

## *Remember Pearl Harbor- Merlin Cone will never forget*

**By: LaRAYNE WATTS**

Merlin E. Cone was born in Raymond in February 1921 to Mr. and Mrs. V. C. Cone.

Merlin would have graduated from Raymond High School in 1939 but he signed up for the Navy and was called to duty on the very day he reached his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, in February 1937. Merlin says, "I don't recall the size of the class, but I always thought it was a happy class."

He remembers being in first grade at Garden Tracts School with Mel Brown and Frank Kolcz. "Frankie Kolcz was the teacher's pet," said Merlin. "We always had a lot of fun with that one!"

Merlin remembers Mr. Lybecker, one of his high school teachers. "I think I always got along good with the teachers, and I was not an "A" student. I was really interested in Mr. Lybecker's woodworking class, and I rode on his bus to and from my home in Garden Tracts."

"I left high school in the middle of the tenth grade, the day I was 17. I'd signed up for the U.S. Navy and was called right on my 17th birthday, February 28. Three months later I was on my first ship, a Navy destroyer out of San Diego. I was the youngest sailor on the ship for about a year!" he recalled.

In 1939 the homeport for his ship was Pearl Harbor; they were operating in the South Pacific. Merlin remembers Dec. 7, 1941 very well. "We happened to be in port at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese started the war against us. It was a devastating attack as everyone knows!"

Merlin is in the Pearl Harbor Survivors' Association of Southwest Washington. There are about 50 members of the group including five from the Willapa Harbor area, according to Cone. He is from Raymond; there are two from Valley and two from South Bend.

Merlin served 22 years with the U.S. Navy, retiring in 1959. His last three years in the military were spent in recruit training in Bainbridge, Maryland, and as chief investigator for the U.S. Navy Training Center in San Diego, Calif.

He married the former Thelma Heyting from Valley in 1945. They have six children, who all live in the local area.

After retiring from the Navy, Merlin worked for San Diego Gas and Electric Co. for two years, then came back to Raymond to be with both his wife's aging parents. The couple lived in East Raymond for 35 years, but have recently moved to another house two miles away.

Merlin's advice to this year's seniors is, "I've always said get as much schooling as you can. I didn't finish high school, and it drastically harmed my working life."



RHS Alumnus Merlin E. Cone, 1939  
(pictured in 1947)