

# PASSWORD



THE EL PASO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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# PASSWORD

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**IN MEMORIAM**

*Ralph Hellums*  
*Carol Bertrand*

## America's Fighting Dollars: The World War II War Bond Drives in Two Texas Cities

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*By Molly Butler*

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When war broke out again in Europe in 1939, nearly twenty years after the Great War, Americans were divided. Many did not support the idea of fighting in yet another foreign war. However, some, including many in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, felt it was necessary to enter the war. Even when the United States entered the war after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, many Americans were not united in the war effort. Furthermore, the federal government needed to finance the war as well as determine a method to offset inflation. These three objectives—uniting the American people, financing the war, and deterring inflation—were accomplished in large part with war bonds.

It has been argued that the World War II war bond campaign in the United States was the "largest and most visible campaign of the war."<sup>1</sup> This is an accurate assertion. At the end of the war, the war bond campaign, which consisted of eight intensive drive periods, would be the biggest the world had ever seen, managing to raise over \$185 billion. How could a nation, which at first barely supported the idea of going to war, produce so much money to finance the war effort? This was in part due to the extraordinary power of the war bond campaign. Not only did the bonds help finance the war and deter inflation, they were able to unite a racially and socially divided nation barely recovering from the most devastating depression the country had ever seen.

This study will focus on two of the eight war bond drives (the first and seventh) in two Texas cities: El Paso and San Antonio. It will attempt to understand and analyze the World War II war bond drives in both of these cities by comparing them to one another and to national patterns. During the first bond drive, El Paso appeared more enthusiastic and stressed greater individual citizens' involvement in the war bond effort. However, by the seventh bond drive, both El Paso and San Antonio led very similar campaigns, targeting similar groups in an attempt to unite everyone in the war bond effort. Both cities' war bond campaigns were very successful, as they consistently oversubscribed their quotas and both drew on national themes and logos, such as comparing the purchasing of war bonds to military action, to promote the selling of bonds and stamps. This examination of the war bond drives will begin with a background study of war bonds and then compare the first and seventh war bond drives in El Paso and San Antonio, respectively.

## **From Liberty Loans to Baby Bonds**

While it is true that the United States' war bond drives during World War II were the most successful the world had ever known, these techniques were not new or unique to Americans. In actuality, World War I saw the first truly significant use of war bonds for everyday Americans. These bonds were pushed through drive periods known as Liberty Loans and (later in the war) Victory Loans.<sup>2</sup> President Woodrow Wilson sought to use these bonds to create a unified America and to preserve American liberalism. These bond drives were very aggressive, often pushing Americans to "Buy Until It Hurts." Indeed, those who did not purchase World War I bonds were often shamed as slackers or even un-American.<sup>3</sup> Many historians have criticized the World War I Liberty/Victory Loans because (1) they actually created distrust of the federal government among Americans, and (2) they were seen as "elitist" bonds (as banks and large corporations invested a majority of the percentage of the 1917-1919 Liberty Loan).<sup>4</sup>

The World War I Liberty/Victory Loans caused Americans to harbor distrustful feelings toward the federal government for two main reasons. First, Liberty bonds at their lowest point fell below their buying price in value; a \$100 bond was returned at \$82.<sup>5</sup> Second, the World War I bond drives caused mass "hysteria and intimidation,"<sup>6</sup> which many Americans felt not only violated their rights, but also resulted in "inflamed passions" and "stimulated xenophobia" among other things.<sup>7</sup> These criticisms, along with the fact that large investors accounted for most of the bonds sold during this period, would help shape the bond drives of World War II and may have contributed to their great success.

Henry F. Morgenthau Jr., who became the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States in 1935, understood the problems that had arisen during World War I. Drawing on examples from other nations, Morgenthau desired to develop a savings program during the Great Depression in an attempt to distribute the public debt more broadly. This idea led to the passage of the Second Liberty Loan Act of 1917, passed on February 4, 1935.<sup>8</sup> Because of the failure of small investors and average American citizens to purchase many Liberty/Victory Loans during World War I, Morgenthau sought to create bonds in much smaller denominations to be attractive to smaller buyers. Also drawing on past experiences, Morgenthau created bonds that were nonnegotiable, so as only to be returned on a fixed rate.<sup>9</sup> This prevented the disaster of the Liberty/Victory Loans, which were offered on a flexible return, which led to their being redeemed at a depreciated value.

The smallest of these denominations were known as "baby bonds." Although there was not much marketing for these bonds, the American public quickly became aware of them. Their popularity prompted Morgenthau to market them directly via a mailing campaign in July of 1936. By early 1941, more than nineteen million baby bonds had been



*"This time—go all out!"*

## *Trade your folding money for fighting money!*

**Buy TWICE as many War Bonds with your farm dollars in the mighty 7th WAR LOAN!**

Get in on the fight! . . . Pitch in with every loose dollar you've got—proudly plank them down for *twice* as many bonds as you ever bought before!

Only when you do that can you look an American fighting man in the eye and say:

"Yes, son, I am doing all I can . . . producing all the food I can, and **BUYING ALL THE BONDS I CAN!**"



### **WAR BONDS PAY OFF IN THESE 7 WAYS . . .**

- 1 The same Government security backs your War Bonds as backs the *actual dollars* you put into them.
- 2 You get \$100 at maturity for every \$75 loaned now.
- 3 You can get your money back, 60 days after issue date, any time you need it . . . in the meantime you get safety and steady growth.
- 4 You have a backlog to renew farm buildings and equipment after the war.
- 5 Bonds will insure your children's schooling, or provide for your own security, travel, retirement.
- 6 Bonds go into a national nest egg that will help to assure post-war prosperity.
- 7 Bonds transform your love of home and country into *action* . . . you join personally in the biggest, most urgent War Loan of all—the Seventh!

# **El Paso County War Finance Committee**

603 MARTIN BUILDING—EL PASO COUNTY HEADQUARTERS—PHONE MAIN 522

This is an official U.S. Treasury advertisement—prepared under auspices of Treasury Department and War Advertising Council

This Advertisement Sponsored by Individuals and Firms Whose Names will Appear in This Newspaper at the Conclusion of the Seventh War Loan Drive

Figure 1: El Paso Herald-Post, June 15, 1945, p. 7

sold.<sup>10</sup> Despite this great success, most of the bonds sold from 1935 to 1941 were not bought by average American citizens, but by large investors, banks, and corporations. In fact ninety-five percent of the bond revenue came from bonds purchased in one hundred dollar denominations or greater.<sup>11</sup> Rather than be dismayed, Morgenthau used these experiences to structure the bonds of America's wartime experience, in what would eventually become the greatest bond selling campaigns the world had ever seen.

### **From Baby Bonds to Bond Drives**

As the European war escalated, Americans (or at least, the federal government) began revving up for war. Two problems arose which the Roosevelt administration needed to address: how to pay for the war and how to offset inflation. John Maynard Keynes, a renowned British economist, favored taxation to complete these tasks. However, taxing the general populace produced several problems. First, the government could not collect taxes as quickly as a borrowing method such as the bonds would allow. Second, taxing the population would result in more wealthy Americans paying for most of the war, whereas borrowing money would spread the debt more evenly. Last, taxes had a negative psychological effect on the citizenry, as opposed to borrowing, which was not only more "democratic" but also made the population feel wealthier, as these bonds were an investment in their future.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, President Roosevelt and Henry F. Morgenthau concluded that war bonds were the best course of action.

Morgenthau was fortunate enough to live at a time when he would have several experiences with war bonds to be able to use them to his advantage. He learned from the World War I Liberty/Victory Loans and the "baby bonds" of 1935-1941 that he would need to drastically change these bonds to make them more attractive to the average citizen. He would also need to develop a strategy to market these bonds so that average Americans would be motivated enough to go out and buy them.

For the first of these challenges, he implemented a variety of changes to the bonds to make them more attractive to the average consumer. He began by offering more choices, learning from the Liberty Loans that offering only one bond was not enough. He therefore created the bond series E, F, and G.<sup>13</sup> Series E bonds would prove to be the most important of these bonds, especially for the seventh war loan, which will be discussed in more detail later. Series E bonds sold in several denominations, the lowest being \$18.75, to be returned at full maturity at \$25. In an attempt to demonstrate that these bonds were tailored to the needs of the people, rather than large investment bankers and businessmen, the Treasury Department sold the Series E bonds at a 2.9% interest rate, as compared

to the Series F and G bonds, which sold at a 2.5% return.<sup>14</sup> In addition to small war bonds, the Treasury offered war stamps. The Treasury created these stamps mainly to attract children. Children, and adults who could not afford an outlay of \$18.75 for a bond, could buy these stamps for as little as ten cents, and continue to purchase them until they added up to the full \$18.75 of a complete bond. The Treasury implemented this system knowing that stamps would not bring in large amounts of revenue, but rather as another demonstration that these bonds were for everyone, not just big business.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, it was not enough to merely make the bonds affordable for many average citizens; there also had to be a reason for Americans to want to purchase the bonds at a time when many did not even support the war. For this, Morgenthau relied on propagandist techniques to shape the bonds, "to sell the war, rather than vice versa."<sup>16</sup> Morgenthau sought the help of Peter Odegard, a political scientist, who worked with Morgenthau to develop marketing techniques to inspire Americans to support the war through the purchasing of war bonds. They relied on themes that were "pluralistic and democratic" to accomplish this goal, again reinforcing the desire for a "broad rather than a rich constituency" of bond buyers.<sup>17</sup> Because of this need for an expansive base of bond buyers, and because Americans loved to spend their money on entertainment, the Treasury drew on popular culture to sell the bonds, particularly the Hollywood film industry. In fact, Hollywood organized seven bond tours throughout the nation, with big names such as Bing Crosby and Bob Hope headlining the shows to promote the selling of war bonds.<sup>18</sup>

Despite these many innovations for the World War II bonds, Americans were still not convinced enough to purchase them in the large quantities that Morgenthau desired. Because of the devastating effect of the World War I Liberty/Victory Loans on the nation, Morgenthau did not originally want to resort to intensive bond drives again. He stated that "there were to be...no quotas...no hysteria...no appeal to hate or fear." Yet because of stagnant sales, in 1942 the Treasury introduced quotas.<sup>19</sup> This still proved to be not enough to entice Americans to buy bonds in large quantities. Therefore, in October of 1942, Morgenthau organized a small bond drive in Vineland, New Jersey, to test the public's reaction to such a method. This bond drive proved to be an overwhelming success and paved the way for what would become the first of eight intensive war bond drives during the war.<sup>20</sup>

Each of these eight bond drives differed from the preceding and following one. The Treasury Department ingeniously adapted each bond drive "to the public's dynamic moods" throughout World War II.<sup>21</sup> Often the bond drives had their own specific slogan and logo that reflected the context of war and the mood of the American public in order to promote constant

purchases of bonds. These messages, logos, and slogans, along with other methods to sell the bonds, will be examined in the following sections for the war bond drives in both El Paso and San Antonio, Texas.

### **The Victory Fund Drive**

The first war bond drive began in late November of 1942 and lasted about four weeks until December 23, 1942.<sup>22</sup> It was a modest start for the drives, especially compared to later ones. Morgenthau set the nation's quota at \$9 billion and did not specify a specific logo or slogan to accompany the drive. Only on the anniversary of Pearl Harbor was a slogan added: "Let's Give the Japanese Something to Remember on Pearl Harbor Day."<sup>23</sup> Emphasis for this bond drive focused on the payroll savings plan for American citizens, and on the purchasing of E-bonds. At the end of the drive, the United States would boast a total of \$13 billion in bond sales, with more than thirty-five percent of the American public holding at least one bond.<sup>24</sup> The first bond drives for El Paso and San Antonio were quite different from one another in terms of the leadership in the drives. El Pasoans focused more on the support of the citizenry, while San Antonio relied heavily on banks and businesses. However, both drew on national themes and were quite successful, as each city reached its quota for the first bond drive.

For El Paso, the first war bond drive centered around three main groups: women, businesses, and schools. An examination of the *El Paso Herald-Post* for the first bond drive suggests that women proved to be the main rallying force in the sale of war bonds. One article stated that it was "the women's appeal for the sale of War Bonds and Stamps" to which El Pasoans responded.<sup>25</sup> El Paso even had an entire week dedicated to women buying and selling war bonds. Women's organizations set the goals for El Paso and were so prominent in the drive that the county war bond committee head, Forrest M. Smith, gave the women of El Paso permission to "work independently of [his] committee."<sup>26</sup> El Paso women even created their own slogan, "She is ready, too," to emphasize the role women played in the buying and selling of war bonds. Women acted through a number of groups and organizations to accomplish their goal of selling \$1 million worth of bonds, including the Women's Division of the Chamber of Commerce, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the Council of Parents and Teachers, to name just a few.<sup>27</sup> El Paso was by no means unique in the important roles given to women during the first bond drive. In fact, women were "actively targeted by the Treasury" to promote the buying and selling of bonds because of "their principal social role on the home front."<sup>28</sup> Part of this federal focus on women also stemmed from the fact that Morgenthau wanted to use the bonds not only to "sell the war," but also to unify the nation. In this way, the bond drives even targeted often marginalized groups of Americans, including ethnic Americans.<sup>29</sup>

Speed the Day!



Figure 2: *El Paso Herald-Post*, June 19, 1945, p. 4

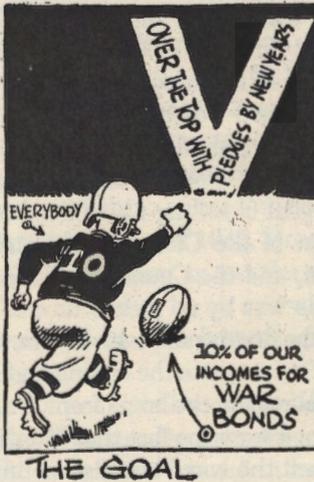


Figure 3: *El Paso Herald-Post*, December 10, 1945, p. 4.

His Number Is Up—



Figure 4: *El Paso Herald-Post*, May 14, 1945, p. 4.

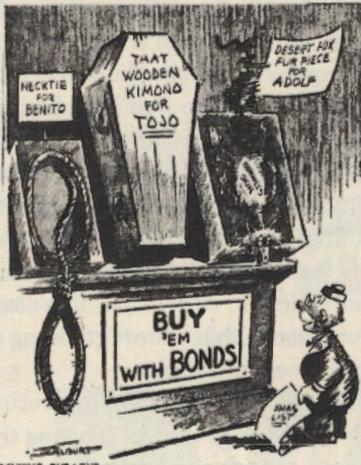
Next to women, the businesses of El Paso had the largest role in the bond drive. One of the main ways this was accomplished was through the payroll savings plan, in which ten percent of an employee's salary was automatically put into war bonds. Business ads in the *El Paso Herald-Post* burst with messages supporting the payroll savings plan: "invest 10%" of earnings in war bonds,<sup>30</sup> "top that 10%!"<sup>31</sup> "Put 10% in War Bonds!"<sup>32</sup> "Everybody 10%!"<sup>33</sup> This plan would prove to be one of the most effective methods during the war in bringing in bond revenue. In addition, it served to strengthen the relationship between the federal government and businesses, which had been waning in the Depression era.<sup>34</sup> Morgenthau's vision of using the bonds to create a unified America, both in terms of its people and its corporations, was becoming realized during this first bond drive.

Businesses in El Paso not only sold advertising space to the bonds and to their workers via the payroll savings plan, but they often sold them directly in stores as well. For example, a full-page advertisement in the *El Paso Herald-Post* revealed the eagerness of some businesses to show their support for the bond campaign: "It's Easy to Buy War Saving Stamps and Bonds at the Popular,"<sup>35</sup> it read. Zale's Jewelers prided itself on "doing their part" for the war effort "by selling war stamps and bonds in all stores."<sup>36</sup> It is uncertain exactly why each business would choose to sell war bonds directly in the store; it could have been because the owners truly felt the need for people to buy bonds, or it could have been to attract customers by showing support for the war effort. In either case, it is clear that because many stores elected to sell war bonds that a strengthening of federal government and business ties was indeed taking place.

Lastly, there was a clear emphasis on schools and children contributing to the war effort by purchasing war bonds and stamps as well. During the first bond drive the *El Paso Herald-Post* had a special school edition printed each Tuesday in the paper. For the first bond drive, the paper consistently had news about each grade/school doing its part in buying bonds. One article stated that a group of young students "saved the money they would spend over the week-end" to buy war stamps.<sup>37</sup> Another article mentioned that the E.B. Jones Elementary School had a competition among the grades, with the most amount of war stamps bought winning a prize (although the paper never stated what the prize was).<sup>38</sup> As previously mentioned, the Treasury never intended to make much money from the stamp program. This is quite clearly the case, as the *El Paso Herald-Post* reported children buying \$20.50 and \$33 in war stamps.<sup>39</sup> While these stamps did not contribute much to the overall quota for El Paso (or for the nation), this served one of the other purposes of the bond campaign: to make Americans "war-minded" and to unify them in the war effort. Imagine the effect of seeing or reading about all sorts of ethnicities and genders and ages doing

his/her part for the war by buying war bonds and stamps. By examining this newspaper, it is easy to see how the war bond campaign "became the largest and most visible campaign of the war."<sup>40</sup>

Although there was not a specific slogan or logo for the first bond drive, there was a general theme and emphasis throughout the nation to promote the buying and selling of war bonds. This theme was that of combining civilians and soldiers so as "to place individual Americans metaphorically into the combat boots of the soldiers" fighting the war.<sup>41</sup> This conflation of citizens and soldiers was clearly evident in many of advertisements in the *El Paso Herald-Post*, particularly for the Pearl Harbor anniversary edition. Many newspaper advertisements had statements such as, "Your Dollars Can Fight,"<sup>42</sup> "Help Our Boys,"<sup>43</sup> "Be A Real American."<sup>44</sup> Several cartoons in the *El Paso Herald-Post* also reveal this conflation (shown below).



The cartoon on the right reads, "Buy Bonds and Help Pay for This Fine Wooden Kimono."<sup>45</sup> The one on the left reads, "Necktie for Benito. That Wooden Kimono for Tojo. Buy 'em with Bonds."<sup>46</sup> For Americans who could not join the army, the best way to fight and kill the enemies was with war bonds.

The first bond drive for San Antonio differed greatly from that of El Paso. Businesses and banks had much more pronounced roles in the bond drive for San Antonio, and there was less insistence on mass citizens working toward the quota. One of the few similarities between the two cities was the emphasis on children and schools buying bonds for the war effort. In the

San Antonio Light, there were also many advertisements which reinforced the conflation of citizens and soldiers, but it was less conspicuous in the Light than in the *El Paso Herald-Post*.

As previously stated, businesses and bankers assumed much greater roles in the first bond drive for San Antonio. This was made evident in an article which claimed that the "bankers of S.A. Area [Began] V-Bond Drive,"<sup>47</sup> whereas in El Paso, women's organizations set the goals for the city. By December 10, 1942, San Antonio boasted sales of over \$5 million, with "a big spurt" attributed by financial institutions.<sup>48</sup> In addition, for the special Pearl Harbor anniversary bond sales, it was reported that "banks" and "saving and loan associations" directed the city-wide campaign and encouraged citizens to buy an extra war bond.<sup>49</sup> It is uncertain why the bankers of San Antonio would be more prominent in the bond drive compared to El Paso. It is possible that banks were just as crucial to the El Paso bond drive, but their involvement was less reported in the newspaper, perhaps in an attempt to encourage citizens to buy more war bonds. In any case, based on these two newspapers, the war bond drive appeared to be much more important to the people of El Paso than San Antonio, as war bond news consistently made the front page in the *El Paso Herald-Post*, but not once during the first war bond drive was it front page news in the *San Antonio Light*. Although the newspaper editors might have been responsible for these decisions, it is most likely that war bond news did not make the front page because it was not as important to the citizens of San Antonio. This trend changed by the seventh war bond drive, though, which will be discussed in more detail later.

Because the people of San Antonio did not seem as enthusiastic about the first war bond drive as El Pasoans, there was much less coverage in the *San Antonio Light*. However, both San Antonio and El Paso devoted ample coverage to children and schools who participated in the war bond effort. The *Light* reported a story of two little girls who saved their pennies to buy two \$25 war bonds.<sup>50</sup> In addition, schools in San Antonio twice held "Victory Concerts" to raise money for the bond effort. These were shows put together by high school bands, with the price of admission being war bonds or stamps.<sup>51</sup> Some schools also instituted their own quotas for the students. For example, St. Gerard's school in San Antonio gave each student a war bond quota of \$2.50 and devised their own slogan: "Save, Serve, Conserve."<sup>52</sup> The *Light* also covered several stories about schools with headlines such as "Students Buy War Bonds"<sup>53</sup> and "Jeff Students buy \$6000 Bonds."<sup>54</sup> While these students may have raised more money in war bonds and stamps in San Antonio than El Paso, they clearly did not add up to much in the overall goal of \$9 billion. Recall, however, that the purpose of war bonds was not only to finance the war, but also to make the country "war minded." While the people of San Antonio may not have



## These men can tell you why the 7<sup>TH</sup> WAR LOAN is the BIGGEST yet!

**YOU ARE** being asked to lend more money than ever before—in the 7th War Loan.

These men can tell you why.

They can tell you of great ships ready to slide down the ways this year.

They can tell you of a whole new air force in the building—large new bombers and fast new jet-powered planes waiting of the lines by thousands.

They could show you why it is cheaper and quicker to give our Pacific Forces entirely new equipment sometimes—instead of shipping tanks

and guns from Europe.

They can, in short, show you 101 ways in which your dollars are needed more than ever in helping America's might to the full strength—so that we may crush our foe the faster, make an end of killing, and bring our own boys home.



## Will you tell these men "I can't afford to buy my share"?

**THE GENERALS** and admirals can show us why our money is needed—more money than before.

But other men can show us something, too.

They're the men with twisted, crippled limbs... with steel from hooks instead of hands. The blind men... the men with scarred, seamed faces. And perhaps worst of all,

the men with blasted, darkened minds.

They can show us, clearly, how small is any sacrifice we make in lending money.

If you have an income, whether from work, land, or capital, you have a quota in the 7th War Loan. Find out what that quota is—**and make it!**

| FIND YOUR QUOTA... AND MAKE IT!            |                                                  |                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| IF YOUR AVERAGE ANNUAL INCOME PER MONTH IS | YOUR PERSONAL WAR BOND QUOTA IS (BASED ON VALUE) | MINIMUM VALUE OF THE WAR BOND BOND YOU MUST BUY |
| \$200                                      | \$167.50                                         | \$250                                           |
| \$250-299                                  | 183.00                                           | 300                                             |
| \$300-349                                  | 197.50                                           | 350                                             |
| \$350-399                                  | 212.00                                           | 400                                             |
| \$400-449                                  | 226.50                                           | 450                                             |
| \$450-499                                  | 241.00                                           | 500                                             |
| \$500-549                                  | 255.50                                           | 550                                             |
| Under \$100                                | 19.75                                            | 25                                              |



**ALL OUT FOR THE MIGHTY 7<sup>TH</sup> WAR LOAN**

# El Paso County War Finance Committee

403 MARTIN BUILDING—EL PASO COUNTY HEADQUARTERS—PHONE MAIN 505

This Advertisement Sponsored by **FINANCIAL** and **FINES** WOULD MAKE WAR APPROX IN THIS PAPER AS THE COMMISSIONER OF THE SEVENTH WAR LOAN DRIVE

This is an official U. S. Treasury advertisement—prepared under auspices of Treasury Department and War Advertising Council

Figure 5: El Paso Herald-Post, May 17, 1945, p. 8

placed as much emphasis on the war bond drive as those in El Paso, there were clear attempts (as suggested by the pronouncement of the war bond effort of schools) to motivate the citizens of San Antonio to support the war effort as well. These efforts became much more inclusive and expansive during the seventh war bond drive for both cities.

### **The Mighty Seventh**

Morgenthau did not originally plan for the seventh war loan to be the biggest of all eight, even with the logo "The Mighty Seventh." The drive began on May 14, 1945 and lasted seven weeks until June 30, with a national goal of \$14 billion overall and \$4 billion in E-bonds. It thus took place after the defeat of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in Europe but before the defeat of the Empire of Japan in the Asian war theater, at a time when the U.S. government needed an infusion of money but also at a time when Americans had become war weary. This was the highest E-bond quota of all eight drives, and the nation would overall fall just short of meeting it, bringing a total of \$3.97 billion in E-bonds. However, the drive did live up to its "mighty" name by raising \$26.3 billion total, surpassing its goal by 188%; this was to be the largest total of all the bond drives.<sup>55</sup> For this drive, Morgenthau created a logo of the famed Iwo Jima flag raisers behind a number seven with the text "The Mighty Seventh." The slogan for this drive was "Now, All Together." This logo and slogan symbolized, again, the conflation of citizens and soldiers and also the "unfinished business" of buying war bonds to finish the war and bring the men serving overseas back home.<sup>56</sup> This drive, as it was so heavily focused on E-bonds, saw the use of Hollywood stars and big spectacles to accomplish its large task. Both El Paso and San Antonio led very intensive campaigns, emphasized the unity of citizens and soldiers, utilized both the logo and slogan of the drive, and attempted to unite the city's residents. Both campaigns would prove to be successful; while the nation fell short of its E-bond quota, both El Paso and San Antonio oversubscribed theirs, even if it did take incredible efforts to do so.

El Pasoans appeared quite eager to begin work on "The Mighty Seventh" war bond drive. Before the drive even began, the *El Paso Herald-Post* reported about 800 volunteers who were prepared to work for the unusually long seven-week loan.<sup>57</sup> The chairman of the El Paso County War Finance Committee, Forrest M. Smith, also reported that these volunteers were "undaunted" by the large quota.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, El Paso County faced a considerably large overall quota of \$8,850,000, with an E-bond quota of \$3,290,000.<sup>59</sup> For this large task, the city emphasized women and businesses (similar to the first bond drive), as well as the military and various organizations which seemed to aim to unite the city for the large drive.

El Paso's strategy to use women as a main force in the buying and selling of war bonds in the first bond drive was quite effective, which may explain their prominent presence again in the seventh bond drive. Women worked in various ways to sell war bonds, one of the most notable being on buses, in order to access greater numbers of people.<sup>60</sup> Women's groups also began to emphasize what they would use the money for if the war ended before it was spent, claiming they would put it into an education fund.<sup>61</sup> This signaled a change in the mindset of most Americans, as they clearly believed the war would be over soon. Indeed, most Americans had not anticipated the war lasting so long, and after six previous bond drives, their support was waning. This was reflected in many of the articles of the *El Paso Herald-Post*, claiming in one way or another that E-bond sales were falling short of purchases to meet its quota. Interestingly, in one of these articles, women were reported as needing to "intensify their efforts" to help meet the E-bond goal.<sup>62</sup> Again, this demonstrates the imperative role women in El Paso played in working for the bond drive.

As women were vital to both the first and seventh war bond drives, so too were businesses. However, the businesses in El Paso played a much larger and significantly more substantial role in "The Mighty Seventh." Like the first drive, businesses supported the bonds with advertisements in the newspaper, often utilizing the logo and/or slogan in some way. However, businesses served a much greater and often more unique and active role in the seventh bond drive. For example, The Popular, a well-known department store in El Paso, held a special war bond rally to kick-off the seventh war loan.<sup>63</sup> The retailers of El Paso also had a special War Bond Committee dedicated to their involvement in the war loan. This committee worked to organize various stores in the El Paso area to work together to sell war bonds. For example, it organized a parade and asked that all merchants in El Paso close their stores at 4:30 p.m. on May 23 so that employers and employees could participate.<sup>64</sup> In addition, many businesses held bond selling competitions between employees.<sup>65</sup> Some businesses also utilized various and unique methods to encourage the purchase of war bonds. Walgreen's, for example, gave a free lunch for anyone who bought a war bond and also gave away a free carton of cigarettes with each bond purchased during a fifteen minute period. The latter resulted in over \$6000 worth of bond sales.<sup>66</sup>

Various movie theaters in El Paso also organized to help sell bonds. For example, June 6, 1945 was dubbed "Free Movie Day" with any purchase of a war bond at a box office allowing for free admittance to the movie. In addition, children were targeted by theaters, as "any child who can show that he has sold a bond" would be given free admittance to a showing of "Tarzan and the Amazons." The Plaza Theatre also featured a special premier of "Diamond Horseshoe" in Technicolor at no charge with the purchase of a

war bond.<sup>67</sup> The increased bond selling initiatives of businesses during the seventh war loan clearly targeted E-bonds and the mass citizenry of El Paso. These unique methods to push E-bonds most probably were created in response to the waning support of the prolonged war in the Pacific and against the Japanese.

Both women and businesses were active in both the first and seventh bond drives, but this was not the case with the military. Activities by local military installations rarely made news in the first, but was quite active in the seventh. For example, a B-29 plane from Biggs Field in El Paso was used on a bond mission, although it flew to Kansas City, rather than being used in El Paso.<sup>68</sup> However, the Fort Bliss band led the retailers parade discussed earlier.<sup>69</sup> Wounded veterans also made appearances in the war bond rally held by the Popular.<sup>70</sup> Soldiers were targeted through a bond campaign known as "V-mail," in which citizens purchased war bonds which were sent overseas to fighting soldiers to show the support they had back home. This V-mail campaign occurred during the special "Beaumont Bonds for Victory Day" held to honor soldiers overseas and the wounded at the William Beaumont General Hospital.<sup>71</sup> Because El Paso was home to a military base, many people knew someone fighting in the war. Therefore, the campaign which targeted the military proved to be especially effective, most likely as it was very personal for many El Pasoans. The "Beaumont Bonds for Victory Day" actually led to more series E-bonds being sold than on any other day during the seventh war loan.<sup>72</sup>

Another important contribution made by the military was a competition among soldiers stationed at Biggs Field. The soldier who bought the most bonds would be awarded with breakfast in bed by their commanding officer.<sup>73</sup> A sergeant at Biggs Field purchased a hefty \$3000 bond as part of a pledge to do so for every bond drive except one.<sup>74</sup> Ft. Bliss personnel also made significant contributions to the bond effort, civilians and military workers alike. The *El Paso Herald-Post* reported totals based on groups such as the War Department civilians, the Anti-aircraft Artillery School, and the Anti-aircraft Replacement Training Center. These men and women contributed over \$300,000 in war bonds to the overall total.<sup>75</sup> In addition, during the seventh war loan, bonus bonds given to soldiers during the First World War would reach full maturity. Many veterans pledged to reinvest them in E-bonds for the seventh war loan.<sup>76</sup> The pronounced effort of both Ft. Bliss and Biggs Field workers and soldiers produced significant contributions to the bond effort, reinforced their presence and importance in the war effort, and demonstrated the city's focus on uniting all citizens through the buying and selling of bonds.

Finally, there was a noticeable increase compared to the first bond drive in initiatives taken by ordinary El Pasoans for the bond effort as well as methods to push the sale of E-bonds. During the first bond drive, women's



organizations in El Paso were the most active and prominent of everyday citizens to sell bonds. However, during the seventh bond drive, various new groups (particularly religious ones) began establishing their own bond sales organizations. Several of these included B'nai B'rith, the Elks, and El Maida Temple, and the Shrine. Each worked to sell at least one bond to every member. Members of the Shrine also organized their own parade and set up a war bond booth to push the sale of E-bonds.<sup>77</sup> Members of the Elks held a special rally dance, with a goal of raising \$75,000 in war bonds.<sup>78</sup> In addition to these efforts, the city of El Paso held a competition among the citizens for special prizes donated by various people/groups. There were a total of 10,000 tickets for the prizes to be received with the purchase of a war bond; the prizes were an Ernie Pyle manuscript, a captured German gun, and a model jeep.<sup>79</sup> The substantial endeavors taken by the city, businesses, and individual citizens to push the sale of E-bonds clearly demonstrate that additional effort was needed. In fact, not only was El Paso dealing with abated zeal for the bond drives, but the whole nation was as well. The *El Paso Herald-Post* reported that the E-bond sales quota "[Lagged] Over [the] Nation" as well as constantly reporting of lagging sales in El Paso.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, while El Paso significantly oversubscribed its overall quota of \$8,850,000 (total was \$13,052,565), it barely oversubscribed its E-bond quota of \$3,290,000 (total was \$4,282,225) and had to rely on the 10% payday deductions to do so.<sup>81</sup> Various groups and organizations had to take incredible actions to reach the individual E-bond quota, signaling El Pasoans' declining enthusiasm for the war.

The story of the seventh war bond drive in San Antonio is surprisingly similar to that of El Paso. Recall that during the first war loan, women rarely made news in San Antonio, while banks and businesses accounted for a large majority of bond-related action and sales. This changed during the seventh war loan, however, as women in San Antonio became more prominent in bond buying and selling. Banks and businesses still remained quite active, but, similar to El Paso, the military made huge contributions in war bond-related activity. Also very similar to El Paso, the war bond committee in San Antonio relied on great spectacles to promote war bonds as the city struggled to meet its E-bond quota due to faltering support.

During the seventh war loan, women in San Antonio gained much more attention for their work in the bond drive. One of the most publicized actions was the "mercy mission" campaign undertaken by San Antonio women to sell bonds in order to finance hospital equipment.<sup>82</sup> These women worked through various groups such as the Woman's Club of San Antonio and the American Women's Volunteer Service, raising over \$200,000 toward the bond goal.<sup>83</sup> Not only were women working tirelessly to sell bonds, but they were purchasing bonds in very large quantities as well. An article printed in the *San Antonio Light* titled "Women Bond Buyers Cautioned," detailed

several steps women bond buyers should take to avoid misplacing their bonds or having them stolen. This would indicate it had become a serious issue for it to be addressed in the newspaper and by the Secret Service. In fact, the Secret Service agent in charge of lost bonds, agent Edward Tyrrell, claimed that women reported up to one hundred bonds lost or stolen every month.<sup>84</sup> Such large amounts of women buying bonds possibly suggest that they were actively targeted by the city during the seventh war loan.

While women's roles in the San Antonio bond drive were new to the seventh war loan (in comparison to the first), businesses' roles were heavily emphasized in both. Retailers were specifically targeted by the Treasury Department in many bond drives, especially during the seventh when the E-bond quota was so incredibly high for the nation. Therefore, many businesses in San Antonio responded to the call with great fervor. For example, one store in San Antonio, Wolff and Marx, dedicated its 68th anniversary to the "Mighty Seventh" war loan and claimed that every employee was a war bond salesman and had an individual quota of \$500 in E-bonds to sell, compared to only \$300 in previous drives.<sup>85</sup> Like El Paso, theaters throughout San Antonio sponsored a free movie day with the purchase of any denomination in war bonds,<sup>86</sup> and also sponsored the special premier of "Billie Rose's Diamond Horseshoe" with the purchase of a war bond.<sup>87</sup> Again, similar to El Paso, several theaters targeted children by offering free movie tickets with the purchase of a twenty-five cent war stamp.<sup>88</sup> Clearly, both the Treasury and the war bond committee in San Antonio felt the need to greatly push the sale of E-bonds through activities such as shopping and movies, where they might be most effective to access mass amounts of citizens, again demonstrating the attempt to unite all people by reaching them through various popular avenues.

The military focus of the seventh war bond drive was also similar to both cities. While El Paso had Ft. Bliss and Biggs Field, San Antonio headlines featured Ft. Sam Houston. The civilian and military personnel at this base were crucial to the war bond drive in San Antonio. First, army members from this base began the seventh bond drive (as compared to banks and businesses in the first drive) with a beef barbecue to recognize the hard work of the war bond workers. In addition, they performed a GI musical comedy, advertising "fun and good music" for the crowd.<sup>89</sup> Military staff at Ft. Sam Houston also held a "medical show" to depict a real battlefield hospital. While the show was free to the public, the soldiers featured commonly used equipment in overseas warfronts and hospitals with its cost displayed in terms of war bonds.<sup>90</sup> This was an incredibly overt strategy designed to pressure the public to purchase E-bonds in large quantities.

San Antonio dramatically intensified its bond selling techniques for the seventh war loan. In addition to the battlefield hospital show, the city held another bond show entitled "Here's Your Infantry." The show was a

reenactment of a jungle patrol, featuring men crawling "through brush and barbed wire." Again, the army displayed all of its equipment labeled in terms of war bond costs. Two of the soldiers who helped raise the famous flag at Iwo Jima also made special appearances during this show, which cost an extra \$25 bond to see.<sup>91</sup> The labeling of army equipment in terms of war bond costs not only made it more personal for the citizens of San Antonio who very likely knew someone fighting overseas, it also continued the trend from the first bond drive of the unity of citizens and soldiers. People were allowed to see exactly what their fighting dollars would be used to buy. The army also gave free rides in two planes for those who purchased \$50 or \$100 in war bonds.<sup>92</sup>

Not only did army personnel help sell the bonds, they purchased them too. One estimate claimed that 41.3% of all E-bonds sold from the beginning of the drive in May to June 24 were held by military and civilian personnel working at army posts and fields.<sup>93</sup> The San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center was publicized for subscribing 104% of its quota, raising more than \$500,000 in war bond funds.<sup>94</sup> The war bond committee of San Antonio placed a clear emphasis on the military and actively targeted the military and civilian personnel of army posts, as well the mass citizenry. Like El Paso and the nation, residents of San Antonio were weary of the continued war and bond drives. Headlines such as "E Bonds Still Lag"<sup>95</sup> and "Sales Still Short of Quota"<sup>96</sup> flourished in the newspaper, especially toward the end of the drive. Ultimately, after exhausting countless unique avenues to push E-bond sales, San Antonio met its overall quota and its E-bond quota of \$26,285,000 and \$10,080,000 respectively.<sup>97</sup> The newspaper headlines of the *San Antonio Light* made it appear to be a very close race to meet the E-bond quota. This could have been a reflection of actual fear the city would not meet its quota, or a tactic used to entice citizens to purchase more E-bonds. In either case, it was clear after this intensive drive that both the leaders of the war bond committee and the citizens were growing increasingly weary of the heavy buying of war bonds and the prolonged war.

## Conclusion

The World War II war bond drive campaign was one of the largest and most pervasive aspects of the war on the home front. These drives encompassed the combined effort of millions of Americans in all aspects of life, with very successful results. It is important to remember that this study analyzes only the first and seventh of a total of eight drives over three years. While the first bond drive was a modest start for the nation, as well as for El Paso and San Antonio, by the seventh drive, the war bond campaign took on a life all its own. Both El Paso and San Antonio heavily reflected national standards in the war bond drives, such as the

Pearl Harbor anniversary theme in the first bond drive, the conflation of civilians and soldiers in both drives, and the stressed unity of Americans "All Together" in the seventh. However, both cities also utilized unique methods to sell war bonds and stamps, such as free cigarettes in El Paso or the "Here's Your Infantry" show in San Antonio, and both were quite triumphant. In the seventh war loan, while the nation fell just short of its E-bond quota, both El Paso and San Antonio successfully oversubscribed theirs, demonstrating the tremendous effort of the bond drive leaders as well as individual citizens doing their part for the war. While this is only a small part of the bond drive narrative for these cities, it is an interesting look into the lives of those citizens and how they responded to the call for their fighting dollars.

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# Polly Harris: Not Your Typical Politician

*By Joseph Longo*

On May 27, 1989, a jubilant El Paso city representative, Suzanne "Suzie" Azar, declared victory over her opponent after winning 65 percent of the vote. Azar made history: she was the first woman mayor of El Paso. The voters were ready for a female city executive and Azar's victory made many women proud.<sup>1</sup>

There was, however, one woman who had worked toward this goal and dreamed of this day, but who was not there to celebrate the historic moment. Her name was Polly Harris. A flamboyant, witty, optimistic, strong-willed city representative, she was one of the most colorful and recognizable women in recent El Paso history. She was by profession a local actress and businesswoman when she decided to jump into politics, a world then dominated by men. She held her own with her male colleagues and made them take her seriously. She spoke her mind—but she was no bomb thrower.

Harris called herself the "alderbroad," a play on the word Alderman, as City Representatives were then known; and she almost always wore a real or fake flower on the lapel of her blouse, which became her trademark. She wanted to stand out and to make a statement. Harris did more than just dream about El Paso having a woman mayor; she firmly believed it could become a reality. And for many years, El Pasoans had little doubt that she, if anyone, would be the first female mayor. She was eager to make history.

Polly Harris was born Pauline Adair Elstein on December 6, 1924, in Kansas City, Missouri, the only child of two professional health practitioners, Dr. Mordical ("Mordy") Abraham Elstein and Lillian Harris. Mordy was a medical doctor who had emigrated to the U.S. from Romania. Lillian was the first licensed woman optometrist in Missouri. Polly earned an associate degree in Art from Kansas City Junior College in 1943 and a bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of Missouri at Kansas City in 1945. In 1949, Polly married Paul Harris, an electrical engineer. The couple moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico that same year. In 1950 they moved to El Paso. From 1950 to 1956, Polly worked for two El Paso radio stations, KSET and KEPO. From 1956 to 1968, she worked in advertising along with stints in the early days of television. In 1968, she co-founded with her husband the public relations firm of Harris and Harris, which was highly successful and had many high profile clients.

Polly was a writer for, and director of, the El Paso Gridiron variety show, which was a fundraiser for the athletic department at UTEP. She

served on the publicity committee for the El Paso-Southwest Sun Carnival from 1958 to 1968. She was also involved in the Empire Club, helping out with the club's publicity and private plane that took members (including herself) all over the world.<sup>2</sup>

From the age of nine, the Kansas City Resident theater in Kansas City, Missouri, was a regular hangout for Polly Harris. She learned every aspect of the stage and at age 17 she directed her first play. She told reporters that she grew up with a stage presence, encouraged by her mother.<sup>3</sup>



**Polly Harris**

*University of Texas at El Paso Library  
Special Collections, El Paso Herald Post  
Records MS348.*

She became involved in the Las Cruces theater scene when she lived there. Her involvement in the El Paso theater scene began in 1952 at the old Hacienda Café where she starred in a vaudeville type comedy. Harris was a key figure in the history of the modern El Paso theater, especially after the era of Lois Kibbee. Harris along with others got together to raise money for the El Paso theater.<sup>4</sup>

Harris served on the board of directors of the El Paso Playhouse, helped organize the Las Americas Civic Theater, and served on the board of director of the El Paso Upstairs Theater. She was one of the better-known local theater directors and actresses in El Paso and always got good reviews from local theater critics. Comedies were her forte. By 1964 she had directed 25 shows, including local productions of *Kiss me, Kate*, *Bell Book Candle*, and *Gypsy*.<sup>5</sup>

Harris made her first run for elected office in 1977, vying for a new place added to the City Council. She was the sixth woman in El Paso's history to run for City Council. Bertie Ussery and Thea Savage were the first women to run for a place on City Council in 1969, both unsuccessfully. The first to win election was Arlene Quenon in 1975, but she was defeated when she ran for re-election in 1977.

The 1977 city election reflected major changes in the electoral system and at city hall: for the first time, voters approved a charter amendment that would change the way voters elected their city representatives. Instead of electing candidates citywide, voters would elect them in single districts. The changes were not implemented until 1979. The ticket system, where mayoral candidates and candidates for City Council ran as a slate, became obsolete.

Harris was the first woman to serve three terms on City Council. She served alongside three different mayors. She was considered a moderate and a swing vote. One of Harris' colleagues, former State Representative

## *Polly Harris: Not Your Typical Politician*

Pat Haggerty, labeled her "the Great Compromiser." Haggerty jokingly told the *Paso Del Norte Magazine*, "I'm convinced Polly will spend her time in purgatory halfway between heaven and hell."<sup>6</sup>

In Harris' first term on City Council she spearheaded the El Paso Tourism and Visitors Bureau, the Civic Center, County-City Nutrition programs, and the Civil Defense Commission departments. She worked to enhance tourism and held brain-storming sessions, inviting the public to help with ways to promote El Paso. Under Harris' leadership, the El Paso Civic and Convention Bureau won three awards from the International Association of Conventions and Visitors Bureau.

Harris was an advocate for the elderly, working for more free services for the elderly and for additional senior citizens centers. She was a strong advocate for the arts, founding the Art Resources Department. She was a big supporter of VIVA El Paso. She supported building the (now former) City Hall just north of the Convention Center and was very much involved in designing its interior. She also supported the establishment of an emergency medical system and supported the city manager form of government.

Harris was a powerful advocate for women. She appointed women to non-traditional city boards and commissions. She also chaired the local chapter of the El Paso Women's Political Caucus. She received the caucus's support each time she ran for office. Harris was considered a mentor for many female politicians who came after her. Harris told *El Paso Times* reporter Ramón Rentería that, "Not a lot of women can take the slings and arrows that befall you as a result of serving in public. But I never did the feminist thing. I served as an alderman. I had one vote that made me equal."<sup>7</sup>

On October 10, 1978, she abstained on an emergency vote to annex a slope of the Franklin Mountains to the Franklin Mountains National Park, which was part of an effort to block development on the mountain slope. Her action was criticized, but she stood her ground. She said in a paid, open letter, released to El Paso newspapers that "undisclosed changes on the City Council agendas are as dangerous to the integrity of our city government as grading is to the integrity of our mountain wilderness. That surreptitious change abused every principle of open government that I am pledged to uphold." Harris was not opposed to preserving the mountain, but she was opposed to undisclosed changes to the Council's agenda.<sup>8</sup> Harris faced an unsuccessful recall effort because of her decision on the matter.<sup>9</sup>

In 1979 Harris was running for reelection as the "People Helper." Harris was the only woman candidate running for City Council that year, and won a bitterly contested race, defeating eight male opponents while avoiding a runoff. She was the first woman incumbent to be reelected. In her second term Harris supported beautification efforts around the city, along with

efforts to revitalize the downtown district.

In 1980 Harris became the first woman to hold the position of mayor "pro tem." By becoming mayor "pro tem" she became the first woman in El Paso history to act in official capacity as mayor. On February 19, 1980 she presided over her first City Council meeting held at the newly constructed city hall.<sup>10</sup>

In 1981 Harris was defeated by only 10 votes for reelection by Dennis Wagner, but she was elected anew to City Council in 1983. She was elected in a Hispanic majority district, defeating three Hispanic men while winning 64 percent of the vote. After making this comeback, Harris eyed a run for mayor.

Harris was the first woman with City Council experience to run for mayor (the first woman to run was Julia Breck, who lost a close election in 1961). Harris announced her candidacy for mayor at the El Paso Playhouse. "This is a day I hoped for the past 20 years. This is the day I worked toward for the past two years. You know you can count on my never ending enthusiasm to see that that El Paso moves forward in directions that you want to achieve." She also told the crowd at the Playhouse, "You can count on my willingness to listen to your concerns and on my ability to understand that every important issue has two sides and that I will always work to end controversy by intelligent compromise; statesmanship instead of politics as usual." According to the *El Paso Herald-Post* she did not mention businessman and Mayor Jonathan Rogers by name, though her comments were a veiled criticism of his administration. She thought the city was too business-oriented and she wanted it to be more people-oriented. "Being a good bookkeeper is always a good principle to run on (but) it's not enough. He's a very good businessman, I just wish he didn't feel his was a dictatorial command of authority," she told the crowd at the Playhouse. The main part of the Harris campaign platform was to open up communication between the people and city hall.<sup>11</sup>

There were those who tried to talk her out of the race but she would say in her colloquial way that "I gots to try." Supporters would point to Rogers' wealth and the power he wielded at city hall but Harris was never one to give up on an uphill battle. Harris had little money, but she did the best she could, running a spirited campaign.

Harris was proud to portray herself as an underdog. She lost support because many felt she could not win. Harris did get the support of the local women's political caucus and others, but Rogers led in contributions. She did not let the money issue bother her, telling the *El Paso Times* that it was enthusiasm, not money that was going to propel her campaign. "I guess the one thing that motivated me all my life is the belief that I can move mountains. You can get anything done with a lot of vigor and vitality. That's what it's all about."<sup>12</sup>

Harris lost badly to Mayor Rogers, who had incumbency and money on his side. The 1985 city election did not attract a lot of attention from voters. There was light voting for an election scheduled during an Easter weekend. The political environment was just not right to defeat a powerful and influential incumbent. El Paso was not ready for a female mayor, but Harris knew it would be eventually. After her defeat some said it was her last hurrah but she vowed to get back into the game. In 1986, Harris ran unsuccessfully for a seat on City Council. She was planning to run for mayor again in 1989 when Rogers would be term-limited, but unfortunately she passed away before she could make another comeback.

On December 6, 1987, Harris died of a brain aneurism. The whole city mourned her. The funeral home was so overcrowded that an audio version of the service was offered at a nearby chapel. Most everybody agreed that El Paso was never going to be the same.

Polly Harris lives on today in local memory. Her legacy includes a senior center in West El Paso named in her honor, which is fitting because of her strong advocacy for the senior citizens. Harris' legacy also includes a scholarship fund for the arts at the El Paso Community College, which was set up after her death. The scholarship fund's purpose is to help students majoring in the arts. Harris would be proud because she was a staunch supporter of the arts. Harris' memory lives in all El Pasoans.

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## Endnotes

1. David Crowder, "Azar wins by a landslide El Pasans elect 1st woman mayor," *El Paso Times*, May 28, 1989, page 1-A. This article appeared in slightly different form in the online journal *Newspaper Tree* (<http://newspapertree.com/articles/2014/09/22/polly-harris-a-flamoyant-el-paso-politician>).
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3. Taboada Luz, "The 'Polly' Tician." *Paso Del Norte Magazine* (March 1, 1983), pp. 28-35.
4. "Polly Harris," *El Paso Times*, January 8, 1982.
5. Polly Harris Resume February 1964, *El Paso Times Morgue*, El Paso, TX.
6. "Polly Has Both Feet Firmly Planted on Both Sides of the Issue," *Paso Del Norte Magazine* (February 1 1985), p. 33.
7. Ramon Renteria, "Defeat fails to daunt ex-alderbroad Harris," *El Paso Times*, May 24, 1981, p. 1-B.
8. Polly Harris, "An Open Letter to El Paso," *El Paso Times*, October 23, 1978, p. 5-B.
9. "Time Limit Halts recall of Harris," *El Paso Times*, November 16, 1978, p. 1-B.
10. "Business as Usual," *El Paso Herald-Post*, February 19, 1980, p. 1-A.
11. Tim Novak, "Mayor too dictatorial says Harris," *El Paso Herald-Post*, December 17, 1985, p. 1-B.
12. "Mayoral challengers exude flamboyance," *El Paso Times*, March 31, 1985, p. 1-B.

## Book Review: My Boys and Girls are In There

*By Ron Rozelle, Texas A&M Press, 2015, \$24.95*

I had not been born on March 18, 1937 when the New London, Texas school exploded, killing over 300 students and teachers. It housed both elementary and high school students and was in the heart of the East Texas Oil Field, which had only been discovered a few years before. Many of the students' parents were oil field workers. This was a field that was just beginning. The field is still producing, but in 1937 it was producing voluminous amounts. They were such that the "Big Inch" was built from East Texas to Pennsylvania. This pipeline provided the troops in Europe during World War II with all the oil and gas they needed to operate their machinery and win the war.

My mother lived in Tyler, less than 20 miles from the explosion. She, even many years later, remembered hearing it. Mother Francis Hospital in Tyler had just been built and was not yet open. It filled overnight with victims.

The explosion made national news. It was one of the first stories that Walter Cronkite covered at the beginning of his career. All of the details are given in Rozelle's book. The chapters are many and are short. Outside the national and local newspapers, it is not really known how much archival material remains for study. Most of the remaining, immediate families are now deceased. It is a quick read with a list of those who were killed at the end of the book.

Progress comes sometimes at a great cost, even though the cause provides a great need. The explosion still ranks in a top list of natural disasters in the United States. There was both a national and international outcome of the New London school explosion. The formerly odorless natural gas that accumulated under the school now has a distinctive odor from a product called Mercaptan. Anyone knows that there is a gas leak when smelling it, no matter where they are located.

This is a recommended book for those who want to know something about the early development of the petroleum industry in Texas and why we are alerted to gas leaks.

— *Reviewed by Patricia H. Worthington*

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The El Paso County Historical Society has published *El Conquistador* and *Password* for about 58 years. In the times in which we now live, it has become quite expensive to publish and mail large quantities of each publication. At this time the Society is conducting a survey to determine whether the membership would be happy with an alternative method of delivery. All membership levels would remain the same. However, members would receive emailed publications rather than printed ones.

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ORGANIZED MARCH 18, 1954

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