

## Rheinschmidt Recalls Time in Service

By Paul Nelles

On a Friday in the spring of 1944, 17 year old Gordon “Gabby” Rheinschmidt graduated from Mosinee High School. The following Monday, U.S. Navy recruit Rheinschmidt had reported to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station near Chicago. Less than one year later, he was aboard his ship and on his way to his first combat assignment, a small island in the Pacific Ocean of which he had never heard. It was called... Okinawa.



### Returns From Washington

Mosinee's Gabby Rheinschmidt was on last week's Never Forgotten Honor Flight to Washington D.C. Above, Gabby is shown upon his return to the Central Wisconsin Airport

67 years later, he still lives in Mosinee, and on Monday of this week, Gabby Rheinschmidt left on another expedition. This time however, it was to Washington D.C. with 82 of his brother and sister veterans as part of the 6<sup>th</sup> *Never Forgotten Honor Flight*. The Honor Flight transports central Wisconsin war veterans free of charge to our nation's capital to see the monuments that have been erected in their honor.

The vets took off from the Central Wisconsin Airport at 7:00 am bound for Washington's Dulles Airport. Their day included visits to the national war memorials including the World War II Memorial.

They returned to CWA around 10:15 pm that same day to fanfare that included fireworks, a band, numerous honor guards, and about 500 cheering family members and friends.

“I enlisted when I was a senior in high school.” Gabby said, “My mother wouldn't let me go until I graduated. After basic training we went to Solomons, Maryland for training on our ship. We picked up the ship in Boston and then went through the (Panama) canal into the Pacific. Okinawa was our first assignment.”

Gabby's ship was an LCS, or Landing Craft Support craft. “We would go into the beach just before the troops landed and strafe the beach with rockets and small guns. When we pulled out the soldiers and marines landed,” he said.

“There were tunnels all over the island. The Marines and the army had a lot of deaths and casualties because of all those tunnels. The Navy lost more at Okinawa than any other place in the war because of the Japanese suicide plane.”

“After the invasion our job was to patrol an area north of Okinawa and let the anchorage know when the Jap planes were coming. If they went into the anchorage that was all right, if they didn't and they picked on us, then we were in trouble. We did that for two months.”

“After the battle we went to the island of Saipan and we were getting ready for the invasion of Japan, which never happened because of the atomic bomb. I think the bomb saved an awful lot of lives. They (the Japanese) were desperate at that time. They were using the suicide planes, and suicide

speed boats. I think they were taught to die rather than surrender. There would have been thousands and thousands of men killed in the invasions.”

“After the war was over we went to the Japanese mainland and were part of the occupying force.”

“We never got discouraged or thought the battle wasn’t worth it. We were young, and it didn’t seem that anything would bother us too much. One thing we learned was to take orders.”

After the war he met and married Beverly. They have recently celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Their son Bill accompanied Gabby on the flight as a guardian.

Gabby said the most memorable parts of the trip were seeing the World War II Memorial, arriving home to the unexpected welcome, and Mail Call. Mail Call occurs on the plane on the trip back where each of the vets receives a

pack of about 15 letters written by area school children.

The next Honor Flight will happen in the spring of 2012. More information can be found at [www.neverforgottenhonorflight.com](http://www.neverforgottenhonorflight.com)

Author’s Note: There are some people in this world that are simply a pleasure to meet. Gabby Rheinschmidt is one of them.



Beverly, Gabby, and Bill Rheinschmidt the morning of the departure.