

Aunt Sally's sons in WWII

Written by a great-niece of Sally Amanda Cook Harrison

My Aunt Sally was a very special person. She was kind, gentle, and everyone loved her. She was the cook at "the little green school" (aka Wheatland Elementary) for many years. I always knew that I had lots of cousins in Wheatland, but I didn't know what to think when I started school and all the kids in the cafeteria called *my* Aunt Sally "Aunt Sally."

Aunt Sally was married to my grandfather's brother, Lloyd Harrison, and he was known as "Twisty". Everyone in town knew Uncle Twisty, because for many years he was the Wheatland City Engineer. He only had one leg, but as the city engineer, he dug ditches with just a shovel for the sewer and water lines, and climbed the water tower with that just that one leg. Aunt Sally and Uncle Twisty lived by the water tower. According to family, Uncle Twisty lost his leg in a gun accident.

Info not in presentation:

My Grandpa Jack (John Hatton Harrison) helped build Wheatland Elementary School as part of a WPA project (Works Progress Administration) which provided jobs for the unemployed during the depression.

At one time, Uncle Twisty worked for the Whitney Warren Ranch. In 1932, Twisty and Sally's son, Claude, died of a strep infection in his leg. Whitney Warren, a local rancher, was quite fond of Claude. When Whitney Warren made a trip to the Holy Lands, he brought back two stone pine trees. One tree was planted beside the old high school on Hooper Street. The other tree was planted at the Harrison plot. Aunt Sally was expecting a baby when Claude died and she named the little boy after Whitney. In 1938, little Whitney died in a house fire. Twisty and his son Bob were burned trying to save him.

1939 marked the beginning of WWII when Germany invaded Poland. Not too long after that, Aunt Sally's sons, Robert (22 years old), and Raymond (18 years old) decided to join the Navy. Ray was accepted, but Robert (or as we always called him "Uncle Bob") did not qualify for service.

In 1940, Ray went into the Navy, and in November, sailed from San Diego into the Pacific Ocean aboard the carrier, USS Yorktown.

Although Bob was rejected from military service, he still wanted to serve his country so he went to work for the Morrison-Knudsen Company as a construction worker helping build an airfield and Marine base on Wake Island in the Pacific.

On December 7, 1941 the "day that will live in infamy", the Japanese invaded Pearl Harbor. Just four hours later, the Japanese attacked Wake Island. Because Wake Island is west of the International Date Line, this event is documented in history as December 8, 1941.

Bob wasn't in the military, but he was still in battle. Wake Island had a small group of American Marines, who, along with the civilian workers, were able to defend the island against the attack for about two weeks. The Japanese outnumbered them by 2:1. The 470 US Marine survivors and 1,146 civilians finally surrendered the island on December 23, 1941. The Marines and civilians were all taken prisoner. These *prisoners of war (POWs)* were shipped off to different locations. Bob, one of the last 265 to leave the island, was sent to a slave labor camp in Sasebo, Japan. He was forced to help build an airstrip, then sent to the island of Kuyshu to work in the coal mines. While a prisoner he endured unimaginable conditions of brutality, torture, and starvation.

Although he was a civilian, Bob spent four years as a Japanese prisoner of war. In the meantime, Aunt Sally did not know where her son, Bob was, or even if he was alive. She still received a letter that he was considered a draft evader because he had not registered with the selective service.

On June 4, 1942, six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese attacked Midway Island. Midway is so named because it is halfway between the United States and Asia. It was a strategic military location for both the U.S. and Japan. Aunt Sally's son, Ray, was at Midway aboard the USS Yorktown. The USS Yorktown was bombed, torpedoed, and eventually sank in the Pacific. Over the next few days, American destroyers in the area did their best to recover survivors.

Aunt Sally soon received a telegram stating that Ray was missing in action and presumed dead. Several months later, Ray showed up at the family home on furlough, but the war was still going strong, so Ray soon returned to duty.

In February of 1943, Aunt Sally's third son, Steve, turned 19, and joined the Army. He was sent into battle in Africa. Shortly thereafter, another telegram arrived at the Harrison household. This one stated that Steve had been captured by the Germans. He was being held in Stalag 7A, Moosburg, Bavaria. In 1944, Aunt Sally had three sons overseas, and when her son, Ralph turned 18, he also joined the Army. Ralph was sent to Texas. *(I don't have other information on his service.)*

Over a year after Bob's capture, Aunt Sally received a message through the Swiss Government and the Red Cross stating that he was on the list of Japanese prisoners. In March of 1945, she received a postcard from him mailed the previous year saying that he was well and looking forward to the day he could come home. He was released from the Japanese POW camp in September of 1945, shortly after the end of the war. Steve was released a month later after spending two years as a German POW.

All four men returned home at the end of WWII. Aunt Sally, Uncle Twisty, Claude, and Whitney are buried at the Wheatland Cemetery beneath the stone pine tree. Steve, Ray, and Ralph are buried nearby.

Approximately 4% of the prisoners in German POW camps died in captivity. Approximately 34% of those in the Japanese POW camps didn't survive. In November of 1977, 36 years after Bob was taken prisoner, the United State Government granted veteran status to all civilians captured at Wake, Guam, and Cavite (in the Philippines).

Aunt Sally's son, Robert Henry Harrison, was buried at Sierra View Cemetery near his home in Olivehurst. He did not serve in the military, but he has a well-deserved bronze military headstone that reads **Robert Harrison US Navy, World War II.**

- 1 Robert Hatton HARRISON
 - +Sarah Jane WILLIAMS
- 2 William Henry HARRISON
- 2 Judith May HARRISON
- 2 Ethel Winifred HARRISON
- 2 Lloyd Benjamin HARRISON
 - +Sally Amanda COOK
- 3 Dorothy M. HARRISON
- 3 Robert HARRISON
- 3 Claude C. HARRISON
- 3 Raymond Lloyd HARRISON
- 3 Stephen Ernest HARRISON
- 3 Ralph Irwin HARRISON
- 3 Herbert HARRISON
- 3 Whitney HARRISON
- 2 John Hatton HARRISON