

# Section 1

## Louisiana in World War II

As you read, look for:

- the “war games” held in Louisiana,
- Louisianians’ participation in World War II, and
- vocabulary terms **sabotage**, **blackout**, **ration**, **victory garden**, and **United Service Organizations**.

In the 1930s, Germany under Adolf Hitler tried to take over Europe. At the same time, the Japanese were expanding in Asia. When Hitler attacked Poland in 1939, World War II broke out in Europe.

Although President Roosevelt had proclaimed America’s neutrality in 1939, he watched with alarm as Japan, Italy, the Soviet Union, and Germany carved up the world. The president looked for ways to help Great Britain, France, and



This seven-story flag hung on Canal Street during World War II.

### Figure 29 Timeline: 1940–1960



**1940**  
Sam Jones elected governor

**1947**  
First offshore oil well drilled in Gulf of Mexico

**1941**  
Mock wars held in Louisiana

**1944**  
Jimmie Davis elected governor

**1948**  
Earl Long elected governor

**1952**  
Robert Kennon elected governor

**1956**  
Earl Long elected governor

**1940**

**1945**

**1950**

**1955**

**1960**

**1941**  
Pearl Harbor attacked; U.S. entered WW II

**1947**  
Taft-Hartley Act passed

**1950**  
Korean War began

**1952**  
Dwight D. Eisenhower elected president

**1939**  
World War II began in Europe

**1945**  
President Roosevelt died; Harry S Truman became president; World War II ended



**Above:** This photograph shows Adolf Hitler in a triumphant motorcade following the fall of Paris.

their allies. The Allies' need for materials and supplies brought the United States out of the Great Depression.

As the situation in Europe grew more threatening, the United States passed the first peacetime draft law on September 16, 1940. The military began to prepare American troops for possible fighting in Europe.

### The Maneuvers

Two major military training exercises or “mock wars” were held in Louisiana. The state offered the right climate and rural areas with few people to disturb. The people of Louisiana followed these maneuvers with great interest.

The first maneuvers started in August 1941. The U.S. Third Army was divided into two groups—the Red Army and the Blue Army. Headquarters for the Red Army was at Mansfield in DeSoto Parish; Vernon Parish served as the headquarters for the Blue Army. The two armies carried out their mock battles over 30,000 square miles of Louisiana land.

After the Blue Army won, another mock war took place. This time, the Blue Army group faced the Second Army. Headquarters for the two armies were Winnfield in Winn Parish and Alexandria in Rapides Parish.



These training exercises brought thousands of soldiers to Louisiana. The men and their equipment filled the rural areas of northern and central Louisiana. Part of the army came with cavalry horses; others had the new two-man Jeeps. After the Louisiana war games, the army determined that horses would no longer

be used in battle. The new equipment was more efficient.

## Lagniappe

The U.S. Coast Guard recruited about one hundred local men to patrol the coast of Louisiana.

The experience the men gained during these exercises was credited with saving thousands of American lives during the real fighting. General Dwight Eisenhower and General George Patton, two of America's most famous World War II commanders, directed the operation.

By the end of the war, Louisiana was the site of five military training camps and ten flying fields. Barksdale Field, which had been established in Bossier Parish in the 1930s, became an important training center. It continued its military importance after World War II and now serves as the headquarters for the United States 8th Air Force. Other flying fields became local airports after the war ended.

**Below:** This tank alongside a column of cavalry during the Louisiana war games was a sign that horses in battle would soon be obsolete.





**Above:** On December 7, 1941, Japanese warplanes attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor on the Hawaiian island of Oahu.

## Reaction to Pearl Harbor

In 1941, Japan decided to invade the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and seize that country's oil, which Japan badly needed. The only force that could stop the Japanese was the U.S. navy stationed at Hawaii. The Japanese made a surprise attack on the fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, causing great damage.

The people of Louisiana heard the news of Pearl Harbor on their radios on that Sunday afternoon. Some of them were in their cars; others were in restaurants eating lunch. A Bienville Parish woman recalled, "I was standing at my kitchen sink washing dishes when the news came over the radio." People who had just left church returned to pray for their country.

On December 8, the United States declared war on Japan and entered World War II. A few days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. Once the United States entered the war, the country prepared for possible attack. In the week following the bombing, special security measures were taken at Barksdale Field. In the Caddo-Bossier area, bridges, city water supplies, and the nearby defense plants were put under extra guard to protect them from **sabotage** (deliberate damage or destruction).

Efforts to protect the country included the civil defense organization. Older men who could not go to war watched for enemy planes and enforced the rules



for **blackouts**. During blackouts, cities had to be completely dark at night so that enemy planes could not locate them if there were an air raid. New Orleans, Shreveport, and other Louisiana cities held practice air raid blackouts regularly. Loud air raid sirens announced the blackouts.

During the war, Louisiana citizens served their country well. Louisiana's first war hero was General Claire Lee Chennault. Chennault was from Waterproof in Tensas Parish. This famous pilot led his "Flying Tigers" in air battles against the Japanese. Their P-40 and P-51 airplanes were painted with the frightening eyes and teeth of a tiger shark.

By the war's end, almost 275,000 people from Louisiana had served in the military. The list of casualties has over 4,000 names. National cemeteries in Louisiana are the burial sites for some of those who died during the war.

## The Home Front

The location of New Orleans and the available labor supply made this port city a vital shipbuilding center during World War II. One New Orleans shipbuilder, Andrew Jackson Higgins, developed the largest shipbuilding plant in the world.

Several defense plants were built in Louisiana. A large shell-loading plant was built in Webster Parish. One interesting wartime industry was the egg dehydration plant in Ruston. Dried eggs were prepared as food for the soldiers.

Many people worked in the factories that made war supplies. World War II brought even more women into the work force than World War I had done. Women filled jobs formerly held by men who had gone off to war. Businesses throughout Louisiana trained women for these jobs. For example, Andress Motor Company in Shreveport trained women as automobile mechanics.

Because of the country's war needs, civilian goods had to be **rationed**, that is the consumption of certain items was limited. Rationing boards were established in each state. One of the first items rationed was tires. As a result, bicycles were soon in short supply. Sugar, coffee, canned fruits and vegetables, butter, and meat were later added to the ration list. As they did during World War I, the citizens of Louisiana observed "meatless" days.

Shoe rationing began with three pairs per person per year; before the war ended it dropped to only one pair. Families used shoe rations for their children; as a result, many adults could not replace worn shoes

## The Art of Politics



*"Nonsense. S-2 reported that machine gun silenced hours ago. Stop wiggling your fingers at me."*

GI cartoonist Bill Mauldin portrayed the lives of American soldiers during World War II through the antics of his famous characters Willie and Joe. Mauldin became a celebrated political cartoonist.



**Above:** Because of the shortage of consumer goods, rationing often resulted in long lines.

## Lagniappe

Over 20,000 prisoners of war were held in camps throughout Louisiana.

even if they had the money. One young Bossier Parish bride was given shoe coupons by her friends so she could have new shoes for her wedding.

Most families also repeated the World War I practice of planting a garden for their use. Across the country, these **victory gardens** supplied over 40 percent of America's fresh vegetables during the war. The military also planted victory gardens. The largest covered 250 acres at Barksdale Field and supplied the mess halls there.

Children in Louisiana also joined in the war effort. Boy Scouts delivered blackout booklets. High school boys made balsa wood airplane models, which were used in civil defense training. Schools collected scrap metal, rubber, and scrap paper. The scrap drives became competitive, and school yards were piled high with scrap metal. In New Orleans, Jesuit High beat Warren Easton High by collecting more scrap metal.

People showed their support for the troops in many ways. A star on a lapel pin or on a banner in a window indicated a son or husband away in the service. Patriotic signs were everywhere. A huge seven-story flag hung on Canal Street in New Orleans.

Communities in Louisiana provided a place for entertainment for the soldiers stationed nearby. These **United Service Organizations**, or USOs as they were called, were intended to provide a "home away from home" for those serving in the military.

Veterans of World War II have fond memories of dancing with the young ladies of the area. The music known as the “Big Band sound” was the favorite dance music. The first USO building in the nation was built in DeRidder in Beauregard Parish. This USO was built to serve the soldiers from nearby Camp Polk (now Fort Polk).

A number of POW (prisoner of war) camps were located in wartime Louisiana. Lincoln, Rapides, and West Baton Rouge parishes were just three of the sites for the POW camps. The German prisoners held in West Baton Rouge Parish were used as laborers during the sugar cane harvest.

## The End of the War

In 1945, Louisiana celebrated the news of the war’s end. Strangers hugged on Canal Street in New Orleans and on Third Street in Baton Rouge. Workers dropped confetti from the windows of businesses in the downtown districts. The churches filled with people saying prayers of thanks. The *Shreveport Times* reported, “The people of Shreveport celebrated V-E Day with tears and laughter, in prayer and gratitude, in silence and sorrow.”

The returning soldiers needed jobs and housing. In 1944, Congress helped war veterans by passing the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, better known as the “G.I. Bill.” This act of Congress provided unemployment and education allowances and home, farm, and business loans for millions of World War II veterans. Soldiers received unemployment pay of \$20 a week for 52 weeks. Many of Louisiana’s former soldiers headed to school.

The end of the war brought back celebrations that had stopped during the war. Mardi Gras was not celebrated in New Orleans from 1941 to 1945. Now everyone wanted to make up for the lost years of fun.



**Above:** This USO Club in New Orleans, like many others, provided a place for military personnel to rest and relax.

## Check for Understanding ✓

1. What are two ways America prepared for the war?
2. What special military training exercises were held in Louisiana?
3. Why was the Higgins shipyard important?
4. Why did women work at jobs they had never done before?
5. Why was rationing necessary?