The War That Never Came: Civilian Defense in Cincinnati, Ohio During World War II

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During World War II the Office of Civilian Defense (OCD), a federal agency, encouraged more than ten million Americans to volunteer their time and effort for all types of defense-related activities that provided psychological and material benefits for the home front. The agency's top priority was civilian protection. By the summer of 1941, air raid precautions modeled after Great Britain's during the blitz had been developed in the United States. Treated solemnly by many, especially in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, civilian protection was seen as America's last line of defense.1

By the summer of 1942, however, the Allied military situation had improved dramatically. The threat of further enemy air raids diminished and the OCD restructured its programs. It gradually phased out civilian protection plans and placed new emphasis on civilian war services, non-protective programs in "emergency" child care, nutrition and consumer information, recreation, and health. These volunteer activities were designed to do three things: give participants a stake in the war effort; encourage wartime unity; and improve and uplift the community. The Office of Civilian Defense also encouraged state and local authorities to coordinate morale-building events such as scrap drives and war bond rallies until June 30, 1945, when President Harry S. Truman disbanded the agency. 2

Precedents for organized federal civil defense reach back to the months preceding American entry into World War I. The Council of National Defense, which had been created by statute on August 29, 1916, encouraged states to form defense councils to help insure civilian compliance with the federal government's preparedness measures. At a gathering of state governors in 1917, Secretary of War Newton Baker announced:

*Under modern conditions, the whole nation is at*
war... as much in the home and in the factory and on the farm as it is on the fighting front.³

In Ohio, a state defense council, formed on April 11, 1917, directed a variety of activities on the home front. In conjunction with Ohio State University's agriculture college, the defense council assisted in the increase of food production. It also coordinated a speaker's bureau that whipped up patriotic support for the war. By 1918 similar defense councils existed in several states.⁴

During the postwar reconversion process, civilian defense activities were disbanded. Yet, as early as 1936, long before the United States entered into World War II, officials in the War Department began to revive and modify civilian defense plans. Some military experts worried that technological improvements might someday enable German planes to launch air raids on industrial and metropolitan centers in the United States. In the fall of 1940, when the Germans dropped incendiary bombs on British cities, many Americans wondered if their cities were just as vulnerable to enemy attack.⁵

President Franklin D. Roosevelt responded to those fears when he created the Office of Civilian Defense by Executive Order 8757 on May 21, 1941. The OCD was divided into two main divisions. The Board for Civilian Protection, headed by OCD director and New York City Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia formulated “civil defense programs... designed to afford adequate protection of life and property in the event of emergency.” The Volunteer Participation Committee, which was led by Eleanor Roosevelt, promoted non-protective activities “designed to sustain the national morale and to provide opportunities for constructive civilian participation in the defense program...” Despite the broad mandate outlined in Executive Order 8757, LaGuardia focused exclusively on developing auxiliary fire and police forces and emergency medical services.⁶

The OCD was strictly an informational and advisory agency. Civilian defense policies were formulated in Washington by a small staff of civilian and military officials and implemented by state and local defense councils. In July 1941, nearly every state and more than 1,000 cities had formed defense councils. LaGuardia created nine regional OCD offices to act as conduits between Washington and this...
growing network of state and local defense councils. The Fifth Regional Office in Cleveland, for example, monitored and coordinated civil defense activities in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, and West Virginia. In Ohio, the state legislature had formed the Ohio State Council of Defense on August 20, 1941. Governor John W. Bricker became its honorary chairman, but the day-to-day administrative duties fell upon executive director Courtney Burton, a mining and shipping magnate from Cleveland.  

Civil defense began to take organizational shape even earlier in Cincinnati. City council member Charles P. Taft wired Governor Bricker in April 1941, that he and Mayor James G. Stewart had asked Philip O. Geier, a local industrialist and president of the Chamber of Commerce, to serve as chairman of Cincinnati’s defense council. In Cincinnati, and in several other major cities, a pattern of corporate leadership in local defense councils arose. The federal government had forged strong links with business leaders, especially where defense plants existed. Since factories represented obvious potential targets for enemy bombers, corporate leaders were encouraged to assist municipal officials with civilian defense planning.  

In May 1941, as he created the OCD, President Roosevelt urged “loyal” state and municipal officials to cooperate with the new agency to assure “our internal security against foreign-directed subversion and to put every community in order for maximum productive effort . . . minimum waste and unnecessary friction.”

Cincinnati defense officials mapped out a comprehensive civilian defense program, including air raid precautions, based on the British experience. Even though Cincinnati—which was about 500 miles away from the Atlantic seaboard—was presumably less vulnerable to enemy attack, civilian protection plans were formulated. Civilian defense planners asserted: “the citizens of every community have a right to assume that their representative officials have considered every possible provision for their protection and safety against sabotage or any act of war.”

By fall 1941, every state and more than 6,000 cities had formed defense councils; sometimes even neighborhoods formed local defense councils. Women’s organizations cooperated with local Red Cross officials to offer “home defense” courses in filing, shorthand, and typing as well as sewing, knitting, and home nursing. During a two-day “mass registration” for civilian defense jobs more than 2,500 area residents volunteered for semi-military fields of fire fighting, communications, first aid, and similar activities. More often than not male recruits were funneled into the civilian protection fields. By this time, local defense leaders recognized the need for a county-wide agency that could coordinate defense activities of Hamilton County’s thirty-three municipalities (including Cincinnati) and twelve townships.

On November 15, 1941, the state officially certified the Hamilton County National Defense Council (HCNDC) as part of Ohio’s defense program. The HCNDC’s certification coincided with “Civilian Protection Day,” capping off a week-long observation of “Civilian Defense Week,” sponsored by federal and state defense authorities. But before the HCNDC could call its first meeting, the nation was jolted by the news of Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. OCD head LaGuardia recalled:  

that raid demonstrated . . . that we live a new kind of war. The customs and rules of civilized belligerents are ignored, and civilian populations no longer enjoy any immunity whatsoever.

The nation’s entry into the war unleashed a tidal wave of patriotism and community voluntarism. Ohio Governor Bricker issued a call for wartime unity and encouraged everyone to participate in the war effort without thought of “race, creed, political conviction, or personal profit.” In Cincinnati, for the thousands of residents who were unable to enlist in the armed forces, civilian defense represented an alternative means of supporting the war.

Not surprisingly, community organizations cooperated with local Red Cross officials to offer a variety of “home defense” courses. (CHS Photograph Collection)
and individuals who had previously demonstrated little interest in organized civil defense activities offered their services to the HCNDC. The number of civil defense volunteers soared from approximately 4,000 in December 1941 to more than 62,000 in June 1942.15

Just after Pearl Harbor, the OCD issued over fifty-seven million copies of “What To Do In An Air Raid,” a tersely worded, eight page pamphlet that warned many Americans about the dangers of total war. The pamphlet urged people to learn the appropriate air raid signals to lessen confusion during blackouts and air raid drills. In general a series of short blasts or rising and falling tones from a siren or whistle signaled a warning. During these tests everyone except air raid wardens and other authorized personnel had to take cover (and extinguish lights during blackouts) until the all-clear signal—a steady tone for two minutes—could be heard. Most cities lacked sirens that were powerful enough to be heard and were forced to improvise. For example, local defense councils in Hamilton County used church bells and factory whistles.16

During December 1941 the HCNDC naturally looked to state defense officials in Columbus, Ohio, for leadership. Overwhelmed by the rush of events, state defense officials issued some dubious advice. “Under [air] raid conditions,” the Ohio State Council of Defense [OSCD] warned, “keep a bathtub and buckets full of water for the fire department in case water mains are broken.” The OSCD added: “if bombs start to fall near you, lie down. The safest place is under a good stout table.”17

Enemy bombers never threatened the safety of Cincinnati—or any other American city—but during the early weeks of the war some local defense heads briefly gave in to wartime hysteria. Few cities, including Cincinnati, were prepared to deal with the sudden influx of volunteers who were eager to do their part for the war effort. Civilian defense volunteers were assigned to guard bridges, defense plants, and public utilities against the threat of sabotage. The HCNDC also encouraged civilian pilots to organize for the purpose of guarding pipelines, railroads, and civilian transportation. City Manager Clarence O. Sherrill, Cincinnati’s civilian defense coordinator, even entertained the notion of transforming the abandoned underground transit tunnel in Cincinnati into a bomb shelter.18

State and county defense officials agreed that a metropolitan area, like greater Cincinnati, needed “one recognized coordinating body” to administer vital disaster and relief services. Upon Sherrill’s recommendation, the HCNDC hired retired Brigadier General Dana T. Merrill to coordinate civilian protection activities in Greater Cincinnati, including Hamilton County, as well as Campbell and Kenton counties in northern Kentucky. A veteran of two wars, Merrill was an experienced administrator. During the mid-1930’s, he had served as the commandant at Fort Thomas, in northern Kentucky, where he was living in retirement in 1942.19

Merrill encouraged local defense councils to adopt a uniform blackout ordinance as well as “mutual aid agreements that would allow communities to share their protective equipment in the event of an emergency.”20 Merrill strengthened his ties with local defense leaders by dividing the metropolitan region into seven zones, five in Hamilton County, and two in northern Kentucky. In Hamilton County, Cincinnati comprised one zone, while the outlying suburban communities of Cheviot, Wyoming, and Mariemont made up three more. Two other municipalities, St. Bernard and Norwood, made up the final zone. In the event of an emergency, Merrill hoped to be able to transmit news quickly through the zone coordinators to the local defense councils.
The HCNDC conducted several registration drives in neighborhoods and ran ads in Cincinnati newspapers for civilian defense work. The OCD recommended that communities enlist sixty-three volunteers per 1,000 civilians (or a little more than six per cent of the total population) to provide adequate personnel for air raid precautions. Based on that ratio, Hamilton County's population of about 622,000 would have required about 39,000 air raid wardens.

Clearly, in retrospect, the threat of an enemy air raid in Cincinnati, seems remote and unrealistic. Not all Cincinnatians were convinced that elaborate air raid precautions were necessary. For example, Bleeker Marquette, the executive secretary for the Better Housing League, argued that social and economic problems should take precedence over civilian defense since “there is little danger of air raids in Cincinnati . . . .” City Manager Sherrill agreed, noting that Cincinnati's chances of being bombed by the enemy were “one in a million.” However, in February 1942, a London fireman visiting Cincinnati said that persons who did not believe that Cincinnati could be bombed should be called “Fifth Columnists.”

Federal authorities helped to insure the public's support for civilian defense measures by exaggerating the danger of further enemy attacks. In January 1942, OCD Head Fiorello LaGuardia—well known for his hyperbolic tendencies—warned that “the war will come right to our cities and residential districts.” At a February 1942 press conference, President Roosevelt told the public to take the threat of enemy invasion seriously. The Germans, FDR remarked, “can come in and shell New York tomorrow night . . . .” It probably alarmed Cincinnatians more when the President said that Detroit—an inland city like Cincinnati—could also be bombed “under certain conditions.”

A local radio station (WLW) aired a program sponsored by the county defense council that reinforced the President's warning. The radio announcer instructed listeners:

Do you have a world map there handy, . . . ? Spread it out on the floor in front of you. See—there's Lake Erie . . . there's Detroit at the end of it. There's Ohio, and down at the southwest corner, Cincinnati and Hamilton County. Distances aren't very great when you look at it on a world map . . . . They aren't very great, either, as the modern bomber flies.

The announcer referred to Cincinnati as the machine tool capital which was vital to the nation's productive capability, adding that “the loss of one single great source of supply—Cincinnati Milling Machine, LeBlond, Wright, a dozen others—would be a knock-out blow more disastrous than Pearl Harbor . . . and the enemy knows it!”

The message did not go unnoticed in Cincinnati. Many if not most public and private organizations influenced by national and local defense activities and by the press, radio, and newsreels demonstrated their support for air raid precautions. For example, most of Cincinnati's public and private schools and universities made important contributions to the civilian defense effort.

High school teachers practiced air raid drills with students. The nuns at Saint Ursula Academy, a parochial girls' school, devised air raid precautions for the school. They divided themselves into three groups: “watchers” kept a
Silverton's Sand Bags Ready

One of the first Hamilton County communities to display visible evidence of defense preparedness is Silverton, which already has distributed bags of sand for use in case of attack by incendiary bombs. The sand, packed in old cement sacks, has been placed at seven street intersections in various parts of the village.

The pile of sand-filled sacks in the above photograph is stacked at the corner of Ohio Avenue and South Berkley Circle. Grouped around the sacks (left to right) are Police Chief John Ballbach, Councilman William O'Brien and Mayor Harry Mueller. Chief Ballbach said there was enough sand in each sack to control an incendiary bomb. The sacks will be kept covered with waterproof paper to protect them against rain. Howard Newman, one of Silverton's volunteer firemen, took this picture.

lookout for falling incendiaries; "sanders" kept full buckets of sand to douse the bombs; and "runners" stood ready to alert nearby defense officials. The student editor of the Woodward (High School) Bulldog solemnly noted that Cincinnati would be a favorite target for enemy planes because of its large production of machine tools so vital to the defense program." He added that "this news should add an incentive to pupils of the school when performing their air raid drills . . . ." Teachers also directed extracurricular activities towards the war effort. Students cut up old sheets and rolled them into bandages, participated in salvage drives, and purchased war stamps and bonds.26 Many schools served as potential "emergency hospitals" and "casualty stations," storing bandages and medical supplies. In addition, the HCNDC secured space in twenty-six public and parochial schools in Cincinnati to train volunteers as air raid wardens and fire watchers.29

Norman P. Auburn, Dean of the University of Cincinnati's Evening College, agreed to head the civilian defense training program. For five weeks, on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, trainees attended classes dealing with: organizational principles of civil defense, fire and gas defense, blackout techniques, and first aid instruction. Federal and state documentary and training films often supplemented lecture formats. Some of the films were produced by Great Britain's Ministry of Information, and depicted "civil defence" procedures during the blitz. The HCNDC also showed a variety of technically-oriented War Department training films, ranging from "Handling Incendiaries" to "The Adjustment of the Mask."30

Cincinnati's universities made other contributions to the war effort. Dr. Leon Goldman, Assistant Professor of Dermatology at the University of Cincinnati's College of Medicine, directed a course for physicians from several states, explaining the potential effects of chemical warfare on civilian populations. Xavier University also assisted the HCNDC by hosting "commencement" ceremonies for over 6,000 air raid wardens in May 1942.30

Other sectors of the community prepared for war. For example, the Cincinnati Zoo devised a special lighting and communication system to enable its personnel to react quickly in the event of a blackout. Sandbags were placed strategically to protect the animals (and people). The zoo superintendent also announced that in the event of an emergency, "the Zoo force is prepared to destroy animals that would be a menace if they should get loose."31

These preparations seemed justified when the OCD designated Cincinnati as a "target area" in March 1942. Based on the vulnerability of area industries, its contribution to national defense, and the likelihood of attack, Cincinnati was one of thirty-three "strategic cities." As a result, the OCD gave Cincinnati priority status for future allocations of fire fighting equipment, air raid sirens, and medical supplies—enough to equip forty-six "casualty stations."32

Even though Cincinnati was a "target area," the OCD provided only limited material support, mostly in the form of literature, films, and some protective equipment. But the ultimate responsibility for training volunteers and implementing civilian defense policies fell upon state and local officials. Ideally, the OCD envisioned each community
IF AIR RAIDS COME
Learn and Remember What To Do If Enemy Planes and Bombs Come

YOU WILL BE WARNED
When enemy planes are spotted moving in your direction, watchers, many miles away will set in motion the machinery of protection. You will hear the warning signal. When danger is past, the "all clear" will be signaled.

YOUR BIGGEST JOB
There are many things you can do to protect your family if an air raid comes. Nothing is so important as to keep calm. Make certain every member of your family knows the air raid rules.

KNOW YOUR AIR RAID WARDENS
You should know by sight and by name the Air Raid Wardens in your block at home, and in the building where you work. Every member of your family should be prepared to carry out your warden's instructions. He has been trained to help you protect your family.

BLACKOUTS
Select the safest place in your house for general air raid and blackout purposes. Be prepared to blanket the windows or cover the glass with opaque protective material. Be sure that no lights can be seen from the outside. Keep your blackout material ready for instant use.

THINGS TO CHECK:
Have you removed inflammable material from your attic?
Have you followed your wardens' advice about equipment for fire protection?
Have you selected the refuge room for your family?
Are blankets available for first aid?
Do you have simple first aid supplies on hand?
Has a member of your family had first aid training?

IN GENERAL
Use your Common Sense. Keep Calm. Locate a safe place wherever your daily routine takes you. Remember that direct hits are few. The greatest danger is from shattered glass, flying debris and fire.

AIR RAID RULES

IF YOU ARE AT HOME... Get your family together in the safest room in the house, and stay there. Turn off your gas stove but not the pilot light. Turn out the lights in rooms not blacked out. Stay away from windows. Don't go outdoors and don't use your telephone.

IF YOU ARE ON THE STREET... Obey the orders of the Air Raid Wardens. Go home if you can walk there in a few minutes. Otherwise, get off the street and into the best shelter you can find. Get into or close to a large building. Avoid large windows, particularly show windows. Don't join crowd. If it is dark, don't light matches and don't smoke.

IF YOU ARE AT SCHOOL... Do exactly what your teacher tells you to do.

IF YOU ARE IN A STREET CAR OR BUS... The operator will try to stop near a good shelter; go into it and stay there until the all clear sounds.

IF YOU ARE IN AN AUTOMOBILE... Drive to curb and park immediately. Shut off lights and ignition and seek shelter.

IF YOU ARE IN A CHURCH, THEATER OR OTHER PUBLIC GATHERING... Stay seated, remain calm, obey orders. Panic can be as dangerous as bombs.

IF YOU ARE NOT NEAR SHELTER AND HEAR BOMBS FALLING... Get off the street and lie face down on the ground, preferably in a low spot.

KEEP CALM
Panic hurts more people than bombs.

DON'T
make telephone calls during a raid. All lines are needed for vital messages.

FOLLOW
these rules of conduct for yourself and family. They are based on experience.

DON'T
shut off main gas supply unless house is damaged or gas supply fails.

FOLLOW
your warden's advice for protection against fire.

CONTROLLING INCENDIARY BOMBS

If an incendiary bomb comes through your roof, it is your job to control it. Prompt action on your part will control the fire. Bring your fire fighting equipment to the scene at once.

Shoot a jet of water directly at the bomb without delay, to put it out of action instantly. Then use the jet, quickly, to smother fragments and the remains of the bomb, and any fires that might have been started.

Be absolutely sure the fire is out before you leave the scene. Use a coarse spray only where scattering of metal must be avoided. Use sand only if a bomb falls where it is not likely to start a fire, or if water is not available.

Posters placed in schools, churches, and public buildings instructed citizens on what to do "if enemy planes and bombs come." (Poster, CHS Manuscript Collection #516)
separately recruiting and training its volunteers. A fully trained air raid warden, one on each block, would be knowledgeable of his neighbors needs, and could provide information about civilian defense. Moreover, in the event of an enemy attack, he could take charge of the neighborhood, and assist members of the local police and fire departments. Hamilton County's smaller suburban villages, like Wyoming, were better able to adapt OCD programs. However, for metropolitan areas, like Cincinnati, with a large industrial base and an heterogeneous population, the process of implementing OCD plans took much longer.

All types of men and women engaged in defense activities, but leadership in the county and city civilian defense program tended to be dominated by middle class white males. Morris Edwards, executive vice president of the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, was named executive director of the HCNDC, and local bankers and industrialists held many of the key leadership positions on that council. Likewise, many small businessmen and elected officials dominated the smaller defense councils. Edwards realized that the HCNDC needed the support of every community in Greater Cincinnati in order to implement OCD programs.

However, many people, particularly Blacks and women, felt that opportunities to participate fully in civilian defense programs were limited. In theory total war was a great equalizer—a leveler of distinctions based on class, race, or gender. In actuality long established patterns of discrimination in Cincinnati persisted after Pearl Harbor and undermined a basic premise of civilian defense, that is, to promote national morale and wartime unity.

The county defense council tried to include a cross section of municipal and county government representatives, as well as persons from business, labor, religious, and civic organizations. Yet, when the HCNDC first met just after Pearl Harbor, no Black representative had been appointed by Edwards, even though Blacks comprised twelve per cent of the city's population and eight per cent of the county's.

The experience of Blacks in Cincinnati during the early months of the war illustrated some of the prejudices they encountered in other northern industrial cities. In its 1941 annual report the Division of Negro Welfare (DNW), the local affiliate of the National Urban League, had noted that Cincinnati was "geographically a northern city, [but] its proximity to the southern boundary exposes it to many traditions of Negro-white relations of the South." The absence of Blacks from HCNDC activities, whether accidental or intentional, reinforced the DNW's depiction of Cincinnati as a racially divided city. It also contradicted Governor Bricker's call for wartime unity and racial amity, and hindered Black morale. During the war, the Division of Negro...
Welfare focused primarily on improving employment and educational opportunities, substandard housing and health care, and race relations. But some area Black leaders demonstrated an interest in civil defense preparations, seeing them as a means of involving the Black community in the war effort.

William W. B. Conrad, a Cincinnati attorney, complained first to Governor Bricker and then to OCD head Fiorello LaGuardia about the HCNDC's failure to appoint a Black representative. Conrad contended: "If we are to secure national unity we shall have to adopt different tactics." Stanley Roberts, a National Youth Administration field worker, added that "the protection of the Negro communities, their homes, and perhaps their very lives," were at stake. Roberts feared that long range civilian protection plans would not include Black communities.

Other Blacks, who had little personal interest in the civilian defense movement, still resented their exclusion from the HCNDC. Cincinnati NAACP president William A. McClain and his law partner, Theodore M. Berry, viewed the war as an opportunity to elevate Blacks into decision making roles. Ten days after Pearl Harbor McClain warned the HCNDC that no organization could be "representative of the American people unless it has a Negro member acting in an advisory capacity and coordinating the activities of the Negroes in the defense of our democracy." Likewise, Berry had written Mayor Stewart six days earlier and urged him to appoint a Black representative to "this important public body." Stewart, threw the problem into Morris Edwards' lap, adding that "Mr. Berry is right in this matter."

While Berry was not chiefly concerned with HCNDC activities, he realized that "civilian defense was part of a bigger problem . . . Blacks were not being regarded as an essential part of the war effort or given an opportunity to play their role." Both McClain and the Cincinnati Independent, a local Black weekly, felt that Berry should be appointed to the HCNDC. However, Berry's local and national commitments to Black organizations, as well as his professional duties as assistant county prosecutor, prevented such an appointment. Despite Edwards' assurances to deal with the matter at the "earliest opportunity," an OCD field representative reported in late January 1942 that "Cincinnati authorities are not including Negroes in the essential organization of Civilian Defense and . . . representative community leaders are not being utilized . . . ." Before the month ended the HCNDC had designated William N. Lovelace, a Hamilton County probation officer as its Black representative.

Women were also restricted in their opportunities to participate in civilian defense, however, they were included in civilian defense work more than Blacks had been. Women's organizations like the Cincinnati Woman's City Club, the Republican Women's Club, and the Business Women's Club that had a reputation for community service participated indirectly in civilian defense activities. These organizations formed ad hoc "defense committees" that were in close contact with county and city defense officials.

However, few Cincinnati women participated directly in civilian protection, according to a University of California survey conducted in early 1942. A team of pollsters from its Bureau of Public Administration examined civilian
Because Cincinnati was designated as a "target area," the OCD gave Cincinnati priority status for allocations of fire fighting equipment. (CHS Photograph Collection)
defense organizations in cities with populations greater than 10,000. The survey, which included Cincinnati, considered six different fields of civilian defense services: air raid warden; auxiliary police and firemen; fire watchers; medical corps; rescue squads; and nurses' aides and found that opportunities for women in most of these fields were limited. Men dominated the ranks of the civilian protection army in every field except nurses' aides. There were six times as many male air raid wardens, the most highly visible and most sought after position in civilian protection work. Hamilton County defense officials suggested that fewer women had become air raid wardens because applicants had to declare their age on registration forms. While the federal government encouraged women to assume a non-traditional role in the defense plants, volunteer civilian defense work seemed to reinforce traditional sex roles. In Cincinnati and elsewhere women were usually cast in supporting rather than leading roles in civilian defense work.42

The HCNDC's emphasis on developing air raid training, instead of other non-protective activities, left many women only marginally involved in the civilian defense program. Likewise, William Lovelace, the Black representative on the county defense council conceded that practically no consideration had been given to Black participation in civilian defense just after Pearl Harbor. Yet, by April 1942, Lovelace felt that Blacks had become more active in county defense programs. Lovelace noted that over forty Blacks had become instructors of the air raid warden courses. In the twenty-six schools for air raid wardens Lovelace indicated that there was "no semblance of segregation."43

County, municipal, village, and township authorities were responsible for funding civilian defense schools as well as other measures, yet, local officials were reluctant to allocate funds necessary for the HCNDC to operate. Governor Bricker alleviated most of the HCNDC's financial woes, when in April 1942, he announced that over

Although the federal government encouraged women to assume non-traditional roles in defense plants, civilian defense reinforced the traditional sex roles for women, for example, serving as hostesses at USO centers. (CHS Photograph Collection)
$2,000,000 in “excess poor relief” would be channeled towards county and local defense efforts. From July 1942 to June 1943 state appropriations for Hamilton County totaled nearly $290,000.44

Ironically, just when the newly trained air raid wardens began to conduct blackout tests in Cincinnati on a regular basis, the OCD shifted its emphasis away from civilian protection. By the summer of 1942, the Allies’ military situation had improved dramatically and the threat of enemy air raids diminished.46 Although civilian protection units remained intact in Cincinnati, and elsewhere, state and local defense councils began to focus on non-protective programs.47

A state defense official hinted at the new direction of Ohio’s defense program in June 1942 and challenged its volunteers to prove that:

Ohio is truly showing her colors in a thousand ways every hour of every day by her civilian protection and mobilization, her war production, her salvage collection, her purchase of war bonds and stamps, conservation of rubber, . . . by rationing, price control, and so forth.48

Harold W. Nichols, the chairman of HCNDC’s Waste Materials Conservation Committee, responded to the challenge by coaxing schools and businesses to donate large amounts of scrap iron that would ostensibly be converted into vital material for the war effort. For example, an RKO theater donated a steel tower, that weighed over 100,000 pounds. Likewise, Woodward High School contributed the iron fence that surrounded its campus, “believed to be the heaviest in the city.” Nichols’ ability to coordinate county-wide salvage drives won the praise of OCD Fifth Region Director Dan T. Moore. In August 1942, the state defense council honored Nichols, who later became state salvage coordinator for Ohio. Civilian defense volunteers in Cincinnati collected more scrap iron—twenty-nine million pounds—than any other city in the nation. Nichols directed over 7,000 Boy Scouts in a six day house-to-house scrap drive. The proceeds went to the USO to help meet the expenses of send-off parties for new recruits at Cincinnati’s Union Terminal.49

While the HCNDC became increasingly preoccupied with salvage drives, rationing, and other morale-building programs, civilian protection units continued to practice air raid drills. By November 1942, there were three “victory sirens” were placed on Cincinnati rooftops. Cincinnati civilian defense officials attempted to maximize the authenticity of an air raid drill on November 8. Planes were

Women volunteers participated in child care, nutrition and consumer information, recreation, and health. (CHS Photograph Collection)
The Paramount Theater at the corner of Gilbert Avenue and McMillan Street contributed a steel tower, which weighed 1,000 pounds, to the war effort. (CHS Photograph Collection)
scheduled to fly over the city and drop “simulated bombs,” small cardboard cylinders with red crepe paper streamers. Each “bomb” contained a message, rolled up inside the cylinder, that described its destructive capability. They were also numbered so they could easily be reported to defense officials. Unfortunately, inclement weather on the day of the drill grounded air traffic, but the bombs still “fell.” They were thrown from automobiles.50

In retrospect, these events appear both humorous and unnecessary. Nevertheless, preparations for the war that never came paid off when a real emergency confronted Greater Cincinnati in late 1942. When the Ohio River surpassed flood stages in Pittsburgh, the American Red Cross appealed to state defense authorities for assistance. In eastern Ohio, civilian defense workers cooperated with the Red Cross in evacuating hundreds of families. Similarly, in Hamilton County civilian defense officials and workers mobilized relief forces in the “onerous responsibilities that follow in the wake of a flood.” Others served as “auxiliary policemen [and] acted as guards at shelter points and assisted city police in patrol duty in flood areas.” OCD Regional Director Moore praised the efforts of Hamilton County civilian defense workers, and the Enquirer attributed the well-organized effort during the flood to the “greater sense of civic responsibilities that have grown out of civil defense , . . .”52

Apart from this brief moment during the war, local civilian defense workers had little opportunity to put some of their training to the test.

In a subtler and less dramatic fashion, thousands of civil defense volunteers engaged in a variety of “non-protective” programs in health, recreation, nutrition, child care, and race relations. Women tended to be more involved in these activities that reinforced rather than challenged traditional sex roles.53

During the summer of 1943, the HCNDC coordinated a morale-building program that was targeted specifically at involving housewives in the war effort. The HCNDC awarded “V[ictory] Home” window stickers to home owners who cooperated with air raid wardens, complied with government rationing programs, purchased war bonds, and “refused to spread rumors designed to divide our nation.” Air raid wardens inspected homes in their communities and were encouraged to be generous in issuing stickers. State defense officials relaxed the criteria and stated that if “the housewife indicates that her family is doing its best for the war effort,” then she was entitled to a “V Home” sticker.54

Proceeds from scrap drives went to the USO to help meet the expenses of send-off parties for Cincinnati soldiers and sailors. (CHS Photograph Collection)
The HCNDC, like every other county council in Ohio, acted as a clearing house of war-related information. It also mobilized volunteer support for other federal agencies. As a result, civil defense volunteers often assisted Office of Price Administration and Selective Service boards in Cincinnati. Other community agencies and organizations that predated the war also took advantage of the extensive network of state and local defense councils to promote their own interests. For example, shortly after the race riot in Detroit, in the summer of 1943, the National Urban League issued an “anti-riot directive” to the Division of Negro Welfare (and its other affiliates) encouraging it to promote better race relations through local religious, business, and fraternal organizations. Significantly, the Urban League also felt it could make use of local defense councils. It hoped that local defense officials could serve as a conduit to promote positive ideas about race relations in white communities.

Likewise, neighborhood child care centers and day nurseries benefited from the civilian defense program when the HCNDC established an Emergency Child Care Office. By the end of 1943, the HCNDC had helped coordinate the activities of twenty-seven nurseries that cared for 1,067 children. While only a fraction of the area’s working mothers made use of these facilities, the enrollment figures were “in line with the state and national trend.” Most working parents relied on relatives or friends to look after their children or left them unattended.

The HCNDC continued to promote the purchase of war bonds, coordinate scrap drives, and it encouraged community organizations, schools, and area industries to cultivate “victory gardens” to supplement food production for the home front. Not all gardens successfully produced food, but few defense activities were judged solely by their end result. The fact that the program involved thousands of men, women, and children in the war effort made it a success.

The HCNDC coordinated a variety of activities that offered both psychological and material benefits to the home front. However, these efforts rarely if ever received the same amount of attention in the media that civilian protection attracted. Nevertheless, the efforts of a child care worker with real children were arguably more important than those of an air raid warden, dealing with “paper” bombs thrown from automobiles. Both activities enabled the participants to feel involved in the war effort.

Civilian defense preparations before Pearl Harbor—based largely on the British experience during the blitz—stressed the need for elaborate air raid precautions in American cities. During the war federal, state, and local defense officials periodically exaggerated the threat of enemy
attacks to combat public complacency and apathy. The air raid warden became an important symbol that reminded many Americans that they were still at war.\textsuperscript{59} When it became clear that sustained enemy attacks against the North American continent were no longer a threat, the OCD encouraged state and local defense officials to participate in non-protective activities that promoted wartime unity.

On November 1, 1943, War Department officials recommended the complete cessation of air raid drills. While they conceded that “token air raids are always a possibility, . . . the present degree of danger . . .” was minimal.\textsuperscript{60} The Ohio state legislature responded to this news by slashing appropriations for local defense activities to a bare minimum. By early 1944, the HCNDCC was unable to meet its administrative expenses. In addition, the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce withdrew the use of its facilities. The HCNDCC did not officially disband until September 1944, but during its final months, it existed mainly on paper.\textsuperscript{61}

Over 60,000 residents of Hamilton County volunteered for some type of civilian defense work, whether as air raid wardens, child care workers, clericals, bandage rollers, or salvage collectors. The experience of the volunteers in Cincinnati reflected the activities of the millions of Americans who participated in civilian defense during World War II. These activities were vital to wartime morale and, in some cases, the community activism behind civilian defense carried into the postwar years.\textsuperscript{62}


7. “State and Local Cooperation,” Defense (a government-sponsored weekly publication), Vol. 1, no. 17 (April 29, 1941): 22. For Ohio see Senate Bill 178, Ohio General Assembly, (effective August 20, 1941). This statute required local defense councils to submit personnel lists to the state defense council for official certification by the Governor.

8. Charles P. Taft to Governor John W. Bricker, April 7, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 8, (CHS) and Memorandum on the Mayor’s Committee on National Defense, May 7, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 8 (CHS).


10. “The City’s Part in National Defense,” American City, 56 (June 1941): cover page. President Roosevelt linked the goals of civilian defense—protection against foreign-directed subversion with war production, the nation’s top priority in June 1941.

11. Cincinnati Bureau of Governmental Research, “Memorandum to the Committee on Coordination and Cooperation in Hamilton County,” June 12, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 1, Folder 2 (CHS). Coastal cities

Local manufacturers, such as Procter & Gamble, held practice air raid drills. Employees had special assignments or reported to specific areas where there were lockers stocked with first aid supplies and bomb fighting equipment. (CHS Photograph Collection)

12. “Tally of Local Defense Councils Reveals 5935 Organized in Nation,” *Defense* vol.2, no. 47, (November 25, 1941):31. Ohio had 150 local defense councils compared to Texas, the largest state in the Union, which had 890. See also Cincinnati *Enquirer* (clipping), September 28, 1941, WW II Scrapbook, v. 1 (CHS); Cincinnati *Post*, November 4, 24, 1941; and Morris Edwards to James G. Stewart, September 29, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 1, Folder 2 (CHS).


15. Governor John W. Bricker to the People of Ohio, December 9, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 1, Folder 2 (CHS). A Cincinnati radio station (WCPO) offered its services to the HCNDI “under any circumstances.” H.M. Kranz, City Engineer for Cincinnati, also offered the services of the Division of Public Works for civilian protection purposes. See Mortimer C. Watters to Morris Edwards, December 9, 1941, and H.M. Kranz to C.O. Sherrill, December 9, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 8 (CHS). On the increase in civil defense volunteers see *Post*, December 17, 1941 and Status Report of the Hamilton County National Defense Council to OCD, July 2, 1942, Civil Defense Collection (CHS). Nationally, the increase in the number of civilian defense workers was just as impressive. In November 1941 approximately 750,000 men and women had been recruited by state and local defense councils; in just six months there were nearly eight million volunteers. See “LaGuardia Calls for More Volunteers in All Phases of Civilian Defense,” *Defense* vol. 2, no. 47 (November 25,


23. Post, December 17, 1941, and Memorandum from C.O. Sherrill to Morris Edwards, December 10, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 1, Folder 2 (CHS); Morris Edwards to Courtney Burton, December 24, 1941, Box 2, Folder 8 (OHS); and Post, December 23, 1941.

24. W.D. Anderson to Dana Merrill, January 9, 1942; Russell Oelsner to Merrill, January 31, 1942; J. J. Greenleaf to Merrill, February 11, 1942, Civil Defense Collection, Box 1, Folder 2 (CHS).


27. Post, January 27, 1942, and February 16, 17, 1942. After the fall of Singapore on February 15, 1942, Sherrill modified his position and noted that the odds of an enemy attack had increased. Sherrill noted that "our protection from Japan depends greatly on the Navy."

28. Enquirer, March 1, 20, 1942; Post, March 10, 1942; and Harry Gilligan to C.O. Sherrill, March 20, 1942, Civil Defense Collection, Box 1, Folder 2 (CHS). For the use of films in civil defense training see Enquirer, February 26, 1942; OSCD Communiqué No. 55, February 10, 1942, Civil Defense Collection, Box 39, Folder 344 (CHS); and Ralph Stone to [All] Mayors, Chairmen, Directors, County and Local Defense Councils, October 5, 1942, Ohio State Council of Defense Papers, Series 2246, Box 4 (OHS). County and local defense councils regularly borrowed films from the OSCD's vast collection of British and American defense-related films. The extant films are available at OHS.


30. For the Zoo quote, see Enquirer, April 3, 1942. Also see Enquirer, February 12 and March 1, 1942.

31. "Post, March 7, 1942; Harry Gilligan to C.O. Sherrill, March 13, 1942, Civil Defense Collection, Box 1, Folder 2 (CHS); and "Civilian Defense . . . First Allocation of Protective Equipment Under the $100,000 Appropriation Will Go Mainly to Coastal Target Areas," Victory (formerly called Defense) vol.3 (March 10, 1942):30. William McMenemy, an Assistant to the President, referred to a list of 39 "target areas." Significantly, fifteen cities were located in inland rather than coastal states. Five of the fifteen inland "target cities" were in Ohio, including: Akron; Cincinnati; Cleveland; Columbus; and Toledo. See William McMenemy, c. April 1942, memorandum, "Plans for Training Civilian Protection Workers," William McMenemy Papers, Box 7 OCD File (FDRL).


33. Memorandum from C.O. Sherrill to Morris Edwards, December 10, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 1, Folder 2 (CHS) and Charles P. Taft to Morris Edwards, December 1, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 8 (CHS). Population figures are based on the 1940 Census. 55,593 Blacks resided in Cincinnati (total pop. 455,610); fewer Blacks (55,313) resided in other parts of Hamilton County (total pop. 621,987).

34. See Horace R. Cayton, "Negro Morale," Opportunity 19 (December 1941):371-375 and Franklin O. Nichols, "Six Industrial Cities and the Negro in Defense," Opportunity 19 (August 1941):335-337. In order to maintain the morale of the larger (majority) group, Cayton bitterly noted that "all forms of segregation and the subordination of the Negro must be continued, so that undivided attention can be directed toward the outside enemy. The Negro is asked to fargo [sic] any change in the status for the duration." Also see Fourth Annual Report (1940-1941), May 21, 1941, Division of Negro Welfare, Urban League Papers (ULP), Box 1, Folder 4 (CHS).

35. George W. B. Conrad to John Bricker, November 29, 1941, and Conrad to Fiorello LaGuardia, December 10, 1941, OCPD, RG 171, Entry 11, Box 47 (WNRC) and Stanley Roberts to J. Harvey Kearns, December 16, 1941, ULP, Box 6, Folder 9 (CHS).

36. William A. McClain to Morris Edwards, December 17, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 8 (CHS). At roughly the same time, McClain and Berry, as members of the civil rights committee of Cincinnati's NAACP, led a successful protest movement against downtown movie theaters to admit Blacks. Theater owners had organized, (it should be noted) with the support of the Chamber of Commerce, but the NAACP prevailed, See William A. McClain "Cincinnati's Theatre Doors Opened," The Crisis 48 (December 1941):382 383, 389.

37. Theodore M. Berry to James G. Stewart, December 11, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 8 (CHS). Before Franklin Roosevelt created the Fair Employment Practices Committee by Executive Order 8802 in June 1941, Berry served as coordinator of the National Committee for the Participation of Negroes in the National Defense Program. The committee was essentially a pressure group with affiliates in fifteen states, including Ohio, that monitored hiring practices of defense contractors. Berry also served as legal council for the Division of Negro Welfare. See Adeline Harris interview of Theodore Berry, Tape 1 (CHS) and ULP, Box 1, Folder 4 (CHS).

38. Interview with Theodore M. Berry, April 18, 1987.

39. McClain to Edwards, December 17, 1941, Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 8 (CHS) and Cincinnati Independent, n. d., Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 8 (CHS). Before Franklin Roosevelt created the Fair Employment Practices Committee by Executive Order 8802 in June 1941, Berry served as coordinator of the National Committee for the Participation of Negroes in the National Defense Program. The committee was essentially a pressure group with affiliates in fifteen states, including Ohio, that monitored hiring practices of defense contractors. Berry also served as legal council for the Division of Negro Welfare. See Adeline Harris interview of Theodore Berry, Tape 1 (CHS) and ULP, Box 1, Folder 4 (CHS).

40. Interview with Theodore M. Berry, April 18, 1987.

41. "Post, November 4, 24, 1941.


43. Ethel A. Irving to E. Eppsinger, March 31, 1942, and William N. Lovelace to P.L. Prattis, April 18, 1942, ULP, Box 6, Folder 9 (CHS). Also see Times-Star (clipping), April 8, 1942, ULP, Box 6, Folder 9 and Enquirer, April 10, 1942.

44. Post April 18, 1942. During the first four months of the war, the Chamber of Commerce provided the HCNDC with free office space, heat,
telephones, and met all other operating expenses. Between April and July 1942, when state funds were appropriated, the HCND relied on the War Chest for support. See Executive and Financial Committee Papers, Box 2, Folder 6, Civil Defense Collection (CHS).

45. Finance Committee Papers, Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 7 (CHS) and Enquirer, June 8, 29, July 20, 1942.

46. James M. Landis, Harvard law school dean and LaGuardia's successor at OCD recalled that after the Battle of Midway "the danger of bombing was gone." Landis headed the OCD from February 1942 to August 1943. See James M. Landis, Columbia Oral History Project, 1963-1964, p.324 (microfiche copy) and Donald A. Ritchie, Landis: Dean of the Regulators (Cambridge, 1980), pp.103-119. The likelihood of enemy air raids had lessened by summer 1942, however, later in the war the Japanese armed high-altitude balloons with explosives and incendiaries that traveled as far inland as Iowa. These "bombs" caused a few fatalities and injuries, but failed to weaken America's wartime morale as Japan had hoped. See Lawrence H. Larsen, "War Balloons over the Prairie: The Japanese Invasion of South Dakota," South Dakota History, 9 no. 2 (1979):104-115; Bert Webber, Silent Siege: Japanese Attacks Against North America in World War II (Fairfield, Washington, 1983) and Leonard, "Denver at War," pp.30-39.

47. Mauck, Civil Defense, Ch. 3, pp. 13-14.

48. OSCD Communiqué No. 136, June 12, 1942, Civil Defense Collection, Box 39, Folder 344 (CHS).

49. Enquirer, May 1, 23, June 12, and December 24, 1942; Times-Star (clipping), August 14, 1942, WW II Scrapbook, vol. 2 (CHS); Harold Nichols to Charles P. Taft, n. d., Charles Taft Papers, Box 33, Folder 6 (CHS); and OCD Newsletter no.20 (September 24, 1942) in Ohio State Council of Defense Papers, Series 2250, Box 1, Folder 1 (OHS). See also Courtney Burton to All Local Defense Councils, February 17, 1942, Ohio State Defense Council Papers, Series 2246, Box 1, Folder 16 and Boy Scouts of America 1942 Series, Bulletin no.1, "We, Too, Have A Job To Do," January 7, 1942, in Ohio State Council of Defense Papers, Series 2246, Box 1, Folder 16 (OHS).

50. Enquirer, November 4, 9, 1942; and Sherrill, Memorandum to the Press, November 9, 1942, Civil Defense Collection, Box 1, Folder 3 (CHS).


52. Post, January 4, 1943; Enquirer, January 5, 6, 1943; Gilligan to Sherrill, January 12, 1943, Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 6 (CHS); Patterson Report on Activities in the Cincinnati Area During the Flood Period of January 1, 1943 to January 4, 1943, Ohio State Council of Defense Collection, Series 2246, Box 4 (OHS); "Flood Tests CD in Many States," OCD Newsletter no.27 (January 25, 1943), in Official File 4422, Office of Civilian Defense, 1943-1945, Box 2 (FDRL); and Landis, COHP, p.326.

53. Earlier in the war Boy Scouts had been recruited as messengers to assist air raid wardens, whereas, the state coordinator for civilian war services encouraged local defense councils to include Ohio's 52,000 girl scouts in non-protective volunteer programs in recreation, child care, consumer interest, and victory gardens. See Delbert L. Pugh, memorandum, October 9, 1942, Ohio State Council of Defense Papers, Series 2246, Box 7, Folder 93 (OHS).

54. Harry Graff to Ford Worthing, April 1, 1943, Ohio State Council of Defense Collection, Series 2246, Box 3, Folder 13 (OHS).

55. Ralph Stone to Morris Edwards, March 24, 1943, Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 4 (CHS). Tire rationing and car pool programs, formulated by the OPA, were implemented by state and local defense councils.

56. Mayor James Garfield Stewart, Memorandum, July 8, 1943, ULP Papers, Box 24, Folder 5.


61. Executive Committee Papers, March 29, 1944, Civil Defense Collection, Box 2, Folder 6 (CHS); Nichols to Edwards, November 17, 1943, Civil Defense Collection, Box 1, Folder 4 (CHS); and Enquirer, September 23, 1944.

62. For example, volunteer fire departments emerged in communities that had profited from the federal government's allocations of fire-fighting and protective equipment. See The Pride of Park Hills (Kentucky), c.1947.