



Murrieta Valley Historical Society Newsletter

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It is our mission to identify, preserve and promote the historic legacy of the Murrieta Valley and to educate the public about its historical significance.

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Hugo Guenther

A Fight from the Home Front (1917-1918)

By Jeffery Harmon

War heroes are often declared by their deeds on the battlefield, but there are also heroes on the home front whose gallant efforts support the troops and the war. During World War I, Hugo Guenther, proprietor of the Murrieta Hot Springs Resort, worked tirelessly in Southwest Riverside County, to raise funds for the Red Cross, the Liberty Bond drives, and several other war related causes. His efforts helped raise hundreds of thousands of dollars by the war's end.

Hugo Guenther was the son of Fritz Guenther, who had established the resort in 1903. When his father died in 1913, ownership transferred to the surviving Guenther family. Hugo Guenther managed the resort, and his brother, Rudolph, was his assistant. The resort gained popularity year after year and the Guenthers had made many additions and improvements to the resort to meet the growing demand.

In 1917, with war raging in Europe, it became evident to most Americans that the country was slowly being pulled into the war.



Hugo Guenther

Source: Temecula Valley Museum

In February, President Woodrow Wilson called for the states to strengthen their National Guard units in matters of national defense. California National Guard Company M was stationed in the city of Riverside. Since the Spanish American War, interests in the city's guard had dwindled. With war on the horizon, a call went out to the city residents for recruits and financial support.

When Hugo and Rudolph Guenther read the newspaper, they

knew they needed to show their support. On February 27th, Guenther's attorneys, Sarau and Thompson, presented a check to Riverside Chairman Craig for \$50 (\$1,046 in 2017) for Company M from the Guenther brothers.

In a letter the Guenther brothers explained:

“Although we do not live in the city of Riverside yet we are residents of the county of Riverside and we certainly approve of the action of your citizens and want to do our part in helping to keep Company M in Riverside” (February 27, 1917, Riverside Independent Enterprise)

The Guenther brothers demonstrated that Company M was more than a city's responsibility, but was a county's as well. Funds began to be received from residents and business owners. In March, Hugo donated another \$50 to the campaign with a note that said, “If more is needed to call on



Source: Wikipedia

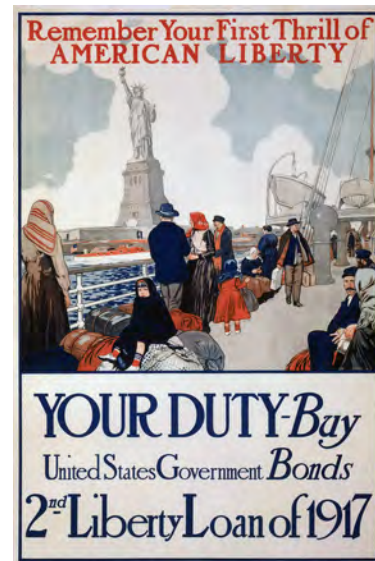
him.” The next month the funds had come in and Company M was able to purchase equipment and began recruiting efforts.

In March, Lieutenant Bain and Sergeant C. G. Decker of Company M, traveled to Southwest Riverside County on a recruiting trip. One young Murrieta man joined the company, Elwood C. Wickerd. In the evening, the officers were guests of Hugo Guenther who entertained them with dinner and the free use of the resort's big plunge.

The first Red Cross campaign began in June. Riverside County was asked to donate \$25,000. The amount was divided into allotments for the different communities. Murrieta and Temecula were asked to give \$500 to the campaign. Hugo Guenther immediately wrote a personal check for \$100 and mailed it to the Riverside Red Cross campaign office.

One reporter described Guenther. “His heart is as strong as is his voice and grip, and anyone who knows him, who has heard his voice and has passed him the hand of fellowship, will know how strong that is.” (June 13, 1917, Riverside Daily Press)

Hugo Guenther was chosen as a member of the county executive committee, leading the campaign in Murrieta and the surrounding communities. He took to the campaign trail and began soliciting for donations. On June 26th, it was reported that Murrieta had donated \$750 to



Source: Wikipedia

the campaign. Then Hugo hosted a Red Cross benefit dance at the resort. The dance brought the final donation to \$850.

The next campaign came in August when Riverside County was asked to donate \$2,700 a month to the Armenian Relief Fund. A committee was organized and Hugo Guenther was named a director. The campaign would be ongoing until the end of the war.

As more fundraising campaigns were needed, the War Time Funds Committee was established in Riverside County. Hugo Guenther was named a member, representing the southwest region. On September 25th, the committee met at the Riverside County Chamber of Commerce rooms to discuss the financial needs of the soldiers and the local National Guard unit.

During the war, the



Source: Digital Commonwealth

United States held four Liberty Bond drives. The bonds helped raise revenue needed for the war effort. The First Liberty Bond drive occurred on April 1, 1917. This campaign was tailored to the banks and wealthy individuals. Riverside County's involvement wasn't reported on extensively.

The Second Liberty Bond drive occurred on October 1, 1917. Temecula, Murrieta, and surrounding communities were asked for a minimum amount of \$11,160 towards the campaign. In one month, the residents and business community purchased \$77,200 in Liberty Bonds.

"A representative from that district stated to an Enterprise representative that almost every rancher, hired man and other responsible person was seen and solicited, and almost every one of them gave something." (November 1, 1917, RIE)

It is presumed that Hugo Guenther led the coordinated effort during this time to raise this revenue.

The next month, the War Relief Committee announced the Soldier's Welfare Drive with a county goal of \$30,000. At the end of the month, the county had received \$35,000. Temecula and Murrieta were asked to contribute \$400, but instead they contributed \$610 towards the cause. The War Relief Committee voted to give \$600 to Riverside's National Guard Company M for the soldier's welfare.

Captain Pattee explained "that the men are reluctant to go to the hospital unless seriously ill. He has drawn on the fund for medicines and delicacies for the men, greatly to their comfort and benefit." (December 26, 1917, RDP) By the end of November, the Guenthers donated 46 wooden cots to the county hospital to help in the war effort.

The War Relief Committee had campaigned for funds,

but a separate entity needed to be created to designate and appropriate the funds. The Riverside County War Relief Council was organized in January 1918 in order to process requests for immediate war funding needs and to prepare for the soldiers return after the war. Each city, town and community also organized a council and then sent a delegate to the county level. Hugo Guenther and Rev. E. H. Kiefer were the delegates chosen from the Murrieta region.

The Third Liberty Bond drive began on April 5, 1918. Though Rev. E. H. Kiefer was chairman of the Murrieta-Temecula War Relief Council, Hugo Guenther led the charge of the region's largest contribution.

The Temecula-Murrieta area's pledge goal was purchasing \$24,388 in Liberty bonds. The drive began on the first anniversary of America's entry into the war. Patriotism in America was at all time high. Within five days, Murrieta had

(Continued on page 4)



Source: Umedia Archive



The three blue bars on this honor flag represent the Third Liberty Bond. A town would receive the flag when the town's campaign goal was reached. A blue star was awarded when the town went 100% over its goal. This example has two blue stars which means this town had gone 200% over its goal.

(Source: Image by Pete Bochek, 2008.)

raised \$10,000.

"Hugo Guenther of Murrieta Hot Springs brought a message from his district. . . He told of the raising thus far of \$10,000 for bonds. The house to house canvas there means a riding over long distances, but the distances are made and the sales are coming in rapidly. Dr. Haywood suggested that Guenther would confer a great favor upon mankind if he could "Can that voice and give it to every pulpit in the United States." (April 12, 1918, Riverside Daily Press)

At 11 o'clock in the morning on April 13th, Hugo Guenther called Riverside and stated that area residents had subscribed to \$27,000 in Liberty bonds. This was \$2,000 over their goal. In Wildomar it was reported that "Hugh Guenther of the Murrieta Hot Springs was in this vicinity Saturday soliciting

Liberty bonds." (April 18, 1918, Riverside Independent Enterprise)

The cities of Riverside, Corona, Murrieta, Hemet and San Jacinto were officially recognized by the United States government as having gone over the top for subscriptions. They were each to be awarded an honor flag on April 27th. Hugo Guenther was pleased with the news, but he was determined to receive a Blue Star on his flag. To achieve this Murrieta had to subscribe over 100 percent of their original goal. By April 20th, \$35,000 had already been raised.

"The Murrieta Hot Springs resort is overrun with guests, though early in the season. Nevertheless, the manager, Hugo Guenther, has time to boost for Liberty bonds and the Red Cross." (April 20, 1918, Riverside Daily Press)

On May 3, 1918, Hugo Guenther notified Riverside that Murrieta had reached Blue Star status. The farm community had subscribed to \$50,000 in Liberty bonds, well over 100 percent of the original \$24,000 goal. The blue star was added to the Murrieta honor flag and it was stated, "This excellent showing is due in a large measure to the activities of the campaign committee, of which Hugo Guenther, proprietor of the Murrieta Hot Springs, was manager." (May 10, 1918, Hemet News)

Immediately following

the Liberty bond drive was the next Red Cross drive. Murrieta was asked to donate \$1,120. Hugo Guenther arranged for a patriotic meeting and a concert performed by the famous 159th Infantry Band from Camp Kearney on May 24th at the resort. On May 25th, Hugo called Riverside and stated that Murrieta had donated \$2,300 towards the Red Cross. Six days later it was reported that Murrieta had raised \$2,428.05.

The War Saving Stamps funding drive occurred in June. Murrieta and Temecula were asked to purchase \$26,296 worth of stamps. By the end of the month, it was reported that no stamps had been purchased in the local area. The failure for this drive may have been due to the enormous past contributions residents had already taken part in. Another possibility may have been that local investors



Source: Propaganda Posters

were funding the construction of the new Murrieta grain elevator.

The Fourth Liberty Bond drive began on September 28, 1918. Murrieta and Temecula were asked to raise \$45,950. Undaunted, Hugo Guenther was determined to surpass the goal and reach Blue Star status once again. By October 5th it was reported that Hugo Guenther had raised \$59,730.

Once again in Wildomar it was reported that "Hugo Guenther of Hot Springs was around trying to do business for Liberty Bonds on last Saturday" (October 10, 1918, Riverside Daily Press)

It was reported on Octo-

ber 17th that Murrieta had raised \$67,550. Murrieta was now eligible for Blue Star status because it had subscribed to 50% more bonds than were allotted. Hugo Guenther needed to raise another \$24,000 to receive the coveted star. Though he was close to his goal, news from overseas would halt his efforts.

"Hugo Guenther, out at Murrieta gave a "whoop" over the wire when the Press told him of the victory that almost fractured the line. No one in this county can doubt the patriotism of Murrieta and the "big news" from the Press set that section of the county ablaze with enthusiasm."

"Every man, woman and

child in this region will know the great victory just as soon as I can get word to them by telephone." said Mr. Guenther. "This is what we have been waiting for, and now watch us celebrate. (November 7, 1918, Riverside Daily Press)

With the war over, Hugo Guenther returned to the resort. Though he never stepped foot on the battlefield, his efforts helped support those American soldiers who did. He continued to support many charities throughout the years including the Boy Scouts. Though his contribution may have been forgotten, one hundred years later Hugo Guenther can be recognized as a hero on the home front.



When word reached the Fountain House Hotel of Germany's surrender, young Hales Sykes grabbed the dinner gong and a friend and held an impromptu parade down B Street. In this photo the Murrieta Depot can be seen to the right. (Source: E Hale Curran Collection, Murrieta Public Library, Heritage Room)

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Next Monthly Board Meeting:

Monday, May 1, 2017 at 5:30 p.m. at
Honeycutt Farms Family Restaurant
40477 Murrieta Hot Springs Road, D2
(In the Alta Murrieta Shopping Center)

All members welcome to attend

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