



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



‘It brought pride back to us’

Trip on Honor Flight a proud moment for WWII veteran Richard Bjorklund

JOY MARQUARDT
FOR GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA

MERRILL— Music and education have been an important part of life for Richard Bjorklund of Merrill both in and out of the military.

Selected to train with the Army Air Corps during World War II, Bjorklund became an instructor at the San Angelo Air Force Base, San Angelo, Texas.

“I enjoyed all the discipline and the hard training,” Bjorklund said. “I think that was part of the selection process. They were looking for people who could stand the discipline. You built a strong camaraderie with the people you were training with.”

During his time in the Air Corp Bjorklund was chosen as a drum major for the Cadet Band. After the war, he received a bachelor’s degree in music from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Master of Science degree in educational administration. Bjorklund spent a total of 39 years in education retiring in 1987.

He and wife, Evelyn, also a veteran of World War II, were able to participate together in the Never Forgotten Honor Flight in September 2011. The couple will be celebrating their 66th wedding anniversary in June.

Question: What did you do in the service? What was your job and where did you do it?

A: I applied for the Air Force cadet program, which was the forerunner of the Air Force Academy and trained for the Army Air Corps. I graduated with a commission as a flight officer and stayed on base in San Angelo, Texas, as an instructor for a year. Then I transferred to train on the heavy bombers the B-24 and B-29 Super Fortress, which could fly at higher altitudes. I was a bombardier navigator. You had the best seat in the house you got to sit in the nose of the plane. I was ready to be assigned to the Pacific when they dropped the Atomic Bomb and the war ended.

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

A: I survived a plane crash and I was very fortunate my instructor and I were both able to walk away from the crash. Our plane hit the ground and flipped. It was due to a mechanical failure. The other memory is of being able to train at the Norden Bomb Site. It was a highly kept secret that was closely guarded.

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

A: World War II was a conflict that had to be fought in order to stamp out the two tyrants, Hitler and Hirohito, who were bent on conquering the world at the cost of many lives. It was a war of citizen soldiers, they were not military people. They were drafted into service to protect our country. It took a chunk out of our lives and then we got back into our life’s journey.

Q: Tell us about your life after the military and how our time in the military influenced what you have done since.

A: After the service I went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison and got a bachelors degree in music and later received a MS degree in educational administration. One summer in Beloit, I got a job as a playground director. That’s when I met my wife, Evelyn. We were co-directors together. I taught in Beloit for 12 years and then taught in Manitowoc and became an assistant junior high principal and director of secondary education. I was brought up to have respect and discipline, but the military really intensified my respect, obedience, endurance and loyalty.

Q: What did Honor Flight mean to you?

A: It meant everything to us. We came back from service and went right back to our way of life pursuing our professions and put military life behind us. The Honor Flight reawakened the experience that we had. I found myself standing a little taller for the National Anthem. It brought pride back to us. My wife, Evelyn, was with the WAVES and served in Washington, D.C., and she was able to make the trip also. It was a real treat for us to go on the Honor Flight together. Two of our sons were able to be our guardians on the trip. It was great to have family there.

About Richard Bjorklund

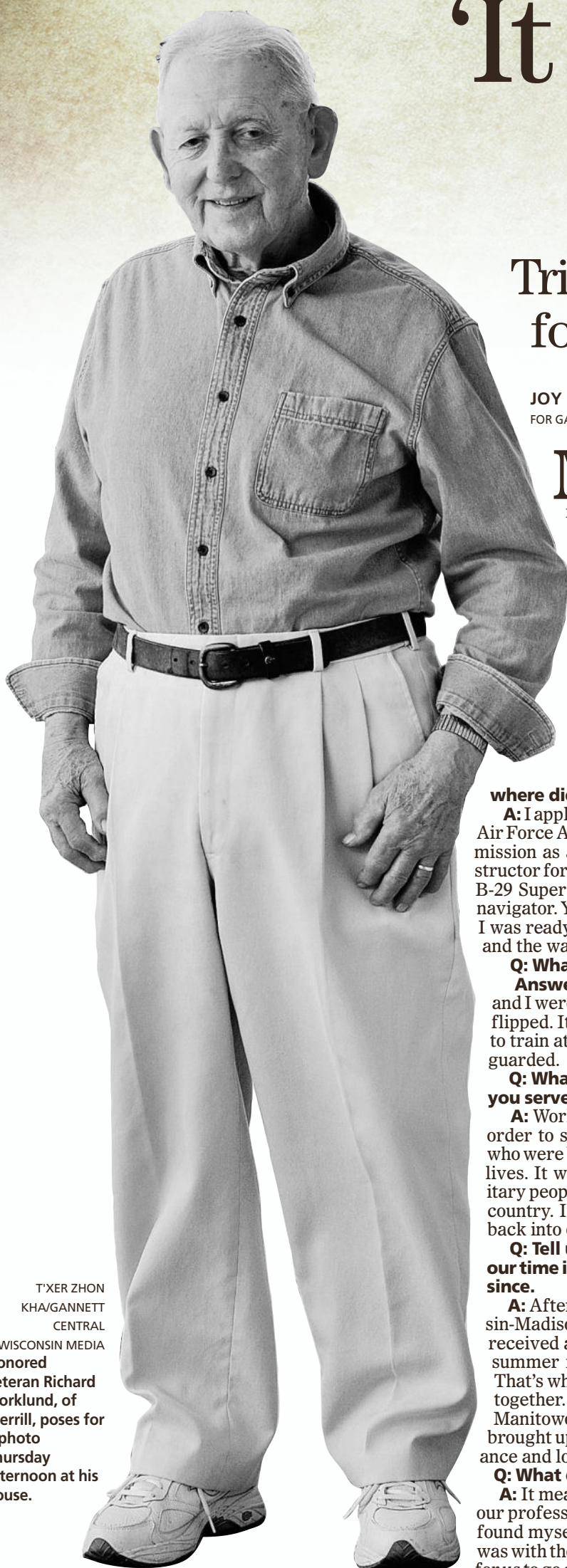
Age: 89
Residence: Merrill
Conflict involved in: World War II
Military branch: United States Air Force
Years in service: 1943-1945
Rank upon discharge: Flight officer



T’XER ZHON KHA/GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA



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Honored veteran Richard Bjorklund, 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>



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