Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,
The other day I was reminiscing about the Eureka area during World War Two. As a local teenager, during that period of time, I kept up with the local activities and the military forces that were present to help protect our part of the sea coast. The U. S. Army mechanized cavalry had a fairly large detachment stationed at the old Washington Elementary School; now the location of the Senior Center on California Street. The Army also had a coastal artillery unit in the Samoa area. The Coast Guard was located at the Life Saving Station as it is now and also had a beach patrol stationed in Samoa consisting of horses and vehicles. The Navy had a section base located just north of the Coast Guard Life Saving Station which was bordered by a sea plane base and ramp equipped to provide air patrols of the coast. Just north of that was a Naval blimp Base from which anti submarine patrols were launched. Our present airport located in McKinleyville was then a U. S. Naval Air Station. All of the facilities that I have mentioned were common public knowledge back then. There was one U. S. Army unit that a lot of us knew nothing about mostly due to its location and duties. This contingent of soldiers guarded highway bridges on Highway One-0- One. To this day, I have read or heard only sketchy information about the operation. I was traveling north from San Francisco to Eureka on a Greyhound bus during the War and sat next to a soldier who was reporting back to his unit located in Willits. During our conversation, the soldier told me what his duties were, guarding highway bridges on Highway One-O-One. Every bridge no matter the size, had a guard at each end. I don't remember if he said the bridges were guarded both day and night or just after dark. His living quarters were located just south of the Willits city limits. The old site is still there but only contains some dilapidated buildings that served as barracks back then. I have no idea of how many bridges were guarded, what Army unit was involved, where headquarters was located and where all the living quarters were located. Highway One 0 One, during World War Two was a lonely road. The guards must have felt pretty isolated out there in the middle of the night. I am sure that a lot of you travelers even today, find the One-0-One lonely in the middle of a winters night. Also, the question arises as to the number of other highway bridges involved in our area including Highways Two-Ninety-Nine, One-Ninety-Nine and Thirty Six plus Highway One to Ft. Bragg. Were those bridges also guarded? When you take this into consideration you are talking about a fairly large number of soldiers involved.
Fred Nelson for Community Comment