

ROY SEIPEL

Roberts: This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri of 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. Today's date is April 9, 2009, and this interview is being conducted at the Nodaway County Museum. The interviewer is Rebecca Roberts and assisting is Lacy Rudicill. The interviewee is Roy Seipel, birthday November 29, 1922. He served in the Navy during World War II and his rank when he came out of the Navy was Aviation Machinist First Class.

Roberts: So, you said that you were born here in Skidmore? Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

Seipel: Well, I was a product of the Depression, I guess. The crash was in '29, I would have been seven years old then, and my folks were farmers; we were a rural family and we sure knew what hard times were.

Roberts: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Seipel: Yeah; we were a family of seven; I had six brothers and sisters. Three sisters and there were four of us boys. My youngest brother died when he was five years old. There were actually just six of us survived and a brother and sister are all that's left now. Coletta Merrigan is my sister and Hubert, goes by H. J. Seipel, is my brother; he was also a Navy veteran.

Roberts: Oh, okay. So, you did have - he was the only other member of your family that was in the military during the war?

Seipel: Yeah.

Roberts: So, what was life like before the war started?

Seipel: How's that?

Roberts: What was life like before the war started? What did your family do for entertainment?

Seipel: Well, [pause, laugh] worked, I guess - my father, my dad died from accidental death when I was eight years old, so my Mother was left with these seven orphaned kids to raise and, of course, she had to move to town and oh, it - how she ever kept seven little orphaned kids together in the Depression still remains a mystery to me, but it was through a lot of help from the church, neighbors, and good people.

Roberts: So, do you remember hearing about the war starting?

Seipel: World War II?

Roberts: World War II.

Seipel: Oh, yeah, and I can remember the attack on Pearl Harbor very clearly. I mean, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and I later learned from history that while us getting into the World War II, I suppose, was just inevitable, but I think there again was a lot of politics involved.

Roberts: So, do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Seipel: Yeah, definitely. I was shucking corn for a farmer out east of Maryville and, oh, they started the draft, and most of the fellows that, of my age or slightly older, that I ran around with were starting to be drafted and I couldn't help but think I ought to be where they were, but my mother - at that time to volunteer for the service, you had to be 21 or drafted and my mother- she wouldn't sign, because I was a minor --- permission and I guess I bugged her until I wore her out and finally she said, "Well, I don't think it's a good thing, but if you insist that's what you want to do, I'll sign it." Three months after, I was in the Navy, I decided Mom was right. [laugh] It was too late then, but looking backwards over my life, the fact that I entered the service when and the way I did, the discipline, I didn't have a father, and the discipline, even though it was kind of hard to take at the time, was probably the best thing that ever happened to me.

Roberts: So, where did you do your basic training?

Seipel: At Great Lakes.

Roberts: And how long were you there?

Seipel: I was at Great Lakes for two months, and then I was assigned to aviation machinist school at Navy Pier in Chicago and I was there about almost a year; about ten or eleven months. The schooling for aviation machinist was nine months, but the procedure-wise, the new arrivals did the compartment cleaning and housekeeping, scullery dishes and such like for a couple of months before they started their schooling, so that accounted for the rest of that year.

Roberts: So, when did you get shipped overseas and where did you go first?

Seipel: Well, I was several bases in the - well, I went to gunnery school after Mechanic Aviation, Machinist School, and I thought I wanted to be an aerial gunner but my weight was too heavy and I had an option of either going back to mechanic, or lighter than air - balloon or blimps, and I thought that was kind of a sitting duck. That didn't appeal to me at all, so I didn't accept that offer and I - well, I went to radar school. That was along with the gunnery school in Memphis, Tennessee, and I guess it was about three months that I was there, and then my next transfer was to California, and I was based at several land-based units of the Navy. Assignment was upkeep of that base and the terminology they used was "ship's company." You belonged to the household of attending to the base that you were stationed at. Well, it was almost the time that the war was over when I was assigned to a squadron and sent to a school for a new aircraft we were supposed to get, the Douglas A-20, a plane that we never did get. The rest of my squadron was gone overseas already and we were supposed to leave San Diego and join this squadron on Guam. Incidentally, because of the events, the war being over, we never did get the

aircraft that I was trained to service. The aircraft that we had at that time was the Martin Marauder. A plane the Navy called the JM and you might know it better by the Army used it an awful lot, it was a medium bomber, the B-26, the Martin Marauder. Well, after I was assigned to a squadron, I was eventually assigned to a plane captain, they called it, and that was your – that particular plane that you were assigned to was your and your crew's responsibility. As plane captain, I had three or four assistants or people under me, but the responsibility hinged on me. I was the one that had to sign and one of the requirements was the plane captain that signed that everything was alright was required to fly with it the first test flight. And I guess I survived.

Roberts: So, did you – were you on any combat missions, or did you do mostly the mechanics?

Seipel: No, our squadron was such that we were never in combat. We had reconnaissance planes that were equipped to take photographs. The Pentagon would send out an order for – they wanted photographs of a certain harbor, and that was one of our assignments. Another was we towed what they called socks – nylon sock for ground shipboard or ground installations to shoot at for target practice and they had photography such that they could tell what kind of a score they had from their target practice. And even though they were towed with a cable a mile behind, but every once in a while, they'd find a fifty-caliber slug where it had gone through the fuselage of the plane. So, you know if it was a mile away that they were kind of off their target.

Roberts: Did you keep in contact with people from your unit after the war?

Seipel: Oh, some to an extent; at Christmas we used to exchange cards, but eventually it just dwindled away. The last contact that I had was several years ago, a fellow that I was with wound up for an inspector for some airline, and a fellow that I knew from Graham, here, that worked under him, and we used to keep pretty good contact that way. Incidentally, they're both deceased now, and so I don't – oh, and the American Legion magazine – I always go over their column of scheduled reunions and such like, and I never did see my utility squadron, you know, cataloged for a union.

Roberts: Were you able to keep in contact with your family when you were in Guam?

Seipel: Yes, pretty good. Of course, the mail was censored – was restricted – what kind of information you could divulge, but the popular thing back in World War II was, I think they called it V-mail; it was just a little photograph about the size of a business card and you'd write a letter and it was photographed. V-Mail, I believe, was what we called it. Hell, I didn't think I'd ever forget something like that, but guess it's been so long since – since I reviewed something like that, I'm not sure what they called it, now.

Roberts: So now what did you for entertainment when you were in the service? Did you see the USO or. . .

Seipel: Well, in state-side, the USO, especially, places like Chicago, they were awful nice entertainment centers, I mean, they would have dances or furnish you tickets to go to different theatrical performances, and I think that you would have to say that the American public were awful responsive, good to service men. I know some places and chapters were better than others,

but I sure marveled at the good treatment that civilians had for servicemen. That was my experience.

Roberts: So, were you aware when you were in state-side of any propaganda about the enemy?

Seipel: Oh, yeah, even state-side, but worse than that, when we were based on the island of Guam, they had a gal that would come on the radio, a propagandist – Tokyo Rose; I suppose that you’ve either heard about or read stories about Tokyo Rose; oh, she’d come up with the damnedest propaganda of what was happening back home, you know, just I don’t know what terminology you’d use for what information she put out, but some people were more gullible than others as far as believing it.

Roberts: So, how did you feel about the dropping of the atomic bomb? Did you think that was a good decision on the Truman administration’s part?

Seipel: Well, we were glad that the war was going to be over, but I still to this day have mixed emotions about it and I think you can intelligently argue pro or con; I mean some claim that more lives would have been taken or destroyed if we hadn’t have done it, and some claim the opposite. But, I know that taking human life is a no-no, I mean it’s in my belief it’s the wrong thing to do, but I don’t know what will ever happen to stop it.

Roberts: So, where were you when you heard that the war was over?

Seipel: Going overseas. I was not to my destination of joining my squadron in – on Guam yet, I mean our squadron was on Guam, but I had just finished this Douglas factory school for the aircraft that we were supposed to be assigned to and, consequently, on account of the war ending, we never did get the new aircraft. So, my schooling for that was time wasted for, I guess, me and our government both.

Roberts: So, then did you just turn around and come home after that?

Seipel: Oh, no, no! Our squadron was on Guam and I joined my squadron with the same old aircraft that they had been using, the Martin Marauder.

Roberts: So, when did you finally get to come back home?

Seipel: Well, when the war was over, by the time I got to Guam, and see, during World War II, they had a point system. You had to have so many points to be discharged, and, of course, your marital status had something to do with it. The guys that were married got extra points. But I had plenty of points in November, shortly after the war was over, that I was eligible to come home, but the people that were experienced, had the experience that I had in the squadron, they froze the personnel. I mean, even though you had enough points to go back state side, they were ignored, you know, because you were frozen personnel, and so I didn’t get to come back home until the last of March in 1946, when I should have been eligible to come back home in about November of 1945.

Roberts: Did you think that the United States should have entered the war earlier when it was just in Europe?

Seipel: No, I can't say that I do agree with that. I do believe, though, from what history bears out, that the United States was, in a sense, just itching for an excuse to join into World War II, and, of course, the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor filled that need.

Roberts: Did you hear – was there a lot of propaganda about the Germans when the war first began?

Seipel: No, I guess I was too busy enjoying myself as a teenager to be as conscious of world affairs as I am today, or as I was even when I was twenty-five versus teenager.

Roberts: So, what was life like for you when you got back to the United States?

Seipel: Oh, radically changed. I mean all the young males, because of the draft, left for the Army, and it was all horse farming in our part of the country at that time. Well, pop couldn't do what he could do with three or four or five boys, or hired men, and so tractors became absolutely necessary. A tractor, depending on size of course, they weren't nowhere near the size they are now, but for an ordinary farmer, a small tractor would take the place of anywhere from two to four or six head of horses, and when we got back home and discharged, why, the machinery that had sat around that was tractor drawn machinery was, you wouldn't even recognize what they were until somebody told you.

Roberts: And then you got married when you got home?

Seipel: No, I was back home, I got home in 1946, in March, and I didn't marry until in January, 1950. That ain't so long looking backwards, but at that time, it seemed like quite a while.

Roberts: Were aware – or how did you feel when you found about the Japanese internment camps that we had in California during the war?

Seipel: Well, I think from what I know now that we were a long-ways – a long ways from perfect in the way we treated the Japanese residents of California and – I mean -changing sides, if I were a Japanese in California and treated, having been treated, the way that the personnel, both the military and civilian, treated the Japanese, I would have trouble forgiving.

Roberts: Do you see any comparisons between World War II and the wars that we're in today – anything that you think we should be doing differently, that we haven't maybe learned our lesson from previous wars?

Seipel: Well, how come that of all the wars since time began that we haven't learned how useless war is? But every second generation gets involved in another war. I mean it's not so much each generation, but generally through history, if you look, it just about skips a generation and then the next generation either creates or becomes involved in a war.

Roberts: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to talk about or anything that you remember that you'd like to bring up?

Seipel: I wish I had the answers for what you did ask.

Roberts: Oh, I think you gave some pretty good answers.

Seipel: I guess we all have to agree that history repeats itself and that's definitely the story of wars; people – we don't learn from the events of history that have happened, and I don't know how we'll change that.

Roberts: Maybe that's what we history majors are working on right now. Hopefully, people will see this interview and learn something from it. I really appreciate your coming down here to talk to me. I don't have any more question unless you have something you want to add?

Seipel: I have always maintained since I am home that I don't know as I'm extra patriotic, but I have no regrets, in fact, I'm proud that I was able to serve the four years I served for my country, but I wouldn't give a dime to serve another day. [Laugh]

Roberts: I think we all appreciated it, I know from talking with my grandpas, what some of the experiences were like and that it wasn't easy at all.

Seipel: Well, I hope some of the info I had will be valuable somewhere some time.

Roberts: I'm sure it will be. I'm sure it will be.