

# The African American Women of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion

## Secondary Source

*This document is an excerpt of an article posted in 2014 on the website of the U.S. Army Center of Military History. The center is responsible for the appropriate use of history throughout the United States Army, and it produces publications and educational materials for members of the military and the public. The author is Kathleen Fargey, a historian at the U.S. Army Center of Military History with expertise in the history of quartermaster, support, and ordnance/maintenance units. The full article can be found here: <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>*

In February 1945, warehouses in Birmingham, England, were filled with millions of pieces of mail intended for members of the U.S. military, U.S. Government personnel, and Red Cross workers serving in the European Theater. Airplane hangars held undelivered Christmas packages, and a constant stream of incoming mail added to the already massive backlog of letters and packages... Servicemembers noticed that they weren't getting mail from home, and Army officials reported that the lack of reliable mail delivery was hurting morale. One general predicted that the backlog in Birmingham would take six months to process.

But who would take on this massive task?... Although there were personnel stationed at Birmingham to handle the mail, the system was in chaos.

The Women's Army Corps (WAC) of the U.S. Army was created by a law signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on 1 July 1943. The WAC was converted from the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps which had been created in 1942 but did not have official military status. New WAC recruits underwent four to six weeks of basic training, which included a physical training program, often followed by four to twelve weeks of specialist training. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and civil rights leader Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune successfully advocated for the admittance of African-American women as enlisted personnel and officers in the WAC, although as in the rest of the Army, segregation prevailed. After several units of white women were sent to serve in the European theater, African-American organizations pressed the War Department to extend the opportunity to serve overseas to African-American WACs.

In November 1944, the War Department acquiesced. Despite slow recruitment of volunteers, a battalion of 817 (later 824) enlisted personnel and 31 officers, all African-American women drawn from the WAC, the Army Service Forces, and the Army Air Forces, was created and eventually designated as the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, nicknamed "Six Triple Eight."...

On 3 February 1945, the first contingent of the battalion sailed for Britain. Their ship, the *Ile de France*, survived close encounters with Nazi U-boats and arrived in Glasgow, Scotland, on 14 February, where a German V-1 rocket exploded near the dock, causing the women to run for cover. They traveled by train to Birmingham, England...

In Birmingham, the women of "Six Triple Eight" confronted warehouses stacked to the ceiling with letters and packages. These buildings were unheated and dimly lit, the windows blacked out to prevent light showing during nighttime air raids. Rats sought out packages of spoiled cakes and cookies. As it was a cold winter, the women wore long johns and extra layers of

clothing under their coats while working in these warehouses. The unit members were organized into three separate eight-hour shifts so work continued around the clock, seven days a week. They tracked individual servicemembers by maintaining about seven million information cards including serial numbers to distinguish different individuals with the same name. The women dealt with “undeliverable” mail which was sent to their location for redirection. They investigated insufficiently addressed mail for clues to determine the intended recipient, and they handled the sad duty of returning mail addressed to servicemembers who had died. The women of the 6888th were initially the subject of a great deal of curiosity from the local citizens of Birmingham, who came to watch them at work. [Unit commander] Major [Charity] Adams received official greetings from a number of civilian and U.S. and British military officials. In time, many of the women of the 6888th made friends in the local community and found the locals to be polite and even friendly....

When a male general came to inspect the unit, Major Adams prevented him from viewing the women’s private rooms while some of them were sleeping. After headquarters and off-duty personnel of the unit were assembled in a formation as instructed, the general chastised Major Adams for not having all her troops present. When Major Adams attempted to explain that the women worked three different shifts and that she followed the orders she was given, the general cut her off and threatened to send a “white first lieutenant” to show her how to command the unit. Major Adams’ famous reply, “Over my dead body, Sir,” nearly earned her a court-martial, but the general was subsequently dissuaded from taking that course of action. By the time the same general visited the unit in France, his attitude had changed and he appreciated the 6888th’s accomplishments...The women of the 6888th found that they were the subject of some hostility and rumors impugning their character spread by both white and black male Soldiers who resented the fact that black women were allowed in the Army.

Despite such treatment, the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion produced great results in Birmingham: With the new tracking system they created, the women processed an average of 65,000 pieces of mail per shift and cleared the six-month backlog of mail in three months. The women adhered to the motto of, “No mail, low morale,” providing essential support for the U.S. military in the European theater by linking servicemembers to their loved ones back home. They achieved unprecedented success and efficiency in solving the military’s postal problems.

With the immense backlog in Birmingham gone, the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion sailed to France on 9 June 1945, shortly after V-E Day. They arrived in Le Havre, where they were shocked to find a city left in ruins by the Nazis, and traveled by train to Rouen, where they were invited to participate in a victory parade past the spot where Joan of Arc had been executed. The women were cheered and respected by the newly liberated French...The arrival of a significant number of American women on the Continent attracted the attention of both white and black U.S. servicemen, who “suddenly found that they had business in Rouen,” and stepped-up security efforts were required to keep unauthorized personnel out of the 6888th’s compound. After the unit’s WAC Military Police were denied firearms, they trained in jujitsu, a martial arts form which proved effective in keeping out unwanted visitors....

After efficiently clearing the mail at Rouen, the 6888th moved to Paris in October 1945...With the end of World War II, however, the strength of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion was reduced by nearly 300 personnel, with over 200 more women eligible for discharge in January 1946. The morale of the battalion suffered as the workload fluctuated and there were

fewer women available to process an influx of holiday mail, and once again, they worked in unheated premises...

In February 1946, the remainder of the unit returned to the United States and was disbanded at Fort Dix, New Jersey, without further ceremony. There were no parades, no public appreciation, and no official recognition of their accomplishments, although Charity Adams was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel upon her return to the U.S. The accomplishments of the 6888th in Europe encouraged the General Board, United States Forces European Theater to adopt the following premise in their study of the Women's Army Corps issued in December 1945: "[T]he national security program is the joint responsibility of all Americans irrespective of color or sex" and "the continued use of colored, along with white, female military personnel is required in such strength as is proportionately appropriate to the relative population distribution between colored and white races."

With the exception of smaller units of African American nurses who served in Africa, Australia, and England, the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion was the only African-American women's unit to serve overseas during World War II.

# The African American Women of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion

## Primary Source

Go to the Library of Congress Veterans History Project website and watch the oral history interview with Mary Crawford Ragland:

<https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.91851/>

You may choose to watch the entire video, but the section in which she speaks about serving during World War II is from 11:55 to 52:58.

# Fighter Pilots in the Pacific Theater

## Secondary Source

*This document is an excerpt of the 1994 book Case Studies in the Achievement of Air Superiority published by the Air Force History and Museums Program. The Program is charged with the mission of preserving U.S. Air Force history by conducting historical research and producing publications for Air Force leaders and the public. The author of the chapter included here was Alvin Coox, a historian with special interest in the Japanese military during World War II. The full book is available here: <https://media.defense.gov/2010/Oct/12/2001330116/-1/-1/0/AFD-101012-038.pdf>*

In early 1945, the American fighter planes in the western Pacific acquired a new and important mission: to escort B-29 bombers in raids against the enemy's homeland. On April 7, each of the 6 P-51 Mustang squadrons on Iwo Jima first sent four 4-plane sections to protect B-29s heading for targets on Honshu. By the end of June, the Seventh Air Force had flown 426 escort sorties.

Although the Japanese may have expected eventually to encounter AAF fighters in such a role, they were taken by surprise when the P-51s showed up. From Japanese sources we learn of the initial IJAAF and IJNAF experiences. At about 10 in the morning on April 7, an estimated 90 (actually 101) B-29s were reported approaching the industrial zone of Musashino in western Tokyo at an altitude of 4,000 meters, usually ideal for IJAAF fighters. From Sagamihara, 24 Huyate (FRANK) Army fighters scrambled. Corporal N. Naitci, operating one interceptor at 7,000 meters over Oshima, detected about 30 small planes, sharp-pointed with liquidcooled engines, flying above the B-29s. Since there had been no reports of enemy fighter-escorts, Naitci guessed that the strange planes were of the Japanese Type 3 Hien (TONY) family, the only operational IJAAF liquidcooled fighter, though the rounded belly differed from that of the Hien. Naitci's supposition was soon disabused after he saw tracers spew from the fighters, and bullets began to hit his plane. When he went into a spin and got away, he saw the star insignia on the planes' right underwing. So these were the P-51 Mustangs, which he had heard of but never seen! When Naitci was about to enter the attack mode, P-51s came at him. Since he was low on fuel, he disengaged promptly. Eleven IJAAF planes were lost, 3 allegedly by ramming...

That B-29s could dare to conduct medium-altitude raids in the daytime was entirely due to the P-51 escorts, say the Japanese. Flying at altitudes where Japanese fighters were ordinarily-at their best, the bomber formations sustained a loss of only five aircraft in the strikes on April 7 against both Tokyo and Nagoya; as a percentage of the total number of B-29s committed, this amounted to less than two percent."....

Since the Americans' round trip always entailed some 1,400 miles from Iwo Jima, about 500 miles short of the maximum range for a Mustang carrying two 108-gallon drop tanks per plane, the escorts could linger over Japan for no more than an hour, including the critical period of the B-29 bomb run. The flights were not easy for the airmen: "Pilots spent 8 hours and more in the air, and the monotony of the long over-water flights and confined conditions of the cockpits brought many fatigue problems."....

By war's end, the B-29 bomber formations were daring to fly consistently without fighter escort. According to Gen. Henry H. Arnold, during the summer of 1945:

. . . we bombed Japan actually at will, at altitudes of our own choosing (as low as 8,000 or even 5,000 feet) with practically no losses. In the last phase, before Hiroshima, we used B-29s without armor, and with almost no guns. When it came time to drop the atomic bomb, we were so sure that any B-29 would reach its objective without opposition that we sent the second of these preciously laden planes without escort.

General LeMay later said “the record will show that in the last 2 months of the war it was safer to fly a combat mission over Japan than it was to fly a B-29 training mission back in the United States.””....

Indeed, the Japanese admit that many of their own airmen had lost heart even before hostilities ended. On August 9, the chief of staff of the Air General Army had telephoned 10th Air Division Headquarters in Tokyo to stress that, although there was talk of ending the war, vigorous efforts should still be made to go on fighting and to intercept enemy raiders. Nevertheless, on August 13, when the Tokyo district was hit by USN carrier planes and Japanese fighters were scrambled effectively, the 10th Air Division commander “failed to urge his men to press the attack to the utmost [because] it seemed absurd to incur additional losses with the war obviously lost and its termination due in a matter of days.”....

The war against Japan was not a sea war or a ground war or an air war, but, as the Strategic Bombing Survey stressed, “a combined sea-groundair war in three dimensions.” Admiral King spoke of a “partnership of accomplishment” with the U.S. Army’s ground, air, and service forces....

In the process of winning air superiority, AAF units had to cope with a large number of limiting factors: enormous distances between islands in the central Pacific, posing difficulties in communication, liaison, and reconnaissance; lack of bases within reach of the enemy; limited range of aircraft; and problems of navigation and navigational aids. The small size of the islands in the central Pacific constituted a chronic challenge. Even when atolls or small reef islands proved suitable as forward bases, their limited capacity usually rendered them useful only for staging operations. As Seventh Air Force officers recalled, not until the Marianas were reached “[did we have] a base which was much larger in effect than an anchored aircraft carrier. Saipan, with an area of 46 square miles, seemed tremendous in comparison with our previous base~.

The AAF in the Pacific faced still other limiting factors: a lack of supplies and a lack of shipping to haul them forward; the need to move into advanced bases before adequate facilities became available; a dearth of radar-equipped aircraft; shortages of planes, parts, and equipment; and the need to create an air-sea rescue capability. There was a lack of maintenance facilities, especially in the early phases of the war, when U.S. flying personnel often had to service their own planes. Aircraft crews were in short supply until 1944; in some months, replacement crews were not received. The Seventh Air Force, detecting inadequate training in crews that did arrive from the United States, established its own schools to teach navigation and gunnery.<sup>141</sup> Despite the many and vexing difficulties encountered by the AAF in the course of the air war in the Pacific, “one by one these problems were overcome,” USSBS analysts concluded. The program for the final air offensive against Japan itself, they added, was “soundly conceived and executed.”....

It is true that Allied aviation could not and did not destroy the Japanese air forces which, for all of their qualitative debilities and numerical attrition, at war’s end still possessed an intact, partly masked inventory of 17,900 to 18,500 planes of all types and all conditions. Even the seasoned

carrier admiral, Frederick C. Sherman, reflected a degree of disbelief when he observed that, as late as mid-1945, “despite the many devastating attacks on their bases, the Japanese somehow were able to continue sending planes on ‘their desperate missions.’” But the combined and mighty efforts of the U.S. Army Air Forces, of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, and of their allies kept the skies open over Japan and wreaked havoc on targets below. They also contributed to the elimination of the need for a frightfully expensive ground invasion.

# Fighter Pilots in the Pacific

## Primary Source

Go to the Library of Congress Veterans History Project website and read the transcript of the oral history interview with Jerome Yellin: <https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.95409/>

You may choose to watch the interview; however, there are multiple breaks in the audio.



# Japanese Americans – Internment Camps and Military Service

## Secondary Source

*This document is an article that appears on the National Park Service website for the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. The World War II Memorial honors the service of all Americans who served in and supported the armed forces during World War II. The website was last updated May 12, 2020 and does not list an author; it is available here: <https://www.nps.gov/wwii/learn/historyculture/japanese-americans-at-war.htm>*

One of the great ironies of the Second World War was America's forced confinement of more than 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry. These Japanese Americans were held in camps that often were isolated, uncomfortable, and overcrowded. Although their families were treated unjustly in this way, more than 33,000 Japanese Americans served in the military with distinction.

Why did this violation of civil rights occur? The United States of the 1940s was a nation that struggled to overcome its racial, cultural, and religious differences. The Japanese American community was isolated and small amidst a sea of neighbors who seethed with understandable anger over Japan's attack against Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. While Americans examined the members of the German and Italian Americans populations individually, most saw their Japanese neighbors as alien and untrustworthy; hysterical and false reports by journalists fueled this suspicion. On February 12, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt caved in to the pressure and signed Executive Order 9066 that condemned over 120,000 of his fellow Americans to detention camps for the rest of the war.

With less than two weeks notice, and without trials, the U.S. Government forced these Americans of Japanese ancestry to abandon millions of dollars in property. These refugees then were sent to large confinement sites in the western, southwestern, and southern United States; others went to smaller facilities across the nation. While living in overcrowded conditions behind barbed wires, these Americans attempted to bring normalcy to their lives, they created newspapers, schools, markets, police forces, and fire fighting squads.

While their families were confined, more than 33,000 Japanese Americans played a major role in the war effort. Why did they serve the nation under these difficult circumstances? Many of them loved their country enough to risk their lives in combat. For others, it was the chance to prove their loyalty and the honor of their families; this they did as members of the famed 442nd Regimental Combat Team fighting up the rugged Italian Peninsula and across Southern France. Others interrogated Japanese prisoners and translated Japanese documents in the Army's Military Intelligence Section in the Pacific and China-Burma-India Theaters. Over eight hundred Japanese Americans were killed in action serving their country.

The Japanese American Memorial to Patriotism During World War II honors those Japanese Americans who endured humiliation and rose above adversity to serve their country during one of this nation's great trials. This National Park Service site stands at the intersection of Louisiana Avenue and D Street, NW in Washington, D.C.

# Japanese Americans – Internment Camps and Military Service

## Secondary Source

*This document is an excerpt of an article published in 2007 in the ATA Chronicle, a magazine published by the American Translators Association. The ATA is a professional association that was founded to help the translation and interpreting professions preserve their history, assist their present work, and stimulate future research. The author was Kayoko Takeda, a professor of translation and interpreting at Rikkyo University in Tokyo. The full article is available here: [https://www.ata-chronicle.online/wp-content/uploads/3601\\_14\\_kayoko\\_takeda.pdf](https://www.ata-chronicle.online/wp-content/uploads/3601_14_kayoko_takeda.pdf)*

Prior to Pearl Harbor, a division of the U.S. Army on the West Coast started a classified military intelligence training program for personnel with Japanese language skills in preparation for an anticipated war with Japan. This classified program, based in the Presidio of San Francisco, began operation on November 1, 1941, with four Japanese American teachers and 60 students (58 Nisei and 2 Caucasians)...

Soon after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, all Japanese Americans were reclassified as 4-C (enemy aliens who were ineligible for military service). In February 1942, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which resulted in the forced relocation of nearly 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans on the West Coast to internment camps. As a result, the U.S. Army's Japanese military intelligence training program moved to Minnesota in late May of 1942.

By that time, the valuable contributions being made by the first graduates of the program had been reported back from the war front. The Army was also becoming acutely aware of the need for more Nisei linguists for military intelligence. The program was reorganized under the direct supervision of the War Department, and reopened on June 1, 1942 as the Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS). Given the proven value of Japanese linguists in various fields of operation, the U.S. government started recruiting hundreds of Nisei from the internment camps to train at MISLS. Finding qualified Nisei, however, was a challenging task. According to Bill Hosokawa: "[o]f the first 3,700 men interviewed, only 3% proved to speak Japanese fluently. The next 4% could be considered fairly proficient in the language. Another 3% knew just enough so that they could be thrown into intensive training; only 1 Nisei in 10 understood a useful amount of his ancestral tongue. And even the best of them had to be taught military vocabulary and usage."

More than 6,000 Nisei received six months of rigorous training at MISLS, after which they were sent mainly to the Pacific military operational theater. They served in the Allied Translator and Interpreter Service (ATIS) and in other units as translators, interpreters, interrogators, code breakers, and "cave flushers."...

Nisei linguists translated captured enemy documents, interrogated Japanese prisoners of war, persuaded Japanese soldiers and civilians to surrender, and participated in propaganda activities. One of the most vital tasks they engaged in for the U.S. military was the translation of Japan's "Z Plan," which called for a Japanese counterattack in the Pacific. The knowledge obtained through the translation of these intercepted documents led to a significant victory for

U.S. forces. This is considered by historians to be “one of the greatest single intelligence feats of the war in the Southwest Pacific Area.”....

According to a 1945 report, the Nisei linguists had translated 20.5 million pages by the end of the war.

Nisei linguists were also indispensable during the occupation of Japan. The enrollment at MISLS actually peaked after the war in response to the need to address the language needs of various operations of the occupation. The focus of instruction shifted from military to civilian language and Japanese culture.

More than 5,000 Nisei linguists worked in occupied Japan, functioning as a “bridge” between the occupation forces and Japanese authorities and civilians. Their duties covered a variety of areas, including intelligence, disarmament, civil affairs, education, and finance. They even participated in the drafting of the Japanese Constitution and the formation of the National Police Reserve (which later became the Japanese Self-Defense Force)....

Along with many other Japanese Americans, Nisei linguists lived through the prejudice and discrimination directed toward them in the 1930s and 1940s. In the midst of the war hysteria and the fierce hatred against Japanese Americans, they were sent to internment camps as “enemy aliens.”....

Even within the U.S. Army, Nisei linguists had to fight prejudice and suspicions of disloyalty while they served in the Pacific. Although a number of testimonials by Nisei linguists show their pride in having proved their loyalty to the U.S., they also discuss their complex feelings about being sent to internment camps by the same government that later took advantage of their language skills in the war against the country of their parents....

While trying to overcome prejudice within the military they served, the Nisei linguists also struggled with issues of cultural identity as they worked to win a war against people of their own heritage. James McNaughton provides the following insight into how the Nisei linguists may have viewed their opponents, the Japanese:

“At a deeper level of analysis, for those who joined the Military Intelligence Service to become linguists, the way they served was more specific to their heritage, and thus psychologically more complex. Whether translating captured diaries or radio messages, or interrogating prisoners of war, they had to confront issues of identity and heritage in ways that most other American soldiers could not even imagine. Although for most of them, learning the Japanese language was a major challenge involving six months of hard work, the knowledge and appreciation of Japanese culture and society they had absorbed from their parents and upbringing gave them a unique perspective on the enemy they faced. They had a capacity, all too rare at that time, for seeing their opponents as human beings, rather than animals.”<sup>4</sup>

This complex psychological aspect of military linguists fighting an enemy closely linked to their own heritage seems relevant in the context of today’s war on terrorism as well.

# Japanese Americans – Internment Camps and Military Service

## Primary Source

Go to the Library of Congress Veterans History Project website and read the transcript of the oral history of Warren Michio Tsuneishi: <https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.02153/>

You may choose to watch the interview; however, there is a lot of static.

# Military Wives

## Secondary Source

*This document is an excerpt of the 2004 book Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II. The author is Emily Yellin, a reporter, author, and producer with special interest in writing about the American South, race, and women's issues. Her work has been published in *The New York Times*, *Time*, *The Washington Post*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *Newsweek*, and *Smithsonian Magazine*.*

After Pearl Harbor was attacked in December 1941, and the United States officially joined the war already in progress against Japan, Germany, and Italy, the warnings to young women started coming with a fury. From parents, from the clergy, on the radio, in newspapers and magazines, and even from boyfriends, they went something like this: Be wary of wartime romance. Hasty war marriages are recipes for heartache, for failure. Don't tie your fate to an uncertain future. There will be plenty of time for emotion after the war. Real love can wait.

Apparently, not everyone listened. Because despite the naysaying, 1.8 million couples married in 1942, a huge increase from the year before....

It was not only young brides who had to endure this strange new loneliness. Women who had been married for a while, and who had children, also began to see their husbands head off to war. At first, men with families were exempt from the draft. But as the war escalated through 1942 and 1943, most able-bodied men between eighteen and thirty-five were either called away or volunteered.

The mail became the lifeline for many relationships. Many women wrote to their husbands every day. But delivery of the mail to and from overseas military outposts was sporadic. Sometimes, both on the home front and overseas, weeks or months would go by without a letter, and then in one day five letters would arrive....

Indeed shortages and rationing altered the lifestyle of all American civilians during World War II, but the impact on the lives of the women in charge of running a home reached into most aspects of their daily routines. In a report to the National Academy of Sciences by the Committee on Food Habits, an advisory committee of social scientists headed by anthropologist Margaret Mead, women were pegged as the ones in the family through which the government could influence and alter civilian eating and shopping habits, as necessary, during wartime. The committee's report said, "In all daily matters of food choices and preparation, women, and particularly mothers and wives, play a leading role."

Changing Americans' attitudes toward consumption was no small task. During World War I rationing had been voluntary and many agreed it had not worked. But with World War II the United States had a bigger job on its hands. The U.S. was once again responsible for feeding and clothing its military. But the government had also taken on more responsibility in this war for stemming food shortages in Allied nations like Britain and Russia, as well as in newly liberated countries.

In addition, there was a new psychological barrier to all this on the home front. During the Depression of the 1930s, goods were available but very few people had enough money to buy what they needed. In fact, people had seen the government pay farmers to destroy tons of

surplus food that no one could afford and ask factories to slow down production because no one had enough money to buy much. Now the government was telling its citizens that the problem was the opposite. Because of the boom in production that the war brought on, America had recovered from the Depression, so people had money again. And the factories and farms were producing at a breakneck pace. But everything produced had to go toward the war effort first. So the newly flush civilians were seeing factories and farms buzzing with activity but still were being asked to cut back their consumption.

Also, in the earliest part of the 1940s, as America's economy was recovering, the government set out to reeducate the public on the subject of nutrition, a concept that had gone by the wayside for many during leaner times. Then, after Pearl Harbor in late 1941, it became evident that some rationing might have to occur, since people began hoarding some items, and supplies from other countries were blocked, making production of certain items almost impossible. For example, Japanese invasions of rubber-producing areas of the Pacific meant the United States's rubber supply was essentially cut off. Tires became precious. The solution, as the government saw it, was to ration not only rubber products but gasoline too. That way, people would not unnecessarily wear down the tires they already had. Soon clothes and shoes were rationed as well. Even girdles were threatened with rationing for the rubber they contained, until women cried out so loudly against it that the government relented on that idea.

The first food item to be rationed, in May of 1942, was sugar. Later that year coffee was rationed. And by the end of 1942, the government had rationed red meat. Though never rationed, butter, milk, and eggs were also scarce in some places. People were also encouraged to plant fruit and vegetables on any spare patch of land they had, to compensate for what American farmers were diverting from civilians to the military. These personal plots of produce were considered the patriotic things to do, so they became known as Victory Gardens. And women were encouraged to can and preserve this home-grown food for the winter months....

During World War II, the American idea of home necessarily expanded to mean more than the house or the town where a person lived or grew up. Home became the whole country. And the neighborhood was a band of allied nations fighting to defend themselves against Nazis, Fascists, and all threats to a humane way of life. This suddenly smaller world forced Americans to adopt a broader worldview than they ever had before. In the process, American women were called upon by their country to venture beyond the safety, familiarity, and some may say confinement of what had always been the most socially acceptable realm for them, their own families and houses. And they were asked to send their husbands, sons, and brothers far away, into the great unknown as well. All the while, American women also were under immense pressure from their country to protect and defend steadfastly the very idea of traditional home and family, and their central place in it, that was transforming so quickly. It was comforting perhaps to believe the after the war everything could go back to the way it always had been. Yet, trying to reconcile such contradictory duties demanded sometimes impossible contortions from women, calling upon all their powers of resourcefulness, sacrifice, and bravery.

Thus, along with the idea of home, the connotation of the term *homemaker* – so often used to evoke a contrived, one-dimensional woman, like Betty Crocker – could be said to have grown in scope and significance during the war years too, whether anyone was aware of it or not. As American men were marching into combat to change the balance of power throughout Europe and the East, the wives, mothers, and sisters of America found themselves thrust into a quieter revolution of their own. Without due recognition or validation, and most often unwittingly,

wartime women embarked on an odyssey that would, for better or worse, begin to explode their time-honored roles within their own families. And the four years of World War II would also start to blow wide open previous notions of just how fully and adeptly women were capable of contributing to and participating in American society as a whole.

# Military Wives

## Primary Source

Go to the Library of Congress Veterans History Project website and watch the oral history interview with Marion Reh Gurfein:

<https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00799/>

You may choose to watch the entire video, but the section in which she speaks about her experiences as a military wife during World War II is from 01:13 to 40:38.



# Survivors of the Holocaust

## Secondary Source

*This document is an article that appears on the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The USHMM is the United States' official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust and produces research and materials that focus on teaching how and why the Holocaust happened. The website was last updated March 12, 2018 and does not list an author for this article; it is available here: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust>.*

### Introduction

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators. Holocaust is a word of Greek origin meaning "sacrifice by fire." The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were "racially superior" and that the Jews, deemed "inferior," were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community.

During the era of the Holocaust, German authorities also targeted other groups because of their perceived racial and biological inferiority: Roma (Gypsies), people with disabilities, some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others), Soviet prisoners of war, and blacks. Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.

### What Was the Holocaust?

In 1933, the Jewish population of Europe stood at over nine million. Most European Jews lived in countries that Nazi Germany would occupy or influence during World War II. By the end of the war in 1945, the Germans and their allies and collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews as part of the "Final Solution."

The Nazis considered Jews to be the inferior race that posed the deadliest menace to the German Volk. Soon after they came to power, the Nazis adopted measures to exclude Jews from German economic, social and cultural life and to pressure them to emigrate. World War II provided Nazi officials with the opportunity to pursue a comprehensive, "final solution to the Jewish question": the murder of all the Jews in Europe.

While Jews were the priority target of Nazi racism, other groups within Germany were persecuted for racial reasons, including Roma (then commonly called "Gypsies"), Afro-Germans, and people with mental or physical disabilities. By the end of the war, the Germans and their Axis partners murdered up to 250,000 Roma. And between 1939 and 1945, they murdered at least 250,000 mentally or physically disabled patients, mainly German and living in institutions, in the so-called Euthanasia Program.

As Nazi tyranny spread across Europe, the Germans and their collaborators persecuted and murdered millions of other people seen as biologically inferior or dangerous. Between two and three million Soviet prisoners of war, viewed by the Nazis as the biological "carriers" of Bolshevism, were murdered or died of starvation, disease, neglect, or brutal treatment. The Germans shot tens of thousands of non-Jewish members of the Polish intelligentsia, murdered the inhabitants of hundreds of villages in "pacification" raids in Poland and the Soviet Union, and

deported millions of Polish and Soviet civilians to perform forced labor under conditions that caused many to die.

From the earliest years of the Nazi regime, German authorities persecuted homosexuals and other Germans whose behavior did not conform to prescribed social norms (such as beggars, alcoholics, and prostitutes), incarcerating thousands of them in prisons and concentration camps. German police officials similarly persecuted thousands of Germans viewed as political opponents (including Communists, Socialists, Freemasons, and trade unionists) and religious dissidents (such as Jehovah's Witnesses). Many of these individuals died as a result of maltreatment and murder.

### **Implementation of the "Final Solution"**

World War II provided Nazi officials the opportunity to adopt more radical measures against the Jews under the pretext that they posed a threat to Germany. After occupying Poland, German authorities confined the Jewish population to ghettos, to which they also later deported thousands of Jews from the Third Reich. Hundreds of thousands of Jews died from the horrendous conditions in the ghettos in Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe.

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Einsatzgruppen and Waffen SS units, with support from the Wehrmacht, moved behind German lines to murder Jews, Roma, and Soviet state and Communist Party officials in mass shootings as well as in specially equipped gas vans. Mass shootings of Jews continued throughout the war, many conducted by militarized battalions of the German Order Police. These shooting operations are estimated to have claimed the lives of more than 1.5 million Jews.

In late 1941, Nazi officials opted to employ an additional method to kill Jews, one originally developed for the "Euthanasia" Program: stationary gas chambers. Between 1941 and 1944, Nazi Germany and its Allies deported nearly three million Jews from areas under their control to Nazi-occupied Poland. The vast majority were sent to killing centers, often called extermination camps, at Belzec, Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they were murdered primarily by means of poison gas. Some able-bodied Jewish deportees were temporarily spared to perform forced labor in ghettos, forced labor camps for Jews, or concentration camps in Nazi-occupied Poland and the Soviet Union. Most of these workers died from starvation and disease or were killed when they became too weak to work.

### **The End of the Holocaust**

In the final months of the war, SS guards moved camp inmates by train or on forced marches, often called "death marches," in an attempt to prevent the Allied liberation of large numbers of prisoners. As Allied forces moved across Europe in a series of offensives against Germany, they began to encounter and liberate concentration camp prisoners, as well as prisoners en route by forced march from one camp to another. The marches continued until May 7, 1945, the day the German armed forces surrendered unconditionally to the Allies.

For the Western Allies, World War II officially ended in Europe on the next day, May 8 (V-E Day), while Soviet forces announced their "Victory Day" on May 9, 1945.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, more than 250,000 survivors found shelter in displaced persons camps run by the Allied powers and the United Nations Refugee and Rehabilitation Administration in Germany, Austria, and Italy. Between 1948 and 1951, 136,000 Jewish

displaced persons immigrated to Israel, while others resettled in the United States and other nations outside Europe. Other Jewish displaced persons emigrated to the United States and other nations. The last camp for Jewish displaced persons closed in 1957.

The crimes committed during the Holocaust devastated most European Jewish communities and eliminated hundreds of Jewish communities in occupied eastern Europe entirely.

# Survivors of the Holocaust

## Primary Source

Go to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website and watch the oral history interview with Eddie Hellmuth Willner: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504739>

You may choose to watch all three parts of the interview, but for this assignment you are required to watch at least the video labeled Part 1 of 3.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



## Telling the Story of World War II

**Primary and Secondary Sources:** A primary source is a document, image or other artifact that gives firsthand information about an event or topic. A secondary source combines and interprets information from primary sources in order to make a statement about an event or topic. In this activity, you will first read an article or book chapter about your topic (a secondary source), before listening to an oral history interview with an individual who lived through World War II (a primary source).

What topic did you choose to learn about? \_\_\_\_\_

### Secondary Source Questions

1. Who is the source? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you think they are a reliable source for information on your topic? Why or why not?

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. List three "big ideas" you learned from this source about your topic:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. How does this source support, contradict or add to your previous understanding of your topic?

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Primary Source Questions

1. Who is the source? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you think they are a reliable source for information on your topic? Why or why not?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



3. List three things that stood out to you most from this source:

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4. How does this source support, contradict or add to your previous understanding of your topic?

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### Reflection

1. What kind of information about your topic was best conveyed through your secondary source?

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2. What kind of information about your topic was best conveyed through your primary source?

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3. What questions do you still have about the topic you studied? What additional primary and secondary sources could be used to explore those questions?

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4. After learning about the other topics, which one are you most interested in learning more about? Why?

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