



Cap. George Atkinson in Burma

George Atkinson

When George Atkinson applied to the Army Veterinary Corps, he wasn't sure he would get in.

Dr. Atkinson, a captain who served from March, 1943, until the Japanese surrender, applied while in veterinary school at Kansas State University. He said the dean didn't think he would ever be called.

But one day he got a telegram addressed to Lt. George Atkinson saying "proceed to Kansas City, Mo."

Dr. Atkinson served in Fort Hood, Texas, and then in Burma, where veterinarians were needed because materials were taken in by pack mules. In all, there were 400 mules and 400 horses. Dr. Atkinson also worked inspecting food.

"I was proud of my service, even though food service was rather a simple thing in many respects," Dr. Atkinson said. "I would have been over there a lot longer but that's when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and that stopped the war. They closed the Burmese theater right away."

He said he was waiting to go to China when the war ended. He said he knew hard times were going to be ahead for him had the war continued.

Dr. Atkinson said the combat was rough because when he got there, the Japanese still held part of Burma. However, he said he got to see a lot of territory, including the jungles, which are some of the heaviest in the world.

Dr. Atkinson's returned home to see his 8-month-old son, who was born while he was overseas. That son is now a veterinarian in Texas.

He said the Great Depression prepared his generation for what was to come.

"During World War II we had a lot of fine boys taken in," he said. "A lot of farm boys with farm backgrounds. Great people. A lot of them had come up during the hard years and they were ready for any kind of service. You might say those kind of people won the war. They were tough. They had a lot of push and a lot of gumption and a lot of strength."

Hank Austerman

For Hank Austerman, World War II was both a brutal experience and a beneficial one. He was wounded, but proud he fought. He fought in hard battles, but learned lessons that stayed with him for the rest of his life.

Mr. Austerman, served as a private in the Army from Nov. 1943 to Nov. 1945 in Europe. Because he already had two brothers in the army, Rex and Carl, he could have received an automatic deferment. But some advice from a veteran helped him decide he wanted to serve, he said.

"I worked for a farmer that was a World War I veteran and I asked him a lot about World War I — what happened and what was done — and he said 'you're going to go through hell and back but when you come back, you'll be able to walk down the street, head high because you done your duty and served your country,'" he said.

Mr. Austerman started at Nancy in France, then was in the Battle of Bulge, then Bastone and on east across the Rhine to the Elb River, where his unit met the Russians.

He was wounded twice. First by a piece of shrapnel in his lung at Sarr Basin, France, and again in the Battle of the Bulge when a bullet hit his left arm. He was awarded a Purple Heart and an Oak Leaf Cluster.



Hank Austerman

Welcome and Thank You

The Norton Telegram staff would like to thank the veterans and their families who were willing to share stories of World War II with us in this special section to honor our "Greatest Generation."

The pictures from the 1940s have been a pleasure to look at and the history lesson even better. Though this is a hard topic for some to talk about, many were willing to tell their story about the supreme effort we know as World War II.

While it was not possible to get the stories of every man and woman who served in the military from Norton County, we have gotten as many as possible.

The stories in this section were written by Brandon Gay, Veronica Monier, Carolyn Kelley-Plotts and Darlene McEwen.

For those who want information on the veterans from Norton County the Norton County Genealogical Society has a book at the Norton Library, which lists the names of those who served. (This is a reference item and cannot be removed from the library.)

The staff at *The Norton Telegram* and the advertisers would like to say thanks to all the veterans who served this country in its time of need.

Thanks for fighting for the freedom we all have today.

— Cynthia Haynes, publisher

He said the Battle of the Bulge was a low point. "That was awful, snowing, couldn't light a fire," he said. "We couldn't get warm, the only way you could get warm was to dig a hole, crawl in it and cover it up with brush. That was probably the worst battle we had as far as human suffering is concerned because we ran out of food; no medicine, no ammunition."

There was a high point, however. One day by the Elb he and a friend met up with his brother's outfit.

"We stopped the trucks and sure enough, Rex was in about the third truck back," he said. "That was probably the happiest time of my tour of Europe. Both of our commanding officer's gave us a six-day pass and when we came back the war was over."

Mr. Austerman said the advice the farmer gave him was good.

"Like Frank said, when you get out you can

walk down the street and you don't have to get out of the way of anybody because you done your time," he said. "It's a great country. You can't live in it for nothing and everybody should do their share."

But while he said everyone should contribute, he said one person couldn't accomplish anything by himself.

"One person is just a speck on the horizon," he said. "It takes millions of people and that's why we won it. We had 16 million people in the armed forces in World War II."

He said the war helped him succeed in life because he learned to make decisions.

"Ten days after I was in the army I thought 'what in the hell am I doing here?'" he said. "But after it was all over and done, I was glad I'd done it. I'd give a million not to do it again, but I wouldn't take a million for what I went through and what I learned."

a tribute to
our country's
heroes

All Creatures Vet Clinic

Rt. 1, Box 26 (Rd E12), Alma, Kansas — Phone 785-669-2227



*In these uncertain times
we realize more than ever
the vital importance of the
men and women who
served and are serving in
our country's military*



Almena Agri-Services, Inc.

Almena, Kansas — 1-785-669-2561 or 785-669-2415

*We Honor Our Veterans
... The brave men and
women who have put
their lives at risk to
protect and serve our
country in past wars
and in the present war.*

Paul Ballinger

Paul Ballinger was working at Boeing Airplane Co. when Pearl Harbor was bombed.

"I was in Wichita on Kellogg Street and saw a boy trying to sell papers," he said. "That's when I saw that Pearl Harbor had been bombed."

Mr. Ballinger was 25 when he was drafted in 1944. He was sent to Farragut, Idaho, for boot camp.

Then he went to Hugh Manley High School in Chicago for

math and science training for a month, to Texas A&M University for additional training in math, science and electronics for three months and then back to Chicago to the Navy Pier for training to become a radio technician. He was there for nine months, before being sent to Stockton, Calif., and then on the Hawaii.

Mr. Ballinger said he was in Hawaii for about a month before being assigned to the Public Relations Mobile Communications Unit One.

On April 17, 1945, he boarded a ship, arriving in Okinawa on May 6. On May 9, he was transferred to the ship Crescent City.

"The next day, I got my first mail," he said.

Mr. Ballinger stayed at sea near Okinawa until Dec. 24, when he boarded Laurens, which was sailing for the states. On Jan. 9, he landed at Portland, Ore.

He was discharged with the rank of radio technician second class on Jan. 18, 1946, in Norman, Okla.

Mr. Ballinger was awarded the Asiatic Pacific Area ribbon, a Bronze Star for his service in Okinawa and an American Area ribbon.

He now lives in Norton at the Andbe Home.



Paul Ballinger

"We were coming under machine gun fire and the guy who was calling for artillery fire was up ahead of us a ways and he called for two more rounds," he said. "But they went too far over, so he called for two more and I heard him yell duck and went to get behind a palm tree about that time a shell went off and I got knocked on my face. I looked back and there was a hole in my hide."

Mr. Belt said he received limited help.

"The doctor looked at it, took a pair of forceps, pulled it out and put it in a helmet full of water," he said. "Then he got a piece of gauze and wrapped it around his forceps and stuck it in the hole and reamed it out and that's all the treatment that thing ever got."

The scrap of lead wasn't the only metal he got in the war. He was awarded, the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star for pulling a soldier, who had been shot in the legs, out of a fox hole.

Mr. Belt served from Sept. 1941 until Oct. 1945. He served in the Aleutian Islands, Leyte and Okinawa, where he was when the atomic bombs were dropped.

Mr. Belt recalls that on the way home, they had limited rations and got to eat twice a day, but they kept their sense of humor.

"When our ship pulled into the dock in California, people down on the dock were pointing up and laughing at us," he said. "We didn't know what was going on until we got off. Someone had taken a piece of sheeting and written USS Malnutrition on it and hung it over the side of that ship."



Bill Belt with ammo necklace

Bill Belt

Bill Belt keeps a four-ounce scrap of lead in a jar. It's important because it was once inside of him.

Mr. Belt, drafted as a private into the Army's 7th Division, said he got that lead because he was "in the wrong place at the wrong time" on the Island of Leyte.

Leo Booth

Leo Booth was 18 when he was drafted shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He served until the war ended in 1946.

He fought in the Battle of the Bulge and shook hands with General Dwight Eisenhower.

His wife, Barbara Booth, said he didn't have to go because his father had bleeding ulcers, but he went anyway. His brother, who was six years older, also went.

Mr. and Mrs. Booth have four children. He worked for Prairie Land Electric until he retired.



Leo Booth

Weldon Brooks

Weldon Brooks just did his job when they asked him to serve.

"I'm no hero," he said.

When Mr. Brooks was drafted in February of 1943, he wanted to go.

"It was everybody's duty," he said. "Everybody had to serve. You just accepted whatever. Movies and everything you saw made you want to be a part of the effort."

He said he was stationed in Central Africa, North Africa, the Persian Gulf and Cairo, Egypt. He was never in any battles.

"I was 19 or 20 when I went in and served three years," he said. "Three short years. It matured you a lot at that age."

Mr. Brooks said he was surprised when he heard about Pearl Harbor.

"You just didn't know how it would affect your life," he said. "You were young and didn't worry about anything."

One thing that stood out for him was how quickly friendships were formed. He said you have a lot of friends when in service.

He was married with a child on the way when



Weldon Brooks

he was drafted. When he was discharged in December of 1945, he was glad to get back.

"In World War II, everyone seemed to support the war effort," he said. "In any of the wars since then, there has been very little support. I especially noticed because we had a son killed in a search and destroy mission in Vietnam. It wasn't an all-out effort at that time like it was in World War II.

"I don't regret having almost three years of my life in service."

Mr. Brooks lives in Norton with his wife. They have been married for 62 years.

Maxine Carr

Maxine Carr's story is different. She didn't fight in combat, but fought other battles for her country. She wasn't wounded, but she aided those who were.

Ms. Carr, a lieutenant commander in the navy nursing corps, served from 1943-1945.

She said she wanted to be a nurse since she was a young girl. She received her first nurse's certificate when she was a freshman in high school.

In 1943 she became a member of the naval reserves and six months later, after she had completed registered nurse training in Salina, she was ready for active duty. She was the first Norton County nurse to receive an officer's commission as a navy nurse.

She served at the Mare Island Naval Hospital in California in the bay area.

While taking a ferry across the San Francisco Bay, a navy man told her there were Japanese submarines off the coast trying to get at the big oil storage tanks.

"I said 'Well, I just don't know why I left Kansas,'" she said.

She worked with amputees from the Pacific Theater and eventually became the chief operating room nurse with seven assistant nurses. She said the attitudes of the men who had lost limbs remained positive.

"I never once heard anyone complain," she said.

Like anyone else in the navy, she had to learn to march and swim.

"After duty we'd march and march and march," she said.

Learning to swim was another experience she didn't get in Kansas.

"The instructor asked me 'How come you never learned to swim?'," said. "I said, 'Well, if you grew up out in Western Kansas on a high divide you'd know there's no water.'"

REMEMBERING OUR HEROES

We Salute Those Who Fought So We Might Be Free. Thanks!

ANDBE HOME, INC.

An Intermediate Care Facility Providing the Highest Quality Care Since 1957
MEDICARE CERTIFIED

201 W. Crane, Norton, Kansas — Phone: 785-877-2601

**PROUD TO HONOR
OUR COUNTRY'S VETERANS**

**The Kansas Army National Guard
170th Maintenance Company
Salutes Our World War II Veterans!**