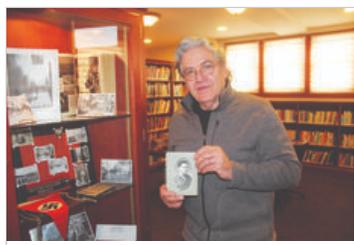


Hoskinson display chronicles father's WWII experience

By Nick Johansen

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Jim Hoskinson poses with a photo of father Gene next to one of the exhibits at the Red Oak Public Library. The exhibit, made up of photos and memorabilia, chronicles Gene's tour of duty overseas during WWII.

The Red Oak Express

Visitors to the Red Oak Public Library can get a unique peek at an Iowa soldier's tour of duty in World War II.

Jim Hoskinson, who lives in Red Oak, coordinated the exhibit along with the local Questers chapter. The exhibit is made up of photos and items belonging to his late father, Gene Hoskinson, who was part of an anti-tank company, the 301st Infantry, 94th Infantry Division.

Gene married high school sweetheart Ann Tinkham following his return from overseas, and the pair lived in the same home in Colorado from 1958 to 2015, passing away only 40 days apart. Jim said both his parents lived in the Great Depression and hardly ever threw anything away. After their passing, Jim said he found a wide array of items, from hundreds of photos and negatives to Nazi artifacts, including a Luger, banners and bayonets.

The exhibit is made up of a series of display cases, which start with Gene shipping out overseas to his discharge home.

"The starting display includes photos of Gene during his two-week leave before being sent overseas. They also saved a ration book, instructions for the Army camp, and other items," said Jim.

The next case features such items as Gene's equation book, which was used to calculate when aiming to fire. In combat, Gene was a part of the clearing of the Saar-Moselle Triangle and the Battle of the Bulge.

"He took a photograph of the Saar River in Germany, and there are various shots of U.S. soldiers. A historian from the Netherlands named Wim Schelberg, who has been instrumental in establishing times and places, returned to the same location where my father took his photograph and took a recent photo of the spot today. Not much of the terrain has changed. That photograph is included as well. My dad was 6'4" and 240 pounds, had his 19th birthday on the English Channel, and landed on Utah Beach. When they got into France, dad's commanding officer made him his bodyguard," Jim said.

Jim added that while he knew his father had served overseas in WW II, his father never shared any details with him.

"None of this my dad talked about. I'm learning all of this after his passing. I don't think he wanted to talk about it because the experience was just too tough to relive," commented Jim.

Another display is dedicated to the Nazi memorabilia, which includes photographs and items

"A lot of the photographs of the German parades included the negatives. There are a few German items, such as the Luger with a Swastika embossed on the leather holster were too valuable to display. I also have 92 photographs of German troops in North Africa, along with the negatives. I don't know if they came from different places, but to have negatives from two different places seems very rare."

The 94th Division, which was known as "Patton's Golden Nugget," directly served under Gen. George S. Patton. Jim has a display dedicated to the 94th Division's crossing of the Siegfried Line.

"I have dad's 72 hour pass to Paris, his maps, a letter he wrote to my mom, and a picture of him in front of the Eiffel Tower. What's interesting about this is that I posted this picture in a historical group, and someone posted a picture of Adolf Hitler posed in the exact same spot my dad was in the picture. I can only assume they had a guide which showed them that Hitler had been there, because it seems too coincidental for it not to be planned," commented Jim

The 94th Division was later assigned as the occupational government in Czechoslovakia, and another display features items collected during that time.

"A Bob Hope USO show was hosted there, with roughly 7,000 GI's in attendance. My dad took about 15-20 photos from pretty close to the front. He also took a poster from the event. I made a copy of the original poster but it was too fragile to display. It's amazing he had the presence of mind to save it. I have searched for other copies of the poster, and I can't find another one anywhere. Some of the other items include football programs, a personalized photo to Gene from Miss Iowa 1945, and a photo of him on the ship coming home."

Jim said his parents saved hundreds of letters his dad wrote to his mom while overseas, and the display's focus is on when he left New York into England on the Queen Elizabeth to January, 1946, when he came home.

"I was able to trace through the letters which camp he was in, and what port he would be by, and then found another envelope of photos of France and located the name of the ship he came home on, and a picture of the port he departed from when he came home," said Jim.

While the collection of memorabilia is extensive, Jim said the photographs are his favorite items.

"Anything else is just stuff. It was produced in big numbers, so they could be in a lot of collections. These photographs aren't in anyone else's collection. Especially the German ones, because I have the negatives," Jim said.

Among the many letters Gene sent home to Ann was his excitement over the end of combat in Europe. Gene wrote:

"Hello Darling- Monday, May 7, that's sure a great day for the war to end, isn't it. Can you imagine it- the war here in Europe actually did end today! Oh what a happy thought- at least no more combat in Europe. Words can't express how I feel- In fact, I don't know how to feel."

Gene sent home another letter on Aug. 15 celebrating VJ Day:

"VJ Day-My Daring!!! What do you know, this blame war has really ended for good!! It hardly seems possible!! Just think, the next time I come home, I'm coming for good. Wow!!"

Jim said the display will be available for public viewing during the regular library hours until April.