

Interviewed at his home by Judy Allen 4-22-2024 at 1 pm

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JB ADAMS - WWII veteran

J.B. Adams (the initials are his given name, just J.B.) is 97, born in 1926, and he is a WWII Army Veteran. He said he tried to enlist in the U.S. Navy but didn't pass the physical exam – he was color blind. "I still had everything wrong with me when drafted for the Army, and they took me in the Army anyway!" He was 18 when he went into service and 19 when he was discharged.

He spent a couple of weeks in San Diego getting his shots and clothes for the service, then was sent to Camp Roberts, California for Basic Training. "At the time I went in, just before I got out of Basic Training, the Germans surrendered so they gave us another hitch of Basic Training," said Adams. He was deployed October 10, 1945 to Manilla, Philippines. "They were still fighting in the mountains and tried to get volunteers to get them (the Japanese) out of the mountains. The Japanese were still up in the mountain!" They didn't know the war was over.

Adams said, "They were bringing the Japanese out by the trainloads. There were boxcars without tops and Japanese were packed in the box cars. They would have 8-10 cars on a train, bring them out and put them in a pen where I was at. I don't know what they were doing in other places in the Philippines."

Adams said his regular job in the Philippines was working in the Ordinance to repair equipment for the Army. "We were taking care of all the salvage stuff from what had happened in Japan." Even vehicles needing repair were sent from Japan to the Philippines to be worked on, then sent back out.

While the items Adams and his team worked on (seven days a week) were sent back to Japan and anywhere else it was needed, he said there was still a lot of waste. "They took good equipment out on barges out on the ocean and dumped it. Just to clean up the areas."

A good friend he made in the Army was a young Italian named Aiello, who was about an inch or two shorter than Adams. They were always next to each other in line, because their names began with **A**. "He was always behind me in the ranks," said Adams. "We were at Camp Roberts at the same time, him from San Francisco and me from San Diego. From that time until discharge, when they called my name, they called his name right behind me. We were always together. We got our discharge at Camp Roberts. I saw him when I got back (and after he was married). I went to Sacramento, where he was living. He met us at a gas station. My kids were little and he had a little boy and a little girl." The last time they spoke by phone was 24 years ago. "He was a year older than I am – I don't know if he is still living."

According to Adams, Aiello had trouble rolling his pack that was a required item to carry every day in training. "After a long hike, by the time we got back to camp, it would be stretched out to his heels. I was funning to see him coming in and that pack would be rolled out hitting his heels. I finally got to rolling his pack for him!"

The soldiers experienced a different culture in the Philippines. Adams said he didn't see dogs and cats for pets. "They ate the animals in the Philippines. They would put a dog in a pen and starve him a few days, then cook rice and feed it to him, then roast the dog and have dog and rice. The locals would take an egg about ready to hatch – with all the fuzz on it – and boil it and eat it. That was something expensive to eat, at a high price. You could smell that stuff and I didn't like it! I don't eat rice anymore. In the shop where I worked if I pulled Guard Duty, we would have to check the Philippine people working in the shop when they went home at night.

They would have their dinner buckets – and it was hot weather all day – and we would have to check inside the bucket see if they were carrying anything home. It would STINK with old rice and fish!”

The mechanic shops where Adams worked used Japanese prisoners to help as guards. Four Japanese prisoners worked with one Army guard. The Japanese would work under the Army guard, providing any needed assistance. “They never gave any trouble,” said Adams. I would pull duty at night and go in the shop and sleep – they (the prisoners working as guards with me) would wake me up if they saw anybody coming in.”

He saw first-hand how the local people were suffering. “We ate in the mess hall. We had to wash our gear we ate with – there were big cans of water to wash in. Kids would come with buckets and want what was still on our trays. We would rake our leftovers in their buckets and they took it home and ate it. They were starving.”

Adams said he had considered making the Army a career and told them he would stay if he didn’t have to pull guard and KP. “I didn’t like either one of those duties. They wouldn’t guarantee it!”

He also didn’t like bivouacs. “I didn’t like living in the woods for 3-4 days for different trainings. But you know, I didn’t pay attention to the training. I think God had something different for me. Going overseas was just like going on a picnic for me. I didn’t fear danger at all. But I wasn’t a Christian then. I wasn’t a Christian until I got back here. I can look back at my life, though, and I know that God was with me from the day I was born. When I came out of my mama, I was sick and I was sick until I was 14 years old. Anything came along, I got it. I couldn’t eat anything that would stay on my stomach but buttermilk.”

When asked what the worst and best things about military life were, Adams said KP was the worst for him. “I don’t know why I hated it so much. The best was going to bed at night and getting a shower,” he laughed. When we got overseas, we didn’t have hot water if it didn’t heat up in the daytime. It was all in big tanks that would sit out in the sun, so if it was hot during the day, we had warm water for our showers. We had enough room in the shower for about 20 people at a time. It was a big building with a roof with the tanks sitting up over it. That is where we had our bathrooms.”

He said military service helped him grow up. “I would like to see everybody serve. They will learn things while in service – I know I did! All I knew before was Short Mountain. We didn’t go away from our house more than three miles any direction until I was 16 and we left to go to Arizona. We stayed there two years, and when I went in service, my folks went on to California (Bakersfield).

Adams kept in touch with his family through letters. “I don’t know if they could even read my letters. I couldn’t write. I couldn’t spell. I got up to 6<sup>th</sup> grade in school but I think they were just trying to keep me up with my brother, because I couldn’t read. I went to Short Mountain school. We lived as far as two miles from the school – walked there every day even when raining or snowing.” He said most of those walks were with bare feet. “We would get shoes for Christmas. Daddy would bring us to town here in Spiro in the wagon, and we would buy our winter shoes. By February they were work out and we went barefooted the rest of the time. I didn’t have shoes I could wear all the time until I was 14. I picked cotton and made enough to get me a pair of shoes. Until then, I had cheap shoes that wouldn’t last. We had some rough times back then.”

After discharge, Adams stayed in California six months, then moved back to Spiro, where he ran into Ruby Chamberlain, the woman who was to become his wife. "She was the joy of my life. We knew each other two months before we were married. We met in the middle of July and were married by the end of September. We were married 73 ½ years before she passed."

He said, "Within a month after marriage, we were up in Michigan. My uncle had lost his wife and had a daughter four years old. We went to live with him so my wife could watch the daughter and I got a job. We got there Halloween night." Ruby had never known about Halloween, and she went trick or treating with the kids.

They spent about a year in Michigan, from October 1947. "That winter was so cold on my back where I worked, I would tell my boss, 'Go over there and close that door!' He got tired of it and said he wished I would go back where I come from. I was drilling two holes in a refrigerator door for the handle, and I threw my drill down and walked right out. We came back to Oklahoma and farmed for two years." They moved back to Grand Rapids, Michigan, now with a daughter, Brenda.

"I got a job at General Motors. We got there at 4 a.m., and went with my cousin in my car and put in a job application. There was a man and a woman taking applications. I went to the man and my cousin went to the woman. He got his done first. She filed his and said she would call. The guy who took down my information said, 'I don't see what you want to do.' I said, 'I don't know what you do here, but I will do anything you think I am big enough to do. He hired me (it was Friday) and I went to work Monday morning. I worked 30 years with full retirement. I was only 54 when I retired.

"I wasn't very big – about 120 pounds. That is what I was when I married. I got up to 168 pounds and quit smoking when my son was born. That was 70 years ago. I started smoking in the Army – the guys told me if I would smoke, the time would go by quicker. I couldn't hardly star smoking – it made me sick. When I finally got to smoking, I smoked until Donnie was born."

Adams said when he quit smoking he was a Christian and attended church services regularly. "We were coming home from church and were almost home and I threw my cigarette case out the car window. After dinner, I wanted to smoke so bad I went back and hunted for the cigarettes. One day, I said I was going to ask the Lord to help me quit, so I prayed about it two or three days. I had always chewed my nails, keeping the ragged. One day I looked down and my nails were all grown out I never smoked another cigarette and never chewed my nails again. God gave me more than I asked for!"

The Adams family moved back to Spiro in 1982, two years into JB's retirement. The area has history that is important to him. "My grandmother, Margaret Trahan Adams went to the all-girls school, New Hope, at Skullyville. She wanted out and was told the only way to leave was to sign papers that she was half instead of full-blood."

Growing up in the area, as a youth, Adams invented games and toys with his siblings and cousins. "We climbed trees, grew up on the mountain. We had a bunch of goats and lots of waterfalls. It is a wonder that some of us hadn't gotten killed. We made our own toys because we couldn't buy them. We had a steel ring that went on the hub of a wagon wheel. We made a board about 2 or three inches wide, and right at the end would get a tobacco can and bend it and put it in so it would have sides on it. We would hold the stick down by the ground and we would push that wheel. No telling how many miles we pushed that wheel. We would make a

gun stock out of wood and take inner tube rubbers, tie them together and shoot from the gun. We would pull that rubber back and shoot it and play cowboys and Indians.”

He said they played in the persimmon trees, throwing the persimmons at each other and swinging through the branches. “Someone would go first and we would get in line. We would have to do what the first person did in the trees or we would have to drop out. I was so little I couldn’t get the branches to swing. But the others would get the tree limbs swinging and I would let go and I would sail like a squirrel into the next tree!”

Laughing, Adams told of other games the kids played. They jumped out of hay lofts, and he and his siblings “would grab cows by the tail and make them pull us. We also rode bull calves!”

He said a third cousin, Howard, was staying over and put his eye out with a home-made toy. “We used to get a branch with a fork and inner tube and use it as a bean flip/slingshot to shoot rocks or anything. Howard and my brother would lay the stock down on the floor and put their foot on it and see how far they could stretch that rubber. Howard’s came out from under his foot and came back and hit him and put his eye out.”

Adams remembers seeing his first airplane when he was four years old. “I was at Grandma’s and she showed me and Grady. It was a two-wing airplane, and it flew over the house. Grandma showed it to me and Daddy and Uncle Ollie.” Details of that day are sharp in his memory. He said they work cleaning out the water cistern when the plane flew over. “They would let Grace down in the well and she would fill a bucket with trash and stuff that had fallen in.”

Asked what else amazed him during his life time, Adams answered, “Winters!” He was amazed they had made it with the extreme cold and poor construction of homes. “When they built the houses back then they took a 1”x6” or a 1”x8” board and the boards wouldn’t come together, so a small, 1”x4” board would be put at the crack. No insulation. The water buckets sometimes froze solid at night. Snow would come in through the roof! The old houses had wallpaper from the floor up, and was even used for a ceiling. One time me and Ruby were at Mama’s and it came a bug snow. We woke up and the cover on the bed was all white with snow!”

Advice for future generations is, “Work hard – it aint’ gonna hurt you. Hard work don’t hurt nobody. Trust in the Lord – that is the main thing!”

Adams said, “I am happy I am still alive at 97. I don’t have a pain in my body. God took it away. I used to have (pain). I say it is God’s work because nothing else could do what has happened to me.”