

Memories Never Fade

WWII vets recall the road to V-E Day.

Bill Carroll

Special to the Jewish News

It was 65 years ago this Saturday, May 8, that Nazi Germany surrendered unconditionally to the allies to end the European part of the Second World War.

The Nazi generals actually had surrendered at a French schoolhouse the day before, but President Karl Donitz, who succeeded Adolf Hitler after Hitler committed suicide, formalized the surrender in Germany on May 8, 1945 — on what became known as Victory in Europe Day, or V-E Day.

Millions celebrated and President Harry S. Truman, who turned 61 that day, dedicated the victory to the memory of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had died April 12. Thus, the European war that started in 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, was over.

The Japanese would surrender in August, ending World War II, a horrific conflict that killed 60 million people worldwide.

America lost 405,000 men and women in the war and 670,000 more were wounded. But Bert Gladstone, now of Madison Heights, and Harold Gross and Larry Paul of West Bloomfield, were three of the lucky ones. They escaped unscathed, despite their perilous jobs in the military.

Proudly, but quietly, they recently described their war exploits, unlike the many veterans who, after 65 years, are still reluctant to do so. Most of the WWII vets are in their late 80s or early 90s and are dying at

Elyne Gross Photography



Larry Paul, Bert Gladstone and Harold Gross with their pictures during their World War II years.

the rate of about 1,000 a day.

Gladstone was in Germany on V-E Day, having completed his dangerous task of defusing unexploded bombs on the allied path through Germany. Gross was getting some "R&R — rest and recreation" at an Air Force base in Santa Ana, Calif., after serving as the belly turret gunner on a B-17 bomber for two years. Paul was in Austria, serving as a flight controller for U.S. combat missions after finishing 67 of his own missions over German targets as a dive-bomber pilot.

"Those of us who returned from the war were pretty lucky," reflected Gross, 88, a Detroit Central High School Class of 1940 graduate. "Either you made it out of the war

all right or you didn't make it out at all."

Russian Connection

Gladstone, also 88, is a transplanted New Yorker who met Gross when they were teenagers in the same AZA group. Not too long after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, they went together to fight the war. But Gladstone enlisted in the army and Gross joined the air force.

Gladstone's first army stint was in the Persian Gulf area as a member of a heavy ordnance section, working on the U.S. supply line to Russia during the battle for Stalingrad in the early stages of the war.

"Big parts would arrive in crates and

boxes and we would assemble them into tanks, trucks and jeeps and ship them off to Russia," he said. "I like to think we helped turn the tide in Russia's battle against the Nazis.

"And we did it under extreme heat ... It's easy to see why many in Iran could be crazy with the heat. And we lived in mud-and-straw barracks. Our only relief was when we rigged up a jeep motor to create an air conditioning system."

But things really heated up for Gladstone when he joined the First Army's bomb disposal unit — "we had no choice; they just put us in there," he laughs — helping to defuse unexploded bombs and shells that fell near the U.S. troops.

He adds, "I wish we would have had those thick outfits [disposal experts have today] while we dug out unexploded bombs that were partially buried, then unscrewed the various parts to make them harmless. I had some close calls over a year, but I fortunately was never injured, although some of my buddies weren't as lucky."

Leading up to V-E Day, Gladstone worked in the displaced person camps created after prisoners were freed from German concentration camps; "a very sad sight," he says.

He returned to civilian life as a clothing salesman for K & G Suit Warehouse in Detroit. His wife, Frances, died in 1982 after 37 years of marriage. He has three children, five grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Now A Gunner

Gross, also a 1940 Central High grad, had officially been drafted into the army in

Russian Vets Honor WWII Victory Date



Photo by Vadim Yelizarov

Lazar Selektor of the World War II Veterans from the Former USSR

The World War II Russian-Jewish Veterans Association of Metro Detroit, together with the Michigan Association of Russian Speaking Jewry in America (MARJA Inc.) and in collaboration with Jewish American World War II veterans, will celebrate 65 years since the great victory over Nazi Germany in World War II.

The official "65th Anniversary of the Victory in WWII" medal ceremony and commemoration will be held at 3 p.m., Saturday, May 8, on the campus of the Jewish Community Center in Oak Park.

The once-large local WWII veterans' community is getting older with its

youngest member at 85 and most around 90 or older.

"We feel this anniversary very well may be the last for most of us," said Anatoliy Granovsky, president, World War II Veterans from the Former USSR.

A younger voice comes from Jenny Feterovich, a local musician and businesswoman who says she understands that very few who risked their lives in World War II are left to testify to the horrors of that war and the severe price paid by all Jews throughout Europe, including Russia, as a result of Nazi Germany.

She is helping to spearhead the com-

memoration.

"It is our intent to erect a memorial monument [locally] commemorating the 65th anniversary of the victory over the Nazis, to celebrate those who fought in that war and in memory of those who lost their lives on the battlefields and during the Holocaust," she said.

To sign the online petition to support the memorial, go to www.thepetitionsite.com/1/detroit-association-of-jewish-veterans-of-world-war-ii.

For further details, contact Dmitriy Selektor, MARJA Inc. president, at (248) 496-4080 or via e-mail: marjainc@gmail.com. □