**SS8H9 Describe the role of Georgia in WWII.**

**a. Describe the key events leading up to American involvement in World War II; include the Lend-Lease Act and the bombing of Pearl Harbor.**

When **World War II** erupted in September 1939, many Americans saw it as a “European” problem and hoped to stay out of the conflict. As Germany continued to be victorious and take over nation after nation, the U.S. continued to watch from the sidelines. In the Pacific, Japan was taking over large portions of China and other countries of Southeast Asia, and the U.S. continued to remain neutral.

Though America officially stayed out of the fight until December 7, 1941, President Roosevelt and the U.S. Congress were anything but neutral. Fearing a victory by Japan and Germany, the U.S. lent support to allies who were at war with the Japanese and the Germans. The U.S. sent billions of dollars in supplies to the United Kingdom, France, the Soviet Union, and China. In exchange, these allied countries gave the U.S. the privilege to use military bases in their countries if necessary. The **Lend-Lease Act** was passed by Congress in February of 1941 and signed into law by Roosevelt in March. For the next four years, the U.S. continued to supply the countries supplies and military equipment while taking part in the war as well. Though there was considerable *opposition* to the Lend-Lease Act by *opponents* of the war, this program successfully helped Great Britain defend against German invasion.

One of the most tragic events in America’s history was the Japanese surprise attack on the Navy base in **Pearl Harbor**, Hawaii. On December 7, 1941, over 300 Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor in hopes of *crippling* the U.S. military in order to further their plan to take over more land in the Pacific. In the attack, over 2000 Americans were killed and the U.S. lost over 150 ships. While the attack accomplished its goal of damaging the U.S. Navy, it also changed the vast majority of opinions about staying out of the war. On December 8, 1941, in a moving speech, President Roosevelt called December 7, “a day that will live in *infamy”* and asked Congress to declare war on Japan, which it did. A few days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the U.S., which America responded in turn. From December 8, 1941, until victory in 1945, America fought a *two- front war* against Japan, Germany, and Italy.

**SS8H9 Describe the role of Georgia in WWII.**

**b. Evaluate the purpose and economic impact of the Bell Bomber Plant, military bases, and the Savannah and Brunswick shipyards.**

Georgia was *instrumental* in providing military support to the war effort. From building aircraft and **Liberty ships** to the quality training that the *infantry* received, Georgia’s participation in the war effort was essential to the allied success of World War II.

In the short term, the arrival of the **Bell Bomber plant** in Marietta, Georgia, was important for the production of the **B-29 bomber**, a bomber that was America’s most technologically advanced of the war. The company was able to produce over 650 of the bombers before the end of World War II. These planes were used in World War II and later in the Korean War.

However, the Bell Bomber company had an even more important impact on the economy of Georgia. During the war, almost 30,000 people, many from Georgia, were employed at the largest plant to have ever been built in the Deep South. After the war, the plant closed until 1951; however, the **Lockheed Martin Company** took over the facility that continues to employ Georgians today. Due to the *proximity* of the plant, **Dobbins Air Force** based was located nearby, adding more employment opportunities to the area.

During World War I there were more military facilities in Georgia than any other state. During World War II, due to the number of men and women in uniform, many of these bases grew in size. They played an important role in training and supplying the military during the war. For example, **Fort Benning** near Columbus, Georgia, was the largest and viewed as the best infantry facility during the war. Interestingly, these bases also held thousands of enemy prisoners. Today, these bases provide thousands of jobs for Georgians and pump millions of dollars into the state’s economy.

A major contribution during the war came from the large number of civilians (many women) who built liberty ships during the war. These ships were used to transport troops and supplies to both the European and Pacific fronts. In all, 187 ships used during the war were built in either Savannah or Brunswick.

The economic impact of the **Savannah and Brunswick shipyards** on Georgia communities was huge. More than 15,000 employees, many of which were women, built 88 Liberty ships at the Savannah shipyard. Local economies were boosted when thousands of Georgia citizens earned paychecks that were ultimately *re-invested* in community businesses.



**SS8H9 Describe the role of Georgia in WWII.**

**c. Explain the economic and military contributions of Richard Russell and Carl Vinson.**

**Richard B. Russell, Jr**. (1897-1971) was a governor of Georgia and U.S Senator, serving in the Senate for 38 years. After serving as a lawyer for a year, at the age of 23 he was one of the youngest people ever elected to the Georgia General Assembly. In 1931, Russell was elected Governor of the state, the youngest in the 20th century. Russell’s time as Governor was short lived however; the death of Senator William J. Harris vacated a Senate seat, which Russell won.

Russell played a major role as a Senator. Serving on the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees, he gained a great amount of influence on U.S. military policy. An advocate for a strong military during the 1930s, he helped the U.S. prepare to fight in World War II. He was also influential in bringing or maintaining 15 military bases in the state, along with many other research facilities, including the Centers for Disease Control, and federal funding of other projects throughout the state. This attention to the *acquisition* of military installations for the state had a major economic impact.

Russell’s strong *segregationist* beliefs caused him to oppose many civil rights bills during his career. Historians argue that these beliefs likely prevented Russell from gaining the presidency. However, with all of Russell’s political accomplishments, he believed his most important was the creation of the National School Lunch Program.

**Carl Vinson** (1883-1981) is often quoted as saying “The most expensive thing in the world is a cheap Army and Navy.” In his 51 years in the U.S. House of Representatives (the longest in U.S. history), Vinson made it his mission to make certain that the U.S. spent funds on both, especially the Navy, which earned him the nickname, the Admiral. The man known as the “Father of the Two Ocean Navy”, was elected to the Georgia General Assembly in 1908. Though his calls for strengthening the U.S. military were largely ignored during the *isolationist* period of the 1920s, as war began to rage in both Europe and Asia, his policies became more accepted, and the nation started preparing for war. Vinson continued to be involved in military matters all the way up until his retirement from Congress in 1964. Due to his hard work for over 50 years, Vinson received the Presidential Medal of Freedom and had a U.S. nuclear powered aircraft carrier named after him. Vinson’s insistence on developing and maintaining a strong Army and Navy has economically impacted many communities. As the chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee (1931-1947), before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Vinson pushed through Congress two bills to expand naval aviation by building 10,000 planes, the training of 16,000 pilots and the establishment of 20 air bases as well as the construction of naval facilities. The economic impact on Georgia, especially coastal Georgia, during World War II was evident. Over 90% of the workforce on Georgia military installations were civilians. Over 20,000 jobs were brought to local communities. In 1955, Vinson encouraged construction at Fort Benning in Columbus, the Marine Supply Center in Albany, and the Naval Ordnance Plant in Macon at a cost of $36,861,000. This financial impact into the local economies of these cities was important as the civilian workforce was utilized for the construction projects. Throughout his congressional career (the longest of any person serving in Congress), Carl Vinson was loyal to providing U. S. military support in Georgia and throughout the nation and world.