

Edwin and Lorraine (Sally) King

Amthor: This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri in the 1940s* program. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Today's date is March 12, 2009, and this interview is being conducted at the Hopkins Historic Museum in Hopkins, Missouri, located in Nodaway County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley, and we are here to interview Edwin and Lorraine (or Sally) King. They both lived during the 1940s and Edwin also participated in World War II and this is their story.

Okay, Edwin, can you tell us a little bit about where and when you were born, what your parents did for an occupation, if you had any brothers and sister?

Edwin: I was born east of Hopkins about 2 and a half miles on July 4, 1920. I did have a sister, Mrs. Orlin Florea. No brothers. What else do you need to know?

Amthor: What did you parents do for an occupation?

Edwin: They were farmers. My parents farmed. Worked in the Creamery in Bedford, my dad did; farmed the rest of his life.

Amthor: Could you tell us what life was life in 1940 before the war?

Edwin: Wages were about a dollar a day, until I went to west coast in 42, and you could make more in an hour than you could a day back here by quite a bit.

Amthor: When the war began how did you hear about Pearl Harbor and what were you doing?

Edwin: About Sunday night, I expect I was home; I really don't remember exactly.

Amthor: Do you remember any propaganda? What they were saying on the radio about the war in Europe and China?

Edwin: Oh, Tokyo Rose was always coming up with something.

Amthor: Did you get drafted or were you enlisted in the war?

Edwin: I got drafted.

Amthor: And what service – what part of the service were you in?

Edwin: I was in the Army. In the engineers.

Amthor: Do you remember you basic training memories? Where you were stationed?

Edwin: Oh, yes,

Amthor: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Edwin: I can tell you where I ended up in the service - in Portland, Oregon. I went to Fort Lewis, Washington, and went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to take basic, and I met a home town boy there, Erville Allison. I got to visit with him. After basic then I went to Fort Crook, Nebraska, for more schooling. That's where Offutt Air Base is now. Then to Claiborne, Louisiana, bivouac, more training, more waiting, and then to New Orleans, aboard ship, headed down through the Caribbean Sea, flying fish and porpoise a plenty. Went to the Panama Canal, refueled, went through the locks and we had a boy that in our outfit that his dad was in Panama and he got to visit with him while we went through the locks. After – through the locks, we went to Fresh Water Lake and then to the Pacific Ocean where we zigzagged to keep the submarines from getting their sights on us to Bora Bora where we refueled again. They had people there with legs as big as their bodies from some disease that they had caught from insects. After that we zigzagged on towards New Guinea and we were there for a year and a half. Now how much farther do you want me to go?

Amthor: So, were you in Europe or in the Pacific area?

Edwin: Pacific.

Amthor: Mainly in the Pacific area?

Edwin: Pacific Ocean. When you cross the International Date Line or the equator you're in the opposite season of what you are on the north side; went from winter to summer and of course you lose a day going one way across the International Date Line and gain it back when you come back. I don't remember whether we lost it going down or coming back. [Laugh] Got a picture of you there.

Amthor: Did you see any combat?

Edwin: No, but I heard some.

Amthor: Okay. What year did you get drafted and how old were you?

Edwin: In 1943 I was drafted and I was coming up for 23 years old.

Amthor: Okay. So, where were you at the end of the war?

Edwin: I was in the Philippine Islands. I was going to tell you that when I was down in Claiborne, I ran into a home town boy, Ralph McMullan, at the PX one day. When I was overseas, I looked up Charles Russell, another home town boy. He later was sent north and lost his life. After we was up at the Philippines, why, I had gone up to Bageo, which is in the mountains. Then when we were ready to come home, it was on the fourth anniversary of Pearl Harbor. 7<sup>th</sup> of December we boarded a ship and headed for the states. Got into California

Christmas Eve, 1945. A group of us weren't supposed to leave the area, but we'd been out of circulation for so long, we called a cab, crawled the fence and went to town to see the bright lights. After a few days we boarded a troop train and headed towards home, came through Arizona where they were harvesting lettuce in December. I came by the airplane graveyard where they stored airplanes in the desert air to preserve them; acres of them. Came home, and of course it was winter time by then, January 3, 1946, I received my discharge and came home. Seemed like it was plenty of work that I'd missed out on getting caught up on work. I was farming with my dad, and taking care of livestock. That's my story, and I'm sticking to it!

Margaret Florea: Tell them about the boys that went into the welding school.

Edwin: What?

Margaret Florea: How you went to the welding school and went to Oregon.

Edwin: Five of us went out there. It was J. W Florea, Wendell Abby, Cliff Allen, and Clyde Olin Pistole, and I think only one of them is left besides me. As far as I know, Clyde Olin Pistole is still alive.

Margaret Florea: How did you get your schooling?

Edwin: I had schooling – Lester Shell, here in Hopkins. Then I had some more schooling in Portland, Oregon. Then I had some more in Fort Crook, Nebraska.

Margaret Florea: What did you weld on in Portland?

Edwin: I was a certified pipe welder in the ship yard for about a year.

Amthor: Did you write many letters home when you were in the service?

King: Yes, I did. In fact, while I was in Fort Crook we weren't supposed to go over fifty miles away from home, but that's about a hundred; I went home every weekend. Because if you didn't get into any trouble, they couldn't prove you were gone.

Amthor: So, did you take advantage of the G I bill where you got back?

Edwin: I did.

Edwin: What kind of schooling did you get with that?

King: It was agriculture. I went to Bedford for a time and then I went to Mount Ayr for a time.

Amthor: Did you join the American Legion or the VFW when you returned?

Edwin: Yes, I'm DAV. [Disabled American Veteran]

Amthor: Okay, what is that?

Edwin: Just some letters.

Amthor: Are you proud to be a veteran of World War II?

Edwin: Yes.

Amthor: How did you feel at the end of the war when Truman dropped the atomic bomb? Did you feel that was necessary?

Edwin: I think so.

Amthor: So, what do you think is the difference between the war that you fought in 1940 and the war today? Do you have any comparison on the two wars?

Edwin: Of today?

Amthor: Yes.

Edwin: I think it was necessary, World War II, but I'm not sure it's necessary right now. I think we've been down there long enough that they ought to be able to take care of their own trouble. They'll probably be fighting from now on somewhere in the world. They had one war that was supposed to end all wars, but it hasn't done it yet.

Amthor: Is there one thing that stands out about your service or life in the 1940s that you'd like to share with us that we haven't covered? Something that you remember that made a difference or

Edwin: Well, the wildlife in New Guinea was a little different.

Amthor: Tell us about that.

Edwin: We had a Greater Bird of Paradise, and I understand that that's about the only place in the world they are. They have Birds of Paradise, but not the Greater Bird of Paradise. Wild hogs, wallabies which is a miniature kangaroo; jungle rats as big as small dogs, bats with a wing spread of six foot. I think they probably were fruit bats, but they still were awful big. I'm glad it's over with. If I was ever to view New Guinea again, I'd want to be in an airplane and pass over and not stop. Mosquitoes, heat and humidity was terrible.

Amthor: Did you ever get malaria?

Edwin: No, I took pills, atabrine pills. Your skin turned yellow. I think it probably was quinine, but it was called atabrine.

Amthor: Were there very many of your fellow comrades have malaria?

Edwin: I don't think so. Not that I heard of. They had jungle rot.

Amthor: I've heard about that.

Edwin: That's like athletes' foot. Of course we boiled our clothes to try to keep infection down. Finally, we made our own wash machines with agitators in them.

Amthor: Okay. Well, we'll go on to Lorraine – Sally – and why don't you tell us about your background and your family and what life was like in the forties?

Sally: I was born at Savannah, Missouri, in 1927 and when I was nine years old, almost nine years old, we moved to Iowa, where we now live and that's sixty-one years in the same place. When I was growing up, money was short and if you got enough money to go to show on Saturday night you were lucky. Ten cents is what it cost, and we worked hard to get those ten cents to go to the show. My parents, my dad worked on rebuilding bridges, and my Mother was taking care of a lady in Athelstan, that's where we moved to. I have been cooking since I was nine years old for a family of three and four. Things were different then of course, than they are now. It was a lot harder then. For our entertainment we'd go sleigh riding in the winter time, and if ice got a little thin, then the boys would pour some water on it the next day, so it would freeze and we could sleigh ride that night, which is a lot of fun. I started to school in country schools, but when we came to Iowa, I went to school in the town schools. It was quite interesting, but it was different than what we were used to in Missouri. Of course you graduated out of the eighth grade; we had eighth grade graduation then. Then I started to high school in Blockton, Iowa, and I went two years and the war just messed everything up. So, I wasn't interested in school. I went the two years and I quit. So, my mother was working in Shenandoah at that time, and she was working in a plant nursery, so she got me a job where she was and I was there a year. One day I went to home where my girlfriend was, and she went to school in Blockton, and she said "Would you like to visit school with me?" Well, of course, I did, and I went, and I liked it so well that I told my mom that if she'd let me go to school in Blockton, that I would finish my education. She said, "You start, you finish." So, I finished. I finished the last of when I was a junior, I was taking six subjects so I could make up the two that I lost. And so, we had basketball, and I played basketball; I was about the tallest one on the team. We didn't do the best, but we sure had fun. We went to the State finals I guess it was; we got to go and watch and see that. We didn't get to play in it, but it was really a thrill because you didn't go to a lot of places. Let's see. . . . Then, when I graduated from – I'd like to back up. When I was a junior, which would have been in 1945, word came to the school that my brother had been hurt, and he was in the European theatre; I've forgotten right now where he was hurt, but anyhow, it was up to me to go get the telegram at the depot, and it was up to me to tell my folks that my brother had been wounded. That was kind of sad, but his elbow was pretty much messed up, but he got better and he got to come home. Of course, there were jobs if you wanted to do the hard work. Let's see now, what else should I say?

Amthor: How about rationing? How about cooking, sewing; what was it like?

Lorraine: Well, I learned to cook when I was nine years old, as I said, and we had cooking at school but it was a lot different than mine, but mine was better than that. One time we were able to have a class party and it was going to be on New Year's Day, New Year's night. The girl that was helping me, we thought we'd do something kind of ornery, so we served them ham sandwiches, except that we put real heavy brown paper for the meat and served it that way. [Laugh] We had lots of fun over that! Of course, if there was anything like that, I had to do it, because I was the only one who could cook. And let's see; after he got home in '46, I met him for the first time in March. Then in July we were engaged, and then in October we were married. That's been a little over sixty-one years ago. Kind of proud of that. We have two sons, Phillip was born where we live now, and he was born in 1947, then we have another son, Dan, and he was born in 1953. They're just like night and day; they're just different. Then Phillip had to go to Vietnam, which was very hard for him, but he was lucky; he got to come home unhurt. Dan wasn't the right age to be in the service at any time, so he went into business with his trucking business and they have four children and they are all adopted. They had one boy who is a sophomore in Maryville, and then they have two little girls that are at home now. We get to see them quite often. That was Dan's family. Phillip had two girls, Alicia and Heather. Alicia gave us our first great grandson in November of last year. We've just got to go see him again. I guess that pretty much brings us up to date.

Amthor: Is there anything that you can think of that made a difference in your life in the 1940s that could be good advice for us now in this decade?

Sally: If they worked real hard like we had to, there might be a change. Now the new thing that we see every day – computers and all big things like that – it was a far change from what it was back in the 40's.

Amthor: Well, I appreciate both of you coming in.

Edwin: Okay. You're welcome.

Amthor: Unless there is anything else you'd like to share with us that we didn't cover?

Edwin: Okay.

Sally: I can't think of any more right now.

Okay.