

Memories of World War II

By Chuck Mauro

In an interview in 2000, longtime Herndon resident Ellen Kephart shared her memories of life in Herndon during World War II. Ellen passed away last year.

I was driving by Sully Plantation recently when I noticed they were having a World War II reenactment. And that got me thinking about an interview I did with Ellen Kephart in 2000, while working on my book, *Herndon: A Town and Its History*. Ellen was born in Herndon in 1916, and married Herman Kephart in 1936. Herman worked at the Green Funeral Home and was a long time volunteer fire fighter. I asked Ellen what Herndon was like during the war, and she related the following.

We were very patriotic. I worked in the tracking station for airplanes. We had certain day every other week and two women would go in. We also had an old railroad by the station where we would help take old metal and it was taken for the war effort. Then we did sugar rationing. That was terrible. People were begging for sugar.

But my husband Herman, he didn't go (overseas) right away but he was gone I guess four years. And many, many people were left taking care of their house themselves because their husband was gone. But, it was kind of sad, and we didn't really say too much about it.

(Speaking of D-Day, June 6, 1944), I remember that day. I got up to go to work. At five o'clock that morning I turned on the radio and they announced it was D-Day, and I said, "Oh Lord, when I get in the car(pool) everybody's going to have something to say. I got in the car and no one said a word about it being D-Day. And the next day, the one woman said, "Ellen, we all agreed we weren't going to say a word about it when you got in the car, we didn't want to upset you." They were really being nice.

I received letters (from Herman) and I sent a package (to him) every single week. But he had to put it in a letter first saying, "I need so-and-so." And I'd have to show that (note) at the post office. Then, I could send whatever I had taken. But I had to have that little note first. But there were a lot of times that, and I would go to the post office right across from the Justice Department in Washington DC, (where I worked) at noontime with my package. And sometimes they wouldn't even ask for (his note) because they said they just felt like if he (Herman) went to that much trouble (to send his letters) it should get over there.

And he got all his packages. I sent cans of tuna fish. That was one thing, but it was all stuff that wasn't going to spoil. I did send cookies a few times, but he said he ate them with a teaspoon. But anything in a tin can traveled very well. And we sent a lot of candy. That was another thing that they didn't get. He always shared it with everybody else.

Now when Herman came home it was a complete surprise. I had gone to work that day and had driven in. And then when I got back to Herndon I went home. And everybody was sitting at the dining room table. And I walked in and was telling them something, and I looked down

and all of a sudden there's my husband sitting at the table. They knew he was coming, but nobody told me. Well, you can imagine what it was like!

He had written to (my) Mom and told her that he didn't want me to know in case anything happened to him before he got to see me—that he wanted to surprise me. There were 10 people sitting at the table, and they all kept it a secret. And all of a sudden I see this person, and you know it was almost like I wasn't going to make it. I was just thinking, "I must be out of my mind!" It was a real surprise.