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about *Engineers*



I was in the Right Place at the Right Time



Master Sergeant (Ret) Vincent G. Leckey (center) is shown holding an autographed copy of an original World War II combat engineer recruiting poster, for which he was the main subject... "an ideal American soldier". AEA Director of Fort Leonard Wood Operations, Command Sergeant Major (Ret) Julius Nutter (left) and AEA Executive Director, Col (Ret) Jack O'Neill accept the poster on behalf of the association. Leckey is an earlier recipient of the AEA's second highest award, the Silver deFleury Medal. AEA photo.

Army Engineer Master Sergeant (Ret) Vincent G. Leckey, a native of Johnstown Pennsylvania and World War II combat veteran, was selected as "The Ideal American Soldier" in 1942. As a result, his image remains a centerpiece of Army Engineering today.

Early in World War II the Army produced various recruiting posters designed to powerfully depict the unique aspects of many of its branches. Called to the Pentagon from his unit at Fort Belvoir Virginia, MSG Leckey was selected to be used as the "model" combat engineer.

Recounting that day, he recently said, "I drove a jeep to the Pentagon from Fort Belvoir, but since the facility was still new, many of the connecting roads and parking areas we see today had yet to be constructed. So, I just headed cross country by jeep to the entranceway, and went inside to report for the photographic session." Leckey said he had been selected for this prestigious duty because of his having been chosen as the best "all around soldier" on Fort Belvoir. The honor was a result of numerous drills, tests and competitive interviews by superiors on the post.

The resulting full color 1942 poster produced using his likeness more than met expectations. Today, it is still in use in many formats; the most prominent being a large mural hanging in the Army Engineer School at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Following creation of the poster, he was sent overseas to the Pacific Theater where he remained for thirty-three months. Assigned as a demolitions specialist and later an intelligence sergeant in the 43rd Engineers and 18th Regimental Combat Team, he fought the Japanese on New Guinea. He remembered one specific wartime event with a smile. "One day" he said, "we were in bivouac, and the Japanese started bombing our location. We had all dug slit trenches for ourselves to be

used under such circumstances, but by the time I got to mine, it was already occupied by several other guys all huddled together. I yelled at them...that's my hole, you guys find your own!" He laughed again when remembering how the Japanese repeatedly bombed an old Dutch freighter that sat rusting in Oro Bay harbor. Japanese radio propaganda (Tokyo Rose) continually reported "another American ship sunk", whenever the old Dutch rust bucket was hit by attacking Japanese planes.

When he retired following a twenty-three year period of service as an Army engineer, he went to work in the Northern Virginia construction industry and helped build and later manage several facilities such as the USA Today and Gannett building in Rosslyn. He retired permanently in 1992.

When asked why the designers of the recruiting poster had him hold a sledge hammer along with an M-1 rifle, rather than giving him a pick or shovel...items more frequently used then by engineers...he said, "The sledge hammer was the only major tool they (the Pentagon staff) had in the old Pioneer Kit available, so it was that or nothing."

Master Sergeant Leckey, now 81, was recently visited and interviewed by several of the Army Engineer Association (AEA) staff at his Northern Virginia home where he lives with his wife and daughter's family. While there, he agreed to autograph two reproductions of the original World War II poster. Master Sergeant Leckey may have been "at the right place at the right time in 1942" as he told AEA Executive Director Jack O'Neill, but his legacy remains today as an inspiration to all combat engineers worldwide.

AEA



Top: An enlarged version of the original World War II combat engineer recruiting poster shown hanging in a main hallway area of the Army Engineer School at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. The poster signifies the spirit and determination displayed today by Army combat engineers as they perform numerous difficult and important missions worldwide, in the Global War on Terrorism. **Left: Master Sergeant Leckey shown signing a copy** of the original poster, at his home in Northern Virginia. He was recently visited and interviewed by staff members of the Army Engineer Association. AEA photo.