

Scott Sandow: Welcome to the Placer Life Podcast. I'm your co-host Scott Sandow.

Chris Gray: And I'm your other co-host, Chris Gray. And as we're looking at the Veteran's Day this week, we thought we'd take a look back at our greatest generation and one of America's biggest challenges and one of our biggest triumphs, World War II.

Every day, we lose more and more of the folks who lived through that era but still with us today and living outside of Auburn is Betty Samson, one of the original Rosie the Riveters. She sat down with us last month to talk about her experiences working as an aircraft engine repair person on the line, what it was like to live through those times, and what Veteran's day means to her.

Betty, could you tell us when you moved to Placer County and then, maybe, just give us a flavor of what the county was like back then and how it is today ... How it's changed.

Betty Samson: We moved to Placer County in 1952. We bought a ranch out in the [Montburn 00:00:59] district, we're still there. And things have changed, you're right. It was a slower pace of life and lots fewer buildings.

Chris Gray: Tell us about the experience of learning about the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Betty Samson: You know, after living to be 91, it's kind of hard to go back exactly on these things, but of course, it was ... We heard it on the radio-

Radio: We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin. The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor Hawaii, by air, President Roosevelt has just announced. The attack was also made on all naval and military activities on the principle island at Oahu. We take you, now, to Washington-

Betty Samson: Naturally, we didn't see it on T.V. Anyway, I was going to Grant Union High School in Del Paso Heights, and I was in my junior year. And they offered an aircraft mechanics course, and we can get out six months early and go to work, which is what I did. I took the aircraft mechanics course in high school, and I think we graduated on a Friday or Saturday. On Monday morning I was working at post schools on McClellan Air Force Base. And I think it probably was a five week course at post schools and I went to what we call the engine repair. Well, first I was making, I think, \$89 a month, which was really big money. And then I got to \$100 a month when I got into engine repair and started my work.

Chris Gray: And what was that first day on the job like?

Betty Samson: Well, it was kind of exciting really. When I went to work, there were some girls working, ladies, girls, working, but not too many as they came on board later on. Some of the girls that I went to the aircraft engine course with didn't follow through on it. They kind of went to office jobs and stuff when they got out and

decided this is kind of hard work. I don't know how long the building was, but they had the engines lined up on a cable, a chain thing, that pulled them one by one. And you'd each have a station and as you moved up ... About the first year I learned all the stations so that I could ... If somebody was off they could say Betty go do so-and-so today. So, that was kind of interesting. I didn't have to do the same dumb thing all the time.

Scott Sandow: I read somewhere where you bought your first car.

Betty Samson: Yeah. I bought my first horse, first.

Scott Sandow: You bought your horse-

Betty Samson: Then I bought a car.

Scott Sandow: What was the name of your horse?

Betty Samson: Rex, and all he did was buck me off. I'm not kidding. Every time I got on him.

Chris Gray: That's one thing you can't accuse a car of.

Betty Samson: Yeah.

Scott Sandow: How did it feel to work on these aircraft engines and aircraft knowing that, you know, where they were destined for and helping a lot of people around the world.

Betty Samson: You know what I told Bud Anderson? He couldn't of flown if I didn't fix his engine.

Chris Gray: That's Bud Anderson, World War II flying ace, also lives in Auburn. Bud, if you're listening, we'd love to talk to you. We'll be in touch.

Betty Samson: You think about this because, you know, there's room for error anywhere working on something. Course, it was really well inspected and everything too. But you certainly thought about that angle of it.

Chris Gray: When you know that your nation's at war and you know that your work really is the foundation of us being able to, kind of, fight.

Betty Samson: Our world was patriotic. You know, some people think now that is patriotic, but everybody was. And everybody worked together for this, and we even thought our president was really pretty great.

Roosevelt : No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people and their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.

Betty Samson: [inaudible 00:05:56] in such a different world to you guys that weren't even born yet.

Chris Gray: How were you, kind of, keeping tabs on what was happening overseas?

Betty Samson: We'd go to the theater and see the news reels.

Radio: Planes line up to take part in the greatest air invasion in history by the first allied airborne army. Americans-

Betty Samson: To which wasn't very informative.

Chris Gray: It wasn't always clear what the outcome of the war was going to be, I can imagine especially in the earlier days-

Betty Samson: Oh definitely not, and you had no idea how long it was going on either. But-

Chris Gray: If the united states had lost the war, how did you view what would have happened?

Betty Samson: Gosh, I've never really thought about that. We could lose the war. But we certainly could have had more attacks or had serious attacks and things, you know. I think it was everybody's mind, sure. Yeah, And you bought war bonds.

Scott Sandow: Getting your information, your news from the radio and from news reels, did that change the morale when you heard the news about invasion at Normandy on D-Day.

Radio: Unconfirmed by allied sources, of course, says that heavy fighting is taking place between the Germans and invasion forces on the Normandy peninsula about 31 miles south west of Le Havre. Another bulletin from Berlin radio and unconfirmed says the British American landing operations against the western coast of Europe from the sea and from the air are stretching over the entire area between Cherbourg and Le Havre-

Betty Samson: Well sure, at that point and time we didn't care what we bought or what we did as long as it wasn't a war, it was war. But I couldn't help to feel sorry for all the innocent people that had to die but that's...

Scott Sandow: That's what war is.

Betty Samson: That's the war. But getting back to the invasion of Normandy, I did meet a young man named Johnny Cassidy. He was from Byhalia, Mississippi. I don't know what would have happened if he came home, but he didn't, and he was in a landing in Normandy. He was hurt and died a few days later. He's buried there. Of course, that touched home because he and one other of the young men I met are the only two that I know that died.

Chris Gray: Hearing the news about the war on the radio sometimes it can seem far from home but then sometimes out of nowhere it was uncomfortably close.

Betty Samson: Yeah. I walked out my back door one evening. It was already dark. I'd say it was eight, nine o'clock, and all of a sudden I heard this ... I looked up in the sky and there was ... My younger brother found a machine gun from the plane later on. You see, it was all open fields except the perimeter of the base, which had a high fence around it. And he found this machine gun.

Chris Gray: What happened in that incident? Did you ever find out?

Betty Samson: It just blew up in the air, that's all. You just didn't get the information that fast. We didn't need to know. So, I mean, it was military stuff.

Scott Sandow: What did you do for fun?

Betty Samson: Oh. Well, I think probably the same thing young people do now-a-days. We'd go out to dinner, go to theater. Downtown Sacramento was where you went. I dated a lot of sailors, and that was, kind of, good because they had money. They'd like to spend it. Anyway, they had come from San Francisco because San Francisco is so overwhelmed with military, every kind of military, including sailors. They come to Sacramento on leave. You'd go to a bar or a restaurant something. You'd have the girls come around with flowers and cigarettes and, you know, you could see the movies. And that was kind of neat. I always liked gardenias.

Chris Gray: Well it seems like it was a time that was, you know, probably filled with a lot of anxiety about what was happening, but at the same time, very exciting.

Betty Samson: Oh yeah. Oh, well, yeah. It was an exciting time to live, sure. You didn't sit around and mope constantly because your country was at war. You did what you had to do and help. And then you had fun, too.

Chris Gray: So today, we're used to seeing this classic image of the Rosie the Riveter, but at the time, it was a pretty novel idea seeing women in jobs like this. And there was plenty of media coverage including lots of photos of Betty on the line. Today, Betty is one of the women that's commemorated at the Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historical Park in Richmond.

Scott Sandow: When we think of women working in factories and building naval ships and working on airplanes, we have the image of Rosie the Riveter, which is an icon. Is that an accurate image?

Betty Samson: Yeah. We all had to have our scarf around our head. We didn't wear a polka-dot one, but usually these outfits we had are like a coverall and Hales Department Store in Sacramento were the only organization that sold these particular outfits that were khaki colored. And after we're through with this I can show you some

pictures. Girls didn't wear pants as much as we do now-a-days, for one thing. But we did wear jeans and slacks to work.

Scott Sandow: How does it feel have embodied that icon?

Betty Samson: Oh, well, it's been a privilege and a pleasure to do this. Yeah, it makes you very proud that you had a part in this and helped during a time that it was really needed.

Scott Sandow: What does Veteran's Day mean to you?

Betty Samson: Veteran's Day has always been really important to me in honor of guys like Johnny, that died. Incidentally, I have a younger daughter, too, and a friend of hers lives in New York. A young man, very young man, and he travels a lot on the Queen Mary and stuff like that. Anyway, years ago he went to France and went to the cemetery and found Johnny's grave for me. Veterans, they mean a lot to me, and still does. We always go to the service at the cemetery. And like I said, I've been riding in the parade, this will be the sixth year, so. That's always fun, and I do my Rosie thing.

Chris Gray: We'll look for you this year, it'll certainly be interesting to see you still wearing that uniform. I think a lot of people will be impressed that it still fits of course.

Scott Sandow: Well, thank you so much for your service and spending time with us today. We certainly appreciate it. It means a lot to us. It's been an honor.

Betty Samson: Oh, thank you for having me.

Chris Gray: Absolutely. Certainly.

Betty Samson: It's been a pleasure.

Chris Gray: Around Veteran's Day, we often get questions about how people can get involved to help veterans in our community. There are plenty of local veteran service organizations that would love your help. So we always encourage you to find a cause close to your heart and to do what you can.

Scott Sandow: But we can also use your help spreading the word about our Veteran's Housing Program. Sadly, there are a few dozen homeless veterans in Placer County who are eligible for housing assistance vouchers but can't find a landlord to take them.

Chris Gray: Through our Veteran's Housing Program, landlords get guaranteed rent and a chance to give back to those who've served. If you're a landlord or know someone who is, check out the program at Placer.ca.gov/veteranshousing.

Scott Sandow:

Well, that wraps it up for today. Thank you very much to Betty Samson for taking the time to join us. And of course, thank you so much to all the Placer County veterans for your service.