

Veterans Oral History

On 21 January 2016, the Heritage Education Commission completed an oral history interview with Hiram Drache who served in the Army Air Corps during WWII. His recording is now on-line at heritageed.com.

Drache enlisted in the Army in 1942, following high school graduation from Owatonna, MN. During the summer before entering, he completed a year of college, because he knew that the more education he had, the better chance he had of going into the Air Corps. Drache completed 32 missions as navigator on a B-17 Flying Fortress. After completing 19 missions including a dangerous landing, his crew got flak leave because their plane was hit by enemy flak. While on, away from the air base and news of the war, they were taken good care of by the Red Cross and were able to relax. After completing 30 missions in Europe, he volunteered to stay in Europe rather than be sent to Japan because "I figured that I'd rather go down on land than on water". One of his missions had only two planes survive out of 24. They did an emergency landing at a captured German airfield in Belgium instead of going back to their departure base because of the damage to the plane done by German fighters. After landing, they counted 130 bullet holes in their plane. Following separation from the military, he enrolled Gustavus Adolphus College. Drache is retired following a very successful career teaching at Concordia College. Drache has written many books, most of them on local history and agriculture. Drache is 91 years old and plans on finishing two more books before "the good Lord takes him". Drache's interview is one of over 70 Veterans interviews we have collected.

Another of the more famous histories is of Ben Steele who survived the Bataan Death March in WWII. Steele was captured by the Japanese in 1942 and spent the next three years as a POW. It was during this time that Steele started sketching his experiences as a POW. Upon his release from the Army, he completed degrees in Education and Art and taught at Eastern Montana College from 1959 until he retired in 1982. Steele was a visiting artist at MSUM and we were honored to record his story.

Former MSUM President Roland Dille's oral history is another Veteran we recorded. Dille served in the Army in Europe during WWII. Former Moorhead mayor, Ray Stordahl entered the Army at age 18 and within two months was part of the Battle of the Bulge and was part of the troops that relieved a concentration camp.

We also have some women who served including Lorraine Gerberding who served as a nurse in the European Theater. She was on board ship headed to the Pacific when the Japanese surrendered. Gerberding's granddaughter had a career in the Army National Guard. Audio recordings and transcripts of these and 67 others are on our website. You can even listen to and read mine. Our website is www.heritageed.com, click on Oral History Projects.