"Okinawa and the End of World War II"
Building a Legacy for the Greatest Generation

The Battle of Okinawa was the last major land battle of the Second World War, yet it has not received the same notoriety as other battles such as D-Day and Iwo Jima. As of recently, historians have begun to realize the full significance of this campaign and how it shaped the end of the war. Army, Navy, and Marine casualties on and around Okinawa were likely the largest factor in President Truman’s decision to use the Atomic bomb against Japan. These casualties also had an effect on Army infantry replacements, meaning that by mid-1945, at the end of the battle, virtually all draftees in the Army would be sent to infantry rifle and weapons companies. This ended the many military avenues that better-educated inductees had used as a safety valve to avoid higher risk combat service. The ferocity of the Japanese in defending Okinawa was perhaps much of the reason an invasion of Japan was not attempted, as there would have been a high rate of loss on both sides, thereby jeopardizing the American expectation for unconditional surrender.

With funding from the 96th Infantry Division Association, and space provided by the Fort Douglas Military Museum, Professor John Reed and I, along with the Fort Douglas staff, have set in motion an exhibit entitled “Okinawa and the End of World War Two”. This exhibit, which is scheduled to be open in mid-May, will be composed of four basic components: uniform and equipment displays which include a life-sized mannequin dressed and equipped as a U.S. Army infantryman on Okinawa, maps and information on the battle and the units involved, combat photography displays, and highlighted individual biographies of soldiers that participated in the battle.

In working on this exhibit, John Reed and I have had to inventory the holdings of the Fort Douglas Museum to locate uniforms and equipment to use for the mannequin and the displays. I also have had to locate items the museum did not have, which involved contacting military.