



The Civilian D-Day: Selling War Bonds from the Air

by Stephen A. Treffman

One summer day during World War II, a huge load of one-page salmon colored leaflets came fluttering down over Hyde Park. The sky was filled with them. At the time, my mother and I were walking south along Kenwood Avenue at 54th Street near the playground of what is now Murray School. The sight of all that paper falling from the sky was, to my young eyes, absolutely breathtaking. When I would later learn the term "manna from heaven," I would immediately know what it was because I had personally experienced it!

Of course I made strides to gather up as many as I could of these marvelous gifts floating down upon us only to be abruptly captured by my mother's hand. Somehow, I was given to understand that I should leave the papers on the ground and that we should go home right away. As we scurried off, I looked back longingly at the sight of all those wonderful pieces of paper far from my grasp but forever fixed in my memory. Their mysterious purpose and message, however, would remain unknown to me for another 60 years.

At a recent paper collectibles trade show I was going through a seller's wares when I suddenly came upon a tablet sized sheet, salmon in color. As soon as I read it, I knew what it was! There before me was a copy of one of those leaflets that had been floating down on Hyde Park that memorable summer day so long ago.

Finally, I learned what it was that had so captured my attention. The mystery was solved! The sheet, printed on one side in English and on the other side in German, turned out to be a promotion to sell War Bonds.

"Citizens of Chicago!" it proclaimed, "This harmless piece of paper was dropped from an airplane. It COULD have been an enemy's bomb bringing death and destruction, or a propaganda leaflet spreading disunity and bewilderment among us. That it is

neither, is due to the skill, courage and sacrifice of our fighting men now invading Europe."

"When the War Bond Warden in your Block calls, during the Fifth War Loan Drive, welcome him in. Then dig into your savings and buy EXTRA war bonds! Put it over the 100% mark! If you have bought war bonds since June 1st where you work or anywhere else, fill out the Red, White and Blue Credit Slip which the War Bond Warden will have. Then your block will receive full credit for all bonds you buy, wherever you buy them!"

The name of its sponsor was affixed: "Chicago and Cook County War Finance Committee, 5th War Loan, Philip R. Clarke, Chairman."

I wouldn't have been able to understand the leaflet's message even if I had snagged one because, unfortunately, at the time, I had no reading skills and wouldn't have had a clue as to what a bond was even if I could read. While I was entranced by the sight of these things, older members of the community may well have viewed them as so much waste paper they would have to be picking up from their lawns, backyards and roofs in the succeeding days and weeks ahead.

Although the leaflet was undated, the text suggested that it must have been produced sometime after the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, and I used that as the major clue as I set off to learn more of its story. I soon discovered that the leaflet was one of a million that were dropped over Chicago by a single air transport plane on June 12, 1944 as part of the kick-off for a nationwide Fifth War Bond Drive to raise \$16 Billion dollars. President Franklin D. Roosevelt would describe it as the "Civilian D-Day."

There were eight such drives during the war. The fifth ran from June 12 to July 31, 1944. Chicago and Cook County's goal was set at \$894,014,000, "the greatest financial undertaking" ever launched in the city. One hundred thousand local volunteers would take part in the drive, 16,500 of them working as Block Bond Wardens who, in turn, supervised the house to house canvassing work of tens of thousands of Block Captains.

In Hyde Park, leadership for the drive fell to Commander George X. Rosenthal, head of the Hyde Park branch for the city's Office of Civil Defense. Its goals for the community were 14,440 subscriptions and bond sales of \$4,860,075. Each of his zone wardens was given a specific quota and, in turn, they apportioned them out to their local block

