



Benjamin Grover Hopkins Jr Sig

1920–1969

BIRTH 16 SEP 1920 • Murray, Cass County, Nebraska 508-09-2870

DEATH 27 JULY 1969 • San Diego, CA

Facts

Age 0 — Birth

16 Sep 1920 • Murray, Cass County, Nebraska
508-09-2870

Age 19 — Military

1939-1945

Age 19 — Military

12 Sep 1940 • NAVY Enlistment Date 1: 12 Sep 1940
Release Date 1: 7 Nov 1946

Age 21 — Military

Sep 1941 • 3166805 Assigned Unit: USS Marblehead
(CL-12)

Age 21 — Military

1 1942 • USS MARBLEHEAD detached to 131 FA TXBG

Age 25 — Military

15 Oct 1945 • Fukuoka POW Camp #1 - Kashii

Age 26 — Military

2 Jan 1947 • NAVY Enlistment Date 2: 2 Jan 1947
Release Date 2: 27 Apr 1960

Age 48 — Death

27 July 1969 • San Diego, CA

Burial

1 Aug 1969 • QMC US NAVY WORLD WAR II, KOREA

Burial

Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery; San Diego,
California

Sources

Ancestry Sources



Ancestry Family Trees



California, Death Index, 1940-1997



U.S. Veterans' Gravesites,
ca.1775-2006



U.S. World War II Navy Muster
Rolls, 1938-1949



U.S., Department of Veterans
Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850-2010



U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s-
Current



U.S., Navy Casualties Books,
1776-1941



U.S., Social Security Applications
and Claims Index, 1936-2007



U.S., Social Security Death Index,
1935-2014



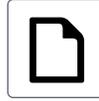
UK, World War II Allied Prisoners of
War, 1939-1945



World War II Navy, Marine Corps,
and Coast Guard Casualties,
1941-1945



World War II Prisoners of the
Japanese, 1941-1945



World War II Prisoners of War,
1941-1946

Notes

[https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/theovervalwagenforum/benjamin-grover-hopkins-dr-wassell-and-the-u-s-s-m-](https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/theovervalwagenforum/benjamin-grover-hopkins-dr-wassell-and-the-u-s-s-m-t1515.html?fbclid=IwAR34vnSJKPpvWTY54DyyBgvIwTNNfQ6BV76t4nxkpPkb_fqeo8ekNdlR_eU)

[t1515.html?fbclid=IwAR34vnSJKPpvWTY54DyyBgvIwTNNfQ6BV76t4nxkpPkb_fqeo8ekNdlR_eU](https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/theovervalwagenforum/benjamin-grover-hopkins-dr-wassell-and-the-u-s-s-m-t1515.html?fbclid=IwAR34vnSJKPpvWTY54DyyBgvIwTNNfQ6BV76t4nxkpPkb_fqeo8ekNdlR_eU) In case you don't know--and I only repeat this in that case, so pardon me--Benjamin Hopkins showed up at Camp No. 2 Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Japan on December 7, 1942 in a group of 300 POWs from Singapore, incl. 88 Americans and 212 British. Here's his story, and some additional info from Craig Chariton's way excellent USS MARBLEHEAD website, and my own materials at hand: Benny enlisted in the navy September 18, 1940. He and his shipmates knew war in the Pacific was not far distant long before Pearl Harbor. They were already stripping ships, putting guns aboard their 7,050 ton light cruiser The Marblehead and trying to get pom-poms when they heard of the bombing December 7, 1941. He was also able to tell us what happened aboard the ship when it was hit. Ben and two shipmates (one of whom was Melvin Francis who played his own part in the movie) were carrying ammunition to the guns. They were returning empty for another load when the bomb dropped from a Jap plane exploded just in front of them as they rounded the corner in the 1st division eating compartment. Benny was burned on his legs, across his back and chest. The men were hospitalized on Java. When the Japs were closing in they left the hospital on an English convoy. Benny and some of his pals volunteered to ride in the back end of a truck. /They got under way about noon. At 2 p.m. the English stopped for their tea so the men got out to stretch. When Benny started to get back into the truck he says, "I just couldn't make it." He was taken back to the field hospital. That was March 1. The Javanese nurse, Teramina, was at the hospital. On March 5 a Dutch medical officer came to the hospital and asked if any military personnel were there. Benny and a Dutch officer were the only ones. The medical officer put them in the side car of his motorcycle and they started for the interior. They found the Japanese were closing in so they "commandeered" a car and went back for the Dutch doctor and Teramina. Commandoes held up blowing the bridge on the road to the hospital until they returned. Their first car was not very good and they wrecked it. They then got hold of a doctor's car - a 1939 model - and made better time. Benny thinks it was about March 9th when a mortar shell exploded near their car and Teramina was killed. One of the men had his ankle hurt but that was all the injury the others had. By the middle of the month they came to Tasikmalaya, Java, and gave themselves up at the hospital. It was under Japanese control but still operated by the Dutch so Benny had good treatment and by the time he was moved to Soerbaia, Java, he was in pretty good condition. He was kept prisoner there until October 26.

So far his prisoner life had not been so bad. Then came the trip to Japan. He was taken by train to Batavia then boarded a ship November 1st or 2nd for Singapore. The last day of November they left Singapore by ship and arrived at Nagasaki on December 7, 1942 - just a year after Pearl Harbor. In Nagasaki he was put to work in the ship yards building 8,000 top cargo ships. Beside the prisoners, he says, only boys eight and nine years old and old men worked on the ships. They built 52 cargo vessels during the two and a half years he worked there. He did everything, welding, riveting, boiler tending, calking or what have you. He says the Japs had good equipment but did not know how to use it. They never sharpened tools and had no grease for their machinery. It did not take long for him to know what he was up against. Three days after he arrived in Nagasaki he saw a prisoner's head cut off for stealing a head of cabbage. The guards took delight in finding cause to slap or hit the men. There were few days he didn't get slapped or struck for something. Many of the guards spoke English so the men had to be doubly careful. Their first interpreter was a graduate of Washington State University and had been back to Japan only two years. Benny's first serious offense was breaking a bowl. They were given a bowl (similar to our cups) of rice and one of souup three times a day. He dropped one and it broke. He was beaten by clubs and belts until he had to be sent to the hospital for 15 days. His second trip to the hospital came when he was believed to have bumped into a guard. His real crime came during the winter - and the winters there are plenty cold, he reports. He was supposed to be calking a ship and slipped over to the forge to warm his hands. A dockyard police (whom they called the gestapo) caught him. He was beaten by them then turned over to the navy who gave him another round. Last he had beatings by the army. He had to be in the hospital from February 6 to March 14. He thinks he held the camp record for days in the Japanese hospital. Only redeeming feature was the patients were fed the same as workers. Benny feels he is pretty lucky though. He saw men beaten to death or left in solitaire and forgotten. Bodies were all cremated. Asked why there weren't buried he said, "The land is too valuable. If a man owns a piece of land as large as this room he is considered rich." When asked if he has any permanent injuries, Benny remarked he didn't think so except two broken fingers. "I put my hands back, just once. I never did it again." As for food the prisoners fared pretty well at Nagasaki. They could always catch rats. The worst part was sneaking to the forges to cook them. Occasionally they got grasshoppers. We asked the method of preparing such a delicacy. It seems one takes a bamboo pole and cuts it below and above the joint, leaving one end solid. Chucks the hopper against the solid section then stuffs the open end full of grass. The bamboo is left in the fire until it is charred so it is just ready to fall apart then one pulls it from the fire and picks out the dainty morsel. And then once in a while they had a real treat when they could catch a sparrow. Such high living could not last, however. June 19 Benny was moved about 150 miles to Orio to work in the coal mines. That move saved him from the atomic bomb which fell on Nagasaki only a few weeks later. At the coal mines there wasn't a living thing to catch and eat and Benny lost another 15 pounds in a week. Prisoners got up at 3:30 in the morning, had breakfast and left for work at 5:30. It took 2 and 1/2 hours by little underground electric cars to reach their work - that is when the cars were running. During air raids they had to walk. Lunch was served about 3 in the afternoon and it was 9 at night when they came out of the mines. Benny says they didn't worry about recreation - all they hoped for was they could get enough rest. Living conditions were better, however, at Orio. They had mining shacks which were

divided into rooms and only four men to a room. At Nagasaki 60 men were housed in a hut 30 ft. wide by 60 ft. long. They slept on shelves on the sides of the room and five tables and stools ran down the center. As for sanitation he says he took three baths the first winter. The men were dying from pneumonia so badly they avoided any exposure not absolutely necessary. News was extremely hard to get. The only thing they ever knew for sure was when the Americans went into Tunisia. One of their guards got drunk and left his radio turned on and they heard the Japanese news broadcast. Their only indication of how the war was going was the mood of the guards. If they were mean the men rejoiced that the allies must have another victory. They watched the B-29s come over and drop their bombs. One of the objectives was "just across the hill" from the mines. It was one of the big Japanese roller mills. (That was the place Benny has learned since, that Ivan Smith was working as a prisoner). Guards forced them to pray every morning to the sun gods. Benny says, you bet we prayed - for more planes and bombs. From their camp they saw the smoke cloud from the atomic bomb. It hovered for several days but the men had no idea what nor where it was. No rumor got to them. An indication of their news was given by Benny when he said "Just a week before the war ended we heard rumors the Americans had landed in the Philippines." Benny was liberated September 13 from Orio. He was taken to Nagasaki where he boarded the aircraft carrier Lunga Point to go to Okinawa. He was at Okinawa just 20 minutes then put aboard the Rixey Auxiliary Hospital Ship from Guam. 80 Americans, 100 English and 400 Dutch were in that group of liberated men. Of the Americans about 15 or 20 were sailors. Many of the prisoners will never return. He spoke of the 131st Field Battalion - most of whom were Texans. There were five batteries. E Battery was in the same camp as Benny. Only three members of that battery died but nearly all men of the other four batteries died of pneumonia, disease, etc. When Benny went off his ship he weighed about 157 pounds. By the time he reached Singapore he had gained 10 pounds. At Nagasaki he dropped to 130 pounds then he went on down at Orio. Since September 13 he has picked up 55 pounds. His greatest craving, he said, was for sugar or anything sweet, and for fruit - another thing they did not see all the time they were in Japanese hands. They did have some time off - He thought they had about 4 or 5 days vacation each year. One year they had a New Year's vacation of two days. He got a little insight into the training of the Japanese children in the shipyards. The boys go to school at about 3 years of age and by the time they are seven or eight they have learned to read and write and obey. Then they are ready to go to work. Benny had purchased a 1941 car so is really enjoying his furlough. He and his youngest brother, Gordon, are constant pals. One almost feels they are seeing double when they glance at the brothers, they look so much alike. Even happier at Ben's return are his parents, Mr. and Mrs. B. J. Hopkins, Sr. It has been a long wait. The family plans to leave with Ben about the middle of the month for California where they hope Lowell, S 1/c, will be able to meet them. His ship, the carrier Essex, is now in port in Seattle. They will also visit Ben's sisters, Muriel Pearson and Louise Smith at Santa Monica, Georgia Kline and his brother, Sterling, at Venice, Calif. Ben is also hoping to see the picture "The Story of Dr. Wassell" somewhere along the line. At present Benny plans to reenlist in the navy. If his time is doubled he figures he will have about 11 years credit and not too many until retirement. In comment on the army of occupation in Japan he says "They knew better than to let us join." I believe Hopkins was one of only three USN men in this force (the rest were Army): the other sailors were Dan Rafalovich, S1/c of HOUSTON who had served

aboard DERUYTER as a liaison signalman, and Marion Connor, AMM2/c of HOUSTON. These men were at Fukuoka with Lt(jg) John 'Jack' Michel of USS POPE (DD-225) and all survived the war. (I have photos of all of these enlisted men as POWs at Fukuoka, BTW.) {Some other Allied officers present were LT CDR Chubb, Sr. Engineering officer of EXETER, Gerry Jenkins of the Royal Navy, who was aboard JAVA as a liaison officer, a Major Horrigan & LT Michie of the USAAC (from B-17 units in the Philippines who retreated to Java) & Dave Hicks, a civilian employee of Douglas Aircraft who came to Tjilatjap aboard either the KOTA BAROE or SLOTERDIJK (I think) and attempted to help assemble what few planes had arrived safely in the port before the island fell...The Dutch were under a LT CDR Visser, I think. There were, in addition, three LTs from the so-called Lost Battalion, a unit of Texas Nat'l. Guard artillerymen captured--probably around the same time as Hopkins--on Java. These were LTs Slone, Allen, and Straughan.}