

They Also Serve

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Sometimes it is more difficult to be left behind or in the wing looking on and seeing the action from a safe place.

So it seemed to me as a woman in uniform, volunteering to do my best in World War II. I lacked confidence that I could put my thoughts and experiences into words that others might be interested in. The grammar, spelling and sentence structure were, as I remembered, difficult days of English class. Then I read a statement that jumped out at me and gave me confidence to try again. Here it is:

"The whole point of writing is to impart information. It is only necessary to have clarity in the written word."

With that as my guide, I am trying again, just writing short articles of what I experienced then and now.

It seems my life had been filled with an abundance of experiences, like meeting the notorious gangster of the 1930s, John Dillinger, but ah, that's another of my half-finished yellowed notes.

Apparently, many years ago I had a desire to write. Not a fancy novel, just my impressions of happenings around me. I would jot down ideas and comments, set them aside, too young and busy to spend much time on projects in which I had no training. Some were torn up and destroyed as they were a personal-type diary of frustrations of life when I was young.

Recently, while sorting through things, I came across an old paper of an unfinished article I had attempted to write when World War II ended.

The war was over and, with Christmas coming on, our camp was not needed anymore. I remained to help it close. It held so many memories as I served my



country there in those dark days and shared this special place with my fellow soldiers.

So, I guess when my orders called for me to help close this once-teeming camp with its haunting memories, I felt the need to try to say what I felt. This is one article I didn't destroy and felt the need to finish what I wrote over 50 years ago.

Our camp mission was communication and training the men who would soon be called to a war zone. I was a truck driver and took on any mission necessary. Driving troops to the rifle range was one of my favorite runs as they let me fire the carbine and, most frightfully of all, the Thompson submachine gun.

Our camp was smaller in area and in number of GIs to train. As a result, we became close-knit; so when I saw the train and its cars sitting on a siding, I knew my buddies would be leaving shortly.

I can vividly see and hear the army band as they played the moving, patriotic "Duty," followed by soldiers in full combat dress, field pack and rifles as they marched to the troop train waiting nearby.

As the soldiers loaded onto the train, not knowing where they were being sent into combat, it was duty and country uppermost in everyone's mind. Were they going to Germany, Italy or maybe even Africa? I'm sure each wondered if and when they would ever return.

There always were tears, a helpless feeling and an empty hurt in the pit of my stomach as the soldiers boarded the train; then it pulled out of camp to an unknown destination. Waves of good-bye were extended by those of us left behind to carry on.

The band disbanded to prepare for the next troop train. Again, we knew not where they would be sent, as all was top secret! I always wondered, sadly, if they would be lucky to live through it all and come back home again.

A war was on and we all were needed in some capacity. It was once said, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

Eventually, the war on all fronts was won, and life could try to resume to normal, if possible.





While I served in this one camp, I also helped it close after our victory.

I have since returned there and relived precious memories. I knew in my heart that I did my job, however small, and helped in our victory, of which I enjoy today.

Here then is what I said in 1946:

Another ghost town is making its tragic appearance. You can feel the empty, lonely atmosphere even though this town is not deserted as yet. There is life and an abundance of activity, but under it all is the knowledge that shortly these humble homes of thousands will be deserted.

The library is closing its doors. Precious volumes are being crated, destination unknown.

Over there, surrounded by soft green grass, is the hospital. Patients have been evacuated elsewhere for care and treatment.

At the crossroads, accessible to all, stands the chapel with its symbol of peace, hope and faith. Here, men and women of all races, creeds and denominations have come to offer a prayer or seek solace. Now, too, it is closing its doors.

Trucks rumble along asphalt roads, loaded to capacity with large crates of various sizes.

I know, as I was one of those drivers.

Now, GIs walk with a quickened step, stopping only long enough for a “Hiya, Weedy” (my nickname then). “What’s new?”

The people are happy now because they are leaving this city behind. Christmas is coming, and they are returning to the city and home of their dreams, dreams they had for three, four or five long years.

Going home. Going home after all these years of separation. Home, where there are white starched curtains in the windows, the inescapable laughter of children at play, a baby crying to be held, jangling of the milkman’s bottles at 4:00 a.m., a cheery “good morning” from the best little woman in the world, home to a job, a place in life’s scheme. A dream come true. It was a long time coming, but now it is close to reality.

Soon the flag of our own valiant colors will be lowered, not in defeat but because victory is ours!

Soon the tumbleweeds will roll across the roads and into fences and against empty buildings. Grass will dry up and dust swirl among the vacant, vast acreages of this dying city.

There is history behind these locked gates, some tragic or humorous, others gallant and magnificent. This history is locked in the hearts of the men and women who came here, departed or lived here for a time against their own desires or will, but now it is becoming a place of memory.

This was your town and mine. It was only one of the necessary army camps now closing its gates after victory in World War II. Its gallant sons and daughters are leaving and returning to their homes and cities of their dreams.

My thoughts this December 1997 are to finish this time in my life and close the chapter on the unfinished, tattered, yellowed scrap of paper written so long ago. Unfortunately, so many we waved good-bye to at the troop train will never have this time of love and happiness at Christmas. We forget and take our freedom for granted.

Much can be said of our country and its decline, but I, for one, know there is still a love of our country and for those who gave their all so we can have another Christmas, another year.