

Bernell LaVar Bateman

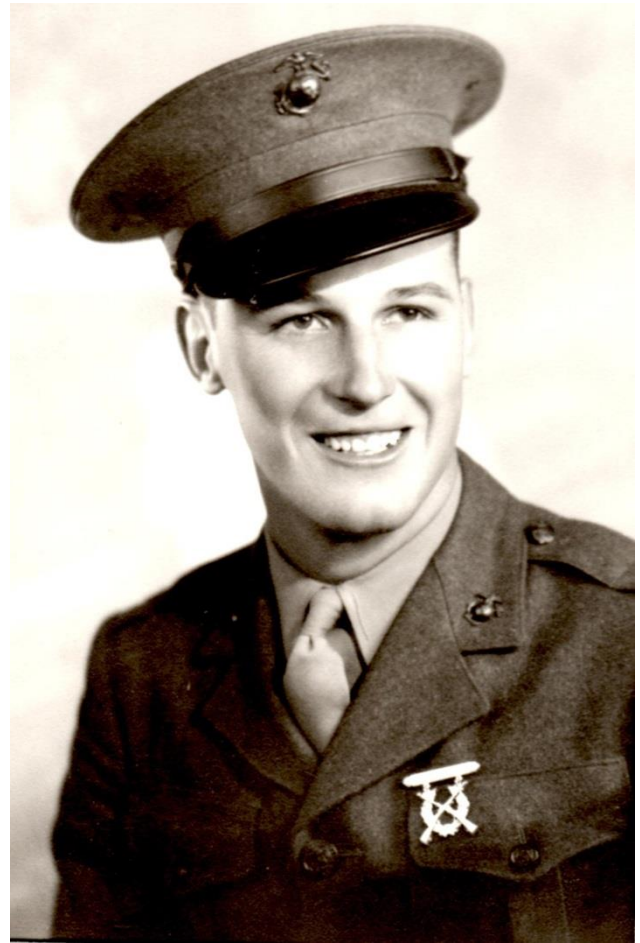
From his autobiography 2007

I was born to David Bernell Bateman and Hazel Charlotte Peck on February 8, 1921 in my grandfather Peck's home in Lehi. My siblings were LaVee, Ralph, Kenneth, and Don. I graduated school at Lehi High and then attended two years at Utah State Agriculture College (now Utah State University in Logan). When I was in college, some of us roommates were playing cards one morning. One of our group was a Japanese fellow. Suddenly, it came on the radio that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. This was December 1941. I felt so bad for my Japanese friend. He just went sick. He left school soon after this.

I received a mission call in December 1941 to the Southern States Mission, which included Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. As soon as I returned home from my mission, I reported to the draft board, and it was only a few weeks until I was called up. Over two hundred of us gathered at Fort Douglas, and the officer said they needed nine volunteers for the Marine Corp. Not one person volunteered. The officer went into another room. When he came out he said, "These nine men just volunteered for the Marine Corp." Well, I was the first name called.

About two weeks later, we were on a train headed for San Diego, California, where we were to have our boot camp. The first day, after we were assigned to a unit, we all lined up at the barber shop. Boy, what a laugh as each went in with a beautiful head of hair and came out completely sheared. I think that was the last good laugh we had for many weeks as we went through boot camp. After we completed boot camp, we were transferred to Camp Pendleton near Oceanside, California, where we received advanced training. I received a five-dollar a month pay increase for achieving a sharp shooter rating and was voted by our unit as the outstanding recruit.

As soon as we completed our training there, we were ready to be deployed somewhere overseas. First, we were placed on buses and taken into Los Angeles, where we were told we had liberty for the day. We were to return to the bus by 10:00 pm for return to camp. I was one of the first groups to come back, and I sat next to a Marine, whom I was told was L. Tom Perry. As we sat there, a Marine, who had been drinking, got on and began walking back and forth throughout the bus and making a nuisance of himself. I finally told him to sit down. He immediately socked me to the side of my head: so I jumped up and hit him a few times. Other Marines put him in the seat behind me, but he came to and hit me two different times when I wasn't looking. I responded for the third time, and the others wanted the driver to kick him off the bus. He responded that he couldn't do that because we were scheduled to ship out in the next few days. I



didn't think he would bother me again as we headed back to camp. In fact I became quite worried about his condition, as he never made a sound. Then I noticed that my hand was swelling up. I went to sick bay the next morning, and they found I had broken my hand. They kept me there for one week, and my buddies shipped out while I was there. I was actually disappointed, but I later learned they were shipped straight to Iwo Jima, and a good number of them were killed there. In fact, I learned after the war ended that my good friend Gene Gibbs had been shot through the neck and shoulder and was shipped back to a hospital in San Diego (He recovered after a long hospital stay). That fight I was in on the bus probably saved my life.

I went through some additional training and shipped out with the next group to the island of Guam in the Mariana Islands. There I was transferred to an artillery unit. While there, I came down with Malaria Fever and was never so sick in my life. I was placed in a field hospital that consisted of a few tents. If you wanted anything to eat, you had to get out of bed and stand in the chow line and wash your own mess kits. A number of times as I was about to get to the front of the line, I was so sick I had to return to the tent. Don Devey, a friend from Alpine, Utah brought me fruits and other items at night, or I may never have survived.

While on Guam, we trained for the invasion of Japan. We were out in the field firing our artillery when word came that the United States had dropped a large bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. This was August 6, 1945. Three days later, they dropped one on Nagasaki. The feeling was that the war would soon be over, which turned out to be true. We were all happy and anxious to go home, but I lacked a few point of coming home with the first ships. Instead, I was sent with a small detachment of Marines to Peking, China where we were to guard the American Embassy and a relay station west of Peking. We docked in Trentsin, boarded a train, and proceeded toward Peking. Man, what a ride! The first day, the train jumped the track, and it took them three days to right it. We had come from the South Pacific, where it was warm, into North China in the winter season, without winter clothing. We actually tore up the wooden benches and made small fires in the train to keep warm. We were glad to finally arrive in Peking.

Peking is one of the most beautiful cities in China. The Walled City still houses some of the richest treasures of Chinese civilization. There are many famous temples, the Forbidden City, and the Imperial Palace. We were able to visit most of these famous places and to see part of the Great Wall of China.

One experience I remember very well. It was Christmas time and I was wishing I could be home. I certainly didn't have the Christmas spirit. We woke up Christmas morning and it was snowing quite heavily. At noon (chow time) as we gathered in the mess hall, we found they had prepared us a special Christmas dinner which we enjoyed. We had to wash our trays and utensils outside in three garbage-type cans. Two were filled with hot water and the first one was for food left on our trays. It was still snowing and blowing as I came out and approached the first can. I cleaned my tray of my leftovers and noticed four or five young children behind the shrubs twenty or more yards away. As I finished washing my tray, these kids rushed up with tin cans and scooped up what they could out of the garbage can and rushed away as if they were stealing or afraid. I remember thinking, "Why couldn't we have taken them in and treated them to some food?"

In the afternoon my buddy, Skancky, and I were permitted to go into the main part of Peking. After we left the compound, we got into two rickshaws and rode toward the main part of the city. We were anticipating going to the most popular restaurant in town that was known for its famous Peking duck. We got off the rickshaws and started walking down the street. It didn't seem like Christmas and we certainly wished we could be home. A small boy approached us. He looked to be about eight or nine years old. He was dressed in very light clothing and his bare stomach protruded out of his shirt. He addressed us, "Com a shaw Marine com a shaw." He was begging for food. We took him by the hand and walked to the restaurant. As we walked inside, we noticed all the people looking at us. We all sat down and managed to give our orders to the waitress. We told her to give the boy anything he wanted. We wondered what he had ordered. The waitress set a large, covered plate in front of the boy. He readily removed the cover and there was a large dish of just plain rice. I will always remember the special feeling that came over me as we watched that small boy eat rice. That was a Christmas that I will always remember.

One of our assignments in Peking was to guard a radar relay station about twenty miles west of Peking. A small detachment would go out for a week and then return back. I only went two or three times, but I remember seeing a dead body or two lying alongside the road both coming and going. I was made supply sergeant, so I spent most of my time in our compound. It wasn't bad duty there, but after ten months I was anxious to go home.

Sailing home, we encountered a severe storm, but I was surprised I didn't get seasick. It was such a great feeling to arrive back in San Diego and then home.

After I returned home I was introduced to Ida Lornell Hansen who was teaching at Lehi High School. After a short courtship, I married her on June 18, 1947 in the Logan Temple. I continued to work on the family chicken ranch producing eggs and working the dry farm in Lehi. We are the parents of five beautiful daughters who we love more than anything in the world; Carol, Colleen, Barbara, Connie, and Janet.