

## Broadsheet III:

# RATIONING AND WAR BONDS: *Daily Life during the War*

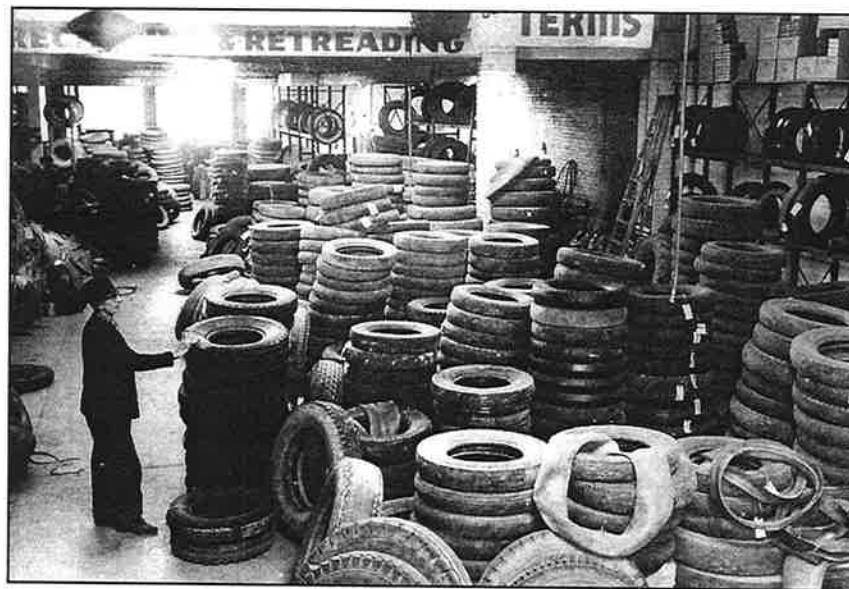
*It's a Saturday night in 1943. You've just gotten off work. You stop by the grocery store: no steak, no hamburger, no meat of any kind available. No butter either. You've used all your meat ration tickets anyway. Won't get your new ration book for three more days, so you guess it's eggs and canned vegetables for dinner again.*

*Your pockets are full of money, but you can't go anywhere. You've used up your gasoline ration.*

*Even if you hadn't, it wouldn't matter. The gas stations all have signs that say "Out of gas." The station owners save some for their old customers, but you're new in town, you had to move for this job. And even if you had gas, your tires are worn out and you can't get new tires because of the rubber shortage. You walk home, eat your meatless dinner.*

*Afterward, you think about walking to the theatre to watch Mrs. Minniver, that war movie about England. The newsreels they always show before the movie will have the latest word from the Italian front, where your brother is serving. You carefully wash and crush your tin can and put it in the bag with the rest of the cans you've saved. You pick up the newspaper and read Ernie Pyle's column, always told from the point of view of the common soldier. You look at the comics — "Joe Palooka," "Blondie" and "Dick Tracy" are your favorites. Finishing the paper, you pick up one of those new paperback books and begin to read.*

***Another night on the home front.***



### Rationing and Mr. Black

Despite its rich resources and manufacturing base, the U.S. was hit by a series of shortages between 1941 and 1945. After the Japanese takeover of rubber plantations in the Far East, there was a shortage of rubber until synthetic methods of making rubber were developed. Then steel became scarce. Then gasoline. Then sugar. Then coffee. Then leather. Then meat. Then many other types of food.

Roosevelt established the Office of Price Administration (OPA) in January 1942. Its mission was to regulate the prices charged for everything from rent to razor blades, so that rising prices (inflation) would not interfere with the production of necessary war materials. In early 1942 the

Rubber was one of the first items to become scarce. With new tires unavailable, recapping and retreading of worn tires answered the needs of the Nation's 30 million drivers until shortages prompted the government to ban the practice. Americans became so desperate that where to get tires became a common topic of conversation and some drivers tried to use wooden tires. They didn't work very well. In the short term, the only solution was to persuade drivers to drive less. Gas rationing was just around the corner. *Sacramento Archives & Museum Collection Center*

OPA froze prices at the maximum level charged in March of that year. Government price controls remained in effect for the duration of the war — although beginning in 1943 monthly adjustments were made, which helped to keep the economy under control. The OPA also froze rents in parts of the country, regulated changes in wages and administered the country's rationing programs.

Gasoline rationing began December 1, 1942, almost a year after Pearl Harbor. Most people got one of three kinds of ration stickers: "A" stickers allowed a person about four gallons of gas a week; a "B" sticker permitted a little more; "C" stickers were issued if driving was essential. Truckers

Ration book in hand, this woman contemplates the purchase of a canned item that will cost her 16 cents and 12 ration points. Office of Price Administration, National Archives



got a special “T” sticker. The bigwigs in Congress got a “X” sticker that excluded them from rationing altogether.

Because gasoline was rationed, most Americans drove less. The city streets were quieter; highway deaths were cut in half between 1941 and 1942. More people would have used bicycles but rubber for the tires was hard to get, and a permit was needed to buy a new bicycle due to steel and aluminum shortages. The OPA banned all pleasure driving, but people did it anyway. Some were caught by OPA investigators — who might write down license numbers at a racetrack, for example — but most people either followed the rules or got away with breaking them.

Gasoline and tire rationing made life inconvenient, but it was food rationing that Americans hated most. Sugar was rationed beginning in May 1942, followed by coffee in November. Initially, rationing worked on a single-item basis. A ration coupon, used in conjunction with money, permitted the purchase of a rationed item — a certain amount of sugar, for example, or a pair of shoes. But, in the early months of 1943 rationing of meats, canned and processed foods, cheese,

butter and other fats began, and the rationing system shifted to a complex, fluctuating point system that frustrated both housewives and retailers.

The OPA assigned a point value to each of some 200 rationed food items. This value fluctuated, depending on scarcity. Ration books were distributed to every man, woman and child, filled with lettered, numbered and color-coded coupons or stamps. Red stamps were for meats, cheese and fats; blue were for processed foods. Letters indicated what months a coupon could be redeemed; numbers represented point value. A housewife had to budget points as well as money so as not to come up short at the end of the month. Compared to the conditions in other Allied countries, America’s shortages were minor, but some Americans resented being told how much meat to eat and how much driving they could do. For those who found wartime restrictions too harsh, there was always Mr. Black.

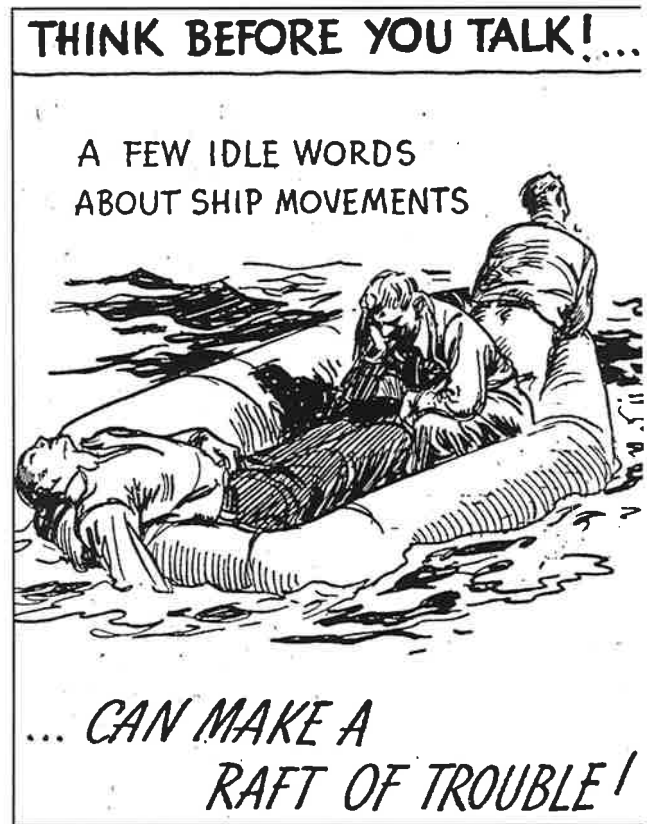
Mr. Black was the black market, an informal, illegal way of buying the goods that were officially rationed. The majority of Americans followed the rules most of the time, but many people violated the rules in small ways and a small number of people committed major violations of OPA rules. The OPA had few inspectors to enforce regulations. Up to 30 percent of the gasoline in some major cities was sold illegally. Ration stamps were stolen, sometimes right out of OPA offices; they were also counterfeited.

#### War and Advertising

The main goal of advertising is to stimulate business and encourage spending. In a wartime economy with shortages the rule for most products, there would not seem to be much reason or need for advertising. But surprisingly, advertising budgets for most companies increased during the war years. Advertising budgets for 1942 totaled \$195 million; \$390 million was spent in 1944. There were large increases in both print journalism and radio. It was not surprising for a large newspaper like *The New York Times* to turn down as much as 30 pages of advertising every day.

With not much to buy, the subject for most advertising became loyalty to the war effort. Indirectly, advertising became an arm of domestic propaganda. Products that had little to do with national defense were suddenly presented as having some profound effect on the war effort. The makers

of Lucky Strike cigarettes created the slogan “Lucky Strike Green has gone to War” when they changed their packaging from green to white. They claimed there was a shortage of the green ink; there was no such shortage. In another ad, readers were urged to “be patriotic and smother sneezes with Kleenex to help keep colds from spreading to war workers.” Although shortages of chemicals and chemical solvents decreased the availability of both cosmetics and clothing, women were still targeted with a “Beauty is Duty” campaign



... CAN MAKE A RAFT OF TROUBLE!

Fearing domestic spying, the government cautioned Americans against idle talk about troop movements. For the same reason, mail from loved ones in the armed services was opened by censors, who snipped out “vital” information before sending it along. *Private Collection*

conveying the message that as the “weaker sex,” it was the job of females to keep up morale by keeping up appearances.

The efforts of advertisers to present their product in the light of national defense sometimes strayed into bad taste. Radio listeners in New York, for example, after hearing of heavy casualties in an action, were then counseled by an area funeral home: “You never know when to expect bad news. So be prepared. Buy a family plot.”

Another reason advertisers worked to keep their product in the public eye was to insure a good post-war position. Most economists predicted a boom after the war, and companies wanted to be in a position to make good profits when the country returned to a peacetime economy. And advertisers were beginning to realize the potential of a new invention that had amazing possibilities for commercialism: five commercial television stations were in operation before the Japanese surrendered.

### Sports in a Wartime Society

Professional sports seasons continued throughout the war years. For Americans, sports were an important form of entertainment and stress relief from the deprivations and tension of daily life. The call for able-bodied men in the armed services, however, robbed sports of most of its big stars. In fact, big stars who had not enlisted by the end of 1942 were often subjected to verbal abuse by fans.

Joe Louis, only the second African-American to win the heavyweight boxing title, was champion throughout World War II. Louis joined the army in 1942 and spent his service years giving exhibitions to GI's. Only one heavyweight title fight was held during the war. Professional golf canceled the major tournaments for the duration. Professional football continued on, even though many of its best players were in the service.

Baseball was particularly hard hit by the war. The biggest stars of the game, Ted Williams, Joe DiMaggio, Hank Greenburg, Phil Rizzuto and Bob Feller, were all in the service. In fact, of the 5,700 players in the minor and major leagues of baseball, 4,000 were in the service. Many minor league teams were forced to stop playing, while the major leagues utilized the skills of lesser known talent. Pete Gray, a one-armed player, with the St. Louis Browns and later the



Several bond drives were organized during the course of the war. Some were successful at meeting the target amount, but many were not. In general, drives that featured popular sports stars and movie stars were the most successful. An exhibition baseball game that included the Yankees, the Dodgers and the Giants — all New York teams at the time — grossed \$56 million. *Sacramento Archives & Museum Collection Center*

Baltimore Orioles, played for a year and drew cheering crowds.

Still, baseball was an important source of entertainment for home front society. In a letter to the baseball commissioner, President Roosevelt said it this way: "Baseball provides a recreation which does not last over two hours, or two hours and a half, and which can be got for very little cost." Shortwave radio broadcasts of games were sent to soldiers in the field, providing them with an important link to home.

Baseball was forced to make a number of adjustments because of the war. In some cities, night games were banned because of blackout rules. Games began in the afternoon, and sometimes even the morning. Travel schedules had to be changed because trains were often diverted for troop movement.

Teams found a way to contribute to the war effort in several ways. Proceeds of World Series games were turned over to war relief. Clubs sponsored scrap drives, aluminum drives and war bond drives. Proceeds from the All-Star games were used to buy baseball equipment for soldiers.

#### Hollywood's Response

Even before the U.S. entered the war, the movies that Hollywood made had a distinctly pro-English and anti-Nazi bias. This bias prompted an isolationist Senator, Champ Clark of Missouri, to claim that Hollywood was "turning 17,000 movie theaters into 17,000 nightly mass meetings for war."

Once the U.S. was in the war, however, the controversy died and Hollywood found various ways to "do their part" for the war effort. Many leading male stars, including Clark Gable, Jimmy Stewart and Douglas Fairbanks Jr., volunteered for active duty and distinguished themselves with their conduct. Female stars could show the proper patriotic spirit by appearing in government films, working in the famous Hollywood Canteen (a nightclub for servicemen), christening newly built warships or lending their images to war posters.

Another commitment made by Hollywood stars was to encourage the public to buy war bonds, loans to the government to help pay for the war. One star, Dorothy Lamour, was credited with selling \$350 million worth of war

bonds. Another, Carole Lombard, died in a plane crash while on tour to sell bonds.

Both male and female entertainers crisscrossed the globe to bring shows to the armed services. Under the direction of the Hollywood Victory Committee, almost 7,000 entertainers traveled over 5 million miles to bring shows to the troops. Along the way, Hollywood also managed to make a movie, *Follow the Boys*, to chronicle the efforts these entertainers made. The large Hollywood movie studios made contributions also: major studios made training films, Walt

Disney made animated cartoon training films and Disney artists designed service patches for the Navy.

The stirring patriotic films made by Hollywood during this period were not that successful at the box office. The wartime American public, their pockets full of money, spent more than ever to go to movies, and the movies they wanted to see were ones that helped them escape the stress of their daily lives. Irving Berlin gave the country its most popular wartime song, "White Christmas," in the 1942 film *Holiday Inn*.



Many actors and actresses devoted their time to the war effort. They did everything from putting on shows to sponsoring war bond drives to serving as waiters and waitresses at canteens. Perhaps no other actor is better known for his activities than Bob Hope. He is shown here posing as a ticket taker at the Presidio Army base in San Francisco. Hope would go on to entertain troops during the Korean and Vietnam wars. *Presidio Army Museum Photo Collection*