

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Project

Life Experiences

O. H. 605

SARAH SHELAR

Interviewed

by

David Powell

on

December 11, 1986

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: SARAH SHELAR

INTERVIEWER: David Powell

SUBJECT: World War II, homefront, Pearl Harbor, Red Cross

DATE: December 11, 1986

P: This is an interview with Sarah Shelar for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on World War II, by David Powell, on December 11, 1986, at 7:14 in the evening.

Can you remember what you were doing or what was happening when Pearl Harbor happened?

S: Yes, I can remember very vividly. It was a Sunday afternoon and we were on our way back from visiting friends in Baden, Pennsylvania when the news came over the radio. It shocked us all at the time.

P: How old were you at that time? That would be 45 years ago. You would be about 38 years old.

S: Yes.

P: Did you have a family?

S: Yes, I had a daughter and a son.

P: Were you working for the Red Cross at that time?

S: No, I don't think I was. I was only volunteering at the time.

P: Would you tell us about the volunteer work you did for the Red Cross?

S: I took the training for Red Cross nurse's aid. That part of my work at that time was in Trumbull Memorial Hospital. The nursing situation was pretty bad; most of the nurses were in the service. They required a great deal of help

from the nurse's aids. My children were old enough at the time that I could go while they were in school.

P: Tell us what a typical day would be like when you were a nurse's aid.

S: They usually gave us the wards to take care of. We would get those wise guys who wanted pretty girls to take care of them. They would vie for our attention and make us think we were pretty important. In Pennsylvania just over the line, where they took a lot of military cases, we would have to go over there every once in a while for the day. That was kind of fun. We got to see the boys that were in the service.

P: Did you get paid for that?

S: No, that was all volunteer. I never got paid until I started working for the Niles Red Cross office. We're a branch of the Trumbull County chapter, which is Warren. Red Cross does not charge for their services. There wasn't anything that we ever got any money for at all; it was all gratis.

P: How long would you work in a day? Would you put in a full shift?

S: It was not like a full day, although if we got started with something that would be needed we would stay an hour or so after. Usually four to five hours is what they requested us to put in. I think they must have known that without incentive we would probably get tired of it. Of the girls that I worked with, none of us ever regretted the service that we gave. I can't explain what motivated us; I don't think any of the other girls could either.

P: Did you work most days a week?

S: When we talked over scheduling I'm pretty sure they didn't want us to overdo for fear it would get boring or tiresome. They cautioned us about that, and yet we would have gladly done extra work when they called on us to do it.

P: During most of the war then you worked that type of work, volunteer work, in the hospital in Warren and then the one over in Pennsylvania?

S: Yes. The hospital at Camp Reynolds, that's where it was. It seemed that we helped, but it wasn't needed quite as much. I kept on with the little contact that I had. I don't remember being off for any long period of time.

P: As the war went on there was just a group of you that usually worked together and you would schedule ahead of time?

S: Yes.

P: Would nurses work with you?

S: Yes. We were always with the trained nurses. They weren't so much in evidence, but I'm sure they saw what we were doing. If we needed any checking on I'm sure they would have told us. We didn't resent being told do this or that; we did take orders.

P: You worked in this most of the time during the war. Can you think of any funny stories or interesting stories that happened to you or to some of the other girls?

S: The only thing I can think of is that one of our girls was very wealthy. She had some beautiful diamonds. She wore them all of the time. This one fellow would always demand this woman when one of us was to give him a bath. He was impressed with her diamonds. But really we had fine types of men. They were just wonderful.

P: What were some of the things the children were doing in school to try to promote the war effort?

S: It seemed like we were making up packages of things.

P: Did they try to have you fill out eight hour shifts by some of you working earlier, some working later? Did they have you come in at just a certain time during the day?

S: It was just a certain time more for their convenience than anything else.

P: What were some of the jobs you did?

S: I had to get out quite a few letters for instance. We had the blood mobile visits we started. We had our safety services program going; that is first aid. Our first aid people arrange to have someone on call in case they're needed for parades and things in Niles.

P: Did they start the blood service during the war?

S: Yes. Our branch chairman is Helen Crofforo now. Carmen DiChristofero was at one time our chairman. He was gung ho on the blood program. He was instrumental in getting us recognized. The people were loyal to the blood program.

- P: I know today sometimes when they take blood they make emergency appeals. Did they have problems during the war?
- S: Not particularly like they have now. Mostly if the people know of the real need they respond so beautifully.
- P: Who did the Red Cross try to teach first aid training to?
- S: It probably would be school people and churches. Anybody can organize and get a group together and an instructor will be provided for you. Marion Jacola is head of safety services in Niles.
- P: Can you tell me a little bit about the rationing?
- S: I was working most of the time and I really didn't bother myself too much about it. It didn't seem like it affected me too much. Sugar was rationed, I remember that.
- P: Did the shortage of gasoline bother the people who were doing volunteer work?
- S: I think the volunteers got a little bit extra gas. They had to go through quite a bit of questioning. I didn't have the car available, so it didn't worry me. Somebody was always picking me up when I needed transportation.
- P: Besides the blood drive programs can you think of any other program they did during the Second World War? Did they do anything for the service people?
- S: We sent dittybags. I think at that time they gave us some money and we went and bought a number of these bags with comfort articles for the servicemen. We sent them out.
- P: If I was a serviceman home on leave and I would need help, could I go to the Red Cross and get help?
- S: Yes. First of all, we verify what the family tells us. Then we would get whatever was necessary, doctor's statements or whatever. Then we would send the information through to the field director's station. There is a Red Cross field director at every one of the military stations.
- P: So if a serviceman really needed help he could get it?
- S: Oh yes. It is the same thing on the homefront; certainly anything that the Red Cross could do there they would try. There is some civilian help too. The service people would take priority of course, but there are plenty of ordinary citizens that need our help too.

P: The Red Cross is like a central clearing agency to help?

S: Yes, I think so. It seemed like that to me when I was in the office. We had all kinds of requests.

P: When you think back on things like rationing then, it didn't seem to be much of a problem?

S: No. I don't think it seemed to be with us. I can't remember that we were in such dire straits.

P: What did people do for entertainment?

S: We didn't hop in the car and go places. We had friends, and families got together quite often. We had very simple entertainment.

END OF INTERVIEW