

Interview with Elizabeth (Betty) Hart  
Interviewer: Katherine Simpson  
November 5, 2006

**Interviewer's Notes:** Mrs. Elizabeth (Betty) Hart has been my next-door neighbor for ten years. I have never sat down and carried on a couple of hours of conversation with her, so I thought this would be an interesting way to get to know my neighbor a little better. I also felt this particular topic would be something both she and I would enjoy. During the interview, I allowed my mother to sit in and listen. While Mrs. Hart was answering each question I asked, she answered as if she was educating not only me, but also my mother on her life experiences during the time of World War II. Mrs. Hart has some difficulties in hearing, so I did have to make sure I spoke extra loud and clear so she could understand each question. To my advantage, Mrs. Hart's house was quite, so we did not have any disturbances during the interviewing process. During the interview, Mrs. Hart was not able to recall any specific dates. In fact, a couple of times she had asked me on some facts about the war. In the beginning of the interview, she said she was not married, but later I think she realized she was married for about a year and then told me some things about her husband Ettress, who had some experiences of his own. At the end of the interview, Mrs. Hart continues to carry on conversation, but the rest of the conversation has absolutely nothing to do with the interview. She made her own transition into a whole new topic.

**A:** My brother, Parvin, was in one of those big planes where they carried all the soldiers to different places, and he was in China. He was in China.

**Q:** Oh.

**A:** He was in one of the big planes all the way, he went to China. I didn't remember that at all.

**Q:** Oh. And so, at the time of the war were you in a relationship with Ettress? Were you married to him?

**A:** No. Now when did the war start?

**Q:** I believe we became involved between nineteen forty-one and nineteen forty-five.

**A:** Well, we were married in nineteen forty-two, I think because a year before that, there was a friend and her brother had, well, some of them enlisted but most of them got called, you know. They called them and they had a big bus that came up town, picked them up and everybody that had somebody that was leaving went up to see them off, and I remember going up to see John off and I wasn't married at that time.

**Q:** Okay. So, what was your family routine before the war? What did you do before it all happened?

**A:** Oh, well I worked at the underwear factory. It was a Boonville manufacturing company. Everybody that didn't go to college or anything, that's where we worked.

**Q:** Uh huh. Is that the one on First Street?

**A:** Yeah, that's the one I don't know if they use it now for the high school, but they did.

**Q:** Yeah, I had a couple of classes in there when I was at the high school.

**A:** That's where I worked. I worked there for several years. Before I got married and just off and on after I got married. If they'd get tied up, they'd call me and want me to come and help out after I was married, but that's where I worked.

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**Q:** Okay. Now, did your job and all that change once the war started?

**A:** Well, yes in a way. We had big, big orders for shorts for the Army and my job wasn't working with that, but Mr. Mason, who was the head of the thing would call me in on Saturday and want me to come down and help box those shorts to send off. And I'd try to think if the Army sent the material in or whether they were all alike, you know the shorts or not, but they had big orders from the Army, the Boonville Manufacturing did. Though it was something else.

**Q:** (Laughing)

**A:** It was something else. But anyway, Boonville Manufacturing Company did have big orders for shorts at the time of the war actually.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** And I helped to box those things. We had, I don't know, we put six in a box. Some of them had to be turned one way and some of them turned another and I was called in several Saturdays. Mr. Mason, who was head of it, would call me in to ask me if I would come in and help do that and that is what I did.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** That was during the war.

**Q:** Did you do anything to prepare for the war?

**A:** No, I didn't. Ettress. Now this is interesting because Ettress after we were married, he was called up to be examined three different times by three different, well it would be the Army, the Navy and maybe the Marines. I don't know, because he tried them all, and they all turned him down because of his enlarged heart. And they had told him at the time that he would never be able to do any hard work, and he's ninety-three years old in the nursing home and he still has his enlarged heart and he still did a lot of hard work.

**Q:** (Laughing)

**A:** But he still has his enlarged heart. They said at the time he was upset because his good friend had gone and was in North Africa when [German Field Marshall Erwin] Rommel was there. At first Rommel was and Forrest his good friend wasn't there very long until he was killed. He hadn't been married very long and she was pregnant. At the time, I thought Germany thought that he was really doing good. I think he was at first, but the Army won out. That was in North Africa.

**Q:** How did you feel when you found out [Ettress] couldn't go because of his heart?

**A:** Well, of course I wouldn't say that I wanted him to go.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** But I felt sorry for him because here he was such a great big man and healthy and I'm sure he thought, too, that people looked at him and wondered why he wasn't in service. But he really wanted to go. But it wasn't his fault.

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**Q:** Yeah. Let's see. You probably weren't a parent at the time during the war. Were you a parent during the war?

**A:** No. I had been married ten years before I had Karen.

**Q:** You had worked at the underwear factory, right?

**A:** Yeah. I had worked there. Well, we lived on North Second Street.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** It was a little three-room house, and now it's been built on and it's got an upstairs. Yeah, we lived there because I got mail from all three of my brothers and that's where I lived then.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** I had three brothers and they were all in different divisions.

**Q:** Oh, okay. How did your family stay financially stable during the war?

**A:** How did they do what?

**Q:** How did you stay stable during the war?

**A:** Well, I guess my mother probably worried really more than I did because well if you had three sons in the service. See Joe, my oldest brother, he was in Australia and they didn't bother Australia, but he was in communications. I'd say, I think he worked in maybe a radio station there that gave the people of Australia what was really going on and they never bothered Australia. That's where my brother was. So, I didn't worry about him and then Ralph, my brother, he was in the Seabees and they were the ones that built the bridges. They did the hard work like roads and things for the main men to go to, and then Harvin (laughing), I said I thought he was really in a big plane ...

**Q:** (Laughing).

**A:** Now, I know that I've already talked about being in a big plane ...

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** But he was in China, so I think he was in communications. So actually, he wouldn't have been in serious trouble over there. So, I really didn't worry about him too much, but I'm sure my mother did.

**Q:** Yeah. Well sure (laughing).

**A:** If you had that many sons and they were all in service in the war.

**Q:** (Laughing) Yeah. Were you related in any war related activities?

**A:** All that I was involved in was the factory.

**Q:** The shorts?

**A:** Yeah, when I worked down there.

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**Q:** Let's see. How did it make you feel to participate in getting their shorts and sending them over there?

**A:** Well, I thought that maybe I was doing a little bit of something to help out.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** It wouldn't have been a whole lot. But somebody had to help because it was a big order. I had no idea remembering it, anything about the order, except I knew that it was a big order and we had to get it out at a certain time. So that is what I did (laughing) to participate.

**Q:** (Laugh). Did you develop any friendships during the war with any kind of, at work or training, because the factories were bringing in a lot more, did they have to hire new people, or did you have to do anything different around there where you had new friendships?

**A:** I don't think that it bothered them, but a lot of us [whose] husbands were in service we kind of got together (laughing) and up town on the corner there was a hotel and downstairs where everybody gathered, women whose husbands were in service and so we made a lot of friends and different friends got together and one of them lived in this house. Her husband was in service and so really the wives and girlfriends stuck together, actually they stuck together and helped one another. And actually, I think that's where I think it helped.

**Q:** So, when you met together what did you do?

**A:** Well, mostly (laughing) played the jukebox. We'd put a quarter in the jukebox.

**Q:** (Laughing). Yeah.

**A:** I don't remember the tunes, but that's really what was down there, the jukebox, and they would all, I guess, had on the music I guess that we liked [it], and they had during the war certain songs. I don't remember, but there were certain kinds of music that came out at times and they would be on the jukebox.

**Q:** Yeah. And you'd just socialize and listen to the music?

**A:** Yes. That's what it was it was, a socializing (laughing) place.

**Q:** (Laughing). Once the war did start what were some of the changes in your life?

**A:** Well, it didn't change me at all, other than the fact that I lost my three brothers that were in the war. And friends, I mean, I had friends. In fact, she just died two years ago but some of those friends that I was friends with for sixty years and we were very close when her husband was in service. And as far as actually affecting me other than my brothers being there, it didn't. But I was very close to some of the wives whose husbands were there.

**Q:** Did you ever worry that we would lose the war?

**A:** No, I never did.

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**Q:** (Laugh).

**A:** I never thought for one minute that we would lose the war (laughing). I had faith in our Army and it never entered my mind that we would lose the war. Now, we had hard times over there. One of the fellows that I knew that used to work at the factory. I think that he lost his leg in Italy. I believe there was some that was killed. There were several from Boonville that were killed and. I guess ... it would upset me when I would read about somebody being killed, especially around here, people that I knew.

**Q:** Yeah. How did you go about communicating with your brothers? Did you just write letters or...?

**A:** Oh, yeah. They were very faithful. All three of them are very faithful to write to me. I don't think that they wrote too much to my mother, but they knew that I would read them to her, or she would keep up [with] them. I'm sure they wrote to her, but I probably was the one that answered their letters.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** They were really faithful, all three of them were faithful in writing to me when they were overseas. So that was a good thing.

**Q:** Could you remember the day that the war did end and what happened?

**A:** When the war ended. I don't remember actually. When did the war end? Do you know?

**Q:** I couldn't tell you the exact date. I think we finally finalized it in nineteen forty-five. That's all I remember (laugh).

**A:** Well, it seems to me nearly every town had something that they celebrated.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** I don't remember that they had parades but there [were] different things that the towns did to, well to be glad that the war was over.

**Q:** To welcome them.

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Did you ever go to any of those parades?

**A:** I probably did (laughing) because I lived just a block from the square and anything, they had up there I'd be there.

**Q:** Yeah. (Laughing).

**A:** So yes, I probably did. I wasn't going to miss anything. I was young then.

**Q:** How do you think that people today in America would act if they had to make the sacrifices that the people did back when World War II happened?

**A:** Well, I think it would be better in a way, because so many are so tired of this war that's going on now and I think that everybody would be, well it would be a little more upsetting that would go on, but I

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think that everybody would be helpful in any way that they could. When it would be over or if it would get worse. Really, I'm one (laughing) that's upset about the war. You don't need to put that in.

**Q:** (Laughing).

**A:** (Laughing) But, to me, it's very, very unnecessary, but I mean that's just the way I feel about it. But the parents and everybody seem to be going along with their sons and everybody that are in there; whether they like it or not they are proud of their family. But (laugh).

**Q:** (Laugh). Let's see.

**A:** Quite frankly I think most everybody is tired of the war.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** I think they are.

**Q:** They seem to drag out sometimes. I don't know. It seems like when it should end something else happens.

**A:** Well, there [have] been several around Evansville and different fellows that have gotten killed that have been close [to this area]. I haven't known any of them but there have been several in the vicinity that has been killed. And everybody has rallied around the parents and their friends for that, but I haven't had anybody close. I don't have anybody close in this war.

**Q:** Yeah. In the aftermath of 9/11, many people compare that attack in 2001 with the bombings of Pearl Harbor. Do you think that they are similar?

**A:** Well, I think it was a terrible thing, but the bombing of Pearl Harbor was such a shock. I mean it was something that happened unexpectedly, Pearl Harbor was. And I remember myself hearing on the radio about it and just being really shocked, because Pearl Harbor was a terrible loss, and that was when we really got into it, because of the bombing in Pearl Harbor. The 9/11 was a very bad thing but to me it wouldn't be any comparison with what happened in Pearl Harbor. Of course, both of them were a surprise but what happened in Pearl Harbor was a surprise. I think the Japanese had been in Washington and they had talked like there wasn't going to be any war and everything and suddenly, suddenly that was an awful thing. So, I think Pearl Harbor was to me much worse.

**Q:** Because it was a surprise.

**A:** Yeah. 9/11 was a terrible thing and it was a surprise to us, but I think Pearl Harbor would be counted as much worse because that was really the start of our war.

**Q:** What do you think about the way that the war was depicted in movies and songs?

**A:** Well, (laughing) I enjoyed some of the songs ...

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**Q:** (Laugh).

**A:** During the war they showed in the movies--when did television come in? Because we had a television when we lived on Second Street one of the first ones that was bought. But it was always on the radio. We could keep up with it very well on the radio.

**Q:** Yeah. And of course, probably through your letters.

**A:** Oh, sure.

**Q:** When your brothers were keeping in touch. I forgot to ask you all of this (laugh). Where were you born and raised (laughing)?

**A:** Oh, I was born in Warrick County in the country and I was born in 1917 March 27.

**Q:** (Laugh).

**A:** So, I'll be (laughing) ninety years old on the 27th of March.

**Q:** (Laugh). And what was your family and educational background?

**A:** Well my father had; I think at least five sisters. I don't know and my grandfather, Dave, saw that every one of them had a college education. And even my half-sister, Pearl. But you'd have to know back then when my sister was seventeen, I think you could go six weeks to college and teach.

**Q:** Oh. (Laugh).

**A:** And she went to Kentucky, and my grandfather drove her there and she said she was a little thing and there was somebody in her classes bigger than she was, but then she had to go to college every summer because they had to get more education as the years went on. You know they couldn't always do that. So, she went to college during the summer for years and years, but she had fun because she would pick different colleges that we went to ...

**Q:** (Laugh).

**A:** Until she got her I don't I ... she probably had her masters because actually she was a librarian after she went from teaching a certain grade, she was a librarian for years and years. But that's the way they used to do, that many years ago. But my grandfather, now my dad didn't care a thing about education ...

**Q:** (Laugh).

**A:** But his father, my grandfather did. He was the one who saw my other half-sister went to Lockyear's Business College back then. There was still a Lockyear's Business College. I'm not sure whether there is now or not.

**Q:** I've never heard of it.

**A:** Well, it probably isn't, but my little half-sister was a teacher. Two or three of the women became lawyers later.

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**Q:** Oh yeah? I had one last question. What was your perception before and after World War II? What you thought about ... just everything?

**A:** Well, naturally everybody was glad it was over with and I was definitely glad that all three of my brothers came back. They got through the war without something happening to them and everybody was tickled to death because we were rationed during the war, and one of the things that I remembered most was sugar. We were rationed on sugar. We had cards and back then it's not like now you can go buy cake mix (laugh) you had to make your cakes or whatever. I didn't like to cook but I liked to bake...

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** And the ration of the sugar hurt me the most.

**Q:** (Laugh).

**A:** But there was quite a bit of rationing. The tires, and you had to have a card if you bought a car and there was a lot of rationing during the war. We had rationing cards that we could only buy so much of this. I remember sugar the most.

**Q:** (Laughing) I probably would have remembered that too if I lived back then.

**A:** (Laughing) But, that was one of the things that we were very glad of, that the rationing was done with.

**Q:** (Laughing) You got your sugar back.

**A:** (Laughing) I got my sugar back. Yeah. I couldn't cook a hoot when we got married.

**Q:** (Laughing).

**A:** But I liked to bake.

**Q:** (Laugh).

**A:** So, that was a little hard on me. I think that most of the women or probably the men because they had to have tires and things for their cars and [other] things like that we couldn't get. Even gasoline was rationed. You could only buy so much gasoline at a time, and I'm sure that's one thing the men were most glad of, but the women were glad of the (laugh) [end of] rationing ...

**Q:** (Laugh).

**A:** And the food.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** That's what we, that's what we were most glad about.

**Q:** Yeah. Getting your sugar back (laugh).

**A:** The rationing part.

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**Q:** Is there anything else that you can remember about the war that I might not have asked you about?

**A:** Well, let's see. You know Bill Richards. And I knew he was in the Navy, but I didn't know that he had been at ... where was it lost? The Philippines? Was it the Philippines that the enemy took over, the Japs took over? He said he was there before and after, so I don't know because he was wounded and that I didn't know. I don't know which ship he was on, but he was in a very, very serious business and I didn't know that. He said, if [Katherine Simpson] asks you something you don't know, just tell her to call me. I know.

**Q:** (Laugh)

**A:** But I really didn't know that about him. I knew that he was in the Navy, but I didn't know that he had been wounded and he was in the most precarious place when the Japs took over the Philippines. He said when we [were] there, our ship was there before and after and I didn't know what he meant by that, if it was before the Philippines took over and then they had to leave or [if] he just said, "yes, our ship was there before and after." So, he was in a very precarious place. But I don't think really, I think that my brothers were lucky that they were in what they were in.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** So, I just, I don't know. I don't know anything, of course we always have known Bill.