

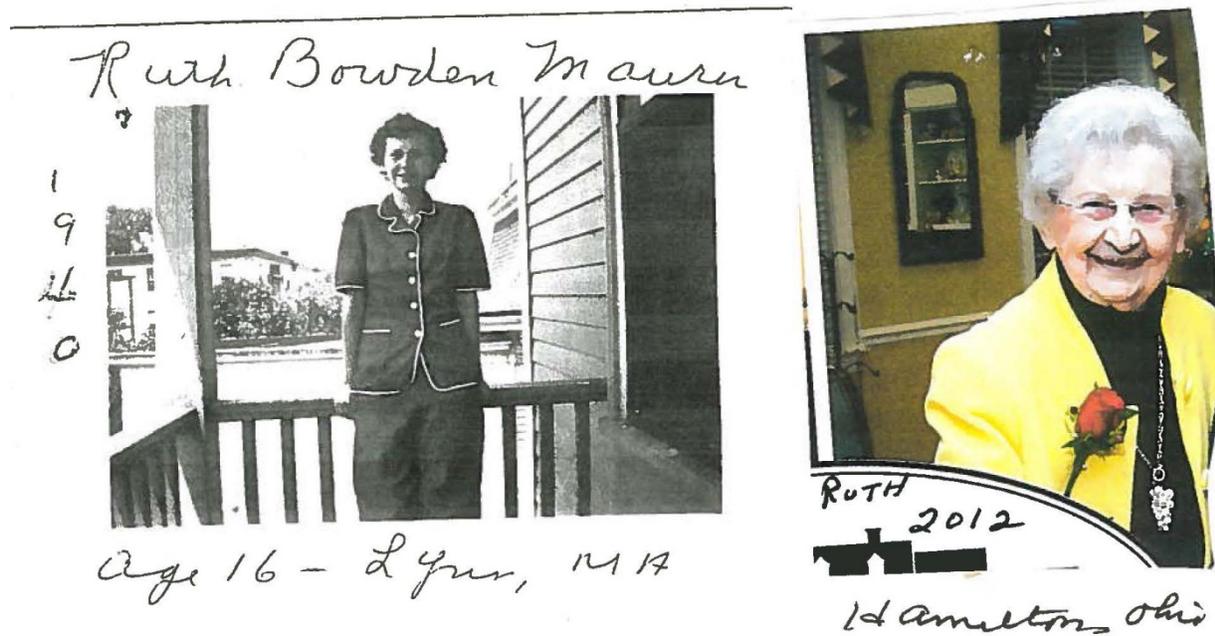
War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Ruth Maurer
Current home town: Hamilton, Ohio
Age: 88

My husband and I were transferred from General Electric in Lynn, Mass. to Lockland, Ohio. We moved into a small lease home in Hamilton, Ohio in 1952. We raised four children here. Pam and family live in Atlantic City, NJ; Grey in Columbus, OH (Vice President & General Manager of Heidelberg Distributing); Marcy in Clarksville, TN; and Glen, Treasure Island, FL. We gave them wings.

Each year, we drove on a trip. One year to Nahant, next to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and back to Ohio. I am still homesick for Nahant! Luckily, we had a station wagon and they played and slept in it all the way (no seat belts then!). In those days, we drove 80 MPH (legal limit) on two-lane highways. We had picnics all the way, and all six of us stayed in one motel room.

My husband died in 1994, at the age of 69. A few years later, I moved to a retirement community in Hamilton.



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Reflections of 1941 - 1942

As we hear more and more that Americans must tighten their belts, it is interesting to look back not so many years ago and see the many changes. The first that comes to mind is the average "good" weekly wage in 1941: \$50.00 for men, and most women started working for \$16.00 per week. In those days, most men lived at home until they married, and only a very few ever lived in apartments. Nylon was fast becoming impossible to obtain, so it was the general rule that you had them repaired when you got a run, and some people made a few extra dollars doing this.

Things changed drastically after December 7, 1941, when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. The small peninsular town of Nahant, ten miles north of Boston, became a very important defense post. The town is only three miles long and only a mile wide at its widest point, and thousands of servicemen poured onto this small spit of land over the next few years. Barracks were hurriedly built and heavy guns installed. The whole area was camouflaged, and some anti-aircraft guns were hidden in what looked like a house, but the roof would part and the guns would rise quickly into the air. Periodically, the air would be filled with the deep boom of the big guns and the sharp report of the anti-aircraft guns. The townspeople were always told when this would happen, and windows would have to be opened a bit. Yet, some damage was done to some homes. Any claims were quickly paid by the government. Day by day, the town changed. The small streets would echo with the sound of marching feet as groups of soldiers drilled. The buses were filled with young men in all branches of the service, and those who arrived that winter in a blinding snow storm wondered why they were sent to this "Godforsaken place."

The whole nation was rallying to the cause and Hollywood began to make many of the war movies we see on the late shows today. Then, the shortages began. Rubber was impossible to obtain, and we were rationed to two pounds of sugar at a time. In those early days, there was talk of evacuating the people of Nahant, but that never happened. The war was very close in that area. Even our time was changed in 1942, when we all put our clocks ahead one hour as War Time.

Everyone in the town was sad the day the lovely, old, huge home of Henry Cabot Lodge was torn down and the area became another fort. This home had seen many famous people, and Teddy Roosevelt had spent some time there.

Blackouts became a way of life, and townspeople patrolled the streets at night checking to make sure no light showed from any window. Ships were being sunk off the coast by enemy submarines, and when that siren wailed, our blood turned cold and we dashed for the nearest cover. By the spring of 1942, there was a permanent blackout of the coast from Maine to Florida.

Then came more restrictions: sugar was now rationed to one-half pound per person, and the conflict over gas rationing began. By July of 1942, they had decided that four gallons per week was right. Many cars were taken off the road, and all public transportation was overcrowded. If you could not get there by bus, train or walking, you didn't go. Many car pools were formed.

Soon, weekly dances were held on the base, and many romances flourished during this period, and many marriages came from it. Soon the two small churches saw an increase in uniforms sprinkled in the

congregation, and the whole town changed from a small-town tourist area to a bustling, small city with almost three thousand men and a few women from all over the country. Many friendships were formed, many of which are still flourishing today.

The sound of someone playing Taps each night echoed sadly over the town, for we all knew that many of those stationed there for a short time were soon to leave on those big ships for battles across the wide ocean. They would slip quietly out of the harbor from Boston in the dark of night and, from a hill in the town, if you peered intently, you could see the signal lights flash every so often. No one ever asked questions, but the people of the town knew when the newly trained group had left.

By the fall of 1942, most of the women had run out of nylon hose, and the hated rayon had to be worn. In the warm weather, leg paint was used (what a mess if you were caught in the rain!). Food was scarce and very expensive, and meat was almost unheard of. No tea was available, and instead of butter, Ducco was used. It came as a white blob with a pat of some yellow mixture and this had to be mixed by hand.

Strangely enough, no one seemed to complain. Almost all young men were in uniform, so all families were touched and wanted to help. Everyone had lived through the Depression, so were used to "doing without." That was part of the attitude. There was such a singleness of purpose in America in those years. The end of The War finally came, and the long slow process of healing all wounds started.

Ruth .Maurer

March 26, 1980