World War II on the Homefront - Rocky Mount, NC
DEFEND AMERICAN FREEDOM

IT'S EVERYBODY'S JOB
While soldiers were doing their part to defeat the Axis powers in Europe and in the Pacific, Americans back home did their part to help in the war effort.

Whether by assuming jobs they were not accustomed to, doing without things, or finding a new way of life, it was a time when communities pulled together in the war effort.

Rocky Mount Mills and surrounding areas was no exception.
Rocky Mount Mills (RMM)

- RMM provided material for the military in every war America had fought in since its inception in 1818.
- World War II was no exception. RMM cotton yarn production was used for uniforms, parachutes, belts, backpacks, and many other items used by the military to outfit soldiers.
- Through the leadership of Hyman Battle, Rocky Mount Mills was a national leader in production, labor changes and examples of morale.
The Riverside Bulletin was produced at Rocky Mount Mills for soldiers who had been employed there, their families, and current employees.

This publication gives insight into the time period, work and life at the Mill, and the relationship between soldiers overseas and the home front of Rocky Mount, NC.

Review the issue provided to you and answer the corresponding questions.
Why do you think RMM needed to increase production?

Why was yarn a “vital part of the war program”?

What clues does this page offer in terms of a war’s impact on the economy?

Listen to Lorene Smith discuss working at RMM during World War II.
What products were made from the yarn at Rocky Mount Mills?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partial List of Wartime Uses of Rocky Mount Mills Yarns</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft Engine Covers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft Safety Belts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artillery Covers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandoleers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barracks Bags</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bedding Rolls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camouflage Netting</td>
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<td>Canteen Covers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cartridge Belts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coal Bags</td>
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<tr>
<td>Command Car Tops</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooking Bags</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Pyrotechnic Parachute Cord
Rope
Rucksacks
Sails
Sand Bags
Shelter Tents
Signal Corps Wire
Stretchers
Tarpaulins
Truck Tops
Utility Repair Shops
Water Bags and Buckets
Water Sterilizing Bags
Who worked at RMM during WWII?

- With men called overseas, there was a need for new labor in factories, farms, mills, etc.
- Young people and women began to fill that void, taking the place of their male counterparts.
- This also opened up opportunities for African Americans, although RMM wouldn’t see a true integration of workers until after the 1964 Civil Rights Act.
Women in the Work Force

- By 1945, the number of women in the workplace had by increased by 50%.
- By the end of World War II, 57% of all people employed outside of military service were women.

Listen to [Lo Bowen](#) discuss her experiences at RMM during WWII. She began working at RMM in 1945 as a 15-year-old.
Women During WWII

- World War II provided unprecedented opportunities for American women to enter into jobs that had never before been open to them, particularly in the defense industry.

- Women faced discrimination, but still 350,000 of them served the military in some capacity and five million joined the workforce between 1940-1945.

- Many occupations previously thought of as exclusive to men, such as the aircraft industry, had majority of workers who were women by 1943.

- About 1/3 of women remained employed after the war.
Women at Rocky Mount Mills Rose to the Occasion

Women Doing Fine Job In Carding Department

CARDING DEPARTMENT

The war has brought a lot of changes to the carding department. When all you husky fellows joined the Army, Navy, Marines and the Seabees it was up to the women to step in and do your work. Up to eighteen months ago there was only one woman employee. But look at the situation now!

Today, we have women stripping cards, doffing cards, running drawframes, doffing fly frames, running fly frames, sweeping and cleaning drawframes.
The mills, with women as the main laborers, were finishing more product than the year before when men were the main labor force!
Rationing

- Men overseas needed calories and protein.
- In general, GI’s were provided meals that contained in excess of 3,000 calories and 100 grams of protein.
- To ensure those in the war had enough nutrition, US citizens participated in rations.
The Office of Price Administration (OPA), put price limits and food rations on many goods and products. Examples of products that were rationed by the OPA included:

- Sugar
- Coffee
- Meat
- Cheese
- Canned Milk
- Fish
- Dairy
- Fuel
- Fats
Consumers not only had to have the money to pay for a product but ration stamps as well.

Merchants had to post how many stamps a product required.
How did rationing affect the people at Rocky Mount Mills?
Patriotic Citizens Pitch In

- Community based patriotism led drives to gather supplies the fighting soldiers needed.

- Scrap metal was used for heavy equipment and weapons. Americans contributed church bells, children’s toys, old Civil War cannons, iron fence panels, & other items.

- Paper drives ushered in the recycling of paper products to provide the military with the product it needed. Lumber was in short supply so Americans dealt with restrictions on the use of paper.
Your blood can save him.

Rocky Mount Mills Blood Drive

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 1945

Red Cross Drive Gets Underway In City

The Red Cross Drive is in full swing in Rocky Mount now. Solicitors are in the mill this week asking for contributions. We sincerely hope that everyone will give their whole-hearted support to this grand organization which is doing such a great job all over the world.
What are some of the ways Rufus Jones asks RMM employees and their families to support the Armed Services?

What is it about these particular items/actions that would be helpful?

How does this compare to the ways people today are asked to support the troops?
Victory Gardens

- Victory Gardens were planted throughout the United States during World War II to help deal with the food shortages that were taking place.

- Victory Gardens made it possible to use the produce that farmers grew for the soldiers overseas.

- Rationing made the amount of canned food available to a family less than they were used to and Victory Gardens could supplement their vegetable allowance.
People planted gardens wherever they could. For those without yards, they used window boxes or apartment roofs.

Schools even planted crops on their grounds and used the produce for school lunches.

Examples of food grown in these gardens included beets, carrots, lettuce, tomatoes and peas.

There were 20,000,000 Victory Gardens that provided 40% of all the vegetables that were grown in America.
Franklin D. Roosevelt Statement Encouraging Victory Gardens | April 1, 1944

“I hope every American who possibly can will grow a victory garden this year. We found out last year that even the small gardens helped. The total harvest from victory gardens was tremendous. It made the difference between scarcity and abundance. The Department of Agriculture surveys show that 42 percent of the fresh vegetables consumed in 1943 came from victory gardens. This should clearly emphasize the far-reaching importance of the victory garden program.

Because of the greatly increased demands in 1944, we will need all the food we can grow. Food still remains a first essential to winning the war. Victory gardens are of direct benefit in helping relieve manpower, transportation, and living costs as well as the food problem.”

Victory Gardens in the Mill Village

Imagine working a twelve hour shift at RMM then coming home to tend your Victory Garden!
War Bonds

- War Bonds provided money for the government to use for the war effort (i.e., paying soldiers and providing uniforms, food, equipment & weapons.)

- War bonds also took cash out of circulation in the economy to slow down inflation.

- The bonds sold at 75% of their value, so you could buy a $100 war bond for $75 and in ten years turn it in for the $100.
Purchasing War Bonds

- Citizens on the home front felt it was their patriotic duty to participate in buying war bonds - 134 million Americans did so.

- The government and businesses would sponsor war bond drives as well as stamp drives to raise money for the war effort.

- The "Stars Over America" bond blitz, in which 337 stars took part (including Rita Hayworth) netted $838,540,000 worth of bonds.
Rocky Mount Mills exceeded expectations when it came to War Bonds.
African-American Contributions

- Over 2.5 million African-Americans registered for the draft in World War II and over a million served, with many of them earning commendations and medals while serving with distinction.

- The **Double V campaign** was a slogan and drive to promote the fight for democracy abroad and within the United States for African Americans during World War II.

- In addition to supporting the war effort in all the ways previously discussed, African Americans also used the opportunity created by job openings to prove their capabilities in positions that were previously unavailable to them.
Rufus Jones was in charge of the “Colored News,” encouraging African-Americans and sharing news about their contributions.
Communication from Home

• It was a big morale boost for the servicemen fighting in World War II to receive information from home, such as in letters or from a copy of The Riverside Bulletin. Generally, letters came from family & friends, but organizations like churches, women’s groups and even factories such as Rocky Mount Mills also sent letters.

• Early on, letters were slow to reach the soldiers - space in airplanes could not be sacrificed for mail. Instead, letters made the journey across the oceans in ships and then had to find the recipient on the battle front. As the war progressed this improved.

• Letters from soldiers rarely reflected the horrors of war. Why worry the family back home? Likewise, news from home was kept uplifting to try to motivate the soldiers, giving them a sense of encouragement.
Hyman L. Battle, who was the Treasurer and Manager of Rocky Mount Mills (and a veteran of World War I) knew the importance of the Riverside Bulletin for the soldiers and the folks on the home front. He encouraged soldiers to write letters so they could be shared with everyone. Soldiers looked forward to letters from anyone just to boost morale and keep up with news back home.
How do you imagine Marvin Nelms felt to finally see a picture of his new-born son?

How does soldier William Earl, a former RMM employee, feel about receiving news from home while stationed in Germany?
Restrictions On Letters

- Censorship was a common practice with corresponding letters. Just in case the mail was captured by the enemy, vital information was protected from falling into the wrong hands.

- Before a soldier’s letter was sent home, his commanding officer would read it to protect against the sharing of troop movements, locations and strength of forces.

- The military would send a telegram home if a soldier was wounded but would give little information on their condition. A letter from a husband or son saying they were alive and well was of great comfort.
As with most factories in the United States, when the war came to a close, men were given their jobs back.

Many women went back to their previous lives, but having proven themselves and new opportunities were available for some.

Kermit Paris’s family worked in RMM for 5 generations, with him starting as a 15 year old in 1942. Listen to Kermit Paris (12:39-15:13) as he discusses hearing about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, entering the service & the end of the war.