



WALTON

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Walter Samuel Carnley, Sr.

Memories of a WWII Veteran on the 75th Anniversary of D-Day

By Sam Carnley

Among the sons of Walton County, Florida who answered our country's call to arms against the Germans in WWII was my father, Walter Samuel Carnley, Sr. He grew up in the rural community of Children's Home where he was born 22 December 1919. In 1923 when he was four, his father died, and in 1936 when he was sixteen his mother passed away. As the baby of the family, he was fortunate to have seven siblings who were willing to care for him until he could fend for himself. Coming from a poor family who failed to recognize the value of education, he only attended school until about grade 3.

About 1940, he met Eunice Evelyn Kirkland, the oldest child of Walton County share cropper Walter Holmes and Addie Elizabeth Kirkland. Unlike her future husband, Eunice loved school and received her diploma from Paxton as salutatorian of its third graduating class of 1941. Except for education, what she had most in common with Walter was a poor family.

As seasonal migrant workers in the citrus industry, Walter and his brothers and Carnley cousins traveled to Polk County in central Florida where they picked fruit in the groves and worked in packing houses during the winter season. When the work ran out they usually returned home to Walton County until the next year's citrus work began.

While back home in the summer of 1941 he registered for the draft on July 1st. He was then twenty-one years old and gave as his address Rt. 2, Laurel Hill, Florida.

Laurel Hill is in Okaloosa County, but is the nearest post office to where the Carnleys lived in Walton County. He listed his occupation as "Laborer, Tung Oil," and his employer name and address as Mr. Earl Wallace, Rt. 2, Laurel Hill, Florida. His place of employment was listed as "Near Children's Home, Walton, Florida."

The tung oil work he did was in the thousands of acres of tung nut orchards in and around Children's Home. A native plant of China, the tung nut, which produced oil used in paint and many other products was an important crop in the late 1930s and 40s. In 1941 before WWII broke out, tung oil was declared a strategic item for military purposes. The orchards were profitably cultivated until the late 1950s and 60s when competing sources of oil and weather related losses in other states undercut demand for tung oil, significantly reducing its profitability and leading producers to abandon it. While it remained profitable, it was an alternative to general farming as a source of employment in the community for many years.

Kate Carnley Palmer, Walter's sister, lived in the community. Her husband was James (Jim) Palmer, aka Parmer. Walter lived with them from time to time.
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time and under "Name And Address of Person Who Will Always Know Your Address," on his Registration Card, he entered her name and address. On the second half of the registration card, he listed his physical description as white, hazel eyes, black hair and dark complexion, with a small scar on the left side of his forehead. He filed the registration with the Local Board, Walton County, 22 Baldwin Avenue, DeFuniak Springs, Florida.

By December of 1941 he was back in Polk County doing citrus work and living with the family of his cousin, Starlin Carnley in Ft. Meade. Having consented to marry Walter after graduation, Eunice took a Grey Hound bus to Ft. Mead in early December where the two met. They went before county judge C. M. Wiggins at the courthouse in Bartow who married them on Thursday the 4th. Walter was twenty-two, and although Eunice was only nineteen, she lied that she was twenty-one, to which Henry Carnley, Walter's brother, and Starlin Carnley, attested as witnesses.



Walter Samuel Carnley, Sr.
(1919-1960)

Like most newlyweds, they no doubt looked forward to a long happy life together. But events of the following Sunday abruptly rendered uncertain all plans for the future. That was the day Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, opening the first act of World War Two. Act two came on the eleventh when Germany followed Japan with its declaration of war against the U. S., to which the U. S. responded in kind to both countries.

Preparing for war, the U. S. government began combing through draft registration cards to fill the military ranks with the millions of troops needed to meet the coming challenge, against which no one at the time could predict a favorable outcome. In a little over a month after the declaration of war, Walter's draft number came up, leading to his induction into the Army on 16 January 1942 at Camp Blanding, near Jacksonville.

Camp Blanding, named after Lieutenant General Albert H. Blanding who commanded the 2nd Florida Infantry during the Mexican Border Service in 1916 and 1917, did not exist before 1940. Its construction began that year and initially served as a training facility for southern troops deploying overseas. As the war progressed it became a multifunction installation which served as an infantry replacement training site, an induction post for troops in the southern U. S., a German POW camp and an internment camp for several hundred American immigrant residents of Japanese, German and Italian descent, similar to the infamous Japanese internment camps of California.

It is unknown whether Walter went through boot camp at Blanding, or someplace else. His permanent assignment however was with the Army's 8th Field Hospital which was not activated until 25 January 1943, over a year after his induction. The 8th was formed by a core medical personnel group originally with the 25th Field Hospital from Tilton General Hospital, Fort Dix, New Jersey. Possibly, Walter's initial assignment was with the 25th and he was later transferred to the 8th after it was activated at Camp Butner, near Raleigh, North Carolina. The unit's organizational structure consisted of a Headquarters component and three operating components - Detachments A, B and C. Which detachment he was in remains undetermined absent its disclosure of record during his 33 months with the Unit. One fact that becomes apparent though is that January proved to be a month of significant events in his life. In addition to being the month he was drafted, and the month the unit to which he was assigned was activated, it was also the month in 1943 that I was born. My

mother had a photo of him in his uniform taken at the home of my Kirkland Grandparents in New Harmony where I was born with January 10, 1943 penciled on its back, indicating to me that he was present at my birth.

After welcoming me to the world, he returned to Camp Butner in time to participate in the training classes and physical conditioning programs underway to prepare the personnel for overseas deployment, the first destination of which was the United Kingdom. He was trained as a Medical Aidman, a subcategory of Medical Corpsman, MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) 657, with the rank of PFC (Private First Class). His assigned duties were as follows:

Administers first-aid treatment to sick, injured, or wounded. Treats minor injuries and wounds, such as cuts, blisters, contusions, and lacerations, applying medicants and bandaging wounds. Makes and applies arm or leg splints, treats patients for shock, and stops bleeding by approved methods. Lifts patient onto litter, and carries to aid station, ambulance loading point, or collecting station. Performs routine duties in the care and treatment of patients, taking temperature and pulse readings, bathing and feeding patients, and preparing patients for operations. Makes beds, cleans and washes equipment and floors, and assists in sterilizing instruments. Performs related duties as directed.

Training of military medical personnel included familiarization with all official and appropriate means of identifying themselves, their vehicles, aid stations and field hospitals, etc. as non-combatant, non-belligerents to avoid becoming enemy targets on the battle field as well as behind the lines. The most familiar identification symbol was the red cross on a white field that adorned helmets, armbands, vehicles, air craft, buildings and tent roofs. Medical personnel also wore unique uniform insignia indicating their status and carried special ID cards for the same purpose. All countries involved in WWII signed the Geneva Conventions in recognition of the need to protect from harm the medical personnel of their own and opposing forces. Generally, soldiers respected the neutrality of the other side's medical personnel in battle and tried to avoid harming them. Occasionally however, failure to distinguish them from combat soldiers led to their capture, injury or death. To maintain and demonstrate their protected status, medical personnel were prohibited from carrying or using arms on or off the battle field. The crucial importance of proper identification and markings to protect themselves under hazardous circumstances was no doubt strongly impressed on the personnel by Commanders of the 8th Field Hospital in the final days of their preparation for overseas deployment.

With its organization and training completed, the 8th sailed from the continental U. S. on 5 September 1943 with a contingent of 20 Officers, 18 Nurses (all female) and 190 enlisted men. Neither the port of embarkation nor the name of the ship was identified. Their destination was EAMETCO (European African Middle Eastern Theater Campaign Operations), Swansea, South Wales, U. K., where they arrived on the 16th.

Following disembarkation, they moved to a hospital in Hermitage near Newbury located about 135 miles east of Swansea. Nine days later, they moved south to a hospital in Ferndown, Eastmoor, near Ringwood (north of Bournemouth on the southern coast of England), 60 miles south-west of Newbury. Subsequent movements included a hospital near the Village of Everleigh near Salisbury Plain (north-east of the site of Stonehenge), and then to Truro, in Cornwall where they set up a tent hospital on a muddy cricket field. There, they built roads, laid steel matting to subdue the mud, installed electric lighting and fixtures and put up a communal shower tent.

Their role at that location was to serve as a Station Hospital for U. S. military units being marshaled in the area for the D-Day invasion. The 8th received its first patients in mid-December 1943, most of which initially were medical cases because that was prior to D-Day, and there were as yet no war casualties. Patients requiring more extensive hospitalization or treatment not available at the 8th Field Hospital were forwarded to better equipped and staffed fixed hospitals. The 314th Station Hospital, another tent housed facility, was established near Truro on 21 April 1944 and all patients at the 8th Field Hospital were transferred to it. The 8th then terminated operations at Truro having processed over two thousand patients none of whom died in its care.

Early in the last 10 days of April, Detachment A and the unit headquarters group moved to Plymouth, Detachment B went to Fort Tregantle on the coast south of Plymouth, and Detachment C went to Falmouth on the coast south of Truro. On March 10, all components of the 8th converged at Penryn near Falmouth where they remained until the evening of 20 June. At 10 pm that night, they boarded a troop train which transported them to Plymouth where they remained until the morning of 26 June. Shortly before noon, they loaded into trucks and rode to the nearby port of Plymouth, crowded into landing craft which shuttled them out to the HMS Empire Gauntlet, and clambered up rope netting to the ship's deck. Setting out across the English Channel, the ship delivered them safely to Utah Beach on the Normandy D-Day invasion site twenty-four hours later. Again boarding landing craft, they were shuttled to a pier at a place designated as Sugar Red Beach.

As they made their way from the pier onto French soil, beach control personnel waved them through the steady bustle and din of traffic coming and going in the work of providing behind the lines support to the troops carrying the battle to the Germans. They were directed to a site about five miles inland where they would await further orders. Trucks were secured for transporting the nurses to the site but the 190 enlisted men were ordered to hike the distance with fully loaded backpacks. Shortly after reaching the designated site trucks arrived to transport them to an encampment near the town of Ste-Mère-Eglise. Spending the night there, they moved again the next day, 28 June, to Pont L'Abbé, only three miles from the front on soil captured by Allied forces just two days earlier. War debris still littered the area and enemy artillery remained within range of the camp as they demonstrated that night by lobbing shells close enough to incentivize personnel of the 8th Field Hospital to experience life in a fox hole.

The close call of that night took a few days to shake off and for their vehicles and equipment to catch up with them, after which Detachment B traveled north of Ste-Mère-Eglise to a point near Montebourg where they set up a 100 bed tent hospital on the highway between the two towns. While this detachment made itself useful, personnel of the other two enjoyed five days of relaxation before receiving orders to move further north to Quergueville near Cherbourg to raise a 200-bed hospital. Due to circumstances beyond their control however, work on the new hospital was put on hold. While remaining in the area awaiting further orders, they busied themselves treating local victims of various accidents, land mines and sick French civilians. On 13 July, the two detachments returned to Montebourg and pitched camp about a mile from Detachment B.

On 19 July, Detachment C was ordered to Biniville, about two miles south-west of Montebourg, and an equal distance north-west of Ste-Mère-Eglise to assist the 93d Medical Gas Treatment Battalion in erecting an air evacuation holding facility for patients awaiting evacuation from a nearby airfield, primarily to hospitals in England.

While Detachment C busied themselves with the air evacuation facility at Biniville and Detachment B continued its duties at the Montebourg station hospital, Detachment A, although bivouacked near Montebourg, was idle in stand-by mode and filled their time with baseball games and other leisurely pursuits. But as Allied Forces engaged Germans troops retreating across France toward Paris, the

resulting rise in casualties routed to Biniville threatened to push its patient load beyond capacity. To provide relief, Detachment A was ordered to that location on 2 August to expand the facilities as needed to adequately house the patients. On 11 August, Headquarters of the 8th also moved to Biniville, apparently having remained in Pont L'Abbé while the three detachments were being deployed to varying locations.

As the battle front moved further afield, the patient load at Biniville dropped considerably and by 24 August had declined to the point of eliminating the need for the hospital, at which time it was closed. Following a brief period of inactivity from the date of closing down at Biniville until 2 September 1944 during which personnel of the 8th indulged themselves in various recreational activities; Detachment C was deployed on 3 September to Melun, south of Paris on the Seine River, to erect a station hospital for the 3rd Replacement Depot located there.

On 4 September, Detachment B, having closed the hospital at Montebourg, moved on to Le Bourget, also near Paris, to assist the 93d Medical Gas Treatment Battalion in setting up an air holding evacuation unit near an airfield there similar to that previously established at Biniville. The muddy conditions at that site however, were worse than they had been at Truro, proving so overwhelming for existing personnel to manage alone, that Detachment A was sent to help them out. The amount of surgery needed there also exceeded any experienced in the past, and meeting the need required the efforts of all available surgical teams working in marathon shifts.

Although urgently needed at Le Bourget, the 93d Medical Gas Treatment Battalion was pulled out on 21 September and moved ahead to a new site. Their departure could not have come at a worse time for Le Bourget, leaving it with an ill afforded vacancy. As events transpired however, Detachment C's work at Melun had declined in importance to that at Le Bourget, presenting an opportune time for it to fill the vacancy left by the departure of the 93d MGTB. On making the move, the 8th Field Hospital found all its components under the same umbrella for the first time in many months, with full operating control of the evacuation center.

Fifteen days after beginning operations at the evacuation center, the 8th transitioned from tents and mire to a fixed facility. A large vacant school house, it was the unit's first occupancy of a permanent structure since arriving in Europe. By 6 October, the building had been cleaned and readied for its first patients. Although the new facility required less upkeep than the tents had, the work force available from the unit's permanent staff was insufficient for its needs. In order to bring its staff to an adequate level, personnel were borrowed from the Motor Ambulance and Medical Sanitary companies, both of which were attached to the 8th. Several hundred French civilians helped out, as did a large number of German POWs. The size of the work force at that point was adequate to handle the more than 1,000 patients a day passing through the facility for immediate care and evacuation.

The situation changed however, when the Germans counter attacked in the Ardennes on 16 December 1944, bringing a sharp rise in Allied casualty admissions to the hospital. At its peak, the hospital was evacuating 1,600 patients daily and holding and treating another 600 a day in its wards, for a total of 2,400 a day. The heightened activity level kept unit personnel under severe stress until 21 March 1945 when the 180th Station Hospital moved in to relieve the 8th.

Except for a few pieces of equipment left behind for the 180th, the 8th packed up in preparation for their next move, which was to Germany. But apprehensions regarding their mode of transportation diminished any relief the group might have felt at the prospect of moving. They were to travel by French box cars known as "40 and 8"s, denoting their capacity for 40 men or 8 horses. The reason for concern was that the Germans had used them and they were sometimes strafed and bombed by Allied

aircraft. Knowing this, personnel of the 8th felt uneasy at the possibility of a mistaken attack by Allied pilots.

They made the trip without incident however and in relative comfort. Leaving Paris on 22 March 1945, they arrived in Maastricht, Holland on the 24th and went into bivouac until 12 April, getting their first R and R since leaving Plymouth. During that time they made needed repairs and replacements to their equipment, at least by personnel who were fit. Many were not and needed hospitalization for a variety of ailments, which included no doubt, both physical and mental stress complaints.

Ending their respite at Maastricht on the 12th, they traveled to Coesfeld, near Munster, Germany, arriving there within the day. The unit less one detachment remained there at a large German hospital while the departing detachment traveled to another installation at Maria Veen (name apparently incorrect as it could not be found on Germany maps), in North Rhine-Westphalia. The patients there were Allied POWs of the Germans who had used them for salve labor, gave them no health or medical care and had almost starved them to death. The demands on unit personnel in providing the care these patients needed was challenging but they mostly succeeded in returning them to health, or sending them to where they received the care that the 8th lacked the resources to provide. The patients at Maria Veen were eventually transferred to the Coesfeld hospital.

The 8th finished its work in Germany on 18 June 1945. On the 19th, the British took over medical care of patients in that part of Germany and the 8th took a five and a half day ride on the "40 and 8"s back to France arriving near Marseille in the south of the country after midnight on the 26th. After spending the rest of the night unloading 16 boxcars of their equipment, they hauled it and themselves to Arles where they would set up their next tent hospital.



PFC Walter S. Carnley, Photo taken early July 1945 in Biarritz, France. The building behind him still stands as of 2019. Its address is Boulevard du General de Gaulle, Biarritz, Nouvelle-Aquataine. The building today looks exactly as it did in this photo, 75 years ago.

To see the building click on this link: <https://www.google.com/maps/@43.4836112,-1.5618881,3a,60y,72.17h,80.16t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sF2Z4LwgfjkjPFRSiiHgp0YA!2e0!7i13312!8i6656?hl=en>

On 30 June, Headquarters and one detachment, whether A, B or C was not specified, were ordered to Biarritz to provide medical services to the Army University Center #2 establishment located there. The detachment was the one that Walter belonged to because in the background of the photo of him on the left is a scene from Biarritz, and as the detachment was there in early July 1945, that is the timeframe in which the photo was taken.

Within the next two months, the 8th Field Hospital completed its mission in Europe and returned home to the U. S. Walter departed Europe on 3 September 1945 and arrived back at Camp Blanding where he was discharged on the 19th. A few days later he arrived at

my grandparent's home in New Harmony where Mom and I were still staying and although I was only 2 years and not quite 10 months old at the time, I still remember how he looked. I was standing on the front porch and saw a strange man in a uniform open the gate and walk into the yard. Carrying a duffel bag on his shoulder, he came up the steps onto the porch and set the bag on the floor. He opened the bag and reaching inside, pulled out a Hershey Bar and handed it to me. I can still see in my mind's eye the bright silver letters emblazoned on the brown wrapper. Later in life I saw American soldiers in movie news reels handing out the same candy to children in European countries as a token of friendship. I have often wondered over the years since if giving me the candy had the same meaning to him.

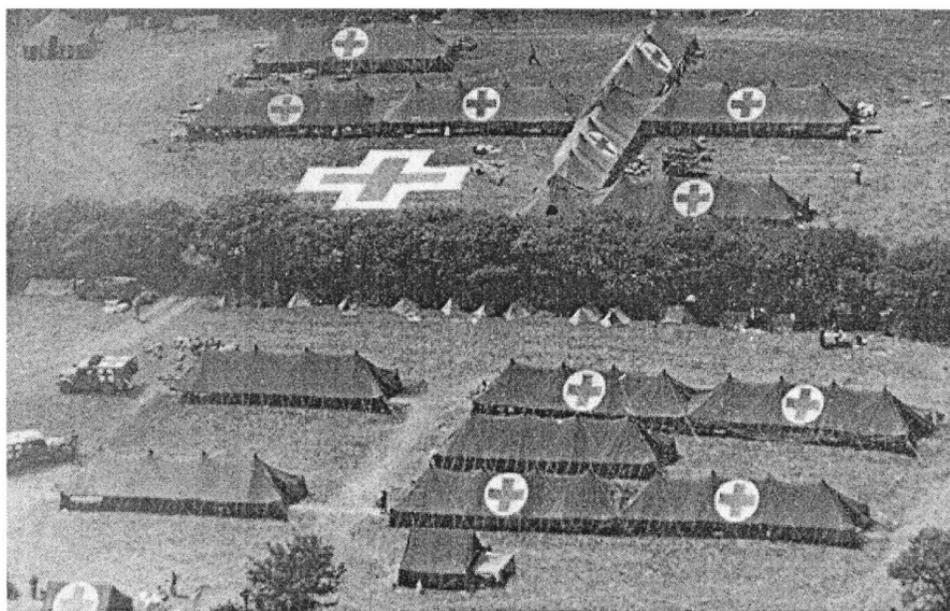
It never occurred to me to ask him and fifteen years later he was dead. He turned 40 on 22 December 1959 and suffered a fatal attack a month and a week later on January 27, 1960. That was the final significant event happening to him in the month of January.

Editorial Note

Sources of information in this article include my personal memories, Walter's draft registration cards, military enlistment and discharge records, family photos and Carnley Family history records. I also consulted online maps of the countries and places within them visited by the 8th Field Hospital as identified in its history. The history is by Tony Honeyman, a British Historian, and was downloaded from the WW 2 US Medical Research Center website located at this link: <https://www.med-dept.com/unit-histories/8th-field-hospital/>

I transcribed information from the 8th Field Hospital history and made editorial change as I thought appropriate for the article. I make no representation whatever that material from the history is my original work and credit it entirely to Tony Honeyman. The history appears to be a public domain document as I found no evidence of copyrighting.

Sam Carnley
6/10/2019



Aerial view of an unidentified Field Hospital set up in the Cotentin Peninsula, France. Geneva Convention ground marker and air recognition markers are highly conspicuous.



Walter S.
Carnley

Walter S. Carnley Sr.
A Detachment of the 8th Field Hospital. Whether A, B or C is unknown. Place: Probably Camp Butner, North Carolina, Date: Between 1943 and 1945.

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Walton County Heritage Association

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