

John Lewis Seipp was born December 4, 1924 in Westminster, MD. He lived in Westminster until he was drafted into the Army in March 1943 at the age of 18. Prior to being drafted he worked at Koontz Creamery where his job was to weigh and pour the raw milk into vats for processing, then go to the office to process paperwork. After leaving the Army, he returned to Westminster, and moved to Damascus, MD in 1949, where he has remained. He married Julia Clay Seipp in June 1949; Julia was a "Rosie the Riveter" during the war. They had one child, Sandy, a member of Auxiliary Unit 171, who held the positions of President, Secretary, Chaplain, and Color Bearer. John has been a very active member of the American Legion since 1978, serving as Post Commander, Adjutant, Historian, and manages the Post's program to place Memorial Day flags on the graves of veterans. He was a member of the Department of MD Executive Committee, and is a poppy maker for the Poppy program for the Department of MD. John is also a member of the VFW and AMVETS. His awards include the Good Conduct Medal, Asiatic Pacific Theatre Ribbon, Philippine Liberation Ribbon, and the World War II Victory Ribbon.

John was inducted at Ft. Meade, MD, where he received immunizations and clothing. From Ft. Meade he went to Camp Callan (La Jolla), CA where he took basic training for 13 weeks. After basic training he got a seven day furlough which provided much needed home rest, better food, and hanging out with friends. From home he reported to Camp Stoneman (Pittsburgh), CA, a camp where they trained replacement troops. He was assigned to the 168th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion. Upon arrival the Army had no orders for him, so he either had to find a job for himself or he was directed to guard U.S. Army prisoners. He was at Camp Stoneman for about 4 months.

He arrived in Sydney, Australia on Oct 10, 1943 after a 15-day transit aboard a troop transport, a converted cruise ship that had been gutted to accommodate troops. They waited at Sydney for six weeks until orders came through transferring them to Townsville, Australia to receive two months of jungle training. During this time John was assigned as an administrative clerk, but it was at Townsville that John became a cook. It seems that all the cooks went to town, got drunk, and got thrown in jail, so when the ship left to go to the Admiralty Islands there were no cooks available. It was during the island-hopping trip from the Admiralty Islands to the Philippines that the Army picked out John and said: "You are now a cook". John remained a cook until he was discharged.

While they were at Buna, New Guinea, enroute to the Philippines, one of his friends got a jeep and they visited a graveyard. His friend was from Wisconsin, and when his Guard unit was called up for some reason he didn't go with them. When they got to the graveyard his friend noticed some Wisconsin crosses. He looked closer and read the names, and recognized some of his buddies from home. He was very quiet after that, and realized that one of those names could have been him. John said of Buna: "All I can remember is that it was a hell-torn place. Everything was broken and trashed, nothing was standing. I was very glad to leave there". He arrived at the Philippines just about the time MacArthur made his "I Have Returned" declaration from the island of Leyte. At this time the Japanese had not yet surrendered, and in 1945 were still bombing the islands.

John continues: "I almost had a front row seat during the battle of Leyte Gulf because I could actually hear the guns and see the gun flashes as the ships fired their guns. The firing went on for a long time. What was most depressing was watching the armored personnel carriers going to the cemetery with the bodies of the dead sailors that they fished out of the waters. All I could do was prepare food for those people carting the bodies off. There were a lot of bodies, and it's not something I want to remember too much."

It was after Leyte Gulf that John was "busted" down in rank. As John tells it: "We were under a red alert bombardment one night about the time I had lit the fires to set up the mess gear for breakfast. I knew that if I didn't get the fires out I would have gotten busted. Well, I put the fires out, but got busted anyway because the Colonel didn't get his breakfast. So I couldn't win no matter what I did. I got busted down from Technical Grade 4 (E-4) down to Private (E-1), and he put me on an amphibious vehicle ferrying mail and supplies to two small islands that had 90mm gun placements. It was really scary because I was by myself this whole time and I didn't know how to swim!"

One thing that John hated was taking officers and WACs, and officers girlfriends, on joy rides. He tells the story: "Someone found a lot of lumber and they wanted me to take it over to one of the small islands where they were going to show a movie that night. We put the lumber on top of the empty water cans, and a Lt. Colonel, a Captain, a 1st Lieutenant, and 3 nurses came aboard to go to the movie. Well, the Lt. Colonel parked his butt right over top of the front bilge pump exhaust. I said sir, I don't believe I would sit there if I were you." He got all huffy and said: "Private, you don't tell me where the hell to sit!" John continues: "Well you know that peed me right off cuz I just got busted, so I kept my mouth shut. Two of the nurses sat up front with me at the pilot's seat, and the other officers sat off to the side. I went about 50 yards and that bilge pump exhaust went whoosh! The exhaust went all over the Lt. Colonel, from his crotch to his cap. The other two officers never looked back because they would have busted out laughing. One of the nurses punched me in the arm, laughing all the way over and all the way back. That was the funniest thing that happened to me during my service."

The 168th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion was broken up at this time so John was sent to Tacloban, Philippines with the 967th Aircraft Artillery. When he got there, John says: "The sergeant told me to get on a 90mm gun and match pointers. Being a cook all this time I had no idea what he was talking about! The sergeant said: 'What the hell have you been doing all this time you've been over here?' "I said I've done nothing but peel potatoes and work in the kitchen. The cooks got drunk, they made me a cook, and that's where I've been ever since." The sergeant said: "You see that place up on the hill? That's our kitchen. You get up there and stay there." "I found out later that 'match pointers' means to align the gun sights." John said it wasn't too bad at Tacloban because he was able to advance up the ranks to Staff Sergeant (E-6). He stayed at Tacloban until he was sent back to the states for discharge.

"The scariest thing to me was when we left the ship we had to climb down the rope ladder, or net, to get into the landing barge. We were loaded with our rifles and backpacks, and if

you fell it was a long way down with all that weight. The barge we got on also had a loaded weapons carrier in it, so the barge was pretty deep in the water when we got in it. The barge was scrapping bottom before we got to the beach so we had to get out in waist deep water and wade to shore. Remember, I couldn't swim! Some of us didn't make it to shore, and drowned."

John left the Philippines on Dec 5, 1945, arriving back home on Dec 23, 1945. After discharge it was hard to find work. He found work as a telegraph operator with the railroad for a year, then went to work for the Railway Express which lasted 4-5 months. He then: "Got mad at myself and picked up a hammer and a saw and worked around Damascus with contractors Burdette and Haines. An opening came at the school board so I applied for a job in carpentry and maintenance. I worked there for 26 years, plus the school board gave me credit for my military service so I retired there with 30 years of service credited. After retirement I worked on installing additions to Post 171."

John's final thoughts are that he was lucky he was not wounded, and came back alive. So are we.