

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

Lucille Wilson

August 20, 2001

Interview With
Mrs. Lucille Wilson

Mr. Misenheimer

My name is Richard Misenheimer and today is August 20, 2001. I'm interviewing Mrs. Lucy Wilson at her home at 114 W. Washington Street, Winamac, Indiana. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific Wars, Center for Pacific War Studies for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mrs. Wilson, I want to thank you for taking time today for this interview. Let me start by asking you, when were you born?

Mrs. Wilson

December the 16th, 1918.

Mr. Misenheimer

Where were you born?

Mrs. Wilson

I was born at Francesville, Indiana. I also have a twin brother named Louis, so it was Louis and Lucille. (Laughing) I was the last of seven in our family. My parent's names were John Carl and Augusta. My maiden name was Werner. We went to school at Francesville. I graduated in 1936 and I worked for a while and then I went to Purdue University. I was still there when the war began and Louis was called to the service and

he decided to join the Air Force and he strongly told me that I should also join but somehow it didn't appeal to me and I went to work at Fort Wayne at General Electric and they were making coils and different things for the service people.

Mr. Misenheimer

Where were you the day that you heard about Pearl Harbor being bombed?

Mrs. Wilson

I was working in Chicago, staying with my sister and I was waiting tables and the news came over in the restaurant and two fellas jumped up and they said, "Oh, we gotta hear this. My name is on the calling list. I'll be in the service. I don't want to miss any of this." And away they went, before I could even take their order. (Laughing) I was just working in Chicago temporarily trying to make money to go back to Purdue. I went back to Purdue after that and that was when I got word that Lester was going to go into the Navy, at that time he was in Arizona.

Mr. Misenheimer

Where had you met Lester?

Mrs. Wilson

Well, he's from Francesville also, so I've known him all my life. He came over and visited with my twin brother, so I got to know him quite well.

Mr. Misenheimer

When did you go to work in Fort Wayne then?

Mrs. Wilson

I stayed with another one of my sisters and went to the General Electric plant and apparently men were hard to come by because they gave me a man's job, testing coils. They paid me a man's wages and that made me very happy so I didn't go back to school. I just worked.

Mr. Misenheimer

What was the wage at that point?

Mrs. Wilson

Seems to me like when I made seventy-five dollars a week, I thought it was really a lot of money. (Laughing) We had electrical components and we tested them to see if they were any good. Occasionally we found a bad one and sometimes they were able to repair it and sometimes they threw them out. I don't know what the coils were used for. They never told us and we never really inquired. I do know that they sent us to electrical classes and we had to go through that. I was young and there were three other girls working with me. It was during that time when Lester wanted me to come to New York and marry him and they gave me time off and I did go to New York and we were married. Every time he came into port, I think I made seven trips to New York and two

to Boston. We were married in 1943 in a church, (Laughing) I know that. November the 26th, 1943.

Mr. Misenheimer

What were things like back here at home at that point? Were there many shortages?

Mrs. Wilson

Oh yes, lots of shortages. We were on coupons. I had shoe rationing, which I usually turned over to my sister because she had several young boys and they went through the shoes a lot faster than I did so I gave her the coupons and there was sugar rationing and there was gasoline rationing and I guess that was about it. Those were the big things, but I got along fine with everything as far as the coupons went, there was no problem there. On my trips to New York, we had some rickety trains that we rode on and some that were very nice. We just took whatever we could and I didn't sleep on the trains but you usually had a reclining chair that I guess I dozed off and on, that was about it.

(Laughing)

Mr. Misenheimer

How long would it take to get from here to New York?

Mrs. Wilson

It was an overnight trip from Ft. Wayne.

Mr. Misenheimer

When you got to New York, did restaurants have food and that sort of thing?

Mrs. Wilson

Yes, they seemed to. Everything seemed to be fine as far as I was concerned and we ate very good food and Lester was always there and I spent a couple days with him and then back to work. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenheimer

They had hotels there that were open and that sort of thing?

Mrs. Wilson

Yes, we had hotels. I remember one time I came to the train depot and Lester wasn't there and I didn't know what to do and I waited and waited and waited and he didn't show up and there was a hotel that we were used to going to, so I thought well, I'll go there and see if he'll find me there and he did. (Laughing) I think it was called the ^{DIXIE} Dipsy at that time so I was real happy that he found me. I don't know what his excuse was any more or if he had an excuse. (Laughing) I remember on one trip to New York, my twin brother decided to join us and we enjoyed his visit. By then he was in the Air Force and he was a Lieutenant JG, I believe, and he was headed for Florida and then the next time I heard of him, he had been killed on our birthday in 1944 and we had a memorial service on our first anniversary, I remember. Lester was still out to sea and I was home so that was a rather tragic moment in our lives.

Mr. Misenheimer

So there were shortages of food but you had plenty to eat, I guess right?

Mrs. Wilson

As far as I know, of course I was living with my sister and she was preparing the meals (Laughing) so I didn't bother about the meals. Anything was fine with me and I didn't notice any shortage. I suppose if they had sugar rationed they probably didn't use it up and make baked foods that needed a lot of sugar.

Mr. Misenheimer

You had your coupons, which she could use to get food for the family. Did you visit your family back here in Francesville during that time?

Mrs. Wilson

I did and I had to ride a bus as far as Winamac and then somebody had to come and get me and if I traveled all the time by bus why I went as far as Delphi and then there must have been a bus to Francesville, I don't remember my parents coming after me but the buses are long gone now. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenheimer

What did your father do?

Mrs. Wilson

He had a grocery store there at Francesville.

Mr. Misenheimer

Did he have a shortage with gasoline do you know? Did he have any problem with that?

Mrs. Wilson

I don't recall. I was in Ft Wayne and I guess that was kind of removed from me so I really don't know. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenheimer

When you were with Lester any time, did you go to any USO shows or anything like that?

Mrs. Wilson

We did go to plays but I don't think they were in regard to service, that came later I think after the war. We did go to a few plays.

Mr. Wilson

Let me barge in there. The only connection that I had with the USO was they had a great, great center in Boston and that city was so outgoing to servicemen that there was more invitations for Thanksgiving dinner than there were sailor boys. We loved Boston.

Mr. Misenheimer

You didn't have television then but you had radio. What were some of the radio shows you might have listened to, or did you do that?

Mrs. Wilson

(Laughing) Oh yeah, we listened to all of the popular ones. What were they?

(Laughing)

Mr. Wilson

Well, I tell you what, the only radio that I heard was when I was in the hospital at Charleston, Massachusetts with what they called Cat Fever, actually it was too much ragweed pollen, and I remember the Super Suds commercial. Remember that little ditty for Super Suds, Super Suds and I thought it was terrible but hey that would be classic compared to what they give us now for advertising.

Mr. Misenheimer

I think Jack Benny was popular back then.

Mrs. Wilson

Oh yeah, he was one of the very popular ones. Amos and Andy and right off hand I don't know.

Mr. Misenheimer

Fred Allen?

Mrs. Wilson

Oh yeah,

Mr. Wilson

Mrs. Wilson

(Laughing) I hadn't thought about some of those for a long time.

Mr. Wilson

Who was the guy that said London calling you? He made his claim to fame in war time.

Mr. Misenheimer

What did you do for entertainment back in those days? I know that Lester is listening so.....

Mrs. Wilson

Boy, I can't remember that we did anything, just stayed at home and worked and went back to work the next day. (Laughing) I don't remember that we entertained anything but probably listened to the radio and read the newspaper.

Mr. Misenheimer

How about movies?

Mrs. Wilson

Did we go to movies in New York? I don't remember. We didn't go to any in Ft. Wayne.

Mr. Wilson

I tell you what, going to a movie was such an ordeal. Lines were so long, there were times the lines were four abreast; and when Frank Sinatra was in New York City the line stretched on the four sides of the city block and it was not just one abreast, one or two abreast, so actually going to a movie was too much of an ordeal.

Mr. Misenheimer

What were your hours? What hours did you work?

Mrs. Wilson

Well, I started out on the day shift and then they put me on the second shift and my hours were 3 to about 11 or 12 something like that. I know it was an 8 hour shift. I wasn't working overtime. Fortunately my sister lived within a few blocks and so I walked to work, (Laughing) so that saved gas. (Laughing) I remember after the war was over, I was still in Ft. Wayne and they had a huge parade for all of the servicemen. I know, I took one picture of the parade and when this friend of Lester's, a Navy buddy, came over

here to look at some of the pictures why he was astounded (Laughing) that we had a parade. I guess when he was out of the service why they didn't have any parades for him but they did in some of the cities.

Mr. Wilson

Incidentally, she also was in New York when they had a Victory Parade and saw Eisenhower. It had to be when Germany surrendered because it wasn't two weeks after Japan surrendered that I was home.

Mr. Misenheimer

So you were there in May of '45 when they had a big parade there in New York?

Mrs. Wilson

Yes, but the parade of which I was speaking was in Ft. Wayne. I guess Lester's Navy buddy was surprised that they had any parades at all.

Mr. Wilson

She has a picture of Ike in the open car.

Mrs. Wilson

Yeah, I do have someplace but you can't really tell it's him. (Laughing) Look closely. (Laughing) It's so far away.

Mr. Wilson

So you see we fought a very dull war, Richard. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenheimer

Then when did you come back to this area from Ft. Wayne?

Mrs. Wilson

Well, at the time Lester finally got out of service, I was pregnant with our first child and then when he came back why we left and went to Francesville for a while and then Lester got a job at Winamac as a service officer and then he stayed with the job for a year and decided there was no future in that and decided to go back to law school. (Laughing)

So the three of us went to Indiana University and they had some apartments built, we stayed at the apartments and he finished his law school and we came back to Winamac and he started his practice.

Mr. Misenheimer

Can you think of anything kind of humorous or funny that may have happened along that time you were in Ft. Wayne or whatever?

Mrs. Wilson

(Laughing) Well, that takes some deep thought. I can't remember anything very funny that happened. (Laughing) Can you Les?

Mr. Wilson

No.

Mr. Misenheimer

There at the factory, GE was it mainly women working there you say?

Mrs. Wilson

No there were some older men that were working there. I happened to be working with two younger girls and chummed around with them. We enjoyed each others company. We did go swimming a few times in Ft. Wayne and I guess before we went to work. Of course, working the second shift why there's not much time for movies and other entertainment.

Mr. Misenheimer

How about clothes, was there a shortage of clothes or how did that work?

Mrs. Wilson

No, I didn't spend a whole lot on clothes at the time. I did buy some clothes when we were going to get married. (Laughing) I didn't seem to have too much problem there.

Mr. Misenheimer

I believe clothing was also rationed during the war. I know the shoes were.

Mr. Wilson

Stockings were. Nylons.

Mr. Misenheimer

Could you get nylons?

Mrs. Wilson

Yes, but they were real heavy stuff, not like it is now and of course they had seams up the middle which they've changed that. I really didn't care too much for the stockings. They were a little heavy. (Laughing) They wore well. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenheimer

Do you recall anything about the clothing styles back then?

Mrs. Wilson

Well, I have some pictures of during the war and I know I wore short dresses, about knee length, nothing any shorter than that. The style isn't too far off from what we have, I didn't think as far as suits went and sports clothes.

Mr. Wilson

Everybody's hair was groomed better then. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenheimer

When people dressed up then, did the ladies wear hats most of the time?

Mrs. Wilson

Oh yes, it was about like we weren't dressed up unless we had hats and gloves and high heels for the young person. I was in my twenties at that time. We got away from the hats after the war when they started the different hairstyles.

Mr. Wilson

She once mailed a snapshot of herself that looked like she was wearing only a towel. I passed it around to my friends on the ship and they oohed and aaahed. She was standing there holding it up (Laughing). They didn't know but I learned later that she had a bathing suit on under that.

Mrs. Wilson

(Laughing) I had my bathing suit underneath that but he didn't know it. (Laughing) That was embarrassing in later years. (Laughing) My brother was still in the trainee service in Florida and I can't remember what kind of a plane he had. It was a huge plane.

Mr. Wilson

I can tell you. It was a PBM.

Mrs. Wilson

I know it was huge and he'd been married six weeks when they decided to go on some kind of training mission off of Key West. I don't know who was the pilot, his wife never did find out. Anyway, they went into a dive, off of the coast of Key West, and they went down and never came up and that was about it.

Mr. Wilson

I can tell you a little about that. That aircrafts primary purpose was on a submarine warfare and they were glide bombers. Gliding like that to the target and that's what they were practicing. We were together in New York City not to awful long before all that happened and he treated me with a fine Cuban Havana cigar and he said, "The plane I fly, takes off at 90, top speed is 90, lands at 90; and you live to be 90". I never will forget that.

Mr. Misenheimer

He was in the Navy Air Corps then?

Mr. Wilson

Yeah, the Navy.

Mrs. Wilson

I remember one instance when he was in New York to visit us, Les was busy on the ship so he decided that we would go out to dinner, and he ordered some wine and I wasn't used to drinking wine and it must have tasted pretty good because I gulped it down and he said, "Lucy, you're supposed to sip wine. You're not supposed to gulp it down. (Laughing) So after that, I remembered to sip my wine. (Laughing)

Mr. Wilson

That wasn't the first time she embarrassed him. (Laughing)

Mr. Misenheimer

Did the people feel real patriotic, or what was the mood of the country along that line?

Mrs. Wilson

Well, a lot of them did otherwise Louis wouldn't have joined the service, and he wanted me to be more patriotic too and join up with the service too but I didn't. It didn't appeal to me. A good friend of mine, while I was working at General Electric, she lived alone in an apartment. She was just a young girl, the same as I was. Her husband was in the service so she kept the apartment so that when he was home on leave why they would have a place to live. Her name was MJ. We lost contact with each other but we enjoyed each others company.

Mr. Wilson'

Actually, outside of the fact that cigarette smokers had a hard time getting cigarettes and anybody that liked sugar was on short rations and gasoline was very scarce, I've got to say this, I didn't see much inconvenience around here the few days I was able to spend here. Really.

Mrs. Wilson

Well, I remember one time Les came home with a big package of gum. He felt that we couldn't get gum and he should bring it home from the service. (Laughing) Strange part of it was, that I wasn't the chewing gum type so it was kind of wasted on me. (Laughing)

Mr. Wilson

Underwear shorts I brought home weren't wasted, you know, there had to be a shortage in clothes because I was specifically asked to bring some underwear shorts and I could get plenty of them. In many ways, we had it far, far better than people at home. I remember one time, I was making the trip coming home instead of having her join me and you look forward after being out to sea, and you had plenty of money to throw around so I ate in the dining car in the morning and they seated me across from some dowagers, very well dressed dowagers, who I know, that when they seated me down there she looked at me like a side dish that she didn't order and I saw her eyeing my butter and I said, "Ma'm can I offer you my butter?" I said, "We get plenty of that." And she grabbed that away and she says, "Yes." She says, "The Navy gives you guys everything and we do without." She was not sympathetic to a guy in his uniform. Very unusual for people to be that way then.

Mr Misenheimer

But they had Victory Gardens?

Mrs. Wilson

Yes, I remember my mother decided she should have a Victory Garden and we had a garden away from our house, a plot of ground. When it came real dry, we carried buckets and buckets of water and I helped water the vegetables when I was home. (Laughing) I do remember that. She did a lot of canning at that time.

Mr. Wilson

Her canned peaches were better than Del Monte's. (Laughing)

Mrs. Wilson

Yes, they were flavorsome. (Laughing)

Mr Misenheimer

Now in Ft. Wayne for example, would there be areas where they had Victory Gardens there?

Mrs. Wilson

Yes, whenever they could, they did have Victory Gardens if they had space in their lawn where they could have vegetables why they plowed it up and they had vegetables for the family. We had a ice box to begin with. We did have a stove didn't we, an electric stove. We had the wringer type washing machine.

Mr. Wilson

I'll tell you what I came home with. I came home with a washboard and a hand wringer and we had the luxury of laundry tubs down in our little basement and she at least didn't have to hand wring her clothes. I suspect it was the fall of '46 before we got a washer. We got a Speigel catalog and they were advertising for \$85 and we immediately sent an order and by golly we got it. We got it! I was a Speigel customer for quite a while after that.

Mr. Misenheimer

This is the end of this tape.