

Centennial Reflections

Essays from the Oakwood Historical Society

Oakwood community whole-heartedly involved during World War II

By Harry G. Ebeling

Most older adult citizens of Oakwood relate to World War II and have memories or knowledge of it, even if our children under certain ages defined as the "X Generation" don't. Some fought in it, some lived through it, some have studied it in school, most have heard stories about it, even if they had to see movies to do so. But it was a different time and the nation reacted differently, with whole-hearted support, unlike any war since. What was it like in Oakwood?

Several years ago, some of our high school students led, by senior Katie Malone, gathered support for framing and hanging a banner in the high school library commemorating the 644 former Oakwood students (with a blue star) who served in that conflict and the 16 (signified by a gold star) who lost their lives in it.



The banner had been saved by former school custodian John Warrington when it was about to be thrown out during a remodeling. His widow was present for the ceremony unveiling it, as were Tracy Clare of the Oakwood Historical

Society and Principal Joe Boyle. It was framed by Tom Hartzell, owner of Deck the Walls, whose cousin, Irwin Hartzell, lost his life in WWII and was one of the gold stars represented.

This gave the students a chance to interview several members of the Class of '44 who were having a reunion at the time. Present in the library were Cy Laughter, Almar Fraley (recently deceased), Rufus Jones and Bill James, whose brother Ted was represented by a gold star. Laughter was wounded in France and Fraley who was a prisoner of war, told of some of their experiences and answered questions from the students.

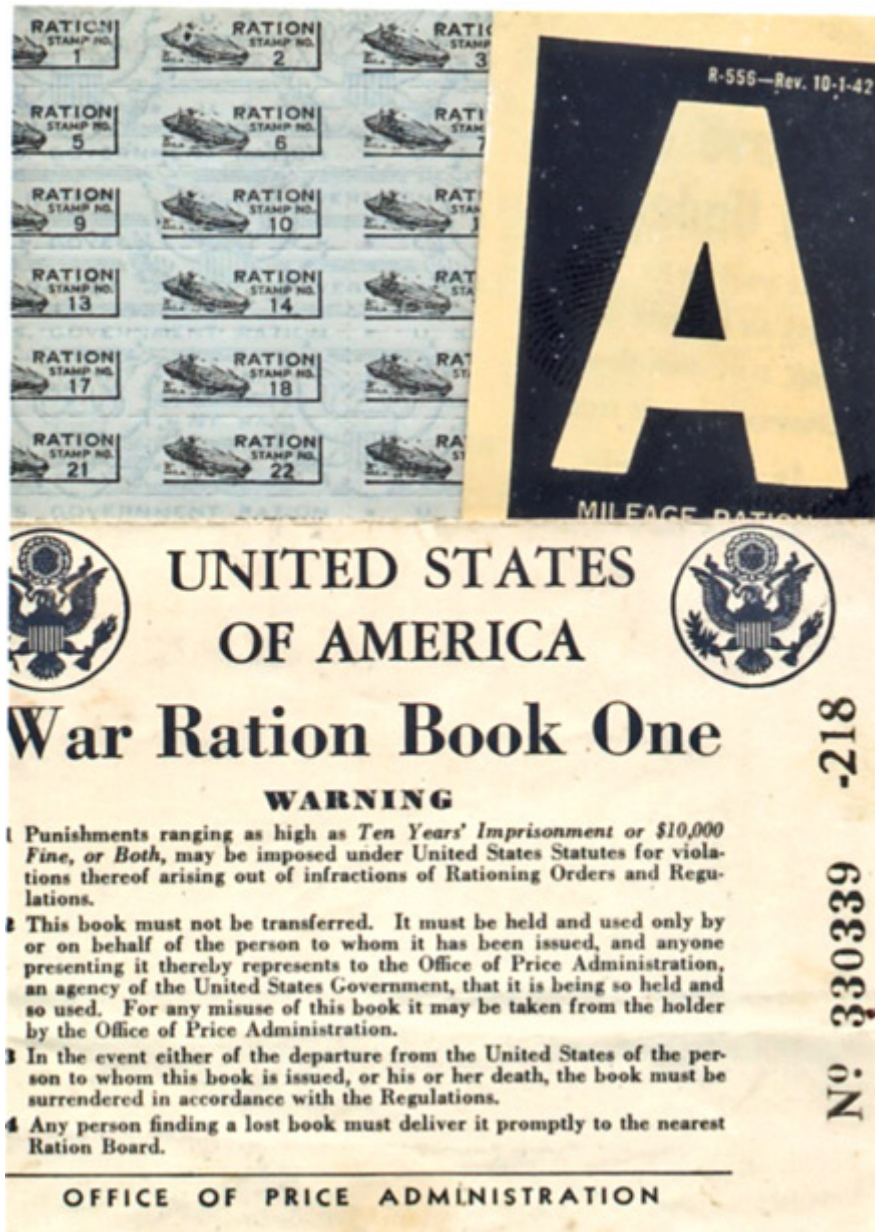
What was it like back home in Oakwood in those days? Things were organized under the Civil Defense Council, headquartered in the city building, and directed by local resident Perry V. Shoe. It was a classic organization with a massive chart to affix responsibilities. Roland Keys was appointed Director of the Civilian Service Corps, which had 12 committees chaired by members of the community. A directory of personnel had 41 pages of 800 names of persons serving. Superintendent Arthur Claggett was in charge of salvage. The Recreation Committee was chaired by – who else - J. Mack Hummon. There were Rescue Squads, Air Raid Wardens, Auxiliary Police and Fire, Demolition & Clearance and Decontamination personnel assigned.

A map of Fire Watcher assignments under Chief Robert C. Kohnle divided the city into 34 Posts, in 9 sectors and 3 zones, carefully balancing the number of houses among the 2471 houses then existing.

Concerned citizens petitioned Columbus to establish a Rationing Board in Oakwood because the closest one was on Hickory St. in Dayton. In 1943, the Consumer Nutrition Committee held a "Town Meeting" at the high school auditorium, to discuss point rationing, school lunches and children's food requirements. By 1944, the need for such an organization was essentially over so the Council turned its attention to the sale of War Bonds. At a community meeting, the quota of \$225,000 was announced.

One effort was scrap collecting which was done at six bins located throughout the community. Divided into three compartments and painted red, white, and blue, these were places where people contributed articles of scrap iron and nonferrous metals such as copper, brass, lead and tin, as well as rubber, burlap, and rope. Scouts helped by house to house canvassing and Earl D. Creager dump trucks picked up large items.

Ration books were issued with Red Stamps for meat-fats and blue stamps for processed foods. About 60 points a month were allowed per person or 16 points per week. Gas was rationed with A, B, and C category stickers for the windshield of a car signifying what the driver contributed to the war effort.



A victim of the war was the annual Thanksgiving Day football game between Fairmont and Oakwood which played its last match in 1942. Oakwood won decisively for the third time in a row, and having won seven times to six, with four ties, kept the trophy permanently. Many mothers probably regarded this as a small dividend of the war.

There was a boom of interest in practical courses at the high school where enrollment increased in manual training, mechanical drawing, machine shop, and aviation ground school. Maybe some of you remember the Link trainer that used to sit in the downstairs corner classroom for a flying course.

Wright-Patterson Field sent students to class in Oakwood using military school buses, increasing enrollment to 1340. Tuition was \$79.28 per pupil for grade school, \$112.16 for 7 & 8 grades, and \$126 for high school students. Interest in academics continued even though some seniors were drafted. Classes numbered around 100 with a high percentage going to college.

The Draft Board met at the former East Oakwood Club (now the Oakwood Community Center) which was vacant at the time. Because of the housing shortage, it was a widespread practice to take roomers in the houses of Oakwood without even a nod to the zoning restrictions. Modified stairways and entrances for access to spare rooms and servants quarters were common until about two years after war's end.

This was truly a time of patriotism, and participation in the war effort and local citizens contributed in every way they could..

