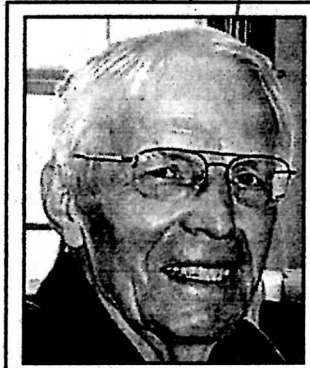


# Washburn During The War Years —The Home Front—2

CS 8/11/11

Civilian defense was an important way in which the war was brought home to the people, and their patriotic energies mobilized for the war effort. An elaborate administrative structure to organize and coordinate the various aspects of civilian defense was established, consisting of a federal Office of Civilian Defense, a state Defense Council, and a county Defense Board. In Washburn a Defense Council was organized, which asked "every able bodied citizen" to enroll for civilian defense. The objective of civilian defense, the council stated, was "the protection of our homes in the event of air-borne attack." The council urged people not to think that "it can't happen here," declaring that "our community is located in an area which has no little importance in our country's war effort," with its explosives and iron ore, "decidedly necessary sinews of war." To emphasize what could happen, the council noted that a bomber from the west coast could "arrive over Chicago" in much less time than taken by the train from Ashland to Chicago.

After a successful enrollment drive, a Citizens' Defense Corps was organized, commanded by the plant manager, with other local notables in charge of the control center, fire service, air raid wardens, medical services, public works, utilities services, and police services. Frequent meetings were held to familiarize



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people with their duties, while classes in first aid, fire control, gas defense, and other subjects were held at the Du Pont club. The city council did its part, approving an ordinance "relating to national defense and public safety and welfare during war emergency," appropriating "\$160 for a large first aid kit, \$40 for armbands with CDC insignia for members of Citizens Defense Corps, and \$10 for incendiary bombs for demonstration," and establishing restricted areas around the coal dock, reservoir, and pumping station. The Civilian Defense Corps devoted much of its time to its primary purpose, the protection of civilians in the event of an enemy air raid. In early October 1942 the corps held a "practice session" at city hall in which descriptions of "Eleven imaginary incidents which might occur . . . in the event of an enemy air raid" were read by the commander of

the corps, with the various staff members indicating what action they would take in each case. These "imaginary incidents" seem to have been taken quite seriously, the problems they presented stimulating "a lively discussion between the staff members, resulting in a keener recognition of the difficulties that may face the corps in an emergency."

A practice blackout was held in the first ward at the end of October, the "chief air raid warden" pronouncing it to have been "a satisfactory success," with only one "deliberate failure" to comply with the blackout order. Four ward blackouts were held subsequently, but a city-wide blackout scheduled for early January 1942 was postponed, "due to the necessity for more complete and thorough preparations." It was then decided to dispense with the city blackout, since a county blackout was to be held in early February. This event was finally held on March 11 from 10:00 to 10:15PM. Reports from around the county indicated that the blackout was a "complete success." One observer on the third floor of the Walker School stated that the blackout in Washburn "was 99 per cent effective within three minutes after the alarm was sounded." Two unintentional violations of the blackout in Washburn were noted, while a third, "the setting off of some firecrackers . . .

was apparently intentional." A second county-wide blackout, lasting from 10:30 to 11:00PM on June 15 1942, was judged to have been "generally successful."

In retrospect all of this fuss about blackouts appears to have been rather frivolous, but at the time the possibility of enemy air raids on Bayfield County was taken quite seriously. There was a certain vagueness about how enemy bombers would reach the northern mid-section of the United States, although it was alleged that there were secret enemy air bases "somewhere" in the Arctic, in Canada, or in Alaska. Among the believers was the Times, which, after having had "the privilege of hearing . . . men of keen vision and serious purpose" speak at a civilian defense conference, declared that "we were never in more deadly danger of enemy attack than we are right now." This area, the editorial continued, "has military objectives of primary importance," while in the dry late summer and fall, "enemy bombers or saboteurs" could set the "dangerously inflammable" forests "ablaze with incendiary bombs." But as people came to realize that Washburn was not really threatened by enemy bombers from Canada or saboteurs landing by parachute, enthusiasm for civilian defense faded and the Civilian Defense Corps became moribund.