

FOR
LOVE
OF
THEIR COUNTRY



*The
Personal Accounts
of
World War II
from
Citizen Soldiers*

By

Thomas J. Morrow

FOR LOVE OF THEIR COUNTRY

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Thomas J. Morrow
Oceanside, California

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www.oldwarriorpublishing.com
E-mail: quotetaker@msn.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas J. Morrow grew up in a small southern Iowa farming community listening to war stories brought back by veterans of World War II.

Some 90 percent of Seymour, Iowa's young men were drawn into the greatest global conflict in history. Since growing up and becoming a journalist, the author has spent a lifetime of studying the war, talking with veterans, and writing their stories.

For the past twenty-five years, Morrow has written numerous columns and feature articles about World War II veterans for the daily North County Times in Oceanside, California.

During World War II, the Morrow family lived in Lincoln, Nebraska, where his father, Jared Morrow, worked as a foreman at the Goodyear Rubber Company's Havelock plant making rubber gas tanks for the B-29 Superfortress bomber.

The first realization of the war, other than Uncles in uniform and parental discussions, was traveling between Lincoln and Seymour along state Highway 2. The Morrow family would pass the huge Prisoner of War Camp near the southwestern Iowa community of Clarinda.

Although just a small child at the time, the author well remembers his mother pointing out the German POWs working in the fields near the highway, saying, "Look, Tommy, look at the Nazis!"

The author graduated from high school in Seymour, Iowa, and through the years earned three college degrees.

For more than forty years he has enjoyed life as a newspaper reporter and editor, with twenty years spent as the daily community columnist for the *North County Times* in Oceanside, just north of San Diego, California. He retired from the newspaper in 2009.

As an award-winning newspaper reporter and columnist, the author interviewed dozens of Allied and German combat veterans of World War II while doing research for this book.

DEDICATION

To my grandchildren so they may know that freedom comes with a very high price, as evidenced in the following stories.

FOREWORD

They were young citizens, most not old enough to vote. They answered their nation's call to war after enduring The Great Depression.

Many had never been more than fifty miles away from the place where they were born, yet, these youngsters traveled thousands of miles to engage in history's greatest global conflict—World War II.

Millions of young people from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand formed the Allied Forces to enter into deadly combat with their counterparts of the Axis Powers from Germany, Italy, Japan, Austria, Rumania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia. The Allied goal was to free Poland, France, The Netherlands, Belgium, Russia, large portions of China, Korea, Manchuria, hundreds of islands in the Pacific, and nearly all of Southeast Asia, all under the dictatorships of the Axis Powers.

While World War I was horrific in itself to be sure, the twentieth century had two defining events: the Great Depression, which began in 1929, and the Second World War, which ended it in 1940.

From 1929 until the mid-1945, the world was in crisis. As late as 1944, it wasn't clear whether the Allied nations would prevail against the Axis Powers. After the surrenders of these nations, the victors would discover just how close the Axis was in developing new and horrific war machines that would have turned the tide of battle in their favor.

Ironically, if it hadn't have been for that world war, the Depression might have dragged on for several more years. Out of necessity, the United States pulled itself from economic ruin by gearing up for war. Thousands of men and women were put back to work churning out war materials in defense factories, while millions of other young men became citizen soldiers.

With the Selective Service Act brought back in 1940 by Congress, a new term crept into the American slang: "GI," which stood for "Government Issue." Whether a young man volunteered or was drafted into the U.S. Army, he was known as a "GI"—citizen soldier.

The stamina and toughness of what the twenty-first century now knows as the “Greatest Generation” was forged by tough times by those who endured both the Depression and World War II. This fact cannot be over-stated.

“We never went hungry. We always had plenty to eat,” my father would say countless times over the years about that decade of Depression days, which began with the crash of the U.S. stock market in October 1929. “We just never had any money to buy things.”

My father, like yours truly, was the son of a meat cutter. He was born in Seymour, Iowa on May 4, 1916, the second of five sons. As a boy and then a young man, he was called upon to work in the family business, usually for no pay. When Dad was able to work for cash during the early years of the Depression, it might be for as little as \$1 a day. The Depression was the defining moment in his life, whereas for his younger brothers and many of his peers, it was World War II.

Dad told the story of how he spent the summer of 1934 immediately following his graduation from high school. He was sent to his uncle’s farm in a nearby community to work through the harvest. Dad had saved up enough money to buy a two-year-old Chevy, but, because his uncle never paid him any wages, he was unable to buy gas for the car.

“All I could do after supper each evening until bedtime was sit in my car and listen to the radio. I had just enough gas to get back home when the harvesting was done.”

Such things were expected of children by their parents and relatives in those days. “Your board and keep was all the pay you could expect,” Dad would lament.

On a trip west with some buddies to pick apples in Washington in 1936, Dad drove south along the California coast all the way to Tijuana, Baja Norte in Mexico. Along the way he and his friends saw the Golden Gate Bridge under construction in San Francisco Bay.

After his trip west, Dad returned to Iowa determined not to end up in the meat business; he bought a Sinclair Oil station and, in 1938, married my mom.

I was born on April 11, 1939. After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Dad moved us to the Des Moines area where he got work in the war effort.

Because he was older and head of a family, draft laws at that time allowed my father to avoid military service. He went to work in an ordinance plant in Ankeny, Iowa that manufactured ammunition. Dad ended the war supervising a crew constructing rubber gas tanks for B-29 bombers at a Goodyear plant in Lincoln, Nebraska. For my father and those who lived through it, those dark days of the 1930s never faded from their memories.

For those who fought in World War II, it often has been said their stamina resulted from the ordeals suffered during the Great Depression. Without those days of struggle and sacrifice, the Allied Forces might not have been so successful.

For many young men entering the armed services during the early days of the war, it would be the first time they would have enough to eat, and the first new clothes they had ever worn. Some young men from the more rural states had never owned a pair of shoes. Many could barely read, and others had never been out of their home county. Most of what they knew about America was from books, magazine, and newsreels at the movies on Saturday night. The laws regarding education were such that many young men dropped out of school by the eighth grade; many before that. The sons of farmers, who would inherit the family acreage, saw no need to go beyond.

This book relates stories as told by citizen soldiers from both the Allies and Axis forces. The author interviewed these men who live or had lived in Southern California over a ten-year period from 1995 to 2006. Most of their stories appeared in my columns and features published in the *North County Times* daily newspaper of Oceanside, California. While most of these old citizen soldiers have since left us, the remainder clings to their memories from those horrific years that have defined their lives.

These stories are a small example of the millions who lived and survived both the Depression and World War II. All, to a man, willingly answered their nation's call to arms—***For Love of Their Country.***

CHAPTER 1

They Led Us Into and Out of Depression

The Great Depression that plagued the entire third decade of the twentieth century took nearly as many years to create. Stock market speculation during the Roaring 1920s caused vast numbers of Americans to borrow money to buy stocks in the hope they would get rich quick. As their stock values grew, investors used those shares as collateral to buy even more shares investing primarily in American industry.

By 1928, stockbrokers had loaned American investors millions. As stock values soared, a buying frenzy ensued. By September 1929, investors had borrowed more than \$800 million causing the market to wobble.

By October 1929, this tremendous debt collapsed when investors lost confidence in their stocks. Loans were called and the resulting selling frenzy completely collapsed the market. Those who sold their shares lost everything.

Ironically, the investors who held their stocks eventually regained their losses, which serve as a lesson for the investors of today: what goes up must come down; but, eventually, it will go back up. Unlike the stock market of today, which now has stringent federal and exchange safeguards, the boom of the '20s was unsteady because of the amount of money borrowed and false optimism.

History shows the U.S. Government had been shortsighted in its banking, securities, and economic policies. The government's hands-off attitude towards American business resulted in unchecked investing and borrowing. The result was an unstable economy with uneven national wealth. The American middle class was barely discernable. By 1930, the United States was truly a "have" and "have-not" nation. This "Crash of '29" is a lesson that should not be forgotten.

Because most of the nation's wealth was in the hands of a few families, who hoarded their cash or invested rather than buying American goods, the supply of products became greater than their demand. While some people profited from this strategy, most did not. Prices began rising to the point most Americans could not afford to buy very much. Farmers and workers were hit the hardest causing a spiraling downward economy.

The 1920s were dominated by a Republican Executive Branch and Congress. Republican President Warren G. Harding succeeded Democrat Woodrow Wilson in 1921. When Harding suddenly died in 1923, Vice President Calvin Coolidge assumed the office and held it until 1929 when Republican Herbert Hoover took office.

President Hoover would have only a few months of peace and prosperity before the nation plunged into economic depression. By 1933, other modern nations followed and the entire world was in economic shambles.

Herbert Hoover was a great humanitarian but eventually would become a tragic American figure. By the time he was elected president in 1928, he was the single most popular man in America and possibly the world. He had an unparalleled reputation for public service. By profession he was an engineer but later decided on public service.

Born in West Branch, Iowa, Hoover was the son of a Quaker blacksmith. He graduated from Stanford University and later worked in China becoming the leading engineer for an American company. In 1900, he and his wife, Lou, were caught in the Boxer Rebellion. (The aim was to drive out all foreigners, remove all foreign influence, and compel Christian Chinese people to give up that religion.) Here he was credited with saving the lives of many Chinese children. This was to be the first episode where he would come to the rescue of humanity.

When the First World War broke out in August 1914, Hoover was in London where the U.S. Consul General asked him for help in getting stranded American tourists in Europe out of harm's way. Forming a rescue committee, he helped assist 120,000 fellow citizens flee the dangers of war.

With the war raging, Hoover later led a U.S. effort to set about the coordination of food distribution to the people of Belgium. It had been overrun by the German army, and its people were starving.

When the United States entered the war in 1917, President Wilson appointed him to head the U.S. Food Administration. His first task was reducing domestic food consumption. By doing so, it avoided domestic rationing—and no one in America, or the Allied nations, went hungry.

At the end of the war, Hoover was named to the Supreme Economic Council as well as head of the U.S. Relief Administration. This organization arranged food shipments to Germany and other war-torn central European nations. By 1921, Hoover extended this aid to the Soviet Union also suffering a nationwide famine.

When Hoover was criticized for helping Communist Russia, he replied firmly: "There are 20 million people starving over there. Whatever their politics, they shall be fed!"

During the Harding and Coolidge administrations, Hoover served as Secretary of Commerce. This appointment positioned him to assume the GOP presidential nomination in 1928.

By March 1929, Americans could not have been more confident when Herbert Hoover moved into the White House. America was booming and its vibrant stock market was bustling—what could go wrong?

When the stock market crashed in October 1929, Hoover declared that a balanced budget and a tax cut, coupled with a spending expansion on public works, would right the situation.

But, by 1931, similar economic woes in Europe were plunging the entire world into chaos. President Hoover presented a program for aiding American businesses and farmers, many of whom were facing foreclosures on their properties. He also proposed banking reforms, as well as state and federal loans, so they in turn could feed their needy. He also demanded the federal government drastically cut its own spending wherever it was possible.

What has been lost to history is that Herbert Hoover was a kindly man who sincerely had the peoples' interests at heart. However, while he felt no one should go hungry, he maintained that the primary responsibility for feeding the poor was that of the individual states, local governments, and private volunteer organizations—not the federal government. This philosophical view would eventually spell his political ruin.

During his four-year span as president, Hoover had his detractors even in a Republican-controlled Congress. He accused politicians on both sides of the aisle of sabotaging his programs for their own political gain. As a result, he was unfairly painted as a “callous and cruel president.”

In 1932, Hoover was soundly defeated by former New York Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt and was destined to the depths of obscurity; however, that wasn't to be the case.

Years later, in 1947, President Harry Truman appointed Hoover to help reorganize the executive departments of the government. When Truman was criticized by his fellow Democrats for appointing, “The man who caused the Great Depression,” he simply replied: “Herbert Hoover didn't create the Depression, it was created for him.”

But still the kindly Quaker from Iowa would continue his service to his country. In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed him chairman of yet another governmental reorganization commission.

In all of his undertakings, with the exception of his four years as president, Hoover earned the admiration of his fellow citizens.

Hoover died at the age of 90 on October 20, 1964, having served the United States Government and its citizens longer and in more far-reaching ways than any other politician and humanitarian in American history. Yet, thanks to a few shortsighted historians, people still equate Herbert Hoover as the man who caused The Great Depression.

Unless one lived through the Depression, there's no way to fully explain what life in America was like—jobs simply dried up and money was scarce. With the exception of folks living in and around the “dust bowl” states of Oklahoma, northern Texas, and Kansas, people in rural America often had plenty to eat as their gardens grew most of what they needed. While food was available, few had cash to buy any other necessities.

When work was available in the outlying farming communities, a dollar a day was considered good pay. But in cities, life was cruel—and starvation and homelessness was common. Jobs were non-existent and it took money for everything. Henceforth, thousands lined up for handouts—usually for a bowl of soup.

By Election Day 1932, the American people were desperate for anyone willing to convince them a solution was at hand to lead them back to prosperity. The man that beckoned their call was Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt.

FDR, as he became known to Americans, promoted his “New Deal.” His plan quickly won the overwhelming support of the public.

To communicate directly with America, Roosevelt did something no other president had done—he used the radio to talk directly to the people. Previous presidents had issued press statements and let the newspapers deliver the message. Often times those releases got distorted when presented. Much to the chagrin of America's press barons like Henry Luce, William Randolph Hearst, and Joseph Pulitzer, Roosevelt's nationwide radio “Fireside Chats” circumvented the media. His evening broadcasts on national radio were delivered when the entire family could gather around the radio. FDR came into every American home like an old friend and made him one of the most charismatic presidents in U.S. history.

President Roosevelt had something Hoover, and most of the previous presidents, save FDR's cousin, Theodore Roosevelt, lacked—the backing of an entire nation. Within the first one hundred days in office, FDR pushed dozens of programs through Congress to create jobs, provide relief, and to get the economy back on track. He had little resistance from either political party as each member was eager to report the good news back to their districts.

Ironically, most of Roosevelt's “New Deal” programs were based upon federal economic programs designed and started by Hoover during the First World War.

Unlike Hoover, FDR experimented by tossing ideas that didn't work and implementing programs that did. But Roosevelt had something most presidents before him never had—the unique ability to relate to the common, ordinary citizen. Despite being a wealthy man, FDR realized that the American working man and woman were looking for change—and no doubt he provided those means. However, as the Great Depression slowly continued through the '30s, American's continued to struggle.

Historians argue whether or not his economic programs would have provided the recovery. It's hard to tell. But what is known, World War II played a major roll in its revival.

History reveals that during the late 1930s and early '40s, President Roosevelt partook in a dangerous game—he played both sides of the fence. On the one side, he continued telling the American public that he would do everything in his power to keep the United States from entering the war. But in reality, he full well knew only a miracle could prevent that from happening because, on the other hand, he secretly met with Churchill behind closed doors and helped him plan a defense against Germany. (There is evidence this collaboration was ongoing even before Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939, igniting World War II.)

Following the fall of France in the spring of 1940, Great Britain became the only European nation actively engaged in war against Nazi Germany. To help in their fight, they began paying for its matériel in gold to the U.S. under “cash and carry” as required by the Neutrality Acts instituted in the 1930s which specifically banned any sale of arms on “credit.”

In due time, England began running out of money. To continue fighting, Churchill beseeched Roosevelt for help. But sympathy to the Brits was hampered by the Neutrality Acts.

Roosevelt lamented to an aide in the Oval Office that something must be done to help Britain while remaining in a neutral position: “We must find a way to help our English cousins; although, I am a bit concerned about the fact that we're caught in the middle trying to stop empire builders in Asia (Japan) and Europe (Germany and Italy). We must find a solution to help our friends so they might continue building their own empire.”

To circumvent the Neutrality Acts, Roosevelt came up with a plan called “Lend-Lease.” The Act would permit him to sell, transfer title to, exchange, lease, lend, or otherwise dispose of to any such government he deems vital to the defense of the United States. He announced his proposal in a December 17, 1940 speech to Congress and the American people. Roosevelt said on the radio:

“My fellow Americans. England stands alone. We cannot and we will not tell them they have to surrender simply because we will not give them the weapons they need. If Great Britain goes down, then all of us in the Americas will be living at the point of a Nazi gun. ...I understand what England’s needs are, and I understand what the dangers are to both of us.”

Later, Roosevelt told key members of his cabinet about his plans to assist Prime Minister Churchill far beyond the Lend-Lease Act.

“Mr. Churchill and I will enter into a secret pact. For our part, we’ll wage war against Nazi Germany, but not declare it. Everything must be done to create an incident.” Roosevelt pondered for a moment, and then admitted what those close to him already knew.

“You know, I’m a juggler. I never let my right hand know what my left hand is doing. I’m perfectly willing to mislead if it will help win the war. However, it’s not that I mind walking a tightrope; but just how neutral can we get?”

Isolationists were strongly opposed fearing it would lead America into a war that was essentially a European conflict. However, in due time, opinions shifted as an increasing number of Americans began to see the advantage of funding England while staying out of war.

The bill was put before the Democratic Congress where there was much debate. Eventually the votes fell along party lines and on March 11, 1941, President Roosevelt signed the Lend-Lease bill into law.

Once the bill was signed and enacted, some fifty old World War I-era destroyers were turned over to the British Royal Navy while dozens of P-39 fighter aircraft and Studebaker trucks were shipped to the Soviet Union via merchant convoy. In return, the United States got ninety-nine-year leases for military bases in Newfoundland, Bermuda, and British Guiana.

While the public focused upon the war news from Europe, on the other side of the globe the invasions by Japan in Korea, Manchuria, China, and Southeast Asia were mostly ignored. After all, the Pacific was a big ocean and that conflict was a very, very long way away.

The script was nearly complete when, in 1940, Japan joined Germany and Italy to form the Axis powers. Roosevelt knew American forces would have to take action as Japanese forces got closer to the U.S. installations of Guam, Midway Island, Wake Island, and the Philippines

During those years leading up to the United States’ entry into the war, resource-stricken Japan had been buying great quantities of scrap metal for producing implements of war. Much of this metal came from the United States.

But the crowning blow in the Pacific came when FDR placed a metal and oil embargo against the Japanese. This action inevitably forced Japan to become more aggressive in Indonesia and Asia.

If there was one single man most responsible for the Allies winning the war against Fascism, it had to be Hungarian-born physicist Leo Szilard (pronounced So-Lard). Szilard and fellow countryman Eugene Vigner. The two had earlier fled Nazi Germany and immigrated to the United States. Before he left, Szilard figured out a nuclear chain reaction was not only possible but an atomic weapon could be made from it.

“If I’ve figured it out, then my colleagues back in Germany can do the same thing,” he told noted physicist Albert Einstein in 1939. Szilard feared Hitler’s scientists would develop an atomic weapon first.

“If that happens, the world will be lost to Hitler,” Szilard maintained.

Szilard wanted President Roosevelt to know about the chain reaction and the possibility for an atomic bomb; however, he thought Roosevelt wouldn’t take him seriously. Szilard went to Einstein.

Einstein kept asking Szilard if such a reaction would be possible.

“How do you know this?” Einstein finally asked.

“I used your formula $E = MC^2$ to figure it out!” Szilard exclaimed to an astonished Einstein.

Szilard pleaded with Einstein for two months and finally convinced him to sign a letter written by him (Szilard) to the President.

The letter was dated July 16, 1939, and signed by Einstein. The letter informed FDR that nuclear chain reactions could be created and used in bombs. The letter was personally delivered by Alexander Sachs, a New York economist, who had been a speechwriter for Roosevelt. It took three months for Sachs to get an appointment. Finally, on October 11, 1939, Sachs was in the Oval office reading the letter to the President.

Knowing how important the letter was before he read it, Sachs got FDR’s attention by telling him a story about Napoleon Bonaparte.

Sachs told the story of a young inventor-visionary who told the French Emperor he could build vessels that could travel the Channel to England at three-times the speed of present-day sailing ships.

As the story was told, Napoleon dismissed the young man as “a dreamer.” The inventor was Robert Fulton, who built the first steam-powered ship.

With the story’s point in mind, Sachs proceeded to inform Roosevelt of the powerful new weapon possibilities.

Roosevelt gathered Szilard and other scientists with the nation's top military experts. It took nearly a year to convince the military of the potential, but when British agents informed American military leaders that Germany's main reason for invading Norway was to capture that nation's "heavy water" supply to develop nuclear weapons, Szilard finally had the attention of officials in Washington.

As we now know, Roosevelt ordered the Manhattan Project which ultimately produced the atom bomb ending the war in 1945. Ironically, FDR signed the directive authorizing the Manhattan Project and the development of the bomb on December 6, 1941, the day before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

The build-up toward the Second World War had one redeeming quality: it put Americans back to work and money in their pockets—something many had not had for a number of years. The build-up effectively ended the Great Depression.

By 1939, the American public was well on its way to economic recovery. The average income was \$1,729; cost of a new house was \$3,850; the average rent was \$28 a month; a new car was \$700; yearly tuition to Harvard University was \$420; gasoline was 10-cents a gallon; the average adult paid 25-cents to go to the movies; and a U.S. postage stamp was 3-cents.

The beginning of the end to the great World War II can be traced to a day in December 1941 when President Roosevelt told the American people during one of his Fireside Chat radio broadcasts that "*America must become the great arsenal of democracy. Let no man say it can't be done ... it must be done!*"

After years of military buildup and territorial intimidation, on September 1, 1939, Nazi Germany unleashed its "Blitzkrieg" attack on a nearly defenseless Poland. This unprovoked action brought Britain and France into the conflict to the promised defense of Poland. Within two years, nearly every modern nation around the globe would join the fracas, primarily with the Allies.

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the American war machine cranked to full speed with nearly every able-bodied man and woman becoming involved in one way or another. By the end of 1942, factories across America were retooled from building sewing machines and automobiles to turning out 60,000 warplanes, and countless numbers of tanks and guns. By 1943, aircraft production rose to 125,000.

Because President Roosevelt had the foresight to come to the aid of Great Britain in their time of need, he knew America would be standing alone in a hostile world if England was defeated. Instead, the United States led Great Britain and the rest of the Allies to a long-fought victory.

Ironically, FDR would not live to see the end of the war. He died on April 12, 1945, less than one month before Germany's surrender on May 8, and five months

before his Manhattan Project delivered the world's first two atomic bombs bringing Japan to unconditional surrender on August 14, 1945.

While Szilard and Einstein were key to guiding the United States towards developing the ultimate weapon that ended the war, both regretted their actions. Einstein continued to work as a pacifist for the rest of his life, and Szilard refused to work any longer as a physicist; he switched to biology. Still, without their vision and intellect, this book might have been written in a different language.