

## **Harold Greenberg vs the US Army**

Steven Greenberg

My beloved dad, who passed away at 93 this past July, was a US Army veteran. Not a war hero, we ain't talking no war hero here, no silver star or medals of gallantry, but shall I venture, a more checkered service career. Drafted into the service in 1945, after basic training, he was destined to fight on the Japanese front. Instead, and fortunately for him, and myself, and all of us who owe our lives to the fact that he lived, the war ended. So instead of fighting on some remote island in the Pacific, he served in the army of occupation of Japan for 2 years. His assignment....he was in charge of liquor and linens at the hotel the officers stayed while they were stationed in Tokyo. More about that later....

My father was demoted from corporal to private, not once, but twice while in basic training. The first time was on a company roll call, and guess who forgot to clean his rifle for inspection. Being ever so resourceful, he switched rifles with a more prepared infantryman, which worked out fine for the inspection, but no so well after....he was ultimately caught and busted in rank. The army then switched him from the infantry to the tank corp, where he didn't need to clean rifles....he said he was much better at cleaning tanks. He was eventually promoted again and trained as a tank driver, which was going along swimmingly until he decided, perhaps under the influence of some unknown substance, to see if the tank could drive through a very thick concrete wall. It did not...The army was not happy about this. The tank was thoroughly demolished, and Mr. G was again busted from corporal to private.

So what does the army do with a guy like this? You send him overseas, and station him at a fancy hotel for officers, and put him in charge of liquor. For those of you who remember the TV show Sgt Bilko, well, let the wheeling and dealing commence. Trading scotch for 3 day passes, gin for hotel room assignments, a quart of fine vodka for that Japanese sword... he found his comfort zone in post war Japan.

Dad was always a bit rough around the edges in his early youth. Growing up in the depression to a poor family with 5 children, he was the youngest, the baby of the clan. All the kids worked as soon as they were able to, to help put food on the table and keep a roof over their head. Dad was mostly raised by his older sisters, given the 12 year age span between them. Frequently ignored, being the youngest of a struggling family, his values may have become a bit skewed. I remember my grandfather, his father, telling me about when dad was arrested for shooting out the street lights near his home on Branch Street in Hartford, Ct. He got himself a BB gun, leaned out the bedroom window, and took aim up and down the street. From what I remember from my grandfathers story, dad was a damn good shot, and nailed most of the lights on Branch Street. As a juvenile, he consequently went for a ride in the police car, and paid a substantial fine, working lots of extra hours in the family's grocery store.

He liked to build balsa wood airplanes as a hobby while he was a kid. He later rekindled this hobby in his final years, and there are quite a collection of planes hanging in the family room of his house. But when he was a kid, these highly flammable tissue paper and balsa wood planes didn't last very long. For their final flight, he would tightly turn the propellor and rubber band that powered the

planes flight, climb up onto the roof of the house, take a match, light the tail, and let her rip. Unfortunately, wind currents don't always cooperate, as one of these fire balls landed the roof of the neighbor's garage. The neighbors weren't very happy. The garage burned down....kids will be kids.

Fortunately for our family, when he married mom after his days in the service, she set him on the straight and narrow. He ended up being a good provider, a good father, and was known to his buddies as an all around mensch. But there was always a little JD in him, the juvenile delinquent capable of crossing the line when he felt the urge. But those are stories are for another time....