

Donation of the Month

World War II Photos



Villagers in Italy threshing wheat and stacking straw, 1944.



Cpl Sam Wood sitting on large vase in Pompeii, Italy, 1944.



Bomb damage to Hangmans Hill at Cassino, Italy, 1944.

World War Two, the war to end all wars, has been talked about, documented and picked apart piece by piece over the years. While most of what has been documented has been the campaigns, body counts, and destroyed land, a few have focused on those involved. The soldiers who served had unique experiences and saw the world even as the world crashed in around them.

Over the years the museum has put up a few exhibits documenting the role Benton Countians played in the war and life on the home front. As the generation who lived through the war dwindles it is hoped that the younger generation will learn lessons about hope, freedom, sacrifice and what ordinary people can do to shape the world. Over the years the museum's collection has grown to include uniforms, ration booklets, and other memorabilia from that era. To this collection we now add several hundred photographs taken by one soldier, who documented the war as well as everyday life from his point of view.

Sam Wood was a twenty year old guardsman who entered the war with friends. He and 112 other Benton Countians were sent to Fort Sill, OK for training. He became a member of the 937th Field Artillery Battalion and spent time in North Africa, France, Italy and Germany. Through it all he carried his portable clerk's desk camera. Wood said "we weren't allowed to take pictures of any military installations or operations", so he photographed the ordinary stuff. Within the stacks of photographs there are photos of the darker side of war, bombed out buildings, victims and troop marches; but, it is the photographs of the everyday life of the soldiers that are remarkable. Most of Wood's images focus on his unit's passage through towns such as Rome or Pompeii or life in camp or eating with the locals.

These images present a different side of the war and provide a rounder image of the soldier's life while on campaign. It wasn't all battles, sitting in trenches and freeing towns from foreign rulers; it was about marches from town to town, making friends with the locals, spending time on Red Cross beaches and

getting passes to see great historical sites. Not every unit was as lucky as the 937th, but these images give you a vastly different view than many of the documentaries and films over the years.