

“LUCK HAS PLAYED A BIG ROLE IN MY LIFE...”

Arnold O. Beckman



From Arnold O. Beckman: One Hundred Years of Excellence
by Arnold Thackray and Minor Myers, Jr.



With boot camp completed, Arnold (Private Beckman) was ordered to the train depot as part of a group of 30 men who were to report to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. This was an embarkation point where the group would step onto a troopship, cross the Atlantic Ocean, and enter into combat. But, their train from Parris Island experienced a delay.

Aerial photograph of Brooklyn Navy Yard and surrounding city seen from the air in 1918; Public Domain, Naval History and Heritage Command (NH 117794); restored by Adam Cuerden.



The delay in arriving at Brooklyn Navy Yard meant that another group of soldiers boarded the troopship in their place. Instead, their unit went to the barracks to wait for new orders.

The men in their unit, and others, were counted off and assigned to barrack floors and bunks. These assignments corresponded to deck assignments for future transport ships.

Private Beckman had luck on his side: He stayed stateside. But every soldier in line behind him shipped out to Russia for two years of combat.





Image: Leon Trotsky reviewing troops of the Red Guard in Russia, circa 1918; Bain News Service/Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (LC-DIG-ggbain-33302)
Credit: Encyclopædia Britannica;
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Russian-Civil-War/Foreign-intervention#/media/1/513737/205224>

*TROTSKY ADDRESSING
THE RED
GUARD*



Just a few days later, the Armistice was signed and World War I came to an end. Private Beckman never shipped out overseas for active service as a Marine, never saw combat on the European front during the Great War. He remained in the service from 1918 to 1919.

Image: The Armistice Train, 1918.
Credit : Mémorial de l'Armistice.



*Mabel Meinzer in her Red Cross uniform,
circa 1918. Beckman Foundation Collection*



In another stroke of luck, on Thanksgiving Day 1918, just days after the Armistice was signed, Private Beckman and members of his unit were directed to nearby Greenpoint YMCA to eat a dinner which had been organized by the Red Cross and YMCA women volunteers. It would be the second Thanksgiving dinner they'd eaten that day, but they summoned up all their energy and headed over. There, Arnold met a young woman who would become his future wife: Mabel Meinzer.



In 1925, Arnold and Mabel tied the knot. They were married nearly 65 years. As the Great War raged, Arnold had enlisted in the Marines just out of high school. Boot camp had taught him discipline, survival skills, and the importance of working well with others. Then, a series of lucky circumstances had changed the course of Arnold's life, enabling him to eventually make his own mark on history.



Arnold and Mabel Beckman wedding portrait, 1925. Beckman Foundation Collection



If you enjoyed this online exhibit about Arnold Beckman's early years, you may also be interested in:



Through Mabel's Eyes: A Photo Diary (ONLINE EXHIBIT)



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