

A Journalist Joins the War Effort From London



FAITH McNULTY MARTIN

Story by Ben Tyler

I was in New York, I was 23, I had an apartment of my own, and I was making \$18 a week. I used every bit of it. I couldn't really live on \$18 a week -- I had help from my mother.

That was Faith McNulty Martin in 1941, working at the New York Daily News as a copy girl. Her career as a writer was just beginning. But now, at 71, Faith was sitting in her Rhode Island farmhouse living room retelling these war memories as an experienced writer. Sitting on her couch with her dog at her side, surrounded by books and magazines, she continues to explain.

In those days a city room was a very fast-moving place where pieces of paper had to go from one desk to another, and they used to use copy boys to carry the stuff. I was hired because the boys had gone to war. It was a very good break for me, and I was crazy about it. I always wanted to be a writer, and I was seeing how news was turned into print. I worked nine to five, or if not nine to five, at least an eight hour shift. I had the interesting experience of just learning so much, being absolutely astounded at this chance to do things that I had never thought about or knew anything about.

I had been pretty well aware of the war in Europe and Asia since 1939. I was well aware of it and horrified by it. I knew a great deal about World War I (I was born in 1918). World War I was still pretty fresh in people's minds when I was a child. I was very much a pacifist in 1938 and 1939, and hoped there would never be another war. I believed that if everybody refused to fight, there would be no war, and I didn't see any reason for a war. I was really unaware of Germany's rearmament and Germany's enormous hostility, that it was really going to embark on a march of conquest. I just didn't think that was going to happen.

The threat of a Nazi victory, and then later of a Japanese victory -- I never really thought there could be such a victory, but I certainly would have known all about carnage and the fact that Britain might go under. By the time that we were in the war, my pacifism was over.

The day that Pearl Harbor occurred I remember very well. I was having lunch in the little restaurant across the street where all the newsmen went, and somebody came dashing in yelling, "They've hit Pearl Harbor!" I was so ignorant I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was or what it was. I found out very fast, but I didn't let anybody know that I didn't know. I rushed back to the office, and the office was going crazy because they had to totally put together a new newspaper.

Everybody was shocked and horrified, but not terribly surprised, because I think most of us thought we'd be in it sooner or later. I saw men in uniform everywhere, and I saw men being drafted. I saw the fact that men weren't where I was working at *The Daily News*. There were an awful lot of absent people who had been drafted or who had enlisted.

Time magazine published a brief story on the fact that women were now working in the city room. I was one of the three first women or

girls hired in the city room. When this was published in *Time*, *Life* magazine called me up and asked me to work for them. I said no, I liked my job. I had just gotten it, and I was going to stick with *The News* until I had learned as much as I could. They said to give them a ring when I was ready. So after two years on *The News*, I called up and said, "I'm ready if you want me," and they said "Come."

At *Life*, I was a reporter, and I also arranged for our photographers' cover stories, and made sure that all the factual material I needed was supplied in order to write the captions for the pictures. It was very exciting. I worked with top photographers who were very famous. I learned how a magazine was put together. I had an opportunity to write some pieces, to do research. That was all pretty fascinating.

I became aware of anti-Asian feelings because when the Japanese were interned I had an opportunity to interview one of those Japanese. That made me very forcibly aware of what a really shabby deal they were getting. I felt desperately apologetic for my country doing this to the Japanese.

What had happened was that they were trying to get some of these Japanese out of the internment camps, so they were settling them where workers were needed. One of those places was a farm in New Jersey. Well, no sooner did they put ten or fifteen Japanese families there with the idea they would work in the truck farms, then the American neighbors rose up in arms and said they didn't want any dirty, yellow Japs in their neighborhood. So this was an issue. They were burning crosses in the vicinity of where these Japanese were. I went out to interview one of the men who was sort of the spokesman. He was very impressive and forgiving and a deeply patriotic American. He turned the other cheek and said, "They don't know what they're doing." I still have the interview I wrote. It was one of my opportunities to do something good.

At the beginning of 1944, I arranged to join the office of War Information in London, which was the government's propaganda office, really. A friend, who was a writer for the *Saturday Evening Post* was head of a section in London. I knew him well, and when I told him I wanted to come, he said he would arrange it.

The office put out publications that were to be distributed in Europe to counter Russian propaganda. They sent me to London where I spent nine months on the government payroll working on magazines that would be distributed in Europe. It was terribly interesting. It was fascinating to be in London during the War. I saw it as a very exciting adventure -- to be in London in wartime and have an opportunity to advance my career, to do more writing.

It was an experience just to fly across the ocean in those days. It took 18 hours. I flew in a bomber. It was a wartime, stripped-down situation. It had huge fuel tanks, I think, and very uncomfortable seats. Of course, everything was blacked out, so you landed in total darkness and icy, icy conditions. Because England had no fuel, they didn't heat anything. I've never been so cold in my life. I arrived in London by bus or car of some kind. Driving into this bombed-out city was quite an experience. The first thing that I was told when I got there was that while I was in the air a new kind of bomb called a V-2 had just been announced. The Germans had been bombing London with it for six months but it had been secret. The censorship had prevented the public from knowing it. Now it was revealed, so I thought, "My God, what have I gotten into?" I remember that I really was pretty scared.

The house that I was taken to was a brownstone near Marble Arch. It was the only surviving house for quite a good part of that block. Everything else had been leveled by the buzz bombs. Buzz bombs were little drone planes without any pilots in them which automatically flew over London, and when the engine cut out they fell. They could take a house down. They had done a lot of damage, and they were still coming over when I got there. The sirens would wail, but there was really nothing you could do about it. People did not go to shelters, but I didn't know that at the time.

When I arrived at my billet in this desolate house, I was told to take a room on the top floor. I climbed up there and I began to unpack, and all the little things that I had packed so lovingly at home seemed really quite useless if they were going to get blown out into the street. They seemed rather pathetic, and I sat there wondering what to do.

Then the siren sound, and I thought, "Oh my God, I'd better go down to the basement or something." So I started down the stairs, but on the floor beneath me I heard somebody typing, and they just went right on typing. I thought, "Well, if they've got enough confidence in the future to go on typing, I'll go back upstairs and unpack." And I did. I could have gotten hit by a bomb, but I didn't.

I married a man I had met on *The Daily News*. I married him in '45. I came back in the summer of '45 after I'd been in London nine months, and then I married. By that time I was sick of London. I could have gone on to Germany, and I'm sort of sorry I didn't do that -- some of my friends did. They were moving the office. You could either go home or you could go to Germany. I was rather homesick and I came home. Now I can't understand why I did it. I should have gone on.

When the war ended in Japan, I was on a ship coming back from overseas. I was being returned by the U.S. government and they had put me on a liberty ship that left from France. Everything was in French and it was an interminable voyage, it seemed to me. There were about ten passengers. They all were French and my French wasn't very good. As we approached the USA -- we were going to dock in Portland, Maine -- one of the French officers came to me -- I was up on the rail -- and said, "We heard this tremendous news over the radio." He said it all in French, you know. "The war is over! The war is over! You have eradicated Japan with one bomb." Well, this sounded awfully insane to me, that we had eradicated Japan, that the war could end like that. I had no idea what he was talking about, that we had this enormous bomb. And in the next few hours, as we approached and I saw the shores of the USA, I began to believe that the war was really over, but I didn't understand about this weapon. As we came into the harbor in Portland, it was the moment that they decided to blow all the whistles to celebrate the end of the war with Japan. This enormous surge of sound welled up -- every factory whistle, every boat whistle, every horn. It was the most extraordinary, sort of orchestral sound, really thrilling. I was certainly moved to tears. It was so wonderful to think that it was over, and it was so dramatic.

I didn't think at the time it was a mistake to drop the bomb. I didn't see why we had to drop more than one. I was so terribly glad to have anything end the war that I did not feel critical of Truman for doing it. I don't know how I feel now, but I think I thought even then that Hiroshima was enough without Nagasaki. I didn't like the idea of killing all the civilians.

The war certainly made me aware of the world politics instead of just U.S. politics. It made me aware of geography. I learned a lot and grew up a lot, I guess. It was a tremendous boost. I was very lucky. I didn't lose anyone close and it gave me an opportunity I might not

have otherwise had. The war got me started on *The Daily News* . I don't think I would have ever gotten that job without the war, and that job was really crucial in my success. Fortunately, I was smart enough to be able to use the break when it came. I hope you don't live to see a war.

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