

This explanation of “The Homefront 1944” may be read prior to a performance or reprinted in the program notes at the discretion of the presenter:

The world was embroiled in World War II in the middle of the last century. The United States was involved from 1941 until 1945, sustaining a loss of over 400,000 American lives. Many family members back home received word from the government that a loved one was killed in action, wounded in action, or missing in action. Wars cause great sadness, anguish, and hardship, and often engender anger in those affected on The Homefront.

Carrie Bair (the composer’s grandmother) of Liverpool, Pennsylvania, USA, wrote the letter, which is set in this composition, on September 28, 1944. She wrote to her sister Nellie who lived near Lebanon, Pennsylvania, about 60 miles from Liverpool. Carrie had received word from the War Department that her son Eugene “Gene” Bair was declared missing in action during the 29th mission of his Liberator B-24 Bomber on July 11th. It was later learned that the bomber had probably crashed in the English Channel with all hands. Gene and his crew, flying out of Horsham St. Faith (now Norwich International Airport) had been involved in the D-Day invasion in early June and were scheduled to return home after their 30th mission to help sell war bonds. Meanwhile, Lowell Bair, Gene’s younger brother (and the composer’s father), was serving in the South Pacific on a destroyer escort. His ship, the USS England DE-635, was attacked and damaged late in the war at Okinawa, but Lowell was not physically injured.

Carrie Bair was a most gentle and even meek woman who found herself caught up in a war that affected her and her family for the rest of their lives. This is just one of thousands of similar stories.

Jack McKinney, mentioned in the letter, died in the early 1970s, perhaps due to the wounds he sustained in WWII.

The work includes short motives from the following hymns:

- The US Navy Hymn – “Eternal Father Strong to Save”
- The US Army Hymn – “God of Our Fathers” (particularly the short beginning fanfare of the hymn)
- The hymn - “It is Well with My Soul”

Sheldon Bair
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