

# Last Year Of Peace

Boynton Beach, Fla.  
October 26, 2000

Dear Editor,

In the November 1941 town election the Republicans won every seat except that of superintendent of highways. That seat was won by Democrat Roy Lester. It was the first town Democratic win since the town election of 1933. Back then, the office was a prestigious seat in local politics, and was always hotly contested. The Democrats were elated with their victory, the credit for which was given to the town leader, Agnes Rampe.

In appreciation of the support of their supporters, they had kegs of beer put on tap throughout the town. One such place was down in Springs at the Jungle Inn. Cal Craner, one of the bartenders, later said that he had never seen a keg of beer empty so quickly as it did that night. The Democrats would not win another seat until 1949, when they won the races for superintendent of highways and town clerk. They had a strong slate and nearly won the race for supervisor.

Raymond A. Smith Jr., who had been elected to the office of justice of the peace in 1937, was re-elected in 1941, but was called to active duty immediately after Pearl Harbor. He saw action in the European theater of operations and after he returned to civilian life he resumed his law practice. Later, he became town chairman of the Republican Party.

On Sunday morning, Dec. 7, Al Lester, his brother, Randolph, and his son, Randolph Jr., and I went gunning at Cedar Point. As we emerged from the woods on the high ground, the sky in the east began to lighten and soon it became a brilliant crimson as I had never seen. I told them that I had just finished reading Lowell Thomas's book "Raiders of the Deep." In it he related what he was told by a German U-boat commander who was on patrol in the North Sea. He, too, had observed a brilliant red sky and turned to his executive officer and stated, "Today England will declare war on the fatherland." The date was Aug. 4, 1914, the day England declared war on Germany.

Little did we realize that at the very moment I was relating that account, Japanese aircraft were getting into position to take off from their carriers for their strike on naval and military targets on Oahu. Little did I know when we parted later in the morning that I would never see young Randolph again. In late December 1944, when I was on Leyte Island in the Philippines, I received a letter from home telling me that young Randolph had been killed in action in Europe. The poor kid was only 19 and had been in the Army for only a short time.

There were several East Hampton servicemen stationed on the island of Oahu. Rosario Criscione was with the Army Air Corps at Wheeler Field, Morris Hettiger at the time of the attack was in the Schofield Barracks Army Hospital, Dave Gilmartin and Billy Hadel were crewmen on the U.S.S. Utah and the U.S.S. West Virginia, respectively. Both vessels were

sunk in the air attack, but both boys survived.

After the war Dave told me that after he got to the main deck of the Utah, he found the port side of the ship under water. Because of the list, he started to crawl toward apparent safety on the starboard side, but kept sliding downward toward the port side. After two or three attempts, a sailor next to him said, "Mate, I think if you got rid of that carton of cigarettes you're holdin' onto, you might have better luck." Dave did not realize, in the midst of the excitement, that he had grabbed a carton of cigarettes in his haste to get to the main deck. As soon as his hands were free he had no difficulty crawling to safety.

When the parents and family of Billy Hadel heard of the attack and sinking of the West Virginia, they commenced to worry about the fate of their son and brother. Some days later they received a telegram from Billy that stated, "I'm okay. Pay my insurance."

From the next day after the attack to well into the new year lines of young volunteers were seen at the recruiting stations throughout the country. After that fateful Sunday, the country united and forgot about petty differences. Our National Anthem, previously heard on some national holidays and on opening day at Major League baseball parks, was heard each evening before the start of the movie and every day at a ball park. When I attended a movie in Australia, both "God Save the King" and "The Star Spangled Banner" were played before the film rolled.

Women and men not in the services worked in war plants and naval and military installations and became a part of America's fighting machine. The country never before or since had been so united. The G.I.s in the Korean War fought just as hard and died just as tragically, and in the Vietnam conflict it seemed the G.I.s were all but forgotten.

I went into the service soon after Pearl Harbor, and when I returned nearly four years later, in East Hampton, I detected a change in the old hometown. I guess it was the same all over the country. Perhaps we had changed, saw things differently.

East Hampton did not come out of the war unscathed. There were gold stars hanging in 36 homes throughout the town. Minnie Easter, who delivered newspapers and letters to homes, also delivered telegrams, which must have been extremely difficult when one came from the War or Navy Department and began, "It is with regret . . ."

Nineteen forty-one was a time when, if a Bonacker happened to be in New York City and met a native New Yorker who asked him where he was from, his reply would be, "Out near the end of Long Island in a place called East Hampton." The chances were that the fellow would have said, "Oh sure. I've been out that way, I've been to East Rockaway."

And so ends my recollection of our last year of peace, as I remember it, in a small country town, which was settled nearly 300 years before World War II.

Sincerely,  
NORTON W. DANIELS