

Local veteran wrote Morse code for the U.S. Army in WWII

Written by Austin Benson

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Alvin Geiken honored for 70-year American Legion membership

Alvin Geiken was 20-years old when he left for U.S. Army basic training at Camp Wallace, TX, and was ordered to go to Coyne Electrical School in Chicago, IL, in 1943.

“I was at telephone school and had no interest in going to radio school,” Geiken said. “Telephone school was complicated enough for me.”

Regardless of his lack of interest, the Army sent Geiken to radio school in Chicago for 13 weeks.

“That’s what the Army does,” Geiken said. “It sends you where it wants you and you have no choice.”

There, the 49 members of the class were taught international Morse code. To graduate from the course, Geiken said students had to code 16 words in a minute.

After graduation, he was sent to Kinder, LA, by mistake.

The mistake was corrected after a few days and Geiken was sent to serve in Hulen, TX, and remained there writing code throughout World War II.

Geiken, who is now 91, was never sent overseas.

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“I didn’t want to go over there,” he said. “A lot of people went over there and never came back.”

His tour of duty in the Army began in 1942, when Geiken was drafted and sworn into the Army in Omaha.

Fourteen days later, he was sent to Fort Leavenworth, KS, to complete an intelligence quotient (IQ) test.

After a few days at Fort Leavenworth, Geiken was ordered to complete basic training at Camp Wallace where he said soldiers were taught how to hold a gun and everything else that would keep them alive.

Geiken said he was also dubbed a “sharpshooter on the rifle range.”

While in training, Geiken said soldiers had to complete a bayonet course hitting blocks and knocking them over to prove they could kill the enemy.

“I struck the block and it didn’t fall,” Geiken said. “My commander said if that was the enemy, I wouldn’t have got him.”

Geiken repeated the action and said he struck the block and snapped the stock of his gun.

In the remaining four weeks, Geiken went to telephone school where he strung some lines.

Following the war, Geiken returned to Gothenburg to help his father on the farm.

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Geiken has called Gothenburg home for nearly a century.

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