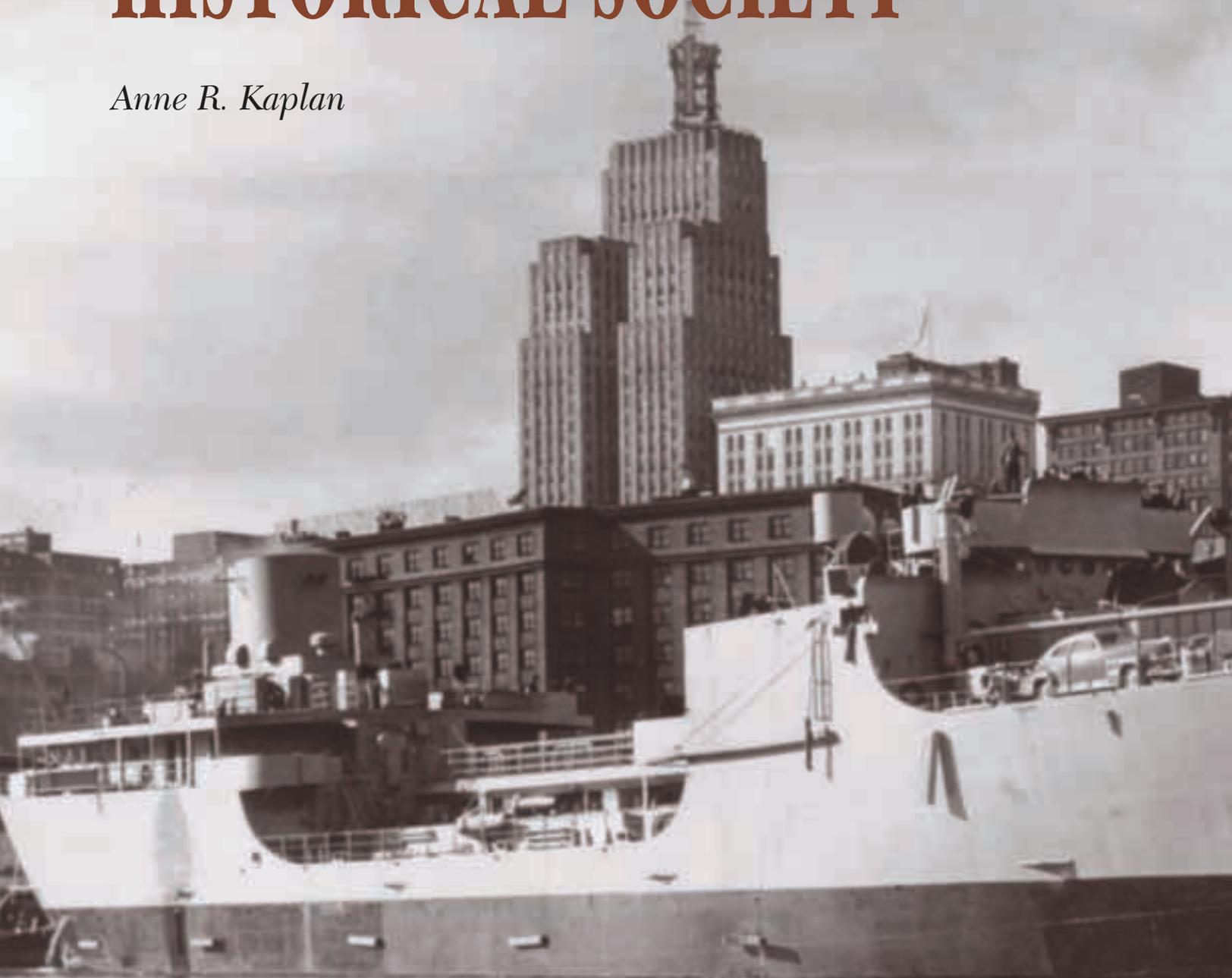


Fifty Years Ago—

EXPLORING WORLD WAR II AT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Anne R. Kaplan



Navy tanker, built on the Minnesota River at Savage, docked in St. Paul on its way to New Orleans, 1944. All parts of the vessel were made in Minnesota, including the guns by Northern Pump of Fridley. The vessel was 325 feet long and 55 feet high; it drew 9 feet empty (18 feet when loaded).

THE MINNESOTA



MHS
COLLECTIONS

As 1995 has unfolded, countries around the world have marked the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II. Ceremonies—some somber, some joyous—have commemorated the steppingstones to war's end: Victory in Europe, liberation of the Nazi death camps, approval of the United Nations charter, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and, finally, Japan's formal surrender on September 2.

Although fought “over there,” World War II had immense local impact. Some 326,000 Minnesota men and women enlisted in the military, leaving school, jobs, and families behind.¹ Others went to work in war industries or filled jobs vacated by servicemen. New, if temporary, opportunities opened for women and people of color. Civil defense exercises, price controls, rationing—these and other wartime measures brought the conflict home to all Americans.

Times to remember, anniversaries also spark new interest in the events they commemorate. The Minnesota Historical Society holds a wealth of material documenting political, social, economic, and cultural aspects of the war years. From records of international diplomacy to

¹ Figures compiled by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and obtained from Dennis Forsberg, Minnesota's director of veterans programs.

Anne Kaplan, editor of this magazine, prepared this overview with the help of MHS staff specialists Tino Avaloz, Mark Greene, Thomas O'Sullivan, Hampton Smith, Marx Swanholm, Duane Swanson, and Jeffrey Tordoff.



personal correspondence, from pictures of Minnesota-made battleships to ration books, the collections yield insights into Minnesotans' involvement in the conflict of the century.

Newspapers from the 1940s chronicle not only Allied war efforts but countless details of life on the home front. Available on microfilm at the MHS Research Center is virtually every newspaper ever published in the state—some 4,000 titles.

Reports of the fighting overseas and federal policies, while taking up the papers' front pages, account for only a fraction of the news. Reminders of war-bond and war-loan campaigns, pointers for Victory gardeners, Red Cross reports, and directives from the Office of Price Administration vie for space with stories of prisoners (home-town boys and enemy servicemen),

lists of new recruits and those just sent overseas, and features about local residents recently appointed to important wartime positions. Emphasizing self-sufficiency and sacrifice, the women's pages include directions for homemade *everything*, from meatless meals to bridal gowns concocted with a minimum of fabric and fuss.

Books and photographs in the Research Center offer other perspectives. While photos capture people, places, and events such as small-town streetscapes and ebullient victory celebrations, books set these images in context and provide a wealth of detail and analysis. There are, for example, general histories of the war, examinations of topics such as Red Cross work or alien internment camps in the U.S., published diaries and memoirs, and bibliographies chronicling the wartime contributions of African Americans, Indians, and women, to name a few groups.

Because the armed forces realized the value of recording what happened and why, they saved records for later study. In addition, historians were drafted (sometimes literally) to compile volumes on subjects ranging from operational campaigns to

support services and surgical techniques. Designated as an official Government Records Repository, the historical society library received these publications as they were released by the U.S. Superintendent of Documents, beginning in the 1950s.

The largest series, the 17-volume *The United States Army in World War II*, includes two volumes of photographs, detailed analyses of major campaigns, and histories of lesser-known areas such as logistics and transportation. The best-known—and perhaps the best written—service history is Samuel Eliot Morison's seven-volume *A History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*. (Morison wrote the highly regarded biography of Christopher Columbus, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*.) Compiled by a great historian rather than a committee, the work was later revised and published as *The Two Ocean War*.



Goldwyn Callerstrom enlisted in the Minnesota State Guard in August 1943 and served with the 1st Medical Detachment until December 1945. The jacket, cap, and skirt pictured here are in the MHS museum collections.

Not to be outdone, the Marines produced the five-volume *United States Marine Corps Operations in World War II*, which details even the actions of regiments and platoons.

Decades after the war ended, each service branch continued to sponsor studies; for example, *On the Treadmill to Pearl Harbor* and *At Close Quarters: P.T. Boats in the United States Navy*. The morbid but fascinating *U.S. Submarine Losses in World War II* gives capsule histories of each vessel and crew lists. Also available are some histo-

ries of the enemy, such as Williamson Murray's *Strategy for Defeat: The Luftwaffe, 1933–1945*, published by the U.S. Air Force in 1983.

A more subjective, personal picture of the war emerges from the materials in the MHS manuscripts collection, and virtually any collection dating from the mid-1930s to the late 1940s holds something of interest. Letters, diaries, scrapbooks, photographs, and reminiscences of the men and women in the armed forces tell many different stories. For example, the papers of the Spreigl family of St. Paul contain extensive correspondence from four sons (three in the army in Europe, one in the navy in the Pacific) to their parents. The Leland R. Rowberg papers include not only his letters home to Northfield but the scrapbook his parents kept with their notification of his death in combat, subsequent government correspondence, and condolence letters. Eli Mark's typescript diary recounts his experiences in a forward-observation battalion in Patton's Third Army. The exchange of letters between Morton Katz, stationed in Australia, and his eight-year-old niece Sally in South St. Paul contain drawings and a child's-eye view of daily life on the home front.

The MHS collections relating to women in the military are especially strong. Examples of correspondence include the stateside letters of Anne Bosanko Green of the Women's Army Corps (WAC), published by the MHS Press as *One Woman's War*; letters from Josephine Downey, a WAC cryptographer in the Philippines and New Guinea, to her parents in St. Paul; and correspondence from Mabel Johnson to family and friends while serving as a nurse in England, France, and Belgium. (Her unit came under fire during the Battle of the Bulge.) The letters, photos, and documents of Women's Air Service Pilot (WASP) Virginia Mae Hope of Winnebago, who died in a crash in Omaha, Nebraska, tell a sadder story. Examples of Hope's military clothing, including her leather flight suit and cap, are in MHS museum collections, and she is one of the Minnesotans portrayed by costumed interpreters in the History Center's exhibit gallery.²

The manuscripts collection also holds compelling accounts of the years before, during, and after the war overseas. Minnesotans such as Walter Judd and John Foster, who lived in China during the 1930s, left letters, diaries, and reminis-

² Where there are papers or letters, for example, there is often a uniform or photograph as well. Researchers should check all of the MHS collections for supporting material.

cences detailing the horrors of the Sino-Japanese War. The typed, German-language autobiography of Bruno R. Menzel, who later emigrated to Minneapolis, recounts his life in Germany during the 1930s and '40s. Families such as the Tauer of Morgan received letters from German relatives describing postwar living conditions, and civilian employees in occupied Germany, including Emerson Hopp and Eloi Anderson, wrote memoirs and letters recounting their experiences.

Life in home-front Minnesota appears in the manuscript collections, as well. Diaries and letters in the Pierce Butler and Langdon family papers, for example, reflect the lives of students and workers. Ruth Tanbara's papers detail her internment in a Japanese relocation camp in California and her parents' internment in Idaho as well as her successful efforts to relocate in St. Paul. The papers of many politicians contain extensive material on the legislative activities necessary to sustain the war *and* the complications that the new bureaucracy created for constituents. Of special note are the briefing books of former governor Harold E. Stassen, a U.S. delegate to the meeting that created the United Nations in 1945.

As one of the nation's largest repositories of business records, the MHS offers the opportunity to explore how the war affected companies. The 15,000 cubic feet of Great Northern and Northern Pacific Railway records, for example, include extensive files about shipping war materials and how this priority affected passenger service. Papers from companies as varied as Munsingwear, American Crystal Sugar, and Honeywell provide evidence of shifts in production, labor and supplies shortages, and changes in marketing strategies.

Finally, the manuscripts collections contain the records of many World War II organizations: the Minneapolis regional office of the War Production Board's salvage division, the Committee on the Resettlement of Japanese Americans (concerned with moving people out of internment camps), the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, the St. Paul USO (United Service Organizations), and the women's division of the Hennepin County War Finance Com-

mittee, for example. Also significant are the papers of organizations established before the war, including the Minnesota branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota, and the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union.

In May 1942, Governor Stassen created the War History Committee, an agency of the Minnesota Office of Civilian Defense. The Minnesota State Archives at MHS now holds about 50 boxes of its files.

Conceived by the Minnesota Historical Society, which chose the committee's director and provided office space, the group helped Minnesota government agencies, civilian organizations, and individuals preserve their records for future historians.

Included in the committee's records are administrative and correspondence files; pamphlets and circulars from agencies involved with the war overseas, the home front, and foreign relief; and records from local affiliates of the National War Fund, which raised money for efforts such as the Polish War Relief. One box from the Committee on Conservation of Cultural Resources discusses plans to protect books, paintings, scientific materials, and museum holdings from enemy attack *or* emergency measures at home, such as the demand for waste paper that might have resulted in the disposal of valuable records.

Also in the state archives are the gubernatorial records of Harold Stassen (1939–42) and Edward J. Thye (1943–47). They contain numerous files on home-front activities, local responses, and matters of personal interest, such as training for defense at Camp Ripley, protests against working married women, army munitions, defense bonds, blackouts, world peace, coordination with federal housing agencies, moral rearmament, and postwar advisory committees.

From flight jackets and service medals to ration books and buttons promoting the victory effort, the MHS museum collections preserve the material record of Minnesotans at war. Included are uniforms representing every



branch of the armed services. Dress clothing, worn infrequently and under less stressful conditions than field gear, survives in greater abundance: summer and winter uniforms, overcoats and removable liners, caps with exchangeable brims, ties, socks, shoes, and boots. A wide variety of women's uniforms documents Minnesotans' service in the WAC, WAVES, WASP, Army Nurse Corps, and Women Marines. White gloves, scarves, purses, caps, sturdy shoes, and high heels are among the accessories. Home-front service is represented by uniforms from such units as the Coastal Artillery and the Minnesota State Guard. There are also homemade knitted items, such as balaclavas and dickeys.

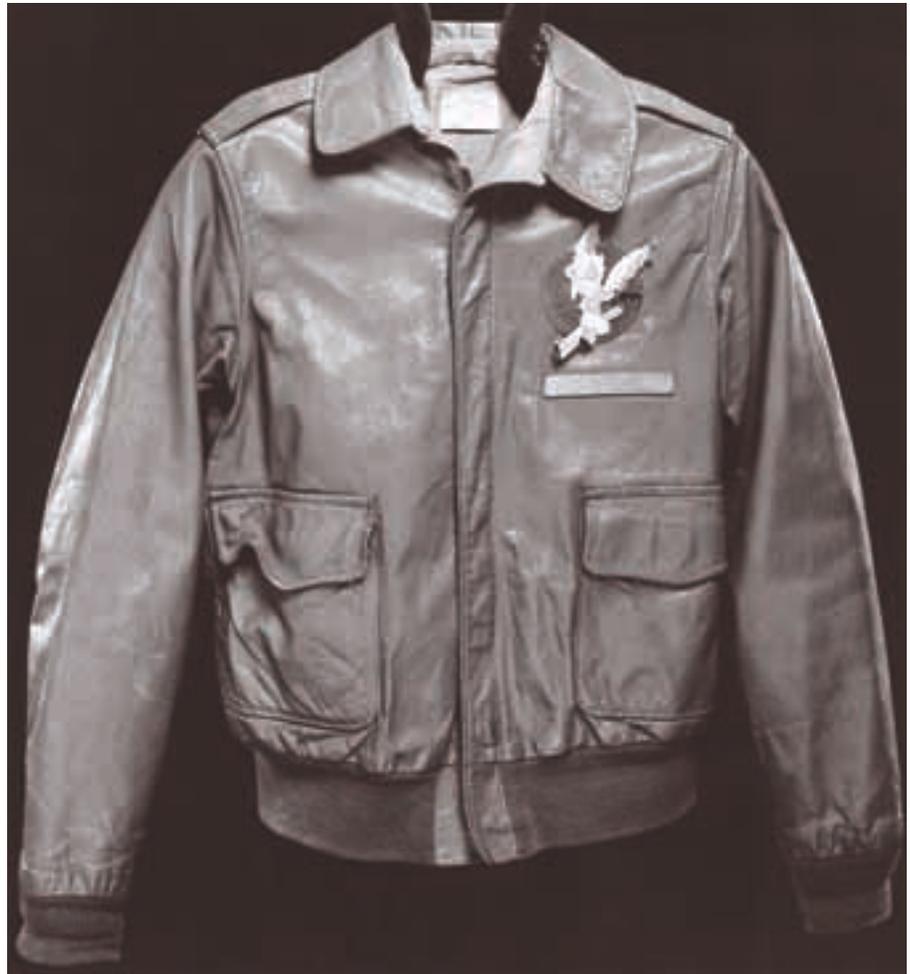
In addition to service and victory medals, the collections contain a sprinkling of other decorations: Geraldine W. Barry's bronze star for meritorious achievement in preparing statistical reports and former governor Orville L. Freeman's Purple Heart, for example. Also preserved is the Red Cross service medal as well as the uniform cape and insignia of army nurse Ernestine M. Koranda, who was later killed in a plane crash. A hospital ship was named in her honor, and her story is told in the History Center's "Families" exhibit, opening on November 19, 1995.

Posters, pamphlets, and other visual items promoted the war effort by exhorting Minnesotans to buy bonds, grow gardens, save scraps, and eat sensibly. The museum's rich collections include window placards and stickers, ration books and their holders, ration stamps and coupons for everything from gasoline and fuel oils to sugar for home canning. "Every week we are sending shiploads of canned goods to feed our fighting men. . . . We at home will share all that is left.

. . . We cannot afford to waste food or give some people more than their fair share," reads the *Instructions for Obtaining War Ration Book Two*.

Tapes in the MHS oral history collection underscore the many ways Minnesotans participated in World War II. Researchers can hear Katherine G. Bowen recall her experiences in China, Isadore Goldberg and Leonard López discuss their military service, and Elizabeth B. Heffelfinger describe her work as head of the women's division of Hennepin County's Office of Civil Defense. Three of eight interviews documenting the Minnesota branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom—with Madge Hawkins, Viena J. Hendrickson, and Olive Meili—span the war years. Founded in 1922, this organization lobbied for peace, human rights, disarmament, and the United Nations.

In addition to the tapes housed at the History Center in St. Paul, the MHS collection includes



Virginia Mae Hope's silk-lined leather flight jacket. The cutout leather WASP insignia is *Fifinella*, a Walt Disney creation, painted yellow, blue, red, and black.

many others located in the state's regional research centers. Of particular note is an extensive project on the home front in western Minnesota that touches on antiwar sentiment, black-market operations, German prisoners of war working on farms, women's roles, rationing, effects on business, service in the war bureaucracy, and overseas military experiences.³

At Fort Snelling, home-front Minnesota came face to face with the military. A new exhibit at the MHS historic site, "Fort Snelling and World War II," depicts its years as an army reception center, the gateway for young men entering the service or being mustered out. Nearly 300,000 passed through, shedding civilian clothing to be tested, inoculated, issued G.I. garb, classified, and sent to other posts for basic training. With photographs, posters, news headlines, excerpts from diaries and letters, and clips from army training films (such as how to make a bed, Army style), the

exhibit charts the short path from civilian to soldier. It also covers the U.S. War Department's Military Intelligence Service Language School, which moved from Shakopee to the fort in 1944. There, more than 5,000 English-speaking Japanese Americans studied the Japanese language and trained for intelligence work in the Pacific.

Anniversaries provide good opportunities to think about the past as well as celebrate it. Fifty years ago, Americans were deliriously happy at the prospect of peace in a world returned to normalcy. Subsequent political, economic, and social developments have cast new light on wartime events and stimulated new interpretations. Half a century's worth of research material now reposes in libraries, archives, and museums, supplementing the private collections and memories of those who participated in one of history's watershed events.

³ Tapes from the western Minnesota project are stored in Moorhead and Morris. Lila J. Goff and James E. Fogerty, comps., *The Oral History Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984) is a useful guide to the riches of this resource.

All items used as illustrations are in the MHS collections.



Generals, silkscreen, 1940. Syd Fossun, one of Minnesota's most socially conscious and politically active artists in the 1930s, watched Europe's path toward war with grave concern. Here he caricatured the continent's leaders posturing before the ruins of their countries, a statement about the waste and futility of war.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).