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Editor, Eighth Air Force News
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Spring Hill
Tennessee 37174

Re: Oregon Chapter quarterly meeting

August 5, 2004

Dear Walt,

OREGON CHAPTER

The quarterly meeting of the Oregon Chapter was held on Thursday August 5, 2004 at the Beaverton Elks Club. 54 people attended. After an hour of socializing amongst the members and their guests, chapter president Eldon Bevens called the meeting to order promptly at 1130 hours. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, the prayer conducted and the meeting got underway.

Present at this session were photographers and reporters from the *Oregonian* newspaper. (In the week following the meeting, an article about this meeting appeared in the *Oregonian*)

Regarding the state of the chapter, treasurer Jerry Andrews reported that we continue to enjoy sound finances. Newsletter chairman Jerry Ritter asked the group to provide him with items that could appear in the chapter's periodical. Membership committee chairman Joe Conroy advised that we currently have 178 members, 109 of whom are veterans.

President Bevens, who is also a volunteer at Oregon's fine Evergreen Air Museum, the home of Howard Hughes' "Spruce Goose," told the attendees that he and others were the guests of Evergreen Air at the dedication of the World War II Memorial held in Washington DC in May. The group was flown from Oregon to Washington on an Evergreen Citation jet and treated royally during the time that they were there. Other chapter members that attended the dedication ceremonies included Joe Conroy and his wife. All agreed that the ceremonies were impressive and that the memorial itself was both fitting and beautiful.

Board member Don Bourgeois gave the group a brief talk on his June visit to Normandy for the ceremonies marking the 60th anniversary of D-Day. In short, the ceremonies conducted by the French government at Arromanches were very moving and

obviously heartfelt. In that part of France, the sacrifices made by American and other allied forces to free Europe of totalitarianism have not been forgotten, nor will they be at any time soon.

It was announced that an organization is being formed for Oregon recipients of the Distinguished Flying Cross. Those in the room who had received this honor (and there were many) were asked to register.

The speaker for this quarter's meeting was **Mrs. Mildred Bradley Harris**.

Mrs. Harris was educated at the University of Washington where she earned her degree in chemical engineering. Thereafter, she went to work as an engineer for the Boeing Aircraft Company helping to build B-17s. She gave the group a fascinating talk on the World War II efforts of women both at Boeing and in World War II.

During the 1930s, more and more women began entering the American workforce, but in World War II the demand exploded. When much of the male workforce left their jobs to enter military service, American businesses were left begging for laborers. Suddenly women were fit for duties that only months earlier would have been considered "too strenuous" for them. Outdated job limitations that had excluded females now were erased and they were no longer seen as "too delicate" for manual labor. Women now were actually recruited for these jobs and eventually 18 million entered the workforce.

In addition, lax safety standards were reformed to accommodate this new wave of laborers. Regardless, during the war years 37,600 workers of both sexes died and 210,000 were disabled as a result of on-the-job injuries. Compared to some 300,000 total combat casualties, this number is significant.

Cities ballooned in size as workers from other parts of the nation "hit town" to work in defense industries. Housing was short. Government-built houses were shared by workers and traded off by shifts. Women were still responsible for domestic duties when their shifts ended. Their housework proved to be difficult to do as the production of domestic laborsaving devices (such as washing machines) had halted. Clothing was commonly homemade and repaired. The World War II era may have been the last years of the darned sock.

Food shortages resulted in a system that rationed essential items. Long food lines were common. Mrs. Bradley reported that these lines were much worse in wintertime. Citizens were encouraged to plant "Victory Gardens" to help feed themselves and others. All in all, people were forced to learn and hone self-help skills in order to survive. Americans responded favorably and for the most part everyone pulled together.

There was a massive cultural shift as people from southern states moved north to work in industrial centers. Many never returned to their former homes, thereby changing the demographics of America forever.

The women's workweek was commonly 6 days. Shifts at Boeing operated around the clock. While the pay was certainly adequate, a portion of it was automatically deducted for the purchase of war bonds. In this way every worker made his or her financial contribution to the war effort.

Mrs. Bradley gave the group a brief history of Boeing and the aircraft that it pioneered and produced.

At the start of the War, Boeing began to hire women. In 1942 15% of the workforce (270 workers) were women. In 1944 the number had ballooned to 40% (19,416) and to 21,505 in 1945. To qualify for a job at Boeing, a woman had to be 18-42 years of age and "not pregnant or overweight."

Most women worked the graveyard shift so they could return home in time to get their husbands and children off in the morning. Then they would sleep all day, prepare dinner for their families and return to work. While at the plant, all women were required to wear pants, a bandanna around their heads and if they were in production jobs, short sleeved shirts.

This great effort was hugely successful. At the start of the war, Boeing produced 60 aircraft a month. By 1944, the company was cranking out 362 a month. Translated into daily work, the plants produced 1 plane per day at the war's start, a number that increased to 4 *per shift* in 1945. This figure is more impressive when it is realized that these aircraft were huge four-engine, long-range bombers such as the B-17 Flying Fortress and the B-29 Superfortress.

The company did not like to lose any of its female workers, and if one did quit, she was interviewed to learn why. In response to information given by exiting workers, Boeing implemented services and programs that sound obvious today: child care, carpooling, a cafeteria and regular rest breaks. To ensure that defense plants had an ample supply of female workers, military recruitment of women was suspended in the Seattle, Tacoma and Everett Washington areas.

The perceived threat of Japanese attacks either by bombing or outright invasion was real. Immediately after December 7, 1941, barrage balloons appeared in the skies over Seattle and Tacoma. To camouflage its plants, Boeing constructed farms, houses and streets on their roofs. These were not just painted surfaces, but were actual structures. Seen from the air, the Boeing facilities would appear to be nothing more than farmland or civilian residential areas.

Mrs. Bradley described her engineering duties as "the inspection of the hanging of (B-17) engines and the installation of gear and fuel tanks." Each inspector had to apply his or her individual stamp to the final assembly. In this way each inspector had a personal stake in the assembly's performance.

When the war ended in 1945, Boeing shut down completely for four months. The large number of workers was no longer needed and what jobs remained were taken back by men returning from the war. The end of the war was anticipated of course, and by September 1945 only 340 women remained employed by Boeing.

Mrs. Bradley went on to a successful and rewarding career as an engineer for Boeing.

Our group greatly appreciated receiving a talk about America's "home front" in World War II. As so much emphasis is placed on combat, the fact that the entire American people made victory possible must not be forgotten.

The meeting was adjourned. The next meeting will be held on Saturday November 13 2004 at the same location.

Don Bourgeois
Board member