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Frances Chow Tuck

Rosie the Riveter

World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interviews conducted by
David Dunham
in 2011

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Frances Chow Tuck

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Interview 1: August 27, 2011
Begin Audiofile 1

Dunham: Okay, so it's August 27, 2011. My name is David Dunham, and I'm here today with Frances Chow Tuck, full name, for the Rosie the Riveter World War II American Home front Oral History Project, a bit of a mouthful, and we usually start at the beginning, so to begin with can you tell me your date of birth and where you were born?

1-00:00:24

Tuck: April 5, 1936, Chico, California.

Dunham: Can you tell me a little bit about your family background, your parents and/or grandparents, where they came from?

1-00:00:38

Tuck: Well, my father migrated from Canton, China, which is now Guang Cho. When he was sixteen years old, that's 1920, and he went directly to Angel Island where he was held for several months, interrogated, and finally released, and he went to Fresno County and found a job there. Since he lacked English and he was only sixteen, he found a job working in the grape vineyards, but after a half a day, he decided that wasn't for him. It was hot, it was miserable, and he wasn't used to that lifestyle. So then he went to work for some Armenian family in a very rich area as a houseboy. Well, he decided that wasn't for him either.

Then he found a position with the National Dollar Store that was founded by one of his relatives, and they had department stores throughout the West Coast. He was working there as an assistant manager and gradually he became a manager, and from that point forward we moved from city to city to manage different stores, and he ended up in Chico, and that's where I was born with my two brothers. I'm the youngest of the three, but I was only there for a very short time. We got transferred to Southern California, where we lived in Huntington Park when he managed a store in Huntington Park and then gradually from there to Pomona.

From there we moved up to the Bay Area, and he was there for a short time, and they opened a new store in Pittsburg, California. I think it was 1941, and we moved there, and that's where I grew up and went through elementary school through high school, graduated in 1953, and from there the family moved to Fresno, where he managed another store, and he retired there in 1964, but during the time that I graduated from high school I went to San Francisco and attended business college. From there I went back to Pittsburg, but there weren't any jobs available, so I went to Diablo Valley College for a short time. We moved to Fresno, and then I finished up at Fresno Community College with an Associate Degree, and I went to work in Fresno for a grocery store. But then we got married, and we moved to Los Angeles and I stayed

home for a while and then I went to work for Pantry Market, and from there we became Vaughn's, and that's where I retired from.

Dunham: Okay, well thank you for that synopsis. Let me back track a little bit, which is to say so when your father emigrated, now did he have a family member that sponsored him then, or what was his experience like at Angel Island?

1-00:03:38

Tuck: Well, we didn't hear too much about the experience other than they kept him there, interrogated them continuously, and I guess if you didn't say the right thing, they sent you back to China. I guess he sort of prepped for it and was very lucky that they didn't really give him the works and he was able to come abroad.

Dunham: Okay and you visited Angel Island recently. Was that your first time?

1-00:04:05

Tuck: Right. They had a hundredth year anniversary commemorating, I guess the immigrants from Asia.

Dunham: Yeah.

1-00:04:16

Tuck: So since my father was there, I went to see what it was all about.

Dunham: What about your mother?

1-00:04:22

Tuck: My mother was born in Honolulu, and her father had a restaurant in Chinatown. She was only eight years old, and her father had her working there, and that's how she learned to speak some Chinese and English. He wouldn't allow them to go to school, he was very old fashioned.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:04:44

Tuck: He made his money, oh, I guess about five or ten years later, took the whole family back to China, and he bought several houses and rentals, rice fields, so he was a very well to do individual and had a good family life, and the war broke out, and he lost everything with the Communists and with the Japanese war, he lost quite a few of his property there, too. But at sixteen my father was told to come back to China. It's time to get married, and they found a wife for him, and since she knew the family I guess she agreed to marry him sight unseen. And we came back to California because she was born in Hawaii, she could come over very easily and moved to Chico and became a housewife. As the war broke out, World War II, I guess they took all the men into the service or they ended up working on farms. That's what my father had to do, and so she took over the store while he was gone those years, and he would come

home on weekends and do the paperwork. After that she just stayed working with him sort of like his assistant until they both retired.

Dunham: I'm sorry, now, I've lost track a little bit, so it was your mother's father who did very well and went back, and so how old she when she went—?

1-00:06:13

Tuck: She was about twelve I think she said.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:06:18

Tuck: Yeah.

Dunham: Then your father, and they married—

1-00:06:19

Tuck: When she was sixteen.

Dunham: And your father?

1-00:06:21

Tuck: Was twenty-six.

Dunham: Okay and this is in—?

1-00:06:32

Tuck: Let's see, my brother was born in '33, so I guess maybe 1931 they were married, somewhere around there.

Dunham: Do you know much about your mom's experiences growing up in Hawaii?

1-00:06:40

Tuck: Other than working for her father, helping him with the register, taking him to the bank because he couldn't speak English, and she spoke pigeon English. She managed to do all these things as a child, helped him with the store, yeah.

Dunham: What language was spoken in your house growing up then?

1-00:07:01

Tuck: Cantonese.

Dunham: Cantonese, okay.

1-00:07:03

Tuck: They spoke Cantonese. I'm very limited with it, but I can understand it.

Dunham: Okay, so you just learned to, you didn't study in school reading, writing?

1-00:07:09

Tuck: Yeah, just enough to speak a little. In Pittsburg I think there were about six families. Didn't have that opportunity unfortunately.

Dunham: So how old were you when you came to Pittsburg again?

1-00:07:24

Tuck: I was about five.

Dunham: Do you have any early memories of Pittsburg or when you first came in?

1-00:07:30

Tuck: Oh, yeah, it was fun. It was a small town. It was an Army town. I think there was about 13,000 population, not counting the military, of course, because they were transient. It was fun growing up there because it was a small town. Everybody knew everybody at school, mostly Italians living there. We had a few Latinos, a few African Americans, other than that there was just a sprinkle of Asians. We had a lot of fun growing up there because it was a small town, everybody knew everybody. I had two older brothers in school, and they were very well known, so that made it a little easier for me being the little sister. There was military, so we knew when to stay off of the streets when they take over at 5:00 o'clock. The local kids did not come out to play because I guess the military guys had a bad reputation, so we were told to stay indoors.

Dunham: Were there incidents that you know of that—?

1-00:08:35

Tuck: Not that I know of, unless it was in the paper, but in those days I didn't bother to read the newspaper, it's just that don't go outdoors and play after 5:00, all the GIs are out, this kind of stuff.

Dunham: Yeah, of the small group of Asians, what different Asians were there?

1-00:08:54

Tuck: Mainly Chinese.

Dunham: Mainly Chinese, okay. Were there any Japanese or Filipinos?

1-00:08:57

Tuck: Not that I know of.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:08:59

Tuck: Filipinos came in later because they sent a lot of officers from Manila to train at Camp Stillman so we had a lot of families, and their children would all go to school with me, and they had a little area what they called Little Manila because they all seemed to live in that same neighborhood.

Dunham: Okay, about when did that start then?

1-00:09:21

Tuck: Oh, I would say that was probably around maybe fifth, sixth grade, so nineteen maybe forty-seven, forty-eight around there.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:09:32

Tuck: Yeah, it's like after the war. Then they had a lot of Koreans come over and train, but those were just the soldiers, the officers, not families. But with the Filipinos there were families, so we had quite a few Filipino kids going to school with us.

Dunham: Okay, and what was school like?

1-00:09:51

Tuck: Fun.

Dunham: Do you remember any favorite classes or teachers or—?

1-00:09:57

Tuck: Probably band was my favorite class and PE. Favorite teachers, my music teacher Mr. Fernwall, other than that, no.

Dunham: You didn't have to do like your mom and start working at the store at a very early age?

1-00:10:12

Tuck: I think I did help. We didn't get paid for it.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:10:14

Tuck: Well, I don't she got paid either, but I would go down and help, just do go-for work, just a place where they could keep an eye on those kids, us kids rather, so we'd go to the store after hours and just hang around there.

Dunham: So what are your memories of when the war broke out and you heard of Pearl Harbor.

1-00:10:36

Tuck: Oh, Pearl Harbor, we were scared. We didn't know what had happened because we lived around Mare Island, I remember going to San Francisco during the war, we had to wear buttons that said, "I'm Chinese American," and whenever we got near the toll bridge, they pulled the Asian cars aside because they didn't know if we were the enemy or, so we had to show our "I am Chinese American" buttons, and they would search our cars. They went through our cars because we were crossing the bridge, and I guess they don't know what we're bringing in our cars. So that went on for quite a few years,

then when Pearl Harbor broke out, my father had a radio, and we didn't know what was going on, we didn't know if they were going to be in our backyard next or what, it was kind of scary. I remember the air raids, we used to have air raids, and I would get so scared I'd run in the closet and I put a pillow over my head, and that siren would, it was just horrible. We just didn't know what was going to happen. Then when Pearl Harbor struck, and then a few years later we had that explosion, we thought they hit us already. We didn't know what to do. I remember my father running down to the store because all the windows were broken.

Dunham: Yeah, this is July 17, 1944, the Port Chicago Explosion.

1-00:11:54

Tuck: Yeah, and we were at the store, my uncle put on one of those helmets, hard hats I guess you call it, and even though it was, I think it was evening, it seemed like he was trying to direct traffic even though he's not a police officer, and there were people running around town stealing things out of the store windows because they were broken, so they were looting. So I remember my father running down there, taking everything into the store, locking the doors, and my mother dragged us out with her because she was helping him, so we had to go, too. We didn't know what was going on, and so after he got everything out of the window, locked it up, and we just came home and just wait to hear what was going on.

Dunham: But your home or the store didn't suffer any damage from the explosion.

1-00:12:41

Tuck: No, both our glass windows broke.

Dunham: Your glass windows did break. In the—?

1-00:12:45

Tuck: In the house and in the store.

Dunham: And the store, okay, so then—

1-00:12:49

Tuck: Not a lot, but I remember the glass, the window in the bathroom broke, shattered.

Dunham: So was the store vulnerable such that your father and other, you had to stay there to kind of guard it, or as far as the windows breaking.

1-00:13:01

Tuck: No, once the windows were broken and he got all the, you know how they used to decorate the store windows in the olden days, I don't know if they do that anymore, once he got all the merchandise into the store, he just locked it up and that was it.

Dunham: What else do you remember about sort of when the explosion happened and the aftermath of that?

1-00:13:18

Tuck: Not too much, but then when school started I remember them telling us to be especially nice to this one boy because his father was killed in the accident. I guess he was a civilian worked at Port Chicago, and they said, "Be nice to Freddy, he lost his dad," so everybody was kind of being sweet to him, and I guess you survive, it was only a couple months later. So, but that's the only one that I know that lost a family member.

Dunham: Do you remember his ethnicity or—?

1-00:13:55

Tuck: The last name was I think Zimmerman, so I'm not sure what kind of a name Zimmerman is.

Dunham: Did you hear anything more about Port Chicago after that? When did you first find out that it was an explosion at Port Chicago?

1-00:14:12

Tuck: I think we heard the explosion.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:14:15

Tuck: That's why we didn't know if a bomb had hit or what, and then, of course, the windows started shattering, and after that I guess, well, the first thing we all do is rush down to the store. I don't know if it was on the radio or the next day in the newspaper that we realized what had happened.

Dunham: Did you hear about the mutiny trial?

1-00:14:40

Tuck: I didn't know anything about that until I read in the paper. Years later they had a reunion I think at Exposition Park, and they had a little blurb in the paper about it. I wasn't aware of that because at that age you're not aware of prejudice. We didn't know what it was like to be prejudiced. So we all got along well in school and all that, there was no problem. But when I read that in the paper I was surprised. Then, of course, recently they had a big spread in the LA Times when they I think they had a 50th anniversary, or some anniversary and they talked about that, and they said that that changed the course of history and so forth and so on. Then, of course, I had read the other one several years back, and then this kind of added to it, so then that's when I realized what took place then. How they court martialed the soldier, actually the Navy lead personnel that refused to go in there and like he was dragging out the bodies or whatever they had to do.

Dunham: Yeah.

1-00:15:46

Tuck: They didn't know if there were live ammunitions or what, and they were made to go in there and do these things, but now that I think back, where they had an open house at the steel mill, I remember they had the black guys working in those, I just remember seeing flames coming out like an inferno and they were shoveling something in there. It was like it was all the blacks that did that kind of work.

Dunham: Where was this?

1-00:16:09

Tuck: In the Pittsburg steel mills.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:16:10

Tuck: So it's like they gave those kind of jobs to the blacks, it was so—

Dunham: Yeah, it was basically despite being California, Jim Crow separation—

1-00:16:18

Tuck: Yeah, yeah, they got all the dirty work I guess you'd say, you would say. But I didn't realize that then, I just thought well, you got a job, and this was their job.

Dunham: Yeah, well backing up with your experiences with having the wear the "I am Chinese American" buttons, did you say that was before the war broke out?

1-00:16:31

Tuck: No, no, that was after the war broke out when they sent all the Japanese to the camps and all that because they didn't know who was Japanese and who was Chinese, and so we had to wear these little buttons that said, "I am Chinese American."

Dunham: Did you or your family, aside from that sort of scrutiny in having to deal with that, were there other examples where you experienced prejudice or being mistaken for Japanese?

1-00:16:56

Tuck: No, even in school we never had a problem with the kids.

Dunham: There was never any prejudice towards the store, or anything?

1-00:17:02

Tuck: I don't know. Maybe because we were American born, maybe because we were in music, I think the kids who are in music and sports, you're one of them, you're not an oddball. We weren't from overseas, so we were just very well accepted, I never felt prejudice against me.

Dunham: Right, nor your parents that you—?

1-00:17:28

Tuck: No, not that I know of because you know why, we lived in a small town, and the National Dollar Store at that time was considered a big store. But in those days we only had J. C. Penney's, Sears, National Dollar Stores, Montgomery Ward, we didn't have all these Macy's and Nordstrom's and all that kind of stuff, especially in a small town, so half the time I worked for my dad, so we were very well respected.

Dunham: How did things change after the war, did things change at all as far as the Dollar Store and what supplies, what things your family carried? Were you impacted by the war and rationing?

1-00:18:04

Tuck: We did have rations. I remember the rations on nylons. We have a picture at home. They wouldn't allow them to sell nylons because I think they were using for parachutes, and when they finally allowed them to sell nylons, limit one pair. I can remember the pictures that we have at home, all these ladies in line waiting to go in and buy that one pair of nylons, and I was standing in my father's office which was above the first floor of the store looking down at all these silly ladies and standing in line for hours to get one pair of nylons. I can remember they couldn't get it, the girls would take, I think it was I don't know if it was fingernail polish or what, and they would put a line in the back of their legs because in those days nylons had like a seam, way before your time.

Dunham: No, no, but I've seen—

1-00:18:58

Tuck: The ladies would put a line in the back to make it look like they had nylons on.

Dunham: It's funny.

1-00:19:04

Tuck: Yeah, I remember they had rations, too. We had to have stamps to buy shoes, to buy food. We never had a problem because when we collect the stamps from the customers and we needed shoes, we would just trade with the guy down the street that had the shoe store. And if he needed whatever, he would trade with us, and so we kind of looked after each other. So finally if we had to turn the stamps in to anybody in particular, we'd just had to collect the stamps for whatever they were buying.

Dunham: Okay, so you just kind of bartered. Did the store carry food and groceries, or—?

1-00:19:38

Tuck: No, we only had clothing.

Dunham: Okay, yeah. And what about, did you participate in Victory Gardens?

1-00:19:46

Tuck: I think my father had a Victory Garden, yeah. But that's because he wanted to grow Chinese vegetables, and we couldn't get it in that town because they didn't have Chinese stores, or we'd have to go to San Francisco to buy it.

Dunham: What did you eat growing up, the traditional Chinese—?

1-00:20:02

Tuck: Yeah, pretty much so, and probably a lot of American meals and that's probably why we're taller than most Chinese in that generation because we grew up with sandwiches and bread, whereas most Chinese eat rice for breakfast, and we grew up with spaghetti and things like that. We didn't eat the typical Chinese meal every single day, maybe just dinner time.

Dunham: Do you remember if there were any changes and limitations during the war again kind of relating to food and what you might have able to have?

1-00:20:35

Tuck: I remember we couldn't get Flair bubble gum, that was hard to come by. They had a candy store, and every Monday they would get a new shipment of candy, so we would always be there to see what the latest items were, and we couldn't get the Flair bubble gum, it was a hot item then. Whenever that shipment came in, we were standing in line waiting for that.

Dunham: Did you go to the movies?

1-00:20:59

Tuck: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: Was there a movie theater in Pittsburg?

1-00:21:03

Tuck: Oh, yeah. Twenty cents to get in in those days.

Dunham: And they had the newsreels.

1-00:21:08

Tuck: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: What about music or the radio—did you listen to the radio?

1-00:21:14

Tuck: Oh, yeah, all the time.

Dunham: What kinds of things did you listen to?

1-00:21:22

Tuck: They used to have those stories on the, oh, what was it, things that you see in the movies now, well, like they used to have "Rochester," and who was that

guy, Jack Benny, and I used to listen to the “Hawaii Call,” radio station that would come on every Saturday.

Dunham: And what was that?

1-00:21:40

Tuck: Hawaii Calls?

Dunham: Um hm.

1-00:21:42

Tuck: It was music from the Hawaiian Islands.

Dunham: Oh, okay.

1-00:21:48

Tuck: Just a typical—

Dunham: Now had your mother fostered your interest in kind of Hawaiian music, or did you find that on your own or—?

1-00:21:56

Tuck: Probably, probably, because she’s from Hawaii. She took me to the Hawaiian Islands when I was very young.

Dunham: What was that like?

1-00:22:04

Tuck: It was great.

Dunham: Where did you go?

1-00:22:06

Tuck: We went to Oahu where her family was, met all my relatives there at that time. I think I was twelve.

Dunham: Did they still have the restaurant, or had that been—?

1-00:22:17

Tuck: No, he went to China; I want to say 1927 maybe? Twenty-five? I think twenty-five.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:22:24

Tuck: Yeah, so no, the restaurant was gone, but the property’s still there. When I go to Hawaii now, which I do almost every year once or twice, he doesn’t own it anymore, but they’ve turned it into a real fancy parking area, parking structure. But I went there when I was twelve or thirteen, let’s see, 19—

Dunham: But after the war?

1-00:22:44

Tuck: Yeah, 1949, 1950, excuse me, 1950.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:22:51

Tuck: Because she got her brother to leave China when the Communists took over. She told him to come back because it's getting dangerous there, so when her brother came back in 1949, we went there the summer of '50 so she could see her brothers again and his family. And I went there, and I yeah, I enjoy the Hawaiian music. I picked up a cheap ukulele and came back and taught myself how to play it.

Dunham: Oh, wow. Do you still do that?

1-00:23:17

Tuck: Oh, yeah, I still play once in a while.

Dunham: Oh, great.

1-00:23:21

Tuck: I still enjoy going over there every year to see my relatives, and that hasn't stopped.

Dunham: That's great. Did you grow up with religion in your family?

1-00:23:34

Tuck: Not really, not really. The majority were Catholics because it's Italian. The whole town is Italian. Most of my classmates went to the Catholic Church. They had a few that went to different churches, and the only time I ever went was when they had Easter programs. We'd go for the Easter program, or they ran out of kids to perform, they would ask us to sing, so I think I did that once, no, other than that, not really.

Dunham: Okay, back to rationing, I was thinking about the trips to San Francisco, was it ever an issue around going for gas, or how did you—?

1-00:24:12

Tuck: Oh, yes, oh, yeah, you'd have a ration—

Dunham: Is that something your father might have had to barter as well to make sure you had enough or—?

1-00:24:15

Tuck: No, because we only made one trip a week for business. He had to go there and being a manager of a Dollar Store, they had to go have a meeting every Sunday morning.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:24:28

Tuck: He would drop us off his grandmother's house, and we would stay there to visit, and then he would come back after lunch and we would all get together as a family and have dinner, and then we'd drive back to Pittsburg.

Dunham: Okay, now when had his grandmother emigrated from China, when was that?

1-00:24:43

Tuck: Just before my father, I think she came, he came in 1920, she probably came around 1918.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:24:52

Tuck: As a picture bride.

Dunham: Oh, yeah, okay, so do you know much about that story?

1-00:24:58

Tuck: Yeah, it's a funny one. I don't even know if you know about, but your grandmother married a chicken because it was a picture bride, and his grandfather was already in San Francisco.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:25:09

Tuck: They made the arrangements, but he wasn't there to actually be part of the ceremony, so it's my understanding that they picked a rooster to be the husband.

Dunham: Wow.

1-00:25:21

Tuck: I asked my mother, "What was the honeymoon like?" But I heard the story was a crack up, and then after they had this wedding ceremony I guess she got on the boat and came across and met his grandfather for the first time, and then eventually they had his mother and another daughter, and well, they're still alive. His mother just turned ninety, looks like seventy, and the other sister just turned eighty-nine, and she's taking ukulele lessons now from what I heard. I met them yesterday for lunch.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:25:55

Tuck: His mother's still playing golf, still playing tournaments.

Dunham: Where in San Francisco did they live when you would stay with his grandmother?

1-00:26:05

Tuck: They lived in Chinatown, or close to Chinatown.

Dunham: So what was that like?

1-00:26:10

Tuck: Oh, it was a fun place to go every Sunday.

Dunham: So it was very different from being in Pittsburg where you were very much a minority, although maybe not that aware of it. But then you saw Chinatown so—

1-00:26:22

Tuck: Yeah, but by going there every Sunday and being with his grandmother and another aunt that I had up there, we had dinner almost every Sunday evenings together and just being there listening to them speak Chinese, I picked up understanding Chinese even though speaking is very limited, but I can understand it. And it was fun.

Dunham: Yeah, but your mother and father also spoke in the home—?

1-00:26:45

Tuck: Oh, yeah, they both spoke Chinese, they both spoke the same dialect.

Dunham: Did you have any thoughts on kind of the contrast between San Francisco Chinatown and Pittsburg community where you grew up?

1-00:26:58

Tuck: Oh, yeah, because I grew up with Italians. Of course, we didn't have a little Chinatown, it was kind of spread out, but still it was completely different, can you compare?

Dunham: Okay, well, yeah, did you ever have any feelings of wanting to grow up more in San Francisco—?

1-00:27:22

Tuck: I thought I did. When I graduated from high school I thought I would want to move there, and that's why I went up there and went to business college, but then for whatever reason I went back to Pittsburg, and my father says, "Oh, we're getting transferred to Fresno." I went, "Oh, gosh, I don't want to go to Fresno." Maybe I'll go to San Francisco. He says, "Well, why don't you just come there and try it and if you don't like it then you can go back and see what you can find in San Francisco. You're eighteen years old." I said, "Okay, I'll go there and try it." So then I got a job in a grocery store, and it was okay. And, of course, I met my husband, and we got married, then we had two children there and then he got transferred to Los Angeles, and, of course, we've been living here since. The other two were born in San Gabriel.

Dunham: Oh, okay. Do you have four children total?

1-00:28:17

Tuck: Four, and I'm so glad we moved.

Dunham: From Fresno?

1-00:28:17

Tuck: Yes.

Dunham: Now why is that?

1-00:28:18

Tuck: Well, I go back there now and I see how pokey it is, and the lifestyle, not my cup of tea.

Dunham: So how do you compare LA with Pittsburg?

1-00:28:33

Tuck: Oh, my gosh, night and day, there's no comparison.

Dunham: Would you not—?

1-00:28:38

Tuck: Although, I'm living in a suburb, it's small, Arcadia? It's small, and you could say it's kind of like Pittsburg because you kind of get to know everybody, and if you want to have a little action, you can go to Los Angeles, it's only a half an hour away, so it's not a big deal. But I don't like big cities, so I'm in a large city, but I don't really live in a city, I'm in a suburb.

Dunham: Do you remember the end of the war, hearing about VE Day or VJ Day, what was that like?

1-00:29:13

Tuck: Yeah, that was exciting, well, there was confetti, people were excited, they were dancing in the streets, and we had Camp Stillman there and I think they called it the largest disembarking center of the West Coast, so when they started bringing all the boys home from overseas, well, we lined the streets and had American flags waving away, and the first month or so they would bring the boys home from the pier, and they would have Army truck convoys taking them to the camp. We'd be out there cheering away, they would throw coins and souvenirs to us, and then as months go by as they come home, then it's not a new thing anymore so the poor kids had to walk from the pier to the camp like a parade, still had the cheering, but the poor guys had to carry all their things on their back and walk to the base instead. It was exciting, being a small town, and they had people were dancing in the street, and yeah, it was fun.

Dunham: Yeah, how long a period did that go on there when they were still coming back, for months?

1-00:30:22

Tuck: Oh, they were coming back for months, yeah. Then gradually they closed the camp, yeah.

Dunham: How did that impact Pittsburg?

1-00:30:29

Tuck: That's when we moved. A lot.

Dunham: There was no more business.

1-00:30:32

Tuck: A lot, especially the restaurants and the downtown area.

Dunham: So did that store close?

1-00:30:40

Tuck: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: What year was that?

1-00:30:40

Tuck: Nineteen fifty-four is when we moved.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:30:47

Tuck: It's just gradually going down—

Dunham: So it lasted a while but it, when did the base close?

1-00:30:53

Tuck: Jeez I don't remember, but now where we, like we went through there the other day, there are all homes out there now, and they call it the new section of Pittsburg. I know going back to Pittsburg after we moved for several years it was a ghost town, downtown. There was nothing there. Every store was empty, and the Dollar Store was empty for the longest time. Our house was gone, I think they knocked it down, but the stairs were still left going into the house. That was left sitting there like that for the longest time. Then I don't know what developer took it over, and now they have all new homes there. All the stores have been replaced by other little businesses, and it's jumping again.

Dunham: Yeah, and the population's very different, not predominantly Italian American anymore.

1-00:31:43

Tuck: No, not at all, it's everything else.

Dunham: Is there still much of the Italian and Latin community—?

1-00:31:50

Tuck: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, there's still a lot. It surprised me a lot of my classmates still stayed in the area, not Pittsburg. Antioch used to be one of our rivals, Concord. They're all living in most of those neighborhoods now. They've moved out of Pittsburg and have gone to places like Oakley and Brentwood.

Dunham: Why is that, do you think?

1-00:32:13

Tuck: I don't know, maybe, I don't know if they're working closer to the Bay Area, or what it is, because all those industries have closed, so—

Dunham: But Pittsburg has a bigger population now than—

1-00:32:28

Tuck: Oh, yeah, because people are moving out to the suburbs now, but my classmates have moved away from the area. When I see them, "Where are you living?" "Oh, I live in Antioch," "Well, I'm living in Oakley." Or "Oh, we moved to Walnut Creek," so for whatever reason I don't know.

Dunham: What reunion is it that you're here for?

1-00:32:47

Tuck: This is from 1940 to 1960, so there are twenty years of classmates.

Dunham: Oh, wow, okay, and how many are you expecting?

1-00:32:58

Tuck: They're expecting eight hundred.

Dunham: Wow.

1-00:33:00

Tuck: But that's not a lot, though. You think of twenty years, because I was asking the person that's in charge of ours, he said we have about forty people coming. Well, when you think of forty, that's probably twenty and spouse or friends, so out of a class of one hundred sixty—

Dunham: You had one hundred sixty in your graduating class, okay.

1-00:33:19

Tuck: Then all the years before that, so you figure twenty times forty, that's eight hundred.

Dunham: Yeah.

1-00:33:24

Tuck: So some classes will have more, some will have less, but averages forty to a class.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:33:34

Tuck: So they're expecting eight hundred people there, so—

Dunham: Have you been to reunions before?

1-00:33:34

Tuck: Oh, yeah, I went to the fiftieth and the, no, not the fiftieth. I think forty-five years and fifty-three years.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:33:46

Tuck: I think I went to the twentieth.

Dunham: Well, is there anything else you'd like to share with us today. I guess looking back, especially about the war years, any other memories, reflections back on that time?

1-00:34:09

Tuck: I can't think of anything. I used to go to the camp because some of the kids went to school with us, especially the Filipino kids, and they would have like teen clubs or youth clubs, and they would invite you to go to the camp where they had functions, social, and it was interesting going to the camp and going to the PX and buying things there at very reasonable prices.

Dunham: So was that in Pittsburg?

1-00:34:42

Tuck: Yeah, Camp Stillman.

Dunham: Oh, Camp Stillman, okay.

1-00:34:45

Tuck: Right, and Armed Forces Day they would invite the band to go there, and they had kind of like an open house. I guess they were probably recruiting kids to join the service there, too. They would have an open house there and feed us and entertain us. That was kind of an exciting time, every May they would have this Armed Forces Day function.

Dunham: Okay. Did either of your brothers go into the service?

1-00:35:12

Tuck: Yeah, both of them.

Dunham: Both of them, when did they?

1-00:35:14

Tuck: My brother joined out of high school. I think he graduated in '52, and he worked at the camp as a watch repairman, and when they closed the camp, he lost a job. So then he decided to go, he wanted to go to college and major in music. My father wouldn't hear of that. He says, "Not music. If you want to go to college, I'll pay for it, but it's not going to be music." So he said, "Well, the heck with it." So he joined the service, and got the GI Bill, and he came back and he went back to college and he got his Masters and he taught at Fresno City College until he retired.

Dunham: What did he teach?

1-00:35:57

Tuck: Graphic arts. They didn't have a graphic arts department, so when he finished college they recommended that he be the instructor, so he started the graphic arts department and he retired from that after I think he had, I forgot, 1950, I can't remember, but they gave him a golden handshake, and he took it and ran. So he retired at 55 and he's now 76.

My other brother, UC Berkeley, he's a pharmacist, and he did that for the last forty-five years, and he just passed away this January.

Dunham: That's right. That's when we were first going to meet, yeah.

1-00:36:44

Tuck: That's right, we were going to interview.

Dunham: Your parents continued running the Dollar Stores all over.

1-00:36:52

Tuck: Well, after they closed the camp and they closed the store, then transferred to Fresno, and he worked there until 1964 and he retired, they retired.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:37:04

Tuck: My mother's still alive, she's going to be 97, yeah, I'm going to see her tomorrow.

Dunham: Wow, that's great. My grandma turns 97 this next month.

1-00:37:12

Tuck: Yeah, my father died in 1995, and he was 91.

Dunham: Okay, wow. So she's still in Fresno?

1-00:37:18

Tuck: Yeah, still in Fresno. She has a little bit of dementia now, but physically she's fine, just mentally she's losing it.

Dunham: Okay, yeah. Okay, well any last things you'd like to add.

1-00:37:38

Tuck: I just don't know what else to add.

Dunham: Okay, no problem. I think this was very nice contribution. Let me just take a look and yeah, so aside from going to Hawaii you've done a lot of other travel? Have you been to China?

1-00:38:07

Tuck: Yes, four times, and I'm going again next year.

Dunham: Oh, wow.

1-00:38:10

Tuck: Next year we're going to go to several of the countries in Asia. We're going to start off in Beijing, then we're going to fly to Singapore, and we're taking a cruise.

Dunham: Wow.

1-00:38:23

Tuck: That will be stopping in Thailand, Viet Nam, Japan, Korea, then we go back to China again, we'll hit Hong King, Shanghai and Beijing, and then we fly home.

Dunham: Wow, how long a trip is that?

1-00:38:38

Tuck: There'll be sixteen days on the ship, but we're going to take about five on our own, because I don't like to get there and just start running.

Dunham: Okay, that's a lot of—

1-00:38:46

Tuck: We'll take three nights on our own in Beijing and two nights on our own in Singapore.

Dunham: Will you see any family in China?

1-00:38:53

Tuck: No, because we're not going to Guang Cho, but in 2004 I went to Guang Cho and my mother was 89, and we rented a little private van, and it took us out to the village where she went to school and where her family had a home. My father had a big home there, five-story home.

Dunham: Was it still there?

1-00:39:17

Tuck: Two stories were left, the other ones were damaged by the Japanese during the war, and I guess we have some shirt tail relatives there now that are renting it out and taking care of it, and whether the family members wanted. All the siblings have moved to Hawaii. Now they've all passed away, except for the half brothers, and none of them wanted it. Once they left China, they don't want to go back. But the property's there. The Communists took it, and then they gave it back.

Dunham: Okay.

1-00:39:49

Tuck: Then nobody wanted to go claim it, and so my father has a house there. We managed to find that, and there's relatives living there, too. They're my father's probably great, great niece and nephews living there now because he didn't want it, so he just—

Dunham: So do they own it now or—?

1-00:40:08

Tuck: Yeah, he turned it over to them. He said, "It's yours." He had to sign off, and he had to go to the Secretary of State and get March Fong to sign off so that he could get rid of it. He said, "It's yours. Don't ask me for any money to repair. If you want it, it's yours." So now they're living in it. None of us want it, so. So we went back there and we found some family members and my mother went to the grave of her parents because she hadn't gone back after she left China. So she found their grave, a relative took her there, and that was very emotional. It was interesting. So I'll be going there again next year.

Dunham: Yeah, and have you been to those other countries?

1-00:40:56

Tuck: I've been to Thailand, I've been to Korea, I've been to Singapore, but that you know, so that should be interesting. So there's a different city in Korea. I've been to Seoul, but I haven't been to this other one. Then in 2006 I took a trip to Antarctica, that was interesting, that was fun.

Dunham: Wow. What was that like?

1-00:41:17

Tuck: Oh, it was fun. It's like going to the moon.

Dunham: What made you decide to go there?

1-00:41:21

Tuck: I like penguins.

Dunham: Did you see penguins?

1-00:41:24

Tuck: Oh, did I ever, coming out of my ears.

Dunham: Do you still like penguins?

1-00:41:29

Tuck: My living room is full of penguins.

Dunham: Wow.

1-00:41:30

Tuck: I just saw the movie of it: *Mr. Popper's Penguins*.

Dunham: Was that a cruise?

1-00:41:37

Tuck: Oh yeah, that was a cruise, yeah. Oh, yeah, that was a cruise. Well, we flew into Argentina. Then from there we cruised to Antarctica. That was exciting. It was fun.

Dunham: Right.

1-00:41:52

Tuck: Then this year we just came back from Germany, Berlin, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria and Poland with Auschwitz. I like to go see all these historical things. It's very interesting.

Dunham: Yeah, great.

1-00:42:14

Tuck: Several years back I went to Dachau in Munich. Very interesting.

Dunham: Well, now you're a part of history. You can come see yourself in the Rosie the Riveter Home Front National Park. Thank you very much, Fran, for participating today.

1-00:42:30

Tuck: Like I say, I don't have a lot to tell you, but—

Dunham: No, that was terrific. Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]