

Margaret Coffey's memories

The following article comes from interviews with residents at the Concord Deaconess and has been put into a book titled "Memories of World War II."

During World War II, I was a young woman in my thirties. I lived in our family home on Oswald Street in Roxbury with my mother, my younger sister Mary who attended high school, and my older sister, Anna. Anna and I both worked and were the source of income for our family at that time. Our brothers Edmund and John served in the Army.

I've written a poem where I share my feelings about having two brothers in the service, as well as my grand nephew serving in Iraq.

During the war, I worked as a clerk for the Massachusetts Registry. A soldier had sent in the paperwork to renew his driver's license. Of course we noticed that the return military address was from Iceland. In addition to processing his license renewal, several ladies in our office also became his pen pals. We all enjoyed writing to him and his buddies.

Also at the Registry, I had a Jewish friend and co-worker named Gussie. She was a kind woman who made woolen socks for the soldiers. Gussie encouraged us to join her in her efforts and she brought in the yarn and other supplies. Several of us knitted woolen socks, and then Gussie would see that the socks were shipped to the soldiers in combat overseas. I admired Gussie, as she was very patriotic in many ways.

I also had a German friend in Boston. The war gave us opportunities to get to know and respect people as individuals. We were fighting Hitler and what his regime stood for, not all of the Germans.

As my brothers served in combat, I recall hearing that my brother, Edmund, was injured. After an ambulance transport, he was then taken by air to a hospital in England. He recuperated for two weeks and then returned to the Infantry in Germany.

On the Home Front, we knew that the war was needed for freedom and democracy. We worked hard and prayed that our troops would come home safely. I coped with my concerns through my faith, work, family, and friends.

Writing letters and sending packages when possible also eased some of our worries. Receiving letters from our brothers also was important to us.

We did not want our Mother to worry too much; so my brothers often sent less graphic letters to her and also sent more detailed letters to me and to my sisters, where he shares his feelings about the Jewish soldiers' leadership and bravery. I realized that we were experiencing some of the same life lessons at home and "over there."

The letters wove a heartfelt connection among our family members. They also linked us to other soldiers and their families. Edmund's letter tells us that he was sending that letter via a soldier who was returning home to our neighborhood. He also entrusted the soldier to bring home Edmund's Purple Heart to be sure it arrived safely.

We are grateful that both Edmund and John did return home safely, along with many others of our troops.

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