

# Virginians at War

## WWII: American Home Front

### Transcript

NARRATOR: Virginians have always stood at the crossroads of the fight for freedom. It is a battle in which we all reap the benefits.

#### **WORLD WAR II: 1939-1945**

NARRATOR: World War II was the defining event of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It involved 60 countries. Over 57 million people were killed. The nuclear age was launched, and the United States emerged as the world's most powerful nation.

World War II was fought in two major theaters of operation: the North African, Mid-Eastern, and European Theater, and to the Far East, the Asiatic-Pacific theater. Following the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, thousands of men flocked to sign up for military service. This response set the tone for the whole nation. As men marched off to the front lines, those left behind – men, women, and children – went to work supporting them. From war bonds to rationing, from women going to work to victory gardens, America stepped up to the challenge. As it turned out, the home front was America's secret weapon in winning World War II.

#### *World War II Home Front: America's Secret Weapon*

ROOSEVELT (1942): But there is one front and one battle where everyone in the United States – every man, woman, and child – is in action, and will be privileged to remain in action throughout this war. That front is right here at home, in our daily lives, in our daily tasks. Here at home, everyone will have the privilege of making whatever self-denial is necessary.

#### **WORLD AT WAR**

BROKAW: Pearl Harbor was the match that lit the flame. And we realized that we were in it, and literally the survival of our country depended upon winning that conflict. And I believe that everybody – people felt that they had to do whatever

they could do to help win that war. This was the only way that we would survive as a country.

COE: According to the story, I was trying to get my father up on Sunday morning to make pancakes, and he had the day off. When the first bomb dropped on Ford Island, my father turned to my mother and said, "Get up, Charlotte. The war's started."

BROOKS: On the Sunday of Pearl Harbor, I had just been to a movie with a friend and we were listening to the radio in the car when the announcement came over that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Quite frankly, most people in America had no idea where Pearl Harbor was.

MAHLER: And we were in the bus station, we saw all the sailors running wild, you know, and everybody... like, they were crazy. And we said, "What in the world has happened?" And they said, "Pearl Harbor's been bombed." And George immediately said, "Oh my God. This is war. This is big, bad war."

TURNER: Everybody wanted to sign up, and everybody wanted to do their part, you know? And you had a cohesiveness in all, with the people, you know? Because it was very different, then.

BASNIGHT: He called me that morning, and well, we didn't have a telephone. Not everybody had telephones then. I called my mother and told her that he was shipping out that night. She came over and took us down to the training station where he met the rest of his group and shipped out, from the train. It's still hard.

HATFIELD: Terrible. Frightening. And a great loneliness. I had told him, though, that I agreed if that is what he wanted to do, and I would take care of the home front. Well, he went into the program at Annapolis, and he was one of those 90-day wonders, and came out an officer.

BROOKS: I lived in the same apartment building with a recruiter for the Women's Army Corps, and I decided if everyone else was going, I was going too. So I volunteered.

DUKE: We all felt sorry for the boys and we knew they were suffering in their hearts, and had to leave their families. Some of them came from California, came from all over the United States through here, going to Fort Lee and Fort Eustice, and the

Navy base. And you met some fine, nice young men. You really did. Not to fall in love with them, but to be friends with them. We had busses to go to Fort Lee to dance with the soldiers to try to make them happy. We had two chaperones everywhere we went.

BRINSER: I danced until midnight every night with those kids. My husband sat on the sidelines. He didn't like to dance, so he smoked cigars and I'm out there kicking it up with the men, having myself a ball with the boys. And they just, I just loved them like my children. And I wasn't but a few years older than they were! They were 17, I was 25. But I felt like that was what I could do for them. We didn't know what was coming next. Everything was split, everything. Everything was split, and everybody went in a different direction. The war stirred up everything. It stirred up marriages, it stirred up family. It's just the breaking up of homes and separating children from their mothers and daddies. War is no fun. A lot of tears, a lot of goodbyes. Well, you live from day-to-day and you don't know what's gonna happen day-to-day.

### **MAKING DO WITH LESS**

FIELDS: It changed a lot, because we had a lot of things we had to do without. Like, everything was rationed during World War II. You had ration books for sugar, or tires and gasoline, of course we didn't have a car. You know, people didn't mind the sacrifices we had to go through. It was a small price to pay for what everybody else was going through. You know, everything went for the war effort, and nobody complained, because, you know, everybody was patriotic in those days.

DAVIS: I remember that the speed limit at that time was only 35 miles an hour. That was as fast as you could go. And of course cigarettes were rationed, and I had relatives who smoked and they would make their own cigarettes.

PERKINS: There was an old fella that run the gas station, and he said, "Whenever you want gas, you come in here. You don't need to have stamps, you're gonna have all the gas you want." It was a different way to live.

FIELDS: Instead of getting new shoes, you got the little package with the soles in it and a little tube of glue, and you would put the glue on it, put the new soles on it and let it set up, and then you'd take cardboard and cut out for the inner sole. And you got a new pair of shoes.

HATFIELD: Everyone had a victory garden. They grew the vegetables and things that were necessary. And meat was rationed, so we didn't get a lot of meat. You had to buy... that was a stamp. And the victory gardens happened to do very well. In the fall, then, you took what was there, what was left, and canned them so you'd have food for the wintertime.

FIELDS: In fact, I think just about everybody that could find a place to dig a hole had a victory garden. That was another thing. I mean, it just seemed like everybody just wanted to do it, you know, to help the war effort in any way they could.

BAILEY: We canned everything we could get in the summertime to have food for the winter. And one thing you had to do was go to the rationing board if you wanted sugar, like, you were going to can your peaches. And one of the farmers asked me, would I help can these? He said, "I'll pay you two dollars a day." And I said, "That'll be fine." Remember, Orange Crush and a big Moon Pie was five cents each back then.

### **ROSIE THE RIVETER**

DAVIS: Of course, women went to work in the factories to take the place of the men who had left to go over to fight.

TURNER: It was kind of a new era for women, because I would, you know, hear my mother say that they were surprised that women could do as much on the bombers there, in Seattle and at Boeing, as they did.

PERKINS: It wasn't a fun time for me at all. And I went to work at a welding factory, and that passed the time.

DUKE: The women worked where the men were gone. And I think that's when women got into a lot of things. Rosie the Riveter, you know, you hear about all that. But I worked for the railroad, in the office, and they gave us training and schooling. We knew all about the troop trains, and where they were going, who was going on them. Couldn't tell anybody anything. You just couldn't tell anybody anything.

CRAWFORD: Of course, all the mail was censored, so you couldn't write anything about what you were doing.

PERKINS: You never knew where they were or what was going on or anything. Because they couldn't tell you, and if they tried to, it was blacked out, so mostly, you know, "I miss you" and blah blah blah. That's about it.

BASNIGHT: We wrote every day, and of all the letters I got, I never had anything deleted.

FIELDS: Some of them were cut out, like with a razor blade or pair of scissors, and they were censored. Back then, everything was... well, there was a lot of posters, everything was so patriotic, you know? And I can remember one of the posters that stood out in my mind was "A slip of the lip can sink a ship." Back then, everything was, you know, trying to be as secretive as it could be.

### **LIVING WITH WAR**

FIELDS: I can remember seeing the movies of the damage at Pearl Harbor. Back then, of course, we didn't have television. You listened, everybody sat around and stared at the radio and listened to the news on the radio. However, at the movie theaters, they always had the news reels of the war.

BURCH: And the movies, you know, were always preceded by the reels. And seeing it made it so much more alive to you than hearing it. For the first number of years of the war, the news was all bad.

BAILEY: But not many children in the country could afford to go to the movies. They could, you know, get 15 cents to go to the movies, you want another dime for a drink and a Moon Pie.

BROOKS: Those things, you heard them. But you couldn't let them affect you. You had work to do.

HATFIELD: So we tried to do any old... save cans, save papers, all that sort of thing. Tinfoil, and yes, all the drives, and we did that very often.

BURCH: We saved scrap metal, and it was sent to make bullets and who knows what else. And some of the scrap came from cigarette packages, chewing gum was wrapped in foil, but we saved tin cans. But we made rolls of foil, of aluminum foil.

FIELDS: Westhampton Theater had a promotion that if you brought so many pounds of scrap metal, you got in free to the movies, and my sisters donated my electric train, and I have a feeling that it never got to the war effort. I think somebody probably took that on the side.

BURCH: The Federal government needed some money because we were at war. And where's the money coming from? And they raised billions of dollars on savings bonds. And we had books of stamps. I think we could buy 25 cent stamps until we filled it up, and then we would go and get a bond.

BAILEY: We had a competition between each class as to who was gonna buy the most stamps. It was exciting to fill the book and then go get an 1875 savings bond. That was exciting.

BURCH: Then we had tanks come in on our main street. The tanks had to go through our small town. We had 500 residents. We had 30 or 40,000 soldiers just within a mile's reach. So we had the sounds of the big guns firing, so we never got away from the sounds and the sights of war. In a little town where nothing happened, and all of a sudden it was a lot, constantly happening.

BAILEY: My parents didn't talk about hard times, but they just – in front of me, anyway – they just... we just went on with things and did the best we could. Momma made all my clothes, and you, girls knew how to cook, sew. You learned all of that in high school.

MAHLER: Of course, everybody had stars in the window, you know. We had five stars in the window for five in the war. My mother did not want to answer the doorbell because she thought it would be Western Union. She said, "Oh, it might be Western Union. I can't go to the door, please go for me." It was bad. Very bad. And thank God all five came home. And you know, when five come home, it's amazing, I think, out of that many. So, we got through it okay.

FIELDS: My mother had the flag in the front window, and it had three – well actually it had four stars on it. So she had three sons and a son-in-law. It was December the 28<sup>th</sup>, 1944. It was three days after Christmas. We still had our Christmas tree up and all. And I can remember the Western Union man coming to the door, knocking on the door and handing my mother the telegram. And she just started crying. Something you don't forget.

## VICTORY

BURCH: I remember looking forward to the end of war. You know, we knew it was coming and VE Day was very, you know, very dramatic for us.

PERKINS: I remember the Saturday Evening Post coming out with ships landing there in New York, showing people on the streets, and here's this sailor in the foreground kissing a gal that was a nurse. I still have that picture.

FIELDS: We were out in the yard for recess when word came that, you know, the war had ended in Europe. And I can remember everybody just celebrating.

TURNER: We were, I guess, about 13, 15, something like that. You know, young girls, and my brother was about seven. And my father said, "This whole town's going crazy, throwing people into the fountains and everything." He said, "You get these girls out of here and head home."

PERKINS: It was a marvelous time, and the music, the songs, it was a romantic time. You wouldn't think so, you know, being in war, but it was. You hear the music that was written then, and the words. It just, it was great, that part of it.

## COMING HOME

FIELDS: Yeah, I can remember him coming home and everybody hugging and dancing around, just, you know, having a good time. Glad they were home safe and sound.

BROOKS: I met my younger brother at the bus station and didn't recognize him. Of course, he came up to me and said, "Hi, Sis." And then I knew who he was.

BROKAW: I know that many people that went through that had such an awful time of it, and such a horror of it, that they didn't want to relive it even in the smallest amount by talking about it.

TURNER: He would have really bad nightmares, and he would, you know, wake up screaming and be in his sweat, and we, you know, we'd get upset. And my mother would say, "Dad's just having a nightmare from what he's gone through. He'll be okay. Go on back to bed."

HATFIELD: Well, I guess I try to look at the better times. I always had faith, somehow, in America holding the line. I never lost that.

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