Eventually two of his older brothers enlisted in the service. One went off to fight in Europe, the other in the Pacific. At the age of 21, Oyster was working at Borden's Dairy in West Branch and met 17-year-old Marge.

Oyster worked with Marge's sister's husband, and Marge and her sister would often visit at the dairy. He would walk Marge home after he was finished with work because she was frightened to walk alone.

''That started it,'' Oyster said. ''That is how we got acquainted, and from there she tried to rope me in, and she did.''

In late 1942 Oyster was drafted into the Army. He could have been deferred because Borden made products for the government, but Oyster opted against deferment.

''I was no worse or better than anyone else,'' he said. Thirty days before he was shipped overseas, he received word that his brother had been killed in Europe.

His brother's death made him a bit uneasy about the future, but he still wanted to serve his country.

''I wanted to go over and finish the job,'' he said.

On Dec. 7, 1942, Oyster embarked on the first leg of his journey. He attended basic training at Camp Claibourne, La., and went on to Camp House, Texas, where he was trained as a machine gunner.

On his first furlough from the service, Oyster married Marge on April 21, 1942.

He was then shipped to New York. Three days later he boarded the U.S.S. Montacella for the long trip across the Atlantic.

''I went over to France on my honeymoon,'' Oyster said. His young bride stayed with her parents in West Branch while he set off to fight for his country.

''(The journey) was kind of hairy,'' Oyster remembered. ''We would run into a storm and have to change course. One time we had to change course for an enemy submarine.''

''There were close living conditions,'' he said, adding that he volunteered for duty with the Navy sailors in the PX to get out from below decks. ''You can't realize—(below decks) it was three bunks high by six to eight bunks wide. Let me just say this—you didn't want to be on the bottom bunk.''

The soldiers finally arrived in France and went directly across into Germany. For six months Oyster, assigned to Company E of the 103rd Infantry Division, served on the front lines as a machine gunner.

''The Germans didn't like machine gunners,'' he said, adding that the gunners were the first targets of the enemy. The battles were fierce and Oyster witnessed the deaths of many of his fellow soldiers and friends.

''When your buddies got killed right alongside of you, it makes you want to finish it,'' he said. ''You really didn't have time to think. You do what you have to do, and that was it.''

Oyster added that fear was always present.

''Anyone who says they weren't afraid, they're nuts,'' he said. ''You have got guns and artillery aimed at you.''

In December 1944 as Allied forces were pushing their way into Germany, the Germans made a surprise counterattack and the Battle of the Bulge ensued.

During an artillery barrage, Oyster was showered with shrapnel. He was hit in the leg and a small piece of shrapnel struck him in the back.

He was taken to a field hospital for treatment. The hospital was located in the woods and consisted only of some tents. Oyster underwent surgery and lay there for several days. The battle was still being waged and he couldn't be moved.

By the time Oyster got to a hospital in England, gangrene had set in.

''They said they were going to take my leg,'' Oyster said. ''I said no. At this time penicillin was just being introduced.''

Doctors administered penicillin to Oyster.

''The infection cleared up and I got to save my leg,'' he said.

On Dec. 31, 1944, as Oyster lay in a hospital in England, Marie gave birth to their first child, Nancy. Oyster was then put into limited service and transferred to the Air Force.

''I wanted to be in the Air Force in the first place,'' he said. ''It (the Air Force) is the best place you can be, as far as I'm concerned. It was almost like sending me home, putting me in there.''

For the remainder of the war, Oyster was stationed at the 8th Army Headquarters, located about 30 miles from London, taking care of three generals' vehicles.

''They were going to send our division to Japan,'' he said. ''But before we got shipped out, the war was over.''

Oyster sailed home, this time on the Queen Mary. Upon arrival back into the United States, Oyster was given a choice.

''They told me that I could go in the hospital for two to three months and get my disability. I wanted to go home,'' he said, looking at his wife of 59 years.

Oyster returned home to claim his bride, and the couple settled back into the Lupton area.

Two more daughters, Joyce and Susan, followed in 1946 and 1948. Oyster yearned for a son.

''You take them as they come,'' he said. ''But I wanted a boy.''

In 1950, Marge delivered their first son, Larry. Another daughter, Jean, arrived in 1951, followed by Russell in 1954, Linda in 1956, and finally Joe was born in 1957.

''I kept trying to have a good one,'' said Oyster teasingly. ''If I couldn't do better than that, I thought I better stop.''

The Oysters now have 23 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

Years later Oyster traveled to the veterans' hospital to receive his medical benefits. He didn't realize that when he was discharged from the hospital in England, he was listed as a amputee.

''Veterans records showed that I had a wooden leg,'' he said, chuckling. ''They wanted to know where my wooden leg was.''

For many years, Oyster worked construction for Strand Steel Construction and also worked for himself for a time. At age 65, he retired on Social Security, but never stopped working.

In fact, at 79, Oyster still works full-time as a park ranger at the Rifle River Recreation Area in Lupton. He is expecting to finally retire later this summer after 20 years at the park.

In addition to working full-time, he also takes care of Marge, who is now confined to a wheelchair.

''My day starts at 5 a.m. and ends at 9 p.m., seven days a week,'' he said. ''I just do it.''

A couple of years ago, Oyster was reading a VFW magazine and remarked that he wished that he would have stayed in the service and received his medals.

His son, Joe, went home and told his wife. They contacted the Veteran's Affairs office in West Branch to determine how they would go about acquiring his medals.

They filled out a medal request form and mailed it to St. Louis, Mo. After six months, they heard nothing. Joe then mailed in a second request and still received no satisfaction.

A representative at Veteran's Affairs suggested they contact Camp, and within just a matter of a few months the medals were in Camps possession.

Camp hand-delivered those medals to a surprised Oyster at Joe's home on June 4.

Joe had invited his father to his home on the pretense of having a pizza party. Oyster patiently waited for the pizza to arrive. He was getting hungry and also a bit suspicious.

''You don't very often surprise me,'' Oyster said. ''But they did surprise me. It felt good.''

''I didn't expect to get them. There are a lot of soldiers who deserve the same thing,'' he added. ''I was just defending my country. I didn't do any more than anybody else did.''

''I would do it again before I would send my grandsons to do it,'' he added.

KNOEBELS AMUSEMENT PARK CELEBRATES 75TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. PAUL E. KANJORSKI

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 27, 2001

Mr. KANJORSKI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call the attention of the House of Representatives to the 75h anniversary of the formal beginning of one of Northeastern Pennsylvania's primary tourist destinations, the Knoebels Amusement Park near Elysburg, which is also Pennsylvania's largest free admission amusement park.

In those 75 years, Knoebels has grown from a small local park to hosting more than a million guests each year. At the same time, the Knoebel family maintains a strong sense of tradition and family.

The land has been owned by the Knoebel family since 1828, when it was purchased by the Reverend Henry Hartman Knoebel. His grandson and namesake was the one who first envisioned the land's recreational potential. The younger Henry, better known as H.H. or ''Ole Hen,'' farmed the land and pursued a lumbering business operating saw mills at several locations on the property.

Around the start of the 20th century, the Knoebel farm began to be visited by ''tally-hos,'' Sunday afternoon rides with a destination, in this case people who came to sit by the creek banks, picnic in the woods and jump from the covered bridge to the swimming hole below.

As the site became more popular, the family installed picnic tables and benches, hired a lifeguard to protect the swimmers, and began selling food and soft drinks. The formal beginning of the amusement park was July 4, 1926, the opening of a concrete swimming pool. That same year, the family opened the first ride, a steam-powered merry-go-round, and the first restaurant.

Since that time, Knoebels has grown tremendously. Today, in addition to 50 rides and great food, the park offers the award-winning Alamo Restaurant, unique gift shops, numerous games, a miniature golf course, two campgrounds, picnic pavilions and the large Crystal Pool with its 900,000 gallons of mountain spring water. Knoebels is a major contributor to the economy of the region, employing 1,400 seasonal workers.

Voted ''America's Best Park for Families'' two years in a row by the National Amusement Park Historical Association, Knoebels is also known as ''Pennsylvania's Hometown Park.'' The park is managed by the third generation of the Knoebel family, and members of the fourth generation are coming on board and taking their places. Brothers Dick and Ron Knoebel serve as co-general managers of the park.