

RAYMOND AND MINNIE JEAN KEEFHAYER

This is a portion of the oral histories of Northwest Missouri of the 1940s Programs. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the National Humanities Council and with support from the National Endowments of the Humanities. Today is February 3, 2009, and we are at TJ's Cafe in King City, Missouri, in Gentry County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley and we are here to interview Raymond and Minnie Jean Keefhaver. Raymond was born on January 18, 1918, and served in World War II and he was a Tech Sgt., and Minnie Jean was born on August 10, 1917.

Amthor: Okay, we're going to talk a little bit about your backgrounds and we're going to start with Raymond. And if you want to just tell me a little bit about where and when you were born and a little bit about your family, what did your parents do, if you have any brothers and sisters, what were you doing before the war?

Raymond: What was I doing before the war? Well, I was farming and then I quit farming and I went to California and I worked for Consolidated Aircraft in San Diego. I was there about a year and a half 'til I got my 1A classification and then I left and come back here to the edge Missouri. And in September they said they wanted me and I went into the military in '42. My parents was farmers. I was born and raised on the farm during the depression days, and you learned to live. You didn't have no money -had plenty to eat. That's about the size of it.

Amthor: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Raymond: I had one brother, Joe. He was also in the 8th Air Force in England. And he is now – he passed away in – 4 years ago, I guess. Now, what else did you want to know?

Amthor: Okay, that'll be enough for now. And we'll go to Minnie. Jean, tell us a little about your background.

Jean: Well, I was born in 1917 to my parents and they lived in King City. Then they – soon, my dad – I guess maybe he liked to farm. They moved out on a farm when I was a child. And first grade, I went to Prairie Flower School – a country school. I graduated 8 years later. I rode a horse two miles to school. Then when I graduated from there, naturally I came into – we lived 5 miles out of town – from high school. I rode a horse 5 miles in high school for four years and graduated from high school here in King City.

Amthor: What was your parent's occupations?

Jean: Farmed.

Amthor: And did you have any brothers and sisters?

Jean: Yes, when I was graduated when I was – how old was I? I was young. I graduated when I was about 17 and, you know, my mother had a little brother for me. He was born in July – Lonnie Lee or Alonzo Lee. He was my little brother. It's quite a thing to have a little brother come when you're just out of high school.

Amthor: So, can you tell me what life was like in the 1940s? What did you do? Were you still at home? Did you go to work? What did you do after you graduated?

Jean: Oh, I went to beauty school and became a hair dresser. I was a hair dresser for years. And I was married to Fred ???? when - I was married – we were married for 40 years, but then... I got a job working as a hair dresser. I owned a beauty shop with another lady for several years.

Amthor: Do you remember anything about the rationing – or having to use coupons and not having enough coupons for hosiery or sugar? What can you tell us about that?

Jean: Well, it seemed like I managed some way here. Everything works out usually. Of course, I went through all that.

Amthor: Do you remember anything about cooking – if you had to go without some of the cooking, sweets?

Jean: Not too much. No.

Amthor: How about travel? Gasoline or tires?

Jean: Well, of course, that was sometimes a problem - gasoline. What'd they call it? Shortage of ...

Raymond: What that?

Jean: Gas. Gasoline.

Raymond: Oh, we was rationed.

Jean: We were rationed.

Raymond: Yal.

Jean: Thank you.

Amthor: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about that you think about was going on in the 1940s? About music, entertainment?

Jean: Oh, I took piano lessons when I was young, too. My folks - no, my Grandma bought me a piano. She lived – yep - in Indiana and she sent money to Eshelman's

and my folks went down on a Sunday and picked out a piano for me. My sweet grandma - Indiana.

Amthor: Well, we'll talk a little bit about the war now? Do you remember when you - did you enlist or were...

Raymond: I was drafted.

Amthor: How old were you and what year was that?

Raymond: When I went in? Approximately 23, I think.

Amthor: Do you know what year that was?

Raymond: 1942.

Amthor: 1942. And you went into what part of the - branch of service did you go into?

Raymond: The Army Air Corps.

Amthor: The Army Air Corps. Can you tell us ...

Raymond: They was in the process of making the Air Force a separate branch of the service. Then World War II come along and they had to postpone it until after the war was over. Now it is.

Amthor: Can you tell us a little bit about your basic training. Where were you...

Raymond: Well, we had very little basic training. We learned how to march and handle guns, but they was more interested in what we had ahead of us. They made an airplane mechanic out of me. I went to airplane mechanic school at Gulf Port, Mississippi. And after I got out of there - I was there 4 months, I think - and then they shipped me to Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan, on big aircraft engines that Ford was building at that time and I really learned more about aircraft there at Fords than I did anywhere else. However, I paid strict attention to the teacher and what we was supposed to do, you know, and it served me well later.

Amthor: Could you tell us a little bit about the barracks or the food while you were there?

Raymond: Well, I was shipped to a B29 base in Victoria, Kansas, and that's where we maintained B29s, trained bomber crews to bomb Japan and they pushed us pretty hard to maintain aircrafts to do the job and we did. I think we had four groups run through there and each one of them took quite a while to graduate and be ready to go.

Amthor: So, where did you serve? Did you leave the United States?

Rauymond: I did not leave the United States. They decided they didn't want me anywhere else but there, I guess, and I didn't volunteer either.

Amthor: So where were you placed then? In Kansas?

Raymond: I was in Kansas, yal.

Amthor: Did you form any friendships or comradery while you were there?

Raymond: Oh, yes, a lot of good friends, I met a lot of good people. And I kept in touch with some of them after I got out, but the ones I kept in touch with are all gone now.

Amthor: So, was there any special jobs that you remember while you were there that you.....

Raymond: Oh, they're too numerous to mention. Well, we changed engines on the B 29. The pilots blew a lot of engines. We were changing 3 or 4 every day. They'd take the old airplane - be out of service approximately 24 hours by the time they come in 'til we had it ready to go back into service. That was pretty fast for that big airplane. I thought we did, well, on base we had the best maintenance record of all the B29 bases in the United States which is somewhere around 20. I thought that was awful good. And the big wheels, they didn't want us to leave too bad 'cause we did a good job for them. So we stayed there.

Amthor: Was there – how many airplanes do you think came in during a week's time that you worked on?

Raymond: Well, we had 32 on the base – what they call groups – 4 squadrons of each airplane. Each squadron had 8 airplanes and the group had 32, but they was 4 groups and different air bases that made a bombardment wing, if you understand what I'm talking about.

Amthor: So, were you able to - what kind of recreation did you have on the base? What did you do for fun?

Raymond: We didn't have too much time for that. We went to a few movies. That's about the size of it. There was a few stars come through there, but I don't know who they were now.

Amthor: Was there the USO or anything like that?

Raymond: No

Amthor: What was the propaganda that you remember? What was the United States saying about the war when you were in the service? Do you remember what they were saying about the war in Europe?

Raymond: Well, we were shown pictures about once a week. They would show us what they was doing in the German manufacturing and transportation and the like. We was shown that every week. And we'd have an old German train going down the track and they'd hit the engine with throggits? and blow it up and then they'd – most generally they'd - rest of the train had bombs and ammunition and stuff like... and they'd blow all that up, too. We'd see that on – they showed that to us. Other than that, we didn't ...

Amthor: So did you listen to the radio to see what was going on with the war?

Raymond: Well, we didn't - we couldn't – they wouldn't allow us to talk too much about it.

Amthor: So, I know they did scrap metal drives – did that help with the ...

Raymond: I don't know.

Amthor: You don't know. How about after the war? How did you feel about the bombing and the dropping of the atomic bomb? Did you agree with Truman when he did this?

Raymond: Yes, I thought Harry Truman did the right thing. He was smart – one of our great presidents - in making the decision to do so and that ended the war quickly.

Amthor: Did you receive any awards or medals for your service in the...?

Raymond: No, I wasn't looking for awards at all.

Amthor: So, where were you when you got news that the war was over? What were you doing?

Raymond: Well, we was still working on - let's see, we were finished with the last group. They'd left for the South Pacific and we was getting ready to go to the South Pacific also and they dropped the atomic bomb and some of the group that I was with was on the West Coast ready to go over and after they dropped the atomic bomb they come back where we were. We finally got out in January.

Amthor: So, let's see. So, how long did you stay in the service until you were let go.

Raymond: From the time I went 'til I got out? 3 years, 4 months and 29 days.

Amthor: And what did you do after that?

Raymond: Well, I started farming a little bit and then I didn't want to borrow money to farm, so I went over to General Motors to get a job and I retired from General Motors in Fairfax, Kansas.

Amthor: Did you take advantage of any of the GI Bills?

Raymond: Well, I did go to agriculture school for a little while until I finally quit farming. That was it.

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

Raymond: I belonged to the American Legion.

Amthor: Are you proud to be a veteran of WWII?

Raymond: Am I proud? Well, sure. When you're in the service, it makes quite a bit of difference in your feelings toward your country and your people than if you're not.

Amthor: Were you concerned about the spread of Communism after the war?

Raymond: Yes, and I am still also today.

Amthor: You think there is still a threat from Communism in the world today?

Raymond: I don't know. I don't know what to believe any more.

Amthor: What do you think are the differences with the war today and the war when you fought in?

Raymond: Well, quite a bit. They have – uh - satellites do all the surveillance anymore where they had to have airplanes when I was in there go over and take pictures, but they don't do that no more. Other than that, well, why do they fight? I can't tell you exactly. See, I have a grandson that's in the army, also, and Sunday he was in New York City coming back from Iraq and he'd been over a year so his term's up this month, so, but he would still be in the army and supposed to come back to Fort Benning. I expect he's there right now, I don't know.

Amthor: So, is there anything you'd like to leave us with – with some other comment or something we didn't cover – something about your service that you'd like to tell us?

Raymond: Well, I was proud to have served, but I wouldn't want to go back in if I was able to, even, or young enough. It leaves you with a different feeling than if you didn't go, I think, as far as I'm concerned.

Amthor: So, what was life like at that point? What was the American feeling about World War II?

Raymond: Well, you know, there's- Brokaw said this, that the people who were in the military at that time was the greatest generation ever. That's about the size of it, too, because most of them grew up during the depression and they knew what everything was like.

Amthor: Life was different then than it is now.

Raymond: You bet. There's money around now and everything, but transportation's different and communication's different – everything.

Amthor: So, did you have electricity and running water in the 40s?

Raymond: Well, no. We later did have electricity and we didn't have no running water. I'd carry it from the well to the house.

Amthor: So, compared to today or the 1940s, what was the best era to live in?

Raymond: Best what?

Amthor: Era. Did you enjoy the 40s more?

Raymond: Well, I just happened to be there. I can't say other than that. So, you have to enjoy it. You can't go back. It's past history.

Amthor: Is there anything memorable that stands out that you'd like to share with us about your time in the military?

Raymond: Well, I'm proud I've served – and I know what all the military's going through. They get better pay than when I was in. We did a lot of good mechanical work for practically nothing. My pay was \$112 or \$118 or something like that a month. Now they probably get that much a day, I don't know.

Amthor: I imagine things have changed over the last few years.

Raymond: Oh, you bet.

Amthor: So did you work just on one type of plane or did you work on other types? Did you just work on the one type or...

Raymond: We worked on flying folks' old B17s and we had a lot of transient aircraft flying across the country have trouble with their airplane and they'd put in and we'd fix them and then send them on their way, like we were supposed to.

Amthor: Well, Margaret, do you have any comment?

Kelley: No.

Amthor: Okay. Well, I really appreciate you both coming in. I've enjoyed listening to your stories. And thank you.

Raymond: You bet.

Amthor: Thank you for coming in and sharing your time with us.

Amthor: Do you have any pictures of yourself in your uniform or something you'd like to share with us that we could see.

Raymond: She's got one, but she ain't got it with her, of course.

Jean: I don't have it with me.

Amthor: Well, we