



# The Manning Exchange

Where Past & Present Meet

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History and current events are shared and preserved.

## “I’m certainly no celebrity or no one famous, I’m just Clarence.”

**Clarence Pfundheller, Iowa’s last living survivor of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7, 1941 - at age 96, currently lives in Audubon.**

By David Kusel

Clarence Pfundheller was born June 17, 1920. He grew up on a farm two and one-half miles from Bridgewater, Iowa, where a lot of other German immigrants had settled. His parents spoke German but Clarence never learned to speak it.

His parents were Frank and Ella Pfundheller (pronounced - ‘fun deller’).

Frank was born November 25, 1889, on a farm northwest of Bridgewater in Cass County and attended a rural school near their farm. After he got older he attended school just in the winter time. He worked on the family farm until he was married to Ella Neizold on January 29, 1913, at the bride’s parent’s home.



Ella, Deloris, Viola, Clarence, Frank, Harold  
Photo taken sometime shortly after WWII

Ella was the daughter of Frederick and Caroline Bauer. Caroline died a few days after Ella’s birth and then she was adopted and raised by Otto and Amy Neizold who were neighbors of the Pfundhellers. Ella attended country school at Jackson No. 8.

After their marriage, Frank and Ella moved to a farm north of Bridgewater where they lived until 1932. They moved to the farm where Ella had grown up and they remained on this farm. At this time Clarence started in the eighth grade at Jefferson No. 4 country school.

Frank continued to live on the farm after Ella died until he moved to Bridgewater in 1971.

Frank and Ella had four children: Viola, Harold, Clarence, and Delores.

Harold was five years older than Clarence and Delores was eleven years younger than Clarence. Harold and Clarence had nicknames, “Diz” and Gopher.” Harold was left-handed like the famous pitcher, Charles “Dazzy” Vance of the early 1900s. Clarence used to trap gophers to earn money when he was in grade school and hence was given the nickname of “Gopher.” Farmers would pay Clarence to trap the gophers in their pastures and hay fields.

Frank and Ella were members of the Methodist Church all of their lives. They belonged to the German M.E. Church northwest of Bridgewater, and then transferred to Bridgewater M.E. Church. Ella passed away in 1963 and Frank in 1981.

Clarence worked with his dad and brother on the farm. They picked corn by hand - in 1936 there were no ears so they cut the corn stalks by hand with a corn knife and ran them through a shredder for feed and stored it in the barn. They also fought the chinch bug infestation. The infestation was very bad and the bugs were also in the shredded corn and the “barn stunk so bad you almost couldn’t stand it.”

Clarence cultivated their corn with a riding cultivator pulled by horses...they never had a corn picker while he was a kid.

Clarence graduated from high school in 1937 when he was 16 years old. The Bridgewater class of 1937 consisted of the following classmates: Mary Jane McDermott, Arthur Brown, Hillas Cole, Doris Dory, Ilah Glade, Jean Love, Clarence Pfundheller, Velma Roos and Delores Eileen Glade.

Clarence’s high school baseball and football coach was Ray Parrish. They played 6-man football. They had three line-men, two backs, and the quarterback. The quarterback couldn’t run or pass the ball, he could only hand it off to the backs. The helmet was leather with no facemask and there were no shoulder or thigh pads. The football was made of pigskin and it was larger with more blunt ends than today’s football.

Bridgewater is now part of the Nodaway Valley Community School District: Greenfield, Fontanelle, and Bridgewater.

The town of Bridgewater had its beginnings in 1885, when the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad was built through the territory. The railroad company purchased the main site of the town from several men, as follows: J.B. Sullivan, George Clark, Matt Lednum, and Tom Warrior. The original plot was filed October 13, 1885, by the first C.B.&Q. general agent, C.E. Perkins. The name of the town has two versions: the first version, probably given from the fact the railroad at this point had difficulty in bridging the Nodaway River. They were compelled to construct a bridge 640 feet in length and the second version was that the Nodaway River went on a rampage and was over a half-mile wide, doing damage to their 640 foot bridge. A bridge in the midst of a lake of water - so why not Bridgewater? The origin of the name has never been verified, but is accepted as the most probable source.

The town of Bridgewater was laid out one mile wide into both Jackson and Washington Townships in 1895.

After high school, Clarence worked for two seasons on the farm of the Bridgewater school board president, Gus Follman. Gus owned 260 acres and Clarence helped him work the fields with a D John Deere and three-bottom plow. He also operated the binder and worked long/hard hours chopping oats and wheat, all for \$30 a month, room and board.



To the left - Pfundheller Farm just north of Bridgewater

Clarence’s quotes are italicized and captured between “ ” in this article.

Below: Great Lakes 2nd Company class of 1939 - Clarence is 3rd row up, 4th from the left



Clarence enlisted in the Navy on January 11, 1939, at Des Moines - Gus Follman drove him to the enlistment center.

When asked why he wanted to join the Navy, Clarence joked: “I said I didn’t want to walk all day and wait for my supper to catch up. I wanted to have it with me.”

Clarence took his basic training at Great Lakes in 1939 from January through March. He started out as Apprentice Seaman and after his basic training was completed, Clarence became a Seaman 2nd Class.

His most vivid memory is marching in the snow in near zero temperatures for the various drills they had. They had watch duty along Lake Michigan where they stood and froze in four hour shifts.

After basic training he went home on leave and then left in March of 1939 and did not return home until March of 1944.

Clarence was assigned to the USS Maryland (BB46) in Bremerton, Washington, in May 1939. The Maryland was known as “Old Mary” or “Fighting Mary” to her shipmates. The Maryland carried three scout planes that were used for



USS Maryland passing under the Golden Gate Bridge

reconnaissance. Generally just one pilot was in the plane but there was a second seat for another person, who might take pictures or film. Two catapults (one on turret three and the other one on the fantail) were used for takeoffs. The catapult area was about 50 feet long...the pilot would rev up the engine and then was catapulted off the side of the ship into the wind. The plane would dip down a little before attaining flight speed.

When the planes landed on the water they were retrieved by a sea sled. The sled was pulled up close to the ship to the crane and then the plane was hoisted back up to the catapult. The crane could be folded down when it was not in use.

The keel of the USS Maryland was laid down in 1917 and she was commissioned in 1921...the newest battleship in the fleet until the South Dakota was built.

The Maryland had eight 16-inch guns. The 16-inch shells weighed about one ton and had 45 pounds of TNT in them to explode the shrapnel.



To give the reader an idea how the retrieval process worked on the USS Maryland, this picture was taken on the USS Missouri while retrieving one of their sea planes.

The Maryland was the mainstay of fleet readiness with many training operations and conducting numerous patrols along the West Coast. Then they received orders to head to Hawaii.

They left Bremerton, Washington, and stopped in San Francisco, California, to watch the 1939 World’s Fair. After several days they were on their way to Long Beach and San Pedro Harbor.

Prior to this, for entertainment, Clarence and other crew members of the Maryland played a lot of baseball; even playing local teams up and down the west coast. Clarence noted that with 1400 men on board, they had players for all kinds of sports competition.

“I was initially assigned to the 4th Division, and then later transferred to the 6B Division in 1940”

Clarence Pfundheller continued November 7