

On Okinawa he helped build air bases and landing strips.

His unit was close enough to hear battle sounds, but unable to see anything.

"Things were sure different," he said. "Nothing like the technology they have today. But we were just like everybody else. We did what had to be done."

When the announcement came that Japan had surrendered, everybody was talking about it.

"We were pretty happy," he said.

Following war's end, Mr. Montoia was with the occupational forces in Germany until 1946. He was discharged in 1949.

He made a lifelong friend in the service. A friendship that eventually brought him to settle in northwest Kansas.

His friend was Augie Unrien from McCracken, a little town southwest of Hays. Mr. Unrein introduced Mr. Montoia to his wife's sister, Clemmie. She later became Mrs. Montoia.

The Montoias settled in Norton County where they operated the A&W Restaurant for 18 years. At the same time he did welding, construction work and operated a back hoe and trenching service.

They raised four children; Tom, Jeanette, Paul and Ted.

## Ken Neiltopp

Ken Neiltopp served as an instructor for the U.S. Navy during World War II.

He was 20 when he enlisted in May of 1942.



Ken Neiltopp

He started out with the rank of radio technician third class and moved to aviation radio technician third class.

By the time he was discharged in November of 1945, he held the rank of aviation radio technician first class, which, he said, is the equivalent to sergeant in the army.

Mr. Neiltopp said he enlisted because he wanted to select the branch of service he went into.

He was upgraded because he had some background in electronics.

His first instructing job was on an island out-

side of Corpus Christi, Texas, where he taught for 18 months on the maintenance and repair of radar.

"The school was on an island because back then it was so hush-hush," he said. "Nobody talked about radar."

From there, he was transferred to the Naval Air Navigations Radio School in Gainesville, Ga., where he was an instructor for repair and maintenance of blind landing equipment.

Mr. Neiltopp then went to Rhode Island where he decommissioned several naval air station control towers of radio equipment along the east coast.

He was discharged in Norman, Okla.

He remembers exactly where he was and what he was doing when Pearl Harbor was bombed.

"I was behind the counter at Moffet Drug Store when I heard the first announcements on my HAM short-wave radio that Sunday morning," he said.

"That summer, I took inventory and got ready to go across."

"Pearl Harbor was the trigger. I knew that we were in for it."

"It was going to be all out. Franklin D. said so."

He said that after Pearl Harbor, there were troop trains going in every direction and there was rationing.

"You had to have a coupon to get nearly all commodities," he said. "Sugar, meat, gasoline, tires... everything."

He said he didn't know if his generation is the greatest or not.

"I think more things happened during our generation," he said.

"So many things advanced so fast — electronics, medicine.

"It seemed we had more of a drive, or urgency, or reason to fight. Mainly it was because of Pearl Harbor. That was something that really united the country."

Mr. Neiltopp said serving in the Navy gave him a livelihood when he got home.

He went into radio and television repair and was the assistant manager of Horney's Appliance Store for nearly 40 years.

When he was stationed in Georgia, he married his high school girlfriend Eunice.

His daughter was born the October before he got out of service.

Mr. and Mrs. Neiltopp live in Norton and have one daughter, three grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.



Bill Nelson

## Bill Nelson

The first time Bill Nelson saw the coast, he began to have second thoughts about the wisdom of his enlistment in the Navy at age 17.

"I told my commanding officer, 'That's not for me,'" he said. "He told me, 'That's home now, son'."

Mr. Nelson had to have his parent's permission to enlist.

"They knew I'd have to go anyway," he said.

It was Oct. 21, 1943, and he was an apprentice seaman taking basic training at Farragut, Idaho.

After a month of gunnery school at San Diego, he was deemed ready for combat.

"They sure didn't over train us," he said. "I

think they just wanted us to know what a gun looked like."

All of his war time was spent in the South Pacific. He saw Australia, the Solomon Islands, Guam and New Guinea.

He was on board Merchant Marine ships the SS Julian DeBuque and the SS Mandarin, which hauled high octane gas barrels and ammunition. He was one of the 29 Navy men and an officer assigned to the gunnery crew that protected the ship.

Later he was assigned to the aircraft carrier, CVE (converted) 66 White Plains. It was what Navy men called a "baby flat top". The White Plains had a crew of 2,500 men.

There, he was assigned to personnel. When the White Plains was decommissioned in 1946, he was responsible for transferring all the men to other vessels. He was the last commissioned man on board.

While out at sea, he went through two typhoons.

"When you are sitting on the fantail of a ship and you can see a wave coming over the top of the ship, it's real scary," he said.

"Typhoon or not, we had to stand watch. To keep from getting washed overboard, you had to be tied to your post.

When the watch changed, you untied yourself and tied the next man into position. During a storm like that the cooks couldn't fix any food. Your ration was water and crackers."

He was discharged on Nov. 30, 1946 as a yeoman third class. He had one advantage. Because of his youth at enlistment, he was what they officially called "minority cruise".

Anyone under 18 at enlistment, immediately got credit for four years of service. Unofficially, it was called "diaper cruise", he said.

He said that he thinks the men and women, who served during World War II were "the greatest generation.

"Not degrading any branch of the service, before or since then, but I think they were," he said.

"They had a place to fill. I know I grew up in a hurry. I don't think we've ever seen the cooperation that this country had then. We pulled together."

Mr. Nelson married his high school sweetheart Helen 60 years ago and he has done a little bit of everything from farming, to working in the oil fields to sales.

He and his wife have four sons, Loyd and Jim live in Colorado; Jon in Johnson; and Larry in Norton. They have six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

## VETERANS

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## Felix Pfannenstiel

Nimble fingers came in handy for Felix Pfannenstiel when he was assigned to the Army Signal Corps as a teletype operator.

Mr. Pfannenstiel was drafted into the Army on Nov. 11, 1942. He was 20 and he remembers how his parents both started crying when they heard the news that Sunday morning after Mass at the Catholic church in Collyer.

"They knew it (the war) would take a lot of boys," he said. He was the oldest of six children, three boys and three girls.

He graduated from high school in a class of 98. Of those nine men and two women served in the armed forces.

He took his basic training at Camp Crowder at Ft. Collins, Colo.

"Us farm boys could do all that physical stuff," he said. "Those city boys couldn't do any of it."

Then, someone asked him if he had taken typing in high school.

"I took a typing test and passed it, 100 per cent," he said. "I could type 68 words per minute."

He was told to report to the first sergeants office where he was told, "Pack your bags, you're shipping out at 4 o'clock." He was being sent to radio school at Omaha, Neb.

In Omaha, he trained 12 hours a day on the operation of a teletype machine at the YMCA building. Again he scored 100 per cent. After completing his training, he was assigned to the Pentagon in Washington. He was there for two years until teletype duties were transferred to the Women Air Corps.

Mr. Pfannenstiel shipped out with thousands of other men for New Guinea Bay, north of Australia. He liked it on board the ship and never got sea sick, he said.

"We camouflaged everything real good," he said of their base at New Guinea. "But the Japs found us anyway. They blasted the hell out of us."

He remembers General MacArthur going through the base, smoking on his corn cob pipe.

Mr. Pfannenstiel was on duty at his teletype machine when news of the A-bomb on



F. Pfannenstiel

Hiroshima came across the tape.

After the fighting was over, he was promised a promotion if he would re-enlist.

"I'm a farm boy and my father has lots of cattle," he told the recruiter. "I'm going home."

He remembers his folks were glad to see him. His clean living in the Army paid off for him, too. He didn't smoke, but all the time he was stationed overseas, he got his ration of four cartons of cigarettes. He sold those cigarettes and sent that money home and upon his return, bought a black 1938 Buick.

Military training and discipline served him well.

"It prepared me beautifully," he said. "I was a shy boy when I was drafted. But I'm not now."

Looking back, he said, "The war could not be helped — the way we were attacked. We had to hit 'em with full force."

The teletype machine took its toll. He developed severe carpal tunnel syndrome that required surgery.

He has kept in touch with some of his buddies and has attended two reunions.

He and his wife Elizabeth had seven children. He is a widower now and retired from farming in 1991.

## Vernon Roberts

Vernon Roberts was 20 years old on Dec. 7, 1941.

"I sure do remember that day," he said. "Everybody was pretty excited. I knew I was going to be involved. My sister was on the Norton County Draft Board and she said, 'You better volunteer if you want to get into something you like.' Well, I had already been in the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) for a year and I wasn't volunteering for anything.

He remembers talking to his parents, who farmed.

"It was something you had to do. My parents accepted it. But, yeah, they were proud of me. Nowadays, they make such a big deal out of it."

His sister Betty Sebelius, later enlisted in the Navy WAVES, but Mr. Vernon waited until he was drafted. He was inducted on Oct. 12, 1942 and went into the Army Artillery. He took basic



Vernon Roberts

training at Ft. Sheridan, Ill.

He went in as a private first class and came out three years later as a corporal.

A lot of soldiers in his unit were from the South.

"They were real good people," he said. "But times were hard there, just like they had been here. Some of those boys didn't go to school. I remember one of them who couldn't read or write. I would write letters home for him. Don't know if his folks could read them or not. But they were good people."

He remembers his trip across the Atlantic to Plymouth, England. A passenger ship, The Empress of Australia, had been converted to a troop ship.

"You know what we ate all the way over?" he asked. "Mutton and marmalade. I can't stand it to this day."

He said England wasn't much fun.

"Every place you went, they would play 'God Save the King' and we had to stand up," he said.

He was assigned to guard the harbor in Plymouth. He was there for about six months — until the Normandy invasion.

Troops were loaded on ships to cross the English Channel. He was with the 456th Anti-Aircraft Battalion and they were on three ships. One of them struck a floating mine and the explosion killed 132 men. The battalion came in on the second wave at Omaha Beach, one of the bloodiest spots of the entire invasion. There was lots of noise and confusion, he said, and his group had trouble getting to shore.

Once on shore, it took them two to three days to remove Cosmoline, a water-proofing agent, from their anti-aircraft guns. By that time, the beach had been secured and his unit had set up their guns and was firing on enemy planes.

From Normandy, his unit moved inland to Bastogne. By now, it was winter time.

"My God, it was cold," he said.

When the war ended, he was in Germany, which he said was a beautiful country. He served with the occupying forces for six months. Hitler's country retreat, Burks garden, had been taken over and it was Mr. Robert's duty to escort visiting dignitaries and Army nurses on tours of the grounds and of Hitler's yacht.

His return stateside was uneventful. He said there were no crowds to meet the ships and when he got home to his parent's farm outside Alma he just went right back to work.

Looking back, he thinks the military probably straightened him out and taught him a few things, like manners, how to polish his shoes and to get along with people.

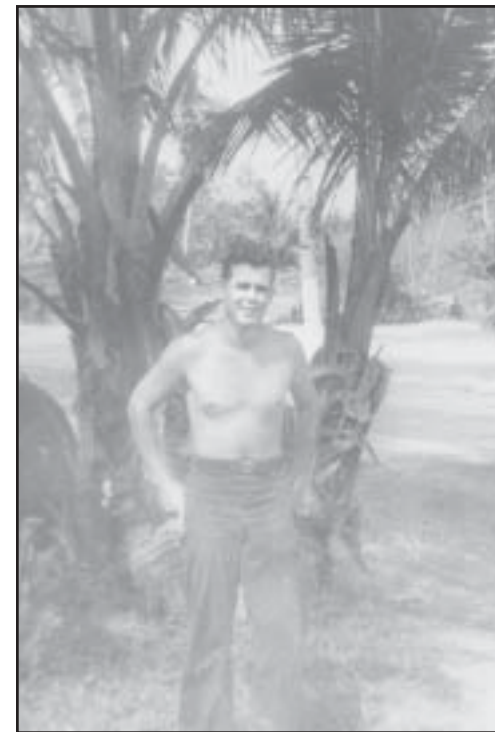
"I came from a family of five kids," he said. "So I already knew discipline. But the Army taught me self-discipline."

He received several medals for his actions under fire. In fact, the last one was presented to him only three years ago by Congressman Jerry Moran. Somehow, that last medal had never been awarded.

"Times were different then," he said. "You didn't dare question the president. Everybody respected him. I didn't even know Roosevelt was in a wheel chair until I got back."

He and a few of the men in his unit kept in touch after the war. Three years ago five of them held a reunion in Hays. They still talk on the phone.

Mr. Roberts and his wife Donna Maxine live in Norton where he worked for the state Highway Department as a road surveyor for 41 years. After he retired, he went into business for himself as a private surveyor. Knee problems forced a second retirement.



Lyman Rowh

## Lyman Rowh

Lyman Rowh remembers World War II as a conflict that united the United States like no event prior or since.

Mr. Rowh, a motor machinist mate third class,

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