



Our Times

Volume 4 Issue 4

THE PEOPLE, HISTORY, AND CULTURE OF LOGAN COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Winter 1999

They Also Serve . . .

World War II—the Home Front in Logan County

Dick Hurley was a Second Lieutenant in World War II—as a child in the “Paper Army” at Central School in Lincoln. He earned his rank by carrying bundles to school, where teachers like Ray Hitchcock stacked them in the hallway.

We collected “tons and tons of paper,” says Dick, who was “old enough to have a patriotic fever.”

When it wasn't paper, it was aluminum pans piling up in the school hallway. But then, everyone was saving scrap: setting out paper and tin cans at the curbside every month for city trucks to pick up, taking old silk and nylon stockings to the Logan County Farm Bureau, and dropping off hot water bottles and tire casings at the service stations.

One casualty of the war was the World War I German cannon that had been awarded to Lincoln for “going over the top” in that war's bond campaign and had stood near the bandstand in Latham Park for twenty years. It brought \$18 in a 1942 scrap drive.

Because waste fats were critical to the war effort, Girl Scouts Norjie Walker

[Nauts] and Jean Hodgson [Bittner] pulled Norjie's little red wagon door-to-door, collecting cans of grease from housewives.

Children were involved in fund-raising, too. Norjie bought her twenty-five cent defense stamps at Central School, while a high school student showed a ten-cent defense stamp as his admission ticket to a Victory dance. Filled stamp books could be used to purchase defense bonds.

The people of Logan County worked hard to fill their quotas in the eight war bond drives. Local efforts included auctions, booths at Woolworth's, promotions at the Lincoln Theatre, door-to-door canvassing, and constant hectoring by the *Courier*.

To show people where their money went, in May of 1945, the armed services presented the program, “Here's Your Infantry” at the Lincoln State School and Colony athletic field. Using rifles, machine guns, and flame-throwers, infantrymen staged the taking of a Japanese pillbox.

Between July of 1941 and May 1st of 1945, Logan County people purchased \$17 million worth of war bonds. By the end of the year, they had bought \$3 million more.



World War II draftees at Lincoln Courthouse before leaving for induction into the armed forces. History of Logan County Illinois 1982.

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Prairie Years Press
121 N. Kickapoo Street
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PUBLISHER/EDITOR

Sam Redding

RESEARCHER/WRITER

Nancy Lawrence Gehlbach

ADVERTISING/CIRCULATION

Darla Hamilton

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Publisher's Notes

My children are fortunate; they have me to blame for their faults. I was deprived as a child: born to parents of the Greatest Generation, the buck stops squarely with me. Lest you think I am being facetious, let me explain.

My dad came of age during the Great Depression and went to college, no small feat given that neither of his parents continued school beyond eighth grade. In his senior year, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Dad enlisted in the Navy the next day. He was allowed to finish his school year, and the college cooperatively permitted graduating enlistees to depart a month ahead of schedule. Completing officers' training at Great Lakes, Dad brought his fiancée to Evanston, where they married. As a gunnery officer aboard an LST, my dad made landings in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. He crossed the English channel several times during the D-Day invasion, unloading soldiers and tanks on the beaches of Normandy. He has never talked much about the grimness of war. Mostly he has related funny stories: the time the ship's hull cracked in a storm, the Algerian soldiers who brought their wives and goats with them to war.

A year ago, I saw *Saving Private Ryan* with my mom and dad. The movie fairly portrayed the events surrounding D-Day, Dad said, including scenes of LSTs beached at Omaha. As the LSTs approached the beachhead, Dad remembered, the bodies of American boys floated back from the battle, bobbing lifeless in the foaming green sea. These images, one realizes, were locked away in unexpressed memories, as veterans turned, uncomplainingly, to the life-affirming enterprise of raising families and building communities.

As this issue of *Our Times* makes clear, the Greatest Generation consisted not only of the warriors, but also of those who supported the great cause at home. My mom was one of those heroes of the homeland. She saw two brothers, her new husband, and her two brothers-in-law put on the uniform, and she bore the news of friends and classmates who died half a world away. Mom went to work, alongside her mother and sister, in an ammunition plant.

The Greatest Generation achieved its greatness not only by heroically defending American freedom, but also by building a post-war nation emblematic of freedom's fruits. And they built it one brick at a time. My dad has been a member of VFW, Odd Fellows, Lions, and Masons. He served as village board member and mayor for four decades. He has been an elder in his church, Sunday School teacher, Boy Scout leader, bookkeeper for the library, and an attentive father, grandfather and great-grandfather. All this while, my mom was den mother, room mother, school committee member, faithful church worker, cook at Crippled Children's Camp, and cheerleader for four boys, ten grandchildren, and a growing crop of great-grandchildren. Let me not forget that this "salt of the earth" couple diligently supported the Multiple Sclerosis Society as they provided daily care for their son who died slowly of the disease over a thirty-year period.

The Greatest Generation, fully aware of how bad things can be, resolved that we not make them worse. Unwilling to turn their backs on countrymen of every stripe who stood beside them in the great cause, they were the pivotal generation in lancing the festering sore of bigotry that rendered our nation not as great as it otherwise could be. By example, my parents taught me that neither color nor financial circumstance nor physical attribute can exalt or dim the glory due each of us as creatures of God. That is a lesson I have learned imperfectly, but one that gives me glimpses of truths transcendent. **SR**

(Continued from page 1)

The Logan County National War and Community Fund raised money both for local charities and The National War Fund, which supported the USO and overseas relief projects.

One of Norjie Naut's vivid wartime memories is of turning out the lights when the blackout sirens blew and sitting in the dark while air raid wardens went up and down the street, making sure all the lights were out.

"Being a little kid, it was frightening," she recalls. "We always heard someone might bomb us, and we had to be prepared."

The first blackout in Lincoln was conducted by The Citizens' Defense Corps, under Commander C. E. Steinfert, on October 7, 1942. During an air raid drill in June of 1943, mock casualties were taken to the First Methodist Church gymnasium, where Dr. L. R. Branom had set up an emergency first aid station.

In 1945, streetlights were turned down and store windows went dark under a "brownout," although an inspector of the War Production Board was overruled after he objected to the lighting of the courthouse clock.

"It was a hard time," sighs Ruth Georgi Bierman, who helped issue ration stamps in the courthouse basement. The Monday after Pearl Harbor, Lincoln High School Principal William C. Handlin had called the students together and encouraged the boys to finish their education. Still, the 1942 senior prom was "a lot of girls," says Ruth, who sent V-mails off to the boys in her class.

The Logan County Council of the American Legion began the war with "A Buck for a Buck" drive, which sent every Logan County serviceman two new one-dollar bills for Christmas in 1941. It ended the war with "Gifts for Yanks Who Gave," for hospitalized servicemen and women.

Legion members sent cigarettes overseas from money collected in milk bottles set out in local stores, opened a

center for servicemen at 116 North Chicago Street, and gave blood at the county's first blood bank, held at Deaconess Hospital in 1942.

When Ruth Bierman heard the fellows from Lincoln were fighting their way out of Africa and into the boot of Italy, she says, "it just gave you the chills to think of what those guys were going to go through."

Her sister Joan Graue remembers that homes had a blue star in the window for each family member who was in the service. If that family member was killed, a gold star took its place.

"I was just ten years old in 1944," she says, "and it seemed so sad to me to go past these homes and see the gold star in the window. . . . We had made so many little sacrifices, and this was someone who had made a huge sacrifice."

Bernard Behrends can vouch for that. He and Martin Dougherty, students at Lincoln College on the GI bill in 1946, had the sad task of meeting the trains that brought the dead home for burial after the war. They accompanied the olive green boxes from the baggage cars to the undertakers'. At the funerals, often only family members were present.

The first Logan County casualty reported was E. Eugene Hubner of Atlanta, a sailor aboard a warship in Pearl Harbor. As of December 31, 1945, Logan County had 93 on its Gold Star honor roll. About four thousand Logan County men and women served in the war.

"It was a wonderful day when it was over," says Ruth Bierman. VE Day in May of 1945 was celebrated quietly in Lincoln, with church services and a program at the high school: the war in the Pacific was yet to be won. VJ Day in August was another matter—horns blew, bonfires were started on the courthouse square, an impromptu band sprang up, and Dave Hanger led the crowd in stirring songs from both world wars. ■

One Spoonful of Sugar—and Stir Like Hell

Everyone has had a favorite car. For one local woman, it was her family's "beautiful blue Pontiac," a 1940 model that had replaced an old car. "We were so proud of that car," she says. "We just felt like royalty—my brother and I."

Until it was hit by the interurban—denting the left front door badly enough that it couldn't be opened.

It was wartime, and the family couldn't get parts. So they spent the duration climbing in and out through the right front door. A new car was out of the question: manufacturers stopped producing automobiles on January 31, 1942, and built no more until after the war.

Compared to Europe, Americans lived in a land of plenty. Still, the *Lincoln Evening Courier* reminded its readers on May 18th, 1942, "You might as well get reconciled to the idea that from here on in every day is going to be Lent as far as your giving up something is concerned."

Silk and nylon stockings, for one. Evelyn Oltmanns [Belcher] and her friends learned to use leg makeup. As a teenager working at Barr's shoe store, Evelyn encouraged customers to use it, too.

Sugar, for another. Sugar was rationed. Mary Lou Mills [Fink] and her brother often couldn't make the fudge they loved because they didn't have sugar or butter.

Hoarding was sternly discouraged. When the sugar ration books were passed out in Logan County schools in May of 1942, a housewife who had more than two pounds per person in the house had to declare it—and wince as stamps were torn from her book to cover the excess.

At Spurgeon's, where Elizabeth Georgi [Geeraerts] worked, people

stood in line for the candy that occasionally came in from South America—even though it wasn't real good.

Logan County folks got used to checking the ration calendar in the *Lincoln Evening Courier*. Meat, processed foods, shoes, gasoline, coffee, fuel oil, tires—all were rationed at one time or another.

When the state tire rationing officer banned the use of school buses to transport athletic teams, Railsplitter fans piled football players into their private cars or took them to the train. After coaches got "B" gas ration cards, they drove basketball players to out-of-town games.

Gas rationing kept most people close to home, tending gardens on streets like Park Place and preserving their output at canning centers in towns like Latham and New Holland. Farm wives like Marian Coates Haseley made their trips into town count by mixing and matching the cotton feed sacks at Lucas and Farmer to find the prettiest prints for sewing—probably not missing the pre-war burlap bags in the least.

As for walking, with three new pairs of shoes allowed per year, mothers wore non-rationed sandals and used their coupons for the children.

People traded to get what they needed. Farmers traded gas coupons; Alexander's grocery store traded coupons with the Hotel Lincoln for extra bacon the hotel was entitled to and didn't use. ■

NOTICE

Due to the Food situation we will have one meatless day each week — on Friday — beginning Friday, April 16th.

Molloy's Restaurant

Lincoln Evening Courier, April 15, 1943.

Life as a Prisoner of War . . .

Charlie Anderson says his World War II days were “a thrilling experience that you wouldn’t give another nickel for.”

Of course, back in February of 1941, when his dad drove him and his friend Bill Beck over to Chanute Field to enlist in the Air Force, Charlie surely wasn’t thinking about POW camps, fleabites, or marching to exhaustion. That came later.

First came aircraft mechanics school at Chanute Field and an assignment repairing airplane engines at Wichita Falls, Texas.

After attending aerial gunnery school at Tyndall Field, Florida (where the men practiced on a target pulled by another airplane), Charlie, who was by now a staff sergeant, was transferred to Colorado, where he spent three months training with the crew he was to fly with.

“You got to know those nine men like brothers almost, because you flew together and lived together and depended on one another,” says Charlie.

The crew’s first job, late in 1943, was to deliver the Patsy Ann, a brand-new airplane, overseas. By way of Africa, they flew to central Italy, where they were bivouacked in tents in an olive orchard and were “immediately thrust into combat”—flying missions to oil fields in Romania and to southern France during the invasion.

It was during Charlie’s eighth mission, in August of 1944, that the crew’s B-24 Liberator bomber was attacked by Hermann Goering’s yellow-nosed fighter planes.

The tail gunner was hit first and “just disappeared.” The pilot, copilot, navigator, bombardier, and nose gunner were all killed. Charlie was in charge of the men in the back of the plane. He got the ball gunner out and strapped the chute on the side gunner and threw him out, not knowing whether he was dead or alive. (He survived.) The plane caught on fire; Charlie, in his sheepskin leather pants and jacket, flak boots, and heavy gloves, was on fire, too, when he bailed out.

As Charlie dove out headfirst, his chute opened and flipped him, taking his shoes off! (It would be some time before he had shoes again.)

Losing his shoes hadn’t been planned, but getting rid of his side-arm on the way down had—all air-men were ordered not to try to fight their way out, but only to give their name, rank, and serial number if captured.

Landing in the snow-covered Alps, trying to get his parachute under control and wondering “what your next move was going to be,” Charlie looked up to see an older gentleman carrying a shotgun. “I don’t know whether it worked or not, but he convinced me,” Charlie remembers.

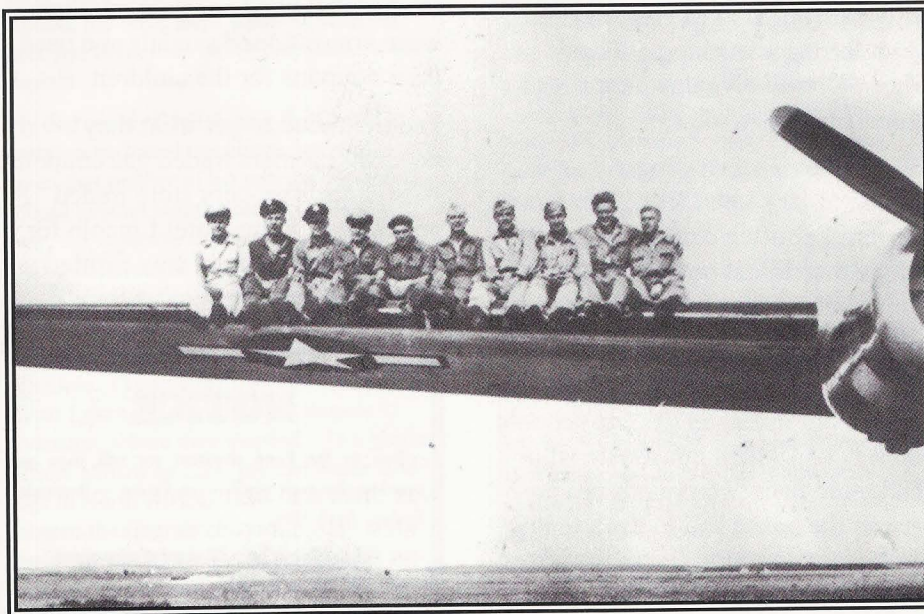
When he tried to get up, he realized he had been wounded in three different places, the worst being in his leg.

Charlie doesn’t remember how he got to the chateau of the older gentleman, who had been in the mountains caring for his herd of cattle. He does, however, remember the torturous six-mile ride from the chateau to the hospital in a two-wheeled cart pulled by a donkey over rocky terrain.

Charlie and two other wounded Americans spent about 33 days in the Mürzzuschlag hospital in Styria, Austria. A doctor who spoke a bit of broken English put salve on Charlie’s burnt hands and face and removed the shrapnel from his leg.

“I think if I was ever scared, I was scared when I went into that operating room,” says Charlie, “because there wasn’t a soul there who spoke English.”

The only other person the prisoners saw was an 18-year-old nun who “developed a very kind and loving relationship with us,” even sneaking them food at night.



B-24 bomber crew. Charlie is second from right. Courtesy Charlie Anderson.

Charlie Anderson Remembers

Charlie's mother and father were notified by telegram that he was missing in action. The telegraph operator and the Methodist minister came to their home to give them the news.

Prisoners were allowed to send one letter and one postcard a month. An Australian prisoner in the same hospital used his post card to notify Charlie's fiancée, Mary Jane Gayle, that he was alive.

Still on crutches and in his stocking feet, Charlie was moved by the German soldiers to Stalag Luft No. 4, a prison camp in northeastern Poland. In the basement of the Berlin train station on the way, a German soldier brought them their evening meal: a bratwurst sandwich and a bottle of beer. Charlie says he will never forget how good that beer tasted.

The prison camp was just being built when Charlie arrived in October, so the 24 men assigned to each room slept in their clothes on straw, with one blanket per man. By mid-December, they were sleeping on straw mattresses on bunk beds. The little cone stove that burned rationed charcoal briquettes doubled as a cookstove and heater, but "you were never warm," he remembers.

Under the Geneva Convention, non-commissioned officers like Charlie weren't required to work. Good thing, because there was nothing much to eat: a cup of broth twice a day, black sawdust bread, and no butter. Rice and water, and once in a great while, a piece of meat. Of course, "the Germans had very little food for themselves," Charlie says.

"If you got sick, you were just in deep trouble, that's all, because there wasn't any medicine," says Charlie. American flight surgeons tried to care for the men, but the Germans didn't have medicine to give them.

The men spent their days walking, playing cards, and having football and softball tournaments. As room chief, Charlie brought back the BBC news from the airplane radio operators, who had put together makeshift radios on the sly.

The Red Cross had sent a hand-cranked Victrola and the record "Oklahoma." That Victrola was passed from room to room in the prison camp; one airman stayed up and played it all night long.

Each prisoner was entitled to a Red Cross parcel containing stable goods such as cookies, cigarettes, Hershey chocolate bars, canned soup, crackers, Spam, and thick bars of cheese. Charlie remembers that the parcels were few and far between and often had to be split among several people.

The one Christmas Charlie spent in prison camp, the prisoners baked a cake. They mixed the prunes and raisins they had received from the Red Cross with portions of their black bread and baked the mixture.

On February 8, 1945, the camp was broken up. About half the airmen were incapable of marching and were sent to another camp. About 900 men, including Charlie, were

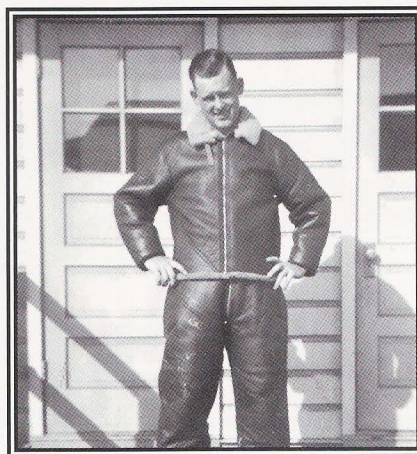
put on the road, where they marched first one direction, and then another, depending on which way the Allies were advancing.

Sleeping in barns, eating nothing but boiled potatoes (except for once when a horse that had been killed in a raid was butchered), Charlie went from 200 to about 125 pounds. And the fleas! The minute an airman lay down in the straw and began to get warm, the insects would bite "something fierce." Men were covered with big brown spots the size of half dollars—infected fleabites.

All of these hardships took their toll, of course, and at liberation, less than two or three hundred were left of the nine hundred men who had started the march.

About a week before the airmen were liberated, the Germans changed their whole crew to a new one, probably to avoid retribution against the captors. One of the Germans, a big man and probably a corporal, had been cruel. If a malnourished prisoner fell down during the march and another prisoner didn't hold him up, the German would kick or beat him. Had he not been replaced, he probably would have been killed after liberation.

Charlie and his fellow POWs were liberated by an English tank division on May 2nd, 1945. The English fed them white bread that "tasted like angel food" and then immediately took the men through their chow line. Having become accustomed to a steady diet of potatoes, Charlie became deathly ill and ended up in Lucky Strike Hospital with dysentery. He was sick the four weeks he was there and on the ship back to the States. He came home on a train with "prisoners of war" written on the side of the car—every train they met let it go first. ■



*Charlie Anderson in his flight suit.
Courtesy Charlie Anderson.*

The Red Cross

Just in time for the \$23,000 Logan County Red Cross War Fund drive, a letter from Staff Sergeant Charles Anderson, prisoner of war in Germany, to his parents in New Holland has arrived. Published in the Lincoln Evening Courier on February 28th, 1945, the letter reads, in part:

"The Red Cross is doing millions of dollars of good here."

After the war, Charlie Anderson spent 17 years with the Logan County chapter of the American Red Cross. After all, he says, Red Cross provisions "may have made it possible to sustain the march" he was on in his last days as a POW.

The U.S. government provided the food for the packets, but the Red Cross packed, shipped, and distributed them.

"You can get my address from the Red Cross," Charlie also wrote, and indeed, Home Service Director Vincent Jones was responsible for obtaining the addresses of POWs, as well as reporting war casualties and filing insurance and death claims.

Irma Pfeifer Potter knows all about

that type of work. As Logan County health nurse beginning in 1942, she worked closely with Vincent Jones over the years. If a baby was born or there was serious illness or death in the family, she would consult her big book of servicemen's addresses all over the world and call the serviceman's commander, identifying herself and passing on the doctor's opinion.

If the commander gave permission for the young man to return home, Mrs. Potter would drive to the Springfield airport to pick him up.

There were worries. But, she says, there was also "a lot of happiness."

Dressed in her Red Cross uniform and wearing cotton hose, Mrs. Thomas A. Scully, chairman of the Red Cross Production Committee, walks from the Logan County Courthouse over to the Basket Grocery, where her husband will pick her up. It's Tuesday, and Red Cross ladies have spent the hours from 9:30 to 4:00 in the production rooms in the basement of the courthouse: knitting, sewing garments on the sewing machines, crocheting, and preparing kit bags to send overseas.

Along with the women who worked regularly with her at the courthouse, Violet Scully also relied on county units with leaders like Mrs. William Drake of Elkhart, as well as community organizations, to fill the county's assigned quotas. Between 1940 (when the production department was organized to aid European refugees) and 1944, the sixteen Red Cross units of Logan County made 21,680 separate garments. Mrs. George Ohmes was chairman of sewing; Mrs. Clarence Gilchrist supervised the knitting and distributed the white sock yarn (for hospital bed socks) and olive drab yarn that Norjie Nauts says her mother used to knit "socks after socks after socks." Knitters also made sweaters, wristlets, helmet liners, gloves, and mufflers.

Red Cross ladies cut up old felt hats to use as slipper soles and sewed everything from hospital bed shirts to blouses. They also crocheted scuffs to be worn by patients in the hospital at Camp Ellis.

A volunteer Red Cross worker who had completed 160 hours of work earned the right to wear the regulation Red Cross uniform—which she may have made herself. Stripes on her sleeve indicated years of service.

Very popular with the servicemen were the overseas kit bags. Fabric for the bags was furnished by the national organization at first, but the contents (including soap, playing cards, cigarettes, chewing gum, shoelaces, razor blades, and sewing kits) were always provided by the county.

Mrs. F. M. Hagans supervised the sobering work of making surgical dressings from gauze and cotton provided by the government. Working first at Trinity House on Logan Street and later on the third floor of the courthouse, the ladies cut and folded sponges and abdominal pads by hand.



Nurse's Aides at the Knights of Columbus ballroom on April 24, 1944. Ruth Tumilty is second from left. Courtesy Ruth Tumilty.

Precious Letters and Diaries

It's a typical wartime evening. Ruth Tumilty has put in a full day at the garment factory, and now she's working at St. Clara's Hospital. Dressed in her light blue denim Red Cross Volunteer Nurse's Aide uniform, she's helping patients get ready for bed.

"Basically, all my young life," says Ruth, "I wanted to be a nurse, but I never had a chance."

So in 1944, with her husband, Frank, in the Navy, Ruth signed up to become a Nurse's Aide. She took her evening classes at St. Clara's Hospital under Sister Clarine, whom she describes as "so kind" and someone who "really fulfilled her calling." After supervised practice, Ruth was capped on April 24th, 1944.

To remain a member of the Corps, Ruth had to serve at least 150 hours each year—an easy thing to do when she was working at least one night a week and every Sunday morning.

Ruth says, "I trust that we did a good service," by helping out during the wartime shortage of nurses. Girl Scouts served as Junior Nurse's Aides.

The shortage of doctors and nurses, Iona Burwell believes, meant "you needed to depend more on yourself," so classes in first aid and home nursing were popular. Iona taught home nursing to adults at Beason High School.

When it came time to teach students how to make a bed with a patient in it, she took the class to her own home, where one of the students crawled into bed so the others could practice.

Teaching nutrition and canteen courses, holding its first blood bank, furnishing sunrooms in the hospital at Camp Ellis: the Logan County Red Cross, under chairman Foster M. Lalor, involved the whole county in the home front. ■

Mary Jane Gayle, Charlie Anderson's fiancée, belonged to the Prisoners of War committee of the Logan County Red Cross. Jane Frantz, whose husband, Pete, was a POW, was chairman; Charlie's mother was secretary. The group met at Tull's ice cream shop, shared letters, and carefully packed boxes to send to their loved ones. (Sadly, Charlie never received any; the committee was organized in January of 1945, and Charlie was on the march by that February.)

And overseas servicemen were looking for letters. "That's when the letters really flew," says Raymond Leesman.

"You'd sit and wait for the mailman and listen to the radio to see what was going on in the war," remembers his wife, Gertrude. "But you'd get a letter, and he'd be safe," she recalls. If you missed a letter, however, "you wondered if something had happened."

Neurologist Dr. Floyd Barringer was a resident at a hospital in Birmingham, England. His long, newsy letters told *Courier* readers about life during the air raids and the courage of the English people.

In 1942, he described his first big air raid, which began with running out to throw sandbags on the nearest incendiary bombs and ended with operating all night on patients with such injuries as compound skull fractures and foreign bodies in the brain.

Dr. Barringer's father kept all of his letters; when he got home, they provided a diary of his wartime experiences. Ben Harrison kept his diary on the backs of soup can labels.

His sister Kate Abbott says that Ben received his cans of soup from the Red Cross when he was marching across Germany as a POW.

Just in case the writing of letters became tedious, the *Courier* reminded its readers that "Thousands of our boys overseas are waiting for those letters the home folks are going to write when they find the time" (November 1, 1944).

Not only letters, but also newspapers were welcome. After newsprint restrictions made it necessary to cancel overseas subscriptions to the *Courier*, a free semi-monthly overseas edition was sent in 1945 to servicemen. The picture of Lincoln, Illinois, in the first edition was a hit.

The Walther League of the Chestnut Lutheran Church published its own newspaper to send overseas. The *Chestnut Chatter* combined service news (like the report from Charles Roos that he had running water in his foxhole in Belgium) with local "gossip" (like the wedding trip send-off given Mr. & Mrs. Albert Ebel).

One of many letters that encouraged Red Cross workers came from a commander in California, who wrote that the sweaters they had sent were appreciated by his men, who had the cold, dreary job of guarding the coastline. ■



*Ray and Gertrude during the war.
Courtesy the Leesmans.*

What Did You Do in the War?

Returning to Tinian Air Base from a bombing mission over Japan, if everything went well, “we’d turn on the radio compass and listen to music all the way back,” remembers Ray Leesman. “It was great to be alive!”

On the way out, however, “it was all sweat.” And all business at the briefing beforehand.

“Those were scary,” says Ray, “because you’d find out how many tons of bombs you had to carry and how much gasoline you were allowed and where the missions were and what our surveillance planes had reported—that there was so much flak and so many fighters spotted at the little airports around—and that would scare you.”

If the raids were at night, the Japanese would “light up these little airports and make you think they were really going to come after you.”

Still, “I missed the roughest raids,” says Ray, who started flying bombing missions in 1945. “We got there as they were finishing up, mining the Tokyo harbors. They’d fly in low, and kamikaze jets would crash into those planes.” When Ray got there,

they were starting to get weak, “but there was still a lot of flak and fighters.”

In his position as central fire control on a B-29, Ray’s job was to defend the airplane as well as serve as scanner for the pilots, reporting the position of the flaps and landing gear and the position of other planes—enemy or otherwise—that the pilots up front couldn’t see.

“Fighter at two o’clock high,” he would announce over the intercom, watching the plane “like a hawk.”

The B-29 had a much more sophisticated gun than the B-17 or B-24. Instead of having to follow the target with a sight mounted on the gun, Ray had gun sights that tracked the plane electronically.

“We had it nice compared to the boys on the ground, laying in trenches or the jungle,” says Ray. On the other hand, “you were really sticking your neck out when you went on a mission,” he recalls.

Taking off with a load of bombs was the most frightening thing. There was always a push to get more bomb load and less gasoline

on the flights; if the navigator or radio operator were off, “you could go down. Maybe you’d be picked up by the Navy, or maybe not.”

The bombers were escorted by P-51 fighters over Japan. Still, if you went down over Japan, it was “Katie bar the door,” says Ray. Everyone had heard of the decapitations that took place when guys bailed out, probably over the target.

So there was reason to take communion before a mission to bombing sites like Nagoya and Yawata. The Japanese had moved a lot of industry into the cities, and the Allies were hitting them and burning them out. Ray’s crew would pick out spots that weren’t burning and drop firebombs, all the while seeing the smoke and debris from the fires ahead of them and sometimes flying into it.

Once, when their plane flew into a thermo (a heavy column of hot smoke) and suddenly went from 9,000 to 11,000 feet, Ray says he thought, “Man, we’ve had it!”

Back at the base, the men were greeted by Red Cross workers, who fed them coffee and doughnuts—and a shot of whiskey to relax them.

Ray flew thirteen missions. On the last one, the plane was hit so badly by flak that it didn’t go down in the ocean only because it could land at Iwo Jima. The plane was shaking badly, but “you just kept going and praying that you’d make it.”

At Iwo Jima, flying over the white crosses that marked the graves of those who had died to take the island “really got you,” Ray remembers.

Had there been wounded on board, the crew could have dropped a flare to get permission to land. Since there weren’t, they had to circle the island six times before they were finally allowed to land. ■



B-29 bomber crew and airplane, July 6, 1945, before a mission to Shimizu. Bombardier was only 19. Ray is third from right. Courtesy Ray Leesman.

You Did *What* in the War?

When Lucyle Lawhead Miller told her husband that she had signed up to work at the Sangamon Ordnance plant at Illiopolis, “he had a fit,” she remembers.

“My land, you’re gonna get blown up!” he said.

Actually, Lucyle herself thought the ammunition plant was a “scary place” until she began working there. After that, she never expected any trouble—“and there never was any,” she says.

Lucyle worked full-time in receiving, inspecting the little flatcars filled with empty shells as they came down a big long hall on a conveyor. When she found a shell that wasn’t supposed to be there, she replaced it with the correct one. She made friends among the many Central Illinois people who worked at the plant, including a group who arrived from Springfield on the interurban.

Although Illiopolis was in Sangamon County, it was just thirteen miles from Mt. Pulaski and employed several hundred Logan County people, who either car-pooled or rode over in buses. Virginia Wiggers remembers that the plant worked two or three shifts; when her husband, Mel, was driving one of his buses, he often didn’t get home until 2:00 a.m.

The three summers Anna Behrends worked at Illiopolis, she rode with a group of workers in a car driven by “Pinger” Correll. Like Lucyle Miller, Anna was not afraid at all. Unlike Lucyle, however, she dealt with explosives.

She *was* careful. Once she was sent to get something out of storage with a man who was very careless.

“I’ll not go with him again,” she told her supervisor. “I don’t like the way he handles things.” When Anna told

him the ammunition might explode, he had said, “It’s supposed to.”

“Yes,” Anna replied, “but not here.”

While Lucyle wore her own dresses to work, Anna wore clothes provided by the factory—right down to bras with buttons on them, since she could not wear any metal.

Dressed in slacks, with a turban wrapped around her head so as not to get TNT on her hair, she must have looked just like Rosy the Riveter, the symbol of women who worked in the war plants. On her feet she wore safety-toe shoes she had bought at the plant, using up her last shoe stamp.

After a day spent testing shells filled with TNT—running a gauge in and out to make sure the booster would fit when it was inserted during battle—she took a shower before going home.

The plant was laid out as separate little factories in four sections so that an explosion in one section would not affect another, and the ammunition made was stored in little caves.

In August of 1945, an explosion killed Stewart D. Jones of Springfield and injured five other persons, including Mrs. Hobart Rose of Lincoln. Generally, however, the plant was a safe place to work; anyway, says Anna, “my brother was in the service, and I just thought this was something I could do.”

Of course, women were taking up the slack all over the country, as the men went off to war. By October of 1942, 32 women were sorting seed corn at Fuller Seed Company—replacing men who had left.

Another source of labor came from Camp Ellis, an Army camp located

north and west of Havana, 60 miles from Lincoln.

Primarily a training camp, Ellis also held POWs, the first one thousand Germans having arrived in August of 1943.

Many farm workers were exempt from the draft because they had the essential job of raising food for the country and the armed forces. Still, farmers were often short-handed. So Mary Reiners Detjen’s uncle, Ed Rademaker, who farmed between Emden and Delavan, used prisoners to pick the peas that went to Libby, McNeill and Libby Canning Company at Morton.

Mary remembers that the POWs, who arrived at the farm on Army transport trucks with armed guards, were often still dressed in their tattered German uniforms. Mary, her grandmother, and her aunt brought them cookies or desserts as they rested in the front yard during their breaks and at noon.

Eleven-year-old Mary expected the prisoners to look like enemies, and was surprised that “they looked just like us.” Sometimes the guards would allow Mary’s grandmother to speak to them in German—but only if the guards spoke it, too.

Mary remembers that one German POW told her he wanted to come back to the United States when the war was over: the POWs were that well treated.

The Rev. John Detjen, father of Mary’s future husband and pastor at the Lutheran church in Emden, had come from Germany during World War I and was often called on to translate for the prisoners. ■

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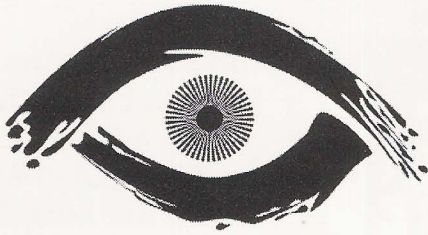
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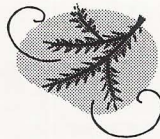
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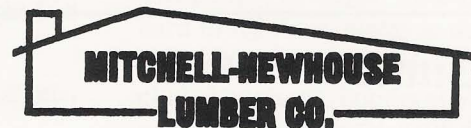
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Servicemen's pictures, Koester's store, New Holland. History of Logan County Illinois 1982. One of many shows of support. Members of the First Methodist Church of Lincoln mailed "cheer boxes" to their servicemen in 1942, and the Courier arranged for wounded American soldiers from Camp Ellis to spend a Sunday being entertained in Lincoln homes in 1945. A serviceman standing at the Four Corners in Lincoln anytime was sure of a ride.

Material for this issue came from the *Lincoln Evening Courier*; *History of Logan County Illinois 1982*; *Chestnut 100 Years 1872-1972*; *From Cornfields to Marching Feet: Camp Ellis, Illinois* (Bordner, Marjorie Rich. Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1993); and the memories of our friends. Longtime Lincoln resident Brayton Danner's memoir, *A Bad Day Near St. Lo*, is full of infantry stories. It's available at Prairie Years.

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