

Fairfield awakens from sleepy town status in 1942

By Nancy Dingler

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The eventful year of 1942 affected everyone in the world, including the quiet little hamlet of Fairfield. The Army Airfield (Later named Travis Air Force Base) was under full construction and use. Permit applications for new apartment construction for the expanding population was granted.

The high school graduating classes of 1941 and '42 scrapped their plans and went to war, both at home and at the battlefronts. Teachers, electricians and ranchers left their occupations, families and homes to join the fight.

Money for the war was raised through different "drives," along with Victory Books and Victory Gardens - everyone pitched in. Then, there were the dispossessed. Japanese families who had lived and worked in the area for generations were ordered to leave everything behind to be concentrated in "camps." Their stressful and tragic stories were also part of the fabric of local life and history.

In January, barely a month into the war effort, Pauline Edwards, the Martha Stewart of her day, began a new theme on her "All American" radio show entitled, "Defense Begins at Home." More than 100,000 rural women were going to learn about all-in-one oven meals, home defense, vitamins and other essential survival tips for the war's duration.

The Jan. 8 edition of the Solano Republican reported that while Armijo and Rio Vista high school football teams were battling each other on the gridiron Friday afternoon, plans were also in the works on Saturday for a series of fund-raisers. To celebrate the 60th birthday of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, there would be a March of Dimes drive.

There was a drive to collect money for U.S. savings bonds. The Red Cross reported by Jan. 29 their drive had been a great success, having collected \$3,403.00 toward war relief. Even the Girl Scouts helped by selling more than \$200 worth of defense stamps and bonds in two days.

A Junior Red Cross program was begun locally with students getting into the act by way of a book drive. The "Victory Book Drive" would supply books to the soldiers and sailors, at home and abroad.

In the same week, it was reported that Carl Gein Jr., son of Mr. and Mrs. Gein of Suisun Valley, had quit his job as athletic coach at Ukiah High School, where he had taught for two years after graduating from Armijo and later, Chico State. Young Carl was stationed at Bakersfield as a Flying Cadet.

The Jan. 15 paper ran a story about "Sheriff John R. Thornton having collected from Suisun Valley Japanese, Italian and German nationals, 50 rifles and shotguns, 100 radios and 100 cameras of various sizes and value. Many of the radios now in the local bastille office, were taken from automobiles."

In March the front page news was about workmen needed at the Hunter Corp. in Suisun to fulfill its defense contract to build boats. Also in that month, sirens were sounded to alert everyone in Suisun and Fairfield that a blackout was being held. This was the third drill and was deemed a success in that two minutes after the signal, the area was totally dark with an exception on Texas Street, where someone left a locked car with its headlights on. Unidentified planes over the Bay Area were given as the cause for the dark signal order.

April saw the evacuation order for all Japanese from Solano County. They were ordered to have only bedding, clothing and a small amount of table silver, toilet articles and other unrestricted articles for their "stay." The Japanese of Suisun Valley and throughout California had until May 3 to dispose of their homes, businesses and farms or be subject to arrest and be "treated as an enemy alien under heavy penalty."

By May the call went out for marksmen to start a local militia group. Particularly sought were men from the farms and ranches who owned hunting rifles and shotguns and who were skilled marksmen. Gov. Olson declared, "that they will be used only in event of enemy attack or invasion."

June brought the call for adult emergency help for farm workers. Most of the men had gone to war, or had been taken away as "Japanese infiltrators," leaving a terrible shortage of farm laborers. "There are some Filipino workers, but not enough. All women who are not working are asked to register and men are asked to register for weekend work. It has been emphasized that this work should be looked upon as a patriotic service essential to the war effort."

"NOTICE!! Air Wardens! If you are an Air Warden and for any reason it is necessary for you to leave town, you are urgently requested to notify the chief of police or Joe Serpas at the O.K. Sweet Shop. This is positively essential and is issued by order of the Fairfield City Council."

A shipment of yarn was sent by the Red Cross National Headquarters for the

completion of comfort kits. The kits consisted of sweaters, scarves and socks. "Your help is needed, so don't fail the Red Cross, as well as the boys."

"Mrs. F.A. Starmer received word from her brother, Martin (Sparky) Jacobson, from Norfolk, Va. Martin is the eldest son of Peter Jacobson of Fairfield . . . He graduated from Armijo High School more than a dozen years ago and has since been in the employ of PG&E . . . He enlisted in the Navy more than two months ago and is rated as a First Class Electrician's Mate."

As the year began to draw to a close, the bond drives continued to expand with the Christmas Seals to fight tuberculosis. During the year, 20 people in Solano County alone had died of the disease.

Word was received that Robert Spohn, son of Mr. and Mrs. O. C. Spohn of Fairfield, was awarded the coveted Navy Wings of Gold and commissioned an ensign in the U.S. Naval Reserve at the Naval Air Training Center, Corpus Christi, Texas. A 1938 graduate of Armijo, who went on to San Bernardino JC and the University of Idaho . . . he was a bookkeeper at the Noah Adams Lumber Co. here."

Dec. 17: After many months of anxious waiting, Mr. and Mrs. Roy J. Sheldon received a cablegram giving meager information of their only child, 1st Lt. Milton Jerome Sheldon's whereabouts. It was "the first word they have had since the fall of Bataan when Gen. Wainright and his brave army were forced to surrender."

Unfortunately, young Jerome died in the P.O.W. camp after the infamous forced 70-mile march. His remains were returned in 1948 when a formal military funeral was held, complete with caisson followed by 150 cars.

The year ended with the crash of another U.S. army plane, which slammed into a mist-enshrouded Napa ridge. This was the second crash, the other occurring near Twin Sisters, in less than a year. The planes were patrolling the skies for Japanese incursions.

The young airmen "had given their last full measure to their country." Fairfield would never be a sleepy little hamlet ever again. This was a pivotal moment in history that changed everything.

Special thanks for preparation of this story to Jerry Bowen and Bob Allen of the Vacaville Heritage Council who provided photos.

Reference: Solano Daily Republican - Jan. 8 through to Dec. 30, 1942.

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