

Beulah King

Mrs. King heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed while sweeping the floor in the small town of Effie, Minnesota. She was 18 years old. She described the “exodus of young people” that followed the bombing as young men enlisted or were drafted immediately after high school. She herself wanted to join a branch of the military service for women but her father refused to sign the papers. He did help her get a job through her brother’s connections in California at Lockheed. She moved to Burbank California in 1942.

Her job at Lockheed put her on the assembly line with other young women from all over the nation in particularly the Midwest. Lockheed especially liked to recruit women from that area of the nation who were known for their strength from farm work. This was especially necessary to be able to hold a drill in place for the making of an airplane.

She remarked that a plane did not look like one when it first started out – just big pieces of aluminum. She would work with a companion to drill and rivet the pieces together. It required precision, strength and skill. While most of the women in the plant were women, there were a few men who were 4-F’s or past the age of being able to go into the military. While there she lived with her brother’s family. There were gun emplacements on every corner and black outs were not uncommon. She dressed like the pictures seen in Rosie the Riveter advertisements with overalls and a “snook” - a type of heavy hair net that kept hair from being caught in the drill and being pulled out. She also described the purple glow that the lights caused on the skin – every unattractive – along with the aluminum dust which she became allergic to.

She headed back home to Effie in 1943 only to return to San Diego with a girlfriend a short time later. While there she worked with Ryans – another airplane manufacturing company. She lived in a dormitory that was like a rooming house with lots of other women who were working in manufacturing plants. She recalls the sailors that were everywhere and the dances they would have that all the girls in the dormitory would go to.

One of her jobs at Ryans was to put in the “pilots relief”. This was a cylinder attached to the floor of the airplane allowing pilots to urinate during flight. Returning soldiers expressed their gratitude for her war effort!

In 1944, the men began to come back from the war and take over the positions of women. She recollected the difficulty of trying to train the men to do their jobs “we all resented it in the beginning. We had to take the back seat and it was disheartening”. She recalls the returning soldiers being very clear with her that she could not teach them anything - despite her skill and years of experience. During this time she married a soldier who had been stationed in New Guinea and lived with serious leg injuries (the injuries brought about his death through a blood clot when he was 50 years old).