

YOU'RE IN THE ARMY, MRS. JONES

WOMEN WAR WORKERS HANDLE TOUGH PHYSICAL GRIND IN FACTORIES



ALL-WOMAN CREW GIVES THE FINAL POLISH TO PLEXIGLASS NOSES OF PLANES PREPARED TO POLISH OFF THE AXIS.

By Stephen Longstreet*

"TODAY you are a plane builder," the foreman said, handing me a badge and a pair of stiff oily overalls. "Anyway, that's what the front office says."

"How do I look?" I said, crawling into the blue canvas outfit.

"Ducky," said the foreman, and he led me down the great open plant where dozens of bombers were taking shape. Playing nursemaid to a writer who wanted to spend a day hammering together bombers wasn't his idea of winning the war.

It was the biggest plant I had ever seen. It ran on and on, and thousands of huge planes, each bigger than a block, were being wired, riveted, bolted and welded. The great bodies, gleaming like modern mirrors, passed, and men and women and boys (and a few midgets to screw up tight corners) worked on them, and under my eyes the ships grew and felt their wings and their wheels moved.

A crew of Okies, Mexicans (born in the United States), and a lot of midwestern hillbillies were screwing together a four-motor job.

My work was to place little slivers of steel in little holes and a big shaggy giant followed me with a gun on an air line and hammered them into place. It was hard work. They had to be placed just right and always the shaggy one was on my heels, hurrying me, telling me to shake my tail.



BOY MEETS GIRL AS BOTH SKETCH HUGE BOMBER DESIGNS.

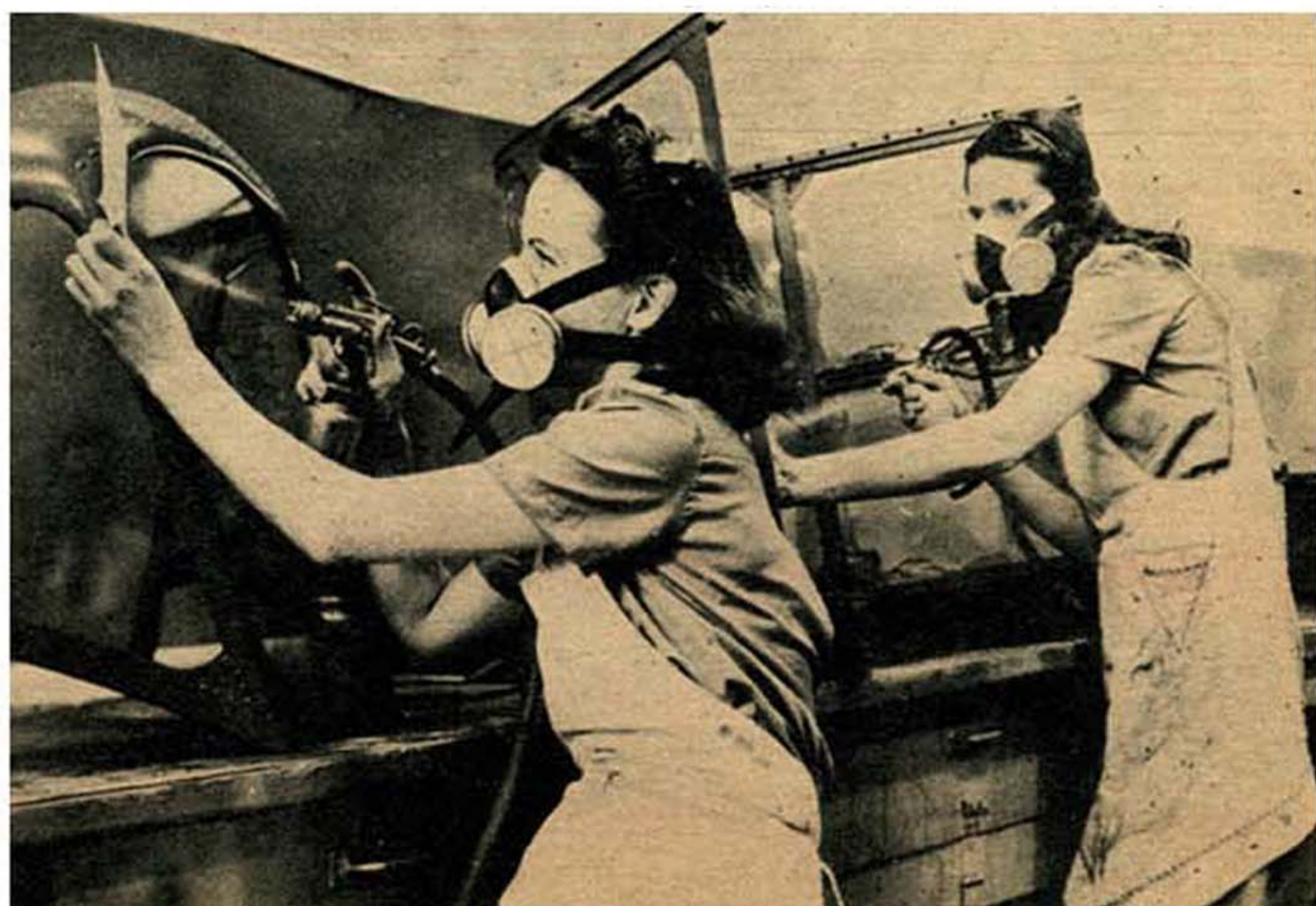
The workers liked their work. This was no flivver hell in Detroit with company police ready to crack heads, or spies to report who went to the john twice during the morning. These were Americans, not giving a damn who got rich on airplane stocks. All they cared about was to get the ships done and away with a belly-load of bombs. Panting, my sack of steel pins weighing me down, my breath coming hard, my heels loaded with lead, I climbed higher on the plane, setting my slivers. And always the hammer carrier was after me to hist them up faster.

The great drop hammers made sections of one blow; the saws ate into sides of steel as if they were beef; the carryways moved quicker as the men and women warmed up and began to punch hard at the ships. They watched neither the slogans, flags, banners, nor clocks. This was the first earnest mass effort I had found in America that was not for gain, not for personal glory. These workers wanted planes to work on. Nothing else seemed to matter.

I was too tired to carry on. Muscles I never knew I had cried shame. Bones I didn't need at a typewriter sent out calls for oiling. Joints buckled on me, and I only wished the columnists, the Peglers, Thompsons and King Kongs of the press, who were fighting a war of their own based on nothing real, were here with me. I think they would don sackcloth and ashes and retire to a farm to grow corn and save a lot of waste paper, if they had to carry those steel slivers and hammer them into place.

No one knows, who doesn't do it, how hard it is to build a plane, get a ship off the ways, move a tank past the inspectors. I knew. I just fell apart under the bomber, and someone else—a slim little girl with a well-fitting uniform—took my bag of slivers and went on with

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WOMEN AIRCRAFT WORKERS FREE MEN FOR FRONT LINES.

my work.

"Tuckered?" said the man stringing cables through the holes of what would soon be a control board.

"Just a little tired."

"First day?"

"First day."

"Hell, you shoulda been in Flint, when the cars used to have to be moved four miles an hour on the lines. You couldn't sneeze without a car being left without fenders."

"It must have been bad."

"Cheese, that's what we made then. But *these* birds, they are solid." I tapped the bomber. "Very."

"You said it. I enjoy making these. I don't care if the company makes a million dollars a day on them. They'll get around to taking it away from them. Wait until things get tough here, like in China and Russia. It's us that will build these things for a long time, not the big mouths . . ."

"You think it's going to get tougher?"

"I got two sons in it. One, he's dead, I guess. The other he's some place in the big sea with a carrier. Sure, it will get tougher. It's getting tougher all the time. The more we build the more we need."

"These are fine planes."

He winked. "We got finer ones coming off the board."

The sound of bells and heavy feet came to me.

"Lunch . . ."

"I'm not hungry," I said.

The girl who had finished my job opened a lunch box and began to attack a whole fried fish. "I know. I couldn't eat either, the first week. But now I could eat a Congressman on rye bread."

Everyone had worked hard and now they ate hard. They chewed and swallowed and did not talk much. They ate and relaxed and rubbed tired arms and legs.

I said, "Funny thing, everyone thinks airplanes are just pasted together by people living like kings on high wages. Everyone just thinks you pass a bill and spend a billion dollars, and someone snaps a button and the planes begin to appear like new pennies at the factory doors."

The girl smiled and offered me a plum. "Sure. We need a few good newspapers out here to tell the truth about how hard it is to build a plane."

The whistles were starting again. I could hardly rise off the floor.



TWO GIRLS BATHE BOMBERS WITH PORTABLE CLEANING KIT.

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I had an easy job. I had a reel of blue-covered wire, and every place I saw a red-covered wire I just followed it with my wire and snipped it off to fit. Two little girls with screwdrivers attached it into place. It was a narrow working room and I kept hitting my head. But now, when they wanted to drop a bomb from that plane, they just pressed something which sent a current along *my* blue wire to something else and the bomb fell away because *I* had strung the wire in the right place. There were hundreds of wires in every plane. The control board looked like a cheap Italian dinner, there were so many wires of copper dough; all it needed was tomato sauce and the breath of a wine-drinking waiter with two lame feet.

I don't remember the last hour of work. I came to standing at the factory gate, leaning against a bus. I was never so tired in my whole life. In my hand I held a pay envelope. It contained five dollars.

"How do you feel?" asked the shaggy youth, looking lost without his air hammer.

"I feel as if I shall never stand again. I want to crawl into a corner and come apart slowly."

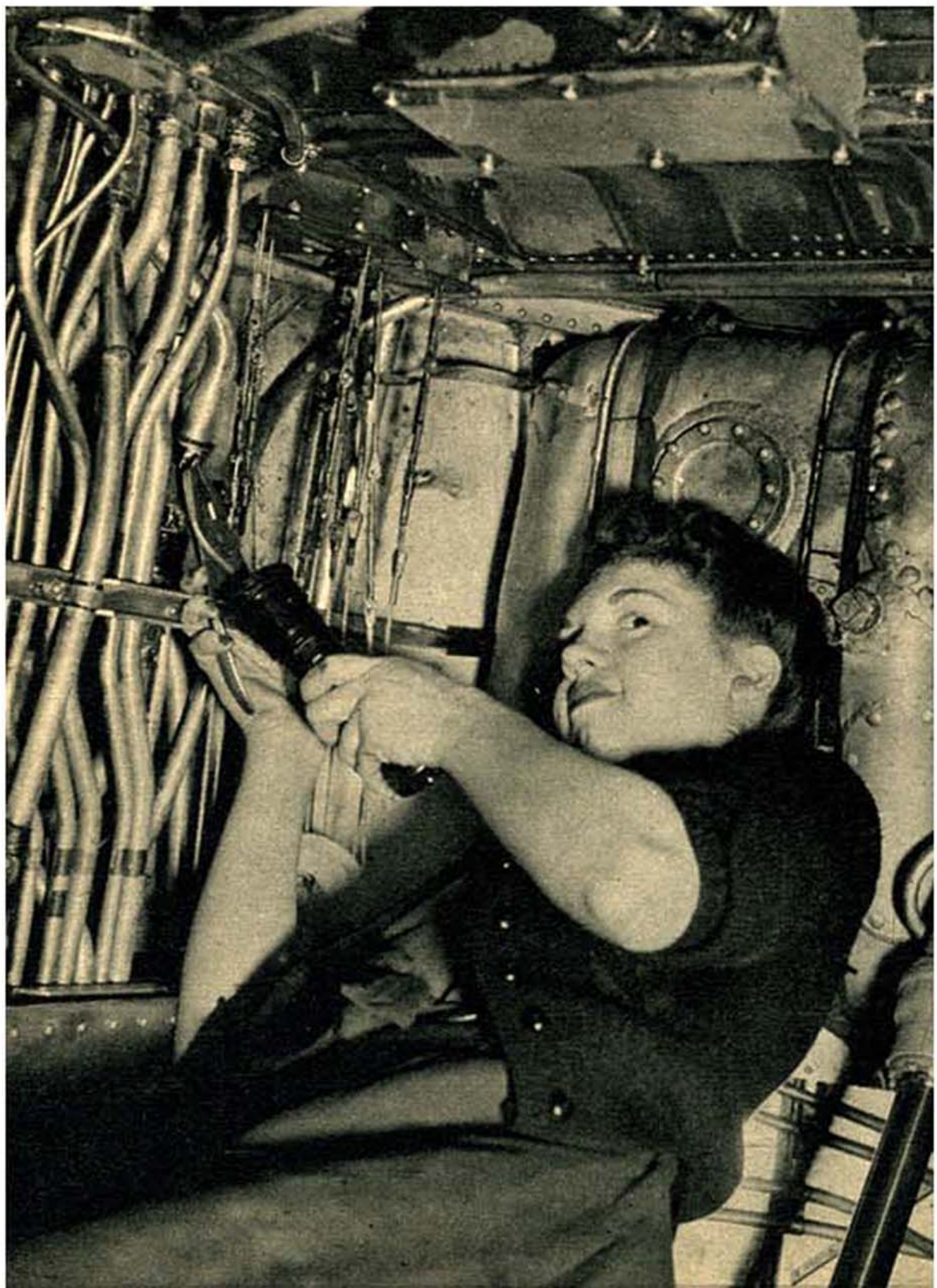
"See you tomorrow."

I gathered that I was expected to finish the week.

I did. Any reward they want to give me in Washington I shall take. Any reward that they want to give my fellow workers will be earned. The day I finished at the airplane plant I went to a party. A lot of screen writers and directors in majors' and captains' uniforms were sore as hell that they were being ordered to give up their leaves in Hollywood and report for duty. A three-thousand-dollar-a-week slug said to me, "The only way to beat this thing is to grow rich in the airplane plants."

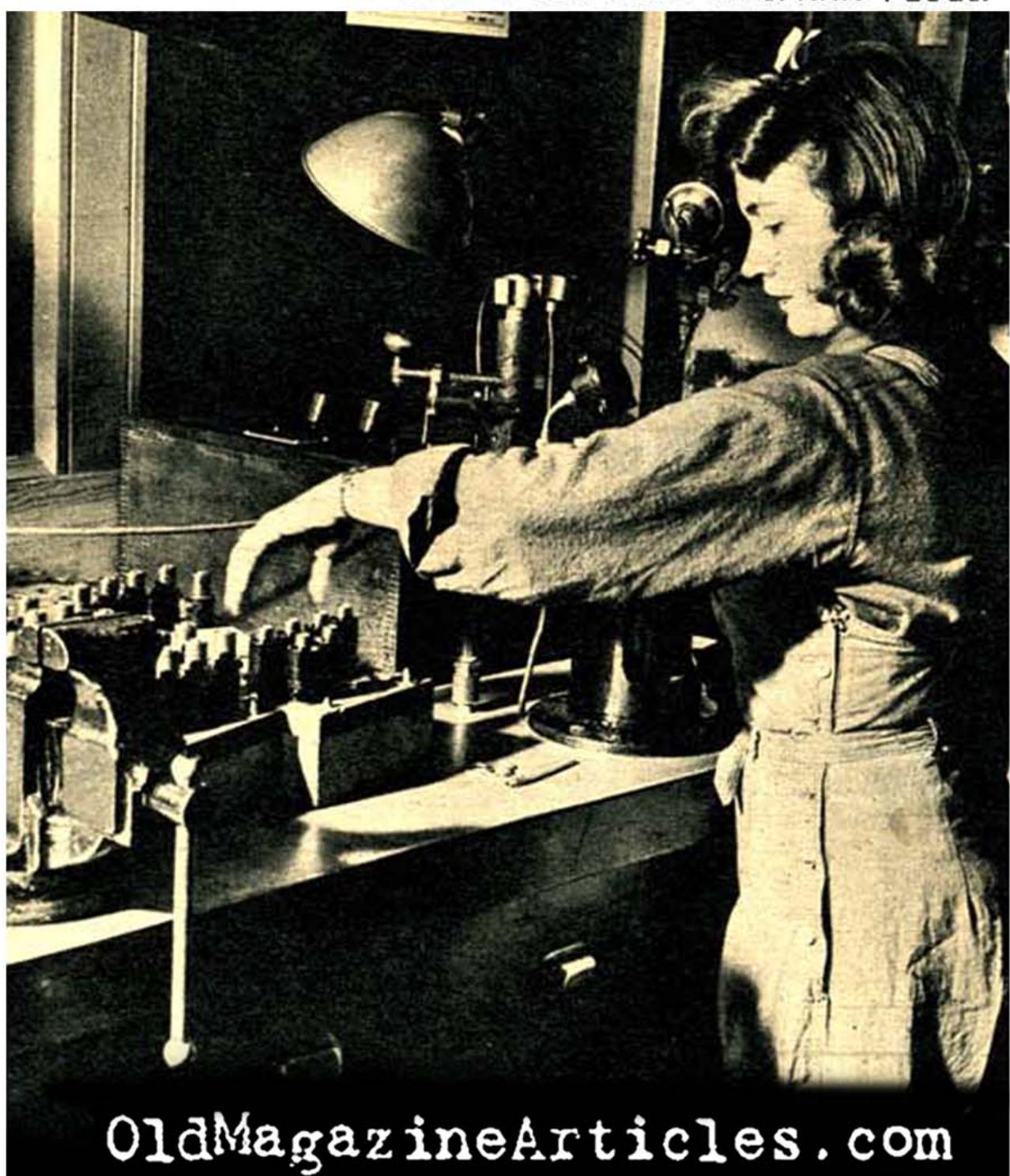
I fingered the twenty dollars in my pants with my two battered fingers and nodded.

"You ought to learn welding. It pays *almost* as well as writing."

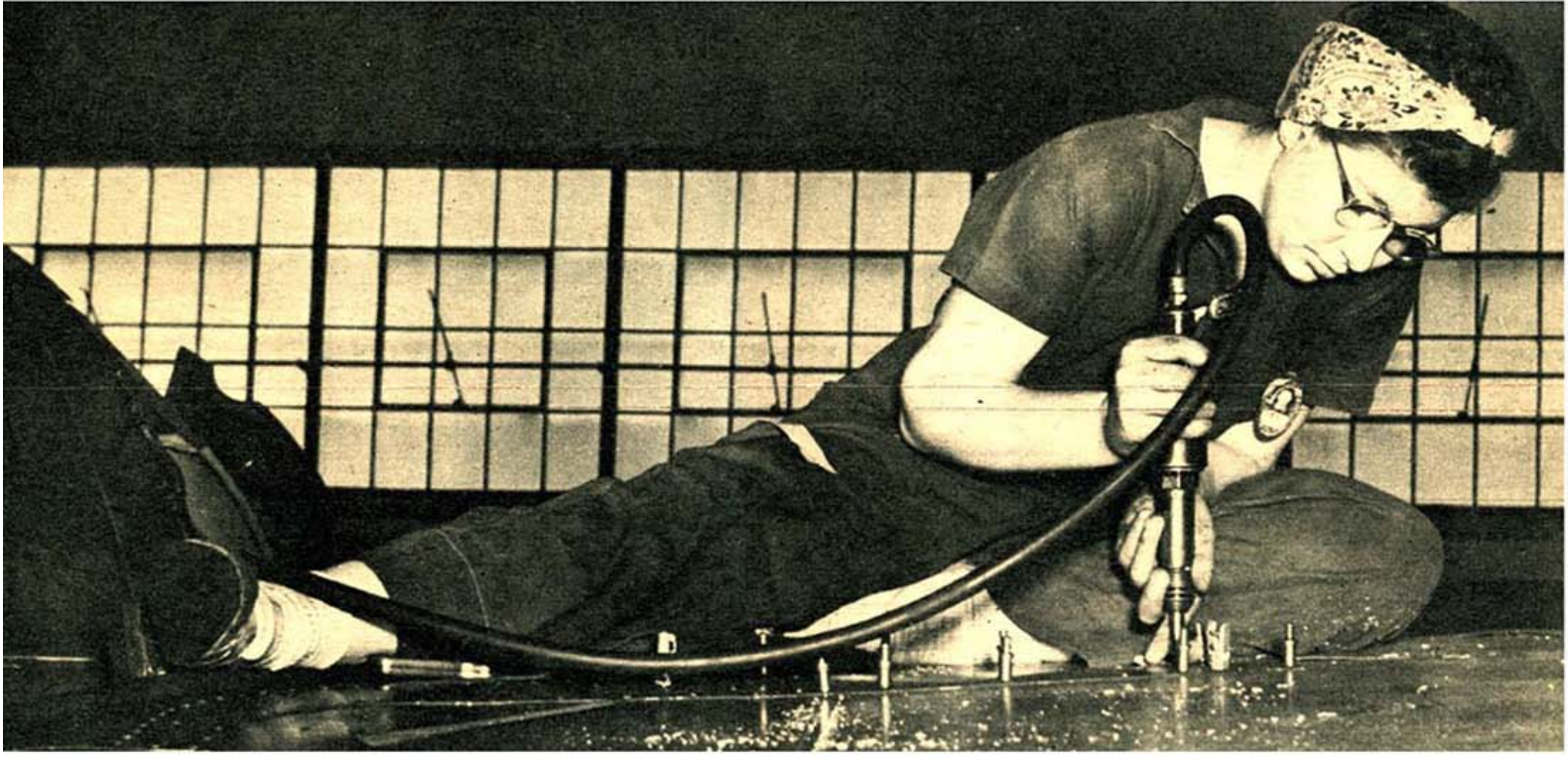


CHECKING INTERIOR CONNECTIONS IS PAINSTAKING WORK.

SHE CLEANS AND ADJUSTS A CLIPPER'S 112 SPARK PLUGS.



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THIS WOMAN RIVETER FIGHTS THE WAR BY WORKING ON THE ENORMOUS WING SURFACE OF AN "AVENGER" FOR THE U. S. NAVY.

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