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John Riisoe poses with his portrait that was drawn by an artist while he was on leave after the war in Europe had ended in 1945. DON STEELE/DAILY GLOBE.

# Ship leave creates lasting memento

BY DON STEELE  
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## Last of a two-part series

KINSLEY — The Kinsley Library, in conjunction with the Kansas Humanities Council, has been collecting stories from the World War II years in Edwards County. The project, which has been underway for a year, is called "Patchwork of Dependency" and the library celebrated the completion of the first phase with an open house reception Tuesday.

The library has created a Web site which features video clips, audio recordings of the interviews, transcripts of the interviews and digital photos provided by the participants.

Amid copies of the record of their stories, many residents of Edwards County gathered Tuesday to share memories. Following is one particular memory.

### A brief diversion

John J. Riisoe, a lifelong resident of Edwards County, spent a lot of time aboard the USS Frankford, a destroyer.

"We spent three days in the Boston area in early May of 1945 looking for a Nazi sub," Riisoe said. "We had three destroyers, an aircraft carrier and a lot of planes trying to get him (the captain of the Nazi sub). Finally, he came up in Boston Harbor, surrendered to the U.S., took a cyanide capsule and killed himself."

Riisoe logged 70,000 miles in his 18 months in the Navy.

"A tin can never sits still," he said, referring to the destroyer.

But the ship did sit still for a while

in mid-May 1945. The war in Europe had ended with VE Day on May 8, so the Frankford was being fitted for combat in the south Pacific. She pulled into New York Harbor, where her torpedo tubes were replaced with quad 40s.

There wasn't much for the ship's crew to do during the changeover, so Riisoe got an 18-day leave and returned to Edwards County for a visit. When he reported back to his ship, the work still wasn't finished, so he and his shipmates enjoyed some leisure time in New York City.

Naturally, they ended up at the Stage Door Canteen several evenings. The nightspot was operated by the American Theatre Wing and sat amid the buzz and glamor of the Times Square theater district. Servicemen could get a good meal, dance with the ladies, enjoy some topnotch entertainment and mingle with celebrities like Marlene Dietrich.

Soon after the club opened on March 2, 1942, sailors were signaling ship to ship to spread the word. According to accounts in "America in WWII" magazine, a sailor who was at the club on opening night signaled another ship "No liquor, but damned good anyway," followed by the club's address.

Among the other amenities provided for servicemen at the club, the occasional portrait artist set up shop and drew charcoal portraits of the soldiers and sailors. Riisoe saw a girl

doing portraits one evening and thought she might be from Edwards County. She turned out not to be the girl he was thinking of, but she insisted he sit down to be drawn.

"When she was done, you couldn't even tell who it was supposed to be, so I threw it in the trash on my way out," Riisoe said.

The next night, an artist named Vincent Trotta was doing portraits. Trotta was art director for Paramount Studios in Hollywood in the 1920s and '30s and created portraits of many movie stars.

Riisoe studied the artist's work and decided it might be worth the sitting to have his portrait made.

"It took about 45 minutes, but I got to sit and watch Jo Stafford sing during part of that time," Riisoe said.

Riisoe had just turned 19, and Trotta's portrait captures the youthful smile of a sailor on the town in New York.

"I asked him what it would cost if I had it drawn in his studio, and he said \$45. I was making about \$1 a day, so that seemed like a lot of money," Riisoe said.

When the drawing was complete, Riisoe reached for it, but the artist wouldn't let him have it.

"You're a sailor and sailors get drunk, and you'll never get home with it," Trotta said.

So Trotta took down the young sailor's address, had the drawing matted and shipped it to Edwards County, where it was on display

Tuesday afternoon at the Kinsley Library.