

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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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

