

ALABAMA VETERAN EARL BRAKE:

In a letter he sent home on his 21st birthday in 1944, Earl Brake of Watson, Alabama, told his family, "I'm trying to keep a smile on my face even though it was so hot here today in the Philippines I thought I was going to die."

Truth was, they say Earl Brake could've smiled 24 hours a day. The youngest boy in a family of five children, Earl was always the most fun-loving. He had blonde hair and his favorite word was "dadgummit." To good old Earl, everything was "dadgummit." He grew up during the Depression, but those who knew him say he was not the type to let anyone get depressed. However, like a lot of young men in the 1940s he was forced to grow up fast when he was drafted into the Army in 1943.

Earl quickly earned a reputation among his buddies in the platoon as one who was just as handy with a rifle as he was with a joke. One day, when heavy fighting broke out on the island, Earl's platoon found out they were about to be overrun by a Japanese force three times their size. The only way the men could escape would be if someone climbed a hilltop and lay down cover fire. Because he was the only unmarried man in the platoon, Earl volunteered. The next thing you know, Earl and his Browning automatic were on the hill giving them hell. The men in his platoon were able to make a safe escape, but Earl was not so lucky. He was shot over 100 times and died on the hill. Earl Brake never received the Medal of Honor for his bravery that day, but the men whose lives he saved would be all too happy to tell you that he was a hero alright. And, dadgummit, that's the truth.