

Milestones WWII: Over There

“WHAT? ANOTHER PAIR OF SOCKS?!”

JOHN KEEGAN EDGEWATER, FL

I NEVER REALIZED WHY I was so obsessed with socks until a recent trip to the department store with my son. Once inside, he went his way, and I went mine—straight to the socks rack, as I routinely do. When we met up again, he took one look at my haul and asked, “Is that all you’ve been doing? Buying socks?”

On the way home, he asked why I was always buying socks. I guess my addiction started with World War II, when I fought in the Battle of the Bulge. If you recall the story, we were caught short with no supplies when the Germans broke through. So what you had was what you had, including one pair of cold, wet socks. They say it was one of the coldest winters in Belgium, so the unfortunate guys had frostbite; some lost toes.


Mind you, there were no tents or buildings to sleep in, just foxholes. And when you came back after fighting for your life all day, you were exhausted and had little sensation except the cold of your feet. You debated whether or not to take your shoes off—if you took them off, your feet would swell up, and



In 2013, the Legion of Honor medal was awarded to John (right) by the consul general of France.

you’d have trouble getting your shoes back on. In my case, I’d tempt fate and take them off. Inevitably, my socks would be soaked through, and I would hold them close to my body, hoping that they would dry. Then I would massage my feet, trying to keep the blood moving. From time to time, I thought, What would I give for a pair of new socks. Money? What good would that have done me then and there?

I finally got through the war and returned home, where a curious thing happened—every time I went to a store, I’d load up on socks. It almost became an issue with me and my dear wife, Mel. She’d say, “What? Another pair of socks?!” It got so bad that if we were out shopping, I’d keep the socks hidden until I was home, then sneak them in and hide them in a drawer. When the drawer got full, I’d donate some to the Salvation Army, then buy more.

That obsession is with me to this day. The sock section is like a magnet—I head straight for it! 




SAVED BY HIS BOOT

LARRY FOSTER SAN ANTONIO, TX

MY FATHER, Wilmer S. Foster Jr., served in the 35th Infantry, Company B, 320th. While he was on patrol in Nancy, France, his left boot came off in the mud. He bent over to pull it back on. Just then, a mortar hit, wiping

out the rest of his company.

Dad was wounded in both arms and the left leg. Doctors never could clean out all the shrapnel from the wound, and in later years, my father would know that another piece was

ready to come out because of discoloration of his skin. My sister and I each had our own pair of tweezers and a jar where we kept the pieces of shrapnel that we’d pull from him. 

A TIME TO REMEMBER

Milestones WWII: Victory!

WE MARCHED THROUGH THE STREETS

NATALIE MCKENNA COVENTRY, RI

WHEN NEWS REACHED US, my father wanted to celebrate in a patriotic way and insisted that my brother and I march down our street. I was 13 at the time and was mortified, but there was no arguing with Dad. With me holding the flag and my brother, Jim, beating a drum, we marched through the neighborhood, as adults and children joined in. But what I recall most is this:


Happiness, because the terrible war was over.

Relief, because there would be no more fighting, maiming, and killing.

Anticipation, for the return of all our beloved in the service, many of whom had been away for months and some for years.

Sorrow, for all those who did not live to see the end of this terrible conflict.


Pride, for all those who served their country to ensure our freedom.

Oh yes, my memories are very vivid, and I pray that we may never see the likes of it again. 



I TRAVELED TO CELEBRATE V-J DAY IN TIMES SQUARE

DELIA CASSIO JACOBS HEROUX
PANAMA CITY, FL


ON V-J DAY, my brother's girlfriend and I went to Times Square in Manhattan. It was New Year's Eve all over again, although far more enthusiastic. Several military personnel attempted to kiss me. After all, I was 18 and not too bad looking (I think being female was reason enough). I was eager to do my part for the military, but Marie blocked every attempt at a kiss! I joke today that I might have been on the cover of *Life* if not for her. 

TOOTED THE HORN FOR VICTORY

JACKIE SOFIANOS VANCOUVER, WA

DAD WAS SERVING in the Seabees and was stationed in Japan. He didn't have to enlist, but his three brothers were serving, and he felt he should do his duty too.

Our house sat on a hill, and below was the garden. We children were at the house doing our chores, while Mother was in the garden collecting vegetables. We'd been told that if an emergency arose, we were to run to the old truck parked in our driveway and toot the horn, and she would come running.

My brother and I were listening to the radio when the show was interrupted for a special announcement: The war was over! We ran to the old truck and started sounding the horn. My mother came tearing up the hill to save us from some unthinkable calamity. But we kept shouting, "The war's over!" We were so excited—Dad would soon be home. 

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