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How World War II Affected the Economic and Social Life
of East Tennessee

By

Stuart Neely Shelton

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Honors-in-Discipline Program in History

Dr. Stephen Fritz, Thesis Mentor Date

Dr. John Rankin, Reader Date

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Abstract

Much has been written about America's entry into World War II. However, little attention has been given to the war's effects on the social and economic lives of the people of East Tennessee who both benefited and suffered from the presence of many wartime facilities and industries. World War II also affected those civilians living and working on the home front. While its men had to fight in foreign lands, the region had to deal with food, housing, and labor shortages, the changing roles of women and African-Americans, and even the presence of enemy prisoners of war. This paper intends to show how the people of East Tennessee both benefitted and suffered as a result of America's entry into World War II. It will detail the role of local industries that in most cases changed from producing consumer goods to war material. Attention will be paid to key wartime facilities such as Oak Ridge Laboratory and Eastman Chemical. In addition, it will examine the effect that the war had on those East Tennesseans who served overseas and returned home to their families and communities changed forever. This paper will also show the extent to which East Tennessee women and African-Americans contributed to and were affected by the war effort as well as how their roles in society would be changed because of it. The use of enemy prisoners of war as labor on the home front will be elaborated upon as well. By examining these themes and topics, our citizenry today will have a better understanding of the sacrifices made to win World War II.

Acknowledgements

I could not have finished this thesis paper without the help of numerous people. My everlasting gratitude goes out to Dr. Stephen Fritz for giving me encouragement and helping me with researching this topic. I also owe a great deal to Dr. Daniel Newcomer who introduced me to social history and helped me improve my writing skills immensely. I give out a special thank you to my mom and dad – Larry and Anna Shelton - who encouraged me when it seemed as if I would never get enough research. Lastly, I thank God for encouraging me and for giving me inspiration.

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Introduction

When the United States declared war against Japan on December 8, 1941 and Nazi Germany on December 11, 1941, it officially entered the Second World War. Much has already been written about how America's entry into the war not only helped its stagnant economy recover from the Great Depression, but also changed the social life of millions of Americans. However, there has been relatively little penned on how World War II affected the social and economic lives of the people of East Tennessee. Those literary works that did describe the impact of World War II on East Tennesseans did not become as massively popular compared to those books that were more general in their descriptions of how the war affected the American Home Front. Wartime facilities and factories appeared all over East Tennessee, which in turn brought much-needed jobs to the depressed region. At the same time, however, some East Tennessean communities suffered the unintentional negative economic effects from the presence of the myriad number of these same wartime factories and facilities. In addition, the war impacted the social lives of many East Tennesseans. Large numbers of East Tennesseans became a part of America's Armed Forces, whether it was from choice or from being drafted. Many of them were permanently affected, one-way or the other, by their wartime service. The involvement of the United States in the World War II also affected East Tennesseans fighting on the home front. Not only did they have to give up their young men to fight in distant parts of the world (some who would not return home), but also they had to deal with the changing roles for women and African-Americans, and the presence of enemy prisoners of war in regional prison camps. Many made sacrifices for the war effort including giving up their ancestral homes and traditional way of life.

Economic Situation Before America Entered World War II

During the years of the Great Depression, Tennessee was among those states hardest hit by this economic reversal. Most of the state, and especially East Tennessee, was still rural and comparably poor.¹ Although the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)'s construction of numerous dams to control flooding and bring affordable power to the state helped Tennesseans, it did not bring them out of the Great Depression. Even the Civilian Conservation Corp's success in recruiting 70,000 Tennesseans to work in "reforestation, road construction, and flood control" and helping those areas of Tennessee that suffered from "chronic structural unemployment" did not make too much of a dent in the unemployment numbers.² That situation changed when war broke out in Europe in September 1939. Even though the United States remained neutral at this time, it still produced war materials under the Lend-Lease Agreement, which was passed in the spring of 1941. When U. S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced in May 1940 that he expected 50,000 airplanes to be built within a year, the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) ordered its plant outside of Maryville, Tennessee to operate at full capacity. Since aluminum at the time was an essential component in aircraft wings and fuselages, it was essential that the plant produced as much as possible.³ Eventually, another 300,000 airplanes were built, all requiring aluminum.⁴ However, ALCOA was not the only company to bring much-needed jobs to the East Tennessee region. Other companies also geared up in response to the war effort, bringing needed jobs to the area as a result.

¹ Dewaine A. Speaks and Ray Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II* (Charleston: The History Press, 2016), 25.

² Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 19-20.

³ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 46-47.

⁴ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 47.

Economic Impact of War Industries

By the beginning of World War II, the U. S. military used extensive amounts of Plexiglas or acrylic glass. It used Plexiglas to make “aircraft windshields, canopies, and blisters for gun turrets. Plexiglas was also used for the lenses of periscopes on all American submarines.”⁵ After it became apparent that Rohm and Haas Chemical Company’s plant in Pennsylvania could not fully meet the U.S. military’s orders for Plexiglas, the U. S. government authorized the construction of another plant in Knoxville, Tennessee. Opened on July 16, 1943, the government-owned Rohm and Haas operated plant provided a constant supply of Plexiglas to the U. S. war effort and provided much needed jobs to the region.⁶

During World War II, Fulton Sylphon Company operated a plant in Knoxville, Tennessee that produced various items for the war effort. The most popular was a “bellows that had a repeatable spring gate, a known yield strength, and a predictable number of cycles that it could be expected to maintain.”⁷ When “internally charged with gas or liquid,” this unique and pliable implement could be used in the manufacture of thermostats, barometers, and altimeters.⁸ One hundred bellow assemblies were used in every American bomber’s airframe and onboard instruments.⁹ The considerable demand for the bellow assemblies and other various materials produced by the Knoxville plant meant the number of employees at the Knoxville plant eventually increased to more than 4,000. For the next three years, “three shifts worked seven days a week, with many employees often working double shifts of sixteen hours.”¹⁰ For the most

⁵ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 50.

⁶ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 51.

⁷ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 56.

⁸ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 56.

⁹ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 58.

¹⁰ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 58.

part, these employees were untrained women and men too old for wartime service.¹¹ Knoxville was not the only city in East Tennessee to host a major war plant, however. Kingsport was also a host to a vital wartime facility.

Beginning in 1941, the British badly needed additional supplies of Research Development Explosive (RDX), an extremely powerful explosive, in their fight against Nazi Germany. A manufacturing plant operated by E. I. DuPont near Terre Haute, Indiana could only meet a small part of the RDX demanded by the British. In order to speed up production, the National Defense Research Committee researched a “faster and cheaper way to manufacture RDX in order to make possible large-scale production.”¹² Eventually, “a method...devised by Dr. Werner E. Bachman of the University of Michigan,” and amended by scientists and engineers from Tennessee Eastman discovered a way to do this successfully.¹³ By developing a way to retrieve, refine, and distill acetic acid and manufacturing acetic anhydride, RDX could be made in large quantities.¹⁴ America’s entry into the war on December 7, 1941 meant an even greater demand for the critical war material.

In 1942, Tennessee Eastman built a facility to produce RDX in the southern end of Kingsport. In total, about “fifteen to twenty thousand men were needed for the construction” of the facility at Kingsport.¹⁵ Technically, the facility consisted of two plants. Plant A manufactured acetic acid and acetic anhydride, both of which were important ingredients in the mass

¹¹ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 58.

¹² Archives of Appalachia, “World War II in East Tennessee Collection,” 500 AppMs 268, Box 2, Folder 2-1.

¹³ Archives of Appalachia, “World War II in East Tennessee Collection,” Box 2, Folder 2-1.

¹⁴ Archives of Appalachia, “World War II in East Tennessee Collection.” Box 2, Folder 2-1.

¹⁵ Archives of Appalachia, “World War II in East Tennessee Collection.” Box 2, Folder 2-1.

production of RDX. Plant B made the RDX itself.¹⁶ After production of RDX started in March 21, 1943, initial capacity was at 100,000 pounds per day per line.¹⁷ Composition B, a combination of TNT and RDX used in bombs and projectiles also was made in the Kingsport facility. Due to it being extensively used by the United States Navy, Composition B played a vital part in curbing “the disastrous German U-boat campaign...and the Jap undersea warfare.”¹⁸ By January 1944, the facility became the largest producer of high explosive in the whole world.¹⁹ At its peak, the plants, collectively known as the Holston Ordnance Works (HOW), employed “seven thousand employees...40 percent of them women”²⁰ The mass production of RDX was critical to the war effort and helped the Allies win the war.

Although the Holston Ordnance Works, later renamed Holston Defense, brought much-needed jobs to the region, the residents of Kingsport had to deal with an influx of people from outside of the city. For the most part, they “bit their tongues and tolerated” the outsiders who also came to work at the plant.²¹ In their eyes, this was the “patriotic thing to do.”²² In addition, some Kingsport natives made extra money from this influx of out-of-town arrivals. It “was not uncommon for local people to take in strangers. Single-family dwellings were converted into boarding houses, and stories are told about large rooms being partitioned with curtains and sheets to afford a measure of privacy for as many as four newcomers in each.”²³ However, there was some grumbling by the locals about the cost of goods going up due to the increased population.

¹⁶ Archives of Appalachia, “World War II in East Tennessee Collection.” Box 2, Folder 2-1.

¹⁷ Archives of Appalachia, “World War II in East Tennessee Collection.” Box 2, Folder 2-1.

¹⁸ The Kingsport Rotary Club, *Kingsport Tennessee: The Planned Industrial City* (Kingsport: Kingsport Press, Inc., 1946), 201.

¹⁹ “World War II.” last modified January 1, 2010. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1536>. Accessed April 19, 2017.

²⁰ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 90-91.

²¹ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 93.

²² Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 93.

²³ Margaret Ripley Wolfe, *Kingsport Tennessee: A Planned American City* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 145.

Despite the fact that the U. S. government tried to keep prices down, the cost of items ranging from groceries and automobiles grew.²⁴ In addition, overcrowding became a big headache. The end of 1942 saw no more houses or apartments being available for rent in Kingsport. In rooming houses, “people slept in shifts.”²⁵ Once the war ended, however, the people of Kingsport developed a certain sense of pride for “having had a hand in a great achievement, accomplished by one of its own great industries.”²⁶

Tennessee Eastman did not focus all of its energies and resources on producing RDX and Composition B, however. It also “directed its energies toward a high level of war production in its regular business...”²⁷ This was primarily producing chemicals. The construction of a plant that was able to produce 36,000,000 pounds of the chemical acetone helped end a shortage of this essential ingredient in the production of explosives, photographic film, acetate rayon yarn, and cellulose acetate plastics.²⁸ The manufacturing of cellulose acetate and mixed esters at the Kingsport plant helped ensure that the supply of Kodak safety film remained as high as possible. Kodak safety film was used to carry V-mail to U.S. soldiers and sailors all over the world. In addition, it was a vital component of the film used by Allied aerial and reconnaissance photography. Lastly, Kodak film saw use in “motion picture training films” seen by millions of soldiers and “stirring documentary films” watched by a curious American public.²⁹

²⁴ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 93.

²⁵ The Kingsport Rotary Club, *Kingsport Tennessee*, 201.

²⁶ The Kingsport Rotary Club, *Kingsport Tennessee*, 201.

²⁷ The Kingsport Rotary Club, *Kingsport Tennessee*, 140.

²⁸ The Kingsport Rotary Club, *Kingsport Tennessee*, 140.

²⁹ The Kingsport Rotary Club, *Kingsport Tennessee*, 141.

Oak Ridge - Economic Impact

Perhaps the most famous wartime facility in East Tennessee was the one constructed at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. On September 19, 1942, Major General Leslie Groves, commander of the Manhattan Project, chose the area that would eventually become the city of Oak Ridge, Tennessee as the site of a nuclear development facility.³⁰ In his opinion, this area of East Tennessee was perfect to host a top-secret military installation. The remoteness of the area meant that whatever transpired at the site would remain as secret as possible, and the long distance from the East Coast made it much harder to sabotage. Buying the 52,000 acres of land needed to build the facility would be easy and cheap, about fifty to sixty dollars per acre. Although 1,000 people would have to be relocated, General Groves and his superiors considered that task not hard to accomplish. Putting the facility in the southern region of the United States helped make it easier for “untapped non-farm labor...” to be recruited and able to travel to the facility.³¹ In addition, the facility would have a reliable power supply, due to the presence of large numbers of hydroelectric plants. Lastly, the site was easily accessible to rail and motor transport.³²

After acquiring the land in late 1942, General Groves had the facility itself built. In February 1943, a nuclear reactor, also known as an atomic pile, was built. Labeled as X-10, the nuclear reactor transmuted uranium into plutonium pieces.³³ At the same time, Y-12, a massive electromagnetic plant was constructed. Here, uranium “was whirled through a magnetic field wherein the lighter U-235 atoms would spin out on a slightly different path than that of the

³⁰ Charles W. Johnson and Charles O. Jackson, *City Behind A Fence: Oak Ridge, Tennessee 1942-1946* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 3.

³¹ Johnson and Jackson, *City Behind A Fence*, 8.

³² Johnson and Jackson, *City Behind A Fence*, 6-7.

³³ Johnson and Jackson, *City Behind A Fence*, 10.

heavier U-238 atoms.”³⁴ After that process, the two elements were then gathered up. In the fall of 1943, a gaseous diffusion plant, known officially as the K-25 plant, was constructed. This was erected in order to combine uranium with “fluorine in a gaseous form and forcing the gas through a series of carefully designed perforated barriers that would cause the lighter U-235 to separate from the heavier U-238 isotopes.”³⁵

In order to house the facility’s estimated five hundred thousand employees, General Groves ordered the construction of housing units on where the modern city of Oak Ridge is today. However, the housing units were not luxurious. A large number of families “resented” the fact that they had to live in small and “cramped trailers.”³⁶ In addition, those employees who lived in dormitories disliked the fact that they had to live with little to no privacy and had to worry about employees from the government contractor Roane-Anderson spying on them in order to make sure that the rules “against drinking, gambling, and visitors of the opposite sex” were being obeyed.³⁷ While there were houses, they were reserved for men who earned “more than sixty dollars a week in salary”³⁸ As for hourly workers, they had to live in “trailers, hutments, dormitories, and apartments...”, regardless as to how much they made an hour or how important their job was to the operation and/or maintenance of the Oak Ridge facility. As a result of there not being enough housing for everyone, many Oak Ridge employees found themselves having to share their already small living quarters with complete strangers.³⁹ Even those lucky families who managed to get a living space for themselves had to endure less than satisfactory conditions.

³⁴ Johnson and Jackson, *City Behind A Fence*, 10.

³⁵ Johnson and Jackson, *City Behind A Fence*, 8.

³⁶ Russell B. Olwell, *At Work in the Atomic City: A Labor and Social History of Oak Ridge, Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 17.

³⁷ Olwell, *At Work in the Atomic City*, 17.

³⁸ Olwell, *At Work in the Atomic City*, 17.

³⁹ Olwell, *At Work in the Atomic City*, 18.

One worker related how she, her mother, her father, and her siblings had to sleep in shifts, since “there were only four beds in the double trailer...”⁴⁰

Large numbers of employees were needed to keep the Oak Ridge facility up and running. In total, about 90,000 people worked at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory.⁴¹ While undoubtedly many of these were from out of state, there were still a good number from East Tennessee. For some, this was a perfect opportunity to avoid military service, while at the same time doing their part for the war effort. After hearing from a friend on the local draft board that he needed to get a war industry-related job if he wanted to remain stateside, one man from Chattanooga got a job in a TNT plant in his hometown. However, he was later laid off and subsequently found work at Oak Ridge. In return for working there, he and many other Chattanooga residents were given a guarantee that they would not be sent overseas if they were drafted. In addition, free housing would be provided.⁴² In the end, the former of the promises did not come to pass, but they did convince many people to work at Oak Ridge.

Dams

East Tennessee’s economy did not just improve during the war years as a result of wartime facilities being built in the region. The construction of dams to provide power to the many industrial facilities in East Tennessee also had a positive economic impact. Before the United States even became a full-fledged member of the Allies, the war affected the region. Because the Tennessee Valley needed even more hydroelectric dams in order to power future

⁴⁰ Olwell, *At Work in the Atomic City*, 18.

⁴¹ Patricia Brake Howard, “Tennessee in War and Peace: The Impact of World War II on State Economic Trends,” in *Tennessee History: The Land, the People, and the Culture*, ed. Carol van West. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 417.

⁴² Olwell, *At Work in the Atomic City*, 11.

war-related facilities in the region, Congress in early 1941 assented to the funding of the “Cherokee Dam on the Holston River near Morristown,” for the construction of “the Watts Bar Stream Plant, and for improvements to existing dams under the TVA’s jurisdiction so that additional power could be generated.”⁴³ When locals heard about this, they were enthusiastic in their support for the project. Not only would the dams make it easier for big business to come to the region, but they would also assist in stopping the Watauga River from overflowing its banks. Flooding was a constant problem for the East Tennesseans living near the Watauga River. In August of 1940, the Watauga River had overflowed its banks and “the torrent washed away ten houses and sent the inhabitants of over a hundred more seeking shelter... It cut communications... washed away rail lines, and swamped a dam...”⁴⁴ Despite the locals supporting the project, the House of Representatives in early December 1941 refused to approve funds for the building of the Holston and Watauga dams. However, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941 convinced both the House and Senate to make the money available for the two projects.⁴⁵ Although eventually it was decided in October 1942 to cease construction of the dams, since they were taking longer to construct than expected and were not going to be finished in time to help the war effort, the building of the dams did leave a mark on the local region. The “construction of the Watauga Dam alone pumped some \$765,947 into the economy of Carter County, Tennessee...”⁴⁶

⁴³ Tom Lee, *The Tennessee-Virginia Tri-Cities: The Urbanization in Appalachia, 1900-1950* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 187.

⁴⁴ Lee, *The Tennessee-Virginia Tri-Cities*, 187.

⁴⁵ Lee, *The Tennessee-Virginia Tri-Cities*, 187.

⁴⁶ Lee, *The Tennessee-Virginia Tri-Cities*, 188.

Economic Impact on Small Businesses

In addition to the construction of dams, the outbreak of World War II led to local businesses seeing a boost in demand for their products. Although Johnson City did not have much industry before the war, it still had its fair share. Some of these, like many factories during the war, switched production from civilian goods to wartime materials. One of these factories was the Harris Manufacturing Company, founded in 1898 by William P. Harris. During the war, it stopped producing “bed slats, trunk slats, plow handles, and gold heads and shanks” in order to make “dummy cartridges and inner cans, parts of radio proximity fuses, and millions of tenet pegs.”⁴⁷ In Bristol, Tennessee, three firms received contracts from the U.S. government to produce “garments, structural steel, and rolling stock” for the war effort.⁴⁸ Also, East Tennesseans employed in Elizabethton’s North American Rayon Corporation were hard at work producing viscose rayon yarn, a synthetic silk material used in airplane tires and parachutes.⁴⁹ However, the entry of America into World War II led to an interesting incident. Since the company was owned by a merger of a German and Dutch corporation, called AKU, “the Office of Alien Property (OAP) assumed management of the factories.”⁵⁰ In addition, it started an investigation into AKU’s “ownership of the Elizabethton plants...”⁵¹ In order to not anger the Dutch, OAP agreed to not seize the cooperation’s assets.⁵² In the small insignificant town of Erwin, Tennessee, the Stein-Way Company converted its efforts from producing men and boys’

⁴⁷ Elery A. Lay, *An Industrial and Commercial History of the Tri-Cities in Tennessee-Virginia* (Kingsport: Lays Publications, 1982), 94.

⁴⁸ Lee, *The Tennessee-Virginia Tri-Cities*, 189.

⁴⁹ Lee, *The Tennessee-Virginia Tri-Cities*, 190.

⁵⁰ “North American Rayon Corporation and American Bemberg Corporation,” last modified January 01, 2010, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1005>. Accessed: April 19, 2017.

⁵¹ “North American Rayon Corporation and American Bemberg Corporation.”

⁵² “North American Rayon Corporation and American Bemberg Corporation.”

trousers in order to supply the U.S. Army with about four million military garments during the war.⁵³

Reactions of East Tennesseans to The Attack on Pearl Harbor

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941, the people of East Tennessee had varied reactions to both the unannounced attack and that America was now officially involved in World War II. To most residents of Chestnut Hill, Tennessee the attack “came as a surprise to most of the residents...especially those who had no access to newspapers or radio broadcasts.”⁵⁴ Young wife and mother, Alma Miller did not own a radio or subscribed to a non-local newspaper. Those who read the local newspaper *The Standard Banner* would not have learned about the attack, as the paper “did not put out a special edition following Pearl Harbor and the issues produced in early December did not recount details of the attack.”⁵⁵ As a result, Alma Miller and many others in Chestnut Hill found out about the attack on Pearl Harbor from neighbors who owned a radio and/or read a national newspaper.⁵⁶

In Chestnut Hill, the manner in which people responded to America becoming an official member of the Allies depended on how much they kept track of current events. Still, after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, those Chestnut Hill citizens who were unable to keep up with current events or who simply did not care about what happened in the rest of the world eventually ended up worrying about what would happen next. Alma Miller, who belonged in both categories, worried about the possibility of an air attack similar to the one at Pearl Harbor

⁵³ Lee, *The Tennessee-Virginia Tri-Cities*, 189.

⁵⁴ Rebecca Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces: The World War II Experience of Chestnut Hill, Tennessee,” *The Journal of East Tennessee History* 85 (2013): 74-75.

⁵⁵ Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces,” 74.

⁵⁶ Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces,” 74.

happening at Chestnut Hill. Since she “was neither well-informed nor particularly interested in the world outside of Chestnut Hill,” Miller easily became victim to pessimism.⁵⁷ In contrast, those Chestnut Hill inhabitants who did keep track of world events did not panic when America officially became involved in the war. Although only twelve years old, J. C. Thornton kept up with world news, especially reports on events in Europe. Due to the fact that his father worked as supervisor at one of Bush Brothers & Company’s canneries, J. C. Thornton and his family could afford to have “a radio, [and] a subscription to one of the Knoxville newspapers...”⁵⁸ In addition to those purchases, the family bought a world globe. Thus, J. C. Thornton not only became well versed in world events, but in geography as well. He realized that since two large oceans surrounded America, it would not be bombed by Japan or Nazi Germany.⁵⁹ Unlike his less informed neighbors, Thornton was not concerned about the war reaching the interior of America.⁶⁰

The people of the Chestnut Hill were not the only ones in East Tennessee to have varied reactions to America officially becoming part of the Allies. For Chattanooga teenager Geneva Holiman, news of the attack on Pearl Harbor “didn’t really hit home for me...”⁶¹ In contrast, her brother, who was seventeen years old at the time, wanted their parents to “sign for him to join the Navy.”⁶² After they refused, he simply waited until he turned eighteen on the fourteenth of December to join up and, as he put it, “fight that war.”⁶³ *The Johnson City Chronicle* reported on December 11, 1941, that the town of Erwin’s Draft Board had six men volunteering for service

⁵⁷ Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces,” 76.

⁵⁸ Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces,” 75.

⁵⁹ Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces,” 75.

⁶⁰ Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces,” 75.

⁶¹ Jacqueline M. Seek, “Oral History Project/Geneva Holiman, World War II,” *Southern Adventist University* (2016): 4, accessed April 11, 2017,

http://knowledge.e.southern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1038&context=oralhist_ww2.

⁶² Seek, “Oral History Project,” 4.

⁶³ Seek, “Oral History Project,” 4.

in the Navy. Interestingly one of the men volunteering, L. D. Baxter, had left the service only two or three months before.⁶⁴ The Erwin Draft Board also had many calls from young women, wanting to join the Red Cross as nurses or ambulance drivers.”⁶⁵

Social Impact - East Tennessee Men Go Off to War

Known as the Volunteer State since the Mexican-American War, Tennessee lived up to its nickname after the United States entered World War II in early December 1941. During World War II, 300,000 Tennesseans served in the armed forces of the United States.⁶⁶ By the end of the war in 1945, “almost 7,000 Tennesseans made the ultimate sacrifice” giving their lives for their country.⁶⁷ Of the former, a substantial portion was from the region of East Tennessee. To some East Tennesseans serving in the military, the war became an enjoyable adventure. After all, “many of the young soldiers had probably never traveled extensively, instead finding work in the close-knit communities where they grew up.”⁶⁸ One of these men was Ellis Edward Hayes from Telford, Tennessee. Living on a small farm outside of Telford, Hayes was drafted into the United States Navy on December 31, 1943. Eventually, he was assigned to help man the 4-mm guns on the battleship *USS Maryland*.⁶⁹ Never wounded, he remembered life overseas as challenging, but interesting. As a result of serving on an important ship in the Pacific Fleet, Haynes got to see Saipan, Tinian, Guam, and Okinawa.⁷⁰ In the case of Saipan and Okinawa, Haynes had to help defend the ship from Japanese air attack. According to Haynes, the ship always had plenty of

⁶⁴ Archives of Appalachia, “Range Family Papers,” AppMS 126, Box 8, Folder 9.

⁶⁵ Archives of Appalachia, “Range Family Papers,” Box 8, Folder 9.

⁶⁶ “POW Camps in World War II.” Last modified January 1, 2010.
<http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1536>. Accessed April 19, 2017.

⁶⁷ Lauren Batte and Carolyn Brackett, *Answering the Call: Tennesseans in the Second World War* (Nashville: Classic Printing, Inc., 1996), 4.

⁶⁸ Batte and Brackett, *Answering the Call*, 20.

⁶⁹ Todd Baldwin and Cathy Walsh, *This is my story: an anthology of American Veterans' memories of service* (Johnson City: Johnson City Press, 2005), 4-5.

⁷⁰ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 4.

supplies, except the few times the crew had to use saltwater instead of freshwater to take showers.⁷¹ Due to the fact that he regularly wrote to his family and received letters from them, Haynes did not remember being lonely for long periods of time.⁷²

Likewise, Seaman Paul Begley, from Rogersville, Tennessee, did not mind serving in the U. S. Armed Forces. Working as a plane pusher on an aircraft carrier in the Western Pacific in March 1945 could be monotonous at times, but it was not unbearable. Begley told War Correspondent Ernie Pyle that he and his fellow pushers had “a pretty good chance of living through this. Think of the Marines who have to take the beaches, and the infantry in Germany. I can stand a lot of monotony if I know my chances are pretty good for coming out of it alive.”⁷³ While Seamen Ellis Edward Hayes and Paul Begley for the most part both enjoyed their time in the U.S. military, not every East Tennessean shared their sentiments about serving in the armed forces.

Crawford Lewis, from Jonesborough, Tennessee, was drafted into the U. S. Army on April 20, 1943. After he received his draft notice, the only “thing running through his mind was fear and he wondered ‘why me?’”⁷⁴ After training, Lewis was made a radio operator and later helped out with maintenance work. While he saw little combat, Lewis became homesick over time. While he did write letters home, he could not reveal where he was stationed.⁷⁵ To Crawford

⁷¹ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 5.

⁷² Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 5.

⁷³ David Nichols, editor, *Ernie's War: The Best of Ernie Pyle's World War II Dispatches* (New York: Simon & Schuster Press, Inc., 1986), 390.

⁷⁴ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 7.

⁷⁵ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 7.

Lewis, the happiest day of his life was on December 9, 1945. That day, “he found out that he would get to leave Camp Berry Indiana” and finally go home.⁷⁶

Crawford Lewis was not the only East Tennessean serving in the Armed Forces who did not enjoy his situation. Gordon Belcher, raised in Alcoa, Tennessee, was drafted into the Army on October 10, 1941. Like Lewis, Belcher experienced fear over this unexpected turn of events. He was also worried about what would happen to him in the days ahead.⁷⁷ In due course, Belcher became a supply truck driver and consequently did not see much combat, as he and his fellow drivers traveled by night. All the same, Belcher prayed constantly that nothing bad would happen to him.⁷⁸ Despite not seeing much fighting first-hand, Belcher still encountered signs that a war was being fought. The first sign was the body of a dead German soldier. When he saw the body, it was to him “the scariest thing I had ever seen.”⁷⁹ The image of a deceased soldier lying in front of him became stuck in his memory and never left it.⁸⁰ His second encounter with the terrors of warfare was even more morbid and sickening than the dead German soldier. After Belcher and his friends broke into an abandoned German college just for the fun of it, “they came upon an empty room with two storage bins...One storage bin was filled with human heads of people [whom] the Germans had decapitated and the other was filled with the bodies.”⁸¹ In order to keep their minds off the war, Gordon Belcher and his comrades did “anything ... including playing pranks on each other.”⁸² Even so, Belcher became tired of seeing dead bodies and piles of ashes. Finally, on October 11, 1946, he was allowed to leave the service.

⁷⁶ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 8.

⁷⁷ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 9.

⁷⁸ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 9.

⁷⁹ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 9.

⁸⁰ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 9.

⁸¹ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 9.

⁸² Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 9.

Gordon Belcher was not the only soldier from East Tennessee to experience traumatic events while serving overseas during World War II. Some witnessed first-hand the Nazi concentration camps used to imprison Jews, political opponents, communists, and other groups that the Nazis believed had no place in the Third Reich. As a result of this, large numbers of American liberators suffered from a form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to psychiatrist Judith Herman, American soldiers suffered from traumatic experiences because they were taken by surprise, felt trapped, and were physically and mentally exhausted.⁸³ Many American liberators had no idea what was in store for them when they advanced towards the Nazi concentration camps. Thus, they could not prepare adequate psychological defenses to shield their minds. They also had to remain in the concentration camps, with all those victims of Nazi brutality, until their unit moved on. Since they could not move on, they were trapped both physically and mentally. Lastly, American liberators felt overwhelmed physically and emotionally after seeing the camps. Psychiatrist Herman went on to point out that “human beings, like all animals, are biologically wired to experience fear when danger looms, but with trauma, a feeling of terror continues even after the danger is gone, as though the terrifying event is still occurring.”⁸⁴

James F. Dorris, Jr., from Chattanooga, Tennessee, participated in the liberation of Dachau concentration camp on April 29, 1945. In recalling the amount of suffering he witnessed in the camp, he concluded that “this is what hell was like.”⁸⁵ One scene in particular stayed with Dorris, Jr. even to the present day. While guarding a fence that confined the inmates of Dachau

⁸³ Leila Levinson, *Gated Grief: The Daughter of a GI Concentration Camp Liberator Discovers a Legacy of Trauma* (Brule: Cable Publishing, 2011), 120-121.

⁸⁴ Levinson, *Gated Grief*, 121.

⁸⁵ Robert Heller, *Living On: Portraits of Tennessee Survivors and Liberators* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 26.

until U. S. Army medical personal could find food for them, Dorris, Jr. witnessed a fight break out among the inmates. Several of them were beating a man after he had picked up something off the ground. After the beating was over, the battered man called Dorris, Jr. over and gave him a rusty can containing a “water stained cigarette butt.”⁸⁶ The man gave it to Dorris, Jr. as a gesture of thanks for liberating him. As he realized what the man was trying to do, Dorris, Jr.’s “eyes filled with tears.”⁸⁷ After returning home, Dorris, Jr. did not speak of his time at Dachau for many years. However, in his old age he felt compelled to tell people what he saw and educated them about his experiences and the Holocaust.

Johnson City native Harry Snodgrass also witnessed firsthand evidence of Nazi crimes against humanity. On April 12, 1945, he helped liberate Buchenwald concentration camp. What he saw there horrified and sickened him. In the camp, there were “inmates everywhere. Some dead, and some alive under the dead...just lying there.”⁸⁸ As he saw this, Snodgrass couldn’t think. The only expression he had was horror at what he was seeing.⁸⁹ When he saw lampshades made from the skin of dead Jews, fertilizer created from ashes of inmates, “he was stunned, just stunned.”⁹⁰ Due to all that he had seen in Buchenwald, for six decades Snodgrass suffered from post-traumatic nightmares. While he knew that Nazi Germany had been oppressing the Jews, he did not think it would go that far. Eventually, he, like Dorris, Jr., decided to speak to schools about what he had seen that terrible day.

For many soldiers from East Tennessee, serving in the armed forces during World War II was not as traumatic as Belcher and Dorris Jr.’s experiences. For them, the hardest part was

⁸⁶ Heller, *Living On*, 26.

⁸⁷ Heller, *Living On*, 26.

⁸⁸ Heller, *Living On*, 128.

⁸⁹ Heller, *Living On*, 128.

⁹⁰ Heller, *Living On*, 128.

enduring the training they had to go through before being shipped out. Most of the time, it was just arduous. Drafted after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Erwin, Tennessee native Ray McKinney supported the United States' decision of going to war, since it had to fight to stay "free after the bombing of Pearl Harbor."⁹¹ To him, basic and physical training stuck out to him as being exceptionally tiring. East Tennessean L. D. Gregg thought likewise. The Piney Flats native joined the U. S. Army Air Corps because everyone else was doing it and in order to "keep from starving to death," as his family was extremely poor.⁹² In his opinion, training was simply "hell."⁹³ He and his comrades barely slept and had to train even if it was raining or snowing outside. While he later would experience "some very difficult times" after his time at boot camp, he maintained that his time training was the hardest part of the war.⁹⁴

Some men joined the military in order to fulfill childhood dreams. Carter County native Dana Anderson joined the U. S. Army Air Corps when he was 17 years old, possibly in order to realize his dream of being a pilot.⁹⁵ A member of a group of B-24s that in 1944 airdropped supplies to the French Resistance and helped it locate "troops, railroads, and factories," Anderson remembered that he and his crewmates used to tell jokes in order to "combat being scared to death."⁹⁶ Not only did they have to be in an airborne B-24 bomber at night under anti-aircraft barrage, but they also had to worry about German night fighters intercepting them. While his B-24 did manage to avoid being shot down, it did get "hit a few times."⁹⁷

⁹¹ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 11.

⁹² Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 12.

⁹³ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 12.

⁹⁴ Baldwin and Walsh, *This is my story*, 12.

⁹⁵ Gary B. Gray, "Not many people came back," *Johnson City Press*, November 11, 2016, 2A.

⁹⁶ Gray, "Not many people came back," 2A.

⁹⁷ Gray, "Not many people came back," 2A.

For many East Tennessee veterans served overseas and managed to make it home safely, the war affected them in multiple ways. One of these was guilt over having to kill fellow human beings. Geneva Holliman's future husband served in the Pacific and after the war constantly talked about how he killed a Japanese soldier on Saipan who "probably had a wife and kids at home...and I killed him."⁹⁸ Those servicemen who were captured by the enemy and were held in POW camps were also negatively impacted. According to a 1985 study conducted by Steve Giles, Chief of Psychology Service at the Mountain Home Veterans Administration Medical Center in Johnson City, Tennessee, Bob Hall, Chairman of the Social Sciences Area at Milligan College, and Vietnam veteran Bert Allen, Appalachian veterans who were held in POW camps during World War II were much more likely to have trouble readjusting to peacetime life. The study revealed that "former POWs reported that they were ill much more frequently than...other veterans and non-veterans."⁹⁹ In fact, of the former POWs involved in the study, "one quarter...were ill more than 30 days during the year prior to the study."¹⁰⁰ In addition, former POWs used medication more often than those who did not spend time in a POW camp.¹⁰¹

After the war, the resumption of formal education of former POWs was also negatively affected by their traumatic experiences. Once they made it home, "two-thirds of the former POWs never finished high school, compared to one quarter of the other veterans."¹⁰² Unlike other Appalachian World War II veterans, those veterans who were in POW camps rarely took advantage of the G.I. Bill. The study showed that in total, just one quarter of former POWs used

⁹⁸ Seek, "Oral History Project," 6-7.

⁹⁹ Bert Allen, "The Effects of These Times We Had..." *Now And Then*, Fall 1987, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED313196.pdf>. Accessed April 17, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Allen, "The Effects of These Times We Had..." 35.

¹⁰¹ Allen, "The Effects of These Times We Had..." 36.

¹⁰² Allen, "The Effects of These Times We Had..." 36.

the G.I. Bill to advance their education.¹⁰³ This in turn led to former POWs not earning as much personal income as those veterans who did not get captured and end up in a POW camp during World War II. Former POWs earned significantly less than “combat and noncombat veterans.”¹⁰⁴ Also, sixty-nine percent of the latter could boast that their income in 1985 was more than \$20,000. In contrast, “only 40% percent of the former POWs reported income that high.”¹⁰⁵

Social Impact - The Home Front

Of course, not all East Tennesseans served in the U. S. military. Most of them remained civilians, supporting the war effort as much as they could. However, the war had an effect on them socially just as it did to those East Tennesseans who served in the military. Farmers throughout the region were encouraged to donate scrap metal for the war effort and to reuse it themselves. School children “were often seen taking tin cans to school in their red wagons.”¹⁰⁶ While most of the cans and scrap metal collected was useless to the war effort, having East Tennessean participate in these drives made them feel part of the war effort and kept morale up. East Tennessee dark tobacco farmers were affected by the war as well. The war breaking out in Europe, which was at the time a big customer of dark tobacco products, sent demand for tobacco and profits spiral down. This in turn made them much more agreeable to growing burley tobacco after the war ended.¹⁰⁷

Like the rest of the country, East Tennessee had to comply and cope with war rationing. In the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, it was announced nationally that as of

¹⁰³ Allen, “The Effects of These Times We Had...” 36.

¹⁰⁴ Allen, “The Effects of These Times We Had...” 36.

¹⁰⁵ Allen, “The Effects of These Times We Had...” 36.

¹⁰⁶ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 101.

¹⁰⁷ Billy Yeargin and Christopher Bickers, *A History of Burley Tobacco in East Tennessee & Western North Carolina* (Charleston: The History Press, 2015), 30.

December 10, 1942, the selling of new tires would be banned until December 22, 1941. This was made in order to curb “a consumers’ buying wave.”¹⁰⁸ It meant that “no new automobile, truck, bus, or motorcycle, farm implement or other type of tire or tube” could be sold to anyone.”¹⁰⁹ In January 1942, the governor of Tennessee, William Prentice Cooper, Jr. ordered that all tires be rationed. As a result of this decision, Jefferson County had to deal with people stealing tires.¹¹⁰ Chestnut Hill resident J. C. Thornton, then thirteen years old, remembered years later that thieves stole the tires off his uncle’s car. Due to the rationing of this product, Thornton’s uncle then had to wait until the war ended to buy replacements.¹¹¹ Tires were not the only commodity to be rationed during World War II. In February 1942, the American government decided to ration sugar nationally . Teachers in East Tennessee’s Jefferson County were given the task of assigning “every family in the county a sugar rationing book before May 4.”¹¹² Unfortunately, they did not do a thorough job. *The Standard Banner* reported on May 7, 1942 that some families had still not received their rationing cards. The simple act of rationing sugar itself led to problems. Jefferson County women who canned their food in order to preserve it found it extremely hard to get extra sugar for this activity. They had to “complete a form and return it in person to an office in Dandridge.”¹¹³ The twenty-mile round trip was not easy for those families who did not have access to transportation, whether due to limited funds or the fact that there were no tires available.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Archives of Appalachia, “Range Family Papers.” Box 8, Folder 9.

¹⁰⁹ Archives of Appalachia, “Range Family Papers.” Box 8, Folder 9.

¹¹⁰ Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces,” 77.

¹¹¹ Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces,” 77.

¹¹² Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces,” 77.

¹¹³ Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces,” 77.

¹¹⁴ Byrd, “Supporting and Tempering Distant Forces,” 77.

Geneva Holiman, then a teenager living in Chattanooga, Tennessee, remembered in 2016 how her mother “had to go down and tell how many was in her family and she would get food stamps for a certain amount of different items and that was all that you were allowed. You could buy one pair of shoes a year. So you took care of em, ‘cause if they wore out you went barefoot because you didn’t have a stamp to buy another one, because all the resources were gone into supplying our military with their shoes and things that they needed. Everything was rationed, everything.”¹¹⁵ Another resident of East Tennessee, Lillian Samuel of Cleveland, Tennessee, in a 2015 interview, remembered how people were issued coupon books, and they could not buy items they did not have a stamp for, “like shoes and sugar, butter, or anything like that...”¹¹⁶ However, since they seldom could afford those items even during peacetime, Lillian Samuel and her family did not complain.¹¹⁷

Due to the fact that so many men had to leave the farms due to being drafted, enlisting, or migrating to cities to find work, women and children had to step up and take their place. Sometimes, even German and Italian prisoners of war were used. Camp Crossville, near Crossville, Tennessee, allowed prisoners to work on local farms in exchange for a small amount of wages.¹¹⁸ Initially, the locals were worried about the presence of so many former Axis soldiers and them having so much freedom. They did not approve of the camp’s policy of allowing

¹¹⁵ Seek, “Oral History Project,” 5.

¹¹⁶ Mallory H. Morgan, “Oral History Project/Lillian Samuel,” *Southern Adventist University* (2015): 3, http://knowledge.e.southern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=oralhist_ww2. Accessed April 13, 2017.

¹¹⁷ Morgan, “Oral History Project,” 3.

¹¹⁸ “POW Camps in World War II,” last modified January 1, 2010, <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1076>.

prisoners to go on walks outside the compound.¹¹⁹ After a few months, however, the fear disappeared, and both the prisoners and locals got along mostly without incident.¹²⁰

However, there were occasional unfortunate interactions involving the POWs and the local population. While escape attempts from Camp Crossville were rare, they did happen. An English-speaking escapee from the camp remained free for several months before, possibly realizing that he had no place to go, returned of his own free will.¹²¹ Not all such escape attempts ended in this way. Three German submariners who escaped from Camp Crossville were all shot and killed by an old woman after she saw them trespassing on her land. Apparently, she believed they were “Yankees” and after being told the men she shot were escaped German prisoners, she broke out in tears and claimed that if she had known they were simply escaped prisoners, she would have not killed them.¹²² Apart from these two incidents, the presence of Axis prisoners of war did not cause any major problems for the Crossville locality.

While most women in East Tennessee, like in the rest of the United States, remained at home, many went to work in wartime plants during World War II. Of the seven thousand employees at Holston Ordnance in Kingsport, about 40% of them were women.¹²³ Knowing that their relatives and friends on the frontlines needed the RDX and Composition B, the women at Holston Ordnance “faced their tasks with grim determination and dutiful attention to the maintenance and cleanliness of their work areas.”¹²⁴ In Maryville, Alcoa Inc. increased its female workforce from 320 to 1,450 during the years 1942 to 1943. It also placed new women hires into nontraditional jobs, such as electrical engineering, mechanical departments, chemical

¹¹⁹ “POW Camps in World War II.”

¹²⁰ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 118.

¹²¹ “POW Camps in World War II.”

¹²² “POW Camps in World War II.”

¹²³ Speaks and Clift, *East Tennessee in World War II*, 91.

¹²⁴ Wolfe, *Kingsport, Tennessee*, 145.

laboratories, crane operators, and operating the rolling mill.¹²⁵ The expansion of Tennessee industry not only decreased migration out of the state, but also increased personal income. The annual income went from being \$339 to \$994. While the wages of women stayed below men's wages, they did go up.¹²⁶

At the Oak Ridge Laboratory, young women were among those hired, performing jobs ranging from janitorial tasks to chemistry. One of these young women was Tomi Peters from nearby Clinton, Tennessee. After graduating from high school, Peters found that she and her family had no money for college. As a result of this situation and the fact that she desired adventure, Peters applied for a job at Oak Ridge.¹²⁷ Like many of the women who applied for work at Oak Ridge, Toni Peters got a job as secretary, typing up contracts.¹²⁸ In addition to this, she helped take care of injured workers.¹²⁹ Pentagon employee Edna Best, from Monroe County, Tennessee, in March 1944 was transferred from her job in the War Department's Military Intelligence Division to the Oak Ridge area. Since she had security clearance to handle and see top-secret information, Best quickly came to realize that her new post was not in a typical facility.¹³⁰ At Oak Ridge's Y-12 facility, many of the young women who worked there were from East Tennessee. Here, women operated the facility's electromagnetic separators. George Parker, a nuclear chemist who worked at Oak Ridge during the war, recalled in an interview that

¹²⁵ Howard, "Tennessee in War and Peace," 422.

¹²⁶ Howard, "Tennessee in War and Peace," 422.

¹²⁷ Denise Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of The Women Who Helped Win World War II* (New York: Touchstone, 2013), 30.

¹²⁸ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 111.

¹²⁹ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 189.

¹³⁰ Edna Best Hunter, "'I Worked at Oak Ridge:' An Early Narrative of Life in the Secret City," *The Journal of East Tennessee History* 78 (2006): 73-74.

at one point a contest was waged in order to determine if the women operators were better at doing the job than highly trained physicists. In the end, “curiously the girls won.”¹³¹

Despite women being hired to fill nontraditional job openings, many were not retained in those positions after the war. In fact, some industries fired women workers during the later years of the war. In 1943-1945, Knoxville’s Alcoa, Fulton Sylphon, and Rohm and Haas Company all decreased their female workforces.¹³² One of the reasons for this decision was the need to find jobs for returning soldiers.¹³³ Another was the fact that while the war was still going on, the situation was not as dire as it had been earlier in the war. As result, women on the production lines were often the first to be laid off. For the most part, “women’s seniority status in the production areas did not surpass that of the men or returning veterans.”¹³⁴ In July 1945, women comprised “only 38 percent of the labor force” in the Knoxville area.¹³⁵ Later, in January 1946, the amount of women in the labor force had decreased by two percent. However, as a result of their tenure working in industry, Tennessee women had proved that they could effectively do jobs that were at the time considered to be too hard for them. In later years, this led to somewhat of an increase in the number of women employed in untraditional jobs. For example, “Tennessee women’s employment in manufacturing was 23,000 greater in 1950 than it had been in 1940.”¹³⁶

¹³¹ “Interview of George Parker describing competition between women workers and physicists,” last modified 2017, <http://cdm15138.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15138coll18/id/299/rec/31>. Accessed April 19, 2017.

¹³² Howard, “Tennessee in War and Peace,” 423-424.

¹³³ Howard, “Tennessee in War and Peace,” 424.

¹³⁴ Howard, “Tennessee in War and Peace,” 424.

¹³⁵ Howard, “Tennessee in War and Peace,” 424.

¹³⁶ Howard, “Tennessee in War and Peace,” 426.

While some East Tennessee women, like Tomi Peters, found the war brought beneficial changes to their lives, not all were so lucky. Others found that their lives had become much more stressful and unhappy. While her husband, Frank Bogart, served in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific, Mary Bogart remained at home in Erwin, Tennessee. In order to feel useful and keep occupied, Mary Bogart threw all her energies into music, performing at local clubs, and caring for her newborn son, Jeff. However, she still suffered during the years of 1942-1943. Part of the reason was due to the fact that her social life was almost nonexistent. Most of her school friends had married and “had their own lives...”¹³⁷ Many of their husbands would not be sent overseas until a few years later. Mary Bogart had no luck making friends with the other women of Erwin. Few wives in town had husbands who had left to fight. Of those who did have spouses serving outside the country, few, if any, were Navy wives. In general, most Navy wives stayed in San Diego or Long Beach. Thus, “there seemed to be no common ground...” and Mary Bogart felt isolated and alone.¹³⁸

For Mary Bogart, good news was continually a rare commodity for her. In 1944, she saw the missing in action lists and noticed that many of the names belonged to friends of hers.¹³⁹ Like many wives who had husbands in the military, Bogart looked forward to letters from her husband. She constantly “hoped for one that might say he was coming home, at least for a short reprieve. But none came.”¹⁴⁰ In order to keep herself from falling completely into despair and hopelessness, Bogart prayed every night for Frank’s safety. She also endeavored to not consider if Frank was in any danger. However, it was not easy. As the fighting in the Pacific got closer and closer to Japan, the residents of Erwin, including Mary Bogart, noticed that casualties from

¹³⁷ Frank Bogart and Mary Bogart, *Till War Do Us Part* (Middleton: Southfarm Press, 1995), 113.

¹³⁸ Bogart and Bogart, *Till War Do Us Part*, 114.

¹³⁹ Bogart and Bogart, *Till War Do Us Part*, 116.

¹⁴⁰ Bogart and Bogart, *Till War Do Us Part*, 116.

their little town were beginning to pile up.¹⁴¹ To them, the end of the war seemed “farther away than ever.”¹⁴² This in turn led to increased anxiety for loved ones. Mary Bogart had not heard from her husband “in many months, and as the summer passed,” her worrying grew worse.¹⁴³ When news of the atomic bombings of Japan and the ending of the war arrived, Mary Bogart waited nervously for word that Frank would be coming home. Finally, in November 1945, she joyfully received news that Frank would finally be home before Christmas.¹⁴⁴

Not all of the changes brought by the war were beneficial to East Tennesseans. Although the land and location picked to build the Oak Ridge National Laboratory were perfect for the future top-secret facility, the decision to build there led to heartbreak and resentment among those members of the local population who had to be relocated. By October 1942, the land surveyors had finished inspecting the land. With that, notices were given to those families that had to move off their land. Negotiators from the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Land Acquisition Section then arrived to “set property prices based on...earlier assessments.”¹⁴⁵ They subsequently made offers to local residents who needed to vacate the land needed for the planned construction. For the most part, these restitution payments offered were scarcely fair. One family, the Brummitts, was promised \$900 for 40 acres. However, in the end not all the money promised was actually paid.¹⁴⁶ Another family, the Irwin family, was offered \$10,500 for their “Gamble Valley Farm, which included a large framed house, two tenant houses, barns, outbuildings, crops, and equipment.”¹⁴⁷ While at first glance the proposed amount of \$10,500

¹⁴¹ Bogart and Bogart, *Till War Do Us Part*, 116.

¹⁴² Bogart and Bogart, *Till War Do Us Part*, 116.

¹⁴³ Bogart and Bogart, *Till War Do Us Part*, 116.

¹⁴⁴ Bogart and Bogart, *Till War Do Us Part*, 117.

¹⁴⁵ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 24.

¹⁴⁶ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 25.

¹⁴⁷ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 25.

seemed a generous amount of money, in reality it was a pitiful sum. It would not even buy half of what was purchased from the Irvin family.¹⁴⁸ In total, between 1,000 - 3,000 or more families were displaced by the facility. However, the property owners were not the only ones to be affected and uprooted. Tenant farmers and sharecroppers, both groups that did not own the land they lived on, were evicted as well.¹⁴⁹

In a bitter twist of fate, some of those same families who had to leave their homes in the construction of Oak Ridge had previously had to move when the Smoky Mountains National Park and the Norris Dam were created in the mid-thirties.¹⁵⁰ In the end, the majority of families accepted the terms on the spot, since officials strongly hinted that if the families made any trouble, like asking for more money, they would have a harder time getting any money at all. Despite this thinly veiled threat, some lucky families did manage to get better offers after they protested and organized meetings.¹⁵¹ However, this was not the norm.

Some East Tennesseans who had to give up their land did so with few, if any, hard feelings. In 1947, local resident and employee at Oak Ridge William Gallagher told people listening to the radio program “We the People” about how in 1942, he got a visit from a government man. The man told Gallagher that the government would be buying up all his land and that he would have to leave the house that his grandfather had built in 1846.¹⁵² As he toured the land with the government agent, Gallagher looked around and saw “the green hills my

¹⁴⁸ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 25.

¹⁴⁹ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 25.

¹⁵⁰ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 25.

¹⁵¹ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 25.

¹⁵² George O. Robinson, *The Oak Ridge Story; The Saga of a People Who Share in History* (Kingsport: Southern Publishers, 1950), <https://archive.org/details/oakridgestorysag00robirich>. Accessed April 11, 2017.

grandfather had come across 100 years earlier.”¹⁵³ Despite the fact that that he had to give up his family’s land and house, Gallagher did not appear to harbor any ill-will towards the U.S. government. Possibly, it was due to the fact that the government agent told him that the land was going to be used in a project that would win the war. As Gallagher said on the program, he had “three sons in the Service - two overseas - and I figured if giving up my home and my land would help bring them home sooner, I’d be happy to do it...”¹⁵⁴

The mistreatment of these East Tennessee citizens fueled a considerable amount of anger and resentment towards the U. S. government. While they supported the war effort, the people of the Oak Ridge area begrudged the fact that they had to give up “their homes, their lands, and their livelihoods.”¹⁵⁵ For many, it was not simply about being forced to leave the tangible structures. It was also “the sum of all the work, love, and life they’d known. They would have to hand over secret hiding places passed down among children, onetime saplings that now towered over their homes, dozens of cemeteries in churches and back yards commemorating lives past...”¹⁵⁶ Tomi Peters’ aunt and uncle lost not only their home, but their beloved peach orchard as well. For Tomi Peters in particular, it held memories of enjoyable past summers.¹⁵⁷ The people of the Oak Ridge area possessed an extremely strong sense of place that was hard to compensate with mere money.

SOCIAL IMPACT - AFRICAN AMERICANS

In addition to building a number of facilities at Oak Ridge, the U. S. Army had an entire city built to house the multitude of workers. After the nearby railroads had laid down extra track,

¹⁵³ Robinson, *The Oak Ridge Story*.

¹⁵⁴ Robinson, *The Oak Ridge Story*.

¹⁵⁵ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 25-26.

¹⁵⁶ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 26.

¹⁵⁷ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 26-27.

“mountains of material began to arrive and gates were erected to keep out the curious.”¹⁵⁸ Then, the first thousand homes were built. By the end of 1944, at least 75,000 people, “men, women, and children,” were living there.¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the many African-Americans who worked at Oak Ridge, Tennessee were segregated from the white workers. Blacks could only live “in an area known as Gamble Valley and lived predominantly in government-built "hutments" (one-room shacks) on the south side of what is now Tuskegee Drive.”¹⁶⁰ This segregation would continue until the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision. In fairness though, all of the housing units were not ideal places to live no matter which racial group lived there. Once it became clear that more housing than expected would be needed, “every type of reconstructed or easily erected, building was procured.”¹⁶¹ These included TVA flat-tops, trailers, and sectional units.¹⁶²

East Tennessee African-Americans did not only find jobs at Oak Ridge. While the majority of Tennessee blacks moved out of state in order to find war-time jobs up North, some remained in the state. The city of Knoxville, Tennessee saw a large number of black women finding work in the various war industries operating there. In fact, “Knoxville housewives complained that they had lost their black maids to the war industries, where black women often earned three times as much as domestics.”¹⁶³ In Chattanooga, black men labored in the local

¹⁵⁸ A.K. Bissel, “A Reminiscence of Oak Ridge,” *The East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications* 39 (1967): 72.

¹⁵⁹ Bissel, “A Reminiscence of Oak Ridge,” 72.

¹⁶⁰ “Oak Ridge, Tennessee,” last modified September 12, 2011, <http://www.blackcityinfo.com/tennessee/tennessee-oak-ridge.html>.

¹⁶¹ Bissel, “A Reminiscence of Oak Ridge,” 72.

¹⁶² Bissel, “A Reminiscence of Oak Ridge,” 73.

¹⁶³ Howard, “Tennessee in War and Peace,” 428.

“iron and steel industries.”¹⁶⁴ As of 1940, about 40 percent of working black men in the city worked in those fields.¹⁶⁵ However, like many East Tennessean women, African-Americans were the first ones dismissed when returning white male veterans came back in need of a job.¹⁶⁶

Conclusion

When people read about World War II, most of the time East Tennessee is hardly mentioned. Other than the contributions of Oak Ridge Laboratory to the atomic bomb project, East Tennessee’s contributions to the war effort of World War II have been for the most part ignored. Wartime facilities and factories appeared all over East Tennessee, which in turn brought much-needed jobs to the depressed region. At the same time, however, some East Tennessean communities suffered the unintentional negative economic effects from the presence of the myriad number of these same wartime factories and facilities. In addition, the war impacted the social lives of many East Tennesseans. Large numbers of East Tennesseans became a part of America’s Armed Forces, whether it was from choice or from being drafted. Many of them were permanently affected, one-way or the other, by their wartime service. The involvement of the United States in the World War II also affected East Tennesseans fighting on the home front. Not only did they have to give up their young men to fight in distant parts of the world (some who would not return home), but also they had to deal with the changing roles for women and African-Americans, and the presence of enemy prisoners of war in regional prison camps. Many made sacrifices for the war effort including giving up their ancestral homes and traditional way of life. Hopefully more and more books will be written detailing how the region of East Tennessee was affected by one of the greatest wars in history.

¹⁶⁴ Howard, “Tennessee in War and Peace,” 428.

¹⁶⁵ Howard, “Tennessee in War and Peace,” 428.

¹⁶⁶ Howard, “Tennessee in War and Peace,” 428.

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