

My Family, Neighbors, & Friends in World War II

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Access from the *My Family* webpage at my *bigpigeon.us* website.

At a minimum, all who served in World War II put their lives on hold and endured the rigors of training and the tedium of normal military life. Millions experienced the misery of life in the field and the terrors of combat. Many bore to their graves scars, some of which were invisible. And some gave everything.

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Relatives of Extended Family Members Lost During World War II

- ☆ *Frederick A. "Bud" Baraks* of Coal Valley, Illinois, my uncle Maynard Jensen's brother-in-law, died in Western Europe. In military records, Bud used the surname *Barracks*.
- ☆ *Darrell Frost* of Crescent, Iowa, my uncle Norvin Oamek's second cousin, was killed in action in Germany.
- ☆ *Avram Glicenstein*, a Jewish native of Poland and the grandfather of my son-in-law, Dan Edidin, died in Belgium during the Holocaust. His wife and children were hidden by Belgian Catholics and survived World War II.
- ☆ *Arthur Orville Jensen* of Council Bluffs, Iowa, my father's second cousin, died in an Air Transport Command plane crash in Alaska on November 28, 1942 while carrying Colonel Everett Davis, the first commander of the 11th Air Force.
- ☆ *Merle Oltmans* of rural Council Bluffs, my uncle Oscar Torneten's first cousin and neighbor, was killed in action on Luzon in the Philippines.
- ☆ *Ralph L. Paulson* of Ames, Iowa, the cousin of my cousins Alvin, Donald and Phyllis Petersen, died during the November 1943 Battle of Tarawa in the Pacific. His battalion was tasked with clearing out outlying Japanese positions on the last day of the battle. Max Rommel, the brother of Margaret Rommel, a rural school teacher in the Big Pigeon area, served in the same company and was killed the same day.
- ☆ *Dean Schroder* of Boomer Township, my aunt Thelma (Schroder) Larson Jensen's first cousin, died while returning to the United States from the Pacific for medical treatment.
- ☆ *Everett W. Shadden*, the first cousin of my aunt Thelma's mother and a Signal Corps combat photographer, was killed by a mortar round in France in 1944.

Big Pigeon Neighbors Lost During World War II

- ☆ *George Jorgensen, Junior* was my Aunt Ethel's student at the one-room Hazel Dell #3 rural school. He became a navy signalman and was killed off the coast of Ostend, Belgium on April 9, 1945 when a German midget submarine torpedoed the army tanker Y-17, which was carrying aviation fuel. All hands were lost.
- ☆ *James Eldon Mustard* was my mother's student at the one-room Hazel Dell #4 rural school in the late 1920s. His family subsequently moved to Newton, Iowa. Eldon Mustard was killed on the Anzio Beachhead in February 1944. He belonged to the 1st Special Service Force, which consisted of a mixture of Canadians and Americans and was a precursor of the special operations forces in today's armed forces. As of 2014, there is lengthy Wikipedia entry for the 1st Special Service Force. Another source is the 1966 book *The Devil's Brigade*, which formed the basis of a fictionalized 1968 film of the same name.
- ☆ *Eldred Welbourn* from rural Underwood, Iowa was a childhood neighbor of my stepmother, Ferne (Spencer) Bertelsen Christiansen, his family then living on a tenant farm owned by Ferne's father, Ralph Spencer. Eldred graduated from Underwood High School at 15 and then from the University of Iowa. He died after a German submarine torpedoed the ocean liner *Leopoldville* near Cherbourg off the coast of France on the afternoon of December 24, 1944. The *Leopoldville* was Belgian, the convoy was English, and the port of Cherbourg was administered by the Americans but operated by the French. For two hours, the *Leopoldville* floated waiting for help that never came. Then it exploded and sank. Eight hundred American soldiers died.

Others Who Served in WW II

Extended Family, Neighbors, Friends, and a Few Others

- **Eldon Christensen** from rural Underwood, Iowa was my second cousin. He served near the end of World War II.
- **Arthur Charles "Chris" Christiansen** from Council Bluffs was my second cousin. Chris was a career navy man, serving for 30 years. Chris was a member of the ground crew when the German dirigible *Hindenburg* exploded at Lakehurst, New Jersey in 1937. Chris served on a PBY patrol aircraft during World War II.
- **Albert Dennis** was the father of my dear wife, Martha. Albert was born and raised in Maine. He moved to Chicago as a young man and came to Terre Haute, Indiana in 1941 with his fiancée, Lucille Shower. Albert served in the southwest Pacific on the PT boat tender *USS Oyster Bay*. His leg became infected and he was sent to the naval hospital in Hollandia, New Guinea, where amputation was contemplated. His leg was saved by a French colonial doctor and Al was sent back to the United States. After a lengthy recuperation, Al was discharged from the military.

Dideriksen/Jessen: My teenaged friend, Helen (Dideriksen) Thompson, was the daughter of Julius Dideriksen and Grace Jessen. Helen had eight uncles in service during World War II. One was killed, one was maimed, and three served long terms as Prisoners of War. Meanwhile, Helen's father worked in defense industry in Bremerton, Washington.

- **Chris Dideriksen**, a member of Co. E, 168th Infantry Regt., was captured at Faid Pass on 17 Feb 1943.
- **Harry Dideriksen**, a member of Co. E, 168th Infantry Regt., was captured at Faid Pass on 17 Feb 1943.
- ★ **Robert Dideriksen**, an Army Air Force Pilot from Shenandoah, IA, was killed in action over France on 15 Jun 1944.
- **James P. Dideriksen** served in the US Navy during WW II.
- **Raymond Dideriksen** served in the US Army during WW II.
- **Max M. Jessen** lost an arm and several fingers of his other hand while serving with the US Army in Normandy in 1944.
- **Forrest L. Jessen** served in the US Army during WW II.
- **Owen E. Jessen**, Hq. Co., 3rd Bn., 168th Inf. Regt., was captured at Faid Pass on 17 Feb 1943.
- **Ruth Glicenstein** was my son-in-law Dan Edidin's mother. During the latter part of World War II, she and her sister were sheltered in the homes of Roman Catholics in Belgium and her mother was sheltered in a Catholic hospital. Subsequently she met Dan's father, Michael Edidin in Israel.
- **Vernon Hansen** was raised in rural Hanley Falls, Minnesota and married my first cousin Kathryn Thompson. Vernon served in the army near the end of World War II, was injured while in training to be a paratrooper, and was in officer candidate school when the war ended. He felt that the atomic bombs which led to an earlier end to World War II may have saved his life.
- **Herbert Hjortsvang** was the husband of my second cousin, Alvina Larsen. Herb served in the Signal Corps in the Pacific.

- **Reuben Iversen** worked briefly as my father's hired man before leaving for defense work at the Curtis-Wright aircraft factory in Buffalo, New York. Subsequently he became a co-pilot on a B-29 bomber, flying missions over Japan from Tinian in the Mariana Islands.
- **Arnold Larson Jensen** of Council Bluffs, my mother's second cousin, served as the chief medical officer at an army hospital on the north shore of Oahu, Hawaii.
- **Lloyd E. Jensen** of Council Bluffs, my father's second cousin, was a navigator in the Army Air Force.
- **Maynard Jensen** of Hazel Dell Township was my uncle by his marriage to my Aunt Thelma. Maynard served as an aircraft mechanic in Reno, Nevada during the war.
- **Naomi Jensen** of Council Bluffs, my mother's second cousin, served as an army nurse before, during and after World War II, capping her career as the head nurse at Brook Army Hospital in San Antonio, Texas. She is credited with helping expand career and promotion opportunities for military nurses.
- **Lloyd Joyce**, the father of my son-in-law Rex Joyce, served as a replacement with the 112nd Cavalry Regiment in the Southwest Pacific. He was first based in New Caledonia and later fought at Arawe in New Britain, the lengthy Battle of Driniumor River on New Guinea and in Leyte and Luzon in the Philippine Islands. He was wounded on Leyte.
- **Raymond Leroy Larson** from Council Bluffs, my second cousin, served with the 11th Armored Division in Europe.
- **Charles Wilbur Lindsay** was the significant other of my mother's double cousin, Evelyn (Larson) Rhode Sherbondy, during the 1950s. Charles Wilbur Lindsay enlisted in the Army in February 1941 and was discharged in May 1946. I believe he was discharged as a Master Sergeant and may have been wounded.
- **Donald Magnussen** of rural Underwood, Iowa was my second cousin. He served on a ship in the Pacific late in World War II.
- **Liselotte Maher**, our friend from Terre Haute, IN, remembers being a toddler when she first saw her German father after he returned home in Marburg, Germany from a Prisoner of War camp. During the war, her father surrendered his German Army company in the Netherlands. On horseback and with his beard complementing his striking physical appearance, the African-American sergeant accepting the unit's surrender muttered to his squad "He looks like Jesus Christ".
- **Uwe Malchow** is the spouse of my cousin, Jeanette Torneten. He spent his early years in Hamburg, Germany where his family was twice bombed out of their apartment. His father worked in German defense industry before being drafted into the Wehrmacht and subsequently becoming a prisoner of war in the Netherlands. His family immigrated to Council Bluffs in the 1950s and quickly became Americans. His brother, Guenther, lost a foot to a land mine in Vietnam.
- **Glen Martin** was my sister-in-law Mercedes Martin's father. He served as a quartermaster on the cruiser *USS San Francisco* in the Pacific.
- **John Wallace Murdock** is the father-in-law of my wife Martha's second cousin, Carole. He was a signal corps instructor at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.
- **Henry Norgaard** of rural Council Bluffs, Iowa was the uncle of my dear childhood friends and later step-cousins, Carol and Kay Spencer. He was shot down over

Germany while serving on a bomber crew with the 8th Air Force. Like most other prisoners of the Germans, he survived POW camp.

- **Norvin Oamek** of rural Crescent, Iowa was my uncle by his marriage to my mother's sister, Alice. He was my only uncle to serve in the military during War II, the others being either too old to be drafted or having agricultural deferments. When the United States entered World War II, Norvin Oamek was working in defense industry in Orange, Texas. Later he worked at an ordnance plant in Nebraska. In 1943, he worked as a farmhand in Boomer Township for his brother-in-law, Victor Petersen. Early in 1944 Norvin joined the Council Bluffs fire department. In May 1944, Norvin, facing prospects of being drafted, joined the Navy, where he became a crew member on a new destroyer, the *USS Bowie*, in December 1944. The *Bowie* was scheduled to participate in the invasion of the Japanese home islands in late 1945. This invasion became unnecessary after Japan surrendered due to our use of atomic bombs in August 1945. Norvin was discharged in February 1946 and returned to the Council Bluffs Fire Department. Context: Late in World War II the Japanese began using Kamikaze suicide planes to attack our navy ships. Destroyers were especially vulnerable, as they screened the larger ships against enemy attack, and twelve destroyers were subsequently lost during the long battle of Okinawa. If the war had continued, the *Bowie* would likely have been on the front lines, so to speak, during the invasion of Japan.

Paulson. The three Paulson siblings were first cousins of my first cousins Alvin, Donald and Phyllis Petersen. They were raised in Ames, Iowa and served during World War II. Ralph Paulson died on Tarawa in November 1943, and appears in the first section of this report. Rodney and Roland Paulson, identical twins, managed to serve on the same B17 heavy bomber in Italy, Roland as a bombardier and Rodney as a tail gunner. Rodney died after World War II in 1954 in an Air Force training accident. Roland Paulson's memoir, *Valley of the Skunk*, memorializes his brother and describes their shared experiences as children and young men.

- ★ **Ralph L. Paulson** served in the 2nd Marine Division and died on Tarawa in the Pacific in November 1943.
- **Rodney Paulson** served in Foggia, Italy as a B-17 tail gunner with the 15th Air Force.
- **Roland Paulson** served in Foggia, Italy as a B-17 bombardier with the 15th Air Force. He was one of 36 bombardiers initially trained to use the United States' first guided bomb, the *Azon*. The *Azon* was used by the 15th Air Force in northern Italy, by the 8th Air Force over Germany and by the 7th Bombardment Group in Burma, but overall failed to live up to its expectations.
- **Donald Petersen**, my cousin, joined the Navy shortly after graduating from high school in 1944. He was stationed in the Philippine Islands and released in time to help my father harvest corn late in 1946. Donald subsequently used the G.I. Bill to attend Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Don played football for Coe College; a fellow teammate was Marv Levy, who later became well known in football circles. Don subsequently moved to Arizona, and was a high school teacher and coach in Prescott for many years.
- **John Polansky** was the father of our friend, Joan Polansky. John was born and raised east of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and joined the navy in 1942. After training, he served in the Pacific on an old S-class submarine, S-28. John's submarine patrolled the north Pacific waters around the Aleutian Islands. While at Pearl Harbor, John

temporarily left his submarine for medical reasons, and during John's absence the S-28 sank with all 49 hands during a training exercise on July 4, 1944. On October 22, 1944, John was assigned to the *U.S.S. Pelias*, a submarine tender. During John's time on the *Pelias*, she was based in Pearl Harbor, then Midway Island, then San Diego, and finally in the San Francisco bay area at Tiburon and Mare Island. John served on the *Pelias* until around May 1, 1946. After World War II, John moved to Pittsburgh where he worked as a country club manager. He and his wife, Agnes, had two daughters. Incidentally, in 2017 the wreck of the S-28 was discovered on the ocean floor west of the island of Oahu.

- **Junior Marion Rasmussen** was my father's first cousin. Junior served in the Army of Occupation in Berlin as a member of the Constabulary. While in Berlin, Junior honed his welding skills under the tutelage of a German ironworker. Subsequently Junior worked as a welder until he retired. Incidentally, Junior's mother had emigrated from Jutland, Denmark as a young woman. While in Berlin, Junior was granted a leave to visit his Danish relatives.
- **Lewis Rhode** was the first husband of my mother's double cousin, Evelyn Larson. Lewis Rhode served in the Navy from 1937 to 1941. After returning to Pottawattamie County, he worked at the Martin Bomber Plant (now Offutt Air Force Base) south of Omaha. In 1944, he joined the Merchant Marine and remained with the Merchant Marine for a few years after World War II ended. He was a navigation instructor in Florida before the war ended, and in 1946 and 1947 was a second mate and third mate on cargo ships sailing from the east coast.
- **Father Francis Sampson** of Le Mars, Iowa briefly resided in the Big Pigeon area while serving as parish priest at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Neola, IA. He later taught at Bishop Dowling High School in Des Moines before joining the U.S Army paratroopers corps. He was a career officer in the US Army, retiring as a Major General and Chief of Chaplains. An incident described in his memoirs became the basis for the fictionalized film "*Saving Private Ryan*".
- **Arthur Schintzel** was our neighbor in Williamsburg, Virginia in 1997-2001. Arthur served in Company B, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, and landed on Omaha Beach on D-Day with the second wave. He landed between St. Laurent Sur Mer and Colleville Sur Mer. He was shot several times but still managed to get part way up the bluff behind Omaha Beach. He was further wounded by flak when the landing craft evacuating him was hit by an artillery round. Arthur spent the rest of the war in hospitals. In our neighborhood in Williamsburg, Arthur was known for the long classic cars he drove, having limited flexibility in his limbs.
- **August Schroder**, the brother of my Aunt Thelma, served in the Army Air Force in England. There he met and married an English woman, Doris Golland. After World War II ended, Doris came to the United States as a war bride. Her parents then immigrated to Missouri Valley in 1948. After August died in a commercial fishing accident in Alaska in 1952, Doris married Harry Berry of Missouri Valley.
- **Donald Schroder**, the first cousin of my Aunt Thelma, was captured near the end of the Battle of the Bulge and held as a forced laborer by a German army unit.
- **Edwin Christian Sorensen Segard** married my grandmother Larson's first cousin, Stephanie Petersen of Dannebrog, NE. He joined the US Army as a physician in 1926 and retired in late 1944. His son, **Edwin Curtis Segard** was a US Army physician in France in World War II.

- ***Ralph Shower***, the uncle of my wife, Martha Dennis Christiansen, lived in Terre Haute, Indiana for his entire life except for World War II. He served with the 389th Transportation Port Battalion in the Mediterranean Theatre, first in Oran, Algeria, then at Salerno and Naples, Italy (and possibly Anzio).
- ***Ralph Shower*** from St. Louis, Missouri was the first cousin of the above Ralph Shower. He served in the airborne, was grievously injured in a training jump, and spent the remainder of the war in hospitals. As of January 2019, Ralph Shower, age 101, is still living in St. Louis, Missouri.
- ***Ralph Edward Spencer, Junior*** from Boomer Township was the brother of my stepmother, Ferne (Spencer) Bertelsen Christiansen. Junior Spencer served as a machine gunner with the 3rd Infantry Division in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and France.
- ***John Torneten*** was the brother of my uncle by marriage, Oscar Torneten. John enlisted in the Army Air Force in 1940 and served as a mechanic.
- ***Adolph Torneten*** was the brother of my uncle by marriage, Oscar Torneten. Adolph served in the US Navy as a Seabee from 1942 to 1945.
- ***Gene Wallenbrock*** from Terre Haute, Indiana was the father of my wife Martha's childhood friend, Penny. He became a B-17 pilot at the age of 18 and flew 35 missions with the 8th Air Force in England.
- ***Leonard Werber*** was the father of my wife Martha's second cousin, Carole (Werber) Murdock. Leonard served in the United States Army during World War II.
- ***Curt Zimansky*** was my English professor at the University of Iowa. As an Army captain, he was one of many bright field-grade officers who worked on the Ultra project at Bletchley Park in England. The Ultra project decoded and processed German messages that had been encoded using the Enigma machine, an early electromagnetic computer. Officers such as Curt Zimansky then determined who, if anyone, would see the decoded information. Decoded information was useless if it wasn't shared, but if shared widely without adequate cover it risked alerting the enemy that their code was compromised.

Some Sources

Belgium and the Holocaust, Dan Michman, editor (Yad Vashem Pubs., Jerusalem, 1998), specifically The Rescue of Jewish Children in Belgium During World War II by Mordecai Paldiel, pp. 307-326