

WITNESSES to WAR



They've been called "The Greatest Generation."

They grew up during the Depression and fought to defeat Fascism all over the globe. Now in their eighties, these veterans are losing their comrades in arms at the rate of more than 1,400 per day. *Northwest Quarterly* recently asked some local veterans to share their memories of war.



WITNESSES to WAR



They've been called "The Greatest Generation."

They grew up during the Depression and fought to defeat Fascism all over the globe. Now in their eighties, these veterans are losing their comrades in arms at the rate of more than 1,400 per day. *Northwest Quarterly* recently asked some local veterans to share their memories of war.





Kaare (pronounced CORY) **Nevdal**, Rockford, Ill., was just 19 when the Germans invaded his homeland of Norway on April 9, 1940. Life in his small, west coast village near Bergen soon became intolerable under the occupation. By the following spring, he decided to escape to England.

"I couldn't stand not to be free," recalls Nevdal. "We had to carry identity papers everywhere, and someone was always watching us. If I stayed much longer in Norway, I knew I would end up in jail."

After one escape attempt was thwarted by a North Sea storm, Nevdal succeeded in reaching the Shetland Islands by fishing boat on March 15, 1941. He went to London to enlist in the Royal Norwegian Air Force, and the Norwegian government-in-exile sent him to Toronto, Canada, for training.

While in Canada, Nevdal visited his aunt in Rockford, who sent a picture of the two of them to Nevdal's family in Norway, claiming it was her and her son, in order to fool German censors. This was the first



Nevdal's Aunt in Rockford, Ill., sent this photo of the two of them to Nevdal's family in Norway to let them know he was still alive.

indication his family had that Nevdal was still alive. He also met his future wife, Muriel, in Toronto.

After completing his training as a radio operator/gunner in 1942, Nevdal was sent to Iceland where he joined the 330th squadron of Coastal Command. He flew on long, tedious anti-submarine patrols and convoy escort duty in the North Atlantic, first in N3PB ~~Nomads~~ ^{NORTHROP}, then in PBV Catalina float planes.

In March of 1943, Nevdal was transferred to Scotland in the Shetland Islands. From there he flew patrols along the Norwegian coastline in huge, four-engine Sunderland flying boats. The Germans called them "flying porcupines" because they had so many guns (18) on board. One purpose of these flights was to keep German submarines from surfacing, thus slowing them down and making it difficult for them to attack Allied shipping on their way to Russia. But in May of 1944, Nevdal's plane caught one on the surface.

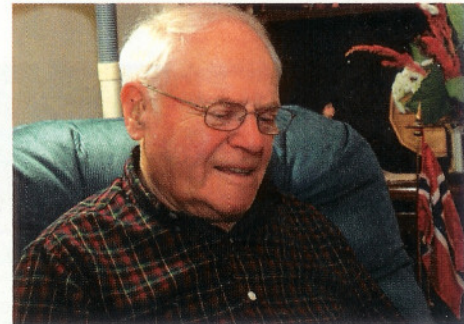
"We dropped depth charges on the sub from about 50 feet above the water," recalls Nevdal, "but it took two attacks. All the time they were shooting at us and we were shooting at them. The nose gunner was killed during the battle."

The attack was successful, and on May 16, 1944, the U-240, a type VIIc German submarine, sank to the bottom with all 50 crewmen.

Later that year Nevdal was again re-assigned, this time to a special unit which flew civilian aircraft in and out of neutral Sweden. His unit carried VIPs, spies, and important documents between Stockholm and St. Andrews, Scotland.

"We had BOAC uniforms and British passports," says Nevdal. "Sometimes we even transported escapees from Norway."

Since Sweden was neutral but blockaded by belligerents, some consumer goods were available in Stockholm that were unattainable in war-rationed Scotland. Nevdal's cousin's wife asked him to bring her a girdle on one of his flights.



Kaare Nevdal was in Norway when the Germans invaded his homeland in 1940. (Jon McGinty photo)

"I had to smuggle it out by wearing it under my uniform," says Nevdal. "It was very uncomfortable. I gained lots of sympathy for ladies who wore them."

Nevdal recalled a Norwegian poem he copied when he reached England the first time. Its meaning could speak to the motivation for many veterans of World War II.

*Kjemp for alt som du har kjart
Dø om sø det jelder
Da er livet sjisaa svart
Døden ikke heller*

*Fight for all that you hold dear
Die if it's that important
Then life will not be so hard
Neither will be death*



Sam Berchiolli,

Rockford, Ill., was a hard-hitting Marine who survived three Pacific island invasions and three courts martial (he had a bad habit of insubordination). Although married with one child and another on the way, "Berch" enlisted in the Marine Corps in November, 1942, at the age of 22.

"Everybody else was joining up, and the Marines were the only service that would take a married man," Berchiolli says.

After "almost" completing basic training (that was the first court martial), he was sent to

New Caledonia in the South Pacific, then to New Zealand. Trained as a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) gunner, Berchiolli was eventually attached to G Co., 2nd Btn., 8th Rgmt., 2nd Marine Division.

On Nov. 20, 1943, he was part of the initial invasion of Betio Island in the Tarawa Atoll, the first major island invasion of the Central Pacific Campaign. With the probable exception of Iwo Jima, Tarawa was the most heavily defended piece of real estate in the entire Pacific war.

"I remember getting out of the Higgins boat into the water," recalls Berchiolli. "I saw the palm trees ahead, the explosions, wading towards shore. Then it's a blank until the next day. I was standing next to the Captain by a pillbox when I got hit on day two."

Berchiolli woke up 11 days later in a hospital in Hawaii, recovering from wounds to his head, arms and

legs, as well as internal injuries from blast concussion.

"I never knew what hit me, but it killed the Captain," he says. "They were still picking sand granules and shrapnel out of me in 1981."

Berchiolli's late wife, Nellie, received an erroneous letter informing her that her husband was missing in action. It took two months before she learned that he was alive but wounded.

After recovering from his wounds, Berchiolli was put to work for several months training recruits on the shores of Oahu. In June of 1944, he

rejoined the 2nd Marines as they invaded Saipan in the Marianas. It was there that "Berch" experienced some of the most intense fighting of the war, attacking Japanese in pillboxes and caves, sometime in



Bethesda, Md. Finally diagnosed with "shell shock and battle fatigue," he was honorably discharged from the Marine Corps in January of 1946.

Even though Berchiolli still suffers from his wounds, both physical and mental, the Veterans Administration denied him most of his disability benefits until 2001. In 2006, after a letter of explanation from his daughter to Rep. Don Manzullo, (R-Ill.), Berchiolli was awarded the combat medals he earned in the Pacific more than 62 years ago, during a small ceremony in Rockford.

Left: Berchiolli waited more than 62 years to receive his combat medals from the Marine Corps.

Below: Sam Berchiolli survived his wounds from three invasions in the Central Pacific. (Jon McGinty photo)

hand-to-hand combat. They took few prisoners.

"The stench from burning flesh was awful," he remembers. "It made me sick to my stomach."

Berchiolli was wounded twice more in battle, and spent several days recuperating in a field hospital from shrapnel wounds incurred while reconnoitering a beachhead on nearby Tinian.

Because of his wounds, Berchiolli was sent back to the States, but instead of being discharged, he was reassigned to guard duty in

