

Coffee with the Mayor

Ser 54 (26-05) 2026 The torch

Normally I write about city related topics in my Coffee with the Mayor. It is my hope that I update those that read this on city related issues or background on city related topics. Sometimes (I hate to admit it) it's hard to narrow it down to what I want to write about. If you allow me, I'd like to shift gears this one time and write about a different topic. This one is more personal.

My Dad was a Navy veteran of World War II, enlisting in Oct 1939 and leaving the Navy in Dec 1945. If you remember your history, he served for all 6 years of the war. I grew up learning about his time in the service and close calls he experienced serving on Navy destroyers. My hobby soon became learning about WW II on all fronts, not just the Navy operations. On a broader scale, I became a student of history. Growing up, many movies I watched were related to war time events with the emphasis on men and women overcoming hardships and trials they never thought they'd experience, let alone survive. The same goes for books. The books I have in my bookcase at home are a testament to this as well. Growing up in Linton I learned there were many veterans who served in the military, not only in WW II, but in Korea and Vietnam as well. I even remember knowing several in town that were veterans of WW I. As I grew older, I wondered how I could share this knowledge to a generation that didn't know the date of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.

Since 2023, I've been invited to speak to the Linton Sophomore History class about World War II. This break from Mayoral duties was always welcome. This is something I look forward to every Spring. The first time I spoke about the European Theater of Operations and Operations in the Pacific. This was covered over three days. The ship Dad was on in 1941 was fired on unsuccessfully by a German U-boat and is in the history books, a fact made known to the students. The last two years speaking with the students my focus was the Pacific theater of WW II from Dec 1941 to Sep 1945. I spoke of the overall strategy laid out by military leaders and notable battles and campaigns. Having served at Pacific commands myself as a reserve officer, I could share my understanding of what was called the "Tyranny of Distance" in the Pacific and its impact to WW II operations. Spoke of islands with odd names like Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Iwo Jima or Okinawa and the importance placed on securing these islands. My Dad served on a destroyer escort supporting the invasions of the last two! These battles were notable when suicide planes called Kamikazes heavily damaged or sank many ships. I spoke of the USS Indianapolis, our state capital's namesake, and the role it played in not only bringing the war to an end

with the dropping of the two atomic bombs but how it became the Navy's worst disaster of the war with its sinking. I later met 14 of the survivors at their reunion in 2004.

The events were important in the understanding of how the war was fought, but that was only part of the story. I tried to stress the importance of the men and women who carried out those events. I stated that to me, my dad was always a hero for what he did, but on a bigger scale he was only an example of his generation that were called to serve when needed and sacrificed much in doing so. After dad's passing I found on the internet a journal of daily events written by one of his shipmates, Arnold Foster. Some of the entries focused on enemy actions and described what the ship and crew endured. This entry is from June 9th, 1945:

“At 1945 hrs air raid, tonight I believe in prayers. A jap suicide plane came in on our portside to make a kill. All guns on port begun to fire. Nothing happened to the plane. It kept coming. I know we couldn't stop it, so I asked God in heaven if it was his will to turn that plane. I closed my eyes thinking I would never again open them. I did not hear a crash but I could hear guns and plane. I opened my eyes and the plane was banking off our port bow. I thanked God from the bottom of my heart for saving my life and 200 others. I know it was his will that the Grady should live. I could feel the prayers of every man aboard the ship praying to God. We really have something to be thankful for, who ever may read this can never feel the way I feel now. We are living on borrowed time. Gods time. The plane crashed about 13 miles away. We really must have hit it pretty bad. At 2030 hrs all raids were secured. Thank my heavenly father we are alive.”

The WW II veterans are almost all gone now. It is up to us to educate the current generation on what they accomplished, and not only them, but veterans of all generations. It is this torch that I feel called to carry.