

One Man's World War II Journey

Janet Scharbor

During World War II, many men wanted to join the military. Some would even lie about their age just to join. In my dad's family, all four of the men served their country. The eldest son, Leon, served in the Army and fought in World War II. This is my Uncle Leon's story.

Uncle Leon Smith enlisted in the Army in 1941. He was 22 years old. He was sworn in at the old post office in Tulsa, Oklahoma. They shipped him to Abilene, Texas, and then to Ayer, Massachusetts, and finally to Fort Drum, New York. At Fort Drum, he learned to adapt to the cold weather. Some troops went overseas without any training and were not prepared for the cold weather.

From Fort Drum, he went to Virginia. He trained on the ship in the harbor. The ships had big nets hanging off of them. The soldiers practiced climbing up the nets with their gear and guns. If you could climb them without getting your gun stuck in the net you were doing great.

Leon commented, "I ate a lot of K-rations and C-rations. They were okay, but they had a lot of

candy in them." He had them for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. When he was in combat, he had 5-in-1 rations. I can't even imagine what it would be like to survive on that type of food. This is just one of the many sacrifices that were made by our soldiers.



The Purple Heart medal

Leon fought in the Battle of the Bulge. The weather was very cold, colder than he had ever experienced. He saw over 100 U.S. soldiers taken prisoner. This was devastating because he knew most of them would not come home alive. Next, he went to the Siegfried Line. The Germans were blowing up the bridges so the U.S. troops could not cross them. There was one bridge that was not blown up, and Hitler heard about it. He ordered the man who was responsible to be beheaded.

Leon was wounded at war. His mother received a Western Union Telegram on June 20, 1944, with the news that he was injured. (See a copy of the original telegram on the next page.) Leon received the Purple Heart for his courage.

On June 16, 1945, Leon sent a telegram to his parents telling them he was coming home. How awesome that must have been to get that news. I feel great pride and respect for my Uncle Leon for serving his country. You can listen to people's stories of war and what it was like for them, but I do not think anyone could grasp the emotional effect if must bring to a person for the rest of his or her life. God bless our troops—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

War Food

K-RATIONS: a package of food that a soldier could carry in his pocket. It consisted of biscuits, a peanut bar, raisins, and bouillon paste.

C-RATIONS: a can of meat and beans, meat and potato hash, or meat and vegetables. It also included a can of bread and dessert.

5-IN-1 RATIONS: a package of food designed to feed five men for one day. It typically included ingredients like canned meat, cheese spread, evaporated milk, dehydrated soup, fruit juice, hard candy, toilet paper, and cigarettes.

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