

George Erickson's 20-year Navy career

spanned two wars

EDITOR'S NOTE: In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the end World War II, the Lawrence Township Memorial Committee, in cooperation with The Ledger, will feature a column each week during the anniversary year profiling a Lawrence veteran.

VETERAN PROFILE

Nicholas Loveless

George W. Erickson was born in Fieldsboro, N.J. on Dec. 31, 1916. He attended local schools, graduating from Bordentown High School in 1933.

On May 26, 1936, as the country was still struggling in the depression years, George enlisted in the U.S. Navy at Philadelphia. He was assigned to "boot camp" at Newport,

R.I., and then to Navy gunnery school at San Diego, Calif.

In February, 1937, George was assigned to sea duty aboard the Navy's first aircraft carrier, the USS Langley, as a gunner's mate. The Langley was part of the fleet involved with the search for the lost aviatrix, Amelia Earhart, whose plane disappeared on July 3, 1937 on a flight from New Guinea to Howland Island in the Pacific. The fate of Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, remains a mystery to this day. In June, 1938, George was transferred to duty in Seaplane Squadron VP-5 stationed in the Panama Canal Zone, where he flew as a crewman in PBY "Catalina" aircraft on patrols. The

strategic importance of the Panama Canal has always made it necessary to be heavily defended. In June, 1940, he was discharged from the Navy, only to re-enlist again. He was then assigned to Squadron VP-56 at Norfolk, Va., as an ordnanceman in PBM "Mariner" seaplanes on anti-submarine patrols in the Atlantic and Caribbean.

After the Lend-Lease Bill was passed in March, 1941, Britain ordered huge quantities of supplies and arms from the United States, and convoys of ships were soon steaming to England. The convoy system had worked well up until the middle of 1941, but the Germans devised submarine "wolf-pack" tactics to lay in wait for convoys in the shipping lanes. After the U.S. entered the war, 87 ships were sunk off the Atlantic coast from January to April, 1942, and the need for anti-submarine patrols became vital.

George was reassigned to duty in October, 1941, to the Glenn L. Martin Aircraft Company to study PBM-3 aircraft. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, he was retained at the factory to accept the completed planes for the Navy and test fly them as they came off the assembly lines. He was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal for rendering this very important service during that period. In August, 1943, he was commissioned as an ensign in the Navy and served at various assignments throughout the balance of World War Two and the post-war years.

When the Korean Conflict erupted in June, 1950, George was still on active duty and was transferred to sea duty again aboard the USS Bataan (CVL-29) as the communications of-

ficer. His ship was responsible for directing U.S. Marine aircraft on air strikes against North Korea, an assignment that kept him in the Far East for almost two years.

After a distinguished career with the Navy spanning over 20 years and two wars, George retired from active duty on Sept. 1, 1956 with the rank of Lieutenant Commander. The Navy had made good on their offer to George to "see the world" back in 1936. His Naval decorations include a Letter of Commendation with Medal Pendant, Good Conduct Medal, American Defense Medal with Fleet Clasp, American Theater Medal, World War II Victory Medal, United Nations Medal and the Korean Campaign Medal with three battle stars.

Almost immediately after his retirement in 1956, George accepted a position with the DeLaval Company of Trenton, which for many years produced turbines for ships. After another 25 years with DeLaval, he once again retired, this time for good, at the end of 1981.

George married his wife, Margaret, in 1940 while he was serving with the Navy, and the couple recently celebrated their 54th wedding anniversary. The Erickson family moved to 142 Graf Avenue, Lawrence, in June 1952, where they have remained since then. They have two sons, George A. of Cherry Hill and Robert M. of Lawrence.

Since his 1981 retirement from DeLaval, George has enjoyed playing golf, bowling, and as he puts it, "playing around with the clarinet and saxophone."

From 1959 to 1964 he was the commanding officer of the Trenton

