

Raymond Hagen

Born: 5/27/1924 on
Island

Died:

Period of Service: WW II
Sources: Monument, JG
Am Legion scrapbook-box17

Ray Hagen notes

Entered Navy 2/24/2943

Discharged 4/18/1946

Served with Command US Naval Group China, Company 258, 22nd Battalion.

After induction, he was given intelligence tests that led to a lengthy wide-ranging interview with a naval officer, which ultimately led to special training at the University of Wisconsin for international radio code and typing. There were also classes each day spelling out wartime responsibilities and basic naval operations. After six weeks he had another interview with a Navy Captain on a range of topics, that resulted in being selected for special duty that would be described later in Washington DC. His rating was to be 'Striker for Radioman'. His address was the Navy Intelligence Station on Nebraska avenue.

Though he and the group with him expected to be trained in military tactics, they were quickly sent off to Seattle by train for further training within sight of Mt Rainier. They were led into a classroom which had a covered object the size of a typewriter which an officer would reveal. He introduced himself, talked about secrecy, and the need to never talk about what they would learn in that room. They must never let anyone know, on duty or off, what they did on Bainbridge Island. "You are to respond that you are simply a radioman taking messages from the Fleet and we don't talk about Fleet operations."

After that, he said, "You may now uncover your typewriters." What a surprise! The typewriters had both English letters, and Japanese Romaji characters. They were to learn some basic Japanese, and forward reports of Japanese operations in the Pacific. They were also to intercept messages which would be groups of numbers, possibly of weather reports, but which might be other reports as well. They were to be forwarded for others to decode.

That very day they began to learn basic Japanese radio traffic language and how the Japanese characters are used to communicate in International Code. They learned the US had broken the Japanese code and were able to discover plans for their fleet operations ahead of their execution. They also learned that the Japanese would change transmission frequencies and other routines, and were able to anticipate those changes so they wouldn't lose contact. They also were able, in time, to recognize the "fist" of their various operators, that is, the quirks and habits of their manual delivery on the keys. They were even able to sense their anger when one of their operators was not able to get his message delivered in good time. Hagen and his group became so sensitive to the process of intercepting Japanese messages that their brains could start the fingers typing even when they were not fully alert in the middle of the night. Sometimes they could tell that our bombers had successfully assaulted a Japanese target when the transmission suddenly went dead.

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After some months of training, they were given choices of where they would like their next assignment, which ranged from Alaska to Hawaii to Johnson Island to China. Hagen chose China, and his group boarded a big Liberty ship and headed south with several thousand men aboard, so many that they could only serve two meals a day, and there was always a long line, leaving behind a constant smell of cabbage and sweat. The ship zig-zagged across the Pacific.

The first one day stop was Fiji, where they were told to stay close to the ship. And then to Melbourne where two of their 14 men left, and the rest were allowed to stay on land for a night. They were rumored to be heading for India, which turned out to be Bombay, and a several day train trip that took them across the country. The air always seemed calm and hot with the odor of cow dung being burnt to cook food. They were required to wear khaki uniforms so that the presence of the Navy would be kept secret in Asia. But they had a little collar insignia that gave the secret away.

They arrived in Calcutta where they awaited transportation to China. The young man from an island in Wisconsin was immersed in a completely different culture but too briefly to savor as they were gone the next day by British plane to China. Though it was a dangerous flight over the Himalayas, it was an exciting adventure to a new world, though they had been harnessed with parachutes and oxygen masks, and sat on the floor of the plane. They were on their way to Kunming to work with the 14th Air Force under the command of Claire Chenault of "Flying Tiger" fame. They flew in full moonlight and had a wild ride over the "Hump".

Their quarters in Kunming was the large house of a Chinese General, large enough to hold all fifty plus personnel who would be engaged in intercepting and decoding Japanese radio traffic, mainly their naval operations. Quarters were ample and the food was good with some exceptions. All vegetables had to be cooked as the Chinese sometimes used human feces as fertilizer. He saw how the poor Chinese had to search for scraps of garbage in order to survive. An executive officer of the Navy helped him with some basic rules of the Chinese language so Hagen could go out to the countryside to 'talk' with the natives. On one of his walks he was invited to a big home by two sisters, one of whom would marry Generalissimo Chung Kai-Chek.

He was sent back to Calcutta for a while to help operate the listening post there including positioning the direction finder to locate the signals. In August, the bomb was dropped and there was no longer a need to listen for naval operations. He was then quartered in a plush high rise, with good food and private quarters. A local Punjabi helped look out for him. Then on to Shanghai where a chief petty officer became his boss and told him that he might be able to make radioman first class. But soon he was on a boat to San Francisco, and then to Bainbridge, MD, where he was mustered out of service.

As a civilian he worked the Teleprompter for Presidents Truman (who muttered about having to give "one of those _____ speeches"), and Eisenhower (who once nodded off before the speech was to begin and had to be prodded awake)

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He married the ambassador's daughter from the Philippines, Edith Yang Fribush. (JG)

Medals include Victory, American Defense, Good Conduct.

He has an amazing voice, even at the age of 87, and sang at the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. for the weddings of several senators, and sang at the Big Top at the 2012 Island Music Festival.