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# Tampa Bay History

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1995

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OF THE AMERICAN RED CROSS  
HEADQUARTERS, OFFICE OF THE EASTERN SEAS





SPRING/SUMMER 1995

VOLUME 17, NUMBER 1

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## FROM THE EDITORS

"War is the health of the state," observed critic Randolph Bourne, and that certainly has proven true for Florida. Historically, war has generated spurts of growth along the Gulf Coast. The city of Tampa owes its modern origins to the placement of Fort Brooke on the eastern bank of the Hillsborough River in 1823. The Seminole Wars begot Fort Harrison (Clearwater) and Fort Meade. The Spanish American War introduced thousands of soldiers to Tampa in 1898.

World War II profoundly changed the social and economic rhythms of Tampa Bay life. The most tangible evidence of change was the explosive growth of the military in Florida. On the eve of Pearl Harbor, Florida hosted only a handful of military establishments; by the end of the war the Sunshine State laid claim to 172 military installations. The Tampa Bay region became home to a variety of bases, ranging from mega-complexes, such as MacDill Army Air Field, to small installations, such as Camp Weatherford in Bradenton, Henderson Air Field in Tampa (near today's University of South Florida campus), and the Dunedin Marine Base.

This summer marks the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II. The editors of *Tampa Bay History* commemorate the conclusion of that great conflict with an issue devoted entirely to the war and its impact on the region. In an article entitled "Tampa's MacDill Field during World War II," Abraham Scherr, a former MacDill Air Force Base historian, has written a profile of the war years at MacDill. Several articles speak to the role of women in war. In "For the Duration," Susan O'Brien Culp argues that the war changed forever women's roles. Culp examines the myriad challenges and opportunities brought by the war and met by women in Tampa and St. Petersburg. In "A Community within a Community," Ellen J. Babb writes about African-American women in wartime St. Petersburg. Acknowledging that traditional sources neglect the contributions of black women, Babb illustrates how historians can imaginatively use oral history and non-traditional sources to fill in this neglected chapter of our history.

World War II served as a bridge between a Jim Crow South and the modern civil rights movement of the 1960s. In "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II," Catherine Fére examines the dynamics of crime and punishment as it related to African Americans in wartime Tampa, where legal battles against forced confessions and the white primary won the support of the NAACP and crusading lawyers such as Thurgood Marshall.

Finally, Tampa Bay's wartime experiences are captured in a photographic essay, "The Homefront on Florida's West Coast," which features images of the war, and "V-J Day Celebrations" looks at the end of the war.

Additional copies of this issue are available for purchase for \$9 each, and the editors hope readers will find this issue of sufficient interest to order copies sent to friends and relatives. You can send a check (made payable to *Tampa Bay History*) to the Department of History, USF, Tampa, Florida, 33620-8100. Or you can call 813-974-2807 for more information.

## **TAMPA'S MacDILL FIELD DURING WORLD WAR II**

by Abraham Scherr

The pre-history of MacDill Field, as it was known throughout World War II, began with the successful efforts of U.S. Congressman J. Mark Wilcox of West Palm Beach to pass his National Defense Act through Congress. In 1935 Wilcox succeeded, although without funding, to push through the passage of the bill that authorized six new airfields for the country, including one in the southeastern United States.

Stage two in the acquisition of an airfield in Tampa was the visit from a representative of the Army Air Corps in 1938, to speak with city officials about the possibility of holding air maneuvers in the area. Major "Pinky" Craig, who retired as an Air Force Lieutenant General, discussed the desired air exercises with then Tampa Mayor R.E.L. Chancey, who informed Major Craig that the city was in no financial shape to bear the expenses of these maneuvers.

Prior to the talks with the Mayor, two Army Air Corps officers – Melvin Asp and Charles Skaw – had suggested that Major Craig contact Jerry Waterman if he encountered any difficulties in holding the maneuvers around Tampa. Waterman was chairman of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce Aviation Committee and an aviation enthusiast who could prove helpful in the air exercise discussions. As it turned out, Jerry Waterman's intercession overcame all the obstacles.

Most essential were living quarters for the 50 officers and 200 to 300 enlisted personnel and facilities for the aircraft. To accommodate the officers, Hudson Manor Hotel on Davis Island, which had just closed after its winter season, agreed to rent fifty rooms in the hotel for thirty days or longer at the rate of one dollar a day per person. Next, Jerry Waterman convinced Harry Warner of the Davis Island Coliseum to rent the facility for the use of the enlisted contingent, at a rate of five hundred dollars for thirty days. Satisfied with the arrangements for both men and machines, Major Craig returned to Washington, D.C., to make his report.

Meanwhile, Jerry Waterman continued with his efforts to insure that the air maneuvers were fully successful. He visited George Howell at the Exchange National Bank, and together they made phone calls to various civic-minded organizations to raise funds for the upcoming event. The reasoning used was that a successful air exercise would count heavily in getting Tampa the new southeastern airbase, since it showed strong civic support for the project. Once fundraising had been achieved, Mayor Chancey was persuaded to provide the sum of five hundred dollars on behalf of the city.

Peter O. Knight and Drew fields served as the designated bases for the thirty-three aircraft, largely P-35 and P-36 fighters, that participated in the air exercises from March 14 to 29, 1938. There were other aircraft, bombers and fighters, dispersed at airfields in Lakeland, Sarasota and Orlando. Jacksonville was the main site for the "friendly" forces, while Tampa was an "enemy" location. The grand finale was a full-scale attack on the defending forces at Jacksonville by the aggressors.



**MacDill Field during world War II, showing (clockwise from the top): A flight of B-26 Martin Marauders over the Gulf of Mexico; the hangar line of B-26s on the apron; a maintenance crew at work on a B-26; the right wing and motor of a B-26; base headquarters.**

Photograph courtesy of the Center for Air Force History.

Even with a fully successful exercise, there were further complications to Tampa becoming the southeast airbase site. Tampa's Chamber of Commerce had promised to support Arcadia – where a military airfield had been located during World War I – as the new site. Joe Sweeney, president of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce, had made the promise to Arcadia when he was chairman of the Good Neighbor Committee. That was where things stood when a surprise visitor popped into town.

A Colonel Howard, who resided in Clearwater, contacted Jerry Waterman about the impending visit to Tampa of Major General Frank Andrews, Chief-of-Staff for the Army Air Corps. The general was in transit from Panama to Washington, D.C., and planned to spend the weekend in Tampa. The Watermans invited Major General Andrews, Colonel Howard, and both their wives to the Columbia Restaurant for a Saturday night dinner. During the course of the evening, Jerry Waterman asked the general what chance Arcadia had of being considered for the airbase, to which the reply was “about as much chance as a snowball in Hades.” The Air Corps wanted schools, clubs, stores, and modern facilities for the airbase personnel, not a country town lacking all the conveniences.

General Andrews' statements were conveyed by Waterman to Joe Sweeney, who remained firm in the support promised to Arcadia by the Tampa Chamber of Commerce. Waterman then resigned as chairman of the Chamber's Aviation Committee in order to organize a group to get the Southeast Airfield for Tampa. After submitting his letter of resignation the next day, he went to see Mayor Chancey. The mayor was convinced that it was in his best political interest, since his administration had slipped into disfavor, to jump on the airfield bandwagon. A Mayor's Committee composed of Tampa's leading citizens was organized, with instructions to pull out all stops to get the Southeast Airbase for Tampa.

In January 1939, a federal board was appointed by the War Department to screen locations for six new airfields, including one in the southeast. Florida was selected as the site for a southeastern base. During the 1938 Army Air Corps maneuvers, the pilots had been impressed with the flat, sandy, snake-ridden stretch of land on Tampa's interbay peninsula called Catfish Point. It was far enough from the city that no one complained of the aircraft noise. Also the base would be strategically located near the Caribbean and would have nearly year-round good flying weather.

Once the Tampa site had been chosen in April 1938, it was named the Southeast Air Base, and the Army took possession of Catfish Point on May 24. To show support for building the base in Tampa, city and Hillsborough County officials promised to acquire 3,500 acres of land as a donation to the federal project, while 2,900 acres were to be purchased by the War Department. Congress appropriated \$3,173,000 in June to build the field, leading to the official announcement in the press on July 15, 1938. Local property owners in the vicinity of Catfish Point immediately inflated their land values, prompting the government to condemn the 298 parcels needed after an appraisal. This changed the scenario originally established between federal, city and county officials. Instead of land, city and county officials pledged \$97,000 for the airbase.

Initial clearance of the brush and swampland began on November 28, 1939, when the Works Progress Administration (WPA) assigned 100 men to clear the nearly 5,800 acres. Almost





**While men and planes paraded at MacDill Air Field in November 1940, construction continued along the runway.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

simultaneously with the onset of work on the airfield, Secretary of War Harry H. Woodring announced a change of name for the future base on November 30, 1939. It was to be named after Colonel Leslie MacDill, who had died test-flying a BC-1 aircraft, along with the mechanic, in a crash on the outskirts of Washington, D.C., on November 9, 1938. MacDill had been a very popular figure with the Air Staff. During World War I he had been the commander of an Aerial Gunnery Training School at St. Jean de Monte, France. In June 1922 he earned a Doctor of Science degree in aeronautical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. MacDill was a rising star in the Army Air Corps when he suffered the fatal accident at age forty-eight.

Clearing of the land at MacDill Field was the last major WPA project carried out in Tampa, at a cost of \$1,064,755 (the War Department's share was \$455,114). Soon 1,600 WPA workers were on the job, which included extending Lisbon Avenue as the first road to the base, soon renamed after Leslie MacDill. Bayshore Boulevard was a brick street that terminated at the base boundary, where motorists sometimes got stuck in the sand at the end. The best highway to the field was an extension of Vera Avenue, dedicated as Dale Mabry Boulevard after its construction, in memory of Captain Dale Mabry, a naval officer who died when the dirigible *Roma* crashed on its maiden voyage at Hampton, Virginia on January 28, 1922. He was a native of Florida, while MacDill's boyhood state was Indiana.



**A hangar under construction at MacDill Field in June 1941.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

Private contractors undertook the construction of runways, hangars, barracks, and administration buildings in December 1939. Runway construction started on August 14, 1940. At that time Benjamin House (located near the present-day officers' club) was used as an officers' club and bachelor officers' quarters, because it was one of the few buildings on Catfish Point before it became federal property. Enlisted men also used the former Immigration Service's quarantine building for temporary housing. Lastly there was a two-story barracks containing the office of the adjutant and a mess hall on the first floor, with sleeping quarters for the guards on the second floor.

The first officer to arrive at the site was Major Lawrence L. Simpson, a construction quartermaster, who initiated the base survey on September 6, 1939, the day after he arrived. On September 8, Lieutenant Colonel Lynwood B. Jacobs, the first commanding officer arrived. During March and April 1940, enlisted soldiers came to the area from Mitchel Field, New York, and Barksdale Field, Louisiana. Lieutenant Colonel Harry H. Young, who had been a member of the selection panel that had chosen the site for the base, replaced Lt. Col. Jacobs as base commander on March 18, 1940. Lieutenant Colonel Vincent J. Meloy, commander of the 29th Bombardment Group, led the first flight of aircraft to Tampa on January 17, 1941. This consisted of fourteen aircraft flown from Langley Field to Tampa: three B-17s, two A-17s, and nine B-18s. Aircraft and men were housed at Drew Field until the runways at MacDill were built. Despite these obstacles, flying operations commenced on February 7, 1941.





**A flight crew reviewing their planned activities before taking off on a practice mission.**

Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Winter 1944), a quarterly magazine published at MacDill.

Colonel Clarence L. Tinker assumed command of MacDill Field on May 17, 1940, and he was commissioned as a brigadier general on October 1, 1940. At the time of the official dedication on April 15, 1941 there were three runways (5,000 feet long and 250 feet wide) and a few two-story buildings. Brigadier General Tinker landed the first aircraft on the newly completed runways to commemorate the opening. Hundreds of troops from the Army Air Corps 29th Bombardment Group and 27th Base Squadron lived mostly in a mosquito-infested tent city at the field. An official flag-raising ceremony was sponsored by the Tampa Elk's Lodge on June 16, 1941.

Transitional training, the base's main mission, started up under the direction of the Southeast Air District, later becoming the Third Air Force. Replacement training units (RTUs) flew B-17 Flying Fortresses, instructed by flying cadre from the 29th and 44th Bombardment Groups Heavy.

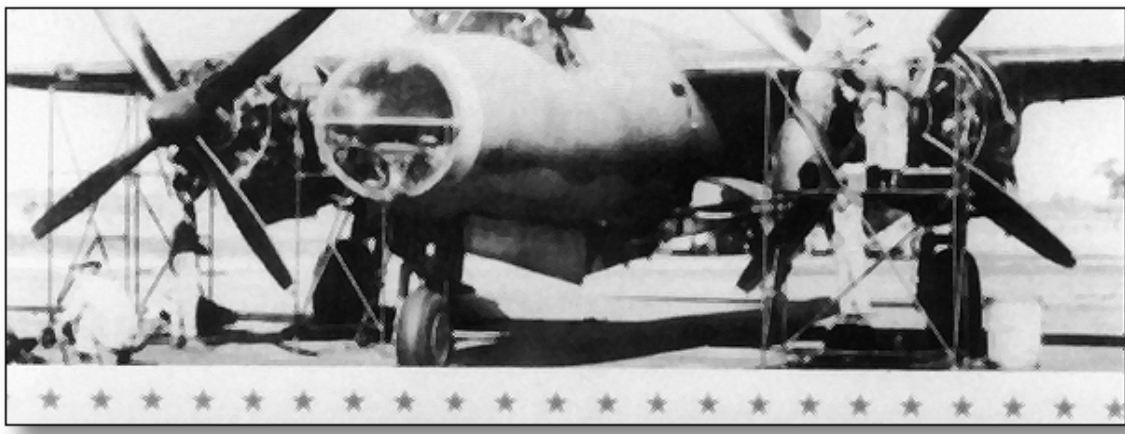
There were three airfields in Tampa during World War II. Drew Field, where present day Tampa International Airport is located, Henderson Field where Busch Gardens is situated (originally envisioned as the place for Tampa's main airport), and MacDill Field. Henderson and Drew fields were designated as auxiliary operational (support) bases for MacDill, as well as a number of other fields around the state.

Mullet Key (part of present-day Fort DeSoto) provided the main practice bombing range, commencing on September 6, 1941. (The site had been abandoned at the end of World War I.)



**An ordnance man loading a bomb on a B-17 for a practice mission.**

Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Winter 1944).



**A B-26 undergoing routine 100-hour maintenance on its motors.**

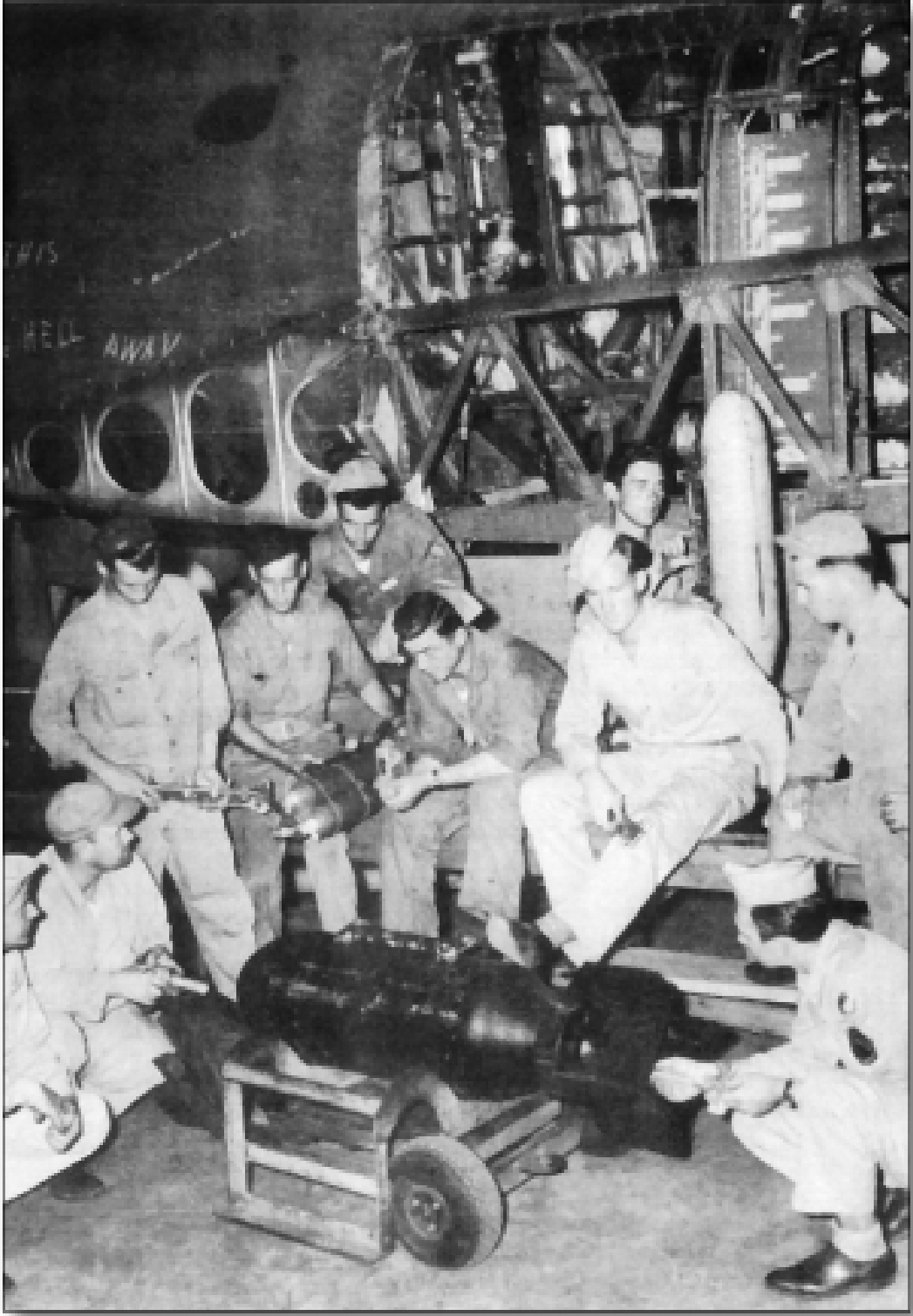
Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Winter 1944).

Pilots, bombardiers, radio operators, machine gunners, parachute riggers, and every type of ground-support personnel had to pass the Mullet Key simulated assignment to get a passing grade and be deployed, later to theaters of combat. In addition to Mullet Key's Bombing and Gunnery Range, there were also smaller ranges near Osprey, Terra Ceia, and Venice.

"Project X" followed the onset of war activities in the Pacific theater of operations. MacDill became the staging area for the transport by Army Air Corps flight crews, from December 24, 1941 to February 22, 1942, of fifteen Lb-30s and sixty-three B-17s to the Pacific. Originally, these aircraft were to be used in the Philippines to repel the Japanese. However, due to the Japanese conquest, the planes were ferried, via the South Atlantic and Africa, to Australia for use against the Japanese military who were then island hopping in that direction.

With the conversion of training from the B-17 to the B-26 Marauder on June 1, 1942, the 29th Bomb Group departed while the 44th Bomb Group had left earlier in January. Replacing these two groups to provide B-26 training was the 21st Bombardment Group-Medium from Key Field, Mississippi. It was while the B-26 was stationed at MacDill that the phrase "one a day in Tampa Bay" was coined. According to one source, thirty-one B-26s were ditched in the month of September 1942 while undergoing transitional training. General Jimmy Doolittle gave a demonstration at the base of the flying capabilities of the Marauder, trying to counter the adverse publicity.

The aircraft received mixed evaluations during its sixteen-month stay at MacDill Field. For training new crews, it proved hard to fly and land by many pilots due to its short wings, 140-mile-per-hour landing speed and fighter-plane maneuverability. In the hands of experienced pilots and crews, the B-26 received higher ratings. One of the major problems that was resolved concerned the electrical system. At first it was a 12-volt system that was insufficient for the aircraft's needs, causing the propellers to fail and even fall off in flight. An adjustment to a 26-volt system rectified the mechanical failures, but not the flying ones for inexperienced pilots.



**Trainees studying “bomb theory,” which involved learning types of bombs and their effects, as well as bombing equipment.**

Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Summer 1944).

In 1944 an inquiry was conducted by Senator Harry S. Truman at MacDill, on behalf of the War Investigating Committee, as to whether the continued use of the B-26 was justifiable.

When the 21st Bomb Group disbanded in October 1943, the 488th Bombardment Group-Heavy resumed B-17 replacement crew training on November 1. This B-17 program continued until March 1945, at which time B-29s replaced the Flying Fortresses until the end of the war. Preparations for the arrival of the larger Super Fortresses had begun in 1943, when one runway was enlarged to a length of 10,000 feet and a width of 500 feet while the other two were converted to taxiways, parking aprons, and ramp space by 1945. Nearly 7,000 townspeople and 9,000 base personnel turned out to witness the arrival of the new aircraft.

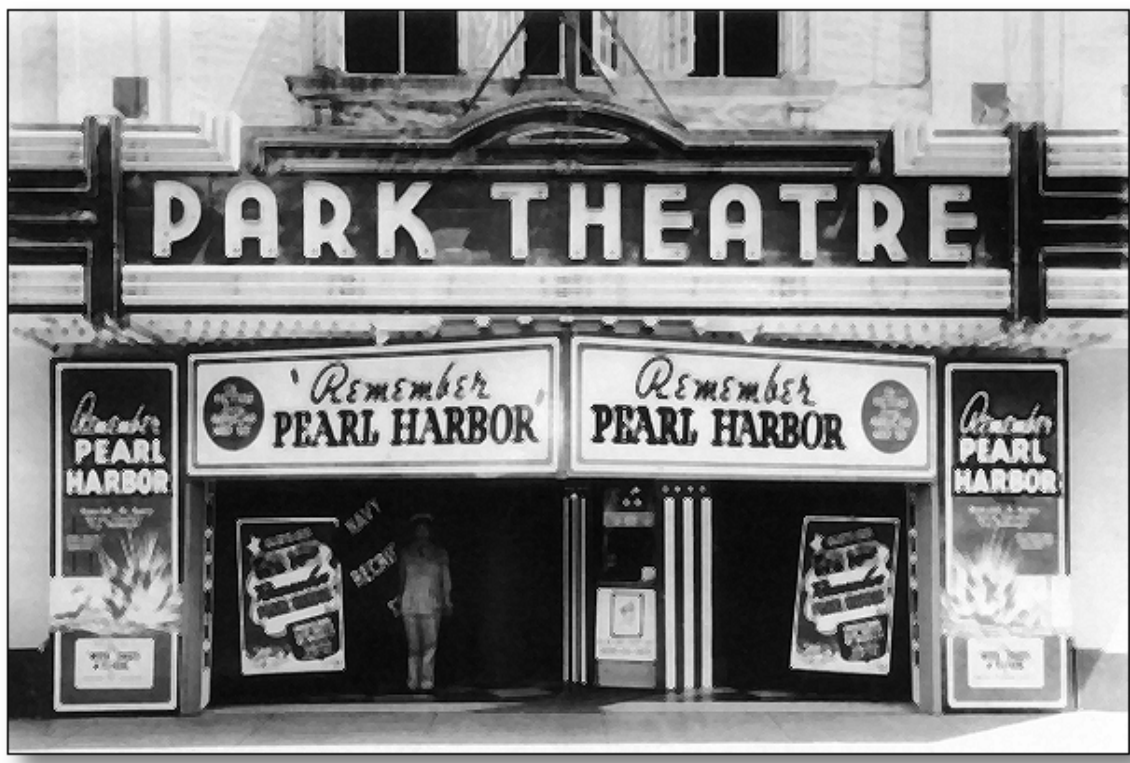
During the war as many as 15,000 troops were stationed at MacDill Field at one time. A contingent of Women's Army Corps (WAGS) troops arrived in 1943. The base provided various forms of entertainment including band concerts, live performers, and a movie theatre. Two films were made in Tampa with wartime themes: *A Guy Called Joe* starred Spencer Tracy and had scenes shot at MacDill; *The Air Force Story* starred John Garfield and had scenes shot at Drew Field. In the latter film B-26s were painted as Japanese bombers, and although the entire Bay area defenses were alerted to this fact, the Coast Guard still shot at the planes as they flew over the Gulf.

Estimates of the number of crew members trained at the bases in the Tampa area varied from 50,000 to over 100,000. Several bases in Florida, including MacDill, also served as detention centers for German prisoners-of-war (POWs) beginning in the latter part of 1944 and early 1945. At the apex, 488 German POWs were interned at MacDill Field.

Post-World War II MacDill Field became an operational base for the Strategic Air Command (SAC). Avon Park, located 100 miles southeast of MacDill, became the main bombing range for the entire southeastern United States. Mullet Key returned to its pre-war state of dormancy, eventually to become part of De Soto State Park near St. Petersburg. MacDill served as headquarters for the IIIrd Bomber and Fighter Commands after the latter moved from Drew Field in December 1945; both commands were inactivated on April 8, 1946. Tactical Air Command established its first headquarters in Tampa at Fort Homer Hesterly Armory in 1946, but soon moved to its permanent base to Langley Field, Virginia. After the Air Force became a separate military service in September 1947, the official name changed from MacDill Field to MacDill Air Force Base on July 12, 1948. Thus ended phase one of MacDill's history, although many an underwater plane hulk and practice bomb still remain as haunts from its wartime past.





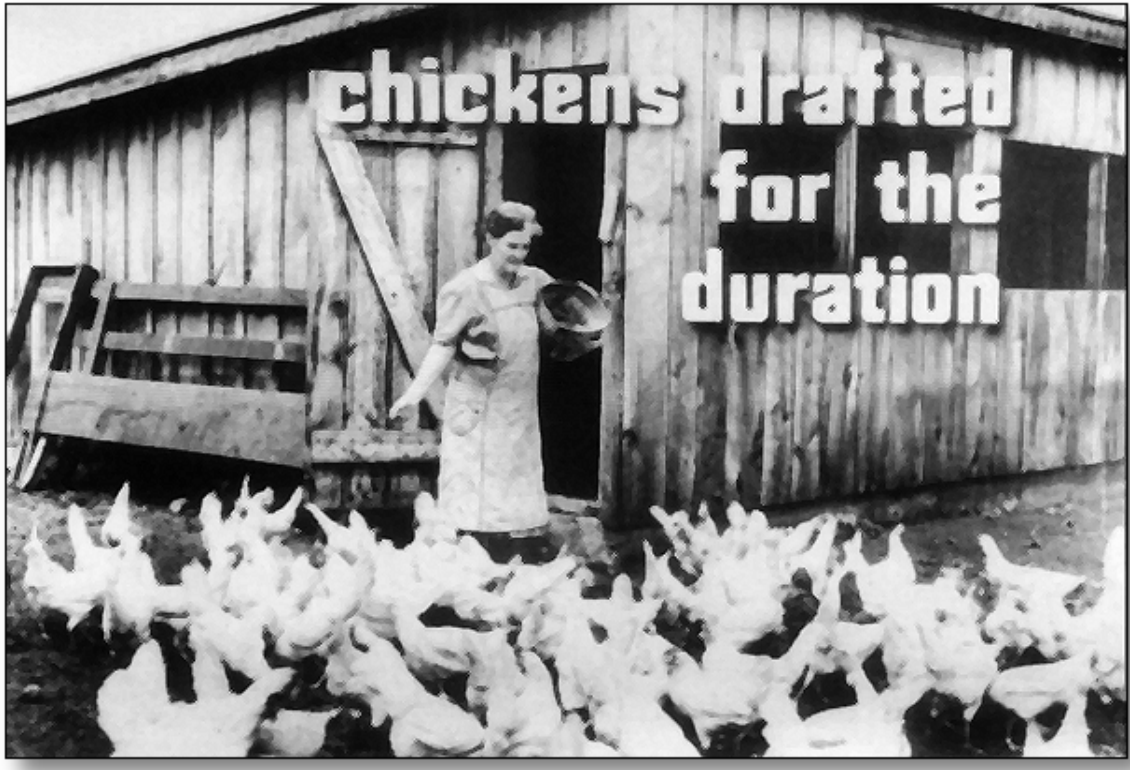


**A double-billing at a Tampa movie theatre sent the messages “Remember Pearl Harbor” and “Wife Takes a Flyer” to people on the homefront.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

erable qualification. She believes that prejudice continued to define the extent of change. As an example, no issue generated a greater emotional response than that of marital fidelity on the part of servicemen’s wives. A patriotic literature condoned infidelity on the part of the husband as inevitable, but society demanded the wife be faithful. The double standard persisted throughout the war.<sup>3</sup> Many found adhering to such a high standard of conduct difficult, if not impossible to maintain. The wartime reaction to the possibility of increased social and sexual freedom mirrored a similar response to all changes in women’s roles fostered by the war. Although the war offered women new opportunities for independence and challenged prevailing stereotypes about their emotional and physical makeup, it also promoted a return to traditional family roles once the war was over.

Ruth Milkman maintains that wartime ideology continued to be based on prewar conservative values for it was the intention of capitalists to maintain gender divisions within the labor force even while hiring women to fill men’s jobs. Milkman believes that job segregation is fundamental to gender inequality for low wages help to maintain an economic dependence on men. Despite this, she believes World War II was a major turning point in the history of American working women. Wartime mobilization and demands swept aside the barrier of traditional sexual division of labor.<sup>4</sup>



Even chickens were “drafted for the duration,” according to this frame from a filmstrip produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Photograph from *American Women and World War II* by Doris Weatherford.

Maureen Honey theorizes that world War II had a positive effect on women’s roles in society. Honey does not minimize the negative aspects of the propaganda of the era. For example, the notion that women have a right to be treated as individuals ran counter to the major goal of war propaganda that advocated a collective spirit of self-sacrifice on the home front. The media also portrayed women war workers as patriots who would eagerly leave paid work to start families after the war. Honey, however, rejects the view that women were manipulated into and out of the labor force by propagandists. The most important factor in women taking a job was financial incentive. Both the government and industry miscalculated when they assumed all women would want to quit their jobs after the war. Despite the many myths propagated, one of the most dramatic changes brought about by the war was the positive image of married women workers, including the notion that homework and factory work could be combined with some success. Whatever the desired motives of World War II propaganda, it gave a positive image of women’s nontraditional and professional roles. Honey offers a valid hypothesis when she claims that the Office of War Information (OWI) was not successful in manipulating most women into and out of the workforce. The reasons for women to join the workforce were as diverse as the diversity among individual women. That women “bought” wartime propaganda is not as clear a picture as previously theorized.<sup>5</sup>





**Government posters like this called on housewives to enter the labor force.**

Photograph from *Mobilizing Women for War* by Leila J. Rupp.

Doris Weatherford believes the changes in women's roles during the war were not temporary. Weatherford contends the historical status of women permanently changed. Sixty-six women were captured at Corregidor and spent the next three years in a Manila prison camp. Their lives and their perceptions of their roles in society may be perceived as changing permanently. While thousands of military nurses faced death and suffering on a scale they had never encountered before, they served by choice as volunteers. Thousands of others left the nursing profession for industrial jobs. Despite years of education and experience, they found they could earn more as defense-plant trainees, and they changed their occupation. Black women were not permitted, however, to serve as nurses in the military until 1945 and, in the civilian sector, were not allowed in "white" hospitals other than in the most menial of jobs. The war did little to improve the status of women doctors, but for nurses it was a career boom. Nurses were no longer looked on as servants of the wealthy and menial duties were dropped.<sup>6</sup>

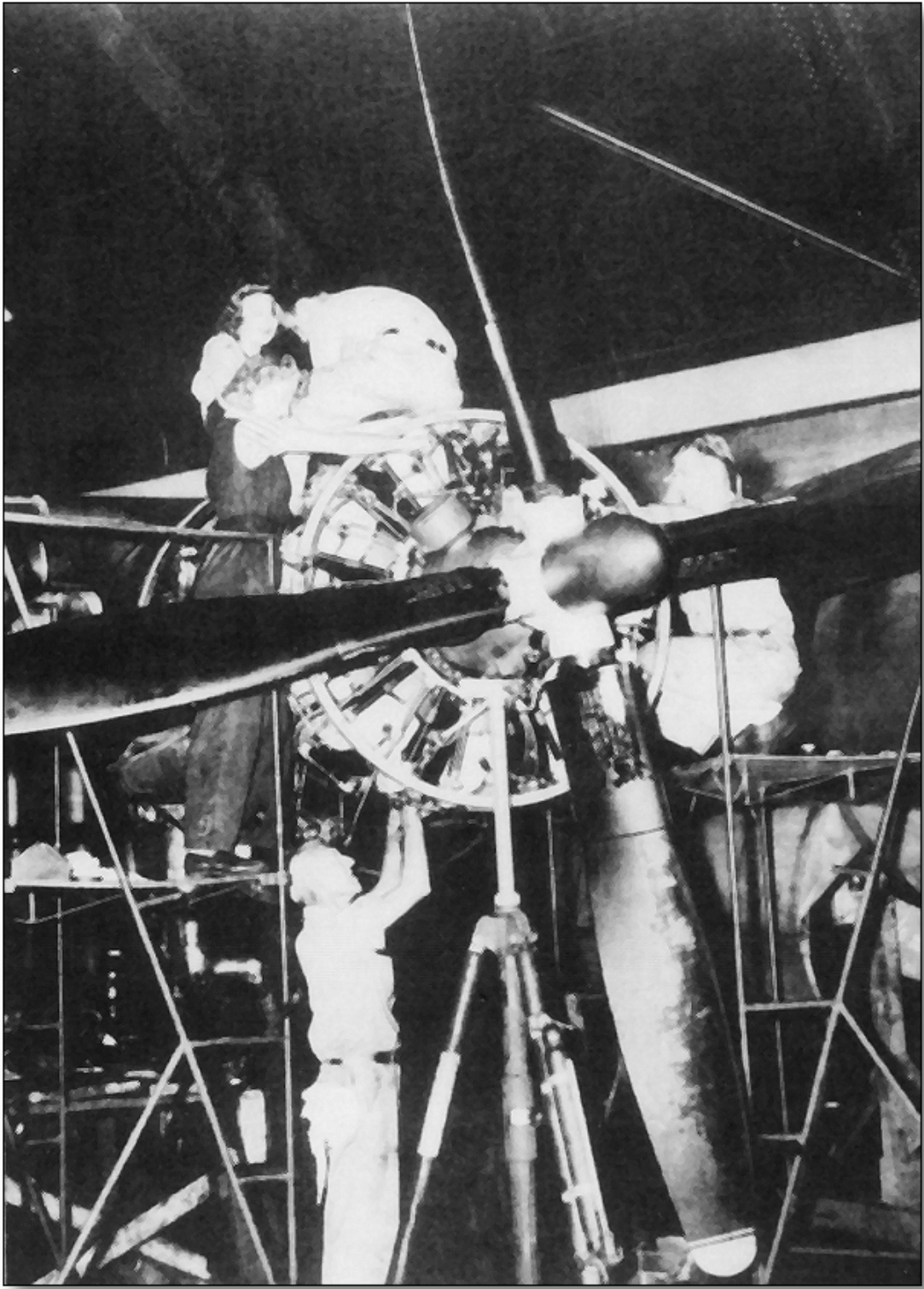
In her stunning book of interviews with women, Sherma Gluck shows how World War II changed American women. For black women, the war was a turning point. As Fanny Christina Hill, a black woman determined to live the American dream, states, "Hitler got us out of the white folk's kitchen."<sup>7</sup> Gluck asks for historians not to debate the degree of change resulting from wartime experiences, but to study the process of change. Wartime experiences meant different things to different women, and it affected them differently. She feels that change has a private face that historians have difficulty grasping. If it is true that most women working in industry lost their jobs at the end of the war, many bought their own homes and held on to them. Moreover, war work challenged the prevailing definition of womanhood. Gluck's oral histories give insight into women's attitudes and feelings about work.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most striking themes in Gluck's history is the desire of women to prove themselves. World War II allowed women to "spread their wings" and become self-confident participants in the wider world. The biggest change was that their concept of themselves as women was drastically and permanently altered. Gluck admits this changed consciousness is hard to assess, but it is imperative for historians to attempt the assessment.<sup>9</sup> Letters written by women during the war reinforce Gluck's contention that World War II changed forever women's view of their roles and status in society. In letter after letter, women expressed pride in their wartime activities and were enthusiastic about the new sense of responsibility and independence they were achieving.<sup>10</sup>

No single study can resolve these historical controversies about women's roles in World War II, but this article examines the experiences of women in Tampa and St. Petersburg in an effort to measure the impact of the war.

Tampa became a vital unit of the national defense program in 1939 when MacDill Army Air Field was established. The Works Project Administration supplied more than 2,000 men for the job. Women were still excluded from construction jobs, but when MacDill was finished in 1942, it provided a thousand jobs for both male and female, black and white. Soon it was bringing into the Tampa area a payroll that exceeded even that of the cigar industry.<sup>11</sup>

In St. Petersburg, the public seemed more concerned with the tourist trade than with military preparedness. An effort to organize a Home Defense Unit, modeled after the Home Guard of Great Britain, failed in May of 1941.<sup>12</sup> St. Petersburg had no industrial plants which could be



**Women working alongside men as part of a civilian ground crew repairing a Pratt and Whitney motor at Tampa's MacDill Field.**

Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Summer 1943).

converted to produce goods needed in a war effort. Its chief business was in providing rooms for winter visitors. Local government did not realize it at the time, but those thousands of empty rooms were to be the economic salvation of St. Petersburg. If Tampa was getting by on “small” government contracts, St. Petersburg was “languishing in the sunshine.”<sup>13</sup>

St. Petersburg and Tampa were stunned when the radio relayed the news that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Hours earlier, both Sunday editions of the *St. Petersburg Times* and the *Tampa Morning Tribune* had been delivered to residents. The international news was grim; however, not all of the front pages were devoted to news of impending war. Welders in the Tampa area were planning a strike to settle differences with shipyard management. The strike was scheduled for Monday, December 8.<sup>14</sup> The strike would never occur. Other events were about to claim the attention of the citizens of the Tampa Bay area.

William Powell and Myrna Loy co-starred in “The Shadow of the Thin Man” playing at several theaters in the local area. Sunday matinees were crowded on this last quiet Sunday afternoon. Peace and quiet would soon be rationed “for the duration,” a phrase soon familiar to the men and women of the area. Suddenly the lights went on in the theaters as managers stepped in front of their audiences with the news that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. For several moments, not a sound could be heard. After the message was received, people quietly left their seats. There was no rush nor panic. People just wanted to get home.<sup>15</sup>

The war wrought drastic changes in the local economy, although changes came slowly. In St. Petersburg a total of 9,820 young men, ages 21 to 35 inclusive, had registered for the first draft on Wednesday, October 16, 1940. Before the war ended, 6,473 were inducted 5,006 white and 1,467 black residents.<sup>16</sup> Women, of course, were not subject to the draft. When the war started, “womenfolk” (white) in southern cities like St. Petersburg and Tampa generally stayed at home if they were married. If women worked, they could select from low-status jobs available in local papers: housekeeper, seamstress, beautician, saleswomen and waitresses or cooks for the local resort hotels. Color preference predicated every ad and occasionally age and marital status. Black women were in demand as domestics.<sup>17</sup>

Pearl Harbor and its horrors awakened the Tampa Bay area to the reality of world conflict. Local air-raid warning service was almost immediately put into effect. The centers were entirely “manned” by volunteers, both men and women, who were to report any flying object showing lights, day or night, and they operated on an around-the-clock schedule. Women answered the phones at the Tampa observation center. However, one resident complained that “young ladies” and soldiers were seen going in and out of the communications center at all hours of the day and night.<sup>18</sup> War or no war, the young women of the Tampa Bay area were obviously running amuck. If they did not know the difference between right and wrong, this guardian of local morals did. Little did the woman realize that other “outrages” were soon to follow.

In some ways, life remained remarkably similar to pre-war days. Morning and afternoon radio programs continued to cater to the housewife. She could turn the dial to “Women in White,” “Light of the World,” and “Ma Perkins.”<sup>19</sup> In St. Petersburg, the American Legion’s Women’s Auxiliary still collected Bundles for Britain. The League of Women Voters declared the St. Petersburg city stockade to be “a disgrace to the Sunshine City.”<sup>20</sup> The fact that the stockade was





**Women helped entertain troops at Tampa's USO club.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

racially segregated did not seem to upset the ladies, but because the bathrooms were not sexually segregated was an issue that raised feminine hackles. Communal toilets would have to go. In Tampa, the war was no excuse to cancel Hillsborough High School's Senior Play, "Ever Since Eve." The entire football team was starring in the comedy. Tyrone Power and Betty Grable were playing in the movie *A Yank in the R.A.F.* at the Roxy, but now there was no need for adventuresome Tampa youth to join the R.A.F. to see "action." The United States Army Air Corps remained open around the clock for local enlistments.<sup>21</sup>

Tampa girls were called on to attend three dances for soldiers during the first week of the war. They served as partners for the 114th and 117th field artillery regiments with "acceptable" boys from Alabama and Mississippi. Tampa's own 116th was asked to provide their own dates. The girls had to be registered with the recreation committee of the Defense Council or USO to attend the dance. Chaperons included Defense Mothers, representatives from the Masons and Catholic Church, and assorted Protestant ministers. Tampa Bay's social conventions would be maintained "for the duration."<sup>22</sup>

Some inhabitants of the Tampa Bay area did not long remain untouched by the war. Theodore F. Byrd, Jr, was the first Tampan killed in World War II when Japan bombed the Philippine Islands.<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Mildred Westbrook Van Poole, a Junior Hostess at MacDill Field, was notified that her only son, Robert, was killed in Honolulu on December 7. He was only twenty years old.

Mrs. Van Poole was one of the first mothers entitled to place a sad little gold star in her front room window.<sup>24</sup> Other gold stars would soon appear in homes throughout the Tampa Bay area. The war would ask much from American women.

The Army soon arrived in St. Petersburg. Although the city had no large industrial plants that could be converted to produce war goods, it did have a wonderful climate, plus an enormous supply of housing. In the spring of 1942, authorities notified city officials that St. Petersburg had been selected as the basic training center for the technical services of the Army Air Corps. Every large hotel was taken over by the military. Only the Suwannee was left for civilians. The Vinoy Park Hotel became the local headquarters of the Army Air Corps. The Don CeSar, on St. Petersburg Beach, was converted into a military hospital. Unlike the requisitioning of the other hotels that threw hundreds of women, both white and black, out of work, the Don CeSar hired local white nurses and, for the first time in the local area, black nurses aids.<sup>25</sup>

For residents of the area the war meant economic recovery. Women thrown out of work by the military's requisitioning of their hotels soon found other work. Downtown streets were often jammed with marching platoons and armored convoys. World War II accomplished what eight years of the New Deal had failed to accomplish: a sharp decline in unemployment and an end to the economic depression that had crippled the area since 1929. Wartime conditions caused major adjustments in age and gender roles. Retirees, women, teenagers, and even children were called upon to keep city services functioning. Much of the responsibility for maintaining the homefront fell to young and middle-aged women. In addition to working as nurses, teachers, clerical workers, and volunteers, women often found themselves working in previously all-male occupations. In March 1942, St. Petersburg hired eleven women to work as bus and trolley operators.<sup>26</sup>

By the fall of 1942, 20,000 military men and women had descended upon St. Petersburg. When word came that 15,000 more would soon arrive, a tent city was established in the Jungle area – once a large golf course to the rear of what is now Farragut Academy. Every available room in both Tampa and St. Petersburg was filled. Early in 1942, a midnight curfew became law. Nights were blacked out and car headlights got a green coat of dark paint.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the dark nights, “flaming youth” returned to both cities in force with the military presence. Army Military Police and Navy Shore Patrol helped keep the peace. Restaurants, bars, and dance halls often filled to overflowing. Local St. Petersburg girls became “Bomb-a-Dears,” and beauty contests were held at the pier to choose Miss Personality – the finalist to compete for “Queen of the Air Force.” Pictures of “pin-ups” graced the pages of the local newspapers. One depicted Miss Georgia next to two planes. She was dressed in very brief white shorts – the brevity of which no doubt highlighted a shortage in material, and she announced her desire to be a ferry bomber for Uncle Sam.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the seeming laxity of convention, mothers of the area vigilantly safeguarded their daughters' virtue. At the Tampa USO, 1,500 “V-Ettes,” between the ages of eighteen and thirty years, were admitted to dances only upon presentation of registration cards. In addition, three Tampa references had to vouch for a girl's character, and no girl was allowed to leave the building until the dance ended. In spite of these safeguards for the girls' morals, the “V-Ettes”



**Local women socializing with military personnel at Tampa's USO building in February 1942.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

were extolled as being “just what the doctor ordered” to cure just about anything that might be wrong with the young serviceman.<sup>29</sup>

Jobs began to appear in newspapers that requested women for the first time. In addition to the old standbys, requests for female linotype operators, mechanics, and chauffeurs became common. The U. S. Employment Service Office canvassed for women to work as weathermen, pilots, upholsters, and, in the shipyards, as welders.<sup>30</sup> Joan of Arc, not Rosie the Riveter, dominated the shipyards. Employment also opened in agriculture. From 1942 until 1945, the government requisitioned all canned and processed fruits for military and Lend Lease purposes. Labor shortages threatened the Tampa citrus and food producing areas. When workers deserted seasonal employment for more stable defense jobs, housewives were recruited to harvest perishable crops. A 1943 survey in Hillsborough County reported that seven out of eleven persons working on farms were females.<sup>31</sup>

Less favorable opportunities for employment existed for black women, who faced both gender and racial prejudice. In St. Petersburg, the unfavorable local job market may have been partially responsible for the proportion of men and women in uniform being higher in the black community than in the white community. All blacks were assigned to segregated units. Only a few black Navy stewards served in the Tampa Bay area. There were few black women serving in uniform in the area. Black domestics and day laborers had been put out of work in large numbers



**A woman welder at a Tampa shipyard in April 1943.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

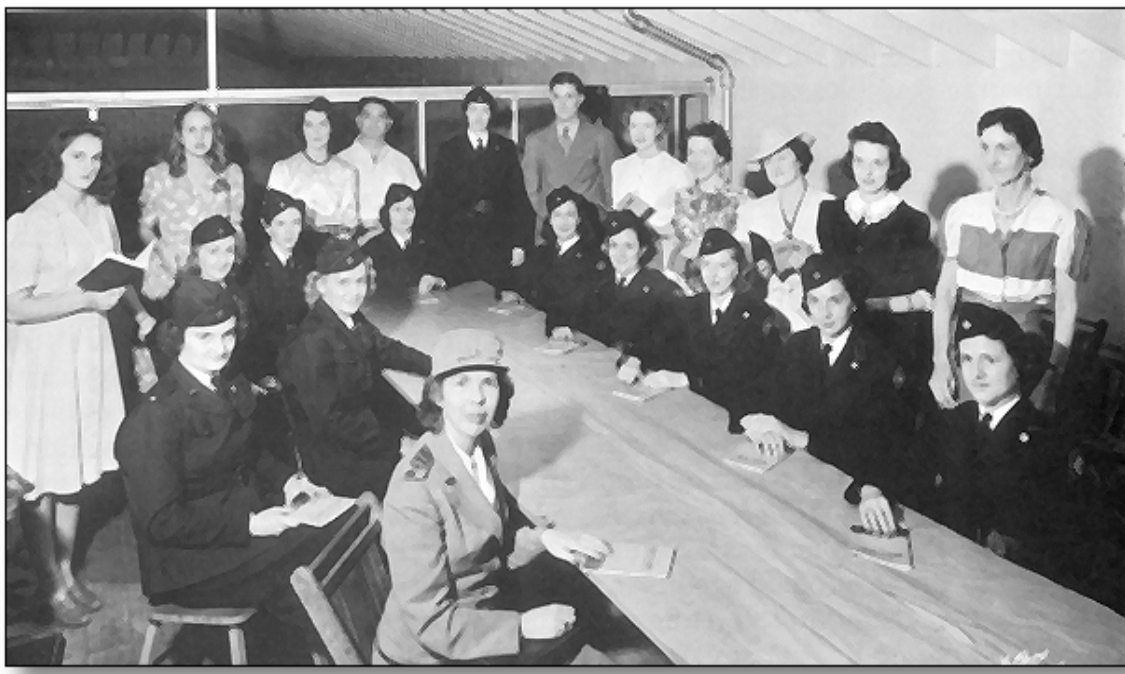
when the hotels closed to civilians. African Americans, however, found job in industries that held government contracts, although there was an unwritten quota system in place in the Tampa Bay area.<sup>32</sup>

Substandard housing and schools were the norm. The University of Tampa and St. Petersburg Junior College remained closed to blacks. For 15,000 blacks in St. Petersburg, there were only two doctors and one hospital. There were no public beaches or libraries available for the black population. No law prohibited blacks from sitting on St. Petersburg's famous green benches, but custom suggested otherwise.<sup>33</sup>

In November of 1942, local authorities announced a "work or jail" edict. Black men who could not prove employment were threatened with imprisonment. Raids stepped up when there was a shortage of labor. The police were empowered by the city council to act as labor agents for city agencies and other local employers who were short of labor. If black women, or men, objected to this treatment of family members, they were imprisoned. Meanwhile, Tampa duly reported that one young black girl, age ten, had successfully passed her exam for air raid warden.<sup>34</sup>

Many wives of officers and enlisted men stationed in the area came to stay while their husbands were in training. Often, even when the husbands went overseas, the wives remained in the area. Housing became so acute that the Office of Price Administration put a ceiling on rents





**Red Cross workers and volunteers at a 1943 meeting in Tampa.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

to prevent profiteering. The crowded cities brought a record breaking business to stores throughout the year and not, as in the past, only during the winter months.<sup>35</sup>

If wives from other states were residing in the Tampa Bay area in record numbers, local women were leaving in equally large numbers. Judging from marriage and engagement announcements in the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, it seemed Tampa women rarely married a Tampa man. Tampa Bay women packed their bags, kissed their families goodbye, and following their new husbands, scattered across the United States.<sup>36</sup>

By the end of 1942, women holding down men's jobs no longer seemed news. What did interest women was fashion. A bobby pin shortage had caused the feather cut to become popular. Besides being attractive, this hairstyle was less likely to become entangled in heavy factory machinery. Women of the Auxiliary Aircraft Warning Service were cautioned to forswear purple lipstick as it had a tendency to give a rather macabre appearance under artificial lighting. In one article, the plunging neckline was extolled for the woman war worker because "it keeps right on pulling in males." Other articles demanded that women war workers be models of good grooming. The absence of articles devoted to the appearance of male war workers suggests no one in the Tampa Bay area cared what men looked like on the job.<sup>37</sup>

Despite efforts by the Office of War Information to glamorize the role of the female in the military, stories about the "petticoat" army abounded in the printed media. One concern proved groundless; women seldom became PWOP (pregnant without permission). The media delivered mixed messages on women's role in the military. One pictorial essay illustrated a woman marine

jujitsu trainer deftly practicing her craft, while another story featured an “appreciating” visiting male officer checking WACs for straight stocking seams. One episode of “The Sad Sack,” syndicated in both local papers, showed a poor, befuddled enlistee being released for active duty by a woman replacement. His befuddlement was compounded when he found that his “active duty” assignment was to guard an off-limit WAC area. The *New Yorker* magazine, in the October 1942 issue, printed Helen Holenson’s satirical cartoon of a very irate WAVE officer listening to a stereotyped women’s club officer tell her rapt audience, “Miss Whitehead has come to tell us how to amuse sailors.”<sup>38</sup>

*Life* was the most popular magazine in America during World War II. For the years 1941 to 1943, its editors attempted to cover the role of women in the war seriously. A study of the magazine for those years reveals that in 1941 five cover stories depicted women and the coming war, focusing on Washington, D.C., workers, Army nurses, women air-raid wardens, knitters, and the American housewife. In 1942, seven cover stories that dealt with the importance of women in the war effort, followed by six covers in 1943. Only one cover in 1944 was devoted to women and it explained how models make good mothers. In 1945, the magazine proudly offered thirty years of American women in swimsuits as one of two covers highlighting women. The other cover depicted a beautiful girl lying in the sand. The caption read simply, “Florida.” Of all the women in Florida who worked, sacrificed, defied shortages and rationing to raise their families, this was the Florida girl selected to grace the cover of the most popular magazine in America. Not until the 1970s would magazines again depict the contributions of women to society as they had during the war.

Two of the most famous G.I. pin-ups of World War II were available to show the “ideal” woman of the American fighting man. Rita Hayworth (in a black, silk nightgown) and Betty Grable (in a swim suit) showed the standard of feminine perfection. When, in 1944, Postmaster General Frank C. Walker banned pin-ups from the mails, he earned the fury of American men. No mention is made of the response of the American women.<sup>39</sup> It might not be unreasonable to speculate that it included a feeling of relief.

The war years meant rationing and frazzled nerves. Clearwater Beach became the vacation destination for local families who saved enough gasoline. Rationing of gas, tires, and food became a part of the local housewife’s daily life, and life itself became a battle to ensure her family’s comfort. The war pinched Tampa Bay pantries. Canned goods became scarce. Three-day-old coffee grounds could be recycled into candy; uses were also found for the soybean that had previously fed cattle. Recipes called for reduced sugar and shortening and advertisements advocated the substitution of oatmeal for meat. Three hundred Tampa women participated in a weekly radio program, “Women At War,” depicting the part they played in the area war effort. Their roles ranged from housewives, pilots, and weathermen to shipyard workers.<sup>40</sup>

By 1943, *Life* reported that the Nash Kelvinator Corporation was no longer making cars and refrigerators, in order to produce Navy Corsair fighter planes. A full page ad depicting seven apron-clad housewives crawling over a Sherman tank sent the message that natural gas was vital to war production and women must use it wisely. Another entire page warned women to take care of the sheets they had and to “please, please make them last.” The housewife was inundated

with tips on how she could help win the war by being thrifty and sensible. She might even attract a handsome soldier by feeding him a Ritz Cracker, according to the not so subtle message of one ad.<sup>41</sup>

By June 1943, local news was returning to the front pages of both papers in the area. As the bombing fury mounted over Germany, a local story of seven vacationers, who suffered burns when their boat caught fire off Honeymoon Island, vied for front-page space. In Tampa, readers encountered a sad story that reported Harvey Lake, a young dairy employee of Mrs. Jeanette Gore, was reclassified 1-A, leaving Mrs. Gore as the sole milker of seventy-eight, apparently desperate, cows.<sup>42</sup> Help might not have been immediately available to Mrs. Gore, but the dairy industry was about to have its horizons expanded. The *St. Petersburg Times* reported that Mrs. Virginia Mitchell had become Southern Dairies first “lady” milkman. The company qualified its exuberant praise for Mrs. Mitchell with the announcement that this only “for the duration.”<sup>43</sup> As 1943 progressed, despite the fact that local railroads were now hiring women as common laborers, more and more articles referred to women’s war work as “temporary.”<sup>44</sup>

These “temporaries” experienced a hard time during the war. Despite O.P.A. rent controls, a desperate young woman welder in the Tampa area advertised for a “comfortable cottage, rent not to exceed \$20.00 a month, furnished,” to accommodate herself and her two sons who had been kept with relatives in Winter Haven. Her plight was not uncommon.<sup>45</sup>

Employment ads continued to show opportunities for women in 1944. As the Allies smashed northward in Italy, women in the Tampa Bay area found new jobs as bartenders, photographers, trolley conductors, bus drivers, bakers, and truck drivers. Women’s clubs were still volunteering millions of hours for the war effort. Navy Mothers were sewing for Navy hospitals and the VFW auxiliary was still collecting Bundles for Britain.<sup>46</sup>

The spring of 1945 marked the beginning of the end of World War II. February had seen the last days of the Ardennes Salient, the recapture of Bougainville and New Guinea. In February, *Life* ran its “Florida” cover that bypassed the housewife, war worker, and woman soldier.<sup>47</sup> *Life* and Florida looked forward to more traditional days. Wine advertisements now extolled candlelight dinners for reasons that had little to do with fuel shortages. Soon consumer goods became readily available. By December 1945, car ads tempted all the residents of the Tampa Bay area, and women were assured they would have no difficulty obtaining all the cosmetics, coffee, and electric blankets they desired. The Wear-Ever Aluminum Corporation was asking women, “Is there a man in your life?”<sup>48</sup> In St. Petersburg, new supplies of pineapples made the front page.<sup>49</sup>

As Johnny came marching home to Tampa and St. Petersburg, engagements and weddings were accorded a separate section in the local newspapers. Tampa Bay women followed their American sisters into domestic bliss. As war work ceased, female war workers were notified their services were no longer required. When businesses reconverted and began to hire again, they gave preference to the returning soldier and to the unemployed male civilian.<sup>50</sup>

The war was over. It seemed the majority of women were about to be transformed, either voluntarily or involuntarily, into that apparently most beautiful and prized of Southern flowers –



This February 1945 cover of *Life* suggested a return to a traditional image of women. The girl selected to represent “Florida” was Amelia Crossland, a 16-year-old student at St. Petersburg High School.



the Magnolia. Whether the “steel” they had acquired from World War II would cease to exist or only remain dormant remains a subject of controversy among historians.<sup>51</sup> While it is true that statistics document women returning to the home and family, they do not tell the whole story. No single statistic shows that women returned to being “traditional” housewives, only that they returned to the home in large numbers.

If women generally made no great permanent gains in the workplace, they became a force to be reckoned with as the most spectacular consumer boom in American history began after the war. Madison Avenue might have tried to manipulate the American woman, but it ignored her at their peril. If the housewife was seen by the media as still “mother” to mankind, she was slowly but surely, becoming a full partner in the family with her husband. This partnership took new forms. The housewife was no longer simply the apron-clad cookie baker of yore. If she remained the oil that greased the gears of the family, she did it in her own car. If she found it necessary to work full or part-time to maintain the level of family life she deemed necessary, she did it and often without the approval of her husband. Adverse media propaganda to the contrary, women began to enjoy earning and spending their own money. Despite what statistics seemed to show, the role of women would never be quite the same after World War II.

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<sup>1</sup> William H. Chafe, *American Women: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Role, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 48-65; and Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women For War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Rupp, *Mobilizing Women*, 89.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), 81, 173-178.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 2, 58.

<sup>5</sup> Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 19, 27, 55, 128, 211.

<sup>6</sup> Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1990), 17, 18, 20, 30.

<sup>7</sup> Sherma Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War and Social Change* (New York: New American Library, 1987), 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 260-261.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 265-266.

<sup>10</sup> Judy Barrett Letoff and David C. Smith, eds., *Since You Went Away* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 145-181.

<sup>11</sup> Gary Mormino and Tony Pizzo, *Tampa* (Tulsa: Continental Heritage Press, 1983), 172-74; Karl Grismer, *Tampa* (St. Petersburg, 1950), 292-94.

<sup>12</sup> Grismer, *Tampa*, 287.

<sup>13</sup> Raymond O. Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream* (Norfolk: Donning Company, 1988), 299.

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- <sup>14</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, December 7, 1941, 1; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 7, 1941, 1.
- <sup>15</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, Extra Edition, December 7, 1941, 9.
- <sup>16</sup> Karl H. Gismer, *The Story of St. Petersburg* (St. Petersburg: P.K. Smith & Company, 1971), 264-266.
- <sup>17</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, Want Ads, December 8, 1941, 6; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, Want Ads, December 8, 1941, 17.
- <sup>18</sup> Evanell K. Powell, *Tampa That Was* (Boynton Beach: Star Publishing, 1973), 126.
- <sup>19</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 8, 1941, 12.
- <sup>20</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, December 8, 1941, 13, 14.
- <sup>21</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 8, 1941, 9, 15.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>23</sup> Powell, *Tampa That Was*, 124.
- <sup>24</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 8, 1941, 17.
- <sup>25</sup> Gismer, *Story of St. Petersburg*, 193; Arsenault, *Florida Dream*, 299; The Pinellas County Planning Council], *Pinellas County Historical Background* (Florida: Pinellas County Historical Museum, 1986), 40.
- <sup>26</sup> Arsenault, *Florida Dream*, 307.
- <sup>27</sup> Del Marth, *St. Petersburg: Once Upon a Time* (St. Petersburg: City of St. Petersburg, 1976), 27.
- <sup>28</sup> Arsenault, *Florida Dream*, 302; Young, *Pinellas Peninsula*, 151; *St. Petersburg Times*, June 7, 1942, Sec. 2, 28.
- <sup>29</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 14, 1942, Mag. Sec., 1.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 2, 4 and 5.
- <sup>31</sup> Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), 418; *Miami Herald*, March 21, 1943, 38.
- <sup>32</sup> Arsenault, *Florida Dream*, 303.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 304-305; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 14, 1942, 13.
- <sup>35</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, June 7, 1942, Sec. 2, 9; Gismer, *Story of St. Petersburg*, 195.
- <sup>36</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 14, 1942, Part 3, 1-6.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 and 8.
- <sup>38</sup> *This Fabulous Century: 1940-1950*, vol. V (New York: Time-Life Books, 1969), 62-63, 176, 177.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-125.
- <sup>40</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 14, 1942. Part 3, 3, and 15, and Part 2, 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Life*, February 15, 1943, 7, 10, 33.

<sup>42</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 25, 1943, 1.

<sup>43</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, June 6, 1943, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Arsenault, *Florida Dream*, 307.

<sup>45</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, June 6, 1943, 3.

<sup>46</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, June 1, 1944, Sec. 2, 1; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 17, 1944, 12.

<sup>47</sup> *Life*, February 5, 1945.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, December 3, 1945, 12-14, 4.

<sup>49</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, June 21, 1945, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 13, 1945, 4.

<sup>51</sup> *St. Petersburg Times*, June 21, 1945, 14; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 13, 1945, Sec. 2, 1-2.

## **“A COMMUNITY WITHIN A COMMUNITY”: AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN ST. PETERSBURG DURING WORLD WAR II**

by Ellen J. Babb

“These are not the days to consider from whence one came, nor the traditional customs of social standing, caste, and privilege. These are the days for a united front with a united purpose to fight for that victory which we must have, or regardless of caste, creed or position, we will all sink together.<sup>1</sup>”

When Florida educator and national reformer Mary McLeod Bethune appealed to her colleagues to support the war effort in a stirring speech delivered at the Southern Conference on Human Welfare in New Orleans, she hoped that black participation in the military service overseas and in support services on the homefront during world War II would lead to improved social conditions for American blacks at war’s end. Observing that the war was a “fight for the perfection of the democracy of our own beloved America,” Bethune noted the moral impetus of the country’s involvement in hostilities abroad and suggested that same spirit should prevail in redefining race relations at home.<sup>2</sup>

But the “united front” Bethune envisioned eluded the majority of black citizens during World War II. Although African Americans suffered the same sacrifices as their white compatriots, black soldiers served in segregated military units in training camps and in combat, and on the homefront employers denied African Americans the types of economic advancement available to many whites in civil service and private industry when the country mobilized for war.<sup>3</sup>

No one felt the disparity in social and public policy more than black women. Although in reality black women played important roles in the Allied cause, newspapers and periodicals recorded little of their wartime achievements. And white faces, not black profiles, graced war posters designed to recruit workers and stir patriotism in American citizens. The double burden of race and gender contributed to black women’s marginal social status and obscured their individual contributions to the war effort through paid work and volunteer activities.<sup>4</sup>

This study of African-American women in St. Petersburg, Florida, during World War II depicts the many ways they helped to sustain their own communities while contributing to the larger war effort during these years of crisis. It also suggests that employment patterns for black women in this southern resort city remained remarkably unchanged, particularly in comparison to the experience of local white women, who enjoyed a vast expansion of job opportunities during the course of the war. Classified advertising, newspaper articles from the “Negro News” page of the St. Petersburg Times, city directories, personal scrapbooks, and personal interviews provide the bulk of information for this article.

When war broke out, St. Petersburg – with a population of more than sixty thousand – lacked a solid industrial base, relying on tourism and associated services for its economic survival. The War Department saved the city from financial ruin when military officials chose St. Petersburg as a training site for more than 100,000 troops. Local hotels, denied normal tourist occupancy,



housed military trainees while city residents became civilian landlords, renting homes and rooms to military families and to workers who labored in Tampa's defense industries.<sup>5</sup>

Although St. Petersburg lacked the types of war contracts and industry that "Rosie the Riveter" and millions like her most often found in larger urban settings, local white women found work in traditionally "male fields" like automobile mechanics, welding, and city transit operations. Others commuted to defense jobs in Tampa, worked in family businesses, or joined the Nurses Corps or new women's branches of the armed forces. Locally and nationally, white middle-class women experienced a great expansion of opportunity during the war years, while the majority of black women remained sequestered in low-paying, low-status jobs. In St. Petersburg, most African-American women continued to work as laundresses, hotel maids, and domestics just as they had previously.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the war, racist and sexist attitudes contributed to persistent segregation in the workplace. When employers depleted their sources of white male labor, they looked first to white women, then to black men, and only lastly to black women to fill vacancies. Employers defended this labor hierarchy by citing fears of strikes, walkouts, and work stoppages by white workers if they hired black women. Custom remained king. White women were particularly vocal in voicing opposition to sharing work space with black women.<sup>7</sup> Many feared they would become ill from sharing bathroom facilities with individuals they believed to be "dirty and diseased."<sup>8</sup>

In spite of these obstacles, the number of black maids and domestics declined nationally by more than fifteen percent between 1940 and 1944 as black women left the service industries to pursue new types of work. In the South, large numbers of black women deserted farm labor and migrated to northern urban areas, hoping to take advantage of a labor market caught short by the loss of male employees to the armed forces. Their moderate success in these endeavors is reflected in the fact that the number of black women working in industry rose from 6.5 to 18 percent during this same period of time.<sup>9</sup>

With few exceptions, these women secured new jobs with great difficulty, and they continued to work in positions that produced few qualitative changes in their lives. Often they found themselves performing hard, manual labor or work considered too dangerous for white women. A local example highlights that experience. In 1943, railroad officials in St. Petersburg hired Mary Johnson and four other black women to work as "common laborers" in positions normally reserved for black men.<sup>10</sup>

A few local black women found work in northern factories during the war, but if the national model holds true, these women probably worked as janitors or performed menial labor, rather than working in the higher paying jobs reserved for white women. Annette Brown, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E.B. Brown of St. Petersburg, worked in a defense plant in Milwaukee during the war, while her fiancée, Corporal David Bell, served in New Guinea. The newspaper article reporting her activities did not mention Annette's actual position at the defense plant.<sup>11</sup>

Women who wanted to serve their country could also join the military, although officials in the armed forces recruited black women with great reluctance. The women's branches of the Navy



**Prior to World War II, domestic work was one of the few jobs open to African-American women.**

Photograph from USF Special Collections.

(WAVES), Marines (MCWRs), and Coast Guard (SPARS) excluded black women from their ranks completely until 1944 when President Franklin Roosevelt ordered military employers to recruit African-American women. The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs) recruited black women much earlier in the war, but they capped black membership at ten percent.<sup>12</sup>

In St. Petersburg, black female recruiters for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps interviewed prospective candidates at City Hall, at Gibbs High School (St. Petersburg's only high school for African-American students), and at Jordan Park Community center in the heart of the black community.<sup>13</sup> Rosalie Peck was twelve years old when the recruiters came to Gibbs High School with their "jaunty caps and leather strap bags."<sup>14</sup> Although she was too young to enlist, her older sister Theo signed up and was assigned to a base in Tucson, Arizona.<sup>15</sup> A number of other young black women also enlisted and the community celebrated their induction with great enthusiasm and pride, as the following article from the "Negro News" page of the April 18, 1943 issue of the *St. Petersburg Times* illustrates.

Causing quite a flurry in social circles today is the departure of three of the city's most popular young women for the WAACs camp in Des Moines, Iowa. They are Miss Gwendolyn Shelby, attractive cashier at the Harlem Theatre; Mrs. Elizabeth Daniels, columnist; and Miss Lucille Bradley, who was an employee at a local cleaning plant here. These three young women, all versatile, willing workers, and possessors of charming personalities, are expected to move ahead



**Created in May 1942, the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAACs) was the only branch of the military that accepted black women volunteers at the beginning of the war.**

Photograph from *The Negro to World War II* by John D. Silvera.

quickly in this new organization of our government. They have been feted with many parties and teas prior to their leaving today.<sup>16</sup>

This optimism may have proven premature because black women (like their boyfriends, fathers, and brothers in the military service) lived and worked in segregated units. Even more disheartening, many of these women were relegated to custodial and kitchen work once they enlisted. Theo Peck was fortunate to be assigned clerical work at her station in Tucson. Civilian employment for the military also existed, and local women toiled in the shipbuilding factories and at Drew and MacDill airfields in Tampa. Mrs. A. Albritton worked in the parachute department at MacDill, where her husband was employed as a chauffeur.<sup>17</sup>

Countless articles in the main sections of the *St. Petersburg Times* lauded the efforts of white civilian workers on the homefront, but the only way to find out about the activities of someone like Theo Peck or Mrs. Albritton – unless one knew them personally – was to read about them on the “Negro News” page of the same newspaper. This page first appeared in the *Times* in October 1939 and was only distributed in black neighborhoods, so that the achievements and patriotic endeavors of local blacks went unnoticed by the community at large.<sup>18</sup>

Such racist business practices reflected the state of public segregation predominant in the city. In these years before President Harry Truman’s executive order desegregating the Armed Forces, African-American soldiers in St. Petersburg could not stay in downtown hotels with white soldiers, but were forced to find housing in the black community. Black women like Jane Jackson, who owned a rooming house on 4th Avenue and 16th Street South above Webb’s City shoe store, rented rooms both to black soldiers and to the African-American entertainers who performed for them in local clubs like the Manhattan Casino.<sup>19</sup>

Notably, the boarding of soldiers was one area where the experiences of white women and black women merged, each providing housing for members of their own race. However, the paths of the races diverged again when considering opportunities for skilled employment. Only a few professional occupations existed for St. Petersburg black women at this time, and these were generally in education, nursing, and insurance. Within these fields, women were often promoted when black males were called to war.<sup>20</sup>

Such was the case of Mrs. Doris Williams who, “due to the continued shortage of manpower and because of the fact that women [were] prepared to take over the work formerly done by men [became] the first woman supervisor of the Atlanta Life Insurance Company in the state of Florida.”<sup>21</sup> The Atlanta Life Insurance Company, based in Atlanta, Georgia, served an all-black clientele. Doris began working for the company in her hometown of Way Cross, Georgia, in 1936, the year after she graduated from high school, and she transferred in 1938 to the St. Petersburg branch, where she worked soliciting new memberships. She feels that the promotion she received in 1943 would have been offered to a man during peacetime. After the war, Doris stayed on in her position for a short time before leaving to work with her husband and father-in-law in a family-owned business, Regal Sundries on Third Avenue South.<sup>22</sup>

Rose Williams (not related), a co-worker of Doris Williams, remembers that women almost entirely operated the St. Petersburg branch of the Atlanta Life Insurance Company during the war. Prior to her employment by the insurance company, Rose worked in Morrison’s Cafeteria and in local hotels and provided non-professional nursing care to patients in private homes. One morning, shortly after America entered the war, a young man who had just been drafted approached Rose after church and inquired if she would like to take his place at the insurance company where he worked. Rose agreed and spent the next several years collecting insurance premiums from African-American subscribers in Pinellas County. She remembers that the job paid well, and Rose continued to work for the Atlanta Life Insurance Company after the war.<sup>23</sup>

Local black women also filled vacancies created when black male teachers were drafted. African-American women substituted for black draftees at all three of the city’s black schools –



Davis Elementary, Jordan Elementary, and Gibbs High School. Helen Edwards, retired librarian for the James Weldon Johnson branch of the public library, taught at both Davis and Jordan Elementary schools during the 1940s due to the wartime manpower drain.<sup>24</sup>

Edwards remembers that older black men, who were generally above draft age, managed most of the black community's middle-class establishments during the 1940s. According to Mrs. Edwards, the majority of younger black men worked as laborers, hotel porters, cab drivers, and yard men. Some of the black men who worked for the Atlantic Coastline Railroad were not drafted, but kept their jobs at the railroad, transporting soldiers from training camps in St. Petersburg to various points of embarkation. Helen's husband, Elmer Edwards, received an occupational deferment from the government so that he could continue to handle baggage and mail for the railroad.<sup>25</sup>

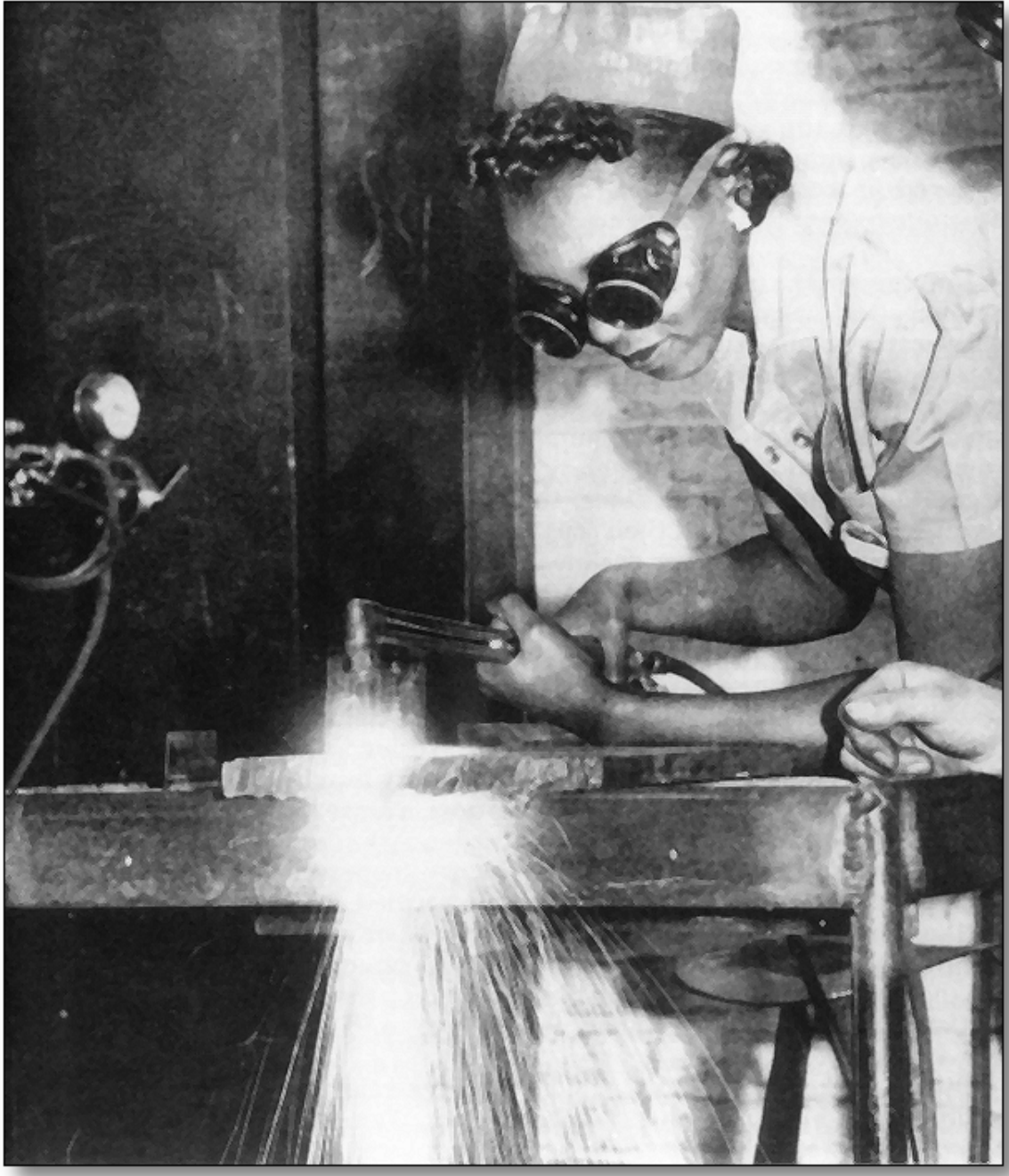
To augment the family income, the majority of black women continued to work as domestics, cooks, and laundresses. Large numbers of St. Petersburg's African-American women worked as steam operatives before, during, and after the war. Interestingly, the atmosphere of the war years provoked some of these women to challenge their employers' power. During the summer of 1944, twenty-five women from the Soft Water Laundry Plant "walked out" demanding higher wages, improved health and safety standards, and recognition of their newly organized union.<sup>26</sup> A week later, thirty-five black women from the Superior Laundry Plant walked off their jobs in a pledge of sympathy and support. This laundry experienced a large decline in output as a result of the strike, and plant manager S.L. McClintock feared he might lose the company's government contract as well.<sup>27</sup>

The striking workers received encouragement from local AFL organizers, state labor officials, and members of the religious community. On July 25, 1944 – two weeks into the strike – Reverend John Wesley Carter invited local laundry workers to a special meeting at the Bethel Baptist Church. In the sanctuary of this African-American church, James T. Whitney, a state labor leader and editor of the *Florida Advocate*, urged those in attendance to stand firm in their resolve to improve working conditions. Blasting the newspapers for being unsympathetic to the causes of organized labor, Whitney warned striking workers that "rich northerners had made fortunes out of 'nigger labor' and that 'chiseling Yankees' were responsible for the southern Negroes' plight. You can't always place reliance in newspapers, and don't be alarmed by them. I have never yet seen a newspaper who champions labor, negro or white."<sup>28</sup>

Early in the war, the NAACP's magazine featured this woman learning to weld as a representative of the slogan "Training to Beat the Axis."

Other speakers that night included Reverend Carter and Perry Harvey, the leader of the black longshoreman's union in Tampa. Carter hoped that the negotiations would bring a swift and peaceful end to the strike, but the civic activist was not adverse to workers using "force if necessary."<sup>29</sup> This was not the first time that Reverend Carter had played a major role in addressing issues of inequality and injustice in St. Petersburg. During the 1930s Carter had lobbied the all-white city council to provide black citizens with improved housing conditions, voting rights, expanded medical facilities, and better employment opportunities.<sup>30</sup>





**Tampa's Modern Progressive Club, shown here in June 1945, was typical of the self-help groups organized by African-Americans.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

The meeting at Carter's church occurred only two days after the *St. Petersburg Times* printed an article announcing that the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church had taken an official stand in support of organized labor at their thirty-second quadrennial convention in Philadelphia the week before. In their report, A.M.E. leaders approved of "trade unionism as an

instrument of practical brotherhood and a most important means of assuring security and equality of treatment in employment.” The report went on to commend “those labor organizations which have welcomed the negro worker on a basis of equality.”<sup>31</sup>

The last reference to the laundry strike appeared in the *St. Petersburg Times* on August 4, 1944, approximately three weeks after the initial walkout at the Softwater Laundry. W.L. Durant, the local AFL representative, reported that the workers found better paying jobs in Tampa, indicating that negotiations between the striking workers and management had broken down. If the aim of the strike was primarily union recognition, then the strike failed. But it is more likely that the core issues for striking women were improved working conditions and higher wages, and that they viewed the strike as a fight for a better life for their families. In this respect, they made measured progress.<sup>32</sup>

The social backdrop against which the laundry strike unfolded was one of grinding poverty for the majority of St. Petersburg blacks. Housing in most black neighborhoods was substandard, health facilities were inadequate, and the specter of Jim Crow marked relations between the races. It fell upon members of the black community to care for their own.<sup>33</sup>

Rose Williams remembers that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was very active in St. Petersburg at this time, its energy fueled by the hope for equal rights at war’s end. Local and national leaders moved to pursue justice at home while black soldiers fought for democracy abroad. Rose attended NAACP meetings regularly, and claims that she was even “dumb enough to have an NAACP bumper sticker” on her car.<sup>34</sup> Black teachers, considered leaders in the African-American community, were active in the organization, but performed their work secretly for fear of losing their jobs. Some white citizens also helped by contributing money, but they did not come to meetings and usually made their donations anonymously. In June 1944 the St. Petersburg chapter of the NAACP held a special fundraising drive, hoping to increase its membership from 139 members to 500 by the end of that year.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to joining political associations like the NAACP, local women intensified their efforts to provide basic services to members of their community by joining black women’s service clubs. Seven such civic organizations existed in St. Petersburg during the 1930s and 1940s. These included the Sojourner Truth Federated Club, the Non-Pareils, the Modernistics, the Socialites Federated Club, and the Margaret Washington Federated Club. Each club operated as an independent member of the local chapter of the National Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, setting its own agenda but occasionally joining forces on major projects like the creation of a common clubhouse at Melrose Park.<sup>36</sup>

The years framed by World War II were a particularly active time for Rose Williams’s club, the Non-Pareils. Organized by Fannye Ayer Ponder in 1926, the organization promoted an improved quality of life for black residents, as outlined in the first two sections of the club constitution:

Section I. To act as an organized unit for the moral, religious, literary, and civic advancement among Negro citizens of St. Petersburg Florida.



**Tampa's Modern Progressive Club, shown here in June 1945, was typical of the self-help groups organized by African-Americans.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

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buting group to help educate the masses toward better ways of living by affording them opportunities for cooperation in educational, philanthropic, cultured, and social activities.<sup>37</sup>

To achieve these goals, Rose remembers that club women raised money by holding beauty pageants and baby contests, hosting regular teas, and sponsoring community plays at Gibbs High School. The club donated food to needy families, as well as to the residents of St. Petersburg's only black nursing home, located in the private residence of "Mother Jones" on 28th Street South and Fremont Terrace. The Non-Pareils and some of the other black women's clubs also sponsored junior affiliates, in which club members trained young women, aged twelve and older, in leadership and community service.<sup>38</sup>

Individual club women exerted a great deal of influence within their community. Fannye Ayer Ponder established the St. Petersburg chapter of the National Council of Negro Women in 1942. Mrs. Ponder, a social studies teacher at Gibbs High School, had befriended Mary McLeod Bethune, who created the national council in 1935. The purpose of the council, based in Washington, D.C., was to provide a "coalition of black women's organizations that addressed the needs of African-American women and the community through planning and action."<sup>39</sup> From the beginning, the St. Petersburg chapter provided educational programs designed to improve the quality of life for individuals in St. Petersburg's African-American community.<sup>40</sup>

Fannye Ponder also served as president of the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs from 1942 to 1946. Her husband, Dr. James Maxie Ponder, served as the first official city physician to the black community, a position he assumed in 1926. During World War II, Dr. Ponder supervised the physical examinations of black military trainees in St. Petersburg. For her part in the war effort, Fannye Ponder traveled the state of Florida selling war bonds. According to Ponder's son Ernest, Fannye Ponder sold over \$300,000 worth of bonds statewide. After the war, President Truman invited Ponder to Washington and honored her for her work in the Victory War Bond Drive.<sup>41</sup>

Historian D'Ann Campbell, in her work *Women at War*, found the rate of wartime volunteerism among black women nationally to be very low. This was clearly not the case in St. Petersburg, where black wives, mothers, and daughters supported the war effort through volunteer work in their own community every bit as much as did white women in the more affluent neighborhoods.

Activities included planting Victory Gardens, Red Cross work, patriotic teas, and USO involvement. Victory Garden owners registered with Mrs. Henrietta Dominis and were asked to can vegetables for future use. Helen Edwards recalls that the Red Cross had integrated meetings and training sessions during the war, but that the black nurses aides and white nurses aides worked in different areas of the community. Helen's mother belonged to the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and during the war the African-American and white chapters met together at the Bishop Hotel to make bandages.<sup>42</sup>

At school, children brought in their nickels and dimes to buy stamps to fill in books which were then traded in for war bonds. They collected aluminum pots and pans for community salvage drives, an activity encouraged by school teachers and parents. One of Rosalie Peck's favorite pastimes was identifying planes as they flew overhead on their way to or from MacDill Field in Tampa. During dances and sockhops at Campbell Park recreation center, Civil Defense sirens blared in mock emergency and lights dimmed. Rosalie was at one of these dances when the news came that the Japanese had surrendered, and she and her friends ran home, elated that their boyfriends, brothers, and fathers would soon return home.<sup>43</sup>

Rosalie lived near Jordan Park, a public housing project built with monies allocated through the 1938 Wagner-Steagall Housing Act. The first phase (242 units) opened in April 1940, and by the fall of 1941 construction on the second phase was finished. In these early years Jordan Park was a source of great pride for St. Petersburg's black community. Rosalie Peck begged her parents to sell their home and move to the project with its pristine dwellings and paved streets. Her parents, however, had worked hard to save the money necessary to buy their home – she as a maid, he as a gardener – and they had no desire to sell their property. Citrus trees grew in the Peck's backyard, and on Sunday afternoons Rosalie's mother baked cakes and made fresh lemonade for the young soldiers who stopped by to visit on their way to weekend activities at Jordan Park.<sup>44</sup>

While white soldiers frequented the Pier, the Coliseum, and other popular downtown bars and restaurants on their free time, black soldiers were restricted to special functions within the boundaries of the African-American community. Various women's clubs sponsored patriotic teas



at their clubhouses, as well as formal “invitation only” programs at the Manhattan Casino on 22nd Avenue South, where soldiers danced to the music of local bandleaders Jessie Henderson and Fess Clark. They enjoyed movies at the Harlem Theatre and played softball against local teams like Elmer Edward’s Pepsi Cola Kids at Campbell Park. The USO held dances at the administration building in Jordan Park, and when the black soldiers stationed in Tampa could not come to St. Petersburg, local black churches packed busloads of young women off to MacDill and Drew fields to entertain the men on base. Many women met their future husbands at such get-togethers.<sup>45</sup>

This picture of African-American women in St. Petersburg during World War II is far from complete, and yet enough information exists to make some general observations. Although national and local research points to increases in types of employment available to white women during the war years, for the majority of black women life went on much as before the war. The social and economic problems that plagued St. Petersburg’s black community did not abate, and the reality of life in this segregated and race-conscious city meant that African-American women continued to work menial, low-paying jobs to provide basic necessities for their families. Occasionally women escaped these narrow confines by enlisting in the military or securing defense work in northern cities.

It is striking that only one out of the eight individuals interviewed for this study remembered any women who left town to secure new employment during the war. In fact, the war years remain a blur in most of these women’s memories, indicating patterns of consistency in their lives during the 1940s. And personal interviews, the city directory, and the classified advertising section of the *St. Petersburg Times* provide evidence that most local black women continued to find work primarily as laundresses, domestics, cooks, and in other low-paying jobs in service industries. A large military-based clientele simply replaced an earlier tourist-based clientele.

Meanwhile, virtually all of the white women interviewed for a similar study remembered the war years with great clarity, as though their entire world had been reordered for those few years. Even if they themselves did not join the military or work in the defense industry or in other non-traditional jobs, they knew plenty of friends and neighbors who had. Countless articles in the *St. Petersburg Times* attest to this dramatic shift in employment patterns for local white women during the war.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to working at low-paying jobs, African-American women in St. Petersburg performed extensive volunteer work in their own “community within a community,” providing essential services that were routinely furnished white citizens as a matter of course.<sup>47</sup> During World War II, they took on additional nonpaid work in support of the Allied cause, entertaining soldiers, making bandages, engaging in Red Cross activities, selling war bonds, and attending to many other details as they struggled to keep their families together until war’s end.

When the war finally did end, the dream of a “united front” that would improve the lot of minorities ended with it. Nationally, the vast majority of Americans remained unaware that their African-American brethren had sacrificed and suffered as they had. Most did not care. In the aftermath, what mattered most was a return to “normalcy” and women in general were the losers. White women generally lost whatever economic advantages they had gained during the war and



were shuffled back down the economic ladder. For African-American women, as reflected by the experience of black women in St. Petersburg, the economic impact of the end of the war was not as harsh. Since they had climbed but little, the fall was not nearly as hard.

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Smith, "Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Youth Administration," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *Black Women in United States History - The Twentieth Century*, v.4 (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1990), 1100. Excerpts from the speech were not dated.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 1100-1101.

<sup>3</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow. Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to, Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 238.

<sup>4</sup> Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 119.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1888-1950* (Norfolk/ Virginia Beach: The Donning Company, 1988), 299-303; Ellen Babb, "Women and War: St. Petersburg Women during World War II," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 73 (July 1994): 43-62.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Jones, *Labor of Love*, 238 and 252; D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 128.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Karen Tucker Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired – Black Women Workers during World War II," *Journal of American History*, 69 (June 1982): 83.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, *Labor of Love*, 240-241; Anderson, "Last Hired," 88; Robert Hooker, ed., *The Times and its Times, A History* (St. Petersburg: Times Publishing Company, 1984), 43.

<sup>11</sup> Jones, *Labor of Love*, 238; "News of Negroes of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County," *St. Petersburg Times*, June 18, 1944.

<sup>12</sup> Campbell, *Women at War*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> "Negro WAACs Stage Drive for Recruits Here," *St. Petersburg Times*, February 20, 1943.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Rosalie Peck on November 20, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "Three Popular Young Women now in WAACs," *St. Petersburg Times*, April 18, 1943.

<sup>17</sup> Peck interview; Jones, *Labor of Love*, 253; "News of Negroes in St. Petersburg and Pinellas County," *St. Petersburg Times*, December 5, 1943.

<sup>18</sup> Hooker, *The Times*, 65.

<sup>19</sup> Telephone interview with Helen Edwards on November 18, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Babb, "Women and War."

<sup>21</sup> "Woman Supervisor," *St. Petersburg Times*, August 22, 1943.

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- <sup>22</sup> Telephone interview with Doris Johnson (Williams) on February 10, 1994.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview with Rose Williams in her St. Petersburg home on November 11, 1992.
- <sup>24</sup> Edwards interview.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid*; *Polk's 1944 City Directory – St. Petersburg* (Richmond, Virginia: R.L. Polk and Company, 1944).
- <sup>26</sup> “Negro Laundry Workers Walk off Jobs Here,” *St. Petersburg Times*, July 14, 1944.
- <sup>27</sup> “Second Laundry Strike Started by Union Workers,” *St. Petersburg Times*, July 21, 1944; “Negro Laundry Workers Still out on Strike,” *St. Petersburg Times*, July 22, 1944.
- <sup>28</sup> “Negro Laundry Workers Urged to Stick to Demands,” *St. Petersburg Times*, July 26, 1944.
- <sup>29</sup> “Police Check Alleged Threats Against Workers,” *St. Petersburg Times*, July 27, 1944.
- <sup>30</sup> Arsenault, *St. Petersburg*, 269.
- <sup>31</sup> “Negroes Hail Organized Labor,” *St. Petersburg Times*, July 25, 1944.
- <sup>32</sup> “Laundry Workers Take New Jobs, Durrant Says,” *St. Petersburg Times*, August 4, 1944.
- <sup>33</sup> Arsenault, *St. Petersburg*, 264-270.
- <sup>34</sup> Rose Williams interview.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid*; “NAACP to Hear Noah Griffin,” *St. Petersburg Times*, June 18, 1944.
- <sup>36</sup> Rose Williams interview.
- <sup>37</sup> 1926-1945 Yearbook of the St. Petersburg Non-Pareil Club. In the possession of Rose Williams.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid*; Rose Williams interview.
- <sup>39</sup> Gabriele Schulte “Celebration of 50 Years of Service,” *St. Petersburg Times*, November 9, 1992.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>41</sup> Phone interview with Ernest Ponder on April 10, 1993; Arsenault, *St. Petersburg*, 206; Frederik Ebersson, *Early Medical History of Pinellas Peninsula: A Quadricentennial Epoch* (Lexington, Kentucky: Vakyrie Press, 1978), 161.
- <sup>42</sup> Edwards interview; “Victory Garden Owners Asked to Register,” *St. Petersburg Times*, April 11, 1943; “Service Men and Women at Non-Pareil Tea,” *St. Petersburg Times*, December 3, 1944.
- <sup>43</sup> Peck interview.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid*; Arsenault, *St. Petersburg*, 270 and 272.
- <sup>45</sup> Edwards interview; Peck interview; Williams interview.
- <sup>46</sup> Babb, “Women and War.”
- <sup>47</sup> In her interview, Helen Edwards referred to St. Petersburg’s black community as a “community within a community.”

## THE HOMEFRONT ON FLORIDA'S WEST COAST: A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

If the decade of the 1920s came to a close with Black Thursday in October 1929, a new era began with Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. Through the medium of photography, we know a great deal about the history of America during the war years. The editors of *Tampa Bay History* are delighted to share these illustrations of war and peace that come from books and area archives.

Photography entered its golden age during the war years. On the national level, photographers such as Dorothea Lange found acceptance and popularity in such magazines as *Life*, *Time*, and *Saturday Evening Post*. On the local level, studios such as Tampa's Burgert Brothers and Robertson and Fresh produced photographs of extraordinary quantity and quality.

Many of the photographs capture the seeming anomaly of soldiers and sailors flanked by luxury hotels. Such was the reality of war on the Florida homefront. In 1942, military officials concluded that taking advantage of the spacious hotels made more sense than investing in the construction of formal training facilities, such as Camp Blanding. Thousands of Florida veterans came to know the Don CeSar, the Belleview-Biltmore, and even the remote Everglades Rod and Gun Club. Other illustrations suggest that some leisure activities continued uninterrupted on the homefront.

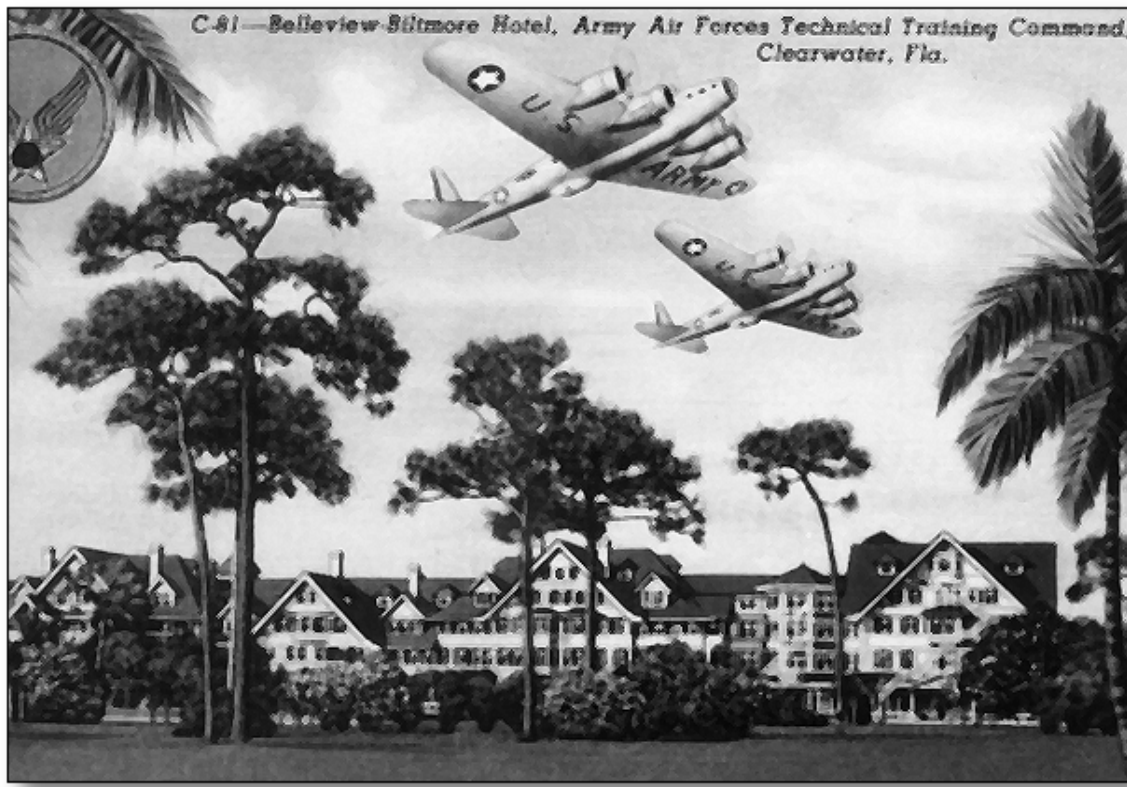
The camera caught the Tampa Bay region at work, play, and war during the period of 1941-45. Photographs reveal home defense units, area night clubs, and myriad volunteer activities. Importantly, we better appreciate that World War II was the last Jim Crow war, a conflict fought with segregated military units. One understands this phase of the war through glimpses of African-American clubs and organizations.

The writing of a caption for a photograph is a necessarily concise exercise. Readers might wish to suggest or construct alternative storylines. For instance, see the photograph of Thelma Gibbons on page 62 and ponder its meaning. When Mayor Robert E. Lee Chancey ordered around-the-clock guard at Tampa's Brewster Vocational School – to repel saboteurs – few would have imagined that one of its students would be a former circus trapeze star. Thelma Gibbons successfully completed welding classes and soon was working at the Tampa Shipbuilding Company. A photographer captured her at the top of a liberty ship mast, a modern "Joan of Arc."



**The Tampa Bay area provided excellent weather for the year-round training of military personnel during World War II. Here planes fly over Tampa.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.



**A postcard advertised Clearwater's role in housing the Army Air Forces's Technical Training Command at the Belleview-Biltmore Hotel.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.





**Even before Pearl Harbor, the threat of war was brought home by the country's first peacetime draft, started in 1940. The members of the Manatee County are pictured here.**

Photograph courtesy of Manatee County Historical Society.



**Military personnel, who frequented businesses like Liggett's Drugstore (located in Tampa at the corner of Zack and Franklin Streets), gave the local economy a big boost during the war.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.





**The Lee County Home Defense Unit, an organization of volunteers who furnished their own uniforms, was created in 1940 to replace the local company of National Guardsmen which was called away for training.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.



**A Tampa company of the Florida Defense Force, shown here in June 1942, stood ready for any wartime emergency on the homefront.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.



**At Bayboro Harbor in St. Petersburg, where USF now has its campus, the U.S. Maritime Service trained some 25,000 seamen during the war.**

Photograph from *St. Petersburg: Once Upon a Time* by Del Marth.



**African-American troops stationed at Tampa's MacDill Field included this 37 mm. gun crew, shown practicing at the gunnery range on Mullet Key.**

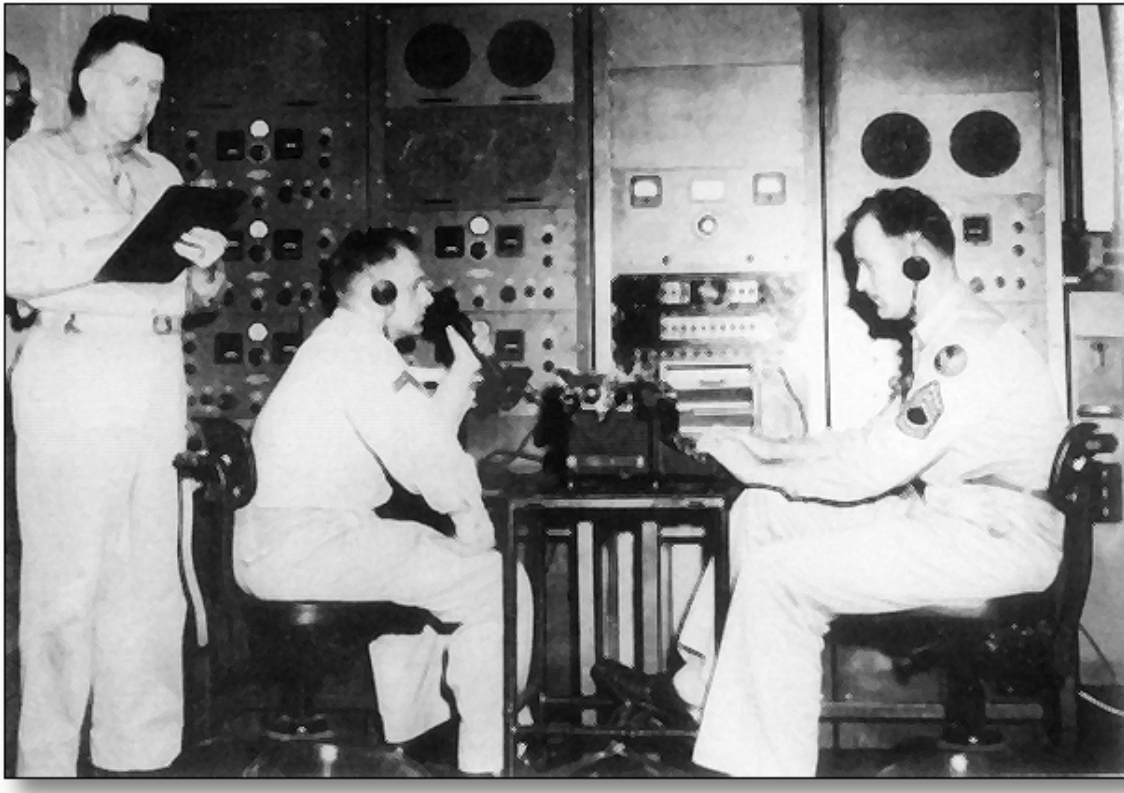
Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Summer 1943 ), a quarterly magazine published at the base.



**A flight crew at MacDill reviewing planned activities before departing on a practice mission.**

Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Winter 1944).





**The airways communications office at MacDill was responsible for all plane-to-base contacts.**

Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Winter 1944).



**Soldiers at MacDill washing one of the bombers.**

Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Winter 1944).



**A black soldier standing guard at MacDill Field.**

Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Summer 1943).





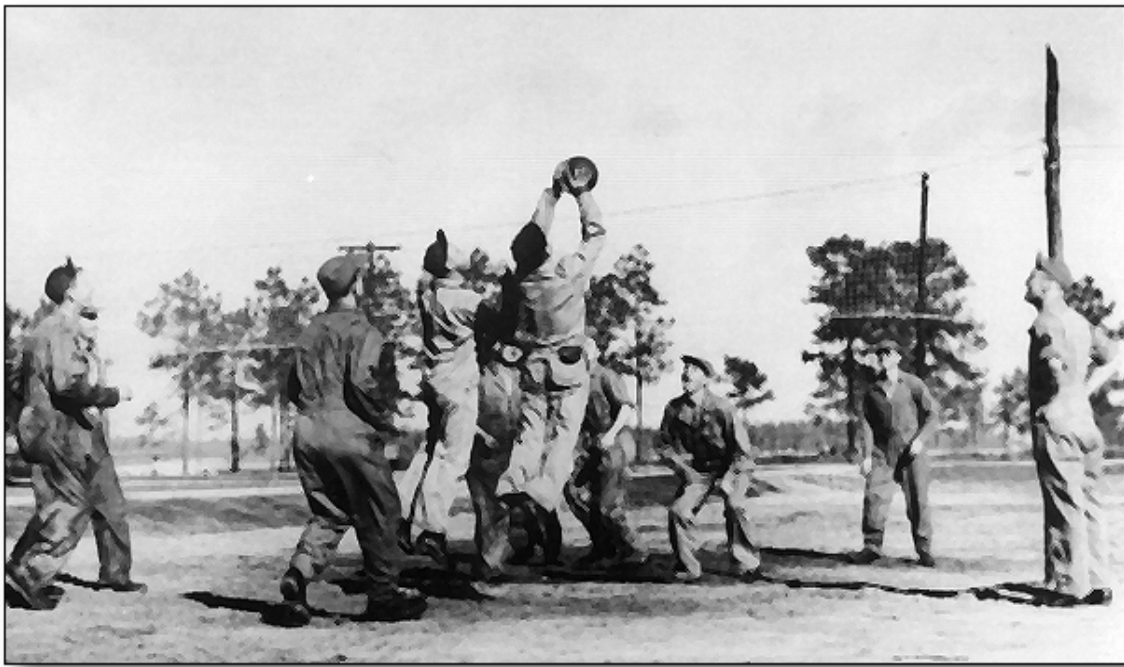
The impact of the war could be seen everywhere, including the year book of Tampa's Hillsborough High School, which showed both faculty and students in uniform prepared to leave for military service.

Photograph courtesy of the USF Special Collections.



**The Buckingham Gunnery School was one of the many training facilities built from scratch along Florida's west coast during the war. Located in Lee County near Fort Myers, Buckingham eventually brought some 20,000 men and women to the area.**

Photograph courtesy of Fort Myers Historical Museum.



**Page Field, another Lee County installation, was built for the U.S. Army Air Corps to serve as a base for bombers and several thousand personnel, some of whom are shown here engaged in make-shift recreation.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.





**In 1943, soldiers relaxing with local civilians at Tampa's High Hat Club, located at 1204 N. Franklin Street.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.



**A banquet for military personnel was given by the USO in Tampa on April 18, 1943.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.



**Rationing was one measure that brought home the reality of wartime sacrifice. As part of gasoline rationing, a national campaign urged drivers to share rides.**

Photograph from *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion* by Anthony Rhodes.



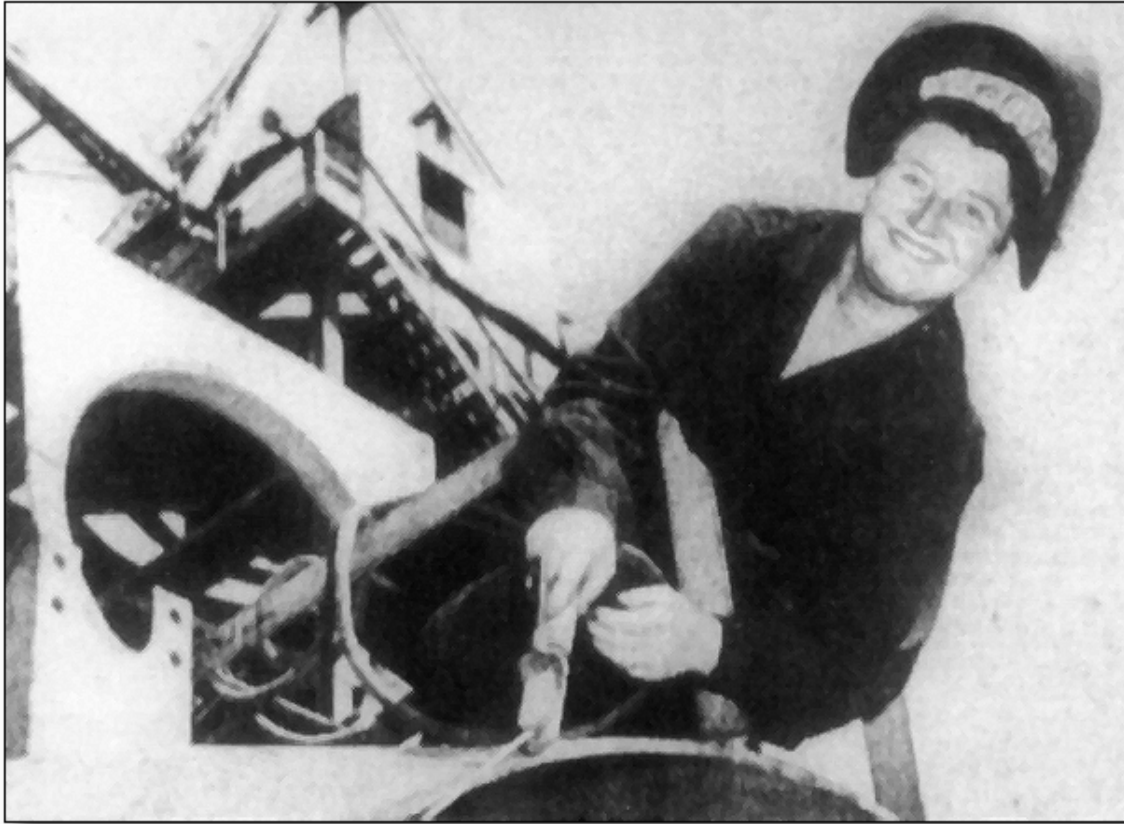
Appeals to housewives to "Get a War Job" included a poster campaign launched by the War Manpower Commission.





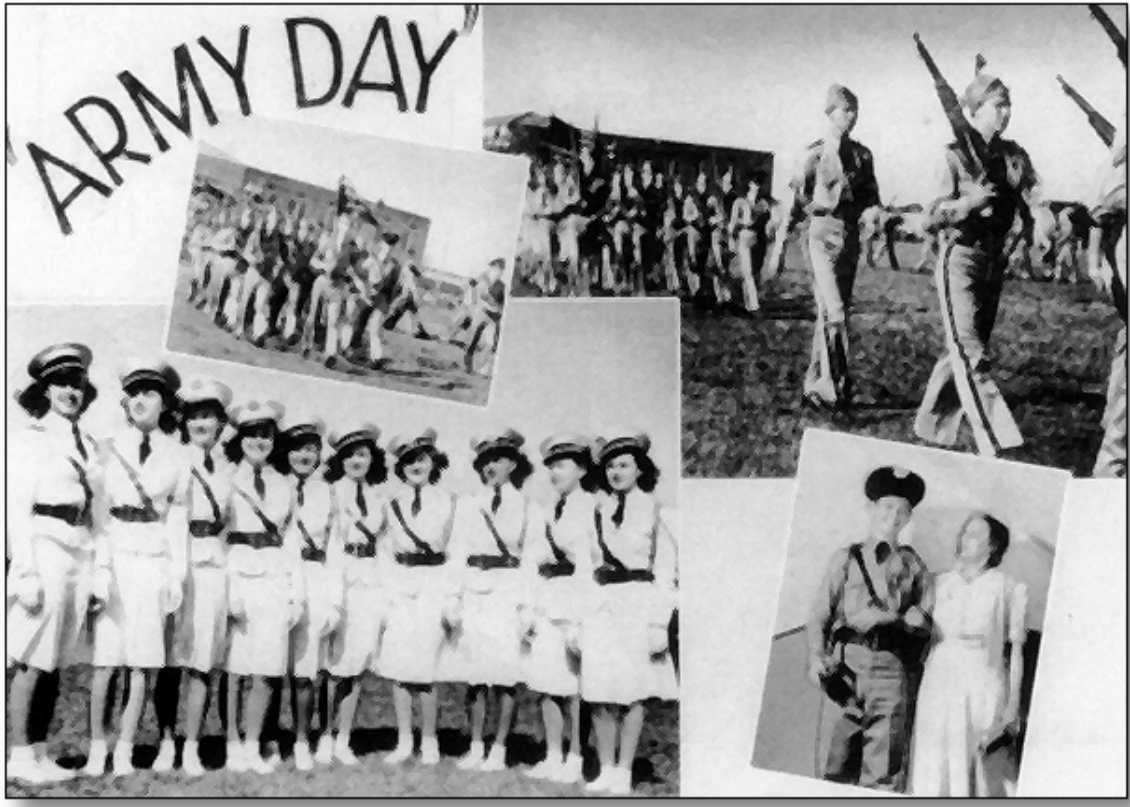
**A woman welder at a Tampa shipyard (photographed in April 1943) suggests that “Joan of Arc” may have been a more important figure than her better known counterpart “Rosie the Riveter.”**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.



**Thelma Gibbons, a former Ringling Brothers bareback rider and trapeze artist, “always wanted to be a welder.” Taking advantage of wartime labor shortages, she learned the trade at Tampa’s Brewster School and then got a job as a welder at Tampa Shipbuilding Company. Her circus career undoubtedly explained her specialty – working on heights such as the ship’s mast.**

Photograph from *Tampa Daily Times*, February 29, 1944.



Students at Tampa's Hillsborough High School parade on "Army Day" in support of the war effort.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.





**A class of women students surround their instructor, Jack O'Neal, at Tampa's Brewster School, where they were enrolled in a fabric class to prepare them for war work.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.



**A Florida girl selling war bonds to cadets training as pilots at Avon Park's Lowick Aviation Military Academy in 1942.**

Photograph from *Pilots in the Sun* by Waneta Sage-Gagne.



**The tradition of voluntarism paid big dividends during the war when thousands of Americans, especially women, donated their time to agencies like the Red Cross.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.





**The “Canteen Corps” of the Red Cross, including these Tampa women, served military personnel during the war.**

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

## CRIME AND RACIAL VIOLENCE IN TAMPA DURING WORLD WAR II

by Catherine Féré

Benjamin Mays and his wife Sadie, two African-American social workers, came to Tampa in 1926 to work for the local chapter of the Urban League. Reflecting upon his arrival, Benjamin Mays later made this comment on race relations in Tampa: “Negro-White relations in Tampa were good, and would so continue as long as the ‘good Negroes’ and the ‘little white angels’ maintained their respective fictions and illusions.”<sup>1</sup> Even though this comment relates to race relations in Tampa more than a decade before the beginning of World War II, the climate seemed not to have change very much. For instance, Mays explained that he and his wife were almost fired from the Urban League because his wife insisted on being called “Mrs. Mays” and not “Sadie.” The white executive secretary of the Tampa Welfare League and Community Chest even demanded that Mrs. Mays refrain from using titles when speaking or writing to other African Americans.<sup>2</sup>

Even though this custom seems a bit strange today, it persisted into the 1940s. When dealing with African Americans, the local newspapers never used “Mr.” or “Mrs.” Instead they always referred to a black person by first name, most of the time followed by his or her last name. Thousands of examples can be found in the *Tampa Morning Tribune*. This custom is exemplified in an article of September 1942, which described a future program of the Tampa Urban League. In this article, the African-American administrators of the league were not referred as Mr. or Mrs. On the other hand, these titles were used for the white members of the league, some of whom actually held lower positions in the league than blacks.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the 1940s, African Americans in Tampa, and all around the United States, fought against discrimination and exclusion. The war period influenced their decision to act. Neil A. Wynn explains in his study of African Americans during World War II that “blacks immediately recognized that the war provided a crisis in which rights could be fought for and won.”<sup>4</sup> Inspired by the “Four Freedoms” of Franklin Roosevelt, many African Americans demanded racial equality at home. Even though the task of black troops was to fight for freedom overseas, many realized that without an improvement in domestic race relations, the United States would not be able to play an important international role.<sup>5</sup>

It is very difficult to find anything about the feelings of African Americans toward the war in Tampa’s local press. There seem to be no surviving copies of the *Florida Bulletin*, which was the weekly black newspaper published in the area. The white press rarely report on African-American activities or concerns. The only articles that can be found are reports of either criminal activities or African-American involvement in the army and in community services. However, on the national level, the *Crisis* (the magazine of the NAACP) and African-American newspapers, such as the *Chicago Defender*, did comment on the situation. Generally, their editorial columns were dedicated to complaints about discrimination in the military, reminders of the importance of the fight against fascism, and calls for fair employment practices. This latter topic was emphasized, and cartoons as well as articles stressed that many African Americans



**Black Tampans found white-collar employment primarily in their own businesses, such as the Afro-American Insurance Company, whose Tampa employees are shown in this 1936 picture.**

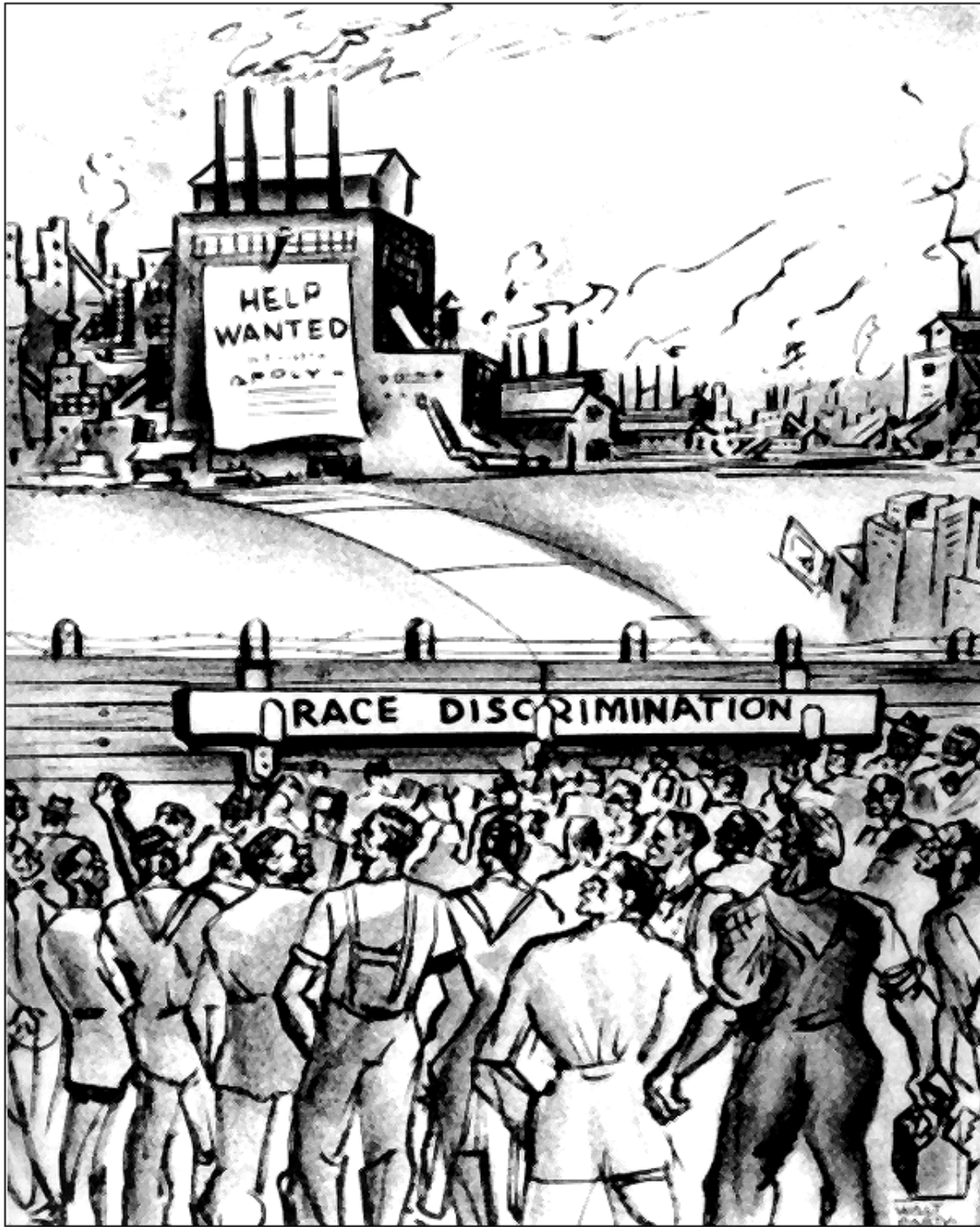
Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

were unemployed while the American war industry was in need of manpower. To portray this idea, slogans such as “Lift the Bar-Beat the Axis” were numerous.<sup>6</sup>

In Tampa, the shipyard was the principal war industry in the area. Even though it employed some African Americans, discrimination in salary was a source of irritation. M.C. Strachan reported the situation to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and asked for help. He explained that skilled black workers were often required to teach white unskilled workers their trade. However, when those whites completed their education, they were either promoted within the Tampa shipyard or sent to other shipyards and earned an average of a dollar an hour, while the African Americans who taught the trade remained in Tampa with an unskilled worker status and a salary of thirty cents an hour. Black workers had little hope of being promoted and were often “assigned to a broom and shovel” when white men were numerous enough to fill all the skilled workers’ positions.<sup>7</sup> Strachan also explained that African Americans were the last hired and the first fired. This situation was reported to Lawrence Cramer, Executive Secretary of the Committee on Fair Employment Practices, but no real sanction against the shipyard seems to have been taken.<sup>8</sup>

These discriminatory practices were apparently not triggered by the war, but had existed before. In 1938 the white boilermakers and machinists of the Tampa Shipbuilding and Engineering Company were able to obtain the dismissal of 500 African-American workers. They also obtained the demotion of most of the 100 remaining black workers. Overall, the situation in





As a way to fight the war more effectively, the NAACP campaigned for an end to racial discrimination under the slogan “Lift the Bar-Beat the Axis.”

Photograph from *Crisis*, (July 1942).

the shipyards did not improve very much during the war. However, the percentage of blacks in the shipbuilding industry in Florida increased slightly in the 1940s. In 1940, only 11 percent of

the state's shipyards' workers were black; by 1950, this percentage had risen to 14 percent.<sup>9</sup> However, the recruiting techniques in Tampa might have been a little peculiar. For instance, on August 10, 1943, eighteen African Americans were jailed because they refused to work on the docks. They were arrested and taken to the hospital for a health test, and those unable to provide a draft certificate or prove they were employed were asked to work in the shipyard. The prosecutor explained that he intended to "clean up this class" by either making them work for private concerns or putting them on stockade crews to work for the city.<sup>10</sup>

Evidence of blatant racism can be found in the press and in the declarations of certain officials. The campaign against venereal disease, which became a significant problem during the war, illustrates the problem. Venereal disease, particularly syphilis, spread through prostitution, and the large number of single men stationed in Tampa contributed to the epidemic. In the minds of community leaders, venereal diseases became associated with African Americans. The *Tampa Daily Times* contented that 45 to 50 percent of the men who contracted venereal diseases in the army were African Americans. In the bars or "jook joints," African-American women were arrested and systematically tested for venereal disease at the city stockade.<sup>11</sup>

Typifying white Tampan's assumptions about disease and race was the mayor, Robert E. Lee Chancey. On the eve of the 1943 Democratic primary, Chancey, who was accused of being too lax on this issue, boldly accused African Americans of being the source of the problem: "If we had no Negro soldiers here, our record for social protection for military personnel would be one of the finest in the United States." However, he did not put the blame on the entire African-American community; he explained that the "better element of our Negroes" was active in changing the situation.<sup>12</sup> This comment also demonstrates the paternalistic attitude toward African Americans. The reference to "our Negroes" shows that whites thought that there were good and bad African Americans. The good ones were presumably the people accepting segregation and exclusion, and the bad ones lived on the edge of society or revolted against the existing system. The 1926 idea expressed by Benjamin Mays of a society divided into "little angels" and "good Negroes" apparently was still very much alive almost twenty years later.

The Urban League, a nationwide social welfare association for blacks, was probably the best known African-American organization in the Tampa area. Some of its events were reported in the local newspapers. The editor of the *Tampa Morning Tribune* even wrote that the Urban League had played "an important part in advancing the community interests of Tampa Negroes and making them better citizens."<sup>13</sup> However, it was not the Urban League which led the fight against Jim Crow in Tampa. The National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People (NAACP) provided legal support for this kind of activity. Created in 1910 by black leaders, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, who were considered radicals, the NAACP sought the abolition of segregation, an end to the white primary, and the equalization of education for African-American and white children. By 1940, almost 90,000 people had joined the NAACP nationally.<sup>14</sup> The Tampa chapter, which dated from 1915, was not as powerful as many in the nation, but it was very active during the war. For instance, the branch filed two suits against segregation by the local bus company. They also demanded integrated elevators in public buildings.<sup>15</sup>





**In a display of patriotism, scouts participated in a flag-raising ceremony in front of Tampa's Urban League Building in 1942.**

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

This increased militancy had gradually built up, but it became more open in Tampa during the war. Nevertheless, the white press did not report the legal fights of the NAACP. Without the records of the NAACP, it would be almost impossible to study the complete story of protest during the war years. The newspaper articles dealing with topics such as the equalization of teachers' salaries only reported the opinion of white teachers or of the superintendent. The opinion of African-American teachers was not discussed by the press, which represented the NAACP as an organization led by Northerners who were corrupting local African Americans. However, the involvement of Tampa's African-American community was critical, and the local leaders of the NAACP were dedicated to the fight for a measure of justice, as will be seen in this article on the black community's fight against police brutality and unfair judicial practices.<sup>16</sup>

Even though no lynching occurred in Tampa during World War II, violence still mediated race relations. One of the most common forms was police brutality, which was rarely condemned except when it resulted in the death of a suspect in the hands of police. In terms of violence perpetrated by African Americans in the community, it is difficult to evaluate accurately the nature and frequency of such acts. The local press was often biased, and objective accounts of an event involving blacks were rare. However, the nature of these crimes attributed to blacks is interesting to study. The large MacDill Army Air Field located in Tampa often served as the

stage for racial tensions. It is important to look at the role of the military police and their relations with African-American servicemen, which ultimately led to a riot in 1946.

Tampa bustled during World War II. The shipyards were manufacturing for the military, and many servicemen were stationed at MacDill, Drew, and Henderson air fields, which instantly created jobs for local inhabitants. Nevertheless, though this was a wartime period, the city seemed relatively calm. Except for the presence of Latin immigrants, the white community was probably less diverse than it is today. Tampa was still a predominantly southern community which had difficulty dealing with the African-American community. The last local lynching had occurred on December 2, 1935, when Joseph Shoemaker was fatally injured during a vigilante attack. Subsequent inquiries implicated some influential members of the community as well as Tampa police officers. The white victim was involved with a local political faction called the Modern Democrats which was associated with the Socialist party. Among other things, Shoemaker was interested in reducing the level of corruption and fraud in Tampa. On November 30, 1935, Shoemaker and two other members were “taken for a ride” outside of town. They were then flogged, tarred, and feathered. This mob killing was not racially motivated since the three victims were white men, but it was a political murder that showed lynching persisted in Florida.<sup>17</sup>

In 1941, a violent attack on an African American took place in Quincy, a little town in northern Florida, and the incident had reverberations in Tampa. Apparently, the victim was suspected of an assault on a white child. Afraid of the gathering mob, he had tried to find refuge at the local jail, but it seems that the sheriff surrendered him to the mob. The suspect was violently killed with no other form of trial. This dramatic lynching was not very much publicized by Tampa’s local press. However, when Westbrook Pegler wrote a national column about it, calling Florida “an adolescent and thus far irresponsible state” and describing Floridians as “creatures having the physical appearances of human beings,” many Tampanians reacted angrily.<sup>18</sup> The editor of the *Tampa Morning Tribune* answered almost immediately to the accusation and explained that “999 of every 1,000 Floridians deplore and denounce lynching.” His main complaint about Pegler’s article was that the author generalized and falsely accused all Floridians.<sup>19</sup>

Readers of the newspaper also reacted to the article. Even though many expressed their anger at Pegler’s misunderstanding of Florida and Floridians, some reacted to the lynching itself. One woman, for instance, explained that she wanted the sheriff of Quincy to be suspended because he allowed his prisoner to be lynched. Other readers who had recently moved to Florida explained that they did not agree with the editor and that serious problems existed. “A. C.” wrote that the statement of the editor on the number of Floridians who deplored the lynching was not true. The reader added that in the past, worse events had occurred in the Tampa area. Finally, others (supposedly belonging to the small percentage of Floridians not condemning the lynching) expressed support for lynch law. One woman wrote: “I hope that if they ever stage another nice, jolly lynching up there ... they will give me the pleasure of being in on it.”<sup>20</sup>

Without the column of Westbrook Pegler, this crime would have been almost unreported in the local press. The readers of the *Tampa Tribune* seem to have been more concerned about what people thought about Florida than about the lynching. MacDill Air Base and the shipyard industry brought national attention to Tampa, and Tampanians were concerned about their image.



Many Floridians sought to overcome the image of the state captured in this 1931 cartoon from a Philadelphia newspaper.

Most condemned the lynching publicly, and many probably realized that this kind of violent outburst against African Americans was very detrimental to the reputation of the town, which was economically expanding.

The local police had frequent violent encounters with black Tampanans. Of course, there are very few articles in the press about this problem, except when the end result of a violent apprehension of a suspect had unexpected repercussions. This happened after Melissa Williams was arrested in June 1943. This African-American woman was to testify in a case involving Joseph E. McGlamery, city sanitary department superintendent. McGlamery was charged with forcing black prisoners of the city stockade to work on his private estate at Echo Lake. Five of those former prisoners, including Melissa Williams, were willing to testify in court against the superintendent.<sup>21</sup> Several days later she was arrested by the vice squad for "being drunk and creating a disturbance."<sup>22</sup> When she appeared in court the next day, her face was badly bruised, and she was taken to the hospital. The physicians who examined her found her "insane."

According to the examining physicians who reported to the judge in charge of the McGlamery case, her state could not be entirely attributed to the police violence, but the beating triggered her insanity.<sup>23</sup> Mayor Robert E. Lee Chancey, who had appointed McGlamery to his post in 1941, ordered an investigation. The report concluded that Mrs. Williams had resisted the arrest and one police officer had to slap her face with an open hand to calm her down. The driver of the police van that brought Mrs. Williams to the police station said that she was fine when she entered the wagon, but that he noticed that “her face was cut and bleeding on one side” only when she stepped out of the wagon. When this report was made public, Mayor Chancey commented that “there was nothing unusual” about Mrs. Williams’s arrest. He continued by stating that “the police officers handling the matter used little violence” during the arrest. Chancey specified that the policemen who arrested Mrs. Williams did not know that she was a witness in the case involving Superintendent McGlamery.<sup>24</sup>

It is impossible to know what really happened at police headquarters on June 9, 1943. Journalists did not question the official report, and no further investigation was ordered. A few weeks later McGlamery was found not guilty. It seems, however, improbable that a single woman was such a threat to three police officers. Even though she might have been violent at the time of her arrest, the seriousness of her bruises is difficult to explain. Very few cases of this kind were reported in the press. Mrs. Williams’s beating would probably not have been reported if she had not been a witness in a case involving a city official. However, other cases lead to the conclusion that many similar incidents occurred in Tampa.

Simon Peter Taylor was an African American living in Tampa. On September 2, 1944, a Deputy Suarez went to Taylor’s apartment to deliver a “writ of replevin” because he had skipped a payment on furniture he was buying. Mrs. Kathryn Taylor was alone when she answered the door. Deputy Suarez left the apartment and met Taylor in the street. According to eyewitnesses, Taylor said that he did not want anyone to take the furniture and walked away from the police car toward his house. Deputy Suarez followed him, crossed the street, and started to beat him with a stick. Taylor answered to the blows by seriously injuring the policeman with a knife.<sup>25</sup> During the struggle Officer Suarez took his gun and shot at Taylor’s feet, but Taylor seized the gun and fatally shot the policeman. He then fled to Alabama to escape the police, but he was arrested and returned for trial.<sup>26</sup>

Even though this attack ended up in the killing of a police officer, it demonstrates quite clearly that the police officer was very aggressive toward the suspect. At the time of the attack the policeman was not legally on duty, but he did not seem to have a problem with attacking Taylor anyway. It is doubtful that Suarez would have acted the same way if Taylor had been white. After all, at the time Simon Taylor was only accused of delinquent payments on a bill!

Taylor was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to the electric chair by the judge. The first-degree murder charge implied that Taylor had acted with premeditation, which seems dubious according to the testimony of the witnesses. Fortunately for Taylor, the local NAACP decided to help him, and attorneys from the national office took the case to the Florida Supreme Court. On June 29, 1945, the Supreme Court reversed the original judgment and charged Taylor with second-degree murder, sentencing him to life imprisonment. Only one justice dissented from the opinion of his colleagues and declared that there was enough evidence to convict Taylor of first degree murder. However, the court’s majority explained that the racial difference of the



two men was important: “In this case, the deceased was a white man and the appellant a colored man.” They concluded, “When the two meet in combat, it is usually violent.”<sup>27</sup> This dramatic incident demonstrates that policemen could be extremely aggressive toward African Americans. It also clearly demonstrates the bias of a local court which sentenced Taylor to death on the ground that he killed a white man, not so much that he defended himself against an attack. Had Taylor been white, this dramatic incident might have never happened, and if it had, the court would probably not have sentenced him to the electric chair.

The Flowers case is perhaps the best example of police brutality, as well as discrimination in the local judicial system. On the night of November 10, 1941, Catherine Oaks was raped by an African American who broke into her apartment. The aggressor asked to meet her on the next day on a bridge in Tampa. Mrs. Oaks went to the place, accompanied by the police. She recognized her assailant, but the police lost his trace and failed to arrest him. In a restaurant close to MacDill Air Base, she seemed to have later recognized her assailant, five months after the crime. On the basis of this identification, Edgar Flowers was arrested on April 23, 1942.<sup>28</sup>

Flowers was arrested and questioned without being informed of the charges pending against him. This questioning was very peculiar. Flowers, nineteen years old, was taken for “a ride” in a police car for an hour and a half, and he was asked if he recognized the premises of Mrs. Oaks. He was then fingerprinted, and an officer explained to him that his fingerprints had been found in the house of Mrs. Oaks. This was a false statement. An officer then took Flowers to the apartment of Mrs. Oaks and asked him to show how he had entered the house: The officer basically asked him to confess to a crime he was still not aware he was charged with. Flowers explained in his deposition how the officer got his confession: “He first asked me what time I was there.... I said I was there about nine o’clock.” Flowers later reported that the police officer responded: “You are a God damn liar.” He then explained to the defendant that he was there at twelve o’clock. Flowers, afraid of the police and fearing to be lynched, said that was true.<sup>29</sup>

Other considerations may also have pushed Edgar Flowers to confess. He was married, and his wife was pregnant and sick. The police took Mrs. Flowers to the police station for questioning, and the suspect saw his wife entering the station with two policemen. This pressure surely influenced Flowers in his declarations. In the evening Flowers was transferred to Clearwater, and the police explained that he could not stay in Tampa for his own security. Flowers was already afraid for his life, and this statement did not reassure him at all. The next day he was brought back to Tampa to confess his crime. In the presence of Chief of Police W.D. Bush, Assistant State Attorney J.F. Umstot took Flowers’ deposition. The questioning started with someone declaring, “Stand up, you black son of a bitch.” Flowers was asked how old he was. When he replied, one of the officers commented, “You have just lived long enough.” Chief Bush answered most of the questions asked by State Attorney Umstot and filled in the details. Flowers had only to answer “yes” occasionally.<sup>30</sup>

The state based its accusation solely on this alleged confession. The only other evidence that Flowers attacked Mrs. Oaks was a man’ shoe found on the balcony of a neighbor. However, the shoe could not possibly have belonged to Edgar Flowers since he had bought a pair of similar shoes only after the November crime. The shoe store manager testified that he did sell similar shoes to the defendant, but that to the best of his knowledge it was after Christmas.<sup>31</sup> Even



though Flowers had a perfectly good alibi for the time the crime was committed, he was convicted without recommendation of mercy. In 1942, in the state of Florida, this meant that Edgar Flowers was sentenced to death.<sup>32</sup>

There being no black attorneys in Tampa at the time, the local NAACP branch hired a white attorney from the Tampa firm Bryan & Bryan to appeal the verdict. Thurgood Marshall and other legal advisors in the main office of the NAACP helped the local lawyers appeal to the Florida Supreme Court and ultimately to the U. S. Supreme Court. This case particularly interested leaders of the national NAACP because they wanted to bring a case of “forced confession” to the U.S. Supreme Court to establish a precedent. Unfortunately, the Florida Supreme Court denied the rehearing of the case. The U.S. Supreme Court subsequently denied the petition for certiorari on October 18, 1943. The only alternative left was to apply to the governor of the state for a commutation of Flowers' sentence to life imprisonment, which was done by Bryan & Bryan.<sup>33</sup> However, the results of this final procedure in the case were neither reported in the press nor followed by the NAACP. The outcome is therefore unknown.

These cases provide good examples of relations between the police and the African-American community. Beatings undoubtedly occurred which were not always reported or brought to court. It seems logical that in the light of the treatment they received, African Americans in Tampa were reluctant to call the police when they needed help. It also explains the fear many African Americans experienced when arrested by the police. In the case of Simon Taylor, the reaction of the police officer who first apprehended him led to a fatal shooting which was probably occasioned by the fear that the officer would not hesitate to shoot him. According to much evidence, and in retrospect, it seems unlikely that Edgar Flowers committed the attack on a white woman. However, the Tampa police obviously needed to arrest someone for this offense. Flowers was an easy target. Even though police brutality existed, and African Americans were accused of crimes they did not commit, it would be too easy to depict a manichean picture of racial violence where police officers were always at fault and African Americans were innocent victims of a racially discriminatory system.

The local press reported many crimes perpetrated by African Americans. In fact, most of the newspaper articles about African Americans were reports of crimes. It is difficult to judge if the accusations were true. In the case of Edgar Flowers, for instance, the press only interviewed Chief Bush and explained that Flowers had confessed to his crimes. According to the article, he was responsible for a series of rapes of white women.<sup>34</sup> Even though Flowers might not have been the man responsible for the rape he was accused of, another African American must have been responsible. Certainly, the rape of a white woman by a black man has always been an explosive subject, and such crimes were highly publicized.

Among the other cases reported in the local press during World War II was that of Douglas Fowler, a janitor at a theater who was convicted of attempted rape of a white woman in 1943. According to the victim, Fowler took her to a room on the second floor of the movie theater and threatened her. He left her alone because he was called by other employees of the theater. She managed to leave the premises. Fowler was sentenced to twenty years in the state penitentiary, two weeks after the alleged attack took place.<sup>35</sup>

Crimes by African Americans appeared frequently in the local press through the first half of the 1940s. For instance, in February 1942, two African Americans were charged with the murder of a Tampa hotel clerk. According to the newspaper article, the aggressors apparently wanted to rob the hotel. They took the cash, amounting to thirty-two dollars, and then shot the night clerk in the basement of the hotel. According to the article, the manager of the hotel heard the shots and stopped the assailant, a Mr. Parker, on his way out by threatening him with a toy gun. Chief Bush was in charge of taking the confession of Parker.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to know what really happened, considering that Parker had been employed at this hotel and had been fired recently. The motive for the crime seems to have been money. Most of the crimes reported in the newspaper during this period were in relation to money.

In mid-June 1942, a white lieutenant in the military and his woman companion were robbed by two African Americans in Tampa. The woman was shot during the attack. The total amount stolen from the two victims was \$25.95. The two assailants burned the car and abandoned the victims on the side of the road. This crime seems to be highly symbolic. The motive of money seems to be again the most obvious one, but attacking a soldier in time of war was more expressive than attacking a wealthy man. Moreover, this military man was accompanied by a white woman. The aggressors were obviously not only looking for easy money. The Tampa police quickly organized a roundup of more than sixty suspects. On June 24, less than a week after the attack, two men (James Allen and Albert Fleck) were arrested for the felony. Less than forty-eight hours after their arrest, the two suspects were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>37</sup>

Other crimes by blacks were reported in the newspapers. Most of the criminal actions reported were robberies and small larcenies. For instance, in 1943 an African-American maid was accused of stealing thirty cents from the purse of her employer. She was also accused of burning the purse, full of bills, after the theft. Even though the accused later explained that the police had forced her to sign her confession, she was convicted of grand larceny.<sup>38</sup>

It would be wrong to conclude that African Americans were more involved in crime than white Tampans. However, the newspapers' focus on African Americans and crime in the city sometimes gives the impression that the black community in Tampa was only composed of criminals! This conclusion, of course, is erroneous.

The MacDill Army Air Field was built in 1939. This military installation brought economic expansion to a Tampa weakened by the decline of its cigar industry. At the peak of the war, 15,000 servicemen were stationed at MacDill. They came from all parts of the country. Even though the air corps was not yet integrated, black troops were also stationed at MacDill.<sup>39</sup> Relations between African-American soldiers and the military police became a source of conflict, and even violence throughout the United States. The frustrations and anger that accumulated over the years exploded in a series of ugly incidents and a riot at MacDill in 1946, right after the end of the war.

African Americans played a significant role in the military during World War II, and their treatment sparked a number of disputes. Even though articles on the efficiency of black troops appeared in newspapers, many African-American leaders deplored the way training camps were



**African-American soldiers from MacDill Field marching in downtown Tampa in support of a 1944 scrap drive.**

Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Winter 1944).

segregated and the lack of opportunities for black men in the military.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, General Dwight Eisenhower publicly praised the courage of black battalions stationed in Africa. He cited the “steadfastness and bravery” of those troops.<sup>41</sup> The *Tampa Tribune* published at least two major articles describing the importance of black troops. A journalist explained that after a visit at MacDill, he concluded African-American soldiers were not anymore “workers,” but that they were “fighters.” Black soldiers were mostly assigned to engineering units which were in charge of supplies in the camps and overseas. Even though elite battalions existed, the majority were not assigned to responsible positions, at least at the beginning of the war. However, the *Tribune* reporter seems to have been very enthusiastic about the tasks given to those troops. He described their assignments as “missions ranging from the dangerous job of penetrating alien territory to laying down advance airdomes for the air corps.”<sup>42</sup> Another article presented the air corps as “standing for equality, fellowship, and opportunity.”<sup>43</sup>

Despite this supposed climate of liberty, equality and fraternity that characterized the military according to the local press, several conflicts between the military police and black servicemen took place in Tampa. In a case reported to the NAACP, Julia Padron, cousin of Frank V. Stovall who was stationed at MacDill, reported that in June 1943 an African-American soldier had been killed by the military police. This incident happened during the dispersal of a crowd. According to the testimony of Stovall, African-American soldiers had become scared and decided to arm themselves. Two military police learned about it and searched through the barracks to find the arms. Stovall, along with eight other soldiers, was accused of attempting to incite a riot.<sup>44</sup>



**A unit of black troops stationed at MacDill Field.**

Photograph from *Thunderbird* (Winter 1944).

Stovall's sister-in-law, an NAACP member, alerted friends about this situation. She was scared her brother-in-law would be hurt because he was from the North: "The stories that come here at the office from camps in the south are enough to frighten me."<sup>45</sup> After being court martialed on October 15, 1943, and sentenced to a term of ten years, Stovall had his sentence commuted to five years. He was finally sent to a rehabilitation camp at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Milton Knovitz, assistant special council for the NAACP, explained that usually a person was not kept more than six months in such a camp and was later restored to active service.<sup>46</sup> The local press in Tampa did not report the arrest of the soldiers nor the killing which, according to Stovall, triggered his conviction.

On August 3, 1943, twelve African Americans were charged with inciting a riot and interfering with police when they protested the arrest of a black soldier who was accused of stabbing a dog. According to the *Tampa Daily Times*, a crowd of African-American civilians formed around the military police station, located on Central Avenue in the heart of Tampa's black district, where the suspect was being questioned. Fifty military police and twenty city policemen were called to disperse the crowd, and fights broke out. The journalist reported, "Several Negroes suffered bruised heads in the scuffles," and he also noted "slight injuries" on the side of the police. Even though the military police were called and soldiers were on the scene, the city prosecutor explained that the disturbance was caused by "Negro hoodlums who hang around pool rooms





**A view of Tampa's Central Avenue in the 1940s.**

Photograph courtesy of the *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*.

and jook joints on Central Avenue and have many times defied Negro Military Police stationed in that district.” He further remarked that he would suggest to military authorities that “the area be included in the ‘off limits’ zone.”<sup>47</sup> However, since the USO recreational facility for black military personnel was located in this area, it would have been difficult to forbid soldiers on Central Avenue.

What might have triggered violence and rebellion by black troops was the discrimination they constantly faced. The mistreatment particularly irritated blacks raised in the North. Segregation was strictly reinforced at the base. In 1945, German prisoners of war, who worked in the kitchen of the base hospital, protested because they had to serve black patients. The local authorities decided to relieve the prisoners of their duties and granted their wish of not serving African-American soldiers. A reporter for the *Atlanta Daily World*, a black newspaper, reported the story and explained that it was an insult to American soldiers who fought in the war and who were not respected.<sup>48</sup>

All these incidents contributed to the heightening of a tense climate at the end of the war. This, along with other elements, led to the riots which took place in October 1946. The black soldiers awaiting their discharges complained about the menial tasks they were asked to performed at MacDill Air Base, while their white counterparts were exempt. They also complained about the

segregation of the base where facilities provided for African Americans were inferior to the ones provided for whites. The troubles started on October 27, 1946, when a group of black soldiers decided to “crash” a dance at the Negro NCO club. A melee erupted, and the military police were called. One black soldier was injured by an M.P.’s bullet, while a military policeman was injured in the temple. The crowd dispersed and then formed again. The angry soldiers marched toward the MacDill Avenue Gate, where they “overcame and disarmed an MP, smashed windows, tossed furniture into the street, dismantled the telephone and barricaded the gate entrance,” according to the official report of the Army.<sup>49</sup> The *Tampa Morning Tribune* reported that “Negroes placed benches across the road and started hurling stones and sticks against the residents in nearby Gadsden Homes.”<sup>50</sup> According to an Air Force historian, the choice of this residential complex was not accidental. The Gadsden Homes was a government project strictly reserved for whites. Even though the demonstrators shouted “No more Jim Crow laws,” the military officially concluded that the riot was due to Communist agitation. It is interesting to note that as soon as the trouble started, nine city police cars, full of men heavily armed, came to protect the white inhabitants of Gadsden Homes. According to one historian, the MacDill riots were the largest the Air Force ever experienced, except for riots at Travis Air Force Base in 1971. However, the Tampa outburst did not change the situation of black troops. “Limited racial integration” was recommended after the events, but the Air Force did not change its racial policies until almost sixteen years later.<sup>51</sup>

No lynchings occurred in Tampa during World War II, but the methods used by the police and the obvious prejudice of the local justice system still repressed blacks. Under the status quo, it seems that the legal actions organized by the NAACP’s local and national branches raised the morale of the African-American community. Even though the white elite still used force to suppress the black community, it was not done as openly as in previous years. After reading the files on the cases raised by the NAACP, it is difficult, however, to look at the reported crimes committed by African Americans and believe in the culpability of the suspects because of a confession, or even so-called irrefutable proof. So too it is difficult to believe the sole reason for the October 1946 riots at MacDill Air Base was the alleged presence of Communists at the base. Nevertheless, the economic boom in Tampa due to the shipyards and the accompanying national publicity probably helped local leaders realize that open racial violence was to be avoided.

Richard M. Dalfiume has referred to World War II as “The ‘Forgotten Years’ of the Negro Revolution.” This emphasis on the war years challenges the attitude of many scholars of African-American history, who have concentrated their research on the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and 1960s. As a result, there are few accounts of African Americans during the 1940s. However, those years were critical because they marked the beginning of claims of the black community in the United States. As Dalfiume emphasizes, the 1940s were the period when “the ground was prepared for the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>52</sup>

According to NAACP records, the commitment of the African-American community in Tampa to fight unfair practices increased during the war years. The NAACP was very active in all parts of the country, and without the strong support of this organization, the black community of Tampa would have been less active. It seems that the local members of the NAACP felt confident in their reliance on the organization for legal as well as moral support. Thurgood

Marshall was one of the most important leaders of this early movement, and he managed to remain available for counseling on Tampa's local issues as well as on national issues.

Despite tense race relations in Tampa and fear of violent police actions, African Americans in the area did challenge discriminatory treatment. In cases of extreme injustice, the community came together and tried to help by providing legal counsel to people facing police brutality or blatantly unfair sentences. This demonstrates that African Americans were not passive victims, but rather felt strong enough to challenge white authorities. These fights against a discriminatory and unjust system did not take place during world War II by pure chance. The ideology behind the war in Europe and the fight against fascism and for democracy overseas formed a crucial element in this sudden consciousness of injustice and violent repression. "Our war is not against Hitler in Europe, but against Hitlers in America" wrote a columnist of the *Pittsburgh Courier*.<sup>53</sup> This statement summarizes very well the state of mind of African Americans of the time who were prepared to fight for justice at home.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-115.

<sup>3</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, September, 28, 1942, 2

<sup>4</sup> Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1975), 20.

<sup>5</sup> John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A history of Negro Americans*, Sixth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1988), 405.

<sup>6</sup> *The Crisis*, July 1942, 225.

<sup>7</sup> M C. Strachan to Thurgood Marshall, February 19, 1940, Papers of the NAACP: Part 4 – The Voting Rights Campaign. 1916-1950 (Microfilm Edition, Frederick, M.D., 1986), Doc. 87-94, Reel 7. (Hereinafter referred as Papers of the NAACP Part 4.)

<sup>8</sup> Thurgood Marshall to Norman Lacey, September 29, 1941, *ibid.*, Doc. 165, Reel 7.

<sup>9</sup> Lester Rubin, *The Negro in the Shipbuilding Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 42, 45, 54.

<sup>10</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, August 10, 1942, 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, August 15, 1943, 2; September 4, 1943, 2; *Tampa Daily Times*, August 13, 1943, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Tampa Daily Times*, September 1, 1943, 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, September 26, 1942, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 288; Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Norman Lacey to Walter White November 10, 1941, Papers of the NAACP Part 4, Doc. 174, Reel 7. See also Walter T. Howard and Virginia M. Howard, "The Early Years of the NAACP in Tampa," *Tampa Bay History*, 16 (Fall/Winter 1994): 41-56.

<sup>16</sup> J. L. LeFlore to Walter White, November 29, 1941, *Ibid.*, Doc. 179, Reel 7.

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<sup>17</sup> Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa: 1882-1936* (Knoxville: University Press of Tennessee, 1988), 179-84.

<sup>18</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 19, 1941, 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, May 20, 1941, 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, May 23, 1941, 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Tampa Daily Times*, June 4, 1943, 1, 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, June 6, 1943, 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, June 12, 1943, 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, June 6, 1943, 1, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Final Judgment of Florida Supreme Court, June 29, 1945, Papers of the NAACP: Part 8 - Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System 1940-1955 (Microfilm Edition, Bethesda, Maryland, 1988) Doc. 252, Reel 14. (Hereinafter referred to as Papers of the NAACP Part 8.)

<sup>26</sup> Newspaper clipping, October 28, 1944, in *ibid.*, Doc. 218, Reel 14.

<sup>27</sup> Newspaper clippings, *ibid.*, Doc. 221, 252, 253, Reel 14.

<sup>28</sup> Petition for Writ of Certiorari to the Florida Supreme Court, *ibid.*, Doc. 485 to 490, Reel 23.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> E L. Bryan to Thurgood Marshall, July 10, 1942, Papers of the NAACP Part 8, Doc. 325-328, Reel 23.

<sup>33</sup> Thurgood Marshall to Norman Lacey, July 8, 1942, Doc. 618, Reel 22; E L. Bryan to Marshall, April 19, 1943, *ibid.*, Doc. 340, Reel 23; Charles E. Cropley to Marshall, October 19, 1943, *ibid.*, Doc. 414, Reel 23; Bryan to Marshall, October 19, 1943, *ibid.*, Doc. 426, Reel 23.

<sup>34</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, April 24, 1942 13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, January 15, 1943, 9, and January 19 1943, 16.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, February 21, 1942, 5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, June 22, 1942, 1, June 25, 1942, 2, June 27, 1942, 2,

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, May 13, 1943, 5, and May 27, 1943, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Jeff Dunlapp, "Catfish Point became MacDill Field before War," *Tampa Tribune*, October 22, 1971, 1.

<sup>40</sup> Roy Wilkins, "USA Needs Sharp Break with the Past," *The Crisis*, May 1942, 151.

<sup>41</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 25, 1942, 16.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, October 8, 1942, Part 2, 8.



<sup>43</sup> Ibid., November 27, 1942, 24.

<sup>44</sup> Julia Padron to Alice Baird, September 6, 1943, Papers of the NAACP: Part 9 - Discrimination in the U S Armed Forces. 1918-1955 (Microfilm Edition, Bethesda, MD, 1989), Doc. 347, Reel 1. (Hereinafter referred as Papers of the NAACP Part 9.)

<sup>45</sup> Alice Baird to Frank ?, September 8, 1943, *ibid.*, Doc. 345, Reel 4.

<sup>46</sup> Milton Konvitz to Leslie Perry, January 19, 1944, *ibid.*, Doc. 342, Reel 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Tampa Daily Times*, August 4, 1943, 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Atlanta Daily World*, February 9, 1945.

<sup>49</sup> Alan Gropman, *The Air Force Integrates, 1945-1964* (Washington D.C., 1978), 64.

<sup>50</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, October 29, 1946, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Cropman, *The Air Force Integrates*, 66.

<sup>52</sup> Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," *Journal of American History*, 55 (June 1968): 106.

<sup>53</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 21, 1940.



The announcement of Japan's surrender was coupled with news of more American casualties.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

## V-J DAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE TAMPA BAY AREA

EDITORS' NOTE: At exactly 7 p.m. on Tuesday, August 14, 1945, President Harry S. Truman announced in a radio broadcast that the Japanese government had surrendered unconditionally. The news was timed for simultaneous announcements in the Allied capitals of Washington, London, and Moscow. Across America people celebrated the end of World War II in every conceivable manner. After more than three and a half years of war, Americans let loose in a joyous burst of relief. Celebrations in the cities and towns around Tampa Bay mirrored those in other parts of the country, and they are captured in the following excerpts from local newspapers.

### SURRENDER TOUCHES OFF WILD CELEBRATION IN CITY

Last night was a night St. Petersburg will long remember. As the official news that the Japs had surrendered came over the radio promptly at 7 o'clock, even before *Times* extras with big red

headlines hit the streets a few minutes later, a howling, screaming, hysterical mob descended upon Central Avenue. At first, it was a few racing cars, mingling the toots of their horns with the whistles and church bells and wail of the city's sirens in individual proclamation of victory. As the minutes went on they gained steadily in numbers until they were lined up four abreast all the way from Ninth Street to the waterfront.

Before police took hold, traffic jams developed at downtown corners. The din of horns grew in a gigantic, deafening crescendo. Most drivers honked as they drove, literally "sitting" on the horn ring. A variety of noises soon joined the swelling chorus of victory. Whistles shrilled, firecrackers popped, cannons boomed on the waterfront. Street cars clanged. Cars backfired. Kids beat a tattoo on the metal tops of cars. No one seemed to be able to make enough noise. Ten minutes after the show began, Central Avenue was a bedlam. Most effective contribution to the noise making was made by the ACL's Tamiami Champion, outbound, entering into a whistle-cord pulling competition with the Havana Special on First Avenue South with a series of deep-toned hoots.

Within half an hour downtown corners were packed to a point where passage was almost impossible, the mystery of where they all came from exceeded only by the mystery of how they got there so soon. Service men from all branches were much in evidence in the crowds that jammed the sidewalks. They grinned, embraced each other, shouted themselves hoarse, obviously glad that the war was over. There were old people and young people, invalids in wheelchairs and babies in buggies, octogenarians and bobby soxers. Apparently, the whole town had turned out to witness the spectacle, and all were waving flags, blowing horns, beating pans together, swinging clackers, doing their darndest to add to the clamor. The tumult grew as the evening wore on. Impromptu parades formed and marched down the avenue, stopping traffic. One, led by a pretty girl beating two pie pans together, was quickly joined by sailors and soldiers, some with their families, some with girl friends, some even with babes in arms. One crowd of teenage boys formed a serpentine and wove in and out among the traffic, each holding the shirrtail of the boy in front.

It was all like one gigantic vaudeville show. A tour down Central Avenue revealed many startling, even hair-raising sights. One driver, in a black sedan, came tearing down the wrong side of the street and had to be extricated by service men. Another, red haired and red faced, who had evidently been imbibing too freely, leaned out a car window almost to his shins, exhibiting the extra's headlines with a silly grin on his face. A large sign appeared high up on the Rutland building at Fourth and Central: "Hurrah for V-J Day." Riding majestically straight through the center of the maelstrom, his pet rooster perched perkily on the back of the seat, drove "Santa Claus, Indiana," known to all St. Petersburg as one of its colorful characters.

In the harbor, the announcement of peace was greeted by a cannonade and flairs from ships at anchor. Two Piper Cubs did barrel rolls overhead. As the sun set over Tampa bay and ribbons of light sparked from army and navy boats, the Cubs flashed on night lights and continued their high jinks.

At the Veteran's administration hospital at Bay Pines, the news was received solemnly, with a full realization of what it meant to mankind. Crippled soldiers of this war smiled wanly and

looked upward, saying “Thank God, some poor devil won’t have to go through what I did.” Older veterans, those of World War I and the Spanish-American war, quietly discussed how the wars in which they saw action ended. They were happy, but a silent reverence was more than noticeable.

The Don Ce-Sar hospital and its patients probably were the principal celebrants when the news of victory was announced. Emotions were mixed with dumb-foundedness, hilarity and silence. Most of the men were in the auditorium when the news came, viewing the movie, “The Woman in Green.” Less than 30 seconds after the surrender was made public, officials of the public relations office burst in the auditorium and shouted the good news. Soldiers desiring passes were immediately given permission to come into St. Petersburg and help the city with its celebrating. Others, remaining at the Don, were entertained by Bomb-a-Dears, who arrived at the hospital in time for the celebration. Men milled around radios, catching all the latest developments. “Look!” shouted one, “I’m so happy I got goose flesh on my arms.” A former infantryman attached to the 15th air force, Pvt. Louis T. Boyles of Anderson, S.C., had a grim look in his eye when he said, “Nobody who was not out there can really say what the news means. The main thing is that now no more of our guys have to die.”

*St. Petersburg Times, August 15, 1945*

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#### HOW NEWS OF SURRENDER STRUCK MAN ON STREET

Interviewed at random on downtown streets as news of Japanese surrender was received, local residents almost unanimously responded with expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving for the end of the war.

Mrs. C.P. Keeter, 525 Seventh Avenue South: “It means I can have that new house we’ve been waiting to build all these years. My husband has just been discharged from the Maritime service and will return to Gainesville and resume civilian life.”

George F. Hargreaves, 555 Fourth Avenue North: “I believe it is going to result in a lot of people being out of work and necessitate a lot of readjustments. It will bring back three of my nephews in service.”

Fred T. Sumner, real estate dealer, 651 Central Avenue. “I have been in the real estate business here 35 years and I anticipate a resumption in that business such as St. Petersburg has never seen. Peace is going to bring real prosperity to this community.”

John Henry, 425 Fifth Avenue North: “I’m a little afraid to believe it. The country faces a big job now. The peace will be hard to get going.”

Mrs. Mary Faitz, 4001 Fortieth Avenue North: “I shall just keep on working, peace or war. I am employed at Bay Pines hospital and my life will be just about the same.”

Miss Mae Lorimer, 618 Thirtieth Avenue South: “Peace will mean to many of us the safe return of our loved ones, among them my brother, who is in Saipan.”



Mrs. Joseph D. Slaughter, 2447 Burlington Avenue North: "Peace means so many things to me. My husband served with the army air force and was injured in this country. We are now waiting to go back to Philadelphia. I am glad it is all over and we can look ahead once more."

*St. Petersburg Times*, August 15, 1945

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#### V-J DAY CELEBRATIONS OKEH – PROVIDED THEY ARE WITHIN REASON

"Let them celebrate."

This in three words sums up the attitude expressed last night at City Hall [in St. Petersburg] by Mayor George S. Patterson and City Manager Carleton F. Sharpe, both of whom confirmed the report that there were to be no restrictions on the public so long as its celebrations, of whatever sort, stayed within the bounds of reason and did not threaten property and public safety. Prior to word that Gov. C. I. Dwell would decree a 24-hour closing of bars and liquor stores, the city manager, was resting on conferences held some time ago with operators and dealers by former Chief of Police E.D. Vaughn, in which it was decided that the dispensers of wet goods would handle their own problem. The probability was that proprietors would have closed voluntarily-both on behalf of the public and in self protection.

"If the people want to celebrate, let them celebrate," said Sharpe. "They've waited long enough for the big day. So long as they keep in bounds and protect property – so long as it's just good, clean fun – there will be no irksome restraints. That has already been covered in orders to the police department. But along with the fun we should, and no doubt will, find time to give thanks reverently. And when the rejoicing is over, let's all get right back to work, because there may be a hard time coming as we face the next few months of getting back onto a peace economy."

*St. Petersburg Times*, August 15, 1945

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#### WAR'S END NOTHING NEW TO MRS. KRAIKER; SHE'S SEEN THEM ALL SINCE 1865

To most people it is the end of "the" war. But when Mrs. Carrie Kraiker, 1720 First Avenue South, speaks of "the" war, she may mean Civil, Spanish-American, World Wars I or II. She will be 90, August 22. She has two grandsons in service, one in the army and one in the navy and she muses proudly that one of her granddaughters "married a soldier on crutches." Living alone with her dog, "Brindle," doing all her work, even to washing and ironing, her mind bright and her memories vivid, Mrs. Kraiker, who says she's a "damn Yankee," has resided in St. Petersburg about 30 years.

As a child, she says, she shook hands with President and Mrs. Lincoln when they attended a Philadelphia fair, given in Logan Square, for the benefit of soldiers of the Civil War. She went

with her father November 19, 1863 to hear Lincoln's Gettysburg address. The next time she saw him was when he lay on a black-draped catafalque in Independence Hall whence his body was taken en route to burial in Illinois. The wounds of the soldiers of the Civil War were stopped with lint she and other children of Philadelphia plucked from the sugarbags of her father's confectionary business, she said. When, as she says, General Lee, "that gentleman of the south," surrendered his sword to "stubborn Grant," Philadelphia fell to its knees and gave thanks. There was no shouting, she said. "There was no celebration. I can remember the day clearly. It was not jubilation. It was thanksgiving. And groping back through her memories 80 years, Mrs. Kraiker raised the tune of "Marching Through Georgia," and sang it through.

*St. Petersburg Times, August 15, 1945*

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### BIGGEST CROWD HERE DOWNTOWN NO MISHAPS

Thousands of persons from all parts of north Pinellas congregated on [Clearwater's] Cleveland Street last night to celebrate the victory. It was the biggest crowd ever assembled downtown but in spite of the traffic there were no accidents except in one instance where a drunk driver damaged his own car. Police Chief John Swift said the evening passed without any trouble. Policemen were stationed at each corner downtown to control the traffic. The traffic lights were operated throughout the evening.

Central fire station got news of the Jap surrender at 7 o'clock and started blowing the electric fire siren. It continued blowing at intervals until after 11 o'clock. Between 7 and 8 o'clock the fire chief allowed soldiers and other celebrants to blow the whistle. Soldiers often were stopped on the street to be kissed by girls and older women. At the corner of Garden and Cleveland four quarts of liquor started circulating among a small group of servicemen. Within a short time one of the soldiers was in the middle of the street directing traffic. Police escorted him to safety. At the height of the celebration Fire Chief Luke B. Martin received a call from a woman asking him to stop blowing the fire siren. "We're trying to hold a prayer meeting and the whistles and other noise are so loud that we can't hear the preacher pray," the woman said. Two other persons called up to request that the noise be stopped.

The attitude of the average soldier was expressed by the sergeant in charge of military police in Clearwater. Said the sergeant: "We're not sure when we'll get out of the army but we know that no one will be shooting at us any more."

*Clearwater Sun, August 15, 1945*

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### VICTORY!

This is victory. We celebrate it. We shake our neighbor's hand and slap him on the back in brotherly happy fashion. We put a flag in the window. We mark down a date forever to be remembered – August fourteenth, 1945.



**Parading with American and Cuban Flags, children celebrate V-J Day in Tampa's Ybor City.**

Photograph courtesy of *Tampa Tribune*.

But there is something else to be remembered. From every town in this country young men in uniform went forth to battle. You might say that from this part of Florida a certain number of young men went out to defend this part of Florida – to defend the United States – to defend the Allied people of the world. To defend us. Fifty of them will never come back to this beautiful place where once they went to school, played ball, sailed boats, went hunting and swimming together. Fifty of them. They were the hostages that we people of northern Pinellas County gave to War. For them there is no day of victory – August fourteenth, 1945. For those who loved them, there is no gladness on this day. Only the bitterness of loss. There is only one thing we who lived to see the victory they gave us, can do for them. We can see to it so long as we shall live that there shall be no more wars upon this planet.

*Clearwater Sun*, August 15, 1945

#### HILARITY MARKS OFFICIAL WORD OF END OF WAR

Bradenton paid hilarious tribute to peace last evening, following President Truman's announcement at 7 o'clock that the Japs had accepted the terms submitted by the Allies on Aug. 11. It wasn't long after the announcement before the siren and Big Ben were blasting the air, and hundreds of automobiles, many loaded to capacity by happy riders, toured the downtown section, blasting their horns and many cheering and singing. A group of boys rode about the city on

bicycles to which were tied tin cans or metal buckets which as they dragged over the streets, made a resounding racket. By 8:30 the streets in the business section were filled with people and the cars at some points were so numerous as to create temporary traffic jams.

City Council had gone into session at 7:30 but for the first half hour the din was so terrific that little could be accomplished. Particularly trying to the Council and audience was the power-light whistle, known as Big Ben. It blew and blew long after the city siren had ceased its din. Superintendent Jim Newman of the Power Company, attending the session was asked to stop the whistle, police reporting that a large number of prominent local people were at the plant, each taking his turn a sounding Big Ben. By some means or other the whistle was stopped about 8 o'clock. But throughout the long session of Council which continued until 11:30 members were disturbed by the numerous and varied types of street sounds.

*Bradenton Herald, August 15, 1945*

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#### LAKELAND COMES TO LIFE IN NOISY CELEBRATION AS ANNOUNCEMENT OF PEACE IS RECEIVED HERE

Lakeland came to life with horn-blowing and lusty cheering last night as official news of the Japanese surrender was announced at 7:07 p.m. by Mayor William Cade with repeated blasts on the city's deep-toned light plant whistle. Crowds gathered quickly on downtown streets and congregated at corners. Cars, most of them with horns going full blast, rapidly filled the streets and in a matter of minutes an impromptu motorcade was making a merry-go-round of the business section. Faces were wreathed in smiles. A pretty girl in a big car stopped long enough to shake her clenched hands aloft in a victory salute to the crowd.

But aside from the noisy horn-blowing, first demonstrations were restrained. Comments from pedestrians along the sidewalks were almost philosophic in their calm. "Well this is it!" was the comment most frequently heard....

Long after the victory whistle had blown cars with horns going full blast were still piling into the whirlpool of downtown traffic. Good-natured policemen with smiles on their faces materialized at intersections to keep traffic rolling but at first made no effort to curb the horn-blowing. An excited elderly man on a downtown corner had a round box of cigars and was passing them out at random. A hilarious passenger in one car thrust out a bottle of beer to the occupant of a car going in the other direction. It was promptly accepted.

*Lakeland Ledger, August 15, 1945*

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#### PLANT CITYANS CELEBRATE PEACE

Plant City welcomed the news of Japan's surrender Tuesday night with jubilation, gaiety and noise. Shortly after the news was flashed across the world at seven o'clock, the din and the noise started. The air raid siren, silent for so many months, blew lustily; the fire whistle tooted and





**In Ybor City, V-J Day touched off widespread rejoicing.**

Photograph courtesy of *Tampa Tribune*.

snorted. Excited Plant Cityans dashed out of the picture shows with broad grins on their faces to watch the celebration. Almost immediately, the downtown section was crowded with people and the streets full of cars, all tooting horns. Little knots of soldiers with their girls gathered on street corners with smiles as bright as shiny brass buttons.

*Plant City Courier*, August 17, 1945

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### WAR'S END BRINGS 'A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN' TO TAMPANS

Tampa awoke, although slowly to a new life today with a light heart-and a heavy head. After three years and nine months, "it" finally came – the end of the war – and Tampa did its full share of celebrating. Most of the city was closed up tight today and there were few who weren't glad of that. Most Tampans needed at least a day to recuperate, and most of them will get another holiday tomorrow.

By 7:30 o'clock last night, a half hour after the announcement, downtown Tampa, Ybor City and West Tampa was a mass of milling, yelling crowds and honking automobiles. And the tempo along Franklin St. did not slow down until the early hours this morning. Police Chief Eddings, who has had a lot of experience counting Gasparilla crowds, estimated last night's peak Franklin St. population at 60,000 to 70,000. When someone finally was located to blow it, the Tampa

Electric Co. whistle used for special Tampa celebration for years and since the war began only for air raid drill signals, gave the celebration “that real old fashioned touch” some Tampan felt.

Although all liquor outlets were closed for a 24-hour period, quart bottles looked like standard equipment for at least half of the celebraters. Some even came supplied with glasses and offered free drinks to every passer-by. City Police, falling in with the spirit of the occasion, made only five arrests, however. Four of those were released on bond. Service men and civilians joined in the wild demonstration of their joy. In front of one department store, a group of Army Air Force officers and gunners joined in a chorus of America. Some officers saluted enlisted men and in front of a drug store a private, first class, offered a major a drink-and the offer was accepted. Bootblacks, Negro and white, gave free shines to every service man who would stop long enough to have the job done.

Young and old joined in the kissing contests. Acquaintance was not necessary although some girls insisted on kissing only sailors and some service men preferred blondes. On one corner, a woman with snow white hair kissed every service man who came by. A snake dance wriggled its way down the middle of Franklin St., where automobiles packed with riders and strung with anything that would make noise tried to make their way through the muddle. Floating down from upper stories, scraps of newspaper and swirls of toilet paper covered the crowd.

*Tampa Daily Times, August 15, 1945.*

\* \* \* \* \*

#### SURRENDER SIDELIGHTS

Girls beating on pie tins, sifters, pots, tin cans...A little Negro boy pulling a red wagon filled with two crumpled garbage cans while other boys followed alongside, beating on the can with stick and other tin cans...The Tampa-to-Port Tampa City train blowing its whistle frantically all the way down the line...Soldiers and sailors democratically sharing the fenders of the same car exchanging white caps and overseas hats...A fire burning in the center of Twiggs St. just off Franklin St. with soldiers, sailors and civilians detaching themselves from the streaming crowd long enough to add fuel to the blaze and snake-dance around it...The drizzly rain which no one noticed.

*Tampa Daily Times, August 15, 1945*



Hernando de Soto

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The De Soto Chronicles: The Expedition of Hernando de Soto to North America in 1539-1543.* Edited by Lawrence A. Clayton, Vernon James Knight, Jr., and Edward C. Moore. Tuscaloosa, 1993. University of Alabama Press. xxx, 564 pp. (vol. 1) and 558 pp. (vol. 2). Illustrations. Glossary. Index. Bibliography. 2 vols. cloth – \$50.00

These two volumes are a culmination of an intense interest in Hernando de Soto whose expedition into today's United States' heartland in 1539-1543 was the first real European venture of this nature. While some years earlier Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca had walked from his shipwreck on the Florida shores to Mexico, De Soto had with him at least 600 persons, plus horses, dogs and equipment. Cabeza de Vaca had survived. De Soto perished and was buried in the Mississippi River, but his party continued to Mexico. Both expeditions landed somewhere in the Tampa Bay area and then marched north into the interior of today's United States. The arrival of the De Soto expedition forms one of the most significant chapters of Tampa Bay history, and two of Florida's sixty-seven counties are named in honor of Hernando de Soto.

These two voluminous tomes are neither a biography of De Soto nor a modern account of the expedition. Such studies are easily available. For example, the excellent contemporary Florida historian Eugene Lyon has provided us with a fine and scholarly account of De Soto and his expedition. The two volumes reviewed here are updated translations of the key primary accounts (chronicles) of the De Soto expedition, and they have never been published together.

There are four pivotal accounts which have provided the great majority of our knowledge of the De Soto expedition. One was written in Portuguese by a "gentleman of Elvas" (his name unknown). Two others are by the Spaniards Hernandez de Biedma and Rodrigo Rangel. The fourth, the longest and best known, is by the Peruvian Garcilaso de la Vega who was of royal

Inca lineage but of mixed parentage. It is called “La Florida” and is known for its literary qualities but is probably inferior in historical accuracy. This chronicle occupies all of volume two. The other three accounts are in the first volume.

The four chronicles have been previously published separately in English translation. Their original publication and later translations have had “an erratic history.” Those interested in that history should read four pages in volume one entitled “Notes on Translation and Names.” It is interesting to note that the large Garcilaso de la Vega chronicle in this edition is actually a newly located translation that was done in the early part of this century by Dr. Charmion Shelby of Austin, Texas. Commissioned to undertake this massive project, she worked for thirteen years with dedication and unmatched expertise while at the Library of Congress, but upon its completion, no funds were available for its publication. Now forty years after her death, it appears in print for the first time.

The editors have kept “the classic translation of Elvas” (the Portuguese gentleman) done in 1933, but with some minor corrections and notes by the Florida historian John H. Hann. The Biedma and Rangel chronicles, which are somewhat shorter, have a new translator in Professor John Worth of the University of Florida.

Besides these four chronicles, some smaller but pertinent pieces are also published in volume one. Eugene Lyon contributed a small surviving fragment by the priest Sebastian de Cañete who apparently had a “narrative” of the De Soto journey. It was located in the Archive of the Indies in Seville by Lyon. Of interest to local readers is a letter of De Soto from Tampa Bay, dated July 9, 1539, in which he tells of an encounter with Juan Ortiz, “a hidalgo native of Seville,” who had come on the early Narváez expedition, had miraculously survived and assumed a native lifestyle which included fluency in the native language of the Tampa Bay area. Ortiz, a valuable advisor to De Soto, has become a legendary figure of Florida history.

These several smaller or fragmentary items, while lacking coherence, add to the value of this splendid publication. Finally, it must be noted that the well-known historian of early Spanish Florida, Paul E. Hoffman, offers a concise but excellent biography of De Soto (in forty-seven pages), using the most pertinent primary and secondary sources. However, to my mind, it should have been placed at the beginning of volume one rather than at the end.

We are indebted to everyone who has contributed to this publication for a well done task. It is recommended that institutions that are interested in American history possess this publication. The De Soto expedition is one of the greatest epics of American history and of Europe's first encounter with the interior of today's United States.

Charles W. Arnade  
University of South Florida





**Victoriano Montiega.**

Photograph courtesy of Roland Montiega.

## BOOK NOTES

*Ybor City Chronicles: A Memoir.* By Ferdie Pacheco. Gainesville , 1994. University Press of Florida. xii, 301 pp. Illustrations. Cloth. \$24.95.

Perhaps best known as “the fight doctor” for his work as Muhammad Ali’s personal physician from 1963 to 1977, Ferdie Pacheco is a product of Tampa’s Ybor City, which he lovingly recalls in this lighthearted memoir of the 1930s and 1940s. A gifted storyteller, Pacheco writes with the instincts of a stand-up comic as he remembers growing up in Tampa’s colorful immigrant community.

At the heart of his story is Ybor City’s fabled Columbia Restaurant, where Pacheco worked as a waiter for two summers – a job with the status in Ybor City equal to that of being a New York Yankee ballplayer, he says. The restaurant’s glamorous doors opened fifteen hours a day to local characters that live as folk heroes in Pacheco’s memory: Pepe Lu Babo, the idiot savant of newspaper circulation; Chef Pijuan, who asked to have a menu buried with him when he died; Pan con Chinchas (“Bread and Bedbugs”), who had once been a reader in a cigar factory; Don Victoriano Manteiga, the resident intellectual, who founded *La Gaceta*, the trilingual newspaper

still published today by his son; and Dr. Jose Avellanal, who experimented with cryogenics on stray cats and practiced law, plastic surgery, gynecology, the ministry, and higher education, all from his “office” in Ybor City’s famed hotel El Pasaje.

Along with these larger-than-life personalities, Pacheco fondly recalls the way he and other Ybor City youth their days and evenings going to movies and dances at the ethnic clubs. Pacheco’s affectionate and humorous recollections capture the spirit that once dominated Tampa’s Latin Quarter.

*Panic in Paradise: Florida’s Banking Crash of 1926.* By Raymond B. Vickers. Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1994. University of Alabama Press. xvi, 312 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$34.95.

Authored by a historian who formerly served as Assistant Comptroller of Florida and head of the Department of Banking and Finance, *Panic in Paradise* examines the bank loan failures of the mid-twenties, which preceded the stock market crash of 1929. During a ten-day period in 1926, Florida and Georgia experienced a banking panic, which produced uncontrollable depositor runs and the closure of 117 banks. Uninsured customers lost millions of dollars. During the crisis, Florida bank assets fell more than \$300 million.

The banking debacle has been blamed on the collapse of the Florida land boom in 1926. It was believed that the precipitous drop in real estate values created a regional recession that caused the banks to fail. Bankers were not regarded as the problem, and they were defended by bank regulators, who blamed the crisis on the public.

Drawing on banking records that were legally sealed for almost seventy years, *Panic in Paradise* shows that despite official disclaimers and previous historical accounts, virtually every bank failure that occurred in Florida and Georgia during 1926 involved massive insider abuses and/or a conscious conspiracy to defraud. Depositors did not know the true condition of the banks because insider abuses and fraud were hidden by regulatory secrecy. According to Vickers, bank examiners reported the self-dealings to senior regulators, who passively watched the looting and withheld the truth from depositors. Even when lawsuits disclosed the chicanery, state and federal regulators misled the public. Despite official denials, customers panicked, and the ensuing runs caused the banking crash.

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COVER: A group of Red Cross workers who ran a mobile canteen in Tampa during World War II. See the photographic essay on page 48. Photograph courtesy of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

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## NAZI WAR PRISONERS ARRIVE IN DADE CITY

"A Unit of 250 German prisoners arrived on a special train this week from a camp in Augusta, Ga. and have been moved into the camp on the eastern edge of Dade City. Buildings to house the prisoners and the force of sixty military police have been built under the direction of Army engineers. The military personnel of the camp are permitted to live off the reservation when not on duty and many of them have been joined here by their families and have taken apartments in Dade City. The prisoners were brought here to work at the plant of the Pasco Packing association and themill at Lacochee, operated by Cumer Sons Cypress Co. Most of the prisoners are young and groups of them in the camp last evening were singing. An officer remarked that they would no doubt soon be singing 'God Bless America,' as they seem rather content to be here."

*Florida Times Union*, April 16, 1944.