WORLD WAR II

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor, a United States military base in Hawaii, was attacked by Japanese air forces. This surprise attack led to the United States' involvement in World War II.

There was already a war going on in Europe. Germany was invading many countries in an attempt to take over as much of the world as it could. Italy and Japan had similar goals. Together with Germany they became known as the Axis powers. The United States, Great Britain, China, and the Soviet Union, who wanted to stop these invading forces, were known as the Allied powers or Allies.

World War II had a great impact on the State of Nebraska and her citizens.
Many Nebraskans decided to join the military in order to help their country fight the Axis forces. Nebraska sent 139,745 men and women to war. They served in every branch of the service—army, navy, coast guard, marines and army air corps. 3,839 lost their lives.

Among the first Nebraskans to go to war were members of the Nebraska National Guard. This group was named the 134th Infantry Regiment, part of the Thirty-fifth Division, United States Army. Under the command of North Platte native Butler B. Miltonberger, the 134th fought across Europe.

Women serving in the military was a new idea during World War II. Nearly 2,000 Nebraska women joined the service. Helen Sagl of Lincoln was one of the first Nebraska women to enlist in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps.

Ben Kuroki, from Hershey, Nebraska, is one of the many Nebraskans who became "war heroes." Kuroki served in both the European and Pacific theaters of the war. He flew on a total of fifty-eight missions as a gunner on bombers. Though awarded many medals, Kuroki's story is more interesting because he is an American of Japanese ancestry. Because Japan was our enemy during the war, many Japanese-American people living in America were treated badly. Kuroki felt it was his duty to prove his loyalty and love for his native country—the United States.
THE NORTH PLATTE CANTEEN
One of Nebraska's best known contributions to the war effort was the North Platte Canteen. Trains were the most common way to transport service personnel across the country during the war. Many communities organized rest areas or "canteens" at their local railroad stations. The canteen at North Platte became famous for the hospitality shown to the troops. It provided food, magazines, and entertainment to over 3,000 soldiers every day of the war.

The canteen was staffed by volunteers who wore pink ribbons with "HOSTESS" on them or wore the letter "V" for victory. Sometimes the volunteers and local entertainment included children. Baskets of food and reading materials were carried aboard the trains to troops who could not leave.
Most Nebraskans did not serve in the armed forces. They contributed to the war effort on the home front.

Nebraska's greatest contribution to winning the war was in food production. The nation needed food not only for our own soldiers, but for our allies. Because many of Nebraska's young men had left farms to join the military, there was a labor shortage in rural areas. Women helped on many farms.

Several Nebraska communities were selected as sites for government defense factories. Omaha became the location of the Martin Bomber Plant which manufactured B-26 and B-29 airplanes. Grand Island (shown here), Hastings, Mead, and Sidney had ammunition manufacturing and storage facilities. These defense industries created thousands of jobs for Nebraskans, particularly women. Before the war, it was uncommon for women to work outside the home.

Eleven Nebraska towns became home to military air bases or satellite airfields during World War II. Bases were located at Ainsworth, Alliance, Bruning, Fairmont, Grand Island, Harvard, Kearney, Lincoln, McCook, Scottsbluff, and Scribner. These bases were used to train crews to fly. The base at Scribner was unusual because it was entirely camouflaged (disguised) to look like a farm.
Nebraska was considered a good location for housing prisoners of war. Twelve thousand German and Italian prisoners were held in twenty-three camps across Nebraska. The largest camps were at Scottsbluff, Fort Robinson, and Atlanta. The prisoners were often used to help area farmers. These German prisoners worked in the mess hall at Fort Robinson.

Fort Robinson also became the country's largest K-9 (canine) Corps reception and training center, where thousands of dogs were trained for war duty. Dogs were used to act as guards, to sniff out mines, to carry messages, and to pull sleds. Do you know what canine means?
Because of the war, the military had the top priority for many items. Civilians (people who were not in the military) had to do without some products. A system called **rationing** was set up to distribute scarce goods fairly. All Nebraskans were issued ration books containing coupons which had to be turned over at the time certain items were purchased. Once you were out of coupons for a certain product, you could not purchase more. Sugar, coffee, shoes, gasoline, meat, and tires were some of the items rationed.

Along with rationing, Nebraskans became well-educated in the art of collecting scrap materials. These could be recycled into weapons and other equipment essential to the war effort. Scrap iron was the most obvious choice for collectors. Paper was the easiest to get and was reused for packaging weapons. Leftover food grease was used to manufacture ammunition.

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McDonald 8/11/43
Even Nebraska families who did not live in rural areas got involved with agriculture through the nationwide "Victory Garden" program. Nebraskans were encouraged to plant gardens to help ease the food shortage. These children from St. Teresa's School in Lincoln are pictured with the victory garden vegetables they raised in 1944.

The war was costly, and the United States government needed to raise money to help pay for it. Nebraskans contributed by buying war bonds, which were loans to the government. Can you tell where this picture was taken?

Another way Nebraskans helped was by volunteering in their local United Service Organization clubs. A USO club was a place where service personnel could go for relaxation and entertainment.

WAR'S END

Germany finally surrendered in May 1945. Japan followed on August 15, following the dropping of the world's first two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is significant to Nebraska history that the plane which dropped the world's first atomic bomb—the Enola Gay—was built in Nebraska at the Martin Bomber Plant.

Nebraskans celebrated the victory wholeheartedly. They looked forward to the return of their loved ones and to a world at peace.
"How To Do an Oral History Interview"

Many people can vividly recall life on the home front in Nebraska during World War II. One way historians gather information is by interviewing people about their experiences. Interview someone from your community—a family member, a neighbor, a teacher—who was about your age during World War II. Here are some questions you might ask them. Share your interview with your class.

• Where did you live during World War II?
• How old were you during World War II?
• Where were you when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?
• How did rationing work? What was hardest to do without?
• Did you make a victory garden?
• Did you collect scrap materials? What kinds of things did you collect?
• In what other ways did you support the war effort?
• How did you keep up on the news of the war overseas? Did you do anything special to keep track of the war news, like keeping a scrapbook?
• How much time did you spend in school talking about the war?
• How did the war affect your family? Did any members of your immediate family go overseas?
• What one thing do you recall most often when you think of those years?
• How did World War II change your life?