



Warren White

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In 1944 Warren White was a young man who wanted to serve his country and serve his family. That's part of the reason he enlisted in the Navy, but he was also looking for something else.

"Why does any young man want to go for adventure?," he said about why he went.

Adventure is something he got.

Mr. White, a second class radarman, served from March 1944 to May 1946. After school to become a radarman, he boarded ship for the Pacific and had an adventure.

He served as the only radarman on a ship that carried the 3rd Marine Division into the invasion of Iwo Jima. As they approached the island, they could first see flashes from battleship fire and, about four hours later as they got closer, they could feel the shots.

"I remember going out on the deck and having my pant legs tug at my knees every time one of those concussions would come by the ship," he said. "That would give you quite an impression because you knew what was up there."

The first night the ship stayed in the invasion area all night, it was reported that Japanese swimmers were in the water. The swimmers

would strap bombs to themselves and try to sink enemy boats. They would hide under debris in the water so as not to be detected. Mr. White was put on guard duty with a submachine gun that night, which he admits was frightening.

"I shot at everything I saw," he said.

His ship's next duty was to carry the second wave of troops into the invasion of Okinawa. Kamikaze planes were a concern and one hit the next ship and shrapnel injured some on his ship.

The ship's next trip was going to be the hardest. They were headed for the invasion of Japan.

"That was going to be tough because when you invade a man's homeland, that's a little more important than some of the outlying islands we'd taken over," he said.

However Japan surrendered.

Mr. White said the harbor went wild with celebration at the announcement. Ships shot their flares and pyrotechnics and sprayed water from fire hoses into the air all night. At dawn, there were no flares or pyrotechnics left unshot.

Mr. White got his adventure and battle stars for each of the invasions, but also came away with a lesson about life.

"Once you're in an invasion, it will make a man out of you pretty damn fast," he said. "You begin to realize that life is pretty precious if you get through it."

Ed Whitney

Anxious to enlist, Ed Whitney, 18, hitchhiked to Fort Riley in June of 1942.

He was a college student and with the war about a year old, all branches of the military were on college campuses, soliciting enlistees.

After joining the Air Force, Mr. Whitney began pilot's training with a college detachment at Pullman, Wash. His cadet training took place at Santa Ana, Calif. He trained on small planes at Thunderbird 1 Air Field, Phoenix; took basic at Lamore, Calif., where he moved up to a bigger single-engine plane; and had his advanced training at Fort. Sumner, N.M. There, pilots were assigned to either a fighter or a multi-engine plane.

During the transition period before he was to go overseas, the crews were assembled at Rapid City, S.D., for 90 days. It was there the crew came together as a unit. They practiced bomb runs and each member of the crew learned their job.

He left from Boston Harbor to go overseas on board an old luxury liner, The Ile de France. It docked in Glasgow, Scotland. From there he went to the base where he would be stationed for

the rest of the war, Thorpe-Abbotts Air Field, 75 miles northeast of London.

Mr. Whitney celebrated his 21st birthday in England. He flew 19 missions before the war ended and he was promoted to captain. At the time, his plane was the lead in formation.

After the war, his homecoming was delayed because of duty in Europe.

"It was real boring," he said "They had me teaching classes and flying the top brass to London, or wherever. I finally asked for a transfer. By the time I got back to the states in June of '46, the celebration was all over."

With the dedication of the World War II Memorial in Washington, Mr. Whitney would like to see a wrong, righted. He noticed that the last line of President Roosevelt's famous "infamy" speech was deleted from the inscription at the memorial. It said, "And thanks be to God."

"I think it should be corrected."

He joined the Kansas National Guard in 1955 and retired in 1972 with 30 years of cumulative service on active duty and in the Guard.

"During the war, we all matured real fast," he said. "We all had close calls. The survivors were the lucky ones. One thing I worry about today is the nonchalant attitude. The next war, we'll learn what it's like to have the enemy on our land."



Co-pilot Ed Whitney (right) and Carl Hellerich, pilot

Gene Wiltfong

Being at the end of the line turned out to be a good thing for Gene Wiltfong.

He was drafted in 1944 and sent to Fort Hood, Texas, for basic training.

He remembers a buddy who went through basic with him.

Both men were encouraged to train for kitchen duty, but another friend talked his buddy out of it. That buddy went to Okinawa and ended up losing both legs.

As the troop ship was getting ready to sail from Port Lewis, Wash., to Hawaii, the men were assigned alphabetically.

By the time they got to the all that was left was an assignment to the 98th Division in Hawaii, cooking for the officer's mess.

Mr. Wiltfong praised the Italian cook that trained him.



Gene Wiltfong

"Besides," he said, "the meals were terrible. I thought I could do better than that."

His unit was loaded and ready to invade Japan in August of 1945, when the A-bomb ended the war.

He thought it was ironic that he waded ashore right at the spot where the invasion would have taken place, had the war not ended.

The difference between the Japanese people and the Japanese soldiers was noticeable to him.

"We thought the Japanese soldiers were so cruel — the way they treated prisoners and such," he said.

"But when we landed as an occupying army, the Japanese public was very kind. Occupation was easy."

In Japan, the 98th Division was dissolved and he was assigned to cook for two generals with the 25th Division. He even cooked for them on a train when they traveled between bases.

Mr. Wiltfong said he had it pretty good. He lived in the New Osaka Hotel, had maid service and got to tour several cities in Japan, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

His biggest honor came when Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower visited the 25th, he ate dinner in Mr. Wiltfong's dining room.

Before the war, he had been a teacher for two years.

When he was discharged in August of 1946, the principal at Lenora had a job for him. He got home on a Sunday and school was to start Monday.

The school gave him two weeks to rest and get ready. He was teacher and administrator in Norton for 44 years. But, even at school he remembered his cooking days.

Every year, he would prepare turkey, dressing and bread for the Eisenhower Elementary School faculty Christmas party.

"I was kind of immature when I went into the service," he said.

"But I grew up real fast. I read and enjoyed Tom Brokaw's book on the *Greatest Generation*.

"I have to agree with him. World War II probably heralded in the biggest changes in technology we have ever seen."

Bob Winteroth

Seaman First Class Bob Winteroth served as part of the armed guard for the U.S. Navy during World War II.

Mr. Winteroth enlisted in March of 1944 and served until May of 1946.

"I decided it was time to do it," he said. "I started in college and then went home to farm. That wasn't what I wanted to do, so I enlisted."

He as a gunner in the south Pacific on board Merchant Marine ships carrying cargo overseas.

While on board, he said he never had to fire at anything.

"One time we thought we saw a submarine, but it didn't come up," he said. "The only firing we did was a little practicing."

"We scraped and painted a lot. We always had to do a lot of painting on the gun deck."

Mr. Winteroth said serving on a merchant marine ship was different than serving on a regular Navy ship.

"The only time we put on blues was when we were going on land."

Another difference, he said, was the food.

"The food was good, because we were on a Merchant Marine ship," he said. "We ate good food all the time. We'd go into the dining room and they'd serve us. One fellow, he liked to eat steak. Sometimes he'd eat three or four steaks in a meal."

Mr. Winteroth said being on board a Merchant Marine ship at the beginning of the war was different than when he served.

"I had a friend who was on one in the beginning of the war," he said. "He served in the Atlantic. They didn't have the weapons we did and had to survive constant bombing. Once, out of a fleet of 50 ships, only five survived."

Mr. Winteroth said he was a senior in high school when Pearl Harbor was bombed. When he got out of high school, he started at Kansas State University and then finished when he got out of the service.

"That was a period when a lot of younger people decided they were going to go into the service," he said. "Many were drafted, but a lot just joined like I did."

"I think I was better off joining like I did," he said. "If I would have been drafted, it's hard to say where I would have ended up."

Mr. Winteroth said he met his wife Doris when he was in college. Both started in 1942.

Mrs. Winteroth said she graduated and then the next day a friend asked if she wanted to go pick up Mr. Winteroth. They got married in August and she taught while he went back to school.

After he graduated, he went to work for the Soil Conservation Service. They ended up in Norton, where he retired.

The Winteroths have been to the Navy Memorial in Washington and are looking forward to going to the World War II Memorial. He said several years ago, they went to a memorial in California, where he was able to show his two daughters and grandchildren what he did when he was in the service.



Bob Winteroth



Chuck Wright

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The U.S. Navy's Seaman First Class Chuck Wright would do it all again if he could.

"I remember a lot of stuff that I would rather not," he said. "But, if something broke out and I could, I'd go back in."

Mr. Wright tried to enlist when he was 17, but his dad wouldn't sign the papers. Then he was drafted and went into service Aug. 13, 1943. He stayed until he was discharged March 5, 1946. When the Korean War broke out, he re-enlisted in 1948 and served until 1951.

He said he served in the Pacific on a small aircraft escort, which took planes out to the larger ships. His ship was the only aircraft carrier in over a 100 that had two presidential citations for extraordinary heroism in action against enemy forces.

The thing that sticks out in his mind the most is when he was in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, which, he said, is called the last surface battle of ships and is considered the greatest battle in naval history.

Mr. Wright was a first loader on a 40-millimeter machine gun on the USS. Fanshaw Bay when the two-and-a-half hour battle took place.

"It was our 13 ships against the Japs' 26," he said. "We lost six. They lost 20."

"That morning, we were called to general quarters and then went up on deck. What we saw looked like a long line of telephone poles. It wasn't long after that when the battle started."

He said he saw two aircraft carriers literally blown out of the water. The Fanny Bay was sent to New Guinea for repairs, because, he said, it had big torpedo holes in it.

The ship was also hit in the first engagement

they were in, which was at Saipan.

"A bomber dropped a bomb in the back plane elevator," he said. "It went down and killed I don't know how many."

After that engagement, he said they were reported missing. His mom had clipped a piece out of the paper that said the ship had sunk. When he went home on leave, he proved that it obviously hadn't. They had gone to Hawaii, where the Fanny Bay was put into dry dock for repairs, while the crew stayed at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

One other time, he said he saw something.

"People talk about UFO's," he said. "I think I saw one. "I was on deck and saw something football shaped and silver with lights on it. The radar didn't pick it up and it made no sound. I was told not to talk about it. That was in 1944."

Mr. Wright was 16 when Pearl Harbor was attacked. He said he thinks his generation was unique.

"They drafted a lot of people, but there were also a lot of volunteers," he said. "Probably just as many as the number of people drafted."

"It's better to fight away from home than have them come here and blow this apart. That's probably what people were thinking when they volunteered."

He said the training he had in service didn't mesh well with farm life.

"Being a first loader on a gun like that won't get any jobs out here," he said.

So he went into civil service, working for the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation as a construction inspector. His first job was inspecting Kirwin Dam. He retired in California and came back because this is home.

He lives with his wife Jackie in Lenora. They will celebrate their 50th anniversary in June.