



## **Ralph B. Friedman**

**U.S. Army—World War II  
Pacific**

**Fifth Air Force—7th Service Group  
1098th Signal Company  
Technical Sergeant**

## **Ralph B. Friedman**

**Veterans  
History  
Project  
Transcript**

**Interview conducted  
March 4, 2008**

**Niles Public Library  
Niles Public Library District  
Niles, Illinois**



Niles Public Library District  
Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran: **Ralph B. Friedman**

Rank: **Technical Sergeant**

Branch of Service: **U.S. Army**

Theater: **World War II – Pacific**

**Unit: Fifth Air Force, 7<sup>th</sup> Service Group, 1098<sup>th</sup> Signal Company**

Interview Date: 3/4/2008, 2-3:30 p.m.

Place: Group Study Room

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder

Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

*This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted on Tuesday, March the 4th, in the year 2008, at the Niles Public Library. My name is Neil O'Shea. I'm a member of the reference staff here at the Niles Public Library, and I'm speaking with Mr. Ralph Friedman. We're sitting here in the Group Study Room on the second floor. Mr. Friedman was born on May 12th, 1917, and he has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Mr. Friedman prepared a statement for purposes of this interview today which he is going to read into the record when we come to that portion of the interview which deals with military service. We appreciate Mr. Friedman taking the time to refine that statement and execute another draft so that it is rich in details that might not be available for recall at one time, but, in the time that he spent preparing for this interview, he's developed a statement which is as accurate and detailed as possible. And the Veterans History Project appreciates that.*

*So, Mr. Friedman, if I may begin, let's see, the first question we usually ask is when did you enter the Service?*

I entered in two phases. I enlisted in 1942 and entered into a teaching project in which I taught some basic electronics. Because I had been a ham radio operator since I was thirteen years old, I was qualified to do this. And I was hired by Civil Service on a short-term basis in what was called the Electronic Reserve. That was in the spring of 1942.

*So, you would have been about 25 years of age?*

I guess so.

*Yes. So were you living in Chicago at that time?*

Yes. I was a married man, recently married, living in Chicago. And I had completed some college classes before going to work. And the employment situation then was such that I was considered a desirable employee because of my background in electronics. I worked in what were then called radio factories.

*Mr. Friedman, what high school did you graduate from in Chicago?*

Crane Technical High School.

*Oh. Yes.*

My last reunion was about five years ago. And we've suspended them. We had reunions for years and years. I graduated in 1935.

*So your neighborhood, was that on the West Side or--*

Yes, the West Side. My home neighborhood is the Lawndale district which has now been retitled, I guess. North Lawndale.

*So that would have been like Madison and--*

Well, closer to Douglas Blvd.

*Douglas Park and--*

Yes. Right near Douglas Park.

*So you wound up in the Air Force, the Army Air Force?*

Yes. Yes, it was the Signal Corps, which was, in this case, attached to the United States Army Air Force.

*So when you began your--*

Active duty.

*Yes.*

*I'm just trying to connect the dots here in my mind. In '42, you were in the civilian Civil Service?*

Yes. I was teaching a class in what today would be called basic electronics.

*And those students were servicemen in all branches of the Service, or--*

No. They were enlisted in the Electronics Reserve which enabled them to not go into the Army immediately in order to undergo training such as mine and further training in Philadelphia at Philco and RCA Signal Corps schools.

*So you were teaching in Chicago?*

In Chicago, I taught. In Philadelphia, I was a student. And I completed that in the early part of 1943 and was called to active duty.

*By the-- by the--*

By the Army.

*By the Army. So you, it wasn't, for you, it was never a question of I would rather have been in the Navy versus the Army?*

No. I made that choice by going in the Enlisted Reserves, which meant I could be categorized for the Signal Corps.

*And you chose that because of your background in electronics?*

Yes. Ham radio.

*Ham radio. Did you -- did you do well in high school in science courses or--*

Yes, I did. I did. I was in college for one year in a pre-engineering course, but it just wasn't in the cards for me to continue with schooling. I had to get a job.

*Yes. What college was that? Was it--*

Medill Junior College. It had previously been Medill High School and it was in the vicinity of 13th and Ashland. Different Chicago than today.

*So you teach for a while in Chicago. Then they move you to Philadelphia, and you were teaching, oh, you were taking courses in Philadelphia?*

Taking courses in more advanced equipment, which was classified as secret equipment. It was the predecessor of radar.

*That must have been kind of interesting for you.*

Oh, it was.

*The cutting edge, so to speak, this new development.*

Much newer.

*Yes. So it was in Philadelphia, is it in Philadelphia then that you were called up to active duty then, or--*

When I left Philadelphia, I came back to Chicago for the express purpose of going into active duty. Not necessarily my choice. It was the government's, the Army's plan.



*So was that the first time you had ever been out of Chicago? Was it when you went to Philadelphia or--*

I don't think so. No. I don't think so. I had been born in New York and had family there. And I guess I had been east on a few occasions.

*So your horizons were probably a little broader than many of the vets?*

Yes. A lot of the guys were neighborhood kids.

*Yes.*

And had never gone out of town at all.

*Yes.*

*And you adjusted pretty well to the routine?*

Had no trouble at all.

*No trouble at all.*

No trouble. I was married already by the time I went to Philadelphia.

*Yes.*

So my wife came with me.

*Oh, so that was less of a hardship then, with your wife with you.*

*Yes.*

*Yes.*

That's right.

*But then when you were called up to active-- then she had to return to Chicago?*

We both returned to Chicago and I took off and went to various places for active training which--

*Yes.*

I will be reading into the record.

*Yes. I think this is, maybe this is, the time in the interview where we should turn it over fully to you, and if you wanted to read your statement here, I think it would--*

Okay.

I titled this account "NAME, RANK, and SERIAL NUMBER" for the most appropriate reasons. My name is Ralph B. Friedman. F-r-i-e-d-m-a-n. I was a tech. sergeant in the U. S. Army. And my serial number was 16071394. I was in the 5th Air Force in the South West Pacific. And we were the 7th Service Group and the 1098th Signal Company.

Like most of over ten million veterans who served in World War II, we not only did what we were trained to do, but, as soldiers, we did what we were told to do. This will be an account of my outfit's service in 1943, 1944, and 1945 under General Douglas MacArthur.

Our men received their basic training at camps located all over the United States. Many of us were singled out for specific aptitudes and sent to Signal Corps schools before being assigned to our unit at Camp Custer in Battle Creek, Michigan. We soon shipped to Westfield, Massachusetts, which was near Springfield, for five months of field training. Electronic specialists served parts of that time at Bradley Field, Connecticut, and other East Coast air bases, installing radio and radar in P-47 planes bound for the South West Pacific.

In October 1943, we were activated for overseas duty. And on November 1st, we left San Francisco on a former Dutch luxury cruise ship, the New Amsterdam, landing on November 15th at the Pacific Ocean port of Wellington, New Zealand. We disembarked in wool, olive drab uniforms in that New Zealand warm weather with gas masks, rifles, and other combat equipment. We were marched across the peninsula and the city, to a port on the Tasman Sea on the western side where we boarded the same ship and pulled up anchor for Australia. In retrospect, it appears that this was our general's way of saying "the Yanks are coming."

At that time, Australia was being attacked by Jap planes from Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands just east of Papua New Guinea. On November 19th, we landed in Sydney, Australia, and moved north by train to Brisbane's Camp Doomben. Our radio/radar section was assigned to the air base to remove the radio and radar equipment we had installed just months before, because the Australians used different frequencies. We then installed the appropriate IFF, which is Identification Friend or Foe, throughout the remainder of 1943. This was important because these P-47s were escorting our bombers striking Guadalcanal.

In early February 1944, we were moved by plane to Port Moresby, Papua Australian New Guinea, and then flown northwest to Saidor to install U. S. aircraft control equipment at the newly captured airstrip. We got our "baptism by fire" by air raids every night the moon was out.

In early May 1944, we boarded an LST, Landing Ship Tank, for what proved to be an uneventful landing at Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea, which was considered secure enough to become the South West Pacific headquarters for General MacArthur.

Once more on May 31st, 1944, we were loaded on an LST, this time as part of an invasion force headed for a Jap stronghold on Biak, Dutch New Guinea, part of the Schouten Islands. This was only 900 miles from the Philippines where General MacArthur had earlier pledged "I shall return."

When we arrived on June 6, 1944, that was D-Day in France, we found that the U.S. Infantry was fiercely opposed on the beachhead by Japan's tanks. And then from hillside caves above the beach, the Japs had installed long guns on rails, zeroed in on the road to the airfield. After firing, the long guns pulled back into the caves like turtles pulling back into their shells. The road to the airport was impassable, blocked with wrecked U. S. jeeps and trucks. Our LSTs circled offshore, waiting for the infantry to secure a beachhead.

Our troops on the LSTs were ultimately put down in the surf to unload drums of aviation gas, bombs, and ammo. Although we were supposed to carry out technical missions like stringing up telephone lines, setting up air traffic control for fighter planes supporting infantry, setting up a Coded Message Center for Air Force Command, repairing and installing radio and radar in planes at the airstrip, however, for now, we were just support troops.

Eventually, our LST, jammed in between others, sprawled on the beach like alligators with gaping jaws, their drop-ramps disgorging vehicles, troops, and endless crates of equipment.

Our first sergeant had a few men drive our trucks ashore, stringing them out along the base of the hills to establish a company perimeter, leaving space around the mess sergeant's truck for feeding the troops. The rest of the men unloaded until it got dark, when truck lights were banned to avoid giving the Jap bombers an easy target.

As usual, the first sergeant had things well in hand. He was Regular Army in his early thirties with cold blue eyes and a square jaw that didn't invite debate. His carefully clipped speech, however, spoke less of the mud of Infantry or the manure of Cavalry than of a headquarters orderly room. As a consequence, some of our "country boys" made snide remarks about his sexual orientation, out of his presence. But it was hard to imagine a homosexual Regular Army first sergeant.

Exhausted that night, men slept in, on, or under the trucks with guards posted along the perimeter. When the Jap bombers came over, we ran for an abandoned Jap bomb shelter made of rice bags, dislodging gigantic rats feeding on the rice spilled on the ground.

With the road to the airfield blocked, on the second day, the first sergeant gave assignments to some non-coms. As a staff sergeant at that time, I was given an eight-man squad to go out to the Infantry front lines to relieve some men who had had no sleep for a few nights. We were assigned four foxholes, two men to a position as perimeter guards. An Infantry corporal showed us how to rig trip wires with tin cans as alarms across paths in from the jungle.

We were told, when it got dark, we were not to speak, smoke, or get out of the foxholes, even to urinate. Above all, we were to fire at anything that moved on the paths. When it got dark, with only a part of a moon, it was hard to make out anything. Well past midnight on my shift, the tin cans jingled. I could barely make out a dark form wriggling along the path to our foxhole. Realizing that the flash from the muzzle of my gun would disclose our position and earn us a well tossed grenade in response, I waited for exactly the right moment to fire. Suddenly, I saw the prone figure rise, and my finger made the decision for me. I heard a yelp of pain and then nothing. My foxhole partner didn't move or speak, but after some time he poked me and mentioned that he would take over. It was a very long night, and I didn't sleep. But when the dawn came, so did the corporal. He wanted to see what had happened. After searching the area, he decided that the Japs had sent a scout dog down the path to probe the perimeter. Since they always retrieved their dead and wounded, we would never know. He patted me on the shoulder indulgently and said, "You did good, Sergeant." When the rested men returned to the forward position, then we were free to return to our own company.

It was still early in the day and we were surprised to find the company gathered in an area near the beach where large coral rocks formed a natural seating area for the men. Note: the following incident which occurred on the beachhead on the previous night when my squad was away on Infantry assistance consists of third-party testimony when we were not present. Therefore, the names have been changed in the interest of fairness. HOWEVER, THIS INCIDENT DID OCCUR AS REPORTED IN OUR PRESENCE.

The previous night brought Jap bombers on another run while most of the company was asleep. "Old Man Staley" was awakened and got up for piss-call. Moving away from where the others were sleeping to the nearest palm tree at the foot of the hill just inside the company perimeter, he was startled by loose stones tumbling down the slope. So he froze behind the palm. Though it was a dark night, he could recognize First Sergeant Maihoff (but not his companion) emerging from the vegetation. That morning, when he told the story to his buddies, it spread through the company and was picked up by Tech Sergeant Kelley who rounded up other non-coms. They decided that the commanding officer should hear about it "for the good of the outfit." However, the c. o. would just happen by and learn details without taking part.

When the meeting assembled, I noticed that the first sergeant was not present. Kelley stood up and said, "There are times when everybody has to pull together. This is not a time a time for personal feelings or desires. You may have heard rumors about the first sergeant in the past. This is different. Breaching our perimeter at night under combat

conditions endangered the Company. The person who did that should not be in charge. Since we don't get to vote in this man's army, all we can do is bring out the facts."

Kelley then asked "Old Man Staley" to tell what he saw. Staley stuck strictly to the facts and offered no conclusions. Others, however, eagerly told of past incidents involving the first sergeant in allegations of homosexuality. Not one word was said in his defense or, for that matter, about the alleged companion. As if on cue, a tropical rainstorm blew in from the ocean and the meeting broke up, since there was really nothing more to say.

When the storm ended, the men returned to unloading LSTs. That afternoon, when they got back, they were told the first sergeant was on sick leave and that Master Sergeant McCoy was acting first sergeant.

The next day our P-47s, power dive-bombed the mouths of the hillside caves with aviation gas and burnt the enemy out, destroying the long guns. The road to the airfield was now open, and it was time for Signal Corps work.

Weeks later, McCoy was named First Sergeant. Also, since his Master Sergeant stripes were now open, Tech Sergeant Kelley became a Master Sergeant. Ernie Maihoff was being discharged for the good of the Service.

In July 1944, an airstrip on nearby Owi Island was activated by the Fifth Air Force. And our service group was told to provide a radio and radar facility. I headed a six-man detachment with a mobile repair van and we remained there through November of 1944. We received a commendation for our work and I became a Tech Sergeant.

On January 17, 1945, we were loaded on a Liberty ship for the invasion of Luzon, Philippine Islands. We landed on Subic Bay on February 10th and followed the invasion force as support groups through the mountains to Clark Field and Manila.

Our occupation was peaceful and we got five day passes into Manila. The war was closing in on Japan, and we were shipped by LST to Okinawa where the Japs were now reduced to suicide bombings. We were stationed at Naha Airfield on a hillside seven miles from Ie Shima, in time to watch the Japanese peace envoys land. We were also in time for the typhoon season and endured two, BUT THE WAR WAS OVER.

On November 20th, as occupation troops, we were shipped to Japan. In Fukuoka, a few of our low-point men helped to restore a telephone exchange. But, largely, we huddled around oil drums heating bombed-out factories, waiting for the ride home. On the way home, we saw Hiroshima. On December 10th, we boarded a troop ship, U.S.S. General William Weigal, in Yokahama, arriving in Tacoma, Washington on December 20th, 1945. And in January of '46, we were dispersed to our home states.

Epilogue: We were very lucky. No lives lost. I got malaria and we had one trivial purple heart. The most important service occurred under our original first sergeant, although he left under a cloud. There were those who say it was Army politics. I'll drink to that.

*Interesting.*

Yes. It was so.

*So, Mr. Friedman, everybody must have been delighted when the war ended.*

Huh?

*Everybody must have been delighted when the war was over, right?*

Oh, you bet.

*Was there a great celebration?*

Yes. It was probably our biggest celebration of all. I still remember all the planes that were based on Okinawa were doing aerial acrobatics overhead, flying upside down, all kind of mock battles. What a show it was! Those guys were young guys, too, and they were just all expressing the feelings they had. I mentioned that the peace envoys had flown into Ie Shima. That was a little island seven miles across the ocean.

*So you were discharged from the Service then in--*

In '46, in January of '46.

*And that was in Fort Sheridan or--*

Yes, you're right, it was Fort Sheridan. I didn't state that. We came back by train from Tacoma. At Fort Sheridan we were processed for health and paperwork and all for a few days and then discharged. Of course, my wife at that time, of six years, my wife of six years, and I were reunited.

*And you hadn't seen her in a couple of years, right?*

Yes.

*Yes.*

Not from '43 on.

*Did you get letters exchanged pretty often?*

Oh, Yes.

*Yes.*



There was-- it was called V-mail.

Yes.

It was a form of letters that got processed by copies, and they were very short little forms. And, yes, we corresponded.

So--

Of course, we didn't get the mail right away when it was written.

No.

We'd get a pack, this thick, of letters.

*Did-- so you were discharged here in the Chicago area? Did you have a difficult time readjusting to civilian life?*

There was no work for me. No, I don't believe there was, but I didn't mind, and I hung around. We had no apartment. We had subleased an apartment for two months. (A couple was on vacation in Florida, and we knew somebody who knew somebody, and we got that apartment to live in.) And somebody else we knew knew of an apartment for rent, but there was a five hundred dollar bribe to be paid just to get the apartment. But we took it. It was a lovely apartment on Logan Boulevard near Western Ave. We took that and stayed there until 1950, so that would be, oh, no, beyond 1950, 1954. So we stayed there a number of years. Yes, there was difficulty getting adjusted. Oh, I did find work, and that was no trouble.

*Was that in your electronics--*

Yes.

*line?*

I went to work for the predecessor of what became Hudson Ross, a radio and electronics chain in downtown Chicago, and the store I worked for was across from the La Salle Hotel. And I sold that equipment.

*Did you avail yourself of the G.I. Bill at all or--*

No. I married, and my wife was very sick. She had a dreadful cancer on her adrenal gland and was having a blood pressure in excess of 250, (a young girl) and, so, it wasn't in the cards for me to entertain any ideas like that.

*Did you-- did you stay in contact with some of your war buddies after the war a little bit?*

Yes, all of them, as many as I could, yes. We stayed in contact and had a number of reunions through the years. And I guess we're down to the point now they're only eight or nine of us alive, and the thought of a reunion isn't practical anymore.

*So, Mr. Friedman, you reached the rank of Tech Sergeant?*

Tech sergeant.

*That was an accomplishment, wasn't it, to become a tech sergeant?*

Yes.

*Were you a corporal before you left the United States?*

Yes, I was. I was called a T5, which was a technical corporal, and I was a technical corporal in one of my, oh, I even got to be a buck sergeant in Massachusetts, because I would be over some squads of men doing the installation in airplanes. We were working on the airplanes, and the equipment would be provided by the Signal Corps, and we were told to put it in certain planes destined for the South Pacific. That was a kind of an irony that they had us put the wrong equipment in it for Australia. When we went to Australia, the radars were useless. I'm sorry, the equipment was useless, because Australia operated on a whole different set of frequencies.

*Yes. So you were a sergeant already when you were in Biak?*

Oh, Yes, in Biak, I was a staff sergeant, Yes.

Yes.

Yes, I went from corporal in the states to sergeant in the states. And overseas, I went to staff sergeant and then, ultimately, just before the year before we went home, I got to be a tech sergeant.

*That-- the incident where you pulled the trigger?*

Yes?

*Did you-- what did you shoot?*

I really don't know. The U.S. corporal said the Japs were very, what's the word, consistent. They retrieved wounded, dead, whatever, and even if it was a patrol dog.

*A dog.*

Even if it was a patrol dog.

*More like a dog, Yes.*

They would have retrieved it.

*Hmm.*

And he said, "You did good, Sergeant," meaning that anything that crossed that path had to be headed off. Even a patrol dog would have a purpose infiltrating into our area, show them that they could follow. They could send a whole squad after that dog.

*Yes. So, then, they made use of dogs to sort of probe or--*

As a probe, yes.

*Yes.*

Yes.

*Were they German shepherds or some indistinct breed?*

I don't know.

*Yes.*

I think they would have been of that type of a breed.

*Yes. That's interesting.*

Yes.

*I'd never--I'd never heard that.*

So, I don't know. I fired in anger, but I don't know if I shot a person or a dog, an irony.

*The--so, in looking back, how do you think your service in the military and the experiences affected your life?*

I wasn't a very mature person. I think it matured me, yes.

*Did the-- did your military, do you think your military service has influenced your thinking about war or about the military and its place in society?*

I don't remember ever feeling that I was in a wrong war, the way these poor kids might feel today. I don't remember feeling that way. I felt we were doing what we needed to do in defense of our country. And there was also the factor that, being Jewish, I had long

hated Hitler and the Nazis, and retribution in any way I could was important. So, I think, no. I don't think I had an adverse feeling after that.

*Some of the Jewish veterans that I've interviewed, they did encounter some degree of anti-Semitism in the ranks. Did you have to confront that, or live with it, or--*

I did, but it was minimal. By and large, the Signal Corps men had a higher intelligence level in order to adapt to that type of work. But not all of them were technicians. A lot of them were just, you know, the guys who did the latrine work, did the cooking. And they were just soldiers. But we didn't have a large anti-Semitic, a large feeling of anti-Semitism, no.

*It seems like the key factor in all of this was your abilities as an electronic, as a ham radio operator, and your love for electronics.*

Yes.

*In your case, the Army really--*

I had leadership ability, too.

*Utilized your aptitudes, Yes.*

Yes, I had better technicians than me in my group. But I think I exhibited leadership, which was what the Army used in giving you that rank. And you needed it, because you, when I went out with these squads, I was the boss. I had to make all the decisions.

*Did you ever have an opportunity to examine Japanese radios or--*

Oh, sure.

*What did you think of their technology?*

Their technology was excellent. Their technology was excellent. I don't know if they got it from the Germans, but the German technology was also wonderful. I would have to say that the best of all those countries was leading the way in the technology. You know, behind the Army, there were all of these scientists and factory engineers who were doing all of this. There was a long-- there was a lot more to it than just the soldiers. We were just the ultimate users.

Yes.

*Is there anything you would like to add to the interview that you haven't covered, that we haven't covered to this point?*

I would like to add my appreciation for the fact that the Library of Congress and the United States government sees fit to record our experiences before we are gone. I think that is a very satisfying measure.

*Well, thank you, Mr. Friedman, for a valuable memoir. And you ended it on a perfect note. Thank you, sir.*

Let me ask, can you tell if it was recording?

*Oh, I think so.*

At times, I had my page of paper in between.

*Yes. We've got it both ways here.*

Okay.

*But this statement is a little different than this one.*

Oh, yes.

*I mean the original one you sent me.*

Oh. Yes. Yes.

*Yes.*

I shortened it.

*You did?*

By a page, and I also altered some of the emphasis.

*Yes.*

On after the war, and all of that.

### **Reader's Note:**

3 pages of supplementary material, provided by Mr. Friedman, follow:

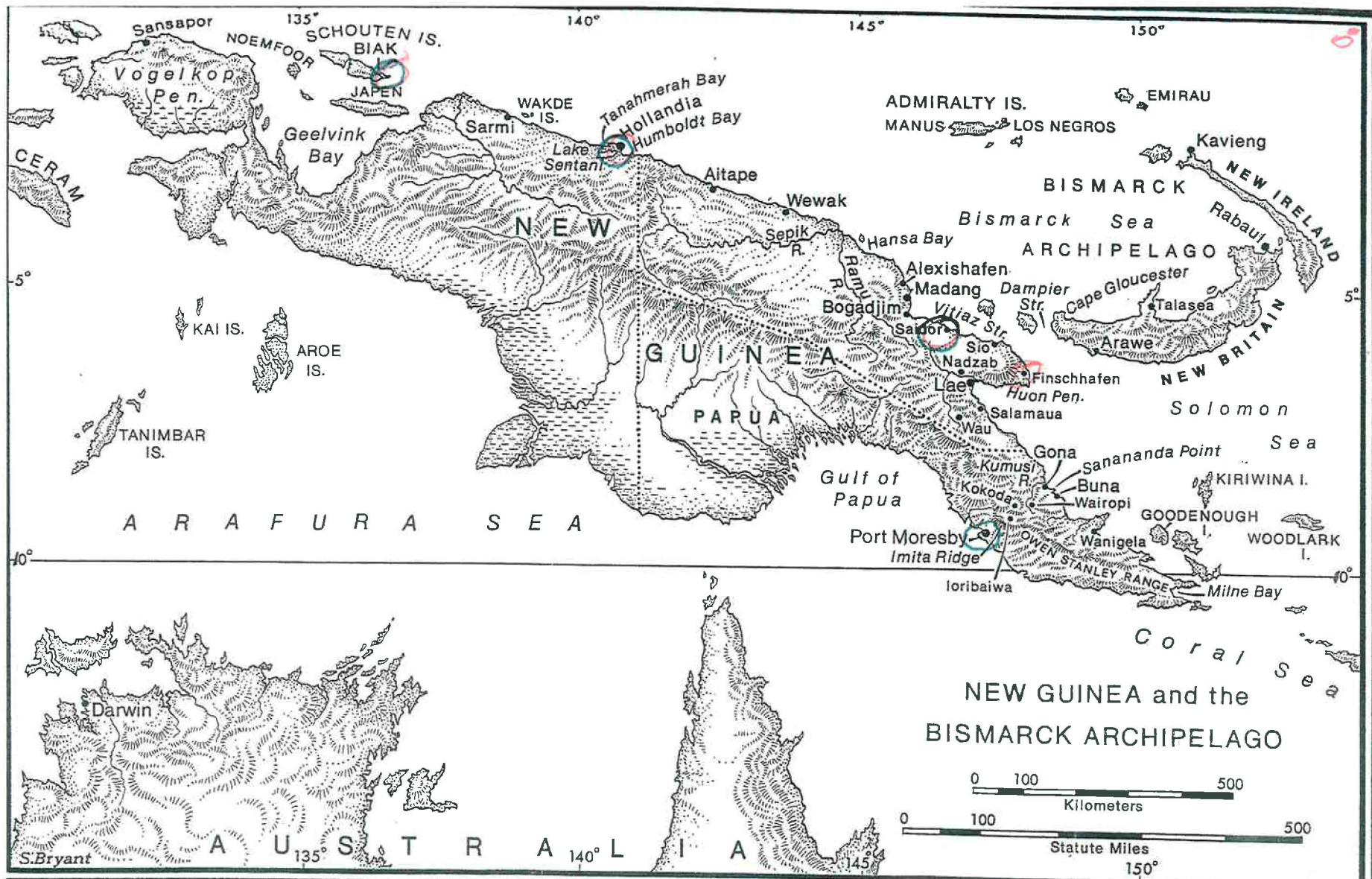
Map of New Guinea and hot spots

Group photographs, taken in Bataan and Okinawa

Newspaper article, Chicago Tribune, 6/23/1946, about Biak.

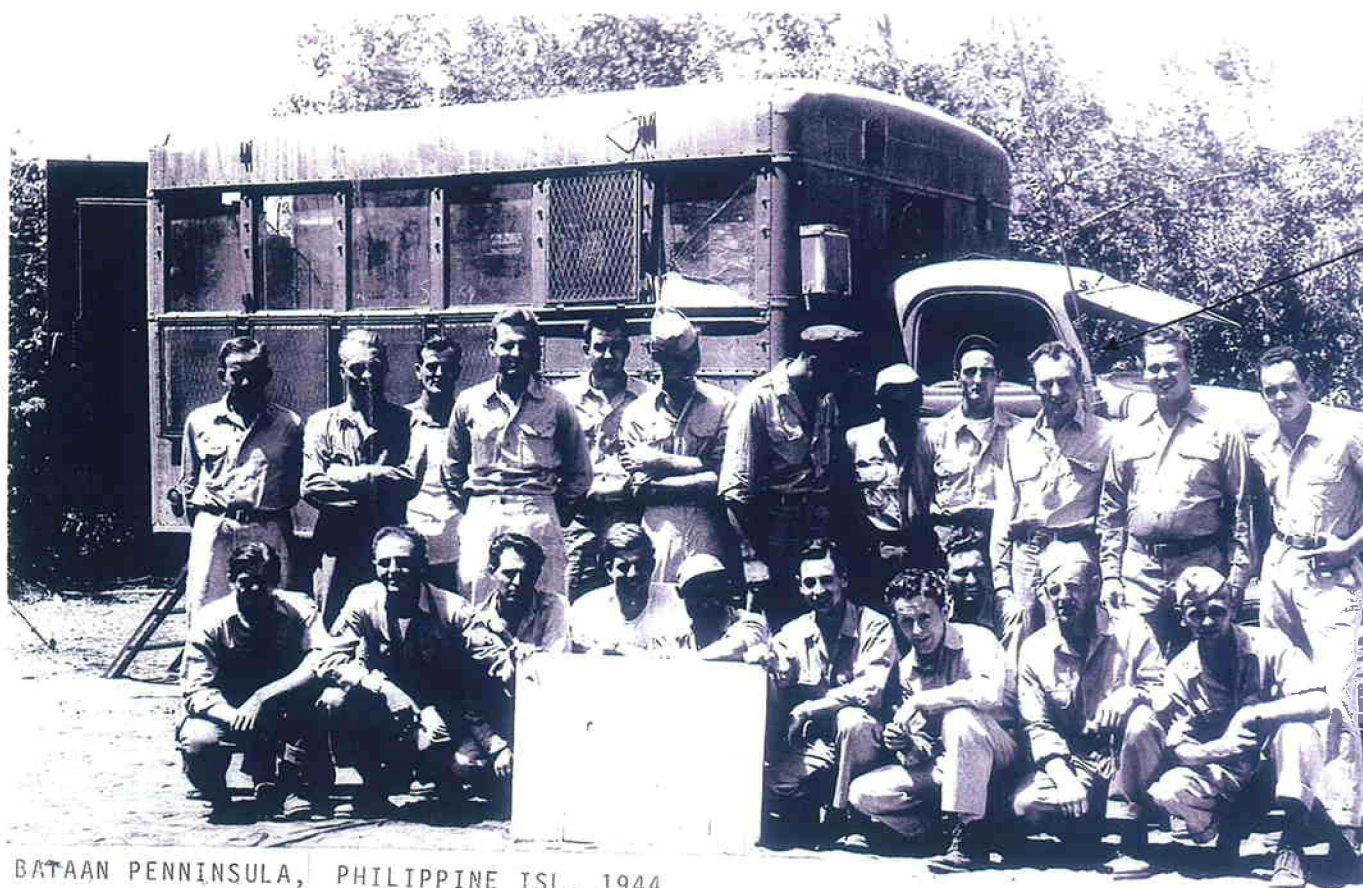
In addition, Mr. Friedman's prepared statement, which he read into his interview, is appended as his 2<sup>nd</sup> place poem, "The Clock Shop," which he entered in the Niles Library Annual Poetry Contest for 2008.

Scan of map provided by Mr. Freidman, showing key locations he mentioned in his interview.  
He highlighted Biak in upper left.





Scan of photocopy provided by Mr. Friedman showing group pictures in Bataan and Okinawa.  
Arrows indicate Mr. Friedman.



BATAAN PENINSULA, PHILIPPINE ISL. 1944



OKINAWA AUGUST 1945



# BIAK—A BETTER SCENE IN WAR THAN IN PEACE

## Melancholy Ruins Mark MacArthur Base

[Harold Smith, Tribune correspondent retracing the route of Gen. MacArthur to Japan, tells in the following dispatch what the United States base at Biak is like today.]

BY HAROLD SMITH  
[Chicago Tribune Press Service]

BIAK, Schouten Is., June 11 (Delayed)—Gen. MacArthur's base area on Biak Island looks much worse in peace than it ever did in war. Lack of care and the elements have done to the island's huge installations what the Japanese never could.

Except for the old Base II hospital area and a small port company area at the dock side, both housing about 1,500 recently arrived Dutch, and the vicinity of Sorido airstrip where a listless detachment of 105 American officers and men live, this base, once as populous as Peoria, Ill., now presents a scene of melancholy ruin. Inadequately policed, it is a happy hunting ground for roving bands of the island's 20,000 aborigines who like to flch fabrics.

### Work Dwindles

Since evacuation of the last Japanese war prisoners a few days ago, work at the base has dwindled almost to a standstill. Under the merciless tropical sun, the white occupants and their native servants are studies in slow motion. Huge quantities of machinery sold to the Dutch, or abandoned as scrap, are dying of inattention. Hangars and warehouses have fallen into disrepair.

One has been completely wrecked by the explosion of ammunition touched off by natives stunning fish with hand grenades just off shore.

The old camp areas are already rotting in the sun and rain. Lighting plants, power pumps, and ingenious laundries stand just as homeward bound troops they served abandoned them. Sea, air, and acid have corroded them internally beyond repair. It is the same with all internal combustion engines that cannot be started occasionally to keep their moving parts lubricated—there just are not enough technicians here to perform such a chore.

### War Planes Wrecked

The Americans still here will remain until September for inventory and liquidation of surplus. They do not have a high opinion of the mechanical ability of the Netherlands. A soldier pointed to a big hangar near Sorido air field, filled with jeeps and trucks. "There are the vehicles the Dutch have run to death," he said. He pointed to another hangar with 100 or more vehicles. "And there," he said, "are the ones they are going to run to death."

Near Mokmer air field, which was used by the Australians until they departed almost three months ago, there is appalling evidence of war's waste and man's maliciousness. Literally hundreds of war planes stand in storage areas, their sides gashed by bulldozer blades, their engines ripped by explosive charges. The planes include Liberators, Mitchells, Skytrains, and Lightnings, some obviously new. A repair dock near the Sorido air strip held another hundred crippled Liberators.

### Destroyed to Cheat Dutch

It was explained that this destruction was wrought deliberately after the Dutch refused to buy the planes. "The Dutch thought they were being foxy," one informant said. "They dwaddled over original prices our liquidators quoted for surplus stocks, and because no other buyers appeared the prices dropped. They figured we would simply leave the unsold stuff and were miffed when they saw what happened."

The informant was not Capt. Joseph Thurston, commander of the American detachment, who announced he would withhold information about Biak and transportation facilities until he received authority from

## At Paris Dog Show



[Wide World Photo]

Michele Jegu, 7, combs the hair of one of the entries in the first post-war dog show in Paris.

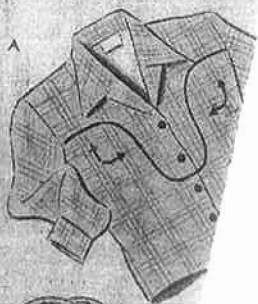
Manila. This authority had not arrived four days later.

Thurston insisted stories concerning Biak must be submitted to him for review, because one Australian correspondent had cabled "misinformation" about his jurisdiction. The captain was reminded that censorship ended last year. He didn't review this dispatch, and he didn't give any information.

Sorido is the only active air strip remaining in the Biak area. Mokmer and Prokroe have been abandoned. Sensapore and Monokari fields on the New Guinea mainland are idle and untenanted, as is the strip on Owi Island, to which the Americans retired when repulsed in their original Biak landing attempt in late May, 1944. Noemfoor Island, is garrisoned by Dutch and native troops, but the air field is unused. Biak is likely to continue as the air center for the Dutch East Indies and as a way station for planes between Manila and Australia.

Store Hours 9:00 A. M.

# RIDING ACCE



Scan of photocopied article from the *Chicago Tribune*, June 23, 1946. Provided by Mr. Friedman, the article describes the changed conditions of Biak.

First column's copy at the crease reads, "Half a dozen large wharves need attention. One has been completely wrecked..."

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Attn: Mr. Neil O'Shea, Reference Librarian  
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NAME, RANK and SERIAL NUMBER

Ralph B. Friedman Tech Sgt. U.S. Army  
S.N. 16071394  
5th AIR FORCE S.W. PACIFIC  
7th SERVICE GROUP  
1098th Signal Company

Like most of over 10 Million veterans who served in WWII, we not only did what we were trained to do, but as soldiers, we did what we were told to do.

This will be an account of my outfit's service in 1943, 1944 and 1945 under General Douglas MacArthur.

Our men received their basic training at Camps located all over the United States. Many of us were singled out for specific aptitudes and sent to Signal Corps Schools before being assigned to our Unit at Camp Custer, in Battle Creek, Michigan. We soon shipped to Westfield, MA for 5 months of field training. Electronic specialists served parts of that time at Bradley Field, Conn and/or other East Coast Air Bases install'g. Radio and Radar in P47 planes bound for the S.W. Pacific.

In October 1943 we were activated for overseas duty and on November 1, we left San Francisco on a former Dutch luxury cruise ship, the Nieuw Amsterdam, landing on Nov. 15 at the Pacific Ocean port of Wellington, New Zealand. We disembarked in Wool O.D. uniforms (in N.Z. warm weather) with Gas Masks, Rifles and other combat equipment. We were marched across the peninsula and the city to a port on the Tasman Sea (western side) where we boarded the same ship and pulled up anchor for Australia. In retrospect, it appears that this was our General's way of saying, "The Yanks are coming!" (At that time Australia was being attacked by Jap planes from Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands just East of Papua, New Guinea)

On November 19, we landed in Sydney, Australia and moved North by train to Brisbane's Camp Doomben. Our Radio/Radar section was assigned to the Air Base to remove the Radio and Radar equipment we had installed (just months before), because the Australians used different frequencies! We then installed the appropriate IFF (Identification, Friend or Foe) throughout the remainder of 1943. This was important because these P47s were escorting our Bombers striking Guadalcanal.

In early February, 1944, we were moved by plane to Port Moresby Papua (Australian New Guinea) and then flown Northwest to Saidor to install U.S. Air Traffic Control equipment at the newly captured airstrip. We got our "baptism by fire" by nightly air raids, every night the Moon was out.

In early May '44, we boarded an LST (Landing Ship Tank) for what proved to be an uneventful landing at Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea, which was considered secure enough to become the Southwest Pacific Headquarters for General MacArthur.

Once more, on May 31, '44 we were loaded on an LST, this time as part of an invasion force headed for a Jap stronghold on Biak, on Dutch New Guinea. Part of the Schouten Islands, this was only 900 miles from the Philippines, where Gen. MacArthur had earlier pledged, "I Shall Return"!

When we arrived on JUNE 6, 44 ("D" Day on France) we found that the U.S. Infantry was fiercely opposed on the beach-head by Japan's Tanks and then from hillside caves above the beach. The Japs had installed Long Guns on rails, zeroed in on the road to the Airfield. After firing, the Long Guns pulled back into the caves like turtles pulling back into their shells. The road to the airport was impassable, blocked with wrecked U.S. Jeeps and trucks. Our LSTs circled offshore waiting for the Infantry to secure a beach-head.

Our troops on the LSTs were ultimately put down in the surf to unload drums of Aviation Gas, bombs and ammo. Although we were supposed to carry out technical missions, like:

- Stringing up telephone lines
- Setting-up Air Traffic Control for Fighter Planes supporting Infantry
- Set up A Coded Message Center for Air Force Command
- Repair and install Radio and Radar in planes at the Airstrip

However, for now, we were just Support troops.

Eventually our LST jammed in between others sprawled on the beach like alligators with gaping jaws, their drop-ramps disgorging vehicles, troops and endless crates of equipment. Our First Sgt. had a few men drive our trucks ashore, stringing them out along the base of the hills to establish a Company Perimeter, leaving space around the Mess Sgt's truck for feeding the troops. The rest of the men unloaded till it got dark, when truck lights were banned to avoid giving Jap bombers an easy target.

As usual the First Sgt. had things well in hand. He was Regular Army, in his early thirties, with cold blue eyes and a square jaw that didn't invite debate. His carefully clipped speech however spoke less of the mud of Infantry or the manure of Calvary, than of a Headquarters Orderly Room. As a consequence, some of our "Country Boys" made snide remarks about his sexual orientation (out of his presence) but it was hard to imagine a homosexual Regular Army First Sgt.

Exhausted, that night the men slept in on or under the trucks, with guards posted along the perimeter. When the Jap bombers came over, they ran to an abandoned Jap bomb shelter made of rice bags, dislodging gigantic rats feeding on the rice spilled on the ground.

With the road to the Airfield blocked, on the second day the First Sgt. gave assignments to some non-coms. As a Staff Sgt. (at the time), I was given an eight man squad to go out to the Infantry front lines to relieve some men who had had no sleep for a few nights.

We were assigned four fox holes, two men to a position, as perimeter guards. An Infantry Corporal showed us how to rig tripwires, with tin cans as alarms, across paths in from the jungle. We were told that when it got dark, we were not to speak, smoke or get out of the foxhole even to urinate. Above all, we were to fire at anything that moved on that path.

When it got dark, with only a part of the Moon, it was hard to make out anything. Well past midnight, on my shift, the tin cans jingled. I could barely make out a dark form wriggling along the path to our foxhole. Realizing that the flash from the muzzle of my gun would disclose our position and earn us a well-tossed grenade in response, I waited for exactly the right moment to fire. Suddenly, I saw the prone figure rise and my finger made the decision for me. I heard a yelp of pain... and then nothing. My foxhole partner didn't move or speak, but after some time he poked me and motioned that he would take over.

It was a very long night and I didn't sleep, but when the dawn came, so did the Corporal, who wanted to see what had happened. After searching the area he decided that the Japs had sent a Scout dog down the path to probe the perimeter. Since they always retrieved their dead and wounded, we would never know. He patted me on the shoulder indulgently, and said, "You did good, Sgt." When the rested men returned to their forward positions, we were free to return to our own Company.

It was still early in the day and we were surprised to find the Company gathered in an area near the beach, where large Coral Rocks formed a natural seating area for the men.  
NOTE: The following incident which occurred on the beach-head on the previous night (when my squad was away on the "Infantry assist"), consists of third-party testimony, when we were not present, therefore the names have been changed in the interest of fairness.  
HOWEVER, THIS INCIDENT DID OCCUR AS REPORTED IN OUR PRESENCE.

The previous night brought the Jap bombers on another run while most of the Company was asleep. "Old Man Staley" was awakened and got up for "pisscall", moving away from where the others were sleeping, to the nearest Palm tree at the foot of the hill, just inside the Company perimeter. He was startled by loose stones tumbling down the slope, so he froze behind the Palm. Though it was a dark night he could recognize First Sgt, "Maihoff", but not his companion, emerging from the vegetation.

That morning, when he told the story to his buddies, it spread **through** the company and was picked up by Tech Sgt. "Kelly" who rounded up other non-coms. They decided that the Commanding Officer should hear about it for the "Good of the Outfit". However he would "just happen by" and learn details without taking part.

When the meeting assembled, I noticed that the First Sgt. was not present. "Kelley" stood up and said:  
"There are times when everybody has to pull together. This is not a time for personal feelings or desires. You may have heard rumors about the First Sgt. in the past. This is different.  
Breaching our perimeter at night, in combat conditions, endangered



the Company. The person who did that should not be in charge. Since we don't get to vote in this man's Army, all we can do is bring out the facts."

"Kelley" then asked "OLD Man Staley" to tell what he saw. "Staley" stuck strictly to the facts and offered no conclusions. Others however eagerly told of past incidents involving the First Sgt. in allegations of homo-sexuality. Not one word was said in his defense, or for that matter about the alleged companion. As if on cue, a tropical rainstorm blew in from the ocean and the meeting broke up, since there was really nothing more to say.

When the storm ended the men returned to unloading LSTs. That afternoon, when they got back, they were told the First Sgt. was on "sick leave" and that Master Sgt. "McCoy" was Acting First Sgt. The next day our P47s dive-bombed the mouths of the hillside caves with Aviation Gas and burnt the enemy out, destroying the Long Guns. The road to the Airfield was now open, and it was time for Signal Corps work.

Weeks later, "McCoy" was named First Sgt. Also, since his Master Sgt. stripes were now open, Tech Sgt. "kelley" became a Master Sgt. "Ernie Maihoff" was being discharged "For the Good of the Service".

By July '44, an airstrip on nearby Owi Island was activated by Fifth Air Force and our Service Group was told to provide a Radio /Radar facility. I headed a six man detachment, with a Mobile Repair Van and we remained there through November '44. (We received a commendation for our work and I became a Tech Sgt.)

On January 17, '45 we were loaded on a Liberty Ship for the invasion of Luzon, Philippine Islands. We landed in Subic Bay on February 10 and followed the Invasion Force as support troops through the mountains to Clark Field and Manila. Our occupation was peaceful and we got 5 day passes into Manilla !

The war was closing in on Japan and we were shipped (LST) to Okinawa, where the Japs were reduced to suicide bombings. we were stationed at Naha Airfield, on a hillside 7 miles from Ie Shima, in time to watch the Japanese Peace Envoys land. We also were in time for the typhoon season and endured two, BUT THE WAR WAS OVER!!

On November 20, as occupation troops, we were shipped to Japan. In Fukuoka a few of our "low point men" helped restore a telephone exchange, but largely we huddled around Dil Drums, heating bombed out factories waiting for the ride home. On the way home we saw Hiroshima! On December 10 we boarded a troopship, U.S.S. General William Weigal, in Yokahama, arriving in Tacoma, Washington on December 20, 1945, and in January '46 were dispersed to our home states.

#### EPILOGUE

We were very lucky. . No lives lost. I got malaria and we had one trivial Purple heart. The most important service occurred under our original First Sergeant, although he left under a cloud. There are those who say it was "Army Politics" I'll drink to that!

\* \* \*



## THE CLOCK SHOP

The Clock Shop wall is lined with shelves

where clocks grown old, tick to themselves,

remembering when their cadence ruled

and sent the children off to school,

first woke the earner with the sun,

then signaled when the day was done.

The Old Folk's Home, in rising tiers

shows first the soundest for their years.

Trembling hands and trepidation

which can't be helped with medication

are banished to an upper story,

on the way to final glory.

\* \* \*

Ralph Friedman

2nd place winner — Adult

# Niles Public Library District

## 2008

## Poetry

## Contest

## Winners