

30 DAYS OF HONOR ★ *A Salute to Local Vets*

Mechanic kept planes in the air

Veteran Ray Schwartz worked on aircraft in Air Force bases around the world

KARLA SWITA
FOR GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA

Ray Schwartz hoped to be a pilot in the U.S. Air Force in 1942, but when he didn't pass the health physical, he chose to work on airplanes instead.

For more than 20 years, he was an aircraft mechanic and moved to various Air Force bases around the world, including England, France, Germany and Turkey. He served during World War II, the Korean War and was stationed in England at the onset of the Vietnam War.

About Ray Schwartz

Age: 90
Home: Merrill
Conflicts served in: World War II, Korean War
Branch: Air Force - 1942-1964
Rank: Captain

"I thought I'd end up over there, too," Schwartz said. "Some of the pilots were called for duty, but the squadron I was in didn't have to go." Although Schwartz never experienced combat firsthand, he has seen "the results of D-Day and passed by the destroyed towns." He knows why it's important to never forget our country's sacrifices and the significant role Never Forgotten Honor Flight plays in keeping those memories alive.

Question: What did you do in the service and where were you stationed?

Answer: I maintained the airplanes and was in charge of the men who worked on the planes. We worked long hours and did whatever it took to get the planes airborne, no matter what the weather was like; we did it in rain, snow or sleet. I was stationed all over, wherever they told me I had to go. I lived in England for four years and it was very nice.

Q: What is your most enduring memory from your time in the service?

A: On Christmas Eve, we were working at getting an airplane ready for flight the next day. We were changing the cylinders. The pilot made the flight and two days later he was shot down over Germany. He lived, but he was captured and put in a prison for 2½ years. He was released when the war ended.

Q: What do you most want people to know about the conflict in which you served?

A: People can be so vicious. The German military would just shoot someone in the back or in the face for no reason. It just made me sick.

Q: Tell us about your life after the service and how your time in the military affected your civilian life.

A: I came back to Merrill. Civilian life was pretty quiet. When I enlisted in 1942, I was single and I got married on leave. I have three boys. They didn't go into the military but my granddaughter did. She's a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force.

Q: What did going on the Honor Flight mean to you?

A: I enjoyed it very much. I met a couple of fellows on the flight and we told stories. The memorials were spectacular. On the flight back, we had mail call. I got letters from schoolkids and my wife.



CONTRIBUTED
Ray Schwartz served during World War II and the Korean War.



T'XER ZHON
KHA/GANNETT
CENTRAL WISCONSIN
MEDIA

Raymond Schwartz, of Merrill, poses for a photo Thursday afternoon at his house.



A flight to never forget

The Central Wisconsin chapter of Never Forgotten Honor Flight celebrates its fifth anniversary this spring. Since April 2010, the Honor Flight program has taken 1,828 veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam and 1,106 guardians from Central Wisconsin Airport to Washington, D.C., to view the memorials built in honor of their service.

30 Days of Honor is a project of Gannett Central Wisconsin Media to profile veterans who have taken an Honor Flight, or are scheduled, and to encourage more veterans to do so. Profiles will appear each day April 26 through Memorial Day.

Veterans may apply for a free Honor Flight (or loved ones may apply for them) by filling out an application. The only qualification for a veteran to take an Honor Flight is to have served in any branch of the U.S. military during the periods of World War II, the Korean War or Vietnam War. Veterans do not have to have been in combat. The applications and more information are available at <http://www.neverforgottenhonorflight.org>

SPONSORED BY

