

Letcher, South Dakota  
April 28, 1988

Hello Luke,

Your mom says you're studying World War II so you wanted me to write a little about where I was.

I went in the Navy in 1943 and went to "boot camp" at the Great Lakes Naval Station or camp north of Chicago. After going through six weeks of basic training, I suppose you'd call it, I was sent to the Amphibious Base of Solomons, Maryland to radio school. We learned to copy code at 30 words a minute which means those dots and dashes are really coming in. We had to be able to take code that fast in order to copy messaging from NPG, San Francisco and NPM, Honolulu when we were on the ship in the Pacific. After radio school we went by train to Portland, Oregon from Washington D.C. and in a few days I was assigned to the 2CS 52. It was a Landing Craft Support gunboat. We had guns all over the main deck plus rocket launchers on the bow. We left Portland went out the Columbia River (as these amphibious gunboats were pretty much flat bottom so we could go in a river as deep as the Columbia).

We had a crew of 70 men and officers aboard to do the various jobs such as radio men, signal men, quartermaster, radar man, machinist mater, deckhands and etc.

We went from Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia to San Pedro California, took on supplies and headed for Pearl Harbor. It was not a very good sight as we pulled into Pearl Harbor several days later as some of the sunken ships from the Japanese sneak attack were still in the Harbor but partially sticking out of the water.

We took on supplies and ammunition after a week in Pearl Harbor and headed for Guam. Off Guam we joined a task force and went on a maneuver so as to work as a unit when we were invading an island or under attack from submarines or planes. I might add that after leaving San Pedro I was made head radioman so I had the added responsibility that we were getting our radio messages from Honolulu and also transmissions among our task forces seeing to it that the code got deciphered right. We soon left Guam and went to the islands of Eniwetok and Saipan. We did not run into much difficulty there, just a stray mine and an occasional submarine alert. It was here we formed the strike

force to invade Iwo Jima. This we did before very long and the amphibious ships went in with troops, tankers, Jeeps and the works LST's, 2CS's, LSM's with battleships, cruisers and destroyers back behind us blasting the island, while we were hitting it from in close with rockets and small guns. We stayed at Iwo Jima till it was secured and furnished fire power for the Mariner on shore when they would radio for help in a given area. It was a very tough island to take for its size as the Japanese were dug in and hard to get at. At one end of this island was a mountain which they called Mount Suribachi. I mention this on a few days later we were in the water right below Mt. Suribachi when the Marine hoisted the flag on Iwo Jima. I never dreamed at that time that this would become a National Monument in Washington D.C. and would also be on postage stamps later. As it happened we had the chance to be out on deck and witness the occasion.

Iwo Jima was a very tough island for the Marines and Army to take. For us it was not too bad as the air raids and firing from shore were not too severe.

We left Iwo Jima a couple of weeks later and headed for the Philippine Islands. We were sent there to rest up a little while the planes were being made for the next invasion. We were ashore on the islands of Leyte and Mindanao in the Philippines.

I might add that the strategic value of Iwo Jima was for "Superfort" bombers to land when they went to Japan on a bombing mission from Guam and couldn't make it clear back to Guam for one reason or another. They flattened Mt. Suribachi and made a landing strip of almost the whole island.

After our stay in the Philippines we got moving orders again and this time it was to the big island of Okinawa which was only 300 miles more or less from Japan. As at Iwo Jima, we moved in with firepower, tanks, men, rockets, and soon had quite a force on shore. However for the Navy the next three weeks were a nightmare. The Japanese were sending down almost all of their remaining planes on suicide missions and every night were diving into or bombing our ships especially the ships on radar patrol on the north part of Okinawa. We had many amphibious ships sunk, 3 destroyers, some transport ships plus many ships that were damaged heavily. We were credited with six planes shot down which for a small ship was not too bad. We did have our tough nights at Okinawa too as the worst one our gunners hit a plant that exploded right above the ship. Two were killed and 10 to 12 wounded but it would've been a lot worse if the

gunner wouldn't have exploded the plane when they did. We had to get our radar tower repaired and a little other stuff but were soon out on patrol again. The mariner and army steadily secured the island and Japan was really using up their air force. A few weeks things slowed down and we went back to the Philippines to wait for the next move. We were on the Island of Somer this time, in the time we were down there the "Superforts" dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at two separate times and before long Japan decided they were ready to start talking. We were in the harbor off Leyte when Japan surrender came on our radio and it was really a sight as the ships were shooting off flares and pyrotechnics so the whole harbor was lit up. After a couple of weeks we got orders to proceed to Japan and we got to go ashore in the big city of Nagoya. It was some site as the superforts had leveled the whole town except the residential district. We were also ashore at Wakayama, Wakanoura, and Tokushima. When we left Nagoya we sailed between Honshu and Kyushu (Japanese Islands) and headed for Jinsen, Korea. From there we went to China. We were ashore in Tientsin and a few days later at Tsingtao so got to see how the Chinese lived too. It was quite a privilege to visit these countries after the war even though we all wanted to head home. After leaving China we did head home by way of Okinawa, Saipan, Eniwetok, Pearl Harbor and then to the base of Treasure Island in California.

Well I've left out a lot details but it would be so long you'd get tired of reading so will close.

We've received rain a couple of times the last week. We have our grain in and corn grounds worked so are really getting along good so far.

Love,

Grandpa Johnson