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Historical Society Of Pottawattamie County

Member Journal

August 2008

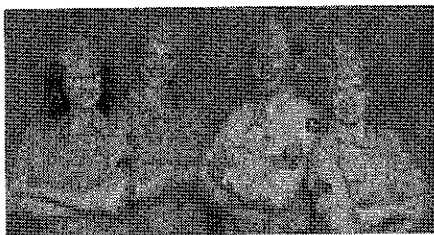
World War II Veterans Invited to USO Show as Honored Guests

A note to World War II veterans:

You fought the biggest war in the history of civilization. You had a job to do and you did it. And you did it well. The Historical Society of Pottawattamie County and the Great Plains Wing Commemorative Air Force Museum would like to say thank-you.

In recognition of your achievements we would like to invite all World War II military veterans to attend the USO show September 6 (see story at right) as our honored guests. Your tickets are free, dinner is on us. We're celebrating your era; the event will be that much more special if you are there.

World War II veterans can reserve their complementary tickets by calling the Society office at 323-2509.



The Avi8ors have performed for the WW II Memorial dedication in DC, the International Glenn Miller Festival, the College World Series, the Strategic Air Command, and the Crew of the Enola Gay. They will be performing at the USO show September 6.

USO Show Comes to Bluffs Airport Hangar

When HSPC president Teresa Sward first addressed the Society board of directors after taking office she articulated as one of her goals the sponsorship of events in which "people can have fun and learn some history at the same time." Saturday evening, September 6, the plan is in action as the Historical Society of Pottawattamie County teams with the Great Plains Wing Commemorative Air Force Museum to present an authentic World War II USO show in a hangar at the Council Bluffs airport, 16803 McCandless Lane.

The evening features a 1940's style dinner followed by four performances which will include period comedy, music, dance, a silent and a brief live auction. Historical Society officers, volunteers, and special guest stars Pottawattamie County Attorney Matt Wilber and Mayor Tom Hanafan will recreate an episode of the popular wartime live radio program, *The Pepsodent Show starring Bob Hope*. No name is associated more with the USO than that of Bob Hope, and for good reason; of the 144 episodes of the show that took place during the war only nine originated at NBC studios; the rest were done live in front of the troops at USO's around the world.

The show to be recreated September 6 uses actual scripts from the program; Society officers were delighted to find a script in which one of the guests interviewed is Pvt. Lyle Moraine from Council Bluffs (see related story on page 3). Part of the challenge is that in 1942 most of the sound effects were done live, so in addition to reading their parts the crew will have to use a variety of devices, from coconut shells to balloons, in order to convince the radio audience comedian Jerry Colonna really rides into the canteen on horseback, that Bette Davis actually popped Bob Hope's tire with her long fingernails, and so forth. Swing dance group *Denim and Lace* will perform as well as the highly acclaimed war era musical act, *The Avi8ors*.

Tickets are \$20 a person, which includes dinner. Doors open for a social hour at 5:30; dinner is 6:30, entertainment is from 7:30 until 9:30. To ensure that adequate seating and food is on hand **RESERVATIONS ARE STRONGLY RECOMMENDED**, including for the complimentary WW II veteran tickets. Call the Society office at 323-2509 for reservations and tickets or e-mail info@TheHistoricalSociety.org.

Eight Air Force Vet Stoic About the War: "We had a job to do and we did it; end of story"

Staff Sergeant Robert Warner remembers his first day in the Eight Air Force 496th bomb group near Flixton in Northern England. The new arrivals were taken to the mess hall where the commanding officer started to explain they were only a few miles from the line and this is serious business. His message was interrupted—and underscored—by a terrible roar. The building shook as a huge B-24 Liberator, so damaged from German fire during its bombing run that it couldn't quite make it home, skimmed just feet above the building and exploded in flames in the adjacent field (the crew had ejected safely). He knew for sure he was in the Army now.

Ssg Warner spent his first year of military service in Chicago. Based on test scores he was selected to go to school where he studied radio, code, and electronics. After graduation he served at three different bomber bases in England as a radar repairman. He explains, "Radar was the big thing; the Allies had it and the Germans didn't." In addition to keeping the radar set itself working before each plane took off he had to test special explosive circuitry in the unit. In the event the flight crew had to abandon the aircraft they were to use this system to destroy the radar set to keep the technology out of enemy hands.



For reasons of secrecy the troops were not advised of D Day plans but Ssg Warner sensed something was in the works. Out of curiosity he volunteered to go on a run to pick up coal cinders (which were used on base roads) from an industrial area near the English Channel. The large buildup



of equipment he saw by the channel aroused his suspicions even more. June 6, 1944 Ssg Warner was off base in radar school at Horsham when he heard bombers over-

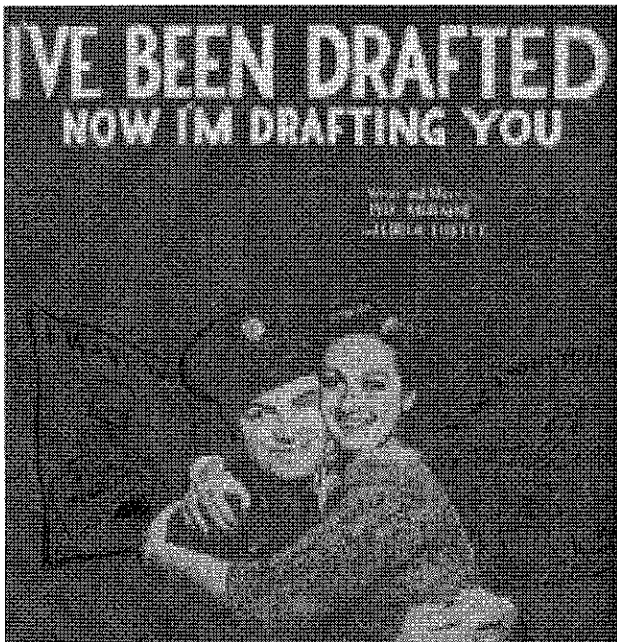
head. He looked out the window and saw a sky full of B-24's. They an "H" on the tail... it was the bombers of his outfit, the 446th. They went out, returned, and went right back. He was in school but he knew just a few miles away the Allies had finally made their big move. D Day had arrived. (See other recollections of Mr. Warner in the story on page 3.)



Council Bluffs Veteran Blended Military Service and Music

Private Lyle Moraine didn't think he was coming home. His cousin, Historical Society member Robert Warner, Sr., remembers Lyle's 1942 going away party. "He was giving away his things to friends and relatives." Warner, himself a World War II veteran, adds, "That wasn't unusual. I felt the same way. I think we all believed we'd never see Council Bluffs again." Warner reminds there was no television or internet. The only images of the war they saw came from the newsreels at the Strand or Broadway Theater, where Moraine worked as an usher. "It looked like Hitler was taking over everything. They told us we'd be home by Christmas but we knew better. We felt the odds of ever being home again period were pretty slim."

For Moraine the war had even more of an impact. After he graduated from Abraham Lincoln High School in the midst of the Great Depression his family moved to California seeking jobs. He was just starting to enjoy success with small roles in motion pictures and writing music when a draft notice halted his movie career in its tracks. Undaunted, he kept writing music while in the service. The song for which he is most remembered, "Christmas Island", came into being when a glimpse of that land mass in the South Pacific on Christmas Eve gave him an inspiration. He borrowed the chaplain's organ and went to work.



Council Bluffs native Lyle Moraine wrote a number of war time hits, including "I've Been Drafted" (sheet music pictured above with Bob Hope and Dorothy Lamour). After the war Moraine worked with Bob Hope as a writer of music for his films and as an actor (the two are pictured together on a movie set at right). Bob Hope's brother, Jack Hope, cowrote some songs with Moraine.

The Army recognized Pvt. Moraine's potential to entertain the troops and he was a frequent guest on live Armed Forces Radio and at USO shows. He quipped to an interviewer in 1942 his most recent songs mirrored his life. He was living in the bright lights of Hollywood when he wrote the song "Hollywood and Vine." He then wrote "I've Been Drafted" and that's exactly what was in store for him next. Moraine signed over the royalties to some songs he wrote while in the service to the USO.



Lyle Moraine continued to write songs in WW II.

Warner explains Moraine remained a lifelong Council Bluffs boy at heart and returned for many a visit, though made California his home after the war. Moraine spent the rest of his life working as a composer and in supporting roles in films with Bob Hope and others. Burl Ives recorded several of his songs. Lyle Moraine died in 1988. Warner embarked on a career with the postal service after his tour of duty with the 8th Air Force and lives in Council Bluffs.

Pvt. Moraine returns to Council Bluffs in spirit when he is portrayed by Society member oncologist/hematologist Dr. Robert Warner in *Live From the Hollywood Canteen*, part of the USO show September 6 in the hangar at the Council Bluffs airport. Moraine will be interviewed by Bob Hope, played by Chanticleer Theater veteran and HSPC officer David Overholtzer.



Carson, Iowa, Newlyweds Defied Hardships to Stay Near Each Other During War

Dudley Wilber graduated from high school in Carson, Iowa, in 1940 and went to Long Beach, California, to work in a Douglas bomber plant. He came back to Iowa in 1941 to help on his family's farm when his brother, Gola, was drafted. Dud enlisted in the U. S. Army Air Corps, and was sworn in on November 4, 1942. Until the Air Force became an independent branch of the United States armed forces in 1947, it began as part of the Army. He and Shirley Peterson were married on December 6, 1942, before he left for military service. He shipped out from Des Moines in January, 1943, to Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis, Missouri, where he and other enlistees were given their physical exams and battery of shots. His cousin, Wendell Campbell, was there at the same time. From Jefferson Barracks, he boarded a troop train for St. Cloud, Minnesota, where he attended college

classes and cadet flight training. It was at St. Cloud that he conducted his "first flight" in a Piper Cub. Shirley joined him in St. Cloud where she found a job and a boarding room. From St. Cloud, the cadets were sent by troop train to Santa Ana where they took tests to determine whether they would become pilots, navigators, or bombardiers. The trains stopped periodically and sometimes were sidetracked, and it was then that the Salvation Army was there with food. While going through cadet training, trains were the only means of transportation for the men. When the men traveled on troop trains, many hours were spent playing cards and talking about home. Shirley followed along, and after a three-day bus ride, with \$35 in her pocket, she had to find another job and a place to live. Servicemen always had their barracks, meals and transportation provided. The airmen were moved every 2 to 3 months, from one "God forsaken" place to another, as most of the air bases were positioned in sparsely populated desert areas. Even though the wives had to scrape by on their own, many of them followed the cadets knowing the men would eventually have to leave for overseas. Their next stop was Eagle Air Field at Dos Palos, California, out in the desert. There were no towns nearby, and Shirley lived in a barracks, along with other wives. She got a job washing cowling on the airplanes, in addition to cleaning the cockpits when some of the airmen got sick. She became president of the Cadet Wives Club, and after the cadets' graduation, the wives spon-

sored a hangar dance with Bob Crosby and his band playing. The primary training at this base lasted for about 3 months, and then the men were sent by troop train to Bakersfield, California, for basic flight training. Shirley followed him there, getting a place to stay in a converted garage, with one meal a day provided in the owner's house. They were there during the holiday season, and she got a job selling men's clothes in a department store. The wives could only see their husbands on the weekends, but there was one time they were allowed on the base to visit for two hours. The men were being shipped to Victorville, California, to catch up on their flying as the weather had been so bad. Dud was given orders to be sent to Stockton,



Dudley Wilber as flight training cadet.



Dudley and Shirley Wilber, of Carson, Iowa, on the state capitol steps, January, 1943, as he was leaving for the U.S. Army Air Corps.

California, for advanced training, but there was a last minute change of orders, and he was sent to Marfa, Texas, instead. Shirley's plans to go to Stockton with other cadet wives had to be changed. She nearly missed her train to Los Angeles. Bob Behrens from Treynor recognized her and helped her with her luggage as she ran to catch the train pulling out. Because it was war time, the wives were advised not to talk to people about their plans because of security reasons. It was winter time and very cold in Marfa, and again the wives were housed in barracks which were heated with coal stoves. Shirley got a job in the PX Coffee Shop. It was here that Dudley would have three months of advanced flight training. From the time he was a little boy, watching planes fly over the farm in Pottawattamie County where he grew up, Dudley wanted to become a pilot. His dream came true when he received his wings March 12, 1944, at Marfa Army Air Field, Marfa, Texas, licensed to fly large multi-engine planes and commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant. He and two other



Dudley Wilber received his wings March 12, 1944, at Marfa, Texas, commissioned to fly multi-engine bombers in World War II.

pilots volunteered to fly bombardiers and navigators on training missions, and he was sent to Roswell, New Mexico, where he was stationed for nine months. While they were in Roswell, there were several USO shows at the base, including Bob Hope, Les Brown and His Band of Renowned, Francis Langford and Harry James. It was also while Dud was stationed at Roswell that Wendell Campbell, another young airman from Pottawattamie County, was killed in a plane crash, July 20, 1944. Wendell had joined the Air Corps the same time Dud did. Two B24's, flying in formation, clipped wings, and all of their crew members were killed. When Dud learned that one of the victims was his cousin, he offered to accompany the body back home, but his offer was denied. After this assignment ended, Dud was sent to Hobbs, New Mexico, for a short time on B-17 transition duty, where pilots were checked out to fly B-17's. From there, they went to Lincoln, Nebraska, with Dud waiting to get his orders to go overseas. That was an especially stressful time, with a baby due soon. He flew to Rapid City, South Dakota, where he picked up his crew for the B17, flying fortress. Shirl Girl was its nickname, printed below the pilot's windows. In the meantime, Shirley had stayed back home near Carson with her parents, Hans and Stena Peterson, until the baby came. Diana was born April 5, 1945. Dudley didn't meet his new daughter until she was 9 weeks old when she and Shirley came by train to Rapid City, South Dakota. With orders to report to Bangor, Maine, and proceed overseas, the crew "swung their compass" to adjust for a move across the country. Then the war ended in Europe, with the Germans surrendering in May, 1945. Dud was sent back to Roswell to be licensed to fly B29's and had that

crew in place with orders to go to Guam, just as Japan surrendered in September, 1945. It had been a B29 which dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, ending the war. Dud was discharged, and they came back to Carson to farm. Glen and Effie Wilber had three of their four sons serving in the military during World War II. LaVerne was sent to the South Pacific, and Gola fought in Africa. The brothers came from a proud military heritage, with two of their great-grandfathers fighting in the Civil War, and Wilber ancestors who served during the Revolutionary War. Shirley's brother, Maynard Peterson, was in the Army Medical Corps, stationed in Texas during World War II. Shirley's dad, Hans Peterson, had come to America as a teenage immigrant from Denmark and received his naturalization while serving for the United States in World War I. Shirley remembers, "In those days, the cadets were paid \$50 a month, \$25 of that was matched by the government and sent to the wives, so the men received \$25 and the wives \$50. After earning his wings, his salary was \$312 a month. Looking back, we weren't worried that we had so little money to live on, as long as we had a place to stay. Everyone was in the same boat. We all grew close together and throughout the rest of our lives, we stayed in touch with many of the friends we made in the service. To this day, there is something fascinating and exciting about train travel." Dudley and Shirley recently traveled to Washington, D. C. for their granddaughter's wedding, and they were able to see the World War II Memorial.

(Contributed by Colleen Wilber. Ms. Wilber is a member of the board of directors of the Historical Society of Pottawattamie County)

Railroads Indispensable to Military Effort

Railroads reigned unchallenged as the backbone of America during the era of the World Wars. Its no surprise they were called upon to shoulder the burden of the military effort as well.

Virtually every soldier spent some time on a train. In addition to moving (and feeding) the troops the demand came in the form of transporting injured to hospitals, hauling military freight, and transporting great quantities of oil.

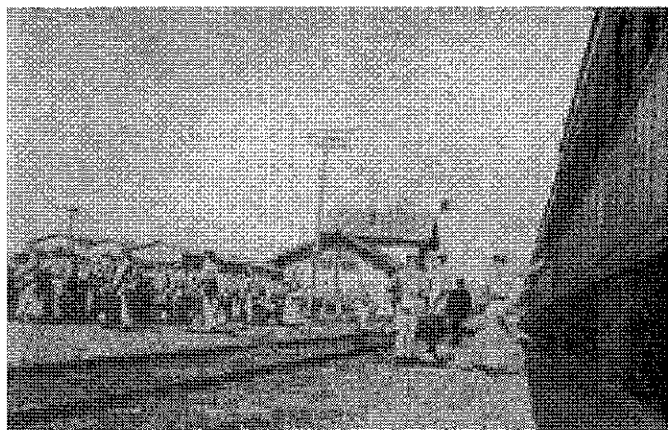
The railroads were so essential to the war many rail workers who tried to enlist found themselves refused. Most worked double shifts seven days a week with no breaks; one telegrapher remembers his wife bringing him dinner at the depot because the train movements were so intense he couldn't leave his post to eat.

The general procedure for transporting troops was to handle small parties on regularly scheduled passenger trains. Large contingents were moved on special troop trains.

For many GI's their first introduction to the service was the railroad. In Pottawattamie County new recruits who lived in Council Bluffs reported to the court house in town, those living in the country went to the court house in Avoca. From there it was to the trains.

A local veteran remembers reporting for duty and his group was put on a train to Fort Leavenworth via Kansas City. They were sent to the dining car for lunch, a luxury he'd never before experienced. He recalls thinking life in the army might not be so bad after all.

Not all the meals proved so luxurious. On the troop trains



Troop train, Eagle Field, Dos Palos, California (Contributed by Colleen Wilber).

makeshift kitchens were set up in baggage cars equipped with army gas ranges or wood stoves. Food was either passed through the train or serving tables set up in the baggage car.

The numbers really tell the story. As many as 600 people might be crammed onto passenger trains that in peacetime were carrying only a third that number. During World War II the railroads operated 200 special troop trains a day in addition to their regular passenger service. Records from one troop train showed the men on board consumed ten gallons of fruit cocktail, one hundred pounds of potatoes, sixty heads of lettuce, thirty pounds of tomatoes, and sixty loaves of bread for just one lunch on a single train.

Some railroads supplemented their dining cars by setting up platform canteens at various stations. GI's could get a sandwich or snack while the train was being serviced. Volunteer groups expanded this idea around the country contributing homemade sandwiches, desserts, and beverages. The most famous of these was the North Platte Canteen which greeted as many as 8000 soldiers a day. The tens of thousands of donated sandwiches, cakes, and so forth distributed by these volunteers are even more incredible when one considers this was in a time when food was being rationed. The canteen also gained notoriety from the practice of young single women putting their names and addresses on slips of paper in the popcorn balls distributed. Many a serviceman gained a pen pal that helped him endure the lonely times ahead and some even found a wife.

With rail capacity stretched to the maximum a Council Bluffs veteran recalls a lot of time was spent at depots waiting for trains. Some stations set up whatever recreational opportunities they could to help the GI's pass the time. Union Station in Omaha hosted a "Service Men's Center" with free entertainment.

The World Wars helped break down gender barriers at the railroads. The Railway Mail Service hired women to sort mail at the Council Bluffs terminal in a separate addition dubbed "the WAC shack." At the Rock Island women were driving supply trucks and working alongside the men.

The relationship was so intertwined it's not really possible to describe the history of the World Wars without also considering the railroads.

(Compiled by Richard Warner from stories and recollections contributed by HSPC members)

Technical Sergeant Gordon W. Brown served in the U.S. Army from July, 1944 to November, 1945. An expressive writer, he penned frequent letters home to his parents, John and Josephine Brown in Council Bluffs. Mr. Brown returned from the service and built a home in west end at 2709 Ave D. He became chief clerk of the law department at the Union Pacific and was also active in church work, helping to raise money for churches in Oakland, Glenwood, and other small towns. Mr. Brown served as mayor of Council Bluffs in 1960, and was still on the City Council in June of 1961 when he became acutely ill and died very suddenly. Thanks to the preservation of these letters by his wife, HSPC member Fern Brown, and generosity of daughter Janet Brown-Lowe, the Society now has copies of his war correspondence, providing a valuable insight into the life and thoughts of a WWII soldier. Some quotes are presented here; others will be displayed at the USO show September 6.

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AMERICAN RED CROSS

Letters Home

"Believe me, the people at home ought to appreciate what they have. I know I appreciate the U.S. now far better than ever before."

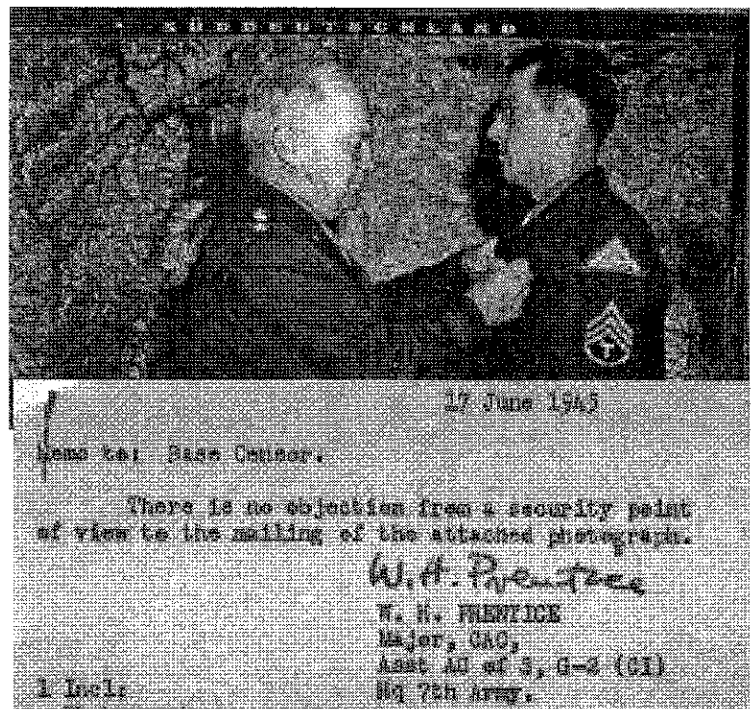
"Greetings from another country! Your son is now a full-fledged campaigner, having landed here on D-Day with the initial assault-- however, it was long after the first wave. You have no need to worry over me and wonder how I am as except for being sweaty, dirty and warm in these OD's, I am getting along perfectly okay. You are assured I have seen history made at this time!"

"I figured up that I have spent a total of 35 days on the water since I left the US. Somewhat of a record for a landlubbing soldier, I believe. It really staggers the imagination to see the magnitude and speed and efficiency of such a movement as this. It is almost beyond comprehension."

"I received a V-mail yesterday from Aunt May. Mail is a very important item and I never receive too many letters. The days go by with practically the same routine on the schedule each day, so there is very little to write about."



(Far right: Former Bluffs Mayor Gordon Brown being awarded Bronze Star. Immediate right: Technical Sergeant Brown in his new "Eisenhower jacket.")



17 June 1945

Send to: Base Officer.

There is no objection from a security point of view to the mailing of the attached photograph.

W.A. Reutter
W. A. REUTTER
Major, GAO,
Apt 40 of 3, G-2 (CI)
HQ 7th Army.

1 Incl:

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Inside...

It has been called the Greatest Generation. The Americans who lived through the World War II era wrote music that is standing the test of time, were hard workers, good dancers... and managed to fight a war that encompassed virtually the entire globe... and win. Hard to not call that "great." The HSPC relives the war years with a USO show September 6; get all the details on page 1.

Last month we solicited memories of the World War II years from our members. This issue of the "Member Journal" is made up of those contributions. Your chance to learn from those who were actually there starts on page 2.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Historical Society of Pottawattamie County is seeking candidates for the positions of president, vice-president, treasurer, and one board member. Members will receive ballots in the mail later this year. Names of potential candidates should be directed to the 2008 nominating committee members Diane Hestness, Mark Ford, or Connie Lairmore. Nominations can be phoned to the Society office at 323-2509 or mailed to P.O. Box 2, Council Bluffs, 51502.

Contact us...

For membership information, volunteer opportunities, address corrections, or questions about the Historical Society call the Society office at 323-2509, write P.O. Box 2, Council Bluffs, 51502, or e-mail via the website.

For questions, comments, or suggestions specific to newsletter articles you are welcome to write the editor directly (Richard Warner, 45 Caribou Circle, Council Bluffs, 51503) or e-mail (richardwarner@TheHistoricalSociety.org).

Historical Society of Pottawattamie County

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