

LEHIGH VALLEY DURING WORLD WAR II

Background

Albert Klan- Lehigh County resident stationed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, December 7 1941

I got up and showered and dressed lazily Sunday morning and walked out on the open porch. And, ah, then we heard this swarm of planes coming towards our barracks and as they got close they came in real low, in fact, so low you could see the pilots in the cockpits, you could see their teeth, you could see their eyes. We saw the insignia of the rising sun on the wing tips and the fuselage, but there was nothing to indicate to us something was amiss. But then, when this cook came across the quadrangle with his white uniform on, he started staggering. He fell, just then he fell over, and his white uniform turned red. Then we knew that this wasn't a maneuver, this was the real thing. Then we started scrambling.

Americo Caggiano-December 7, 1941- Brooklyn, New York Lehigh County resident after World War II

We're all dressed up, my buddy Mello and me, and ready to go on a date. The New York Giants' football game is on the radio. "Ladies and gentlemen," the man on the radio says, "we interrupt this radio program. Pearl Harbor has just been attacked." We turn to each other and I say to Mello "where is Pearl Harbor?" And then he said, "I don't know, but who attacked us?" We went on our dates, but there was something missing. By the time we got to the corner, we met a neighbor. He said, "Pearl Harbor's in the Hawaiian Islands." And right away we knew it had to be the Japanese. We were at war.

President Roosevelt, December 8, 1941 Congress, Washington, D.C.

"Yesterday, December 7, 1941-a date which will live in infamy- the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by the naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan." Congress votes to go to war.

December 8, 1941-Lehigh Valley, PA.

Men from the Pennsylvania Reserve Defense Corps and Allentown's Company F are already standing guard at the Armory and at two bridges crossing the Delaware River at Easton in case of a wartime attack. The Lehigh County Council of Defense, organized to prepare Lehigh County and Allentown in case of attack, announces that blackouts are in effect. Everyone must draw their shades at night so no lights can be seen. Deputy air raid wardens are told to be on standby at all

times. Aircraft spotters, volunteers who scan the sky for enemy war planes, are on the look-out. Meanwhile, volunteers rush to their local post offices to join the army, navy, and marines. The American Red Cross begins to enroll women in the Volunteer Nurse's Aide Corps to serve as volunteer nurses' aides and to assist nurses in hospitals.

December 11, 1941- Washington, D.C.

Congress declares war on Germany and Italy. The United States has entered World War II.

First six months of 1942-Lehigh Valley

Soldiers kiss their loved ones good-bye as they go off to fight in a foreign land, not knowing when they'll return home again. The government advises everyone to be prepared in case of enemy attack, and warns all citizens that sacrifices will have to be made to win the war.

Rationing or limiting certain goods is one of the sacrifices that must be made because the American economy must concentrate on producing goods for the war. Sugar is one of the first items to be rationed. To purchase sugar, you register at one of the schools in the area to receive a War Ration Book. This book contains coupons that are turned in to the grocer when you buy sugar. Gasoline is added to the list next, and motorists are allowed only a certain amount of gas depending on their driving needs. Even before sugar and gas were rationed, rubber was limited because the Japanese cut off the United States' supply of rubber when they captured Malaysia. People will learn to do without other things as more and more items are rationed.

Everywhere in the Lehigh Valley, people are preparing in case of attack. The Lehigh County Scout Council begins training its members in emergency first aid, and volunteers its services as messengers during air raids. More than 2,000 people train to be air raid wardens at Allentown High School. Wardens are needed to make sure everyone obeys blackout regulations. If an actual attack happens, the wardens will assist firemen and emergency medical personnel in caring for people. Each warden carries a shovel, first aid kit, hose, blanket, axe, gas mask and steel helmet. In schools, an air raid defense program is organized so children will be cared for in an emergency.

The Red Cross, too, is preparing in case of an attack. Classes are held all over the area, in churches, businesses, industries, and schools to teach women first aid and how to make surgical bandages. They are also helping to recruit nurses for the armed forces. The Army and Navy needs 3,000 nurses per month, and all nurses under forty years old are told to be on call for military service.

Twenty million pounds of aluminum are needed to build 2,000 fighter planes for the United States and Great Britain, so Lehigh Valley residents, along with the rest of the nation, collect aluminum. Men, women, and children deposit the aluminum they gather in a huge collection bin at Center Square. Almost 24,000 pounds is collected in Lehigh County, which is enough to build four planes. Scrap metal and rubber are also desperately needed, and women volunteers comb the streets of Allentown for these items. Tires, inner tubes, garden hoses, raincoats, and even toys are collected. In the home, housewives save kitchen grease so that the glycerin can be extracted from the grease. The glycerin is used to manufacture weapons for the war.

Colleges in the area aid in the war effort and in the defense of the United States. Muhlenberg College offers tuition-free defense courses for engineers who work in the Lehigh Valley's industries. Both Muhlenberg and Moravian Colleges begin to instruct pilots-to-be, who then learn to fly planes at the Allentown-Bethlehem airport.

Allentownians watch as Victory House, a small wooden booth, is built in Allentown's Center Square to sell war bonds. The government urges everyone to buy bonds because they help to support the war. Quotas are set by the state government for each county, telling them how many bonds they should sell. By the end of July, more than ten million dollars worth of bonds have been sold.

Second Half of 1942-Lehigh Valley

More Lehigh Valley residents are bidding good-bye to their husbands, sons, and even daughters as they go off to fight. Four thousand men from Lehigh County are in the armed forces now, about 2,500 from Allentown. Ninety companies in Lehigh County are producing materials needed for the war. A shortage of labor develops because more men are going off to war. To fill the shortage, women are working at men's jobs.

1943-Lehigh Valley

For the first time, fathers and eighteen and nineteen year old men are drafted because many more soldiers are needed to fight the war. Women are needed too, and they are encouraged to enlist in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) to free up men in the army and navy for duty in combat zones. Another bond drive begins, and once again the government urges everyone to buy bonds. The hunt for metal scrap and rubber continues. An additional 12,000 workers are needed to work in the area's plants that are making materials for the war. The rationing list gets longer with the addition of meat and shoes. "Victory Gardens" become popular in Allentown. These vegetable gardens help residents grow produce that is in little supply because of rationing.

June 6, 1944-D-Day

Lehigh Valley residents hold their breath as news of the invasion of Normandy reaches their ears. Everyone is expecting the war to be over soon, but they will wait another ten months before it ends. There are so many U.S. men fighting overseas to end this war that there's a shortage of labor almost everywhere. In Allentown, volunteers are going door to door to convince housewives to work in industries producing goods for the war.

May 7, 1945

Germany unconditionally surrenders.

August 6, 1945

Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan.

August 14, 1945

Japan unconditionally surrenders. World War II is finally over!

**Anthony Basilone- August 14, 1945
Lehigh County resident & World War II
veteran**

“Well, it was a pretty happy day in Allentown. The people were waving flags. The church bells were ringing, the sirens were blowing. The trolley cars were ringing their bells. I mean, people were running up and down the street saying ‘the war is over, the war is over.’”