

DONALD E. CRASS MEMORIAL FUND

c/o Donald R. Crass, 4315 Deerskin Rd, Phelps, WI 54554

June 13, 1919 – April 11, 2012

June 4, 2012

Never Forgotten Honor Flight
c/o Jim Campbell
PO BOX 5056
Wausau, WI 54402-5026

Dear Mr. Campbell and the Never Forgotten Honor Flight:

We are pleased to provide a donation totaling \$1000.00 to the Never Forgotten Honor Flight in honor of Donald E. Crass. This donation from the Donald E. Crass Memorial Fund is designated to be used to sponsor two veterans on an Honor Flight.

Donald E. Crass served in the U.S. Army from 1941 – 1945. One of the highlights of his later years was to go on the Never Forgotten Honor Flight to Washington, DC, on September 19, 2011. He enjoyed seeing the monuments, visiting with other vets, and especially all the extras provided by the Never Forgotten Honor Flight, such as the banquet the night before, staying in the hotel the nights before and after the flight, the mail call, and especially the incredible welcome home.

Donation to the Never Forgotten Honor Flight from Donald E. Crass Memorial Fund, p. 2

Donald said of his experiences on the Honor Flight: “On the plane on the way home, we had a mail call. I was so surprised by all the cards and letters and posters thanking me for my service. Then when we got off the plane in Wausau, I was floored by the hundreds of people and all the units, such as the American Legion and Boy Scouts, that were there to welcome us. I went down the line, shaking hands. Then half-way down, I fell apart. It was such a thrill! Never had I gotten such a welcome home when I came back from overseas during World War II.”

Donald’s obituary is enclosed, along with a copy of a video tape prepared for the Wisconsin Veteran’s Museum Oral History Project, a biographical sketch, and a summary of his World War II experiences including medals and honors.

We greatly appreciate the excellent work of the Never Forgotten Honor Flight volunteers to give Donald such a wonderful and memorable experience. We hope to give other veterans a similar experience and honor. Thank you for your excellent work!

Sincerely,

Fayme Irene Crass

Russell A. Crass Donna Faye Crass Sefton Donald R. Crass Ina Crass Stachewicz
Grandchildren (April Crass Halpern, Torry Crass, Aaron Sefton, August Crass, Donald M. Crass,
Justin Sefton, Danielle Stachewicz Wiler, and Laura Sefton)

Great-Grandchildren (Michael Halpern, Naomi Halpern, Lily Sefton, and Madelyn Crass)

Donald Ervin Crass Biographical Information

- Donald was born in Newburg, WI on June 13, 1919 to Edna Gerner Crass and Joseph August Crass. He was the 11th child of 18, which included 6 girls and 11 boys. He also had an adopted brother, Phillip.
- When a baby, Donald's parents left Newburg for Phelps in Vilas Co., WI with their 10 children. Donald's father had a sawmill business & worked as a carpenter & for C.M. Christensen Co. sawmill as a fireman and steam engineer. He was paid in tin company money that could only be used to buy items at the company store.
- In 1928, they piled their possessions on a truck and moved to Fillmore, WI. They owned land on both sides of the N Br of the Milwaukee R and farmed using horses. Donald only attended school through the 8th grade because he was needed to help around the farm and to make money to help support the family. He worked on threshing crews, at cutting ice blocks for the breweries, and for canning companies. In the winter of 1937, Donald went back to Phelps & worked cutting & peeling Poplar trees. He used some of these logs to build a hunting cabin where his parents lived when they returned to Phelps.
- Donald was drafted & inducted into the U.S. Army in Milwaukee, WI on July 24, 1941. Basic training was with the Coast Guard Artillery Anti-Aircraft Battery. He was sent to Aruba in Feb, 1942 to protect the oil refinery. In July, 1944 he was sent to Omaha Beach as part of the replacement pool after the main invasion. He fought in the Northern France, Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge) and Rhineland campaigns. He was hit in the left hand/wrist by shrapnel while fighting near Obergeich. He barely escaped being taken prisoner by the Germans near Remagen, Germany by going out a back window while the others were filing out with their hands above their heads. He was sent to Chiney, Belgium for insulin shock treatment for battle fatigue (PTSD). He was being sent back to the front lines when Germany surrendered. He was discharged on Aug. 7, 1945. Four other Crass boys served in WW II (Merlin, Bill, Ray and Roy) and three others served between 1950 and 1955 (Everette, Bruce and Phillip). They all returned home safely from the wars.
- After the war, Donald returned to Phelps. He spent much time outdoors and trout fishing, which helped him to recover after his horrible war experiences. He started working for C.M. Christensen Co. in 1946, sorting, peeling and piling poles and as a log scaler. In 1953, the C.M. Christensen Co pole treatment plant was put into operation where he worked until retirement in 1981.
- Donald met his future wife, Fayme Irene Kohta (born Oct 20, 1926 to August Anshelmi Kohta & Impi Irene Isaacson) when she was musky fishing on Sand L with her father. They were married on Aug 13, 1949.
- On April 19, 1950, while Donald was working in the woods, their son, Russell August, was born prematurely. Fayme's father drove up to Michigan and walked miles in the deep snow to tell him. In 1952, Donald was sent to Warroad, MN to ship out cedar poles for General Telephone. Fayme accompanied him on the trip. While in Warroad, their daughter, Donna Faye, was born prematurely on June 4, 1952. She weighed 3 lbs 9 oz and had to stay in an incubator for 52 days before they could bring her home. Their son, Donald Rudy, was born on May 1, 1956 and their daughter, Ina Miya, was born on April 19, 1959.
- After retirement, Donald worked at Smokey L Reserve, was a caretaker for summer homes and built his own sawmill. He gardened and made maple syrup. He built a log cabin for Donna and family near the Elvov Creek in Forest Co from logs he sawed. He joined the 9th Infantry Division Association and attended their reunions, where he met Richard Nevins, the other man who escaped capture by the Germans at Remagen with him.
- As of Aug 13, 2011, Donald and Fayme were married 62 years. In recent years, Donald has dedicated his time to caring for his wife. They have 8 grandchildren (April, Torry, Aaron, August, Donny, Justin, Danielle and Laura) and 4 great grandchildren (Michael, Naomi, Lily and Madelyn).
- Donald was very active in St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church in Phelps. He thanked God for guiding his way and watching over him throughout his life. He felt very blessed. Donald passed away on April 11, 2012. It is not the birth and death dates that count, but how he lived the dash. And he lived it well.

Donald Ervin Crass History of Service in World War II

- Donald was inducted into the Army in Milwaukee, WI on Aug. 24, 1941.
- He was shipped to Camp Grant, IL, where he awaited assignment along with his cousin, Harold Crass. He was not called to leave the first day. The following day, they called Harold Crass, but Harold had already left the day before, apparently in Donald's place, to receive training as an engineer.
- Donald was shipped to Fort Eustis, VA for 13 weeks of basic training with the Coast Artillery, Anti-Aircraft Battery. He was assigned to 213th Coast Artillery in Camp Steward, GA.
- Following the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, Donald was reassigned to Task Force 1280 Battery B 498th Coastal Artillery Anti-Aircraft Battery & sent to Aruba, West Indies, arriving on Feb. 11, 1942 to protect the refinery. He laid communications lines in the refinery. He was the first person to report the German submarine attack on Aruba on Feb. 16, 1942. He was on guard duty and was able to see everything because of his location. They had their guns set up at the water's edge. About 500 yards in front of the guns was a coral reef, and out beyond that an open harbor with many ships anchored waiting to get in to unload their crude oil. At 1:30 a.m., a large light traveled beyond the reef towards the ships. It looked like a car going down the highway. It was a German submarine. Shortly after that, there was an explosion. One of the oil tankers was hit. Then everything on top of the water ignited. Donald used his field phone to call Battery Command. After the ships were torpedoed, the Germans loaded their 105 M.M. deck gun, but forgot to take the plug out of the barrel and blew up the gun. If that hadn't happened, the troops would likely have been burned alive if the refinery were hit, since a ship in the harbor was loaded with 3000 tons of TNT.
- Donald was sent to England and then to Omaha Beach (Normandy, France) in July, 1944 as part of the replacement pool that arrived after the main invasion. He fought in the Northern France, Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge) and Rhineland campaigns.
- Donald was assigned to 9th Division, 60th "Go Devils" Regiment, Company F, Second Battalion in Sept. 1944. He was initially the radio man for Captain Johnson and carried a 300 radio (which the Germans thought was a tank). Later he was the assistant bazooka man. Some of areas he fought at were Roentgen, Monschau, Germeter, Hurtgen Forest, Camp Elsenborn (Buzz Bomb Alley), Echtz and Obergeich. While fighting near Obergeich, a piece of shrapnel pierced his left hand and wrist. Another went through his wallet and lodged in the last piece of leather of his billfold.
- Donald's next battle was at Merriweiler, where the 104th Div. relieved them. They then went to Warzee and Eupen, Belgium, then to Rohren, Widdau, Drieborn, Schwammenauel Dam, Roer River & the Ludendorff Bridge over the Rhine River at Remagen, Germany. They were taking the town house by house and were under fire by a big German tank. They were pinned down and were given the option of surrendering or getting blasted. Everyone lined up and began to file out with their hands above their heads. Donald looked back to the rear of the garage and saw someone escaping through a window. He followed. As he was going through the window, he looked back into the car that was inside of the garage. There had been a German soldier in it the whole time, relaying information back to his commander. After Donald and the other soldier ran, flares went up and mortars dropped, but they made it back to the American lines and Command Post.
- Following that incident, Donald told an officer that he did not want to go back to fight tanks with a rifle. He had what they called battle fatigue (now called post-traumatic stress disorder) and was sent to Chiny, Belgium for insulin shock treatment. He was going to be sent back to the front lines, but Germany surrendered. Donald was discharged on Aug. 7, 1945. He had to spend much time in the outdoors and fishing when he returned to Phelps to help recover from his horrible war experiences.
- Donald said the only reason he survived the war was that the Good Lord was watching over him and had a purpose for his life. He thanked God for guiding his way and watching over him so he could come home safely, raise a family, and live a long and productive life.

Obituary

Donald Ervin Crass, 92, died Wednesday, April 11, 2012 in Phelps, WI.

He was born, the 11th of 19 children, on June 13, 1919 in Newburg, WI to Joseph A. Crass and Edna (Gerner) Crass. He grew up in Phelps and Fillmore, WI.

He served in the U.S. Army during World War II in Aruba (1941-1943) and Europe (1944-1945). In September of 1944, he was assigned to the 9th Division, 60th Regiment, Company F, 2nd Battalion. For his service, Donald received multiple awards and honors including the French Legion of Honour Medal and the Bronze Star medal. After his service, Donald returned to Phelps, and was employed by the C.M. Christiansen Company as a poleman and a lumberjack.

On August 13th, 1949, he married Fayme Kohta. Together they built a loving family with the addition of their four children.

Throughout his life, Donald was a very devoted husband and dedicated father who held the love for his family and country above all else. He was fond of recounting his life experiences and would share his opinions on various topics with anyone who would lend an open ear.

In his retirement, Donald created and ran his own sawmill, was an avid carpenter, inventor, gardener, fisherman, berry picker and maple syrup 'sugarmaker'. He also authored a book, "Reminiscing", about his life experiences. He was proud of his heritage and looked forward to the yearly Seidemann family reunion.

One of the highlights of Donald's recent years was traveling to Washington D.C. as a part of the "Never Forgotten Honor Flight" for veterans of World War II.

Donald was an active member of St John's Lutheran Church, the American Legion, the VFW, and the DAV.

He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Fayme Crass; his brothers: Everette, Bruce, and Phillip Crass; his children: Russell Crass, Donna (Bill) Sefton, Donald R. Crass, and Ina (Ron) Stachewicz; his grandchildren: April (Jonathan) Halpern, Torry Crass, Aaron (Rachel) Sefton, August (Megan) Crass, Donald M. (April) Crass, Justin (Christina) Sefton, Danielle (Jerry) Wiler and Laura Sefton; and his great grandchildren: Michael and Naomi Halpern, Lily Sefton and Madelyn Crass.

A visitation will be held at Gaffney-Busha Funeral home in Eagle River, WI on Sunday, April 22nd from 4 to 7 pm.

The funeral service will be held on April 23rd at 11 am at St. John's Lutheran Church in Phelps, and will begin with a viewing from 9 to 11 am. A luncheon at Holiday Lodge will follow the service.

In lieu of flowers, a memorial fund is being established in Donald's memory for the "Never Forgotten Honor Flight, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Project, and St. Johns Ev. Lutheran Church". Donations to the fund can be directed to Donald R. Crass (4315 Deerskin Road, Phelps, WI 54554). Please specify which organization you would like to contribute to.

The family would like to extend their appreciation to Dr. Costa and Dr. Zelinski of Aspirus Hospital for their compassionate care, the staff at InnCare in Phelps for their kindness and friendship, and to the staff at Lillian Kerr for their support during Donald's final days.