Introduction

Knowlt Hoheimer

I was the first fruits of the battle of Missionary Ridge.
When I felt the bullet enter my heart
I wished I had staid at home and gone to jail
For stealing the hogs of Curl Trenary,
Instead of running away and joining the army.
Rather a thousand times the county jail
Than to lie under this marble figure with wings,
And this granite pedestal Bearing the words, “Pro Patria.”
What do they mean, anyway?

Lydia Puckett

Knowlt Hoheimer ran away to the war
The day before Curl Trenary
Swore out a warrant through Justice Arnett
For stealing hogs.
But that's not the reason he turned a soldier.
He caught me running with Lucius Atherton.
We quarreled and I told him never again
To cross my path.
Then he stole the hogs and went to the war—
Back of every soldier is a woman.

(Two of the epitaphs in the Spoon River Cemetery)
Spoon River Anthology (1915)
By Edgar Lee Masters

In World War II there were over 400,000 deaths among over 16 million U.S. service men and women.

Just after World War II, the government issued a pamphlet on how families could get the remains of their fallen loved ones returned. It was titled “Tell Me About My Boy”.

This book contains the last story of each fallen serviceman connected to a single rural community. For them, there will be no more stories, sweet or funny, of a son, brother, husband, or father.

There are also wartime stories of survivors, as well as the view their folks back home got of the war.

Close your eyes and imagine nearly <u>every male between 18 and 25</u>, including relatives, loved ones, friends, coworkers, and even store clerks. "Our Boys" were to be <u>gone for no one knows how long. Or gone for – ever</u>.

Winamac (IN) Republican 6 Feb 1941: 1.

Wherever you were, your community had its own set of "Our Boys".

For me, they were connected to rural Pulaski County in northwestern Indiana, where I was born. But whether rural or urban, once in service, their stories were the same.

During World War II, Pulaski County in northwestern Indiana had about 12,000 residents. The county seat, Winamac, was a rural town of about 1,800 in 1940. There were also four small towns and a few villages. Cattle and corn were the county's primary products. During the 1940s, Winamac had a small business district that included five law offices, four small groceries, a few clothing stores, two drug stores, two furniture stores, two banks, two newspapers, a lumber yard, a grain elevator, and a movie theatre. The spiritual needs were met by one

Catholic and four Protestant churches. Healthcare needs were provided by three doctors and three dentists, but the nearest hospital was a 40-minute drive south in the much larger city of Logansport.

The county was connected to over 2,000 men, and women too, who left for war. Most were life-long residents or lived in the county during childhood or as adults. The rest had connections to the county through relatives or spouses.

In this book, nearly all their stories are based on items published in Pulaski County's two competing weekly newspapers, the Pulaski County (IN) *Democrat* and the Winamac (IN) *Republican*. In the first half of the 20th century, each Thursday you could count on the local news provided by the *Democrat* and the *Republican* for sale downtown, delivered to homes in town, or delivered by mail to the farm.

Born between 1901 and 1927, after living through the Noble Experiment and Great Depression as children, this Greatest Generation, went on to a World War as young men.

Before they were our fathers, uncles, grandfathers, and even great-grandfathers, they were the sons of their communities. Whether volunteered or drafted, Our Boys trained stateside, then were sent away to fight in Europe, North Africa, and the South Pacific. Before then, most hadn't gone farther from home than Indianapolis, 100 miles south southeast.

The elders of Pulaski County saw them answering the nation's call, leaving their work on farms and in towns, the steel mills of Gary, the Studebaker automobile plant in South Bend, and the nearby munitions plant. For others, it was their first "job". They went off with their buddies to fight for their country and their loved ones back home.

Most were away from their family, friends, and jobs for three years or more on an ocean or on the other shore.

Our Boys are gone now, but they left a legacy of service to their communities and county, as well as to the country.

This large cohort was representative of America's youth, not only the rural population, which, in 1940, was 42% of the country, but also boys from the cities. While more than half were between 18 and 25, nearly all ages entered service, from old men of 63 and 74 to an underage runaway, 15.

Our boys had folks for whom the previous world war was fresh in their minds. Except for stories from the elders, few had any idea what war entailed. But their elders knew.

Fourteen of Frank&Magdalena's grandsons were in the service across Europe, North Africa, and the South Pacific, including five sets of brothers. And not only did Gerald go to war, but also his

brother, five brothers-in-law, and a cousin-in-law, and five cousins, one of whom was killed in action.

Carl&Clara had four sons, a son-in-law, and Carl's brother in the service in World War II as were the six sons of Herschel&Edith. And Hattie sent a son and five grandsons. Three sons and three grandsons of Oscar&Della were in service. Joe&Mary had three sons and two daughters in the service. John&Mary Kate had four sons in service, as did Della.

In other families, enlistment pairs included three married couples, a father and son, and even a son and his mother.

At least two pairs of fathers and sons were photographed in their respective World War I and World War II uniforms.

A few of the youngest men were already married and even had kids. A few married just before they left for service. Many married after they returned. Robert and Raymond returned with brides from England, and Harry married a Belgium girl. Some died in battle before they could return to marry their loved ones. James' fiancée sadly learned of his death in the newspaper.

Several families lost multiple sons or grandsons. Three sets of brothers didn't return. And Henry's momma lost a son in each World War.

In this book are almost 300 stories of Our Boys, nearly all taken from newspaper items in the two competing local weeklies.

For example, John wrote home of his time "somewhere overseas", losing a day crossing the International Date Line, sailing the Indian Ocean, and seeing the Pyramids and the Holy Land, but missing the sight of the feet of his new baby girl. He returned to see her.

Five of our boys who were fathers were not as fortunate. Ralph had only seen his son in a photograph a month before he was killed in action. Richard, a bombardier, only saw his baby daughter through his bombsight during a flyover of his hometown eight months before he was missing in action and later declared dead. Nick, Richard, and Chester never even got to see their babies.

Some of the first Baby Boomers were connected to furloughs or camp visits. When Bill was home on leave in October of 1942, he hooked up with Elaine. The next week Bill left for base. A couple of months later, Elaine left for Fort Wayne, a much larger city about 80 miles to the east. In June 1943, Elaine gave her newborn son up for adoption and returned to her hometown. Bill and her family never knew. Keith's wife visited him at his camp in Tennessee several times, including another September visit. She gave birth to a son in May 1943.

Introduction

Although he never lived to fulfill his potential during World War II, Dick was an accomplished airman. A graduate of West Point, he flew diplomatic and rescue missions to South America and a scientific mission to Alaska. Sadly, he died in an air crash early in 1941, before the US went to war.

Many had established professions before the war.

Since 1927, Doc had been a prominent doctor in Pulaski County. Since he was in the National Guard, he was called back into service for World War II. Dr.John grew up in Star City and, in 1942 while stationed in Ireland, reconnected with war columnist Ernie Pyle, a fellow student at Indiana University. Married to the *Republican* publisher's daughter, Don was also a physician. He treated a wounded soldier described in one of Ernie's columns. James, Paul, and William were also physicians in the war. After the war Carl and Charles became physicians.

There were two Catholic priests among Pulaski County's Greatest Generation. Father Harold returned from war, but Father Clement did not. After the war, George became a priest, and Jack, a minister.

Before the war, Harry and Urban were morticians. On his way back to base after a family visit, Harry helped deliver a baby on a Chicago bus. Two years later, he was awarded a Bronze Star for his care of the sick and wounded. Byron taught hand-to-hand combat in Hawaii and was depicted in six paintings at the Pearl Harbor Officers' Club. His brother, Stanley, was borne over five days on a stretcher in China after a field appendectomy. After the war those two of the six veteran brothers became morticians.

Everett was a farm boy who routinely won prizes for his corn. He went off to war with his brothers. While stationed in Oregon as a Seabee, he met Ethel. They married, and after the war, returned to Pulaski County, where they ran a small-town grocery, raising five kids.

As children, some of the greatest generation wrote letters to Santa which were published in the paper. Like his older brother, Jay, Jack had his letter to Santa published in the paper. Neither survived the war. In 1924 and 1925 papers, young Chet's letters to Santa included a request for an electric moving picture machine. When Chet returned from the service at 27, what business do you think he entered?

Dave never served in the military, but he fulfilled his potential by leading two large federal projects. In 1933, he was named to the board of the Tennessee Valley Authority which was charged with providing low-cost electricity to eastern Tennessee. After the war, he was named the first chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission.

While Our Boys were away, doing their part, the rest of community pitched in.

Initially, tires were rationed, but soon so was coffee and sugar. Eventually, ration stamps were also required for meat and canned goods. Teenage Don, at one point, lost a family ration book and ran a classified in the local weekly. Others came to post in "Lost&Found" as well.

"Victory" gardens to supplement rationed food were less obvious than in the larger cities because it was already part of life in towns and on farms.

Scrap metal was collected for the war effort. The plastic in photograph records as well could be recycled. Homemakers were urged to collect bacon fat and other trimmings which were used in the production of explosives. Children collected milkweed pods for life vests.

Homemakers had always joined church auxiliaries and neighborhood book clubs. In wartime, there were also clubs for war mothers and women's clubs to bolster their own morale, including the Polly Ann Sewing, Cheer Up, and Happy Hour clubs.

Even after the war's end, homemakers were still collecting fats and urging their children to eat, given that there were "children starving in Europe"

Local businesses were affected by employees going off to war. In one case, due to public outcry, Harold's induction was postponed three weeks, but his bakery was finally closed, requiring grocers to turn to a distant firm to provide bread and other baked goods. In another case, Alfred closed his meat market, because his butcher, Jack, was inducted. And while Pete was away at war, his wife assumed his elected duties as County Treasurer.

There were lighter moments during their service, Robert and John, during separate training flights in 1942 and 1943 respectively, "attacked" their small hometown, Francesville, with flour bombs and threatening aerial maneuvers.

From time to time, veterans unexpectedly met their schoolmates far from home. In December 1943, while driving an Army truck along a narrow road in Sicily, Arlis encountered an oncoming Army truck driving too near the center of the road. With blood in his eye, he was ready to fight, only to discover it was his friend, Bob.

Women, too, did their part in service. Two years after touring with a vaudeville troop in the west for six weeks, LaVerne volunteered for the WAACs but, after a year, returned home to help her father farm.

Mary joined the Air WACs as a cryptographic technician after her son, Forrest joined. Other women served, like 'Hap' worked in a motor pool, and 'Deanie' supervised the fountain at her camp's PX (Post Exchange). Most women served as nurses in military hospitals around the world or as "Cadet Nurses" in other state-side government hospitals, such as those affiliated with the Veterans Administration. Danger was still present, in the states and abroad. One state-side nurse, Dorothy, was slugged by a soldier who feigned fixing her car at a traffic light.

Except for battle, most Pulaski County men found the military tolerable, but three of our boys went AWOL. John even escaped the guardhouse at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis. Joe

was labeled a “Straggler” by the Navy. And Fred was AWOL for seven wars, before being pinched in 1949. Over the years, three times the sheriff came across a visitor to Pulaski County who turned out to be AWOL.

In the letters home, our boys wrote about their experiences and thoughts. In fact, for his first year or so in the service, Dick, working for the *Democrat* before the war, wrote a column about his early state-side service experiences.

Although Pulaski County had no Medal of Honor recipients, it did produce three recipients of the next-highest award, the Distinguished Service Cross. In August 1943, Bob was awarded the Air Medal for, as co-pilot, taking over controls entangled by the body of his pilot killed at the start of a bombing run; two months later, he was missing but worked his way back to his unit months later. Meanwhile, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. In July 1945, Andy earned his Distinguished Service Cross when he "ran across open fire-swept terrain to friendly tanks", mounting first one, then knocked to the ground and mounting another before being wounded, he guided them to relieve his company pinned down by enemy fire. Forrest earned his Distinguished Service Cross at the Battle of St. Lo in France. And Ray’s unit earned a Presidential Unit Citation, when "[o]ut of his company of 250 men which went into the 6-day battle for Hill 510 at Bastogne, France, only 18 returned.". Our boys collectively earned a variety of other medals, including the Silver Star, the Soldiers Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star, and the Air Medal, as well as the Purple Heart. In 1985, several dozen of Our Boys were awarded the Prisoner of War medal.

In 1942, at least two of Our Boys were doomed to the over-60-mile Bataan Death March with 10,000 Americans and 66,000 Filipinos. At least 500 Americans and well over 5,000 Filipinos died. John died of exhaustion during the march, but his folks didn’t learn his fate until 1945. Clarence survived the March, but in 1944, was lost at sea when the unmarked Japanese prisoner ship on which he was held sank by US planes.

That first full year of war, 1942, included the war’s deadliest day for Pulaski County, 8 November. Jack and James both died in training flight crashes stateside. Father Clement died during a landing in North Africa. And, also off North Africa, David died of wounds incurred after his ship was torpedoed.

Over the years, there were over 100 occasions of those in service meeting fellow Pulaski County residents, including brothers and cousins. Almost half were coincidental – meeting on board a large troopship, in the same company, or in a bar. There is also a case where Joe, an immigrant from Germany, got to visit his parents and family just after the war in Europe ended. One bittersweet event was the first coincidental meeting between brothers, Arthur and Harry, and one more meeting a year later, just three months before Harry was killed.

After meeting his brother, Bob, in a nearby camp in Italy, Ed wrote to their folks, “Fifteen miles sounds close to you, but it isn’t always that way here, and one is not always sitting around his tent waiting for visitors from home. I may not get to see him again, but this meeting did us both a lot of good.”. Eight months later, Bob was killed.

On a stateside visit, Butch raised the spirits of his Pulaski County uncle and aunt after recent reports of their son, Richard, also a bombardier, was missing in action. Butch told them that he too had a plane shot out from under him, and had parachuted to safety. Sadly, Richard was not to be as fortunate. And Butch’s luck ran out a year later.

Buck’s plane went missing during a flight from China to India in 1944. He and his crewmates were declared dead after two years. In 2006, 62 years later, the crash site was discovered in the backcountry of India.

In two separate cases, a Pulaski County aviator, after perishing in an air crash, was re-interred in his final resting place with a pair of his crewmates. In both cases, the military, unable to identify the individual bodies, buried their remains together in a stateside military cemetery equidistant from their three families. Albert and his two crewmates were re-interred together in Zachary Taylor National Cemetery in Louisville KY, and “Tip” and his two crewmates were re-interred at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis MO.

Christmas, away from home, was tough for our boys. But in 1944 Belgium, it was catastrophic for two. Robert was killed on Christmas Eve. And Jesse drowned in an overturned truck in a ditch on Christmas Day.

In the same outfit, Henry and his hometown buddy, George, were killed four days apart on Corregidor.

Soon after the war ended, some returning veterans met death by accident or, in one case, by action. Soon after their return, Donald and Dick died in separate car wrecks. Phil earned his Bronze Star delivering ammunition over shelled roads in pitch darkness. Although caught in Missouri as a youth after stealing a new car in his hometown, Phil shined in service. But back home after the war, he died in a shootout with police.

Sadly, Shep was volunteered but returned as gun-shy, and Jerry was too nervous. Tippie’s handler wrote glowingly about his performance in a letter to the dog’s owner. Brownie was killed in action. Tippie, Teddy, and Fuzzy were discharged. The fates of Bus, Sport, Dick, Lad, and Ranger are unknown.

Who was a Pulaski County veteran of World War II?

On 16 Oct 1940, the first registration for the draft was conducted. All men between 21 and 35 participated and were assigned a lottery number. Two years later, the lower end of that age range dropped to 18 and the upper limit raised to 37. After registration, it was up to each man to decide whether to enlist at a time convenient or wait and see if his “lottery number came

up". Whether volunteered or drafted, if an individual passed the pre-induction physical, he was likely inducted. About 3,600 individuals connected to Pulaski County went into service. Hundreds more, typically married with children or disabled men, registered but never served.

All the veterans associated with Pulaski County were identified. Most were reported in the newspapers as living in the county or had lived in the county. Others were identified as frequent visitors, most likely because of county relatives or those of their spouses.

There were several who were coded in military records as enlisting in Pulaski County Indiana but were strongly associated with Pulaski County Kentucky. The stories of two of those Kentuckians who died in service and appear on the Memorial Plaque on the courthouse lawn in Pulaski County Indiana are included.

This book includes all those who died in service and a few survivors in stories drawn from newspaper accounts. Sadly, no veterans were interviewed. A complete list of over 3,600 World War II veterans and draft registrants, along with related facts, is included in an appendix.

This book has an introduction and eight chapters. Each chapter has four or five sub-chapters. The first three chapters contain the years before the US entered the war. It starts with **1939: Distant Lightning**. Local newspapers were getting stories of conflict in Europe, North Africa, and the Far East. Germany had already annexed Austria, made land claims in Czechoslovakia, and nearly all of Europe was at war after Germany invaded Poland. In **1940: The Draft**, conscription started in the US, and US arms production began in earnest. In **1941: Preparing for War**, the US continued to build arms for European "allies". After the December attack on Pearl Harbor, the US joined Britain, France, and others against Germany, Italy, and Japan.

The next three chapters contain the years of intense conflict. In **1942: The First Year**, the US sent Our Boys into harm's way in Europe, North Africa, and the South Pacific, and some died. In **1943: All In**, the deaths of our boys doubled, indicating the increasing level of conflict in Europe and the South Pacific. In **1944: In the Thick of It**, deaths quadrupled, indicating a more elevated level of conflict, although an end of the war in Europe was visible by the fall.

The last two chapters contain continuing intense conflict until there was a spring peace in Europe and, four months later, in the South Pacific. In **1945: Mopping Up**, deaths of our boys continue at the rate of the previous year, but, thankfully, end with total peace by mid-year. Finally, in **1946: Aftershocks**, there were a few service-related deaths, as the remaining servicemen returned, and the community began a "new" normal.

Most of these yearly chapters contain five sub-chapters. In addition to an Overview sub-chapter, there are sub-chapters: Community Climate, War Stories, The Dead, and Also in the Paper. The short sub-chapter, Overview, summarizes the major battles in each war zone, the medal and fatality counts, and the local news related to the war. The short sub-chapter, Community Climate, summarizes the headlines of a nearby local daily, which regularly reported

war news, including major events in other countries, the nation, and the state. The competing two Pulaski County weeklies reported the local news items. Additionally, the most popular music of the year is listed, as well as News of the Future, which are events, unreported at the time, which would become important, like the Manhattan Project and the Holocaust. The sub-chapter, War Stories, about the men and women in service, was taken primarily from the local weeklies. Starting in 1941, there is a sub-chapter, The Dead, which contains a profile of each fatality. Finally, the sub-chapter, Also in the Paper, contains other war-related clippings.

There are four Appendices. Appendix A is a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet of the personal demographics of each Pulaski County veteran and registrant. Appendix B is the complete collection of newspaper clippings related to the Greatest Generation of Pulaski County. Appendix C is a description of the author's research related to the residents of Pulaski County from 1924 through 1950. Appendix D is a brief description of the assumptions and protocols associated with the book.