

Cindy Knodel  
Interviewing Mrs. Mildred Knodel  
Subject: Indiana in World War II

Q. Where did you live at the time of the outbreak of the war?

A. At the time the war broke out I was living in a small community about twenty six miles northeast of Evansville.

Q. Was your movement into Evansville directly related to employment opportunities found in a larger city as a result of the war?

A. Definitely, being from a small community there were no job opportunities available there so most of the youth did seek employment in the larger cities. The majority of them I think did migrate to Evansville.

Q. Being from a small farming community did you find that a lot of the farmers and a lot of the people being from the much smaller communities moved to Evansville at this time?

A. A few of them did, but for the most part those who were farmers also continued to be farmers. There was a tremendous shortage of food. It was important that the farmers continue their farming, but in addition they took on jobs in the industries in the evenings and the nighttime. Most individuals from my community worked two jobs.

Q. Besides the youth coming into Evansville from smaller communities, was there a lot of mobility into Evansville from other states and from other parts of Indiana?

A. Oh yes, we had two fairly large army bases. On of them was Camp breckingridge down in Morganfield, Ky. which is now the Morganfield Job Corp Center and the Camp Cambell base at Fort Knox Ky. An awful lot of the families moved in and around Evansville to be near their servicemen.

Q. Was there alot of mobility outside of the Evansville area to larger cities such as Louisville, Chicago. and Cincinnati?

A. There was just an awful lot of mobility period, Cindy. In addition to the families moving around alot to spend just as much time as they could with their sons and husbands, there was a tremendous shortage of manpower, and it wasn't unusual at all for men who held supervisory jobs in the industries to have two or three plants under their management- so there was alot of mobility.

Q. Before the war what industries had been of great importance in this area?

A. Oh, the auto industry, there was the Chrysler and the Briggs plant, the refridgeration industry- the big Serville plant, the Mead Johnson Corporation- however it wasn't the pharmaceutical company that it is today, and then railroads, and then the health industry, the hospitals. It has more less been the medical center of the tri-state for sometime.

Q. Did these industries continue to be important in employing people during the war?

A. Oh, very much so. All the large plants converted their machinery to produce war materials. The health industries-- there were tremendous demands for health workers. And you can just imagine the demands that were put on the railroad to supply needed food stuffs, supplies, and to move the troops.

Q. So the industries in Evansville during this time were not new industries coming into the area, they were just converted industries supplying the war effort?

A. Right, stepped up effort.

Q. What exactly were some of the jobs you held during the war and by which firms were you employed?

A. Shortly after I graduated from high school in 1943, I came to Evansville and was employed as a government inspector. My first job was with the Chrysler Ordnance Plant. I inspected casings for small ammunition. I was there for approximately a year and was transferred to the Republican Aviation Plant. It was a plant out on old 41 which is now the Whirlpool Corporation. While I was there I inspected riveting on the fuselage of the plane. From there I was transferred to Sunbeam until about March of 1945 and then I resigned and went into Nurses Training.

Q. What other kinds of jobs besides inspection were open in these industries?

A. Oh, just about anything you could think of. There was a tremendous demand for welders and riveters, general assembly line work, security, first aid workers, just any

number of jobs.

Q. After the war did these industries go back to their prewar state or were they just shut down?

A. Oh No, they converted back to their prewar production. During the war you know we weren't able to get new cars and appliances, so there was a tremendous boom, after the war trying to supply all these needed things we were forced to do without during the war years.

Q. So because of the industry in the Evansville Area after the war, the employment continued to remain high and it wasn't necessary to move out of Evansville to find work?

A. No, Evansville grew and expanded their boundaries several years after the war.

Q. Because of the shortage of manpower, women were now finding themselves in traditionally held jobs. What was the general reaction to this?

A. I don't believe that there was any resentment on the part of the men. In fact I think they rather enjoyed it. In the shipbuilding industry they had quite a lot of women working with them. You know Rosie the Riveter, and they had them in welding positions, and I think the men sort of enjoyed having the women.

Q. Was there any kind of sex discrimination in the industries?

A. Sex discrimination as we know it today, no, at least I wasn't aware of it. However, in retrospect I can't remember

any women being placed in supervisory jobs, those were always held by men. As far as the pay scales, I doubt if there was any differential because I can remember some instances where women were bumped from their jobs by men, because the men held more seniority.

Q. After the war, was there a reversal back to the prewar sex segregated roles?

A. In industry you mean.

Q. Yes

A. Yes, to some degree I think. However, not as much as before the war. But, I think it was because the women choose it that way. I mean if there were office jobs available to them, they would rather work in a nice clean, air conditioned office than they would out on an old assembly line.

Q. Would you consider the war to be one of the first major steps in the breakdown of the traditional segregation of the sexes in work opportunities.?

A. I think so, probably that was the forerunner of our present day Women's Lib.

Q. Did most of the servicemen whom you had known previously return to this area after the war to settle and make their homes?

A. Yes, initially. When the G. I. benefits became available a lot of them went on into higher education and a goodly number of them did go elsewhere to seek employment after they finished their schooling.

Q. How did the ending of the war affect the population of Evansville as you remember. Was there an increase or a decrease in the number of people moving in or outside of this area.?

A. There was a tremendous increase in the population growth during the war and shortly after the war. Many of the families that had moved to Evansville to be near employment during the war remained here. Then we had the returning servicemen and in addition to that an awful lot of the G. I.s at Breckinridge and Camp Campbell had married local girls and came back here to settle down. In addition to that, an awful lot of returning servicemen from surrounding county areas came here to seek employment in our industries and to go to school.

Q. With the increase in the population was the Evansville area affected by a housing shortage as the rest of the nation experienced?

A. There was a very acute shortage during the war. I can remember how families doubled up and rented out every spare space that they had. I can recall very vividly a studio apartment that I had, which really was nothing more than an unfinished attic. And even though they had rent controls the prices that they charged for rent was pretty exorbitant.

Q. What were some of the areas built in the Evansville Area after the war and during the war due to the housing shortage.?

A. You know where the Erie homes are down on Lincoln and Canal. That was one of the first developments I think. Another was the Rotherwood Apartment and the Columbia Apartments near the University of Evansville where an awful lot of the students live today. Then one which has just recently been demolished and received a new face lifting was the Villa Sites area that was a horrible disgrace to the city, that was sort of a slim area. The others have remained and I think are quite an asset to the city.

Q. What impact did the war have on you personally?

A. I really don't know Cindy, but I doubt very much if the war had not come about if I would have ever been able to have gone into nursing as I had wanted to do, because I came from a fairly large family, my family was very very poor and there was no hope of me going on to college. And when the war broke out and job opportunities presented themselves I came to Evansville and went to work and even though I made fairly good money and was at time tempted to stay in industry, I just couldn't see myself tying myself down doing that kind of work. I quit really before the war was over and went into nursing.