



FEATURE STORY

WWII Weapon Production in Tennessee

By Station Camp High School research team:
Brianna, Taya, Madison, Caleb, Eulisses

Businesses in Tennessee received more than one billion dollars in contracts for military supplies from 1940 to 1945. Although Tennessee industries did not experience as much growth as in some other parts of the nation, war production provided the state economy with a much needed boost.

Tennessee played an important role in producing weapons. The massive Holston Ordnance Works plant was located near Kingsport. In this factory, workers produced a very dangerous explosive called Research Development Explosive or RDX.



By doe-oakridge - Billboard Oak Ridge During World War II, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=65677641>

Tennessee played a primary role in the creation of the atomic age. Oak Ridge, which had grown out of the Manhattan Project, produced vital components of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima during the final stages of the war.

< Billboard at Oakridge WWII

To manufacture nuclear materials needed for the atomic bomb, the government secretly built an entire city called Oak Ridge in the hills of Tennessee. Most Tennesseans didn't know it existed until after the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan in 1945.

Four production facility sites were located in valleys away from the town. This provided security and containment in case of accidental explosions. The Y-12 area, home of the electromagnetic plant, was closest to Oak Ridge, being one ridge away to the south. Farther to the south and west lay both the X-10 area, which contained the experimental plutonium pile and separation facilities, and K-25, site of the gaseous diffusion plant and later the S-50 thermal diffusion plant. The first was Alcoa. The Aluminum Company of America's factory

south of Knoxville, Tennessee, was then the largest aluminum plant in the world. Months before Pearl Harbor, as war loomed, defense experts realized how important aluminum would be in building an air force—especially one with the 50,000 plane-strength demanded by President Roosevelt in May 1940.

During the war, Nashville became an important center for military aircraft production. In 1940, a new, very large airplane factory was constructed in Nashville. During the war, Vultee made planes for both Great Britain and the United States. They built both fighter and bomber airplanes.

Sources

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