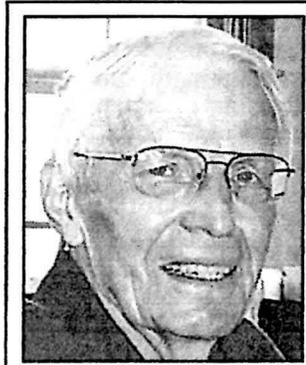


Washburn During The War Years — Mobilization

109
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In his Pearl Harbor speech to Congress on December 8, President Roosevelt declared that "the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory." But to achieve that victory the "righteous might" had to be organized and directed. The mobilization of the industrial, financial and manpower resources of the nation was primarily the responsibility of the federal government. The major agencies responsible for the direction and coordination of the war economy were the Office of War Mobilization, the War Production Board, the National War Labor Board, the War Manpower Commission, the Selective Service system, and Office of War Information. The major agency for control of the civilian economy was the Office of Price Administration, responsible for price control and rationing. These mobilization agencies did not operate according to an overall plan, however, resulting in a great muddle of competing agencies, personalities, demands, and priorities that reflected not only the haste in which they had been undertaken, but the managing style of President Roosevelt, who was supposed to be in charge of it all.

During World War I public pressure, demand for conformity and suppression of dissent, ostentatious patriotism, exploitation of ethnic differences, and insidious government propaganda were among the methods for mobilizing the



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population to support the war effort. By the time of World War II the population was largely Americanized, with no widespread discrimination against people of German or Italian descent, although Japanese-Americans on the west coast were herded into internment camps. Other than this shameful episode, there were no ugly excesses in the name of patriotism, no persecution of "enemy aliens," no secret list of "slackers" and "traitors," no tar and feather parties, no "cowards" doused with yellow paint. The American people were mobilized through defense work, service in the armed forces, participation in civilian defense, local offices of war agencies, and the Red Cross, rationing, and through many other linkages to the national war effort. There were the usual public rituals of patriotism (for example, flag raisings), and certainly there was public pressure to conform and support the war. The federal govern-

ment through its various agencies, particularly the Office of War Information, engaged in what might be called "soft propaganda," ably assisted by Hollywood and the advertising industry. Another factor less praiseworthy, but nevertheless real—in some small measure people supported the war effort because after ten years of depression they had jobs and the nation was prosperous again. Finally, people did not harbor doubts about the necessity and justice of the war, as they had during World War I. There was a national consensus that Germany and Japan were evil, intent on world domination, while the United States and its allies were the "good guys," who would inevitably bring about their destruction.

All of these factors contributed to uniting the people of Washburn to support and contribute to the war effort. Their experiences during this Second World War were in broad outline similar to those of the first one, 25 years earlier. Men (and a few women) entered the armed forces, the Du Pont plant expanded production, and war bonds were purchased, while unity, patriotism, and sacrifice were preached from pulpit and podium. But more men were called into service; there was rationing of food and gasoline; there were scrap drives and civilian defense exercises; a continuous flow of war news over the radio, and frequent reports of men killed, wounded, missing or

taken prisoner, all of which brought the war into the homes and lives of everyone in the community, more than in that earlier conflict. At the same time that this Second World War placed greater demands on the people than the first one, Washburn did not experience another economic resurgence. Wartime employment at the Du Pont plant, while ending the depression and providing a stable source of income, was modest compared to that of the earlier conflict and did not bring the prosperity of a wartime boom.

The issue of the Times on the Thursday before December 7 reflected a community at peace, filled with Christmas season advertisements—13 in all—from Ashland clothing, shoe, furniture, and jewelry stores. The only suggestion that the nation was preparing for war was a front-page article reporting that thirty draft registrants were leaving for Eau Claire the following Tuesday for physical examinations, a large advertisement on an inside page urging young men to join the Navy to serve their country and protect their future, and "Caught In The Draft . . . A Riot of Army Life," playing at the Lake Theater. But for the people of Washburn, as for the entire nation, the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor instantly mobilized the community for the total war, which was to follow.