

KRAMER

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worth much more than that,” Kramer said.

The attempted Kamikaze attack on the USS Algol was one of many Kramer saw near Okinawa in early April 1945.

“We saw six or seven a day (against other ships),” he said.

Several of the Kamikaze attacks hit their targets, including one that crashed into a hospital ship.

“(The Kamikaze experience) was a nightmare. I can talk about it now, but I couldn’t for many years,” Kramer said.

The USS Algol remained anchored off the shore of Okinawa for several days, while its crew loaded 21 boats with supplies and equipment for troops sent to the island. It was a precarious situation for the American ship.

“We were lucky,” Kramer said. “Beaches on both sides

of us were hit (by enemy fire), but not ours.”

Kramer’s ship was spared attacks by Japanese guns and artillery, but not the horrifically turbulent waters caused by two typhoons in the Pacific. So rough were some of the waters that Kramer’s ship was once tilted at a 38-degree angle, two degrees past its capacity for rough seas.

“I don’t know how (the storm) didn’t break our ship in half,” he said. “Typhoons wrecked a lot of ships.”

So high were some of the waves the USS Algol was subjected to that the crew could not see over them.

“You could not see ships that were close to you,” Kramer said.

There was little the crew could do in such rough waters.

“You couldn’t buck the storm,” he said. “You just had to go with it.”

Kramer was a radio operator on the USS Algol, recording the Morse code signals

he received from shortwave radio. The messages were a series of letters that seemed random until translated by a code breaker machine on the ship. Recording Morse code signals was an intense experience, Kramer recalled.

“Two hours was the most you could (work) at one time. After that your brain would be going in all directions,” he said.

In addition to military orders, the ship received news from the United States by Morse code, which Kramer helped share with the rest of his ship’s 440-man crew.

“We printed our own newspaper,” he said, referring to a newsletter printed with a mimeograph machine, which was distributed on board. It was a popular publication.

“Everyone wanted to know about the news,” the WWII veteran said.

Kramer, like everyone else on the USS Algol, was thousands of miles from home. He spent much of his childhood in North Dakota

and later moved to White Salmon, Washington, with his family. There he finished high school, graduating in the middle of his senior year, after which he enlisted in the Navy.

He joined one day before his 18th birthday, which was not an accident. Kramer explained that at that time anyone who joined the Army before he turned 18 could choose the branch of service he would serve in. Those who had not enlisted by age 18 would be drafted and not be able to choose their branch of the service.

Kramer, who was honorably discharged from the Navy a few months after WWII ended, moved to La Grande six years ago from Medford to be near his son Ted, former editor and publisher of The Observer.

Today, at 94, Kramer is a picture of health and has a youthful spring in his step.

“I’m fortunate. I have longevity on both sides of my family,” Kramer said.

La Grande veteran makes Honor Flight

La Grande World War II veteran Dan Kramer recently went on an unforgettable trip.

Kramer was one of 25 veterans from Oregon who made an Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. Honor Flights are provided to veterans free of charge to see memorials and many sights in our nation’s capital. Honor Flights, which have been given since 2005, are funded by private donations. Kramer and other veterans were provided free transportation, lodging and meals during their visit in late September.

The group Kramer was with visited 10 sites, including the World War II and Lincoln memorials, over a two-day period. Honor Flight participants also met a number of national leaders, including Oregon Congressman Greg Walden (R-Hood River) and Oregon U.S. Senator Ron Wyden (D-Portland).

The veterans were greeted by many others including a group of 90 children who cheered for the veterans at one of their stops.

One of the children who welcomed Kramer was a girl who told him, “My great-grandpa died in World War II.” Kramer then hugged the girl and told her: “I am giving you a hug from your grandpa.”

Moments like this made the Honor Flight experience priceless for Kramer.

“I was so touched by everything that was done for us,” he said.

— Dick Mason, The Observer

EOU

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addiction because I didn’t want to face (the deaths of my fellow soldiers), and I found when I was on alcohol and drugs I didn’t really feel anything. I avoided it,” he said. “Eventually, I learned all that did was prolong the pain and suffering, and I had to face it regardless.”

Talbert said rediscovering his faith made his recovery from addiction possible. He said he grew up going to church, but had become less religious as he got older.

“I eventually allowed myself to come back to God,” he said. “That has done more to heal (me) than anything else I have ever tried.”

It took a few years after returning to civilian life for Talbert to consider continuing his education.

“It took a good three years before I was in a place where I was able to handle it,” Talbert said of pursuing a college degree.

In 2015, Talbert enrolled at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg. In his first year, a gunman opened fire in a classroom at the community college and killed nine people before killing himself. While Talbert wasn’t on campus that day, he said it almost drove him to quit school, but his grandfather convinced him to keep attending classes.

His studies at UCC helped him realize he wanted to pursue degrees in business and agriculture science, with hopes of having a farm someday.

“I don’t really like big crowds or big cities that much,” he said. “I was looking for (a school) that was a little closer to my liking and found EOU. It was cool that it was in a small town, and the area was similar to where I’m from in Montana.”

Talbert settled on EOU and began attending classes in fall 2017.

Last fall, he was approached by Kerry Thompson, EOU military and veterans student success coordinator, about starting

a chapter of Student Veterans of America. Talbert took on the task, and the club became a chapter of the national organization in January 2018.

Thompson said he is thankful for Talbert’s leadership.

“Chris has been a blessing,” Thompson said. “He’s somebody who’s going to step up in a leadership position for on-campus veterans. If we come up with something to do, he takes charge of it. He doesn’t need a lot of assistance from me, and he gets the job done.”

While the chapter is still getting off the ground, Talbert said his intent is for the group to support student veterans at EOU.

“I’d like to see it become a buffer between the community and the university,” he said. “We want to be there to help veteran students and their families through school, but to also put those veterans in contact with members of the community, where a relationship would be mutually beneficial.”

WOMEN

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served your country and sacrificed,” said Carlson, “because you know that person has experienced and seen the sacrifices that have been made.”

All the women noted both positive and negative aspects of their time in the military, though most agreed their experiences were overwhelmingly positive.

“It gave me such an opportunity to travel and meet new people and (have) new experiences,” Dalglish said.

“I’m a very shy person, but when I put the uniform on it boosts my confidence and (helps to) build my leadership skills,” said Army veteran Terah Kincade, who is still active duty in the Oregon National Guard.

Others said the military provided them with a greater sense of morality and a framework for how to live their lives.

“It got me out of (La Grande) and gave me the structure I needed — discipline, doing the right thing and making the right choices,” said Army veteran Suzanne Osterloh, who worked as an EMT and mechanic. “I’m pretty sure I would’ve been involved with drugs (if I hadn’t joined), and I was actually prejudiced before I left. Meeting other people and (learning about) their lifestyle made me realize skin is just another color. We all bleed red.”

Carlson agreed. “(The military) changed me a lot, that’s for sure — a lot of structure, teaching me to be a more disciplined, responsible

person. I’m definitely not the same person I was (before joining),” she said.

Despite a positive majority, however, some had to make sacrifices in their personal lives in order to serve.

“I had to leave my six-month-old son and newlywed husband for about three years (because of) my tour in Iraq, training in Texas, then a tour in Korea,” Osterloh said. “I missed the first step, first word, all of that.”

For some, leaving the military was an equally sacrificial experience in other ways.

“I really enjoyed meeting (people from) different cultures (and) from different walks of life, and I adjusted to that type of lifestyle,” Carlson said. “(When I came home) I missed my friends that I’d established in the military and having friends that could relate. I felt different. I didn’t feel like I was the same person.”

The support group, which tentatively meets every other month, is led by Dakota Olson, a 10-year veteran of the Army National Guard. Olson organizes and plans the meetings for their six-person group, which are typically held at the Union County Fairgrounds or a local restaurant.

“Essentially, it’s like a support group where we just get together, talk and see how everyone’s doing. Just talking is kind of therapeutic (and) helps with coping,” Olson said.

“A lot of times the older ladies will talk about their experiences and the trials and tribulations females face in the military, and we can talk about our experi-



Submitted photo

Members of La Grande’s American Legion Auxiliary Post 43 pose with their banner during a past Veterans Day parade. Some women veterans meet as part of a support group.

ences too. Each individual has something to bring to the group.”

The group, originally established in 1979, also gives back to the community (particularly veterans) through fundraising and aims to provide resources to veterans and help them navigate the oftentimes difficult process of either finding or attaining those resources.

“A lot of veterans don’t know what resources are available to them (or) don’t know who to go to, what they have to do, etc., (so we) pretty much help them navigate how to get benefits,” Olson said. “If someone is having an issue or problem, or is looking into (receiving benefits), a lot of us have experience and can provide them

with resources. Or if we don’t know, we’ll connect them with a person who can help.”

Olson added that veteran or active duty status isn’t a requirement to participate in the group.

“We’ve made it all-inclusive, and any female associated with the military (is welcome). I think they need support too, and getting that from a female perspective (is helpful),” Olson said. “I know there are a lot of female veterans who live here. It’s just (a matter of) reaching out to them and getting them to come to the group.”

The next women veterans meeting will begin at 10 a.m. Dec. 8 at the Union County Fairgrounds. For more information, contact Olson at 541-519-4106.

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