

Maryland and the World War II Home Front

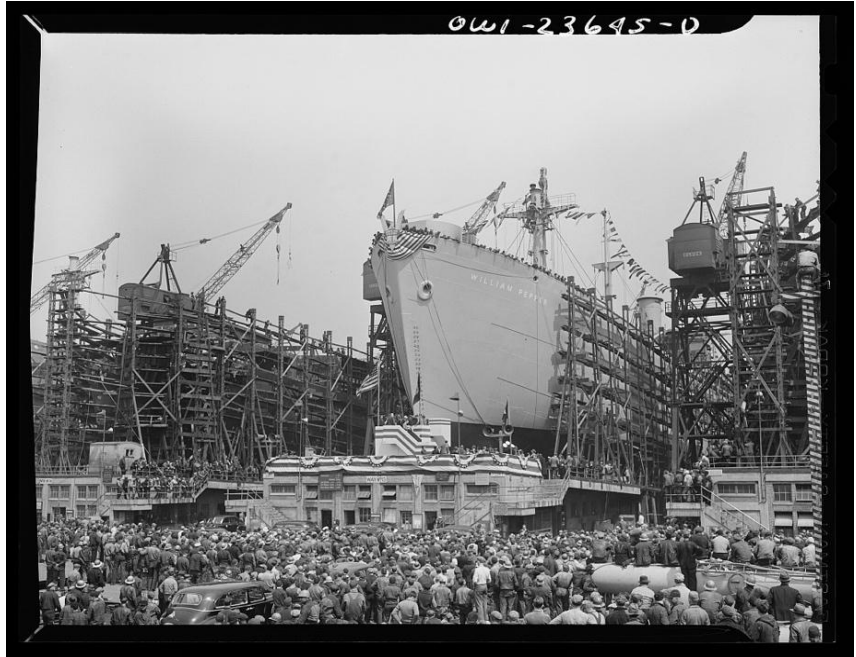
Introduction

Maryland's established heavy manufacturing industries, lengthy coastal border, and proximity to the nation's capital made it a significant contributor to the nation's home front. Residents of "The Old Line State" aided in wartime efforts through the production of steel, ships, aircraft, military research, and more to support their country. Black Marylanders, some migrating from the South, faced ongoing racism and discrimination in jobs and housing, while the Black community organized against Jim Crow conditions and violence as part of the state's larger civil rights movement.

Mobilization: Military and Industry

As the largest city in Maryland, Baltimore played an outsized role in the state's home front production and readiness. The Bethlehem Sparrows Point Shipyard and steel mill located in Baltimore County, adjacent to the city of Baltimore, contributed to the drastic increase in national steel production during the war. The steel complex at Sparrows Point produced nearly 20 million tons of steel during the war. The steel mill earned an Army Navy "E" Award for exceeding its production goal for the 1942 fiscal year.¹

Bethlehem operated other shipyards in Maryland, including the Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard in Baltimore. In the years between 1941 and 1945, the Fairfield shipyard produced the largest number of Liberty Ships of any shipyard in the country at 384, in addition to 94 Victory Ships and 45 LSTs (Landing Ship-Tank).²



Bethlehem-Fairfield shipyards, Baltimore, Maryland. Launching ceremony. May 1943. Credit: Arthur S. Siegel, Library of Congress.

Other infrastructure projects came to Baltimore thanks to the central place it occupies in the corridor of cities between the nation's capital and the densely populated northeast. For example, [the Baltimore-Washington Parkway](#) saw construction work during the war, buttressing its capabilities as a transportation corridor. The expanded highway relieved traffic congestion on U.S. Route 1 and other regional expressways. In addition, the Parkway connected federal facilities in the Maryland countryside, such as Fort Meade and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center of the USDA, to other agencies and buildings in the federal district.³

¹ Mark Reutter, *Sparrows Point: Making Steel: The Rise and Ruin of American Industrial Might* (New York: Summit Books, 1988), 305, 317-318.

² Joseph Abel, "[Building a Bridge of Ships: Fairfield Shipyard](#)," Baltimore Museum of Industry, September 17, 2019.

³ Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, "Baltimore-Washington Parkway, Greenbelt, Prince George's County, MD," <https://www.loc.gov/item/md1496/>.

Maryland was also known for its aircraft manufacturing. The Glenn L. Martin Company, which opened in Middle River (also in Baltimore County) in 1929, mainly produced the B-26 Marauder medium bombers during the war. The design was later updated and known as the B-26B, of which 1,883 were built by early 1944. By the war's end, the plant had produced over 11,000 planes.⁴ The Fairchild Aircraft Corporation, located in Hagerstown to the west, built thousands of trainer planes for Allied pilots to learn to fly fighter and bomber crafts, including over 5,000 PT-19 training crafts. The Hagerstown location also became the secret headquarters for Fairchild engineers to design and build the C-82 "Packet" that allowed military vehicles to drive onboard and be taken via plane to war.⁵

Maryland's geographic position, hugging the Chesapeake Bay and the nation's capital, also impacted the development of its military landscape. The Aberdeen Proving Ground, 26 miles to the northeast of Baltimore, was renovated in 1940 and 1941 to provide new capabilities to the Ballistic Research Laboratory and the Ordnance Training School. A total of 5,479 civilians and 27,185 military personnel contributed to the war effort from Aberdeen, working to research, develop, and train new technologies and methods, with a particular focus on automotive, armor, and anti-aircraft gun development. The facility claims many technological contributions to the war effort, including "the world's first digital computer (the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Calculator or ENIAC), the first man-portable antitank weapons system (the Bazooka) and the first system-wide practical applications of Statistical Quality Control."⁶

Fort Washington, 20 miles below Washington, DC on the Potomac, earned its infamy as the only point defending the capital during the War of 1812. During WWII, the Fort became an Adjutant General School, a training facility for Army officers in administration duties. The 67th Women's Army Auxiliary Corps joined the Adjutant General's School in March of 1943, under the command of Captain Dorothy A. Tomhave. There, they served in transportation, communications, and administrative roles.⁷ Fort Meade, south of Baltimore, served as a major training hub used by more than 200 units and 3.5 million soldiers from 1942-46.⁸ At Fort Detrick in Frederick, west of Baltimore, scientists converged in 1943 to develop defenses against biological agents and "pioneered laboratory designs, equipment and procedures used for infectious disease research that are in place today in laboratories worldwide."⁹

In 1942, the federal government built "Shangri-La" in western Maryland's Catoctin Recreational Demonstration Area as a secure wartime retreat for President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Office of Strategic Services, precursor to today's CIA, was also housed at Catoctin under orders from President Roosevelt, training men and women in the art of espionage.¹⁰

Mobilization: Changes for Workers

The high number of Maryland men leaving to fight overseas coupled with the increased demand for war industry work created severe labor shortages. Women from all backgrounds stepped into new job

⁴ Bill Yenne, *The American Aircraft Factory in World War II* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2006), 44.

⁵ "The Hangar," Hagerstown Aviation Museum. "[Race, Gender, & War: Manufacturing in Maryland During World War II](#)," Maryland Center for History and Culture (2022), 14.

⁶ "History," U.S. Army, Aberdeen Proving Ground, U.S. Army.

⁷ "[67th Women's Army Auxiliary Corps](#)," Fort Washington Park, National Park Service.

⁸ "History," Fort G. Meade, U.S. Army.

⁹ "History," Fort Detrick, U.S. Army.

¹⁰ Edmund Wehrle, *Catoctin Mountain Park: An Historic Resource Study* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007), 197-98.

opportunities despite initial hesitation from companies and workers. Of 54,000 workers who built B26 bombers night and day at the peak of Glenn L. Martin's wartime production, 16,000 were women, many of whom were "Rosie the Riveters." African Americans also gained new work opportunities in the face of ongoing racial discrimination and segregation. Ample defense jobs made Baltimore a key location in the "Second Great Migration," when thousands of African Americans left the South for northern cities.¹¹

To address the influx of workers who accompanied wartime production, the Glenn L. Martin Aircraft Company built a company neighborhood in the suburbs of Middle River to house working-class employees on the production line. The neighborhood, named Aero Acres after its 1941 completion, included homes constructed using a prefabricated artificial building material known as cemento, which consisted of "panels of pressed sugar-cane fiber sprayed with a coat of asbestos cement on each side."¹² Prefabricated techniques like those used at Aero Acres were fast enough to keep up with the pace of wartime expansion, but were produced without understanding of the long-term health effects of materials such as asbestos.

Discrimination and Fights for Equality

In a state steeped in Jim Crow, Maryland companies pushed back against hiring African Americans. Before the war, Glenn L. Martin only hired white men, and it was only after the government passed Executive Order 8802 barring discrimination in defense industries that the company began hiring Black workers. Despite having over 50,000 workers, only 5% were African American by 1944, and they worked in a segregated factory. The Fairchild Aircraft Company also hired Black workers but did not allow them to work at the main plant. Instead, they worked at Plant No. 7 in an all-Black workforce. The Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyards, however, did not segregate by race. Black workers across the board faced discrimination and segregation in housing. Companies and city officials often refused, sometimes in response to white local pressure, to build adequate housing for Black workers while simultaneously expanding housing options for white workers.¹³

Before the war, organizations like the NAACP and local labor unions in Baltimore fought for equal rights and pay. They also organized against lynching and police violence, which culminated in the 1942 March on Annapolis, the first mass civil rights demonstration at the state's capital. The immediate cause of this demonstration was the fatal shooting of a Black uniformed soldier, Private Thomas E. Broadus, by a white police officer. The prominent Black newspaper the *Baltimore Afro-American* played a significant role in highlighting the ongoing discrimination faced by Black service members and defense workers while also promoting the "Double V" campaign that fought against fascism abroad and racism at home.¹⁴

Life on the Home Front

Maryland residents eagerly joined forces in a number of civilian defense efforts. For example, the Maryland Minute Men formed to protect localities in case of threat before the Maryland Guard could arrive. By 1943, the Maryland Minute Men consisted of 184 groups with close to 11,000 members. Maryland's public libraries played a significant role on the World War II home front compared to libraries across the country and nation. The library system used its community reach to help with war

¹¹ "[Race, Gender, & War](#)," 11, 30.

¹² Elyse Marguerite Marks, "The World War II Defense Housing Community of Aero Acres: Case Study for the Future Preservation of Historic Planned Suburban Communities" (MA thesis, Columbia University, 2012).

¹³ "[Race, Gender, & War](#)," 10-11, 15, 25, 29-30. "[Baltimore County, Maryland](#)," National Park Service.

¹⁴ "[1930-1965: The Great Depression and World War II](#)," Baltimore Civil Rights Heritage.

propaganda efforts. The Enoch Pratt Free Public Library in Baltimore used its plethora of resources to aid the home front effort in several ways. This included creating book lists to go with the theme “I Am an American,” having war information tables, and information on where to find training for different industrial fields. In 1944 the library opened a window exhibit on “Victory Gardens” along with information on how to start, grow, and maintain your own garden.¹⁵

After the War

World War II helped permanently shift Maryland’s economy away from agriculture and heavy industry to military infrastructure centered on defense contracting, aerospace engineering, weapons testing, and federal intelligence and surveillance. Today, Fort Meade houses the headquarters of the National Security Agency and the [National Cryptologic Museum](#). The volume of military testing and manufacturing during the war left a legacy of environmental degradation, including unexploded WWII-era bombs and artillery shells as well as groundwater contamination. “Shangri-La” was preserved as Camp David and has become a focal point of global diplomacy. War worker housing laid the groundwork for the postwar suburban boom but also systemic housing segregation that inspired a highly visible interracial student movement, led by students at Morgan State College, to overturn decades of segregationist policies.

Places of World War II History

- **Baltimore County:** Maryland’s designated World War II Heritage City was remarkable for its industrial contributions, including Bethlehem Steel’s Sparrow Point Shipyard and steel mill as well as the Glenn L. Martin Company’s aviation factory. Today, you can visit the [Glenn L. Martin Maryland Aviation Museum](#) and the [Baltimore Museum of Industry](#) to learn more.
- **Fairchild Aircraft Corporation:** Located in Hagerstown, the company’s plants, including the all-Black Plant No. 7, produced thousands of trainer aircraft for Allied forces.
- **Fort Washington:** Now a national [park](#), Fort Washington became an Adjunct General School, training 300 officers every 60 days, and was home to the 67th Women’s Auxiliary Corps.

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¹⁵ Gwenlyn Coddington, “The Sole Measure of Service: A Social History of Baltimore’s Public Libraries during World War II” (MA thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 2019), 14, 28.