



Howard Sumner

about tents. What a mess.”

He flew all his missions from an air base out of Pisa, where the famous leaning tower is.

“When we were off duty, us pilots would go up there in the evening,” he said. “It was nice and cool and we’d drink wine.”

Pilots were on a four-days-on, one-day-off rotation. Mr. Sumner, who flew P-47s, said most of his missions were to blow up bridges to disrupt enemy supply routes. He also flew escort missions to Germany and some to the front lines.

He became a flight leader during his tour of duty. But recognized it took a lot of ground support crews to keep the planes in the air.

He didn’t know it at the time, but May 1, 1945, was the day he flew his last mission. “My C.O. (commanding officer) was killed that day. I might have stayed in, if he hadn’t been killed.” Mr. Sumner said.

When pilots had flown 100 missions they could go home. He had flown 79 missions when he was told he would be going to fly missions over Japan. He was given the choice of taking a

leave and coming back or going directly to Japan to finish his 21 missions. He chose to finish his tour. It took three months for his outfit to get loaded up for the move to a new site of operations.

He was on a ship outside Panama when the news of the A-bomb being dropped on Hiroshima reached him.

“We had a helluva celebration,” he said. “A buddy had a fifth of whiskey he had been saving for when the war was over. He got it out and it didn’t last three minutes.”

The atomic bomb saved a lot of American lives, he said.

He was put ashore at New York Harbor and took a troop train home on leave. He had to go back to Goldsboro, N.C., for his discharge.

When he got home to Norcatour, there was a big party for all the local boys returning home. There was a dance and lots of fun.

“Everybody shook your hand and said they were glad to see you,” he said.

“The military taught me discipline and that’s

good for anybody. I’ve always been proud of my part in the war. I was proud of being a fighter pilot.”

Mr. Sumner agrees with the president’s policies in Iraq.

“If President Bush hadn’t done what he did, Saddam Hussein would have got an A-bomb himself and blown up some big city in America. By God, he (Bush) showed ‘em. Appeasement doesn’t get you anywhere. I learned as a young man in Lebanon, Neb., that if someone was pickin’ on you, you might as well get up and hit the *% @#!, ‘cause he wasn’t going to leave you alone.”

Mr. Sumner said there are only three men left from his squadron. They have been lifelong friends and still see each other at reunions. The last reunion of the P-47 Association will be in Albuquerque next year.

He plans to be there.

Ed Trueblood

Ed Trueblood saw the war you read about in history books first hand. He was involved in the Normandy invasion, crossed the Maginot Line and saw the Battle of Bulge.

Mr. Trueblood said he was probably in more danger than he realized at the time.

“I had a job to do and I was busy,” he said. “I didn’t even stop to think about it.”

Mr. Trueblood, a captain drafted into the fifth armored division, transferred into the signal corps. He served from March 1942 to November, 1945.

He spent the war working with radio systems and following the command post, the roaming facility where the general was, across Europe.

He recalls seeing buzz bombs and artillery fire fly overhead. But, he was always confident he would be all right.

Mixed in with the danger were a few mundane activities and good times. He played softball on the day the Normandy invasion began while waiting to move out.

“There were good times, but I had times that were rather scary,” he said.

One of those times was when he was instructed to set up a radio system in a small German town that had been liberated, or so he thought. When he arrived, there were American soldiers laying on the ground, preparing to fight.

“A soldier asked me what I was doing there, and I told him I was there to set up a radio system and he said they liberated the town but they lost it again. he said ‘you better get out of here’



Ed Trueblood

and I said ‘thank you’ and got out of there.”

Mr. Trueblood said when he heard the radio broadcast that Pearl Harbor had been attacked, he didn’t believe it at first.

“I thought another Orson Welles deal was going on,” he said referring to the War of the Worlds broadcast.

He soon became convinced it was real and he was sure he would have to get involved. He also soon realized how serious the attack was.

“That was a real serious deal for our whole country,” he said. “We could have lost the whole war right there.”

He said his generation was prepared for the fight because of the way they grew up. He said not only did they experience hardships during the Great Depression they respected their parents and did what they were told. He said this was a good preparation for military life.

“I think when the Japanese general said the sleeping giant had been awakened he was about as right as he could have been.”

On his way home he had one more bout with danger. In the English Channel a freighter hit the back of his ship, poking a hole and causing a ship wreck. He was playing cards and all of a sudden the ship started to bounce around and emergency sirens started to go off. After a tense hour they learned what had happened and two weeks later they boarded another ship for home.

When he did get home, it was a surprise to his parents. He hadn’t told them he was coming. It was the day before Thanksgiving and he said the family reunion made for a good holiday.



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Elden Vincent

Elden Vincent's school superintendent had a lot to do with him joining the Navy.

"He was a veteran from World War I and influenced me greatly," he said. "I had just turned 17 when I enlisted and had to have my parents signature. I don't think they would have signed, but George Cole, my superintendent, thought it was the thing to do."

Mr. Vincent was called to active duty in July of 1945. He took basics in San Diego, Calif., and then was transferred to Camp Shoemaker, which was near Oakland and San Francisco, where he worked in the records office.

"Camp Shoemaker would receive troops going to different assignments and we would type up drafts of where they were supposed to go," he said.

He was discharged from Camp Shoemaker in October of 1946, but served an additional five years in the Naval Reserves.

Mr. Vincent remembers that when he heard about Pearl Harbor, he was shocked.

"We didn't have a television in those days," he said. "Everybody was glued to their radios. I knew it was inevitable that we were going to get in it."

He said during the war everything was rationed.

"There was gas rationing and you couldn't get tires," he said. "I drove a Model A Ford to school and the tires were so bad the tube was sticking through. You couldn't get sugar either. I liked sugar on everything, but sugar was rationed too."

Despite the rationing, everyone was behind the war effort.

"I can remember my parents and grandparents buying victory bonds," he said. "I don't think I ran into anyone who wasn't very supportive of the war. Everyone was 100 percent."

After he was discharged, he went to college for two years at Denver University, then got married and came back to the area to farm.

Mr. Vincent and his wife Arleta have been married 55 years. They have four children, eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

He said two of his grandchildren have seen the World War II memorial in Washington. Both were very impressed with it, he said.

Frank Ward

Frontwards or backwards, Frank Ward will never forget his service number. It reads the same either way — 841148.

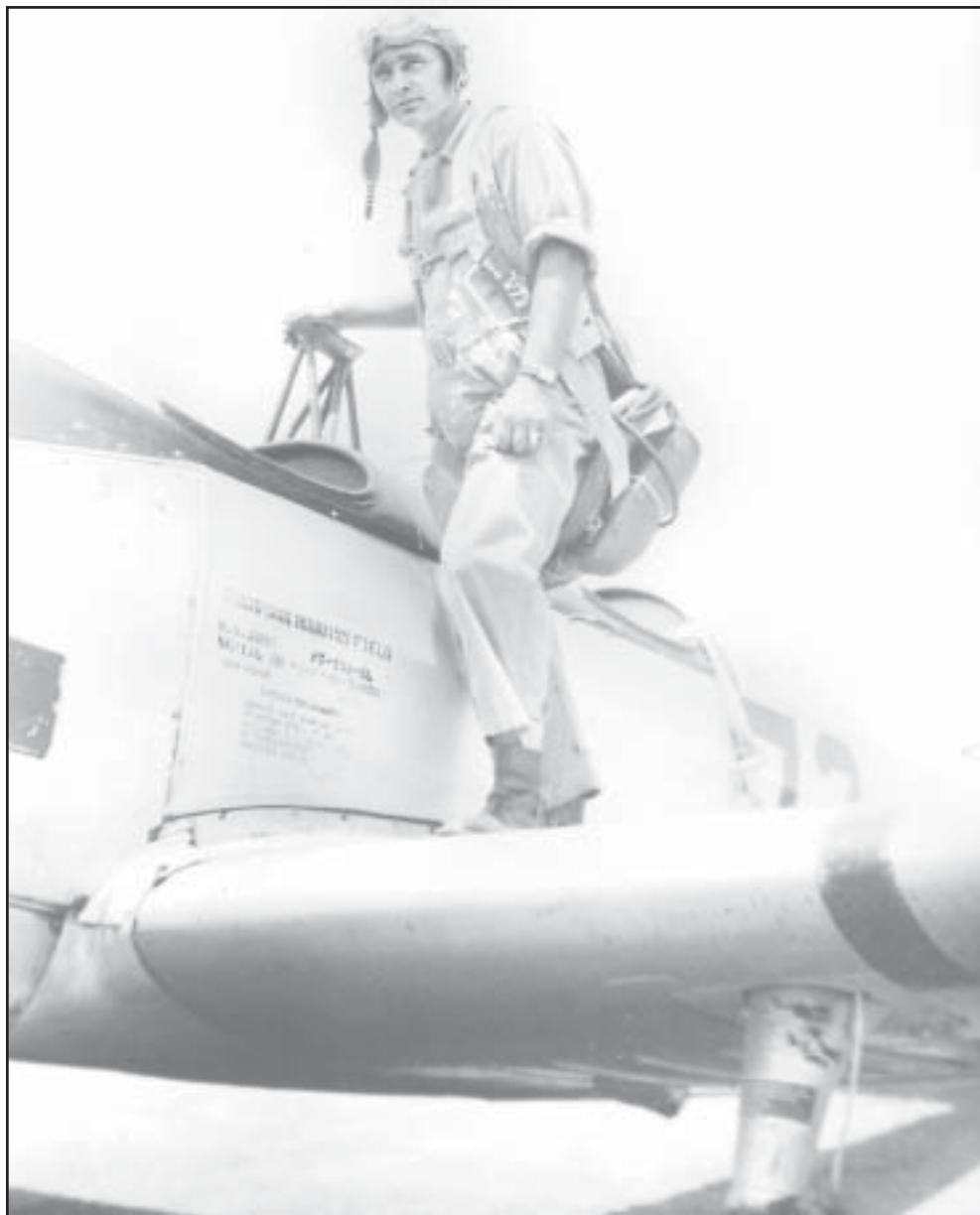
Mr. Ward volunteered for the Kansas Air National Guard in October of 1941. He was stationed at Fort Leavenworth when the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor reached him.

"We knew we were in for more than a year," he said after hearing President Roosevelt on the radio.

In the fall of '42 he was shipped to Panama as a member of an observation squadron. Then, he applied for flight school, was accepted and got



Elden Vincent



Frank Ward with one of his airplanes

shipped back to the states for training as a pilot. He was sent for college training in New Hampshire and then all over the country. He spent time in Hattiesburg, Miss.; Greenville, Miss.; got his wings in Albany, Ga.; and took more training on B-17s at Locklear Air Force Base, Columbus, Ohio.

Training was no piece of cake, either. He said he knew of six men, who were killed in training before they even left the states.

He remembers when two of his buddies narrowly escaped a court martial and possibly death.

They were on a training mission and decided to try a loop-de-loop. The stress on the plane was too much and the fabric covering the fuselage tore, causing them trouble in landing. After inspecting the damage, the general in charge delivered his assessment of the situation, "faulty fabric."

With a grin, he recalled a tradition amongst the pilots. After a flyer made his solo flight the rest of his outfit would dump cold water on him. "It's just something we did," he said.

When the war in Germany ended in the early part of 1945, Mr. Ward was sent to Montgomery, Ala., where his training was switched to the B-29s. When the war ended, that was the end of his flight training.

"When I heard on the radio about the A-bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I was satisfied that

it had saved a lot of American lives," he said.

"Pilots were a dime a dozen when I got out of the service," he said. "I couldn't have done anything with that." So he did what he knew. He came back to Kansas on a train. There were no brass bands to meet him.

"The celebration was already over," he said.

He and his wife Velda farmed and raised livestock. They have been married for 58 years and have two children, Wava and Leslie. They have three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Mr. Ward can understand how folks might think World War II vets were the greatest generation.

"But, we've had two outfits that have been overlooked," he said. "The Korean vets and definitely the Vietnam vets. Those guys got missed. Damned news and hippie outfits that lambasted them. I can understand how those guys feel.

"We had the country behind us. They didn't. The country began to separate. In Korea, men were ill-equipped when they went in. In Vietnam, they could get shot at, but they were restricted at who they could shoot at."

Mr. Ward keeps a scrapbook of his pictures and mementos from his time in the service. He managed to keep in touch with some of his buddies, but the only reunions he has attended have been those for the Kansas Air National Guard.

"We were a solidified unit," he said.

Jack Ward

It was a Sunday afternoon. Jack Ward was 17 and at the high school in Norton playing a basketball game when he learned of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

"We were all stunned," he said. "One of our coaches told us what had happened. We sat around awhile, then went home and listened to the radio. We all expected to go."

The next summer, after he turned 18, he joined the Marines and was sworn in November 1942. His basic training took place at Camp Elliott in California. He went in as a private and advanced to corporal.

In March of 1943, he was one of 7,000 men on board the USS Washington, a converted luxury liner, bound for New Caledonia, an island north of Australia. The voyage took 18 days.

At New Caledonia, the ship was unloaded and all the supplies and men were set up in a staging area in preparation to go on to the Solomon Islands. Mr. Ward ended up on Russell Island, a 14-square-mile piece of land. He remained there for the duration. He and his unit supplied all the ammunition for all the Marines in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Divisions fighting in that area.

He said all the fighting was north of the island, but they did have air strikes.

When news of the atomic bomb ending the war was learned, he was on furlough in Norton.

"It was a joyous occasion," he said.

He was discharged shortly after that in December.

The war was pretty tough on his family. He had a brother stationed in the Philippines who was captured at Battan. His brother survived the death march and was the next to last prisoner of war released in World War II.

"I think Tom Brokaw was right," he said of the "Greatest Generation" quote. "There were 19 million people involved in World War II. We fought and did what we had to do."

He kept in touch with some of the friends he made in the service. But all his buddies are gone now.

He and his wife Esther are the parents of four children and have been married for 55 years. He was a long-time Norton businessman, owning Jack Ward's Sporting Goods. Now, he is an "advisor" at The End Zone.

"One thing the military taught me was discipline," he said. "It also taught me to appreciate things more."



Jack Ward