Tidbit No. 49

1944 --- Tokyo's Project Fugo - Starke County Connection

In the fall of 1944, Japan launched 9000 thirty-foot diameter hydrogen-filled balloons so that easterly winds would carry them to the United States. These balloons carried bombs. They landed mostly in the western United States, Canada and Mexico, however, two came inland as far as Michigan and Iowa. They were intended to disrupt the war effort by starting forest fires in the West, but they didn't do a lot of damage, because the dry fire seasons had passed and the balloons landed on wet or snow-covered trees. However, a few people were killed in Oregon by one of the bombs.

Our government was aware of the vulnerability of our coastal areas, which is one reason why the Kingsbury Ordnance Plant was built in north central Indiana. We were being attacked on both shores. The German submarines were all over our troop ships' routes during the early part of the war. You may remember the story of the 4-chaplains where the troop ship, the Dorchester, was torpedoed by the German submarine U-223 off of Newfoundland in the North Atlantic.

The Japanese also had other plans for the west coast as well as New York City in WWII. They had developed a submarine with 3 hulls or tubes. The top hull was sitting on the two others that acted like pontoons. The top hull carried a wing-folding sea plane with one bomb on it. It was planned that while some of the subs would be used to attack the western seaboard cities, one would travel around South America and bomb New York City. All of these plans didn't get carried out, because, before most of these subs could be launched, the U. S. had dropped the two A-bombs that ended

the war.

Now, to get back to the 9000 balloons --- and what does all of this have to do with Starke County history?

I just received this news article from Lila Lucas Cowley, a former Starke County resident, now living in Indianapolis:

Notified of Tragic Death Caused by Jap Balloon Bomb -- May 5, 1945

Frank Cromey of California Township received word, Tuesday, of last week, from his sister, who lives at Bly, Oregon, that two of her children were killed with four others by the explosion of a Japanese balloon bomb.

Joan Patzke 11, spotted the balloon, when on an outing with her brother, Dick 13, a minister and his wife, and three other youngsters, 13 and 12 years of age. One of the victims tugged at a piece of the balloon and a tremendous explosion followed, killing five of the party. The clergyman escaped.

The incident was described by the War Department as the only damage or casualty inflicted by the long-range paper balloons sporadically attacking the Western United States. The cause of the tragic explosion was released as a warning to the public to emphasize the need for precaution.

Thanks, Lila, for sharing this article.

Jim Shilling
Starke County Historical Society

http://www.starkehistory.com http://www.scpl.lib.in.us/historical/