

# 1945 October 8-14

## VJ Day Baby



—Tribune Photo  
**Born On V-J Day**, this five-week-old youngster tries to look pleasant for her daddy, Eldon Meil, SK3c, in the U. S. navy in the Pacific. The baby is Vicki Jane, who poses with her mother, the former Beatrice Johnson. Mother and daughter live at 1907 Liberty.

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 September 22, page 8)

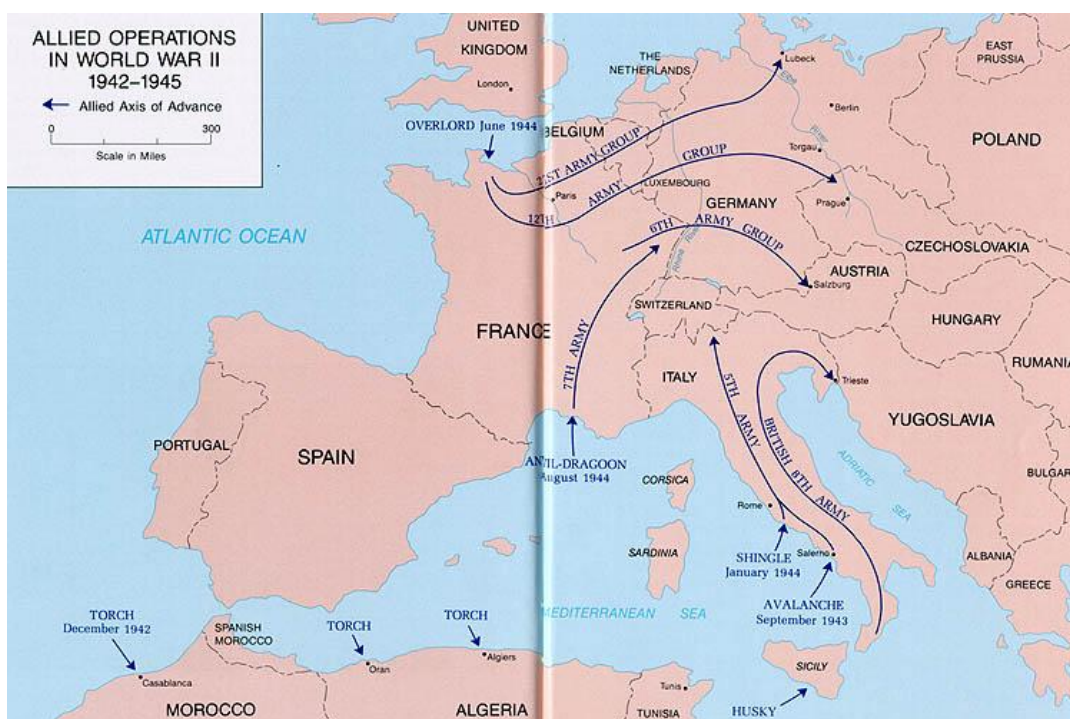
Photos of babies whose fathers were serving in the armed forces were a regular feature of the *La Crosse Tribune* in 1945. But the photo above is special because of the date of birth of the baby---VJ Day, the day that World War II ended.

Vicki Jane Meil was born in La Crosse on August 14, 1945, the day that Japan announced it would surrender unconditionally. Officially, VJ Day was September 2 when the surrender documents were signed on the *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay.<sup>1</sup>

Her father, Eldon Jerome Meil, was born on March 18, 1923, in La Crosse.<sup>2</sup> His parents were Ernest A. and Alta L. Meil, and they owned their home at 1907 Liberty Street. Ernest Meil was a car inspector for the railroad. The family also included two more boys and a girl.<sup>3</sup> In June 1942 when Eldon Meil registered for the Selective Service, he was working for E. J. Baertsch of Fountain City, Wisconsin, in Galena Junction, Illinois.<sup>4</sup>

Eldon J. Meil enlisted in the Navy as part of a gala ceremony at the Avalon Ballroom on October 27, 1942. As part of Navy Day, recruiters all over the state of Wisconsin were recruiting men to be a "token crew" for the [battleship Wisconsin](#) then under construction. Meil was one of 19 men sworn in at the Avalon that evening. That was followed by a ceremony honoring the La Crosse Navy Mother's Club and a dance featuring Gene Mendez and his 10-piece orchestra, plus other musical entertainment. The auxiliary of the Sons of Veterans of the Civil War, crew members of a coast guard ship, six women who were sisters or wives of Marines, and members of the [301st Infantry Regiment](#) of the Army at Camp McCoy were also part of the event.<sup>5</sup>

After recruit training at [Great Lakes Naval Station](#) in Illinois, Meil went to New York in January 1943 for assignment to a transport ship. The ship picked up troops in the United States and took part in the [American invasion of North Africa](#) at Oran.<sup>6</sup>



Eldon Meil sailed between North Africa, Sicily, and Italy  
([A Brief History of the U.S. Army in World War II](#))

In May 1943, Meil was transferred to a [Landing Ship, Tank \(LST\)](#) where he worked in an ammunition magazine. The LST hauled supplies between [Bizerte](#) and Oran. His ship landed British troops in the first wave of the [invasion of Sicily](#) on July 9, 1943. For the next month after the invasion, his LST hauled prisoners of war and supplies between Sicily and Bizerte. When the Allies [invaded Italy](#) on September 3, 1943, Meil's LST landed British infantrymen on the beach at 3:00 a.m. It took three tries to get their load of troops on the shore. His ship then hauled prisoners and supplies between North Africa, Sicily, and Italy.<sup>7</sup>



A Landing Ship, Tank during World War II  
([worldwar2headquarters.com](http://worldwar2headquarters.com))

Meil went to a rest camp in England in December 1943. After that, he worked at the largest naval supply base in England as a storekeeper. All supplies from the United States went through his base and were then transferred to the coast as part of the build-up for the Normandy invasion in June 1944.<sup>8</sup>

He came back to La Crosse on leave on October 21. While he was in town, Eldon Meil married Beatrice Johnson on October 27, 1944. Following his leave, Meil reported to Boston on November 15 for reassignment.<sup>9</sup>

Beatrice Johnson was the daughter of John and Tillie Anderson of 1719 Pine Street in La Crosse. They were married in Minneapolis in 1906. After living in Minneapolis for a short time, they moved to La Crosse where John worked at the Smith Wagon Works, the La Crosse Plow Works, and as a janitor at La Crosse State University until his retirement.<sup>10</sup> Beatrice was born on July 27, 1924, in La Crosse.<sup>11</sup>

Beatrice (Johnson) Meil moved in with Eldon's parents at 1907 Liberty Street. In January 1945, she, along with Eldon's mother and brother, visited Eldon at his duty station of Norfolk, Virginia, for a week.<sup>12</sup>



Eldon Meil in November 1944  
 (*La Crosse Tribune*, 1944 November 11, page 9)

By August 1945, Eldon and Beatrice Meil had a daughter, and Eldon was in the Pacific.<sup>13</sup>

Eldon Meil was discharged from the Navy on November 17, 1945.<sup>14</sup>

Eldon and Beatrice made their home at 915 S. 14th Street in La Crosse.<sup>15</sup> Daughter Vicki was eventually joined by two brothers, Mike and Kevin. Beatrice worked at Columbia Studios and then at Onies Restaurant for many years.<sup>16</sup> Eldon Meil worked for the railroad.<sup>17</sup>





**Two Young Customers** make their purchases at the "Shop-In" grocery store which was constructed by members of Franklin School's first grade as part of their health studies. The shoppers are David Colburn, left, and Barbara Wells. Clerks are Vicki Meil, Steven Scholberg, Jerry Peterson and Kathleen Roberts. The first grad-

ers, who were hosts to their mothers for a health program Tuesday afternoon, built the store after they had visited a grocery store. Under the direction of Mrs. Bessie Rude, teacher, they wrote a health song and short pieces on various types of health foods.

—Tribune Photo

Vicki Meil (left) as a first grader in 1952  
(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1952 April 9)

Vicki Meil graduated from La Crosse Logan High School in June 1963.<sup>18</sup>



(*Winneshtiek*, La Crosse Logan High School yearbook, 1963)

Sometime before Vicki's high school graduation, her parents had separated. Beatrice was living at 2508 2nd Avenue on French Island, and Eldon was living at 400 Copeland Avenue. Their divorce was finalized in June 1963, and Beatrice was granted custody of the children.<sup>19</sup>

Eldon Meil remarried in 1964 when he was 41 years old.<sup>20</sup> His second wife was 23-year-old Karen F. Dahn, a 1959 graduate of La Crosse Central High School. Karen had a daughter from a previous relationship or marriage.<sup>21</sup> Eldon and Karen had a daughter and a son. They remained married until Eldon Meil's death on January 3, 2001, after a long battle with cancer. He was 76 years old.<sup>22</sup>



Eldon Meil  
(*La Crosse Tribune*, 2001 January 5, page D-3)

After her divorce from Eldon Meil in 1963, Beatrice Meil did not marry again. She was 79 years old when she died on January 28, 2003.<sup>23</sup> Her cremains were buried at Woodlawn Cemetery in La Crosse, where she shares a headstone with her parents and other family members.<sup>24</sup>

Vicki Meil, Eldon and Beatrice's VJ Day baby, married Dennis J. Demaiffe on May 11, 1968.<sup>25</sup> Demaiffe was a 1963 graduate of La Crosse Central High School.<sup>26</sup>



Dennis J. Demaiffe  
(*Booster*, La Crosse Central High School yearbook, 1963)

Dennis, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Elvin Demaiffe of 1406 Johnson Street, joined the United States Navy after high school graduation.<sup>27</sup> His ambition was to make a career in the Navy, but he must have changed his mind after being in for one hitch.<sup>28</sup>

During their marriage, they lived in La Crosse. They lived at 1915 Prospect Street in 1976.<sup>29</sup> Dennis was working for the railroad in 1980 when they were living at 2831 Onalaska Avenue.<sup>30</sup> Vicki was working at the Excel Inn in 1983.<sup>31</sup>

Dennis James Demaiffe and Vicki Jane (Meil) Demaiffe were divorced on November 13, 1984, after 16 years of marriage.<sup>32</sup>

Four years later, 42-year-old Dennis Demaiffe married 26-year-old Jolene D. Schmig on March 12, 1988, in La Crosse County.<sup>33</sup>

Like her mother before her, Vicki Demaiffe did not remarry. By 1985, Vicki was working at the Skemp-Grandview Clinic,<sup>34</sup> and she was still working there in 1988.<sup>35</sup>

Vicki (Meil) Demaiffe, La Crosse's VJ Day baby, is living on French Island.<sup>36</sup> For every one of her 75 birthdays, she has had a dual reason to celebrate. It was not only the anniversary of her birth but also the anniversary of the day her father, as well as millions of people all over the world, were no longer threatened by a world war.

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### Sources & Notes:

<sup>1</sup> "VJ Day," *The National WW II Museum*, accessed 2020 October 17, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/v-j-day>.

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<sup>3</sup> 1940 U.S. census, La Crosse County, Wisconsin, population schedule, La Crosse, p. 18A, dwelling 1907, family 373, Ernest A. and Alta L. Meil; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 17); citing NARA microfilm publication T627, roll 4491.

<sup>4</sup> *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947*.

<sup>5</sup> "Nineteen Young Men Inducted Into Navy In Solemn Ceremony," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1942 October 28, page 15.

<sup>6</sup> "Member Of LST Crew Returns Home On Leave After Having Active Part In Three Invasions," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1944 November 5, page 9.

<sup>7</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1944 November 5.

<sup>8</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1944 November 5.

<sup>9</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1944 November 5.

<sup>10</sup> "John Johnsons Celebrate 50th," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1956 August 26, page 10.

<sup>11</sup> "Beatrice A. Meil," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 2003 January 30, page D3.

<sup>12</sup> "Mrs. Ernest Meil," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 January 11, page 11.

<sup>13</sup> "Born on VJ Day," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 September 22, page 8.

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- <sup>14</sup> U.S., Department of Veterans Affairs, *Beneficiary Identification Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) Death File*, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 17).
- <sup>15</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1956 August 26.
- <sup>16</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 2003 January 30.
- <sup>17</sup> The National Archives at Atlanta; Morrow, Georgia; *Records of the Railroad Retirement Board, 1934-1987*; Record Group Number: 184; *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 17).
- <sup>18</sup> "Seeking Epitome Theme Of Logan Graduation," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1963 June 3, page 8.
- <sup>19</sup> "Circuit Court," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1963 June 5, page 2.
- <sup>20</sup> "Eldon J. Meil," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 2001 January 5, page D-3.
- <sup>21</sup> "Meil, Karen F." *La Crosse Central Red Raiders, Central High School Centennial 1907-2007, Alumni Directory* (La Crosse, Wisconsin: La Crosse Central High School, 2007), 135.
- <sup>22</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 2001 January 5.
- <sup>23</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 2003 January 30.
- <sup>24</sup> "Beatrice A Johnson Meil," *FindaGrave.com*, accessed 2020 October 17, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/142532178/beatrice-a-meil#view-photo=116920589>.
- <sup>25</sup> "Marriage Licenses," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1968 May 4, page 6. Some sources show the "M" in "Demaiffe" capitalized and some do not.
- <sup>26</sup> *Booster* [La Crosse Central High School yearbook] (La Crosse, Wisconsin: Central High School, 1963), 30.
- <sup>27</sup> "8 Youths From Area Join Navy," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1963 June 23, page 12.
- <sup>28</sup> *Booster*, 30.
- <sup>29</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1976* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1976).
- <sup>30</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1980* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1980), 131.
- <sup>31</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1983* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1983), 122.
- <sup>32</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, *Wisconsin Divorce Index, 1965-1984* (Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services); image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 17).
- <sup>33</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, *Wisconsin, Marriage Index, 1973-1978; Wisconsin Marriages, 1979-1997* (Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services); image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 17). See also: *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1988 March 20, page 13.
- <sup>34</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1985* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1985), 116.
- <sup>35</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1988* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1988), 124.
- <sup>36</sup> *Data Axle by Reference Solutions* [database online], accessed 2020 October 17.