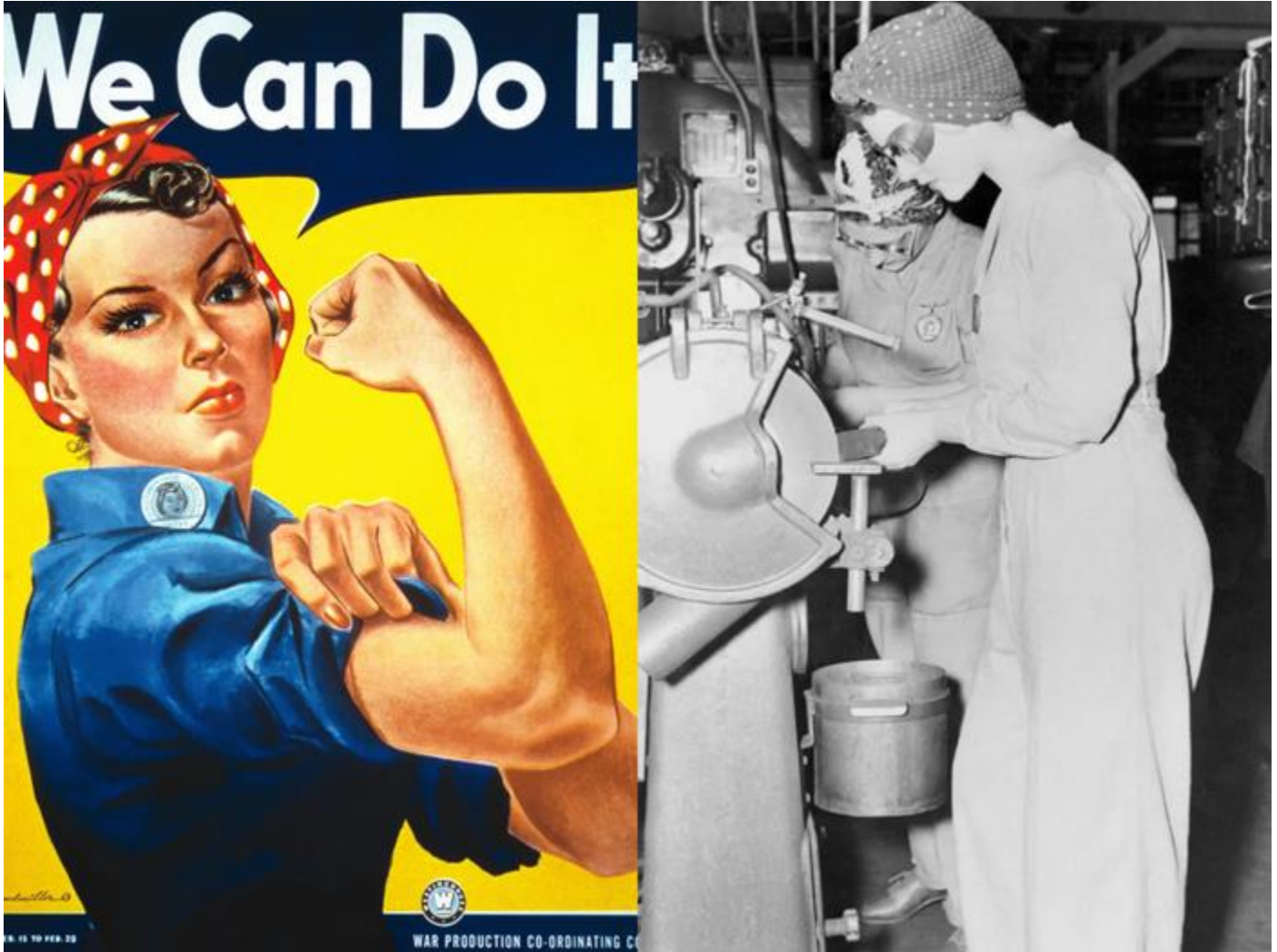


# Meet the real Rosie the Riveter, who was unknown until a years-long investigation revealed her identity.

Erin McDowell. Updated Mar 7, 2024,



Rosie the Riveter was believed to be based on one woman for 30 years until an investigation revealed Naomi Parker Fraley as the true inspiration.  
National Archives/Getty Images

Rosie the Riveter is one of the most famous symbols of the feminist movement, but who actually inspired the iconic image of a woman flexing her bicep and wearing a polka-dot bandana?

For three decades, Geraldine Hoff Doyle was widely acknowledged as the inspiration behind Rosie the Riveter.

However, an investigation conducted in the 2000s revealed that Naomi Parker Fraley, who worked at the Naval Air Station in Alameda, California, had served as the true inspiration behind the image. Here's the story of the real-life Rosie the Riveter and how her identity was eventually uncovered.

**During World War II, women assisted in manufacturing wartime products like gas masks.**



Workers assembling control units for tanks and aircraft in a US factory, circa 1943.

[FPG/Hulton Archive/Getty Images](#)

Before the war, women were in traditionally "female" fields such as nursing and teaching.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, women joined the armed forces at remarkable rates. By 1943, over 310,000 women were employed in the US aircraft industry, comprising 65% of the industry's workforce, a stark contrast to the mere 1% representation before the outbreak of war, according to [History.com](http://History.com).

[Forbes](http://Forbes) reported that between 1940 and 1945, female participation in the US workforce as a whole increased from 27% to nearly 37%. By 1945, a quarter of married women worked in jobs outside the home.

**Many women working in military factories were photographed wearing bandanas to tie back their hair.**



American female workers drive rivets into an aircraft circa 1943.

[Harold M. Lambert/Lambert/Getty Images](#)

One photo, taken in 1942 by a photographer touring the Naval Air Station to show what life was like for women working in the aircraft industry, appeared to catch the attention of a Pittsburgh artist named J. Howard Miller.

[The New York Times](#) reported that Miller created a poster for the Westinghouse Electric Corporation in 1943 that became one of the most iconic images in history.

The woman in Miller's poster soon came to be known as Rosie the riveter.



A World War II color poster depicting "Rosie the Riveter"

National Archives/Getty Images

The image featured a "Rosie," as female factory workers were known at the time, flexing her bicep, wearing a red polka-dot bandana and a riveter's uniform. Above her were the inspiring words "We Can Do It!"

The woman in Miller's poster soon came to be known as "Rosie the Riveter" after musicians Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb released a popular song with the same title in 1943.

The New York Times reported that the poster was initially only displayed in the Westinghouse Electric Corporation plant to deter women from not showing up to work and strikes among female workers.

However, once the poster was published and gained national exposure in the early 1980s, it evolved into an emblem of the feminist movement and emerged as one of the most iconic images in pop culture.

**The inspiration for the iconic Rosie the Riveter image was initially believed to be Geraldine Hoff Doyle, a Michigan factory worker.**



Naomi Parker, Ada Parker, and Frances Johnson arrive to work at the US Naval Air Station.

[Bettmann/Getty Images](#)



Geraldine Hoff Doyle, who worked in a Navy plant in Michigan, was long considered to be the inspiration behind the iconic image. The New York Times reported that Doyle came forward in the 1980s and claimed to be the woman in a photo believed to have inspired Miller's famous poster.

Doyle had seen the photo, which was published without its original caption and the correct names of the women in the photograph. She mistakenly identified herself as the woman in the photo and, since she bore a striking resemblance to the woman, she was widely accepted as the real-life Rosie the Riveter.

**The true inspiration for Rosie the Riveter was later identified as Naomi Parker Fraley, a waitress from California who worked at the Naval Air Station in Alameda.**



Naomi Parker, the inspiration behind "Rosie the Riveter," and Frances Johnson.

[Bettmann/Getty Images](#)

In 2009, during a reunion of war-era Rosies, 88-year-old Naomi Parker Fraley (pictured) attended a reunion of war-era Rosies, where she spied a photo of herself working at the Naval Air Station in Alameda, California, in a historical display — and saw another woman's name listed underneath the image as the inspiration for Miller's famous "We Can Do It!" poster.

The photo in question showed a then-20-year-old Naomi Parker Fraley wearing a red-and-white-polka-dot bandana and working on a turret lathe.

"I couldn't believe it because it was me in the photo, but there was somebody else's name in the caption: Geraldine," Parker Fraley told "People" in 2016. "I was amazed."

**After learning that she had been the inspiration for Miller's poster and that another woman had been misidentified as her for more than 30 years, Naomi Parker Fraley got to work trying to set the record straight.**



Naomi Parker, the inspiration behind "Rosie the Riveter."  
[Bettmann/Getty Images](#)

According to “People”, Parker Fraley contacted the World War II Home Front National Historical Park with her saved newspaper clipping, which included the original caption that listed her as the woman in the photo.

"I just wanted my own identity," she said. "I didn't want fame or fortune, but I did want my own identity."

However, it wouldn't be for another six years that Parker Fraley, then 95, would be able to correct the record. In 2015, she was approached by Seton Hall University professor James J. Kimble, who had been on a quest to discover the true identity of Rosie the Riveter for six years.

After Parker Fraley showed Kimble the evidence that she had been Miller's inspiration, he published an article in an academic journal, "Rosie's Secret Identity," in 2016. “People” magazine then published a feature about the discovery, and Parker Fraley was finally recognized by the media at large as the inspiration behind Rosie the Riveter.

"She had been robbed of her part of history," Kimble told People. "It's so hurtful to be misidentified like that. It's like the train has left the station and you're standing there and there's nothing you can do because you're 95 and no one listens to your story."

**Rosie the Riveter is now considered an icon of the feminist movement.**



A group of marchers with signs that say "Nevertheless. She Persisted" with Rosie the Riveter during the Women's March in New York City on January 19, 2019.

Ira L. Black/Corbis/Getty Images

Parker Fraley told People that after she was identified as the inspiration for Rosie the Riveter, she began receiving fan mail.

Miller's illustration of Rosie the Riveter has come to embody the tenacity and strength of women.

"The women of this country these days need some icons," Parker Fraley told People. "If they think I'm one, I'm happy about that."

Naomi Parker Fraley died on January 20, 2018, at the age of 96.