

Our Families' Home Front Stories

Tom Butt, September 4, 2007

As the countdown to Richmond's Home Front Festival has less than a month to go, I reflected on the Home Front experiences of our own families.

Over the weekend, I read [*Women of the Homefront*](#), World War II Recollections of 55 Americans, edited by Pauline E. Parker. This book was published in 2002, and the author, Pauline E. Parker, died in 2004 at the age of 91.

This is an extraordinary collection of stories, not only of typical American women, but also of Japanese American women who endured both racial discrimination and the relocation camps, of African-American women who endured racial discrimination and segregation and of foreign born women who later became United States citizens.

Most of the stories are from women who were teenagers or in their early twenties during WWII. There are many common themes involving ephemeral boyfriends, relatives and husbands gone off to war, dreading the Western Union telegram, taking new and challenging jobs in far away places, accelerated courtships and marriages, moving from place to place to follow husbands before they were sent overseas ("camp followers"), scrambling for any kind of housing and taking care of young children in the absence of their fathers.

The stories also reflected a huge measure of pride and accomplishment for taking on challenges they had never anticipated, for making lifelong friends in the midst of common experiences, and, for many, even a remarkably good time. Underlying it all was a sense of common purpose, trustfulness in strangers and unity that has perhaps existed at no other time in our history.

There are other books out there with similar themes, such as *Rosie the Riveter, Women Working on the Home Front in World War II* (Penny Coleman, 1995) and *Memories of the Home Front* (Atria Senior Living Group, 2005).

Neither my mother nor Shirley's mother was a Rosie the Riveter. They didn't work in defense industries during the War. But they were typical of many women whose husbands had gone off to war while they were pregnant or had small children. Both coped, as did many women, by moving back with their parents while their husbands were overseas.

Thomas Franklin Butt and Cecilia King Butt

My father graduated from the University of Arkansas with a law degree in 1938 and was admitted to the bar at age 21. He participated in ROTC, as was common at the time, and was commissioned a second lieutenant of infantry in the Army at graduation.

My mother had spent the summer of '41 in Hawaii visiting her aunt and uncle, who was an Army surgeon. She recalls dating young men who were on their way to China to serve as pilots in the clandestine [Flying Tigers](#), formed to help defend China from the Japanese aggressors.

My father was called to active duty in 1940 and met my mother at the University of Arkansas, where he was assigned as an instructor in ROTC, and she was a sophomore student. My mother and father were married April 25, 1942.



Wedding of Thomas Franklin Butt and Cecilia King, Beebe, Arkansas, April 25, 1942. From left, Dr. Arthur King, Thomas Franklin Butt, Cecilia King, Charles Pinkney Reid Carol King Reid, Helen King and Harry King.

They were lucky to stay at the University of Arkansas for a time, but my father was moved around from assignment to assignment, with my mother following until I was born on March 23, 1944, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he was at the New Mexico School of Mines in nearby Socorro as an instructor in an Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). This was a program designed to give special college training to young men already in the military. Many colleges and universities across the nation had similar units.

My mother later wrote:

The then Capt Butt had received Army orders in December 1943 to go to Socorro where he would work in an Army officers training program at the School of Mines there. We made the long trip out slowly as I was about seven months pregnant. Upon arriving, we went to a little old hotel (the town's only) at the end of the road, staying there for a few days looking for housing. We eventually moved into an adobe duplex which had originally been a one-family house, the home-place of a ranch complex. It was a dreary vista for any eyes and a difficult one for a pregnant, sickly female. Shopping was traumatic, with only naked, cold rabbit offered in the grocery meat counters, or fried, the only meat on the menu in the two town restaurants. Overly hot Mexican food was an alternative. There being no doctors or hospital in Socorro, our frequent weekends to Albuquerque to see the obstetrician offered a chance to enjoy the hospitality of the lovely Alvarado Hotel there. The Santa Fe charged right up to the doorway of the hotel where Indians in native garb waited to show and sell their arts to incoming tourists. Literally, it was a "Gateway to the West" as the sign over the entrance gate stated.

There was a splendid dining room with waitresses in Spanish costumes and very much an atmosphere of the grand hotels that railroads built as major show places and resorts around the turn of the century.

To return to our arrival in Socorro, and the little hotel there where we went on our arrival night, there was much scurrying about as a large party was to be held that evening. Since visitors at the hotel were few and Tom's position at the local college made him already known, we were invited to join in the festivities. The party was a birthday celebration to honor the grand dame of Socorro, the beloved Senora Baca. All the town seemed to be there to pay tribute to the tiny little lady of 90, beautifully dressed in an ankle length black silk of an earlier day, with lace and jewels to make a picture perfect image. She and her family were among the earliest, and surely the most distinguished, of the Socorro citizens and one of the few aristocratic Spanish families to still be social, political and economic leaders. Her late husband, El Fago Baca, had been their sheriff in territorial days, as well as U.S. Marshall and legislator.

The senora reigned that evening as a queen might, graciously greeting all well-wishers from her throne-like seat in the large hall. We were enchanted.

It was nearly a year later, back in Batesville, that I learned from Aunt Dan that the same Senora Baca had been her dearest friend in those much earlier days when they were frontier wives together at Socorro, the senora of landed Spanish gentry and Aunt Dan, who followed the Santa Fe through the wilderness of New Mexico. Time and the world become swiftly small for us.

The new orders for overseas duty had arrived the day after the baby's arrival in a hospital in Albuquerque.



Left, Cecilia King Butt and Thomas King Butt, 1944.
Above, Charles Pinkney Reid ("Pinkie"), "Ruffy," and Thomas King Butt ("Tommy") in Batesville in 1944 while their fathers were at war.

My father spent a short time in Ft. Worth at another high school ROTC program before shipping to Europe as a legal specialist in foreign claims. He disembarked at Omaha Beach in Normandy in August, 1944, a couple of months after D-Day, and then followed the front through France and Belgium where he commanded a small detachment (Claims Office, Team 6816) settling claims of Europeans against the American military.

My mother moved to Batesville, Arkansas, where she stayed with her parents for the duration, along with her sister, Carol, whose husband was also in Europe.



In 1945, my father returned home, and the family moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas, where my father worked for a time for the [Office of Price Administration](#), then went back into practice as an attorney before embarking on a 50-year judicial career in 1949. He stayed in the Army Reserve for many years until he reached the rank of chief judge, U.S. Army Judiciary, retiring in 1970 as a brigadier general and receiving the Legion of Merit.

My mother eventually went back to school at the University of Arkansas where she resumed studies in library science and worked for many years as the reference librarian in the Fayetteville Public Library.

Thomas Franklin Butt and
Cecilia with baby Tommy
reunited in 1945

James Edward Ryland and Mary Chew Brummett Ryland

Shirley's father, James Edward ("Jimmie") Ryland and her mother, Mary Chew ("Chew") Brummett grew up in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. They graduated from high school in 1936 and were married on June 16, 1941. They moved to Memphis, where Jimmie had been working as a salesman for a paper products company since 1936. In 1942, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps as an Aviation Cadet Candidate. This was the first time that non-college graduates were offered the opportunity to become pilots.

Shirley's older sister, Katherine Amy ("Katie") was born November 6, 1942. Jimmie was called to active duty in 1943 and spent over a year in an accelerated college program, from which he graduated in March 1944 and was commissioned a second lieutenant. Chew, meanwhile, moved back with her parents in Pine Bluff.

After completing 48 weeks of flight training in Chattanooga, TN, Maxwell Field, AL, Lafayette, LA, Walnut Ridge, AR and Stuttgart, AR, Jimmie qualified as pilot of a [B-24 Liberator](#) and was ordered to the European Theater on September 19, 1944.



Flying with a stopover in the Azores, he reported first to North Africa. He was scheduled to fly next to Italy, but during takeoff, one of his engines malfunctioned, and he turned back. All of the other planes in his group were lost in a storm over the Mediterranean.

Jimmie Ryland with daughters Shirley and Katie
in 1945

Jimmie flew five combat bombing missions over German-held territory from Italy. On his fifth mission, his plane took flak while bombing Vienna on October 17, 1944. His tail gunner was killed, and Jimmie was severely wounded in his calf muscle. He returned to base safely, but it ended his flying career, and he spent the next nine months recuperating in hospitals. Shirley was born November 10, 1944, while her father was in a hospital in [Bari, Italy](#) until December 15, 1944, when he boarded a hospital ship to return to the U.S. he learned of Shirley's birth through the Red Cross.



From left to right, Chew, Shirley, Katy and Jimmie after Jimmie's return from Europe in 1945

Jimmie finished out his military service as a Transition Dispatcher at an Air Transport Command Base and was separated from the service on October 1, 1945.

He was awarded the Air Medal, Purple Heart and the European-African-Middle Eastern Theater Ribbon with three Bronze Service Stars.

In 1945, Jimmie resumed his sales career, and the family moved back to Memphis where Jimmie and Chew raised three daughters and as son and remained the rest of their lives.