

# The National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with:

Arnold Abbott

34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division

January 20, 2018

This is Mike Zambrano. Today is January 20, 2018. I am interviewing Mr. Arnold Abbott who lives in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and research Center archives for The National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. Good morning Mr. Abbott.

Arnold Abbott:

Good morning.

Mike:

Could you please tell me when and where you were born?

Arnold:

I born in Beverly, Massachusetts on April 12, 1924.

Mike:

What did your parents do for a living?

Arnold:

My parents were in the antique business. They followed the antiques shows all around the country and they had a beautiful red barn in Connecticut where they sold their antiques, when they weren't on the road.

Mike:

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Arnold:

I had one sister who is now 99 years of age.

Mike:

As you were born in 1924, you went through the Depression, can you tell me how that affected your family?

Arnold:

I was just a youngster during the Depression so I don't recall a lot. I do know that we were poor.

Mike:

Were your parents able to keep their business during the Depression?

Arnold:

Yes, they kept it.

Mike:

Did you live in the same town, up until you were 18 years old?

Arnold:

No. We moved from Beverly to Brookline, Massachusetts.

Mike:

Can you tell me what you were doing, when you heard that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor?

Arnold:

I was in high school and I sold stamps, by mail, all over the United States.

Mike:

How much do you think you made, off of the little business you had?

Arnold: I just added it to the family finances.

Mike: Do you remember where you were when you heard that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor?

Arnold: I was in Philadelphia as I had enrolled into the University of Pennsylvania. I was in the Reserves and studying Pre-med which was considered a critical occupation, so I was not eligible for the Draft. I was considered exempt.

Mike: So, you weren't Drafted because of your Pre-med status.

Arnold: That is correct. After a while, I transferred into the Warden School of Finance. The people in the Engineering school were being drafted so I took a long look and decided that the war couldn't be won without my help. So, I took a bus to Camp Mead, Maryland and when asked what branch of service I preferred, I said the Medical Corps. The Company Commander happened to be an anti-Semite and he said that no damn Jew was going to get into his outfit, so you are going into the Infantry. I became a Sargent in the Infantry and that is where I spent the next 2 ½ years. When I went to Camp Wheeler, Macon, Georgia, I walked on the Colored side of the street, drank out of the colored drinking fountains and went to the Colored restaurants. I also rode in the back of the bus. Before, I got back to camp, I was scheduled to be involved in the invasion of North Africa. I never finished my Basic Training. That was my punishment for Civil Disobedience. I was disobeying the laws of Fort Lauderdale, Florida while led to me being arrested four times for breaking the laws. I kept on doing it and everyone said that I was going to be Court Martialed.

Mike: There were several articles about you, in several newspapers as well as a video on the inter-net and that is the way I found out about you. Just to be clear; can you tell me why you drake from the Colored fountains and why you sat in the back of the bus, when you were at Camp Wheeler?

Arnold: I had been trained for Civil Rights, all my life. I wrote my first poem about Civil Rights, when I was nine years old. I took on an American icon, Waldo Emerson, who stressed that one had no obligation to do anything except what one wants. Apparently, his desire was not to feed the poor. So, I was fighting for Civil Rights, in my own way, when I was very young. I have never stopped. The program I have now, Love Thy Neighbors, I

started twenty-six years ago and I have continued to fight for Civil Rights and the under-dog.

Mike: That is very admirable.

Arnold: That is what I do.

Mike: Getting back to Camp Wheeler.

Arnold: I came from Massachusetts and I never knew about Segregation. We never had it.

Mike: Was Segregation a shock to you?

Arnold: Yes, it was.

Mike: While you were at Camp Wheeler, just how much Basic Training, did you go through?

Arnold: About two-thirds.

Mike: Do you recall how long it was supposed to last?

Arnold: It was supposed to be four months long.

Mike: Do you recall what you did learn in Basic Training?

Arnold: Basically, you learned how to engage the enemy.

Mike: You also learned how to fire weapons, did you not?

Arnold: Oh, yes. I was a Sargant so I had a 45 pistol and a Carbine rifle.

Mike: What else do you recall about your basic training?

Arnold: Not much.

Mike: Did you make any friends?

Arnold: Yes. Basically, my best friend was a Mohican Indian whose name was Rainwater. He was from Oklahoma.

Mike: Di you meet him in Basic Training?

Arnold: Yes. As you might know, the US Government has pushed the Indians around for years. They were under-dogs and I always tried to help them.

Mike: Back to your acts of Civil Disobedience, did the police arrest you?

Arnold: No. the M.P.s (Military Police) took me into custody.

Mike: You didn't get to finish your basic training, so where did they send you?

Arnold: They sent me to be involved in the invasion of North Africa. We went to Casablanca and to Tunisia. We also went to Algeria where we freed the port of Oran. Then we were shipped to Italy and Sicily. Then we went to Naples and all the way up to Laveno. Then we were on our way to Japan, when the war was declared over. That was after Hiroshima.

Mike: Were you sent home after that?

Arnold: Yes. I was sent to Alexandria, Louisiana which was as red-neck as Macon, Georgia. From there, I was sent to New Port News and I was discharged from the Army. Then, I returned to the University of Pennsylvania.

Mike: To be clear: From Camp Wheeler, they sent you to a unit that was going directly overseas?

Arnold: Yes. Directly overseas.

Mike: Do you remember where you disembarked from?

Arnold: It was New Port News.

Mike: Were you assigned to a Unit by this time?

Arnold: I was assigned to the 34<sup>th</sup> Division, 180<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

Mike: Do you recall how long it took to cross the Atlantic?

Arnold: No.

Mike: Were you prone to getting sea-sick?

Arnold: No.

Mike: As the trip undoubtedly took quite a while, what did you do during your spare time?

Arnold: We had classes and we played card games. We did what ever we could to pass the time.

Mike: Was your friend Hershel Rainwater still with you?

Arnold: Yes.

Mike: Was it a combat situation, when you went ashore in North Africa?

Arnold: Yes, it was. We were replacement troops.

Mike: So, you weren't in the first wave that went ashore?

Arnold: No. We went the Repo-Depo (Replacement Depot).

Mike: So, when you went ashore, you didn't go ashore under-fire?

Arnold: No. We were replacements.

Mike: Do you remember what month it was that you enlisted?

Arnold: No. It was in 1942.

Mike: How did you find North Africa?

Arnold: The situation was pretty bad. There was little food.

Mike: Did you actually see any fighting in North Africa?

Arnold: Yeah.

Mike: While you were in North Africa, did you run across any German or Italian P.O.W.s?

Arnold: Yes. They were treated like dogs. They were carried around in cages.

Mike: Were there a lot of them?

Arnold: Yes.

Mike: Do you recall any particular battles?

Arnold: No, I really don't.

Mike: You mentioned that you achieved the rank of Sargent. How did that come about?

Arnold: It was a battle field promotion. So many of our Non-coms had been wiped out, I being a college kid, they figured I had some brains, so they promoted me.

Mike: Were you a Platoon Sargent?

Arnold: Yes.

Mike: Is that the rank you held for the remainder of the time you were in the military?

Arnold: Yes.

Mike: Now, where did you go after North Africa?

Arnold: We went to Sicily then to Naples and then up the Italy boot.

Mike: Were you involved in the invasion at Anzio?

Arnold: Yes, that is where the Germans trained their 88s (Guns) on us. We lost a lot of men as a result of that.

Mike: Do you remember any particulars about Anzio?

Arnold: All I remember is being in fox-holes and being the target of the German 88s.

Mike: You must have been lucky to come out of that.

Arnold: We got smart, in a hurry.

Mike: You Unit asI landed at Salerno, did it not?

Arnold: Yes.

Mike: So, you were involved in two amphibious landings.

Arnold: Yes. and we lost a lot of men along the way.

Mike: What happened to Hershel Rainwater? Did he make it through the war?

Arnold: Yes.

Mike: What do you remember about Cheventia?

Arnold: It was a playground area for the Italians. It was a recreational area when we got some time off. That is where I met an Italian lady and spent the whole week with her. I went to her apartment where her grandmother threw a blanket over a clothes line to separate the room.

Mike: You spent the week there?

Arnold: Yes.

Mike: What else do you recall about being in Italy?

Arnold: The people were very friendly. A lot of them had relative in America and they were anxious to find out where they were.

Mike: You mean that you would try to explain to them what it was like back in the United States?

Arnold: Yes.

Mike: I believe that you said that the Italian soldiers were not interested in fighting.

Arnold: No. They didn't like to fight. The Italian soldiers would surrender.

Mike: When you were in Italy, was your Unit constantly on the move?

Arnold: Yes. We would pause now and then and then move forward.

Mike: During the time you were in the service, did you write home?

Arnold: Not very often as we were always on the move.

Mike: Did your Unit make it to Monte Casino?

Arnold: Yes. It was hell..

Mike: How is that?

Arnold: The Germans were very rough. They had a very tough Battalion at Monte Casino. It was fighting all the way.

Mike: How many men did you have in your Platoon?

Arnold: We started with 15 and ended up with 8 or 9.

Mike: Did you have a lot of replacements?

Arnold: Yes.

Mike: Did you have any that were with you for a long while?



Arnold: Yes.

Mike: What do you recall about the rain and mud at Monte Casino?

Arnold: It rained almost all of the time.

Mike: I imagine that was quite distracting.

Arnold: I remember on incident where there were several of our men trapped in a farm house and I asked for volunteers to go to their assistance. I had three volunteers that went with me and all three were killed. They all were married and had families. I was selected to be promoted to Sargent as a result of that action. I questioned why I survived, but I guess that God had missions for me later on. I am in my 94<sup>th</sup> year and I am still working on living.

Mike: You certainly are and you are in the news too.

Arnold: I try.

Mike: Do you remember when you Italy?

Arnold: Yes, and that is when I went to Alexandria, Louisiana. There I experienced as much Segregation as I did in Macon, Georgia.

Mike: Was the war over, when you got shipped home?

Arnold: No. It was not.

Mike: Do you happen to remember when you heard about the Atomic bomb being dropped?

Arnold: Yeah. We were on our way to Japan.

Mike: So, you had returned to the US and you were immediately redeployed to go to Japan?

Arnold: Yes. We were redeployed right away. We were to go to Japan.

Mike: What did you think about this new weapon that could obliterate whole cities?

Arnold: I thought it was just another example of man's inhumanity to man.

Mike: When you were on a boat headed for Japan, where you still with the 34<sup>th</sup>?

Arnold: No. I was just a replacement.

Mike: So. You actually leave Europe before the war was over and you get reassigned to the Pacific.

Arnold: Right.

Mike: Were they a lot of you that got reassigned like that?

Arnold: Yes.

Mike: Was this in 1945?

Arnold: Yes.

Mike: Did you have any leave when you got back to the states?

Arnold: I do not recall any leave.

Mike: In all the time in the Army, what did you think of the food?

Arnold: Not much.

Mike: Do you remember who the Commanding Officer was of the 34<sup>th</sup>?

Arnold: No.

Mike: What was your over-all impression of the 34<sup>th</sup>?

Arnold: It was very diverse. It had some nice guys and some not so nice guys.

Mike: As a Platoon leader, did you every have soldiers under you tht caused trouble?

Arnold: Oh, yeah. You would always have someone who thought they could run the outfit better than you could.

Mike: Do you remember any particular individual that you thought was a very good soldier?

Arnold: Not that I can recall.

Mike: You said that you wee on a ship headed toward the Pacific when the bomb was dropped and it turned around and returned to the US. Where did you come into port?

Arnold: I can't recall.

Mike: Where were you eventually discharged?

Arnold: I believe I was discharged Alexandria. Yes, I was a civilian when I got back to the East Coast.

Mike: What was the first thing you did, when you got home?

Arnold: I sat down for a good meal.

Mike: What did you end up doing, for a job?

Arnold: I went back to school, under the G.I. Bill.

Mike: How did the G.I. Bill work out for you?

Arnold: It worked fine. Rather than medicine, I tried Journalism.

Mike: You were a Journalist?

Arnold: I tried to be. have been writing all of my life. I have written four or five books.

Mike: Can you give me the title of one of them?

Arnold: One of them is Poetic life; Essays in Rhyme.

Mike: How long were you a Journalist?

Arnold: I have been a writer all of my life. I have a book of poetry and a number of others.

Mike: Did you work for a particular company as a journalist?

Arnold: I did everything.

Mike: Is that what you retired from?

Arnold: I am still writing. I working on one now.

Mike: Can you tell me about some of the things you have for the Civil Rights cause?

Arnold: I have just fought for people's rights.

Mike: How is your program, Love Thy Neighbor, going now?

Arnold: It is still going. We haven't missed a feeding.

Mike: How often do you feed?

Arnold: Every Wednesday at the Fort Lauderdale beach and every Sunday at 2:30pm at a church.

Mike: Have you had any trouble with the authorities?

Arnold: No. They were getting more trouble than they were giving, so they quit. I am still waiting my day in Court for the suit I brought against the city of Fort Lauderdale. I brought it in 1999 and I can't get my day in Court.

Mike: Is there anything else about your experiences during World War II that you would like to share.

Arnold; No.

Mike: Thank you making time for me today and thank you for service during World War II. I would also like to thank you for your commitment and your time and caring for the homeless.

Arnold: Thank you. God Bless you.

Transcribed by:  
Floyd C. Cox  
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