

to North Africa and on to Anzio Beach and France

York and traveled by troop train to Fort Leavenworth where he turned in military clothing and equipment.

Hawk was honorably discharged from the Army after 39 months, 36 of those spent fighting in World War II.

He arrived by train in Oakley at 4 a.m.

“There was my beautiful Katie,” he said. “She still drove the same DeSoto car I had purchased just before I left for the Army, but the tires were bald. Couldn’t get tires during the war.”

Hawk and his cousin, Raymond Mallory, now deceased, became partners in the Hawk

and Mallory Wholesale Grocery Co. for 35 years with great success.

Hawk recalls he waited in Algiers for Raymond, who was nearby, but they didn’t find one another.

Dale and Katie Hawk have two sons. Tom, the eldest, is the retired superintendent of

schools at Manhattan, a Kansas legislator representing that district and past owner of a nationwide school yearbook photo company. Jay Hawk and his wife Cathy live in Colby. They own the theater and have a stable of horses in north Thomas County. Jay is a long-time manager of motels in northwest Kansas.

Levant native built bridges for troops in Germany and Korea

By Phil Finley

Henry C. “Hank” Vette grew up in the Levant community, enlisting as a young man in the U.S. Army and serving four years in World War II.

Basic training for this new American soldier was at Fort Hood, Texas, followed by combat engineering training at Fort Eustis, Va.

Assigned to the Engineer Battalion of the 4th Cavalry Division, Vette sailed from Virginia aboard the troop ship U.S.S. General Pope. The ship, which held 5,000 had five decks and each troop compartment had rows of bunks five high in each row.

Traveling through the English Channel to Bremerhaven, France, the division began moving in combat into Germany.

The engineering elements of the division made repairs to blown-down bridges so the division could move forward, and opened roads for the armor and artillery and troop supply trucks.

Vette still recalls service to help prisoners

held by the Germans at Auschwitz and the other German death camps.

Vette’s war ended when the 4th Cavalry Division with other Army elements cleared the Germans from Adolph Hitler’s hideaway at Berchtesgarden in Austria.

The war was over, Vette recalls, but Germany and its people were devastated.

“People were wearing rags and children starving and begging for handouts from our food ration packs.

“The German treated us well,” said Vette.

“We had a lot of green eggs and our one-per-day hot ration was often just gravy with bits of meat on bread, but we shared all we could with the Germans.”

Short, non-filter cigarettes were the favorite commodity in demand.

Shortly after the war ended, Vette returned by troop ship to Fort Knox, Ky.

He met a young woman from Covert in Osborne County, Erma Eileen Eddy, on the train he took back to Colby on a three-day pass from Fort Knox.

The couple married on Dec. 25, 1947, at Osborne.

Discharged from the Army but placed on orders as a reservist, Vette began working for Jim Caldwell six days a week for 50 dollars a week. The Caldwell stores, in several northwest Kansas locations, sold appliances, and Vette was the appliance service technician.

In June 1950, the North Koreans crossed the 38th parallel, invading the Republic of South Korea.

While Vette was vacationing with his wife and two young children, notice came for him to report to Fort Riley. Sent to Fort Carson, Colo., Vette was posted to Camp Drake in Japan.

The soldiers boarded a troop ship at Yokohama, sailed for three days, sleeping on mats on the decks, and went into Inchon Harbor, South Korea, on landing craft. The North Koreans were at Pusan, just a few miles north.

The same skills Vette used in the war to liberate Europe he used in Korea: repairing downed bridges and opening destroyed roads

right alongside infantry artillery, armor and supply trucks fighting to go forward.

One bridge, Vette recalls, was still being lifted when fighting forces crossed it, leaving a large Caterpillar bulldozer in the river that they could not retrieve.

Vette advanced in rank from corporal to technician sergeant, earning four combat action campaign stars and the Bronze Star for combat action valor.

Vette returned home again in 1951.

Vette traveled to Kansas City to interview with the Ford Motor Company and became a big tractor specialist, calling on dealers across Kansas, Nebraska and eastern Colorado. He retired from the company in 1991.

Vette and his wife have a son, Jerry, born at the Fort Knox post hospital, now living in Garden City, along with two daughters. Carolyn, the oldest, lives in Massachusetts; Tammy, the youngest child, lives in Great Bend.

The house the family built at 680 W. Walnut in Colby is still Vette’s home, though Erma died in the spring of this year.



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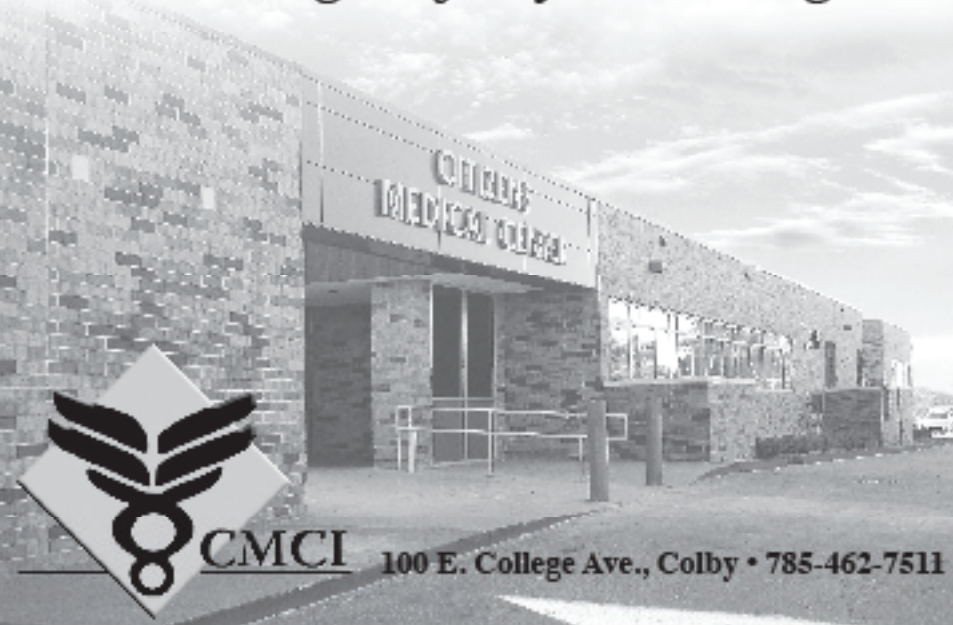
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