

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1047

ROBERT COOK

Interviewed

by

David Powell

on

December 9, 1986

I have known Bob Cook for about forty years and I did not intend to ask him to be interviewed. As we were talking one day he told me that he had to change his job during World War II. He had not passed his physical for the Army as he was recovering from TB. The treatment for TB in the 1940's was plenty of rest and good food. For this reason he appeared very healthy. As he was a meter reader for the East Ohio Gas Company, he met many people each day. The many negative comments by people made him look for another job where he would not meet so many people. With that opening, I asked him if he would like to be interviewed as part of my Oral History Project.

Bob is 72 years old and still active. He has had some health problems, but walks when he can to stay active. He would still like to be working at Packard, but he has been retired for six years.

Bob worked for Packard Electric during most of the war. He knew a lot about their war effort to make wiring harnesses for Army tanks. A wiring harness is a wrapped group of wires that carries the electricity to the right place in a vehicle; cars, trucks, boats, etc. I felt his interview was very informative because he had a good memory and had a lot to tell about on the home front during the Second World War.

David Powell

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INTERVIEWEE:       ROBERT COOK

INTERVIEWER:       David Powell

SUBJECT:            Army drafting, TB, General Motors,  
                     Packard Electric, Air Raid drills,  
                     rationing, war bonds

DATE:               December 9, 1986

P:    This is an interview with Robert S. Cook for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on World War II at the home front, by David Powell, at 577 Belvedere NE, on December 9, 1986, at 7:10.

Can you remember what was happening when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

C:    Gladys and I were down at her mother's in Girard. For some reason I had to come up to visit my brother-in-law for something and on the way up, on the car radio, I heard the news. That was the first I heard of the bombing of Pearl Harbor and it sure shook the devil out of me.

P:    About how old were you when you heard the news?

C:    That was 1941, this is 1986, I'm seventy-two years old now. I was about . . . Now I can't even remember. Twenty-six years old, married, no kids, and that was the first I heard of Pearl Harbor. It sure shook the devil out of myself, all the family. I don't remember what we were going to do that day but I know we didn't do it because I went back to Girard. I was just shook up, I can't tell you what I was going to do.

At the time I was working for the East Ohio Gas Company, meter reader and everything. I worked there until . . . I worked there about seven years I imagine.

During that time I was subject to colds. I always have been subject to colds and outside weather if it is damp or anything. I came down with an attack that I had to go to TB (tuberculosis) sanitarium. I spent four months there. Now, this is the second time I had been in there. I had been there ten years previous to that when I was in high school. I was in there and they fattened me up and I went back to my old job at the gas company. It got to be rather embarrassing; people asked me, "What is a big, strong looking fellow like you? What is he doing out here reading gas meters when my son, my daughter's nephew, etc. having called to service?" Well, little did they know but I had been called to service too and been turned down.

The day of the service, I do remember that very good. The night before, my daddy-in-law had an appointment with a heart doctor. I took him over there to the heart doctor and I was sitting there reading a magazine when the doctor came out. He said, "What is a matter with you?" "I don't know, I'm fine." He said, "Well, come on in. I want to examine you." So, he took me in and he examined me. He said, "You have got the German measles." I said, "I have got the what?" He said, "German measles." I said, "Can you fix them up?" He said, "Well, sometimes they go in twenty-four hours, sometimes it takes two, three day." I said, "I have to have them fixed up tomorrow. I have to go up and get examined for the army, the draft board." "Gee sonny, I can't fix you up the fast," he said. "They may go away themselves. The best I can tell you just forget them." Okay, so I went home that night and told my wife and everybody. They tried to talk me out of it, to call the draft board and say I couldn't go. No, I would go. Next morning they had cleared up and I went up with the rest of the boys.

Talking about the draft board, our draft board was down at the Armory, the one that I was subject to call. I was in the sanitarium and I got a letter to report for examination. Dr. Adams was supervisor of the hospital. He called them up and he also sent them a letter that I was in the TB sanitarium and they didn't want me. So, they let it go while I was in the hospital. I finally had to go down and talk to them. Then, I would say, about six or seven months later is when I finally got to call the exam to go to Ravenna. At the time of the examination I was told to report down to . . . We had a hospital down on Main Street, down there, for contagious people. I don't mean it the way it sounds but that is where you got examined, got your blood test.

About a half dozen people that I knew personally went down. I do remember one very explicitly, he and I were buddies, had been for a long time. He had about the same thing I had, he had a bad lung. So, he was very

deathly scared of the needle. He was really shaking in his boots when he went to get his blood test. The lady that took the blood test wasn't very good about it, she really punctured his arm. He could have let all the blood out of him. She finally got some blood out of him and she held it up and she wanted to kind of compress it to see how much she had in the bottle. In the process she squirted it on the ceiling, so, she lost just about all of it. She turned around to him and said, "Well, I'm going to have to get some more out." That is when we had to pick him up and carry him out. He passed out cold.

He went to Ravenna with me . . . I'm not sure it is Ravenna or Akron we went to for the test. First thing I did when you go in was strip and take an X-ray of your chest. At that time they asked a lot of questions and made out a record for it. You grab the record and you parade it around through all these other tests that the doctors gave you. A major was in charge and he came around about an hour later and came around and asked Bob Bowers and myself to step out of line, he wanted to talk to us. He was really a nice gentleman. He took us in a small room and he said, "I'm going to have to mark you two boys 4-F." He said, "Do you know the reason why?" I said, "Well, I know," and Bob said, "I think I know." He said, "Well, your lungs are all scarred up, we can't take you. Now I could take you if they would send you up the Aleutians or someplace, but if I say to send you to a cool climate for sure they will send you down to tropics somewhere. So, I'm not going to do it. By the way what was your draft board's gentleman down there, what was his name?" We told him and this mild, gentle doctor took off on a tirade. I won't quote what he said, he marked real broad letters then across our papers, "4-F, call me before you re-classify." He put his name on there and he said, "You take this back and you can tell him what I said too." We brought them back and that was my first experience with the war effort.

During this time I had . . . As I say people had me kind of embarrassed reading gas meters in and out of their house and I looked so healthy, and they had a legitimate complaint because their relatives had gone to the Navy, Army, Seabees. I decided I had better switch jobs. So, at that time I had an offer and I moved to General Motors. It was from General Motors that I left and went up to get my tests. I hadn't been there very long, two months or three months, or something like that.

P: You were talking about they had given, classified you 4-F because of your lungs. What did they do to treat TB? I had a brother that had TB and I know when he had

it they had a whole bunch of drugs and so forth. In just a few weeks he was much better. What did they do then?

C: Well, first thing they did was give you X-rays and find out all about you; consider whether it would be better to collapse a lung or whether the treatment would make it inactive. The treatment at that time was fresh air and lots of food, and do absolutely nothing. They even didn't want you to blow your nose. They just didn't want you to do any exertion. We had three wonderful meals a day. In fact, as I can remember, the first meal was peanut butter soup made with . . . I'm not going to say half and half I'm going to say it was made with whip cream. It was so awful sweet I couldn't even eat it at that time, but I learned to eat it. I ate anything, I wanted to get out of there. I think at that time a big part of your cure was your confidence; I can beat it or not. Because a lot of people I thought were in better shape than I was, didn't make it. I mean not at that time, after a year or so I found out that they had passed on. If you let it scare you and didn't fight the darn thing you were licked. That was the treatment as I know it.

Every night they pushed our beds out on the porch, crawled in there, pulled the covers up, and had a good night's sleep. In the winter time we could wake up to three inches of snow. That was all they knew at that time. There was another treatment, as I said, collapsing a lung. Which, in making the thing inert in there, seemed to control it quite a bit. I never had that treatment but I do have very badly scarred lungs. It could be a carry over from when I was a lot younger because the first time it happened to me was when I went out for football in high school. I had no wind, I had nothing. Everything just got me down. Once they gave me a good examination when they found out that I just couldn't make enough laps around the field. At that time, it was during the depression, they sent me to the hospital and that was the first time that happened to me.

P: Then basically wouldn't you get awful weak just laying around?

C: No, not necessarily weak. It is like being in a hospital; if you are not operated on you can lie there for quite a while. You know, people you see, grandpa, grandma, I mean they used to sit in their old rocking chair a lot and they could get up and mosey around the farm and things like that. There was not any regular . . . You got no regular exercise. Everything you did you had to do slowly. We walked around the circle out there in a daze in front of the hospital.

You didn't run, you didn't exert yourself at all. Nothing! It really made a lazy man out of you, if you had any inclination to go that way. It did.

P: Then when that was over, of course, you went back to work. You said that you started working for General Motors then, what did you do for them?

C: I was a cost estimator, and at that time the gentleman I replaced was made an engineer. The primary thing we were estimating at the time was tank wiring. I mean all kinds for G.E. and Chrysler and all the big tanks. That was my baptism in estimating because the tanks were so big, and the parts were so complex that I didn't get it down to seconds, how long it did take to do each operation. The material actually cost more than the labor we put into it. Well, not quite but we worked at it. I had a very good tutor who just retired. Well, no he didn't just retire. He has been retired about ten years. He is a very good friend of mine, I was just talking to him the other day. He was a Standards man and he had been in the business for a long time. Whenever I needed any help he was always there to help me. We worked day and night practically on those things; put together a whole order. We are talking at that time \$1.5 million to \$2 million for a contract. That is like, I'm thinking, now in trillions of dollars. From there it evolved into the automobile business, making wire, things like that, until I retired.

P: So then during the war you worked on basically--if I understand you right then--your job was to figure out the cost of putting tanks together.

C: Wiring in the tanks. I did take those up the . . . As it started to branch out, as the war started to wind down, then we started to get back into the old business. Packard at that time used to supply all the battery cables, ignition wires, and other things for almost all of the service stations under their name Atlas, etc. Of course, the wire for General Motors automobile. At that they were not very complex with two headlights, one taillight, some of the deluxe cars had a little light on the dash, and ignition cable, battery cable. There were no accessories.

P: Not like today with so many lights.

C: Oh, yes! Today those harnesses will wind up weighing sixty, seventy pounds, the big ones. They are complex, very, very complex. They are computer, all the wires have to have the right resistance in it. It is things like that. Before it didn't make any difference. You get a coat hanger in there to carry the wire from one

end to the other it would have probably worked. Actually I have heard a lot of cases where people had used old wire, bailing wire--something like that--to trigger or jump an ignition wire that had busted or something. That was the good old days, that time.

P: Now during the war, of course, I assume there were a lot of people drafted. Did you have to work much overtime and things like that?

C: At that time I belonged to . . . I belonged to, I think, four different organizations which I was keeping up fairly well in. In the process of the overtime that I put in down at the place I just couldn't keep it up. Actually my boss at one time came out and said, "Look, you can't go to these meetings and stuff like that and work all these overtime hours." Besides that I was putting in two nights a week at Warren Business College. I was trying to learn all this new fangled business equipment; computers, adding machines, and stuff like that which I had never had access to before. First when I went to Packard I found out they were run by electricity. They weren't run by wind them up and crank them aside. That was quite a jump and I enjoyed it whole length of time I had been there. I would probably be there yet except old man time caught up with me.

P: Alright now, getting back to during the war years. My dad was telling me that here in Warren they had some kind of air raid patrol or something. Do you know anything about that?

C: Yes, I was not part of it but they had an air raid patrol. Infact, a lot of the girls that worked for me belonged to the air raid patrol. They put in a specified number of nights a week. They did it very much like you have in seen the pictures of England, the airway raid patrol people. They had a uniform. They just went around and they told you at the time not to . . . I mean close your lights out and things like that, just like they did in Britain. They also used it for . . . Well, farmer day and stuff like that. Although they were not farmers per se, they looked around for everything that they had care of. Things like our ward watch now that we have; Wand patrol now for safety. They did about the same thing, they had specified areas that they had to report to. At that time I worked one night a week with JC's at . . . I worked at Saint Joseph's Hospital at that time as a telephone operator. Not a very good one, some night I could get two or three wires screwed up. I worked there and they were glad for the help, even if it wasn't very good.

P: Getting back to this air raid, how did they know when



the air raid was supposed to be on? Did they just set a time or what?

C: Well, these people had times to patrol that were special. We also had air raid sirens. They are still located around town; I think up on the city garage on Summit street. You will see one or two on top of that big barn out there; used to be a lumber company at that time. They had great big signs. The fact is I think they are trying to reactivate those sirens now, use them for hurricanes or any kind of a warning to warn all the people that something is wrong. You could hear those doggone sirens when they took off. You could hear them because they were coming from all directions. They weren't like a siren now for the fire departments that comes from one direction. They sounded them all up at one time and they were really blaring away.

P: After they would put on the sirens, then they would go around, did they have any power like they could write tickets or anything like that or what?

C: I am not sure. I never really had too much contact with them as far as their authority. I did know they could have you arrested and those things that they could pick you up on. I'm not sure exactly what the limit of their authority went. I know they could report you and it was taken care of by the police department, or something like that. I don't know as an individual what they could actually do to you. The sirens didn't come on that often. The sirens came on once in a while. I mean, you had a test and things like that. They didn't put them on every day or like a curfew. The curfew, if you remember the curfew was real loud, and you could hear that all over town. Just imagine that with maybe six or eight different sirens. That is about as far as I can tell you on the . . .

P: Were there people that really thought that we could be bombed?

C: I don't know, I think there were people. You can tell anybody, or a lot of people, anything and they will believe you. I think really what happened to the thing was just like the work ethics up there, with signs all over the place that said . . . Well, we were actually building ignition sets too for airplanes, besides the tanks. We had signs scattered around at the work place up there that said, "Build this as though the man that uses it would be your husband or your brother." There were no short cuts on the thing, as far as the people building it. They built it as though their husband or brother's life depended on it. The testing on it was phenomenally.

We had a fellow in here that, ordinance inspector. I remember one time because it was such a heck of a stink. We were behind in the order and he came out and canceled it because the color of the nuts, kind of a khaki nut that were anodized, was a little bit darker than they should be. He said, "Anybody that puts those things on,"--it was all we had--"Anybody that would put those things on a harness I'm suspecting they might have slipped something else on the inside." It really caused trouble. Actually, if you ever saw that wiring that we had that was mounted in a tank, on the inside of the tank bolted with clamps and everything else, nobody ever saw the damn thing. It was all armored cable and things like that and great big metal T's and elbows, plugs.

P: When he thought if you had substituted one place you might have substituted somewhere else?

C: Yes, that was his argument. You know, it made sense except that this was a part that had absolutely no bearing on the thing at all. The thing was these big nuts were anodized, they came out, they were a little bit too dark. That was it, they were all the nuts we have in that thing. Those tanks and stuff you used to say . . . You get an order for fifty or 100 or something like that, we didn't get orders by the millions at that time with a lot of people making them. The line we had would come from the different people, maybe Chrysler, or the Cadillac Tank Plant in Cleveland. They would order those things from four or five different places, not just one. Of course everyone of them had every part you made had a record or a log. During inspection reports and all that stuff, they made you open that log. We thought our quality was pretty high, well we knew it was. Because I had been at the tank plants, and those people liked our dimensions, and quality, and everything. We stayed pretty good. I was quite proud to be a part of that outfit at that time.

P: So in other words, really turning it down was for some thing that was just not anything really.

C: Engineering wise, no. His reason for turning it down I can't argue with it. It is like other things we note today, they look real good on the outside, after you take them home they are not very good on the inside. His reasoning was if you did a sloppy job on the outside what the devil did you do on the inside that I can't see. He was paid by the government to inspect them, he had the power to turn them down. He did. You couldn't argue him out of it. Oh, once in a while you had a little thing that you could argue him out of but whatever it was you had to prove would sure didn't hurt anything. He could look at the whole job and see that

whatever it was. It had to meet specs . . . One of these things say we will patch up and send it out. No way! Our quality was pretty doggone good.

P: Let's go to rationing then. I know there was rationing, can you tell me a little bit about it?

C: The rationing was set up and everybody was allowed so much food or meat, butter, milk, so much a month. I think, I'm not sure about this, the coupon books we got were for one month, two months, or three months. Everybody in the family had their own coupon book and gasoline there was an A, B, and C classification as I remember it. Depending on how far you had to ride to work or whether you picked anybody up. At the time I lived about five miles away from work and I picked up three fellows. I had a B, so I remember a B coupon which entitled me to drive back in forth everyday to work. I picked those people up, and I worked so much over time I got credit for that. I do remember one time my wife was sick. I had taken her back to her parents in Girard and I was going down there every night. I would stay down there every night rather than going to my own home. So, I applied to the ration board for extra coupons. I explained the reason for it and they gave plenty of coupons, enough to do the job. I know guys saying they were very strict.

Meat was a ration item, and there was a lot of short cutting in that. I had a friend that was a butcher. Periodically you could get a ham. He never charged me any extra or anything else. He just didn't have too many stamp worth. It was his allotment or how he did it or not I don't know but he would buy so much ham and he had to get so many stamps for it. Every once in a while he let me have a ham. I ate more ham than ever ate since. I think shoes were also rationed, some types of clothes and I think shoes were one of them.

It was cigarettes. We were alright on everything and I will tell you something else, no, they weren't rationed but you hardly get the cigarettes. I didn't smoke at the time. I used to sit down and help my dad-in-law roll target cigarettes, I remember the name of it. Everybody had a roller and you bought this cigarette paper and you bought this tobacco by the pouch and you sit down--you had this little hand roller--and after awhile you got pretty good at rolling those doggone things. You roll about 1,000 of them you know, and after you smoke them and you start all over. It would give a night or two with something to do. Then, of course, they came in all the taverns, they got their cigarettes. They were on allotment too. I don't understand why they were all cut down so bad because . . . Well, I do know too. They had Mr. Yellow

went to war, or something like that, Lucky Strikes. I believe they changed the color on their packaging to show you that the guy that was vice president, or something like that, went to war. Also, that a great big chunk of their production was going to the war effort. You could stop in these taverns and if you knew the night, or the day, that he would be getting his allotment and you knew somebody in there, why they would save you a couple of packs if you didn't get in early enough. If you went to enough places why you did pretty good. I had three or four girls who worked for me that didn't smoke or didn't need them. They would get me some. My dad-in-law smoked and a couple of other members of the family. In fact, I started to smoke before the war was over. I was probably using half of them myself. It was a lot of fun trying to get cigarettes. It got to be like a big game. Nobody got mad if you didn't have any. I mean it was like the day . . . I have seen days up there that two guys, maybe three are sharing their cigarette. It wasn't to sanitary then but it was the best we had.

P: So actually as far as rationing was concerned did you ever really see real shortages?

C: No, nobody starved that I know of. There was enough rationing to go around to keep you . . . Rationing gave you a good . . . Should I say nutritious, it wouldn't be exactly, that because you couldn't always get the right thing. You had enough to eat if you had the ration books, or if you had the money to buy it. Most people were working and could buy it because the money was pretty good, everybody was working overtime.

My wife reminded me of nylons. Nylons came out during the war. They were a treasure I guess, but I know a woman just loved them for that. They used leg makeup, they painted their legs with this leg makeup. Of course, they come off on every damn thing. If I came home from work and my pants legs have any of that darn stuff on them, why I got the third degree. Nylons were a treasure. If anybody got nylons . . . They seem to have come in the doggonest places, I mean some of the taverns, bars. You go in there and you knew a fellow, say, "Say we got some nylons in there. Do you want a pair?" "Yes." You took them whether you needed them or not. Whatever you didn't need you switched off with somebody else that had something you wanted. Either that or coupon books for gasoline and things. It was the time everybody was for everybody. I mean to say that everybody went out and they got all the cigarettes that they could get and everything else but switched off; switching with somebody for something else. So, you could switch around and get most anything.

One time there was five of us going to Canada for a week. To get up there we went down to the junk yard, bought an extra tank and put it in the trunk, hooked it all up, the valves and everything else. We filled it up full of gasoline. We got up to Buffalo up there and the first fellow says, "What have you got in the trunk?" "Well, we have the reserve tank in there," because Canada at that time was not going to give you any gasoline. So, this tank would take us up to where we were going fishing and back, two tanks. He took a look at it, he says, "No, that is not right. It is not hooked up right. The valve is in the wrong place." So, okay. So we go back, he says, "You'll have to fix that and I'll come back and take another look at it." We went back, we didn't know what to do. One of the fellows suggested, "Let's go to the Niagara Falls, and when that fellow asked you if you got that valve underneath, yes." We were very fortunate the man that inspected ours, why I don't think he could bend over far enough to take a good look. We got passed, so we went up to where we fished.

We had some friends up there that had a lumber camp. We had no problem with gasoline up there, he had excess gasoline that he was really trying to get rid of the stamps, because if you turn them back in that was it. Next time he got his allotment he was short. In the lumber camp you don't use them everyday. Some days you are using some of the big equipment and some days you are not, or some weeks I should say. You got to understand the timber, maybe things were pretty good and you run it without too much gas and then you want to haul everything out or something, you used a lot of gas. He didn't cotton to the idea of turning it back into the government all the time. So, we used his gasoline as we ran around up there, which we didn't need much.

P: Then, what you are really saying is that with rationing there really wasn't hardship there, almost anywhere. At least it didn't seem like to you.

C: No, I don't really believe there were. As I say the people process the trading back in forth. If you were sick and you needed something, you got it. You went down and you applied for it and they took care of it. They were very fair. I don't really thing the shortage was as acute as the rationing could have been. I think it was more . . . It made you part of the war effort, you are part of this thing now, you are not a spectator.

Everybody had a garden, and raised all the vegetables needed. There were gardens all around town. You weren't allowed to plant them but rights were waived and people got their backyards plowed up or dug them up

themselves. Out where Kent State is now located that used to be a farm, belonged to the county anyhow. People went out there and were assigned allotments. I think they still do parts of it. They can make their own gardens and people made their . . . They had beautiful gardens. If we had the fertilizers we have now we could altogether forget about rationing. Those times the only thing we had for fertilizer was getting extinct.

P: Just manure, huh?

C: That is right, compost.

P: I'm supposed to ask about victory bonds, I suppose at work of course. What was your program for that?

C: A very intense program, they promoted that all the time. I was, not captain, but . . . In our place they set it up in segments. One part of the office, and one or two departments, or a segment of the plant, we combined it. We had competition who could sell the most victory bonds. Get them signed up, talking them out of pay. Now talking them into paying so much a pay is always the best way because they buy more bonds. It doesn't cost as much at one time and isn't missed as much. Whoever proportionately sold the most bonds would have a party. It was a lot of fun as working in the things. In those bars I still think I still got, oh maybe not, but I may have a couple left yet. They were trying to call them back in a couple of times and I know I sent some in and traded some off. About everybody that worked at General Motors out there was buying those bonds. Besides buying the bonds, helping the war effort, they were very, very good savings.

P: Of course in those days there wasn't very much inflation either.

C: No there wasn't much inflation. I think it took ten years for a bond to mature. Even at that, a \$1 then was worth, what \$12, \$15 today? So, you can see that \$25 bond that most people would buy, some of them it would take three months to buy the thing, so much out of every pay. I know on some of the deals down there, just to get on the record, they would buy a bond every three months or every four months. It could have been installment's plan. \$.25 a pay or . . . We had a lot of so called "Rosie the Riveters" up there. Women came out of retirement, out of home life, they came up, they worked. They worked hard and they did a very good job. That was part of our slogan up there, "This might be your brother, or your sister, or your husband." So, the quality stayed up there. I don't know, I think we will ever see that effort put in to anything anymore

that . . . Well, maybe it is getting into new times.

P: Was that the first time really that they had had women working there?

C: No, Packard had always been a place for women because of small hand fabricating. They could do a more efficient job than the men. We always had a lot of women up there in proportion. Actually, even today I would suppose that that is eighty percent female employment.

It was like a little old home town factory, you know. The people who built it, originated it, started to build automobiles. The Packard Brothers said, "Oh, we need some good battery cables," and they started Packard electric, building battery cables and ignition wire. Came along, didn't come along, it was there but it was very inefficient and "I can build a better ignition wire." So, he started building ignition wires. Then after that, "I could build better cables," so, we started building cable. That place has been in existence since, I'm going to say 1908 or something in that area. It was Packard Motor Car, and Packard brothers really who started it. Packard Brothers, yes. One of them went to Packard Motor Car and moved to Detroit, the other stayed in Warren and built up Packard Electric.

P: Sounds like a home town grown factory then?

C: Yes, at that time yes. The fellows that got in there, got there sons in, they got there daughters in, it was family affair factory. When I first started there in 1943 I think they had 700 people. When I left there in 1980 it was maybe 8,500 hourly and about 3,000 salary, that wasn't peak load. It has grown but now it is not the family orientated place it used to be, kids out of high school. You may even remember back when you were delivering newspapers and stuff, everybody around your neighborhood worked at Packard electric.

P: Yes, I know.

C: Either there or the mill.

P: I know they did. Can you tell us something about the OPA and rent control, or didn't you ever have anything to do with that?

C: The OPA pricing of rents. It had a committee for fair rent. I didn't have to much to do with it because when I got married in 1936, and we moved to Warren here, by the time that that was in existence I was already buying my own home. I had a very constructive fortune and good friends that I was able to start

buying my own home. So, I had very little to do it with except the time I was in the sanitarium. A very good friend of mine, a real estate gentleman, took care of my house. He rented out complete, I mean we just walked away. I went to the hospital and my wife went back to live with her parents. He rented out and I know at that time he was under a rent control deal that he could only charge so much for it. I know he probably charged all he could, and a wonderful job. Sometimes it worked more to you to have good renters than it was to get the peak price.

P: Yes, I could see where renters could really tear a house apart.

C: They sure can, sure can.

P: Alright now, some of the people I have talked with said that when they got mail and so forth from the people overseas it would be censored. Do you know anything about that?

C: Yes, we had brothers in the service, and my wife had friends in the service. We would get the mail back from Germany, before the V-day, and there would be paragraphs scratched out. Everybody got to accept it. It used to be a laugh, people would say, "I know what he is trying to tell me." When they word something, you know what I mean, "How's my brother Johnny?" He had no brother, something like that. That isn't a right saying but they would have some they would throw in there that thought they could get by the censors. I don't know for sure whether it did or not. I was just reading an article in a magazine that said the censors were pretty smart. If it didn't really amount to anything they let it go. Things were censored. I had a brother down in the South Seas and I had some friends in Niles.

At Christmastime she made up two or three packages, the lady in Niles, to send to her son down in the South Seas. It was cookies and other things that she had sent. One package particularly, all it had in it was a bottle of scotch. I don't know if he ever drank scotch or not but that was the only thing he got. That is the only thing that went through, the scotch. Everything else was delayed or somebody interrupted or something, but he didn't get it.

I had a brother in the South Seas and he came back. He had malaria. I had a lot friends, as I say, at that time that went to the service. A lot of them didn't come back, most of them did come back; my particular acquaintances, thank god.



- P: So then they did try to censor the mail some.
- C: Yes, it was censored. I mean you could . . . There was nothing you could do, I mean you got across it "censored" in these red letters, censored. It had to be, because there are some people, like myself, that would probably blab about everything and there would be no secrets left. It is like our investigation now for Iran.
- P: Who knows what?
- C: Who knows what? All the people want to know is the truth, inject that in here. Another war is starting.
- P: Many of those people must have quite a bit of money saved up then by the time the war was over if they bought bonds and so on. Is that one of the things that helped make the boom after the war?
- C: Well, what made the boom after the war, in my opinion, was the great shortage of everything. You say they had the money saved up but you must remember back at those time. We are not talking about a lot of dollars. We are talking about, when I started there I was making \$160 a month and I got no overtime pay. If I had been out on the alley I would have got paid. That went on until way after the war, and then the decision was made if you worked your department why you got paid too. Which made it pretty good because you were putting in all those hours for nothing. Not for nothing, they were . . . That was part of your job. I guess that is the only way I can put it.

There was a lot of people who had money saved up. Two of the kids that worked for me that I know particularly, they had their money and one of them bought a house, and he bought a new car. That is they way that they were, and after that people didn't seem to have to much trouble from World War II right straight through to the last . . . Until about 1980 things were good. A lot of them over extended themselves. Things happen, what are you going to do though? Nothing happened, they got up where they had everything paid for and now they council their kids not to do the same thing that they did.

Things are not as good as they were after the war. We had it very good in most cases. There were some industries that had a change overtime, had work on that, or had shortages to get the things in they needed. Equipment was pretty well beaten in some places because whatever they were making . . . If the government needed it they sure put it out as fast as they could. We made cars. The cars were there before the war. I

think it was 1945 before I got a new car again. They just started making them that year I believe. I wouldn't have gotten that car except had that fortune up over the years that my department grew up to be big enough that I could call it a department. It went from two, I think there is thirty-six in there now. There could be more than that except they don't do all the work that we used to do. It is the computers.

P: During the war what type of entertainment did they have for the people or what did you do as entertainment?

C: You know that is probably the easiest question to answer, you made your own. We went to dances. When I say we went to dances I'm talking about church dances. The churches had doings and every lodge had doings. Nobody had any money to go anywhere and do anything anyhow. So, our friends, we got together, we played cards, we did this, we did that. We went swimming, we went . . . Everything, but everything didn't cost any money I should say because it was kind of sinful to be out there enjoying your life too much. Fishing, as I say, I went fishing. Every year, why, I took a week and went fishing. That was with a group of fellows and some of them . . . Well, most of them went to the war and almost every one of them was Seabee. They went to either California and shipped out to the South Seas or never got out of California. Then corresponding took a bit of your time too you know. You had friends that were going, they just loved to get a letter every once in awhile. You had to drop them a line. We did that. Postage was cheap then, you could afford that. I don't know.

P: Did you ever try doing any traveling besides just, like, going to Canada?

C: Oh no, just out traveling your ration stamps wouldn't handle that. You could buy ration stamps. Let's face it there was a black market. It is like everything, cocaine and stuff today. There is a place to buy everything. You could buy the stamps if you wanted them. You could buy all the meat you wanted if you had the right price.

The only thing on buying a lot of that meat is you had to be sure the guy hadn't cut it out in the sun too long or something. Some butchers were very good to you. If you had been dealing with them for years, and stuff like that, or grew up with them, or they were in the family, or something like that, there was always a little bit extra that they could get rid of without interfering with their regular customers. I don't remember, we used to play cards a lot. We were laugh-

ing there when one of my friends died at . . . We used to play cards. Well, we played nuts. We were laughing the other night about how red his knuckles got.

P: That is one game I have never played, how do you play it?

C: Right now I really can't tell you. All I can tell you is the looser takes a card and puts his hand out there and you hit him.

P: Oh.

C: You get an invisible score . . . As I remember it it was . . . It has been so long. All I can remember is the name and the fun we had but I don't remember exactly how we played it. We did play it a lot. Of course the kids that weren't married played post office an awful lot. There were so many more girls than there was fellows to go around that most anywhere that you went every fellow had a girl. There was no stags amount to anything. Girls danced together. They worked together and they worked hard, and a very good job.

There was a lot of sports; baseball, horseshoes, not tennis at our place. We had hoiseshoes and baseball and bowling. We didn't have enough bowling alleys to start with and bowling was a great sport. Jiminy Christmas we had leagues up there after we started to grow. We had leagues up there that . . . The midnight shift would come out at midnight and the other shift had gone about then. They would come out and they would bowl. The midnight shift in the morning went out there when they get done at 8:00. Fellow went out to go home and they went out and bowled. Another shift would come out in the afternoon, they went and bowled. We kept them pretty well occupied, all the bowling alleys. It was a good sport, I still enjoy it.

P: In other words it wasn't so much where you had to pay a lot of money, the things you did with friends.

C: Oh yes, the things we did with friends. Actually when you see them pay a lot of money . . . I think it was a \$.25 a line but then there is inflation, so what is that today? \$2.00, \$1.50, it hasn't gone up that bad I guess. If you had the leagues . . . Why, just to get the league in there they gave you a cut rate. Then of course the bowling, and after a league was over, you bowled long enough, you spread out the winnings. \$.05 a game, or whatever it was, for all those people. They would have a banquet, give out the prizes and things like that. You made do with what you had.

P: One thing, I remember a little bit about the war, I remember my mother used to save cans of grease. I have never been able to find out what happened to those cans of grease. What were they for, do you know?

C: I think they were used to make gun powder, or ammunition. They did pick that up, you saved your grease.

P: I can remember my mother saving it in tin cans.

C: Yes, I don't remember whether they picked it up. I think you took it to the butcher shop. I don't remember whether you got stamps for it or what. I know people were saving it. That is just one of the sidelines . . . Just my wife and I and we didn't have to much into that. We had no kids or a big family. We both worked. She worked at Packard at that time too, same as I did.

Actually she got me the job up there or she told me they were going to interview for the job. I went up and I probably think it was the personnel manager was a friend of mine in the Army. One stipulation, if I could cut the mustard, "okay," if I couldn't . . . As I say, after I got in there, I had some very good help and I liked it. So, I worked twice as hard to make it work as I would of if it had been just a job. In fact I worked at that thirty-eight and a half years and I would probably be there yet if they let me.

P: I came down through all my questions, do you have any thing you would like to just tell about the war that you thought of? Something funny that happened or something amusing.

C: No, not particularly funny. Some things I didn't think were right. I had a friend in Niles, he had glasses on that were about an inch thick I thought. They were great big bifocals. He was very chubby. He got examined, they passed him, put him on one of these boats over in England over there to take the boys across for VJ-Day . . . Not for VJ-Day but for the invasion of Europe. If he gained five pounds he couldn't go either down a manhole or up the manhole to get down under decks. That kind of boat is a landing craft, I think it was. Then he lost his glasses one day. Took them about two weeks to get him glasses so he could see. After that I think they gave him two or three pair he carried around with him, because he couldn't see.

There were people I think they took that they should not have taken. I know there was a hell of a lot of us guys around here that felt they should have been taken. The doctor said, "If they will only use a little common sense." There seems to be some little devil sitting

down there and he looks and says, "Don't put this guy in the tropics," and the first thing you know he is in the tropics. Like my friends, I had several of them signed up as carpenters. Carpenters made some Seabee. They never saw a hammer, or a chisel, or a saw, or anything like that. They had them sign up and went through their boot training and everything. They assigned them to other jobs. People they had working as carpenters were probably brick layers or something. It just seemed to be a snafu that what they told me when they came back and things like that.

That was something else, the boys would come back on furlough before they left. That always seemed to be a deal. You always wanted to take them out and have dinner with him and the wife, or him and his girlfriend, something like that. They didn't make that much in the service at that time. You didn't feel it was an obligation as much as, "Here is my buddy back and he is doing the best he can." Take him out and show him a good time for a night. There was a lot of that. We enjoyed it. Some of would come back and they needed a car. My wife's cousin came Europe, had no place to stay, he stayed with me for about three weeks. He put a lot of miles on that car. I don't know my ration booklet. At that time when they come back like that he could go down and apply and get an extra ration.

Nothing was in that big of a shortage that it hurt, as I remember. Now, the meats and stuff like that; ham, and . . . Well, steaks and things, you just didn't waste your coupons on that because there was different grades of things you got. Ham seemed to be a big item at that time. After they got organized and stuff, after the big shortage . . . I say the big shortage. It seems when they decided to take it all, or take a big chunk of it for the military, it kind of disrupted everything for awhile but it didn't hurt anybody. Nobody starved.

The end of the war came, and that was the week of my vacation. I wasn't going to go and the boss man said, "Look it is just about over. Why, you might as well go. We are cutting back." So, I went to Canada. I was up at North Bay. I was out fishing all day. I didn't even know about it until I came back. I thought there was a riot in town. It was almost a riot when it happened. There is a lot of miners up above North Bay there. They got out of the mine . . . As I say they worked all day too and they got out in the afternoon at 4:00 or something like that. They heard the good news, they were going to celebrate to. They went down to liquor store and the liquor store had closed. They didn't go for that. The people who had been there all

day got liquor, all they wanted. Then they decided to close it before the miners get out. Well, they just opened the doors and went in and got themselves a jug or two. Then North Bay, I didn't even get down there that night. In fact I couldn't have gone down there because my car wasn't there. There were a lot of rides offered. We just stayed in Sturgeon Falls. In fact I think I played cards about all night. It was really . . . The hotel I mean they opened up the beverage room. You didn't have to pay for anything. Everybody was bringing in drinks and all at once everything caught up. The lady that ran the hotel she had three sons in the service. They all returned. She had been saving, as I say she had the beverage room, she had a great big trunk up in her room and that was loaded with booze. Of course we drank it. She just opened it up and turned the tap on and let it run. It was . . .

Oh, one thing did happen to me during the war. I went to Canada. I went on the train. I got to Buffalo and I was to meet some people up there to go fishing, up in North Bay. They used to come down the train, "Where are you from?", etc., "You got any credentials?" "Yes, I have some," what I had. That train didn't move and pretty soon another fellow got on the train and he came back and he started asking the same question. He said, "Can you come with me?" "Sure." He said, "Bring your luggage." I didn't have much because I had sent everything up before that with my buddy. Took me over to a little station over there and he set me down. I really got the third degree. They were looking for somebody who I must have resembled. I didn't know there was a good looking fellow out there like me. Finally, he was on the telephone and stuff and he came back and he said, "Okay, if you don't run you are going to miss your train." You know that train had set there for about fifteen minutes waiting for me to get back on there. I was not a very popular man. Not a very popular man. We left there, we went to Toronto. At Toronto the train set for about an hour before it headed for North Bay, which is straight north. People got on there and they lay on the floor and everything. Anywhere there was room there was a person. That train from there to North Bay probably made 100 stops. I think it stopped to deliver newspapers was what I was kidding about. Anybody who wanted off anyplace along the line they got off.

Since then I have gone to Canada on trains and back in the woods. You tell the conductor, or whoever is in charge of the train, where you want off at, and they will stop and let you off there. If it is out in the middle of nowhere and they will stop, no joke. They give you about ten minutes. You got to go back in the baggage car and have all your stuff ready and he has

got the door open the time you come into a stop. Well, before you come into a stop. If you got any heavy duffel bags or anything he would throw them off first, and your fishing equipment--they are a little more careful with that--then finally you throw yourself off I guess. But you got off there. They would do that. Then when you were ready to come back you told them. If you were ready to come back by walking up the track about a mile or two and fix up a little dummy or whatever they had up there to do that. They would stop for you, very nicely.

Nicest people in the world that I have ever met, outside of your local hometown people. I don't remember a lot of people. I don't remember the bad times per se, I remember the good times. I had a lot of them. As far as the bad times, I know they were there in the war. Maybe I shut them out, I shouldn't have. I don't remember. There are a lot of people I knew after that. Somebody didn't come home. I still have friends in the hospital. My brother, as I say, came home with malaria. It got him about fifteen, twenty years later. That is about the size of it.

I don't always say a lot of people got rich during the war. Sometimes some bitterness from the gentlemen I worked with, he was very, very perturbed that I didn't go and he did. I tried to explain it to him but there was nothing I could do about it. It took him a long time before he got over it. In the last eight, ten years we have been friends. He and his wife come over, he admits he was bitter. It wasn't just me he was bitter at. He was just bitter with the whole damn world.

P: Because he had had to go?

C: Because he had to go. I told him one day, I said, "Instead of being bitter at the whole world you ought to go. You so damn proud of the war you ought to come home." He was just bitter, he couldn't help it I suppose. He probably had a reason. He was always saying that a lot of people stayed home and they made themselves rich, carpetbagger sorts of people. I am lucky I didn't run in to any of those people. We worked, we didn't make that much money, although we put in a lot of overtime. The company as far as I am concerned, General Motors, went out of their way to help that war effort.

P: Then basically that is what you remember about the war?

C: That is about all I can remember. That is all I can remember, I just don't recall.

END OF INTERVIEW