

December 7th plus Christmas 1941
A Christmas Gift for You
(An Excerpt from my book Gibbon's Secrets)
R.G. Bud Phelps

Gibbon Nebraska, a small town in the middle of the United States, had been feeling the pressure of the war in Europe throughout 1941. Five young boys had formed a special group called 'The Five Friends Forever' to illustrate their friendship by standing by each other in any and all things – no matter what.

One of the boys, Bud Phelps, lived right across the street from Mr. Ross's big red barn – so on these cold December days he invited the rest of his group to meet at the big red barn.

Bud, a blond tow head with blue eyes and a sly grin, was the first to arrive at the barn and immediately headed up to the hay mow.

Donny Hawke, another tow head with bright blue eyes, arrived next.

"How are 'ya doing today, Donny?"

Donny, who always seemed to display his shy timid smile exhibiting a fear of the unknown said, "I'm okay Bud but this war news from Europe sure scares me."

"Me too!" Bud said as they snuggled deeper in the hay.

Stanley Sylvester, who was as thin as a scarecrow with large round glasses and wispy-thin brown hair, ran up the stairs with a clatter. "Hi guys, you doing okay?"

Bud and Donny, in unison, said "Yeah, I guess."

The boys heard a lot of commotion downstairs in the barn and then the thundering herd of Wally and Duncan bounded up the stairs to the hay mow and flopped down in the hay next to their three friends.

Wally Buchanan had a face full of freckles, round gold glasses, and a mischievous grin – while Duncan McGregor was the tallest of Bud's friends with dark brown hair, brown eyes and the one that always seemed to be more serious.

Duncan said, "What's new in your dad's scrap book Bud?"

"He's added a bunch of clippings from the paper about the war in Europe."

"That's neat – Do you think I could see it sometime?"

"I'll see if dad will let me bring it over here so all of you guys can see it."

They soon got tired of all the serious talk and climbed up on the rafters above the hay. Their favorite sport was to dive off of the rafters down onto the hay. They pretended to be many things while diving off the rafters, depending on the latest picture show at the Moon theatre.

Sometimes they were Captain Marvel, other times the Green Hornet, and lately it was the British Commandos. Today was Saturday December 6th and they were pretending to be commandos and had named themselves 'The Gibbon Commandos'.

They had been parachuting behind enemy lines, off of the rafters of course, as volunteers from the United States.

Finally, their battles all won, they decided to head for home – hopefully to meet another day soon to continue their missions.

December 7th, 1941

One of Gibbon's favorite sons, Dale Pitke, had returned home from the Navy to spend Christmas leave with his folks, George and Cecil Pitke.

The Pitke's had invited Bud's folks, Reg and Addie, and his sister Jean for Sunday dinner after church. Cecil said, "I wanted to share this special treat of having Dale home on leave from the Navy with our dearest friends."

Dale quickly responded, "I am glad that you invited the Phelps' over for Sunday dinner Mom. You are such a blessing to me and being home with you is really something special, I'm glad we can share this time with them. Dad, would you say Grace before our meal?"

George said, "It is with pleasure today that I thank thee Lord for the joy of spending this Sunday with our son Dale and our special friends the Phelps'. Lord, we ask thee to continue protecting our loved ones and to bless this food that is set before us. In Jesus name we pray – Amen."

Bud was so proud that he got to sit next to Dale – and could learn all about ship-board duty. “Dale – what is it like being stationed on USS Arizona?”

Dale smiled and said, “Well Bud – it’s pretty exciting – the Arizona crew’s total compliment is more than the total population of Gibbon, and she does have many of the same conveniences you would find in any small town.”

Bud could not even imagine a ship that would hold that many people and have stores – places to eat – places to sleep – and even a hospital. “Do they even have movies aboard ship?”

“Yes, they do, and we get to see all of the latest releases.”

“Wow! You probably see movies before we do in Gibbon.”

“I’m sure that sometimes we do. Did you see ‘Aloma of the South Seas’, starring Dorothy Lamour?”

“Yes I did, I took Marilyn Kirk to that movie on a Saturday, and Dad gave me a quarter to take her and since the tickets were nine cents each, I had enough left over to buy a bag of popcorn to share with her!”

Dale laughed and said, “You are one big spender Bud – it’s amazing that you could do so much with a quarter.”

The radio was on low with a pleasant sound of music in the background when the song was interrupted with a news flash – *“Japan has delivered simultaneous bombing attacks on Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, Wake Island, and Guam. Japanese forces have invaded Malaya and Thailand, seizing Shanghai, and have declared war on the United States and Great Britain.”*

Everyone was in shock – Dale immediately contacted the Naval Headquarters in California and was ordered to return as soon as possible.

Bud, close to tears, said to Dale, “I want you to know that you are my hero and I will think of you every day. When I’m old enough I’m going to join the Navy too!”

“Thanks Bud and I’d like you to do me a favor while I’m gone. I want you to be my pen-pal and keep me posted on what’s happening here at home. Will you do that?”

“You bet! I promise to write you every week and I’ll ask my buddies to add their little notes, too.”

Addie was already comforting Cecil and said, “Oh Cecil, we will get through this thing together and I’ll be saying special prayers for Dale’s safety.”

Reg and Addie sensed that Cecil and George deserved some time alone with Dale so Reg said, “We know you need some private time with Dale so we’ll just slip on home and if we can do anything at all for you please let us know.”

George said, "Thanks Reg – we really would like to spend this little time we have with Dale now, and I know we will definitely need your caring prayers for all of us. Your family has always been very important to us."

Reg and Addie and the kids went home with heavy hearts wondering what was in store for Dale and for our country now that the war they were so worried about had so violently erupted on Pearl Harbor.

The boys all met in Mr. Ross's barn late in the afternoon of December 7th and banded together to pledge a patriotic bond supporting the United States until World War II ends in victory. They also made a solemn promise to write their new Navy hero, Dale Pitke.

The haymow of Mr. Ross's barn was a special place for the boys and with this sad news of Pearl Harbor on their young minds they felt the need to feel safe in a familiar place.

Bud said, "Guys, it is our duty to do whatever we can even as kids, to help keep up the morale here in Gibbon."

They all agreed and Duncan added, "Bud's right, even though we were just kids we can do a lot to help out."

Donny, the timid one, said, "I'm scared!"

The boys all pulled close to Donny, doing their best to act brave, hoping they could make him feel safer. Soon after that the boys left the barn and headed for their homes.

On December 8th – President Franklin Delano Roosevelt announced to the nation by radio that the United States had declared war on Japan. Several days following our declaration of war against Japan – Germany declared war on the United States.

These events were shocks felt by the entire country and you could quickly see this small town of Gibbon showing their own effects of these shocks and many of its young men quickly heading to the recruitment centers in Kearney and Grand Island.

December 15th 1941 the Gibbon Grade School presented the Christmas program that they had been working on well ahead of the attack by the Japanese.

The kids had been working hard on their program and the school administration felt, in light of the current world situation, it would be good for the morale of the community for them to go ahead with their performance.

The program consisted of several different scenes, starting with singing from the Kindergarten group. Bud was proud that his friends were really involved in many of the areas of the program.

Jimmy Lyons, Donny Hawke, Jackie Sigler, Jerry Lou Randall, and Charlotte DeBrie were among the group in "Old King Cole's Christmas.

Marilyn Kirk was featured in, 'Kitty's Present'.

Marilyn Kirk, Bud Phelps and Duncan McGregor were among the characters of, 'Christmas Eve at Home'.

Christmas carols were sung by grades 5 through 8 which included all of Bud's friends.

When the entire cast came out for their final bows - they received a standing ovation from the parents and others attending the program.

The crowd of people in attendance for this 'Christmas Carol Program' started the evening with heavy hearts, but left the auditorium with smiles on their faces - thanking the Lord for the innocence of these Gibbon Grade School students and the joy they brought through their program.

The Christmas of 1941 came during a time of mourning for the many service men and women who died or were severely injured in the attack on Pearl Harbor. Dale Pitke's ship 'USS Arizona' sustained a loss of 1,100 lives. Dale lost many friends that tragic day. He also lost all of his own personal belongings that were left on the ship when he came home on leave. He was very fortunate to have been home at that time and the Gibbon townspeople all adopted him as their personal hero.

Bud started writing Dale soon after he returned to active duty and pledged that a weekly letter would be sent to him until the day he came home again. The 'Five Friends Forever' helped Bud with the letters to Dale and a strong bond was developed between this sailor and these five boys.

Reg and Addie had already bought Bud a Schwinn bike for his Christmas present back in November. It was probably very fortunate they had because with the war production now in full swing bike production would probably be curtailed.

Christmas Day arrived and there was a small present under the tree for Bud from his Dad and Mom. Bud opened that present first and it contained a note that said, 'Go with your Dad – he wants to take you for a special ride'. "I don't know what this is all about but I'm ready for the special ride, Dad."

"Okay son, let's go see what we can see. Put on your hat and coat though it's pretty cold."

Reg drove Bud to a warehouse building he rented to store things for his trucks and said, "Okay let's go see what's in here. I'm going to pull your stocking cap down over your eyes and lead you into the warehouse – now don't peek."

Reg opened the door and led Bud by the hand until they got inside – then he said, "You can pull up your cap now."

Bud pulled up his cap and there stood a brand new red and cream Schwinn bike with a big tag on it that said – [FOR BUD FROM DAD AND MOM].

His eyes got real big and small tears started to trickle down his cheeks – he finally found his voice and said, “Oh Dad – I’ve wanted a bike like this all of my life.” He ran over to his bike and said, “Can I ride it home?”

“You sure can son – I’ll follow right behind you in my truck.”

Bud rode his new bike all the way home on a very cold December day with no gloves, and when he got home he said, “You know mom, my hands didn’t even get cold. Gee whiz, I am so lucky to have this neat bike and great parents like you, thank you so much! You’ve sure made this a very special Christmas for me.”

A tired and beat-up ‘Father Time’ was ushering out 1941 and the New Years ‘1942 Baby’ was just around the corner ready to enter the battle for freedom. Everyone in this small town of Gibbon couldn’t imagine the changes that were in store for them in the coming year. **Time will tell.....**

This short story is an excerpt from my book *Gibbon's Secrets* and is my gift to you this special time of the year. Both of my historical fiction books (*Gibbon's Secrets & Back in the Day*) have delightful Christmas stories in them, therefore would make great gifts. You can order the books on my website, <http://www.budsbooks.com> and I’ll even sign the copies for you.