

WORLD WAR II



IN: Tell me about civil defense and the War Ration Board during World War II.

TC: Well, during World War II we had a Ration Board in Ridgewood and I was, I think, chairman of it at that time. And I worked in the bank in Ridgewood at that time, and every afternoon I would get the people in the bank. And we'd go upstairs and sit around the table and review all the affidavits from people who wanted ration books for oil or for gasoline and for food. And that went on for a long while. And then I was also involved with civilian defense. ... I guess the Motor Corps ... And we would have to go out at night. Quite often, we'd get—the sirens would go off and we'd go out at night with our cars, and quite often went up to the Hohokus Race Track and—which was located off the Franklin Turnpike into Hohokus. And there we had to put all the lights in the car out and there was no lights on the track. And we'd have to learn to drive around the track in the dark so that in case of emergency we could drive—drive in absolute dark and not—outside of the little noise we made, not make our whereabouts known. At home, we had to, of course, blacken—all the window shades came down. And it [the siren] usually went off right in the middle of dinner so that [chuckles] you—it was an interesting time during the war.

.....

IN: What was the philosophy of the general town regarding possibility of attack? ...

TC: I don't think they really thought we did and yet, on the other hand, you had—you know, it wasn't something you could ignore. And it was—I think everybody participated. It was drilled into them, if the siren goes off, you get in the house and stay there. Some of the people had bomb shelters in their houses in the basement, heavy concrete. I wouldn't be surprised if there's a few places in Ridgewood that probably still have bomb shelters. And those that did—in the bank, our vaults were in the basement and down there we were supplied by—I don't know whether it was state or county—with cartons of food and so forth that we kept down there. And we were a gathering point of people who were outside. I mean, a big sign outside of the front of the office that we were a Civilian Defense Center, and you go in there and seek shelter.



1994

- DP: [W]hat were the World War II years like around Ridgewood?
HK: Oh, you had stamps. I could always manage my stamps because if they didn't come in on time the people [unclear] remember to say, "Oh, I understand that"—
EK: Meat was very scarce. ...
HK: You had the stamps but it wasn't always there—always there.
EK: I would take these stamps with me on a trip and bring home a ham from Indiana or from Virginia.
DP: Oh, that's a good idea.
EK: But ham was—but meat was so scarce that it was a treat if you could pick up a heart.
HK: Oh, well, you hear that—you go down in your coupons. You had your coupons but the food hadn't come in yet. ... So you stood on line.
EK: Sugar was stamps. We had a hard time getting sugar, meat ... gasoline.



1994

- DP: ... Tell me about life in Ridgewood during the Second World War. ... It started in '41 and how—
RC: Yes, it started in December of '41.
DP: Where were you living then?
RC: With Ted's mother.
DP: Okay.
RC: And [chuckles] I think our main activities were going down and getting butter. You went to about six different stores to get one stick of butter, and meat rationing and coffee rationing. Shoes, I remember. Nana, which is what I called Ted's mother—Nana and I were very fortunate that he didn't drink coffee. So our coffee rationing lasted a little longer, because I could get it for him also. [laughs]
DP: Right. Tell me about rationing stamps.
RC: You know, it's—I think I still have some of them in some place. You husbanded those and were very careful. And I can remember I was—wanted a leg of lamb so I saved my ration stamps—meat rationing stamps until I had enough to get a leg of lamb. I loved—
DP: And how long—how long did it take you to save enough stamps to buy a leg of lamb? Days or weeks?
RC: It seemed to be forever. [laughs] ... —till anyhow, I finally got the leg of lamb. And I loved to smell it cooking. So I came down with one of these colds where I couldn't smell a thing. [laughs] That's why I've never forgotten that leg of lamb.
DP: I can understand that. [chuckles] What about shopping for your children? How did you manage to get them enough clothing, et cetera?

RC: Well, of course, with our second daughter, she wore hand-me-downs, mainly. [laughs]. And I don't know. I think it was shoes that were rationed. I don't think the other things were rationed.

....

DP: Did you—what can you remember going without and missing?

RC: Really and truly, because if you knew enough people in enough stores, they'd save you some butter. And I can't remember anything particularly that I—I would have died if I hadn't had my cup of coffee. But I had his. So I really don't remember too much.



2002

GM: And he did not serve in the war [World War II] because we already had a child before the war began and had another one before he was called up. So he was given a choice of defense or going in the service which, of course, he took the defense. And I remember they paid him \$35 a week. And we had two children and just bought a house. [chuckles] So, of course, he had to do—work another job too at the time, which was very rough.

AM: What other job did he have to do?

GM: Well, he went—went to the one that he had in New York. And he—they let him come in part time. He used to go there from eight in the morning till 12, I think it was. Something like that. And then—maybe it was nine to one. And then in the afternoon he was on the shift from 3:30 to 11:30 at Wright's in Paterson.

AM: Oh, that was a factory or what was that?

GM: That was—well, they were doing all World War defense work, bench work, and originally it was—had to do with airplanes. ... I think he had the dirtiest job. [chuckles] He had to take his clothes off before he came in the house But he didn't have a choice. ...

AM: Do you remember other families who did have to send their boys off to war?

GM: Oh, sure. I had two brothers and a sister that went. ... My sister was a nurse and she was overseas for two years. ... But he [her brother] did go over to—and he was on a ship headed for Manila in the Philippines, and they were just outside the port when the Japanese took Manila. And they had to turn around and they headed for Hawaii and he was in the Infantry and, yet, he was an engineer. And that's when they discovered that he was—he shouldn't be where he was. So they brought him back and put him in Officer's Candidate School. And eventually he became a pilot. And so then he was bombing in the Pacific and Japan and he was the last one out. He was the first one in and the last one out. So we've had—our family really ...contributed.



CC: But I wish you had been here the day the war ended.

IN: Tell me about it.

CC: The town just went crazy. Everybody rushed uptown. They had snake dances through the street. Kids—truckloads of kids hollering and screaming. The police just stood on the corners and let everybody do their thing.

IN: Isn't that wonderful! Gee!

CC: They just snake danced all through the streets and sang and danced. And you met your neighbors on the corner up there and everybody was talking to one another. ... And there's never been a day like that since. It—it was such a—

IN: Jubilation.

CC: Yeah, it was. ... People that lived here in town that you'd never met were talking to you. I mean, it was just exciting.



DP: All right. Now, what about when the war was over?

...

DW: About '45. My husband phoned me from his office in New York and said to get on the Erie train and come in and meet him and we'd all go to dinner. The train was packed with people—

DP: All from Ridgewood?

DW: —all going into New York to celebrate. ... And then there were lines in front of the restaurants but everyone was so thrilled and happy. And everyone was friendly and it was a big, big thing. ... I remember in the restaurant the management brought out paper hats and confetti and we were all blowing horns. You'd think it was New Year's Eve.