

Letters from World War II: A Story of Life and Love during the Extraordinary Events of World War II

Barbara Jane Hannon

Readers Magnet

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Letters from World War II is a fascinating family memoir covering the wartime bravery and sacrifices of an imprisoned soldier and his wife.

Barbara Jane Hannon's family memoir *Letters from World War II* is about the harrowing early years of her parents' marriage.

George Hannon and Dorothy Snouffer began dating in high school. Their romance escalated after graduation when they reconnected at a friend's wedding. But Dorothy lived with her parents in Iowa and George with his in Minnesota. Facing a long-distance relationship, they wrote letters to continue their courtship.

Later, George opted for an eighteen-month enlistment, fearing "the long arm of the Army on [his] shoulder" and the possibility of being drafted into a branch that he did not want. He dreamed of becoming a pilot. Separated from his Dorothy by virtue of his duty, he continued writing to her.

The book moves through George's rise through basic training into his eventual entry into the Air Corps Academy and the war itself. It covers how, while serving as navigator, he escaped from a burning plane by parachute. Later, he worked as a bookie in a POW camp run by Nazis, facing starvation and other deprivations.

Such information is pieced together using both George's letters and the historical record. The text includes photographs of official documents, letters, and other pieces of ephemera for clarity. There are details regarding the impact of the International Red Cross Committee and of personal care and YMCA packages for the interred soldiers too.

Over nine thousand men were imprisoned with George at Stalag Luft 1 in Barth, Germany, along the Baltic Sea, and the book is quite exhaustive when it comes to detailing the imprisoned soldiers' days. It covers what they wore, what they ate, and relations between prisoners and guards. There's information about the college that officers set up to educate their fellow prisoners as well, George's role as bookie, and about how an underground newspaper was printed on toilet paper.

Some of the book's information is shared in the style of reportage, though, with the nuances of scenes falling to the wayside in service of a complete record. Better established are the relationships between the imprisoned men—and the relationship between the central couple. While George was imprisoned, the book notes, Dorothy experienced ongoing fear; she also worked to provide him solace from a distance, sending cake mixes, fresh socks, and cherished memories, awaiting his improbable liberation.

Letters from World War II is a fascinating family memoir covering a soldier's wartime bravery and sacrifices.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (July 16, 2024)

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