

World War II Experiences

Historical Note:

Below are three firsthand accounts taken from "Albany Hospital News" May and September, 1945 from Albany Medical College graduates and faculty members describing their experiences in service during WWII. The fourth account is from a handwritten letter.

From Capt. Arnold M. Meirovsky - AMC Faculty member – Dept. of Surgery:

"Somewhere on Okinawa," April 10 & 17, 1945

"I am working almost day and night; for the first time tonight things are quiet, but I'll need that time to sleep, I'll write long letters when this campaign has been completed.. Our soldiers are doing a superb job, but the going is rough for them and for all of us. My experiences here are beyond anything that I have ever known. I am spending all my time taking care of the brain injuries; there is practically no time for me to take care of the many peripheral nerve injuries; I have to leave that to the orthopedic people and to the general surgeons...Some can't be saved but there are many whom we can help.. If I'd get killed tonight, I'd feel my life has been worthwhile, if for nothing else than these days on Okinawa."

From Capt. J.E. Gainor – AMC Class of 1930



France, March 1, 1945

"We have been heroes for some time and have the opportunity of seeing some of the remnants of the back trail of the Nazis. At the present time, censorship only permits mentioning certain places. The Normandy section of D-Day fame was under our scrutiny some while ago. Cities such as La Havre, Rouen and Cherbourg are adequately described by one word: Destruction. . . In the country there is not much destruction but many areas are still heavily mined. We were warned about that on our arrival and I recently had it verified beyond my satisfaction. I took a short cut one day on my way back from a hospital to my map teachers' great pride, I waltzed right into the center of a mined area, sure got a high rating in that course. No more short cuts."

From Lt. J.A. Cetner – AMC Faculty member –Dept. of Ophthalmology
USS Teton, July 4, 1945

"On Easter morning our fleet appeared off Okinawa and the assault on the island began. It was an amazing experience to stand on the deck of a ship and watch waves of assault troops hitting the beaches. Now, after 72 days at Okinawa we hoisted the anchor and left for other places. . . . Enemy suicide planes were extensively used causing constant anxiety and danger to us. For the most part our combat air patrols and picket ships took the heavy brunt of the enemy attacks, but occasionally some would sneak through the screens and raise plenty hell with us. . . . Army, Navy and Marine eye casualties from the beaches and from other ships were routed to my ship for care. Shrapnel wounds in and around the eye predominated. A 19-bed sick-bay was at my disposal. The eye patient would be kept aboard until well along in convalescence and then be transferred to a hospital ship for evacuation to the rear areas. I kept constant lookout for someone I might know from Albany but did not meet anyone. We are now in the Philippines giving our frayed nerves a chance to recover. Have made several visits to bomb-torn Manila. It is really flattened. Inflation is rampant. Am ready to return to Albany anytime the Navy will let me."

From Capt. Bertram J.L. Sauerbrunn - Class of 1940



Below is an excerpt from a letter written to Mary Carroll, Executive Secretary of the Alumni Association, from Dr. Sauerbrunn on January 9, 1946.

"Dear Miss Carroll,

As you can see from the form I will soon be started in private practice. It's been a long long time coming. I hope that I can really settle down now and get going.

My experiences in the Army have been quite varied. I spent some time in India and Burma doing Flight Surgeons work and evacuating wounded by air from Burma. Some of the interesting things which I saw in India was cholera, mite typhus and that bizarre disorder Kala Azar. In the Philippines and on Okinawa, I

was with an Emergency Rescue Squadron and we pulled ditched airmen out of the sea with the Catalina Flying Boat. I love to talk about my "flying time" (like all good F. Surgeons). It's considerable and includes around the world jaunt via S. America, S. Atlantic, Africa, Arabia, India, Philippines, Okinawa and Pacific Ocean Areas and then the USA of course. The lap took quite a few months to accomplish but ended in a blaze of glory when I was sent home from Okinawa on a B-29."