BOOM TIME: SOME 60 YEARS AGO, BALTIMORE WAS TRANSFORMED ECONOMICALLY BY A FLOOD OF NEW WORKERS BROUGHT HERE TO HELP FIGHT WORLD WAR II. NOW, ANOTHER TRANSFORMATION APPEARS IMMINENT AS THOUSANDS HEAD FOR MARYLAND TO STAFF AN AMBITIOUS FEDERAL DEFENSE RESEARCH EFFORT.

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

"You didn't have much free time, working seven days a week," recalls [Jarvis T. Hughes], now 83 and living in Pasadena. What free time he did have, he recalls, he spent fishing and crabbing or occasionally taking a "lady friend" to the movies in Glen Burnie.

"It affected the economy of the entire area," says Robert Johnson, director of the museum at Meade. Nearby communities of Odenton and Laurel "became built up and stayed up." A strip of bars, dance clubs and shops known as "Boomtown" sprang up near the fort's gate just north of Odenton, to entertain soldiers on leave.

The strands merged in the war, he said. "Houses were pretty small, but on curving streets, and also this new invention called the `cul de sac,' " which had been mostly reserved for more affluent suburbs. "World War II democratized this kind of suburb."

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FULL TEXT

An article about World War II's impact on the Baltimore area in Sunday's Ideas section understated the current number of employees and the size of the campus at Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics Laboratory. A staff of 4,100 works on the 399-acre campus in Howard County.The Sun regrets the error.

During World War II people flocked to Baltimore to fill thousands of new, defense-related jobs. Downtown streets bustled with people looking to spend their newly earned wages. Commuters were stuck in traffic for hours. Housing was in such short supply that people lined up to live in trailers, and even to share beds in rooming houses and dormitories.

The war altered Maryland's economy, population and landscape in ways still visible today, from the continued prominence of defense contractors to the spread of car-dependent suburbs. The work that opened up for African-Americans boosted the city's black population, historians note, and helped set the stage for the civil rights movement.

Now, the region appears poised for another military metamorphosis likely to alter the course of our economy and our culture.

Up to 60,000 new workers - scientists, engineers, researchers and bureaucrats - are scheduled to arrive in Maryland in the next several years to staff an expansive array of defense research facilities centered here by the Pentagon's national base realignment plan. An army of contractors and other support enterprises appears likely to follow.

Though much smaller in scope than the migrations triggered by World War II, this new buildup could have similarly lasting impact, experts say. With that in mind, it might be useful to look back at those scenes from World War II for a sense of how a such change might transform central Maryland - for better and worse.

Richard Clinch, director of economic research at the University of Baltimore, says the buildup around Aberdeen Proving Ground could be "transformational" for Harford County, in part because of the numbers of jobs - upwards of 35,000, some local officials predict - and the type of work concentrated in a county that has gone from largely rural to suburban in recent decades.

Clinch says Harford will "become a high-tech center solely because of" the base realignment. Mostly rural Cecil also will see big changes, he says.

"You're going to amplify the development of northern [Interstate] 95," he adds, predicting the base moves will "do in five years what would have taken 20 years."

The growth spurt could also worsen the region's already notorious traffic, school crowding and housing shortages. Much depends on how state and local officials and businesses respond. One advantage local leaders will have this time around is that it is not expected to be played out to the frantic tempo of a global conflict, so there should be more time to build the roads and schools and housing that will be needed to avoid significant social disruption.

The world war brought change seemingly overnight, quickly lifting Baltimore and the nation out of the Depression. Hundreds of thousands found work in and around the city building Liberty cargo ships, bombers, electronic gear and and other war materiel. The port teemed with ships loading supplies for troops in Europe.

Millions of soldiers and sailors, meanwhile, were trained at area bases, notably Fort George G. Meade in Anne Arundel County, Aberdeen Proving Ground in Harford and Bainbridge Naval Station in Cecil County.

As job-seekers migrated here from Pennsylvania, West Virginia and elsewhere in the mid-Atlantic and South, the city's population soared from 859,000 in 1940 to more than 1 million by 1942, by unofficial counts.

"For a lot of people, this was the first good job they'd had in years, so they came and lined up," notes John Breihan, a history professor at Loyola College who has researched the war's local impact.

Harry Mettee was one of those who landed work. Freshly graduated from Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, Mettee became employee No. 10,003 in 1940 at the Glenn L. Martin Aircraft Co. in Middle River. He was 18 and living in Hampden with his parents.

"They were hiring like mad at the time," recalls Mettee, now 85 and retired after 48 years with the aircraft company, now known as Lockheed Martin. "I was one of the youngest foremen there." He qualified for the plum job by going to

school on Saturdays in his senior year in high school to learn how to read blueprints.

Incomes that had been stifled by the Depression more than doubled during the war. "Pay Checks Again - It's Grand!" exclaimed a headline in The Evening Sun.

The pay at Martin was $19 a week, Mettee recalls. "I gave my mother $15 and kept $4," he says, and celebrated his new-found affluence by buying an Emerson record player.

Baltimore's boom started before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941. France, alarmed by the growing aggressiveness of Nazi Germany even before war broke out, contracted with Martin to build bombers starting in 1939. Britain became Martin's next customer after Germany invaded France in 1940.

As production ramped up, the workforce at Martin's Middle River complex grew from 3,500 to a peak of 53,000 after the United States entered the war. That wartime workforce alone nearly equals all the jobs expected to be transferred or created in Maryland by the new base realignment.

In all, more than 200,000 jobs opened up in factories, shipyards and rail yards in Baltimore and Baltimore County, says University of Maryland history professor George H. Callcott.

The Bethlehem-Fairfield shipyard - located on Baltimore's harbor near Bethlehem's Sparrows Point steel plant - increased its workforce from 350 in 1941 to 46,700 just two years later to crank out more Liberty ships than any other plant in the country.

Jarvis T. Hughes got a job there as soon as he was old enough, starting at 90 cents an hour as a signalman on the 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift directing cranes and workers assembling the ships.

"You didn't have much free time, working seven days a week," recalls Hughes, now 83 and living in Pasadena. What free time he did have, he recalls, he spent fishing and crabbing or occasionally taking a "lady friend" to the movies in Glen Burnie.

The war produced new military bases in Maryland, such as Patuxent River Naval Air Station, Andrews Air Force Base and Fort Detrick. It also revived and expanded bases created during the First World War, such as Fort Meade, which doubled in size, and Aberdeen Proving Ground.

"It affected the economy of the entire area," says Robert Johnson, director of the museum at Meade. Nearby communities of Odenton and Laurel "became built up and stayed up." A strip of bars, dance clubs and shops known as "Boomtown" sprang up near the fort's gate just north of Odenton, to entertain soldiers on leave.

The war also brought a more or less permanent growth in the nation's armed services. The military-industrial complex that President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned about has since become a lasting economic fixture, particularly in Maryland.

Another legacy of the war effort is the Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics Laboratory. The lab began in 1942 as a relatively small, top-secret push to develop proximity fuzes for bombs, artillery shells and rockets, in a former used-car dealers' garage in downtown Silver Spring. Now located on a 360-acre suburban campus in Howard County, its 200 engineers and scientists earn $680 million a year in contracts, mostly with the government, to work on missile defense, space research and other projects.

Economists don't expect the base realignment to produce such a dramatic impact on the state's economy.

"This is much more incremental," Clinch, of the University of Baltimore, says of the modern-day base buildup. "And we should be glad of that - who wants another world war?"

Still, a spurt of economic growth can have unanticipated effects, as it did during World War II. As demand for wartime production outstripped the labor supply, companies scrounged for workers. An Elkton munitions plant even hired a plane in early 1944 to drop 50,000 recruiting leaflets over West Virginia, according to a Maryland Historical Society review of the war's impact.

As more than 50,000 Maryland men entered the armed services to fight overseas, women and African-Americans stepped up to fill the vacancies, though not without tensions.

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered integration of factories with war contracts. But Martin and other plant owners balked, contending the presence of women and minorities on factory floors would be disruptive. Frustrated African-Americans pressed for a crack at the wartime work, with hundreds staging a protest in Annapolis in 1942 in the wake of a black soldier's killing by Baltimore police.

By1943, under pressure from federal officials, employers began lowering race and sex barriers, at least part way. African-Americans grew from 7 percent to 17 percent of the city's industrial workforce, while women wound up holding half the civilian jobs by war's end.

"There were occasional flare-ups - brief walkouts at Western Electric and then at Maryland Dry Dock over integrated cafeterias and restrooms, and scuffles at the USOs in Elkton and Middle River - but relative harmony prevailed," Callcott wrote in Maryland &America: 1940 to 1980.

Planners expect the modern-day defense buildup to create - or worsen - a regional labor shortage. But it won't be as easy to solve as during the war, when employers tapped a vast pool of unemployed or underemployed workers and quickly trained them. Many of the new jobs will require technical skills or advanced degrees.

Of the more than 60,000 jobs estimated to be moved to or created in Maryland by the base realignment, about 14,500 will be performed directly for the military on base, while 27,500 are expected to be "indirect" work for defense contractors and support businesses. Another 18,000 jobs are projected to spring up in businesses that sell goods and services to the increased population.

Many of the jobs being relocated here could be vacant - up to 70 percent of the 5,000 workers at Fort Monmouth in New Jersey have indicated they will retire or quit rather than move.

With 8.4 percent of its workforce holding science and engineering jobs, Maryland leads the nation in high-tech employment, says the Population Reference Bureau. It's also among the leaders in awarding bachelor's and advanced degrees, according to Census data.

But the 3.6 percent unemployment rate makes labor officials worry that there could be a shortage of workers with the requisite education and skills.

For all the boost that World War II gave to Maryland, it also led to gridlock in some areas, crowded buses and a

housing crisis.

"Large parts of the inner city were absolute squalor during the war," said historian William M. Armstrong, author of Baltimore in World War II. Housing was in short supply region-wide, especially for African-Americans, who were denied access to the new housing built near factories and forced by segregation into already crowded urban neighborhoods. "People [were] living 30 to a room and sleeping in shifts."

Traffic was particularly nightmarish around Martin's aircraft plant in Middle River. Built like many defense plants outside the city, it wasn't reachable by rail, and there were few houses within walking distance - at least at first.

Though Martin built a bus depot to serve workers, most got there by car. Harry Mettee and a friend paid a neighbor for rides, until the friend could get his own car.

The plant's expansion overwhelmed nearby roads. Life magazine carried a feature in its Dec. 8, 1941, issue about workers complaining of monster traffic jams getting into and out of the plant. Photos show a bumper-to-bumper crawl from the plant onto two-lane Eastern Avenue.

Amid complaints that the congestion was hurting the war effort, officials corralled the money to build Martin Boulevard, which historians say incorporated one of the nation's first cloverleaf-style interchanges - a highway form replicated thousands of times.

Government and industry likewise rallied to deal with the housing crisis by constructing apartments and whole new communities of modest homes near the bases and the Martin plant.

Aviation magnate Glenn L. Martin built hundreds of apartments and homes for workers. Aero Acres, with curving streets named after airplane parts, sprang up nearby. The government added to the private initiative with the Victory Villa development, more than a thousand trailers and some dorms.

The developments marked the start of a new kind of suburb for Baltimore - one that spread across central Maryland.

Before the war, explains Breihan, Baltimore had two types of suburbs. Streetcar suburbs had right-angle street grids and homes within walking distance of a trolley stop; the more affluent lived in leafy suburbs like Roland Park with curving streets.

The strands merged in the war, he said. "Houses were pretty small, but on curving streets, and also this new invention called the `cul de sac,' " which had been mostly reserved for more affluent suburbs. "World War II democratized this kind of suburb."

No one foresees a revolution in development patterns from the new defense buildup. But planners warn that with up to 28,000 new households expected in the base realignment, housing pressure could help gobble up Cecil County's remaining farmland.

The base realignment could breathe new life into some areas that accommodated the crush of people during World War II.

In Anne Arundel, officials hope a new town center at Odenton with easy access to MARC commuter rail will attract some of the growth surge expected around Fort Meade.

And the Bainbridge Naval Training Center in Cecil County, which closed in 1976, is now slated for redevelopment, with 1,250 housing units planned on its 2,000 acres, plus a 450-acre business park that could draw defense contractors wanting to be near Aberdeen Proving Ground.

News researcher Paul McCardell contributed to this article.

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For more information

In addition to interviews, information from the following books was included in this article. Anyone seeking to learn more about how the Second World War changed Baltimore and Maryland should start with these sources:

Maryland in World War II, by Maryland Historical Society, three volumes published 1950, 1951, 1958.

Baltimore in World War II, by William M. Armstrong. 2005. Arcadia Publishing.

Maryland &America, 1940 to 1980, by George H. Callcott. 1985, Johns Hopkins University Press (Chapter 2).

Maryland: A Middle Temperament, 1634--1980, by Robert J. Brugger. 1988, Johns Hopkins University Press. (Chapter 10).

The Maryland State Archives also has photographs online of Maryland in the war. To view them, go to http:--teaching americanhistorymd.net/html/packets.html and scroll down to the section labeled "1929-1945 Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II."

Credit: Sun Reporter

Illustration

Photo(s); Caption: 1. The Bethlehem-Fairchild shipyard, shown in July of 1943, built more Liberty ships than any other plant in the country.2. Before housing was built nearby, workers at Martin Aircraft lived in trailers like these on Eastern Avenue.3. Harry Mettee went to work for Martin Aircraft Co. in 1940, building B-26 Marauder bombers like the large model behind him in the Glenn L. Martin Museum at Martin Airport, which he and other Martin retirees helped start.4. Streets in Aero Acres - built, like Victory Villa, to house workers at the Marin aircraft plant - were named after airplane parts.5. Britain's Duke of Kent (front left) and Glenn L. Martin look at a bomber production line.

DETAILS

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