let out of the boat to go ashore, we were a little further off-shore than we were supposed to be, and we were sunk.

I was wearing a life jacket and was soon picked up by a sub chaser, which turned out to be the best living I had anytime I was in combat, because I had a dry place to stay. They kept me on that ship for about a week, until they went back to Naples, where I rejoined my old outfit that had just come to Italy a few days before.

We were soon put into the line and in the early spring of 1944, we made an attack at Minterno. I was with a forward observer group, which usually consisted of myself, an officer, and a radio operator. We were assigned to the assault companies of an infantry battalion to bring down artillery fire whenever the assault stalled. This was the job I did until the war ended. We would usually attack and stay in the attack until the objective was taken. Then, we would be pulled back and another outfit would go through us and go on another attack, leapfrogging each other. This continued for about another year until the winter of 1944, when we pushed through to the edge of the Po Valley, in northern Italy.

We dug in and waited for the winter to be over while shelling the German lines and going out on patrols and listening patrols. By this time, we had seen lots of combat. Army personnel were given points, and when you got 85 points, you were eligible to come home on a 30 day furlough. This was the biggest thing that could happen to a soldier in combat. We earned points for the number of years you were in service, the number of months you had been overseas, the number of combat battles you had been through, and the medals you had earned. I had enough points to qualify for a furlough. At about this time, they set for me to come to headquarters, and I met with our commanding officer, Major Daniels, who was from Mission, Texas. He told me they were short on officers and had decided that, because of the experience I had, they would make me a commissioned officer as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. Because I had already been told I would be considered to come home on a furlough, I had a real decision to make. I decline the battlefield commission, and I don't know to this day whether it was the right thing to do. It was a great honor to be awarded a commission on the field of battle instead

of having to go to Officers Candidate School. But, I still thought more of the possibility that I'd get to go home. As it happened, I never got to go home on furlough, but I was able to stay with my friends that I went over with.

In the early spring, we made our last attack which was to take the Po Valley, go on through the Alps, and meet up with other parts of our army that had been fighting on the western front. This was a real change for us. The south of Italy was hilly and mountainous, but the Po Valley was much like our Corn Belt – beautiful, level, fertile ground where all of the farming in Italy was taking place. The Germans were retreating. They'd fight until they gave out of ammunition and then surrender. Only a week before the war ended our position was overrun. The Germans were unorganized, but they were all around us. I had a group of probably 15 soldiers who were really not combat soldiers, to try to protect our position. We were going across a wheat field, and I was shooting a Thompson sub-machine gun, which drew a lot of fire from the Germans. I didn't know it at the time, but my gun had a bullet hole through the stock of it and there was also a bullet hole through my jacket when the battle was over.

During this time, the soldier to my left had yelled that he'd been hit. I was lying on my stomach on the ground to try to hide, but I knew somebody had to get up and go back to get help. I began to holler, asking if anybody could get up. Nobody said they could, because they were being shot at. Finally, I got up and made a run for it. I remembered a ditch behind us. I had thought that ditch was possible 30 to 40 yards away, but it turned out it was a hundred yards or more. I did make it there without getting hit and got help. By the time I got back with help, the Germans had wasted all their ammunition and had given up.

We planned a big assault on the Po River crossing and prepared to engage the Germans in a big battle. We were to cross the river just before dawn and get ready to start the attack when daylight came. But, during the night, we heard tanks moving out. Sure enough, the next day when we started to move out, they had withdrawn and we did not have any opposition that whole day. We traveled on to the foothills of the Alps where we began to meet more resistance. While looking into the valley below, we saw German soldiers approaching with a flag of truce. Our commander ordered us to cease firing, which we did, and he went out to meet them. They told him their representatives were in Naples meeting with the American commanders for a surrender and asked that we hold fire. Our commander radioed back the Regiment commander, but he said he knew of no such meeting. He thought it was a trick and for us to continue the assault. Right after we started, we got another radio call ordering us to stop. And, that ended the war for us in Italy.

The war on the western front continued for about a week. We were getting German soldiers by the thousands every day that were surrendering. We put them in big camps, surrounded them, and kept them there for as long as I stayed. However, the war in Japan was still going on and the soldiers with fewer points were ordered to go back to Naples to depart for a 30-day furlough home, then to the Pacific to fight the Japanese. The day they boarded ship and started home, the war in Japan ended.

About two weeks later, I was released from my unit to go to Naples and then home. We finally started from Naples and got into New York Harbor the latter part of October, 1945. The Statue of Liberty was as beautiful as they told me it was. It was the greatest sight that I'd ever seen.

I was there a couple of days before getting on a train to ride 3 or 4 days to San Antonio, Texas, where I was discharged. I believe they gave us about \$300 each. I remember my thoughts the day I was discharged. I had gone into the Army a boy and now I was a man. When the Army got me, of course, that released my parents from providing for me, and it dawned on me that from that day forward I was responsible for my keeping and all the things I did. I was a grown man and should accept the responsibility of it.

On the second day in San Antonio, I ran into Virgil Baughman from Henderson. He had gotten home a couple of weeks earlier and bought a car. He was staying in San Antonio and would gather up a group of people who were returning to their homes and drive them home. He charged maybe \$40 or \$50, but it was faster and better than going on the bus or the train. Virgil told me he had three fellows he was taking to Dallas and if I wanted to go with them, he wouldn't charge me anything. We planned to go through Dallas, let them off, then Virgil and I would go to Henderson. We left immediately.

When we got to Dallas and let our soldiers out, Virgil and I went by to see my sister Mary and her husband Hoyt, who were living on Hampton Road in the west part of Dallas. They were the first of my people I saw.

We arrived at Millville a little before daylight. I knocked on the door, and Mama said, "Clate, get up. The baby's home." Ethel was teaching at Overton then and was living at home with Mama and Papa. Although I had been up all day and night traveling home, I quickly saw this was going to be a long day because I would have to stay up. We went later that day to Gaston, where Erma Jean was teaching, and then to Longview where Grace was working. Then, I had to go see all the neighbors and kinfolks. We were a happy bunch. Ralph and Walter had written that they would be home soon.

Our family was forever changed after World War II. Mary and Ethel had married, as had Ralph and Walter, Erma Jean and Grace would soon marry. Papa had just about quit farming and started raising cattle. As I look back, I could see that Mama and Papa both had aged a lot in the three years I was away. The whole surrounding had changed. I spent the next couple of months looking around, thinking about what would be my future, visiting kinfolks and friends. There were no jobs, so it was pretty easy to make the decision to go back to school at SFA. The next term was to start around the first of February, 1946. I graduated with a degree in Agriculture in May, 1947.