



## Straight Talk

by Muriel Sluyter

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Greetings, Gentle Reader,

Sixty years ago our fighting men set out on a mission from which many knew they wouldn't return. They knew they must save America, that they could and would succeed, but many knew they would not live to see it happen.

They had developed strength, courage, devotion and dogged determination by growing up in the America that existed in the first half of the twentieth century. It doesn't exist anymore, and I cannot tell today's young Americans what it really was. I only know it was made up of strong homes, strong religious faith, strong schools in which patriotism was taught rather than derided, strong teachers who knew right from wrong, good from bad. Teachers who determinedly educated their students in reading, writing, math, Latin, science, geography, real history, writing and music. Teachers who loved their country and its people, revered their Constitution, and taught, rather than indoctrinated.

Our fighting "boys" were young, with the strength and determination of youth, but they weren't stupid. They knew what war had done to Europeans and Asians, and they were determined to keep it from happening to Americans. Rather than see us suffer as others were suffering, they went into a fight they knew could cost them their lives.

Ross Carter, a paratrooper, said the men had a view of America in their minds, and that was what each fought for. For some it was a wife and children. For some it was parents, siblings, a young sweetheart. Curiously, he said hamburgers were a part of what represented home. And the dinner table. Oh, yes! The dinner table, with Dad at the head, often with a baby on his lap. Dad's presence accounted for the teenage boys' good behavior, for the woodshed was usually reasonably close to the house and every boy in the family knew it was used for more than storing wood.

To some it was the rolling plains, to others the mountains. To some it was the big city, to others a small town in which everyone knew everyone else. To some it

meant horses, cattle, hay, grain and rewarding, though backbreaking, work. To others it meant fishing and swimming in the ocean. To some it meant cranberries and lobsters. To us it meant a warm house with a cottontail, pinto beans and potatoes cooking on the wood stove.

To some it meant Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, to others Bing Crosby and Bob Hope. To Glenn Miller it was music, dancing and the privilege of living his life in freedom, and he gave his "last full measure of devotion" to preserve it for those he left behind. It is impossible to listen to his music without remembering that his plane was shot down in that great battle for America's survival.

There were no politics in that war, though both Nazis and Communists attempted to create societal schisms during the Thirties. It was America against the enemy, and while there were some traitors in high places, everyday Americans were overwhelmingly patriotic and supportive of leaders.

Mistakes were made by leaders at every level, some costing thousands of lives. 400,000 American fighting men died, many unnecessarily by bad leadership decisions, but leaders are fallible, and war is that way. Fortunately for us, back then all teens and adults knew we were in this fight together. They didn't attack their own; they were too busy attacking the enemy. They even lied to get into the military, instead of lying to stay out of it.

Did they die in vain? If we accept the reality that this country cannot stand if it remains divided against itself - then act on it - only then will they not have died in vain.