



P.C.H.S

Volume 2007

Pennington County Historical Society

Number 2

Johnny Enlists!

(This article is the second of a series based upon interviews conducted with John Jaranson. It covers John's World War II military training.)

When the draft came up, I had a high number. I knew that I wasn't going to be called in for quite a few months. Draft numbers were assigned randomly and I think that they went up to 1500 or 1800. My number was 700 or 800. In November of 1941, I thought that it might be better to try to get into one of the sub-branches of the service. Because I had not been called up yet, I had a choice. I talked to a fellow named Ab Stromberg - "Big Ab" - who was in the service. He was back home on leave. He was in the Coast Artillery and said it was a good outfit. After talking to Ab, I went down to Bemidji where there was an enlistment office. After talking to them, I found out that you really didn't have much choice. You went in and they assigned you to the infantry or whatever they chose.

I then decided that I should try to get into the Army-Air Force. I went with Ray Olson and Jessie DuChamp. We drove down to Fargo where there was an enlistment office. The interviewer was a sergeant. He asked us some questions and from my answers he learned that I didn't have one year of college or the equivalent. Because of that I didn't qualify to enter into the Cadets. So, I went back to Bemidji and enlisted in the regular Army. I went into the service in February of 1942. I signed up in the Army, and I was lucky enough to be assigned there because they were just then making it the Army Air Force. I went to Sheppard Field in Wichita Falls, Texas for my basic training. I was in Aircraft Maintenance school there from February until July when I graduated.

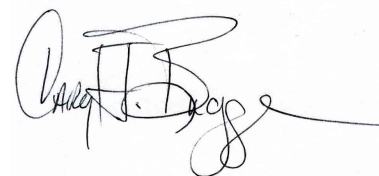
Our graduation took place in a hanger. A colonel spoke and made a pitch for men to become

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Personally Speaking

In the last newsletter, I reviewed the history of the Historical Society and the Engelstad Village. I announced that I had retired as the Village Director and that Jill Johnson had been hired as the 2007 Director. Jill has served most ably as the director of the Village this past summer and has agreed to return to the task for another year. After next year, she will evaluate her continuing as Village Director.

I have not retired from the Historical Society. It has been my continuing task to come to the Village when called by the staff to do historical research for people requesting assistance and respond to all internet and land questions. I edit the newsletter, document new accessions to the Village, work to re-organize at least one Village display each year, digitize photographs and documents received for the website, maintain membership and memorial lists, speak for groups on behalf of the Society and Village, serve on the Historical Society Board of Trustees, handle the publicity for all events, manage Engelstad winter storage, and assist in contracting and overseeing needed repairs at the Village. It is my hope that someone might soon come forth to edit the newsletter and at some future date, someone will come forth to take on the additional tasks.



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aircraft gunners. He said that if anyone wanted to apply, they should go over to the medical office to have a physical. Twenty-three of us went. It was kind of a spur of the moment thing and three of us passed to go to gunner school. The training was in Harlingen, Texas. We had a class of about thirty men. One of the reasons that we tried for it was that we were only buck-privates in Aircraft Maintenance School. If we passed gunner school, we would be corporals. That was quite a jump from a buck-private to a corporal. When we got off the troop train in Harlingen, the graduating class came out with stripes. They were corporals. We thought that was something. However, the Army changed the orders. If a soldier had been to AM, Radio, or Armament School, he would be a staff-sergeant when he finished gunner school. That was a big jump – a bigger jump. Then it was really something. So if we graduated from gunner school, we would be staff sergeants.

For gunner's school, you had to have good eyesight and you had to be a certain weight. You couldn't be too big as you had to be able to get into the turrets. The tail

gun was in the back, right under the horizontal stabilizer, looking back. The waist gunner was in the center of the plane and it could fire out both sides. Normally when in combat, in England, they had two waist gunners – one on each gun – but we went over with one and he used both guns – down one side or the other. There were open windows on each side. The guns could fan out from either side. Then they had the ball-turret hanging underneath - right underneath where the waist windows were in the middle of the plane. In the waist, you made access to the ball turret. You could roll the guns down and the door opened so the gunner could crawl in there. You sat with your knees up by your ears and the sight up to your face with two guns firing along side. I never fired when I was in the ball but did go in there just to see if I could fit. I fired the top-turret guns. I was the engineer on the airplane and that gun was up in the cockpit.

I passed the physical so I was shipped down to Harlingen, Texas, on the border of Mexico. From there we were shipped to a replacement center where we were assigned to the field where we going to train. We

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Remembering

The Endowment Fund was established to secure the future of the Peder Engelstad Pioneer Village. Only the interest from this fund can be spent. The current balance in this account is \$11,000. Please consider the Historical Society in your memorials, charitable giving, and estate planning. The Society is a non-profit institution, so all donations are tax-deductible.

Since the inception of the endowment fund, donations have been made to the fund in memory of the following:

Russell Williams
 Hazel DuChamp
 Jan Haider
 Glenn Carlson
 Katherine Strong
 Kermit Finstad
 Marion Hoglo
 Torjus and Sophie Larson
 Kevin Swanson
 Val Chommie
 Marian Williams
 Junes Race
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 Constance Hicks Rossman
 Rose Needham
 Hannah Hornseth
 Millie (Pederson) Olson
 Gote Anderson
 Opal Bjerken
 Jerry Fessler
 Genevieve Ring
 Orlene Reed
 Lloyd Vevea
 Edla Holmberg

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Oscar Odegaard	Marion Cork
Ralph Engelstad	Marcella Hanson
Inga Geving	Helen Beebe
Cora Alvina Olson	Melva Lee
Robert Looker	Rebecca Berg Grayson
David Kringsberg	Betty Dow
James Engelstad	Pearl Wold
Clarence O. Swanson	Woodrow Craik
Earl Halvorson	Bob Bergan
Marlene Johnson	Carrie Lunke
Myrtle (Bugge) Nelson	Verna Myhrer Ehrle
Peter Hess	Caroline Brunelle
Douglas Stewart	Lloyd Hogenson
Avis Hoium	Alice Brubakken
Joseph Armstrong	Milton Davidson
Rolland Sande	Paul Kayser
Mary Thompson	Ernest Helgenset
Irene Ellingson	Lester Muzzy
Mel Carlson	LeRoy Bugge
Patricia Henning	Gini Engelstad
Sophie Marie (Jensen) Sevre & Donald I. Sevre	Orin Green
Bernard Myers	Harold Burrell
Roger P. Mickelson	Orville & Gay Johnson
Ruby Huseh	Elsie Johnson
Lois (Klennert) Jung	Leonard Furuseth
Millard Nelson	Darlene Forsberg
Bertha Schlenker	Richard Mosbeck
Clifton Mattson	Albert Koop
Cliff, Margaret, & Dick Bjorkman	Gwen Brooten
Marion (Geving) Adolphson	Delphis(Sonny) Bergdahl
Kenneth Pearson	Cliff Swanson
Bob Bredeson	Peggy Nicholson

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went to Salt Lake City which was a big center. There they threw numbers in a hat or something and they assigned us to the various bases. From there, I got assigned to Gowan Field in Boise, Idaho. It was a B-17 base.

The school included learning parts, operation, and flying a B-17. Because I had been to Aircraft Mechanics School, I was an engineer. The engineer was in charge of refuelling and general maintenance on the plane when the plane stopped at an airbase that did not have facilities for B-17's. The engineer had to pre-check the engines. He would walk around the plane and check to see that the flaps, tires, elevators and everything else was going to work before the plane took off. The engineer made out flight forms. Form one included the pertinent information for each flight. It gave the names of the pilot, all the crew members, destination, time of take off, time of landing, where the plane flew, and a list of any problems. It was turned in when the plane landed at its home base and put in the record logs. The navigator plotted the course across country and the distance. We always had to know when we needed to land for fuel.

The plane was cold but not very cold. It was enclosed and had a little bit of heat. The navigator's compartment was down in the nose. One time the navigator called up and said that it was 69 degrees below zero. We had to wear warm clothes, but we were out of the wind. We wore sheep-skin gloves. I could take my glove off to write. It wasn't uncomfortable. We wore leather, sheep-lined boots, and leather flight suits. The waist gunners were the ones that got the blast of wind. It was hard to keep warm there. A lot of them froze their cheeks or froze their fingers.

In training, I probably got 15 or 20 hours of short flights, mostly at night. All of them were with different pilots. They were student pilots and being instructed. As soon as we took off the landing gear had to come up. In the bomb bay, there was a manual crank that you wound up to make sure that the landing gear was up and locked. It was the same with the tail wheel. You had to learn how to crank the bomb bay doors open in an emergency. They were electrically operated, but if something went wrong, you could wind them up or down by hand. You could operate the flaps with two or three hundred turns with

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the crank to get the flaps up or down. Before landing, you had to go back and check to see that the landing gear was down and locked.

While in training, we took off one night in one of these old rattle-trap model E's with a student pilot. There was an instructor pilot, a ground crew man, and a mechanic to teach us how to do the operation. We got up in the air – flying at night – and all the electrical equipment in the whole plane went out. We couldn't see anything. We were lucky enough that the engines run on magnetos so they still ran. We didn't have any generators working. All four alternators were out. There were no lights for the instruments, no landing lights, and no power for the landing gear, the landing flaps, the tail. We had to wind it all down by hand. We came in the first time and a civilian airplane came off from the side. They didn't see us, but we saw them. We had to go up and come around again to land.

I had to wind the flaps up again. The next time we started, another B-17 came in and landed right over the top of us. I had to keep winding the landing gear up and down for each attempt. The next time we came in, we came in hot – fast – and instead of landing at one-

fourth of the way down the runway we landed pretty near the intersection. We were over one-third of the way down the runway. We were rolling pretty fast. We used the brakes and we finally ended at the end of the runway. We were just going to turn off when another airplane landed behind us. That plane banked and his wing went over the top of the wing of our plane. I got off the plane, checked in my parachute in and went to the barracks. The class that was going to take off at midnight and fly after we were through was there waiting with their trainer. All of a sudden, we heard a crash. We ran out, looked down the runway, and there were flames going up on the runway. A B-17 had come in to land with one engine on fire. They had an inexperienced pilot. Instead of setting his plane down, he started to take off again with an engine on fire. One wing tilted and tipped into the plane that we had just landed. The ground crew was now in the plane that we had just landed. The two airplanes were all in flames. Everyone in them was killed. We all just stood around in a ring and couldn't help anyone.

The names of all the men in Boise, Idaho were thrown in a hat and drawn out for

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crew assignments. That was when I was assigned to a crew. That was the crew that I stayed with during my service. That happened after about a month. The crew included the pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, engineer, radio man, ball-turret gunner, waist gunner, and tail gunner. The bombardier and the navigator were ex-washed-out pilots. They had gone to flying school and didn't make the grade. They then had a choice of going to the navigator's or bombardier's training. So they had previous pre-flight training and could possibly fly the plane.

The pilot has to have a feel for flying. He shouldn't have to think about it. It's like driving a car or riding a bicycle. Their reflexes are already there and they do it automatically without thinking. I had to admire the way they could fly in formation. These big airplanes have four engines and columns of controls. When flying in formation the wing of one plane is right behind the wing of another plane. You could almost walk from one plane to the other. They could fly like that for hours in good weather and nobody ever bumped into each other.

First we went to Alamogordo, New Mexico and there is where we flew as a crew

the first time. We flew in these old airplanes that had been used a lot and overused. They were outmoded because they were "E's". The ones that went to combat were "F's" which was a later model. The maintenance on them was poor and the sparks would be flying off the wings around the engines. When we were flying at night the oil was leaking out of them and there were black streaks on the wings. There was something wrong with them all the time.

In 1942 we were in Alamogordo in October, Topeka in November, and then we flew to Salina, Kansas. There we were assigned our airplane. We named our plane "Elaine". For the crew, the plane was just like a member of the family. We called it a "her" and she was named "Elaine". "Elaine" was the name of the pilot's daughter. In the end of December of 1942, we were ordered overseas. We flew Elaine to West Palm Beach, Florida. We had all the equipment that we needed. We finished preparing for our overseas flight. We flew from there to Trinidad and then Brazil. From there we flew to the Ascension Islands. It was a 3000 foot island out the middle of the south Atlantic with a landing strip run by the British.

✂-----Snips-----

Society Membership

A membership renewal envelope was included in the April newsletter. Your mailing label on this newsletter gives the last date of your membership. If you have not already done so, please renew your membership, increase your contribution, and invite a friend to join the Society. Please encourage the businesses that you frequent in Thief River Falls to support the Historical Society with a business membership. The Historical Society publishes this newsletter, does research for individuals, and researches the history of the county and its cities throughout **every month of the year**. It also owns and maintains the Peder Engelstad Pioneer Village. Funds are always needed to keep up the Village and pay for utilities, even when the Village is not open.

The Website – Grade-School Names ??

The Pennington County Historical Society website (www.pvillage.org) was receiving 170 visitors a day as of August of 2007. Recently a book scanner was added to the electronic equipment used to digitize material for the website. Copies of the newsletters published since 2004 are now available on the website. The photos donated to the Historical Society by the closed grade schools have now been scanned. There are photos that are missing and the names of all but the last few years of students are also missing. When viewing the photos from Northrop, Knox, and Washington, please help the Historical Society by noting the number of the photograph and forwarding any names that you can provide.

Historical Society and Engelstad Pioneer Village 2008 Schedule

P.C.H.S. Annual Meeting - Monday, April 27
 Village Pitch-In Day - Saturday, May 17
 Opening of the Village - Monday, May 26
 Family Festival - Saturday, June 28
 Park & Rec. Pioneer Day - Wednesday, July 23
 Bountiful Harvest - Saturday, August 23
 Closing of the Village - Monday, September 1

Northwest Regional Library Joint Project With PCHS

While the LHS class of 1957 was touring the Village this past summer, Dale Gram asked about a display of artifacts that had been found at one time at his family farm. It was determined that the display had never been at the Village, but had been at the Thief River Falls Library at one time. After checking with the library staff and not finding the display, Dale contacted Gretchen Beito who had documented the find in a news article in the *Times* in 1977. Gretchen contacted Barbara Jauquet Kalinoski and the result is that the local library staff and the Historical Society are going to put together a display at the library of the artifacts from the Gram farm. The library staff will change the display periodically to include items and artifacts from the Village collection that depict the history of the Indigenous cultures in this county.

Peder Engelstad Pioneer Village Repairs, Changes, and Additions

During the past year, the Arctic Cat Display in the Engelstad Building has been rearranged, increased, and documented with the help of Leon Johnson and Robert & Mary Johnson. A restored Allis Chalmers tractor with a plow was donated by Elmer Hanson, a Honda ATC 90 donated by Robert Johnson, and an early snowmobile added by Leon Johnson. Ted and Darlene Koropatnicki added a display in memory of Darlene's father, Alton Skallet. The photographic equipment display has been documented and Roger and Arty Tunberg have added a Tunberg Motors display in the Great Northern Depot.

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Maintenance Manager—Nathan Olson
Gardener—Beattie Mickelson

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