INTERVIEW **Russell Unruh**

YEAR **2005**

GRAY COUNTY ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

NAME: Russell Unruh
DATE: November 28, 2005
PLACE: Cimarron, Kansas

INTERVIEWER: Joyce Suellentrop

PROJECT SERIES: Veterans Oral History Project for Gray County

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:
Russell Unruh, raised on a farm north of Cimarron, went to basic training in the Great Lakes. He was trained in radio work in Gulfport, Mississippi. His group was shipped out of there to San Francisco. Because he had high blood pressure, he was not sent overseas and worked with many others in a communications center in California. He taught himself to use the equipment there and served until his discharge. He returned to the Cimarron area when his father became ill so that he could help on the farm.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Entering the Navy and training and life as a part of a radio communications group that was based in San Francisco were talked about. They discussed the dirty '30s in Kansas and how his family fared through that time. Russ set up his own farm bookkeeping system on the computer and still works at it at his home in Cimarron with special sight equipment. He has macular degeneration.

COMMENTS ON INTERVIEW:

SOUND RECORDINGS: 60 minute tape

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 1 hour

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: none

TRANSCRIPT: 24 pages

ORAL HISTORY
Unruh, Russell
Interview Date: November 28, 2005

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Russell Unruh (RU)
Tape 1 of 2
Side A

JS - The first question is how old were you when the war started in 1939 and what did you, your friends, and relatives think about the war and did you know anyone that was opposed to the war?

RU - How old was I? Fourteen, and there wasn't much discussion about the war in this area until about '41 or so and we got concerned about what Germany was doing.

JS - How would you have gotten the news of the war if you did?

RU - By radio and what ever my folks read in the newspapers.

JS - So in 1941, you are talking about Pearl Harbor?

RU - Yeah, because I was still in high school then and I remember we had a general assembly and they announced it. They had a speaker set up and gave President Roosevelt's speech over the radio.

JS - And you were in Cimarron at that time?

RU - I was in Cimarron at that time.

JS - Did young men begin to enlist at that time or not?

RU - Yes, there were some that enlisted and a lot of them were drafted. Every week there was an announcement in the local paper of who was leaving.

JS - Did you have friends or relatives who had enlisted?

RU - Yes, in fact I had a cousin who had enlisted ahead of it and he was in the Navy, but was on a Maritime ship. His biggest concern was that they didn't really have enough guns on that Maritime ship to really protect it.

JS - Where was this, the Atlantic or Pacific?

RU - In the Pacific.

JS - Was he from Cimarron?

RU - He was from Montezuma, Gray County. I remember that Dwight Roberts was killed on the Arizona. I remember him leaving and enlisting. I remember him in high school here.

JS - He was killed at Pearl Harbor?

RU - Yes, in fact, I think he was the first Gray County casualty.

JS - I hadn't run into that.

RU - Check the records. I am pretty sure he was.

JS - He wouldn't have been the only casualty during World War Two?

RU - Oh no.

JS - There were others. You said that you tried to enlist at one time. What happened?

RU - They said that my eyesight was bad, but I found out later it was more my blood pressure than anything. I wanted in the Navy so bad and I didn't want to go to the Army. When I was drafted, there were, I think, six fellows that went to Fort Leavenworth and took our physical. That particular day they were taking every other person and putting them in the Navy. I happened to be in the right spot and got in the Navy.

JS - Why did you want the Navy rather than the Army?

RU - I had a brother that was in the Navy and he was telling me, "Your bed is as clean as you make it. You don't have to lie out in the mud."

JS - That's a good reason. When did he join?

RU - I think he went in, in '42. He was quite a bit ahead of me.

JS - Where did he see service?

RU - He never did talk about it much, but he was in the Navy and he had a desk job most of the time.

JS - In the States and not overseas?

RU - I think he spent some time in an officer's deal in Guam.

JS - You said you and others went to Fort Leavenworth for your physical. What were the physical and induction and your first day like?

RU - We went to Fort Leavenworth and they just started you down through there and gave you your physical and that took one day. Then you came back through this line and gave preference to Army or Navy. I said Navy and they said, "You're in the right spot." I remember Joe Redger was right behind me and he wanted to go to the Navy, too. Had he got another person in between us he would have got in the Navy.

JS - Did others from Cimarron get in the Navy at the same time?

RU - No, I was the only one from here. The other boys were from other parts of the county and we didn't know them. I knew Joe because he lived here in Cimarron. I think the next morning we were back in Kansas City and it had only been about six weeks before that that I had tried to enlist. This doctor remembered me. He said, "He was here sometime back." I said I was and he asked how many red marks I had on my physical. I said I hadn't seen any. He looked at it and said, "It's a good thing you are going in the Navy, you wouldn't have lasted very long in the Army." I never knew what the problem was until I went to radio school in Gulfport, Mississippi. Then I was shipped out to San Francisco and there were seven of us that went from Gulfport to San Francisco and they lost our records. We set seven weeks on Treasure Island practically doing nothing waiting for our records to catch up with us. Then when we finally got them, I had to take another physical out there. I looked up there. My dog tags had USNI on them and most of the other's had USNR on them. That was US Navy Reserve. USN was the boys that had signed up for six years.

JS - What did USNI mean?

RU - Medically disqualified for overseas service. It was all due to high blood pressure. They didn't know what to do for it back in those days.

JS - But you didn't know you had it?

RU - No.

JS - When you were in Kansas City, did you go through a ceremony to become part of the Navy?

RU - There were other boys there and I hardly knew any of them and from Kansas City they shipped us to Great Lakes Naval Training Center and that's where I took my boot camp.

JS - Could you describe boot camp?

RU - You learn how to respect other people. All of our officers of our companies were not.....they were first class officers and had no, in the Navy you call them, gold braids on them. When you got out of boot camp, technically the only person you were required to salute was a lieutenant or a grade up. We had to salute these chief petty officers because they were our camp commanders. They were trying to teach us respect for them. I feel nowadays that our children have lost respect for a lot of things.

JS - Authority?

RU - Yes, authority.

JS - Was there a physical part of the boot camp. Did you have to do exercises and calisthenics?

RU -Yeah, we had physical training everyday. We had at least an hour. We had to run obstacle courses and do push ups. We had to qualify to swim at least fifty yards.

JS - Did you know how to swim?

RU - No, I had never learned to swim. I learned how in the Navy. They felt that if the ship was going down, you would have to swim at least fifty yards away from it or else it would suck you on down with it as it sank.

JS - You were taught how to salute, right?

RU - Yes.

JS - What other things were you taught, like marching, etc?

RU - Marching and you had classes where you had to learn to identify all the airplanes, whether they were ours or foreign. They would take you in a dark room and put pictures of ships up like you were seeing them out on the ocean. We had to learn how to identify those ships, whether it was aircraft carrier, destroyer or whatever it was.

JS - What would you look for to identify a ship?

RU - Mostly how many stacks they had on them and whether they were at an angle or straight up. They also explained that you could identify the gun turrets on them.

JS - Were these United States ships or were they foreign ships, also?

RU - They would mix them up and they had a number on them and you had to write down whether they were a destroyer and American or Russian, etc.

JS - Was that difficult to do?

RU- Yeah, in a way it was. I had a Hawaiian boy in my boot camp that had been in the Merchant Marine Service and he knew how to look off in the distance. They had classes where we would go through them verbally for a week or so. At the end of a week or so they would give us a written test on them. When you look out in the distance, you look up, you don't look right down. If you look up, you will see your vision down here better than if you look down on the water. If you look toward the sky you will spot an object quicker.

JS - He told you that?

RU - He helped us out on that because he had been out on the sea and he knew that.

JS - What if you weren't able to identify, was there a certain number that you had to get?

RU - There was a certain number that you had to know to qualify.

JS - Were there other people in the boot camp from Kansas?

RU - A few, in boot camp there were probably quite a few. A company was 100 men and I don't know how many companies were on the base. We had two days of fire fighting. They took us over to a place and they had a big old cement building about the size of this house and they had diesel fuel on it and touched that off and they would let ten or twelve guys put that out. They'd get it going again and tell us whether to use spray water or forced water or mist to put it out. Still in that day they did not mingle the Negroes with white boys. I saw the Negro companies marching and I am glad the white companies did not have to march in competition to them. They could strut and walk and they had cadence counters.

JS - They were part of the Navy?

RU - Oh yeah, they were in the Navy. When I went to Gulfport to radioman school why we had a Negro boy in, I call them chicken houses, kind of a round top. There were twenty-five boys in each one with upper and lower bunks and we had a table to where we could sit to do our studying. There were four Negro boys in my company down at Gulfport.

JS - Was it your first experience with meeting them?

RU - With Negroes? Not particularly.

JS - Then you went to Fort Leavenworth, then Kansas City and right to boot camp?

RU - We went to boot camp and then after boot camp, they gave us a seven day leave. We went back down there and reported in and they knew what you were going to do and you had to wait until there was a 100 men going. They had one radioman school in Guam and the other one is in Gulfport, Mississippi. I was in the next to the last class that went to Gulfport before they shut it down. I mean, shut the radio school down.

JS - Was it difficult to leave home? Was that the first time you had been away?

RU - Yes, it was the first time I had been away for any length of time. I had been to some church camps once or twice for a week, but they were only fifty or sixty miles away.

JS - How did you view going away?

RU - I was ready to go. My mother was real upset over the deal. She didn't believe in war. She wanted me to sign up as a Conscientious Objector and I refused.

JS - Why did you refuse?

RU - I believed that we had an obligation to protect our country.

JS - Your religion was Mennonite then?

RU - At the time, yes. Her religion was Mennonite, my dad was a Methodist. That was the reason her people left Prussia because back in those days, they did not want to take up arms.

JS - That is one of the traditional peace religions, certainly. You mentioned a Redger, would you say that most of the young men with the Mennonite religion joined or were Conscientious Objectors?

RU - There is a church right south of town that used to set north of Ingalls and there is a school for kids there now. Ninety percent of those boys signed up as Conscientious Objectors. Down here around Montezuma where the Holdeman, bearded Mennonites are, I can't tell you how many of them signed up that way. Being that I was neighbors out there we are kind of more familiar with them. Those boys had to go to certain places and work. Some of them weren't left to stay home. They had to go someplace, maybe, like on a dairy or something. They had hours and restrictions there. I know a good friend of mine had parents that were adamant and he had signed up CO. He went down to the draft board

and pulled his name off the CO list and within three weeks they drafted him. His parents were upset, but the war was close enough to being over and he got into the Marines.

JS - You said that your brother had joined so your mother saw two of hers go.

RU - No, he was a half brother. He was already married and lived in Wichita. In face, he was drafted, probably through the Sedgwick County draft board.

JS - You had seven days leave and when you were going places, did you take the train?

RU - Yeah, that's the only way we traveled. All our transportation was free, like when I got leave. I got on the train in Chicago and rode it home. When I went back, I had to be back in Great Lakes at a certain time so you had to see what train made connections in order to get there on time.

JS - You didn't have to have a ticket, you could just get on?

RU - You just showed them that you had a card in your billfold with your identification. Of course, you had that uniform on. Everybody respected the uniform.

JS - I didn't realize that. There were a lot of people from different parts of the service traveling on the trains then?

RU - Yes, I know when I went back, when I got on the train, I arranged it. I had another brother living in Kansas City and I could see him for five or six hours between trains. When I got on that train it was so crowded that I stood for three or four hours. Finally the conductor said, "Where you going?" I said, "Great Lakes." He said next stop he would have an empty seat and he wanted me to be right at the door so he could see that I got a seat. That's how they respected servicemen back then.

JS - So you went back to Great Lakes and then you were assigned to Gulfport radio school.

RU - Yes, Gulfport, Mississippi.

JS - Did you have a choice in that?

RU - Yes, during boot camp you had a day when you took tests nearly all day long. That's how they determined what you were going to do. Evidently, when they ran that code by me, I evidently got the right letters or something. That's how I qualified.

JS - Did that satisfy you? Did you know what radio school was?

RU - It was a two year course crammed into you in twenty weeks. That's all you did for five days a week was learn procedure and code. We had to sit there and run a typewriter. Fact is the equipment was getting so run down, down there that when they gave us our final typing test, I didn't have to take it because the instructor said I had already qualified, but some of the typewriters were broken down and I think there were three of us who didn't have to take it.

JS - Explain to me what you would do as a radioman?

RU - They set there and the ones that go aboard ship are responsible for all messages sent and received. A lot of it is in code and the radioman himself may not know what the code says. The captain of the ship will have a code book that will tell him what the code is for that particular day. All the codes are in five letters then a space. All of them look like a five letter word. He can break it down from his code book and it tells him what it says.

JS - You would hear a message coming in?

RU - Yeah, you had earphones on and you had this code.

JS - Then you would type it?

RU - Yes.

JS - Then what would happen to the message after you had typed it?

RU - It went to the captain or whoever was in charge. There were some messages that came over in plain language.

JS - When you went to school they just had all this set up?

RU - Yeah, you had to learn how to send code with a key. I don't know if you ever saw these railroad operators. We had one that you went up and down and one that you could work sideways if you had to. You had to qualify at twenty words a minute while sending messages.

JS - You really had to be mechanical minded and also skillful.

RU - And you had to be mechanical minded enough to fix your radio. You had to check your tubes and maybe a wire would get broken or something. Everyday we went to a place that a guy taught us how to fix a radio. They were about this wide and about four foot tall and you worked on the back of them.

JS - You said it was a twenty week school and it was during that time that you lived like in a chicken house. What was the food like? What did you do when you weren't in training? Was there a town that you could go into and do you remember any particular people that you were there with?

RU - We didn't get liberty every weekend. I think we were there almost four weeks before we got to go on liberty. Gulfport, Mississippi, wasn't a whole lot bigger than Dodge City. There was a B29 base not too far away so that little town was crowded with servicemen. If we had a two day pass we would catch a bus to an outlying town and hitchhike back or something like that.

JS - What would you do in the evening after the training? Did you play cards or sit around and talk?

RU - Study.

JS - Did you smoke before you went into the service or did you start smoking then?

RU - No, I smoked before I went in the service. In the Navy they have certain times when you can smoke. When the smoking lamp is lit, it's the same every day. In the classes you don't smoke, but sometimes they give a break and in the evening after dinner. There were times in the evening we could go out. It was hot and sultry down there. We didn't have any sidewalks. We had boardwalks. While we were there we had a shower of rain everyday for thirty days straight. There were times that it would rain enough that our boardwalks would float down the ditch. We would have to go retrieve them and get them back and get them all set up so they would pass inspection.

JS - What was the food like in the Navy?

RU - I liked it. There were some things I didn't like, but ninety percent of the time it was good. One thing about the Navy, every Saturday morning you had beans for breakfast. That was their menu. Sundays for lunch you always had smorgasbord cold cuts to make your own sandwiches. They had potato salad and they had all kinds of lunch meat there you could make a sandwich out of and cheese.

JS - Did you have other work duties, other than training?

RU - Not too much, not in school. You did in boot camp, you had work details. You had guard duties and sometimes you had to go on guard duty at midnight until six in the morning or maybe six in the evening until midnight.

JS - So was part of your boot camp shooting a gun?

RU - No, I think we went to the range one day. All they did was set up targets down there and each guy shot, I think it was thirty rounds--ten rounds standing, ten rounds sitting, and ten rounds lying on his stomach.

JS - That was the extent of the training?

RU - That was the extent because some of those guys could shoot real good and they might have gone to gunnery school for all I know: One day they took us over to the lakes and there was an airplane pulling a big old deal behind him with a target and we had machine gun practice that day. That was the biggest gun that I ever shot.

JS - Did you know how to shoot? Did you hunt?

RU - I knew how to shoot the rifle, yeah. For the machine guns they went through that for an hour and a half. They would take ten of you at a time.

JS - At Gulfport after the twenty weeks of training, what happened then?

RU- I was shipped to San Francisco. They put seven of us on a train and we went to L.A. We had a seven hour layover in L.A. to catch the next train to go up to San Francisco. We had first class with folding bunks. There were a bunch of Army guys on there with us. The Navy has a rule that two guys don't sleep in the same bunk. The Army was mad at us because each one of us had a separate berth and some of them had to sleep two to a berth. From there we wound up on Treasure Island and that is where we set for seven weeks while we were waiting for our orders.

JS - What did you do those seven weeks?

RU - Oh, we had liberty every other night and guard duty every other night. USO centers in Frisco were real good. You could buy a hamburger for a nickel. In fact, all seven of us ran out of money being they lost our orders.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Russell Unruh (RU)
Tape 1 of 2
Side B

RU - They allowed each one of us five dollars apiece. I had a sister that lived in San El Salmon and I called her up and went out there and my brother-in-law worked in the shipyards and I borrowed fifty dollars from him. I came back and shared it with my srven buddies so we had a little money to go into San Francisco on liberty.

JS - What did you think of San Francisco?

RU - To an old country boy, it was a big town. From Treasure Island over to Frisco Pier One, they ran a water taxi run by the Navy and held 240. It didn't cost anything to ride it. We'd go to town and we could go to picture shows and stuff. There was a big old Pepsi Cola USO center there. There were other ships that came in and there were always sailors up and down Market Street in San Francisco. When I finally got my orders, I was stationed right down town in San Francisco.

JS - Doing the radio?

RU - Yeah, that is where the Naval Radio Station was. We had to find our own rooms and they paid us $105 a month for our board and room plus our regular salary. There were three of the guys that worked with me there that had two rooms in an old rooming house. guys could use the same bedroom. It was kind of an old fire trap, but seems like it cost us seven dollars a week. You could stop in a restaurant and get a hamburger steak for a dollar and a quarter and breakfast for fifty cents.

JS - Amazing.

RU - When we checked into work in the morning, we worked eight hours. We had what we called chow runners. They would come around and take our orders and we would give them the money and they would go across the street and get our sandwiches. They didn't allow us to have a dinner break.

JS - That center was working twenty-four hours a day with three shifts?

RU - Three eight hour shifts.

JS - Did you always have the day one?

RU - No, you went to work at seven in the morning until three in the afternoon for two days. Then you had twenty-four hours off and then went from three until midnight for two days. Then you had twenty-four hours off. Then you went from midnight until seven in the morning and had forty-eight hours off. So technically every twenty-eight days we had two twenty-four hour liberties and a forty-eight hour liberty.

JS - That wasn't so bad was it?

RU - No, I couldn't figure out why they couldn't leave them on a week at a time and they claimed it affected all the people that worked up there with all that code. It affected them mentally.

JS - So basically, you were just sitting there receiving the messages?

RU - Yes, and we had to file them in a certain spot and we figured what priority they had. If they had top priority, we put them I a little tube and they were sent to another room. We knew where every ship was in the Pacific. We had direct contact with Pearl Harbor. We had direct contact with Washington, DC.

JS - How did you figure out the priority?

RU - It was coded on top of the message and you got chewed out if you didn't get it in the right spot. I know one morning when we came to work, the group that left ahead of us was 500 and some messages behind and something was going on in Pearl Harbor or somewhere. That's when things would really get jammed up is when something hot was going on overseas. Our captain bet the captain that left, five dollars that we would be caught up by the time we went off shift. We were.

JS - That must have been a hectic day.

RU - It was, yeah. They had teletype machines there and a teletype machine is one key off from what a typewriter is. Sometimes when we weren't busy, I would go over there and play with that teletype. They had two civilians that worked on those teletypes most of the time. That morning, the captain came over there and he said, "How good are you on that teletype?" I told him I didn't know how good I was, I had just been playing with it. He said, "You're going to set at this one all day." I did. They would put messages up there and I would type them all. I guess I was good enough. I didn't screw up too bad.

JS - What kind of messages would you receive?

RU - I don't know.

JS - Because they were all in code?

RU - All in code. In our room, most of it was printed out and our job was to file them and determine. There was another floor upstairs that broke down the code. In essence, my floor was kind of a flunky floor.

JS - How did you view your job and the work you were doing as part of the war effort?

RU - I just spent that time in that radio room there. Technically, in my room there, we didn't know really what was going on. Sometimes we would go out and hear on the radio what had happened before we really knew. The people that broke the code down were sworn and couldn't walk out of there and talk about it.

JS - They had gone to a different kind of school?

RU - No, they had just been there longer and it probably was the ability of how well you could read the code and stuff.

JS - What was your rank?

RU - I wasn't in that long. I was just a seaman first class.

JS - When you were in Gulfport and out there, how did you receive mail? You wrote home to your parents.

RU - Oh yeah, I wrote letters home and where the stamp went, you wrote "free".

JS - How would you receive mail?

RU - In San Francisco we had our address. We had mail call every day at the Gulf and the same at Great Lakes. Some of the boys just had that as there job and they came around to the barracks with it. You had your barracks number on your address so sometimes when you got out of school in the evening all the mail was laying there on that table. The mailman had laid it on there for us.

JS - Would you write home once a week?

RU - Oh yeah, at least.

JS - The letters that you were writing home didn't have to go through a censor?

RU - Yeah, this boy I told you that got in the Marines, somehow got word to me on what ship he was going to. I wrote him a letter back and told him he was going to Tem Sun, China. All of that was blacked out. When we got home he told me when I had told him where they were going all that was blacked out.

JS - You knew where all the ships were, so that is how you knew?

RU - Yes. When he told me what ship he was going on, I just wrote him a letter telling him where it was going. Of course, he didn't get the letter till he got to Tem Sun, China.

JS - So you would write the letter, but not put it in an envelope and seal it?

RU - Oh yes, the letters to your folks, I don't think were ever censored. Letters to another person, especially like that one going overseas, they were censored.

JS - Did you think the training you received at Gulfport was adequate for what you did?

RU - Yes, I did.

JS - Do you remember a particular friend or a particular fellow, a Navy person or a particular experience?

RU - There were twenty-five of us boys together and this one negro boy was from Martha's Vineyard and New York. We all walked down to the bus in Gulfport and still back in those days the Negroes had to sit in the back of the bus. We weren't going to let him and he begged us to not create a problem. He said, "I'll go back there, no problem" We told him if he was good enough to fight the war he could sit anywhere in the bus he wanted to. That bus driver just got mad at us so finally all of us white boys went and sat in the back of the bus. The bus driver wasn't going to move and one of the guys got up and grabbed him by the neck and said, "If you don't move this bus, get out of the seat and I'll drive it." When we went up town, we picked up a lot of women and children and they had lived in shanties. They'd stand there and look a minute. We had their seats. The driver said, "Ladies, them sailors have got this bus occupied, just set anywhere you want." We all clapped.

JS - That would have been fairly unusual, wouldn't it?

RU - Oh yeah.

JS - That is a good story.

RU - I still feel that way, if he was good enough to wear the uniform, why wasn't he good enough to ride anywhere he wanted to on that bus?

JS - I think that was a rarity because the United States Government didn't feel that way.

RU - No, they didn't.

JS - Any other particular story or memory?

RU - One of my buddies down there at Gulfport got married and we had quite a deal. He had a cabin rented and we went out to his place and had a celebration of his wedding and everything. That was quite an experience.

JS - Were most of the men unmarried or not?

RU - There were several of them, especially from the Kansas City area, that were married, but most of the boys that I was with were not. I don't remember any of them being married except when this boy got married.

JS - They were about how old?

RU - I was twenty and I suppose most of them were eighteen or nineteen. I came awful close to being the oldest one in my hut down there at Gulfport.

JS - They came from all over the United States?

RU - Yes, one of my best friends was from Cleveland, Ohio. I ran around with him quite a bit. The timing instructor was from Kentucky. He went home on leave and when he came back he called me up and said, "I've got some extra money in my pocket, let's go on liberty." He didn't hold any rank over me or anything.

JS - Did you learn a lot about people?

RU - Yes.

JS - What did you learn?

RU - You learned people have different ideas from around the United States. It was an eye opener to an old farm kid from out here in Western Kansas. We are isolated and as far as I had been away from out here was Kansas City. To hear their stories about how they lived was different.

JS - What surprised you the most?

RU - Probably, how well everybody got along. We did have a problem with two other Negro boys. They weren't particularly in my hut, but they got caught raiding, what we called, midnight small stores. You'd leave your clothes hung out on the line and they would come there and steal them. Why, I don't know, because our names were all stenciled on our clothes. Another thing, when we got down to taking the tests, a couple of the boys, just like in high school, they went to another class and got the answers to the dang test. They got caught. They were out and spent the rest of the time down working in the chow hall. It was no different than in high school. Somebody was always cribbing something.

JS -Was it hard to take orders and to obey?

RU - I guess it wasn't for me so much. I was brought up that you got up in the morning and milked the cow, fed the chickens, and had to be ready to go to school at a certain time to catch the bus. There were very few of the boys that did. We had a fellow in our company that could really call cadence, kind of singsong. We would echo him just like you hear on these deals and I guess we woke some gold braid up once. We got turned in and we had to march an extra hour because he didn't like what we were doing. The captain of the barracks was watching us march and our guy was calling our cadence and he stopped us and said, "When you were marching the other day past this certain barracks, was

that what you boys were doing?" The cadence caller said, "Sir, every time we go from one class to the other, that's the way we travel." He told us to take off and get back to our barracks and he would go talk to that guy. That was no reason to put us on report.

JS - That was good. So you were in San Francisco until the war was over?

RU - The big bomb had been dropped before I ever got to San Francisco. I missed the big show in Frisco.

JS - Where were you when the war ended in Europe? Gulfport?

RU - Refresh me on the dates.

JS - It was May 6, 1945.

RU - I was in Gulfport, Mississippi.

JS - Do you remember when the announcement was made?

RU - Yeah, but when the big bomb was dropped on Japan, everybody was celebrating down there at Gulfport.

JS - Simply because it was going to end.

RU - Yes, we knew the war was going to be over.

JS - What did everybody think about the atomic bomb because it had been secret?

RU - Everybody thought that was the greatest thing that had ever happened. When you look back and see how many lives it took, I don't know. I was home on leave when President Roosevelt died.

JS - What do you remember about that?

RU - I was sitting there in the drugstore and there was a fellow that was a couple of years older than I was. He was a lieutenant in the Navy and he was on leave too. We had gone to school up here. There was only about three years difference in us and Dwight Robert's dad walked in the drugstore and said, "President Roosevelt died." Bob said he and I were lucky. If we were on base now, those guys will be standing guard and there will be all kind of deals every so many hours they are going to have to do. He said we'd better enjoy this leave.

JS - What did the community feel about Roosevelt as president?

RU - They thought he was a great man.

JS - Do you know why? He was a Democrat.

RU - I know that, but we are going to go way back now. When did he take office?

JS - '32.

RU - My dad bought a Philco radio that operated with a six volt battery. The reason I remember this so plain is that three of my dad's brothers-in-law came over and they wanted to hear President Roosevelt speak. We had this radio so they all sat there and listened to it. The farm program started and I had a sister that was still in high school. One of my dad's brothers-in-law went when they were signing up at a little old school house over there. Uncle John hired my sister to be a typist for him. He had four or five girls there getting all the information. He paid her like fifty cents a day to sit there and run a typewriter. Back in '32 and '33, especially in '33, that was big money.

JS - Why were they signing farmers up, was it for the Farm Recovery Act?

RU - Yes, the farmers were absolutely broke out here. We were going through the dust storms and were absolutely raising no crops. This farm program has been going on ever since the Roosevelt era. That's what I remember about it.

JS - What do you remember about the dirty '30s?

RU - I remember waking up in this house that we lived in. I didn't think it was that bad of house. The dirt blew so bad, my mom would come in and wake me up. She would roll the covers back gently. She didn't want to make dust and then the minute I got out of bed she put the covers back up over it. It may blow all day long and there was no use of shaking the dirt off the covers. The windows aren't built like they are nowadays. When it would clear up we would fold the covers up real gently and take them outside, hang them on the clothesline and take a stick and beat the dust out of them.

JS - Did you have a garden and raise your own food?

RU - Yeah, mom had a garden and as I look back I was proud of my dad. We had meat on the table at least one meal a day, maybe chicken, but we butchered a couple hogs. When a calf was born, if it was a bull calf, that calf never got out of the barn until he weighed 400 lbs. We took him to town and butchered him. We'd haul the meat back out to the farm. My mom had a pressure cooker. She'd cut the roasts and things up into inch and a half squares and put them in Kerr jars and in the pressure cooker. She'd put them down in the cellar underneath the house. We rendered our own lard and always had chickens.

JS - What kind of chores were you asked to do on the farm, milk?

RU - I had to milk. We always had four cows, but I had two cows that were gentle and that's the reason I got to milk them. We had hogs and always had to carry feed to them and make sure they had water. In the wintertime when a blizzard would come why the cows never got out of the barn. My dad was so particular and pampered them so that we carried the water to them instead of driving them out to the stock tank.

JS - What did you feed the cows in the dirty '30s when you weren't raising much? Did you have a pasture?

RU - We had a pasture, but there wasn't much to eat in the pasture in the wintertime. Dad always managed to raise a little feed and put some up of some kind. We sold the cream and the eggs.

JS - At Hauk's here in Cimarron?

RU - We hauled a lot of cream into Hauk's at that old hotel. The eggs usually went to Trainer's IGA store. He bought the eggs and if there was any money left after we got groceries, my dad always bought a hundred pound sack of bran. They were called shorts from the wheat. We would always give the cows a coffee can of bran every night and every morning. He always had some feed. He bought some feed and I guess how he paid for it was from those government checks he got from the government.

JS - We better get back to World War Two. When you got out of the Navy and came home, did you know what you were going to do? Did you want to come home?

RU - Yeah, because while I was gone my dad was trying to run the farm out here. The brother in Kansas City came out and helped him that summer, but my mom wrote and told me that dad was coming home from the tractor sick. I went over to the chaplain to see if I could get a fifteen or twenty day leave in September so I could come out and drill wheat for him.
The chaplain said, "I can go you one better. Get your mother to get a couple of guys to write a letter for her, saying that your dad is unable to continue to farm and send it to the congressman." It took from September to January for it all to catch up with me. Back in those days sixty was old and I knew mom and dad were getting up there. I am eighty now.

JS - You are eighty, but sixty was old then, wasn't it?

RU - I knew that I would probably farm.

JS - Where was your farm located?

RU - We lived ten miles north and a mile west on the pole line road.

JS - There was a school out there that you went to?

RU - No, I went all my years to Cimarron.

JS - How do you think your experience in the Navy changed you?

RU - Probably, respect for others and being on time at a certain place at a certain time. I guess it's what you call being prompt. You learned how to take care of your own clothes and stuff. You washed your clothes by hand. They had big old wooden troughs there with water running and they would give you a scrub brush and soap.

JS - Were these white?

RU - Yeah, we had white uniforms. When we were in Gulfport, Mississippi, and you went on liberty, you were required to wear a white uniform.

JS - Did you have to, then, iron?

RU - No. The way you pressed your clothes, you put them underneath your mattress if you wanted something really pressed. The Navy taught you to roll those clothes real tight.

JS - When they were wet?

RU- No, when they were dry because everything you had went in a sea bag about this big around and this tall. Everything you wore was in it.

JS - So you didn't have much, two uniforms or three uniforms?

RU - We had Levis, what they called dungarees and a regular old farm looking shirt. We were issued three blue shirts, three pair of dungarees, two white uniforms and two blue uniforms, a big old pea coat and a smaller jacket.

JS - Any kind of a hat?

RU - We always had those white sailor hats.

JS - What kind of shoes?

RU - A pair of lace top shoes that came up to about here and a pair of dress shoes.

JS - And you wore the lace top shoes when you were working?

RU - Yes, the only time you wore your dress shoes was when you went out on liberty or when they had, usually every Saturday, an inspection. Each company went in and the captain of the base would walk up and down the line. If somebody didn't look right, they had a guy following and he would put you on report and you couldn't have liberty.

JS - If you only had the sea bag, did you have many personal items that you took?

RU - They had a little ditty bag for your razor, shaving soap, toothbrush and all that kind of stuff. When you'd get ready to travel, if you didn't want to take the bag you tied your little ditty bag on and you had your own hammock and your own mattress. You put the mattress in the hammock and tied it up real tight and then your hammock went over your sea bag.

Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Russell Unruh (RU)
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Side A

JS - If you had stationery and things like that would you just carry that along with you?

RU - It went somewhere in this. You never had a very big supply because you could go to the PX and get a tablet for a nickel or something like that. Cigarettes were a nickel a pack.

JS - What kind of cigarettes?

RU - Lucky Strikes, Camels and Phillip Morris were the most popular. At one time they couldn't get rid of Herbert Georgenes. They wouldn't sell us any Camels or Lucky Strikes until they got rid of part of their supply of Herbert Georgenes at Great Lakes.

JS - Get rid of what, I am not understanding?

RU - Get rid of their supply. Nobody was buying those Herbert Georgenes. They were a long cigarette with a filter on them and the guys wanted Camels or Lucky Strike. I went one time on liberty in Great Lakes. I had met a boy that lived in Cicero. I went to his house. He got shipped off before I did and I went out to see his folks. His dad was walking me back to where I could catch the

elevated train back to the base. I flipped out my cigarettes and I dropped about three of them on the ground and he picked them up right quick. I happened to have a couple of extra packs in my pocket and I said, "What's the problem?" He said you couldn't buy the things there. I just reached in my pocket and gave him those two packs. He said, "How much?" I told him, "You can have them. Your wife fixed me a nice home cooked meal."

JS - The cigarettes that were manufactured went to the servicemen, right?

RU - Yeah, they were rationed, just like sugar and coffee were. I'm sure your dad and mom knew about that.

JS - I remember those ration books with the stamps?

RU - Yes.

JS - Any other stories that you think are significant or important?

RU - No, not too much about my service, no.

JS - Then when you came back after the war, you started to farm?

RU - Yeah.

JS - Let's go back to when you were born in 1925. We talked about the dust bowl and the dirty '30s. During that time did your family ever act like they were discouraged or fearful?

RU - Yes.

JS - Would they talk about it?

RU - No, one thing as I look back on mother and dad's life, we lived up there and Henry Timken and W.D Brady were our neighbors and stuff like that. People visited back in those days. Nobody has time now. Maybe they would just set around and talk. They might come over for a couple of hours in the afternoon and visit. People don't have time now.

JS - They don't take the time, I guess.

RU - Let's look at our school system. How much time do our kids have? If you had a kid living on the farm now, he wouldn't be in athletics. When I went to school, athletics were over with when that bus left at 4:15.

JS - What other changes of living have you observed in our society?

RU - Biggest change I see lately is the quality of the farm equipment and machinery. I started out on an old International tractor with steel wheels when I was ten years old. We pulled an eight ft one-way or three-row lister. We pulled an old combine and you had to go round and round. You couldn't go back and forth and stay out of the wind when you cut. When the wind was in the south at twenty-nine miles an hour, the tractor driver ate all that straw that came out of the combine. I guess the biggest change in tractors was in the late '60s or early '70s when they put air conditioning in these tractors, and heaters.

JS - And cabs, I guess.

RU - And cabs.

JS - What changes have you seen in the methods or the way of farming? Certainly out here, irrigation came.

RU - Irrigation changed things and renovated the sand hills. In the '30s, you couldn't get anybody to buy these sand hills for ten dollars an acre. My dad bought land out here in 1929 and that was a boom time and he gave too much money for it. He fought that and finally got it all paid for in 1948. I remember one time, right across the road from our house a half section came up for sale for ten dollars an acre. I was only nineteen years old and I said, "Dad, let's go buy that half section." He said we could never pay for it. The wheat crop off that made twenty-seven bushel and I think they got eighty cents a bushel for it or something like that. A fourth of the rent would almost have paid for that land. My dad, after his experience, was so conservative and probably made me that way. I have never expanded like I could. I guess I never plunged.

JS - I was born in 1940 so I grew up in the '50s and south of Ingalls there were those sand hills. During the '50s they were still sand hills.

RU - And in the '50s were the seven years of drought. We cut a whale of a milo crop in '51 and cut a whale of a wheat crop in '52. We didn't cut another one until 1958.

JS - Are you retired from farming?

RU - I'll never retire. I have macular degeneration and that equipment setting right there is $2000. I have a set of glasses over there that has a mouse on and I turn my computer on and I put that mouse up there to make sure. I built my own bookkeeping system in Lotus and I do all that.

JS - How did you learn all that computer stuff?

RU - I bought the first computer off of Galen Buller and was lost with it. I went to Denver to see my daughter and got that book right there.

JS - You still smoke. You have smoked your entire life and have no plans to stop.

RU - I'm going to have them put a carton in my casket.

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END

JS - The A B Cs of .....You are mechanically and technologically inclined if you can figure all that out.

RU - When I saw that in a book store in Denver, my wife and I bought that and I came home. After I got started, we had a little office over in the other house. I got so fascinated with building a spread sheet and everything that I stayed up to two o'clock in the morning. I took every step in there it said to do in that, so all my bookkeeping system is set up out of that book.

JS - For several years?

RU - I've got the same program in there. I haven't changed much. If I get to a problem, I can look it up in that book.

JS - I think that is unusual for someone to teach themselves on the computer. So you will never retire?

RU - I am on a restricted driver's license. I love to run the tractor. Gavin, my son, will go out to the field and lay it out for me and help me get the equipment set right. All during harvest, I still drive the tractor and the grain cart. I've watched too many people retire and set in a chair and go to pot in two or three years. I think you need to stay busy.

JS - It sounds like you do. Do you use the internet?

RU - No, it would be too hard to follow.

JS - How did you find out about this equipment?

RU - See how that magnifies? I look at the screen and write my check over here.

JS - What a wonderful piece of technology.

RU - I found that out through Low Vision Clinic in Garden City. That is where I found these too. I call these my E. T. glasses.

JS - That is amazing. You can read and do almost anything.

RU - Yeah, I'm too stubborn to quit.

JS - Is there anything else that you can tell us? You say that you are eighty years old?

RU - I will be eighty-one in January.