

AT 97 YEARS OF AGE, MACKIE PART OF HISTORY



Ruby Mackie, left, is pictured with her granddaughter, Candy Stamey Pearson, in a photo taken this past summer.



Ruby Ray Mackie, dressed in her uniform, before going to work in Willow Run, a manufacturing complex located between Ypsilanti and Belleville, Mich. As part of the group known as "Rosie the Riveter," Ruby worked on the assembly line for the B-24 bomber during World War II.

COOKEVILLE — Ruby Ray Mackie is a part of history — part of an era that's not much talked about by those who lived through it.

She was a young married woman of 27 years of age whose husband, Elbert Lee Mackie, soon left to serve in the military during World War II. It was during this time, she became a part of the group known as "Rosie the Riveters."

"Shortly after marrying, my father had to go to Battle Creek, Mich., for training and mom followed him," Ruby's daughter, Gail Mackie Smith, explained. "The next year, he had to go to Wisconsin. That was too cold for her, so she stayed in Michigan and went to live with her sister and brother-in-law."

Her brother-in-law helped her get a job at the re-tooled Ford factory called Willow Run manufacturing complex, located between Ypsilanti and Belleville, Mich. The plant was constructed in the early years of World War II by Ford Motor Company for the mass production of the B-24 Liberator heavy bomber.

The plant was originally meant to produce components for the Liberator, with final assembly by the plane's designer Consolidated Aircraft and Douglas Aircraft. It began production in the summer of 1941.

However, remote assembly proved to be a problem and by October of 1941, Ford received permission to produce complete Liberators.

The production line at Willow Run ran through May 1945, producing almost half of all the Liberators built.

Ruby “riveted,” or fastened plate of metal or other material with a rivet or rivets, to the doors to the plane.

“The place was massive,” Ruby recalled. “I had to have people lead me to my work station.”

At this time, she didn’t have any children at home to take care of. According to earnings statements from January to April of 1943, she earned \$369.09.

Ruby is the seventh of 11 children of the late Jake Ray and Lizza Hampton Ray of Sparta.

“She learned the value of hard work at the age of 14 when her mother died,” Gail said. “She then took up the task of taking care of her younger siblings who were still at home, ages 12, 9, 5 and 20 months.”

They had no running water and no refrigerator — just a coal burning stove to keep warm.

“Her father supported the family by picking strawberries that he sold,” Gail said. “They also raised chickens and gathered the eggs for sale.”

Ruby remembers picking those strawberries — a lot of strawberries.

“He wanted the good strawberries,” she said. “We had to throw a lot out.”

Through the years — even through the Great Depression — Ruby kept a positive spirit and adapted to any situation thrown her way.

Around 1940, Ruby got a job as a seamstress at the shirt factory in Sparta, where she grew up and spent her young days.

But it was getting out of Sparta that was adventurous to her. She lived in Akron, Ohio, and Michigan, but she came back home to care for her family — and raise her own.

“Being a Rosie the Riveter was the last job she had outside the home,” Gail said. “She keeps saying, ‘That was a long time ago,’ but, over and over, she’s also said it’s the best job she ever had.”

Since then, she became a caretaker for her family — from her father, mother-in-law, brothers and sisters — she took care of them without complaint.

“Everyone called upon her,” Gail said. “Her life has been all about taking care of people close to her.”

Her main hobby included working in the garden, something she did with a passion up until she was 90.

She just celebrated her 97th birthday.

“Now, she likes to handle the produce — shuck the peas, shell the beans, things of that sort,” Gail said. “Her positive attitude about life probably has something to do with why she’s outlived her siblings.”

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 1 December 2013

*Read more about the history of Putnam Co., TN & surrounding areas at:
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