

James J. Buckley: Bombs That Saved Lives

James J. Buckley grew up near Anaconda, born there in 1920. Shortly after coming of age during World War II, he enlisted in the Army and rose to be a sergeant in the 603rd Ordnance Battalion. He was a technician who handled bombs and other munitions for the Army.

Attached to the Fifth Army headquarters with his unit in Livorno, Italy, Buckley was assigned to design and build a very special bomb. Captain John Whitehead, chief of the Fifth Army's Psychological Warfare unit had an idea for a bomb that would deliver leaflets. Scattering leaflets from the air was nothing new –a delivery of leaflets was done from a hot air balloon during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, and airplanes had first been used to deliver them in 1911 during a war between Italy and

Turkey. But for direct delivery from planes to be on target, the pilots had to navigate dangerously close to the enemy territory while at very low altitude. Whitehead wanted the leaflets to be encased in a bomb that could be delivered from an aircraft, while keeping the pilots a safe distance away. Leaflets would be dropped with several possible intents – to warn of impending attack to encourage desertion or surrender, to harm enemy morale, to promote Allied ideologies, to encourage insurrection by noncombatants and even to provide humanitarian aid information.

Buckley was provided with no directions other than the idea. It was up to him to find the way to create a bomb that could deal with the high winds, have a shape that kept the trajectory smooth, and could contain the leaflets, then release them at the optimal moment. Buckley overcame the obstacles and was able to devise a bomb that worked for leaflet delivery.

Buckley remained in the Army through the duration of the war in Europe. He was demobilized in Indiana in October of 1945, then headed home to Montana, where he started working for the Anaconda Copper Mining company, fabricating in the sheet-metal department.

Some six months later at a ceremony in Butte, he was awarded the Bronze Star at the direction of President Truman. According to the citation that accompanied the award, the dropping of leaflets was responsible for the surrender of thousands of enemy troops, having decimated the enemy's morale. Buckley's bomb saved the lives of the soldiers on both sides who did not have to fight further battles.

Sources:



*A US Army Soldier Loads a Leaflet Bomb
During the Korean War*

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Korean War Leaflet Bomb: US Army, Public domain