

A grandson's memories

James M. Kabella, 42, of Crockett is a truck driver and Army veteran. He doesn't remember a lot about his grandfather Johnny D. Kabella who was born and raised in Temple. The grandson is not sure when his grandfather was born but he was 56 years old when he died "sometimes in the 80's."

But the photograph albums handed down from his father Johnny E. Kabella of Georgetown tell a poignant story about his grandfather's service as a Navy Seabee during WWII.

The military played an important role in the lives of this family; the younger Kabella served 15 years in the Army and is partially disabled; his father was in the Coast Guard.

The following information can be found on the Internet. Using the elder Kabella's snapshots of places he was stationed and served in Hawaii, the Philippines, and Okinawa, Japan, this story of the Seabees emerges.

"The Seabees played a key role in the last big operation of the island war, the seizure of Okinawa. The main invasion forces landed on Okinawa's west coast Hagushi beaches on Easter Sunday, 1 April 1945.

Off the amphibious landing craft and over pontoons placed by the 130th Naval Construction Battalion went the 24th Army Corps and Third Amphibious Corps. Right beside them was the 58th, 71st and 145th Naval Construction Battalions.

A few days later, two additional Naval Construction Battalions, the 44th and 130th, landed. The fighting was heavy and prolonged, and organized resistance did not cease until 21 June 1945.

The Seabees' task on Okinawa was truly immense. On this agrarian island, whose physical facilities a fierce bombardment had all but destroyed, they built ocean ports, a grid of roads, bomber

and fighter fields, a seaplane base, quonset villages, tank farms, storage dumps, hospitals, and ship repair facilities.

Nearly 55,000 Seabees organized into four brigades participated in Okinawa construction operations. By the beginning of August 1945,

sufficient facilities, supplies, and manpower were at hand to mount an invasion of the Japanese home islands.

While the Allied forces in the Philippines and on Okinawa were readying themselves for the final battles that would get them to Tokyo and complete the roads to victory, decisive events were taking place elsewhere, on the island of Tinian in the Marianas.

During the summer of 1945, the USS Indianapolis arrived at Tinian from the Naval Weapons Center at Port Chicago, California. Seabees of the Sixth Naval Construction Brigade helped with the unloading of the components of a newly-developed weapon.

The Seabees then stored the elements in a shed built by them, and organized a detachment to guard the shed and its mysterious contents. Scientists assembled the weapon in the shed with several Seabees assisting as handymen.

On Aug. 6, 1945 the new weapon was loaded into a U.S. Army Air Force B-29 bomber, named the Enola Gay. A short time later, the Enola Gay took

off with its secret load from Tinian's North Field, which the Seabees had built, and started on her mission to Japan. Later in the day, the mission ended with the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

This historic event sealed the fate of Japan. Realizing that the war was lost, the Japanese government negotiated a cease-fire that went into effect on Aug. 16. On Sept. 2, 1945 Japan formally surrendered, and Allied forces occupied the Japanese home islands in a peaceful manner.

Thus, the Pacific roads to victory reached their final destination.