THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE

World War II and the Pacific:

Wisconsin Soldiers and their Roles and Experiences

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

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CONTENTS

Abstract……iii

Introduction……1

James Webb……4

Francis Sawyer……12

Peter Weitz……23

Bibliography……32

Abstract: The following Paper covers World War II in the Pacific Theater. Furthermore the paper will focus on Wisconsin soldiers and the roles and experiences that they lived through during their deployments in the Pacific. This paper will compare and answer the question on whether or not the experiences that Wisconsin soldiers had were comparable to those of other soldiers from around the United States. This information was found by using interviews that were provided by the Library of Congress which has spent the last few years working on an oral history project concerning war veterans. The three gentlemen that were used for this were James Webb, Francis Sawyer, and Peter Weitz.

Throughout the twentieth century, there have been many events that have transpired in the world that could claim to be the most important moment of the century. World War II is that polarizing moment for more than just one particular reason. World War II brought the emergence of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi ideologies. This paper will cover Wisconsin soldiers and the role and experiences that they played in the Pacific Theater of World War II. The information covered will focus on three soldiers from different military backgrounds that were born and raised in the state of Wisconsin and their journeys from the quite state of Wisconsin to overseas and the different things that they encountered while they were there. While their military experiences may not compare to each other, together they help paint a picture of what soldiers from Wisconsin experienced during fighting compared to the experiences that other soldiers experienced. There will be three different veterans that will be used to show the different experiences that soldiers from the state of Wisconsin experienced the war. The information that will be taken from these men will then be analyzed to see the similarities and differences between them. The three men are James Webb who served in the United States Marine Corps, Frances Sawyer from the United States Air Force and Peter Weitz also of the United States Marine Corps. Each of these men were involved in different branches and fought in different battles throughout the south pacific during the war. The reasons for choosing these specific men were that they were all from Wisconsin, they were all involved in various battles throughout their campaigns, and they shared similar experiences. These experiences can be analyzed to show how their experiences were the same or different from other soldiers from around the United States. During World War II over 332 thousand soldiers from Wisconsin

served in the war and around 8,390 of those men and women were killed during the fighting that took place in World War II.[1]

The United States did not enter the war effort right from the start. This would not last for the entirety of the war. Over the course of the first couple years of the war, the United States did supply countries like England with weapons and money that helped to fund their war efforts. America was determined to stay out of the conflict as long as possible. However it seemed more and more likely that Japan and the United States would go to war. By the time that 1941 had rolled around, Japan had already been at war with China for four years.[2] It was around this time that the Japanese decided to attack Pearl Harbor. Relations between the United States and Japan became worse as 1941 went on and July 26 of that year, President Roosevelt decided to freeze all Japanese assets in the U.S. This obviously did not go over well in Japan as the Japanese began to go over their plan for attack much more vigorously. Before the actual attack, The United States had received information that a possible attack was scheduled for December 8. General Walter Short was then informed about the possibility of placing troops on war alert. However, Short disagreed with that and believed that Japan did not have the long range bombers to carry out such an attack on Pearl Harbor.[3] This would wind up being an unwise decision for Short as Japan decided to attack on the morning of December 7, the attack was surprising and a little unexpected by the United States.[4]

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[1] World War II Commemorative Community Program (Wis.), State Committee. *Wisconsin's Role in World War II: Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of World War II: on the Battlefield, on the Home Front*. (Madison, WI: Dept. of Veterans Affairs, 1994), 24

[2] Harry A Gailey. *The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995. 53.

[3] Harry A Gailey. *The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995. 82.

[4] Harry A Gailey. *The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995. 90.

This attack was a little unexpected because just days before the attack, the U.S. did not believe that a war was imminent. Because of the somewhat surprising attacks, American casualties were very high and many battleships and planes were also lost due to the attack. After all was said and done the U.S. suffered large causalities. The Navy had lost 2,008 men, the Marine Corps 109, the Army 218, and civilian causalities numbered 68. Besides that the battle ships Arizona, Oklahoma, and Utah were all sunk.[5] Many other ships were also damaged or sunk, ninety-two planes had been destroyed, and ninety-six army aircraft had also been destroyed. Due to this attack, the United States declared war on Japan the very next day. President Roosevelt was almost given unanimous support by Congress to enter into war with the Japanese Empire.[6] The only person to vote against a declaration of war was Jeannette Rankin of Montana. After the declaration of war, Germany declared war on the United States and the U.S. subsequently declared war on Germany. From there the war took off and there were many major battles that were fought in the Pacific Theater. A few of these major battles were the battle at Guadalcanal, Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. Guadalcanal was one of the first major conflicts as it was an island that the Japanese were constructing an airstrip on. The United States decided that they had to invade the island before the airstrip was built because if the Japanese succeeded they would have been much closer to U.S. bases and it would have made it much easier for them to attack the bases.[7] This was the first step in a long four year process for the United States that would not end until the dropping of the atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945.

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[5] Harry A Gailey. *The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995. 96.
[6] *Manitowoc Herald Times.* (Manitowoc, WI), 8 December 1941, p. 1.
[7] Harry A Gailey. *The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995. 175.

James Webb

James Webb was born and raised in Neenah Wisconsin and served in the United States Marine Corps from 1943 to 1945.[8] He was one of many soldiers from the state of Wisconsin to serve the United States during the Second World War specifically in the Pacific Theater. While enlisted, he participated in two major battles which were the battle at Peleliu and the battle of Okinawa. Webb stated that at the time when he was growing up the United States was not extremely patriotic. Most of this was due to the fact that the world had been at peace since the end of the First World War or the Great War as it was called before the onset of World War II.[9] The idea of the United States not being very patriotic before the onset of World War II is not entirely surprising. As Webb stated, the world was at peace and it was not really necessary to act patriotic. This idea sounds a bit odd in this day and age and can be almost come off as being unpatriotic. The fact of the matter is that since the ending of World War II, the United States has constantly been involved in conflicts.[10] These conflicts tend to entice people to be patriotic so the world that surrounds people today is much different than the world pre-World War II.

Captain Webb did not originally enlist like many Americans did after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Webb chose not to enlist until 1943. At the time of the attacks on Pearl Harbor, Webb was attending the University of Wisconsin Madison and the first thought was that he would not have to take his semester exams as the attacks happened near the end of the

[8] James Webb Collection (AFC/2001/001/66702), Interview by Jacki Bolwerk Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress
[9] Webb Article
[10] Examples: The Cold War (1944-991), The Korean War (1950-1953), Vietnam War (1955-75,) Persian Gulf War (1990-91), The War on Terrorism (2001-present day)

semester. This sentiment quickly changed as people began to question; where was Pearl Harbor and what was this all about?[11] Once information had been collected, the radio informed the public of the amount of battleships that had been sunk and the vast amount of Americans that had lost their lives in the surprising yet terrible attack. From that moment there was an explosion of patriotism in the nation and many young men choose to enlist because of that national pride. When 1943 came around, Webb decided to enlist but ended up failing his physical due to the fact that he had contracted the German measles at some point in time. It was not long after that point that enlistments were closed and the draft was implemented.[12] The draft was originally instituted in 1940 before the attacks on Pearl Harbor and continued through the end of the war.[13] Once he was healthy, Webb contacted the draft board and notified them that he wanted to be drafted and he was. He was then placed in the United States Marine Corps. When asked about what he felt to be leaving his family and the thoughts of traveling to places unknown, Webb stated the following,

> "My thoughts were great anticipation of a terrific adventure. As I said before, we had, in those days, we didn't go places. Most of us didn't have automobiles, there was the train. I had been once down to Illinois to visit my grandparents, and family, my father's. But here I was, heading off, to parts and places unknown. That was real anticipation."[14]

Even with the possible onset of not knowing where he was going or what would happen to him, Webb did not seem to fear whatever was in his future no matter how dangerous it might end up being. After basic training, Webb was sent off to Australia and then eventually was

[11] Webb Interview
[12] Webb Interview
[13] Kenneth H. McGill *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (Oct., 1944), pp. 508.
[14] Webb Interview

stationed in Guadalcanal which was an island in the south pacific.[15][16] It was at this point that he was assigned to the third battalion of the eleventh marines, first division.

Fighting was not the only thing that happened while soldiers were stationed overseas. Between the occasional fire fights and big battles, there was a great deal of downtime and the soldiers adjusted to that by doing various activates. One particular thing that kept the men busy was the use of the radio.[17] The men were able to listen to the radio at night and typically they listened to the music of Tokyo Rose. Tokyo Rose was an American citizen who had been in Japan at the beginning of the war and was forced into doing Japanese propaganda broadcasts on the radio. However, American music was played on the stations so that was a refreshing change that gave the soldiers a taste of home.

Soldiers also passed a lot of time by playing a lot of card games, writing letters, and make jewelry out of shells that were found on the beaches. Webb talked extensively about writing letters to his then girlfriend and future wife. Along with the letters, Webb would add a personal touch by pressing tiny insects onto the letters. That was about the extent of anything fun that happened while stationed overseas. Webb was very quick to say that getting shot at was not fun at all. However, there was one story of interest that Webb decided to talk about that involved the use of chewing tobacco.[18] Webb began chewing tobacco because he was told it was a good way to combat air or seasickness. It seemed to work quite well as Webb

[15] Guadalcanal was the site of a major battle from Aug. 1942- Feb. 1943 that resulted in an allied victory and served as a base for the allies during the rest of the war.
[16] Harry A Gailey. *The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995. 174.
[17] Webb Interview
[18] Webb Interview

continuously chewed tobacco throughout his tour.[19] One particular story that came to Captain Webb's mind involved him having to stand at attention and speak during a medal ceremony. He had been chewing tobacco and still had it in his mouth. He knew that he could not throw it out or spit so he decided to swallow it. Now this may have not been the smartest to do as anyone who has done this before would know. Chewing tobacco is not meant to be swallowed by any means and the reaction to doing that is not very pleasant. It is probably true that Webb also felt this same way when he did the same exact thing. By doing what he did, a few of the soldiers around him had a good laugh. This was a comical story that was sure to give the soldiers a few laughs during their trying times during wartime. Laughter has been said to be the best medicine so even though doing that caused Webb a little discomfort it gave a few of his fellow soldiers a good laugh at a time when laughs were not the easiest to come by.

During his time abroad, Captain Webb fought in the battles of Peleliu and Okinawa.[20] Webb did not go into very much detail about the battle of Okinawa. Okinawa was a lot different fighting compared to the battle at Peleliu. Okinawa was a much bigger island and therefore many more soldiers fought there at the same time. Webb figured that that there were six divisions total on the U.S. side. Three of which were army divisions and the other three were marine divisions.

Peleliu however is discussed by Webb with greater detail and much more information than Okinawa. He did not go into very specific details about the battle but he was able to give some insight to what exactly was going on during the fight. The invasion of Peleliu began in

[19] Webb Interview
[20] Webb Interview

September of 1944 when the island was bombarded with gunfire for three days from up to five battleships. The actual ground invasion started with on September 15 when the first marine division set foot on the island.[21] Initially it was thought that the battle would only take a few days to take the small island over but it was not as easy as first though. The actual invasion took until about the end of November as the Japanese stood their ground as best they could.[22]

The island was not very big according to Webb, only about two and a half miles by five miles.[23] Webb figured that this was about the same size roughly as his home town. Webb said that the fighting was difficult because it was so hot, the island was not very big, and the fact that there was not a lot of water and the rations were not as plentiful as they should have been. He had estimated that they had as many as 8,000 causalities out of 15,000 troops. In actuality the total troop loss was close to 2,000 men between the first marine division and the eighty-first infantry division with about 1,200 hundred of those soldiers coming from the first division.[24] Webb could have been counting the missing and wounded from his division as that total did reach close to the 8,000 that he had suggested. Ironically this amount of causalities could have been avoided as Webb stated that the invasion of Peleliu was not entirely necessary and that the amount of lives lost was not necessary. The initial invasion was that the island was to be taken to protect General MacArthur's flank from the air as they went into the Philippians. However by the time that the invasion took place, many of Japan's naval carriers and airfields had been damaged that it was decided that the invasion of Peleliu did not have to happen.

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[21] Max Hastings. *Retribution: The Battle for Japan, 1944-45*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008. P. 112-115.
[22] Edwin Palmer Hoyt. *How They Won the War in the Pacific; Nimitz and His Admirals*. New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970. 419.
[23] Webb Estimated that the island was about the same size as his hometown of Neenah
[24] Hastings 118

However, since the operation was already in movement towards the objective, the mission was carried out as scheduled.[25]

When reminiscing about the difficulties that took place during his time abroad, Webb seemed upbeat. "Really it was a great adventure," he said mostly due to the fact that he was not shot nor wounded while fighting of which he credited to his training at boot camp.[26] The thing that seemed to bug him the most were the rations that they were allotted. The ration food was terrible according to Webb and it was even worse during battle because there was no time to set up field kitchens while on Peleliu because of the constant fighting.[27] Webb went on to talk about the specific rations that they were allotted. Two types of rations were given out to Webb and his fellow soldiers, C-rations and K-rations as they were called. Webb disliked the C-rations they most as all they contained were two little cans and a package of biscuits. Webb disliked these because of what were in the rations which were lima beans and ham. Typically the ham would go bad so the soldiers would have to throw them away or basically be forced to eat it. The K-rations were a bit better as they contained nutrition bars, dates and chocolate nuts, and some dried coffee.[28] These rations also included crackers and a small pack of cigarettes. An interesting part about getting dried coffee was how would you heat it up and make it while out in the field.

Another important part about the fighting was the reaction to coming home and whether or not there were any lingering battle scars that Webb and other soldiers experienced

[25] Max Hastings. *Retribution: The Battle for Japan, 1944-45*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008. 115
[26] Webb Interview
[27] Webb Interview
[28] Webb Interview

during their time after they returned home. Battle scars mean any lingering feelings or memories that Webb and other soldiers experienced after they came back. This could range anywhere from dreams that soldiers experienced or reactions to certain situations that reminded them of being at war. By the time that Webb and his battalion had returned home to the states, the war had been over for a few months so there were no parades or celebrations which did not seem to bother him at all.[29] It was typical for soldiers to come home and return quickly to their daily lives. It was much different for them when they returned after the war like Webb. Usually these soldiers would return home to little fanfare because the war had been over for a few months and there had already been countless celebrations for soldiers that had previously come home. However, even because of this, Webb was not disappointed in receiving no hero's welcome.

Another lasting impact on many soldiers when they came home was whether or not they experienced flashbacks or feelings after they returned home from their war experiences. Webb was very colorful in talking about whether or not he had experienced any lingering feelings or flashbacks after he had returned home.

> "We never saw any of that, that's a bunch of bull roar, bah humbug. Half of these guys that claimed this, I'll betcha half of those SOB's were never out of this country. Absolutely, we didn't have anybody that I ever know of that went nuts, we got a little crazy once in a while, but we had stump juice, see, we had some guys from Kentucky, rich ones."[30]

Webb was able to assimilate very well as he stated that the day after he came home, he was already back on the job. He did not state what the job was but he was able to start working

[29] Webb Interview
[30] Webb Interview

right away. This did not come across as a typical response for soldiers coming back home. It was not uncommon for soldiers to experience flashbacks among other things but according to Webb this did not really happen to anyone that he knew. This could be an example that had a wide spectrum. The reasoning behind this could be the fact that soldiers were welcomed home with homecomings more so than future wars and that could have led them to better assimilate back into society.

James Webb seemed to enjoy his time overseas and at times he almost treated it as he was a tourist. Webb fought in two important battles, the battle at Okinawa and Peleliu. Peleliu was a battle that was very bloody and Webb was able to go into details about how many people were killed while fighting. Another soldier that had some insight on the battle of Peleliu was E.B. Sledge who was stationed in the Pacific and fought also fought at Peleliu and Okinawa. Sledge seemed to a nice down to Earth guy until it came time to fight. He recalled their drill instructor telling him and his fellow soldiers that they were going to the Pacific and not be to be afraid of playing dirty.[31] Sledge recalled one time where at Peleliu where some fellow soldiers were shooting wounded Japanese soldiers and knocking gold teeth out of their mouths while they were still alive. Usually these soldiers would keep the teeth as souvenirs. Sledge also recalled a time while fighting on Okinawa and coming across an older Japanese woman who wanted him to shoot her because she was in so much pain. The woman even went as far as to grab Sledge's gun and put it to her forehead.[32] He decided not to shoot her but it turned out that a fellow infantryman ended up shooting her anyways. This may have sounded inhumane

[31] Studs Terkel. *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War Two*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984. 62
[32] Studs Terkel. *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War Two*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984. 63.

at the time but many of the soldiers argued that they did those things because the Japanese would just as likely do the same thing to them if they were to let their guard down. Webb never talked about this, he may have experienced but maybe he felt that he did not want to talk about it. It also could be possible that he did not experience such inhumane things like that. Sledge was on the front line and stated that you saw a lot more when you were on the front line then if you were sitting back behind the riflemen.

Francis Sawyer

Francis E. Sawyer was born in 1918 in Badin, North Carolina, and was raised in La Crosse, Wisconsin. He served in the United Air Force from 1941-1945.[33] The story of Francis Sawyer and his enlistment is quite different than that of James Webb. For one, Sawyer was an Air Force pilot and secondly he was shot down and was a prisoner of war for 18 months during World War II. Being a Prisoner of War cannot be an easy thing to live through but Sawyer was able to survive for 18 months while being held prisoner in India. It goes to show that Sawyer was very strong willed and determined to survive no matter what. One thing that could have helped him keep going was the fact that he had family at home wondering and waiting to hear back from him, never knowing whether he was dead or alive. Being a prisoner of war was thing that helped shape Sawyer into the man that he was in his later years. An experience of that proportion is sure to have long lasting effects on a person no matter how strong willed they

[33] Francis Sawyer Collection (AFC/2001/001/26803), Interview by Melissa Kelber, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

might be. It is very possible that experience helped shape Sawyer into the person he would eventually become.

Sawyer decided to enlist before the attacks of Pearl Harbor which is different considering that many men during that time choose to enlist because of the attacks. Mr. Sawyer decided to enlist before Pearl Harbor because he reasoned that he probably would have been drafted eventually because he figured that there the United States would become involved in the war. The decision to join the Air Force rather than the Army was an easy one for Sawyer. He stated that he would rather be up in the air flying then on the ground laying in the mud and other such things like that.[34] It is interesting to note that Sawyer choose to enlist before the war started as many men and women did not choose to do this until after Pearl Harbor and even then most waited until they were drafted. There is no evidence to suggest this but it is possible that Sawyer had older relatives who had served in the military before and that he felt it that he should also follow in his family's footsteps. That is one thing that it is not entirely known but it is something to think and wonder about. Also his reason for going the Air Force instead of the Army had an interesting story to it. Sawyer did not seem to have a rational answer for why he decided to choose one over the other. The choice was made for no reason other than not wanting to be on the ground and have to deal with such elements as getting shot at all the time and having to survive in gross conditions. These conditions include things like being stuck in the rain at times and along with that having to walk through mud and muck.

[34] Sawyer Interview

When asked about his early days in the service, Sawyer had some interesting things to say. Being that he had entered the Air Force before the United States declared war on Japan and Germany, boot camp was not as hard. After Pearl Harbor, the commanding officers were much harder on soldiers for obvious reasons. These reasons were that the United States was at war and every soldier had to be prepared for battle at some point in time. During camp, typically Mr. Sawyer and his fellow soldiers went through foot drill. There was not rifle drill or other things like that because these particular soldiers were going into the Air Force and did not need the ground training of Army soldiers. After drill camp was complete, Sawyer then went to the airplane mechanic school.[35] That is what Sawyer had originally wanted to do as he had no thoughts of actually flying airplanes during the war. He felt very content with fixing on them and making sure they were in good shape when his fellow soldiers took them up in the air. After sometime went on, he was asked by the commander about whether or not he wanted to fly airplanes. This was something that Sawyer had not thought much about and decided that it was something that was interesting so he decided to do it even though he did not quite know what he was getting himself into. Perhaps if he had known he would eventually be shot down and taken as a prisoner he might have taken a different path.

Flying was something that Sawyer had never done before so the first time up in the air was not a pleasant one. His first thoughts of flying were, "I don't think I would want it again."[36] After a thought like that, one might have a hard time going back up in the air but Sawyer knew that he could get past that thought. Sawyer said the biggest thing at first was that there was a

[35] Sawyer Interview
[36] Sawyer Interview

lot of moving and cutting that happened while flying. Not surprisingly this caused a little discomfort to Sawyer which is very understandable. While the initial flight did not go as well as planned, Sawyer eventually got the hang of flying and learned one important thing which was to not eat anything before going up in the air. Learning to not eat beforehand was an important thing as Sawyer eventually learned to eat after a mission had been completed and they were on their way back. Eating on the way back from a mission seemed like it was easier for the pilots and they were able to keep their food down much better. The first planes that Sawyer flew were B-17s but he eventually was switched over to flying B-24s and they were much different to fly then the B-17s.[37] When Sawyer left the United States to go overseas he had mostly trained on the B-17s. He had only had about ten hours of flight time on the B-24s, but that would end up being the plane that he would fly exclusively while flying missions throughout the war. Both of these planes were by no means small as both commanded a crew of close to ten people. The B-24s were bigger than the B-17s and Sawyer was able to go into some detail about how the B-24s worked and how big of a crew they commanded. There was a 10 man crew that usually commanded the B-24s. There were four officers that were aboard on every flight and those four were the pilot, copilot, navigator, and the bombardier. Besides those four, there were also a radio operator and an engineer. Sawyer stated that the engineer was basically like a third pilot who would help the pilot and copilot with anything that they needed during a flight. Then there were also was assistants to both the radio operator and the engineer. The ninth and tenth people on the crew were the gunners. One was the tail gunner

[37] Sawyer Interview

and the other was known as the belly gunner.[38] The tail gunner was located in the back tail section of the plane where they controlled a large turret. The belly gunner typically was located in the middle underneath of the plane.

Sawyer was all over the United States during his training. He started flying in Idaho and eventually he made his way to New Mexico, Kansas, and finally to Fort Worth, Texas, which is where he switched over to flying B-24s over B-17s. From there he was transferred to Nashville which was the last stop before he was sent off to India. Sawyer fought exclusively in the Pacific Theater during his time as an Air Force pilot and India was primarily where Sawyer was stationed out of for his missions. When talking about where he was stationed out of, Sawyer stated that, "This was the theater [over there] that nobody knew about, nobody really cared about."[39] Sawyer thought that the Pacific Theater was not seen as being as important as the European Theater. This assessment does hold some weight as many people were more intently focused on what was going on in Europe than what was going on over in the Pacific. This probably has a lot to do with the fact that Hitler was seen as a more polarizing figure than any people in the Pacific. Sawyer argued that the objective of protecting India from takeover from Japan was very important because if it did happen, Japan would have control of almost all of Asia. With that, the Japanese could have advanced all the way to Europe and that would have created a big problem as the areas that Japan and Germany controlled would have met up together and created a very difficult thing of the Allies to overcome.

[38] Sawyer Interview
[39] Sawyer Interview

Most of the mission objectives saw Sawyer flying into Burma (since remained Myanmar) and doing many different things ranging from mine-laying missions to general observant missions where they would do fly overs to gauge what was going on in a particular area.[40] Sawyer stated that they actually had to fly the planes to overseas themselves rather than have them taken over on an air craft carrier. When the planes had to be flown to India, Sawyer and the other men in the company flew them over Puerto Rico and South America before landing in Africa. In Africa, they landed at an English base where they were allowed to stay for a night and then they eventually made their way to India. While in India, Sawyer and the other people in his company were stationed in Agar, India. Before staring on their missions, the men were allowed a few days of down time in which Sawyer was able to take a visit to the Taj Mahal.

Following the down time it was time for fighting and the first missions that Sawyer took part in was a covert night mission which involved being perfect in accomplishing the mission and not being seen at all. The mission was a mine-laying mission that Sawyer explained was a mission where they dropped mines into the water so that they could damage ships when they went through certain areas.[41] The mission involved flying at a very low altitude which was difficult and dangerous at the same time. The reason for flying at a low altitude was so that they airplanes would stay under the radar line and therefore not be able to be detected by the enemy. This particular mission took place on the Rangoon River, which is located in Burma. Sawyer had to fly so low that when the mines were dropped in, water splashed back into the airplane which shows how low the pilots had to fly. Sawyer explained that these mines had a

[40] Sawyer Interview
[41] Sawyer Interview

magnetic force in them that whenever a ship would go by it would be drawn towards the ship and basically destroy right there and then.[42] This was one of the few night missions that Sawyer made during his deployment as many of the missions he was involved in were took place during daylight.

While Sawyer was able to survive the war and live a long and prosperous life not everything was smooth sailing during his deployment. After being overseas for about ten months, his airplane was shot down and he became a prisoner of war for roughly eighteen months.[43] Sawyer was able to go into some detail about his how he became a POW but he did not provide an area where it happened. All that can be certain was that it happened in enemy territory. While on a routine mission, the airplane that Francis Sawyer was flying was struck and started on fire. Because of the fire communication was lost between the head and tail of the plane. This was a problem as everyone on the crew did not wear their parachutes at all times. Sawyer stated that they did not wear their parachutes because they would not have enough room to maneuver around and shoot at the enemy while wearing them. He did state that they would lay them on the floor in a way that they could easily grab them and put them on if needed. So at that point, the fire had disconnected contact between the front and back of the plane and Sawyer and his other crewmen were not able to reach the men in the tail of the airplane.[44] He stated that that was the last time he ever saw those men and he had no idea what happened to them. Sawyer stated that years later he was notified in a letter from a Burmese mayor that his fellow crewmen had died and that they had been buried in Burma.

[42] Sawyer Interview
[43] Sawyer Interview
[44] Sawyer Interview

Sawyer ended up being the lone survivor of the crash and was then taken prisoner by the Japanese.

Before being captured, Sawyer told the scary story of ejecting from the plane and trying to figure a plan on what to do after he landed. Being that there were still Japanese planes flying in the area, Sawyer had to take his time with his descent even though he figured he was still traveling at a speed of close to sixty miles per hour. When he finally did find his way to the ground, Sawyer landed in water that was about chest deep. Sawyer figured that this helped soften his fall since he had been traveling at such a high speed up to that point. From there he was taken prisoner by the Japanese and taken to a prisoner of war camp where he was forced to stay for a total of eighteen months. Being a prisoner felt like being a zombie according to Sawyer.[45] The prisoners were not allowed to go anywhere while they were interred and they were only three guards looking over the camp. Sawyer did state that the guards did change posts every hour so that guards would not tire and lose track of what their job was. There were no means of escape as every door and gate of the compound led towards the middle of the camp where the water well was. This shows that the camp was made into a type of maze that made it almost impossible to escape.

Another big part of being a POW was the amount of food that was available the prisoners. Typically the prisoners were given just enough food to keep from starving. The usual diet consisted of rice about three times a day and on occasion they were given meat. The meat portions were very small in size. They were also given a weed that tasted and smelled like

[45] Sawyer Interview

spinach but it was more like a hogweed once it got cold.[46] During this time, Sawyer had no contact with his family like he did before being captured so his family feared that he had been killed in action. One thing that kept Sawyer going during this time was the hope that they would be liberated. "You just had to have faith,[47]" he said and he always believed that he would be rescued the very next day if nothing happened on the day in question.

There are many examples of marches that went on during the war that involved many prisoner of war camps. Sawyer was also involved in one of these as he and other prisoners that were able were forced to march sixty-one miles at one point during their imprisonment. Sawyer's particular march was not as well-known as the Bataan Death March that happened in April of 1942. This march was a very brutal seventy-five mile stretch that involved 75,000 American and Filipino soldiers. Among those many poor souls were Wisconsin soldiers who were part of the 32nd Tank Company Division of the Wisconsin National Guard. After going overseas to Japan, they became a part of Company A of the 192nd Tank Battalion. These men from Wisconsin became known as the Janesville 99.[48] These men along with many others were captured in April of 1942 and then forced to go on the deadly march that took many lives of soldiers because of poor conditions. During the Death March, one soldier of the 99 died and thirteen more died once they reached the prison camp. During the course of this march the soldiers were beaten and killed if they failed to keep up with everyone else. They were also forced to go without food for over three days and the only water they were able to have was

[46] Sawyer Interview
[47] Sawyer Interview
[48] Michael J Goc, "Janesville, City On the Rock," WPT: Wisconsin Hometown Stories, http://www.wpt.org/wisconsinstories/janesville/essay.cfm?page=4 (accessed November 4, 2011).

found on the side of the trails they were walking in puddles. After the march and spending over three years in captivity, these men were finally liberated in 1945. Sadly only thirty-five of the Janesville 99 were able to survive and able to see their families again.[49] These men showed great heroism and it is a given that they cherished the rest of their lives and never forgot those that they lost during that inhumane death march.

Sawyer's march was not quite as bad as the Bataan Death March but in reality, they were still the same thing. These men were deprived of their basic human rights and forced to do things that were impossible. Going through this must have been excruciating for the men that were involved. During the march Sawyer was involved in many soldiers had planned to execute a mass escape as many of them figured that if they did not, they would not be able to survive much longer. However, luckily before that happened, the English 14th Army came across the POWs and they were all rescued.[50] A few of the POWs were able to make contact with the English and during the night all the men were able to be saved. They were able to sneak through a forest that was nearby and on the other side was a large open field that had trucks among other things located in it. They then came in contact with Indian soldiers and it was at that moment that Sawyer knew that he would be alright. After a few days of being free, Sawyer and the other men were flown to Calcutta, India, then to Canada, and finally back to the United States. Sawyer was finally able to see and talk to his family and that was the end of his experiences of the Second World War.

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[49] Michael J Goc, "Janesville, City On the Rock," WPT: Wisconsin Hometown Stories, http://www.wpt.org/wisconsinstories/janesville/essay.cfm?page=4 (accessed November 4, 2011).
[50] Sawyer Interview

Being a prisoner of war was not an easy thing for Sawyer and the other men that were with him during those eighteen months. Being involved in that situation must have been brutal to go through and it was tough wondering if you would get rescued let alone whether or not you would live to see the next day. Sawyer was able to survive because of his faith and by keeping a positive attitude that something good would eventually happen. If one did not stay in good spirits it would be very difficult to live through something as depressing as being a POW. Then men that were involved in the Bataan Death March also went through very similar situations compared to Sawyer.[51] These men also kept their faith and even though it took more than three years to be saved, they knew that if they believed something good would eventually happen to them. Sadly with the Bataan Death March, many men lost their lives during the deadly march. This death toll involved sixty-four of Wisconsin's finest. It is sad that these men were not able to survive to see their families again. A refreshing moment however was that thirty-five Wisconsin soldiers were able to make it home and they lived their lives to the fullest and never did forget the friends that they had lost.

Being a prisoner of war made it tough to have respect for Japanese soldiers and it is very possible that many of the survivors carried very strong hatred towards the Japanese for the rest of their lives. Hopefully these men were able to get over their hatred and live long happy lives knowing that they were lucky to be alive when many of their friends were not able to experience the same fate. Francis Sawyer was grateful for surviving his POW experience and lived the rest of his life cherishing every moment. Cherishing your life became pretty easy to do

[51]Michael J Goc, "Janesville, City On the Rock," WPT: Wisconsin Hometown Stories, http://www.wpt.org/wisconsinstories/janesville/essay.cfm?page=4 (accessed November 4, 2011).

after living through an experience like that and it showed soldiers that they should have no regrets in life.

Francis Sawyer helps tell an important story about a soldier from Wisconsin. He was a decorated member of the United States Air Force who also happened to be a prisoner of war. Being a prisoner of war helped define who Sawyer was. Surviving eighteen months of captivity showed how dedicated Sawyer was to make it home. Sawyer stated that about the only consistent convention that he would go to post war was the convention that would honor American Ex-Prisoners of War.[52] This particular convention was the most important thing to Sawyer as being a former POW was who he was as a person. Being a prisoner of war shaped Sawyer into the person he was and he did not want to lose that identity. This was one of the main reasons that Sawyer kept in contact with fellow ex-prisoners and it helped keep in touch with a dark part of his life that helped to define him.

Peter Weitz

Peter Weitz was born in 1920 in Neenah, Wisconsin. He served in the United States Marine Corps from 1942 to 1945.[53] While Weitz was in the service for about three years, he only fought in one major battle while he was deployed. He played a role in the Battle of Iwo Jima. He was shot and injured during the battle and was eventually sent home because of his wounds. Along with James Webb and Francis Sawyer, Peter Weitz was another important

[52] Sawyer Interview

[53] Peter Weitz Collection (AFC/2001/001/66704), Interview by Ryan Ellerbusch. Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

World War II veteran from the state of Wisconsin. The story of Peter Weitz and his experiences is an important one that helped show that Wisconsin soldiers played an important role of what went on during World War II and especially in the Pacific Theater part of the war.

Along with Webb and Sawyer, the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese Empire on December 7, of 1941 played a profound role in him joining the war effort on behalf of the United States. Before joining the Marine Corps, Weitz was single and working at the Bergstrom paper mill. After he had heard about the attack, Weitz and five other gentlemen got together and decided to enlist in the Marine Corps because they wanted to demonstrate their patriotism.[54]

Being that he had enlisted in the Marine Corps, Weitz had to travel to San Diego, California which is where basic training was. The first thing that had to be done when he arrived to basic training was that every man had to be given a haircut. Weitz recalled fondly on having to get his haircut. He recalled one such gentleman having very long hair and the barber cut it right off when he was not even paying attention.[55] Weitz thought that it was a pretty comical situation and it was a good sign that Weitz and other marines were able to laugh about things even in a time of serious events. Weitz was in basic training for about six weeks which at the time was shorter than what was normally expected for marines. This was mainly because they needed men out at sea so Weitz and other marines were put through put more quickly than usual. After basic was completed, Weitz boarded a ship that took him to the Pacific. He was on that ship for seventy-five days as the ship was not able to travel at a very quick pace.

[54] Weitz Interview
[55] Wietz Interview

The ship according to Weitz carried many different things besides marines. It also hauled a lot of cargo including oil and gas.[56] Spending that much time on a ship was sure to instill a little boredom but Weitz seemed to not remember having that much trouble finding stuff to do. During their trip which eventually landed in Australia, occasionally the men were allowed off the boat for a bit when they would port. At one point, the ship set up port on the island of Fiji and Weitz and his fellow marines were able to enjoy a few hours of the Fijian lifestyle. After arriving in Australia, Weitz then went to New Zealand for about a year.

It was after this that he learned that he would be a part of the invasion of Iwo Jima. The beginning of the invasion was very hectic for Weitz and his fellow marines. To get to the island, the men had to climb down ladders to the smaller boats that would then take them to the island. While that was going on, the ship was getting shot at by the Japanese so Weitz had to make sure that he did not get shot or anything like that.[57] Once the boat got to shore, they had to get out of the boats and stay as low as possible as to not get shot. The Japanese were hard to see during this because they were usually entrenched in fox holes. Being on the island was both dangerous and scary. Being shot is not usually seen as having a good time and Weitz was far removed from enjoying what he was doing. As an artillery gunner, Weitz was usually heavily involved in a lot of fighting. Weitz did say that he was scared to get onto the island because you did not really know what was going to happen or what to expect when the fighting commenced. With constant fighting going on, it was hard to find a place to relax and sleep. Weitz stated that you basically lived wherever you could and that you were much better off if

[56] Weitz Interview
[57] Weitz Interview

you were able to find a foxhole to sleep in because you would have better protection.[58] The foxholes also helped with the weather. During the day it was extremely hot and at night it was cold so being in the foxholes helped control your temperature and helped Weitz stay warm or cool depending on the time of day.

As previously stated, the fighting was almost nonstop on Iwo Jima and Weitz had a firsthand story about almost not making it out alive. One night when the Japanese Army was out and about, one Japanese soldier stepped in a fox hole and stepped right on Weitz' stomach without even knowing it.[59] Weitz was covered by a blanket and did not make a sound when it happened. He figured that by doing this, his life was spared. Weitz said that there were many Japanese soldiers present on the island but it was very difficult to find them. On the island of Iwo Jima, the Japanese had tunnels all over the island and would pop up unexpected out of holes and shoot U.S. soldiers before the soldier even knew what hit him. Weitz said that these tunnels were very small mainly because the Japanese people were much smaller than American soldiers. After fighting on the island for twenty-eight days, Weitz was unfortunately shot. Luckily he was not seriously injured and he was able to make a full recovery eventually. After getting shot, Weitz was taken to a field hospital where he was taken care and able to heal up. Weitz was not shot in a major area of the body as the bullet entered his buttocks. The moment that stood out the most to Weitz at the hospital was when he was able to take a shower. "Boy that shower was the most pleasant shower I have had…I tell ya it felt good."[60] After spending some time in the field hospital and given the time to heal up, Weitz was sent home to the

[58] Weitz Interview
[59] Weitz Interview
[60] Weitz Interview

United States on a ship. That meant that Weitz was at home when the war ended. He remembered the war ending like it was yesterday and that everyone was very happy that the war was over. Weitz stated that everyone knew it was over because of the big boom. The big boom is sure to have meant the dropping the atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which occurred on August 6 and August 9, 1945 respectively.[61] After returning home, Weitz did experience one flashback where he had nightmare but other than that he could not think of another time that he had a flashback to when he was fighting.[62]

Weitz did say that had the war not ended, he would have went back to fight. Weitz felt that he owned to his country and it also might have had to do with him wanting to get back at the Japanese for being shot. The interview with Peter Weitz seemed to at times show some tendencies towards hate or of despise towards the Japanese. This is not surprising that this would be the case as many soldiers felt that the Japanese were inferior to Americans and that they had to pay for what happened at Pearl Harbor. John Dower, who wrote *War Without Mercy* had many good points throughout his book about the race relations between American soldiers and Japanese soldiers alike. In his research, Dower decided to look at songs, movies, and cartoons to help find the undertone of the racial tensions that were present during the war. According to Dower, many Americans felt that the Japanese were much more evil than their Nazi counterparts. This concept seems farfetched as in hindsight the Nazi's killed millions of Jews and other minorities throughout the war. The German people were not looked at as

[61] Harry A Gailey. *The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1995. 174.
[62] Weitz Interview

being all evil while most if not all Japanese were looked at as being evil.[63] E.B. Sledge gave a solid statement about the differences between the German and the Japanese soldier. A brother of Sledges had fought in Europe and said that when the Germans surrender, they typically acted civil and did not try to kill their capturers. With the Japanese, they were not like an American when they were captured because they did not want to give up.[64] Most of the time if a Japanese soldier was captured he would try to kill himself and take an American with him and that was a major reason why there was a lot of resentment towards the Japanese. Most of this sentiment came from the attack on Pearly Harbor which Americans looked at as an unnecessary attack on American soil. Japanese were characterized as being "treacherous" after Pearl Harbor.[65] Also some of this racism also stemmed from the treatment of American Prisoners of War like Francis Sawyer. Almost all of these POWs were deprived of their basic human rights and most of them greatly suffered because of it. Besides the Bataan Death March that was mentioned earlier, POWs were also treated badly after the Doolittle raid that was popularized in the film, Pearl Harbor in 2001. Eight of the pilots from the raid were captured and executed under a military law that had just been adopted a week prior to their arrests.[66] Following these events a film was made in 1944 titled The Purple Heart. In the film there is a quote that is put on the screen which helps to explain how Americans felt towards the Japanese at that time.

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[63] John W. Dower. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. 34.
[64] Studs Terkel. *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War Two*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984. 62
[65] John W. Dower. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. 36.
[66] John W. Dower. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. 49.

> "It's true we Americans don't know very much about you Japanese, and never did—and now I realize you know even less about us. You can kill us—all of us, or part of us. But, if you think that's going to stop them from sending other fliers to bomb you, you're wrong—dead wrong. They'll blacken your skies and burn your cities to the ground and make you get down on your knees and beg for mercy. This is your war—you wanted it—you asked for it. And now you're going to get it—and it won't be finished until your dirty little empire is wiped off the face of the earth!"[67]

This quote was and still could be considered as being racist but the fact of the matter is that was how people felt during that time. Many American soldiers figured that in order to win the war, every last Japanese soldier would have to be killed to ensure victory otherwise they would never quit. There was a poll that was taken in 1943 and almost half of U.S. troops believed that it would be necessary to kill all Japanese before peace would be able to be achieved.[68]

There were also some other examples of anti-Japanese sentiment during the war. Robert Leckie, the author of *Helmet for my Pillow: From Parris Island to the Pacific* had some personal stories on this particular subject. Leckie served in the Pacific Theater and later wrote down thoughts on what happened while he was at war. Leckie had a firsthand account on racism towards the Japanese. They were not even looked at as being human by Leckie and his fellow soldier. Typically after a battle, some soldiers would scour the dead Japanese looking for trinkets or souvenirs that they could take with them as mementos. Some of the souvenirs taken from dead Japanese soldiers ranged from rings, guns, and gold teeth out of dead soldier's mouths.[69] This was just another example the racism that was felt and shown during the war. The examples from Dower and Leckie help to reinforce Weitz's and Webb's thoughts on the Japanese. Overall the feelings of Weitz and Webb compare very favorably compared to the

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[67] John W. Dower. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. 50.
[68] John W. Dower. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. 53.
[69] Robert Leckie. *Helmet for My Pillow: From Parris Island to the Pacific*. New York: Bantam, 2010. 232

other soldiers that served in during the war especially in the Pacific Theater. The Japanese were not seen as friends and many soldiers did not have positive feelings towards them. While it is almost certain that there were soldiers who did not have these racist thoughts, overall many soldier fell the same way about the Japanese.

World War II was one of if not the most polarizing event of the twentieth century. It is an event that will be remembered for centuries because of the events and the polarizing people that were involved in the war itself. The Pacific Theater while not as well-known as the European Theater was still just as if not more important during the war. The United States played a large role in the Pacific during their war with Japan. The attack on Pearl Harbor is what led the United States to declare war on Japan. This paper went into this diverse information and gave it a different spin. While there might not be people that are as knowledgeable about the Pacific Theater, this paper explained what went on in this almost separate war. Many different people played a role in the fight but this paper focused on the role and impact that soldiers from the state Wisconsin had on the war. The information provided of James Webb, Francis Sawyer, and Peter Weitz looked into these homegrown soldiers and the diverse things that they experienced during their fighting overseas. Each one of these men had vastly different stories that helped to show the role that they played in this unforgettable conflict. Whether it was Webb who first thought that he would not have to take semester exams because of the Pearl Harbor attack, Sawyer, who was an Air Force pilot who was a prisoner of war for eighteen months, or Weitz who was wounded in action while fighting at the Battle of Iwo Jima. These three men only represented a small part of the vast amount of soldiers from Wisconsin that either decided to enlist or were drafted into the military. Even though it is the

case that they were a small sample size, overall these three men exemplified the ways that Wisconsin soldiers experienced their time abroad in the Pacific and the distinct roles that they played in helping the United States to victory over the Japanese Empire.

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