

## WWII Vet builds homes in Roseway

(Interview done August 23, 2006 by Bonnie LaDoe)



Ivan Powell on Makin Island in 1944



Ivan Powell 2006

If you live in a mid century ranch home in Roseway, there's a good chance it may have been built by Powell and Sons. Ivan Powell, his dad, and two brothers owned Powell and Sons builders on 71 and Prescott for almost 40 years and built many homes in Roseway.

Ivan, born in the little town of Cherokee, Oklahoma in 1918, moved to Longview, WA at age 6 and then to NE Portland to attend the third grade at Fernwood grade school. But by 1929, the family had moved back to Oklahoma as his dad, Grover Eddie Powell, always in construction, followed the job market. 1934 found the family again in the Pacific Northwest in Ellensburg, Washington where Ivan graduated from high school in 1936.

The Depression had halted most of the building activity, so after high school Ivan went to J. C. Penney in Ellensburg and asked for a job. He not only got the job, he became assistant manager of their Goldendale, Washington store for 2 years and the Port Townsend store up until the beginning of WW II. In December 1941, Ivan quit his job and came to Portland, where his parents were now living, and went to work in construction at the Portland Air Base on Swan Island. This meant a wage increase from \$95 a month at Penneys to \$105 a week in construction. However it also meant he was working 7 days a week because it was wartime.

On March 18, 1941, Ivan received his "greetings" from the US Army to go to war. Instead of waiting to be drafted, Ivan joined the Navy as a Warrant Officer and by July 6, he was off to the East Coast for training. By September, he was overseas with the Navy engineers, Construction Battalion, the famous Seabee's. With the 16th battalion, Ivan

built air bases on many Pacific islands. He said he "had a little problem with the enemy" and was awarded the bronze star for a "little extra hazardous duty". He also received a medal for good conduct, which he says he finds interesting to "get a medal for being a nice guy".

In the spring of 1945, Ivan came to Portland on leave to visit his parents who had built a small home on 69th and Prescott. He reported back to base in San Francisco and was there until the war ended in 1945. Leaving the Navy in November 1945, he and his younger brother, Harold, who was stationed in San Diego, drove home to Portland. And a week later, their older brother Earl, also in the Seabee's, came home. They soon outgrew the little house on Prescott, but because his dad had purchased a 100 x 100 lot, they were able to build a bigger home around the corner on 69th.



Earl Powell & wife, Pat, with Ivan  
at 6828 NE Prescott



Later Powell home facing 69th at Prescott

On January 2, 1946, the three brothers along with their dad formed Powell and Sons General Contractors, leasing the land at 71 and Prescott, and later purchasing it. Earl was the architect, Harold the shop and cabinet man, and Ivan managed the finances and personnel. So with from 15 to 20 hired men, they started buying tax lots to build homes, mostly in Roseway, and continued for the next 40 years, closing the business in 1986.

On March 26, 1950, Ivan married the love of his life; Donna Fisher, and they celebrated 54 years of marriage before her death. They had two children, Sue and Verne, and lived in a

Powell built home on NE 74th. In 1955, Ivan built his family home on NE 65th and resided there until a very recent move into his son's home - which is, of course, a Powell built home in Roseway.

Ivan has more memories than can be told here, including attending the opening of the Hollywood Theatre in 1928 as an 8 year old. He can remember when the Prescott Market was called Mungers. And when his son owned the Arco station across the street that was once an ice cream store. And so much more, including many stories from WWII.

As part of the interview with Ivan, he drove me around the neighborhood and pointed out many of the homes that Powell and Sons had built. Below are just a few, and I'll bet one of them could be yours!



Thank you Ivan, for telling us your story and your memories of living in Roseway for 62 years.

Note: Ivan passed away August 2010