

WORLD WAR II ON THE TEXAS HOMEFRONT

Shoulder to Shoulder, On to Victory!

Part Two: Sacrifice and Celebration

Carol Gibson was nine years old, living in Sherman, when Germany surrendered unconditionally on May 7, 1945. By the time of Victory in Europe (V-E) Day, her fifth-grade world had become all too accustomed to World War II on the Texas homefront.

Her father was in the Navy in the Pacific. Her mother cared for three children at home, rolled bandages for the American Red Cross, and even drove a truck for a while, as more and more men left for the military.

At school, Carol and her classmates sang patriotic songs with religious fervor—from *God Bless America* and *Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean* to lyrics from a Disney cartoon, “HEIL! (phhht!) Right in Der Fuehrer’s Face.” Pupils pooled their pennies to buy savings stamps they pasted in bond books to help fund the war effort. They constantly collected scrap metals that went into tanks and bombs, helmets and bullets.

Wartime also colored everything outside school. The military was first in line for food and supplies. Civilians simply had to reuse, recycle, and reduce—as the saying went, “Make do, do without, use it up, wear it out!” Government-issued

ration books and stamps were required for everything from gasoline and tires to sugar and shoes. As farmers geared up to feed soldiers first, families filled the food shortage gap with Victory Gardens nurtured in backyards and vacant lots.

Carol's house, like that of others with close relatives in the war, proudly displayed a blue star in the front window. (A gold star replaced the blue star, when a soldier was killed.)

Carol's handsome young uncle, her father's younger brother, died when his plane was shot down over Germany in March of 1945. So the news, two months later, of V-E Day moved the youngster to action. "It struck my vulnerable young heart with intense emotions," Carol Gibson Wagner of Wichita Falls now recalls. "I was joyful for the imminent return of my father, but I also wanted to honor those who had fallen. I recruited my good friend, Joan Webster, to help with a ceremony of celebration that had to be solemn and lovely."

The girls gathered two baskets full of fragrant rose petals from their yards and set off on a two-girl, two-block parade. "We walked slowly and most solemnly down the center of the street, scattering our petals and singing patriotic songs," Carol remembers. "People must have been inside listening to the news on the radio, because the streets were empty and quiet. I don't remember that anyone saw us."

World War II brought sacrifice and celebration to the Texas homefront.

As Texas troops prepared for war, then fanned out across the globe, civilians supported them in myriad ways—from letter writing to volunteering for the American Red Cross and the USO (United Service Organization). Communities rallied to buy war bonds, collect metal and paper for war use, and grow food in V-Gardens. Through it all, people adapted to shortages with creativity and resolve.

Of the 750,000 Texans who served in the armed forces, more than 22,000 died as a result of World War II.

When surviving troops returned to Texas after Victory over Japan (V-J) Day, they found a Lone Star State that was vastly different and more prosperous than the one they left.

Industries which the government had ramped up for the war effort—aircraft, ship, and steel manufacturing, as well as wood products and petrochemical sectors—continued to develop after the war. Thousands of women and minorities experienced manufacturing work for the first time. The number of Texas wage earners, in fact, tripled during the 1940s. The new jobs were in cities. As agriculture became more mechanized and productive, many who moved from farms for city work never returned. The million-plus wartime population gain came mainly in metropolitan areas. Rural Texas was suddenly urban Texas, a place which emerged from the war as a homefront ready and able to grow.

Last month, in the first of a two-part series on the homefront in World War II, readers remembered how Texas mobilized for war. This month, readers conclude

the series by recounting the scope and meaning of their sacrifices and celebrations.

NOTE: UNDERLINED SUBHEADS ARE FOR CATEGORICAL PURPOSES
ONLY...SOME COPY MARKED AS 'OPTIONAL' IS SPACE IS TIGHT

Something to Sacrifice

“One day, Army trucks appeared in a pasture at our farm near Beaumont on a training maneuver that lasted weeks. We children were thrilled. The friendly young soldiers were from all parts of the U.S., probably on their first trip from home. One time, Daddy invited them to our front porch to listen to a boxing match of champion Joe Louis. We often wondered how many of those young recruits survived the war.”

--Dorothy Parrish Trotter, Fair Oaks Ranch

“Workers streamed in from all over when the military began building Camp Bowie (Tarrant County). Our home (in Bangs) was nearby, so my parents rented our living room to one worker who was only there a few hours each night just to sleep. Once the camp opened, there was no housing for families of the troops, so people opened their homes to them.”

--Billie Hardy, Arlington

OPTIONAL:

“Soldiers stationed at Camp Bowie (Brown County) enjoyed getting away for entertainment. Bus service was limited, so people set up ‘travel bureaus.’ Anyone with a car, gasoline, and good tires would transport soldiers to Fort Worth, Dallas, or San Antonio for a fee. My mother worked as a bureau dispatcher, and I occasionally stayed with her. The soldiers spoiled me, probably because I reminded them of their daughters or sisters.”

--Selma S. Goswick, Rowlett

“I can still see my dad sitting at his old Underwood manual typewriter typing a letter every single day for 33 months to my soldier brother, Curt. Dad never wanted Curt to go to mail call and not have a letter. Thursdays were when mother used her sugar rations to make fudge to send Curt. It was also when my other brother, Bill, and I hurried home to lick the bowl.”

--Betty Jordan Boynton, Kerrville

(NOTE: PICTURE ENCLOSED OF HER DAD AT TYPEWRITER)

“Each evening at 6 p.m., everyone gathered around the radio to hear the latest war news from commentator Gabriel Heater. When something especially important happened, newspapers hurriedly printed extra editions, and paper boys walked up and down shouting, “Extra! Extra! Read all about it!” Letters to and

from the battlefield were shrunk (into a microfilmed form called Victory-Mail) to make more room on ships for war materials. The tiny V-mail connected us with our loved ones overseas.”

--Pat Miller, Silsbee

“Every weekend in El Campo, my parents entertained soldiers from Camp Hulen at Palacios, providing them a home-cooked meal and church visit. Two soldiers I especially recall were from the Bronx, our first exposure to New York vernacular. My parents often recalled with laughter the attempts to understand and be understood. Several words had to be written out, but it did not dampen the hospitality or good time.”

--Norma Inman Schmelling, Bandera

“My ladies church group volunteered at the USO to entertain troops stationed in San Antonio. I played the piano for sing-alongs and holidays. The first GI’s were from New York and New Jersey. They danced beautifully to the music of the Big Band era. Summertime, out on the open terrace, we taught them country and square dancing. They told us, ‘You Texans are the friendliest folks we ever met.’ It was a sad ‘Good-Bye’ when orders came for them to ship overseas.”

--Dorothy Lee Challiss Goldfarb, San Antonio

“One day I was shocked to find that the piano I practiced on was gone! Mother told me the USO in Beeville didn’t have one, so she gave them mine. ‘How am I going to learn to play?’ I asked tearfully. ‘That’s no problem,’ she said, whipping out a long cardboard keyboard with all 88 keys on it. ‘You can learn on this!’ Instead, I learned to play the trombone...they didn’t need one at the USO.”

Kay Russell McBrayer, Beeville

RED CROSS

“Nearly every Saturday afternoon, between double features at the Alpine movie theatre, news reels brought the war into my mind and heart. At age 11, how might I help our soldiers? I remember knitting an army-green wool sweater to help. The lady at the Red Cross office praised my effort without noticing dropped stitches and uneven flaws. The finished product took nine months and hung to my knees. I went home feeling proud, knowing that my knitting kept one soldier warm in Germany.”

--Patricia Wilson Clothier, Shawnee Mission

“A motley gang of boys gathered in my parents’ house in Houston to knit midnight blue turtleneck sweaters, watch caps, and mittens for England-bound sailors. As I knitted, I imagined a lonely American sailor on a cold and wet night, kept warm by

the sweater and watch cap I made. The Red Cross gave us work badges—they were badges of honor.”

--Mike Maher, Annapolis, Maryland

“My most vivid memory is of my mother’s volunteer work for the Red Cross in Wharton County. On ‘Red Cross Day,’ community women met in a vacant house without heating or cooling. Some rolled bandages or used pedal sewing machines to make pajamas and quilts for servicemen in hospitals. They all worked steadily and quietly with cheeriness, and I sensed that this was very serious business with a purpose.”

--Margaret J. Lam, Houston

“The Red Cross came to our country school in Central Texas to collect materials and money. If any one grade collected a combined total of one dollar, we’d get a Red Cross sticker for the classroom window as a symbol of our patriotism and sacrifice.”

--Billy Tom Curry, Mart

RATIONING

“Rationing meant that school buses could only carry kids to and from school. With towns so far apart, our West Texas schools had to discontinue their football

programs. Sanderson did continue basketball, and we traveled to away games in an old sedan packed with six players, coach, and equipment. To save gas and tires, we played two games on the same weekend, spending the night with the same boys we competed against. This plan had the added benefit of acquiring new friends.”

--Jay Tom Holley, Point

“After football games at McAllen High School, I joined a group of young kids who went below the stadium stands and picked up discarded tin foil wrappers from cigarette packages of the day. We formed the tin foil into balls the size of softballs, and the school sent them away for military use.”

--Dick Harris, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

“I was a little girl during the war. Most of all, I remember getting a spanking because I licked the pretty-colored ration stamps and stuck them in my coloring book!”

--Florence P. Cotter, San Antonio

“Our East Texas town had a rubber recycling drive, and even as a child I wanted to do my part. So I offered the tires off my new scooter. After the man at the recycling center realized I would not be deterred, he cut the tires off my nice

scooter. The trip home, riding on the metal rims, was loud and bumpy, the noise reaching my house before I did. I was filled with patriotic pride.”

--Edna Tucker Jones, as told to her son, Phillip W. Jones, both of East Bernard

“Even though we were poor, volunteers came to our Mount Vernon home asking for anything made of rubber. My father responded immediately and convinced me it would be patriotic to give up the tires on the new tricycle Santa brought last Christmas. When I grumbled, he would tap the porch firmly with the bare tip of his cane, reminding me that he also had contributed the rubber off of his own cane.”

--Charlene Donaghue, Mount Pleasant

“It was during the war that oleo-margarine was introduced to the American housewife as a butter substitute. It was my job to mix a yellow coloring tablet into the white oleo to make it look like butter.”

--Aileene A. Saegert, Denton

“Cars would have a decal on the windshield saying, “Is this trip really necessary?” When I got married, I was working at North American Aviation (B-25 bomber plant) in Grand Prairie and the employees there gave us their own gasoline ration stamps so we could make our honeymoon trip.”

--Meraye Doigg, Dallas

“I was in a choral group at Austin High School. Whenever our director saw us walking to practice, he would give us a ride. To save gasoline, he never stopped the car, but just slowed down, and we would run fast, hop on the running board, and climb in.”

--Doris Dill Cornell, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

“Nylon meant for stockings went for parachutes. Since it was not considered nice to go bare-legged, we wore leg makeup and drew seams on our legs. To save fabric, we made girls’ skirts shorter and boys’ pants without cuffs. Instead of elastic for underwear, we used buttons or drawstrings that sometimes didn’t work well. My uncle once saw a woman running away from a sudden shower when her underpants fell to her feet. She just kicked them off and kept running.

--Ruby Jewel Hall King, Robinson

“In the Panhandle, towns filled grain trucks with scrap iron and other needed metals. Old worn-out farm equipment from the Dust Bowl and Great Depression was tossed on trucks for smelting down to use in making military equipment. We laughed at an enemy being stopped by old wagon rims, horseshoes, and broken gears.”

--Delbert Trew, Alanreed

“We coped beautifully with wartime shortages. I think the war helped us find out how strong we really were. It taught us how to work and how to grow up fast.”

--Jimmie Shield Shaw, Nacogdoches

WAR BONDS, ETC.

“To help out with food shortages, our Boy Scout Troop 114 in Floresville planted a ‘Victory Garden’ on an empty lot next to our scoutmaster’s home. We tended it after school. Because men were away in the service, kids from my high school were released from school early and bused to farms to pick whatever needed harvesting.”

--Rudy Elizondo, San Antonio

“My sorority sold war bonds at Love Field in Dallas. One day I sold a \$25 bond to a man who requested that it be sent to his nephew who was a German prisoner of war on the East Coast. The man was an American citizen and evidently wanted to his extended family. I thought it was admirable.”

--Norma K. McClay, Dallas

POWS

“My aunt had shopping privileges at Camp Hearne’s prisoner of war commissary near our hometown of Calvert. My cousin and I often accompanied her, and she allowed us kids to spend time with the POWs working there. I recall their smiles and happiness when I responded to them. It eased their homesickness for families back in Germany. Language proved no barrier. It showed me how we are all much alike in this world.”

--Edith Tindall Towns, Temple

OPTIONAL:

“We lived across the street from the POW camp in San Augustine. My sister and I enjoyed being around the guard soldiers, who were very protective and respectful of us. People asked if we were afraid the prisoners would escape, and my father would say, ‘No. If they escape, they’re certainly going farther than our home.’”

--Dorothy Mae Tannery Wilkerson, Beaumont

“My father was a surgeon at Camp Hearne (Robertson County). My mother often took me and my brother, Danny, from our home in Calvert to have dinner with Daddy. I remember the musical groups of German POWs who entertained at the officers club. Danny and I spoke to the prisoners and couldn’t understand why they were considered *bad* people. They seemed just like us. Some of them were

artists, and one gave Daddy a large oil painting of a German river scene. It hung in our home for 50 years.”

--Harriet Redwine, Phoenix, Arizona

“German POWs were used for labor at the Army Quartermasters Depot in Fort Worth where my mother was head librarian. Once a week, she crammed her lunch box full of cookies or candy and slipped the treats to a young German assigned to the library. I asked her about showing kindness to the ‘enemy,’ and I’ve never forgotten her response. ‘Imagine yourself in his place. I do. And I imagine myself in his mother’s place, too.’ After that, I started thinking of individuals as people like myself.”

--Hugh Neeld, Jacksonville

“I worked at Camp Howze (Cooke County) near a carpenter’s shop where German POWs worked. Sometimes they’d show me photos of their wives and children. That really touched my heart. I was in the hospital with appendicitis once, and when I returned to work, a German prisoner gave me an intricate wooden picture frame he’d made. The frame held my photo or that of boy friends until 1945 when I married a returning American soldier. He had been treated so badly at a POW camp in Germany that I could never display the frame again.”

--Frances Louthan, Gainesville

“My sacrifice in the war was having to tell my parents that their first-born son had been killed in France. I was barely 20 years old, and it took me decades to get over this very painful event.”

--Ann Hollon Taylor, Dallas

Something to Celebrate

“After Hitler’s defeat in Europe, my husband’s tank unit was ordered to the Pacific. We were able to get together in San Antonio the day before he was to ship out. On the way to our hotel, an excited voice interrupted the music on the car radio to announce that Japan had surrendered. The war was over! Instantaneous celebration erupted on Broadway Street. Horns honked! Drivers yelled! Mobs of people, many military, crowded downtown. The party was on. Total rejoicing!”

--Evelyn B. Faubion, Marble Falls

“Progresso honored its returning soldiers with covered dish dinners. For one dinner, my younger sister and I decided to take the soldiers a cake, the only kind we knew how to make—a mud cake. We decorated it with crayons on top and presented it to ‘the boys’ with great sincerity and pride. They accepted that mud cake in the same manner.”

--Pat Davina, Roswell, New Mexico

“I remember a chilly night in 1945 playing with my dog before a warm fire in our home at Iron Bluff (now Lone Star). I answered a knock at the door and jumped with laughter into the arms of my soldier dad returning home, safe and unharmed.”

--Carmen A. Bennett, Tyler

“Not a shot was fired in Victoria, not a bomb was dropped, not a grenade thrown. What happened in Victoria was typical of what happened all over America. People did their part daily, shoulder to shoulder with people from every other town. This unprecedented united spirit of patriotism, cooperation, and willingness to sacrifice helped us all win World War II.”

--Jean G. Schnitz, Boerne

RESOURCES

--http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daylight_saving_time (Re: daylight savings time)

--Texas Handbook online

--Texas Almanac, 2004-2005

--Cambridge Encyclopedia, second ed.

--*Gone to Texas; A History of the Lone Star State*, Randolph B. Campbell

--*The History of Texas*, Calvert, De Leon, Cantrell, 3rd ed.

.TEXAS HIGHWAYS—WWII, 2of2—MALLORY

--<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1682.html> (bonds)

--<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1674.html> (rationing)

--<http://us.history.wisc.edu/hist102/lectures/lecture21.html> (general)

--http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/food_history/27411 (rationing)