

**Title of Unit:** Women's Role During World War II

**Vital theme of the unit:** The Life and Times of women in World War II

**Author and Contact Information:** Jeff Bird  
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**Grade level:** 5

**Number of lessons in unit:** 2

**Time needed to teach lessons:** These lessons can be taught in one to three forty five minute class period.

**Curriculum Standards addressed:** 5.5.9 Understand America's role during World War II

**Purpose:** The fifth grade curriculum includes a unit on World War II, the events that led up to the war, major events that led to the end of the war and life after the war. In this unit there is one lesson that covers women's role in the wartime effort. In the past I have noticed the female students in my class have been particularly interested in this lesson. This caught my attention as well. In most chapters of the fifth grade social studies book, women's roles in historical events are rarely discussed. I wanted to create a unit that would focus on the importance of women in war and in everyday life during World War II. Many people are familiar with the 'Rosie the Riveter' poster from World War II; I am seeking to help my students realize this character was in fact very real.

**Background Information:** The students have been learning about life in the 1940s. They have been studying the events that led to World War II. In previous chapters, the students have discussed the role that women have played in World War I and the Civil War etc. A general understanding of World War II terms and terms used during World War II will be helpful.

**Materials:**

- 1) An assortment of photos of women working taken during World War II. These can be found on the internet at <http://www.si.edu/harcourt/socialstudies> , <http://www.google.com> , or <http://www.newdeal.feri.org>
- 2) Television hooked to the internet to show other web pages containing WWII posters.
- 3) Any fifth grade text books containing World War II and the New Deal Era.
- 4) Photo Exploration Worksheet

5) World War II letters from Elizabeth Rogers (found in the University of Tennessee Special Collections)

6) Crayons, markers, pencils, etc.

**Strategies/ Procedures:** During the course of this unit the students will actively take part in discussions on issues such as life on the American home front during the war, technological advances during the war, and women's role during the war. Students will also keep a daily journal to record their thoughts and reflections on each lesson. The students will also take on the role of an American soldier during World War II and will write a diary to a love one chronicling their adventures during the war. Students will also work in small groups to create a museum artifact to help them remember what they have learned during this unit of study.

**Evaluation/ Assessment:** At the conclusion of this unit, the students will take a chapter test. This test will be teacher made and will cover topics discussed during class. Students will also be graded on their museum artifacts and diary as well as posters created during this study.

The following letters were transcribed from The University of Tennessee Special Collections and University Library, Hoskins Library in Knoxville, Tennessee. These letters were written by Ms. Elizabeth Rogers of Sevierville, Tennessee. Rogers served as a nurse in Normandy, France in 1944. She was a member of the Army's 165<sup>th</sup> General Hospital during World War II. In these letters to her mother, Rogers describes life in a field unit just after the D-Day invasion, the living conditions in an Army tent, and the daily friendships she forged with her fellow nurses and tent mates. In these letters Rogers described the treatment she and the other nurses received while living in Normandy, nice living quarters, delicious food, and dinners with the officers. Reading these letters gives one an inside view of World War II from the perspective of a young nurse.

During World War II, many men had left their jobs in factories to serve in the military. This left a major void in the factories, fields, and offices thus the need for more workers. Many women around the country heeded the call and filled the role of men in the factories, fields, and offices around the United States. The United States Congress also saw a need for women in the military. Congress chose to authorize women to serve in the military; however, women could not fight in combat. During this time of war women could serve in the United States and overseas as secretaries, medical technicians, switchboard operators, and drivers, etc. During this time about 200,000 women chose to enlist in either the WACs (The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps), the WAVES (The U.S. Navy's Women for Volunteer Emergency Services), or WASPs (Women's Air Force Service Pilots). These women were a tremendous asset to the war effort.

During this time, many women entered into the field of nursing while others chose to work in factories. For many of these women who chose to enter into the nursing

field, this was an opportunity to see the world, experience new adventures, and earn a decent salary, not to mention great benefits. Life in the military took many young men and women from rural areas of the United States and placed them in other parts of the world for the first time. For many this was a difficult adjustment. In her letter to her mother dated October 3, 1944, Elizabeth Rogers described her arrival in Normandy via ship as “a miserable crossing-I was seasick most of the time and would be terrified to spend the rest of my life in France just to avoid an ocean trip again.”

On June 6, 1944, allied troops from the United States, Canada, and Britain crossed the English Channel in a surprise attack on German forces occupying Normandy, France. The attack, also known as D-Day, marked the beginning of the end for the powerful German military led by Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party. This successful attack on the beaches of Normandy led to the death of many soldiers and delivered a punishing blow to the German military and Axis forces (Boehm and others, 2002, 328). Upon her arrival to France, Rogers described her pride in being attached to the 165<sup>th</sup> General Hospital and the accomplishments of her field unit during the D-Day invasion. Rogers said, “we are attached to a Field Unit-they came here to France on D-Day and did a marvelous job of taking care of the sick and wounded- we are very proud to be attached to them if only for a short time.”

The living quarters (tents) for most nurses in the military were quiet comfortable. Rogers described her living quarters in her October 3, 1944 letter: “Here I am all comfortably bedded in a tent; we have a stove and a sack full coal and scavenger wood (old packing cases etc. Which the boys cut up for us) I have all my bedding & 7 more blankets (had 2 to begin with) a canvas bag like affair with my clothes all under the

blankets, but believe me it is not half bad.” As for the food, Rogers said, “even the food is not too bad. Night before last the same infantry Col. stationed near here came over and asked the chief nurse if some of us gals would have dinner with them, so we did all eight of us- had it in a lovely French Restaurant- the meal had 5 courses- soup, shrimp, fish, roast beef and vegetables and cheese-cider to drink ( the Germans got all the wine) no water as the Army won’t let us drink any away from camp as it is not good enough” Interestingly all nurses were provided a nurse uniform to wear however, because the location of their hospital, had to wear,” fatigues leggings and helmet all the time-no nurse clothes.”

In her letter dated October 3, 1944, Rogers described the conditions of Cherbourg, France. She wrote, “There are plenty of bombed places around here, whole streets lined with buildings that are just blasted to pieces- its hard to see how anything was left living but some were.” Mud was also a major factor in the daily living for Ms. Rogers and others in the 165<sup>th</sup> General Hospital. In one letter, Rogers described what it was like getting to wash her hair for the first time in three weeks after arriving in France. She wrote, “there were 8 other gals in the shower with me, but one of them had some shampoo, and we washed our hair— it is the 1<sup>st</sup> I’ve had since arriving in France— Three weeks—we had to go to another tent and wear galoshes to keep out the mud, but it was worth it!” Mud was such a problem that one of the Captains had a bridge built to help the nurses get from one place to another without having to walk through the mud.

After reading these personal letters from Elizabeth Rogers, one gains a unique perspective on what life was like for many women in World War II. These letters shed light on the pride Rogers had in the field unit she belonged to, the sense of personal

accomplishment, and the need for personal items from home such as Kerns bread. These letters do a great job of describing the role of women during World War II. After reading these personal letters from Elizabeth Rogers, and seeing the photos that accompany them, the reader will gain a sense of pride for the accomplishments of women in the military during World War II. The reader will also gain an understanding to the importance of women helping fill the vacant roles the men left during this time. The lasting effects of women, like Rogers, working during World War II played a major role in changing how women were viewed. From this point in history, women began to gain respect and were viewed as equal to men.

In this letter Elizabeth Rogers describes the new adventure she is embarking upon. She begins her letter by describing her living quarters, clothing, her miserable ocean crossing to arrive in France, and the wonderful food that was offered to her and the other nurses. Elizabeth Rogers seems to be very excited and proud of the field unit she is attached to. This unit had played a role in the invasion of Normandy, France on D-Day. In this letter, Rogers also describes the conditions of Cherbourg, France after it had been bombed. In her own words, Rogers is amazed that anything could have survived or lived through the bombing, however, they had.

165<sup>th</sup> General Hospital  
A.P.O. 562 C/O P.M.  
New York City, N.Y.

Note ch'9 A.P.O

Somewhere in France

Tuesday Night  
3 Oct. '44

Dear Mom and All,

Here I am all comfortably bedded in a tent, We have a stove and a sack full coal and scavenger wood (old packing cases etc. Which the boys cut up for us) I have all my bedding & 7 more blankets ( had 2 to begin with) a canvas bag like affair with my clothes all under the blankets, but believe me it is not half bad- I and 7 other nurses are working in a Hospital- wear fatigues leggings and helmet all the time-no nurses clothes we look real soldiers- and are attached to a field unit- they came here to France on D-Day and did a marvelous job of taking care of the sick and wounded- we are very glad to be attached to them if only for a short time- It is grand experience- I think I wrote Estalena that we had a miserable crossing- I was seasick most of the time and would be terrified to spend the rest of my life in France just to avoid an ocean trip again- However I won't- who knows, maybe I can hop a plane when the war is over and return home that way we eight who are on Detached Service (five only across the street from the other gals) are no longer restricted to the area, but can come and go on our "off duty" time as we please- we have much nicer quarters and are very well treated- even the food is not too bad. Night before last same infantry Col. stationed near here came over and asked the chief nurse if some of us gals would have dinner with the so we did- all eight of us- Had it in a lovely French Restaurant the meal had 5 courses, soup, shrimp, fish, roast beef and vegetables and cheese-cider to drink ( the Germans got all the wine) no water as the Army won't let us drink any away from camp as it is not good enough- Last night two of <sup>1</sup>the doctors

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took the Chief nurse here and I to a different restaurant- They drew Hospitality stations in the morning and took them out so we had an even better meal- we had soup, lobster, fish, roast beef & vegetables and pastry- They had taken some flour and sugar for the pastry- It really was delicious- they forgot to take coffee though, and we didn't have any. It is surprising how well one can get along without speaking French- Everything is rationed and the Army doesn't want us to impose on the French people. I am going into Cherbourg tomorrow for a look see- we were there before but it was too dark to see anything. There are plenty of bombed places around here- whole streets lined with buildings that are just blasted to pieces- its hard to see how anything was left living but some were- I have a German Parachute ( about 1/5 of one) camouflaged – and very nice silk-have been using it for a pillow (Gosh, wish I had brought mine)- But am planning on ways & means of making scarves or something to send home for Janis- I don't remember weather I wrote Lena or not- I try to write some every day but we are busy, as always.

-Elizabeth

<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Roger to Mrs. E.B. Rogers October 3, 1944 Ms-1427, Box 6, Folder 13 Rogers, Elizabeth K The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee Special Collections and University Library, Hoskins Library

In this letter Elizabeth Rogers describes in detail her living conditions in Normandy, France. Surprisingly, the living conditions seem to be fairly nice. In this letter to her mother, Rogers describes the relief she experienced when she and the other nurses got to take a shower and shampoo their hair for the first time since their three weeks earlier. In this letter Rogers also describes her ingenuity. She and her fellow tent mates created a clothes rack to dry their clothes and three bedside tables. Also, Rogers has learned the value of her raincoat, galoshes, and clothesline. Rogers describes her tent mates and expresses a personal need for items such as candy, batteries, fountain pens, etc. In closing Rogers briefly describes her job working in the admitting office and the lack of patients. She also describes in this letter the use of German prisoners to help place a sink in her tent.

I have more money than I need here—

Monday Night

15 October '44

Dear Mom,

Just a note it is nearly 10 PM. And also I don't have to go to work until 8AM. The other girls go at 7 and that wakes me —We are finally settled in our own tent in our own area with our own little Depot stove to keep us warm— we have our own lanterns too, and can burn it as long as the Kerosene holds out— there are three of us in the tent, we have a concrete base for it, and today— marvel of marvels, I had a shower bath— of course there were 8 other gals in the shower with me, but one of them had some shampoo, and we washed our hair— it is the 1<sup>st</sup> I've had since arriving in France— Three weeks—we had to go to another tent and wear galoshes to keep out the mud, but it was worth it—we made us a clothes rack yesterday, and I made three bedside tables today, by nailing boards to a box—unbelievable, but the hatchet, clothes line, pins, and flat

iron—plus my raincoat, and galoshes, are among the most valued pieces of equipment I bought—The mud is higher than High top shoes, articles are like boots, Capt. Mahoney today built us a Bridge across the deepest part of the mud— I share my tent with Betty, and Amy— one girl from McCain, and one from Knoxville, if you send anything, be sure to include candles, they are easy to light, and nearly essential, I thought I had 12 but it seems only 6—that isn't enough – I seem to have plenty of most everything else— I might need a fountain pen, if you can get one have only one cheap one I lost my spare somewhere— + flashlight batteries are dear here if you can add some it would be appreciated and altho we have good chow it never seems to be enough – anything to eat a can of something would be appreciated Hope someone will send something like cake or hard candies, or cookies. Here is an idea— anything that wont spoil might be taken to the canning factory and put in a tin can to be shipped—just an idea—maybe Gladys' butter would get them to can up something for the idea—she could send Walter things that way.

I am working in the admitting office—we have no patients as yet—are trying to get the place set up—have tents, but they must be supplied, beds made etc. Have been trying to get a litter rack made—or something to keep the patients on litters from being put down on the floor. Also, trying to get German prisoners to put the sink in right instead of crooked. They did but it was a job. Must close

—Elizabeth

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Roger to Mrs. E.B. Rogers October 15, 1944 Ms-1427, Box 6, Folder 13 Rogers, Elizabeth K The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee Special Collections and University Library, Hoskins Library

In this letter to her mother, Elizabeth Rogers described the daily living in her camp. She also described the daily rations given to each person in the military and expresses her appreciation to her mother for sending extra candy bars, candles, paper, and ink pens, etc. Rogers also described the joys of having a day off all to herself. She continued to be very happy with life in her camp and seems to really enjoy her fellow nurses. Rogers seemed to be very pleased with the tent she is living in. According to this letter, and the diagram drawn from Rogers, the tent seems to be very comfortable and has several items complementary of the Air Force. In the closing of the letter Rogers described a post card that her friend had purchased after visiting Mont Saint Michel, which was built by the Benedictine monks. In closing, Rogers expressed her love for Kerns bread and cakes and described how she had shared a piece of Kern's cake with a friend that knew someone from Knoxville, Tennessee.

Normandy-

Saturday 16 Dec. '44

Dear Mother,

I am using the paper, pen, and candles you sent to write this letter- altho we now have lights in our tents they are very unpredictable and the first thing we do when the lights go out is fire up our candles- it certainty saves the situation at times- I also ate some of the candy you sent this P.M. - It was very good peanut butter bar- We get a ration of from two to 4 bars of candy each week. I am also having my first day off- all to myself since I joined the 165<sup>th</sup> General Hospital- 4<sup>th</sup> of September – believe me it is



making it—I hope you get this by Christmas—if not by New Years anyway, and if not by New Years anyway, and they you all have a very happy Christmas and New Years. I am positively going to spend the first Christmas and New Years too after the war AT HOME and NOT have to go anywhere at any certain time.

Love to Aunt Serena and all, and I gave Mull a piece of the cake because it said “Kern’s Bakery” on it—she also knows an officer here from Knoxville named “Hatmaker” from whom she got a piece, on account of it said “Kern’s”—again Love to all—as always

—Elizabeth

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Roger to Mrs. E.B. Rogers December 16, 1944 Ms-1427, Box 6, Folder 13 Rogers, Elizabeth K The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee Special Collections and University Library, Hoskins Library

In this short V-Mail to her mother, Rogers briefly describes with anticipation the arrival of a friend named Joe. According to this V-Mail the Red Cross had been informing Rogers that her friend named Joe was trying to come and visit her. However, Joe would be crossing two battlefields to visit and Rogers was uncomfortable with this idea. Also in this letter, Rogers signs off by discussing a wire transfer to her mother for the amount of fifty dollars.

To Mrs. E.B. Rogers  
202 Grace Ave.  
Sevierville,  
Tenn

From 6k E. K Rogers 11-969211  
165<sup>th</sup> General Hospt.  
A.P.O 562, c/o P.M.  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mom,

7 Jan. '45

Have written Lilly and Lena Air mail letters today- Let me know if you get yours before they do- I would write often if I wrote v-mail better because don't have to wrote so much-usually don't have much to say-

The Red Cross called again to say Joe was trying to get over to see me again but it will be really a job if he makes it- will practically have to cross two battlefields to get here- I wish he wouldn't try if it's going to be too hard a trip.

Received your letter about the money order etc. and if that woman has not sent you the 50 bucks in a week after you get this letter let me know and I'll collect it from here- and I mean to do it- she have seen about it before now. Loves to Aunt Serena & all

- Elizabeth

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Roger to Mrs. E.B. Rogers January 7, 1945 Ms-1427, Box 6, Folder 13 Rogers, Elizabeth K The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee Special Collections and University Library, Hoskins Library

## Bibliography

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Elizabeth K The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee Special  
Collections and University Library, Hoskins Library.
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Elizabeth K The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee Special  
Collections and University Library, Hoskins Library.

Rosie the Riveter:  
Who was this important lady of World War II?  
Roles of Women in WWII  
Submitted by Jeff Bird  
Greenback, Tennessee

**Objectives/Purpose:**

The goal of this lesson is for students to develop an appreciation of women's role in the World War II effort. Students will discuss the impact of women in the factories and in the military.

**Grade Level:** Fifth Grade

**Essential Question related to Vital Theme:**

What role did women play during the war effort of World War II?

**Lesson Time:** This lesson may be taught in one 45-minute session.

**Curriculum Standards:**

5.09 Understand America's role during World War II.

**Technology used:**

Internet students will use this to research examples of posters used to recruit women into the war effort during WWII.

**Materials:**

- 1) An assortment of photos of women working taken during World War II. These can be found on the internet at <http://www.si.edu/harcourt/socialstudies> , <http://www.google.com> , or <http://www.newdeal.feri.org>
- 2) Television hooked to the internet to show other web pages containing WWII posters.
- 3) Any fifth grade text books containing World War II and the New Deal Era.
- 4) Photo Exploration Worksheet
- 5) Crayons, pencils, markers poster board
- 6) *Rosie the Riveter* poster rubric

### **Strategies/ Procedures:**

To get the students ready for this lesson, post the following question on the board for the students to read: “Since women could not fight in World War II, what role did they play at home?” Allow the students to work with a partner to come up with some possible roles for women during the war. As the students arrive at their answers write their responses on the board. After discussing these answers, hand out the **Photo Exploration Worksheet**, along with several pictures of women working in factories. These photos will be from the World War II era. These questions (**Photo Exploration Worksheet**) will help the students to investigate the photos. Provide the students plenty of time to answer the questions on the worksheet. This activity should take five to ten minutes for the students to complete. Once the students have completed the questions with a partner, allow each group to show their photo and their explanations of what they think is happening in the photo. After each group has had an opportunity to share their photo, each student will post their picture on the board. Once the photos have been posted explain to the students that women were not permitted to fight in World War II however, they did play a major role in the war effort. Display Rockwell’s *Rosie the Riveter* poster. Explain that women were needed in the factories because many men had gone to war. These women worked very hard to build such items as air plains, ships, weapons, etc. Go to the web page above to show examples of posters used during the WWII era to recruit women into the work force.

### **Supporting Assignments/Homework:**

For homework students will spend class time working with a partner searching the internet for posters used to recruit women into the work force during WWII. Once students have found a poster that captures their attention, they are to use elements of this poster to create their own poster. These posters are to be used to recruit women into the war effort. Along with the poster students are to write a brief description of their poster and its major theme.

### **Assessment:**

After completing the poster activity students will present their posters to the classroom and will be graded by the teacher created rubric for this project. This grade will be a part of the unit grade.

## World War II Letters From The Front Lines.

Submitted by Jeff Bird

Greenback, Tennessee

### **Objectives/Purpose:**

The goal of this lesson is for students to become familiar with women's role on the front line during WWII.

**Grade Level:** Fifth Grade

**Essential Question related to Vital Theme:** What role did women play on the front line in WWII?

**Lesson Time:** This lesson may be taught in one 45-minute session.

**Curriculum Standards:** 5.09 Understand America's role during World War II.

### **Technology used:**

Internet students will use this to research examples of women working on the front line during the war. Overhead projector to project letters and pictures from nurse Elizabeth Rogers.

### **Materials:**

- 1) World War II letters from Elizabeth Rogers (found in the University of Tennessee Special Collections) or other letters from this era.
- 2) student journals/ World War II diaries
- 3) pencils, paper, pens etc.
- 4) Overhead projector
- 5) Transparencies of Elizabeth Rogers's picture and letters
- 6) Map of France during WWII

### **Strategies/ Procedures:**

To get the students ready for this lesson, post the picture of Elizabeth Rogers and other World War II nurses on the overhead. Give the students enough time to view the picture. Have students make predictions about the picture of Elizabeth Rogers and the other

nurses. Ask guiding questions such as, “Who do you think this woman is? What do you think her role was during the war? Where are these women going?” Take down the pictures and hand out copies of Elizabeth Rogers’s letters for each student to read. Call on a volunteer to read aloud one of the letters. After reading one of the letters, discuss the contents with the students. Explain that this is a letter from Elizabeth Rogers from Tennessee. She was a nurse stationed in France during World War II. Hand out a copy of the map of France during World War II and let the students try to find where she was located by skimming Elizabeth Rogers’s letters for details of her location. Explain that many women chose to join the military as a nurse or other medical professional. As the students read the letters of Elizabeth Rogers, explain that she has drawn a picture of her tent for her mother to see. Ask why is this important for the reader to see? Discuss the importance of letter writing during a time of war or other event. Explain that saving letters can also be important to future generations as well.

### **Supporting Assignments/Homework:**

At the end of this lesson students will work together to brain storm events in World War II that they have learned about. They are to pick at least three events and create a journal or write a letter home describing the event they have chosen. The students are to use Elizabeth Rogers’s letters as their guide.

### **Assessment:**

The journals or letters home will be due at the end of the unit and will count toward a unit grade.