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# Local men stepped up to answer WWII's call

BY TRAVIS GULBRANDSON

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One of the areas of interest in the Austin Whittemore House's Simonson scrapbook is that pertaining to recruitment.

Over the course of the war years, the Vermillion Plain Talk and the Dakota Republican both printed notices for area men to get their pre-induction physicals – the majority of which took place at either Fort Crook in Nebraska, Fort Dodge in Iowa and Fort Snelling in Minnesota.

Many of the men whose names were printed in these notices were from the Vermillion/Yankton area, but the Pacific states appear on a fairly regular basis, as well.

On Sept. 24, 1942, Lester Lloyd, secretary of the selective service board in Clay County, said he could not give an accurate count of how many area men were in the service, but that there were "more than 500."

The numbers of men called ebbed and flowed over the years, and were not necessarily indicative of how many were inducted following the physicals.

But, the numbers did decrease as the war continued – even while more men were always needed.

On Jan. 11, 1945, it was reported that local selective service boards in South Dakota received a director calling all registrants ages 18-25 that had been deferred in Class 11-C, which pertained to agriculture.

"The further deferment of all men now deferred in the 18 through 25 age group because of agricultural occupation is not essential to the best interest of our war effort as is the urgent need of the army and navy for young men," President Franklin D. Roosevelt was quoted as saying.

Col. E.A. Beckwith, state director of selective service, said local boards would begin at once to carry out these directives.

"Our policy has been changed definitely by the president's determination," he said. "We must now call the under-26-year-olds except under the most extreme circumstances."

Up to that point, approximately 364,000 men in the United States had farm deferments, 11,000 of whom were in South Dakota.

Following are the statistics the scrapbook records, organized by the date the men were called, the number of men who were called, and the location to which they had to report:

July 28, 1942	22	Fort Crook
Aug. 24, 1942	18	Fort Crook
Sept. 23, 1942	30	Fort Crook
Oct. 28, 1942	47	Fort Crook
Nov. 21, 1942	35	Fort Crook
Jan. 20, 1943	13	Fort Crook
Feb. 21, 1943	8	Fort Dodge
March 3, 1943	19	Fort Crook
March 11, 1943	45	Fort Snelling
April 29, 1943	8	Fort Crook
May 21, 1943	33	Omaha
June 7-8, 1943	16	Fort Snelling

June 24, 1943	28	Fort Crook
July 21, 1943	12	Fort Crook
Aug. 15, 1943	4	Fort Crook
Sept. 22, 1943	35	Fort Crook
Oct. 26, 1943	36	Fort Crook
Nov. 18, 1943	11	Fort Crook
Dec. 21, 1943	27	Fort Crook
Jan. 20, 1944	28	Fort Crook
Jan. 26, 1944	11	Fort Crook
Feb. 8, 1944	19	Fort Crook
April 14, 1944	71	Fort Crook
April 24, 1944	11	Fort Snelling
June 20, 1944	10	Fort Dodge
July 13, 1944	12	Fort Snelling
July 26, 1944	9	Fort Snelling
Aug. 24, 1944	10	Fort Snelling
Sept. 22, 1944	12	Fort Snelling
Oct. 12, 1944	19	Fort Snelling
Dec. 17, 1944	20	Fort Snelling
Jan. 4, 1945	16	Fort Snelling
Feb. 8, 1945	16	Fort Snelling
March 4, 1945	2	Fort Snelling
March 13, 1945	9	Fort Snelling
April 1, 1945	10	Fort Snelling
April 15, 1945	41	Fort Snelling
May 11, 1945	45	Fort Snelling
June 7, 1945	12	Fort Snelling
July 10, 1945	12	Fort Snelling
July 22, 1945	9	Fort Snelling
Aug. 9, 1945	15	Fort Snelling
Aug. 21, 1945	7	Fort Snelling
Sept. 10, 1945	5	Fort Snelling
Sept. 25, 1945	7	Fort Snelling
Nov. 6, 1945	4	Fort Snelling
Dec. 6, 1945	11	Fort Snelling
Feb. 5, 1946	22	Fort Snelling
March 3, 1946	12	Fort Snelling
April 14, 1946	4	Fort Snelling

## ■ RED DRAGON

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radius of curvature about 21 inches in diameter.

Otto's book describes the process Knutson followed each time the Red Dragon took flight.

"The turret was rotated so that Ralph could slide through an open hatch onto a small steel seat between two 50 caliber machine guns with his feet propped up in front at eye level," Otto writes. "In this uncompromising position for 10 hours at a mission, he faced machine gun and cannon gunfire from enemy aircraft and cannon fire from the ground spewing steel shards called 'flak,' all of which could easily penetrate the turret."

The Red Dragon's crew wore suits that were electrically heated to stay warm at high altitudes. Besides carrying bombs, they never left on a mission without a supply of oxygen. The cabins of B-17s couldn't be pressurized. Crew members breathed oxygen through masks to survive while flying through very thin air.

Knutson naturally was nervous during

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his first flight. Not long after he climbed into his turret, however, he became too preoccupied with other things to feel fear.

"I was so busy with what I was trying to do that I didn't really think about how nerve-wracking it was," he said.

That's not to say Knutson never experienced moments so horrendous that a notion of "fight or flight" didn't kick in.

In Otto's book, he describes the terror of his first time in battle.

While wearing his parachute, the plane flew into an area where it seemed to be an easy target for the enemy.

"They really shot the heck out of us," Knutson said. "You could hear the shells hit. I mean they were just hitting like hail on a tin roof, you know. And I said 'I'm not going stay here anymore.'"

Knutson said he got to the point where he was ready to jump from the plane. But then he decided to take one more look at the engines.

In his words, all four of them were "still perking." And he rode out the storm of lead.

He flew his first mission in May of 1944. "They say we got our 31 missions in faster than anyone else had," Knutson said.

He doesn't admit ever getting used to the experience of literally fighting face to face with enemy planes.

Knutson reasons, however, that many of the German pilots may have been just as anxious as he was.

"They had to come through a mess to get to us," he said. "We had a lot of bombers, and a lot of guns shooting back at them, but they got a lot of us."

Knutson is happy he flew on a plane that could take an incredible amount of punishment from enemy planes and still remain airborne.

And he doesn't resent the fact that he wound up in the ball turret, one of the worst places to be on a B-17 during battle.

"I felt like I was in my own cubby-hole all by myself," Knutson said. "It wasn't any safer than anywhere else (on the plane) but it just felt like it was."

More of Knutson's World War II adventures are included in Otto's book, which is available at USD Book and Supply and the gift shop of the W.H. Over Museum.

