

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

Honor Flight a 'very personal trip' for vet

Prehn recalls days in Japan after atomic bombs

By Dan Richter

For Gannett Central Wisconsin Media

WAUSAU — Donald Prehn of Wausau was just 18 years old, studying premed at The Citadel in South Carolina, when he was drafted into the United States Army.

World War II had recently ended when Prehn was sent to Japan to serve during the American Occupation.

"It was an interesting time in my life. I look back on it with a lot of fond memories and a lot of appreciation for what the other guys did over there prior to us arriving," said Prehn, 87.

Here, Prehn talks about serving in post-war Japan and about visiting Washington, D.C., in 2012 on the Never Forgotten Honor Flight.

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

Answer: I was a baggage and customs officer in the Tokyo office, working with servicemen going back to the States after the war. I worked during the American occupation of Japan under General Douglas MacArthur. I was in charge of getting ships loaded at the docks that were going from Tokyo to Yokohama. It was a little chaotic, but not as much as during the war.

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

A: I got in the Army during the Occupation and rehabilitation of Japan phase, shortly after the atomic bombs were dropped. I didn't know what to expect. It was a long ship ride over there — 20 some odd days — and we kept wondering what it was going to be like. Yokohama was flattened from all the air raids and parts of Tokyo were, too.

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

A: It was a period of increasing turmoil. I remember hearing about all the war activity going on in Europe in the late '30s, when I was in high school, and then it increased around Japan. It was such a major conflict and there was hardly anything on that news that wasn't about the war. I remember thinking, "What are they going to talk about when the war is over?"... It was also a war that touched everybody, because there was rationing going on in the U.S. with meat and sugar and gasoline, but the whole country was geared for it and everyone did what they could.

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

A: I went back to school at the University of Wisconsin and later went to dental school in Marquette. My father was a dentist so I became one, too. I started a practice in Wausau with my father and then took it over when he retired, and then I retired about 20 years ago. I was heavily involved in Boy Scouts and was very involved in the community and did what I could to make it better.

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

A: I had been to Washington, D.C., during the war but hadn't been there since. I was amazed by how different it was and was quite taken with the memorials. They were quite astounding and really left an impression. It was a very personal trip and was different for everyone who was there. Some of the guys were emotional and others were proud. It was really a fine "thank you" for us.

ABOUT DONALD PREHN

Age: 87

Residence: Wausau

Conflict involved in: World War II

Military branch: United States Army

Years of service: 1945 to 1947

Rank upon discharge: Second lieutenant

T'XER ZHON
KHA/GANNETT
CENTRAL
WISCONSIN
MEDIA

Dr. Donald Prehn of Wausau remembers vividly Japan during the American Occupation.

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 more than 1,700 veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam 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>



Until his Never Forgotten Honor Flight trip in 2012, Donald Prehn had not been to Washington, D.C., since World War II.

SPONSORED BY

