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# 60 years <sup>Sat.</sup> after A-bomb

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## WWII remembered in letters

By Dick Bernard

"Hurrah, the old war is over!"

With these exultant words in August 1945, Grandma Rosa Busch, writing at the farm near Berlin, N.D., began her letter to her son, and my uncle, Navy Lt. George W. Busch.

As she wrote her "Hurrah," the deck officer of the USS Woodworth, George Busch's home for the preceding three years, recorded that the ship was "underway with Task Unit 38.3.9 consisting of 4 heavy units and 6 escorts."

Later, the deck log for Sept. 11, 1945, reported that the ship had anchored a few hours earlier in Tokyo Bay. Indeed, "the old war [was] over."

The USS Woodworth docked in Portland, Ore., on Oct. 20, 1945, and Uncle George began his return to civilian life.

One Navy man who didn't return was my Uncle Frank Bernard, brother-in-law of Rosa's daughter, Esther. Frank went down with the USS Arizona Dec. 7, 1941, one of the first of hundreds of thousands of U.S. casualties in World War II and one of perhaps 50 million total casualties.

Uncle George and Aunt Jean, his wife, wrote hundreds of letters to each other from 1941 to 1945, and they saved every one.

On Aug. 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, though thousands of miles apart, the two wrote almost identical words.

Aunt Jean, from near Grand Forks, N.D.: "The news that excited everyone is Russia's declaration of war on Japan. Surely Japan will crumble now under the combined pressure, new atomic bomb and repeated attacks."

Uncle George, from somewhere in the Pacific: "Good news! Good news! Comrade Joe came through with a declaration of war against Japan. That should step up VJ day considerably. This plus the new bomb might even convince the Japs that the struggle is futile. Surely they can't be ignorant enough to believe that they can whip the world."

With Jean's Aug. 9 letter came an unidentified newspaper clipping, probably from the previous day's Grand Forks Herald. "1st Test Made in Desert" read the headline, and the story told of the July 1945 test of a new extremely powerful bomb "in New Mexico's desert" near Alamogordo.

The U.S. War Department, quoted in the article, said: "A revolutionary weapon designed to change war as we know it, or which may even be the instrumentality to end all wars was set off with an impact which signalized man's entrance into a new physical world."

In none of the many letters from George's family or from George himself is there evidence that anyone really knew the incredible destructive power, or even the human consequences for innocent "Japs," of the bomb they were cheering. Neither could they know how history would assess the War Department's optimistic prediction that the atom bomb would bring freedom from future war.

In all of their letters was evidence of the polarities of war: To them, the war was very personal, in the person of their brother, their son, their nephew, their neighbor; those on the other side were simply "the Japs."

In her Aug. 26 letter, right af-



An atomic bomb exploding over Japan in 1945: At the time experts predicted that the weapon would change war as we know it.

ter she wrote "Hurrah, the old war is over," Grandma Rosa, as saintly a person as I'll likely ever know, told her son then steaming toward Japan, "I went rite to my statue and lit a candle and prayed."

History doesn't record the subject of her prayer.

Neither does history record what happened at the grotto in the farmyard of the ancestral home in Germany — a grotto built by our German relatives in gratitude that four sons returned safely from the war that had all but destroyed their country.

Those four sons, I'm told, never talked about what they did in the war. They give silent

witness to Reichmarshall Hermann Goering's oft-quoted statement, as he talked with psychiatrist Gustave Gilbert in his cell at Nuremberg in 1946:

"Why, of course, the people don't want war," Goering shrugged. "Why would some poor slob on a farm want to risk his life in a war when the best that he can get out of it is to come back to his farm in one piece. It is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along."

When will we ever learn?

Dick Bernard lives in Woodbury.