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Army-Navy "E" Awards in New Orleans, Louisiana

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Army-Navy “E” Awards in New Orleans, Louisiana

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts
in
History

by

Timothy S. Wilson

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Introduction	1
The War Production Board and the “E” Award	4
New Orleans and the “E” Award.....	8
Todd Johnson Shipyards	10
The Freeport Sulphur Company	13
The Freiberg Mahogany Company.....	16
Equitable Equipment Company.....	18
The Allen Boat Company.....	20
The Rheem Manufacturing Company	22
Higgins Industries.....	25
The American Red Cross Blood Donation Center	28
The End of the “E” Award	30
Bibliography	32
Vita.....	35

Abstract

This thesis, in conjunction with an interactive digital exhibit, examines the Army-Navy “E” Award as it was applied to military defense industries in New Orleans, Louisiana during World War II. The thesis and the website are available for World War II researchers of wartime manufacturing in New Orleans as well as teachers who are conducting lessons on wartime manufacturing and home-front activities in New Orleans throughout the duration of World War II. A thorough examination of historical records establishes the significance of wartime manufacturing capabilities of New Orleans during World War II by providing an historical narrative of those companies that received the Army-Navy “E” Award. This essay and exhibit also explore the effect the “E” had on the goods and services these businesses provided before, during, and after the war, and whether the companies stayed in business or failed after the war’s end. The thesis also considers the effect of total warfare in New Orleans, as defined during World War II, as well as the long- and short-term economic effects of the switch from a making civilian domestic goods to military production. Wartime manufacturing and military actions taken to boost production is an often overlooked and interesting lens in which to view New Orleans during World War II.

Keywords: Army-Navy ‘E’ Award, World War II, WWII, New Orleans

Introduction

On December 11, 1941, the United States of America declared war on Japan, thus formally entering World War II as an Allied power. A great many changes and sacrifices, both foreseeable and unpredicted, faced the nation seemingly overnight. The goods and services requirements of the U.S. military needed to be met, and the United States manufacturing needs during World War II increased to an unprecedented level of urgency. The requirements of a peacetime military can usually be met through specialized contractors or the labors of those within the armed forces, creating little or no disruption to civilian consumption. However, the sharply increased needs of a wartime military during World War II can only be met through total commitment to the war on the home front, both in terms of production and in terms of (forgoing) consumption. Total war effort on the home front requires the mobilization and utilization of any and all civilian associated resources, means of production, and infrastructure that can be put to military use, as well as re-prioritization of military needs over the needs of the citizenry. More importantly, this re-prioritization cannot occur without the willing, even enthusiastic, participation of those tasked with the home front war effort. The following 1942 excerpt from “A Call for Sacrifice” demonstrates Franklin D. Roosevelt’s social and political persuasion.

My Fellow Americans, it is nearly five months since we were attacked at Pearl Harbor. For the two years prior to that attack this country had been gearing itself up to a high level of production of munitions. And yet our war efforts had done little to dislocate the normal lives of most of us. Since then we have dispatched strong forces of our Army and Navy, several hundred thousand of them, to bases and battlefronts thousands of miles from home. We have stepped up our war production on a scale that is testing our industrial power, our engineering genius, and our economic structure to the utmost. We have had no illusions about the fact that this is a tough job and a long one. [...] Not all of us can have the privilege of working in a munition’s factory or a shipyard, or on the farms or in oil fields or mines, producing the weapons or the raw materials that are needed by our armed forces. [...] To build the factories, to buy the materials, to pay the labor, to provide the transportation, to equip and feed and house the soldiers and sailors and marines, and to do all the thousands of things necessary in a war all costs a lot of money, more money than has ever been spent by any nation at anytime in the long history of the world. We are now spending, solely for war

purposes, the sum of about \$100 million every day of the week. But, before this war is over, that almost unbelievable rate of expenditure will be doubled. All of this money has to be spent and spent quickly if we are to produce within the time now available the enormous quantities of weapons of war which we need. But the spending of these tremendous sums presents grave danger of disaster to our national economy. When your government continues to spend these unprecedented sums for munitions month by month and year by year, that money goes into the pocketbooks and bank accounts of the people of the United States. At the same time, raw materials and many manufactured goods are necessarily taken away from civilian use, and machinery and factories are being converted to war production. [...] All of us are used to spending money for things that we want, things, however, which are not absolutely essential. We will all have to forgo that kind of spending. Because we must put every dime and every dollar, we can possibly spare out of our earnings into war bonds and stamps. Because the demands of the war effort require the rationing of goods of which there is not enough to go around. Because the stopping of purchases of nonessentials will release thousands of workers who are needed in the war effort. I know the American farmer, the American workman, and the American businessman. I know that they will gladly embrace this economy and equality of sacrifice satisfied that it is necessary for the most vital and compelling motive in all their lives winning through to victory. [...] As we here at home contemplate our own duties, our own responsibilities, let us think and think hard of the example which is being set for us by our fighting men. Our soldiers and sailors are members of well-disciplined units. But they're still and forever individuals, free individuals. They are farmers and workers, businessmen, professional men, artists, clerks. They are the United States of America. That is why they fight. We too are the United States of America. That is why we must work and sacrifice. It is for them, it is for us. It is for victory.¹

In the interest of securing the voluntary “work and sacrifice” for which Roosevelt called, the United States government created the General War Production Program in 1942 to incentivize manufacturers and producers to meet the challenges of total warfare. The General War Production Program assisted and encouraged businesses engaged in commercial production activities prior to the war to switch to military production. This mass re-purposing of manufacturing and the labor force ensured the rendering of goods and services from 1942 to 1945. The entirety of the United States shifted focus from private production and consumption to the effort to meet wartime production needs. Significantly, this unity of effort became a fervent expression of patriotism at both macro and micro levels of American

¹ Tracey Warm. “Wartime Production.” *OAH Magazine of History* 16, no. 3 (2002): 47-52. www.jstor.org/stable/25163526.

society. From manufacturers that retooled their factories in order to churn out aircraft parts instead of washing machines to families that planted Victory gardens and voluntarily participated in scrap drives, blood drives, recycling, and rationing, the United States went to war on all fronts.

The War Production Board and the “E” Award

On January 16, 1942, President Roosevelt issued an executive order that both established the War Production Board and promoted three-star lieutenant general William S. Knudsen to head of operations in charge of expediting production. President Roosevelt referred to Knudsen, the former Chief Executive of General Motors, as “one of the greatest production men of the world.”² With the advent of the War Production Board under the supervision of Knudsen, the shift from commercial to military production boomed.

In July of 1942, the War Department and the Navy Department initiated a joint venture to reward any military defense production facility that excelled in specific criteria for the timely and efficient production of goods during World War II. The award became known as the Army-Navy “E” Award, E standing for excellence. For a business to receive an Army-Navy “E” Award, it had to be nominated by one of the Technical Services of Army Service Forces, Army Air Forces, the Bureaus of the Navy Department, the Coast Guard, or the Marine Corps (USMC). The nominating entity depended upon which branch had the largest vested interest in the company. For example, if the USMC had the largest volume of business within a manufacturing facility, it was the USMC’s responsibility to nominate that company.

In order for a manufacturing plant to be eligible for an Army-Navy “E” Award, the manufacturer had to meet the following criteria:

- Achieve excellent quality of production
- Maintain a high rate or quantity of production
- Surmount production obstacles
- Achieve and maintain a low rate of absenteeism
- Avoid work stoppages
- Maintain fair labor standards
- Actively train additional labor forces
- Sustain effective management practices
- Maintain a low incidence of accidents
- Maintain high standards for worker health and sanitation
- Observe high plant protection standards
- Use sub-contracting facilities appropriately

² Ibid

- Manifest cooperation between management and labor as it affected production
- Conserve critical and strategic materials

In addition to the criteria above, the nominating branches also had variations in criteria within the nominating process. The Army's nomination initiated with the field procurement officer who had the largest contractual interest in and direct contact with the manufacturing plant. For the Army, this officer oversaw the Ordnance Department, Chemical Warfare Service, the Army Air Forces, or any other technical service branch within the Army to nominate a manufacturing plant for the Army-Navy "E" Award. This nomination then transferred from the District Office to the Office of the Chief of the Service for assessment before final submission to the Army Board for Production Awards.

The Navy followed this model closely, where the cognizant inspector with the most vested interest in the company was responsible for the initial nominating process. The cognizant inspector could be the inspector of Naval Aircraft, the Naval Inspector of Ordnance, or the Supervisor of Shipbuilding. Once initiated, the manufacturing plant's nomination moved to the desk of the appropriate Bureau of the Navy Department for further review. If approved at this stage, the nomination was then forwarded to the Navy Board for Production Awards. The nominating actions of either the Army or the Navy Board had to be accepted by the opposing Board before the award was granted.

In December of 1945 the members of the Army Board for Production Awards included the following military personal: Major General William Harrison, Chairman; Major General Edward M. Powers; Brigadier General Hugh C. Minton; Brigadier General Alexander G. Gillespie; Colonel Ralph F. Gow; Mr. Edward F. McGrady; and Lt. Colonel Robert B. Clark, Jr., Recorder. The members making up the Navy Board for Production Awards in December of 1945 included the following military personal: Admiral C.C. Bloch,

USN (Retired), Chairman; Rear Admiral W.T. Cluverius, USN (Retired); Rear Admiral George H. Rock, (CC) USN (Retired); and Lieutenant James S. Copley, USNR, Secretary.

By the program's end in December of 1945, only five percent of manufacturing plants (4,283) in the United States received a coveted Army-Navy "E" Award. Manufacturing plants that maintained a record of outstanding performance for a six-month duration after receiving their Army-Navy "E" Award were granted a Star Award, indicated by a white star on the Army-Navy "E" Award pennant. For every continuous six-month period of an outstanding performance, a manufacturer received an additional white star until their flag carried four stars. If a manufacturer accomplished the Star Award, the time frame for additional stars increased to one year for a maximum total of six stars.

A total of 763 manufacturing plants nationally received one white star award, 723 were awarded two white stars, 767 had three white stars bestowed upon them, 820 were presented with four white stars, 206 received five white stars, and only eight manufacturing plants won the maximum of six white star awards.

Given the high standards and difficult criteria, many companies in New Orleans still performed well, but did not earn an "E" Award. In fact, a few companies such as Delta Shipyards met all the requirements set forth to receive an "E" Award and yet never received an "E". That some companies produced goods efficiently without earning an E Award lends weight to the very real possibility that it was politicized, that it was given to some and withheld from others for reasons other than the officially stated criteria. What is it about companies such as Delta Shipyards, which met all of the criteria for production, safety, and management, that caused them to be passed over? Such oversight calls into question the real point of the "E" Award. Was it a propagandistic tool used to raise morale along with production at home? Was its real purpose to make those citizens at home feel as though they

were contributing significantly to the war effort? Or was it a combination of all of these things and more?

Many of the shipbuilders that received an “E” had their corporate headquarters and shipbuilding facilities along the northeast coast of the United States. These facilities had political connections and easier access to Washington D.C. Some historians have speculated that this proximity contributed to their receiving a greater portion of government contracts than those shipbuilders located in the South, thus explaining why Delta was never awarded the “E.” For example, historian Jerry Strahan (1976) contends that the authorities responsible for awarding U.S. Naval contracts did not personally like Andrew Higgins. Only after Higgins competed successfully to build a landing craft did Admiral Roberson, U.S. Navy pulled rank on those in the Bureau of Ships, who initially denied Higgins a contract. The Bureau finally took note and awarded Higgins a more substantial contract. Even after Higgins proved his company worthy of contracts and had the ability to mass produce ships, the Navy still tried to find ways to divert Higgins’s contracts to east coast shipbuilders.³ The feud between the Bureau of Ships and Higgins became so prevalent that “the Senate War Investigating Committee, headed by Senator Harry S. Truman, was called in to examine the dispute...Truman stated that he could not ‘condemn too strongly the negligence or wilful misconduct on the part of officers of the Bureau of Ships’ in the planning and production.”⁴

³Jerry Eugene Strahan, “Higgins: the Man, the Boat, the Industry”(master’s thesis, University of New Orleans, 1976),30, 54-56,59,80.

⁴ Ibid 59

New Orleans and the “E” Award

As the largest city in the American South prior to the onset of World War II, New Orleans, served as an important U.S. manufacturing center for shipbuilding and essential basic military items. With commercial shipping essential to the war effort, the demand for shipbuilding and repair was high in the Crescent City and the large number of manufacturing companies taking advantage of New Orleans ports was prevalent. Prior to the onset of World War II, approximately 450 manufacturers of goods and services existed in New Orleans⁵. Historian Alan Milward’s research argues that “the American economy not only produced the material and food needed to wage war and sustain its allies, it also enlarged during the conflict.”⁶ The United States’ advantage during World War I was “the country’s ability to bury its enemies in machines manned and maintained by healthy, well-fed, and well-trained personnel. This vision was not lost between the wars.”⁷

In 1945 the New Orleans metro area continued to host approximately 450 companies providing goods and services for the war effort under the supervision of a branch of the War Production Board. Successful wartime production brought patriotism to an all-time high as companies sought the coveted Army Navy Excellence “E Award” in production. While patriotism translated to higher production numbers as manufacturers competed to out-pace one another. Originally started by the Navy in 1906, the “E” Award—“E” signifying “Excellence”—included a pennant bestowed upon firms who displayed manufacturing excellence in the fields of gunnery, engineering, and communications. Solely distributed by the Navy prior to the onset of World War II, the “E” award went to those companies producing maritime equipment, ships, and weapons for military naval use.⁸

Of the hundreds of manufacturing plants in New Orleans, only the Allen Boat Company, The American Red Cross, Equitable Equipment Company, Freeport Sulphur Company, Freiberg Mahogany Company, Higgins Industries, Rheem Manufacturing

⁵ The New Orleans City Directory 1945, The Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶ Alan Milward, *War, Economy and Society, 1939-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 18.

⁷ Thomas Hone, *Fighting on Our Own Ground: The War of Production, 1920-1942*. “Naval War College Review, Vol. 45, No.2 (Spring 1992). 93-107

⁸ Army-Navy “E” Honor Roll, “*Proceedings of the I.R.E.*,” October 1942

Company, and Todd Johnson Dry Docks won Army-Navy “E” Awards. Of these eight, only six companies won white stars in addition to their Army-Navy “E” Award pennants. The Freeport Sulphur Company won three white stars, the Freiberg Mahogany Company won two white stars, Higgins Industries Canal plant won four white stars, Higgins Industries City Park plant won four white stars, Higgins Industries Bayou St. John Plant won four white stars, and Todd Johnson Dry Docks won one white star.⁹ The following examination of these six companies considers them individually from inception, through physical expansion, and their final post-war economic fate, reveals a great deal about the influence of the Army-Navy “E” Award and the strategies it represented.

⁹ War Department Bureau of Public Relations Press Branch, “For Release to P.M.’S of December 5, 1945 JOINT ARMY-NAVY RELEASE, ARMY-NAVY “E” AWARD TERMINATION SEES AWARD GRANTED TO 5% OF ELIGIBLE PLANTS” December 5, 1945

Todd Johnson Shipyards

The earliest known iteration of Todd Johnson Shipyards, Delameter Iron Works, dates back to 1835 in Manhattan, New York. After changing hands many times, the company became the Todd Shipyards under William H. Todd in 1916, by which time Todd Shipyards had expanded into four other areas: Brooklyn, New York; Wilmington, Delaware; Hoboken, New Jersey; and Seattle Washington. Military production demand during World War I led to a huge boost in productivity and Todd Shipyards employee roster skyrocketed to approximately 18,000. At the war's end, ship demand dwindled, as did the need for a robust payroll, and employee numbers shrank to 2,000.¹⁰

After the end of World War I, the William H. Todd Corporation built Todd Shipyards in McClellanville, what is now present-day Algiers Point, Louisiana, along the shore of the Mississippi River and where ship building had been an established industry since the 19th century. Todd Shipyards was located near the Algiers Naval Station in order to be geographically viable to service naval needs at the present-day intersection of Merrill and Patterson streets. In 1936, Todd Shipyards merged with the nearby Johnson Iron Works to form the Todd Johnson Shipyards and continued to provide shipbuilding and repair services to the U.S. Navy.¹¹

At its peak during World War II, the Todd-Johnson Dry Docks in Algiers Point occupied 73 acres along the Mississippi River, including fifty buildings covering 228,000 square feet. There were 6,400 linear feet of wharves along the Mississippi River and two dry docks that could hoist ships weighing up to 20,000 displacement tons. Todd Johnson Shipyards employed approximately 4,000 people building and repairing military sea going vessels.

¹⁰ "Todd Shipyards Corporation." FundingUniverse. Accessed December 13, 2020. <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/todd-shipyards-corporation-history/>.

¹¹ Ibid

Nationwide, Todd employed approximately 57,000 people during World War II, built over 1,000 ships, and repaired another 23,000 ships.¹² To help meet the demand for workers in New Orleans, Todd Johnson used the celebrity of popular Major League Baseball Mel Ott. During World War II more than 500 Major League Baseball players served as poster boys for the various branches of the military, using their popularity, charm, and charisma to encourage ordinary citizens to join the war effort in a variety of capacities. These figures included the likes of Ted Williams, Stan Musial, Joe DiMaggio, and Mel Ott, a native of Gretna, Louisiana and right fielder for the New York Giants.¹³ Ott joined Todd-Johnson's personnel department during baseball's off season for a "winter war job" with the express purpose of using his celebrity status to draw in more contracts and help with employee recruitment.

With demand for employees so high during the war years, those already employed felt safe enough in their jobs to strike. In July of 1945 when the war was practically won, the white workers did just that. The workers belonging to the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers (IUMSWA) Local 29 struck in protest of African Americans being trained as welders, a job that was protected by the welders' union as being for whites only.¹⁴ In striking, the workers showed that the "E" award was not a priority of workers, but that of management.

This award brings into question whether Todd Johnson legitimately met the criteria set forth to be eligible for an "E" award. As a powerhouse shipbuilder in World War I, Todd Shipyards established a significant relationship with the U.S. military. By the time World War II hostilities opened, it is possible that Todd Johnson's inherited World War I reputation and Todd's East Coast home base gave Todd Johnson shipyards enough political clout to be nominated by a sympathetic member of the military or Congress.

¹² Ibid

¹³ "Two Who Did Not Return." *The New York Times*, May 26, 2013.

¹⁴ Charles D. Chamberlain, *Victory at Home: Manpower and Race in the American South during World War II* (University of Georgia Press, 2003), 146-147

Regardless, Todd Johnson did receive an Army Navy “E” award on Wednesday June 16, 1943 at 3:30 p.m. Master of ceremony duties fell to New Orleans native Ernest Lee Jahncke, coordinator for ship repairs and conversion for the Gulf area and former assistant secretary of the Navy. Rear Admiral Wat T. Cluverius, I.S.N. retired and member of the board for production awards, presented the “E” pennant to production manager A.J. Legget Jr. Colonel Fred M. Fogle, superintendent of the United States Army Transport Service, presented the “E” lapel pins to employee representative Matthew C. James. The closing ceremony was presided over by Captain H.L. Dodson, U.S.N. industrial manager of the Eighth Naval District.¹⁵

The location of Todd Johnson Shipyards in Algiers Point, once an industrial center for wartime shipbuilding, is now a green space. In 2018, the Port of New Orleans filed an application to the city to alter the site’s zoning from green space to maritime use. The Port of New Orleans has since withdrawn the application after pushback from the local community and the area will in theory remain a greenspace for the foreseeable future. However, a recent site visit revealed an abundance of commercial activity along the previous location of Todd Johnson.

¹⁵ “EMPLOYEE[E]S WILL RECEIVE AWARD; Todd-Johnson Workers to Get Army-Navy ‘E’.” *The Times Picayune*, June 16, 1943.

The Freeport Sulphur Company

The history of the Freeport Sulphur Company mining operations in Grande Ecaille, Plaquemines Parish reflects the founding of Port Sulphur, Louisiana. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, one area of Louisiana boomed from an untouched piece of nature that historian Larry Foulk described as “consist[ing] of only a few hunting camps,” which transformed into “the world’s second largest Frasch-type producer” of sulphur.¹⁶ The Freeport Sulphur Company of Freeport, Texas learned of the vast sulphur deposits in Lake Washington and the Grande Ecaille area from the Humble Oil and Refining Company (Humble Oil and Refining later became Exxon Mobile). The Freeport Sulphur Company purchased the rights to the sulphur deposits from the Humble Oil and Refining Company in February of 1932 and started work on the Grande Ecaille mine while simultaneously establishing a business operations office at 200 Carondelet Street in New Orleans.¹⁷

Logistical difficulties loomed from the onset. No roads or railroads existed to transport either labor to build drilling platforms or the materials with which to construct them. Furthermore, the marshy, swampy land offered no place to establish either infrastructure for transportation or the platforms themselves. The Louisiana weather only compounded Freeport Sulphur’s problems. The Grande Ecaille area is prone to flooding, and open to both hurricanes and tidal surges

The Freeport Sulphur Company solved the infrastructure problem by purchasing land from the State of Louisiana adjacent to the Mississippi River. The plot was 2,800 feet long, 7,600 feet deep, and had a strip of land 1,000 feet wide that allowed access for barges to dock.¹⁸

¹⁶ Larry Foulk, “The Freeport Sulphur Company Enterprise at Grande Ecaille and the Rise and Fall of Port Sulphur, Louisiana.” *Louisiana History* 50, no. 2 (2009): 203-12. Accessed April 2, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/25478645.205

¹⁷ Ibid, 204.

¹⁸ Donald W. Davis and Randall A. Detro, *Fire and Brimstone: The History of Melting Louisiana’s Sulphur* (Baton Rouge, 1992,) 29

At the river a dock 1,000 feet long was built to accommodate vessels with the draft of a battleship. The river water here is sufficiently low in salt for mining purposes, and a fifty-million-gallon reserve was constructed. The earth from the dredging that took place to create the reservoir was used as fill dirt for the townsite.¹⁹

Freeport built the town of Port Sulphur to support mining operations at Grande Ecaille, which utilized the Frasch process to liquefy ore underground using superheated, high-pressure water to extract the sulphur. This process requires a lot of manpower, resulting in a demand for housing for both workers and their families, schools for the children, and a market for businesses to feed, clothe, and entertain the residents, all paid for directly by Freeport Sulphur Company or from the wages of its employees. The population rose from a few hunting lodges in 1932 to approximately 600 residents in 1939. Grande Ecaille mine was therefore renamed Port Sulphur, a company town named for the company that created it.

The December 16, 1933 *Plaquemines Gazettes* headline read simply, “Sulphur Produced at Grande Ecaille.”²⁰ Production grew so rapidly that the paper ran a follow up story a week later that read, “1,000 Tons per Day at Sulphur Mine.”²¹ Just three months later, Freeport Sulphur shipped its first international cargo of sulphur upon the *Queen Olga* to Liverpool, England on February 24, 1934.

The arrival of World War II saw the mining operations by the Freeport Sulphur Company in full swing as production ramped up to fill the military’s wartime munitions requirements. The *Plaquemines Gazette* stated in August of 1941 that the Freeport Sulphur Company was capable of producing “Sulphur Able to Meet Full Defense Call.”²² Sulphur mining operations proved so successful that they won their first Army-Navy “E” Award in July of 1943. Historian Larry Foulk described how “in August 1943, ‘Major General Charles

²⁰ “Sulphur Produced at Grande Ecaille.” *Pointe-a la Hache Plaquemines Gazette*, December 16, 1933.

²¹ “1,000 Tons per Day at Sulphur Mine.” *Pointe-a la Hache Plaquemines Gazette*, December 23, 1933.

²² “Sulphur Able to Meet Full Defense Call.” *Pointe-a la Hache Plaquemines Gazette*, August 16, 1941.

T. Harris, who was commanding general of the Aberdeen Proving Ground, the Army's largest ordnance proving ground,' officiated at a ceremony to present Williams with an 'E' flag and its employees with 'E' lapel pins."²³ In July of 1944 Lieutenant Commander E. C. Eiband, security officer of the Eighth Naval District, commented on the impact of Freeport Sulphur Company's contribution to the war effort, stating that in "one form or another [sulphur] helps make nearly all the machines and weapons and munitions the navy must have."²⁴ Sulphur still has many of the same uses today as it had in World War II. Sulphur is needed to make antibiotics, sulfa tablets to prevent dysentery, and is an important ingredient in the making of gunpower for munitions.

The boom times for the Freeport Sulphur Company continued to support the town through the 1950s and early 1960s. However, by the late 1960s the ore started to dwindle. Freeport Sulphur located a new deposit of sulphur on Garden Island, which drew the company's focus and resources away from the Port Sulphur area, and the company ceased operation in Port Sulphur altogether on December 12, 1978.²⁵ However, the Freeport McMoran Company is still a successful mining company with various gold and copper mining operations in other areas around the world.

²³Larry Foulk, "The Freeport Sulphur Company Enterprise at Grande Ecaille and the Rise and Fall of Port Sulphur, Louisiana." *Louisiana History*50, no. 2 (2009): 203-12. Accessed April 2, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/25478645.205

²⁴ "SULPHUR MINE IS GIVEN AWARD." *Times-Picayune*, July 29, 1944.

²⁵ Larry Foulk, "The Freeport Sulphur Company Enterprise at Grande Ecaille and the Rise and Fall of Port Sulphur, Louisiana." *Louisiana History*50, no. 2 (2009): 203-12. Accessed April 2, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/25478645.205

The Freiberg Mahogany Company

The Freiberg Mahogany Company was founded by Harry A. Freiberg Sr. in 1902 and moved its operations to Harahan, Louisiana in 1916. The company produced mahogany timber and veneer furnishings prior to World War II, during which Freiberg transitioned into manufacturing mahogany timber and veneer for aircraft and landing boats. Freiberg Mahogany was sold by Harry A. Freiberg Sr. in 1955 to Texas Industries Incorporated.

Freiberg Mahogany was noteworthy during World War II for primarily employing African Americans. *The Starr Advocate* at the time claims “the plant employs two-hundred and eighty-five persons, all but a score of them Negroes.”²⁶ The pointed way in which *The Starr Advocate* mentions this detail is telling of the time. Articles covering plants employing a majority of white workers stated what the companies won the “E” Award for or that they simply won an award. The New Orleans newspaper, *The Times Picayune*, felt it necessary to clarify at more length why Freiberg Mahogany might receive such an honor:

Army officers said that quality and quantity of production in the light of available facilities are prime factors in selecting awardees for the awards. Other factors considered were overcoming of production obstacles, avoidance of stoppages, maintenance of fair labor standards, training of additional labor forces, effective management, good record on accidents, health, sanitation and plant protection as well as co-operation between management and labor as it affects production. A low rate of absenteeism is also considered.²⁷

Freiberg Mahogany was awarded the Army Navy “E” Award on March 10, 1944 for “outstanding accomplishment in the production of war materials.”²⁸ Undersecretary of War Robert Patterson stated in a telegram that Freiberg Mahogany “serve[d] as an example to all Americans.”²⁹ While these words from the Undersecretary of War offer a certain gravitas, the dignitaries chosen to represent the War Department at the Freiberg ceremony suggests a less

²⁶ Associated Press, “Orleans Company Wins ‘E’.” *The Starr Advocate*, Tuesday, February 1, 1944.

²⁷ “FREIBERG MAHOGANY FIRM GETS E AWARD.” *Times-Picayune*, Tuesday, February 1, 1944.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

prestigious affair. The Harahan award presentation took place at the plant headquarters on Friday March 10, 1944 at 3:45 p.m. Plant Manager Harry A. Freiberg Jr. received his company's award from Lieutenant Colonel Irwin W. Minger, Transportation Corps, attached to the New Orleans port of Embarkation. Captain R.W. Truitt, United States Navy head of the Chaplain Corps of the Eighth Naval District was responsible for presenting the lapel pins to an unnamed wounded war veteran. Jefferson Parish Sheriff Frank Clancy served as Master of Ceremonies and the music was provided by the 382nd Army Band Transportation Corps Replacement Training Center. The 382nd band, an all-female band consisting of musicians formerly of the WAC, performed for the employees of Freiberg Mahogany.³⁰

While other, primarily white-staffed plants in the New Orleans area received awards from major generals and admirals and were honored by the presence of relatively high-ranking members of the War Office, the Freiberg ceremony attendance was conspicuously less prestigious. Masters of Ceremonies for the white-staffed plants were chosen from the upper ranks of the military, Congress, and the more influential social circles of the day. No other ceremony had been presided over by a Parish Sheriff, and all other recipients were honored by both the larger and all male 383rd Army Band as well as the Color Guard from Jackson Barracks. Even though these African Americans had won an "E" Award, racial inequality remained evident in the less celebrated recognition of their achievements.

³⁰ Mattie. E Treadwell, *United States Army in World War II: Special Studies The Women's Army Corp* (Office of the Chief of Military History Department of the Army, Washington D.C., 1954) 332

Equitable Equipment Company

The Equitable Equipment Company, founded by Neville Levy in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1921, initially focused on air conditioning and refrigeration but soon branched out into arc welding in industrial applications. In 1939 Equitable Equipment purchased a shipyard in St. Tammany along the Tchefuncta River, which empties into Lake Pontchartrain, making it possible for Equitable Equipment to move into shipbuilding. *The Times Picayune* documented Equitable Equipment's government shipbuilding contracts and charter as far back as April 4, 1940.³¹ Levy, Equitable Equipment's president, took a military leave of absence from his corporate position to serve as a Commander in the United States Naval Reserve.³²

The Equitable Equipment Company relocated from 411 Whitney Central Building, New Orleans, Louisiana to 150 LA-21, Madisonville, Louisiana. The area already existed as a well-established shipbuilding and repair community at the time of the move, and has continued to exist in that capacity, as reflected in the existence of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Maritime Museum and Research Center, as well as the Wooden Boat Festival.

The company received the Army Navy "E" Award on Monday, July 17, 1944 at 4:00 p.m. in a ceremony performed at the Madisonville shipyards. Arthur A. Moreno, a prominent New Orleans lawyer and politician, served as the Master of Ceremonies for the event. Executive Vice President Ralph H. Wilson received the Army-Navy "E" pennant for Equitable Equipment. Brigadier General Burton O' Lewis, Assistant Chief of Transportation and Director of Supply for the Transportation Corps presented the "E" pennant presented to Wilson.

Captain L.W. Hasselman, United States Naval Reserves (Retired) Eighth Naval District, Civilian Personnel Director awarded the lapel pins to the employees of Equitable Equipment. W.D. Bullock received the lapel pins from Captain Hasselman while a Color

³¹"THREE TUGS SOON TO BE COMPLETED." *Times-Picayune*, April 4, 1940.

³²"CEREMONY IS SET FOR PLANT AWARD." *Times-Picayune*, July 16, 1944.

Guard from nearby Jackson Barracks raised the “E” pennant and the 383rd Army Service Band performed.³³

Trinity Industries purchased Equitable Equipment Company on December 21, 1975. According to *The Times Picayune* the name changed to Equitable Shipyards making it a “wholly owned subsidiary of Trinity Industries” and “one of the world’s largest medium-sized shipbuilding concerns.”³⁴

Arcosa Marine acquired Trinity Industries, and still occupies the same location that Equitable once did at 150 LA-21, Madisonville, Louisiana, Arcosa Marine produces multiple styles of barge. With various members of the senior staff formerly employed by Equitable Equipment, Arcosa Marine corporate leadership is very proud of honors bestowed upon Equitable Equipment Company.³⁵

³³ Ibid

³⁴ “Maritime Briefs.” *Times-Picayune*, December 21, 1975.

³⁵ Richard Badon interview with author. Madisonville, Louisiana, March 16, 2020. Plant manager, Mr. Badon, stated that the situation with the corona virus makes it impossible at this time to allow visitors to the site of the plant.

The Allen Boat Company

The Allen Boat Company's historical record is sparse. What is discussed below has come mostly from *The Times Picayune*. Allen Boat Company received its charter on April 6, 1940 and was organized by S.H. Allen who is credited as the company president and secretary.³⁶ The Allen Boat Company's dock was located in the Harvey Canal at spot 36 along the east bank of Harvey Canal, approximately 6,000 feet from the lock on the Mississippi River. Allen had 168 feet of railroad track that connected Allen to the Southern Pacific Railroad line.³⁷

The Allen Boat Company received its first government contract to build a steel barge on September 30, 1940 for \$40,451.³⁸ Allen received a second government contract for towing services at \$17,500 in June of 1941.³⁹ Starting off small, Allen proved itself to the Navy and on September 28, 1941 received a large contract to produce steel barges at a cost of \$130,000 per steel barge. The record for Allen remains mostly blank until 1948 when a small article in *The Times Picayune* mentions that the Green-Walker Company formed as a subsidiary of Allen Boat Company offering galvanization services to the New Orleans metro area.⁴⁰ Green-Walker is documented in *The Times Picayune* into the mid-1980s at 4932 Jefferson Highway.

The Allen Boat Company received an Army-Navy "E" Award on Tuesday July 18, 1944 at 5:00p.m. at the Harvey, Louisiana plant. Brigadier General Burton O'Lewis, Assistant Chief of Transportation and Director of Supply for the Transportation Corps, presented the Army-Navy "E" Award to General Manager, E.M. Spence received the award on behalf of the Allen Boat Company.⁴¹ General O'Lewis credited the Allen Boat Company with aiding

³⁶ "CHARTERS" *Times-Picayune*, April 6, 1940.

³⁷ Harold Sinclair, *The Port of New Orleans*, Garden City, New York, 1942. 335

³⁸ Associated Press, "GRETNA FIRM GIVEN STEEL TUG CONTRACT." *Times-Picayune*, October 1, 1940.

³⁹ The Associated Press, "HARVEY FIRM GETS TOWING CONTRACT." *Times-Picayune*, June 27, 1941.

⁴⁰ "Markets and Business," *Times-Picayune*, August 14, 1948.

⁴¹ "NAVAL CONGRATULATIONS FOR EFFICIENCY." *Times-Picayune*, July 19, 1944.

the U.S. soldier with a sentiment reminiscent of Roosevelt's 1942 speech: "Our soldiers on the battlefield would not have been able to raise the American flag over Cherbourg, Rome or the newly invaded islands of the South Pacific if you, too, hadn't gone to war, on the production lines of industry."⁴²

General O'Lewis used the occasion of the "E" Award ceremony to call for increased production and for more workers in a press conference right before the ceremony. "You can go to the limit in urging people who are not already engaged in essential war work to give up their present jobs and get employment at the shipyards. They need not have any training or previous experience in the shipbuilding trades or even in machine work generally. Women, including housewives who have never held any outside jobs, have taken hold of the work in shipyards wonderfully well."⁴³ Once establishing a reputation for excellence by winning an "E" award, manufacturers seemed to fight even harder to improve production numbers during World War II.

Lost to history are the exact details that led to the demise of the Allen Boat Company. Allen operated until the 1980s when the economic downturn that was central to other plant closings also claimed the Allen Boat Company among the casualties.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ "NEED OF SHIPYARD LABOR STRESSED." *Times-Picayune*, July 17, 1944.

⁴⁴ The Secretary of State records indicate the Allen Boat Company dissolution on April 28, 1944. This date is a discrepancy in the historical record for which I cannot account as the Allen Boat Company won their "E" award after this date. Additionally, the Allen Boat Company was still advertised in the local papers well after this date.

The Rheem Manufacturing Company

Brothers Richard S. and Donald L. Rheem founded the Rheem Manufacturing Company in Emeryville, California on June 20, 1925 with financing from another Rheem brother, William K. Rheem. Rheem Manufacturing initially turned out galvanized steel products, specializing in galvanized steel drums. The company incorporated on January 22, 1930 and obtained the Republic Steel Package Company of California. In doing so, the Rheem brothers expanded beyond galvanized steel drums and entered into the production of boilers and boiler tanks, elements essential to shipbuilding, among other industries.

The Rheem brothers acquired the John Wood Manufacturing Company of California in 1931, further expanding their portfolio to include automatic gas storage water heaters. Business expanded enough to justify the building of a new manufacturing plant near Los Angeles which became the South Gate plant. In 1937 the Rheem Manufacturing Company announced the decision to have an initial public offering on the stock market. The I.P.O. marked the transition from a family owned business to a corporation answerable to shareholders. However, it also made Rheem flush with enough capital to expand. The company built new facilities in Houston, Texas and Sydney, Australia; opened an executive and sales office in the RCA building in New York City; leased a drum manufacturing plant from the National Steel Barrel Company of Cleveland, Ohio; purchased Meurer Steel Barrel Company of Newark, New Jersey and the 34th Street drum plant in Chicago, Illinois; and, finally, leased the Southern Steel Barrel Company plant located along Jefferson Highway in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Rheem's first foray into military contracting occurred in 1940 and 1941, when they built three separate plants and a research laboratory in Sparrows Point, Maryland, which manufactured water heaters, boilers, water tanks, and most importantly, Navy ammunition boxes. Looking to expand beyond the galvanization process, the laboratory in Sparrows Point

focused upon protective coatings and linings for various metal containers. By the end of 1941 Rheem had become the nation's largest producer of steel shipping containers and automatic water heaters.

Rheem's efforts during World War II garnered them seven Army-Navy "E" Awards for their contribution to the war effort. The years from 1940 to 1945 saw an 800% percent increase in sales for Rheem, jumping from \$10 million to \$900 million annually. Following the end of World War II Rheem successfully made the transition from the military industrial market to the commercial consumer market by a national advertising campaign aimed at the household appliance market. Rheem Manufacturing Company still thrives today as a leader in HVAC at both the commercial and residential markets, producing hot water heaters, air conditioners, furnaces, heat pumps, pool and spa heaters, thermostats, and much more.⁴⁵

The Rheem Manufacturing plant located at 5001 Jefferson Highway, New Orleans, Louisiana, received one of their many Army-Navy "E" Awards on Friday, July 28, 1944. Rheem Manufacturing produced 81mm mortar shells, 105mm high explosive shells, smoke pots, and steel drums. The plant at 5001 Jefferson Highway, adjacent to the Huey P. Long Bridge, was the fourth war time Rheem plant awarded the Army-Navy "E" Award.⁴⁶

Colonel James D. McIntyre of the Office of Chief of Ordinance presented Plant Manager A. Reber with the Army-Navy "E" Award at a ceremony honoring Rheem Manufacturing at the Jefferson Highway war plant. Colonel McIntyre stated at the ceremony that the U.S. Government spending for weapons ordinances was between \$800,000,000 and \$1,000,000,000 monthly. Reber declared, "We hereby rededicate ourselves in the future to continue doing our utmost as we have in the past, to hasten the day of victory."⁴⁷ With this much currency being spent monthly, it is no surprise that a company such as Rheem found

⁴⁵ Tim Wilson, email message from Joanna Oliva, March 2, 2020

⁴⁶ "We are Proud." *Times-Picayune*, July 28, 1944.

⁴⁷ "'E' AWARD GIVEN TO RHEEM PLANT." *Times-Picayune*. July 29, 1944.

incentive to win multiple “E” Awards, but the significance of the personal sense of accomplishment that employees gained from the award cannot be discounted. Employee representative Mrs. Georgina Scorsone said of the award that it was “the same as a medal awarded a soldier in the field of battle. We will wear it just as proudly.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid

Higgins Industries

Higgins Industries, while no longer in business, has left a lasting mark upon New Orleans and World War II aficionados. A street outside of the World War II Museum in New Orleans is named for Higgins, while inside the museum one will find an exhibit on the Higgins landing crafts that are credited for winning World War II. A visitor to New Orleans can even ride one of these historical crafts, for a fee. This level of recognition 80 years after the company's hey day carries a certain sense of cult status.

Andrew Jackson Higgins incorporated Higgins Industries on September 26, 1930 as an offshoot of his previously established business, the A.J. Higgins Lumber and Export Company. The new division of Higgins was located at 1755 St. Charles Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana. Both of the Higgins companies were in dire financial straits in 1931 and were put into a voluntary receivership in order to avoid bankruptcy. An unnamed (unknown) judge named Higgins his businesses' own receiver, allowing him to make financial decisions regarding a company for which he had legally been declared too irresponsible to run. A.J. Higgins soon after created a third business, the Boat Services Company, which purchased the products of his other two businesses, A.J. Higgins Lumber and Export Company and Higgins Industries, in order to keep Higgins himself solvent. Higgins's legally questionable tactic of purchasing his own products proved successful, however, providing Higgins Industries time to build a solid reputation among the various oil and petroleum industries located in the southern United States.

By 1935 Higgins had approximately fifty employees and had earned enough capital to pay off his creditors. Higgins Industries specialized in the development of shallow draft boats for navigation in the swamps, bayous, and marsh lands of the southern United States, Central America, and South America. The U.S. government awarded Higgins Incorporated its first governmental contract in 1937 to produce specialized boats, the first of many contracts

awarded to Higgins Industries as the United States entered World War II in 1941, when the demand for shipbuilding services escalated dramatically. Higgins Industries quickly became one of the largest manufacturers of U.S. Naval combat vessels during World War II. The company rose from employing approximately fifty people in 1935 at its St. Charles Avenue location, to employing over 20,000 personnel at seven locations around New Orleans.

Higgins Industries is credited with manufacturing 20,094 naval vessels during its participation in World War II.⁴⁹ The company's astounding growth after rebounding from near insolvency was largely due to Higgins's then-unconventional tactics to bolster his workforce and speed his production. Higgins Industries hired a diverse workforce that included African Americans, Caucasians, and Asians of both genders to work alongside one another throughout World War II.

These policies were of Mr. Higgins's own design and were reinforced by frequent contests among the employees to boost wartime morale. Activities such as slogan contests in turn improved the productivity of the workers. The policies and contests paid off early as Higgins Industries was amongst the first in the nation to receive an Army-Navy "E" Award on August 19, 1942. The award ceremony was held on Sunday September 13, 1942 at 1:00pm at the Industrial Canal plant.

The award ceremony proved to be a triple celebration that honored the "E" Award, marked the dedication of the new Industrial Canal plant, and commemorated the first anniversary of the dedication and completion of the City Park plant. A.J. Higgins Sr. asked for permission to fly the "E" Award pennant at three of his plant locations. Admiral H.A. Wiley, president of the Naval Board, granted Higgins permission for displays at City Park, Industrial Canal, and Bayou St. John plants.

⁴⁹ Jerry Eugene Strahan, "Higgins: the Man, the Boat, the Industry"(master's thesis, University of New Orleans, 1976), 4.

Alabama Congressman Frank W. Boykin served as the Master of Ceremonies for the event.⁵⁰ While it may seem odd to have a Congressman from Alabama as Master of Ceremonies, *The Times Picayune* called Boykin Louisiana's ninth congressman "because his influence was an important factor in the award of Liberty ship contract[s]."⁵¹

A.J. Higgins Sr., the president of Higgins Industries Inc, received the "E" Award pennant from Admiral H.A. Wiley. Higgins supervisor Henry J. Barbe received the "E" lapel pin on behalf of the workers at Higgins Industries. Brigadier General George B. Hunter, commanding officer of the New Orleans Port of Embarkation presented the lapel pins to Barbe. Others present at the ceremony were Louisiana Governor Sam H. Jones and New Orleans Mayor Robert S. Maestri. The Higgins military band provided the music and played *The Higgins Victory March*.⁵² A naval motorboat pageant at the Industrial Canal plant honored the visiting Army and Navy officers in attendance as well as the other guests at the award ceremony following the "E" award ceremony.

Almost exactly a year later on September 14, 1943 Higgins Industries received their second "Army-Navy "E" pennant with two stars, signifying renewal of the award for sustained performance in war production."⁵³ This second presentation received far less fanfare than the first presentation. *The Times Picayune* noted that "Lieutenant Commander C.W. Leveau U.S.A.R., Navy supervisor of shipbuilding at Higgins plants" presented A.J. Higgins Sr. with the award and nothing further.⁵⁴ None other than President Dwight D. Eisenhower credited Higgins Industries production during World War II for winning the war.

⁵⁰ Arthur Halliburton, "HIGGINS INDUSTRIES GIVEN 'E' AWARD." *Times-Picayune*, September 13, 1942.

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ "Higgins Plant Get New 'E' Pennant." *Times-Picayune*, September 14, 1943.

⁵⁴ Ibid

The American Red Cross Blood Donation Center

The New Orleans American Red Cross Blood Donation Center received the Army-Navy “E” Award on Wednesday, August 23, 1944 at 8:15p.m. at the Municipal Auditorium located at 123 Carondelet St. The Chairman of the Blood Donation Committee, Clifford F. Faurot, acted as the Master of Ceremonies for the event. Colonel Alfred P. Upshur, Commanding Officer of the LaGarde General Hospital, presented the pennant flag portion of the award to Allard Kaufmann, the Director of the American Red Cross Blood Donation Center in New Orleans. The New Orleans American Red Cross Blood Donation Center received an Army-Navy “E” Award “for its outstanding record in having procured approximately 75,000 pints of blood for the armed forces” and for having “856 volunteers [which] had contributed almost 50,000 hours to the work of the center.”⁵⁵

Private First-Class Charles L. Eble of New Orleans, an injured veteran who received lifesaving blood donated by the American Red Cross in New Orleans, assisted Lieutenant Colonel M.E. DeBakey of the Office of the Surgeon General, Washington D.C. A native of Lake Charles who later became a world-renowned heart surgeon, DeBakey awarded the lapel pins to the employees. The Chairman of the Volunteers of the Center, Mrs. John M. Parker, Jr. received the lapel pins on behalf of the employees.⁵⁶

The Color Guard from Jackson Barracks raised the flag above the donation center while the 383rd Armed Service Forces Band of Jackson Barracks played *America*. Dorothy Moody, a Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVE) stationed at the United States Naval Air Station on the Lakefront, served as the 383rd's song leader.⁵⁷

Interestingly, unlike the other war-plants discussed above, The New Orleans American Red Cross Blood Donation Center elected to open the Army-Navy “E” Award ceremony to

⁵⁵ “Blood Donor Center Given ‘E’ Award For Great Record.” *Times-Picayune*, August 24, 1944.

⁵⁶ “Blood Donor Unit Award Date Set.” *Times-Picayune*, August 20, 1944.

⁵⁷ “Blood Donor Center Given ‘E’ Award For Great Record.” *Times-Picayune*, August 24, 1944.

the public. The American Red Cross ran a full-page advertisement in *The Times Picayune* inviting the public to attend the ceremony.⁵⁸ The open invitation to this public celebration vividly demonstrates the purpose as well as the strategy involved in the “E” Award program. The publicized and public event both celebrated an achievement and was an opportunity to inspire more blood donors into contributing to the war effort.

⁵⁸ “is this YOUR blood.” *Times-Picayune*, August 23, 1944.

The End of the “E” Award

Undersecretary of War Robert P. Patterson stated in July of 1944 that “This award symbolizes your country’s appreciation of the achievement of every man and woman in the Equitable Equipment Company. It consists of a flag to be flown above your plant and a lapel pin which each of you may wear as a sign of distinguished service to your country.”⁵⁹

By investing a relatively small amount of effort and resources into the award, the War Board and the bestowing military entities drew on manufacturers and community leaders to inspire the citizen workforce to greater achievement. The communal rewards of that effort—a formal ceremony with the fanfare of a military band and color guard presentation of a coveted pennant—lent a communally recognized value to the personal rewards, the lapel pin, in turn increasing communal effort and production numbers.

The Army-Navy “E” Award program came to an end on December 6, 1945 with an announcement in *The Times Picayune*. By the end of World War II a total of 4,283 manufacturing plants received an Army-Navy “E” Award nationwide. The manufacturing plants discussed above make up the New Orleans area’s contribution. The New Orleans manufacturers to receive the “E” award generally had political connections to those in Washington D.C. Many had East Coast plants and corporate home locations. However, as Freiberg Mahogany Company illustrates, this political influence is not always the case. A small manufacturer specializing in a niche market could find themselves a recipient of an “E” Award. The *Times Picayune* pointed out in the announcement that “firms which won the award may continue to fly the army-navy “E” flag and employees are still entitled to wear their “E” pins.”⁶⁰ Considered a great honor bestowed upon a company during World War II, the Army-Navy “E” Award was greatly coveted by those who received an award and coveted by those who had yet to receive them. The “E” Award program proved to be a great

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ “‘E’ AWARDS ENDED BY ARMED FORCES.” *Times-Picayune*, December 6, 1945.

propaganda tool employed by the United States Government as well as manufacturers to dramatically increase wartime production numbers. Businesses competed with one another for a chance at receiving recognition for their part in the war effort and used the prize to further orient workers to the same goal. Business owners greatly benefited from the program as receipt of the Award amounted to an endorsement for further contracts, evidenced by a competitive work force capable of high production numbers and high profitability.

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