



The Mitten

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THE ARSENAL OF *Democracy*

DURING WORLD WAR II, the United States was called the **Arsenal of Democracy** because of its great manufacturing capabilities. For many, the title applied to the tens of thousands of workers who worked in Michigan's auto plants making the weapons of war.

In the years before World War II, Detroit factories had made millions of cars, trucks and buses. It was only natural that the government would turn to the auto industry in a time of crisis.

Women worked in the auto plants during World War II. This woman stands next to an airplane engine (below). Posters like this one at the right inspired workers who made weapons.

At first, auto manufacturers did not want to produce war goods. In 1940, with much of the world already at war, President Roosevelt knew that the United States needed to improve the **armaments** of its armed forces.

Roosevelt asked William Knudsen, president of the General Motors Corporation, to get the support of the auto industry.

By the time the United States entered the war in December 1941, Knudsen convinced some automakers to build tanks and planes. Early in the war, automakers also stopped making cars and turned all their attention to war production.

Automakers made items they had never produced before. They



R. E. Olds Museum

redesigned weapons to make them easier to mass-produce. They also improved the weapons after they had been tested in **combat**.

By war's end, the automobile industry produced a variety of war **materiel**: bombs, rifles, torpedoes, and ammunition. However, it was the complex machines that received the greatest recognition. This included 4 million engines, 2.6 million trucks, nearly 50,000 tanks, and 27,000 airplanes.

To win World War II, Americans expected a great deal from the auto industry—and they got it.

Business Week



In mid-1940, K. T. Keller, president of the Chrysler Corporation, was asked if his company could make tanks. Keller responded, "Yes." He then asked, "where can I see one?"

Within weeks, Chrysler and the U.S. government signed a contract. The government agreed to build a plant in present-day Warren, Michigan, where Chrysler would make tanks. The new plant was called the Detroit Arsenal.

On April 24, 1941, the governor of Michigan and other guests gathered at the Detroit Arsenal for the **dedication** of the plant. The star of the day's festivities was a 30-ton, steel monster—the first tank delivered from the arsenal. The M3 tank fired its guns and smashed through telephone poles and a small wooden house.

Soon, tanks were rolling



M-4 Sherman Tank



TANKS

off the assembly line. One year after the plant's dedication, the arsenal delivered its 2,000th tank. In July 1942, the arsenal started making the M4 Sherman tank—one of the war's best-known armored vehicles.

In December 1942, the arsenal's 5,000 workers set an all-time monthly record by producing 907 Sherman tanks.

When World War II ended in August 1945, the Chrysler Corporation had built 22,234 tanks at the Detroit Arsenal.

In the years following World War II, tanks were still manufactured at the Detroit Arsenal. When tank production ended in the 1990s, more than 60,000 tanks had been produced in Warren. Today, the Detroit Arsenal remains the home of the Tank-automotive and Armaments Command, which is responsible for keeping the U.S. Army ready to fight a war.

WILLOW RUN

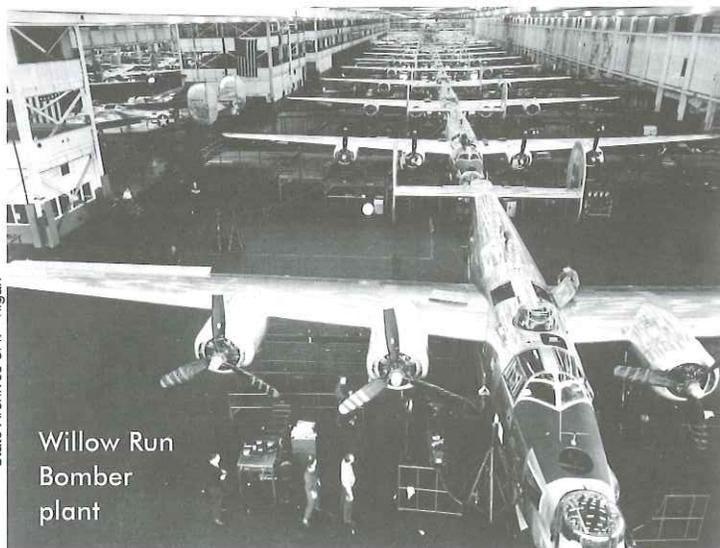
One of the best-known production achievements of World War II was the Ford Motor Company's Willow Run Bomber plant. Located near Ypsilanti, Willow Run was the idea of Henry Ford, who claimed that the Ford Motor Company was capable of making 1,000 planes a day.

This was an unbelievable claim, but Ford's reputation as a mass-production genius in building automobiles led the government to ask him to manufacture planes. The government agreed to construct a factory where Ford would build B-24 bombers along a one-mile-long assembly line. Construction of the plant began in April 1941.

Willow Run was completed in September 1942. The largest assembly plant ever built up to that time, Willow Run was hailed as "one of the seven wonders of the world." An airport was built next to the factory so the new planes could be flown away.

By the end of 1943, bombers were being produced at a rate of one per hour. The total number of B-24s built at Willow Run was 8,685. The last bomber moved off the assembly line on June 24, 1945.

After the war, Willow Run changed to automobile production. It closed in 1995. Today, the Willow Run Airport remains open for service.



Slate Archives of Michigan

Where to Take Your Family

The **Michigan Historical Museum's** Arsenal of Democracy gallery is a recreated World War II factory room. On display are a nose cone from a B-24 Liberator Bomber made at Willow Run, a Jeep, and a Pratt and Whitney aircraft engine made at the River Rouge plant. Telephone (517) 373-3559 or visit online at www.michiganhistory.org.



At the **Walter P. Chrysler Museum** in Auburn Hills, Chrysler Corporation's role in World War II is showcased with a Willys-Overland Jeep and images of Sherman tanks, plus an actual tank engine designed and built by Chrysler. Telephone (888) 456-1924 or visit online at www.daimler-chrysler.com/museum.

A giant B-52 bomber greets visitors to the **Yankee Air Museum** in Belleville at the Willow Run Airport. Telephone (734) 483-4030 or visit online at www.yankeeairmuseum.org.

The **Kalamazoo Air Zoo** has preserved and restored many historic aircraft, including those that take to the skies in the "flight of the day" program. Telephone (616) 382-6555 or visit online at www.airzoo.org.

Michigan's Own, Inc. Military and Space Museum in Frankenmuth honors Michigan's veterans, including many Medal of Honor recipients. Telephone (517) 652-8005 or visit online at www.michigansown.org.

What Did You Learn?

ACROSS

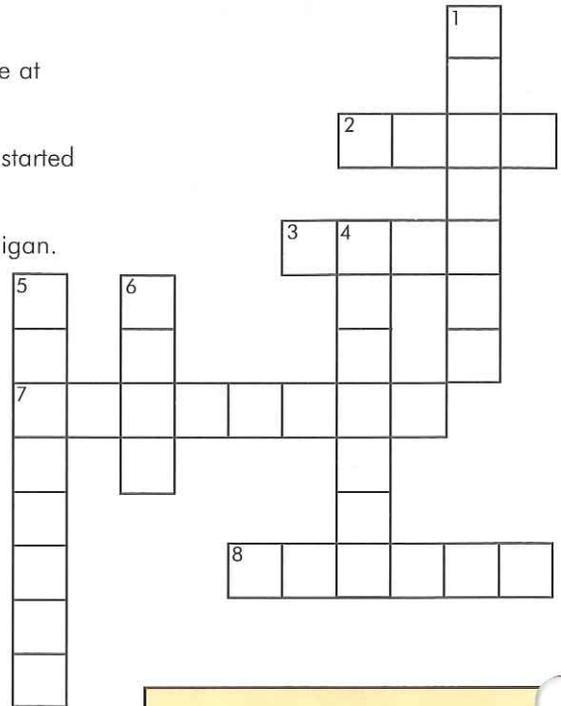
- By the end of 1943, bombers at the Willow Run plant were being made at the rate of one per _____.
- Soon after the war began, automakers stopped making _____ and started making tanks and bombers.
- The _____ Corporation operated a tank plant in Warren, Michigan.
- The _____ Run Bomber plant was located in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

DOWN

- The president of the General Motors Corporation, William _____, convinced some automakers to build tanks and planes for the war.
- By the end of World War II, more than 22,000 tanks had been built at the Detroit _____.
- The United States entered World War II in _____ 1941.
- The Willow Run Bomber plant was the idea of Henry _____.

Word List
(in random order)

KNUDSEN
 DECEMBER
 CARS
 ARSENAL
 WILLOW
 FORD
 HOUR
 CHRYSLER



Vocabulary

Armament: a military unit's war supplies

Arsenal: a government establishment for storing and making war supplies

Combat: to fight against

Dedication: to open or unveil something with a ceremony

Democracy: government by the people, directly or through elected representatives

Materiel: the equipment of a military force.