

Fred Burnham
Division Exchange Officer
106th Infantry Division

August 14, 2005 - Anniversary recalled by those who served

Editor's note: *Today, Aug. 14, marks the 60th anniversary of President Harry Truman declaring that Japan had surrendered, marking the end of World War II. Here are some memories of Southwest Florida veterans who were serving at the time.*

World War II veteran Fred Burnham still struggles to find the words to describe his experiences overseas and the emotions he felt 60 years ago today.

Happy? Anxious? Angry? More bittersweet than anything else, the 87-year-old East Naples man said.

By the time President Harry Truman declared victory on Aug. 14, 1945, Burnham had already seen too much. And he was too tired to see anymore.

"It was interesting," he said. "I was tickled to death in one way, but I didn't like the idea that we might have to (leave Europe) and go to Japan."

The members of Division Exchange Officer Burnham's [106th Infantry Division](#) were notified they would be sent to Japan after overtaking the Germans in Europe over the course of a year.

With the help of a crafty colonel, who managed to smuggle the soldier onto a transport headed back to the United States, Burnham was spared a trip to the Far East.

But just before he left his post in Badens, Germany, for his sneaky trip home, Burnham and his men were relieved to hear news of the war's conclusion in Japan, and that a return to normalcy was near.

"It was the bomb on Hiroshima that did it," he said. "Instead of going to Japan, I got to go home. I was so lucky."

After coming in contact with thousands of bodies, watching friends blown up by land mines and having his brother, Carl, captured, starved and, later, released by Nazis, Burnham was more than ready to come home.

And he did so with the knowledge that he had protected the sanctity of freedom in his country for decades to come.

"When I saw what people were going through (in Europe), I was so glad it wasn't here," he said, dabbing tears from his eyes. "I don't think there's any question that if the U.S. hadn't stepped in, we wouldn't have the freedom we have now."

"But if we're not careful, we're going to lose it." Naples Daily News (subscription) - Naples,FL,USA



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