

Frances Ellis

The Real Rosie the Riveter Project

Interview 23

Interview Conducted by

Kirsten Kelly

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Interview: Frances Ellis

Interviewers: Kirsten Kelly

Date: June 26, 2010

Place: Nashville, Tennessee

Ellis: Well my is Frances Loraine Tunelle Ellis and uh I live in Sun City, Arizona right now and um well originally was from the state of Washington and from Washington, after we married moved to Salt Lake and then to Sun City, Arizona where we are now. But at the time, I was young and became a Rosie we were in working in Georgetown. Now Georgetown is a suburb of Seattle. And just before you go into Georgetown, across the street Seattle so you're like that and we were under contract of Boeing. Now I was only- I'm 82 now but at that time, I was 18 and uh so when you went up there you had to be of age and they were kind of real strict on you being of age to work. I think probably liability or perhaps. I think at the time, I don't know for sure but I started out as a bucker. And the girl got sick and she was pregnant so they had me take her place to rivet. She was a riveter and then of course we went from there. We worked on the bulkheads of the P-38s. Had a lot of fun. I lived with another family in northern part of Seattle. And us girls would- Mickey and I- that's who

their daughter was called, Mickey that's what her name was and we get on the bus and we go for an hour to come clear from the north end of Seattle clear in to town then get the bus to go out to Georgetown because it was like we had to go right downtown to get on the busses back out. But we had a good time and lots of times we stood up because those busses were loaded, honey. I- really a lot of people worked in those plants and of course when we got there we changed into overalls. We- and we took out lunches with us. It was a fun time. I remember though, one thing. When you were drilling if you got the the rivet in wrong which is easy to do if that bucker isn't perfect with that bucking bar because she had a bar- it was a big piece of metal bar that you had to hold real tight to the rivet 'cause when you rivet than it would, ya know, the rivet would go as you're riveting it in she's bucking and holding and pushing it against it and it would flatten it out to hold it in position. The the two pieces of metal together, that's what you are doing actually, riveting those two together. And of course we were on the bulkheads of the P-38s and those were where the instruments go in- When you're in a cockpit, the airplane's cockpit than that's where those instruments went in and this went in up to the cockpit but the instruments came in front of them and two of them of course in the

airplane. So that's what we did and it was fun and everybody worked hard.

03:25:01-----

Kelly: What was the spirit like in the big factory- can you explain what the factory looked like? Or-

Ellis: Oh, it's kind of hard to remember. Well we were in an open- a big open room um I don't remember that you know it was so long.

Kelly: How many people would you say-

Ellis: Oh there were a lot of us in there ya, a lot. And you went in and out of the gate too. You had a big name plate. You know you were you were- it's almost kind of like going in the airport now except they were very fussy about anyone bringing anything in or out. Your lunch pail- I mean if anything suspicious went on, they were right on it. There wasn't any messing around about stuff like that either because we had at that time we had security too, we had too because we had the Japanese. Of course that was our main concern, one of them. And of course the German too but

it it was a safety issue. Uh, they were real nice to us girls though and we always had a man around too. Not too many but they were around to help us if we got in trouble of any kind or in anyway you know. When one of the instruments that we needed was a new gun. You had to go down to get drills and he had a- what do we call it? Where they would get and you'd get your drills and pick up your machines- or rivet machine, your gun. It's just like a big gun and those- and you pull it just like you do your hair dryer or something you know and BBLLLEEE. Well, you've seen your husbands have a drill at home. It's a big drill similar to that and then it had a "buda" that would push that rivet in. It was kind of- it really is kind of interesting. Interesting thing that the women did. As a Rosie, uh maybe in one- I was just able- when we organized this I was uh a charter member so I was in one of the very first groups in Arizona. And of course Sun City, because so many people have moved there we have one of the biggest chapter of everybody which is kind of interesting because we've had ladies who were made Movie Stars, we have ladies who are pilots, that ferried the planes. We have three of those pilots there in our group.

Kelly: A W.A.C.K.?

Ellis: Yes we have one girl that was a W.A.C.K. and one of the ladies who passed away now but she was a W.H.E.N. you mentioned- you know she mentioned the W.H.E.N.s and um that kind of stuff is real interesting when they have seen all the different people who have worked in the different areas, it's just marvelous how they talk about all this stuff. You think you did a lot! You really don't seem you did very much compared to some of the other ladies who worked in different instruments. Now we have one lady in our group that she was on in the middle of the city of Phoenix, Arizona. They had a- it was so hush-hush people didn't even know those people were working there or they called it something else but it was so ammunition that if it blew up it would have blown up that whole town. The whole center of that town down there. That's how hush-hush it was but it started in that factory down there in Phoenix that it as called something else so people wouldn't that that had that. Now they wouldn't let something like that go. But with everything from Pearl Harbor, I'll tell ya, we really had to sit on that.

7:41:04-----

Kelly: Is it such a surprise- were you already working when Pearl Harbor happened?

Ellis: No I was in school, in high school and it was- we had bo- all the boys left, the 17, 18 year olds left to get joined up. Everything it meant so much. Even my husband was 17, just before he was 18 that went in. But he was in the Maritime. He wanted to be a pilot but because of his one eye, they wouldn't take him as a pilot because you had to have perfect vision in order to be a pilot. They wanted him to be a mechanic and he said, "No way, if I can't be a pilot than I ain't going to be anything." Well, he joined the Merchant Marine and to this today so many people don't know that Merchant Marines more men died in that line than all the men in the world- in the whole war. It amazed you. As a young person, you wouldn't know that but if you read some of the- if you got a hold of some of this history, you would. Uh, they lost so many of them in the Atlantic from the German subs sinking the merchant ships that were taking the, everything to our men. You know, they had to get them there. No like, less he was out to see for 13 months, in Pacific and down into Australia. He came from Australia over to Abakan to Aruba and all those places bringing oil. So they could refine it and get it to our own guys to use

for the machines for the track- for all those big what do you call them?

Kelly: Tanks?

Ellis: Tanks. They had to have fuel to run them, you know and that's what they did too yea...I hear him talk about it and it's so interesting and it's only the last, well 20, 15 years or so that they became Veteran and there aren't too many of those men left because my husband will be 85 pretty quick. So we've got but they did final get they did finally get- they did finally make them Veterans and he did get Veterans ch- and you had- the men had to get this through the Coast Guard...uh...is who gave out all those, to those guys but it's quite interesting

10:15:00-----

Ellis: At home as a younger girl on that too, we had we had quiet a bunch that you can't see through the windows. We had black out blinds, you know. And boy if you didn't do that you had a person come around your neighborhood you all had to- whatever they called it- I forgot what they called it but you had this man go around and boy, if you didn't-

if he could see light out of your windows, you were in trouble. Because you see, we lived on the coast of Washington so it was a real. They all you know they did bomb, where was it. A place in Washington but it didn't hit anything that was real important. They missed, the JAPS did. The war was going on over in Europe before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor because of all that they thought they were going to get away with it you know. They don't teach them, they teach the Japanese kids even today that we started that war. You didn't know that I bet, did you.

Kelly: What do they-

Ellis: I don't know what they do this but they do. Well I think it's because we bombed Hiroshima you know the Atom bomb and thank God, for President Truman to go ahead and do what he did. It was an awful thing to have to kill so many people to stop a war but they had to do it. And this what they should do some of that today. I'm not kidding. I don't go for all that, honey, it's just not right.

Kelly: All what?

Ellis: All this war over there that we're in now because my son was the Vietnam War and was hurt in it. For nothing, it was. They could get nowhere doing it and killing all those people. Their people as well as our people. I just don't understand it. We need more women to rule the world, instead of men. Truly, we truly do.

Kelly: The world would be a different place.

Ellis: Yes, the world would be a different place. I really do believe that.

Kelly: How do you think being a Rosie changed your life?

12:44:20-----

Ellis: Well it made me think more love in my heart for our country for one thing. Um I mean I've always had it. And I fly my flag. I'm really a sinker about flying my flag everyday. And uh of course I've been associated with Coast Guard Auxiliary and was a commander of a big flotilla in Utah so I have come across some of the Military stuff too and it's-it's pride. Pride in the us we do and the county. I just wish are politic thing was better. It's too- it's

too raunchy or maybe that's not the word, "raunchy." Well they aren't as honest as they ought to be. We need to get a little more honest in our government and they-

Kelly: Were there any gender challenges? What was it like for women at this time as you were going to become a Rosie?

Ellis: Well, at that time, one of the things was, "Whoa!" The old ladies even older than our generation that were- well you know, our mothers never wore pants, jeans, or anything like that. Overalls, sure people out on the farm had an overall but the men, even the women out on the farms didn't wear overalls. They wore long dresses yet, you know. And that was such a changed for the women to to going to wearing pants and that was on of the big things in our society at that time. Those women...and so many women coming out and having to have their children taken care of in nurseries and stuff like this. And then you didn't end- well I was young enough that I didn't went home, but I didn't- because I lived with some other people and I didn't have the responsibilities there that I grew up with as a kid because I was from a family of 12. There were two grandfather, eight children, a mother and a dad. And you could of eaten off the floor, that's how fussy my mom was

and I was older girls so there for you had to do a lot of work. And uh canons and that sort of thing growing up. And that was another thing, a lot of these people did uh, you can't believe how many victory gardens we had. Uh one of the ladies spoke about that today and yesterday about the victory gardens and they had to have food for the troops too. And there were wonderful farms. Everybody just came together. You've never seen or felt such coming together in a country than you did during that war. Especially, in Pearl Harbor. We just couldn't believe it. Even as a young person, I don't know how to explain it... you just sat there. You can't believe that this happened. I'm sorry, honey. Then all of sudden you are in the middle of all this stuff. You just can't imagine that you feel so- horror and then togetherness and everybody coming together to go to work and try to make these planes. We had it. We had to get these planes and stuff out in such a short time because we needed them. I mean, boy and you had to do them fast and they were taking a car plant and making it into a airplane plant and it's it's amazing all the things they did back then. Uh, we've come in a lot of strives since the war, like our cameras that we're using right now. All this kind of thing, technology is just well gone out the window. It's just amazing. It's it's I could get carried away here. It's

just make you feel like your hearts going to bust because it's so much for you sometimes. That's the feeling you had back then. Pride at buying a war bond. The kids at school- we'd take a dime to school and I can remember at the first of the war, I made a- I was an art student too and I can still remember this big airplane I made, and it was a big poster for the hallway. And this pilot was sitting on top of the airplane over the fusel lodge and on the wing you know. He's sitting up on the wings and his legs over fusel lodge. It was quite a- I'll never forget that darn poster and then we paid and saving all this buying all the gum we could get for a penny. And then we'd take all the foil, and we saved all the foil in one of our Rosebuds, that's what she did. She went around all the neighborhood and she's a blind girl now cause she diabetes as a child and growing up with this and now she's where she can see light and day and stuff like that and figure us out by our voices and stuff. But it's amazing how even she talks about getting all these. And she'd have big rolls of it. I'm not kidding, like big baseballs. We'd get baseballs that big and bigger of all this foil, tinfoil because they used that for uh tanks and uh everything. It's amazing all the things that we did do. Uh, yea, I never thought about that until just now. See you get talking about stuff and here you remember

these little things that you did do. But she was talking about the shoes.

19:12:07-----

Ellis: My father would save so he could take us for a ride once a month. He'd save up for the gas for the car because you had to ration the gas. And of course we had the tickets to buy the gas and that's the same way as the food. That's why we had to can so much stuff because uh, you just couldn't buy food, well for a family of 12 you know. Yea, but it was pretty- it was a nice

Kelly: Can you tell me about the last day you worked as a Rosie and then what happened after?

Ellis: Well I came home, well you know it's hard to remember. I don't know, once all that was over you kind of went on with your life and it was just something you had to do and you just sort of put it behind you. I had a sister that died at the time and we had a little baby left and so just kind of put up with that and then the next year I met my husband and got married and he quit going to sea because he was going to sail one more time then we got married and

he didn't go. He came back and then we got married. Yea
yea, it's just part of after the war. Uh, it was something
after the war too, I'll tell ya because houses started to
shoot up and all kinds of stuff and everybody is getting
new cars and lots of things.

The End.