

she's a very good choice." Lyons served as assistant with 11 schools and roughly on the basketball court. that with three-fourths of see LYONS, page A-8

# Honor Flight

## Spencer County veteran saluted for WWII service

by JOHN SHINDLEBOWER  
*Magnet Freelancer*

In the basement of Vincent Heuser's home in western Spencer County are scrapbooks, files, photos and other records that detail his three plus years of service in the U.S. Navy during World War II.

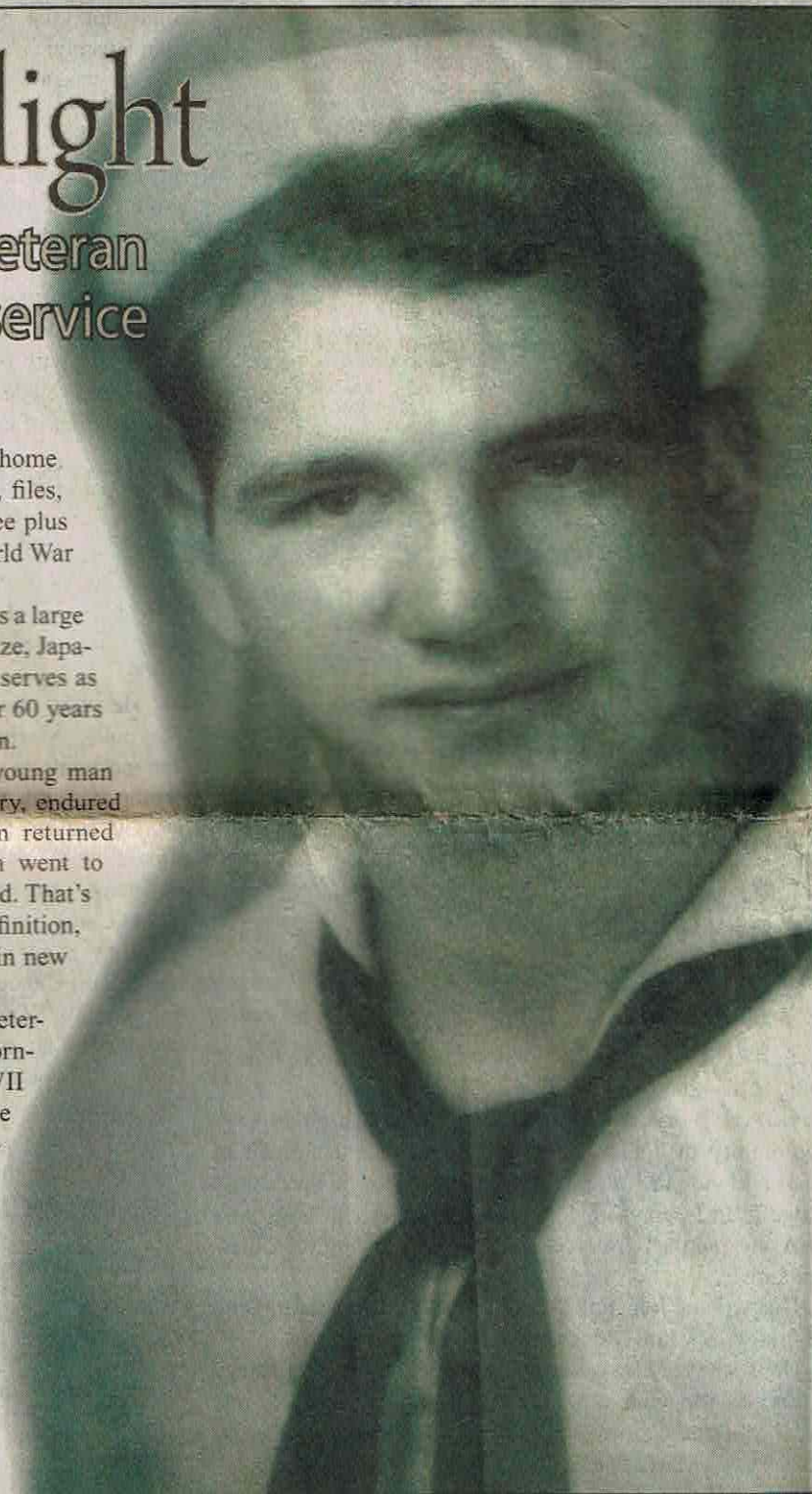
But the thing a visitor's eyes turn to first is a large painting of a sea battle that shows ships ablaze, Japanese planes diving toward U.S. vessels and serves as a vivid reminder of the sacrifices made over 60 years ago in a war that defined an entire generation.

Heuser was part of that generation, a young man who enlisted in the Navy, served his country, endured many hardships, lost several friends, then returned home without too much fanfare. He then went to work, raised his family and eventually retired. That's a complete and fulfilling life by anyone's definition, but an experience this past weekend put it in new perspective.

Heuser was one of 85 Kentucky WWII veterans who flew out of Louisville Saturday morning for a one-day visit to the national WWII Memorial in Washington D.C. The trips are chartered by Honor Flight, a group dedicated to getting as many aging WWII veterans to the nation's capital to see the tribute in their honor while they're still physically able.

In the span of a few hours on Saturday, Heuser said decades of emotions that he'd kept bottled up inside of him came to the surface. Seeing the monuments, the faces of fel-

see HONOR, page A-5



boater, said Officer Reynolds, of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, said he was through driving at Taylor, Ky., operations began in Spencer County continued for months.

## SCMS s

by ROBIN  
*Spencer Magnet*

Thirteen-year-old Douglas Mitchell of Waterford, died Saturday afternoon in Nelson County after being ejected from a vehicle in which he was a passenger.

Mitchell would have been an eighth grader at Spencer County Middle School this fall. P

## Teen after co

by  
*Spencer*

Nicholas Herdman's critical condition at the hospital Tuesday after a bike accident that took place near Little Mount.

Emergency services arrived at the home of Bruce Herdman on Tail Drive, Sunday.

# Drop out rates on the rise in Spenc

by ROBIN BASS  
*Spencer Magnet Editor*

More Spencer County high students dropped out of school in 2008 than the previous year. Recently released non-academic data also reveals that fewer stu-

Department of Education, 2.41 percent of students in grades nine through 12 dropped out of Spencer County High School during the 2007-08 school year. In the preceding school year, that number was 1.62 percent. The difference repre-

some students may be having difficult time making the switch from middle to high school.

Upon further investigation, Assistant Superintendent Norma Thurman discovered that the average number of freshmen that

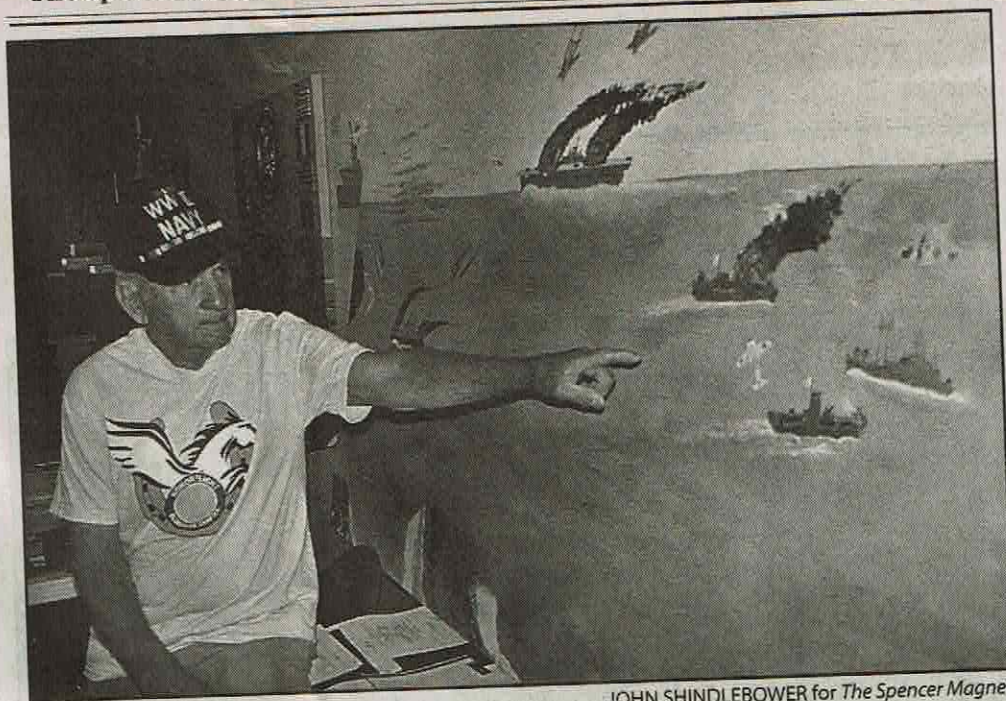
and 12, the districtwide drop out rate was 1.85 percent in 2007 versus 2.35 percent in 2008. In both categories, the district's drop out rate still remains below the state level of 3.3 percent.

As the number of students quitting school early

class of 2007 saw a 10 percent more seniors with a total of 900. Still, these numbers are above the state rate which hovered around 10 percent.

While school board members expressed





JOHN SHINDLEBOWER for *The Spencer Magnet*

A painting in Vincent Heuser's basement reveals some of his experiences during WWII.

## Honor from page A1

low WWII veterans who joined him on the trip, and the grateful response of so many Americans who formed a reception at the Baltimore airport when they landed touched him as few things ever have.

"It makes you feel like everyone really does care," he said.

A grateful nation should care about the efforts made by Heuser and the other WWII veterans, and a grateful nation should be willing to learn more about their sacrifices.

For Heuser, his service began in 1942 when he joined the Navy and was placed aboard a LSM, a landing craft that was used to resupply other ships and land units with ammunition. With a crew of about 60, this ship was part of a larger fleet and Heuser's fleet saw plenty of action in the Pacific theater as the U.S. battled the Japanese.

He has plenty of stories to tell, like the time he was

promoted on the spot by Admiral Chester Nimitz after successfully landing a heave line to connect his ship with the Admiral's after several failed attempts by others.

Or the time when Heuser's ship docked at a location in the Pacific and he received a letter from his mother informing him that one of his best childhood buddies who was serving in the Army, had been killed by a German tank in Europe. Heuser said he became emotional, and knowing that his brother, stationed on a ship on the other side of the island, set off on foot without permission to go see his brother. He was brought back, faced a court-martial and restricted to the ship for a period of time.

Then in the weeks and months after the Japanese surrender, Heuser recalled other tales. His ship was part of a force that was sent to China and then into Japan to assist with the disarming of the Japanese. They arrived at one location and they found two Japanese soldiers inside an arms warehouse and began to take out the weapons.

The two Japanese, who Heuser said could speak English very well, began talking to the American sailors, asking them where they were from. When Heuser told them he was from Kentucky, one of the Japanese men took a harmonica from his pocket, and played "My Old Kentucky Home."

These are images that came back to Heuser, some touching and some lighthearted. But to get an accurate account of the sacrifice made by those who served, one needs to hear the stories that many veterans have found it difficult to relive. Heuser has those as well.

The painting in his basement is a depiction of a sea battle near Okinawa, when his fleet came under heavy fire in early April of 1945. Heuser recalls the sight of Japanese suicide pilots — Kamikazis — ramming into ships causing massive explosions and loss of many American lives.

Another of Heuser's childhood buddies was serving on another ship and the two friends had talked earlier using semaphore, a

flag signaling system. But shortly after, he watched as a Japanese plane hit the rear gun turret his friend was in, resulting in a massive and fatal explosion.

There wasn't much time for mourning, as Heuser was in the middle of the battle himself, and manning an anti-aircraft gun from his own ship, he spotted another Japanese plane making a dive toward the ship carrying the fleet's admiral. Heuser fired a volley, adjusted his aim after watching the tracer rounds, and was able to knock the plane out of the sky before it reached its target.

The battle was one of the bloodiest in the Pacific, and Heuser watched as several ships were hit and he witnessed sailors on other ships perishing in flames and in the water. One was an LST loaded down with fuel drums when it was hit and exploded.

"We were close enough to feel the heat off the ships," said Heuser, and he started to recall seeing burning sailors jumping overboard, then his voice trailed off and he redirected his thoughts away from that memory.

On the painting, ships are named and then there are numbers indicating how many sailors were killed or wounded aboard each vessel.

Ultimately, the U.S. forces won the battle, highlighted at sea by the sinking of the largest Japanese battleship, the Yamato and it signaled the end for the Japanese. However, the U.S. was gearing up for a massive invasion of Japan and Heuser's fleet would take part, but the decision to use the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki prompted the Japanese to an earlier surrender.

For six decades, Heuser never forgot those experiences, but always wondered if

he and the other Baltimore last their way to D.C., he would

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HEUSER for The Spencer Magnet during WWII.

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he and the others landed in Baltimore last Saturday on their way to Washington, D.C., he wondered no more.

"People were lined up, cheering, clapping, hugging us and people were coming up to us thanking us," said Heuser of his initial steps into airport.

"All this emotion is buried up in you," he said, but admitted that on Saturday, it surfaced.

The veterans boarded buses and made the trip to the monument, and once on the ground, they were again flooded with people thanking them. He had a college student who was working on an essay start asking him questions about the war. Other visitors were seeking autographs from some of the veterans. And one man from Argentina asked Heuser if he would pose for a photograph with him.

"It makes the hair on your arms stand up," he said of the emotions that took over on Saturday.

While the response of the public was rewarding, so too was the time spent with other veterans. They talked about their experiences and no doubt shared some feelings that only they could truly understand.

"In battle, you become one. You miss that when you come back over here (to peaceful America)," he said.

While the trip was enjoyable and rewarding for veterans, Heuser said his mind on Saturday went back to those who never made it home. The childhood buddies he knew that died, both in Europe and the Pacific, to others he saw perish in battle, and whose names are now inscribed on the memorial in Washington.

It may have felt good to be viewed as a hero on Saturday, but Heuser said the real heroes were unable to make that trip.

## Henry

from page A1

a teenager that had been hit by a sports utility vehicle while riding his motorbike. The caller to 9-1-1 told Spencer County Dispatch that the teen was not breathing.

Spencer County Sheriff's Deputy Kyle Bennett was one of the first to arrive on the scene. He said that it appeared that Henry had driven his dirt bike into the path of the oncoming SUV and that no charges were being filed at this time. Bennett estimated that the driver was moving at a rate of 30 m.p.h.

Witnesses said Henry appeared to have injured his head and suffered several broken bones from the accident. He is not believed to have been wearing a helmet at the time of the crash.

While EMS cared for the injured teen, fire department personnel set up a landing zone for STAT Flight. Chief Nathan Nation said that the westbound lane of KY 44 near Lincoln Logs was closed to traffic for approximately 15 minutes while Henry was loaded into the helicopter.

The Spencer Magnet welcomes letters to the editor and asks that readers adhere to the following guidelines when submitting letters:

- No form letters or photocopies.
- Letters must include signature, address and phone number of writer. No unsigned letters will be published.
- The Spencer Magnet reserves the right to reject or edit any letter submitted.
- Readers are limited to one letter every 30 days.