

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II, Women

Personal Experience

O. H. 892

RUTH E. HINKSON

Interviewed

by

Janice Cafaro

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II, Women Project

INTERVIEWEE: RUTH E. HINKSON
INTERVIEWER: Janice Cafaro
SUBJECT: Microphone, TrusCon, airplane, rationing
DATE: October 23, 1985

C: This is an interview with Ruth Hinkson for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the World War II Women project, by Janice Cafaro, on October 23, 1985, at 3:00 p.m.

Could you tell me a little bit about your parents and your family?

H: My mother and father lived in a housing project. My father was an electrician, and there were eight children younger than I was. I was the oldest, and I was married. My mother worked also; she worked at Truscon. I had two brothers in the service during the war.

C: How did you get interested in working for Truscon?

H: It was wartime, and they needed people to work.

C: Was it in the paper? How did you find out about it?

H: Everybody was talking about it. They opened this new division for the airplanes. We were making airplane wings. I just went out and put in my application.

C: What was that like making airplane wings?

H: It was kind of boring once you got used to it. You just put one part together. Everybody just put one

part together. I put one part together and riveted it. Then, I just passed it on down the line.

C: Were there a lot of women working there?

H: Oh yes. I couldn't begin to tell you how many.

C: What was it like working for Truscon?

H: For me it was kind of a hassle; I had three children. I lived on Kenmore and Market Street in an apartment house. I had to take my children up to Monroe School where they had a day care center. I had to walk, because if I didn't, I had to take a bus clear downtown. I walked them seven blocks over every day and went and got them. I was young and walked them seven blocks home. I got used to it.

C: Did your family support your decision to go to work?

H: They didn't say anything one way or the other.

C: How did your husband feel about it?

H: He was in the Merchant Marines.

C: Were there men at Truscon while you were working?

H: Yes, there were some men there.

C: What was it like working with the men?

H: I didn't have to work with any. I just had one that came along behind me to see that I was doing all right until I got used to it.

C: There wasn't any fraternizing at lunch?

H: There might have been for the younger, single women. I didn't pay that much attention to it. I had my hands full during the war.

C: So you stuck with the other women?

H: Basically.

C: You worked for three months. Why did you quit?

H: I started to get sick, and I went to the doctor. He told me I was three months pregnant. He told me I had to quit. I only weighed about seventy-five pounds, soaking wet, so the riveting gun was too much for me.

C: Was it heavy work?

H: No, it wasn't heavy. I guess shaking things were too much. He told me I had to quit because I couldn't stand the shaking around.

C: What were the day care facilities like back then?

H: I forget how much I paid. At Monroe, they took care of the kids and gave them their breakfast and lunch. I got done at three o'clock, and when I got home, I gave them their supper. It seemed to be all right. My children liked it.

C: Was it large? Were there a lot of women with their kids there who were working?

H: There were quite a few there. There were only about three women taking care of them, but they did a good job.

C: How much did you earn as a riveter?

H: After deductions, I think I earned about thirty dollars a week. It was big money then for a woman to make.

C: How much had you made at the Microform place?

H: I don't remember. I wasn't there too long before they called me to Truscon. I had my application in and worked a few weeks at Static microphone. Then, Truscon called me.

C: What was it like to be a housewife during the war years?

H: It wasn't hard for me because I was brought up during the Depression. Rationing wasn't hard for me because I had small children. I always had plenty of food stamps.

C: What about raising your family? Was it a little bit harder because the war was going on?

H: It didn't seem hard to me.

C: What about Christmas time? Were there things which you couldn't buy?

H: Yes. I just bought what I could. My children were little.

C: How did you feel about the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

H: I was mad. We didn't believe it. We were sitting down to Sunday dinner, and my brother-in-law came in and told us what happened. I told him he was crazy because

that belonged to the United States. We turned on the radio and found out that it had happened.

C: Were your brothers already in the service at that time, or did they enlist?

H: My one brother was. He said we were going to have a war with Japan, and he enlisted a year before it happened. My other brother had to graduate from high school. He graduated from high school right after Pearl Harbor, and he went down and enlisted.

C: Where did they serve at?

H: My oldest brother served on the China-Burma Road. He was supposed to be an airplane mechanic, but he was driving gasoline down the China-Burma Road most of the time. He was there.

C: Did they ever talk about service life or their experiences with the war?

H: Not too much. Most men that come back from the war don't talk about it.

C: Did you have any opportunities to see them while they were in the service?

H: Yes, when they came home on furlough. When my oldest brother went overseas, we didn't see him again until the war was over. My other brother was a tail gunner--my family is all short--and he flew ninety-nine missions over Germany. He could never have children afterwards. The high altitude made him sterile. He reenlisted too. He served eight years. The high altitude made him completely deaf. They had to turn him down when he tried to reenlist.

C: How long were your brothers overseas?

H: I can't remember. That was a long time ago.

C: Did you write to them at all?

H: I wrote to them every day. I told them plain, ordinary, everyday things that happened, what the kids did. It was what was happening at home. That's what they were interested in.

C: Were they able to write back to you often?

H: No, I wouldn't get letters for a long time; and then, I would get a whole bunch at once.

C: How did you feel about the war?

H: At the time, I felt that we had to defend Pearl Harbor; but when they kept sending them farther and farther away, I used to think, "What do we care what they do over there?" I can see now that they had to go all the way to Japan and Germany, because if they hadn't stopped it where it started, it could have sprung up again.

C: What was the mood of the country?

H: Patriotic. Everything was patriotic. You would go to the picture show, and they would play the National Anthem. Everybody would stand up. Right after Pearl Harbor happened, they announced that all the servicemen had to go back. You'd see them getting up and going. Everybody was trying to do war work, crushing cars and stuff like that they wanted you to do, to try to help.

C: You think it was a united effort then?

H: Yes. I think the country did very well, because we didn't have a very big Army or any defense plants at all. They just sprang up all over the United States.

C: Do you remember any of the service signs and stuff that were posted? What they were like?

H: I remember the Uncle Sam, one that they had all over.

C: They had signs like "Loose Talk Sinks Ships."

H: Oh, yes, those.

C: Did people believe that?

H: Yes, they did. It was amazing how people did believe it.

C: Did you feel we were justified in dropping the bomb on Japan?

H: When it happened, nobody knew what it was except the people in Washington. I don't know. I have a divided opinion about this. At the time it happened, I was so happy because my brothers were still alive; my brother-in-laws were still alive, all but one of them. One of them got killed doing a mission. I thought, "Now everybody will come home." Afterwards was when people found out what the atomic bomb really was. I think they turned a monster loose on the world. But at the time, everybody was happy.

C: They wanted to see their people again.

H: Yes, they wanted the killing stopped, but they wanted their own people to come home . . . alive, you know? At least I did. I didn't take time to worry about other people at the time.

C: How long was it before you every saw your brother?

H: It was about six or seven months before he got home. They both came home, I think, a few weeks of each other.

C: Do you remember D Day?

H: Yes, I remember. I had a son that was born in 1945 and a baby at home. I remember an old man and his sailer son home on furlough running down the street. The sailer had nothing on but an undershirt and one shoe. They were so happy.

C: Were there celebrations in Youngstown?

H: I didn't get out, but other people said there were. I had small children at home.

C: Do you think that we learned anything from the war?

H: I don't think so. Not looking at the world today, I don't.

C: Do you feel it was something we had to get into, but we didn't learn anything?

H: No, I don't think so. I think we had to do it, or they would have been over here next. If they could get to Pearl Harbor, they could have a base and come over here. I don't think that the world learned anything.

C: If you were to compare World War II to Vietnam, do you notice any similarities or things that were different about the people?

H: I don't think the Vietnam veteran soldiers had as much of a chance of survival as the soldiers in World War II. They were fighting in jungles they didn't know anything about. They were fighting a race they didn't know anything about. They ran into viciousness that was unbelievable. I had nephews that came back. They told my sons. Some of the people that have come back from Vietnam, their whole life is messed up. I thought it was a mistake, and we had no right being there.

C: It was the opposite of World War II, then?

H: Yes.

C: What about the treatment the veterans received after each war?

H: After the Second World War, the veterans received good treatment. The Vietnam veterans never even had a

parade. Actually, we didn't win anything; I don't think we did. I think they just wanted to sweep it under a carpet because we didn't win. We had to compromise.

C: What did your husband do during the war?

H: He got out on an extendency discharge when I had my fourth child.

C: He was in the Merchant Marines?

H: Yes.

C: Did you get to correspond with him?

H: Yes.

C: Did he see any action?

H: No. He never did get sent out or overseas.

C: He was fortunate.

H: Yes, he was.

C: Where was he stationed?

H: I can't remember that.

C: Did you get a chance to see him at all?

H: Once. They didn't have as many furloughs during war-time as they do now.

C: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW