

ROBERT AND DOROTHY MOORE

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 of the Humanities. Today is March 27, 2009, and this interview is being conducted at the Tiffany Care Center, Mound City, Missouri, in Holt County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. We are here and we're going to interview Robert and Dorothy Moore. Robert was born on June 7, 1921; Dorothy on June 5, 1926. Boy, almost shared a birthday. Robert was in the Navy and Dorothy was working in a factory – a defense plant.

Amthor: Okay. We're going to start with Robert first. Tell us a little bit about your background. Tell us where you were born, a little bit about your family, and what life was like up to the 1940s before the war.

Robert: Well, I was born in Craig, Missouri, and my folks were farmers and I grew up on the farm. I don't know what else I need to...

Dorothy: You went to school.

Robert: Well, yeah, I went through 12 grades of school, but finished up high school in Bellevue. And - back in early '42, I went to work for Boeing Aircraft in Seattle, Washington. And I worked there 5 months and my draft number came up, so I come home. They wouldn't defer me.

Amthor: Did you have any brothers and sisters, too?

Robert: I've got one sister.

Amthor: Okay, and she wasn't in the war?

Robert: No.

Amthor: So, what was life like before you entered the war? What did you do? What did you do for fun? What was life in general like?

Robert: Well, it was not very good back there when we had the Great Depression. We had, folks had to scrape to get food and this and that and the other, to keep you going. And then, when I got old enough and got out of high school, I went to work for farm people as a farmhand. I did that until I went to Seattle and went to work for Boeing.

Amthor: How old were you when you started working for Boeing?

Robert: I would have been 21, wouldn't I?

Dorothy: I don't know. I wasn't with you.

Robert: Well, it was just before I went to the service.

Dorothy: You were 21 when you went to the service.

Robert: I would have been 20.

Amthor: Okay. Well, tell us about your life, Dorothy. Tell us a little bit about your background, your family, if you had brothers and sisters?

Dorothy: I had one brother who was 3 1/2 years older than I. He was a pilot in the Air Corps--the Army. But I went to high school and we started going together, I guess, two years before I graduated. And we were married in November before I graduated in the spring, but we didn't tell it.

Amthor: What year was that?

Dorothy: 1943. But I was going to graduate from high school and I was afraid they wouldn't let me go to school, so we didn't tell it. But then after I graduated, he was at Olathe, Kansas. I went to Kansas City and I worked in Pratt-Whitney, Defense Plant. And he was sent to Florida later and he went and found a place to live and then I went. You might say my grown life -- he raised me.

Amthor: Either one of you, what were you hearing about propaganda about that time period? Did you hear a lot about that on the radio about the war?

Robert: Well, Japan.

Amthor: What were they saying?

Robert: They were overbearing, you might say. They didn't have a good reputation.

Amthor: Is that what you remember hearing?

Dorothy: Well, I wasn't old enough. I wasn't interested in the news. But I do remember the day they bombed Pearl Harbor. We had it on the radio in the great big study hall and the whole high school was in there when they declared war.

Amthor: Okay. Let's talk about your days in the service. You said you were drafted.

Robert: No, I enlisted.

Amthor: Oh, you enlisted.

Robert: My number came up and I was in Seattle, Washington, and I quit my job out there and come back here and that was in June, the last of June, and in July, I got word that they were enlisting in the Navy in Kansas City and, --what do I want to say?-- Well, six months and duration - duration and six months - and so I went down there and talked to them and they signed me up and put me on inactive duty and for about a month, then they called me on the 15th -

Dorothy: Of November, wasn't it?

Robert: The 15th of September, and I...that's when they called me for active duty, was the 15th of September. And -- it wasn't September, was it?

Dorothy: I thought you enlisted in September.

Robert: Well, and when I went down there for – when they put me on active duty, I went down there and they said, “Well, we don’t have a place for you to live. We don’t have any clothes for you. And you’ll have to find you a place to live and we’ll get your clothes whenever we can.” So, I found a place there in Kansas City and lived for one week. They sent me up to Fairfax Airport on the runway to take my boot camp. I got one week and they said to come in and said, “Well, you’ve got to go out to Olathe, Kansas. We need you out there because I was a carpenter and they were building barracks and hangars. So I went out there. I don’t know, I was probably out there a couple of weeks when I got my clothes, but I did have a place to live out there. And that’s when I joined – or went to the Navy. And, of course, I went to the Navy because I didn’t care about being on a ship and I didn’t have to be. Then I was there, I guess, 22 months at Olathe, Kansas. We were working on barracks and hangars and things. Then they shipped me to Florida to Sao Luis –

Dorothy: That was Brazil.

Robert: That was Brazil. DeLand, Florida, and after I got down there I got a place for her to live and she came down and we spent that 22 months together. And then in – well, that was a trainer base for - a primary trainer base for cadets. And then when I went to Florida, that was an advanced base for training cadets. Well, then, after I got my orders down there – I was down there 5 months, I guess – then I got my orders to go to Norfolk for further replacement, and they – we went up there in December and I went from there to -

Dorothy: Brazil.

Robert: No. What Florida town?

Dorothy: New Orleans.

Robert: New Orleans. We shipped out of New Orleans, but they didn’t tell us where we were going. I was on that ship for 21 days and they wouldn’t let you have any lights at night, period. So you were in the dark. So when I got down to Brazil and got on the base, the commander come to me and he said, “You’re not supposed to be here. All you can do is sit tight for a little bit until I can find out where you’re supposed to be. He came back in about a week and he said, “You’re supposed to be in Alameda, California, in amphibious training, but, he said, if you want to stay, we’ll keep you.” I said, “That’s fine with me.” And I stayed there until the war was over in Europe. Now, that was a lighter air base- these dirigibles- and when they came in, it took about 10 guys that had ropes on the bottom of them to pull them down, and one time one come in and he come in too fast and we couldn’t handle it , so it piled all of us up and broke some of them’s legs and some of them’s arms and broke my ribs and, so that was as far as that went, but I was there – well- it was in July of ’45 when I - they shipped me back to San Diego, California, for -

Dorothy: You came home for...

Robert: Well, they shipped me – that was where I was supposed to go, San Diego, California, for further assignment. And I was there, I don’t know, what-- a couple of months, anyway.

Dorothy: Until the war was over.

Robert: We were ready to load out – we were loading out – that afternoon to go to Guam and along late in that afternoon they come in and said, “The Japs have quit fighting. The war’s over.”

So everything stopped right there. And I was glad of that, so then I got my discharge out there in San Diego. That was the 25th of...

Dorothy: 15th

Robert: The 15th of November in '45.

Amthor: You mentioned the dirigibles. Did they use those quite often during the war?

Robert: Well, they used them to patrol the coast. That's what they were doing with them.

Amthor: And which coast did they usually go down?

Robert: On the east coast.

Amthor: And what did they burn in them? What kind of gas was in those?

Robert: You know, I don't really know.

Amthor: 'Because I know some of them would catch fire. I just wondered what kind of gas it was.

Robert: They weren't the nicest things to handle, in a way.

Amthor: So let's talk about your time in the defense plant where you worked during the war.

Dorothy: Well, you had to be 18 before they'd let you go to work. And I was what they called a tool grinder and it had to be precise. You had to miter these parts that they shipped in for you to prepare, and they had to be exact, because they used them on the motors. I think they came from Wichita. Now I'm not positive about that, but I think they did. And that's all I did all day long, five days a week. And, when he was gone, I went back to work there, same job, and I could work 6 – I could work all day Saturday and I could work a half a day on Sunday. I worked all I could work. It kept my mind busy.

Amthor: You probably did work more just for the fact that he was gone.

Dorothy: I didn't have anything to do.

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Amthor: Now you were married before you went into the service.

Dorothy: No, we were married when he was in Olathe.

Amthor: While you were in the service. Did you have any children?

Dorothy: Not then.

Amthor: So you ever went overseas. You stayed...

Robert: Brazil was all.

Amthor: That's South America.

Robert: Yeah. But I told her when I left the states, I said, now every paragraph, I'll put letters – write down where I'm at so that every paragraph you can go down and put those letters down, so you can tell where I'm at. And so that's the way I told her where I was at.

Amthor: I heard some people had codes.

Dorothy: He was at Sao Luis and Louise was spelled Luiz. He started that paragraph with Yippee or Zippee!

Robert: That was hard to come up with.

Dorothy: I knew then I was being told. We had an idea that was where he was going, but we weren't positive.

Amthor: Now, what town did you live in while he was in Brazil?

Dorothy: Kansas City

Amthor: And that's where you stayed most of the time when he was gone?

Dorothy: When he was in Brazil, but when he was in the states, I was with him.

Amthor: So what was it like on the home front? Did you have to deal with a lot of rationing?

Dorothy: Oh, that was before the service. I presume that started when the European war was going on. See the Japanese war continued later – farther on. Yes, I remember my parents being rationed of sugar and coffee and – well, my dad ran the filling station downtown and he kept him in gas coupons and tires and....because he was close enough he could drive home for the weekend.

Robert: When I first went to Olathe, I didn't - my folks didn't have a car and I left my car with them, and you could get out and thumb your way home quicker than you could really drive. Anybody would stop and pick you up, with a uniform on. So that's the way I got home before I finally told the folks I needed a car. But I just had, I don't know, maybe two weekends a month off that I could come home and that was Saturday afternoon and Sunday.

Amthor: Did you ever travel by train?

Both: Always.

Amthor: How was that travel?

Robert: Tell her.

Dorothy: Not bad. He went on troop train to Florida and I waited til he found a place to live. And I went to the depot to go down there and there were soldiers lined up all along. They got to go on first, you know. So I walked up to one of them and I said, "Could I be your wife to get on this train?" You weren't afraid of people then like you are now. And he said, "Sure!" You know that man - he had been to his home in Colorado, and he rode with me all the way. We changed

trains in Atlanta. He got me back on that train. And then he got off in - oh, before I got off – in Jacksonville. He got off in Jacksonville. And I continued on to the end.

Amthor: How was the music and entertainment? Did you do anything like that – I mean did you go to dances? Did you go to movie theaters?

Dorothy: What did they call them for entertainment for dancing and things?

Robert: USOs?

Dorothy: Yeah, USOs. In fact, my brother married a Belgium girl, and she loved to dance and she'd go to these USOs over in Belgium, and that's where he met her.

Amthor: You said you had a brother. Is that the only one in your family that was in the service?

Dorothy: Well, I had a cousin that was in the Army, but he never was overseas either.

Amthor: Did you listen to the radio much to hear about what was going on?

Robert: Well, some. But we didn't have too much time to listen to any radio.

Amthor: After the war, did you have – did you – you came back home? What did you do when you came back home?

Robert: I started my own farming.

Amthor: Did you take advantage of the GI bill?

Robert: I did.

Amthor: Did you go back to college?

Robert: No, what I meant - I got some implements through the GI people.

Amthor: How was cooking during that time period? Did you have large gardens? Did you...

Dorothy: Well, my mother did. And we always had a garden, until me moved to town. We moved to town in 1993. We always had a big garden, and I canned. But I'm past it now.

Robert: Our youngest son has been in the National Guard down here at St Joe for 32 years. He really likes it down there. They're going to make him retire though, I think, in a couple of years.

Amthor: After the war, were you worried about the threat of polio?

Robert: No. We took polio shots.

Dorothy: Well, they did have quite a bit of polio around here, though. That's about the time that they started doing something about it.

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

Robert: Yeah, I was in the VFW for 50 some years and then I joined the Legion here – I don't know - 10 years ago, I guess. We had to close up the VFW because all the members had been deceased but me. I'm the only one – we have a...

Dorothy: Well, there's one here in the nursing home.

Robert: Yeah, but we have a supper once month and I'm the only man, and 7 women.

Dorothy: That's about all.

Amthor: How – I lost my question. What do you think the difference is from that time period during the 1950s[1940's] – we had war, and of course we were coming in from a bad economy going into the war - how do you think that period is similar or different to what's going on right now with the economy and the war that we're fighting now?

Dorothy: We had the economy before the war then in Roosevelt's term. We had economy problems. He's the one that started the WPA and all those things.

Robert: Yeah, I was in the first depression we had back in the 30s.

Dorothy: Our parents had hard times.

Robert: Yeah, I remember I had \$3 in the bank and I lost it.

Amthor: So what was the bank like when the doors closed?

Dorothy and Robert: You didn't get anything out of them.

Dorothy: My dad, he was farming then, and he worked for 50 cents a day shocking fodder – manual labor – 50 cents a day – two children. But, they were farmers. They had cream. They had eggs. They had potatoes, onions, all that Mom canned, and all the garden stuff, so we ate. We didn't go hungry, but they had a hard row.

Robert: When I got out of high school, I worked for a \$1 a day straight time; \$26 dollars a month. And that's what we went out on, on Sunday night. That would buy us show tickets, buy us maybe a hamburger, and put a little gas in the car and a drink, on that buck.

Amthor: Do you remember any of the movies you saw?

Robert: A lot of John Wayne movies I saw.

Dorothy: Roy Rogers

Amthor: How about the one with Scarlet O'Hara – "Gone with the Wind"?

Both: Oh, yeah.

Amthor: How about the music? What were the big bands sounds that were going on?

Both: We weren't dancers.

Amthor: Was there any particular literature that was out that people was reading – books?

Dorothy: I can't – there probably was, but we didn't have any.

Amthor: Well, is there any story that we didn't cover or that you would like to share with us that left a lasting remembrance that you would like to....

Dorothy: Well, I'd like to tell you about the day the war was over. We knew he was going to Guam and I was out to the base telling him goodbye. And this speaker came up – The war is over! Don't think we didn't celebrate. But he couldn't leave the base. And I had friends from back here that were out in San Diego. That's where we were, and they knew what I was doing. Well, the sailors went wild in San Diego. You can't imagine how many sailors were out there. They went to the bus station and they sat there and they waited until I got back and we all took hold of hands – there were 5 of us – I would never have made it back home without somebody with me. The sailors filled the streets from building to building. So I was very thankful for my friends.

Robert: They were celebrating.

Dorothy: The sailors were.

Amthor: So how wild were the celebrations?

Robert: I don't know. I wasn't there.

Dorothy: He was on base.

Amthor: Did you have a celebration on the base?

Robert: No.

Amthor: Do you have any stories from being on base that you'd like to share.

Robert: Yeah, I was a carpenter's mate and we had to take care of the barracks. Well, one day they called me that the WAVES, which was the women of the Navy, had a problem in their barracks. So I went over there to work on that problem, and I went in there and there wasn't nobody in there and I was a working and pretty soon they started coming in some of them and when they looked up and seen me – they wasn't very well dressed, but they had plenty on – but, they left.

Amthor: So, were there very many women that joined?

Robert: Quite a few. Quite a few.

Amthor: How many women do you think would have been in that WAVES division?

Robert: Oh, I wouldn't have any idea.

Dorothy: I'll tell you what kind of wages I made. I thought I made good wages when I worked at the defense plant, but now, they were meager. But at that time, they were above all other wages. I worked for \$20 a week. Went to Florida, I worked in kind of a restaurant like on the base at \$20

a week and my dinner.....And then we went to Norfolk, and I worked in a dress shop, \$20 a week. Then I come back to the defense plant to my good job, when he left.

Robert: When we were in Norfolk, we had an apartment and we just had an oil burner in that apartment and all we had for supper was one can of soup between us and we cooked it on that oil burner – on top of that oil burner.

Dorothy: We saved our money – my allotment, you know, my big allotment. We bought four rooms of furniture when we got home.

Robert: I only got \$50 a month and they took \$28 for it for her allotment. So that didn't leave me very much money.

Amthor: So they provided you with food. So how was the food on the barracks?

Robert: It was pretty good. I didn't have any complaints about it.

Dorothy: I'd eat a good lunch when I'd go to work, and he'd eat a good meal at the base. And in the evening, we just had soup.

Amthor: Okay. Well, if you don't have anything else to share, I think this has been a great interview.

Robert: Well, probably something we forgot, but we won't know about it.

Amthor: Well, you can always write it down sometime and we'll add it to your list.

Both: Good to meet you.

Amthor: Thank you for you sharing your stories with us. We've enjoyed it.