



# Plant City Goes to War

By World War II, the small farming town of Plant City had grown to about 7500 residents. The war changed everything. After Pearl Harbor, many young men left the phosphate mines and the strawberry fields to take part in the global struggle against fascism.

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In conjunction with Ken Burns' "The War," WUSF has produced a pair of documentaries focusing on two Bay area communities and the residents who served in the military during World War II.

## Tampa Goes to War

"Tampa Goes to War," features Congressman Sam Gibbons, who parachuted with the 101st Airborne Division into France on June 6, 1944. In addition to his D-Day experiences, Gibbons talks about the Battle of the Bulge, when his unit was cut off from reinforcements for about a week.

"We ran out of food, we ran out of ammunition, we ran out of gasoline, we ran out of everything but Germans," he says.

The special also allows Army Air Corps Second Lieutenant George Drew to tell the heartbreaking story of his nine months as a German prisoner of war in his own words.

"It's an experience that you lost your freedom and when you do that, you've lost everything," says Drew, a former inspector at the Tampa Ship Building Company who returned home from his captivity on a craft that he had previously worked on—a ship named "The Exodus."

The Tampa segment also features brothers Willie and Joe Vila, the oldest of seven brothers who served in the U.S. military from World War II through Operation Desert Storm.

Evelyn Johnson, an African-American member of the Women's Army Corps who helped sort over two and a half years worth of mail for the armed forces throughout Europe, talks about how much better she was treated "over there" than back at home.

"When we were in Europe, we didn't have any problems whatsoever," she says. "We were well accepted and when I came home, I still had problems with the segregation."

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"Plant City Goes to War" airs on Saturday, November 17th at 10 p.m., immediately after the seventh and final part of "The War."

John Germany talks about his service in the Army under General Patton, including his experiences at Hitler's "Eagle's Nest" retreat and at a German internment camp in Czechoslovakia.

"The fires were still hot in the ovens," says Germany, "and immediately when we came in, the members that were to be killed, burned, wanted to turn on the guards and throw them in."

Other Plant City veterans profiled include Lonnie Davidson, who became a career soldier and reached the rank of Colonel in the U.S. Army, Philip Patrinostro, an Army Air Corps flight engineer who served on twenty-six B-17 missions over Europe, and David E. "D.E." Bailey, Junior, the first married man in Plant City to be drafted.

"I was in a great outfit, a great company of fellows," says Bailey. "We looked out for one another and they probably saved my life several times, and I wouldn't take anything for my Army experience."

The special also features Ted and Harrison Covington, a pair of brothers who playfully banter back and forth as they tell their stories about serving in the Pacific theater in the Army and Army Air Corps respectively.

However, Harrison, who later became the founding chairman of USF's Department of Art, concludes his story with an interesting observation.

"They call us 'The Greatest Generation,' I think that's a lot of malarkey," he says. "I think that almost any generation would have done the same thing. When the chips were down, with the kind of enemy that we faced, I think that the current generation would have done the same thing."

"We felt it was important for the people in the Bay area to hear the stories from these heroes in their own words," says co-producer Andy Nichols.

"It was very interesting to see that while these two cities were separated by less than thirty miles and were so very different back at the time of the war," adds co-producer Mark Schreiner, "their citizens stepped up and answered their country's call the same way.

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