

# WORLD WAR II *Remembered* LEADERS, BATTLES & HEROES



## World War II Participants and Contemporaries

Dr. Maxwell Glen Berry  
Mission, Kansas  
U.S. Army, Pacific Theater

*World War II Remembered* is a multi-year exhibition currently on display at the Eisenhower Presidential Museum. The article that follows is a special feature of this exhibition, the sixth in a series created to honor and educate about the generation that won World War II. Featured are the stories of real people from the “World War II Participants and Contemporaries” collection, held and preserved in the archives of the Eisenhower Presidential Library.

*“Every adult American alive that day remembers where he heard the news of Pearl Harbor. I heard it on my way home from Sunday rounds at St. Luke’s Hospital in Kansas City. The Japanese had destroyed most of our fleet by a sneak attack without declaring war. Their success in such a large mission, together with our demonstrated ineptitude, made invasion of our mainland and even our total military defeat terrifying possibilities.*

*Josephine and I sat up long after our two kids were in bed that night. We agreed that I had no other choice than to do whatever I could to defend our country and our family.”*

Maxwell Berry  
Lieutenant Colonel Medical Corps A.U.S.  
*One Man’s WW II*

deserved adult life, epic global events intervened and, once again, he was swept along with them.

Maxwell Glen Berry was born on a Monday, April 5, 1909, in Virgil, Kansas, a tiny town nestled in the Flint Hills, a vestige of the once-magnificent tall-grass prairies. “Max,” the second of six children, was the oldest son of William Glenny and Mamie Dehlinger Berry. Along with his parents, two formative influences in his life were his paternal grandfather, Alexander, himself a physician in early Kansas, and his grandmother, Mary. She was a powerful presence, encouraging lofty life’s goals for her grandchildren. One can only imagine her profound sense of accomplishment on June 12, 1933, as she proudly watched three grandsons awarded diplomas from the University of Kansas.

Over the next four years, Max engaged his resourcefulness, determination, and solid work ethic in order to complete the rest of his medical training. Back home, his father had “lost a small fortune” trading cattle, and jobs were virtually nonexistent. In the agricultural heartland of the country, hard times were further exacerbated by the Dust Bowl. Grabbing up any job he could find, Max earned tuition money in the summers. Following an internship at Tulane University, he completed his medical residency at the University of Kansas. Dreams of a bright future, now so near, were

**I**n the spring of 1937, Maxwell G. Berry, M.D. was a newly minted physician, and the odds for succeeding had not been in his favor. At a time when graduating college was rare enough, he had managed to become a doctor—all against a backdrop of the Great Depression. When the stock market crashed on October 29, 1929, Max was just 20 years old. At the time, he could not have known that circumstances, far beyond his control, would complicate his life for nearly two decades. For, just as he was settling—very happily!—into a well-

turned upside down on December 7, 1941. A married father of two with a fledgling medical practice, Max did not have to think about it twice—he would do what he could to help win the war.

On May 10, 1942, Captain Maxwell G. Berry, M.D., entered active duty in the U.S. Army; he would serve until November 14, 1945, by then promoted to lieutenant colonel. From Max's military separation papers, dated March 1, 1946, we know his eyes and hair were brown, and that he stood 5'9," weighing a slender 165 pounds. Overseas duty began in August of 1943 and, at the time of his departure for home in October 1945, he was serving in the southern Philippines. As Chief of Medical Service, Max served in the 117<sup>th</sup> Station Hospital and the

*We have about double our full quota of patients, and they are sick . . . it's a pleasure to take care of these young men who don't ask favors . . . ."*

Letter to Josephine  
November 21, 1943

served as an invaluable consultant in tropical medicine with the 29<sup>th</sup> Hospital Center in Leyte, Philippines.

While he was overseas, Max and his wife Josephine wrote one another daily. From these letters, addressed "Dearest Josephine" (later shortened to "DJ"), emerges a colorful account of life for the doctors who served in the Pacific. Max and Josephine were clearly a well-matched and affectionate couple who had cherished a life together prior to the war. On February 21, 1945, Max poured out his heart, "Our anniversary. Here's how I feel now. In the last 19 months, I have missed more happiness than most men have in a lifetime . . . ." It is with this collection of letters in hand that Max eventually wrote *WW II: One Man's War* in 1948, a captivating memoir of *his* World War II.

Not only did the first doctors to the Pacific Theater live in tents with dirt floors and sleep on cots—they were expected to construct their own hospitals! As housing conditions improved, Max marveled at tin roofs, screened-in walls, wooden floors, and electric lights. Conditions were particularly challenging for the doctors, nurses, and patients because of the oppressive heat, humidity, and a veritable parade of sometimes self-

important, high-ranking visitors. All this, in combination with frequent downpours, knee-deep mud, and impenetrable, mountainous terrain,

*"It's so hot outside, sweat comes out like water out of a squeezed wet sponge."*

Letter to Josephine  
April 4, 1944

complicated the difficulty of every task. The most serious problem by far, however, was the ever-present threat of the ubiquitous tropical diseases. Malaria was endemic and particularly devastating. In 1942 alone, it affected one of every three soldiers. Max's dictum was absolute: hospital facilities must be kept insect-free, and everyone was administered a daily dose of Atabrine, an anti-malarial drug. Noncompliance was deadly.

Doctors in the South Pacific made do with second-rate medical supplies and chronic shortages of life-saving medicines—generally castoffs from the European Theater. Max agonized over one especially tragic case—a young soldier afflicted with gas gangrene. Because all available antibiotics had been routed to the European Theater to counter a gonorrhea epidemic, Max had to break the devastating news to the young man that there was no choice but to amputate both his arms.

Arriving home in November 1945, Max rejoiced, "home was as near Heaven as I ever hope to be." Belatedly, and after much administrative wrangling, he received a Bronze Star for "meritorious achievement in Leyte, Philippines." The war now over, Max, age 36, had to start his medical practice all over again. Nonetheless, many decades later, he must have looked back and marveled that he had made it! Despite a contagion of events that seemed ever determined to thwart his dreams and dash his hard work, he had prevailed. Following the war, Max practiced internal medicine for more than 50 years, rising to prestigious leadership and teaching positions at both the University of Kansas Medical School and the University of Missouri at Kansas City's Medical School. Max and Josephine's family would eventually expand to four children: William, Jane, John, and Barbara. Dr. Maxwell Glen Berry, World War II veteran, died on August 18, 2004, at the age of 95. He is exemplary of the generation that, having survived the Great Depression, would face down—and defeat!—the greatest threat to liberty in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.