

Veterans Oral Histories

The Heritage Education Commission, www.heritageed.com, conducted about 70 oral histories of Veterans. The project started in 2001 with a gift from a Moorhead family. One of the more interesting is that of Ray Stordahl. In 1944, Ray graduated from McIntosh high school, although his first seven years of school were in a one room schoolhouse. Ray volunteered for the Army after high school, and went to basic training in July 1944. Ray went to Europe in time for the Battle of the Bulge and served as a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) person in an infantry squad with the 11th Armored Division. When asked for a special story from the war, Ray said "We went across Germany quite rapidly capturing town after town, heading east. And when the war ended, we were the farthest east of any divisions in the U. S. Army and we met the Russians about a day before the war ended. But one of the significant things is that we were the people that opened the gates of Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps and that's an experience that even when I say the words I can barely say them yet, and it's almost 60 years." Along with a group of Veterans, Ray returned to Belgium fifty years later and stopped at a barn where they slept while crossing Europe. They were remembered by the locals who threw a party for them.

A few years ago, I heard Ray give a presentation to a local service club and I can still hear his voice when talking about the concentration camps. It never left him. Dr. David Pike in *Spaniards in the Holocaust* lists servicemembers who relieved the camps and Ray's name is there. As he said "My name is in the history book."

Following his years in the service, he was discharged in 1946, Ray enrolled at Concordia College and received his business administration and physics degree in 1950. Following college, he and a friend started a construction business which they had for 20 years. He then went into manufacturing and was president of Silverline Boats. Ray was very active in our community, serving as mayor from 1964 to 1971. When asked how he would like to be remembered, Ray said "Well, I guess I've been – over the more than 50 years that I've been here in Moorhead, I've been active in community affairs and I think that some of my small town upbringing and my military service, and education I received at Concordia are all of the elements that really caused me to feel a responsibility to be doing some things in community service and I'm still involved in."

If you want to know more about Ray and other local people who served in the military, check out the webpage www.heritageed.com. You'll even find my story there.

On Sunday, April 17 local Veterans organizations will be holding a fund raising dinner, raffle and silent auction for the WDAY Honor Flight. The event will be at the Moorhead American Legion, 303 30 St N, dinner served from 11:30 – 3:00.