

The Voices and Faces of Iowans Fighting World War II on the Home Front and Overseas

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Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED



Front Porch

Dear Readers:

A few years back, my husband and I transcribed dozens of love letters from his father to his mother—a Missouri fella who had fallen in love with an Indiana girl in the unlikely place of Italy.

Not so unlikely, given that the year was 1944. World War II scattered Americans all over the globe, setting up millions of chance encounters that led to love, death, generosity, intolerance, sacrifice.

Fortunately for Allan Swaim and Norma Hitzeman, their chance encounter led to head-over-heels love. Some of Allan's letters to Norma are downright silly with love. Others ache with it.

All my adult life—long before I'd read these love letters—I'd thought about war and wondered how wives and mothers had suffered through the waiting, not knowing if a husband or son was safe or injured or dead.

Transcribing Allan Swaim's letters revealed to me a new perspective: that of men waiting for their women to return from war. Allan, who had fought in the Mediterranean, returned to the States many months before his fiancée, and was an instructor at Fort Benning, Georgia. He missed Norma intensely and his misery is evident in the letters. "Right now I feel as if you are at one end of the world and I am at the opposite end."

What Christmas gift should he send his lovely First Lieutenant Hitzeman, who was living in a tent—some perfume, or a heavy bathrobe to keep her warm? He was also studying the problem of where they should make their home together. "Itching to get settled in Civilian life" and begin "the venture of matrimony," he tells her that "homes are at least one third higher now than their real value is worth in normal times."

As I put this special World War II issue

together, I reread those love letters. What struck me this time, more powerfully than ever, was the emotional meaning and importance of letters and photographs during the war. Allan delights in receiving a new snapshot of Norma, and then wrestles with whether he should send some of them to her parents in Fort Wayne. At night, he kisses her photos set up beside his bed. When he receives a letter from her, he is giddy. There is a lift to his walk, a smile he can't get rid of. "You should see how removed I am from the world when I tear into your letters," he confides to her.

"Those letters are my very existence."

Dear readers, many of you experienced World War II firsthand. Perhaps you served in the Armed Forces or volunteered on the home front. Maybe you were a child during the war. Others of you who are younger may have acquired photos and letters from the war years and hope someday to sort through them, make sense of them.

Here's my advice, personal and professional: Make the time—now. Record those memories. Transcribe the letters. Turn on a tape recorder, and ask those questions you've always meant to ask. Preserve those materials with thoughts for future generations, who will want to know.

I guarantee it: they will want to know.

Treat those memories and materials with the respect they deserve. They have the power to tell us so very much about the history of the country and about the human condition.

—Ginalie Swaim, editor

CORRECTION: In the last issue, we incorrectly stated the occupation of author Robert B. Mitchell ("Get Ready for '96"). He is an editor with the Los Angeles Times—Washington Post News Service. We regret the error.

Iowa Heritage Illustrated

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Special Issue!
World War II



SHSI (DES MOINES); L. H. DAVIS COLLECTION



SHSI (IOWA CITY); WPA COLLECTION



BOTH PHOTOS ON RIGHT: SHSI (DES MOINES); DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE

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On the Cover

Identified only as Mr. and Mrs. Green, this couple and their pup tend their victory garden in Des Moines, May 1942. Photo by Don Ultang (SHSI-Iowa City).

On this page, top, from left: Doing war work on the home front, Maurine Davis sells war bonds and stamps to Evelyn Lavonne Patterson at a grocery store in Hampton, Iowa. Soldiers leave the Fort Des Moines supply depot. Lt. Alvina Mickels, of Panama, cleans intravenous tubes at an evacuation hospital in Italy. Soldier Frederick Foreman (far right) of Des Moines takes a break from the war.

The Voices and Faces of Iowans Fighting World War II

SHSI (DES MOINES): DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



Seated in the Marine barracks in Pearl Harbor, November 1942, Pvt. Harold W. Rasmussen reads a community letter from his friends in Ida Grove, Iowa. It took Rasmussen three hours to read all 33 feet of the letter. In Fort Dodge, members of a women's organization, the Wan Ta Ye Club, gathered every Tuesday night to address 5,500 newsletters to Webster County's service men and women—all part of a local "Your Letter from Home" project organized by radio station KVFD. Iowans knew well the power of a letter from home during a war that shook the world.

There are many ways of looking back at World War II. The massive troop movements and decisive battles. The political and military leaders facing tough choices. The gearing up of the defense industry.

What we have chosen, for this issue, are the faces and voices of Iowans.

During the war, military and civilian photographers steadily supplied newspapers with war-related photos, particularly ones that would boost the nation's morale. Leaf through Iowa's wartime newspapers. They are saturated with these images. Six decades later, we look again at some of these Iowa faces. Perhaps you will even recognize a few. Some sport proud grins. Others are serious and determined, intent on doing their part in winning a war. Some mask fears and worries with a big smile for the camera.

The voices in this issue are as varied as the faces. We hear from soldiers writing home from Europe or the Pacific. Other voices are those of Iowans who lived through "the duration" here at home, and, years later, wrote down their experiences or recounted them to others.

What these all represent—these faces and voices of Iowans—are individual stories, individual moments, captured on film, recorded in words, preserved by memory. Admittedly, they are only the tip of the iceberg, only a handful of the millions and millions of pieces that make up the history of World War II. But like the wartime efforts of every foot soldier, every local Civilian Defense Council, every farm kid gathering milkweed pods for life jackets, these individual moments are important and essential parts of the whole story. We offer them to you, with the greatest respect, in this special issue

—Ginalie Swaim, editor

Four Iowans & the Nazi Olympics

by Jack Lufkin

Three years before World War II began, Berlin, the capital of Nazi Germany, hosted the 1936 Summer Olympics. The controversial Games are legendary: Adolf Hitler showcased a revitalized Germany to a world suspicious of mounting publicity concerning Nazi brutalization of Jews, while African American Jesse Owens thrilled the world with his four gold medals. Less well known is that four Iowans participated in the 1936 Games in Berlin. Two of them played on a U.S. baseball team in front of the sport's largest crowd in history.

The choice of Berlin as the 1936 host site had been made by the International Olympic Committee in 1931. Two years later, Hitler assumed power. The Führer had already written and spoken in severe terms against Jews, declaring them un-German. Now, he began to unleash an onslaught of repressive laws, forbidding Jews to ride German horses, taking away Jewish rights to citizenship, outlawing intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews. The Nazis hounded, beat, and murdered thousands of Jews, drove them from public office, ruined their businesses, and allowed some to flee Germany only after stripping them of all possessions. A system of concentration camps, foreshadowing the Holocaust, was put into place to detain Jews and political dissidents (primarily Communists). At the same time, German rearmament and ambitious public construction projects, such as the autobahn, had lifted the nation out of economic depression and turned it into a growing war machine. In giant demonstrations, crowds roared approval to the Führer's exhortation, "Today Germany, tomorrow the whole world."

By the time of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, internal foes in Germany had been killed or silenced. Hitler very

much wanted the large American contingent—who had overwhelmingly won the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles—to compete in Berlin and thus legitimize these Olympics as a truly international event. He also wanted to demonstrate the athletic prowess of what he considered the superior "Aryan" race.

As in many nations, debates had raged in the United States over whether to boycott the 1936 Games to protest anti-Semitic activities contradicting the Olympic spirit of fair play and equal opportunity for athletes, or whether to participate, on the grounds that politics should not interfere with sports. Boycott arguments appeared in the press and occurred within the American Jewish community. Opposing a boycott, Avery Brundage, president of the the American Olympic Committee, skillfully maneuvered a close vote by the Amateur Athletic Union: The U.S. would send its athletes.

One American determined to go to Berlin was baseball promoter and former major leaguer Les Mann, who believed that baseball should become an Olympic sport. A demonstration game between a U.S. team and a Swedish amateur baseball club at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm had done little to advance the game across the Atlantic, and most Europeans still had little exposure to or understanding of baseball. Mann was determined to change that, and he saw the 1936 Olympics as the opportunity. A tireless champion of America's favorite pastime, Mann was remembered by one Olympic organizer as "a hot dog. With the mustard."

Mann ran a baseball academy in Florida, and one of his students was shortstop Dow Wilson. Wilson was

born and had lived his first 14 years in the town founded by his grandfather, Dow City in Crawford County, Iowa. His father, Arthur Wilson, was a semi-professional spitball pitcher who had barnstormed with teams in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa. Mann invited the 19-year-old Wilson to try out for the U.S. Olympic trials in Baltimore. Wilson batted over .500 at the three tryout games and earned a berth. "Making the team was indeed quite an accomplishment for young Wilson," the local *Denison Review* reported back in Iowa, "and Dow City and Crawford county can well be proud of the success of his efforts."

Another Iowan to make the U.S. team hailed from Rockford in Floyd County. Grover Galvin, Jr., played center field for amateur Iowa teams, including the Charles City Lions ball club, and played basketball and football at Coe College in Cedar Rapids. Unlike Wilson, who knew Mann and the other organizers, Galvin went to the Baltimore tryouts on his own initiative.

Once the baseball team was picked, the players joined the other U.S. Olympians in New York and embarked on July 15. For Galvin, boarding the ocean liner *Manhattan* with 470 other American athletes and officials was his first great thrill. "I had to pinch myself to believe that I was really there," he recalled.

Both Galvin and Wilson have warm memories of meeting the already famous world-record sprinter Jesse Owens. Wilson got to know the soft-spoken Owens better as one of a foursome playing bridge on the ship. During the eight-day voyage, the U.S. athletes worked out as best they could aboard ship. The baseball players, Wilson remembers, practiced hitting off the deck.

In preparation for the Berlin Games, the Nazi minister for food and agriculture had ordered the removal of "all signs posted in the fight against Jewry . . . for the period in question." Instead, international visitors saw swastikas at every turn. In obedience to the Führer's instructions, Berliners extended a warm welcome to the athletes as they arrived on a train from Hamburg and boarded 300 buses for the Olympic Village.

Onlookers cheering for the Americans was Galvin's second great memory of the Games. "Occasionally somebody in the crowd would shout they were from some American state and we would stick our heads out the window of the bus and yell with all our might." Dispatching notes to his hometown *Rockford Register*, Galvin related how nice the Germans were and how eagerly they requested the athletes' autographs. He mentioned, too, the omnipresence of Nazi flags. "Everybody gives that salute, and you can't imagine

how many army people there are—thousands everywhere—and even little kids would salute you in Hitler's salute."

By all accounts, Olympic Village was a lavishly planned, beautiful wooded complex of white stucco houses with red tile roofs. One player likened it to a "fairyland." According to Dow Wilson and other sources, Hitler and his companion, Eva Braun, had taken a liking to baseball, and Braun visited the players a number of times. "I should have smacked Hitler," Wilson recalled in a recent interview.

In one of the buildings, a few players discovered a back stairway leading to a cavernous, empty basement with an enormous garage-type door. The Olympic Village was ultimately part of a larger Nazi design and would become a military training facility. Through that huge garage door, the Panzer Corps would drive tanks.

German hospitality and exuberant pageantry left most international visitors genuinely impressed. They could find little to corroborate rumors and reports of anti-Semitic activities in Germany because the Nazis cloaked their dark activities or took a short break from persecuting Jews and other "undesirables" in and around Berlin.

Hitler opened the Games on August 1 with a new ritual: a single runner with a lighted torch, relayed from Olympia, Greece. As a token of Olympic fairness, the Germans had placed a part-Jewish athlete, Helene Mayer, on their team; she won the silver medal in fencing. However, Gretel Bergmann, a Jew and a world-class high jumper, was banned from competing.

Iowans were among the 300 million radio listeners worldwide who thrilled to the victories of the U.S. team, which finished second overall to Germany. Two native sons of Iowa made their mark and contributed to U.S. glory. Lamoni's Jack Parker earned a bronze medal in the ten-event decathlon, completing the American sweep of the grueling, two-day competition. Parker had first captured Iowans' attention in 1933 when Lamoni's track team lost the state title to Clinton by only two points; Parker had scored all of Lamoni's 19 points. The youngest member of the U.S. decathlon team, Parker was already primed to be the premier athlete for the 1940 Olympic Games.

Iowa's second native son was Des Moines-born Frank Wykoff, Jesse Owens's teammate on the sprint relay team. Wykoff had moved to California as a child. He had already won Olympic gold medals in 1928 and 1932 as anchor to the 400-meter relay team. Now at the Berlin Games, Wykoff won his third.

The demonstration baseball game, in which Iowa's two other Olympic participants would appear, would cap the Games. To build enthusiasm, Les Mann had organized local baseball clinics, and a German newspaper had printed a week-long series of articles attempting to explain the game, which seemed to both delight and mystify Europeans. Position names were translated in German for all but the shortstop, whose responsibilities seemed unfathomable. "Pitcher" translated into *der werfen* or "thrower-in." The diamond was called the German word for "rhombus," and the bases were "points of refuge." For the demonstration game, the American team split into two squads: the "U.S.A. Olympics" versus the "World Champions."

The game began on the final evening at nine, before a crowd estimated as large as 125,000. The huge stadium was darkened. Spotlights followed the players as they trotted onto the field from opposite ends. As the shortest player, Iowa's Grover Galvin came first. The American national anthem was played in the chilly night air, and the players made a gesture of respect. Misinterpreting it as a Nazi salute, the Germans applauded wildly.

According to player Bill Sayles, box seats for Hitler were on the right. "Before the game started a whole gaggle of German generals came down—I later recognized Göring as one of them. We were told that under no circumstances were we to hit a ball into right or right-center field. Well, being Americans, you never saw so many line drives hit to right in warmups."

Despite lengthy translations and explanations by announcers over a sophisticated sound system, the spectators often seemed befuddled and confused about what they should cheer for. Iowan Dow Wilson was the first batter, the first to get a hit, and the first to steal a base. The Germans laughed at his slide, thinking he was clowning around. The American umpire was perhaps the most unintentionally entertaining. His loud calls and showy gestures for "strike" and "ball" drew more laughter. The runners' safe sign of extended arms seemed to resemble a Nazi salute, and the spectators voiced approval. Infield pop-ups drove the crowd mad, one player recalled, but an extra-base hit brought no reaction, nor did the only home run. At the sixth inning,

Mann and the other organizers noticed that the spectators were beginning to leave. They decided to end the game early. When it was announced that the seventh inning would be the last, the crowd cheered. For the record, the World Champions beat the U.S.A. Olympics, 6–5.

Thus ended Mann's demonstration game, and his hopes of convincing the International Olympic Committee to add baseball to the 1940 Olympics, scheduled for Tokyo. World War II cancelled those Games, and although there were demonstration ball games in later years, baseball did not become an official Olympic sport until 1992.

The two Iowans who had played baseball for a record-setting crowd in the Berlin stadium in 1936 both served in World War II, Grover Galvin as an army captain and Dow Wilson in the coastal artillery. Galvin later ended up in Rockford, Iowa, to run the family brick and tile business. He died in 1995.

Wilson worked at various jobs in New York City and elsewhere. Now in his eighties, Wilson lives in Florida. He can still fit into the baseball uniform worn some seven decades ago in Berlin, as the clouds of world war began to darken the horizon. ♦

Jack Lufkin is a museum curator at the State Historical Society of Iowa, with special interest in the history of sports, music, African Americans, and business.

Learn more of the gripping story of the "The Nazi Olympics: Berlin 1936" at the State Historical Building in Des Moines, 600 E. Locust. Loaned by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the exhibit uses photographs, documents, film footage, and athlete testimonies to chronicle the Nazi rise to power, the Nazification of German sports, the boycott controversy, and the Games themselves. The exhibit runs through September 30.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The author's phone interview with Dow Wilson (3/30/2004) added details to contemporary accounts of the 1936 Olympics baseball team in the following: *Des Moines Register*, 8/1/1936, story by Sec Taylor, p. 1, sports section; *Rockford Register*, 8/23, 8/13, 8/20, 9/3, all in 1936, all on page 1; *Charles City Daily Press*, 6/26/1936, p. 6; *Denison Review*, 7/13/1936, p. 2; and *Denison Bulletin*, 7/23/1936, p. 2. Tom Shieber (curator of New Media, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, Cooperstown, New York) and Connie Birmingham (Alumni Records, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa) were also helpful. Secondary sources include: Susan D. Bachrach, *The Nazi Olympics* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2000); Duff Hart-Davis, *Hitler's Games: The 1936 Olympics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986); Arnd Kruger and William Murray, ed., *The Nazi Olympics: Sport, Politics, and Appeasement in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Richard D. Mandell, *The Nazi Olympics* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1971); M. E. Travaglini, "Olympic Baseball 1936," *The National Pastime: A Review of Baseball History* (Winter 1985); and United States Holocaust Museum, "The Nazi Olympics: Berlin 1936" (exhibit brochure).



World War II Comes to Iowa

Opposite: Four days after Pearl Harbor, and half a world away, snow gently falls on Christmas shoppers in downtown Des Moines. Sheltered in the doorway, a man sells newspapers headlined "WAR."

December 10, 1941: Sitting in a booth built by the WPA, a corporal interviews an enlistee at Fort Des Moines.

February 2, 1942: New soldiers are sworn in at the induction center at Fort Des Moines.



SHSI (IOWA CITY): WPA COLLECTION

SHSI (IOWA CITY): WPA COLLECTION





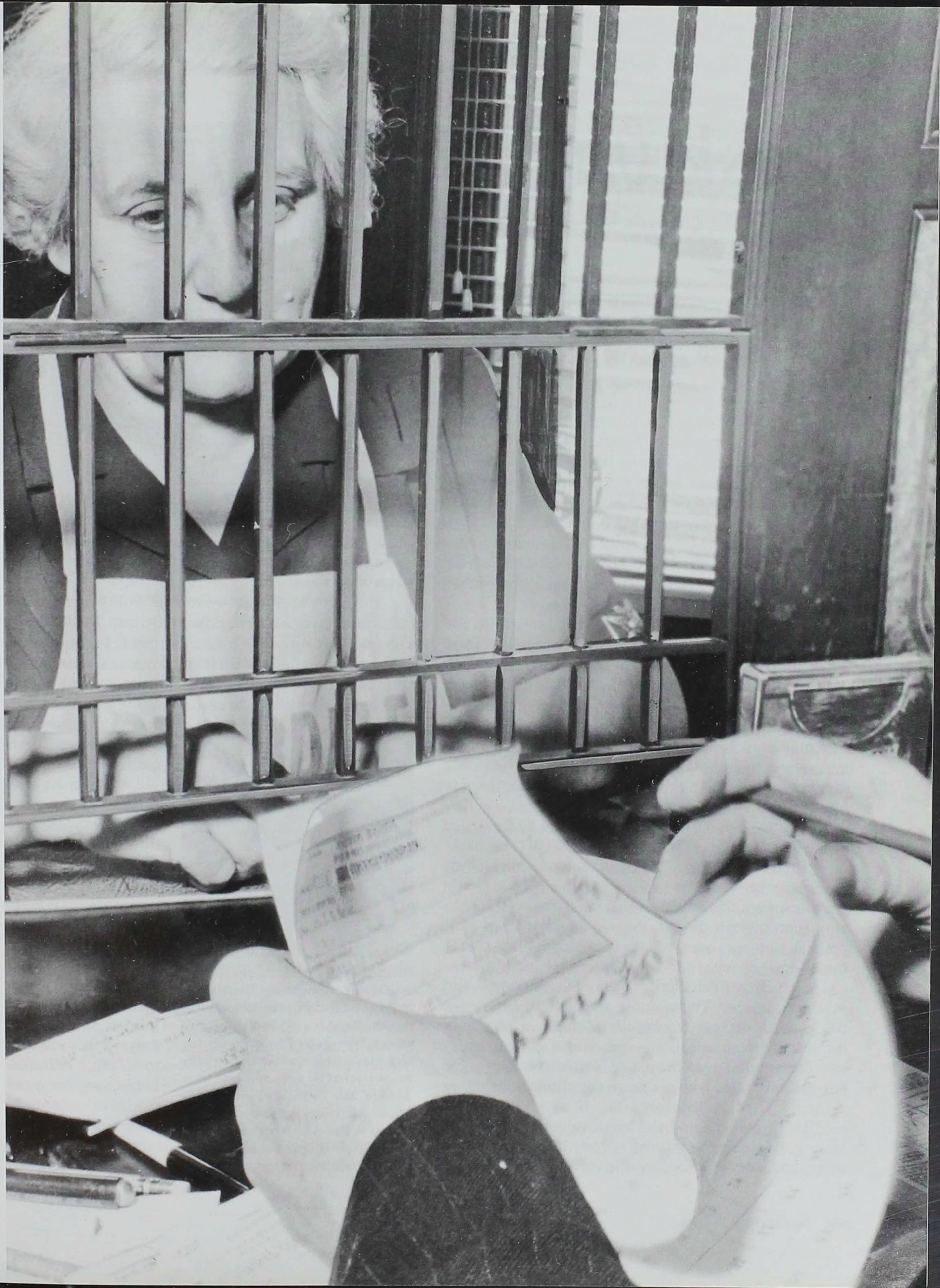
First aid classes were part of the civil defense program in Hampton, Iowa. Instructor Harold D. Baldwin demonstrates on Harold C. Argent, as Henry A. Farnham and a Mr. Storch look on (October 1942).

BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (DES MOINES); L. H. DAVIS COLLECTION



Preparing for a blackout drill in Hampton, mayor J. M. Boots (center) studies a map of the community with other watchers (December 1942).

Opposite: Ruby Haggin makes a ration stamp deposit in March 1943 at the Union-Whitten State Savings Bank, in Union, Iowa. "War time," the *Des Moines Register* commented, "with its increased farm production, its higher income taxes, its war bond drives and rationing activities, finds these rural banks the nerve center of this greatly accelerated activity."



Meskwaki Code Talkers

by Mary Bennett

Armchair military historians know all about the critical strategic importance of the Mediterranean campaign during World War II. The British fought the Italians for control of North Africa, only to lose ground when German field marshal Rommel's Afrika Korps secretly invaded North Africa in April 1941. Even with the formal entry of the United States into the war at the end of 1941, it took nearly a year before troops and home front forces could be mobilized and outfitted.

Ready for action, but with no easy way to invade German-occupied Europe, and under pressure from Stalin to open a second front, the Americans made their first large-scale appearance as Allies—landing in North Africa in November 1942 under the leadership of General Eisenhower. Among the soldiers in the 34th Division making the initial advances on the beaches of Algeria were several Meskwaki code talkers, who would save many lives using their unique language to communicate vital military messages.

Twenty-seven young Meskwaki men had enlisted in the Iowa National Guard in January 1941, probably motivated by economic circumstances as much as by patriotism or a chance to learn new skills. No doubt Americans could sense the tension of war on the horizon, even though the cataclysmic effect of Pearl Harbor was almost a year away. As new recruits of the 168th Iowa Infantry, eight Meskwaki were selected for special instruction in elements of walkie-talkie radio and machine gunning. This training and experimentation—using a code derived from Native American languages for secret communications—predate American entry into the war and even the use of Native speakers of the Navajo language, who are more commonly celebrated as World War II code talkers.

The Comanche and the Meskwaki were probably among the first to be trained as code talkers, although more than a dozen tribes were involved. As a February

1941 newspaper explains, they “were trained to translate messages from English to their own language and relay them by radio or phone to an Indian who in turn will turn the message back into English for officers.” The headline proclaims “Army Indians to Foil Enemy Listeners,” while the accompanying photo depicts the Meskwaki wearing stereotypical feather headdresses more representative of western Plains Indians than the Meskwaki's traditional regalia.

The eight Meskwaki—brothers Frank and Willard Sanache, Dewey Roberts, Edward Benson, Melvin Twin, Dewey Youngbear, and brothers Judy Wayne Wabaunasee and Mike Wayne Wabaunasee—joined Company H, the heavy weapons company of the 168th

Infantry, just three weeks before the unit was mobilized. According to the press, the young men, who ranged in age from 18 to 22, were “induced to join up only when they realized that they were to play a strategic part helping the 168th maintain a valiant tradition in battle.” Their initial training was at Camp Dodge in Johnston, Iowa, but they were soon sent to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, for more intensive training in the use of the walkie-talkies. As the newspaper reported, the

SHSI (IOWA CITY); MARSHALLTOWN TIMES-REPUBLICAN, FEB. 26, 1941



Willard Sanache straps a radio unit on Dewey Youngbear. The February 1941 caption read: “Man-nwe-net-da-mon! It's an Indian way of saying, ‘We don't like it’ in his native Mesquakie and what he really means is that he doesn't like to have people ask too many questions about his language, now that he knows it will play a strategic part in regimental communications of the 168th infantry.”



Resting here in their quarters in February 1941 are the eight Meskwaki trained as code talkers. From left, front row: Mike Wayne Wabaunasee, Edward Benson, Dewey Roberts, Frank Sanache, Judy Wayne Wabaunasee (reclining), and Melvin Twin. Standing in the rear are Willard Sanache and Dewey Youngbear.

shortwave radios "are carried in a pack strapped to a soldier's back, have a collapsible antenna and a three mile range." Besides mastering gunnery school, radio operators had to learn to use the code and understand electronics, mechanics, and the inner workings of a radio, such as vacuum tubes, amplifiers, transformers, and transmitters. Field communications were vastly improved using the Indian code language to send messages about enemy troop movements, battlefield tactics, and directions for artillery fire.

Acting as scouts, those in the lead assaults had to move quickly with heavy equipment across any terrain to establish observation and communication posts, whether in open, flat country, in the desert, or in mountainous regions like Italy. The Meskwaki code talkers, with their special language skills, were assigned to the 168th Infantry, 34th Red Bull Division. By October 1942, it was reported that Judy and Mike Wayne Wabaunasee (and probably the others) had been assigned to Northern Ireland, but they were soon dispatched to the deserts of North Africa, a place Frank Sanache described as "the worst place this side of hell." Landing in Algiers and moving eastward towards Tunisia, the green recruits were decimated by the veteran

Afrika Korps. Frank Sanache was captured by Italian soldiers in Tunisia in 1943, while Dewey Youngbear and Judy Wayne Wabaunasee were captured by the Germans.

With the support of the vast American fleet, airpower, and ground troops, the Allies regained territory in North Africa before launching attacks on the coast of Italy in September 1943. Dewey Roberts remembered how the troops would advance, put up a defense line, dig foxholes, and stop for a short time before moving forward—all the while getting shelled by artillery. "The 34th Division got chewed up," he recalled. "From Salerno to the Naples area we lost a lot of men. They were killed, wounded, and captured." While near Naples in March 1944, Roberts had the opportunity to meet up with his younger brother, Ernie, who had joined the service a year earlier. The

Italian campaign moved forward slowly, with heavy fighting because of the mountains north of Naples and mighty German defenses, but the Allies finally liberated Rome on June 4, 1944.

Besides suffering harsh treatment, beatings, and near starvation, American Indians, rarely seen on the European continent, faced racial prejudice in Italian and German POW camps. The Meskwaki, like other POWs, had to learn the German language quickly; if they didn't respond to a command, they would be beaten. Donald Wanatee, adopted son of Frank Sanache, said, "They didn't treat them well. They worked them to death."

The sense of desperation felt by these men is reflected in the multiple escapes made by Dewey Youngbear, who no doubt paid a heavy price each time he was recaptured. On his third attempt, he managed to find an Italian soldier's uniform to wear as a disguise. Driven by hunger, Youngbear risked eating and drinking at a local restaurant, only to be discovered when he could not understand or speak to the German and Italian soldiers who approached him. Judy Wayne Wabaunasee also escaped his captors in Italy, but later, when he arrived at the same prison camp in Germany, guards noticed that Youngbear and Wabaunasee knew each other. Youngbear received "rough treatment from the Germans" for refusing to give information about the other Meskwaki code talker.



Annie [Waseskuk] Wabaunasee displays a service flag in her home on the Meskwaki Settlement. Each star represented a son in the Armed Forces: two were code talkers, and the third, Walter, was stationed on the West Coast (October 1942).

Like many POWs, they required hospitalization after their release, and their ravaged bodies suffered lingering effects. Dewey Youngbear died in 1948 of tuberculosis, Wanatee recalled, a disease he contracted in Germany as a POW. Other Meskwaki veterans also had war-related health problems.

Back home in Iowa, life on the Meskwaki Settlement in Tama County had remained essentially the same for many generations, with relatively few encroachments from white civilization. The tribe had purchased the settlement land in the 19th century rather than live on a government reservation. Though economically impoverished in the 1940s, the tribe had retained a rich cultural heritage by preserving their language, customs, and ceremonies over the years. Approximately 420 Meskwaki lived in frame houses without modern amenities like telephones, electricity, or indoor plumbing. Most of the women had a traditional wickiup near their homes because they liked to cook over an open fire. Younger members of the tribe scattered during the war, joining the military or moving to

large cities to work in war industries. Others worked on railroads and at local factories in communities like Marshalltown, while some like Nell G. Ward pursued educational opportunities. Ward became the first formally trained Meskwaki nurse after enlisting in the Cadet Nurse Corps and attending the University of Iowa.

The Meskwaki participated in scrap drives, canned vegetables, and contributed to the war effort in the noblest manner by sending warriors off to fight and die. Because of the war overseas, the swastika—an American Indian symbol long before Hitler was born—was replaced by a thunderbird on powwow advertisements, especially after the swastika caused an uproar in nearby Tama about whether the Indians were joining Hitler. Attendance at the annual powwow celebration was down in 1942, and no powwows were held in 1943 and 1944 because of the war.

After the war, people moved more freely in and out of the life on the Meskwaki Settlement, and new ideas competed with old. More than fifty Meskwaki had served in the military during World War II, and the returning veterans established their own American Legion post in tribute to young Robert Morgan, the first Meskwaki casualty of the war. Ironically, these men were the first generation of Meskwaki to enjoy the full rights of U.S. citizenship, granted to Native Americans only as recently as 1924. Yet they honorably defended this country, fighting as warriors for both their homeland and adopted nation. ♦

Mary Bennett is Special Collections Coordinator at the State Historical Society of Iowa.

A wealth of historical information is available about the Meskwaki, and the State Historical Society of Iowa, continuing its active role in documenting the cultural heritage of the tribe, has produced an interactive program full of photographs, documents, and cultural history. The Meskwaki History CD-ROM will be available for distribution in the fall of 2004. Contact Mary Bennett, 319-335-3916, for more information.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The author wishes to thank Meskwaki historian Johnathan L. Buffalo, who conducted oral histories with Frank Sanache and Dewey Roberts in 1978 and shared useful newspaper articles and photos. Donald Wanatee also graciously shared his insights. Also useful were articles in the *Marshalltown Times-Republican* (2/21/1941, p. 11; 2/26/1941, p. 11); *Des Moines Register* (10/11/42, section 4, p. 1); a February 18, 1941, clipping (newspaper not known); and several clippings rescued by the volunteers working on the World War II Clippings Project (SHSI-Iowa City). Timothy Jones and staff from the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., have been researching the lives of the code talkers, conducting oral history interviews with Frank Sanache and others from a dozen different tribes. Upcoming traveling exhibitions developed by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition (SITES) will showcase photographs, text, and artifacts such as radios and uniforms. Untranscribed oral histories with the code talkers and other Iowans in the 34th Infantry, held at the Gold Star Museum at Camp Dodge, may yield more information. Robin Roberts (Dewey Roberts's nephew) and others have been working with Iowa's U.S. senators to obtain the Congressional Medal of Honor for the Meskwaki code talkers.



SHSI (DES MOINES); DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE

The war broke traditions and brought new ideas—and faces—to Iowa. Above: Sgt. Joseph W. Donahey came home to his family in Clinton with a Filipino wife in February 1945. A survivor of the Bataan Death March, Donahey had organized a guerrilla band. Among the Filipinos fighting with him was Corajon Mangrovang, the woman he married.

Right: Women acquired new skills during the war. Here, WACs at Fort Des Moines learn to operate a transmitter in radio and television school (undated).



SHSI (DES MOINES)

SHSI (DES MOINES): DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



Wearing helmets, boys play war with toy soldiers, tanks, and airplanes, while two girls look on (August 1942, probably Des Moines). The war fueled the imagination of American children—some dreamed of becoming war heroes, others had nightmares of being bombed or losing their fathers.



SHSI (DES MOINES)

Three basic training companies from the WAC training center at Fort Des Moines march down Locust Street in Des Moines (Memorial Day, 1945).

SHS (DES MOINES) DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



Wearing helmets, boys play war with toy soldiers, tanks, and airplanes, while two girls look on (August 1942, probably Des Moines). The war fueled the imagination of American children—some dreamed of becoming war heroes, others had nightmares of being bombed or losing their fathers.



Three basic training companies from the WAC training center at Fort Des Moines march down Locust Street in Des Moines (Memorial Day, 1945).

SHS (DES MOINES)

SHSI (DES MOINES): L. H. DAVIS COLLECTION



Opposite: Boy Scout Bill Free milks cows on the Rex Helfinstine farm near Farrar. Some 50 scouts from Polk County worked on farms in the summer of 1942 to help build United Nations' food supplies.

Left: Students in Hampton contribute scrap metal to a salvage drive in November 1942. The photograph was captioned: "Barbed wire was hard to handle but the students brought it in just the same."

ALL THREE PHOTOS: SHSI (DES MOINES); DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



Baby Helen Marie Radosevich holds a letter from her father, Tony P. Radosevich, stationed in Ireland since before her birth. The letter read in part: "We have to make our country a safe and peace-loving state so we can all live happily" (October 1942).



Christmas Day, 1944: Susan Minkel opens a card from her father, bearing the "Red Bull" icon and the silhouette of Italy. Newton physician Roger Minkel had been overseas since February 1941. Susan and her mother were living in Fort Dodge for the duration.



Dressed in a pint-size military uniform and with his white toddler's shoes peeking out the bottom, David Carroll Veach studies the controls of a tiny tank in a toy store in Des Moines (November 1942).

SHSI (DES MOINES); DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE





ALL PHOTOS COURTESY THE AUTHOR

A wartime childhood often included watching older siblings leave for the service, as it did in the Kooi family. On horseback, six of the eleven Kooi children: Verna Mae, Milly, Irene (author of article), Elmer, Stan, and Glenn. Home on leave: siblings Clarence and Gladys Kooi. Ray Kooi and his mother, Ida Kooi. Wedding of Gladys Kooi and George Gritter, with sisters Milly and Irene.

A Child's Memory of World War II

by Irene Kooi Chadwick

Somewhere on the road between our farm and Hospers, Iowa, a big billboard towered high above us as we drove to town. The man's furrowed face on the billboard was overshadowed by his tall hat banded with stars. He pointed his long finger down at us: "Uncle Sam Wants You."

In the years when I was a child on our Sioux County farm, four of my older siblings answered his summons, and when the war ended, another sibling did. No longer were we all seated around the kitchen table at breakfast, dinner, and supper, we eleven children impatiently waiting for Pa's long opening prayer, and for Mother's coaching the youngest of us to say as fast as we could "Lord bless this food for Jesus' sake Amen." World War II ended the secure, protected farm life we had led, circumscribed by family, church, and Christian school. Strict rules had always isolated us. No dancing, gambling, or watching movies, and no wearing of makeup or revealing clothes. No mixing with the outside world—in other words, with "heathens," because the Bible said, "Ye are in the world but not of the world." Books and magazines were church approved. Our music came almost entirely from our singing of songs found in the *Psalter Hymnal* or *The Golden Book of Favorite Songs*, accompanied by a piano or organ, or a cappella. Pa read a chapter from the Bible to us after every meal. Twice every Sunday we went to church, and on Wednesday

to catechism. Social life revolved around programs at church or school, visits with relatives on their farms, the occasional wedding and rare funeral, always at church.

Our religion was Christian Reformed, and many other farm families in the northwest corner of Iowa were like us, from Dutch-immigrant stock and the Netherlands Hervormd (Dutch Reformed) church in the Old Country. My mother was Ida Sybesma and only eight when she emigrated from Friesland, a province in northeastern Netherlands. She had learned English right away. My pa, Fred Kooi, was second-generation Dutch; his grandfather had emigrated from Groningen, the province next to Friesland on the North Sea. However, we never heard our parents speak the Dutch and Friesian languages except on rare occasions when they did not want us to overhear them. Mother occasionally sprinkled her English with Dutch. As my oldest sister, Gladys, says, "As salt on food gives it seasoning, so the Dutch words gave a rich ethnic flavoring to her speech. It took years before we kids knew which words were Dutch."

One link to the outside world was our family's radio, a bulky floor console. Heavy brown fabric covered the speaker, and a crocheted doily graced the top of the varnished wood cabinet. After dinner at noon, or supper at six, Pa would draw the wooden rocker up close to the radio, lower his head to the speaker, and turn the dial back and forth, trying to tune in the Sioux City sta-

tion. Frequent static on the airwaves meant that this tuning took awhile. Some nights, Pa could barely hear a faint voice weaving in and out. Then he would turn the radio off and go to bed or read the *Sioux Center News*.

Pa liked to listen to hog prices, market and weather reports, and the news—also to President Roosevelt's fireside chats and some of the political programs. Mother, however, was pretty much apolitical. Her realm encompassed the traditional role of Dutch immigrant women: *kinderen, keuken, kirk* (children, kitchen, church). When questioned about voting, Mother would tell us that she did not care to vote. When pressed, she coyly replied, "Oh, I think Pa can do that for me."

Naturally, all eleven of us children were fascinated with the radio. Raymond, the oldest, was especially eager to tune in. Our parents, however, would not let him listen very often and not at all to programs such as *Fibber McGee & Molly*, *The Jack Benny Show*, and *The Charlie McCarthy Show*. Usually, all eleven of us went upstairs to bed at dark, because our day started before dawn, when the older boys rose to milk the cows and the older girls lit the fire in the cookstove for breakfast. But sometimes at night, without being seen, Ray sneaked back downstairs and into the front room, found a place out of the way, and listened to the radio. In this way he had heard parts of the 1936 political conventions, including FDR's stirring acceptance speech. As he grew bolder, Ray would listen to the radio on the sly anytime he could get away with it, so that eventually he heard all kinds of programs. Entranced, he decided to become a radio announcer.

"Clearly no one who was not Dutch could pronounce, much less spell, the name 'Kooi,'" reasoned Ray. "No announcer could be expected to say 'Good evening, here is Raymond Kooi with the eight o'clock news.'" So he decided he would change his name from Raymond Kenneth Kooi to Kenneth Raymond. At night, in the boys' bedroom upstairs, he would practice on his next-older brothers to get the hang of auditioning. His youngest brothers had long ago gone to sleep. For newscasts he started with, "Good evening, this is Kenneth Raymond with the latest developments in the world. Tonight in Washington . . ." Then he would make up news stories. His brothers listened raptly. When they grew tired of the news, he would invent other programs to hold their attention.

Pete asked Ray, "Do you want to be an entertainer?"

"Oh, no," said Ray, "I want to do the interviews of the man on the street." For him, radio was serious; it must inform people. Raised by a strict, no-nonsense father, he was all business.

News of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor came

by way of our radio after Sunday dinner on December 7, 1941, the day after Ray turned twenty. I had just turned five a few days earlier and was playing on the floor with the other little kids. We had taken dried corncobs from the wood box and were lining them up to make roads, farms, and houses. Tractors and dolls littered the landscape. Pa was sitting in the rocker, his strong body slumped toward the radio, his fingers adjusting the knobs. Suddenly he cocked both ears forward and cupped them with his hands. He leaned closer to tune in a news bulletin. Half turning his body, he lifted his left hand to quiet us down.

But the straining urgency coming through the static had already lowered the volume of our commotion. The radio crackled and the voice of the newscaster grew louder, becoming fixed in my mind as an incomprehensible danger. The alarm sounding brought an early end to the sheltered life of the thirteen of us on the farm.

Ray was now driving to his first year of community college classes in Sheldon, and, without telling the folks, he bought a radio in town for his and Clarence's bedroom, plus a second-hand typewriter. When Ray's draft number came up in the spring of 1943, he researched his options and decided to apply to the Navy V-12 Officers Training Program. Ray passed the written and physical exams and the interview and was one of the 70,000 select young men accepted—only 22 percent of the total applicants. At the end of June 1943 he prepared to take a train across the breadth of Iowa. He was bound for Davenport and St. Ambrose College, one of the 131 U.S. undergraduate schools that were training sites for the Navy's V-12 program.

When Ray leaves, he is eager to go. He is the only one of us who does not notice that everything is unnaturally quiet. Not a single farm machine is running. Even the chickens are not scratching in the farmyard. In the house no fire crackles in the cookstove, no radio is on. No kid is running lickety-split across the kitchen linoleum, through the wash porch, and out through the screen door before the spring bangs it back, shut tight.

In the kitchen doorway, Mother embraces Ray and says something too soft for us to hear. Pa is already sitting in the gray Chevy, anxious to get Ray to the train on time, nervous about the war. We watch a cloud of dust spiral up behind the car as they leave the driveway and go down the center of the road toward Sheldon, seven miles away. Ray is the first of five to leave for military service. Already we little kids miss him.

To make room for the men in the V-12 program, St. Ambrose College moved faculty and civilian students

out of two residence halls. These dorms were now considered "ships." Floors and walls were called decks and bulkheads; windows became ports; restrooms, heads. The recruits' day began with reveille at 0530 or 0600, followed by calisthenics, room inspection, chow, a march to classes, and so on, continuing throughout the day and ending with taps. Letters went out from the commanding officer and college president to proud parents, congratulating them on the selection of their sons for officer training and urging them to write frequently, with encouragement and support.

As in other U.S. cities during the war, Davenport's civilian population helped young men in uniform who often were away from home for the first time. The Masonic orders, American Legion, USO, and other local groups organized parties, dances, open houses, and concerts for the V-12s, besides the dances the men held on their own. The women of the First Presbyterian Church repaired their clothing for free. Citizens gave soldiers on the streets rides here and there. When the boys in uniform appeared at church on Sunday, they often were invited into homes for Sunday dinner. Before the war, the St. Ambrose student body had been largely Catholic, but now, of the nearly 300 V-12 trainees the college received, only 20 percent were Catholic.

"Is there a Christian Reformed church there?" Mother surely asked Ray, expecting him, of course, to attend our church and then spend the day in a Christian Reformed Service Home. These homes, established near U.S. training camps during the war years, provided to servicemen and servicewomen the continuity of familiar religious ways and family traditions, and the opportunity to meet their own kind of young people, and, in due course, marry in the church.

Perhaps there was not a Christian Reformed church in Davenport. In any event, Ray visited a local church one Sunday and afterwards was asked by one of the families, the Van Walterops, to come to their home. They invited him again and again, after Sunday church, or to concerts. The boy in the family was fourteen and played the bassoon. Two older sisters were about Ray's age. The younger played the oboe, and Ray played the piano. As time went on, the two of them often played music together. Ray had found a piano teacher at St. Ambrose. He practiced Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, then performed it with the Davenport Symphony Orchestra.

The family life he was now experiencing was easy-going, friendly, and casual, an atmosphere he most likely welcomed after the strict, work-centered, religious tone of the farm. Now in this open climate, his natural expansiveness and curiosity flourished. The Van Walterops became his new friends, and when he went on leave

from later postings, he returned to Davenport to visit them. He met their relatives and shared snapshots of his family with them. His letters and visits with the Van Walterops gave us views of another world than the farm.

"Where's Davenport?" I demand of my mother.

She looks wistful, distance in her eyes. "Oh, across the state, a little below Des Moines, to the south, and then east some."

"How far?"

"Maybe a couple hundred miles or a little more, I'm not real sure, honey. Now you go run outside. Go play."

"When will he come back?"

"I don't know."

"Is he going off to fight?"

"Well," says one of the other little kids, "he's only going to a school for officers, not off to the war."

"What's that?"

"Dummy, it's a college," is the swift comeback.

"He's at this place, training to be an officer in the navy," adds a bigger kid.

"What's that mean?"

Our chatter showed challenge and bravado as we tried to ward off fear, hold up our spirits, and buy assurance that the oldest of our big brothers would not be in danger. Back and forth we went, questioning, trying to understand what was happening to the small world we inhabited.

Four months after Ray left, the next older brother left. When Clarence joined the Army Air Force in October of 1943, he was sent to Amarillo, Texas, for three months, and then to Drake University in Des Moines for three months of training as an aviation cadet. One day an officer walked into the classroom and said, "You're finished. This class will be gunners." Training stopped immediately. Clarence's heart was set on becoming a pilot.

On the farm, our little ears perk up whenever a letter comes from one of the brothers, especially when we see Mother read a letter alone and save it in a special place.

Night comes, and weary, we trudge up the stairs to bed. Even with the windows open, it is hot. To get some air we frequently drag our mattresses out the window to the roof over the front porch, while Mother's warnings ring in our ears. "You could fall through that roof, you know, it's so thin." Underfoot it feels rickety and sticky, and I jump up and down trying to keep the soles of my bare feet from sticking to the hot tar roof.

"C'mon, don't be such a cry baby."

"But Mother said . . ."

"Shuddup or she'll hear you." And then, placating, "See? It's already cooler. Just lay down and go to sleep."

I lie down and huddle into a ball, expecting to fall through the roof any minute. When I uncoil to look up, the sky is blazing with a billion stars. No cricket is singing and not a single bullfrog is croaking his deeply sonorous, territorial grunts.

"See that? You see that?" Elmer whispers into my ear, interrupting my thoughts. "Look!" He points at the Milky Way.

"Where? I don't see anything."

"Look quick! There goes a shooting star!"

Sure enough, I do see one falling, diving. "How do you know that isn't an enemy airplane?"

"Ah, c'mon."

My eyelids squeeze shut as I pivot my head into the pillow and fall into sleep. In the nightmare that jolts me awake, a bomber flames toward earth. The night has turned cool. Shivering, I tiptoe inside where it's warm.

From the mailbox on the corner come letters from the two older brothers away from home. When the letter from Ray arrives, Mother is in the kitchen. She wipes off her glasses with a corner of her apron and slowly opens the envelope. Her voice carries an edge of expectation mixed with apprehension.

"Well, I think I'll sit down to read this."

We wait while she reads.

Looking up, she says, "Well, he's going home for Sunday dinner with a family that has a Dutch name, but they belong to a different church. They have a boy and a girl, an older girl too."

She turns toward a window and her eyes catch the light. Something sparkles. "Well, well. Ray says that we are invited to a review of the naval cadets on the parade ground. He says the Van Walterop family has a room where we could stay." Her eyes fix on some distant object. "Well, I don't know."

The idea of Mother going away feels like a heavy bag of flour settling slowly. Rays of sunlight sift through her hair, down through her slight body seated in the wooden rocker. Gravity surrounds her like an aura; its halo sparks, its earthiness is solid and irrefutable.

"Will you go?"

"Well, maybe..." She pauses. "We'll have to see about that." She gets up to do something. We run off to play.

When the day comes for Mother to take the train to Davenport, she puts on her Sunday dress, straightens the seams on the backs of her legs, and ties the laces of her black shoes. I watch her take down from the closet shelf her black purse with the shiny clasp. She brushes off her hat and settles it firmly above the bun at the nape of her neck. I love to watch her position the long hatpin

just so, pushing it deeply into the hat, through her hair, and out the other side.

"How do you know where to push the pin so it won't go through your head?"

She smiles and pats me on the head. "It's pretty easy, Snooky. Here, look, you see?" She stops, hands me a hatpin, pushes another hatpin through the hat into her hair, and then looks down at me. "I'll be back in a couple of days."

I hand back the other hatpin, remembering the unnatural quiet in the kitchen when Mother had embraced Ray good-bye while Pa waited in the car, anxious to get him to the train. Ray has not come back. Mother is busy now and doesn't notice me standing there, waiting, hoping she will not go.

Times are tense beyond childish understandings. The outside world we are glimpsing seems far away and foreign to us, and so our inside world holds onto the familiar. We girls endlessly crochet edges around neat squares of cloth—dresser scarves, doilies, and hankies. Although Mother's crochet hook could deftly connect the fine threads of variegated colors with the crisp ironed edges, our limited skills lead more often towards loops and snags. Then my Aunt Mattie's face and voice come into view. Gently she takes the hankie and crochet hook I hold out to her. "*Och Heiden, kleine kind,*" she frowns, "what a mess!"

While playing on the front porch, I watch a car approaching from far away. I race to the gate, swing out on it, then run to the driveway. Pa spins the Chevy off the road and into our yard. The car stops. Mother lets herself out. She looks different, but I can't figure out how. We little ones crowd around, hugging her knees, stopping her from moving toward the front porch. Our questions come tumbling out all at once.

"What about the train ride? What did you do?"

"What are they like?"

"What does Ray do there?"

"When is he coming home?"

As she makes her way toward the house we step back. In turn, she hugs each one of us.

"Sure nice to be home again. Let's go inside first, then I'll tell you all about it." In the front room she puts her purse down on the dining-room table, removes her gloves, and smiles. She reaches up and slowly pulls out the hatpins, one by one.

She pauses, then looks up. "Well, they aren't like us, but they are good people. The mother is such a kind of..." In the pause, her eyes go far away. "Well, a jolly sort of woman, nice and round. The boy plays a..."

well . . . it's like a horn, and the girl plays an oboe."

"What's that?"

"Well, you know, a pipe that sounds like a bird."

"Does Ray like her?"

"Oh," Mother demurs, her voice growing softer, "I don't know about that."

"The father is a nice man," she continues. "He works in town somewhere, I believe, and they have a nice house. The church was so strange, not at all like what we're used to."

"What kind of church?"

"It's called Community Christian Church or something like that. Nothing like ours at all, but it's good Ray has a place to go to church on Sundays. We don't have a Christian Reformed church in Davenport."

"What's Davenport like?"

"Something like Sheldon, maybe bigger, and Ray lives in a big dormitory at the college." Her voice grows anxious. "He's in training for something secret. He couldn't say what. You know we must not talk about what our boys in the service are doing."

Her tone changes gears. "My, you should have seen how good those boys look in their uniforms, especially on the parade ground. My, that was really something to see, something special."

"What did you do on the train?"

"Oh, look out the window," she smiles. "It was so nice and green, so nice and quiet." Her voice has grown soft and wistful, but it quickly switches. "Run outdoors and play now."

Our oldest sister, Gladys, enlisted in the WAVES the next February, in 1944, when she was twenty. I was now six and in second grade in nearby Hospers. Gladys was sent to New York for six weeks of boot camp at Hunter College in the Bronx, then to Bethesda Hospital in Maryland for nurses training, then to a military hospital in San Diego. She attended services and events at the Christian Reformed Service Home in San Diego, where she met a sailor and fell in love. She sent us letters—and also dresses. She missed sewing for her little sisters, bathing and mothering us.

Rationing was in effect, but some of it had little impact on our already frugal household. The wartime limit of three pairs of shoes a year, for instance, was not that important. We were used to getting two new pairs of shoes in late August of each year—one pair for school and the other for Sunday. By the next June, when we had outgrown them, we could go barefoot except on Sundays; for that day a pair of hand-me-down shoes might fit. Thrift had been a way of life on the farm, and

we were used to "making it do, wearing it out, making it last, or doing without."

As the war wore on, more things were rationed, including gasoline and sugar. At the beginning of each week, Mother would measure out our individual half-cup rations of sugar and pour them into jam jars, each lid labeled with one of our names. On Saturday, what was left in the jars was combined and used to make a cake or cookies or maybe fudge. As time went on, many common things could not be found anywhere. Posters everywhere exhorted us to buy U.S. savings bonds. Pa kept ours in a strongbox, reminding us that we each owned a \$5 war bond: "Now, isn't that something?"

In July 1944 Ray left St. Ambrose College and continued his naval training on the East Coast. Eventually he would be posted to Newport, Rhode Island, as a crew member of the USS *Columbus* for its shake-down cruise. This involved months of going to sea to test every single facet of the cruiser, and then coming back into the nearest port to correct anything wrong. While the ship was in dry dock, the crew had long shore leaves. Ray used his free time to build a radio with a friend.

In December 1944, Clarence went to Sudbury, England, as part of the Eighth Army Air Force, known as "The Mighty Eighth." From numerous airfields in the south and east of England, Boeing B-17s were carrying the air war to Germany, bombing heavily defended targets while dodging flak and enemy fighters. The Mighty Eighth steadily pounded Germany's great industrial web. B-17 Flying Fortresses were America's main strategic weapon in Europe. Able to withstand severe damage, the "Fort" commanded great respect and was fast becoming an American legend.

Clarence was assigned to fly weekly missions as a ball-turret gunner, crouched in a vulnerable plastic bubble under the belly of the B-17 as it flew over Germany. Pitted against some of the most experienced fighter pilots in the world, B-17 crews sustained heavy losses. More than 47,000 crew members either died or were taken as prisoners in daylight raids over Germany. Most of the men were barely into their twenties. Clarence was nineteen.

On hot afternoons we little kids would walk the half-mile on the dirt road to the mailbox on the corner, hoping to find a three-cent postcard or a letter from Ray, Clarence, or Gladys. In the kitchen, Mother would read each precious letter while we hung around her skirts, waiting.

She wipes her hands on her homemade apron and then wipes the dirt from her glasses. She pauses a moment, maybe to pray, before taking the letter handed to her. The unsettled silence in that pause makes us want

to run, but we are as quiet as barn mice, whose habits of evasion we know so well. She stands still, riveted to the thin piece of paper she holds.

In unaccustomed quiet, we read her face and are rewarded when her eyes glance up with a smile. Relieved, we dance out the screen door, letting it bang behind us as we run to our playhouses in the grove. In a tumble of emotions, we are happy, afraid, proud little kids.

The front window of our farmhouse frames a red, white, and blue service banner with three blue stars—for Ray, Clarence, and Gladys. These gold-fringed banners hang in nearly every front window of the farmhouses we pass as we drive to church every Sunday. The number of blue stars tells how many sons and daughters in each family are serving our country. Mother explains that a gold star means someone had died while serving our country.

When we drive by the window where a blue star has been replaced with a gold one, Mother's eyes grow somber and she confides how fortunate our congregation has been so far: "And you know, in our church, only one Gold Star Mother."

Clarence flew twenty-eight combat missions over Germany before he returned to the States. He arrived home on Mother's birthday, September 6, 1945, but she was no longer there. The previous June she had been carried off the farm in an ambulance, ill with tuberculosis, and taken to Bethesda Sanatorium in Denver for treatment. It was thought that the air in this mile-high city could help cure tuberculosis.

Gladys was still serving in the WAVES as a nurse's aide in a San Diego military hospital. A friend she had met while she was in boot camp had been her pen pal ever since. She wrote Gladys in September, describing the celebration in New York City. "Can you imagine the excitement and dither on V-J Day! The crowds, the bits of paper flying here, there, everywhere! Cars and taxis scooting past, decorated with red white and blue flags! A big pasteboard box tumbled out of a window above, nearly knockin' out my permanent wave! And we had a circus, too, no less. One especially excitable gentleman mounted a window ledge, held on with one hand, and with the other, adjusted his Hitlerian moustache. Then, gravely, amidst the excited cheers of the throngs, he stretched forth his hand in stiff 'Heil!' fashion. We craned our necks to read the news atop the Time building. It was all too good to be true. Strangers thumped strangers on the back, and oh—everyone was so happy! Why you couldn't have torn me away from the city that night! New York surely goes for things in a big way."

Back home on the farm, though, the war did not seem to be over. Mother was far away in a hospital and very sick, and Pa was worried. Ray was still on the USS *Columbus* in the Pacific and would be for several months. (He was discharged on July 1, 1946.) My third-oldest brother, Pete, joined the army and left in December of 1945 for Japan. He was gone for two years. The next brother, Stan, was not yet old enough to go, but he joined the marines after the war. We little kids overheard banter, songs, and swear words about the different branches of the armed services from our older siblings.

Gladys was going to marry George Gritter, the sailor she had met in the Christian Reformed Service Home in San Diego. The couple planned to live near his family in Grand Rapids, Michigan, far from northwest Iowa where all the large families of Koois and Sybesmas lived and farmed. Since Mother still was not well enough to come home, the wedding took place in the chapel of the sanatorium. Pa drove some of us to Denver for this, the first wedding in our family, in April of 1946.

Mother had to stay at Bethesda Sanatorium for another year. Although she came home briefly for a trial visit, she was not able to resume the hard life of a farm wife and the mother of several growing children. And so in June 1947, Pa sold the farm and we moved away—away from our twelve uncles and twelve aunts and over a hundred cousins—away from the Iowa farm to the big city of Denver. After two years in the sanatorium, Mother now left against medical advice to come live with us. Her tuberculosis was arrested—but not cured.

On the long drive to Denver in our gray Chevrolet, Pa sang the chorus of "There's a Long, Long Trail," a song he remembered from his military service in France during World War I: "There's a long, long night of waiting / Until my dreams all come true / Till the day when I'll be going down / That long, long trail with you."

For our family, the war was finally over. ♦

Irene Kooi Chadwick is an author living in California. This article (copyright Irene Kooi Chadwick) is adapted from a chapter of her Iowa Images: Dutch Immigrant History Illustrated (forthcoming in September 2004 from Pie Plant Press; see www.iowa-images.com). She was born tenth of twelve children in their Sioux County, Iowa, farmhouse. Her four sisters contributed their voices to this memoir.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Secondary sources used include Edward Jablonski, *Flying Fortress: The Illustrated Biography of the B-17s and the Men Who Flew Them* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965); and James G. Schneider, *The Navy V-12 Program: Leadership for a Lifetime* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987, 2nd ed., 1993). The letter describing V-J Day was from Abbey Hengeveld in New Jersey to Gladys Kooi in California.

SHSI (DES MOINES): L. H. DAVIS COLLECTION



Purchasing a war stamp was the only admission for these children at a Saturday morning movie in Hampton (November 1942). Newsreels about the war splashed combat footage on the screen, especially later in the war, when the government feared civilian morale was falling.

January 1944: Des Moines soldier George Reagen, on far right, flanks a "doorway of a shell-battered house in Venafro, Italy.... The Germans are no sooner out of an Italian village," the caption reads, "than M.P.s are in, maintaining law and order, directing traffic and keeping the situation in hand."

SHSI (DES MOINES)





SHSI (DES MOINES); DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE

SHSI (DES MOINES); DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



Above: Factory workers at the Pittsburgh-Des Moines Steel Company take a break from their defense jobs to hear Warrant Officer James D. Fox recount his experiences in the South Pacific with the Coast Guard (April 1943).

Left: Helping ease labor shortages in agricultural work, Charles Worthen, a 70-year-old tile layer, and Tom Heathman, 65, painter and blacksmith, pitch peas into a viner at the Iowa Canning Company in Vinton (June 1944).

Opposite: Ava Weisert, a widow with six sons in the service, punches her time card at the Iowa Canning Company (June 1944).



SHSI (DES MOINES): DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE

The Girls They Left Behind

by Mary Wear Briggs

In the years right before World War II, I taught in a small town in northeast Iowa. It was a happy time, a carefree time, with few complications. My life was relatively simple. I made \$90 per month and ate in restaurants, along with the Bachelor Club of the town. The Bachelor Club was a group of a dozen or so single boys who had never left their hometown or who, because of the Depression, had returned. Some were college graduates who lived at home and worked in the bank or their father's law office, or hometown sons teaching in the high school. Some could only find work as soda jerks or meter readers.

At our favorite restaurant, after the supper hour, my teacher friends and I often remained to play cribbage or just talk and listen to the jukebox. It was our singles' gathering place. At times, with much ado, the boys would announce that they were going to hold a bachelors' meeting that night. To tease them, we girls would go down and bang on the locked door demanding to get in. Their "meeting" was just playing poker and drinking spiked Cokes, no doubt.

For recreation, we bicycled, ice skated in winter, played bridge, picnicked, dated, and danced. We went to every big band around, to Clear Lake, Rochester, Waterloo, Spillville—anywhere that had a big ballroom. We gathered by the stage and cheered and clapped loudly when the bands went on national radio on Saturday nights.

The bowling alley was off limits for teachers as, of course, were the pool halls and beer parlors. All female

teachers were, however, expected to belong to the Monday night women's club. When we missed a meeting, we heard, "If those teachers would stay home on Sunday night, they could get here for the meetings."

On one particular Sunday morning, I had gone to church, then crossed town with my friends, Helen and Marian, to Marian's family's restaurant. The café was in a retired railroad dining car, with an extended kitchen. There Marian's mother prepared the best Sunday dinners in town. The smell of roast chicken and dressing urged us on as we crossed the open lot to the dining car. The menu was roast beef or pork, plump country-raised roast chicken, garden-grown potatoes with gravy, a vegetable, salad, and good homemade pie piled high with glistening white meringue capped with peaks of gold—all this for 65 or 75 cents.

After we ate, we walked to where I roomed. I read the Sunday paper. The front page pictured the Japanese peace delegation bowing to President Roosevelt. I decided to take a nap, as I had a date that night.

I awakened to my landlady calling up the stairs, "Mary, turn on your radio. Japan is bombing Pearl Harbor!" It was December 7, 1941. I listened as the urgent news unfolded, not fully realizing then that my secure little world had disappeared while I napped, and I would never find it again.

Of course, we had all read in the newspapers of Hitler's Nazis, as they goose-stepped across Europe. We watched the latest newsreels in the movie theaters as thousands of Germans gave the "Heil Hitler" salute. We

hoped we would never have to fight, but deep inside us we knew someday we would have to help stop him.

My date that night was on a very low key. We spent our time driving around, talking about the war, and listening on the radio to the hysterical reports coming from Hawaii. We both knew he would be called up soon along with all of our other friends.

In January 1942, a few weeks after the war started, a boy I knew dropped out of college and came home. He called late that afternoon. "Would you like to go skating?" he asked. Although I was not especially good at it, I loved to ice skate, and I often spent many hours, after I had finished my teaching day, skating on the flooded pond across from my school.

"I would love to go, but what are you doing home?" I asked.

"I've enlisted. I'm leaving for boot camp in the morning."

We went and waltzed together around and around, alone on the pond. Darkness came. He was very quiet and I'm sure frightened inside. I, too, felt his sadness and envisioned his fear of the future. He took me home, then he went home to supper. I never saw him again. That encounter was my first experience of losing a young friend, and it still remains with me.

In the summer of 1942, four of us from northeast Iowa went down to a Tennessee camp to see the boys we knew. In that small, very southern town, we attended a canteen dance every night. Every boy from Iowa tried to show us a good time. They took us out to their camp: no fancy barracks, no mess hall, no non-commissioned officers club. Their tents covered the bluegrass hills and valleys in rows and rows. When we lined up to eat with them from huge kettles and tin plates, there in that open pasture, we learned what the mess in "mess-call" meant. Their night hours were indefinite; they told us that all they needed to do was crawl through the old farm fence and find their tent. They didn't need much; they were on their way overseas. By that November they were in battle in Africa.

Later one of the boys I had gone to see was killed in Italy. Another dancing partner, after fighting in Italy, was transferred to the Pacific and came home when the war was over with jungle rot to the knees and various rare fevers. He was hospitalized for almost a year.

By the fall of 1942, all the boys I knew had gone to war. I read every new book that came into the public library. It was a dull, dull year!

By now, the women's club had become active in the Red Cross. We attended classes in home nursing and

first aid and sewed long-sleeved, dull cotton dresses to include in "Bundles for Britain" for the children being evacuated from London. For the soldiers we knitted scarves, which were probably thrown overboard on the way to Africa or the South Pacific.

In the spring of 1943, a friend (the junior high principal) and I decided to take a more active part in the war effort. We resigned our jobs and went to Cedar Rapids to join the WAVES (Women's Naval Reserve). I didn't pass the eyesight test. Our second choice was the WACs (Women's Army Corps). We took a bus to the WAC's national headquarters in Des Moines. Hotels were taken over by the WACs and boys coming in for induction.

We arrived late in the evening. At headquarters, we picked up the slips for our "free" reserved room. We found the room, in a sleazy, lower east side hotel. Boys unable to sleep were going up and down the hall in their undershorts to the only bathroom on the floor. There were no locks on the doors. We walked into our room. There on our bed sprawled a young man sound asleep. We spent the night in an all-night breakfast bar.

In the morning, in front of the Hotel Fort Des Moines, we climbed aboard a canvas-covered truck, among a load of young men, and headed toward the induction center. I was given a short, white gown, told to strip, put it on, and get in line. Coming to the stripping room, I had passed that line—men carelessly attired in short, white gowns, with plenty of white exposed behinds.

Never having had a physical in a doctor's office, I stood pondering the gown. The safest way would be to put it on with the opening in the front—I'd have more control. I came out and took my place at the end of a long line of nervous, white-reared boys.

Finally, I reached the front.

"Mary Lauretta Wear."

I opened the door. There stood three young, very bored doctors. I clutched the front of my gown with both hands!

"Oh, God, a girl, and she even has it on backwards!"

Again I was told to take it off. I stripped and climbed up on one of the unoccupied tables. Another doctor walked in, and for an eternity they stood over me, visiting back and forth while I lay there completely exposed, studying the ceiling.

My eyesight saved me. To my relief, I was rejected from the WACs. My friend signed up that night and was sent to an army air base in Texas. She worked in the flight tower for the duration.

Five of my friends and I rented a furnished upstairs apartment in a house in Des Moines in the summer of

1943. We called ourselves "The Harem." By then, women had taken over the factory jobs of the men who had gone overseas. Most were young single women or women without young children. We were told that it was the patriotic thing to do. "Help the War Effort." "Help Bring the Boys Home."

U.S. Rubber had just completed a new complex of buildings in Des Moines to produce ammunition. They were hiring. After being fingerprinted and checked by the FBI—a new experience—I was hired. I worked with .30-caliber tail-gunner ammunition, loading it into a weighing and measuring machine. The job was a long way from the soft life I had led as a teacher. I couldn't work fast enough, scooping the ammunition by hand from large carts, then sorting and rolling it into the machine. My machine often shut down for lack of cartridges. I wasn't too popular with the machinists! My back soon ached; my ankles became swollen from standing ten to twelve hours on the cement. The ends of my fingers were calloused and bleeding, my nails worn down to the quick. But I was making more money than I ever had teaching.

Work shifts at the factory alternated every six weeks. By the time my stomach and sleep pattern had adjusted, it was time to move to the next shift. Many times we worked twelve-hour days, seven days a week. Although we were almost as lonely as the boys we knew, now in training camps or somewhere overseas, we felt that we were doing something worthwhile. We felt proud when our boyfriends wrote and said they had used or seen cartridges marked "DM 43."

Probably one of my greatest shocks, in my education, involved the "street" women who came, from necessity, to work in the plant. Few men were left to patronize the bars and streetwalkers of the red-light district on the lower, shabby side of town. With the streets and bars empty, the women came to the factories in their skimpy attire, showing generous cleavage, their faces heavy with makeup, and their hair in hues of orange or red. They were rude, hardened, belligerent women, but most of all they spit out curses and gutter language like the toughest longshoremen. Some words I had never heard before, and until years later I didn't even know what they meant. They probably enjoyed the shock treatment they gave us! Our machinists were all older men. They told us the history of some of the women and advised us to stay away from them. Now I wonder if these women might have had brothers or lovers overseas. But we left them alone, so I never found out.

After work at the plant, we were usually too tired to go out, and there was little to do when we did. Sometimes, one of the girls would get out her wedding gown and dress up for us. She had purchased the gown and veil and was on her way to Louisiana to be married when her guy was shipped overseas. Another roommate had already received word that her boyfriend had been killed.

Other times, we would meet downtown in some restaurant that had a jukebox and dance together to a Benny Goodman record, or perhaps "Josephine," "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree," or "In the Mood." Frances Langford's "I'll Be Seeing You" brought tears to our eyes. These gatherings didn't drive away the yearning for our boyfriends and our past good times. To us, then, it seemed that the war would drag on forever.

During the war, Babe's was the top nightclub in Des Moines. I believe it was the only club where you could buy illegal drinks by the glass. Iowa was still dry, to the extent that you bought your bottle of liquor only at the state liquor store. One night a group of us girls decided to see what went on at Babe's. We climbed the stairs, found a table, and ordered drinks, mostly favorites of our boyfriends, whiskey sours or scotch on the rocks. We talked about our latest V-mail letters.

Most of us wrote to several boys. With some we had worked out a code to know where they were and whether they were in combat. If they wrote of hot sand and long marches, they were in the African campaign. If they told of beautiful sunsets and the moon reflecting on the water, they were in the South Pacific. Always large sections of the letters were cut out by the censors, with only small parts left for us to reread and dream over.

We left Babe's disappointed. It was filled with WACs and middle-aged couples out for a good meal. We didn't do any "swinging and swaying." As we went down the stairs, we met ten cops on the way up. Babe's was raided that night and shut down. We were relieved to be on our way home. Babe's was frequently raided, but it was always open again in a short time, and the liquor continued to flow.

In our "harem," war rationing affected us severely. As single women, we received our families' ration books only after most of the coupons had been removed. Gas and tire rationing didn't affect us directly; none of us had cars and there was no one to take us places anyway. But coffee, butter, and sugar were rationed and almost nonexistent for us. Canned goods became scarce. Fresh chickens soon left the markets. Other meat as we

knew it could not be found, unless you liked mutton. Some thought they could fool us by putting it in hamburger, but one whiff, while it was cooking, and the camouflage was known. On rare occasions of eating out, leg of lamb was delicious. A once properous meat market near us had a "Gone Fishing" sign hanging on the door most of the time.

One of the harem girls' father worked at a German POW camp in northern Iowa. Whenever she went home, she brought back a package or two of T-bone steaks and pounds of butter. We never questioned why the German prisoners ate better than we did. We just enjoyed!

One time, a teacher friend was going to Chicago to see her college sweetheart off for overseas. She had no silk stockings left for the occasion. She would either need to go bare-legged or wear cotton hose, as we all had to do. I loaned her my last precious pair. Silk stockings were very sheer and very delicate. We carefully crocheted the runs to preserve them as long as we could. I always smile when I think about what a wonderful last night my stockings must have had! When my friend returned them, they were completely blown out at the knees.

In late 1943 I was transferred to the large-caliber tail-gunner ammunition wing. Each day, I brought in my lunch, changed to coveralls, and remained locked in until the end of the shift. I was the only woman in the wing. I went from machine to machine every half-hour, gathered sample casings loaded with powder, and took them back to my glass-enclosed room and weighed them on a delicate, glass-enclosed scale. If they weighed short on powder I went back and told the operator to shut down until he brought the amount of powder up to the desired weight.

Each machine had a separate, reinforced cubicle. The cubicles stretched down both sides of the wing, probably twelve to a side. All cubicles had their own escape doors to the outside. To eliminate friction, on the half-hour the ceilings, walls, and floors of the cubicles were washed down.

One day a machine went haywire, and a bullet shot through the machinist's chest. Another man was beheaded when a machine fell from overhead. I seemed to have conditioned myself against danger.

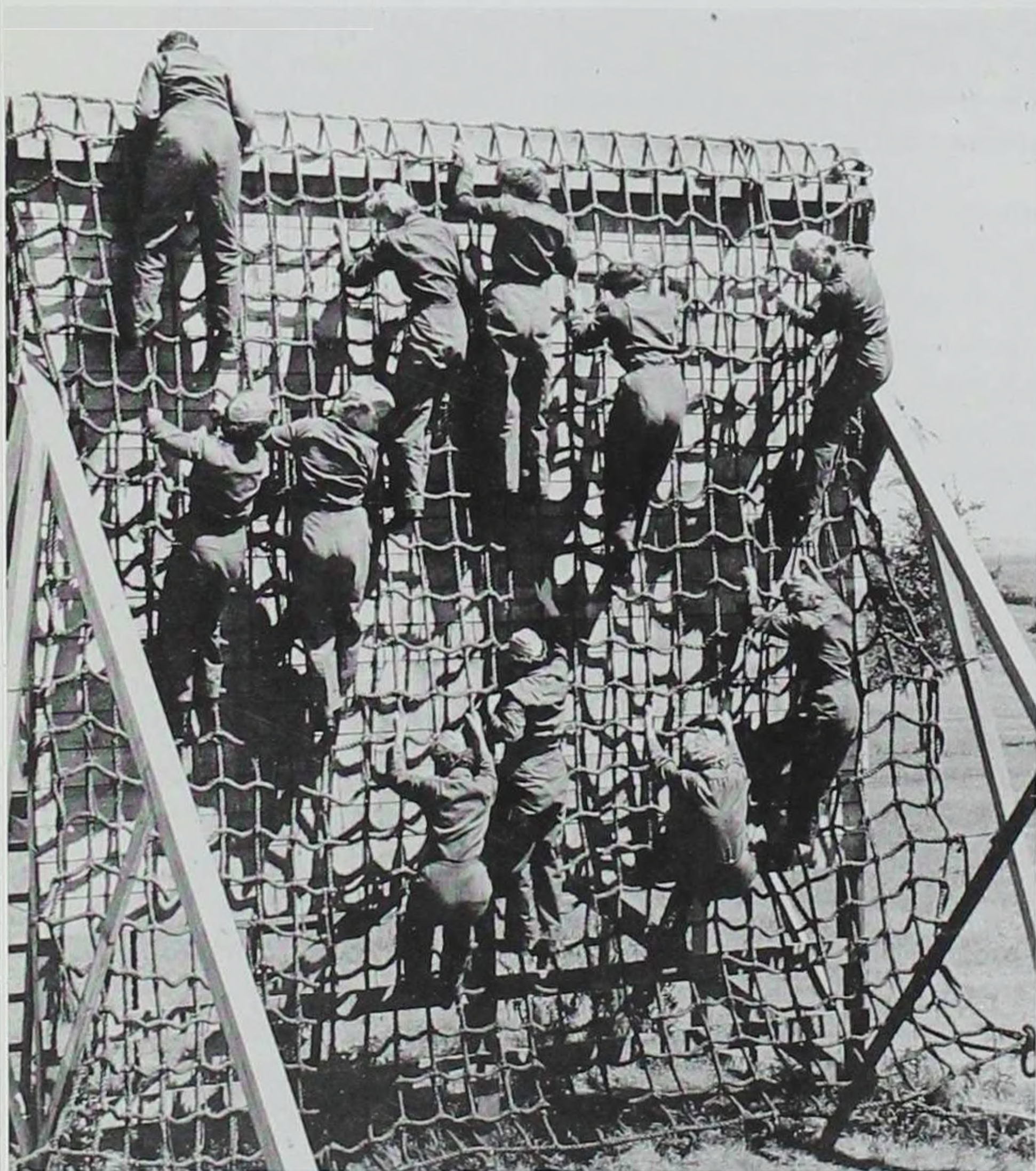
On another day, a young government inspector from back east stood behind me, checking me as I weighed and recorded the powder weight from each machine. I tapped the case, as I had previously been shown to do, to get out all the remaining powder before weighing. He turned chalky white. "Good God, girl, don't you

know that could explode!" He left quickly, and I was never checked again.

Soon after D-Day, in June 1944, the company told us that we had made enough ammunition to last for the next twenty years. We all thought the war would soon be over. The plant started to lay off personnel. Some departments started to make a new, strange, and very smelly product—large sheets of clear plastic.

One of the harem girls left to work in a German POW camp. Another went back home to pump gas in her father's gas station. As there was no work in Des Moines for the thousands of us laid off, my friend Hazel and I decided to try our luck somewhere we had never been. Neither of us had seen the mountains. In fact, we had hardly traveled out of Iowa. We boarded a fast train, the Denver Zephyr, and headed to Colorado.❖

Mary Wear Briggs, from Missouri Valley, Iowa, wrote this reminiscence in 1988, as part of a larger memoir that she compiled in 1992 and later donated to the State Historical Society of Iowa. Her writings on her childhood home in Harrison County and on chasing chickens have appeared in earlier issues.



SHSI (DES MOINES)

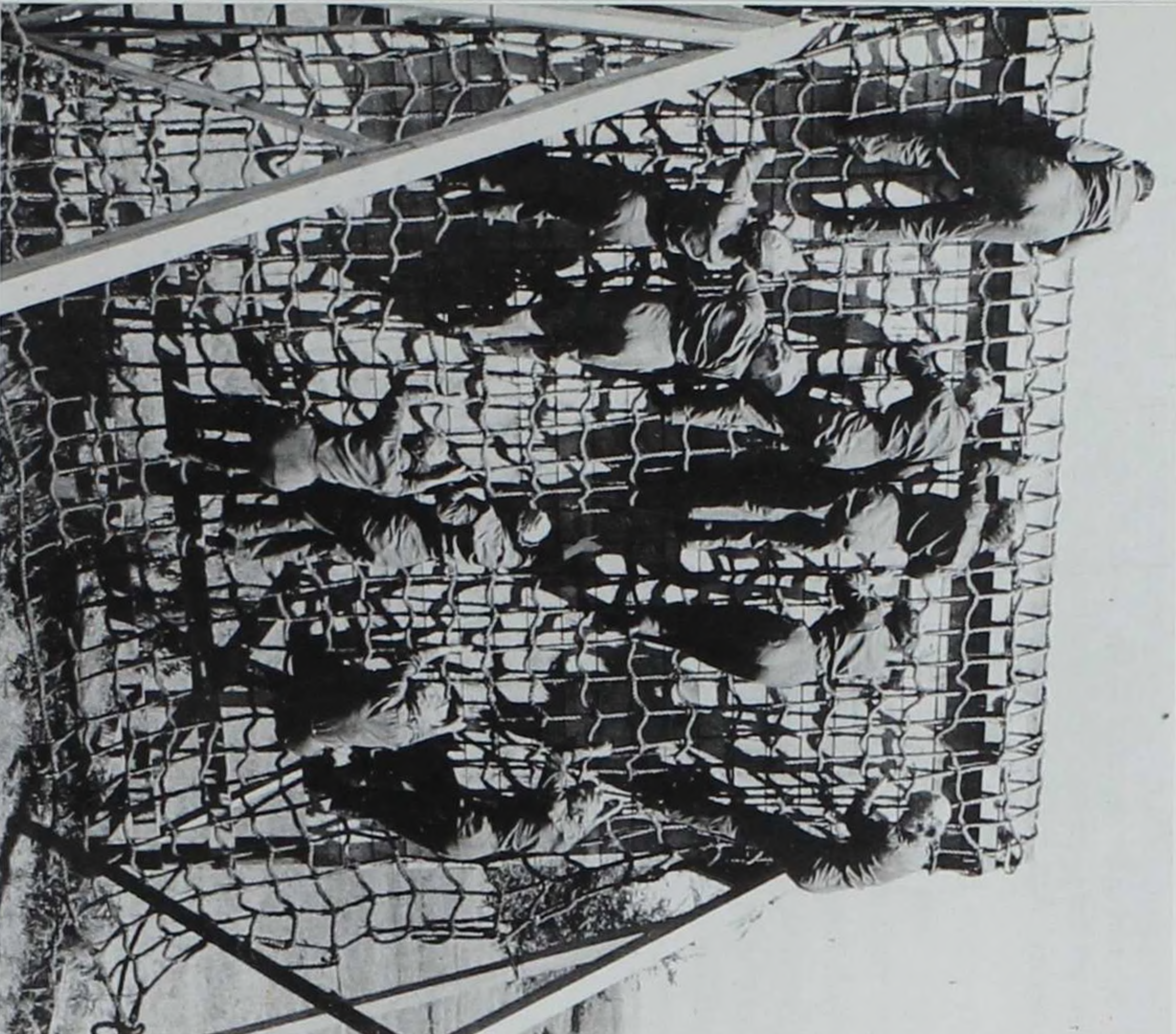
Scrambling down a cargo net, WACs at Fort Des Moines simulate a landing from a troopship (August 1945).



SHSI (DES MOINES); DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



June 1944: Women workers from the Iowa Ordnance Plant at Burlington and the Sheaffer Pen Company in Fort Madison dance with soldiers from Camp Ellis, Illinois, at a USO-operated community center in Flint Hills, a federal housing project in Burlington. First open only to ordnance workers, Flint Hills had recently started accepting wives of soldiers with children, at reduced rents, "whose allotment checks would provide only skimpy living and probably less desirable quarters elsewhere," said the *Des Moines Register*. With a population of more than 2,000, Flint Hills had its own stores, library, school, playground, and recreation center.



Scrambling down a cargo net, WACs at Fort Des Moines simulate a landing from a troopship (August 1945).

SHS (DES MOINES)



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June 1944: Women workers from the Iowa Ordnance Plant at Burlington and the Sheaffer Pen Company in Fort Madison dance with soldiers from Camp Ellis, Illinois, at a USO-operated community center in Flint Hills, a federal housing project in Burlington. First open only to ordnance workers, Flint Hills had recently started accepting wives of soldiers with children, at reduced rents, "whose allotment checks would provide only skimpy living and probably less desirable quarters elsewhere," said the Des Moines Register. With a population of more than 2,000, Flint Hills had its own stores, library, school, playground, and recreation center.

Right: WACs at the Fort Des Moines training center drill with gas masks in Iowa's August heat (1945).

June 6, 1942: Saturday night in Des Moines finds these two soldiers from Fort Des Moines on a weekend furlough.



SHS (DES MOINES) DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



SHS (DES MOINES)

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Right: WACs at the Fort Des Moines training center drill with gas masks in Iowa's August heat (1945).

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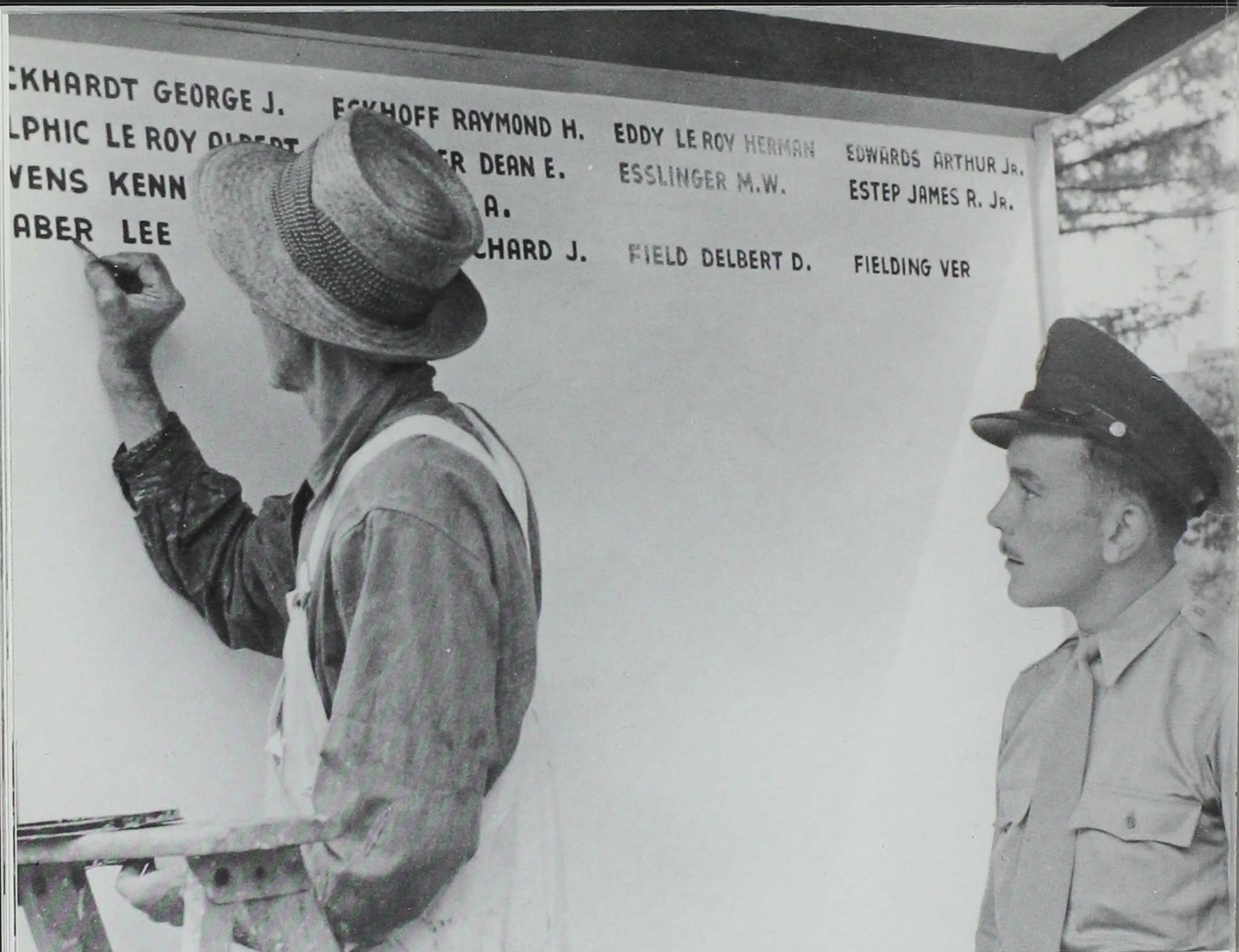


SHSI (DES MOINES): DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



SHSI (DES MOINES)





BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (DES MOINES); L. H. DAVIS COLLECTION

Home on furlough in August 1942, Merlin Garrison watches as R.W. Collins carefully paints the names of Franklin County men in the U.S. Armed Forces. The memorial arch in Hampton's courthouse square was sponsored by the local Civilian Defense Council.



From Vassar College to Small-Town Iowa: Winning World War II

by Mary Draper Janney and Barbara Gair Scheiber

More than sixty years ago, three of us—newly minted Vassar College graduates—set out to save the world.

It was 1942. The country had been at war for six months, and most of our classmates wanted to contribute to the war effort as soon as we graduated. Many got married and prepared to set up housekeeping with husbands before overseas duty claimed them. Others went into uniform—the WAVES, the WACs, the American Red Cross. Still others went to Washington to seek government jobs. The three of us had a different idea.

In our senior year at Vassar, we had concocted a plan that we thought would help—in some small way—to win the war on the home front. Many Americans, remote from the bombs and fires of battle, wanted to feel useful but didn't really know how to go about it. Perhaps, we thought, the three of us could help people organize for effective participation, not only to defeat Hitler and his Axis partners, but to understand and deal with postwar challenges. Though we were full of idealistic fervor, we were definitely uncertain of how to proceed. Having grown up in New York City, we wanted to live and work in a small rural community far different from the urban eastern world we knew.

As a first step, we went to Washington during spring vacation of senior year, and found a sympathetic audience in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Officials there urged us to contact colleagues in the Agricultural Extension Service at Iowa State College in Ames, Iowa. They knew the leaders there were outstanding, forward-looking people who would willingly work with us, guide our idealism, and put our energy to good use.

In mid-June, in our 1940 blue Plymouth convertible, top down most of the way, we drove from the East Coast to Ames. To our immense satisfaction and gratitude, we were greeted by warm, welcoming professionals. They not only helped us develop a real plan of action, they advised and guided us throughout its implementation.

During our week in Ames, the staff reaffirmed the hunch that American home front activities were in need of organization. A lot of activities had sprung up with little or no coordination. There was much waste and duplication, and frequent frustration, just about everywhere. The previous year, for example, four different organizations in one town had conducted scrap metal drives at the same time. The result? Not only did efforts overlap, but many people were not asked to contribute at all.

What was needed in that town and many others, the Extension Service team believed, was the formation of a town-wide coordinating council composed of representatives of all established organizations—churches, schools, civic groups, social clubs. A federation of this kind could be a clearinghouse of information for home front activities. It could set up a calendar of upcoming war drives so that organizations would not “trip over each other.” In addition, the council could take the lead in organizing neighborhoods, with leaders on each square block, so that everyone would have the chance to participate.

The Extension Service professionals at Iowa State had an even broader vision. “Developing the habit of working together instead of at cross-purposes in war-

time could carry over into peacetime," they told us.

We were thrilled. Their words fit the dreams that had filled our late-night talks at college. "Why not adopt the community council idea as your plan?" they asked. "If you help to set up a War Activities Council in an Iowa town, perhaps it could be a model for all towns across the United States."

Now we had to find a town. Our mentors spread out a map of Iowa. Clarion, a rural town in northwest Iowa, would be a promising setting for launching such a council, they told us. It had a population of 3,000 wide-awake and friendly people who got along well together. It was surrounded by farmland with some of the most fertile soil in the country. There were no extremes of wealth or poverty. The town had good leadership. It would welcome "three girls from the East" in its midst.

It sounded like the destination we had hoped for. Arming us with names of potential friends and words of advice—"don't start organizing right away, just get to know people," "get involved in town activities"—our new backers saw us off. And, they reminded us, "Holler if you get in trouble."

On July 4, we headed toward Clarion, where we would live and work for the next three months. Our confidence boosted by the trust that Iowa State had shown in us, our spirits soared. We arrived in Clarion to find the town deserted. (Later we learned that just about everyone had gone to an Independence Day picnic in a recreation area not far from town.) Our morale plummeted, but we managed to find a place to stay for the night.

Our spirits rose the next morning when we called on the minister of the Congregational Church, Ralph Beebe, as the Extension team had suggested. We introduced ourselves as three college girls from the East who wanted to see what it was like to live in a small town in the Middle West.

"Glad you're here," he said. "I hope you'll like us and I hope you'll stay." We consulted him about possible jobs to support ourselves. The town needed a summer program for children, he told us. The school playground was a fine site; it was empty for the summer. How would we like to start a day camp?

We were elated. We had all had experience as camp counselors, and this was a positive way to meet people and get to know the community. Within a week, we were going door-to-door recruiting children for the camp, and news of the arrival of "three girls from the East" had

spread through town. It wasn't long before we were greeted by friendly calls of "Hey, Vassar," or "Hey, Massachusetts" (from the license plate on our car).

"Camp-at-Home in Clarion" opened on July 13, with children signed up for full or half days, Monday through Friday (\$2 a week for full-time attendance, \$1 for half-time). The Oddfellows agreed to let us use their basement on rainy days, and the Commercial Club provided equipment and supplies. Later, a county social service agency paid for enrollment of a group of children whose families couldn't afford the program. Camp provided us with a livelihood, augmented by selling subscriptions to the *Wright County Monitor*, the local newspaper.

The paper allowed us to write a long story about

PHOTO COURTESY OF BARBARA GAIR SCHEIBER



Vassar graduates Juliet Fleischl, Barbara Gair, and Mary Draper smile from their 1940 Plymouth convertible, in Clarion, Iowa.

the camp for the August 6th edition, and we three shared the byline. We described in detail the activities—swimming, dramatics, singing, art, puppet shows, games, treasure hunts, and field trips to the Great Western roundhouse, the airport, Lake Cornelia, and Gordon's Greenhouse. "Camp has been fun for us, too," we wrote. "None of the children are 'problems.' Discipline is rarely necessary. Everyone knows each other by now, and we have no 'mortal enemies' in the group. And it's always gratifying to know that you've been able to teach someone something, even if it's just that hey [you] shouldn't hog the teeter-totter. We want to thank all the mothers for trusting us with their children. We hope they've had as good a time as we have."

We were amazed at how quickly we were accepted and welcomed. Clarion's friendliness was in startling contrast to our urban experience. Although some people spoke harshly of the East and its "big city ways," most were outgoing and hospitable. After we moved into our own apartment, neighbors brought us tomatoes, beans, corn, and other succulent vegetables from their gardens. People consistently inquired about our well-being and seemed to want us to have a good experience in their community.

Eager to be part of community life, we accepted invitations to church activities, 4-H club meetings, civic clubs. We agreed to be Victory Girls at the Commercial Club's "Retailers for Victory" night, donning red, white, and blue jumpers and selling defense stamps. It was clear that there were already several local efforts to do war work.

After four weeks, we decided it was time to ask townspeople about their involvement in home front activities. How to start? There were more than 60 active, lively organizations in this town of 3,000: six separate religious denominations; civic groups like the Rotary, Kiwanis, the Commercial Club; lodges, including the Masons, the Royal Neighbors, the Eastern Star; railroad brotherhoods and sisterhoods; the American Legion and VFW and their women's auxiliaries; dozens of study groups, like the Monday Club, the Progress Club, the Knotty Thread, the Merry Eight. Finally, there were county offices of government agencies and national campaigns such as bond drives, scrap iron drives, the Red Cross, and Civilian Defense.

We began by conferring with our friend, Rev. Beebe, the Congregational minister, asking him point blank if he thought the town would see the need for a coordinated war activities council. He liked the idea, especially its potential for dealing with human problems unrelated to the war. He suggested we get reactions from all organization heads, starting with the county chairman of the office of Civil Defense. He'd be in a position to give the idea a real push.

We were in for a splash of cold water. The chairman spoke emotionally of his hatred of "the East," "the idle rich," "the monied states with all the power." This was "Roosevelt's war," he said. He complained bitterly about people cheating with rationing—sneaking extra sugar, bootlegging tires. We tried asking if giving out information about rationing would help, but he brushed off that idea. "I haven't started any home front activities here in Clarion," he told us. "People like to relax in the summer."

Crushed, we beat a hasty retreat, caucused over ice cream cones at Evans Dairy, and decided to move ahead on our own. We drew up a list of every organization in town, and for the next three weeks spent our after-camp hours calling on leaders of these groups.

In approaching people, we knew that to succeed, a community war council had to be their idea, not ours. Our instincts, and the advice we received from the Extension Service, told us to listen to each person's concerns and to "float the idea" of a town-wide council, rather than assert that such a federation of groups would improve home front participation in the war.

The response was astonishing. Almost everyone we spoke to agreed on the need for a town-wide council of organization representatives that could unify current war activities and start other valuable programs. "If we can have a war program in this town that'll give every man and woman a specific job to do, I'm all for it," one prominent church leader said. "The trouble has been that so far a few people have done all the work. Yet everyone is anxious to do something. They just don't know what to do."

People spoke about failed drives—piles of paper that got dumped because no one knew where to put them, rubber that never got picked up. And there were too many fund-raising appeals. "People get tired of being approached every other day for a different organization. We need to consolidate all the drives into one and then allocate the funds to the different organizations," a member of the American Legion said. "It would save time and energy and probably raise more money in the end."

Others wanted more information and discussion about major issues. One woman active in civic affairs called for forums on national concerns: the plight of Japanese internees, the importance of planning for enduring peace.

By mid-August, 37 representatives of organizations had expressed their readiness to come to a town meeting to help set up a community council. To ensure the success of such a meeting, we were advised to meet with a man described as a golden-tongued orator, one of the most respected people in town. We made an appointment, expecting his blessing. Instead, he asked coldly, "Who or what organization sent you girls here? You must admit it's unusual for three girls to come into town and inside of 60 days start organizing a movement." We protested our innocence, but he was unmoved.

We left his office shaken, with visions of being run out of town. But we tried not to dwell on this setback; there was too much to do. The immediate question was: Who in town was qualified and willing to take respon-

sibility for convening the crucial meeting of organization heads? A popular businessman on the Commercial Club board was a logical candidate, but he said no: though he was all for the plan he was too busy already. When a second candidate turned down the role, we began to wonder if our accuser had been spreading suspicion about our motives.

Our Extension Service friends came to our rescue, appearing in Clarion out of the blue "to see how you girls are getting along." They assured us that no false accusations could undermine the work we and the people of Clarion had done. They suggested that we ask Arnela Kyseth, one of the town's leading women and a member of the State Board of Education, to call together a representative group of citizens to plan and convene the big town meeting—a far better idea than placing the responsibility on one person's shoulders.

Wheels began to turn rapidly. The group—eight outstanding men and women—met several times the following week to draw up a proposed organizational structure and an agenda for the town meeting, set for Wednesday night, September 2, at the county courthouse in Clarion. Every organization in town was asked to send a delegate.

Wednesday night we arrived at the courthouse early, helped to set up chairs, and waited nervously as 50 Clarion citizens came in, including the newspaper editor, the state senator, the superintendent of schools, heads of Navy Mothers, the Red Cross, railroad brotherhoods, the VFW auxiliary, and all the others we'd come to know in the past two months.

The first order of business was a surprise—a letter read aloud by the chairwoman, Ilah Banwell. Incensed by rumors about our "connections" to sinister forces, the Congregational minister had called Iowa State to ask for a letter telling the true story of how and why we came to Iowa. As we had feared, our accuser had been busy behind the scenes, but the words sent from Ames, warmly supportive of us, scotched any suspicion that might have ruined the meeting.

We had been asked to speak, to introduce the idea of a community council and describe briefly how it would work. We took turns, using the opportunity to express our feelings of appreciation for the way Clarion had welcomed us. Then, we sat back, watched, and listened.

Almost everyone spoke, pointing to problems that could be solved through a representative council, from fund-raising, to duplication and wasted resources, to the need for more education about important civic and social concerns. After three hours, they voted.

It was unanimous, a resounding "yes" to setting up a community war council. The group elected ten men

and women to an executive committee that would report to a larger assembly of organization representatives. Every ward in town would have a captain, every block a lieutenant. Through them, all citizens would be an integral part of the programs carried out by the council. The delegates planned to go back to their organizations for final approval, but there was no doubt: The Clarion War Activities Council was born.

We could hardly believe it. The people of Clarion had adopted the concept of coordinated community action as their own. Our dream had become their plan. Natural leaders emerged and put the plan into action.

On September 23, three representatives from the board appeared as guests on *Freedom Front*, a WOI radio program hosted by Pearl Converse of the Extension Service. "Good neighbors in Clarion are working together in a community program to help the war," Converse began. "In my opinion, this work in Clarion is a fine example of democracy in action on the home front."

"People have accused us of not realizing we are at war, especially here in the middle west," board representative C. J. Christiansen commented. "No one could help but know with boys gone and going every day. We wanted to do something—to live up to the responsibilities we owe to our fighting men. That's the biggest reason, I think, that this organization was formed."

State Senator G. R. Hill noted, "Naturally there was a lot of war work already under way in our community. But there was a good deal of confusion about it. For instance, the USO drive didn't start until very late last spring due to imperfect organization. The Red Cross drive was launched at almost the same time and so neither drive succeeded as well as it might have. We need a council to time these activities."

When we left in late September, the council was up and running, with committees, ward captains, block lieutenants, and clear lines of communication.

The story has an epilogue. We were determined to tell Clarion's story to people in Washington, hoping it would inspire others. Who would be more interested than Eleanor Roosevelt? We wrote to her, then called her office at the White House. An invitation came. Could we meet with her in the Red Room? A week later, a warm, attentive First Lady listened to our account and agreed that grass roots action was vitally important. "This is something the president has to hear," she said, inviting us to dinner.

And so, in mid-October, the three of us had dinner at the White House with eight other guests. At dessert, Mrs. Roosevelt gave us our cue, saying, "Franklin, these

girls did something remarkable this summer." We recited the tale of Clarion to a genial, beaming president. In spite of the incredible pressures he faced leading a nation at war, he listened patiently, made a few jokes to put us at our ease, and nodded his approval.

The next day Eleanor Roosevelt mentioned the three of us in her daily column in U.S. newspapers. "It seems to me that they have been enterprising and far-seeing, because in planning to use this organization for the present, they are laying the foundation for post-war activities on an intelligent basis." But she misstated the local situation when she said we had come to Clarion "to arouse it to its own responsibility in this war."

We immediately fired off a letter to the good folks in Clarion, which was then printed in the paper. "Our summer in Clarion proved to us that you people out there are far more genuinely patriotic than the people we know in this area of blackouts and alerts." We added that "the National Head of Civilian Defense thought so highly of Clarion's experiment, that he hopes to see it tried on a regional basis here in the East.

"We did not go to Clarion because we felt it was 'unaware of its responsibilities.' We were told that it was a wide awake community, willing to accept three Eastern girls. We were told its people were intelligent and likely to cooperate with a new plan designed to unify existing civilian war activities. It was not our plan. It grew as we spoke to your leaders. You formulated it, and can make it work or fail. As one of you once said: 'We were just the mild burr under the saddle.'"

We'll never forget our evening at the White House or the lessons Clarion taught us in 1942—about people, communities, and ourselves—lessons that have guided us throughout our lives. It was thrilling to learn firsthand, from Clarion, how eager people are to work together for the good of their community and their country. ❖

Mary Draper Janney lives in Washington, D.C., and is an educator and community leader. Barbara Gair Scheiber lives in Bethesda, Maryland, and is a writer and advocate for children with disabilities. The co-authors write: "Juliet Fleischl Brudney was the leader of our threesome in Iowa, spurring us on with her boundless energy, her wit, and her intense, unflagging commitment. She later became a columnist for the Boston Globe. Juliet died on January 23, 2003. This account is dedicated to her."

Clarion citizens speak out for War Activities Council

A full page in the *Wright County Monitor* on October 1, 1942, explained the new Clarion War Activities Council's function as a coordinating clearinghouse and how it would solve problems that had plagued earlier home front efforts.

What Mrs. Ed Jacobson liked best about the new plan was that "no one organization will be running the whole show. It isn't good to have the same group out in front constantly. They over work and the community lacks that fine spirit it gets when everybody is working together."

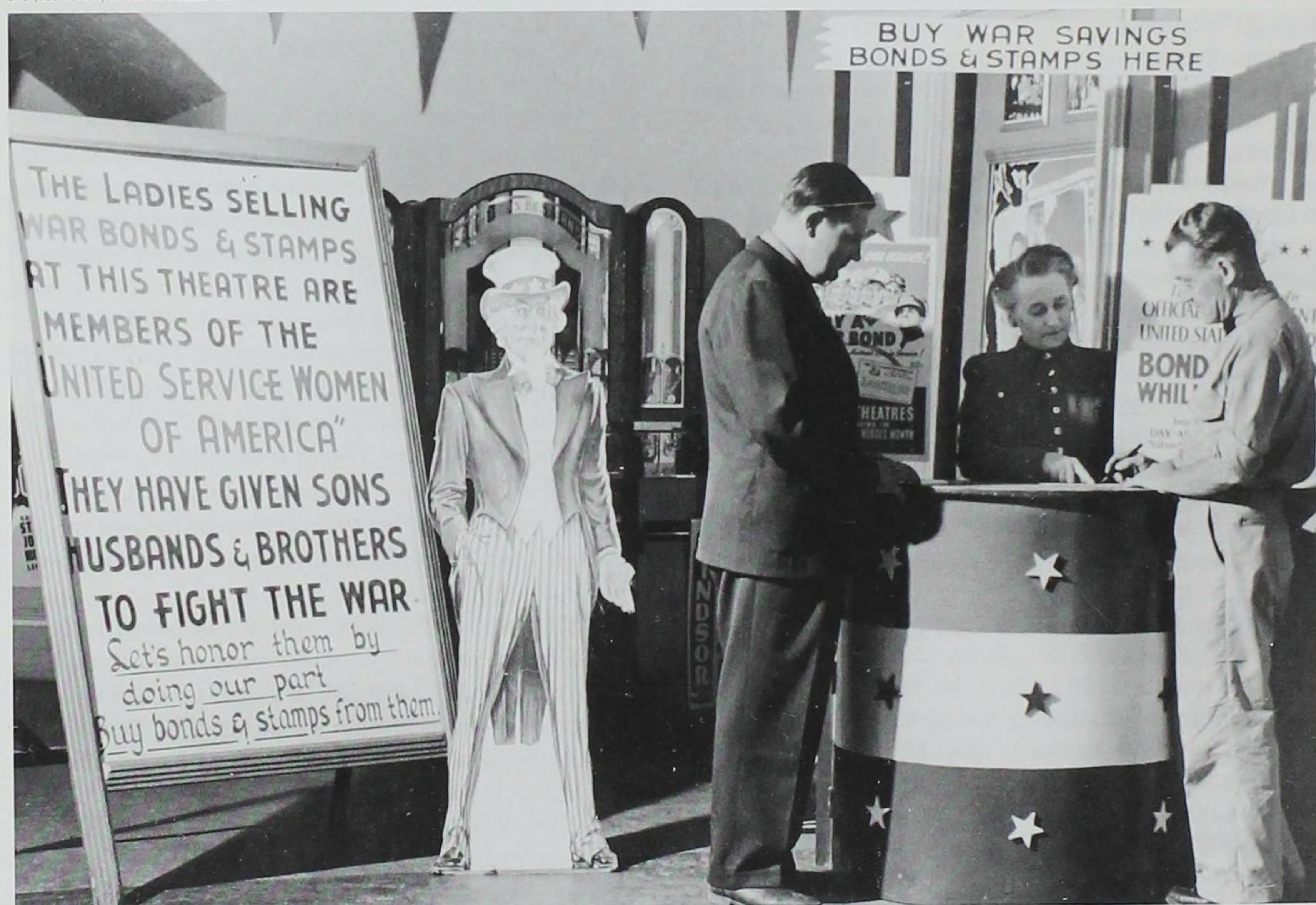
Regina M. Sheffield also approved of the system. "So far about all I've done is listen to news reports and read the papers. I know that isn't enough and I know there's a lot I could be doing. But I'm more of a follower than a leader. I need some help in discovering what contribution I can make." She added, "Sooner or later people will have to be organized for war work. It's much better to do it ourselves in our own way, rather than be dictated to from above."

"It's a wonderful plan. I wish it had been in effect a couple of months ago when I was asked to solicit for Navy Relief," said Grace Virginia Buchan, farm woman and vice-president of the Navy Mothers. "For three solid days I went from house to house trying to get money. I never had a chance to do my dishes or take care of my baby chicks. No one will have to do that much work with these Block Lieutenants covering definite small areas." She added, "And the people they'll be canvassing will be their own neighbors. It's always much easier to get help from people you know."

"Things are pretty complicated now. But wait until 1943. Meat rationing, gas rationing, a farm labor shortage," county agricultural agent Jay Vandelboe commented. "Some of the mistakes we've made in the past need never reoccur. Three separate tries to collect scrap and none of them completely successful. The salvage head will have the service of an already organized army of workers. This plan is needed alright. Just because Washington is muddled and confused, there's no reason why we have to be."

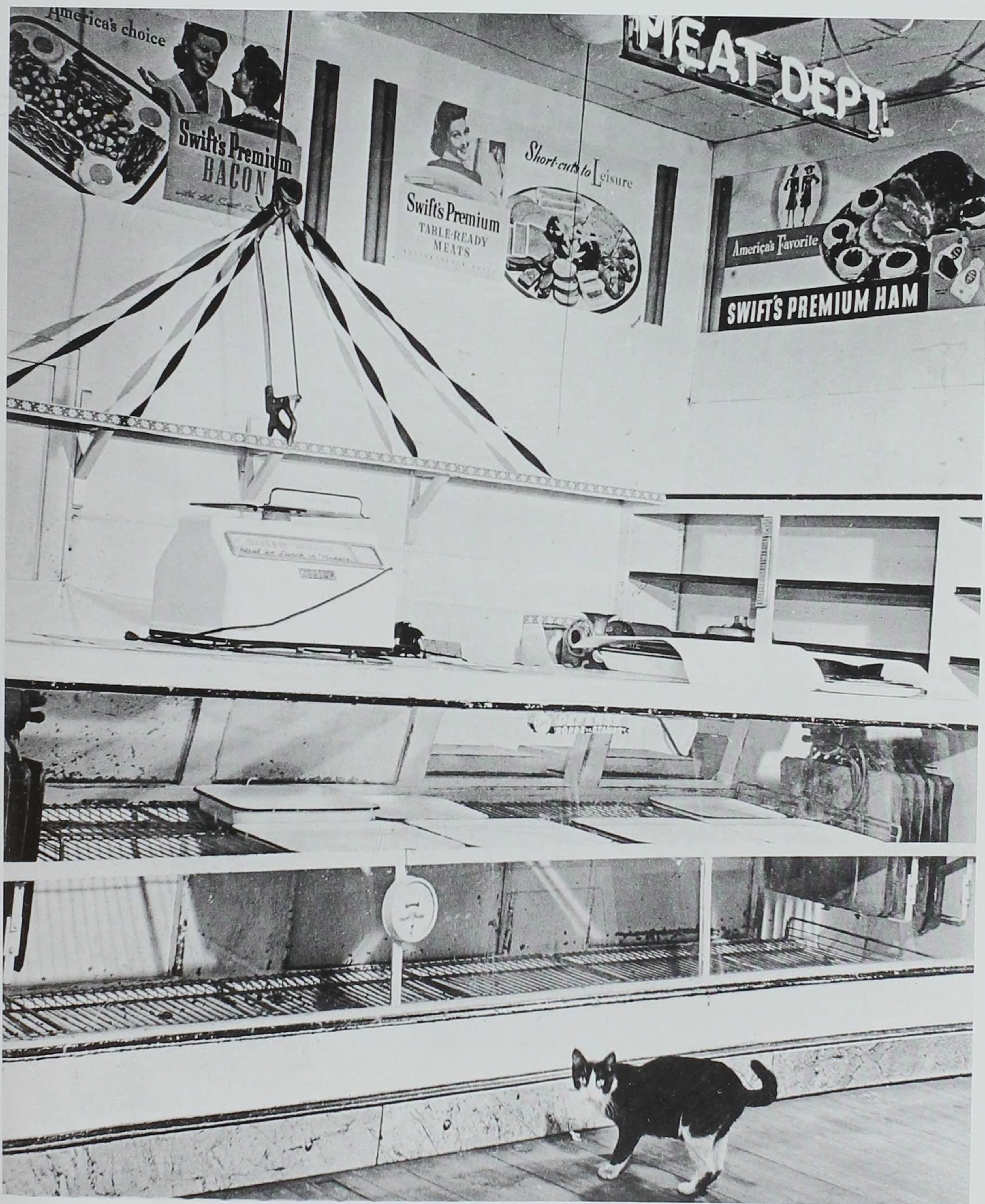
—The Editor

SHSI (DES MOINES): L. H. DAVIS COLLECTION



From left: Walter Peterson and Blanche Jennings wait as Lon J. Allison fills out a war bond application in the Windsor Theatre, Hampton (November 1942).

By November 1942, cuts in meat deliveries had closed down this grocery store in Oakland, Iowa.



SHS (DES MOINES); DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



SHS (DES MOINES) DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE

November 1942: Just weeks short of her 90th birthday, Elizabeth Goodbarn of Des Moines keeps busy knitting for the Allies. "Most recently," the *Des Moines Register* said, "she has been knitting sweaters, stockings and mittens for crew members aboard the British ship, H.M.S. Chesterfield. Mrs. Goodbarn was born at Burnt Island, Scotland."

Opposite: Sgt. Eugene Friedrichs of Batavia, Iowa, helps repair London homes damaged by bombs. General Dwight Eisenhower had placed 3,000 U.S. soldiers skilled in the building trades at the disposal of the British ministry of works (December 1944).



"Couldn't say I was scared"

The War Correspondence of Luther College's Student Soldiers

by Jon Richard Peterson

Into the quiet college town of Decorah, Iowa, came accounts of flushing out Japanese resistance in the South Pacific, liberating a concentration camp in Germany, holding the line in an Italian foxhole, and transporting troops during the Normandy invasion. Decorah was home to Luther College, a small Norwegian-Lutheran school of about 500 students at the start of World War II. By the 1943/44 school year, enrollment had plunged to half that. The war had pulled away all but 80 of Luther's male students. To boost the morale of the college's "student soldiers," history professor Chellis Evanson created a newsletter called *Scuttlebutt* for those transplanted from classroom to battlefield.

Evanson had had some experience with the military himself. He missed his own graduation ceremony from Luther College in 1918 because he had enlisted in the navy and was already aboard the USS *Pennsylvania*. Returning to Luther to teach history in 1919, he soon became head of the history department and, for a few years, dean of men. In 1928 he organized the college's news bureau and directed it for the next two decades as a sideline.

Former student Weston Noble described the history professor as "intelligent, brusque, yet compassionate." Always a navy man in his heart, when World War II began, Evanson knew that corresponding with soldiers was a way of helping with the war effort. He began writing letters to naval recruits. This evolved into *Scuttlebutt* and "gradually expanded until it was reaching everyone from Luther in the armed forces," writes Luther chronicler David T. Nelson. "It was a cheerful sheet with the typical Evanson touch, made possible by his singlehanded, devoted efforts." He updated war-

weary soldiers with news from the college and community. In turn, students wrote to Evanson reporting where they were and what they were doing (as the censors would allow). He then published this information in *Scuttlebutt*, encouraging his readers to watch for other Luther alumni stationed nearby.

Luther College's "student soldiers" sent Evanson honest and forthright accounts of the battles they fought, the countries they passed through, and the world changes they witnessed. Today these letters—a sampling of them follows—give voice again to young Iowa soldiers spread across the globe sixty years ago.

Perhaps I was a poor student of geography because I never knew that they had a real winter in Africa but I learned the hard way," Bud Eiden wrote Evanson from an air base in North Africa in November 1943. "I came over here without clothes for cold weather but now I'm spending my money for winter uniforms. . . . Lumber is more precious than gold over here. . . . I built myself a clothes locker out of ammunition boxes and it serves the purpose very well. . . . My engineer took a five-gallon oilcan and made us a stove for the tent. . . . We buy eggs from the Arabs for fifteen cents a piece and by carrying bread from the mess hall we usually manage to eat a couple of egg sandwiches before going to bed. It reminds me of our room up in Old Main [at Luther College] which was pretty much of a kitchen most of the time. . . . Most of the old pilots have finished up and have returned to the States so they made me a flight commander and on the next raid they have me scheduled to lead the Squadron. . . . I've seen a

lot of Europe from the air and I'll have a lot of interesting things to tell you when I get home. . . . I've come to the conclusion that this war isn't going to last an awfully lot longer. The news from the Russian front is very encouraging and I don't see how Germany will be able to stand up forever when the people can't even sleep at night. . . . I've seen the results of some of this bombing and I know what it is. I'm glad the bombs are dropping on Germany instead of on the United States."

Don Strom wrote Evanson in mid-March 1944. He was in a foxhole in Italy on the day after the bombing of Cassino had begun in earnest, and he painted a gritty, tense picture of the horrors of war. "I get used to the noise, but put that with the ground shaking and trembling and you really have something. I said I got used to the noise, that's about half true, you just don't get used to it I guess. . . . The one place the army has the navy beat and that's when I hear 'Whistling Joe' coming. I have many nice holes to jump into to be truthful I'm writing from one of those holes . . . it's the same one I sleep in. I have really cut quite a figure around here running and jumping in these holes. . . . The only thing wrong with my setup in the hole is that it won't stop raining. So far I've managed to stay afloat, but I sure give the rain a good cussing out. . . . It's been raining ever since I came to 'Sunny Italy' last Nov. and it looks like it's never going to stop. . . . I have had a few shells land around me, but no harm was done. In fact I got so brave once I had to look out just to see where they were busting, I got the look but another 'Whistling Joe' told me to get back where I belong. Couldn't say I was scared, I guess I just stopped living for a while. I kept thinking of room 88 in Larsen [on Luther campus] and how nice it would be to be back there."

Evanson again heard from Strom two months later. Allied planes had dropped more than 2,000 bombs over Cassino, and victory there had propelled the Allies north toward Rome. Strom's unit was left behind to secure the area. "The boys picked up and left us a while back. Pulled out of here on the 'Rome special' I guess. . . . For the past three months I've been laying around holes sweating things out in general. Mostly working at night, as the guys up in the mountaintops didn't like to see us boys work during the day. . . . Things have changed in this writing though, I can go out and walk around when the mood hits me and nothing to worry about. The truth of the matter is it's too quiet for any good use. Been so used to having things whistling me to sleep, that now, being so quiet I find it rather hard to get any sleep at all."

He continued: "I was moping around in the dark this certain night in the middle of no place trying to dig a foxhole. Digging a foxhole in the pitch dark is really

something. . . . Just the same I spend most of the night sweating it out, as there was so much noise you couldn't tell for sure when they threw them back so I just sit out there in the middle of the hole just watching what was taking place before my eyes and then trying to believe it. Never heard so much noise in one place for so long a time in my life. I certainly thought that would bring out Jerry's air force, if he has any left. I don't see much of anything, except our planes and it wouldn't do to shoot one of them down. . . . I don't know if you have ever shot at something you can't see, but you know it's there."

Operation Overlord, the D-Day invasion of France, set the tone for many of the letters written by Luther College servicemen stationed and fighting in France. Sailor R. G. Roalkvam, who wrote Evanson in late August 1944, looked back and considered himself lucky: "We had a part in the 'D' Day exercises; we took in the initial wave and then stayed a short distance off shore for 16 days. . . . There was plenty of stuff coming our way; but thank God! Neither men nor ship was ever scratched. . . . We have since then had a few days of rest and relaxation in England; but have been along the coast of France on various duties."

Writing from France in August, Norman Selness was impressed by the strong spirit there: "We've been here for some time taking part in the Brittany Campaign. France is a beautiful scenic country, with excellent roads, quite heavily wooded, rich agriculturally, and the larger towns have elaborate private and public buildings. . . . The French are much as I expected them to be, nationalistic and displaying much fervor and enthusiasm . . . and are happy to be liberated and show it. . . . I'm mighty anxious to get back—have a nice soft bed, American meals and enjoy the niceties of home life again. . . . It will be a task to reorganize Europe to normal socially; economically it is awfully disorganized but the French have the spirit and determination to again become a great France."

"Things are moving rather rapidly these days," F. W. Moen wrote in August. "First thing I know I was in combat and still am. . . . Whoever said 'war is hell' and 'war is a constant state of confusion' certainly said a mouthful. One day the monotony of it all practically drives a man crazy and the next day you don't know whether you will live or die. At any rate, I have received my wish and won't have to tell my kids I sat out the war in the Quartermaster back in the States. . . . I like France much better than I did England. The people are exceptionally hospitable—that no doubt is due in part

to the fact that they are over-joyed at being liberated from the yoke of the Germans. When we go thru a city, they line the streets, throwing flowers, food, wine, etc. England was O.K. but I detested its climate—France's is much similar to Iowa's at least in the summer time."

Weston "Butch" Noble described his own impressions: "Landed in France—using one of the famous beaches of 'D' Day. Saw evidence of heavy fighting all the way to our camp someplace in Normandy. I witnessed the ruins of Valognes and Monteburg. . . . I was surprised to see Normandy as backward as it is, the house and barn being together in many places, and the houses which were all of stone were hundreds of years old. . . . The attitude of the French is rather 'cool' to Americans. We tore everything to pieces for them, and the Germans weren't too rough on them, as they have good country in Normandy. . . . As I progressed toward Paris it seemed as if one was coming back into civilization. . . . On our trip to Belgium, we passed through one sector of France on a Sunday afternoon and the reception we got from the people was most gratifying as they threw everything from grapes, apples, turnips, carrots, cookies to flowers at us. . . . We went through one town quite late in Belgium, the people getting out of bed to stand in the doorway in their nightclothes to wave us through. Very encouraging to say the least. Yet I was quite surprised to see the pro-Nazi element as strong as it is in some places."

From the Pacific Theater, Chellis Evanson received accounts that were grim and haunting. In November, John P. Halvorson described a land battle in the South Pacific: "Rode around in a landing craft for about five hours before landing watching the Navy bombard the beach. . . . Knocking out everything on the beach except those [enemy] which were dug way down and there always seem to be some that are. . . . And imagination plays so many tricks on you and every little noise is [the enemy]. Didn't sleep much—just lay in my foxhole and dozed. . . . Don't believe I ever hated to see night come so much in my life. . . . I really understand what those pockets of resistance are now. . . . They hold up in a natural bowl which had caves galore and crevices, pinnacles, trees, and have a weapon, ammunition or grenades they are satisfied as long as they can get plenty of men before they get killed or commit suicide. . . . The news is good to hear now with the Philippine campaign going well, the Navy running the [enemy] home (those that were left), and the European campaign still moving if slowly."

Okinawa was the last major land battle of World

War II. Harris Kaasa was in the 7th Division, which experienced some of the most savage fighting on the island. They faced heavy artillery in early April and early May, when he wrote to Evanson. "They stuck me in the 7th Division, an outfit with a real history (there's that word again) that runs from Attu to Kwajalein to Leyte and finally this rock, which is a rugged go in any man's language. . . . They say this island used to be the [enemy's] artillery training ground, and brother I know what they mean. We have ducked a few short barrages, and it's the most hellish thing I've ever seen. I don't think I'll ever forget the devilish screech of those whistlers as they came over they nicked me very slightly once, but it was too negligible to even be classed as a scratch. Don't guess I ever shook so hard or prayed so fast in my life. . . . Incidentally, I'd like to say right now that the doggies up here are great fighting men—you can see heroism written in every movement. . . . The boys in these line rifle companies really go in there and dig—when they trade grenades with Tojo at 25 paces, things get rough. . . . And when the shells aren't falling the green valleys have a queer sort of beauty unlike anything I ever saw in the Western World. . . . Nevertheless, the place is American—anywhere you see American men and equipment and hear English spoken is American. . . . Once again here's my vote for Uncle Sammy's foot soldiers . . . and the gallant medics who are always on the job."

Nine days later, Kaasa wrote again. Fighting had temporarily flowed away from his division, and his mood had shifted. "It's quite a relief not to be jumping every few minutes. I was getting to the point where I would dive headfirst into a hole if a shell hit half a mile away. That sounds silly and looked silly as hell but brother, I take no chances because sometimes they give you no warning, zeroing in on the first round. . . . The insect situation in the Rhyukus is absolutely un-American. Mosquitoes, eyes glowing with an eerie, inhuman light poke their head into your tent and you dive for your rifle, thinking it is an infiltrating [Japanese]. The fleas, on the other hand, are so minute that you cannot detect them."

Back in Europe, Allied forces swept through Germany. In March 1945, Charles Hegtvedt described for Evanson what he saw: "We passed through many former German cities and towns. I say 'former' for these former cities and towns are now reduced to mere monstrous piles of rubble, ruin and trash; allied bombings over a period of many months, and recent shell and small arms fire has been most effective. . . . The non-fraternization policy is strictly enforced over here so we have no contact with German civilians other than in the

line of duty. . . . Due to the obvious shortage of manpower most of the field work is being done by women of all ages."

The final obstacle in the defeat of Nazi Germany was to cross the last natural boundary into greater Germany, the Rhine. Soldier Adolph Fossum described his crossing: "Our division made the Rhine crossing via glider and parachute and gave the Krauts a very sound beating, making up for some of the pushing around it got in the Bulge. Airborne operations remind you of the [Luther College] Norsemen after they get inspired by [Coach] 'Pip' Qualley and they really know how to fight. The best part is that after we have accomplished our mission we are usually relieved by the infantry and don't have to stay in the line too long although our casualties are quite heavy during our operations."

Writing in late June from Germany, Weston Noble tried to explain to Evanson his thoughts about what he saw in the Nordhausen Concentration Camp, which he had helped liberate. "Many women and children as well as men had met their death in this place. We made the citizens of the town take each body individually, carry it about 1.5 to 2 miles, and then bury it. When we could not stand it anymore, we made them continue on regardless. . . . We can readily see just what was going on here in Germany. The majority of the civilians deny any knowledge of such. . . . The Army of Occupation is not too good for the average GI. First of all the present younger generation of the German race is not at all high as far as morals are concerned because of Hitler's teachings, etc. The American soldiers with idle minds and nothing to do after hours are falling 'prey' to this, and that plus the excessive drinking is going to ruin many American soldiers."

Norman Selness's July letter revealed a young man attempting to analyze the momentous world-changing and life-changing events that he had witnessed. "From reports Central Berlin is horrible. Complete destruction," he wrote. "We hope some good developments will come of the Potsdam Conference. . . . American policy is too negative especially politically for Europe. Russia has taken the lead in matters and from evidence is very likeable and an amazing fact about Russia's foreign policies, but of course it is to win peoples and countries to her side. Our policy is too economic and military suppressive giving the people little to change their voices or attitudes except what they catch from contact with the American Soldier."

Selness concluded: "Germany youth is healthy and

handsome and even after their defeat Germany cannot be ignored as a force in Europe in future years. They take great pride in their work. . . . No doubt, since the time of German unification she has made vast strides in modern and industrial developments, national unity and some respects almost have to admire it. I have seen a few factories and they are almost models of cleanliness and efficiency. But it is along political and behavioral lines that Germans fall far behind the Western world. Her treatment and utter disregard for other nationalities is perhaps the most unjustifiable part of the whole system and all thought was held down here too. . . . Hitler got in on the hate of the people—it was much because of economic conditions and political eyewash and promises and Germany being so industrialized face conditions similar to the US in 1933. . . . Russians are breaking up the estates which should be a good step."

After the war, Chellis Evanson continued teaching until retirement in 1966, ending a 47-year career at Luther College. Stories still abound of his colorful and unorthodox teaching style, and, in the Luther College Archives, the letters still exist from the "student soldiers" who wrote to him during World War II. Wrestling with homesickness and culture shock, and pondering America's place in the world, they told him what war was like—frightening, dull, frustrating, and at all times educating, as they learned about life, the world, and themselves. ❖

Jon Richard Peterson is a graduate student in history at Ohio University. This article developed from a longer senior paper completed at Luther College in 2002, in which Peterson compared the soldiers' accounts of the war with contemporary accounts by the national media.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The quotations are from letters in the Chellis Evanson Papers in the Luther College Archives. For more on the history of Luther College, see David Theodore Nelson, *Luther College, 1861–1961* (Decorah: Luther College Press, 1961), and Leigh D. Jordahl and Harris E. Kaasa, *Stability and Change: Luther College in Its Second Century* (Decorah: Luther College Press, 1986).

The World War II Clippings Project: Saving the Past, One Story at a Time

IF YOU WANT TO WITNESS THE reach of World War II into everyday life in Iowa, pull out any microfilm roll of the World War II Clippings Project and begin winding. You'll soon be immersed in thousands of individual stories of Iowans fighting the war, on the home front and overseas.

A half-century after World War II, a small group of Iowans is rescuing thousands of Iowa stories—800,000, in fact—from enemy Time. Twice a week for the last nine years, a handful of members of the Iowa City Genealogical Society and other local volunteers have gathered to prepare fragile newspaper clippings for microfilming.

During World War II and the Korean War, the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City received a steady flow of newspaper articles referencing Iowa or Iowans, clipped from more than 90 Iowa papers by the Iowa Press Clippings Bureau. Sometimes as many as 10,000 arrived in a month, labeled with date and newspaper. The clippings filled more than 18 file cabinets. Over the years, the edges of the long clippings turned brittle, the newsprint yellowed, and the ink faded.

In 1995, Char Hixon and Joni Hindman, members of the Iowa City Genealogical Society, undertook a massive project to save these war-related stories with Iowa connections. Nancy Kraft, then a preservation librarian at the State Historical Society of Iowa, established proper procedures; now at the University of Iowa Libraries, Kraft continues to check in with the volunteers. But the clippings project is sustained by the dedication and

stamina of the volunteers, who have become something of a family. That's what comes of individuals working together for over 5,000 hours.

One by one, the fragile clippings are carefully unfolded, sorted by date, pasted on sheets of paper, quality checked, and then sent off for microfilming. Do the volunteers actually read each article as they trim and paste?

"At first we read a lot but when we got to the casualties, it got too sad," Hixon said.

The volunteers do skim the articles, to make sure each is in the proper category. Sometimes a volunteer reads aloud a clipping that is especially heroic or heart-wrenching, funny or astonishing.

The stories are endless. A Clear Lake soldier received General Dwight D. Eisenhower's blood in a transfusion in France. A private from Villisca was saved by a monkey in North Africa. In a Seattle shipyard, a Marshalltown woman discovered her long-lost sister working right next to her. Leo Hendrickson witnessed Nile Kinnick's plane crash. Nurse Gertrude Morrow, from Algona, died at Anzio.

One clipping reports that possibly the first African American in the war to be assigned to military intelligence, in North Africa, was Guy W. Smith of Des Moines. Another relates that Algona's John Slagle was headed back home on a ship with 500 Australian war brides. Eight-year-old Harold "Corkey" Wells of Maquoketa sent 650 of his comic books to his uncle in the navy. Another article asks whether Iowa will help resettle Europe's displaced



Doris Thompson was a nurse in the South Pacific during World War II. Now she volunteers on a project in Iowa City that is preserving thousands of news clippings about the war, and making them available to the public on microfilm. For each of 30 categories, the first step (above) is sorting by date.

persons. And this story seems right out of the movies: When he was sent overseas, John F. Hassebrock of Buffalo Center lost touch with his wife, a WAC corporal. On a convoy in France, he went into a farmhouse to spend the night and discovered his wife—at the exact hour of their wedding, and on their first anniversary.

The volunteers regale each other with their own World War II stories as they sort and paste. Larry McConahay used his portion of rationed sugar as a bargaining tool with his brother. Char Hixon scouted the Iowa skies for enemy planes. Mary Robertson nearly lost her job as a telephone operator for sounding the local fire alarms at the war's end. Doris Thompson battled heat and disease as a nurse in the South Pacific.

Because each category is ordered chronologically, every time the volunteers begin a new category, they are viewing the war all over again, from start to finish, but from a different perspective. There are 30 categories in all. Seven are already microfilmed. Hindman and Hixon are indexing the POWs microfilm (nearly 11,000 clippings and 16,000 index entries). They hope to eventually index Marriages and Women's Military Activities, but that's probably all. They acknowledge that the entire collection of 800,000 clippings is just too enormous. The sorting, pasting, and microfilming, now in its ninth year, will probably take ten more years to complete.

The volunteers agree they have learned a lot about the war and war-time news coverage, which sometimes lagged far behind the actual events. "I think newspapers do bring out the human elements, how the people endured," McConahay commented.

Thompson agrees. "Everyone ought to know what went on then."

—Ginalie Swaim and
Karen Heinselman, intern

At this time, microfilm of the following categories of the World War II Clippings Project is available for use at the State Historical Library in Iowa City (402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, IA 52240, 319-335-3916).

Casualties
Women's Military Activities
Prisoners of War
Business & Labor
Public Health
Education & Training
Farming, Food Production, & Rationing
Life & Activities (1942-1943) will be available soon.

We welcome your financial donations towards microfilming. Thank you!

Have You Used Our Military Records?

Family historians and other researchers will want to check out these military records in the State Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa (600 E. Locust, Des Moines, 50319, phone 515-284-7416):

- **World War II Bonus Case Files:** Applications submitted by World War II veterans or next of kin for a military service bonus from the State of Iowa. Files include limited information on the soldier's military service and the amount of the bonus paid and to whom, and sometimes supporting documentation. More than 300,000 Iowans received a World War II bonus from the state.
- **World War II Casualty Files:** Photos and compiled service records of men and women who enlisted from Iowa and died during the war.
- **Armed Forces Grave Registration Records:** Information on veterans of the U.S. military buried in Iowa. May include genealogical information (such as date and place of birth; names of parents, spouse, and other immediate family members) and data pertaining to military service and place of burial. The earliest graves registered are those of Revolutionary War veterans buried in Iowa. To date the series contains more than 270,000 grave registrations.

—Sharon Avery, archivist

Help Us Preserve World War II History

The story of Iowa and World War II has many facets, and we need your help in preserving and documenting all aspects. The State Historical Society of Iowa is seeking three-dimensional objects, written narratives, journals, correspondence, photographs, and other documents related to the war. We are particularly interested in material related to social and political aspects of the war, such as:

- Non-military objects, documents, and photos that show how people carried out their daily lives in the midst of war.
- Items made or modified to make Iowans' lives easier during the war.
- Iowa-made products or services that contributed to the war effort.
- Material descriptive of women's entry into and experiences in the wartime workforce.
- Papers of Iowans in political office during the war and that reflect public debate and opinions about the war.
- Papers of individuals involved in pro-peace or relief efforts and that describe the work.
- Papers of individuals involved on the home front and that describe those activities in detail.
- Well-documented photos with accompanying manuscript or personal commentary.
- GI helmet, Browning automatic rifle, M1 carbine, and Thompson submachine gun.

Please note: We do NOT need ration books or tokens; uniforms; enlistment papers or other certificates; individual portraits or group unit photos, unless there is an accompanying manuscript collection; photos of soldiers in training camps and European landscapes.

Before bringing in a donation, please consult with our staff:

Photographs and documents: Becki Plunkett in Des Moines (515-281-8976) or Kevin Knoot in Iowa City (319-335-3916).

Artifacts: Jack Lukfin or Bill Johnson (515-281-8295; 515-281-5627)

—Thank you for helping us preserve Iowa history for you and your descendants.

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One in a Million

TWO JAZZ TUNES performed by legend Louis Armstrong and his band at central Iowa's Val-Air Ballroom on August 1, 1943, were pressed on this vinyl record by a forgotten local musician. This scratchy-sounding slice of Americana, now part of the museum collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa, preserves a moment in the career of one of America's foremost musical geniuses—and a moment in Iowa during World War II.

By 1943, this big-band musician, showman, and singer had already influenced an entire generation of jazz musicians and had blown his famous trumpet for appreciative audiences in countless clubs and ballrooms across America and Europe. Armstrong's contributions to American music almost defy exaggeration. His mid-1920s recordings represent "one of a handful of unsurpassed artistic achievements of the 20th century," according to film documentarian Ken Burns. Here is how Armstrong biographer James Collier explained the impact of his 1920s records: "In an instant, everybody knew that this was how the music was to be played. Nothing had to be explained, nobody had to be told. Armstrong's way was the way. From that point on, the main line of jazz development was directly through Armstrong." He melded popular songs, blues, and ragtime, intersected improvisation and composition, and pioneered the swing jazz form both instrumentally and vocally. In 1943 he was only a few years away from assembling his All-Star Band, which would create a sensation in postwar Europe.

The unknown individual who made this 78-rpm record must have hauled a bulky, suitcase-sized recording device up close to the Val-Air stage and probably had Armstrong's permission. "Satchmo" was known for his generosity, caring little about copyright. The two songs on this record are "Baby, Don't You Cry," and "BT Mama." The first was recorded in 1944 for the Armed Forces to boost troop morale. It also appears in the movie *Pillow to Post* (1945). Neither song is considered an Armstrong standard.

Iowans at the Val-Air that August night paid 89 cents plus tax to hear Armstrong (about \$10 today). The ballroom was a summer venue only; half the dance floor was really, as advertised, beneath the stars. Thus the name: "Val" for Valley Junction (now the town of West



Des Moines) and "Air" for open air. Tom Archer opened the ballroom in 1939. He owned several in neighboring states and is credited as the first to bring big bands from New York to the Midwest. In 1942, Glenn Miller had attracted 4,200 to the Val-Air. Rebuilt after a 1961 fire, the Val Air is still a popular ballroom.

Getting one's mind off the war would have been hard for readers of the *Des Moines Register* that Sunday in August 1943, even if they glimpsed this enticing ad in the classifieds. As the front page reported, the Allies were bombing German targets day and night, including a German war plant in occupied Norway. In Hamburg, incendiary bombs had killed 10,000 and turned thousands more into refugees. In Washington, the Office of Price Administration detailed changes in rationing and price controls, daily concerns to most Iowans. Another news story related how a wonder drug used on an injured soldier had proved more effective in fighting infection than standard sulfa drugs. The new drug was penicillin.

—by Jack Lufkin, museum curator

SHSI (DES MOINES): DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



Home on leave in June 1944, a soldier passes time with his girlfriend in Washington, Iowa. This special issue of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* looks at World War II and the remarkable experiences of Iowans who lived through it.

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