

George Kauffman  
and Alabama's  
Defense Industry

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Chronology of the life and times of  
George Kauffman.

1. December 1, 1914 - Born, Texas.
2. 1922 - Moved to Pennsylvania.
3. September 1939 - November 1943- Attended Cornell University.
4. November 1943 - Inducted into U.S. Army.
5. October 9, 1944 - Wounded in Europe.
6. December 1944 - January 1946 - Worked as machinist at Moore Avenue Machine Shop.
7. August 11, 1945 - Married in Anniston Alabama.
8. January 1946 - Employed by U.S. Army at Fort McClellan and Anniston Army Depot.
9. 1966 - Retired.

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The reasons are many and complex for the social and economic conditions which existed in Alabama prior to the Second World War. In a large part, those same conditions had existed since the late nineteenth century. The constitution of 1901 served to solidify both the economic base of the state and the social stratification as well. During the war conditions changed dramatically. The questions which must follow then are; to what extent did the war effect the state and more importantly, perhaps, to what extent did these changes survive the end of the war? It is equally important that an interpretation be made concerning the effects of the Cold War as well, for these events too were an unexpected change in direction of the fortunes of the state.

When the United States entered the Second World War there was an unprecedented feeling of a common and noble cause. The degree to which the national war effort was coordinated and organized is nothing short of outstanding. The very nature of twentieth century global warfare made it necessary that the nation be mobilized as a vast, interconnected network of military installations and manufactories, all working together towards the nation objective. In this Alabama

played an important role, both militarily and in industrial contribution.

Mr. George Kauffman, of Anniston Alabama experienced the war from both the battle fields of Europe, and the home front as well. George Kauffman was born in Texas in 1914. As a boy he moved to Pennsylvania with his father, and in 1939 he attended Cornell University where he studied Mechanical engineering. During the Second World War George was drafted and served with the third and seventh armies in Europe. Although he crossed the English Channel a few days after the Normandy invasion, he saw some of the most vicious fighting of the war including the Ardennes forest and the Battle of the Bulge. In 1944, as the allies pushed eastward toward Germany, George was wounded through the left shoulder. this wound took him out of combat and back to the states. Less serious wounds were treated at the front, and the wounded were returned to the battle field as soon as they were able to walk and carry a rifle. In the Ardennes, casualty rates ran as high as three hundred percent, and of George Kauffman's company, only eight riflemen survived the battle, at which point the company was reorganized. <sup>1</sup>

George spent the last year of the war in Alabama. He explains his reason for settling here as an economic one. According to George, it was Alabama's low tax rate which made the state the only place to live. <sup>2</sup>

In Anniston, George married and bought a plot of land for \$275.00 where he and his wife built the house in which they live today. While he was building the house, he had only partial use of his left arm due to nerve damage from his wound which took almost a year to fully heal. At this time he became vigorously engaged in Alabama's home front effort. working first at the Moore avenue machine shop where he made eight inch shells, and latter for the army at fort McClellan and the Anniston Army Depot. <sup>3</sup>

Alabama was a state rich in natural resources, particularly those which are vital to waging war such as cotton, and iron. But she was ill equipt to exploit the at the rate which the situation made necessary. Huge amounts of federal money were invested in the state in order to upgrade production. In 1942 the total expenditure for industrial and military facilities in Alabama was 520,000,000. Average

monthly production costs had tripled what they had been in 1929. By 1949, Birmingham steel had reached a level that was straining the regions capacity to supply the coke and ore necessary for the process and new emphasis was placed on the steel regions of Gadsden, Anniston, Tuscaloosa and Muscle Shoals. 4

The occupational make up of the state was changing rapidly during the war. Alabama, which had traditionally been an agricultural state was urbanizing as farm workers moved to the cities to fulfill the great demand for factory workers. During the war, Alabama's unemployment rate was nearly zero as war time industry provided more jobs than the state had workers. 5

Perhaps the most important transformation which the war brought to Alabama, and one which seemed most threatened by the war's end, was the trend toward producing finished products as opposed to semi-finished stock material. Alabama had hither to operated an industrial base which was not unlike colonialism to the northern industrial states. War time production was giving the state an opportunity

to break free of this low return system. According to George Kauffman, though, this was not an easy transformation. One of the tasks in George's hands was the inspection of eight inch artillery shells made in Anniston. He explains that much of the finished product was rejected at inspection, and he describes the workmanship as "shoddy".

They didn't have the experience. All they had in Alabama was pipe shop machinists; they weren't engineers. In other words you had to have a boss for every two or three men. 6

An efficiently run military industrial system was not realized until the late years of the war in Alabama.

In part, the problem of inefficiency was the result of the complexity of coordinating a national war effort. In many cases, the fabrication of one particular piece equipment involved operations in several states.

One such case in point, with which George Kauffman had extensive experience was the 105 millimeter shell. He explains that the shells which were manufactured in Anniston, then had to be shipped to Maryland where they were proof tested. In Maryland, more than half of



the lots were rejected because the tolerances were too loose or the shells simply did not perform up to specifications. The waste of resources here is self evident, and this would continue to be a problem in the in the post war defense industry. 7

Never the less, the Second World War certainly stimulated the industrial growth of the entire nation, Alabama being no exception among the states. But the war would eventually end, and by the time it did, Alabama's industry was geared almost entirely to a situation dependent upon the war. The problem had been considered as early on as 1943. George Kauffman recalls the day of the Japanese surrender as the day the order came to stop production, and the government owned machines at the Moore Avenue machine shop fell silent. 8 Plenty of evidence exists to suggest the abruptness with Alabama's fortunes changed. On 4, September, 1946, the Anniston Star reported that permanent residence in Anniston was declining, and job placement had been steadily declining as well. Within Calhoun county, 532 new positions had been filled in May 1946. By August the number had dropped to 352. 9

On September fifth it was reported that \$17,487,000 in unemployment relief had been paid state wide in the first year of peace time. Moreover, of the 78,160 workers laid off that year 68% had been directly engaged in war time manufacturing. 10

For a time at least, it appeared as if Alabama were returning to a condition of high unemployment and low wage colonialism. Not only had industrial demand dwindled with the end of the war, but now the very nature of the state economy had changed. Alabama was no longer the agrarian state it had been. War time industry had caused urbanization as thousands of workers, many of whom had been engaged in agriculture, sought higher paying and readily available jobs in the cities.

Alabamas threatened prosperity appears to have been saved by the Cold War. By late 1949 world events were already starting to indicate the course of the future. As early as September 20, 1946 the army brass was suggesting the future, long term importance of Fort McClellan and Huntsville's Redstone Arsenal. 11 In March of 1953 the Fort was again expanding with the

addition of 175 houses; a \$1,500,000 building contract. 12

George Kauffman went to work for the army in 1946; first at Fort McClellan as an artillery and small arms inspector, and as those operations were moved to the Anniston Army Depot, he assumed charge of those same weapons as quality assurance inspector of "everything that fired." The machines at the Depot were owned by the Chrysler corporation through out the Second World War. Eventually, as the Depot became a permanent facility, they were purchased as government property. George stayed on at the Depot until he retired in the mid sixties. He became an authoritative expert on everything from the largest field guns down to the 1911 pistol. Many of the evolutionary improvements of weapon systems during this time were the direct result of his suggestions. 13

The industrial boom created by the Second World War had set the course of the state in a new direction. Necessary improvements in the infrastructure ended the days of the riverboat freight transport, and tonnage was carried on pavement and rail. New industries such as aluminum production

appeared for the first time. Cities evolved around the manufacture of finished products, and, eventually the technological gap between Alabama and the rest of the country began to shrink. Where agriculture survived it became more diversified and new emphasis was placed on beef cattle and soy production.

The Cold War saved Alabama's defense industry and may have averted potentially hard times. To appreciate the importance of this industry to the state we need only remember the uneasy feelings created a couple of years ago when Fort McClellan was threatened with closure.

## Bibliography

1. Anniston Star, 4 September 1946.
2. Anniston Star, 5 September 1946.
3. Anniston Star, 20 September 1946.
4. Anniston Star, 20 December 1947.
5. Anniston Star, 22 December 1947.
6. Anniston Star, 5 March 1953.
7. Kauffman, George. U.S. Army Civil Service retired, Anniston, Alabama. Interview, 12 November 1994.
8. University of Alabama, Bureau of Public Administration. War Comes to Alabama. University of Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1943.

Notes

1 Interview with George Kauffman, U.S. Army Civil Service retire, Anniston Alabama, 12 November 1994.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 University of Alabama, Bureau of Public Administration, War Comes to Alabama (University of Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1943), p.77.

5 Ibid., p.7.

6 Interview with George Kauffman, U.S. Army Civil Service retired, Anniston Alabama, November 12 1994.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Anniston Star, 4 September 1946.

10 Anniston Star, 5 September 1946.

11 Anniston Star, 20 September 1946.

12 Anniston Star, 5 March 1953.

13 Interview with George Kauffman, U.S. Army Civil Service retired, Anniston Alabama, 12 November 1994.

Gift and Release Agreement

We George Kauffman and Thomas Chappela  
Interviewee (print) Interviewer (print)

do hereby give and grant to Dr. Suzanne Marshall, Assistant Professor of History, Jacksonville State University, all literary and property rights, title, and interest which we may possess to the audio or video recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) conducted at

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on the date(s) of 12 Nov. 1994  
for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.

George P. Kauffman  
Interviewee's signature  
Address McArthur Drive  
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Phone 237-7727

Date 12 Nov. 1994

Thomas Chappela  
Interviewer's signature  
Address 11011 A Mountain St.  
Jacksonville Alabama  
Phone 435-2294

Date 12 Nov. 1994

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: George P. Kauffman M/F Mr

Address: MacArthur street Anniston

Phone number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate age or date of birth: Dec. 1, 1924

Mother's Name: Dora Preston

Father's Name: Victor Kauffman

Places lived and when: Alabama, Texas, Pennsylvania

Education: Cornell University

Religion: Christian

Business, political and social memberships (past and present) Masonic order

Present occupation: Retired

Former occupations: Mechanical engineer

Special Skills: \_\_\_\_\_

Major Accomplishments: \_\_\_\_\_

National Events in which interviewee has participated: Veteran of WWII in European theater

Local Events in which interviewee has participated: \_\_\_\_\_

National born U.S. citizen?  Yes/No

Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Country from which he/she emigrated: \_\_\_\_\_

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information: \_\_\_\_\_