

# Torpedo Factory

The U.S. Naval Torpedo Station was planned during World War I, but construction did not begin until November 12, 1918, the day after the war ended. The factory manufactured Mark III torpedoes for the next five years, and in 1937 began production of Mark XIV torpedoes, an example of which is displayed in the first floor main hall today. After World War II, the Torpedo Factory buildings were converted into the Federal Records Center. The City of Alexandria purchased the buildings from the federal government in 1969, and the Art Center was established in 1974. Today, the Torpedo Factory Art Center is a major cultural center in Alexandria and home of the Alexandria Archaeology Museum, The Art League, and studios and galleries of working artists, all of which are open to the public.

Segregation of the Federal workforce, instituted under President Woodrow Wilson in 1913, physically separated white and Black employees, limited Black employees' access to jobs and promotions, and reduced their pay. The desegregation of the defense industries through Executive Order 8802 in 1941 began the slow and uneven process of integrating the station's workforce. Within months, African American men were working as machinists on the Torpedo Factory floor. The U.S. Navy transferred Aaron P. Hatcher, previously stationed at the Washington Navy Yard, to work as a machinist at the station in June 1941. He worked for three years in Alexandria, before moving to Nashville, Tennessee, where he graduated from the Aviation Machinist School in 1945. Wicklef Jackson, another former Washington Navy Yard employee, served lunches from a pushcart starting in 1929 before the military transferred him to the Production Department where he was a laborer. After a brief stint in the military, Jackson returned to the Alexandria Torpedo Station and continued to be employed there after the war.



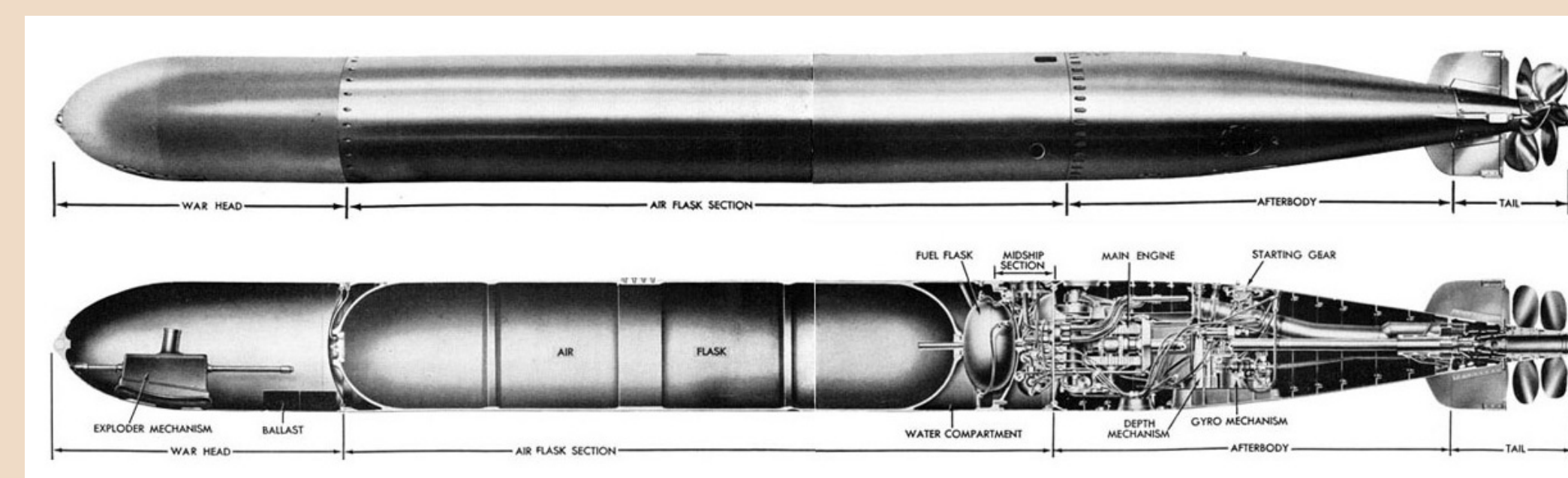
New Accession of Records..., ca. 1950s.  
National Archives and Records Administration, 64-D-4-3



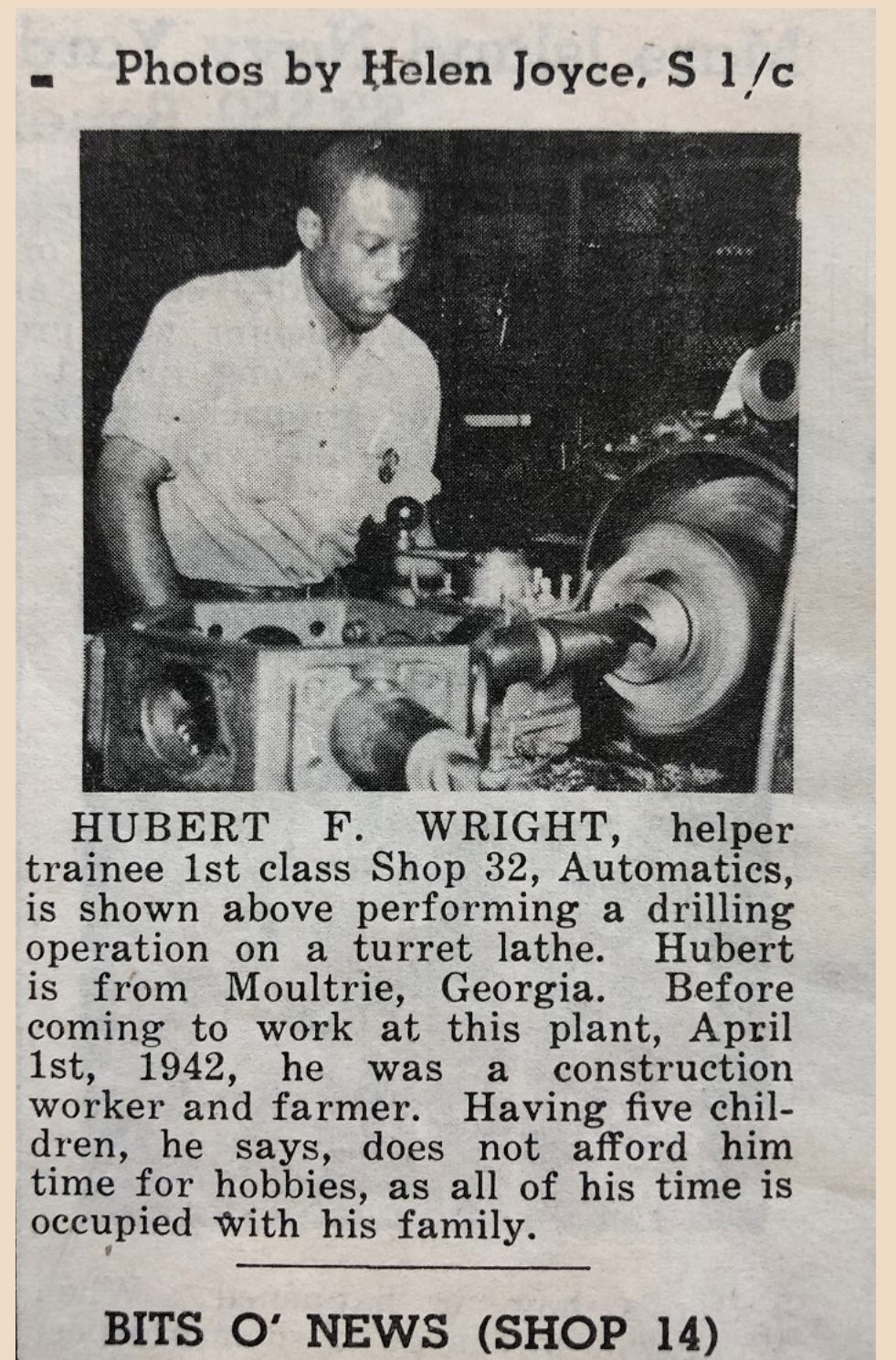
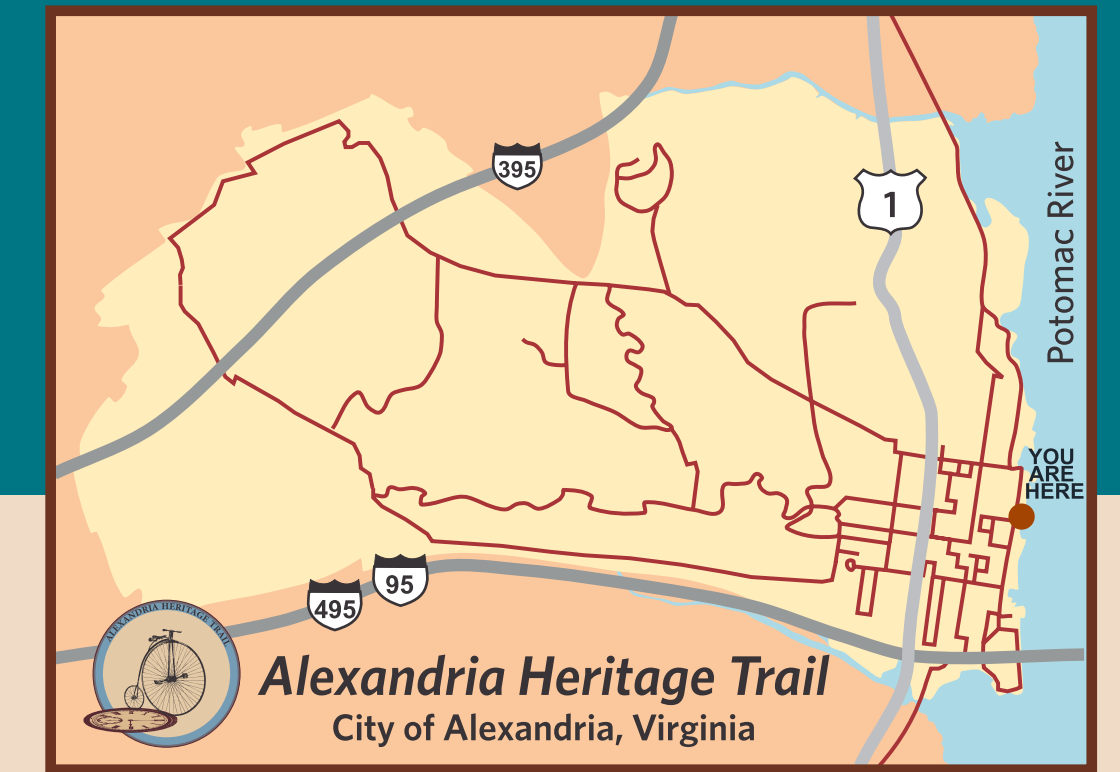
Photo of Reference Service Unit..., ca. 1950s. Alexandria native and Living Legend Lillian Stanton Patterson identified her mother, Esther Gray Stanton, in this photograph (right row, woman in pearls).  
National Archives and Records Administration, 64-NA-1832

One of the Alexandria Torpedo Station's other most important (and least recognized) moments was its use for the storage, processing, and return of records captured during World War II, the largest archival project ever undertaken by the U.S. government. Allied Forces acknowledged that the war threatened priceless works of art, monuments, and archival collections, and sought to remove materials from war zones. At first, the British and American military used these papers for intelligence information and later to prosecute war crimes, including as evidence in the Nuremberg trials. However, the Adjutant General's office followed by the National Archives recognized the collection's broader historical significance and requested the assistance of the American Historical Association in processing the papers, which were housed at the Torpedo Station from 1947 through 1968.

The names of the scholars who oversaw the collection are better known; however, unnamed government employees, contractors, and military personnel, whom we find in photographs, completed much of the day-to-day work. Many of these workers were also African Americans and the photos highlight the Federal government's increasingly desegregated workforce.

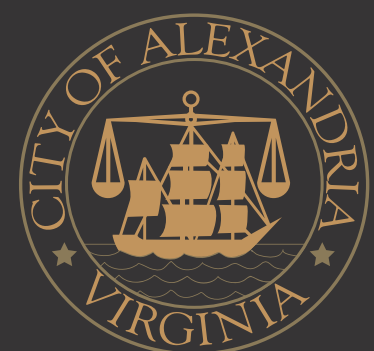


Mark 14 torpedo's side view and interior mechanisms, published in "Torpedoes Mark 14 and 23 Types, OP 635," March 24, 1945  
United States Navy



PHOTOS BY HELEN JOYCE, S 1/c  
HUBERT F. WRIGHT, helper trainee 1st class Shop 32, Automatics, is shown above performing a drilling operation on a turret lathe. Hubert is from Moultrie, Georgia. Before coming to work at this plant, April 1st, 1942, he was a construction worker and farmer. Having five children, he says, does not afford him time for hobbies, as all of his time is occupied with his family.

"Introducing - People You Ought to Know," in *The Torp*, employee newsletter of the U.S. Naval Torpedo Station, Alexandria, December 1944.  
The National Archives at College Park, Maryland



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA EST. 1749

Created by the Alexandria African American Heritage Trail Committee, Alexandria Archaeology, and the Alexandria Black History Museum.

