

He survived Pearl Harbor, the Korean and Vietnam wars and cancer – now this 77-year-old soon to be a college grad

# A degree of difficulty

12/16/1999



Martin Schenck of Munfordville served in Vietnam (above, in 1966), in Pearl Harbor during World War II, and in the Korean War. The 77-year-old will graduate Saturday from Western Kentucky University.

By JASON RILEY  
*The Daily News*

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After what Munfordville resident Martin Schenck has been through, finals week at Western Kentucky University really isn't that stressful.

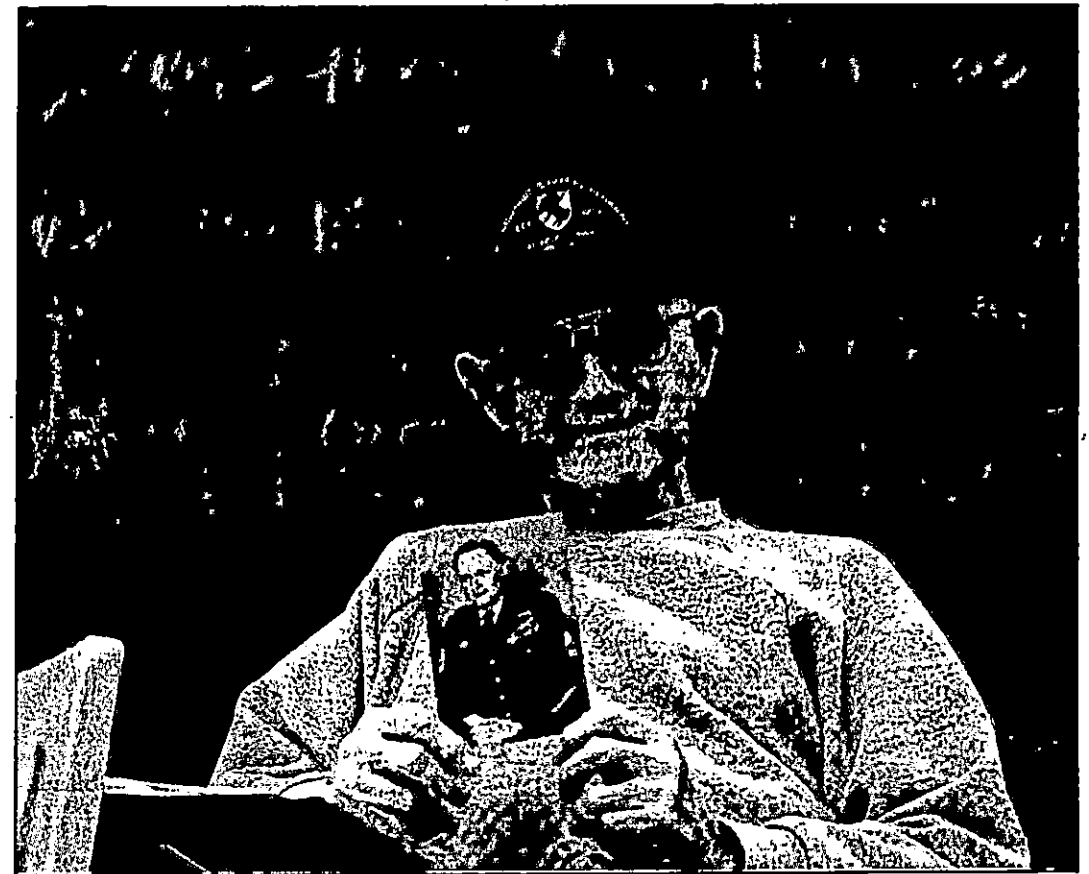
At 77, Schenck, Western's oldest participant in Saturday's fall commencement, has had more important things to worry about in December than an anthropology test.

When Schenck was at the age where he should have been worrying about college finals, he was in the process of earning the first of five Purple Heart medals when he was injured in the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The 19-year-old sailor was a gunner on the USS Helena, out of Montana, when his ship was damaged by a torpedo Dec. 7, 1941. Schenck kept his post and fired until his anti-aircraft artillery became too hot to fire anymore.

In what would become a pattern throughout Schenck's life, he survived and persevered.

"We lost 38 men on my ship that day," he said. "Everything was all confused. The planes came in low



Daily News/Joe Imel

Martin Schenck, 77, of Munfordville was wounded five times during military service and served in three wars. On Saturday, the war hero finally will realize one of his dreams – becoming a college graduate.

and headed right for the battleships; we weren't ready for anything like that."

For Schenck, who spent seven years in the Navy and 25 years in the Army, there was always a war – be it his 18 months in Vietnam or seven years in Korea and World War II – or a transfer order that kept him from going to college.

But gaining that college diploma

was always in the back of his mind – so Schenck waited.

While he waited, Schenck earned a Silver Star for valor, five Purple Hearts for wounds and a Vietnamese Gallantry Cross.

"Getting shot in the stomach was the worst," he said. "I thought I was finished; it tore up everything inside me. It kept me out for about nine months."

Schenck came back, though – he's just not built to quit.

Which is why, after a military career and several years as a mechanic in Louisville, Schenck felt like he had some unfinished business before he spent his twilight years fishing, playing golf and spending time with his wife, Della.

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## ▲ DEGREE

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"I have always wanted a college degree but I never had opportunity or the time," he said.

After spending a year in Western's Veterans Upward Bound program, which helps veterans brush up on math and writing skills to prepare for college, Schenck enrolled in school again after more than 50 years.

Despite the age difference with his classmates, despite having to get up at 5 a.m. to drive 50 miles to school, despite having to study until 9 p.m. once he got home, despite having five tumors removed from his neck and bouts with two forms of cancer in the past few years, Schenck has stuck with it.

At 10 a.m. Saturday, that perseverance will pay off.

Schenck's wife, four children, four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren will watch him pick up his bachelor's degree in anthropology.

They will watch as Schenck fulfills a dream years in the coming.

Then and only then, will Schenck finally rest.

"I am going to go fishing," he said of his plans for life after graduation. "I'm getting too old to worry about anything else."

## WKU graduation set for Saturday

By the Daily News

Western Kentucky University will confer more than 1,000 degrees during its fall commencement ceremony at 10 a.m. Saturday.

More than 650 students are expected to participate in the ceremony at Western's E.A. Diddle Arena.

The university will confer 101 associate degrees, 672 baccalaureate degrees and 256 master's degrees.

Western also will present honorary doctoral degrees to Don Vitale and Sallie Bingham.

Vitale, chairman and president of Manchester Capital in Bowling Green and retired chief executive officer of DESA International, is being honored for achievements in business and public service.

Bingham, a noted author, playwright and humanitarian, is being honored for her contributions to literature and philanthropy.

## World War II's heroes



Daily News/Joe Imel

Pearl Harbor veteran Martin Schenck (right) of Munfordville describes Friday how he watched a Japanese Zero warplane make a bombing run Dec. 7, 1941, while fellow veteran James Lones of Scottsville listens. The pair watched the premiere of "Pearl Harbor."

# 'Pearl Harbor' film 2001 stirs up memories

By MELINDA J. OVERSTREET  
The Daily News

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Some of the most difficult scenes to watch in the movie "Pearl Harbor" were from the aftermath of the infamous Dec. 7, 1941, attack.

They brought back horrid memories for Martin "Marty" Schenck of Munfordville, who, in real life, had been manning a machine gun on the deck of the USS Helena, trying to fend off Japanese bombers in the midst of the attack that day.

It was most difficult to watch "when they got wounded on the deck where they were laying around and getting bombed on there, and ... they couldn't get them off. They were stepping all over them ... , and running."

By the next day, the fires from the oil burning on top of the water had been extinguished, Schenck said.

"There was dead bodies in it and they were picking them up and taking them to the hospital," which had also been bombed,

Schenck said.

Despite the fact that it dredged up memories of the event that brought the United States into World War II, he was glad he came to see it — his first movie in about 60 years.

"I thought it was pretty good; it was pretty realistic," said Schenck, who served in the Navy from 1937 to 1945.

The first 90 minutes of the three-hour film, which premiered Friday, are used to develop the main characters — two U.S. fighter pilots and a nurse. It also illustrated the planning on both sides that led up to the offensive.

In response to praise for his "brilliant" strategy before the strike, the Japanese admiral replied, "A brilliant man would find a way not to fight a war."

Schenck has a personal version of what happened, experienced first-hand.

"We were in 10-10 dock; we were tied up and the (USS) Oglala was alongside ... we were behind the (USS) Pennsylvania ... this (Japanese) plane

came in," Schenck said. "He got in about 50 yards and he dropped the torpedo. And it went in and went under the Oglala and hit us and blew a hole about 20-foot long in the side."

The Oglala wasn't as lucky; it was one of several vessels that sank on that Sunday.

Schenck had been in his bunk on the third deck down and thought, as did many others, that the noises he heard were training exercises. Then the announcement was made over the loud speaker that the Japanese were attacking.

"I started running, climbing up and that torpedo hit and there was a fire that went all through there," he said.

"Some of the (men) were up on the deck as it went through and they were burning from the fire," he recalled.

On the other side of the ship, looking across the dock, he recalled seeing a plane shot that "went down over by

See PEARL, 2A

## ▲ PEARL

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Hickam Field."

That could have been the same plane that James Lones of Scottsville saw.

The movie made Lones, who had an office job at Fort Kamehameha, Hawaii, realize even more that he was "in the country club in the Army" compared with what Schenck and thousands of others went through.

"I'm glad I saw (the movie), but I don't care to see it again," said Lones.

The bombing woke him in his barracks.

Within his view, bombs were dropping on the Army's Hickam Field and clouds of smoke were rising.

"At first I thought it was just practice, and then when the three dive bombers came down and dropped the bombs on that old machine shop and it burst open in flames, I knew it was the real McCoy," Lones said.

"And then a Japanese plane that had been hit went right down in front of me over the buildings and I could see the pilot, and it crashed into a building the next block up from me and killed two boys that were watching it and of course the pilot was killed, and he had a University of Hawaii 1941 class ring on."

It wasn't until the next day when he went with a group to guard various points that he realized how much damage there really was, he said.

"It was amazing," he said.

Most of the movie was emotionally stirring for Lones, so it was difficult for him to pinpoint which parts were the toughest to sit through.

"It was pretty rough, ... especially the scenes in Pearl Harbor, men being blown apart and people running and being shot at, no way for protection," Lones said. "I hope we never have to go through it again."

Martin Schenck

n. 9, 31

My birth date 7 Sept 1922

MAY 1928 DUTCH SCHULZ CAME TO MY TOWN  
THEY SHOT UP THE TOWN

JUL 1929 THE STOCK MARKET CRASHED  
STARTING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

1933 HITLER ROSE TO POWER

SEPT 1938 HITLER MARCHED INTO CZECHOSLOVAKIA  
STARTING WWII

8 DEC 1938 ENLISTED IN THE US NAVY.

FEB 1939 ASSIGNED TO THE NEW CRUISER

USS HELENA,

ABOUT 15 DEC 1939  
AFTER TESTING ALL THE GUNS AND ENGINES

WE SAILED ON OUR SHakedown CRUISE  
TO THE SOUTH ATLANTIC, WE PULLED INTO  
MONTEVIDEO, URAGUAY, WHILE THERE, THE  
GERMAN BATTLESHIP GRAF SPEE ENTERED  
THE PORT PRETTY WELL SHOT UP THE BRITISH  
CHASED HER INTO PORT THEY WERE ALLOWED  
TO STAY THERE FOR 72 HRS FOR REPAIRS,  
AFTER THE 72 HRS SHE STARTED OUT AND  
THERE WAS A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION  
THE GERMAN SCUTTLED, IT SO THE BRITISH  
COULDN'T SINK IT.

7 DEC 1941. WAS AT PEARL HARBOR DURING THE  
ATTACK MY SHIP WAS HIT WITH A TORPEDO  
AND A BOMB.

SEPT 1942 AFTER BEING REPAIRED SAILED  
FOR SOUTH PACIFIC AND LAND TROOP AT GUADALCANAL  
OCT 12+13 42 ENGAGED JAP NAVY IN A NIGHT SEA  
BATTLE

NOV 12+13 1942 IN MAJOR SEA BATTLE WITH  
JAP NAVY

FROM DEC 42 THRU JUL 43 PARTICIPATED IN  
MANY SEA AND AIR BATTLES 6 JUL 43 MY  
SHIP WAS HIT WITH THREE TORPEDOS AND  
SUNK, SPENT 8 HRS IN WATER OFF JAP ISLAND  
FINALLY PICKED UP BY DESTROYER.

AUG 1943 TRANSFERRED TO SUBMARINE  
USS ANGLER SERVED ON IT TILL SEP 1945

SOCT 1945 DISCHARGED FROM NAVY

JAN 1945 REENLISTED IN US ARMY

My death at age UNKNOWN but CLOSE

MY LIFE: past - present - future

5 NOV 1945. ATTENDED PARACHUTE AND GLIDER SCHOOL  
JAN 46 sent to Germany, assigned to Hammelburg to guard  
all the Nazis and take them to NUREMBERG FOR THEIR  
TRIALS. AFTER THE TRIALS THOSE TO BE HUNG WERE, THE REST SENT TO  
PRISON. AFTER THIS I WAS ASSIGNED

to PATROL THE EAST-WEST BORDER  
I did this UNTIL DEC 1951, RETURNED TO U.S. FORT KNOX,  
MAR 1952. SENT TO KOREA ASSIGNED TO 7TH INFANTRY  
DIVISION FOUGHT FOR 24 MONTHS WOUNDED TWICE.

RETURNED TO U.S. FORT POLK, LA. APR 1954 TRANSFERRED TO  
FORT HOOD TEX AUG 1962

OCT 1962 I WAS AWAKENED AT MIDNIGHT IN THE MORNING AND TOLD  
TO GET MY PLATOON TO THE MOTOR POOL AND LOAD AMMUNITION  
ON THE TANKS AND OTHER VEHICLES THEN LOAD THEM ON  
FLAT CARS TO BE TAKEN TO FLORIDA. UPON ARRIVAL WE  
LOADED ON LST. AND HEADED FOR CUBA. WE FLOATED  
AROUND FOR 2 DAYS WAITING TO LAND IN CUBA. WE  
WERE TOLD TO RETURN TO FORT LAUDERDALE, THE RUSSIAN  
WERE REMOVING THE MISSILES. WE RETURNED TO TEX.  
AFTER ABOUT 6 MONTHS I WAS SENT BACK TO GERMANY.  
I REMAINED THERE UNTIL FEB. 1967 AND WAS REASSIGNED

TO FORT KNOX, JUL 1967 I WAS SENT TO VIETNAM. AGAIN  
I WAS SHOT TWICE. OCT 1968 I RETURNED TO THE  
U.S. FORT KNOX, I WAS AGAIN PUT ON ORDERS FOR  
VIETNAM, I WAS TO LEAVE JUL 1970 I HAD MY GEAR  
PACKED AND WAS GETTING READY TO GO TO CALIFORNIA  
WHEN NEW ORDERS CAME DOWN SAYING I COULDN'T  
GO TO VIETNAM, I HAD TO RETIRE, I HAD 32 YEARS  
AND YOU COULD ONLY STAY 30 YEAR I RETIRED 1 SEP 1970

AN MOVED TO MONTROVILLE AND STILL LIVE THERE  
 I WORKED FOR ABOUT 3 YRS AT GE. THEY WENT ON  
 STRIKE ONE DAY, SO I QUIT. I FISHED FOR A LONG  
 TIME, I HEARD ABOUT VUB SO I CALLED, I ATTENDED  
 CLASSES THERE FOR A YEAR, THIS YEAR I AM ATTENDING  
 WKV. I AM 72 YRS OLD I HAVE NO IDEA HOW  
 MUCH MORE TIME I HAVE. BUT I ENJOYED WHAT  
 I HAVE DONE AND WOULD DO IT AGAIN IF I  
 HAD THE OPPORTUNITY.



TOOLS ON POSITIVE

ROOM FOR CHANGE!

## **“ ‘Old Soldier’ Shows a Hero’s Mettle”**

**By Naomi Rock**

**Evening News Staff Writer**

PERTH AMBOY – “He’s all soldier,” the blonde, attractive woman said proudly. “When the Vietnam conflict began to get worse he was so miserable he couldn’t stand not being able to do something.”

Mrs. Yvonne Schenck smiled as she spoke about her husband, M. Sgt. Martin G. Schenck, a 45-year old U.S. Army platoon sergeant who has been awarded a Silver Star for bravery in Vietnam.

She smiled and recalled that two years ago Sgt. Schenck, five years retired from the Army had to fight to get back in.

Knowing her husband would be unhappy sitting home, Mrs. Schenck, wrote to the President, to explain that for a year her husband had tried unsuccessfully to re-enlist. The President answered the letter and the Army took back Sgt. Schenck.

Last August, Schenck, a Perth Amboy native was sent to Vietnam. On Feb. 3 during the massive Viet Cong assault on Saigon and nearby villages, Schenck led his platoon through heavy enemy fire to rescue wounded friendly forces.

Mrs. Schenck is very proud of the letter that accompanies her husband’s medal – the letter which describes his heroic action in the village of Bien Hoa not far from Saigon.

“He led his platoon of five armored cavalry assault vehicles into the enemy-held village several times to evacuate the friendly troops,” the letter reads. “Each time his was the first vehicle to enter and the last to leave.”

The letter says he personally saved eight men “dismounting several times...he exposed himself to intense enemy fire...aiding those wounded soldiers...During the last attempt he was wounded in the shoulder.”

Schenck, a member of the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment, wrote his wife about the assault and rescue, but toned down the heroism, she says. The shoulder wound knocked him unconscious and he was pulled to safety by his men. Today, recovering from his wound, he is still somewhere in Vietnam.

Mrs. Schenck, the former Yvonne Rogghe, says she worries about her husband and hopes he will come home safely and on schedule in August. But she is an Army wife and is used to the dangers.

Since their marriage in 1950 Schenck has fought in Korea, and served in various positions in the United States and in Germany. In 1961 he retired from the Army and went to work as a laborer for the Arko Construction Co. in Perth Amboy.

But he could not forget 22 years of military life. He first joined the Navy at age 17, upon leaving Perth Amboy High School, and survived the attack on Pearl Harbor when the battleship he was on was sunk by enemy torpedoes. After World War II he left the Navy and enlisted in the Army.

The Schencks met in Germany after the war (Mrs. Schenck is Belgian) and between tours of duty have lived in Perth Amboy. They have three daughters ages 8, 14, and 17, and a son by Mrs. Schenck’s former marriage. They now live at 219 Brighton Ave.



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Schenck has two sisters in Perth Amboy, Mrs. Jane Greco of 253 Water St. and Mrs. Dorothy Bruno of 135 Madison Ave., and two brothers, Robert of Sayreville and George of the Highlands.

Asked how she feels about the Silver STAR, Mrs. Schenck says "wonderful," but then she pauses and smiles.

"He's got a lot of medals," she says softly. "A whole box of them from other battles. He's wonderful, but the medal...is just another medal."

B  
MARTIN #. SCHENCK born in Perth Amboy, NJ on September 7, 1921. Entered U.S. Navy on October 8, 1938. Served on Cruiser U.S.S. Helena, U.S. Submarines U.S.S. R-20, U.S.S. Angler, and U.S.S. Greenling during World War II. Was at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Enlisted in the U.S. Army in November, 1945. Attended Glider and Parachute school in 1946. Served with the U.S. Constabulary in Germany, 14th Arm'd Cavalry from 1946 to 1951, 7th Recon Company 7th Division in Korea, 11th Arm'd Cavalry Regiment "E" Troop 2nd Squadron from August 1967 to August 1968 as Platoon Sergeant. Returned to Fort Knox as 1ST Sergeant Training Company. Assigned to General Subjects at Arm'd School; Map Reading Section. Retired September 1, 1970.

### LOCATIONS OF STATIONS

PERTH WEST AUSTRALIA WWII

NEW ZEALAND WWII

GERMANY

KOREA

VIETNAM

SOUTH WEST PACIFIC WWII

GUADALCANAL WWII

NEW GEORGIA ISLANDS WWII

PHILIPPINE ISLAND WWII

PEARL HARBOR, HAWAII WWII

RETIRED 1ST SGT. US ARMY

### WHAT DOING TODAY

HUNT & FISH, WORK AROUND  
HOUSE, HELP VETERANS AND  
THEIR DEPENDENTS FILE FOR  
VA. BENEFITS.