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## Wayne Davison

JOHN VAN NOSTRAND - BH MEDIA NEWS SERVICE

CLARINDA – Iowa to France is about 4,400 miles, which probably feels a lot farther knowing your son is in the trenches, literally and figuratively, in World War II.

But what Wayne Davison did for his mother may have made that distance feel closer:

He wrote home as much as he could.

And his mother, Irene, appears to have kept every letter, which number in the dozens over a two-year timeframe. The letters are in excellent condition and in protective, plastic sleeves. The pages were not discovered until after Irene's death in 1990.

"It was something to do to pass the time," Davison, 92, said about the writings from his apartment at Eiler Place in Clarinda. "And I was probably a bit homesick."

"And he still had his dog at home," Wayne's wife, Robbie, interrupted with a chuckle. "He was afraid she wouldn't feed him."

The two have been married for 72 years. Robbie lived with Wayne for some of his military service before being sent overseas.

Born and raised on the family farm east of Braddyville, Wayne was drafted in the Army in 1943.

"I expected it," he said.

He wasn't alone after he was shipped off to boot camp in California. His younger brother, Leo, who was also drafted, ended up at the same camp, but they were drafted at different times.

Ben, the youngest, was still at home.

"I wrote a letter about every day," Wayne said about his boot camp experience.

The letters had a feel of a diary entry as he told Irene and his father, Wilber, about his daily activities. What was served for meals was another detail in the letters. Letters varied in length, as some are written on front and back of four pieces of paper. The sizes of paper used varied too.

But the letters were not all about marching and doughnuts. While on training along the beach, a rain fell, and Wayne's exposure to the elements eventually created a nasty ear infection that wouldn't go away.

Davison was in the infirmary for 28 days. The rest of his unit was shipped off to the South Pacific while he was still in treatment.

He still kept writing as many of the letters are addressed to his parents and Ben. He would ask about the things at home as he explained how well he slept and the status of his health.

Wayne's health greatly improved and was in condition to be sent overseas. But he didn't join his unit on a tropical, South Pacific island. He was sent to Europe in December 1944, six months after the famous D-Day invasion when the Allies, including the Americans, arrived on Omaha Beach in France to take over the German-occupied country.

Wayne was in Europe during historic moments in war and Clarinda history. December 1944 was also when the Battle of the

Bulge started, when the Germans went on the offensive in Belgium and France. Clarinda native and famous Big Band director Glenn Miller died in a plane crash in the English Channel days before the battle started.

It's also cold in France in December.

"We lit a fire in a barrel to stay warm," he said. "Then we heard planes fly over."

Those planes were the enemy. The light from the flames gave the enemy pilots and gunners a target. Bombs started dropping throughout the area.

It was easy what commanding officers quickly told Wayne and the others.

"Put the (expletive) fire out," Robbie said.

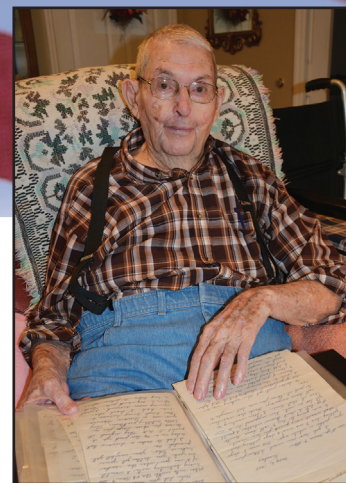
Wayne was first assigned to heavy-artillery duty. He would prepare howitzers – cannons that could be towed from place to place behind a truck. It's speculated the repetitive booms from the cannons permanently damaged his hearing. If it wasn't the howitzer's noises, it was the German bombs nicknamed "Screamin' Mimis."

Wayne also went 100 days without a bath.

But the letters continued.

The folder still includes some of the envelopes Wayne used with the simple address "Irene Davison, Braddyville, Iowa." No house address. No zip code. Soldiers didn't have to pay for a stamp for a letter home. Some letters are written on stationary from certain camps.

Wayne also drove transport



Wayne Davison

trucks of troops and supplies while in Europe.

"Because I don't think the East Coast boys knew how to drive," Robbie said with a smile.

The details in the letter were disturbing at times. Wayne remembers watching a German boy's life fade away after stepping on a landmine in a pasture of sheep. During troop movements at night, flashlights were necessary to avoid tripping over the bodies of dead soldiers in the field. Wayne was on the Rhine River in Germany when he learned of the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in April 1945.

After the war ended, Wayne's service time continued for a few months, and Leo, who'd served as a bridge engineer, beat him home.

When discharged, Wayne returned to Braddyville and continued to farm and drive a truck. Wayne and Robbie had two children, Dennis and Scott.

Irene died Aug. 9, 1990 at the age of 85. Family members were sorting through her possessions and came across all the letters. No one knows why they were a secret. The letters have been kept with other family history items and pictures.

"It was just life," Robbie said about the letters.

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