



Kenneth H. Earhart

September 10, 1911 - November 25, 2008

Kenneth H. Earhart, born September 10, 1911, in Mason City, to Harrison B. and Zoe (McElheny) Earhart, passed away at 4:52 p.m. on Tuesday, November 25, 2008 at Mason District Hospital in Havana. He was preceded in death by his wife Mary of 77 years, a brother and sister in their youth, Andrew and Glen Dora, and Helen Becker and Ruth Elliott. He attended school in Mason County and also briefly in Ohio.

He married Mary Haack in 1930. They have three children, Rosemary (Richard) Watson of Pekin, Sylvia (Vernon) Heye of Bath and Byron (Virginia Donaho) Earhart of San Diego.

Shortly after his marriage, while managing an A & P meat market, Kenneth and his wife won a trip to the New York World's Fair in 1938. In 1940 they opened Havana Food Locker at 115 North Orange, pioneering the frozen food industry in Mason County. Like anyone starting a new business, they were struggling to make a go of their new venture, persuading farmers and city folk that they could actually freeze meat and vegetables and fruit, store them in the locker, and later thaw them out and eat them. During the war, when food was rationed and scarce, the Havana Locker Plant helped both farmers and city folk to eat and live much better. The produce from many Victory Gardens was preserved and stored in the locker.

In 1941, when war broke out, Kenneth was thirty-one years old, had three children, and a new business that was vital to the local economy, so he would not have been drafted. But, he felt it was his duty to serve his country, so he enlisted in the U.S. Navy, leaving his wife to manage the Locker Plant. People remember Rosie the Riveter, the poster girl who helped build ships and airplanes, but Mary, like so many other unsung heroines of the war, helped hold together homes and families – and businesses – while their men were off to war. During the war, housing was hard to find, with the building of Camp Ellis in Fulton County. The Earhart family home was rented to the family of an officer who trained recruits at Camp Ellis. For the duration of the war, Mary and the three children lived with Mary's elderly parents, who also played their part helping out at the Locker Plant and taking care of their grandchildren.

Kenneth received his basic training at Great Lakes, before being stationed at Bremerton in the state of Washington. With his background and experience handling food, he was assigned to the commissary. He narrowly escaped being killed at the beginning of the war, when he received orders to go out on the aircraft carrier Franklin. He was packed and ready to board, but at the last minute his orders were changed. Shortly thereafter, the Franklin was hit with a bomb that penetrated the deck and killed everyone in the commissary where Kenneth would have been.

He shipped out to Bremerton on the battleship USS Missouri and was in charge of a large galley, serving 3500 men on the ship. He tells his family and friends that when he shipped out of Bremerton for the Western Pacific and the warfront, he never expected to come back alive. The Missouri was one of the ships that was hit by Japanese kamikaze planes, but fortunately, the Missouri was not as badly damaged as other ships, and after repairs, continued to operate in the Pacific. Kenneth served on the Missouri until the end of the war, and was stationed on the ship at the time of the signing of the Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay in 1945. He remembers the air thick with Japanese

planes and our own anti-aircraft fire just before surrender. Although a cook, at the time of surrender he and every other able-bodied man climbed down the rope ladders into smaller boats and landed on Yokohama. Two war souvenirs he brought home are a Japanese sword and a rifle.

After his discharge at Norfolk in 1945, he stayed in the Naval Reserves for a number of years. Immediately after the end of World War II, no one knew when servicemen would be called on again, but he was in Reserves and ready to go. He returned to Havana and the Locker Plane, and under the G.I. Bill, took flying lessons and opened the Havana Airport on Route 136. He retired from Caterpillar Tractor Co. in 1976 after fifteen years. He has been an active member of the American Legion, and marched in many Memorial Day parades. Until a few years ago, Kenneth and Mary sold poppies every Memorial Day. He was a member of the St. John's Lutheran Church at Matanzas.

In addition to their three children, he is survived by ten grandchildren, thirteen great-grandchildren and four great-great grandchildren.

Services will be held at St. John's Lutheran Church on Monday, December 1, 2008 at 11:00 a.m. with visitation one hour prior to the services. Burial will follow the services at Laurel Hill Cemetery in Havana. Rev. Brian Lesemann will officiate.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Havana Health Care Activity Fund, Mason District Hospital Foundation, Havana VFW or Legion Post or to the donor's choice.

Hurley Funeral Home in Havana is in charge of arrangements.

Tribute Wall



“ *Kenneth H. Earhart*

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