

**ADMIRAL NIMITZ NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF THE PACIFIC WAR
Fredericksburg, Texas**

ORAL STORY PROGRAM

ANN LIEDTKE

WAR BRIDE

Oral Interview

December 5, 2000

**AN INTERVIEW WITH
ANN LIEDTKE
WAR BRIDE**

Mrs. Bloomfield: This is Vivian Bloomfield. I am interviewing Mrs. Ann Liedtke for her experiences as a war bride. This interview is for the Museum of the Pacific War, located in Fredericksburg, Texas. Today is Tuesday, December 5, 2000. I am at the home of Mrs. Liedtke in Kerrville, Texas.

She will relate her experiences as a young, single woman in Britain during the war. She will let us know about meeting her husband and becoming a war bride. Mrs. Liedtke's given name was Alma Anning. Her nickname was Ann and that is the name that she has been called since coming to the United States.

Mrs. Liedtke: Hello. The reason I was at Oxford, England, was that I worked for the Westminster Bank. It was one of the "Big Five". They wanted to evacuate some of their essential departments, Bank Shares, and that type of thing. So they bought a beautiful home four miles out of Oxford, called Oaken Holt. I worked there in the Bank Shares Department. I was an Addressograph operator.

I saw in the newspaper an advertisement for the American Red Cross. They wanted help to start the American Red Cross in Oxford. So, I wrote to them and I received a post card and I went to a meeting. I am going to read from my diary what I said about the meeting.

"The Red Cross meeting went off marvelously. There were two undergrads there going to teach the Americans how to punt. I am going to be a hostess and talk and cheer up the convalescent men who use our club. (Actually no convalescent men ever used our club.) So the meeting turned out ok after all. Gosh, it does sound interesting and I am going to the dance at Clarendon on Saturday. I'm printing the invitations. There is going to be cycling and hiking and picknicking."

The invitations which I printed were part of the work that I did at the bank.

Mrs. Bloomfield: Ann, you said that you were working for the Red Cross and your job for the bank using the Addressograph machine came in handy. Now, I realize that an Addressograph is similar to our current or modern embossing type printers. Were you able to do this on bank time or was this part of your volunteer work?

Mrs. Liedtke: That was my volunteer work. And I will quote from my diary. By the way, I would mention that Miss Blum was the one who was the head of this American Red Cross and it had not really got started in Oxford yet. She had an office in Botley which was half way between Oaken Holt where I lived and Oxford.

So I have written here: "Had lunch with Miss Blum in her office. She does eat funnily. To my eyes it was funny. We discussed the program and invitations until 4:30. Then I dashed into Oxford on my bicycle with the cards. Got the cards from the stationers, came back to Oaken Holt, embossed a sample plate, printed it, took it down to Botley where Miss Blum OK'd it. She asked if I would like to stay for supper. I said, "No, thank you, I would rather get the job done." I came back and printed 200 invitations, went over, had supper and went gallivanting."

Mrs. Bloomfield: These invitations were for the first or opening party at the Red Cross Center.

Mrs. Liedtke: Yes, I did take the invitations along to the Red Cross.

Mrs. Bloomfield: Ann, you said you saw an advertisement in the newspaper and that is what led you to apply to work or to volunteer at the Red Cross. Did you have to provide any kind of background information or fill out any paperwork before you were able to volunteer?

Mrs Liedtke: Oh boy, yes. I sure did. First of all you had to have a letter from a minister, and a letter from a doctor that you were healthy. Then you had to show that you had a bank account. I did not have a bank account because it was right after the depression and I was always broke. But fortunately, I worked for the Westminster Bank. So I asked my boss for a letter of recommendation. To begin with, he thought "no" because he thought he would lose me. See, the women were conscripted in those days. So, I got the three necessary pieces of information and gave them to the Red Cross.

The Red Cross wanted to make sure that the girls who were going to be there were not what we would call "on-the-make." There were too many of the other kind of girls. It was interesting anyway.

Mrs. Bloomfield: It took a lot of work on your part to even be able to do the volunteer work.

Mrs. Liedtke: Oh yes.

Mrs. Bloomfield: Ann is going to read more from her diary concerning some of the first parties that the Red Cross held.

Mrs. Liedtke: Well, we'll just back up a little bit. By this time we had moved into the Clarendon, that big hotel downtown.

"Went along to the Clarendon last night to see Miss Blum. She has a lovely office and even a lovely bathroom. I am helping to give the name tags out on Saturday. It was fun there tonight. She asked me if I would like to be on the Host Committee. I said "yes". We had a picnic on her desk which I had phoned to Botley for. She also mentioned the Sunday afternoon gathering of some girls who have helped and a few fellows. She hinted that a Master of Ceremonies would come and she also gave me some candies and tissues.

Mrs. Bloomfield: The Clarendon Hotel was taken over to be used by the Red Cross. Was it a very large hotel?

Mrs. Liedtke: Yes. I think I have given you a small picture of it. In my diary I say: "I went along to the Clarendon to help give out the name tags. There were very nice girls. One Austrian girl from Berlin asked me to help her. We exchanged addresses."

Mrs. Bloomfield: Ann is now going to tell us about one of the large social occasions there at the Red Cross, held at the Clarendon. It was one of the large dances and she is going to relate the experiences of helping to organize it and at the party itself.

Mrs. Liedtke: This is July 7, 1943, and I have in my diary that the dance for Miss Blum was a marvelous success. Actually, this was the official opening of the place. "I didn't dance all of the dances. I do prefer the English to the American dancing. (I sure changed my mind later on). The Clarendon really is lovely. Beautiful lounges, nicely furnished, much nicer than I expected. Miss Blum introduced me to an American Colonel. There were Generals there, Colonels, Lady "Somebody" and the Chief Constable of Oxford, who all made speeches. It really is a lovely place. I do hope I am OK on the Host Committee."

Mrs. Bloomfield: Ann is going to discuss some of the living conditions at the time and discuss some of the refreshments at the Red Cross party.

Mrs. Liedtke: Well, the American Red Cross parties or the dances were very popular. Another thing that I didn't mention before. Later on when you got to be friendly with a GI, then if he liked you, he would give you a pass in his name. Then I was able to go in. So this one weekend, I went on a Saturday to the dance. A very nice English guy - they sometimes allowed the Air Force in - asked me to dance. Then he wanted a date with me. I said that I

couldn't because my mother would be there the next day and I had promised to take her on the river.

So that was too bad. Then a Yank came up and asked me the same question. I gave him the same answer. But he said, "That's ok, honey, I'll take your mother too." And I said that I didn't know if mother would want that. He said, "You tell her that the Red Cross is going to provide a picnic and we'll have chicken." Oh, he told me all the things we were going to have. So I asked him to phone me the next morning and I could ask Mother if she wanted to come.

He phoned me the next morning and Mother said "OK", if he wants to take your mother along." So we met him and we went along the river. We got a punt. That is a flat-bottom boat and you have a pole - you don't row it - you have a pole. The Yank was very clumsy, but he did a good job and we had a wonderful picnic. My Mother just loved it because there we were sitting back reclining in the punt and he was doing all the work. He brought this delicious meal along. The donuts there actually had sugar on them. We had never had fried chicken before. When we looked at it, he said, "that's chicken inside that." We weren't used to fried chicken. So it was really terrific to have such a delicious meal like that. Let's face it, in England at that time, there was nothing sweet anymore.

When we had the dances, they always had an interval - none of the girls ever decided they didn't want to go to the lunchroom. We always went to the lunchroom and had the donuts with sugar in them. We really had a very nice time at the American Red Cross. That is where I met my husband.

They had the dances Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. They had very good bands, excellent bands. But the people in charge were very strict. One time it was very crowded and I went to sit on Chester's knee and the Red Cross lady came over and said, "I'm sorry you can't sit on his knee." That was a no, no.

Mrs. Bloomfield: So, they were very well chaperoned as well.

Mrs. Liedtke: Oh, definitely.

Mrs. Bloomfield: How old were you at this time? You were still working at the bank and then you said you met your husband. How old was he and what was his branch of service and what was his job at that time in England?

Mrs. Liedtke: He was in the 8th Air Force Reconnaissance. He was a cook in the Officers' Mess. That is why he got so much time off. I didn't have time to

meet anybody else, because he had so much time off. Actually, I was really going with somebody else.

Mrs. Bloomfield: You said that Mr. Liedtke was with the 8th Air Force as a cook. That is why he had more time off. Now he was stationed in Oxford?

Mrs. Liedtke: No, it was at Mount Farm. He had to catch one of their trucks to go back. Then he would come in on a Liberty Run.

Mrs. Bloomfield: About how far was that from Oxford.

Mrs. Liedtke: Oh, not too far because some of the guys cycled in. Oh, I have to say that until I came over here to the USA, I didn't realize what a sacrifice some of the Yanks made because I lived four miles out of Oxford. One time Chester walked me home four miles and then walked back four miles. Not until I came over here and I saw with the cars how they do not like to walk any distance.

Mrs. Bloomfield : What rank was Chester?

Mrs. Liedtke: Sergeant. Anyway, when we were at a Red Cross dance this one night, he asked me if he could -- he said -- "What exactly is this Ben to you?" I had told him that I was going to marry Ben. I was really looking forward to marrying him and joining him on his farm in North Dakota. He asked me if I could possibly change my mind. Well, I had made up my mind that I was not going to. But when I thought of not seeing Chester again, I said, "yes". Then he said, "Well, I'm going to get a furlough." I asked, "What for?" and he said, "To get married." I didn't think that we were going to get married right away. He said that he didn't want to lose me. So, I was absolutely flabbergasted and had mixed emotions, changing my future so suddenly, being so very happy, yet so sad and guilty that I was letting Ben down.

Mrs. Bloomfield: After the two of you decided to get married, what sort of paperwork did you have to fill out, or did he have to fill out to enable you to get a marriage license and to be able to arrange your transport to the United States.

Mrs. Liedtke: We had to go to the American Embassy and fill out a lot of forms there. Then the paperwork, oh, there was oodles of paperwork. Lots and lots of it. Which was a good thing because they wanted to make the GIs slow down and think twice about this foreign girl. When we decided to get married, at the last minute, his outfit was going to be sent overseas. So I wrote people and said, "I think I am getting married, but if you want to come, please come but I might cancel it at the last minute. We don't know

whether Chester is going to be here or not." Fortunately, he was not sent overseas and we did get married.

The food rationing was so very strict. As Chet was living on base he had no ration books, and I, still working at the bank had to eat lunch there and - if overtime - supper also. Therefore no ration book for me either.

We were rather foolish even looking for a place of our own. Finally, found a very nice lady who took us in because her son got a good meal once in a while from "The Yanks".

She gave us a big bedroom, breakfast, and week-end meals, we had to eat our evening meal at restaurants in Oxford.

Chet said, "She's like a mother to us." It was wonderful because she had some chickens in the backyard. We had eggs. We were used to having one egg a month usually. It was wonderful there.

Mrs. Bloomfield: So, how long after your marriage did the two of you live with this lady before he went back to the United States and sent for you?

Mrs. Liedtke: About six months, when I meet people now-a-days who say that their daughter is getting married and they are all excited - they don't know about this and that. I tell them that as long as you have the "groom" there, that is the main thing, because when I got married, it was so hard finding a place to stay and finding a place that would give us meals afterwards. It was so hectic!

Oh yes, I have got to tell you this. My husband was a Baptist. So, I said that we should get married in the Baptist church. I was nothing in particular then. We went to the Baptist Church and the minister said that he would marry us. Then about a couple of days before we were to get married he phoned and said that he could not marry us.

Well, why not? He said that we were just outside the four-mile limit of Oxford. So, I said, "What are we going to do?" He said for us to go to the Registry Office, get married legally, take your ring off, come to the church and get the blessing of the church.

When I actually got to the church and I saw the chap who was giving me away. He was my boss. I thought "He looks nice. He has a nice flower in his buttonhole." Then I realized I was the bride and I was supposed to have flowers. I didn't have flowers. But I had my husband, I had my groom, which was the main thing.

Mrs. Bloomfield: You had mentioned something about problems in getting a ring. Can you tell us that story, please?

Mrs. Liedtke: Oh yes. Things were so bad in England at that time that they put on a 100% purchase tax on non-essential things. We would have to pay exactly double. So, my husband sent to America to his brother and asked him to send some rings over. So they did and we got the rings that way.

Mrs. Bloomfield: Then how long were you in England alone after you said your husband came back stateside first? Then let us know about the time frame when you got here. You came on a ship?

Mrs. Liedtke: The bank went back to London, so I got a small job in Oxford, because Chet was still here. Then he had to leave, go back to U.S.A. So I went home to Chiswick where my Mother was and my address on all the paperwork. I got a job with the Bank of Australia until I left England.

But anyway, what was the question you asked me?

Mrs. Bloomfield: When you arranged to come to the United States, he had already come back to the United States to his family farm.

Mrs. Liedtke: We were only apart about six months. We were married in February, 1945 and I went over on a hospital ship, the Bridgeport. My husband met me in New York in February, 1946. The hospital ship was full of GI brides and their children. I volunteered for the library with the American Red Cross. I was so excited. Every night when I went to my bunk, I thought that the ship was getting closer to America all of the time.

It was in February and there was a storm at sea and did that ship ever go up and down, up and down. They gave us wonderful food on board. Compared to what we had in England, it was terrific. They gave us chocolate ice cream. I ate so much chocolate ice cream, that I didn't want any more when I got to America.

Mrs. Bloomfield: Tell us about him meeting you in New York and your travel to South Dakota.

Mrs. Liedtke: Well, Chester met me in New York. Because of the storm at sea, our ship was delayed a couple of days. Actually, the storm was so bad that some of the women had to be met by ambulances, they were so seasick. I was very fortunate. He met me in New York.

I have a picture someplace of me in front of the window of a wonderful shop that had the window full of chocolates. Oh, I couldn't believe it. A

whole window full of chocolates. Back at Oxford, when Chester would bring me a candy bar, I would never eat it by myself, I would always break it up and pass it around the office. Oh, to see all of that window full of chocolates. I said, "Take a snap of me."

Mrs. Bloomfield: Approximately what was the date that you arrived in the United States?

Mrs. Liedtke: It was in February, I'm not quite sure of the date. Then--

Mrs. Bloomfield: Was this in 1945?

Mrs. Liedtke: No, it was 1946. We married in 1945, then we were together about six months. We were very fortunate to be together for six months. Because I still worked. I didn't know what would happen if I didn't work. They could have drafted me, still, I thought. But we had this nice little place where that lady took us in. We enjoyed the Red Cross. We really had a wonderful time. Because we were at Oxford, just 70 miles from London, we did not get any bombings at all. When I had my sister come from London and a plane would go over, she would cringe. I told her that she didn't have to worry because we never got bombed.

I heard that there was an unspoken agreement that the Germans would not bomb Oxford and Cambridge and we would not bomb Heidelberg. I don't know if that was true, but it just worked out that way.

Talking of bombing, in late 1940 I was home in Chiswick, London, for the week-end. In the evening, I waited to be picked up by the coach, which the bank provided (at that time) to take us back to Oxford. The raid started, sirens wailing, Ak-Ak guns going, bombs exploding; the Air Raid Warden made me go down into the shelter.

I was scared, when a big "thud" came close, the dirt ceiling kinda vibrated and shook some dirt on us. While still dark, the "all clear" siren went off and when I came up, there was a BIG-RED-GLOW in the sky -- LONDON WAS BURNING.

I went back to Oxford by train and folk were happy to see me because they thought I'd been killed in the raid.

A lot later (from my diary July 7th '44). Letter from Mother, "We've been bombed." Mr. Parsons, my boss OK'd me leaving. At home in Chiswick, walls one could see through, our kitchen door - the back - just been jammed on again but, back to front.

Mrs. Chivers, upstairs apartment - part of her roof gone.

Slept with "Tiny" in her bunk in the surface shelter.

The "Doodle Bugs" came over, but, it's when the noise stops, that's when you know it's now coming down -- that's the worst part -- then -- a thud -- and someone else "GOT IT"

Mrs. Liedtke: I have a snap of me in the "Fire-brigade" at Oaken Holt, complete with hard-hat, coveralls, hatchets and long hose, five girls and three retired men (bank clerks). We were taught how to put out "incendiary" bombs mostly small ones which would start a bigger fire if not put out.

Mrs. Bloomfield: So you were married in February of 1945 and were together until approximately August? Then he returned to the states. Then you took a ship over and arrived in February of 1946.

Mrs. Liedtke: We went by train to his home. We stopped in Milwaukee to see a cousin of his. They were so welcoming. It was wonderful.

Then we got to his home. His folks were so welcoming. Chet's dad said "Ann is like Ruth in the Bible.... Thy people shall be my people". Chester and I lived with his folks on the farm for about one year.

Mrs. Bloomfield: What city was this in South Dakota?

Mrs. Liedtke: It was a farming community out in the boon-docks. The closest town was Miller, South Dakota. Then where the State Fair was in Huron was about 45 miles, and cross country was Pierre, the Capital. We used to go camping there later on. But anyway, we lived with Chester's folks for a year and they were wonderful to me. Actually they were scared that Chester would stay in England.

They started us on a little farm. It was 80 acres and 10 cows and Chester's dad bought us a small house. It is what would be called a cabin, now. In those days they didn't have motels. Remember they had small cabins. That is what we had to begin with. We did not have any children right away. Well, I just wanted to make sure that every thing was as good as it turned out to be.

One day, when we moved onto our own farm, Chester told me that I had to be friendly here. I was not in Oxford or England. I was isolated and had to be friendly to people. A couple drove up in the car and I invited them in. It turned out that they wanted to sell me something. They wanted me to have a beautiful portrait done. We couldn't afford it.

So I decided to be more careful the next time. So when the next car drove up, I looked in the car window and asked very politely if they would mind very much telling me exactly what they wanted. They said that they were relatives from North Dakota. I was embarrassed, but they were fun people and we had good laugh about it later on.

Mrs. Bloomfield: You mentioned to me earlier that there was sort of a support group of other brides from England or from other countries. Could you tell us something about that?

Mrs. Liedtke: The dentist's wife in Huron belonged to the American Red Cross and she started a support group in Huron. We really liked it because we could compare notes with each other. You could say things to a fellow English gal which you would not say to an American however well meant it was. The funny things that were perfectly innocent to us, had a different meaning over here. We just were homesick and it was so good to get together.

The American Red Cross was so good. If Chester hadn't have met me in New York, they would have seen that I got on the correct train and they would have had somebody to meet me and they would have followed through – like I was a package being delivered!!

Mrs. Bloomfield: You had mentioned in this support group there were some young ladies who were extremely young. At this time, approximately how old were you and Chester?

Mrs. Liedtke: I was two years older than Chester. He was 25 and I was 27. I kidded him about marrying an older woman.

Mrs. Bloomfield: So you said you were married a while, approximately how long were you married when you had your first child?

Mrs. Liedtke: I was married in 1945 and Brian was born in 1949. My in-laws had thought that we wouldn't have any children. They were so happy because we were the ones who were the closest to the home farm. His brothers were there and they helped us with the machinery. His folks were just crazy about our kids. I had one son and four years later we had another son. Our children were the ones that were closest to the grandparents.

Mrs. Bloomfield: Do your children still live in South Dakota?

Mrs. Liedtke: Yes, the oldest son, Brian, is school principal in Mobridge, South Dakota -- a small town, but great hunting and fishing.

He's married to Jodi, they have a daughter, Kisha, and a son, Jed, who married Tammy and now I'm a great grandmother with their baby, Sydnie.

The other son, Roy, is in "Range Management" in Gillette, Wyoming. Started with Exxon, then others, being a "farm boy" he surely likes that, working, replacing the land, etc.

As a hobby, he is a partner in a 6,500 acre buffalo ranch outside Gillette.

Mrs. Bloomfield: You mentioned to me that you began to long for the Coast. So that is when you began to travel to the Texas coast.

Mrs. Liedtke: Oh yes. Somebody had told us that Brownsville was very friendly to visit. I wanted to see the sea. It was really nice to get down there. But my husband was very thoughtful because one year the snow was so deep for so long, I said, "It seems to have been so white outside for so long, I long for color." It was planting time. He was planting corn. He took a long week-end off and took me down to Orange City, Iowa, where the tulip festival was. It was wonderful to see the colored tulips.

When we got back, we visited with his brother on the home farm. Chester said, "I suppose you thought I was nuts taking off." And his brother said, "If it had rained, you would have lost part of your corn crops." But Chester still had his wife and his brother didn't.

I did go back to England later on a visit.

Mrs. Bloomfield: When did you return to England to visit?

Mrs. Liedtke: That was in 1960. But I got ill over there and I could not have come back on my own. And Chester came and got me. That was in August, it was the height of the tourist season and things were so rushed. (Actually, a friend of ours had to go and see our Congressman to be able to get a passport in a hurry) and he flew over and he was my "knight in shining armor."

Mrs. Bloomfield: You say that through this support group that the Red Cross had started, did you stay friends with some of those women? Were they life-long friends? Or did you just sort of help each other?

Mrs. Liedtke: I was very fortunate according to some of them. I think I told you earlier there is one gal that I still correspond with and I saw her when I went to see my grandson get married earlier this year. She came over with her young son to join her husband, her husband took her to his home and they stayed the night there. The next morning, his folks said to her "How much will you take to leave the boy and go home?"

There were some people who did not want to have a foreign daughter-in-law. I was very fortunate.

Oh, and I must tell you. I had a twin sister, Rene, and things were -- it was after the depression so nobody had -- ordinary working people did not have much money. So we wanted to get her over and we had to prove that she was not going to be a burden on the community. We were able to say that, this being 1952, we were worth \$10,000. I said to my sister, "You come over next year." She said that she could not come because they would not allow the money out of England. I had told her that we were going to send her the round-trip fare. I said we would send the one-way fare and she could save up the money for the other 1/2 and when she got here we would give her the other 1/2 back so she would have spending money. She came over. She enjoyed it so much. I am so glad we had her because later on she had trouble and could not have come.

I should mention that Roy did visit England and "Tiny" took him to Oaken Holt, and he saw the lovely place where I spent the war years and Chester came up so often.

They welcomed him, had a nice tea, it's now a very expensive retirement home.

Mrs. Bloomfield: Ann, do you have other memories or experiences that you would like to share with us to help with this history of the home front experience?

Mrs. Liedtke: Amongst the different chaps that I went out with, there was a young Canadian I met at one of the dances, just before the Americans came over. We went out and had funtime together. One time, he wanted to go to London, so I met him in London, went to a show and brought him home. He stayed overnight with my mother and I. We were not going to get married or anything like that. We were just having fun together. He used to come out to Oxford. He was an air gunner. He would come out to Oaken Holt, where I lived and worked, on that beautiful estate. He really liked it. This I remember, we went cycling and he saw the thatched cottages. He said he had seen pictures of those in calendars, but he did not really know people lived there.

One time he phoned up and asked if I could come out. I said, "No, I have my curlers in and I am having an early night." He said, "Please come out." So, I went out and met him at the bottom of the driveway. We talked and necked a little. I am so glad I took time out, because later on, he got killed in a plane crash. I was so sorry and I wrote the commanding officer and then he wrote me and told me I could write to his folks. So I wrote his

mother and I said that I thought that she might like the pictures I had of her son. I said, "You don't know me, but I enjoyed being with your son and here are some pictures you might like." And she sent me a letter back. Oh, she was so thankful for those pictures. She said, "You don't know what a difference it made in my son's life. He had told her that going to Oaken Holt was like going home." So I always felt so glad that I did go out that night.

Mrs. Bloomfield: And it was good that you had befriended people. Well, thank you so much for sharing your experiences with us today.

FOOD RATIONING

Weekly Rations

2 1/2 oz. Tea
3 oz. Bacon
1/2 lb. Sugar
3 oz. Cheese
4 oz. Margarine
3 oz. Butter
2 oz. Lard
1/4 lb Meat (about 25¢)

1 lb of Jam per month
1 egg per month

No milk unless under 18, or over 65

“POINTS” were used to ration other types of food. We were allowed 20 points per month. For example:

Can of beans – 4 points
Tin of Salmon - 20 points
Chocolate Biscuits – 16 points for 1 lb.

If going home for the weekend, our weekend portion of the ration was 1 "pat" of butter (as now served in cafes) and 1 slice of bacon that was so thin one could almost see through it.