

*The following was written by Art Larson from Sandstone, Minnesota in the year 2000. Art was 87 years old when he wrote this story. John Larson, a nephew to Art, has given Pine County Genealogical Society permission to publish it on our web site.*

*Art Larson passed away on July 21, 2007. His obituary is at the end of his story.*

Written by: Art Larson in the year 2000 at the age of 87

I was born at Sandstone, Minnesota, on November 20, 1912. I was the fourth son and fifth child born to Adolph S. Larson and (Gunvor) Helene Halvorson. I was preceded in birth by three brothers, Arnold, Edward, and Adolph, Jr. and one sister, Helen. Three more sisters followed.

It was the year the British ship Titanic sank in the Atlantic Ocean on her maiden voyage with the loss of over 1500 lives. It was the year my father was first elected to the Minnesota State Legislature from Pine County as State Representative. It was the year when our family moved from Park Ave. to our new home on Court Ave. when I was one month old. It was also the year, as were the ensuing years 1913-14, when war was brewing in Europe between England, France and other allies against Imperial Germany.

I was five and six years old when World War 1 broke out. I recall that I marched around the neighborhood as the youngest in the formation with brother Edward as the commander in our little troop. Patriotism was running high. I also recall when my Uncles Art and Harry Halvorson (Mother's brothers) returned from France after serving in the U. S. Army. I remember going over to the Halvorson home and they put parts of their uniforms on me and I was real proud.

The growing up years were real happy years. We lived in a wonderful house. It was ideal for our family as it was close to our school, close to the stores and large enough for our growing family to be very comfortable.

I enjoyed the years of growing up swimming and fishing in the Kettle River and hiking all over. Getting out to Grindstone Lake once a year for our Sunday school picnic was great. The years spent on the Kettle River were happy years. I recall one time we got out to Bear Creek east of town and collected minnows for fishing. The next day the three of us, Edward, Ade and I caught 55 crappies in the river and fed the whole neighborhood with fish.

The years went on and school, and school activities became more important. Sister Helen graduated in 1927 as valedictorian of the class of 59 seniors. Ade graduated in 1928, Edward in 1925, Arnold in 1923. I graduated in 1930. Arnold played some basketball but was thwarted in his senior year by a broken arm he got cranking an old car of Dad's

so he was out. Edward was a great athlete and played two years regular on the high school team besides being a top pitcher in baseball and later on the city team in the Pine County League. After high school I also played on the city team in the league as shortstop along with Edward. I had my share of basketball also - playing on the high school team and as a shortstop on the city baseball team. They were great sport years. Transportation was minimum so people loved their hometown sports.

The years of the Depression slowed everything a bit but people made do and lived.

Two weeks after graduating from Sandstone High School I was cracked I up in a car accident. I was bed-ridden at home most of the summer. Joe Markley, a Minneapolis Central coach and alumnus of Carleton College came to see me two times offering me a scholarship to go to Carleton College. It was really an athletic scholarship to play baseball and basketball, but I was unable to accept it due to my physical condition. I recovered enough to enter Sandstone teachers' training up to department where we had eight as an enrollment. After finishing that one year I taught country school east of Hinckley for one year at \$80 per month. What a year! 39 pupils and all subjects and all grades from the 1st to the 8th. Wanted me back but could only pay \$70 a month. I had saved a bit of money so I decided to go to St. Cloud Teacher's College. Tuition was \$43 a year and I got by for about \$400 all year. After graduating I landed a job at \$50 a month up at Kerrick - the upper grades and principal. What a year! I organized a town basketball team and we played a lot of Civilian Conservation (Depression employment) teams. I taught there another year with a 25% raise, \$62.50 a month. That's how things were in those days.

Then I got a teaching job up at Marble (Coleraine District) at a salary of \$95 a month. Big money considering the Depression was very much with us. I spent 3 happy years on the iron range. I even bought a 1933 Plymouth coupe car. Played lots of basketball with the Marble town team all over the range.

Then happy days. I landed a guard job at the federal prison in Sandstone for \$150 a month. Worked 1 1/2 years there and then came the federal draft for the army as things in Europe weren't too rosy for the world. I was drafted into the army in March 1941. I was in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and had almost served my year when Pearl Harbor happened. I came home from army service in November and then with Pearl Harbor I was due to go back.

I had been dating Moreita Dodge for over a year while in the peace time army. We decided to get married before I went back. On January 17, 1942, we became husband and wife at a nice ceremony at Moreita's home in Moose Lake. Best day of my life and the best thing I ever did. We've been devoted for 56 years now.

Within a week I was called back to my old army unit - the 8th Field Artillery Observation Battalion - joined them at Hattiesburg, Mississippi. So it was for the duration of the war. My rank was a tech Sgt. Then it was to Camp Gruber, North Carolina - then to Camp Blanding in Florida - back to Oklahoma in August 1943.

Moreita joined me at various camps where I was in training. We had a small apartment near the camps and enjoyed our years before I went overseas.

In January 1944 I went to Scotland and England to await the Normandy Invasion in June of 1944. It was mostly hard training for the invasion in Normandy, but I did get to visit London for three days. I enjoyed London and saw the mounting of the guard at Buckingham Palace which was interesting but "plain" as the war was on. I visited various places such as London Bridge, houses of Parliament, Picadilly Circus and other places in London. Everything was a bit austere as the war was on. London as a whole impressed me very much as it would any "country boy." My leave was only for 3 days so I was soon back at our camp after an interesting trip.

Our battalion was quartered in tents (5 to 6 in one tent). We experienced several air raids from the "Luftwaffe" (Germans) and we piled out in slit trenches near our tents several times at night for protection. Fortunately they didn't hit us but areas around suffered real damage.

In June came the big Normandy invasion. We waited in the harbor of Southampton all night before hitting the beaches of Normandy. The apprehension of waiting to merge into real combat was something hard to explain. It was a somber trip across the English channel but we unloaded onto the beaches amid scattered gunfire and artillery as the infantry had preceded us on the beaches. The best defense was small shovels we all carried to "dig in."

I won't go into detail about the two months following. We lost men, were pounded at night by German planes, and lived in fear. Then in the middle of July we "went over" St. Lo which broke the German resistance. Our outfit survived somehow. I remember we came to a river(?) and the order was to break ranks and get washed up. It was quite a scene for the next half-hour as we hadn't had our clothes off for about 2 months. Water felt good and lots of underwear and clothes (uniforms) were tossed aside for cleaner clothes from our packs.

My brother Ade was a 1st Lieutenant in the signal corp. We got together a couple of times in England before the invasion and then after St. Lo he took a chance coming down to see me. It was a very brief get-together as I was anxious for him to get back as things

were very dangerous. I heard from him months later that some 45 vehicles (weapon carriers and jeeps) were knocked out by enemy warfare on his way back. He was fortunate to get back when he did. I certainly appreciated his visit to see his little brother under these circumstances. After St. Lo our battalion then headed north toward Belgium with less resistance. We went into Belgium and then Holland and into Germany at Aachen which was rough going. We just missed the Malmedy Massacre as the outfit lost 143 out of 149 committed. The three survivors joined our outfit the next morning after playing dead when the Germans massacred the 143. The outfit had been with us the day before the advance. We went our way and they went to the right so we were fortunate. I knew a lot of the fellows who were in the massacre as they cadred into the 285<sup>th</sup> when we were in the states. I don't want to go into more details of our advance toward northern Germany. We ended the war about 25 miles from Berlin. We met the Russians near there who had the option to go into Berlin. Very uncouth group the Russians and the day the war ended we were ordered to back-track into occupation into southern Germany. We settled into old German barracks at a town called Butzback. We had hastily gathered our gear to pull out as mixing with the Russians troops had its problems.

From the Normandy beaches to the edge of Berlin - five separate campaigns and 330 consecutively in combat was enough. Our battalion was cited by the XIX Corps and by General Bradley of the US 1st Army as outstanding in combat through all five European campaigns and for 330 days of consecutive combat.

Many incidents of that period June 6, 1944 to May 8, 1945 come to mind but I'd rather not dwell on it. I lost good friends as others did but I survived the fox-holes, the hedgerows, etc. etc. - and my prayers to survive were answered. The good Lord took many friends but he spared me. I recall so many incidents - too numerous to mention. It seems strange when we have our battalion reunions these days - and we've had a few - that no one mentions our days 'on the line' as we all want to forget the horror and just want to visit.

Our days of occupation in Germany lasted until October when ships were available to transport the bulk of the troops home. I can't forget to mention my trip or leave of 10 days to the French Riviera while in occupation in Germany. Two others of my battalion and I were given this leave after the war. We visited Nice and the Alps Mts. while there. To say that it was a wonderful experience is putting it mildly. We took a bus trip into the Alps and touched Switzerland and Italy on the tour. A beautiful trip with no sign of war. We went back to England on small boats to await transportation for the trip home. All ports, France, Belgium, etc. were still heavily mined so the transports were kept out.

Spent another 2 weeks in England waiting for transportation back home. The day arrived for our trip back home on the British liner the Elizabeth. Four days or less we were back

in the good ol' USA. A little different trip from the one going over which took 13 days as we were escorted by mine sweepers and (navy submarines) and gunboats. Within a couple of days we were on our way to home. Landing in New York was the greatest after almost 2 years. Remember our first chow (meal) after landing. We got all the milk to drink we wanted and everyone drank at least a quart, as we hadn't had fresh milk in all the time overseas.

A few days after arriving in Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, I was discharged and I met my wonderful Moreita at Minneapolis. Dad had reserved a room for us at the St. Francis Hotel in St. Paul and the next morning up we came to Sandstone on the morning train. How wonderful to see everyone. To the best mother and dad in the world. My brothers and sisters! I was happy.

The many months and years I was away my thoughts were always with Moreita, my wonderful wife. Her letters and prayers kept me going. I still have her wonderful letters stashed away for safe-keeping. Letters from Dad and Mother were so wonderful. I still treasure them in my trunk. Dad sent me a pound of Home Brand coffee which I received in Belgium, I believe. This I shared with my buddies in a basement there. My thoughts were ever of Moreita and my parents and my brothers and sisters who also wrote me regularly. These things keep one going through many dark moments. The good Lord brought me home for which I am so thankful. I still have the small Bible which I kept in my possession all the way through.

Getting back into civilian life after almost 5 years in the military felt real refreshing. Missed the comradeship but the real life was to follow. Back with Moreita and my father and mother and the others was wonderful. My brother Ade came back a month or two later and we had much to share with our experiences.

The years that have happened since were happy. Clayton was born in 1949 and Mary (daughter) in 1951. How wonderful. They flew the flag at the high school on Feb. 12 when Clayton was born and some old-timer asked my dad why the flag was flying. Without a pause Dad said that Art had a baby son born today without acknowledging that it was Abe Lincoln's birthday. The old-timer nodded and said that was fine.

Dad passed away in 1953 and Mother in 1968 (15 years apart). No family could have had better parents.

Dad served in the State Legislature for 22 years. Six years as State Representative and 16 years as State Senator from Pine and Chisago Counties. 1912-1934 continuously. Dad

operated the Larson Funeral Home. The good Lord brought me home for which I am so thankful. I still have the small Bible which I kept in my possession all the way through.

Mother was a real mother to us all and loved by everyone. Raising a large family and doing her best for everyone. All four sons and four daughters graduated from Sandstone High School.

We all loved them very much. We had a happy family those years. Taking over the Larson Funeral Home after Dad's passing was my duty as I attended the University and got my funeral director's license in 1951. I tried to carry on the best I could to fill Dad's capable shoes.

Busy years followed. I served the four years from 1947-51 as mayor of Sandstone. We paved 42 blocks, renovated the city golf course and tried to keep Sandstone as the progressive city. I then served 9 years on the Sandstone School Board from 1954-1963. I also tried to be active in the Masonic Lodge - joining in 1946 and at present a 55 year member. I was also active in the Sandstone Chamber of Commerce. During that time we had the Pine County Hospital build and other improvements in the city.

I enjoy being a long time member of the Sandstone Vasa Lodge.

The years go on - am now in the 87 year and am thankful to the good Lord for his guidance and good health. Have much to be thankful for as we all should be. Many of our family have gone to a better world but we should all cherish our wonderful good memories as well as our sorrows. To have lived this long and have cherished memories, wonderful parents, brothers and sisters, loving wife and son and daughter - one can be grateful - real grateful to our heavenly Father whom we hope to meet in the world to come.

*Arthur Harold Larson's obituary*

Published in the Pine County Courier, Sandstone, MN page 5, July 26, 2007

Arthur Harold Larson was born in Sandstone, Minnesota on November 20, 1912, the youngest son of Adolph and Helena Larson. He died July 21, 2007 at the Grandview Christian Home in Cambridge, MN.

He graduated from Sandstone High School in 1930 and St. Cloud Teachers College in 1933. He taught school for six years in Kerrick and Marble, Minnesota. He was employed at the Federal Correctional Institution in Sandstone for one and a half years before being drafted in the U.S. Army in March 1941. He served in the military until November 1945. He served two years in the European Theater of participating in five major campaigns from the landing on Normandy Beach to the Elbe River in Germany. He received five battle stars.

Upon discharge he returned to Sandstone and assisted his father in the Larson Funeral Home before graduating from the University of Minnesota Funeral Direction course in 1951. Upon the death of his father in 1953 he operated the Larson Funeral Home in Sandstone until 1977 when he semi-retired.

He was active in the Sandstone community serving as Mayor from 1947-1951. He was a member of the Sandstone school board and past president of the Chamber of Commerce. A life long member of the Sandstone United Church of Christ, he served as both a member of the church board and a deacon. He was a past Master of the Sandstone Masonic Lodge which awarded him the Hiram Award in 1992. He was a member of the VASA Lodge, the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

He is preceded in death by brothers, Arnold, Adolph, and Edward, and sisters Catherine, Dorothy, and Betty. He is survived by his loving wife of 65 years, Moreita, his son Clayton (Anita), daughter Mary Brodehl (Terry), and three granddaughters, Emily, Anne and Clare. He is also survived by two sisters, Hortence Shober of Edina and Helen Larson of Dallas, Texas.

Funeral services for Arthur H. Larson were held Wednesday, July 25, 2007 at the United Church of Christ in Sandstone with Rev. Laurie Kantonen officiating. Interment at Spring Park Cemetery in Sandstone with military honors accorded by the Sandstone American Legion #151. Arrangements by Methven Funeral Home, Sandstone, MN.

