

# WARTIME FOR A PRE-TEEN

*By Fred Hobbs*

Shortly after noon on Sunday, December 7, 1941, I was seated in the front row of the base theater at Denver's Lowry Field. I was with a group of kids about my age (I was nine.) We lived in a nearby government housing project for families of military service members and civilian defense workers. We were watching a movie featuring the popular comedy team of Bud Abbott and Lou Costello. Somewhat ironically the film was called "Buck Privates."

About twenty minutes into the movie, the projector was stopped, the lights went on and an army officer went on the stage and announced that all men were to report to their barracks immediately. Our childhood contingent was totally perplexed and more than a little put out. Why did they stop the movie? What was going on? At that moment, no one was answering those questions for us or for the GIs who were in the audience. When I reached home, I started to complain to my mother about the sudden unexplained event. She interrupted me and informed me of the Pearl Harbor attack, that war with Japan was likely and that this was a very serious situation.

Soon I was to encounter a series of first-hand experiences that were largely set in motion by World War II and that contributed materially to the shaping of my life ahead. Obviously, I was too young to enter the service, but one by one my three older brothers joined the military. In essence, I became an "only child."

My mother was a widow. She was working at the Remington Arms defense plant when war was officially declared. (On reflection later I found that odd, until I read of the help the U.S. was giving to the allies, especially Britain, prior to America's formal entry into the war.) As a result of her work schedule, I spent a great deal of time alone. If that were the case today, I might be called a "latch key" kid. But, my sister, newly married, lived not too far away. And in those days, under those circumstances, neighbors took care of neighbors. Quite different from today when many people might not know or care to know their next door neighbor.

I actually enjoyed the level of freedom and independence the situation afforded me. At age 11, I began a part-time after-school job selling a popular weekly magazine of the day, Collier's. Now, most kids would have had to conduct their sales efforts door to door perhaps selling ten or twelve magazines per week.

But because I lived near the Lowry air base, a training facility for combat photography at the time, I had a much larger customer base (approximately 30,000.) I sold copies in the mess hall, in the hospital and even in the barracks. I discovered that if I went on a Sunday morning virtually from bed to bed through the barracks, I would find many GIs waking up late on their day off, still lounging in bed each more likely to buy a magazine for himself rather than share one with their buddies. Result, on average, I sold 350 Collier's a week. Later, I replicated the same sales technique at Buckley Field, taking the bus out to what then were "the boonies".

At two and a half cents profit from each 10-cent magazine, I made enough money to pay for some of my clothes, and for goodies such as movies, Cokes, ice cream cones and an occasional trip to Elitch's. I also bought my mother a set of dishes and gifts for family birthdays. I was proud to be somewhat independent and able to contribute a bit to our limited resources.

For my mother, concern for me and my welfare and living during a war with three of her boys in uniform, was a constant worry. One of my brothers was a bombardier-navigator in the Air Force, one served as a radar man on a Coast Guard ship ferrying Japanese prisoners of war, and one was a forward observer in an Army unit in France. As it turned out, all three came home safely. They all were my heroes.

Their sacrifices and those of my mother coupled with what must be considered my unique childhood have served as significant and valuable touchstones all through my life.