VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

WILLIAM J. KELLY

2201 Floyd Road

Weatherford, TX 76087

817-596-8890

email: wjk1920@gmail.com

Birth Date: September 12, 1920, in McKeesport, Pa.; hospital in McKeesport, Pa.

Parents: William Joseph Kelly and Josephine Bell Kelly. WJK was an accountant, and Josephine was a homemaker. He was a private first class in WW I in the 80th Division.

Siblings: Thomas Edward Kelly, Navy Medical Corp.

James Regis Kelly, Navy Air Force

Leo Lawrence Kelly, Navy Air Force

Joanne Kelly

Newborns deceased: Mary Kelly and Francis Kelly

All three brothers served in the Navy in WWII.

I was employed as an electric welder in a factory manufacturing 100, 200, 500 and 1000-pound bomb casings. I had a very high service deferment.

**Basic Training – Greensboro, NC:**

I served in the United States Army Air Corp. I enlisted and chose the Air Force because I wanted to fly. I was always interested in aviation and built many model airplanes as a boy, and read many aviation magazines. I had a flight in the Ford Tri motor passenger plane, which was the first commercial passenger plane. My father drove my wife, Bette, my son, Larry, and me to Pennsylvania Station in Pittsburgh, Pa., to board a train for basic training in Greensboro, N.C. There were lots of hugs, tears and kisses, and my dad advised me to never volunteer for anything. It was tough leaving my family, but I was gung ho to be a pilot, preferably a fighter pilot.

On the train, I met some young men from all over the western Pennsylvania area. When we arrived, we were met by a young sergeant who lined us up and marched us to Supply. We were given ill-fitting uniforms, and my shoes were too big. I cannot remember how it was done, but our civilian clothes were packed and sent home. We were then marched to our barracks and told how we had to take care of it.

Next to the barracks was a boxing ring. The base 135-pound boxing champion trained there. Talking with the people, I mentioned that I had been taught how to box while in school. Somehow, that information got to the captain in charge of the boxing program, and he came to see me. I had not boxed in four years, so I declined his request to join his boxing team. He talked me into sparring with his fighter. I agreed on the basis that there would not be any hard punches thrown. About two weeks after, the captain and his fighter came over with gloves and protective gear for me, and the sparring began. At first, it was just a light workout, then all of a sudden he hit me with two very hard punches. That made me mad and I worked him around the ring until he was about to hit me hard again. Unfortunately for him, I had seen a little movement he made backward when about to throw a punch, so I let him have it with a hard left, then a hard right, which knocked him out of the ring. All the barracks crowd cheered for me. I left the ring and never boxed again.

I do not recall any instructors' names, but we were first trained in close order drill. We had chemical warfare training, oxygen training, heavy physical training, which was done on an obstacle course. In addition, of course, we had firearm training. There was always K.P. to contend with. I was lucky on my first K.P. duty. The mess sergeant asked if there was anyone from Pittsburgh there; no one stepped forward, so I thought that even though my dad had warned me to never volunteer, I would take a chance, so I stepped forward. The sergeant then assigned every one duties and I was still standing there. He then called me into his office, and it turned out that he was from Pittsburgh and was hungry for information about what was transpiring there. We talked for quite a while, and then he gave me my K.P. assignment for the day. I had to fill two large containers with ice and water for the three meals. I thought this is my lucky day. I was never assigned K.P. again in the service.

We had to run a 10-mile obstacle course to complete basic training. In a short three months, we had gone from a bunch of out of shape people to a group of soldiers well disciplined and in great physical condition. We had also learned what a white glove inspection was. I had no problem adapting to military life. I thought the food was mostly good, and there was plenty of it. I had many new friends, but six of us became special friends.

Social life on base consisted of the movies and the PX. We all usually went to Greensboro on Saturday evening if we had a pass; that usually consisted of having dinner and walking around town. I missed my family on weekends. I wasn’t used to the heat in this area so Mother Nature gave me a big sunburn, even my lips. I had difficulty eating and drank with a straw for about a week. That was fun! My instructors were all firm, but fair, and knew their job.

**Pre-Flight Training – Maxwell Field, AL:**

Upon completing basic training, we were sent to pre-flight training at Maxwell Field, Ala. We were confined to base for 30 days. I did no flying at Maxwell Field, a B-24 transition base. I had a lot of officers training, square meals, more physical training and flight studies. It was a beautiful base, and the Air Force threw a big graduation party for us.

**CTD Training – Wilkes-Barre, PA:**

I went from Maxwell Field to CTD at Bucknell College in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. We were discharged from the regular army and re-enlisted as aviation cadets. We occupied five floors of the local Hotel Sterling. The officer in charge was Lt. Pray, and he held regular prayer meetings. Most were for training, but if they were off schedule, you knew there was trouble afoot.

One such meeting was very bad. Two cadets had decided that we all needed the services of some girls, so they installed these girls in rooms on the floor above our top floor. To run this operation they had to have the cooperation of the CQs (charge of quarters) who were stationed at each elevator door. Most of us knew nothing about this, so it was a complete surprise when Lt. Pray divulged it. We were all confined to quarters for the weekend while Lt. Pray’s investigation was completed. However, the girls at Bucknell heard about this and they arranged a dance at the college center for us. It was a very nice evening — a closely guarded one. Three cadets were washed out and sent to the worst duty Lt. Pray could find.

There was a tailor shop in the hotel and we all had our uniforms cut to fit. We all really looked great when marching and singing through the streets of Wilkes-Barre. After 30 days, we were free on the weekends from noon Saturday until 9 p.m. Sunday. We married people had our wives come visit us. My wife, Bette, and I were walking down the street when two girls I had met at the above-mentioned dance came by and said, “Hi Bill.” Need I say more?

We did study! We learned the history of war, especially about the Germans and Russians. We had a cadet from Yugoslavia, and he really educated both us, and the teacher about what was happening in that area politically. We learned Morse Code and how to send and receive it. One course was in airplane identification of both friendly and enemy aircraft. We had a great course in English with an accent on communications. Leadership was emphasized in both the classroom and in leading a squadron in close order drill.

The training we were most interested in was the flight training. We learned to fly the most basic of airplanes, the Piper Cub. We learned take offs and landings, as well as tailspins, 360s and other turns and stalls. My Cub had a 25-horse power engine and had tandem two-place seating with dual controls. My instructor weighed 295 pounds, and he sat in front of me. I received an unintended course in blind flying. I passed all the classroom tests and also my flying test, which was very tough because of the small engine and the heavy instructor. I tested at 3,500 feet altitude instead of 5,000 feet because it was taking too long to get to 5,000 feet. I did the tailspin last, and the ground looked awful close to my inexperienced eye as I pulled out of the spin.

My wife, Bette, was sharing an apartment with Ann Krause, AC Floyd Krause’s wife. However, she missed our son, Larry, and wanted to go back home to Carnegie, Pa., to bring him back to Wilkes-Barre. I got off duty on a Saturday at noon and managed to get a three-day pass from Lt. Pray. There were no busses or trains leaving for Pittsburgh on Saturday afternoon, and we did not want to lose any time. I was discussing this problem with someone at the hotel and was told that the over-the-road truckers were permitting cadets go with them on their runs. I jumped on that idea and immediately got on the phone to long-haul trucking companies. I found one that had a trip to Harrisburg, Pa., at 10 a.m. that Saturday. I talked the boss into delaying the trip to 12:30. Bette was working at the Planters Peanut factory, so that night when she came over to the hotel, I told her what the plans were so she could get off work. We met the truck and squeezed into the front seat, truck cabs were very small in those days, and headed for Harrisburg, Pa. It was a rough uncomfortable ride, but we did not care, we were going home. The truck driver let us off at the train station, and we caught a train to Pittsburgh, Pa.

In Pittsburgh, we took a streetcar to 306 Lydia St., Bette’s parent’s home. We were ready for a quiet weekend with family and our son when on Sunday I got word that my grandmother Bell had died. My three brothers came home and a boyhood friend, Jack Beatty, was there. Other friends were at the visitation. It was a sad thing, but I did get to see many friends, my brothers, my uncles, aunts and other relatives. I now had to report to duty, so I left Bette home to come later with Larry, and took a train back to Wilkes-Barre. We laughed about that hitch hiking trip all of our lives.

We were shipping out to Nashville, Tenn., around the first of December, so I sent Bette and Larry home at the end of November. It turned out that the troop train was going to be going through Carnegie, Pa, Bette’s hometown. Therefore, I obtained the train schedule to learn when the train would be going through Carnegie, called Bette, and gave her the expected time. As we went through Carnegie, Bette and Larry were standing on the street next to the tracks, and all my buddies waved and hollered to them, as did I. That was a nice treat for everyone on that long train ride. I played poker on that entire trip and ended up winning 35 cents. That ended my poker career.

**Pilot Testing Base - Nashville, TN:**

It was here that all the psychiatric and other tests were given to all the cadets that had made it to this point. The necessary test passing grade to go on to pilot, navigator or bombardier training was a seven, eight or nine number. This was a combined number of all the tests. I scored a nine on all the tests, so I qualified for all three positions. Unfortunately, about half the cadets washed out, and we had to say goodbye to many friends. One, an Italian boy, went to the Paratroops and was killed in a jump when his chute did not open properly. He was a happy go lucky funny person.

The weather was miserable that winter in Nashville; we never saw the sun, and after the tests, we had nothing to do. After about 60 days of this weather and eating salami every night for supper, we six buddies were in the PX area playing pool and drinking beer when an orderly came in and put a letter on the bulletin board. The letter said that anyone volunteering to go to navigation school would have their commission in six months. We talked it over, and all six of us decided to switch from pilot training to navigation school.

**Navigation School – Monroe Field, LA:**

We shipped out and began school on Feb. 8, 1944. Back to math, logarithms, the stars in the heavens, meteorology, radio classes and all the different kinds of navigation, headings, doglegs and ETAs (estimated times of arrival). We did our flying at Monroe Field, La., in twin engine Beechcraft airplanes. For some reason, I got air sick in this plane. I was about to give up flying when I ceased getting sick, and I have never been sick in an airplane since.

My final test flight was from Monroe, La., to Benito Air Base in Texas. We were given our flight plan when entering the plane; the flight plan also had a take off time and an ETA. We were also given the weather for the time of the flight. I was within 80 knots of my destination and was about 27 minutes ahead of my ETA. I gave the pilot a big dogleg heading, and he did not want to take it. I knew that I was in charge of the course, and I told him that and insisted he take my headings. We crossed the field within one minute of our ETA, so I passed my navigation flight test.

When the commission announcements were made, I suffered a big disappointment. I was promoted to Flight Officer instead of Second Lieutenant. I was going to resign and went to headquarters to do so. Some major explained to me that they had quotas, and they had too many lieutenants. I argued that my test scores were better than some of those who received a second lieutenant's commission. In the end, it was useless to try and change things, and as the alternate duty was not good, I settled down to being a flight officer for a while. When the testing was all over, I found out that three of our six had been made flight officers. A flight officer is the same as a second lieutenant, except for the title. We graduated on Oct. 1, 1944. We were then given a 30-day leave, and my orders were to report to Lincoln, Neb.

**B-17 Training – Lincoln, NE:**

In Lincoln, our crew was put together, and we were trained to fly the B-17 bomber. I was happy about that. Our flight crew consisted of the following men: William G. Cridlin, pilot from Virginia, William D. Swanson, co-pilot from Oklahoma, William J. Kelly, navigator from Pennsylvania, Unknown Bombardier, dropped, J. R. Akin, flight engineer from Georgia, Theodore R. Clarkson, radio operator from Utah, Anthony Lumia, ball turret gunner from Pennsylvania, Carl (Pete) Johnson, nose gunner and togglier from California, James P. Scott, waist gunner from Texas and John E. Hawks, tail gunner from Virginia. When we were fully outfitted, we were shipped to Sioux City, Iowa, for transition flight training.

**Transition Flight Training – Sioux City, IA:**

Officers Club:

My first visit to an officer's mess was at the air base in Sioux City, Iowa. I was amazed the first time I had dinner there. I learned that the mess sergeant had been a chef at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. I had never eaten Roquefort cheese in my life, but there on the line was an entire skein of it. Delicious! The food was so good that I grew out of my uniforms. That food was without a doubt the best food I ever had while in the service. Twice while in Sioux City, our enlisted crewmembers complained about the food they were being served and asked the officers to come and eat with them to check out the food. Both times we did, the food was excellent. They were embarrassed and claimed we had eaten there on unusual evenings. I suppose that was possible, but not on that base. I personally was always satisfied with the food served on bases.

Hawks:

John Hawks was our tail gunner, and shall we say he liked to have a little nip occasionally. One evening we were all in our Quonset hut when John came to visit us. He was very happy because somewhere he had gotten a bottle of Scotch. He had come over to offer us a drink. We obliged him, and when he was leaving he put his bottle of Scotch in his belt and closed his coat around it so as not to be seen. He was no more than out the door when we heard a loud pop. I opened the door, and there on the stoop was Hawks broken bottle of Scotch. It had fallen out of his belt, and the Scotch was draining into the ground. Hawks was standing there with one of those everything-went-wrong smiles. At some later date, we gave him a bottle of Scotch. John seemed to be accident-prone. My wife, Bette, was able to buy a Thanksgiving turkey with her rationing coupons, so I had all the crew to my place for Thanksgiving dinner. After dinner, Hawks took out the trash. There was wet snow on the ground, and there was a wire clothes line stretched low across the yard. Hawks did not see the wire, and it caught him at his neck and flipped him down into the snow. The wire also scraped his neck. He came back into the upstairs apartment and very sheepishly told us what happened. We cleaned him up and treated his neck, but we also had a good laugh.

**Shipping Out to England:**

I went overseas to England on the ship *John Wakefield*. It had previously been the cruise ship *Manhattan*, out of New York. It had been torpedoed by the German subs, burned, but did not sink. The Navy towed it back to the USA and rebuilt it into a troop ship.

Our bomber crew was given a bunk in the hold of the ship. We officers were assigned to a stateroom on one of the upper decks. It was bare bones, but had a nice bath and shower. We also had an officer’s dining room. Several days into the “cruise,” the three Bills decided to go see how our crew was doing. The stench in that hold was terrible, and we found the bunks were stacked six high, about 30 inches of space between them. The chow line never stopped. Enlisted men were not permitted on the upper decks, but we three Bills decided to sneak our crew up to our quarters and let them breathe some fresh air and take a good shower. We did this without realizing the affect it would have on the crew. We later learned that this one act of kindness told our crew that they had good caring officers, and they always worked and cooperated with us 100 percent.

Dining on Board:

One day on our free cruise to England, the sea was very, very rough, and the waves seemed as high as our deck. When the sea was rough, the orderlies put wet tea towels on the tables so the dishes would not slide. The dining room had about six long tables, and I was seated at the table next to the bandstand. The cook had prepared elbow macaroni in tomato sauce for dinner that evening. Maybe he did not like officers! I noticed that as the ship rolled the macaroni was moving back and forth on the plates. We had just been seated and served when the ship took a big roll, I thought it was going to turn over and the dinner plates began to spill the macaroni. I left the table and stepped on to the bandstand. When the ship hit the bottom of its roll, it recovered with a mighty jerk. This jerk tossed macaroni and officers all over the room. Everything was covered with red tomato sauce, including the officer’s pinks. What a mess I saw before me, and I could not keep myself from laughing. I was the only officer with a clean uniform. I went out on deck and the escort destroyers looked as if they were standing on their nose at the bottom of the wave trough. That wave was an experience I would not want to repeat.

Liverpool Landing:

When the *Wakefield* landed in Liverpool, England, it was at low tide, so we could not disembark. I did not know that there could be so much difference between high tide and low tide — it was about 15 feet. We stayed on the ship until high tide waters came in. I am sure that amazed every soldier on board the ship. It took us nine days to travel the southern route to England.

**Eye Air Base - East Anglia, England:**

At Eye Air Base we were assigned to B-17G No. 338441, and flew most of our missions in that plane, which we named, Maid for Action. Bill S. and I painted a pretty maid on the plane.

Eighth Air Force:

I was assigned to the Eighth Air Force, 95th Bombardment Group, and was in the 412th Squadron stationed at Eye Base in East Anglia, England. The duty was to partake of daylight bombing flights over targets in Germany and elsewhere. The officers were assigned a barracks in their area, and the enlisted men the same in there area. It was there we met some of the other crews that we would be flying with. It was also where we first learned what combat missions were like and where the toughest targets were.

The barracks and the adjoining latrine were not heated. We did have a pot bellied stove in the Quonset hut, but we were limited to three shovels of coke per day. Tradition had it that when the crews flying combat that day were due back, the fire would be lighted for them. The latrine was cold all the way, even the water. The shower consisted of a tank up at the ceiling full of ice-cold water. It had a chain pull, which you pulled to get shower water. This is how it went! You pulled the chain to get wet, then after the shock you soaped up and scrubbed yourself, pulled the chain again to rinse off, and if still living, dried off as fast as possible and got dressed. Then the blue look went away. The beds we used had straw mattresses, and the blankets, though warm, were jaggy. Only the sheets were changed once a week. I located a bomb crate and made myself a desk beside my bed, which was the first bed inside the door on the right. There were shelves on the walls back of your bed to keep your equipment and supplies on.

We had two clubs on the base, the Officers Club and the enlisted men's club. We went there in our free time. That was it as far as recreation being available. The bar had Scotch, Irish whiskey and warm beer. I thought the Scotch was terrible and so was the warm beer, so if I had an occasional drink it was Irish whiskey and water. The base had whiskey runs to Ireland every so often, and they would come back with the bomb bays full of Irish whiskey. I wanted to go to Ireland, so I always signed up for the trip. Someone with a higher rank always bumped me off the flight. Rank does have its privileges.

Casualties in aircrews were mostly impersonal as compared to ground infantry ones. A plane would disappear from formation and we would look for parachutes and count them; sometimes there were none. A crew that had casualties on board their plane, but the plane made it back somewhere to make a safe landing, did witness death and injury, but that did not happen to our crew. We certainly felt bad about their misfortune and missed them, talked about them and prayed for them. We would then face the reality of wondering if we would be the next ones not to return. I have heard people say they were not scared when going into combat situations, but I do not believe that is true. There was a big line of porta-toilets where we boarded the transportation vehicles to take the crews to their planes. I will let you draw your own conclusions about that. I know I was scared, but I had a job to do, and once into it you were too busy to even think about being scared. I think that was true of most flyers.

Our contact with home was by V-mail. Letters were sent to wives, parents, sweethearts and friends. Every one looked forward to mail call hoping to get a letter from all of the above. Some airmen got much mail and others did not. You could see the disappointment on the face of an airman who constantly did not receive mail. When an aviator got a box of homemade treats from home or even candy, it was passed around to all and was gone in a few minutes. It brought joy to everyone. All letters sent home were censored by our crew captain, Bill Cridlin, to be sure no classified information was accidentally written. I sent a bomb tag home after each mission so my wife and family could keep track of the number of missions flown. When I got home, I wrote the date and mission target on each tag. That way the family knew how many missions I had flown toward my required 25 missions.

Crewmembers were life long friends as were other soldiers that we met along the way. Our crew was scattered all over the country, but we visited when we could. We also had several reunions. There was also the telephone. Many calls were made and were really good because of the voice contact. At first, there was the happiness of marriage, the birth announcements, the career successes and finally death announcements as life grew old and shorter for all of us. Of our crew, we have now, in 2014, three survivors. By a strange coincidence, we three were all born in September: J. R. Akin will be 93 on Sept. 14, 2014, Carl Johnson will be 90 on Sept. 10, 2014, and I will be 94 on Sept. 12, 2014.

Memories are all we have left now, memories of our first meeting, of learning to work together and gaining confidence in each other, of drinking parties, talking and laughing together, of discussing combat missions, of our travels and adventures in England, of being in London for the end of the war, of the excitement of coming home and of having families of our own. Some of the memories are now dim, but occasionally for some reason, one will pop into your head as if it happened yesterday, and the faces are as they were long ago. Other times the loss of young friends in the war will bring tears to your eyes when you think of the joys of life denied them.

B-17 G:

The Army Air Corp received its first B-17 in October 1939, and its last one on July 29, 1945. We had between 50 and 60 B-17s on our base. The 95th Bombardment Group flew 320 missions and lost 157 planes and their crews. Approximately one out of three flyers were lost. It was definitely not fun. The average age of a flyer was 20. Over 2,000 planes were lost to crashes or heavy combat damages. When a crew completed its combat tour missions, they were part of the Lucky Bastards Club. The war ended before I completed my tour of 25 missions, but I consider myself a member of that club. I was proud to be part of the 95th Bombardment Group, the first group to bomb Berlin.

Navigation Surprise:

I was introduced to a navigation device called a Gee-box by the English. It was a radar method of navigation that I had never heard of in my U.S. training. I knew of Loran, a long-range radar signal, but not of the Gee-box. My learning to use this short-range radar navigation system took place on our training flights for the entire crew. I suspect that the weather in England, as well as the war, was a factor in its development. Once learned, it was a great tool in bad weather.

Combat Missions:

1. Dortmund - Datteln Oil Plant - front line support.

2. Langendreer (Dortmund) - front line support.

3. Frankfurt - rough one jet plane factory.

4. Hanover - visual - flak marshalling yards - flew B-17 Kimmie Kar on its 50th mission.

5. Big “B” Berlin - marshalling yards; March, 18, 1945 - major plane damage; no injuries.

6. Meersburg, bad weather - lost targeted oil fields - hit secondary target - long flight to Folda Oil area -dropped 12 500-pound bombs.

7. Hamburg - March 20, 1945 - fighters at submarine factory - dropped 12 500-pound bombs, plus Zebras.

8. Monster - March 21, 1945 - visual airfields - dropped 100s and 500s - took a pounding.

9. Eschborn - March 22, 1945 - airport - creamed target with 38 100-pound bombs.

10. Unra - March 23, 1945 - marshaling yards - dropped 34 150-pound and two 500-pound bombs.

11. Steenwijk in Holland - March 24, 1945 - airport - dropped 14 500-pound Zebras - no flak.

12. Sieger - target of opportunity - dropped 5,700 pounds of bombs.

13. Zietes - March 31, 1945 - oil target - dropped 24 250-pound bombs - heavy flak.

14. Nuremberg - April 5, 1945 - marshaling yards - dropped six 1,000-pound bombs. Bad weather to 25,000 feet, but we hit the target. No fighters' flak.

15. Liepzig - April 7, 1945 - marshaling yards - dropped 34 150-pound, plus two 500-pound GP bombs - overcast, hit target.

16. Eger - April 8, 1945 - marshaling yards - dropped four 1,000-pound plus four 500-pound GP bombs.

17. France-German hold-out at Royan Fortress - April 15, 1945 - dropped six large fire bombs - no resistance.

18. France - April 16, 1945 - Royan fixed shore batteries - dropped 12 500-pound bombs.

19. Crew had this mission, but I was not on it because I was at an interview at Eighth for a promotion approval to First Lieutenant. I was approved, but all promotions were canceled because the war was about to end.

First Mission:

This is an interesting story, and if not for the skill of our first pilot, Bill Cridlin, I would not be here to tell it.

The orderly awakened us at about 3:30 a.m. I got dressed and went to mass and communion in the base chapel and then on to a breakfast of bacon and eggs, toast and coffee. The crew then reported to the ready room and took their seats in the row assigned to crew 8204. A major came out to the platform and announced the mission for the day and rolled down the mission map for all to see. The mission was to bomb the Datteln Oil Plant in Dortmund, Germany. The mission was said to be a milk run (an easy one).

We were in line to take off when the No. 2 engine began to act up. The tower advised us to taxi back to our plane's hardstand for repairs. I did not think we would be going on the mission, so I curled up on my little desk and went to sleep. About a half hour later, Bill Cridlin called me on the intercom and said the engine was repaired, and I was to plot a course to catch up and join our 412th Squadron. Wow, what a way to start my first mission.

The pilot headed for the take off and I was busy planning a course to intersect our group. The pilot was in a hurry to take off because he had been given clearance from the tower to taxi to the runway and take off. I was not watching the runways as I normally would have been doing because I was busy with my navigation problem. We were going down the runway when I noticed the end of it was getting close, I glanced at my instruments and we were only at 65 knots, and with a load of fuel and bombs. This was much too slow for taking off. Our normal takeoff speed was 110 to 115 knots. Bill mushed the plane into the air and kept it at about 50 feet and I thought this was the end; no way can we stay airborne at this speed. The plane slowly picked up speed, but as yet, not enough to climb higher. Then, exactly in front of the plane was a farmer’s house with a straw roof. We could not turn at that low speed, but Bill managed to clear that house. Then the tail gunner got on the intercom and said, "The U.S. government is going to have to buy that farmer a new roof because we just blew his off."

The plane slowly climbed, and we were now safely flying, so I asked the pilot what on earth happened there? He said I'll tell you when we get back to the base. The course I plotted was correct, and we joined our squadron and completed the flight to the target. However, the mission was not a milk run because we ran into heavy flak, and the plane took some minor damage. After we had returned to our base and landed, a message came over the intercom. Bill Cridlin is to report to the Colonels office after debriefing. Later at the barracks, I learned from Bill that he had mistakenly taken off on the shortest runway on the field. He assured me that we would not have anymore scary take offs like that one, and we never did. You cannot put much more drama into a first mission. Bill Cridlin was a very good pilot and proved it many times. Our crew was selected to be a lead crew, but we turned it down.

Tragedy:

Our fifth mission was a long one to Berlin, Germany. We were returning and were over the English Channel when one of the planes in the formation, for some unknown reason to me, suddenly increased in altitude in the formation, and the starboard engine chewed the tail gunner’s area of the plane it collided with. Both planes broke formation but were still in controlled flight. One plane kept losing altitude, and when the pilot determined that he could not make it to land, he gave the bailout signal. We observed only six parachutists and only four opened. The pilots made a water crash landing, but I never found out the details of that crash.

Super Chargers:

On one mission to Nuremberg, we had just finished our bomb run when the engine superchargers failed. We could not fly at 25,000 feet without the superchargers, so we began losing altitude fast and had to leave the formation. We leveled off at about 10,000 feet, and we were now flying on our own, and thus left to our own defenses.

I had the intelligence reports on all the fighter bases and known flak areas. I went to work and plotted courses that would avoid German fighter air bases. This meant that we would not be flying a straight heading. On one of the sharp changes in heading, a crewmember called me and asked where I was going? It just so happened that we were headed for Switzerland, so I told him I was tired of bombing missions and that I was headed for Switzerland to get out of the war, all in favor say Aye! We all had a big laugh about that. We did see Switzerland in the distant mountains. We did not encounter any German fighters, and a P-51 fighter saw us and escorted us the rest of the way. The crew thought I had saved their lives by getting us across Germany safely. There could be some truth in that, but I never thought of it in that way.

Close Call:

We put our heavy flak suits on when nearing a combat zone. I had a chest pack parachute, and with the dissension vest on I could only attach it to one side of the harness. The other people were kidding me about wearing the chute that way when they were not wearing theirs. This one mission I decided that I would not wear the chute to be like the others. We ran into very heavy flak and a piece bounced off my helmet and went through the astrodome. I looked out the window after a large hit and saw a big hole in the wing. I grabbed my chute and attached it to one side of the harness, and that is the way I wore it from then on. Pete Johnson turned around to see what happened, and he said I was shrunk into such a small ball that he could hardly see me. The plane was badly damaged, but no one was injured.

A Strange Happening:

I received two letters one day at Eye Base, one from my mother and one from my friend, Hugh Daugherty. I read my mother's letter first, and in it was the news that Hugh was missing in action and presumed dead. I am reading that bad news and holding in my other hand a letter from Hugh. His letter was upbeat, as he told me about his experiences and a visit to Australia. I was really stunned by this strange coincidence of getting these two letters the same day. The remains of Hugh and his crew were never found to this day.

Muscle Palaces:

Our Eye Base was located halfway between Norwich and Ipswich in East Anglia, the closest part of England to Europe. The area had so many airports that the base flying patterns overlapped. The men needed recreation so on the weekends the base would provide transportation to large dance halls in Norwich and Ipswich. If you could not meet a girl there, you were a real sad sack. The dances ended at midnight, and the transportation back to bases also left at the same time — midnight. No passes were given, so we had to return on the base transportation. These dance halls were beautiful, and all had a good time.

Our entire crew went on leave May 3, 1945 to May 8 1945. We all went to London. The Germans capitulated, and the war ended on May 8, 1945. Our leaves were extended three days, so Bill Swanson and I saw London explode. When back at the base, we flew several food drop missions over Belgium and Holland. We dropped food at 500 feet altitude, and the Germans were still guarding bridges, etc. That was the end of our missions over Europe.

Flags:

We thought this was very funny! On a food drop mission to Utrecht, Holland, we were coming in at 500 feet up a long street with water on both sides and a commons in the middle. We were to drop the food supplies on this common. Normally we flew at 25,000 feet, so we were taking in all the views of Holland at that low altitude. As we proceeded up to the target drop area, there were multi-story apartments on the starboard side. Out of every window, people were waving American flags. We laughed about this thinking: "I’ll bet they have all different country’s flags and waved which ever one was needed at the time.” We dropped the food successfully as planned and headed back to the base, after a little sight seeing flight.

**Off Base Experiences in England:**

Saluting:

The first time in London, Bill Swanson and I were in Grosvenor Square sightseeing when we approached a gate being guarded by two British soldiers. When we were close, the two soldiers began doing maneuvers with their rifles. We two dunces just stood their watching them as they kept repeating the rifle movements. Then it suddenly dawned on us that we were officers and these soldiers were giving us the British rifle salute. We saluted back, and that ended that. We talked about the fact that those two British soldiers would not let us off the hook until we finally returned their salute. Another life long laugh for us!

More London Stories:

In London, I visited all the famous places and many castles. Food was scarce, so I ate at the army mess in the Grosvenor House. One time Bill and I decided to try a restaurant we had seen. It was a beautiful place, and the table was set with China and real silverware; there was silverware on each side of the plate with a piece with which to eat every type of food. Then the waiter came and told us that the only thing they had on the menu was water cress sandwiches.

The enlisted crewmembers told us they had found a restaurant that served steaks. I thought that is impossible in London because of the rationing of beef and other food. The guys invited us to eat with them at that restaurant on our next leave. I did so, and sure as heck steak was on the menu. We all ordered steak, and it was served nicely grilled as ordered. The steak was good, but had a slightly different taste than any steak I had ever eaten. After dinner was finished, I asked the waitress if the steaks were horsemeat, and she said yes it was. I was sorry I had asked because none of those crewmembers would ever go back there to eat after they knew it was horsemeat.

Someone told Bill Swanson about a nice club on the waterfront, so we decided to visit it one night. We took a Hack to the club, and I began to worry when the Hack driver asked us if we were sure we wanted to go there. Once in the club, we knew we were in trouble. It was full of girls of the worst type, and there were two fights before we got to the bar. We had heard about how rough the sailors were, but this was beyond our imagination. We decided to have a beer and then leave. These girls were all prostitutes. One came up to me, and the bartender served her a drink as well as mine. She then very vividly told me what she would do for me for the price of one pound. Some person bumped her while walking by and she turned around and slugged him. I told her I was not interested and said to Bill, "Lets get out of here." The girl got angry and swore at me and said, "You think you’re too good for me?” We could not find a Hack, so we left the area walking down the middle of the street, close together for protection.

At last, a Hack came driving by, and we hailed it. It was a cold night, but we both were sweating and short of breath when we entered that Hack. We always thought that we were very fortunate to have gotten out of that club and the area without getting beat up or robbed.

I was in London during Easter Holy week and attended mass on Holy Thursday in London’s Saint Paul's Cathedral. It was very crowded, and I was standing there when a priest came up to me and told me he wanted me to be one of the four soldiers to carry the Archbishop around the Cathedral during mass. He wanted four different countries represented. The four were from America, Britain, France and Poland. When the time came, we four picked up the gold platform, upon which the Bishop was sitting, and took our place in the procession. This platform was heavy, and the Bishop was also a large man. Halfway through the procession I was straining to hold up my corner, which was the right front one. I looked over at the British soldier on the other side and sweat was running down his face. It was a long trip around the cathedral, I made it, but I don't know how. It was a beautiful mass, and I felt privileged to be part of it. Pictures were taken, and I was told I would get one, but I never did. The war was still on, but the Easter season bunny was everywhere in London.

One other time Bill Swanson and I were on leave in London and decided to go to Madame Tussauds Wax Museum. Bill wanted to see the old torture machines they used in the past. When we entered the museum, Bill went up to the guard standing there and proceeded to ask him directions to that exhibition. In the meantime, I am dying from laughter because the guard was made of wax and very, very realistic. Suddenly Bill realized what he was doing, and we both laughed about that incident all of our entire lives.

London Under Siege:

I watched, from Eye Base, the Germans launching their V2 Rockets. I could not see the actual rocket, but could see the contrail they made as it flew to its target. I was in London and had to visit a bomb shelter when either one of those rockets or a Putt-Putt was going to hit somewhere in the city. The London subway was used as a bomb shelter and was loaded with people. Many had blankets with them and took a nap during the raid. Others played cards or other games to pass the time away. The all clear sounded, and all went back to whatever they were doing before the raid. The subway returned to normal operation. We were told that if a Putt-Putt came over, as long as we could hear the engine to not worry about it. If the engine stopped, it was going to drop to the ground and explode. I just made sure that when I heard one that I was not in its flight path. The Putt-Putt was more of a psychological war item.

Scotland:

Lt. Bill Swanson, Pete Johnson and I went to Scotland together. We visited the Firth of Forth area, but did not see the Loch Ness Monster, but it was a beautiful area. We were in Edinburgh and visited the famous castle. They had a beautiful floral clock about 20 feet in diameter near the castle ramp. In the city were numerous shops selling beautiful assorted plaid material. Pete and I thought our wives would like this material to make an outfit for themselves. Upon attempting to purchase the material, we found that it was rationed. We tried to bribe the sales girl into selling it to us, but she would have no part of that.

We went to a photo studio where they outfitted you with a Scottish kilt. I had my photo taken holding the traditional staff in my left hand. I mailed this photo home to my wife thinking she would get a big kick out of it. However, the first thing she noticed in the photo was my left hand around the staff. I did not have my wedding ring on my finger. Believe me, I heard about that in her next letter. Actually, my gold wedding ring was in storage at the base. We were not supposed to fly missions wearing any gold jewelry because if we were shot down, the first thing the Germans searched for was gold, which they needed badly. At times, you can get into trouble without even trying. We did go to a dance hall in the evening. A good live band provided the music, and the hall was loaded with girls. They also had refreshments available. We had a nice evening dancing and learning a lot of first hand information about Scotland.

My wife’s full name was Ruth Elizabeth Natalie Knox Tomlinson. The name Knox came from Reverend John Knox, founder of the Presbyterian Church, of whom she is a direct descendant. They hailed from a town named Lancaster, and my train stopped at Lancaster for about 10 minutes on its way north to Edinburgh. I got out on the platform when the train stopped at Lancaster and talked to people there about the family name. I found one gentleman who knew about the family name, but said they had all left for the states years ago. The family has a very old picture of the Lancaster Cathedral, and I did get to see it. It looked about the same as it did in the picture we have. We were quite impressed with the beauty of Scotland. Back to work!

Royal Baptism:

Bill Swanson and I attended a Royal baptism in Westminster Abbey in the spring of 1945. I have written about this in a column for The Weatherford Democrat newspaper. The column, published December 9, 2010, is as follows:

Royalty! The past week or so, the TV stations and newspapers all over the world have been covering the engagement of Prince William, heir to the English throne, and his beautiful bride to be, Kate Middleton.

I know many American women follow this story and get excited over Kate becoming a princess. Much of the discussion is about the big, beautiful, large sapphire engagement ring, which originally was given to Princess Diane by Prince William's father. It's fun for all the gals to watch and to read all this romantic news from England. And of course, they think of that American girl, Grace Kelly (no relation to me) who became a princess, Princess Grace. Oh! How romantic to be a princess.

This brought to mind my unexpected Royalty experience. Lt. Bill Swanson and I were visiting the magnificent Westminster Abbey in London one day in the spring of 1945. We were on a three-day pass, and as always, we did much sightseeing when not in a bomb shelter. We were in the Abbey and decided to go to the lower floor to look at the tombs of famous people interred therein.

I guess we were down there several hours before we came back up to the main floor. Much to our surprise, not one person was to be seen; the Abbey was empty of people. We walked toward the nave and noticed a plush red rope strung across the entrance to the main aisle of the Abbey. The Abbey is built like a cross, and we were on the left side of the cross. As we were standing by the rope, we saw a minister rushing toward us. He asked us, "How did you two men get in here?" We told him what had happened, and he said the Abbey had been cleared of people because a royal baptism was about to take place. We showed him our ID, and surprisingly he said, "You might as well stay." So we did!

In a few minutes, there was the sound of those English trumpets heralding the arrival of the baptismal parties. The doors opened, and the religious ministers, followed by a few other people, entered the Abbey. Behind them in the procession was a person carrying a red pillow, on which the baby to be baptized was lying. Then came the big surprise! To our amazement, the next two people in the procession were King George and Queen Mary. They were followed by the two young princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret. There were others, but we were watching the royal family. When the King and Queen came to where we were standing, they both paused, turned toward us, and nodded to us with their head and shoulders. Bill and I had no knowledge of the proper protocol for such an occasion, so we just nodded back in the same way. The Queen smiled, and her smile was even more beautiful than the one we had seen in many news reels.

They all proceeded to the baptismal font, and if my memory is correct, a little girl baptized. As the procession returned down the aisle, the King and Queen again acknowledged us. The two princesses were looking at us out of the corner of their eyes and we noticed a slight giggle as they looked at each other. Normal teenagers! We had been within four feet of the royal family of England. Needless to say we were thrilled to be present at this royal festivity. I'm sure not many Americans have ever attended a royal baptism. We were there by accident, but nevertheless, we were there.

Through the years I have often thought of writing the present Queen Elizabeth II and asking her if by any chance she could recall this event of that spring day in 1945, but I never did. Maybe I will now! Ladies, have fun dreaming of being a princess like Kate Middleton and wearing that beautiful ring. We can all dream, can't we?

Letter to the Queen:

This is a letter I wrote to the Queen, dated July 9, 2013:

Her Majesty the Queen,

This letter will take you back all the way to the year 1945. I have been meaning to write to you for many years, too many, about a big event that took place in my young life. My 92-year-old brain can still remember being age 24.

It all happened in the spring of 1945, in London, and it could have caused a security investigation about the safety of the Royal Family.

We were two young flying officers of the 412th Squadron, 95th Bomb Group of the Mighty Eighth Air Force flying out of East Anglia. My name is William J. Kelly, and my good buddy was William Swanson. We were both lieutenants. I was a navigator, and Bill was a pilot flying the B-17G aircraft.

We both loved sight seeing historical London when on leave, and on this particular day we were exploring the bowels of Westminster Abbey. We were down there quite a long time and had no idea about what fate was about to thrust us in to.

Please stop reading this letter at this point and read the article I wrote for The Weatherford Democrat newspaper on December 9, 2010. The article will explain what I am writing about. Thank you, and then continue.

I am not sure I have the correct name of that baby in the article, but it must have been someone close to your family for you all to have been present at the baptism. I sure would like to know the correct name and title of that baby being baptized.

I can still see the program as it unfolded in the Abbey that day as if it was yesterday. I still especially remember how gracious your mother and father were to us in the Abbey; how could I forget the beautiful smile your mother, the Queen, gave we two young officers that day. My life long friend, Bill Swanson, has passed on, but he too had expressed the above thoughts many times when we would reminisce about that day in London.

Bill and I were in London again on May 8, 1945, VE Day. We were standing on the base of the statue in front of Buckingham Palace, and once again we saw the Royal Family as Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced the end of the war in Europe and gave the V for victory sign. I have never again seen so many smiling, happy faces as I saw on VE Day 1945. I do not know how many times I was hugged and kissed by those happy English people; there were no strangers that day in London. The dangers and hardships they all had endured through those many years were over, and they wanted to share their happiness with everyone. It was a truly great celebration.

I know that as Queen of England these many years, you have been very busy attending to your many duties, traveled the world, been part of many historical events and met most, if not all, of the famous people in and out of government; I just have this thought, because this was such an unusual and unscheduled occurrence in the Abbey, that you might have a teeny recollection of it. I hope so!

Thank you so much for reading my letter. I am an American, not British, but I can still say, and really mean it, "Long live the Queen."

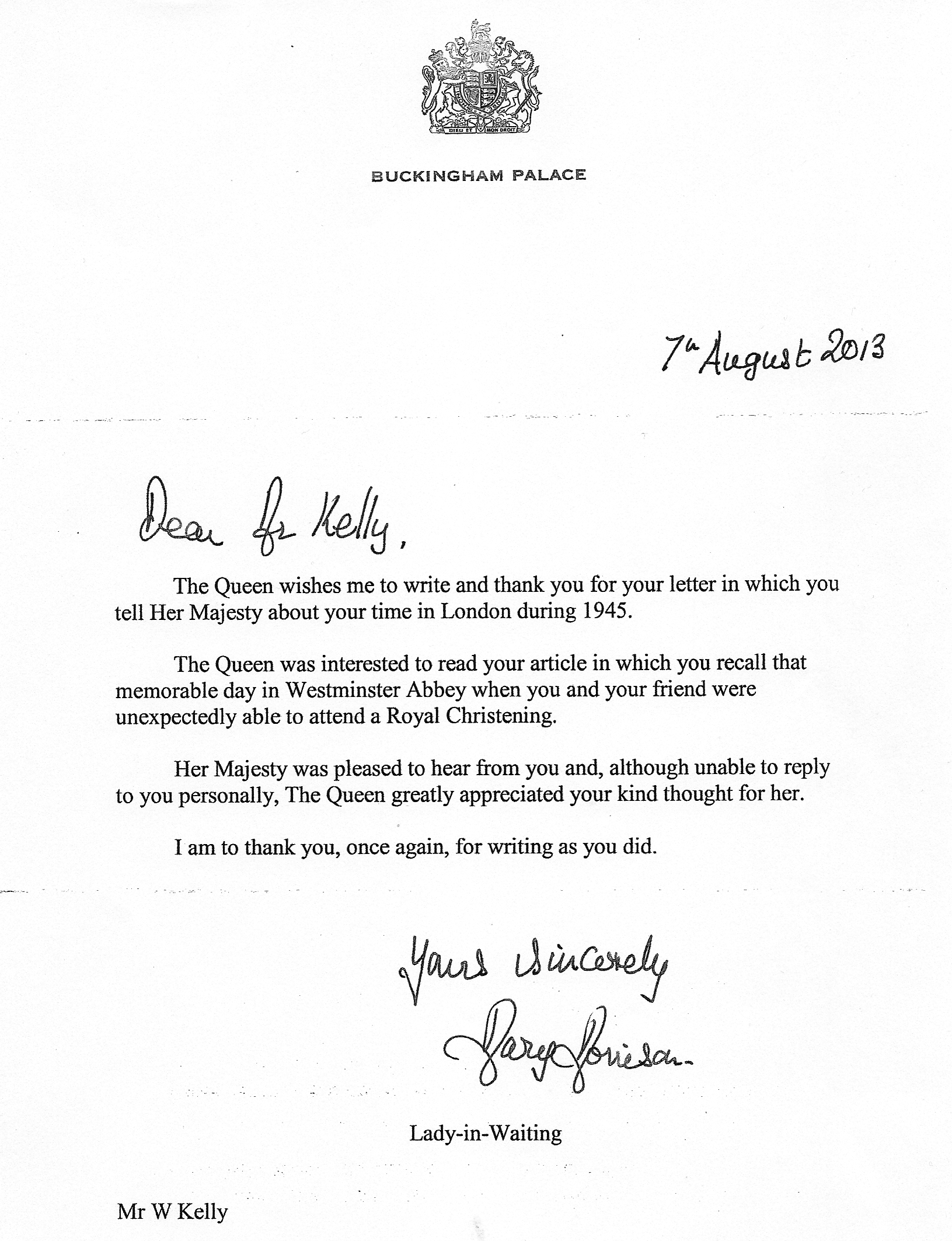
Sincerely,

Life Time Admirer,

William J. Kelly

The Queen's Response:

Here is a scanned copy of the letter I received from the Queen.



**War's End:**

I was on leave in London from May 5 to May 8, 1945. Bill Swanson and I had taken in a play at a theater in Piccadilly Circus on the evening of the seventh. We both knew that the Germans and the allies were working on a peace treaty, but we prepared to go back to Eye, our base, the next day. However, at about 11 p.m., we heard that the treaty would be signed the next day, and that all leaves were extended three days. The area was normal when we returned to the Reindeer Club to retire. On the eighth, we got up and had our coffee and donuts at the Reindeer and hit the streets of London, England. Rumors were that Winston Churchill, Prime Minister, would announce the end of the war some time that day. I cannot remember the time, but we learned that Churchill was going to make the announcement first at St. James Palace. Bill and I rushed over to St, James Palace through crowded streets because now, the English people were inundating London. Eventually, Churchill, surrounded by other dignitaries, came out on the balcony of St. James Palace, and a huge cheer went up by the people there. He made a short speech announcing that the Germans had surrendered, and that the war was officially ended. He then said that later in the day, the announcement would be made to the world from Buckingham Palace, at which time the Royal Family would be present.

Now the streets of London were so crowded with people that public transportation and even the Hacks could not operate. People were so happy, they were hugging and kissing everyone. We were probably kissed more than a hundred times. I will never see such joy and happiness in so many people at the same time again in my lifetime. St. James was a mass of people in front of the Queen Victoria statue base, and all the way back to the central part of the government area. Bill and I found a spot on the statue base to stand while waiting for the announcement. When you might see an old news reel picture of that blob of people there that day, I want you to know that Bill Swanson and I are each one of the blobs.

First, there was the changing of the palace guard, and then the palace doors opened and out came the Royal family, followed by Winston Churchill and other war leaders. The end of the war announcement was followed by the loudest cheer I have ever heard, or ever will hear. I have nothing to compare the happiness I saw that day with; these people had suffered day and night for many years, so their relief from all that had to be released. Husbands would now be coming home, blackout curtains would be removed, the lights were back on, and most of all, the loss of friends being killed would stop, people could once again sleep at night without being awakened by the sound of the air raid sirens and return to their homes if they were still there. I was both lucky and happy to be there to share it with them on this day known as VE day, Victory in Europe.

Sad Story:

When in London, Bill Swanson and I palled around together, and we stayed at the Red Cross run Reindeer Club. It was not fancy, but it was cheap and centrally located. On May 9, 1945, we got up late because of the May 8th's celebration, which was still going on in a big way. At the desk I had a message to call the lieutenant from our base barracks. He knew we stayed at the Reindeer Club. I did so, and he advised me that my father had been trying to reach me for three days to tell me that my mother had died on May 4, 1945.

The club put a call through to my dad, and he told me what happened. I knew she was ill, but dad never told me it was that serious. The funny thing is that as I looked at her while saying goodbye before leaving to go overseas, I had a premonition that I would never see her again. I brushed it off as just a thought that I would not return from the service. Dad was trying to pull strings to get me on a flight home for the funeral, which he was holding up for my return. I also tried that when I had a talk with our CO upon my return to base. It was impossible because of the end of the war. I called Dad and advised him to proceed with the funeral because I could not get home. If mother had lived another four or five weeks, I would have been home because I was home the first week of June. Homecoming was both great and sad.

**Coming Home:**

The crew was back at the base on May 11, 1945, and we flew food drop missions, which ended our flights over Europe. We then prepared to close the Eye Base and fly home.

First the planes had to be checked mechanically and then the pilots and navigators checked and corrected, if necessary, all the navigation compasses, etc. We were scheduled to leave the last week of May. When orders were received the planes were fueled and loaded with as much equipment as we could carry. Our ground crew was to fly with us for the first time on the way back to the states. I walked around the base that last full day there and stopped in to the Officers Club for one last drink of Irish whiskey. Also that day, I attended a movie of the approaches to the bases in both Iceland and Greenland. I memorized the Greenland one because it was very scary if a low level approach was necessary. The weather on the northern route was subject to almost instant fluctuations, so I had to be prepared to land at different airports because the B-17, as loaded, did not have the flying range to make it to the states non-stop.

I believe it was May 23, 1945, that we took off from Eye Base for the last time, and we headed north over the northern tip of Scotland and across the sea to Iceland. However, something was wrong. I called the pilot and asked why he was not following the headings I gave him because we were off course. Bill said that he was following the headings, so we needed to do some checking. By using the pilotage method, I was able to learn how much the compasses were in error and make the necessary correction to stay on course. We found out from the plane's log that another navigator who needed that procedure on his records had used our plane, and he had somehow messed up and the compasses were off about 15 degrees.

We were about two hours into the flight when the radio operator received orders for us to fly back to Gander Field in Wales because both Iceland and Greenland were socked in with fog. We headed back to Gander Field and the pilot wanted to dump some fuel before landing, but was denied the request. Bill was always at his best when under pressure so he made a very soft landing at Gander Field. We were there for two days. One day, a P-51 pilot took off, entered high cumulus clouds, and became disoriented. We heard this loud speed whine, and he came out of the clouds straight into the ocean.

After two days, we got orders to fly to Iceland. We made Iceland with no difficulty. We were to take off for Newfoundland the next day, but that base was fogged in, so we were stuck on Iceland for two more days. We all went in to Reykjavik to sightsee, and while there, we went into a restaurant to have dinner. We ordered some fowl we had never heard of. We should have ordered fish because that fowl had a fishy taste. We finally got the take off orders to fly to Newfoundland.

We were past Greenland when the radio operator got word that Newfoundland was socked in, and we were to make a low level approach to the Greenland air base. I gave the heading and ETA to the pilot for the Greenland coast. Along this route, we saw many ships lying on the ocean bottom. Most were in one piece and looked like new. The Greenland coast consisted of mountains, coming out of the sea and going 6,500 feet tall and no shoreline. I found the Fjord we had to enter, and we took a very good look at it first. It looked like the wing tips were almost touching the sides of the mountain. Our next worry was taking the correct divide, of which there were many. We achieved that, and next was the landing. When we exited the Fjord there was a bay at the end of a glacier, which had a small boat anchored in the center of it. The bay was surrounded by mountains on three sides. Our pilot had to make a 90-degree turn over that boat and land on the only runway, which was not level, but followed the slope of the glacier down to the water, uphill to us. We landed OK, and when we parked the plane, we had to tie it down because of the high wind. The Quonset huts had large boulders stacked up all around them to the very top because of the winds. The flies in Greenland were twice as big as the biggest horse fly you ever saw, and when they landed on you it was necessary to brush them off, a wave would not do it. We were stuck there again for several days before we took off for Westover Field, Mass., in the good ol' USA.

**Home At Last:**

We didn’t encounter any weather problems on the flight from Greenland. It was beautiful flying down over the land of the East Coast. After landing, we had to check in all our guns and other equipment. We all had dinner somewhere, and that night, I went to bed and slept 24 hours straight through. That was an interesting, but very stressful flight for me to navigate with the compass problem, flying over water and the weather problem, all of which made a lot of work for me. I had 12 men to get home safely. I was told the plane we flew home in was flown to the Arizona storage lot the next day. It took us over nine days to fly back to the States. The trip was long and hard, but I enjoyed the experience of visiting Wales, Iceland and Greenland.

The crew received a 30-day leave, and I was home on June 2, 1945. I arrived in Pittsburgh at about 2 p.m. and walked over to my dad’s office. I knew most of the employees there, so I had a nice welcome home, although the office work was completely disrupted. Then I made a big mistake, I decided to surprise my wife instead of calling her from the office. At the time, I thought it was a good idea. However, it did not turn out very good. It so happened that my wife was house cleaning that day, and when I walked in and hollered, "surprise,” she was down on her knees, in an old housedress, scrubbing the kitchen floor. That did not bother me, but it really upset her. She had different plans for my homecoming, and there was nothing I could do to placate her. There was a dance at the local fire hall, so I just went dancing there alone. I had a good time because several of my local friends were there. Bette was angry about that, but she was OK the next day. I guess you could say that for both of us it was not the type of homecoming we wanted.

Gold Star Mothers:

My two boyhood friends from about the age of six through our high school years were in the service. Joseph Volpe was in the Navy Air Force, and Hugh Daugherty was in the Army Air Corp. Joe was a Naval pilot and Hughy was a bombardier on a B-24 based in the Pacific Theater. Unfortunately, they both died in plane crashes that were never located to this day. I was the only combat survivor of us three good friends. I was home now, faced with the fact that I had to visit the mothers who had fed me, corrected me and I presume loved me and welcomed me in to her home. How do you prepare yourself for this visit, what do you say? Many thoughts went through my mind, and one day I decided I was ready to make the first visit to Mrs. Angelo Volpe.

I went to the Volpe's residence, knocked on the door, and Joe’s mother opened the door. When she saw me, she hugged me and started to cry. She sobbed as she asked me if I had the Rosary beads that our priest had given us when we were altar boys. I said that I had them with me in my pocket. She then began to cry very hard, her tears were running down my face as she said, Joes beads were in his personal affects. I was completely unprepared for this; she was thinking that if Joe had had his beads with him he might not have died. I never said any of the things I was prepared to say, and when I think of this visit, I can still feel those tears running down my cheeks. I think that visit was tougher than any combat mission I flew.

Reassignment:

At the end of the 30-day leave, I took a train to Sioux Falls, S.D., for reassignment to the Super Fortress B-29 airplane. However, I had been having eye trouble, so I checked into the hospital one day for a checkup. I had some kind of eye infection, so they admitted me to the base hospital for treatment. We all thought they would keep the crew together, but that is not the Army way of doing things, so the members of the crew were sent to assignments all over the country. We were all upset about that, but there was nothing we could do about it. We said our goodbyes and did not see each other for quite some time. I stayed in the hospital while they tried many treatments on my eyes, but nothing worked, and my vision dropped to 20/50 and 20/40. After four months I was discharged. I learned later that I should not have accepted the discharge and held out for a medical discharge as a second lieutenant.

After I was home, my eyes deteriorated to the point where I could not see across the street. The VA was not doing me much good, and they were greatly overloaded with patients. I went to a Dr. Rock, and he was also stumped. Dr. Rock invited the six best ophthalmologists in the Pittsburgh area to a consultation with me. None had seen this type of infection before. However, later they came up with some treatment ideas, and after a year of being on the 52-20 club ($20 per week for 52 weeks) I was able to work. The VA gave me a 10 percent disability pension, which amounted to $10 a month.

**Post-war Life:**

My wife put on Stanley home parties to enable us to survive that first year. I had been thinking about the after war shortage of many things, especially for the home. I studied the market and settled on home appliances being a good way to go. I found an old farmer with a pickup truck for sale and bought it, rented a building and opened shop as Elizabeth Appliance. Everyone needed a new appliance of some kind, so in a short time, I had orders for everything. Of course, all other appliances shops had the same orders, so it was a case of whoever got there first made the sale. It did not matter because if you had a refrigerator, someone in line would take it.

After a year, I expanded into commercial refrigeration, and in the spring of 1948, I sold the business and took a job with Service Fire Insurance Co. in New York City. I did not like New York City as a place to live and work, so I told my manager I was going to quit and go back to the Pittsburgh area. It so happened that the company's business had increased so much in the Pittsburgh area, they needed someone like me to work there. I moved back to Pittsburgh (Carnegie, Pa.). In addition, I worked out of a post office box and my wife’s family home. I had a company car, an expense account and a salary of $3,500 a year. I built my first home in Greentree, Pa., and moved into it the Christmas of 1948. It was a six-room house on a half-acre lot with a 100-foot frontage and cost $8600. I enlarged the house and lived in it until August 1979. Over that time my wife and I were blessed with six children: Lawrence, Robert, Margaret, William, Daniel and Beth Ann. Robert also served in the military flying helicopters in Vietnam. My son William wrote a poem titled “It Had to Be Done” for Veteran’s Day 2012 in honor of those who served in WWII and I’ve attached the poem to the end of this narrative.

I opened my own business, William J. Kelly Co. in 1962. I opened K & S Corporation a few years later. Eventually the corporation consisted of four different companies, and I had the title of president. I retired and sold the corporation in 1979, and moved to Weatherford, Texas.

I remained retired until 1982, when I became interested in hearing loss after buying my mother-in-law a hearing aid. I looked into it when the audiologist at Bill Vincent's Pharmacy told me he was looking for a replacement so he could move back to Missouri. I decided to become a hearing aid specialist, worked with him and studied for a year. I then took the Texas state required exam and received my license as a hearing aid specialist. Eventually, I had my own hearing aid business under the name Accent on Hearing. I sold the business in 2005, and retired again.

Writing:

The Weatherford Democrat editor at the time was looking for people to write articles. I submitted an article, which she printed. She then called and asked me if I could write regularly for the Viewpoints page. We agreed on every other week, and that was the beginning of my writing career, unpaid of course. I was a little bit prepared because I had completed a writing course with Writers Digest. My instructor said my work was commercial, but I was never able to sell anything but one, it was sold for the large sum of $35. I have been writing an article, which I named, "WHAT DO YOU THINK?" since then to now, 2014. It keeps me busy and I really enjoy doing it.

Reflections:

I enjoyed the military life training that I received, especially the officers training. I took this with me into civilian life. I learned to make decisions that were fair and proper affecting the problem whatever it was. Just as in the military, business requires complete education about the product or service you are engaged in providing. Commitment to your job, business or family is necessary if you are to be successful in all aspects of life. I think I had a happier life because of the things I learned in the service.

I also learned in my military service that war is hell, and no person or country should be engaged in it. I know it will exist until the men eligible to be soldiers rise up and say “no more." When you think of it, there are only a few people out of the billions of people in the world who cause these many wars. Why should we be slaves to their greed? Of course, if our country is attacked, that is another thing, which calls for self defense. Then we should go after the leaders of the attacking country and dispose of all of them. I do not believe that we should let the bad people set the rules for the rest of us.

In this United States of America, we citizens have the right of a free vote. The percentage of people who vote is small, and those who do vote do not know whom they are voting for with the exception of the major candidates. I would like to suggest that anyone reading this veteran's story would first of all vote in every election, especially the Primary, where each party selects their best candidate for the job. I would also suggest that you research the candidates thoroughly so you actually know for whom you are voting. Voting is a privilege, so be sure to take advantage of it. Voting is your peaceful power over tyranny.

I want to thank all the people who made this interview possible. Thank you for reading stories of my war experiences. I pray you'll never be writing your own war stories.

**It Had to Be Done**

By: A Proud Son

Young men run down the street to stand in a long line

Many no doubt thinking “we’re invincible, we’ll be fine”

Ready to fight for good and to defend their nation

Eagerly awaiting an assignment to man their station

No debate, no complaint, it was a duty not to shun

We are one nation, we are one unit…it had to be done.

Madmen in far away places had turned the world upside down

Some thought the melee was so far from their home town

Our boys would say it was their duty to serve and to protect

America - no dictator, no crown; we defend our right to elect

Never asking for thanks, striving to be Lady Liberty’s brave son

Only focused on the task at hand…it had to be done

We will always respect those that stood in that long ago queue,

Many did not come back having fought so strong and so true

They now rest in neat rows having made the ultimate sacrifice

Was it worth such a cost – too many paying the ultimate price?

War is not easy, war is not fun

Yet no one questioned…it had to be done

So tempting to run, it would have been easy to flee

That was never an option, freedom is not free

When honored each is reluctant to be called a hero

But the odds of being forgotten are less than zero

Steadfast they stood, united they won

To a man they all knew…it had to be done

Dedicated to my father – W.J. Kelly