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Ernest Lionel Schobl: A World War II Veteran's Memories

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World War II changed the lives of numerous individuals converting young men to soldiers, women to workers and in many cases tragically converting young wives to seemingly younger widows. The effects of the war are evident in the frequently documented stories from this historic event. However, undocumented stories and thus important lessons from the war are increasingly lost with the aging World War II generation. Therefore, this paper examines the life of Ernest Lionel Schobl, a World War II veteran and my grandfather, focusing on his memories of life before, during and after the war.

Life Before the War

Ernest L. Schobl was born in Otisville, New York on September 11, 1924. Ernie was the eldest of two sons. His father was an electrician and his mother filled the traditional role as a housewife. Therefore, he seemed to come from a traditional middle class family. However, Ernie and his family also lived through some of the toughest times Americans have ever had to experience, the Great Depression. Ernie said, "to make extra money we use to run trap lines. We would trap beavers, muskrats, skunks and raccoons. Whatever we caught we ate or sold." Moreover, Ernie described his pre-war diet saying "I never had red meat or beef before I went into the Navy. Ted (Ernie's Brother) and I always carried our guns to school incase we saw a deer, or a rabbit, or a squirrel or anything else we might be able to eat."

News of Pearl Harbor

Ernie was seventeen years old on the eve of Pearl Harbor. He was in the fourth month of his senior year. He first heard of the event as most Americans

did, on the radio. He recalls a conversation he had with his father at the dinner table that night. For instance, his father said, “we are going to need some good men for this war.” Ernie replied, “Yes sir, and I’m going to be one of them.” The next day, December 8, 1941 when the recruiting offices opened Ernie enlisted, with his fathers permission, into the United States Navy. As a result, he never received his high school diploma.

Going to War

Ernie said he did not go to boot camp before the war. Instead he said he went to a boat handling school in San Diego, California. Ernie’s first invasion took place at Guadalcanal in 1942. Ernie drove a landing craft that delivered the marines to the beach. Ernie remembered that day as being “hot and clear” and “the water was like glass.” He described his emotions simply saying, “I was scared and nervous. We were expecting the Japs to be waiting on us, but they weren’t.” Ernie said, “we unloaded the marines all day long and never got fired on.”

Throughout Ernie's time in the war he participated in the New Georgia, Kwajalein, Enewetak, Saipan, Guam, Bougainville, Peleliu, Luzon, Okinawa and Iwo Jima invasions, a total of 10 invasions. However, his second invasion, the New Georgia invasion, seemed to be his most memorable. For example, he was on the “first wave” and a “shore battery” hit them. They drove straight for the shore because they were taking on water. He said, “We landed outside the beach head, just behind Japanese lines.” Ernie and a squad of marines had to hide in the jungle until their “line caught up with them.” They hid in “a limestone

cave” and “had nothing to eat” the entire time they were missing. In other words, Ernie was missing in action for three days. His father was notified that he was missing and thankfully re-notified when he was found. By the end of the war Ernie's rank was Boatswain Mate 1st class. He received the Purple Heart twice for being wounded in New Georgia and Okinawa with shrapnel.

The War is Over

Ernie was in Okinawa on the ATR16 preparing for another invasion. However, this invasion was sure to result in the most serious consequences as they were preparing to invade mainland Japan. Then, the news of V-J day was announced. He said, “ the whole fleet fired their guns in the sky” in celebration. Moreover, Ernie said, “Everyone had a deep down gut feeling, there was a good chance we wouldn't survive this invasion” thus the news of victory arguably had the greatest affect on these men as it undeniably saved their lives. In an instance, they were able to think about their future at home instead of the invasion that may have resulted in their deaths. The extremes of emotions that were felt on this day seem clearly evident.

Returning Home

Ernie was honorably discharged from the Navy on December 28, 1945, four months after V-J day. He returned to Middletown, New York where he married his high school sweetheart Jeanne Marie Uhlig on April 27, 1946. Ernie obtained employment with the “Erie Lackawana Railroad” where he worked on a tugboat “handling the lines.” Ernie and Jeanne first settled in Union City, New Jersey and then in Jersey City, New Jersey. They had one son, August Leo

Schobl on February 27, 1949. Furthermore, they moved to Anna Marie Island, Florida in 1957 and then later relocated to Bartow, Florida where they purchased and ran their own business the "Tasty Freeze." When asked what were the most important lessons learned from the war, Ernie replied, "I didn't learn a damn thing except maybe that I'm a lucky son-of-bitch." It is no wonder where the phrase "cussing like a sailor" came from after talking with my grandpa.

This interview was extremely hard to complete as my grandfather's hearing has significantly declined in the past few years. For instance, I would yell the questions several times and then his wife would yell them and eventually between the two of us he would understand. Interviewing someone else may have provided a more insightful interview for this paper. However, this interview has given me the opportunity to learn more about my grandfather's experiences. I am sorry to say I have never asked about the time he served in World War II until this point and I am so thankful I finally have.