

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With  
Virginia A. Cumberland  
Rochester, IN  
August 9, 2017  
Rosie the Riveter

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is August 9, 2017. I am interviewing Virginia A. Cumberland at her home at 945 Sanford Road, Rochester, IN 46975. Her telephone number is 574-847-7142. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. Virginia is telling me about her brother, who was in World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Virginia, explain to me. Show me some pictures here and tell me what they are. What's this picture, Virginia.

Ms. Cumberland:

Why this would be at Fort Riley, Kansas and that is my brother's buddy on the horse and that is my mother standing beside the horse. Some of those I don't know. That would all be at Fort Riley, Kansas, about 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This was a group of people.

Ms. Cumberland:

A group, yes. That is my brother, Gene Cummings, standing beside his horse. That's my brother in his riding outfit and he's saluting. He was always doing a lot of saluting.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He's got on his riding boots and his jodhpurs on so he looks like a real soldier.

Ms. Cumberland:

This is Gene in World War II sitting on his jeep and the jeep's name was "Happy."

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. Looks like a GPW, jeep, right.

Ms. Cumberland:

This is a picture of the guard mount. That's the guard mount.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's a group of soldiers standing, ready to go on guard.

Ms. Cumberland:

This is him also in his riding hat. This is the summer of 1942 when he was home on furlough in Kokomo at Foster Park. Now this is him. He was in charge, I don't know if those were jeeps.

Aren't they jeeps? He was in charge of every one of those to make sure they were in shape and ready to go.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The first is a jeep and the rest of them are command cars.

Ms. Cumberland:

He was in charge of that whole row and not only that, he was in charge of a lot of motorcycles, too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They are half-tracks there with rollers on the front.

Ms. Cumberland:

Here he was in 1942, staying in front of the house we were raised in and he's standing with his grandmother and his grandfather. He's home on furlough. This is 1943 in Foster Park, Kokomo. Just in uniform.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Got his hand up on a tree limb, resting.

Ms. Cumberland:

I don't know about this. Just a picture of him. I don't know what year that car is. I can't tell, can you?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No. He's standing in his uniform with his jodhpurs and riding boots on.

Ms. Cumberland:

Here he is on a motorcycle and he was in charge of, oh I don't know, lots of motorcycles. He had to make sure all the motorcycles were all ready to go. It must have been the summer of 1943 probably, he's got his hat all dressed and there's snow on the ground and he's standing next to...he's home on furlough...and that's my mother with him. That's all I got out. This is in France in 1945, that's when he was in France in 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Virginia, I want to talk a little bit about your background. What's your date of birth?

Ms. Cumberland:

February 7, 1922,

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Ms. Cumberland:

Kokomo, Indiana.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Ms. Cumberland:

I had two brothers. No sisters but the one brother got killed by a school bus when he was 14 years old.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And the one you showed me the pictures of was your brother that was in the service?

Ms. Cumberland:

Yes. He's the one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Ms. Cumberland:

Well, grandpa worked at the steel mill and grandpa always had a job so we didn't go hungry or anything but there's a lot of people did. It was hard on everybody. We didn't go to town and buy new dresses or anything. Mother made most all my clothes. But some people it was harder than others but being grandpa had a job, we fared fairly well. Oh, I made seed sack dresses. Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Seed sack dresses, those were the days.

Ms. Cumberland:

Seed sack dresses and aprons.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Ms. Cumberland:

Kokomo.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you finish there?

Ms. Cumberland:

1940.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do when you finished high school?

Ms. Cumberland:

Well, let's see. What did I do? I went to work. I went to work at Delco first and then Chrysler's. Back then you could walk out of one factory and walk right into another. Jobs everywhere galore. Then I left that and I went to the steel mill and I worked several years at the steel mill. I was a tool and die maker.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were at the steel mill, were you making things for the war?

Ms. Cumberland:

Well, yes. All of them, Chrysler and all we were making, at Chrysler's we were making engine, what do you call them? For the motors to go in, the planes. Oh, they were huge, they were big. They'd come down, you couldn't lift them. They were heavy. The steel mill was using tool and die rooms so we were making lots of different things for, you know, I had to run all kind of machines. They'd bring me a blueprint and give me a blueprint and I'd look at the blue print and I'd make on my shaper...you know what a shaper is?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No. Tell me.

Ms. Cumberland:

It's a big machine that cuts steel, does anything you want. They'd put a big piece of steel in the shaper and they'd give me a blueprint and I'd make it for them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You made that, OK.

Ms. Cumberland:

It was interesting. I liked it. I liked my work.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did you do that?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, let's see, about two years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Everybody was just scared and worried and especially my mother because she had a boy, you know, and didn't know what would happen. Of course he ended up in the war and ended up in France. Went all clear through the war. But I remember V-J Day when we won. More than anything, because everybody went to town. Everybody was hugging and kissing everybody else. The war is over and people were just grabbing strangers on the streets and everything. It was just wild. Just wild.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But having heard about Pearl Harbor, how did you think that would affect you?

Ms. Cumberland:

Well, other than just worry about the country and all, I was too young to really understand the severity of it but you know, you worried about your brother and things like that. They didn't get over here. I'm more worried now that they're going to be over here, according to the news.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your brother's birth date?

Ms. Cumberland:

February 27, 1920.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He was older than you?

Ms. Cumberland:

Yes. The one that got killed was older too. He was born in 1918.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, so your brother that was living was older than you were?

Ms. Cumberland:

Yes, they were older. I was the baby.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were your father's and mother's first name?

Ms. Cumberland:

I didn't have a father. He left my mother with three little children. I was 4, 6 and 8 and he left her and went into Ohio. And back in those days they didn't have to pay support so my mother worked to raise us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was her first name?

Ms. Cumberland:

Mother was Garnet.



Mr. Misenhimer:

What was his first name?

Ms. Cumberland:

Roy. Back in the Air Force

Mr. Misenhimer:

In the Air Force?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, yeah, he was in the Air Force clear to the end of the war. He was stationed in Paris for two years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But now earlier, the pictures with that...

Ms. Cumberland:

That was back before they went overseas. That was at Fort Riley, Kansas. But he went from being in the cavalry to being in the Air Force. Then he was in the Air Force clear to the end of the war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did he do in the Air Force?

Ms. Cumberland:

He couldn't fly because he had to wear glasses. You couldn't wear glasses and fly an airplane but he was, well, anytime I wrote the address was 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant J. R. Cummings, C.O. He was an officer most of the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did he go to O.C.S., Officer Training School?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, yes. He graduated from that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Had he been to college?

Ms. Cumberland:

Yes, but he left college to go to the war. He was at Indianapolis.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did he go in? Do you know?

Ms. Cumberland:

I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Probably 1942.

Ms. Cumberland:

He'd been I suppose about 18-19.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He was 21 when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Ms. Cumberland:

Yes, but he was in before Pearl Harbor. They were already drafting people. Of course he was drafted. Everybody was drafted, you know. They drafted them one right after the other. You had to go.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The draft started in 1940.

Ms. Cumberland:

Yes, Yes. I believed in the draft. Because it equal...it wasn't just the rich boys getting to stay home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, yeah, that's right.

Ms. Cumberland:

Because Roosevelt's son was in. He fought right alongside the rest of them. It didn't matter who you were, you were drafted. Otherwise only the poor kids had to go. They volunteered.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about...who all were you working with when you were making these engines and motors. What were the people like you were working there with? Were they nice people?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, lovely people. Oh, yes. It was practically...there wasn't too many young men in there. The young men had all left. They were gone. It was more middle-aged men and all the foremen and all the people working and women. Women were working. The factories were full of women running great big milling machines and everything were women. The machines were big as that wall or more. But it was girls that was running them. 19-20 year old girls and 21.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What percentage of your group would have been women and what percentage were men?

Ms. Cumberland:

98 women and 2 men.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, mostly women.

Ms. Cumberland:

The men were gone.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in that group?

Ms. Cumberland:

Good, good. Everybody was nice. Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the pay in those days?

Ms. Cumberland:

Well, I don't even remember. You made a living. I don't remember hourly wage or anything like that. I don't remember but we used to get time and a half on Saturdays and double time on Sundays. So that was pretty good.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some things you remember about your time working there?

Ms. Cumberland:

It was nice. I made lady friends, women you worked with.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the last time you worked there? What date did you leave?

Ms. Cumberland:

The last day I worked out here at Torrence, too for several years at Torrence. Made some nice friends there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do there?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, run a machine and we made, what did we call them? It made nuts and bolts and things. There was a great big machine that went round like this and at every station it either drilled a hole out for the screw to go in or it chamfered it, smoothed it out, or reamed it or whatever and there were about six stations around the machine and every station it did a different job. You could set it on automatic and let it do its thing or you could run it by hand and put one on it and let it go around, put another. Some of the girls got mad at me because I would set it on automatic and let it go. That was harder. I always run it on automatic and some of the girls wouldn't. They would wait until it stopped and then they would put on. You understand?

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of training did you have to do that?

Ms. Cumberland:

Well, just working.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about your first job you had? Did you have training for that?

Ms. Cumberland:

Not much. We were green off the street. They wanted workers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Just on the job training?

Ms. Cumberland:

Yes, really.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Did you hear about that?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What reaction did people have to that?

Ms. Cumberland:

I was very sad because I liked him. He brought us through the war and Truman had took over then. Truman had to finish it but Roosevelt got us through the worst part of it. Otherwise if it hadn't been for him I think we'd be speaking Japanese today. He really got things going. I'll put it that way. That's just the way it was. It was sad that people had to...you kill me or I kill you. I mean it's whoever pulls the trigger first. That's just the way it was. Just the way it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you get your war news during the war?

Ms. Cumberland:

Radio. There was no TV. Radio and newspaper.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about movies?

Ms. Cumberland:

Well, probably but I don't remember much news in the movies.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They had the newsreels all the time.

Ms. Cumberland:

Yeah, they did. But I probably pay any attention to them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered. Did you have any kind of celebration when that happened?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, yes. People went crazy. Oh, yes, we were so happy. So happy and the boys would be coming home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm talking about Germany.

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, Germany. Oh, yes. That was a different thing. I don't know too much about that part of it. I was more with the Japs. I'm sorry but that's what we called them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

August 6, 1945 they dropped the first atomic bomb. Did you hear about that?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What reaction did people have when they heard that?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, it scared me to pieces. It was scary and to think that you killed that many people at once. But according to what we got now, that's

Mr. Misenhimer:

Nothing, yeah.

Ms. Cumberland:

Nothing. And according to the news it's getting a little dangerous right now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, yes, it is.

Ms. Cumberland:

That crazy guy over there in North Korea. They said on the news last night somebody said that he should be assassinated. That's what they said.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When they dropped the second atomic bomb on August 9, what did you think about that?

Ms. Cumberland:

I don't even remember. I suppose thought maybe that would be the end of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you say when Japan surrendered everybody really celebrated, huh?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, yes. Oh my, yes. We just didn't care for the Japs at all. They bombed Pearl Harbor. They sunk so many ships and killed so many boys and they were sneaky.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's right. Did you have any souvenirs from World War II?

Ms. Cumberland:

Oh, I got a little heart made out of a fuselage of a Jap plane. I can't think of too much.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any U.S.O. shows anywhere?

Ms. Cumberland:



No. Never saw one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Didn't have them around here. Any experience with the Red Cross?

Ms. Cumberland:

Nope.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear of Tokyo Rose?

Ms. Cumberland:

Yes. She was a lady that news wasn't it like or was she a spy?

Mr. Misenhimer:

She was actually propaganda.

Ms. Cumberland:

That's what I thought, propaganda, OK.

Mr. Misenhimer:

She broadcast out of Japan.

Ms. Cumberland:

Yes, yes. I remember that now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You never did hear her on the radio though.

Ms. Cumberland:

No. She must have been on the inside or something to find all that out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, right. Now when the war got over, did you have any trouble adjusting to the change in

your life and the way things were?

Ms. Cumberland:

Not really. Everybody was just home and happy and my brother came home and went right to work. When he come home and went to Houston and stayed in Houston the rest of his life.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you kept up with anybody you worked with?

Ms. Cumberland:

No, well, most of them are dead. I'm 95.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I know but over the years, no reunions, no getting together or anything with anybody?

Ms. Cumberland:

No, no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Nothing at all. You left and came home.

Ms. Cumberland:

Yeah, came home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was there ever any time you felt frightened or scared?

Ms. Cumberland:

No. We used to have wardens in town. Remember the wardens and they'd have a drill and everybody had to have their lights out. Turn out all your lights out and everything but I wasn't really scared but we had wardens that went around and checked everything and made sure all the lights were out in the town and everything.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did they have air raid warning people?

Ms. Cumberland:

I don't think so. I just remember those wardens and making sure all the lights were out and everything. We had to darken all the houses. Everything had to be dark. I do remember that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That seems to be all the questions I have. Have you thought of anything else?

Ms. Cumberland:

No. I had a real good friend. He was a neighbor of ours, his name was William Porter. He flew a plane in World War II and a Jap shot him down over the Pacific and they never found him or anything. William Porter was his name. He was a neighbor boy. There was a lot of sadness.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where was he from?

Ms. Cumberland:

Kokomo. My brother, really, he was an officer all the years. You know what I mean. And I don't think he got out in the thick of battle. He was a commanding officer and made sure, I think, that everybody else did what they were supposed to do. Is that what commanding officers did?

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's right.

Ms. Cumberland:

OK. I'm 95 so some of these things I forget.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now Virginia, tell me again: what was your maiden name?

Ms. Cumberland:

Cummings.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's all the questions I have unless you know of anything we need to talk about.

Ms. Cumberland:

OK. Do you know what that's a picture of? It's a plane but what is it?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Her alternative contact is Beth Burch, 1546 Park Road, Rochester, IN 46975. Her phone number is 574-835-6265.

Ms. Cumberland:

That's the souvenir. Just took a part of it and made that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Piece of a Jap plane you say?

Ms. Cumberland:

Yes. From World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This says from New Guinea.

Ms. Cumberland:

Yeah, made it in New Guinea. Friend of mine did that. He was in New Guinea.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In the shape of a heart and encased in plastic.

Ms. Cumberland:

Isn't that cute?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, that is.

Ms. Cumberland:

Yeah, World War II. I don't know how they did it. Didn't have much to work with.

Mr. Misenhimer:

All right Virginia. I appreciate your time today.

Ms. Cumberland:

That's all right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And thank you for all you did for our country during the war.

Ms. Cumberland:

Well, I worked. I needed to make a living and I needed to help make what they needed.

We were in an assembly line and these motor housings. We made a lot of motor housings because they were big because they went in planes. The foreman, at least every day, he'd say, "You know girls these boys' lives is in your hands. You don't want any mistakes." He'd come by and he...we realized that when we was making these parts for the airplanes that everything had to be perfect. Everything had to be perfect.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Virginia, again, you worked with what now?

Ms. Cumberland:

My work was a lot of precision. We used a lot of calipers inside and out and mics inside and out and everything had to be...the foreman would come around and tell us "you know, some boy's life is in your hands." That's the way we worked, under those conditions, but we knew it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The mic is a micrometer.

Ms. Cumberland:

Micrometers, yes. Oh, yes. I used to be able to read anything or a blue print like this. I had to cut it down here and cut it down here so far and then I had to cut it straight across there with a shaper.

*End of Interview*

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