

WWII Veterans continued with the "S" letter of the alphabet

By Dave Kusel

Last week we started on Glenn Steinke's military story - now we continue with that story and go into more of the other Veterans' whose last names start with S.



Glenn, the son of Friederich and Pauline (Hedke) Steinke, was born November 21, 1919, on a farm south west of Trenton, Nebraska. He attended rural school near his home and helped his father on the farm.

After his honorable discharge in 1945, Glenn returned to Nebraska and started working as a parts man at Miller Implement, a John Deere dealer. On April 3, 1946, he was united in marriage with Rachel R. Fahrbruch at the Lutheran Parsonage in Culbertson, Nebraska. Two children were born to this union.



Rachel, Mary Ann, Glenn, Jimmie

After Miller Implement sold out, Glenn started working for the Co-op in Trenton. However, he wanted to work for John Deere so when he noticed an ad in the Omaha World Herald for 'Parts Man wanted John Deere' he jumped at the chance. Glenn got the job and started working for Puck Implement in Manning on April 1, 1957. Two months later his family joined him, living on the Glen Struve Farm until they found a house in Manning. Glenn continued with Puck Implement until his retirement on January 1, 1984.



Glenn Steinke with Leroy Rowedder - parts men 1974

#519 John Stender (no pictures or information)

At this point I'm not sure where John's name came from in the Manning database. There are several Stender families who lived in the Westside and Denison area. If no one comes forward with pictures and information that show John's connection to Manning and his WWII service then he will be left out of the Manning Veterans' book.

Another Veteran with no pictures or information

Sadly I have no pictures or any military information about this next Veteran. His brother, Leon, was KIA during WWII.

Donald Stoelk was the son of Albert and Elsie (Klindt) Stoelk. He was born on his parents' farm southwest of Manning. His siblings were Leon, Merle, Jaenice Popp, Darlene Porsch, and Berdine Herbers.

Don's name is listed on the Manning Memorial Day program in the WWII section, but he possibly should be listed post WWII, since he attended school at Manning with the class of 1947 but did not graduate. Without an obituary and other documentation, Don's story will be very incomplete.

#520 Donald Stoelk (no pictures or military information)

#521 Leon Hartley Stoelk (1 picture, 6 Monitor articles, brief military biography at this point in time)



This is the only military picture I have of Leon. I have a number of newspaper articles about Leon but not a formal write-up at this point. Once I start laying out the Manning Veterans' book I'll compile a formal story with the limited information I have about Leon at that time.

Leon's body was temporarily buried in Sicily after he was killed in action and then was repatriated after the war.

I never know where pictures and information will come from. Unfortunately, much of the time it doesn't come from family members and relatives but sources you would never expect.

In 2012 I received an e-mail from Jan Bos, a man who lives in Nijmegen, Holland, and is working on history about the cemetery in Gela, Sicily, where US men and women were temporarily buried after they were killed during Operation Husky.

The only way Jan could have found me is through my extensive web pages about Manning and specifically the Veterans web page that lists over 1000 Manning area Veterans.

When I set up my web pages in 1996, I had no idea who would find them and if those people would contact me to help with my research. In this case it took 16 years of patience by me to be contacted about Leon. Without my web page that listed Leon Stoelk, I would have never received this information below that Jan had and sent to me.

At that time I sent Jan the picture I have of Leon and some other military information for him to use with his project and he returned the favor by sharing what he had.

This is the key to preserving our history...SHARING!!!

I plan on e-mailing Jan again very soon to see if he finished his book on the cemetery and maybe found out other information.

Here is the first contact e-mail that Jan sent to me on July 8, 2012.

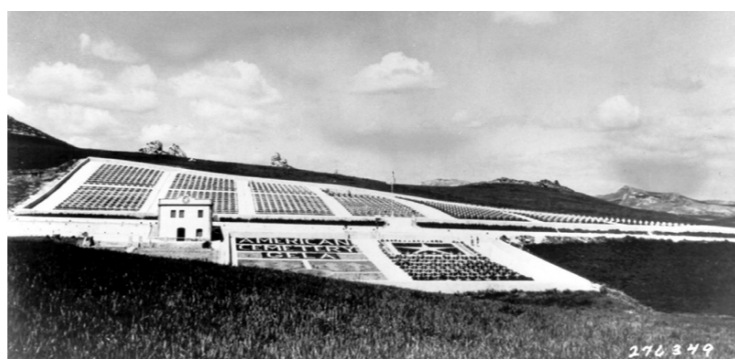
David: Can you please help. I am looking for information and picture of Private Leon H. Stoelk about his death in Sicily during operation Husky, July-August 1943.

Private Leon H. Stoelk was killed on July 22, 1943, in Sicily, during the so-called operation Husky. After his death he was buried in the temporary American cemetery GELA on Sicily in plot-grave A-7-76, date of burial was August 1, 1943.

I am writing a book about this cemetery, where over 1,200 young American men and women were buried.

The 753 Tank Battalion was in Sicily, the tank exploded killing at least three men, including Leon Stoelk. One of the men is buried in the Sicily Rome Cemetery in Italy, the other two were repatriated.

I have pictures of the area around the Gela cemetery, will send some in a couple of days
Jan Bos

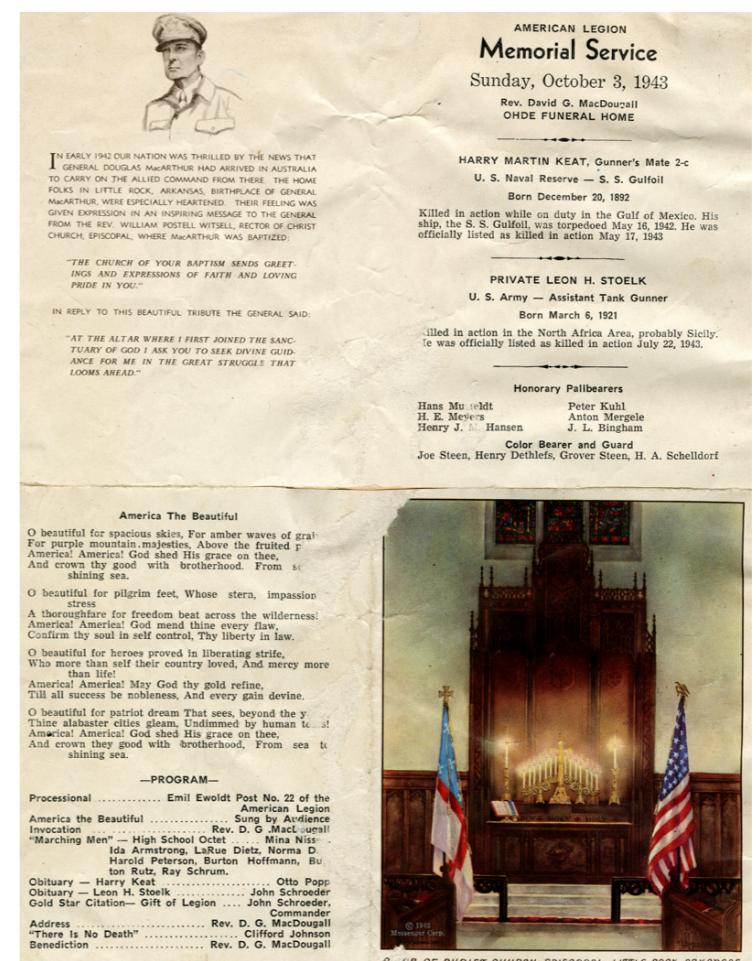


Above: American Cemetery Gela before repatriation of the bodies
Below: the only remaining cemetery remnant - the wall



Image from the Internet that shows the SS Robert Rowan as it explodes along the shores of Gela during Operation Husky

During the Allied invasion of Sicily the SS Robert Rowan (Liberty ship K-40) exploded after being hit by a German Ju 88 bomber off of Gela, Sicily, Italy, on July 11, 1943. The Liberty ship SS Robert Rowan was built at the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company, Wilmington, North Carolina. She was sent on to Gela, to support the invasion of Sicily "Operation Husky." She arrived at Gela July 11, 1943, with a cargo of ammunition and 334 soldiers of the 18th Infantry. She also carried 14 U.S. Navy personnel, 32 U.S. Navy armed guards, and 41 crewmen. Just before 14:00 German Junkers Ju 88 bombers appeared overhead and attacked the ships in the bay. During the attack the Rowan was hit by three 500 kg bombs. One bomb passed through the ship, but the other two exploded in the holds. Because of the nature of the cargo the ship was abandoned without any attempt to put the fire out. All 421 men on board safely evacuated the ship and were picked up by PT boats and transferred to nearby destroyers. Within twenty minutes the fire reached her munitions with a tremendous explosion tearing the ship in half. The burning ship came to rest on an even keel and burned for two days. The destroyer USS McLanahan (DD-615) attempted to sink the ship because the fires lit up the area during the night, but this failed as the water was too shallow. The hulk lay in the waters off Gela until 1948 when it was sold and scrapped.



Joint American Legion memorial service for Harry Keat and Leon Stoelk held at Ohde Funeral Home on October 3, 1943.

At the time of this service, they still did not know exactly where Leon was KIA.

Honorary Pallbearers: Hans Musfeldt, Peter Kuhl, H.E. Meyers, Anton Mergele, Henry J.M. Hansen, Jay L. Bingham
Color Bearer and Guard: Joe Steen, Henry Dethlefs, Grover Steen, H.A. Schellendorf



Stoelk family - Back: Berdine, Merle, Darlene, Leon, Jaenice; Front: Albert, Donald, Elsie (Klindt)

#522 Henry Stoffers (1 picture, no other military information)

In 2012 I scanned the Manning Homemaker's Club scrapbook and in it was a military section with several Veteran pictures and items, including this next picture.

The Homemakers members would send small packages of non-perishable items and notes of encouragement to the various WWII service men who were connected to club members.



Corporal Henry Stoffers on Champ

Henry, son of Fred and Sophie (Bauer) Stoffers, was born June 4, 1918, at Westside. Heine was a veteran of WWII, having served from 1941 to 1945. He attained the rank of Corporal. He fought at the Battle of Remagen in the Battle of the Bulge.

He married Blondina Gehlsen on January 29, 1949. He owned and operated Stoffers Oil Company. He was a member of the Arcadia American Legion post #694. Siblings: Regilda Stribe, Henrietta Hagge, Ruby Hunter, Harry Stoffers, and Elmer Stoffers. Henry was buried at the Westside Cemetery with Allen Hunter, Arlin Hunter, Lowell Stribe, Brian Joens, Troy Gehlsen, and Barry Gehlsen serving as casket bearers.

Next week we'll begin with another Veteran who was KIA - Gene Strathman. Thanks to a relative of his who lives in California and sent me tons of pictures and information, Gene's service will be well documented in the Veterans' book.