

It was the
deadliest war
in world history.

More than 16 million
American men and
women served,
and an estimated
50 to 70 million
people worldwide
lost their lives.

SHADES OF **WAR**

WALKING WHERE THEY WALKED

Six decades later, a new generation of Americans is trudging along the beachheads and battlefields of World War II. They're trying to reconnect, remember, or finally meet their grandfathers, uncles, and others who served. By retracing the footsteps of their family's soldiers and sailors, members of this new generation, born in relative peacetime, hope to discover a person behind the statistics they studied in school. And more importantly, each wants to capture firsthand the story of the hero in the family tree who helped change the face of world history—before that history becomes too distant to recall.

BY JENNIFER WILLIS

IT WAS OCTOBER 1943 when Eugene Roland St. Charles, age 21, was drafted into the U.S. Army. As a member of the 90th Infantry Division, he landed on Utah Beach in June 1944, part of the Normandy invasion of World War II.

“Most World War II veterans that I’ve been exposed to were very reluctant to talk about their experiences,” Eugene’s great-nephew Roger Langevin says today. But on the 50th anniversary of the Normandy invasion, Uncle Gene sat down with Roger to talk openly about the war.

Roger was deeply moved by the stories his uncle told—so moved that he offered to take Uncle Gene to France. “But,” says Roger, “he was just not strong enough to do that.”

So, 52 years after the invasion of Normandy, great-nephew Roger took a two-week trip to France to visit Utah Beach and the small towns where his Uncle Gene had fought. Roger walked the beaches, visited monuments and cemeteries, and toured towns that Uncle Gene had helped liberate from German occupation.

Saved Memories

Roger’s not alone. He’s part of a growing trend towards hands-on military history research that puts the researcher back in the trenches to see how history affected the lives of their families and vice versa.

One of the towns Roger visited was Auxerre. In February 1945, the town’s mayor issued a proclamation encouraging his fellow citizens to welcome the approaching American forces. Years later, Roger’s Uncle Gene, who still had a copy of that proclamation, showed it to his nephew.

When Roger arrived in Auxerre, he went to the town hall and sought out the current mayor, Jean-Pierre Soisson. When Roger told Soisson about his uncle, the mayor invited Roger into his chambers. “With a lot of fanfare, he presented me a medallion of the city and wrote a wonderful



THEN AND NOW. Roger Langevin’s Uncle Gene (above) during World War II, and at his 50th wedding anniversary (right). Years later, Roger meets with the mayor of Auxerre (opposite page).



letter to my uncle,” Roger says. “He said he wanted to express thanks on behalf of the whole city.”

When he got back to the States, Roger sat down with his uncle and gave him the letter from Soisson.

“And he cried, because it meant so much to him,” says Roger, choking up himself. “That was a very rewarding part of the relationship with my uncle, to have been able to do that for him.”

And it happened with no time to spare: Uncle Gene died in August 2007, taking his memories with him.

Quickly Losing Ground

Just over 2.5 million U.S. World War II veterans survive today. And according to 2008 data from the Department of Veterans Affairs, we’re losing, on average, nearly 900 per day.

“They’re dying ... which is pretty sad,” Jennifer Weaver-Neist says. This is part of the reason she embarked on a 10-year journey to reconstruct her great-uncle’s military service.

The other part? Intrigue. Her journey started the day she sat down to help her great-aunt clean out the family attic. While sorting and shuffling, Jennifer came across a box

Seeing the Difference

How much more involved in family history do you get when you take your behind-the-scenes research and couple it with the kind of hands-on adventure that gets you up close and personal with family history? Plenty, according to Jennifer Weaver-Neist. Her tour stopped in Halle, Germany, a town the Timberwolves liberated toward the end of the war. The group was visiting a memorial museum, and American veterans were having photos taken. “This German gentleman comes up, and he was crying,” Jennifer recalls. “He said that he had fought as a German soldier against the Americans—and probably even the Timberwolves—during the war. He just had so many regrets and said war was a terrible thing. It was an amazing moment.”

with old letters her great-uncle had written when he was fighting in Europe.

Ralph Edward Shank—nicknamed “Bud”—was halfway through college when he was drafted in 1943. He shipped out with the 104th Infantry Division—the Timberwolves—to Cherbourg, France, in the fall of 1944.

“My uncle only made it to Holland,” Jennifer says. “He was dead by November 4. He only saw maybe 10 days of combat.”

The letters fascinated Jennifer and prompted her to dig deeper to find out more about this uncle she’d never met. She came across the National Timberwolf Association, serving World War II veterans of the 104th Infantry Division and their families. The association has organized several tours of the European battlefields where the soldiers fought.

“There was no question,” Jennifer says. “I just had to go.”

In 2006, she joined the Timberwolves on a trip to Europe, where she got a better idea of the conditions her great-uncle had faced. She was particularly struck by the local World War II military reenactors in Holland and Belgium. “It was like stepping back in time,” she says of

timeline

On the Home Front

BY TANA L. PEDERSEN

THEY’VE BEEN CALLED America’s greatest generation: the men, women, and children who faced the hardships and horrors of World War II. And while the troops were overseas, families on the home front united in patriotism, sacrifice, and self-reliance to hold the nation together through the crisis.

1941



June

Thousands of teenagers—too young to enlist but eager to do their part—train to be junior air raid wardens. When the sirens sound during mock air raids, the teens, armed with flashlights and whistles, bike through their towns ushering people off the streets and checking for telltale luminescence peeking through blackout blinds.



December

Across the country, baseball fields, city rooftops, and backyards make way for “victory gardens.” Canned vegetables are needed for the troops overseas, and skyrocketing transportation costs make it expensive to ship food at home. Americans unite behind the cause, and by the end of the war, more than 20 million victory gardens are producing 40 percent of crops in the United States.

1942



19 February

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, an uneasy nation grows suspicious of anyone with “enemy ancestry.” Thousands of Germans, Japanese, and Italians—most of whom are U.S. citizens—are taken from their homes and confined in internment camps. Family members fortunate enough to be left behind still face travel restrictions, curfews, and the constant fear of retaliation.

hitching a ride in a military police jeep. “I rode in the back with these guys all dressed up on the roads where the Timberwolves actually traveled.”

Jennifer was unable to pinpoint the exact location where her uncle had been killed, but the tour did stop at a river crossing Private First Class Shank had traversed several days before his death. Jennifer also visited the Henri-Chappelle cemetery in Belgium, where her uncle was buried before his remains were returned to his family in the U.S. in 1946.

“I felt like I was a messenger for my family,” Jennifer says. “Just the fact that I could put my feet, the feet of his family, overseas in some of the places where he was—especially because it sure didn’t feel like home to him when he was there.” It was a way to bring a little home back to him.

Stories into Lives

Also on the 2006 Timberwolf battlefield tour was Jerry Lacy, who was only 2 years old when his father left for the war in Europe. Sergeant Windsor Hurt Lacy was killed in action in April 1945 outside of Halle, Germany. Jerry’s younger brother, Mike, never met their dad.

Sea Cruise

Take a look at the U.S. Navy Cruise books in the Ancestry.com military collection for an inside view of life aboard ship. Yearbook-like, each book features pictures and names of officers and crew, short biographies of prominent officers, highlights of the ship’s deployment, and even candid shots of life at sea. You can even tell Dad or Grandpa how great he looked in his “Crackerjack” with that moustache—and this time with conviction.

<<http://content.ancestry.com/Browse/list.aspx?dbid=1250>>



IN HIS FOOTSTEPS. Jennifer Weaver-Neist’s great-uncle Bud in basic training (top) and before the war (right). Three years ago, Jennifer visited the cemetery where Bud rests today.



FATHER AND BROTHERS. Brothers Jerry and Mike Lacy (right) toured the battlefield where their father, Sergeant Windsor Hurt Lacy (left), was killed in 1945.

“My mother never remarried,” says Jerry. “She always kept his memory alive with us all her life. We played with his medals as kids.”

Jerry and Mike have gone on several European battlefield tours to build a relationship with the father they never knew. “It’s just a way of getting close to him, of saying he was standing right here, he was walking down this road,” says Jerry. “Sometimes, depending on where I am over there, I get a wonderful feeling of closeness, just a glow.”

On one of the trips, Jerry was approached by a man in Holland who had been a small boy during the Nazi occupation. The man told Jerry how frightened he’d been as a child and about the toll the occupation had taken on his parents.

“And he said, ‘One day, all of a sudden over that field—right over there—the Timberwolves came running across with their guns,’” Jerry recalls. “He said, ‘I was so thrilled. I ran upstairs and got oranges and whatever I could find to give to the GIs as they passed through our town chasing the Germans out.’”

In Memoriam

Military pages are a quiet little corner of Ancestry.com made up of memorials to family veterans—more than 75,000 of them in fact. Adding yours is simple. From the person page associated with the military hero you wish to honor, click on the “Create military page” link (you’ll find it in the Additional Tools box), then add stories, photos, and audio. Ancestry.com populates the page with information from your family tree. Select “edit” to change or add details.



You can also choose the “View other military pages” link to visit other pages that have been created in honor of family veterans or go directly to the pages via <<http://trees.ancestry.com/view/warmemorial.aspx?alliance=United+States+of+America>>.



23 February

War touches the mainland when a Japanese submarine fires on an oil field near Santa Barbara, California. Although no one is injured and the damage is minimal, residents along the West Coast fear a coming invasion.



March

Even fashion isn’t safe, as the government steps in to regulate the clothing industry. How wide can your belt be? The War Production Board says two inches. Use of natural materials such as wool and silk is restricted, as are unnecessary pockets, decorative buttons, ruffles, and pleats.



September

Long before the Patriot Act, America has its own Office of Censorship. And every piece of mail going into or out of the country is fair game for search and seizure. The government employs more than 10,000 individuals to inspect the almost one million postal items crossing the borders each week. Soldiers and their loved ones begin communicating with homemade codes designed to fool the censors.

1943



January

When can sliced bread be a matter of national security? When the Secretary of Agriculture bans its sale because the metal used in slicers is needed for munitions production. The ban doesn’t apply just to new machines; bakeries that already own equipment aren’t permitted to use it in order to be fair to those that do not. To the nation’s delight, the ban is lifted after less than two months.



March

“Use it up. Wear it out. Make it do or do without.” That’s the nation’s rallying cry. For more than a year, key goods such as sugar and coffee have been rationed. Now cheese, milk, butter, meats, eggs, and cereal are added to the list. *Good Housekeeping* releases a cookbook to help housewives make the most with less; make way for the Eggless, Milkless, Butterless Cake.

Talking It Out

A handful of old photographs, a notebook, and a nickname—"Ski"—helped spur author Jeffrey Badger to start the search for his grandfather and World War II veteran, Leo Kavanaugh.

Years of research and several trips to Europe later, Jeffrey had pieced together the story of his grandfather's military service and turned it into his book, *Finding Granddad's War*.

Along the way, Jeffrey interviewed more than 30 World War II veterans who served with his grandfather's unit. Collecting their stories, their memories, and their words was an inspiring and daunting task.

One veteran, Marvin Mangham, had been sent with Jeffrey's grandfather to repair a crane damaged by German artillery as the Americans were attempting to cross the Roer River at Jülich, Germany. "[The Americans] were building these sort of makeshift bridges to get their troops



MEN AT ARMS: Jeffrey Badger's grandfather, Leo Kavanaugh (left), and Marvin Mangham.

and tanks and vehicles across, and while they were building, the Germans would send over artillery and blow them up," Jeffrey says.

"My grandfather's buddy starts talking about trying to repair the crane while the Germans are sending artillery over," Jeffrey says. The driver of the crane, shot dead, was still in his seat, Mangham explains. And there the story ends for a while, as Mangham, "breaks down crying and can't continue" says Jeffrey. This, Jeffrey realized, was the same story his grandfather never finished telling his daughter; he would mention "blood and bodies in the water" but go no further.

Just a few years ago, Jeffrey, whose grandfather died when Jeffrey was an infant, visited Jülich and even located a house that had appeared, practically roofless from the shelling, in a 1945 *LIFE* magazine photo spread documenting the Americans' crossing of the Roer. "I'm walking down along this little road on this little river, and it's mundane," Jeffrey recalls. "It's just a river with some trees. You wouldn't even know that 60 years ago, that was going on right at that location."

Just in Time

Visiting the sites his grandfather saw during the war helped Jeffrey put his own life in perspective: "I thought, here I am, a 25-year-old guy, and I'm going around Germany, drinking beer and having fun," he says. "And 60 years ago, my grandfather was a 25-year-old guy with a wife and kid at home, and he's getting shot at."

"It makes me appreciative of what a privileged life I've had, that I didn't have to go do some of the stuff that these guys had to do 60 years ago. There are only two generations separating us. I've certainly got a pretty good deal."

But for the historian who wants the first-person account of World War II, the clock is ticking. Jerry Lacy readily admits he's looking forward to more Timberwolf battlefield tours, but acknowledges this year's reunion may be the group's last. He estimates only about 125 Timberwolf veterans are still living, and, aside from one 88-year-old participant on last year's tour ("I'll tell you, you couldn't beat him to the bar at five o'clock to have a beer," Jerry laughs), they're becoming a little less mobile with every passing year.

Jennifer Weaver-Neist, who also put her research into a book, *Give My Love to Everybody: Letters from a World War II Soldier*, believes that, had he lived, Bud would have been one of her favorite uncles. She has come to love Bud through his letters and developed a strong bond with the veterans who were traveling with her through Holland, Belgium, and France.

"These older guys would be going around to these sites with tears in their eyes and memories that we would never be able to access," she says. "I wanted to put my arms around all of them and tell them I'm sorry they had to go through all this stuff."

To Jennifer, researching Bud's history and writing a book about her experiences seems like the most important thing she's done in her life. "Genealogically speaking, you learn about yourself in doing anything like this," she says. "I've learned the most through my family history. More than I have through my own experiences."

JENNIFER WILLIS was raised in a family steeped in lore and with a passion for family history. She's a freelance writer living in Portland, Oregon, and can be reached at rev.jen@gmail.com.

When Hope Met George

Pat Lassiter cherishes her father's World War II draft card. But not for the reasons most family historians might think. Pat's favorite part is the anomaly it contains: her mother's signature.

Why is it there? Because, says Pat, "My mother met my dad when she signed him up for the draft."

Pat's mom, Hope Waletta Shellenberger, was the secretary of the schools. Part of her job was to sign up draftees. That included Pat's dad.

The draft card offers the basic facts about Hope and George Earl Dukes's unofficial first date. As for ambiance? Pat's pretty sure there was no fancy dinner or candles.

Regardless of the circumstances, the would-be couple made do. They dated for two years before George and Hope married—on the same day George received his orders to report for duty.

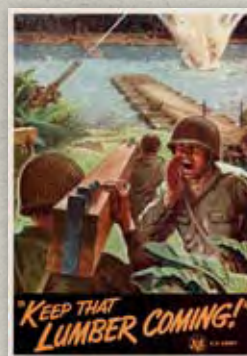
Pat knew about her parents' strange meeting all her life. But it wasn't until she began trading stories with a distant relative ("my great-grandfather was his grandfather's brother," says Pat) that she discovered the draft card. Naturally, the card today holds an esteemed position in Pat's family history files. After all, how many of us can say we have an official government record documenting the moment our parents first met?



September

When the United States faces a shortage of workers, the War Advertising Council begins a vast recruitment campaign aimed at women. Rosie the Riveter isn't just a celebration of working women; she's a brilliant stroke of patriotic propaganda. The ad campaigns are so successful that by 1944 more than 19 million women are in the American workforce—6 million of them new recruits.

1944



August

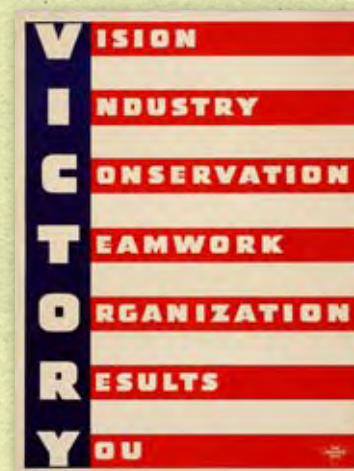
Vital lumber needed to push the war effort forward is being lost to forest fires across the country. To encourage the public to keep America's woods safe, the Ad Council unveils a new campaign. Its star? Smokey the Bear.



November

In spite of failing health, Franklin D. Roosevelt is elected to his fourth term as president. He dies a few months after taking office in 1945 and never sees the end of the war.

1945



August

You've seen the iconic *Life* photograph: a young sailor kissing a stranger in the middle of Times Square. It is Victory over Japan (VJ) Day. When Emperor Hirohito announces Japan's surrender, America erupts with spontaneous celebrations. In towns small and large, crowds spill into the streets. Horns honk, flags wave, and people gather at bonfires, parades, and fireworks.

September

Unable to purchase stockings during wartime, women paint their legs with pancake makeup and use eyebrow pencils to draw seams. A month after Japan surrenders the wait is over—for some. In Pittsburgh, 40,000 women fight over 13,000 available pairs of nylons, and the police are called in. It's the beginning of the "nylon riots."

World War II Records

at Ancestry.com

BY ESTHER YU SUMNER

LOOKING TO ADD WORLD WAR II military records to your family tree? You'll find a number of records focused on just that at Ancestry.com, each rife with stories, details, and your family history.

How to Start

As with any search at Ancestry.com, start by entering the name of the person you're interested in finding records for, plus any other details you know, and Ancestry.com searches all of its records for matches—military records included. You may also want to limit your search solely to military records.

When looking for draft registration cards, don't limit your search just to males of draft age. In 1942, the United States held an "old man's" draft registration, just in case. Men between the ages of 45 and 65 years were required to register.

Include women. You may luck out and find a female veteran in your family tree.

A 'REGISTRAR'S REPORT' form from a local board, dated April 27, 1942. The form is for a registrant named Hazel A. Esch, born April 27, 1942, in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. The form includes a table for physical characteristics (Race, Height, Weight, Complexion, Eyes, Hair) and a section for 'Other obvious physical characteristics that will aid in identification'. The registrar's name is Hazel A. Esch, and the local board number is 4. The stamp of the local board is also visible.A 'REGISTRATION CARD' for a man born on or after April 28, 1877 and on or before February 16, 1897. The card is for a registrant named Charles Wilcox, born April 28, 1882, in Fayette, Pennsylvania. The card includes a table for physical characteristics (Race, Height, Weight, Complexion, Eyes, Hair) and a section for 'Other obvious physical characteristics that will aid in identification'. The registrant's name is Charles Wilcox, and the local board number is 4. The stamp of the local board is also visible.

What You Can Find

Ancestry.com hosts World War II collections ranging from small, town-focused histories to large, nationwide databases. Here are a few you may want to check out.

U.S. World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938–1946

www.ancestry.com/search/DB.aspx?dbid=8939

Records of approximately 8.3 million men and women who enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War II; information may include name, physical characteristics, and box and reel number of microfilmed records

U.S. World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942

www.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1002

"Old man's registration" conducted on 27 April 1942 for men born between 28 April 1877 and 16 February 1897

WWII United News Newsreels, 1942–1946

www.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1142

Original 267 United News newsreels produced by the U.S. Office of War Information (OWI) during World War II; search by keyword or date, or browse by year

WWII Young American Patriots, 1941–1945

www.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=8941

Yearbook style collection from nine states; information includes name, branch of military service, birth date, place entered service, parents' names, and service person's photo

U.S. WWII Military Personnel Missing In Action or Lost At Sea, 1941–1946

www.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1199

Includes date of loss, branch of service, rank, service number, and status (lost at sea vs. missing in action)

WWII U.S. Navy Aircraft Carrier Muster Rolls, 1939–1949

<http://content.ancestry.com/iexec/?htx=List&dbid=1143>

Quarterly lists and reports of changes for naval personnel aboard several aircraft carriers

Germany: Data on 7,400 North Bavarian Jews

www.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1486

Names of 7,407 Jewish North Bavarians who emigrated from Bavaria or were deported or murdered, as well as addresses and emigration and deportation dates and locations

Holocaust: Schindler's Lists

www.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1376

Two of Oskar Schindler's lists of employees, including 1,980 names, plus birth year, camp, occupation, gender, and information on whether individuals survived; made available through partnership with JewishGen.org

U.S. Rosters of World War II Dead, 1939–1945

<http://content.ancestry.com/iexec/?htx=List&dbid=1102>

Individuals who died during World War II while in the U.S. armed services; included are name of the permanent and temporary interment site, name, rank, service number, religion, race, and disposition. Search by name, birth, gender, race, or keyword, or browse by the first letter of the last name

Stars and Stripes Newspaper, Europe, Mediterranean, and North Africa Editions, 1942–1964

<http://content.ancestry.com/iexec/?htx=Newspaper&dbid=1136>

WWII Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard Casualties, 1941–1945

<http://content.ancestry.com/iexec/?htx=List&dbid=1122>

Includes name, rank, address, and relationship of next-of-kin; browse images by filtering down from location, to casualty type, to surname, or search by name, birth, or keyword; includes wounded and POWs

WWII Prisoners of War, 1941–1946

www.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=8919

Approximately 140,000 U.S. soldiers and U.S. and Allied civilians who were prisoners of war between 7 December 1941 and 19 November 1946

Japanese Americans Relocated During WWII

www.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=8918

Details on more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans relocated during World War II from Washington, Oregon, and California; may include name of evacuee, where he or she was relocated to, occupation, and alien registration or social security number

WWII Japanese-American Internment Camp Documents, 1942–1946

<http://content.ancestry.com/iexec/?htx=List&dbid=1134>

Collection of smaller databases from 10 Japanese-American internment camps located in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming

Photographs of Japanese Soldiers and Allied Prisoners of War, 1942–1945

<http://content.ancestry.com/iexec/?htx=List&dbid=1163>

Collection of 46 photographs listed by English caption; each image is preceded by text pages—use the Next button to advance to associated captions and photo

WWII and Korean Conflict Veterans Interred Overseas

www.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=4283

Be It Ever So Humble: The Story of Hopewell, New Jersey, and Its Servicemen During World War II

<http://content.ancestry.com/iexec/?htx=BookList&dbid=15122>