



## THANKSGIVING "OVER THERE"

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### World War Two Voices from the Front

#### **Bill Sykes of Plymouth, Combat Engineers and then 1095th Engineer Utility Company, Command SoPac, US Army Engineers 1942-1945:**

"My first Thanksgiving, that was kind of a sad thing for me, being away from home and being young and not being with my family for Thanksgiving, missing the football games. And having no Thanksgiving -- we had no Thanksgiving. They attempted to do it in a field kitchen, but what can you do in a field kitchen? After that first Thanksgiving, though, they put on some beautiful meals. They had everything you could think of for Thanksgiving dinner. They really made a big effort to do it the proper way. We would find out who had the best dinner. And the Navy had the best dinner, I'll tell you right now. The Navy had really good Thanksgivings. They had the ships, you know. And they'd bring in all kinds of food. But the Army did pretty good, too.

"The Thanksgiving dinners were served on trays. (My first one, with the Combat Engineers, was served in mess kits. That doesn't work too well.) They had cranberry sauce, stuffing, the whole thing. It was a good meal. But the feeling of Thanksgiving wasn't there. The meal was there, but the feeling of Thanksgiving wasn't. I guess you couldn't have Thanksgiving when you were overseas. There wasn't much to be thankful for. It was sad. Although, I guess there was some thankfulness, at least you were still alive!"

#### **Cliff Sampson of Plymouth, US Navy 1942-1945:**

"My first military Thanksgiving was in 1942 at Great Lakes. We had a big mess hall and it was a typical Thanksgiving dinner with turkey and all the fixings, apple pie and mince pie. They tried to make it special and, of course, everybody was hepped on the war. Just being a little recruit, you didn't have much to say about it anyhow, you just did what they told you and ate what they gave you. But it was good food, I can't complain. Some of the food probably was better than a lot of people ever had before they were in the service. Some people came from poverty...

"Thanksgiving 1945 I was home in Plymouth with my family and my wife. We were getting ready to settle down and I was back to work, running the store again. It was a great feeling to be home, after being blown up on a ship in July (the *USS YMS 84* yard mind sweeper was blown up 3 July 1945, Cliff Sampson received the Purple Heart) and then in November, I'm out of the service and the war is over. I feel sorry for all those that didn't come back. It was a great experience, but it's too bad for those who had to leave us. They fought for a great cause."

#### **Bill Shepard of Plymouth, 102 Infantry Division ("Ozark Division"), U.S. Army, stationed in Ohio, Germany and Wales:**

"The Armed Forces were absolutely adamant about getting the troops a Thanksgiving dinner, all over the world, no matter who you were or what you were doing. Whether it was on the front lines

or in a big fort like Sam Houston in San Antonio, they always made sure that the Armed Forces got a Thanksgiving dinner. Christmas meals were also somewhat like that, but I remember the Thanksgiving dinners -- there were always turkeys and pies and everything you would have at home. The food was often cold, if you were in the field (Thanksgiving Day 1944, the Ozark Division had just broken through the Siegfried Line at Aachen), but it was Thanksgiving."

**Stanley Collins, US Navy:**

"I was on submarine duty in the Pacific in the year 1943. We were in the area off the coast of the Philippines. I remember having a complete turkey dinner on Thanksgiving. While the turkeys were cooking, the submarine took a dive. We went down too steeply and the turkeys fell out of the oven onto the deck. The cook picked them up and put them back into the oven -- and we ate them, regardless of what may have gotten on them as a result of their fall. That meal was so good!"

**Ervin Schroeder, 77th Infantry Division, 3rd Battalion, I Company, US Army:**

"On Thanksgiving Day, we made our landing on Leyte Island in the Philippines very early in the morning. We therefore missed our dinner aboard ship. Somewhere down the beach from where we landed, the Navy sent us ham and cheese sandwiches. My buddy happened to get one of the sandwiches and brought it back to our area. I was complaining to him for not bringing one back for me when he started to have stomach cramps... At this point, I shook his hand and thanked him for not bringing me a sandwich."

**Ed Campbell, US Marine Corps, 1943-1945:**

"There were 3 Thanksgivings. Actually, the one in '43 I don't really remember -- we may have been in California but it was just about the time we were getting ready to leave for the invasion of the Marshalls. I think we spent it like we spent all our weekends -- every weekend we would all get liberty and head for Los Angeles. That Thanksgiving just draws a blank.

"The second one, I was on Maui and I do remember. It was an odd day. You remember all of your early Thanksgivings with the family and a certain feeling of nostalgia sets in. Then you take your mess kit, which is like an oval opened up, and go down to the mess hall and get your Thanksgiving dinner thrown into the mess kit. It ends up with the turkey and carrots all mixed. The cooks do a great job of trying to make it a festive meal but when you mix it all together with the gravy in the mess kit, it's sort of like mush. I do remember that. Other than that, there was no celebration. There wasn't too much discussion, we just all sort of hunkered into ourselves and thought of earlier days and days to come, hopefully.

"The third and last Thanksgiving (1945), I landed in Boston on Thanksgiving Day... I walked around the city for a little bit, with joy in being immersed in the quietness of Boston -- it was around 7:30 or 8:00 in the morning. I decided I would take a taxi home to Quincy. I had enough money -- my discharge money -- so I was able to pay for a cab to take me home in style. Of course, we had a great Thanksgiving. My mother had all the relatives and old friends there -- I had called her to say that I would be home on Thanksgiving. It was a wonderful day to come home. It was literally the first day of the rest of my life."