

Vets: 'We did the best we could'

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While serving as a fighter pilot, Nathaniel (Nat) Adams, 80, of Boise flew off the Monterey, Enterprise, and San Jacinto aircraft carriers. During World War II, he was escorting George H. W. Bush's torpedo plane when it was shot down, forcing the airman who later became the nation's leader to parachute to safety.

Referring to former President Bush as a "nice guy," Adams recalled that he liked to start arguments among the pilots and then leave while the conflicts were still going on.

"He was very popular," Adams said.

In addition to World War II memories, the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks also cast a shadow on the gathering.

Some veterans said they were appalled by the attacks on New York, calling them worse than Pearl Harbor. Some called the destruction of the World Trade Center the most awesome sight they had ever seen, adding they couldn't believe it happened.

But the patriotism left in the attacks' wake was similar to what came after the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, veterans said.

"The person on the

street became much more dedicated to his nation — just like Pearl Harbor," George Jensen, 87, of Boise said. "Things like that bring our people together."

Another veteran noted Thursday's program would have probably been less warmly-received by the students if it had happened before Sept. 11.

George Eldridge was an "old man of 23" when World War II started. He joined the Army Air Corps and became an expert bombardier, flying 45 missions with the 9th Air Force before the war ended.

He commented with regret on recent "friendly fire" that killed U.S. soldiers and civilians in Afghanistan.

"We did the best we could," Eldridge said. "Accuracy was very, very important."

The efforts of the aging bombardier and his fellow veterans were not lost on students — including Amy Johnston, who called for continued appreciation of the sacrifices made by America's heroes.

"We have so much to learn from them," Johnston said. "We owe them so much respect. They haven't gotten enough."

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Valley heroes

Here's a list of the veterans who joined students in Nampa on Thursday for a Pearl Harbor-related gathering at the Warhawk Air Museum. They are pictured on Page 1A today.

Nampa

Bob Coates
George Eldridge
Cecil Engle
Wayne Fairchild
Dave and Leland Fife
Vic Loveless
Corinne Moyers
Karl Newby
Joe and Betty Oberst
Bud Ptacek
Elmo Strickler
John Young

Caldwell

Floyd Shelp

Melba

George Metteer

Middleton

Floyd and Mabel Hester

Meridian

Bill and Dorothy Gornick
Chuck Koska
Bob Wickard

Emmett

Hi Lorenzen

Boise

Nat Adams
Jim Biggs
Chet Bowers
Ken Gurr
Bill Hill
George Jensen
Chauncy Reese
Robbie Robinson
Frank Sutherland
Eagle
Fern Dixon
Ray Smith