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# Reflection and Remembrance: Oral histories and critical thinking

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## **Reflection and Remembrance: Oral histories and critical thinking**

Robin O. Harris

Critical thinking is one of the most significant goals of education. I always tell my students that if I can get them to "think," then I consider myself a successful teacher. Of the courses I teach, many lend themselves to critical thinking by the very nature of the topics, such as Technology and American Culture, or Women's History. Such courses inherently offer students a different prism through which to view the world as such unfamiliar perspectives demand a more critical and thoughtful approach than other more familiar topics. However, World Civilization survey courses lack such a "hook," and generally mean simply a rehashing of, or an expansion on, material encountered throughout earlier education. This sets up a significant challenge: how can we engage students in such a way that the material on the printed page comes to life and demands thoughtful consideration and analysis? In addition, my educational philosophy is that assignments should not be routine "busy" work, but rather actually help students develop significant skills useful in a myriad of other courses, and in the "real world" as well. Some of my most effective assignments are those that have come to me as a result of the energy that flows between students and teacher. I teach discussion-based classes because I believe the most lasting education students can receive comes not from the "pearls of wisdom" spewing from my mouth, but rather the ability to apply critical thinking through life; to understand that sometimes the most significant things to know are the "how" and "why" rather than the minute details of the "what." In order to do that, students must grasp the connection between the text and the real lives of everyday people.

One assignment that I give has proven particularly effective in meeting all of the criteria I believe important: an interview assignment I use with my World Civilization II students which

requires an interview with someone who lived through World War II. The interviewee can be someone who served in the armed forces, someone on the home front—even someone who was a small child at the time—simply someone who can share a personal connection to this time of great world distress. I guide the students in developing some very basic questions to ask, such as: “How did World War II affect your life? What are the strongest memories you have of the time period? How did the war change your life and that of those around you? What was life like for those left at home? For those fighting? Do you remember when you first learned of the war? What are your feelings now when you look back on the War? What do you think today’s young people can learn from those who lived through the experience?”

Since one of the main goals I have in teaching survey courses is to make students aware of historical interpretation, we discuss bias and objectivity. We talk about oral history and the value of primary sources, as well as memory and individual perspectives. I explain to the students the need to proceed cautiously and be sensitive to the feelings of the person being interviewed. I encourage the students to go to the interview with prepared questions and to carefully take notes of responses and use those as clues for further questions. Most of all, I encourage the students to listen and learn.

Although I provide alternative assignments for students unable to locate someone to interview, I coax students to consider the many possibilities: their grandparents, neighbors, fellow church members, family friends, employers, even nursing home patients. Very rarely is a student unable to find someone to interview.

In the years I have been giving this assignment I have received some remarkable papers: the stories of underground resistance fighters in occupied France; women who piloted aircraft between bases; men who survived prison camps; survivors of concentration camps; women who undertook factory jobs previously reserved only for men; children sent away from home for safety during the London blitz, and other children in America with little understanding of what was really going on, but aware of the shortages and heartaches around them. Some papers are very well writ-

ten; some are not. Yet each and every one of them yields a direct connection to the “experience” of history; this takes World War II from a topic in a text book to an event in the life of another human being. Many interviews are punctuated by pauses, and often tears; and sometime the things the interviewees are unable to talk about carry the greatest impact.

Not only do the students detail the interview, but they are asked to connect what they are told to what they know about World War II and to their understanding of war. This connection provides one of the multiple valuable layers of this assignment, and represents my expectation as I originally envisioned the project. What I did not anticipate was how this assignment would serve to strengthen the bond between the interviewer and the interviewee. That is particularly true of grandchildren and grandparents. Over and over again, students write of new appreciation and understanding of grandparents resulting from this assignment as they are suddenly forced to see someone they thought they knew so well in a different light. As a grandparent myself, I find this particularly gratifying.

While the following papers come from one specific class, they are representative of all those I have received. I believe this assignment illustrates how using non-traditional approaches to engage students in relevant and thought-provoking assignments can effectively achieve the goals and objectives of a liberal arts education.

The research assignment for this class was to interview someone who lived through World War II. The interviewee could be someone who served in the military service, someone on the home front or even a child—anyone who was touched by the experience of World War II.

### **1. Author: John Pilgrim**

World War II marked a violent and tumultuous period in American history which altered life for many individuals who adapted in a myriad of ways to a United States at war. My great-grandmother, Gladys Hill, encountered many of the changes World War II wrought for those on the home front. As a mother with six

children, she tackled many new and different responsibilities during the war to assure that life for her family proceeded as close to normal as possible after her husband, John Hill, left for Okinawa. As a Seabee, he was among the first people to make landfall there for America and assure the area's safety for Allied troops. The Seabees actually entered enemy territory before the Marines to provide exact coordinates for enemy barricades and bunkers. Later in the War, as part of a construction battalion, he helped build bases for troops. Back at home, his wife's responsibilities expanded beyond taking care of the children and feeding her family under the constraints of rationing to include work in the local mill, and somehow find time in her busy schedule for leisure with her children.

My great-grandmother's major responsibility revolved around the care of her children. Solely responsible for their care with her husband away in the War, she became an extremely watchful mother. The long months of war made providing even basic clothing and food difficult. In addition, she became a much stricter disciplinarian, assuming a role generally held by men during this time period. During her husband's absence, the children's well-being depended entirely upon her as she took on the role of both mother and father.

After my great-grandmother began working at the local mill, she returned home late in the afternoon, not to rest from her hard day's work, but to prepare dinner for her children. With most men off fighting in the war, the scarcity of labor drew many women into factories and mills. She remembers the work as difficult and tiring. The wool arrived at the mill recently sheared from the sheep, and thus dirty. The workers put the wool into a large machine for cleaning and processing. The machine rolled the fiber and packed the wool in barrels. With the wool reserved for blankets to warm soldiers fighting in cold and wet climates, those on the home front often wore whatever mis-sized and overused clothing a family owned. New clothes became a rare gift for special occasions.

My great-grandmother made \$24 a week. With four children to feed and clothe, as well as herself, her small paycheck left

little extra money, but the funds carried the family through the war. Yet securing the money necessary for the family's survival meant she spent forty-eight long hours away from home.

The War effort brought food rationing, but with most people lacking a surplus of money anyway, people bought food sparingly and wasted very little. My great-grandmother recalls the key to rationing as careful planning. While the family continued to require sugar and butter, two key ingredients in cooking, war rationing rendered these supplies available in only small quantities. Because of the butter shortage, the use of margarine—which my great-grandmother describes as “white lumps the size of a cherry”—gained popularity. With meat and poultry difficult to obtain there emerged the use of a new meat product made from horses which many markets began to sell to satisfy customers desperate for a cheap and readily available meat during the war years. My great-grandmother admits to buying the meat once, but describes the texture as horrible and the taste as nasty and unfit at any price! Since the family lived only a mile from a lake, fish became a frequently served item with other rations short. Although generally served only as a back-up in case of an emergency, my great-grandmother recalls serving fish for dinner on a number of occasions. Because of the low price and good flavor, Spam became a hot commodity during the War. During peak-growing season, the family relied on fruits and vegetables. The small backyard garden produced enough tomatoes, pears, apples, and corn to feed my great-grandmother and her six children throughout the war.

Long hours of work at the mill left my great-grandmother little time for fun and games with her children. However, sometimes the family went horseback riding along the trails of North Georgia, and fishing—always a source of fun for the family—also brought a sense of accomplishment with a prize catch stored in the freezer to offset rationing. Throughout the war, the family spent a lot of time with neighbors playing cards and board games and eagerly awaiting the latest news from the War.

I felt great sympathy with my great-grandmother as she talked about her sense of joy and relief upon her husband's return

from duty in World War II. Our conversation enlightened me about the problems and challenges my family faced during the War. The story opened an entirely new dimension of World War II to me, one I have never received from reading a history book. Understanding the feelings and emotions that ran rampant through my great-grandmother's household taught me much about other American households as well. The heartfelt and emotional memories of my great-grandmother revealed a deep passion for the war effort shared by many Americans. Although I remember hearing parts of my great-grandmother's story as a child, I had never heard the entire tale before. Perhaps if I had lived during World War II, I would have reacted similarly to the necessity to care for my children, work in a mill, and deal with the shortages and rationing of food and other essential items. Yet, I can never be sure. The War affected many American families and my great-grandmother's story reminded me how turmoil brings families closer together. My great-grandfather returned after his service in the United States Army and the War ended soon thereafter. Yet the memories of the War stayed in the hearts of those who experienced it. Those memories still linger today.

## **2. Author: Jennifer Puckett**

I interviewed my grandmother, Helen White, and her best friend, Rosalyn Beasley, about their experiences during World War II. Rosalyn began working at Robins Air Force Base three days after turning twenty-one. The Base had two employment offices: one to hire skilled workers and clerical staff; and the other, called the "shed," which hired unskilled laborers and uneducated people for menial jobs. Rosalyn, and eight or ten other women, sat at a window handing out paperwork to those looking for jobs. The women assisted people who required help in completing applications by asking them the questions and filling out the forms before sending the applicants to get finger printed. After working in this position for several months, Rosalyn moved to the separation department where she fired people and handled resignations for the



same people she had hired. While turn-over was huge, wartime demands made hiring workers a constant.

Rosalyn worked at RAFB from 1942 through 1945, and then in personnel at McDill Air Force Base until V-J (Victory in Japan) Day. Helen lived in Macon during World War II and began working in the Finance Department of Robins Air Force Base as a cashier in 1943. Both women lived in a boarding house along with about twenty other women who also worked at the Base, or for the local newspaper, *The Macon Telegraph*, or in area factories.

Rosalyn and Helen got up at 4:30 a.m. each morning as getting to the base required three hours because of the limited two-lane access with buses delaying traffic. The buses earned the nickname "M&Ms" (meet 'em and mash 'em) due to frequent wrecks, and everyone joked that S&S Cafeteria stood for "Stand and Wait" because of the long lines found there. The huge influx of service men in the Macon area during the War resulted in long lines for everything! Some men came to train at Camp Wheeler or Cochran Field, and many worked or served at RAFB.

The two women recalled the many items rationed during the War, such as shoes, sugar, butter, meat and gasoline. Purchasing these items required rationing stamps. People often fried and ate tripe, the lining of an animal stomach, since steaks and chops were rarely available. People also learned to eat Spam made from formerly "undesirable" animal parts.

World War II required many women throughout the United States to work outside of the home for the first time. Women worked in factories and plants making tanks, jeeps, machines, ammunition, guns and cannons for the war effort. Such women became known as "Rosie the Riveters."

Rosalyn and Helen remember the country as totally unprepared for war. They recall everyone hearing on the radio about the bombing of Pearl Harbor: Rosalyn and Helen heard the news while getting ready for dates, and Rosalyn's aunt and uncle heard about the bombing in their car on the way to Macon. The very next day, President Roosevelt declared war.

All able-bodied men, eighteen and older, went into the serv-

ice. Although new soldiers were supposed to receive eighteen months training, immediate demand meant that many men entered battle without any training at all. Rufus Rogers, a Marine the women knew, enlisted and fought in Iwo Jima and Guadalcanel. After receiving shrapnel wounds in the leg, he spent time in several hospitals before release from the Marines and arrival at a hospital in Jacksonville, Florida. Rosalyn's brother, Nat, a carpenter before the War, had his ship torpedoed by a German submarine on the way to Guam for construction work. He and his fellow passengers survived eighteen hours in the water before rescuers picked the men up and carried them on to Guam. After working there a year, Nat returned to the United States and enlisted in the Army to go overseas and fight. Rosalyn's oldest brother enlisted in the Medical Core in 1940, but remained in the United States throughout the War. Her younger brother, Mason, also enlisted in the Medical Core where he met his wife, a lieutenant. Regulations prohibited even dating between enlisted people and officers, so when the couple married, the marriage remained a secret until she became pregnant and resigned from the service. Rosalyn and Helen remembered a pilot, Jesse Kennedy, killed during the War, and Keith Smith, a driver for General Patton. The women also recalled J.M. Smith, and "Old Bo," two other soldiers who died in battle. The families of deceased soldiers received letters stating, "We regret to inform you...." Families held memorial services even though often without ever receiving the bodies of their loved ones bodies.

Women serving in the Army were called WACS, and those in the Navy, WAVES. Rosalyn and Helen remember their friend Margaret Alexander, a member of the WAVES, as well as Hettie and Mary Moreland. Doris Ferrara, a nurse on the front lines, received a Silver Cross for bravery.

Rosalyn and Helen explained that the soldiers of World War II saved this country; without their sacrifices, the United States would not remain today. The women remember everyone able to fight wanting to do so: a sharp contrast from today when many people avoid serving in the military or join only to get money. During World War II, every man, woman, and child contributed to the war

effort. Everyone banded together, and no one minded rationing. "Everything we could do, we did for the soldiers overseas fighting in dire circumstances. For the first two years of World War II, we were glued to the radio to hear the news of the men. The U.S. was so unprepared that the soldiers were being mowed down like grass on a lawn." As time went on, the War took a turn for the better. However, the women remember the War as a terrible time in the lives of everyone.

Rosalyn and Helen remember everyone donating coats for the soldiers to wear and not minding, even during cold weather, because no one minded giving up anything for the GIS. The women recalled the USO (United Service Organization) in Macon which catered to all the soldiers. Every Saturday night, the USO sponsored a dance; once Bob Hope even entertained troops there. Every week Rosalyn and Helen attended the dances at the USO where soldiers could also play cards, socialize, write letters to people back home, or simply relax.

On V-J (Victory in Japan) Day, the streets filled with people and everyone stayed up all night celebrating. V-J Day meant that the Americans had "whipped" Japan and everyone was coming home!

The interview allowed me to learn firsthand much new interesting information. Somehow I cannot imagine knowing people that actually fought in the War, or even died, yet these women remember so many wartime details. World War II influenced both of these women's lives. This interview helped me understand the huge sacrifices made by the soldiers that fought in World War II.

### **3. Author: Teresa Pike**

Nathan Driscall, a long-time family friend, explained to me that as a young man he had no desire to be in the military. However, drafted by the United States Army in 1942, Driscall served as a medic during World War II. First stationed in London, England, he arrived in Normandy, France, during the most desperate time of the War. I was excited to have him share with me sto-

ries which he had never before shared with anyone.

When I asked Mr. Driscal what he remembered about World War II, he responded: "Oh, dear! We could be here for hours if you want to know EVERYTHING!" I laughed at his comment and asked him to tell me some of the more specific things he remembered. He began by describing his time in Normandy, during the D-Day invasion. Although not present for the first two days of the invasion, he arrived on the third day and saw heart-wrenching sights. Speaking with great difficulty at some points in the interview, Mr. Driscal recalled some of the injuries he dealt with as a medic. He described the D-Day invasion as "very tragic and downright sad," remarking that "a soldier can have every type of training there is, but no one really knows war until they get there." Although I found Mr. Driscal's involvement with the Battle of the Bulge very interesting, he did not really want to talk much about this part of the War, just mentioning how the wounded and dead soldiers surrounded him.

One of the few stories Mr. Driscal was able to share with me concerned the field hospitals where wounded, sick, and recovering soldiers stayed. During this time, the Geneva Convention declared both Allied and Axis hospitals as off-limits for attack. Small field-base tents bore a large red cross on top so that aircraft could recognize the tents as hospitals. According to Mr. Driscal, the use of tents as hospitals during the War resulted from the need for hospitals "easy to pick up and move when the troops moved to different battle fields." However, even with the tents clearly marked as hospitals, Mr. Driscal recalled instances when his tent underwent attacks by machine guns and aircraft. He commented that the Nazis were not the only ones who broke the Geneva Convention. He remembered a time in Germany, beside the Rhine River, with the Axis powers on one side of the river and the Allied powers on the other. A British plane flew over the hospital where he was stationed, and the pilot attempted to attack the field base. The Allied army spotted the plane and shot it down. The British pilot rescued himself via parachute and arrived safely on the ground on Mr. Driscal's side of the river. Learning he had shot at the wrong field

base, the pilot simply replied, "Sorry, chaps! I thought I was on the other side of the Rhine." Mr. Driscal considers this as prime evidence that both Allied and Axis powers violated the Geneva Convention.

When asked how the War impacted his life, Mr. Driscal responded that one of the hardest things he had to do during the war was to leave his "love" behind in the United States. About a month before the War, he met his "love" at a dinner party. After meeting the "beautiful young lady" once, Mr. Driscal knew she was "the one." During the War, he wrote his "love" everyday, and believes that sometimes she was the only thing that kept him alive. Mr. Driscal wrote letters telling her how much he loved her and how he wanted to be with her—even after only one meeting. After the War, Mr. Driscal proposed to his "love" and they have lived happily together ever since.

Mr. Driscal was a pleasure to interview and I learned a lot from him. I tried to put myself in many of the situations he described and to connect myself to his experiences. It is impossible for me to imagine being the mother, wife, daughter, girlfriend or relative of any person fighting in a war! I agree with Mr. Driscal about the reality of war: a soldier cannot know war until he is actually there. Listening to Mr. Driscal, I learned that all the training in the world could not prepare a soldier for what they saw in World War II. This interview definitely increased my compassion for Mr. Driscal and all other veterans. I think veterans should receive the highest honors as these people have placed their lives on the line to save ours, and anyone who fights for our country should be respected and honored. Mr. Driscal's stories touched my heart and soul, and I appreciate every second I got to spend with him.

#### **4. Author: Jill Simmons**

Ms. Sherri Prestwood was three years and nine months old at the bombing of Pearl Harbor. I wanted to get a child's perspective of World War II, and I found how much an almost four year old could remember absolutely fascinating!

On December 7, 1941, a child, not quite four years old, sat on the living room floor looking at the "funny" papers when chaos began. Family members started running all around her talking about the bombing at Pearl Harbor. Her papa turned on the huge radio and the family all gathered around to listen to the live broadcast. Franklin D. Roosevelt, the President of the United States, had met with Congress on the same Sunday morning at 6 or 7 o'clock our time. As all this occurred, the confused child sat thinking, "Why would these people want to bomb a man?," referring to Roosevelt. She remembers getting down on the floor and looking at the disturbing news in the *Atlanta Constitution*. Even at such a young age, Ms. Prestwood remembers the shock felt by the whole nation.

The child lived with her papa and granny who had three sons and a son-in-law. The two eldest sons and the son-in-law entered the Navy immediately. R. D., 24, Lane, 21, and the son-in-law, Jerry, all joined the Navy to avoid being drafted by the Army. The family was all devastated by watching the boys leave for war. The child's granny sat and cried for days on end as she envisioned the boys as shot day after day. Eventually, Pete, the youngest at seventeen, begged Papa for permission to go fight in the War since he was not yet old enough to join on his own. Her papa signed the paper granting permission, and Peter, too, went overseas. Her granny, dressed in high heels and a dress, stood in the huge kitchen wiping each dish and crying, "My baby's gone to war; my baby's gone to war!" The child, closest to Pete, felt the impact of his leaving as well. Throughout the war, she wore a bracelet with four red ribbons each bearing the name of one of the boys.

Banners, approximately ten inches by thirteen inches with a blue border, hung by a gold cord in the front windows of houses, with a red star placed in honor of each person off at war from that particular household. When someone was killed in battle, a service man brought a letter as well as a gold star. In case of notification by telegram, a gold star arrived with the victim's belongings. The gold star replaced a red one and passers-by could see which families had lost loved ones.

Everything focused on the war effort. With soldiers' needs as the first priority, people learned to make do with less fuel for heat and worn out too-small shoes. The purchase of sugar, coffee, meat, and other essential items, required ration stamps. Each person received a ration book, one for adults and a different one for children. The purchases not only had to be paid for, but required the stamps as well so a person could buy only the rationed amount within any given period. Nothing was taken for granted. People ate butter beans and cornbread at almost every meal and any money for savings went to buy war bonds. Children at home received war bonds for Christmas presents and anything extra went to the war fund. Ms. Sherri remembers her granny going to the Red Cross to wrap bandages for overseas. She recalls peeling the tin foil off gum wrappers at school and rolling this into large balls used for the war effort. In addition, she and her classmates wrote letters to servicemen for the holidays. When she started first grade, everyday began with prayers for the men and women overseas. To Ms. Sherri, the war seemed to unite people in support of a common cause.

Every morning and night, Ms. Sherri looked in the newspaper at the dramatic photos of the war. She recalls seeing the picture of a man who survived, in spite of the death of his whole company, but who was captured by the Japanese forces. Pictures showed headless bodies and etched the horror of war deeply into the child's mind.

With televisions very rare, most families went to the movie theaters on Saturday nights to watch the news reels. Ms. Sherri remembers seeing many pictures of children rescued from concentration camps, and recalls her deep impression of Hitler's hatefulness as responsible for the death of three to six thousand people a day, including ultimately six and a half million Jews. Her mother showed her pictures of people in concentration camps and she remembers one of an extremely thin man who looked "like a skeleton with skin pulled tightly over his bones." She heard of the atrocities the Germans inflicted on the Jews, such as using people in the camps for medical experimentation: taking naked men out into the snow and cold and leaving some alone, pouring cold water on

some, and hot water on others, all to determine which would freeze to death the quickest. She remembers hearing how grown men arriving to free the prisoners from the camps, stood outside to cry and vomit before being able to pull themselves together and tend to the horrible conditions of the people they found.

At various times, the boys received furloughs which allowed them to visit at home for thirty days. Usually her papa and granny went to California to meet the boys and bring them home. Ms. Sherri remembers one incident when Pete came home. When she returned from school and went to her room to put something on her bed, Pete jumped out of the closet and surprised her. She recalls her elation at seeing him because of the closeness of their relationship.

She shared other incidences, such as the story of a friend's mother who managed to escape from Poland when Hitler invaded. The lady constantly wrote letters and sent things to her family in the concentration camps, but never received any mail in return. One day she received one of her own letters returned in the mail and marked "Family Deceased." The woman was devastated that she had no idea how her family came to their deaths and that she was left as the sole survivor.

When the boys came home, there was a huge celebration since they all came through the War safely. The banner hanging in their window was one of the few in Atlanta without a gold star. She recalls that everyone seemed to cry with joy for three months straight: the War was over and their family members had returned home safely. Her papa bought cars and houses for the four boys as some sort of pay back; he was so upset over what they had suffered and endured while fighting.

None of the four boys were even wounded. Although they all recalled horrible experiences they did not want to talk about, Lane did tell one story. He had "a gentle soul," and although he joined the Navy at the beginning of the War, he ended up fighting as a Marine. The Marines did not have a medical corps, so Lane took care of people on the battlefield. One night, the Marines received orders from their mean officer to "gut" a captured wound-



ed Japanese soldier and make him run until he died. This was something Lane never got over; he was the only one of the boys to have lasting effects, mostly emotional, from the experience of war. He lived until 1985 and certain things remained with him until his death; he only shared a very few of his experiences. While on the battlefield, Lane contracted malaria from some of the troops he treated. He ran a fever of 112 degrees, and never fully recovered.

Throughout the War, an intense effort to win at all costs and bring the soldiers home dominated the country as a very strong sense of patriotism and a healthy respect for the president reigned. Ms. Sherri remembers a great deal of honor and integrity among people all going through difficult times. She believes the War greatly affected her as she gained a deep appreciation for the price paid for freedom because she saw it all first-hand, and she learned to really appreciate patriotism. The War also made her follow to the far right of Rush Limbaugh. To this day, she cannot watch movies about boys coming home from war without crying. The five long years of war changed her life drastically.

This paper gave me a birds-eye-view of life during World War II. While I found some things, such as the hanging of the banners in the window and the strong sense of patriotism, interesting. Others, such as the story of the soldier captured by the Japanese and the people in the concentration camps, were heartbreaking. I have often viewed World War II as unrelated to me—something in the distant past. I now realize how much the past affects what happens in my life today. I ask myself, “What would life be like today if men such as Lane, Pete, R.D., and Jerry had not risked their lives for MY freedom? What would life be like if America had lost the War?” I gained a whole new respect for Ms. Sherri. I cannot imagine life not knowing if at any moment you might hear a knock on the door or receive a telegram informing you of the death of someone you love, and then having to replace the red star on the banner in your window with a gold one. I have a feeling that if I had experienced what Ms. Sherri went through, each year when December 7th arrived, I would have to get by myself and praise God for keeping my family safe, and giving me the courage and strength to carry

on. I think that I would have had many sleepless nights worrying about the next day might bring. Through what I learned from this interview, I remain constantly indebted not only to the men who fought for my freedom, but to the families that gave up their children for the cause. I never imagined that I could learn so much from the memories of a child, but through this project, World War II became a reality, instead of just another lesson in a history book.

### **5. Author: Paula Berenguer**

1941 was a year that changed the lives of thousands of people living in the United States. After surviving “The War to End All Wars”—World War I—no one was prepared for the second war to take the world by storm. World War II killed more people, cost more money, damaged more property, affected more people, and caused more far-reaching changes than any prior or subsequent war in history. The war, which began in 1939, drew the United States in in 1941, and then continued to rage for four more years, cannot be understood as a date recorded in history books, but as an event that impacted every American person, and determined the fate of all American families. My family was not excluded from this dramatic event.

Mr. grandfather, Grover Duffie Jones, grew up in a family of strong morals and Christian beliefs. Born in Forsyth County, Georgia, on October 6, 1925, Papaw, as I know him, was the only son of nine children born to Mac and Victoria Jones. His father, a tenant farmer and Baptist country preacher, often moved the family to various rural Georgia areas in search of more productive farmland. My grandfather attended Jackson County High School in Talmo, Georgia, in addition to working days on the family farm and nights at a bakery. His sister, Eunice, also helped the family through her secretarial position, and Victoria saved her “butter and egg” money. When Mac developed “dropsy” (congestive heart failure), everyone pooled their money to buy a house in Gainesville, Georgia. While living there, Papaw traveled to Atlanta to voluntarily join the United States Navy, requesting a place in

cooking or baking, an area in which he had considerable experience. However, he scored so well on the aptitude test and he was placed in the electronics field. When I asked why he joined the military in the middle of the War, he turned to me and responded: "I would have rather volunteered to be a member of the Navy than be drafted into the Army." As a high school student, he was not eligible for the draft. Papaw recalls his journeys with the Navy as difficult and strenuous—although somewhat exciting—and exacting a heavy toll on his emotions. The experience marked his first time away from home for such a long period. At such a young age he was cast into a war that would change his life forever. He chose to share with me his once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Papaw's memories of the war began with his training. A prerequisite to his work in the electronics field was typing forty words per minute. When he completed his typing test, however, Papaw had only typed thirty-nine and a half words per minute! The man administering the exam graciously let the half a word slide, and declared Papaw "close enough." My grandfather did not find basic training very difficult; he learned military maneuvers as well as "everything on the ship." After completing training in Maryland, he moved on for further training in electronics and communication at the Naval Training Center in Great Lakes, Michigan. Upon fulfilling his required training, he went to Corpus Christi, Texas. Papaw has many memories of his six-week training in Texas where he received the equivalent of a Master's Degree in Electronics. The fast-paced schedule, which called for completion of a college algebra class in one week, allowed minimal time for sleep. One day, my grandfather, suffering from lack of sleep, failed to remain awake in class. He awoke quickly when the teacher completed a diagram of a complicated machine and queried, "Jones, could you tell me how this machine operates?" The only thing Papaw could say was: "It won't work, Sir." Indeed, the machine would not work as two crossed wires short circuited the mechanism! This was the first of several times throughout the War when chance circumstances rescued Papaw from serious consequences. In fact, some of these events proved prophetic of his future career.

During his stint in Texas, Papaw's unit stood at attention in the Texas sun for so long that the polish on their spit-shined shoes melted! The commander declared everyone as failing inspection and then pulled all off-base passes for the day. As this happened on a Sunday, Papaw and a few of his buddies had plans to attend church services in town. They protested that prohibiting them from doing so violated their rights. The commander finally relented and granted passes for church only. No doubt this was the largest crowd of sailors the minister had ever seen at the small church outside the front gates of the base!

Grover Jones, one of the fifty men stationed in Texas for training on the single-side band radio, learned Morse code as well as a "secret" code—one so secret that none of the trainees even realized the secrecy involved. After completing training, twenty-five of the men shipped out for the Pacific while twenty-five more, kept in reserve, remained in the United States. Without adequate supplies of this particular radio, dividing the unit was a strategic decision to avoid risk of the Japanese capturing the entire unit and discovering the secret code. My grandfather and one other man, sent to San Francisco, California, to receive dental care, did not know the location of their twenty-three cohorts. Although anxious to rejoin their unit after completion of their dental work, Papaw and his friend did not receive orders to ship out. Frustrated, the two men approached the base commander about the delay and discovered, surprisingly, that their orders required the signature of the President of the United States! By chance one day, someone came by requesting a volunteer as a sentry guard for a meeting; my grandfather, with time on his hands, agreed to the task. Little did he know that he served as a sentry for a preliminary meeting regarding the formation of the United Nations. Finally, Papaw received orders for Hawaii where he joined the other men of his unit.

His unit's role as part of the second wave of American Navy men to invade Japan required Papaw's shipping out on a minesweeper used to relay radio messages and orders. This, in essence, made the ship a "sitting duck" for Japanese submarine

attacks. Days before the scheduled invasion of Japan, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima, and then Nagasaki, thus ending invasion plans. His ship ported in Nagasaki Bay and became part of the Communications Operation. Papaw relayed messages sent by using Morse code as well as the secret code he had learned in Texas. Many troops visited the bomb site in spite of the "off-limits" designation. One such group used my Papaw's camera to take pictures of the site which literally looked like a garbage heap. The brutality of the War often gave rise to great resourcefulness on the part of the troops. An example occurred one night with Papaw on duty in the radio room of the ship. Rumor spread that a larger ship just docked beside them had fresh eggs as well as freshly baked bread on board. At sea for a longtime without fresh supplies, and with a scarcity of fresh items after the bombing, Papaw managed to work his way onto the other ship, locate the baker, and barter—or beg—for three eggs and two loafs of bread. When he arrived back at his station, his four comrades anxiously questioned him about the eggs. Mischievously, he pulled one egg from his pocket and declared his plans to enjoy the whole egg himself! Under threats from the other four, including his supervisor, he relinquished the eggs, but received one whole egg for himself as reward for bravely securing the fresh provisions. Papaw remembers this as the most delicious meal of his tour of duty!

In December, 1945, my grandfather left for Florida to receive an honorable discharge from the United States Navy. His journey home, however, was not a simple one. Papaw left Japan on a troop hospital ship which shortly began to come apart in the middle. When a call for welders came, my grandfather, not knowing anything about welding, did not respond. Not more than an hour later, another call came asking for anyone knowing anything about welding to please come help since the boat was rapidly coming apart! With the ship finally welded back together, the troops eventually returned safely to American soil. Although scheduled for a direct flight, Papaw's plane encountered difficulties and made an emergency landing in North Dakota. Here the troops boarded a train headed towards Florida only to discover that cold tempera-

tures had frozen the train to the railroad tracks! Once again the men eager to get home faced a delay. Eventually, with the use of hot coals to warm the tracks, the train began the journey to Florida. After arriving there, Papaw received his official discharge and purchased a bus ticket to Gainesville, Georgia, where his family waited to hear word of his arrival. With no way of notifying them in advance of his discharge, Papaw recalls walking toward the house and his parents, catching sight of him, rushing out to hug him.

While Papaw's time in the United States Navy ended, the effects of his experience did not. In the summer of 1946, he developed rheumatoid arthritis, thought to be radiation related. Bedridden for six months, before the illness suddenly abated, Papaw also credits radiation exposure for his premature balding.

My grandfather achieved much in his life, and he never stopped to take a break. The fall after returning from Japan, he went back to high school for one year to take required math classes since he wanted to become an electrical engineer. In 1947, he attended Truett McConnell College where he met his future wife, Ethelene Dyer. The two married on December 23, 1949, and moved to Macon in 1951 for my grandfather to attend Mercer University. While there Papaw decided to become a Baptist minister. The couple's first child, Kevin, arrived in 1952, and my mother, Cynthia, five years later. My grandfather serves as pastor for various churches throughout Georgia. He remembers the time he served in the War and the great impact of the experience on his life. World War II affected the life of every person alive in that time period, and their future as well. Papaw has no regrets about being a part of the War. I can only hope that should another war strike our country, the people of this country would once again respond in the way the men and women of my grandfather's time did.

## **6. Author: Brad Brinkley**

My grandfather, Dudley Brinkley, a veteran of World War II, entered the service in 1943, leaving behind his wife and fourteen-day old son, Jay Brinkley. Sent to Fort McPherson for classi-

fication, Dudley learned that despite his desire to be a part of the Air Force, his prior experience led to his assignment with the Navy to work on railroads. After a brief stay in New Orleans, he went to London, England, and saw the effects of the war first-hand. My grandfather went many places and saw many things during his wartime service; he learned all about war.

When he first arrived in England, Dudley did not have much to keep him busy. Working with an English group, he riveted tops on boxcars. Air raids, most common at night, occurred frequently and brought work to a halt. He recalls having to turn out the lights to inhibit planes trying to identify bomb sites. In one instance, only two of the twenty-one bombs dropped actually exploded; Russian laborers forced to work for the Nazis often sabotaged the bombs, thus saving many, many lives.

Having already seen some of the tragedies of war, my grandfather went to Cherbourg, France, to become a part of invasion forces. During his six months spent at Cherbourg, Dudley learned the truth about war. He remembers the concrete bunkers impenetrable by artillery, but susceptible to grenades which thrown inside exploded, killing everyone. My grandfather recalls blood as thick as his fingers left on the steps of bunkers by soldiers frantically trying to escape. Cherbourg marks the beginning of Dudley's real wartime experience.

Dudley then moved to Amberg, Belgium, known as the "City of Sudden Death." Hitler tried to knock the town completely out with V-1 and V-2 rockets, each containing one thousand pounds of TNT. A V-1 rocket hit the block next to Dudley's station blowing off doors and knocking windows out in his quarters. Amberg, controlled and governed by American troops, was a big rail line connection. Dudley recalls people running to shelter upon seeing "buzz bombs" (visible from the ground) which collapsed the lungs of anyone unfortunate enough to fail to reach shelter. On more than one occasion, my grandfather narrowly escaped death in Amberg.

Dudley saw terrible things during wartime, such as a German tank with a hole in it the size of a man and two dead men

inside. He remembers the worst thing about war as seeing that the civilians suffered as much, if not more than, the soldiers. Soldiers were soldiers; they knew they might die at any moment as a result of war; innocent civilians should not be at the same risk. One day as Dudley drove, he viewed two large military trucks driving recklessly and subsequently hitting a pedestrian on a bike. My grandfather helped load the man in a vehicle to take him to receive help, but never found out what happened to the man. Dudley's worst experiences during the war involved digging people out of the "buzz bomb" damage. Some soldiers survived, but most died. One "buzz bomb" could kill five hundred people. Soon after finding this out, an order declared that only fifty people could assemble at any one place at a time.

Dudley remembers the situation of the infantry as the worst of any soldiers. They slept on the ground because they had nowhere else to sleep, and constantly experienced danger. An acquaintance of his, Jose Williams, was the only soldier to survive when a hand grenade hit his trench; Jose spent nine months in the hospital recovering.

During war, soldiers encounter danger wherever they are. My grandfather explained that soldiers cannot think about dying, but have to assume they will survive each day. Sent out to sea without a submarine escort, Dudley remembers after three days hearing a general alarm which indicated the presence of enemy ships. As he remained in his bunk, a shipmate came in looking for his gun. Dudley said: "What are you doing? Don't you remember? They took all the ammunition out of our guns...What are you going to do, throw the gun at them?" When the man threw the gun down, Dudley remarked, "Well, you might as well strap it on; if they sink the ship, we are going to die anyway!" Another time, when Dudley's boat docked between a PH ship and an ammunition ship, a German plane flew over dropping a bomb on the PH ship, and killing five people. Had the bomb hit the ammunition ship, no one in the area—including my grandfather—would have survived.

Dudley experienced a lot throughout the war. He says that missing his wife and baby so much dominated even the enjoyable



experiences during the time. My grandfather thought about his family night and day since he loved his wife and child with all his heart and found being away from them agonizing. He once told me, "War is hell." Hearing his story, I think the statement is accurate. Monuments and pictures of men on the battle field offer a misconception of war as glorious. My grandfather says there is nothing glorious about war. He was away from his family; he saw terrible things; he faced death every moment; and, worst of all, his father died while he was away at war. He never got to tell his father how much he loved him before he died. That is something my grandfather really wishes he had done.

I have learned a lot about war by sitting down and talking with my grandfather. I do not know how I would have handled the situations in which he found himself. A person cannot know what war is like without experiencing it. You can hear all the stories, watch all the movies, read all the books, but nothing will ever show you what war is really like. I had no idea that my grandfather had come so close to death so many times. The very thought of him being in some of those situations makes me thank God that my grandfather survived the war and remains alive today. Dudley Brinkley is an honest, highly-respected, caring man whom I am honored to call my grandfather.

## **7. Author: Ivan Bracic**

When I asked my grandfather, Ivan Bracic, Sr., if he could tell me about the War, he was happy to do so. When I was a child, I remember him telling me stories with great enthusiasm because, as he often said, he "fought for the liberation of his country." His memories and stories make him proud of who he is and what he fought for. Yet, he remembers World War II as changing his life forever.

Since my grandfather lives in Europe, our telephone interview was limited by the expense of an overseas call. Rather than answer interviews questions, my grandfather simply shared his memories with me.

My grandfather, born in 1926, and only thirteen when the war began in his country, became a volunteer soldier at the age of fifteen simply because he had little choice. All men, and many women, ranging from fourteen to the late fifties, were quickly recruited as war developed in Croatia, Yugoslavia, in early 1941. My grandfather began serving as a Yugoslavian army soldier, called a partizan, and distinguished by red stars on their hats. The units quickly and spontaneously formed as the country recovered from World War I. The soldiers initially lacked real weapons, but used old guns and pistols, knives, or anything else found in the course of action. The English and French helped supply food, weapons, and other necessities, but distribution was difficult. The main source of food came from local people who helped by giving soldiers cattle, pigs, poultry, bread, and other supplies. As the troops grew stronger, weapons were usually taken away from the enemy.

Italian fascists occupied the region when my grandfather lives, so he and the rest of the partizans in his unit hid in the mountains, often spending the night in the open or in caves. As a fifteen year old, he initially did not serve on the front line, but helped with cooking, cleaning, carrying, or transferring messages. He recalls these as his big assignments.

His first fight took place when he was sixteen. His unit of fifteen to twenty people was assigned to take over two trucks coming from Bosnia with supplies for Italian soldiers. The men cut down a tree to block the road and then aggressively surrounded the Italians. The frightened soldiers did not shoot as the partizans took over the trucks full of supplies and made the Italians prisoners of war. My grandfather still remembers the Italian soldiers' terrified faces at the moment of capture which was a matter of life or death for them.

The most devastating part of the war for my grandfather was the death of his comrades. He remembers the horrible experience of watching them helplessly as they bled to death. There was no proper medical care, just a local doctor who helped. When the doctor joined the brigade, he brought with him his own small bag in which he carried medicine and equipment. He could stop the

bleeding of small wounds by quickly sewing them up, but there was not much he could do for serious injuries. Many of my grandfather's good friends died during the war—many of them his own age. I sensed as my grandfather spoke that someone very close to him died; he became very uncomfortable talking, so I changed the discussion.

Winters represented the worst time for the partizans as they often marched several miles in deep snow without warm jackets or boots. Toes often froze, requiring amputation. My grandfather luckily had big leather boots given to him by my great-grandfather. He used the boots for several winters.

As the war came to a close, enthusiasm increased. Things did not seem too dark and fearful anymore as hope appeared for a better and more peaceful life. My grandfather particularly remembers the last few months of the war as different when joy appeared on people's faces for the first time in four years. News of Germany's defeat spread quickly and the partizans gained an additional surge and push for liberty. With the Italians pushed from the region, and the country, a strong nationalist headquarters came together. The last day of the war will always remain in my grandfather's memory: "There was something extraordinary that went through my body that day. I could not believe it was true. I just sat there and watched my comrades, full of joy, singing national songs. They had the happiest faces!" After the war, my grandfather remained with the Yugoslavian army until his retirement.

As a boy, my grandfather's stories seemed interesting and amusing; I even used to play "war" with my friends. This time, his stories sounded very different. I could hear his emotions through his words. Although I can never really understand what he went through, now I can at least better envision his experiences. The war forced him to grow up prematurely. Instead of enjoying the last years of childhood, he spent his youth in fear of death. My grandfather was one of the lucky survivors. His story made me think about all the people who did not survive on both sides of the war. Why did so many of that generation have to die? Is it right they had to die because of someone else's sick ideas and fantasies?

Although my country, Croatia, was in war a few years ago, I cannot say I really experienced warfare. I was very close to it, but I am grateful that I have not had to experience what my grandfather did.

## **8. Author: Keshae Cobb**

Patriotism and nationalism play a major role in a soldier's dedication to fight in war. Patriotism is a person's devotion and support for his or her country. I found a survivor and veteran of World War II, Samuel Jeffries, a seventy-nine year old white male, who is a family friend and a regular visitor to my church. He and his wife, Elizabeth, have six children.

Just eighteen years old when the War began, Jeffries still had to go to war. A soldier who served on the battlefields of Europe, he explained that the war changed his life dramatically, and began by describing the day he left home. He talked about the difficulties of leaving his family and friends and described his mother as "devastated." She did not want him to go to battle since she had lost her husband in World War I and feared losing her son on the battlefields of War War II. After the war had been going on for about a year and a half, Jeffries finally left to go fight. At first he was nervous and afraid, but felt better when he realized that some of his childhood friends would accompany him. He describes this as just the beginning of his new and unhappy life.

Jeffries recalls the long bus ride to his scheduled location as extremely quiet. No one said anything more than, "When will we get there?" He remembers his first day on the battlefield as traumatic; the war was nothing like he expected. With dead bodies lying all around, all he could think about was what if he was among those lying on the ground. Jeffries recalls killing his first man a week after arriving on the battlefield. He explained that he hated killing, but knew the war meant the choice between his life or theirs. He received his first wound after only a month and a half. Shot in his right arm, the wound—while not life threatening—was very painful. Hospitalized for about a month, he then returned to the battlefield.

Throughout his years in the army, life did not get any better, only worse. Jeffries recalled the day known as “D-Day” which he remembers as one of the most horrific times of the war. On June 6, 1944, the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and France began a surprise attack on the German soldiers in France. He recalls the Germans fighting back more powerfully than the United States soldiers had imagined, and explains this resulted in the loss of many American troops, including a few of his friends. He lost his best friend, Bobby Martin, as well as other friends made throughout his time on the battlefields. Jeffries received a life-threatening chest wound and was honorably discharged from the service.

Jeffries explained that his life has not been the same since the War. He still has trouble sleeping at night and continues to hear some of the men crying out for help. He remarked: “War isn’t for everyone.” What he meant was that it takes a strong person to go to war and fight and kill innocent people. He also meant that helplessly watching your best friend die takes real courage. Jeffries explained that without his wife, Elizabeth, he did not know where he would be. At the end of his story, he looked over at her with tears in his eyes and said, “Thank you.”

Interviewing Mr. Jeffries gave me enormous respect for soldiers. Fighting for your country requires a lot of nerve and patriotism. I could actually feel his pain as Mr. Jeffries told me his story. He remarked that there was much more, but the details were just too painful to go into. If I was a soldier then or now, I do not know how I would react. I do not really think that I could survive in such a life. I hope and pray that I will never have to go to war myself, or have to lose any of my loved ones to war.

## **9. Author: Chandler Rushing**

Ollie Mae Nimmons, born in November 1921, in Augusta, Georgia, grew up during a time in history that allowed her to experience many of our most memorable historical events, such as World War II and the depression. She is my grandmother.

Ollie Mae grew up in a place known as “the mill village” on

Broad Street in Augusta. Her mother and father both worked in the mill; her mother as a spinner, and her father repairing the looms. Although she had two sisters and one brother, Ollie Mae was the only one in her family to serve in World War II. Like most people of the time, Ollie Mae was very poor while growing up. Yet she remembers childhood as one of the happiest times in her life: "You didn't really care about being poor because no one else had any money, either." After graduating from Tubman High School in 1940, Ollie Mae joined the Navy four years later. She attended the Naval Training Center at Hunter College in Bronx, New York. After four to six weeks at the college, when asked where she wanted to be transferred, she requested to study International Business Machinery somewhere along the west coast. She was sent instead where she was most needed, the Fleet Record Office in San Francisco. Connected with the Post Office, Ollie Mae received information about "where the boys were," and made sure the servicemen received their mail. While in San Francisco, she stayed at 609 Sutter Street, a thirteen story high building with exceptional living conditions. The girls had the luxury of a swimming pool, a sun room, theater, and lounge. However, no males were allowed above the first floor. Ollie Mae also recalls that the girls were not allowed to be seen outside of the premises wearing civilian clothes. They were required to always appear in uniform, dressed properly and neatly, without any of their hair touching their jackets.

Ollie Mae experienced much sadness in losing many loved ones in the war. She said that when she entered the war, she had no idea that later her brother would have a son destined to lose his life as a Marine in Vietnam. When I asked about her over-all feeling about the War, she replied, "It was so sad." Her voice then began to quiver, and she started to sob. She recalled that while living in San Francisco, she heard mothers screaming and crying in response to hearing about the death of their sons in the war. At this point in the conversation, I really did not know what to say; I had no comforting words to give her. At the time, I really felt my grandmother's pain; it was so very sad. All of this brought back some really upsetting memories for her.

When I asked about her most memorable event during her service in the War, she recalled that while in Bronx, New York, she stood in review with five thousand other women before President Franklin D. Roosevelt on Navy Day. She remembered the event with excitement and honor.

Ollie May was engaged to a young man who was drafted. He served three and a half year in the army and was sent to the South Pacific, and later, Japan. My grandfather's brothers also fought in the War. His younger brother went to Germany and his older brother went to England. Later, when the War ended, the couple married in San Francisco at the church my grandmother attended. They enjoyed fifty years of marriage before my grandfather's death in 1996. She explained, "Both my husband and I received Honorable Discharges and returned home to Augusta, Georgia."

When I asked my grandmother how the war impacted her life, and that of others, she replied, "I wish that people today, the younger generation, would realize the sacrifices that were made. We could be speaking another language now, the War got so bad." My grandmother definitely spoke proudly of her role in the War. She told me that she wanted to make her father proud of her. When she entered the War, her father received a flag with one blue star on it to represent his daughter in the service. My grandmother's aunt, on her mother's side, was a gold star mother. She had five sons that were in the service and all of them came back home safely.

After this interview, I definitely look at my grandmother in a new light. I admire her much more. She has been through so much, and has lived an incredible life. I really felt sorry for her when she started to cry; I was not expecting it and was really surprised. I cannot even comprehend living this kind of life during this time in history. My generation really does not realize all that was given for us. I do not know what I would do if my brothers had to go to war. I just think about every man that died—someone's brother, father, husband, son. I am so thankful for all of the brave men and women that served in the War and are responsible for the life I live today. I am very proud of my grandmother, and I admire her for her courage and her strength.

## **10. Author: Shannon Kitchens**

My cousin Megan and I went to my grandparent's house together as I thought it would be interesting for her to sit in on my interview with my grandmother, Laura Kitchens, who was a child during the War. Born August 16, 1935, my grandmother was only six or seven during the War, and lived in Cinninnati, Ohio. I also asked my grandfather a few questions about the War, but at first he did not want to talk much about it. My grandfather has lived on a plot of land in Twiggs County all of his life. About ten years old during the War, his oldest brother was drafted at nineteen, and with his brother and father gone, he was responsible for the farm. My grandmother knew them all and so was able to answer the questions I was going to ask my grandfather.

My granny began to talk about the stamps used to ration such items as sugar, coffee, gas, and tires during the War. Each month families received stamps for these scarce items; she recalled tires as particularly hard to come by. She remembers rationing as an awful thing since as a child she really wanted to have sugar to sweeten things.

At this point, my Papa began to explained how he and his mother ran the farm during the War. He got up at daybreak to milk two cows, feed the mule and then the hogs before eating breakfast. He then headed to the fields to plow until lunchtime when he took a short break before returning to his chores. They grew peanuts, cotton, corn and cantalopes, selling the peanuts and cotton for cash money. My grandfather quit school in the third grade, something he really regrets.

My grandmother remembers that although the War did not seem too relevant to her life as a six year old, there were times when the way the grownups talked scared her. She recalls one time when the grownups were talking about the "enemy" and she began to wonder what kept the "enemy" from her house. She became completely terrified that the "enemy" would show up and take her away from her home.

My cousin and I spent about three hours talking with my



grandmother. I was deeply touched by the stories she told me and when we stopped talking about the War, we began to talk about a lot of other things. She told us how she and my grandfather met, and that they married one week after his return from the Korean War. This February will be their fiftieth anniversary. The interview was a very special experience for me as my grandmother talked to me about so many other things besides the War. She talked about the people I am related to and a lot about my father—things that I might never have known had I not done this interview. This was a very touching assignment for me as I now look at my grandmother in a very different light. She has an amazing past and a lot of knowledge that I did not know about since she and I had never talked about these things before. I feel the same way about the chance to talk with my grandfather. He is in poor health and getting to know how the War touched his life was a truly moving experience for me. This project was worth more than any letter grade can ever define because getting to know a whole different side of my grandparents was more valuable than any grade will ever be.

### **11. Author: Karen Hall**

My grandfather, William Humphrey Burdette, served in the army during World War II under the command of General Patton. Since I was a little girl, I can remember my grandfather describing Patton as the one man in the world he could not stand. My grandmother worked for the war effort in a factory that made parts for guns. My grandfather was in Europe for “D-Day,” before being stationed in Japan. He received a shrapnel wound in Japan and earned the Purple Heart. I love to sit and hear my granddaddy tell stories about World War II.

Drafted into the Army at the very beginning of the War, he first served under the command of General Patton. Granddaddy, being a very Christian man and a Baptist preacher, loves ever person he has ever met—except for General Patton. He recalls him as a “coarse and mean man who really did not care about other people,” even though he only met Patton once or twice on special occa-

sions. Granddaddy recalls not only food as scarce, but things such as toilet paper as virtually non-existent. He remembers one of the hardest parts of the War as being away from my grandmother. He explained that "teenage love was hard enough, but distance made it harder." My granddaddy wrote my grandmother every night and returned to her immediately when discharged because of his injuries.

When he was only my age, my granddaddy was shipped to be part of the invasion on Omaha Beach, Normandy, France, on June 6, 1944. He has many stories to tell about the War, but his descriptions of "D-Day" are the most heart-wrenching of all. He recalls the man who left the boat before him and was shot in the head and killed instantly. Granddaddy remembers wanting to turn right around and get back on the boat and come home to America. However, he realized that a nation in despair needed his help. He described men around him being shot and killed by snipers as all he could do was run to safety. He hid behind shelter and every little while went into the fray to help a wounded soldier. He recalls being surrounded by the smells of death and the screams of dying men. My granddaddy asked me if I had seen "Saving Private Ryan," which he describes as the most realistic interpretation of what happened on that beach of anything he has ever seen. After sitting with his hands folded in his lap, he began talking again about missing my grandmother.

Granddaddy explained that on the front, correspondence was very difficult. He stayed busy most of the time, either fighting, sleeping or eating, and described an average day consisting of getting a few hours of sleep, waking up to a mediocre meal, and spending a day on the front. He recalls any food as a godsend and explains that even if he did get a chance to sleep at night, the rest was not good nor was it enough. Granddaddy remembers one thing he will never forget: one Christmas in Normandy singing Christmas carols with the enemy.

He explains the fighting in Japan as not as bad as in Normandy, but describes war as hard no matter where the battle is. He received shrapnel in the buttocks in the beginning of 1945, and

went home to recover. Later, he received the Purple Heart—in his opinion, the most beautiful award every given out—for his injury. He loves to watch the movie “Forrest Gump” because of the similar injury Forrest received in the Vietnam War. When Granddaddy told me about his injury, he used a Forrest Gump accent. With his already rich southern accent, Granddaddy, as usual, made something completely serious into a joke.

Getting the chance to talk to Granddaddy and Grandmother about the War did not seem like a regular assignment for college. Listening to my granddddyy weave in and out of his stories is one of the most exciting things for me. I have heard his stories about the War all of my life, but when I took the time to specifically ask him questions about what all went on, I learned things that I never knew about him. I have never heard him talk about “D-Day” before, and the only reason I knew that he had fought in “D-Day” was because my parents had mentioned it. Talking about this has not only brought me closer to my Granddaddy, but has brought a new-found respect to the subject for me. I feel that this assignment really opened my eyes to life during the War, both at home and on the front.