ust as the millennium was getting under way, a copy of a short description announcing the death of a Mount graduate during the Second World War came across my desk. It was written by one of his peers and it was so moving that I immediately contacted the author, Philip A. McDonnell, C’43, and asked him to send me more information. I had been trying to research the situation at the Mount during those difficult years and found suddenly that my work was done for me by this accomplished alumnus. After receiving a slightly more extended version of his first work, I again contacted Phil and this time coaxed him into writing a more complete memoir of that era. What follows on these pages is that memoir, exactly as he wrote it, and it is a fitting tribute both to him and to the men of whom he writes.

Philip Adrian McDonnell had just turned 80 when he wrote these pages. While a senior at Mount St. Mary’s, he was sworn in as a Navy Apprentice Seaman in September of 1942. He graduated as valedictorian of the Class of 1943 and was immediately ordered to active duty, and commissioned to serve with the Seventh Fleet Advanced Bases in New Guinea and the Philippines under General Douglas MacArthur. He was released to the Organized Reserves in 1946 after the war had come to an end. He resumed active duty as a Naval Intelligence Officer during the Korean War, and was honorably discharged with the rank of Lieutenant (SG) in 1954.

Between seasons of active service in 1947, he married Catherine Winter, who had been a student at Saint Joseph College, though she later graduated from Chestnut Hill College in 1945. Another one of those wonderful St. Joe-Mount marriages, they have been together for 54 years and are the parents of eight children and grandparents to 13.

Phil worked as a reporter for The Spectator Magazine and the New York Journal of Commerce until he joined the business staff of TIME Incorporated in 1956. He served on the staffs of both TIME and LIFE until his retirement in 1987.

Phil was the 1966 recipient of the Mount St. Mary’s Alumni Association’s Brute Medal. As a distinguished alumnus, he was chosen to present the college’s 1967 DuBois Medal to Bishop James Walsh upon his release from imprisonment in China. Bishop Walsh, P’10, and co-founder of Maryknoll, remains an important inspiration to Phil.

The pages that follow are a remarkable document, bringing to life again the difficult days of a lingering depression just before the infamous attack on Pearl Harbor, and the years that followed. They create an authentic portrait of the men of the Mount, their trials and their victories, and above all their heroism. Modestly, Phil refers to them as “one of the Mount’s greatest generations,” though arguably the “one of” could be eliminated and, I suspect, few objections would be heard. I am pleased to present this as the second of our Analecta series. As we move toward our Bicentennial Celebration, nothing could be more appropriate.

Father Dan Nusbaum, Ph.D.
College Historian
During the past two centuries, there were undoubtedly many great and accomplished citizens among the tens of thousands of alumni who received an education at Mount St. Mary’s College and Seminary. Their individual achievements would place them proudly in any great generation. However, those who matriculated at the Emmitsburg campus during the 1930s and early 40s were tested and challenged before and after college by catastrophic events like no other group in the history of the institution!

This is a summary report on what this generation went through while being raised during the worst economic depression the nation had ever experienced. Then, despite this financial upheaval, they and their families managed with the help of an equally cash-stressed college to eke out an education. Two thirds of those accepted by the Mount somehow managed to qualify for partial scholarships or received outright financial aid. Since only 10 percent of all high school graduates attended college in those days, this group needed no reminder of their unique opportunity to pursue their chosen careers. To each one, it was the beginning of a lifelong love affair with a caring and generous academic institution.

The all-encompassing catastrophic events of World War II were the third force impacting these particular men of Mount St. Mary’s. While most went into military service, many had to adapt to the tumultuous pressures of civilian life. NBC Anchorman Tom Brokaw first coined the phrase: “Greatest Generation” to describe many people who lived through the Depression and World War II. This essay adopted his theme with the suggestion that the hundreds of Mountaineers so caught up in these three developments deserve to be designated as members of “One of the Mount’s Greatest Generations.”

This generation of Mountaineers were Marked Men for they truly had a “Date with Destiny!”

Who were these men? How bad was the Depression? What was life like on the Mount campus before and after the nation declared war on its enemies? To what extent did World War II affect the men of Mount St. Mary’s College, whether in the military or civilian life? Why should they be privileged to belong to “One of the Mount’s Greatest Generations?”

Who Were These Mountaineers?
They were children from a dozen states, territories and the nation’s capital. The collapse of the United States economic system left many households in financial chaos. A collection of some of their stories seems almost repetitious, for they all read the same. They came from large families whose fathers were often unemployed and earning limited dollars with an emergency government works program. These future Mount students were expected to take on youthful chores and adult like responsibilities. The chance of attending college would be the same as winning the lottery. Instead, as children, they were prematurely being molded as adults in the shadow of their own lives’ darkest clouds.

A few of these Depression born alumni were kind enough to sum up their personal remembrances of that period and of their views on what life was like during their years on the campus. One of those was Paul Blasco, who starred on the Mount’s football team starting in 1940. He commented:

“My father’s Pennsylvania steel mill employer reduced its capacity by 90 percent and he held
on only as a part-time employee. I was ninth of 13 children and delivered morning and afternoon newspapers. My two incomes were all we had for quite awhile. At that time, our parents insisted that the older brothers and sisters leave our house each day at 6 a.m. in search of employment. We had no car. The daily search was on foot. The reception we always got was: ‘We’re not hiring anybody today!’ Our credit at the local market was always at maximum. Each evening after supper, we would say the rosary and my parents always added a special prayer for our kind grocer!”

Paul Blasco went into service with the 3rd Marine Division. He was a company commander during the invasion of Guam and Iwo Jima and served aboard the USS Callaway. After the war, he spent another 30 years in Foreign Counterintelligence with the FBI and received a dozen commendations. When interviewed recently, he credited the Mount with affording him “the opportunity to develop close human relationships and a spiritual devotion to the Blessed Lady, which helped carry me through war and peace.”

**How Bad Was the Depression?**

Unless one lived during this period, it is almost impossible to convey the pain, suffering and fright that the 1929 crash on Wall Street spread across the land and even around the world.

More people departed from the country than migrated into the USA. A third of the population had no income whatsoever. Eleven million farmers were totally broke and desperate. 5,500 banks closed when they ran out of assets. The remaining 18,569 banks had only $6 billion in cash to meet the demands for $41 billion in deposits. Stocks on Wall Street lost 90 percent of their value. Stockholders lost three times what it cost the United States to participate in the First World War.

The victorious, yet panicked, veterans of the earlier 1917-18 conflict had marched on Washington demanding reparations and relief for their families. They had to be dispersed when President Herbert Hoover ordered the United States most decorated soldier, General Douglas MacArthur, to burn their shacks, contemptuously called “Hoovervilles” and drive them out of the nation’s capital.

Author William Manchester reported in his best seller, “The Glory and the Dream” that when President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1932, democracy, capitalism and the American system were on trial! He wrote: “Prominent figures believed we were on the verge of a revolution. The pull of socialism and communism was espoused by many of the nation’s leaders and their attraction to a different way of governing was more than a flirtation.”

**What Was the Effect on the Mount Administration?**

Well, on the campus at Mount St. Mary’s, a cost-conscious council was forced at that time to operate the college on an annual budget of about $100,000. Through the wise planning of its administrators and the availability of the Mount’s farm products, the students were adequately fed, housed and instructed. Loyal instructors and sympathetic employees made no demands which undoubtedly helped everyone through the crisis.

One student, who would eventually be elected president of the Mount, the late Monsignor Robert R. Kline, described his days on the campus: “Few of us had money. We worked out our debt to the school on the playing field, working in the library, or in the dining hall. There were hardly any cars, but strict disciplinary rules and the geographical isolation of the Mount threw us on our resources of relaxation and recreation. We taught each other in ways that the modern college student would not easily understand – we learned to enjoy the company of other people!”

In the fall of 1935, the editors of the college newspaper, the award winning *Mountain Echo*, wrote a prophetic editorial: “A war in the next 10 years is inevitable and the college boys of today are the ones who will be in the thick of it. We think we are right to say that no Catholic boy will disregard the Call to Arms, whether he is the brightest figure on campus or the most timid!”
It was only a half dozen years later when this prediction of hostilities was confirmed. In December 1943, the Gettysburg Times reported that already over 727 Mount St. Mary’s alumni, including 48 priest chaplains, were wearing military uniforms on active duty as servicemen. Among them was the Dean of Men, Navy Lt. Chaplain Father Francis P. McNelis, P’28, who was first assigned to the Sea Bees and then aboard the USS Zeilin. On campus he was a respected disciplinarian, who was known to have knocked on every door during Lent to encourage student attendance at Mass. The story noted that among the many decorated Mountaineers, two of the latest were: Marine Captain Howard G. Fitzpatrick, C’41, with the Distinguished Flying Cross and three presidential citations for conspicuous service, and Army Captain Chaplain Michael J. Lyons, S’33, with the Legion of Medal Award.

When the war was over in 1945, 28 Mount alumni, including three chaplains, had been killed and an untold number were wounded and maimed. The Class of 1943 would dedicate a major perpetual scholarship fund to its six classmates who died in the service. Among the most seriously wounded Army soldiers in the Mount class was Lumen Francis Norris, whose wounds hospitalized him after the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium’s Bastogne. His brother, Lt. Cdr. Emmett J. Norris, C’36, served aboard the USS Nitro. Another Mountaineer, his brother Thomas J., served in the Air Corps. They were sons of Irish born Mount science professor Thomas Norris. As the Echo had predicted, those and many other alumni eventually found themselves in “the thick of it” and some “paid the heavy price.”

First Depression, then the Academia World. And Lastly Unforeseen Vocations

In simple terms: these Mount men were survivors of a disastrous depression and then nourished and instructed by a benevolent and caring faculty whose first career goals were toward careers of peace. With limited teaching facilities and little specialized experience, both parties had to shift their direction to preparing for a war that had little immediate precedence in the Mount’s world of academia.

Whether as soldiers, sailors, chaplains, or civilian participants, this generation was forced into vocations that had no direct bearing on their previous education, hopes or plans. As the Echo editors had forecast back in 1935, the students would some day be called upon to do their wartime duty, “no matter how bright or timid,” as they were once described.

They next found themselves scattered over all the oceans with only one constant and consistent preparation: they had been schooled and trained as Catholics. It played a major role in giving them confidence and reassurance under extremely stressful conditions as they went forth with their new missions as priests and laymen to protect and preserve the freedom of a world seemingly gone mad!

The Early Years and Life on the Campus

The Pre-War 30s and early 40s were actually exciting days for those on campus. However, nothing at the Mount compared with an electrifying event on Echo Field in the months before the Wall Street crash. This was the period when all of America was still talking about the phenomenal accomplishment of the youthful Charles A. Lindbergh, who had been the first to fly alone for 33 hours over the vast Atlantic between the U.S. and France.
During an intramural baseball contest one afternoon in 1928, two students lost control of their airplane and crashed on Echo Field in the middle of the game, scattering players and bystanders in all directions. The pilots were unhurt.

Regrettably, the details of the ownership and the type of plane have not been recorded, but the event was the forerunner of what followed a dozen years later when the military actually began training Mount students. They learned to fly at the nearby Waynesboro airport and some eventually became pilots of Flying Fortresses in WWII.

That program was replaced in 1943-44 by a larger Naval flying cadet school on campus during which time part of the farm was leveled for takeoff and landing exercises. In addition, a Navy V-12 deck officers school was also established on campus to train men from a dozen other colleges and universities. By then there were nearly 400 Navy men on campus occupying the rooms and classrooms of departed Mount students, with only about 50 Mount students awaiting graduation. The seminary continued to ordain priests, many of whom became military chaplains, or were assigned to hospitals and parishes.

Death of a President
On September 21, 1936, the campus was stilled by the death of its president, Monsignor Bernard James Bradley. He had served for 26 years, the longest in the history of the school, and had just been elected for another five-year term. The new freshman building was named in his honor and the eulogy was delivered by another pillar of the Mount’s long history, Monsignor John J. Tierney, dean of the faculty and the president’s life-long friend. Ironically, Professor Tierney taught Bradley when he entered the Mount 52 years before. In his eulogy, he praised the Mount’s leader for having contributed so much to the school and for constructing “the new buildings rising up to the sky, which will serve this old college as the best memorial anyone could ever have.” Monsignor John L. Sheridan was elected as his successor. He served throughout WWII as the 17th President of the Mount and died in 1961.

Several students served as pallbearers for Monsignor Bradley’s burial in St. Anthony’s Cemetery. One of those who carried his casket was Larry McDonnell, C’37, who would later be presented with the Bishop James E. Walsh Award as an alumnus. He recalled that 250 religious men and women were in the crowd that attended the funeral, including the heads of the Sulpicians and the Society of St. Joseph, as well as the students and faculty from both the Mount and nearby Saint Joseph College. Impressed with the spirituality of the Mount community, he later reflected on the tradition of how the students and seminarians would halt their games or studies or other activities at the sound of the Angelus bells each day, in order to...
silently pray and momentarily honor the College Patron.

Monsignor John J. Tierney, Class of 1880, was born in Ireland in 1853 and was often referred to as one of the most brilliant scholars ever associated with the Mount. He died in May 1941 and was well known for his strolls on the Terrace while reading and praying. In his eulogy, Father Pete Coad pointed out that the Monsignor had received a doctorate from Georgetown and was also respected as a champion chess player. As the older alumnus on the college faculty, Tierney was well versed in the Hebrew language and was an authority on Biblical questions and classical languages.

The highest academic honorary society on campus was formed in 1935 and is named after Monsignor Tierney. To qualify for membership, students must maintain a four-year general average of 85 percent. Among its presidents were, Army Officer and Football Team Captain William O’Conner, C’42, Bernard Jackson, C’41, and Thomas H.R. O’Neill, C’43, a Navy Captain who was to serve aboard the aircraft carrier Midway and specialize in meteorology.

Gatherings on the campus always prompted tales told around the drinking fountain. It was said that once you imbibed of its magical and ever flowing waters, you were a certainty to return to visit your alma mater. An oft-repeated story described the graduation ceremonies of earlier days in the old Chapel, which was later converted during the 30s into a chemistry lab. The June Grad programs lasted for six hours, with a brief time off for lunch. Every subject in every class had its award recipients, each of whom had to be recognized individually. Prep School students were part of the graduation ceremonies as well. When it was over, the visitors and alumni made their way to the “Dinky Railroad” station at Motters, near the ever-popular Roddy’s Store, to climb aboard the Emmitsburg-bound “Dinky train,” the shortest official railroad in the nation. This Emmitsburg historical contrivance went out of business in the 30s.

Since the histories of both Saint Joseph College for Women and the Mount St. Mary’s College for Men goes back two centuries, there are many stories of the romantic relationships and interplay between the students. In the 30s, it followed a traditional old pattern. The parlor visits at St. Joe’s on Sundays were very restricted, as were the few dances at the Mount when “Miss Emma,” an employee of St. Joe’s, would arrive on campus with her female charges and her
large foot-long flashlight used to hunt out stray couples in dark corners.

The tight depression economy didn’t allow for too much dating, especially when dances might cost 50 cents or more. Nonetheless, the beginnings of many Mount/Saint Joe romances and the marriages first dreamed of during those college days did become lifelong relationships.

The writer can attest to his own trip to the Altar with St. Joe’s Catherine “Spring” Winter, a marriage that has lasted to this moment for over 54 years.

In 1934, one alumnus wrote to the editor of the Mount’s Alumni News column with these comments:

“There are some things which can transport an Alumnus into a beautiful reverie. For instance, the marriage notification of a Mountaineer and a young lady who attended St. Joe’s, will recall a flood of memories, such as the hike across the way on Sunday afternoons, the dances and the kidding about the opposite sex. We take such scenarios for granted, but have you ever considered how delightfully romantic such marriages really are? The background and setting of the two colleges couldn’t be surpassed, even by Hollywood!”

Washington’s birthday was celebrated in the 30s by what was called a “Cease Fire” Order. It was temporary cessation from all studies by the entire student body for a full day. A campus reporter noted that many groups visited Carrick’s Knob up the mountainside, the Grotto, as well as Indian Lookout where Civil War period students had years ago witnessed the smoke and sounds of the Battle of Gettysburg. Others played tennis, handball and basketball before returning to the next day’s classes.

Biology Professor Dominic Greco, himself a former athlete at Catholic University, introduced boxing to Mount St. Mary’s. Eventually it died out, but for a number of years in the 30s and early 40s, it was an exciting sport and matches with other colleges added to student interest.

One of its less appealing aspects, but very popular to a student body that was willing to pay an admission cost, was the spectacle of a “free for all” intramural event. In it, eight blind-folded battlers would compete at the same time for the approval of the audience. All survived this mayhem to fight in WWII.

A Unique Career That Started on a Battlefield

Many Mount alumni “Greats” have done it all. The institution has often been referred to as the “Cradle of Bishops.” Some Mountaineers have risen to positions as founders of other colleges, have become Cardinals, legislators, politicians, CEOs, medical professionals, Admirals and Generals. But one of the most unique careers belongs to the late Joseph L. Rosensteel of the Class of 1937.

As a boy growing up on the Gettysburg Battlefield, just outside the gates to the National Cemetery, he became enamored with the history that was all around him. He picked up bullets from “Pickett’s Charge,” read every book on the conflict, and memorized the players from Lee and Meade on down to the lesser known participants. With his father, he traveled the country in search of relics and memorabilia about the Civil War, especially if it had any connection with Gettysburg. These things became centerpieces in the family museum that grew a hundredfold in size. Finally Joe began developing his masterpiece: “The Electric Map of the Battle of Gettysburg!”

At first, with only chalk marks and Christmas tree lights, he laid out the streets and hills of Gettysburg combined with marked locations for the three days of fighting by the armies of the North and South. With hidden electric wires and flashing markers, he illustrated and demonstrated the three moving days of the battle that changed the course of the Civil War. In their little shop for tourists at the time, the Rosensteel family sold postcards and trinkets, while Joe worked the colored light display in another large room for a paid audience. He gave so many lectures in a day that he lost his voice and records had to be cut and played using his narration. The little presentation which he started as a student at Mount St. Mary’s eventually had to be
housed in a separate building with bleacher-like rows of chairs on four sides of the huge room.

“The Electric Map” became the biggest Civil War attraction in Gettysburg. Active duty military groups made official visits just to hear his lecture, as did bus loads of school children. Military leaders, such as General Dwight D. Eisenhower and England’s Prime Minister Winston Churchill, were among the many viewers of the work of this Mount alumnus. The huge brick building and its valuable historical treasures eventually were taken over by the Federal Government, but not until all the members of the family had passed on. The contents and location, so close to the spot where Lincoln gave his famous Gettysburg Address, became too valuable as a private historic site to be operated outside the purview of federal control.

A President Comes Calling

When President Eisenhower gave his 1958 Commencement Address at Mount St. Mary’s, he brought tremendous national attention to the school. With a huge press corps in attendance and news media cameras recording the event, “Ike” opened with these comments: “On my many trips to Gettysburg dating back to World War One, and more recently as a resident of that community, I would often wonder as I passed by your front gate traveling from Washington, what must it be like inside on your campus. Today I fulfilled that long held wish and I’m delighted to be here in your presence.” It was a warm introduction and had his Mount audience giving him a rousing welcome. The Mount was doubly honored that weekend to have Robert Kennedy, who was to become the attorney general, give the Baccalaureate Address.

After serving as President of Columbia University and while President of the United States, Eisenhower liked Roosevelt’s wartime presidential retreat in nearby Thurmont so much, he named it “Camp David” after his grandson. It was part of the Camp Ritchie Army Base, which became FDR’s “Shangri-la” during WWII and where he met secretly with Prime Minister Churchill during the conflict. In 1936, the Mount community first became aware of this location just eight miles away, when it was named in memory of Maryland Governor Albert C. Ritchie. In the years of John F. Kennedy’s presidency, the Mount’s Rev. Carl J. Fives was often invited to say Mass there whenever JFK was in residence. President Kennedy was familiar with the Mount because one of the officers in his WWII PT Boat squadron in New Guinea was Navy Lt. Robert E. “Killer” Kane, C’42, who later was on Kennedy’s campaign team in Massachusetts for his election to Congress.

The Mount and the military have always been closely associated. There were two Northern militia groups in training on campus during the Civil War, despite the tension of an almost equally divided college community that slightly favored the Confederacy. During the period of Eisenhower’s presidency, two of the highest ranked military were Mount graduates: Major General Anthony Studds, C’60, of the Marine Corps, and Navy Rear Admiral Thomas F. Brown, C’54. Admiral Brown had at one time commanded the aircraft carrier USS Midway. Both men were honored with doctorate degrees in 2000. Rear Admiral Bartholomew W. Hogan LL.D., C’45, and Surgeon General of the Navy, was aboard the aircraft carrier
Wasp when it was sunk off Guadalcanal in 1942. As a survivor, he described his experiences to the student body during WWII and told how another Mountaineer, Father John P. “Chicago” Murphy, C’29, was part of the rescue operation that pulled him from the sea. Doctor Hogan later became head of the Bethesda Naval Hospital.

Ironically, in 1936 the Mountain Echo defended General Mitchell’s controversial position that the country should support the Navy’s experiment to build a ship called an aircraft carrier. Without such vessels, the U.S. would not have defeated the Japanese in WWII and Mountaineer Admiral Brown may not have commanded a battle group that President Reagan ordered to the Mediterranean during a crisis in his presidency.

High Praise for One of the Mount’s Former Presidents

Another one of the “great” alumni is Monsignor Hugh J. Phillips, the 19th president of the Mount and now in retirement at age 94 in Carroll Manor, Maryland. He entered the Mount Grammar School in 1921 as an orphan. He followed this with attendance in the Prep School, the College and the Seminary. On the day he was ordained, Archbishop Michael Curley asked him to join the faculty at the Mount. His service and association with the college for over 80 years will never be equaled.

A touching example of Monsignor Phillips’ rapport with the alumni came after WWII. Pete Grandell, C’43, a Mount football stalwart and a Marine Corps survivor with battle stars from five different invasions in the Pacific, returned to the campus. His mission was to present Monsignor with his captured samurai sword in “appreciation for the priest’s counsel and support through some difficult days.” The sword was accepted and cherished and Grandell returned after marriage to live in the Veterans apartments to finish his wartime interrupted studies at the Mount. His daughter, Kathleen, was the first child born to an enrolled student.

In his career at the Mount leading to the presidency, Monsignor Phillips had been assigned to monitor every aspect of student life. He supervised the Mount Symphony in the 30s and cataloged and managed the library for 30 years. As the dean of freshmen, he was the youngest department head in the history of the school. He was college chaplain and a grand knight in the Knights of Columbus and had the very imposing new Phillips Library Building named in his honor.

Monsignor Phillips’ last responsibility was as chaplain of the Mount’s National Shrine Grotto of Lourdes, which dates back to Founder John DuBois’ arrival at the site around 1800. Phillips supervised its expansion and reconstruction and spiritually guided over 500,000 visitors annually to the site. One of his biggest disappointments at the Mount was a failure to have the remains of the founder of the college, New York’s Bishop DuBois, transferred from his burial at New York City’s Old St. Patrick’s Cathedral on Mott Street, to the Emmitsburg campus. It took two Cardinals and the 100 member “Priests’ Board of New York” to deny the Mount’s request. If the College were ever to be renamed, the names of Phillips and DuBois should be high on the list of considerations.

Entertainment During the Thirties
There was always much activity on the Mount campus, especially before the days of radio, television and automobile ownership. The Depression’s economic shutdown forced the students to entertain themselves. Some managed an occasional visit to the cinema in Gettysburg, or the Gem Theatre in Emmitsburg, often referred to as the “Germ” because of its small size. Intramural sports were always in play and regular sporting contests with visiting teams were very well attended. But the decision in 1935 to concentrate on building an expanded football program caused the most excitement in decades.

Joseph “Jojo” Lawler, a three-sport star for Catholic University, was a high school football coach in Jessup, Pennsylvania. His team had won the 1934-35 State Championship. Mount St. Mary’s invited him to bring his talents to Emmitsburg. He did just that, which included his assistant, Coach Walter J. Opekun, a University of Pennsylvania football great, plus many “Coal Cracker” college players, and the Mount’s first Publicity Director, Larry McDonnell, C’37, who later worked for the San Francisco Examiner and retired as a Navy Captain after the War.

The next two years found an array of superior football talent and a bigger Mid-Atlantic press and media exposure for their gridiron exploits than the Mount had ever seen before. Names like Army Sergeant Stan Kokie, C’41, Frank and Tony Appichella, Hall of Famer Bob Stevens, C’40, a transfer from West Point Academy who served as an Air Corps officer in WWII, the late Mike Scesny, Naval Officer Mike Kuratnick, C’39, who served with the Army in the SW Pacific, and Al Matuelia became familiar names that infused a new excitement in sports recruitment for years to come. Jack Leonard, C’39, a manager for the basketball team and a Naval officer in WWII, recalled the prowess of the two Appichella brothers and how Tony later became a very successful coach in his own right.

As the weekend games began drawing bigger crowds, some of the football games were moved to McCurdy Field in Frederick and the games were then being broadcast over Maryland, Washington and Pennsylvania stations. The Baltimore and Washington papers were happily focusing on the new big talent at the little school in the Catoctin Mountains. Jo Jo Lawler, also a lawyer, was later called up by the Army and subsequently became the Assistant Postmaster of the United States. Wally Opekun stayed on the campus for 30 years as professor of education and also served as coach for Mount students and navy flyers.

Lawler and Opekun remained close friends and as successful athletic mentors, they met once again, but on opposite sides of the basketball court. Private Jo Jo brought his Army team stationed near Cumberland, Md. to the Mount to compete against Professor Opekun’s Mount-V-5 just before Christmas in 1942. Perhaps out of respect and courtesy, the details of the Army’s loss were never recorded.

The new sports excitement on campus reached out to other areas. There was a massive demonstration and parade of 5,000 student visitors at an outdoor Mass on Echo Field in the fall of 1935. It was sponsored by the Catholic Student Mission Crusade and the celebrant of the Pontifical Mass was Baltimore’s Bishop John McNamara. The speaker was the Mount’s Father William Culhane, who electrified the gathering with a dynamic speech that urged the representatives of the many colleges to “assume their responsibilities as soldiers of Christ and to carry his name to all others who don’t recognize it.”

Mount Alumni Who Died in the First World War

About that time, the Italian dictator Mussolini was stirring the pot in Europe and Africa with an invasion of Ethiopia and Hitler’s Spanish ally and protégé, General Franco, was splitting Spain in two with a Civil War. Mount instructors were cautioning their students that while Franco was the best possible ally in opposing Communism, they felt his allegiance to the Nazi dictator made him out to be someone to be watched. On the Mount campus in the mid-30s, the students were somewhat indifferent to world affairs, but they did support U.S.
Secretary of State Cordell Hull’s position that seemed to favor isolationism for this country in matters abroad.

According to the Mount Archives, eight of its Alumni Army Officers who served in the first World War were buried in the “Poppy Fields of France.” A total of 17 alumni died in service during that war. Students with anti-war feelings in the 30s noted that Washington reported the war debts owed to America after 1918 were still being ignored, except for the prompt payments of little Finland. The *Mountain ECHO* editors never lost sight of the Depression, but they admitted in one editorial that “they didn’t have a solution to the nagging unemployment problem, but thought the nation should wait a little while longer to see if President Roosevelt’s radical and socialistic efforts can succeed.” The students seemed more interested in the revelation by Mount farmer Joe Harris that there was an ancient Artesian well 120 feet under Flynn Hall.

The same speaker at two different commencements in the 30s was another hero: Bishop James E. Walsh, C’10, the founder of the Maryknoll Order and the Catholic Students Mission Crusade. A quiet and very holy person, he spent many years in missionary work in China and was imprisoned there and sentenced to life for his spiritual efforts. He was the last of the Christian religious figures confined by the Communists and was finally released in 1966 after 12 years. He walked across the border at Hong Kong and then traveled for an audience with the Pope in Rome. The Mount awarded him the DuBois Medal while in prison. He later recounted that he used to recite the decades of the rosary by using his fingers. His brother was able to deliver the Mount medal to him in China, but the government took it away. After his release by the Communist Government, he added Emmitsburg to his U.S. itinerary and proudly received the replacement medal at the annual Alumni Homecoming.

The creative aspect of student life was very much in evidence on the campus in the years just before the war. The Purcell Lyceum produced plays and minstrels and a full student orchestra was functioning. The hilarious annual Jamborees were very popular and pulled talent out of nowhere. One of the most popular maestros was Joe Kilgallen, C’37, a cousin of Broadway columnist Dorothy Kilgallen. He rocked Flynn Hall one year with a comic masterpiece entrance on roller skates. Two other humorous MCs were William Bridges, C’41 and
James Shea of the same class who later entered the Army. Father Phillips was producing comedies like “Charley’s Aunt,” and Mount football players were being picked for All-Maryland slots for the first time in years.

The students were still suspicious of Roosevelt, but by the end of his first four years in office, the Mount campus was beginning to have more faith in him. The student opinions and feelings on internationalism were expressed in these Mountain ECHO statements:

“Follow George Washington’s advice and stay out of foreign entanglements… Apparently, only an accident can prevent FDR’s reelection in the Fall of 1936… The U.S. was lucky to have rejected a membership in the League of Nations, now that England is holding a whip over France… Since Italy is trying to find its place in the sun, and Germany is demanding its rights and Japan is playing checkers with China, where would our country be if we had gotten involved in such a mess!”

Holding the Senior Prom on Campus Was a Sign of the Times

In the same year of 1936, the senior class voted to have class rings made to display the Mount seal for the first time. Another sign that the tough Depression years might soon be under control was the heavy turnout of more than 200 Mount alumni at a New York City hotel banquet to hear Monsignor Fulton Sheen speak. The next year the senior class elected to hold its prom in Flynn Hall and imported a Washington, D.C. orchestra to musically accompany the flow of gowns and tuxedos in one of the fanciest campus affairs in the school’s social history. The conversion of Flynn Hall completely disguised its tiny nature and the fact that baskets were once nailed to the walls for basketball games.

Life on campus before Hitler invaded Poland might be boring to today’s active students, but in the view of Father John O’Neill who was in charge of student activities, 1937 was a time of big recreational changes. He pointed out that “Rec rooms now have overstuffed chairs and sofas, bridge and reading lamps accompany tables for maximum reading comfort. Books, magazines, reading racks and card tables with double ashtrays, have been installed.”

Father O’Neill, one of the many priest instructors then on campus, boasted further that “there was now no need to go haunting the movies and business districts in Emmitsburg or other towns”. He suggested the students could now do “calisthenics, bowl, play pool and visit the rec rooms in facilities that will match those of any other institution of learning in the nation!” This was partially true because there were few automobiles, no radios, TVs or cell phones on campus. At the time, the Mount Orchestra was offering professional local entertainment on campus and over the local WFMD radio station in Frederick, thanks to the participation and direction of such students as Tommy Coyne, Army Officer Ted Sink, C’39 and Jerry Krepps, C’38, who served as a WWII Naval Officer. Since the student body was relatively small, everyone sooner or later had an assignment of some kind. The presence of many community activities didn’t seem to suffer for lack of experienced talent to handle such matters. Alabama born George Widney, who arrived in 1938, became one such student leader with a heavy load. He was student body president and head of the Forensic Society and its Radio and Debating Bureaus. He and his veteran debaters competed
against colleges such as NYU, Columbia, City College of New York, Johns Hopkins, Western Maryland and Bucknell. He was also assistant editor of the *Mountain ECHO* and a student proctor. It was not so surprising to find that after graduation, he was recruited to join the U.S. State Department and served admirably in foreign embassies. Widney modestly attributed his success and heavy involvement in extra curricular activities to his “good fortune to attend a small college where the opportunities often outnumber the available individuals.”

The issue of isolationism was beginning to heat up by 1940. Previously the student polls reflected empathy for Germany’s “boxed in” status due to the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles. The student editors’ attitude was in favor of finding a peaceful solution to Hitler’s demands and urged the Paris signers to “be more tolerant and stop acting like antagonistic conquerors.” No one could have known that over the next decade, the German leader would be responsible for the death of millions of his own people and millions of others in Russia, Poland and the rest of the world. Hitler’s failed attempt at becoming a conqueror cost civilization 50 million deaths.

**Smoking Was the Students’ Trivial Pursuit**

Looking back on the days spent on the campus in the 30s, one is reminded of the wonderful spiritual atmosphere, coupled with the influence of wise instructors preaching on very serious subjects. And then there was the trivial side of living with all young men. In the earliest days, smoking was only permitted in the structure on the Back Terrace between the old Music Hall and Brute Hall, called “the Boat.” After it was demolished in the 30s, smoking was permitted campus wide.

A majority of the students were smokers. Those who carried full packs of cigarettes were in the minority and falsely considered rich. Many of those with the habit exited on half smoked hand-offs earned by yelling: “butts” whenever they spotted someone just lighting up. Distance was not a problem. The claim of “butts” could be hollered from a fourth floor dormitory window. If parental permission to smoke had not been granted, there were always the full-page celebrity endorsement ads in the college newspaper to help ease one’s disobedience and conscience, because, if nothing else, that revenue helped publish the *Mountain ECHO*.

Social “Open House Smokers” were sometimes promoted by student and seminarian groups, such as the Knights of Columbus, as a way to raise charitable funds. Usually they conducted an amateur show as the entertainment, followed by refreshments, midst the blue haze smoke of cigars and cigarettes, which would hardly be tolerated on today’s campuses where the mores call for clean minds and healthy bodies in concert.

The radio commercials and the *Mountain ECHO* full-page advertisements featured celebrity endorsements for cigarettes that were “toasted” and “blended” to “protect one’s throat.” And if the “mildness” and “better taste” weren’t seductive enough, you had the reassurance that “there wasn’t a cough in a carload!” That was 60 plus years ago. It would be interesting to determine how many Mount students smoke tobacco now and how they feel about the “arrogance” of today’s smoker. Since most of the Mount men of that period went on to military service, if they hadn’t learned to drink coffee and smoke cigarettes by then, they were in the minority.

It wasn’t in existence for too long, but in the late 30s the Mount had a barber shop. One day, a fire was discovered by Professor Joseph Ash just outside the door of the shop in lower Brute Hall. As with many conflagration reports in newspapers of that period, the cause of the fire was routinely referred to as having been started by a careless cigarette smoker. In this case the significance of the event which the *Mountain ECHO* reporter failed to grasp, was the oddity of the last name of the professor who spotted the smoldering ash in the first place.

**Marching to The Grotto on the First of May**

While May 1st was marked with Communism’s marching in Moscow’s Red Square, it was always celebrated quietly on the Mount campus with students, seminarians and faculty walking to the Grotto of Lourdes on this first day of Mary’s
month. Most of the faculty members were priests in those days. The seminarians would be most impressive in this unpretentious parade, with their black cassocks and white surplices adding a striking touch to the silent march and celebration of the Mass in the wooded setting of the Grotto, paying tribute to the Blessed Mother.

The social activities at the Mount before WWII continued at a high pace, despite the economic hard times, the growing concerns about world peace and the possible involvement of the United States in the war. Class proms and club dances continued to be big features on the social calendar and a college-hosted dance at annual alumni reunions was a tradition. An annual Fall Gridiron Dance was held in Flynn Hall, in addition to such affairs as the 1936 Junior Class Barn Dance. The overall impression one gets in reviewing all these activities is: “Not too bad for a school full of young men!” The Mount didn’t go co-ed until 1972. But a more practical explanation might be that the threat of war and the weary Depression years were forcing everyone to look for diversions.

A Dining Room Tradition and a Thoughtless Protest

One of the most respectful traditions that lasted for years was the silence of the dining hall students when the faculty entered and lasted until they were seated. It continued for the reading of the Gospel before the meal. In deference to the heavy work load for their studies and the demanding varsity sport schedules, the students were given dispensation from Lent fasting, but daily presence at Mass remained popular. Retreats were always well received, especially since they provided a two-day break from studies.

The retreat schedule called for early rising and breakfast. This was followed by the first Rosary, which was said while the student body walked with impressive solidarity on the front Terrace before the start of the first conference and meditation. An after-lunch Rosary and Stations of the Cross preceded the final afternoon conference. After dinner came Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament and meditation until lights out. The second day ended with the Papal Blessing. A good Retreat Master added to the wonderful spiritual feeling it produced.

One of the memorable clashes during the Depression years between the authorities and students, came when the financially aided or scholarship holders, and their very few full paying contemporaries, protested the lean food servings in the dining hall. As financially strapped as the administration was during those days, they had failed to convey to the strikers that the college bank account and the food servings depended on the “lean” contributions of the partially funded students, which was almost everyone in the community. A somber official stood looking over a sullen sea of faces and began pointing first to each striker and secondly towards the dining room – one at a time: “YOU, get in there! YOU, get in there!” When one Baltimore paper began calling asking for more information about the “Food Strike at Mount St. Mary’s College,” the reporter couldn’t find anyone who would admit there had been one.

Another less serious challenge came when the Junior Class of 1938 was ordered not to hold their prom off campus. The practical reasoning by the authorities was that with the economy still at risk, they didn’t want the class to take on such an unnecessary debt. After negotiations ended, the students agreed to hold their quite dressy affair in Flynn Hall and the college consented to upgrade the rest rooms and the gym facilities just in time for the event.

Such journalistic authorities as “Believe it or Not” Robert Ripley, and Columnist Drew Pearson, had judged and praised the Mountain ECHO for its literary and news reporting. It was always ranked with at least “high honors.” One of its most prolific editors was G. Henry Roth. He later went on to become the editor of the Gettysburg Times. One of the youthful editor’s prognostications two years before Hitler marched into Poland, was that there would be a “Second World War!” He created that phrase long before TIME magazine coined the icon – “WWII.” His reasoning was “Communism and Fascism are brothers under the skin. Both
Russia and Germany have starving populations and it is only a matter of time before they will go to war to keep their people’s minds off their stomachs.” It was quite a prediction for a college student, which unfortunately came true.

Two New Exciting Additions to the Faculty

At a time when European war clouds began to build up, two Jesuit priests joined the faculty: the Rev. Joseph F. Thorning and the Rev. John E. Weidinger. The latter took charge of the Forensic Council and added much professionalism to the debating and radio bureaus, with extensive engagements with other colleges. Father Thorning was a known magazine and book writer and was honored with his selection to give a prayer before the U.S. Congress. He headed up the philosophy department and gave the College a new view of the changing world’s landscape.

One of their first duo educational trips was to Havana, Cuba, where they met with the infamous Colonel Batista and the Papal Nuncio. This “Mission to Cuba” was reported on national wire services and drew the praise of Undersecretary of State Sumner Wells, who felt their close up reporting was helpful to our nation’s foreign affairs planning. Both were encouraged by the State Department to do more educational trips. Before hostilities in Europe broke out, they traveled again and reported back to their classes on pre-war conditions in Poland, Berlin, and Paris. Thorning had an interview with General Franco during the Civil War in Spain. He also made a trip to Japan. He provided his students with a rare picture of the Japanese as they began preparing for their role as our future enemy. He said he observed in his travels around Japan, that they were highly disciplined, obedient, healthy and focused and would be very difficult to defeat if a war ever started with the United States.

Another priest who traveled to Europe in 1939 was Father John J. O’Neill, a skilled professor of languages. He visited in France, Germany and Italy and was present in the Vatican when the College of Cardinals elected the newly named Pope Pius XII. Father O’Neill and other traveling Mount priests returned from Europe on the last pre-war passenger ships available, shortly before Poland was invaded, forcing France and England to declare war on Hitler’s Germany.

It’s always a treat to go back in time and review the prognostications of so called experts, and measure those views against what really happened. Several years after the Wall Street Crash of ’29, Peter Murrin, editor of the Catholic Worker, lectured at the Mount and told his audience he had the solution to the problems of the Depression. Sponsored by the Knights of Columbus Chapter, he told his listeners that they should all become small farmers. Such a vocation would offer them contentment in the troubled world and give the nation the needed production for the starving population, he said. He ignored the fact that the depressed farmer, large or small, was even more desperate than the rest of the unemployed in trying during the thirties to feed and clothe his own family.

Journalist Murrin then blamed the Depression’s origin on all of the country’s citizens. The economics and business students were surprised to hear him explain that the people invested too much money in stocks, bonds and insurance, which should have been put away for a rainy day. Then, business interests took all that money to invest in the production of their products and they got way ahead of consumption, and the marketplace then became littered with goods and no buyers. Now in hindsight, the skeptical Mount students were being misled into thinking that the bottom line in his flawed thesis was that with a free market, thousands of banks failed because they just didn’t have enough rainy day funds.

As to whether President Roosevelt was doing a good job, the student body had come around 180 degrees by the time of electing FDR to his third term. A Mountain ECHO poll showed that previously, their “most hated man in politics” was now their “favorite public figure.” About this time they learned that the President would hide away in his Shangri-la at Camp...
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Ritchie just eight miles away from the campus and this made him their next door neighbor. Despite their personal associations with scholars, siblings and friends on other campuses, the Mount students voted St. Joe's to be their favorite women’s institution. A majority remained pro-isolationists, but oddly enough, the people on campus did list the liberal New York Times and the conservative Reader's Digest as their favorites of all popular publications.

Although FDR was very popular, the besieged British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, did not fare as well at first with the Mount students. The older upperclassmen were strong in their opposition to what they called: “Britain’s devious methods of luring America into Europe’s wars once again”. The lowerclassmen who weren’t facing a call to arms any time soon, were more sympathetic in their voting and supported all possible aid to Britain and France. The national college debating questions, with their pro and con positions, ranged from: “Resolved – should the administration become entangled in Europe’s conflict?” to: “Should the U.S. adopt a strict policy of isolation toward the nations of Europe?” The Lions Club of Frederick was so impressed with the Mount debating teams, that they sponsored a discussion of the two sides of the question of “Socialized Medicine” before the Frederick County Medical and Dental Society.

By 1939 when the largest freshman class was entering the Mount with more than 100 young men, the international pot was boiling and the German invasion of Poland was shockingly successful. The Mount Student Council met and agreed to send a letter to FDR, their preferred politician, and to members of Congress protesting: “Any changes in the Neutrality Laws that might draw us into Europe’s wars.” The Radio Bureau planned to continue its half-hour programs over WFMD in Frederick, covering anti-Semitism, socialized medicine, neutrality and issues on peace and war.

A New Student Arrives and Goes Into the History Books

For the first time in the Mount’s history, a student named William J. O’Connell, C’43, of Flushing, N.Y. who had exactly the same handicap as Franklin D. Roosevelt, was admitted to the College. He had graduated from Long Island’s Newton High School without ever having been inside. Working with a private tutor since stricken with infantile paralysis in grammar school, Bill was, like the President, completely dependent on his crutches. Bill had a very upbeat attitude and kidded constantly with his classmates as they carried him whenever he had steps to climb. He graduated in January 1943 as an officer in the distinguished Monsignor Tierney Society and with a Bachelor’s Degree cum laude. He was married for 52 years, had three children and seven grandchildren and retired after 38 years as a New York State Department Head. He died at 79 with a unique reputation as another Mount giant.

There has always been a steady flow of famous visitors to the campus, such as the Governor of Maryland, technicians from Johns Hopkins Medical School, or the Pope’s U.S. representative, but for awhile in the late 30s the most celebrated alumnus was Father Edward Joseph Flanagan, C’06. Made even more well known by Spencer Tracy’s Hollywood portrayal of him in “Father Flanagan of Boys Town,” the Mount graduate never lost his love for his Alma Mater. His story of how he started a school for five homeless and destitute boys in Omaha, Nebraska, was lovingly received and heavily supported by the nation at large. Father Flanagan accepted boys from six to eighteen years of age, regardless of religion or race, and his small school eventually accepted similarly homeless girls and expanded to the size of many leading universities. He was awarded a Doctor of Laws Degree by Mount St. Mary’s in appreciation for his deep charity and outstanding work for humanity.

One of the standing jokes on campus during those depression days was the occasional reports that the Mount was about to build a golf course! There were a few students, such as Thomas J. Grodavent, later Monsignor; and Paul F. Dolan, later the Reverend; and Eddie Azar, who did
know a putter from a “mashie” in 1939-40. They did take part in the Western Maryland Golf Invitational and Team Captain Grodavent took all the tournament honors! Their participation in golf did inspire others.

At one point someone organized a student project, along the lines of one of FDR’s Works Progress Administration task forces. A hundred volunteers spread out all over the field between Bradley Hall and the highway to pick up all the rocks possible, because this would speed up the construction of a new golf course. Later this area was selected as the site for the Phillips Library and the Coad Science Hall. In ignorance of the fact that it can take hundreds of acres to support a golf course, even the Mountain ECHO was misled and ran a headline reporting that the “Mount Golf Course Nears Completion.” Sixty years later, there is still talk that there will yet be a golf course built on John DuBois’ campus!

**The U.S. Army Did Storm the Mount Gates**

Events were always unpredictable and one unexpected surprise in early 1941 was the arrival of a section of 31 members of the United States Army Infantry at the college main gates. This group of full dress gun toting soldiers was en route to Georgia from upstate New York and learned that the Frederick Armory would be unable to house them overnight. The priests of the Mount were mindful of Christ’s sermon about “feeding the hungry” and were able to provide late “Hungryman” type TV dinners and lodging for the night. After describing their plight in an earlier distress call from Harrisburg, they arrived at 8 p.m. to a waiting crowd of future draftees, who had eagerly volunteered to direct them to the various student rooms with empty beds.

The New York state based troops were boggdered with questions about what army life is like and admitted being disappointed to find the Mount was covered with snow. They had been told earlier that it would be warmer south of the Mason Dixon Line. President of the Mount, Monsignor John L. Sheridan, greeted them at breakfast the next morning and before they departed for a probable warmer State of Georgia, he gave them his blessing.

Another odd event in April of that year was the arrival of a female debating team from Upsala College. Mount debaters Paul Lane and George Widney were fully prepared to discuss and argue the pro and con positions of whether the U.S. should adopt an Isolationist strategy in world affairs, but this was planned to be held on the female campus of St. Joe’s across the road. For some reason, the schedule mix-up prevented the debate from taking place at the neighboring location and the Mount administration threw open its male doors and allowed the first ever contest of any kind with a girl’s team against a Mount St. Mary’s team on campus. The confusion may have contributed to the fact that no winner was ever reported and it would be another 31 years before the Mount would go co-ed in 1972. After graduation, Lane became an Army Lieutenant and Widney entered State Department service.

There was a continuous step-up of activities on Campus as the U.S. involvement in the war drew closer. Nine months before the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor, the Purcell players were invited to nearby Army camps, at which they presented such plays as “Fourth at Jamaica,” starring Frank DeBottis and Ben Mayock, both of whom lost their lives in Air Corps crashes during the war. The interest in football became intense as the students wondered what Mount players might possibly make the next All-Maryland teams.

The debating teams added more schools such as Fordham, Brooklyn College and Loyola to their schedule. Their subjects were now changing to less controversial wartime topics, such as “Government Wartime Controls” and “Labor Laws.” The skepticism of earlier polls about Winston Churchill’s possible seduction of FDR, gave way to the students’ acceptance of Lend Lease and how to best help the Allies. Sociology Professor Thorning was asked to speak at the Naval Academy in Annapolis on the “Menace of the Soviets in South America.”

Polls Still Showed an Ambivalence About Joining the Allies
Polls of the student body began happening with greater frequency just before Pearl Harbor. They showed an increasing support for the Allies, but the Mount students favoring Isolation were a strong force. This may have been a product of the tension and growing concern about the future that was on everyone’s mind. Charles A. Lindbergh, “Lucky Lindy,” was getting a lot of press with his stand on keeping America out of Europe’s Wars. Ambassador Joseph F. Kennedy, father of the future President of the U.S. and a big supporter of Roosevelt, also joined up with the “America Firsters.” FDR remained aloof from these protesters for the most part, but a slight majority of the Mount students were strongly on their side.

Lindbergh’s Air Corps Colonel stripes were taken from him in anger by the President, who felt he was acting like a traitor. Nonetheless, Mountaineers voted in support of this national hero and declared him the most popular political figure. When FDR declared war, Lindbergh quickly reversed his political course and volunteered to be sent to the Pacific as a civilian observer for aeronautical companies. Some of the Mount Navy Alumni were to meet up with him in 1944 when he secretly returned to the cockpits of Air Corps planes and shot down some enemy planes over New Guinea. He was hardly a traitor.

Part of the pre-war activity at the college included uniformed military alumni stopping in to say goodbye. In 1941, college people were not exempt from the draft and the erosion of the student body had begun. Graduations would have to be accelerated. House President Peter J. Manzone, C’42, was ordered out of school and entered the Army as private. One of those who visited the campus in early 1941 was Marty Hunt, C’43, en route to his assignment with the Marine Corps in the South Pacific. He had been pulled out of school early by Selective Service and with a preference for the Marines over the Army, had decided to enter Paris Island training. He and Army Pfc. Joseph D. Manning, who died at Seeshaupt, Germany, were two of the six C’43 classmates killed in WWII.

The College Council had been trying to get approval to establish an ROTC unit, but didn’t succeed. It was later approved in 1979 and operates today on the Campus. In the meantime, the Mount was picked along with 500 others to sponsor a Civilian Air Patrol Training Unit under the C.A.A., to train student pilots between ages 19 and 27 who had completed their freshman year. By the summer of 1941, those accepted were deferred from the draft through graduation. At first there were 10 who signed up and later another 12 were added to the original class.

Among the signers was Captain Salvatore J. Melomo, C’43, from Brooklyn, N.Y., who lost his life piloting a Flying Fortress over Austria, and Lt. Benjamin J. Mayock, C’43, from Wilkes Barre, PA, another Air Corps fatality. A third
1943 classmate to die when his Marine Corps plane exploded was Lt. James P. McCullough from Lancaster, PA. The instructors were U.S. Army Pilots and the Waynesboro Airport was used for landing and takeoff training. Class was set on campus with Father J.C. Gordon on meteorology, Dr. John Richards on parachute training and aircraft flight theory, and Professor Richard McCullough on navigation. Other instructors handled engines, general service and instruments. A small airplane skeleton had been set up in Bradley Hall basement.

Three Midnights With the Wail of an Irish Banshee

The most talked about happening in early 1941 was the reported existence of an “Irish Banshee” on the campus. It started out innocently enough one midnight when a wailing scream was heard echoing across the Upper Terrace. Only a few heard it, but the story was embellished the next day. By midnight of the second day, the excitement had reached fever pitch and every student room had someone listening for a repeat performance. It came on schedule and despite skepticism and suspicion, its precise location could not be determined. By midnight on the third day, Jack Connor, who later was an officer on a U.S. submarine sinking Japanese ships in the Pacific, earned a $5 bet by daring to walk alone to Flynn Hall and back at the stroke of midnight. His courageous stroll was made during the wail of the hard to locate Irish Banshee.

Father James J. Burke, another Irish born priest and known surreptitiously as “Beaner,” was not convinced the “Banshee” was a hoax, and was seen strolling the Terrace in thoughtful prayer as Connor made his way to collecting his own bet. The spoofers became believers when someone pointed out that real native Irishmen, such as Father Burke, knew a Banshee when they heard one! After his prayerful stroll, the Banshee never appeared again. But when questioned, one resident of Senior Alley admitted to the authorities that his practical joke got out of hand when he discovered he could wail undetected from a partially closed closet door with his room window wide open. An entire campus breathed a sigh of relief.

Summertime called for swimming and the age old quarry was the place to go. Generations of Mount men had tested the depths and the temperature of the pure water hole down Motters Road. It reportedly was 100 feet deep and the water felt below zero without a bathing suit. The old timers in the area claim the hole was created when the rock site was cut up to construct the buildings on campus. Whatever the history, or the actual freezing temperature of its treacherous depth, the future military student candidates could tell their WWII buddies that the quarry waters gave them their first real “wake up call!”

The Mount Community was not surprised in the early 40s when the winner of the J.V. Watterson Oratorical Prize was Robert R. Kline, C’41, who someday would be a Monsignor and President of Mount St. Mary’s. He had an M.A. and Doctorate from Georgetown University and an intellect and resonant voice that impressed everyone. It did bring out a little more history on prize donor Watterson, one of the great loyal sons of the Mount. He had served as President of the Alumni Association for 27 years, a record unequalled before or since. He established the perpetual prize of $25, a sum that by today’s standards might not seem to be enough to inspire any competition. But it remains one of the most prestigious oratory challenges in the Emmitsburg academic world, and its annual winners are a fraternity all by themselves.

Females Made History on the Mount Campus

As campus life headed for the unknown future and the Second World War as predicted by the Mountain ECHO editors, the students at the Mount participated in a national college poll organized by Yale University. The results showed a slight majority still opposed aiding Communistic Russia and against sending American troops abroad. Oddly enough, female colleges that were included were in favor of both proposals. Females also made history at the Mount in 1941, when the Knights of Columbus...
Chapter staged a Harvest Ball in Flynn Hall with an Indian Summer motif. But of significance was the hiring of “Eleanor and Her All Girl Orchestra” to provide the dance music, a “historical first” at Emmitsburg.

Women made more history that fall at Mount St. Mary’s, when the St. Francis Community of Nuns was honored for their work on behalf of the students. For years they operated behind the scenes in the laundry, darning holes in men’s socks, supervising the kitchen and the cooking, but their identities remained almost a secret. President John L. Sheridan praised them for this charity and good works and put the deserving spotlight on the college’s living saints: Sister Superior Mary Radundis, Mary Petronella (Sewing Room), Mary Floberta (Infirmary Nurse), Mary Agatha Joseph and Mary Malinia (Clothes Room), Mary Innocent (Seminary). Mary Ann Bernadette and Mary Tranquilla (Freshman Bldg.), Mary St. Bride (Dining Room), and Mary Cecilia (Storeroom). Obviously they had all adopted the additional name of the Mother of the Mount.

The junior class in 1942 had succeeded in getting two major national musical organizations to dedicate their programs to Mount St. Mary’s. On separate occasions both Fred Waring and His Pennsylvanians and the Glenn Miller Orchestra, broadcasting over networks with 100 stations, singled out the Class of 1943 for their tributes. The most popular of all bands was the Miller aggregation and in their salute they made special mention of Father Joseph F. Thorning as the class moderator. The latter, who had no radio and was not a disciple of America’s top swing music, was overwhelmed with the response to him personally from the Alumni.

Malloy’s colorful career included service in the First World War with the U.S. Army in France, so it was a natural for him to answer the call once more in 1942 and help the United Services Organization in setting up their military base sports programs. During his long career at the Mount he recruited and coached some of its finest athletes. One of those was Dr. Joseph J. Velky, C’43, who later served as a Naval Officer on the USS Nightingale in the Atlantic, Mediterranean, at Okinawa and in occupied Japan. He commented that through Art Malloy, “I received a philosophy of life and the guidance of the Blessed Mother that saw me safely through some rough times”.

The Attack on Pearl Harbor

Everyone alive on Sunday, December 7, 1941, knows where they were when the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor was announced by John Daly on NBC Radio. There weren’t many radios on campus in those days, but the news spread quickly. As editor of the Mountain ECHO, the writer decided to join with another associate, now Monsignor Robert C. Gribbin, and hitch hike to Washington the next day. We couldn’t resist the chance to go where the action was taking place. We recently compared notes on what we saw that momentous day. Monsignor, a graduate of the College and Seminary, recently
We were just a few feet away from FDR and his wife Eleanor when their limo arrived at the Capitol building just prior to his “Day in Infamy” speech. Later we were admitted to the spectator’s balcony seats to watch the process of Congress approving FDR’s request for a Declaration of War. Our schoolboy trip resulted in some very interesting follow-up columns in the Mountain ECHO, in which we claimed that our personal coverage may have been the only such on-the-scene reporting of that major event by a college newspaper.

The days after Pearl Harbor and the Christmas of 1942 went by very quickly. Father Edward D. O’Connell continued as course director for the Civilian Patrol Classes. Alumni head, Thomas B. Schmidt, Sr., agreed to continue on for a second term after his very successful Presidency. His alumni chapter work put the Mount on nationwide radio programs for dinners in many cities. The student schedule of classes was speeded up to go through the next summer, enabling more to graduate before going into service. The draft made no exceptions at the time for anyone to remain in college unless they were enrolled in Army and Navy programs that permitted it. The Mountain ECHO began running full page ads by the Army and Navy offering an Officer’s Training Program to college freshmen and sophomores. It urged students “To Stay in College and Become an Officer!” It was a chance to stay in college and then become an officer in the military. The rush to recruiting offices in Baltimore was on!

Father William Culhane was placed in charge of all defense activity on campus, including blackouts and assigning air raid wardens. The Red Cross began sponsoring life saving swim classes. Students were urged to prepare themselves spiritually and physically for the trying days ahead. They were told that they already knew how to develop a strong mind, but now they must learn to build a healthy body by using the gymnasium, swimming pool, athletic field, hiking trails and by rowing on the lake. They responded with a Navy Training Class for those already enlisted, a Woodsman Club that was featured in the Washington Post, and a stepped up aggressive Intramural Sports Program.

The social side was also invigorated with the new sense of involvement by the student body. The Knights of Columbus added new members as did the John Berchman Society. A Shamrock Club was organized, as was a Billiards Club. The Monogram Club became more prestigious and the Purcell Drama Group added more plays to its program. Travel was becoming a problem with gas rationing, but the Forensic Debating Society added more colleges for competition. The traditional Jamboree stage calls found many more applicants. All of this activity probably indicated a need for diversion, but it also hinted at a feeling of doing things today and not waiting for tomorrow and service calls.

And the center of all gatherings was “Rudy’s Cabana,” where the jukebox played Glenn Miller’s tunes and the booths were always filled with people opening mail from home, letters from the Draft Boards, or confirmations that the military’s guidance and instructions let the recipients know who really was in charge. This knotty pine soda fountain was another of Father Phillips many responsibilities, but one the students deeply appreciated where they could gossip and sympathize about the dramatic changes in their lives.

The college reported that as of June 30, 1942, “every eligible student aged 18 to 20, had now been registered as required under the Selective Service Act.” This was accomplished when they transported 73 men on this date to Emmitsburg for registration. The government explained that while these younger students weren’t being drafted, it was important to have a complete tally on all eligible men for future manpower needs. Those aged 20 to 45 had already been required to be registered elsewhere, mostly with their home town draft boards.

The pages of the Mountain ECHO told the story of how the student leaders of the Class of 1943 became military leaders within months of their graduation. They were: Thomas B. Schmidt, Grand Knight, later to serve aboard the USS
Chateau Thierry, and to be elected a Trustee of Mount St. Mary’s. Jack Armstrong, Chairman of the Athletic Council, who served aboard Sub Chaser LTA; John A. Haag, Senior Student Council, who served aboard the USS Humbolt; John J. Fitzpatrick, Class President, who served on the USS Achernar and was decorated for his actions on Omaha Beach during the invasion of Normandy; Joseph F. Dolan, Student Body President, who served as a Naval Officer; Phil McDonnell, Mountain ECHO editor, who served on the NAU SS Monterey; James J. Clark, Captain of Football Team, whose Navy Vessel LST 531 was sunk in the Atlantic; John E. Connor, Class Salutatorian, who served on the Submarine USS Bergall; and Robert C. Tuttle, incoming Class President, who served with the U.S. Army in Europe.

Doctor Thomas J. Charles, C’43, who retired as a Commander in the Regular Navy, served on four Navy ships in WWII, including the Battleship USS Washington. His love for his Alma Mater and his extensive Navy service, inspired him to compile a record for the Mount Archives of the names of those Mountmen who served on 70 different ships in WWII. Anthony Topper, a mainstay on the 39-40 football teams and president of his freshman class, was drafted before graduation and became the first Mountaineer to leave the mainland for an overseas post in Hawaii. The war topic soon became part of every conversation and the House Council announced a program to collect scrap rubber to aid the national drive. Four sons of Judge John P. O’Brien, C’85, three of whom had graduated from the Mount, had been called up for service. A flagpole was erected on the Lower Terrace, and a service of flag raising became a daily ritual.

As the college opened its 135th year in September 1942, new “War Courses” were added to the curriculum and word was received that Father Francis X. Clougherty, P’18, who was the head of the International Relief Committee in Hunan, China, had been captured and imprisoned by the invading Japanese.

One year after Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor, one third of all Mount students were officially sworn in by various military reserve programs. Prefect of Discipline Father Francis P. McNelis, who was fondly referred to as “Pooch,” was about to enter service himself as a Naval Chaplain. He spoke to the classes then being
scheduled for early graduations. The first of these ceremonies was in January 1943. The second was held in May of that year. The combined classes became the Class of 1943, which probably contributed a greater percentage to the Armed Forces than any other in WWII. Father McNelis’s encouraging words to all the men now departing for unknown assignments around the world, were poignant and portrayed the faculty’s constant concern for its youthful protégés. He continued: “You men have less to worry about than others in this country now entering service, whether civilian or military. You have the benefits and graces of a Catholic education. We are facing a great physical crisis to be sure, but we are also encountering a moral crisis. With the grace of the Patroness of Mount St. Mary’s, you will be able to meet both of these difficulties with her power to protect you from danger!”

The Question of Whether It Was a “Just” War Was Answered

Speaking for the community, the editors of the Mountain ECHO editorialized in 1942: “Today the men of Mount St. Mary’s stand at the greatest crossroads of their lives. They have watched their curricula being intensified, revamped, broadened, physical fitness stressed and a cultivation of God and His Sacraments being urged. They have seen Air Corps, Army, Navy and Marine Corps instructors and recruiting officers visit the campus. They now realize that the supreme crisis is at hand, that these indications have been the harbingers of a future we all face; admittedly not a pleasant one, but still one that can be met with courage and resolutions. For we are fighting for something ideal and particularly negative to us – something we have for too long taken for granted.

“We are fighting for the inherent rights of mankind; the right to worship God as we see fit, to pursue our own destiny, to build our own home and protect our family with our own toil and industry. We are fighting because we do not believe God ever intended mankind to become the creature of the State, and because we believe the American system of freedom of religion, thought, speech and enterprise to be the finest on earth. In a word, we are fighting to preserve the dignity of mankind in a “just” cause.

“What we need is an inner courage and conviction that our cause is right, that the sacrifice is worth making...to do the job right, we will have that inner conviction, because we do have that “just” cause!”

That literary expression best indicated that if there had been any remaining isolationists, they were now being replaced by true patriots! By the end of 1943, 88 men from the graduating classes that year were now in uniform. More from these classes would also see service in 1944.

In one of the first of his many reports, Father John F. “Spike” Cogan reported in December that the first alumnus to die in service was Lt. John J. Gibbons USN, C’32. He was from Avoca, Pa., and was killed in the southwest Pacific. These bulletins and “Khaki Blue & White” newsletters became Father Cogan’s great letters to all in the service. Accompanied by news of the College, they were widely read and prepared and distributed as his personal wartime effort. No mail received anywhere in the world was more welcomed and no priest more idolized than “Spike” Cogan. He was Mount St. Mary’s.

More of the early Cogan items about “One of the Greatest Generations of MSM Alumni” noted that: Lt. Christopher Mendelis, C’35, was “over there somewhere.” Army Captain John F. Waldron was stationed in the American embassy in Moscow. John J. “Spike” Leary was with General MacArthur in Australia. John H. Fitzpatrick, C’41, was somewhere in the Pacific. Joseph D. Manning, C’43, was in Army training in Fort Bragg, N.C., (he died later in service in Germany). Air Corps Lt. Robert L. Stevens was somewhere in England. One of those who had to depart before graduation and was serving aboard the Aircraft Carrier Sitkoh Bay, was Marine Corps Captain Fred Kolb, C’43. He would shoot down at least three enemy planes before the war ended.

The best report on how many Mountaineers were serving in the Armed Forces in World War
II was the several page listing in the December 7th issue of the Gettysburg Times. It was prepared by diligent and caring faculty members and totaled 727 people. The conflict went on for almost two more years and hundreds more were to be added to the list by that time. It would make a good project for future historians to determine the real total of those who served and their related casualties.

One of Father Cogan’s most touching and saddest announcements to all Alumni, was sent out from the Mount in April of 1944 concerning James Joseph Clark.

He was one of the most popular young men on the campus. He had movie actor Cary Grant’s good features, and yet he was the most unassuming and shy member of the 1943 Class. He was both a star athlete and a superior student. A member of the Monsignor Tierney Honor Society, he was elected captain of the 1942 Mount St. Mary’s football team and selected as All Maryland Center the same year. The Baltimore Sun called him, “The Field General.” The sports editor added that he was “the most reliable member of the Mount team who played the full 60 minutes of every single game during his four years in college.”

Jim Clark was known on campus as “the Dutchman from Metuchen.” He was the oldest of a large family and had received his Naval Officer’s Commission prior to his graduation. He was then ordered to Harvard University for training. He was assigned to the amphibious invasion forces and was lost at sea when his ship, LST 531, was sunk.

Father Cogan reported: “Word has been received of the death of Jim Clark, killed in the European area. He was sure one fine youngster…and perhaps too good for this not so good world of ours. I feel very sorry for his wonderful father and mother…and a flock of adoring sisters and brothers.”

There have been other wars involving Mount men. Vietnam and Korea were difficult conflicts and the alumni served their country as well. But the probability exists that the alumni who were raised in the 30s during the Depression, then sought an education on campus at the time of national economic and social turmoil, and finally left academia to participate in fighting for the freedom of the world, just may have been special. They certainly represent a very unique combination of men who made up “One of the Greatest Generations” to have ever attended Mount St. Mary’s College.