

Supporting the War Efforts

By Jack R. Gannon

Deaf Heritage Excerpt

Soldiers on the Assembly Line

During World War I patriotic deaf men tried to enlist in the armed services. Some managed to lipread their way past the recruiting officer, but in most known cases, their hearing impairment eventually surfaced and they were released. With the outbreak of WWII, that old patriotic spirit arose once again and for many the temptation to serve their country in uniform was strong.

One deaf man who had read about deaf men serving in the Canadian Home Guard wrote the Adjutant General at the War Department and asked what plans had been made for deaf persons to participate in the defense set-up. The Adjutant General responded: "It goes without saying that people with loss of hearing are just as patriotic as any other group," but, in essence, he offered no hope or encouragement for deaf people's involvement.

Manpower shortage eventually attracted many deaf, persons to war work. They flocked to shipyards, aircraft manufacturing plants, tire and rubber factories and other war production plants across the country. They filled badly-needed jobs, built enviable personal work records, set production records and helped this country win the war. And, in doing so, they became a special kind of soldier ... soldiers on the assembly line.

Although war is hell, ironically it did deaf people a good turn. It brought this group of invisibly-handicapped Americans out in the open, gave them an opportunity to perform an important role and a large variety of jobs and to prove to government agencies and private businesses that when given the opportunity and proper training, deaf people can make valuable contributions to any work force.



The clubmobile on the right was donated to the American Armed Services by the National Association of the Deaf.

Doing One's Share

As the war progressed everyone wanted to help. School children collected grease, scrap iron and rubber and saved their coins to purchase Victory Stamps. In Staunton, Virginia, deaf children at the Virginia School for the

Deaf and the Blind sold over \$3,200 worth of stamps and bonds, collected 4,500 pounds of scrap iron and 5,000 pounds of paper. Boy Scout troops everywhere had paper drives. Girls at the Maryland School made approximately 18,000 surgical dressings for the Red Cross. Deaf ladies in Washington, D.C. organized "The Silent Service Unit of the American Red Cross" to sew and knit for the armed forces. Forty deaf persons in Atlanta, Georgia enrolled in first aid classes.

The National Association of the Deaf purchased \$5,300 worth of Defense Bonds, the Louisiana Athletic Association of the Deaf bought \$1,500 worth and the Boys' Athletic Association at the California School invested \$1,000 as did the Minnesota Association of the Deaf. The Washington State Association of the Deaf purchased \$4,500 worth of bonds. Individuals everywhere withdrew their savings and placed the money in Defense Bonds.

Learning of the copper shortage, one deaf couple in Virginia decided to turn in their four cigar boxes full of pennies. After the weary bank teller had finished counting the 6,192 pennies, weighing approximately 44 pounds, they put the money in war bonds. Students and teachers at the Rochester (NY) School sent contributions to schools for the deaf in China enabling them to remain open during the war.

But there was also a black side of deaf America during that period. In Oregon deaf Japanese students were denied admission to the school for the deaf.

The National Association of the Deaf in the 1940s bore little resemblance to a national organization as we know it today. There were no paid employees or officers. President Tom L. Anderson was, at that time, principal at the Iowa School for the Deaf in Council Bluffs. The two vice presidents were Winfield S. Runde of California and T. Y. Northern of Colorado. Byron B. Burnes, a teacher at the Minnesota School for the Deaf in Faribault, was the secretary-treasurer. Such persons as Marcus L. Kenner (New York), Thomas F. Fox (New Jersey), the Rev. R. C. Fletcher (Alabama), James N. Orman (Illinois), George G. Kannapell (Kentucky), Kenneth Murphy (New Jersey), Robert M. Greenmun (Ohio), Lawrence Yolles (Wisconsin), Reuben Alitzer (District of Columbia), Arnold Daulton (Ohio), Leonard Warshawsky (Illinois), and others were active in NAD affairs in those days.

Membership stood at around 2,500. The Association derived its support from dues of \$1.00 a year or \$10.00 for life. The main issues facing the Association in those days were public ignorance of deafness, a strong oral philosophy in the education of the deaf, deaf peddling, unemployment of deaf Americans, and the American Federation of the Physically Handicapped (AFPH). With no home office, weak financial backing, no official publication of its own, a poorly organized network of state associations, and the need to handle Association business through the mail or at conventions every three years or so, it is amazing that the NAD managed to survive and accomplish what it did.

The NAD was successful in getting the Civil Service Commission to revoke a ruling that discriminated against deaf printers. The ruling stated that a Government Printing Office (GPO) printer "had to be able to hear an ordinary conversation at a distance of at least fifteen feet from the ear." The elimination of this barrier opened the door to well-paying positions for many deaf printers.

In 1942 the NAD launched a national "Victory Fund" drive. Working with state associations, the NAD raised \$7,771.68. The money was used to purchase three Red Cross clubmobiles which saw service overseas. They were: "A gift from the American Deaf to their Fighting Forces."