



Volume 2008

Pennington County Historical Society

Number 2

We Knew we were Winning!

(This Article is the fourth in a series based upon interviews conducted with John Jaranson. Previous episodes have dealt with his early life in Thief River Falls, his military training, and his military service. This is the final article in the series.)

In some issues of the April 2008 newsletter, the final lines were missing in the story due to a formatting error. The last lines should have read: “ I will always remember that day. It was June 28, 1943. It was my thirty-fifth flight and the last flight of the Elaine.”)

After getting back to our base, we were assigned to different planes at the daily briefings. Once in awhile a crew would be short a person and we would fill in for them. I flew with other crews a few times before we lost the Elaine. I can remember one time when I was assigned to this crew and when I got there, the pilot told me that I would be the waist gunner. He was going to put his waist gunner in as the engineer. The waist gun equipment was different from what I was used to operating.

It was a common practice after a plane was in the air that the crew test-fired the guns. Everybody fired and you called in so if anything wasn't going right, the crew could correct it or the plane could turn back. When we test fired the guns, the top turret guns wouldn't test fire. We were about to abort the mission. Finally, the waist gunner who was now the engineer, called back and asked if I could do anything with the turret. It just happened that I had previously been visiting with a group of young experienced engineers. One guy told us about a particular plane, number forty-six, that had a “tricky” turret. He said that

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Personally Speaking

It has been a wonderfully busy summer at the Village! We hired Bill as our maintenance worker and his expertise as a contractor has noticeably improved the safety and appearance of the village. Jessie is our new assistant to the director, which is a newly implemented position. Jessie has organized and showcased multiple rooms this summer adding many interesting new attractions. We were also fortunate this summer to have a crew from Inter-County, and a crew from the Experience Works program that have thoroughly cleaned the buildings and made them sparkle. We are continually grateful for our dedicated volunteers!

We have added new events this summer; Old Time Story Time & Latchkey Day. The events are organized by both the Village employees and the organizations wishing to hold the events. I will continue to search for ways for community groups to utilize the uniqueness of our village. We had the most successful attendance yet at our Park and Rec. Pioneer Days, National Night Out and Bountiful Harvest Bazaar. We feel very fortunate to have discovered Frank Kahoombaush, a Native American presenter who presented at both Park and Rec. Days and National Night Out. Frank shared his knowledge of the Ojibwa language, rituals, and bandolier beadwork. We had 10 additional booths at our Bountiful Harvest Bazaar this year and know it will continue to grow. I feel blessed as a member of the Thief River Falls community that we are able to maintain a historical museum such as ours. Many of our summer visitors are from out of town or from out of state. We hear rave reviews about the appearance, size, collections, and uniqueness of our village. We truly have a treasure within our community! Remember us for weddings, reunions, picnics, birthday parties, etc... I look forward to seeing you next summer!

Respectfully submitted,

Jill Johnson, Peder Engelstad Pioneer Village Director

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he had trouble with it and couldn't quite figure it out. He told us that he finally opened it up and found that one clip was loose and the fuse wasn't connected. So he fixed it and it was okay. I went up to the front of the plane and stalled long enough so that the pilot sent the waist gunner back to the waist. In a few minutes, I pinched the fuses together and the turret worked so I got back in the engineer's position where I should have been in the first place.

I remember another flight when we were flying the number two plane in a formation. I looked out and there was a string of explosion flashes and they sounded like fire crackers. I saw flashes like sparklers high off the top of the wings. I didn't know what they were and I looked up. I saw two 109 Messerschmitts coming at us - kitty-corners - straight down - and they just missed us. The Messerschmitts had twenty millimeter cannons set for contact or explosion. They were timed to explode at six hundred yards. We just happened to be at six hundred yards so that's what I was hearing and see-

ing off the wings. I swung the guns over, but they came by so fast that I almost bent the barrels, catching up to them. I could see the pilots' faces. Their planes were right in front of our plane and only about one hundred feet away.

Another time, when we were coming back after we had dropped our bombs, we went down and flew about fifty feet off the water. You could see the wake behind the four engines in the water. At that time, we were kind of relaxed. We were flying low over the water in a group of nine planes. It was my job to serve the lunch. We had number-ten cans of pineapple juice and sandwiches. I was going back and forth distributing the lunches and pouring juice into canteen cups and all of a sudden I looked out through the side window and the plane next to us was firing their guns. There was a fighter plane that had sneaked in on us. I wasn't in the turret and none of us were in a position to see those fighters.

The fighters were flying next to us. They

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Remembering

The memorials donated to the Historical Society are deposited into the Endowment Account. The purpose of this account is to insure the future of the Peder Engelstad Pioneer Village. Only the interest from the account can be spent for current expenses. Since the inception of the account, all interest earned had been left in the account. The current balance of this account is \$12,900. Please consider the Historical Society in your memorials, charitable giving, and estate planning. The Society owns the Village and is a non-profit institution. All donations to the Society are tax-deductible including membership. Each person for which a memorial was donated is named only once and the amount of the memorials is not published. The list is in the order of the dates of the donations.

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

Russell Williams	James Wells
Hazel DuChamp	Russ Molldrem
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Glenn Carlson	Lenore Lieberman
Katherine Strong	Lloyd Nereson
Kermit Finstad	Leona Peterson
Marion Hoglo	Luella Holen
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Marian Williams	Bernard J. Wold
Junes Race	Mike Frankenberg
Lucille Spyhalski	Helen Nomeland
Dr. John Beebe	Madelyn Robarge
Myrtle (Jensen) & Louie Johnson	Phyllis Caldis Gustafson
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Peter Stensgaard	Hannah Hornseth
Perry Borgie	Millie (Pederson) Olson
Bill, Sadie, and Jerry Bugge	Gote Anderson
Carol Ann Huber	Opal Bjerken
Marge Swenson	Jerry Fessler
Dorothy (Jansen) Johnson	Genevieve Ring
Celeste Gerardy	Orlene Reed
Marie Larson Vevea	Lloyd VeVea
Petra Larson Nigl	

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Edla Holmberg
Oscar Odegaard
Ralph Engelstad
Inga Geving
Cora Alvina Olson
Robert Looker
David Kringsberg
James Engelstad
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Marlene Johnson
Myrtle (Bugge) Nelson
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Avis Hoium
Joseph Armstrong
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Cliff, Margaret, & Dick Bjorkman
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Kenneth Pearson
Bob Bredeson
Marion Cork
Marcella Hanson

Helen Beebe
Melva Lee
Rebecca Berg Grayson
Betty Dow
Pearl Wold
Woodrow Craik
Bob Bergan
Carrie Lunke
Verna Myhrer Ehrle
Caroline Brunelle
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Gini Engelstad
Orin Green
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Orville & Gay Johnson
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Leonard Furuseth
Darlene Forsberg
Richard Mosbeck
Albert Koop
Gwen Brooten
Delphis(Sonny) Bergdahl
Cliff Swanson
Peggy Nicholson
Palmer & Marion Lorenson
Melford Burrell
Gail Bergland

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shot at the tail of the plane next to us and killed the tail gunner. Another guy in that plane was wounded and their engine was shot up so they had to ditch the plane. We flew in a big circle and threw them life rafts. They had two life rafts in compartments on the fuselage. They pulled a switch and carbon dioxide released the cover. The life rafts popped out and the men pulled them off and got into them. It was calm with no wind, so we circled and saw that seven of them were out on the wings. The plane floated just like a big duck. It floated for about five minutes, before it went down. Seven of them got into the rafts but two of them were hurt and went down with the airplane. Air-Sea Rescue was notified and they came out and picked up the seven men and recorded where the plane had gone down.

By the time we lost the Elaine, the Allies had chased Rommel out of Africa. The Elaine with our crew had been there when that was hap-

pening. We had bombed them on the way coming up from Tripoli, Souse, and Sfax. We chased them up to Tunis and Bizerte and that's where they started to evacuate. The Germans used these big 323 Messerschmitts. The planes were great big gliders made out of canvas with six good engines in them.. The planes could carry a tank. The Germans used them for transport and were transporting their troops out to move them over to Sicily. We hadn't captured Sicily, so it was still enemy territory. On a mission coming back, our fighter planes spotted a group of these 323's and they shot down a bunch of them.

There must have been thirty or forty German soldiers in each one of them.

For news and entertainment, we had the radio. We had Axis Sally and we had all the independent radio stations. Axis Sally was like Tokyo Rose. They always seemed to know what we were doing. They had the nicest music and better singers than we did. We also had briefings every

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day before every mission. They would give us information as to what had happened on the Russian front, how the Eighth Air Force was doing, and how we were doing. We knew that the Japs were backing off and the Russians were coming in and beating back the Germans.

When I look back, I don't think that I ever lost any sleep worrying about a mission. There were some missions that we preferred over others, but we knew we were winning. The allied radio was mostly one-sided propaganda. The German stations were always telling us how good they were doing. That was their propaganda. We listened to Axis Sally because they had good music. "Lily Marlene" was quite the song. I always think of Marlene Dietrich when I think about those radio broadcasts.

The only time that I remember that we were feeling down was after Eddie Rickenbacker had spoken to us. Eddie Rickenbacker was a WWI Ace and Race Driver who had been on a raft in the

South Pacific for twenty-three days when his plane went down. After his rescue, he did a propaganda tour. He was on his way to Russia when he stopped at our base. He made a speech in front of the whole assembly of men where I was stationed. He said, "There is one thing about you fellahs. In England, a tour of duty is twenty five missions and here we have raised it to thirty. But you're not going to go back. You're going to fly till you're dead."

Some of the men were demoralized by what he said. They realized that they weren't going to go back to the states when they had thirty-five or even fifty missions. There were four or five of them that went off the line and didn't fly anymore. They just felt that they couldn't take it. We all felt that we weren't going to get enough flights so that we could go back. Finally, men that had fifty missions, got orders to go back. It was fifty missions instead of twenty-five. That gave us something to look forward to. The guys that had thirty-

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two missions and had gone off the line wanted to get back on again so that they could get in fifty missions. They had a hard time because all the other crews that had filled in didn't want to have a guy on their line that might be scared. The men that had gone off the line had an awful time getting their extra missions. They had to fill in on different crews. So they were in a bad spot. That was the only demoralizing thing that I can remember.

I wrote a letter to Sylvia almost every week or so and sent it V-Mail. I wrote to my brother and my folks. We didn't get a lot of mail as we moved so often that the mail did not catch up with us. Sylvia wrote a couple of times. She was lonely too. She had worked at Hartz. Then she worked in Fargo and then she went to Tacoma, Washington while I was gone. She worked in the OPA. I think that was the "Office of Public Administration" or something like that.

Our fiftieth mission, our last one, was kind of nerve racking. We knew that it was the last time. We didn't all finish at the same time, but my

fiftieth mission was the last one that I flew with the crew. We had started together as a bunch of kids. My co-pilot was twenty one, the ball turret was nineteen, and the radio man was twenty-three. I was one of the older ones. The tail gunner and the bombardier were older. I think that we had to be young to do what we did.

After my fiftieth mission, I got travel orders in July of 1943. I hitch-hiked to Marrakech and then hooked a plane, a C-47, and finally got to Prestwick, Scotland. I was there for two or three days until I caught a ride on a DC-4 cargo plane back to the States. We landed at Iceland and Goose Bay; Labrador; Presquile, Maine, and then down to LaGuardia and Mitchell Field in New York. I stayed there until I got orders to travel home. It was about the 15th or so of August in 1943 and I had orders to go from Mitchell Field to Salt Lake City. I had ten or twelve days before I had to report, so I went home to Thief River Falls for a visit.

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When I did report to Salt Lake City, a group of us were assigned to the air base at Kearney, Nebraska. It was a B-17 training base and I reported to Kearney, Nebraska and flew some out of there. I flew training missions where we trained other men for combat overseas. I was transferred again in October or November to Sioux City, Iowa. I didn't do as much flying there as I had been doing. They assigned me to be an instructor on cruise control and flying responsibilities for B-17's. I had the mock-ups and other visual aids to show the students how to transfer gas and what they should watch for on take-offs and landings. I was there until June 6, 1944 – D-Day.

From there, I was transferred later in June to Clovis, New Mexico. It was a B-29 base. I hadn't flown B-29s, but a B-17 was a baby B-29. A lot of the things were the same, except the B-29 was pressurized so oxygen lines and masks were not needed. It was a bigger plane and flew farther. It had different controls and had tricycle landing gear. The B-

29s had a nose wheel instead of a tail wheel, and they were built by Boeing. The people in training flew in B-17s first to get the feel of it. Then they went onto the B-29 training. I got a chance to go home on furlough, from Clovis. I was stationed at Clovis until February of 1945 and then my TO (Table of Organization) was assigned to the Jackson Army Airbase in Jackson, Mississippi. My TO was 612. I was an aerial engineer with over water experience on B-17s. That was in February 1945. We trained B-17 navigators that were being rotated from England and coming back. They were being assigned to B-29 groups that were on Tinian, Siapan, and Guam. These navigators needed over water training. They were good navigators to begin with, but had no over water experience.

We'd take a B-17 up, with 4 or 5 students, and fly down over the Gulf of Mexico to the Yucatan Peninsula, Merida, and back over to Savannah, Georgia. We flew to Atlanta, Cuba and back from there with these stripped down B-17's. The planes

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didn't have armament and had no bombs. They had two bomb bay tanks for fuel because we were flying twelve to fourteen hours. The instructor was teaching these people how to shoot the stars and sun lines to navigate. I flew there from February until May. The pilots were pretty rusty. They had been assigned out of Air Transport Command (ATC) and had flown mostly cargo planes. Now, they were being trained using B-17s. They were inexperienced with B-17s and we had some close calls with them. They weren't as experienced as combat pilots.

On one mission, when I was checking the landing gear on a landing, I got a broken thumb. The landing gear was all electric, but the engineer had to go down and be certain that the wheels were fully extended and locked. There were hand cranks that were like the cranks on a Model-T Ford. The crank went into the receptor and you wound the crank to take out any slack until it was tight. I was doing that on this mission and the darn co-pilot pressed the switch on the landing gear. The handle

of the crank came around and hit my thumb. With a broken thumb, I was grounded for quite awhile, so I got a chance to come home again.

Then the war was over in Japan in August and they started discharging men from the service. Men were awarded points for being overseas, for air minutes and I was just on the edge of the first to be discharged. I think that I had one hundred twenty-eight points and I was discharged with the second bunch of guys.

I went by train up to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin in September. I got on the Hiawatha from Camp McCoy and went to Minneapolis. I took the bus from Minneapolis to Thief River Falls. Clarence Kverno was the bus driver. When we got to the edge of town, Clarence asked me where I wanted to get off. I told him to let me off at the stone station. Since we lived on Riverside Avenue, that was close to home.

I didn't feel like going back to work right away. I took a little time off. I had been working

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in the credit department at Hartz. Alma Elseth, Cora Fischer's sister, was at my job when I went into the service. She was leaving that fall when I came home, so they said I'd better come back. They didn't want to bring someone else in and then have me come back later. So I went back to work in October or November.

I sort of picked up where I had left off. I went back to work and I went hunting, played some ball again, and settled down. I was then the credit manager at Hartz. Sylvia was in Tacoma, Washington when I came back. I wrote her a letter and told her that I was home. Sylvia came home in May of 1946 and we were married on the twenty-fourth of November. She didn't go back to work. She stayed home and raised the kids. Jim was born in October the following year and seven years later, Suzy was born. Sylvia did work for the Soil Conservation office with Janet Heiren over there by Hardies (now Arby's). It used to be the Soil Conservation Office. Janet Heiren needed some help. Sylvia had been a sec-

retary, so she asked Sylvia to work. Sylvia worked part-time – about twenty or thirty hours a week.

When we were first married, we lived in one of the Hartz apartments. The apartments were above what is now the Thrifty White Drugstore. We lived there from 1946 until 1949. After Jim was born, but before Suzy was born in 1954, we moved out of the apartments. We had been looking for a place to live. The apartment was nice enough, but it didn't have a garage or anything. My father-in-law owned a duplex and he decided that he was going to sell it. Tron Fonnest was living in one of the sides of the duplex. He worked for the Chevrolet Garage with Al Holtznecht. Tooney (Glen) Carlson lived on the other side. Tron was going to buy the duplex.

My father-in-law, Melvin Evenson had set the price on the duplex. However, he hadn't made the deal with Tron. I talked to Ken Wendel, and Wendel told me that the price was a

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real deal. So I told my mother-in-law, Olga Evenson, that if I'd known Melvin was going to sell it for that price, we'd have bought it. She was one of those ladies who was real quiet and very nice, but she was the boss in the marriage. She never asserted herself or butted in, but I know that she talked to Melvin. I don't know what she told him or what she said to him, but one day Melvin asked me if we wanted to buy the place if he could talk Tron into not buying it. Tron understood and didn't blame us for wanting to buy the place. We bought it for \$5,500. It was at 705 1st Street East, on the corner. We lived there until 1960.

One day Myrtle Stromberg and Sylvia were out walking. They used to walk down to Knox School and around the block. When they came over on 122 South Tindolph, there was a sign on the boulevard saying the house was for sale. Henry Hallstrom from St. Hilaire had built the house. Sylvia came back and told me that we were going to buy a house. I didn't even know where there was a house to buy. I asked how much they were

asking and it was \$13,000. We'd been looking at houses, and this one was built in 1950, so it was only ten years old. It had an apartment in the basement. It was good deal, compared to other places we looked at in that price range. It had been listed for \$13,000, but Henry said that as long as we didn't have to go through a real estate man, he would take five hundred dollars off. So we paid \$12,500 for it.

We hung onto the duplex and rented one half to Elling Iverson who lived in it for a while. Tron also lived in the other half for awhile. I think that we sold it in 1973. It is no longer there. It burned down and lot is vacant now. It was on the southeast corner of Kendall and First Street - right across from a store that Christofferson had that is Liden Lefse now.

Sylvia always managed things. She must have a little halo over her head to put up with me and raise the kids. I tried to help her raise the kids, but I was mostly in the background. She raised

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them. We never argued in front of the kids, but we never had many arguments anyhow. If we were going to have a discussion, we went where the kids weren't able to hear and had our discussion.

The kids both turned out good. Jim retired in 1993 but remains active in volunteer work with survivors of politically-motivated torture. He graduated from Concordia College in Moorhead with a BA in English and the University of Minnesota, where he earned his medical degree, a masters degree in anthropology, and completed his psychiatry residency. Later, he attended Harvard, where he earned his masters degree in public health. He practiced psychiatry in Oregon, California, and Minnesota before he retired. He lives in San Diego but returns frequently to Minnesota during holidays and the summer.

Sue graduated from vocational technical school in Duluth. Sue and her husband, Dean, live in Burnsville and work in the Twin Cities area. Their daughter, Kimberly, graduated from

Carroll College in Waukesha, Wisconsin and now works in Milwaukee. Their son, Joshua, is a sophomore in engineering at Kansas State in Manhattan, Kansas.

Sylvia and I now live at Valley Home in Thief River Falls. I still read about World War II and keep in contact with Bill Nick, the ball-turret gunner, Ken Slaker, the pilot, and Les Varner, the radioman. There are only four of us left. Leo Flowers, the co-pilot, Jim Passmore, the navigator, George O'Hoppe, the bombardier, Bill Childers, the waist gunner, and Frank Laky, the tail gunner are no longer living. I was a little worried about Ken as I have not heard from him in awhile. I finally heard from him a couple of weeks ago and he is fine.

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Editor: Caryl J. Bugge

Formatting: Missy (Hams) Sletten

Village Employed Staff:

Village Director – Jill Johnson
Assistant Village Director – Jessica Olsen
Village Managers – Hailey Johnson & Dana Dyrud
Maintenance Manager - Bill Kennel
Gardener: Beattie Mickelson

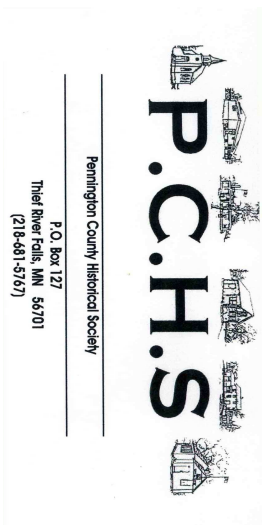
Village Government Supported Staff:

Experience Works – Carol Nelson, Rosie Naeseth, and Carol Odegard
Inter-County – Nick Olson

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