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Washburn During The War Years, 1939-1945 — The Boys At War — Part 1

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This current series of articles will describe the participation of the people of Washburn in the war effort from 1941 to the victory over Germany in May, and Japan in August 1945. A second series of articles will cover community, government, and economic affairs of the city during the war years and immediate postwar period.

During the war years, the Washburn Times printed many letters from servicemen from Washburn and vicinity, describing their experiences in the United States and in overseas locations. The letters are unpretentious, those describing combat experiences being matter-of-fact, totally lacking in heroics, as if being bombed, shelled or shot at were normal, everyday experiences. The letters constitute an invaluable record of the war from the point of view of those who directly participated in it. In this and the following articles selected letters will be presented as they originally appeared in the Times, beginning in 1940.

Gerald S. Kile entered the Army Air Force in September 1940. After training in the United States, he served in New Guinea and the Philippine Islands. In September 1940, he wrote his mother from the Recruit Training Center at Scott



Lars Larson
Guest Columnist

Field, Illinois: "Is this ever a monstrous place! It's a regular city. There are both wooden and brick barracks and I think that we'll be in one of the brick ones. They have pool tables, reading and lounging rooms, cafeteria and everything — that is, the brick ones. We haven't been issued any clothes yet, but I don't think that it'll be long now. Our commanding officer, Lieutenant Kurschner, says that he doesn't approve of us drilling in civilian clothes. He's new here. He used to be a German and served six years in the German army. He's a 'grad' from West Point and finished at Randolph Field, Texas.

"We have tennis courts, a gym, horseshoe range, football, softball and baseball fields. There is a restaurant, the P.X. or post exchange, a post office, a library, and

the Service Club, at which I am writing. There is a cafeteria, reading room and game room here. We have our own heating plant, power plant, our own water, a railroad station, bus service, plane service, and practically anything a city has. You should see the big hangars. They're a block long and three-fourths of a block wide. We have paved streets, stop signs, police all over, a fire station with firemen and two big trucks. It really is nice and will be nicer. They're building the field larger and building 90 more barracks.

"There's a show every night and a matinee on Saturday and Sunday. We get up at 5:45, clean barracks, take a shower, shave, eat at seven, and are ready for drill at 8:15. We drill again at 1:00 after an hour for dinner. Supper is at five and then our time is our own. Lights go out at 9:00 and you have to be in bed at 11:00. We can't go to town until we show a positive typhoid reaction. I haven't had any shots yet and probably won't until Friday. There's a dance here every Thursday night. They bring girls in from Belleville."

Henry A. Malinoski was also stationed at Scott Field. He entered the Army Air Force on September 1940. He completed pilot training in June 1943 and

was commissioned a second lieutenant. He served in the Netherland East Indies, Philippine Islands, and Okinawa. In September 1940, he wrote: "We had a parade today at retreat. There were between 500 and 600 recruits in the parade. We had instructions on parachutes today and I think we'll have pistol and gas mask drill this week. The weather made another turn and it is usually around 115 degrees and we have to drill from 8:00 o'clock on. We had instructions this morning, not schooling, and it was rather cloudy, but we never had the breaks as far as rain is concerned.

"It hasn't rained since we came down here and a sergeant told me it hadn't rained for about a month before we came down. It's so dry and dusty that every time a bomber takes off it kicks up so much dust from a road about a block from the field that you can't see at all. A few days ago a few planes were doing a few formations, etc. and we're not supposed to look at them when we're drilling. Well, a drillmaster caught one big Swede looking at them and he made this guy run across a field about 300 feet long five times, back and fourth, and made him wave his arms like a bird and say 'Whee—I'm an airplane!'"