



PROVIDED

**SERENDIPITY:** Mitsuko Hoehne (center) reunited with Eugene Leinen (left) from Perham. They believe they first met in Okinawa in 1945, when Mitsuko was 9 or 10 years old and living in the forest. Hoehne, a U.S. soldier, had shared some of his rations with her and other children who were forced to live in caves after their homes were destroyed during the war.

## IT'S A SMALL WORLD

*FF resident from Okinawa reunites with veteran who fed her during WWII*

By Johanna Armstrong  
The Daily Journal

Mitsuko (Nohara) Hoehne was 9 or 10 years old when American soldiers burned her home in Tomori, Okinawa, in 1945. Her family, made up of her grandpa, grandma, mother and three sisters, had to move into a cave nearby, it was the first cave they could see their house on a hill. Tomori is a farming village in southeastern Okinawa and was the site of front-line fighting between the United States Marines and Army forces and the Imperial Japanese Army during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945.

Considered the bloodiest battle of the Pacific, the island saw 142,058 civilian casualties throughout the 82-day campaign. Starvation was rampant as the Japanese military confiscated food from civilians, and there was a strong Japanese propaganda movement convincing locals that American soldiers were barbarians who would kill them, feed them poisoned food and commit atrocities. Hoehne's husband, Gilbert, said, "The Japanese told them the Americans would poison them, don't trust them at all...." Mitsuko herself

SEE WWII B3

## Veterans Home celebrates America with annual parade

By Johanna Armstrong  
The Daily Journal

This Saturday, June 29 the Fergus Falls Veterans Home will be celebrating July 4 with their 12th annual Stars & Stripes Parade. The event starts with a performance by the Carlisle Band at 9:45 a.m. at the Veterans Home flagpoles followed by a Warbird fly-by by pilot Paul Brutlag at 10 a.m. Next is a kiddie parade organized by Misty Bjerken featuring children 10 and under wearing red, white and blue and patriotic costumes with decorated bikes, trikes, wagons and strollers.

Behind them is the Stars & Stripes parade itself, with 57-60 units including five color guards from VFW Post 612, American Legion Post 30, Underwood American Legion, Ashby American Legion and Dent Ameri-

can Legion, patriot guard and the Minnesota Veterans Home Honor Guard. The Fergus Falls High School marching band will also be making an appearance along with representatives from the Disabled American Veterans all the way from Bemidji.

This year, the parade is dedicated to World War II and World War II veterans, and the grand marshals are Les Goodman and Art Stortroen, veterans of World War II. They'll be in the parade riding in a prototype 1941 Jeep T-14.

Other special guests in the parade include patriotic volunteer Judy Gregor as Betsy Ross, Veterans Home staff member Tyler Hansen as Uncle Sam and Hazel Magdich as Rosie the Riveter. Magdich herself is a

SEE PARADE B2



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**COLOR GUARD:** The Underwood American Legion Color Guard will be participating in this year's Stars & Stripes Parade at the Veterans Home.

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## WWII: Healing the wounds of war

Continued from page B1

writes, “During the war, there was nothing for us. We ate one meal a day,” which was usually a little rice, soybean paste and greens, and if someone butchered a horse they would go around and sell some of the meat to their neighbors. At one point, while staying in a cave without a water source, Mitsuko’s mother had to get water from a ditch to cook their rice.

One memory Mitsuko shared with her husband was the loss of her best friend during the war. “She and her girlfriend were running, bombs were dropping and one was really close,” said Gilbert, “it knocked her one ear out, and she said she never saw her girlfriend again. I asked her, ‘Did you stop and look?’ and she said ‘She was gone.’”

Mitsuko’s family had to move away from that first cave to avoid more bombings, and they spent a month living in a tomb with the bones of their deceased family members, a fact that scared young Mitsuko. After about a month or two of staying in the tomb, they had to move again as the bombings intensified, and they went to a cave by the ocean. “In the cave,” she writes, “we had nothing, no pillows or blankets, we slept on rocks.”

At this cave, her grandfather left one night, likely to retrieve some rice they had buried in a trench by their house, and did not return. “We think he came upon American soldiers and fought, and was killed. We never found his body,” Hoehne writes. Her grandmother would also fall victim to the effects of the war, dying of malaria shortly after Japan’s surrender.

While living in the cave by the ocean (where they were no longer allowed to swim after finding a soldier’s body in the water), a young half-Japanese half-American boy came to tell them that the war was over and they could leave. Tomori, however, was devastated, and there was nowhere for them to go, so they followed American soldiers to a camp.

It’s at this point that Eugene Leinen believes he met Mitsuko. Leinen was an 18-year-old combat engineer in the Army and he remembers seeing the children in Japan, and how bad the American soldiers felt for them. They knew the children had lost their homes, and that bothered many of the soldiers. “We would get supplies, candies, blankets, and if we



PROVIDED

**LEARNING TO TRUST:** Mitsuko Hoehne grew up believing Japanese propaganda about American soldiers until she was shown kindness by soldiers like Eugene Leinen in 1954.

saw children we would try to be as nice to them as we could,” recounts Leinen, “we would’ve liked to talk to them and we wish we could’ve taken them all home with us.”

“They didn’t wait for a government program to come along, they just shared their food with them,” said Deanna Mounts, who works at the Fergus Falls Veterans Home where Mitsuko now lives. “They felt it was their responsibility.”

Mitsuko, however, still didn’t trust the Americans. “On the way to the camp the soldiers tried to give us gum but we thought they were going to poison us with it,” she writes. “The soldiers started to chew it to show us it was okay. The soldiers were very nice. They also gave us soda crackers. My uncle said it was okay to eat.”

Since then, Leinen says he’s frequently wondered about the children they had helped. “We thought of the kids running around with no place to go, we thought about them many many times over the years,” he said.

Little did he know that he would meet one of those children again, 74 years later, near his hometown of Breckenridge.

Mitsuko went from camp to camp in Okinawa until her eldest sister returned from mainland Japan, where she had been working in a factory making airplane parts. Together, they went back to Tomori and built a tin-roofed house to live in.

Mitsuko met her hus-

band, Gilbert, in 1958 when he was stationed in Okinawa with the U.S. Army. Any apprehension she had towards American soldiers was gone, with the help of the friendliness soldiers like Leinen had shown her when she was a child. She was working as a housekeeper for a military family when she met Gilbert. He was stationed there for 18 months and they fell in love. When he returned to America, he spent years, with the help of Hubert Humphrey, trying to get the paperwork in order so that he could marry Mitsuko and bring her back to the United States. Finally, in 1961, he returned to Okinawa as a civilian and married her.

They returned to Perham in December of 1961 and it was a difficult first winter for Mitsuko. “We got here the seventh of December in a snowstorm, she’d never seen snow before in her life, it’s hot over there, the tropics,” he said. “She wasn’t too happy with it. That first winter, we had quite a time. I didn’t have any money left, otherwise she would have gone back if she could have.” However, in the spring, women from church brought Hoehne into the fold and she became a part of the community. She’s returned to Japan four times and her family came to visit her here once. Her three children have each returned to Japan twice.

When Mitsuko got sick she was taken to live in the Veterans Home in Fergus Falls, where Leinen volunteers as part of the Cooties.

He was at one of the meetings at the home one day when someone asked him where he served and he said Okinawa. Gilbert and Mitsuko’s ears perked up and they went over to introduce themselves.

They spoke to Leinen about how Mitsuko was a young girl in Okinawa during the war, and in comparing notes about years and places, realization settled upon them that their paths had crossed before. Although they couldn’t truly be 100% sure that they had met each other before, “It means so much to me to meet someone who was a direct recipient of what we did,” said Leinen.

“There was a feeling, a real feeling of connection,” said Mounts, who was present when they met at the home. Even if they hadn’t actually met in 1945, Leinen was so happy to see that a child the American soldiers had helped had lived such a long and wonderful life, with a loving husband, three children and many grandchildren; and Mitsuko was so happy to have met an American soldier that had shown children like her such kindness.

Gilbert, whose eyes well with tears when he recounts his wife’s childhood, said, “That’s the kind of people who heal the wounds of war.”

## Enjoy a safe and happy Independence Day

For the Journal

Independence Day is a celebration of the United States of America. The holiday is marked by fanfare and large parties, complete with barbecues, fireworks and parades.

As fun as July Fourth festivities typically are, injuries, particularly those involving fireworks, are a concern that celebrants should not take lightly. An estimated 11,000 people visited the emergency room for fireworks-related injuries in 2016, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. However, fireworks aren’t the only danger this time of year. In order to remain safe, individuals can heed these tips.

- Do not drink and drive. Alcohol consumption may accompany Independence Day festivities. For those planning on using a car to get to and from parties, it is essential to designate a driver who will not imbibe. Otherwise, utilize any number of ridesharing services or available taxis.

- Swim smartly. Always swim with a buddy, and consider hiring a lifeguard if you’ll be hosting a pool party and cannot keep a watchful eye on guests in the pool. Adults also should not swim intoxicated, as it can impede the ability to stay afloat and may lead to risky behaviors.

- Leave fireworks to the professionals. Watch a public fireworks display instead of lighting fireworks on the street or in the backyard.

- Exercise caution with sparklers. Kids running around with sparklers in hand could be a recipe for disaster, as sparklers burn extremely hot. Make sure children do not wave them around or others can get burned. Keep a bucket of water handy to properly extinguish the sparklers.

- Review safe boating practices. If July Fourth festivities find you out on the water, be sure that life jackets are worn and set boating and water safety rules for the family.

- Check in with a vet. The Fourth of July can be traumatic for pets not accustomed to fireworks and other loud noises or crowds. Behavior therapy, medication and ensuring that pets do not run away from home and get lost may be necessary.

- Watch food temperatures. Do not leave food out in the hot sun for too long; otherwise, harmful bacteria can grow and potentially cause foodborne illnesses. The USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service says to never leave food out of refrigeration for more than two hours. If the temperature is above 90 degrees, food should not be left out for more than one hour.

## Enjoy and be Safe

As you celebrate our nation’s independence and enjoy the freedoms won in hard conflict, remember to think safety. From our staff to all of you: Have a safe and happy 4th of July!

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