



Don Bromeland - WW II

Frost man served on a submarine during the war

BY CHUCK HUNT

Register Editor

Donald Bromeland, of Frost, always felt like one of the luckiest men alive.

Lucky to have married his wife, have four children, see his grandchildren grow up, and to always do what he liked for work, farming, much of his adult life.

But none of that would have happened except that Don Bromeland was unlucky back in 1945 and lost a coin toss.

"He would tell that story of the unlucky coin toss to us every once in a while," his son, Duane Bromeland says. "And he did always say he was the one who lost the coin toss, but in truth, he was the one who won."

Bromeland was serving as a torpedo man on the U.S.S. Trigger submarine in World War II. The sub had spent several years out on 11 different war patrols.

In February of 1945 it was in Guam and getting ready to go out on patrol again.

"There was a new sub that needed another torpedo man," Duane says. "It was between my dad and another torpedo man on the Trigger, of who

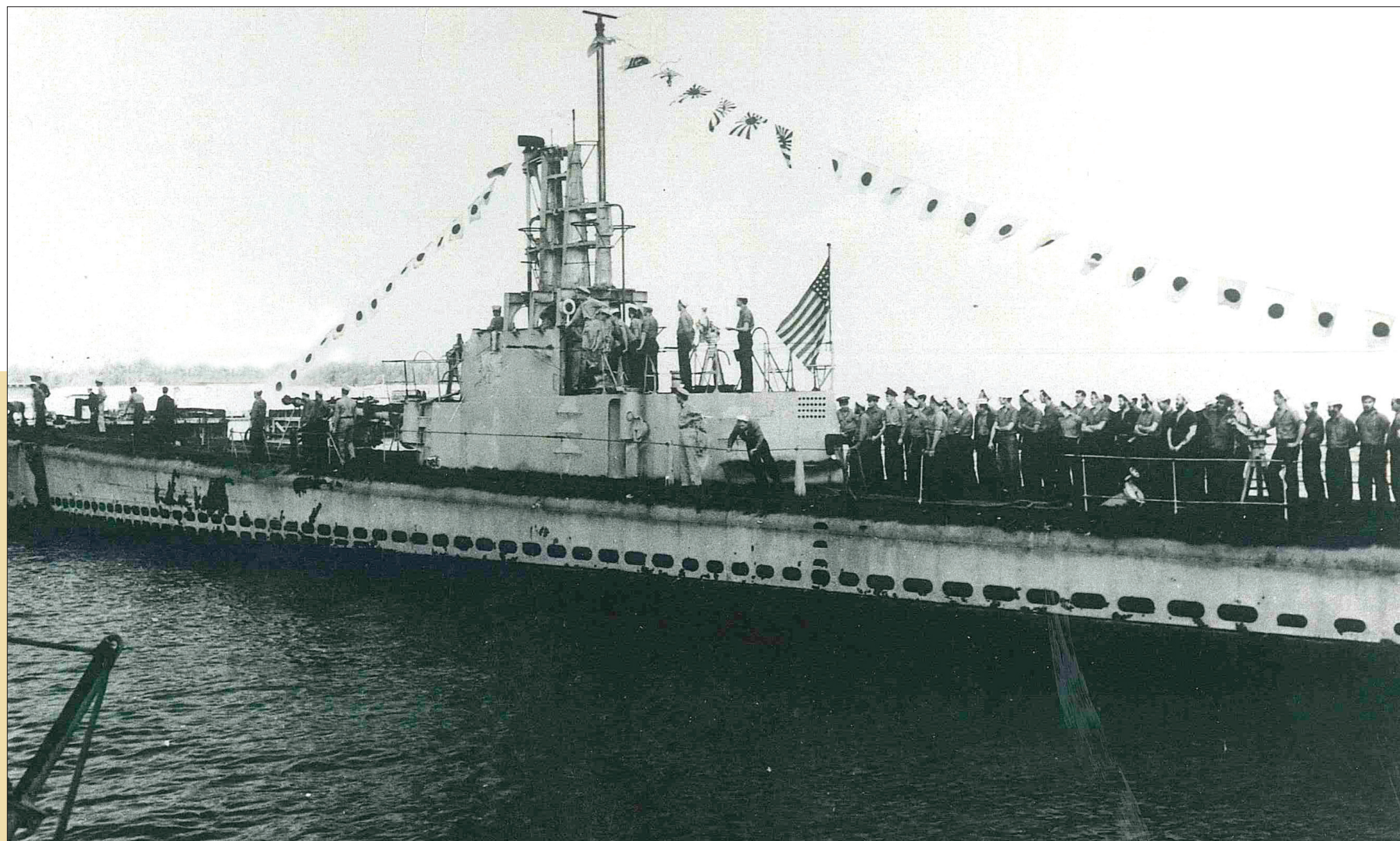
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'He did always say he was the one who lost the coin toss, but in truth, he was the one who won.'

Duane Bromeland, about his father, Don



Donald Bromeland, pictured at left, along with his friend Harry, on shore leave from the Navy and visiting his family farm home near Brush Creek.



This is a photo of the U.S.S. Trigger submarine that Don Bromeland served on in World War II. In fact, if you look at the line of pennants that are on the left side of the top of the conning tower, and follow them down to the deck, they end right at Don Bromeland, according to his son, Duane Bromeland.

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was going to have to leave his shipmates. The captain let the two flip a coin to decide who had to go to the new sub.”

Don Bromeland lost the toss and had to pack up his duffle bag and leave the Trigger and go off to another submarine which was in New London, Connecticut.

The Trigger left Guam soon after for its 12th war patrol. As far as the Navy is concerned, the Trigger is still out on that 12th patrol.

It was to have rendezvoused with another sub, the U.S.S. Tirante. The Tirante kept repeatedly sending radio messages to the Trigger, but she never responded.

No one knows what happened to the Trigger, a

sub which had survived numerous battle engagements at sea during the war.

“My dad’s parents died when Dad was very young. My dad just went to school through the ninth grade, because he basically had to go to work.”

— Duane Bromeland

But Don Bromeland always knew he was a very lucky fellow, despite ‘losing’ the coin flip.

Bromeland was born on Sept. 23, 1923, on a farm a mile and a half away from Brush Creek. His parents were Andrew and Allette (Midtbo) Bromeland. He was baptised and confirmed at North Blue Earth Lutheran Church and went to rural school in Brush Creek Township.

He was the youngest of four children; the others were Gertrude (Mohr), Arnold and Melvin.

“My grandparents, my dad’s parents, died when

Dad was very young,” Duane recalls. “My dad just went to school through the ninth grade, because he basically had to go to work.”

After the attack on Pearl Harbor happened, Don Bromeland, who was 18 or 19, enlisted and joined the Navy and went into the Submarine Service.

“He was like a lot of those guys who served in the war,” Duane Bromeland says. “He never talked about it. You had to pry it out of him, and he claimed he had forgotten a lot of it.”

The U.S.S. Trigger had already been out on eight war patrols when Bromeland joined it as a torpedo man. It had been commissioned in January of 1942.

The Trigger was in Pearl Harbor being refitted after having been damaged in heavy action during

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its eighth patrol.

Bromeland joined it in early 1944 before the sub left for its ninth patrol on March 23 of that year.

By April 6, the Trigger had encountered a huge convoy of freighters surrounded by escort war ships.

As the Trigger was about to unleash 10 torpedoes, it was suddenly surrounded by escort ships including a destroyer that was about to ram the sub.

"The steel sides of the submarine buckled in and out under the terrific pressure. The pipes and bulkheads vibrated like guitar strings and locker doors sprung open."

— U.S. Navy Records

It did get four torpedoes away before diving deeper. The crew could hear all four torpedoes hit their targets.

Six Japanese anti-sub ships hounded the Trigger for 17 hours, dropping untold number of depth charges. Six hit the sub and caused considerable damage.

"The steel sides of the submarine buckled in and out under the terrific pressure," a Navy historical report reads. "The pipes and bulkheads vibrated like guitar strings and locker doors sprung open scattering

the contents over everything. The intense heat and humidity sent rivulets of perspiration rolling down the faces and bodies of the crew until their clothes were drenched and socks and shoes were soggy. Lack of oxygen in the air and the nervous strain of the unrelenting 17 hour depth charge

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Don Bromeland, left, with his sister, **Gertrude**, at the family farm. Gertrude wrote many, many letters to her brother Don during his time in the Navy.

*"It doesn't take a hero to order men into battle.
It takes a hero to be one of those men who goes into battle."*
—General H. Norman Schwarzkopf

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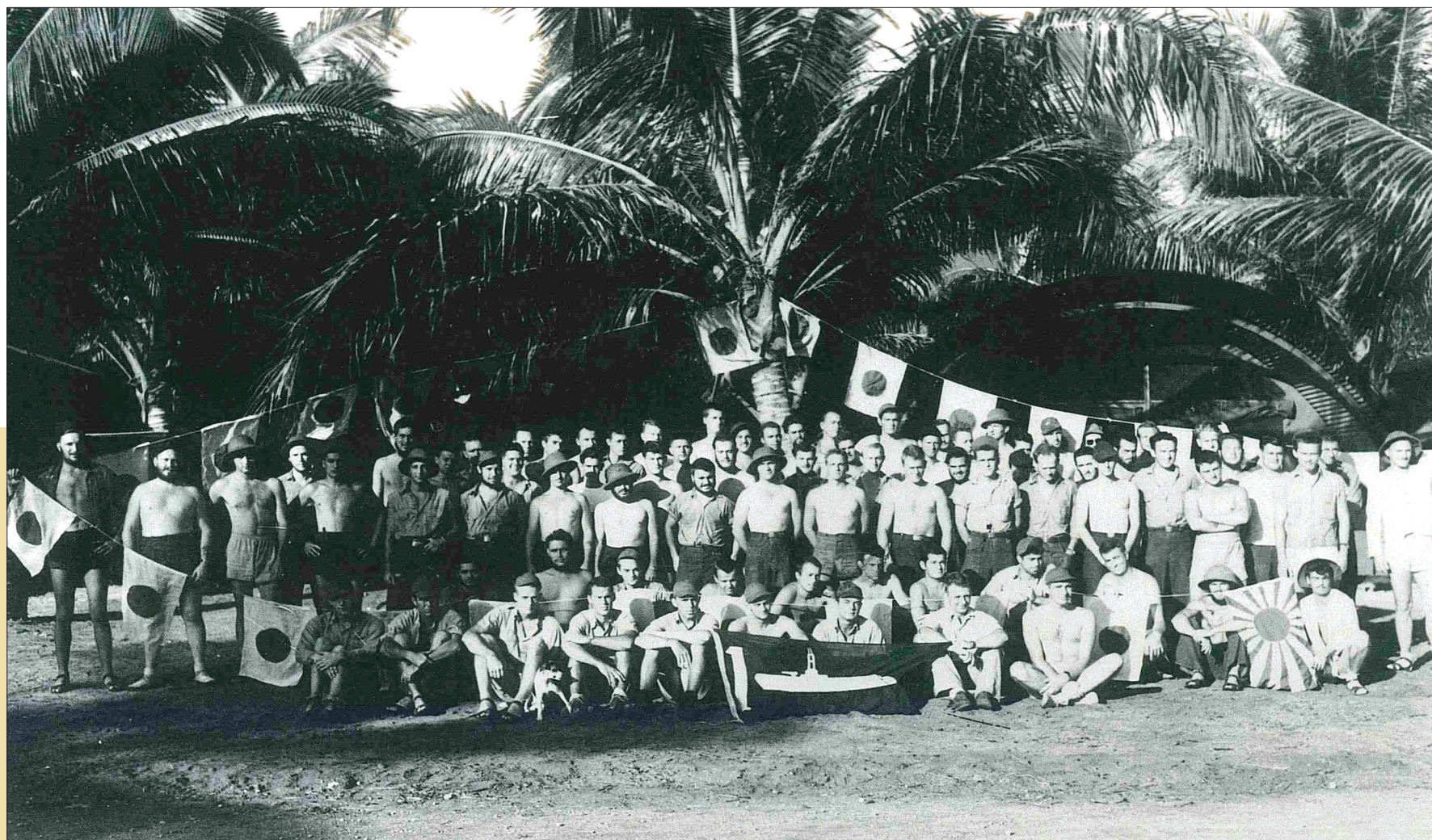
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Don Bromeland is pictured somewhere in the group photo, above, which was taken of the U.S.S. Trigger crew at the Submarine Crew Rest Camp on the island of Guam, in November of 1944. Don's son, Duane, is not sure which of the crew members pictured above is his father, Don.

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barrage brought some to the verge of collapse.”

The forward torpedo room was flooded, machinery was damaged or out of commission entirely, including bow planes, sound gear, both radars and the sub was unable to transmit radio messages because the antennas were down.

It was the worst beating the Trigger ever had. But, the crew used ingenuity and effected repairs with spare parts and baling wire.

And, they continued to go after the Japanese. On April 26 they made radar contact with another convoy. The Trigger fired four torpedoes at the ships, then turned around and fired six more torpedoes from the aft torpedo tubes.

“The forward torpedo room was flooded, machinery was damaged or out of commission entirely, including both bow planes, sound gear, radar and radio antennas.”

— U.S. Navy Records

Bromeland and the other torpedo men would fire four more torpedoes, then another two. Finally, there were three more fired at a destroyer.

Final score for the day was four freighters and one escort vessel sunk and one freighter and two escorts put aground or chased back to a nearby island.

The heavily damaged Trigger had to have a major overhaul at Hunter's Point in San Francisco.

After it was all fixed up, the Trigger's 10th patrol was in two phases, one an attack off the coast of Formosa where the Trigger crew rescued a downed pilot. The other

was off the coast of the Bonin Islands.

On Oct. 30, the Trigger spotted a large fleet of

tankers with four escort ships. The sub chased the tankers for nine hours before scoring four torpedo hits on a tanker, blowing off its stern and stopping it forever.

However, a patrol vessel was bearing down angrily on the Trigger, forcing it to dive deeper. The Japanese boat unleashed a depth charge attack that lasted an hour and ended up with 78 depth charges going off not far away from the submerged sub and its crew.

The Trigger saw a little more action on this 10th trip, but not a lot. The same was true for the 11th war patrol, where contacts with the enemy were few and far between, mainly due to rough seas and enemy aircraft patrols.

Trouble with her main motors ended that patrol on Feb. 3, 1945, and the boat moored at Apra



Don Bromeland with a big smile on his face as he enjoys one of his favorite places, the backyard of his home. When he retired from farming, he and his wife, Thelma, moved into the town of Frost.

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Harbor, Guam.

Then came that fateful coin toss, and Don Bromeland left the Trigger. He was honorably discharged later that same year, on Christmas Day, 1945.

The U.S.S. Trigger received 11 Battle Stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Medal, and torpedo man's mate third class Donald Bromeland received the Ribbon Bar of the Navy Unit Commendation for heroism in action against enemy Japanese shipping and combatant units in the Palau Islands area from March 23 to May 20, 1944.

After Bromeland came home from the service, he married Thelma Clark on July 28, 1946. The couple had five children; Andrew (who lives in Oregon), Duane (who lives in Frost), Virginia (who lives in Minneapolis), Kris (who lives in Montana), and Kenny (who lives in New Mexico).

Don Bromeland farmed for many years with his partner. He retired from farming in 1985 and he and Thelma moved into the city of Frost. Don then continued to work as a crop/hail adjuster for Minnesota Insurance.

He was also active in the community, including holding several church office positions, St. Luke's Lutheran Care Center Board of Directors, Frost Farmers Elevator, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Faribault County Livestock Feeders Association.

"Dad was also a member of the Submarine Veterans of World War II group," Duane Bromeland says. "He would attend all of their reunions."

Duane remembers one time when he was a boy that he went along with his father to one of the reunions.

"My dad was shocked when he ran into two of his crewmates from the Trigger," Duane says. "He thought all of them, except for himself, had been lost on that last patrol when the Trigger disappeared. But there were two of them at the reunion."

Turns out those two had gotten into some kind of trouble before the ship left Guam and were in the brig when the Trigger left port on that fateful 12th trip.

Donald Bromeland died on April 19, 2002, at the age of 78.

"My dad was shocked when he ran into two of his crewmates from the Trigger. He thought all of them, except for himself, had been lost on that last patrol when the Trigger disappeared."

— Duane Bromeland

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“Dad had learned to smoke cigarettes in the Navy, they were free, and he smoked all his life,” Duane Bromeland says. “So he had a lot of health issues, including a stroke in 1991.”

Just a day or so before his father died, Duane Bromeland visited him.

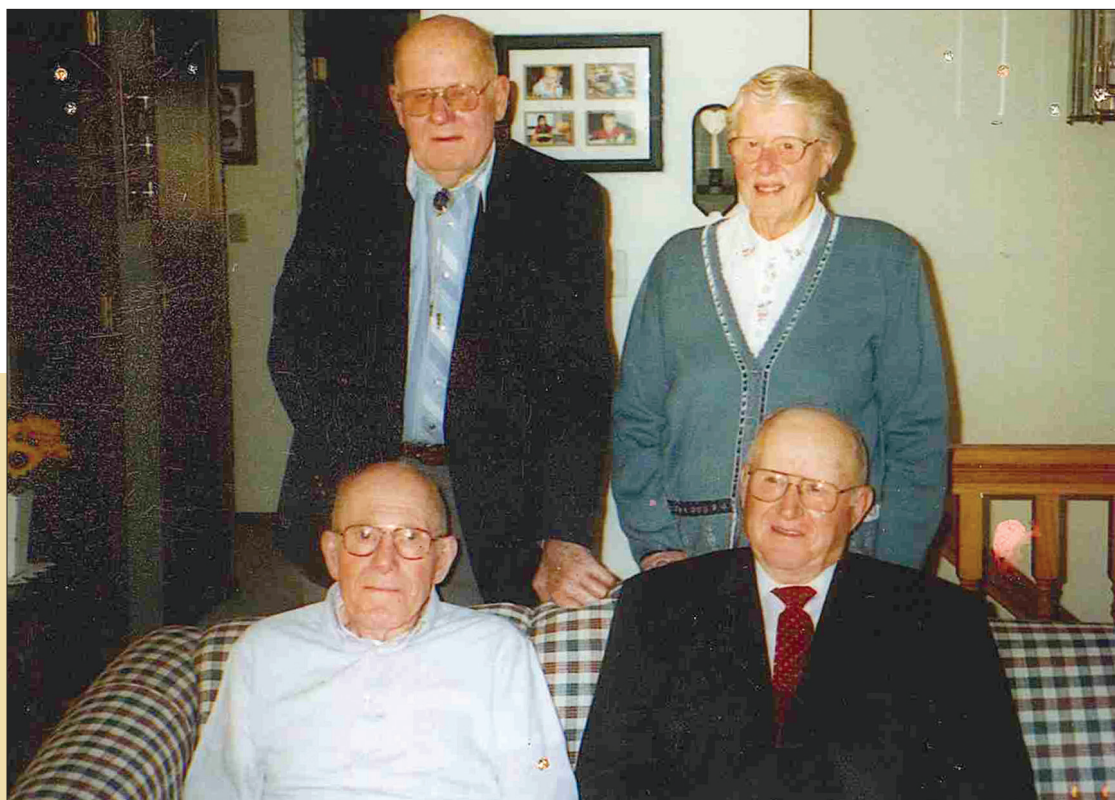
“It is kind of amazing to think that my being alive depended on that coin flip. My brothers and sister and I would not be here if my dad had won that coin toss and gone out on the Trigger’s 12th patrol.”

— Duane Bromeland

“It was a real nice spring day, and Dad was looking out the window,” Duane recalls. “He turned to me and said, ‘Shouldn’t you be out farming?’ He was right, I was supposed to be out there.”

Duane says he often thinks of his father, and his time serving in the Navy during World War II.

“It is kind of amazing to think that my being alive depended on that coin flip,” Duane says. “My brothers and sister and I would not be here if my dad had won that coin toss and gone out on the Trigger’s 12th patrol.”



Don Bromeland and his siblings. In the front is Don, left, and his brother Melvin. In the back is his brother Arnold, left, and his sister Gertrude Mohr. It was Melvin’s 80th birthday celebration.



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