

**Ok, let's get started. Ralph, thanks a lot for coming in here today. Really appreciate it. We've been working together on this project. But without you, we wouldn't be here. So, I want to thank you in front of everybody.**

You're welcome. My pleasure.

**So just to make sure everybody knows, I know who you are, but what's your name?**

Ralph Bishop.

**Okay, and what class, what year did you graduate Main High School?**

Class of '45.

**Right. What was your address during the war?**

Well, I was born in the house 404 South Greenwood. I lived there from 1927 until 1950.

**Great. Tell us about your parents and any sisters and brothers in the house.**

My father, he did many, he was employed by many different companies. He worked for the post office, auto mechanic for a while. He worked for Perkins Express Moving. That was before they had the forty hour work week. They work long hour. He went to work early in the morning, come home late at night. The forty hour work week came in and gave us a little more free time. We had weekends together. After that he went, during the war he went to work at Douglas plant. He worked at Douglas plant quite for a few years. And until it closed. Then he worked for the city of Park Ridge in the water department. During the war, he had the railroad express contract, pick up the express and deliver in town.

**So, Ralph, what did he do at the Douglas plant? Do you remember? Do you know anything about it?**

He worked in the outside in the area where they had different equipment that they had loan out, like tool shot...

**Tool exchange?**

Equipment.

**Tell us a bit about what you said about postal express. Tell us what that was.**

Many, many years ago, all the deliveries came in on the railroad. The railroad had railway express. And my father had a brother out in Iowa. And he would always ship him in cases of

eggs from Iowa. And it would come in by rail to Park Ridge. They'd take it off the train, and our dad's contract was to take it from the train and deliver it to the people.

**Oh, okay.**

To the addresses. And they got paid ten percent of whatever the bills were. And the minimum bill was thirty-five cents. They only got 3.5 cents for delivery.

**How about your mother? Did....**

She never worked. She was a stay-at-home mom. She baked a lot of bread, a lot of pies. Did a lot of baking. Did a lot of cleaning. For the four of us.

**Sure, and anybody else living with you?**

No, that was it.

**Tell us about when you were growing. Tell us about the neighborhood.**

The neighborhood on the south side of Park Ridge there, good neighborhood. There's only four of us left from the old neighborhood. All the rest of them are gone. We had Bob Peacock is still alive, lives on the south side of Park Ridge. I live on North Lincoln Avenue in Park Ridge. Don Johnson lives down in Florida. And Babe Miller, or Donald Miller, lives out in Schaumburg.

**So what was as far as it as, what kind of things, not what kind of things did kids do growing up? You know, when you were little? What kinds of things for fun? What was it like?**

Well, we played outdoors most of the time because there was no television. There was nothing to do other than what we could do ourselves. We played a lot of baseball. We had two ball diamonds. One was for the big kids, like my brother and his group. And the other one was for the younger ones like myself. We played a lot of kick the can, draw around circle, baby in a hole. Those were some of the games we played. And had a good time.

**Sounds like it. So, then as you know you got a little older, tell us about what you were like as a kid, as a teenager. I happen to know personally a few stories. But [LAUGHS], what were you like as a teenager?**

Well, we did date, I never dated anybody from Park Ridge. Don't know why, but I didn't. Course I had to, I was forced when my brother went into service, I had use of his car. It was a problem because it would never keep a rod in it. One or two rods would go out in it at various times, so I think I replaced three rods in two years. My dad showed me how to do it. I could do it myself.

**So you were pretty mechanical?**

Yeah, so we kept busy. Some of the things we did for entertainment- we went to Riverview. That was a big park down Western Ave in Belmont.

**How did you get down there?**

We took the, we walked to Edison Park. Took the bus in Edison Park, Ozark. It took us down the Northwest Highway to Milwaukee Avenue. We got off and got on a streetcar, and took the streetcar down to Belmont. And then we took a streetcar down to Western Ave.

**Any idea how much that cost back then?**

Oh, it was only pennies. One of the time, most of the time we went down to Riverview was Two Cent Days, where all the rides were two cents. Otherwise it was too expensive; we didn't have the money. And we went to Riverview quite often because quite a few of us worked for Downtown Shopping News. And Downtown Shopping News would have Downtown Shopping News Days at Riverview and you went down and had the rides free.

**Now, how old were you when you were working for Downtown Shopping News? And what was, tell us what was Downtown Shopping News?**

Well, you couldn't go to work until you had a work permit, and you had to be fourteen years old to get a work permit. So you were fourteen years old. Downtown Shopping News was a newspaper that came out twice a week. Come out on Wednesday and Saturday. And you got ninety cents a delivery, if you delivered it yourself. If you had a helper, you had to pay the helper forty-five cents, or half the wages. I never had a helper. You had to walk. You weren't supposed to cut across a lawn. You had to hang, when we first started, you had to hang, fold the Shopping News up and put a rubber band on it and hang it on the door. Well, during the war, rubber was rationed and couldn't get rubber bands, so they did away with the rubber bands. But we're still supposed to put them on the door, and you tried to balance them on the door. And each route contained about 180 papers.

**Wow, so you were about fourteen, fifteen at that time.**

Fourteen, that's right.

**So that might of been just around when the war started. Tell us what do you remember, how did you hear about the beginning of the war?**

It was on the radio Sunday morning. And we just couldn't believe it. Course we had no television then, that's before television. The only news you really news, or pictures you got, you had to go

to the theater and see the weekly newsreel. And they would, you'd see all the war pictures and war stuff at the theater or in the newspaper.

**What was your, I mean, do you remember, what were people saying when we heard, when the attack on Pearl Harbor happened? What was the talk about, you know, your family and friends? What were people saying back then?**

Well, the biggest thing was rationing came in and the young folks had sign up for the draft. And like my brother was drafted in '42, shortly after the war. He served over in New Guinea. I think he got five battle stars over there. He was lucky; he come back, he wasn't wounded.

**Did you hear from him during the war?**

Oh, yeah. Yeah, he wrote quite often, as often as he could. Some, he never said much about what was going on over there, although he did say that when they got some gasoline, 55 gallon drums, they would put them on the ground, and they'd sink in the ground. They'd put another one and they'd sink. Put another one..... He said he didn't know how many were down underground.

**Mhmm.**

And he made some rings, two rings. I got at home. I got one for myself, and he made one for himself. And they were made out of Japanese airplane aluminum propeller with a stone in it that he made over there. He made several things over there. He made a, took a base of a artillery shell and he put 50 caliber I think it was. And then he made a P-38 out of bullet casings. And it's a beautiful piece of workmanship. Then he had foreign coins around them, sauntered on around the base. I got it at home; it's a beautiful piece.

**Wow, that's great. So when the war started, how did your family, like what kinds of things impacted your family right away? Did your dad... What things do you remember, as a kid, changing in your family?**

Well, the first things was my dad had an old 1928 LaSalle. And it had side mounts, right behind the front wheel. One on each side. So it had six tires. And the government come along and said you can only have five tires. And you had to turn the sixth one in, or if you had more, you had to turn them in, for rubber drive. Well, he had quite a few old tires, because what he had on it was old truck tires from Perkins Express that were bald. And in those days it was a casing and an inner tube, and if you nail in it, you had to take the tire apart, patch the inner tube, and put it back together again. Well these tires had holes in them, we had boots in them at that time. We didn't have money to buy new tires. We had big boots, a thing that's maybe out of like a tire casing and it's glued inside so the inner tube wouldn't go out and get pinched. Well, my dad had to get rid of all the tires, other than those five. And they were truck tires, they were 8 ply. They didn't have any tread on them, but they were 8 ply. And we had a lot of flat tires.

**I bet, I bet. So about your family in terms of food or gasoline rationing? How was....**

Well, gasoline rationing, my dad had an "A" card, which was very limited gasoline.

**Tell everybody about what were the different cards and what they could mean.**

They had an "A" card, which anybody with an automobile got. A "B" was if you worked on a defense plant or something of emergency nature. And "C" was a commercial. Now, my dad had an "A". I eventually got a "B" because I worked in a defense plant. And the fire department was volunteer at that time, and the fire department got extra gasoline to give to the volunteer fireman so they could go to the fire.

**So tell us, since you mentioned you worked at a defense plant, what was the defense plant? Where was it?**

The defense plant was in Park Ridge on Beechum Avenue, the old Busse Buick Garage. Originally it was Busse Buick Garage, it was a big garage. And during the war they divided it in half, and one half was a defense plant. The other half was auto repair. You gotta realize, there were no new automobiles built for civilian use after 1941, after the war. So the dealerships only had repair work. They had no new cars. They could sell used cars if somebody traded one in. The other side was the defense plant. They packed tools for the Signal Corps and the Navy. They had three or four different types of toolkits that they made. One was a canvas bag, with a lot of tools in it. Another one was like a footlocker, with about eighteen inches deep. No, it was a foot deep, eighteen inches wide, and about two foot long. And there were all kinds of tools in there for the Signal Core- screwdrivers, pliers, wire cutters, soldering irons, you name it, and different sizes. These toolboxes would come in, crated. We'd uncrate them.

**Where would they come in from? How did they ship them?**

They shipped them, those came in by truck.

**Okay.**

And we unloaded them. We uncrated them. We packed them with tools. And then we crated them, labeled to where they were going, sent them back out. The big ones stood about three foot high, about two foot wide, and about fourteen inches deep. And it was in two sections. The bottom section was the drawers and like a little workbench. There was a vice on it, and there was different things for working on wires. The top part would come off, turn it over, and the bottom part would sit on the top part so you would had like a bench. **Now weighed 320 pounds when they were loaded.** Well, the high school kids, they came in emptied. We uncrated them, packed them, re crated them. **And then we had the job of loading them. Now this was a job because we loaded them into railroad freight cars on the siding by the Heines Lumber company.**

Mr. Bredemann, Sr., up at Bredemann's Chevrolet, I met him there. That was Mr. Bredemann's oldest son, he was called Junior, but now he doesn't want to be called Junior, he wants to be called Senior. So I knew him real well. But he had health problems, and he couldn't load the stuff on it. We out came running out of the building, down across the ramp, and up the ramp. And you sure didn't want to miss the ramp, which we did often. We got them jammed between the ramp and the building, or the ramp and the railroad car. Well, then two or three guys had to go out there and help get it back up and get it in. The other problem, we got 'em up there. You always wanted to be the first one in there, so you put it on the first level. They went three high. Many times you come in there, and you had to take them up to the second one, up to the third one. These were all high school kids loading all these.

**Wow. So tell us about, in addition to gasoline being rationed and you got a "B" card, how about food?**

Food was rationed. There was meat rationing, there was grease rationing. You got rationed stamps for meat. You got rationed stamps for gasoline. You had rationed stamps for shoes.

**How many pairs? I mean, shoes, how often?**

Well, they were pretty rare. They really had to be worn out to get a new pair of shoes. You didn't just go get a new pair of shoes.

**So how did your mom cope with the food rationing? What kind of things did your family do to deal with that?**

Well, our dad had two garden. He had a garden on our property on Greenwood. And then across the street there were two vacant lots. The two lots north of Stewart on the east side of the street, the first two lots. 50 foot lot. That was our ballfield. Then when the war came along, my dad decided he was gonna have a Victory Garden over there. So the Victory Garden was about a hundred feet this way and about a hundred feet that way. And he got a rototiller, I think it was from the park district, to rototill it. And we raised beets, carrots, parsley, lettuce, onions, some corn, and I think that was about it. And of course all these were good for vegetable soup. So my mother would get meat ration, and she could get the small roast. Put it in there and make a stew or make a pot roast. So, a lot of Victory Garden all around.

**So there was a lot of Victory Gardens in Park Ridge?**

Oh yeah, oh yeah.

**In other public spaces and things like that?**

Yeah. Most vacant property was turned into a Victory Garden by somebody.

**Oh, okay. Now how about you personally, did you go ahead help... I understand that you did some little hunting.**

Well, the other thing was for meat, we used to do a lot of hunting. West of Western Avenue was outside the city limits. I don't know whether you know about the Washington School. Do you know where the Washington School is? I got my first pheasant right about where the principal's office is at Washington School. And pheasant was a luxury. It was meat during the war. And I got a rabbit out there, just west of Western Avenue. My mother cooked it but she didn't know how to cook rabbit; it wasn't very good. I never shot rabbit unless somebody wanted a rabbit. They were a lot of them. There were mothers who knew how to fix house and fet [00:20:14] for her, and that I understand was delicious. But you can't fry a rabbit like you can squirrel, or anything else.

**Did you get squirrels too?**

Oh, yeah. We got squirrels. There were about five- Dave Group, Don Johnson, Ernie Rizler, myself, Jimmy Trecker. We were hunting all the area west of Western Avenue up to D Road, up to the cemetery. And then from Touhy Avenue to Talcott, in there. And we were hunting squirrels.

**Was that just all woods, or what was that?**

That was wood. Everything from Western Avenue to about Home Avenue was a prairie. They started the subdivision, and the sidewalks were in out there but there was no streets. And the Depression came and it stood that way until after the war.

**Sorry to get back a little earlier. How was your family? The war started just at the end of Depression. What was life like? Was your family affected by the Depression?**

Oh, yes. The only reason my folks, my dad saved the house was because Mr. Rohloff, local hardware man, had the mortgage. And Mr. Rohloff said he didn't want the house, just pay the interest. If all he could do was pay the interest, pay the interest. Well, talking to Jimmy Trecker, his father was the same way. The only way they saved the old homestead was they paid the interest. And the houses didn't get paid off 'till after the war started. Because when the war came, you made money and there was no way to spend it. You couldn't buy cars, couldn't buy refrigerators, you couldn't go on vacations. Everything was so limited on your buying power. You couldn't buy a lot of food you liked. You couldn't buy expensive food because you couldn't buy it, they didn't have it. And so they really made quite a bit of money and they were able to pay off their mortgages. And it wasn't until after the war started these houses got paid off.

**So getting back to high school when the war started. So going to school, how old were you in '41? So you were about 14?**

14.

**How did that change high school? What things were different in high school?**

Well, of course I started high school in '41. I graduated from Lincoln School in '41, and then I went into high school the fall of '41. And how did it affect us? It affect us because you were limited on your transportation to school. A lot of kids couldn't drive their cars. They didn't have enough gas to drive their cars, so you had to take the busses. That was the main way to get to school.

**Right. And I understand they had civil defense programs or things like that in school and they had different training. Do you remember any of that or hear about any of that?**

Oh yeah, there was all kinds of civil defense. There was volunteer firemen. There were volunteer policemen. There was airway wardens. There was airplane observers, and they learned the different images of airplane. There was all different branches of the fire department. There was the rescue units, civil defense rescue units, civil defense fire units, civil defense first aid units.

**Now could you do any of that as a teenager?**

Oh yeah, some of them did that as a teenager.

**Sure, did you have, I don't know, was there any blackouts?**

They had blackouts here. They had one or two actual practice bombings. They made paper bombs and dropped paper bombs. And then they wanted people to find them and turn them in. And they had them in different colors for like incendiary bombs or different type bombs.

**Did you find any or know anybody?**

I never found any, but I know people who found them.

**Now tell us about the blackout. What did you guys have to do for that?**

Well, you had dark shades, and you had to pull the shades down. They didn't want any light so if an aircraft came over, they didn't know where anything was. And of course, one of the things was, early aviation, they didn't have a lot of the equipment they have today. So it was all visual. They went by a water tower, or they went by the river. Certain landmarks was how they determined where what was what.

**Now tell us about what kinds of things were you and your friends, how did the war affect that, as far as did any of them get as far as jobs or anything they did differently.**

Oh, yeah, almost all of the people eventually got into a defense plant of some sort. We had two defense plants in Park Ridge, Busse Buick and American Tolizer.

**What was the American Totalizer?**

They were over at Touhey Avenue on Main Street. I don't know exactly what they made, some sort of electronical stuff there. But they had quite a crew over there. And then of course there were, Des Plaines had quite a few defense plants. I worked at one over there, which was Do-all Company. I worked there for during the war also. And one of the things was, when you worked at a lot of those defense plants, you had a hard time getting off.

**Really, so it affected school then?**

Well, it affected a lot of the things you would do. I didn't participate in any sports. I got into the defense plant at Bredemann's. I was scheduled to, I did play a little softball. I was on the team I should say. I think I only played one game. I was supposed to play one game one night, and Mr. Bredemann said, "We can't do it, we gotta have this boxcar loaded by tomorrow morning. It's gotta go out of here." So it was a hot summer day. The sun had beat on that boxcar on all day long. It must have been a hundred and fifty in that boxcar, and we were loading that boxcar. And it got loaded and shipped out the next day.

**Do you want a water break there, Ralph?**

Please.

**You what, Ralph?**

We had the big bands. We had good music. We had the good songs. We only two goofy songs.

**What were those?**

"Mares Eat Oats" and "Three Little Fishies."

**How do those go? Do you remember them?**

Oh I remember part of them. "[SINGING] Mares eat oats, does eat oats, little lambs eat ivy. Tiddle-ley divey do, to you." That's what I remember of that one. "[SINGING] Three little fishies, mamma fishy too, three little fishies and mamma fishy too. Swim, fishie, swim..." something. Something that way.

**Did you guys go to, did you guys have a lot of dances you went to?**

My mother never allowed us to dance. She belonged to St. Andrew's Church, and they didn't believe in dancing so we didn't dance.

**So that leads me into, were you able to date at all?**

Oh, yeah, I dated. Like I said I didn't date anybody from high school. Edison Park had a lot of girls, a lot of girls from Edison Park.

**Where did you meet the girls and what did you guys do for dates?**

Well, mostly it was the movies there. Then, of course, when I had the car we go up to Bang's Lake, up to the beaches. That was a big thing. We went up there a lot of weekends. And Riverview. And just hang out, the movies...

**Did a lot of your friends date, too?**

I dated a lot. We double-dated a lot times. [LAUGHS] I probably shouldn't tell this..

**No, absolutely you should tell us. Go ahead.**

Well, I told you about the model T spark coil.

**Now tell me how did that work? What kind of car were you driving?**

'33 Gram.

**Now what was the spark coil?**

It was a model T spark coil. It was mounted underneath the front seat. And one wire went into the coil. One wire went from the coil to the car frame. And the other one went from the coil to a wire and a brass, piece of metal that drug on the ground.

**Oh, okay.**

Well, I knew this was supposed to work. When I was making it, it was wet. I would go into the basement and solder, and I would come back and put it in. Well, luckily I opened the box side, the driver's side. The switch was on the driver's side. And it was a knife switch, one that you come down it's on. So I turned it on with a stick. No, I sat in the car and I turned it on, and I was afraid I would get jolted. I made sure I didn't touch the gear shift or anything, and I turned it on and I didn't get a jolt. I felt oh boy, this is good. So then I decided I have to see if this works. So I reached in and turned it on with a stick, and I touched the car's chrome bumper. It knocked me across the garage. My feet were wet.

**So then did you test it out on anybody, Ralph when you were driving around?**

Oh, yeah.

**What was that one time you were telling me about?**

Well, the first time was I went down to see Fred Halbrough. Fred lived down on Prairie Avenue and Touhey. It was a nice summer evening. The grass was nice and damp. And Fred come running out and grabbed on that chrome door handle, and I hear him "YeeeOWW". [LAUGHS]

**Now I happen to know that you had another very cool thing that you had in case you wanted to make a getaway. What else did you do on that?**

I had a smoke screen on the car.

**Now how did that work?**

There was a kerosene tank, square tank about that long, about that wide, and about that deep. And it just fit under the seat. It could be pulled out and filled. Then there was a pipe and hose leading to the intake manifold on the car. There's a valve there. And when you turn the valve on, it would suck the kerosene in and it would just make a big cloud of smoke. I mean, a big cloud of smoke. Well, I had more fun with that than you could shake a stick at numerous times. But the one I told...

**What was that one on Dempster Street that happened?**

Yeah, I'm at the high school one day. And I told Hank Liberhouse, I explained, "I put something on my car." He said, "What's that?". I said, "I put a smoke screen on." He said, "How's that work?". I said, "I'll show you." So I reached down and turned it on. Boy, the parking lot at the high school is getting all smoked up. And I had Bob Peacock and Don Johnson rode with me to school. I said, "Turn it off." Well, it was on there. One of them swings it over to here. He's says, "It's off." And I'm driving out the parking driveway out on the south side of the school, and I'm looking out the mirror. "Oh my God, you shut it off?". He said, "Yeah." And I said, "It can't be shut off." So the other fellow, he reached down, he did the same thing. Turned it over the other way. He didn't turn it to the off position. I get out on Dempster Street, I go north on Dempster Street. I stop, I finally said, "I gotta disconnect this thing. I don't know what happened to it." So I got out of the car. I couldn't see the car! And then it dawned on me, that thing must not have shut it off. So I reached in, I could see in there, so I reached in and I shut it off. Got back in the car, closed in the car door. I could see on this side. But that side, I couldn't see. The smoke was going around. Well, I could make a right turn because I could see that. School bus was going left on Dempster Street. He had to stop to wait for this cloud of smoke to disappear. Come back to school. Couple of kids said, "What happened to your car?" I said, "It burned up." He said, "Yeah, lying son of a gun." [LAUGHS] And they saw the car out in the parking lot.

**Yeah, sure. So you learned more than arithmetic in school then.**

Oh, yeah. We had fun. You can't fun today. We lived in the best school. 'Cause what we did, you can't do today.

**No, no. Any other off the record kind of things that you guys had fun with?**

Well, one of the worst stories about this coil was Fred Halbrough, I told you he was the first guy that I got with this. Well, we double dated in his coupe. And we took the gal he was with home. He was driving, he took the gal I was going with home. He went to get me. He went to turn onto model T spark coil. Doris was one foot on a running board, one foot on a puddle of water. Did she go down! [LAUGHS]

**Oh, that's not good for dating.**

That coil, he tried to get me numerous times when he was driving. I let him drive it. He did get me once. He got me once good.

**So getting back to working, so you had plenty of money when you were dating back then?**

Well, not plenty of money. But we got ninety cents a delivery when we were working for the Shopping News. And I paid my bus fare, and my car expenses. I paid all my books and I paid a lot of my clothing.

**And how much were you paid when you were at the defense plant? Do you remember how much they paid?**

I think it was thirty-five, forty cents an hour. It wasn't much.

**Right. When the war came on, and your brother was serving in the war, what was your feelings about the war at the time?**

Well, you had mixed feelings. Of course you hated the Japs and hated the Germans for the uprising in the country. Now we did have a German prisoner of war camp up in Des Plaines. There was an old CCC camp along the river. It was a CCC camp, and then I think it was a Boy Scout camp. And then during the war, I think it, I know it was a PW, prisoner of war camp. And then I talked to a person recently in the Des Plaines Historical Society when I was up there, and she said she went there as a Girl Scout; it was a Girl Scout camp. And I think it must have been, from what I determined, the Girl Scout camp was the last one. And there are still remains of the foundations up there, I understand. I haven't been back in there. But I understand...

**Did you have any run-ins or know of? Did you the place during the war or see any of the prisoners at all?**

No, again, it was pretty quiet that there was a prisoners of war camp up there. But the prisoners worked for Pesche Flowers. Not too long ago, one of the German prisoner of war and his family came back here to visit Frank Pesche. Frank Pesche was in my class, for the fiftieth anniversary. And he came back to visit and stayed with Frank. Now, I don't know, Frank is no longer working at the Pesche store, and I haven't been able to contact him. I don't know how up he is. He knew all the... His dad was German, and the prisoners of war loved working for him because they'd invite them to eat with them and stuff like that.

**Great. So during school, I understand they had assemblies whenever there was a causality, when somebody who was a student died. Do you remember those?**

I remember one of them especially. It was Paul Fleischner. His sister went to grammar school, I think first grade all the way through high school with me. And Paul was one or two years ahead of us. And he was killed in the war.

**What do you remember about that? How did you feel about that?**

Well, of course I had played some ball. I wasn't too much in playing ball with Paul because they lived north of Touhey Avenue, and for quite a few of years we were never allowed to go across Touhey Avenue. Touhey Avenue was too dangerous to cross. So I did play with Paul. And it was hard to take that someone you knew passed away or was killed that early.

**Yeah. Did you have any other friends or that was close to you that died in the war?**

No, I can't say other than Paul that I really knew.

**How about other families? Did you have any friends who had families who had lost folks in the war? Any friends or anything like that?**

Well, there were several people in town. I didn't know them or their sons that were killed. They were older than us. Like my brother's age or older. But I didn't know them.

**So later on in the war when they had the Douglas plant, which you said your dad worked at, they did have the war bond drive.**

Well, war bonds were a big thing. Then of course the principal at Main East, Main, the only Main [LAUGHS], he challenged the class of '45 to raise \$300,000 to buy a Douglas C-54 that was built out at O'Hare Field, which is now O'Hare Field. So the four classes, the class of '45, '46, '47, and '48, set out to accomplish this. We accomplished it in what I think was two or three or four weeks, very short period of time. We raised over \$550,000, and they bought this C-54,

Douglas C-54. If you raised over \$400,000, you could have the plane named after you. Well, we had raised over \$400,000, so they named the plane. It was *Main Flyer Flies Higher*. And we had many, the class of '45 had quite a few class reunions. We didn't any reunions until our 20th, that was our first one. After that, we one every five years. One fellow in the class, he said he flew on the plane at one time. The plane was a hospital plane during the Korean War. The plane eventually got bought up by a private party, and I understand it was used as a plane for forest fire fighting. And the historical society has found the plane out in Arizona at an abandoned airfield on an Indian reservation. It's in pieces. There's no tail section from what I understand. I understand they got some parts off of it to put in a museum. And it was quite a feat to find this. And then class of '45 is happy they found it.

**Yeah, that's exactly correct. So on the bonds, do you sell stamps and bonds? Do you remember selling them?**

They sold both stamps and bonds. Now I didn't personally sell any bonds, because I was working in a defense plant. And these defense plants wouldn't let you off for a lot of this stuff.

**What was your schedule during the day? So like when did you go to school and when did you go to work?**

Well, we went to school at eight o'clock in the morning. And I think I had to punch in, when I worked in... I got home, changed clothes, and went to work for Bredemann, Busse Bredemann when I was working at that defense plant. When I worked, after I got of there, I went to work for Converse Saw, and I went right from school to work. And then I worked until about seven o'clock at night.

**Do you remember, did you get out earlier? What time did you get out of school then?**

I got out a little earlier because of my classes. I had one less class. I wasn't a good student.

**[LAUGHS] Well, you graduated, so, right? And that's all we need to know.**

Well, I planned my senior year ahead- Gym, Woodshop II, Metal Shop III, and Mechanical Drawing I, and that was it.

**I can see then, it makes sense with your jobs you were doing at the second place you were working at in Des Plaines.**

Yeah, Condour Saw.

**At what were you doing there?**

Well, we were worked on rewind and recoil. We made these saws, band saws, and they were long strip of steel with teeth on it. And they come out in long coils with two, three hundred, five hundred feet of metal with teeth on them. And when they come off the first project where the band went through and they cut all the teeth on it. Then they went out and they turned around and they send them through a heat treat to heat treat the steel and temper the blades, the tips, the teeth. And we had a return to put them into the boxes to send them out. They had to be recoiled to reverse them and they put them in boxes. So I worked on the recoiling.

**Right.**

And the interesting thing is, Condour Saw during the war, they stopped production at times. They had a person came through and you had to take vitamins. They had vitamins and they gave you vitamins and you had to. They stopped there, they gave you a vitamin and they watched that you ate them.

**Really? What was the point? Did they say why you needed to take these vitamins?**

I guess it was just to keep the stamina up for the constant workload.

**Wow, I think that's a little different than today.**

Oh, yeah!

**So now that was near the end of the war. What was your thoughts in like 1945, when did you hear about, what was the end the war in Europe?**

Well, the end of the war. I had just talked to Don Johnson down in Florida a couple of weeks ago. When was it June the 6th when it ended? June the 7th? Whatever it was. And I called him, and I said, "Do you remember where we were sixty some years ago?" "No, where?" I says, "We got out of school. The war was over." I says, "We got in my Gram. We had your dad's gas upward motor." I said, "We went up to Lake Wakanda to go finishing." I said, "We got up to Lake Wakanda and we couldn't rent a boat. They stopped renting boats. Taverns closed. That was tavern was closed. They stopped renting us boats. But the guy in the tavern, well, he said, 'I won't rent you a boat, but you take the boat and you go out and go fishing.'" So we ride out. Oh, it was a cold day. We got out there and no fish were biting. And all of the sudden somebody from somewhere let, released one of these guys boats. It was floating across the lake. Well, we went out and we got the boat, and we were going to haul it back there to shore. We ran out of gasoline probably two hundred feet from shore. And I said, "Well, I row us in." I started rowing, and I row, and I'm rowing. And we're losing ground. So Don got on one oar and I'm on the other, and we pulled like the devil. We finally got into shore with both boats. Can never forget that day.

**I bet. And how did you hear about it? Was it on the radio? How did the word come down? Was it in the newspaper?**

Mostly radio. That's the only way. Radio or word of mouth. Because no television. Like newspapers then, news didn't come across the Atlantic to the news offices for sometimes hours or days. So when you got some news, it might be four or five days old. It wasn't like it is today. Television, they show you the picture of what's going on.

**Right, right. So during that summer, then did you expect the war to go on longer than it did?**

No, not really. No.

**Do you remember when V-J Day happened?**

Oh, yeah.

**What was going on then?**

Well, of course, that was quite a celebration. That was quite a celebration because the war was over. People didn't think they'd get drafted yet or wouldn't get drafted, but they still got drafted and they went into service for a while as replacements for the ones coming home.

**Do you remember where you were or anything about V-J Day itself?**

Not really, not really.

**What was the atmosphere like after the war was over? Did rationing...**

Well, of course you got to realized, after the war is over, you don't automatically convert everything right now to making refrigerators or stoves or cars or anything. It was quite a while before the cars. When I came out of service, I bought a 1939 Chevy. It was a fairly new car, when you figure in car years, because there wasn't anything made for public use since 1941. And it over 70,000 miles on it when I bought it.

**What year did you go in the service?**

1945.

**Like when in '45?**

I went in after. I went in to enlist. My brother wrote me from New Guinea and told me, he says, "Go enlist in the Navy." He says, "Don't wait to go in the Army and get in a mud hole like this." So I went in May of '45 to enlist in the Navy. And went down to Plymouth Court and took the

physical. And I didn't pass for some reason. I don't know what the reason was. But I didn't make it. And then I come home and I waited for the draft. And the draft called me in October of '45.

**Okay, alright. And then so you went in late '45. Looking back during your teenage years during the war, what would you want to make sure kids today know about?**

Well, what the problems were during the war, the hardships, broken families. A lot of my friends, my cousin, Don Miller, and a good friend of mine, Bill Arnsfelt, they enlisted in the Merchant Marine. My folks didn't want me to enlist; they wanted me to finish school. So I didn't get to enlist. But there were a lot of my class enlisted before they graduated.

**Did they?**

Several of them. Johnny Nicholas, he was a captain in the Navy and he flew off aircraft carriers. There was a lot of them.

**What age were people a lot that people were joining up in? Seventeen?**

Well, most of them, the ones that I knew, was just before they were graduating, the early part of '45.

**I see.**

January, February of '45.

**Is there anything else that you think we should know? Or that people don't appreciate?**

The training and stuff, and the volunteer time of all people during the war doing the various chores, training as civil defense personnel, volunteer fire and policemen, air raid wardens, airplane watchers. It was all time consuming, and it was all volunteer time. And they were doing that while they were trying to do everything for the war efforts. One of the reasons that somebody couldn't believe that the class of '45 raised that \$550,000 in that short period of time, they couldn't believe how they could raised it. I told them, I said, "Well, there is only one reason they raised it that way." They said, "How's that?". I said, "That's because you couldn't buy a car. You couldn't buy a refrigerator. You couldn't buy anything. You couldn't buy guns. You couldn't buy ammunition. So the people had money and they bought the war bonds." And then people were working overtime. There was a lot of overtime during the war.

**Mhmm.**

That I contribute to being able to raise that kind of money in that short a period of time. The people just couldn't spend any of it.

**They were able to buy war bonds.**

Now, when you bought war bonds, you were able to buy a \$18.75, I think it was, war bond and it would pay you \$25 after ten years. Or you could buy a \$50 war bond for \$37.50 I think it was. And children in school, they would buy saving stamps, 25¢ saving stamps, and put them in a book. When you got \$18.75 or \$37.50, turn them in for a war bond. I have, some place I must have it, because I can remember when I delivered with my dad on railway express, I had a cap like a truck driver. And I had a little rosette that was made out of war bonds savings stamps, and I had that on the front of my cap. It's got to be there some place, but I don't know where.

**Well, if you do find it, we would certainly appreciate taking a look at it. Ralph, I just want to thank you very much for coming in and talking to us. I think it's going to make a big difference. Your memories are going to be preserved forever now so that other generations can appreciate what you experienced and went through.**

Well thank you and welcome.

**You're welcome. Thanks a lot.**

But one of the gals in the class of '45 at almost all of our reunions, Glare Honey. She's passed on. But she always talked about her experiences selling war bonds. She says, "It was a cold night." She says, "We had skirts on and we had our saddle shoes on. And the snow was about knee deep." And she says, "It was cold out there." And they were knocking on doors.

**I guess they got it done. Great. Alright. Anything else?**

*[MALE VOICE] Just a technical question, I was curious about that instance about repairing your dad's car. The rods that you replaced, I'm assuming you're talking about piston rods.*

Right.

*[MALE VOICE] Okay, thank you.*

I repaired. You always hoped it was number one and number six cylinder. Those were the rods that went. Because those rods, you didn't have to pull the head off. You could pull a piston out from the bottom. Set it out and have the rod rebabe [00:56:25] and put them in.

**Hold on, let's go ahead. Go ahead.**

*[FEMALE VOICE] I have a question about the classes. You mentioned that you had four classes in your senior year. Was there like a class requirement?*

There was a class requirement. I had my three years of English. I had my year of history. I had a year of general science. I had a year of biology. Like I say, three years of English. And I had my requirements.

***[FEMALE VOICE] So with the people who left, or went to volunteer, did they have their requirements, or did some of them just decide to leave high school?***

A lot of them left the high school to enlist in the Air Force or the Navy. A lot of them. And then they went back and they finished up or they took their high school equivalency test and got their diploma that way.

***[FEMALE VOICE] Okay.***

Good question. 'Cause there was a lot of them that left high school to go into the service.

***[FEMALE VOICE] I'm just surprised with the one year of history because now we have to take four.***

[LAUGHS] What happened in the machine shop. We were fortunate we got some brand new metal lathes in the machine shop. And they got a brand new milling machine in the machine shop. But we never got to run the milling machine. We never got any mill cutters. So the milling machine sat there for four years and we never used it. And other thing was, in wood shop we couldn't get good one. My buddy in Des Plaines, he must had a been a pet of the wood shop teacher, Mr. Roberts. 'Cause he got cherry wood and he made a beautiful desk and a beautiful bench. And he's still got it today. And he's never reglued it. I made a bed, a chest of drawers, a gun rack, and they were all made out of pine. Pine wasn't an expensive wood, and it wasn't hard to find. Almost all of the projects were made out of pine. Some fellas, they were pets of Mr. Roberts, and they got some walnut and they got some oak. I wasn't a pet. I got pine. [LAUGHS]

**Alright, great. Okay, I think we are right at the end.**