

## Part D: World War II's Impact on Alabama

Vocabulary: infamy, USS, sacred burial site, Civil Liberties Act, U-Boats, POW, Geneva Convention, induction, boomtowns, rationing, scrap, GI

President Roosevelt called the attack on Pearl Harbor “A date which will live in **infamy.**” The attack killed 2,335 military men. Half the people killed were on the **USS Arizona**. Today, the ship, still at the bottom of the harbor, is a national monument and **sacred burial site**.



DoD photo by: PH3(AW/SW) JAYME PASTORIC, USN.

*This image of the USS Arizona Memorial was released by the United States Navy*

Two months after the attack, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 that declared people of Japanese ancestry, most of whom were U.S. citizens, were excluded from living or visiting California, Washington, Oregon, and Arizona. These states were closest to Hawaii where the Japanese attack took place. Consequently, 130,000 Japanese-Americans were forced to give up their homes and businesses in these states and move to camps in the western interior of the U.S. as prisoners of the government.

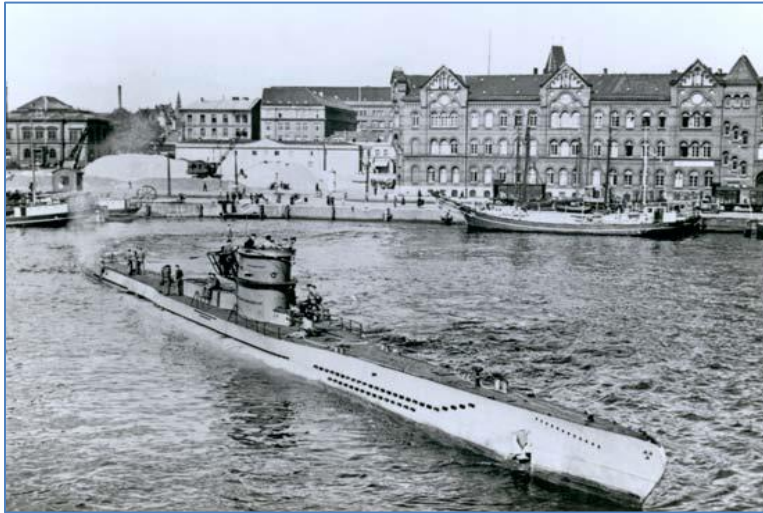


Japanese-American concentration camp somewhere in the western United States during WWII.

*Picture courtesy of Encyclopedia Britannica*

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the **Civil Liberties Act**, which apologized to and paid reparations to the Japanese-Americans and their descendants for their treatment by the U.S. government during WWII.

The United States was under attack not only at Pearl Harbor but also in the Gulf of Mexico along the coast of Alabama and Florida. German **U-boats** stayed in the Gulf from 1942 to 1943 and sank more than 50 freighters and tankers.



Launching of U-218 at Kiel, Germany, in 1941.  
*From J.P. Mallmann Showell, U-Boats under the Swastika (1987); picture courtesy of Encyclopedia Britannica.*

In Alabama during WWII, twenty-four (24) **POW** camps were established to imprison 16,000 Germans and Italians captured in the fighting in North Africa. The largest camps were built in Aliceville, Opelika, Fort McClellan, and Fort Rucker. The **Geneva Convention** in 1929 ruled that POWs had to be treated fairly. The prisoners were paid 80 cents a day to harvest the cotton and peanut crops. The prisoners were allowed to read and study and participate in many forms of recreation in the camps when they weren't working.



Most of the prisoners of war in Alabama camps were German, but a small number of Italian soldiers were held at Fort Rucker in southeastern Alabama.  
*Courtesy of U.S. Army Aviation Museum*



In addition to their work duties, prisoners at the Opelika camp enjoyed leisure-time activities such as sports and music.  
*Courtesy of Museum of East Alabama*

Tens of thousands of soldiers from all over the U.S. were trained at the military bases in Alabama. The U.S. government built many military bases in Alabama because the climate was mild and the land was cheap. Maxwell Field in Montgomery became a famous training facility for pilots along with Craig Field in Selma and Napier Field in Dothan. Fort McClellan in Anniston became a major **induction** center. Camp Sibert in Gadsden trained soldiers in chemical warfare. Brookley Field on Mobile Bay repaired military aircraft and was a supply center for Southeast.



Women employed at the Redstone Ordnance Plant in Huntsville examine ammunition produced at the facility for the U.S. Army during World War II. By 1942, more than 40 percent of the employees at the facility were women. *Courtesy of U.S. Army*

Industry expanded in Alabama during WWII in the **boomtowns** of Mobile, Montgomery, and Huntsville. Two of the nation's five aluminum plants were in Alabama. Aluminum is the most important metal in the building of airplanes. Mobile was the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> busiest port. Two shipbuilding companies in Mobile employed 60,000 workers.





A ship under construction at the Port of Mobile in Mobile County during the World War II era.  
*Courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History*

A gunpowder plant in Childersburg employed 20,000 workers. Huntsville employed 11,000 workers to make explosives and Birmingham employed 30,000 workers to make steel. Many of these workers were women who had to replace the men who were fighting in Europe and the Pacific. These women were called “Rosie the Riveter.”

Agriculture also expanded in Alabama during WWII but most farms did not have enough labor to manage the work because so many Alabamians moved from the countryside to the cities. Cotton was in demand for military uniforms, military tents and sandbags, for example.



Cotton Bale

In spite of the growth in the economy and the job opportunities, Alabamians and all Americans had to sacrifice in their personal lives. In 1942, **rationing** began on rubber tires, gasoline, sugar, meat, coffee, shoes, and electricity. The loss of these products affected everyone in their daily living. Community groups also collected clothing, made bandages, and knitted sweaters for those in need. They had **scrap** drives to collect rubber and metal, which was used to build airplanes and weapons. They wrote letters to the soldiers and sent them packages of snacks, toothpaste, and other small items they couldn't find in the war-torn countries.

Approximately 350,000 native Alabamians between the ages of 21 and 35 joined the war (6,000 lost their lives).



Alabama National Guardsmen with the 106th Reconnaissance Squadron. Members of this unit fought in the Southwest Pacific in WWII, flying B-25 Mitchells. *Courtesy of Southern Museum of Flight*

In January 1941, the United States War Department formed the all-black 99<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron at Tuskegee Army Air Base. During the War, 992 African American pilots were graduated from Tuskegee Air Field courses. The Black pilots flew 1578 missions and 15,533 sorties. They destroyed 261 enemy aircraft. They won more than 850 medals. Visit website [Tuskegee Airmen Visit the White House](#).

Video "[Tuskegee Airmen Visit the White House](#)"



A World War II era war bond poster featuring the image of a Tuskegee Airman created by the Office of War Information, which operated from 1942-1945. *The National Archives: picture courtesy of Encyclopedia of Alabama*



U.S. pilots of the 332nd Fighter Group, trained in Tuskegee, Alabama, attend a briefing in Ramitelli, Italy, in March 1945. *Library of Congress: picture courtesy of Encyclopedia of Alabama*

WWII ended in 1945 but the effects of the war continued to change people's lives. For example, President Roosevelt signed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, which was known as the **GI Bill**. It gave each soldier \$20 a week while they were looking for a job. It made bank loans more accessible for buying homes. It provided each Veteran an opportunity to go to college. Another example is that women were no longer needed in the work force to support the war effort. However, they found ways through education and training to re-enter the work force in other jobs. Also, African Americans did not experience segregation as soldiers in Europe or the Pacific, so it was difficult for them to return to Alabama where segregation was still practiced. This made them fight harder to eliminate segregation.

### Vocabulary Words

**Infamy:** an evil or terrible act.

**In the Story:** The bombing of Pearl Harbor was an evil act.

**USS:** United States Ship.

**In the Story:** Each military ship has a name that begins with USS or United State Ship Arizona.

**Sacred Burial Site:** A grave that has a significant and spiritual meaning to the family or nation.

**In the Story:** The USS Arizona sunk to the bottom of Pearl Harbor when it was bombed. All the men on the ship sunk with it. The ship is their grave.

**Civil Liberties Act of 1988:** The Act stated that the imprisonment of Japanese-Americans during WWII in the United States was based on "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership."

**In the Story:** The Act provided reparations and an apology.

**POW:** Prisoner of War.

**In the Story:** There were many POWs in the United States and in Alabama during WWII.

**Geneva Convention:** An international treaty whereby countries follow rules for the treatment of prisoners of war.

**In the Story:** The POWs in Alabama were treated according to the rules of the Geneva Convention.

**Induction:** the formal act of making someone a member of the military.

**In the Story:** Men went to a center to fill out papers and have a physical examination to be accepted into the military.

**Boom Towns:** a town that experiences a sudden growth in population or business.

**In the Story:** The war created new businesses in towns and many people from the countryside moved to the towns to work in the new businesses.

**Rationing:** a limited amount given each day.

**In the Story:** Alabamians were given by the government a certain amount of sugar each day.

**Scrap:** pieces of aluminum or clothes that are thrown away.

**In the Story:** Alabamians collected scrap into a central place until they had a large quantity to give to the people who needed it.

**U Boat:** The American version of the German word "Unterseeboot," which means undersea boat or submarine.

**In the Story:** U-boats were in the Gulf of Mexico near the Alabama coast in WWII.

**GI:** G I stands for General Inductee, which means a person with no military background who is accepted into the United States military. Inductee means person and Induction means the process the person goes through to be accepted.

**In the Story:** The person will fill out papers and have a medical exam.