

In March of 1944, Clarence received his first leave home in five years and was able to go back to Greenfield for 30 days. While in the Greenfield cafe he met a waitress, Leatha Estell, who he would eventually marry.

He had received delayed orders and then went on to San Diego where he was assigned to the LCI (Landing Craft Infantry). An LCI ship had two engines and was around 100 feet long with a complement of 65 men. The Lieutenant Commander asked Clarence if he wanted to join him and eventually be assigned to a newly built LCS (Landing Craft Support) ship. So they left San Diego and headed to Solomons, Maryland, where they continued their training.

After this training period Clarence was assigned to the LST 120. The 120 and the other LCS ships were built in Bainbridge, Maryland.

From Bainbridge, the 120 and seven other LCS ships traveled to Newport, Virginia, down to Key West, Florida, and through the Panama Canal. Clarence recalls that four of their ships went through each lock at one time. Smaller ships would guide the LCS ships into the locks. Clarence steered the LST 120 for over 30 hours during this trip.

From there they sailed out into the Pacific Ocean where they crossed the equator. There was a small initiation of “polly-wogs” at this time and then they headed up north to San Diego. From San Diego, they headed to Pearl Harbor, with the other LCS ships.

From Pearl they headed to Okinawa where they assisted with the installation of radar on the island and began training in August for the Invasion of Japan.

One time Clarence was ordered to retract the anchor when a groundswell hit the ship which pushed it, and then the anchor caught on the sea floor again and was torn from the one-inch steel cable. When Clarence was asked how long it would take to fix the line and attach a new anchor, he said about 30 minutes. Clarence was instructed to talk to another shipmate on how to shorten up the repair time. Losing anchors was a problem from time to time with other shipmates too, so a spare anchor was always kept on board.

Clarence recalls that the cable on the wench was around 150 fathoms which is 900 feet. This cable could also be used to tow ships.

### Invasion of Japan

Code named “Operation Downfall,” the invasion was to begin in November on the southern tip of the mainland of Japan. The first stage named “Operation Olympic” would begin in November 1945 and the second stage named “Operation Coronet” was to begin during the spring of 1946.

*“We was training first for landing in the southern part of the main island of Japan, which they estimated it would have been half a million Americans and a million and a half Japanese killed. That was supposed to be the first landing, and then the next one we was going to go right on to Tokyo.”*

Fortunately for Clarence and the hundreds of thousands of other Americans who would have fought and many would have died during this invasion, Hirohito surrendered after the US dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

After the Japanese surrender, Clarence returned to San Diego on a troop ship and then to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center where he was discharged in October 5, 1945, with a final rank of Chief Boatswain Mate.

From Great Lakes he rode home on a streamliner passenger train to Des Moines and then rode a bus back home to Greenfield. While at Great Lakes, Clarence was asked if he wanted to join the Navy Reserves, but he declined. *“I’d been regular Navy and I was going to be a regular civilian, or else I would have been in the Korean War too.”*

Clarence started at \$21 a month, and went to 36, then to 48, then 60, then 72, then 84, and finally \$96 a month when he was discharged.

Clarence feels that having a positive attitude helped him survive the war. He signed up and *“when you agree to do something you just do it, otherwise you go crazy.”*

*“My doctors tell me the reason why I’m still alive is because of having a good attitude and taking one day at a time.”*



2014 Atomic Bomb Dome “Genbaku Dōmu” which partially survived the bomb in Hiroshima in 1941

In 2011, Clarence attended the 70th anniversary event at Pearl Harbor for three days and then went to Okinawa where he spent three more days, and lastly three days at Hiroshima where he visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial site.

Clarence recalls one of the Hiroshima survivors who spoke, and kept repeating “that terrible Truman bomb.”

Clarence was with a group of five other US Veterans who each had an interpreter.

Clarence could see how the Japanese speaker was being affected during the event.

Then Clarence thought to himself that the atomic bombs didn’t have to be dropped if Hirohito would have surrendered after the US bombing of Tokyo in March of 1945 where the Japanese civilian death toll was estimated at 100,000 and 50,000 wounded.

Clarence reflected - *“we hated that the atomic bombs had to be dropped but were very glad we didn’t have to continue with the Invasion of Japan.”*

### Back home

Clarence married Leatha Estell on May 14, 1944, in Greenfield by a preacher at her parent’s home. Leatha had a daughter, Judy Rhine, who Clarence adopted and then they were blessed with two daughters, Gloria Mosser and Linda Weston.



Back: Linda, Judith, Gloria; Front Clarence



Clarence & Leatha

The town baseball teams were well-known in the area and Clarence enjoyed participating in the games. In the fall of 1946 the Bridgewater town team booked a game with Dexter. The coach was Fern Gipple, and the players on the team were Saunders as pitcher, Clarence Pfundheller, Don McMorran, Leon Buckner, Harvey Gipple, Bob Shatava, Paris Sullivan, Lloyd Bayman, Howard Vorrath, Ralph Vorrath, Jack Pote, Don Brawdy and Glenn Raasch.

From October 1945 until May 1951, Clarence first worked for the county where he repaired road graders and hauled fuel to the road crews in winter.

From May 1951 until January 1954 he worked at a hardware store in Greenfield.

After that he spent ten years in Kent, Iowa, where he owned and operated a grocery store called LNC Grocery. Clarence was a member of the Kent Fire Department.

In 1964 Clarence went to work in Audubon as a district salesman for Gooch’s Best Feed that covered six counties. It was during this time that Clarence became acquainted with Bud McMahon and Bud & Thelma Mohr of Manning, who were also in the Gooch’s feed business. Bud Mohr was a survivor of the D-Day Invasion during WWII.



Wade “Bud” Mohr

As an interesting side-note: during the years Clarence and Bud knew each other through the feed business, they never once spoke about their WWII experiences to each other. Bud started telling his story in the early 1990s and Clarence in the early 1980s.

In August 1973, Clarence was employed as a custodian at Benson West School in Omaha and he retired in October 1983. Then he returned to Greenfield to live.

Clarence’s wife, Leatha, passed away in 1992. Clarence’s brother passed away and then he married his brother’s wife, Mabel Jensen, in 1993.

### Reunions and preserving Clarence’s history

Clarence has 26 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren to help carry on his wonderful and historically important story.

*Below: the USS Maryland reunion in 2004 in Boston*



Clarence & Mabel

In 2014, Clarence moved back to Audubon to live in the Friendship Villages apartments. He enjoys life every day, including sharing his memories with anyone who will listen.

*“Nobody ever asked me and I never told anyone about my experiences at Pearl Harbor, not even my parents, wife, or kids.” “The first time I got thanked for being a veteran was after 9/11/2001.”*

In 1981, Clarence asked the school principal Miss Clark at Benson West in Omaha if she could order a tape and some slides he saw in a school magazine about the attack on Pearl Harbor. When the Pearl Harbor items came in, Clarence asked the principal what he owed and she said nothing...Then she asked Clarence if he would tell his story to the sixth grade students...He did and this was the first time Clarence ever talked about his WWII experiences.

After that first experience in the classroom, Clarence has traveled around Iowa and spoken at dozens of events.



Clarence speaking near the Greenfield opera house - wearing his Navy uniform. Larry Riley (Greenfield Legion commander) on the right.

### Freedom Rock near Greenfield

*“I got a call from the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association not long ago telling me I was the only one left in Iowa, but I did know of a gentleman living down by Corning who was a Pearl Harbor survivor. He just never joined the association or talked about that day. I lost contact with him and I don’t know if he is still living”*



Ray “Bubba” Sorensen and Clarence first became acquainted several years ago while Clarence was volunteering at the Iowa Aviation Museum in Greenfield. At that time, Clarence commissioned Bubba to paint a couple of Pearl Harbor murals for the museum.

For the past 18 years “Bubba” has been painting patriotic scenes and images of appreciation to police and fire services and honoring other prominent historical imagery of the US on a 60-ton boulder just south of the Greenfield exit. Early in 2016, Bubba had planned to feature a depiction of the USS Pillsbury and their capture of a German submarine during World War II. Sometime thereafter when Bubba and Clarence were visiting, Clarence reminded Bubba that 2016 would be the 75th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack. So Bubba changed the theme and decided to feature Clarence on the south side of the Freedom Rock as a shout out to the few remaining survivors of that day of infamy.

**The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor - A date which will live in infamy - we must never forget!**