

The Duration

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I grew up as a young boy in Minneapolis during the years of World War II. My memories of that time are quite varied, some vague and obscure, others vivid. It was a time of anxiety and apprehension, a time of deprivation, but also a time of hope. As the war progressed, the tide turned in favor of the Allies. The hated Japanese and Germans (not so much the Italians, they didn't seem to want to fight that much) were losing. Eventually we won, the casualties ended and servicemen and servicewomen came home.

On Sunday, December 7th, 1941, I returned home from attending a movie with a young man, Gary, soon to be my brother-in-law. I was nine years old and my memory of that day was vague except for one incident. When we entered the house, my Father and three older brothers were listening intently to the radio. Then one picked up a broomstick as if it were a rifle and began to march around the room, followed by my other brothers. They were shouting about how they were going to kill all those Japs. I don't remember anything else that day. The next event I remember was going with my Mother to see the youngest brother (except for me) Kelly, who was nineteen, board a train. He had an Army uniform on and carried a packed duffel bag. My mother was crying disconsolately which affected my brother but he tried not to show it. He was my Mother's favorite son, besides me, and she often spoke about what a good heart he had but also bad luck. Here he was, the first of the sons to go to war.

My other two brothers entered the service later. My oldest brother, John, was twenty years older than I was. He was a practicing lawyer and had the opportunity to be an officer in the Army but decided to enter as an enlisted man because he didn't want any advantages.

Eventually, however, he did enter Officer Candidate School and became an officer in the Judge Advocate Corps.

My other brother, Joe, was attending the University of Minnesota as an Engineering student. After graduating, he received a deferment from military service by working for Thompson Aircraft Products in Ohio. He became uncomfortable with his deferment and joined the Navy.



Kelly served from 1942-1946



Joe, on right, with Navy buddy 1943



John as enlistee, 1942



Captain John and secretary 1944



Our three stars: Kelly, John and Joe, 1944

Like so many families then, we were very proud of our servicemen and had three stars displayed prominently on our front door. When Kelly was temporarily assigned to the Army Air Corps, I felt really good about having a brother in the Army, Navy and Air Corps.

Along with other young boys of my age, I soon became knowledgeable about the weapons of war, particularly the airplanes. We would argue about which were the fastest and of course would play war games. I particularly liked the P-38 Lightning because of its twin fuselage. The P-47 Thunderbolt and P-58 Mustang were favorites too. There were model kits for all of these airplanes that I would buy. In our games, the US fighters would shoot down the German Messerschmidt 109s and the Japanese Zeros. Very rarely were our fighters shot down. Then there was the B17 Flying Fortress. What a plane!! Big, sleek, armed to the teeth. Believe me, we blew up a lot of German and Japanese targets with them. Unlike the reality, we lost very few planes.

There were lots of songs during the Duration. They ranged from nostalgic to patriotic to humorous. "I'll be Seeing You" was very sentimental. "Johnny Got a Zero" was gung-ho. "They're Either Too Young or Too Old" depicted the plight of young ladies without young men to date. And the war movies. There were lots of them. After seeing them you were ready to go out and shoot every Jap and German you saw. Although there were virtually no Japanese where I lived, there were many German Americans. It sort of got tricky when you spoke of killing Germans. I remember one of my older cousins cautioning me about speaking anti-German slogans because she was married to a German American.

Whether it be in movies or on the radio, Hitler and Togo were depicted as either monsters or clowns. I remember one song with lyrics that said "When the Fuhrer says 'we is the Master Race,' we will blat...blat...right in the Fuhrer's face." We young kids would especially love this song and would sing it with a German accent. Very little was said about the Italians, however.

As I said, the prevailing opinion was that Italians really didn't want to fight; they were lovers not fighters. I remember my brothers talking about the Italians when they invaded Greece. They would laugh about how the Greeks were beating them with rocks and stones even though the Italians had a lot of equipment. It really didn't surprise many of us when Italy surrendered to the Allies before the war ended. Mussolini was depicted as a buffoon, which in fact he was.

Ours was a big family. In addition to my three brothers, I had five sisters. My brothers and sisters were all born about two years apart, except for me. I was eight years younger than my sister Joan, the second youngest in the family. My oldest brother and a few of my oldest sisters were old enough to be my parents. My parents were pretty strict with most of my brothers and sisters but less so with me. I guess you could say I was spoiled, at least in comparison with the rest of my siblings. I think my youngest sister was a little spoiled too. Although I don't remember too much, apparently my sisters would dote on me when I was real little. As for my parents, they were really like grandparents in a way. My Dad was fifty years older than I, and my Mother forty. My oldest sister, Effie, experienced tragedy as a young bride with a daughter. Her first husband, a city inspector, was killed when a sewer system he was inspecting collapsed. She remarried some years later.



Dad & Mom Abdo 1940's

My sister Louise married just before the War started and my sister Linda married during the War. Betty, the second oldest sister, married after the War and my youngest sister, Joan, never did marry. A few years after graduating from high school, Joan became a professional nightclub singer. She left home to sing at nightclubs back East and my sister Betty joined her for a while. Both eventually returned home.



Louise's Wedding, November 1941
The ring bearer (to the bride's right) is the author, age 9



Linda's Wedding, 1942
Kelly, Joan, Linda, Gary

My parents immigrated to the United States from Lebanon in 1909, shortly after they were married. Dad would sometimes talk about the journey and how he thought Naples was a pretty city, viewing it from the ship. He said he came to America because he wanted to make a better life for himself. He, too, came from a big family, mostly brothers. He would talk about them and his Father occasionally, particularly about how they reacted to his leaving. According to Dad, his family resented his desire to leave Lebanon. They viewed him as thinking he was better than they were and a deserter. Dad would get upset in talking about this and felt strongly that his Father and brothers were jealous of him. Years later, although he had the opportunity, Dad never returned to Lebanon. Mother was much younger than Dad, a teenager when she married him. When they left for America, Dad was 26 and Mom 16. Unlike Dad, Mom didn't seem to have unpleasant memories of Lebanon and did visit there many years later.

Like a lot of immigrants, my folks had a hard life when they first came to America. Neither one could speak any English. Both eventually learned to speak it quite well, although with an accent. Dad also learned to read and write English but Mom never did. In the beginning, Dad took a variety of jobs, including working for the city of Minneapolis but eventually started businesses in cigar making and groceries. The

businesses produced enough income to provide the basics for the family but not much more. He loved to fish and hunt and later in his life started a resort business in northern Minnesota a few years before the War. He used to talk about how difficult the grocery business was, particularly during the Depression when a lot of customers defaulted in paying their bills. During the War, Dad worked part time in a grocery store for a while.

The Duration required a major change in lifestyles but most people seemed to tolerate it pretty well. To allocate resources for the War, rationing was imposed. Families were given ration coupons to buy scarce items. For example, I remember certain foods were really scarce, such as bananas, bacon and all kinds of meat, canned goods of all kinds, candy, etc. Wasting food was not tolerated, at least in our family. I was always reminded to finish my plate by thinking of the starving children in Europe. Funny, I don't remember being told much about the starving children in Asia. Gasoline was rationed too but then where would you go? Daily commutes were done mostly by streetcar. Vacation trips were, to say the least, not very feasible. Resorts and other vacation sites were mostly shut down. I remember my sisters longing for nylon stockings that were scarce because nylon was a critical war material. Then of course we were asked to collect things that could assist in the War effort. Things such as newspapers and magazines, tin cans and tinfoil (we would peel off the tin foil in gum wrappers and roll them into balls) and, believe it or not, grease. As a young boy I could never understand why grease would be valuable. I finally learned it was used in making explosives. We were all encouraged to have "Victory Gardens" so we could supply all of our own fruits and vegetables. This was no big deal because my parents always had a garden anyway. Often we would refer to something made before the War as "prewar" and that implied it was well made because substitute materials were not used. To help finance the War, you could buy war bonds and war stamps. I would buy war stamps and paste them in stamp books.

Entertainment was very restricted except for radio and the movies. Movies were really packed. My Dad had rarely gone to movies previously but I remember him taking me to see some. One movie, "Wilson" shown by our neighborhood theater, was so crowded we had to stand for the entire movie. We also listened to radio shows such as one featuring Bob Hope with Jerry Colona and Frances Langford. Hope was quite entertaining and constantly made jokes about the servicemen and the War. I really think he helped a lot of us psychologically in keeping our morale up. News of course was very important and we were always anxious to hear reports from newscasters such as Edward R. Murrow broadcasting from London. There was usually a lot of static in his reports and his sentences were often cut off but you generally got the gist of what he was saying. I remember vividly his reports of how many merchant ships were sunk by

German U-Boats as they crossed the Atlantic to England. It seemed ships were being sunk every day and I would think to myself whether or not we would run out of ships. He also reported on the air raids over Germany and other parts of Europe by US and Allied planes. The news was very serious but also very exciting. In school, I used to love the "March of Time" and other patriotic newsreels they would show during school assembly. Most evenings Dad and I would play darts and other games at home.

One time we got a call from a guy who said he was a Lebanese from South Africa and visiting the Minneapolis area. My parents were elated with the possibility of seeing him and invited him over for dinner. I vaguely remember him but I do remember he was a big guy and talked a lot. It turned out he was a schemer and apparently milked some money out of my parents. My parents were often very gullible when it came to Lebanese.

Of my three brothers, Kelly was the only one who spent time in a combat zone. He went to England and then France and Germany, serving in the Medical Corps. We were always worried about him and I got real nervous when the phone rang. I didn't realize that if bad news came, it would be delivered in person or by a telegram. My other brothers John and Joe, stayed in the states during the War. John eventually got promoted to Captain and was assigned as a Judge Advocate Officer to a prisoner of war camp in Scottsbluff, Nebraska.



Kelly in the Medical Corps, 1944

Both John and Joe got married during the War. John married a Lebanese American girl, Helen Jacob, in a military wedding in Tucson, Arizona, her hometown. Joe married Dorothy Lehn, a German American girl from rural Minnesota, while he was assigned to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. My brothers would periodically call and visit us on leave. Later, Kelly would just write to us after he was assigned overseas. I was very proud of them and got very excited when I saw them. They would call me "runt" and asked how I was doing in school.



John and Helen Abdo, 1944



Dorothy & Joe Abdo, 1944

When we exchanged letters, they asked how things were doing at home. I remember their letters being censored. Since Dad's writing wasn't that good, I would write the letters for Mom and Dad. Although they could speak English well, when they dictated to me their grammar wasn't that good and I remember how I would try to correct the grammar while writing the letters. This was very frustrating for me and often I would get upset with them. I really didn't like to do it and, like other boys my age, I wanted to play or do other things that I liked. After writing letters for my folks for a while, my brothers all told me to stop trying to correct their grammar and write the letters exactly as they dictated. They said they wanted the letters to sound just like my folks talked because it meant a lot more to them that way. This made my job easier and I didn't mind doing it so much.

In later years, I wondered what my childhood would have been like if there hadn't been a war and if my brothers were all home. The time span of the duration covered the formative years of my life. I really didn't have role models such as my brothers except in a very abstract sense. Because I was too young to know any of them that well before they entered the service, they were somewhat mythical to me. My folks would talk about what they were like. Although he was fond of all the boys, Dad particularly liked John and would speak about his accomplishments. John was smart, energetic and accomplished a lot. He got "A's" in school, was president of his high school class, a boy scout (he almost made Eagle), valedictorian, editor of the school newspaper. He also loved sports and was very competitive. He particularly liked football but he was small and after getting injured was advised not to play anymore. From the time he was very young, John wanted to be a lawyer and his life was focused on attaining that objective.

He graduated from the University of Minnesota with a law degree, the first to do so in the Lebanese American community in Minneapolis. It would be an understatement to say that Dad was proud of him.

According to my folks, Joe was also smart but was a rebellious child, bordering on being a juvenile delinquent. He was actually kicked out of high school but reinstated after vowing to change his ways. After graduating from school, he entered the University of Minnesota and earned a degree in Mechanical Engineering. While at the University he joined the wrestling team and competed as a wrestler in the lightweight class. I remember seeing him compete against opponents and was thrilled when he won. Joe had a lot of mechanical aptitude and could fix things in the house.

My brother Kelly was well liked and contributed a lot to the family. As a young boy he was a very successful paperboy and would win awards for expanding his route. When he became older he worked at various jobs. During all of this time he gave money to Mom and Dad. When Dad started his resort business, Kelly worked very hard in helping him get established. He helped to clear the land and build the cabins.

As I mentioned, my oldest sister Effie became a widow as a young bride. Although she and John could only speak Arabic as young children, they soon learned English. Effie became a legal secretary when she grew up and met her second husband, Don, an attorney, at work. She, along with my other sisters, was very fond of me as a child and would take me for rides in her car.

Betty and Linda worked in various office jobs. Louise became a beautician and Joan worked as a secretary prior to singing professionally. Effie, Betty and Joan all had good singing voices. Effie and Betty liked classical music and were very fond of Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald. (As a young boy, I refused to believe that Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald were not married.) As I mentioned, Joan became a professional singer a few years after she graduated from high school. She left home and sang in nightclubs in Chicago, Baltimore and other places. Betty joined her for a while and they roomed together before eventually returning home. None of my sisters attended college though I'm sure some of them would have done quite well. They were good cooks and attentive to the needs of our parents.

During the War, I attended a Catholic elementary school and then a public junior high school. While training to become an altar boy I remember I learned my Latin before most of the other boys but was the last to serve. I really can't explain why this happened but I think about it now and then. The parish was heavily Irish and I tend to suspect perhaps there was some favoritism in selecting Irish boys. When I finally did

serve, I remember pouring water and wine for Father O'Brian. It was light on the water and heavy on the wine. The nuns at the school were pretty strict but generally nice. I remember one, Sister Anthem, who was usually very pleasant but boy did she have a temper. When she got mad her face would get red and she would grab and shake you. Other than that, if you knew how to handle her you could get away with almost anything. Because of my ethnic background, I was initially viewed as an outsider by the other students. Minneapolis was predominantly populated by people of Northern European ancestry, many of whom were Scandinavian and German. In our particular neighborhood there were also a lot of Irish, Poles and other Eastern Europeans. There were also a few Italians but not many. I would get into fights, mostly with Irish and Polish kids. I remember one time when I got a new bike with balloon tires and one of the local Irish kids belittled it. I became furious with him and we got into a fistfight. I won. Because of my olive complexion I was often the subject of ethnic slurs. Believe me, I was called "nigger", "wop", "kike", "camel rider", etc., many times.

However, not all of the kids would call me names and some were actually friendly with me. My closest childhood buddy was Duane Nasser, a Lebanese American boy. He was two years younger than I and we had a lot of fun together. As for the girls, I was extremely shy in their company. In class I remember a very pretty blonde girl--I think she was of Swedish ancestry--who was very friendly and sat behind me. She would periodically ask if she could borrow a pencil. I was so shy I would give her one without turning around to look at her. I continued to be shy of girls all through junior high and even high school.

I wasn't just shy of girls but shy generally throughout my youth. While I always had a few buddies with whom I socialized, I was basically a loner. I remember one of my homeroom teachers in high school telling me I should try and mix more with other students. His name was Mr. Erickson. During homeroom period he would read passages of the Bible to us. It was really weird. The students in the class were very unruly and would always be yelling and shouting at each other while he was reading. He really didn't try to control them and just kept on reading so they paid no attention to him. Starting from grade school, I was usually a pretty good student. I liked history and geography but didn't care much for math. One class I found challenging was shop. We did metalwork and woodwork. We sanded, planed, soldered and made a lot of things. A lot of boys in the class were pretty good but I struggled.

There was a period in junior high school when I wanted to be "one of the boys" and became very rebellious and disobedient. It was almost a mark of distinction among the rough kids in my class when a teacher would signal me out for discipline. I think I was trying to win their acceptance. My grades dropped dramatically during this time. Then

I became ashamed of my grades and started to study again. Also, I developed other interests. I started to play the trumpet in the seventh grade. You had to choose between singing in the chorus or playing in the band. I chose the band and playing the trumpet because I really liked Harry James. I also liked to draw and sketched various subjects, especially athletes and pretty girls. I really had a crush on Esther Williams.

I remember a few of the teachers I had in junior high during the War. Miss Schafer was our science teacher. She was very serious. Miss Dolan was our art teacher and very pretty. Mr. Boylan was our physical education teacher. He was a tall, athletic guy who tried to encourage us. Whenever we performed a particular activity well, he would say, "all right, guy." Our band teacher had an accent--I think he was Austrian or something like that--and he kept trying to discourage me from playing the trumpet. He said my lips were too full for the trumpet and I would be better off playing the sousaphone. It turned out he needed sousaphone players. I just kept on playing the trumpet. What he said was confusing to me because there were a lot of good Negro trumpet players, such as Louis Armstrong, and they had full lips. After the War ended, I remember some of the teachers returning from service. They seemed to fit right in and we admired them.

I was an average athlete. I played the usual playground games in grade school but really liked football and basketball. Somehow, I never really got that interested in baseball. I got confused about where to throw the ball after I fielded it and had difficulty hitting. If I were a better player perhaps the game wouldn't have bored me so much. Playing football and basketball were more enjoyable even though I was smaller than most of the kids my age and not particularly gifted. There was a Polish kid in my class that was a terrific athlete. He was really coordinated and a natural athlete, especially in football and basketball. On top of that he was also much bigger than the rest of us. In high school he became All City in football and got a football scholarship from the University of Minnesota. Unlike many other good athletes, he wasn't cocky. As if all this wasn't enough, he was also good looking and the girls really went for him. After he graduated from high school he started to lose his hair and became prematurely bald. There seemed to be a lot of good athletes among my classmates, many of them of Eastern European ancestry. There also was an Italian kid in junior high who was a good athlete but boy what a juvenile delinquent. He would constantly go out of his way to disobey teachers and raise hell in class. Later on, after he graduated from high school, he enlisted in the Air Force and he returned a completely changed person.

Even though gasoline was rationed while the War was on, we still took a few trips. They were mostly to the resort Dad started before the War. The resort was about 180 miles from home and I remember one trip with Dad, Mom and me going with Effie in her car. I think she averaged about 35 mph and I thought we were never going to get there. Dad also took some trips to the resort with some of his Lebanese friends. After catching fish they would wrap them in damp newspapers and throw them into a roaring fire in the fireplace. I thought this very strange but the fish tasted good. Dad often told me he hoped I would be more interested in hunting and fishing than my other brothers. I was at first but then lost interest as I grew older.



Ron and Dad Abdo at their Resort in Northern Minnesota, 1940

One of the most embarrassing moments I remember while growing up during the War was in grade school. Although I don't remember, apparently during a medical exam a doctor detected that I had a slight heart murmur. Mother, with the best of intentions, took it upon herself to announce before my class that I had heart trouble. I was absolutely humiliated because I felt ok and didn't want to be singled out by the other kids. For a while after that, when I would be playing with other boys, one would say, "You better go easy with Abdo, he's got a bad heart." It's funny because for years after that incident other doctors were never able to detect a murmur. I competed in sports, served in the Army and never had any problem. It was only much later in life that a cardiologist noted I had a slight murmur, which really wasn't very significant.

As a youth I became a Boy Scout. The troop was at St Anthony, my grade school. While a scout I had some interesting experiences, many of them associated with hiking and camping trips. One time we were hiking in a big, grassy field that was swarming with garter snakes. Even though garter snakes are harmless, I was afraid of them and some of the other boys noticed this. While we were camping, they tied a bunch of them together and placed them under my blanket. You can imagine my reaction when I came to sleep. One time on a camping trip it started to rain and we had to start a fire. I managed to start one by gathering leaves under a tree and managed to win the approval of the Scoutmaster and the other scouts. We had different Scoutmasters but I remember one in particular. He was very helpful and wanted us to do well but he was drunk a lot of the time. Often I could smell alcohol on his breath and was puzzled how he could be a Scoutmaster. I attained the rank of First Class Scout, the first in our troop to do so, and earned three merit badges. Then I lost interest in the Scouts.

I remember working as a paperboy during the War. My route was close to our home so it was convenient. I really didn't enjoy it all that much but I did have some interesting experiences. There was a big German Shepherd that lived in one of the apartment buildings on my route. I was afraid of it and would try to avoid it whenever I could. When delivering newspapers to that apartment I was always apprehensive of seeing that dog. Early one morning the weather was overcast and bleak. When I entered the apartment it was so dark you could barely see the hand in front of you. As I slowly climbed the stairs I brushed against what appeared to be the dog. My heart was racing so fast I could hear it. I glanced sideways very cautiously and, sure enough, there it was. Remarkably, it just continued sleeping and didn't bother me. Collecting payment for the papers gave me some insight into people. I remember vividly one house where several young women were living. It smelled so bad I felt like holding my nose when I went in. Most of the time they said to come back later to get paid. They got so far behind in paying me that I finally had to get one of the managers to come with me. I remember how nice they acted with him and they finally paid. There was also an older couple on my route that were just wonderful to me. When I came to collect they would invite me in to have milk and cookies and would chat with me.

I also worked at a grocery store during the War. The owner was Lebanese and a friend of my parents. You could tell who his favorite customers were because he would hide the really scarce rationed items under the counter to sell to them. I found the job boring.

We lived on the second floor of a two story brick building located on a corner intersected by two busy streets. It was originally a commercial building and the first story was occupied for many years by Dad's grocery business before he sold it a few

years before the War. The store got robbed several times through the years but fortunately no one ever got harmed. After Dad sold the grocery business, he would rent out the first story to various businesses. Streetcars ran on one street and on one side of the house you could hear the rumble and the clanging of bells. The building was really old. When helping to do repairs in the house, I remember how the original nails were flat and looked as if they were hand made. The basement was dark and damp and I would occasionally see a rat when I went down to shovel coal in our furnace during the winter. It did have one advantage, though. It was cool during the hot and humid Minnesota summers and I would go down there to work on my hobbies.

My parents had only a few relatives in the United States. My Dad had a cousin, Sadie, a shy but very nice lady who lived in a small Wisconsin town near the Minnesota-Wisconsin border. Her husband was a Lebanese American and worked for the railroad. We would visit each other occasionally. They had one child, a daughter, Frances, who eventually worked for the Federal government in Arlington, Virginia. Mother had a sister, Martha, who lived nearby. She was married to Uncle George. Like my folks, both immigrated to America from Lebanon. Although Mom and Dad would see them occasionally, they really didn't get along all that well. My Mother thought my Aunt was crude and just about everyone in our family thought Uncle George was stupid. Uncle George was quite a character. He was about average height and very strong. I remember him taking walks just about every day. He spent a lot of time reading Arabic books and papers. John would say that Uncle George could read for hours and not understand anything he read. He firmly believed the world was flat. They had six children, three boys and three girls. Like us, they lived on the second floor of a commercial brick building. Two of their children, Lorraine and Phillip, were mentally deficient. Lorraine was severely handicapped mentally and spent all her time in a mental institution. I don't remember ever seeing her. Phillip was just slightly handicapped and although institutionalized for most of the year, he was able to live at home during the summer. He was six years older than I and we would play together when I was young.

My sister Effie and her husband, Don, lived in a lovely home in a very nice neighborhood in St. Paul. I would always look forward to visiting them. They had two children, RaeAnn, from her previous marriage, and Johnny. RaeAnn was just three years younger than I and we would play together. I especially remember when we would visit them at Halloween because we would get great goodies when we went for "tricks or treat." In our neighborhood in Minneapolis, I don't remember any kids going out for "tricks or treat." Maybe they wouldn't get much. One time I remember walking by myself from our house to Effie's house as a young boy. It was quite a distance but I made it okay. It was exciting.

My sister Louise and her husband, Mitch, lived in a nice home in Minneapolis. I remember babysitting their first boy, Mitchell. Linda and her husband, Gary, lived in a pleasant apartment, also in Minneapolis.

When U.S. troops invaded North Africa, it was the first taste of land battle for our soldiers in the fight against the Germans and Italians. The names of U.S. General Patton, English General Montgomery and the German General Rommel, the "desert fox," were in the news constantly. Then of course there was the top guy, General Eisenhower. Prime Minister Churchill of England was also very prominent. FDR was very reassuring, giving us patriotic talks over the radio periodically. After the Allies invaded Italy and the Italians surrendered, I thought we would take over Italy without much of a problem but it didn't work out that way. The Germans rushed thousands of troops to Italy and put up a hell of a fight. The battles were fierce and took place in rugged terrain.

When "D Day," the Normandy Invasion, occurred, all of us got excited and knew it really meant the beginning of the end of the European War. The radio, newspapers and movie news segments all dramatically portrayed General Eisenhower and his staff, the soldiers packed into the landing boats, the English Channel swarming with all kinds of ships and the thousands of planes covering the sky. Omaha Beach became infamous because of the severe casualties suffered by our soldiers. The Allies advanced rapidly through Europe although the Battle of the Bulge was a setback around Christmas of 1944. We overcame that, however, and moved on. On the Eastern Front, the Russians were doing real well. The Battle of Stalingrad seemed to go on forever and the Germans failed to capture it. It was the turning point in the fight on the Eastern Front.

In the Pacific, the war seemed to move more slowly. We were all thrilled when General Doolittle's planes bombed Tokyo shortly after the war started but then it got really tough. A lot of battles took place on islands in the South Pacific, such as Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Iwo Jima, Saipan and Okinawa. We saw depictions of tough jungle fighting and our soldiers and marines suffering casualties both from fighting and from diseases such as malaria. The sight of flame-throwers and pill-boxes became commonplace. Even though we would bombard the hell out of them before invading, the Japs always seemed to still be there and ready to fight. After the islands were captured, we would build airfields on them for our planes. On the sea, the Battle of Midway proved to be a turning point and we sank a lot of Japanese ships although we lost some as well. Further North, the Japs invaded Attu in the Aleutian Islands but vacated it without a fight. After General MacArthur's troops invaded the Philippines, we knew we were closing in on the Japs. We were concerned, however, that they were

more fanatical than the Germans. When kamakazi planes started to attack U.S. ships, we worried that the Pacific War would go on forever.

In April, 1945, I was working on a model airplane after school in the afternoon when news came that President Roosevelt died. It was really shocking. I had never known any other president since I was born. It was very ironic that he died only a month or so before the Germans surrendered. I remembered his meetings with Churchill and Stalin and he was starting to look real tired and worn down. My folks and the rest of the family really admired him as well as Mrs. Roosevelt. I was disappointed when his successor, Harry Truman, took over. He was a very plain looking guy with glasses and talked with a twang. As time went on he proved to be a pretty damn good president himself.

After the Germans surrendered, we knew the War was only half won and wondered how long it would take to conquer the Japs. We were sure it would be very tough going because the Japanese would fight to the last man. When we dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the news hit us like something from outer space. Most people didn't know what atomic meant and when we saw pictures of the mushroom cloud after the explosion, we were overwhelmed. We kept hearing news reports about how this was going to change the world forever. Shortly after a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, the Japanese surrendered. The War was over!!!



Kelly Abdo, 1945

Naturally all of us at home were hilarious and relieved that the War was finally over. Joe was the first of the boys to come home, then John and finally Kelly. Initially, everyone was grateful and happy about the boys being back. But then there were problems. First of all, there was a severe housing shortage. This was especially a problem for John and Joe, who were married. It seemed that no matter how hard they looked it was impossible to find a place to live. Finally it was decided that John and Helen, who now had a boy, Bob, would live in rooms we had previously rented in our building. Joe and Dorothy were eventually able to find an apartment. Kelly, being single, moved back in with us.

All of the boys were preoccupied with catching up on their lives and careers. John returned to the law firm he had been working in. Joe got a job with Honeywell as an engineer. Kelly enrolled at the University of Minnesota under the GI bill. Then family

squabbles began. My sisters Betty and Joan did not get along with Helen and Dorothy. My Mother was also critical of them.

As a young boy of 14, I was confused by what I viewed as a most chaotic and incomprehensible situation. How could there be so many arguments when my brothers all got back safe and sound? Why were my brothers so immediately preoccupied with their careers before savoring their return to civilian life? After such a long absence I thought my brothers would be more interested in speaking with me, their kid brother, about growing up during the War. Not that they ignored me. They were all pleased about how much I had grown. They would periodically measure my height and felt sure that at the rate I was growing I was sure to reach six feet. I didn't. John and Joe were concerned that I got good grades in school. Kelly was especially preoccupied by trying to accomplish several things at the same time. Besides attending college, he worked at a part-time job. Then he tried out and made the college boxing team. On top of this, he would socialize at night by bar hopping with his childhood friend, Al. The result of this was that he simply bit off more than he could chew. His grades suffered and he didn't do well in boxing because he didn't train enough. Looking back now, I can understand more about why my brothers wanted to "catch up" on their lives after the War. I still wish, however, that they would have spent more time with me.

Eventually, all of them became quite successful. John developed a flourishing law practice. Joe and Kelly started an engineering company that prospered.

The Duration was a unique time in my life. In some ways, life was very simple then. Because of rationing and other restrictions, you had fewer options of things to do. You didn't think much about where you were going on vacation or deciding about what to buy at the shops. There wasn't a lot of frivolity in life because everyone was so concerned about the War. My parents and others would remind me about what life was like before the War. On the other hand, we would also speculate about what life would be like after the War. So much in life seemed to be put on hold. It was a time that encouraged people to be more introspective, even young boys like me. Once the War was over, however, the Duration was quickly forgotten. It was the past, a blip in our history. Our attention was now immediately on the NOW, the life AFTER the Duration. It was a new world and everybody wanted to catch up and indulge themselves in everything they were deprived of. There was a huge, pent up demand for all sorts of goods and services. Veterans and civilians alike wanted to buy everything that was still scarce like automobiles and homes. They wanted to have a good time and went to nightclubs, took trips, went fishing and hunting and did a lot of things they hadn't been able to do. The restraint so prevalent during the Duration was quickly forgotten. It was now time to move on, enjoy yourself and get a piece of the action.

The life style of people who lived during the Duration has been lost forever. People were so anxious for the Duration to end that once it ended it seemed to disappear in our minds. The experience of sacrifice, restraint and profound patriotism which so many of us had during the War essentially disappeared. Since then we have compensated manyfold for the restrictions under which we lived. For me, it was a defining period of my life. I grew from a young boy of nine to a teenager. I had a lot of questions about life then but not many answers. Will I be a success or failure? What were my brothers really like? Would I grow up to be like them? Would I ever have the same experience of going to war? What if I disappoint them? Some of these questions remained with me long after the Duration was over. I think that by now I've answered most of them but it took me a while. To me, the Duration will always be significant, a time of hope and remembrance.



Ron, wearing Captain John's jacket and hat, 1944