

"This is Randy Ward, interviewing my mother, Betty Ward, about her memories of World War II. Today is April 7th, 1974, and we are at our home in Mt. Vernon, Indiana.

Mrs. Ward was born in Mt. Vernon and graduated from Mt. Vernon High School in 1939. She was married in 1939 and lived with her husband, Val, for two and one half years before the outbreak of World War II. Here are her memories of life in Mt. Vernon during that war."

INTERVIEWER: "Okay. Mrs. Ward, what did you first think when you heard that the country was at war?"

MRS. WARD: "I was frightened. Your dad was a ham radio operator. And he was on the air at that time and was having trouble contacting anyone. Finally, the FCC cut in and told him that Pearl Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese, and that all the airways should be cleared."

INTERVIEWER: "Okay. Did you become involved in defense in any way?"

MRS. WARD: "Yes, I joined the Civil Air Patrol and for a time took flying lessons. I was also on the- worked at the War Price and Rationing office."

INTERVIEWER: "How did you feel about becoming involved in helping? Did you feel that it was your patriotic obligation?"

MRS. WARD: "Absolutely! I wanted to do all that I could."

INTERVIEWER: "What exactly was rationed?"

MRS. WARD: "Gasoline, fuel oil, cars, bicycles, rubber footwear, shoes, all kinds of food"

INTERVIEWER: "How did people in the co- community uh- accept rationing?"

MRS. WARD: "Some people didn't like it. It was a nuisance in a way, but in the end I I uh think that people realized that it was necessary."

INTERVIEWER: "Did your husband become involved in defense?"

MRS. WARD: "Yes, he joined the a- Air Force. He served as a cadet in the Air Force. And was being trained as a fighter pilot."

INTERVIEWER: "Where was he stationed?"

MRS. WARD: "He was stationed at Biloxi, Mississippi, Marianna, Florida, Dothan, Alabama, and Bainbridge, Georgia."

INTERVIEWER: "Did you ever visit him?"

MRS. WARD: "I visited him in Florida and I visited him in Biloxi."

INTERVIEWER: "How did you get down there?"

MRS. WARD: "By train."

INTERVIEWER: "Did a lotta people travel by train?"

MRS. WARD: "Absolutely! I sat on my suitcase practically all the way down there. Soldiers were on the train, and uh- it was full."

INTERVIEWER: "Did your husband ever see active duty?"

MRS. WARD: "No."

INTERVIEWER: "Okay. How did the war affect other people in the community?"

MRS. WARD: "Well, people were rationed on their gasoline; they didn't have gasoline to take pleasure drives or go to work. They had to form car pools. Uh- Food was naturally rationed. People couldn't do as much canning as they'd like to because of the sugar situation. Uh- A large number of people from Mt. Vernon worked at the Evansville shipyards. They made LSTs there. Your uncle, Vern, worked there. Frank worked there. Red- They had Red Cross meetings that the women would roll bandages, different types of bandages for the soldiers. Everyone saved their tin cans that their vegetables and fruits were canned in and they were flattened and saved for the war effort. Also, the two cannons that used to be on the courthouse square were melted down for the war effort."

INTERVIEWER: "Uh- You mentioned that you were in the Civil Air Patrol. Out of curiosity, what kind of aircraft did you fly?"

MRS. WARD: "Piper Cub aircraft." The reason I didn't continue with my lessons, they were quite expensive, for one reason. And a group of us would get together and drive to Evansville on a Sunday. We had to watch the gasoline, 'didn't have much. I

continued until my husband wrote me a letter saying that he wanted me to stop flying. Later on I found out it was because he and his instructor had crashed in a training plane. And the instructor was burned to death. My husband was in the hospital for a time. So I stopped the lessons."

INTERVIEWER: "Did anybody else in your family uh- contribute to defense?"

MRS. WARD: "Yes, I had two brothers who served during the war. One served in the supply division and was stationed in England. The other served uh- mostly driving a truck, and was in the area of the Battle of the Bulge at the height of the battle there."

INTERVIEWER: "Were they both in the Army?"

MRS. WARD: "Both in the Army."

INTERVIEWER: "Anybody else in your family active in defense?"

MRS. WARD: "No."

INTERVIEWER: "Okay. Uh- You mentioned you worked for the uh- rationing board, uh-, how far did you-, uh-, How far away from home was it and how did you get there?"

MRS. WARD: "It was about a mile. I did not have a car or a bicycle so I walked."

INTERVIEWER: "How-, How did people get along during the war? Did

they get along alright?, lotta crime?"

MRS. WARD: "I don't remember any crime taking place. Oh, at one time the rationing office was broken into, but we kept our coupons, our stamps of all kinds in the vault in the local bank. We would go over to the bank every morning 'bout nine o'clock, bring the box of coupons and stamps back that we would be using for the day, and before the bank closed in the afternoon at three o'clock, we would return those unused stamps and coupons to the bank. So when the office was broken into, they didn't-, the burglars didn't get any coupons or stamps. They opened drawers and desks and scattered papers all over the place, but they didn't get anything."

INTERVIEWER: "How did people get along? Were people friendly toward each other? Uh-, Were they tense?"

MRS. WARD: "Uh-, I think they were friendly. They uh-, They sorta worked together, and everybody was in this together. Some people who had more sugar coupons than they needed would give them to other families. People uh-, would have what they called "Victory Gardens". Some nice homes spaded up their front lawn and uh-, made gardens, and canned the vegetables."

INTERVIEWER: "Were these vegetables that were canned used uh-, sent overseas?"

MRS. WARD: "Some of them were. Some of them were used by the families and some were sent overseas."

INTERVIEWER: "Uh-, Was any mass transit system uh-, in operation either in Mt. Vernon, or between Mt. Vernon and Evansville?"

MRS. WARD: "Uh-, Trains, uh-, travelled between Mt. Vernon and Evansville, buses, buses were always loaded with people going to work over there who uh-, didn't have enough gasoline for their cars. Very seldom was there an empty seat on the bus. 'Seats were all full and people would stand in the aisle, but everybody took it as a-, for granted."

INTERVIEWER: "Since you were familiar with ra-, rationing, uh-, do you know if anyone in particular had preference as far as gasoline rationing? Did doctors get more stamps?"

MRS. WARD: "Sure, people fell in different categories. Doctors, uh-, especially, uh-, received more because they had to have it. It was necessary. We didn't have too many doctors in town at that time. The local doctor's office was opened up by his wife, who was a nurse, and she took care of maternity cases here so that the women wouldn't have to go to an Evansville hospital."

INTERVIEWER: "How were prices during the war? Were they pretty high-priced on everything, or reasonable?"

MRS. WARD: "Fairly reasonable. You couldn't always get what you wanted. Usually, once a week a store would get in bananas, and the word would travel like wildfire, and people would rush to the store and buy-, You could only buy so many."

INTERVIEWER: "Did people generally uh-, live comfortably? Uh-, Of course they had to sacrifice some, no doubt, Did they have enough food, uh-, ^{to keep} from being hungry?"

MRS. WARD: "I think there was enough food. They didn't go out and starve. The materials, clothes, things like that, weren't of the highest quality. And most people bought what they had to have have."

INTERVIEWER: "How did you feel when the war was over?"

MRS. WARD: "I felt jubilant. Everybody did. At the time word came that it was over, I was attending an Eastern Star meeting in Evansville. We'd had a session that afternoon, and we were on our break, before our large meeting that night, and after our evening meal bef-, by the time our meeting started, everything just worked out wonderful. Everybody was happy. "

INTERVIEWER: "Lotta celebrations?, Uh-"

MRS. WARD: "Uh-, By other people there was a lot of celebrations."

I waited till my husband got home before I did any celebrating."

INTERVIEWER: "Lotta noise and horn-honking and the like?"

MRS. WARD: "Absolutely. 'Sure was."

INTERVIEWER: "Did rationing continue shortly after the war was over?"

MRS. WARD: "Shortly afterwards, yes. I continued my job until my husband came home from service, then I resigned."

INTERVIEWER: "What was your most vivid memory of World War II?"

MRS. WARD: "Seeing newsreels of soldiers going off to war, boarding ships; that was very touching."

INTERVIEWER: "I'd like to thank you for sharing some of your memories of life in Mt. Vernon during World War II."

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