

Slinging Doughnuts for the Boys



I am deep in the middle of Adam Hochschild's new book, To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914-1918, about the anti-war movement before and during World War I (and is thus far excellent). And I recently slogged through British historian Antony Beevor's 500+ page D-Day: The Battle for Normandy, which was a bit too detailed, but very fair in representing Allied incompetence and portrayed some of the major players, including Montgomery, Eisenhower and Patton in a new light for me. Can you tell I was a history major? Standing out so far in this recent WWI/WWII kick was Slinging Doughnuts for the Boys: An American Woman in WWII by Indiana University history professor, James H. Madison.

Professor Madison came across the story of Elizabeth Richardson after seeing her grave at the American Cemetery in Normandy. He took note of her gender and being a Hoosier, of her northern Indiana birthplace. Upon his return and a few internet searches later, he was in touch with her younger brother who had saved many of her letters home, and was also in possession of her diaries and drawings. Even better, he was grateful and willing to share his sister's war story.

Liz Richardson grew up in northern Indiana, and went to college in Wisconsin in the early 40s. She was bright, artistically gifted and worked briefly in the advertising field before volunteering for the Red Cross in early 1944. She spent most of her time working in a Clubmobile, a mobile bus serving doughnuts and coffee to soldiers in Britain and France, even after VE day (the anniversary of which was last week, generally celebrated in the US on May 8). Especially heartbreaking was her experiences talking to released Allied prisoners of war waiting in camps to be shipped back home.

Liz's letters to her friends and family are both extremely funny and provide a clear picture of her daily life living in war torn areas. Madison leaves large portions of text untouched from these letters and diary entries, but also provides some historic background of larger events.

Often war stories are told by men about men. While seldom thought of, and seldom told, the picture is so much greater than that, and this book fills a small part of that gap in war biographies. WWII non-fiction readers, women's history fans, and general biography readers will all find something to enjoy.

Madison lists several resources in the back, including websites for the history of the Clubmobile and the American Red Cross.

Posted by sbowman on May 11, 2011

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[World War II](#)

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Links

- [1] <https://mcpj.info/blogs/love-reading/playing-through-music-toys>
- [2] <https://mcpj.monroecol.edu/view.aspx?cn=591418>
- [3] <https://mcpj.monroecol.edu/view.aspx?cn=594789,%20513284>
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