

Newsletters kept servicemen up to date on hometown news

By MARY LOU OLSON

Decatur County men and women who served in World War II kept abreast of the happenings at home through the efforts of Marian Cathcart, who compiled a monthly newsletter that was mailed all over the world.

She was secretary at Decatur Community High School from 1925-1944. Postage was paid by the school and at one time, she mailed newsletters to over 600 servicemen and women.

Miss Cathcart, who was an aunt of Ethel Railsback and Joy Votapka of Oberlin, spent the last Sunday of each month typing up the letter, which was then mimeographed. After she left the school in 1944, Laurene (Shaw) Bryan, who worked at *The Oberlin Herald*, took over the job of writing and mailing the newsletter until the end of the war.

A story in *The Oberlin Herald* in April 1942 told of the beginning of the project.

"A monthly mimeographed newsletter to the boys in military service is being planned by the office of the Decatur Community High School," the paper reported. "It will be edited by Miss Marian Cathcart.

"The date of issue will be the 10th of each month. If this newsletter is to be a success, there must be assistance from the families of boys in service by furnishing the correct mailing addresses."

The goal was to furnish "News about you and your friends, about Decatur Community High School and Decatur County." Miss Cathcart said in a story published later that the publication started soon after the tornado which struck near Oberlin in the spring of 1942, one of the largest to ever hit Kansas. She said that Blackie Lindquist, who was in the army, wrote the school office for information about the storm.

"Blackie had spent a lot of time in the office when he was in school," she laughed, "and we were always glad to hear from him."

Soon there were other requests for information from servicemen, and it became easier to mimeograph a letter using a sheet of legal-sized exam paper.

During the month, Miss Cathcart saved clippings from *The Herald*, used information received from servicemen and women, jotted down notes of general interest about happenings at the school and in Oberlin and Decatur county, and news of former students.

The last Sunday of the month, she spent much of the day at the school office compiling the newsletters.

"It wasn't a professional job," she said later, "just put together as best I could to save space. All too often there was bad news — a serviceman missing in action or killed, but it had to be included in the best way possible, and that was difficult."

Years later, she said she could remember many of those former students who failed to return from military service.

Overseas addresses were not in-

cluded in the letter for security reasons, only general areas, but the newsletter enabled many to keep in touch.

Miss Cathcart kept the letters she received from servicemen, as well as copies of those she wrote, and all were encapsulated by the late Sandy Russell at the Last Indian Raid Museum in Oberlin.

As a tribute to her, the family of her brother, Shirley D. Cathcart, purchased a file cabinet in his memory, which contains all of this information, and donated it to the museum. It is located with the military display from several wars at the museum.

Here are a few excerpts from the first newsletter:

Decatur Newsletter for the boys in Military service.

V. I, Issue 1. May 10, 1942
Edited and compiled by Marian E. Cathcart, Oberlin, Kansas.

The yellow paper is to give you that "back at D.C.H.S." feeling." ... Raymond Wurm is employed in the Santa Monica, Calif. Douglass Aircraft Co. It was an interesting visit with Bard Claar ... he tells me there are three lines of work within the maritime service: deck, engineer,

and steward. Deck was chosen by Lotker who now has the rating of Coxswain. This is the phase, with further training, that can end in an officer's rating. Bard chose the steward line and his rating is that of second cook ... Lorraine Love is an assistant dietitian in one of the state institutions located in Lincoln, Ill ... Carol Stevenson was elected to Mortar Board at Kansas State ... Clarence Manning has been trans-

ferred to the truck division at Camp Wolters ... Tech. Serg. Harold Nitcher writes concerning Camp Chaffee, Arkansas: "This camp is an entirely new one and although not complete has around 10,000 soldiers here now ... Virgil Cathcart reported after his first rifle range practice, "I not only missed the bullseye, I very nearly missed the target." ... Bill Pryor is taking auto motor training at Camp Crowder...

Manhattan, Gustave Lippelmann of the K.U. law school, Alice Beardsley and Marian Hawkes of Colorado Women's College ... Dennis Fraker is the new wrestling captain. ... Add Dale Carlisle to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center ... Claxton R. Bryan is located at Salt Lake City, while the naval base at Norfolk, Virginia, claims Dean Hinze, Don Everist, and Don Claussen. Raymond Hague is right at home in San Diego since the naval training camps he has occupied have been named Camp Mahan, Camp Decatur, and Camp Kidd ... Pete Everist writes concerning the training he and Don Claussen are sharing, "Naval construction is operated under navy rules and regulations. During the three weeks we were at Great Lakes we were formed into a company and most of us are still together here (Norfolk, Virginia).

Harold Rehm is located at Fort Devens near Boston. He is hoping he and Harry Brown see each other ... Married recently were Cletus Kelly and Hertha Fuhr ... Ten men left the 8th for medical examination. They were Lawrence Urban, Louis Tuxhorn, LeRoy Linn, Kenneth Schmoker, Charles Corcoran, Harold Graves, Lloyd Corcoran, Everett Adamson, Dale McConnell, and John Mazanek, Jr. ... Mrs. Don Claussen (Genola Waldo) left last night to join her husband in Virginia. Add these to your list of marriages: Norman Bainter and Dorothy Counter; Norma Dodson and Allen Richards; Erma Logan and Gustave Lippelmann; Leora Leist and George Sines; Harold Brown and Doris Willcox. Dorothy Diehl and Harold Chambers; Helen L. Johnson and Dale Johnson; Margie Bogart and James Plotts ... Chiz Ruzicka holds the league record in the mile.

This from Dorothy Kelley's column, "Sometimes there seems to be no suitable words in the dictionary with which to express ourselves. When some important event takes place, words seem so powerful; it is easy to find just the exact words to describe that event, to make the rearer see what we see. But once in each man's lifetime such a stunning thing will occur as to make it impossible of description; impossible almost of realizing that it has truly happened even after we have seen it for ourselves. Such an event was the tornado of 1942, as it will be told and retold for many, many years to come." ... Commencement is Thursday evening. The 111 seniors constitute the largest class we have graduated ... The many letters, cards, and calls by mothers in regard to this newsletter have been appreciated.

Adios!

The only letter missing at the museum from Miss Cathcart is June 1942. If anyone has a copy, the World War II letters are posted on the Internet by the museum at skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/decatur/index.html and a copy may be sent there or mailed to the museum, 258 S. Penn, Oberlin, Kan., 67749.

V. I, Issue 1. May 10, 1942
Edited and compiled by Marian E. Cathcart,
Oberlin, Kansas.
"News about you and your friends,
about Decatur Community High School
and Decatur County"

This letter is by the courtesy of Supt. Mahon and the Board of Trustees. I only do the assembling and the typing. ... Emerald Kahlor does a swift transfer from maritime to navy. ... My recipe to determine the number of newsletters to run is much as that for green apple sauce "use twice as much sugar as I think it can need; close my eyes and add that much more. ... Marie Howard and Reva Mae Kelley are also in Washington, D.C. ... Who can help me on these addresses? Wilbur Barrett, Wilbur Bystrom, Cordette and Francis Cevely, Jack Cleland, Herbert Dyer, Lyman Gage, Arthur Moss, Dallas Patrick, or any others whose names we have not listed? Lester McDowell, who left for service from Colorado was greatly surprised to find old schoolmates at Camp Barkley. He says, "From the list of men in the service, I can very easily see why I thought Oberlin deserted at Christmas time. I believe Oberlin is doing its share in furnishing men for the service" ... This letter would not, of course, be complete, without the story of the recent devastating tornado. Grief stricken but calm and courageous after the first dreadful shock, relatives, friends and people of the entire community have settled down to the grim realities confronting them following the worst tragedy ever visited upon this county. The raging tornado that struck just east of Oberlin Wednesday night (April 29), about 10:30 has to date reaped a toll of 15 dead, and left 12 other persons in the hospitals receiving treatment for many types of injuries. No other tragedy has ever reaped such a toll of death, injuries and destruction in Decatur county, not excepting the Indian raid of September 30, 1878, when 16 settlers were massacred by the raiding Cheyenne Indians.



Marian Cathcart, age 100



Miss Cathcart, circa 1937

Dale Thornburg has wired his parents, "Ship sunk by underwater explosion. I was rescued and uninjured." ... Arthur and Vivian Landau-Dowling were recent visitors, their home is in Amarillo, Texas. She is one of the prettiest girls I ever have had the privilege of seeing.

Jack Hendrix was glimpsed recently climbing aboard the Zephyr. It is law school at Nebraska next year, your Uncle Samuel willing ... How the school will miss Miss Douglas next year. She announced her retirement from the schoolroom recently at a party featuring a cake with 24 candles for the years spent as an instructor in D.C.H.S., but she will be about and interested as always in her former students ... We are hoping to have Lt. Col. Harwood Benton as our chief speaker at the Alumni Banquet ... Alex Francis is located at Stamford, Texas where he assists with physical education at the Stamford Flying School ... Gloria Benton shared honors with the cherry blossoms on the front page of a recent Washington Post ... Noted among the visiting college students at Easter time were: Lefty Van Pelt from Salina, Darrell Landau, Joe Ridgway and Von Kirkendall of

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Wagner Ford - **Montego**

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obh/adv

Ad sent to GDN