# War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: Not given

I am from a family of 12; 6 girls and 6 boys. I am #6 in the family. Through the 30s, the depressions years, we really got along fairly well. Living on the farm, we had a big orchard, big garden, had poultry, swine, cattle, so we always had plenty to eat. But we had very little money.

Come 1940, with the war in Europe getting started, my parents were very concerned, remembering WWI and having 3 boys in the draft age if our country would get into the war. My older brother Urban got drafted in the middle of 1941. Then came Pearl Harbor on December 7th. Our whole family was very concerned; we listen to the radio a lot to keep up with the war. The food ration didn't affect us much since we lived on the farm. Gas rationing did keep us at home more, but we lived close to the grocery store and other stores, and our church was close too, so we didn't need much gas.

My brother Homer and I got farm deferments. Come June 6, 1944, we learned that my brother Urban was with the army that made the landing that day at Normandy. Our family was really concerned and did a lot of praying. In July my farm deferment was stopped, so in September I was drafted into the Navy. Homer's deferment was stopped also, and he joined the Merchant Marines. My father and my two younger brothers took care of the farming. Thank the Lord we all came back from the war unharmed. After I was discharged I got a job in construction and got married. In 1948 I took a job as general manager of a feed, grain company. After that all went well.

## My Military Story

I was born in 1922. I left school after my sophomore year to help my father on the farm. I had 6 sisters and 5 brothers. I was the sixth one born in our family of twelve. My parents raised our family through the Great Depression, which wasn't easy. We lived on a farm and we raised all our food. We had plenty of good food. We never had any money and our clothes were hand me downs.

When the war started for the United States on December 7, 1941, I was still helping on the farm. I had a farm deferment, so I wasn't drafted into the military early on in the war. I was drafted into the Navy in September of 1944. I was 22 years old at the time. I took my basic training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center near Chicago.

I was on the farm my whole life, so I very seldom got out of Shelby County. My first train ride to Chicago, the basic training, and meeting men from all over the United States, was an overwhelming experience for me. Completing basic training in December 1944, I went by train to Shoemaker, California, across the Rocky Mountains. I wondered if mountains could really be that big? Shoemaker was a distribution center for the Navy.

They sent me to Bremerton, Washington. I was assigned to serve on the *U.S.S. Idaho*. It was a battleship built in 1918. It had twelve 14-inch guns. The shells were about 6 feet high and 14 inches in diameter. It had some 8-inch guns and many smaller anti-aircraft guns. From Bremerton the *Idaho* went to San Francisco, California, to take on supplies and 1,000 or more soldiers. The *Idaho*'s regular crew was about 2,400, so the ship was really crowded. I had to sleep in a hammock that was tied to the ceiling right over a busy passage way. I never got a good night sleep until we got to Hawaii. All night long, someone would be bumping their head into my hammock. My job aboard ship was a surface look out. We were placed high up on the ship (the crow's nest). We had strong binoculars with which we would scan the ocean surface and sky for Japanese ships or planes. We were taught how to identify their planes and ships.

We left San Francisco with many other ships. There were other battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers and destroyer escorts. They all traveled in a zig-zag route, all flying the U.S. flag. It was quite a sight to see. At night, they all traveled without any lights. On a full moon night, it was another fantastic sight. At Hawaii, we dropped off the soldiers. We went to the Ulithi Islands next. From there, a group of ships and the *Idaho* went to Iwo Jima, arriving on February 14, five days before the invasion. We would fire on the Japanese military targets on the island all day long. We would go out to sea at night and cruise around. The next morning, we would be back at the island and bombard some more. We did that for four days, then on the morning of February 19, when we got back to Iwo Jima, the sea was fun of ships. It was the day of the invasion.

Stationed up in the crow's nest, I watched the invasion like watching a movie. These memories I'll never forget. We carried two planes aboard. They would fly over the island and spot the targets for us. By luck, I saw the raising of the American flag on Mt. Surabachi. I never thought that the picture taken of that event would be the most famous picture of WWII. After about a month, Iwo Jima was secured.

We went to Guam for repairs, then back to the Ulithi Islands for more supplies. A group of ships, including us, headed for Okinawa. It was sort of a repeat performance like Iwo Jima. We were there about five days before the invasion. The invasion was April 1, 1945 – Easter Sunday. I watched the invasion again like on Iwo Jima. I could tell where the battle front line was located. The United States side had trucks, tanks, Jeeps, soldiers walking around and lights on during the night. Watching the Japanese side, you would never see any movement unless our troops would force them out into the open.

While the battle was going on day after day, the Japanese started to send suicide planes (Kamikazes) over on the Navy. They came nearly every day. I saw many small ships and aircraft carriers get hit and they sunk. One day, it became our turn, and one suicide plane hit us right above the water line. It blew about a 10 foot by 10 foot hole in our side. It didn't bother us much, because our ship had 14 inches of solid .steel around the outside. To give us more protection, they had a 4 foot wide tank welded on the outside of the 14 inches of steel. It was pumped full of high air pressure. When the suicide plane blew this hole in our side, it just blew a hole in that tank. The high air pressure stopped a lot of the concussion. If the suicide plane would have hit about 40 feet higher, it probably would have taken me out. Lucky me!!!!

These suicide planes would come over every day and all the ships would be firing their anti-aircraft guns at them. It was like a big Fourth of July fireworks display. There were some shot down. They would fly real low over the water, making it hard to hit them for fear of hitting the other ships. I have a piece of the suicide plane about as big as a dinner plate. Okinawa was secured in July. We went to the Leyle Gulf, on the southern part of the Philippines. There, they repaired the hole that the suicide plane blew in our side.

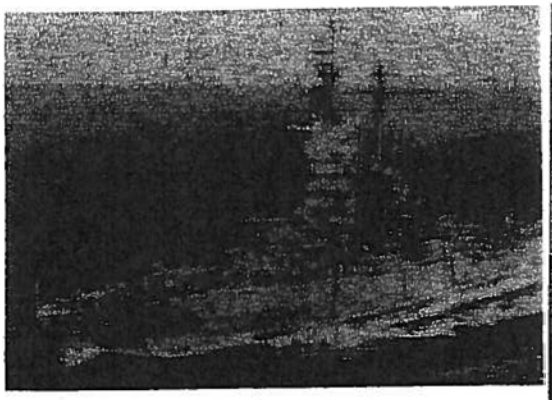
On August 14, 1945, Japan surrendered after 2 atomic bombs were dropped on their cities. When the news came that the war was over, there was one fantastic celebration in Leyle Gulf. All the ships were shooting rockets in the air and blowing horns.

We went to Tokyo Bay to help secure Japan. We were there when they signed the Peace Treaty. We left Tokyo Bay and returned to Hawaii. We passed through the Panama Canal on our way home. The ship was so very wide, I could have stepped on either side of the walls of the canal. Then we went to Norfolk, Virginia Navel Yard. There, we started to put the *Idaho* into so called "mothballs." We put plastic covers over all the guns, etc. (Some years later, the *Idaho* was sold to the Gillette Company. I was told they made razor blades out of it.)

In early May, they started taking all the crew off. I hitchhiked all the way home with my big bag of all my belongings. That was another experience.

I was discharged from the Navy in May 1946. I married Rita Bensman in October. We had eight children. I worked different jobs for several years. l was hired as the general manager of an elevator. We handled farmer's grain, feed, fertilizer and supplies. I knew a lot about farming, but not much about owning a business. With help from my wife Rita and the employees, I learned the trade. After 33 years, I retired from the elevator. Some of the boards I served on were Anna School Board, Shelby County School Board and the Piqua . NS board. I served on a board at Fostoria, Ohio. It was a company that had a big grain storage terminal and supplied all elevator needs in northwest Ohio.

I play guitar with a group that plays music at different rest homes. I guess with my military experience aboard the *Idaho*, I got bit with a patriotic bug. I have been in many parades in Sidney and Ft. Loramie dressed as Uncle Sam. Is this a great country or what?



U. S. S. Idaho