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**Memories of World War II on the
Homefront**



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Summary

Firsthand memories of World War II on the homefront are now rapidly fading. The paper began with individual memories, which were then expanded with details from the literature and internet. Common memories included air raid drills and air wardens in response to the initial fear that the Japanese would attempt to invade the mainland. There were memories of rationing, particularly of food and gasoline, and of recycling. World War II was the heyday of repair and recycling, since automobiles and many appliances were no longer being manufactured, due to the conversion of the manufacturing plants to the production of war materials. Other common memories were of war bonds, victory gardens, and of real-time news on the radio. Above all was a feeling of a united nation, with nearly all citizens, whether in the military or at home, doing their part to win the war.

Background of the Author

Boyd A. Nies was born and raised in Orange, California. He graduated from Stanford University in 1956 and from the Stanford University School of Medicine in 1959. An internship and residency in Internal Medicine at the UCLA Medical Center and the Wadsworth Veterans Administration Hospital was followed by sub-specialty training in Hematology and Medical Oncology at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland and the Stanford University Medical Center. From 1965 to 1995, he practiced Hematology and Medical Oncology in Redlands and San Bernardino. During periods of that time, he was Chief of the Medical Staff of St. Bernardine Hospital and was also on the Clinical Faculty of the UCLA Medical Center. After retirement from full-time practice, he was the Medical Director of the St. Bernardine Hospice for 2 years and later served as a Medical Oncology consultant for a technology company. During retirement he has been a Board Member, and has also served as President, of the Watchorn Lincoln Memorial Association, the Friends of A. K. Smiley Public Library, and Lifestream (formerly the Blood Bank of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties). Boyd has also served as Secretary, Vice President, and President of the Fortnightly Club. He and his wife, the former Helen Salter, moved to Plymouth Village in 2017. They had been married for over 63 year prior to her passing in November 2020. They have 3 children and 6 grandchildren. This is Boyd's eighth Fortnightly paper.

Memories of World War II on the Homefront

December 7, 2024 marked the 83rd anniversary of Pearl Harbor. 83 years is a long time; looking back 83 years from 1941, the Civil War not yet started. That year, 1858, was the year of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Just as firsthand memory of the Civil War faded rapidly after 1941, individual memories of World War II will also soon be gone. In this paper, I will relate some of the stories of that time, told to me by others as well as a few of my own. Some of you have your own stories, which hopefully we can hear if there is time.

At the outbreak of the War, I lived in Orange, California and was in the second grade. Several of us at Plymouth Village remember our parents telling us about the attack. We, our parents, and many of their friends were fearful that the Japanese would soon be attacking the mainland. Some remembered worrying that planes seen in the sky might be Japanese. Schools had air raid drills. Dick Jones recalled, at his elementary school, students were instructed to go to surrounding orange trees (3 to a tree) to provide cover so that Japanese pilots would be unable to see them. In order to enhance the defense against potential air attacks, an extensive civilian volunteer aircraft spotter system was established in coastal areas.

There actually were several incidents involving Japanese submarines off the California coast in December 1941 and early 1942. On December 18, off the Mendocino coast, the Japanese submarine *I-17* opened fire with a 5.5 inch deck gun on the *Samoa*, carrying lumber to San Diego. Only 5 shots were fired, doing no significant damage. A torpedo was then launched from only 70 yards away, but miraculously went underneath the ship before exploding on the other side, again without inflicting damage. Two days later, the skipper of the American tanker, *Agwiworld*, began zigzagging his ship in Monterey Bay after an explosion barely missed the stern of the ship. That Japanese submarine, the *I-23*, also fired 8 shots, 4 of which were close enough to splash water on the ship's deck. Fortunately, there were heavy swells that day, preventing the submarine from again getting close to the ship. Golfers playing at the Cypress Point Golf Club, being unable to see the submarine, wondered why the large tanker was taking such an unusual

course. They did not find out that the ship was under attack until the next day. On February 23, 1942, another Japanese submarine surfaced onshore 12 miles north of Santa Barbara and fired 16 shells at the Ellwood Oil Field. Again, only minor damage was done. George Skelton, columnist for the Los Angeles Times, has written that his father was working at the oil field on the day of the attack. He relates that men working there were given pitchforks and told to guard the beach, as if this would be a significant deterrent to armed invading Japanese. They stayed there all night, but there were no further attacks. The "Great Los Angeles Air Raid" occurred the following day. Japanese planes were reported over the City and hundreds of anti-aircraft shells were shot into the sky. Twenty Japanese Americans were arrested for supposedly shooting up flares to signal the enemy. It turned out that there were no planes or flares, only rumors. Shell fragments did, however, damage several buildings and vehicles.

There was great fear that Japanese-Americans on the West Coast might be disloyal and commit espionage or sabotage. There was a rumor that the Japanese spies were communicating with the Japanese submarines off the coast to assist their attack on ships. (In reality, there was never any concrete evidence to support those claims.) Of the 120,000 Japanese Americans on the West Coast, 2/3 were born in the United States, grew up as Americans and were United States citizens. Despite no evidence of disloyalty of the Japanese Americans, President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942 signed executive order 9066 beginning the process of interning the Japanese Americans on the West Coast. Initially, the Japanese Americans were herded into assembly points, such as racetracks, fairgrounds, and parking lots. George Takei, author of the book "My Last Freedom" and a recent guest on the CSPAN Q and A program, describes how his family was forced to sleep in a horse stall at Santa Anita. Later the Japanese Americans were transferred to one of the internment camps, of which there were a total of 10 in the United States. These camps were usually situated in remote areas. They were surrounded by barbed wire, and each had watchtowers. In California, these were the Manzanar camp located south of Bishop east of Highway 395 and the Tule Lake camp. The Tule Lake camp later became a center for the special imprisonment of Japanese Americans who were thought to be "disloyal" to the U.S. George's family was sent there because his parents answered a confusing question on the loyalty questionnaire form which was thought to indicate possible disloyalty. He describes three barbed wire fences around the camp, with the soldiers on the watchtowers

having machine guns. He also indicates that there were tanks around the areas outside the barbwire.

In addition to being an affront to American ideals, and clearly unconstitutional, the incarceration of Japanese Americans produced economic effects as well, particularly with food production. Japanese farmers controlled over 450,000 acres of agricultural land, which produced almost 40% of California's total crop. After incarceration, many Japanese American farmers were forced to sell their land at much reduced prices.

My Japanese-American daughter-in-law's mother was a child during World War II. She was a member of the third generation of Japanese Americans and the second generation to be born in the United States. This generation was called Sansei. (The second generation was called Nisei). The governor of Colorado at that time, Ralph L. Carr, was a staunch critic of the internment order and welcomed Japanese Americans to Colorado. She and her family who lived in Los Angeles, after signing papers allowing them to do so, were able to avoid internment by moving to Colorado. Governor Carr paid a political price for his opposition to Japanese-American internment. He was defeated when he ran for senator in 1942.

After Pearl Harbor, the country was united as never before or since. There was a subsequent massive mobilization of troops via enlistments and the draft. Many young men enlisted immediately after graduating from high school. Infrastructure for the draft had been established by the Selective Training Service Act of 1940, operative on September 16, 1940, which required all men between the age of 21 and 45 to register for the draft. Many of those not eligible for military service, such as my future father-in-law, volunteered to be Air Raid wardens and later as Block leaders. During the day, the Air Raid warden would visit his neighbors and educate them about what to do if an air raid did occur: turn off the lights, hang blackout curtains, and refrain from driving. He also taught his neighbors how to fight an incendiary bomb fire should it fall through the roof to the attic. At night, the warden would patrol their neighborhood, enforcing blackout and air raid drills. During that time, he would be equipped with a helmet, a flashlight, a gas mask, medical kit, an air raid siren alarm, a whistle and possibly a fire extinguisher.

Officials at Douglas Aircraft Company in Santa Monica and Lockheed Aircraft Company in Burbank realized that these plants would be extremely

vulnerable to an air attack. They were aware that Britain had successfully concealed many of their military targets during the Battle of Britain using camouflage. The aircraft companies mobilized engineers, architects, painters, and set designers and artists from nearby movie studios to create a plan to disguise the plants from the air. Chicken wire (nearly 5,000,000 square ft. at Douglas) was attached to tall poles and strung across to cover the terminal, hangers, and other buildings. A covering of canvas was then placed and painted to blend in with the surrounding area. Then lightweight wood framed houses complete with garages, clotheslines, and fences were placed on top as well as fake trees made of twisted wire with chicken feathers as leaves which were painted green or brown. The tallest hangers were made to look like a gently sloping neighborhood. The parking lots and airfields were painted green and lined with plants to make them look like fields of alfalfa. Underground walkways were constructed to allow for free movement throughout the Lockheed plant (and very likely at the Douglas plant as well), and air ducts were installed to provide adequate ventilation.

When the work was finished, pilots had difficulty finding Clover Field, which was near the Douglas plant. When planes were due at Clover Field, men with red flags were stationed at each end of the field to help guide the pilots. A general taken on a reconnaissance flight above the camouflaged Lockheed plant could see only suburb after California suburb.

Later, Warner Brothers Studio camouflaged their lot as well, fearing that the soundstages which resembled hangers would be targeted by enemy bombers.

By the fall of 1942, Japanese air attacks appeared to be less likely. Robust civilian protective services were in place and more importantly the capability of the Japanese military appeared to have been significantly diminished. A system of Block leaders or neighborhood leaders was established. Their function was to educate their neighbors about what they could do for the war effort, such as recycling, victory gardens, and blood donations. They also helped develop community plans such as carpooling and childcare.

Large numbers of physicians were needed to care for the troops. My dad, who was nearly 39 at the time, joined the Army Air Corps in late 1942, after arranging for a retired doctor to take over his 10 year-old general medical practice. After basic training in Miami Beach, he was sent to Mitchell Field on Long Island, New York, where he was joined by our family, who

travelled across the country on a train. I was then in the third grade, and found that the New York schools were ahead of those in California, particularly in math. My mother tutored me and I was able to catch up fairly quickly. The school authorities there decided, probably because of a shortage of teachers, that the upper half of the class would skip the fourth grade and would enter the fifth grade in the next school year. After I completed the fifth grade in New York, Dad was transferred to Dover Army Air Base. When I started school there in the fall of 1944, mother decided that I should repeat the 5th grade. Otherwise, I would be going into the 6th grade at age 9 and everyone else would be at least a year older than I was. Dad was transferred to the Santa Ana Army Air Base in May 1945 and we were able to return to our home in Orange at that time.

While living on Long Island and later in Delaware, we planted a “Victory Garden”. Near the beginning of the war, the US government re-introduced the idea of “War Gardens” from World War I, re-branding them as “Victory” Gardens. In large cities, private gardens were not often possible. There, school grounds, parks, and vacant lots were used as community gardens. Victory Gardens had a number of positive effects. They helped offset the shortage of agricultural workers and the food they would have produced. They provided better nutrition for the gardeners along with increased physical activity. Finally, they fostered morale, patriotism, and a community spirit. In 1944, an estimated 18.5 million “Victory Gardeners” supplied 40% of the nation’s fresh vegetables.

The civilian population during WW II was greatly inconvenienced, a situation that was not repeated in subsequent wars. The Food Rationing Program was started in the spring of 1942. Subsequently, clothing, shoes, coffee, gasoline, tires, and fuel oil were also rationed. The amount of gasoline available to an individual depended largely on the driving distance required in one’s work. Stickers, to be applied to the windshield, indicated how much gasoline would be available for that particular driver. Most motorists received an “A” sticker which entitled them to 3 gallons per week. War workers who shared rides with three or more workers received a “B” sticker, which entitled them to 8 gallons per week. The “C” sticker was for drivers with essential occupations, such as physicians and clergy. There were other stickers for motorcycles, emergency vehicles, farm vehicles, truckers, and VIPs. (Gasoline at that time was priced at 19 cents per gallon.) A speed limit of 35 miles per hour was instituted. Each family was issued a War Ration Book into which specific stamps were placed. The value of the

stamps distributed depended on the size and the makeup of the family and usually had an expiration date. Red stamps covered meats, butter, fats, oils, and certain cheeses. Blue stamps covered processed goods. Sugar began to be rationed in May 1943. After one person in a family registered, usually in a local school, "Sugar Buying Cards" were distributed. A ceiling price was established for each rationed item.

Most citizens complied with the rationing regulations, but some did not. Many Americans who worked in the war industries were well paid, and had extra money to spend. As might be expected, a black market developed. Meat and gasoline were the most affected. In simplest terms, a buyer might offer the neighborhood butcher a bribe to obtain higher quality meats than his ration coupons allowed. On a larger scale, livestock was diverted to black market slaughterhouses that lacked proper cleanliness and safety measures. The meat from those slaughterhouses was then sold at inflated prices. Locally, gasoline could be siphoned from the gas tank of another car. On a larger scale, criminal syndicates counterfeited large numbers of gasoline stamps and sold them at high prices. The Office of Price Administration (OPA) estimated that up to 17% of the meat sales and 5% of gasoline sales were through the black market.

Recycling was born during World War II. Metal was in short supply since it was needed for the manufacture of tanks, ships, bombs, and other war materials. Scrap metal drives were organized in many communities. Tin cans, old toys, old pots and pans, aluminum foil, and even bottle caps were collected in those drives, often by the neighborhood kids. Many of the Plymouth Village residents I spoke with particularly remembered collecting tin cans and aluminum foil. One member remembered collecting foil from the paper that lined cigarette boxes and individual sticks of chewing gum and then pounding it into a ball. Others remembered collecting bacon grease. (Bacon grease contains glycerin used in the manufacturer of explosives.) Old tires and old phonograph records were collected to help alleviate the shortage of rubber, the supply of which had been cut off by the war. Paper was also scarce, since not only was there increased demand for wood by the defense industry for weapons and supplies, but also a decrease in its supply because of a shortage of lumbermen, many of whom had joined the military forces. Paper drives were often organized to collect scrap paper, again using neighborhood kids going door to door.

One Plymouth Village resident remembers that one day a woman representing the Red Cross of America visited her classroom and distributed to each child a ball of yarn and two nails about 7 inches long with a large head. She showed the children how to complete very simple knitting stitches. The idea was that each child would complete a square measuring about 3" x 3". The squares would be collected and later sewn together to produce a large lap robe, which would be used to keep wounded soldiers in wheelchairs warm.

Sales of automobiles were frozen by the Government on January 1, 1942. For those who had ordered cars before that date, permits could be issued by local rationing boards allowing delivery of those vehicles. Production of cars, commercial trucks, and auto parts ended on February 22, 1942 and was not resumed until October 1945. The 520,000 vehicles produced in January and February were put into a stockpile which would be available on a very limited basis for sales by auto dealers to essential drivers. Having no cars to sell, many automobile dealers went out of business. Others were able to survive by enlarging their maintenance and repair facilities.

Automobile factories were completely redesigned to produce war materials such as tanks, jeeps, bombs, ammunition, torpedoes, and airplanes. Ford built the enormous Willow Run plant to mass-produce airplanes, particularly the B-24 Liberator heavy bomber. At its production height, the plant turned out a bomber every 63 minutes, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

With American men joining the armed services, workers were in short supply. A massive publicity campaign, including the famous "Rosie the Riveter" image created by Norman Rockwell, was undertaken urging women to aid the war effort by joining the labor force. More than 6,000,000 women responded, working in war related industries. Many others volunteered to work for the American Red Cross and the USO.

War Bonds were introduced to help finance military operations. The bonds were sold at 75% of their face value, which ranged between \$25 and \$10,000. The popular \$25 bond was bought for \$18.75 and was redeemable in 10 years for an interest rate was 2.9%. Stamps, starting at 10 cents apiece, could be saved toward the purchase of a bond. A coin folder having slots for 75 quarters was created, which could be turned in for a bond. Large advertising campaigns were created by both the government and private companies, which often donated their services. Bond rallies featuring film

stars and other celebrities were held through the country. 337 stars took part in the “Stars Over America” bond blitz, which raised over \$838 million. Norman Rockwell created a series of images, which helped sell the bonds. A special baseball game featuring the Yankees, Dodgers, and Giants, with each team batting 6 times in a 9-inning game netted \$56 million. Remarkably, during the war, over half the population, whose average income was only \$2,000, purchased these bonds.

During WW II, Radio was a primary source of wartime news. For the first time, listeners could experience such news in real time and, in some cases, hear the sounds of battle as well. Perhaps the most famous journalist and newscaster during World War II was Edward R. Murrow. He was in London in September, 1940 when Germany began bombing English cities. During the Blitz, Murrow’s brilliant reporting earned him a wide following. Murrow continued to be based in London during World War II. He recruited a number of broadcast journalists to help cover the war for CBS in Europe and North Africa. The journalists were known as “Murrow’s Boys” although one of them was a woman. Many of “Murrow’s Boys” became famous in their own right. Among them were William L Shrier, Eric Sevareid, Howard K. Smith, and Bill Downs. Another popular radio commentator during World War II was Gabriel Heatter, who signed on his newscast with “There’s good news tonight”.

Newsreels were shown regularly in movie theaters. Newspapers carried extensive reporting on the War. I remember, after D-Day, daily following the maps showing the advance of the Allied forces.

The men and women who ultimately won the war were, of course, those in the armed forces. Over the course of the war, over 16,000,000 Americans served. The vast majority were men, although 350,000 women also donned uniforms in the WAC’s, the WAVES, the SPARS, and the Women Marines. The population of the United States in 1945 was about 140,000,000, so about 11% of all Americans and 20% of American men served during the war. Almost 40% of US servicemen during the war were volunteers including the famous baseball players Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams as well as many other celebrities, the remainder draftees. 73% served overseas with an average duration of 16 months. Over 400,000 were killed and about 670,000 wounded during the conflict.

As I mentioned previously, Dad was transferred to Santa Ana Army Air Base in May, 1945 and I finished the last few weeks of fifth grade in Orange. Later that summer, German POW's picked oranges in our orange grove. Dad's stay at the Santa Ana Army Air Force Base was brief and he subsequently was sent to Tinker Field in Oklahoma, which was a staging area for overseas duty. Fortunately, Japan surrendered in August 1945, but there was still a matter of physicians being needed for the Army of Occupation. The Army began a point system for discharging their men recruited from civilian life. Points were awarded for months of service, for months of combat service, and for age. Dad was 42 at that time and had enough points so that he was able to be discharged in March 1946. He resumed his private practice of general medicine and later anesthesiology. I went into the sixth grade at Orange Intermediate School and later graduated from Orange Union High School. Our class was the last to graduate from the "old" Orange High School. A new high school had been built and the grounds and buildings of the school that we attended were taken over by Chapman University.

ADDENDUM

When I moved to Plymouth Village in 2017, there were two longtime Fortnightly Club members, Albert Clark and Bob Knight, who had served in World War II living there. I interviewed them at that time and here are their stories:

ALBERT CLARK

Albert Clark was born on May 14, 1920 in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania a small town in eastern part of the state where anthracite coal was mined. He graduated from high school there near the top of his class academically. He then went on to Lehigh University where he was a member of the Army ROTC. He graduated from Lehigh in 1942 with honors, majoring in chemistry and physics, after which was inducted into the army as a Second Lieutenant. He was sent to the Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland, where he was assigned to the bomb disposal unit. He soon became expert in taking apart and defusing American bombs dropped accidentally and also German bombs sent over from Europe. After about 2 years, he was sent to the Pentagon, where he served in Army Ordnance Headquarters. There he was involved in writing manuals on how to disable bombs and fuses and also helped to design new bombs. After the war was over, he was discharged with the rank as Captain, and subsequently went back to Lehigh University, where obtained his Master's degree in chemistry and physics. He then worked at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory for several years, after which he went to work for General Electric, initially at Schenectady, New York, then at Philadelphia, and finally at Redlands. He remained with GE until his retirement.

BOB KNIGHT

Bob Knight was born in Redlands in 1922 at the Redlands Hospital, then located at Clark and Nordina. He graduated from Redlands High School in 1939. He was a good student, receiving mostly A's and was a lifetime member of CSF. Bob enrolled at the University of Redlands in the fall of 1939. He graduated in 1943, majoring in math and physics. He did not participate in the V-12 program, which had just started at the U of R in 1943. Bob had signed up for the U.S. Navy prior to graduation, and the day after graduation boarded a train to Notre Dame, Indiana, where he underwent officer training. After 60 days, Bob was commissioned as an Ensign in the U.S. Navy. He was then sent to New England where he received training in degaussing ships and adjusting their compasses. The steel in a ship's hull changes the earth's magnetic field, a change than can be detected by mines and submarines. "Degaussing" refers to the processes used to neutralize this change in the magnetic field. Initially, electromagnetic coils were placed in ships to accomplish this. Later large electrically charged cables dragged along the side of a ship were used. Bob served for a time at a degaussing station in San Francisco and then later was sent to the South Pacific. There, he served in the Philippines and in New Guinea. The Japanese would often bomb these facilities in an attempt to disable them, but Bob escaped injury. He was discharged from active duty in 1946, but stayed in the Reserves long enough to obtain a pension. After the War, Bob taught math and science in Junior High Schools for 29 years, primarily in the San Bernardino school system. He was also a citrus grower and after retirement, a pioneer kiwi grower.

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