

# Washburn during The War Years — The Boys At War - 15

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Chester R. Sanger was the son of Mrs. Tillie Sanger of Washburn. He entered the Navy in July 1943. After basic training he was assigned to the battleship USS Mississippi and saw action in numerous battles in the Pacific theater, for which he received nine battle stars. In an interview with the Washburn Times in May 1944, he described his experience during the battle for Kwajalein Atoll, in the Marshall Islands, which was held by the Japanese and invaded by the U.S., in the face of heavy Japanese resistance, on January 31 1944. "Everyone is plenty scared when we go into action. Some of them try to hide it but it doesn't do much good. We were all scared stiff when we moved in to blast Kwajalein. The cruisers had been in to bombard the place but had met considerable resistance from shore batteries. We went in to 2,000 yards offshore, only about a mile, which is point-blank range for a battleship's big guns, so we could shoot straight at the Jap pillboxes and gun emplacements and blast them right off the island. There wasn't much resistance left for the ground forces to overcome after we got through. We kept it up for hours, with shells going off every few seconds." Sanger's action post of duty is below decks, so he doesn't see much while a bombardment is in progress. But he was able to see plenty after the bombardment of Kwajalein. His ship lay offshore only a mile and a half and he was able to watch the land fighting on Kwajalein through a high-powered range-finder. He saw Yank soldiers dig in on the beach, with Jap bullets kicking the sand all around them. He saw American tanks circling and blasting away at Jap pillboxes. And he saw Japs pop out of the pillboxes and make a run for other shelter, only to be mowed



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down by American rifle fire.

Chester A. Root was the son of the Archie Roots of Bayfield. He entered the army in September 1943, saw action at Guadalcanal, Bougainville, the Philippines and Japan, and was awarded the Bronze Star. In an interview with the Times in January 1945, he described fighting the Japanese on an island somewhere in the south Pacific. Scouting far beyond their own lines, the Yank reconnaissance men found a Jap camp hidden in the jungle. For several days the Americans lived only a few hundred yards from their unsuspecting enemies. Private Root watched for two days as they did their daily tasks. He saw laughing Jap soldiers wash clothes, bathe and swim in a creek, little dreaming that American troops were in their backyard. The Americans send a radio call back to their own lines, giving their location and asking for reinforcements. When a platoon of infantrymen arrived, the reconnaissance men threw out a protective circle while the new men practiced attacking an exact

duplicate of the Japanese camp until the assault was letter perfect. The next dawn, the Americans attacked, opening fire when their line was only a few yards from the first enemy hut. Sleeping Japs were riddled before they could get out of their blankets. The attack wave kept firing as it swept through the shattered living quarters. Ambushes on the trails prevented any Nips escaping. Private Root was part of such an ambush. One wounded Jap staggered into view but was cut down before he could dive into underbrush. The two or three Japs who lived through the first burst killed themselves with hand grenades. Not an American was killed or wounded, but one man was bit by a centipede just as firing ceased.

Fred Frostman was the son of Hjalmar Frostman of Oulu. He entered the army in April 1941 and saw action in three battles with the Japanese, for which he received battle stars. In an interview with the Times he described a nine hour battle on a southwest Pacific island between his rifle platoon and Japanese soldiers in pillboxes, which were blocking an important communications trail. "We went about 200 yards down the trail in single column before we hit resistance. An automatic rifleman at the head of the column took only two minutes to take care of two Japs probably acting as security for the larger force farther on. Two hundred yards more and we hit the real stuff—about 40 Japs deployed on the side of a small ridge in seven pillboxes. They were really dug in. Their pillboxes were so well camouflaged that once a couple of the fellows got right on top of one before they knew it was there. Seems like I was ducking hand grenades and rifle fire all the time."