

# Ridge Historical Society

# Newsletter

AUGUST - SEPTEMBER, 2000

10621 SEELEY AVENUE • CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60643 • (773) 881-1675 • Pat McGrail, President • (773) 238-6196

## RHS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT ADDRESSES WORLD WAR II

World War II is the primary focus of this summer's exhibit and programming at Ridge Historical Society. In addressing those who gathered for the opening of the exhibit on June 11, Paul Petraitis, Executive Director and Curator, quoted veterans of the great conflict.

"It was real loud for a short time — then it was real quiet for a long time."

"Come on! Let's go! Whaddya wanna live forever?"

"I had a mom that loved me, and a girl friend, and I knew I wasn't gonna die overseas."

The quotations are as different and varied as the veterans themselves. Some are eloquent and loquacious and have prepared slide shows and published articles. Other vets can't or won't speak of their experiences. Some veterans are only now sharing their stories for the first time, some 50-plus years having passed.

This past Spring some of these local vets gathered around Ridge Historical Society's dining room table and we put their stories on tape.

The on-going Storytellers' Project is but the most recent of RHS's oral history initiatives. Over the years we have captured the stories of many of our older residents. It was one such tape, by the late Bud and Dewey Lane, that formed the basis of a portion of our Centennial Exhibit "Horses & Wires" on view earlier this year.

Small museums, like that of Ridge Historical Society, have the objective of focusing on local history in all its forms: ethnic, institutional, archeological, architectural, geological, genealogical. Fortunately, Driscoll House has the setting and the facilities to make these presentations with a certain amount of style and a sense of occasion.

With the current exhibit "From the Homefront to the Battlefront" RHS lets veterans tell their stories, with their mementos on display. Veterans of both Chicago and Normandy Beach are honored: Rosie the Riveter, GI Joe and GI Jane are all included.

But please — no talk of heros! The Vets will tell you: We got in and we got out and we did our job. The real heros are those who didn't come back."

And please — no talk of "our boys overseas." As one veteran explained it "we may have been boys of 18

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## Allied Prisoners Leave German Prison Camp

Steve Lewellyn loaned this photograph to the RHS WW II exhibit. It shows Allied prisoners leaving the German Mooseburg prison camp after General Patton's 14th Armoured Division had crashed through the camp's main gate on April 29, 1945. The German soldiers had abandoned the camp a few hours before Patton's arrival.

While he announced that they would be evacuated as soon as possible, the ex-prisoners were told to stay in camp for their own safety. However, Steve tells that he and a fellow prisoner, who spoke a little German, went through a hole in the fence and hitched a ride to Munich in a Jeep whose driver was deer hunting. Steve and friend were invited to a deer-feast but realized that German soldiers were still active in the area and made their way back to camp where Steve was thereafter known as "Lucky" Lewellyn.

The ex-prisoners were later flown to Camp Lucky Strike at LeHavre, France for physical exams, good food and the chance to contact their families. Steve arrived in Chicago in June, and after a summer on leave, went to Texas for reassignment to the Pacific Theater. However, an automobile accident resulted in a broken back which kept Steve in the service a couple of more years during which he was able to finish his studies and earn a BA degree at the University of Chicago in 1948.

or 19 when we left but very quickly became men by anyone's definition."

Of course not all vets agree today on matters like continuing the draft, gun control, immigration, politics or the place in history of General MacArthur; but they all share a desire to educate today's young people on the value of freedom, the horrors of war and the repairing of what some have called a "dislocation with our past."

Against great odds the American GI, with his Allies, won the second (and we hope the last) World War. Let us honor our Vets! We can never repay them.

## Veteran's Stories Expand on WW II Exhibit

With the World War II exhibit in full swing, Ridge Historical Society has encouraged local veterans to tell and record memories of some of their wartime experiences.

Imagine yourself in in an amphibious plane that bounces and flips as ferocious winds from the Himalayan Mountains drive you up into the air and back down towards earth. Technology required to pass over the mountains is not yet known, so you fly between icy peaks, your 104-foot wing span dipping and vibrating above the rocky valleys that hide the entrance to Shangri-La.

The man recalling his cockpit experiences is Les Harkness, a Beverly resident who served as a Navy pilot from 1941 to 1946. He regularly flew men and supplies from British headquarters in India to U.S. Marines supporting the Chinese army.

"We flew almost every day, about 12 hours a day," said Harkness. "We coordinated activities with the Flying Tigers, mostly carrying goods rather than men, up to 35 tons at a time."

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, Stephen B. Llewellyn, another Beverly resident, was flying bombs to factory targets in Liepzig, Germany. Dodging artillery flak from the ground and German fighter planes in the air, Llewellyn's B-17 spun out of control and headed for terra firma. It was May 28, 1944. Forced to make his first combat parachute jump, he fell through a barrage of "silver streaks." He closed his chute to reduce his visibility as a target, then opened it again to make a safe landing in a villager's garden.

At that point, he recalls, he was grabbed by a big German villager who shook him violently and cried, "For you the war is over, terror fighter." As angry townspeople pumelled him with clubs and fists he was rescued by local police and taken to jail.

Now a POW, Llewellyn endured forced marches and stinking, crowded rail cars as German soldiers tried to keep American prisoners away from the advancing Soviet army. The worst of the ordeal ended April 29, 1945, when the 14th Armored Division commanded by General Patton crashed through the main gate at Stalag VII-A at Moosburg, Germany (photo, page 1).

At war's end, while Llewellyn was heading home through LaHavre, France, another Beverly resident was still in the thick of things in Berlin.

Robert J. Wirtshafter, M.D., was in counterintelligence,

## Calendar of Events

**Monday**      *RHS Board Meeting*  
**Sept. 11**

**Saturday,**      *Annual Garage Sale*  
**Sept. 16**

**Sunday**      *Ice Cream Social*  
**Sept. 24**

**Sunday,**      *Roundtable Discussion*  
**Oct 1**      *Veterans of the*  
              *Pacific Theater,*  
              *World War II*

working for the war department. In a preview of the years of cold war to come, the Soviets decreed that no U.S. or British intelligence agents were allowed in Berlin. So Wirtshafter and his colleagues entered the city as military cooks. "Part of my job," he said, "was to arrest war criminals and prepare charges against them." He added that there are big lapses in his memories, and the more serious incidents tend to fall through these gaps.

Today he prefers to discuss the war's aftermath.

"Military service made me want to be a surgeon," he said. He also became committed to educating young people about the sacrifice and bloodshed that laid the foundation for today's wealth and privilege. To that end he sends out a monthly bulletin that educates as well as "propagandizes his own conviction that life's journey is more important than its destination."

Additional fascinating World War II stories from men and women participants are on exhibit at Ridge Historical Society, 10621 Seeley Avenue and are available there every Sunday and Thursday from 2 P.M. to 5 P.M. As noted in the calendar, there will be a program featuring Pacific Theater veterans at 2 p.m. Sunday, October 1. The exhibit is free to all.

## JULY MEETING FEATURES VETS

Complementing the World War II exhibit at Ridge Historical Society headquarters was a July 16 program featuring three veterans of that conflict.

One was **Robert Wirtshafter**, wartime special agent in the Counter Intelligence Corps., who served in Europe from 1944 to February 1946. Much of the time he was in England training for the invasion of Spain which never happened.

The principal purpose of counter-intelligence is to discover what enemy intelligence is up to. Lots of Allied intelligence personnel had German family backgrounds and, in many cases, language skills.

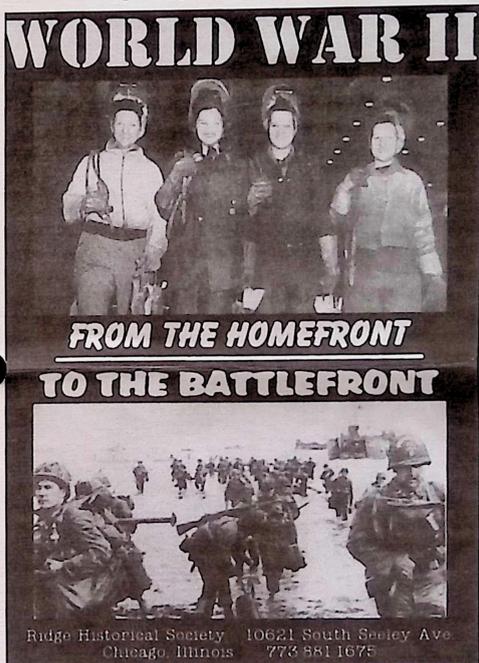
One of the first lessons U.S. Army personnel had to learn was how to kill. They learned from the British and Russians who had been in combat before the U.S. got to the battlefield. In part, the Allied victory was achieved by the ability of its fighting forces to think independently, while the Germans had to check any decisions through a chain of command.

**Cliff Hullinger** had been a member of the National

Guard which was mobilized in January 1941. He went to Camp Clayborn and then to No. Africa in 1942. However he saw much of his service (from 1943 to 1945) in Italy, which he characterized as a bloody mess.

**Bruce Walker** was a V-12 expert who characterized our forces as the greatest war machine in history. He spoke of there having been 60,000 men trained in the V-12 program. Walker was in the Intelligence Division for 30 years. On display were three-dimensional maps developed from aerial stereo photographs.

According to Walker all of our military services are more dependent on human intelligence than on sheer mechanical capability.



## COMMUNITY and RHS NEWS NOTES

\*It is reported that Metra has plans to restore all Beverly Hills/Morgan Park depots over the next eight years. As each renovation is completed, Ridge Historical Society has arrangements for installing historical displays, possibly kiosks, telling different aspects of the story of the community. Upon conclusion, the displays will rotate among the stations for exposure to the full community of commuters.

\*Eileen Klees, co-chair of the Archives Committee, testing computer software specifically designed for organizations like RHS. It is a true data base, said Ms. Klees, an aid to many kinds of record keeping, accessing, curating, indexing and more. Presently she is working with Kate Eaton on how to use the

software to create a current RHS membership directory.

\*RHS bylaws are being reviewed, and the amendments adopted through the years incorporated, preparatory to renewing Ridge Historical Society's tax exempt status — a process that is required periodically.

\*Bids for air conditioning Driscoll House, RHS's headquarters are under consideration.

\*At both June and July RHS Board meetings, Maureen Gilligan was praised for her work with the RHS archives. Currently she is giving attention to the Fran Warren files and the accompanying index. It is painstaking work and Ms. Gilligan's diligence is applauded.

\*For many years the oldest house in Beverly Hills — formerly the village of Washington Heights — was Gardner House, built in 1836 by Jefferson Gardner who kept it as a rental property. In 1844 Gardner sold the house to William Wilcox and "left for parts unknown" according to "A History of Cook County" by A.T. Andreas. Gardner house was demolished in 1934.

## Bud Lane Memorials (continued)

*In addition to those friends of the late "Bud" Lane who were listed in the last issue as having made memorial donations to Ridge Historical Society, gifts continue to be received in his honor. Those received since the last issue are from:*

Jack & Audrey Sullivan	Marly Trautman
Carl & Elaine Spencer	Darlene Johnson
Nancy Peterson	Robert Riberto
Nancy, Barry & Debbie Lane	The Sandusky High School
The Men of Leisure	Faculty & Staff
Lois Kidwell	

## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Pat McGrail

Here are some dates for your calendar:

### September 16— RHS Garage Sale

Bring items to donate to RHS right after Labor Day, which is September 3. The committee needs that time to organize and set up its "boutique." Book donations are limited to 1st Editions, and no clothing items can be accepted.

### September 24— Ice Cream Social

for members and friends of RHS, with the RHS veranda as its attractive setting.

Grateful thanks to **Grace Larsen**, an active member of the Costume Committee, for her donation of small-sized hangers for children's clothes. Also thanks to **Jackie Scanlon** of Timeless Treasures, 2412 W. 111th St., for her donation of four 1940's folding chairs which enhance our current World War II exhibit.

And yet more thanks to **Terry O'Hare** and **Marlene Sullivan** for planting the RHS planters, cleaning the porch and weeding the flagstone terrace.

How lucky we are to have such interested and generous donors!

**Ridge  
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