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# St. Johns High School

Home of the Redwings!

## Neal Harte

### Interviewed by Caitlin Harte, Granddaughter

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My Grandpa, Neil Harte, served in World War II at the Philippine Islands. He saw a lot of combat against the Japanese. He joined at the age of 21, in 1942 because he felt that after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, he needed to help his country. If no one helped, then the Japanese would have moved right into the United States and took it over like it was their own country. He wasn't drafted or forced into fighting in the war. My grandpa could have entered the war a couple years earlier, but he was working in a factory and was helping his dad on the farm, so he was given a dispensation.

He said that his most memorable part of the war for him was when the war was declared over. WWII was an overall bad experience for him since it involved a lot of bloodshed and loss of lives, and by the time it was over, he was 24 years old. Although the war was officially over, he had to stick around for another couple of months to help with taking care of the equipment. They dumped the equipment into Manila Bay because they didn't want to take it home and they didn't want anyone else to have it either. Although all wars are bad, a good part about this was that my grandpa was able to see different parts of the world. He said that at times of non-war, different countries' lands are really beautiful and awesome.

He was first stationed at Camp Hood in Texas where he was in a tank destroyer unit. He does recall some humorous times when he was in training with the tanks during night maneuvers. He said it was so dark and dusty that you couldn't see a thing and they would run into one another. The government didn't appreciate them wrecking their machines even before they got into combat. He was also stationed in Fort Ord California, then in the South Pacific in New Britain, and New Guinea. He drove in a machine, which he called an alligator. The Landing Ship Tanks dropped off these alligators close to the shore on the beaches.

He disliked the Japanese very much. He thinks they are just bad people and has felt hatred towards them ever since. He thinks that the droppings of the atomic bombs actually saved many Japanese lives, as well as American lives. In late August and early September of 1945, he explained that his division was training new green troops for a massive invasion of the Japanese mainland. Just before this invasion they heard that the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The invasion never occurred and he thinks he probably wouldn't have lived through it, if it had occurred. That is

why he tried so hard to fight against them and gain back our territory.

He recalls his first day being in the war as miserable, since he was separated from everyone he knew. He first gathered in Michigan, where all new recruits met, then they were all assigned to their designated stations. He was involved in 17 invasions on the Philippine Islands. After the war ended, the officers were the first ones to go home. Grandpa, as staff sergeant, was left in charge of 2800 Japanese that were left in a prison camp. It was his responsibility to make sure that these former prisoners were shipped back to Japan. He had some interesting yet scary stories about the war and the invasions that he took part in. He says that the war hasn't affected him too much, except the fact that it took 3 years of his life away.

There were some situations that made the war even more unpleasant than usual. In New Guinea, he said that on the boat they were caught in the middle of a typhoon. Another scary situation was on the way home when they came to a stop in the middle of the ocean because they almost ran into a mine that was left from the Japanese. This was in the shipping lanes, right where the Japanese were sure some unsuspecting boat would hit it. No one detected this mine by clear sight, but someone caught it on the radar and that's how they missed it. He thinks that World War II was something that the US had to do. Some other wars such as Vietnam War, wasn't something that we had to get involved in, and it just cost the US too many lives.

After the war he had a choice of either going back to school with the GI Bill, or going back to work in the factory. He chose to go back to making a few bucks in the factory, but now he says that he wonders if he should have went back to school. If this whole war happened again, he said that he would probably do the exact same thing. He doesn't like to talk about the war a whole lot though, so he doesn't think too much about that kind of stuff. When asked if he would fight in another war, he answered that it would depend on the circumstances.

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