Pedagogical Narrative

After the bomber: Life and work for women during and after World War II

World War II brought significant social change to the United States. Blacks served in an integrated military marking the most extensive integration project since Reconstruction. The modern American suburb was born following the war with the development of new housing for returning soldiers. And, women entered the workforce in numbers never seen before. Almost 20 million women worked in some capacity during World War II. This represented a significant increase over pre-war years. Much of this change was a product of necessity. With millions of men removed from the labor force through active military duty and the U. S. industrial production efforts related to the war in high gear, women almost had to work. The U. S. War Department made it a top priority to attract women to the workforce to limit wage inflation and keep production at a peak.

As women entered the workforce, the stage was set for a dramatic series of stories to unfold. First, how would the nation react to changing women roles, particularly with women working in physically strenuous jobs which had almost exclusively been male work? Second, what would be the long term political effect of women in the workplace, particularly given the recent (just two decades prior) successes of the Women’s Suffrage Movement? Third, and perhaps most intriguing, what would happen when the war ended? Would women just quit their jobs, go home and resume life before the war? This narrative explores this third question through the lives of four women who worked at the Bell Bomber Plant. We use interviews with these four women as our primary source of information. The interviews were conducted at Kennesaw State University as part of Dr. Thomas A. Scott’s Bell Aircraft Project <http://www.kennesaw.edu/history/BellProject.shtml>. Since the interview were not conducted with our question in mind, there are no clear answers (often the case in history), but patterns do emerge which can be used to help students better understand the time period.

Ruth Ivey was typical of women who worked at the Bell Bomber Plant. She grew up in Jackson and Clarke counties, just east of Atlanta and after graduating from high school in Athens, moved to Atlanta with a friend to take a secretarial job at Bell Bomber. She worked for three years at Bell Bomber, leaving as the plant for a job at the Atlanta national headquarters for the Red Cross as Bell Bomber began to scale back operations in 1945. One gets the feeling from reading her interview that Ruth did not have to work. Ruth explains her move to Atlanta in the following excerpt from her interview.

Well, I had a friend there, a girl that I had been in school with. She said, "Let's go to Atlanta." Now Mother and Daddy were not very happy about this. "Let's go to Atlanta and get a job with Bell Aircraft." And I said, "Doing what?" "Well, you know, whatever." So we got on the bus, and we came to Atlanta. I wouldn't have wanted my little girl to do it, but anyway -- we came to Atlanta.

Her happy-go-lucky attitude is very different that Betty Williams, who entered the Bell Bomber workforce for a very different set of reasons. As a young girl, she developed an interest in planes and went to vocational school in Evansville Indiana to learn specific skills related to building P-38 fighter planes. Betty’s training was focused working the bulkheads of the plane, but she was also taught “riveting and counter sinking” to broaden her skill set. She worked in the Evansville plant for about a
year before being, in effect, transferred to the Bell Bomber plant in Marietta. At the Bell plant, Betty rose to a foreman’s position, a very unusual accomplishment for women in industrial plants at this time. In another more contrast, Ernestine Slade also came to work at Bell Bomber, but for her it was out of necessity. Ernestine quit a job as a housekeeper in Atlanta to take a better paying job at Bell Bomber. For Ernestine, who is black, the change in jobs was about money, race, and power.

…you made so much money at Bell -- much more money at Bell than you could make working for a permanent family. So me and my friends, we didn't go to the employment office here in Marietta. We went into Atlanta to the employment office. And that's how I got hired. Then I came back, and I told this lady that I had been working for, they hired me that day, told me when I could start to work. So that weekend, I told her. I said, "Now I'm going to start working at the Bomber Club" -- that's what we called it. Well, naturally, she didn't like it, but she didn't fuss too much about. And I said, "I'll be leaving you." And so I went on that Monday morning to work out at Bell.

All three women found themselves working at the same place, but for very different reasons. Students need to understand that there were a variety of reasons why women worked at places like Bell Bomber. In our three examples we can see evidence of at least three reasons, adventure, profession opportunity, and utility. Each woman had a personal story, unique and equally meaningful. Understanding the conflicting reasons they had for working is a start toward understand why some women left the workplace after the war. For Ernestine, it would be a life of work interwoven with the birth of her children. She worked out of necessity and when she did not work, she describes life as difficult. When talking about a time when she was out of work and at home with young children she said of her husband pay “that was for food, clothing if we needed it, wood or coal and -- well, that covered everything. And we made it somehow.” Ernestine worked most of her life in occupations and places including housekeeping, a bakery, a restaurant, a country club, an insurance agency, and a county government office for senior services.

Betty’s story was very different. After working her way up to a foreman’s position, Betty abruptly left the Bell Bomber plant and moved back to her home in Indiana. She left after finding out that her husband of just three months had died in service while fighting in France. Betty would only stay in Indiana a few months before moving back to Atlanta and remarrying. After the war, she talks about the lack of work and indicated that only her husband worked, in a job at a grocery store. The economic activity which brought people to Atlanta and Marietta during the war would have a long lasting impact and students can she how Betty Williams is a living example of this impact – relocating permanently to Atlanta even after the her work in the city was done.

Although Ruth Ivey went to work at the Bell Bomber plant as an adventure, she was prepared to work, having attended one year of business school after graduating from high school. After the Bell Bomber plant closed, Ruth worked briefly for Sinclair, and then after her husband took a commission in the Army Air Corps, gradually eased out of the workforce. “And so then I started moving around with him. I've had a few odds and ends of jobs and part-time things here and there and volunteer and whatever, but I've never worked at a full-time job since then.” Ruth’s experience was not uncommon and may in-fact be what students think was the norm. It is vital for students to understand the complexity of working life for women during and after the war. Professionals like Betty Williams were breaking gender barriers with work in male dominated areas. Women like Ernestine Slade worked and raised a family, struggling to make life better for her children in conditions which were often hostile to her. Ruth Ivey and millions like her settled into a pattern of life that would fuel a massive baby boom and change once again the social and cultural patterns of life in the United States.

There are a number of resources which might be useful to teachers and students as they study about women working in the United States during the 20th century. The Harvard Open Library has a
massive online collection of resources relating to women at work. Although, the resources in the collection predate our story, ranging from 1870 to 1930, they could be useful in setting the context for women at work during and after World War II. A more relevant resource is an online collection developed by a group of high students in Rhode Island titled “What did you do during the war grandma?” <http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/tocCS.html>. The collection includes 26 interviews with women who lived and in some cases worked during World War II all conducted and transcribed by high school students. A short article about women and World War II by Kristine M. McCusker <http://www.humanitiestennessee.org/community/articles/wwwii.php> includes as good bibliography of secondary sources on the topic.

**Topic: The Bell Bomber plant in Marietta, Georgia, during World War II: A Historical Inquiry**

**Subject: Georgia Studies or U.S. History**

Note: This lesson as written may take two or more days in a fifty-minute class. Of course, teacher may pick and choose the activities deemed most appropriate for their classrooms.

**Goals:**

1. Students will examine primary source material and make judgments based upon their analysis.
2. Students will gain an understanding of some of the tremendous changes in Georgia as a result of World War II.

**Behavioral Objectives:**

1. Each student will analyze primary source materials and identify positive and negative results of the location of the Bell Bomber Plant in Cobb County, Georgia. Then each student will evaluate the short-term and long-term consequences of the location of the Bell Bomber Plant in Cobb County Georgia.
2. Each student will analyze photos and posters to consider the changing roles of women in the civilian workforce and the military during and after world War II.

**QCCs:**

Georgia Studies

33. Topic: Contributions: World War I, World War II
Standard: Examines Georgia's contributions to U. S. participation in World Wars I and II.

U.S. History

33. Topic: Global Conflict
Standard: Analyzes the causes and results of America's participation in World War II

**GPS**

Georgia Studies
SS8H9 The student will describe the impact of World War II on Georgia’s development economically, socially, and politically.

U.S. History
SSUSH20 The student will identify the origins, major developments, and the domestic impact of World War II, especially the growth of the federal government.
Bibliography

Resources on "Bell Bomber Plant"

Video: Georgia Stories Video The Rise of Modern Georgia” Part 4 for more information see http://www.gpb.org/GeorgiaStories/videoHomePg.jsp

U.S. National Archives and Records Administration Digital Classroom http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/index.html The National Archives website in an amazing site with an array of photographs. Click on the “Search in Digital Classroom” to locate images and documents related World War II, Women in the war and the Superfortress B-29

Resources on "B-29 Air Raids"


Video: Greene, Myron. A World War II Odyssey of an Indiana Dentist. Available from Georgia State University’s Pullen Library Media Center; contains personal narratives, 1939-1945.

Resources on Women in World War II

Florida State University: Institute on World War II and the Human Experience [links]- An excellent site with very informative links. Links directly to "Rosie" sites and "women in the military" sites. Has a poster database that includes the famous "We Can Do It" Rosie the Riveter poster, as well as the Norman Rockwell painting.


Georgia Stories resources on “The Women of World War II” http://www.gpb.org/GeorgiaStories/homepg1.html click on the file cabinet, then navigate by year on the left to the Women of World War II episode

General resources

Women Come to the Front: Journalists, Photographers, and Broadcasters During WWII. From the Library of Congress http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/wcf/wcf0001.html

Guide for searching Library of Congress and American Memory online collections relating to Women’s History http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/awsearchex.html

Historical maps of Cobb County - [http://www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gainfo/histcountymaps/cobbhistmaps.htm](http://www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gainfo/histcountymaps/cobbhistmaps.htm)

Current and historical population figures for Georgia and Cobb County from U. S. Census - [http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/13/13067lk.html](http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/13/13067lk.html)


Activity One
Manufacturing during World War II: The Bell Bomber Plant

World War II brought tremendous change to the world. Massive loss of life, political disruption, and physical/environmental destruction affected large percentages of people in dozens of countries throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Excepting of the loss of life, the United States may have been most significantly affected socially and economically. The military buildup of the early 1940s energized the American economy and changed the workplace. In Marietta, Georgia one of the largest defense plants in the country was built to produce the B-29 Superfortress. The plant brought rapid change to Marietta, and as is often the case with change, some of it was good and some bad. In this activity, students will explore the development of the Bell Bomber plant during World War II to determine if the good outweighed the bad.

To open the activity, provide students with background information on the wartime production effort in the U.S. and the plan to build the Bell Aircraft plant in Marietta also called the Bell Bomber Plant. This can be done in an introductory lecture or by providing students with the fact sheet available in the resources section of this lesson.

Student groups will investigate the question: "Was the development of the Bell Bomber Plant in Marietta beneficial or harmful in its overall effects?" Students should work in groups of three or four to analyze resources and use them as evidence in constructing a response to the question.

The resources include information relating to

- Infrastructure (having to do with transpiration facilities, utilities, public buildings, sewage and sanitation, etc.)
- Housing
- Jobs
- Schools
- Quality of life (having to do with the cost of living, the environment, the atmosphere of the place where you live, the safety and security of the place where you live, etc.)
- Life and work for women
- Life and work for African Americans

In their groups, students should complete the chart titled "The Bell Bomber Plant: Positive and Negative Effects." Students should analyze a range of resources to determine whether they believe it portrays a positive or negative result of the Bell Bomber Plant. This lesson includes newspaper excerpts, photos, interviews, and posters which students might use in this analysis in the resources section. Additional resources might be obtained through the bibliography on page 2 of this lesson.

As a closing, draw parallels to the present with question such as: "How does the Lockheed Martin Plant (the successor to Bell Aircraft) affect Cobb County and Georgia as a whole? What benefits and problems are related to Lockheed’s presence? What infrastructure and environmental problems do Cobb County and Georgia still wrestle with as a result of economic growth?"
Activity Two

Women working during World War II: Photographic evidence

One of the most interesting social effects of World War II was the movement of women into the American labor force. The Bell Bomber plant was typical of hundreds of places in the United States where women took jobs in areas which were typically male only. In this activity, students will investigate photographs of women working in the Bell Bomber plant in an effort to understand the short and long term impact of their work. To open this activity, ask students if they have heard of Rosie the Riveter. Introduce students to the history of women working in the industrial war effort during World War II. One resource which may be helpful in preparing an introductory lecture is available from the Library of Congress at [http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/journey/robbie.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/journey/robbie.html). This resource, titled *Rosie the Riveter: Real Women Workers in World War II*, includes a webcast of Library of Congress Women’s Studies Specialist Sheridan Harvey discussing the lives of real women workers in World War II.

Following the opening presentation, students should examine the photographs available in the resources section of this lesson using the photo analyzer worksheet, also available in the resource section of this lesson. The worksheet will facilitate students as they analyze photographs and make specific suggestions about the occupations women were engaging. Students will need to develop titles and answer a series of questions about each photo. The focus of this part of the activity should be on summarizing the content of the photo, determining the context of the photo and making inferences from the photos. Students should be able to construct their own summaries, but they will need help developing the context and making inferences. The context of the photo would include the conditions in which the photo was produced and what was going on outside the photo when it was taken. Inferences are the guesses or impressions which can be drawn from the photo. To save time, students might be grouped and asked to analyze smaller sets of photos.

After all photos have been analyzed, students should be directed to draw on multiple photos to make suggestions about the types of work in which women engaged. Students should consider the consequences of the entry of women in the occupations traditional reserved for men and might be asked to write up their findings in a brief essay or paragraph.

Possible extension activities

Student might also be provided with opportunities to analyze historical census data on women in the workplace. The Historical Census Browser available at [http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/](http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/) includes data on “Economy/Manufacturing/Employment” which can be manipulated by year and reporting category. Students might also seek data on the number of women who entered the workforce during the war years. Overall, about 19 million women were employed during World War II. Over 2 million left the workplace after the war ended. The Department of Labor has some resources on women in the workforce available through their website at [http://www.dol.gov/dol/audience/aud-women.htm](http://www.dol.gov/dol/audience/aud-women.htm)
Activity Three

Propaganda, Women, and World War II

Propaganda was highly effective in drawing women into the military and the civilian workforce during WWII. In this activity, students will analyze and compare several WWII propaganda posters and one cartoon. The goal of the activity is to have students determine how the posters motivated women to join the military or labor force as well as how the posters represented the service or labor being performed. For example, was participation in the military or workforce portrayed as glamorous, strenuous, patriotic, creative, etc.

Students should identify the motives behind the production of the posters. Additionally, students should assess the effect of the propaganda on the type of labor performed by women and the shift in society’s expectation of women’s roles in the workforce during and short after WWII. At the conclusion of the activity, students should understand that the changing gender roles for women were temporary and, after the war, many women returned to the domestic sphere.

Using the photo and poster analyzer worksheet, have students work with the posters to make judgments about the reasons for their production and the potential consequences of their use. This activity should differ from the photo activity described earlier. The goal of this activity should focus on the purposes of the posters. Students might describe the effect of the posters in simulated newspaper articles or possibly in a report to a simulated watchdog group.

Students can also create their own propaganda poster targeted at women to either attract them into the labor force or to drive women out of the labor force after the end of the war. Additional posters are available from the following online resources.

World War II Poster Collection, Government Publications Department at Northwestern University Library [http://www.library.northwestern.edu/govpub/collections/wwii-posters/](http://www.library.northwestern.edu/govpub/collections/wwii-posters/)


Posters from the WPA available at American Memory [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaposters/wpahome.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaposters/wpahome.html)
Resource list for activities

1) Fact Sheet on the Bell Bomber Plant.
2) Handout titled “Bell Bomber plant: positive and negative” - chart for organizing information about the benefits and costs of the Bell Bomber Plant
3) Handout titled “Was the bell bomber plant beneficial overall or harmful overall?” – questions for prompting students to consider the benefits and costs of the Bell Bomber Plant
4) Photo and poster analyzer worksheet
5) Newspaper excerpts from the Marietta Journal, Marietta Times, Rotalight, Atlanta Journal, Atlanta Constitution and Living Atlanta by Clifford Kuhn
6) Photos of female workers at the Bell Bomber Plant
7) Interviews with female workers at the Bell Bomber Plant
8) World War II Posters from the United States Government Printing Office
Fact sheet on the bell bomber plant

Bell Aircraft Corporation, of Buffalo, New York, built the plant to produce B-29 bombers for the Army Air Corps. It was financed by the Defense Plant Corporation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, a U.S. Government agency.

**BOMBERS:** The plant produced Boeing Bombers/ B-29 with the longest flying range of any World War II bomber. The plane had four motors and flew with a crew of eight.

**LOCATION:** The plant was built on a 260-acre tract on old Atlanta Highway about 2 1/2 miles from Marietta. It was next to the old Rickenbacker Air Field.

**SIZE:** The plant itself was 800 feet wide by 2,500 feet long and covering 2,000,000 square feet.

**CONSTRUCTION:** Construction began in February 1942 and took eight months. The first B-29 was completed in February 1944.

**EMPLOYEES:** About 800 people worked on the construction. At peak production almost 40,000 people worked at Bell plant. More than 6,000 of the employees were women.

**PAYROLL:** The plant had a monthly payroll of $2,000,00. Executive and white collar jobs paid at minimum $2,600 per year. Skilled laborers started at 85 cents an hour and unskilled laborers started at 70 cents. The minimum wage at the time was about 40 cents an hour.

**HOUSING:** The location of the plant in Cobb County doubled the county’s population. A severe housing shortage occurred. Over 1,000 new housing units were built in the Marietta area during the time the plant operated.

**WORK:** Most of the work was done on the assembly line--relatively unskilled and repetitive tasks.

**PERMANENT PLANT:** The plant was expected to continue building planes after the war. The Lockheed Corporation bought the plant and continues to produce the aircraft today.

**AIRPORT:** All three runways at the airport were extended and used for testing planes. Those runways are still in use today.

**INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS:** Improvements were made to Rickenbacker Air Field. Cobb County and Marietta city officials had to struggle with providing services to the new residents. New water and gas pipe were laid for Cobb County. Improvements were made to two railroad lines. Two major highways were constructed.

**POPULATION:** The Georgia population in 1940 was 3,123,723. In 1950 it was 3,444,578. The population of Cobb County was 38,272 in 1940 and 61,830 in 1950.
**Bell bomber plant: positive and negative**

**Group Members**

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<tr>
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<th>Positive Results</th>
<th>Negative Results</th>
<th>Evidence Used</th>
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<td>Infrastructure <em>(transportation, utilities, public buildings, etc.)</em></td>
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<td>Housing</td>
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<td>Women</td>
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<td>Quality of Life <em>(cost of living, environment, loss of small town atmosphere. etc.)</em></td>
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<td>African Americans</td>
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Was the bell bomber plant beneficial overall or harmful overall?

Group Members ____________________________________________________________

Analyze resources and consider the following questions.

1. How did Marietta and Atlanta change because of the building of the Bell Bomber Plant?

2. What were the best results that came from the building of the Bell Bomber Plant? Who especially benefited from the Plant? Why do you say so?

3. What were the most negative results that came from the building of the Bell Bomber Plant? Who was especially hurt by the building of the Plant? Why do you say so?

4. Final judgment - Was the Bell Bomber Plant more beneficial or more harmful overall? Write a paragraph to explain your judgment. List and explain the specific evidence you use to support your position.

5. If you were faced with a choice of a growing economy which provided plenty of jobs and prosperity but at the same time it led to increase traffic congestion, a lack of affordable housing, pollution, crime, and other problems, would you choose it? Why or why not? Can you think of instances where Georgia faces these choices today?
## Photo and poster analyzer worksheet

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<td>Describe exactly what you see in the photo/poster including: the subject of the photo/poster; what are people doing in the photo/poster; what is the physical setting; and other details can you see.</td>
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<th>Context</th>
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<td>Summarize what you already know about the context of this photo/poster including: when the photo or poster was taken or created; where it was taken; and why it was taken.</td>
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<td>Infer from the photo/poster about thing that are not actually in the picture. What is the message of this photo/poster? What can we conclude about the actions of the person or people in the photo/poster?</td>
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**Bringing it together** – What commonalities emerge across the photos/posters? Consider some or all the photos/posters and think about what the photos tell us about the women in the workplace.
**Newspaper excerpts**

*Marietta Journal, January 28, 1942*

At a meeting of Marietta, Cobb County, and Atlanta banker and financial institutions Tuesday afternoon, at which sixty attended, the matter of financing the building of 1,000 houses in this community was discussed...Regarding houses for the thousands that will come to live here [to work in the Bell Aircraft Plant], Mayor Blair said he was in favor of them being built by private citizens and that only in case of necessity would a government housing project be asked for .... All houses built would be expected to be of permanent construction and a credit to the community.

*The Marietta Times, January 29, 1942*

Final details on erection of the $15,000,000 bomber plant have been completed. Work will start in a matter of weeks. And our quiet, peaceful "aristocratic" little city will suffer a change.

It will be unpleasing to some of us. But it will mean great things to many who never expected anything much out of life.

New people. New faces on the [town] Square. New stores. New streets. New houses. New and bigger traffic jams (believe it or not!). The dogs that scratch their fleas on the sidewalks will find themselves crowded out into the hazards of the gutter.

*Rotalight (publication of the Marietta Rotary Club, men’s business and public service club), February 12, 1942*

Some 77 years ago, come next July, one William T. Sherman, with his army of damnyankees, invaded these parts and burned our little village of Marietta, Georgia, to the ground. The intervening years have seen a rise from the ashes of Sherman's fires a peaceful, healthy, reasonably prosperous community of cultured, law-abiding, God-fearing people . . .

Word now comes that another army of yankees is headed our way. They are no longer armed with torch and sword but with millions on millions of Uncle Sam's dollars. Their object is not to destroy our community but to build it up. They are no longer our enemies, but our brothers, seeking the help of our southern workmen in making weapons to defeat the foes of freedom.

The Bell Aircraft Corporation... expects to employ forty thousand people. The weekly payroll will be nearly two million dollars -- ten times as great as the largest industrial payroll in Georgia today .... We will soon be selling our cowpastures for city lots .... A deluge [flood] is coming. Every facility of our community will be taxed beyond capacity. Housing, transpiration, schools, traffic, police, and fire protection -- these are only a few of the services which must be doubled and tripled. All of this is going to cost money, and more money for local government means increased taxes .... Whether we like it or not, our way of life in Marietta, Georgia, will soon be gone forever.
Atlanta Journal, February 15, 1942

When the great flying plant opens at Marietta on October 1, women will do their share in building the planes .... At least half of the workers on every shift will be women, and powder-puff mechanics may constitute an even larger percentage of the personnel. The fact that men are needed to fly the planes and man the guns in this war isn't the only reason why women are to be employed. It has been discovered that girls make expert airplane builders.

[The demand for workers has] left a tremendous problem for the people in the Atlanta district to solve. It was an order for several thousand trained airplane builders by the time the plant opens on October 1, and 40,000 trained workers by the end of next year . . . [School officials] have already worked out schedules that will graduate 3,000 workers every 10 weeks . . . [Dr. M.D. Collins, state superintendent of education, said:] "... We will use assembly line methods. We'll run our schools three shifts, 24 hours a day!"

The Marietta Times, February 19, 1942

Wrath of Marietta property renters at suddenly increased levies brought forth a declaration from Mayor L.M. Blair today that it would become "the position of the city to prevent unjustified increase in rentals by taxation or regulation." . . . The Times . . . reproduces a letter sent a renter by a Marietta property owner in which a rent of $50 a month is asked on living property which formerly cost only $20 per month. [Mayor Blair stated:] "... The city hopes all classes of people will benefit by the location here of the Bell Aircraft Corporation Bomber Plant. If, however, property owners raise rentals above reasonable bounds, then unquestionably the federal government will step in and place a ceiling on all rentals."

Atlanta Journal, February 22, 1942

A plan to change working shifts every hour at the bomber plant to be built north of Atlanta is under consideration by officials of the Bell Aircraft Corporation. The Journal learned Saturday, the idea being to avoid great traffic congestion that would result with thousands of workers arriving and leaving the factory ....With a shift change every hour, not more than probably 2,000 men and women will leave or go to work at one time .... It has been suggested that the N.C. & St. L. Railroad lay double tracks from Atlanta to the Cobb County site to run work trains .... Proposals have been submitted to the Government in the hope that federal funds may be made available to make Northside Drive a four-lane highway from the point it joins the new Marietta Highway all the way in to Fourteenth Street.

The [Cobb County] Planning Commission also has in mind a belt highway that would lead off the new Marietta Highway in the vicinity of the Chattahoochee River, and skirt the city, allowing workers to drive around the borders of Atlanta to homes in the south and west sections.
Newspaper excerpts

*Atlanta Journal*, February 22, 1942 (continued)

Such a project is largely conditional, however, on the automobile and tire rationing situation, which may eliminate to a great extent the possibilities of using motor cars in transporting workers.

...Fulton and Cobb Counties are concerned with keeping undesirable persons from being attracted by the bug defense project.... Fulton zoning laws are strong enough to prohibit families from living in their cars or in trailers that have not proper sanitary facilities.

...Plans have been made to lay an overground water main from Atlanta to the site of the bomber factory .... The City of Atlanta plans to lay two permanent underground mains, one along the old Marietta Highway and one along the new route.... The two permanent mains are to be connected with lateral lines so that homes and businesses situated between the two roads may be served.

*The Marietta Times*, February 26, 1942

Let’s be frank about this bomber plant and rush of newcomers. It will congest an already congested town. It will end the quiet old residential flavor of Marietta. The city that springs up here will not be the one we have known and loved. It will be bigger, perhaps more prosperous, but very likely not better than the old.

*Marietta Journal*, March 16, 1942

The City Board of Education has submitted to Mayor Blair an exhaustive report on the present need of expansion in view of the prospective increase in population. ... According to a recent preliminary survey, the population of Marietta will reach 20,000 by the end of 1943. This will require over three times the present facilities of our elementary schools and double the capacity of the high school .... The entire building program [will cost] $320,000 ... [and will require] an increase in the school tax rate.

*The Marietta Times*, April 3, 1942

...40 families have to be moved [to make way for the construction of the Bell Bomber Plant]. The notices went to them today. Fair prices will be offered, and accepted, but some of them will feel that they lose what money cannot repay -- and they will be right, or they lose their homes, into which went much of their lives. But this is war, and individual people must suffer.... We could sympathize with those who were losing their homes, the lovely old before-the-[Civil] war home of the Garners with its fine, well-kept lawns and gardens, all of them to go, make room for the greatest single enterprise of the war.
Newspaper excerpts

*Atlanta Constitution*, May 17, 1942

You can hear the thunder of their engines coming out of the Earth up at Smyrna, where the hills, green with grass, have been ripped away and thrown over into the valleys to make way for bombers by Bell.

It is smooth now. The hills are gone. The grass is gone. There is only the red, raw vista of Georgia clay.

From *Living Atlanta* by Clifford M. Kuhn, Harlon E. Joye and E. Bernard West.

Joel Smith ... was one black citizen who [obtained] a better wartime job: "I worked for the [Bell] aircraft plant during World War II as a counselor. My job was to help apply for gas, tires or whatever they had to have through the Rationing Board. We had a Rationing Board at the plant, and my job as a counselor was to interview those people and see that they got whatever they needed to get on their job everyday."
Photographs of Women at work in the Bell Bomber Plant

Photo #1

Photo #2
Photographs of Women at work in the Bell Bomber Plant

Photo #3

Photo #4

Photo #5
Photographs of Women at work in the Bell Bomber Plant

Photo #6

Photo #7

Photo #8
Photographs of Women at work in the Bell Bomber Plant

Photo #9

Photo #10

Photo #11
Photographs of Women at work in the Bell Bomber Plant

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Photo #14
Photographs of Women at work in the Bell Bomber Plant

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Photo #17
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Photographs of Women at work in the Bell Bomber Plant

Photo #23

Photo #24
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
COBB COUNTY ORAL HISTORY SERIES
NO. 73
INTERVIEW WITH BETTY L. WILLIAMS
CONDUCTED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT
SUNDAY, 22 OCTOBER 2000

Cobb County Oral History Series, No. 73
Interview with Betty L. Williams.
Conducted by Thomas A. Scott
Sunday, 22 October 2000
Location: Social Science Building, Kennesaw State University

THOMAS SCOTT: I’m interviewing Betty L. Williams for the Cobb County Oral History Series, and particularly we’re going to be talking about her experiences at Bell Aircraft. Her son, Kenneth Williams, is also participating in the interview.

TS: How did you get interested in airplanes?
BW: Well, I guess it was from my cousin, Tom. He took me up several times in an open cockpit airplane and almost scared me to death. He was always doing all kinds of things like that. I got interested in airplanes from him.

TS: I see. Did he own his own plane?
BW: Yes. I don’t know what kind of bomber it was that he flew in the war. I think it was a B-17. There was a big write-up about Tom after he brought his plane in on one engine and saved a whole bunch of people’s lives.

TS: I guess he did.
BW: Yes. He was the one that was always aggravating us and scaring us to death. We thought it was neat.

TS: About how old were you when you went up in that plane?
BW: Between fifteen and sixteen. I thought he would break my neck.

TS: So you decided that you wanted to go to this school. And what was the name of the school?
BW: Well, it was Evansville, Indiana. They had built the Republic plant. That’s where they had the school, and were building the P-47’s.

TS: I see. So you went to school to learn how to build P-47’s.
BW: Right.

TS: How big a plane is a P-47?
BW: Very small compared to a bomber, of course.

TS: Is it like a two-engine?
BW: No.

KEN WILLIAMS: It’s a single engine.
BW: Yes. Just about the same size as the P-38, wouldn’t you say, except for the engines?
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

KW: The P-47 had a single fuselage. The P-38 was split. BW: Right, but I mean the size of the airplane itself, the fuselage

TS: How long was the training program that you went through?
BW: The first one was six weeks, and then the second phase of it was around three months. But they were in a hurry to get you in and out of there.
TS: Right. They needed people to build planes.
BW: They didn't need you sitting around at recess and all that kind of good stuff.
TS: So a six week and then a twelve week basically. So you went about eighteen weeks.
BW: And then you went back for different refreshers when something new came up that they wanted you to know about.
TS: Now, specifically what were you training to do?
BW: In that plant you had one thing to do, that's all. My job was inside the fuselage. I used a long piece of sandpaper. You filed down or sanded down the web bulkheads; I can't think of the name . . . That's all I did.
TS: So all you're doing is sanding.
BW: Yes. That was my entire job; that didn't take much skill.
TS: Well, it sounds like it would be very tiring work.
BW: It was, but if you're young and you had a lot of young people around you, it's not bad.
TS: So you talked while you worked.
BW: Oh, yes.
TS: So had good conversations.
BW: I wouldn't say good.
TS: To make the time pass.
BW: It wasn't good conversation--just conversation.
TS: Right, right.
BW: But they laughed a lot; it wasn't a tight situation where you felt like you were in the army.
TS: Was it eight-hour work days or did you do a lot of overtime?
BW: A lot of overtime. You very seldom worked eight hours unless you were on one of those training things. But if you were actually in there working, and they were trying to get so many planes out by such and such time, why then it was not unusual to work two shifts.
TS: Two shifts straight?
BW: Right. But twelve hours is about as much as a person can take and produce anything worthwhile. That's just my opinion.
TS: I would think so too. How much were they paying you, do you remember?
BW: You know, it was not a great deal of money compared to what you boys would be thinking about. I remember one check. It was $133.00, and for some reason there for awhile it was $200-and-something. It seems like nothing now but that was good money.
TS: Sounds like it. Was that for how many weeks, for one week?
BW: Well, I was basing that on a forty-hour week. Of course, if you worked more there would be more.
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

TS: Yes. That sounds real good.
BW: But to the employees, they were making super bucks. I mean . . .
TS: Compared to everybody else.
BW: Right.

TS: When you went through your training program before you actually started sanding the bulkheads, did they teach you all phases of building an airplane like how to be a riveter and so on?
BW: Yes. They taught us the riveting and the counter sinking. If you were pulled off a list they wanted you to be able to go and take a job. See, we were trained for all of that; it just so happened that I was chosen for some odd reason to be inside that fuselage. After the place closes up they're supposed to vacuum all these metal shavings out of the planes to get ready for the next shift. I was working overtime, and they didn't know it. Instead of vacuuming they stuck the nozzle in and blew the shavings out with air. I'm paying for that in my eye to this day. But our family had never believed in suing anybody. People back then just didn't jump on someone and sue them if they got hurt. So I never even thought about getting anything for that.
TS: Did you wear a mask while you were doing all that sanding?
BW: Yes, you were supposed to wear one at all times. No, I did not. [laughter]
TS: You were supposed to but you usually didn't?
BW: No. As soon as the inspector came by we'd take them off. It's kind of like your seat belt now. You don't wear it all the time.
TS: It probably gets very hot with those masks on, doesn't it?
BW: The people I had at Bell were doing counter sinking, and definitely they needed a mask on, because metal would come off there and curl up. It was absolutely mandatory that they had a mask on.
TS: I would think it would be kind of dusty in there where you're doing all that sanding.
BW: Oh, yes, yes.
TS: That the air would not be very high quality.
BW: Yes, but if you're seventeen, eighteen years old you don't think ahead; you're not worrying about it.

TS: Did you feel like you were doing something daring to go to work in the aircraft industry or did it just seem a normal thing to do?
BW: It was just something I wanted to do; so it didn't seem like it was daring.
TS: How long did you work at Republic?
BW: Probably a year. By that time Bell was getting ready to open, and they had started bringing the people in.
TS: So you went straight from Republic to Bell?
BW: Right. It started out as eleven, but there were nine of us that came down together. We were chosen by Gene Shippee. I can't think of what his title would be--he's the boss. He told us to come to Georgia with him. I wish I knew if Gene was still alive; Gene could tell you everything you needed to know.
TS: So Gene Shippee was the foreman and he picked . . .
BW: He was more than a foreman; Gene was a . . .
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

KW: Departmental manager.
TS: Department manager at Republic.
BW: He was over the fuselage and everything as far as the assembly part.
TS: So he's a major supervisor then in the company that has to do with everything with the fuselage. BW: Right. The reason we came was not that we were so good. It was because there was no one here for them to hire that had experience. So they gave us a few tests. Then also they wanted to make sure that we wanted to come. But as far as the tests were concerned they weren't anything difficult. Then, when we passed, we came on down. There were only two of us that stayed though.
TS: Really?
BW: Yes, within two or three weeks everyone else had gone home.
TS: They just didn't like it here?
BW: They just didn't like it. They didn't like southerners, because we didn't know that we were Yankees until we came down here.
TS: You thought Yankees were in New England?
BW: [laughter] Yeah.
TS: Did you come down here before the B-1 building had opened up or after? In other words, did you work in Atlanta for awhile? I understand that they had some training programs in Atlanta that they operated before the plant actually got into production; I think it was at least March of '43 before they actually start production in the B-1 building.
BW: I took some classes that were in there. But when I came in, the first thing I remember was that a machine shop was over in the next aisle. It actually had men working there--and I do say men too because I didn't see a solitary woman in there. The building would have had to have been partially completed.

TS: You're looking at a document.
KW: You graduated from here. November 27, 1943 was when you got the elementary blue print certificate.
TS: Right, it says "Certificate of Merit, Georgia Division, Bell Aircraft. This is to certify that Betty L. Morgan"--which was your name at the time--"has satisfactorily completed the Bell Aircraft training course in elementary blue print. In consideration of the results achieved, this certificate is awarded." It gives Charles A. Britton, Training Manager, 11-27-43. Then there's a later certificate, July 3 of '44 where you've completed a foremanship training course and by that time it says Betty M. McLean. So I guess you were married between November and July.
BW: Yes.
TS: Would this elementary blue print course be before you actually started working on the plane or were you already working?
BW: I was already working.
TS: You were already working and then went through this course.
KW: And it says she's been building them since August '43, August 8.
TS: Okay, all right, great. This is her son, Ken Williams, handed this to me: "The bearer, Betty McLean, has been helping us here in Bell Aircraft to build B-29 bombers from August, '43 until this date." Okay. So you came apparently in August of '43 when things are really just beginning to hum inside the plant.

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Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

BW: Yes.
TS: Okay, what was your first job at Bell Aircraft when you first started working here? What was the first job that they had you doing?
BW: I started on the wing.
TS: On the wing.
BW: Right. Well, your first few weeks you're actually not working; you're only observing the few people that do know how to work.
TS: So you're watching somebody assemble the wing.
BW: Right. Then it won't be long until they would pick someone out of that group, and they would be a leader. It works like that.
TS: So you start out observing the wings being assembled.
BW: Right. The wing would be brought in to our department just as a frame and then . . .

TS: Oh, so the frame's already made before it gets to you.
BW: Right.
TS: Do you remember what department you were in, what the number was on it?
BW: 38-6.
TS: So the framing comes in. Then what all do you do to it?
BW: When you say it comes in, you don't pick up something and move it. You move what it's on. When it would get to me it would be fastened together. Then we started to put the big sheets of metal to . . .
TS: So it's already fastened to the plane by the time you're working on it?
BW: No.
TS: How do they move the frame to your work station?
BW: There's a picture with the stair-step things on it. Just as if we'd lined up six of these chairs, and they're fastened together. Then you would build on there. What we would do is move the whole chair thing down, so it would be the whole . . .
TS: So the main thing you're doing then is putting this sheet metal on the plane? Is it aluminum or what kind of metal is it that makes the wing?
BW: Steel, isn't it?
TS: I guess it would be steel, wouldn't it? And does it have any kind of . . .?
BW: Well, now, you have huge, huge cranes up overhead that will bring in these big sheets of metal and things and set them down where you need them and various parts and frames and things.
TS: These are really dumb questions on my part but do you rivet them on or how do you attach them to the frame?
BW: The blue prints will show you exactly where the rivets are supposed to go, and that has to really be exact. If you threw a foot off here you would throw, you know. . . .
TS: We're looking at a picture of a team of riveters on the center wing section at Bell's Marietta Plant Number 6, which, of course, is the plant here in Marietta. It shows the workers going up steps. They're on a platform where they're high enough to work on the wing that is turned sideways, isn't it?
BW: Right.
TS: And so they're doing the riveting and I guess various other jobs.
BW: The metal and things are brought in by that crane. It would set it down on this right here.
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

TS: So a crane brings in the wing and puts it . . .
BW: The wing will be built right there, but it brings in this heavy thing.
TS: This is from a book, Building the B-29, by Jacob Vander Meulen. So that's the kind of work that you were doing then?
BW: After it had an inspection stamp on the whole thing, then I would check my blue prints. Then we would start the counter sinking. Counter sinking is completely different from riveting, because it's making a little funnel shaped hole so that the rivet will fit down in it. Now, if the counter sinker makes the hole too large or too small, they are in trouble. Of course, too small, is easy; but too large well, that's more trouble. Then they have the inspectors come and decide what they want to do about that. Generally, most of the time it would pass by using such and such size rivet, if it wasn't going to put too much strain on the part.
TS: So if they've drilled the hole too large you use a larger rivet.
BW: Right, but they don't like to do that because actually it weakens the wing. Too many of those holes in that piece would cause the section to have been junked. But that was all I was responsible for was that top of the wing.

TS: Right, when you first got here. How long does it take before you're in a supervisory position?
BW: Like I told you before, it wasn't that I was intelligent. It was just that they did not have any people here that had experience. That's why within three or four months I was in the supervisor capacity.
TS: Now how many people did you supervise, would you say?
BW: It would be between thirteen and twenty-five on a crew. It was according to how fast they had to have that job done. For instance, if my counter sink people were not doing their job, then they held up the riveters that would come in behind them. Then in turn they would hold up something else. It would get to where it would hold up the actual assembly line. It's quite a sight for them to put all these wings and everything together like you were doing a toy thing. When they're all lined up over there getting ready to. . .
TS: When you supervised say thirteen to twenty-five, does this include the counter sink workers and the riveters?
BW: No, mine was counter sink only.
TS: So you're supervising all those that are doing the counter sink.
BW: Right.

TS: All right. I understand that this was men and women that you were supervising?
BW: Right. Mostly men though because there was a greater amount of men there than women.
TS: How unusual or how typical was that to have women who were supervising men on the assembly line? BW: Very bad. [chuckle]
TS: Not too many were there? BW: No, no, and they did not like it. Oh, mercy.
TS: They didn't?
BW: No, no, I had three strikes against me to start with. Like I told you, I didn't know I was a Yankee until I got here. I was much younger than they. The men would have a wife and three or four kids. There I would be, eighteen years old. They didn't care for
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

that. If a new job came in, they'd hand me some new blue prints to check. I would have to prove by doing. I couldn't just tell them, well, let's do this this way. I would have to actually do it to show them that I knew how before they would do it.

TS: They just automatically assumed you didn't know how until you showed them that you did.

BW: Well, they weren't against me. It was just that I was a woman; "You're a woman and you should be home doing the pots and pans and cooking cornbread."

TS: [chuckle] So there weren't very many women in supervisory jobs then?

BW: No. I didn't know of any others except Sylvie and I that were on the assembly. I don't know how many they probably had as far as the secretary and the office workers and this, that and the other. It was just more or less this is your space. Do it and that's it.

TS: So you didn't pay that much attention to what other people were doing.

BW: No, you didn't run around and say, "How's your department doing today?"

TS: Right, you minded your own business. But still this had to be very rare for you to be supervising men.

BW: Right.

TS: It looks like there's a lot of room in there. How long were you in the supervisory job? It's at least a year, wasn't it that you were supervising?

BW: I guess it'd be in the year and a half until I left. After my husband got killed I left and went back up to Indiana for awhile. Then when I came back that's when they were closing Bell down. I didn't see any point in going back to work for that little bit at the time.

TS: I understand you met your second husband, Paul Williams, while you were working on the wing section at Bell. He also worked at Bell, is that correct?

BW: Yes. He was on the bottom of the wing, and I was on the top. He actually had the real heavy riveters down there. I don't know exactly what they called it. It was actually in the center where the fuselage was; that's where he was. Where the wing fastened on.

TS: Where the wing fastened to the fuselage?

BW: Right.

TS: So that was his job to fasten the wing to the fuselage?

BW: Well, to get the wing set up so it could be fastened to the fuselage. It wouldn't be in the right department.

TS: Okay, so you have done your work, and the wing is assembled. Then it's moved to where the fuselage is and fastened to it. That's where he was?

BW: No, he was there at the same time I was. He didn't have to be there at the same time, but that's just usually where he was.

TS: So he's doing riveting work. He's a riveter?

BW: Doing counter sinking and riveting because they were huge, huge rivets. He was a sub-foreman and he had a crew.

TS: Now when did you get married?

BW: In 1945.

TS: Okay, so you married Paul Williams in '45. What about McLean?

BW: In '43. Allen was my first husband. He got killed.
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

TS: Did he ever work at Bell?
BW: No, he was from Okanogan, Washington.
TS: Where did you meet him?
BW: Here in Atlanta at the Fox Theater.
TS: Was he here because he was stationed here?
BW: He was a paratrooper over in one of the Carolinas.
BW: Yes. And they came up here on the weekends to . . .
TS: I see. And you just met him at the Fox Theater.
BW: Right.
TS: How long did it take to get married after you met him?
BW: Oh, it was a long time, probably about two weeks.
TS: Two weeks. [chuckle] Things went fast during war time, I guess, didn't they?
BW: Right, right, right.
TS: So he was up here on leave?
BW: Right.
TS: I see. And then married two weeks later.
BW: Yes.
BW: It was a little longer than two weeks; it was probably about two months. Allen always told it was two weeks, but it was probably two months. Really, people didn't wait around for anything; if you were going to do something, you just did it.
TS: Okay, so you get married after about two months, but you continue to work at Bell?
BW: Yes.
TS: And he goes back to Ft. Bragg I guess and then gets sent overseas.
BW: Right.
TS And then I guess you didn't ever see him again after that. So he was killed in Europe or Asia?
BW: In Europe.

TS: Do I understand that you left Bell after that? You left Bell Aircraft after he died?
BW: Right.
TS: And went back to Indiana?
BW: I did. And then by the time I came back well, that's when Bell was winding down. It was going to be no more.
TS: When was he killed by the way? Was that still in '44?
BW: Yes.
TS: Late '44? Okay. So you stayed up North for awhile and then came back to this area, but by then the War was almost over.
BW: Right.

TS: How did you deal with the resentment that men had against you as a foreman?
BW: I mostly laughed it off and let them know that I was just a friend, that I wasn't just a smart aleck in there. I was just there doing my job like they were. So it didn't take them long.
TS: Did you have the power to hire and fire people?
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

BW: No, what I would have to do would be to put in a complaint against someone. If they had so many complaints—I think about three—then they were called before a board. They would decide what to do. Now, if it was someone that was so bad, just really bad and physically hurting someone or something like that, you could go and say, "This guy’s got to go now." And they would do away with him.

TS: Were you working as many hours at Bell as you were at Republic? Working twelve hours?

BW: That would be according to [circumstances]. I was reading last night that President Roosevelt was not able to get the first B-29 finished when it was supposed to be. There was something wrong with it. If anything came up like that then they'd work everybody as hard as they could.

TS: Right. So you were often working two shifts at Bell?

BW: Not often, I'd say occasionally. When something arose when an order or a claim had to be at some place at a certain time then they would do everything possible to make it happen. They would even call or have the supervisors and the engineers and everybody working. I mean, if it meant that much.

TS: As hard as you were working I don't guess you had too much time for social life did you?

BW: Well, now, don't kid yourself.

TS: Don't go that far?

BW: When the second shift got off at eleven o'clock, we'd ride into Atlanta with our ride. At that time I had a room out in the West End [of Atlanta]. She'd drop us off there. By getting off at eleven and fooling around it'd probably be about two o'clock when we got home. They'd say, "I think I'm hungry." So we'd go out and get on the trolley and come all the way to downtown Atlanta and get a Manhattan sandwich or whatever. We wouldn't even get on the trolley to come back home till five or six o'clock. We weren't doing anything because there wasn't anything to do. I mean, there wasn't any hanky-panky stuff. But I think young kids can always find something to do.

TS: So that was your shift then, from three to eleven?

BW: That's the one I liked the best, because you could sleep late. I've always liked to stay up late.

TS: Well, thank you very much.
THOMAS SCOTT: Today I am interviewing Dorothy Odom who worked in personnel at the Bell Aircraft plant in Marietta during World War II. Ms. Odom, why don’t we just begin with a little background information about you? First of all, are you from Georgia?

DOROTHY ODOM: Atlanta.
TS: You were born and grew up in Atlanta.
DO: That is the truth.
TS: Then what year did you go to work at the Bell Aircraft plant?
DO: I was trying to figure that out on the way here, and I'm not really sure. I think it was around '42.
TS: Well, was it after the plant was already in full production that you started?
DO: Not really, because I was in the personnel department, the employment department; and they were desperate for people. I had a couple of girlfriends, and we worked some nights till twelve and one o'clock, because they were so in need of help.
TS: So about how many workers were there at Bell when you started would you say? Just a few thousand?
DO: Yes.
TS: So this is probably 1943 then.
DO: Actually, yes, probably, that’s better.
TS: I see. So you were hired right away to work in personnel?
DO: Correct.
TS: So primarily your office is involved in hiring people at that time?
DO: Hiring people, yes. And making sure they had the right papers, like birth certificates and citizenship and that sort of thing. You’d be surprised that some people didn’t have birth certificates.
TS: Probably pretty rare in the South at that time to have a birth certificate, wasn't it?
DO: Yes. You can’t come to work with just that; you’ve got to have this and this and this and this. Sure enough, when they came back, they had the family Bible, a big old thing.
TS: Now, was your job as a secretary? DO: No, I was just processing people, I guess is what you’d call it. Processing there, being sure they had the correct amount of
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

information. But they’d fill out the application. Then I would check it to be sure they had the birth certificate information and all that good stuff.

TS: Then what did you do with that? Who actually made the decision to hire them? How was that done?

DO: Well, basically they took everybody, because they were so in need. But there toward the end, when they were getting enough people, they were a little more, shall I say, choosy.

TS: Is that right? How many hours a week did you work at Bell?

DO: Well, we worked some nights till midnight. From eight or nine in the morning till midnight.

TS: Were you on hourly wages in the way you were paid? And so you got overtime when you worked extra?

DO: I think so, yes.

TS: You wouldn’t be salaried work, I guess.

DO: We’ll, I think I was salaried and then some overtime.

TS: Do you remember about what the wages were that you were making at Bell?

DO: No, I don’t.

TS: Did it seem like a lot at the time?

DO: It did to me.

TS: That seems to be a universal experience of people that wages were a lot better at Bell than people had experienced before.

DO: Yes.

TS: Well, tell me, once you came out to the plant, you were in the B-2 building, the administration building. I was over there just a week or so ago, and it hadn’t changed that much, I don’t think, since then. It’s a relatively small building, the administration part, compared to that huge plant. But did you run into the big shots while you were over there, the Jimmie Carmichaels and so on? Did you ever run into them in the halls or anything?

DO: If I did, I didn’t know it.

TS: So you just went to your office and did your job.

DO: Yes.

TS: So you say you worked till midnight; what time did you start each day?

DO: Nine.

TS: Well, how would you describe your experience at Bell? Was it the experience of a lifetime or a relatively unimportant part of your life? Was it real exciting to be there during World War II?

DO: Yes, it was. I don’t think we, that worked like I did, were as glamorous as Rosie the Riveter; but we did our part. I felt like I was doing something; so I felt pretty good about it.

TS: When you came out to the plant in Marietta, were you still looking at people’s birth certificates and that kind of job or had the job description changed when you came out here?

DO: No, it was the same thing.

TS: You’re still hiring people.
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

DO: Yes.
TS: So they're coming to apply for jobs, and you're obviously meeting a lot of people. You're saying very few people had birth certificates. What percentage, would you say, could really read and write of the people coming to work at Bell? Was it a high rate of literacy or did you run into a lot of people who had a third grade education?
DO: Yes, something like that. They were medium. I mean, some of them you would have to explain some of the things on the forms to them, and not all of them were black. There were some white people.
TS: Who couldn't read the form?
DO: Yes, I don't remember exactly what positions they got, but I'm sure it wasn't secretary. I was telling Deb the other day when we were talking about this--I said I can remember hiring midgets to work in the nose cone of the plane.
TS: Oh, really?
DO: Yes. Because big people wouldn't fit in the nose cone, you know, and I don't know if they prefer midgets or dwarfs or whatever, but little people. [chuckle]
TS: Right, right. So you're actually placing people in jobs then, when they come through you're . . .
DO: I think, in my opinion, when they came out of there that they had more job skills, let’s say, than they did when they came in, because they were building the plane actually and had to know one screw from another. So, in my opinion, I think they had a better education for getting a job than they did when they came in there.
TS: Well, weren’t there training schools in the plant?
DO: Yes.

TS: I know that it's a segregated plant at Bell, but I've also got a few pictures where it looks like blacks and whites are working together in at least a few situations. How did you handle that? If there were black workers did you assign them to different buildings or whatever than where the whites were?
DO: No, we were briefed, basically, this requires so and so and this requires so and so. When they sent us, "We need so many in this department, so many in that department," it didn't matter; color didn't matter.
TS: So blacks and whites are actually working together.
DO: Yes.
TS: Okay. I do have a few pictures where it looks exactly like that, and so, I'm not exactly sure how segregation worked at the plant. I've also heard of blacks being in separate buildings working from whites.
DO: I haven't heard that.
TS: What about where you're working? Were there any blacks at all that were working as secretaries or doing personnel work?
DO: Yes, I think so. And they were pretty good too.
TS: Okay. So in your office there were black workers.
DO: Yes.
TS: And they're pulling their own weight.
DO: Of course, yes.
TS: What would you say the impact of Bell was, first of all, on you? Did it teach you some skills that helped you later on?
DO: Not really. I mean, because I basically already knew what I was doing, and I didn't do anything else.
TS: Now, Ms. Odom, you worked from '43 to the end of the War at Bell? Did you stay till the plant closed?
DO: No, I could see the handwriting on the wall, I guess, for lack of a better expression, and I left before it closed. Because I could see that it was closing, you know, and they were getting rid of people in my department. So I left before they closed.
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
COBB COUNTY ORAL HISTORY SERIES
NO. 28
INTERVIEW WITH ERNESTINE J. SLADE
CONDUCTED BY KATHRYN A. (KITTY) KELLEY
28 APRIL 1992

Cobb County Oral History Series, No. 28
Interview with Ernestine J. Slade
Conducted by Kathryn A. (Kitty) Kelley
28 April 1992
Location: Residence of Ernestine J. Slade, 425 Fort Street, Marietta, Ga.

KK Ms. Slade, would you tell me your complete name and your date of birth?
ES My name is Ernestine J. Slade -- Ernestine Johnson Slade -- and my birth date is May 6th. I was born in 1913.

KK Where were you born, Ms. Slade?
ES I was born in Alpharetta, Georgia in old Milton County, but it's in Fulton County now.

ES Yes, I lived there with my mother and my grandparents. My father was deceased.

KK Oh, I see. Did he die before you were born?
ES No, no, no. My father died when I was eight or nine years old.

KK Oh, I see.

ES And shortly after he died, we moved into Marietta -- Cobb County.

KK All of you?

ES My mother and father had separated and it was me, my mother and my sister then with my grandparents.

KK I see.

ES And then we moved with them here into Cobb County.

KK So there were three generations living in one household?
ES Yes, yes.

KK How many children did you have?
ES I have eight girls.

KK Eight girls?

ES Eight girls, uh-huh.

KK Now when did you go to work in between all of these eight children that you had?
ES I always managed somehow to work. And having children, it was necessary to work. And when I started working out at Bell Aircraft, he was working on the day shift.

KK At Bell?

ES Uh-huh. And I worked at night.

KK So you coordinated your child care?
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

ES Yes. And my oldest children were old enough to kind of help, you know, see after each other.

KK So what a big change, then, from you doing laundry and being more or less self-employed, to going to work at a big company like Bell Aircraft. Tell me about -- how did that come about?

ES Well, I tell you, I had been working for this family of people helping them. And I was always one who wanted to make as much money as I could possibly make to help carry on the family. And I worked for this family of people I’m going to tell you about off and on for eight years. It was a little difficult when Bell first came here for a person who had a regular job, a domestic worker, to get on. Because, see, like they had an understanding or had discussed or didn't want to take nobody's help away from them, especially a person who was working for, you know, a well-to-do family.

KK So you mean the rich, white people had an agreement with Bell that --

ES If you went there, and you were working for one of these well-to-do families, you could not get on at Bell easily. And you made so much money at Bell -- much more money at Bell than you could make working for a permanent family. So me and my friends, we didn’t go to the employment office here in Marietta. We went into Atlanta to the employment office. And that’s how I got hired. Then I came back, and I told this lady that I had been working for, they hired me that day, told me when I could start to work. So that weekend, I told her. I said, "Now I’m going to start working at the Bomber Club" -- that’s what we called it. Well, naturally, she didn’t like it, but she didn’t fuss too much about. And I said, "I’ll be leaving you." And so I went on that Monday morning to work out at Bell.

KK So she wasn’t very happy about that?

ES She wasn’t pleased about it at all, huh-uh. She asked me what was I going to do when the war was over and the plant would be closed down. "Had you thought about you’re going to need somewhere to work?” I said, "Well, I’m sure I’ll find something."

KK So you were confident you had enough skills you could find a job?

ES Well, I had always been able to find work.

KK Now was your husband already working at Bell when you went to interview?

ES Yes, he was still working there.

KK What was his job?

ES He was in the janitorial department.

KK Now when you went to Bell, what kinds of job openings were there and what led you to the job that you took?

ES I can tell you what I did. It was something like the finishing department where they sent all parts that went into the airplane, regardless of how small they were, through some kind of treatment process. We would clean those parts, and they would put it in a machine and then some kind of solution and what-have-you. I don’t know whether it was strengthening or just to be sure it was clean or what. And then sometimes, after they had got a part of the plane completed, we’d go inside of that plane and clean it all in the inside. Those long parts to the plane, sometimes we’d have to take something like steel wool and rub them; and then they would put them through this process I’m telling you about. And the little, bitty pieces like that, we had in the buckets, we’d drop them in. They’d put them through this process.
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

KK Did you work Monday through Friday?
ES Yes, yes, I did.
KK From like nine to five?
ES No, I went on the evening shift.
KK Because your husband -- that's right, your husband was working days.
ES Yes. We would go in around 11:00 or 11:45 and work until -- now my older children had started to school. And see, I'd get here early enough to see that all was well with them and that their clothes and everything were on properly and so forth, and they could get to school without being late.
KK Uh-huh. So you went to work at what time, then?
ES I think it was around 12:00, 12:45.
KK Was that noon or at midnight?
ES At night -- midnight. KK Midnight?
ES Uh-huh. KK And then you worked until about 8:00 in the morning?
ES That's right.
KK So when you came home then, some of your children were just getting up and getting ready to go to school?
ES Yes. I'd come in from work, do my cleaning, do my wash and my laundry work, wash the children's clothes, iron whatever needed to be done, then I would lay down and go to sleep. And when they would come in the afternoon, I'd get up and do their dinner, fix their meals for them, and have that ready for them so they could eat. Then I'd lay down again and take another little nap before going to work at night. I'd comb the girls' hair at home for the next day, and I put stocking caps over their heads so their hair would stay nice, and give them their bath and get them ready for bed and get them in the bed before I'd leave.

KK How much money did you make at Bell, do you remember?
ES Oh, Lord. It was like a million dollars, my first paycheck -- it was about 33 or 34 dollars. I can't tell you the exact amount.
KK For one week?
ES For one week.
KK And what had you been used to being paid?
KK Ten -- seven and ten dollars a week.
KK Now it sounds like a very small amount, but at the time, was that enough money for you?
ES It wasn’t enough, but we had to manage, you know. No black woman made a whole lot of money. I remember some of our neighbors and friends used to work for five dollars a week.

KK So as a black woman, you made more than you had made before, but you didn’t necessarily make as much money as a white woman at Bell?
ES That's right, that's right. Uh-huh.

KK Where you worked in your unit at Bell, was that all black women working together?
ES No, black and white worked together.
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

KK So the plant was not segregated at that time?
ES Not to an extent, no.
KK I’ll bet that some jobs weren't available --
ES For blacks.
KK Right.
ES Well, you know not, no.
KK Some of the women that I've talked to that worked in secretarial services, for example, there were no black women --
ES That's true, that's true.
KK What kinds of jobs were available for black women at Bell?
ES Well, just they worked in the cafeteria.
KK Serving food?
ES Helping to prepare the food.
KK And cooking?
ES Uh-huh. Some of them had a little better job than I had and a better paying job. Because I can't say how much, I don't remember now how much.

KK What did you wear to work every day?
ES Slacks -- I wore a blouse and pants.
KK Not a uniform?
ES No, but all the ladies working in my department, we were required to wear slacks and blouses.
KK Was that new for you?
ES Yes, indeed so.
KK What did you think of that?
ES Well, I was glad to have work. It was just quite all right.
KK That must have been very interesting to wear slacks to work?
ES Yes.
KK Very liberating, maybe.
ES Yes, yes.
KK So how long did you work for Bell?
ES Well, I worked for Bell -- I think about two years; and I tell you why I stopped working -- I became pregnant again. So I had to give up my job; and it was just so funny -- I worked on in that department pregnant for about -- well, when I left I guess I was about seven or eight months and nobody knew I was pregnant.
KK You must have been a tiny woman.
ES No, I wasn’t.
KK No?
ES Larger than I am now.
KK Did you keep it a secret?
ES Well, I just didn't say anything about it and just went on working because I was afraid they might let me go before, you know. I wanted to be and so I just worked and said nothing.
KK So I take it they had no maternity leave?
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

ES No. I believe -- some of this stuff I've forgotten, but I'm thinking now in my mind if they had known ahead of time, they would have probably let me go.

KK I see.

ES And so I just said nothing about it and just kept working.

KK Well, at that time, pregnant women weren't considered to be healthy.

ES Really?

KK Well, I think that they looked at pregnant women as being too weak to do the work and so they --

ES Probably so.

KK -- wanted to replace you with somebody that they thought was healthier. Things have changed now,

KK You couldn't go back to work at Bell?

ES I didn't try. You know, I just didn't know whether they would hire me having a small baby or not. So I was able to get a nice job out there at the restaurant, and I worked there for a long time. And when I give that up, if my memory serves me right, I took a job as an insurance agent -- collecting, you know -- selling and collecting life insurance.

KK Now did you have to quit your job every time you had a baby?

ES Yes. I did, you know, because I did not believe in leaving a little, bitty baby at home. When I had a new baby, I would stay at home and take care of my children and the baby -- that's what I did. I started working with Atlanta Life Insurance Company when my last child was three or four years old

KK I see.

KK To sum up your experience at Bell Aircraft, do you think that that experience changed your life at all?

ES Well, it was a help.

KK A lot of money?

ES Yes. Well, you know, a little more money. Yes, that was a help. Oh, Lord, it just helped in every way. I remember when I started working, I first paid off all my bills. Got my bills paid off and I was able to get some things that we needed in the home. The older girls had never had Sunday shoes -- they always had shoes, you know. I bought them some nice dresses, and I bought them Sunday shoes, an extra pair of shoes. And that meant everything in the world to them and me, too. When I started working out at Bell, I never could put no money in the bank. I didn't have a million dollars, however, now, but I was able to save a little bit.

KK You didn't put money in the bank?

ES Before I was out there. But see, when I started working at Bell, got all my bills paid, got nice things for the children like I wanted them to have, nice things in the house, I could put four or five dollars a week in the bank. But see, that was money -- sure enough money then.

KK One of the things that I remember reading about Bell Aircraft was that they did have a child care facility. Do you remember that at all?
ES I don’t remember that at all. And if they did have it, I can’t remember hearing any black say that -- see, I started working in the early years at Bell. I don’t remember that.

KK So if they did have child care, it was probably for the whites?

ES Probably so. I just don’t remember.

KK Another thing that I have read in my research is that the cost of living in Marietta went up --

ES Yes.

KK -- during the time that Bell was here because people were coming in. The population grew two or three times over.

ES Oh, yes.

KK And the cost of living got very high. Do you remember that that impacted you at all?

ES I can remember that, yes. I had to pay a little more for everything, but we were thankful to be making a little money.

KK Well, can you think of anything that we didn’t cover thoroughly or was there anything else that you wanted to say?

ES Let me see -- well, Bell, as I said -- we’ve stated this -- was a blessing in disguise coming here to Marietta and then Lockheed following. It has certainly made a difference for the people in Marietta. And I hope nothing will ever happen where it will have to fold up and we not have Lockheed or someone here.
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
COBB COUNTY ORAL HISTORY SERIES
NO. 22
INTERVIEW WITH RUTH ASBELL IVEY
CONDUCTED BY KATHRYN A. (KITTY) KELLEY
APRIL 21, 1992

Cobb County Oral History Series, No.22
Interview with Ruth Asbell Ivey
Conducted by Kathryn A. (Kitty) Kelley
April 21, 1992
Location: Ivey residence, Acworth, Georgia
Mrs. Ivey worked as a secretary at the Bell Aircraft plant in Marietta during World War II. The interview focuses primarily on her experiences during that time.

KK = Kitty Kelley RI = Ruth Ivey

KK: What was your occupation there [Bell Bomber]?
RI: Oh, I was a -- I started off as a stenographer. Well, there again, we were talking about that this morning. Eventually, I was given the responsibility of the typing pool, of assigning people to the typing pool and the stenographic pool, which was a promotion. Then Margo became private secretary to one of the engineers, and that's when we were talking about how much money. And I said, "Margo, I can't even remember how much money we made". She said, well, the highest that she made was $55.00 a week. That was a real, real good salary. I was thinking probably $45.00, $50.00 dollars a week or in that neighborhood.

KK: At the time, do you remember yourself making more money than other girls your age at Bell?
RI: Well, now I would make more than the girls who worked in the pool, after I had the promotion and was in charge of the typing pool assigning, because all of the men didn't have secretaries. We just had the pool and whenever they needed anything. So it was somebody's responsibility to see it was done. And I did make more than some of them after that.

KK: What about working at a place other than Bell Aircraft? Were those people making anywhere near what you were making?
RI: Oh, no. You would've definitely made more in any of the defense industries -- were paying more. Now I left. I worked there I think about two and a half years. I know I worked over two years, because I have a two-year pin. I was sure I had it in there somewhere. It was in the jewelry box.

KK: When you were at Bell, were all the bosses men and all the secretaries women?
RI: Yes, they were. They were all engineers. Like I said, we were in the industrial engineering department; and all of the engineers were men, every one of them. Margo said something this morning about this woman who had been in charge of the
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

stenographic pool at one point and about one of the men who had asked particularly for her [Margo] to do his work. This woman said, "Well, you can't ask. You just have to take who it was." I said, "I don't know where she thought she was getting off, because those men were the boss." I mean, there was no two ways about it. It was a man's world; it was. Now there were women in some of the other departments with more responsibility, but certainly there were none of the engineers.

KK: So the professionals were men?
RI: They were men, that's right -- absolutely.
KK: And that's just the way it was?
RI: It was -- and it was a big department. I don't know how many of them there were -- it was a very big department. There were a lot of them. But there were no women engineers in that department -- at all. I think, as I said, in some other areas of the plant there were probably some areas where there were women with more responsibility, but not in that section.

KK: What about blacks and other minorities that worked at Bell?
RI: Now you know, there were none in our office.

KK: No black secretaries?
RI: None whatsoever.

KK: Any black engineers?
RI: None whatsoever. I don't know why. Occasionally we'd have some occasion rarely to go out into the plant. I guess that there were blacks who worked in the plant; but I declare to goodness, I have no memory of it whatsoever -- at all. The main thing that I remember is the noise. I don't guess I ever went out into the actual plant but a very few times.

KK: Did you feel patriotic working there?
RI: Oh, absolutely. Oh, yes, indeed.

KK: Especially with your brother --
RI: Oh, yes, indeed.

KK: -- in the military?
RI: All of the men were gone. I say all the men were gone; but I mean the young men, the ones our age were mostly. There were a few who, for some reason or another, were not in the service; but most everybody you knew was. You did feel very patriotic, yes, because you were helping the war effort. I remember when they rolled out the first B-29, which is what they were making. It was a big occasion.

KK: What happened?
RI: It was kind of like a holiday. Everybody came out to see the roll out. Also, another thing that I remember was when Franklin Roosevelt died, when the news came; and the thing was that the way to show him honor or respect was to keep working, so that the war would end sooner. So there was no closing up.

KK: Do you remember when that happened?
RI It was in April, 1945.
KK: Now what did that bomber, that B-29, look like to you?
RI: It was enormous, enormous. Of course, it's not now. I mean, it doesn't look big now. It wouldn't look big now. They had the heavy bombers -- they had the B-17. That's what my husband flew, or was a navigator on. They had the B-24. They had the B-26, although I didn't hear much about the B-26. But this was the big one. And, of
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

course, that ended up that that was used to drop the bombs on Hiroshima and a lot of other bombs on Japan. It was used in the Pacific; it was never used in Europe.  
KK: So that must have been very exciting?  
RI: It was, it was. It was a very special thing to do for the war effort. It’s just hard for anybody now, I think, anybody your age or for people who were not living in that time to realize the effort that people put forth. It was like it really was the cohesiveness of the country.  
KK: So everyone fought the war?  
RI: You couldn’t ever say everyone, but it was the thing to do. I mean, it was absolutely the thing to do, to be patriotic and to work and to serve and to whatever -- buy war bonds. You bought war bonds.  
KK: And Victory Gardens?  
RI: That’s right. And there again, when I was talking to my sister-in-law this morning, I said, "You remember somebody or some movie star or somebody came." There was this big bond drive there at the plant. Neither one of us can remember who it was, but I had a bond -- money taken out of my paycheck for bonds which I still had, when I got married. I spent it then. But that’s what people were doing, and it was a real interesting time. It’s very hard to realize, when there is so much controversy about any of the military actions, any of it that there has been since, including Korea and Vietnam. My husband was in both places. Then even this Gulf thing -- people seemed to be a little bit more behind that. But, as I said, it’s kind of hard for people who didn’t live in that time to realize how much togetherness there was in that respect.  
KK: What did you wear to work?  
RI: I wore dresses or skirts -- no pants. Now the women who worked in the plant wore pants.  
KK: Was that new?  
RI: Yes, it was. It was very new. But they -- you know, for safety reasons.  
KK: Was it scandalous at all?  
RI: No. Now actually we were wearing like shorts and slacks before for play.  
KK: But not to work?  
RI: But not to work. But, as I said, the women who worked in the plant for safety reasons and because they had to climb up on -- you know, for many reasons wore slacks. But not us at all. I always liked clothes; so I spent a good part of my salary on clothes and shopped at Rich’s and, it was Davison’s then. It was Davison-Packson, you know, it wasn’t Macys. But I had charge accounts. I’m telling you, that was the first thing practically I got was a charge account at Rich’s. I’ve had a charge account at Rich’s ever since, as I said, almost since I can remember. But anyway, suits -- you dressed up.  
KK: Professional?  
RI: Yes. I always wore very high heels being short. And then, gosh, they were like this (indicating).  
KK: Maybe about four inches high?  
RI: Oh, very high heels. I couldn’t walk in them now to save my life. But stockings -- as long as you could get stockings.  
KK: Were they nylon then?
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

RI: Well, you couldn't get nylon. You had just started getting nylons at the war; and then you couldn't; and you couldn't get silk stockings. But rayon -- and they were just dreadful. So you could go bare legged, because you couldn't get stockings. At first, you used to wear stockings always; but then when it got to where you couldn't get stockings -- the rayon, they drooped, you know, and oh, they were just terrible. But you could go without stockings. Some people used leg makeup. It was dreadful, though; it wasn't very attractive.

KK: Did you wear makeup?

RI: Yes, not a lot. I never used very much makeup, but, yes, I'd use certain lipstick and rouge and powder, like -- I think it went back that far -- like the pancake makeup, like the Max Factor pancake or something like that. I think it went back that far. But I never used a lot of makeup when I was young or ever.

KK: What was your relationship with the engineers, the men? You said that they were very domineering?

RI: Yes, well, they were the bosses. I mean, that's true. Actually, they were all very nice to us, to me and Margo and most of the girls. There was one in particular who -- he was a dear man and his wife had come from Pennsylvania -- I'll always remember, Johnstown, Pennsylvania. She worked with the Red Cross in Atlanta. They would invite soldiers to their house and then invite some of us to a party or have one or two and lend you their car to go to take them sightseeing around Atlanta or something like that. His name was Stohr, S-t-o-h-r, and his nickname was Skip -- I don't remember what his first name was. They were really very nice people. And actually, all of them were -- they were all nice to me. I never had any real problems with any of them.

KK: Did you make a lot of friends with the girls there at Bell?

RI: Yes, yes. I haven't kept up with any of them over the years and can't remember some of their names. As I said, my sister-in-law and I were trying to remember some of the names; but yes, we were friends and did things together and went to movies together and, like I said, bowled. I think at one point we had a little bowling team. I never was very good. One of the things that I remember about going to work was that you had a badge. But they had this tunnel that you had to go through, a long tunnel because the parking was way out here. And it was the longest thing that you walked through this tunnel to get into the building and up to work. I don't know why they had those long tunnels. I have not been to Lockheed. I don't know whether they still have that or not. I guess they do. But it always would seem like you were just never going to get through that long tunnel.

KK: Was it safe?

RI: Oh, yes, because there were always a lot of people. I mean, everybody -- that shift -- everybody. I came to work at 8:00 and got off at 5:00 or 5:30, or something, whatever. I was strictly working in the day time. I never worked at night.

KK: Did you work Monday through Friday?

RI: Yes. I cannot remember that we were ever required to work overtime, like they did sometime in the plant. Of course, they had the different shifts in the plant.

KK: But the clerical staff and professional staff worked --
Interviews with women working at the Bell Bomber Plant

RI: That's right, worked day time hours only. But as I said, I had just forgotten that long, long tunnel. I think there was probably a guard, when you came into it to check and then probably when you got through there and to your building -- I can't remember. I know you had to go through several different checkpoints for security.
KK: Do you ever remember any trouble or any scandal there at the plant while you were there with security or anything like that?
RI: I don't remember ever, ever anything of the kind.
KK: So it was a good place to work?
RI: Yes, it was a very good place to work. I really do not recall ever there being any trouble. What did they call those awards they gave? E Award of Excellence or whatever -- [that] was what they were doing then.
KK: So that was a motivational award?
RI: That's right, to the people in the plant. I never had any real problems at all. When I left and took another job, it was because the war was coming to an end and the handwriting was on the wall. In fact, some of the men in the office were saying, "This is a good time to find another job."
KK: Now when was that, do you remember?
RI: Well, it was sometime between VE Day and VJ Day. Sometime in that period, because once VJ Day, see, everything began to close down.
KK: I remember reading about how employees at Bell were at some point reassured that their jobs would not end --
RI: Yes.
KK: -- and that there was a lot of controversy about that, because people seemed to say that they knew otherwise or they suspected otherwise. Could you comment on that?
RI: Well, as I said, the main thing that I remember was that in talking, like to some of the engineers and everything about what was going on, some of them were beginning to hunt other jobs.
KK: After VE Day?
RI: Yes, in that time frame there, when things were beginning to kind of wind down. And it seemed that rather than waiting until there was a possibility everything would close down and everybody was hunting a job, that it was a good time to do it and there was a little more choice. And, in fact, this man that I was talking about, Mr. Stohr, was one of the engineers; and his wife I had said worked with the Red Cross. I interviewed for a job at the Red Cross, and I liked her a lot -- she was a really nice lady. I could have had the job, but it didn't pay enough. It didn't begin to pay enough, and that was when I went to work for Sinclair.
KK: Had you saved a lot of money?
RI: No.

KK: When you look back on the Bell Aircraft days, how would you summarize the impact that Bell Aircraft had on women at that time?
RI: Oh, I think it was very good for women. I would certainly think that it was very good for women, because it did provide jobs that were well-paying jobs. But I think the fact that women were given, that there was the opportunity for a lot of different types
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of jobs. Not only the kind that I had, but the ones for women who worked in the plant; and these were jobs that women had never had before.

KK: Physical labor jobs.
RI: Physical labor jobs. Probably, people never thought women could do that sort of thing.
KK: And they could.
RI: And they could.
KK: What did you think about that at the time?
RI: I thought it was great. I didn’t think it was for me, because I’m not very adept with - - I had a feeling that if I put rivets in, they’d probably all fall out. But I think it was great, and I admired the women who worked in the plant -- I really did.
KK: Do you think that their work changed life for women after?
RI: Oh, I think it did -- oh, I think it did. Well, I mean, we certainly know that the war years changed all of our lives. It changed a lot of things. But certainly that was one aspect of the change.
KK: So when you said that you thought a lot of people didn’t realize women could do that kind of thing, then perhaps after the Bell Aircraft experience, men who hired people for physical labor jobs might consider women for those jobs?
RI: Yes. They didn’t -- it didn’t come very easy or fast even after that. I think after the war women were kind of expected to just go back [to] their place in the home. A lot of them didn’t, and a lot of them didn’t want to. And a lot of them did not. So it had a great effect on American life and on women. You know, it’s like the changes that have come and are still coming.
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