

WWII RATIONING

What it was like -- from one WASP's perspective!

I had begun to appreciate some of the difficulties the rest of the country was enduring. Gasoline rationing, shortages of new cars and rubber tires made private transportation challenging, if not impossible. Buses and trains were always overcrowded, with standing room only being the norm. People formed car pools and often had to double up in houses in big cities. Near military bases couples were lucky to find a room in someone's home, where they often shared the only bath.

Everything was in short supply, from coffee to nylon stockings. There wasn't just gasoline rationing; meat, sugar, and eggs were all in our coupon books. And shoes! No coupons, no shoes. That presented a special problem for WAFS, since we wore our shoes out, marching for the Army.

Government controls over civilian life regulated prices and rents. Factories that formerly had turned out new automobiles, sewing machines, or small appliances had now geared up to produce military equipment. People kept their old cars, refrigerators, and washing machines running, but finding a mechanic or repairman was an experience--and if you found one, he probably couldn't get the parts you needed. Many, accustomed by now to electric refrigerators, went back to using ice boxes when their refrigerators went on the blink. Even then, frequently there was a shortage of ice.

Hoarding, as well as black-marketeering, greed, and exploitation of the wartime situation existed. On a small scale those things were winked at, but on a larger scale they were socially unacceptable and, ultimately, illegal.

The women who stayed home knitted, sewed, baked, rolled bandages, got up Bundles for Britain, and volunteered for the Red Cross. Citizens saved grease (for explosives), tin cans, and foil; had paper drives and war-bond rallies; worked for Civil Defense; planed Victory Gardens; and gave blood.

Women who had never worked before suddenly had to run the family farm or business, while the head of the house went off to war. Women worked in offices and hospitals; drove ambulances, trucks, and streetcars; and some, like me, flew airplanes. Young men and women signed up for military service or tried to get into an essential industry. Older men came out of retirement to join the work force.

Norman, who had rented a room from Mother, was a case in point. He was 4-F unfit for military duty, because of an old injury. He was the spoiled darling of a wealthy family, a man with a law degree he had never used, a man who had never worked a day in his life. He went to work in a shipyard and labored for long, grueling hours, yet he certainly didn't consider himself a hero any more than I considered myself a heroine. We both were doing what we could. In my case, I was also doing what I wanted to do more than anything in the world.

Taken from **"WINNING MY WINGS"** by Marion Stegemen Hodgson. Naval Institute Press, 1996. pp. 82, 83