

History's Helping Hands

The current global pandemic causes us to reflect on crises the United States has faced in the past. The massive social and economic upheavals of World War II immediately come to mind. While today's crisis calls for isolation and physical separation to overcome the threat, the war years of the 1940s were a time when Americans worked side by side as never before to fight a common foe.

As young men went off to battlefields overseas and businesses transitioned to producing war materiel, Americans on the Home Front looked for opportunities to support the war effort. Volunteering became an important way to make a difference, even for children. Almost 20 million children volunteered with the American Red Cross during the war, comprising about 75% of school-aged children. One of those young volunteers was June Pilcher.

June was in third grade when her family moved to Brunswick from Ellaville, near Americus, Georgia, in 1943. Her father had found work as a carpenter at the J.A. Jones Shipyard, where Liberty Ships were being built. One of the ways June supported the war effort was through bandage rolling. As a Red Cross volunteer, she learned to fold, roll, and securely tie bandages in a sterile environment to be sent overseas to dress battle



wounds. The Red Cross rolled over 2.5 billion surgical dressings during World War II. Then, as now, health care workers and volunteers were essential to meeting the challenge of a global threat.

This month's photo from the Coastal Georgia Historical Society's Liberty Harbor Collection shows

June standing with Mrs. Jack Chapman, another Red Cross volunteer and family friend. Both are wearing the regulation head covering, or coif, adopted by the Red Cross during World War I and required in surgical dressing workrooms. The snug fit of the coif kept hair from falling on the bandages as they were rolled.

June married Asa Richard Brown in 1955 and now lives on St. Simons Island. In 2007, she generously donated to the Society the toolbox her father, Elmo T. Pilcher, used at the Brunswick shipyard. Several of the tools are now displayed in the Liberty Ship Gallery at the World War II Home Front Museum on St. Simons Island.