

Department of History and American Studies

University of Mary Washington

Fredericksburg, Virginia

Jack Dickson

Rosie the Riveter and the World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by

Michael Corrigan

in 2012



This interview was conducted by a student in an oral history seminar in the Department of History and American Studies at the University of Mary Washington. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

\*\*\*\*\*

All uses of this interview transcript are covered by a legal agreement between the interviewee and the University of Mary Washington. The interview transcript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to the University of Mary Washington. No part of the interview transcript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Department of History and American Studies, University Mary Washington, 1301 College Avenue, Fredericksburg, Virginia, 22401, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user. Excerpts up to 1000 words from this interview may be quoted for publication without seeking permission as long as the use is non-commercial and properly cited.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Rosie the Riveter and the World War II American Home Front Oral History Project: An Oral History with XXX conducted by XXX, Date, Department of History and American Studies, University of Mary Washington, 2012.

Interview with: Jack Dickson

Interviewed & Transcription by: Michael Corrigan

10/22/2012

**00:00 Jack Dickson**

Before Dec 7, 1941 like Philadelphia you think "Big City." Well like we were discussing before, Philadelphia is a bunch of small towns, like little neighborhoods all over and everybody stayed in their own little quadrant there and lived their life. When the war came along of course all that changed. They inducted guys into the military. At the end of the war there were 13 million guys in the service for the United States. But the day itself like I said, was a nice, chilly Sunday afternoon which was the tradition in Philadelphia on Sunday afternoon you had a big dinner at the dining room table rather than eating in the kitchen, family was all there. And as usual my father would stamp his foot for the radio – the big box radio they had to turn on. And the radio turned on and they announced "we interrupt this program to bring you a special bulletin; the Japanese have attacked and bombed Pearl Harbor." The first question out of everybody around the table is where in the hell is Pearl Harbor? And then they later said it's in Hawaii-- so we knew. It was west of California somewhere out in the Pacific. So we knew that we were in the war. And we had been somewhat I guess you would call isolationist before the war under FDR. The English, the French, the Allies were pushing us to get into the war because they knew we had the industrial base. And we didn't do it

Phone rings

**Jack Dickson**

Get that Hun, so anyhow... Is that on now?

MC – you're fine.

**02:10 Jack Dickson**

So before the war like I said it was a sleepy, quiet town and then about 1938, 39 when the Nazis were overrunning the Netherlands and this country and that country and France and all. We started what they call "Lend-Lease" We were making guns and tanks and all and shipping them overseas to the British and the French to whoever was fighting over there. So that by the time Pearl Harbor came along we probably had a million, maybe a million five in the service. So we were--we thought we were pretty well prepared but that day we were completely unprepared. As I ... the paper said later. Some of the things in Pearl Harbor they court marshaled a couple of admirals and generals. Air Force General Hiccup Field he was concerned about people sneaking- they didn't know who- because this was right before Pearl Harbor- they didn't know who was going to attack. They put the planes nose to nose like 6 planes, bombers pointing at each other in a pod around. Well when an enemy comes in with an attack plane and there's six of them laying there, I mean they're sitting ducks. He caught heck for that. The same

thing with the Navy, where everything, all of our battle wagons and all were in one little channel. All you had to do was blockade that channel and they were all sitting ducks. Like the Arizona and I forget some of the other battleships and all that were just you know annihilated. We were completely caught with our pants down. So that started it- from that day on, the sleepy life for I think everybody in the United States completely changed. Everything was the war effort. They had what was it "OPM" or something Office of Price Management.

### **Marge Dickson**

Something like that. OPM I think.

### **04:35 Jack Dickson**

OPM, OPA and all. Everything started being rationed and controlled by the Fed. And life completely changed. Gasoline rationing in particular. They had A, B, and C cards you put a little decal on your card. And I think an A was the worst one, you probably got 3 gallons a week. If a man had to go to work, he either took public transportation or they carpooled. That was the beginning of carpooling in this country. And gasoline I think was about I think 15 cents a gallon then.

MC—Wow

### **05:15 Jack Dickson**

It wasn't the price of it, it was the idea that all of it went to the war effort. So everything became rationing and war effort and even school kids and I was probably in I think I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade when it started, they started collecting newspapers for the war effort...scrap metal for the war effort, sugar, coffee and tea. Everything was rationed. They were giving it to the military and overseas aid. So from that time on, you were living a completely different life. In fact, I went to work and I was 11 or 12 years on the Roosevelt Boulevard, which is actually route 1, but a big wide avenue in Philadelphia in the basement of a very large house. A guy had a saw-- cutting saw and all. And all the kids in the school I went to worked for him. We were making boxes for ammunition for the navy. Boxes about I would say about 2 foot wide. 10 cents a box. You would hammer it and all. And it was interesting, you know. The war effort was on. And of course, the adults, anybody 18 and over they were shipping them out as fast as they could. They started to draft. Well the draft started a little before Pearl Harbor. That's why I said we had over a million men in the service then. And things really got hectic. You also worked on the farms, over on the New Jersey side which is right across from Philadelphia. They had a lot of farms over there. They grew tomatoes. And they couldn't get anybody to pick them. So they would get 12 year old kids. Somebody would come by in a stake body truck. We would hop on and go over to Jersey and pick tomatoes.

### **Michael Corrigan**

How long did you do that for?

**07:20 Jack Dickson**

I think I did it two weekends. Two weekends during like the season it was September I think then. 10 cents a bushel. Bushel—a basket like that, they would give you a dime and you would pick them. And that was kind of fun. But there were no men around to do anything. Everybody was either in the service or going in the service or going to boot camp or something. So the times they changed quite a bit, everything was the war. There was nothing else on the news. All the music started. You know. I'm just trying to think of the songs. What was it "the sky pilot said it, you gotta give him credit. For a sonofagun of a gunner was he." Something about a chaplain on a bomber. But they were all military type songs that they made. Everything was the war effort. Every waking minute was about the war. But it was a very interesting time.

**Michael Corrigan**

You mentioned isolationism earlier, do you remember anyone talking about how we shouldn't get involved in the war.

**08:35 Jack Dickson**

Oh yeah. Yea in fact there was a previous hero. Colonel Lindbergh. You've heard of Lindbergh? And you know his plane flew over the Atlantic. Lindbergh was of German descent. He got on the radio and talked about how we shouldn't fight with the Germans. And because of that he sort of lost some popularity with the people. But staying out of the war was a lot of people. And Roosevelt just held off as long as he could. He didn't want to get into the war. In fact before the war started, they sent a load—a ship full with Jewish, I guess it would be patriots, whatever they were called. They were trying to get out of Germany and come somewhere to live. Well every country where they went, including the U.S., they turned them down. They didn't want to get involved in ruffling feathers of say the Germans or whoever. They ended up I think some down in South America somewhere. But there was big stories on it. We don't want to ruffle anyone's feathers, we are isolationist. And the day of course of Pearl Harbor the next day, FDR announced that "December 7 is a day that will live in infamy and we declare war on both the Germans and the Japanese and the Italians." So that was the start of it. But yeah, isolationism was where we were because we were—war had not been discussed since, you know, WWI. Nobody was interested in going to war. We were, you know, very content to live like we were. But you knew we were going to get drug into it. And then of course the Germans kind of pushed the envelope by attacking the freighters. We were sending freighters over by the boatload with the Lend Lease equipment for the English and the French people to fight. So with that when they started blowing up our freighters—we didn't start war then, but the day of Pearl Harbor gave us the impetus to say "ok enough of this nonsense, you want a war? You got a war." We declared it on the spot. Of course it cost us dearly like right after that—Bataan. Our ill-prepared soldiers, you know, they didn't have the latest gear then because it was a peace-time army. Bataan death march, I don't know if you've heard of that?

**Michael Corrigan**

Oh yeah.

**11:35 Jack Dickson**

And I don't know how many thousands of guys were slaughtered there. They marched them all the way back to Japan in fact; you know shipped them back over there. Most of them died. And in the beginning of WWII we weren't doing too well. We were not prepared for war. And the Japanese they knew they're only thing was a short war. If they didn't get something done very quickly they knew that all the civilian factories, we had them all over the place, were going to turn to the war effort. Which like I recall in Philly I worked at Edward G. Buds and they manufactured railcars before the war. And as soon as the war started those railcars turned into tanks. It was a big tank factory.

**Michael Corrigan**

How old were you when you worked there?

**12:32 Jack Dickson**

Well this was not then, this was later. But they did in WWII they built tanks then—for the war effort. And all the factories-- Chrysler and them. I think Chrysler was one of the first to get the rifle. I guess it was an M1. They got the rifle contract. Because before they had the one-shot rifle, you know. You shoot once and you had to redo something with it... and clean it out and all. I think it was eight shots with the first rifle we got so we were better that way. And all the big auto... well they stopped making cars in 41. No more cars. So the production line at General Motors. It was General Motors and all the other car places in Detroit immediately just closed down. No more cars you can't buy a new car. So that happened right then. So like I said the whole, the way you lived, the way you thought, and what you heard was all the war effort. We went out like I've never seen before. The expressions that they use today what is it 24/7? Well they did that... 3 shifts. Eight hour shifts, 3 times. Around the clock production. Guys that were makings lamp shades, you know, eventually started making you know bullets and bombs and things like that. Everything was the war effort.

**Michael Corrigan**

What do you think drove the war effort? Do you think it a sense of pride, or a sense of fear?

**14:20 Jack Dickson**

Well the sense – I guess it was a combination of a sense of pride but a sense of agitation. When the Japanese, because you know, here we are minding our own business. We're not doing anything in that area. And all of a sudden they sneak up and just bomb our Air Force and our Navy. A complete sneak attack-- and killed a lot of civilians. They said "what the hell?" you know people were extremely angry. So that's when jeez the next day it started. These factories that are making lamp shades and all, you're not going to. The government would come in there and say we are buying your factory in effect. Ok, what do you need to start making bullets or bombs or whatever it is we need for the military? All kinds of stuff. And they just geared it up in a couple of weeks. And we started shipping. And like I said they even had kids like me, bing bing bing ten cents a box. And they would put the shell casings in there, it

was this big, the shell casings would fit in there. 12 year old kids were making them. It shows how they went all out. Almost overnight.

MC- Wow. Do you remember the rationing system that was going on during the war?

**15:47 Jack Dickson**

Oh yeah, well you know you were told what you were going to get. Like they would say where do you work? Well my father was non-essential. He used his car to go to work. He was a cable splicer. Climbed telegraph poles and fixed the lines. And I think he had a B. Now I forget the exact numbers but it was A, B, and C. A was you know not-essential guy. Hey you don't need gas, here is three or four gallons and I think that was it. And of course cars back then only got like 10 miles to the gallon so you didn't go very far. So what they introduced then was carpools. You know 1 guy would drive for a week and use up all his gas, another guy would take it over for a week and all. And of course in Philadelphia they had a pretty good mass transit system everybody "well just take me to the bus stop and I'll get to work." But it was quite a time.

**Michael Corrigan**

Where did your parents work during the war? Do you remember?

**16:55 Jack Dickson**

No my mother was home with the kids—had four kids. She didn't work. But my father like I said had a high school education and he was a cable splicer, he was a foreman. And during the war I guess at about the middle of it in 43 he became a professor. They sent him out to Drexel Institute which is a college in Philadelphia to teach cable splicing. Because they had these college programs, V6, v8 or whatever, where these were G.I.s they were already inducted in the service and they would give them an aptitude test and you know "hey you should become an officer." And they put them through a V6 program. All the colleges, every big college you could think of had a v6 program. And they had Navy, Army, Marines, everything. They all went to college but then they recruited in the industrial base, guys that teach, there's going to be military guys for communications there going to need a guy that knows how to cable splice. You have them out in the boonies in the South Pacific so he went and he taught. I never got over that. High school graduate he's teaching guys, college students. But he did well.

**Michael Corrigan**

Can you tell me a little about your brothers and sisters?

**18:25 Jack Dickson**

Yeah, I had my older brother who passed away about 8, 10 years ago. Dave. He got in the war at the very end of it. In late, I guess it was 46 when he got in--right when he got out of high school he joined the Navy and he got the GI bill. In fact him and his buddy, his best man at his wedding in fact, Jim Baker, they joined together. One went in the Navy and the other went in the paratroopers. And the guy that

went to the paratroopers went to the same high school I went to which was the largest boys high school in the world then. Fifty-two hundred boys. Can you imagine cramming them in a school? Had good football teams though. And anyhow he went to the high school and they put him in the first class. A1 to 12. He was in A1 same as my brother. He flunked out in the first quarter of the freshmen year. The guy was brilliant!

### **Michael Corrigan**

Didn't want to be there?

### **19:35 Jack Dickson**

And I talked to him later and I said well "you ended up with a doctor degree, how in God's name did that happen? He said "I was bored to death. The priest would be up there talking and I would be reading it and I would be way ahead of the guy." But then after a while he says "I just lost interest." I was too far ahead of them. I guess they were teaching to a group that he was way above. So anyhow he flunked out, and he said that I don't know, he got a little job and did something for a couple of years. But then he went in the paratroopers in 45 or 46. And then got out of the paratroopers, took his GED, gave him the high school equivalency. Went to West Virginia University and got his Bachelor's degree. Went to Kentucky Wesleyan and got a Masters. And I don't know where he went to get his... but he got his Doctor Degree. I says "freshman year high school dropout and he's a Doctorate." He taught Human Factors for the government for a number of years. Brilliant guy, but just lost interest. But he did well. And my sister became a nurse. And my younger brother he was born, what was it 50 something hun?

### **Marge Dickson**

No, no he was born in 45.

### **21:19 Jack Dickson**

Well so was he then. He was born right at the end of WWII. He went into the Navy and he stayed in the reserves and he became a Chief in the Navy and he did good. So all of them did pretty good. They all got good jobs and ended up doing okay. Myself, I went in the... 51? When the Korean War started. I went into the Navy and was on an aircraft carrier for a year. And I enjoyed it. But the war didn't affect me too much. Sailing around down in Gitmo bay and areas like that, I thoroughly enjoyed it. So that's about what we did. But my brother, both my brothers and myself were in the Navy and we enjoyed it thoroughly.

### **Michael Corrigan**

Did you have any other family in the military?

### **Jack Dickson**

No, no because like I said just my brother Dave, my brother Jimmy, my sister Jude and myself. They were the four kids.

**Michael Corrigan**

No cousins or anything...uncles?

**22:42 Jack Dickson**

Yea, I had cousins. I don't know whether they went into the service or not. I'm not too sure. But one of them went into the priesthood. He is the one that married us. He wasn't in the service. In fact when I got out of high school that was par for the course. You went into the service. Your brother went in so you went in. And then of course when the Korean War started they had the draft again. And they were drafting guys. I recall on the ship, the mail call came one day out in the middle of the ocean and I get a letter and it's a government type—telling me I had been reclassified 1A. And I said I don't think so. They won't let me out of here to go there. They were going to put me in the army. But I wrote a little letter that said, sorry can't do it.

**Michael Corrigan**

Did you have friends from the neighborhood or anything that were in the war? That you remember...

**Jack Dickson**

Yeah like I said when the war first started I was eleven or twelve and the older kids, the kids that were seventeen or going on seventeen. Of course they couldn't be drafted until they were 18. But a lot of them they joined. On what did they call it? D-Day? No it wasn't D-Day. Pearl Harbor. Was that D-Day? Okay well after Pearl Harbor a lot of guys went. There were lines and pictures in the paper, around the block—thousands of guys going down and signing up early in the war. They couldn't handle all the guys that were going in.

**Michael Corrigan**

Did you want to sign up after Pearl Harbor?

**Jack Dickson**

No like I said...

**Michael Corrigan**

You were way too young but...

**24:50 Jack Dickson**

Eleven, twelve years old I just stood there like everyone else and hollered at the Japs. And of course like I said if you did that today they would arrest you for prejudice or something. Couldn't say it that way, but during the war they did. In fact I've got some music on there that will tell you about.. Do you remember the songs about the Japanese? Wasn't very nice but of course you know, the shouldn't have attacked us. They deserved it. Yeah I had a lot of older guys I knew. Like I said, in Philadelphia people

would congregate and they weren't gangs, but they were just kids that would hang on the corner candy store or something, they would hang outside there. And when right after the war started you started seeing less and less of the older guys. They either went down or joined, about half of them did; and the other half got drafted. So 17, 18 you didn't see them anymore. They disappeared. Then you would see them when they came home on leave in their uniforms and all. And a couple of them I knew got killed. I'm thinking, I can't think of the guy's name. He was on the next block and he was in the Air Force. His plane crashed in the South Pacific and we had Frances Bodner? She had two sons. The one, the younger one flew I guess a p40 in the South Pacific and he got shot down. He died. The fact you would see that on the news every night. They used to put the little flag on the window and if someone was killed they would put a white star that said you had someone in the service and if they got killed they would put a gold star. You started seeing gold stars in the windows. I don't know if you ever saw that movie the Sullivans? There were five brothers and on December 7<sup>th</sup>, all of them went down and joined Navy. And foolishly, this was the beginning of the war, they put them all on the same ship. The ship got torpedoed and they all died. And the movie shows, I forget who the actor was, well known actor. The car pulls up, the service guys, the officers come and let you know that somebody died in your family in the war. The mother said which one? And he's shaking his head and he said all of them. That was kind of touching. Five of the Sullivan Brothers. And that was right at the beginning of the war. And after that they did away with the brothers serving together. You just couldn't do it you know. Because they knew if you got two brothers, bingo, you're all in the same place, you're all going to die, they don't want that. That's too much to ask your family to give up all of them. So like I said everything until the war ended was about the war. Everything. Food, any move you made to do something you gotta get their permission to do it. Nobody traveled of course with the rationing of gasoline. And what else was rationed? Meat, sugar, most all the foods were rationed. No but it affected everybody. I was telling him about working over at Campbell's soup and picking the tomatoes. That was quite interesting. And that was in WWII. 10 cents a bushel.

### **Michael Corrigan**

Do you recall any rations that affected you the most? You mentioned gasoline but was there anything...

### **29:31 Jack Dickson**

Well for me I didn't care about gasoline I never drove. But like sugar, I liked sugar and things. They started coming out with this saccharine I think. There were a lot of things that people weren't used to like butter. They would say "butter has gone to war" or something like that. Well you couldn't get it, I don't know what they did with it. But they come up with margarine, and it was the ugliest looking thing. Initially there was a little thing on the side of the packet to color it yellow. Because it looked like lard or something, it looked ugly. And they said well you can't eat that. So you had to put this to flavor it or color it. And you would eat that and you would go, "oh that don't taste like butter." To this day a lot of people will not eat margarine. They say its much better but it wasn't butter. And they rationed almost everything. I think the only thing they didn't ration was milk. They had a lot of that. They used to have milk horses come up and down the streets and they would put the milk on your stoop. And of course,

they don't do that no more. But rationing was strictly enforced. If you heard of something, there were cases of guys that tried to buy your rationing card from you, you know. That was common.

**Michael Corrigan**

Black market stuff?

**Jack Dickson**

Yeah like a guy would get a rationing card and say you don't have a car even, how the hell did you get that? Because you gotta go and sign up and show them you had a car. Guys were selling it you know. And of course if they caught you there would be heck to pay you know.

**Michael Corrigan**

Do you know if your mother ever got around the rationing system or anything like that?

**31:44 Jack Dickson**

You know not too many people were... kind of prideful because you would look, like I said someone got a gold star and you're shortchanging them on the other end. I've never seen such a controlled environment as when, and people willingly did it. Like the air raids you know. I remember the guy like I said the end house on a row was a store. And George Carmanian was his name and George was about five foot tall and he had polio as a kid so he would limp and the shoe was that big on him. And he would wear a white helmet that showed he was the air raid warden. And all the lights went out. And all you would see is this little guy, the hat popping up and down going up and down the block screaming "turn that light out." Oh if you left your lights on he would raise hell. And everybody had black curtains, the air raid curtains I think they called them that you would put across your windows so the Germans wouldn't. Of course it was the Japanese at first we were concerned about and then we realized they had no plane, even if it came in on an carrier it could probably bomb the West Coast but they had nothing that would go cross country. Those bombers you know. Most of them kamikazes.

**Michael Corrigan**

Let me pause right here.

**Marge Dickson**

He used to sell candy. He didn't drink and he didn't smoke and he used to go out and sell them candy bars.

**Jack Dickson**

In the service she's talking about.

**Marge Dickson**

Up in Great Lakes when he was up there.

**Jack Dickson**

No but I'm talking about where you went like to Macguire Air Force Base.

**Marge Dickson**

I used to go.

**Jack Dickson**

USO.

**Marge Dickson**

I used to work at AT&T, then it was Bell Telephone. We would go after work and we would get a bus to take us down to Fort Dicks or Macguire Air Force Base. Now Fort Dicks was all soldiers but Macguire you went and they had it was a Cantina like a club you know. You liked to go there. The other one,

**34:01 Jack Dickson**

Well Fort Dicks is not a very pleasant place. Fort Dicks was the Army. In fact I went, we went over there, this is a little side story, in about 1939. Before the war. And my father would go down the shore as people from Philly used to go down to New Jersey Shore, the ocean. And we stopped off at this Fort Dicks, I don't know how he talked his way in getting aboard but this is like 1939 and there's a guy up on the roof of a barracks with binoculars and he's hollering numbers out and I'm wondering what is he doing? They all went out to watch and I stayed in the car. And I got in the front seat where my father drove. And I'm watching and he's calling the artillery and they're calling coordinates as they're going to fire. And I lean on the car, on the horn and everybody's quiet and they're calling coordinates out and rip, the horn started. And I panicked. I was frozen on there. And you could see the officers pointing "get that thing the hell out of here." Oh my father was mortified. We had to leave. That was terrible. In 39, they knew they were going to war then but it was peacetime. They did they're little thing.

**Michael Corrigan**

Well let me backtrack a little bit to the Great Depression. You would have been very young but what do you recall about the Great Depression?

**Jack Dickson**

Well the Great Depression to me as a kid was, I didn't know it was a Depression. The word meant nothing to me. I knew that everybody, they patched their clothes if they ripped them and the mothers would stitch them and we always had food.

**Marge Dickson**

What I was thinking is, you and I were lucky. Both of our fathers had a job. His father worked for the electric company and my father was a house painter but he did a lot, like decorating and all that. We really never felt, I mean we didn't have a lot but we never,

### **36:30 Jack Dickson**

No, no one had a lot. My father did talk once in a while about his job during the Depression because out back in this row house, you had wires coming down. And he would have to go out because they would give him the orders at the electric company. To shut the man, the man who hasn't paid for his power. "Shut it off." And they would go out and look he said it would be interesting, the wire coming down would be spliced to the next doors because both wires came down the same wall. And this guy would be feeding off of the other guys. Because he had a family and had kids and he didn't want to be in the dark. So he would splice into the other guy's. And the other guy would get a bill and say "what this is twice what we normally pay." Well you're doing the guy next door's. There was a lot of that. And you know, when you get, things get a little tight, you do what you gotta do.

### **Marge Dickson**

You learned the value of money because you knew that you couldn't. You would never think to ask can we do this or can we do that. But as I said we never did without.

### **Jack Dickson**

Yeah you think things are tight now, you know because we've come from plenty a couple of years ago to now. And you've got high unemployment and people are feeling the sting. But you know a couple of years ago, well easy come, easy go and things were great. But then people learned to tighten their belt. Older people, people like in here, a lot of them had gone through some part of a Depression. Which you know, there's twenty percent laid off or something, everybody feels it you know, because you end up even if you've got a decent job you had to be helping your kids or somebody else you know.

### **Marge Dickson**

(Largely inaudible). Jobs weren't plenty.

### **Jack Dickson**

And that's why we all went in the service. There were no jobs you know, we had to do something. But it was fun, I enjoyed it.

### **Michael Corrigan**

So for you the Depression wasn't that bad?

**39:02 Jack Dickson**

No the Depression was if every other kid, like I said I went to an all-boys school, high school, 5100 kids. And everybody looked the same. They dressed kind of the same style, we had baggy pants then and you know, you did what you did and,

**Marge Dickson**

(Inaudible).

**Jack Dickson**

Yea that was big time then.

**Michael Corrigan**

Did you play sports when you were younger?

**Jack Dickson**

Yeah I played sandlot football. What did I break there? My nose and my elbow and I ran cross country and track. And I did alright on that. I held my own there. But football was...

**Michael Corrigan**

Did you have a football to play with?

**40:12 Jack Dickson**

No the sandlot, the Summerdale Athletic Club as they called it you know, a bunch of men got together and they did little raffles or would ride around the neighborhood with a loudspeaker on the car and the kids would make a donation and that's how we bought our uniforms. And then the one year we got lucky. There was a sheriff by the name of Osman??? And sheriffs are big in Philadelphia. They're the ones that evict you and things like that. And he gets a percentage so he did well. And Osman paid for our uniforms. We were the jazziest looking team. In every neighborhood they would say "look at the uniforms these guys have." Everything was brand spanking new, which we were not used to. Before that when you were nickel and diming it, you were lucky if the helmets were the same color. But we had new jerseys and everything and that was a good time.

**Michael Corrigan**

Well after the attack on Pearl Harbor, did you feel a personal fear? Were you afraid of the Japanese or the Nazis... personally?

**Jack Dickson**

Yes and no. Like in school the nuns would tell you to get under the desk in case its, but you know when you're like 5<sup>th</sup> grade or so.

**Marge Dickson**

We didn't feel it in the United States. We used to have a (inaudible) from Germany and she said it was terrible. You know you had to get,

**Jack Dickson**

Well if your house was being bombed yeah.

**Marge Dickson**

We never had, we fortunately never in this country.

**Jack Dickson**

Well that's why 9/11 was so bad

**Marge Dickson**

(Inaudible).

**42:16 Jack Dickson**

No, WWII you became very patriotic, you would sing patriotic songs and all and everybody really did their part. Like you would see kids going down the street with wagons of newspapers and tin or iron or something, they would smelt it down.

**Marge Dickson**

We used to have this thing in our neighborhood. (Inaudible).

**Jack Dickson**

Yeah like I said Philly went from like a sleepy little neighborhood thing to the war. Everything touched the war. Touched it with gasoline, with sugar, with eating, and you know. Whatever you did related to the war effort. And the newspapers every day you would see "Manila attacked" and when MacArthur went back to the Philippines. Do you remember that? When they retook the Philippines. That was a big deal. But every night that's all you heard. What's going on in Luzon? Where in the hell is Luzon you know? But you learned real quick. The nuns would point out to you where they were going and where the Japanese are, over here. And of course all the movies which were a big deal when I was a kid. Movies were a dime. And a penny for candy. But all the movies were war movies. I mean they cranked them out by the ton. What's the big guy that died? John Wayne you know. He was always a Marine in the things. And show after show, everything was a war movie. Do you remember that? Everything was a war movie, about the war.

**Michael Corrigan**

Did you go see a lot of those movies?

**44:24 Jack Dickson**

Oh yeah, yeah. But like I said movies were cheap. I think it was eleven cents. That was a matinee. A Saturday matinee the movie would be 2000 kids there screaming and hollering and raising hell. But the parents were glad to pay ten cents to get rid of the kid for the whole day. They had peace and quiet. Because they would show two or three chapters as they would call it. Dick Tracy, do you remember that? He was on there. And they would show the chapters where he's almost dead and next chapter he ducks under and he's okay. And the kids would eat that up and then they would show comedies. Three or four comedies and a double feature. You were there from, well you got in line at about ten and the movie opened about eleven thirty and before the movie started they would have a , what was the guy with the yo-yos? Around the world, they would do these; did you ever see a yo-yo? He would be doing tricks with the yo-yo and then another guy with a little ball on a bat and he would how many times can you hit it? They had these Pilipino guys who could do fantastic tricks with that. And it entertained the kids, I mean you had...

**Marge Dickson**

(Inaudible).

**Jack Dickson**

Well they always showed the war effort. What's going on in Europe or Dunkirk or whatever. And you saw all that every Saturday. But Saturday was a big day for the movies. But during the week I would go occasionally because there was always good war movies on. You know kids liked to see the war movies. In fact, I'm thinking of Tom Manly, a neighbor of ours. He could sit there and talk on that thing for a week and not, you know.

**Marge Dickson**

He's interesting too.

**46:53 Jack Dickson**

"I'm out there one day and I'm talking to my buddy and we're in the fox hole and he put his head up and he said would you believe I turned around and he didn't have any head." And I'm going oh my God, what did you do? What did I do, I looked out in case that guy came after me. I was prepared but if a guy dies he dies. You can't do a damn thing about it. So you know. I think I had my uncle in WWI he died at Cooper Hospital, didn't we go there to Pennsylvania one time? The veteran's hospital he died in there. He was gassed in WWI. But he told me a story and I was only five years old I guess and he went to a bombed out place and he's looking for shelter and gets in there and there's another G.I. in there with a cigarette in his mouth and he said something to him and the guy didn't answer so he said to hell with you, you don't want to talk, alright. He took his nap and he woke up early next morning and he looks around, the same guy with the same cigarette. He was dead. And the cigarette just burnt down to his lips. So there he is hollering at a guy for not talking to him but the guy couldn't, he's dead. But that's some of these war things. But this guy Tom Manly he was in Guadalcanal, Bataan, not Bataan that was

Army. Where was he Guadalcanal, L'Ete? What were some of the other, there were a lot of areas that Marines were involved in and he was in most of them. In fact I recall in the war, Wake Island. That was a big deal. That was the Marines and there was a small little island there maybe a mile or two big and the Marines had an outpost there. And the Japanese, this was early in the war, they bombed that thing day and night. We didn't have anything there or near there to get help. And they held out for I think like three months and they gave the Japs all they could handle. They ran out of ammo and everything else. And then Wake fell finally. And then the Japs took it over.

### **Michael Corrigan**

Where did you hear most ... or did you pay attention to the radio or newspapers more than other things?

### **Jack Dickson**

Yeah because the t.v. wasn't in yet. Everybody had a big box radio. The box stood this high and everybody had one in their living room or dining room and you would gather around that. The family would sit there, and of course my father controlled what you heard, he turned the knobs. But we always got the news. You wouldn't leave... we ate our meal and that's when my mother cleared our dishes and we would all listen to the local news. What's going on with the Japs?

### **Marge Dickson**

And they had soap operas... (inaudible)

### **50:35 Jack Dickson**

Oh yea well that was my mother's vintage, she would do her work like crazy in the morning, make the beds and do this and run around. One a clock came and we went to Catholic school a block away we would come home and she would have soup and sandwich and we would eat and go back. As soon as we'd go back she would clear those dishes off and then she would put her feet up on the coffee table, sit back in a soft chair. That's when, they had the tube then. And she would turn that t.v. on and she would watch whatever was on there. She had her favorite shows of course. But she worked like mad from seven thirty in the morning and got my father up at 6. Made his breakfast and work like mad. But one o'clock, timeout. And she, two to three hours watching that. And then she would run back in the kitchen and get ready for dinner or she would make dinner then. Spend an hour there. But yeah that's the way they did it then.

### **Michael Corrigan**

Did you enjoy listening to the radio? Did you enjoy hearing stories about the war?

### **Jack Dickson**

Oh yeah, well I think everybody even kids, I can remember some of the Jack Armstrong, the All-American boy, Bobby Benson, he was a kid cowboy or something- he was there. And who was the one

that had the hiking meter? They were great for that then, years ago. They had a little thing and you stuck it on your belt and you would walk and it would measure how far you walked. And you sent away to Bobby Benson and you had the hiking meter.

**Marge Dickson**

I think Johnny has that.

**52:20 Jack Dickson**

And you had a decoder ring. I think that was The Shadow or something like that. You know, "what evil lurks in the hearts of men, The Shadow do." That was one of the favorites. They had all kinds of shows. Radio was a big deal until t.v. came along you know. And then t.v. took over. In fact, I recall before the war, a guy down the street, I don't know where he worked but he was the first guy to always get new things. Furniture, you would see the furniture truck come up and he got new furniture. We're all looking, "wow this sucker must be rich." He got the first house phone. And boy that was amazing because you always went to the corner piper's candy store. The kids would make money that way.

**Marge Dickson**

When my father was away we didn't have a phone but we had a neighbor who was in business and he had a phone. He would call their house and they would come and get us because he was the only one in the whole area there that had a phone.

**Jack Dickson**

Yeah, and phones were different then. Somebody would holler, its long distance hurry up. They would charge you by the minute.

**Marge Dickson**

Nobody made a long distance call you would get killed.

**53:48 Jack Dickson**

Well you made it by doing let it ring three times and if you would go to pick it up and there's nobody was there you would know everything was okay. Like if I was away somewhere, three rings and click. Nobody would answer but you knew everything is okay, he just called. But nobody answered because you had to pay. That's the way they did then.

**Michael Corrigan**

You would have been very young but do you remember listening to the Presidents at all during the war? FDR and Truman?

**Jack Dickson**

Yeah Roosevelt always had his fireside chats and they were very interesting and he was a good speaker. By the way you know, he was very presidential. When he spoke, you listened.

**Marge Dickson**

Everybody listened, everybody. And they had respect.

**Jack Dickson**

But anyhow, I'm thinking of the motto. The kids used to pick up on when the presidential thing, Roosevelt ran against a man named Wendell Willkie. And kids would come down the street singing with the latest little tidbit from a kid's mouth. "A horse's tail is nice and silky, lift it up and you'll find Willkie." And I'm going what? What the hell is that?

**Marge Dickson**

We used to have buttons too. They haven't done this.

**Jack Dickson**

Yeah they don't do them anymore.

**Marge Dickson**

I used to have a Willkie button.

**Jack Dickson**

Yeah a Willkie button. Yeah that was a long time ago.

**Michael Corrigan**

Did you have faith in the Presidents, did you trust them?

**55:35 Jack Dickson**

Yeah well you know you had to. Here you are in the midst in the war. And it really got tough after we were in there a while. Guys are dying and your lifeline had to be the President. He gave his fireside chats like once a month. And he was the one that came up with that expression "you have nothing to fear but fear itself." Which is a pretty good expression because early in the war we weren't doing well at all with the Japanese. I mean they were prepared and they knew where they were going and what they were going to do. We had WWI equipment you know, they had the gas masks and all which were never used in WWII, they were in WWI. And the helmets we had were little short ones like the British wear. We didn't have the latest of anything. And I recall them going in to Philly and they had a name, X, doing something X. Which meant they would go to a manufacturer, "we're taking over your factory. When? Right now. We will let you stay here; you're the president we need you to find out how things are and

all.” And they would just clear the decks and put in equipment. Like in Philly they had a lot of textile factories. And they would go to the textile factories and instead of making ladies stockings, they would start making G.I. socks and underwear or whatever for the military. And it was just like that they would take it over. I was amazed the way they did it. They said “we’ve got a blank check for you, we are going to send people in, and they’re going to clean out your stock put it away in storage or whatever, sell it on the side if you want. But we are manufacturing for the Army, for the Marines or whatever.” And they gave them some kind of an X rating which means bingo, the minute we say, they went around and told them ahead of time, we are going to take your factory over in thirty days. Finish up the runs of what you’ve got but don’t buy any more, don’t buy anymore stock because we are going to put something different in. And then they would come in.

### **Marge Dickson**

They were very fussy too about parties too. I went to get a job at City Hall one time. They asked me are you Democrat or Republican.

### **Jack Dickson**

That was big.

### **Marge Dickson**

They were very Democrat then in Philadelphia. Or it was Republican I think then. Whatever it was I wasn’t at that time.

### **58:24 Jack Dickson**

I did that when I first got out of the service in late 52. In the Korean War and I got discharged. And I had that chartreuse convertible. I was courting her. And what a nice car you know. And I got a couple of tickets, I parked somewhere and I wasn’t worried and then finally somebody said hey, they’re going to put a boot on your car. Well who and what do I do? Well go down to city hall and the guy writes a name of a guy down. So I go to City Hall and you know, it was a maze finding it but I finally found the place. And the guy “can I help you?” I had three or four tickets and I said can you do anything with these? Well, let’s see you’ve been busy. He was kidding with me. And he said by the way, what affiliation are you? And I said affiliation, what? Politics, Republican or Democrat. And I thought oh jeez, I know what’s going on here. I got two options. Which door am I opening? And I think they were Democrat then. Dillworth? and people like that. Anyhow whoever they were, I said it correctly. Sheer accident but I picked one and I picked it right. And they said well you shouldn’t be having these, don’t worry about it. He ripped them up and I never heard a word. Philly was very political that way. Get a ticket? If you knew somebody, no problem.

### **Michael Corrigan**

How about the end of the war? Do you remember the war dwindling down or what about Victory over Japan Day?

**Jack Dickson**

Well we beat Germany first as I recall right?

**Michael Corrigan**

Right.

**Jack Dickson**

And then Japan came second. V-E was Europe and V-J was Japan. Where did they have the big parties though, was that Europe or Japan? Remember Time Square?

**Marge Dickson**

I can say something or do you want me to wait?

**Michael Corrigan**

No go ahead.

**Marge Dickson**

I remember the day that they announced it. Everybody went to church and the bells were ringing and everybody was just coming and coming. That's what I remember.

**01:01:04 Jack Dickson**

Well by the end of the war like I said we had thirteen million guys in the service. You know, anybody that could walk was taken into the service at the end of it. They were you know, even if you were overseas well... [End of tape].