

A NECESSARY WAR

Consensus seems to say that the 15 hour PBS series: 'The War' projects all the trial and triumph of that horrendous Second World War, precipitated by the Pearl Harbor attack but already a fait accompli by President Roosevelt 'secret strategy' -aiding both the English and Soviets (after Germany invaded). One can almost smell the fetid jungle of Guadalcanal, the flight of Torpedo Squadron Eight at Midway (all perished except for Ensign Gay) -like the 600 at Balaklava-the terrible early days of 1942 before Jimmy Doolittle's famous raid on Tokyo with B26s subsequently. And the road back by the Russians..... stopping the German a few miles from Moscow and then Stalingrad. Torch (landing in North Africa) by American troops hoping to join the British from Alamein, a tonic in late 1942. Landings on Sicily and Salerno began the tortuous fight up Italy.

A meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill on a naval vessel near America solidified the strategy: Germany first, then Japan and Unconditional Surrender to trump any attempt by the Axis to seek a peace or armistice. Stalin, now a partner, wanted a second front to ease his situation and plans considered the 'soft underbelly of the Balkans' (Churchill) and/or a straight shot into France (Roosevelt).

A two-way thrust by MacArthur and Nimitz in the Pacific War revealed the former in the south from Guadalcanal, New Guinea, to the Philippines as Nimitz struck the Gilberts, Marshalls and Palaus. Terrible losses at Tarawa and Peleliu resonated.

Despite the great sweep of armies in several theaters, propaganda aimed at the jew-hating German and the slant-eyed, buck-toothed Jap- an exercise between Good and Evil- was this a proper analysis of the confrontation? It is said, Ken Burns, in his 'strategic vision' saw his major thrust should be to thwart any whiff of celebration, no hint of triumph or testament to the character of the nation thrown into war in December 1941. Some say this is dangerous but would agree there is no such thing as 'good wars'. Necessary war, certainly!

The real strength of this series is the voice of those who participated at the moment of truth and are representative of the four locales, Burns draws his sample: Luverne, Minnesota (a throwback to the Norwegian, Swedish immigrants in that area); Waterbury, Connecticut, and better known, Mobile and

Sacramento: Quentin Aanenson, a fighter pilot from Luverne and Babe Ciarlo from Waterbury. Ciarlo, an Italian, fought in Italy keeping his mother out of the war with his tales of good food and good living denying the hell of the Italy fight. Earl Burke, Sacramento, lost a younger brother, a pilot, via a training accident but arrived in England as an aerial gunner on a B-17; Schweinfurt daylight raids are vivid reminder of two where 1200 Americans died.

'Without fighter escort we were sitting ducks', Burke remembered and after two serious wounds, came home. Honored from Mobile were Glenn Frazier, a survivor of the Bataan Death March as a POW, along with Katherine Phillips, a Southern lady of panache and pride. I spent a few moments with Colonel Glenn Frazier at the Mobile showing.

Irony is there for the uneducated or 2-somethings who were unsure whether it was the Chinese or Italians who bombed Pearl Harbor. Burns recognized this incongruity as well as the delay in story telling when it is said 1000 WWII veterans die each day. He finds the War experiences as bloodless or unfeeling and cruel. This is a stretch but the realization a soldier fights for his buddies and if the enemy employs these methods, the proof is in the pudding. Tit for tat!

As we who were left behind settled into a long war the homefront was part of the 'awakening giant concept' alleged to have been said by Japan's Naval leader, Yamamoto after the Pearl Harbor attack. The young were seen scrambling to join the military while the old, both women and men, were involved in what became America's Arsenal of Democracy: shipbuilding, plane and tank assembly among other war requirements. Each town were like the four represented here, involved in the war effort. Blackouts at night were enforced especially along the West Coast, and rationing of foodstuffs, liquor, cigarettes, gasoline, and much else was ordered. Fund raisers led by celebrities were in vogue and I remember the tragic death of Carol Lombard while on one of these. We were as one. Most of my high school classmates were already in the service while old friend Kenny Franklin and I waited The Navy had turned me down and I went to work at Douglas Aircraft on the Graveyard Shift; I was 17. I still had hopes that the Army would find a place for me.

Vivid still was remembering the fate of Tadashi Matsuoka and Tom Ishii, Japanese-Americans here one day and gone the next as they among others were interned in relocation camps. They were good Americans and proved it again later. Segregation in the military and down South did not keep the blacks from seeking better jobs and enlistment.

As 1943 began the war went on in all its fury and it seemed it would last for an eternity.....and so it went.