

Ray Luhn was born on June 5, 1926 in Dickerson, MD. His family moved to Damascus, MD when he was one year old, where Ray has lived ever since. He has been a dedicated member of Damascus American Legion Post 171 for over 50 years participating in many activities. He still works as a bingo volunteer. He is an active member of the Distinguished Member Committee and Life Membership Committee; two extremely important committees that select American Legion members honored to receive two of our highest honors. Ray is also a charter member of VFW Post 10076 in Mt. Airy MD, which was formed in November 1967.

Ray was drafted into the U.S. Army at the young age of 18. He served during WWII, and saw combat infantry action at the Battle of the Bulge with the 42nd Rainbow Division. He was discharged on July 9, 1946, with the rank of Sergeant (E6), stayed in the Army reserve, and returned home, hopefully to resume his life. This was not to be as he was called back to active duty in Aug 1950 when the so-called Korean Conflict broke out. Upon recall he was reduced in rank to Buck Sergeant (E5). He served in the combat infantry in Korea until his second discharge in November 1952, obtaining the rank of Sergeant First Class (E7). Ray has two Combat Infantry Badges, one each from WWII and Korea, and four (4) Bronze Star medals- two each from WWII and Korea. His other decorations include the American Theatre Campaign Medal, European–African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with Battle Star, WWII Victory Medal, Army Occupation Medal, Good conduct Medal, Rifle Marksmanship Medal, and the Korean War Service Medal.

Ray reported to the draft at Baltimore, MD, then reported to Fort Blanding, FL for 17 weeks of basic training. Troops were needed in Europe so training was cut to 14 weeks, upon which his company was sent directly to Germany from Ft. Blanding. Ray had not yet reached his 19th birthday. In fact, he was still 18 years old when the war ended! An interesting coincidence is that Ray went over to Germany on the troop ship George Washington, and when he came back home from Germany he came back on the troop ship Martha Washington. Those ships were modified “vacation” ships.

The ship unloaded the troops in Marseilles, France. He then spent the next two days on a train, arriving in Belgium where he was immediately put on the front lines at the Battle of the Bulge. He was assigned to a company that usually had complement of 31 men, but when he arrived the company had only 8 men left. They immediately set out to dig foxholes on the front lines. Ray says that he has dug foxholes in six different countries: He trained digging foxholes in the US, then dug more foxholes in France, Belgium, Germany, South Korea and North Korea. (I think by now Ray should have been certified as an honorary mole!).

Ray’s thoughts on the Battle of the Bulge (in the Black Forest): “It was a complete surprise to us, the Germans caught us flatfooted. The battle started with a surprise attack on Dec 16th, 1944, and lasted about a month. The Germans had over 500 tanks in the battle, and my platoon took many casualties. I was very lucky because he had a platoon Sergeant First Class named Sanchez. Sergeant Sanchez is the reason I’m living today, because he taught us everything we needed to know to stay alive. Sanchez was a pre-Pearl Harbor soldier who knew all the right things to do. He told us: “You do everything I

tell you to do, and do it when I tell you, and you'll be all right." "He was the best soldier I ever served with."

His company stayed in the Black Forest about a month, and then were moved off the front lines to make the final push into Germany. Ray took part in the liberation of Augsburg, Frankfurt, Munich, and Offenburg. Ray said: "I was also with the second or third group to arrive at Dachau, where I saw the barracks, gas chambers, and ovens, and where the Nazis has killed and buried so many people. I was at Dachau to open the gates, liberate the prisoners, and help feed them. I saw firsthand many of the prisoners who were half starved to death. It was an awful sight. After the war, but before I was sent back to the states I met one lady who told me: "I was a Nazi and I'll be a Nazi until the day I die." "She had no regrets. But surprisingly she treated us soldiers first-class."

Ray was discharged on July 9, 1946. His actually arrived in NY on July 5th but they wouldn't let them off the ship because they thought we were going to celebrate too much. They were right! After discharge Ray came back to Damascus where he joined the reserves, and went to work for his father who owned a trucking company delivering materials and supplies to farmers. He worked there until he was called up for Korea in August 1950. His company was sent to Ft. Campbell, KY, where in one day he received 13 medical injections. Training consisted of firing one clip of bullets from an M-1 rifle. They then took a troop train to Camp Stoneman, CA where they stayed for 3 days, and in Oct of 1950 they were put on a troop ship for Japan. After arriving in Japan, they went through Hiroshima and Sasebo, and crossed the channel to Pusan, Korea. Ray went into a rifle company with the 7th division, where it was just like the Battle of the Bulge - they dug foxholes, and slept in the snow and mud. Ray said: "At the time we got there Gen. MacArthur had received orders not to cross the 38th parallel. Well we know that he disobeyed orders and went up as far as the Chosin Reservoir. Truman was a very strong president who had no choice but to fire MacArthur."

"Combat in Korea was lot different from Germany. A lot of "first things" happened in Korea. The first thing was helicopters transporting wounded soldiers, the second thing was jet aircraft, and the third thing was the American soldiers standing side by side with the Korean soldiers. The American soldiers didn't like that, but it worked out. The fourth thing was that about the time they got that worked out the reserves who were called up arrived. These reserves were WWII veterans and they didn't want to fight at all, which caused a lot of friction. The fifth thing is that about this time the US military integrated and both white and black soldiers fought side by side in combat on the front lines. We then went up north into Manchuria. Our reconnaissance up there said there were no enemy combat troops in sight. Well, within 3 days thousands and thousands of Chinese were attacking us, and I was right in the front lines. The fighting was awful. The Chinese soldiers in the front lines had weapons, but the lines behind them had only sticks and stones. Evidently there weren't enough weapons to go around so the idea was that the second lines would pick up the weapons of those in the front lines who were killed or wounded. And was it ever cold! Someone took a thermometer out of an old truck and told me that it was 28 degrees below zero."

After discharge from Korea in Nov 1952, Ray came home and became a brick mason for 9 years. In Dec 1960 he partnered with Tommy Bellison to open Tom & Ray's restaurant in Damascus, which is still there today. He remained a partner for 18 years. But after 18 years, it was either invest more heavily in the business or get out, so he chose to sell his share of the business. It was good partnership but he had enough of the business. "I've been very lucky in that I've survived two wars, had a successful life, and raised a good family. I recall an incident in Korea that came to mind when I read about the big landslide in Oso, WA. In Korea a huge landslide came down on an ambulance and a big tent. Well the mudslide came down and rolled the ambulance and large tent up into a giant mud ball, nothing was left. Luckily everyone had gone to chow, and nobody got hurt."

What I think most about is the Battle of the Bulge and fighting the Germans. The Germans were good soldiers, as were the South Koreans. But the North Koreans were barbarians. They were worse than the Chinese. I had more bad dreams about Korea than I did Germany. WWII was such a good bunch of guys who stuck together, and as much as you can during war, we had some good times. But I had a lot of memories of Korea, and one thing I'd like to say is this: "After I came home from Korea I had dreams about it. But as I think about the Vietnam War and every soldier who ever put his foot down, I say thank you and God bless you, because they didn't get treated well by the country. They deserved better"

When we got discharged in Ft Meade the CO got up and said: "The army don't owe you a dam thing. You stood up for your country." Now it seems like the country owes everybody something, and they don't want to stand up for themselves, everyone's looking for a handout. Back then during WWII if an officer came up and said, I need seven men, he got seven men. In Korea, if an officer said that, everyone would try to back out by going to sick call, or coming up with some other excuse.

Ray's final thoughts are: "I have had a wonderful life, with a wonderful wife and lovely daughters, and great friends. I am blessed, and have no regrets. Life has been good to me, and I want to thank everyone along the way." I think it is we who should thank Ray for his friendship and his service to our country. It's amazing how virtually every veteran I interview has these same qualities and outlook on life. They are indeed the Greatest Generation and a breed apart.