

Blue Star Brothers

*As Told to Tricia Goyer
by Margaret Gerace, wife of Sam Gerace*

During WWII, walking down the streets of any town, it was common to spot Blue Star Service Flags hung in the windows of homes. Another name for these flags was “Sons in Service Flags” as mothers proudly displayed their flags to show how many sons were in the service. Each star on the flag represented one son.

During World War II, the Department of War issued specifications concerning the manufacturing of the flag, as well as guidelines stating when and by whom the Service Flag could be flown. The flags were usually no larger than one foot long. They were double-sided in order to be admired from both sides.

The flags were always hung vertically, and a stick was sewn into the top heading of the flag. A piece of string then attached to both ends of the stick in order to be suspended at its midpoint from a hook or some other feature of a home’s front window. While some service flags were made commercially, most Service Flags were handmade with cotton. Other flags were manufactured using felt, satin, or silk. Some service flags were personalized with embroidery, including either the soldier’s name or patriotic phrases such as “Proudly Serving” or “Serving our Country.”

Blue stars were sewn on a white background, highlighted by a red border. Then, if tragedy struck and a son was lost, a gold star was sewn over the blue one, leaving the border of the blue star visible. The blue star represented hope and pride, and the gold star represented sacrifice to the cause of liberty and freedom. And in the case that a son was lost, it was the uppermost star that was replaced by gold, showing top honor and respect.

An example of a “Sons in Service Flag” can be seen hanging in the window of Mrs. Ryan’s house in the movie, *Saving Private Ryan*. For those familiar with the movie, the thought of losing more than one son was to be feared. Yet worries such as these were not uncommon, especially to mothers such as Bernardo Gerace of LaSalle, Illinois. Mrs. Gerace had not one or two sons fighting for the United States during W.W.II . . . but five. Five sons fighting in foreign battle zones. Five blue stars shining brightly from the Service Flag that hung in her front window.

In the town of LaSalle, and around the United States, gold stars were not uncommon. In fact, “Gold Star Mothers” was a national organization created by women who’d lost their sons in war. But that was one club that Mrs. Gerace did not wish to join.

Mrs. Gerace’s first blue star was sewn on June 25, 1941 when her oldest son, Vincent, joined the Army. Vincent trained with Patton’s 3rd Army in an armored regiment and later found himself on the battlefields of Europe. Eighteen months later, in the fall of 1942, a second blue star was

added when Dominic joined an anti-aircraft artillery unit. Around the same time, Sam joined a medical detachment with the 11th Armored Division—also with Patton’s 3rd Army. A third, blue star now represented this third son.

Thinking the Navy sounded good to him, the next brother, Joseph—blue star number four—joined this branch of the armed services. Followed by Peter who joined the Air Corps bringing the star count to five.

Five sons to pray for—to worry about. Five stars Mrs. Gerace prayed would remain blue.

And as the war raged on, finally coming to an end, the prayers worked. Although, Vincent was injured in Germany by the Rhine River and was award the Purple Heart, all of the boys made it home alive . . . and Mrs. Gerace was more than happy to never have joined the Gold Star Mothers.

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