





# All Ages Have Memories

*No matter what age you were, nor where you were during the war,  
lasting impressions were etched.*

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# Second Chances

By Betty Mulcahy #76334

*Heat radiating from the deck of the ship is so intense, I feel it through the soles of my sneakers. I follow closely behind my brother as we climb this vessel resting at an awkward angle in the sand. Only two years earlier it had been a warship engaged in World War II combat.*



But it is now 1948, and I am four years old. I am ignorant of the ravages of war. I pay no attention to other hulks strewn nearby or to the remains of great ships projecting from the waters offshore. I concentrate solely on exploring this wreck, ignoring even my father who stands on the hot sand and stares into the distance, lost in thoughts that I cannot conceive.

Except for our family, this beach near Normandy, France, is deserted.

Only years later would I learn the role that Omaha Beach played in World War II. But only after he died would I yearn for the opportunity to engage my father in discussion of his war experiences and explore his emotions of those events.

How fortunate I am that before he died my father wrote his memoirs. Perhaps my negligence toward his past was rooted in the knowledge that I could thumb through this brief history anytime I chose.

The time I chose, however, came after his death when I could no longer probe for further details. And the memoirs merely hinted of his role in intelligence in London where he was stationed with the Air Force during the late years of World War II.

How I would love to ask him to describe the fear he must have felt when “bombs dropped near my hotel, including a few incendiaries that landed in

the lobby.”

My father had flown in the Air Force, recalled to active duty for the war, leaving behind a wife and two children.

Not understanding the implications of war, I paid little attention to his reminiscing that day on Omaha Beach. The beach, with all its broken warships, was nothing more than a playground to me.

Only years later would I wish I'd had the maturity to stand beside my father, forget the heat of this day and visualize history in the making.

Sometimes we get a second chance; sometimes we don't.

Omaha Beach, Betty and her brother, Bill Helfert on Normandy April 1949

# Wartime Christmas Images

By Jerry Land #87746

*I remember one particular wartime Christmas. The year was 1944 and the world was deep in World War II. As a young boy I was aware of the events taking place in the South Pacific, Europe and elsewhere.*

The sawmill across the street from our place was surrounded with barbed wire, and guard towers had been erected in strategic locations to prevent sabotage of a vital war product, lumber.

B-25 bombers from the air force base in Spokane, Washington, made practice low level bombing runs up the Palouse River Valley that ran just south of town.

When school let out in the afternoon, all the kids would pass by the local telephone office, where the operator was using the old-style switchboard with hundreds of plug-in wires for all the local party lines.

The latest news bulletins would be posted on the window, including the casualty list. On a separate list, all the local servicemen and servicewomen's names were shown, the branch of service they were in and where they were stationed. It seemed like everybody I knew had a relative in the service.

My uncle was in the South Pacific.

This particular Christmas is memorable because of the emotional events that took place on the night before. It had snowed heavily all day.

The snow was wet and the flakes came down slow and fluffy. The trees looked like the Christmas scenes from Currier and Ives.

The Christmas lights in the store windows and the residences hid the hardness of a company town and gave off a feeling of warmth and hospitality.

There was to be a Christmas dance and party at the community center. The center served as a basketball court, meeting place and the downstairs offices for the town council and mayor.

In those times, the whole family went to the dance—the children, grandparents and anyone else who wasn't working the night shift at the mill.

When my father, mother, grandparents and I arrived at the dance, I immediately headed for the balcony that surrounded the combination dance floor and basketball court. That's where all the kids were, and that's where the action was, as far as I was concerned.

When I did look down, I saw the men mostly gathered around a makeshift bar at one end of the room, smoking and drinking, and women and small children seated on the other side of the court, gossiping among themselves. The youngsters ran wild and noisily in the balcony.

Some couples were dancing to the music of a three-piece band on a small stage set up under the scoreboard.

Late in the evening, the band leader asked the hall to be quiet while he made an announcement. Standing next to him was a sailor in uniform. The band leader introduced this young man as a former choirboy from the local Methodist church. He had just arrived back home on leave after spending three years in the South Pacific.

The image of this young man has never left me. He looked like he had grown since his uniform had been issued. His arms were too long for his sleeves and his pants looked like he was getting ready to wade across a creek.

He did have several rows of ribbons on his chest and three red chevrons on his sleeve. He had the type of haircut called a "white wall," which I, too, became familiar with years later in the Marine Corps.

The band leader announced that the sailor was going to sing a Christmas song for us. As he began to sing, gradually the men quieted down, the glasses stopped clinking and the chatter from the women and kids ceased.

I must point out that a large percentage of homes in this community had a little flag hanging in the window with one or more stars on it signifying that at least one member of that family was in the service somewhere overseas.

In the winter of 1944, there was a battle going on in Belgium called the Battle of the Bulge. The Germans had launched a tremendous counter offensive, and thousands of our troops were surrounded and cut off from supplies and reinforcements.

The war in the Pacific was progressing from island to island at a terrible cost of human lives.

The sailor on the stage was singing, "I'll be home for Christmas," a capella.

I don't remember if his voice was good or bad; it didn't matter at the time and it doesn't matter now. Everyone, and I mean everyone, was transfixed by the young sailor singing, what to many people in the room, was a prayer for a loved one. To some it was a prayer that would never come true.

I doubt that there was a dry eye in the house when the sailor finished. At first,

all were silent as he stepped off the stage and walked across the dance floor. Someone in back of the room began clapping, and then the place erupted into a spontaneous ovation with applause and cries for more.

He actually left the auditorium with people slapping him on the back, women giving him hugs and grateful cheers from the crowd gathered at the door. I never saw him again.

As the years have gone by, I realize more and more how that performance symbolized the struggle that was taking place across the world at war.

How utterly helpless the people at home felt and how desperately each wanted their loved ones to come home for Christmas.

# The Girl Scout Messenger

By Joanne Hetherington Sterrett #27321

*I was 10 when WWII began, so I saw a lot of war movies, bought a lot of war stamps, and helped my mother in our victory garden.*

**B**ut nothing felt as important as the time when I, as well as other members of my Girl Scout troop, became an official “messenger,” with an arm band to show my title.

Because my hometown, Miami, Oklahoma, was on Highway 66, it was feared that invaders could come up 66. So, town leaders prepared!

We had a night of blackout. Various points were planned for leaders to assemble, and messengers were needed to take vital news.

Thus I, on my bicycle, went from point to point, taking messages such as “BLACK OUT! PUT DIAPERS ON ALL LIGHTNING BUGS!”

Miami’s small airport became a training school for British aviators, and the town adopted those men from so far away. Several of them came often to our home for Sunday dinner. I learned to waltz from one of them, and a big thrill for me was when one took me to a movie when I was only 11. And he paid the adult rate (25 cents!) for my ticket!

# From a Different Perspective

By Marian Polack #31029

*When war was declared on September 3, 1939, I was a child of seven and living in a London suburb. The British Government decided to get all the children out of London because of the expected bombing.*

**E**vacuation Day finally arrived. My sister, Jan, and I were put on a big red double-decker bus, with a label pinned to our coat with name and identity number and a pillowcase full of clothes.

Parents had no idea where their children would end up. Jan and I were picked out by Mr. and Mrs. Small, who lived in Six Bells, Abertillery, in Wales. Mr. Small worked in the local coal mine, and they had two children, three and four years old. A wonderful, loving family who took such good care of us.

In 1988 I managed to track down Mary, who was three years old when we moved in, and who had had to give up her bed (she still remembers that!).

After about one year, my young sister got terribly homesick, so it was thought best to bring us back home to London, and, in any case, bombing had been very light up to that point.

As soon as the war was declared, each family was issued an air raid shelter. Ours was an Anderson shelter eight feet by six feet.

Father dug a huge ditch at the bottom of the garden and then installed the heavy aluminium shelter, then covered it with earth to be totally camouflaged from above. He put a double mattress on the floor, and a bunk bed each side





for the two girls.

People who couldn't dig down the necessary six feet because of the water table were issued Morrison shelters—large iron tables that sat inside the home. My mother dreaded that thought: if the house fell on top, you would have to wait to be rescued, or be buried alive!

At first we would go to sleep in our beds until the siren went off, then Mother would wake us and walk us down in our sleep to the shelter.

Once bombing was almost nightly, we went straight to the shelter at bedtime. I remember it being very damp and spiders falling on my face!

Bombs would fall all around us. My best friend, Margaret, who was 10 years old and lived next door, was killed along with her mother.

One game that children would play during the bombing was to be able to boast about who had the biggest pile of shrapnel.

A piece of a shot-down German plane that landed in your garden was shown off with pride to other kids.

I remember we had no windows throughout the war—just a heavy material to keep out the rain and let in light. Ceilings came down with each blast, so we spent the war without any.

As the Germans only bombed us at night, we were able to go to school and our father to work. He was an iron worker and put iron plates over the hulls of ships that had been torpedoed.

I cannot imagine seeing my children go off in a bus at that age, having no idea where they were going or whom they would live with. Our mother must have suffered terribly. We have since learned that many evacuees were abused (Ben Wicks, *No Time To Wave Good-bye*).

My father was an air-raid warden. After the sirens went off at night, his job would be to walk up and down the street looking for the slightest ray of light coming from anyone's window.

Everything had to be totally blacked out—no street lights. Those of us who

had no shelter would go to a public shelter or sleep in the London Underground stations. The Battle of Britain in London was terrifying—fires were all around us.

I recall a wonderful camaraderie among the people.

Army convoys, both British and American, would drive down our road, and we cheered them as they passed the house, waving our Union Jacks.

Toward the end of the war, a German prisoner-of-war camp was set up across the street in a field. Mother told us that they were not bad people—that they were husbands, brothers, sons, the same as our men and didn't really want to kill us.

Children would poke cigarettes or candies through the chain-link fence and anything that we could scrounge, as we were heavily rationed.

Then came the V-1, known as the Doodle Bug—the pilotless plane carrying a bomb. We could hear the low-pitch hum long before it came toward us. Suddenly the noise stopped—the engine had cut out and it glided to the ground and exploded. Apparently the RAF let very few get through from France into England.

Then the Germans invented the V-2 rocket—no sirens for these—they were just shot from the French coast straight to London, day or night, with no warning.

The BBC was our lifeline. We got the news, our comedies, plays and the voice of our beloved prime minister, Winston Churchill, who instilled such a spirit in us all. We just knew we were going to get through it.

Recently I went to the war rooms in London where Churchill ran the war operation. I was given the usual tape recorder and earphones to explain the exhibits. As I turned mine on, I heard the sound of the siren! All these years later, my stomach churned and I threw off the earphones!

It was hard to believe when V-E Day came, as we celebrated in the streets, that we would never hear that sound again.

But there were some positive aspects for me. We had to grow our own vegetables in the garden, breed our own chickens and rabbits—all organic—walked everywhere as petrol was impossible to buy and heavily rationed. We had very little sugar for candy, two ounces a week per person. We were allowed one egg a week each, 1/4 pint of milk a day, four ounces of meat each week per person, so we saved that up and bought a one-pound roast of beef for Sunday dinner. With Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes and a fresh vegetable from the garden, it was the highlight of the week for us. But all that exercise and healthy food has served us well, and I now reap the benefit with good health.

When I first located my evacuee family, I was living in the Cayman Islands. On a visit to England, I drove to the village of Six Bells, located the Small

family and two years later I sent them airline tickets and gave them a two-week holiday in Cayman to say thanks and to let them know how much I appreciated their parents' love and caring in those wartime days. They still live to this day in that little coal-mining village in Wales.

# Every Little Bit Helps

By L. Ruth Scott #24364

*During most of World War II, I was a high school student in a small town and a farmer's daughter. Radios, newspapers, magazines and movie houses promoted all the things the citizenship should be doing for the war effort: join a military service, grow a victory garden, buy US savings bonds, volunteer at the USO, write to the servicemen and women.*

From that list my only option was to write to those in service. So, that became my gift to the war effort. Letters and V-mails were sent to nearly everyone I knew, and any letter I received was answered. What an education was gained keeping track of all those faraway places that those letters came from—many places I had never heard of before.

During my senior year in school, a recruiter from the U.S. government visited the school and asked girls to sign up to work for the government to “replace a serviceman working in an office, so he could carry a gun.”

I ended up working for the Pacific Overseas Air Transport Service Command in Oakland, California, and living at the YWCA on Lake Merritt. The war ended while I was there, and soon the phone calls started coming into the “Y” for me.

As those men who served the armed forces in the Pacific area started returning home through the port of San Francisco, they were anxious to see someone they knew.

Some had not been stateside for four years. Living in the “Y” made it easy to find other girls to come with my friends and their buddies for a day of sight-seeing or an evening of bowling, paddling on the lake, talking in the YWCA lounge or attending a movie.

We visited Berkeley campus, Golden Gate Park, rode the cable cars in San Francisco, went to the beach and were at times invited to attend a party given at a rented facility. These parties were put together by a group who had served together, maybe aboard a ship or at a station on one of the Pacific Islands, celebrating their homecoming.

As soon as released at their point of entry to the United States, these men headed east, usually on a train, to their families. Some have never crossed my

path again, and some from the old neighborhood I see often. Some are no longer with us. Recently, while cleaning out the attic after my mother's death, I shed a few tears as I found some of those old letters.

# Magnetic Memories

By Chuck Mulcahy #76334

*My father was a welder during World War II, building ships for the Navy. Because he was more valuable to the war effort in that capacity, he was not allowed to enlist.*

**B**ut my cousin, Jimmy (JJ), was a navigator on a bomber. Whenever an airplane flew over our house, my grandmother would say, “There goes JJ!”

I was about four years old then, and I didn’t know JJ very well at that time. My attention was focused more on the magnet I liked playing with.

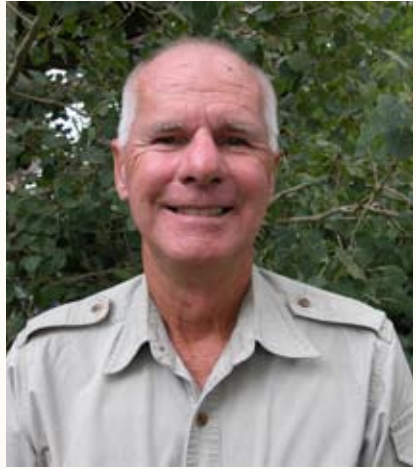
Because steel was being used for the war effort making tanks and weapons, a lot of pins my grandmother and aunts had for their sewing were made of brass rather than steel.

When I put my magnet in a whole dish of pins, I could find the few that were steel, and I used those to play with my magnet.

One of the phrases I remember most distinctly at that time was, “Before the war!” Before the war you could get all the butter you needed; before the war you could use as much gas as you wanted.

During the war, everything was rationed. Even after the war, there were still shortages.

Frequently in my neighborhood, people would burn their trash in the street or in front of their house, creating a large bonfire. That’s when a lot of the kids would scream, “There goes Hitler’s house!”



# Life In France For a Seven-Year-Old

By Monique Pope

*I remember being scared when the bombs came, and I remember going to the shelter. But the main thing I remember was hunger, and not being able to eat well. That was the worst thing. Always being hungry.*

**B**orn in 1932 in Paris, I was seven years old when WWII started. During the exodus from Paris, we left too. My family had a house in the country near Fontainebleau and we went there. But, a bomb fell on our house in the country when we were in Paris for the weekend.

We didn't know the country house had been bombed. When we returned, it was not too bad but my room and another room had been hit by the bomb. The Germans occupied the house for the rest of the War, so we went back to our apartment in Paris and stayed there for the rest of the War.

The south of France was not occupied, but Paris was. So my parents sent me to my grandmother who was living in Provence. I left in a cattle train run by the Red Cross. They put a big sign around my neck with my name on it, and off I went. By then, I was eight or nine years old. It was a horrible and frightening experience, being in that cattle train. There were other youngsters, and they were just as scared as I was.

But I got sick in the south of France because I didn't eat too much. Most of the food had been sold on the black market by the enemy to make money. There I was at my grandmother's in the fruit garden of Europe. So, I ate a lot of fruit and it just killed me because my body became full of sores. It was horrible.

My mother came for me. But in the winter of 1941, I became extremely ill for about three months with a high fever. They found out that my lungs were infected, so I had to go away for a year to a children's sanitarium by the border way up in the mountains. I was there because I had tuberculosis from malnutrition. But, there wasn't any food there either. We ate mostly beets.

Then I spent a few months on a farm with two nuns so they could feed me. It was like a nursing home. I was fed well, and when I was better I returned to

Paris. Oh, but was I skinny; only about 40 pounds.

I remember there was always a siren, and we had to go in a shelter once or twice every night. And then I remember my mother would get up around 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning to go to market and wait in line for food. Then, an enemy truck would come and they'd pick up all the food.

Even if we had the money, we couldn't buy food. But many times, my father got food on the black market, and we would land in the hospital to have our stomach pumped because there was something bad in the food. One day, he bought 50 pounds of noodles, and we had noodles every single meal. At the end, the noodles had so many bugs, you couldn't separate the bugs from the noodles. We ate it all—bugs with the noodles.

Then after that, I became ill again from not having any food. So my father rented a house outside of Paris, and we went there. My father was an eye doctor. That's why he could afford to send me away on trips. If I hadn't gone away, I would have died. I was lucky we had the money to do it.

Then D-Day happened, and there was fighting everywhere so we had to walk back to Paris. We didn't want to stay near Normandy. It was too scary. We walked and we slept on the side of the road. One truck passed us full of people. My mother's brother was on the truck! He saw us and he waved. It was so weird. He had been fighting in Dunkirk with the French Army at the beginning.

I think it took a couple of weeks to get to Paris walking from one town to another. We never knew who would be occupying the next town. We kept walking, getting bombed. But we made it to Paris.

Everybody was happy when the Americans took over but I was still too young to go in the street and have fun. I wasn't allowed out because it continued to be dangerous. Slowly, life returned to normal, but I know what it is to be hungry. Everyday of my young life I was hungry. That's not good as a child. People should not make war! The wrong people suffer for it. It changed my life completely. To this day I don't leave any food on my plate, and I don't throw anything away either.

