

The Home Front: 1940--

by David Ackley

Many had felt it coming, some, like Lela, for a long time. Having sent off one son to one war, each tremor, each threat from some aggressor, predicted the next. The Nashua draft roster, published in *The Telegraph* in 1940, with her son Philip's name among the 3600 young men from Nashua and surrounding towns listed as eligibles was another step toward the inevitable abyss.

Hundreds of the names on the list, the majority—the Dugases, the Beaulieus, the Goulets—were of French extraction, sons of emigrants from Quebec farms who'd come south to work in the Nashua mills. A French language paper, *L'Impartial* was published for the French population of Nashua from 1898 until 1964. The largest headline of the war in *The Telegraph* was in 1940:

FRANCE FALLS.

The year previous, 1939, Poland, where my mother's parents had emigrated from in 1912 and 13 had been overrun in the German blitzkrieg. Stanley and Zofia (Bednarz) Hujsak had brothers and sisters in the Polish village Bukowsko where both were born and raised. For more than 150 years the Poland they'd left had been parceled out as imperialist spoils among Prussia, Austria and Russia. Until they went from the family farm in nearby Reeds Ferry off to school, the oldest of their twelve children spoke Polish as a first language, and the younger ones as their second.

Stanley, new to this country, loathing Germans and Germany, had registered for the US armed forces during WWI and again in his fifties for WWII; refused on both occasions for his age, his adopted country might have missed a bet. He had emigrated as a released conscript of the Austrian Army, and was, according to his son, my Uncle Eddy, the strongest man he ever knew who could crush a raw potato in his hand, and a dead shot with a rifle.

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The children of Polish and French emigrants in and around Nashua volunteered en masse for the armed services.

Men and women joined up during WWII for diverse reasons: personal pride, probably like my father Harry; a sense of duty and love of country, like you; fear of being seen as a shirker or cowardly.

And for those like Stanley Hujak's sons- my mother's brothers- Karol and Alec, both of whom waded onto the beaches of Normandy in 1944, and the uncounted numbers of the children of French speaking parents in Nashua and elsewhere, hatred for Germany rooted in origins, handed down from parents, in a history both national and personal.

In war, hate is a valuable motivator for both warriors and the civilians who must accept the sacrifices it requires. Nations cultivate hate with propaganda that is in its own way as ruthless as any other weapon using racist stereotypes in cartoonish exaggerations of facial features, skin color, even dental peculiarities to turn men into monsters bayonetting babies—though atrocities are never lacking in actual war. “National hatred,” writes Von Clausewitz, “is seldom wanting in our wars...”

