

Helen Anello,
Narrator

Hudson Falls H.S.
Hudson Falls, NY

Interviewers Ellie Murphy and unknown male [INT]

Interviewed on January 4, 2010 at Hudson Falls, NY

HA: [Phone rings/HA talks/interview begins] I was going to say when I first went out to meet my husband and we're walking through the town, knocking on every door and this is a small town right in the middle of the Mojave Desert and it was hot. We'd knock and ask if they have a room to rent. No, no, no. Everybody had been there before me so they got all the rooms. We finally got to the end of the town where it was just a house here and a house there and we came to another, it wasn't really a house, what it turned out to be [Phone rings/HA talks] Anyway, we were in the process of trying to find a room for me to stay. My husband was going stay on the base, it was an air force base so he had a place to stay. We're knocking on doors and so far nobody had another room. I guess we got there about a day late because it's like every three weeks a group would leave and a new group would come in and all the wives needed rooms. Finally we did find a place and we got a room there for me to stay in. Of course he stayed with me because he didn't have to report to the base until a few days after that. We stayed in this place and the next day when we got up and went out to have breakfast somewhere, he met a couple of the young men that he knew. We told them where we had stayed in this one house and they told us that place was off limits, you're not supposed to stay there. We didn't know it and nothing happened. [laughs] I still had to find a place so we kept knocking on doors. We got to another spot and the person said to go down this way and there'll be something there. We walked some more and we went into this place and it was like a tent. My husband said don't you have a room? They said this is the room. [laughs] I started to cry. He didn't know what to do but I said I can't stay here – it was just horrible and they had this old bedstead with a mattress folded over on top of it and that was it. It was a tent. I was beside myself and my poor husband didn't know what to do with me.

EM: Did they ever tell you why the first place was off limits?

HA: No. They had all these rules for the men because they were in the service. I don't know why.

EM: Let's talk about the beginning of the war for you. You said you were working as a nurse?

HA: Not as a nurse. I was working in a hospital but I was doing clerical work.

EM: And then you decided to take a class on drafting and go that route. What made you want to do that?

HA: I felt that it was something that was going to be helping the war effort and that when I finished taking that course, they were going to give me a job that was going to be something to be helping the war effort. A lot of other young ladies did it, too because the boys were all being

drafted or going into the service and they needed women to take over and help. When I got through with the course, I don't know how long it was, maybe three months, and then I was a draftsman. They gave me a job, I was working for a company that made airplane parts. I wonder if I have any of those ... [To INT] Can you open that bottom drawer? See that roll of paper? [Takes rubber band off roll of paper.] These aren't it. These are the blueprints of the house that my husband built and I drew. [Unrolls another roll.] This is all my work but it's not what I [Long pause while HA looks through papers.]

EM: What is it that you're looking for?

HA: I was looking for some blueprints of the airplane parts that I was working on.

EM: So you actually were like in the process of building airplanes?

HA: Yes.

EM: Wow.

HA: Parts of the airplane.

INT: Was that out in California as well?

HA: No, that was in New Jersey.

EM: So you went out to California with your husband did you go back to New Jersey when he left?

HA: Yes, I was with him for about a year. We were in California for about three months.

EM: What did the drafting class entail? What did they want you to learn?

HA: It was learning how to draw things like that [Points to roll of blueprints]. It was parts of the airplane that we had to draw, it's so hard to explain when I don't have a picture to show you.

EM: Your brother and your husband were both drafted into the Army?

HA: My husband was drafted, my brother enrolled in the Navy. He never was sent overseas. He was stationed in a couple of places in the United States and then in, I think, Nova Scotia. Then the war was over and he was let to go home.

EM: The two important men in your life were gone, but your father was still there, right?

HA: My father was still there.

EM: Was your family affected in a big way? Or like you said, you were a happy family?

HA: I was away from home while I was staying with my husband, wherever he was, I could go stay with him. That went on for about a year and a half. Then when he went overseas, of course I had to come back home. That was good because we had a big family and it kept me busy, I was happy but I wasn't happy, you know? [laughs] I used to walk to the store every night to buy the newspaper to see what it would say about the war, what was happening. It was a worrisome time,

a very upsetting time, but everybody was in the same boat, every family had people that were in the service. We were fortunate that nothing happened to my husband or my brother. Then when the war was over we picked up and did what we had to do.

EM: Did any of your sisters have husbands or boyfriends that were in the war?

HA: No. I was the youngest in the family and my sisters were all married and their husbands were not affected, they were older.

INT: Did they become involved in the war effort like you did?

HA: I don't recall, they were all much older than me.

EM: You said you were only married to your husband for two months before he left but you spent a year with him before he was sent overseas?

HA: Yes, it was about a year and then he went off and I didn't see him for about a year.

EM: Was that hard?

HA: That was very hard.

EM: What kind of contacts were you able to have with him?

HA: Letters, I tried to write him every day and he wrote to me pretty much every day, too. I have all those letters.

EM: He was stationed in Guam, right?

HA: Yes.

EM: Was that any place you knew anything about?

HA: Never even heard of it. It's familiar to me now but not because I've seen it. You know, one of my daughters travelled a lot after she got out of college and at one time she actually was in Guam so she brought back some pebbles from there.

EM: Did she go there because that's where he was or did she just happen to be there?

HA: She knew that he had been there and she was having to go there, this was long after the war was over.

EM: He was a bombardier, right?

HA: He went in with the idea of being a pilot, he wanted to fly the plane but they were very strict about everything. At the least thing, they called it washing out, he would be washed out. He had to step down to the next level then he became eligible to be a bombardier. Every plane had a crew and in the crew there was a pilot, copilot, engineer, bombardier so he was a bombardier.

EM: At the time did you know anything about what his job was, what he was going to be doing?

HA: No, I knew that he was the man that dropped the bombs.

EM: Did that scare you?

HA: It did. I asked him how he could drop bombs when he knew they were going to kill so many people. He said you couldn't think about that, you just had to do it. That was what you were supposed to do. That's what he did.

EM: Were you a very patriotic family growing up? From what you've said it feels like you wanted to help the war, did you feel like as an American it was kind of your duty?

HA: Oh yes, everyone I knew was affected and wanted to do whatever they could to help the war effort because our men were there—our husbands and our boyfriends. We wanted them to win and we wanted to do whatever we could to help.

EM: That's a lot different from today. Back then everyone wanted to see what they could do to help.

INT: You mentioned that "How could you drop these bombs on people." Did you feel like the war was justified?

EM: Definitely. When we heard, it was a Sunday afternoon and the news came over the radio that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, none of us knew where Pearl Harbor was. But it was where our men were so everybody was just very upset. We knew that we were going to be in a war and that was horrible.

EM: How did you find out about the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

HA: On the radio. I happened to be at my husband's family home which was in the same town that I was living in. We weren't married yet, we were married in 1942. From Christmas [1941] until August of 1942 my husband was still here with me at home. That's when we were married, in August of 1942. We knew that the war had started but we decided to get married anyway. By October of '42 my husband was drafted into the army.

EM: How did your parents feel about that, getting married and being with an army man?

HA: They supported me, they knew and liked him. They knew that we loved each other and they were fine.

EM: Where you were at the time, what was the homecoming like? When all the soldiers came home, your brother and your husband came home?

HA: They all came home at different times and when the war ended in August 1945 and immediately I thought my husband's gonna be home right away. Didn't work out that way. They had a system where the soldier had to have so many points to get out and he lacked a few points because when he first got there, he got sick and he missed out on some of the missions that he was supposed to go on. The war was over in August of '45. I kept waiting for him write and tell me he was coming home and he kept writing and saying he didn't know when he'd be coming home, that they were just moving them from one place to another, that they don't tell them anything. Finally, he told me to go to your doctor and tell him that you're very upset because I'm not coming home. I did that, I went to the doctor that I had. In the meantime, when he left and I had to come home and stay with my mother and the family, I found out that I was pregnant so I

had a baby that was born while he was overseas. She was born in October of '45. [Repeats earlier] I went to the doctor and told him the story and he must have given the word to somebody that had some kind of power. Bingo! Two days later my husband was home. He got home January 12, 1946. He didn't even have time to write to me. When he got word, he had to leave immediately. He left immediately and the next thing I knew, he was ringing the doorbell and coming in.

EM: Were other people coming home? Like friends or friends of the family? Did that make you want to see him even more?

HA: I can't remember particularly who came home before him but I know that's how it worked with me.

EM: So when he came home that was the first time he met your child?

HA: That was the first time he met his daughter. She was three months old when he got back home.

EM: Your brother made it back safe, too?

HA: He did. He had been living in Ohio. After he got out of college there were no jobs and he had studied some type of engineering and he got a job in Cleveland, Ohio. When he was in the Navy he never went overseas.

EM: Has the war permanently affected you or your family in any way?

HA: It affected me emotionally at the time but it didn't stay with me. As soon as he was home and we started to live our own life, I was fine. He was not hurt in the war, he had some close calls. He was stationed on Guam and he had to fly to Japan and back so that was like a twelve hour flight.

EM: So he must have had a lot of stories when he got back? Or did you not want to hear them.

HA: He didn't tell too many stories. On one of the trips his plane was shot and damaged so they had to land and you know the island Iwo Jima, have you heard of that? The United States took that island specifically to have a spot for the American soldiers who were in trouble could land there. And that's what happened, he landed on that island with his crew. They had to land there and repair the plane and then go on back to Guam. That was probably a real close call, he could have been [makes thumbs down motion] into the deep.

INT: With your husband being in the Pacific theater, how did you feel about the use of the atomic bombs to end the war? It ended the war faster but how did you feel?

HA: My feelings at the time, I don't think it affected me that much. When I think now I wonder why can't we just end these wars? Why do they keep continuing? I'm not for it at all.

EM: You said in our initial survey where you thought Truman's decision had to be made, you supported the war.

HA: We supported the war effort, we were in it all the way. But I don't support it now, I don't think that we should have war. I think they should know enough about it now that they would not be drawn into any wars. That's essentially how I feel.

EM: I noticed in the initial survey there was a question about if you had any fond memories of the time and you left it blank. I was wondering if you did that on purpose, if there weren't any fond memories, or if you had anything you want to share?

HA: I don't know whether I can say I was happy at that time or not. I wasn't happy because I was only involved in writing to him, waiting for his letters to come back and of course I had friends who had husbands away, too, and we were all in the same boat. But we did live our life, we had good times, we went out together, girls, women. I know one thing that bothered me a lot when I was working doing drafting, the men kept teasing me, "Oh your husband is probably going out with other girls." I didn't have any patience with that. I said no he doesn't. I believed in him that he was faithful to me.

EM: Did you ever say anything about that in your letters? Question him?

HA: No, I never questioned him. I just knew.

EM: Must have made it easier for you having him that far away and trusting him.

HA: He wrote letters but he was not the type that would be gushy. He just wrote and would say I miss you and I'll be happy when this war is over and I'm home again, stuff like that.

EM: Was he upset when he was first drafted?

HA: No, he wasn't upset because he knew that this was happening and everybody was getting drafted and a lot of men were joining up on their own.

EM: Would he have done that if he hadn't been drafted?

HA: I don't know. I don't think he would have done it too soon.

EM: If you could tell my generation one thing about what you lived through and the importance of history, what would you tell them?

HA: Looking back on it now, it was a wonderful learning experience. I know of several very close friends who never came back but for me, I don't know, it was a very unhappy time but once it was over it was OK.

EM: Would you encourage kids my age or who may be graduating high school to join the military or the armed forces and support the country like your husband did?

HA: No, I wouldn't encourage anybody but if something happens and they throw us into another war, I don't think we should fight it. I don't think we should agree to go.

EM: Do you think that's because of what you went through?

HA: Because of what all of us went through. What did it do for us?

EM: Do you ever wish that you could have grown up in a different time period?

HA: No, I'm satisfied. I have the best of a lot of things. The only thing that was hard was going through that process of being in a war and being separated from my husband for a couple of years because he was in about four years and I didn't see him for three of them.

EM: Are there any other stories you want to tell us?

HA: I could tell you a little bit about our living arrangements with the girls. The first girl that I became friendly with was from Chicago and her husband was [trails off] Anyway, we found two rooms in a house that we lived in. Both of us got jobs in the PX, the post exchange, and we worked there. During the week our husbands were on the base learning how to do what they had to do and we were on our own. We got these jobs, you know I can't remember what my duties were but I went to work every day [trails off]

EM: Did you stay in touch with the woman that you lived with?

HA: Yes, for a while, quite a few years. Her name was Dorothy.

EM: Did her husband make it back okay?

HA: Yes, he came home but they lived in Chicago so I never saw her any more after that. Then there was another girl, we were friends, her husband—this is the sad part—her husband got a “Dear John” letter. In other words, he was away, she met somebody else and she wrote and told him that she was not interested in him anymore. That was kind of sad and when I heard about that, I felt bad. That happened quite a bit.

EM: Really? Were you ever afraid that you were going to get one of those letters from your husband?

HA: No! I didn't let myself think that way and I didn't have to because [trails off] My husband was a little bit jealous and I would never tell him that I wanted to go out with anybody and I didn't want to go out with anybody else. If I did I don't know what he would have done. [laughs] He wouldn't have agreed.

EM: Any other stories?

HA: It was a hard time but we got through it okay. [yawns] Are there any other questions you want to ask?

EM: I think I'm finished with the interview unless you want to show me any of the letters or pictures?

HA: I have those letters. [Goes to another room, returns with a bin of letters.] These are letters that I sent to him and he kept all the letters and brought them back home so there are letters from both directions.

EM: I won't read them if you don't want.

HA: You can read anything you want. This is interesting because this is a graduation something. This is from him to me, you can look at it. They're mostly very short letters.

EM: This is a program of his graduation as a bombardier? In California?

HA: Yes, in California. [Looking through letters.] This is from me to him.

EM: What was your husband's name?

HA: Sam. This is from me to him.

EM: Did they give him these envelopes and stamps and stuff? I see the planes on them.

HA: I don't know.

INT: Seems like he was all over. This one's from San Francisco, this one's Nebraska. They had him going all over.

HA: Yes, we were in Nebraska. [Tape runs out.]