

# Kansas at War

## The Home Front 1941-1945

by Patrick G. O'Brien

On December 7, 1941, many Kansans instantaneously knew "the world would never be the same again."<sup>1</sup> Not even the most farsighted Kansans, however, could have imagined the momentous influence of World War II on their state. When war erupted, the horse-mounted Second Cavalry Division was stationed at Fort Riley, the chief military installation in Kansas. By 1945 the war effort focused on Wichita, where the revolutionary B-29 bomber was manufactured, and on the Smoky Hill Army Air Corps Base outside Salina, which trained the crews. This shift from horse cavalry to B-29 symbolized the seismic change wrought on Kansas.<sup>2</sup>

In the interval between the eruption of hostilities on the European continent in 1939 and American entry two years later, the war transfixed Kansans. From the outset, Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the U.S. Congress provided first moral support and then

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1. George Gird, interview with author, August 1, 1986.

2. A half century after World War II, an enormous amount of home-front history has been and is still being written. Representative sources include John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976); Richard R. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On? The American Home Front, 1941-1945* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970); David Hinshaw, *The Home Front* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1948); Jack Goodman, ed., *While You Were Gone: A Report on Wartime Life in the United States* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946); Roy Hoopes, *Americans Remember the Home Front: An Oral Narrative* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1977); Ronald H. Bailey, et al., *The Home Front: USA* (Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life, 1977); and Richard Polenber, *War & Society: The United States, 1941-1945* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1972). An off-beat, wry, and often perceptive study of the "psychological and emotional culture of Americans" is Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Although Kansas receives negligible mention in these sources, they avail necessary background; many aspects of the Kansas home front have been investigated, but a comprehensive study is lacking. *From Horse Cavalry to B-29: The Kansas Homefront During World War II* is a one-hour media survey of the war years. It is available from the Kansas Humanities Council, Topeka, and the Emporia State University Media Center, Emporia, Kans. An excellent source on one Kansan's wartime observations is Charles William Sloan, Jr., ed., "The Newelletters: E. Gail Carpenter Describes Life on the Home Front," *Kansas History* 11 (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter 1988): 54-72, 123-42, 150-70, 243-59.



*With the United States' entrance into World War II, Kansans across the state volunteered their time and services to aid the cause. These Coffee County women have joined ranks with servicemen to support one of many home-front projects.*



concrete assistance to the nations fighting Nazi Germany.<sup>3</sup> Although strongly anti-Nazi, Kansans almost unanimously balked at what they deemed reckless Rooseveltian policies. Believing military intervention unwarranted, Kansans enthusiastically supported the antiwar stance of the state's delegation in Congress and favorites like Alfred M. Landon, ex-governor and 1936 Republican presidential candidate.<sup>4</sup>

After the 1940 Nazi blitzkrieg and occupation of the European continent, however, a deep split occurred within the state on the best strategy to avert war. Convinced aid was necessary for Allied survival, some Kansans supported that illegal and risky policy as the one that afforded America the best chance to skirt war. Perceiving FDR as eager for a pointless war with Germany, however, the majority favored staying aloof and tending to the country's own defenses. The lend-lease controversy both reflected and intensified the split.

3. A sampling of the astronomical sources on the political and military preliminaries to World War II include William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation, 1937-1940: The World Crisis and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), and *The Undeclared War, 1940-1941* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953); James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1956); Arnold A. Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War: American Foreign Policy and World Politics, 1917-1941* (New York: Praeger, 1975); Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Stephen E. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938*, 6th ed. rev. (New York: Penguin Books, 1991); Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR, Into the Storm, 1937-1940: A History* (New York: Random House, 1993).

4. The overwhelming opposition of the Kansas congressional contingent to administration policies is clearly stated in Philip A. Grant, Jr., "The Kansas Congressional Delegation and

In early 1941 FDR pledged that America would become the "arsenal of democracy," and that up to 60 percent of the nation's industrial capacity would be devoted to war production within the next year. Roosevelt requested legislation granting broad authority to lend and lease—in reality to give—materials, supplies, and equipment to any country whose defense was judged vital to the security of the United States. Sen. Arthur Capper and Emporia editor William Allen White exemplified the division between Kansans. The former vehemently rejected the bill, and the latter served as chairman of the influential Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies to ensure its passage.<sup>5</sup> As on nearly every war issue since 1939, Capper lost.

The dangerous state of the world had left the United States no realistic choice except to prepare its own defenses. Although the first steps were reluctant, few and short, Congress voted a larger military budget in 1941 than in the previous twenty years combined, and a million and

the Selective Service Act of 1940," *Kansas History* 2 (Autumn 1979): 196-205. Donald R. McCoy, *Landon of Kansas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), is an excellent biography with pertinent sections on Landon's anti-interventionist views.

5. William M. Tuttle, Jr., "Aid-to-the-Allies Short-of-War Versus American Intervention, 1940: A Reappraisal of William Allen White's Leadership," *Journal of American History* 56 (March 1970): 840-58, is critical of the Emporia editor and writer. The same author edited interesting correspondence between fellow editors in "William Allen White and Verne Marshall: Two Midwestern Editors Debate Aid to the Allies versus Isolationism," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 32 (Summer 1966): 201-9. Capper's views are explained in John W. Partin, "The Dilemma of a 'Good, Very Good Man': Capper and Noninterventionism, 1936-1941," *Kansas History* 2 (Summer 1979): 86-95. See also Grant, "The Kansas Congressional Delegation and the Lend-Lease Act of 1941," 73-81.

a half men were in army uniforms by the middle of the year.

The U.S. military, however, was unprepared to wage full-scale war, and the country unwilling to let it. Ammunition shortages at Fort Riley, for example, required cavalry troops to substitute eggs for hand grenades in training exercises. Although the army was nowhere in combat before Pearl Harbor, navy destroyers protecting foreign ship convoys bound for Allied ports with lend-lease supplies fought German submarines in the North Atlantic. Despite the fact that the United States was a limited if unofficial belligerent, public opinion polls showed that Americans desperately wanted peace. Many feared widening war was inevitable, but clearly they hoped to be wrong.

Circumstances, however, had already altered the texture of Kansas. Reflecting the sharp escalation of government spending as America became the arsenal of democracy and began building its own defenses, Kansas newspapers in 1941 reported the "greatest pre-Christmas boom in years." Fifty million Americans were employed, which exceeded the previous peak year of 1929 by five million. Many were Kansans with new jobs in the expanding defense industries and at military installations. Agricultural prices also had rebounded from the nadir of the Great Depression. With wheat at ninety-eight cents and corn at sixty-eight cents per bushel, the highest levels in a generation, Kansas farmers thrived.

Intractably against war, Kansas nevertheless enjoyed the economic balm from defense spend-

Entertainers perform for an enthusiastic crowd that has gathered for a war bond drive in Winfield.



ing.<sup>6</sup> Although suffering the handicap of a Republican state dealing with a Democratic administration, Kansas received a surprisingly generous share. Its advantages in the scramble for government money included ambitious and adroit entrepreneurs, educated and mechanically adept workers, geographic invulnerability for a burgeoning defense industry, and politicians who unabashedly aided businesses in the contract thicket.

State officials and the Kansas congressional delegation displayed singular aggressiveness in seeking

defense contracts. With key figures like Senator Capper and Rep. Clifford Hope prying open doors, Gov. Payne H. Ratner was in Washington "chasing from one defense official to another." Kansas was awash in contracts. Wichita had the highest per capita war contract volume of any American city, and many towns and smaller cities shared the economic largess.

Snaring defense business nearly eliminated any traces of the Great Depression, but it was also responsible for strains of urban overcrowding, inadequate facili-

ties in military towns, and serious labor shortages. Many of the dislocations associated with the war years actually occurred earlier in Kansas. Hired hands left farms in alarming numbers, cowboys defected from the range for defense plants, and teachers abandoned one-room schools in droves leaving the Kansas Board of Education no alternative in 1941 except to lower requirements to teach.

Enjoying high wages and strong crop prices, eager Kansas 1941 Christmas shoppers found bargains in profusion and credit easy. Stores advertised men's suits at \$16.50, women's cotton dresses at \$1.00, and fur coats for fashion-conscious women at \$99.50. Among the popular children's gifts were fully dressed eighteen-inch dolls for \$1.98, and the All Wheels Ball Bearing Velocipede (tricycle) with "all the little extras children adore" sold for a mere \$9.90. Whereas the liv-

6. A summary on the amount of Kansas war contracts is in the *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 16, 1945. Representative sources on Kansas aggressiveness in obtaining contracts and the consequences of defense spending include "They Also Share," *Business Week* (May 3, 1941): 18, 20; "Midwestern Realists," *Fortune* 16 (October 1942): 93-96, 190, 198; Denver Lindley, "War in the Heart of Kansas," *Colliers* 110 (November 14, 1942): 16-17, 38-40; *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 28, 1941; *Topeka State Journal*, July

31, 1941. Capper's offer "to render all possible service" to state bidders on Topeka air base contracts is one example of his eagerness to abet businesses. Arthur Capper to Edgar W. Degan, January 8, 1942, Arthur Capper Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society. Revealing on the political stalking is the *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 30, 1941. Many newspapers, particularly those of Kansas City, Wichita and Topeka, record the economic story.



ing standard normally declines in warring nations, the Christmas boom forecast its rise in America.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, Kansans awoke to sunshine and unseasonably mild weather. High temperatures reached near sixty degrees that day. Aware that they could be pulled into the vortex of war anytime, Kansans still went about Sunday preparations without particular foreboding. If war preparations had modified some Kansas features, others were largely unaffected. A still predominantly rural state, many farmers and ranchers had chores before they could look forward to church and rest. Milking, feeding stock, and the other routine farm jobs were done that morning largely as they had been for generations—tediously and by hand. Electricity and mechanization had not yet eased the monotony, grueling toil, and long hours for many farm families.

Kansas towns and cities enjoyed a life made easier with conveniences unavailable in the country. Although about two-fifths of the state's population was designated as urban in 1940, the statistic obscures the fact that most people lived in small towns.<sup>7</sup> Ranked sixty-ninth among American cities, Kansas City was the most populous urban enclave. Whereas Hutchinson and Salina, for example, qualified as cities by Kansas standards, the rest of the nation probably regarded these entities with limited populations and small-town atmospheres as little

7. A statistical profile of Kansas is easily extracted from various volumes of the *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943).

more than overgrown settlements. Kansans, urban and rural, shared many old-fashioned experiences and beliefs.

Many diligent churchgoers resided in Kansas in 1941; on December 7 many persons picked up a newspaper or turned on the radio after services while waiting for Sunday dinner. At Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands seven thousand miles away, early risers were considering breakfast, and American military forces were at a high-level alert. Shattering the deceptive calm at 7:55 A.M., Japanese aircraft roared in to strafe and bomb army installations, airfields, and anchored ships. It was 11:55 A.M. in Kansas. The Pearl Harbor generation can instantly recall what they were doing and how they learned of the attack. Immediate reactions varied; however, persons were generally shocked but not surprised, angry but not hateful, upset but not uncontrolled.

On December 8 Kansans seemed normal, even nearly complacent, as they waited to learn of their government's response to the attack. The *Topeka Daily Capital* reported "business as usual" downtown.<sup>8</sup> Thousands of persons on the streets displayed no emotion and "were apparently unconcerned about the world shaking events." When the president signed the declaration of war at 3:12 P.M., "nothing happened." But while Kansans stolidly attended to affairs, "a stream of young men poured in and out, hour after hour" at army and navy recruiting offices in Topeka and elsewhere.

Pearl Harbor instantaneously united Kansans for the duration.

8. *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 8, 1941.

"When the country was suddenly attacked," Dodge City newspaper editor J.C. Denious wrote Capper, "it . . . brought immediately the support of the entire population. . . . The people want the entire enterprise of war undertaken on as large a scale as we can manage and . . . the notion of the people is that it should be fought through to a finish."<sup>9</sup> While recalling his own resolve to subordinate personal interests to the war effort, dairyman Orville Hoch remembered that "everyone was willing to let partisanship go by the wayside, work together . . . to win the war, and get it over with."<sup>10</sup>

The abrupt shift of public opinion was reflected in civilian defense programs in which Kansans had earlier displayed faint enthusiasm. Following Washington, D.C., directives, the Kansas Council of Defense beseeched citizens before Pearl Harbor to enroll in classes ranging from first-aid to air raid warden training. Even a simulated attack on Topeka by Fort Riley troops and the easy capture of Governor Ratner prompted few volunteers, partly due to fear of derision by neighbors.<sup>11</sup>

Within days of Pearl Harbor, however, two hundred thousand men and women had signed up, exceeding two-fifths of the adult population. When eleven thousand Topekans volunteered in three days, a shortage of forms delayed registration. Not every scoffer disappeared, but the enormous rally to civilian defense con-

9. J.C. Denious to Capper, December 8, 1941, Capper Papers.

10. Orville Hoch, interview with author, March 4, 1986.

11. "Topeka Taken," *Time* 38 (November 24, 1941): 44, 46. Highly informative on civilian defense is *Civilian Defense Clippings, 1941-1957*, v. 1, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

Producing and conserving food supplies were major home-front programs. Joining these efforts was Governor Schoeppel's wife, Marie (left), who headed a canning project at the governor's mansion.



vincingly refutes the pejorative view that the state was among the "oases of apathy" during the war.<sup>12</sup>

Although demonstrably inexperienced, thousands of air raid wardens were on duty several days after December 7. Municipalities required only slightly longer to field civilian defense teams with fire-fighting, police and medical outfits, and with units to deal with public health services, food, clothing, shelter, and utilities. Frequent drills sharpened proficiency.

Officials expressed fear of enemy nuisance air raids, sabotage, and gas attacks by suicide squads. Railroads, key bridges, communication lines, and defense facilities were immediately placed under guard, lasting for the duration in some cases. Governor Rattner ordered state law enforcement agencies and appealed to the

American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Spanish-American War veterans to "be on the alert" against the dangers of disloyal citizens and saboteurs.<sup>13</sup>

Air raid drills and practice blackouts, notoriously inept at first, became community events. Unscheduled power failures from electrical storms caused great excitement, nearly panic, in some locations. Defense against attack was a natural immediate reaction, but exercises to confound and repel the enemy and vigilance against possible internal foes were never more than a minor part of the civilian war effort, and they diminished as the threat became remote. The only enemy penetration of Kansas occurred when a Japanese balloon landed on a farm near Bigelow. The farmer wanted the balloon for a haystack cover

but reluctantly surrendered it to authorities.<sup>14</sup>

Kansans spent vastly greater time and energy on tasks like collecting scarce materials and selling war bonds to support the war than on civilian defense. Significantly, these projects promoted and heightened public unity resulting from a common threat. The *Topeka Daily Capital* expressed the popular belief that the civilian defense program would be "worthwhile" if its sole result were to "break down the barriers between neighbors."<sup>15</sup> Organized under the Kansas Council of Defense, with auxiliaries in each of the 105 counties and 589 incorporated towns and cities, grass roots war-related programs often touched every person.

Examples abound. American Legion posts led blood drives to

12. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?*, 61-62.

13. *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 24, 1941.

14. *Ibid.*, August 16, 1945.

15. *Ibid.*, February 9, 1942.



aid wounded servicemen. Local schools offered rooms in which volunteers sewed items for troops. Red Cross groups wrapped bandages, knitted clothing, and packed gift boxes for military personnel overseas. Public libraries sponsored "Victory Book" campaigns, with local women collecting reading materials for soldiers, sailors, and marines. Civilian volunteers served troops at USO canteens on military posts, in towns and cities, and at railroad and bus stations. Teresa DeLong remembered that facilities at train depots operated by groups like the Army Mothers were "a wonderful thing. People baked cookies, gathered up magazines, and took all kinds of things down to be given to troops on trains that went through."<sup>16</sup>

A necessity for many families during the Great Depression, vegetable gardens were dubbed Victory Gardens after Pearl Harbor. They quickly became a conspicuous and successful symbol of the civilian war contribution. Initial government fears that V-Gardens would waste seed, fertilizer, and insecticides were expelled by high yields the first year of planting. In 1943 gardens accounted for one-quarter of the country's total food production and one-half of the commercial total of canned vegetables. Consequently, the government optimistically envisaged Americans tilling twenty million garden plots.<sup>17</sup>

16. Teresa DeLong, interview with author, March 4, 1986.

17. Victory Gardens were ubiquitous in both popular and technical writings. As examples, see "Victory Gardens," *Life* 14 (May 3, 1943): 28-29; F.F. Rockwell, "Wanted 20,000,000 Gardens," *Saturday Evening Post* 215 (February

Attesting both to patriotism and food shortages, V-Gardens flourished in Kansas. With the shortage of available ground in towns and cities, municipal governments found vacant lots for urban dwellers. School yards were cultivated, and the Santa Fe railroad opened tracts with space enough for as many as thirty persons to work one plot. Whereas participation in specialized programs was often according to age and gender, gardens were commonly family projects. Tips for gardeners ranging from beginners to experts were distributed by gardening clubs and published in newspapers, which meticulously reported on local plots. With 17,710 cultivated gardens in 1943, Topeka was indicative of the state trend.

Youth were assiduously snared in the war effort. Within two weeks of Pearl Harbor, officials announced plans to mobilize fifty thousand boys and girls in 4-H, Future Farmers of America, Boy Scouts, Future Homemakers, and Girl Scouts.<sup>18</sup> These groups often had key duties in an array of activities, and nearly every school also enlisted students in the war-related programs. Volunteers in the Topeka High Victory Corps, for example, earned credit for graduation by baby-sitting for women in defense work and delivering Western Union messages.<sup>19</sup>

Countless youngsters had experiences similar to those of Ray Call, whose family lived in Sedan.

6, 1943): 12-13, 68; "18,000,000 Gardens for Victory," *Popular Mechanics* 79 (May 1943): 1-6; various features in *Publishers' Weekly* 145 (March 11, 1944); *Emporia Gazette*, June 13, 1942, February 2, 1943, January 22, 1944; and the *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 6, 1943. An interesting Wichita project is discussed in G. D. Wilkins, "War Housing Victory Gardens," *Recreation* 38 (August 1944): 232, 272.

18. *Kansas City Times*, December 20, 1941.

19. *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 25, 1942.

The *Emporia Gazette* editor remembered that he had avidly collected scrap metals, rubber, rags, and paper in multifarious drives, conscientiously saved tin cans, and regularly bought defense stamps at school: "Kids couldn't afford . . . a war bond, but we could bring . . . a dime or a quarter and buy a stamp. Week by week, we would accumulate first a dollar [in stamps], then five dollars, then ten dollars, and eventually we would have . . . enough in stamps so we could buy a bond."<sup>20</sup>

Picking milkweed pods was a special contribution by Kansas children. The Japanese had occupied Java, the island that supplied the kapok filling used in life jackets; with the prewar supply of the material nearly exhausted, the U.S. Department of Agriculture started harvesting the milkweed substitute in June 1944. Just twenty-eight ounces of the white fluffy fiber buoyed a person for 140 hours, and state coordinator C.F. Gladfelter expected a yield of twenty-five carloads, enough for fifty thousand life vests.<sup>21</sup> Primarily children were recruited to tramp the fields. Depositing pods from one of the ten "bad weeds," so designated by Kansas agricultural experts, in fifty-pound mesh onion bags, pickers were paid the bountiful sum of twenty cents for each bag.

The war effort was defined in compelling terms that required change in society to wage war with greater spirit, skill, and acumen. This was evident in programs to strengthen the family, increase educational opportunities

20. Ray Call, interview with author, May 23, 1986.

21. C.F. Gladfelter, "Milkweed Floss Collection in Kansas," *Kansas Academy of Science Transactions* 49 (1946): 217-28; *Emporia Gazette*, May 20, 1944.

for both youngsters and adults, and provide better public health and nutrition. Victory required a society of well educated, physically fit, and socially responsible persons. This appeal was successful on behalf of programs that might have been strongly resisted or received only grudging support in peacetime. World War II is not usually perceived as a time of expanded social consciousness and responsibility, but that was the case in Kansas.

The war both created social problems and enlarged and intensified extant ones to the point they could not be avoided. Often in conjunction with state and national organizations, local defense councils and an array of groups began programs to aid children, strengthen families, assist needy persons, and engender community unity and morale. Countless locations adopted unprecedented programs, essentially in proportion to the amount of war-induced strain.

Staggered by wartime problems, Wichita probably set the record. Multifarious activities promoting family life and personal growth were sponsored by the Wichita PTA. One of the first nutrition committees in America was organized by the Wichita Family Life Program to train leaders for PTA classes, help welfare families, and offer an exemplary food preparation program for boarded defense workers. Even institutions like the Wichita Public Library, which provided bookmobile services to factories and manned book stations during shift breaks, accommodated wartime realities. Self-help centers offered recreation and stressed cooperation to raise community spirits. Many children enjoyed day care arranged by the staff of Wichita Wartime Child



Civilian volunteers served troops at USO canteens at military installations across Kansas. This trio performed at Strother Army Air Field in Winfield.

Care. One North Wichita neighborhood council started its day-care center, had a home garden project, offered weekday Bible school, and planned the local Christmas celebration.<sup>22</sup>

The need for programs like those noted above was apparent, as no social institution experienced greater wartime stress than the family. Of family members experiencing duress, children were a special concern. According to the

Kansas Council for Children (KCC), the war had sharply "accentuated many problems of health, education and welfare for the children and youth."<sup>23</sup> The council fretted specifically about escalating

22. Information on community groups and programs pervades Wichita newspapers. See also, for example, Muriel W. Brown, "Community Action to Meet Family Needs," *Journal of Home Economics* 34 (September 1942): 440-41; Ruth E. Hammond, "Libraries and the War Program," *Library Journal* 67 (May 15, 1943): 465.

23. Statement in the introduction of a pamphlet entitled *Kansas Children in Wartime* published by the council in January 1943. Highly respected in the public welfare field, Ester Twente headed the Kansas Council for Children. Files on Twente are in the Kansas University Archives, Lawrence. A worthwhile nationwide contemporary view is presented in Frances Merrill, ed., *Social Problems on the Home Front: A Study of War-time Influences* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945). A sound policy survey is Leroy Ashby, "The Depression and World War II," in *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook*, ed. Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 489-531.



rates of juvenile delinquency, emotional disorders, and school dropouts. Unseparated families also had abundant problems. Parents often worked long and irregular hours, and neglected "latchkey" children had ample opportunities for wayward diversions.

Organized by fifty state bodies on October 28, 1942, the sprawling KCC formulated ambitious policies to ease deprivation of the young and strengthen society's investment in its progeny. The council criticized Kansas for lagging behind other states both in the quantity and quality of service. Striving to promote comprehensive programs in every field related to the welfare of the young, the KCC offered a model blueprint to the state legislature, which was later adopted, and encouraged local groups and schools to compensate for family dislocations with additional activities, summer programs, and greater supervision.

One laudatory response was the creation of the Sons of Victory to deal with a temporary problem that had possible long-term consequences.<sup>24</sup> Noting the struggles of boys to adjust to the situation of fathers away in the military, Topeka junior high principal M.J. Whitson believed that a school-administered program was necessary to fill the void that family members and friends could not. Surrogate fathers were recruited to eat lunch regularly with boys at school and play basketball and baseball afterward. Tennis, bowling, hiking, and field trips were typical Saturday outings. Although providing a wholesome routine, the pro-

24. Floyd B. Nichols, "Sons of Victory," *Hygeia* 22 (October 1944): 748-49, 799.

gram's key aim was to foster guidance and companionship from adults in whom the boys could readily confide. Due to the youngsters' enthusiasm, the Sons of Victory spread from school to school, and the Daughters of Victory was organized to lend girls adult emotional support. Mothers lavishly praised the "intelligent attention" and "inspiration" their children received.

War also affected well-adjusted children with normal home lives. They conscientiously imitated elders at war even in their play. Described by the *Topeka Daily Capital* as the "most enthusiastic military organization to be formed in Kansas," the Potwin Home Guard included "one captain, a dozen top sergeants, and two overworked rear-rank privates." Recruited by an eleven-year-old boy, the Potwin Home Guard trained "feverishly . . . for any eventuality."<sup>25</sup> Ray Call reflected on this apparently harmless play: "We really began to take on the roles of soldiers . . . and have mock battles. We really had very accurate copies of weapons . . . and we were encouraged to play with them, because there was a great patriotic spirit and this was fostered in the children."<sup>26</sup>

Eventually, as with many others, the war became real to Call, who remembered that the fright-

25. *Topeka Daily Capital*, January 1, 1942. Sessions of the "Kansas at War: The Home Front, 1940-1945" conference, August 10-14, 1992, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, were highly informative on children and adolescents. Dan Holt, Nel Richmond, and Marilyn Holt presented excellent papers on the theme "Growing Up During World War II." Strongly recommended is William M. Tuttle, Jr., "The Homefront Children's Popular Culture," in *Small Worlds: Children & Adolescents in America, 1850-1950*, ed. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 143-63.

26. Call interview.

ening stories his uncle told while on military leave "began to sink in, and I began to understand the horror of war." Seeing his trembling uncle reduced to "a nervous basket case" was a "terrible and a vivid experience. From that point on . . . I began to understand . . . war was hell."

It would be erroneous to conclude that the mass of Kansas children became either miscreants or neurotics. Their wartime experience was nearly idyllic compared with children in other parts of the globe who routinely knew deep sacrifice, suffering and danger, and the plight of the latter is the compelling stuff of one Kansas human interest story.

A nagging premonition of danger to his three pre-teenage children during the 1940 German blitz motivated suburban Londoner Stanley Fletcher's desperate appeal to the generosity of Hutchinson, Kansas, of which he had scarcely heard and where he knew no one.<sup>27</sup> Many families in the reputedly anti-British town eagerly volunteered to raise the children for the duration. After bureaucratic delays and red tape, lawyer, businessman, farmer, and new "uncle" A. Lewis Oswald met Nigel, Patricia, and Jacqueline at the Kansas City Union Station. Hutchinson had nearly gone into mourning earlier when the chil-

27. Hubert Kelley, "The Pilgrims Land in America," *American Magazine* 141 (March 1946): 32-35, 102-5, describes the Fletcher-Oswald experience in human interest style. John Oswald, interview with author, July 31, 1992. Raised with the refugee children, Oswald was twelve at the beginning of the war. For a wider view, see Joyce Statler, comp., *Special Relations: Transatlantic Letters Linking Three English Evacuees and Their Families, 1940-1945* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1990). Adoption of English "war orphans" was rare, and only two cases are known in Kansas.

Scrap drives, such as this one in Coffee County, were supported by many Kansans who saved and collected tons of metal, rubber, waste paper, tin cans, used fats, and other salvagable products.



dren were feared lost on a torpedoed British evacuation ship.

Adapting to an unfamiliar routine of farm work, household chores, and attending a two-room school, the children blended with their temporary family, which had two boys and a girl, and Kansas accents even seeped into their speech. Back in Great Britain, the Fletchers reciprocated for their children's care by converting their dining room into a dormitory and allowing as many as six American servicemen the run of the house.

Evacuating the children saved their lives. While safe in Hutchinson, they received news that bombs had hit the portion of the house in which they stayed; had they been there they almost certainly would have been killed. Children and parents were reunited in Kansas after the war.

While becoming more socially conscious, Kansans also were becoming more patriotic. Governmental and private groups lost no

opportunity to arouse patriotism. Appeals to work harder and longer, save scrap metal, and live cheerfully with rationing gas, tires, and sugar were wrapped in patriotic symbols and rhetoric. Susceptibility to these appeals is reflected in the fact that Kansas was one of the top three states in the 1942 national scrap drive. Nearly every standard of conduct and expression was judged on whether it was conducive to or detracted from the war effort. Patriotism enveloped Kansas, and any reservations either about the war or its rightness were not evident.

Extreme wartime patriotism could have led to intolerance and grave abuses against groups and individuals whose loyalty, often for baseless reasons, was suspect. This frequently had happened in Kansas in World War I but was nearly unknown in World War II. Tolerance, it appeared, was on the increase. Black Kansans were second-class citizens before the war,

which was apparent in widespread discrimination and the wall of social separation between white and black. In 1941 Governor Ratner supported full participation of black citizens in defense programs, the small first breach in the racial system. Like all Kansans, blacks performed the patriotic duties of collecting scrap, selling war bonds, and knitting for servicemen. They joined civilian defense groups, often segregated, and expressed pride in the organization of a black unit of the Kansas State Guard.<sup>28</sup> But this was more a hope

28. A. Russell Buchanan, *Black Americans in World War II* (Santa Barbara: Clio Books, 1977), is an informative survey. The range of black activity in the war effort is described in the *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 30, 1942. For the early wartime views of black Kansans, see *Topeka's Kansas American*, which halted publication on May 8, 1942, when publisher Eugene Lucus enlisted in the army, and the *Plaindealer*, a Kansas City, Kans., weekly. The Japanese seem to be the sole group subjected to greater and not less enmity as the result of the war. According to the *Topeka State Journal*, April 1, 1942, for example, highway patrolmen were ordered to bar Japanese from the state.



for the future than a reflection of dramatic change.

With all this interest in the war effort, Kansans did their best to "carry on," to do as they had always done. Many ordinary things acquired greater significance because they symbolized the purpose of the war and had greater poignancy because of the absence of loved ones. Adjustments, of course, had to be made, especially for wartime shortages and rationing.

Children and adults sacrificed equally. Ray Call remembered the "hardship" of enduring "substitute candy" in place of Hershey's and Snickers bars. "The worst was a ribbon bar. It was a little red, white, and blue coconut kind of a thing that . . . tasted like shoe-leather."<sup>29</sup> With the limited availability of commercial booze, some Kansans resorted to making their own. L.E. Garrison of Abilene wrote a friend in the military that "Duffy & I made a batch of 'Kickapoo juice.' It is really pretty good. It tastes like a dry wine."<sup>30</sup>

Rationing affected every Kansan, and often necessitated that citizens make do and do without. Common items like sugar, meat, and gas had to be paid for in both money and ration coupons, and local rationing boards often had to grant special permission for the purchase of scarce items. No wonder many Kansans forewent the status of serving on these boards to avoid the risk of offending neighbors and friends.

One couple passed out homemade "white lightning" at their

chivaree because candy was unavailable. Their wedding cake was made of sugar saved over a long period, and a short honeymoon trip was possible because they received a ration stamp for five gallons of gas as a wedding gift. Car pools, bans on outdoor Christmas lights, and cancellation of church dinners were ways that Kansans tried to conserve and thereby demonstrate their patriotism. Kansans, like other Americans, were asked to sacrifice without complaint. But cases of actual deprivation were rare, if they happened at all.

Some Kansans grumbled about rationing, usually with good humor, and a few resorted to evasion. Although the scale of the black market and violations in the state is impossible to ascertain, the greatest amount of transgressions appears to have been of the petty variety. A typical practice, admitted to years later by some store owners, was to save a shirt, women's hose, or a steak for special long-time customers.<sup>31</sup>

Among the important consequences of World War II was its permanent imprint on the Kansas countryside. An exodus depleted the farm population from 607,000 in 1940 to 495,000 in 1945. Technological and economic influences responsible for this declining rural population were not necessarily new, but the exigencies of war made them stronger. Cora Phelps recalled: "I'd been down at Fredonia running a farm while my husband was in Montana. . . . I was down there until I couldn't keep help. They discovered Boeing paid more than I could so they kept

going. . . . I finally wrote my husband and told him I was going to sell off the portable stuff, and I was going along with the help."<sup>32</sup>

Although farm population was dropping, agricultural production was rising dramatically. According to Pete Maley, "We began to gear up for high production out on the farm." Taking advantage of the available technology, he remembered that "We plowed up everything from fence row to fence row."<sup>33</sup> Kansas farm productivity surpassed the national average during the war years. Nearly all the afflictions of farmers in the Great Depression and Dust Bowl abruptly disappeared with the war boom. Crop surpluses that dragged down prices were consigned to memory. High prices, backed by government supports, apparently infinite markets for crops, and patriotism induced farmers to stretch production to the limit. The Kansas State Board of Agriculture cited production records as evidence of "the tremendous contribution of Kansas toward the inevitable victorious conclusion of World War II."<sup>34</sup>

32. Cora Phelps, interview with author, August 1, 1986. An informative survey that includes World War II is Gilbert C. Fite, *American Farmers: The New Minority* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1981). No thorough and intensive study of Kansas agriculture is available, but two useful sources are Dorothy Belle Guggell, "The Impact of Two Wars Upon Trends in Kansas Agriculture" (Master's thesis, Kansas State University, 1946); and Gary Walker Rumsey, "The Influence of Technology on the Productivity of Kansas Agriculture" (Master's thesis, Kansas State University, 1960). Joyce Thierer, "The Home Furrow: Kansas Farming During World War II" (Paper delivered at the "Kansas at War: The Home Front, 1940-1945" conference) is a nicely done survey. Essential information in profusion is available for 1939 through 1946 in the thirty-second through the thirty-fifth biennial reports of the Kansas Board of Agriculture, and they are the sources for nearly all statistics cited.

33. Alvin (Pete) Maley, interview with author, May 23, 1986.

34. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Thirty-Fourth Biennial Report* (Topeka: 1944): 7.

29. Call interview.

30. L.E. Garrison to Maynard R. Hoffman, November 18, 1944. Letter in the possession of Hannah Garrison, Abilene, Kans.

31. Various sessions of the "Kansas at War: The Home Front, 1940-1945" conference had detailed and frank discussions on rationing, including the topic of evasion. Also, newspapers are replete with information on rationing.

The acute shortage of agricultural workers led to using German prisoners of war on farms and ranches. Here POWs work in the fields of the Fort Hays Agricultural Experiment Station.



Affluence was a new experience for Kansas farmers who had their highest cash incomes in history during World War II. The \$595 million they received in 1942, for example, was more than double the average for the years between 1936 and 1940. Increased farm income can best be comprehended in personal items. In the depths of the depression, farmers struggled to stay in business, lived on credit, and went without basic necessities. Some farmers made enough in World War II to pay income taxes and have the security of savings. They could escape crushing mortgages, add acreage to farms, and even afford higher quality vice—one farmer recalled that he was aware things were better when he could afford commercially-made hooch instead of bootleg.

Although old-fashioned methods lingered, farming was rapidly becoming more scientific and increasingly mechanized. The all-purpose tractor in use by 1940 is one example. Lighter and with greater power than earlier models,

its pneumatic or rubber tires resulted in better traction, lower fuel consumption, fewer repairs, and gear ratios enabling highway speeds of between twelve and twenty miles per hour (compared with three miles per hour for horse teams). Proliferation of bigger and more efficient equipment specifically designed for tractors also increased cultivated acres with less labor and higher yields.

The rise of the custom combining industry was one consequence of the war. Combines were in short supply, and the government would not allow production on the scale needed. Some custom combining outfits had traveled the region before the war, but now a class of professional custom cutters followed ripening wheat from Texas to Canada. Still, technology could not offset the shortage of labor.<sup>35</sup>

By 1943 the government identified the "seriously depleted" farm labor supply as one of the coun-

try's gravest problems. Desperate farmers and ranchers scrambled for any available workers, and the search for labor solutions was among the most interesting of the Kansas home-front phenomena. Relatives and friends afforded willing farm hands, although not necessarily highly skilled. This volunteer labor source was essential, but farmers sometimes appeared ungrateful. L.E. Garrison stopped spontaneously after work to help with the wheat harvest on the A.S. Merrill farm. After a stint operating the combine, Garrison confided to a friend that Merrill complained, "I wasn't worth a damn—however, when I told him I was worth perhaps all he was paying me, he didn't have much to say."<sup>36</sup>

With women as the largest untapped labor source, the government (as it had successfully done in World War I) mobilized city women to replenish the dwindling

35. Thomas D. Isern, *Custom Combining on the Great Plains: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981).

36. L.E. Garrison to John Chain, July 3, 1944. Letter in the possession of Hannah Garrison.



supply of farm workers. Of the recruiting organizations nationwide, the most important was created in 1943 within the purview of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. County extension agents, with the cooperation of government agencies, colleges, groups and clubs, enlisted women in the Women's Land Army of America (WLA).<sup>37</sup> Approximately 360,000 women volunteered for farm work on either a permanent or regular part-time basis. Although making an effort to recruit city women, the WLA shifted its Kansas emphasis to women already on the farms.

As males departed from Kansas agriculture, farm wives and daughters assumed their jobs. Women inexperienced in outside work had to learn to operate heavy machinery, and those women who helped in the fields and with livestock before the war carried even greater burdens. In nearly every case, these duties were added to the already strenuous regimen of the typical farm woman. Consequently, the principal WLA aim was to instruct women on subjects from family nutrition to farm safety whereby they could deal efficiently with their additional chores.

Family and friends, however, seldom made up the total labor deficit. Youngsters who organized early in the war to collect scrap and baby-sit for mothers working in war plants also helped fill the labor void. Examples include the Boys Labor Brigade, which received time off from school to pick corn, and the Victory Corps at Topeka High, which released stu-

dents from classes and gave course credit for performing agricultural labor. In 1943 farmers counted on the help of twenty-five thousand Kansas Boy Scouts.

The acute shortage of agricultural workers led to one of the most unusual episodes of the war—the use of German prisoners of war on farms and ranches.<sup>38</sup> POWs performed a variety of jobs including harvesting potatoes, dressing turkeys, milking cows, and shocking kafir corn; many Kansas farmers testified that the prisoners saved their crops. Kansans liked the polite, good humored, and industrious POWs who were grateful for the generosity and kindness of their unchosen employers.

The experience changed the perceptions and attitudes of both groups. Kansans learned to judge the POWs on their individual qualities, and not on the grotesque philosophy of the nation they served. Prisoners received a practical lesson in democracy and often acquired a genuine fondness for the American way. Former POWs and Kansans still exchange recollections and news by mail, and some have visited each other. The return of former POWs to reaffirm friendships has even been the occasion of community celebrations. Imbued with the American dream, some prisoners returned to become citizens, raise families, and enjoy the freedom, opportunity, and vast open spaces that had impressed them as POWs.

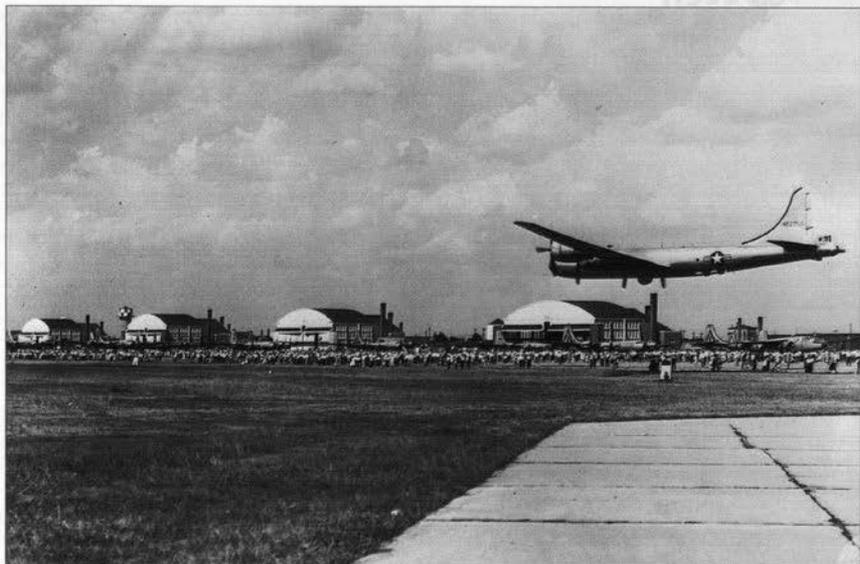
38. Patrick G. O'Brien, Thomas D. Isern, and R. Daniel Lumley, "Stalag Sunflower: German Prisoners of War in Kansas," *Kansas History* 7 (Autumn 1984): 182-98. Local newspapers are often informative on POW camps in the vicinity. The interesting history of the camp at Elkhart, for example, can be traced in the *Elkhart Tri-State News*.

37. Caron Smith, "The Women's Land Army During World War II," *Kansas History* 14 (Summer 1991): 82-88.

The change that World War II brought to the farms of Kansas hastened an agricultural revolution that continues today. But change came not just to the farms of Kansas, but to the towns and cities as well. About 40 percent of the state's population was urban in 1940, but that increased to slightly above 52 percent as a consequence of World War II. Only 12 percent urban in 1940, Johnson County surpassed 70 percent by 1950. The huge urban population influx created enormous problems of both physical accommodation and social adjustment.

Of the small towns, one strongly affected by the war was Eudora, which found itself a neighbor of the rapidly expanding Sunflower Ordnance Works. Housing was constructed near the plant works, but Eudora was the closest town, and the Sunflower workers flocked there in search of recreation. In early 1943 a USO club was established with headquarters in the old opera house. The *Lawrence Journal-World* later reported that the building had no plumbing; nevertheless, luncheons and dinners were served successfully, even though "water had to be carried from neighboring restaurants." The club sponsored lectures, classes, parties, and held checker and ping-pong tournaments. Graveyard-shift workers were served meals when they came off at 7:30 A.M., and second-shift workers who left the plant at 11:30 P.M. could dance until 2:30 in the morning. At times, as many as three hundred people crowded the tiny hall. On occasion a USO orchestra, directed by Prof. Russell Wiley of the University of Kansas band, provided concerts. In June 1943 an expanded facility opened, but workers had begun to move out.

Much of the war effort focused on aircraft production. The revolutionary B-29 superfortress was manufactured by Boeing in Wichita and tested, as shown here, at the Smoky Hill Air Force Base in Salina.



A year later the club was closed, and its popular director, Alice Moe, was transferred to other duties. Before she left, the high school student body and faculty gave her a compact, and the city of Eudora presented her with a sapphire pin.<sup>39</sup>

Wichita became one of the main wartime industrial cities in the country. Rapid expansion of the aircraft industry was responsible for a spiraling economic boom. Compelled by government policy and lured by jobs and high wages, new workers from Kansas farms and small towns and the surrounding states engulfed the city, whose population nearly doubled during the war. Nowhere in Kansas was urbanization more obvious and of greater consequence. The population shift strained Wichita to the limit.

39. *Lawrence Journal-World*, June 17, 1944; *Topeka Capital-Journal*, September 15, 1985.

*New York Herald Tribune* writer Kunigunde Duncan described the

"nightmare" of too many people in stores, on buses, at the bank, gas, water and electricity pay windows. It takes forever to get nothing done. There are too many traffic tangles and accidents, too few lodgings for airplane workers, too few seats in school rooms. There is increase in crime, and streets are now trash-laden. It is a headache to try to telephone.<sup>40</sup>

Inadequate housing was probably the severest problem. Appropriately called "hot-flops," board-

40. Quoted in Craig Miner, ed., *The Wichita Reader: A Collection of Writing About a Prairie City* (Wichita: Wichita Eagle and Beacon Publishing, 1992), 94. Wichita received extensive national publicity on its growth problems and as a key defense manufacturer. Russell E. McClure, "Wichita Maps Program to Solve War Problems," *National Municipal Review* 31 (September 1942): 436-37, describes the city's blueprint for coping.

ing houses were common in which beds were always warm from being slept in in straight shifts. Paying generous rewards for leads on rentals, persons were grateful to find even wretched facilities. One Wichitan remembered that "old sheds and garages were converted for housing. Basements had one, two, or three apartments added. People just came from everywhere, and . . . put up with phenomenal conditions. . . . They just stuck it out."<sup>41</sup>

A partial answer to the housing problem was to build the new town of Planeview on the Kansas prairie close to Wichita. Planeview, a war housing project for Wichita Boeing workers, was completed in fifteen months and became the seventh largest city in Kansas. Planeview had forty-four hundred dwellings and twenty thousand residents, a million-gallon water reservoir, 117

41. Gird interview.



## BOEING

miles of sidewalks, parks, schools, playgrounds, and something new: the first shopping center in the Wichita area.<sup>42</sup>

The "miracle" community was a good example of institutional adaptation to wartime exigencies. Planeview's institutional practices were to reflect the particular and urgent needs of workers and their families. When convention interfered, it was disregarded. Schools, for example, completely revised schedules and activities and expanded operations to include day-care nurseries for children of working mothers. The Planeview experience was duplicated throughout Kansas and the country. War changed the needs of society, and institutions responded with new services and revised operations to mirror the new realities.

Wichita adapted to the population explosion, often with ingenuity. City traffic signals were set at thirty-two seconds to enable bigger sidewalk crowds to safely cross streets. The sewage-treatment plant was reconditioned to handle a population of two hundred thousand and the new housing developments and industry. Services such as restaurants, movie theatres, and bowling alleys never closed. Social adjustments were commonly more difficult than the physical. Although reflecting a "cross-section of America," newcomers wrenched the community life known by longtime residents, and they caused

42. A short description of the physical layout of Planeview is in "Streets, Utilities, and Community Facilities in a Large War Housing Project," *American City* 59 (August 1944): 73-74. An example of the Planeview accommodation to residents is in "Social Health and Physical Education," *Education for Victory* 3 (July 20, 1944): 19.

some grumbling.<sup>43</sup> Often just off of farms, the newcomers typically had few acquaintances, and they were unaccustomed to organized community life and group activity. Wichita, as well as many smaller towns with a similar problem, used existing institutions like schools to introduce the newcomers to neighbors, offer group events, or simply provide an opportunity to relax or pursue a hobby. Private enterprise also had its influence—Wichita even developed a nightlife, and one that threatened a Kansas tradition. Wichita historian Bill Ellington vividly recalled:

Dance halls were just going full blast. I can certainly relate to a quite popular one called the Blue Moon out near where the Boeing plant is today. The Blue Moon, of course, had great bands, even Glenn Gray and Charlie Stivak occasionally. It was common to carry in a bottle of booze and place it under the table... everyone did it. As long as it wasn't visible, that was the understanding.<sup>44</sup>

Wichita's spasms were due to the precipitant expansion of the aircraft industry. Whereas only 3 percent of the city's population relied on the industry for their livelihood in 1939, the proportion jumped to one-half by 1943. Of Cessna, Beechcraft, and Boeing, the last was the biggest story. Its Wichita operations in 1940 were basically confined to the manufac-

43. Phelps interview; Lula Reider, interview with author, March 17, 1987; Laura Newell, interview with author, May 5, 1992. Integration of the new population into Wichita is the subject of William H. Crawford, "Recreation in a Kansas Boom Town," *Recreation* 36 (February 1943): 637-38, 647-48.

44. Bill Ellington, interview with author, January 6, 1986.

ture of Kaydet trainers. In 1939 the Army Air Corps notified airframe companies that it had a "super-bomber" in mind and asked them to prepare estimates. The Boeing design won the competition, and the company built experimental models while it constructed a second Wichita plant ten times the size of the first to mass produce the bomber. Boeing engineers literally redefined principles in their field to create the B-29 "superfortress," which was called the most "perfect blending of harmonious parts ever achieved... in the science of aerodynamics." Built under tight security, Boeing delivered the first of more than sixteen hundred superfortresses in July 1943. The B-29 could fly faster, higher, and farther with a heavier pay load than any World War II bomber. More than four B-29s a day came off the Boeing assembly line at peak production. The Boeing work force jumped from seven hundred in 1940 to twenty-nine thousand in 1944.<sup>45</sup>

By 1943 thirty-one thousand women worked in the Wichita aircraft plants, many in jobs for which only men had earlier been thought suited. These women were mythologized in songs, movies, and posters as Rosie the Riveter.<sup>46</sup> They

45. John Zimmerman, *Aerospace: Wichita Perspective* (Wichita: Wichita Eagle, 1966), is highly informative. Produced by Wichita State University (1984-1985), *Oral History of Aviation and Wichita: The Thirties and War Years* is a video program of recollections. Copious literature is available on specific aspects of the Wichita aircraft industry, of which an interesting example is F.L. Novascone, "Aircraft Riveting and Assembling Course," *Industrial Arts and Vocational Education* 31 (March 1942): 102-4.

46. The topic of women during World War II has generated intense interest, sharp controversy, and voluminous literature. Standard accounts are Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War With America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Karen Anderson,

Due to the prevailing attitude of white society in the 1940s, African Americans endured segregation throughout the war. This USO center in Junction City was one of several in Kansas provided for black soldiers.



labored at drill presses wearing bib overalls and bandannas to defend America and win the war. Women adjusted quickly to the demands of new work. According to Cora Phelps:

You'd see women who had never done anything but housework in their lives. . . . They got some training, and they were working right along with the men. An awfully lot of women

were doing the riveting and that sort of thing. . . . I thought they did an awfully good job of converting to something that was totally strange.<sup>47</sup>

Many Rosies like Lula Reider and Laura Newell, one of the first three women hired in the Cessna machine shop, could not remember overt discrimination.<sup>48</sup> But Cora Phelps described the treatment of women as

just about what it is now down underneath. Men were used to being heads of families. If there was a good job they got it. A lot of them resented the women, but they knew they needed them. But sometimes you'd be surprised at the individuals who backed up the women. Some be-

lieved that women ought to be able to earn money, eat, and buy clothes just like a human being.

In all accounts of women aircraft workers, receiving their first paycheck was a memorable event. Laura Newell's \$18.56 check was two and a half times the amount she earned in a week as a waitress. They all testified that the experience changed them in both small and large ways: some acquired a preference for slacks even outside the factory, and others decided they would stay at work after the war. It was all part of the movement that helped change women's role in American society.

World War II spread Kansans to every corner of the world; it also brought tens of thousands of young men from every corner of America to learn the craft of war at Kansas military installations and colleges. They were usually ac-

47. Phelps interview, August 1, 1986.

48. Reider interview; Newell interview.

*Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); Margaret Randolph Higgonet, et al., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). For contemporary and retrospective views of women in the defense industry, see Frank J. Taylor, "Meet the Girls Who Keep 'Em Flying," *Saturday Evening Post* 214 (May 30, 1942): 30-31, 57-58; Sherna Berger Gluck, ed., *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, The War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987). On Wichita specifically, see *Kansas City Star*, September 10, 1943; *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, July 28, 1985.



corded Kansas hospitality. Of one town that had an air corps cadet unit stationed at the college, Orville Hoch testified that "the community went all out to make those boys welcome, and make their stay as pleasant as possible." As a consequence, "a great many of those boys came back, finished school, and some of them married, went into business, and are still here."<sup>49</sup> Military personnel and their families often became deeply assimilated, and sadness resulted from cutting close ties. While her husband was away in the service, Teresa DeLong lived in a building with four apartments, of which three were rented to the wives of cadets. "When any of their husbands marched down . . . to the Santa Fe station to be moved somewhere else," she recounted, "we'd all go and stand along the street and cry."<sup>50</sup>

Occasional strains in hospital-ity could be humorous. On February 27, 1943, Willard Brown, state senator from Emmet, Kansas, complained that bombers from the Topeka Air Force Base had dropped six bombs on his ranch, destroying a chicken house and frightening his hired hands enough that they threatened to quit. Learning the bombs were four miles off target, Willard asked the senate to pass a resolution against "poor marksmanship."

When the war began, Fort Riley was the principal Kansas training post. The fort had been nearly ideal in peacetime. According to the director of the U.S. Cavalry Museum:

49. Hoch interview.

50. DeLong interview.

You talk to people who were here at that time, and it was really a nice place. You had a lot of good social activities on post as well as the surrounding area. You had the polo teams. . . . They played against the teams from Wichita, Kansas City, and Oklahoma. Of course, there was the weekly fox hunting event. I've talked to a couple of boys who were raised here in the thirties, and the only mounted troop in boy scouts was right here. The kids went riding twice a week on every Wednesday and Saturday. They had the best instructors in the world at the Cavalry School, and used Cavalry School horses.<sup>51</sup>

Fort Riley's horse cavalry dated back to the frontier when it was part of the onslaught against Plains Indians. By the eve of World War II, many believed that the cavalry had outlived its usefulness. With the cavalry still ingrained in military doctrine, however, army preparations for war in 1940 included expanding the cavalry by reactivating Fort Riley's Camp Funston from World War I. Construction was frenzied: "Every 45 minutes they'd have another building done. It was mass production; just throw them together; and if you dropped a nail or your hammer, don't worry about it, keep on going. They needed the buildings."<sup>52</sup> This base expansion was to accommodate twenty-six thousand additional troops, and nearby towns were staggered by ten thousand new civilian construction workers plus twenty-six hundred new families.

51. Terry Van Meter, interview with author, May 8, 1986.

52. *Ibid.* Voluminous information is available in Fort Riley clippings, 1855-1941, v. 1, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

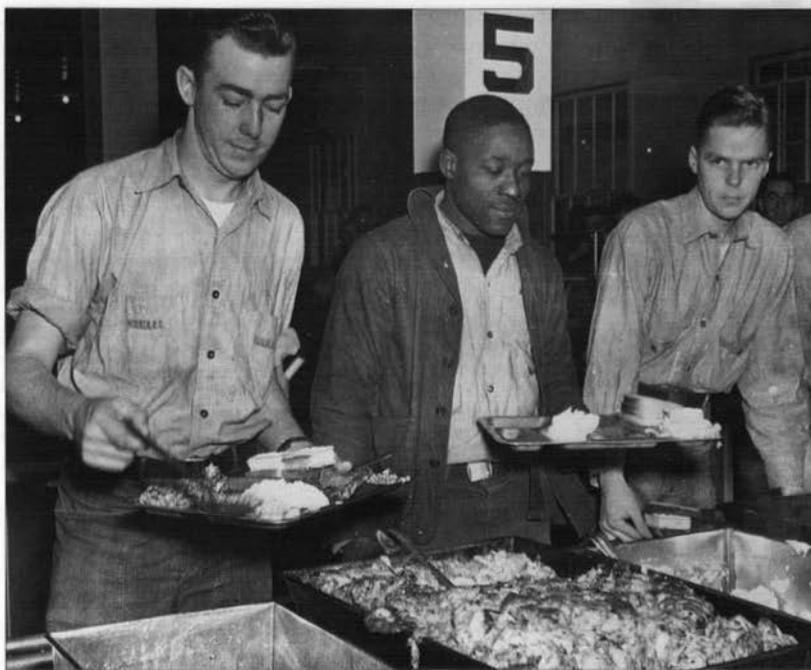
In 1940 the army reorganized the cavalry units stationed at Fort Riley into the Second Cavalry Division. It consisted of two white and two black regiments. The influx of both white and black troops into the fort presented an interesting case study in race relations both at the post and in nearby towns. Black soldiers had long been stationed at the fort, but now they arrived in large numbers. Among them was Joe Louis, world heavyweight boxing champion.

To provide recreation for the troops, black and white, USO recreation centers were set up at Fort Riley, near other Kansas military installations, and in the major cities, where they also served defense workers and student servicemen at local colleges.<sup>53</sup> All manner of local buildings were utilized, from municipal centers to the old Harvey House at Topeka, and most of the funds were raised by local donation. On October 1, 1941, the *Topeka Daily Capital* reported that Junction City had two temporary centers. The white USO was in the Municipal Auditorium, while a residence was "in temporary use for negro soldiers." By early 1944 forty-three USO centers in Kansas were serving 375,000 uniformed men and women each month.

One week after Pearl Harbor, Ezekiel Ridley, a black teacher and principal with forty-one years' ex-

53. Local newspapers and clippings files in the Library and Archives Division of the Kansas State Historical Society have abundant information on civilian service organizations and recreational and social programs available to military personnel stationed in Kansas. A variety of facilities operated in the state. Victory Centers, for example, in Salina, Junction City and Topeka, which offered "moral and spiritual uplift" to men and women in the armed forces, are described in the *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 17, 1943.

Naval air stations were established at Olathe and Hutchinson in 1942. Here naval recruits line up for chow in the Olathe Naval Air Station mess hall.



perience in the Topeka public schools, organized a black USO with the support of the Topeka Citizens Committee of which he had been a member for several months. For more than a year, Ridley struggled along in a twenty-four-by-twenty-five-foot room on East Fourth Street, until he finally moved into a five thousand square foot two-story building at 112 Kansas Avenue.<sup>54</sup>

On November 15, 1942, the *Kansas City Star* described the social events of Fort Riley's Eighth Squadron of black troops, and the difficulties of providing them with

appropriate companionship. The squadron decided to hold a dance at the fort, and "since Kansas had never had so many Negro lads in its midst, a question of finding the feminine contingent for the dance became the problem of the moment." Corp. Joe Louis had the answer: bring girls to Fort Riley from Kansas City, Topeka, Lawrence, Abilene, Junction City, and Salina. For this activity, Corporal Louis used some of his own money.

The dance was a huge success, and the girls from Salina invited the Eighth Squadron to the Booker T. Washington Center, "the hub of all Negro activities" in that city. Recruited for the occasion were "a hundred beautifully clad young women" from McPherson, Junction City, Great Bend, Abilene, Lyons, and Ellsworth—but still "the girls

had to be rationed." The visit began with a parade for the entire town led by Louis carrying the American flag. A chicken dinner was provided and a dance followed. The whole affair seemed to be viewed as a commendable reflection of American democracy.<sup>55</sup>

It was evident by 1942 that cavalry would be unimportant in the war, and the Second Cavalry was disbanded. Most of the white personnel were transferred to the Ninth Armored Division, which was also stationed at Fort Riley. Black cavalymen were assigned as stevedores in the African cam-

54. *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 26, December 20, 1942; see United Service Organization clippings, and "U.S.O. Council Meeting Minutes, Topeka, Kansas, [beginning] September 16, 1941," Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

55. *Kansas City Times*, October 1, 1941; quoted material from *Kansas City Star*, November 15, 1942; see also "Kansas At War: Part 3, At Ease," *Kansas History* 15 (Autumn 1992): 180, which provides information and images of other recreational activities.



paign. But even after the breakup of the Second, the Cavalry Replacement Center continued to operate for both horse and mechanized cavalry. The last horse officer candidate class graduated in 1944, although most of the later horse trainees ended up in pack mule units.

Shipping black cavalymen to be stevedores in North Africa while white counterparts moved into tanks, and the difficulties of organizing black USOs reflected the prejudice of the day; nevertheless, the service of black soldiers in World War II was an important step toward the later civil rights movement to which Kansas would have contributed its share.

By 1943 the most important military training in Kansas was to meet the burgeoning needs of both the army air corps and the navy for flying personnel. Naval air stations were established at Olathe and Hutchinson in 1942, the latter mostly on land purchased or leased from Amish farmers.<sup>56</sup> Construction of the Hutchinson base was a particular trial for the little town of Yoder. D.M. Beachley's general store was unable to meet the demands of the construction workers, especially for cold soda pop: they consumed his monthly allowance in a single day. Missouri Pacific railroad agent E.J. Golden and his wife had managed the Yoder station by themselves for years; now they were supervising an army of helpers.

The base was first manned by fifteen-hundred enlistees recruited from Kansas and Missouri in ten

days. As no housing was available, the men were billeted in Hutchinson at the 4-H buildings at the Kansas State Fairgrounds. Mattresses finally arrived, but only after a large shipment of pamphlets on how to play water polo. Food for the men was purchased from local merchants and cooked in borrowed pots and pans. After some rudimentary training for the recruits, the base was commissioned in an impromptu ceremony, with the twenty-seven officers in uniform and the enlisted men "in their cleanest civilian clothes."

Hutchinson had to adjust to both a new military base and the demands of a thriving local defense economy.<sup>57</sup> One woodcraft business, for example, became a primary subcontractor for the Wichita aircraft industry and employed a thousand persons. Besides the sailors and WAVE cadre stationed at the base, as many as eight hundred cadets were in training at one time. Generally cordial relations prevailed between the base and city, but problems were unavoidable. Friction resulted when Hutchinson laundries, unable to handle the volume of both military and civilian business, refused the navy top priority. The solution was to "Iron Your Own Shirt," a voluntary campaign that lowered demand on the laundries by elevating a mundane task to a patriotic act. In spite of early chaos, Hutchinson, which became the largest inland naval base in the nation, and Olathe produced more than eight thousand naval flying personnel by the end of the war.

But the big Kansas military story in World War II was the numerous army air bases that dotted the state at Coffeyville, Independence, Arkansas City, Winfield, Topeka, Dodge City, Herington, Great Bend, Liberal, Hays, Garden City, and Pratt where the first B-29 bound for the Pacific theater took off.<sup>58</sup> In size the Smoky Hill Air Force Base near Salina was the largest army installation in Kansas and was ranked as third in the nation. To speed up B-29 deployment to the Pacific, the army air corps tested the aircraft produced at the Boeing plant in Wichita and trained crews at the same time. These two tasks were Smoky Hill's great contribution to the Allied victory.

By 1944 the need for new military personnel was winding down, and all but a few of the air and land training bases began to close. Of World War II bases, today only Forts Riley and Leavenworth remain. The military installations had served the nation well in wartime; they would do the same for Kansas in peacetime. Some were converted (or reconverted) to municipal airfields; land was turned back to the Amish farmers; Walker Air Force Base between Hays and Russell became the subject of litigation as farmers demanded the opportunity to buy back their land, which had been found to contain valuable deposits of oil. Smoky Hill continued on for some years as Schilling Air Force Base, with missiles added, but eventually it closed. Today it houses the Kansas Technical Institute. Perhaps the most typically Kansas conversion of former airfields was

56. A handy summary is R. Douglas Hurt, "Naval Air Stations in Kansas During World War II," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 43 (Autumn 1977): 351-62. Both revealing and humorous on the base's early convulsions is the *Kansas City Star*, July 10, 1945.

57. The Reno County Museum has an excellent inventory of World War II materials and artifacts. Important information and viewpoints were obtained from Charles Steed, John Oswald, Mae Boggs, Lydia Streeter, and Velma Peoples, interviews with author, July 31, 1992.

58. A short description of each base is "U.S. Army and Air Force Wings Over Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 25 (Summer, Autumn 1959): 129-57, 334-60.

Kansas was home to numerous military training bases. These WACS contributed to the war effort at Winfield's Strother Army Air Field.



at Pratt and Herington. Parts of the two bases, with their excellent underground drainage and eight to fourteen-inch concrete runways, were converted to cattle feed lots.

In August 1945 World War II abruptly ended with the atomic bombs dropped on Japan. Many Kansans have testified that they had no doubts then about using this terrible weapon against the enemy to save American lives, and time has not markedly altered their judgment.

Aside from the immediate and all too brief euphoria of victory, more than anything else World War II meant change to the people of Kansas. They emerged from war with a different economy, dif-

ferent social institutions, and at least to some extent, different ideas and attitudes. Change has always been the natural state of America, but compressing a generation of change into four short years strained the institutions and emotional elasticity of Kansans, probably even more than that of their fellow Americans. Yet Kansans met these challenges with resilience, perhaps as a consequence of the adaptability ingrained by the earlier frontier experience and the more recent trials of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl.

When the war ended in 1945, Kansans looked forward with confident optimism to the future, although the outlines of that future

were still unclear. Like other Americans, Kansans knew that they had entered a new age. As one Kansas woman confided to a *Life* magazine reporter, "When I see a transport plane flying over my house and realize that it will be across the Atlantic in 14 hours more, I know the world is a lot smaller than it used to be, and that Kansas is no longer far from anywhere."<sup>59</sup> Still, Kansans believed strongly in the values inherited from the past; to preserve those values in a society transformed by war would be their next challenge. KH

<sup>59</sup> "Kansas: Bill White's State is Wide-Open America," *Life* 16 (February 14, 1944): 87-95.