

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
Oral History Interview with Bertha Staninas Tuting
Soldier's wife and war worker, 1945
Interviewed by Tom Hanley, Monmouth University student intern
March 15, 2004
Transcribed by Mary Rasa 2010



Miss Bertha Staninas, who tests glass tubes in the RCA plant in Harrison.

RCA Advertisement with Bertha Staninas Tuting as a war worker, 1941 (Top portion)

"SURE, it would be nice to be home with my folks, enjoying a nice big turkey and taking it easy. Of course it would.

"But I'm working today—all day long—and I'm *thankful* for it! What's more, all of us at the RCA plant in Harrison feel that way.

"You see, this isn't just an ordinary Thanksgiving Day, not for any of us in America. We've all got brothers, or sweethearts, or husbands, in uniform—fighting for us in every corner of the world. We all want them to be safe, and to have everything they need to come through all right. But most of us can't *do* anything about it.

"Well, we—working here at RCA in Harrison—*can* help our boys, and that's why we're thankful. We're thankful that we can be making something as important as radio equipment—to go into their planes



and tanks and ships. We're thankful that we can turn out the very equipment that may protect their lives, or help them fight better, or return them home safely . . . We're thankful that with our own hands, right here in Harrison, *today*, we can be backing up those we love and those who are fighting for us.

"So we'll be working today, working hard. But we'll be thankful for it—proud and happy and thankful. Because we'll be doing all we can for them."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

There's plenty to be done here—and *you* can help. If you're not engaged in war work at present, apply *today*, or as soon as possible, to the RCA Radio Tube Division, Harrison, New Jersey. Here is a chance to do *your* share for Victory.



RCA RADIO TUBE DIVISION

RCA MANUFACTURING COMPANY, INC.
HARRISON, N. J.

RCA advertisement from a magazine with Bertha Staninas Tuting. (Bottom portion)
Courtesy of Tuting family



Bertha Tuting at Sandy Hook Education Center in 2004.



Bill Tuting, Bertha's husband, at Battery Kingman c. 1945.
Two lower photos courtesy of Gateway NRA/NPS

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

TH: This oral history interview of Bertha Tuting is taking place on March 15, 2004 at the Education Center at Fort Hancock, New Jersey. I am Tom Hanley and I will be conducting the interview. Good afternoon Bertha.

BT: Good afternoon.

TH: I have a couple of quick questions that we ask everybody before we get into things. First of all, when and where were you born?

BT: I was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania, December 6, 1920.

TH: Did you attend high school?

BT: Yep.

TH: What high school did you graduate from?

BT: Technical High School.

TH: Was your Father or Grandfather in the military?

BT: No.

TH: Before we even get into Fort Hancock, you brought a poster with you from the RCA Radio Tube Distribution with a picture of you on it. And it said, "Yes, I am thankful I'm working this Thanksgiving." Could you tell us a little about that, your experience at RCA during the War?

BT: Well, that was taken in 1941, (actually 1942) in October. And November, of course was Thanksgiving and we worked. And there were times that we even went into work on Sunday. But, I was thankful to be working on Thanksgiving Day. Of course, I had moved into New Jersey in 1941, October and I started within three days working at RCA. And I was there for well over 22 years. And I had my Son and then went back to work for another six and a half years. But that was taken during the War. (I) worked on radio tubes and of course, I did secret work too for the Army at that time. I'm not going to say anything about that.

TH: Is it still confidential?

Bill Tuting (son of interviewee): No. It's not anymore.

BT: Well, it had to do with submarine tubes and it was very interesting and I really enjoyed my work. Very secretive, but I still enjoyed it. And then of course, during the War, they had buses that they asked any of the women who would like to come down to Fort Hancock and dance with the servicemen. And of course, it was very well chaperoned. We were not allowed off, outside of the dance hall, just on the porch. And we, I was there and my husband of course was stationed up at the Twin Lights. And the first night that he was off from duty he came down to the dance and we happened to meet. And from then on, you know, we started to date. And he, we met in August and I was engaged in December and we got married on the 21st of April 1945. So, a group of us would come down by bus. But I had only made about three or four trips down and one of the last trips down, I think was when I met him. So, other than that, I don't know what else.

TH: So, did you actually work at the Fort at all? You just came down for the dance?

BT: No. I did not work at the Fort. No, and I did take, they also had buses from RCA that would take the girls to Fort Monmouth. And I remember feeding some of the soldiers, marines, or whatever they had in there, who were wounded during the War. I would feed them lunch or whatever they had. And one person in particular that I remember was a young blind boy. He was blinded I guess by shrapnel. And I remember asking him just how he ate his food, whether he mixed it. And he said, "No. No ma'am. Its just fine the way it is." So I would tell him when I would give him potatoes and meat and all this. And then in my spare time I took a nurse's aide course. I would work, after working at RCA, I would work 8 and 10 hours a day and then in the evening maybe walk up to St. Michaels Hospital in Newark, New Jersey and would help some of the patients

that were there and then come back. So, I kept myself very busy and occupied. But then after I met my husband Bill, we decided to get married and of course in between I would come down to the Post and see him when he couldn't get a day off. Other than that, I don't know what else, what kind of questions you might want to ask me.

TH: You did a lot of great stuff helping out our soldiers, the wounded and everything. Was there a certain organization that was running this or were you just doing it by yourself?

BT: No. It was the RCA that had asked for volunteers and they supplied the bus and this is what we would do.

TH: So you came down here often to see your future husband at the time. Do you know what his rank or title was when he was here?

BT: He was here, he was sergeant and then he became staff sergeant. And of course after we were married he was in service so he went to December, the end of December. Then he was discharged. They wanted him to stay in and enlist for the Korean War, but he thought he had enough. He was in for 12 ½ years. I think 5 years with the National Guard and then the rest of the time was at Fort Hancock.

TH: Did he have a specific job here at the Fort?

BT: Yeah down here. Yes. He was the commander of the disappearing guns. And he enjoyed it you know. He said of course summers were beautiful down here, except for poison ivy, but the winters were brutal. Of course you know that too.

TH: Yeah we have a nice balance down here between good and bad.

BT: Yeah.

TH: When you would come to visit him down here was there a particular place that you would go to visit him at, a specific location?

BT: Oh yes. Yes. We, a couple of us would go to the barracks. He had his own little office there or private room I guess that went with his job. So, other than that, why I didn't get down here too often because I didn't have a car at that time so I wasn't able to do it.

TH: When you came down here did you drive or take the train?

BT: No. No. No. I came down on the bus. That was the one time that I would get to see him. I think it was only one time that a friend of mine drove me down, but prior to that it was always just coming down on the bus. There would be about maybe 20 or 25 girls and we'd have, one of the older women would be our guide, which was very nice. And

of course the music was good, naturally. It was all from the '30s and '40s. It was good, very good.

TH: And when you were dating, did you have to wait for him to get leave to go off the Fort and other places in the area?

BT: Yeah. When we got married, we were married on the 21st of April in '45 and he was able, barely able to get a leave because at that time President Roosevelt died. I think he died on the 15th of April. We were married on the 21st and it was very difficult for him to get a pass. But he finally did get a pass and I remember one of his top, I guess it was Captain Spencer, I always remember that name. He was the one that signed his pass. In fact, I still have his pass and signed it that he was leaving to get married. Then we were married of course in Harrison, New Jersey and then went up to the Buckhill Falls in the Poconos. And we came back within four days because I understand he had to pull straws with another sergeant to be shipped overseas. So, the other sergeant was pretty happy that he pulled the straw because in the meantime he was getting divorced from his wife. So of course my husband and I had been together up until 1997 when he died. Prior to that I had a wonderful life, a wonderful husband and I have a wonderful son. Of course now I have a grandson and a great grandson. But my husband was, I don't know whether you want to know this but he had joined the National Guard in 1963, no I'm sorry, 1936 and he did a lot of his training at Fisher's Island and Fort Wright (New York) and then he and his regiment, now I don't know, I'm pretty sure it was a regiment, they marched through the Midtown Tunnel for the dedication event in New York City. He was also down here at Sandy Hook when they had Tent City. So, up to that there isn't anything else much. It's just that I had worked for RCA before I was married and then after my son was born and we moved back from New York to Harrison. At that time, he was just about four and I put him in the nursery and I went back to work. But of course it was radio tubes then and then TV tubes. Because by that point in time all the war products had stopped being produced. But I was tester and I really enjoyed it.

TH: While you were coming down here were you living in New York or were you living somewhere in New Jersey?

BT: No. No. I was living in Harrison, New Jersey and we were married in Harrison, New Jersey.

TH: The two of you ever take any excursions over to New York while he was here at the Fort?

BT: No.

TH: How about the beach? Did you ever visit the beach?

BT: The beach here?

TH: Mmmhmm.

BT: Oh, yes. Yes. When I came down here after we were married we would walk the beach. And that's where I picked up my poison ivy. Prior to that everything just went fairly smooth.

TH: What was this area, Fort Hancock like?

BT: Beautiful. The homes and everything was so well kept and it was just great. Because you know (it was) 40-50 years ago and it deteriorated but it is very, it was very nice. And I'm hoping that they can restore the homes and officers row because that was nice.

TH: Did your husband live in a particular building here?

BT: No. No. He was in a barracks and it wasn't special. I guess all the officers must have had little, you know, where the men were sleeping in the barracks.

TH: Did you husband or yourself keep in touch with anyone from Fort Hancock?

BT: Did we what?

TH: Did you keep in touch with anyone from the Fort?

BT: Yes. We kept in touch with Frederick Schneider who unfortunately has passed away. And with Earl, I'm trying to think of what his last name is. He lived in South Dakota and he became a taxidermist after he left the service. And then there's another one, what's his name, I can't think of it. He lives in Minnesota. Do you remember his name? (speaking to her son off tape) Bjorgan. He and I still keep in touch you know at Christmas time. He seems to be doing pretty well. But Earl and Freddy Schneider they passed away. That's about it.

TH: Did you attend any religious ceremonies with you husband at the Fort at the Chapel?

BT: No. No. We were married at a church in Harrison New Jersey.

TH: Now aside from the dances that you came down to, were there any other social activities that you were involved in?

BT: I don't recall. No. I don't think so. No. We just went to dances because War was on and there wasn't that many activities going on. They just wanted to make sure the soldiers were able to mingle in with civilians.

TH: When you and your husband were dating were there ever any alerts of potential enemy attacks in the area from our enemies?

BT: What was that? I have my hearing aids in.

TH: When you and your husband were dating and you were coming down here often was there ever a time when there was an alert of a potential attack?

BT: No. No. But I do know that during the War there were alerts. He would tell me that you know, that they had an alert. Of course was a false alarm but they all had to do their job. Other than that, of course they had to be secretive too. Anything else?

TH: Yeah. During this era you were working at RCA. I know you were working on vacuum tubes and everything. And you said later you did a lot of stuff that was top secret at the time with submarines and what not. What was that like overall, that experience of helping out your nation in that sense?

BT: Oh, it was wonderful. I really enjoyed it. And it was very, very interesting work. And I had to remember a lot of code numbers. And the tubes were almost like fitted with the gyroscopes so that whichever way the submarine would move, you know it would keep the tubes steady in the submarine steady. But other than that, why all the work that I did I thought it was very interesting.

TH: Were there a lot of women working there?

BT: Yes. Quite a few women. In fact, they even had a bus coming up from south, from Georgia and around the southern states and they would have the women come up and then they would I guess you know put them up for a while until they found their own place. They came up and started working too at RCA. I started with 19 cents an hour. Could you believe that? Nineteen and I think tops at that point might have been \$2.25 and it depended on that amount of production that you would produce. You would have to reach a certain amount a number of all the tubes and then you would work your way up.

Bill Tuting: Would you just describe how you tested the tubes.

BT: Would you want that?

TH: Yes. Please.

BT: Well, the tubes had to be pre-heated on the pre-heater. And then of course we had to wear gloves because the tubes would get hot and we put (inaudible) and then we would have all these meters in front of us and we'd use a tapper that had a felt bumper on it as you would call and we would have to tap it and watch the meters to make sure and to look at the tubes. I worked on the magic eye tubes and when I would tap those you would have to watch for any little flakes of mica or whatever was on top. And then you would read the meters and all these tubes had to read in a certain to be passed. And if they weren't if they were able to if I rejected any of them, they read too low or too high of the meter reading then the tubes would go back to what they would call the sealex. And the girls would have to heat the base, take the base off and check the tube and see whatever they could repair. And if there were any flakes of mica then actually you know,

I don't think they blew it out but you know they would have to shake it out. But then of course we packed them in crates and boxes and they were sealed and labeled and I would go around, I was a tester, but I was able to go around and print test sets and select maybe five or ten or twenty tubes, take some and from each box that they had already sealed and I would test them. And if there were two or three bad out of forty or fifty tubes that I tested that whole lot would be rejected. And the girls would have to go through the complete testing again. So, other than that, why that was it.

TH: If you had one word to describe the kind of work you were doing, it was fun, boring, tedious, hard, what would the word be?

BT: I enjoyed it. I think that would be the best thing. It kept your mind active because there were a lot of things to remember and different codes. That would go, match up with different rejects. So, I would say it was very interesting. I really enjoyed it.

TH: Were there different times during the War when you would be more busy than others or was it a constant stream of busyness?

BT: No. I think it was constant. It took quite a few years. Other than that...what else?

TH: What stands out most in your mind about working for RCA during World War II?

BT: Let's see. The people that I worked for and my job as a tester. I really enjoyed that. And I learned an awful lot in reference to different parts of a tube. When I first went there I didn't know what they were talking about when they mentioned the filament, but then of course, after that you know you get to know the different parts of a tube. But it was the friendship of all the people and the engineers; the men and women engineers that we had were very, very good, very cultural. And I know that this one Chinese engineer and I always remembered his name was Deling Cho (spelling?). He was the one that I worked with on the submarine tubes and was very helpful. So, all in all I enjoyed my work. Even though there was a lot to remember but I just taught myself to remember, you know the different codes and the different type tubes.

TH: What was the morale like at RCA?

BT: Well, I would say good and bad. The people who had their sons and daughters in service they were very leery. But the ones that were waiting for their loved ones it was sad but in another way they were very happy that they were there serving their country. And I too, you know, was glad that I was there to be able to do something during the War for the country.

TH: Finally, I will bring you back to Fort Hancock for one final question because you were out here a couple of times since you met your husband here at the dance. What stands out in your mind the most about Fort Hancock?

BT: That's something. Well, I guess to me when I would come down here, I would go to the dances but I really felt sorry for all the men and women who were here because some were happy and some were not. And it was just sad because so many of them were so far away from home. It's just like this fellow Earl who was from South Dakota he never saw the ocean until he came here. He used to say he thought South Dakota was cold, but Fort Hancock was bitter in the wintertime. That's it.

TH: Thank you very much Bertha.

BT: You're welcome.

Bill Tuting: If I could add just a couple of things before you turn it off.

TH: Sure.

UV: Just for your information, just a couple of comments. Mom said that this was taken before the War in November of '41. December of '41 was Pearl Harbor.

BT: That's right.

Bill: This had to taken after Pearl Harbor. It was probably of November of '42.

BT: There's no date on that?

Bill: No, there is not. It's obviously a wartime poster so it couldn't have been November of '41. You had mentioned that Dad was in charge of the disappearing guns and he may have been at one time, but they moved him, most of the War he was at (Battery) Kingman which is 12-inch guns. And again, we spoke over the phone if you want a pictorial record of my Father, when the Fort was just opened as a National Park and Tom Hoffman just started out he was giving a slide presentation. He said, "We don't have any pictures of the guns with the concrete emplacements around it". My Father came forward with pictures in the Museum and also on the videotape of the history of Fort Hancock. There is a soldier in fatigues in front of Kingman Battery with a dog and that's my Father. That's just a little history here of the place during his tenure and what he did. And then she also has an interesting story about how she met my Father that he had a kitten at the dance. It sounded like it was a scam to get women to come over to him.

TH: Oh.

BT: He put it on my shoulder and I had told him, I said, "This kitten is digging his claws in my shoulder." He said then, "Aw, I'll take it off your shoulder so we can dance". That's the way it started. But I think that picture was taken before because I was there before the War. Before it started.

Bill: It says here, "Brothers, sweethearts, or husbands in uniform fighting for us in every corner of the world." It had to be after. It had to be after Thanksgiving of '41.

BT: Maybe so. Okay. I botched up.

TH: Now you gave us plenty of very useful information and historic documents. Thank you very much.

BT: Oh, you're welcome.

End of interview