



Worth the Sacrifice

World War II veteran, Lester Schafer, Buffalo Lake, Minn., was proud to serve and is honored to remember.

by *Christy Couch Lee*

It has been nearly a lifetime ago. But the memories are just as vivid for this 93-year-old as they were when he was a young man of 19 stepping off a ship and onto German soil in his U.S. Army uniform.

Lester Schafer, Buffalo Lake, Minn., helped to rebuild the war-torn German landscape in the months following World War II battles, with the U.S. Army of Occupation. He may not have seen combat during his service, but his eyes were most definitely opened to the effects of war.

“We served and put our time in,” he says. “The biggest share I served with hadn’t seen combat. But we saw the results of it.”

Now, 75 years later, Lester still proudly dons his U.S. Army uniform to participate in services honoring American veterans and says it is important we all never forget.

Journey to Germany

Lester was raised on his family’s Hereford operation south of Buffalo Lake, and he graduated high school in 1944. He worked on the farm until November 1945, when he was drafted into the U.S. Army. World War II had ended two months prior; however, military help was still needed.

He completed basic training in Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo. and spent a bit of time in California. He was then shipped by railcar to Camp Kilmer, a U.S. Army camp located in New Jersey.

“From there, we boarded a Victory ship and set sail, passing the White Cliffs of Dover and docking in Bremerhaven, Germany,” Lester says.

From Bremerhaven, he traveled across the country to Altlussheim, which is located on the Rhine River. There, he was stationed about 10 days before being moved to Stuttgart in 1946, where he was assigned to the job of dispatcher in the motor pool.

“They learned I knew how to type, so that’s how I got the job,” he recalls.

Living in a former German barracks, he worked in this city that was greatly damaged from the war.

“We sent out a lot of trucks and repair crews, as it was our job to rebuild many bridges and much infrastructure destroyed during the war in Germany,” Lester says. “Stuttgart was nearly



Lester dons his U.S. Army uniform each Memorial Day with the American Legion to honor those who served. His great grandson, Miles Schroeder, learned the importance of honoring veterans.

in complete shambles after the war. The streets were bulldozed, as bricks from demolished buildings had to be pushed to the side in order to travel the streets.”

Lester returned to the U.S. in January 1947 and was discharged the following month. Thanks to the G.I. Bill, he earned a degree in animal husbandry from the University of Minnesota in 1951.

“That was well worth the time spent,” Lester says.

The impact of war

At the young age of 19, Lester found his eyes opened to the true sufferings and effects of war.

First, he says, is the effect on the population of war-torn countries. Very few younger German men were in the areas where Lester was stationed — a result of loss during the war and the devastation to the population. This lack of men left many young German women alone. As a result, many U.S. servicemen fell in love with these German women and returned to the U.S. to marry.

Additionally, Lester noted the effect the war and the loss of German men had on children in Germany.

“When it was lunch time or meal time for the servicemen, the German children would congregate,” Lester recalls. “It didn’t take us long to figure out they were hungry. So, as we were going through to fill our plates at meal time, we would always add more than we could eat and would give it to the German children.”

They also helped to feed local families in other ways. As servicemen, the U.S. troops were able to obtain German hunting permits.

“I was fortunate to be able to shoot a deer and a wild boar,” Lester says. “Other troops were also with me, and we donated those animals to the German people who very much appreciated the food.”

Proud to serve

Up until this year, due to COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings, Lester has proudly worn his U.S. Army uniform and participated in local Memorial Day services with the American Legion.

“Until recently, I also marched in the parade and have participated in the 21-gun salute,” Lester says. “But the M1 Garand rifle is getting pretty heavy these days.”

Lester believes it is important to remember the service of our military members — those who have seen battle deal with the effects for a lifetime.

“Most servicemen who saw active combat aren’t willing to sit down and talk about it,” he says. “Even when I was in Germany, I served with several servicemen who had served during the war and fought. They wouldn’t talk about it — even to us.

“The conditions were such that they dealt with dying and wounded,” he continues. “I think with

Hereford for a lifetime

Once Lester Schafer returned home from Germany, he went back to his first love: raising Hereford cattle.

His registered Hereford herd was originally started by his grandparents in 1917. Through the years, Lester has been a leader in utilizing the Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) program.

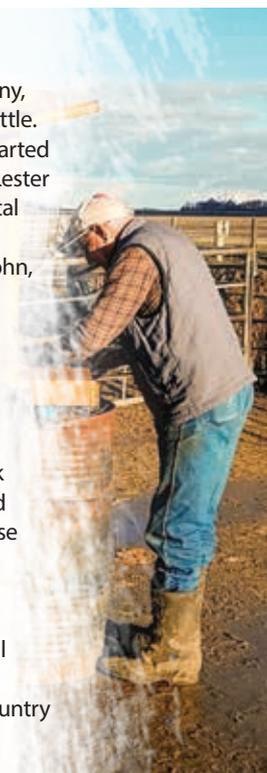
Today, he, his wife, Kathleen; and their son, John, manage the operation.

“John does most of the planning these days. With my age as it is, I do as little as I can,” Lester says with a laugh.

However, his dedication to the Hereford industry has not gone unnoticed.

Lester was named to the Minnesota Livestock Hall of Fame in 1996 and the Minnesota Hereford Breeders Hall of Fame in 2000. In addition to these honors, in 2017 he was named to the American Hereford Association Hall of Fame and was recognized as an AHA Century Breeder.

Lester is an excellent example of an individual with valor and integrity. As Lester reminds us to never forget, may we honor his service to our country and his dedication to the Hereford breed. **HW**



some of them, talking about it would bring back memories they wouldn’t want to have. It makes a person wonder how any human can do the things the Nazis did.”

Lester says the effects still remain with him today, as well. For example, pictures taken in concentration camps are more than he can handle.

“There are pictures of human bodies stacked up like wood,” he says. “The inhumanity of some former Nazi leaders is hard to comprehend.”

It is important for the youth of today to understand history, so it will not be repeated in the future, Lester says.

“Not all youth understand what our country stands for now,” he says. “Our history hasn’t always been as it should have been. And things haven’t always been as good as they should have been. They probably still aren’t.

“The biggest problem in the world is greed,” he continues. “Most wars are started by people being greedy. This goes back to the days of the Bible. Most incidents that took place were begun by greed.”

Regardless of the lingering effects some 75 years later, Lester is proud to have served his country, and his service has benefited his life in many ways.

“We complained a little about having to be away from home,” he says. “But when all was said and done, it was an interesting learning experience. I don’t regret at all having served and done what the Army asked me to do.” **HW**