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WOMEN AND WAR:
ST. PETERSBURG WOMEN DURING
WORLD WAR II

by ELLEN J. BABB

*“Rosie got a boyfriend, Charlie; He’s a marine. Rosie is protecting Charlie, Working overtime on the riveting machine.”*¹

DURING World War II, government agencies and private businesses recruited millions of American women for employment in wartime industries and in other nontraditional fields when the nation’s young men left for war. Government propaganda, national periodicals, and local newspapers worked in unison to promote female employment, and popular songs like “Rosie the Riveter” inspired allegiance on the home front. In a radical departure from previously sanctioned public behavior, older, married women— many with children— entered the country’s labor force en masse. Even though millions of women stepped well beyond previously accepted boundaries of home and “women’s sphere” during World War II, recruitment campaigns continued to define women’s new roles in domestic terms, reinforcing expectations that women would relinquish their wartime positions to veterans when peace returned.²

Meanwhile, at least “for the duration,” women worked in defense plants and in heavy industry to provide the military with necessary munitions and supplies. At the local level women entered administrative and business positions and ran family enterprises while their husbands, sons, lovers, and brothers engaged in military duty. Others served as nurses, clerks, secretaries, and transport pilots in the military and joined the newly formed “women’s branches” of the armed forces. To augment their roles as support personnel, women also volunteered in organizations like the Amer-

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1. Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Time to the Present*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1983), 254.
2. *Ibid.*, 225-79; Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst, MA, 1984), 6-7.

ican Red Cross, rationed food and gas, bought war bonds, and planted victory gardens.³

This article focuses on the wartime experiences of women in St. Petersburg, Florida, to determine how the lives of individual women in this southern resort town compared with the lives of women nationwide during World War II. St. Petersburg is an interesting case study, given its unusual economic base and unique demographic makeup during these years of crisis.

With a population of more than 60,000, St. Petersburg lacked a solid industrial base when war broke out, relying on tourism and associated services for its economic survival. The city was spared total economic devastation when the War Department chose St. Petersburg as a site for training facilities. Local hotels, denied normal tourist occupancy, housed military trainees while city residents became civilian landlords, renting rooms and homes to military families and to workers who labored in Tampa's defense industries. St. Petersburg's resort image and its high percentage of middle-class retirees and winter residents provided a sharp contrast to the youthful, urban-industrial centers where so much of the research on women's wartime experiences has been focused to date.

In spite of these differences St. Petersburg women involved themselves in many of the same economic and volunteer activities as women in more industrial settings. In addition to taking jobs in traditionally "male fields" like automobile repair, welding, and city transit operations, St. Petersburg women commuted to jobs at defense plants in Tampa and, on occasion, left the area altogether to seek economic opportunities in states where the shortage of available male workers was particularly acute. Many other young women worked in family businesses or joined the Nurses Corps or new women's branches of the armed forces.

A strong racial caste system combined with the city's economic base to determine the scope of individual women's wartime experiences. White middle-class women experienced a great expansion of economic opportunities during the war years, prompting politically active women to demand recognition for their labor and

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3. Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York, 1989), 219, 222.
 4. Raymond Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1888-1950* (Norfolk, VA, 1988), 299-303.

patriotic endeavors in the form of legal rights legislation. Meanwhile, the majority of black women remained sequestered in low paying, low status jobs. And, in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, families in the small Japanese American community that existed in St. Petersburg had their businesses closed and properties seized. They were denied any chance at economic advancement and suffered discrimination at the hands of their white neighbors.

Across racial lines St. Petersburg women shared a strong tradition of service in voluntary associations, and this was due in part to the large middle-class makeup of the city and the continuing influence of progressive Northerners who began making St. Petersburg their winter home in the early 1900s. Winter residents continued to play a leading role in wartime volunteer work in the city during the 1940s. Among white women, traditional church and civic organizations and women's clubs continued to flourish, but their services were augmented by new associations like the Defense Mothers and the Women's Volunteer Ambulance Corps. Black women also engaged in civil-defense activities and volunteer work in support of the war, but their efforts remained segregated from the activities of their white neighbors.

As in other cities across the nation, "women's work" remained the primary source of employment throughout the war years.⁵ Yet oral testimonies and select news features reveal a range of alternative occupational choices. Targeted advertising and fiction in national magazines, which resulted from cooperative efforts between the Office of War Information and magazine publishers, encouraged women to apply for positions in defense industries and other nontraditional fields. Under a patriotic veneer, the crafters of wartime propaganda continued to depict women's abilities in familiar feminine terms, stressing the need for women to work out of a sense of duty and not for any real personal satisfaction. On the home front and in the home women continued to play the role of "support staff."⁶

Locally, recruitment for many defense jobs traveled by word of mouth or through newspaper articles similar to the one written by Mr. R. M. Chase of the U.S. Employment Service (located in down-

5. Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 22.

6. Mary Jo Buhle, review of *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II*, by Maureen Honey, *American Historical Review* 90 (October 1985), 1029.

town St. Petersburg). In one article, which appeared in the *St. Petersburg Times* on June 9, 1943, Chase informed women that Tomlinson Vocational School offered classes in machine shop, boat building, radio, and welding and that “women should take advantage of these courses in fitting themselves for a good-paying job.” Yet Chase recognized that not all women would be able to find war work. Claiming that even “working in a laundry or dry-cleaning plant . . . [played] a big part in releasing some man for one of our vital war industries,” he offered a now-familiar rationale for remaining within women’s traditional sphere, an option forced upon many black women who took these low status jobs in the absence of any real opportunity elsewhere.⁷

For those with a choice, however, nontraditional employment often seemed more attractive. Mrs. V. M. Ellenberger and Selma Thomas were a mother-daughter team from St. Petersburg that answered the call for women welders. They worked the graveyard shift at the Tampa Shipbuilding Corporation, making the daily commute from their homes in St. Petersburg to Tampa. Like many housewives who found themselves employed for the first time during World War II, Mrs. Ellenberger cited civic duty as her reason for going to work. In a newspaper interview she proudly added that “if women can learn to be welders, there is nothing else they can’t do.”⁸

One thing they had to do was find new ways to balance family and work roles. Because the government viewed women’s duty as temporary, it made few provisions to care for children or help with family services, and this lack of assistance saddled working mothers with additional burdens. One young woman, working as a welder in Tampa, sought affordable housing in St. Petersburg so that her children could live with her over the summer months. They lived with their grandmother in Winter Haven during the school year, presumably so they could continue their school work in a supervised, stable environment.⁹

While mothers sent children to be housed outside the city, St. Petersburg officials anxiously sought to attract adults, especially

7. *St. Petersburg Times*, June 6, 1943; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1986), 238-40.

8. *St. Petersburg Times*, March 28, 1943.

9. *Ibid.*, June 6, 1943.

men, to the city. As early as December 1941 an editorial in the *St. Petersburg Times* lamented “the loss of skilled workers to outside defense jobs because such employment [did] not exist at home for them.”¹⁰ City officials and local businessmen worried that in the absence of both tourists and defense contracts the local economy would collapse.

At first city leaders continued to promote St. Petersburg as a vacation resort, hoping to attract war workers who might need to “escape the grimness and worries of our country at war” by coming to a friendly resort where they “could condition themselves to meet the rigorous requirements of fighting and winning the greatest war in the world’s history.”¹¹ Despite the publicity and lobbying efforts of local officials, the city’s boardinghouses and hotels remained empty until June 1942 when the Army Air Corps arrived in St. Petersburg and leased almost every major hotel in the city. The number of servicemen training in St. Petersburg was so great (more than 100,000 Air Corps soldiers between June 1942 and July 1943) that tent cities were erected on public land to handle the overflow.¹²

The next boost to the local economy came in March 1943 when representatives of the War Manpower Commission approached the St. Petersburg Board of Realtors in hopes that St. Petersburg could provide housing for many of the defense workers employed in Tampa. Although Tampa expected an onslaught of some 5,000 new shipyard workers by July of that year, the commission would not authorize new housing in Tampa as long as surplus housing existed in St. Petersburg and Clearwater. Individual men and women rented rooms, homes, and apartments to defense workers and their families, and local realtors acted as brokers, submitting lists of available properties to the federal rental office located in the Chamber of Commerce building. Realtors and prospective landlords in turn received the names of workers and military personnel who needed housing.¹³

Evelyn Queen worked in her husband William’s insurance and real estate office during the war, and she remembers the high demand for housing. Her own specialty was insurance, a career

10. *Ibid.*, December 7, 1941.

11. *Ibid.*, March 8, 1942.

12. Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 299.

13. *St. Petersburg Times*, March 16, 18, April 4, June 5, 1943.

she began after her husband was called up for service three times. Ultimately, William escaped the draft due to minor health irregularities, but the prospect that her husband might be drafted prompted Evelyn to train for and obtain her insurance license so that she could keep the family business running if William were called to war.

According to Evelyn, formal schooling did not exist locally for aspiring insurance agents. She remembers meeting with other "students" at the old Florida Power building on First Avenue South to share notes and learn from licensed agents already working in the field. She took the required course work through home correspondence courses. Evelyn obtained her insurance license and continued working in the family business until she retired in 1977. She went back to work part time after her husband's death the following year and remained actively employed in her late seventies.¹⁴

Many women, however, particularly those in traditionally male fields, realized that their employment was temporary and that they would be expected to return to their domestic duties once the war ended. A group of women aircraft mechanics (WAMs) at MacDill Field told a newspaper reporter that they not only expected to return home, but were looking forward to it. One woman said, "I'll be so glad when my husband comes home again. I love this work, but I want to make a home for my family."¹⁵ These women, including Dorothy Boyer and Emily Quirk of St. Petersburg, cleaned, repaired, and maintained airplanes at MacDill Field. Referred to as "girl grease-monkeys" by their male colleagues and crew chiefs, the women learned airplane mechanics by attending instructional classes at MacDill and then supplementing the formal course work with practical field experience. Their supervisors were initially skeptical of the "lipsticked mechanics" but in the end conceded that "the girl is eager to learn, capable of retaining what she has learned, and a thorough worker."¹⁶

For some young women wartime positions led to lifelong careers in the military as members of the women's branches of the Coast Guard (SPARs), Army (WAACs), Navy (WAVEs), Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs), or Marines (MCWRs).¹⁷ News

14. Interview with Evelyn Queen, March 3, 1992, notes in author's possession.

15. *St. Petersburg Times*, April 18, 1943.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 222.

articles, magazines, and direct mail solicitations contained recruitment advertisements, and mobile units came to town to interview applicants. In January 1943 Navy-Coast Guard representatives visited Tampa in search of women "to fill the enlisted ratings and commissioned ranks available in the WAVEs and the SPARs."¹⁸ One recruiter came to St. Petersburg at the end of that ten-day campaign to meet with local women who were unable to make the trip to Tampa. The newspaper specified eligibility requirements: "Any woman from 20-36 is eligible to apply for an enlisted post . . . if she has two years of high school training, no children, and provided her husband isn't on duty in the same service."¹⁹

The first day the recruiting office was open more than 150 women came to City Hall to be interviewed, prompting recruiters to lengthen their stay by two days. Two months later the navy increased its quota for women recruits, and this time local club women offered their assistance as volunteer recruiters. In December 1943 the Army Air Corps staged an equally successful campaign in St. Petersburg. A highly publicized military parade featuring band members from Maxwell Field in Alabama preceded the event.²⁰

Flora E. Hamer of St. Petersburg was one of the first WAACs sworn in at MacDill Field. Although she was only commissioned as a second-cook, Flora made it clear that she intended to pursue a career in the army. "I wouldn't trade this for civilian life for anything," she said in a newspaper interview. "If there's still a standing Women's Army after the war is over, I expect to remain in it."²¹ Flora's story, accompanied by a photograph of her in uniform, was found in a feature of the *St. Petersburg Times* entitled "The Bugle Call." This regular column in the local newspaper reported on the military activities of the city's young white men and women. Information on black recruits and military trainees was not listed here but could be found in the weekly *Negro News Page* of the same newspaper.

When "The Bugle Call" first appeared in the paper in 1942, almost all of the photographs, news items, and features were about

18. *St. Petersburg Times*, January 5, 1943.

19. *Ibid.* At this time married couples could not serve in the same branch of the military. It was assumed that wives would give up their positions.

20. *Ibid.*, January 17, March 17, December 5, 1943.

21. *Ibid.*, June 16, 1943.

young men. But as mobilization efforts increased, more and more women were called to military service, and by 1943 young women like Edith “Shack” Shacklette and Lucille Brown commonly were the subjects of reports. These two young women joined the Nurse’s Corps, having previously pursued medical careers as civilians. Brown graduated with a nursing degree from St. Petersburg’s Mound Park Hospital Nursing School and served for five years as a supervisor at that hospital before reporting to Fort Benning, Georgia, to begin military duty. “Shack” was cited for bravery by General MacArthur and promoted as a result of her medical work in the Philippines. Between 1942 and 1944 the number of graduate nurses working in St. Petersburg dropped by 50 percent, as many women, like “Shack” and Lucille Brown, traded in their white caps for military blues and greens.²²

Dottie Moe, the reporter who wrote “The Bugle Call,” found that the field of journalism likewise afforded women new opportunities during the war due to the absence of male reporters and staff. In a speech before the St. Petersburg Kiwanis Club in March 1943, Moe remarked “how the call to war of male reporters had opened the field to women, and it [was] not unusual to see women news photographers and reporters covering everything from weddings to murders.”²³ Although middle-class white women experienced unprecedented access to new professions during World War II, even the most skillful were allowed to climb only so far. Most administrative and supervisory positions remained the enclave of white males, whether in newsrooms, hospitals, or factories.²⁴

The restraints on women’s occupational choices were perhaps sharpest in the armed forces. Women served as pilots during the war, but they invariably flew commercial airplanes or military transport planes instead of being involved in direct combat. In 1943 Mrs. Helen McBride of St. Petersburg Beach was an experienced pilot with numerous aviation awards and more than 1,000 hours of flying time to her credit. Military officials hired her as a civilian instructor to teach young pilots at Drew Field to fly bombing missions. Although she could hit targets with near-perfect

22. *Ibid.*, March 22, 1942, March 16, 1943; *Polk’s 1942 City Directory— St. Petersburg* (Richmond, 1942); *Polk’s 1944 City Directory— St. Petersburg* (Richmond, 1944).

23. *St. Petersburg Times*, March 17, 1943.

24. Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston, 1982), 87-88.

accuracy and was good enough to train over 300 young male pilots, McBride was never considered for combat duty.²⁵

Female entry into formerly male jobs on the civilian front meant confrontation with unions dominated by men. Here, at least, women had choices in how to respond. In March 1943 St. Petersburg municipal transit authorities hired eleven women to work as city bus and trolley operators. Demands on the city's mass transportation system had skyrocketed due to gas rationing programs and military transportation needs, and transit officials were forced to find drivers for the city's six new buses. Although women in other cities had been working as transit operators since World War I, the civil service commission in St. Petersburg had to amend its by-laws so that women could be hired legally for these positions. Interestingly, the first women were hired in the midst of a labor dispute between city officials and male operators demanding union recognition, overtime pay, and increased benefits.²⁶

The women evoked suspicion from both male supervisors, who initially questioned their capabilities, and from male colleagues, who wondered what stand the women would take in the labor dispute. The women succeeded in calming supervisors' fears long before the end of their probationary period. James Gibson, director of city transit, told a newspaper reporter that the women operators were as efficient (more efficient, in some cases) than the average male operator. The proficient manner in which they handled new responsibilities paved the way for the city to add women to the personnel roster in the following months.²⁷

The newspaper reported that at least some of the new female employees joined the union their first week at work. Although city officials claimed that the women were not brought in as strike breakers, the timing of their employment makes such motives somewhat suspect. At any rate, city officials must have been at least a little surprised to see how quickly the women chose sides.²⁸

When the union marshaled nearly 100 percent solidarity in demanding recognition, the votes of women union members were counted with those cast by men. The transit workers' labor dispute ended early in April 1943 with both city officials and union repre-

25. Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 222. Also *St. Petersburg Times*, June 20, 1943.

26. *St. Petersburg Times*, March 7, June 19, 1943.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

sentatives making concessions. Hourly pay did not increase, but the city reluctantly agreed to an overtime rate of time and a half. Operators had complained about working a seven-day week, and under the new agreement workers were given one full day off a week. Whether the city ultimately recognized the union is not clear.²⁹

Prostitutes benefitted during the war due to heightened demands for service. Although headlines in the *Tampa Tribune* relating to prostitution, “red light districts,” and venereal disease in that city were commonplace, the *St. Petersburg Times* remained largely silent about these issues.³⁰ Since prostitution clearly existed in the city, the reasons behind this omission are uncertain. Perhaps prostitution was less visible in St. Petersburg than in Tampa. This may have been a function of military assignment policies. Service men were stationed at bases in Tampa on a semi-permanent basis, but recruits only spent four to six weeks in St. Petersburg training camps. Supervision of trainees was typically much stricter than the oversight of commissioned men, and trainees had less “leisure time.” Alternately, the real difference between the two cities might have consisted of newspaper editors and city officials in St. Petersburg who consciously buried information in attempting to protect the city’s middle-class family resort image.

As women found themselves on more equal footing with men in the work place and as partners on the homefront, they used their new public roles to fight for legal equality. Florida laws pertaining to married women’s legal status were antiquated, and a young female legislator from St. Petersburg, Mary Lou Baker, made the revision of these laws and other women’s issues her primary concern after she was elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 1942. Baker announced her fitness to run for political office in rhetoric reminiscent of that used by some feminists to claim women’s moral superiority over men in the public arena: “Women have done, are doing, and will continue to do excellent work for defense. A study of legislation in Congress during the past will show that in the introduction, support, and enactment of

29. *Ibid.*, March 6, April 9, 1943; *Polk’s 1944 City Directory— St. Petersburg*. The Amalgamated Association of Street Electric Railway and Motor Coach Employees of America— Local 1329— did not appear in the St. Petersburg city directory the following year.

30. Dawn Truax, “Victory Girls and Social Protection in World War II Tampa,” in *Florida at War*, ed. Lewis N. Wynne (St. Leo, FL, 1993), 29-48.

progressive humane legislation, women members have about four times as much per member to their credit as have the men."³¹

Baker was elected by her constituents in Pinellas County and served as the only female legislator in the 1943 Florida legislative session. She was only the second female legislator to serve in the Florida House of Representatives. Reelected for a second term in 1944, Baker served on the education committee, public health committee, and as chair of the women's rights committee. Colleagues remember her for a series of women's bills that she initiated and helped pass during her tenure.³²

In 1943 Baker authored what was commonly referred to as the "married women's emancipation bill." In this powerful piece of legislation married women in Florida, for the first time, were given the right to "transact their own business, to sue and be sued, and the right to contract and be contracted with."³³ Known as House Bill 275, the law passed during the 1943 legislative session, its advocates' case reinforced by the fact that so many women were running family businesses and engaging in new economic endeavors to fill the voids created by husbands who went to war.³⁴

Baker's efforts to secure a Florida women's jury service bill during the 1943 session were less successful. Arguments from Baker's opponents indicate the high level of paternalism toward women despite their proven capabilities in the public arena during World War II. Even as government and private industry stepped up efforts to recruit women into the work place, male legislators argued that women were best suited for the domestic sphere. Making sure they stayed there, they claimed, was not only in the best interest of society, but was also in women's best interests.³⁵

Fighting for legal equality was a long-term goal; supporting the fighting men abroad demanded more immediate attention from most women. Even those who did not enter the work force

31. *St. Petersburg Times*, March 4, 11, 1942.

32. Mary Carolyn Ellis and Joanne V. Hawks, "Creating a Different Pattern: Florida's Women Legislators, 1928-1986," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 66 (July 1987), 68-72; Biographies of Members of 1945 Florida House, *Florida Highways* 13 (April 1945), 29.

33. Mary Lou Baker, "The Divorce Traffic, Its Causes and Cure," *Florida Law Journal* 13 (January 1939), 13-17.

34. *St. Petersburg Times*, March 21, June 6, 1943; *Laws of Florida 1943*, 484.

35. *St. Petersburg Times*, April 22, 1943.

contributed to the war effort by following Civil Defense guidelines in rationing food, gas, and other materials, by planting victory gardens and buying war bonds, and by becoming involved in volunteer activities. St. Petersburg had a long history of middle-class female volunteerism, and during the war traditional women's organizations like the YWCA, League of Women Voters, American Red Cross, and American Association of University Women, as well as numerous women's auxiliaries of church and civic associations continued to serve the community and engage in social networking. In addition, new organizations like the Defense Mothers, Bomb-a-Dears, Women's Volunteer Ambulance Corps, United Services Organization (USO), and Service Wives increased the options available to women interested in nonpaid war work.

The details of women's teas, weddings, and club meetings continued to dominate the women's pages of the local newspaper, but they were augmented with descriptions of the very real sacrifices women were making on the homefront. Special features depicted club women engaged in new forms of volunteerism, particularly those involved with war support. In December 1942 the *St. Petersburg Times* promoted YWCA-sponsored "airplane identification" classes in which young men and women trained to serve as "airplane spotters" in their communities. The high school Service Club of the YWCA— comprised of 235 young women— also sponsored classes in first-aid, made recreational items, collected books for soldiers, offered mending services to enlisted men, and entertained soldiers at the maritime training center in Bayboro Harbor.³⁶

A socially accepted venue through which white, middle-class women met soldiers was the junior affiliates of the Defense Mothers organization. These were the Bomb-a-Dears, the Brig-a-Dears, and the Avi-Aides. The largest and most popular of the three appears to have been the Bomb-a-Dears, which had more than 400 members in 1943. The club had its own weekly column in the *St. Petersburg Times* and held dances, dinner parties, and other forms of entertainment for the soldiers. Before they were eligible to volunteer with this service organization, young women were required to present references attesting to their moral character. Most of

36. *Ibid.*, December 6, 1942, January 24, 1943

the new recruits came from local high schools and the junior college.³⁷

The Defense Mothers were the real-life mothers of these young women, and they planned and chaperoned the group's activities. These included weekly dances at the beach for the military men from MacDill Air Base and nightly (except Sunday) dances at the men's center on the second floor of the Pier. The Army Band, the WPA orchestra, and the jukebox provided music for these soirees. Some of the "junior hostesses" also volunteered at the military hospital, formerly the Don Ce Sar Hotel, on Pass-a-Grille Beach.³⁸

A year earlier Pinellas County probation officer Al Rogero requested that children under the age of sixteen be placed on a 10 P.M. curfew in an effort to curb an upswing of juvenile delinquency. Of grave concern to Rogero was the fact that he was "having considerable trouble with girls under 14 dating soldiers."³⁹ Once this behavior came under the control of upper- and middle-class matrons, the social stigma associated with young middle-class women entertaining soldiers diminished.

For some St. Petersburg women, social encounters with soldiers led to marriage. Harriett Jones was in her late twenties when the Army Air Corps set up camp in St. Petersburg. As a customer service representative in the Florida Power Company billing department, Harriett's job was to turn on the power in the major hotels leased by the military. From her office window in downtown St. Petersburg, Harriett watched a daily parade of servicemen march and drill on city streets. Divorced and with a six-year-old child, Harriett remembers that the soldiers brought an aura of excitement to the otherwise sleepy resort town where she had grown up.

Harriett and a friend joined the local branch of the USO and were "regulars" at the Saturday night orchestra dances at the Pier. Officers and enlisted men met young women there with whom they could dance and talk. As much as Harriett enjoyed these social encounters, she recalls that all was not fun and games. There were strict regulations surrounding membership in the USO. Although women were not chaperoned, they were forbid-

37. *Ibid.*, January 1, March 24, 1943.

38. *Ibid.*, November 28, 1943.

39. *Ibid.*, December 16, 1942.

den to arrive at or leave the dances with a soldier. The women had to be at least eighteen years of age, and they had to commit to entertaining the men at least one other night a week in order to be permitted to attend the glamorous Saturday night dances. Week nights at the men's center on the Pier were fairly uneventful. The only music on these nights blared through the speakers of a jukebox, and entertainment usually consisted of cards, darts, and ping-pong.

During one of these "boring" evenings Harriett encountered her future husband, George Montague. They met in June 1942 and were still dating in July 1943 when the military transferred George to Keesler Army Air Base in Mississippi. A month later Harriett and George were married in Gulfport, Mississippi. Shortly thereafter they transferred to California and then to Yuma, Arizona, where they lived for the duration of the war. In Yuma, Harriett worked as a switchboard operator and a bookkeeper. For the first two years of their marriage Harriett's daughter stayed with her mother in St. Petersburg, and after the war Harriett and George returned to the city and made it their permanent home.⁴⁰

A wartime romance also led to wedding bells for Sophia "Yi" Roberts. Her story also illustrates the degree to which many winter residents participated in volunteer activities in their "second" home. Yi was a twenty-one year old living in St. Petersburg Beach when war broke out in December 1941. Although she and her family were permanent residents of New Jersey, they involved themselves in volunteer war work during the winter months they spent in St. Petersburg. Yi and her father, Walter Roberts, volunteered with the Civil Defense to be "plane watchers" and air-raid wardens. Security along the beach was particularly tight, and the Roberts's and their neighbors alternated shifts as they watched for incoming enemy planes over the vast waters of the Gulf of Mexico and Boca Ciega Bay.

In December 1941 Yi went back to New Jersey to spend the Christmas holidays at her family's home there. When she returned in January, many of her friends in St. Petersburg were joining the Women's Volunteer Ambulance Corps, and Yi decided to join as well. Comprised of approximately 120 young local women who trained two to three nights a week, the corps was established in St.

40. Interview with Harriett Montague, March 25, 1992, notes in author's possession.

Petersburg and elsewhere as a civilian defense measure. In the event of an emergency, these women could be activated to staff first aid stations established throughout the city.⁴¹

With these objectives in mind, the women learned first aid, map reading, riflery, morse code, and basic automobile mechanics. Most of the training was held outdoors, but Yi was particularly fond of the automobile mechanics classes held in downtown garages like Adcock Motor Company. She had always been mechanically inclined, so she was well ahead of the rest of the class when it came to changing oil and rotating tires. Most of the other women in her class were learning these skills for the first time.⁴²

On weekends Yi and her friends entertained soldiers who drove from Tampa for rest and recreation. They invited the young men to Yi's parents' beach house to swim, sail, and have outdoor barbecues "as friends, only." One of these young men was from Ocean City, New Jersey. His name was Joe Daily, and he and Yi were married in January 1943.⁴³

In her analysis of women during World War II, D'Ann Campbell found the rate of wartime volunteerism among black women nationally to be very low.⁴⁴ This was clearly not the case in St. Petersburg where black wives, mothers, and daughters supported the war effort through volunteer work in their own community every bit as much as white women in more affluent neighborhoods. Yet, racial segregation limited their roles. Local branches of the Red Cross, YWCA, and other community-wide volunteer organizations remained staunchly segregated throughout the war.

Their activities, conducted within the boundaries of St. Petersburg's African American community, included planting victory gardens, bond drives, Red Cross training, patriotic teas, and USO work. The husbands and sons of these women, serving in segregated combat and training units, fought for equality abroad in the hopes of having it at home. In the local black community, where some 2,000 blacks enlisted for service, the "black war effort was a great source of pride."⁴⁵

41. Interview with Sophia Daily, February 27, 1992, notes in author's possession.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, 1984), 69.

45. Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 303.

Rosalie Peck was twelve years old when recruiters came to St. Petersburg's all-black Gibbs High School with their "jaunty caps and leather strap bags."⁴⁶ Although Rosalie was too young to enlist, her older sister Theo signed up, and the military assigned her to a base in Tucson, Arizona. For their part, Rosalie and her classmates brought nickels and dimes to school to fill stamp books which were then traded for war bonds. Encouraged by school teachers and parents, they collected aluminum pots and pans for community salvage drives. One of Rosalie's favorite pastimes was identifying planes as they flew overhead on their way to or from MacDill Field. Citrus trees grew in the Peck's backyard, and on Sunday afternoons Rosalie's mother, who worked as a maid, baked cakes and made fresh lemonade for the young black soldiers who stopped to visit on their way to weekend activities at Jordan park.⁴⁷

Some middle-class black women participated in more formal types of war work. Mrs. Fannye Mae Ponder served as president of the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs from 1942 to 1946. Ponder was an active St. Petersburg club woman whose husband, Dr. James Maxie Ponder, had the distinction of being recognized the first physician to the black community, a position he assumed in 1926. During World War II, Dr. Ponder supervised physical exams for black army recruits. For her part in the war effort, Fannye traveled all over Florida selling war bonds. According to Ponder's son Ernest, she sold \$85,000 worth of bonds in St. Petersburg's black community alone.⁴⁸

Despite the fact that black women were expected to share equally in the sacrifices demanded by war, there were significant discrepancies in the types of employment opportunities available to blacks as opposed to their white counterparts.⁴⁹ Although national and local research points to qualitative increases in the jobs open to white women, the economic choices available to the majority of St. Petersburg's black women were similar to those existing before the war. The realities of life in this segregated, race-conscious city meant that African American women—married or single—continued to work menial, low-paying jobs in order to pro-

46. Interview with Rosalie Peck, January 25, 1994, notes in author's possession.

47. Ibid. Opened in April 1940 with monies allocated through the 1937 Wagner-Steagall Housing Act, Jordan Park was St. Petersburg's first federal housing project. Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 270-72.

48. Interview with Ernest Ponder, April 10, 1992, notes in author's possession.

49. Campbell, *Women at War with America*, 76.

vide basic necessities for their families. Only one of the seven black women interviewed remembered knowing anyone who left town to secure new employment during the war.⁵⁰

Another group of minority women living in St. Petersburg at this time experienced even more severe restrictions in their personal lives and economic opportunities. A small Japanese American community existed in St. Petersburg at the time of America's entry into war. These Japanese Americans suffered dramatic personal losses as a result of wartime hysteria. The fear of enemy invasion was very real in coastal areas such as St. Petersburg, and security along the beaches became very tight. The Civil Defense recruited volunteers to watch for incoming planes from the towers of local hotels, and "dim-outs" at night were enforced to prevent enemy ships from seeing either the shoreline or allied ships.⁵¹

A hostile atmosphere of suspicion and fear within St. Petersburg resulted in the closure of local Japanese businesses, seizure of the owners' properties, and abrogation of their constitutional liberties. The situation of Aiko Sone, a native-born Japanese American woman, illuminates the predicament of these individuals in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor.

Aiko owned the Sone Gift Shop on Second Street and First Avenue North in downtown St. Petersburg. On December 8, 1941, one day after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, local law enforcement officers and federal customs agents, in cooperation with the FBI, raided the Sone Gift Shop and neighboring Nikko Inn, owned by S. Noro Tsotaneguchi, Shoi Goto, and Iso Tanyguchi. The raids, ordered by the foreign property control officer in Atlanta, M. L. Smith, were authorized under the Trade Emergency Act. Police seized all cash and business records and padlocked the doors of the two businesses. Signs bolted to the front and back doors read: "This property is under control of the U.S. Government. All persons are hereby prohibited from entering the premises under penalty of law. Signed: H. Morganthau Jr., Secretary of the Treasury."⁵²

50. St. Petersburg city directories and newspaper classified advertisements provided ample evidence that most local black women continued to find work primarily as laundresses, domestics, cooks, and in other low-paying jobs in service industries.

51. Melody Bailey, "The Yellow Peril in St. Petersburg During WWII" (seminar paper, University of South Florida, December 1989), 7.

52. *Ibid.*, 8-10.

On December 18 Aiko Sone was allowed to reopen her business, but she and her compatriots continued to live under severe restrictions. Their bank accounts and assets remained frozen, they were forced to live off designated allowances from their business profits, and they were forbidden to leave the city. The *St. Petersburg Times* reported that many of the Japanese women felt threatened and were afraid to leave their homes, and the men also complained of abuse at the hands of white neighbors.⁵³

Because of the manpower shortage during World War II, many American women obtained a wide range of opportunities in traditionally “male fields” during the early and mid 1940s. The paths taken by women in St. Petersburg ran a parallel course. It made no difference that St. Petersburg was without both large war contracts and the types of industry that “Rosie the Riveter” most often found in larger urban settings. St. Petersburg women worked in neighborhood gas stations as auto mechanics, rented out rooms, managed family businesses, operated buses and trolleys, and did whatever else needed to be done to keep the homefront secure for their families and community. This included commuting to jobs in war industries in nearby Tampa, enlisting in the military, as well as participating in volunteer activities that directly supported the war effort. Race was a determining factor in the allocation of employment opportunities, and white women fared far better than black women both in the number and quality of jobs available to them.

The social realities of the Cold War era that followed largely negated advances women made in the public arena during the war years. Once the war crisis abated and their services were no longer needed, women were asked to return to “female-type” jobs in the mushrooming sales and clerical sectors of the economy and to leave their new-found freedoms and higher wages behind. Propaganda used to recruit married women with great fanfare during the war now encouraged married women to return home and embrace familiar stereotyped roles. Black women had no choice but to continue working, and most often they clung to the bottom rungs of the economic ladder, employed as laundresses and maids in private homes.

For a time the majority of American women resigned themselves to the restrictive roles prescribed for them in the postwar

53. *Ibid.*, 11; *St. Petersburg Times*, December 10, 1941.

years. Yet especially in tourist and service-oriented cities, demands for women's skills would quickly draw women back into the labor force. Then, memories of wartime gains and discontent with the new status quo would lead women toward a new battlefield in the 1960s and 1970s to resume the fight for economic and legal equality.