

## **I'M A CHILDHOOD VETERAN OF WORLD WAR II**

By Wayne Hogan

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Our family didn't have a radio or subscribe to a newspaper before the war. So, news of outside-world-goings on traveled slow to our place. The first awareness I had of World War II was my first grade teacher telling us that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor jus the day before. I of course, hadn't the slightest idea of who or what "Japan" was, or what or where "Pearl Harbor" was. I was just a 7-year-old boy growing up on a farm in the rural mid-lands of Oklahoma.

What this thing the grown-ups called "World War II" quickly became for me the constant sight and sound of small yellow bi-planes flying every which-a-way over our house, going to and from the little hurriedly-built naval training station in nearby Norman.

How I loved watching those slow flying pieces of yellow canvas stretched over thin strips of aluminum alloy. Imagined me being up there. Imagined me going off to engage the enemy in some far foreign sky.

One day, a young pilot crash landed his little two-winged yellow plane in a field about 100 yards from my Aunt Elma and Uncle George's house, some two miles from school. The next day our teacher hiked us over to see the wretched plane. The pilot (he hadn't been hurt in the crash) said he'd simply run out of gas. He'd landed okay except his plane had come to rest on its nose, busting up the propeller pretty bad, as I recall. Uncle George and Aunt Elma fed the hapless youngster a good country supper and then drove him a few miles to his base at Norman. I've always wondered how that young man had fared by War's end. He'd be in his early to mid-90s about now.

Being the sprite I was, I had to settle for "fighting" World War II through the always-slightly-dated but relished-beyond-measure issues of LIFE magazine that an oil-field-working uncle (Uncle Harper) and aunt (Aunt Mary) regularly brought me on their irregular visits to the country. It was mainly from LIFE's covers that I quickly learned who Hitler, Tojo and Mussolini were. And Roosevelt and Churchill and Stalin and DeGaulle and Franco and Tito and Marshall and Patton and Eisenhower and Rommel and Montgomery and Halsey and Doolittle and MacArthur and Bill Mauldin. And Audie Murphy. And it was from LIFE's inside pages that my younger inner-life was filled with other-worldly visions of such till-then-never-heard-of-places as London and Berlin and Anzio and Rome and Dunkirk and Corregidor and Guadalcanal and Leningrad and Warsaw and Normandy. And Dachau.

When the War had finally ended the closest personal contact with it I could claim was having another uncle (Uncle Henry, my mom's youngest brother) come home from Army duty in Europe that included the Battle of the Bulge. Plus knowing my nearest boyhood friend's older brother who'd made it back from several Pacific missions in B-29s.

But in my mind and heart, I too, am a veteran of World War II, the War when brothers did not fight brothers, and news of death came to us slow, not live like today on TV. I made it through World War II on rations of LIFE magazines and CAPTAIN MARVEL comic books.

Looking back now these 70-some years later, I credit LIFE magazine with pretty much saving me, but I don't think I could do the CAPTAIN MARVEL comic books again.

\*Read more 'Writers' Corner' at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>