

WWII IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

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December 7, 1941. Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood. Bill Gruber was helping his father hang wallpaper in the family's dining room when a neighbor interrupted: the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Bill's father asked what many Pittsburghers were thinking: "Where the hell is Pearl Harbor?"¹

He learned soon enough. World War II engulfed a generation of Americans in a conflict that scattered young men and women across the globe. It introduced strange new place names—Guadalcanal, Bataan, Casablanca, Anzio, Iwo Jima—and sent families searching for maps and atlases to identify where loved ones might be serving. The war changed Americans' understanding of their place in the world and catapulted the nation into global leadership.

It transformed life in Western Pennsylvania too, opening new doors of opportunity for many yet also highlighting inconsistencies in American society that had yet to be resolved. Wartime innovations inspired by military need brought exciting new technologies

to the American public, including the iconic Jeep. Likewise, this industrial expansion sowed the seeds of what became Pittsburgh's Renaissance, and national defense projects changed towns forever.

The Senator John Heinz History Center's new exhibit *We Can Do It! WWII* immerses visitors in the dramatic events of the 1940s, exploring how multiple generations of Western Pennsylvanians contributed to the war effort by fighting overseas or working in the region's industries. Featuring rare artifacts from the Smithsonian and private collections, historic vehicles, life-like figures, photographs, oral histories, and interactive activities, *We Can Do It! WWII* brings to life the stories behind the real people and companies that sustained a remarkable collective effort in Pittsburgh for at least half a decade, fighting a war that began for many Western Pennsylvanians years before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

¹ Dr. Joseph F. Rishel, *Pittsburgh Remembers World War II* (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2011), 81.



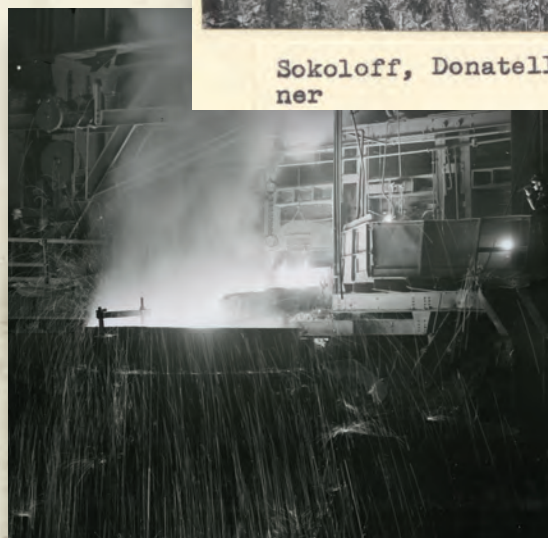
Mystery and myth surrounds J. Howard Miller's iconic "We Can Do It" poster, released by Westinghouse in February 1943 and posted on nearly 2,000 bulletin boards across the country (seen left behind the History Center's Rosie figure). Miller's "Rosie" was likely inspired by popular interest in the hit song "Rosie the Riveter" written by Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb in 1942.

A Jeep convoy outside of Kunming, China. At center is Beaver County native Eugene Donatelli.

Joyce Paeck collection, in honor of Brother John (Eugene) Donatelli OFM cap.



Sokoloff, Donatelli and Cartner



A ladle with 180 tons of molten steel, part of WWII production at the Edgar-Thompson Works, Carnegie-Illinois Steel Corp., Braddock, Pa.

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, Russell Aiken U. S. Steel Collection.