

## War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 78

*Ruminations and Recollections of Nicholas C. Nett, born 1934 in Syracuse New York and just short of eight years old when the Pearl Harbor attack took place.*

In thinking back about WWII, a flood of memories come to mind. A lot of them centered on thoughts of doing with less or totally without, for there were shortages of everything. We lived in the old homestead on East Brighton, on the second floor above my Grandparents, and WWII started for me on Sunday December 7, 1941.

I was sitting on my Father's lap, and while we were reading the Sunday funny papers, the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor came over the radio. He unceremoniously dropped me and the newspaper on the floor, uttered some obscenities and went downstairs to get my Grandfather. After ignoring objections by my Mother and Grandmother, they promptly drove downtown to the local recruiting office to sign up. They were both rejected, but remarked that when they arrived there, the line was almost a quarter of a mile long and growing. The enlistments and draft saw relatives, neighbors and friends suddenly gone, some to never return.

Roosevelt's speech about the Declaration of War and the use of the word "dastardly" was explained at home, in School and from the pulpit. Everything was gearing up in support of the War effort. Victory gardens sprang up everywhere producing a variety of produce for home use.

Things started to rapidly change. There was fear of a west coast invasion, fear of what might be in the future and fear of the unknown; then came the rationing of gas, meat, butter, shoes and manpower. Ration books were issued by the "OPA" for each member of the family. They contained pages of stamps that were used in addition to money when purchasing items. When your allotment for a time period was used up, you had a waiting period of time before you qualified to be issued more stamps.

War bonds and war savings stamps were sold everywhere, including schools from grammar, junior high and high school, where time was allotted for purchase of the items by the students. Pages in the war savings stamp book were decorated with various slogans such as "nip the nips" and "axe the axis."

There were scrap drives for virtually everything; metal of any kind. Old trolley tracks were uncovered and torn up, old cars were dismantled and tin foil from gum wrappers and cigarette packs were laboriously separated and formed into balls. Paper drives were a Boy Scout priority. Milkweed pods found growing along the railroad tracks were gathered into potato sacks and turned in to be used in the making of life vests.

Grease residue from cooking was saved, and when a reasonable amount was collected, it was taken to the local butcher where a small payment was received. We were told that it was going to be used in the

making of munitions. Oleomargarine came along to replace butter. It was a grayish color, and a package of yellow coloring was provided to make it look like butter.

Another item was the development of synthetic rubber. Also, daylight savings was instituted to help factory workers working second and third shifts enjoy a little more daylight. No shoes were thrown out. Instead, they were put in a shoe box out in the hall. When you needed a different size shoe for School or play, you tried to find one in the shoebox that fit and then took it to the local shoemaker for any needed repair. New shoes, when available, were usually purchased for Easter and then only worn for Church and eventually recycled.

Blackouts (air raid drills/practice air raids) were a scary thing, not ever knowing whether if it was the real thing or not. Windows were covered so that no light showed through. Air raid Wardens would patrol the neighborhood looking for any light that might be showing and if there was, a knock on the door would be made to correct the situation.

The full impact of the war was realized when we read the casualty lists that were published daily in the local newspaper. The lists were looked at daily to see if anyone we knew was wounded, MIA or KIA. When a family member, neighbor or friend was listed, a black wreath was always placed on the front door and shortly after, a small red, white and blue banner with a gold star appeared in the window. The other dreaded thing was seeing a telegram being delivered to a house in the neighborhood. It didn't take long to realize that usually it meant bad news.

When anyone came home on leave it was a time of joy and celebration, and then sadness when the leave was over and departure took place. When V-E Day came and then V-J Day, the spontaneous celebration is hard to describe. Church bells rang for hours, businesses shut down, busses were left stranded, schools emptied, people crowded the streets shouting and laughing, and many just cried that after almost five years it was finally over.