

Name: _____ Class: _____

One Woman's War Efforts During World War II

Interview with Lotte W. Goldschmidt Magnus

By Veterans History Project
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Lotte W. Goldschmidt Magnus (1920-2006) was a Jewish girl born in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. In her teens, Magnus was forced to emigrate to the United States when anti-Semitism¹ began to rise in Germany. After high school, Magnus pursued a degree in dietetics and eventually enlisted in the army as a dietician. In this excerpt from her interview, Magnus reveals insight into the treatment of Jewish people in Nazi Germany and what it took to survive and succeed as a refugee in the United States. As you read, take notes on how gender influenced the responsibilities of Lotte Magnus and her family members during and leading up to World War II.

[1] **Gary D. Rhay:** Let's start with your mom, why she couldn't leave Holland.

Lotte W. Goldschmidt Magnus: Oh, because Holland was overrun by Hitler just the night before she was supposed to leave. And her luggage was on the ship, but as far as we know, it went down to the bottom of the ocean there, because things were bombarded. And — but — oh, I was talking about the fact that she had become friendly with a man in Germany, who happened to have been a Dutchman by birth. And he had already sent his daughter to Holland, and his son to Bolivia, where there were some other relatives. And he had come back to Holland, where he still had a sister, I believe. And he knew that mother was going to come through there, and he made it a point to get together with her. And then of course my mother couldn't leave. They stayed together, and during that time I could still get mail from mother. In one letter she wrote that Arnold had asked her to get married, but she just couldn't see herself giving me a stepfather. And I wrote back to her, you marry whomever you want to because that's what I'm going to do when the time comes. The next thing I knew they had gotten married. My brother had written in the same vein. He was married already so... And, anyhow, we were both glad that she and Arnold were together because they spend some time together in Frankfurt already. And Huntz and I both know Arnold, and he was a decent man. We always liked him, and he was very handy to have around. He was — well, I could use him here all the time now to do little things.



"Lotte W. Goldschmidt Magnus" by Veterans History Project is used with permission.

1. "Anti-Semitism" refers to hostility towards or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group.

So... And then they were hidden in Holland for some time, but eventually they had to come out of hiding because it got too difficult for the people that were hiding them. I don't know if they were Christians or Jews that were hiding them. But anyhow they had to come out. And they ended up in Westerbork, which is the concentration camp in Holland. And because Arnold had gotten the Iron Cross in the first world war, he had the dubious privilege of having his wife in the same camp with him. So at least they were able to stay together. I don't remember how long they were at Westerbork. And I imagine it was probably sometime in 1941 that they were put into Westerbork. And from there then they were transferred to a camp in Czechoslovakia called Theresienstadt or Terezin. And it — they did not get tattoos. I guess they didn't do that in Holland. And then for the people that went to Theresienstadt, they didn't do it either in German — through the German authorities because that was the camp that they always took the Red Cross people to show them how well the people were being treated in the concentration camps. But before an inspection team came from the Red Cross, the place was always spruced up. The people got better clothing, the food improved, they stay to give concerts and plays and things like that. If you want to read a chapter about that, Herman Wouk wrote two books. One is called *War and Remembrances*, and the other one is called *Winds of War*. It goes the whole gamut² of the second world war and what led up to it and everything. And there is quite a long chapter about Theresienstadt. And my mother read it after she came here, and she said, yes, that's exactly what was going on, that all this sprucing up was being done before the Red Cross came, but afterwards it was the same old misery."

So they were — mother was there until the end of the war, April of — May of '45. Unfortunately, Arnold didn't manage to not be around when they were rounding up more people to send to Auschwitz³ the very last transport that went out sometime in '45. And no one has ever seen or heard a trace of him. But the two of them had agreed that if either one of them survived, they would go back to the small town in Holland and wait for each other for one year, because Arnold — his girl had already died in — had been killed in Holland, but he had intended that if he was going to be left alone, to probably go to Bolivia to his son, and of course mother would have wanted to come here. But like I said, Arnold never showed up, but we finally started to hear from mother in the summer of '45. And she waited until '46 before she came.

- [5] And when — I guess my brother got word from mother that she was alive. And I imagine because the war was still going on with Japan, she couldn't say much, and probably only send an address to him with her name. And Huntz sent that on to me to Honolulu. And one day when I was on duty, I get this call from the switchboard, we have a telegram here for you. And I said "well, read it to me." Can't do it, you have to come and see it yourself. And I went down there and looked at it, and it said Lily Sarah Solomon, something, something, Venlo, Holland. It didn't mean a thing to me. I kept looking at it, and looking at it, and finally it dawned on me. That's your mother Lily Goldschmidt. The Sarah I knew she had to take because all the Jewish women had to take Sarah, like all the Jewish men had to include Israel in their names. And having met — having married Arnold, she changed her Goldschmidt to Solomon. And I didn't — I hadn't even thought of my mother for several days.

2. A "gamut" refers to the complete range or scope of an issue or event.

3. "Auschwitz" was a network of concentration camps and extermination camps built and operated in Polish areas controlled by Nazi Germany. Over 1 million people were killed by the Nazis at Auschwitz during the Holocaust.

Well, the next thing I knew was that somebody was pouring water on my face, and I was looking up at all these sergeants that were standing around me. Was the first time in my life that I ever fainted. And of course they all wanted to know what the telegram said, why did you faint, et cetera, et cetera. And I told them. And everybody was delighted to realize, along with me, that mother had survived. And this was shortly before lunch. And by the time I walked into the officer's mess for lunch, everybody in the dining room stood up, word had gotten around. And they all knew. I tell you, I don't think I was ever that touched before or since. And, of course, that evening we had to have a reason for a party, so what better reason. So... but that's how I found out that my mother was still alive. And she was really skinny. I got a snapshot of her fairly soon after that, and — but she made up for it, even before she came to the states the following year. So like my husband always said, "your mother had guts." And that's true. She lived through the first world war, with a — as a young bride with a small child, and a husband in the service. And she had an invalid husband for 16 years. And then those years in the concentration camp. And it was in '46 when she came, and she didn't die until 1973 and is buried here in Portland. So that's the story of my mother. And it's connected with the service also because I was in the service, and as soon as she came to the states, I was able to draw dependency pay for her, and that helped my brother a great deal, because he was struggling. He was a 4F⁴ because of poor eyesight and varicose veins⁵ in his legs, and felt bad about it, but they had a small child by that time, so not everybody could enlist in the service. I did it because I was just so grateful that I could come to this country. And I'll forever be grateful, no matter what goes on, though I wish at times now things would be going on a little differently, but that's another ball of wax.⁶ We won't go into that.

[...]

Gary D. Rhay: Well, tell us about the rest of your military career.

Lotte W. Goldschmidt Magnus: Okay. Like I said, eventually I ended up in Honolulu in May of '45, lovely weather. In fact, it was while I was in transit that it was announced that Germany had capitulated. I was changing trains in Denver, and that's when it came across the news that Germany had capitulated. So by the time I got to Honolulu, part of the war was over, but still we were under military law and everything. And I — I want to go back a minute to my six months internship at Fort Leonard Wood.

One day towards Christmas time, the supply sergeant came to me because he had the list of food there that the German prisoners of war wanted. There was a ward on the fort, at the hospital, for the POWs⁷ from Germany. And there were items that they requested that first of all, he didn't have them, and he didn't recognize them. Excuse me. And he asked me — he knew that I spoke German. And I looked at it, and I said, "these are ingredients that they would like to have to make Christmas cookies and pastries." And I said, "you cancel all these items. They're not in the Geneva Convention,⁸ and I'm not about to condone German POWs celebrating their Christmas in this country as long as I have anything to do with it." And the commanding officer heard about it, and he said, "from now on, you take over the feeding of those POWs, but don't let them know that you speak German." Okay. So I got the Geneva Convention papers out to really be sure what I was talking about, and read them over again. And then it was subsistence,⁹ and we stuck strictly to the line.

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4. "4F" is a classification given to a new U.S. military registrant indicating that he or she is "not acceptable for service in the Armed Forces" due to medical reasons.
 5. veins that have become enlarged and twisted, often causing pain to the individual
 6. an idiom or saying that means "another entire issue"
 7. prisoners of war
 8. The "Geneva Convention" defines the basic rights of war time prisoners.
 9. **Subsistence** (*noun*): the action or fact of maintaining or supporting someone at a minimum level

[10] Then when I — shortly before I left there, the colonel came to me and said, "let's go down to the POW ward," I think it was No. 27, "and let them know that you speak German." So I walked in there. And they didn't give me any special trouble, but I just didn't have kind feelings towards them. As far as their injuries and things, of course I took care of all of that but nothing extra. And we walked in there, and some — I could hear somebody in the back saying something. I turned around and answered in German. Oh, very much surprised. And I conversed back and forth with the noncomms¹⁰ that were in charge of them, and pretty soon I heard one of them say behind me, now I know why we didn't get the stuff for the Christmas cookies, she knew what we wanted to do. And I said, yes. But then somebody asked me how come you speak German so well? And I had to do some quick thinking. I wasn't about to let them know that I'm a German Jewish refugee. So suddenly I had a father who was stationed in Germany during the first world war. And he stayed there, and that's how come I knew German so well. So that was one experience. At the time it was kind of frightening. But now that I look back upon, first of all I think where did you have the guts, where did you get the guts to talk like that, but obviously I did. And I'm glad I had the opportunity to be fair with them, but not overly friendly. It wasn't necessary. It wasn't necessary. And if they ever figured out what my actual background is, they're probably surprised that I treated them as well as I did.

So then I went to Honolulu, and there I first was at the Tripler Hospital down on King Street, I think it was, where the old one was. And then I was changed over to the campus, Kamehameha Heights School campus. We had a branch there, and also a branch at the Farrington School. And the Kamehameha Heights School was, and I guess is still, an exclusive school for just pure Hawaiian children. Was a beautiful campus, beautiful rooms, and all sorts of niceties that certainly don't speak of army life. It was a good place to be stationed. And also from there we went on many excursions on the islands, and down into the city, and other parts of the city. And transportation was available. Of course being a woman, there were comparatively few of us. There were always plenty of dates available. And somebody always could get a Jeep. Sometimes we had somebody that could get a staff car. And — but we did have to work, too. It wasn't all just fun and games. I was on duty every day, usually all weekend, too. And we had some pretty bad casualties come in. And it was also the feeding of the general troops, not just the patients, and it was a lot of work to be done. And also morale building.

Some of the fellows were in awful shape, even by the time they got to us and... But, and we had a lot of bodies being shipped back to the states for burial by the families, but that's war. I knew — I expected things like that, and I'm just glad I wasn't any further front. Though I did get into a station hospital then, but even then it wasn't as bad as it was for some of the nurses that were really up front in the evacuation hospitals. But the dieticians did not go that far front. Nutrition wasn't that important at that time at that point in the troops lives. And we realized that. And if I had gone into nursing, I would have gladly gone all the way to the front. So... And then I was in Hawaii for 11 months, and then on down to Guam.

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10. Short for "noncommissioned officer," meaning an enlisted person who holds a low ranking in the military.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which TWO statements best summarize the central ideas of the text? [RI.2]
 - A. Lotte Magnus chose dietician work to avoid getting put in dangerous situations.
 - B. After leaving Germany, Lotte Magnus desperately missed her homeland and her only salvation was the opportunity she was given to help the U.S. in the war.
 - C. Without the help of the men in her life, Lotte Magnus never would have accomplished all that she has.
 - D. Lotte Magnus' bravery and loyalty to the United States allowed her to contribute to war efforts in valuable ways.
 - E. Lotte Magnus' family was torn apart and irreparably damaged by the Holocaust.
 - F. Lotte Magnus' ability to forgive the Nazis presents a roadmap for how people can overcome grief.

2. PART B: Which TWO details from the text best support the answers to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "And then of course my mother couldn't leave. They stayed together, and during that time I could still get mail from mother." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "And because Arnold had gotten the Iron Cross in the first world war, he had the dubious privilege of having his wife in the same camp with him." (Paragraph 3)
 - C. "And no one has ever seen or heard a trace of him." (Paragraph 4)
 - D. "As far as their injuries and things, of course I took care of all of that but nothing extra." (Paragraph 10)
 - E. And it was also the feeding of the general troops, not just the patients, and it was a lot of work to be done. And also morale building. (Paragraph 11)
 - F. "But the dieticians did not go that far front. Nutrition wasn't that important at that time at that point in the troops lives." (Paragraph 12)

3. PART A: What is the meaning of "capitulate" in paragraph 8? [RI.4]
 - A. resist
 - B. surrender
 - C. bargain
 - D. express regret

4. PART B: Which section from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "part of the war was over," (Paragraph 8)
 - B. "we were under military law" (Paragraph 8)
 - C. "I got the Geneva Convention papers out" (Paragraph 9)
 - D. "the POWs from Germany." (Paragraph 9)

5. How does paragraph 6 contribute to development of ideas in the interview with Lotte [RI.5] Magnus?

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. Do you agree with the United States' rule of "subsistence" in treating German prisoners of war?
2. Are you surprised by Lotte Magnus's decision to join the army after escaping Germany? Why or why not?
3. In the context of the text, how are the roles of men and women defined? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
4. In the context of the text, how are we changed by war? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
5. In the context of the text, how does a person overcome adversity? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
6. In the context of this text, what makes someone a hero? Did the actions taken by Lotte Magnus during the war make her a hero? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.