OUR HEROES

At the close of World War II the small community of Belleville listed one hundred fifty-eight people of the community and surrounding area who had served their country in the war. This included women too. Ten young men lost their lives, five were prisoners of war and one served as a fighter pilot in the R.A.F. One had a destroyer named after him and one was in the funeral procession of the death of a president. All were heroes, if only for the fact that they served their country and community in time of need.

Almost all the men and women of this community in the service of their country wrote to Mr. Adams. They thanked him for the paper, they praised the Red Cross for the things they received, and thanked the churches and ladies societies of their community for all they contributed.

All the letters were interesting and timely. I did not intentionally leave out names or letters. It is my hope that you find that this is a cross section of all the letters and news items and you will share with me the feeling of a time gone.
1942—Verle Smith was the first boy of this community to give his life in World War II. He was a fighter pilot in the Royal Air Force of England and was killed in a bombing flight over Hamberg, Germany. He was twenty-four years of age. He enlisted early in the war before the United States became involved and rapidly advanced to a pilot officer in the Royal Air Force. He was captain of one of the world’s largest bombers.

In May of 1942 he told of participating in the largest raids in history. Of those over Cologne and Essen Germany he said, "The towns were one brilliant mass of flames. The sky was full of flares, rockets, bursts of anti-aircraft shells, search lights and planes taking evasive action waiting for their turn to do their bit. Imagine the greatest Fourth of July celebration you have ever seen. Multiply that by thousands and perhaps you can imagine what it was like. The fires could be seen for one hundred fifty miles."

He told of flying one of the largest bombers in the world. He said, "This plane has 1600 horse power engines. The wheels are seven feet high and the pilots seat is thirty feet above the ground." In his last letter home Verle said in part, "Well, I guess I'm on top now flying the largest four engined bomber in service. It certainly is an immense thing. Sometimes I sit in the cockpit directing the ground crew thirty feet below. I wonder if it is really I."

On July 29, 1942 he failed to return after a bombing flight. He was buried in Bremen, Germany.
March of 1943 - Sgt. Lincoln Marty accompanied the "Flying Kellys" as a crew chief on a trip in four bombers from Kirtland Field New Mexico to Madison.

April 23, 1943 -"Well, I sure had a nice trip back home last month. Those pilots sure are crazy. They'd just as soon fly upside down as right side up and the idea of diving down and catching chickens is out with me, but there wasn't much I could say on the deal. We struck a head wind on the way back, and it took us seven and half hours to get back. The ceiling was very low and we hardly flew over 1,000 feet. I don't think we flew right over Belleville, but we came close. I saw New Glarus at our right, so we weren't really far from there.

I want to thank the people of Belleville for making it possible for me to get the paper."

"Your friend,
Lincoln Marty"

BELLEVILLE BOY MISSING IN NORTH AFRICA AREA SINCE THE 28TH OF MARCH:
Sgt. Donald Keegan, son of Mr and Mrs. Charles Keegan of Basco is missing in action in North Africa. Keegan was twenty-five years old and one of the first boys in this community to enter the service having enlisted in the army in October of 1940. In September of 1943 Mr. and Mrs. Charles Keegan received their first letter from Sgt. Donald Keegan, who was a prisoner of war in Germany. They had previously received post cards, but following is the first letter they received.

"Dear Mom,

Here it is another Sunday so I thought I would write a line. I've just come from mass and had my breakfast, some toast with coffee. We have a new priest now. He can speak a little English. Our church is really pretty. We made it with Red Cross boxes.
The news we hear is very good and surely hope the war is over
soon. I haven't heard from anyone yet, but I'm hoping to hear from you
soon.

As you might guess I have nothing to write of here. I just hope
everyone is well.

Be sure and write a line and have a good Christmas dinner ready
because I expect to be hungry.

Love Donald"

Donald Keegan returned to the United States in June of 1945.
He was discharged September 21, 1945, after serving fifty-nine months
and twelve days in the service of his country.

Richard V. "Dick" Adams, son of Mr. and Mrs. Herb Adams graduated
from advanced flying school and received the coveted wings of a pilot
in the Air Force. He passed his aviation cadet examination in 1942
but was not called into training until January of 1943. He was an
instructor at George Field Lawrenceville, Illinois. Following is an
excerpt from one of his letters telling of night flying.

September 17, 1943 - "I finished my night flying last night. We
had all kinds of landing. Combination flood light and landing light,
only landing lights, only flood lights, and total blackout landings.
I did o'k.

Did I tell you that two instructors were killed here Sunday
morning? They were "buzzing" a house and got caught in a tree. I knew
both of them quite well. Rode with one of them once. Buzzing can
be dangerous but, it is so much fun you don't realize the dangers..
Don't worry about it as we're not allowed to buzz except on cross
countries and then only to identify towns."

November 1943 — The silver wings, emblematic of a pilot in the United States Air Force, which would have been presented to Bernard G. Baebler on his completion of his training, but which he never received because he was killed in training, were presented to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Baebler by the Army Air Force. Bernard would have graduated December 1, 1943, had it not been for his fatal crash while in the service of his country.

"My Dear Mr. Baebler,

General H. H. Arnold, commanding General of the Army Air Force has directed that the enclosed wings be presented to you in honor of your son, Aviation Cadet Bernard G. Baebler, who gave his life in training to become a pilot in the Army Air Force. This insignia would have been his badge of achievement on the completion of his training. You can rightly share the pride which would have been his on receiving these wings. The Army Air Force presents them in honor of his memory."

G.C. Brant, Major General U.S. Army

To: Mr. Arthur Roberts
Belleville, Wisconsin

"My Dear Mr. Roberts:

The name ROBERTS has been assigned to a Destroyer Escort vessel in honor of your son, the late Ensign Arthur John Roberts, Jr., U.S. Naval Reserve.

The U.S.S. Roberts is scheduled to be launched at the plant of
the Western Pipe and Steel Company, Los Angeles, California, on
(deleted because of censorship)

Will you please suggest the name of a sponsor to christen this vessel when she is launched and at your earliest convenience advise the Navy Department of the name and address of the person you propose for this purpose. As a matter of Navy tradition only female sponsors are designated to christen vessels, and it is customary that sponsors for destroyer escort vessels be chosen from the female members of the family of the deceased relative whose name is honored.

Because of war restrictions, it is requested that information concerning the launching date be kept confidential.

Sincerely,

Frank Knox"

Ensign Jack Roberts was killed in action in a naval battle in the Solomon area and is now buried in a beach cemetery on Tulagi Island along with one hundred twenty-five other navy men who lost their lives in the same battle. Ensign Roberts graduated from the University of Wisconsin in chemical engineering. It was known that he was in the thick of some heavy fighting in the area of the Solomon Islands.

December 6, 1943 - Somewhere in the Pacific: "By now you know that I was with the American Forces that landed on Makin Island. This is my first encounter with the Japanese, and for my part I hope it is the last..

There are times when I thought I would never see Belleville again. The first time was when we were going into the beach for a landing. In passing through the harbor to the beach we had to pass two old boats
that looked like they had been there for years. The Japs had a machine
gun nest set up in these boats, and as we passed them they opened fire
on us. I can say that one ages about ten years when this happens. We
reached the beach all right even though we had to wade in water up to
our waist for about one hundred fifty yards before we hit the land. My
job, when I hit the beach, was to set up a radio along with two other
fellows. We were back from the front line so the only chance we had of
getting hit was by snipers. Those snipers are everywhere.

You see a lot of Japs but most of them are dead. Our mail has
cought up with us, and the first day I received thirty-five letters.
I was reading in the RECORDER where the hunting season has opened back
there.

Gordon Sardeson."

SOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC:
January 15, 1944

"Dear Herb,

I have a little time to spare today so I will try to write
you a few lines that may be interesting to you and the rest of the folks
at home.

Just recently we made a beach landing on a jeep held base in
the southwest Pacific. We made a very successful landing which was well
and good for us. We ran into a few Japs, but that didn't last very
long. They were soon underground except for a few of the more fortunate
ones that took off for the hills.

Our biggest worry now is the air raids. They came over quite
often at first, but since a few of their planes have been shot down
they don't seem so brave.
There are a lot of natives around here, and they are friendly to us. They don't care for the Japs though. That is to be expected. They drove them out of their homes. They don't wear many clothes. The women wear grass skirts, but we seldom see many of the women. The men wear a piece of cloth around their waist.

Leland Kuhl"

England February 28, 1944

"Dear Folks,

Just finished reading the RECORDER and feel I owe it a few lines. Now I enjoy it more than ever being so far from home.

Arrived here safe and sound without any danger. We were first to Scotland then to England. Our trip was too long for most of us as some of us were sick nearly the whole trip, and that's no fun.

I visited London two days last week. Enjoyed the stay very much. I saw Big Ben, House of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, and many interesting spots. A sight that took our eyes was the damage that the enemy had done the night before.

Cloyance Zentner"

Somewhere in England January 19, 1944

"Dear Friends,

This letter is being written by Irv Gillette and I. Soon after my arrival in England I looked Irv up, and found him in his barracks, all dressed up waiting for inspection. He was speechless for a few moments after he saw me. I guess that is excuseable since Irv hasn't seen anyone from Belleville for nearly eighteen months.
Immediately after inspection Irv secured a three day pass from his C.O. and we have been spending it aboard my ship which is docked somewhere in England. We have had a lot of fun reminiscing and toasting the good people of Belleville. Our only regret is that it won't last but a few days at the most.

Irv Gillette and Johnny Saxer"

February 1, 1944- Anywhere

"First I want to thank the Ladies Aid for the swell Christmas packages they sent, and I want to thank everyone for all the Christmas cards. It didn't seem like Christmas where we were, but we made the best of it, hoping we can be back home next year.

It was not until a few weeks ago I heard that Art Klassy was missing in action off the Gilbert Islands. I saw the ship he was on go down but, I never thought a boy I knew was on it at the time. When you have gone through and seen the things I have in the last few months you know war isn't any picnic.

Gordon Sardeson"

Somewhere in England May 26, 1944

"I have visited a lot of small towns in England. The thing was the town of Exeter. This is a small town in England and perhaps one of the oldest. It has a very old cathedral. The second oldest in this country. It is a very beautiful thing and very large. If the place could speak it could no doubt tell many interesting stories.

They have many small rivers and streams in the countryside with a lot of good sized trout in them. Some of the boys tell me I can't fish in them because the fish belong to the king. I guess they don't know me very well.

Leo Gehlin"
May 1944 - Belleville Boy gets air medal - flew on eleven missions.

Lt. Edwin Ringgenberg local boy, who is a pilot and the commanding officer of a flying fortress based in England has been awarded the Air Medal.

May 1944 - Ray Sherman German Prisoner -

Ray Sherman, who was reported as missing in action as of February is now a prisoner of war in Germany. The war department reported to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Sherman, that their son PFC Ray J. Sherman was alive and a prisoner of war. They had also received a postcard dated March 13 that he was a prisoner. The card was sent through the Red Cross.

July 1944

Marvel Viney was a veteran of Africa, Sicily and Italy. Some of his unforgettable experiences were the bombings to which he was subjected to at Palermo and shellfire he underwent while riding in a jeep as a messenger in the Italian campaign. Although he was a member of an anti-aircraft unit he hit the Sicily beaches as a member of a wave of infantry. In Italy he sometimes served as a messenger before other means of communications were established. Of the Palermo bombing Cpl. Viney said, "Two days after Palermo was taken we set up our anti aircraft guns in a lemon orchard right in the town. The German planes were coming over us shortly after midnight and continued until daylight. I don't think I'll ever forget that. The enemy dropped so many flares it was as light as day all night. You could have read a newspaper."
August 1944-

Pvt. Paul Derendinger is killed in Italy. The fifth Belleville boy killed. Paul was twenty-three years old. Another gold star was added to Belleville's honor roll.

August 1944-

On August 4, 1944 Frank C. M inch of Belleville received his U.S. Army Air Force silver wings and commission as a second lieutenant.

Rodney Berg saw action in the navy. He had been on anti-sub duty in the Caribbean Sea for two and half months. He had been across the Atlantic twice. Their fleet sank two submarines in the south Atlantic and on one trip across they ran into a "Wolfpack" of eight submarines. Five of these were sunk and three got away.

September 1944-

William Morehead, glider pilot, was killed in the invasion of Holland. He received a slight head injury while landing, but managed to land his glider intact. After administering first aid to victims of a nearby crash, Lt. Morehead, another officer, and five enlisted men started to leave the vicinity crawling through brush and ditches. However, German patrols were all over the area and Lt. Morehead was killed by sniper. The others were taken prisoner. (Until they were liberated in 1945 and the truth was told the entire group was listed as missing in action.)

Pvt. Francis Butts was among infantrymen who established bridgeheads across the Moselle River in heavy action and played a heroic part. He was with a bazooka team that broke up a tank attack. They knocked out one tank and scored a direct hit on others. He was awarded the silver star for gallantry in action. Citation read as follows.
"When enemy forces launched a determined tank infantry counter
offensive under a heavy barrage of their artillery and mortar fire,
Pvt. Butts, an anti-rocket gunner, without hesitation or thought of
personal safety, went well forward in an attempt to stop the counter-
attack. Oblivious to the intense enemy fire, Pvt. Butts, completely
exposed in the open terrain, aggressively moved his anti-tank launcher
in position and skillfully and expertly operating the weapon succeeded
in destroying several of the enemy tanks and causing the others to
return."

September 1944-

"Well last night was my first night in Belgium. A Friend and I
went sight seeing. We were invited into two homes. Really very nice
clean homes. We had some good wine. After that we attended a dance.
Just one madhouse. They certainly dance different than we do, only a
waltz. I had a good partner for that. It's all fast music and jitter-
bugging. All they do is go round in circles and jump up and down.

Our travels through France were interesting at times. We were in
St. Lo., or should say what was St. Lo. Now the people are coming back
to what was their homes. I can safely say there isn't one building
standing.

I saw one woman hold the key she once locked her door with. She
looked at the pile of rubbish that was once her home and threw the key
away.

Gloyance. Zentner"

September 13, 1944 - Interesting letter received from Ray Sherman
"Dear Mom and All,

Just a few line to let you know that I am in good health and hope you are also. It sure is hard to fill up one these pages when you are restricted.

I am on a farm in a small town in Germany. The people treat us good. I eat the same as they do five times a day. We get our Red Cross parcels every week so we get enough.

All the work here is done by hand. We're nearly through with threshing. The farmers furnish us with feather beds and do our washing.

Hope to see you soon,

Ray"

December 24, 1944 – France

"Dear Folks,

This Christmas eve is quite different than last year. A year ago we were taken off the boat and went back to the POE. I'll never forget how good the spare ribs tasted. Then cooking on English boats is notorious. Anyway, I was in the States last Christmas. I tried to call from a USO but I couldn't get near a telephone.

I just came back tonight from going caroling among the wards.

A few of the fellows seemed very diffident about joining in, but by and large, most of them were pathetically eager to join in the singing. One fellow with a bad lung was trying to sing but he had to give up. He just lay back and smiled until I thought he would burst. He was really glad to speak to anyone. I think I will try and get over to see him tomorrow."
You should have seen the Santa Clauses who went around the wards. Capts. Conroy and English are both very heavy set and plenty sharp on the Irish wit and humor.

There are services tomorrow morning, and I'll attend if I am free. There is communion in the afternoon too.

The news sounds good tonight. They say the Allies have stopped the Jerry counter-attacks and there will be some good news soon. I certainly hope so. If they get these Jerries this time I think the war will be considerably shortened.

Don't worry about me.

Love -Howard" (Huck Hoesly)

December 1944 - Mrs. Laverne Cate received a short letter from her brother Ray who was a prisoner of war. The letter was dated August 7, 1944. "Dear Sis and family,

Just a line to let you know I am o'k and hope you are the same. I've been working on a farm lately. It's nothing like the farms at home.

Hope to see you all soon. May God be with you.

Ray"

December 1944- Great Lakes, Illinois

"Dear Herb,

Just a few lines to tell you that I'm receiving the paper and I sure appreciate it.

Well Navy life isn't so bad but civilian is much better. Today was another tough day for us. We had Capt. Inspection. We scrubbed
the deck until the darn thing shone. We use the new dance called
the "Great Lakes Shuffle."

I sure am glad to know the Belleville basketball team is winning
a few games.

The only thing I don't like about the Navy is washing clothes. I
sure hate it.

Just another Belleville Boy

Smokey" (Kenneth Babler)

December 1944 - Floyd Klepp, Belleville boy, was wounded in the Pacific
on Leyte Island in the Phillipines. Floyd had seen heavy fighting in
Northern New Guinea, Palau Islands Leyte. In August he was awarded the
combat infantry medal.

December 27, 1944 - Oahu, Hawaii

"Dear Mr. and Mrs. Adams,

Now that Christmas is over for another year we can all settle
back to the regular routine. For us here it was just another day
other than the feast.

After spending my third Christmas here at this station it should
seem like home. For some reason or other I just can't see it that way.
It did seem like home when Gordon Sardeson and the Jamiesons were
stationed here but since then I have been rather by myself.

This month I had a surprise. I just don't recall the day but,
I received a letter from home saying that Raymond Genin A.M.M. 3C was in
the hospital on the island of Oahu. Without too much effort on my part
the next day I had off I found him. During the two hours or so that we
spent together everything imaginable was discussed. The next trip to visit
him I found that he was discharged from the hospital and his whereabouts could not be given to me.

Cpl. Floyd Palmer"

January 1945 -

Sgt. Wendell Hoffmaster is missing in Germany. He had been missing since December 21 according to word sent. He was overseas less than three months. Also missing in action since December 21 was Cpl. Harold Babler. Harold had been overseas only two months. He was missing in action in Germany.

With this report it brought eleven the number of casualties in the Belleville community of which three were missing in action.

January 1945-

Harold Babler wrote home to his parents and told them that Wendell Hoffmaster and he were prisoners of war together in Germany. He asked that his mother should send packages from home with raisins, cans of meat, cheese, and plenty of candy.

February 1945-

Claude Staley, Seaman First Class and a gunner aboard the aircraft carrier Monterey was awarded the Bronze Star medal and a citation for shooting down a Japanese two engine torpedo bomber which was attacking the ship.

February 28, 1945 -

Sgt. Lester Meland was reported killed in action in Germany.

March 1945- Norman Schaller was reported missing in action in Germany since March 3.

Sgt. Donald Pierson was reported missing in action. He was a tall gunner on a flying fortress over Germany. He had been overseas since January 1944.
April 1945—
It must have been "old home week" in New York City one day last week. Four of our local people: Lt. John Saxer, Lt. and Mrs. Lester Fredrickson and Seaman Laurette Schmetter, met and had dinner.

April 1945—Germany
"We had seen several prisoners that the Germans had taken from France and Belgium and Holland. The Americans leased them from their camps. They had no soft spot in their hearts for the Germans. They had hard work to do with potatoes and two slices of bread being their main meal of the day. Yesterday I saw a German prisoner of war. Sixteen years old and in the army for fourteen days. Someone said he told them that his father said to raise his hand if he saw an American. He certainly did not have much of an army career.

Cloyance Zentner"

May 1945—
Sgt. Wendell Hoffmaster and Cpl. Harold Babler return home after being prisoners of war together in Germany.

May 1945—
Cpl. Sylvester Slotten, son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Slotten of Belleville was awarded a Bronze Oakleaf cluster to wear with his Bronze Star and a citation for meritorious service. It was awarded for heroic achievement in action in Germany.

May 1945—RAY SHERMAN ESCAPES FROM GERMAN PRISON CAMP,
"Dear Folks,

I'm about the happiest guy in the world I guess. A buddy and I escaped from the Germans and headed for Switzerland. We were recaptured on March 29 about twenty kilometers from the border. On April 15 we escaped again and headed for our work camp to get more food. Our camp was evacuated on the 22 of April when we escaped again and hid in the
woods until we American tanks last night. After fourteen months and eleven days, I can hardly believe we're back with our troop again."

Ray Sherman was a prisoner at Stalag 7-B Germany.

July 6 - Men from Belleville met in Europe -
Lt. Russell Howard and T5 Howard Hoesly met face to face in Paris, France. Another coincidence was that Sgt. Lincoln Marty and his brother-in-law T. Sgt. John Helman found themselves in adjoining tents where they were located on an island in the Pacific.

August 1945 - Rheims France

"Dear Grandmother Fritz,

I suppose by now you know that I am to be shipped direct to the Pacific. Of course none of us were very happy when we heard that we were not going to be allowed to come home first, but when we do it will be for good.

The news this morning has all been about the new atomic bomb. It must have tremendous exploding power, and I fear for Japan if she doesn't surrender. I hope too that the U.S. uses this new power intelligently because I know something of atomic energy and it could be quite easy to destroy the world if used wrongly.

Gary Fritz