

Washburn During The War Years 1939-1945—The Boys At War - 18

Washburn and Bayfield County contributed generously to the armed forces during World War II. Four hundred and forty-six men and one woman from Washburn, amounting to 18.9 percent of its 1940 population, served in the armed forces, the 446 men who served constituting 34% of its 1940 male population. For all of Bayfield County, 2,178, or 13.8 percent of the 1940 population, served. Participation among the towns of the county varied, from 8.8 percent for Barksdale to 17.6 percent for Namakagon, of their 1940 populations. With 25 percent of its 1940 population in the armed forces, the village of Mason had the largest proportion serving of all of the cities, villages, and towns of the county.

Several Bayfield County men were killed in action or died from other causes while in the services. From Washburn, five were killed in action and three died from other causes. The first casualty was Private Irwin Roy Jackson, who died of pneumonia in August 1941 in the Panama Canal Zone. The first battle casualty was Corporal Stance Guski, killed in July 1943 in Sicily. In June 1944 Lieutenant John B. Manning, the first man in the nation to be inducted under the Selective Service Act, was killed near Cherbourg, France. Also in June 1944 Corporal Robert L. MacDonald was killed after parachuting into Normandy as part of the invasion on June 6th. In July 1944 Gunner's Mate Donald W. Beaulieu was lost on submarine patrol, somewhere in the Pacific, and in February 1945 Private John P. Swanson was killed in Germany. Finally, in 1945 two men died of service connected illnesses, Captain Hugo V. Dittbrenner in March, and Private Danforth G. Welty in May. Men from Washburn wounded in action included Wilbur Bluhm, in the attack on Pearl Harbor; Private Arthur Jacobson in April 1943, in North Africa; Corporal Louis H. Justice at the Rapido



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River in Italy, in January 1944; Captain Robert Joanis in France, in June 1944; Sergeant Earl MacDonald "on the western front," in November 1944; and Private Robert Lindgren and Private William J. Zinski, both on Iwo Jima, in March 1945. Only one man from Washburn, Private Duane Faulk, was a German prisoner, captured on April 16 1945 and liberated a month later. Two cousins from the Town of Bayview were captured by the Germans, Private Theodore Smolen, on November 11 1944, near Schmidt, Germany, and Private David Smolen, on December 12 1944, near Diekirch, Luxembourg, during the beginning of the last German offensive on the western front, known as the Battle of the Bulge. The two men were liberated by American forces in May 1944.

There were several meetings of Washburn men throughout the world during the war. A number of Washburn men were stationed in Hawaii, so there were frequent meetings and reunions there. Occasionally they met by coincidence, as when Petty Officer Melvin Moe "was standing in the door of the movie theatre somewhere in Italy when along came his brother, Corporal Carlton

Moe," or when two cousins, Staff Sergeant Leo Oberets and Carpenter's Mate Robert Lindsey encountered each other "on a Pacific island." In another case, Staff Sergeant Fred Frostman and Private Alfred Bratley lived about 50 feet from each other on Bouganville Island for two or three months before they learned of each other's presence from letters from home. Occasionally, men knew that they were stationed near each other and were able to arrange a meeting, as did Private Glen W. Moe and Lieutenant Jack Bealieu, on the island of Saipan, and two brothers, Sergeant Robert Thoreson and Private Donald Thoreson, in Italy. Remarkably, Private Dan Welty, "stationed somewhere in the South Pacific," came across of copy of the Washburn Times "blown up against a tree. . . rough and yellow from the elements but still legible. I proceeded to sit down and read every inch of it," he reported.

The discharge of men from the services began after the surrender of Germany on May 8 1945. At first a trickle, the exodus became a veritable flood with the Japanese surrender on August 15 1945. The number of discharged Washburn men who remained in the city to continue their lives is not known. A substantial decline between 1940 and 1950 in the number of males in the 15 to 44 age category, suggests that many did not stay. There were practically no employment opportunities, while most of the businesses started by veterans were unsuccessful. Those veterans who did remain in their hometown soon became important participants in the life of the community. Some of them joined the Legion, taking over the leadership positions from the aging World War I veterans, while others established the Washburn Memorial Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.