

We Were There
Collingtonians and WWII
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Kay Swift, Editor

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THE MUNICH CRISIS -1938 (France)
Penny Vickery

In August of 1938 I set sail for France with a group of classmates from Smith College. We were to spend our Junior Year Abroad, first in Dijon, where we were to study at the University for two months to perfect our French, and then in Paris for the full academic year at the Sorbonne. We were accompanied and chaperoned by Mademoiselle de Bourgoin, a professor of French at Smith.

We loved Dijon (although the grammar courses were a headache) and we quickly made friends with French students. We paid little attention to world events but in early September we were more or less aware of the fact that Hitler was threatening Czechoslovakia and that Mlle was in constant communication with the American Embassy in Paris.

Suddenly we awoke one morning to unusual sounds coming from the street. We were amazed to see French tanks rumbling by. Although my father was an Army colonel, I had never before seen a tank actually in motion. Shortly after that we were told that Mlle had received a message from the American Embassy in Paris that we had to leave Dijon that night and go to the port of Le Havre to wait for transportation back to the United States. We were to be evacuated! How poor Mlle arranged for buses and hotel rooms I never knew.

We were to leave Dijon at 10 o'clock that night. We each packed a suitcase and then some of us raced to meet our French beaux (we had by then met and flirted with several French boys) at our favorite café. The evening was exciting - we were being evacuated and they were being called up for military service in the French army. Much Normandy cider (alcoholic) was consumed. We were all very naive and thought this was a great adventure. We could not conceive of the true reality and horror of war. At the appointed time we kissed our French boy friends goodbye and the buses departed.

The trip to Le Havre was ghastly. We went by back roads as the army had appropriated the highways. To add to the length of the trip were the frequent stops made necessary by the effects of the Normandy cider many of us had so blithely imbibed. My one outstanding memory is of being shocked when we went by the Cathedral of Chartres and saw the famous stained glass windows being taken down. It was then that I really became aware of the potentially extremely dangerous situation we were in. This was no mere adventure!

We arrived in Le Havre and Mlle de Bourgoïn was informed that all available places on ships to the United States were reserved. She would find somewhere for us to stay until transportation could be found for us. While she was frantically trying to make plans, some of us explored the city. We found a wonderful restaurant where we ate lunch two or three times. We noticed that groups of men would go upstairs after lunch but we thought nothing of it. It was only later, when we told a horrified Mlle de Bourgoïn where we had been, that we learned that the restaurant was a front for a house of ill repute.

Mlle was in constant touch with the American Embassy and on September 30 they called to inform her that the famous Munich agreement had been reached and that it would be safe for us to return to Dijon. Her relief was immense and we were thrilled at the idea of seeing our French beaux again. Unfortunately for us they had been assigned to various French army units far from Dijon.

While in Dijon three of us lived in a "pension" (boarding house) with a very nice Frenchwoman and her two children. Occasionally her husband, who was supposedly traveling on business and was away most of the time, arrived for the weekend. Aware of their rather modest circumstances, I was surprised by the lavish presents he brought the children. He also seemed very interested in my father's work in Army Ordnance. Fortunately, I was certainly not privy to any U.S. military information. I found him very dull so I was amazed to learn months later that he had been apprehended and arrested as a German spy and sentenced to death. I am convinced that his poor wife knew nothing of this.

In November we moved to Paris and I was involved in my studies at the Sorbonne. It was not until April 1939, when Mussolini seized Albania, that reality hit us. The French began to construct air-raid shelters (I believe that one was dug under the Tuileries Gardens) and posters appeared in my apartment building saying that citizens should apply for gas masks. I wrote my father who said that he did not believe that the Germans could successfully gas Paris because of all the buildings and other obstructions. However, I spent the next few months with a packed suitcase, my passport and extra money. By then we knew that if Germany invaded France we would have to walk out of Paris.

Fortunately Hitler did not attack France. He waited until September 1 and invaded Poland. I had reached home and safety two weeks before the beginning of World War II.

1938 - SHADOWS OF WAR (Scandinavia)

Judy Kidney

(Judy's full account, "The Danish-German border" appears in the May and June 1993 Collingtonian).

In the summer of 1938, during the pre-Munich period of European tension, Judy went with Youth Hostellers on a bicycle trip in Scandinavia, avoiding the "dangerous" areas of the continent and England. When there was a shortage of bikes, however, she volunteered with four others to cross the border from Denmark into Germany to pick up more of the "bargain" bicycles. Returning by bike to the Danish-German border they spent two nights in hostels which were actually Hitler Youth camps. The youths, ranging in age perhaps from seven to seventeen, came marching in singing the Horst Wessel song with great zest. There she happened to talk with a 14-year-old boy who had once lived in the U.S. and now was enamored of Hitler and the military. Later at the border she had a terrifying experience being held back alone for severe questioning by the German guards and the SS men, probably, she concluded later, because of suspicion about her conversation with the boy.

She notes "As we proceeded toward Copenhagen it became quite evident that the Danes had no illusions about their future; they were convinced the Nazis would invade and occupy." Later she comments: "In Sweden I was far less conscious of a concern about war and Nazi Germany, although it must have existed. In Norway the atmosphere more nearly approximated that in Denmark. In Oslo and Bergen the numerous German tourist ships anchored in their harbors were pointed out to us as 'spy' ships for the coming invasion."

She concludes "So we sailed back home from Bergen after a beautiful, scary, heartwarming trip, yet with an underlying sadness in the shadows of war."

YUGOSLAVIA AND GERMANY, SUMMER 1939

Alex N. Dragnich

A two-month trip I took to Europe in the summer of 1939 included Nazi Germany. As a second-year graduate student at the University of California (Berkeley), I borrowed money to make the trip, believing that it would improve my chances for a teaching fellowship the following year. My wife, Adele, who was working as a nurse, agreed, and stayed on her job. (I did get the fellowship).

I wanted to go to Yugoslavia, especially Montenegro, from where my parents immigrated. Before leaving the USA, I sought some advice from a mathematics instructor at the University of Washington, whom I had met during my senior year there. He was from Germany, and as it turned out, was going to be spending the summer in Berlin, where we agreed to meet on my return from Yugoslavia. He advised me to take German steamships, which I was eager to do since I had taken two years of college German. A fellow graduate student who had spent a year in Prague, Czechoslovakia, advised me to visit that city, and gave me the name of a friend who would be my guide.

I went third class on the S. S. Hansa, which appeared to have mainly German-American passengers, many of them members of the pro-German Bundt organization. (Incidentally, in World War II the Hansa was an ocean raider which was sunk by the British in the Far East). After an 8-day trip we landed in Hamburg. Following a couple of days there, I went by train to see Dresden and then proceeded to Yugoslavia by way of Prague. After checking in at the Prague YMCA, I called my colleague's friend, who spent two days showing me the city. It was sad for her because the Germans had occupied Czechoslovakia the previous month and German soldiers were very much in evidence.

The following day when I was waiting for the train, I met an Argentine businessman who asked me how I got permission to stop in Prague. I hadn't. Consequently, even as I pretended not to know, I knew what the German customs official was asking me as the train was about to leave what had been Czechoslovakia. He warned me in stern German that I had better have a permit if I intended to return that way. On my return from Yugoslavia I went a different route.

In Montenegro I met my maternal grandfather and other relatives, including

an uncle whom I knew during his several-year stay in the state of Washington before he returned home in 1926. He and I went by bus to Kosovo to visit another uncle who lived there.

In Berlin I met my math instructor friend who showed me around, including a trip to Potsdam and a pleasant evening at a cabaret. He was there when the war broke out, but eventually was permitted to leave. While in Berlin I stayed at a youth hostel and met a few German young men, none of whom believed that there would be a war. That was the view of Germans I met on the train and elsewhere. Most Germans with whom I talked believed that the Versailles Treaty was unfair to Germany. And Hitler seemed to have had some success in his allegations that Jewish financial manipulations had harmed ordinary Germans.

When I returned to California in August, I told friends that I did not think there would be a war. I was in good company, because a group of American journalists who had been sent to Europe to assess the likelihood of war, came back with the same wrong answer.

I had returned on the S. S. Europa from Bremen on what turned out to be its last trip to New York before the war.



LAST DAYS OF AUGUST 1939 (Germany)

Maria Colvin

In 1938 when I was 16 with two more years of high school to go, my parents decided I should attend a boarding school of the Sacré Coeur sisters in the Rhineland near Bonn, and I was eager to go. I made friends there with a classmate from Luxemburg. In 1939 when I heard that she was going to spend the summer on a seaside vacation with her parents, we decided it would be fun if I could come along. My parents gave permission and we drove to a little town on the Baltic Sea and enjoyed two great weeks of beach life.

In the hotel dining room there was much talk about the danger of war. As war with Poland seemed imminent, the mood was somber and subdued. No one dared speak openly in opposition to Hitler's actions, but many hoped against hope that Britain and France would not come to the aid of Poland. Tension and worry increased among the guests. Many vacationers went home and gradual

the beach and the hotel emptied. My friend's parents also decided to leave. Gasoline was getting rationed and they worried whether they would be able to get enough to get me home to Hildesheim and then drive on to Luxemburg.

We stopped on our way in Hamburg where they had friends. We sat with several young Luftwaffe officers around the living room table. Their mood was quite a contrast. They were very excited and proud, and they assured us that the coming war would not, could not, last very long; it would surely be over in a few weeks. Their new airplanes were the latest, "state-of-the-art", most efficient, absolutely superior, almost invincible, and so were our tanks and other weapons. I was impressed if not quite convinced by their talk and remembered it often later on. "Technical superiority"; it still is a magic phrase. Apparently Hitler also thought that a quick victory might avoid further hostilities.

We all made it home in time before gasoline was more severely rationed, and just before Hitler went into Poland on September first: Everybody started hoarding staples. I especially remember one woman who bought a dozen or more nylon stockings. Although at the time I disapproved of that, later I wished I had done the same.

My parents did not let me go back to my boarding school in the Rhineland. They felt it was too close to the Belgian and French borders; the front might well come near it. So back I went to the public school in Hildesheim and finished there. I now think back how my parents, who were opposed to Hitler from the beginning, must have felt as they now saw him prepare for war. In WW I my father left my mother with three little children and fought in Russia and Italy and now, only 21 years later, they faced another war, and their three sons were between the ages of 23 and 31. (All three went off to war; one never came back).



WORLD WAR II BEGINS (France) Katharine Swift

It was August 24, 1939. My French friends, André and Germaine Sallet, had been visiting me and now I was returning to France with them on the Ile de France. I was to stay with them for a week or two and then go to Minehead,

Somerset, England where I was thrilled to have an exchange teaching job for the school year '39 to '40. My family was less thrilled in view of the war clouds hanging over Europe. But in 1938 they seemed to have been dispelled by the Munich agreement, so I struck my own pact with the family: if war hadn't broken out before my departure date, I would go.

That morning, August 24, as we left the hotel in New York for our ship, suddenly we heard the newsboys shouting, "Read all about it: Russo-German pact." André turned grave, saying, "That means war." I didn't want to believe him. Above all, I hoped my family would be too unaware to take alarm and wire me not to go. Until we actually sailed I feared that telegram and the agony of having to choose between family concern and this dream of adventure. No telegram came and I relaxed to enjoy the ocean trip.

There was anxious talk of war all during the voyage. The French, who had known the miseries of war only 21 years before, were not ready to renew its acquaintance. I remember hearing a room steward say, "Je ne vais pas me faire casser la gueule pour des millionnaires." ("I'm not going to get my mug bashed in for any millionnaires.")

We still tried not to believe the worst but our efforts at optimism were sorely tested after we arrived at Le Havre and reached Rouen on the drive to their home. That lovely cathedral looked like a great gaping skeleton, being stripped of its stained glass windows which we were told were to be shipped and stored for safety in a cave under a mountain range in central France. I still clung to the hope of a last-minute reprieve as in 1938. This was September 1st, the day Hitler's forces invaded Poland, and Britain and France delivered their ultimatum. That evening we reached the Sallets' home in the outskirts of Lille near the Belgian border. In spite of the facts André tried to reassure his elderly father who had spent World War I as a slave laborer in Germany.

Then came the fateful radio announcement at noon on Sunday, September 3. Faithful to their pact with Poland, France and England were declaring war on Germany. The announcer ended with: "Les français sont calmes." ("The French people are calm."). We looked at each other in disbelief; who could be calm at such a moment?

Later, as we walked over to the home of André's parents we passed groups of agitated people discussing the news, and I caught the word "quatorze" (14)

repeatedly. They were comparing this to 1914, the beginning of WW I. This flat region of Belgium and northern France had been a prime invasion route and these residents had lived under German occupation the whole of that war. They had no illusions about what was in store for them.

We reached a large square; at one corner was a group of heavy draft horses requisitioned to pull ammunition wagons (an indication of how poorly prepared the French were for modern warfare). The horses were standing stolidly in place. André pointed to them and remarked ironically, "Ce sont de bons français; ils sont calmes." ("They're good Frenchmen; they're calm.")

Later that day we visited the bistro (pub) run by Germaine's father. It became a patriotic duty to drink as much champagne as possible to keep it from the Germans.

I was not in a hurry to go on to England where school would not start for another two weeks or so, but the next day I felt obliged to report my presence to the American consul in Lille. In his office there were a number of Americans frantically seeking a way to get home. The consul wasted no words with me. "Get out now!" he ordered. So the next day I reluctantly took the train to Calais for the Channel crossing to Dover.

On arriving at the dock I learned that a ferry boat had delayed sailing for several hours because of reports of U-boats in the Channel. I was bundled into a life preserver and told that ours was to be the last ferry crossing without a naval escort. I saw a group of young Englishmen who had been vacationing on the continent. Their lively spirits were undampened by the news. One young fellow perched his camera on the ship rail, saying gaily, "If a torpedo comes, I hope I can snap it before it hits." What a contrast with the gloomy mood of the French who had known up close the harsh reality of war! Strong pacifist though I was, I'm afraid that in my naiveté I, too, shared their excitement, looking on this as a Great Adventure.

The adventure continued for nearly ten months during the "phony war" while Hitler's attention was on Eastern Europe. But when he moved westward in early May 1940, threatening England, family pressure forced me home. I returned to the U.S. from Galway, Ireland, on the S. S. Washington, leaving on June 14, 1940, the sad day when the Nazis marched into Paris.

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1939 (Germany and England)

Walter W. Ristow

As August 1939 approached my excitement increased. I was going to Europe! I had a booking on the Queen Mary for late in August. I disembarked at Cherbourg and took the boat train to Paris. I was impressed by the fairly large number of soldiers in evidence. I noted that they were dressed in World War I-type uniforms and were not too military in appearance.

From Paris I went by train to Berlin where I had dinner with a former graduate school colleague at Clark University, Angelika. I observed that she was wearing a swastika and learned that she was using her geography training by working in one of the government agencies. I had seen many men in uniform all looking well trained and experienced. I questioned Angelika about the soldiers and she assured me that war was not imminent despite some stories in non-German newspapers.

A day or so later I boarded a train for Neu Stettin in Pomerania, near the small village from which my paternal grandparents had emigrated to the United States in 1870. I was a bit surprised to find that I shared a second-class compartment with some three or four burly German officers. I tried to be as inconspicuous as possible as the train rolled eastward. At each of the small towns we passed through we saw armored cars and tanks in sidings along the main tracks. Seeing these, one of my military companions remarked with apparent pleasure, "Es gibt Spass". With my meager background in German I mentally translated this as, "There's going to be some excitement".

At Neu Stettin I was met by one of my German relatives who accompanied me on the short train ride to Thurow. I was interested to note that most of the houses in the village had straw-thatched roofs. I also observed that even in this small settlement friends greeted each other with a raised right forearm and a "Heil Hitler".

I returned to Berlin and then continued to Belgium. By this time the clouds of war were darkening and my scheduled sightseeing in that country was canceled. From Brussels I therefore went to the seacoast resort city of Ostend from which I was to take a boat across the English Channel. A number of other

persons had the same idea, and there was a twelve-hour wait for the earliest boat reservation. In the late evening I made the trip across the Channel and settled in a small hotel in London. I learned that my scheduled bus trip to Scotland was operating the next day.

That evening in London I had dinner with Barbara, one of the friends I had met on the Queen Mary. She had spent all of her time in the British Isles and happily informed me that she had obtained a reservation on the Athenia which was sailing from Southampton the next day, Saturday Sept. 2.

Although there were increasing signs that war might soon break out, I left for Scotland on a tour bus the following morning. All went well and I spent a delightful two days visiting Edinburgh, passing over the Scottish Highlands to the home of Sir Walter Scott and arriving at a hotel on lovely Loch Lomond. That evening, September 3, we received the news that England had declared war on Germany and our tour was discontinued. The following morning I was able to hitch a ride with a busload of British tourists to reach Glasgow. Here I reported to the American Consulate where I was astonished to find my friend, Barbara, and some fifteen or twenty other survivors of the torpedoed Athenia. That evening I had dinner with the survivors at the consulate. They told how they had lost everything and spent the night in open boats scared and seasick.

The following day, September 5, I returned to London where I wondered how I would get back to America. Happily, after two days I had word from the Cunard Line to report at Southampton the following morning, September 8. Here I boarded the old four-stacked liner Aquitania. After boarding the ship with other returning tourists, we learned that the crew was on strike and asking for higher pay because of increased risk. This problem was settled in the evening when the captain piloted the ship to open water. The strikers were then faced with the prospect of being charged with mutiny.

The liner was crowded with returning tourists as well as German refugees and was blacked out with a gun crew on the deck. We zigzagged westward across the Atlantic, arriving in New York City eight days later. Ours was the first ship from Europe to reach America after war was declared.



WW II - THE FIRST TWO WEEKS (England and At Sea)

Muriel H. Parry

Our quiet end of summer interlude in Dieppe prior to crossing the Channel to board our ship for the return to New York was being shattered by the spreading signs of international tension. When soldiers with bayonets showed up to stand guard at bridgeheads, it seemed wise to report to the American consul in Dieppe and inform him that there were two American ladies in Dieppe; Dad had gone on ahead since his school started before mine. Two days later the consul called with instructions that we should leave immediately -- not the next day, but that night. There was concern that the Channel boats would be commandeered for troop transport. The sea was calm, but the hard wooden benches didn't encourage much sleep!

On arriving in London we reported to the American Embassy and were instructed to go directly to the Bristol Channel resort of Weston-super-Mare. It was expected that London would be bombed directly and that American ships would be sailing from Bristol. We proceeded to the station, armed with a box supper provided by a friend, and boarded a sardine-packed train; the children were being relocated outside of London. We sat on our luggage all the way to Bristol (one must always have luggage one can sit on!), arriving after dark and in a blackout. A helpful exit ticket-taker suggested we might find accommodation at a B&B just down the street, identified by a pale blue light over the door. Yes, there was a room. We followed the owner up three flights of dark stairs, with each turn and landing being identified on the way. The only hitch was that we'd failed to inquire about the location of the W.C., but such accommodations always have a chamber pot!

Morning found us on a bus to Weston-super-Mare where we settled into a pleasant B&B and then reported to the major hotel where the U.S. Committee was getting organized. Mother helped where she could, and I enjoyed the amenities of the resort town, especially the fine large outdoor swimming pool.

But by mid-September, equipped with a government-issue gas mask each, we were again crossing southern England to London to board our American ship at Tilbury Docks, as originally planned. There was never a question of seeking other transportation because I'd won the trip in a national high school essay

contest and was a guest of the steamship line. The ship had undergone modification which included adding a berth or two in each cabin, rearranging the lounge to accommodate the homeward-bound Rhodes scholars, adapting the bar for church services, and painting a large American flag on each side of the hull, floodlighted at night.

Our departure and trip along the south coast were uneventful, though tense. Many of us were on deck enjoying a quiet sail about 300 miles west of Land's End when it became apparent that we'd changed course. What was up? We learned that we had answered a distress call from a torpedoed British freighter home bound with a cargo of Cuban sugar. We arrived in time to see the bow of the ship disappear. The lifeboat was spotted, but what was alongside? None other than the German submarine! The British were conversing with the German officers, but were carefully concealing the identity of their captain for fear that he'd be taken prisoner; we learned later that the Germans had offered to tow the lifeboat closer to Land's End if no rescue ship appeared. While the crew and passengers of our ship were all watching the unfolding scene on the water, out from behind a cloud came a small plane with three bombs under each wing. With the lifeboat so close to the submarine, the plane couldn't unload any of its bombs and had to circle. By the time it had done so, the sub's crew were inside, the hatches closed, and the submarine was rapidly submerging. The plane did drop two bombs, circled our ship, waved and headed back to what was undoubtedly an aircraft carrier since the plane was too small and heavily loaded to have come from England. But no wreckage was spotted, so it was assumed that the bombs had done no significant damage. This event, however, spelled one of the last times that the Germans gave warning of impending torpedoing, thereby giving away their position.

We took the British crew aboard as well as their lifeboat since our extra passengers were already straining the normal emergency facilities. Sadly, six of the engine-room crew had drowned when they refused to go back below and shut off the engines; with the ship still moving their lifeboat capsized during launching. We continued our westward passage, but it was a much subdued ship. We were met in New York by a bevy of press; everyone was very glad to get back to the States. I was given the lantern from the British lifeboat as a "souvenir". I still have that wartime gray-painted utilitarian lantern, an object which I'm sure will puzzle my heirs.

It was only the briefest taste of the war, but I can say I was there!

EAST FROM BEIRUT TO BOSTON - SUMMER 1941

Elisabeth West FitzHugh

My family was evacuated from Beirut, Lebanon, in May 1941, courtesy of a European - not yet a world - war. A group of us from the American University of Beirut, where my father was teaching, left there with only a few days' notice when the Free French were about to march into Vichy-controlled Lebanon, the Germans were infiltrating into Iraq, and Rommel's army was approaching Cairo. We ended up traveling two-thirds of the way around the world.

We first spent a month in Ramallah, just outside Jerusalem, then another month in Cairo waiting for ship transport south since civilians were forbidden to travel in the Mediterranean.

I spent my fifteenth birthday in Suez harbor where burnt-out bombed ships were scattered. The ship we boarded at Suez, headed for Sydney, Australia, was the former Cunard liner Aquitania, veteran of many Atlantic crossings, now a troopship battered by months of transporting Australian and New Zealand troops to North Africa. In addition to our group of refugees, the passengers included some Australian airmen being invalided home, and several hundred Italian prisoners-of-war below decks, destined for a camp in Ceylon. My father came out on the lighter with us to the ship, to say goodbye, then to return to his job in Beirut. As a parent years later I can imagine my parents' feelings as we set out - my mother, two younger brothers and I - through the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean. There were known to be U-boats in the area but the Aquitania was too fast for any convoy so we traveled alone. My youngest brother recalls that we were each assigned a certain item to grab if we were torpedoed.

There were thirty or forty of us - families or parts of families - and a few teen-agers traveling independently, headed for school or college in the U.S. We spent a month in Sydney and eventually got passage to the United States on the Monterey, a Matson Line cruise ship. We stopped in New Zealand, at Fiji and Pago Pago and then in Honolulu before heading for California. Finally we took the train across the country to the Boston area where life became serious once again with finding a place to live and starting off in strange schools.

We had been en route for five months. I've often thought how different our lives might have been if we'd been traveling a few months later. By then it was two months before Pearl Harbor.

THE WAR IN CAIRO

Leila Wilson

After the Munich pact in September 1938 the immediate threat of war had passed so the Wilsons with 4-month-old Leila jr. took off for Cairo, their first Foreign Service assignment. "That was the beginning of four tense but fascinating years." When war broke out in Europe Leila's letters were filled with the devastation of shattered hopes for peace. "From here on one lived with a fear and dread that had to be accepted and suppressed." Life went on in Cairo in spite of an all-pervasive nervous tension; parties and sports activities continued.

The British thought they had Egypt and King Farouk pretty well controlled with their soldiers and airmen, but in Cairo alone there were 60 to 80,000 Italians, including the King's favored advisers and friends. "The Italian army was very busy at the time in Ethiopia having ambitions directed toward the Suez Canal and sea routes to the east. Tension rose and Cairo was soon in a state of jitters. All Anglo-Saxon men were called to take shifts patrolling the streets at night. By day one sensed the nervousness of the community in the rising voices of the crowds milling in the streets or gathered at corners to listen to an itinerant reader reporting on the latest news release, true or false. In the evenings one heard from neighboring balconies the laughter and chatter of Britishers confident of instant triumph when the anticipated uprising should take place.

"It had been determined early on that if and when Italy formally joined the Axis and came into the war, the women with children in our legation would have to leave. An arrangement had therefore been made with the Consulate General in Jerusalem to receive us. Palestine being a British Mandate at that time, Arabs and Jews were more concerned with the European war than their own rivalries so the area was more or less quiet." So it was that the day in June 1940 when Italy declared war, Leila and her now 2-year-old daughter left for Jerusalem where they remained for seven months until British forces moved westward with the Italians in retreat toward their base in Libya.

Leila recounts "Some months passed before I learned about the denouement of the anticipated Italian uprising in Cairo. The majority of the British troops had been out on maneuvers in the desert when word was received that the

Italians were seizing the opportunity to stage a take-over. They mobilized and raced for Cairo. It was not generally known, but the fact was that military supplies and arms for Egyptian-based forces were practically nonexistent. They put on ostentatious demonstrations with imitation arms while awaiting the real thing to arrive from ill-prepared Britain. All the way back to Cairo the soldiers in personnel carriers were lectured to and prepared for hand-to-hand street fighting. They had swords, knives, and handguns. They came into town shouting, yelling, and waving wooden guns. As they approached the main intersection on the way to the barracks a scarlet outsized vehicle drew up and stopped across their path. The defiant army continued to advance with increasing noise and waving of weaponry until the King's car slowly moved away. A courageous bluff had won the day. The point of it all was that only the King's vehicles were permitted to be colored fire-engine red. His men were testing and they lost their nerve."



HORSING AROUND AT FORT MYER, VIRGINIA - BEFORE PEARL HARBOR

Charlie Trammell

I still have vivid memories of my experiences as I made the sometimes daunting, sometimes amusing, transition from a young practicing lawyer to an army officer on "sure-enough" active duty on a real army post. Having a reserve commission as an army lieutenant, I was called to active duty several months before Pearl Harbor. I was assigned to Fort Myer, Virginia, which at that time was still a cavalry post with cavalry traditions and real live horses (in addition to the current burial detail) even if a good percentage were polo ponies. In peace time, after all, the nation's capital had to carry on the tradition of polo games, didn't it? Why else that grand polo field by the Tidal Basin?

On the date and at the time directed in my printed orders I reported to the commanding officer of the post. After the customary exchange of formal greetings and welcome I was told that I was being assigned to his staff as the Post Intelligence Officer and that, in addition to the formal statement of duties

set forth in the Post Manual, I was expected to inspect the post periodically as a security measure. In my naiveté I asked if I was expected to drive around in my car or walk. After he recovered from what I feared was an attack of apoplexy he calmed down a bit and said, "You will ride a horse, of course!" He looked positively incredulous when I said that I didn't know how.

Before dismissing me, and with an amused smile at this point, he called his adjutant and directed that I be given a crash course in equitation. I'm sure he was smothering a laugh when he added, "beginning with which side to mount."

Well, I found that you don't have to achieve polo skills to enjoy riding, and, by staying with the elderly polo ponies, I did moderately well on level ground. One day, too soon, it seems, I joined some fellow officers on a jaunt on one of the steeper, more rugged trails in a more remote part of the post. In proceeding down a very steep and somewhat muddy path my horse slipped and stopped unexpectedly, while turning slightly. It was enough to throw me over his shoulder, and I hit the ground. I started walking back up the hill, leading my horse by the reins to more level ground where an amateur like me could more easily remount. While still ascending I met my commanding officer who was taking some recreational exercise. He asked, "What happened to you, Lieutenant?" I said, "Sir, I fell off my horse". He said, "When you get back to the stables you say: 'I was thrown.' No officer in my command ever 'fell' off a horse."

The Penny-Pinching Army and a Hero

Bob Browning

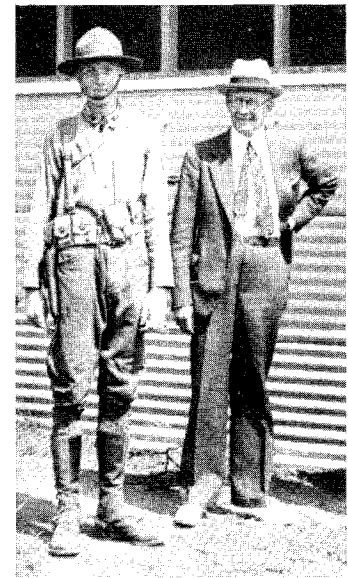
When I was a youngster growing up in Washington, many of my friends' fathers were officers in the U.S. Army. We read such stories as The Boy Allies and the life of cadets at West Point. We fought World War I battles in the woods. A career in the army seemed ideal.

When I got to Western High School I joined the High School Cadet Corps. In my junior year I was a sergeant and wanted to be promoted to commissioned rank in my senior year, 1935-36. I talked to our cadet faculty advisor who said, "If you go for a month at the Citizens' Military Training Camps, the CMTC (the poor man's ROTC), I will see that you get a commission." So I had a physical exam and put in my application.

Finally my orders came; I was to report to Ft. Myer, Virginia, in July 1935.

When we received our uniforms it was a shock. World War I contractors had got away with murder. Collars ranged from one inch wide to Buster Brown. All khaki was baggy. We looked like somebody out of a George Price cartoon in the New Yorker magazine. The only regulation item in the uniform was the Stetson hat now worn by the infamous drill instructors. You see them in "in-your-face" situations on TV and in movies.

We marched. We rode horses on the drill plain on the edge of Arlington Cemetery while funeral processions passed on their way from the chapel to burial. We couldn't help hearing the salutes of rifles and cannon. That's hard when you are at an immortal age.



Bob Browning on left wearing baggy khaki

When we returned in 1936 our instructors said, "Boys, things are different. Col. Jonathan Wainwright is our new Post Commander." The future hero of Corregidor had shaken up the post. At our first dismounted inspection he was appalled at our appearance. He asked the first fifty or so boys, "Is that the best shirt you have?" "Yes, Sir," they all said. The following summer we were each issued two khaki Arrow shirts from the Post Exchange at the Colonel's expense for use at inspections and guard duty only. My first year we had taken a mounted hike of a few miles out U.S. 50 into Arlington. Under "Skinny" Wainwright we rode our horses all the way to Fort Belvoir and set up picket lines for the horses and pup tents for ourselves. Field kitchens got the mess sergeants working for a change.

I have a certificate which declares that as of July 7, 1937, I am a sergeant in Troop E, CMTTC, at Camp Henry, Ft. Myer, Virginia, signed by Col. Jonathan M. Wainwright. I feel very proud to have my certificate signed by him. He had shown his strength in his command at Ft. Myer. Little did we know how he and our troops would be tested in the awful Bataan Death March. I was pleased when Gen. Wainwright was sent to the signing of the Japanese surrender. He certainly deserved the honor.