

Glenwood Springs

Post Independent

Local author tells stories of Glenwood's WWII veterans

By [Ryan Graff](#)

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Hal Terrell isn't like many men of his generation.

He grew up in Glenwood Springs and seems almost typical of men growing up just as the Great Depression was taking hold in America.

He played football for Glenwood Springs High School back when it was Garfield County High School. At 6 feet, 2 inches, he fought in "smokers," organized fights, in towns up and down the valley. Once, he won \$6.40 in a nine-minute, three-round "battle royal" with six guys in the ring.

"That was spending money for a couple of months," he said.

He was poor, as were 30 percent of people in America at the time. His family rationed and saved. He picked up pennies out of the gutter because a penny could buy you a piece of hard candy that would last all day - a "good investment," he said.

Despite the rationing and saving, "It was the best of times," he says. Kids learned respect for their elders and teachers, to work hard, and good manners.

Then the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

"December 7, 1941, changed a lot of things for a lot of guys," he said.

That one statement is what makes Terrell different.

Terrell, unlike many of his generation, especially ones who went to fight World War II, is a talker. He is a trove of facts and figures about World War II and the times he grew up in. He talks about how, in 1941, there were 86 boys in Garfield County High School, and by 1945, 18 of those boys had been killed.

He talks about the American and allied invasion of Europe on June 6, 1944. In the first two hours of that invasion 2,300 - roughly the same number of people living in Glenwood Springs at the time - American boys lost their lives.

The most important of Terrell's statistics though, is this: At the end of WWII there were 16 million veterans. Today, 4 million are left, and 2,500 more die each day.



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"We're down to the end," he said of himself and other WWII veterans.

And that is why Terrell has written "Heroes Among Us," a book that chronicles the lives of the 22 boys from Garfield County High School's class of 1944 who went to WWII.

Terrell decided to write the book after a trip to Omaha Beach in 2001. He was chosen, with two other veterans, to place a memorial wreath at the feet of the "Spirit of American Youth" statue.

Terrell stood in the bright sunshine in the sea breeze, looking at the memorial gardens, bright green grass, and white headstones of American boys, two of which marked the graves of his friends.

It was "aesthetically beautiful," he said. But the scene didn't inspire awe in Terrell - it inspired him to start writing.

"I determined right then that 'I'm going to do this book.' So I did it, and it took me three years."

Along the way, Terrell researched and wrote about boys he hadn't seen or heard from in years. Some had passed away, some were fighting Alzheimer's, and some were still enjoying life on the Western Slope.

Terrell talked to John Artaz, "the nicest, quietest, sweetest little guy you'll ever meet."

"There's no way he could ever be in the service," Terrell thought when he spoke to Artaz. But Artaz fought hand-to-hand and liberated Los Banos, a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp.

He also talked to Bob Simmillion, who grew up in a two-room cabin with seven siblings up Four Mile Creek. From his modest beginnings Simmillion "took hold of his bootstraps and never did let go," Terrell said. "He had the courage of a lion."

Artaz, Simmillion and Charles Jackson will join Terrell at a Veterans Day celebration Tuesday at the Ramada Inn.

The night will be emotional for Terrell, a man in his late 70s who was tough as a kid, tough as an airmen over the Mediterranean, and still tough today.

Unless Terrell is smiling, he isn't given to showing his emotions. But when he thought of his friend, James "Bus" Abshire, "a happy-go-lucky young man ... generous to a fault," Terrell let a tear slip from the corner of his eye as he recited a poem by Charles Hanson Towne:

So I say tomorrow I'll call on Jim

Just to let him know that I'm thinking of him.

But tomorrow comes and tomorrow goes

And the distance between us grows and grows.

Around the corner yet so far away

Here's a telegram, Sir, Jim died today.

And that's what we get and deserve in the end

Around the corner a vanished friend.

Terrell worries about the fate of his friends and other WWII veterans. There's no stopping life, but the history of those men should be known, Terrell said.

"If you listen to guys my age, and you listen with your heart you'll hear us whispering our good-byes," he said.

Terrell will have two booksignings this week - one at Through the Looking Glass, and one at the Glenwood Springs Sunrise Rotary meeting. Terrell will have two booksignings this week - one at Through the Looking Glass, and one at the Glenwood Springs Sunrise Rotary meeting.

[BACK](#) 