



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

Ornaments with History

This is a bittersweet time of year for me. Folks who have read my blogs for years know that very soon it will be my favorite night of the year—St. Nicholas Eve. For me it marks the real beginning of the Christmas season. Once Thanksgiving is past, a certain spirit is in the air. As I have done for a number of years now, I'll make borscht on St. Nicholas night, and enjoy it when our son comes over with his family for the evening. The Christmas stockings will be hanging up, and we all enjoy putting the last ornaments on our tree.

But that pleasant evening is followed a couple days later by December 7, the date that "lives in infamy." For us older folks, we grew up hearing a lot about that sad time. For the United States it marked the entry into World War II. The effects of the war were felt by everyone, and even trickled down, in a small way, to the world of Christmas ornaments. The needs of the war meant shortages of many common products, among them mercury and aluminum. Ornament manufacturers used mercury to coat the inside of glass ornaments, making the outside appear as silver. This was called "silvering."



unsilvered 1



unsilvered 2

With mercury not being available, manufacturers were forced to use clear glass. To make it interesting, they painted the ornaments. Stripes were a common decoration, and with all the possible colors combinations, there was almost no end to the decorative possibilities. They also decided to color the glass, but it was still transparent. Some of these were painted with stripes and other decorations, too. All of these are referred to as "unsilvered" ornaments. Most that we see are American made, though European manufacturers faced the same shortages. I like these unsilvered ornaments because they give the tree decor an added depth. You can look through one ornament and see several others. With the different colors, the effect can be very interesting.

With aluminum unavailable, ornament makers had to find new ways to make ornament caps. Paper or thin cardboard (paperboard) are the materials I have seen most, but sometimes just a wire was used. You can

see from the ornaments we are currently offering that there are several types of paper hangars. Hanging one of these rarities on your tree can be your own silent memorial. It also shows American ingenuity, something too seldom celebrated. We are excited to be able to offer about twenty of these war era ornaments, the most we've ever acquired at one time.



war ornaments 1

Speaking of war, I'm reminded of an encounter with a customer from several years ago. I may have already told this story, but it warms my heart every time I tell it. We often purchase a large group of ornaments from estates or when someone is downsizing or moving. When we do that, we always acquire some ornaments that are less desirable. But you never know. One day I was hanging up some ornaments

at Milaeger's and I had just put out a few that didn't appeal to me. A few minutes later a woman approached the tree, and started examine the ornaments. A short time later I could hear her softly crying. I was hesitant to approach her, but eventually asked her if she needed help. She explained how a certain ornament caught her eye. When her husband returned from Vietnam many years ago, they went out and bought the very same ornament for their tree. Their ornaments had been lost over the years. Finding that ornament made her day, and it made mine, too.



war ornaments 2

Please [email me](#) if you have any questions or comments. If you are interested in purchasing ornaments pictured in this blog, please contact Kelly, who handles mail order sales, at 262.693.2040 x101 or info@milaegers.com.