

JOHN RICHARD AND LORNA SLATEN

Christy: This is a portion of the oral interviews of Northwest Missouri of the 1940's program. The Nodaway Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and the support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Today's date is April 22, 2009 and this interview is being conducted at the home of Richard and Lorna Slaten in Clearmont, Missouri. The interviewer is Christy Taylor, assisting is Tanja Shimak and the interview is with Lorna and Richard Slaten.

Christy: Shall we begin with you, Richard? Can you tell me where you were born and when?

Richard: I was born at Bonnerdale, Arkansas, December the 19, 1925. Now that was rural route, Bonnerdale.

Christy: Do you have family, brothers and sisters?

Richard: I have 5.

Christy: And your parents occupation?

Richard: He was a store keeper.

Christy: And what was your life like before you entered the military?

Richard: Well, I left Arkansas when I was 9 years old, and I came to Mercer County, Missouri ,and I went to grade school there – I finished grade school in Mercer County. Then went to high school – we moved over here to Clearmont in 1941-- and I finished my high school here at Clearmont, Missouri.

Christy: And then you were drafted?

Richard: Yes.

Christy: So what did you do in between – were you drafted right out of high school?

Richard: Yes, drafted right out of high school. I was a farmer.

Christy: Did you have any other family members drafted?

Richard: No, but I had a brother that was in the service – a younger brother-- in the Korean Conflict.

Christy: Oh, okay. When you were in the service, were you aware of propaganda? Did you listen to the news, the radio?

Richard: Yes, yes, we kept abreast of the war.

Christy: So you knew what was going on on all fronts.

Richard: Yes.

Christy: How was it portrayed? How did you feel about the Japanese?

Richard: Well, they taught us to be – I realize-- they were the villain, you know, and “remember Pearl Harbor.” That was a big slogan then, and that inspired us to the war drives.

Christy: So, Pearl Harbor was a major issue?

Richard: Yes, yes, I was there twice.

Christy: Oh, okay. And you were in the Navy?

Richard: Yes.

Christy: Can you tell a little bit about your service?

Richard: Well, I took extensive training in California in the amphibious forces, and I was trained as an LCVP. I was coxswain of an LCVP and training exercises.

Christy: Now, what’s an LCVP?

Richard: That’s a landing craft vehicle of personnel and it transported troops or vehicles from ship to shore. That was what the amphibious part of it was, and I took 8 weeks of extensive training in that area.

Christy: Did you like what you were doing?

Richard: Yes, I liked it.

Christy: How about the social life, or food?

Richard: The food was alright, but lots of time we had to eat Army rations when you were training at sea , see, but they were alright.

Christy: So you served – where exactly did you serve most of your time?

Richard: In the South – In Hawaii – I was in the Hawaiian Islands, most of my time, when I was overseas. But after I left the Hawaiian Islands, I went to the Philippine Islands, and was on my way to Japan when I got enough points to get out of the service. I was in for the duration and 6 months and my time ran out.

Christy: Did you make a lot of friends.

Richard: Oh, yes.

Christy: Did you keep in touch with them still?

Richard: Yes.

Christy: How about staying in touch with family, were you able to do that while you were in the service?

Richard: Yes, and I had a lovely lady started writing to me, when I was in the service-- and her twin sister.

Christy: Oh, both of them?

Richard: Both of them. But one of them quit writing, and you know which one kept writing.

Christy: Was there entertainment where you were, USO or Red Cross, movies that were available?

Richard: Yes, there was.

Christy: So what did you do for recreation?

Richard: Well, I swam in the beach a lot, off shore there, and you could go swimming there, everyday about. It was a wonderful beach. However there were sharks in the water. Some of them guys, they went out there where there was a buoy in the bay, and bated a big old hook and caught a shark on it.

Christy: Wow.

Richard: So, but as far as I know, no one was ever bothered by the sharks.

Christy: Okay, how did you hear about D-Day, did you hear about Normandy?

Richard: Oh yes, yes, sure did.

Christy: And then the dropping of the Atomic bomb?

Richard: Yes, I sure did. That was a big hallelujah.

Christy: Okay so you were – you thought it was a good idea that Truman had them drop the bomb?

Richard: I think it was, I think it was.

Christy: So, where were you when the war was over?

Richard: I was in the Hawaiian Islands.

Christy: How did you get home?

Richard: I went back to – I got enough points to get out-- and I was shipped back to – I went by land, on a troop carrier by land, back to Manila, and then took a ship back to the United States. Then from there, we flew back to San Francisco, and we flew to St. Louis and I came back by bus from there.

Christy: Were you treated well when you came back?

Richard: Yes, I was, sure was, glad to be here.

Christy: Did you adjust well, coming back?

Richard: Yes, I think so, yes.

Christy: Are you a member of the Legion or the VFW?

Richard: American Legion.

Christy: After the war, were you concerned about communism?

Richard: Yes, we were.

Christy: And did you take advantage of the GI Bill when you came back, for education?

Richard: Yes, I did. On the job training. I think I had 33 months.

Christy: And what do you think are the differences between the wars today and World War II?

Richard: There's quite a bit of difference. I don't think they use the amphibious forces like we used them. They have amphibious landing craft, but they go from ship to shore and then on to – they go on to the land, see, but we couldn't do that then.

Christy: Really? (To Lorna) Okay, what could you tell me about yourself? You're a twin, apparently?

Lorna: Yes, that made me the youngest in the family, by 15 minutes.

Christy: 15 minutes. Okay. And where and when were you born?

Lorna: I was born February 12, 1928, at home. A Dr. Laws came out and delivered us, and I look back now, and I think --HUM, I'm sure probably mother had nothing for pain-- -after I'd experienced it. We were kind of the rage of the community, because there weren't many twins, and we lived on a farm. Our address was New Town, Missouri, but it was Mercer County, and attended the Pin Oak School, which was a 2 mile walk for us girls. We started when we were 5, and then we went to Ravanna High School. We went 6th grade through junior year, and our folks sold their farm, and we moved to Princeton, Missouri, and I graduated from there my senior year, and then our folks wanted us [afterward, to go to college]. They'd take us to Bethany, and then we'd catch a bus and come over to Northwest at Maryville, which was State Teachers College then, and on spring session and summer session, and we did that 3 different years and - we got out of school when we were 17 and teaching in country school at Ravanna [Pleasant Hill] that fall. And that was a fun experience, because, you know, you are everything when you do that, including the playing outdoors, the fires, and everything that you had to keep, but that was interesting. During this time his two sisters, younger than him, gave us his address. [Richard] was in Hawaii, and we started writing to him, because we were friends over there by Ravanna, and so ---you'd better not stopping talking, when you're this age, because you can't remember what you was going to say. But anyhow, -- what's your next question?

Christy: What about propaganda?

Lorna: Oh, I believed in it. I didn't really know how I knew what it meant, but I'm not really an historian, but I knew that propaganda was bad, you know, I didn't really know the what aspects of it.

Christy: How did you hear about Pearl Harbor?

Lorna: Ah, Let's see, that was in '47, I probably heard it then, on the TV at home.

Christy: Pearl Harbor was in '41.

Lorna: Oh, '41 you know, I don't really remember, right at the time, because we didn't have electricity. So we had a battery radio, but our Dad wouldn't listen to anything but H. V. Kaltenborn and the news, and you think a kid is gonna watch that? So we were kind of – I don't remember – I remember, though, I guess in studying history, and when we were in high school.

Christy: And so you were teaching during the war?

Lorna: No, we started teaching at – yeah, yeah, yeah, graduated in '45. '46, '47, took 3 years. You know, when you don't have communication, you really don't much know what's going on, and you don't really kind of hear what your parents – and you're a teenager, it's not that important. It's too bad.

Christy: Did rationing affect your life at all?

Lorna: I knew that there were stamps. They had to use stamps, and of course, money was so tight, because our parents lost their farm due to the depression, and then bought it back, and so things weren't easy, and I knew they had to even ration their stamps on what they bought, and so I had a little taste of that, so we kind of know a little bit about what they are talking about, when they say cut back on things. We never had it, so we had to watch all the time, anyhow.

Christy: So what did you do for entertainment at that time?

Lorna: Let's see, that would have been in '41, you said.

Christy: Anytime in the '40's there. In high school or.....

Lorna: Well, we didn't have a lot because we lived out in the country, but the folks would take us into Ravanna, and they would show little movies, and my twin sister was scared, because they always scared her, and she had bad dreams about it, but they would show it, I don't remember, on the side of the building or something, you know and of course, they was black and white, and we got to do that and we got to go to Trenton, Missouri, once a year, and that's the main time we got to go to town to Christmas shop, and we couldn't afford to go out and eat. We didn't know what that was, but the folks would go to the grocery store and get a ring of bologna. It was about that big around, and long horn cheese, a hunk of that, crackers and bananas. We couldn't afford pop, but we were thankful to have that, and that was always what we did, and once in a while there was a – about every fall, I suppose, the carnival came to town in Princeton, and so we got to go there, and the folks would give us a nickel to spend. That would buy a hamburger, and so we didn't think we had to wash it down with pop, because we knew we couldn't get it and – but, they were good times. Our mother sewed our clothes. We never had

boughten clothes until – even when we were still in high school-- she made our clothes and she was a good seamstress, and our father farmed. Mother helped on the farm and they milked. We had a whole cow barn of cows at one time, and it was a lot of work, but it was always good, because you know you look back, and I didn't miss anything, because we didn't know what to miss. You don't miss what you don't have, so all in all they were pretty happy times.

Christy: How did you learn about D-Day?

Lorna: Probably by paper in just doing history because we didn't – I think that's the way it was.

Christy: So how did you feel when the veterans came back?

Lorna: Well, I thought it was okay. No, his folks, at that time, they had moved over here from the area where I was talking about, where we were born, and a so then I – I guess that's about all I can say about that, you know, I just knew. He came back, because he sent me this picture. And he sent it to me in a letter one day and another letter, I also got a picture of his girl friend that he had. She's still alive and I thought --wonder why he sent me that, but now that I know him, I can understand why. [Laughter] 61 years last December.

Christy: Congratulations.

Lorna: Well, we haven't killed each other yet. I think that's good.

Christy: So do you two have anything else you would like to add about that period?

Lorna: No, not in the '40's. I don't think so. Do you?

Margaret: What would be some words of advice or your philosophy of life; how you managed to do what you did? Words of advice for the rest of us.

Lorna: The real thing, I think, that came out, we always went to church over to Otterbein south of Ravanna, and our mother played the piano there for I have no idea how many years. In fact that old piano is setting in there, and it's now connected with, because it was United Brethren, and now it's connected with the Methodists, United Methodists, and but they had, so to speak, "hell and brim fire" kind of people.

Richard: They closed that.

Lorna: But, I thought I really I got my start there, because I became a Christian when I was 13, and was baptized, and but our folks always taught us that honesty and, really, the integrity of what life's really about, and I think unless you have that foundation, I think you don't have anything to look forward to for the future and to this day people say you're getting old, I says I'm thankful for every day, because it is so important because if you live right, it doesn't mean that you do everything right, but you have the Lord, to – go with you, and he prepares the way and I'm happy we learned that from our parents. You don't see a lot of that.

Richard: This – her mother played this piano at a little country church, they closed that church, and the floors--so we saw several of the people around there and this piano was still in there in this building and it was about to fall through the floor-- so we asked if we could take that piano,

and they all agreed that she was entitled to it because her mother played it so much. So we got it over here and fixed it up and it's playing now.

Christy: That's wonderful.

Richard: Well, the mice had been in it, had built nests in it, and I spent a lot of time cleaning that up, but I got it all to working.

Lorna: I talked with a relative, probably a second cousin, I don't know what, and anyhow, they said as far as they were concerned it was fine, and they talked to somebody else and so it was done the right way, because, and you'll notice it when you got out, it has candles that used to be the way they had of lighting, you know, and so I was so happy to get it.

Richard: It's quite an antique really.

Lorna: So am I.

Richard: Well.

Lorna: Anyhow I was – but that all of the church – I won't say the church, but our folks, you know, made it sure that we got there and they didn't have a whole lot of extra to put into this sort of thing, but we always did that. Sunday morning, Sunday night, and we probably went during the week, and they had dinners like they used to out under the big old trees, and those big old trees are still there. The church fell in, it's still standing, but it's going to fall down one of these days. But anyhow, I'm just thankful for the training we had from our parents and they didn't have to beat us with it. We just knew not to use bad words, and we didn't hear them around them, so that's good.

Christy: Well, thank you.

Richard: Well that's very thoughtful of you to come out.

Christy: Appreciate you talking to us very much.

Lorna: Thank you very much for coming.

* *Entries in brackets [] indicate additions or corrections*