

An early radarman helped win the war

EDITOR'S NOTE: In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, The Lawrence Township Memorial Committee, in cooperation with The Ledger, will feature a column each week during the anniversary year profiling a Lawrence resident.

Winfield T. 'Bud' Lacey was a Civil Service radar instructor at Fort Hancock, N.J. on Dec. 7, 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Several years earlier he had served two years on Hawaii, most of which was at Luke Field, on Ford Island in Pearl

Harbor. When the news of the attack was announced, his thoughts flashed back to Hawaii and to the people and places he had known, and the following morning went to the nearest recruiting office to re-enlist in the Army. At that time the military services wouldn't accept anyone with dependents, and since he was now married, he was rejected.

Bud Lacey was born in Atlantic City on June 24, 1915, and named after General Winfield Scott. In 1921, his mother died and his father re-married the same year, hoping to

provide a home for Bud and his brother and two sisters. In 1923, his father signed away his rights to the three younger children and they were placed in the Children's Home Society in Trenton. It was only learned recently, from previously confidential records, that his father had been chronically ill and unable to care for his children. In desperation he had placed them in the home. Bud ran away a number of times and was eventually placed on a farm in Millstone. In his late teens he lived on Brookdale Farm in Pennington, which was owned by the Rev. Harter.

Work on the farm was hard, the hours long, and it did not appear to have much of a future, but there were few jobs available during those depression years, so in May, 1936, as he approached his 21st birthday, Bud enlisted in the U.S. Army and left the farm behind. After basic training, Bud was assigned to the coast artillery in Hawaii. Six months later he was transferred to the Air Corps at Luke Field, on Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, with the 23rd Bomb Group, where he completed his two-year overseas assignment.

Returning to Mitchell Field, N.Y. to complete his three-year hitch, he had an opportunity to enroll in radio operator school, but to do so, he had to re-enlist for another three years. Upon graduating from the seven month course, he flew for a short time with the 5th Bomb Group at Mitchell Field. He was still in the service in 1938 when he married Anna Clark of Trenton. In June, 1939, Bud decided he could do better outside the military service and was able to 'buy out,' a practice in effect at that time. With his valuable experience in radio repair, he began repairing home radios. Learning that the

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Nicholas Loveless

Signal Corps was looking for experienced radio men to study radar, he applied and was among 24 men sent to Canada for radar training, which was still in its infancy. On his return he was made an instructor at Ft. Hancock, N.J.

Not satisfied that he was contributing enough to the war effort, Bud once again tried to re-enlist, and this time he was inducted Nov. 3, 1942 and sent to Gowen Field, Idaho. Five months later he received an emergency furlough when his pregnant wife lost their child. On his return to Gowen Field he learned that his outfit had been shipped out to Attu, Alaska without him, and he in turn was sent back to Hickam Field, Hawaii.

Bud recalls, 'I was assigned to the Army airways communication as a radio operator, but convinced my CO that my main interest was in maintenance, so that's where he assigned me, and where I stayed for the duration of the war. They never sent me to school, and I was made a section chief wherever we went. For the next 30 months we were island-hopping all over the Pacific. Our first base was at Nanumea in the Ellice Islands. We flew there in modified B-24s and when we landed the pilots were anxious to get unloaded and out of there, as the Japanese were only 65 miles away.'

Bud was also stationed at Tarawa, Kwajalein, Saipan, Australia and landed at Okinawa while there was

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Winfield Lacey in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1943. His skills in radar and radio maintenance were transferred to the computer field after the end of the war.

still fighting there. 'While the war was on,' he continues, 'I didn't think too much about being away from home even though I hadn't seen my wife for so long, but once it was over, every day seemed like a month. There were so many troops that had to be returned to the States, and only so many ships and planes to transport them. It was early in December by the time I got home, and in the middle of a snowstorm. Coming out of the tropics my blood was thin and I was freezing. I was discharged at Ft. Monmouth shortly after that.'

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tute as a memorial to Dr. Von Neumann, who worked on the project.

In 1956, after eight years with the Institute, the electronic computer project was phased out and Bud left with the highest praise from his superiors. He then went to Princeton University in the same capacity, maintaining electronic equipment in the advanced physics laboratory. In 1972 when a blind student enrolled at Princeton, he became interested in helping the blind. He developed the 'Braille Game' to help sighted people learn the Braille alphabet, and developed a special map of the Princeton University campus that would allow blind students to move about the entire campus with ease. He has also worked on a light probe that translates differences in light to audible frequencies. About the size of a ballpoint pen, Bud has since been sending these to blind persons requesting them. He has completed a course with the Library of Congress and received certification as a Brailist, and still enjoys great personal satisfaction in working with the blind.

When Bud was discharged he immediately applied for a job at the Signal Corps radar laboratory in Belmar and was hired. 'My wife and I didn't know many people in that area,' he continues, 'so we decided to move back to Trenton. We settled on Phillips Avenue in Lawrenceville and I was hired as an electronics technician by the Institute For Advanced Study in Princeton. My daughter, Virginia, was small then, and Professor Einstein would talk to her occasionally. He was always friendly toward children, but that big fuzzy head of hair would scare her. Dr. Oppenheimer was there at the time, too, and I used to work on his television set. We had an IBM computer at the Institute that covered the whole room where it was stored and I did most of the electrical wiring on it. That computer is now in the Smithsonian Institute with the Princeton engineering library for the past 25 years. One of Bud's prized possessions is the scrapbook that he has kept over the years, which included old photographs of pre-war Hawaii, scenes of Pearl Harbor, Scofield Barracks, and a photograph of the 'China Clipper,' a fore-

Bud retired from Princeton University in 1980, and he and Anna have lived at 2218 Brunswick Avenue since 1981. Their daughter, Virginia, also resides with them. Virginia has followed in her father's footsteps and has been associated with the Lacey children who had been torn apart as orphans, were reunited after 60 years and the circumstances leading to their reunion is another story to be told.

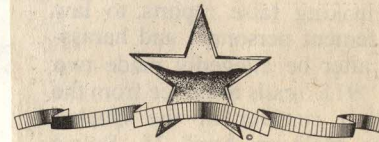
The Veterans Memorial Committee is

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asking veterans from World War II and other conflicts to provide a photograph in uniform, along with their name, present address, branch of service and unit, where and when they served, their principal assignment and summary of their service. Their individual experiences or unusual stories are also welcomed. All photographs will be returned. Families of deceased veterans are also encouraged to submit articles. All materials should be sent to The Lawrence Township Veterans Memorial Committee, P.O. Box 55966, Trenton, N.J. 08638. Inquires may be made by calling 882-9108.



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