

Panelists, WWII Vets Program, January 21, 2007

At the Manchester Historical Society, text & interviews by Susan Barlow

175 Pine Street, Manchester, Connecticut. Photos by the late Richard Witham.



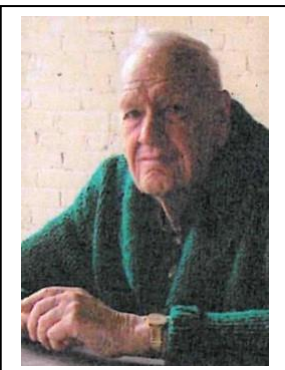
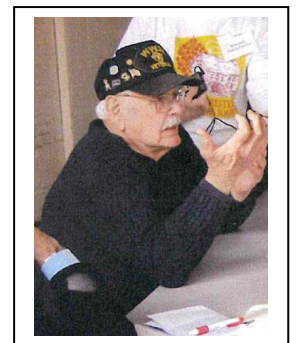
Ted Cummings, of Lawton Road, served in the South Pacific. He was a corporal. He enlisted in the Marines right out of high school, but had to have a parent sign for him, because he was only 17. After the war, Ted and his wife, Lorraine, lived with Ted's parents in the South End of Manchester. They were later among the veteran families to move into the newly built Vet Haven houses in 1948. Ted recorded his memories about Vet Haven for the Historical Society. Ted explained that Vet Haven was behind the Poor Farm (Almshouse, which was later remodeled into the Police Station). "And all of the families were veterans, and many of them had children, and many had children while they were. The rent was \$35 a month."

Dorothy (Denton) Olcott, of Oakwood Road, enlisted as a WAVE (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service) in 1943. She served in Washington, D.C., transmitting codes and decoding, using special coding machines. Their work was through the Intelligence Department, and all very hush-hush. They were told never to discuss it. But as you may know from the news, the U.S. was very successful at breaking Japanese code, and the WAVES contributed substantially to this effort. Dorothy was a Lieutenant, J.G. When she came home after the war, her parents very much wanted her to live with them, which was the typical scenario for young unmarried women.



Mike Nimirowski, of Tower Road, was drafted into the Air Force in 1942 and reported to Fort Devins in 1943. He trained as a ball-turret gunner, and the training required him to learn the job of bombardier as well. He was a staff sergeant in the 96th Bomb Squadron. The B-17s he flew on had a crew of 10: pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, navigator, engineer, radio man, 2 waist gunner, 1 tail gunner, and the ball-turret gunner. Mike's service brought him to South Africa, Italy, French West Morocco, Algiers, Casablanca, Italy, and the Ukraine. After completing 50 successful bombing missions, Mike came home in 1944. Mike lent his bomber jacket and other articles to the Historical Society's exhibit on WWII veterans.

John Robotto, of Oakland Street, enlisted in the Navy Air Corps in 1942 at the age of 18, signing up "for the duration." He had tried to enlist earlier, but his parents wouldn't sign for him – his father said he was needed on the family farm in Bolton. John served in the North Atlantic Theater, on a carrier doing anti-submarine duty – search and destroy. He was a Petty Officer, Aviation Ordinance Man 2nd Class, similar to a staff sergeant. John said of his 18 months at sea, "It was very cold in the North Atlantic, but we had good chow and nice clean bunks; they treated us OK." John got out of the service in 1946, and for many years ran a floor covering business in Manchester. He served as Commander of the VFW for three years, and still volunteers there after completing his term as Commander.



Richard Witham, of Canterbury Street, was drafted in 1943. He started training at the Air Force College, but there was a need for infantry, and he was sent overseas. Dick fought with the 75th Division in the Battle of the Bulge. He received a Purple Heart for a wound in combat – shrapnel in his leg. He got severe frostbite in his feet while in Belgium, and came close to having to have his feet amputated. After hospitalization in England, Dick was sent to the African campaign, and as a staff sergeant worked with the local personnel – they used camels to transport goods. Back in the U.S., he went to the Veterans Hospital in Newington for treatment on his feet. He was discharged in 1945, and in November 1946, he and his wife, Beverly, moved into their first house, where they still live, although it's been expanded over the years. Dick lent his uniform Historical Society's exhibit on WWII veterans.

Editor's note, as of August 1, 2020, the following vets have died: Ted Cummings (1924-2015), Dorothy Olcott (1918-2011), Mike Nimirowski (1922-2017), Richard Witham (1923-2010). John Robotto lives in Manchester; he was born in 1923. – Susan Barlow