

February 25, 2005

Peggy Hunter

Home front Interview

Interviewer: My name is Sarah Spencer and I'm here with Mrs. Peggy Hunter. Um, and the date is February 24th 2005. Uh, Mrs. Hunter what is your birth date?

Peggy Hunter: Uh, everybody kids me, I'm a firecracker, I was born on July the 4th.

Interviewer: Oh, so was my mother.

Peggy Hunter: Actually July the 3rd, but it was minutes before twelve o'clock so if you want to call it firecracker, ok.

Interviewer: Well that's really neat. Um, so your husband served in the war before you were married. Where in the war did he serve?

Peggy Hunter: He was in the Pacific.

Interviewer: The Pacific.

Peggy Hunter: In the South Pacific.

Interviewer: So um, how old were you in 1939?

Peggy Hunter: Oh, 1939.....I must have been about ten years old.

Interviewer: Ok, how aware were you of the political developments in the world and the threat of the U.S., to the U.S. from the rise of Nazi Germany and militarist Japan?

Peggy Hunter: At ten years old, I don't think I was thinking too much about that. I, I don't recall, I do recall my father listening to the radio and because it was them days before television, and um, he would listen to all them, um, afternoon news, um, concerning I guess the building up of the time before we entered into the war, but I actually don't not remember anything about the war per say.

Interviewer: What are your memories of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Peggy Hunter: Well, it was real funny, I don't remember that Sunday afternoon at all, but I have heard many people say talk about they won't ever forget what they were doing but I do remember going to school the next morning and in class, the teacher said how many boys and girls are going to have brothers or fathers or cousins that will be going into war, and of course I

had two sisters and I was about the only one that didn't raise my hand. I had nobody and um, so that's about the first real accounting that I have about us entering the war at Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: What do you recall about the rationing system, do you remember having butter or tires or anything like that rationed?

Peggy Hunter: Um, I actually don't remember too much about the rationing other than I can still in my mind's eye see the little books they had and my mother would spread them out on the dining room table and she'd say now I have this many stamps left for sugar, and I have this much left from um, to get gas with and I don't remember anything about the amount you were allowed but um, but I can remember seeing the little books more than anything else, I don't really remember doing without all that much.

Interviewer: Where did your family live during the war?

Peggy Hunter: Laurel, Mississippi.

Interviewer: Alright.

Peggy Hunter: I remember my father was a railroad engineer and he was really, really busy because he was on call so much because they were transporting so much material for the war effort and he would come home from taking a train somewhere and he would just be able to get in enough rest that was required and then he would be ready to go again, we saw very little of him because he was so very, very busy.

Interviewer: What do you remember of the depression, did the amount of work your father was doing after the beginning of the war, was it dramatically different?

Peggy Hunter: Well, we were very lucky, the depression never did effect us much because he never was without a job, um, he was, had started with the railroad when he was a young man so he had enough seniority, that um, we never suffered like a lot of people did.

Interviewer: That's great. Um, if you were in school during the war, obviously you were, do you recall discussing it in class with your fellow students, once the war had progressed?

Peggy Hunter: Yes, I can remember it and some of the classes we had maps and would follow the battles, where they would be and if a student had a relative that was in a certain place, they would take these little colored pins and go up and pin it on, I remember that very vividly.

Interviewer: Did it make you feel left out because you didn't have anyone serving?

Peggy Hunter: No, I really didn't.

Interviewer: That's neat. I guess it was a collective feeling among society.

Peggy Hunter: Yes, I know we were all very concerned, and we tried to remember the people that were gone and um, but I do not remember feeling left out. We were all just a part of it together.

Interviewer: Did you ever buy war bonds or ever see the entertainment offered at the war bond rally?

Peggy Hunter: Oh, yes, I surely did and I also remember we would take uh, go along on the sidewalks and pick up tin foil.

Interviewer: Oh, for aluminum drives.

Peggy Hunter: And you would roll it up and you would say this is for the war effort. You know, like chewing gum would come in with the little foil around it and all the kids, it was just indoctrinated to everyone that they had to do certain things to help the war effort, and I don't remember this but someone told me that if you saved your old toothpaste tube and turned it back in, or you would have to turn it back in rather, in order to buy another tube of toothpaste because they could reuse the squeezed out toothpaste tube for the war effort too, they saved everything. And my sister especially, she was older than I, and she had a boyfriend that was in service and he sent her a pair of nylon hose, and that was a prized possession if you got a pair of nylon hose and she was so thrilled over the gift.

Interviewer: Oh, that's so neat. Um, well, did you know any service members who were injured or killed in the war?

Peggy Hunter: No, I had a cousin that was a prisoner of war at

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Peggy Hunter: But um, I do not know of anyone that was killed.

Interviewer: Do you recall the blue star and gold star mothers and stickers in the front windows?

Peggy Hunter: I, I can very vaguely remember people talking about that but I don't actually remember anyone that had one in their window.

Interviewer: How did your family react to having your sisters' boyfriend over there, did you all write to him collectively or...?

Peggy Hunter: Uh, yes, we only had this one cousin that was in the Air Corp at the time and that was when his plane went down and that's why he was captured and was a P.O.W. We would write him notes and wondered if he ever got the mail or not.

Interviewer: How often would you guys get correspondence from the soldiers, like for your sister, for example, how often would she maybe get letters from her boyfriend or..?

Peggy Hunter: She would get them fairly often but um, of course I was too young to have a boyfriend so.

Interviewer: Did you have a telephone service and you mentioned you had a radio, were those you main ways of getting information or news?

Peggy Hunter: Uh, yes, radio was the main thing, we had telephones back in the days and , number please, and you would give the operator the number and being on the party line, I remember that.

Interviewer: That's neat. Um, um, now was you father, was the industry or I guess he was in the railroad industry, was it organized by a labor union at all?

Peggy Hunter: Yes, um, the engineer was called the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.

Interviewer: Ok, now here's a, you mentioned your father worked overtime and did your family ever feel like you were doing well in terms of earnings but there was nothing to spend it on?

Peggy Hunter: No, uh, my father was very thrifty, he was a believer in saving and he saved consistently, he had a plan and every time, in fact my husband and I were talking about not long ago, we have somewhere in our possession and I would give anything in the world if I could find it, it's in some box, somewhere, in this house he kept a record of during those years of all, of every time he would make a deposit and sometimes, this was in the um, from the beginning of the depression years on through when he was working longer hours and making more money, he consistently saved and it was many, many entries of something like fifty cents, seventy-five cents, things like that but it would be page after page, after page and it was done every week.

Interviewer: Wow.

Peggy Hunter: Constantly. They were very thrifty.

Interviewer: Did you and your family generally support FDR and his handling of the domestic and foreign affairs?

Peggy Hunter: As far as I remember. I know we used to listen to his fireside chats through the radio.

Interviewer: As a little child did you really understand what was going on or..?

Peggy Hunter: Some of it I would but I probably didn't comprehend it as well as an adult would, but I was aware that we were in war and had to, uh, save and that we needed to pray for

the boys and, uh , and hope that they would soon be home, and things like that, but I don't remember um, what was the question?

Interviewer: Oh I was just asking...

Peggy Hunter: Oh, was I aware?

Interviewer: Right. Were you aware of what the chats were talking about, what FDR was saying.

Peggy Hunter: I might pick up a few things here and there but not a whole lot.

Interviewer: Right. Um, many Americans look back on the war years as the best years of their lives despite the sacrifices and service made and the shortages, how do you look at the war years? You know, how do you remember it compared to other times in your life?

Peggy Hunter: I really don't know how to compare this since, if I would have been older I think I would have had, I could compare more, but I know I was just a carefree, happy little girl and um, I went about my daily life, going to school and playing and um, doing the little things like picking up the tin foil and things like that but um, it did not mean any more to me as far as a happy or less happy time in my life.

Interviewer: Was there anyone in your neighborhood or acquaintances who's loyalty was suspect and how did people react to them?

Peggy Hunter: People in the neighborhood who did what?

Interviewer: Who's loyalty was suspect, perhaps people didn't feel like they were supporting the war effort, or..?

Peggy Hunter: No, I think everyone we knew were um, right there supporting every move that was made, in fact, the country was just so much more united.

Interviewer: What are your recollections of D Day?

Peggy Hunter: I guess the biggest thing is, that by that time I was getting to be fourteen or fifteen, sixteen, somewhere along in there and um, seeing the sailor kiss the girl in New York, I think, and naturally being of that age, that was a big thing, say your kissing the girl became so famous.

Interviewer: Right. Yeah, what was the feeling of the country as soldiers began to return home?

Peggy Hunter: Oh, I think it was jubilation, everybody was coming home, they started making plans, and their whole lives, they knew were fixing to be changed to the extent that life was going to be better and we were going to be able to get things that we were doing without for so long. And it, it was just jubilation.

Interviewer: Did you or family members ever have to um, with your, with like rationing grubber or tires, did you ever have to donate tires or anything, maybe put a car up on blocks because you didn't have the necessities...things needed to run it?

Peggy Hunter: No, I remember more about my bicycle tire, more than I do about anything else because I couldn't ride my bicycle for the longest because we couldn't have a tire for it so we set it in the garage. At that time, it was more important to me than the car., and people walked so much too back in those days, we lived in town, we walked to school, we'd walk home for lunch, we'd walk back, we'd walk home in the afternoons and um, um, we just didn't do a lot of driving anyway. For probably days the car would not even be moved.

Interviewer: How did your sisters' boyfriend do in the war, did they get married when he returned?

Peggy Hunter: No, um, he came back but she had fallen in love with a minister that had come to fill in at our church and by the time that he got back she was in love him and they eventually married but they remained friends through the years.

Interviewer: That's neat.

Peggy Hunter: They correspond and he has a family, and of course she did too. But one of the things a do remember about um, that you had not mentioned about um, the women, some of the things they did, I can remember this was in the days when most mothers stayed home, they had no outside jobs and on a certain day of the week, the women in the neighborhood would get together and uh, roll bandages for the Red Cross and every time uh, each day of the week, I don't remember now weather it was a Wednesday or a Thursday, but let's just say it was Wednesday, every Wednesday morning when we would leave for school she would say now I may not be home when you get here this afternoon, but I'll just be up at Mrs. So and So's house, this is her day for us to roll bandages so if you need me that's where I'll be, so it may be three doors away, but they always let you know where they would be and they did that every week, would roll bandages.

Interviewer: As you got older were there any other contributions that you started making to the cause or any other ways that, you know, the feeling of the war changed among your classmates?

Peggy Hunter: Um, no. I know when the boys started to come back, I think I was in high school by then, um, they seemed so much older than the boys that we were in school with and of course many of them were coming back to go finish their education because they had dropped out to go to war, and we had many boys that were ex-servicemen now back in school.

Interviewer: Did you have other family members that worked in the war effort, like maybe in an arms manufacturing plant or did you see those industries of war grow?

Peggy Hunter: My mothers' sister um, had never married and was a music teacher and times were um, hard enough that there was not enough people that could send their students to her class to take piano lessons, so she had to find something else to do as a means of livelihood and she took a job at Camp Shelby, Mississippi and um, I do not remember what she did there but I remember that she and several ladies drove back and forth from their hometown which was only about thirty miles away and she worked in Camp Shelby until the war was over and then she went back to teaching music.

Interviewer: Do you recall a black market for scarce items, during the war?

Peggy hunter: No.

Interviewer: Not really.

Peggy Hunter: I'm sure it was, but I don't remember.

Interviewer: Did you ever see entertainment offered at a war bond rally?

Peggy Hunter: I'm sure they had some but I don't recall any.

Interviewer: Yeah, Well during the war and after the war, many people were reported a feeling of wellbeing because everyone had a job after ten years of the Great Depression and the nation was united behind the war effort, do you recall feeling like that, do you recall a heightened sense of collectivity among Americans?

Peggy Hunter: The biggest thing is I remember, is people were able to get washing machines again and they were able to get appliances that they had been doing without, they were able to um, finally get those tires on their cars and could take trips, and it was very evident that we were living a little more fluently than we were living in the past.

Interviewer: Did you get a bike tire once they...?

Peggy Hunter: Oh, I'm sure I got a bike tire the very first time I could.

Interviewer: That's neat. Do you remember any other big events during the war that struck you?

Peggy Hunter: Um, I do not remember an event during the war but I remember the Sunday afternoon that the atomic bomb was on New Mexico, I had a girlfriend visiting me and we were playing monopoly and um, my dad came in and he said turn on the radio, turn on the radio, I just heard that uh, something about the atomic bomb, and so, I said but we are right in the middle of our monopoly game an something and I didn't want to stop playing monopoly in order to hear about it but we. But I remember it was such a big event and the excitement in his voice let me know it was really big.

Interviewer: Do you remember being aware of them working on an atomic bomb before that or was pretty much like the first time you ever?

Peggy Hunter: It was pretty secretive I think.

Interviewer: Yeah, it was. Do you remember the bombings on Namisaki and Hiroshima?

Peggy Hunter: Yes I remember uh, everybody talking about how horrible it was and the burns and um, I know my mother did not want to listen to it, she thought that um, it was just so horrible because it brought back some memories because she had a child that had been burned to death and she did not want, that brought back memories with that and she said I just don't want to hear about that, and I know that that must have been horrible

Interviewer: Was there a sense of relief at all that the war was finally over for good in the Pacific?

Peggy Hunter: I don't remember that.

Interviewer: Really. Was there a fear among the community after the war was over in Europe, that the men from Europe might have to go to the Pacific?

Peggy Hunter: I just don't know, I as just a little girl, too young to comprehend, If I would have been a little older, I think I would have...

Interviewer: Do you remember any radio programs or music or movies maybe that encouraged patriotic spirit or...?

Peggy Hunter: Oh, yes, the Hit Parade, on a Saturday night, we always listened to that and I remember um, that they were always promoting patriotism and singing the songs that would boost the morale of the people and uh, those are the type things a remember most about that.

Interviewer: What about in school would you do any special maybe patriotic programs or uh, even, you know, aluminum drives or things like that in school as part of a school day.

Peggy Hunter: Um, I don't really remember anything specific that we did.

Interviewer: Now as your generation, you said you were ten at the start of the war so, maybe you were fourteen or fifteen or sixteen toward the, were any of the men in your class worried that they might have to serve?

Peggy Hunter: Oh yes, I think they were all, if the war had not ended when it did, I'm sure there would have been many, many that would have had to go. Uh, because they were getting to the age then but it happened that it ended and then I remembered the G.I. Bill. So many of them that came back were able to go to college because of the G.I. Bill, which I think was a wonderful

thing, we would not have launched the college careers that we have today, had it not been for that.

Interviewer: It gave a lot of people the opportunity.

Peggy Hunter: Many opportunities they wouldn't have had otherwise.

Interviewer: The town that you were from, was it big or small or..?

Peggy Hunter: It was uh, about twenty thousand. The biggest thing it had going for it, was it was only about thirty miles from Camp Shelby and an influx of people from all over came because it was one of the larger bases and families would come to be close by their loved ones before they had to leave to go overseas. And um, so many people couldn't find places close by and they would live as far as thirty miles away. It's not unheard of to be living, even though the soldiers were at Camp Shelby.

Interviewer: So did you have a lot of classmates whose fathers might have been away at war or brothers?

Peggy Hunter: I think I had more brothers than I did fathers.

Interviewer: Did you guys ever go out to Camp Shelby and see what it was like on the military post or were you allowed on the post?

Peggy Hunter: I don't remember. I doubt you would be able to go on during war time.

Interviewer: Well thank you for your time and your interview. I really enjoyed this, let go ahead and...

Peggy Hunter: Well, you're welcome.