

1945 January 8-14

Four Medingers

Four Medingers In Service; Three See Overseas Action



JOHN



BERNARD



JEROME



DONALD

La Crosse Tribune, 1945 January 14, page 10

Like so many families in La Crosse county at the time, the Medinger family had multiple family members serving in the armed forces during World War II. It was not uncommon for all of a married couple's sons to be in the service, and daughters also served in the armed forces or its auxiliaries.

The Medinger family name is well-known in La Crosse because of local politics, but what might not be so well-known is the service of four Medinger brothers in World War II.

They were the sons of Ben and Clara (Krause) Medinger, who lived at 2331 Green Bay Street in La Crosse.¹



(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1944 July 23, page 5)

John A. "Big John" Medinger was born on September 29, 1918.²

He graduated from Central High School.³

As a young man during the years of the Great Depression, Medinger was a member of the [Civilian Conservation Corps](#).⁴

He worked at the Trane Company prior to his induction into the army on November 24, 1941.⁵ His initial processing was at Fort Sheridan, Illinois.⁶ When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, John Medinger was in infantry training at [Camp Croft, South Carolina](#).⁷ He remained at Camp Croft until early March 1942 when he was transferred to [Fort Dix, New Jersey](#).⁸

Medinger had a brief furlough home before going overseas. By July 1942, Medinger was in Northern Ireland.⁹ He did not like Ireland; Medinger called it "damp and dirty." He claimed there were only three days out his seven months there when it did not rain.¹⁰

He liked Scotland better. His division trained there, and Medinger remembered the beautiful scenery.¹¹

Medinger was an infantryman in the [34th "Red Bull" Infantry Division](#). The division landed in [Algeria](#) and took part in the [Tunisian campaign](#) in the North African theater of operations. Medinger liked Algiers and would have liked to go back there in peacetime. Medinger's unit won a [Presidential Unit Citation](#) for bravery in the battle for Hill 609, where he was wounded by German machine gun fire.

John Medinger also served in Italy. Combined with his time in North Africa, Medinger was overseas more than two and one-half years.¹²

On July 13, 1944, John Medinger returned to his home in La Crosse for a 21-day furlough before reporting to San Antonio, Texas, for reassignment.¹³

By the end of the year, he was back in La Crosse on a Christmas furlough before heading to [Camp Ellis, Illinois](#), in January 1945.¹⁴

After his discharge from the Army, Medinger was a house painter. He married Gustava Thaldorf on May 10, 1954, when he was 35 years old. They did not have any children. Medinger loved to hunt and fish, and he was a member of the American Legion Post 52 and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1530.¹⁵



Medinger

John A. Medinger

(La Crosse Tribune, 1996 March 11, page B-2)

“Big John” Medinger was 77 years old when he died on March 9, 1996, in the Bethany St. Joseph Care Center. Funeral services were at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church, and he was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.¹⁶



(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 January 14, page 10)

Bernard H. "Bernie" Medinger was born on August 21, 1920. He attended the Holy Trinity Catholic School and Central High School. Like his older brother, Bernard also worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. He worked in the West Salem and Hixton areas.¹⁷

He enlisted in the United States Army when World War II started. Bernard Medinger served in the infantry in the South Pacific where he was a platoon leader.¹⁸

By January 1945, Bernard Medinger was a sergeant in the United States Army. He had been overseas for 21 months in New Guinea, the Dutch East Indies, and the Philippines.¹⁹

In November 1945, Sgt. Medinger sent to the La Crosse Tribune "an appeal issued in letter form by the [37th division](#) for help to get them out of 'this God-forsaken Pacific area.'" The letter complained about delays in sending them back to the United States. The official explanation was a shortage of ships, but the men of the 37th speculated that military politics played a role.²⁰ Bernard Medinger did make it back to the United States on December 12, 1945.²¹

After the war, Bernard, along with his father and his brother, Jerome, built houses in the La Crosse area. Then he was a cement finisher for concrete contractors until he retired in 1982 after 37 years in that line of work. Bernard Medinger married Clara Zander on April 21, 1956, when he was 35 years old. They had a daughter named Nancy. Medinger was a member and commander of the American Legion Post 52 and a member of its firing squad. He was also a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1530.²²



Medinger

Bernard Medinger

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 2005 December 6, page B-3)

Bernard Medinger was in his Onalaska home when he died on December 4, 2005, at the age of 85. After funeral services at St. James the Less Catholic Church, he was buried in the St. Joseph Convent Cemetery at Hokah, Minnesota.²³



(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 January 14, page 10)

Jerome R. Medinger was born on March 31, 1922. After attending schools in La Crosse, he too worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps; he was at the Hixton camp.²⁴

Like his two older brothers, he was in the Army during World War II. As a member of the [36th Infantry Division](#), Medinger was in action in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, and Germany.²⁵ In January 1945, Private Jerome Medinger had been overseas for 21 months.²⁶ By the end of war, he had risen to the rank of staff sergeant.²⁷

Jerome Medinger “was involved in many different enterprises,” but his main job was as a cement finisher for construction contractors. He was a member of the American Legion Post 52 and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1530. Medinger married Bernice L. Halverson on August 6, 1955, when he was 33 years old. They had a son named Russell.²⁸

On January 15, 2003, Jerome Medinger died at the Hillview Health Care Center. He was 80 years old. Following funeral services at the Blaschke Funeral Home, Medinger was buried in the Oak Grove Cemetery.²⁹

The lives of the three older Medinger brothers had some remarkable similarities. They all worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s; they all were in the Army during World War II; they did not get married until they were well into their 30s; between the three of them there were only two children; and construction or home improvements were their main occupation during their careers.

The fourth Medinger brother who was in World War II followed his own unique path. He joined a different branch of the armed forces, married early, had many children, and became a business owner while making his mark in local politics.



(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 January 14, page 10)

Donald Lincoln Medinger was born on February 12, 1926. He was the eighth of ten children in the family.³⁰

Don Medinger entered the United States Navy on June 23, 1944, when he was 18 years old. His basic training was at the [Great Lakes Naval Station](#) in Chicago.³¹ Before joining the Navy, Medinger had attended vocational school and worked as a truck driver.³²

After basic training, he married Audrey Anderson on September 11, 1944, making him easily the youngest of the four brothers at the time of matrimony. Don and Audrey Medinger would eventually have eight children together.³³

Medinger was then stationed at [Little Creek, Virginia](#), while his bride remained in the La Crosse area.³⁴ He was assigned to the *USS LSM 413* (Landing Ship, Medium) that had just been commissioned August 28, 1945.³⁵

Donald Medinger, a graduate of Aquinas High School, returned from the Navy in 1946 and worked at Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Co. from 1946 to 1968. He then worked at La Crosse State University and at a Winona Company for a couple of years. In December 1970, he opened Don's Texaco Service.³⁶ He retired from the service station business in December 1989.³⁷

He was on the La Crosse Common Council from 1963 to 1995. Medinger was also a member of the La Crosse County Board from 1982 to August 1996. When he was re-elected in April 1996, he was sworn in at his hospital bed. He had to retire from the county board because of health problems.³⁸

Medinger was known for being outspoken and fighting hard for issues he believed in. Loren Wardwell, who served on the common council with Medinger for 28 years, said Don Medinger "always expressed his views plainly and was not always complimentary but he never held a grudge." Roger Plesha, another council member who served with him, said Medinger "represented the average guy on the street." He had strong opinions, but he was willing to listen to other views. Medinger was also known for his support of labor unions.³⁹

Don Medinger was equally colorful during his time on the La Crosse County Board. He was known for yelling a lot. First-year board member Mike Huebsch, who went on to become a state representative and a state department head, was a frequent target of Medinger's outbursts because of Huebsch's penchant for long speeches. Medinger would yell, "Sit down, ya (moderately bad word)! Shut up!" until the county board chair insisted on Roberts Rules of Order decorum.⁴⁰



Don Medinger

(La Crosse Tribune, 1997 September 1, page B-4)

Don Medinger died on August 30, 1997, at the age of 71, in the Franciscan Skemp Medical Center in La Crosse. Following funeral services at Holy Trinity Catholic Church, he was entombed in the St. Francis of Assissi Mausoleum in the Catholic Cemetery.⁴¹

But the Medinger family contribution to La Crosse politics and government did not end with him. Don's son, John, was a state legislator for 16 years, mayor of La Crosse for eight years, and, like his father, served on the La Crosse County Board, as well as working as an aide to United States Senators Russ Feingold, Herb Kohl, and Tammy Baldwin. John Medinger retired from public service in 2017.⁴²

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Revised: 2021 March 1

Sources & Notes:

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¹² "Four Medingers In Service; Three See Overseas Action," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 January 14, page 10.

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- ¹⁴ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 January 14.
- ¹⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1996 March 11.
- ¹⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1996 March 11.
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