

Smoking became consequence of war

I am what they call a baby boomer, born in the first years after World War II.



Dr. Rick
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My dad, like many others, came back from the war having survived that ordeal with an overwhelming sense that his generation's sacrifice had rid the world of an awful evil and now everything was going to be all right.

Yet after an exposure to all that comes with war, Dad

and his fellow warriors brought back something many could say was worse than war: the cigarette habit.

Widespread smoking is a phenomenon that came with the 20th century, since less than half of 1 percent of Americans smoked at the start of the century. The habit rose to 51 percent of men and 33 percent of women at its peak in 1965.

Many people have ascribed this to the free cigarettes that were included in food rations GIs were given during the war. Even the Red Cross handed out free cigarettes to military men. And then those men came

home with a smoking addiction.

It is not surprising that cigarettes became part of the culture. The heroes smoked, so others did, too. In the 1960s, it seemed like every adult smoked, and every kid wanted to. There was smoking in the house, in cars, at movies, in restaurants ... everywhere.

The smokers took over almost every public place, and no one seemed to mind. We felt safe in our perfect smoking families, together forever.

But it was a false sense of security. In the first 20 years after the war, the consequences of so much smoke

became obvious.

Fourteen million men served in the military during World War II, and although almost 300,000 died in the war, it's been estimated that 1 million to 3 million have died early from the consequences of smoking.

Isn't it sad that so many of those heroes who saved us from the evil threatening the world during the 1940s would be so harmed by simple cigarettes?

Dr. Rick Holm is the host of "On Call," a weekly call-in program about health on South Dakota Public Broadcasting produced by the South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service. "On Call" airs at 6 p.m. Thursdays. Holm has practiced general internal medicine and geriatrics in South Dakota for more than 20 years.