

Astorians Rally For Warplanes, Creedmoor Is Investigated

Get into a conversation with a long-time Queens resident and you're likely to discover a subscriber of the *Long Island Star-Journal*, a daily paper that informed the community about local and world news until it folded in 1968. A banner across the *Star-Journal* masthead reminded readers that the newspaper's name came from the merger of the *Long Island Daily Star* (1876) and the *North Shore Daily Journal--The Flushing Journal* (1841).

Welcome to March 1943!

The Queens "Buy a bomber" campaign got good news on the night of March 11, when a rally in Astoria was attended by 1,000 people and raised \$1,500,000. It had been hoped to raise \$300,000 to finance the construction of a single Flying Fortress bomber, but generous Astorians gave enough for five planes.

On March 24, the Office of Price Administration published its official list of points for rationing meat, fish, fats and cheese. There were 16 points per person per week. Steak and center cut

pork chops could set the buyer back 8 points for a single pound, while pig's ears would set the buyer back only 1 point per pound. Rationing experts pointed out that by practically eliminating steaks and roasts and by relying on meat stews, variety meats and hamburger, the housewife could provide 2 pounds of meat a week for each family member and still have at least four points per person left over for butter and fats.

On March 2, the *Star* reported that a 42-year-old man, Karen Dowly of Astoria, had died of injuries sustained in a beating by fellow patient Gilbert Hamilton at Creedmoor State Hospital in Queens Village. Dowly's autopsy revealed that he had died of a ruptured colon as a result of the savage beating. District Attorney Charles F. Sullivan decided to present the attack and the circumstances surrounding it to a Queens grand jury. It would be the third time in eight years that a grand jury had looked into the affairs of Creedmoor. It was investigated in 1935 as the result of 15 violent deaths in 12 months and again in 1939 on reports that

patients had been brutally beaten. Initial findings of the probe were that attendants at Creedmoor were making only \$54 a month and that, out of the normal attendant staff of 500, there were 157 vacancies.

At the same time, Creedmoor was experiencing an outbreak of amoebic dysentery, the worst in 16 years, that had taken the lives of nine patients.

On March 12, Governor Thomas Dewey ordered an investigation of what he called "disgraceful conditions" at Creedmoor. The investigation was ignited by state Senator Seymour Halpern, a Kew Gardens Republican, who visited the institution incognito and reported that conditions there were "horrible." Dewey made public a letter from Halpern in which, among other charges, Halpern said that he found mouse droppings on dishes about to be used for patients' food; that the attendants were afraid to eat in the hospital and consequently patronized outside restaurants; that mattresses of patients suffering from dysentery and tuberculosis were not disinfected before being used again, and that the attendants who cleaned the lavatories also prepared and served food.

The federal government took over the plant of Hellige, Inc., a manufacturer of scientific laboratory supplies and water testers for the Army, at 37-18 Northern Blvd. The plant owner, a Jackson Heights doctor, Dr. Paul A. E. Hellige, had been held in custody by the FBI since February 16. Production at the plant had fallen off perceptibly shortly after Hellige's arrest, and it was felt that the only way to restore full production was a

government takeover. Although the FBI refused to discuss Hellige's "arrest", it was learned that a hearing on his status had been conducted by the Enemy Alien Board. When Hellige was taken into custody, the FBI quoted him as saying he favored an Axis victory in the war. Hellige had fought in the German army from 1914 to 1916 and had been decorated for bravery with the German Iron Cross. Up to the outbreak of World War II, he had received a pension from the Nazi government.

On March 13, the Blizzard Men of 1888 held their annual luncheon at the Pennsylvania Hotel in Manhattan. After lunch, the program was to consist of telling tall tales of experiences during the blizzard, which occurred on March 12, 1888 and was the worst snowstorm in New York City history [until February 11-12, 2006]. The club members had been meeting for 55 years since the storm. It appeared that with every passing year the tales got taller, to the point that some of them seemed as tall as drifts in the blizzard, which were rumored to have reached 20 feet high in some places.

The observation deck at LaGuardia Airport was scheduled to be jacked up to keep it from sinking into the landfill on which the \$4,000,000 airport was built. The job was expected to cost \$85,000. Just two years before, a system of hydraulic jacks had to be installed under the Administration Building to hold it together. Engineers checked and adjusted the jacks every month to keep the building level. The LaGuardia landfill was composed of garbage, rubbish and other fill. According

to engineers, who had studied landfills, it just didn't provide a firm enough foundation for buildings. Assemblymember William F. Bowe of Flushing called the LaGuardia experience a "disgrace" and called this a valuable lesson for the construction of the new Idlewild Airport [now John F. Kennedy International Airport] on the shore of Jamaica Bay.

Jones Beach would probably open for the summer, unless bus service to the beach were to be banned by the Office of Defense Transportation. Under Office of Price Administration rules, anyone using the family car to reach the beach would violate the pleasure-driving ban, but officials hoped the rule would be relaxed. Another problem for the park was a shortage of staff, who had been drafted or were working in war industries.

On March 20, square dancing was brought up to date with a dance at Lost Battalion Hall in Elmhurst. The event had a "V for Victory" theme originated by the caller, Ed Durlacher. More than 300 attended the dance, the first large-scale square dancing in the area since the gaslight era. Novices at square dancing were given a demonstration by a group of recreation attendants from Richmond Hill. Durlacher's calls executed the formation of groups of Vs on the floor, at first in groups of eight, then in larger groups until 100 couples made one large V covering the entire dance floor.

On March 5, Greer Garson won the Best Actress Academy Award for her role in "Mrs. Miniver", which won most of the other Oscars. Exceptions were James Cagney, who won the Best Actor award for his work in "Yankee Doodle Dandy", and Van Heflin, who won Best Supporting Actor for "Johnny Eager."

Playing at the movies were "Casablanca", starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman; "Commandos Strike at Dawn", starring Paul Muni; "Immortal Sergeant", starring Henry Fonda and Maureen O'Hara, and "Journey Into Fear", starring Orson Welles, Joseph Cotton and Dolores del Rio.

That's the way it was in March 1943!

For more information, contact the Greater Astoria Historical Society at 718-728-0700 or visit www.astorialic.org.



Rationing poster Northwestern University
<http://www.library.northwestern.edu/>

From the Maxwell Air Force Base website (original image). www.maxwell.af.mil/

