

## Rosies.

Continued from page 12

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# 'Rosies' visit Tinker, relive past

Carolyn Fletcher  
Office of Public Affairs

During World War II, while men fought on the battlefield, women on the home front produced vast numbers of airplanes, tanks, guns

and warships, and also kept the country running. America's wartime production was called a miracle by *Time* magazine. These miracle workers were ordinary women who stepped out of the stereotypical roles of the day and

came to be known as "Rosie the Riveter."

Former 'Rosies' returned to Tinker Air Force Base Monday as guests of honor for a luncheon and tour of the base. More than 130 Rosies were among the capacity crowd in the Tinker Officers' Club ballroom during the luncheon sponsored by the Federal Women's Program.

Rosies came from all over the Oklahoma City metropolitan area and beyond the state line to visit Tinker. Rosie McLaughlin's family knew she wanted to attend the event, however, she thought the distance from Ft. Worth, Texas, was too great. Her family surprised her with a trip to Tinker, a corsage, and a ride to and from the event in a limousine.

The day was also a dream come true for modern day Rosie Elizabeth Ward. She is a riveter in the Propulsion Directorate's Quick Engine Change unit. It was her idea to bring all the Rosies living nearby back to Tinker for a visit.

"My grandmother was a

See Rosies page 13.



Air Force photo by Margo Wright

## Next-generation 'Rosie'

Veralyn Wall, a welder in the Commodities Directorate, left, explains modern welding techniques on the TF-33 fuel manifold to her mother, LaVera Senn. Senn is no stranger to the sounds, smells and sights of a depot; she is an original "Rosie the Riveter" and was one of many "Rosies" to revisit the depot March 30. Senn was first trained to rivet but was needed in fuel cell repair work where she spent three years from 1942 at the Oklahoma City Air Depot.

Tinker Take Off — April 3, 1998 — 13



Force photo by Margo Wright

olbox tour to visiting



# Rosies...

Continued from page 1

Rosie, and she worked at Douglas, and so did my grandfather, who drove the overhead crane out there" said Ward. My grandparents, in 1942, already had their three kids, so Grandpa was out of the draft. They took the single men first, then the married men, and then the men with one child. Before they took the men with two children, the war ended. That's where my first interest in Rosie began."

"The ladies' smiles and their response to this visit has been fantastic," Ward said. "The day has been more than I ever dreamed it could be."

In 1943, the War Department joined in the campaign to persuade male employers to hire women. At that time, some employers preferred to produce less or even turn down a contract for war goods if it meant hiring women.

The War Department distributed a booklet, "You're Going to Employ Women." The booklet advised employers about hiring, training and supervising women. According to the booklet, "In some respects, women workers are superior to men. Properly hired, properly trained, properly handled, new women employees are splendidly efficient workers. The desire of a new woman worker to help win the war — to shorten it even by a minute — gives her an enthusiasm that more than offsets industrial inexperience."

Ouida Miler worked at the Douglas Aircraft Plant for three years while her husband, Roy, was away at war from 1942 through 1945. Just three months after they married, he was sent overseas. She lived with friends in Oklahoma City and worked at the Douglas Plant as a riveter on the center wing section of the C-47.

Miler remembers training at a facility on North Broadway in Oklahoma City. "I was young, and was interested in getting my work done and writing letters to my husband."

One of Roy's letters was printed in part in the Douglas Aircraft Plant's weekly publication "Air View News" on Sept. 25, 1943. In the letter, the B-25 crew chief described the invasion of Sicily from his vantage point on the ground. He noticed how the C-47s were so dense the sky looked black, and he wanted to let the women back home working at Douglas know what a tremendous impact they were making in the war effort.

Eva Selken, 88, won a bond-selling contest during the war. "I was flown to California for a week. It was real exciting. It was \$186,000 worth of those little \$18 bonds."

"I started out doing magnetos," Selken said. "I just kept going on. I really enjoyed them. That magneto is so technical. It has to be measured just exactly right, because the men depended on that. The big box was used on the big planes, and the little be-boppers on the small planes. We had a big assembly line."

"They taught us here. I entered out at the state capitol. That was where they first brought us through. It scared me to death, absolutely. I didn't know anything about anything like that. I thought 'I'll never learn it.' But, you know, they were so patient, and they were such good people you worked with, it didn't take long."

"I had a wonderful time out here, besides working on magnetos. That was what they used to start the engine. They have a new way of doing it now. Don't ask me what, I don't know."

Selken worked in "the old big hangar" on Tinker Field. "It burned. Burned up a lot of my friends. They were in magnetos and they had that acetone between engines and it exploded and these men were holding a meeting upstairs and they couldn't get out. The fella that was head of the department



Air Force photo by Margo Wright

## Tools of the trade

Sheetmetal worker Sharon Jazdzewski, left, gives a toolbox tour to visiting "Rosies" Sammy Beck, center, and her sister Clara Shults.

jumped out of a window and it broke his leg because it was so high. He did save his life, but a bunch of our good friends were burned to death."

Some of the ladies had not seen Tinker since they worked here in the '40s. They expressed amazement at the changes that have taken place over the years. During the war, a line of C-47s stretched throughout the high bay of Bldg. 3001, in what was then the Douglas Aircraft Plant. Today it has become the longest covered industrial facility in the Air Force inventory. Work in the high bay area includes five different jet engines, as well as the KC-135 aircraft.

Elizabeth Ward is keeping a database on the ladies who responded to her recent request to find the former Rosies, and plans to keep in touch with them all. In the future, she hopes for another get-

together for those interested, possibly even a Rosie reunion. "They are really excited about getting back together, but right now, it's just a dream," she said.

When World War II ended, America's wartime production record included 296,429 airplanes; 102,351 tanks and self-propelled guns; 372,431 artillery pieces; 47 million tons of artillery ammunition; 87,620 warships; and 44 billion rounds of small-arms ammunition. These staggering numbers were due largely to the efforts of women who took the places of the men who went to war. These women miracle workers truly made a difference.

(Information for this article was provided in part by "Rosie the Riveter: Women Working on the Home Front in World War II," by Penny Colman.)



Air Force photo by Margo Wright

## Different decades, common bond

Eulila Davis, center, handles tools like she once did as a riveter. Davis and her sister, Ila Biser, far right, shared memories of past days with current Tinker depot employees, from left, Angie Bohanan, Elizabeth Ward, Marsha Blair and Eileen Hines.

## FWP honors award winners



Merline Lovelace

Women's achievements were celebrated during Monday's luncheon sponsored by the Federal Women's Program in honor of National Women's History Month. This year's theme is "Living in the Legacy of Women's Rights."

Retired Air Force officer Merline Lovelace told the crowd of the contributions women have made in battle since the time of Cleopatra. Lovelace, a successful writer of romance and military thriller novels, paid special tribute to the many luncheon attendees honored as 'Rosie the Riveters.'

The FWP gives awards to individuals who enhance employment and career opportunities for women. Winners are chosen based on their notable mission-related enhancements and community involvement during Jan. 1, 1997, through Dec. 31, 1997. Award winners are Tara Brewer, Leah Mala Banzon, Barbara Williams and Donna Wheeler.



Air Force photo by Margo Wright

## It's been a special day

Not all "Rosies" can claim to be a real Rosie. B-24 riveter Rosie McLaughlin, right, fondly recalls her days at the General Dynamics plant in Ft. Worth, Texas, where she met her husband, Everett, center. McLaughlin shows jet engine mechanic Elizabeth Ward a prized possession during her reminiscing; framed photos of her and her roommate and the B-24 they helped keep in the sky. McLaughlin and her husband of 54 years drove from their Ft. Worth home and were escorted to Tinker in a limousine compliments of their children.