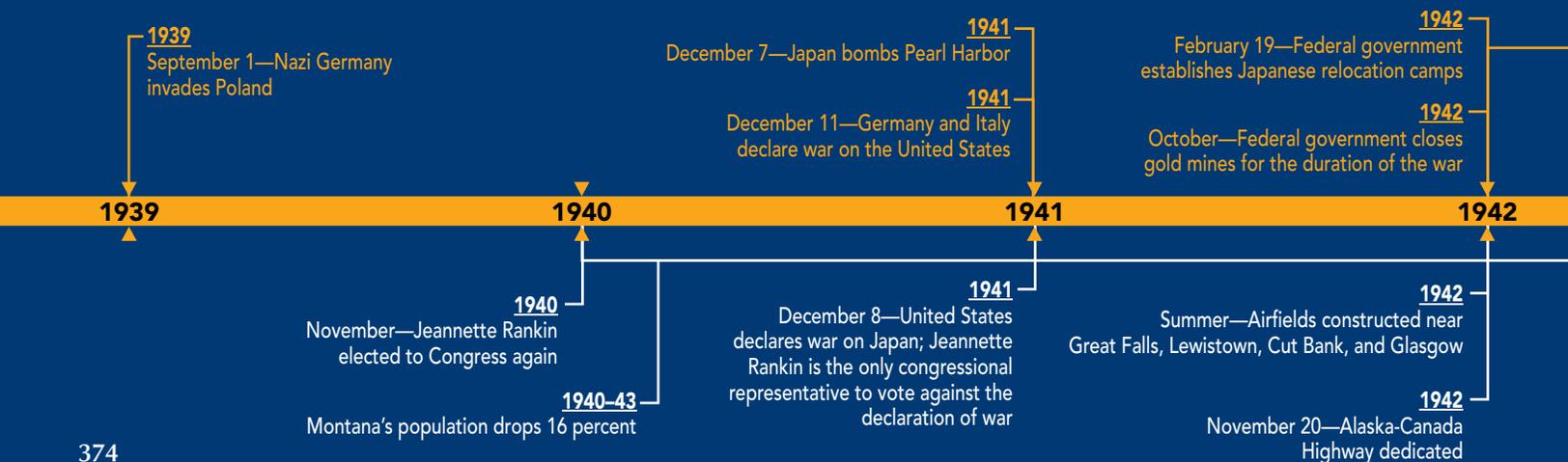


19 World War II in Montana

1939-1945



FIGURE 19.1: "Montana Day" among the 163rd Regiment, March 4, 1945





READ TO FIND OUT:

- What Montanans did during World War II
- Why Montana was a strategic spot in the war effort
- How the war affected everyday life in Montana
- What lasting effects the war had in Montana

The Big Picture

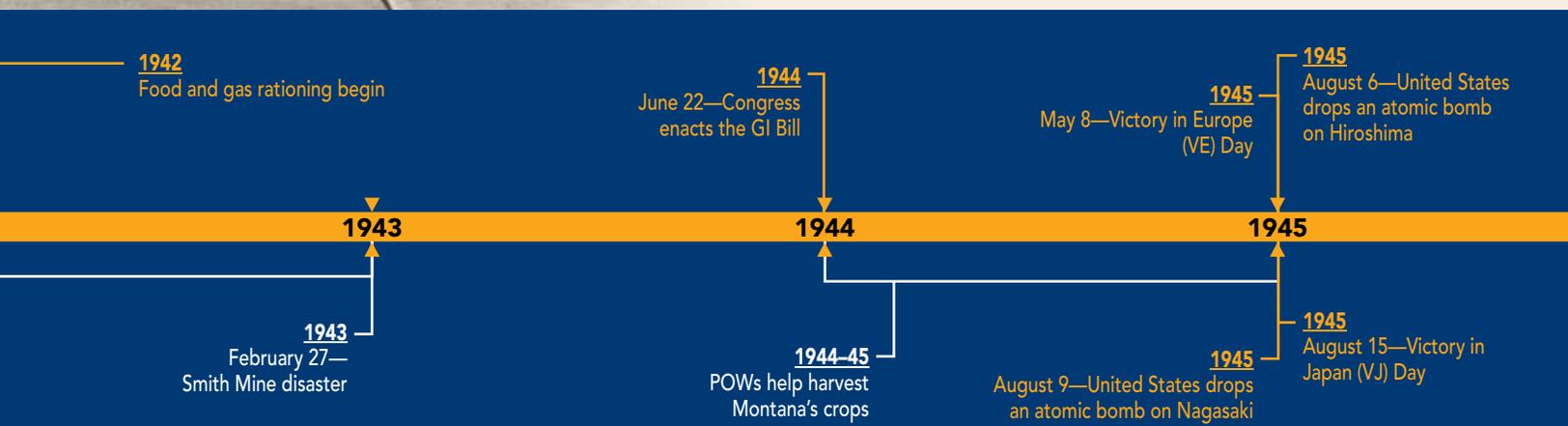
World War II changed the priorities of the entire nation and transformed many people's attitudes about themselves, one another, and their world.

Life always changes in wartime—sometimes in big ways, sometimes in small ways. War changes economic activity and rearranges politics. It changes the way the government spends money. Sometimes it changes how people act and what they think.

Sometimes people are arrested or suffer discrimination that they would not face if it were not wartime. And for people who go to war, or send a family member, wartime experiences can change life forever.

World War II (1939–45) was the largest military conflict in the history of the world. The war involved countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific Islands, and North America. More than 62 million people were killed, including 37 million **civilians** (people who are not in the military). The war changed the history of this country (and many others).

Even though World War II happened far away from Montana, it had an enormous effect on Montana's people.



Europe Becomes a Battlefield

The war began in 1939 when Nazi Germany, led by Adolph Hitler, invaded Poland. Italy, Germany's European ally, quickly joined the fight. To stop Hitler's advance across Europe, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany.

In 1940 the Nazis conquered Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, Holland, Belgium, and France. Britain pleaded for help from the United States. Then, in 1941, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union (now Russia and several smaller countries). The entire region, from North Africa to Russia, became a battlefield.

On the other side of the world, in Asia, Japan had invaded China. Japan was also an ally of Germany. The United States supported China by sending weapons and money, and by refusing to sell any metals or oil to Japan.

Americans watched with horror as the Nazis marched across Europe. Many Americans still had relatives there. President Franklin D. Roosevelt responded by doing everything he could to help Britain—short of declaring war and sending troops.

The pressure to go to war was intense, but not everyone agreed it was the right thing to do. Montana senator Burton K. Wheeler remembered the horrors of World War I. He knew this war would be even more bloody, and he did not want Montanans sent off to die in it. Most Montanans agreed with him.

Then, on December 7, 1941, Japan bombed a U.S. navy base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. This attack killed 2,300 American servicemen and 68 civilians. It damaged or destroyed 12 U.S. battleships and 188 military airplanes. The next day the United States declared war on Japan. On December 11 Japan's allies, Germany and Italy, declared war on the United States. The nation was swept up into the biggest war in human history.

Jeannette Rankin: "I Will Not Vote for War"

Montana's Jeannette Rankin, the first woman in Congress (see Chapter 16), had run for Congress again in 1940 on an antiwar platform. As war built up around the world, she hoped to keep the United States out of it. Montanans elected Rankin—at that time most of them were against joining the war, too.

After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, almost everyone's opinion changed. Senator Wheeler issued a statement to the press calling on Americans to "lick" the Japanese. But Rankin did not change her position. "Killing more people won't help matters," she said.

On December 8, 1941, President Roosevelt urged Congress to declare war on Japan. When it came time to vote, Rankin was the only member who voted against the declaration of war.

War supporters were enraged. People called her a traitor. Leaders of

her own Republican Party demanded that she change her vote, but she refused. She received death threats and had to have police protection. Yet others recognized her courage in the face of overwhelming opposition. Jeannette Rankin never again ran for Congress. For the rest of her life, until she died in 1973, she worked for peace.

Montanans Go to War

Many Montanans had joined the military during the Great Depression, when there were few other jobs. Now thousands more signed up—40,000 Montana men and women in the first year alone. By the war's end 57,000 Montanans had served—almost 10 percent of the population. Just like in World War I, Montana sent a greater percentage of its people than almost any other state. More than 1,500 Montanans died in the war.

More women served in the military in World War II than in any previous war in U.S. history. Nearly 400,000 American women served in the Army and Navy Nurse Corps, in the Women's Army Corps (WAC), and in the Navy (WAVES), Coast Guard (SPARs), and Marine Corps Women's Reserves. Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs), who were not officially members of the military, provided important support. Women like Marty Volkomener of Great Falls and Margaret Holdhahn of Riedel joined the WASPs and became pioneers in female aviation.

FIGURE 19.2: Montanans of the 163rd Regiment faced jungle diseases and food shortages while engaging in some of the toughest battles of the war. Here soldiers of the 163rd waded onto Wakde Island, off northern New Guinea, in 1944.



“Basic training doesn’t train you [to witness death]. You learn to march well, to salute sharply, but first seeing a guy dead or wounded—you can’t train for that.”

—SERGEANT LESLIE D. SLYTER, A SOLDIER IN THE 163RD REGIMENT

“When the oatmeal was wormy, for example, what you did was put some of it in a canteen cup, cover it with water, and let the worms float to the top. Those you skimmed off. Repeat the process two or three times then cook it, don’t look too closely, and eat it down.”

—KENNETH CLOTHIER, A MEDIC WITH THE WHITEFISH MEDICAL DETACHMENT OF THE 163RD REGIMENT

More than 1,500 members of the Montana National Guard became part of the 163rd Regiment of the U.S. Army. Many of them were teenagers. Even though 17 was the minimum age to enlist, many boys lied about their age. Howard McKinney of Bainville was 14 when he enlisted. Leslie D. Slyter of Kalispell was 16. “It never occurred to me at the time that the National Guard could be sent out of the country to fight overseas,” Slyter said later.

The 163rd included National Guard members from Montana, Wyoming, Oregon, and Washington—including American Indians from every Montana reservation. These men served some of the toughest duty in the war. They shipped out to New Guinea and other remote islands in the South Pacific. Heat, humidity, biting insects, and the

fevers of **malaria** (a tropical disease transmitted by mosquitoes) were almost as bad as the battles. It could rain ten inches in one night, filling the shallow trenches where soldiers hid. The water was undrinkable.

The men of the 163rd sometimes fought in hand-to-hand combat in jungle so thick they could barely see five yards in front of them. At times the fighting was so intense that the army could not get food to the soldiers. In one three-week battle, the 163rd Regiment lost 923 soldiers.

American Indian Code Talkers

American Indians brought a special skill to the war: native languages that no one else could understand. Military outfits on both sides transmitted strategic information by code to make it harder for the enemy to understand. Both sides struggled to come up with codes that their enemies could not break.

FIGURE 19.3: If someone in your family served in World War II, he or she may have earned war medals like these. Second Lieutenant Harold W. Lauer of Helena earned these medals, which include a pair of wings, a purple heart, and other campaign medals, while serving in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Lauer was killed in action in the South Pacific on January 2, 1944.



Two Crow brothers, Barney and Henry Old Coyote, flew bombing missions for the army in Europe and North Africa. They radioed to one another in Crow, exchanging strategic war information that Germany could not decode. Sioux, Choctaw, Comanche, and Navajo Indians also became “code talkers,” transmitting important information throughout the war.

The Men Who Would Not Kill: Conscientious Objectors

Throughout American history there have been some citizens who have refused to kill other people for any reason—even war. Most of these **pacifists** (people who are opposed to war or other kinds of violence for any reason) were members of Hutterite, Mennonite, Quaker, or Brethren churches. These were called “peace churches” because they taught their members always to work for peace.

The government called people who refused military service on religious grounds **conscientious objectors** because their consciences drove them to object to war. Instead of fighting, conscientious objectors served as medics on the front lines or by performing crucial and sometimes dangerous work at home. Many of Montana’s Hutterite and Mennonite men performed alternative service.

During World War II, several groups of conscientious objectors came to Montana to fight fires using a technique called **smoke jumping** (parachuting out of an airplane into a fire zone to help fight fires). Smoke jumping was a brand-new technique. Some considered it as dangerous as warfare.

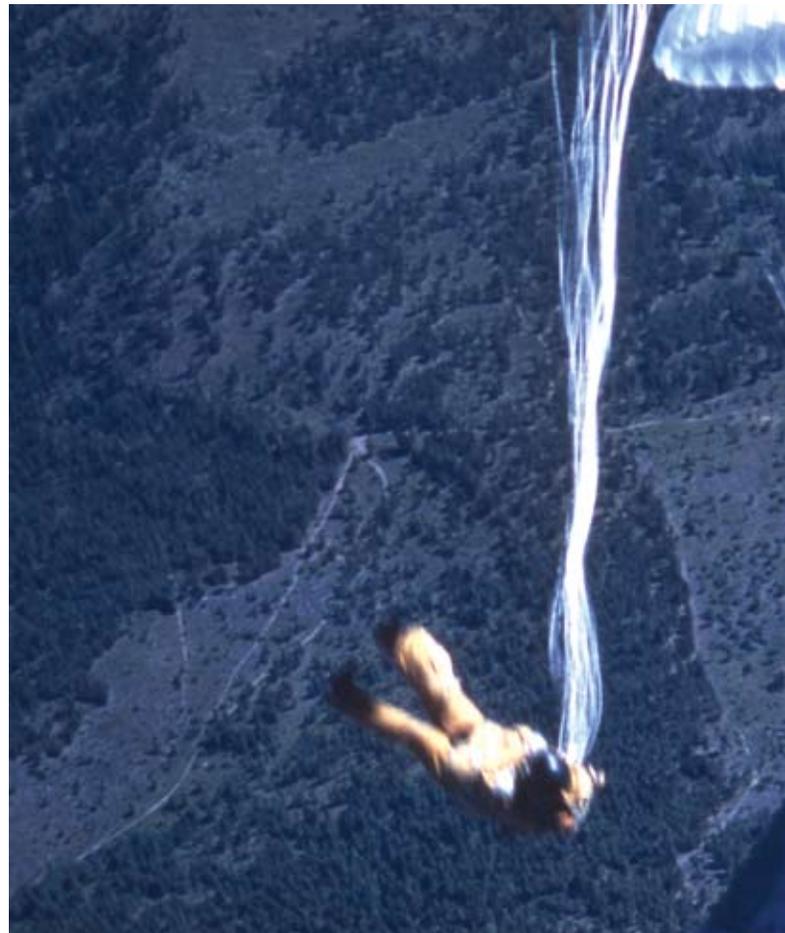
Montana: A Strategic Spot in the War

Even though the war happened far away, Montana was an important part of it. Montana’s weather and **topography** (land features) made it an ideal

FIGURE 19.5: Conscientious objectors refused to fight because of religious convictions—not fear. Here a conscientious objector parachutes out of an airplane in a firefighting exercise. Lee Miller, who served as a smoke jumper in Montana during the war, said, “We . . . wanted to prove to ourselves, as well as to society, that we were not **yellowbellies** (cowards). This seemed a chance to do that.”



FIGURE 19.4: Barney Old Coyote Jr. (right) was a high school senior waiting for his school bus when he heard that Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor the day before. He left his schoolbooks at the Crow Agency bus stop, borrowed \$4 for bus fare, and headed into Billings to enlist in the army. Here he receives a commendation for heroism in 1943.



“My draft notice created a turmoil within me. Which way to go? Stay with my upbringing as a pacifist, or go along with our government? I decided to go with my family’s identity, although I stayed in this mental whirlpool throughout the war years.”

—CLARENCE W. DIRKS, A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR WHO BECAME A SMOKE JUMPER IN MONTANA DURING THE WAR

training ground for military operations in remote, mountainous areas. One special army unit, the top-secret First Special Service Force, trained at Fort William Henry Harrison, on the edge of Helena. They trained along the Continental Divide, practicing for dangerous missions in arctic conditions. They were called the “Devil’s Brigade” because of their reputation

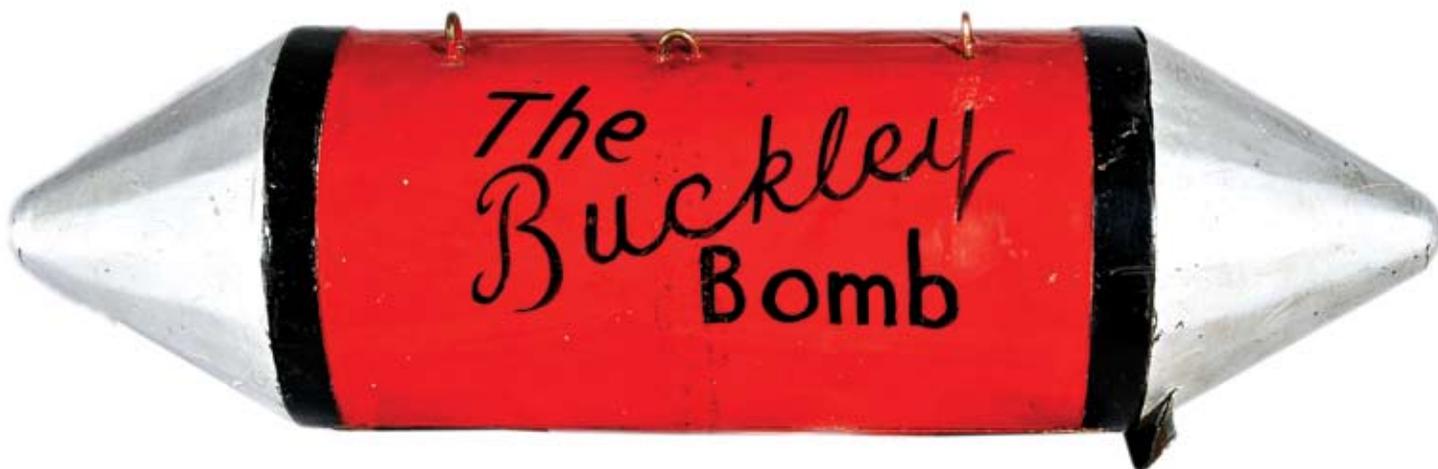
for fierce fighting. The Devil’s Brigade fought in several important battles in Europe, and also in the Aleutian Islands, off Alaska—the only place where Japanese forces landed on U.S. soil.

In 1942 the Army Air Corps built a new air base east of Great Falls—first called East Base (it was renamed Malmstrom in 1954). East Base supplied airplanes and other equipment to the Soviet Union under a special agreement with the U.S. government. Military crews flew the airplanes to Great Falls, painted them with Russian markings, geared them for cold-weather flying, and then flew them on to Alaska for transport to Soviet military bases. Women Air Service Pilots, called WASPS, often flew these missions.

The government also built airfields at Cut Bank, Glasgow, and Lewistown. Airmen here practiced navigation, bombing, and gunnery skills on B-17 aircraft before flying to Europe to join the war.

Montana’s location also made it a strategic departure point by air to Asia and the Soviet Union. And in 1942 the Army Corps of Engineers began building a road connecting Fairbanks, Alaska, to the Lower 48 states. The road entered Montana north of Shelby. When Japan bombed an Alaska harbor and took over two Aleutian Islands, in 1942, this road funneled military equipment between East Base and military bases in Alaska.

FIGURE 19.6: James Buckley, a sheet-metal worker from Opportunity, designed the Buckley Bomb for the U.S. Army—not to destroy anything, but to drop propaganda over enemy targets. When the bomb burst, it distributed 30,000 leaflets encouraging enemy troops to surrender. The army called it psychological warfare and awarded Buckley the bronze star.



War Changed Life at Home

The war brought the end of the Great Depression in Montana. Suddenly, the military needed lumber for building materials; copper for ammunition, telephone, and telegraph wires; coal for heat; oil for fuel and lubricants; and chrome for many uses. Montana's copper, coal, and chromite mines, smelters, oil fields, and sawmills swung into full production to answer the demand. Industrial jobs were so important that some workers were allowed to stay home from the war to help produce the resources that the military needed.

Between 1942 and 1945 the U.S. military purchased nearly \$25.3 million worth of Montana's industrial and agricultural products (about \$282 million today). After 20 years of drought and depression, Montana's economy roared back to life.

The government also became the biggest food buyer in the country. The military purchased large amounts of Montana-grown wheat, beef, and other agricultural products. It controlled the price so it would not have to pay too much. Like industrial workers, some farmers were also excused from military service so they could stay home and produce food.

At the same time, the long drought ended. Rains returned to Montana's farmland. Many farmers said 1943 was the best year they had ever seen. Between 1940 and 1948 Montana's agricultural profits increased 188 percent. Farmers and ranchers paid off loans and bought more land to make their operations even more profitable.

Tragedy in the Midst of War: Smith Mine Disaster

Some soldiers looked down on men who took jobs in the mines rather than joining the army. But miners also faced great danger. The worst coal mine disaster in Montana history happened on February 27, 1943. An open flame touched off

FIGURE 19.8: Three rescue workers leave the Smith Mine on February 27, 1943. Of the eight Bearcreek High School seniors that year, five lost their fathers. Coal mining in this region never recovered from the disaster.

FIGURE 19.7: Miner Emil Anderson scrawled this farewell message in chalk on a piece of powder box. It reads, "Its 5 mins pass 11 o'clock . . . dear Agnes and children I'm sorry we had to go . . . God bless you all Emil with lots . . . kisses." The other side reads, "We try to do our best but we couldn't get out."



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an explosion at the Number 3 Smith Mine in Washoe, near Red Lodge. The explosion erupted deep underground and was powerful enough to knock a 20-ton locomotive off its tracks a quarter mile from the mine. Of the 77 miners who went to work that day, only 3 survived.

The disaster was a terrible blow to the communities of Red Lodge and Bearcreek. It left 58 widows and 125 fatherless children. One Bearcreek woman lost 11 relatives in the explosion. After that, the mines around Bearcreek and Red Lodge closed permanently.

Government Control Increases

The war became Montana's top priority. The federal government wanted everyone to focus on the war effort, so it discouraged all other industries and activities. Montana's tourism industry fell into steep decline because the government discouraged people from traveling for pleasure. It **rationed** (limited people's access to) materials like gasoline and rubber tires because the military needed them. Road and bridge construction projects stopped—except for those that were important to the war effort.

The government even banned gold mining because it used valuable resources to produce a product that did not help fight the war. The government encouraged gold miners to take jobs in industries that produced materials critical to the war.

The government also decided what prices it would pay for food and materials. It set price controls to keep prices from rising as demand for products increased.

FIGURE 19.9: During the war, shoppers had to take their ration stamps every time they went to the store or gas station. They could buy only as much rationed food or gas as they had stamps for.



The War Changed Montana's Workforce

After the Depression, some people moved to Montana for mining and industrial jobs. But far more Montanans moved away during the war. Shipyards, airplane factories, and ammunition plants across the country geared up for full production to supply the war. A man could make \$7.75 a day (\$106 today) working underground in a dangerous mine—or he could earn twice as much building bombers in Seattle. More than 88,000 Montanans—3 out of every 20 people—left the state.

Montana's population dropped 16 percent between 1940 and 1943. Most of the war workers and their families never returned. This

enormous migration out of Montana shaped communities, politics, and the economy for decades after the war ended.

So many men went off to war that there were not enough left to fill all the jobs. Women, young teens, and foreign labor had to pitch in to get important jobs done at home. The state recruited teenagers to join a farm corps to help bring in crops. The government negotiated with Mexico to send thousands of migrant farm workers into agricultural states like Montana.

Women had always run farms and ranches in Montana. Now they rolled up their sleeves, tucked their hair into scarves, and went to work at jobs that had never been open to females before.

More than 100 women worked at copper smelters at Anaconda and Great Falls between 1940 and 1945. They operated equipment, ran conveyors, made quality and density measurements, and shoveled steel balls from a wheelbarrow into a ball mill that ground up the **ore** (rock containing precious metals). One woman, Ursula Jurich, said that except for working with arsenic, smelter work “wasn’t any more **strenuous** [demanding] than housework.”

Prisoners Work in the Fields

More than 1,200 Italian sailors spent the war at an alien detention center at Fort Missoula. They had been working on Italian merchant ships sailing within U.S.-controlled waters just before the United States entered the war. The government refused to let them go home to become enemy soldiers. So the Italians lived in barracks at the fort and were assigned to help farmers in the Bitterroot Valley bring in their crops.

The Italians were civilians, not military prisoners, so security was relaxed—though armed guards manned lookout towers at each end of the camp. The only threat of violence came when a group of prisoners staged a brief uprising. Prison guard John Moe of Missoula later called it the “Olive Oil Rebellion.” He said he thought prisoners were protesting the quality of food—especially the olive oil. But because none of the guards spoke Italian, no one was sure.

In 1944 and 1945 the government also

FIGURE 19.10: The Anaconda Copper Company began publishing the *Copper Commando*, a weekly newspaper boosting employee patriotism. Articles reminded workers that their labor directly benefited the war effort.



“They Were Not Much Older than Me”

“The prisoners all seemed so young, not much older than me . . . They acted like they were pleased to be safe as POWs after what they had probably been exposed to in the war. None of them spoke English except the leader, or ranking officer . . . He said he would like to see the war end, but didn’t have much desire to go home to Germany. He said the town where he lived . . . was totally wiped out. He figured all of his relatives had been killed.”

— MARVIN COSTELLO, STEVENSVILLE RESIDENT WHO WAS 14 IN 1944 WHEN HIS FAMILY HIRED POWS TO HARVEST THEIR APPLE CROP

transported 425,000 German, Italian, and Japanese **POWs** (military prisoners of war) to the United States, where they could be held more securely than in war zones. Several thousand POWs were stationed in prison camps near Missoula, Billings, Miles City, Forsyth, Glendive, and Sidney.

Montanans were allowed to hire POWs for day labor on farms and in sugar beet fields. They paid the prisoners 80 cents per day (about \$10 today) in coupons that the prisoners could spend at the prison camp to buy cigarettes, candy, razor blades, soap, and towels.

Civilians Do Their Part

With so many Montanans at war, people at home wanted to help, too. Government leaders knew it was important to involve civilians in the war effort. They created several ways to keep people active and committed to the war.

Just as in World War I, people bought **war bonds** (savings certificates issued by the government as a way to raise money for the war). On the Blackfeet Reservation, the Browning War Mothers Club purchased \$10,000 in war bonds (about \$116,000 today).

People scrimped on food and household items so more materials could go to the war. The government encouraged everyone to grow their own food in “victory gardens” so that commercially produced food could go to the war. At one point during the war, one-half of the vegetables consumed in America came from victory gardens.

Government agencies also sponsored **scrap drives** (campaigns to get people to turn in household items, rubber, or metal for re-use by the military). The government called on citizens to turn in old tires, garden



FIGURE 19.11: Community groups sponsored scrap drives, like this one organized by Webster School in Butte. Scrap drives encouraged people to turn in household items made of rubber or metal for re-use by the military.

hoses, rubber boots, and other rubber items so they could be recycled into tires for military jeeps and airplanes. Youth groups like Camp Fire Girls collected used household fat for military use. Military contractors extracted **glycerin** (a syrupy ingredient in fats and oils) from it to use in explosives. Buying war bonds, contributing to scrap drives, and donating their time helped promote patriotism and war awareness among citizens.

In 1942 the government began rationing tires, gasoline, and food like sugar, meat, and butter. It distributed ration books and gave each family a certain number of stamps for different products. You could buy only as much of an item as you had stamps for. Most people could buy only five gallons of gasoline per week. Anyone caught disobeying could be put in jail or fined.

Ann Allen of Great Falls, who was a young homemaker during the war, said, "When the meat ran out we did without." She said she missed chocolate cake the most.

Patrolling for Danger

Right after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, people worried that attacks on the United States might continue. Some people also feared that Japanese or German spies might **sabotage** (deliberately destroy) important operations like dams, bridges, and public utilities, or might even bomb U.S. cities.

Great Falls and Billings posted guards at airports, power plants, and water supplies. Firefighters and police officers remained on alert in case of emergency. Some citizens even posted watch on Montana hilltops, searching the skies for enemy planes.

The only enemy craft that did land in Montana were balloon bombs. Balloon bombs were small explosives attached to hydrogen balloons. The Japanese military floated these balloons into the

"Patriotism Was Almost Unbelievable"

"Practically every home had one or more stars [a 10-inch-by-12-inch banner with a big star in the center] hanging in their window or door meaning that one or more sons or fathers were away in the military. If this relative were killed, then a silver star was hung replacing the original star . . . Many homes had silver stars. Emotions against the Germans and especially the Japanese ran very high and the total patriotism to our nation was almost unbelievable."

—MARVIN COSTELLO, STEVENSVILLE FARMER

FIGURE 19.12: Posters appeared in store windows, dressing rooms, movie theater lobbies, and other public places reminding people that doing without new things was helping the war, too.

**USE IT UP – WEAR IT OUT –
MAKE IT DO!**



OUR LABOR AND OUR GOODS ARE FIGHTING

skies, hoping they would drop down over the western United States and start forest fires. At least 30 balloon bombs landed in Montana, but they did not start any major fires or hurt anyone. However, one bomb that fell in Oregon did kill six people.

Prejudice against Asians Turns into Fear

Asians had faced widespread **prejudice** (a pre-formed negative opinion) in America since the late 1800s. After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, that prejudice turned to fear. Some people began to suspect all Japanese Americans of being enemy agents.

In 1942 the U.S. government forced all Japanese Americans on the West Coast—110,000 men, women, and children—to move out of their homes and live in **relocation camps** (prison camps) until the war ended. These were not POWs. Most of them were American citizens, born in the United States. Many of them lost their homes, businesses, and everything they owned.

About 1,000 Japanese American prisoners were temporarily held at Fort Missoula. But none of Montana's 500 Japanese Americans was imprisoned. Montana was a landlocked state unlikely to be invaded by Japan, so it was not included in the **internment** (imprisonment) program.

However, Montanans of Japanese descent did lose their jobs and suffer other kinds of discrimination. In railroad towns like Miles City and Whitefish, Japanese American railroad workers were fired. In Superior, a patriotic mob nearly hanged five Japanese American railroad workers. The local sheriff had to take the five men to jail just to protect them. And in Three Forks, Tom Oiyee lost his job at the Trident cement plant, even though his son was serving as a U.S. Army combat soldier.

Some white Montanans helped their Japanese neighbors during

An Eighth Grader Watches the Skies

"In 1945 we all knew it was our duty to memorize the names and silhouettes of both enemy and allied war planes, and every kid in Helena willingly accepted it. Ever since the war began, I had this recurring dream that I would be the first one to spot an enemy airplane flying over Helena . . .

"Sometimes at night, I'd sit all by myself in my back yard and spend hours watching the starry skies, just in case a Messerschmitt ME 110 night-fighter, or a twin-engine Mitsubishi G4M2a bomber, might try a sneak attack. Often I would fall asleep there and wake up shivering cold in the middle of the night."

—GERALD SULLIVAN, WHO WAS 14 IN 1945

"Be Tolerant"

"Not all of the Japanese, even in Japan, favor the military clique which has started this war. Here in Livingston . . . two elderly Japanese, in spite of the closing of their business and the freezing of their savings, still found money to donate to the American Red Cross.

"Dr. Paul L. Greene, chairman of the county defense commission, has voiced a plea for tolerance toward people of Japanese blood or Japanese ancestry.

"Many of the younger generation of Japanese are American citizens. There is no question that they deserve the protection which that citizenship implies."

—LIVINGSTON ENTERPRISE, DECEMBER 17, 1941

this time of fear and suspicion. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government closed down all Japanese-owned businesses. When federal agents closed down a popular Wolf Point restaurant owned by Tom Kurokawa, neighbors rallied to Kurokawa's defense. The agents confined the family to their home for a week while they investigated Kurokawa's background. Every day until the restaurant reopened, neighbors watched over the place to make sure no damage was done.

Montana's representative in Congress, Mike Mansfield, defended Japanese Americans. He said in Congress that citizens of Japanese descent were as loyal as any other Americans and deserved to be treated with dignity.

"To hear somebody of that stature make a statement like that in a public meeting . . . gave us a lot of heart and encouragement," remembered Henry Munetta, a Japanese American from Harlowton.



FIGURE 19.13: George Oiye, a Japanese American Montanan, grew up in Logan and Three Forks. Oiye was a crack shot with a hunting rifle—a skill very useful in military service. At first the army rejected Japanese Americans because of their race. Later, it allowed them to serve. After Oiye joined a special combat team of Japanese Americans, he earned a bronze star for his “cool efficiency” under fire.

Soldiers Return to a New Life

On May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered. In August the United States dropped atomic bombs on two major cities in Japan—Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A few days later the Soviet army wiped out 1 million Japanese soldiers in China. These events drove Japan to surrender on August 15, 1945. The biggest war in human history was over.

America was jubilant. The United States and its allies had won the war. Though bombs and battles had devastated much of Europe—and killed 23 million people in the Soviet Union—the United States emerged as an economic and political superpower.

Rations were lifted. Gasoline and supplies were plentiful again. And the surviving soldiers started coming home.

The War Changed People

The war changed Montanans. Many young people had been to foreign lands and had life-changing experiences. Hundreds of Montanans had to adjust

“Dear Dad,

For many today is a day of celebration but for us who know the real price of our great victories of this past year it is impossible to think of celebrating. Rather I pray in the years to come we can look at [this time] as the beginning of world decency and that the price we have had to pay was not in vain.”

—MAJOR JOHN C. HARRISON OF HARLOWTON, WRITING HOME TO HIS FATHER TWO MONTHS AFTER HIS BROTHER BOB WAS KILLED

to war injuries. Some had been in horrible battles and came home with tangled-up emotions that took a long time to heal.

Some returning **veterans** (people who have served in the military) felt dread and anxiety about the world after the war. They had witnessed the unbelievable inhumanity of the concentration camps where Nazis had imprisoned and killed 11 million people. Some had witnessed the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the atomic bombs that killed around 210,000 Japanese men, women, and children. After these horrors, people wondered if life would ever feel normal and peaceful again.

Yet others felt elation. They had fought for their lives and survived. As one veteran of Montana's 163rd Regiment said, "We came home healthy, happy and alive. We were ready to set the world on fire."

Not everyone did come home. More than 1,500 Montanans died in the war. And of the 88,000 who moved away for war jobs in other places, very few came back.

The war changed Montana's American Indians in several ways. Young men and women from each reservation had traveled and seen other cultures firsthand—both good things and bad things. Their experiences gave them a different perspective on life on and off the reservation.

Indian soldiers' wartime accomplishments gave many of them a strengthened sense of identity and confidence. Many had earned the respect of their comrades in the military. Yet they returned home to the same prejudice and misunderstanding that had colored their lives here before they left. This made many Indian veterans think about working for **civil rights** (fundamental rights guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution) in the postwar years.

Wartime experiences changed Montana's women, too. Women had taken industrial jobs they had never held before. Many expected at first that they would work only

FIGURE 19.14: Military service gave American Indian women opportunities they could not find on the reservation. Posed here, from left to right, are Minnie Spotted Wolf (Blackfeet), Celia Mix (Potawatomi), and Viola Eastman (Chippewa), who served in the Marine Corps Women's Reserves.



while the men were away and would give up their jobs when the war was over. But by the end of the war, some refused to give up the independence, respect, and income they had earned during the war to go back to their old lives.

The GI Bill Fuels a Postwar Boom

What if someone told you that you could go to college or trade school for free, buy a house cheaper than renting, and get a year's worth of federal unemployment checks while you figured out what you wanted to do? You might feel pretty optimistic about your future.

At the end of the war, the federal government realized it needed to help its 11 million veterans adjust to civilian life. In 1944 Congress enacted a law known as the GI Bill of Rights. (**GI** is a nickname for a U.S. serviceman or service-woman; it is short for "Government Issue.") Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edward Humes later called the 1944 GI Bill "the most enormous, far-reaching, life-changing government program in the history of the world."

The GI Bill gave veterans free tuition to attend college or technical school and low-interest loans to buy their own homes and invest in businesses. It paid unemployment compensation to veterans while they looked for jobs. And it provided health care, counseling, and other services to help veterans re-adjust to civilian life after the war.

With help from the GI Bill, 7 million Americans enrolled in college. Millions more bought new homes for their families, invested in businesses, and boosted economic activity across the country. The GI Bill had a huge effect on the U.S. economy for many years.

In Montana, the surge in college enrollment caused dramatic growth of both the University

FIGURE 19.15: Some GIs came home full of optimism about finding a wife, building a family, and owning their own dream home. James McCone, who grew up in Glendive and Helena, landed in New York City in October 1945. Before he came home, he stopped at a photo studio to pose for this portrait.



of Montana and Montana State University. Missoula and Bozeman boomed. So did other communities, as contractors quickly built new houses for the returning veterans to buy with home loans provided by the GI Bill. And hundreds of farm families paid off their farms, bought new equipment, and joined in the nationwide economic boom.

Not everyone received equal benefits from the GI Bill. African American, American Indian, and female veterans had a harder time getting loans, enrolling in college, and claiming other benefits, even though they had worked as hard and risked as much as white male soldiers. This is one reason that African Americans, American Indians, and women began fighting for equal rights in the 1950s.

With the benefits of the GI Bill, with new houses and jobs opening up, and with a renewed sense of confidence and accomplishment, Montanans looked ahead with optimism.



FIGURE 19.16: As a result of the G.I. Bill, so many people went to college that the University of Montana had to set up trailers for faculty and student housing. Young, educated Americans were about to change society in a big way.

How It Worked

The Dogs of War

Dogs joined World War II, too. While families collected scrap metal and donated rubber tires to the war effort, hundreds of them also volunteered their dogs for the army's Dogs for Defense program.

Dogs for Defense set up five War Dog Training Centers in the United States. One training center opened at a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp near the mining town of Rimini (west of Helena).

Rimini, on the slopes of the Continental Divide, had long winters and deep snows. It was the perfect place to train officers and dogs in arctic rescue and survival techniques. About 235 people worked there during the war, training between 700 and 900 huskies, Saint Bernards, Newfoundlands, Great Pyrenees, and other breeds.

The first purpose of the dog training camp was to prepare dogs to accompany the First Special Service Force—the Devil's Brigade—on a top-secret mission into the mountains of German-occupied Norway. When the military canceled that mission, the dogs switched jobs.

FIGURE 19.17: Not very many dogs in the world have had a ride like this sled dog, who is skydiving into Alaska wearing a parachute harness developed at Camp Rimini especially for dogs.



Next, trainers taught the canine force to rescue pilots who had crashed in remote regions of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. A few dogs learned to parachute out of airplanes (and many got hurt in the effort). Others learned to pull sleds and carry packs full of supplies. These Arctic Search and Rescue Units saved many lives during the war.

“There was a wonderful sense of satisfaction,” remembered Stuart Mace, one of the dog trainers. “We were privileged to be participating in a process of saving lives rather than taking them. In wartime this is a real privilege.”



FIGURE 19.18: These sled dogs in training at the War Dog Training Center at Rimini got to do what they do best: run.

CHAPTER 19 REVIEW

► CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Identify: (a) Devil's Brigade; (b) victory garden; (c) balloon bombs
2. Define: (a) civilian; (b) pacifist; (c) conscientious objector; (d) smoke jumping; (e) ration; (f) POW; (g) war bonds; (h) scrap drive; (i) internment; (j) veteran; (k) GI
3. What event changed many people's mind about going to war?
4. Describe some of the military service branches in which women could enlist.
5. Why were Indian code talkers so strategically important in the war?
6. Describe some of the ways conscientious objectors served their country during the war.
7. Why did Montana's topography make it a good place for military training exercises?
8. How did the war help Montana recover from 20 years of economic depression?
9. Which industries were encouraged and which were discouraged during the war?
10. Why did so many people leave Montana during the war?
11. Describe the two reasons the government sponsored scrap drives.
12. What were some of the acts of discrimination against Americans of Japanese descent?
13. Describe how the war changed the self-image of Indians and women.
14. How did the GI Bill affect educational institutions in Montana?

► CRITICAL THINKING

1. You read that many Montanans moved away from Montana to find jobs in factories in other states. Why do you think these factories were not built in Montana?
2. Government-run internment camps for Americans of Japanese descent were a part of the national response to the war. Why do you think camps were not created for Americans of German or Italian descent?
3. Why might a returning veteran feel dread and anxiety as well as elation?

► PAST TO PRESENT

1. How does the role of women in the military today compare with their role during World War II?
2. The text explains that the long-standing prejudice against Asians in the United States became fear after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Do you think there are similar fears toward ethnic groups in our society today? If so, do you think this reaction is justified? If it is not justified, what might be done to keep it from happening?
3. Think about the sacrifices people at home were asked to make during World War II. How does that compare to the sacrifices people made during more recent wars (the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan)?

► MAKE IT LOCAL

1. Gather information about someone from your family or community who served in the military during the war. Then create a commemorative quilt square honoring their service.

► EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Research and write a report on one of the following topics: Jeannette Rankin; the 163rd Regiment; the Alien Detention Center at Fort Missoula; World War II conscientious objectors; the Smith Mine disaster; women's military service.
2. Analyze one of the propaganda posters the government created during World War II. Then design your own World War II propaganda poster.
3. The year is 1944. Write a letter to someone serving overseas in the Pacific or in Europe. Ask the person questions and give the person a report on life back home.
4. Organize a "scrap drive." After it is completed, debate the merits of recycling and compare the reasons people recycle today with the reasons they recycled during World War II. Which reasons do you think provide greater motivation?

Credits

The following abbreviations are used in the credits:

BBHC Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming
GNPA Glacier National Park Archives
LOC Library of Congress
MAC Montana Arts Council, Helena
MDEQ Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Helena
MDT Montana Department of Transportation, Helena
MFWP Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena
MHS Montana Historical Society, Helena
MHSA Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena
MHSL Montana Historical Society Library, Helena
MHS Mus. Montana Historical Society Museum, Helena
MHS PA Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives, Helena
MSU COT Montana State University College of Technology, Billings
NMAI National Museum American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
MSU Billings Special Collections, Montana State University Billings Library
NARA National Archives and Records Administration
NPS National Park Service
NRIS Natural Resource Information System, Montana State Library, Helena
SHPO State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Historical Society, Helena
TM Travel Montana, Helena
UM Missoula Archives & Special Collections, The University of Montana-Missoula
USDA United States Department of Agriculture
USFS United States Forest Service
WMM World Museum of Mining, Butte

Chapter 19

- FIG. 19.1** Montana Day in South Pacific, 1945, MHS PA PAc 92-8
- FIG. 19.2** 163rd going ashore at Wakde Island, MHS PA PAc 85-75
- FIG. 19.3** World War II medals, MHS Mus. X1984.07
- FIG. 19.4** Barney Old Coyote Jr. receiving commendation from Col. Fordyce, 1943, MHS PA PAc 2000-18.10
- FIG. 19.5** Conscientious objector/firefighter parachuting from airplane, 1940s, photo by Roy Wenger, courtesy Mark Williams and Lillian Wenger
- FIG. 19.6** Buckley bomb model, MHS Mus. X1997.02.01
- FIG. 19.7** Farewell message on powder-box board, MHS Mus. 1985.58
- FIG. 19.8** Rescue workers at Smith Mine, courtesy Flash's Studio, Red Lodge, MT
- FIG. 19.9** Ration book, MHS Mus. 1998.80.07
- FIG. 19.10** Cover, *Copper Commando* 1, no. 24 (July 16, 1943), MHSL
- FIG. 19.11** Children on scrap heap in Butte, photo by Russell Lee, 1942, courtesy LOC LC-USW3-009702-D
- FIG. 19.12** Poster, MHS Mus. 90.11.21
- FIG. 19.13** George Oiye, from *Montana The Magazine of Western History* with permission from Tom G. Oiye
- FIG. 19.14** Marine Corps Women, 1943, NARA, Washington, D.C.
- FIG. 19.15** James McCone, 1945, photo by Oklahoma Studio, New York, MHS PA PAc 2003-65.16
- FIG. 19.16** Overflow housing on UM campus, 1946, UM RG6 Box 2 St & Fac
- FIG. 19.17** Parachuting dog in Rimini dog harness, courtesy Chuck Dean, Victor, Colorado
- FIG. 19.18** K-9 Corps, Rimini, MT, 1944, MHS PA PAc 93-22