On August 31, 2012, four World War II veterans visited the students of East Catholic High School in Manchester, CT. There, they connected personal military experiences to Laura Hillenbrand’s novel *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. As required reading for the summer intercession, the students arrived with both contextual and emotional understanding of the war in the Pacific.

In *Unbroken*, Hillenbrand recounts the story of Louis Zamperini, an Army Air Force bombardier who served aboard a Consolidated B-24 “Liberator” bomber. In 1943, however, Zamperini was interned in the Naoestu Prisoner of War camp, where he remained until his liberation in August 1945. Consequently, three of the four lecturers had served in the Pacific Theatre of Operations during World War II, the fourth being a decorated B-24 pilot from the European Theatre of Operations.

Each of the veterans delivered a fifteen minute summary of military service, which ranged from the high-altitude night bombings of the Japanese mainland to the “0311s” of the Marine Corps, on whose shoulders rested the responsibility of reclaiming the myriad of Japanese island strongholds.

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**VHP SPOTLIGHT: PEARL HARBOR SURVIVOR**

By Jonathan Salomone

Edmund G. Klepps, a survivor of both Pearl Harbor and Kula Gulf, was recently interviewed by the CCSU Veterans History Project. At 97 years old, Klepps recalls the morning of December 7, 1941 as if it were yesterday. Enlisting in the Navy on June 19, 1935, Klepps was originally assigned to the U.S.S. *Mississippi* (BB-41). A Plank Owner aboard the U.S.S. *Helena* (CL-50), Klepps was the Chief Warrant Officer of the engine room, responsible for the maintenance and operation of the ship’s massive diesel engines.

On the morning of the attack, Klepps was enjoying a hot shower when the officer of the deck sounded the alert: “All hands, man your battle stations; Japanese planes are attacking Ford Island!” Mere moments after the announcement, a Japanese torpedo breached the hull of the *Helena*. Dodging the scalding fireballs that shot through the stair wells, he safely reached the upper deck. Fortunately, the flood doors effectively sealed the damaged compartments on the *Helena* and kept the ship afloat. Nevertheless, the *Helena* lost thirty three souls that day.

After twenty days in dry dock, the *Helena* and her crew steamed to the South Pacific, where they participated in the Guadalcanal landings and the ensuing duels with the Imperial Japanese Navy. In the Kula Gulf, however, the *Helena* came under heavy enemy fire and sank after multiple torpedo impacts. With the night sky illuminated by naval gunfire, Klepps climbed to the top deck of the sinking ship. With no “Mae West” life vest of his own, he held hands with a fellow sailor, whose life preserver would keep both of them afloat. Swimming through thousands of gallons of leaking fuel oil, they were rescued by U.S.S. *Nicholas* (DD-449).

Of the 900 sailors aboard, 168 were lost. Nevertheless, the tenacity they displayed at Kula Gulf, Guadalcanal, and Cape Esperance earned them the first Navy Unit Commendation ever issued. Moreover, Klepps continued to serve his Navy through Victory over Japan Day, ending the war in sight of the battleship U.S.S. *Missouri* (BB-63) where the Imperial Japanese formally surrendered to the Allied nations.
Housing artifacts and memorabilia from the former 102nd Infantry Regiment Museum of New Haven, CT, the West Haven Military Museum chronicles the story of the “New Haven Grays.” Originating as a colonial militia, these citizen soldiers protected settlers from “savages, pirates, or other hostile forces.” Called to arms during both King Philip’s War and the American Revolution, Captain Benedict Arnold led this storied unit to the Massachusetts colony, where they relieved the beleaguered Bay State militia.

Serving from the Formative Period of the United States through the ongoing War on Terror, the 102nd has encountered a variety of national security threats. Echoing centuries of foreign policy, the 102nd has participated in nearly every United States war or conflict, with the exception of the Vietnam War, when they deployed to West Germany as part of the NATO Defense Force.

Located at 32 Hood Terrace in West Haven, Connecticut, the museum is staffed by volunteers, including Frank Carrano and Frederick Horn. Both of them are veterans of the 102nd Infantry Regiment, whose combined service span the Korean War and the Vietnam Era. As unit historians, they have arranged a diverse inventory of uniforms and weaponry that communicate the active service of the 102nd. In addition to a comprehensive collection of uniforms and personal equipment, the facility displays a wide variety of military weaponry, including an M29 81mm mortar, a World War I French 75mm howitzer, an M151 jeep, and a full size replica of a Korean War bunker fortification. Furthermore, the museum contains a variety of original artwork and media sources and a library that houses enrollment records and sources related to the 102nd Infantry.

A self-sustaining institution, the objects contained in this museum collection were donated by Connecticut veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and American Legions Posts, as well as the Army National Guard. This generosity has resulted in an array of original materials dating from the American Civil War to Operation Enduring Freedom. In this sense, the Grays are both the guardians of our security and our past. To this end, the 102nd Infantry Division Association honors their history through reunions and a unit camaraderie that keeps the history of the Connecticut Army National Guard alive.

George Jones is an independent software consultant. His interest in the Veterans History Project comes from a long and abiding love of history. He believes that the more you know about the past, the better sense you have of where you should be going. After completing his first VHP interview, he realized that it is “one thing to read about something in a book, and quite another to look into the eyes of someone’s who has seen a horror you’ve heard of.”