Freeport During World War II
Presented at the 2015 Freeport Memorial Day Parade
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There are two words that best describe America during World War II: sacrifice and teamwork. These words are easily applied to Freeporters who lived here during the war years. Between 1941 and 1945, Freeport had a population of about twenty thousand (20,000). Over two thousand (2,000) Freeporters were called to service in World War II. This includes 63 women. Sixty four (64) soldiers, sailors, and airmen died as a result of the war. Their names appear on both the bronze plaque inside the Library’s Memorial Room and on the granite memorial in front of the library building. Another six Freeporters who served in the U.S. Merchant Marines also died while in service. On this Memorial Day, we should remember the seventy (70) Freeport soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Merchant Marines who made the ultimate sacrifice. Forty (40) of these men are buried in the United States; sixteen (16) are buried overseas (in Belgium, France, Netherlands, Philippines, Great Britain, and North Africa); and the bodies of 14 Freeporters were never recovered.

Freeport’s heroes include McKinley Blaine Taylor, Jr. who lived on Nassau Avenue and worked as newspaper reporter before the war. Taylor was a member of the First Marine Division in the Pacific Theater. Before he died during the Guadalcanal campaign in 1942, Taylor wrote home, “I have seen action. I’m going to come through okay.” 22 year old baymen, Warren H. Stevens, Private U.S. Army, 4th Infantry Division, survived the D-Day invasion of Normandy at Utah Beach only to die 13 days later at the storming of Cherbourg. He grew up on Albany Avenue and was married. Freeporter
Jim Brodbeck was stationed in the Philippines. In January 1945, the jeep he was riding in was hit by enemy machine gun fire. The driver of Jim’s jeep ran off, leaving him alone and wounded until he was rescued the next morning. Jim lost his left leg from the incident and was rehabilitated at Walter Reed Hospital. He was later awarded two Silver Stars, a Bronze Star, and two Purple Hearts. Jim died in 1999 at the age of 80. According to his obituary, he lived a full life and was never bitter about his war experience. In fact, most people didn’t know that he had a prosthetic leg.

Those living in Freeport during the War also sacrificed. In 1942, Freeport residents began registering at 50 North Grove Street for ration books. Sugar and coffee were rationed. Freeporters who wanted meat, canned milk, and cheese were required to produce a red ration coupon. Processed food and dried beans required a blue ration coupon. During World War II, you couldn’t buy a new car – Detroit wasn’t making any. Automobile manufacturing plants were retro-fitted for military use. Even if you had a car, gas was in short supply. Depending on your occupation you were limited to the number of gallons of gas you could purchase. An “A” sticker allowed a driver to purchase four-gallons of gas a week. A “B” sticker on your windshield indicated your occupation was essential to the war effort so you could purchase 8 gallons of gas per week. So what did people do? They walked. But you had to be careful not to wear-out your shoes because shoes were also rationed.

With sugar, butter, and meat in short supply, mothers became culinary magicians. Vegetables grown in a victory garden, helped bulk up “meatless-Tuesday” stews.
After the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941, an observation tower for enemy plan spotting was constructed on the roof of the Meadow Brook Bank Building (the triangle-shaped bank on Sunrise Highway). The Army Air Corps estimated that 16 fliers a week, who lost their bearings, were helped by this tower. From 1942 to 1944, about 300 Freeporters manned this observation tower.

Twenty-four Freeport companies began producing products for the military. Some of those companies included Freeport Point Shipyard located on Woodcleft Avenue; Freeport Ornamental Iron; and Columbia Bronze. Of those 24 companies, three are still here today: Al Grover’s; Freeport Glazing Works; and Freeport Bedding.

In 1943, Main Street merchants agreed to close four nights per week in order to save light and heat and to adhere to the south shore dim-out regulations. A steam air raid whistle was installed on the roof of the Brooklyn Water Works building. An emergency blast would last one minute. Freeport also created a Salvage Committee to collect excess iron, steel, copper, aluminum, lead, and rubber.

The greatest example of Freeport working together was in the way this Village raised over $700,000 for our troops through a war bond drive. This money was used to finance the construction of a B-29 super-fortress which was christened the “Spirit of Freeport.” This plane had an enviable record of accomplishment during World War II and later supported the 22\(^{nd}\) Bomb Wing division during the Korean War.

In 1942 an Honor Roll with the names of Freeport’s soldiers sailors, and airmen was erected in front of the Library. This Honor Roll disappeared in 1954 when Merrick Road was widened. As we approach the 70\(^{th}\) anniversary of the end of War World II, it...
is important for us to remember those men and women that answered the call. We also need to remember all those on the home front who worked together and sacrificed to make sure that the United States could be victorious.