

Veterans Travel on Honor Flight

Text and photos by Paul Nelles

In 1944 two high school kids from different states would leave to join the military. Sixty eight years later, they would leave Mosinee together to be honored on the tenth *Never Forgotten Honor Flight*. One hundred veterans of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, left the Central Wisconsin Airport Monday for the nation's capital to see the monuments that stand in their honor.

Shortly after **George Guenther** graduated from Mosinee High School, he joined the Merchant Marine. This was not an especially dangerous job, except that it was 1944, the United States was at War, and merchant vessels were priority targets for Japanese submarines.



100 United States military war veterans are given a pre-dawn water cannon salute as they depart for the nation's capital.

Guenther trained for six weeks at Sheepshead Bay, New York, the largest US maritime training station during World War II. His ship was the *USAT (United States Army Transport) Imperial*. In addition to military supplies, it often carried as many as 2000 troops. While they did carry 50mm defensive weapons, they were often escorted by Coast Guard destroyers.

Although he was fortunate never to have been involved in combat, he and his crew did ride out a hurricane that produced 40 foot waves.

When he was discharged on 1947, he found



Honored Mosinee Veterans

World War II veterans **George Guenther**, left, and **Bill Acree** are pictured at the Central Wisconsin Airport just before they boarded the plane for the tenth *Never Forgotten Honor Flight* to Washington D.C.

employment at the Post Office in Chicago, and made the five to six hour trip to Schofield every weekend to visit his girlfriend. She is now his wife of 60 years. In Wausau he was employed as a painter for Leo Kordus and Sons.

Guenther, who now lives in Schofield, was born and raised in Knowlton. His grandfather built St. Francis Xavier Church, and the Town of Guenther is named for his ancestors.

Bill Acree left high school in Michigan before graduation to join the Navy. He became an "Evaporator Operator" on board a destroyer in the Pacific Theater. Evaporators distilled sea water for use in the ship's boilers. This physically

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demanding job was a four-hour-on, eight-hour-off rotation, and required him to keep working while the ship was in port.

His vessel was the Command Ship of the Destroyers and had a Commodore onboard. They patrolled from the Admiralty Islands in the South Pacific to the Aleutian Islands of Alaska. Like Guenther, his ship did not see combat, but also encountered a typhoon. He remembered that this one tore a 90 foot section off the bow of an accompanying cruiser.

After the war, Acree received his high school equivalency diploma, became a commercial baker, and later drove truck for Red Star



George Guenther being welcomed home by his wife of 60 years, Mary Yeast. He and his wife left Milwaukee for Mosinee when he retired in 1991.



Bill Acree returns to Mosinee

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