

9-2007

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### Recommended Citation

Wooster, Ralph (2007) "East Texas in World War II," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 45: Iss. 2, Article 9.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol45/iss2/9>

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## EAST TEXAS IN WORLD WAR II

*by Ralph Wooster*

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 surprised and shocked most East Texans. The region, consisting of fifty counties that ran from the Red River on the north, through the Piney Woods and Post Oak Belt, on to the upper Texas Gulf Coast, was, like most of Texas and the nation, slowly recovering from the Great Depression of the 1930s. Although its residents still depended heavily upon farming for their livelihood, drilling for and refining oil became increasingly important after several major discoveries in the 1930s including the great East Texas oilfield in Rusk, Gregg, Smith, Upshur, and Cherokee Counties, Conroe in Montgomery County, Tomball in Harris County, and Anahuac and Barbers Hill in Chambers County. In 1940 over half (nearly 270 million barrels) of Texas' oil was produced in East Texas, and much of it was refined in East Texas along the Houston Ship Channel and in the Beaumont-Port Arthur area.<sup>1</sup>

Slightly more than two million people resided in East Texas on the eve of the Second World War, the majority of them on farms or in small towns. With the exception of Houston (population 384,514), Galveston (60,362), Beaumont (59,060), and Port Arthur (46,140) on the Gulf Coast, no East Texas town had a population of 30,000 or more inhabitants. In forty-two of the region's fifty counties seventy percent of the people lived in rural areas. In only three East Texas counties – Harris, Jefferson, and Galveston – did a majority of inhabitants reside in urban communities.<sup>2</sup>

East Texans were feeling the effects of increased military preparedness even before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Construction of new military bases, federalization of the National Guard, and extension of the Selective Service Act in 1941 convinced many East Texans that war was near. New government contracts for shipbuilding along the Gulf coast and aircraft production in the Dallas-Fort Worth area led to many shifts in population. Between 1940 and 1943 nine East Texas counties lost more than thirty percent of their population as large numbers of rural inhabitants moved to the areas where high paying jobs in defense industries were available. Eighteen other East Texas counties lost between twenty and twenty-nine percent of their population by 1943. Only five East Texas counties – Harris, Galveston, Jefferson, and Orange, along the Gulf coast where oil refining and shipbuilding required additional workers, and Bowie in northeast Texas where two massive military installations, the Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant and Red River Army Depot, were constructed – experienced population growth during the period. Orange, with three shipbuilding firms, increased its population from 17,382 in 1940 to 45,775 in 1943, a 163.3 percent increase. By the end of the war the population in Orange County was over 60,000.<sup>3</sup>

An enormous expansion of military facilities in Texas followed the Japanese attack in December 1941. Because of the open space and good

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weather most new military installations in Texas were located in the western part of the state, but two major army training camps were built in East Texas – Camp Maxey, near Paris, Texas, opened in July 1942, and Camp Fannin, ten miles northeast of Tyler, opened in 1943. An air force base, Majors Field, named in memory of Lieutenant Truett Majors, the first Hunt County native to be killed in the war, was opened near Greenville on June 26, 1942. The Hitchcock Naval Air Station, between Houston and Galveston, designed for lighter-than-air, semi-rigid airships known as “blimps,” was commissioned in May 1943. By the end of the war, more than thirty army training camps and airfields were located in Texas.<sup>4</sup>

East Texas was the site of one of five new army hospitals built in Texas during the war. Harmon General Hospital, named for Colonel Daniel W. Harmon, who served in the Army Medical Corps from 1904 until his death in 1940, was constructed in Longview. When activated in November 1942 the facility included 119 buildings and provided 1,525 beds. Harmon was staffed by over 700 officers and enlisted personnel including forty doctors and seventy nurses. The hospital specialized in treatment of tropical and dermatological diseases, the central nervous system, syphilis, and psychiatry. Over 23,000 patients were treated at Harmon during the Second World War.<sup>5</sup>

Although East Texans anticipated the outbreak of war, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor caught most area residents by surprise. Dan Dennis, then a student at Lamar Junior College in Beaumont, recalls that he was reading the Sunday comics after attending church when he heard of the Japanese attack. Laquata Landry, a 17-year old school girl living on a farm near Timpson, was listening to the radio when she heard reports of the Japanese attack. “Then everybody went [into] hysterics,” she recalled. Mrs. Lance Wingate, who had moved from Beaumont to Orange the previous spring, remembered the news of Pearl Harbor “affected every single person alive in many ways.” “My feeling was just shock, that things were going to be different,” she noted. Martha Stroud of Clarksville was at the Avalon Theatre when an announcement was made that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Hazel Shelton Abernethy, then a sophomore at Nacogdoches High School, learned the news when she came out of a movie theater with friends about 4:30 that Sunday afternoon. Newsboys were selling “extra” editions of the *Nacogdoches Daily Sentinel* describing the attack.<sup>6</sup>

Philip Latimer, a young math teacher from the small town of Detroit in Red River County, who had been drafted in June 1941, learned of the Japanese attack while hitchhiking from Beaumont back to his army camp at Fort Polk, Louisiana. Like many Texans, Latimer, who later served as a white officer in the famed 461st Tank Battalion made up of black troopers, wondered where Pearl Harbor was.<sup>7</sup>

While most East Texans learned of the Pearl Harbor bombing from their radios and newspapers, some witnessed the attack first hand. Machinist Mate Third Class Leon Bennett from Kennard in Houston County was assigned to the tanker *Neosho* which had arrived at Pearl Harbor the previous morning.

*Neosho* had just completed pumping aviation fuel into the tanks on Ford Island when Japanese planes appeared. Bennett had finished duty and walked out on the dock to smoke when he saw the Japanese planes. At first he believed they were American aircraft dropping sandbags as part of a drill, but soon saw the Rising Sun insignia on the planes. "They were so low you could see them [Japanese pilots] grinning," recalled Bennett.<sup>8</sup>

Private First Class Melvin Faulkner from Henderson, Texas, a heavy equipment operator in the 24th Infantry Division, was in his barracks on Oahu when he heard a series of explosions. "The whole scene was like a nightmare," recalled Faulkner. Bombs were falling; men, planes, trucks, and buildings were being blasted apart. "No one really knew what was going on, and, by the time the ammunition and weapons were set up, the raid was over." Lee Herwin Duke of Vidor in Orange County was one of the 2,403 Americans killed in the Japanese attacks. He died when an enemy plane crashed into his ship, the sea-plane tender *U.S.S. Curtiss*, in what may have been the first *kamikaze* (suicide) attack of the war.<sup>9</sup>

Three Texans, Doris Miller and Paul James McMurtry from Waco and Fred Kenneth Moore from Campbell in eastern Hunt County, were awarded Navy Crosses for their roles in defending the fleet during the Japanese attack. Miller, an African American mess attendant on the battleship *West Virginia*, manned a machine gun after assisting in moving the ship's fatally wounded captain and shot down one or more enemy aircraft. Boatswain's Mate McMurtry was awarded the Navy Cross for assisting "materially in maintaining continuous and effective fire against the enemy" with his antiaircraft battery. Seaman Moore remained at his gun station despite orders to take cover and assisted in keeping his antiaircraft gun in operation until killed by an explosion.<sup>10</sup>

The American entry into war meant that production of war materials was stepped up everywhere. This was particularly true in the Texas oil industry. Statewide production, half in East Texas, rose from 491 million barrels in 1940 to 746 million in 1944. Much of this was refined at facilities along the East Texas coast stretching from Beaumont and Port Arthur to the Houston ship channel. The production of 100-octane aviation gasoline became a major function of Texas refineries. Humble Oil's giant facility at Baytown produced more 100-octane aviation gasoline than any other refinery. In December 1944 the Baytown plant celebrated the production of the billionth gallon of 100-octane gasoline, the first refinery in the world to hit that mark.<sup>11</sup>

The threat of German submarine attacks on tankers carrying oil and gasoline from Texas to the northeastern states led to the building of two giant pipelines connecting East Texas with the East Coast. Construction of the first of these two, twenty-four inches in diameter and known as the "Big Inch," was begun in August 1942 and completed a year later. The Big Inch carried Texas crude oil from Longview to Pennsylvania and New York. Construction of another pipeline, twenty inches in diameter and known as the "Little Inch," began in 1943 and was completed in March 1944. This line ran from the refinery complex in the Houston-Beaumont-Port Arthur area to Linden, New

Jersey. Together, the two lines carried 350 million barrels of Texas crude and refined oil to the East Coast during the war.<sup>12</sup>

East Texas chemical and petrochemical production played a vital role in the war effort. The Humble Oil Company received a government contract to make toluene, a basic ingredient of trinitrotoluene (TNT). By late 1941 the Baytown Ordnance Works, built next to Humble's Baytown oil refinery, was shipping toluene to the Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant at Karnack on Caddo Lake in Harrison County.<sup>13</sup>

The Humble Company also contracted with the Defense Plant Corporation to build a butyl rubber plant at its Baytown facility. During the last year of the war the plant produced 24,000 long tons of butyl rubber, approximately half the amount produced in the United States, for insulation and rubberized cloth. Butadiene, a basic ingredient for synthetic rubber, was manufactured by oil companies at Baytown, Port Neches, Houston, Corpus Christi, and Borger. In June 1943 the General Tire and Rubber Company opened a plant next to Baytown's Humble refinery to make tires produced from butadiene manufactured by Humble and styrene manufactured by Monsanto Chemical Company at Texas City. Other synthetic rubber plants were opened by B.F. Goodrich and Freestone at Port Neches and Goodyear at Houston.<sup>14</sup>

The metal industry assumed new importance during the Second World War. The Dutch firm N.V. Billiton Maatschappij built the world's largest tin smelter in Texas City for the U.S. government. Sheffield Steel of Texas, a division of the American Rolling Mill Company, built a new steel mill on the Houston Ship Channel in 1941 and expanded the mill two years later. At Longview the Madaras Steel Corporation built a plant to reduce iron ore to sponge iron. Sponge iron was then converted into steel ingots by the East Texas Electric Steel Company. The Lone Star Steel Company built a blast furnace, coke ovens and a beneficiation plant near Daingerfield. An iron smelting plant was constructed at Rusk.<sup>15</sup>

As noted above, the small East Texas town of Karnack was a center of ammunition production during the war. In December 1941 Monsanto Chemical Company selected the site near Caddo Lake for the manufacture of the explosive trinitrotoluene (TNT). Construction began soon after, and in October 1942 the Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant (also called the Longhorn Ordnance Works) began operation. By the end of the war the plant had produced more than 400 million tons of TNT.<sup>16</sup>

The Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant (also known as the Lone Star Ordnance Plant) was constructed nine miles west of Texarkana by the Lone Star Defense Corporation, a subsidiary of the B.F. Goodrich Corporation, in 1941. That same year the Red River Army Depot (also known as the Red River Ordnance Depot) was constructed adjacent. In 1943 the two facilities were consolidated as the Texarkana Ordnance Center. Other East Texas ordnance plants and depots were located along the Houston and Sabine River ship channels.<sup>17</sup>

The East Texas Gulf Coast played a major role in shipbuilding during World War II. There had been a lively shipbuilding and ship repairing business

between Houston and Orange during the First World War, but this declined appreciably after that war. The need for vessels of all types became obvious with conflict in Europe and Asia in the late 1930s and accelerated after Pearl Harbor. In 1941 the U.S. Maritime Corporation contracted with the Houston Shipbuilding Corporation, a subsidiary of Todd Shipyards Corporation, to build cargo vessels at Irish Bend on the Houston Ship Channel near Deer Park. By March 1942 the Irish Bend facility had 6,000 employees; by June 1942, 20,000; by 1943, 40,000. During the course of the war the Deer Park facility turned out 208 cargo vessels and fourteen oil tankers.<sup>18</sup>

At nearby Green's Bayou, a tributary of Buffalo Bayou, the building contractors Herman and George Brown formed the Brown Shipbuilding Company. Their first shipbuilding contract was for constructing pursuit ships; by the end of the war the Brown facility employed 20,000 men and women who worked shifts around the clock building destroyer escorts, landing craft, and other vessels for the military. Over 350 combat vessels were built by the Brown brothers during the war.<sup>19</sup>

The Beaumont-Orange region was the other center of Texas shipbuilding during World War II. The Pennsylvania Shipyard on the Neches River at Beaumont employed 10,000 men and women to construct naval vessels and auxiliary ships. One hundred nine vessels were built at the Beaumont facility during the war. At nearby Orange three shipbuilding firms, Levingston, Weaver, and Consolidated Western Steel, employed more than 22,000 workers. Consolidated, the largest of the three companies, built thirty-nine destroyers, ninety-two escort destroyers, 106 landing craft, and nine amphibious personnel deployed during the war. The Levingston firm constructed 157 vessels, including steel tugboats, oil barges, cargo barges, and small tankers for the Navy. Weaver Shipyards built twenty-six minesweepers and two 110-foot submarine chasers.<sup>20</sup>

Although major aircraft production eventually centered in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Houston still played a role in the World War II aviation industry. The Hughes Tool Corporation, founded by Howard R. Hughes, Sr. and Walter Sharp and later owned by Howard R. Hughes, Jr., built parts for American bombers. The younger Hughes, an avid pilot who set several flight records in the 1930s, secured a government contract to build a giant flying boat made of plywood in his California factory. Dubbed the *Spruce Goose* by the press, the flying boat was not finished until after the war and then flew only one time.<sup>21</sup>

Oil, shipbuilding, and aircraft were the largest producers of war materials and employers, but many other East Texas entities produced items for the war effort. Houston's Cameron Iron Works made depth charges and K-guns for antisubmarine warfare. Anderson and Clayton of Houston, in a joint venture with Brown and Root, made eight-inch shells. Former Houston mayor Oscar Holcombe created a construction company that manufactured huts for the Army, houses for the Navy, and pre-cut structures for overseas shipment. The International Derrick and Equipment Company (Ideco) produced more than 40,000 armor-piercing 1,000-pound bombs as well as propeller shafts and

cargo winches for Liberty ships and draft-control shutters for naval destroyers at its Beaumont plant. The Lufkin Foundry and Machine Company made drive gears for Sherman tanks, marine gears for cargo vessels and landing craft, artillery carriages, and cast iron practice bombs. Its trailer division produced truck trailers, mobile laundry units, and gasoline transports. By 1943 eighty-five percent of the Lufkin Foundry's production was for the war effort. Like many Texas war plants the Foundry operated three shifts, including Sundays, and for the first time employed women as welders.<sup>22</sup>

East Texas farmers and ranchers played their part in the war effort by increasing production of crops and livestock needed to feed and clothe Americans on the home front and battlefield. The shift from cotton production toward livestock and other crops that had begun in the 1930s continued during the war years. In 1930 Texans grew more than four million bales of cotton, much of it in East and Central Texas. This had fallen to 3.2 million bales in 1940, 828,789 in East Texas. In 1944, the last full year of the war, this fell to 2.6 million bales in the state and 523,716 in East Texas. Cotton was only one of the important commodities produced in East Texas during the war years. By the end of the war there were more cattle in East Texas than in West Texas. The number of hogs and chickens raised in East Texas also increased during the war as the government encouraged farmers to double their efforts to meet added demands for both military and domestic consumption. East Texas production of Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, and onions increased by thirty percent during the war years. The Japanese capture of the coconut-producing islands of the Pacific early in the war necessitated greater production of peanuts, as peanut oil replaced coconut oil in making glycerin required in munitions manufacturing. Texas farmers met the challenge, tripling peanut production during the war.<sup>23</sup>

Shortages of agricultural labor plagued all farmers during the war years. Although farmers had some deferment protection due to amendments to the Selective Service Act, many farmers and farm laborers volunteered or were drafted into military service. Many others moved to towns and cities to take high-paying jobs in defense industries. In East Texas German prisoners of war partially offset the shortage of agricultural workers. Many of the prisoner-of-war camps were located in central and western Texas, but two large base camps and numerous smaller ones were in East Texas. Camp Huntsville in Walker County, one of six large base camps in Texas, was one of the first prisoner of war camps built in the United States. The first prisoners of war (POWs), members of Rommel's Afrika Korps, arrived in spring 1943. By the end of the year 4,840 POWs were in Camp Huntsville. The other prisoner-of-war base camp in East Texas was at Camp Maxey, the military installation near Paris, Texas. The largest prisoner of war camp in the United States, Maxey held 7,458 German prisoners, including army, navy, and air force personnel, by the end of the war.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the large base camps, thirty-five smaller branch camps were located in rural areas of the state. Twelve of these branch camps were opened in East Texas to provide workers for the timber industry, while others were

established for general farm work. The camp at Center was largest, at one time holding 773 German prisoners who worked in the timber industry. Lufkin had two camps with a total of 800 prisoners who worked for the Southland Paper Mills. A camp at Liberty, with 300 prisoners, was located on property owned by the Forest Service. Other POW camps were at Alto, Bannister, Chireno, Milam, Orange, Patroon, Princeton, San Augustine, Navasota, Anahuac, Mont Belvieu, Corsicana, and Kirbyville. Camp China in Jefferson County, opened in 1944, was designed to provide workers for the area's rice producers. After the rice crop was in, the prisoners became lumberjacks and sawmill workers.<sup>25</sup>

While the use of prisoners of war helped offset labor shortages, East Texans faced a variety of other problems during the war. Lack of adequate housing was a major concern in coastal communities such as Beaumont, Orange, and Port Arthur as thousands of people left small towns and farms for employment in refineries and shipyards. In Orange County population doubled and tripled almost overnight. Local residents attempted to help by taking boarders in spare rooms and dividing homes into small apartments. Harold Harrington, a shipyard worker in Orange, recalls that his mother took in workers from rural East Texas. "She had as many as three beds in a big room, and three men stayed in one room. She even had 'em in a little place in the hall out there she partitioned off."<sup>26</sup>

To help alleviate the housing shortage in Orange, the federal government constructed thousands of housing units. More than 4,000 of these were in two government projects, called Riverside and Riverside Addition, on the west side of the Sabine River. Local residents scoffed at the Riverside project, which was located "on a cypress swampland infested with mosquitoes, snakes, and an occasional alligator." The site was chosen because it was within walking distance of two major shipyards.<sup>27</sup>

Old-time Orange residents derided the Riverside project, but for shipyard workers and their families the government housing was better than sleeping in their cars, trailer homes, or tents. C.W. Waggoner, who came to Orange from Nacogdoches when his father found work in the shipyards, remembers that the streets in Riverside were knee-deep in water. As a young lad Waggoner resented the move from the Piney Woods to the treeless marshland, but later admitted, "it was a pretty doggone good house." "It was tight and warm," he recalled, with inside plumbing, which was not always the rule in those days.<sup>28</sup>

While housing shortages primarily affected those living in towns affected by war production, everyone felt the effect of commodity rationing, and other commodities were added to the list soon thereafter. The rationing of coffee, in short supply because of lack of shipping cargo space, was announced in November 1942 with one pound per month allowed each individual. Meats, cheese, fish, fats, processed foods, and canned goods joined the ration list in February 1943. A shortage of leather led to rationing of shoes in February 1943. Initially each individual was allotted coupons for three pairs of shoes per year. This was later reduced to two pair. Shoes not requiring leather were not rationed.<sup>29</sup>



Although rationing of food and shoes was never popular it was more acceptable to Texans than gasoline rationing. In a state where there existed an abundance of oil and gasoline and where travel distances are great, Texans failed to see the need for gasoline rationing. Imposed by the federal government in December 1942 in an effort to conserve rubber, gasoline rationing was universally unpopular. However, over time most Texans learned to live with the system by reducing speed (also required by presidential order) and eliminating or reducing driving for pleasure.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to rationing of certain items, there was a variety of shortages of non-rationed commodities. Cigarettes (especially Camels and Lucky Strikes), Coca-Cola, Wrigley's chewing gum, Hershey Chocolate Bars, Milky Way candy bars, liquors (especially Scotch), facial tissues, toilet paper, soap, cotton diapers, cotton shirts, and nylon hose were in short supply. In some areas where smoking was not permitted on the job, shortages of chewing tobacco were reported. In a few instances milk was scarce.<sup>31</sup>

Rationing and commodity shortages required individuals to plan more carefully, but few Texans on the home front suffered during the war. Buck Young, who grew up in Pelly (now part of Baytown) during the war, recalls, "even with rationing our family did all right. We had plenty of butter from our cow, eggs from our chickens, and fresh vegetables from our garden, or from the Mason jars of my mother's canning efforts."<sup>32</sup>

During the war more women were employed outside the home than ever before. The expansion of the war effort and the departure of men to the military created a need for additional workers. This was particularly true in Southeast Texas where thousands of workers were required for oil refining and shipbuilding. A federal agency, the War Manpower Committee, recruited female workers to the labor force. Through radio announcements, newspaper stories, motion picture spots, and outdoor billboards, the agency appealed to American women to take jobs in shipyards, aircraft plants, munitions factories, and oil refineries.<sup>33</sup>

The efforts to recruit women for wartime employment were successful. The number of women in the American work force rose from twelve million in 1940 to nineteen million in 1944. By 1944, the last full year of the war, one-fourth of the individuals employed in essential industries and military establishments in Texas were women. Women worked in a variety of jobs formerly reserved for men. In oil refineries women worked as timekeepers, yard clerks, storeroom helpers, chemists, crane operators, electricians, and machinists. In shipyards they were welders, packers, burners, mold loft workers, tool checkers, and layout workers. In aircraft factories women operated machines, rivet guns, and welding torches. At army bases and airfields they performed a variety of tasks necessary for the war effort.<sup>34</sup>

More than 12,000 Texas women served in the armed forces during World War II, 8,000 in the army and 4,200 in the navy, marines, and coast guard. Women in the navy, marines, and coast guard were assigned mainly to clerical duties, many of them in the Hawaiian Islands and Alaska. Seventy-six thou-

sand American women served in the army and navy nurses' corps during the war. Some of these women were in the military before Pearl Harbor. Four East Texans – Agnes Barre of Orange, Hattie Brantley of Jefferson, Eula R. Fails of Houston, and Verna V. Henson of Trinity – were among the seventy-seven army and navy nurses taken prisoner by the Japanese in the Philippines early in the war. Another East Texan, Lucy Wilson of Big Sandy, was among those evacuated from the Philippines to Australia before the surrender. Other East Texans, including Catherine H. Wiley of Galveston and Clarice Ann Dreskin of Longview, joined the army nurse corps after their husbands were called into service. Both saw overseas duty, Wiley in the European theater and Dreskin in the Far East.<sup>35</sup>

Texas women served in a variety of volunteer organizations during the war. Thousands worked for the Red Cross, knitting garments and rolling surgical dressings for the military. Others assisted in the activities of service clubs operated by the United Service Organizations (USO). In some communities, such as in Baytown in Harris County, they served as ambulance drivers. The American Women's Volunteer Services in Beaumont opened a nursery for children of women defense workers. Eloise Milam of Beaumont organized a group of teenage girls, known as the Melody Maids, who provided music at bond rallies, military bases, service clubs, and military hospitals. In several cities women, such as Ruth Coffey of Beaumont, volunteered their services to the Civil Air Patrol.<sup>36</sup>

Young people contributed to the war effort. Almost everyone who grew up during the war remembers purchasing savings stamps and war bonds. Hazel Shelton Abernethy recalls that Tuesday was Stamp Day at Nacogdoches High School. On that day students could purchase stamps in denominations of ten and twenty-five cents. These were pasted into a small booklet that when filled with stamps valued at \$18.75 could be exchanged for a defense (later war) bond that in ten years was worth \$25.00. Competition between classes and between schools was encouraged by the U.S. Treasury Department. St. Anthony High School of Beaumont claimed a national record by collecting \$152,000 in one major campaign.<sup>37</sup>

During the war East Texas young people, as well as adults, continued to take an interest in sports, particularly high school football. Two East Texas teams, Houston Reagan and Lufkin, advanced to the 1942 state quarterfinal games. The Lufkin Panthers, behind the passing of Harmon Carswell and running of Oliver McKay and Les Taylor, made it to the state finals in 1943, defeating Marshall, 32-6, and Waco, 28-0, in bi-district and quarterfinal games, and then edging past Goose Creek (Baytown) in the semifinals on a greater number of 20-yard line penetrations after playing to a 7-7 tie. In the state finals Lufkin was defeated by San Angelo, 26-13. In 1944 a Southeast Texas team, the Port Arthur Yellow Jackets, won the state crown in football.<sup>38</sup>

Texas colleges and universities were severely affected by the war as thousands of students volunteered or were drafted for military service. The state's big colleges, the University of Texas and Texas A&M, suffered heavy losses in

enrollment; the University of Texas dropping from 11,627 in autumn 1941 to 8,794 in fall 1942 and Texas A&M from 6,679 in 1941 to 2,215 in 1943. East Texas colleges had enrollment declines; Lon Morris in Jacksonville falling from 239 students in 1939 to 82 students in 1942, Kilgore Junior College from 700 students in 1941 to 330 in 1944, and Stephen F. Austin State Teachers College from 1,021 in 1941 to 419 in 1944.<sup>39</sup>

In an effort to supplement enrollment many Texas colleges and universities added military training programs. Several of the larger institutions had V-12 programs for training aviation cadets. Four Texas colleges, Stephen F. Austin State Teachers College, Texas State College for Women, East Teachers State Teachers College, and Sul Ross State Teachers College, housed army administration schools for the Women's Army Corps.<sup>40</sup>

Racial tensions in the state and nation had been growing for several years as wartime conditions brought more people together in crowded towns and cities. In July 1942 William Vinson, a black Texarkanan accused of raping a white woman, was dragged to a cotton gin by white vigilantes and hanged. When the United States Attorney General registered concern over the issue, Texas Governor Coke Stevenson replied "certain members of the Negro race from time to time furnish the setting for mob violence by the outrageous crimes which they commit."<sup>41</sup>

On June 15, 1943 racial tensions in Beaumont, where the expansion of shipbuilding and oil refining had attracted thousands of newcomers to the city, exploded when a white woman reported that she had been raped by a black man. Several thousand shipyard workers moved through the black districts of the city, assaulting black citizens, breaking into homes, stores, and restaurants, and burning automobiles and buildings. More than 300 blacks were injured and three individuals killed.<sup>42</sup>

City, county, and state law enforcement agencies were called out to establish order. A.M. Aiken, Jr., of Paris, president *pro tempore* of the Texas Senate, who was acting governor while the governor and lieutenant governor were out of the state, declared martial law to avoid further bloodshed. By nightfall of June 16 more than two thousand lawmen, including Texas State Guardsmen, city police, sheriff's deputies, state patrolmen, and Texas Rangers, occupied the city. Beaumont was placed under martial law for several days while authorities brought life back to normal.<sup>43</sup>

While East Texans at home wrestled with problems of rationing, housing shortages, and racial tensions, thousands of other East Texans faced the enemy on battlefields around the world. More than 700,000 Texas men and women, probably a third of them East Texans, served in the armed forces of the United States during the war. Lucian H. Truscott, a native of Chatfield, a small community north of Corsicana, was the highest-ranking East Texan in the military. Truscott rose from the rank of brigadier general in the North African campaign to lieutenant general commanding the Fifth Army in Italy during the closing months of the war. Another East Texan, Major General Roderick R. Allen, a native of Marshall, led the 12th Armored Division, which became the first

Allied division to reach the Danube River in Germany. Claire Chennault, born in Marshall, and Barney and Benjamin Giles, twin brothers from Mineola, were the highest-ranking East Texas natives in the Army Air Force. Chennault commanded the famed Flying Tigers, American volunteer airmen who served in China before American entry into the war. He was later promoted to major general commanding the U.S. Fourteenth Air Force in the Far East. Barney Giles held a variety of assignments during the war, eventually becoming deputy commanding general of the Air Force and acting head during the illness of General "Hap" Arnold. His brother, Benjamin, served in several leadership roles before becoming commanding general of U.S. Air Forces in the Middle East in 1944.<sup>44</sup>

Other East Texans served on battlefields around the world. Several, Paul O. Mock of Goose Creek, Robert Johnson of Lufkin, Truett J. Majors of Greenville, and Hugh Marble, Jr., of Houston, were fighter pilots in the 24th Pursuit Group that battled against overwhelming odds to defend the Philippines early in the war. Four East Texans participated in Doolittle's bombing raid on Japan early in the war: Ross Wilder of Tyler and James Parker of Houston were co-pilots, Nolan Herndon of Greenville was a bombardier-navigator, and Douglas V. Radney of Mineola was rear gunner on planes making the raid. Navy pilot Ensign George Gay of Houston was the only survivor of Squadron 8 in the American victory at Midway, the turning point of the Pacific War.<sup>45</sup>

East Texans took part in all the major campaigns as American forces fought their way across the Pacific. Lieutenant Commander Glynn Robert Donaho, from the small town of George in Madison County, received the Navy Cross and other decorations while commanding the submarine *Flying Fish* in the South Pacific. Corwin Mendenhall of Anahuac and Winnie was decorated for his services in the Pacific on the submarine *Sculpin*. Leonard Hall, an enlisted man from northeast Texas, was one of several East Texans in the 43rd Division who fought in the Solomon and Philippine Islands. Lieutenant Wayland Bennett of Texarkana was killed while serving with "Pappy" Boyington's "Black Sheep Squadron" in the South Pacific in 1943. Staff Sergeant Manton Stewart of Baytown was a member of the 6th Ranger Battalion that liberated American prisoners at Cabanatuan in the Philippines. First Sergeant Herman J. Dupont of Port Arthur led a company in the 27th Marines during the bitter fighting on Iwo Jima.<sup>46</sup>

Seven East Texans serving in the European Theater were awarded Congressional Medals of Honor for heroism. Of these Audie Murphy from Hunt County is the best known. Serving first as an enlisted man and later as an officer, Murphy, who received thirty-three medals, decorations, and citations, including the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, and Bronze Star, became the most-decorated American serviceman in the Second World War. Staff Sergeant Lucian Adams of Port Arthur, Technical Sergeant Forrest Everhart of Texas City, Second Lieutenant James H. Fields of Houston, Technician Fourth Grade Truman Kimbro of Madisonville, and Private First

Class George Turner of Longview were awarded the Medal of Honor for combat action in France and Belgium, Kimbro posthumously. First Lieutenant Raymond Knight from Houston, a member of the 350th Fighter Group, was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for action in Italy's Po Valley.<sup>47</sup>

The end of the fighting in Europe in May 1945 and the Pacific in August 1945 was greeted with enthusiasm by East Texans everywhere. Max Lale, a graduate of the University of Oklahoma and later a journalist and historian in East Texas, whose artillery group had fought its way across France and Germany, was awaiting reassessment when he learned that the war had ended. "We celebrated the Japanese surrender at a glorious party," he later wrote in his memoirs. Francis Abernethy of Nacogdoches was on the minesweeper *Harkness* in a convoy near Okinawa when he heard that the war was over. "We screamed and hollered and jumped around like a bunch of crazies," Abernethy recalled. Another East Texan, Boatswain Mate James W. Lowry, was on the *U.S.S. Zeilin* in the Marianas preparing for the invasion of Japan when he received the good news. "They let us fire flares off the ship, and shoot tracer shells. The whole sky was lit up," he recalled.<sup>48</sup>

The war was over. The cost had been high; 20,000 Texans, many of them East Texans, were killed. The lives of those at home as well as those returning had been changed. Many of the old problems such as racism and poverty had not been conquered and new ones including the Cold War with the Soviet Union and the fighting war in Korea were ahead. But for the moment East Texans were pleased that they had done their part in winning the war against the greatest evils of their day, German Nazism and Japanese imperialism.

## NOTES

For purposes of this essay the author is generally following the definition of the region given in E.H. Johnson, "East Texas," in Ron Tyler, et al., eds., *The New Handbook of Texas*, 5 vols. (Austin, 1996), Vol. I, p. 770. One or two exceptions, such as Fannin and Hunt counties, are made where counties fall outside Johnson's definition but seem to have political or economic ties with East Texas. *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide, 1941-1942* (Dallas, 1941), p. 230; Roger M. Olien, "Oil and Gas Industry," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. IV, pp.1123-1124; Julia Cauble Smith, "East Texas Oilfield," *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. II, pp.772-774.

<sup>47</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population* (Washington, 1942), Vol. II, pp. 792-796; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Seventeenth Census of the United States: 1950, Number of Inhabitants* (Washington, 1952), Vol. I, p. 43.

<sup>48</sup>*Texas Almanac, and State Industrial Guide, 1945-1946* (Dallas, 1945), pp. 109-110; Louis Fairchild, ed., *They Called It The War Effort: Oral Histories From World War II Orange, Texas* (Austin, 1991), pp. xxv; Cecil Harper, Jr., "Bowie County," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 672.

<sup>49</sup>For experiences at Fannin see Lawrence C. Walker, "Camp Fannin: A Reminiscence," *East Texas Historical Journal* XXXVII (Fall 1999), pp. 64-67. Majors Field was also the training site for the Mexican 201st Air Squadron. David Minor, "Majors Field," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. IV, p. 471.

<sup>50</sup>Ken Durham, "Harmon General Hospital," *East Texas Historical Journal*, XXXVIII (Spring 2000), pp. 35-42; Archie P. McDonald, "Harmon General Hospital," in Bob Bowman and Archie

P. McDonald, *Pioneers, Poke Sallet & Politics: All Things Historical* (Lufkin, 2001), pp.100-102.

<sup>9</sup>Interview with Dan Dennis, January 9, 2002, Beaumont, Texas; Fairchild, *They Called It The War Effort*, pp. 59, 135; Martha Ann Stroud, *For Love of Country: The Price of Freedom* (Austin, 2000), p, 116; Hazel Shelton Abernethy, "The Home Front in East Texas," in Joyce Gibson Roach, ed., *Collective Hearts: Texans in World War II* (Austin, 1996), pp. 84-85.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Philip Latimer, January 20, 2002, Beaumont, Texas.

<sup>11</sup>Quote, Leon Bennett, in Robert S. La Fonte and Ronald E. Marcello, *Remembering Pearl Harbor: Eyewitness Accounts by U.S. Military Men and Women* (Wilmington, Delaware, 1991), p. 42.

<sup>12</sup>Quotes, Melvin Faulkner, in Paul Joseph Travers, *Eyewitness to Infamy: An Oral History of Pearl Harbor* (New York, 1991), p. 256; Gordon W. Prange, *At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor* (New York, 1981), p. 539; Andrea Wright, "SE Texas' First WWII Casualty Died on Ship at Pearl Harbor," *Beaumont Enterprise*, December 6, 2001.

<sup>13</sup>Walter Karig and Welbourne Kelley, comp., *Battle Report: Pearl Harbor to Coral Sea*, 6 vols. (New York, 1944), Vol. I, pp.72-73; Neil Sapper, "Aboard the Wrong Ship in the Right Books: Doris Miller and Historical Accuracy," *East Texas Historical Journal* XVIII (Spring 1980), pp. 3-11.

<sup>14</sup>*Texas Almanac, 1945-1946*, p. 237; Roger M. Olien, "Oil and Gas Industry," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, IV, pp. 1124-1125; Henrietta M. Larson and Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *History of Humble Oil & Refining Company: A Study in Industrial Growth* (New York, 1959), p. 595.

<sup>15</sup>Jerrell Dean Palmer and John J. Johnson, "Big Inch and Little Inch," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, pp. 532-533; Diana Davis Olien and Roger M. Olien, *Oil in Texas: The Gusher Age, 1895-1945* (Austin, 2002), p. 226.

<sup>16</sup>Donna Brewer, "Baytown Humble Refinery's Contribution to World War II: The Development and Production of 100-Octane Aviation Fuel and Toluene and Its Impact on Allied Victory," *Touchstone*, Vol. XIV (1995), pp. 2-15. Toluene was produced at other Gulf Coast refineries including Shell Oil's facility at Deer Park on the Houston Ship Channel. Diana J. Kleiner, "Deer Park," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. II, pp. 561-562.

<sup>17</sup>Larson and Porter, *History of Humble Oil & Refining Company*, p. 598; Margaret Swett Henson, *The History of Baytown* (Baytown, 1986), pp. 124-126; James A. Clark and Mark Odintz, "Fxxon Corporation, U.S.A.," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. II, pp. 928-930; W. T. Block, *Sapphire City of the Neches: A Brief History of Port Neches, Texas From Wilderness to Industrialization* (Port Neches, 1987), p. 356.

<sup>18</sup>*Texas Almanac, 1943-1944*, p. 184; "Tin Smelting," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. VI, p. 504; Wayne Gard and Diana J. Kleiner, "Iron and Steel Industry," *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol., III, p. 872; Clara H. Lewis and John R. Stockton, "Manufacturing Industries," *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol., IV, p. 494.

<sup>19</sup>Mark Odintz, "Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, IV, p. 279.

<sup>20</sup>Christopher Long, "Lone Star Ammunition Plant," and "Red River Army Depot," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. IV, pp. 270-271.; Vol. V, p. 493; Carter Barcus, "San Jacinto Ordnance Depot," *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. V, p. 859; Vickie L. Kelly, "In the Shadow of Fame: The San Jacinto Ordnance Depot, 1939-1964," *Military History of Texas and the Southwest* XIII (No.2, 1977), pp. 39-54; *Texas Almanac, 1945-1946*, p. 255.

<sup>21</sup>David G. McComb, *Houston: A History* (Austin, 1981), p. 87. In his *Galveston: A History* (Austin, 1986), p. 168, McComb points out that the Todd firm also built tankers and concrete barges at its Galveston Dry Works where it employed nearly five thousand workers during the war.

<sup>22</sup>Joseph A. Pratt and Christopher J. Castaneda, *Builders: Herman and George R. Brown* (College Station, 1999), p. 77; Marguerite Johnston, *Houston: The Unknown City, 1835-1946*

(College Station, 1991), pp. 370-371; James C. Martin, "George Rufus Brown," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, pp. 760-761.

<sup>18</sup>Robert H. Peebles, "Shipbuilding," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. V, p. 1030; William T. Faucett, *The Shipyard at Beaumont* (Beaumont, 1991), pp. 68-86; William T. Faucett, "Shipbuilding in Beaumont During World War II," *Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record* XL (November 2005), pp. 55-65; Frank Karpi, "Shipbuilding in Two Wars," in Howard C. Williams, ed., *Gateway to Texas: The History of Orange and Orange County* (Orange, 1988), p. 155.

<sup>19</sup>Walter F. Pilcher, "Howard Robard Hughes, Jr.," in Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. III, pp. 771-772; Donald L. Bartlett and James B. Steel, *Empire: The Life, Legends and Madness of Howard Hughes* (New York, 1979), pp. 105-134.

<sup>20</sup>Johnston, *Houston*, pp. 369-370; Judith Walker Linsley and Ellen Walker Reinstra, *Beaumont: A Chronicle of Promise* (Woodland Hills, CA, 1982), p. 164; Bob Bowman, "A Century of Entrepreneurs: The Lufkin Industries Story, 1902-2002," *East Texas Historical Journal*, Vol. XL (Spring 2002), pp. 21-22.

<sup>21</sup>*Texas Almanac, 1945-1946*, pp. 190, 193-195; Henry C. Dethloff and Garry L. Nall, "Agriculture," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, pp. 64-66; *Texas Almanac, 1945-1946*, pp. 214, 216-217; *Texas Almanac, 1947-1948*, p. 230; Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York, 2003), p. 403; *Texas Almanac, 1947-1948*, pp. 199-205; B.C. Langley, "Peanut Culture," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. V, p. 108.

<sup>22</sup>Richard P. Walker, *The Lone Star and the Swastika: Prisoners of War in Texas* (Austin, 2001), pp. 3-7, 18-19. See also Arnold P. Krammer, "When the Afrika Korps Came to Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. LXXX (January 1977), pp. 247-283; Robert Tissig, "Stalag Texas, 1943-1945," *Military History of Texas and the Southwest* XIII (Fall 1976), pp. 23-34.

<sup>23</sup>Walker, *Lone Star and the Swastika*, pp. 37-43; Bob Bowman, "Southland Paper Mills, Inc.: The South's Pioneer Newsprint Manufacturer," *East Texas Historical Journal*, Vol. XI (Fall 2002), pp. 29-30. The work of German prisoners in the timber industry is described by Mark Choate, *Nazis in the Piney Woods* (Lufkin, 1989) and Jeanie Carmody, "German Prisoners of War—the Liberty Experience," *Touchstone*, Vol. VI (1987), pp. 59-65.

<sup>24</sup>Quote, Harold Harrington, in Fairchild, *They Called It The War Effort*, p. 32.

<sup>25</sup>Quote, Louis Fairchild, *They Called It The War Effort*, p. xxiv.

<sup>26</sup>Quote, C.W. Waggoner, in Fairchild, *They Called It The War Effort*, p. 112.

<sup>27</sup>Ronald H. Bailey, *The Home Front: USA* (Alexandria, 1977), p. 110; Richard R. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?: The American Home Front, 1941-1945* (New York, 1970), pp. 243-247; Bailey, *The Home Front, U.S.A.*, pp. 111-113; Fairchild, *They Called It The War Effort*, pp. 398-399. Detailed studies of rationing of various items may be found in *The Story of Wartime Rationing* (Washington, 1947).

<sup>28</sup>A more detailed account of the system of gasoline rationing may be found in Wooster, *Texas and Texans in World War II*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>29</sup>Personal experiences of author; Mrs. Leona Whitman, interviewed by Phyllis Jordan, March 27, 1989, and Gladys Price, interviewed by Jan Street, November 6, 1990. Special Collections, Gray Library, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas; Fairchild, *They Called It The War Effort*, pp. 175-176, 247.

<sup>30</sup>Buck Young, "Memories of World War II," *East Texas Historical Journal*, Vol. XXX (Spring 1992), p. 43.

<sup>31</sup>Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995* (College Station, 1997), pp. 136-138.

<sup>32</sup>Cynthia Guidici, "Women at War," in Lee, *1941: Texas Goes to War*, pp. 145-164; Gary J. Rabalais, "Humble Women at War: The Case of Humble's Baytown Refinery, 1942-1945,"

*Houston Review of History and Culture*, Vol. II (Spring 2005), pp. 33-36, 58; Charlotte A. Holliman, "Beaumont Women During World War II," *Texas Gulf and Historical Record*, Vol. XXXI (November 1995), pp. 50-65; W.T. Block, "Women Pitched In To Help Industry in Wartime Beaumont," *Beaumont Enterprise*, May 18, 2003.

<sup>3</sup>Clarice F. Pollard, "WAACs in Texas During the Second World War," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XCIII (July 1989), pp. 61-74; Cynthia Guidici, "Women at War," pp. 165-166; Aileen Kilgore Henderson, *Stateside Soldier: Life in the Women's Army Corps* (Columbia, 2001), pp. 57-66. Names and home towns of Bataan nurses are provided in Appendix II, Elizabeth N. Norman, *We Band of Angels: The Untold Story of American Nurses Trapped in Bataan by the Japanese* (New York, 1999). Lucy Wilson Jopling, *Warrior in White* (San Antonio, 1990), provides a full account of her experiences in the Philippines. See also "Heroic Nurses of Bataan and Corregidor," *American Journal of Nursing*, XLII (March 1945), pp. 187-198, and Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, eds., *We're In This War, Too: World War II Letters from American Women in Uniform* (New York, 1994), p. 29.

<sup>4</sup>Guidici, "Women at War," pp. 153-159; Henson, *History of Baytown*, p. 128; Holliman, "Beaumont Women During World War II," p. 61; Mamie Bogue, "Melody Maids," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, IV, p. 608; Melissa R. Platt, "The Melody Maids: Thirty Years of Song," *Texas Gulf and Historical Record*, XXXV (November 1999), pp. 32-45; Louis E. Keefer, *From Maine to Mexico: With America's Private Pilots in the Fight Against Nazi U-Boats* (Reston, 1997), pp. 236-239, 289-290.

<sup>5</sup>Hazel Shelton Abernethy, in Roach, *Collective Hearts*, pp. 85-86; Young, "Memories of World War II," p. 12; Rita Green, Joe Walker, Marcus C. Robbins, "Beaumont at War: The Home Front, 1941-1945" (typescript manuscript, Beaumont, Tyrrell Historical Library, 1992), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup>Harold V. Ratliff, *Autumn's Mightiest Legions: A History of Texas Schoolboy Football* (Waco, 1963), pp. 92-95; Bill McMurray, *Texas High School Football* (South Bend, 1985), pp. 18-19.

<sup>7</sup>*Texas Almanac, 1945-1946*, pp. 373-375; Henry C. Dethloff, *Centennial History of Texas A&M* (College Station, 1976), p. 459; Glendell A. Jones, Jr., *Mid the Pine Hills of East Texas: The Methodist Centennial History of Lon Morris Junior College* (Jacksonville, 1973), pp. 79-80.

<sup>8</sup>Dethloff, *Centennial History of Texas A&M*, pp. 456, 461; *Texas Almanac, 1945-1946*, p. 81; Karen Kaemmering, "The Training of WAACs at Stephen F. Austin State Teachers' College," *East Texas Historical Journal*, Vol. XXXV (Spring 1997), pp. 74-80.

<sup>9</sup>George N. Green, *The Establishment in Texas Politics: The Primitive Years, 1938-1957* (Westport, 1979), p. 79.

<sup>10</sup>James A. Burran, "Violence in an 'Arsenal of Democracy': The Beaumont Race Riot, 1943," *East Texas Historical Journal*, Vol. XIV (Spring 1976), pp. 39-44; James S. Olson and Sharon Phair, "Anatomy of A Race Riot: Beaumont, Texas, 1943," *Texana* Vol. XI (No. 1, 1973), pp. 66-71; Pam Lippold, "Recollections: Revisiting the Beaumont Race Riot of 1943," *Touchstone*, Vol. XXV (2006), pp. 52-65.

<sup>11</sup>*Beaumont Enterprise*, June 16-18, 1943; Burran, "Violence in an 'Arsenal of Democracy'," pp. 45-47; Merline Pitre, *The Struggle Against Jim Crow: Lula B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957* (College Station, 1999), pp. 40-41.

<sup>12</sup>L.K. Truscott, Jr., *Command Missions: A Personal Story* (New York, 1954); Theodore J. Conway, "Lucian King Truscott," in Roger Spiller, ed., *Dictionary of American Military Biography* (Westport, 1984), Vol. III, pp.1110-1112; Harwood H. Hinton, "Roderick Rodman Allen," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 113; Martha Byrd, *Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger* (Tuscaloosa, 1987); Claire Lee Chennault, *Way of a Fighter: The Memoirs of Claire Lee Chennault* (New York, 1949); Anna Giles Kimbrough, "Barney McKinney Giles," and "Benjamin Franklin Giles," Tyler, ed., *New Handbook of Texas*, Vol. III, pp. 160-161.

<sup>13</sup>William H. Bartsch, *Doomed at the Start: American Pursuit Pilots in the Philippines, 1941-1942* (College Station, 1992), pp. 27, 50-51, 435-440; Carroll V. Glines, *The Doolittle Raid:*



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