

Doris Corrigan

The Real Rosie The Riveter Project

Interview 8a

Interview Conducted by

Anne de Mare & Kirsten Kelly

May 7, 2010

Newaygo, Michigan

For The

Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives
Elmer Holmes Bobst Library
New York University

Interview: Doris Corrigan
Interviewers: Anne de Mare & Kirsten Kelly
Date: May 7, 2010
Place: Newaygo, Michigan

Corrigan: But this was quite a, this was in a Sunday paper

Off camera: Goodbye. Doris, thanks for having us.

Corrigan: Ok, we'll see you later.

Off camera: What time are we meeting tonight?

Corrigan: Six o'clock!

Off camera: Ok, I just wanted to know.

de Mare: So you can just show us what you...

Corrigan: Ok, this was the first one, this was a, from a newspaper, but I thought it had a lot here to show, you know, about 'Day of Infamy,' of course, was Pearl Harbor. And of course, now, some of these are just the articles

about, you know these are just articles about Pearl Harbor.

And let's see, so, you know, you don't need to really get them. And this was when Roosevelt announced the next day, this was a picture of Pearl Harbor, and this was the next day when Roosevelt declared war on Japan and Germany.

And here was a picture of the Hornet, which Ray's brother Bill was on, and this is a sad picture to look at because, this was 19... "USS Hornet sunk by the Japanese Aircraft on October 26, 1942." And Bill was on there, Bill Corrigan, and a lot of them were killed. But they said during the process of the planes flying over, the people on the ship managed to kill, or to take down 59 planes that were flying over to get them. They were determined to get the Hornet, because the Hornet had taken the planes over that had bombed Tokyo before that, and that's why they were after this particular ship. So that was a picture of that. And then these were just some other pictures of that.

And, as I haven't got everything in here, but this was, this was about the bomb. And this was, Ray gets a newspaper, I mean a magazine from the vets every month, you know, and they had, and they had this story in there, "Why I Dropped the Bomb." Why he decided, Truman did, and why he dropped the bomb.

Kelly: What were the feelings about that decision?

Corrigan: Well it was, they said, reading his story, half of the people agreed with it, half of them of course didn't, you know. But he said it saved millions of American lives. Because those islands, like where Bill Edwards was killed, there was so many of those islands and the Japanese were just entrenched in those islands. And so all we did was just lose boys, you know, just, there'd be so many of them killed trying to get those Japs out of there. So this is why they come to the conclusion that they would use the bomb.

But I tell you, I hate to think of what that man had to decide, you know. But he, he did. Like I said, there was...

This was a picture of Ted Holton, that I told you about. He was at Pearl Harbor and he said, he was the one that said he never forgot it a day of his life after that. So, anyway, so, but...

I just thought it was nice to have all this stuff together. And, what else we got here. And then this one, I wanted to take out and show you, because, oh this was what Marilyn was talking about. This is the memorial in, at Pearl Harbor, about, right after Pearl Harbor. What was it

sunk, this ship that was sunk?

Marilyn Dawson: Could one of you move your car, or you direct me out, 'cause I don't want to hit your car.

Kelly: Oh, here, John, I can...

00:03:42:07-----

Corrigan: Now, that's 'Memory and Infamy,' and that was when they, they sunk the, they sunk a lot of, several ships then, but the Arizona, was the one that took the [...] And then this one was just a newspaper that I saved for a long time.

And this was, as you can see up here, an article about Roosevelt and his decision and then the Japs quit, 1945, and "Jap City of 343,000 is Erased by the Atomic Bomb" and "Japs Surrender Fully" and "Japs Sign on the..."

But you know they wouldn't sign at first. Even after they had bombed Tokyo, then they were going to drop another bomb on Hiroshima, and even then they acted like they still hesitated. But they knew that they were going to get another bomb, and so they finally signed. But there's a

story about that. So, and let's see.

de Mare: I think it is so extraordinary that you as young women were connected to all of this, these larger events in the world.

Corrigan: That's what I said. I don't mind being the age I'm at

because, because of that. We lived through all of this. To the rest of you, it's history, you know.

And here was an old meeting of the big three, Roosevelt and, 'cause these three leaders were of course against Germany and Hitler, but it turned out this was Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill, you know he was the head of England, and here was the Russian guy, what was his name, but you know what, he turned out, after all, Joseph Stalin turned out to be worse than Adolf Hitler, with his own people. He, you just can't hardly believe it when you read his story then.

And then there's some other pictures I've saved I've taken out of the local papers about women and this was Anne Frank's – you all know about her story. And that was a picture of her and her story. "I'm turning into an animal, waiting to die."

This is a lot of, Bob Hall is going out with us tonight, and he was very artistic. And he gave me some of these pictures that he drew when he was in the service, and I got quite a lot of those. Did you know that he was artistic? Bob Hall?

Off Camera: Uh uh.

Corrigan: And then you'll probably have all heard about the famous kiss, the "Nurse Recalls VJ Day Kiss." That the day it ended, in New York City, of course everybody was rushing out everywhere, and this nurse said this sailor, she didn't even know who he was, but he run right up there and gave her this kiss, you know. And said over the years, she said, they proved that she was that one, but the sailor, they never found out for sure, because lots of old sailors claimed it was them, so they wasn't sure if it was them or not, you know.

And this was just more about, oh then this was about Hiroshima, of course, and everything was so terrible. But the Japanese have their side of the story too and this was an article, you know, about how they felt about it.

This poem was from World War One, and it was in Flanders Fields, 'The Poppies Grow.' Maybe you've heard

that poem? And so I cut that out and saved it, and of course an awful lot of people died in World War One, you know. So, anyway, I haven't got something on all the pages, but.

00:07:24:05-----

de Mare: Could you just tell us in kind of a simple way where you worked and what you did at the Robey factory, can you just, you know give us...

Kelly: An intro.

de Mare: ...an introduction to all of you and just say that, you know, during the war you worked at the Robey Factory and this is what you built and this is what you physically did. Could you do that for us?

Corrigan: Well, like I said, the two other girls, his mother and the other girl's mother, Rose, let's see, Willie Gillette and Ruby Edwards were working there already, and other women too. And then when I started right after I got out of... I graduated and then I went down there, and then

later Marilyn came. But, and I didn't know they were, had started to do war, you know work for the war. So I didn't go there knowing I was going to help out on something, that was just what they were doing. These...

de Mare: So what were they doing when you first worked there?

Corrigan: That's what they doing, when I got there. They were making the shovel carriers, like I said. And it was, it was, they were big machines, and it was hard sewing, 'cause, the stuff, they were made of canvas so it was just kinda hard sewing, you know. And of course we told you about what kind of temperament the boss had.

But anyway, so, once I had a bunch of other pictures in here. This is my husband, and that was him and his and his first ship was the Cincinnati, and this was a picture of him in boot camp. And he was on that ship and then later he was on the Corson, the USS Corson was his second ship.

And this is, after a while I want to show you in the other room, this is a picture I took, because back then they all, everybody put these in their windows, these banners, with how many you had in the service. If you had somebody killed you got one with a gold star, or whatever,

you know.

You probably have all heard the story of the Sullivan brothers. Well they all went in the navy, and we just saw that movie again recently, and they wanted, they all went together, and they were brothers, five of them, and they wanted to be on the same ship, which turned out to be a huge mistake, and they never let again more than one person from a family, because that ship was sunk and they were all killed. And this was just a picture off a magazine of that during the war.

But anyway, this is mine, and I've got it in the other room on the wall. And then the Midway, Island of Midway was, they said, the turning point, but this was just a picture of some of my telegrams and stuff, with a little poem called, 'His Letters.' I didn't write that one. But anyway, and this was just songs that were popular then. And I have a whole bunch of these I went around and collected. That, of songs from back then.

And this was, talking about the ration book. I was so happy when I found the real thing, you know. But, 'cause like this guy said, "Yes, we have no bananas." I mean they ran out of a lot of stuff, but like I said, really, nobody at home had a bad time except the people who had somebody come to their door and tell them they had lost a son or

daughter. And it wasn't really that bad at all on this end of it.

00:10:44:15-----

Corrigan: Looking back now at the history of World War II, of course, thank God it never came to our shores, but England and some of those countries, in fact I've got an article in here about how many were killed – how many Americans and how many Germans and so on. But England had it just terrible, I mean, what they went through, you know. They had to all the time be hiding in basements and stuff, you know, at night. So it was really bad for them.

And that's why Churchill was trying to get Roosevelt to help him out, which he finally did after Pearl Harbor. This is Bill Edwards. That was his...

de Mare: Can you hold that up again for me?

Corrigan: Yeah, that was his graduation picture. So, yeah.

Kelly: A nice looking man, very nice looking young man.

Corrigan: Yes he was. Just a super nice guy. Like I said he was my classmate and Marilyn's boyfriend and probably would have been husband. And these are just articles about more of the same thing, I guess. And I've got a lot of them.

This was 'Blue Star Mothers.' These were mothers that were all in Newaygo that had a group and they all had people in the service, and, boys in the service.

And here was another article about, 'Here He Stalls While the World Awaits His Decision.' I mean they, even after that big bomb they still hesitated as to whether they wanted to give up or not. And this was more about it. They had, they threatened the third one to blast them into action. When they heard there might be a third one they finally gave up.

And there was more about the nurse that got kissed in the middle of New York City. And this was more about, that Roosevelt did that to end the war, you know, which it did.

This was just a picture of downtown Newaygo in those days.

Kelly: Can you hold it up?

Corrigan: Yep. And I wrote a poem about that. Well, one time, it was in the Times Indicator, back when it had been

fifty years, and it said, "Would people around write in their thoughts of happened?" you know, when the war ended. And so I wrote a poem, and I wrote and did mine in a poem and sent it over there.

And then this was more about 1945 remembered. And this was just a picture of a building that was down town. It was the depot, an old, old building, the depot down at the end of town, and one time some eighteen year olds, for no reason, got in there and set it on fire. Just being naughty, and burned it down, do you remember that.

Off Camera: Yeah.

Corrigan: So, and then this was some articles I cut about other veterans and this was the poem that I wrote, I got it in here, about Newaygo at that time. Newaygo in 1945.

de Mare: Would you, would you read it for us? On camera?

Corrigan: Sure.

1945 unforgettable year

To me and to many the memories are clear.

The terrible war had come to an end.

A world torn asunder would begin to mend.
August fourteenth was the end of the war
Via radio the announcement we had long waited for.
Around the world, in Newaygo folks danced in the streets.
Our returning heroes very soon we would greet.
Nickelodeons played a song of that day
So fitting for those who had been far away.
To the top of the list it was bound climb
'Kiss Me Once, Kiss Me Twice, It's Been a Long Long Time.'

...I get a little emotional – I'll get it together in a
minute...

The great homecoming was a time for elation,
Explains the number of the next generation.

...You came along fast then...

The baby boomers as they are called today.
Their fiftieth birthdays are not far away.

...This was – now they're in their sixties...

Recall the hairstyles the young ladies wore,

One called the pageboy, one the pompadour.

Saddle shoes were in and sweethearts of that day,

To the big band's music danced the night away.

At dawn Henry Beth...

...He was the local milkman. Back in those days - you kids probably don't remember - they brought it to your porch and set it there, you know...

...At dawn Henry Beth, local milkman would stop.

Recall rattling bottles, the cream at the top?

Young boys on the bikes brought the news back then,

Took aim at the porch, hit it now and again.

Soda fountains in drug stores I also recall

Where sundaes and sodas were enjoyed by all.

Perched on a stool one could chat with a friend.

Ever wonder why things like this had to end?

The post office back then was on the main street.

Postmaster...

...now these were people that were in Newaygo...

Postmaster Pierre Sawyer the towns folks would greet.

Don Nelson, Len Lewis, Maddie and Dorothy Babbit

Passed out the mail as folks rushed in to grab it.

On up the street a number of stores;

Christensen's, Eddie Goffer's, Power's and more.

The theater, Durfeys, the Valiant Hotel

Others too now gone but remembered so well.

Around the corner at left...

...I was describing this scene here...

Around the corner at left Booth's Five and Ten

Adam's Hardware, Truman's Market some others and then

Lamier's Pro...

...What do you, how do you say it? Well anyway, it was
their drug store...

...it still stands today

Now in renovation, we're glad it will stay.

...Proprietary, that's what it was called...

The Red and White Groceries, on down, Henning Sports

Hemway Lumber and Hardware, they sold things of all sorts,

Gleason's Drugs, Neitzche's Hairstyles, and the T&T,

That was the teen hang out, old teens informed me.
There are many omitted for pure lack of space,
But our hometown Newaygo was and is a great place
And in our hearts they are forever alive
The 50 year memories of 1945.

So I stuck that in here, and then I've got, I have a lot of
loose stuff. So I wanted you girls, if you wanted to, if
you want a, this is Remembering World War II.

Kelly: That's great.

Corrigan: And then I run these off too, this was, this was
what John pulled on us here a year ago. I thought that was
two years ago.

Kelly: That's the Marshal...

Corrigan: Yeah, that's them. It didn't turn out very good.
Made me look like I had black skin, but anyway, and this
was the other one if you want copies of those. So and that
was Willie and Ruby, right here, and now they're gone, and
so is Mrs. Robey. She was 97 years old at this time, so.

00:18:38:01-----

Corrigan: That's what they were before they started. Fishing tackle was what his main thing was before the war, you know, and then they evidently you said they started with tennis shoes and then they, when I started there, they started the shovel carrier.

deMare: Do you know how they got the contract? How they...

Corrigan: I don't know, but it was a government contract, evidently. Which I had written down in my, in my little book there, you know, that... So it was for the war, I don't know how they went about getting it or anything.

Off Camera: My mom said that they came back, they went to work making the, she had told me tennis shoes, but they made both, and after that they came back and they were making, came back to work and they had the contract for making the shovel covers. And then like I said, like I told you earlier, I said well what did you do right after the war? "Oh we went back to making tennis shoes."

It was like it was nothing to them, you know. The

girls had to do a job, you know, whatever the job was that they were going to do and when they put it down in front of them they just did it, you know. And they don't think it was nothing. I think it was a whole lot, you know. A lot of people helped.

Corrigan: Yeah, well when like the guys went into the service. And they all had to go. They were drafted. And I thought it was awful that they took them right out of high school. Out of my class that year, but anyway, but the women, now like, if they were married, the women had to go to work because they didn't get enough money from their husband in the service.

Ray said he got, he started out, he got twenty dollars a month when he first went in the navy. You know, and so the women had to go to work, their wives did. You know, some of them, your mother, had I think she already had one, didn't she? Is your brother older than you?

Off Camera: Yeah, she had one child. And then after dad got home she had two more.

Corrigan: 'Cause she had just had the one, then when I knew her there, yeah. But, like I said, the four of us just

become really good friends, you know. So, stayed that way all through the years, and it was about, probably twelve years ago that I got the idea about taking Mrs. Robey out for her, he was dead then, you know, for her birthday. So and then that was fun, 'cause we got what remaining ones was together and we did that, but now we're down to three, is all, so.

Off Camera: It's funny how the Robey Girls get their name. I asked my mom, "How'd they ever come up with Robey Girls?" Said, "Well we were sitting 'round this table" you know having their lunch, "And Marilyn goes, 'Hey, we're the Robey Girls.'" and it stuck, that was it.

Corrigan: Well when I had called, or had first had that thought come to me, that maybe we should take Mrs. Robey out, you know, 'cause I was thinking about the days when we worked there. And I, so I called Marilyn and asked her what she thought of it, and then she said, "Well that's a good idea."

Then I remember I called Mrs. Robey and I said, "How would you like to go out with the Robey Girls for your birthday." And that was when she said, "The who?!" She hadn't heard us called the Robey Girls, you know. But

anyway, she loved it. We did that every year after that until she was, until she was gone. She was the sweetest lady. Just the opposite personality of what he had. Maybe that's the way their marriage worked. So anyway.

Kelly, de Mare: Great, great.

Kelly: Well this is wonderful.

de Mare: Thank you so much.

Corrigan: Well, thank you girls for doing this.