

**NAOMI
FERN
PARKER**
1921-2018



**ROSIE THE
RIVETER
MYSTERY
SOLVED**

After Pearl Harbor, the Naval Air Station in Alameda, California began recruiting female factory workers. Hoping to contribute to the war effort, 20-year-old Naomi Parker, who was born in Tulsa in August 1921, applied for a mechanic job. Little did she know that this difficult and dirty job would lead her to becoming an iconic part of American history.

In 1942, an Acme photographer visited the sprawling base to document the pioneering women. He captured Parker in profile, whose red polka-dotted bandana and coveralls perfectly embodied World War II's female workforce. When her picture appeared in the *Oakland Post-Enquirer*, Naomi saved the photo – for the next seventy years!

A year later, Pittsburgh artist J. Howard Miller created a poster of a wartime female worker in a blue shirt and red polka-dot bandana, flexing her biceps, with the caption “We Can Do It!” Miller’s motivational poster was intended only for Westinghouse factories to boost morale, but is widely recognized today as a sign of patriotism and female strength.

The poster disappeared until it was discovered in the National Archives vaults in the early 1980s, when the gift shop retroactively labeled it as ‘Rosie the Riveter’, and began to sell it. It quickly became a feminist symbol.

When Geraldine Doyle saw the photo in *Modern Maturity* magazine in 1984, she believed it was her. She repeated her claim, without any verifiable evidence, when the poster appeared on the cover of the March 1994 *Smithsonian* magazine. When she died in 2010, Doyle was widely accepted by many historians and journalists as the inspiration for Rosie.

Not convinced, Seton Hall professor James Kimble started investigating. He learned the poster was likely based on a photo of a young woman at the Alameda Naval Air Station in 1942. Kimble started “a six-year obsession” to find the original wire photo – with the long-forgotten caption.

While attending a 2011 reunion at the Rosie the Riveter National Historical Park in Richmond, California, Parker saw her photo misidentified as Doyle. She sent a copy of her saved clipping to the National Park Service, but they wanted more proof.

Miller never revealed his model’s identity, but in 2015 Kimble found his ‘smoking gun’ – a copy of the photo with the original caption glued on the back. Dated March 1942 at the Naval Air Station in Alameda, it identified “Pretty Naomi Parker” as the woman at the lathe.

Kimble’s article “Rosie’s Secret Identity”, published in 2016, finally linked Parker to the photo. The connection to the poster was not as clear. However, the only physical resemblance between the photo and the poster is the red polka-dotted bandana. Finally, Parker, with Kimble’s dedicated efforts, reclaimed both her identity and place in history.

Naomi Parker died on January 20, 2018 at age 96, ironically on the day of the 2018 Women’s March. For countless women who demonstrated in cities across the country that day, this ‘Rosie the Riveter’ had come to represent an empowering feminist symbol.