

GLEN BREACH'S STORY

There is an old poem authored by Major Kelly Strong called Freedom Is Not Free. It is probable that only those who have fought hard to win battles with our enemies can understand the full significance of those words. Many have such awful memories of loneliness, horror and destruction of war that they refuse to talk about their experiences.

Glen Reagor Breach thankfully returned home from his service in the United States Army with no physical injuries. However, he has numerous unpleasant memories that he was hesitant to talk about for many years. A few months ago, 56 years after World War II ended, he did tell me of some of his memories of his time in the infantry. I will try to give an accurate account of what he told me.

Prior to 1942, all men were required to register for military service on their 21st birthday, but that year the law was changed to lower the draft age from 21 years of age to 18 years. Glen was 18 on October 9, 1943. He dutifully registered for the draft and his name was added to thousands of others who would soon receive "greetings" from Uncle Sam.



Glen, age 18

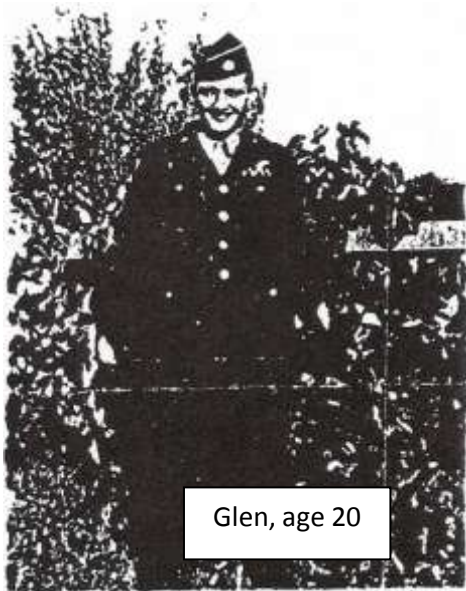
Glen had begun his senior year of high school in September just prior to his birthday. Thinking he would soon receive his notice from the draft board and would be required to leave for basic training, he finished the first semester of school, but did not go the second semester. He needed only four additional credits to graduate. He didn't receive notice to report for duty as soon as he had expected, but was notified that he was to leave in June. However, as he was needed to help on the farm in the summer, he was granted a deferment until September.

September came too soon and he left from Caldwell for Fort Douglas, Utah where he was inducted into the United States Army. He was there for a short while before going to Camp Hood in Texas for basic training. He arrived at Camp Hood, which was near Killeen and not far from Temple, Texas the last of September 1944 and was there until after Christmas of that year. Most of Glen's training was in anti-tanks.

While in Texas, he attended church when he could and found the members there at the church of Christ to be very caring and hospitable. He was invited into their homes quite often. He especially remembers the dinners at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Sprott and the good times he had with them. He really appreciated them and so many others who were considerate of the service men.

When Glen's training was complete he rode a train to Green River, Wyoming and then traveled on to Caldwell, returning home for a seven or eight day furlough. Boys in the service were given this short time home to visit their family before shipping out for overseas.

Glen's Story



Glen, age 20

When it was time to leave, he traveled on a bus to Nevada then by train to San Francisco. From there he went on a ferry to Oakland, a train to Salinas, California and finally a bus to Fort Ord. He was at Fort Ord for ten days or so before he was sent by train to Vancouver, Washington. After another ten days, he was sent to Portland, Oregon where he shipped out on a Sunday for Oahu, Hawaii. (American forces had defeated Japan against its invasion of the Hawaii Islands in June 1942). Glen received one more month of training there.

After the month in Hawaii, he sailed on the Franklin Bell troopship to the Marshall Islands, where they docked for a day or two, but did not leave the ship. From there he went to Saipan in the Marianas.

Glen was there about one month. While he was there, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt died (April 12, 1945) and Vice President Harry S. Truman succeeded to the presidency on the same day. It was also during that month that Glen and his company were told that they would be going to Okinawa, Ryukyu, Japan.

Okinawa was an island of 467 square miles. It was an important strategic site because of its location close to many areas in Asia and the Pacific. Japan had controlled Okinawa for about sixty years previous to World War II. American forces were to invade the island to use it as a staging area for the assault on Japan.

The XXIV Corps of the 10th Army invaded Okinawa on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945. When they stormed Higashi Beach, the Japanese 32nd Army allowed the Americans to land unopposed, to conserve Japan's strength for defense of the southern half of the island. The Corps made contact with the first line of Japanese defensive fortifications on April 4th. For a few days of battle, the Japanese army succeeded in turning back the Americans.

Glen's Company D was sent to Okinawa as replacement troops. They sailed on the Liberty from Saipan and then transferred onto a motor barge to the shore of Okinawa. They carried their rifles and duffle bags as they descended a long rope ladder onto the barge from the ship. It was a difficult procedure and a few of the men dropped their rifles into the ocean by accident. They arrived in Okinawa sometime in the first part of May in 1945. They were assigned to the 96th Division, known as the Deadeyes. Glen was assigned to the 381st Regiment, 1st Battalion, Company D, 96th Division. As they arrived and trudged inland, they heard shooting of artillery. They advanced from near the central part of the island toward the south.

Glen's Story

Glen's training had been mostly anti-tanks, but he was assigned to heavy weapons/mortar duty. He believes this was because Japan had fewer tanks than expected. The United States relied heavily on tanks to provide heavy firepower against the excellent Japanese defensive positions.

Heavy rain on Okinawa turned foxholes and trenches, as well as roads, into a muddy quagmire. The weather was cold and clammy. The soldiers slept on plastic in their clothes in foxholes with their ponchos over them. It was difficult to sleep!

The heels on both of Glen's boots came off and he found it very difficult to walk in the gooey slick mud day after day, while packing heavy loads of mortar ammunition. He walked with those boots with no heels for three or four weeks. He fell down several times as a result and still wonders why he wasn't supplied with new boots or at least new heels.

About one-fourth mile inland, the men were eating their C-Rations one day when Japanese machine guns started shooting from planes. Glen saw seven of the planes fall from the sky as the U.S. Navy shot them down.

One day, Glen was assigned to go back for C-Rations for his squadron. A sniper started shooting at him. Glen started running and jumping down terraces and managed to dodge the bullets.

On another occasion, one of the men finished his C-Rations and threw the can into a nearby sugar cane field. Instantly, a hand grenade was thrown from the field towards the men. It went just over Glen's head and exploded right behind him. They couldn't see where the man was in the cane field so they threw a smoke grenade into the field to flush him out so they could get him.

Jim Sibley from Seattle, Washington was Glen's foxhole buddy. One night a large ten-inch shell weighing approximately 1,000 pounds dropped thirty or forty feet from their foxhole and exploded. No one was hit with shrapnel, but the next night another one exploded in the same place and wounded a man in the neck.

Another time, Glen told the men, "Someone is behind that wall". They could see through the thatch that two Japanese soldiers with rifles in their hands were there. Wesley Brown shot both of them.

Occasionally, a mine would blow up when stepped on, but vehicles would always make them blow. Glen saw a truck blow up when it struck a mine. Then when a dozer went to fill the hole, it also hit a mine. Another time a jeep came along and hit a mine. When it exploded the soldier went way up in the air, but his only injury was a skinned nose.

The Japanese army positions were often in caves, bunkers and other underground fortifications with barracks, equipment, artillery etc. The hilly terrain of southern Okinawa helped Japanese troops to defend the island. It was difficult to find them but when the American soldiers came across those places they would blow them up with satchel charges and this would often seal the caves with the enemy inside.

When the soil became so muddy that most vehicles were immobilized, (caterpillars would sink and spin their tracks) United States airplanes dropped supplies to the men. Some of the men had to go a short distance and pick up the supplies and were to pick up a big red parachute, which marked the front lines. One time, someone failed to remove the parachute. As it hadn't been moved, an

Glen's Story

American pilot of a plane dropped two bombs, since the parachute indicated the Americans to be behind the line. In fact, they were in front the line. Glen was a few yards away when the bomb hit.

Another incident of what is known as "friendly fire" caused the death or injury of 32 Americans. A marine shooting from a US Corsair apparently mistook them for the enemy.

There were some unusual things that Glen saw, such as the time a soldier was blown clear out of a foxhole. His equipment was all destroyed, but he received no injury!

Lt. General Simon Boliver Buckner, Jr. was commanding officer of the 10th Army, which included both Marine and Army units. He ordered the 96th Division to attack and conquer Kakazu Ridge, but Colonel Halloran refused to send his men there unless it was shelled and bombed first, so he wouldn't lose more men than necessary. He said it would be suicide to do so. It was a hard battle, but the Deadeyes as the 96th Infantry Division was known, conquered the hill. (Lt. General Buckner, Jr. was the highest-ranking officer to die in the war. Japanese artillery shells killed him on June 18, 1945). One time, on Kakazu Ridge, rifle companies had gone up and then partially withdrawn, but the Deadeyes had no knowledge of their withdrawal. Some of the Deadeyes climbed part way up the hill and started digging foxholes, but then went back down the hill to push the Jeeps up the hill through the mud. All at once, the Japanese mortars started shooting and in exchange 57 anti-guns started firing at the Japanese who were just above the Deadeyes.

The Assistant Commander of the 96th Division of the 10th Army was a man from Texas whose name was Claudius Easley. General Easley was a great inspiration for all in Glen's division. He was a very nice man who wouldn't ask his men to do anything that he wouldn't do himself. He was an excellent shot (was a former U.S. Champion pistol shooter) so was nicknamed Deadeye. Therefore, the 96th Division was called "the Deadeyes".

Toward the end of the battle in Okinawa, Glen and a man whose last name was Ballinger and another man named Wesley Brown were resting where they had spent the night. They were preparing to go on up the ridge together. General Easley and two or three other men came by and stopped to talk a minute. General Easley asked, "What are you going to do with that? Ammunition?" Apparently not realizing who General Easley was (as officers didn't wear insignias, medals etc. when in battle to prevent recognition by the enemy) Ballinger answered, "Mac, what do you think we're going to do with it? We're going to take it up there and fire it!" General Easley just smiled and walked on up the hill about one-fourth mile or so. It wasn't very long, maybe two hours or so later when two men came down the hill carrying a man on a stretcher. They stopped and pulled the cover off of the face of the dead man to show Glen and Ballinger. It was General Easley. The Deadeyes had lost their wonderful leader.

Yes, Glen had to kill too --- something that was very difficult for him and still bothers him. He had grown up on a farm and had been taught to respect people and treat them with kindness.

Glen's Story

He had been a good student in school and a well-behaved teenager who went to church on Sunday and had a strong faith in God. But he had been drafted into a war and he had a responsibility to defend his country against those who willed to destroy it. He knows he did what was required to do in a horrible war.

Glen remembers one time when some Japanese were waving white flags to surrender. One of them was an eleven- year-old Okinawa boy. Another time a civilian woman with two children came out of a cave. She was burned quite badly. The U.S. medical personnel doctored her. Glen gave the children a Hershey candy bar and, though it had been in his pocket for some time, the kids thought it was great. Glen says he never saw any prisoner of war mistreated. In fact, one prisoner told the American men that when they arrived in Tokyo he would give them a ride in his taxi!

The Okinawa battle lasted for more than two and one half months. The final combat came in late June after months of bloody land fighting and kamikaze attacks. It was very important to conquer the island as it was fortified so well with the underground caves and all they held for Japan. The Japanese 32nd Army was headquartered there and fought with force, but the U.S. Marines and the U.S. Infantry were able to overcome them. Japan was unable to rely only on the strength of its soldiers, so they drafted civilians into battle. As a result, a large number of Okinawa citizens, including elderly and children were victims of war. In fact, there were more civilian deaths than military personnel deaths in the battle for Okinawa. The Japanese authorities were using the battle of Okinawa to buy time for what they thought would be the decisive battle of the war -- the battle for the mainland Japan. But as it turned out, Okinawa was the site of the only land battle in Japan during the war. On June 10, 1945, Lt. Gen. Simon B. Buckner, Jr. who was commanding the 10th Army offered surrender terms to Lt. Gen. Ushyima Mitsuru, commander of Japan's 32nd Army. Lt. Gen. Mitsuru did not respond.

Five days later, the coordinated Japanese resistance ended which was basically the death of the 32nd Army. Eight days after that, Lt. Gen. Ushyima Mitsuru and the chief-of-staff of Japan's 32nd Army. Both committed suicide.

American casualties of the battle of Okinawa totaled more than 38,000 wounded and 12,000 killed or missing in action. The 96th Division lost 1,504 men. Another 5,790 were wounded. They killed 37,763 of the enemy, more than any other division in the war. General Douglas MacArthur let it be known that he was especially proud of the 96th Division because of their heroism and determination. The 96th Division (the Deadeyes) was one of the toughest groups of men in the war and the battle in Okinawa was one of the toughest battles fought in the war. There was more posttraumatic stress by those who fought in the Okinawa battle than by those in any other World War II battle. Twenty six thousand (yes 26,000) veterans of the Okinawa battle required counseling after the war.

Glen's Story

By July 2nd the mop-up campaign was finished. Glen, along with the rest of the division left Okinawa sometime after July 25th. They sailed on a LST ship (a flat bottom ship of which the complete bow would open to drive equipment off) for seven or eight days to Mindoro in the Philippines. There they prepared to be part of a massive invasion of mainland Japan. Glen was there; waiting to be shipped to Japan, when on August 6th the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. He thought the war must be over, as big guns were shooting, cars were honking etc. However, Japan had not surrendered. Three days later, a bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Six days after that, on August 15th, Japan announced their acceptance of Allied surrender terms. The war had claimed more than 405,000 United States lives and injured thousands more either physically or mentally and often both.

The 96th Division was deactivated in January of 1946. Some of the men were sent home, but some including Glen who had not served the designated time for discharge, were transferred to the 86th Division. The 86th had been stationed in Europe, but had not had combat. They were sent to the Philippines with an assignment to keep peace between the Muslims (there were about 250,000 of Muslims) and the other residents. Many residents were afraid of the Muslims and their actions. Glen was on guard duty there for about three months. He did not like guard duty as some Japanese men were still there and did not know the war was over. They would sometimes sneak into camp and it was difficult to see them in the dark. Sometimes with stolen American army uniforms and raincoats, they would sneak through chow lines also.

From Mindanao they were sent to Luzon to help train the Philippine army. Glen was in charge of part of a company of Philipinos, 30 or 40 men. He tried to be nice to them, but found he had to raise his voice to get their attention. Glen was on Luzon when the Philippines received their independence on July 4th. He had KP duty that day. The men were fed turkeys that had been kept in freezers for a long time and which even had feathers rolled up in them! Many of the men got sick, probably from the turkey.

Upon leaving the Philippines, Glen boarded the Monclair Victory at Manila Bay to head back to the good old USA! But the ship sat in harbor for a couple of days rocking and swaying. Glen got seasick, as did some of the sailors. It took sixteen days to arrive at Oakland, California. It was just at sunup when they sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge. The men unloaded at Oakland and went by train to Fort Lewis, Washington where they were discharged. Glen took a train back to Caldwell. It was October of 1946.

As he did not know ahead of time just when he would be coming home and we had no phone, he could not let us know to pick him up in Caldwell so he hitch-hiked the seven miles from Caldwell to Greenleaf. Glen remembers that Daddy was working on the pickup and did not see him coming. He of course, was all smiles when he looked up and saw his son home from war. Glen had been overseas about eighteen months and gone from home longer than that. It was such a joyous thing for all of our family just as it was for thousands of families nationwide to have our son and brother back home!

Glen's Story



Glen and parents, 1946

Private First Class Glen R. Breach of course was honorably discharged. Medals and Ribbons that he earned included the following: Good Conduct, Victory, Asiatic Pacific, Ryukus, Philippines Liberation, Bronze Star, Combat Infantry Badge and the 96th Division Presidential Unit Citation Award. The 96th Infantry Division was only the third or fourth full World War II Army division to receive the prestigious Presidential Unit Citation Award. It is for extraordinary heroism in military operations against an armed enemy.

Someone once said, "Judge a nation by the heroes it honors". Our nation is free today because of heroes such as those who were part of the 96th Division -- the Deadeyes.

I was a young girl when Glen left for the army, but I remember that day well. I was so upset that I got sick at school and had to go home. We all worried until the war was over and he came home. The radio was often tuned to war news. It was an exciting day when we received an occasional letter from him. Mother would read it aloud to us. It was easy to tell that he longed for home. Of course, the letters took two or three weeks to reach us so we wondered if he was still alive, but at least it was some consolation to know he was alright at the time he wrote. And I remember when Glen sent money for Christmas for us with instruction to buy bibles. Another time he sent us girls handkerchiefs from the Philippines. I still have my bible (though it is badly worn) and the handkerchief. The best gift of all was his homecoming! !

Margaret (Breach) Grill, Glen's sister