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The Queen City and World War II

Allan M. Winkler

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor shocked Cincinnati, just as it jolted the rest of the United States. For the next four years, the Queen City struggled with the same issues of mobilization, production, and adjustment at home that all Americans faced in World War II. Asked to mount a more extensive effort than any yet made — and any that would later be required in the new nuclear age — the city's citizens responded willingly to the demands of war. They bought bonds, planted victory gardens, retooled their factories, and sent their boys abroad. Their experience serves as a microcosm of the entire American experience in the Second World War.1

The onset of war brought a sense of relief. The nation had been divided in the late 1930's as fighting broke out in both Europe and Asia. While most Americans deplored the hostile maneuvers of the Germans, Italians, and Japanese, they desperately wanted to stand aloof. They remained disillusioned with the outcome of World War I, when President Woodrow Wilson had promised to make the world safe for democracy and failed in his quest. Isolationists shunned involvement in the current struggle and resisted the government's effort to provide antifascist nations with the materials needed for their own defense. As the 1940's began, however, interventionists who understood that the United States had a vested interest in the outcome of the war created tremendous pressure for a larger American role that was not relieved until the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Cincinnati mirrored the national split. A local chapter of the America First Committee, with Theodore Roosevelt's daughter Alice Roosevelt Longworth as honorary chair and financier J. Austin White as president, protested the administration's effort to aid the Allies. Meanwhile Henry Wise Hobson, the city's Episcopal Bishop, served as national head of the Fight for Freedom Committee that asserted the need to assist Great Britain in its struggle against the Nazi threat.2

The Pearl Harbor attack — which came without warning, knocked out five battleships and ten smaller warships, and left 2,400 servicemen dead — united nation and city. "My first feeling was of relief that the indecision was over and that a crisis had come in a way which would unite all our people," Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson declared. A Newsweek headline read: "AMERICANS ALL: National Disunity is Ended." Cincinnati Post columnist Alfred Segal observed that isolationism was over, with everyone "brought together under the butcher knife," while America First head White acknowledged that "we should do all we can . . . to win the war as completely and as quickly as possible."3

Americans welcomed the war, without always fully understanding the national aims or the sacrifices they might have to make. The Four Freedoms President Franklin D. Roosevelt had defined — freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear — were idealistic yet vague. Most Americans could not even name those freedoms and fought the war instead to defend — and spread — the American way of life. Prosperity was an important component of their dream, and economic concerns often seemed paramount. Having weathered a decade of dismal depression that only began to abate with the defense spending of 1940, people were sometimes reluctant to do

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President Franklin D. Roosevelt defined the freedoms the country was fighting for: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.
without goods they had only just been able to afford. To that end, the administration embarked on a concentrated effort to inform the public about the struggle and to maintain morale.

The Office of War Information, headed by CBS news commentator Elmer Davis, trumpeted the liberal war aims Roosevelt had defined and also broadcast the message — in all forms of media — that “we are coming, that we are going to win, and that in the long run everybody will be better off because we won.” It explained in detail government policies in an effort to persuade people that they had a vested interest in the war. But often something was necessary to cajole Americans to do their bit, and so the federal government undertook a series of promotional programs.

Since the war required a massive infusion of money, Roosevelt authorized a campaign to encourage Americans to buy bonds. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., understood the need “to use bonds to sell the war,” and enlisted the support of such figures as singer Kate Smith in the effort. Known best for her rendition of “God Bless America,” Smith spoke sixty-five times in a radio drive in September 1943 that reached an audience of twenty million people and raised $39 million. The first bond drive brought in $12.0 billion; the entire series of drives earned a total of $135 billion.

Locally, the all-volunteer bond drives were enormously successful. On June 25, 1942, actress Marlene Dietrich sold the first official war bond in Hamilton County to Benjamin F. Stites, a direct descendent of the founder of the city. The next month a model destroyer, the S.S. Victory, was constructed on Fountain Square where it served as a navy recruiting station and downtown war bond office. A bond pier built at the corner of Fifth and Vine streets provided a place for civic and social groups to sell bonds for the duration of the war. Divided into forty divisions, Hamilton County boasted 8,500 volunteer “bondadiers” who conducted door-to-door campaigns. Women, organized by Margaret Tangeman, played an important role in the drives, with a coordinating committee called “Women at War” including representatives of 900 women’s organizations. Hamilton County more than met its quotas. Seeking to collect $82,000,000 in the first drive, it raised $108,000,000; seeking to collect $117,000,000 in the second drive, it amassed an award-winning $175,000,000. Over the entire series of drives, Hamilton County raised the extraordinary amount of more than one and a half billion dollars.

The nation’s civil defense program also helped focus attention on the demands of war. The German bombing of Great Britain in 1940 prompted fears that the United States might soon face a similar threat. To calm such fears, Roosevelt created an Office of Civilian Defense six months before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Headed by flamboyant New York City
mayor Fiorello La Guardia, the agency aimed to “provide opportunities for constructive civilian participation in the defense program.” Regarding non-protective activities as “sissy stuff,” La Guardia devoted his own attention to air raid warning systems and warden schemes. When pressed to consider moral questions further, he finally appointed First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt assistant director, and she established a series of national programs to encourage public involvement in the defense effort. Her choice of actor Melvyn Douglas to lead a volunteer talent branch and dancer Mayris Chaney to head a physical fitness section drew the ridicule of political opponents who charged that the Office of Civilian Defense was just another New Deal agency masquerading behind the needs of war. Their criticisms led to resignations and to a drastically reduced role for the national office.

Despite those bureaucratic difficulties, the effort proved successful at the local level. In May 1941, Cincinnati mayor James G. Stewart and councilman Charles P. Taft persuaded Chamber of Commerce president Phillip O. Geier to serve as chairman of the city’s defense council and plan for civilian protection. Five months later, Governor John W. Bricker certified the Hamilton County National Defense Council as part of the statewide defense program. Following the Pearl Harbor attack, local volunteers guarded bridges, utilities, and defense plants against possible sabotage. Like citizens in countless other cities, they served as air raid wardens and fire watchers. Public and parochial schools provided classrooms for training sessions that dealt with first aid techniques, blackout precautions, and the basic principles of civil defense. City manager Clarence O. Sherrill, who also served as civilian defense coordinator, considered converting the abandoned underground subway tunnel into a bomb shelter. The zoo superintendent decided that in an emergency, dangerous animals which might be a menace if loose would be destroyed. As fear of an attack subsided, Cincinnati citizens, like their counterparts around the country, shifted their attention to other home front activities that could help maintain wartime morale. The Hamilton County National Defense Council undertook salvage drives, bond sales, and provision of child care for working mothers. When the Ohio River flooded in early 1943, 1,000 civilian defense workers helped the Red Cross evacuate victims, while others guarded shelters and patrolled flooded streets. 5

At the same time, the government launched a number of other initiatives to encourage people to do their part. In particular, it tried to help them cope with the inevitable shortages of war. With raw materials diverted to military use, civilians found virtually everything in short supply. Japan’s seizure of the Dutch East Indies and Malaya cut off more than ninety percent of America’s crude rubber supply, particularly before development of a synthetic rubber industry. Metal that could have been used for consumer items went into guns, ships, and tanks. Fabric for civilian clothing was now used for military uniforms. Silk for women’s stockings made parachutes instead.

To counter the inevitable grumbling and promote a sense of participation, the administration cajoled people to conserve and collect scarce resources. Homemakers, for example, were asked to save kitchen fats and turn them over to the butcher. One pound of fat presumably contained enough glycerin to manufacture a pound of black powder that could be used for bullets or shells. Similarly, scrap metal was useful. If each American family bought one less can a week, that could save 2,500 tons of tin and 1,900 tons of steel, which could be used to produce 5,000 tanks or thirty-eight Liberty ships. The iron in one old shovel could be converted into four hand grenades; old lipstick tubes contained brass that could be reused in cartridges. In mid-1942 FDR asked people at home to collect “old tires, old rubber raincoats, old garden hose, rubber shoes, bathing caps, gloves — whatever you have that is made of rubber.” Everywhere the slogan became: “Use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without.” For those who resisted or proved reluctant, there was another refrain: “Don’t you know there’s a war going on?”

Cincinnati participated actively in the cam-
campaigns. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hamilton County organized a Waste Materials Conservation Committee. Headed by Harold W. Nichols, president of the Fox Paper Company in Lockland, it collected everything from old keys to abandoned cars. Nichols initiated a number of ingenious projects. Movie theaters held scrap iron and scrap paper matinees, where children could enter with a donation of scrap material. More than 3,000 large red, white, and blue barrels placed in schools and other buildings encouraged citizens to “Get In The Scrap.” The same message appeared on city posters and streetcar signs.  

Salvage officials were active on all fronts. They regularly sent trucks into residential neighborhoods and enlisted the assistance of Boy Scouts in the collection effort. In August 1942, the Scouts conducted a six-day door-to-door drive that netted impressive amounts of iron, copper, brass, aluminum, and rubber. In January 1944, Nichols, now state salvage chairman, organized a one-day waste paper drive. Noting that paper was a necessary packing material for food rations, blood plasma, and ammunition, he encouraged local citizens to clean out old files and remove scrap paper from the basements and attics. “On the battle fronts, the drive goes forward incessantly,” he declared, “and here on the home front, we can’t slacken our efforts, either... We have to have scrap paper to keep that stream of supplies flowing to the boys on the battle front.” In Cincinnati, as elsewhere, gas stations agreed to collect worn out tires and other forms of scrap rubber. And local residents responded to the conservation committee’s appeal with a number of unusual scrap metal donations. Veterans organizations offered old cannons to the cause. The Paramount Theater at the corner of Gilbert and McMillan streets contributed an old steel tower, while Woodward High School provided the iron fence that surrounded the campus. When buses replaced some of the city’s streetcars, the Cincinnati Street Railway Company offered its abandoned iron tracks for scrap. For a brief time, the committee considered taking the statue of the Capitoline wolf in Eden Park, but fortunately found other sources of the needed bronze.  

Still another effort to deal with the shortages resulted in a national rationing program. The Office of Price Administration attempted both to cap rising prices and to ration scarce supplies by establishing allocations for such goods as sugar, coffee, meat, butter, tires, and gasoline. Ration books, issued by local boards, contained stamps or coupons entitling consumers to purchase different products. Initially each coupon counted for a given amount of an item; later a flexible point system required more points for particularly scarce items, with a maximum limit on the number of points that could be used each month. 

Cincinnati, like every other part of the country, was plugged into the national program. Public school teachers and other personnel handed out ration books for sugar, the first food to be apportioned, to all residents of Hamilton County in May 1942. Six months later they distributed books for gasoline, with allocations dependent on occupational needs. As the rationing scheme kicked into gear, local inhabitants felt the pinch. Stier’s Prescription Pharmacy in Clifton curtailed nonessential deliveries; Pogue’s likewise cut back on delivery service. City bus service was reduced by fifteen percent to save the wear on bus tires and businesses tried to stagger employee work days to reduce congestion on public transportation as workers had less and less gasoline to drive their own cars.  

One final response to food shortages was to plant Victory gardens. Encouraged by the government, Americans planted some twenty million such gardens, which in 1943 provided more than a third of all the vegetables grown in the country. Slogans like “Food Will Help Win the War” and “Vegetables for Victory” persuaded people to participate.
Movie theaters held scrap iron and scrap paper matinees, so children bringing a donation of scrap material could enter.
The salvage committee even considered taking the Eden Park statue of the Capitoline wolf.
in the voluntary effort. There were more than a million gardens in Ohio, an estimated 60,000 and 75,000 in Hamilton County alone. Within the city the program also flourished. C.L. Miller, principal of Garfield School, authorized Victory gardens on school grounds and encouraged students to help their parents plant vegetables at home. McCullough Seed on East Third Street faced far greater demands for seed than ever before as soon as spring weather beckoned, and the Cincinnati City Council supported the program when it considered legislation to penalize those stealing from or damaging gardens. Whether or not the plots were profitable, they encouraged a sense of participation in the larger war effort.9

That participation was important, for the United States had undertaken the monumental task of full mobilization. Well before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt recognized the need to bolster the defense effort and to provide the resources the Allies needed for victory. In 1940 he asked Congress to appropriate one billion dollars for defense, and he returned again and again with requests for more money. “We must be the great arsenal of democracy,” he declared, as he established first one coordinating agency, then another, to help the American economy shift from crafting consumer goods to making the implements of war. National goals were enormous. In 1943 alone Roosevelt called for production of 125,000 planes, 75,000 tanks, 35,000 anti-aircraft guns, and 10,000 tons of merchant shipping – and the industrial system responded successfully to those demands.

Business boomed. Industrialists, out of favor in the dismal years of the Great Depression, now flocked to Washington to coordinate the production process at the national level. “Dollar-a-year” men were permitted to stay on their company payrolls to preclude sacrificing regular incomes while they worked for the federal government. The cost-plus-a-fixed-fee system mandated that the government guarantee all development and production costs and then pay a percentage profit on the wartime goods produced. It meant, in short, that the government assumed all risks.

The results were visible around the country. In Michigan, at Willow Run, Henry Ford built a mile-long
bomber assembly plant that Charles Lindbergh called “a sort of Grand Canyon of the mechanized world.” On the West Coast, Henry J. Kaiser, who had helped construct the Boulder, Bonneville, and Grand Coulee dams, mass-produced thirty percent of all the ships launched in 1943. In virtually every state, industries retooled to meet the needs of war.

While most Cincinnati firms never operated on the scale of the plants of Ford or Kaiser, they played an important role in war production. The city’s diverse industrial base and large pool of skilled workers allowed it to convert easily to military demands. Midway through the struggle, more than 180,000 residents of the greater metropolitan area worked in 2,000 different manufacturing facilities, ranging from a husband and wife operation with one machine tool in a garage to the huge Wright engine plant with 35,000 employees. Government contracts brought five billion dollars worth of orders to the region.

Some area firms received contracts to continue making the same kinds of goods they produced in peacetime. Plants manufacturing glycerine, soap, food products, and certain types of clothing kept making those items, though often in far greater quantities than before. Sometimes the most minor adjustments allowed a company to carry on prewar patterns. Tie manufacturer Beau Brummel, for example, still produced ties, but now turned out the narrow, khaki-colored model the army required. Procter and Gamble likewise had to make only small shifts. It replaced metal packing with glass and made white laundry soap without naphtha, for steel and naphtha had other military uses. It also dropped some brands, like Dreft, when key ingredients proved unavailable, and discontinued production of the largest boxes of powdered soap to discourage consumer hoarding.

Other firms changed course to meet military demands while still remaining in the same general field. Fashion Frocks ceased making women’s dresses and began to produce parachutes. Mosler Safe stayed in the metal-working business but now made armor plate and tank turrets. When Cincinnati Air Conditioning found that metal was unavailable for luxury items like cooling units, it turned to production of meat lockers, for which metal was found, to help stretch the national food supply. The Kroger Company remained in the retail grocery business but also won a contract to produce cynamya tusbonka, a kind of braised pork, for the beleaguered Soviet army.

Still other companies changed direction entirely. One sign company now prepared and heat-treated armor plate. Rookwood Pottery produced wooden water pipe rather than ceramic goods, and the Progress Lithographing Company left the printing trade and obtained machine tools for use in metalworking.

Most Cincinnati production involved subcontracting — making components or parts of larger items that were assembled elsewhere. Machine tools and chemicals manufactured in the city went to other factories, in other communities, for use in production of military items like rifles or artillery shells. Components like the armor shields, aircraft wing flaps, and engines, found their way into cannons, planes, and tanks that were put together in other plants.

Cincinnati’s largest subcontractor was the Wright Aeronautical Corporation. Aircraft production required reliable engines, and Wright’s twenty-five-acre, one-million square foot facility north of Cincinnati provided Whirlwind and Cyclone radial engines for military planes. The parent company, headquartered in Patterson, New Jersey,
Tests Parachutes Made in Cincinnati

Standing, left to right, Lt. Margaret Bartholomew, CAP; Lt. John Quist, AAF; Capt. James L. Shepherd, AAF; Maj. Harry T. Shepherd, AAF; Lt. Melville Meyers, CAP, and Edgard F. Shepherd, CAP.

With the tempo of air combat constantly being stepped up on the battle fronts of the world, probably a good many American pilots, forced to take to their parachutes, will live to feel a glow of gratitude toward those at home who made sure those parachutes would operate properly. Some of that testing is being done right here in Cincinnati, where many of the parachutes are being manufactured by Fashion Frocks, Inc., formerly devoted exclusively to the manufacture of women's dresses. Courier Station 51-2, Civil Air Patrol, Chamber of Commerce Building, under arrangements with the Army Air Forces, is doing the testing. A plane attached to the courier service takes the parachutes up to designated altitudes and subjects them to drop tests prescribed by the AAF. Lt. Herbert L. Thompson, in charge of the courier service, has assigned Lt. Melville Meyers, 169 Van Zandt Road, a member of Squadron 5111-1, based at Lunken Airport, to the work. Lt. Meyers uses his own plane for the job. Maj. Harry T. Shepherd, Army Air Force, has supervision of the parachutes in this area. His son, Edgar F. Shepherd, also is a member of the Civil Air patrol, Lunken Airport.

Fashion Frocks ceased making women's dresses and produced parachutes instead.
settled on Cincinnati because of its central geographical location and ample labor supply. Begun in the summer of 1940, the plant turned out its first engine in mid-1941. Operating at full tilt, three shifts a day, it produced some 60,000 engines by the end of the war.

Mobilization involved more than industrial production alone. Systematic manufacturing schedules required an acceptable transportation system, and Cincinnati had to extend its preexisting network. Lunken Field, expanded and improved in the late 1930’s, remained the city’s principal airport, although its limitations for heavy commercial and military use quickly became clear. Short runways, lack of field space, and tricky flying conditions caused by surrounding hills hampered efforts to supply firms with needed items and led local leaders to plan for a second airport in the future.13

The Ohio River was a more important commercial link. Barges hauled coal for heating and manufacturing, oil for propelling merchant and war ships, and limestone and crushed rock for use in construction. Though some barge lines had limited equipment, much of it out of date after the difficult Depression years, they now revived and their growth continued for the duration of the war. The Ohio River Company, a subsidiary of the West Virginia Coal and Coke Corporation, had run in the red in 1938 and 1939; from 1940 through 1944 it showed increasing profits, and continued to make money after the war.14

But railroads were most important of all in moving people and freight. Cincinnati, a junction connecting routes running to the South, the East, and the West, served as a crucial link in the national rail network. Large groups — troops, government personnel, and prisoners of war — often traveled on special trains, while civilians and other soldiers used regular commercial trains. Here as elsewhere, the number of regularly scheduled passenger trains remained relatively constant during the war, although the number of miles per passenger doubled between 1940 and 1944. The railways also served the city’s — and the nation’s — factories. From mid-1941 to mid-1945, an average of 27,800 cars per month were loaded, 28,800 unloaded, in Greater Cincinnati’s plants and warehouses. Meanwhile, an average of 110,000 freight cars each month, almost doubled the prewar number, passed through the city and switched from one line to another en route to destinations around the country.15

Union Terminal was the center of rail activity. As wartime restrictions limited airplane and automobile traffic, more and more people took the trains that came in and out of the nearly new station. At the wartime peak, the number of rail passengers using the terminal was more than two and one half times the figure for 1933. Whether they lived in Cincinnati or were simply passing through, as many as 34,000 people used the building each day in 1944. Though the terminal operated at maximum passenger capacity, it could have accommodated far more than the 145 passenger trains that came through daily. Rather than adding other carriers, the railroads simply ran longer and more crowded trains.16

Mobilization of the American industrial system would not have been possible without the cooperation of the labor force. Workers welcomed the conversion to a war footing, for it heralded an end to the ever-present unemployment of the 1930’s. Jobs first became more readily available as the nation began to organize for defense in 1940, and employment opportunities expanded further after formal entrance into the war. By 1943, the unemployment rate stood at 1.3 percent, less than a tenth of the figure in 1937, the best year during the Great Depression. Full employment alone, however, did not guarantee the necessary coordination of the work force. The War Manpower Commission played an important role in making sure that workers were available where they were needed most.

The flourishing economy improved labor’s lot. The war enhanced union membership, which rose from 10.5 million in 1941 to 14.75 million in 1945, and also bolstered the national wage rate. Average weekly earnings for people involved in manufacturing increased from $32.18 to $47.12 in the forty months after Pearl Harbor. Even after corrections for inflation, real earnings rose twenty-seven percent in manufacturing work.

Nonetheless, there were frustrations. Most important of all was the perceived gap between wages and profits that seemed to increase for the duration of the war. Wage controls, which along with price controls helped check inflation, capped what workers could earn, even as businesses made increasing profits. Although organized labor had made a no-strike pledge in late 1941, workers in Cincinnati and elsewhere occasionally took matters into their own hands. Strikes — over pay, personnel, and union representation issues — occurred at area plants including Williamson Heating, Lunkenheimer Valve, and Stacey Manufacturing. In 1944, 15,000 white workers at Wright Aeronautical Corporation walked out to protest the assignment of seven black machinists to the central shop.17

Still, on balance mobilization worked as well in Cincinnati as in the rest of the country. American manufacturing firms produced what was necessary to win the war, and workers took enormous pride in their accomplishments. While monetary rewards provided the best motivation,
Machine tools and chemicals produced in Cincinnati went to other factories in other cities for use in manufacturing military items.
owners and workers both appreciated the “E” awards given by the Army, Navy, and Merchant Marine to war plants with excellent records in the areas of production, quality control, and labor relations. At a ceremony, military officials presented an “E” flag to the facility and “E” pins to the employees. Among local firms to be so honored were American Tool Works and Cincinnati Milacron.

But winning the war meant more than simply boosting morale and mobilizing the economy. It was equally important to assemble the military machine to fight the necessary battles on two fronts and grind the Axis powers to the ground. In this war, as in past wars, conscription was the most equitable way to enlarge the nation’s military forces, though it did not come without initial protest. A proposed draft bill in 1940 caused a real uproar, with opposition from students, clergymen, and isolationists who attempted to persuade Congress to defeat the measure. One Senator was hanged in effigy by women calling themselves the “Congress of American Mothers” and “Mothers of the USA.” When the furor died down and the bill finally passed, the United States had the first peacetime draft in its history. After the attack on Pearl Harbor the draft was tightened, but in all essentials continued as before.

Cheviot, Colerain, Crosby, Delhi, Greene, and Harrison townships. Once registered, the men received a number for a lottery that would select draftees, though initially volunteers satisfied quotas set in Washington. Cincinnati’s first draftee, Ralph Davis, a one holder of number 158, was not called into service for several months.18

Local volunteers and draftees, between 100 and 175 each day, reported to Fort Thomas in northern Kentucky. There they were interviewed, fingerprinted, and given a physical exam. Inductees who failed to meet physical requirements or who could not sign their names or read at a fourth grade level received military deferments. According to state surveys, 0.2 percent of Hamilton County’s white draftees, and 1.3 percent of the black draftees were illiterate.19

Some men of draft age sought to avoid military service. Frederick Waehaus, Jr. of South Cumminsville refused to register claiming that he was a member of the American Communist Party. Conscientious objectors, citing religious or moral convictions, could obtain deferments, but usually had to perform some sort of alternative service. Draftees with jobs vital to the national defense effort could similarly stay
out of the military if their petitions were successful, although not all requests were granted. Jerome Hoersting, for example, asked for a deferment to continue working in his father’s business. When he was turned down, he refused to report for induction, and spent seventeen days in jail before agreeing to report to Fort Thomas. There, ironically he failed his physical examination and received the deferment he had long sought.20

Altogether nearly 100,000 local residents fought in the armed forces during the war. Of those, 70,000 men and 4,000 women served with the Army, 11,000 men and 500 women with the Navy, and 9,000 men with the Marines. Ted Combs and Bob Doepke fought with George Patton’s Third Army in Europe; Chuck Wolever served with a mortar team attacking German towns; Bill Nimmo participated in the invasion of North Africa as a member of the First Division; James Ferguson worked as an anti-aircraft gunner through the Philippine campaign; William L. Jones fought in the Pacific as part of the all-black 93rd Division. Local Women, serving largely in support roles, were equally active. M. Eileen Lutz worked as a driver and spent a good deal of her service time in New Guinea; Ruth Boenke trained as a radio operator, then guided B-17s in and out of a Florida air base.

The National Guard provided another outlet for military service. In the summer and fall of 1940, reservists who had been training on weekends and during the summer were called to full-time active duty and incorporated into the army. Hundreds of local men, most of them members of the 107th Cavalry or the 147th Infantry, were among those so mobilized. The 107th Cavalry was one of the last American units still to use horses. In maneuvers in Wisconsin and California in 1941, its members rode both on horseback and in motorized vehicles, but in Europe they received assignments in armored and motorized reconnaissance units alone. The 147th Infantry, called “Cincinnati’s Own” because

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most original members came from this area, served in the Pacific theater where they fought in the island campaigns against the Japanese.21

Not all national service involved joining the military. Many local residents served in federal agencies or in the diplomatic corps. City councilman Charles Phelps Taft II, son of a former president and brother of an Ohio senator, became assistant director of the Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services in early 1941, moved on to direct Community War Services for the next two years, and finally served as director of Wartime Economic Affairs at the State Department. Theodore M. Berry, prominent in breaking down local racial barriers in the late 1930's, served as midwestern coordinator of the Committee for the Participation of Negroes in National Defense, then joined the Office of War Information, only to resign and return to Cincinnati

You’ll be happy too, and feel so proud serving as a WAVE in the Navy

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when he felt the propaganda organization was not working hard enough to attack white prejudice. Both men continued their public service. Taft became mayor in the late 1950's, Berry the city's first black mayor in the early 1970's.22

The Second World War changed Cincinnati, just as it transformed the rest of American society. It made unprecedented demands on regional residents, altered traditional patterns of behavior, and so laid the groundwork for the postwar years. Local frustrations echoed those felt in other cities; local victories reflected similar achievements in communities throughout the United States. Closely tied to the massive military and economic effort, Cincinnati experienced all the trials, and triumphs, of the nation at large.

Economically, the war ushered in the Keynesian revolution, and vindicated the theory of the great English economist. It proved that positive steps could be taken to mitigate the effects of a business cycle that seemed stalled on a downward turn, and demonstrated that aggressive public policy could make a difference. It also promoted the growth of big business, as it underscored the military-industrial links that made possible the massive production necessary for the war. War Department ties to the nation's largest firms remained important at the war's end.

Socially, the war brought progress at long last for women and blacks, especially when their own interests coincided with larger military demands. The need for labor, as the draft drew white male workers into the armed forces, opened new opportunities for them and for a variety of groups outside the mainstream of American life. In Cincinnati as elsewhere, women, who were unquestionably second-class citizens at the start of the struggle, now became part of the huge productive effort. Nationally, the number of working women rose from 14,600,000 in 1941 to 19,370,000 in 1944. Where former female workers had been single and young, now married women accounted for 72.2 percent of the total increase and for the first time in American history outnumbered single women. By the end of the war, half of all female workers were over thirty-five. Women — and men — worried about the disruption of traditional social patterns, about what to do with children while they worked, about the possibility of maintaining femininity in new places of work. Yet they welcomed the new opportunities and used them to provide the groundwork for the women's movement in future years.

Similarly, the war helped in the black struggle for equal rights. Again Cincinnati's experience mirrored that of the rest of the country. A movement aimed at ending discrimination against blacks had been underway for years,
with people like Ted Berry active in the struggle, but blacks remained acutely aware of the gap between American dream and American reality. Now, in the face of powerful pressures for manpower and production, blacks pressed for new opportunities. The “Double V” campaign, started by the Pittsburgh Courier, demanded V for victory in the struggle for fair treatment at home. The Army, needing men, accepted more and more blacks, as the number rose from 97,725 in late 1941 to 467,883 in late 1942, although the Army remained segregated. Perhaps the greatest gains came in industry. Between 1940 and 1944, the number of blacks employed rose from 4.4 million to 5.3 million; by 1945 blacks comprised eight percent of all war workers, compared to three percent in 1942. Equally important, the war established the framework for further protest in the postwar years.

Finally, in Cincinnati and the rest of the country, the war changed political relationships and patterns. Americans now looked to the government, local and federal, as never before. Despite pressure from Cincinnati’s Robert Taft and others to circumscribe that growth, government played an increasingly active role in people’s lives. The war also gave a boost to a conservative coalition of southern Democrats and Republicans that had begun to form in the late 1930’s. More and more influential, it propelled Taft, commonly known as “Mr. Republican,” into the political limelight until his death in 1953.

Cincinnati citizens pulled together in meaningful ways in World War II. They did their part and more. In addition to serving in the military, working in the city’s factories, and participating in the numerous wartime campaigns, they reached out to others whose lives were disrupted by the war. When the War Relocation Authority allowed some Japanese Americans, who had been interned without legitimate cause, to leave the camps, Cincinnati helped some 600 resettle here. Local Quakers opened one hostel, Episcopalians another, to provide released detainees a first place to stay as they searched for housing and jobs. Claude V. Courter, Cincinnati superintendent of schools, worked with his staff to make school-age Japanese American children feel welcome, while the University of Cincinnati encouraged Japanese American students to enroll and reduced tuition by $50 for evacuees who had lived in the city for a year. Similarly, the city’s Jewish population worked to assist Jewish refugees who were fortunate enough to leave Europe resettle here. The Hebrew Union College established a “College in Exile” that provided foreign Jewish scholars with teaching positions to meet the requirements of immigration laws. An Emergency Rescue Committee, organized by Rabbi Eliezer Silver, assisted the relocation effort of more than 1,000 refugees. Finally, more than 2,300 local residents made the ultimate sacrifice and died during the struggle. Alex Bishop of Clifton, Robert Horton of Westwood, Roland Cox of Indian Hill, Nick Smith of Hyde Park — they were but a few of the non-returning casualties of war.23
Hundreds of thousands of others, of course, survived the struggle. Whether their war unfolded in factories or on battlefields, they were eager for it to end, and welcomed the capitulation of the Germans in May and the Japanese in August, 1945. Celebrations on Fountain Square, and throughout the city, were much like celebrations in every community in the country. Some citizens were exuberant, others quietly thankful that the mighty effort had come to a successful end. They were ready to put the war behind them, to return to what they recalled of the pattern of the prewar years.

Yet these veterans, soldiers and civilians both, soon found that it was impossible to recreate the past. Outwardly their city seemed the same, but inwardly it had changed, and continued to change, in important ways. Planners learned from the war that industries, and workers, were mobile. That awareness guided the redevelopment of the riverfront and downtown. Builders here and elsewhere relied on Federal Housing Authority loans and G.I. Bill benefits that made new suburban housing affordable to veterans of the war. Women and blacks in Cincinnati and communities around the country remained insistent on enjoying the full benefits of the American dream and, even when relegated to subservient status once again, they maintained their pressure until the rest of American society finally caught up with their demands. For Cincinnati, and for the rest of the nation, the war brought the long-awaited return of prosperity, but it also brought much more. It pushed city and country toward postwar commitments that changed the patterns of American life. Continuities with the prewar period persisted, to be sure. But in fundamental ways the war altered hopes, expectations, and daily patterns, as Americans embraced new responsibilities at home and abroad.
1. For additional information on the American experience: mobilization, production, and adjustment at home in World War II see Allan M. Winkler, Home Front U.S.A.: America During World War II (Arlington Heights, Illinois, 1986). General information and quotes not otherwise noted are taken from this work.


12. Geoffrey J. Giglierano, “Industry Adapts” (CGW). See Ohio War History Commission Records Box 3 (CHS); Thomas Grace, War Production Board Report; Production Division; Cincinnati District, August 1941-August 1945 (CHS).


17. Robert Earnest Miller, “Draft Boards in Cincinnati and Hamilton

Women joined the war effort by serving in the Red Cross and as volunteers for the U.S.O.
More than 2,300 local citizens died during the struggle.