

YONGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II: The Home Front.

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1462

Elizabeth Widger

Interviewed

By

Rebecca Smith.

On

November 19, 1991

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Oral History Program

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O.H. # 1462

Interviewee: ELIZABETH WIDGER

Interviewer: Rebecca Smith

Subject: World War II: The Home Front

Date: November 19, 1991

Rebecca Smith: This is an interview with Mrs. Elizabeth Widger for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. World War II: The Home Fronts by Rebecca Smith at 105 Thompson Ave, East Liverpool, Ohio on November 19, 1991 at 6:30pm. Ok, Mrs. Widger could you give me some background information about your life, when you were born and your family.

EW: Well, I was born over in Chester, West Virginia. In fact today is my birthday and it was 1928, 63 years ago.

RS: Well, happy birthday.

EW: Thank you. I have one real sister. My father died when I was ten and my mother remarried two years later. When I was twelve or thirteen something like that, we moved to Liverpool. I've been here ever since. I've lived in this vicinity within a five-mile radius of Liverpool the rest of my life. During the war, all of us girls tried to join the service. Several of us we wanted to join. I had bad eyes, and I guess you just don't do those things with bad eyes. They didn't back then anyhow. So, when the civil defense came along we all jumped on the bandwagon. I was married by then and had a small boy and the ground observer corps built their home right behind. We called it the home because that's where we spent most of our time, right behind my house in Ephraim St. up on the north part of the city. It was there for almost four years. We stayed out there night and daytime twenty-four hours a day watching airplanes. Our connection was with Canton, Ohio is where our base was; we had a telephone line right straight into Canton that you could call in, no matter what you saw. Once in awhile you'd see things that weren't supposed to be there. It was amazing.

RS: Like what?

EW: Like airplanes, that were most were either off course or it was nothing exciting, except sometimes the air force themselves would send things up to see if people were really observing and really paying attention. Our code letters were KL23 Red. You said this and they would buzz you right in. You told what kind of an airplane it was, what way it was going, and approximately how high it was, and then they would confirm it or they would call us back and tell us it was not supposed to be there. Then we would get excited and call in two or three others to make sure that we spied everything. Didn't want nothing getting over that wasn't supposed to be there.

RS: Now this is part of the ground observer corps?

EW: Yes.

RS: And its exact, was that just your job or the job?

EW: That was the big job or the civil defense here in this town. We had, I really don't know how many members we had, but there was an awful lot of people involved in it. We'd take two-hour shifts, and if somebody couldn't show up, Mrs. Teresa Combs, she was one lady that was my land lady, that lived next door, so whenever anybody couldn't come they could call her and either her or I could fill in, because it was right there beside our house. It was exciting; it really was. It was a lot fun and you met a lot of people. They gave us wings when we got a hundred hours in. They gave us wings and every time you got another hundred hours you got a pin or some sort. I don't what I did with mine, but I had 500 hours.

RS: Oh, did you really?

EW: Yes, it was exciting. People were very conscientious about Home Front. We were always on guard. We weren't scared like people are today about the atom bomb and things like that. We weren't scared about that. We had Shippingport up here, and that was the one thing that they'd want to bomb if they ever came up this way.

RS: Okay, now what was Shippingport at the time? Was there a nuclear plant there?

EW: Yeah, it was the beginning.

RS: Oh, okay.

EW: It was the very first nuclear plant in the United States.

RS: I did not know that. Now at the time did you know that, that was a nuclear plant?

EW: No, we didn't know what nuclear meant. We had no idea, but it never bother nobody. We never made no big fuss over it or anything. We just knew that we were going to get better electricity and things would be cheaper. That's what they told us, nothing ever got cheaper, but that's what they told us.

RS: So, you were not aware that it was a nuclear plant at all?

EW: No, I mean there might have been a few big shots that knew that, but the average person we had no concern over that as far as I knew. Of course I was in my twenties and I might not have paid much attention. Not like the kids of today so conscious they are about everything going on. So many know so much more today than they did then. We didn't pay as much attention to the television; it wasn't a big thing. I didn't think it was a big thing anyway. That's about all I can expand on that part of it.

RS: Now you say that you have one real sister, okay, and then your mother remarried and now...

EW: And now I have a half sister and three step brothers and mom has been married three more times since then.

RS: Oh my goodness.

EW: They've all passed away. (The stepfathers) (One natural father and four stepfathers).

RS: Oh really, gees! What did your stepfather do in the years before the war during the Depression?

EW: Well, my dad, my real father lived through the Depression, and he had worked in Weirton in the steel mill. Of course things got bad and he got laid off just like everyone else. I can remember holding mother's hand standing in line for beans and butter. Only we didn't get butter. We got oleo that was in white bars like lard, and it had a little package of yellow stuff, and you tore that open and sprinkled over the butter and then you mixed it. It took you an hour. And we mixed it real good to get it looking yellow like butter. It didn't taste as good, but it was something for the bread. Had a lot of bean soup.

RS: Did you?

EW: An awful lot of bean soup. Although I still like bean soup, you wouldn't think I would, but I do. My mother worked in a paper factory down in Weirton, flour sacks, paper flour sacks for Pillsbury. She put the glue on the seams with a big stick. That plant has been out of business for many, many years now. But my mom is still living, and I think she was 83 at her last birthday.

RS: Really?

EW: Last July. And she drives and she gets around, and she's a good look women. She's got more guts than I've got; she can get up and go when I can't.

RS: I'll be darned, that's something.

EW: She is somebody. After daddy died, (lets see he died in '39 just before the war. He was only twenty-eight years old). Then she married Jim, at that time I don't know if he worked in the mill. I guess he did. He worked at Crucible up in Midland. I know there were six in the family, his four and her two and then they had Linda, my other sister. It was tough going; even then it was tough going. So, he opened a little grocery store in Beachwood about right after the war started in '41 or '42. Of course I got married and then I left home.

RS: You must have been awful young?

EW: No, I was twenty.

RS: Oh you were twenty, okay.

EW: When I left home, I don't know just when that was somewhere in '49 or '48.

RS: Oh I see.

EW: I guess it was a little earlier then that. But the day the war was over, not the European one, but the final war over in Japan, VJ Day what a day that was. I mean everybody nobody ignored it. Everybody was out in the streets and hugging and kissing and hollering and beating pans and waving flags. I am out in Beachwood and there's nothing out in Beachwood, and there's nothing in Beachwood just streets. But everywhere in the country everybody was so happy that the war was over. It was just such a tragedy such a terrible thing to send our young men to war, that's just not the way that life's supposed to be. That was the War to end all Wars! We weren't supposed to have any more.

RS: Are you talking about World War I?

EW: Two.

RS: Oh two okay.

EW: World War II, but then Korea. And that's when our ground observer corps came back and that's when I got involved with it, with the Korean War.

RS: So, you were in the Ground Observer during the Korean War, oh I see.

EW: They had it during the Second World War, but it just wasn't available at any site were you could get involved. I tried to get in the service, that was our big thing, all us young girls. The fellows got to go. All the fellows went. There weren't no men left in town at all hardly, except on leave when they'd come home on leave.

RS: Now are you back on World War II again, I am getting a little confused?

EW: Yes.

RS: Let's back up here a minute so I can get my thoughts straight here.

EW: You ask the questions!

RS: How much schooling did you have?

EW: I graduated from High School that was all.

RS: Okay. You did say about the Depression you remember standing in line.

EW: Oh yes.

RS: Just real quickly is there anything else that stands out in your mind about the Depression?

EW: Clothing, you just didn't have it. You had to wear the same thing. You had maybe two outfits, and you didn't go to town. Nobody went to town. I lived out back of Chester then, and once a year mother would come over to Liverpool, but I never got to come. She never brought the kids because it was too expensive, because you had to ride the bus or the streetcar, or whatever. It was streetcar I guess in those days. I believe if I am not mistaken that there was a ferry that went over. I can't really remember, but I do remember my dad swimming the Ohio River.

RS: Really?

EW: Yes, it wasn't as wide and as big as it is today. It was smaller and it was much more shallow. There weren't as many dams on the river see. They've all been built recently, well forty fifty years ago. At that time the river was a river; it was just an ordinary river it didn't have all these dams on it. He carried mail over on his back in leather bags that was one job he had.

RS: Oh for heavens sakes.

EW: That was during the Depression, before when I was just wee little. But I do know that it was rough on everybody. You know us kids; everybody around us seemed to be in the same boat so you didn't realize that you didn't have. Everybody else had what you had so you didn't realize that you didn't have anything. But I do know that there were only two dresses and two pair's of shoes. Always two pair of shoes, one for church on Sunday and one for school and come Christmas you got your new shoes for church and you got to wear your church ones for school.

RS: Oh.

EW: And we went bare foot in the summer, always bare foot in the summer. There were friends that had ponies and that was our fun, hoping in the cornfields and the hay fields and playing in the haystacks. And toys, you didn't have toys like you do today you might have had one, maybe a home made doll that grandma made or something like that. You didn't have a lot of things at all. But you didn't miss them because you didn't have them. I remember when I was sixteen I finally got my first little radio. The first one wasn't for me, but daddy had said it was for me. It had to be in the early thirties, I can't remember dates very well, but Joe Lewis was going to fight Mac Smelling, and dad bought this radio. It was a great big console thing it stood up on legs and had a little tiny celluloid dial in the middle; this big hulk of a thing with just this little celluloid dial. They got all ready for it, mom made sandwiches and dad got this big galvanized tub and filled it with ice and got beer. They got all ready for this fight and Joe, (I am sure it was Mac Smelling it might have been another fighter) but, he knocked him out in the first minute of the first round and everybody was so disappointed. They thought it was going to go fifteen rounds, and they was going to have a big evening. Those were the fun things we'd do, everybody sitting around the radio, and then when I was sixteen I got my own little radio. My home burned down when I was twelve. Mom married Jimmy and I got my little radio. It was a little white ivory one electric you plugged it in. I was so excited I carried it all around. I plugged it in when I was in the bedroom, I plugged it in the kitchen when I was doing the dishes and kept it with me. That's when we didn't get things so much that when we did finally get something you appreciated it and loved it. Today, you get and you get and you still want more. That's the way that the kids are today. I still say that we should have had a little bit less and we would have been happier, because the television is ruination. I think it shows that children everything they see they want. It corrupts the mind. It does it, makes us want too much. In those days you just didn't want because you had everything that you really needed. Food not always the best food, but it was food and everybody was healthy. We didn't run to the Doctor, no way, and yet we ate potatoes, beans. We had vegetables like lettuce and stuff like that, but we didn't eat like they tell you you have to eat today low cholesterol no calories. We got fat or we were thin and it didn't matter. I just think that kids miss out today on a lot of wonderful times, because family was big then. You had card games at home. The friends would come and bring their children. Then on Saturday night there was sometimes a barn dance, maybe once a month or once every other month, where you'd go and the kids would all sit around the edge of the barn and the parents would dance and we had a fiddler and it was fun, good fun, I am not saying that guys and girls didn't go off in the corner and neck like everybody else. It wasn't as public as it is today; it wasn't as permissive. The War itself came along and everybody just pulled together. There wasn't that wrangling all the time and fighting. It just seemed like everybody did their share.

RS: Okay how old were when the war, in 1941?

EW: In '41 lets see I was born in '28, '38 about thirteen fourteen years old something along that line.

RS: December 7<sup>th</sup>, Pearl Harbor what do you remember about that day?

EW: I remember Roosevelt's speech. I was sitting in the living room. Mother was in the kitchen, and dad hadn't come home from work yet. He was pulling an extra shift to get a little extra money. It was on a Sunday. Roosevelt, they said that President Roosevelt was going to come on and make a speech and I ran in and called mother. She came in and we cried.

RS: Did you?

EW: Oh yes we cried we no idea where the hell Pearl Harbor was but we knew it was wrong. We knew that our boys had died and they had sunk several of our battle ships and that and that the boys had not gotten off, that they had gone down with the ship. And of course that was terrible news and he said that we was at war with Japan. From that minute on it seemed that life changed. It got faster a little bit more hectic. Work picked up in the mills, they were going twenty-four hours a day. My mother got a job and my dad worked and the rest of us girls were of course too young to get work right then, but as the war went on we babysat for other mothers and stuff and then of course when we got into high school we tried to get into the service too. Of course most of us didn't make it, but they took the boys. It didn't seem to matter whether they needed glasses or not they took them.

RS: What was the talk that day, I am sure you talked to your friends that day?

EW: Everyone wanted to get in and kill the Jap's.

RS: Okay.

EW: That's exactly what they wanted to do. They called them terrible names. Now, I wouldn't think of doing that but at that time they were different from us then. They had slanted eyes so we could tell them from us. Now see Germany, we felt bad about it, but they looked like us. You couldn't hate them and kill until word came back and started trickling in about the terrible atrocities that they did over there. Of course hardly anybody here believed that. It was just beyond your comprehension, we didn't see pictures and stuff of it like the kids did today, now they can turn on the TV and find out about everything. We didn't do that. I know people had televisions but they weren't prevalent; they weren't around.

RS: Were you expecting war? Before Pearl Harbor had there been much talk among your family?

EW: No not here. We didn't babble. Our town was just a busy hustling little town. Now I supposed maybe that older people talked about it, but it affect us kids. The kids didn't, they didn't draw us into conversations like you do today. If they were going to talk serious you left the room. Mother and I want to have a chat, whenever they talked about war and stuff. We didn't read the newspapers like kids do today, we just didn't keep up on things, but when the war did break out then everybody was ready. We had a shopping town of 65,000 can you believe that?



RS: No.

EW: East Liverpool 65,000. They came from all over. The town was open on Saturday night so the farmers could always come to town on a Saturday nights. You elbowed your way down to get in the stores. The bus terminal was one of the biggest this side of the Mississippi.

RS: Really?

EW: Oh yeah. Down here where Gus's is and the liquor store is, that was all bus terminal. C. A. Smith owned it. His home is over in West Virginia on that hillside. That big white home that's his.

RS: Oh yes that beautiful house.

EW: That's his home and he owned the Chester Bridge, but he was a good man. He kept that bus terminal going and there were bus's leaving every fifteen minutes to every part of the vicinity: Steubenville, Pittsburgh, Beaver Falls, and Youngstown. We had one pulling out every fifteen minutes and we could go anywhere. Today you can't go anywhere. War seemed to make everything faster. The bus terminal was really, really crowded all the time soldiers, sailors coming and going, people talking. That was when, after the war that was when things started. Everybody was really pulling together to work together to get everything done. You could hitch hike anywhere and not have a worry in the world, the boys would get in at route 30 over here in Chester, and they wouldn't have to wait two minutes and they would be picked up and taken to Pittsburgh to the airport and nobody thought of being afraid to pick anybody up.

RS: What did your school do?

EW: Well, not much of anything that I can remember of. I got transferred from Chester over to here when I went to high school and I didn't know too many people. Now my husband Ralph said that he was in the Key Club, and he was on the newspaper. He said that they did a lot of saving newspaper. Tin wasn't big in those days we didn't collect cans and stuff like that, but there was always like a Canteen for the boys to come to. That was probably in the old high school where the college is now. We had a small gymnasium and they had dances on the weekend's cause most of the boys came home on the weekends.

RS: Is that what a Canteen was a dance?

EW: Yes.

RS: Okay.

EW: The women would donate cookies and punch and stuff like that. Of course there were the bars just like everything else, but most of the guys just liked meeting girls and dancing and talking. They loved to talk.

RS: What did they talk about?

EW: Home.

RS: Home?

EW: Home, they wanted and wished that they could go home, but they had to get the war over with. And there wasn't a one of them that said that they wanted to desert or that they hated it. They weren't not welcomed, everybody was just cheering them on when the buses would pull out with them on, there were crowds around waving at them, and the American flag flew everywhere.

RS: Did it really?

EW: It did. Now I have mine in the corner and I forget to put it out. I don't know why I don't put it out, because we did during the war. We put it out everyday and everybody else did. It seemed everybody was happier then, not happy in the scene that we had a war, but pulling together. Neighbors knew each other, we all knew everybody on the street. You knew everybody on the others streets too.

RS: Okay, so what happened if somebody on your street lost a child or a husband?

EW: Oh my God, everybody was there with pies and cakes and food, and would baby-sit them. They talk about support groups I still say that your neighbors are your best support groups in the world.

RS: Good point.

EW: Yeah, they were, but today I bet I won't see either one of my neighbors all winter. I won't see none of my neighbors; maybe in the summer time I might see them get in their car and leaving. Nobody, now Bob comes over ever once in awhile since my husband died to see if I need anything or something, but that's very rare. But in those day's everybody, you never had a death, even if you didn't know them, if they lived in the neighborhood you took something to them. Funeral's you didn't go to the funeral home like you do today. People were buried from their home, like my dad. He was over at my grandma's. People I didn't even know came and a service man that called for mourning for the whole town.

RS: Oh really.

EW: The whole town. It was a sad time, but it was a happy time because everybody seemed to help everybody else. And it seems like, women went to work and I think that is the worse thing that ever happened.

RS: Well, why do you say that?

EW: Now that I look back, I do because, since women have left the home crime has gone up, children are being abused has gone up. You never heard of children being abused, they were maybe verbally abused and maybe they got whipped. I got whipped a lot of times it didn't hurt me at all it helped, because I never did it the second time then. But women got to making money and prices went and it takes two in the family to work to keep acquiring things. The women then couldn't quit and stay home, because they had gotten in debt and then credit cards came out and it's just been the ruination when the women left the home. When she was home, she was there for her children to talk to they didn't have to wait. You know how long a stretch their minds are, they forget to talk to mom, because she wasn't there when it happened. So, they forget and they don't talk and then it was bedtime and she was too tired. So, I still say that women would have stayed in the home after the war was over and gone back and prices wouldn't have skyrocketed we wouldn't have the crime that we've got today, we wouldn't have the mental disorders that are prominent all over the country, the homes are so full of mental disorders. Just tonight I heard from a boy, Bo that was in the Vietnam War. Twenty years ago when I lived over on Lincoln Ave. he had an apartment. When he came home with his second wife I guess and he's been an unhappy boy ever since. Tonight he called me from Lisbon, he's helping the Veterans get something started over there and because he was there. Gary, my friend Carol's husband was over there if he could help because he's got mental disorders and its because it was the Vietnam War. But we've never treated our soldiers the way that they should have been treated. First World War and Second World War, but my father-in-law James Earl Fleak, was in that March on Washington after the First World War to get help.

RS: Oh, oh.

EW: The First World War, and they were hosed down to get them out of there. They had been soldiers that had fought for our country over seas and they weren't getting anything and they had to fight, fight, for it. So, they're still fighting for it, they are still fighting for their rights.

RS: Do you think they were treated right in World War II?

EW: They were treated better in World War II, than they were in World War I and the Vietnam War. Yes I think they were treated better, in the war as good as could be, because we weren't prepared. We just weren't prepared and there were so many young ones that went that didn't have training. Now today we got training, they're trained all the time. And as far as I am concerned I think every boy and every girls ought a spend two years in the service after graduation, just automatic. They ought have to go in for discipline and training. Just so they have some idea when something, maybe something

won't ever happen, but at least they will have some idea. Discipline in your life is good for anybody. Its good for anything you do: your job, running a house, anything, its good. So, I think that they should go into the service for two years. I would have given my \_\_\_\_\_ to have gone in. I really would have, but I didn't and I never really learned neatness. I always have clutter around, no matter how hard I work, which I haven't been doing lately since I've had my cancer, I just don't work. I just can't work like I used to. I am getting there. I am getting better all the time, but we did have fun doing things. Nobody seems to have fun doing anything; it's a chore today to even go to church. It's just a chore to take that time out to go, because you're working so hard to get that extra dollar to buy something that you really don't need. We've been brainwashed terrible about needing things. We really have. You don't need all this clutter around the house to really exist and live and be happy and be out of debt. Being in debt it what makes everybody unhappy. But during the war everybody had money. There was always money during the war and that's what spoiled everybody the war jobs. The mills, women went to work as Rosy the Riveter and all these things. My oldest stepsister, Pauline, she was the tinniest little thing and she was a riveter up at the crucible. I couldn't get a job up there because I wasn't old enough yet, but I was real proud of her because she was doing something for the war.

RS: Really?

EW: Oh yes. Yeah you felt very proud of somebody working in the mill. Crucible was the big one around here. Girlfriend Loraine worked out in Dayton, Ohio only she just worked I found out I thought that she worked in the factory, but she didn't she only worked in the office. That's where she met her husband; he must have been in the air force he flew in there or something or some reason and that's where she met him. We had quite a bit going on in Ohio, air force.

RS: What about your stepbrothers did they go to war?

EW: Yep. I had, now they weren't old enough for the First World War, but they went to the Korean War. They both went to the Korean War in the 50's. One was in the Navy and one was in the Air Force, no the Army and the Navy. My mother's nephew we raised him and he was in the Marines. So, we had three flags in our window with little stars on them. Everybody that had anybody in the service after the beginning of the Second World War put a blue flag in the window with gold fringe around it and a gold centerpiece with a red star in the middle. If you had one or two or three you had a star for each one that was in the service.

RS: Wow.

EW: We had joyful times when they came home and very sad times when they left. But everybody got together whenever somebody came home, the whole family I mean cousins and everything got together, because everybody was so proud of everybody. Today, they go to the service, bye that's about it. It doesn't seem sort of fair to the servicemen.

RS: You being a teenager during the war years did you write to any servicemen?

EW: Yep, oh God did I. The mailman hated to come to my house. I wrote the Army, Navy, Marines, and the Air Force. I had 72 that I was writing to.

RS: Oh my goodness.

EW: Like I said when I signed my name I don't write so well today, the tingling in my fingers I can't hold a pencil, but I used to write. Oh every night there were two or three letters that had to be wrote.

RS: Well, what in the world did you write about?

EW: Just school and what I was doing and I asked what they were doing and sent them cookies and candy. Just wanted to know how they were getting along, what life was like over there.

RS: What did they tell you?

EW: Oh, they didn't like life over there. Especially in France, they were not happy with the French. The French weren't, they had a great army I guess underneath underground, but their regular army they drank a lot. All our kids from around this neck of the woods didn't drink like that. So, so many of them learned to drink over there. Now Lee he was one of my favorites in the navy, I can't remember his last name he lived in Niles, Ohio. I don't know where I got his address him and a boy named Kenny Gardner, I remember Kenny Gardner because I fell in love with Kenny Gardner. He wrote and sent me a girls picture and told me he was going to marry her and asked my opinion on her. We kept our letters light, nobody got serious. Maybe you did over one or two, but you kept your letters light about school plays, what was going on in town, parties that you went to. There weren't too many parties I didn't go to too many parties in high school. You were too busy and you had too many things to do. You come home you had dishes to do after supper, then you had to get your homework, and on the weekend you had to clean the house. Today the kids you can't get them to do anything, we just did it. I don't know how are parents made us do it, I don't really know, I didn't get that many beating's, I got one good one because I was late from coming home after school, because we did have to come directly home after school, because the parents worried if you wasn't there. So, I got one good strapping from my real father when I was eight, about eight years old. He switched me clear from where Hill Top is clear a half a mile across the field to my home all the way. You weren't supposed to be late from school, I was never late and to this day I am always early.

RS: Really?

EW: Yes. Like I said whipping's never hurt a kid, and since then they've got so many rules and regulation about discipline children.

RS: What about your friends in the service?

EW: You tried to keep everything light, because they really had it rough in some times. Some of them had it rough in some places; some of them didn't even get out of the states at the end, you know they had joined up at the end. But everybody wanted to join, that's what I couldn't understand as I've gotten older, how they would run away and go to Canada that just don't comprehend with me. I can see why you wouldn't want to go get killed, but not to want to fight for your country is beyond my comprehension. It always was in the Second World War everybody, everybody wanted to do something for somebody or some how. The boys would write back and saw how terrible it was, but that they were glad that they were there and they were going to fight until it was over with. They had all kept their spirits up pretty well.

RS: Now were those letters censored in anyway?

EW: Yeah some of them the VJ letters or the VE letters, the victory letters what were they called not victory letters they were just little like a folded envelope about that big a square and they had red, white, and blue on them. I can't remember the name of them was. I golly, I had some of them left too I kept some of those, but in all the moves they've gotten destroyed and that's a shame I should have kept some with the rations books, we kept some of the ration books.

RS: Did you?

EW: Yeah, we all had ration books, we all had them in our name and had our age on them and you could only buy so much meat or sugar. It was tough sometimes, you couldn't have everything, and gasoline you saved all your rations for work to run your car to work and there was only one car in the family cause most of the time they had the jobs on day turn and pretty close, you didn't have to go miles to go to your job today. Dad could drop mom off at work and then pick her up on his way home, course maybe you'd have to wait a half-hour or hour after work before you got home, but you couldn't buy gasoline unless you had your ration card. These letters, I can't remember what they were called, but there were several of them censored. Blacked out certain lines, everybody's letters were read no matter what. Over sea's letters mostly you wrote on little, it was just like one page on the inside. That's why it was easier to write because you didn't have to write more then that. What were they called? And I hadn't even thought of them until we started talking, but that's what you said censored because I can see in my minds eye them opened and see the black marks on them, I can see that now I'd forgotten, but I can't tell you the name of them were.

RS: Well, did you know all these people or had you gotten their addresses from?

EW: I knew several of them I met several of them. When they'd come home, most of them lived in Ohio as far as Zanesville and Newark and maybe Columbus or Cincinnati and over to Niles and Youngstown. Some of them we were give lists at school that we

could take names and write to boys that didn't have anybody to write to. But I myself knew several and a lot of them were my relatives, I think every relative I had was in the service at one time or another. My cousin Billy and my cousin Carl and one day they came, Billy was in the navy and Carl was in the army, and I skipped school that day and went down to Aunt Stella's to see them because they were only going to be home for one day. I went up town with them and I knew I wasn't supposed to be up town, but I went up town with them one on each arm and I was so cock proud. And did you know that, that was the last time I'd see, I never did get to see Billy again. Billy was shot up pretty bad from the waist down with a machine gun and he died in the Veteran's Hospital about ten years ago I guess, I never got to see him again. My cousin Carl came up last summer and that was the first time I'd seen him since 1943, '42 or '43. He lives way down in Mansfield, Ohio and country boy he never got back out after he came home. He never wanted to leave home after he got home from the service.

RS: Okay you had talked a little about rationing. Changes in everyday life, were there Black Out Drills here in East Liverpool?

EW: Yes.

RS: All right, tell me about those.

EW: Well, I don't know too terrible much about them, but I do remember we had them. We didn't have alarms like we got today that tells you when something is wrong. I don't remember just how we did do it. The bells rang the church bells rang.

RS: Oh.

EW: And we had the drills, we never had to really have the Black Outs nothing ever happened that created that problem, but we practiced. And there were Civil Defense men that went around with their little hats on and to tell you to turn out your lights, those who didn't hear the bells. The church bell that's how they told everybody around to turn out the lights. When the drill was over they played them again. But it just didn't bother anybody, you did it and it became a habit. You heard the church bells you'd draw the drapes, turned out the lights, or anything outside you'd turned out, because we had Venetian blinds, not like I've got today, but big heavy metal Venetian blinds and that would keep the light out pretty good. In the very beginning this was before the war, we didn't have electric in our home we had oil lamps.

RS: Oh did you?

EW: Yeah. But that was before the war, the war did help that. The war got us electricity. We had electricity all over the place, which was really nice. You appreciated your electricity.

RS: As a young girl what songs were popular?

EW: *When the Lights Go on Again All Over the World* and I was just listening to Harry James playing *Cherry Berry Bin* in there he was one of my favorites a trumpet player.

RS: You keep emphasizing how everyone pulled together; did you see that in the entertainment industry too?

EW: Yes.

RS: How was that?

EW: Well, happy movies to make everybody happy. We just and the war movies that came out didn't really come out until after the war, most of them they didn't Charlie Chaplin was the only one that really panned Hitler and did things like that in the silent movie. But as far as war movies we had happy movies, love stories of when the boys would come home and everything.

Interruption.

RS: What about war songs?

EW: Now, Lorain's the one that remembers all them, I know them when I hear them, but to remember the titles. Well, *Over There* came out during the First World War, but that one *When the Lights Go on Again*. Isn't that awful I know them all I know everyone of them, in fact I've been playing some, but they're all upstairs now. Oh, the big bands and Connie Francis, not Connie Francis but Connie Stevens, Glen Miller and his orchestra. All war songs and there were so many of them and why can't I remember any of them right now.

RS: World War II was famous for its victory gardens, was there anything and propaganda like that?

EW: Yeah. We all grew vegetables in our back yards, even if you had a small back yard. You helped grow, you helped yourself grow because food was hard to get, because you had your ration cards. Everything was being used for military and sending it over sea's. So, everybody pretty well grew something in their backyard.

RS: I had read somewhere that a women had made a Victory Aprons, that you could make a victory apron. I don't know if you recall that, but is there anything that you might recall. I know in the Gulf War we had yellow ribbons.

EW: No, I don't remember doing anything like that. Except for like I said we hung our little flags in our windows, the little service flags they were called for your boys if you had, some people had four or five in the service and you'd just walk past their house and see their flag in the window and you'd know that they had five in the service. Boy what a family, that was really great.



RS: So, you didn't see much desertion or much talk of?

EW: Oh, no never heard of anybody leaving the service. I suppose there was, but you never heard of it, you just never heard of it, never thought of anything like that.

RS: Well, if there was a man of age that could go to the service and he didn't for some reason were eyebrows raised?

EW: Nope, because I don't remember anybody that didn't go. Fathers even that had children that didn't have to go, and the boys couldn't wait to get out of school to go. I don't remember any of them saying that they didn't want to go, not a one. I don't remember of course my memory's not the good it could have happened; maybe I didn't know those guys. I don't know. I never remember anybody that didn't want to go to the service.

RS: Was there any talk here around about enemy aliens?

EW: Oh yes.

RS: Okay, can you tell me about that?

EW: Shallots over in Chester.

RS: Shallots, I am assuming they were German.

EW: Yes they were.

RS: Okay.

EW: And we were terrified of them. And they were the nicest people, but they had an aerial up their chimney. Nobody ever saw an aerial around our vicinity, nobody. So, of course they were spies and had a two-way radio that was the way we thought and everybody thought that so we stayed away from them. Until after the war and the aerial was still there and people finally let things die down. I don't know Mr. Shallot died. They had a boy and a girl my age and the boy committed suicide, not too terrible long ago maybe ten or fifteen years ago. See when you get old ten or fifteen years was just the other day. But that was my first experience with that. Now we didn't have colored people in Chester and we didn't have any Japanese, but because I think of the war movies of the Japanese after the war, not during the war I didn't know about the internment camps in California and that until after the war, it just wasn't nobody paid attention to it around here, because we didn't have an Orientals or anything. We just hated them and that was all.

RS: Okay.

EW: It was a good thing that there wasn't any here, because I do think we would have quiet a bit of animosity there. The slanted eye, and until this day there are still a lot of people that feel that way. I mean even today when I see the reruns on the television of these movies I get angry.

RS: Do you?

EW: Oh yeah, I can still feel that hatred and I don't like it, but I feel it. So, it sticks with me and there's nothing you can do about, and I know that there are ones living today didn't have a damn thing to do with it, but I still get a funny feeling. Yet, when one of our boys from Vietnam married one of the Vietnam girls and brought her home I just loved her. Rosie, I just thought the world of her. Her mother-in-law didn't like her, but I did. But its funny how you feel about something and that stayed with me about the Japanese. I'll still say when I see the dog fight between the Japanese planes, get the son of a bitch, you know of something like that and I'll say it out loud and I'll think to myself now why did I say that for its just a movie and it's the past and its over. But, there was an awful lot of hatred, an awful lot of hatred for the Japanese. It was such a sneaky way to start a war, if they had done it like Adolph had and marched in and let you know that he was coming and he let everybody know he was coming and nobody paid any attention to him. They were quit dumb.

RS: Um, do you remember ever hearing anything about like you said you didn't know about the internment camps, do remember hearing anything about the concentration camps in Germany.

EW: Not until after the war. When the pictures started coming in and the newspaper's started, then I was older and I was paying attention and it was gruesome. We just couldn't believe nobody could really believe it. That's hard to fathom that they could do that and nobody know about it. That was the thing, how it could happen, because the German people were like we are about today. Their hopes were low, the economy was bad, and they need a shiny star and he came along and they were gullible. We're in part of that the United States itself, interest rates are finally dropping but people still aren't spending because their scared. They are scared of the rates are so high for everything and the prices are out of ordinary and nobody is working the jobs are bad and you get somebody like Dave Duke come along he say's an awful lot of things that are true and somebody like that, it could happen. Because Hitler had charisma, he had something.

RS: Okay.

EW: But I didn't even know that we had concentration camps in this country, we had them in this country right here on the Eastern Sea Board. It really scared me to know that we had German prisoners right here and I didn't know about it. I look back and think how dumb I was not to pay attention to things, but I didn't. We had a good childhood, it wasn't a lot, but it was a good childhood. So, bad things just didn't seem to enter our life, like today you turn on the TV and right away murder, somebody was shot here. Somebody was shot over there. Kills, rapes, child abuse, you never heard of that and if

they did the neighbors took care of it they went in and took the child. It was wonderful to have neighbors, if something happened to a kid out on the street neighbors took them and were good to them, you know what I mean. They helped out, but you don't have that today we're afraid of our neighbors I think.

RS: Did you have any other then babysitting did you work during the war?

EW: Not during the war but after the war.

RS: Okay.

EW: I did a little bit, nothing big no army jobs or anything. I wanted to be in the service so bad. I got the kids around the neighborhood we'd drill. We'd get wooden sticks and use them as guns and shoulder and we'd march up and down the center street out there in Beachwood. Just in case, you know, we were going to help fight the war.

RS: That's cute.

EW: Well, everybody was interested in the war. I mean after it got started and everything after Pearl Harbor it was really the main topic of everything, your kids and they were in the war. You didn't have a kid that ran away and deserted. And rationing didn't seem to matter to us we gave it up I guess willingly. We maybe we bitched a little bit. I suppose we did. Especially dad, he didn't have enough gas to take us out on Sunday afternoon's like we used, we used to get the kids in the car and go for a ride couldn't do that and we hated that naturally, that and food, but we learned to get a long with it. You adapt.

RS: I read in an old newspaper that Liverpool called for Civil Defense workers and of course I see that you were part of Civil Defense in 1952 during the Korean War. Do you remember anything that Civil Defense workers would have done during World War II, even though you weren't part of it yet?

EW: No, except I supposed they gathered food packages and the Red Cross worked pretty big in this town. Of course later there was controversy about Red Cross, after some of the boys came home from the service. They'd come in from the front lines and they'd get a beer or a coke and they had to pay for it and they didn't have money in their pockets. Nobody had money on the front line, you didn't need money on the front line, but they said they had to pay and if they had trips home like emergency trips home they had to pay it back, the Red Cross gave it to them, but they had to pay it back. I wouldn't do two cents for the Red Cross today, I collected for the Red Cross for different things through the years, but I wouldn't do more after that, after the boys came home I wouldn't have done it for nothing. After they told me those things and they all told it, I mean there wasn't just one or two but everybody was say how crummy the Red Cross was to make them pay back, because they were supposed to just give.

RS: Do you remember VE Day?

EW: No. VE Day came and went, because the war wasn't really over on VE Day.

RS: Okay.

EW: It was VJ Day that I remember so vividly, VE Day was we was glad that it was over, over there, but we still some of them had to go clear over to the South Pacific then. So we weren't happy until VJ Day. That was a happy day. Now when the atom bomb was dropped that was a sad day. Everybody seemed to get quiet that day. It was something nobody could believe. But they said it would shorten the war.

RS: Did you believe that?

EW: No. I just knew that it killed a lot of people. Even if they were Jap's it was a bad thing. Bad thing, but it did shorten the war. Isn't that awful that you can remember that? That was a sad time, it seemed to me that everybody around felt the same way, it was a sad day, and I can remember it real vividly everybody was sort of quiet. No cheering no happiness about it at all, but VJ Day came shortly there after and that made up for it and we forgot about the bomb for awhile, but that was a terrible thing, that was a terrible thing to do.

RS: Looking back do you think that Truman should have Okayed the dropping of the bomb?

EW: Yeah, in hindsight. In hindsight I think that was the only thing that he could do, because the Japanese are like the Iran's and Iraq's they believed that dieing was going to heaven and their life would begin over again, and so they would fight to the last man dropped and so many more of our boys would have been killed. The war would have drug on and on and on. That was the only thing that frightened them to death that was the only thing that he could have done. Now I approve of it after hindsight, at the time we thought it was terrible thing to do. And the boys that dropped the bomb that is was pretty terrible too. The things that happened to them afterwards, but it was a sad day for everybody. Nobody thought it was a good thing at the time, but in hindsight most people look back on it and think that we had to. We didn't have much choice. And Truman was a good president.

RS: Who were your hero's?

EW: Macarthur, I thought he was a wonderful man.

RS: Why's that?

EW: Oh, he was just right up there in front. So, I've learned differently since, but at the time his publicity men was very good. I still think that he was right in most of his decisions though. I think Truman was wrong in firing him like he did. That was, he could have been a little bit more gentler about it. But Truman was a very out spoken man and I don't think that he ever lied about anything. He come right out and he was blunt. And

Roosevelt I loved Roosevelt, I thought he did more for this country than any man every has before or since. Of course he didn't get to finish a lot of the things and they went a rye like Social Security.

Interruption.

RS: Okay, we were talking about Macarthur and ...

EW: I know my Hero's.

RS: Oh, okay. We were talking about Roosevelt; do you remember the day that Roosevelt died?

EW: OH Yes! We cried all afternoon. They came on the radio and told us that President Roosevelt had died, it was heartbreaking, and it was as bad when Kennedy died.

RS: Really?

EW: Oh yes! Oh yes, everybody just loved him. He was a wonderful man. We all loved him around here and this was a republican town, down town, but people just really loved him. He had done a lot, but like I said he didn't get to finish. See Social Security wasn't to be your only savings; it was to be a supplement until you could get on your feet. How to help you when you got a little older, you was to save along with it, but he didn't get to finish that and so it's continued and now people are dependent on it. That's what they live on when they get old now is their Social Security, which isn't much. But he didn't mean it for that, but he had the three C's, we called them Cross Country Caravans. But the boys planted trees and made parks and things, and it gave the young people that didn't have anything else to do something to do. So, he did a lot for our country course he was in there a long time, twelve years. You didn't get Presidents don't get to stay in that long to do. Really when you implement something in a country this big that's tough to carry out in four years you really need a little bit longer, but they're afraid of today a politician gets in a gets too much in the first four years so trade him for something else. They really don't give him chance to carry out a plan to really do something big. Like it was in those days, he had a lot of support from the country and you need support. But we loved him, we really loved him and it was a sad day when he died. Everybody cried it was as bad as when Kennedy died.

RS: Did you meet your husband during the war?

EW: No it was after the war, I met my husband in 1949. Well, we were married in 1949 six months after I met him.

RS: Oh my!

EW: We was married 42 years.

RS: Really, my goodness.

EW: And if we would have let what people get divorces over we'd been divorced 20,000 times. But in those days you stayed at home and did your thing and got through. You stuck it out. You didn't just run oh well I am running home to mother, because mother wouldn't have taken us home, no way once we left home that was it, you had left home. And of course we weren't career minded in those days we were family oriented.

Interruption.

RS: I just have one last question. Tell me a little bit about the Civil Defense that you did work for during the Korean War?

EW: Well, we'd take two-hour shifts and usually we tried to pair everybody up because it was dark at night especially, the daytime it wasn't so bad. We'd take two-hour shifts and we did it around the clock twenty-four hours. We'd arrive and we had to sign in and we'd have to call in to KL23Red and tell them that we were on duty. Sometimes we'd take, Mrs. Combs and I went out together, we'd take Chinese checkers or something like that to play. You had to listen, so you couldn't do much talking. We sat and just played checkers and when a plane would come we had to get on the line and tell them. At night we didn't have to give them a description because it was dark, but if we knew what direction it was going about how high it was and then they always called us back and let us know that it was were it was supposed it be and that was the right time for it.

RS: Now what was the whole reason for this was there that much fear during Korea?

EW: No it didn't seem like there was that much fear. I think it was because of Shippingport was up here.

RS: Oh yes.

EW: Whether they did this everywhere I don't know, but I know it lasted for close to a year, I was involved with it at least a year. They abandoned it about '54 or '55 something like that.

RS: Okay. Okay, I think that I've asked you about everything that I can think of, is there anything that?

EW: I've rattled on, I don't know that there's anything else.

RS: Any other events in the war that stand out in your mind?

EW: No, except waiting for the mailman everyday, that was important that I hear from them.

RS: That must have been something.

EW: It was, hearing from them and writing back and forth that was important. I looked forward to that, just to know that they were still alive as long as you got letters you knew that they were still all right. Sometimes you wouldn't hear from them for three months at a time and then you'd get four or five letters from them all at the same time. And they'd all be censured so you didn't really know where they were or what they were fighting, where the fighting was. Why I don't know. It wouldn't hurt anybody here knowing but I guess they figured that spies were everywhere you just couldn't be sure.

RS: Did, this might be hard to ask, but did any of your friends that you were writing to, we're they imprisoned or killed?

EW: I had two that were imprisoned and one never got out, he died in prison and I think out of the seventy some that I wrote to thirteen of them were killed.

RS: How did you find this out?

EW: I just never heard from them anymore, so after the war I wrote to their home address. And I was told, not all of them, but I presumed after the first five or six letters that I got back that they had been killed in action that the others must have been too. I didn't write to all the parents, but I wrote to several of them and they wrote back and said that they didn't come home.

RS: Oh, that's a shame.

EW: Oh yeah, but all my relatives came home.

RS: Did they?

EW: I didn't lose a relative.

RS: Good.

EW: In that I was very grateful for. Now, Billy died in the Veteran's Hospital from his wounds, but it was years after. He never walked again after he was machine-gunned and he spent many years off and on in Veteran Hospital's around and that was bad and that was sad. I never got to see him again after that one day.

RS: Well, when they came home did they talk about the war?

EW: No. No, they didn't want to talk about it. And we didn't have as many like we did after this war. They didn't go into depressive moods and things. The ones I knew didn't, they all just got jobs, and there were a job to be had. That's it, maybe that's part of the trouble today, there's just not enough jobs for them. They don't have work to do or we've babied them too much, I don't know that the reason is. But for some reason I don't recall, Jimmy Graft came home and he had everything in the world to be unhappy about, he'd been gone two years and his wife was eight month pregnant. He just put his arms around

her and was so glad to be home. He and I delivered the baby and I was sixteen and he was just so happy to be home and go to work that they had four more children after that. So, women were more free with their selves in that period of time. I do know that. Several married women that ran around, well their husbands were gone for so long, two three years at a time, I guess that was the reason, but I guess I was too young to really pay attention to that. I didn't matter to me about Ma and Jim. He didn't care he was wonderful about it, just wonderful. I said I fell in love with him the day he came home and did that.

Interruption.

RS: Okay, lastly where there any rallies here for the boys came home from the services like there was in the Gulf War?

EW: No, the boys seemed to come home in dribbles, they didn't have one big group come home at a time.

RS: So, they came home and went to work?

EW: Yes. They just came home and went to work. They had big affairs like in Washington for certain groups and in New York City they had big parades when they got off the ships. But at home just families would have big parties or things like that for the boy. No big rallies, nothing spectacular. Now on Armistice Day, there used to be on November 11<sup>th</sup> and we did it on November 11<sup>th</sup> not the Monday before or anything. Everybody turned out for that and went to the cemetery and everything. They still decorate the cemeteries, but the parade I watched it the other morning from the porch and there was hardly anybody around. It was just grand to have them all home, but nobody made a big deal out of it. They just come home and went to work. Of course there was work for them then, of course it started dribbling. After the Korean War kept it going pretty good. Until after the Korean War things started going down hill and they've been going down hill ever since. Never did get back on their feet. The towns just gone to, I can't believe it, its just hard to believe when I walk down town to see the empty stores and cars everywhere, but no people. And really no stores, but I can remember every Saturday night we all went to town on Saturday night always and you elbowed your way through and there were restaurants everywhere, we had a tearoom. We've got a tearoom now and its nice I like it, Fleming's Tearoom on Fifth Street and that's where I went to Business College. I told you high school and I had two years of Business College, I forgot, but we used to go in there and had tea and it was nice. We had the Olympic Soda Ice Cream Parlor over there where Zack's is at on Market Street. Great big beautiful place, black and white marbled floor, big bar, with a lot of booths. They sold home made candies, and they made the best sundaes and root beer floats, and things like that. That's where everybody congregated and everybody was dressed up and they looked nice. I think when they took the clothing codes out of school that was the wrong thing to do. Put Levis and tennis shoes, we thought they were the poor kids; anybody that wore overalls was really poor. You wanted to help those people, because they were poor. Now the Levis that everybody wears, I have never worn a pair of Levis I have sworn that I never



would and I never have. But this town was really booming and it was something and there were just servicemen everywhere. And everybody was so polite and you knew everybody, well you didn't know everybody, but you spoke to everybody. Today I can go down town and be down town for three hours and not see a soul that I know and its sad, it's a sad commentary for a town that used to be as big as it was. There were 25,000 living here, 30,000 living here in the 40's and 50's living here, but we had a shopping quota of 65,000.

RS: Boy that's something.

EW: Even Hills and that don't get that kind of crowd. We had everything in this town. Ogilvie's was the nicest department store. When they sold something it was a good price, but you got good quality. So, you could even pick up the phone and call and they delivered. My Aunt Mel taught me that in the beginning. She would call over there to Ogilvie's. She knew what she was getting and she could tell them what she wanted, and she knew that it would be a good quality. But now you can buy the same thing at Kmart and at Ogilvie's they'll charge you three times as much for 1/4 the quality. Everything was just wonderful here, boy that town you could hear it clear until 9 o'clock at night and on Saturday night. Then they went and switched to Thursday nights and I have no idea why, nobody got paid on Thursday and you had to get up Friday morning to go to work. Why would they open it on Thursday night and they are still doing it? Still they're doing it, still dumb enough to have it on Thursday nights. Doesn't make any sense. Everybody's payday was on Friday. Friday afternoon, if you worked in town you stayed in town, went shopping and had dinner, not anymore you can't do that now.

RS: Okay is there anything else?

EW: No, nothing I can thing of.

RS: Okay then this concludes my interview with Elizabeth Widger.