

Hettie Davis Bushman on the World War II home front

By HETTIE BUSHMAN

I remember the World War II home front during the Depression – with no electricity, phones, or cars – and the worst was that all of our men were gone to war and the only communication was a letter or a death notice. The home front was totally united in this war, with everybody working in every possible way to help our men over there.

I was in high school at the time, walking two miles each way to catch the school bus in snow and rain and I had to leave before breakfast, with no money for lunch. I had to miss a day a week to help my mother on washing clothes day. Girls weren't suppose to go to high school, but stay home to help with the many chores, or get married and have kids. I was determined to get my schooling, and finished three years before leaving for Cincinnati, Ohio. This came after a neighbor boy and I cut paper wood and I got \$15 for the bus ticket to leave.

I had to lie about my age for a Social Security number. Two neighbor girls were living there on 9th Street. I had never been in a city before and I didn't know what a door bell was. The police helped me find the place and the landlady showed me where to go to eat. I went up the street three blocks, got a job at Streetman's Biscuit Co. packing cookies, and worked there three weeks past my return for high school. When I returned home to go to school they refused to admit me.

They were signing up young people for welding training in Robbins, Tennessee at the time. I signed up, and they trained us for the job, then sent us all to Mobile, Alabama. But I was too young for the shipyard where they sent all the others to work. One girl stayed behind with me and they put us in with a family living there. They were a very nice older couple. Then they sent us to another shipyard, never to see our old friends again.

Hanging onto the side of a big ship, welding with fire flying everywhere, was not our cup of tea. It was good money – \$3 an hour – but after a few months we quit, and flipped a coin: heads we go home, or tails we go to Cincinnati, Ohio for work. Tails came up, so we got a ticket on a Greyhound bus north. Coming through our neck of the woods my brother-in-law got on the bus to my surprise and informed our parents of where we were going.

My friend and I both got jobs as waitresses in a restaurant, and had a room upstairs.

I went back to school on time and graduated from high school in 1943. My friend got married and I went back to Cincinnati, working in a defense plant making shells for our soldiers. When a



Figure 1 Hettie Davis Bushman in World War II

beautiful plant nurse came by I said to her: “I would like to be a nurse.” All she asked me was for my name, and if I had a high school diploma. I said, yes.

Then , on January 1, 1945, I was called to St. Elizabeth Hospital in Convinton [sic], Kentucky. I joined the Army Nurse Corps at \$15 a month, one overnight per month, and one day a week off. I stayed in the hospital building with four girls in each room, separated by religions, for six months — all book learning. Then we went to the floors under strict discipline, and did all the procedures we had been taught. I loved every minute of it



Figure 2 Hettie Bushman in 2002 photo taken at the Women In Military Service For America Museum in Washington, DC

for three years, earning my R.N. cap and diploma on January 1,

1948. The war was over, so we didn’t have to go into the Army, but ran the hospital while all our nurses were gone. We worked with many soldiers after their return. There were many horrible stores told to me.

I am now 78 years old with benign tremors, and my husband, Gene, is 80 now.