

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Lillian Fildes

Current home town: Grafton, Ohio

Age: 83

My name is Lillian (Tkacs) Fildes, Widow of Jack D. Fildes, to whom I was married sixty years, God always being part of our relationship. We have five sons. I am 83.

As civilians, we were affected by World War II. Meat, sugar and, I think, butter were rationed. Also, canned goods may have been rationed. Gasoline also was rationed. Each family got a certain number of stamps, depending on the number in the family.

Soap was hard to get. Fat was somehow used to make weapons. Laundry detergents were being developed, and did not clean well. I worked in a grocery store where there were counters, and the clerk would write down your order on a special pad that had carbon paper to make duplicates. The prices were marked below the items and the clerk would write the price on the pad and add them all up, and then you paid your bill. The clerk would ring it up on a cash register and give you the change. In those days, people did not have personal checking accounts.

Plastic had not been developed and the clerk would cut your cheese with a knife for a slab. I believe there were cheese and meat slicers that you turn by a handle. Coffee beans came in bags and you ground them in an electric coffee grinder. The butcher cut up the meat by hand and ground the hamburger in the store. You could buy big marrow fat bones with meat (beef for soup) on them. My maternal grandmother raised chickens, and my dad killed them and drained the blood. Grandma cleaned and plucked the feathers, saved the down, and my mother made down quilts for the beds. She bought special cotton fabric that was tightly woven to keep the feathers in.

Automatic clothes washing machines and dryers had not been invented yet. Wringer washers popped off the buttons on the clothes. Mother hung clothes to dry outdoors in summer and the basement and attic in winter. You could not buy silk stockings! Nylon had not yet been invented, so special make up for the legs was invented to make it look like you were wearing stockings. Silk stockings had dark seams up the back and no one went bare-legged. Polyesters and nylon had not been invented and all clothing had to be ironed. Knit rayon was used for women's panties. Underslips were always worn and they were made of cotton or rayon and needed to be ironed, as well as dresses. Women did not wear shorts, slacks, or jeans.

Public buses ran at that time in Elyria, and we either walked to high school or took the bus. They were always overcrowded and people were standing, especially after school. We liked to stop at the drug store on the square and have an ice cream soda, root beer float or ice cream sundae at the soda fountain, no longer there. Pleated wool skirts, sweaters, long wool coats, brown and white saddle shoes were the style then.

Some friends still drove cars with “rumble seats” and we enjoyed it when we were invited to have a ride. Street gangs were not in Elyria and it was safe to walk alone at night. I hope you print this.

Jack grew up in Medina, Ohio, and moved to Grafton in his senior year of high school. At 17 years old, he joined the Navy; he did not want to be drafted into the Army. He thought that in the Navy he would have a clean, dry place to sleep. This was World War II.

He was sent to Great Lakes Boot Camp for his training. Later, he and his group were sent to California. By train, they were ordered to the *U.S.S. Carter Hall*, L.S. D. (Landing Ship Dock). He worked in the engine room, where it was very noisy, which later on led to hearing loss. The ship was ordered to the South Pacific Ocean and engaged in many battles with the Japs, including Layete Bay. When not fighting battles, they repaired smaller boats. The ship would take on water and sink deeper into the ocean, the front end would open and the smaller boats would come into the ship, it would come up, the door closed and the boats would be repaired! At one point they were docked in the Philippines.

On Sunday, he went with some friends to a catholic church for mass. Growing up, he went to no church. The church had been bombed and there was no roof or pews. The church was quite full, but the people made room for them closer to the front. Also there were a good number of the “top brass” there. When the bells were rung by an altar boy at the Elevation of the Eucharist, the “top brass” knelt down, as did the people. Jack was most impressed. He looked up to the “top brass” as “gods,” and there they were kneeling like everyone else! Later in life he became a catholic and remained a catholic until he died.

Also I recall his telling that, after the war was over, the ship’s captain made friends with a Japanese captain and made some deals. The other captain traded Japanese rifles and bayonets for every man aboard ship for an American Jeep! Jack threw out what he thought was the firing pin but turned out to be the safety lock. One of our sons now owns it. Jack came home with many souvenirs including a machete, silk pillow covers, silk p.j.s, and a silk blouse for his future bride, and also some souvenirs for his family.

I did not meet him until after the war. Jack was an exceptional husband and father and was loved by a large number of friends. Jack was in the Navy for three years; honorably discharged in 1946. When his ship returned to port in California the Navy promised him a raise in rank if he signed up for three years. He said no, he just wanted to go home and stay there. While he was in the Navy Jack’s mother took in proof of his Navy training and he received his high school diploma.

When Jack returned home to Grafton, he lived with his parents, Desmond and Gladys (Elder) Fildes, and brother Edward. He worked for his parents at Fildes Electric Motors and also attended Elyria Public High School to take algebra, physics and geometry so he could go to college on the GI bill. However, he met me, we married, and instead he graduated in electrical engineering from the International Correspondence School and raised our family.

Jack died in April 2012 of T-cell lymphoma, a cancer of the blood. We have five sons, eight grandchildren, and six great grandchildren.