A Social History Of The World War II Era, 1943-1945, As Seen Through The Eyes Of U.S. Soldier William A. Reynolds

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"More than an end to war, we want an end to the beginnings of all wars."¹

Franklin Delano Roosevelt - 1945

World War II raged into its fourth year in 1944. In upstate New York, a common cab driver in Rochester received his draft notice from the U.S. Army. William Reynolds, the driver of a 1942 Plymouth taxi, enlisted on April 7 of 1944, thrusting this common American into the global conflict, and changing his life forever.

Historians have often retraced the history of World War II on a global scale, examining the war through the perspectives of entire nations as they clashed. As the best oral histories have illustrated, the most personal stories of World War II can be illuminated in very human ways through the eyes of everyday Americans and their personal experiences. One person who lived through the era and provides a valuable look at being an American and a soldier was William Reynolds, who suddenly became a soldier during the height of World War II.
This thesis is an examination of Reynolds' experiences from 1943 to 1945 during World War II. A look at his personal account of the war helps to provide unique insight into what it was like to be a young man during World War II, and how individual lives were affected.

However, before the individual experiences of Reynolds are examined, it is important, to take a brief look at America during World War II to help us understand the sweeping change that took place in the United States. The first chapter will examine World War II's effect on the United States in general, and particularly the changes that Americans like Reynolds were forced to make as the war raged. Individual citizens, national unity, families, and even pop culture felt the influence of the global conflict.

The World War II era was a unique period not only for the United States, but for most of the globe. During the tension-filled times of the late 1930s and early 1940s, Americans and many other peoples were concerned about their national survival. For many in the United States, the threat of Nazi Germany and the Axis powers was real. As the historian Studs Terkel noted, World War II was "an event that changed the psyche as well as the face of the United States and of the world."²

Terkel and others have been correct in their
descriptions of how World War II enraptured so many on Earth. The war had profound implications for large nations and for individual citizens. As for the historical significance of World War II, the historian Marvin Rapp accurately describes the conflict as "a war that affected more lives and caused more deaths than any war in the history of the world since time began." Indeed, for the world in general, the war was all encompassing and all consuming.

As for the impact on everyday individuals like Reynolds in the United States, the force of World War II was no less consuming. Common working class men suddenly found themselves in the role of soldiers, while women quickly moved into the work force. The war caused ordinary Americans to be placed in positions they could have never have imagined before the conflict began. Over the course of a few years, Americans went through changes of unimaginable proportions. As one citizen-soldier like Reynolds from Chicago remarked,

World War Two has affected me in many ways ever since. In a short period of time, I had the most tremendous experiences of all of life: of fear, of jubilation, of misery, of hope, of comradeship, and of endless excitement. I honestly feel grateful for having been a witness to an event as monumental as anything in history and, in a very small way, a participant.
The unifying effect of the war was immediately apparent. Americans rallied together for victory more than any other time in the nation’s history, producing a sense of unequaled national unity. As Richard Polenberg wrote, "Americans were brought together by a common sense of danger and hatred of the enemy." The scope of the World War II era is evident to anyone who lived through the time, as Americans at the time understood the need for the United States to lead the allies to victory.

As some argue, however, that the widespread feeling of American unity was less about defeating the Axis than it was about not wanting to let other Americans down. This notion of connection to other Americans was particularly evident on the battle lines. As it has been noted by one soldier, often the motivations of American soldiers was directed toward their peers: "The reason you storm the beaches is not patriotism or bravery. It’s that sense of not wanting to fail your buddies. There’s sort of a special sense of kinship." At home and on the battlefront, the American sense of unity certainly proved to be a critical element in the national war effort.

The American feeling of unity was coupled with a high level of determination as well. Those fighting for the U. S. were extremely focused on one fundamental goal, victory for
the allies. The United States would accept nothing but a victory for the Allies. As historians Walter LaFeber, Richard Polenberg, and Nancy Woloch have noted, "On the homefront Americans were single-minded in their pursuit of victory. On the battlefield they waged campaigns with the same determination." It seemed to many Americans that even the President was as determined as everyday Americans, since President Roosevelt declared his shift from, "Dr. New Deal," to "Dr. Win The War."  

American culture was strongly affected by the war as well, which Americans like Reynolds were sure to have noticed. The image of "Rosie the Riveter" was featured on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post in 1943, emphasizing the importance of women aiding the war effort by working in factories. However, it wasn’t just Norman Rockwell sketches that helped to create the wartime culture in the United States. Other media forms, such as music and films, also reflected the era by depicting the dominant war themes. Songs like "We’ll Knock the Japs Right into the Laps of the Nazis" and "You’re a Sap, Mr. Jap" were popular in nightclubs and on radios during the war. In addition, films such as "Wake Island" and "V for Victory" were produced by Hollywood, also contributing to the unique wartime culture. Immediately after the Japanese bombing of
Pearl Harbor, films of this variety depicting the war in the Pacific were rushed into production. In the end, images in art, music, and films all helped to reinforce the American need for patriotism, sacrifice, and unity.

Perhaps the most affected part of American society during World War II was the American family. Drastic changes in family leadership and family lifestyle took place as fathers became soldiers. Because the nation needed to continue to be productive in the absence of male workers, women took on tremendous amounts of responsibility on the homefront, greatly changing the face of American families. Alan Brinkley and Ellen Fitzpatrick were accurate in stating, "World War II affected women and the family in ways that few Americans could have anticipated before the war began."  

Women in American households suddenly found themselves at the head of those households in the absence of their husbands. As Richard Lingeman noted, "reflective of wartime living was the rise in the number of families with a married woman at the head, the husband absent; the number jumped from 770,000 in 1940 to 2,770,000 in 1945." Because of the war, women in the United States became heads of households almost overnight, and were forced to cope with the responsibilities of being both parent and breadwinner. Many
saw the role of women in the home as crucial. Even FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover remarked, "There must be no absenteeism among mothers, her patriotic duty is not on the factory front, it is on the homefront." The sentiment in the United States seemed to stress the importance of women serving as mothers first and foremost.

At the same time that women were faced with the burden of running households, they were also greatly needed as workers. As two historians have noted, "many women were left to shoulder the burdens that the combination of motherhood and wage work imposed." During World War II, thousands of women eventually entered the workforce because of the dire need for employees in the absence of so many males. Even as they did so, they continued to fulfill the role of mother in the home. As Susan Hartmann wrote, "the number of women at work outside the home jumped from 11,970,000 in 1940 to 18,610,000 in 1945." Women truly led dual lives in both the home and in the factory.

As for the men, literally millions like Reynolds served in the United States Armed Forces during World War II. In fact, in the army alone, more than eleven million young American men fought for the United States in battles around the world, risking their lives for "Uncle Sam" and in the name of democracy. All around the country, from small
towns to big cities, young men quickly joined military units, turning the common man into a citizen-soldier.

As one of the most crucial and important periods of American history, World War II drastically changed the face of the United States. Ordinary men became "GIs" and everyday women became family heads and factory workers. Indeed, the years from 1940 to 1945 proved to be a unique time for Americans, as the United States felt the effects of World War II from coast to coast.

Typical of the changes taking place was one American from New York, William A. (Bill) Reynolds. Reynolds suddenly found himself serving for the United States in Italy as a member of the 10th Mountain Division. His experiences and those of his wife Gloria back in New York, reflect many of the common themes evident for many Americans during World War II. The story of Bill's wartime experience exemplified what it meant in the 1940s to be a soldier and an American during the era. It is his story that I intend to tell. Reynolds's experiences typified what it meant to be a soldier and an American during World War II.
CHAPTER 2
FROM TAXI DRIVER TO SOLDIER

From April 1943 to March 1944, while America was deeply engaged in World War II, Bill Reynolds enjoyed life as a civilian. During this period, Reynolds worked with a railroad line and later as a cab driver. In 1943, meeting and falling deeply in love with Gloria Benner would drastically change his personal life. Despite his new relationship, Reynolds left Gloria to volunteer to fight for the United States against the Axis powers. In his time before the U.S. Army, Reynolds was consumed by his relationship with Gloria. Further, even when far away, his letters illustrated how his life would remain dedicated to her over the next two years. When the thirty-nine letters are read, they begin to give the reader a sense of how everyday Americans were consumed by World War II.

The story of Reynolds's life during the World War II years begins in 1943, when he began writing Gloria Benner from Florida. Letters from Reynolds in April and May of 1943 were the first of many sent to Gloria in Rochester, New York, where she would receive all of his letters through 1945. Unfortunately, the letters began after William and Gloria had met, so how the two came to know one another is
unknown. By the summer of 1943, however, the two had already met and were deeply in love.

In the new relationship, Reynolds admitted his past to Gloria, and also his love for her, when he wrote the two early letters to New York from Florida. In his first letter on April 14, 1943, he reminds her of his older age: "As you know I am 28 years old, and probably have had things happen to me that you haven't."1 Despite Gloria's younger age, he continued by writing "I fell in love with you, not your age."2 In addition, he admitted that he had been married once, but hoped "that it won't change your feeling toward me."3 Reynolds prayed that being older and formerly married would not jeopardize their romance. Benner was not discouraged, however, as Reynolds had already confessed to her that "I love you more than anything else in the world."4 Throughout all of his letters to Gloria, Reynolds' affection for her remained undiminished. Often writing while "listening to Bob Hope and all the programs" or lying on his bed, Reynolds never seemed to forget to tell her of his love.5

Reynolds' second and only other letter from Florida illustrates a concern often on his mind when writing. When more than a few days passed, he wrote that he was concerned either for Gloria's health, or that she had met someone
else. In his letter of May 11, 1943, he voiced his concern over not having received a letter "for a week or more," hoping that "nothing is wrong." Reynolds obviously valued the letters he received. He often worried when Gloria's responses did not arrive as quickly as he had hoped. Later, while overseas and so far away from home, the letters would mean even more to him.

Bill was then employed by the Rochester Transit Corporation back in New York. Reynolds sent his letters from Waukegan, Illinois, home of his mother Annie Reynolds, from December 1943 until February 1944. His employment took him to Waukegan, where Reynolds worked for the North Shore and Milwaukee Railroad. While with the line, Reynolds first made trips between Waukegan and Chicago and later between Chicago and Milwaukee. He wrote, "There is a lot to learn" about the railroad, but that was as he expected. Later in that same letter, Reynolds noted, "the fellow that I am with said that I catch on quick." While he was learning the ways of the railroad, Bill and Gloria desperately longed for a reunion. Addressing himself as Gloria's "future husband," Reynolds planned for a visit by Gloria to Chicago to see him. The much-anticipated meeting finally took place that winter, allowing the two to see each other briefly.

Meanwhile, Bill had a new job in the transportation
industry as a cab driver. In a February 1944 letter, Reynolds describes his new position as the driver of a 1942 Plymouth, "No. 6" in the company.\textsuperscript{12} Despite having "a lot of nice girls in my cab," Reynolds' commitment to Gloria was unchanged, as he again noted that he "loved her and her alone."\textsuperscript{13} Reynolds continued to work driving the cab while the country was deeply involved in World War II. But for Reynolds, life proceeded as a working man in Waukegan, noting that "the tips are fair."\textsuperscript{14} His 29\textsuperscript{th} birthday passed on the 7\textsuperscript{th} of February, and the celebration consisted of a lamb dinner from a friend and a carton of camel cigarettes as a gift from another.\textsuperscript{15} But in less than a year, Reynolds, like many other young American men, would be consumed by the war.

On April 7, 1944, his life changed drastically, when after being drafted Reynolds enlisted in the United States Army.\textsuperscript{16} Over sixteen million Americans joined the United States Army from December 1941 to December 1946.\textsuperscript{17} As Randy Roberts explained, "One out of every six American men wore a uniform during the war. . . . For a man in his twenties or thirties not in uniform, the central question was, 'Why not?'"\textsuperscript{18} Reynolds underwent training first at Camp Fannin, Texas, and then briefly at Fort George Meade in Maryland. While experiencing grueling military training from April to
Fig. 2.1. Reynolds' taxi driver's license from 1944.
October 1944, major changes took place in his personal life. At this time, Reynolds had decided to get married to Gloria. In addition, they awaited the birth of their first child.

In his preparation for combat later in Italy, Reynolds had to deal with challenging obstacles in the area of military training. Reynolds wrote little about the specifics of his training, but did mention some elements of his preparation as a soldier. At Camp Fannin in particular, Reynolds wrote of the toll the work took on his body and his personal time. Early on, Reynolds noted on April 26, 1944, that he was "dead from the hips down" from the work he had done. Physical strain was not the only part of military preparation, however; Reynolds also described extremely long work days. He reported to Gloria on July 5, "we started out at 5:30a.m. yesterday and I got back to the area at 1:30a.m. today." He called the long hours of work simply "quite a day." Later at Fort George Meade, Reynolds explained how little time the soldiers were given for themselves, writing, "they keep us so damn busy." Reynolds desperately wanted to write home more frequently, but his grueling workload would not allow it.

A rigorous schedule of training for Reynolds also included learning to be proficient with different weaponry. Because of his monotonous description of the weapons
training, often describing the weapons training as "going to learn to shoot another gun," we can assume that Reynolds did not enjoy the long hours at the shooting range. Learning to fire everything from rifles to a bazooka, Reynolds wrote of a different weapon in nearly every letter he sent while at Camp Fannin. In spite of the monotony, the skills acquired with guns definitely were a necessity to prepare the men for the combat they were soon to encounter.

Concerning the speed of training, Reynolds also noted that "they sure don't waste any time with the different subjects and expect you to remember all of it." In only his first letter from Camp Fannin, he mentioned that the army was already exposing the new soldiers to "different gases" and filling their days with training. Indeed, busy days were frequent for Reynolds at Camp Fannin.

Bill sometimes complained about the training and the military, which was another theme of his correspondence. He wrote that Camp Fannin was a "hell hole" and it was "hot as hell." Frequently there were sarcastic comments aimed at the army as well. He mentioned to Gloria that writing was "our time to be together. At least they can't take that away from us." Furthermore, when the trainees were given the afternoon off for the Fourth of July, Reynolds remarked sarcastically that "it [the time off] must break their
military] hearts."²⁷

At this time, Reynolds spoke with the chaplain at Camp Fannin, and the minister said that he would marry the couple when Gloria visited. Reynolds discussed their marriage first in a letter on June 4, 1944, saying that being a married man would "make me feel like I have something to fight for."²⁸

Although their marriage certificate has not survived, we can assume William and Gloria were married sometime in May of 1944. Letters sent to Gloria after May 24, 1944, were always addressed to "Mrs. William A. Reynolds." Moreover, by then the couple was awaiting the arrival of their first child. In many respects, the rather sudden marriage of William and Gloria, and Gloria's subsequent pregnancy, typified the experiences of many young Americans of their generation.²⁹ As Alan Brinkley and Ellen Fitzpatrick noted, "Some couples married quickly before the husbands shipped out; when the husband returned, many met newborn sons and daughters for the first time."³⁰ Clearly, the Reynolds' were representative of this common wartime phenomenon.

In his letter of June 18, 1944, Reynolds made first mention of the baby that he and Gloria were now expecting, hoping that they were "both well" back in New York.³¹ Reynolds was understandably excited in his letters about the coming birth of the baby. From that point on, he signed his
letters as "Pa" or "Daddy," along with Bill.

There was constant discussion in his letters about the coming baby. Bill wrote from Fort George Meade about possible names for their new baby. In response to Gloria's suggestion that a boy be named William, he states that a daughter should be named after Gloria, since it was a "lovely name." As for the gender of the baby, Bill added in a later letter: "that is something we can't control . . . I know we will love it boy or girl." Regardless, both looked with anticipation toward a time when the family could be together. In William's letters, he nearly always remarked that he would rather be at home with Gloria.

Meanwhile, Gloria began work in Rochester. While William was preparing to fight for the United States, Gloria was also a part of the war effort, working on the homefront. At the time of William's training, Gloria was a part of the approximately seven million women entering the work force. She enjoyed the work, but her pregnancy would eventually force her to stop working. While she was able to work, however, Gloria was a classic example of women who came out of the home to aid in the war effort. In his letters, Reynolds would frequently inquire if Gloria was still working and how she liked it.

By June of 1944, Pvt. William Reynolds was married and
excited about a coming child, while also experiencing a U.S. Army boot camp. The months from April to October of 1944 transformed William Reynolds into a soldier, ready for combat. The months also saw him become a married man and an expecting father. However, Reynolds would not remain in the United States much longer. As the Allies looked to finish off the Axis powers, Reynolds would soon get his chance to see combat. Reynolds and the rest of the U.S. 10th Mountain Division would be asked to help drive the Germans from Italy, thus transforming the former cab driver into a soldier.
By June of 1944, Bill Reynolds was married and joyful about a coming child. Meanwhile, he was also experiencing life at a U.S. Army boot camp. The months from April to October of 1944 transformed William Reynolds into a soldier ready for combat.

After six months in training, Bill Reynolds was finally sent overseas in the fall of 1944. According to the Rochester Democrat / Chronicle, he departed for battle against the Nazis in Italy on October 21, 1944. He and the 10th Mountain Division were intended to help bring an end to the Nazi strongholds in northern Italy. The months of combat proved to be an important period in his life. While on foreign soil from October 1944 to April 1945, Reynolds not only heard of the birth of his daughter, but also suffered an injury that would change the rest of his life.

Reynolds' letters while overseas were censored by the Army, so it is difficult to estimate where precisely he was fighting. Letters he sent from Italy were postmarked in New York City, so as not to disclose the army's position. Reynolds wrote in one letter on the way to Italy, "Can't tell you where I am but we are not in New York." When Reynolds wrote to Gloria concerning their location or when...
they arrived in Italy, his words were erased by army censors. Typically, he was forced to write his location at the top of his letters, using the vague phrase "somewhere in Italy" as a heading. Clearly, he was aware of the fact that his letters would be read and censored and that he could not give Gloria the details he would have liked. Bill remarked on October 19, 1944, "Don't know anything about where we are headed, but suppose I will be able to tell you sometime."³

Rather than describing military action, Bill's letters focus on his affection for home and family. Perhaps because he knew the danger he would face on the battle lines, Bill made even more of an effort in his letters to tell Gloria how much he loved her. He often wrote how he would much rather be back in New York with her, and how anxiously he looked forward to their time together. Summing up his feelings about being away from her, Bill wrote, "Uncle Sam has me over here, but my soul is with you."⁴

After finally arriving in Europe, military action progressed slowly, as the Allies prepared for a final offensive in Italy. Despite the monotony of military life, he experienced significant changes in his personal life. Three telling events that occurred during his first months oversees were: Christmas, the birth of his first child, and his 30th birthday.
Bill celebrated Christmas 1944 in Italy, far away from home and family. In his letters around the holidays, he wrote that Christmas overseas was "one Xmas I won't forget for many a year to come." As the holiday approached, he wrote, "a week from tomorrow is Christmas and it will be the worst one I have spent. My thoughts will be with you. ..."

Mail and presents helped brighten Christmas for Reynolds, Gloria sent him gifts, such as a new pipe (that Bill said smoked, "real nice") and even a fruitcake, which he would share with "all the fellows in the tent." Reynolds wrote that the gifts and cards "make a fellow feel so much better" and that the mail "keeps the old morale up."

Reynolds did not know it at the time, but his new daughter had been born in New York on December 17, 1944. He eventually received the news from an American Red Cross telegram, saying that mother and baby were "both fine" and expected a discharge by Christmas. The Reynolds' were now parents to newborn Gloria Jean, named after her mother. Unfortunately, the proud new father would not see his baby for another 10 months.

Time passed and Reynolds and his fellow soldiers waited for something important they knew was likely to happen. Meanwhile, William celebrated his 30th birthday on February 7, 1945, telling Gloria on February 4th that "in 3 more days your old man will be another year older."
Around the time of his birthday, Reynolds realized that the inactivity his unit enjoyed would not continue much longer. He wrote on February 21, 1945: "the news is pretty quiet right now. [This] may be the lull before the storm." One month later, on March 21, he noted that "things are quiet for the moment." This lull, however, was about to end, as Allied commanders were planning a massive assault deep into northern Italy.

It is important to Reynolds' story to understand some of the history behind his unit. Reynolds' 10th Mountain Division was the backbone of the Allied Fifth Army. The division was originally organized in 1918 to defend the U.S. against a possible, though highly unlikely, German attack feared by Americans during the World War I. The assault against the U.S. was expected to take place in Maine during a winter, the main reason the division contained many skiers. The legendary unit included the 87th, 86th (Reynolds'), and 85th regiments that attracted what historian Jake Thompson called "an unusual crowd." Guido Rosignoli explained that the unit contained "a high percentage of expert skiers, woodsmen, and mountaineers." The 10th was notorious for its "aristocratic flavor" (many members were Ivy League graduates) and was described by a journalist as "a mammoth ski club." Although Reynolds certainly was no
Figure 3.1. Photograph of Reynolds he had taken for Gloria before going to Italy.
(Courtesy of Johnson Collection).
Figure 3.2. Photograph of Reynolds he had taken for Gloria before going to Italy.
(Courtesy of Johnson Collection).
skier, the 10th dropped the strict skiing requirements in late 1944, and he was thus able to fight with the unit.\textsuperscript{16}

One member of the 10th Mountain Division who served with Reynolds was the future Senator from Kansas and 1996 Republican Presidential Nominee Bob Dole. On March 18, 1945, Dole was leading a night patrol when an exploding grenade severely injured him.\textsuperscript{17} As a result of his wounds, he was awarded a Purple Heart.\textsuperscript{18} Reynolds and Dole not only served in the same division, but were awarded the Purple Heart for an injury exactly one month apart.

The 10th Mountain Division, including Reynolds and Dole, was well prepared for the mountain combat that awaited them in the Po Offensive. The Fifth Army was to launch an attack against the Axis by streaking north and crossing the Po River and the German "Gothic Line." The movement, known as "Operation Craftsman," was scheduled to begin on April 12, 1945, the same day as President Roosevelt's death.\textsuperscript{19} However, it was unfavorable weather, not FDR's death, which delayed the attack until April 14. The "last great offensive" in Italy started on the 14th, sending thousands of men, including the Tenth, toward the Germans.\textsuperscript{20} After a breakthrough three days later, and the crossing of the Po on the 23rd, the Allies had crushed the entire Axis position in Italy.\textsuperscript{21}
Fig. 3.3. The Italian Front at the time Reynolds was in Italy.
Participating in the push north to the Po, Reynolds was shot in the throat during a battle on April 18, 1945.\textsuperscript{22} Despite the seriousness of his injury, Reynolds wrote little about his wound in his letters home. Instead, his focus was now on his desire for the war to end, and on his desire to return to New York.

After being wounded, Bill Reynolds wanted only to go back to the U.S. to see Gloria again. From April to July of 1945, Reynolds spent time in different military hospitals, and was able to write more frequently than when in combat. He experienced much more time to himself; despite the injury, he still stood guard at night. Foremost in his mind, however, was his wife and daughter, whom he was desperate to see.

As mentioned, Reynolds wrote very little regarding his injury in his letters. However, at his first hospital in Naples, he wrote that the doctor told him to "get out in the sun as much as possible."\textsuperscript{23} Instead of describing his wound, Reynolds' letters emphasized his desire for the war to end and, more importantly to him, his desire to get back to New York. "The news really looks good," he wrote at this time.\textsuperscript{24} "It won't be long until the end comes and we can all go home."\textsuperscript{25}
Pvt. W. A. Reynolds
Wounded in Italy

Pvt. William A. Reynolds, 20, whose wife, the former Gloria Brenner, lives at 30 Hickory St., was wounded in action between Apr. 15 and 20 in Italy. He is now hospitalized there. The  father of a five-month-old daughter, Gloria Jean, whom he has never seen, he has been serving with the infantry and holds the Combat Infantryman's Badge. He is the son of Mrs. Annie Reynolds, Waukegan, Ill., and was employed by the Rochester Transit Corporation until he entered service in Apr. 7, 1944. He has been overseas since Oct. 21, 1944.

Fig. 3.4. The Democrat / Chronicle clipping reporting Reynolds' injury.  
(Courtesy of Johnson Collection).
During his recuperation, Reynolds enjoyed some recreation time. He spent days on the beach, visiting Naples, and going to "ball games." Reynolds even worked on a present for Gloria, making a bracelet out of Plexiglas from the nose of a bomber. A trip to the Red Cross for "coffee, cookies, and ice cream" was a treat on one afternoon for Reynolds.

Reynolds was later moved to Treviso, Italy, where he remained until returning home. There he continued to wait for word that the 10th was being sent back to the U.S. In Treviso he and his fellow soldiers were sleeping on beds rather than in tents for the first time. Reynolds stressed, however, that he would much rather be in bed back home than in Italy.

While he was in Treviso, the American Red Cross paid the soldiers a visit. In spite of their efforts, the American Red Cross did not favorably impress Reynolds. He wrote that the women who passed out "do-nuts" thought they were "hot stuff." He described the Red Cross as "the biggest racket there is," claiming that he definitely would not donate to them upon his return to New York. Reynolds wrote that perhaps he was only in a bad mood, but was not sure why. We could speculate that Reynolds was dissatisfied with the Red Cross because he felt that civilians did not understand what it meant to be a soldier in his position, a
point he made in later letters. Regardless, Reynolds clearly had resentment toward the Red Cross on that particular day.

Simultaneously, Reynolds continued to participate in night patrol in the area of Treviso. Frustrated, he complained that "I can't get a break in the Army," and that standing guard was "some crap," particularly for someone recovering from an injury. We can assume that by this point in the war, after dealing with both being away from family and an injury, war was something Bill was becoming tired of. Fortunately, it would not be long before Reynolds was free from duty.

He even had time while in Treviso to show his concern, along with 20 fellow soldiers over an article in the Boston Globe they had read. The editorial had claimed that the soldiers were “lucky” to be fighting in Europe and that life on the homefront was more difficult. Reynolds noted that “I wouldn’t mind being a civilian if I could be with you,” and continued to remark sarcastically, “some people think war is fun I guess.”

Finally, after nearly a year of separation from her husband, Gloria would receive word that the 10th Mountain Division was headed home. The Rochester Democrat / Chronicle reported that "approximately 6,000 troops of the U.S. 10th Mountain Division were sailing home aboard the troop ship Mount Vernon." Bill Reynolds was headed home at last.
Fig. 3.5. Reynolds (right) and his friend Nate on the beach in Italy -
August 3, 1945.
(Courtesy of Johnson Collection).
Fig. 3.6. The decorations of William Reynolds.
CHAPTER 4
HOME AT LAST

By the second half of 1945 Bill Reynolds was finally home in New York to live as he had wanted to with his wife and daughter. Upon his return, he took advantage of benefits provided under the GI Bill of Rights and continued his education. While many veterans of the 10th Mountain Division found work as ski instructors, Bill went to work with the Delco Appliance Division of General Motors in Rochester. In addition, during this time he and Gloria also had another daughter, Joyce Debra, who was born on August 23, 1951. Then home from the war, Bill, an avid fisherman and father of two, was able to enjoy the civilian life he had missed from 1944 to 1945.

Unfortunatley, in the years following the war, Reynolds developed throat cancer. During the last part of his life he attended radiotherapy treatments at the V.A. hospital in Buffalo, New York. There he was scheduled to receive radiation treatments over a four-week period in early 1953. Only months after those treatments, however, he succumbed to the cancer and passed away on April 15, 1953. Funeral
Merry Cacophony of Farewell
To 1947 Has Somber Undertone

Here are a few of the celebrants who saw the New Year in at The Barn, Gannett Youth Center. Front (from left): Joan Krug, Dick Berner, LeAnn Bogart and Dick Horan. Rear: Mr. and Mrs. William Reynolds. Photo was taken in Barn's Fiesta Room.

Fig. 4.1. Life after the war: Bill and Gloria (rear) ringing in 1948. (Courtesy of Johnson Collection).
services for him were held at N.J. Miller’s Son Funeral Home in Rochester. Suddenly, Gloria found herself a widow with two young daughters. Ironically it was cancer, not a Nazi bullet, which killed her husband.

Both Bill and Gloria had done their part during the war. During the unique time of wartime America, he had fought in the U.S. Army and she had worked on the homefront. He had quickly gone from working as a taxi driver to becoming a decorated soldier. However, it is important to remember that, historically, the experiences of Bill and Gloria were not unique. Rather, they dealt with many similar events that faced other Americans their age. In many ways, the historical significance of Reynolds’ story is that it is representative of the wartime experiences of many Americans during the era.

Bill’s experiences in the army, contributing to what Richard Polenberg called “the common good,” was not unusual. Average blue-collar Americans such as Bill Reynolds becoming soldiers was commonplace. Further, his injury was also typical. In his division alone, the 10th Mountain Division, 4,154 out of 14,000 soldiers were wounded. Bill was similar to many other American men his age at the time who also went through dramatic changes between 1941 and 1945.
Gloria’s experiences on the homefront were also representative of many women in the United States during World War II. Welcoming home a wounded husband was common, as Susan Hartmann noted, "Millions of women suffered the temporary or permanent loss of husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons. More than 400,000 men lost their lives and another 671,000 returned wounded from the war." Gloria Reynolds was thus one of thousands of women who welcomed home an injured soldier. In addition, Gloria was similar to millions of women who had become both breadwinner and mother during World War II.

If Bill Reynolds’ experiences during World War II were so typical, then why is his story historically significant? First, his story, while representative of many wartime themes, is unique. Obviously there were many men who went to fight and who were wounded while overseas, but the private letters of Bill and Gloria help to provide a human face to the war.

In addition, uncovering the experiences of people similar to Reynolds begins to shed light on the individual, untold stories of history. Too often, historians write their accounts in an impersonal manner, at times seeming to forget that actual individuals make up the larger mosaic. In Bill Reynolds’ case, he was one person from New York who helped make up the 10th Mountain Division, a division of 14,000
soldiers. Unfortunately, there are surely many other stories similar to that of Bill's that will never be heard.

Today, the 10th Mountain "Mountaineer" Division holds reunions from time to time, such as a recent gathering of 10th veterans in Sacramento. Moreover, in 1997 at a similar reunion there was a statute dedication in Colorado honoring the men of the 10th. Finally, further recognition occurred for the 10th Mountain Division when a documentary called "Fire on the Mountain" was released. As one film critic noted, "it's doubtful ... that any actors could move us as much as the real-life skier-soldiers of the 10th." Among the survivors and veterans of the 10th, there are likely to be stories similar to those told by Reynolds' correspondence.

The wartime letters of William Arthur Reynolds offer us a valuable historical window through which to view the early 1940s. While his experiences were typical of many young American males during the World War II era, his letters provide a personal perspective on the war around him. As a result, Bill Reynolds' letters from 1943-1945 tell the story of one American life that was changed by World War II, a war that changed the lives of so many others as well.
NOTES

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4 Terkel, The Good War, 16.


6 Terkel, The Good War, 5.


8 Terkel, The Good War, 9.


11 Lingeman, Don’t You Know There’s a War On?, 210.

12 Brinkley and Fitzpatrick, America in Modern Times.

13 Brinkley and Fitzpatrick, America in Modern Times, 362.

14 Lingeman, Don’t You Know There’s a War On?, 91.

15 Brinkley and Fitzpatrick, America in Modern Times, 366.

16 Ibid.

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1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.


6 Rochester Democrat / Chronicle (Rochester, NY), 1945, newspaper clipping from Johnson Collection, specific date unknown.


8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.


12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.

15 Rochester Democrat / Chronicle (Rochester, NY), 1945, newspaper clipping from Johnson Collection, specific date unknown.

17 Ibid.

18 William Arthur Reynolds, Camp Fannin, TX, to Gloria Benner, Rochester, NY, 26 April 1944, Johnson Collection.

19 William Arthur Reynolds, Camp Fannin, TX, to Gloria Reynolds, Rochester, NY, 5 July 1944, Johnson Collection.

20 William Arthur Reynolds, Camp Fannin, TX, to Gloria Reynolds, Rochester, NY, 5 August 1944, Johnson Collection.


22 William Arthur Reynolds, Camp Fannin, TX, to Gloria Benner, Rochester, NY, 26 April 1944, Johnson Collection.

23 Ibid.

24 William Arthur Reynolds, Camp Fannin, TX, to Gloria Reynolds, Rochester, NY, 18 June 1944, Johnson Collection.


26 William Arthur Reynolds, Camp Fannin, TX, to Gloria Reynolds, Rochester, NY, 5 July 1944, Johnson Collection.

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30 William Arthur Reynolds, Camp Fannin, TX, to Gloria Reynolds, Rochester, NY, 4 June 1944, Johnson Collection.


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6 William Arthur Reynolds, Italy, to Gloria Reynolds, Rochester, NY, 22 December 1944, Johnson Collection.

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