

Narrator: Bernice Huels
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Place of Interview: Narrator's home, located at
6057 Crain, Morton Grove
Interviewer: Yvonne Ryden
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INTRODUCTION

In this interview, Bernice Huels tells the history of the Program to Aid Local Servicemen organization, better known as P.A.L.S. It was a wartime organization to show support for Morton Grove men serving in the armed forces during World War II.

P.A.L.S. was a very active organization and supported enthusiastically by the town. To show hometown appreciation to the local servicemen, a five-page monthly bulletin, local newspapers, letters and birthday cards were mailed to them. The organization also sponsored Farewell Breakfasts and had a special flag commemorating each Morton Grove man in the service at that time.

BH: Bernice Huels

Q: Question asked by interviewer, Yvonne Ryden

TAPE ONE, SIDE A

Q: I'm sitting here with Bernice Huels preparing to talk all about the P.A.L.S. organization of Morton Grove. Bernice, would you begin.

BH: In World War I, Morton Grove had a Woman's War Working Circle, a group of local women organized to show hometown appreciation and support of our local men serving in the armed forces. After the war, the Circle raised funds to erect the Doughboy Monument presently on the library grounds. In World War II, Morton Grove had a similar-oriented organization known as the P.A.L.S., an abbreviation of its formal name, Program to Aid Local Servicemen. In World War I only forty-three local servicemen were involved whereas in the Second World War, three hundred and fifty-seven men and women -- five women -- were served in a conflict that lasted almost four years.

P.A.L.S. was organized in 1941. Art Loutsch was chosen its first president and was later succeeded by Irene Faulmann who, in turn, was succeeded by Mrs. Harold Pierce. Art Wuest served as treasurer. I, as bulletin editor, compiled and produced the P.A.L.S. monthly bulletin. Fred L. Huscher and Mack Falknor served jointly as ways and means chairmen. Gretchen Loutsch served as publicity chairman and keeper of the servicemen's address file.

Soon after Pearl Harbor, Morton Grove men began leaving for service in ever-increasing numbers. P.A.L.S. erected a service flag hung between two posts in back of the Doughboy Monument. Displaying one star for each Morton Grove man

in service, the flag was an impressive sight, both in daytime and also under illumination at night. However, the flag was not large enough to accommodate the ever-increasing number of stars, and the form was changed to show only one large numeral figure -- total number then in service.

On this current year of 1988, looking back forty-seven years to 1941, it should be remembered that Morton Grove was then, literally and truly, a small town. Its population was only twenty-five hundred, but its response to the war effort was exceptionally great. It was estimated that at the close of the war in 1945, and with three hundred and fifty-seven men and women in the service, one of every three homes in town displayed in its window a star-studded service flag. The town's citizens responded enthusiastically and most of them proudly wore a P.A.L.S. button on their coat lapels. The P.A.L.S. program was composed of many parts. The P.A.L.S. bulletin board -- also in Doughboy Park, now the public library grounds -- had a glass- hinged door and was erected with a miscellany of servicemen's pictures, news clippings, snapshots of home-front parties, etc. The exhibit was regularly changed as new events occurred. It was titled, "News and Views of Our Boys." My mother, Mrs. Matilda Huels, and Gretchen Loutsch, and I handled this project.

P.A.L.S. parents' parties, also P.A.L.S. wives' parties and P.A.L.S. sisters' parties, regular card and bunco parties, and raffles were held to raise funds for the organization. These affairs were well patronized by our local citizens. They also resulted in a closer friendship amongst the various parents. Strangers developed into friends. Mere acquaintances became good neighbors.

P.A.L.S. Letter Gals was a group of local girls called the Chiquita Club. They regularly conducted a letter-writing project whereby, through correspondence, local news with a hometown flavor was mailed to all those in

service. Needless to say, newsletters from the hometown brightened the mail call in the camps and on the fighting fronts. The Letter Gals Committee consisted of Florence Huscher, Carol Hampton, Meta Sigel, Ruth Riha, Marion Haupt, Alice Winklhofer, Ruth Husen, Agnes Theobald, Bernice Yehl and Eleanor Winandy.

P.A.L.S. Monthly, a regularly-published mimeographed, five-page bulletin was sent to all those in service. This regular mailing reported the various home-front P.A.L.S. projects underway, names of the new inductees as time progressed, notes and comments from various ones in service. Art Loutsch edited and prepared the monthly until he entered the Army himself. Then I succeeded Art, and I acted as editor and publisher until the war ended with the help of Gretchen Loutsch and Lucille Rodenkirk Huels, my sister-in-law. She lived with us while my brother, Marvin, was in the service. The bulletin was processed after our working hours and sometimes into the wee small hours of the morning.

P.A.L.S. Farewell Breakfasts. Everytime a group of local draftees left for induction, P.A.L.S. parents, village officials and other interested citizens gathered at the village hall for a farewell breakfast. Then, the entourage of autos left for Park Ridge, the central gathering point for this area. These early morning breakfasts showed a fervent home-front support in appreciation for those who were about to embark on an uncertain future. The breakfasts were a big undertaking. They necessitated an early morning start, and they were well handled by those two P.A.L.S. Breakfast Gals in charge, Frieda Harms and Anne Godemann Lange.

P.A.L.S. Birthday Gal. Then another project -- a committee of one -- was the P.A.L.S. Birthday Gal, Marvillia French Krakora. It was P.A.L.S. policy to remember every one of our servicemen and women on their birthdays with a greeting card and a crisp one dollar bill. Remember that dollar in the 1940s bought more at the

camp P.X. than the weak dollar of today. It was not so much the monetary value that mattered, it was the remembering thought that touched a soft spot in the serviceman's heart.

Betsy Ross. Morton Grove's Betsy Ross was Mrs. Otto Frank. Her contribution was to sew the stars on our service flag until the stars became so numerous that a large numeral was substituted instead to show the total. But the tragic Gold Star display, one for every fatality, was retained. That sorrowful total at war's end finally reached nine.

P.A.L.S. New Gals. A group of high school girls from town assumed the task of wrapping, addressing and mailing the local Morton Grove newspaper to all in service. This big task averaged about three hours each week. The New Gals Committee, under the direction of Mrs. Harriet Lindemann consisted of May Robinson, Lenore Peters, Doris Hampton, Eleanor Polk, Dorothy Olsen and Virginia Sorensen.

P.A.L.S. Mailbox. Then there was the P.A.L.S. mailbox installed in our village hall lobby. It contained letters received from the men and women in service, which letters changed regularly, were read with great interest by visitors at the hall. Even the school children got into the home-front effort. Students in the art classes at Grove School prepared, with their elementary art abilities, homemade Valentines and Christmas cards which were sent to all the servicemen. In response, some servicemen would answer, and those letters resulted in a feeling of delight and appreciation when read during class.

The Morton Grove Roll of Honor. The village's Roll of Honor, a large billboard-type structure, was erected on what is now Baxter property at Lincoln and Ferris Avenues. Its cost and erection was borne by the local Lion's Club. As draftees and enlisted ones were inducted, the P.A.L.S. organization, under Mack

Falknor as Honor Roll chairman, procured the inductee's names, had name plates printed accordingly, and they then were added to the Roll. In fact, the number of names became so numerous that two wings were added to the original board to accommodate the number, which total ultimately reached three hundred and fifty-seven. Gold stars, signifying the supreme sacrifice, were placed in front of nine of those names. The area surrounding the board was landscaped with greenery, and a concrete lion animal decoration was placed at each end. It was a beautiful sight.

P.A.L.S. Publicity -- Gretchen Loutsch edited a P.A.L.'s column in the local newspaper, which column contained notes about and comments by various members in the services as gleaned from their letters. The local paper also was provided with photos of the men and news about the P.A.L.S. meetings and various organization projects. Even the Chicago Tribune ran a large featured article about the P.A.L.S. organization. P.A.L.S. members here at home participated in large numbers in the annual Memorial Day parade and program held at Doughboy Monument under the sponsorship of the American Legion.

Lest We Forget. By war's end, nine Morton Grove men had given their lives in the conflict. They were Glenn Brock, Raymond Noesen, Alling Norman, George Stejskal, Clarence Sesterhenn, Leonard Voss, Warren Kawell, Wayne Mattson and Clarence Lindemann. Finally the victory was won. The effort on the home front, but it was little compared to the risk, the heroism, the sacrifice, and the loss of life and limb by our men and women in service.

Welcome back home. In late 1945, P.A.L.S. staged a big welcome home party in Deckert's Hall, now the Villa Toscana on Lincoln Avenue -- and the town celebrated. Those who participated on the fighting fronts were generous and sincere in their thanks to those who remembered them back here on the home front.

Then the P.A.L.S. Honor Roll was taken down to make room for Baxter's parking lot. The P.A.L.S. service glad was taken down and stored away. Art Loutsch still has it over forty years later.

The Final Act. But there was one more piece of unfinished business for the P.A.L.S. organization to decide -- the treasury still contained a balance of twelve hundred dollars. It was decided to split the money in even shares among the six children of the Gold Star heroes. This mean a two hundred dollar scholarship fund to each of them upon reaching their eighteenth birthday. Those Gold Star awardees were Kenneth Noesen, Gerald Voss, Sandra Mattson, Ronald Stejskal, Jean Norman and Carol Norman.

Morton Grove has had many fine local organizations down through the Village's ninety-year history. The P.A.L.S., because of the purpose for which it was organized, the years of its war-time home-front service, and that final noble act of its existence, will be remembered as one of them.

TAPE ONE, SIDE A ENDS