

War Era Story Project 2012

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Current home town: Cincinnati, Ohio
Age: Not given

On the Home Front

Shortly after Dec. 7, 1941, a civilian defense unit was organized in our neighborhood. My dad was asked to be the commander and to put together a workable volunteer group. Neighbors and his poker buddies signed up as traffic managers and wardens. Teenage boys on bicycles made up a messenger unit. Many of the ladies volunteered as first aid helpers.

The Red Cross came to the local high school to teach first aid; Mom was enrolled and attended. One week, they learned artificial respiration and mom practiced it on me. I was on the floor, face down, and she straddled me, placing her hands on my rib cage. She pushed up, then quickly released. This was supposed to restore natural breathing. It was “place, push, release.” Soon, I was teaching my friends how to do this on their dolls. My doll would squeal when I released. Was this ever fun!

My dad saw me doing this, and so on Red Cross night, he packed me and my doll in the car and we went to mom’s class. He called the instructor out into the hall and told her he had a sample of artificial respiration being administered. So they took me in, and sure enough, my doll performed beautifully and I became a hero! That was a good memory.

Life is simple when you are six or seven years old. But on Dec. 7, 1941, everything changed. Dad worked in the machine tool industry in Cincinnati. Mom took care of the house. My brother was 12 and interested in baseball, model airplanes and food! We did chores and weeded the victory Garden. I played with my dolls and with the other kids on the street. Life was good and simple.

So much changed that December. Dad’s work days stretched to 12 hours, and he made many trips out of town. We’d say goodbye on Sunday evening as a cab waited to take him to the train station. And he would be gone three or four days.

When a civilian defense unit was formed, dad was asked to be the commander. That meant organizing and planning meetings and blackout drills. Traffic managers, air raid wardens, first aid workers and “communication specialists” were recruited. Many of our neighbors enlisted. My brother was a “Com. Spec.” These were teenage boys on bikes who would interact with the different sectors (no cell phones then!). Our neighborhood dentist, who was a very soft spoken, southern gentleman, headed the first aid unit. Mom and many of her lady friends volunteered and studied under the Red Cross. They were ready.

At home, we would listen to WKRC Radio Newsman, Tom McCarthy, with his accounts of the war, the losses and the few victories, and the many casualties. Many of my cousins and neighbors were serving. It was a scary time.

When the call came to dad that a blackout drill was being called, and before the sirens went off, dad called his key people, who alerted others. Dad went to headquarters, mom went to her station, and my brother went to his. That left me at home to keep the lights off and not to answer the door. So I would huddle in Mom and Dad's bed. It was a lot safer than mine. They would all be home in about an hour and I didn't have to be brave any longer.

However, one very stormy night, mom took me with her. Most of the time, they didn't have any emergencies. But this night they received a call that a person had been struck by a car and was on the way in. All the ladies were very jumpy, and doc was a little pale. He was checking the preparations when the ambulance pulled up. Mom told me not to look, but I did. I saw a person with his head bandaged and red stuff on his face, arm and leg, and notes tacked on him.

Doc looked at him and sounded an obscenity that I'd not heard before. "It's Billy knoll." Billy was laughing so hard he almost fell off the gurney. The red was lipstick and the notes described his "injuries" in Dad's handwriting. Mom recognized dad's hand in this too. They breathed a sigh of relief and stood down. When mom and I got home, a few hot words were spoken in my dad's direction. He gave her a hug and said, "the first one is always the hardest."