

Newsletter348

Keith's Corner/McGill News

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Christmas In McGill—1945

The 1945 Christmas was a mixture of happiness and sorrow. We kids were happy to get some toys, now that WWII was over. There weren't a lot of them but there was enough to help us forget the war.

WWII officially ended on September 2. 1945. The "Greatest Generation" had defeated the Japanese in the Pacific and the Nazi's in Europe. The long painful 4 plus years of world war were finally over.

The US Military all over the world was starting to come back home. There was a lot of joy in many homes, but there was a lot of sorrow in others.

I remember the day my Uncle Carter stopped by our house to see his sister, my Mom. It was such a moment for them both.

Carter brought my brother Paul and I some things from Germany. There was some German money and a fancy cigarette case with a built in lighter. There were some cigarettes in the case and I guess he had forgotten about them. Paul and I days later took them into our little secret room in the basement and lit one up and tried smoking it like an adult. It was horrible. If I remember correctly, they were not round but kind of triangular. They were weird. No wonder the enemies were always after American cigarettes.

It was such a thrill to have our uncle back and to celebrate the occasion Dad went down to the basement and into the locked fruit cellar and got a one pound can of Hill's Brothers coffee. He had hidden it back in 1941 when the US went on ration stamps. He knew that coffee would be hard to get. That is, Real coffee not a mixture with other ingredients.

We all had a great cup of coffee. I think it was the first one I had ever drank in front of my parents.

Carter told us many stories about his time in Germany. He was with the US Army Corp of Engineers. He was a large dozer operator and at one point involved in pushing huge piles of bodies into large burial holes. The bodies were from the execution camps of the Nazi's. I don't think the younger generations in this country are even aware of such things, it is a shame. Pearl Harbor and the Bataan Death March are not known to them either. I am glad that they don't have to worry about such things, but I am very upset that they aren't aware of such events.

Sometimes in life, you may be doing something as simple as eating a meal, when a memory from the past startles you. This happened to me when I was in boot camp at Fr. Ord, Calif. in 1959. We had been on a long 10-mile march with full packs, M1 rifle, bayonet and canteen and other things hanging on our belts, a helmet liner and of course the standard heavy, hot steel helmet gracing our heads. I had just gone thru a long, long, long chow line and was sitting on my helmet looking at my mess kit tray loaded with SOS. That is chipped beef and gravy over a hard biscuit. No wonder they called them mess kits. I was about ready to toss the stuff into the nearest garbage can,

when a thought from long ago hit my brain. It was from the day Uncle Carter had come to our house. He told us that the only time he ever got enough to eat in Germany was when they served SOS. Many of the other troops refused it and so Carter said he went back thru the chow line several times. I cleaned my tray and went back for a second helping in honor of Carter. I still to this day never turn down an SOS meal.

Our home was full of joy that Christmas but there were so many homes in McGill that had lost a son, dad, brother or uncle that were full of sorrow.

Each house had a sticker on the window by the front door that represented someone from the home that was in the military. If a member of the family was killed in the war, then a gold star was put on the sticker. I remember seeing several of them.

I think there was a red or yellow star for a wounded member. Could be for a POW. I don't remember the exact colors.

I wish our schools would wake up and start teaching the real history of WWII and what actually happened.

Thank God we had our "Greatest Generation" to save us from the Axis of tyranny during WWII. We are so lucky.

So, I hope you all had a great Christmas and looking forward to a new year.

Always remember those that went before.