

TO HELL AND BACK

by: Viola Hill as narrated by: Alvin Hill ©

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I suppose it wouldn't be too unusual for anyone to wonder why I have entitled this short story as I have—but since it is mostly about me, I have the experiences to back it up—I'm not a writer so I can't make the events come alive, just take my word for it they were real. Of course the only people that really know are the ones that were with me or other service people that had similar experiences. Anyway it all started a long, long way from where most of it happened.

Arkansas is a beautiful state filled with friendly people. The Boston range of the Ozark Mountains is the prettiest of all—of course, that is my opinion. It's been my home for 86 years with the exception of four and a half years of military service in World War II. I still live on the same farm where I was born. I've only moved once in my lifetime and that was after we built a new house in 1970. Then we moved across the road. My folks lived on the mountain just above where we now live. It was originally owned by people named TAYLOR. My brother and sisters were born there. I now own it as well as the farm on the creek. The folks traded the mountain land to Bill HILL for the place here on the creek. I don't recall the first house they built. It was just a three room shack mainly as a temporary shelter from the weather and a place to eat and sleep. They later built a slightly bigger house as time and money permitted. I do remember the barn being built. There were four log pens divided by a hallway. We used one stall for the mules, one as a corn crib and another for saddles, harness and small equipment. The pens and hallway were covered with a wooden floor to stack hay on for winter feed. The roof was so sharp it would split a raindrop. The rafters were made from 25 foot pine poles. These were held together with slats to nail red oak shakes to. We made the shakes by hand. In that day, the neighbors came to help. The men worked on the building and the women were kept busy cooking to feed a hungry bunch at noon. I was small and was given strict orders to stay away from the building project. Everything was done by hand. We had no electricity so there was no power saw or drills. The old hand saw and claw hammer were the tools used. The good neighbors furnished the free labor. You paid them when they needed something and you worked free for them. Too bad that tradition wasn't handed down. Seems today it takes both just to make a living and there's no time to help anyone.

One of those early years, the flu was really prevalent in our area. All of our family was sick in bed at the same time. My uncle, Baxter STARKEY, brought food for us every day until Mom was able to take over the cooking chore again. He would set the food on the porch and holler for someone to come and get it. About all I remember of it is someone's asking me how I was feeling and I said, "I'm just pert nigh dead." I guess I was feeling a little under the weather!

Brother Alvis was about twelve years older than me, so he'd always talk me into doing things that would get me in trouble. Dad had given Alvis a mule some time before that. Unknown to me, the other kids had pranked with the mule by pulling hair along his side when you got on him. One day Alvis told me to go get the mule from the pasture. As was always our practice, once you caught the animal, you would ride back to the barn. I jumped up on his back as far as I could then reached down on the opposite side and got a hand hold of hide and hair to pull myself on. Right then the mule proceeded to throw me bigger than a kite. To Alvis, watching from the barn, it was hilarious! To me, I saw nothing funny at all! I learned, sometimes painfully, not to trust Alvis too much. I suppose I was ten or twelve years old when I went rabbit hunting with him. There was four or five inches of snow but much deeper where the wind had blown the snow into a gully where I slipped into. Naturally I had to carry anything we might need such as

the double bit axe. I stuck the axe into the snow to help pull myself up out of the ditch. Unfortunately, the snow was very slippery and my feet flew out from under me. I fell forward and my arm hit the exposed blade of the axe and sliced a long, deep gash in my arm. Alvis bound it up, but warned me not to tell the folks as they might not let me go with him again Mom found it later on her own when she took hold of my arm and I squalled out I have a very impressive scar today. Of course I still went hunting but the scar did help to teach me to treat an axe or any dangerous object with respect.

Our growing up years were a far cry from the youngsters today. If we wanted to go anyplace, we walked, unless we were lucky enough to own a horse. Most of us weren't that lucky. Community picnics were held every Fourth of July out at Lurton. Nearly always we went. It was only ten miles so not too far to walk. Mr. CASH from Harrison owned the ice company there. He always brought pop to sell. That was the first time I'd ever tasted soda pop. It cost a nickel a bottle but most of us were lucky if we could get the first bottle. We had a lot of fun on those gatherings. Our folks didn't care for us going. There was only one condition for us to remember just be here Monday morning ready to go to work. If the event happened during the week, be ready to go to work the next morning.

Regardless of anything else, we always went to church every Sunday. We either walked or rode in the lumber wagon. There was always a good attendance as everyone went to church. I appreciate my upbringing in the church and I thank my parents for getting us there. We just had to get up earlier as it took a lot longer to get there. We had what they called 'Dinner on the ground' every month with five Sundays. We had church as usual in the morning. Then after services everyone gathered for a big dinner made by the women. Almost everything you can imagine they brought. Everyone enjoyed it so much they never complained of all the work that went into getting all that food prepared and carrying it to the church building. The afternoon was spent in gospel singing. It was really good as they knew how to sing. The church leaders and song leaders took the time to have a singing school each summer for anyone interested. I later regretted I didn't take the time to attend when I had such a great opportunity. Estelle and Arlie, two of my sisters, both went and were beautiful singers. My other sister, Ola, like a lot of us, couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. Most of those good old traditions have disappeared today. It is really sad as that helped hold the community together and people going to church.

I was probably five when I started school at Happy Home. Our teacher was Johnny PAYNE and he was blind in one eye. He wasn't a good teacher, but maybe it wasn't entirely his fault. My brother Alvis and our cousin Walker LIVELY also went to school there at that time. They were always into some kind of mischief, and what one couldn't think up to do the other could. I don't think their minds were on "book learnin" much as they spent most of their school time finding ways to aggravate our teacher. They loved to put tacks in his chair or anything else they could think of! I also went to school at Iceledo. I imagine I was there more than at Happy Home School. Back in those days the school board wasn't too concerned where you went as long as you were in school someplace. I had two very good teachers there, Alma TAYLOR and Lois GRIFFITH. They tried hard to teach us. But we wouldn't study so we never learned as much as we could have.

Estelle married when she was 14, and moved to Richland. I stayed maybe six months with her. I went to school there but I didn't like it much. I had a really hard time trying to understand

how to do fractions. I wasn't really interested in learning how to do them either, so just decided I would graduate early, so I stopped going to school. Looking back, I suppose I didn't set a good example for my own kids, but at the time I wasn't thinking much about that. I did go back to school when they consolidated the schools in the community. I went about two more years. My teacher was Alton THOMPSON and I really liked him. Some of the people in the community were not very happy about the schools being consolidated. They wanted the school to be back like it had been in the beginning. As we all know we can move forward but it is much harder to go back to the way things used to be. As a result, the school idea didn't succeed and it closed. I didn't go to school after that.

My cousin Raymond STARKEY and I were good friends and we loved playing together. I recall one day we were playing at the barn and found a bottle of moonshine. I imagine it had been hidden there by Alvis. Being the kids we were, we were curious about how it would taste. We tasted and the results were disastrous. We must have "tasted" rather heavily as we both got drunk as skunks. The "sobering--up" wasn't as enjoyable as getting into that condition. We were so sick we thought we were going to die. We didn't get any sympathy from anyone either, Just an invitation to try some more. Right then it was the one thing we didn't want! To this day, I can truthfully say I've never drunk enough to loose control of my senses. For the last fifty years I've not had more than a few cans of beer. I guess I did learn it was just a waste of time and money. I remember one time we had some calves penned up in the barn lot. I suppose Dad was weaning them off the cows. Alvis proceeded to tell me how much fun it would be to take a ride. His idea was we'd catch a calf and one of us would lead him while the other got to ride. We'd take turns. Naturally my turn came first. We caught the calf and Alvis helped me on. His job was to lead the calf or at least hold it from running all over. Then he turned it loose. It took very little time for the calf and me to part company. For some reason his turn at riding the calf just didn't come and it just didn't sound like fun to him anymore.

My grandparents all lived close to us so we visited often. Grandpa DEAN couldn't stand the noise us kids made in the house so he'd tell us to "get out yonder—way up on the hill" to play. He was always ill tempered and grouchy Grandma was his opposite, always quiet and pleasant. I cannot remember her when she could see. To me she was always blind I was the youngest and whenever we'd go there she'd always have me come to her chair so she could "see" how much I'd grown. She would feel my head and face and overall size. That always embarrassed and bothered me. However now I can better understand her method of seeing. I have thought so much about her. She lived the majority of her life in darkness. It may only have been cataracts that kept her in darkness. At that time they couldn't afford doctors, and Medicare wasn't in existence so she died in darkness.

After leaving school, we had to work if we could find a job. Jobs, as well as money, were scarce as hen's teeth, and you really figured yourself fortunate to work for just a short while.

A man from Russellville came up to this area to cut heading blocks. He stayed with us and Dad was hired as overseer of the job. Dad let me use his team and wages to haul out what blocks I cut. My idea was to load on all the blocks I could get to stay on the wagon. As a result I broke up about as much as I made. I did manage to save enough to buy my first horse. She cost me \$50.00. I later traded her to Bill SALMON for a gray horse. I don't know that I benefited myself

any but maybe I felt I needed a change. That's sorta like trading one old car for another old car. You end up with another old car! But it's a change. A short time later, since we couldn't find public work, Eli WAGES, Alvis and I decided to go thirds on a mining venture. Eli managed to make a deal with a mining company to lease us a "hole" where we could start digging. Back then working only with a pick and shovel mining is a slow paying investment unless you find something fast which seldom occurs. Needless to say, riches don't come overnight. It wasn't too long before I decided I needed a job with a paycheck now and then. I left the job to Alvis and Eli and I went in search of other work. They did find a small vein of ore and Alvis also left when he got his part. Eli stayed and worked and eventually he found a good amount of lead. He made enough to buy a farm in the Buffalo River area. I found work here and there. We cut red oak timber for \$1.25 a thousand using a cross cut saw. You didn't cut too much a day. I worked at the Bald Hill Mines. It was mostly raking leaves and carrying them away from the mill as a fire precaution. During the night the leaves would roll back where they'd been if there was any wind at all. So you started where you'd been the day before. As least there was something to do every day. The boss liked me so I guess that's why he let me putter around more than any other reason. I got a dollar a day and I was really happy I had it, whatever the reason. A company brought in a tomato canning plant that hired a few workers. I was fortunate there too that I got a job. There my pay was 10 cents an hour and my job was rolling cans down the chute to be filled. Not a job with advancement but it did pay 80 cents a day if we got to work all day!

Later my brother-in-law, Loyd CASEY and I decided to go cut stave bolts on the head of Richland Creek. Loyd's sister lived there so we stayed with her and her husband. We got 3 cents for each bolt we made. For anyone that has never done the job, it's just not that quick and easy. First you cut the tree, trimmed it, and sawed it into bolt lengths. Back then we had big timber to cut. Not the bushes that are left now. You were then ready to split it into bolts. You worked hard to get a few out each day. At the end of two weeks I had a little profit so I bought some Prince Albert smoking tobacco and went home. Loyd's sister didn't charge us for room and board, but once again the venture was a failure.

In 1939 I married Ruth CURTIS. We divorced six or eight weeks later. For reasons I'll not go into here, I was threatened with jail time or return to her. I went to jail until Dad could bail me out. I gave her what I had and I'll admit it wasn't much. But right then she had more than I did. One good thing came out of that catastrophe, we had a son. One of her demands I was not to see him or attempt to get in touch with him. I honored that condition and, as a result I didn't see or hear from my son for over forty years.

Dad traded a horse for an old Chevy pickup. Since I didn't have a lot of experience driving I suppose I wasn't as good at it as I thought I was. One day, coming home from town with Mom and Dad I killed the motor on McElroy Gap Hill. As I started to let the truck roll back to the bottom of the hill, I lost control of it and it went over the road bank. I believe we were able to creep back home with the truck but it about ended our transportation service. We were back to the horse and walking.

Shortly after that, I went to Jasper and signed up in the CCC Camp. I first went to the Black Hills in South Dakota. In our training, we were shown pictures of fires in the pines. We also had some training in actual fire fighting. I didn't want any part of that so I was happy when I was transferred to Montana. I guess that's how the tale got circulated later that Vi and I had been

childhood sweethearts. Actually I was only about 175 miles from where she was raised, but that's where the fairy tale ends. We didn't meet until years later.

World War II was lurking on the horizon and I knew I'd be one of the first to go. I wanted to spend a little time at home before I'd be leaving so I returned home. Several of the people in the community had a finger in the draft board. I knew, because of my recent trouble at home they'd see to it my name would be at the top of the list to leave. I expect I was a little hard headed too, so rather than give them the satisfaction of making me register I went to Richland to register. When my papers were returned to my sisters over there I took them to Jasper. They notified the draft board here on the creek. It was no surprise to me that I was the 2nd man in the community to go. Sims TENNISON and I went to Little Rock together. He was turned down. I was taken. I was stationed at Camp Robinson and got the chance--by just taking it--to go home for the weekend. After a tearful goodbye, I returned to Camp Robinson. That was the only time I was home until after my discharge in October 1945. About a week later we got orders to leave for Camp Roberts in California. I was mad at the world and lots of the people in it as well as very bitter over the way the community had treated me at home. I expect I wasn't the easiest person to be around right then. The fault really wasn't all mine but I was getting all the blame. I received nearly all my training at Camp Roberts and what a work out we got. Believe me, we were in great shape at the end of our training. We didn't like the people in charge of it for making us do all the stuff we had to do, but during the next few years we probably thanked them a thousand times for making us do it. We knew exactly what to do and how to do it. The boys that came into the service later didn't have time for all that rigorous training we got. When we needed replacements they were sent ready or not. Some of the results were disastrous. My feeling of bitterness and resentment gave way to one of actually having the last laugh. The draft board forced me to be among the first to go, but that action may have helped bring me back home eventually. In some of the fiercest fighting of the war when our buddies were dying around us like flies and screaming for us to help them. There wasn't a thing we could do. All we could do was stay perfectly still and pray. Even now, after all these years, I still dream of those terrible scenes at times. I hear their screams for help and see their outstretched hands. It makes you sick all over again. Think about it War is hell If you've not experienced it, you just can't imagine what it's like having bullets whizzing all around you and there's no place to hide You won't find another experience that you'll be that scared I was in company E 185th infantry Besides all our training, we marched for hours and hours As a result, we had the honor of being named the best marching band in the unit. We were chosen to go to Ft Lewis, Washington where we would participate in the 4th of July parade in Seattle. During my stay at Ft Lewis, I met Vi and her sister Alvina. We did have a chance to have a few meals together. One little café down in a basement was our favorite and veal cutlets was our menu choice. To this day, neither of us can remember the name of the café. Our most enjoyable day was a full day at Jefferson Park. We didn't do anything exciting. We talked a lot, took pictures and really nothing more. One disturbing incident we both remember was a caged coyote. His prison was about 5 ft square that had a 6 foot short post on one corner. That little beast walked constantly turning round and round routinely missing the post and never missing a beat. We wanted very badly to open his cage and set him free. I'm sure it would have been much more enjoyable for him had he been dead. We played the Juke Box a lot. Vi accused me of trying to use slugs to play it. Now you know I wouldn't think of doing something like that! I really liked the song "Rubber Dollie" and was forever singing part of it or humming the tune. One day Vi said "If you don't stop

it with that song I'm going to send you a doll." I kept singing. She sent the doll! When it arrived at the barracks, some of the boys took the liberty of unwrapping it and setting it against the pillow on my bunk. I got a lot of ribbing over that!

A short time later I was given special duty in Oregon to help set up Camp Adair. We were still on assignment there when we got order to return immediately to Ft. Lewis. Company E was being shipped out. Vi and her sister rode with me on the bus back to Camp as far as they were allowed to go. They walked back across the street and stopped to look back and wave one last time. Neither of us thought then that it would be 49 months before we'd see one another again I must say, Vi was good with her letter writing. She wrote regularly, not every day but often. Sometimes I'd get a stack of mail that had caught up with me and then it might be days before we were able to get mail again. Some seldom got mail of any kind. I guess if families would have realized just how much getting mail meant to us, they all would have written more often.

We left Ft Lewis in August and went to San Francisco. From there we had orders almost immediately, to ship out for Hawaii. We landed at Pearl Harbor and did guard duty on the beaches of Hawaii. There we got strenuous jujitsu and Ranger training. Both proved life saving in the times ahead. We also did the five mile march to prepare us in case of capture. Try to imagine marching in full gear under a scorching sun.

There was no warm water for showers. The bath we got was in that ice water that originated from who knows where. I can say that was the coldest water I have ever felt. We didn't leisurely bathe, we ran under and right back out. It was the next thing to washing off with ice cubes. We had one choice, use that cold water or nothing. So we each took our turn 'running' under with everyone else. We all grumbled and complained but I think all that training helped me make it all the way through and eventually back home. Maybe that's the reason why I detest taking a bath even yet. If Vi gets on to me now and then about it I remind her that it's not time yet! I go through the ritual twice a year. Once in the spring and once in the fall--end of discussion any problem?

Each island we went into we had to 'take back'. We didn't just walk in and take over. We fought every step of the way with lots of casualties and vicious fighting. When we landed in Kuwait, we made camp in a coconut grove The huge palm leaves nearly completely covered the camp and everything under them It was a ready made camouflage It was interesting the way they harvested the coconuts The owner of the grove would walk up the bent trees to inspect the coconuts. He would cut each coconut that was ready to harvest. He had a sharp spike size nail fastened to a post that he used to knock off the outer hull of the coconut. I really don't recall how he got them out of the grove and to market.

We had our trucks and other equipment under that protective covering too. The ground there was sandy and the trailers we pulled behind the trucks were very difficult to back into stalls. After several failed attempts of one of the drivers to complete the task, our "book learned" Lieutenant decided to show him, and the rest of us, just how easy and simple that little job was when you know how! After several embarrassing attempts on his part to complete the task, he crawled from the truck and told the driver to "carry on". Needless to say we didn't get any more lessons in backing a trailer. Seems some times simple jobs can become complicated.

The pineapple fields and sugar cane were grown further inland. The soil there was red in color and hard as a rock. Care to try digging a fox hole in that! We did. There was a large sugar refinery there that we could have gone through. I regret that I hadn't taken advantage of that.

Unlike wars fought later that had celebrity entertainers at times for the troops any entertainment we got had to be supplied by the troops themselves. I recall one Christmas on New Britain Island, some of the boys dressed up as women to put on a show for our entertainment. They made grass skirts and used mops to make for long hair They completed their ensembles by using coconuts as breasts to give themselves a well rounded figure Not a beautiful sight I'll admit, but as they say, beggars can't be choosers, and we did appreciate their efforts When we left New Britain Island we stopped at a small island (I have no idea now what name it was called) but I remember very well what it contained. I've never seen so much beer in one place in all my life. It was stacked at least 10' high and the space it covered would easily have covered one whole field at home. I guess they thought they'd get us so soused we'd forget, for a short time at least, the rest of the hell we were headed for. We could have all we wanted and do whatever we wanted just as long as we were back on ship that night ready to leave out the next morning. Talk about a bunch of sick boys. That ship was quite the smelly place for a while. Some of the boys carried all the cans they could back on board. They had it stuffed any place it would stay—under their shirts, every pocket and any way else they could. You can imagine what it was like after being stacked out in that hot sun with no way to cool it. It was sorta like dishwater but I guess because it said beer on the label was enough for some. We should have had some of that water in Hawaii to have laid it in, then it would have been ice cold! Shortly after leaving that Island, we met with the navy and other military units to regroup and prepare for the invasion of the Philippines Island. There were ships everywhere and of course men swarming everywhere like bees. When we were in the China Sea we were struck by a violent storm. Waves were crashing over us and the ship rocked and rolled in every direction. Every new wave made you think it would capsize the ship. I still wonder how we ever stayed afloat. We were unable to stand without holding on for dear life to anything stationery. I strapped myself in my bunk to stay put. Unless you have been sick from that kind of situation, you cannot even come close to imagining the way we felt. Later we could joke about it but I think we all agreed we threw up everything including our toni1 I guess the storm probably lasted a couple days so of course we had to eat something It was nearly impossible to keep food on your tray or in a spoon to try for your mouth if you got it that far. On that trip I saw my first flying fish. I understand we have some here in the states now but that was a first for me.

Our goal was Luzon in the Philippines. The Philippine invasion was the 2nd largest invasion of World War II. As we were coming in, Japanese planes came out of nowhere. They were suicide planes with no other intention than blowing us out of the water. I think most of us thought it was the end of the trail for us, but our gunners were fast and accurate enough to shoot them out of the air only a stones throw from our ship. We could finally start breathing again. Shortly after that incident we all hit the beaches. Our ship hung up on a reef and we had to wade out through chin dip water doing our best to keep our rifles dry. Besides God, our only protection was our rifles. As we hit an island, it was fight to the death and after we mopped up the entire area, we moved on to the next target.

Luzon was probably our closest example of hell on earth. One hill called 1700 was a high peak with a steep incline. That was our destination. Our goal was to plant the Stars and Stripes on

the very top. There were numerous caves on the side we were advancing up. We made excellent targets for the Japs hiding in them as they were looking down on us. The tall grass was literally shredded to bits by their machine gun fire and the straw and chaff sifted over us as we crawled on our bellies through it.

Thanks to the grass cover, some of us made it to the top. That was one place we used the flame thrower. I've always been thankful I never had to use them. In those situations you get used to almost anything, but to see the few Japs that managed to get out was not a pretty sight. Some were walking flame figures and others were so black they were practically charcoal. Needless to say they didn't make it far from the cave entrance. If you've never had a buddy next to you scream out for you to help him when there's nothing you can do, then you can't imagine the feelings that rip through you. People today wonder why my emotions get the better of me and I cry, but that's just one of the reasons. We did succeed in getting the flag firmly planted on the very top of 1700.

While on Luzon, Lewis KIESPER, one of my buddies, had a brother killed there. He was so furious he grabbed his rifle and headed out to annihilate the whole Japanese Nation by himself. Since of course that's an impossible task, he had to be assigned to the cook detail until he calmed down enough to go back on the line.

I was a scout and probably had that duty eighteen months or more. As you can imagine, being out there ahead of the front lines in unfamiliar territory and not knowing where the enemy was waiting, made it even more dangerous. My buddies marveled that I got through so much, still in one piece. I've always felt that God was with me there and in all my military duties. It was on one of those missions that I happened to run into Doc HOYT, another buddy. Since it was lunch time we sat down for a bite together. Japanese soldiers lay dead everywhere and the green flies were having a field day. K-rations were bad enough on good occasions, but having flies buzzing around them made them nearly impossible. After the war, Doc and I kept in touch and he visited Vi and I quite often. In all those years, he could never stand having a fly around him. During one of his visits, Vi noticed his reaction if a fly happened to get in the house. She later asked me why. I guess, like me, he still had too many vivid memories of our service day. On one occasion, on Panama, we were pinned down under extreme enemy fire, our replacement turned tail and disappeared like rabbits. They all "went over the hill" There was only about 12 or 15 of us left alive when Captain WILLIAMS finally got permission for us to pull back. We never saw the boys again that had deserted us. I suppose, under the circumstance, you couldn't really blame them. You do a lot of things you wouldn't believe you would if you get scared enough. Regardless, whatever their reason was, it sure left the rest of us in a bad spot. There are approximately forty men in a platoon and four platoons make up a company. I was in charge of about twelve men and two other men had the others. We all had leaders and if someone with a higher rank than you was killed you automatically took his place. That was one place the government could get through the transactions in a hurry. No messing around for a year or so with paper work. You had no choice, you just took his place. As an example, Sergeant NELSON was a rank above me and when he was killed on the front lines, I automatically took his place. Transactions were immediate with no ifs, ands, or buts! It just happened. I'm sorry to say it didn't happen that way once we got home and needed a little help from them.

One incident I'll never forget, nearly took my life. One reason that made it even worse, the attackers was our own aircraft! We were advancing on enemy positions with tanks. We were in a long line with tanks so far apart and the foot soldiers were between the tanks. Once in a place, there was very little protection, just a few scattering trees. From out of nowhere these two planes made a dive right over us with a machine gun melting the barrel. I hit the ground and, looking over my shoulder as I fell, I saw the 2nd plane zooming right down on me. I flipped up on my side to make the smallest target possible. The bullets took the seat out of my pants and burned a trail across my belly. I was really scared they'd come back and maybe drop a bomb. I knew God didn't have any trouble hearing me! I wanted him to hear! He was our only protection. The boys that operated the tanks had taken Army cot mattresses and tied them around the tanks. Don't ask me why they just did. Anyway, they were set on fire so what little protection the tank could have given us was gone. One of the foot soldiers had become tired so he hitched a ride on the tank. The aircraft knocked him right off the tank. For whatever reason, the plane didn't return. Maybe they learned of their mistake and perhaps one of another reasons. For myself, I thanked God for getting me through one more mess. To be a target for the enemy is one thing, when it's your own, really makes you wonder how so many mistakes of that caliber happens.

Another time we were advancing on an enemy target. We had just started to dig in when some of our planes flew over. They mistakenly thought we were the enemy and did drop a few bombs. Immediately, red flairs were set off to identify ourselves. Certainly too close for comfort! That sort of thing happened more than once.

Negroes was the last island I was on and that's where I was shot. I had just returned from a scouting mission and was reporting enemy positions to Captain Williams. We were in a depression left by an earlier bomb explosion when I was hit. The bullet split my helmet right off my head and fragments lodged in my right shoulder. In all the turmoil, noise and confusion, I didn't realize I'd been hit until Doc grabbed me and said, "Man, you've been hit!" Blood was everywhere and Captain WILLIAMS gave HICKS's, one of my scouts, orders to take me back where the medics could take me to a field hospital. Enemy fire was popping around us like pop corn in a pan. We didn't have time to wonder how in the world we made it through. I guess by the grace of God. Hick's returned to the front lines. I was transported to a field hospital for treatment. One day while there, I had gotten myself a sack of bananas and after eating some of them I evidentially had dozed off. When I woke up, a monkey had come into the tent and was sitting there calmly peeling the last of my bananas he hadn't already eaten. Had I been able there would have been one less monkey on that island!

After about 30 days, I was returned to the front lines. Whether we were ready or not, we went. I guess someone had to be targets for those Japs.

We were regrouping to hit Japan when the news of the Atomic bomb was broadcast. Everyone knows what happened after that. With the war over we were sent to a holding place for further orders about returning home. We were grouped into units in a point system. Those that had been there the longest, (I was one) were in a huge tent by ourselves awaiting a ship to return us to the states.

Returning home then was a little different than what happens today. No one knew we were coming. No one met the ship for a welcome home. No parades or fanfare. We just thanked the