

World War II and the Wildcats

Pfc. Michael S. Byczek

Company M, 321st Infantry Regiment, 81st Infantry Division (Army)

Written and Compiled by

Michael E. Byczek, Esq.
Grandson

Michael S. Byczek was the son of Martin Byczek and Maryanna Dudek. He was born in the Bridgeport neighborhood of Chicago, IL on August 3, 1917 and was baptized at St. Barbara Catholic church. The Byczek surname is known as among the earliest Polish settlers in Bridgeport. Prior to World War II, Michael had various jobs, such as at local factories and as a “hustler” for a printing company. Martin and Maryanna Byczek owned a farm in Roselawn, Indiana during the 1940s. They and their children, including Michael, divided their time between Bridgeport and the farm in Indiana.

On June 18, 1942, at the age of 24, Michael S. Byczek joined the Army during World War II as a Private First Class with the 81st Division Wildcats. An injury resulted in a finger amputation in April 1945. He was discharged on January 18, 1946 when he was 28 years old.

Upon returning home to Chicago, he worked for the State of Illinois as a grain inspector and remained in that position through retirement. Michael S. Byczek (33) and Marie Flanagan (27) were married at St. Bridget’s in Bridgeport on November 4, 1950. Marie Flanagan was the great-granddaughter of William and Julia Rooney who were prominent early settlers of Chicago dating back to 1835. During the 1960s and early 1970s, Michael S. and Marie Byczek owned and operated a tavern with banquet hall on Lyman and Farrell.

Michael S. and Marie Byczek spent most of their life in the Bridgeport neighborhood and had four children. Their eldest, a son, Michael M. Byczek married Betty A. Bykowski in 1974 at St. Helen’s in the Ukrainian Village neighborhood. They are Michael E. Byczek’s parents.

Michael S. Byczek passed away in Oak Lawn, IL on December 17, 1992 at the age of 75. Marie (Flanagan) Byczek passed away on March 5, 1996, also in Oak Lawn. She was 72 years old. Both of their funerals were held at St. Barbara in Bridgeport. They are buried together at Resurrection Cemetery in Justice, IL in the Martin and Maryanna Byczek family plot.

Michael S. Byczek’s father-in-law Martin J. Flanagan, had served with the 23rd Engineers in France during World War I. The 23rd Engineers were known as the “Road Builders” of the American Expeditionary Forces. His son Michael M. Byczek is an honorably discharged Naval Air Reservist (Vietnam Era).

From Marie (Flanagan) Byczek’s perspective, her father, husband, and eldest son all served in the military.

Michael S. Byczek and the Wildcats

The 81st Division (Army Infantry) consisted of the 321st, 322nd, and 323rd Regiments, collectively called the “Wildcats” attributed to a World War I unit that earned a fierce fighting reputation. The Wildcats were activated on 6/15/1942 at Camp Rucker (Dale County, AL).

Michael S. Byczek entered the Army on 6/18/1942. He joined the 321st Regiment and was part of Company M in the 3rd Battalion (formally written as Company M, 321st Infantry Regiment, 81st Infantry Division). It was a “Heavy Weapons” company and Michael operated a machine gun.

Michael’s older brother George and younger brother John also served in the Army during World War II, as did multiple cousins. Raymond Byczek, first cousin and son of Jacob Byczek, was killed in the Philippines.

The Wildcats received extensive and specialized training, which was perhaps underutilized during the war. The 81st Division first went into combat in the Pacific during September 1944 after initially having prepared for action in Europe. The Wildcats launched an amphibious invasion of Angaur in the Palau (Pelew) nation of islands. The 3rd Battalion of the 321st Regiment was kept in reserves and were among the last to depart the ships and land on the beach.

The Wildcat invasion of Angaur was part of a joint operation with the Marines who launched their own amphibious invasion of the neighboring island of Peleliu. The Marines went into Peleliu first while the Wildcats were ready in reserve. Once the Marine operation was underway, the Wildcats began their own assault upon Angaur.

As events unfolded, the military campaign in Peleliu was far worse than expected. Angaur was a relatively smooth campaign for the Wildcats. As a result, the 321st Regiment was quickly deployed to Peleliu to assist the Marines. The remainder of the Wildcats, the 322nd and 323rd Regiments, stayed behind to finish their activities on Angaur and other smaller islands in the region.

The U.S. military campaign on Peleliu would turn out to be amongst the worst of the entire Pacific operations during World War II. The 321st Wildcats played a significant role in what started as a Marine operation. The Wildcats would eventually assume full responsibility for Peleliu with several landmarks on the Island named for them, such as “Wildcat Bowl”. The contributions of the 321st Regiment to these efforts are memorialized in a monument dedicated to them on Peleliu. This monument is a lasting tribute to the furiousness and determination of the 321st Wildcats.

After the military operations on Angaur and Peleliu were over, the Wildcats began preparation for the invasion of Okinawa in Japan. Ultimately, they were not needed. Instead, the Wildcats spent time in New Caledonia to rest and continue their training for the next assignment in the Philippines.

During one of these training sessions, Michael S. Byczek was injured during an amphibious maneuver on April 19, 1945. Michael lacerated his left hand with a fan blade on a boat, perhaps after losing his balance. Doctors attempted to treat the injury, but were unable to do so. One of his fingers had to be amputated. While Michael recovered in the hospital in New Caledonia, the Wildcats were sent to Leyte in the Philippines.

Michael S. Byczek immediately returned to duty upon his discharge from the hospital on August 6, 1945, four months later. He was transferred to what was called the “4th Replacement Depot”, which was also stationed in Leyte in the Philippines. It is not possible to reconstruct his daily activities for the rest of the war because a government fire in the 1970s destroyed military personnel records.

The 4th Replacement Depot was used as a transition to civilian life. Combat soldiers were transferred to this unit to begin the process of returning home. The Wildcats and 4th Replacement Depot were reassigned from the Philippines to Japan in September 1945 during the occupation phase at the end of the war. The Wildcats were sent to Amori while the 4th Replacement Depot was assigned to Tokyo.

When Michael S. Byczek was discharged from the hospital he was given “light duties” as a result of his injury. It is possible that he may have joined an “on demand” program to work with one or more units throughout the Pacific during this time. The best conclusion, supported by military documents, is that Michael S. Byczek went to Leyte and later transferred to Tokyo in coordination with the 4th Replacement Depot’s official duties. Family memories refer to discussions about Guam, but it is unknown how time may have been spent in that location. Michael S. Byczek was discharged from the military on 1/18/1946 at Camp McCoy in Wisconsin.

His grandson, Michael E. Byczek, compiled a comprehensive HTML-based World War II online archive with documents, videos, photographs, and books. The archive was originally compiled in May 2021 to commemorate Memorial Day and is available at:

<https://michaelbyczek.pro/genealogy/worldwar2/michaelbyczek.html>

Form 55 A
MEDICAL DEPARTMENT, U. S. ARMY
(Revised May 31, 1939)


CLINICAL RECORD
BRIEF

Surg.

Register No. 15095 Hospital 31st Station Hospital
Name Byczek, Michael S. Serial No. 36 351 076
Grade PFC Inf Co. M Regt. and Arm or Service 321st Inf
Age 28 Race W Nativity Illinois
Service 3 Yrs Date of admission 24 April 1945, 19
Source of admission Trfd (321st, 3rd Bn Aid Sta)
Station _____
Ward 18 Previous admission None
Religion Catholic Home address Box #96, Roselawn, Ind.
Name and address of nearest relative (Mother) Mrs. Mary Byczek, S/A
LOD: Yes
Cellulitis, acute, suppurative, left 3rd finger RFS/ism
(Initials of admitting officer)

Michael E. Byczek and his father Michael M. Byczek obtained the medical file for Michael S. Byczek's hand injury (about 2008)
The documents were not damaged by the fire that destroyed personnel records.

Discharged U.S.A. 1-18-46

SERIAL NUMBER 01067	1. NAME (Print) Michael Stanley Byczek (First) (Middle) (Last)			ORDER NUMBER 2155 ✓
2. ADDRESS (Print) 2816 Short St - Chicago Cook Illinois (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)				
3. TELEPHONE None (Exchange) (Number)	4. AGE IN YEARS 24 DATE OF BIRTH 9-29-16 (Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)	5. PLACE OF BIRTH Chicago Illinois (Town or county) (State or country)		6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP USA
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mrs Mary - Byczek (Mr., Mrs., Miss) (First) (Middle) (Last)			8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON mother	
9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON 2816 Short St Chicago Cook Illinois (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)				
10. EMPLOYER'S NAME Cuneo Press Co				
11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS 2242 S. Grove St Chicago Cook Illinois (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)				
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.				
REGISTRATION CARD D. S. S. Form 1 			<i>Michael Stanley Byczek</i> (Registrant's signature)	

World War II Draft Card
(Front)

REGISTRAR'S REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRANT

RACE	HEIGHT (Approx.)	WEIGHT (Approx.)		COMPLEXION	
		EYES	HAIR		
White	6.3		160	Sallow	
				Light	
Negro		Blue	Blonde	Ruddy	
		Gray	Red	Dark	
Oriental		Hazel	Brown	Freckled	
		Brown	Black	Light brown	
Indian		Black	Gray	Dark brown	
			Bald	Black	
Filipino					

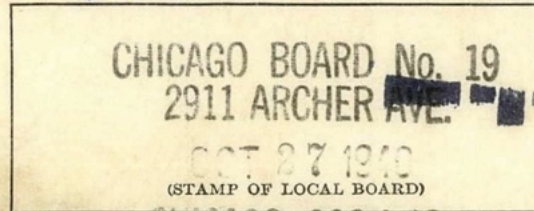
Other obvious physical characteristics that will aid in identification.....

I certify that my answers are true; that the person registered has read or has had read to him his own answers; that I have witnessed his signature or mark and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

Rosemary Lee
(Signature of registrar)

Registrar for _____
(Precinct) (Ward) (City or county) (State)

Date of registration *October 16 - 1940*



61
731
D18

(The stamp of the Local Board having jurisdiction of the registrant shall be placed in the above space.)

CHICAGO COOK CO.
ILLINOIS.

World War II Draft Card
(Back)

Very little information is available,
because the original records were destroyed.

INFORMATION RELEASABLE UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT	
Name	Byczek, Michael S.
Branch of Service and Serial/Service Number(s)	36 351 076 - Army of the United States
Dates of Service	June 18, 1942 to January 18, 1946
Duty Status	Discharge
Rank/Grade	Private First Class
Salary	N/A
Source of Commission	N/A
Promotion Sequence Number	N/A
Assignments and Geographical Locations	N/A
Military Education	N/A
Decorations and Awards	Service Lapel Button WWII, World War II Victory Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge and Bronze Star Medal
Transcript of Court-Martial Trial	N/A
Photograph	N/A
Place of Entry	Chicago, IL
Place of Separation	Camp McCoy, WI
FOR DECEASED VETERAN ONLY	
Place of Birth	N/A
Date of Death	N/A
Location of Death	N/A
Place of Burial	N/A
NOTE: N/A denotes information is not available in the veteran's records	

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https://aad.archives.gov/aad/record-detail.jsp?dt=893& ... Search

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Access to Archival Databases (AAD)

AAD Series List Series Description Fielded Search Partial Records Full Records


AAD TOOLS FILE UNIT INFORMATION Print Bookmark/Share Help

Display Full Records

File Unit: Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, ca. 1938 - 1946 (*Enlistment Records*)

in the Series: World War II Army Enlistment Records, created 6/1/2002 - 9/30/2002, documenting the period ca. 1938 - 1946. - Record Group 64 ([info](#))

Brief Scope: This series contains records of approximately nine million men and women who enlisted in the United States Army, including the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps.

 This series does not contain records of all World War II Army enlistees. You may wish to [View the FAQs](#) for this series.

[< Previous Record](#) | [Next Record >](#)

Field Title	Value	Meaning
ARMY SERIAL NUMBER	36351076	36351076
NAME	BYCZEK#MICHAEL#S#####	BYCZEK#MICHAEL#S#####
RESIDENCE: STATE	61	ILLINOIS
RESIDENCE: COUNTY	031	COOK
PLACE OF ENLISTMENT	6120	CHICAGO ILLINOIS
DATE OF ENLISTMENT DAY	18	18
DATE OF ENLISTMENT MONTH	06	06
DATE OF ENLISTMENT YEAR	42	42

The National Archives have a transcription of Michael S. Byczek's enlistment data on their website.

Field Title	Value	Meaning
ARMY SERIAL NUMBER	36351076	36351076
NAME	BYCZEK#MICHAEL#S#####	BYCZEK#MICHAEL#S#####
RESIDENCE: STATE	61	ILLINOIS
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PLACE OF ENLISTMENT	6120	CHICAGO ILLINOIS
DATE OF ENLISTMENT DAY	18	18
DATE OF ENLISTMENT MONTH	06	06
DATE OF ENLISTMENT YEAR	42	42
GRADE: ALPHA DESIGNATION	PVT#	Private
GRADE: CODE	8	Private
BRANCH: ALPHA DESIGNATION	BI#	Branch Immaterial - Warrant Officers, USA
BRANCH: CODE	00	Branch Immaterial - Warrant Officers, USA
FIELD USE AS DESIRED	#	#
TERM OF ENLISTMENT	5	Enlistment for the duration of the War or other emergency, plus six months, subject to the discretion of the President or otherwise according to law
LONGEVITY	###	###
SOURCE OF ARMY PERSONNEL	0	Civil Life
NATIVITY	61	ILLINOIS
YEAR OF BIRTH	17	17
RACE AND CITIZENSHIP	1	White citizen

BRANCH: CODE	00	Branch Immaterial - Warrant Officers, USA
FIELD USE AS DESIRED	#	#
TERM OF ENLISTMENT	5	Enlistment for the duration of the War or other emergency, plus six months, subject to the discretion of the President or otherwise according to law
LONGEVITY	###	###
SOURCE OF ARMY PERSONNEL	0	Civil Life
NATIVITY	61	ILLINOIS
YEAR OF BIRTH	17	17
RACE AND CITIZENSHIP	1	White, citizen
EDUCATION	0	Grammar school
CIVILIAN OCCUPATION	999	Undefined Code
MARITAL STATUS	6	Single, without dependents
COMPONENT OF THE ARMY	7	Selectees (Enlisted Men)
CARD NUMBER	#	#
BOX NUMBER	1069	1069
FILM REEL NUMBER	5.131	5.131

[< Previous Record](#) | [Next Record >](#)



Wildcat Training and Preparation

Trained throughout Alabama and Tennessee, including Conecuh National Forest in Alabama
Camp Horn, Arizona (Hyder near Yuma) - Desert Training
Prepared for Europe, but reassigned to Pacific (appears while in Arizona)
California (three bases) - Camp San Luis Obispo (in San Luis Obispo, CA) - March 1944
Beale (Marysville, CA)
Stoneman (Pittsburg, CA)

Departed through San Francisco Harbor
June through July 1944 - Oahu, Hawaii (passed through Honolulu and Pearl Harbor)
August 1944 - Guadalcanal (Solomon Islands) [used as rehearsal area to launch invasion of Angaur]

Type of Training

Extensive desert training, corps level exercises stressing attack of fortified defense positions
California and Hawaii - Amphibious
Guadalcanal - Jungle training, acclimatization, and rugged terrain training

Military Operation

Operation Forager - Invade Philippines
Operation Stalemate II - Capture Angaur, Peleliu and other islands in support of Operation Forager (sub-operation)

Angaur and Peleliu are neighboring islands in “Palau Nation of Islands”
Angaur (Island is 3 square miles) - Present day population - 119
Peleliu (Island is 5 square miles) - Present day population: 484

Battle of Angaur

Wildcats kept in reserve for Marines to invade Peleliu first
9/17/1944 - Wildcats invaded Angaur (few days after Peleliu started)
321st and 322nd landed on different beaches (323rd kept in reserves and ultimately sent to other islands)
3/321 was reserve battalion during initial assault wave of landing boats (sent to the beach a few hours later)
3/321 stayed on the beach overnight and afterwards stayed along the shoreline in small region
Within a few days, 321st sent to Peleliu to reinforce Marines
322nd took control of Angaur
Gave Wildcats their first combat experience.

Battle of Peleliu

9/23/1944 - Entire 321st joined Marines immediately.

10/20/1944 - 81st assumed command of all troops on Angaur and Peleliu

Present day monument on island dedicated to the "321st Wildcats".

Elements of 81st went to several other islands (seen numbers as high as 27). The 323rd is credited with the other islands.

Casualty rate considered one of the worse of all other amphibious operations during Pacific

Considered the "bitterest" battle of the entire war for Marines

New Caledonia

January through February 1945 - 81st left Peleliu for New Caledonia (rehabilitation and training before Philippines)

Michael S. Byczek Injury

4/19/1945 - Injured during "amphibious maneuver" - Caught left hand in electric boat fan (treated at 3rd Battalion Aid Station)

4/24 - Transferred from Aid Station to 31st Station Hospital (incision and drainage)

5/6 - Transferred to 8th General Hospital

5/12 - incision and drainage

6/19 - amputation

8/4 - recommended for duty

8/6 - discharged from hospital

Hospital was located in Noumea, New Caledonia

Note: Wildcats arrived in Leyte, Philippines on 5/17/1945

Post-Injury

Attached and unassigned (not returned to original unit)

Transferred to 4th Replacement Depot

As of that date, this unit was stationed in Leyte (Philippines) [Wildcats were also in Leyte at same time]

This was a personnel replacement program to replenish losses within units

Michael S. Byczek may have been spun off immediately as of 8/6/1945 without even arriving in Leyte

The 4th Replacement Depot moved from Leyte to Tokyo, Japan on 9/4/1945

The Wildcats left Leyte for Aomori, Japan on 9/18/1945 (occupation force)

Scenario 1: If Michael S. Byczek remained with the 4th Replacement Depot or rejoined the Wildcats, he ended military service while in Japan

Scenario 2: 4th Replacement Depot assigned him to an unknown location or series of locations prior to their moving to Japan

Weapons

Company M 321st Infantry Regiment (Part of 81st Division)
Heavy Weapons Company compared to three rifle companies (four total companies)
Two machine gun platoons / one mortar platoon
Each machine gun platoon: six-man HQ
two 15-man machine gun sections
each section had two .30 caliber M1919 Browning machine guns
total of eight .30 caliber machine guns in whole company
total of 36 men per machine gun platoon
Full strength weapons company: 160 men in total (with eight officers)
82 men were issued light M1 carbine rifles
44 issued M1 Garand rifle
30 also had M7 and M8 grenade launchers
Remaining 34 men had M1911 sidearm pistol

Discharge

Michael S. Byczek was discharged on 1/18/1946 at Camp McCoy (Wisconsin)
81st Division deactivated in Japan - 1/20/1946

Analysis of APO Locations

APO Chronology (Known):

- 81 7/12/1944 Fort Hase (Oahu) - Hawaii
- 11/__/1944 Angaur (Pelew Island) [former name for Palau]
- 4/__/1945 New Caledonia
- 5/6/1945 Leyte, PI [presume Philippines Islands]
- 9/18/1945 Aomori, Japan
- 6/27/1946 Ceased Operation

- 502 3/13/1942 Noumea, New Caledonia
- 2/28/1947 FST [unknown]
- 6/3/1947 Ceased Operation

- 703 6/8/1942 Melbourne, Australia (Cp Darley)
- 10/__/1942 Sydney, Australia (Cp Warwick)
- 1/__/1944 Milne Bay (N G) [Perhaps New Guinea?]
- 10/24/1944 Leyte, PI [presume Philippines Islands]
- 9/4/1945 Tokyo, Japan
- 3/__/1946 Yokohoma, Japan
- 6/__/1947 Zama, Japan

Based on this chronology:

November 1944 Started with APO 81: Went from Oahu, Hawaii to Angaur (Palau Islands)
April 1945 Went from Angaur to New Caledonia
April 19, 1945 Injury with treatment at APO 502 (Noumea, New Caledonia)
April 24, 1945 Hospital Admission
August 6, 1945 Discharged from Hospital
Transferred to 4th Replacement Depot, APO 703 - Leyte, PI
At this same time, 81st Regiment also in Leyte (coincidence?)

September 4, 1945 APO 703 moved from Leyte to Tokyo, Japan (remained in Tokyo until after discharged)
September 18, 1945 APO 81 moved from Leyte to Aomori, Japan (remained in Aomori until after discharged)

81st Division Organization

Based on “triangular” organization, online resources, and books (precise statistics may not be accurate, but is a good visualization):

81st Infantry Division (“Wildcats”) with 9,000 combat troops

Combat Units: 321st, 322nd, and 323rd Infantry Regiments
81st Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop (155 officers and men)

Each Regiment: 3 infantry battalions
service company
medical detachment
antitank company
cannon company

Each Battalion: 3 rifle companies
1 heavy weapons company with 81 mm mortars and heavy .30-caliber machine guns

1st Battalion: A, B, and C (rifle) and D (heavy weapons)
2nd Battalion: E, F, and G (rifle) and H (heavy weapons)
3rd Battalion: I, K, and L (rifle) and M (heavy weapons)

Each rifle company: 3 rifle platoons
1 weapon platoon with 60 mm mortars and light .30-caliber machine guns

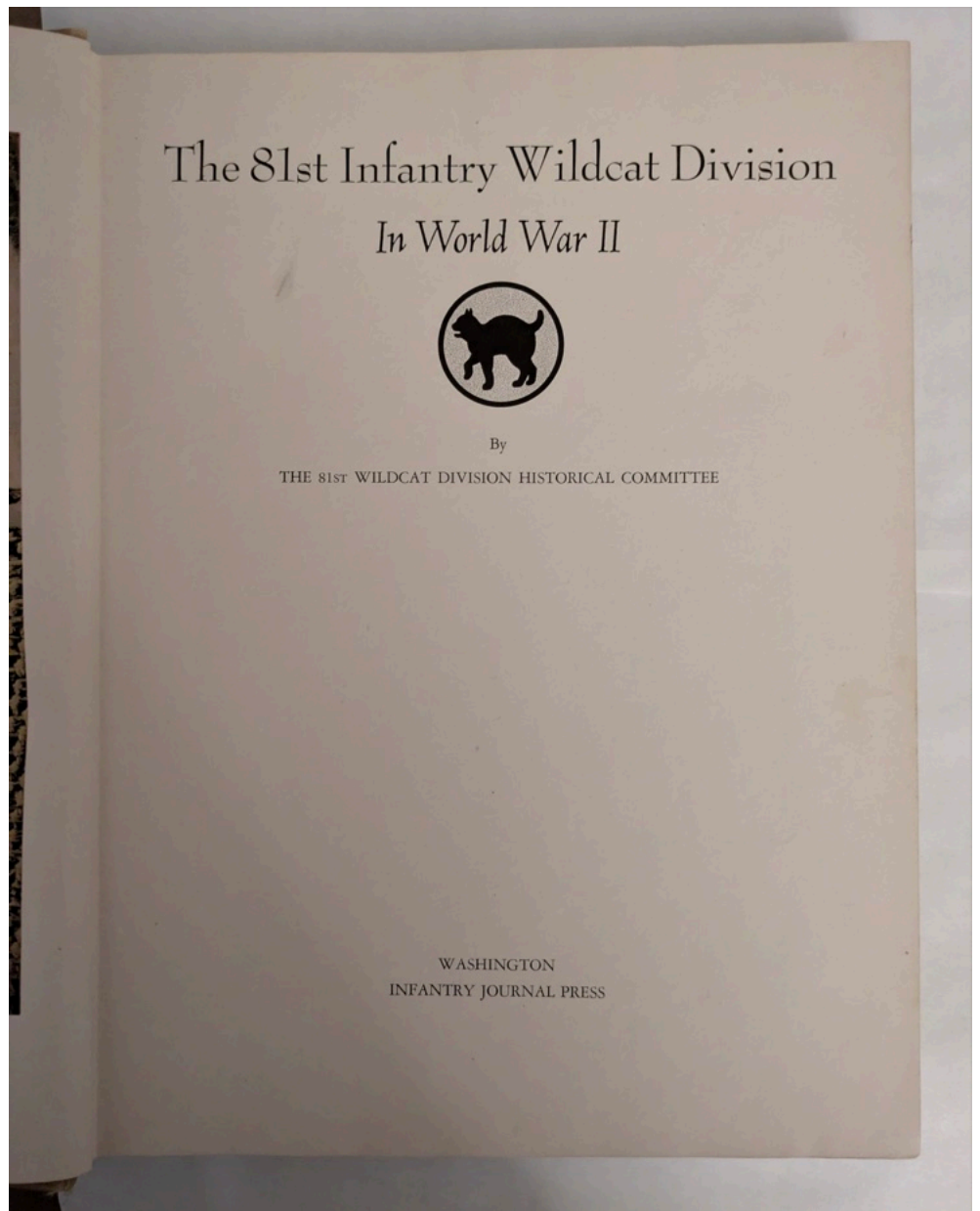
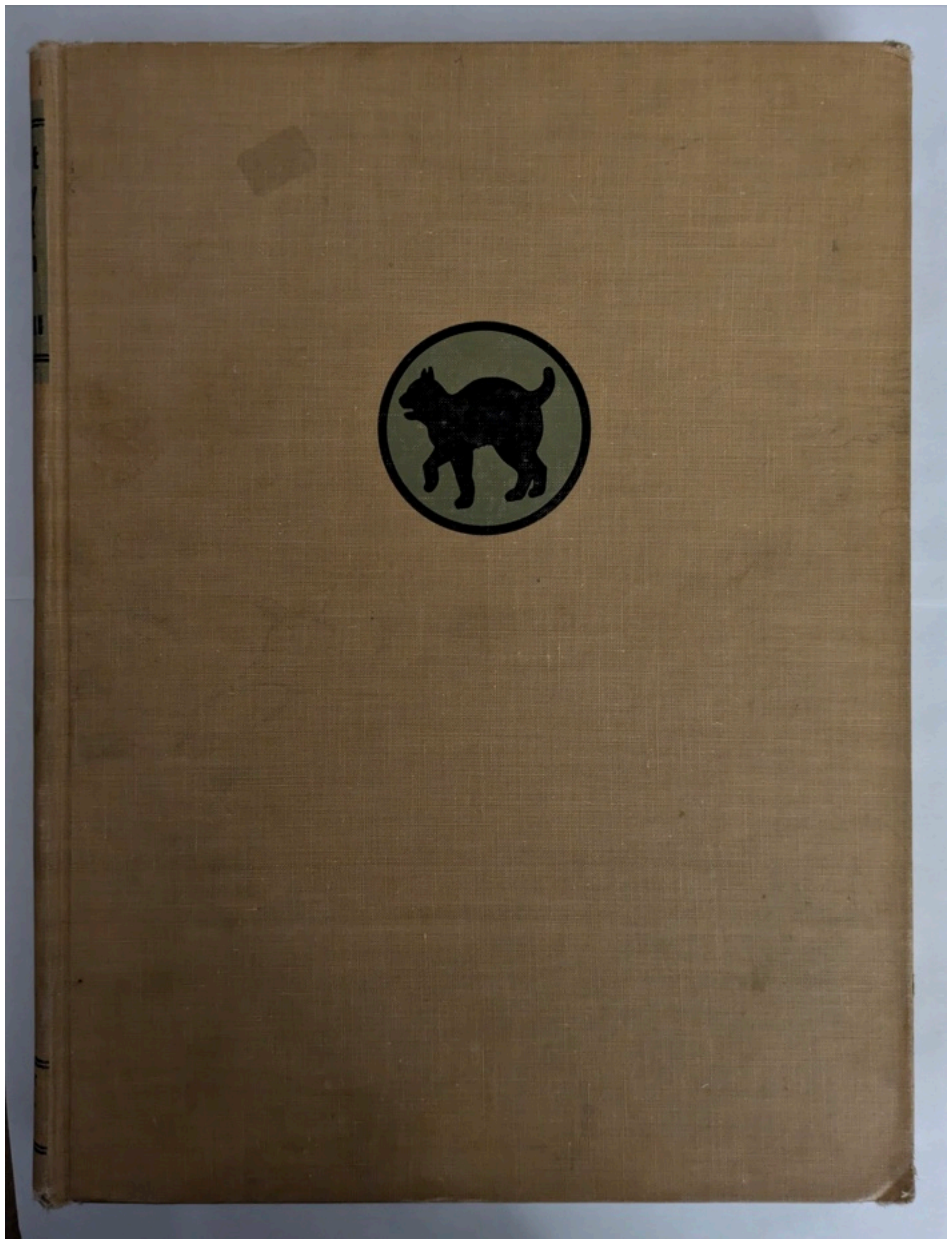
Each rifle platoon: 3 rifle squads, each with 9 riflemen and 1 Browning Automatic Rifle team of 3

Resources

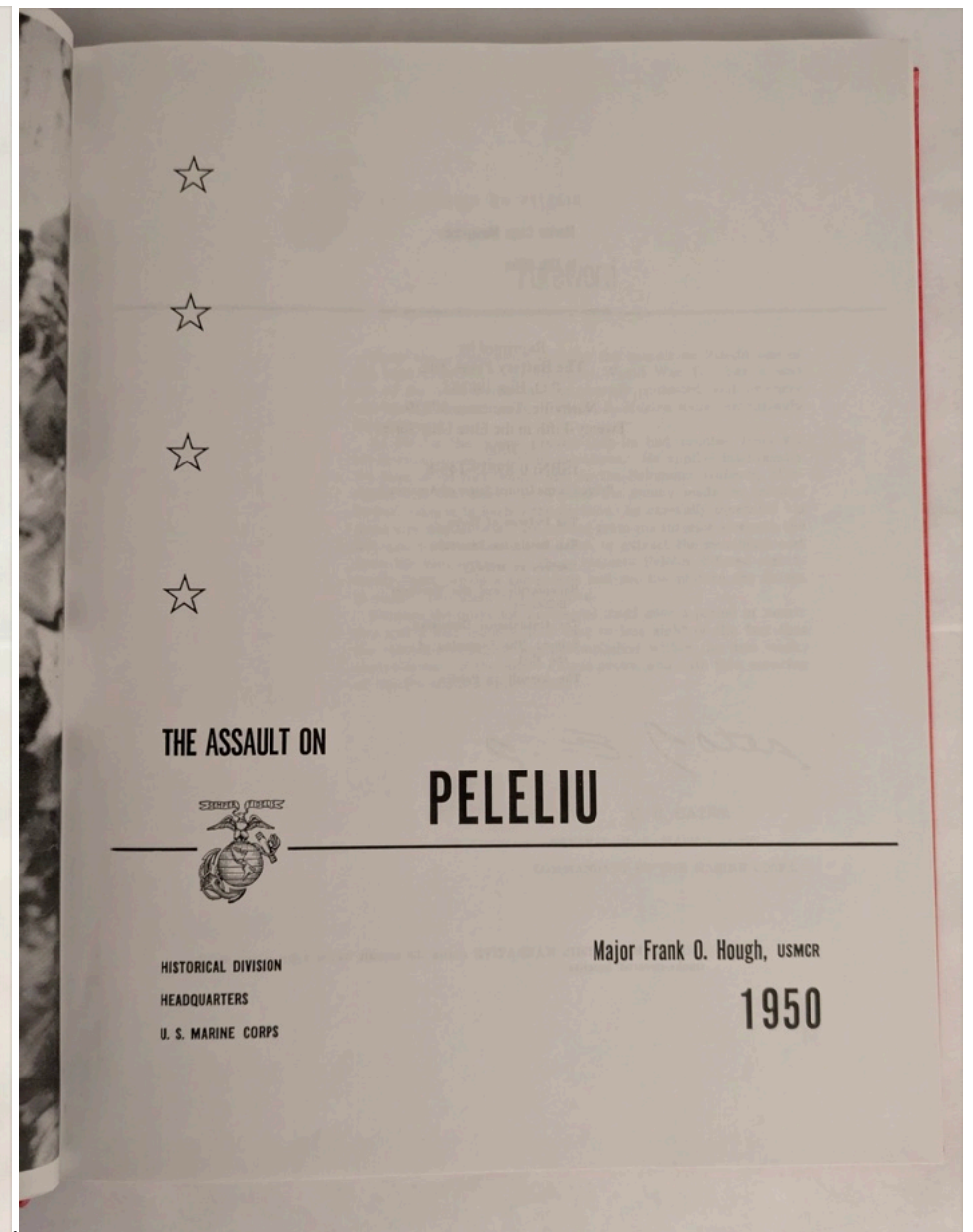
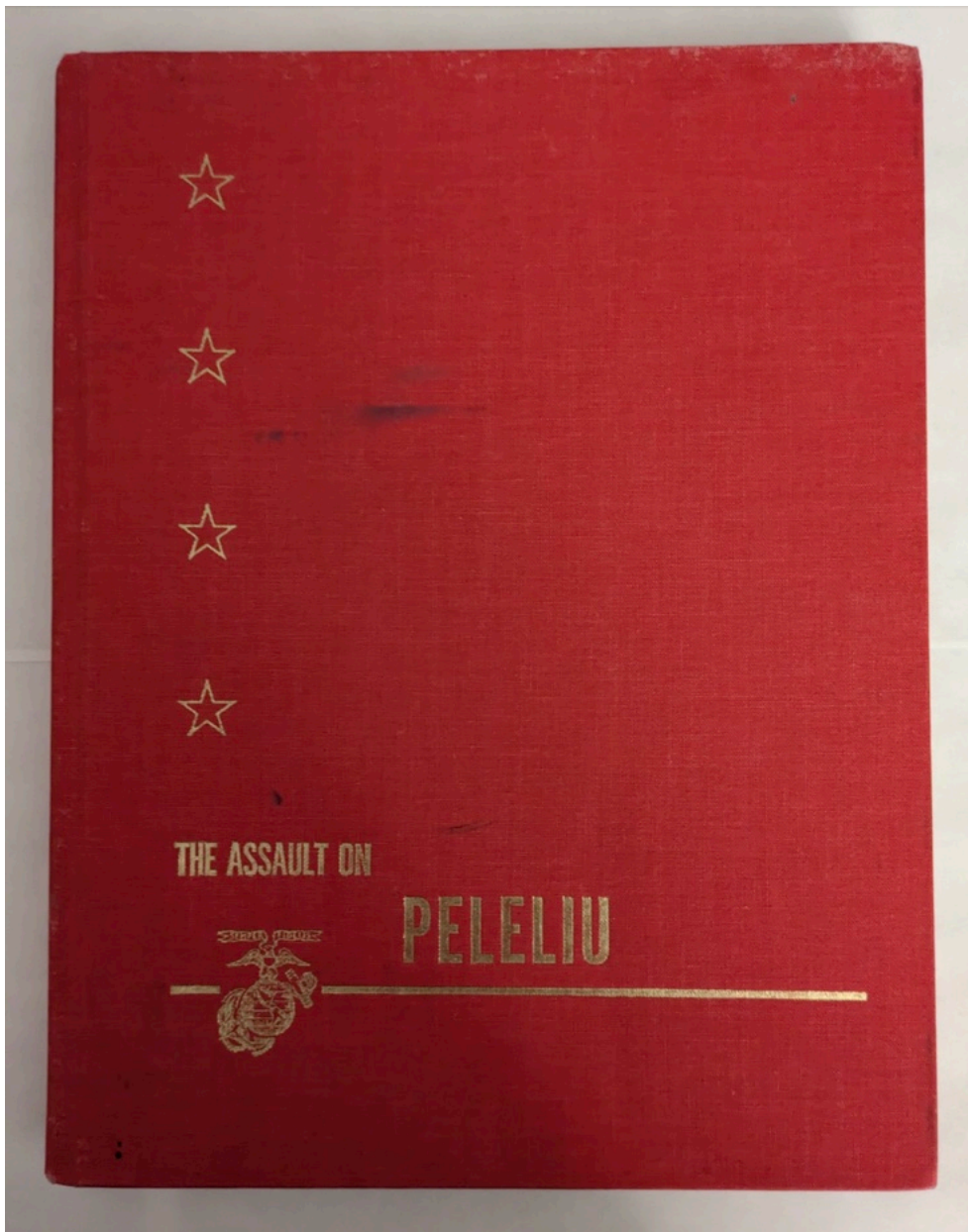
The National Archives has numerous digitized videos and photographs of military operations in Angaur and Peleliu. Complete operational reports are available through several websites that detail minute-by-minute activities. Various sources have photographs and information about the Wildcats that are available online.

Michael E. Byczek has copies of the three most important books about the Wildcats in World War II:

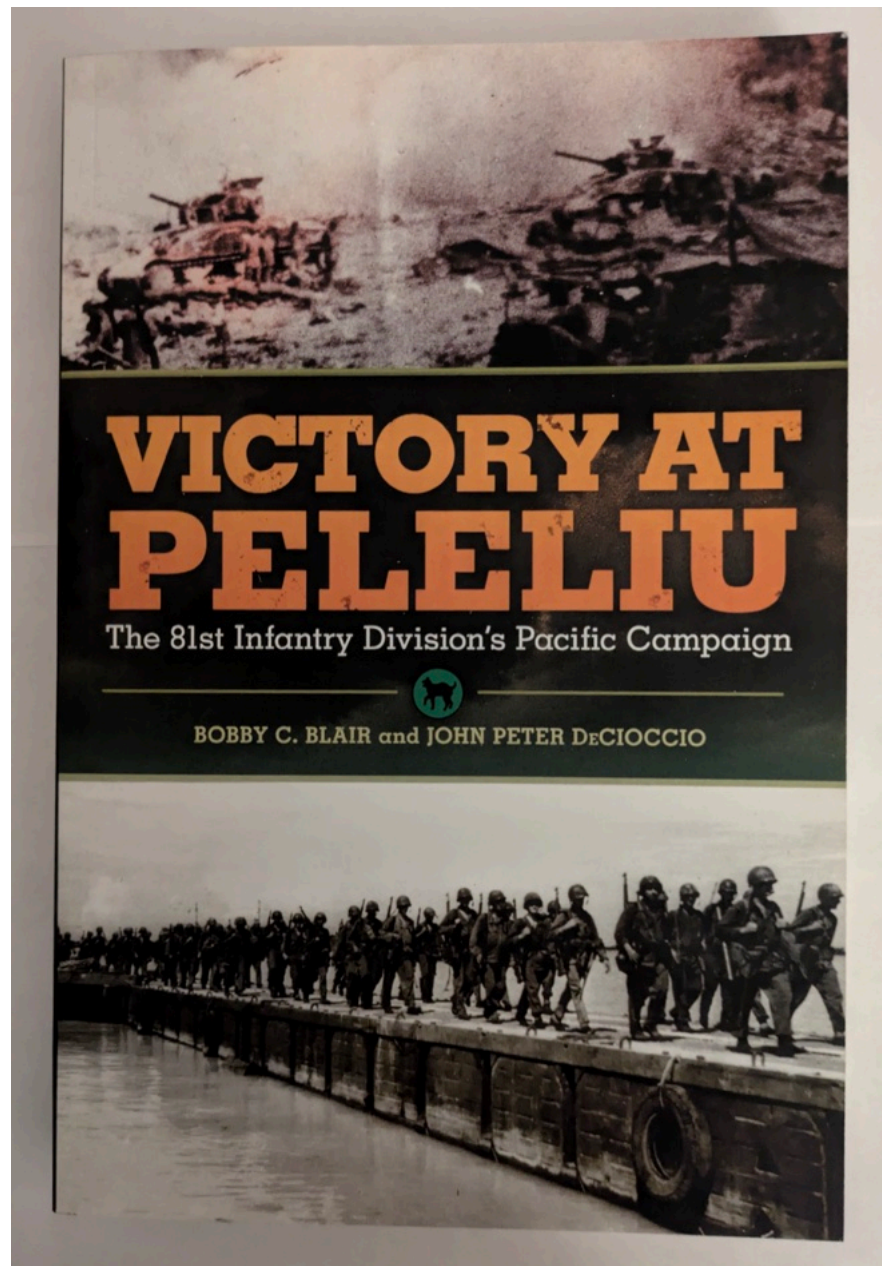
1. An official Wildcat historical book from their own perspective (1948)
2. An official account through the perspective of the Marines at Peleliu with extensive reference to the Wildcats (1950)
3. A present-day documentary about the Wildcats with emphasis on Peleliu, but covers the entire war (2011)



The official Wildcat perspective of World War II
Actual Item from the *Michael E. Byczek Genealogy Collection*
Photo Credit: Michael E. Byczek. Copyright 2025.



The official Marine perspective of the Peleliu Operation
Actual Item from the *Michael E. Byczek Genealogy Collection*
Photo Credit: Michael E. Byczek. Copyright 2025.



Present-day documentary about the Wildcats with emphasis on Peleliu
Actual Item from the *Michael E. Byczek Genealogy Collection*
Photo Credit: Michael E. Byczek. Copyright 2025.

Additional Information

Michael E. Byczek, an Illinois attorney and managing real estate broker, has compiled original records for genealogy since 1992. Research and analysis have been published on family websites for over 30 years. A project to compile comprehensive digital, print, and video documentaries for every direct blood ancestor began in September 2024 for accurate online genealogy.

Michael S. Byczek and Marie C. Flanagan are Michael E. Byczek's grandparents. Their eldest child, a son, Michael M. Byczek (father) married Betty A. Bykowski in 1974 at St. Helen's on Augusta and Oakley in Chicago. They have two children. Their son Michael E. Byczek is the eldest and was born in the Bridgeport neighborhood.

Revision History:

5/29/2026

2/9/2026

11/26/2025

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