

A soldier remembers his days at Highland's Army Air Corps Training Camp in World War II

During the 1930s, the last Big Red Car took its last run in Redlands. There would not be any more trips from the Inland Empire to Los Angeles or San Gabriel.

Nor would there be more trips to beaches.

The weather was wreaking havoc in Highland. Floods ruined the Camp Cajon grounds and washed out the railroad tracks on the Loop Line.

A nasty freeze fell upon the citrus groves of Highland, Redlands and other cities that relied on the cash crop.

Yet looming in the horizon came the devastation of Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7 1941. The Japanese had unleashed squadrons of bomber and torpedo airplanes on the naval base, on the island of Oahu.

To this day, Dec. 7 is historically known to millions of Americans, as "a date which will live in infamy," as stated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The United States of America would soon go to war.

Today, 94-year-old veteran Paul Hopson recalls a time when the United States was about to enter into the second world war.

He remembers a U.S. Army Air Corps. training base near the area of Victoria Avenue and Ninth Street in Highland.

Highland, like hundreds of other cities in the United States, was enlisting men in all branches of the military. Hopson, like other residents of the Inland Empire, enlisted to serve his country.

"Prior to Dec. 7, 1941, I worked for the California Division of Forestry, which is now



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son. "The next weekend, after Pearl Harbor, the district ranger came to my house and said come on. He took me up, and we opened Little Mountain (lookout post). He told me what to do.

"We would listen to aircraft. We'd call in to a center and gave a description of what we saw or heard.

"In the daytime, we used sight. At night, we used sound. Most of the air traffic was going up through Cajon Pass.

"When I was at Summit, the planes would fly within 50 feet of the lookout. The fighter planes would come up the canyon and buzz me.

"That was kind of scary."

The San Bernardino Army Air Base started in the early 1940s, said Hopson.

"When the air base opened, the California Division of Forestry sent our biggest firetruck down there that had the biggest water tank. There was a tent set up at the end of Victoria Avenue.

"There were some eucalyptus trees there."

Hopson said his superior lived in a tent with four or five servicemen, at that location.

"Basically, it was fire protec-

"We went up Victoria Avenue and pulled into this little Army base. I didn't even know it was there. We sat there on the firetruck and watched a movie, not realizing that it was a training base."

"Later on," Hopson said, "in September or the first part of October, we heard that if you joined the Air Force, you could take basic training out there, at that Army Air Base, on the east side of Victoria, by Ninth Street.

"So, I went up to March Field and enlisted, and sure enough, I got sent back and had basic training at that place (in Highland)."

"We lived in tents at first," recalls Hopson. "Before Christmas, they put up little wooden bungalows for six men, which kept us out of cold. That was a lot nicer."

Hopson was assigned to Company B. He said that there was probably was a Company A and C that lived at the same camp. While at the camp, Hopson said that his physical training consisted of marching and drilling every day.

He believes that the camp had about 200 soldiers in training. "It wasn't very big," said Hopson.

He fondly recalls an episode of one of his superiors.

"It was rumored that Captain Black was dating a movie star named Dorothy Lamour. Sure enough, one Sunday, she came out, and we had a little stage, and she performed, which was quite a treat for us."

"The basic training camp was an open camp," said Hopson.

He was able to visit Helen. his

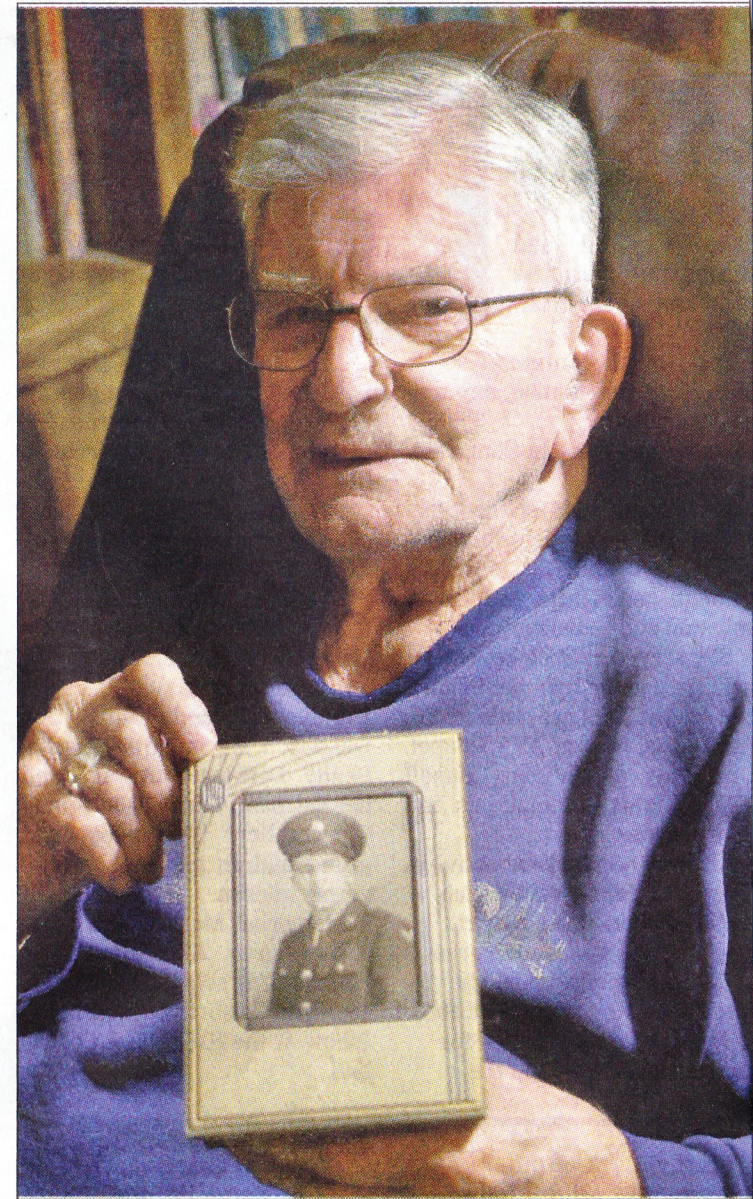


PHOTO BY PAUL PRADO PHOTOGRAPHY

World War II veteran Paul Hopson remembers a U.S. Army Air Corps. training camp near Victoria Avenue and Ninth Street in Highland.

ary [of 1942]," said Hopson. "Then they, the government, sent me to Lincoln, Neb., to go to an aeronautical school. I was there to June. Then I was sent to North American (Aviation Com-

In the Army Air Corps., Hopson worked as an aircraft mechanic for B-25 airplanes. The bomber planes were used extensively in World War II.

With the war under way, what

called Cal Fire. I was involved in aircraft warning service.

"I served as a lookout on Little Mountain and up at Summit. It was an aircraft warning system that started on the night of Dec. 7, Pearl Harbor."

"I was a fireman (at that time). I got laid off on the first of December in 1941," said Hop-

son for that training base. That was the only thing they had for fire protection at the beginning of that air base."

"One day I was visiting my boss on my day off," said Hopson. "He said that there was going to be a program at the base that night. Why don't you come down, and we'll go up there and take the firetruck? So, I did.

future wife, every night.

"I proposed her at Christmas-time, Christmas of 1942, and she said yes. We were engaged until December of 1945, when we got married. I got out of the service in November. On the second day of December, we got married."

"I was at the training camp from the middle of October [of 1941] to about the end of Janu-

pally), in Inglewood, Calif., where they built B-25s. I was there for six weeks."

Hopson then found his way to Wichita, Kan., for several months. He was told in Wichita that someone was needed in Fresno.

After arriving in Fresno, Hopson learned that soldiers were all packed up and ready to go overseas.

will happen next for Highland-trained Cpl. Hopson?

Read next week's article on Highland's history to learn more about the interesting people that make up this great city.

If you know anything about the history of Highland, I would be interested in listening to your story. You can reach me at (909) 816-0318.

Highland soldier remembers World War II

Paul Hopson was a soldier in World War II. He joined the Army Air Corps and received his basic training in Highland. Once in the military, Hopson travelled to many parts of the world as an airplane mechanic on one of the legendary bombers of the second world war, the B-25.

The bombers were built at the North American Aviation factory, in Inglewood.

"The airplane would come off the assembly line," Hopson said. "I'd get on it and we'd fly it to Texas."

According to Hopson, the military stored many B-25 airplanes in Wichita Falls, Texas.

"They stored them in Texas, until they could move them to Kansas City to put the armament on them," Hopson said.

It was Hopson's responsibility to maintain the aircraft.

"I was there for several months to take care of a whole bunch of planes that were parked there. I did general maintenance on the airplanes and watched over them. I'd check the tire pressure and other things."

Hopson was part of the 41st Bombardment Group. Within that group there were four squadrons — the 47th, the 48th, the 396th and the 820th. Hopson belonged to the 48th Squadron, the Wolf Pack.

"This bombardment group started at March Field," said Hopson.



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With the war under way, Hopson found himself on ships, traversing the globe to provide needed assistance for the legendary B-25.

Hopson travelled in an Landing Ship Tank, known as the LST. These vessels were long ships that carried transport vehicles, tanks, jeeps, other and troops. The ships delivered their payload onto the shore.

LSTs did not require a dock or pier. Two huge doors would open and a ramp would descend into the water. The vehicles would simply drive onto the beachhead. LSTs assisted in amphibious landings during the war effort.

"We had black out windows on the ship," said Hopson. "That way, there was no way that (enemy) submarines or anybody could see us at night. There was a double door to block the light. You had to be careful not to let any light show out."

During the day, Hopson recalls being only able to socialize on the main deck.

"We could only be on the main deck. We were free to

walk around, play cards, talk or do nothing. We mainly did nothing," Hopson said with a smile.

Hopson's squadron was typically deployed with another squadron. Along with the ship's crew, the entire crew of the vessel was composed of approximately 500 soldiers.

"The flight crews, they traveled by air," Hopson said. "The ground crews travelled by boat."

Thankfully the seas were kind to the 48th Squadron.

"We never experienced any rough seas out in the Pacific. Everything was pretty calm. I was on an LST for two weeks going to Saipan," said Hopson. "Most of the time, traveling on the water was like riding on glass. This was great, because that LST was a flat-bottom boat. We went to different islands in the middle of the Pacific as the Marines and the Army took over the different locations."

Hopson recalled a fond memory when he was stationed in Hawaii.

"We had a radio in our hut," Hopson said. "I heard it on the local radio station that they were looking for guys from San Bernardino (to talk on the air). So, I went down there, and they interviewed me. They said, 'Okay,' and I told them what I wanted to talk about. You could only say certain things. You couldn't tell them where you were or what you were doing."

"It was mainly personal

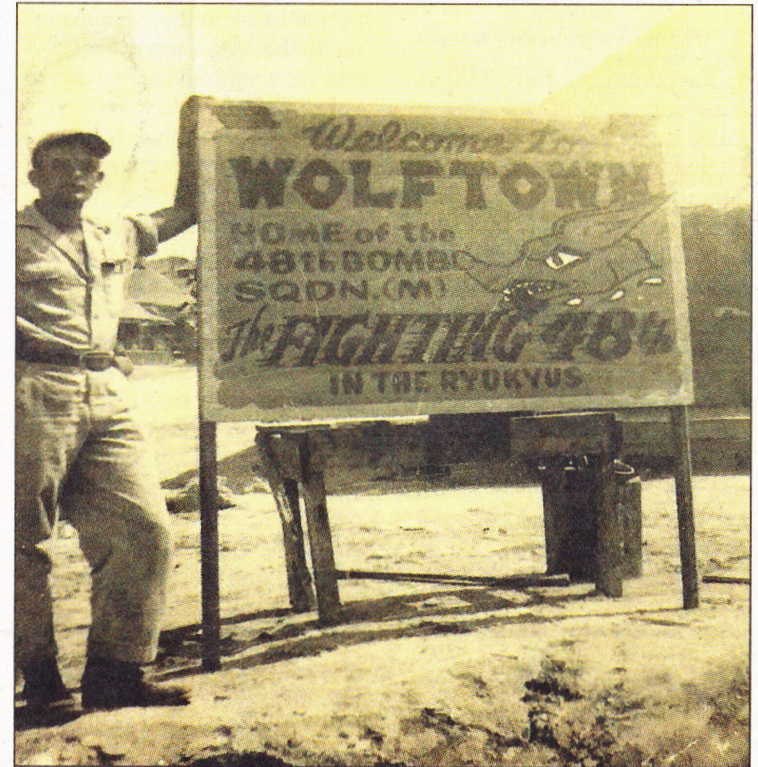


PHOTO BY PAUL PRADO PHOTOGRAPHY

Highland-trained B-25 mechanic Paul Hopson stands by the Wolf Pack banner, during his time of service in World War II, while in the Ryukyu Islands near Japan.

things to talk about," said Hopson.

His father made a record of the broadcast.

"I have that record somewhere of what was said on that program," said Hopson. Engaged to his fiancée Helen, Hopson was able to speak with his mother, father and Helen for about four to five minutes on "Hawaii Calls" radio show in Waikiki Beach.

What will happen in Asiatic Pacific Campaign for Paul Hopson?

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From Highland to the Pacific Theater and the B-25 bomber

A 94-year-old U.S. Army Air Corps sergeant vividly recalls his adventures in the U.S. military, as an airplane mechanic for the B-25 bomber in World War II.

Trained in Highland, Paul Hopson found himself immersed in the Asiatic Pacific Campaign. His journeys found him in a variety of tropical locales maintaining the integrity of one of the most fortified aircraft in the war.

The utility of the B-25 was unparalleled for its time. It was used in multitude of applications, such as bombing runs of various types, submarine patrol and strafing operations. The B-25 was also used as a gunship, according Hopson.

"The nose gunner was in the front of the plane," Hopson said. "There was a glass dome there. There was a tail gunner. Some of the planes had guns on the sides. It was a beaut'."

Yet, serving his country in faraway lands took its toll on a lonely heart.

"One of the stories about us is that I was working as a secretary for an old maid who was the director for secondary education for San Bernardino city schools," said Helen Perris, then Paul's fiancée.

"We were engaged, and he was gone. At the last minute, my boss asked me to go on a recruiting trip to hire teachers. We went on a train. I'd never



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been on a train, yet. So, at the last minute, I had to mail a letter to him.

"Well, I mailed it as were on the train. We were stopped. It was postmarked in New Mexico. So, he thought that I had run off with someone else," said Helen with a giggle. "No way!"

"Yeah, that was a shock when I saw the postmark of New Mexico on that letter," chuckled Hopson. "But then I opened the letter and read it, and she explained why it was mailed in New Mexico. The funny things that happen in your lifetime that you remember."

Hopson shared other stories of his time overseas during World War II. He spoke of how hurricanes would destroy their huts and other buildings on the base.

There was a Home Address Directory of All Overseas Personnel that was provided to all the soldiers who were assigned to the squadron from October 1943 to September 1945. On the cover of the directory is a sketch of a wolf patch, at the top of the page and B-25 bomber drawn in the middle.



PHOTOS BY PAUL PRADO PHOTOGRAPHY

World War II vet Paul Hopson can be seen third from the left, in the second row, of the Lefty's Wolfpack Squadron.

Hopson has kept that memento from his time in the military.

The bombers at the airbases mostly had names of women painted near the noses of the aircraft. A colorful illustration also accompanied the name. Hopson affectionately wrote his fiancée's name under the cockpit of the B-25 on the cover of the directory. He wrote, Miss Helen.

According to Hopson, when the Japanese began their surrender at the end of the war, the military used two airplanes painted white. They had green crosses painted on the sides. These planes were referred to as the Green Cross Bettys of

lejima.

"When they (the U.S. government) wanted the Japanese to surrender, it turned out that they flew in what they called a Betty Airplane," said Hopson. "It was a bomber. Officials from Japan landed in at a military base near Okinawa. It had to be a white airplane with green crosses on it, so that we'd know who it was, so that they wouldn't get shot down."

At the end of the Asiatic Pacific Campaign, the 41st Bombardment Group (M), medium, that was assigned to the 7th Air Force group. The group received a Presidential Unit Citation for their work in the Anti-



Helen Perris.

Ryukyus; China Offensive.

Hopson belonged to the 48th Squadron, "Lefty's Wolf Pack." The patch was that of an angry-faced slathering wolf, with a bomb behind it.

The three other squadrons that were listed on the Citation were, the 820th Squadron, the Alley Oops, the 47th Squadron, the Crow Flight, Glide Torpedo Squadron and the 396th Bomb Squadron. Each patch had a caricature of the squadron's name. The 396th Bomb Squadron had a cupid-type figure on a bomb.

Returning home to his beloved Helen in the Inland Empire, Sgt. Hopson wasted little time before he tied the knot to his betrothed, a woman that he proposed to at Christmas in 1942. The two love birds were wed on Dec. 2, 1945, less than one month after Hopson's honorable discharge in late November of 1945. Since then, Hopson and his wife have enjoyed being with each other for more than 70 years.

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submarine, American Theater: Air Offensive, Japan; Eastern Mandates; Western Pacific;