

## RAYMOND AND EILEEN SEIPEL

This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri in the 1940s* program. The Nodaway County Historical Society Museum is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Megan: Today's date is April 15, 2009, and this interview is being conducted at the Nodaway County Historical Society Museum. The interviewer is Megan Binkley, and assisting is Margaret Kelley. Today we are interviewing Raymond and Eileen Seipel. Raymond Seipel was born on September 2, 1919, and he served in the Army as a Staff Sergeant. Eileen Seipel was born on May 23, 1921, and during the 1940s she worked at J. C. Penney's and the Nodaway Valley Bank. Our first question would be where and when were you both born?

Raymond: I was born in Maryville, about seven miles southwest of town on the farm where my parents lived.

Megan: And where and when were you born?

Eileen: I was born at Conception at home and my grandma was what would you call them?

Raymond: Midwife?

Eileen: Assisted the doctor.

Megan: Could you tell me about your parents' occupations and how many brothers and sisters you have?

Raymond: My parents were farmers all their lives and I have one brother; I had two brothers – one died real young, and two sisters.

Megan: What did you do prior to 1940? Prior to World War II?

Raymond: Well, after my school time, I worked for a neighbor for two different summers, and that was still during the Depression. I got paid seven dollars a week, and for six days a week; not forty hours. The day started at a quarter to five, we milked a bunch of cows, and it ended about seven in the evening. Other than summer time, I helped my dad at home on the farm.

Megan: What about education? Can you tell me about your schooling?

Raymond: Really, I didn't have a whole lot of schooling – eighth grade is as far as I went. We were out in the country, and no school buses at that time, had no way for getting back and forth.

Megan: How about your life prior to World War II? Can you tell me about your life prior to World War II?

Eileen: I was born at Conception at my family – my parent's home and I went to school at McCann. It was a little country school and we walked to school which was about what? About [two miles]?

Raymond: It was about three [two] miles.

When the weather was bad, my Dad would always take us in the carriage and the horses, but most of the time we walked to and from school. Then after – well, after I was old enough to get out, – after I finished my schooling, I came to Maryville and I worked first at the drug store – it was the Nodaway Drug Store and it isn't here anymore. And from there I worked at Penney's as a clerk, and then I worked at the Nodaway Valley Bank until he came home.

Raymond: Now I – when I didn't work for Mr. Bainum after – oh, what was that, about 19, I rented some farm land and used my dad's equipment and helped him with his farming until I was drafted for the service.

Megan: Did either of you have any family members that were – that participated in the war?

Raymond: I had one brother

Megan: You had one brother?

Raymond: He was in Germany.

Megan: Did you have any family in the military?

Eileen: I didn't have any.

Megan: What did you know about the war in Europe or in China before the United States entered?

Raymond: Really, I didn't know too much about – the one in China at all; we had always paid more attention to the European theatre and the war with Germany until after it started – after the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, that kind of put us in a different area, and were thinking more about the Pacific area too, then.

Megan: How did the U.S. portray the war and the Japanese? Through propaganda?

Raymond: Well, the Japanese – maybe I'm getting ahead of myself, but I was in the South Pacific for two years and four months, and the Japanese – we didn't hear much about the propaganda that the United States was putting out for the Japanese, but we always had a lot of propaganda from Tokyo Rose to the how bad the United States was losing all the time. Tokyo Rose was pretty popular in the news all the time over there. Crazy.

Megan: How did you learn about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Raymond: The day they bombed Pearl Harbor I had gone home with a friend – it was on a Sunday and I had gone home with him for dinner after church. We were just sitting around – we had been playing cards and we had the radio on – we didn't have TV at that time – my gosh, here it come – Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor and well, they pretty well occupied every station on the radio for the rest of the afternoon. My friend Ralph Zech and I, we were the same age and we knew what we were going to be doing right quick. It happened that way, too.

Megan: How did you learn about the progress of the war?

Raymond: Well, just by radio and newspapers, more or less.

Megan: Were you drafted, or enlisted?

Raymond: Yes, I was drafted. I oh, let me see – my number came up in September of 1941 and well, I had a corn crop planted, so I went to the draft board and asked if I could have a deferment until after I had my crop harvested, and they gave me a deferment. I don't remember whether it had a length of time or not, but I – well, they gave me another number, I guess the way it was – that's been a long time ago. But I was drafted then – February 7, 1942 and left that same day.

Megan: Do you have any memories from basic training camp?

Raymond: Oh, yeah! We went to Fort Bliss – no, – we went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for basic training. To start out with, that was so different that it took a while to get used to things. I never will forget – we had Sergeant French, he was the drill instructor – hut, two, three, four – you know? Man, I'm telling you, if you didn't keep in step, why he sure-he could find anybody in the group that wasn't in step and make you carry a – why you always had to step off with your left foot first, and if you missed a couple of times, he'd give you a rock to carry in your left hand so you could be sure and remember – left foot first. Well, we were all in the same boat; nobody knew anything about marching or keeping step or anything. I was placed in field artillery and after we got to where we could march properly, why they gave us more training in the field artillery part. I enjoyed that much more than that hut, two, three, four.

Megan: How long was your basic training?

Raymond: It was six weeks.

Megan: Did you have any specialized training after basic training?

Raymond: Well, not really, other than field artillery.

Megan: How did you adapt to the military life?

Raymond: Well, after a while you kind of get used to it. That's – you're in, and that's it. You might as well make the best of it. I got along real well, really. Seemed like – oh, you always wanted to go home, but you knew you couldn't.

Megan: Where did you serve?

Raymond: The places I was? -- okay, Fort Sill, then we went to Fort Bliss, Texas. We were there until July of 1943. July, we shipped out from San Francisco on July 3, and went to Australia -- Brisbane, Australia. We were 21 days on ship from the U.S. to Brisbane. Sometimes it was kind of rough -- I mean, the sea was rough. I volunteered for KP just to have something to do. Twenty-one days of just doing nothing seemed awfully long to me. Then we landed in Australia just kind of a stopover place until they needed us. We were there for what? Three or four months, probably, then we went to New Guinea for another stop off place. Part of our division had already gone to the Admiralty Islands, and made a beach head there and they ran into a lot more interference than they expected so they radioed back and our battery, or our artillery division -- they loaded us on destroyers -- we were scheduled to come up on -- what were they? LST's -- the big doors open in front and the destroyers are much faster on the sea than those little ships and I'm telling you, I've never seen the seas so rough in my life. I don't remember how many destroyers there were of us, but when we got close enough to the Admiralty Islands, they'd send a bunch of those boats that the front ends drop down. The destroyer -- we couldn't get ashore from the destroyer, you know, so they sent those little -- I've forgot the name of those, too. But anyhow, everybody on ship was sick, and we had to climb down a rope ladder down to the boat, and it was just a flopping and a going on, too. I'll never forget one guy -- Lester Smith, he said, "Oh, God, I'm too sick to die!" But we made it into shore and a few days later our artillery guns and all of our equipment came on the LST's and we went back to our own duties with artillery.

That was the Admiralty Islands. We were there -- oh, I don't remember how long, I should. Well, you couldn't keep a diary because you weren't supposed to. But anyhow, there are several islands there, and when it was cleaned out and the Japs were gone or whatever, we went to Leyte Island, on the Philippines, -- our division was to make the initial landing there. Oh, there were battle ships, destroyers, and troop ships -- boy, it was a sight to see, really. Just before daylight -- well, quite a little bit before daylight, the ships and destroyers started firing to the beach, you know, to clear the Japs off the beach, and well, being the artillery, the infantry had to go in first, you know, and after they were in, I don't remember what time it was, it was still that morning, we went in with our artillery and got set up ready to fire whenever they called on us. We were on Leyte Island -- oh, gosh, quite a while and we were there during the monsoon, the rainy season; oh, mud and rain! Hot! Mosquitoes -- you name it, it was there. But we kept making progress and we finally got control of Leyte Island so we were in what they call a rest area for oh, I don't remember how long -- a few weeks and then we went on to Luzon Island; that's in the Philippines. Our first job was -- another outfit had already made the beach head on Luzon and our duty was to free the prisoners of war that the Japanese had taken before the war started; during the first part of the war, anyhow. This was 90 miles inside of the enemy's territory. Well, we got there, but it was pretty spooky sometimes, I'm telling you. We freed those prisoners and then went back to our regular job as artillery firing whenever needed.

Megan: What combat duty or missions did you witness or participate in or if you had any?

Raymond: See I was in the artillery, in the 105, was the size of it. I started -- well, there's -- eight people to the gun crews, four guns to the battery. I started out just helping with the ammunition,

I guess, and finally worked up to - oh, what did they call them? Well, anyhow, I'd set the elevation for the height and see, the artillery shoots over the infantry, and all. I was on that position for quite a while, and then our gun crew chief was killed, and I got promoted to crew chief - ah, wait a minute, I'm ahead of myself. I come from that to the gunners position to set the - oh, that's been too long ago.

Kelley: Coordinates?

Raymond: Yeah. Well, anyhow, I was on that position for quite a while, and then our gun crew chief was killed and I was promoted to gun crew chief and I was on that for quite a little while. The gun crew chief is - he is responsible for everything that goes on within his crew.

Megan: How did you handle emotion in combat when witnessing casualties and destruction?

Raymond: Well, you know, we didn't have - oh, three or four casualties in our outfit all the time - all the way through, but it was pretty dang rough, I'm telling you sometimes. You know it's another thing- you're there, you know what's happening, it's war, and you just kind of got to do what you've gotta do, that's it, and hope for the better.

Megan: Did you form friendships and camaraderie while in the service?

Raymond: Oh, yeah. One fellow from Menomonie, Wisconsin, Clarence Gesche. We were on the same gun crew in basic training, we transferred to Fort Bliss, he and I were on the same gun crew and we were on the same gun crew for - through the whole war. He and I were the only two that started - I mean were still on the - the other guys were transferred in or out to different parts of the division-or battery. He came down to see us - he lived in Wisconsin, we were in Maryville. He came down to see us about a year after the war was over. We'd go up to see him; we made several trips back and forth and we always wrote to each other. We had a lot of -- he was my best friend. I had a lot of friends. We - everybody made the best of everything we could.

Megan: How did you stay in touch with family and friends back home?

Raymond: Well, by letter, mostly. Once in a while we'd call home or call my girlfriend and overseas it was just letters only.

Megan: What entertainment did you have in the service - such as USO, Red Cross, movies, radio?

Raymond: Well, in the states it was pretty good, I mean, we had a day room with pool hall and card tables and all that; and the PX was always open, and the USO. There was pretty good a pass to go to town once in a while - El Paso, Texas - wasn't a whole lot, but it was a town to go to. Overseas, well, even in Australia we didn't get to town hardly ever and I mean they weren't giving passes as easily as they did in the United States. Just kind of make your own entertainment, I guess; same way when you got out in the islands; there wasn't any entertainment.

Megan: You said you listened to Tokyo Rose. Did you ever listen to Axis Sally?

Raymond: We hardly ever got that, you see that's in the Eastern – in the European theatre.

Megan: What did you do for recreation or leisure time?

Raymond: Well, we played a lot of card games, lot of poker games; we had a baseball game once in a while. That's about it.

Megan: We'll have some question about life on the home front now. Were you aware of propaganda in the United States?

Eileen: We just thought it was the news. We didn't realize, I guess, that it was propaganda, but I'm sure there was plenty of it.

Megan: How did the U.S. portray the war in Japan? In the news or through propaganda?

Eileen: I guess you just – all we had for news was the radio and the newspaper and we just took what they printed and what they said was true. I didn't – I don't ever remember that we thought of it as propaganda.

Megan: What did you know about the war in Europe or in China?

Eileen: Well, just what we heard, and – just hoped that it would be over.

Megan: Do you remember how you learned about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Eileen: It was on the radio. How I heard it was.

Megan: Uh-huh.

Eileen: I guess it was just horrible and – oh, did we even have a radio?

Raymond: Oh, sure!

Eileen: I just heard it on the radio. Let's see, I guess we were going together at that time, and figured that he'd have to go. Just had to make the best of it; I had a good job and go to work every day. Worked at Penney's as a clerk, and then one of the ladies at the bank came down and asked me if I'd be willing to come up to the bank and work. I said, well, if I'm sure of a job; but I said I can't just quit a job and just hope to get another one. I have to be sure that I've got a job. So I went up and talked to Chilton Robinson and he hired me and I really enjoyed working there at the bank. I knew a lot of ladies, and they were all really kind and just really friendly, and a good bunch. We always enjoyed, . . . and A. J. Dinsdale, he was one of the men at the bank and he had to go – I always went home at noon to eat, 'cause I didn't make enough money to eat out;

and he'd take me home and he'd always say, "Well I could tell that Eileen had a letter in the box 'cause she always perked up." He was a good guy.

Megan: How did you learn about the progress of the war?

Eilene: Just what we heard on the radio, and the newspaper.

Megan: How were rationing and price controls during the war? Do you remember?

Eileen: The rationing was quite – you know – it was hard. You figured that what we were doing in rationing was minor to what the boys were doing. I remember then when we were planning to get married, my Mom had been saving sugar, and all of her friends saved sugar, extra, so we could have a wedding cake. And had an aunt that baked an angel food cake and I don't know how she got it so big, but she did.

Megan: How did rationing and food and gas affect your family and the shortage of shoes and clothing? How did that affect your family during the war?

Eileen: I guess we just figured that the rationing was minor to what the men were doing, and you just accepted it.

Megan: Did you participate in scrap paper and metal drives and blood drives?

Eileen: Oh, yes. I gave blood until – I gave too much and I became anemic, so couldn't give any more.

Megan: What about metal drive? Did you ever participate in a metal drive?

Eileen: Metal? Oh, we participated in every drive that they had, in some way. Donated what you could.

Megan: Can you describe what you did for entertainment before and during the war?

Eileen: Raymond used to say you could go ahead and date if you want to, it'd be alright with me. I said who was there to date? [Laugh] Did have a real good friend that he didn't pass the war, and he and his girlfriend were really good to me, and would take me to places, and always had fun.

Megan: Did you listen to the radio a lot during the war?

Eileen: Oh, yes, you did. Read the paper, everything you could get a hold of to read. The St Joe paper, the Maryville paper, and at the bank they got the Kansas City paper.

Megan: Do you remember any songs or movies from during the war?

Eileen: Well, I guess our favorite was *You Are My Sunshine*, and we used to sing that a lot. Oh, what were some of the other ones?

Raymond: *Deep in the heart of Texas*

Eileen: Oh! [Both laugh}

Raymond: The apple tree. *Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree*

Eileen: *With Anyone Else But Me*.

Megan: Now we're to the end of the war, and coming home, and these questions will be for both of you. How did you learn about D-Day and what did you think of D-Day?

Raymond: I thought that was the best day that ever happened. [Laugh] I was in the hospital in Luzon Island the day the war ended. The rest of the division were on their way to Japan – they all- I mean they were on a ships, they were on their way to make a beach head when war was declared over, so they turned around, I mean just turned the ships around and came back to Luzon to unload, and they were – when I got back from the hospital to Japan, there was one other fellow that was still there; all the other guys were gone home. We had a complete new battery when I got back. Well, I was in Tokyo probably about two weeks, and got shipped on home to Tacoma, Washington, and from Tacoma by train on back to Leavenworth, Kansas, and was discharged from there.

Megan: How do you feel about the dropping of the atomic bomb and the Japanese surrender?

Raymond: Well, I tell you, I think that was the best thing that ever happened. Knowing the Japanese and what they did at Pearl Harbor and all the rest of the time through the war, they deserved what they got. Had they not dropped those bombs, I'm telling you it would have been a rough job getting into Japan.

Megan: How were the veterans treated upon their return home, from your perspective?

Eileen: I thought everybody was really anxious to see them, and welcome them with open arms. I never thought about anybody having any feelings toward any of them. There was always kindness and happiness.

Megan: Were you given a reception from family, friends, and the community when you returned?

Raymond: Yes, and I think everybody was – everybody was glad to see me, and I was glad to see them. I know I can't think of anyone that wasn't glad to see us.

Megan: How did you adjust back to civilian life?

Raymond: It was quite different again. See, I was in the service almost four years, and it didn't take near as long to get used to civilian life again as it did to get used to the Army.

Megan: Did you join the American Legion or VFW?

Raymond: Yes, I joined the American Legion.

Megan: After the war, were either of you concerned about the Soviet Union's spread of communism?

Raymond: Well, I think everybody was concerned for quite a while about Russia. There was a lot of thought and a lot of everything that was put into that, but the way it turned out was the way it was supposed to.

Megan: Did you take advantage of the GI Bill?

Raymond: Yes, I did.

Megan: Did you have any concerns about the economy or inflation, or the spreading of polio, tuberculosis, or cancer after the war?

Eileen: I guess you were concerned about inflation and oh, you were so glad it was over, and the rationing was gradually,-- you just worked back into a normal routine. But I remember my mom saving sugar, and had a lot of her friends save sugar so we could have a wedding cake when we got married.

Megan: What have both of you learned from your life that might serve as good advice to people today?

Raymond: Well, you know we've been living too fast here the last many years; I think it's going to slow down some now. But we always -- everybody lives on wants. I want, I want, I want. You know, I grew up in the Depression, and we lived on what we needed; we didn't always have what we needed, and I guess I just grew up that way. We never did -- Oh, we had a good life, but we never did go really extravagant on most things, and I don't know, I think people are getting too self-centered -- not thinking about other people as much as they should. But I'm sure the way things are looking right now they're going to be concerned about other people, not just themselves.

Megan: Do have any advice?

Eileen: No. Not really. I agree with him, you know, we just are happy for what we have and everything we have, we've worked for it and I think we live -- we don't have the finest car on the market, and two of our sons farm our farm and they get along with older machinery and they're both good about working on machinery, and then our oldest grandson on the farm; he's just really good at helping them, so they don't live extravagantly, but both of the girls, our daughter-in-laws, they're both -- Linda works at Eugene Field as a secretary, and Sandy's a principal.

Eileen: I don't think they could farm and live off what they make at the farm. The girls have to provide an income to live on, and I don't feel that's right, you know, I think our farms should be able to produce and get paid –

Eileen: But anyway. Well, I think we have happy families, and that's a lot!

Megan: Well, thank you both.

Eileen: It was good to meet you.

Megan: It was nice to meet you.

Raymond: Thank you.