

took him to the island of Sabu in the Philippines. He landed on a sand beach, where his unit was assigned to mop up activities. They were replacements to rebuild the forces. His next assignment was going to be Japan for the planned invasion.

It was Aug. 14, and Mr. Severns had decided to stay in his tent that night. The other men had gone to the movies. He began to hear hollering and yelling and he soon learned that the Japanese had surrendered.

"That was quite a night of celebration," he said. "We stayed up most of the night playing cards and talking."

He was moved into the city of Sabu to transfer the stockpiled ammunition out to the ships in the harbor. While at Sabu the men played a lot of volleyball during intrasquad competition. At one point, he learned that Gale Davis, a Long Island boy, was just across the road.

On Oct. 12, he was sent to Hokkaido, on the northern end of Japan as part of the occupying forces. Men who had enough points were able to go home. That's when he became a mail clerk. When the outfit was broken up, he got transferred to the Air Force and he stayed an extra two weeks in order to forward everyone's mail.

He was sent to Johnson Army Air Base close to Irmagawa, 35 miles from Tokyo. There, he worked in the mail section for a few weeks. He delivered military mail to the military bases in the Tokyo area, including Gen. MacArthur's office.

"General MacArthur would get down on his knees and pray that God would lead him to guide the Japanese people and he would pray for his ability to lead in the way they should be taken care of," Mr. Severns said. "In my opinion, MacArthur was a tremendous Christian man. He was a witness to me as a young man."

When he returned to the states, he was discharged at Camp Beale, Calif.

"I've heard that statement, 'We're the greatest generation'," he said. "Are we? There have been a lot of great generations. I can't say that we were any greater than any other. We don't know what sacrifice really is. But, I'm glad I served my country."

Dale Shearer

Dale Shearer was only 17 years old, but he had leased 80 acres and had corn in the field, ready to pick, when he got drafted, right out of high school in 1942. His dad and brothers had to pick that corn for him.

He took basic training in Paris, Texas and was assigned to the Army's 343rd Infantry Division, called the Blackhawk Division. He went in as a private and came out a corporal.

He recalls that Army life wasn't so bad. He had weekends off and could go to Dallas or Gainesville. One day, he noticed a posting of an opening in personnel for a record keeper. His friends laughed at him and said he didn't have a chance. However, he interviewed with a young lieutenant and is convinced it was his snappy salute that got him the job. His friends were downcast to see him leave the unit and he admitted it was tough on him, too, when he had to turn in his weapons.

Being the record keeper was not always pleasant. If a soldier went absent without leave (AWOL), it was his job to withhold a portion of their pay.

He remembers the military being short of ships when he was being sent out.

"I was sent over in a cargo ship that had been overhauled into a troop ship," he said. "I slept on the deck where it was cooler. One night, it quit. There we were, just sittin' still in the water, no lights or anything. It might have been a big ocean, but, one of our ships found us. The repairs were made and we got underway again."

The trip took 30 days.

Mr. Shearer's time overseas was spent on the island of Luzon. He wasn't involved in the fighting, but battle sounds could be heard at the base. He said, there was always a danger, especially when the Japanese made bomb runs.



Dale Shearer

"There were lots of happy guys," he said, when word came over the intercom that the war with Japan had ended. "It (dropping the A-bomb) was something nobody wanted to do. It may sound cruel, but it saved a lot of casualties on both sides."

He remembers months after the war was over, Japanese soldiers who had been cut off from their units, did not know the war was over. He said, they were so hungry, they would try to sneak into the American's chow lines.

When he returned home from the war, he got as far as Norton. At the time, a man named Sandy DePew, who ran a taxi service from Norton to Almena, took him on home.

"Nobody even knew I was home 'til I walked in the back door," he said. "They were glad to see me."

"I wouldn't want to brag on us being the greatest generation. It was different then. It was a war we were allowed to win. The others have seemed more like police actions."

Mr. Shearer and his wife, Dorothy, have been married 55 years and have three children. Since the war, he has been a farmer/stockman and a mail carrier for the last 18 years.

David Sheley

The last draftee from Norton County was David Sheley in 1946, when he was 18. Technically, the war was over, but he is still considered a war veteran.

Mr. Sheley was only 13, when the U.S. got involved in the war. Dec. 7 was a day that stood out to him, anyway. It was his father's birthday. He remembers his family hearing the news of Pearl Harbor on the radio. During the war years, his family had to cope with rationing.

"We got by," he said. "We didn't have sugar, so we used honey instead."

He reported to Fort Logan, Colo., for enlistment, but was sent to Kansas City to do that. From there he went to Ft. Sam Houston, Texas, for his basic training. He remembers having to



David Sheley

stand at attention for hours as discipline for someone else's goof.

"Everyone suffered the consequences if someone messed up.

He was selected to attend a six-week hygienists school in Chicago. He received his certification as a meat and dairy inspector for the Army and went to Seattle, Wash., where he worked in a cold storage warehouse. It was his job to inspect carcasses, boxed meat, fish, eggs and dairy products.

He was eligible for discharge in 1947. The Army tried to entice him with a promotion if he would stay in and go to Korea. His only thoughts were of going home.

"I didn't want to make a big deal out of it," he said. "I just wanted to come back and help Dad on the farm."

Mr. Sheley thought his time in the service was great.

"There was lots of discipline, but I didn't mind it," he said. "I already knew discipline."

"At the time I was in the service, I thought it was great. Many years went by when veterans weren't recognized. But, I knew who I was and what I had done. I'm proud of my service and what I did for my country. I met lots of fine people in the service."

He and his wife, Wanda, have been married for 52 years. They have two children, five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Jerry Sloan

The bombing of Pearl Harbor came as no surprise to Jerry Sloan.

He had enlisted in the Navy in 1940, and while in boot camp, his chief petty officer said, "We were going to be fighting the Japanese."

"I figured if he knew it, everybody else did too," Mr. Sloan said.

On Dec. 7, he was stationed at New Port, R.I., tending to general maintenance on a torpedo boat when the news came

"Word traveled fast," he said.

He was sent to San Francisco, where he got on a converted cruise ship "The West Point" and headed to Australia.

"We got paid \$21 a day, one day a month," he said.

He was a torpedo man first class, assigned to a torpedo boat that escorted supply and troop ships. His job was to keep the torpedo racks in shape, keep watch and assist with steering. Their escort missions took them to Guadalcanal and Talogee.

Whenever an enemy submarine was in the area, they would drop depth charges. But as an escort, the torpedo boat didn't have any support.

He remembers when his boat had to go the aid of the USS Pensacola.

"A torpedo had torn the ship in two," he said. "Two hundred men were killed below decks when hot oil exploded on them. It was awful. It just cooked 'em. They brought the bodies out on deck and laid them out in rows. They were burned so bad, their friends couldn't even identify them."

He was on the Perkins No. 377, just off the coast of New Guinea when they ran into trouble.

"It was in the middle of the night when we were rammed by an Australian supply ship," he said. "We probably had one of those 90-day wonders on the bridge. He zigged when he should have zagged. The Perkins sank in a mat-

ter of minutes. We lost nine men. They were below deck in the boiler room. There was no way they could get out."

Meantime, back in the states, his family was coping with rationing.

"Rationing didn't bother them," he said. "We didn't have much anyway."



Jerry Sloan

To pass the time on board, he would weave macrame belts and make yarn rugs. When he was in Honolulu, he bought \$300 worth of yarn for his projects. He made them and then gave them away. After his return to civilian life, he continued to make belts. Someone offered his daughter \$50 for one he had made for her, but she wouldn't take it, he said.

He was somewhere around New Guinea when the A-bomb was dropped. He said there was no special celebration, but he remembers thinking it was a good deal.

He got out of the Navy in 1946 when his enlistment was up. It was exactly six years, one month and 27 days.

"It was just something we had to do," he said of his time in the service. "I got to see places in the world I never would have seen otherwise."

Back in Norton, he went to work for the telephone company, but they were going on strike, so he quit and went to work at a filling station. The owner sold out, so he worked as a mechanic at the Pontiac/Buick garage for awhile. Finally, he settled in with Garrett's Plumbing and Heating where he stayed for 25 years. He retired, but soon found himself back at work when his son decided to go into the plumbing business. He helped him out for about 10 years.

He and his wife Wanda have two children and still live in the house they built.

He has kept in touch with one of his service buddies who lives in Davis, Calif. They talk to each other about once a year and exchange cards, he said.

Richard Smith

Richard Smith holds the distinction of being among the first boatload of American Air Force personnel to go overseas on board the Queen Elizabeth.

He was drafted in 1942, at 27. He and his sweetheart Mildred had been planning a wedding, but his service postponed their plans.

"Mildred, it looks like I'm headed to the war," he told her.

He took his basic training at Ft. Jefferson, St. Louis, Mo., then 10 weeks of gunnery training at Buckley Field, Denver. He passed with a 93.87 percent average. He was assigned to the 8th Air Force, 4th Fighter Group, 336th Fighter Squadron.

When he arrived in England, his unit was kept in a holding area where they waited to be assigned and for their equipment. He was told to get all his belongings together and found himself being sent to the Royal Air Force Commandant.

"I see you were a mechanic in civilian life. Would you work for us?" the commandant



Richard and Mildred Smith

asked.

"I'll do anything you need," he replied. "I can work on anything that runs on gas."

From then on, he was attached to the Royal Air Force. He worked on the crew of the top ace fighter pilot, Johnny Gadsby.

"We kept him flying," he said.

England was under constant attack. He remembers the sirens blaring night and day for 17 months.

He said every morning at sunrise, the unmanned German "buzz bombs" would come. Sometimes, the pilots could deflect them to head back across the English Channel to Germany, where they would run out of gas and crash.

"Was I scared?" he said. "All the time!"

He never had a furlough.

When he got his discharge Oct. 7, 1945, he said, "I'm going back to marry the most beautiful girl in Kansas."

His wife remembers the rationing of the war years.

"We didn't consider them hardships," she said. "We knew we were helping the cause. Of course, you had to plan. But we made out fine. That was a war we were going to win — at all

costs."

Shortly after his discharge, with the rank of sergeant, on Oct. 20, 1945, he and Mildred were married. For a time they lived in Guthrie Center, Iowa, where he worked for the International Harvester dealership. Mrs. Smith was from Prairie View and when her mother became ill, they moved back to Kansas to care for her.

They farmed for awhile, then he worked for Garvey Elevator for 17 years. After the elevator sold, he became the safety crossing guard on U.S. 36.

Five years ago, he was hit by a car and his injuries forced him into retirement. He still suffers from those injuries and depends on his wife to help with his daily activities.

They are the parents of two sons, David of Greeley, Colo., and Randall, Wichita. They have six grandchildren.

"The military was a good experience, but I was a homesick boy," he said. "I think we left quite a mark behind us. When I got home, someone asked me what party I belonged to. I said, 'The American Party!' There weren't any Democrats or Republicans; blacks or whites. Our blood was all the same color."

'Lefty' Stephenson Francis Strayer

You could say Raymond "Lefty" Stephenson was a gung-ho kind of soldier.

Already in the Army when Pearl Harbor was attacked, he was stationed in Little Rock, Ark.

When he and his buddies heard the news, he said, "Let's go! That's what we're here for!"

He was 21 when he was drafted as a private making \$21 dollars a month and was one of the first to leave Norton.

He was a member of the 635th Tank Destroyer unit. This was a Kansas National Guard Battalion under the command of Lt. Col. Wint Smith from Mankato.

"We were all Kansas boys in that unit," Mr. Stephenson said. "Even had some Indian boys from Lawrence."

He saw plenty of action in the war, fighting in five major battles in Normandy, Northern France, the Rhineland, Ardennes and Central Europe.

He recalls a time when he and a buddy were checking for booby traps. They were spotted from a church steeple by the Germans, who began to fire on them.

Mr. Stephenson called in a tank to knock out the steeple.

He said he learned to distinguish between the sounds made by 88 millimeters or mortar shells.

One of his fears was that his best friend might be killed. Some of his friends did get hit by shrapnel.

One day he was on the back of tank with infantrymen walking on both sides of the road.

Amongst the men, he spotted his brother-in-law. They got together that night and had a big night of talking.

When Mr. Stephenson was discharged, after 4 1/2 years of service, he had reached the rank of buck sergeant.

"When I came home from the war, I was the only one from Norton to get out on the point system," he said. "Maybe that was the reason there was no homecoming for me.

My family had a celebration for me, though. My wife had planned a celebration for me. We went to Colorado for a couple of weeks in Denver. Then we went to Loveland where my wife's mother lived. What a change from the war. I loved it!

"The thought of my family praying for me everyday helped me know that I would come through this. If they didn't hear from me for a month, they thought something had happened to me.

"I was with Patton and the Third Army. He moved so fast, you didn't have time to do anything."

Being in the war changed his life, he said, "It made me want to be a good person, a good husband and good to my family," he said. "This is a great country. Some people don't realize what these boys go through in a war. I think being called the 'greatest generation' is an honor. We should be proud of all the boys that go to war."

Francis Strayer is a resident of the Andb Home in Norton. His voice is weak, but his desire to share his story was strong.

In 1941, when the U.S. declared war on Japan, Mr. Strayer was 26 and unmarried.

"I knew I would be drafted, so I just thought I would volunteer," he said.

During the rationing of World War II his family was still on the farm and he said they got along all right.

He served as a mechanic on trucks and tanks with the 34th Ordnance Company.

"The military taught you how to take care of yourself and to take orders," he said.

The men in his outfit found time to have some fun, too. During off duty hours they played softball, football and pitched horseshoes.

Lots of friendships were made during his time in the service, but a few years after the war, most of them just kind of lost touch, he said.

He worked at Foster Lumber Co. for 20 years. When the business sold, he retired.

Never married, he said he didn't have time, but laughed when kidded about it.

He said that during his military career, he got to see this country, crossing it three times from east to west.

Mr. Strayer agreed that his generation could be thought of as the greatest generation.

"We had quite a time, but I wouldn't want to do it again," he said.



Francis Strayer



R. Stephenson

Howard Sumner

"I didn't know until I got to school Monday morning that Pearl Harbor had been bombed," said Howard Sumner. "and I wanted to go so bad. I thought it would be over before I could get there."

But he was still in high school and had to wait until he was 18. In December of 1942, he volunteered for the Army Air Force. The stringent requirements allowed only about seven out of every 100 applicants to make the cut.

After passing aptitude tests and a physical, he became an aviation cadet. He was sent to what was called "college detachment" at Michigan State for three months; received his basic training at Strother Field, Winfield; primary flight training at Saxon, Mo.; and advanced training at San Antonio, Texas.

After flight school he was sent back to Strother Field as part of a Replacement Training Unit. There he learned strafing and bombing and to fly in formation. At that point in the war, about 1,000 men were being lost every day in air combat, so the need for replacements was great, he said.

He was shipped to Pisa, Italy, on a ship, carrying mostly tires and supplies. He and the other pilots on this ship arrived at an infantry depot in the middle of the night, during a rain storm.

"We were given a tent and told to pitch it," he said. "We were pilots; we didn't know anything