

Three wars and plenty more for this vet

EDITOR'S NOTE: In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the end of 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 resident.

VETERAN PROFILE

Nicholas Loveless

'It was an awesome sight,' Bob Black began as he described the experimental atomic explosion at Bikini Atoll on July 1, 1946. 'The huge mushroom cloud rose upward toward the sky and seemed to be boiling fire in the center. Knowing a bomb that size and so powerful could be terrifying.'

Robert B. Black was born on April 23, 1928, in Detroit, Mich. In the early 1930s Bob's family moved to Princeton, his father seeking better employment opportunities. Bob attended Princeton public schools, and as World War II was entering its final stages, most of his friends had already entered the military services. Several months before he reached his 17th birthday, Bob applied to the U.S. Navy Reserve and was accepted. He completed his physical examination and other pre-induction phases, and on April 24, 1945, the day after his 17th birthday, was sworn in.

After Navy boot camp he was assigned to Davisville, R.I., for Sea-Bee training, but in the meantime, the war ended. He was then given the option of enlisting in the regular Navy for two years, which he did. As a shipfitter 3rd class, he was sent to the USS Ajax AR-6, an auxiliary repair ship in San Francisco.

During the summer of 1946, the U.S. Navy exploded two atomic bombs in tests to determine the effect of such bombs on ships. The tests were known as 'Operation Cross-

roads' and Bikini Atoll was chosen as the site for the controlled blasts. Bob was aboard the USS Ajax on the operation, and an eyewitness to the testing. The first atomic explosion had been set off at Alamogordo, N.M., on July 16, 1945, and it was not known at that time whether or not it would actually work. Its success then led to the second one dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on Aug. 6, killing or critically injuring over half of the 300,000 residents and leveling most of the city's structures. The third bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on Aug. 9, after the appeal to Japan to surrender went unheeded. The fourth and fifth were planned for Bikini, a coral atoll in the Marshall Islands in the Central Pacific Ocean. The land area of Bikini was less than 3 square miles, but the lagoon covered almost 200 additional square miles and was determined to be the ideal location for the testing.

'There was an assortment of 73 ships in the explosion area,' Bob continues, 'and there were a number of animals on some of them to simulate military personnel and what effects the bomb would have on them. We were on the Ajax about 15 miles away and didn't have to take any precautions, except we were told not to look directly at the blast when it went off. The bomb was detonated several hundred feet in the air and sunk some of the ships. I had been aboard the Japanese battleship Nagato, which was with the fleet that attacked Pearl



Bob Black's military career extended from the Bikini atomic bomb tests shortly after the end of World War II to Vietnam. Photo was taken in 1975.

Harbor, and was now in the target area. We had a chance to go all through it before the testing. I believe the German cruiser, Prinz Eugen was also there. We were sent in after the blast to wash down and decontaminate some of the ships, but never boarded them after the blast. The second bomb was set off on July 25, and that was an under-water detonation.

6038.01-13

It wasn't long after the second bomb that we returned to the U.S. after having been at the operation for several months.'

Bob was discharged from the Navy on Nov. 11, 1947, and returned to Princeton, only to enlist in the regular Army in Feb. 1948. After a short refresher course on Army procedures, he was sent to Berlin as one of the first group of reinforcement troops in the Berlin Blockade by the Russians. At the Berlin Ammunition Depot, his unit was responsible for the storage and issuance of all ammunition and ordnance other than bombs. The unit was also responsible for the disposal and destruction of recovered ammunition, rockets, artillery shells, grenades and other explosives. As Berlin slowly began to recover from the massive destruction of World War II, their work never ended.

'We didn't handle unexploded bombs, the Germans did that,' Bob continues, 'But we did take care of everything else, and would dispose of each one by blowing it up. There was a make-shift golf course in the American sector of Berlin, and when we would play there occasionally, we always came back with shells or grenades that we would find on the course. There were hazards there that no other golf course had, including shell holes and wrecked tanks. I served at the Berlin Ammunition Depot for three years and met my future wife, Therese, while I was stationed there. We didn't have too much contact with the Russians even though the Russian Zone surrounded Berlin.

They would pass through the American sector on a train and every now and then pick fights with American GIs riding the same train'.

After his tour of duty in Germany, Bob was reassigned to Korea in May, 1951, where he continued with his duties in disposal of explosives. Stationed at Yongdungpo, just outside of Seoul, his squad traveled wherever they were needed, and often to the front lines, which were just north of Seoul at the time. The squad consisted of an officer in charge, and five enlisted men, assisted by several Koreans. In December, 1951, Bob's enlistment was up and he was returned to the U.S. for discharge. Shortly after he left Korea, his squad had been called to defuse a bomb in the railroad station. In the process, the bomb detonated, killing several members of his former squad.

For the next several years, Bob was out of the military completely and worked in his father's taxi and limousine business in Princeton. Blackie's Limo Service was a landmark in Princeton for many years. In 1957, Bob joined the Army Reserve, and remained with them for many years, training with them and taking the required two-week training periods each year. His various assignments included five years with the Special Forces, better known then as the Green Berets.

In 1968, the wanderlust returned and Bob applied for a Mariner's document and for the next three years sailed the world with the Military Sealift Command. The mission of the MSC was to supply U.S. military forces scattered around the world with vehicles, ammunition, food and other supplies. His travels took him around the world five time, including three trips through the Panama Canal. One of those trips involved picking up 10,000 tons of 500-pound World

See **VETERAN**, Page 3A

Thursday, June 8, 1995



Planning veterans memorial

The Construction Sub-committee of the Lawrence Township Veterans Memorial Committee recently met to review construction plans. Shown at the site are Cliff Horner (left), designer; Vince Scozzari, construction oversight; Bill Ronca, electrician; William Harle, designer; Jeff Ronca, electrician; Robert Simonelli, chairman of the sub-committee; and Nicholas Loveless, chairman of the Memorial Committee.

Veteran

Continued from Page 2A

War II bombs from England and Belgium for delivery in Okinawa and Thailand to be carried by B- 52 bombers flying missions over North Vietnam. They then continued on to Saigon with supplies and rations for servicemen in Vietnam. His ship was escorted by South Vietnam patrol boats, as the Viet Cong always was a threat. On another trip, his ship had just delivered a shipment of vehicles at Chittagong, Pakistan, to be used by U.N. forces, when the India- Pakistan war erupted. Bob often wonders where those vehicles ever ended up.

In 1970, Bob finally settled down and for the next ten years operated Blackie's Limo Service again, and then spent another 10 years with McClain Engineering Co. In 1952 after his return from Korea, he married Therese, whom he had met in Berlin, and they moved to their present home at 95 Smithfield Ave., Lawrence, in 1956.

Bob has one stepson and two grandchildren, and is a member of American Legion Post 414, VFW Post 3022 and Lawrence Senior Club 5. Over the years he has enjoyed golfing and bowling, but his main interests have always been with the military, which played a large part of his formative years. He retired from the Army Reserve as a master sergeant in 1988, after a career that began in World War II and saw him through two more wars in three capacities, and has now settled down to a full retirement.

The Veterans Memorial Committee is asking veterans from World War II and other conflicts to provide a photograph in uniform, along with their name, present address, branch of service and unit, where and when they served, their principal assignment and summary of their service. Their individual experiences or unusual stories are also welcomed. All

photographs will be returned. Families of deceased veterans are also encouraged to submit articles. All materials should be sent to The Lawrence Township Veterans Memorial Committee, P.O. Box 55966, Trenton, N.J. 08638. Inquires may be made by calling 882-9108.



Weekly Roll of Memorial Donors

Eleanor and Edward Weisgerber
Nancy Antonish- Chordas
Bristol-Myers Squibb Company
Family of Joseph Mached, Sr.
Dr. and Mrs. Alphonse Palmieri
Calvin L. Parson
Mr. and Mrs. A. Nilsson
Mr. and Mrs. William J. Monachello
Lester J. Skowronek
Alice and George Kelly
Memory of Robert R. Kelly
Phyllis and John McBride
Mary Delaney
Memory of Thomas F. Delaney
A.J. Licisko
112th Field Artillery Association
Sheila and Leon Colavita
Mary and John A. Butler
Mary Harrigan
Memory of Thomas Harrigan
William Oldenburg
Joan and Jos. Willis
Willis Greenhouses
Sturwood Hamlet Associates
White Pine Associates
Sonja E. Ericson
Raymond and Dorothy Mount
Enzo's La Piccola Cucina
Virginia and Charles Hopkins
Waltraud and Glenn Mohrman
Audrey J. Maher
Antoinette DiTullio