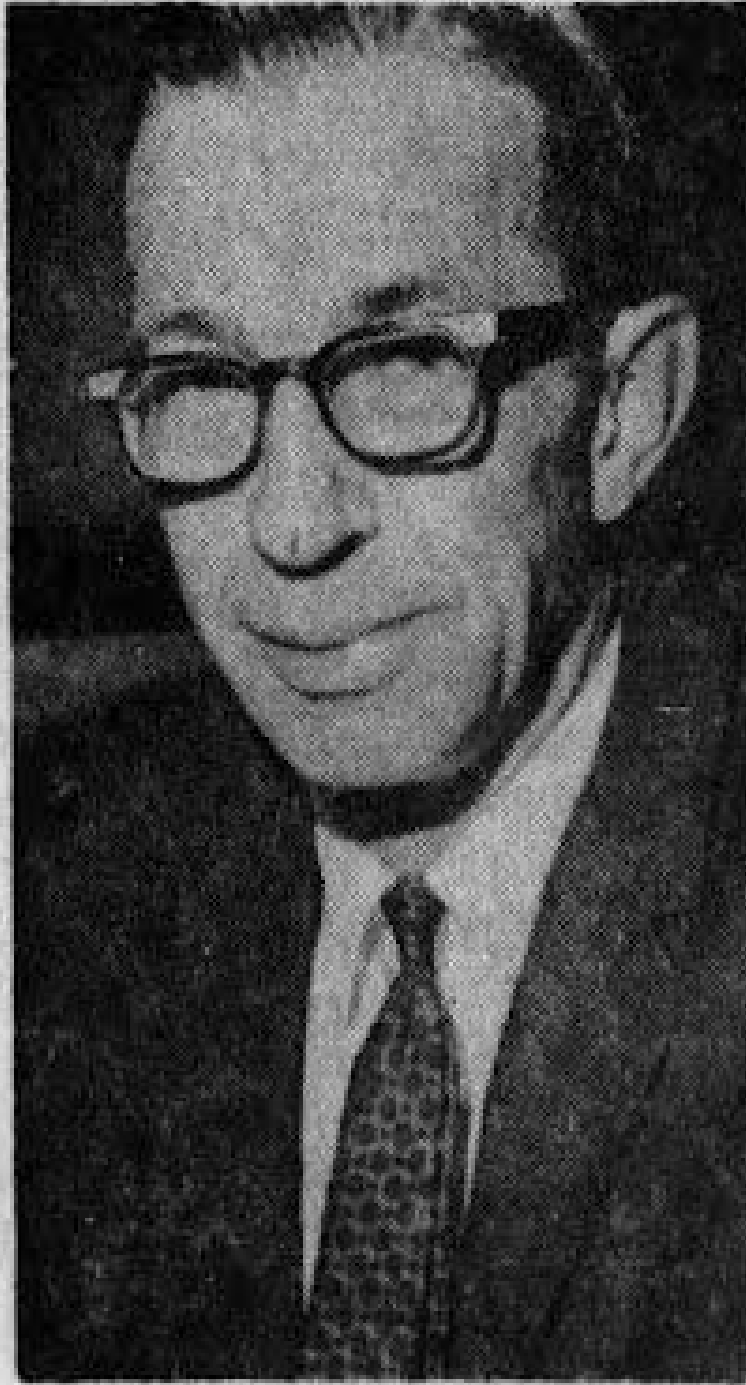


# MMM1 Robert W. Graf

Location - West-A: R17, C14



Robert Graf

**MMM/1 Robert Graf, Route 1, Oshkosh, entered service Jan. 20, 1943. He was decorated with the American theater ribbon, the Asiatic-Pacific ribbon with two stars and the Philippine liberation ribbon.**

Wed., Dec. 28, 1983 The Northwestern 7

## Commissioner to trade roads for golf course



Northwestern photo

**Soon Robert Graf won't be calling the shots when snowplows should be out**

### DOUG ZELLMER

Northwestern Staff Writer

Thirty-seven years ago Robert Graf, fresh out of the Navy, traded his mechanical ability for a desk job.

He settled into white collar employment as a clerk in the Winnebago County Highway Department with little realization that bigger and better things would come his way.

"I never dreamed I would be working with a government body," he said. "I always had a mechanical aptitude. My plans were to someday land a job as a tool and die maker. I trained as a machinist and diesel mechanic in the Navy."

His plan to be a machinist did not get beyond the thinking stage.

Graf learned to persevere. He spent four years as clerk before a promotion in 1949 brought him the job as highway office manager — a position he held until 1967.

His bookkeeping work had paved his future with the county.

"I was appointed Winnebago County Highway Commissioner (by the county board) in 1967," he said. "Looking back, it doesn't seem like I've been here 37 years. I've certainly enjoyed my time here."

In a few days, Graf, 60, will retire from his job as highway commissioner. He will trade in his lunch bucket for the golf course and travel with his wife, Vivian, who will retire as a secretary from the highway department.

The bespectacled Graf, a thinly built man with an unshakable voice, started work with the county for \$155 a month — including \$65 a month subsidy from the veteran's administration — and finished earning \$35,000 a year. Not bad for a man who didn't finish high school.

"I remember Mr. (E.M.) Bird (former highway commissioner) saying I should give the clerk's job a try," said Graf. "The veterans' administration was looking for a job for me in fixing office equipment. At first, the clerk's job was a big change for me, but after a while I had no intentions of leaving."

The job of highway commissioner has undergone physical and administrative changes since Graf took over. Most changes have been for the better, says Graf.

The highway office is located on Knapp Street, after years in the courthouse. Gravel roads are now all paved. Fewer men have been required to undertake highway department work.

"There has been a minimum of a 20 percent reduction in manpower since 1968. The department is down to 64 men. We have improved equipment and a change in how that equipment is manned. We've saved manpower."

Graf says the highway department has eliminated using two of its men to operate a snow plow with attached wing. Towns furnish the extra man to operate the wing. Fewer men are needed to salt roads, mainly because of improved equipment.

"I remember when we didn't have spreader trucks (for salt). We fabricated home made spreaders that spun the salt onto the roads. Hydraulics have played a big role in upgrading equipment."

Roads, something most of us take for granted, have improved considerably under Graf's guidance. He said better roads have made for more and better transportation. County crews are responsible for nearly 1,000 miles of roads.

"There are still potholes and other road problems. But it bothers me that the county is seeing more claims (the result of accidents) against it for the condition of the roads. Years ago we didn't see claims. People's attitudes have changed."

Graf's highway commissioner post, to be filled by Raymond Grigar of Rusk County, was an administrative one. He prepared budgets, attended county board highway committee meetings, and had a working relationship with the state's Department of Transportation.

"I really believe that knowing the bookkeeping end of this business helped me when I took over as commissioner. When I took over we went into data processing."

Bookkeeping aside, Graf will be leaving friends in the highway department. He said people made the difference in his life.

"The memory I will carry with me is the people I worked with and knew. I'll miss those people more than anything. What made this job interesting was I never knew what the next day would bring. There was always something different."

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**Motor Machinist's Mate Second Class Robert Graf, who saw service aboard a troop transport at the battle of Tarawa, arrived this morning from San Diego, Calif., for a 10-day leave at the home of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Graf, Route 1. His brother, Alvin, will be home over the weekend from the coast guard station at Muskegon, Mich.**

Promoted

# Graf Heads Road Dept.

A man who has been connected with the administrative phase of the Winnebago County Highway Department for over 20 years and can instantly put his finger on any needed statistic, Robert Graf, 44, of 55 W. 17th Ave., was elected county highway commissioner to succeed Leon Morrissey, by the county board of supervisors today.

Graf, presently serving as administrative assistant in the highway department, will start his duties as commissioner Jan. 1.

Graf defeated George Parsons, 53, 1522 Burdick St., who is patrol superintendent for the county highway department, and has served the department since June 29, 1929. He was a grader operator before becoming patrol superintendent in 1949.

Vote of the supervisors was 25 for Graf and 20 for Parsons.

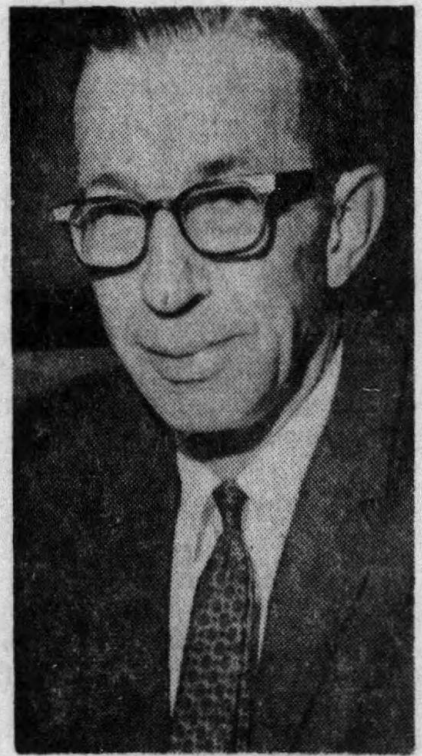
Supervisors re-elected four

county officers: Jerry F. Shea, trustee for the Winnebago County Hospital for three years; Lloyd Buhler, trustee for the Sunny View Sanatorium for three years; purchasing agent for one year, Frank Luedeke; and corporation counsel for one year, Gerald L. Engeldinger.

A native of Oshkosh, Graf started in the highway department Jan. 1, 1947, as a Veterans' Administration trainee to replace the bookkeeper, who retired in May of 1948.

Although the highway department budget has grown to \$765,000 for 1968, the number of office employees has remained at a total of four during the past 20 years. Included are the commissioner, administrative assistant and two account clerks. The department has a total of 95 employees.

The total highway expenditure is about \$1,400,000 as in addition to the budgeted \$765,000 there



Robert Graf

are revolving funds that bring the total over the \$1 million mark. These non-included operations that break even are: machinery operation and expense, \$300,000; materials and supplies, \$230 - \$250,000; and incidental labor costs (retirement payment, social security, etc.), \$90,000. The county highway department is reimbursed approximately \$250,000 for work it does on state and federal roads.

Graf, whose wife died two years ago, has two children, Joan, 17, a senior at Oshkosh High School, and a son, Robert C. Graf, 13, an eighth grader at St. Vincent's School.

## Robert Graf

Robert Graf, 78, of Lakeland, FL, and formerly of Oshkosh, died at home on November 26, 2001, of respiratory failure.

Bob was born in Oshkosh on July 15, 1923. He served in the US Navy during World War II, then was employed by the Winnebago Highway Department for 37 years, the last 16 years as Highway Commissioner. He retired to Lakeland in 1988.

Bob was a member of the Reformation Lutheran Church. He was an avid golfer, a member of Sandpiper Golf and Country Club, and a member of the Cleveland Heights Men's Golf Association, where he held the position of treasurer for several years.

He is survived by his wife,

Vivian; one daughter, Joan (James) Banks of Fullerton, CA; a son, Robert (Laurie) of Vail, CO; stepson Steve Schettl of Deforest, WI; stepdaughters Linda Cross of Whitefish Bay and Lori Schettl of New London, WI; three granddaughters; and a sister, Bernice Hildebrandt of Oshkosh.

A Memorial Service will be held at Gentry Morrison Funeral Home, (863) 858-4474 on Thursday, November 29, 2001, at 11 a.m. Burial will be at Florida National Cemetery at Bushnell.

The family appreciates the attentive and concerned staff of Lifepath Hospice. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Lifepath Hospice, 1037 S. Florida Avenue, Suite 106, Lakeland, FL 33803.