

VICTOR AND DELORES SLOAN

Today's date is April 14, 2009, and this interview is being conducted at the Nodaway County Historical Society Museum located in Maryville, Missouri. My name is Chad Halstead and assisting is Margaret Kelley. The interviewees are Delores and Victor Sloan. Birth date is February 7, 1926. He was in the Navy and his highest rank achieved was Seaman 1st Class.

Chad: I'll start with you, Delores. Where and when were you born?

Delores: I was born in Shenandoah, Iowa, July 17, 1928.

Chad: Is there any details of your family – your parents' occupations, how many brothers and sisters?

Delores: We moved to Jefferson City, Missouri, when I was about five. My dad was transferred by Montgomery Wards where he worked. I had 5 brothers and one sister. In the beginning, my mom stayed home and took care of us. We stayed in Jefferson City until 1945.

Chad: Victor, tell us about your life in 1940 before you entered the military.

Victor: I just grew up on a farm. That's about it.

Chad: Did you have any other family members who participated in the war?

Victor: I had a half brother who was in the Coast Guard. He was in earlier and went in to beat the draft, really.

Chad: Do you know how did the United States portray the war and the Japanese?

Victor: I don't understand quite what you mean – portray.

Chad: Back home, did you hear any of your uncles or relatives talk about the war or the Japanese or did they have any.....

Victor: Well, it was quite a– the war back then was quite the thing. I mean, we had all the battle we needed in Europe and we switched over into the islands and then Japan. And that was just about the main subject because war in Europe was as wicked as could be and a lot of guys got killed there.

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

Victor: Well, that was a big topic. I mean, everybody was looking forward to – they figured that they had to do something because it was not only losing a lot of men and a lot of ships and it just looked like there was no end until they dropped the bomb on Pearl

Harbor. From then on it changed. Japan hit Pearl Harbor and that's what really tipped it off. They'd had all they wanted of it and they said the only way that they was going to wipe them out was to hit Japan with the atomic bomb. If you'd ever seen where it hit, why, there was hardly anything left.

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

Victor: Well, I guess just the news about it. You know, just whatever was - it's just like now. We've still got reporters in every country. In Iraq - I don't know how many reporters we've got in Iraq - and it's simple to get messages back and forth now and they've got them everywhere. And that's just about the way they had it then - they had news correspondents.

Chad: So were you drafted or enlisted into the service?

Victor: I was drafted. About everybody that become 18 years old was drafted unless they volunteered ahead of time. If they were able to go, you went. Of course, like I said, you had a choice of either Army, Navy, or Marines. And when I went in, now all the time, I don't know if they had that choice all the time. I can't say they did.

Chad: Did you receive any specialized training?

Victor: Just boot camp and then training on the guns on the ships.

Chad: Did you find it easy to adapt to military life, the duties, the boot camp, socializing?

Victor: Boot camp was kind of rough, I mean, about the main thing they did was paper work and march you a lot and learn fire fighting and they probably figured we'd be fighting fires on navy ships and stuff like that. But, outside of that, it was just a training camp.

Chad: Could you tell us about the places and your duties at these places while you were in the military?

Victor: Well, on ship duty, you mean?

Chad: Yeah, what did you do?

Victor: Well, like I say, when I went to armed guards, we was gunners on merchant ships. Then I went down and we took gunners - went to gunners school at Gulf Port, Mississippi. And then we went over to New Orleans and that's where I shipped out - my first ship - a brand new ship - American Rochester? - which was a brand new ship - a merchant ship. Now don't get them mixed up with the others. It was the SS Amermar, which stood for steam ship - Amermar. [American Merchant Marine]

Chad: Did you witness any combat missions – did you participate in any during the war?

Victor: No, I did not. I happened to be in the right place at the right time.

Chad: So did you form friendships while you were in the service?

Victor: Well, I had several – well, I had several friends I met later. And me and Richard Slaten - a fellow from Clearmont. We went in at the same time. In fact, at boot camp, he slept in one bunk and I slept in the other one. He was either above me or below me, I don't remember which. And then he left boot camp the same time I did. And then that's the last I seen of him.

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

Victor: You didn't do much. You could write home, but if you wrote a letter home then you had to take it to the lieutenant and he read the letter and if he didn't like what was in it, he'd cut it out. I did not write home at all. When I hit port, most generally, in New York City, that's where the troop transports - the merchant ships, most of them came in New York, and the first thing I'd do as soon as I got ashore, I'd call home on the telephone. Margaret, do you remember back when the old style phones-- I remember when I was in Clearmont it might take, I don't know how long, just to call from my place to your place or home. But I could go to a telephone in New York City and call - I'd call collect and I never failed to get home. Now why – how come – I do not know. Of course, I didn't do it very often, because I wasn't home very often. But I remember two or three different times when I called home and told the folks where I was and what I'd been doing.

Chad: So, in your free time what did you do for entertainment while in the service?

Victor: Well, on the ships you was checking the guns out and stuff like that.

Chad: Did you have any movies to watch or....

Victor: No, not on the merchant ships. Huh-uh. Some of the guys had guitars and some of the merchant marines had guitars and they'd play and sing. There was a lot to see if you stood the watch a lot of times - just a lot to see. It's amazing how far you can see from the decks of the ships. I mean, just any direction you wanted to look that's all you could see was ships – that's how much a convoy was. That's a convoy.

Chad: What were your thoughts, your reactions, about D-Day?

Victor: Well, I was glad it was over. I'm sure anybody that was in on it was glad it was over with.

Chad: What about the dropping of the atomic bomb?

Victor: Well, I'm sure everybody was glad of it because it happened, because that was about the end of the war right there.

Chad: So do you with President Truman's decision on dropping the bomb?

Victor: Absolutely. Absolutely. He was pretty sharp. When he said drop her, he dropped her.

Chad: Do you remember what you were doing when you got the news when the war was over?

Victor: I expect I was still home wasn't I, Dee?

Delores: I thought you were on a ship heading for Japan when the bomb fell.

Victor: No, the war was over. I'm not sure about this deal.

Delores: You came home in May of '46. Was it over by then?

Kelley: September, '45, when they signed.

Delores: Pretty much, it was over.

Victor: Well, I know that Japan, I think Japan surrendered when I was on the way and ended up in Japan. I was on that ship going out to go on an invasion of Japan, but Japan surrendered so I went on in, then, and served in occupation forces in Yokosuka, Japan.

Chad: Were you given a reception when you returned home?

Victor: No, I wasn't big- time enough.

Chad: So did you find it easy to adjust back to civilian life when you got home?

Victor: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I just – I went to work. The main thing was getting a job.

Chad: So did you stay in contact with the people you served with?

Victor: Well, a lot of them's dead. I guess Slaten – he's still in Clearmont. He's the one I went to service with. Far as I know Stanley Hawkins may be alive. And Dale Moore...A few of them I knew and went to camp with are still alive.

Dee: That one from Cape Girardeau came and visited us once. And then the one over east, in....What was the name of that town - Pattonsburg - came once. So those two he visited with once.

Victor: Well, we made special trips to see Stanley a couple of times. They're just so far apart, you know, and there just wasn't too many people that...

Delores: In Tennessee

Chad: Did you take advantage of the GI bill for education, housing, home mortgages, or any of those benefits?

Victor: I never fooled with it. I still - I never have. I should have lined up for - like health benefits, but I just missed the date. Somebody told me I needed to go sign up, but I've never been to a VA Hospital. In fact, they're all right, but our youngest boy was in the service, retired, and they never did him a bit of good. He still can't get them to give him an operation. They just run him around and run him around. Her brother is about the same way. They darned near let him die on the floor.

Chad: So what would you consider to be the biggest difference among the wars today and the war then?

Victor: Well, it's so much more - different weapons and all different stuff. It's so much different. TV coverage now. Just like I can't understand the war in Iraq, but yet we go from the United States and go to Iraq and take pictures. That's something that's different. Of course, there was reporters all over in World War II, in Japan, too, but they still do it.

Chad: Delores, could you tell us about the woman's role in the war?

Dee: Well, as a teenager I didn't know much about it, except what I read about Rosy the Riveter and the women that worked in the factories.

Chad: So at this time during World War II a lot of women worked in lots of factories. Did you happen to know any moms or friends?

Delores: No.

Victor: There were a few in Clearmont worked in the factories [Mildred Bears and Meredith Evans]

Delores: I wasn't there then.

Chad: Were you aware of any of the propaganda back home?

Delores: No, not really. Like he said, we just called it news. What we heard on the radio we took for truth, not knowing now if it was true or not.

Chad: What about when you'd go to movies? Did they have reels of different events of the war? Did you see photos of battles and things like that?

Delores: Not so much in the movies. Well, in the movies some of the news reels. But the movies, I just will not watch a war movie.

Chad: During the war, what did you do for leisure time, in your spare time?

Delores: During the war? I was still in school.

Chad: High school at the time?

Delores: High school. Roller skated was about our main entertainment.

Chad: Any board games?

Delores: No, not really. Card games. We played a lot of card games.

Chad: Did members of the community meet together in houses or did you guys meet at a certain place?

Delores: Not during those years, no.

Victor: We'd just go to friends' houses.

Delores: After we were married, we got into that more, then I was home.

Chad: Can you explain the effects upon your family created by the gas rationing? I notice you brought some samples of that today to show us.

Delores: My family wasn't affected as much as probably his was being on the farm. We lived in town and I don't remember being affected at all by the gas ration.

Victor: Well, you just didn't drive too much either.

Delores: On the farm you would notice it much more, being out in the country.

Chad: So you in town – it didn't really affect you. So they basically had rations to obviously would get you by.

Victor: Everybody had the ration books.

Delores: Meat was rationed. Sugar was rationed. Gasoline.

Chad: So if you can compare the economy of the 1940s during the war to the economy of now, is there any similarities or major differences?

Delores: Oh, all the difference in the world. Salaries are so much higher. Prices are much higher. Everything is available if you have the money to buy it. And back then even if you had the money, you couldn't always buy it, things that you wanted.

Chad: So the war opened up a lot of jobs for people and workers?

Victor: Oh, yeah, a lot of factories. Ammunition factories, and just about everything they needed.

Chad: Off the top of your head, do you know any songs or movies that you remember going to watch during the war?

Delores: A lot of songs. Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition. Do you remember that one?

Victor: Rosie the Riveter. The Boys Will Come Marching Home.

Delores: White Cliffs of Dover. There were a lot of songs about the war areas.

Victor: What's the one that they would play over the radio?

Delores: Oh, Rum and Coca Cola? That was the Andrews Sisters and Coke was Coke and not the drink. And they banned it on the radio.

Victor: They banned it. It started out "when the Yankee Goes to the" – what was the name of the city?

Delores: It was bad.

Victor: They banned it and the only place you could hear it was on the jukebox.

Chad: In your perspective, how were the veterans treated on their arrival home?

Delores: After World War II? I think they had a lot more respect than they did later during the Vietnam War and all. And there were parades. A lot more respect at the end.

Victor: Now in small towns you didn't see much. I happened to be in New York when they had a bunch of them. They had a big parade there. There's a lot of difference in now and then.

Chad: Were you guys aware of the Holocaust at home during World War II? Did it leak out in the newspapers?

Delores: I think we read about it in the paper, but it was so remote that I'm not sure that we gave it as much thought, because we didn't understand as much about it as we did later.

Victor: I think they knew that the Germans had about taken all of the Jews....

Delores: I'm reading a book now written by a Jew survivor of the Holocaust. And from his perspective England and the United States neither one did what they could have to stop it. Being aware of it, they seemed to overlook it a lot.

Chad: There's also numerous assassinations attempts on Hitler during World War II. Did any of those come back to the states to the newspapers or did you ever know anything about that?

Delores: I don't remember being aware of it. We might not have read the news, you know, being teenagers. We had other interests, I think.

Victor: That was kind of a deal that didn't work out either. They wanted to assassinate him, but it didn't pan out. He got his when the Americans marched into Germany then.

Chad: After the war, were there any concerns about the economy, inflation, the spread of polio, cancer?

Delores: I don't know about inflation. It was rough because there just wasn't as much money. There was very little money, but then it was the same for everyone. So we weren't so much aware of it because everybody had to do with very little. Polio, I don't remember

Victor: That's when the shots came out, wasn't it?

Delores: We were aware of it, but we didn't know anyone personally affected.

Chad: Before the TV, what were your listening habits when you were listening to the radio?

Delores: Well, some of the serial stories, like The Shadow, and that type of thing and then music, mainly music. Lum and Abner, Jack Benny, and all those comedy shows.

Delores: Just the radio.

Victor: What was - the Grand Ol' Opry was on the radio, wasn't it?

Delores: I don't remember listening to that after we were married, but before.

Victor: Yeah, before, but...Radio, just wasn't too many stations, and you just didn't get very far. I remember - how come they had, I don't know - my grandparents had a radio

that you could turn and pick up police stations and they'd call and you could hear the police like in St Joe and Kansas City. How they ever happened to get one I don't know. They just happened to come with the radio and I don't know how they could even afford the radio.

Chad: After the war, were you concerned about Soviet Union's spread of Communism?

Delores: I don't remember giving it a lot of thought. We were so far removed from it.

Victor: Well, that's it. And it was so far away, you know, that you just didn't give it much thought. You know, it can't happen here.

Delores: We knew it was wrong, but we just didn't really dwell on it, I guess.

Chad: All right, well, thank you guys very much. Good to see you.

Delores: Thank you, Chad.

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