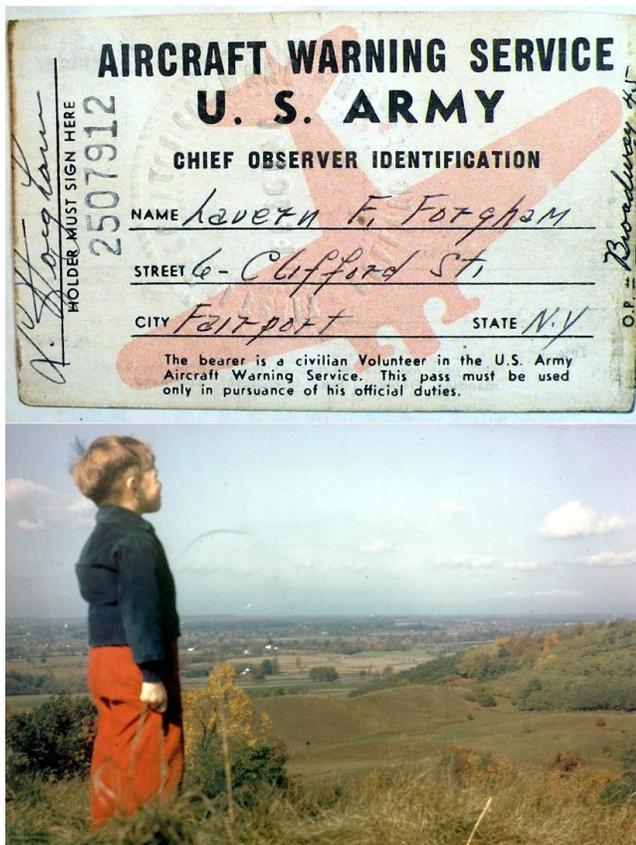


Selborne Chase Residents Occupy former WWII Observation Post

America was at war in 1942, and our citizens did what they could to support the effort. Although disabled while serving in the U.S. Navy in World War I, Ernie Stewart still manned a post, right here in Perinton. Stewart was one of 17 observers and three commanders appointed to serve at the American Legion's Air Observation Post on Sullivan's Hill, one of Perinton's highest. The volunteers were armed with binoculars and a telephone with a direct connection to the military base at Mitchel Field, Long Island.

Plans were established for an observation post in Perinton months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, for the purpose of spotting enemy aircraft. As the Fairport Herald Mail reported, "One of the most vital necessities to our country is the observation posts which are stationed in every part of our country so that no plane will go unidentified. This is just another step to safeguard our country from the enemy." Sullivan's Hill was the chosen spot for Perinton's post, with an ideal vantage point for spotting planes for miles in any direction. The name of the hill is in reference to an early property owner, John Sullivan. Today the hill is home to hundreds of Perinton residents, on a street named Selborne Chase. The homes at the very top of the hill, where the observation post was located, were built in the early 1970s.



Aircraft Warning Service identification badge and Merit Award for hours served. The WWII era photo is of Perinton attorney Douglas Whitney, who recalls accompanying his father to the AWS observation post.

A cabin previously used during a nearby Works Progress Administration project was adapted for use as an observation post. Members of the Brooks-Shepard American Legion outfitted the cabin with a table, chairs, and other necessities, along with most of the volunteers. The operation was under the command of Lavern Forgham, Kenneth Tresscott, and Russell Schutt. Identification cards were issued, identifying participants as a "Civilian Volunteer in the U.S. Army Aircraft Warning Service. This pass must be used only in the pursuance of his official duties". Observers were trained in radio communications protocol, and each was assigned a code name. During the winter, it was often impossible for volunteer observers to reach the post by car, requiring a difficult hike to reach the top of the hill.

Many Perinton residents spent hundreds of hours as volunteers in the Aircraft Warning Service. Of particular note were WWI veteran Ernie Stewart, who served 12 hour shifts daily from April of 1942 to June of 1943, and Lavern Forgham, recognized for serving over 2,000 hours as an Observer and Area Supervisor. When the Aircraft Warning Service was discontinued in June of 1944, Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, commended volunteers on their contribution to the war effort: "All of you have done a splendid job and have successfully accomplished your particular mission... your country, the Army Air Forces, and your fellow Americans owe a debt of gratitude to the members of the Aircraft Warning Service."

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