

Mays Walter Anderson

1921 to 1994

EARLY YEARS



Mays Walter Anderson was a native of the state of Utah. He was born on January 14, 1921, in Mapleton, Utah. His parents were Walter Anderson and Kathryn Olivia Hopla, both Utah natives. Mays grew up in Mapleton and then nearby Springville, Utah, graduating from Springville High School in 1938.

MILITARY LIFE

On March 3, 1941, Mays Anderson enlisted in the United States Army by joining the 115th Company, either Ordnance or Engineers, of the Utah National Guard. The National Guard had already been inducted into federal



115th Company of the Utah National Guard

service. Mays would have enlisted as a private and gone through basic training and infantry training. Ultimately, he was assigned to the 750th Tank Battalion, an element of the 1st Army.

The 750th Tank Battalion was a specialized unit that could be attached or withdrawn from any division as needed. The unit was activated January 1, 1943, at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Officers and troops were transferred in from the 7th Tank Group and the 8th Armored Division. Mays was likely serving in one of those units at the time. On September 16, 1944, the battalion sailed from Boston to Omaha beachhead, arriving on September 25. The battalion waited in Valognes, France, for tank and equipment delivery, and then prepared the tanks for battle. On November 1, 1944, the 750th was attached to the 104th Infantry Division and sent into Germany, near Aachen. On

November 16, 1944, the 750th began an attack beyond the Siegfried Line, supporting the 104th in a town-by-town drive. Mays was now a Second Lieutenant and a tank commander.

CAPTURE

In July of 1985 Mays told the story of his capture to a reporter from *The Herald* of Provo, Utah. He had kept a journal of his experiences during the war. On November 20, 1944, 2LT Anderson's tank became stuck in the mud and then was hit by a shell near Eschweiler, Germany. Mays and his crew of four abandoned the tank under covering fire. He was trapped between the two attacking forces and under shell fire. He waited out the barrage in a foxhole with a crew member, then moved to the basement of a nearby house. A United States Army tank platoon arrived. Rather than head to the rear, Mays and his comrade decided to return and find out what had happened to their tank and to the rest of their platoon. Unfortunately, they ran into a German column first and were taken prisoner.

For the next several weeks Mays was marched from collection point to collection point. Arrival at each new place meant searches, interrogations that often included beatings, and little to no food. In Limburg, he was loaded on a boxcar with other prisoners for transport to Oflag 64 in Szubin, German occupied Poland. They were issued food for five days. The journey actually took ten days. The boxcar was so crowded that half the men would stand while the other half sat. Mays arrived at Oflag 64 on December 13, 1944.

Treatment at Oflag 64 was an improvement for Mays. He enjoyed delousing, showers, access to Red Cross parcels, and news about the progress of the war. His time at Oflag 64 was short. The Russian Army moved closer and closer and camp evacuation became a certainty.

ESCAPE

On January 21, 1945, as the prisoners were marched away from Szubin, Mays and Dr. Vincent di Francesco opted for escape. They hid inside a haystack within a barn. According to Mays, the Germans were in such a hurry to leave that they did not wait for a body count and they did not prod with their bayonets deep enough into the haystack to find them. Once the prisoners and their guards were gone, Mays and Vincent emerged and wound up going into town and seeking shelter with a Polish family. The next day the Russian Army arrived in Szubin.

When the Russians moved on towards Germany, Mays and Vincent went with them, riding on a tank. He was dismayed by the numbers of dead he saw, both soldiers and civilians, men, women and children. They were brought to Russian headquarters. The Russian tank commander offered Mays the chance to ride all the way to Berlin, but Mays declined. Once the tanks were

gone, Mays and Vincent were interrogated and beaten by the Russians, who now refused to believe that they were American prisoners of war. Finally, when Mays demonstrated that he could read English, the Russians accepted that they were not Germans and turned them loose.

Mays and Vincent now joined the many other refugees walking east. As he told *The Herald*: “We were entirely on our own. We could go anywhere, but where could we go?” (Hall, “American POW”) Where turned out to be Rembertow, Poland, just east of Warsaw, which was a refugee center. This was Mays’ home until March 1945, when a prisoner trade was arranged by the British. Mays and hundreds of other American officers and enlisted men were loaded on trucks and driven to Odessa. There they were exchanged for Russian soldiers captured on the eastern front, who had then fought for the Germans and were then captured by the Allies. Mays was loaded on a British ship and taken to Port Said. A second ship delivered him to Naples, Italy. From *The Herald* newspaper interview:

We feel so damn happy it is pathetic, but now we have food and clothing. I at last stripped off my old trousers. I had worn them from the 14th of November, 1944 until the 15th of March (1945). They were never cleaned. I had slept in my clothes, dirty as they were, most of the time. For months they were never off my body. No showers or baths could be had. (Hall, “American POW”)

POST WAR



From Naples Mays was shipped to Boston and then home for 60 days of leave. He was discharged from the United States Army on January 3, 1946. He returned home to Springville, Utah, and on January 31, 1946 he married Orpha Maurine Peay. They had seven children together. Mays opened an appliance store in Springville, which grew into Anderson’s Furniture Store. He was active in his community, civic organizations, and his church (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints). He died on May 11, 1994, and was buried in Springville, Utah.



Sources

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