



MEMORIAL DAY: REMEMBERING ALL WHO SACRIFICED FOR OUR COUNTRY

2009

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Photo: Gilford residents and active members of Gilford's Thompson-Ames Historical Society, Jim Colby and Yvette Johnson, pause to remember the sacrifices of those who served in our country's military. They are pictured next to the monument in Gilford village that is dedicated to World War One and Two veterans.

As the nation prepares, as it does each Memorial Day, to remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice to their country by giving their life, we can bring even more meaning to the holiday by taking the time to thank our living veterans as they, too, pause to remember their fallen comrades. Listening to them tell of their experiences during war gives them the chance to remember how they fought in their own way to stop further casualties.

Each war is unique, but it was World War Two that created some of the biggest changes to our lifestyle here at home. It was a war with battles fought throughout the world, but it became a war that arrived horrifyingly, and without warning, on our own doorstep.

Soldiers left home to fight the battles, and families left behind fought the war on what became known as "the home front". Being patriotic was in the

forefront of everyone's mind. Citizens knew that soldiers and civilians throughout the world were being killed at an alarming rate and each wanted, in any way possible, to help the effort that would someday stop the carnage. Realizing that if one life could be saved by their sacrifice at home, each and every American became very aware of the influence they could have on the war.

Entire families fully participated in the war effort, not an easy task for a nation that was trying to pull itself out of the Depression of the 1930s. Women, not allowed to become soldiers, went off for the first time to the factories to make war equipment and perform "men's work".

Ration booklets, rationing precious supplies such as gasoline and food items like sugar and butter, became an accepted part of every family's life. Rationing was imperative so that much-needed



Example of gas and tire ration coupons

Supplies were available for the military, but at times even rationed items were not available to our citizens. Victory gardens sprang up in backyards everywhere with the hope of home-grown food feeding American families thus leaving our farmers free to produce the food required to feed the troops. Families kept black-out curtains ready and available at all times in case of an air attack. Those curtains were designed to block out house lights and hopefully confuse enemy aircraft.

New Hampshire, being located on the coast, had to be especially diligent about protecting not only the state but also its coastline. Individuals volunteered in large numbers to become "spotters", a job that consisted of watching for foreign aircraft or any suspicious activity.



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Gilford resident Yvette Johnson, who grew up in Whitefield, NH, remembered how much she wanted to help and did so by volunteering to be a spotter, something she scheduled around attending high school.

“All of us did whatever we could do help the war effort. We volunteered to be spotters, usually scheduling our time in the afternoons, evenings, and weekends because we were still in school,” she said. “We would gather in the center of town looking for not only foreign planes, but anything that looked suspicious, and we would report back if we saw anything. It was an important thing to do since some of the submarines did come close to the coastline and there was always the fear of an attack.”

Navy veteran, Don Frost, began his naval career shortly after our country declared war. He originally signed up with the Navy for a six-year hitch, but decided afterwards he liked the idea of a career in the military. His career lasted 21 years during which he served in two wars: World War Two and the Korean War.

When the war was declared, it erased any hopes that Frost had of attending college straight out of high school, a great disappointment for him since becoming an educated individual was one of his goals.

With a war that had to be won, he put his disappointment behind him and set sail for places such as Aruba, Panama, the South Pacific, to name a few, while doing what had to be done to squash Japanese aggression.

He quickly rose through the ranks, ending his enlistment with the highest rank given to the enlisted: Chief Petty Officer. With wars and his career in the Navy behind him, he went on to earn his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Plymouth State College. He began a second career as a

teacher specializing in special education and work with the handicapped. Calling Gilford one of the best places in the world in which to live, he remains a very active member of Gilford's historical society.

Jim Colby, whose family has called Gilford home since the very early 1800's, was a young boy living in West Alton at the time the war broke out. His family helped by collecting items needed by the government.

“Even though I was young at the time, I still remember some of the things we did as part of the war effort,” he commented. “We would save our tin soup cans, cut the bottoms out and crush them. As kids, we would save the milkweed pods which were then used in life preservers. Yes, our family did have the black-out curtains, which we were prepared to use.”

Colby proudly went on to join the Air Force at age 19 and had a 20-year career in the military. He served in the Vietnam War as an aircraft mechanic specializing in hydraulics. Today, he remains a familiar participant in our town's Memorial Day parades. Each Memorial Day he takes time to remember a distant relative nine generations away who served in the military and is buried in Gilford.

Lloyd Eckholm, today a resident of Gilford, joined the Navy in the spring of 1944 after having moved to Connecticut to complete an apprentice machinist program. He, too, remembered volunteering to be a spotter in Seymour, CT, saying the spotters were trained to be able to identify the silhouettes of different aircraft. Upon completion of the apprentice program, he immediately joined the military, with the Navy being his first choice.

“I knew I really wanted to join the Navy,” he recalled, laughing. “What I didn't know was that I would get seasick any time I was below deck on a boat; if I was on deck, I was fine, but below deck



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was just terrible. I lived on prisoner's rations, bread and water, any time I was on a boat."

He ended up being stationed at a Japanese-bombed Navy base in the Philippines after a trip that included stops in New Orleans, San Francisco, and Pearl Harbor. Once on dry land, he forgot about seasickness and went on to serve his country well.

It was Eckholm who thoughtfully summarized what we all think each Memorial Day by saying, "I have the ultimate respect for those who have fought in the front line of battles and who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country."

Gilford's historical society joins the town in remembering those who gave their life to keep our country free and safe. We are incredibly thankful for the sacrifices made by those in the military, as well as those made by their families, all throughout our nation's history.

Gilford's Thompson-Ames Historical Society welcomes stories of local history. To contact the Society, e-mail: www.thomames@metrocast.net.