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Feature Article

Jack Brickman

Uncommonly Blessed: A Veteran's Encounter with War

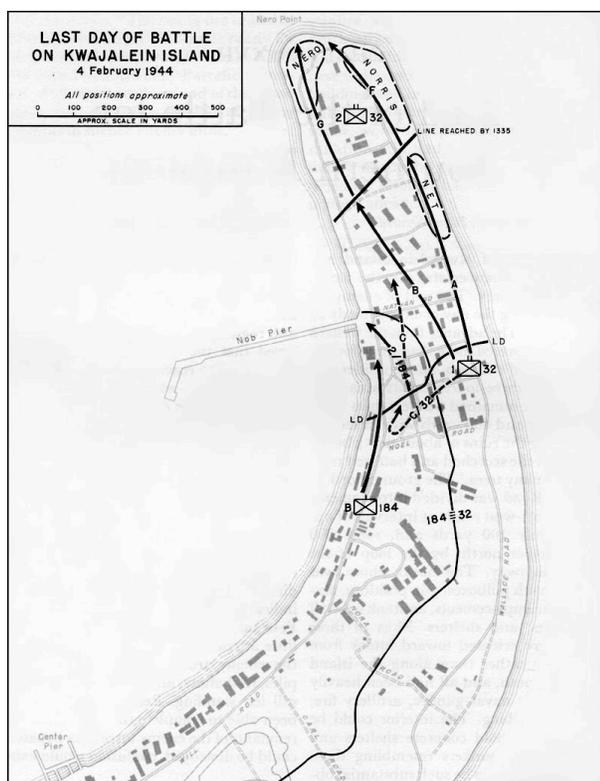
If you see him on the street, you might wonder if the unassuming 92-year-old might be past his prime. But, on closer inspection, you would see the twinkle in his eye and hear the humor on his tongue, traits that would make you believe he was a much younger man. This man's name is Jack Brickman.

A local Charlestonian, he was born in the day when babies were still delivered regularly at a maternity hospital on at the corner of Bee Street and Ashley Avenue, a building that you can still drive by today. His parents came over from Poland in the 1920s and brought with them the traditions of their Jewish ancestry. They settled in Charleston and had Mr. Brickman and a little girl about ten years later. When he was younger, Mr. Brickman did the things well that most boys struggle to do: he listened to his parents, studied the Talmud, and worked hard for his father. After attending Charleston High School and The College of Charleston, war broke out, and Mr. Brickman volunteered for the Army Air Corps.

With a glint in his eye, he told me a short story about his wife, "My mother came here [to the United States] after World War I and didn't get here till 1920. After she came here, she was a mother. Good cook. Good baker. All the things my wife can do, but needs to get better at." With a hearty laugh, he went on to describe Fay, the lovely woman I met while interviewing Mr.

Brickman; it is not hard to see why their courtship lasted throughout the two and a half years he was away for the war. Immediately after he proposed, he was sent to Scott Field, Illinois, for his basic training and then onto Yale University for two months of training in his specified field. He would become a Second Lieutenant in the Army and serve with the 87th Army Airdrome Squadron as a Communications Officer.

After a brief moment when they thought they would be sent to the European theatre, his unit received their sets of summer khakis, a dead giveaway that they would actually be sent to



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the Pacific and not Europe. Mr. Brickman reflected on much of his service time in Kwajalein Island. He was in charge of a command post that funneled communications from troops on a neighboring island to artillery and air support units. If somebody needed help, the call came through Lt. Brickman.

A particular incident on this island is one that has stayed with Mr. Brickman his entire life. He told me, “When we got there, after our first night ashore, I got my men established and we put

up pup tents. I didn’t have a tent, so I dug a little trench in the sand and put on my poncho. In the middle of the night it started to rain and I had bulletin boards to keep track of information, and I pulled the bulletin board over my head. I said look how lucky I am that it is raining and I [don’t have water] coming on my head. I’ve just been very fortunate all my life,” he said.

“Somebody’s protecting me.”

This protection is what got him through the war and back to Charleston just over two years later. Within a week he was married and working in his father's shirt store. After a discussion with a family friend, Mr. Brickman decided to attend law school at the University of Virginia. Three years later, he was back in Charleston, and his wife was pregnant with their first child. Six children and 70 years later, he is still the same man he was then, only sharper and wiser.

Meeting Mr. Brickman gave me a wonderful window into the way life was before the war and how it evolved after. I hope to maintain a friendship with him, and I wish him, as he wished me, many more happy years to come.