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Notes: Eyewitness testimony to day-to-day conditions: rationing, scrap drives, civil defense drills, and shortages of household goods; Nebraska's largest contribution to the war effort: food. Also information on bases and POW camps, and changing attitudes in society

Photos: Horse drawn milk delivery wagon; ration coupons; Lincoln businessmen working a "twilight" shift in the fields; ad for repair parts for tractors; Boy Scout scrap drive; pilot and plane "keep 'em flying" poster; women performing farming duties; Civil Defense air wardens; Little Orphan Annie cartoon "junior commandos"; Spencer Park, Hastings, housing construction; Nebraska Ordnance Plant bomb; Scribner Air Base camouflaged building; Fort Robinson POW camp; war bond sale; Abbott and Costello selling war bonds; "Keep Faith with Them" poster for armed forces; Segregated USO club

# THE HOME FRONT



*Gasoline rationing forced a return to earlier forms of transportation.  
(NSHS MacDonald Collection, 4-6-42:1)*

## RATIONING AND SCRAP DRIVES

I remember when about fifteen boys in my junior class stole the tires off an old man's car and put them on their car, and we all went to Beatrice to the dance. Then they had to stand trial, and only one of them got sent to reform school. But that was beside the point. They just "borrowed" them for a little while, you know . . . . If the cops hadn't seen the boys putting the tires back on the car, they would have gotten away with it, but they were pretty nosy cops.

**Marialyse Hager Knobel**

[I]f you wanted to go to all the work, you could shave your legs, and you could buy leg makeup. I never did learn how to put it on properly and we had nylons every so often. Actually, the nylons we had . . . the famous nylons from World War II, were like what you have for support hose nowadays. I mean they were so tough.

**Betty Busboom Kohl, Hastings**

High school student

We didn't have nylons. We often wore cotton [hose] which was terrible or rayon which was a heavy thing, and then somebody came up with the idea of makeup that you paint on your legs. Well, it was hot. We didn't have much air conditioning. The Student Union was the only air conditioned building on campus. If you went someplace and you perspired, it ruined your leg makeup for sure. It wasn't very good. A lot of times you just went without hose and hoped your legs looked tan enough and not too white. This wasn't considered very nice for you to run around that way, but what else could you do?

**Mildred Pogue Gardner, rural  
school teacher in York County,**

later student at the University of  
Nebraska

You got ration points or coupons for a pair of shoes . . . . You could get one pair of shoes, and I had to decide whether to get ordinary shoes like oxfords or saddle shoes or something like that or to get these snow boots, because you didn't know if you would be able to get overshoes. I took the snow boots, but every once in a while I'd say, "I wish I'd taken those other shoes." Cold days they were fine, but on warmer days they weren't so great.

**Rose Marie Murphy Christensen**

[T]o keep your soles from wearing out they had these little rubber soles that you could buy at the dime store. You'd peel off the sticky part, and then there was a horrible little tube of glue, and it had sort of like a food grater that you would rub up the sole of your shoe to make it

## What Did You Do in the War?

stick better, and then you'd pour this sticky glue on and stick it on. That would make your shoes last a little bit longer.

**Juanita Stocker Upton, Fairbury**  
Junior high school student

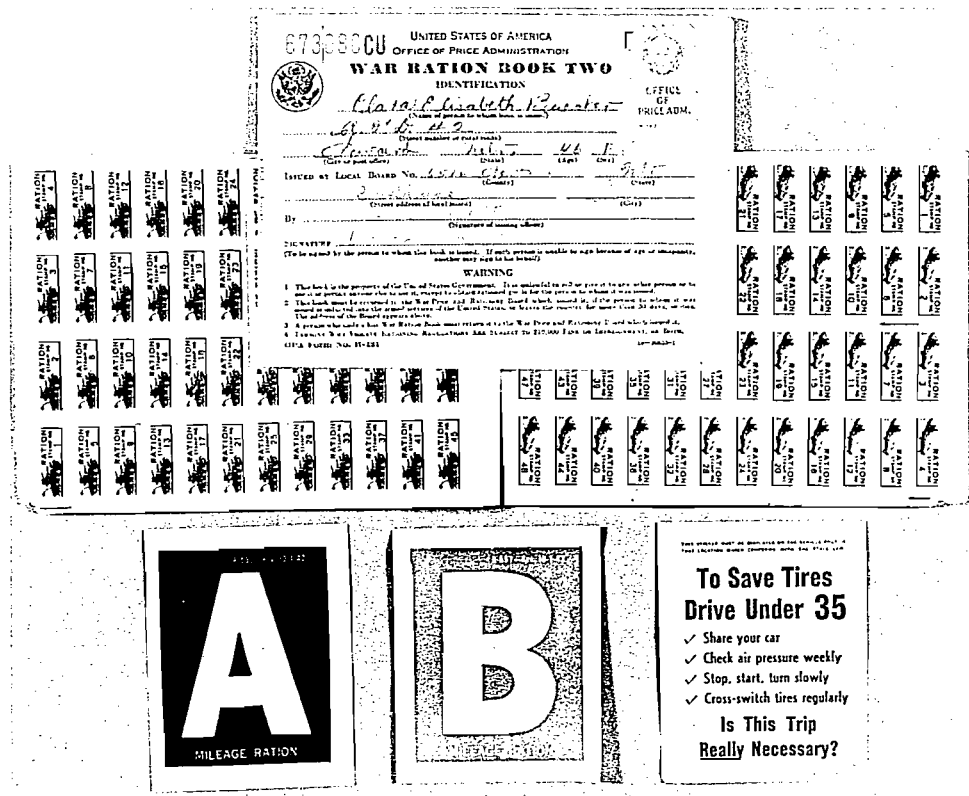
### RATIONING

For most Nebraskans, the first sign of the war's impact was the unprecedented rationing of more than twenty essential items. In combination with price controls, rationing was an attempt to distribute scarce goods equally and control inflation.

The first item to be rationed nationwide was sugar, which was soon followed by coffee and shoes. However, the rationed item producing the greatest inconvenience to most was probably gasoline. Each motorist was assigned a windshield sticker, indicating a priority. Most

of the population received low priority "A" stickers, which allowed three to five gallons of gasoline a week. Gasoline was rationed in an effort to save tires, because supplies of vital rubber from the Far East had been cut off. There was no gasoline shortage.

The complicated rationing system attempted to prevent hoarding. Coded stamps were redeemable only for a specified period. Along with ration stamps, the Office of Price Administration issued tokens, or points, which were also used when purchasing rationed items.



(NSHS Collections - R. Bruhn Photo)

The speed limit was thirty-five miles an hour. They set up a regulation, and a lot of local officials . . . enforced that law . . . . They figured that would use the least amount of gasoline and [cause] the least wear on tires at the slower speed. The panel would stick to that too. If somebody got picked up for speeding for fifty miles an hour and then the next week came in and wanted extra gas, the board would be kind of rough on him.

**Fred Merriman, Loup City**

Chief clerk, Sherman County  
Rationing Office

There were eight in our family at the start of the war, so we had plenty of ration cards. Dad had an old model A vehicle and got five gallons of gas a week. Getting tires was impossible . . . . [It] was hard to get shoes, as I remember having holes in the soles, so I put cardboard inside.

**Martin Caffrey, Jr., Grand Island**

High school student



*A "twilight" work crew of Lincoln businessmen shocked grain on the Liebers farm near Bennet. (NSHS-L716.4-206)*

KEEP EM ROLLING



order  
**REPAIR  
PARTS  
NOW**

Don't delay; check your machinery and order new parts needed. They may be hard to get later. Don't gamble on a break down when your fighting country needs food. : :

For Any Information, see your  
**LANCASTER COUNTY U.S.D.A.  
WAR BOARD**

*The Order Placed Through Cooperation Of*

Minneapolis-Moline Implement Co 201 S. 5th Lincoln Nebraska	John Deere Farm Implements 315 So 10th Lincoln Nebraska
Port Huron Machinery & Supply Co 803 Q. St. Lincoln Nebraska	J. C. Case Sales & Service 719 So 10th Lincoln Nebraska
International Harvester Co 512 So. 7th Lincoln Nebraska	Allis-Chalmers Sales & Service 325 No 9th, Lincoln Nebraska

(NSHS Collections – R. Bruhn Photo)

Farmers had a lot of problem[s] getting gasoline for cars — not so much [problem getting] fuel for their tractors. We used tractor fuel, which was a low grade of gasoline, for our tractors, but it was hard to get enough gasoline for our car to get our supplies and machinery parts. We were only issued a “B” stamp for one car. A “B” stamp, I believe, allowed us seven gallons a week. And we lived out here, which was fourteen miles away from Ninth and O [in Lincoln], and several of the implement dealers were right on Tenth street . . . and we had to go there for parts. A lot of the parts were hard to get. You couldn't get any new machinery.

### Vernon Lostroh, Lincoln

Farmer, later U.S. Army Quartermaster  
Corps, Pacific Theater

The Junior Commandos collected scrap of all kinds. My sister and I picked up cigarette packages and gum wrappers all the way home from school each day and separated the tin foil from the paper. We then made a big ball from it. When it became the size of a softball, we turned it into the junk dealer. It had to weigh five pounds before he would take it.

**James Murphy, Columbus**  
Grade school student



*Lincoln boy scouts and their scrap. (NSHS MacDonald Collection, 8-11-43:5)*

## What Did You Do in the War?



(NSHS Collections – R. Bruhn Photo)

[T]he *World-Herald* had started its World War II scrap drive, for which it won the Pulitzer Prize, and Ralph Mears was the state editor, and he called me and said, “We’re really looking for pictures, any kind of feature you can come up with, that deals with scrap that could be converted into metal so they can make bombs. We’ll do it because the paper is really getting all behind this.” So I did a feature with a camera — even then I was taking pictures — in which we titled the story, “Fairbury, Here’s Your Scrap,” and I went around and, unfortunately — I’ve always kicked myself a little bit about this — one of the things that I proposed as part of our scrap was a cannon we had in the city park that had been used in the Spanish-American War, and sure enough Fairbury gave it up for scrap after I did my story . . . . After the war was over, and I came back, I always had a feeling in my heart, what a dumb thing it was for me to do.

### **James Denney, Fairbury**

Reporter, *Omaha World-Herald*, later  
U.S. Army Air Forces, European Theater





*Because of a labor shortage, more women participated in farming activities during the war.*  
(NSHS MacDonald Collection, 7-28-43)

## FOOD — NEBRASKA'S GREATEST CONTRIBUTION

Nebraska's greatest contribution to the war effort was in livestock and crop production. The nation needed food not only for its own soldiers, but also for its allies. Fortunately, rain and a wartime prosperity came to Nebraska's farmers following years of drought and depression.

Many of Nebraska's young men left the farm for military service. Hired hands who were not in the service also left in pursuit of higher-paying jobs in defense work. The labor shortage became so acute that in the fall of 1942 Congress passed the Tydings Amendment to the Selective Service and Training Act. The amendment allowed

the deferment of essential agricultural workers until satisfactory replacements could be found. Migrant workers, prisoners of war, civilian workers, and women also eased the shortage.

Some farmers suffered when the government confiscated land for war industries and air bases. Even though the federal government took 129,000 acres of Nebraska farmland, valued at nearly five million dollars, approximately 128,000 farms and ranches remained in the state. During 1942 the state ranked twelfth in farm income with a total of 496 million dollars, the highest in twenty years.

**CIVIL DEFENSE**

***“Can you imagine Lincoln, Nebraska,  
being bombed?”***

**Paul Andreas**

[One thing that] . . . was kind of scary, was the blackout. This covered a nine-state area. It happened about December 14, on a Monday in 1942. The blackout was supposed to be between 10:00 and 10:20 at night. Everybody was supposed to douse their lights completely. We hung blankets over the windows, you had to turn off all the lights . . . . You weren't allowed to use the telephone. You couldn't light matches or flashlights. The traffic had to stop and be parked . . . with all the lights off. This lasted for twenty minutes over nine states, until an all-clear signal was given in each town. The siren would ring. We had one long blast and we'd know it was all right to go back to what we were doing.

**Lorena Smith, Hastings**

Housewife

The only thing I did [on the home front] was being a warden — a night warden. Why, would you believe, Lincoln, Nebraska, in the middle of the United States, had bomb wardens? I was one of them. I wasn't the head warden, but I was responsible for a square block. We had about two or three of these [blackout tests] and the bombing was supposed to occur at ten o'clock at night. The whole city knew it. I was assigned a square block, and, boy, I went up and down the streets and made sure all the lights were out . . . . Can you imagine Lincoln, Nebraska, being bombed?

**Paul Andreas, Lincoln**

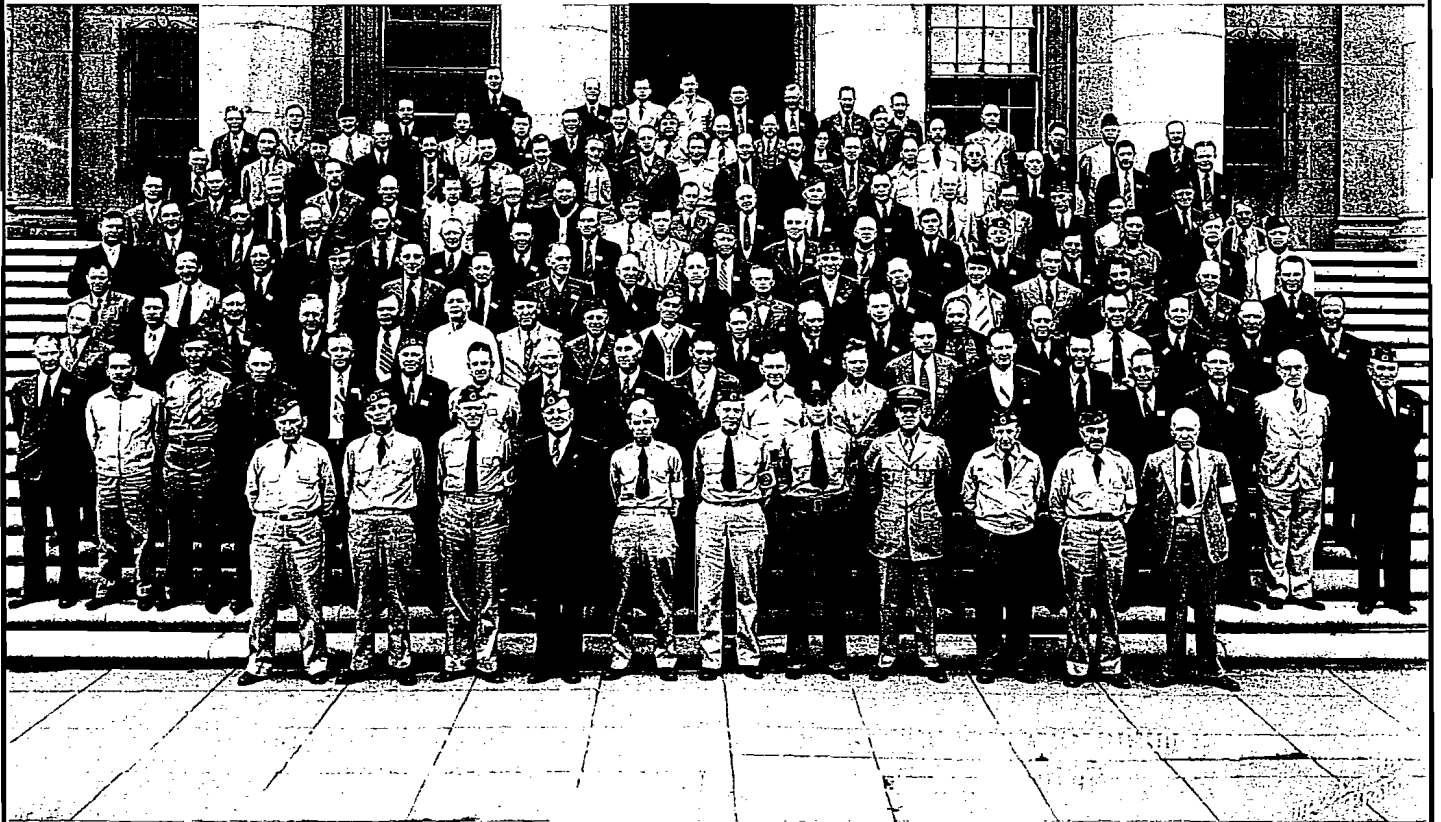
High school student, later

U.S. Army infantryman, European Theater

I can remember the B-29s were particularly fascinating to me because they were in Grand Island and they were in Kearney. The B-29s were big, big planes. You could hear them coming for three or four minutes before you ever saw one.

**Geraldine George Sorensen,  
Bartlett**

Grade school student



*Nebraska air raid warden instructors. (NSHS MacDonald Collection, 6-16-42)*

## CIVIL DEFENSE

Because of Nebraska's central location, blackouts and air raid drills were not as common as they were on the coasts. It was over a year after the attack on Pearl Harbor before Nebraska had its first statewide blackout. Volunteer air raid wardens were recruited to patrol their neighborhoods during the warnings and blackouts. Black-

outs and air raid drills were taken seriously. Those who did not comply with regulations were fined.

With civil defense awareness and an abundance of air traffic in the state, airplane spotting became a popular hobby for children and adults alike.

## What Did You Do in the War?

We had a slumber party one time, and this one girl . . . was out on the [roof of the] garage and she had a flashlight and she was looking at her map because she was trying to find the star constellations. Some of the neighbors thought it was a spy or something . . . so they called the police, and they came and checked it all out . . . [P]eople were edgy.

Juanita Stocker Upton

### JUNIOR COMMANDOS

Little Orphan Annie, the popular comic strip character, encouraged children's participation in the war effort. She enlisted young people as "Junior Commandos." "Colonel Annie" recruited Nebraska children through the *Nebraska State Journal*. The paper publicized Annie's activities and encouraged children to sign the "Junior Commando Pledge," collect scrap rubber and metal, and contribute their extra pennies for war stamps and war

bonds. Junior Commandos received armbands to show their participation. Rank was distinguished by colored buttons sewn onto the armbands. Promotions were based on the number of hours worked and the amount of material collected. The community of Columbus had some 400 Junior Commandos, who gave their all. Sadly, the Junior Commandos have become a forgotten aspect of the home front.



[I]n industrial arts we made model airplanes. The government furnished the wood and the plans, and we'd make models of all the enemy airplanes. They'd use these airplanes to teach the pilots and the air crews how to identify one airplane from another. You'd paint them all black, and they were a certain scale, and they'd show them real quickly to them and then take them away and say, "Okay, what's that? . . ."

I remember I really got in a jam one time. I was in high school, and the B-29 was the big deal. I mean we knew there

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was one, but nobody had ever seen one. One day I was in class at Lincoln High, and it was on the top floor and I was looking toward the capitol, and here came a B-29 coming in for a landing. There weren't any ever stationed out here — they were at Grand Island and some other places — but this was the first one I'd ever seen. I just jumped up and ran to the window and said, "It's a B-29!" In the middle of class. It was not a good thing, it was not real proper, but I never gave a thought to it. It was something you had to do, until suddenly I realized, "My God, what have I done?"

**Barc Bayley, Lincoln**

High school student

There was PEP cereal and they put in these little sheets [of planes to put together]. My mother was always worried . . . whether splinters were getting in the cereal. I don't remember what the cereal was like anymore. It wasn't all that good, but we wanted those airplanes. You cut them out, and you had the insignia then to put on. We had British and United States and German and Japanese — the whole works — so you could spot them. We learned to spot by the shape, and we could tell as they flew over. And planes did fly over. Thankfully they were all ours. We never had to spot anybody else's.

**Rose Marie Murphy Christensen**

## WAR PLANTS AND POW CAMPS

***“We wanted to go into some kind of war work.”***

**Dorothy Huls**

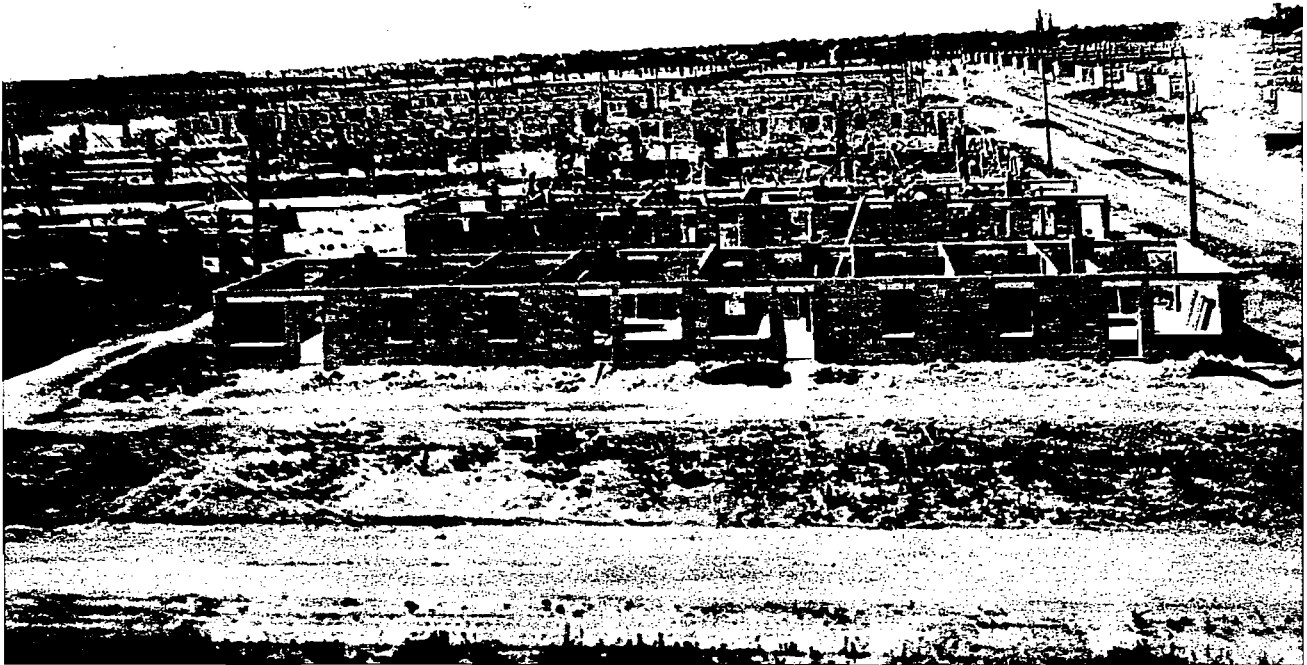
Of course, there was the big ordnance plant in Grand Island and the one in Hastings — out east of Hastings — the naval ordnance plant. I'll never forget that because they had a lot of people working there. They had this little shanty town built out east of Hastings, just little houses

## What Did You Do in the War?

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with tall chimneys. That's where most of those people lived that worked at the ordnance plant. I remember being downtown in Hastings when they'd quit work at night, a shift [would] come in, they brought them in on buses . . . . There was something about the powder they worked in out there that turned their skin kind of a yellowish-green and their hair a kind of yellowish-green . . . . Some of the weirdest looking colored hairdos would come in there.

**Fred Merriman**



*Spencer Park in Hastings was constructed to provide housing for workers from the Hastings Naval Ammunition Depot.  
(Courtesy Adams County Historical Society)*

We saw so many people in town that worked with the ammunition out there [at the Hastings Naval Ammunition Depot] and their skin was yellow. You couldn't come in contact with all this powder without having this happen . . . . I mean it was ungodly yellow. They looked terrible, but they were making good money and I guess money is the name of the game.

**Betty Busboom Kohl**

I did teach in the rural schools then until my friend and I decided that we wanted to go into some kind of war work. She was engaged to marry too, and we decided we wanted to get into war work. Of course, the money looked good at that time too, and we thought maybe we could save. At that time teaching school, I think I was getting \$45 a month. So we decided to go to Wichita. We had to go to the University of Wichita and take blueprint reading because we wanted to get into the inspection department [at Boeing]. It was great to see all these women working there. A lot of them, their husbands were overseas, or they were gone, and every day we'd hear [about] some who had lost their husbands. It was sad, but we were glad we were among people that were in the same boat we were. It made you feel better. You could talk to them. And, of course, a lot of the girls didn't wait for their husbands [to come home]. We saw that every day, which was very sad. They just decided it was too long to wait and they'd find somebody [else]. There weren't too many of them [available men] around, but they thought they had to find somebody.

**Dorothy Huls, Beatrice**

Rural school teacher,  
later Boeing aircraft plant worker

You've probably heard stories about Rosie the Riveter. Well, we never met Rosie [at Lincoln Steel Works]. There was just not very much involvement of women in what they used to refer to as a dirty industrial job. This was pretty rough work, handling heavy steel plates. We didn't do much riveting, but welding. We did have a young lady who came to work for us as a crane operator inside the shop. She was doing very well [until] one day she started climbing the ladder to get in the cab of the overhead crane . . . . She fell and injured herself and she never came back. She was the only one there, I think that had something to do with it too. As a matter of fact, I'm relatively sure she's the only woman that ever applied at our place for employment during the war. Even after the war, we had very few women.

**Earl Luff**



## WAR INDUSTRIES

Before Pearl Harbor, rumors were rampant that Nebraska communities would be chosen as sites for government defense plants. Due to the efforts of Nebraska congressmen and senators vital war plants subsequently were built near Omaha, Mead, Hastings, Grand Island, and Sidney. While the Martin Bomber Plant, Nebraska Ordnance Plant, Hastings Naval Ammunition Depot,

Cornhusker Ordnance Plant, and Sioux Ordnance Depot, each employed thousands of Nebraskans and brought additional workers to the state, they created severe housing shortages. Many farm families, whose lands were bought for war plant sites at seemingly unfair prices, were displaced.



*Nearly three million bombs were produced at the Nebraska Ordnance Plant near Mead. (Courtesy Saunders County Historical Society)*

[There were] just hundreds and hundreds of people who'd come to work for a while and then they'd get drafted . . . . I never was drafted because I was a certified A-1 welder, so they weren't about to let me go. There must have been maybe a dozen welders there that had that qualification . . . .

[O]ne Monday morning I went to work and the first thing the foreman came up to me and said, "Were you out partying Saturday night?" I said, "No. What's the matter?" He said, "Every one of your welds that you made Sunday cracked." I said, "You're crazy." He said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, let's go down to the machine shop and check them out and

see what's the matter . . . ." They were about ready to fire me and I said, "Let's go down and run a lab test on one of those rings." We went down there and checked it out and ran it through the lab . . . and it was the metal in the ring. It wasn't my welding . . . . A big old boxcar completely full of those rings, and every one of them had to be sent back . . . . They wouldn't have stood up. The plane probably never would have got off the ground before some of them would break.

**Lovern Blacksher, Plattsmouth**  
Martin Bomber Plant welder

## AIR BASES

Twelve Nebraska communities were home to air bases or satellite airfields during World War II. Nebraska was a favored location because it had excellent, year-round flying conditions. The sparsely populated land made ideal

locations for gunnery, bombing, and training ranges. Air bases were located at Ainsworth, Alliance, Bruning, Fairmont, Fort Crook, Grand Island, Harvard, Kearney, Lincoln, McCook, Scottsbluff, and Scribner.



*Buildings at the Scribner air base were camouflaged. (Courtesy Omaha World-Herald)*

## What Did You Do in the War?

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We had one woman that put instruments in. We had a crew of men that went up and checked all the instruments in the plane after they were in . . . . Of course Margaret's job [was to] go up and take that [defective] instrument out and put a new one in. She was always perturbed. She always screwed the screw the wrong way and broke the head off. Then we had to send two men up to drill those little tiny holes in there and take an "easy-out" and get that screw out. So each morning we made Margaret put a screw in and take a screw out. We made a little block and put the little block up there and her lead man . . . [would say], "Margaret, go to your block . . . ." After her rest break he made her go to her block. After lunch break he made her go to her block to make sure that she would know which way to turn the screw when she got upstairs.

### **Vince Ortman, Omaha**

Head of mechanical and engineering lab,  
Martin Bomber Plant

We lived upstairs in a home operated by a lady named Mrs. Baker. She used the kitchen and a back bedroom for herself. We would come in the front door and go up an open stairway to the rooms upstairs. There were three bedrooms. We rented and lived in one bedroom. In the closet was a little table with a two-hole gas plate on it. That was all the cooking area we had, nothing to put dishes or anything on. Then there was a sleeping room at the end of the hall that was rented out weekly to people . . . . There was another room across from us which an elderly couple rented. All it was was a bedroom and she had a cabinet and that was her kitchen. We all used the same bathroom . . . . There was a couple in the front room downstairs, and there was an extra sideroom that was just rented overnight or weekly to workers, and they also had to use the same bathroom. Not only that, she [Mrs. Baker] fixed up her chicken house out in the back. There was such a demand for places that people would live in anything that they could get. [Those people] had to get their water from a spigot off the side of the house in the summer and winter, and they also used our bathroom.

### **Lorena Smith**

Well, it was pretty bad. I'm still bitter about it myself because when I came to town trying to find an office, I'd never been here before. I went to the bank to talk to the banker to see if he knew of anything. No, he didn't know [of] anything. I said, "How big is Sidney?" He said, "It's 3,300 people, and we want it to stay just that way." That's the attitude there was . . . . You'd go to a meat counter where they were cutting the meat right there, and you could stand there and wait . . . because they waited on all the local people before they waited on anybody that came in [earlier].

My wife went to the library to check out some books for the kids, and she got the books all checked out, and finally the lady said, "Are you a native?" She said, "No. My husband works for the government. We're in here for the ordnance depot." [The librarian] said, "Well, you'll have to pay a dollar for each book. We don't trust anybody else." So Helen threw the books down and left . . . . I think I would have smacked the woman with them. A lot of the outsiders were treated pretty rough.

**Francis Hiner,**

Came to Sidney to work for  
U.S. Department of Labor at  
Sioux Ordnance Depot

I lived with my parents, while he [husband, Lovern Blacksher] was in welding school at Steele City, Nebraska, and then when he got his job at Martin, Nebraska, [Bomber Plant] then we found housing — a little apartment — in Plattsmouth, Nebraska. We weren't too enthused about living in Omaha because we were country reared and so on. Many of the private homes were opened to people because housing was very difficult. We had two small rooms which were normally bedrooms in the upstairs of a home. One was fixed as a kitchenette, and the other was the bedroom. [There was a] Very tiny closet and we shared a bathroom with another couple who lived on the second floor of the same house . . . . Each couple was given one shelf in the landlady's refrigerator downstairs. We got along fine there.

**Pauline Blacksher, Plattsmouth**

Martin Bomber Plant worker

[T]he government kept giving me deferments and I kept trying to head it off and finally one time I said, "I don't want any more deferments. I want to go to the army." That's when they were drafting people and I was thirty-eight years old. So I got as far as Denver and they put me through a physical and this officer said, "Well, what were you doing before you came over here?" I said, "I was in employment services over in Sidney." He said, "That's where the Sioux Ordnance Depot is?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, go get your clothes and go back home. You'll do more good there than you will in the army." That's as far as I got. It kind of made me mad because here I was thirty-eight years old and they said, "Some young kid will be carrying your pack. You won't be able to carry it." At thirty-eight, I was pretty husky and big.

**Francis Hiner**

For the most part, most of them [POWS] were happy to be here. They were fed and clothed and housed better than they were at home. A lot of them were very happy and that's the reason a lot of them wanted to come back and did come back because they were well taken care of here. They had a lot of privileges. They ate well. This is the main thing. You know if you can keep food on the table you can make anybody happy . . . . We had some that were very strong communists, and you weren't going to change them, so after interviewing all of them, they sent some of them out and then they turned the others loose and let them run around the [Sioux Ordnance] depot. You could bring them home with you, weekends, if you wanted to bring one home for dinner [you could]. A lot of them did. They were really, a lot of them, nice people. Of course, we did have a few bad eggs in the bunch . . . . There was no attempt to escape because they didn't know where to go in the first place, and they were very happy too, because they had a good place to sleep and plenty of food to eat. It was controlled strictly by the Geneva Conference [Convention] . . . . If the prisoner of war camp is operated under the rules of the Geneva Conference, nobody is going to get hurt . . . .

One time I was officer of the day, and [it was a] Sunday afternoon about two o'clock. We had twelve air force men there studying ammunition. Of course, that was after the Italians were free to roam around the area. There was one

Italian that was probably the tallest one I've ever seen. He was an Italian lawyer and a very well-educated man. There was a young lady, a nice looking blonde . . . . She was very much in love with this fellow. They were drinking beer in the post exchange one afternoon. The colored troops, the Italians, and the air force were in there. All at once they got in a fight . . . . They were fighting for keeps. I walked in the back door, and I hollered, [but] they didn't see me. So I just pulled my old .45 out and blew another hole through the roof. It didn't hurt that old building anyway. It was full of cockroaches up there — I probably killed a few of those. Anyway, I sent them all back to the barracks and put them under arrest . . . . These twelve air force boys were the ones who created the problem. They didn't like this girl sitting there with that Italian drinking beer. She was a nice looking lady. She left here, and I was told that she went to . . . Italy and married this fellow.

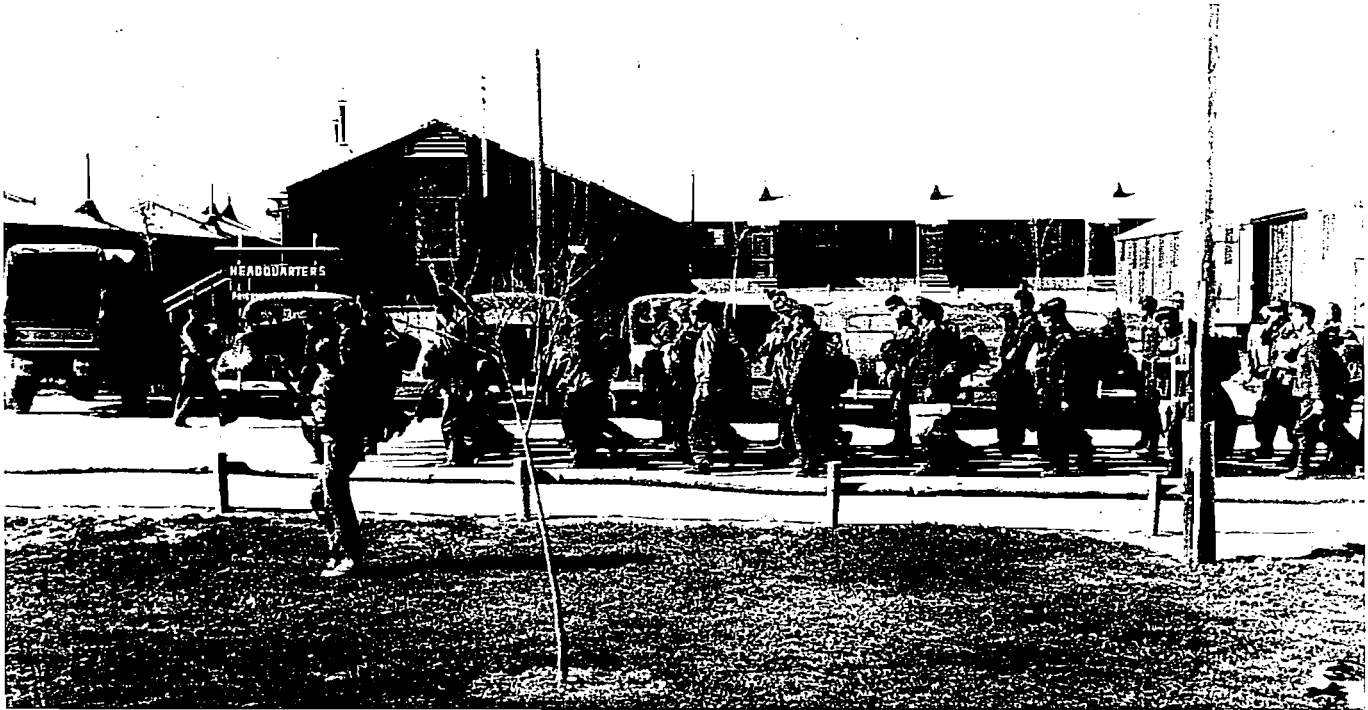
**John Underdown**

Came to Sidney as U.S. Army supply  
officer, Sioux Ordnance Depot

I do remember one interesting thing that happened when I was teaching. It was the year of 1944-45, and I was in Seward County, District 45, which is right straight west of Lincoln on Highway 6. One day someone knocked at the door. I answered it, and there was an army man who asked me whether he could bring in some German prisoners of war. He had them on a truck and they had engine trouble. He had to go find help and he wanted his other man to stay with the prisoners. But it was so cold in the truck — it was winter — [and] he wanted to know if they could come in [the schoolhouse]. Well, I didn't think I should let them come in. I was just a little bit afraid myself, so I sent him down the road to a neighbor's house. There he got to use the telephone, and he also got permission to bring those men down there and stay in their basement until help arrived.

**Doris Lostroh, Lincoln**

Rural school teacher



*German soldiers arriving at the Fort Robinson POW camp. (NSHS-T467-13)*

## PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS

Over three million prisoners of war were captured by Allied forces during World War II. Of these, 370,000 Germans and 50,000 Italians were transferred from the battlefield to the United States at the request of our European allies, who were holding all the prisoners they could.

Nebraska's remoteness made it an ideal location for housing these prisoners. In addition, the Midwest suffered from a labor shortage for production of agricultural products, which were vital to the war effort. Approximately 12,000 prisoners of war were held in camps across Nebraska. Scottsbluff, Fort Robinson, and Atlanta were base camps. There were smaller, satellite camps at Alma, Bayard, Bertrand, Bridgeport, Elwood, Fort Crook, Franklin, Grand Island, Hastings, Hebron, Indianola, Kearney, Lexington, Lyman, Mitchell, Morrill, Ogallala, Palisade, Sidney, and Weeping Water.

Treatment of the prisoners in Nebraska was very good.

The United States respected their rights guaranteed under the provisions of the Geneva Convention. Prisoners performed various tasks around the camps and some were allowed to work for area farmers. They were paid a nominal sum for the work they did. When the prisoners were not working, they often enjoyed participating in sports or their own musical and theatrical productions. Classes in various subjects were organized, and some prisoners received certificates of achievement.

When the war ended, the prisoners were sent back to their homelands, where they faced an uncertain future. The last of them left Nebraska in early 1946. Many prisoners had found their treatment as prisoners of war to be better than their lives at home, and some were reluctant to be repatriated. A few former prisoners later returned to live in Nebraska, often aided by the people who had treated them with kindness and respect in a time of war.

## Nebraska History – Winter 1991

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[There was a] German prisoner of war camp in Bayard, Nebraska. Six of them worked on our farm. Dad picked them up and returned them daily. I remember the big, high fence around the prison yard. Mom felt sorry for them and fed them a hot meal at noon. They were so appreciative. The Bayard prison camp was within view of Chimney Rock, and one of the prisoners did a chalk drawing of the rock and gave it to my parents. I looked at it many times in my life and regret that I cannot find it now.

**Lois Jurene Meter Odell, Bayard**

Grade school student



## RELATIONSHIPS AND ATTITUDES

*“Our lives began to change.”*

**Sylvia Iwanski Chalupsky**

Nobody wanted to date these boys who didn't pass their physicals, and we called them "4-Fers." Now that I think back, that was terrible . . . . We all thought they were physically unfit to go and fight for our country. How awful! . . . . The one boy, I had dated off and on every time he came home . . . . He was in the navy air corps, and he was going overseas. He had on a navy blue uniform and I went out and I bought a navy blue velvet dress. It was a beautiful thing . . . . We were going dancing to Ravenna — that's quite a long way — but there was a name orchestra [playing there], and he was a marvelous dancer. Then he got called back early, before his furlough was up, because his outfit was going overseas. He went, and he never returned. I had such a feeling for this dress for so long, but I have finally gotten rid of it.

**Sylvia Iwanski Chalupsky, Ord**  
Nebraska State Bank employee

## What Did You Do in the War?

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When I started college in the fall of 1944, it was like a girls' school — ninety-five women and only five men students. During the second semester of my sophomore year, more male students were enrolled. By 1948 when I graduated, there were twice as many men as female students. During that first year, several of the girls dated high school seniors because to us the boys on campus were "4-F." They needed a good reason for not being in the service to be respected by the girls.

**Wanda Mowry, Bayard**

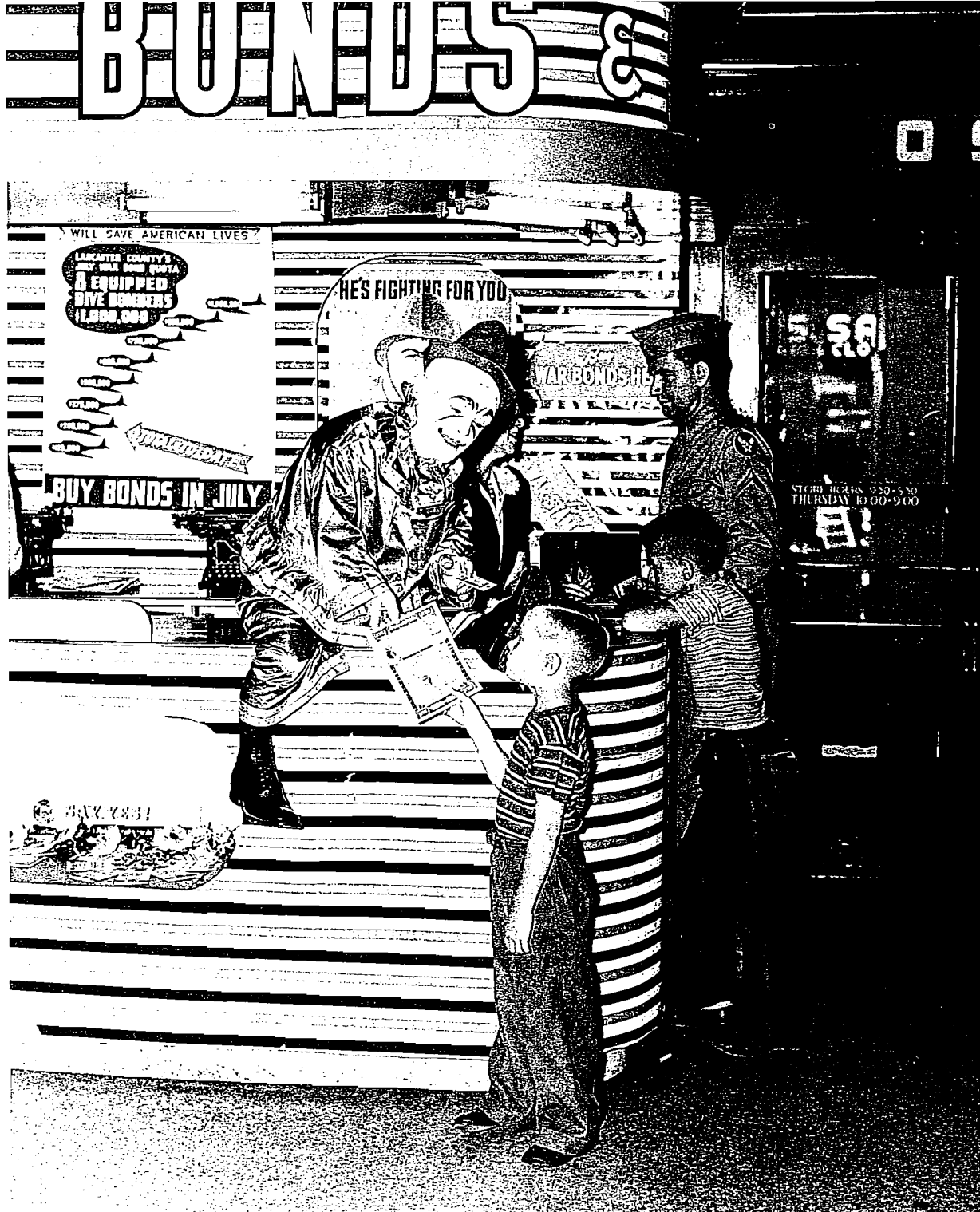
High school student

Going to the movie was a very important thing to do. We really rather regularly went to both the Saturday matinee and the Sunday matinee. The good movies were at the Sunday matinee and the cowboy movies or the Tarzan movies were Saturday. I don't remember much difference in the Saturday movies. The others [the good movies] would finally come to Geneva. The one I remember the most was "Since You Went Away" with Claudette Colbert and Joseph Cotten. Her oldest daughter was Jennifer Jones, and Robert Mitchum played the young soldier with whom she fell in love. I went with all my friends. We sat in one row together and we cried the whole time. I still remember that movie.

**Virginia Koehler Knoll**

Another terrible thing that went on, and I suspected that they were soldiers from the . . . East Coast who came to Lincoln. They dated girls. They did not give them their real name. In a few instances there were marriages just before the fellow went overseas. I know of one [girl] . . . and she said, "I do not believe in divorce," but she said, "I had to divorce him because after he went overseas, I didn't get an allotment check. So I went out to the air base to find out why I wasn't getting it. There was no one by that name who had ever gone through that air base. He had given me an assumed name. He had been to my parents' home many times . . . . To protect myself, I had to divorce him and take back my maiden name." It was certainly justified . . . . These were scoundrels who came out here and did this.

**Mildred Pogue Gardner**



War bond sale in Lincoln. (NSHS MacDonald Collection, 7-14-43)

We had a \$10,000 life insurance policy on us, government insurance. Now \$10,000 at that time would buy an awful lot. Houses were selling for maybe \$1,500-\$2,000. Ten thousand dollars was a fortune. There were girls who were looking for the \$10,000. They were looking, and if you got married, and if you got bumped off or shot down, why that's all right. Some of them made a racket out of it, and married one or two.

**Floyd Marian**

Just about ninth grade . . . boys were just becoming aware of girls being anything meaningful in their lives. All the girls, you'd see them downtown all made up to look older than they were with a lot of makeup. Girls in the ninth grade, normally, when I was going to school, didn't put on much if any makeup. They weren't quite ready for that. But boy, they were downtown, trying to look older, because here were 20,000 guys [from the Lincoln air base] . . . . [The girls] were fourteen, fifteen maybe, and they were trying to pass themselves off as a good deal older than that. We'd see them, and then they'd try to hide. They'd be with some soldier, and they'd see somebody from their class and they'd try to duck and hide and fake it out . . . .

We went to the movies all the time. You see them now on television, the same movies, and [they are] so blatantly propagandistic. Here would be this grinning little guy again with the glasses and the buck teeth and the fur-lined helmet. And he's always in the cockpit. You're supposed to believe that there was somebody out on the wing shooting pictures of this guy in the cockpit while he was diving down.

### **Barc Bayley**

The local boys, if they ever saw you with a soldier, they'd never ask you out again. They were that jealous. We didn't care . . . .

We had a lady of the evening in Fairbury, too. I don't know as I ever knew her name. She had a communicable disease that eventually found its way to the [Bruning] air base. This was severely frowned upon by the authorities of course, so they came screaming back to town with the commandant and his escort and insisted that the local authorities arrest this young lady. She of course was arrested . . . . Anyway, she was asked to name her companions so that they could curtail this disease. And she named every minister, every priest, every lawyer, every merchant all around the square . . . . Every banker in town, everybody she could think of but not one serviceman did she name. It was just hilarious.

### **Marialyse Hager Knobel**



*Abbott and Costello made a 1942 Lincoln appearance with Governor Dwight Griswold to promote war bond sales. (NSHS MacDonald Collection, 7-32-42:4)*

## HOLLYWOOD AND NEBRASKA

The stars of Hollywood shone brightly over Nebraska during the war. Movie actors, who had only been seen on screen or in the fan magazines, were here in the flesh. It was statewide news in 1943 when Lieutenant Clark Gable was stationed briefly at the Kearney Army Air Field. Who could blame a young woman, such as Joyce Anderson, if her most vivid wartime memories were of three dances she shared with Lieutenant Gable at a Kearney dance. Jackie Coogan, "the Kid" from the silent movie era, trained with gliders at the Alliance air base. Orchestra leader Glenn Miller, serving in the army air forces, set up the base band at Lincoln.

Most stars were drawn to Nebraska for bond sales and USO shows, rather than military training. The comedy

team of Abbott and Costello performed on the steps of the capitol. Technical Sergeant Gene Autry, wearing non-regulation cowboy boots with his uniform, brought his radio show to the Scottsbluff air base. Betty Grable, the GI pin-up girl, visited a Grand Island theater; Jane Wyman, then Mrs. Ronald Reagan, came to the Lincoln air base hospital; and William "Hopalong Cassidy" Boyd drew crowds to an Omaha bond rally.

The stars found enthusiastic audiences and adoring fans, whose morale and subsequent purchases of war bonds rose appreciably. The lucky Nebraskans might even snare an autograph! [R. Eli Paul, NSHS Research Division]



*"Keep Faith With Them,"  
by John P. Falter. Incentive  
Poster. (NSHS Collec-  
tions - R. Bruhn Photo)*

My high school years were all during war time. No one but farm kids had gas or tires to go to out-of-town football and basketball games. I remember going to a basketball game with some farm kids and having two flat tires on the way home. All the boys in our class left for service before they graduated — as soon as they turned eighteen. Few of us had dates for the Junior-Senior Banquet in the spring because all the boys were gone. The school gave these young men their diplomas even though they couldn't finish the school year.

**Faye James, Ashland**

High school student

After I had worked for quite a while, I wanted to go to the city to work. It was just dullsville [in Ord], and it kept getting worse. Boys were killed and a few got married and it seemed like [something happened to] most of the kids we knew. Our lives began to change and the war just looked like it was never going to be over.

**Sylvia Iwanski Chalupsky**

I was down taking the interview for the position in the [Portland, Oregon] shipyards, and there was a beautiful black girl. She and I were talking that day, and I was not at all efficient in typing, and she could type. She said, "I can go, I can really type." Before she went in for her interview she said, "If they don't give me a chance in there!" And she came out completely deflated because she had been offered a job cleaning up in the restrooms. I said, "Why didn't they hire you?" She was a beautiful person, and I was not aware of the white and the black clash at the time. As I say, I was way back in Nebraska. We were rural minded. We were so far removed from this sort of a thing.

**Marie Curtis**

We had a lot of black boys in Hastings at the time in the military . . . . We had not had black people [among us]. A lot of people did not like to see the black people around. They wouldn't even sit beside them on the bus. This is just something that you grow up with. There was no reason for them not to like these people, but that's the way it was.

**Lorena Smith**



*Because the armed forces were segregated, separate USO clubs, like this one in Lincoln, were organized for black service personnel. (NSHS MacDonald Collection, 9-22-45:2)*

## What Did You Do in the War?

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We got on the bus [in Chattanooga, Tennessee] and there weren't any seats in the front, so we went back and sat down with the Negroes. Wow, did they ever get after us! The Negroes didn't, they just kind of looked at us like, "What are you doing back here?" The bus driver turned around and said, "You women get out of there! You're not supposed to be sitting back there!" We said, "Why not?" Dumb midwesterners. He said, "That's the law. Get back up here!" We argued. We said, "There aren't any seats up there. There are seats back here. We don't mind sitting back here." "Get up here, or get off the bus!" So that was segregation.

**Annabelle Peshek**

We knew about the Jewish situation. We couldn't have known everything because nobody did, but we certainly understood that the Jews were being persecuted. I didn't know any Jewish people. I had never met a Jew and I didn't quite understand all of that. I didn't understand Jewish people and their faith — it made no sense to me. Still we knew about the persecution. I think we were fairly well-informed for children.

**Virginia Koehler Knoll**

All I have to say is when war breaks out like this, there's always the fears — the same as the Germans who were persecuted during World War I. The Jews were the ones who were persecuted during World War II, but then Hitler had already started persecuting them. They had that fear, phobia, saying that the Jews began this war. I notice that even after World War II, there was real antagonism against the Jews and still to this day. I notice there seems to be some against the Japanese, but not to the extent that the Jews were persecuted. I don't know how to . . . put it. The fever ran very high during World War II.

**Mitchell Kumagai, North Platte**  
U.S. Army anti-tank company,  
European Theater