The Letters of "Dear Mollye" a.k.a. Mollye Sklut a.k.a. A Person Who Made a Difference

by Marvin S. Balick





The purpose of this paper is threefold: to refresh the memories of those who lived through World War II by recalling the accomplishments of our "Dear Mollye;" to remind everyone of the importance of the "Y Recorder" as a communications paper; and to show the faces and share the feelings of some of our heroes, with special emphasis on those who gave their lives in World War II. It is my desire that we will always remember the men and women who served, fought and died for our freedom.

Since the end of the war in 1945, a span of fifty-seven years, our Jewish community has seen two generations of young people grow to become parents, grandparents and community leaders. When your community asks for help, think about those who gave their lives so that we all are able to live and enjoy life. Think about what this one person, Mollye Sklut, did to benefit the community in which we live!



1925 WHS

The focus of this paper is Mollye Sklut, best known as Dear Mollye for the moralebuilding letters written to Jewish men from our area serving in the many theaters of operation in World War II.

Mollye Sklut was born in Wilmington and graduated

from Wilmington High School in 1925. At that time, she lived at 205 Washington Street and later moved to 14th and Washington Streets. Her father, Abraham Sklut, ran a kosher butcher shop on Second Street. She had three brothers (George, Dave and Jack) and two sisters

(Bessie and Jean). Mollye never married. She began working at the YMHA (the precursor to the present Jewish Community Center) in 1934 and had a thirty seven-year career there, serving as office manager for four executive directors: Isadore Sollod, Harry Bluestone, Simon Kornblum and Meyer Bass.

With a population of approximately 5,500 Jews in Delaware in 1940, 528 Delaware Jewish men and women served in the military during World War II. More than 800 Delawareans were killed in action (KIA), twenty-six of whom were Jewish. The names of those men are listed below along with five others who died in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts.

Nathan Aernson+	Harry Fineman*	Herbert Rubenstein*
Nathan Balick*	Zane Glazer+	Norman Schoenberg*
Arthur Blatman*	Bernard Goodlevege	Max Schwitzgold
Nathan Blume*	Gordon Goldstein	Benjamin M. Simon*
Rupert Burstan+	Kenneth Goldstein*	Jacob Israel Silver*
Morton Carlis*	Bernard Greenberg+	Charles Spiegel*
Herman Cohen*	Maurice Jacobs*	Sidney Steelman*
Charles Edelberg*	Robert Lisansky*	Arthur Weiler+
Martin Eisenman*	Seymour Miller*	Marvin Weiner*
Harry First*	Simon Rosen*	Henry Winston*
		Morton Wolson*

^{*}photo included (see pages 18-24) +not killed in World War II

The Jewish War Veterans Memorial Wall, located at the Jewish Community Center, displays a bronze plaque

with the names of twenty-six soldiers killed in action during World War II.





The entire wall is pictured here

The four photographs on the wall are Nathan Balic, Arthur Blatman, Henry Winston and Henry Fineman.

From 1941-1945, Mollye Sklut, then in her thirties, received over 500 letters from the Jewish men and women in the Armed Services. She received 10 letters in 1941; 81 in 1942; 167 in 1943, 168 in 1944 and 79 in 1945. The hundreds of letters written from her boys from all over the world expressed their admiration, love and appreciation for her consistent news of the homefront. There is little doubt that she answered just about every single one, personally writing over 50 letters a week to

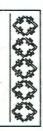
"her boys." Her letters were either hand written or typed and sent by V-mail. Once, early on, Mollye used a mimeographed common letter. She received notes back that the boys didn't care for this kind of contact. The letters received by Mollye were printed in the "Y Recorder", which was published twice monthly from 1942-1945. The title line on page one of the Recorder is reproduced below along with the DEAR MOLLYE headline.





DEAR MOLLYE

The former "Word From the Front" is now "Dear Mollye." It has its reasons. Miss Sklut has undertaken a one-man correspondence with virtually every Wilmington boy who has left for service. Even the stranger in our midst writes "Dear Mollye."



The archives of the Jewish Historical Society of Delaware, located at the Historical Society of Delaware, are the repository for the many letters written to Mollye. These letters conveyed current local community news and were replete with information about where

individuals were stationed, what they were doing, who was promoted and who was wounded or killed in action. Mollye wrote back of community events, general and specific family activities.

The following are a few of the V-mail examples of letters that Mollye wrote to "her boys." The first was written to Lt. Irwin B Cohen and dated November 21, 1944.

The second letter was written to Lt. George Samuels on March 23, 1945. *They are reproduced exactly as written*.

Dear Irv.

I read your letter and haven't said a word to your uncle and aunt, incidentally I bawled them both out last week about not writing and they promised they would. Gosh, I hope its true and before long you'll be walking in on us. I'd like to see that mug of yours, since I don't have a picture of you to display with the others, I'd much rather have you here in person. Last week I wrote Moish's wife and told her that as soon as you return that you would drop her a line. I know she will appreciate hearing from you. Artie Blatman just left again for your side of the fence. He'll be able to swap stories with you and some of those on the other fronts.

If this letter is returned to me I'll know for sure then that you are on your way home - if not, I'll be looking for an answer to it.

Peeny Berger may be home soon too - when I say home he'll probably wind up in some hospital first as did Sam Sloan. Marty started his furlough the other day and while coming home he was to stop and see Sammy first, he should be in Wilmington either Wednesday or Thursday of this week and then we'll hear all about Sammy. I wish I could see for myself but he's too far away from home, he might as well be right over there as to the distance. I presume we all would have made a beeline for him if he was closer.

Still as a sign of a basketball team this year - the old men of the "Y" including our Sonny are busy playing volleyball - as a matter of fact they are playing a league game now in the gym. Don't know what the score is. Good luck and come home safe.

Sincerely. Mollye

Dear George:

As soon as I got your letter I called your mother and we had a very nice visit on the telephone - I mean it was almost like a visit. We talked about you, she worries but what mother doesn't worry, we talked about Mickey and her coming here. I told her about getting the excitement of the telegram and the news that you were wounded it would work out swell having Mickey coming up here to live with her. The folks won't be so much alone and I believe its a darn good suggestion, that is if you are dam sure that Mickey is the girl and you sounded like it in your letter to me.

You don't mention whether or not you are in the hospital or out. I hope of course that you are up and around but believe me, no one of us still worry if you are still in the hospital, at least we know there you are taken care of.

I felt swell up until we got the news about Artie Blatman and that about shocked the whole community, it sure knocked us for a loop around this building. I wasn't going to write you about it but Morris told me that he had already sent you the clipping of your story and of Artie which both happened to appear on the front page that night. Too bad they both had to be run at the same time. But we have to take the good with the bad and just try and grin and bear it.

The last I heard from Byron he is still in the hospital and getting along fine, did I tell you that Morty Schulman is back in action and is a 1st Lt...Be careful George and don't go taking anymore wrong turns.

Regard from us all.

The following are excerpts from letters written to Mollye. From reading them, one can see the importance

of the Y Recorder. Again, all letters are reproduced exactly as written.

Dear Mollye,

I was rather shocked to hear the news of Harry First and the Winston boy. But we all know that wars can't be won without losses.

Major Bernie Greenberg (KIA)

Dear Mollye.

Above five minutes ago I received my first copy of the Recorder. Reading it made me quite homesick, so in order to thank you I decided to write a letter without delay.

(Pfc) Francis Hirshout

Dear Mollye.

Please excuse me for not writing sooner, but we have been in combat 64 consecutive days since our jump into southern France on the 15th of August and are still on the front.

How are you and what is all the news at home? I got the Recorder telling me about Nate Balick and the rest of the casualties. Very sorry to hear about it.

(Cpl) Willard Berdit

Dear Mollye.

This is the first real letter I have written to you in a long time...of course I expect to read it again in the Recorder along with those of my friends who I've overlooked writing to.

(Pfc Dave Balick)

Dear Mollye.

Received your letter and it's always swell hearing from you. Haven't received the Recorder for awhile but I guess they will catch up with me soon.

(Pvt) "Yankel" Fine

Dear Mollye,

I'm sorry to hear that Peeny Berger and George Frankel were hurt, but they are home now and that means a lot. My sister Reba told me that you had sent me the Recorder, should arrive soon.

S/Sgt Harry (Horse) Brenner

Dear Mollye,

I received, so far, one edition of the Recorder and I'm anxious to receive another.

(Pvt) "Bucky" Lewis

Dear Mollye,

I received the copy of the Recorder and the very issue that I never wanted to read. When I read through the first page and saw familiar names cloaked in black, none of the other letters interested me. I know we have to be prepared to learn that some of our dear friends gave their lives to their country, but I dread that day.

(Sqt) Marty Greenberg

Dear Mollye,

I attended the Jewish services and it had a very large crowd. I met Joe Lacoff and Siggy. I extend my wishes for a Happy New Year to you and Mr. Sollod, and all at the "Y." Write soon and send the Recorder.

(Cpl) Jack Schenkman

Dear Mollye.

I have had several Wimingtonians coming to services. We are having a Sukkoth service and party on Sunday night. Regards to all the Sollods as well as yourself and family. A Happy New Year to all.

Chaplain Henry Tavel

Dear Mollye.

I haven't forgotten you. I could hardly believe that Marvin Weiner was killed. He and I grew up together and went through school together. We were great pals, and I'll certainly miss him.

Some additional letters written between 1940-45.

Dear Mollye.

I received another edition of the Recorder today, and I was very much interested in the good news concerning the future erection of a new and better "Y".

The finish of the war caught me in a fox hole trying to drink vodka with a Russian soldier, and I enjoy their company.

In the last few months I have been meeting some Wilmingtonians. Three weeks ago I met an Air Corps boy who was shot down over Essen. He played basketball against the "Y" and we chewed the fat for a couple of hours, talking about the "Y" and its teams. Franny Hirshout and I met in a town near Duren. We have very little time together and the meeting was very unusual. Jenys were still sniping and all poor Franny had was a 45 pistol. I guess you know things were pretty rough.

I am Sgt. of the guard tonight and the next relief must now go out. Give my regards to everyone.

(Sqt) Dave Cohen

Dear Mollye.

Received the "Y" Recorder and your letter a few days ago. I can't believe the news about Ben Simon. I lived across the street from Ben for a long while and we were friends ever since childhood. When you know a fellow as well as I knew Ben it makes the kind of news twice as hard to take. The other night I went to a band concert. One of the numbers was the "Ballad of Roger Young." The entire time the band was playing that song, all of the fellows lever knew personally, such as Ben Simon, Artie Blatman and many others were parading back and forth in front of my eyes. I just can't write the way I feel, but I'm sure anyone that knew these fellows will understand how I felt.

(T/S) Dave Paikin

Dear Mollye,

I sure was glad to receive your letter...it was the first after several mail-less days. Thanks for the news about Morty Shulman. I received a letter from him and he is OK. I heard that Byron Samonisky was on the way home but I didn't know about Georgie Samuels. Will he be alright?

Glad to hear that everything is fine around the "Y" Keep that snack bar open as long as you can as I have a lot of eatin' "work" to do ... meaning corned beef sandwiches and Jewish pickles.

That's about all I have for now. Regards to Mr. Sollod, Sonny, Johnny and the rest of the gang.

(Cpl) Bernie Fischer

Dear Mollye.

Thanks a million for your recent editions of the "Y" Recorder which I enjoyed reading. You are indeed doing a remarkable job in seeing that the service men in the community receive the paper. Occasionally I get a couple of chills when I think of some of our boys whom I personally knew, and who have sacrificed their lives and those who have been wounded. I wish them a speedy recovery and homecoming. It was a shock to hear that Herbert Rubenstein was killed in action. War is hel...Thank God that war has ended over here and we hope and pray for an early termination of the war in the South Pacific. I have 5 Battle Participation Stars to my credit and still I do not feel optimistic about receiving an early discharge. 61 points is the best I could get. If I would have been married and had a couple of kids...it would have helped.

Regards to all.

(Pfc) Joe Klevan

Dear Mollye.

It was our fortune to liberate 127,000 Allied Prisoners on one swoop. Another piece of Humanitarian work was the freeing of many Jews in concentration camps near Amphing, Germany. Six hundred of these poor, miserable creatures required hospitalization for starvation. You've never seen such sights: living skeletons, who had formally been prominent doctors, lawyers, authors, etc. Their only crime...they were Jews. By the means of a cool, calculated, and sadistic program they were slowly starved to death and then beaten. When they died, they were bones, and like cords of wood they were buried in mass graves, unnamed and unmarked. I've seen the graves of 2700 Jews with my own eyes. Those dead were the lucky ones I believe. However; many Americans and Allied prisoners can and have told the same stories.

In accord with this sorrowful tale is the fact that I even dread to look on the last page of the "Y" Recorder. The Jewish community of Wilmington has paid more than its full measure in this war so far, and it isn't over. So many young boys I know, or whose families I know are now just a memory. My sympathy, poor compensation as it is, goes to their families. They have paid and done more than those of us who are living. I pray that this last issue of the Recorder will contain names of the last of our boys to die. Yet, I feel that they have given more than their lives for the USA...they have given their lives to save the rest of the Jews still living all over the world, and have made the Nazis pay for their misdeeds...too damned little. I pray, as you do, that it hasn't been in vain, but I hear that anti-semitism is spreading in our country. Let's stop it. We have done our share, and we are entitled to our religious freedom.

I certainly appreciate your writing. It has helped us all tremendously...the thought that someone beside our immediate families remember us. Good luck.

(Lt Col) Lou Schinfeld

Dear Mollye, 10-30-42

By the way I read a letter that I had written some time ago in the Recorder. I'll tell you the truth I look forward to receiving the Recorder as much as I do in looking forward to receiving the latest issue of "Time" or "Life." How do you like that for a buildup?

Bernie Greenberg (KIA)

Dear Mollye.

Have just received another edition of the "Y" news. Right now I'm reclining on my back and trying to think of something interesting to say.

I see by the paper that Marty Sloan, Phil Weinstein, and Sid Lincoln have joined the ranks. Too bad they weren't sent near here.

I've heard that Irv Sigmond and Dave Nathans made 2nd Lts.; also Irv Miller is bucking for *O.C.S. Good for them. The old town should be proud of their proteges. Then too the S.A.R." is going to hold their annual "Snowball." Wish I could be there. About 12:00 p.m. Christmas night I'm going to stop and think about last year at the moment when the snowballs were raining down. Maybe the other boys have the same thought.

Thats all for now
Regards to all at the "Y"
Charles Edelberg (KIA)
* O.C.S. - Officer Candidate School
*S.A.R. - SigmaAlpha Rho (High School
Fraternity)

Dear Mollye,

Received your letter and Recorder and their is no words that can tell how happy I was to receive them, but here news of home is worth more than anything else to a fellow.

Everything with me is fine and I'm well and you can't ask for more than that. Old man nostalgia sort of creeps up on me occasionally but the best remedy for that is work, so work I do.

The "Y" really must be a "pip" now, my mother wrote me how beautiful everything was. Wilmington has just about everything for my money anyhow and I think (I know) when I get home again I end the pages on my book of travel.

I noticed in the Recorder where a few of the Army boys sort of made slanty remarks about the Marines being glory hunters etc. Well I got a big kick out of it as I know how ridiculous that is, you can give those fellows the word because the only thing Marines are interested in is winning this war and getting back home safe.

I haven't heard from Milt Cohen for quite a while I guess he is busy. I met another fellow from Wilmington the other day and although I didn't know him in civilian life we both

knew the same people and the gums were really beating.

You know Mollye I just happened to think you ought to send me Dave Bergers address and also Mendel Fine's, I may bump into them around here.

I guess there isn't much more to write about around here now so until I hear from you which I hope is soon. I'll end with love.

Sid Steelman (KIA)

P.S. Give my regards to Mr. Sollod and any of the fellows who are lucky enough to be home on leave.

Dear Mollye.

Received your 27th Dec. letter and kid you are surely "on the ball." the Recorder; by the way, seems to be getting to me much sooner than they did back in the states, either way I enjoy the news. Did I sense a bit of favoritism in your letter when you referred to the "boys on second street;" now Mollye I know you well enough to say that it was only my interpretation or the particular way in which I interpreted the letter. I assure you that I get as much of a thrill when I read what you have to say about all the folks from home as when you mention the names of those that I can remember personally.

Nat Blume (KIA)

Dear Mollye,

I have just finished reading the best issue of the "Y" Recorder and Mollye I never realized what a great thing it is.

Morty Carlis (KIA)

Dear Mollye,

I received a Recorder today marked Bell Haven. I see where the fellows are all fine and happy. Give my regards to all.

Nate Balick (KIA)

Dear Mollye,

Dad sent me a "Y" Recorder and I was very much impressed with it. I was wondering if I couldn't get them sent to me. I am the only one in this regiment or division as far as I know from Wilmington or from Delaware and news from the hometown sure helps out a fellow a lot. Your column is what pleased me most, I knew you would remember the boys.

I have been in the Army thirteen months now and haven't seen or heard from some of my friends that are in the services. Can you send me the address of Charlie Lewis, Henry Winston (MA) and Joe First.

Well, I guess thats all for now, will write more later.

Your friend, Herman Cohen (KIA)

Dear Mollye,

The last time I was home I told you that I was going to be an instructor in an advanced flying school. Well, I took that job, and kept it for about 3 months. Then they put in a call for pilots who wanted to go to combat as pursuit pilots, so I am now in southern Florida, undergoing a short, but intensive course in combat flying. We are training in Thunderbolts (P-47), but that is no indication of what we are going to fly when we get overseas, all we know is that it will be pursuit. We are concentrating on gunnery, aerial and ground, skip-bombing, dive-bombing and various other phases of tactical air training. I'll be set to go in another week, and when I finish out my A.P.O. number I would appreciate if there is any chance in your letting me know some addresses of fellows in the same approximate location that I will be stationed.

Marvin Weiner (KIA)

Dear Mollye.

Received your letters and was really glad to hear from you. I guess you know by now that Milt and I met before I left the other island. It was really great seeing him and we were talking over the "good old days." I'm sorry we couldn't have gotten together sooner, but war is war and everything must be taken in stride.

I guess you are having a bit of trouble keeping up with me, almost everytime I write I have a new address, but that's the way it is in this kind of an outfit. You just get use to a place and boom, you're shoving off for some place new. That is one thing at least I am getting to see quite a few places, but really the only part I am interested in visiting is a certain little Wilmington on the Delaware.

Mollye I haven't received the last few issues of the Recorder; I would appreciate it very much if when you get a chance you will send them to me. You have no idea how just a little piece of paper can boost morale so much.

What's new around the "Y"? I hear it's really beautiful. It seems that in almost every letter I receive from somebody back home they mention something or other about how nice the "Y" is now. Well, Mollye, that is about all the scuttlebutt I can think of for now so until I hear from you again which I hope is soon I'll end.

Gobs of love Sid Steelman (KIA) Dear Mollye,

How are things in Wilmington these days. I guess it's still the same old town as when I was there last. Give everyone my best regards and I hope the snack lounge looks the same. When you get it enlarged, send me a sample of the good things to eat in there (joke).

Write soon and regards to Mr. Sollod.

Your Yankee Friend, Bob Lisansky (KIA)

Dear Mollye.

Well, I know that it was about time that I sent a letter home so I decided to send one your way also. At the present time we're out on the artillery range catching up on our much needed practice shooting.

As far as I know my leave is still set for the eighth of May. So sit tight sweetheart see ya soon. I'm trying to get a class four air priority so I can fly home and that will mean a couple of entire days at home.

That's all for now, everything is fine. Regards to everyone at the "Y."

Artie Blatman (KIA)

Dear Mollye,

As I sit in the office tonight, I took a look at the letters that were in my desk. I was startled to see that I had so darned much mail that had to be answered. I was double startled that I had two of your letters lying there plus the Recorder; which I had received today! So I says to myself, "Bernie, you better sit right down and drop a line to Mollye." The funny part about letters is that if one doesn't write, one never gets any mail. There is but one exception to the rule, I think that you know who that exception is. Perhaps I should have said that there were two exceptions. One is my wife and the other is none other than good ole Mollye. There is one thing that I can say and that is how in the world do you find time to drop a line to all of the boys and girls in the service. It is a gigantic task, isn't it?

Well Mollye, I guess that this is about all for now. Give my regards to all and for God's sake keep the "Recorder" coming,

Bernie Greenberg (KIA)

Dear Mollye.

Received your letter of May 3, and as usual enjoyed every bit of dirt from Wilmington. Except for our missions, it's been rather dull around here, so I don't have much for you now. Promise a much longer letter next time.

Best personal regards to Mr. Sollod.

Dear Mollye,

I'm to come up for a furlough some time in June and of that time shall make my exodus to the "Y." Its sort of strange Mollye, my being a Wilmingtonian, but, one who hasn't seen very much of Wilmington in the past 14 years, yes its been that long, however; whenever the fellows ask "Where do you come from," I automatically reply with, Wilmington, Delaware. I guess no matter where this mess takes me I shall always give the same reply, and with a decided boast. In closing Mollye let me say that I agree with you most whole heartedly in respect to the Winston boy (KIA). I can remember him when I went to his dad's store out on Union Street (am I right); remember me to all the folks and give them my best regards as for you a big kiss for your thoughtfulness in writing, until next time so long.

Nat Blume (KIA)

Mollye was recognized and honored by many people and organizations in Delaware.

In December, 1951, the Jewish War Veterans of Delaware presented Mollye with a plaque inscribed as follows:

"Presented to Mollye Sklut by the Harry Fineman Post 525 Wilmington, Delaware.

To Our Dear Mollye—for the love you gave and long hours you spent on our service men and women, where they went, a cheery word, a considerate thought followed us all where e'er we fought."

The July 5, 1971 Jewish Voice noted that George Weiner presented an award to Mollye when she retired after thirty seven years with the Jewish Community Center. The tribute read as follows:



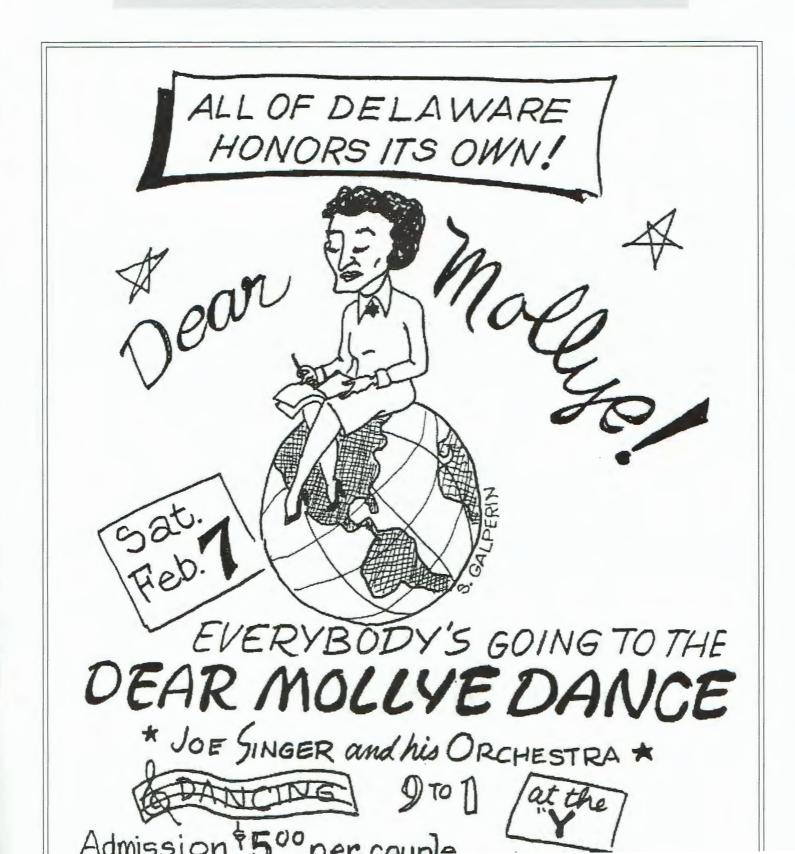
"Mollye Sklut came to the YM-YWHA when it opened in 1934 and remained a devoted and faithful and loyal member of the staff. Over the years she developed a deep attachment to the Center and a sincere concern for the well being of its members. "Dear Mollye" was one of the few bright spots in the dark memories of the World War II years. Her unselfish devotion to the cause of service to those in the armed forces earned her the affection of the entire community. Her letters of local news, good cheer, well wishes and prayers went out to Wilmingtonians all over the world. In her correspondence with them she kept the agency alive, awaiting their return to active membership. It is with profound gratitude that the Board of Directors of the Jewish Community Center pays tribute to Mollye Sklut upon her retirement and records this timely sentiment:

"Give her of the fruit of her hands and let her own works praise her in the gates."

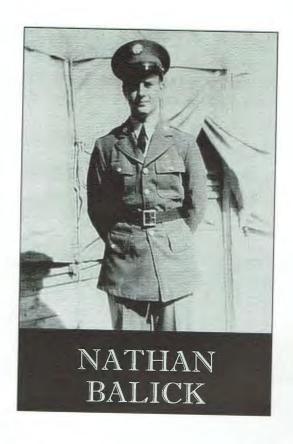
Bill Frank wrote of her in the *Jewish Voice* of November 18, 1977, in his column *Frankly Speaking*. "I know and you know there have been great men and women in our Jewish community. Men and women who have sacrificed time, energy and money for the overall good. But as I sit here and write, I am asking myself 'How many Mollyes have there been, who with the limited resources but with so much energy, served so many Jews on a one-to-one basis?' And you know, Mollye, you didn't have to write all those letters. You didn't have to be a pen pal to 600 or more soldiers. That was not in your job specifications as Girl Friday in the old "Y." Mollye Sklut, you are a woman of valor; heaven bless you."

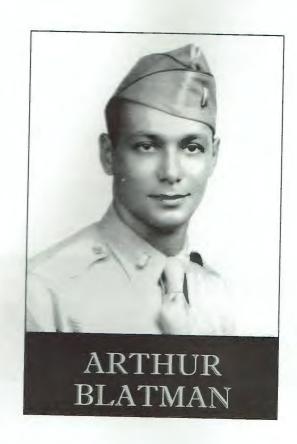
Mollye Sklut is 94 years old, in poor health and now resides in the Kutz Home.

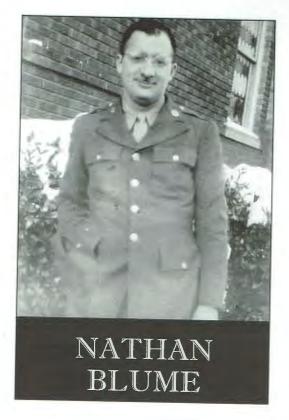
A recognition/appreciation dance was held in her honor after the war. The following is a publicity sketch by Saul Galperin, a WWII veteran.



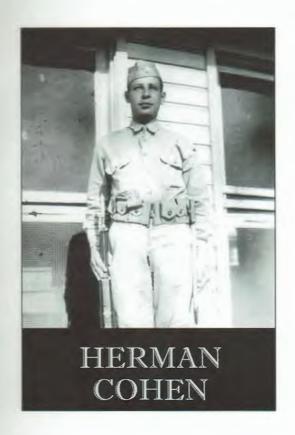
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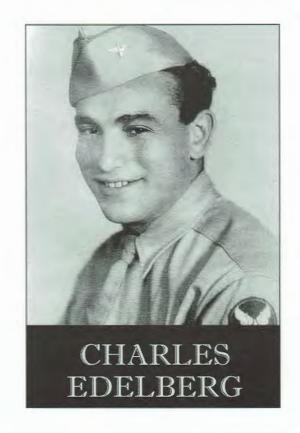


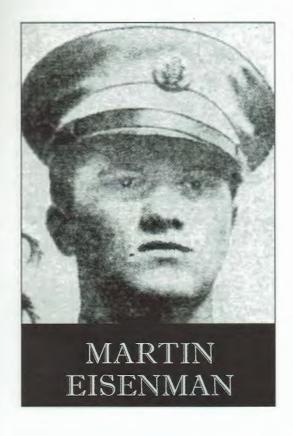


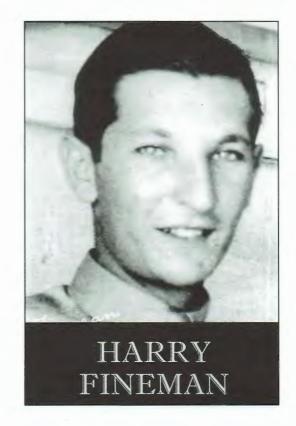


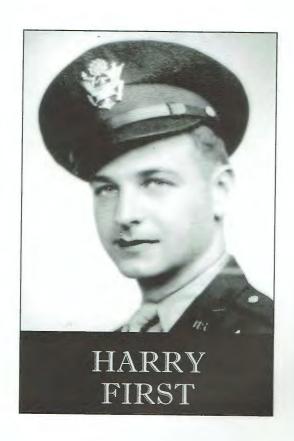


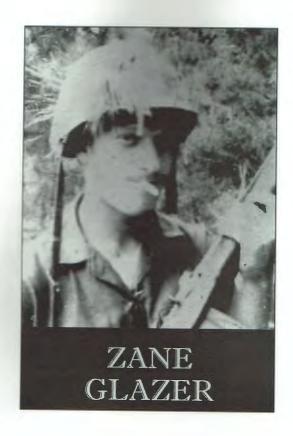




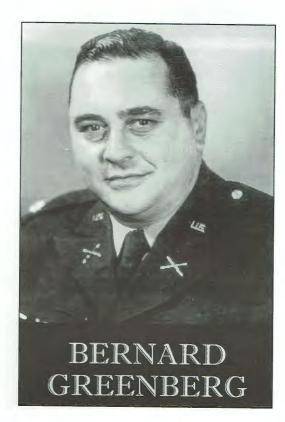


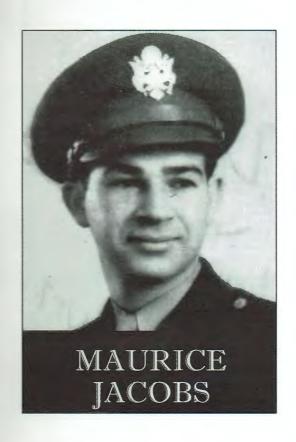


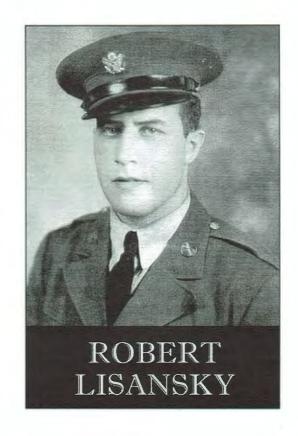


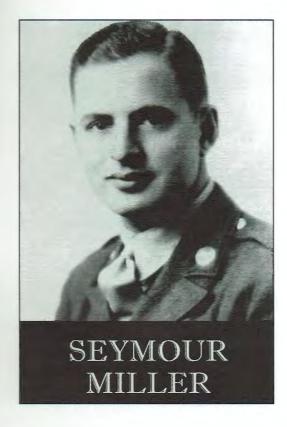


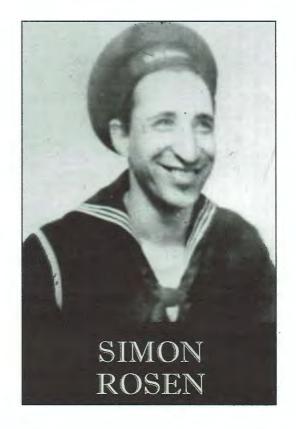


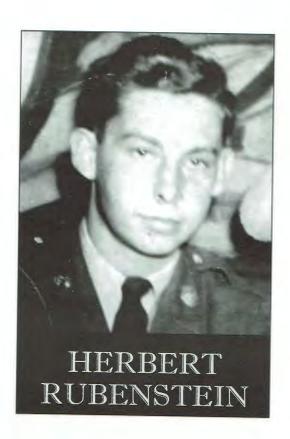


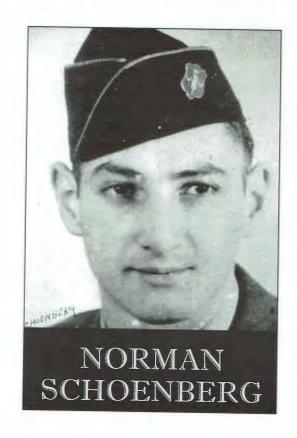


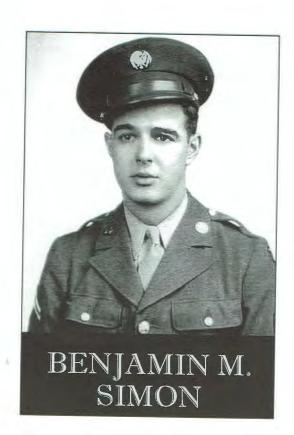




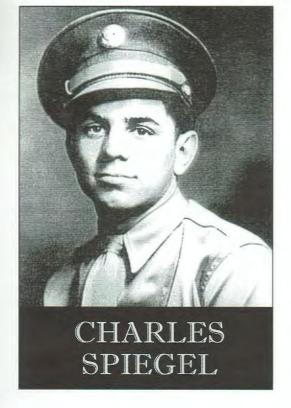


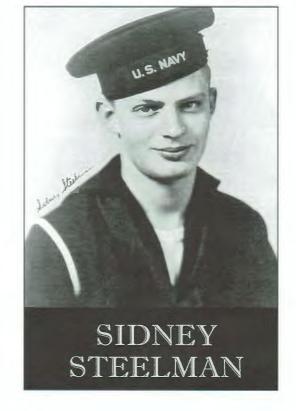


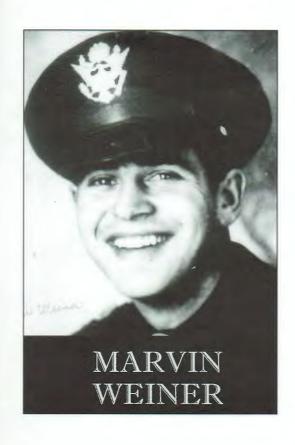


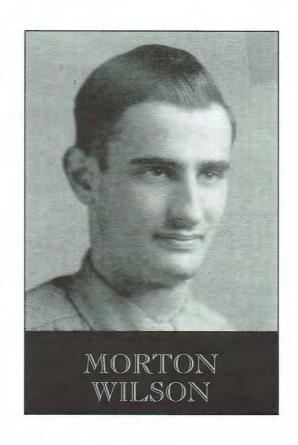














Photographs Missing

Nathan Aernson
Rupert Burstan
Bernard Goodlevege
Gordon Goldstein
Max Schwitzgold
Arthur Weiler



@1937, YMHA*

Top: (left to right) Bob Lewis, Reds Middleton, Jake Freid, Maurice Jacobs (KIA) Arthur Blatman (KIA) Bottom: (left to right) unknown, Harry Stat, Sam Sloan, Sonny Levy, Dave Glazer, Sam Gellar, ball boy, Morris (Skyball) Schultz

WHAT WILL BE YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE FUTURE OF OUR DELAWARE COMMUNITY AT LARGE AND TO OUR JEWISH COMMUNITY IN PARTICULAR?

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