

Eileen Tench

The Real Rosie the Riveter Project

Interview 26

Interview Conducted by

Kirsten Kelly

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Interview: Eileen Tench

Interviewers: Kirsten Kelly

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Place: Nashville, Tennessee

Tench: Well my name is Eileen Tench. Actually, Eileen Headen Tench. And um I started well after the war started oh I shouldn't start there either. When I first heard about Pearl Harbor, my father and I had gone to a movie and we were on our way home. And there was no one in the cold night. And we heard this terrible news. So then my boyfriend at the time, he eventually had to go to the service. He was drafted. And then Goodyear was hiring. Goodyear Aircraft so I thought, oh I think I'll go over there. So I had to go to school for three weeks to learn how to drill and rivet and do that kind of stuff. So when I got finished with that, then they sent me over to Goodyear Aircraft. And I worked in the Air Dock, which is the big hanger where they used to build blimps. And uh so then in the winter time they put up like tents all because the building was so big and they put all these tents up and that's where we worked, under there. And then in the summer time they would roll the canvas back and uh said, the building was so big, it would rain in there and that was

the story you used to- but actually what it was condensation dripping because when we would go outside of the canvas to go to the bathroom, you'd get dripped on. So we knew it was the condensation. It wasn't really raining. And I was uh we worked at benches, on benches and we did drilling and and this one friend of mine she was working the punch machine and she caught her thumb in it and just punched a hole in her thumb. And she sat there and I yelled and everybody came in and released the machine. But she kind of slumped over. She kind of passed out. She was okay though. That was one of the bad experiences I had there.

02:47:20-----

Kelly: Was it dangerous?

Tench: Pardon?

Kelly: Was it dangerous work or-

Tench: No. Not really you had to be careful. You had to cover your hair because every so often they'd come around with this really long drill with hair all around it. They tried to scare you know. Now see if you don't cover your

head, that's what will happen. You'll lose your hair. It will get caught in a drill. So uh then one time they had Wallace Barry. He was movie star come to-they were selling bonds. And they had a big rally outside the building. And then-

Kelly: Did you buy bonds? Was that something-

Tench: Oh yea, I did. Bought my first house when we sold all my bonds. When my husband came home, we got married in 1945 and um we sold all my bonds and bought a house. That was our first house. When I first started working, I was making \$.75 an hour and then when the war ended I was making \$1.20 an hour and that was big money and so then when the war ended it was just like turn out the lights and go home. I mean I was one of the last ones to leave and it was just really weird. And they had- we had gas rationing you know and I had an eight sticker because I live far enough away that I could get the bigger amount of gas. And we had to have so many passengers. I had an eight coupon so I'd get people rides to pick up. So-

Kelly: And did you have a car you drove?

Tench: Well my brother had a car. He had a '38 Chevy. He had to go into the Navy so he sold me his car. So I had my own car and that was great. And one of the girls I worked with had a car just like it. So we'd all get together and go places.

Kelly: Can you talk about exactly what you did as a Roise? Like what did you do each day when you showed up to work?

Tench: Well they had these parts that we had to drill holes in and they were called Al- alerones. I worked on a PBM, that was a Navy airplane and um then they had, what's it called, a boot. It looked like a boot almost. It was big shoe like you put on a giant or something and I put rivets all around the outside. You had to drill holes, put the rivets in and use the bucking bar. And um-

Kelly: And that was for the airplanes you were making?

Tench: Um uh and uh when you first start working there, there was always someone pulling a fast one on somebody so they called me- they told me to go over- they had a tool bench where you'd go get the drills and stuff and you had to get stuff so um they told me to get some prop wash so I

went over to the window and said, I need some prop wash and soon as I said it the look on the guys face, I knew it was a joke. You know what prop wash is? It's the air behind a propeller.

06:42:04-----

Kelly: Do you remember what your very first, what your very first day was like when you were hired as a Rosie?

Tench: I was afraid. I didn't know what to expect but it wasn't long before I made friends with all the people I worked with. There was one lady, she was comical because she wanted to learn how to make airplanes. She was going to build her own plane. She wanted to know how to make every part. It was impossible and every once in a while they'd come over the P.A. System and tell us what was going on during the war or what was happening. When they had D-Day they told us and we were all so happy then because we thought maybe this is going to be end. And it was close to the end so-

Kelly: Do and did you have a buckler with you? You were a riveter and you had buckler with you or what? What were the positions-

Tench: Well sometimes we could do both. I mean hold the bucking bar and rivet at the same time. And if you weren't careful sometimes the metal would get a little hairline split in it and you had to drill a little hole at the end of that crack to keep it from going any further. And there were difficult things like that we had to do.

Kelly: Who was- can you- what were you wearing at that time? What were you-

Tench: My mother made me coveralls like and that's what I wore mostly.

Kelly: And what were the fashions like when you weren't working? What what were women wearing at this time?

Tench: Well, not much different than now. We didn't have hoes, nylons, we painted our legs. Drew a line up the back of our legs for the seam. And that was funny because

sometimes if you got wet it would get kind of messy. Other than that I-

Kelly: Was it- was it a big thing for women to go to work at this time?

Tench: I don't think so. I don't think so.

Kelly: No? Because you were working before?

Tench: Uh no.

Kelly. No. So this was your first job. You were a Rosie

Tench: (nodding) Yea.

Kelly: And then did you keep working after the war? Did you ever work again?

Tench: uh well after the war, like I said, we got married. My husband got home in April and then we got married in June and I uh of course didn't have a job then because the plant just closed down so I went work at a match company

and uh I worked there until I got pregnant and that was the end. So-

09:58:00-----

Kelly: What do you think being a Rosie taught you for the rest of your life? What do you think it gave you?

Tench: Ummm, well I really don't know. It, it, I learned how hard it was to work and make money. I used to be ashamed to tell anybody I worked for Goodyear Aircraft because it seemed like there was a lot of hanky panky going on during that time and uh of course I wasn't involved in any of that because I was just a teenager. But it just seemed like it didn't have a very good reputation. And that's why I just wasn't too happy to say I worked for Goodyear Aircraft because I thought, well they're going to think that I'm a bad person. And I wasn't.

Kelly: Were you one of the younger ones working there?

Tench: Yea, um uh.

Kelly: And what was the age range of the women working?

Tench: Well it varied, um there was um I guess teenagers and I guess probably- well some of my friends were- well the one lady had a little boy. I think he was ten. And Polio was a big thing during that time and I remember she was very concerned about him getting Polio. And then there was a couple older ladies who had bifocals and every time the supervisor would come around and tell them to do something, he'd be showing them something and this is not very nice, he would say, look at this you know, both of their heads would fly back. You know when they would have to look through their bifocals. And I thought that was funny. I have to do that now myself.

12:10:04-----

Kelly: What were some of the feelings about the war at this time?

Tench: It was terrible. It was really sad. I mean, it hit on the best part of my life I felt and uh I just- made it bad for kids my age- teenagers because we didn't have anything to really look forward to because everything was

taken, everything was rationed. You couldn't get shoes and you couldn't do this and you couldn't do that.

Kelly: Do you remember hearing um about any stories or about anything that was happening in Europe or in with Japan?

Tench: Well I know that that nobody liked the Germans and nobody liked the Japanese. 'Cause they were what was causing all our problems.

Kelly: Did you know anyone who served in the war?

Tench: Yes, uh um, one of my classmates was killed on on a D-Day and uh then I had some other classmates who were in the service but they got back home. And then uh I had some of my family members were in the Army.

Kelly: Were there pretty good relations between the men who stayed working and the Rosies or was it difficult sometimes or was it- were there challenges?

Tench: Uh not too much. Um we called the Four F-ers. Did you ever hear of the- you didn't? You've never heard of the

Four Fs? They were the guys that stayed home and they didn't have to go serve their country. There were a lot of them- it wasn't their fault. They had some medical problem or reason but that's why girls didn't have any boyfriends because they were all Four F-ers and nobody wanted to associate with a Four F-er.

Kelly: And what did the F stand for?

Tench: I don't know.

Other person: F is the classification.

Kelly: Oh

Tench: Oh that's right.

Other person: It's the Army Classification as to whether you are fit or not. That's what it stands for.

Kelly: Oh ok, right.

Tench: Yea.

The End.