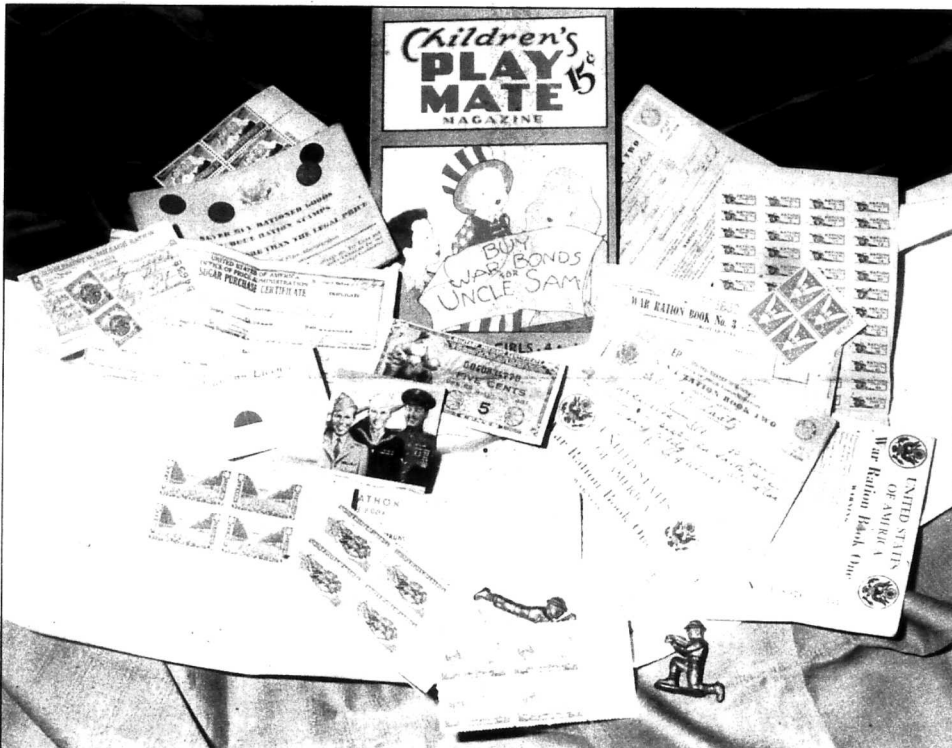


# ★ E ★ X ★ T ★ R ★ A ★

## THE HOMEFRONT

# How Grundy County Helped Win the War



Now collectibles, these bits of World War II history symbolize the nationwide effort to support the troops overseas. (Herald Photo/Clerence Jeske/Jo Ann Hustis)

## Prairie Shipyard changed Seneca overnight

The late Dr. W. E. Coulter, family physician in the area, wrote of the Prairie Shipyard of World War II which attracted thousands of workers to Seneca from 1942 to 1945. Coulter's article was submitted by Seneca Mayor Bill Steep. He recalls Coulter as "the kind of public spirited individual every town needs."

The article is dated eight days after Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945.

The village of 1,200 quietly nestled in the Illinois River Valley 70 miles southwest of Chicago on the main line of the Rock Island Railroad and U.S. 6.

Then in March 1942, word circulated that the Chicago Bridge and Iron Company would build mosquito boats for the military east of Seneca.

Word was the government might spend millions on the project.

In April, Merle J. Trees, executive vice president of Chicago Bridge and Iron, announced that he had signed a contract with the government for \$6.6 million for shipyard facilities. Eventually over \$200 million went into the shipbuilding project.

Resident F. A. Graves was highly instrumental in selling the property to Chicago Bridge. But for his enthusiasm and drive, it is hardly possible the company would have picked Seneca.

The village was selected for the

See "Shipyard..." on page 2B

## Most women stayed here, taking jobs left by men called to war

Bank teller recalls people asking her to cash war bonds she printed years earlier

By ELLIE ANDERSON  
Herald Community Editor

While the men were fighting overseas, most of the women stayed home and "kept the home fires burning."

Janice Thompson remembers what it was like when so many of the young men from Grundy County were serving in the service, including her future husband, John Thompson, and her brother, John Stinchcomb.

She said, "I'm sure if a survey was taken, it would be hard to find a person who's life was not affected in some way by World War II. Many people never knew their fathers who were killed overseas."

She continued, "The Sunday news reached us about the bombing at Pearl Harbor. I got a sick feeling knowing that my brother and my friend would most likely be going

off to fight the war."

And she was right. John Thompson was in Europe for four years, and John Stinchcomb was in the Navy for more than three years in the Atlantic on the U.S.S. Tarazed.

During the war Janice worked for Chicago Bridge and Iron at the Prairie Shipyard in Seneca. She and a "friend" worked in the Addressograph department where time cards, payroll checks and savings bonds, also known as war bonds, were printed.

Most employees had war bonds deducted from each pay check. The bonds were delivered each week by special carrier from the Chicago Federal Reserve.

Janice said that from 1971 until 1989 while she was employed at the Grundy County National Bank, she cashed many of the bonds she had printed while working in Seneca.

She said that, during the war, many young women with babies spent a lot of time together to pass the time as they waited for their husbands to come home.

They went for long walks with the

children, attended church activities or went roller skating, an event that was very popular at the time. There was a roller skating rink in Gould Park which was a popular gathering place.

During World War II many women went to work for the first time. Some worked at the Prairie Shipyard where the LST was built. Janice remembers that there was always a big celebration when a ship was completed and launched.

Usually a celebrity would be on hand to christen the ship properly with a bottle of champagne. One person she particularly remembers was Victor Mature. She said he was so handsome in a white suit and very friendly to those who worked at the shipyards.

Building ships was a 24-hours-a-day job — getting them completed was a top priority. The Navy was anxiously awaiting every one that was finished.

Many of the shipbuilders were women. They did all kinds of things previously considered man's work such as welding and heavy labor.

One of the most important events

of the day was mail delivery. Men and women at home and abroad looked forward to letters from loved ones. Many times letters from the war zones had words, sentences or paragraphs blacked out from someone's censorship.

Being a small town, people in Morris supported each other in times of need or tragedy. When word was received of the death of a soldier, the whole town grieved.

Janice said that the Morris Daily Herald did a good job in keeping the county up-to-date on what was going on in the war.

Janice remembered that all four of the Thompson children were in a branch of the service. Her husband was in the Army and fought at The Battle of the Bulge. Ed served in the Pacific. Mary was in the Marines and Marguerite was a nurse at the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant.

Another popular activity by the women was the task of packing boxes to send to the soldiers. The contents included cookies, candy, gum, pictures and letters

See "Women..." on page 2B

### FEATURED INSIDE

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# Early mishaps aside, LST 202 served well

By JO ANN HUSTIS  
Herald Writer

**SENECA** - Despite her rather ignominious departure from the Prairie Shipyard during World War II, LST 202 went on to participate in nine major battles and 12 lesser actions, and was awarded five battle stars.

The military utilized LSTs - the abbreviation by which Landing Ships, Tanks are known - to haul troops and equipment to wherever they were needed to aid with the war effort.

LST 202's first major beachhead was a midnight landing in an Illinois cornfield. And there by a tale.

"The ship was launched from the shipyard into the flood-swollen Illinois river on April 1, 1943," recalled Willis Gholston of Mosier, Ore., the bow lookout that evening.

"We made a right turn in the water and the steering gear went out. The rudder took a hard left and the bow crashed through the trees onto the river bank. And the ship made her first landing in the cornfield," he said.

There were no casualties and the LST continued on downstream, bound for New Orleans via the Mississippi River.

But the second day out, high water and strong winds combined to sweep LST 202 broadside into the locks at Alton on the Mississippi River, Gholston recalled.

And so the damaged ship was laid up for repairs at the Todd-Johnson Shipyard in Algiers, La., for two weeks.

In yet another incident, LST 202 was laid up for two more weeks in the harbor at Balboa, Panama, Gholston said.

That time the ship was anchored and awaiting orders to leave for the war zone. Three more LSTs were tied up on her starboard side.

"When the time came for departure, two of the LSTs loosened their lines and pulled away.

"Then the ship tied adjacent to us proceeded to move ahead. But she suddenly took full left rudder and rammed us."

Her first major operation was while the ship was landing units of the First Marine

Division at Cape Gloucester, New Britain. It was Christmas Day, 1944, and the fighting was heavy.

Gholston recalled that nine Japanese dive bombers strafed LST 202 while the ship was landing the Marines. And several enemy bombs landed 20 to

The crew also was credited for possibly downing a third plane, Gholston said.

During another incident while the ship was landing troops and supplies on Los Negros in the Admiralty Islands on March 2, 1944, Gholston spotted the location

*"We made a right turn in the water and the steering gear went out. The rudder took a hard left and the bow crashed through the trees onto the river bank. And the ship made her first landing in the cornfield."*



40 feet away from the ship.

The gun crews were showered with water from the detonations and the ship was splattered with bomb fragments. But no damage or casualties occurred.

Two enemy planes were shot down by the crew of LST 202.

from where enemy gunfire was sweeping the beach.

"So, we directed our fire there and knocked out the enemy gunners," he said.

While on special assignment in May 1944, LST 202 transported a weapons battalion ashore at Wake Island to cap-

Normandy and the South Pacific to play their part in the winning of the war.

When the war is over, will Seneca be a ghost and is living. She has improved streets and a sanitary sewer system blasted through rock, new schools, and had the pleasure of giving

Seneca is on the map. As the years go by, men will take pride in saying, "I worked in the Seneca Shipyard. I helped build LSTs. I was part of the power behind the heroes at the front."

I see the sponsor of an LST on the platform at the prow of her ship. Her husband is an Army officer. For the past three years, he has been fighting in the South Pacific.

She closes her brief remarks: "And may this ship, as it goes down to the sea, be one of the means of bringing back our brothers, sweethearts, and husbands."

The launching signal is given and the sponsor stands poised with the bottle of champagne. Thousands of workers are watching. There is a click, a burring grind. The mountain of steel moves sideways. The bottle crashes against the prow in a shower of spray.

The speed of this mass of thousands of tons increases. We are awed by its power as it sweeps past us. No human hand or a thousand horses can stop the mad rush of the ship to its new home on the water.

Down the long way she gains momentum. (She) strikes the water, throwing high great clouds of spray. She lists dangerously, first away, then toward us. We catch our breath.

And then she rides majestically, proudly, calmly on the Illinois River. Across the river a column of water rolls. Striking the shores, the column dashes water high on the cornfields. Another LST is born.

A thousand workers hurry back to their jobs and I think I hear their message: "We'll stand by the ship. We'll stand by the ship."

Their words roll across the cornfields and prairies of Illinois to the nation's capital, the Atlantic and Pacific, and our troops in Europe and the South Pacific.

Reaching out their hands across the seas to clasp ours, I see the smile of assurance on the faces of the troops as they send this message rolling back to Seneca.

"Prise la Lord and keep passing the ships. You hold the line and we'll carry the ball. You buy the bonds and we'll fire the guns."

## Shipyard...

From page 1B

location. The railroad was here, the high tension electric line was close and the sloping shoreline of the river contained a solid base of rock.

A small force came in April to grade and dig deep drainage ditches around the proposed shipyard. The force grew in number weekly.

A large truckload with lumber arrived in the field east of the high school and unloaded its contents. Night and day the trucks continued to come.

The building of the War Homes for shipyard employees had started.

The sounds of crickets and bullfrogs were replaced by the ring of hammers of a thousand carpenters. Under brilliant electric lights, night was turned into day and work continued on a 24-hour schedule. Small construction buildings were completed in two days' time.

Then the vast army of shipyard workers arrived. Cars poured down Main Street from practically every state in the union.

The workers inundated the town, overran the meager restaurants, ate at the grocery stores, and slept on the front lawns.

The town was gorged with people. Traffic moved at a snail's pace and parking was at a premium. Buildings were completed overnight. And construction work roared on.

Next to arrive were representatives of Chicago Bridge and Iron.

George T. Horton and his company made the best LSTs in the country. Horton gave back to his country a hundredfold what he received from her.

Other representatives were Merle Trees, Charles Pillsbury, Clarence Hines, Don Leach, Edward Ait, Bees, Ellerbe, Jim Gaylor, Gerry DeWayne, and Walter Coiby, Capt. Dowd and Capt. Goennig, Evelyn Martin, and Commanders Brown and Paul Birchard.

Chicago Bridge and the Navy worked together with little friction, dovetailing efforts so that Uncle Sam had the best ships in the shortest periods of time.

God bless the hundreds of women who worked alongside the men. They left their homes to dress in overalls and become greasy, grimy soldiers of industry for their country.

Local nurse Elsie Maxwell, saw that 5,000 immunization shots against contagious diseases were administered.

During the entire shipbuilding period in Seneca, not one child died of a contagious dis-

ease.

If 15 to 20 children had died in an epidemic, we would have witnessed the rapid exodus of a thousand families or more.

The low record of absenteeism from the government sponsored kindergartens was not excelled anywhere in the United States.

More and more untrained and trained men continued to pour into Seneca. Out of farmers, preachers, barbers, merchants and lay laborers came welders, electricians, painters, and ship-builders.

The whole was welded into a working unit of 10,700 men. The shipyard roared with... power mills spelling the doom of Hitlerism and Hirohitism.

At night our proud little city glowed and sparkled with 10,000 lights. The sky shown red for miles around. Seneca was the Gary (Indiana) of Illinois.

"Wax production has always been costly. There is always lost motion and claims that many men are idle or sleeping on the job."

*Seneca is on the map. As the years go by, men will take pride in saying, "I worked in the Seneca Shipyard. I helped build LSTs. I was part of the power behind the heroes at the front."*



Some slackers avoid all work possible - parasites and barnacles on the ships and men who really work. Unfortunately we cannot shoot them.

But one fact stands out; that seven LSTs slide down the runways each month to join their sister ships in the ocean.

No better LSTs have joined the Navy than those made at Seneca. Longer than destroyers, they are capable of carrying innumerable fighting tanks for unloading in minutes.

They have played a great part in the winning of the war. More than 150 ships have been launched. If placed end to end, they would reach from the shipyard through Marselles.

Each LST has a combat crew of about 135 men. About 20,000 sailors boarded the ships in Seneca and sailed to Africa, Italy, England and

ture the Japanese fighter plane airstrip in the Toem area.

LST 202 also "mothered" seven PT boats for 14 days while they raided Japanese shipping and shore installations at Morotai in September 1944, Gholston said.

The LST was at Leyte in the Philippines when MacArthur returned on Sept. 20, 1944.

"He was on the ship just to the right of our ship. He stepped ashore and said, 'I have returned,'" Gholston recalled.

"There was much shooting going on, sniper fire and so forth. MacArthur didn't want to come back until everything had cooled down."

Gholston said torpedo planes attacked the convoy the ship was accompanying on Nov. 24, 1944.

"One plane fired its torpedoes outside the convoy columns. A torpedo crossed directly in front of LST 202's bow and through the middle of the convoy without hitting a ship," he said.

LST 202 participated in heavy movement of troops and materials to strategic locations in preparation for the planned attack on Japan.

While en route to Lingayen Gulf on Jan. 7, 1945, a plane suddenly zoomed across LST 202's starboard beam, Gholston said.

The men ran to their battle stations. The plane tilted its left wing to avoid hitting the LST's mast and left.

"Everything happened so fast that the crew did not have a

chance to fire a shot. But why the plane never strafed, bombed or crashed into the 202 will remain an enigma," he said.

Probably the most dramatic times aboard LST 202 were during the ship's trips to Cape Gloucester and Leyte Island because such a tremendous convoy of vessels was involved, Gholston said.

"There were battleships, heavy and light cruisers, hundreds and hundreds of ships: about 3,000 in all," he noted.

Some facts about LST 202:

- Chicago Bridge and Iron Company laid the ship's keel at Seneca on July 15, 1942.
- Mrs. P. I. Birchard christened the ship on April 9, 1942. The ship received its commission in the Navy the same day.
- There were 66 crew members and seven officers aboard the LST. The ship survived 2,194 days of war.
- Her first captain was the Filipino Merchant Marine officer who was instrumental in getting Gen. Douglas MacArthur out of the Philippine Islands in 1942.
- After the war ended, LST 202 was put on occupation duty until November 1945.
- The ship was decommissioned April 11, 1946. Her name was removed from the Navy's list of ships four months later.
- LST 202 was sold on April 16, 1948, to Bethlehem Steel Company of Seattle, Wash., for scrap metal.

## Women...

From page 1B

Surprisingly enough most of the boxes arrived at the correct destination.

Janice remembers that when her soon-to-be husband arrived back home he came to see her. The first thing he said to her was, "I bought something for you." When she asked what, she found out that it was a lot for a new house. They were married soon after that.

"We will ever be grateful to our men and women who fought for us and share in the grief of parents whose sons and daughters did not return," said Janice.

## Don't Worry!

If you miss any of the three commemorative World War II editions, you can pick them up at the Daily Herald office. And if you don't already subscribe, call 942-3221, Ext. 12, today to have all the news of Grundy County delivered to your home every weekday!

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# Selective Service Board had thankless job

**By SHIRLEY HEAP**  
(Shirley Heap worked in the local Selective Service Board office through the entire war.)

The Grundy County Selective Service Board for World War II was established in October 1940. The office was located in the Post Office Building in the large offices on the second-floor facing Washington

dentist was Dr. A.D. Costello. These physicians examined registrants every Monday morning at the Board Office.

The first Selective Service Registration was Oct. 16, 1940, and included men ages 21 through 35. The second registration was July 1, 1941, at the local office for men who had reached the age of 21 after

armed forces. This number did not include those who enlisted during that time.

The board members met at least once a week and sometimes twice a week. It was their duty to classify registrants as fairly as possible.

As the registrants were classified by the board to be eligible for service, they were first physically

appeal their cases to an Appeal Board. The local attorneys who served on that board were S.J. Holdeman, David F. Root and Frank W. Young.

The other attorneys in the area were notified to help with employment or to be an advisory member for the registrants.

The board members met all day at

least once a week and sometimes twice a week. They were often criticized for the classifications that were made.

There were some registrants who were deferred because of their occupation while others had physical or mental conditions that were not acceptable for the service.

This was confidential information and it could not be revealed to the public.

The members gave their time without compensation and it was a thankless job. They lost friends and took a great deal of abuse from people who did not think the board was fair.

I believe in later years most people agreed the board had been fair.

The clerks of the board were compensated for their work.

During those years, Nelson W. Campbell passed away and George E. Trotter replaced him and clerk

Levi Morrison changed jobs and Bervice Heegen replaced him.

The board office was open every day, including all holidays, even Christmas. That was because Selective Service Boards were under the War Department.

As the war progressed, the Veterans' Administration set up offices in our office and Henry Hoyt of Morris was appointed to represent the returning veterans.

Most of the returning veterans had severe injuries and Mr. Hoyt helped them to make claims and find employment.

A lot of clerical work went through our office and it was very hard work. We were sending our relatives and friends into this terrible war.

Then, when the injured honorably discharged veterans and their papers came back, it was also a very sad time for all of us.



THIS IS A Christmas card received by Shirley Heap from the Selective Service System and Governor Dwight H. Green.

The original board members were Dr. Roscoe Whitman, Chairman, Nelson W. Campbell, Cial City, Wayne Misener, Mazon, Wendell Dirst, Minooka, and Robert H. Walsh, Verona. The clerks for the board were Levi C. Robinson, Gardner and Shirley Heap, Morris.

The examining physicians were Dr. F.C. Bowker, Dr. W.F. Breusch and Dr. J.B. Larson. Examining

Oct. 16, 1940.

The third registration was February 16, 1942, for men ages 20 through 44. The fourth registration was for men ages 45 through 64. On June 30, 1942, we registered all 18- and 19-year-olds. After that, all were required to register at the age of 18.

During the years 1940-1945, we had 4,951 registrants and locally 1,372 men were inducted into the

examined at the local office and then sent to Chicago for further examination.

If they qualified for service, they were ready for induction. The groups of inductees would leave Morris early in the morning by train to the Induction Stations in Chicago where they were assigned to the different branches of service.

If the registrants felt they were classified incorrectly, they could

## Frey wanted to fly in service of Allies, but never got the chance

**By KEVIN WOODWARD**  
Herald Writer

He didn't tell the recruiter he was only 15 years old. Then again William Frey was eager to learn how to fly.

So eager, in fact, he tried to join the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) where his not-quite 20/20 vision wouldn't prevent him from flying.

After the recruiters in Canada said

he couldn't join their air force, Frey, who graduated from Morris Community High School in 1943, talked to the RCAF attache in Ottawa who told him he could join any U.S. service branch and request a transfer to the RCAF.

So he joined the navy. Four days later he went into his commanding officers' quarters at Great Lakes Naval Training Center and requested the transfer.

Five chief petty officers authoritatively threw Frey out of the office when his commander told him to leave and if he came "back here in again, I'll throw you into the brig."

Frey never did make it into the Canadian armed services. He went

on for naval training and became an AOM 3rd Class, aviation ordinance man.

He spent 2 1/2 years in the service and saw no action.

He spent the last two years of the war as an air gunnery instructor just before the war ended. Frey was in training in Texas with a torpedo squadron.

He repeatedly requested a transfer to the front, but to no avail. And all that time, no one discovered how old he really was.

After his discharge in 1946 Frey took up flying.

He is a member of the Confederate Air Force and helps fly that group's B-17

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# Franklin's weather predictions helped war effort

By **ELLIE ANDERSON**  
Herald Community Editor

When Ruby Franklin joined the U.S. Navy and became a WAVE she went through a two-year program to be certified as an aerologist in eight months. She said it was a very intense course.

"I became a WAVE by accident," said Mrs. Franklin. "At the time of the war I was teaching school. A friend asked me to go with her to take a test to be accepted into the Navy. While I was waiting for her in an outer room, a recruiter sat down and started talking to me. He thought that while I was there I might as well take the test also. The ironic thing was that my friend didn't pass the test and I did. Before I knew it I was a WAVE," said Mrs. Franklin.

About 6,000 U. S. Military officers were trained to be weather forecasters during World War II, about 100 of them women.

The recruitment of WAVES forecasters was in response to extreme shortages of weather officers at the Naval Air Stations in early 1943 as the war escalated.

Those recruited to the WAVES forecasters had previous experience as math/science teachers. They were assigned as forecasters stateside. Following meteorological training, Mrs. Franklin was stationed at an air base at Astoria, Ore., one of the oldest cities on the west coast.

This became the air base to train pilots for squadrons that had been depleted in war areas. New pilots coming in went out over the ocean on training missions, so it was

important for them to know weather conditions at all times.

Complete weather maps and extensive weather forecasts were compiled every four hours.

This information was also telegraphed to Seattle and San Francisco weather centers.

During World War II, aerology training was comparatively new to the Navy. It rose-side by side with the airplane up the scale of importance in naval strategy and warfare.

The pilots depended heavily upon

the advice of those predicting the weather.

The Aerology Department was on duty 24 hours a day.

Four times a day weather predictions would come in from all over the country, including Alaska, the Aleutians, and ships at sea. This information was plotted on a weather map which was then analyzed by the weather people and predictions were then made.

Born in Gardner, Mrs. Franklin was raised in South Wilmington.

She received a Bachelor's Degree in chemistry from the University of Illinois in 1933. The only time she used her chemistry education was when she worked at the Joliet Arsenal in the control lab.

Working in the field of chemistry was very difficult for a woman, so Mrs. Franklin went back to school and received a Master's Degree, in math in 1941.

For several years before going into the Navy she taught remedial math at Bloom Township High

School in Chicago Heights.

After being discharged from the Navy, Mrs. Franklin was involved in teaching veterans.

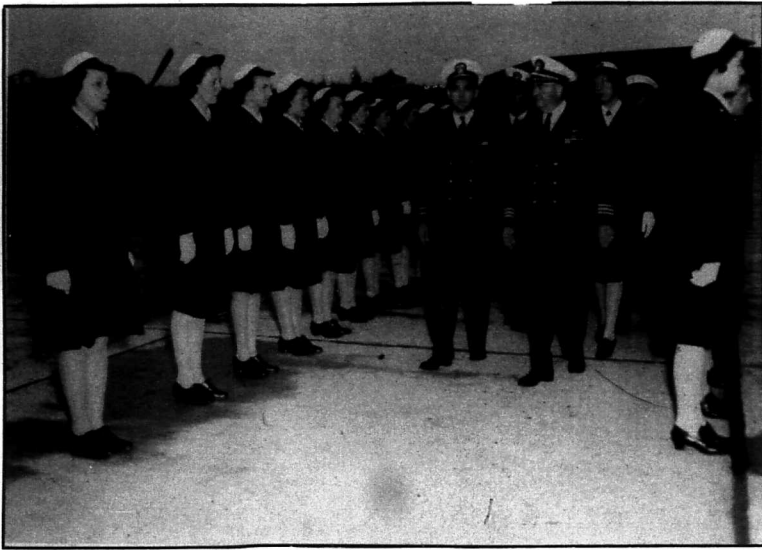
She then decided to use Her GI Bill for continuing education and went on to get a Doctorate in Psychology Degree in 1951. She became a professor at Roosevelt University in Chicago for 24 years.

Mrs. Franklin was discharged from the navy on Dec. 31, 1945.

See "Franklin..." on page 6B



RUBY FRANKLIN



RUBY FRANKLIN, the only female officer in the group, inspects a group of WAVES. Franklin was an aerologist, tracking weather for the U.S. Navy.

# With ocean between them, Hallorans remained close

By **LEIGH ANN JOHNSON**  
Herald Writer

World War II was a time that took many people to other countries and kept them apart from the familiarity of the community in which they grew up.

One Morris couple, John and Zita Halloran, experienced the war effort and came through it as husband and wife.

Although her husband has passed on, Zita recalls her memory of him since childhood. Their families knew one another while she and John were growing up.

Even though they knew one another for most of their lives, the couple endured a time of separation. This was a time that the world itself knew separation and discord. John went to Europe and Africa while Zita remained in the United States.

Zita recalls that her husband did not talk about the war "for a long, long time." It was nothing he ever really cared to discuss. But over the years John told her parts of the war which he endured.

He entered the Army on Nov. 26, 1941, and a mere 12 days later war was declared. John was immediately sent to Northern Ireland to complete his training. Following that he was shipped to North Africa to aid in the campaign for General Patton.

John's work continued on in North Africa, and then later in Italy. Zita recalled one of the few stories that he was inclined to tell over the years.

John and a group of men had settled for the night at the base of a mountain in a dry riverbed. During the night a terrible storm flooded the river and poured water down the mountainside. The men escaped with only their lives, while their belongings were washed down the river.

Later in his travels, John had to spend time in the hospital in both North Africa and Italy. He was shot during a combat mission and had

also received shrapnel wounds.

While John had to spend time in the hospital, Zita was spending her time in the hospital as well.

Zita was a nurse in training at the time of the war and she recalls many

memories of her own.

Recently, she and her surviving classmates celebrated their 50 year reunion.

"It was a very exciting time to be in nurses training. Students were

allowed to do procedures and assist in ways that would have been unthinkable except in war time.

"In fact, our class had the first student cadet nurses that served our country at an army hospital in

Galesburg, Illinois, and a naval hospital in California."

Zita reminded her class at the recent reunion that it meant to be a World War II woman.

"We were the wives of the G.I.s

that got government loans to get more education or build a five room brick home for \$5,000 to \$7,000 that was like a mansion to us."

"We were the women that Betty Frieden targeted in 1963 with her book 'Feminine Mystique' to demand equal rights and assert our selves to stand on our own two feet and be reckoned with as individuals.

But remembering more than the outcome of the women of the World War II generation, Zita reminded the class what it was like to be the developing generation.

"The extra few steps to go by the mail boxes to see if just maybe there was a letter or, better still, a V-Mail from overseas."

"Our social life was with the nurses we worked with everyday. All the boyfriends were in service and if someone had a date, they had the choice of the best clothes from everyone's closet. That was a special occasion.

In 1945 John's time in the hospital was complete. He was sent home because there was a piece of metal that doctors felt was to close his spine.

If it were to move it could paralyze him. His days of fighting were over.

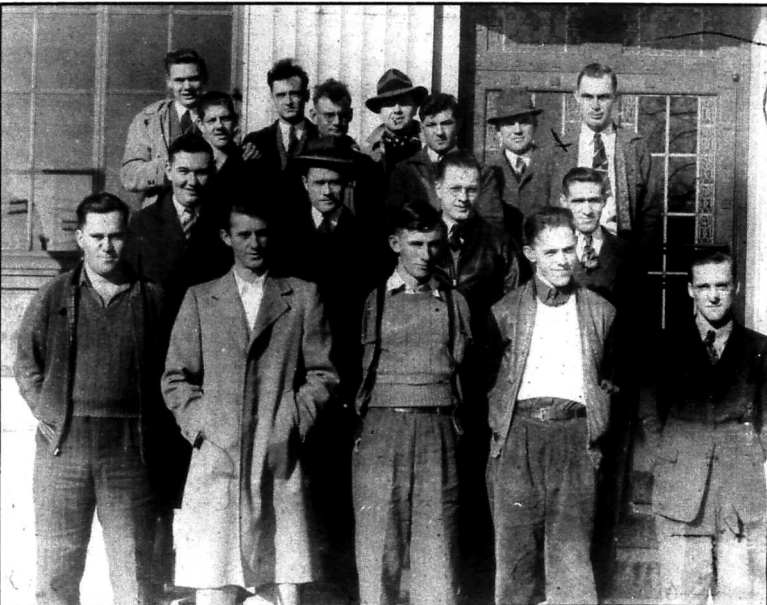
When arriving back in Morris, John and Zita, who had kept in touch over the past five years, were together once again. John proposed in 1946 and they were married.

Zita recalled that the priest was particularly happy that day because it was the first time in a great while that he had performed a full wedding.

Most of the weddings in that day were quick while men were home on furlough. The priest was proud to see that they had waited.

John and Zita were married for 46 years and had one child.

John passed away in 1991 and Zita still remains active in the Catholic church, Grundy Community Hospice, and the Grundy County Historical Society.



JOHN HALLORAN (second row, far left) poses with his induction group on the steps of the Grundy County Post Office, where the Grundy County Selective Service Board had its offices.

# Youthful war memories focus on family losses

By JO ANN HUSTIS  
Herald Writer

World War II probably came the closest for us who grew up during that time when someone in our or the neighbors' families was killed or missing in action.

There were still a few one-room schoolhouses scattered about La Salle County, and my older brother and I attended the one nearest our home.

We in the lower grades knew a lot about the conflict. Our's was mostly a vicarious learning experience derived from the Current Events mini-newspapers the upper grade kids read from aloud.

Death came on a cold drizzly mid-morning in early spring. There was a general tap on the schoolroom door, and the father of several of the students stepped to the head of the class.

"I've come to get my children and take them home for the day," he told.

Our teacher "We got a telegram that our son, Harold, is missing in action."

That immediately singled out Harold's brothers and sisters from the rest of us.

Awe struck, we watched while they put away their books and aligned themselves with their father at the front of the classroom.

He wore old blue jeans and shapeless jacket - barn coat, it is called today - and twisted his cap in his strong hands. He had mud on his shoes.

He apologized for disrupting the morning. Then he and his other children departed.

It was the first experience with death for most of us.

But the kids returned to school the next day. We plied them with questions. None of the rest of us had a brother so much older that he could fight in the war.

The man's plane disappeared during a flight over the South Pacific. No trace of it or the crew was ever located.

Eventually the government changed the missing man's status to that of dead. His family hung a gold star in their living room window.

Later, the man's mother was invited by the federal

government to christen an LST (Landing Ship, Tanks) in his honor.

The ceremony was on the north bank of the Illinois River at Seneca. The man's whole family attended. The neighbors watched from the south bank because there was no room for us at the launching site.

The LST hung horizontally on the wharf, ready for the great slide down the greased skids into the water. The mother splashed the bottle of champagne against the bow and the crowd applauded.

The ropes holding the ship in place were cut by men swinging axes. The ship slid down the wharf and struck the river with a mighty splash, then dipped and bowed in the water before leveling off.

The wave the LST created raced across the river to our shore. "Back, back," my father shouted.

The wave crashed against the bank, curled upward, and dashed water hither and yon before subsiding. The launching was done.

The government boxed the remains of the champagne bottle in a presentation case and gave it to the family. They put it on a sideboard in the living room.

Many years later, my brother-in-law married a German woman. She, too, grew up during World War II and sometimes she'd mention it.

Her father was an SS Storm Trooper, one of Hitler's elite forces. He drowned after parachuting into Holland when the Dutch opened up the dikes and flooded the countryside. That was September 1944.

She and her mother and baby brother left eastern Germany ahead of the Russians to reach Berlin before the end of the European Campaign in May 1945.

Public transportation did not exist by then. So, her mother placed her brother in a baby carriage, piled the family silverware in around him, and they and thousands of other refugees began the long walk to Berlin in late winter.

The most vivid part of the journey to her was the hunger they experienced. She and her mother pried up and ate frozen potatoes from the ground as they made their way over the fields.

"I've come to get my children and take them home for the day. We got a telegram that our son, Harold, is missing in action."



# War years full of working, waiting for Mazon woman

By MICHAEL FARRELL  
Herald Writer

For those who were in high school in 1941-42, the involvement of the United States in World War II insured they would grow up fast.

Phyllis (Johnson) Sereno of Mazon found herself working for Chicago Bridge and Iron at the Seneca Shipyards in 1943, after graduating from high school.

Over the next couple years she would be married, travel with her husband to two bases in the southern United States and then wait for him to return from Europe. In addition, she would give birth to their only child.

Sereno said she was not interested in going to college and expected to get married, so she went to work at the Seneca Shipyards.

Although she worked as a secretary, Sereno said she was in crude field offices. "I wore coveralls and worked in the field where it was hot in the summer and cold in the winter."

Her future husband, Frank Sereno, also worked for Chicago Bridge and Iron at the shipyards while waiting to enter the military.

Her father, Kelly Johnson, had operated a garage in Mazon and sold cars through a dealership in Coal City. After the war started, he also went to work in the shipyards.

Sereno enlisted in the Army Air Force in October 1943. She spent time at Jefferson Barracks, Mo., Naples, Fla., and Lowry Field in Colorado. He returned home and they were married at the Park Street Congregational Church on July 15, 1944.

At 19, Mrs. Sereno said she went with her husband, as he was stationed in Charlotte, N.C., and Savannah, Ga., before going to Europe as part of the 9th Air Force.

"The Southern states were really delightful," Mrs. Sereno said. In Charlotte, she said, they lived in a log cabin behind a beautiful old house.

When her husband was transferred to Savannah, Mrs. Sereno said she had to take all their belongings and ride the bus to Georgia.

"When I got to Savannah I bought a newspaper and started looking for a place to live."

Mrs. Sereno said by accident she met a woman who had divided her house into apartments for people in the military. "She happened to have a vacancy and we lived in the sun porch. We thought it was nice but today it would probably be nothing."

Mrs. Sereno noted they didn't have any money and they didn't have a car. "Even when we came home we had to borrow our Dad's car."

When her husband was sent to Europe, Mrs. Sereno, expecting their first child, returned to live with her parents in Mazon.

Mrs. Sereno said he one thing younger people today probably can't understand is how poor the communication was and how little was actually known about the war.

No one just called on the telephone, she said. "You would go for weeks without getting a letter, then you would get several all at once."

Mrs. Sereno said there were news about the Ninth Air Force. Each week she would listen to Gabriel Heator on WGN and he would sometimes have news about the Eighth Air Force.

When the war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945, Frank Sereno was given a furlough, prior to being sent

to Japan.

Mrs. Sereno said that en route home, he ended up spending six weeks in Reykjavik, Iceland. During this period, she said, their daughter Carol (Now Mrs. Richard Walker) was born on July 24.

The Red Cross, Mrs. Sereno said, did an outstanding job of locating Sereno in Iceland and telling him about the birth of his daughter.

At the time people said that a baby announcement meant there was a new ration book in the family.

On VJ Day (Sept. 2) I dressed our new baby daughter in her finest

for her first outing. It was a special service at our church to commemorate the end of the war.

Although the war in the Pacific ended, Sereno was required to return to service, but based on a point system, he was discharged in October.

Mrs. Sereno said she stayed home until her daughter was three. The family lived in Morris for a couple years, while Frank worked at the Morris Paper Mill.

He then became a carpenter's apprentice for Baker's and they moved to Mazon.

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"Now that ya mention it, Joe, it does sound like 'I'd patter of rain on a tin roof.'"

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# Teen writes story of shipyard

A historical article by a 14-year-old Marseilles girl on the Prairie Shipyard in Seneca appeared earlier this year in Illinois History, a publication of the Illinois Historic Agencies.

Jennifer O'Brien, whose grandparents, Elizabeth and James O'Brien, resided in Seneca during World War II, wrote on the shipyard's production of Landing Ships, Tanks (LSTs) to aid in the war effort.

"Built in 1942 and 1943, the shipyard played an important role in Illinois' military history."

"After Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese on Dec. 7, 1941, more American naval vessels were needed to replace those destroyed and to serve America during World War II."

"A 30-inch layer of topsoil was removed from a subbase of sandstone to start building the shipyard."

"The land was already bought from Chicago Bridge and Iron Company, it was centrally located near communities that could provide labor, and was on the Illinois River."

"A shipyard could not be built by the Navy on the company alone. Federal, state and local organizations combined efforts to complete the yard."

"Cutting 30 miles of trench in

sandstone was necessary to accommodate underground sewer and water mains, air lines, electric power and conduits for drainage ditches."

"Water wells were drilled and storage tanks erected."

"Eight storage tanks were constructed on one side of the center line, and seven on the other, staggered so that 15 ships could be pulled to the center."

"Construction consisted of the erection, fitting and welding of the hull, installation of machinery as the hull progressed, and mechanical, piping, sheet metal, electrical, pipe insulation, painting, outfitting and other tasks."

"The hull department erected, fitted and welded 23,000 separate pieces of metal per ship."

"The hull required 1,340 tons of steel."

"There were four construction stages - unload, erecting, welding and testing."

"The LSTs were designed with a shallow draft and large carrying capacity."

"They were fitted with doors and a ramp to unload cargo on a flat surface and carried sufficient armament for protection."

"The Navy contracted for the steering gear, stern, anchor, holding gear, snaking winch, main genera-

tor, pumps, tanks, heaters, fire fighting equipment, valves and pipes to produce the LSTs."

"Peak employment of 11,000 was reached in 1944, and 27,000 people were used to maintain a normal working force over the three years the shipyard operated."

"Over 20,000 Navy officers and crew manned the ships."

"More than \$82 million in wages was paid to Seneca shipbuilders. The shipyard cafeteria served six million meals."

"There were 157 LST hulls built in Seneca."

"The first, LST 197, was built on Dec. 13, 1942."

"All were delivered to the Navy on schedule."

"Three Caterpillar tractors moved the ships onto the launching ways, and 39 gallons of champagne were used for the christenings."

"On June 18, 1945, LST 1152 was the last LST launched from Seneca."

"On May 22, 1943, the Army and Navy E. Award was presented to Seneca in appreciation for high production standards."

"To this day, there still are people in Seneca and Marseilles who remember the Seneca Shipyard days and the jobs they did in the building of the LSTs."

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25 Years

# Farm girl remembers doing her part

By JEAN ANN ROBINSON  
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I remember being very glad knowing that, because my daddy was a farmer, he wouldn't have to leave us and go off to war any maybe get killed.

In the war effort, it was obviously essential that enough people be left on the "home front" to till the land and harvest the food and fiber needed to sustain material needs while feeding their own families and others, as well.

I remember walking the railroad tracks by "Pa and Mom's" house (my grandparents' Wills) with my aunt Ramona helping me look for milkweed so I could take it to school like we were asked to.

On a warm, sunny, fall day, we picked the white "fluff" hanging from "poppy" milkweed pods and others that were dry but had not yet opened. These were gathered into old cloth feedbags.

Our teacher had told us that the milkweed would be used to make life jackets for fliers to keep them

afloat if they were shot down over the ocean. The milkweed fiber replaced kapok, the usual filling, which grew in the enemy-occupied territory.

Every able bodied person, including school children, mobilized to do what he or she could to help meet the needs of the war effort. Schools sponsored scrap drives and other collections. Children collected pennies for the Red Cross.

I remember helping save grease in a big can in our kitchen which I think was collected at the locker plant on West Main St. to be used to make soap to help "our boys" stay clean. Many butcher shops saved as grease deposit.

A locker plant was where you could freeze and store home-prepared fruits, vegetables and meat in locked drawers you rented, before home freezers were common.

"Stopping at the locker plant" was part of our regular shopping routine.

I found out much later, when I learned how to make homemade soap, that the glycerin naturally formed from combining lye and the grease people collected was used to

and others, like tomatoes, in tin cans. Daddy boiled the sealed cans in a big wash boiler over a wood fire out the yard.

The tin cans could be reused by cutting off the tops and turning the cans through the re-ringing setting on the can sealer. New lids could then be attached.

I remember my parent's and others talking about Jack Berner and how sad it was that he was killed. I know there were others killed, too, but his name I remember.

His family owned the Berner Bakery. Bread and rolls from there were delicious treats for us, usually reserved for special occasions or outings when people routinely packed their own public lunches. No "fast food" back then.

I remember "reading" Life's

weekly picture magazine about the war, and later about the awful places where people were tortured and killed and also hearing Hans V. Kaltenborn and Gabriell Heater on the radio describing these things. Our family listened to the news.

The magazine came every week in the mail. I think it said 10 cents on the cover. The movie newsreels and picture magazines were the best visuals people on the home front had. Newspapers carried very few pictures, at that time.

I remember wishing I was old enough to join the WACs. There was a movie I saw called "Keep Your Powder Dry", about being a WAC. I know I saw it more than once.

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## New marriage, new baby, but duty called

Edith Jorstad had to support self, baby while husband was away two years

By LEIGH ANN JOHNSON  
Herald Writer

The World War II generation faced many realities and hardships — husbands leaving, children being born while fathers were overseas, and women being left with the duties to bare of both women and men.

Wes and Edith Jorstad are products from the war years. Their story is like many others. However the unique fact is that they are not a storybook or World War II documentary, they are a couple that has made their home in Morris all of their lives.

The couple was married in February 1941. Three years later, on Jan. 19, 1944, Wes was drafted and sent to boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Base, in North Chicago.

Edith was expecting their first child at the time. On July 19 the baby was born and Wes was allowed to come home for the evening and see the baby and his wife.

As his military duties were primary, Wes was allowed to come home for the baby's christening and that was the last time he saw the baby for two years.

Wes was sent to California, then on to Hawaii until he was shipped to the island of Saipan and was stationed in the Pacific for the duration of his duties.

As a Navy man, his duties were air and sea rescue and ship repair. He recalls the work as very hot, very hard and often nerve wracking.

All that the men worried about was going home, Wes said. Edith, who had moved back in with her parents during Wes's absence, remembered that back home it was very nerve wracking as well.

The lines of communication were limited. Edith received letters from Wes, and was able to send letters and pictures of the baby. But for the duration of their two year separation



WES AND EDITH JORSTAD

the couple did not see or speak to one another directly.

With the communication gap it made war time extremely difficult for the women at home who were forced into factory work, managing family farms and businesses, and raising children alone.

Edith had the opportunity to stay with her mom and dad and for the first two years, raising their child in an extended family style with the baby's grandparents always present.

Although money was scarce, the Navy allotted a paycheck to Wes in the Pacific and another to Edith.

The check is what bought the groceries and helped to pay the bills.

But the part that was most disturbing was never knowing from one day to the next whether or not the men were dead or alive.

Edith remembered one of her saddest moments being when Wes had left Chicago after graduating from basic training, and was sent to California.

His clothes were mailed to Edith after he had been issued his uniform.

"Oh I thought, this is a sad, sad day," said Edith. The idea of getting

your husband's clothes in the mail and not a word from him was more than unsettling.

Two years after that "sad, sad day," Wes was discharged and sent home.

After readjusting and acquainting the family all over again the couple moved to a house on Helmar Road while Wes worked as a hired farm hand.

In 1948 they started their own farm.

The couple has retired from farming and the memories of World War II are very distant now.

After 54 years of marriage, the couple of the World War II generation has three children, eight grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.

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-- Winston Churchill

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## Franklin...

From page 4B/

She applied for a USWB job as a meteorologist. There was such a long delay in Bureau action, she returned to graduate school at the University of Illinois.

When she was finally contacted, she was making good progress on her doctoral studies and decided to go to Washington as a meteorologist.

Franklin was one of six women meteorologists from World War II to participate in the compilation of a document entitled W.A.V.E.S. Forecasters in World War II.

J. M. Lewis of the National Severe Storms Laboratory in Norman, Okla. put the manuscript together and submitted it to the "Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society." Its tentative publication date is October, 1995. This document will be placed in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

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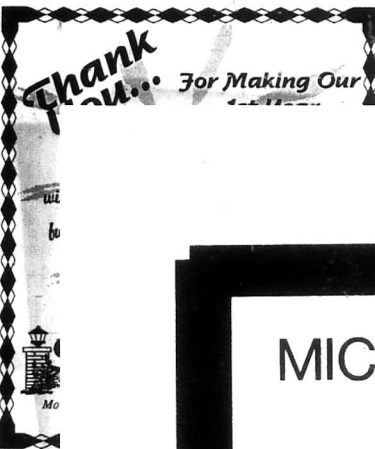
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In 1948 they started their own farm.

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## AIRSHOW

MORRIS MUNICIPAL AIRPORT  
1995 MORRIS SKYFEST  
AIRSHOW  
Saturday, Sept. 2nd  
Sunday, Sept. 3rd



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## Franklin...

From page 4B

She applied for a USWB job as a meteorologist. There was such a long delay in Bureau action, she returned to graduate school at the University of Illinois.

When she was finally contacted she was making good progress on her doctoral studies and decided against a job as a meteorologist.

Miss Franklin was one of six women meteorologist from World War II to participate in the compilation of a document entitled W.A.V.E.S. Forecasters in World War II.

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# Farm girl remembers doing her part

BY JEAN ANN ROBINSON

These remembrances from the World War II years are gleaned from a "home front" of feelings, images and incidents in a little farm girl's life.

I remember being very glad knowing that, because my daddy was a farmer, he wouldn't have to leave us and go off to war an maybe get killed.

In the war effort, it was obviously essential that enough people be left on the "home front" to till the land and harvest the food and fiber needed to sustain material needs while feeding their own families and others, as well.

I remember walking the railroad tracks by "Pa and Mom's" house (my grandparents Willis) with my aunt Ramona helping me look for milkweed so I could take it to school like we were asked to.

On a warm, sunny fall day, we picked the white "fluff" hanging from "popped" milkweed pods and others that were dry but had not yet opened. These were gathered into old cloth feedbags.

Our teacher had told us that the milkweed would be used to make life jackets for fliers to keep them

afloat if they were shot down over the ocean. The milkweed fiber replaced kapok, the usual filling, which grew in the enemy-occupied territory.

Every able bodied person, including school children, mobilized to do what he or she could to help meet the needs of the war effort. Schools sponsored scrap drives and other collections. Children collected pennies for the Red Cross.

I remember helping save grease in a big can in our kitchen which I think was collected at the locker plant on West Main St. to be used to make soap to help "our boys" stay clean. Many butcher shops served as grease depots.

A locker plant was where you could freeze and store home-prepared fruits, vegetables and meat in locked drawers you rented, before home freezers were common,

"Stopping at the locker plant" was part of our regular shopping routine.

I found out much later, when I learned how to make homemade soap, that the glycerin naturally formed from combining lye and the grease people collected was used to

and others, like tomatoes, in tin cans. Daddy boiled the sealed cans in a big wash boiler over a wood fire out in the yard.

The tin cans could be reused by cutting off the tops and turning the cans through the reflagging setting on the can sealer.

New lids could then be attached. I remember my parents and others talking about Jack Berner and how sad it was that he was killed. I know there were others killed, too, but his name I remember.

His family owned the Berner Bakery. Bread and rolls from there were delicious treats for us, usually reserved for special occasions or outings when people routinely packed their own public lunches. No "fast food" then.

I remember "reading" Life's

weekly picture magazine about the war, and later about the awful places where people were tortured, and killed and also hearing Hans V. Kaltenborn and Gabriell Heater on the radio describing these things. Our family listened to the news.

The magazine came every week in the mail. I think it said 10 cents on the cover. The movie newsreels and picture magazines were the best visuals people on the home front had. Newspapers carried very few pictures, at that time.

I remember wishing I was old enough to join the WACs. There was a movie I saw called "Keep Your Powder Dry," about being a WAC. I know I saw it more than once.

We kids played "WAR," with sticks as guns and rubber balls for grenades, complete with vocal sound effects.

I remember learning to ride

"new" blue bicycle, which my parents bought from my aunt Phebe because you couldn't buy new bicycles during the war.

Later, I remember pedaling it over to our neighbors, the Sperbers, to tell Mrs. Sperber that we had heard that President Roosevelt had died. They did not have a telephone, but probably did have a radio. It seemed important to me, at the time, that they should know right away.

When I got home, Mother was angry with me because I didn't tell her I was going and she couldn't find me. This was memorable because she didn't get angry very often.

These thoughts come from a very long time ago, from a child's perspective of what was happening and how it affected my life during the WWII years. These few memories of that formative time, as I lived it, have stayed with me.

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make explosives.

I remember mother being able to get extra sugar ration coupons because she canned and froze fruits and vegetables that we grew or bought (especially I remember peaches). They were canned in jars

## New marriage, new baby, but duty called

Edith Jorstad had to support self, baby while husband was away two years

By LEIGH ANN JOHNSON  
Herald Writer

The World War II generation faced many realities and hardships — husbands leaving, children being born while fathers were overseas, and women being left with the duties to bare of both women and men.

Wes and Edith Jorstad are products from the war years. Their story is like many others. However the unique fact is that they are not a storybook or World War II documentary, they are a couple that has made their home in Morris all of their lives.

The couple was married in February 1941. Three years later, on Jan. 19, 1944, Wes was drafted and sent to boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Base, in North Chicago.

Edith was expecting their first child at the time. On July 19 the baby was born and Wes was allowed to come home for the evening and see the baby and his wife.

As his military duties were primary, Wes was allowed to come home for the baby's christening and that was the last time he saw the baby for two years.

Wes was sent to California, then on to Hawaii until he was shipped to the island of Saipan and was stationed in the Pacific for the duration of his duties.

As a Navy man, his duties were air and sea rescue and ship repair. He recalls the work as very hot, very hard and often nerve wracking. All that the men worried about was going home. Wes was said.

Edith, who had moved back in with her parents during Wes's absence, remembered that back home it was very nerve wracking as well.

The lines of communication were limited. Edith received letters from Wes, and was able to send letters and pictures of the baby. But for the duration of their two year separation



WES AND EDITH JORSTAD

the couple did not see or speak to one another directly.

With the communication gap it made war time extremely difficult for the women at home who were forced into factory work, managing family farms and businesses, and raising children alone.

Edith had the opportunity to stay with her mom and dad and for the first two years, raising their child in an extended family style with the baby's grandparents always present.

Although money was scarce, the Navy allotted a paycheck to Wes in the Pacific and another to Edith.

The check is what bought the groceries and helped to pay the bills.

But the part that was most disturbing was never knowing from one day to the next whether or not the men were dead or alive.

Edith remembered one of her saddest moments being when Wes had left Chicago after graduating from basic training, and was sent to California.

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'Lest We Forget . . .

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-- Winston Churchill

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