

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

This is an interview with Jacob Roenbaugh, part of an oral history project entitled "Patchwork of Dependency: The Effects of WWII on Edwards County, Kansas" conducted by the Kinsley Public Library. The project was supported by a Kansas Humanities Council Heritage Grant. Jacob talks of his family, education, military career, and the home front during WWII.

Creator: Roenbaugh, Jacob Byron

Date: November 09, 2009

Callnumber: 2010-176.01

KSHS Identifier: DaRT ID: 227287

Item Identifier: 227287

www.kansasmemory.org/item/227287



Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 1

**Interview with Jacob Roenbaugh
November 9, 2009
Conducted in the Roenbaugh home
Interviewers: Joan Weaver and Rosetta Graff**

Interviewer: What is your full name?

Jake: Jake Byron Roenbaugh.

Interviewer: Where do you currently reside?

Jake: Kinsley, Kansas.

Interviewer: And when and where were you born?

Jake: Fellsburg, Kansas. 11/06/31.

Interviewer: And what were the names of your parents?

Jake: My mother's name was Mildred. My father's name was Gordon.

Interviewer: And your mother's maiden name?

Jake: Shank.

Interviewer: And how about your grandparents?

Jake: Well, let's see. Grandma Roenbaugh was Nora Roenbaugh. I didn't know my grandpa. And my Grandfather Shank was Henry. He lived in St. John.

Interviewer: His wife?

Jake: I don't know. He'd been remarried, and I don't remember what-- Grandma is the only thing I remember.

Interviewer: Describe the makeup of your household as you were growing up? Brothers or sisters?

Jake: Well, I had two sisters. One older and one younger.

Interviewer: Their names?

Jake: Doris was the older and Virginia was younger. They're both alive.

Interviewer: And what was it like in your house? Were you the only boy?

Jake: I was the only boy and I got, how do I want to put this without cussin'? I got blamed for everything.

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 2

Interviewer: What brought you and your parents or your grandparents to Edwards County originally?

Jake: They came from Ohio, and I really don't know, other than I guess they were looking for a better life.

Interviewer: They were farmers?

Jake: Yes.

Interviewer: Back in Ohio too?

Jake: I would assume so, yes. I don't recollect.

Interviewer: Are these your grandparents?

Jake: Yes, my dad was born in the same place I was born, there on the farm. He was born in 1895.

Interviewer: Do you know when they came? Was that about the...

Jake: I don't know. They'd been there before that, but I don't know how much longer.

Interviewer: Were they original homesteaders?

Jake: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, we wanted to do a little background to WWII. First, you said you got picked on a lot, or you got blamed a lot. And you were the only boy. What kind of a farm was it? Was it both cattle and...

Jake: Yes, we raised cattle, and we also raised wheat and some milo at that time. Corn was...we had some third row corn. The main reason for the third row corn was to keep the ground from blowing. Our ground was awful sandy.

Interviewer: What do you mean by "third row"?

Jake: Well, there'd be two rows in between, there wouldn't be anything. And we had drills that would drill wheat in between those rows of corn. It wasn't all that way, but quite a bit of it. It was a conservation method to help protect the ground from blowing.

Interviewer: What's the soil like up there?

Jake: Sandy. I'm a sand rat.

Interviewer: Then you had chickens, pigs...

Jake: Yeah, we had chickens and hogs and turkeys and geese. There was everything.

Interviewer: So as a child and teenager, what were your chores?

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 3

Jake: Well, I carried the coal to the house 'cause we had a coal stove.

Interviewer: Did you have electricity?

Jake: We did, but it was from a Koehler deal that created a low voltage electric deal throughout the house.

Interviewer: What do you mean, Koehler deal?

Jake: Koehler engine. It created...I never did really understand it because I wasn't too old when the electricity came in.

Interviewer: What ran the engine?

Jake: I don't remember.

Interviewer: Propane? Coal?

Jake: No, it couldn't have been propane because we didn't have propane at that time.

Interviewer: Maybe gas then?

Jake: It must have been. Must have been, I just don't remember. It was in the basement of the house, what we called the wash house, out away from the house.

Interviewer: So you carried the coal, and what else?

Jake: Oh, I milked the cows and gathered the eggs and...

Interviewer: How many cows did you have?

Jake: Oh, one or two.

Interviewer: Just enough for the family's milk.

Jake: Yes, and what else did I do, or what else did we raise? Oh hell, I don't know. We had the normal things that you had at that time. Mom made butter and, we butchered there at the farm. Some of the neighbors would come in and help. We usually butchered a hog or two. In one of the outhouses, we had a great box full of corn. In that corn there would be the hams and the bacons. We'd smoke the hams and the bacons, and then when my dad was through doing that, he would put them in this big box and would pour corn all around it so the mice wouldn't bother it.

Interviewer: Wouldn't bother the corn?

Jake: That's right, and it made it stay the same.

Interviewer: Did the corn help preserve the ham too, or was the ham...

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 4

Jake: It was just there as a protection to the hams and, I don't know, it was a great big old box. You know at that time, you really didn't understand why we did anything, but that's what it was for. And that's how we preserved our meat.

Interviewer: Did you do that butchering in the fall? Or the winter?

Jake: I'm sure it was, probably in the fall, I don't know. I don't remember exactly what time it was.

Interviewer: During that time, you were born in '31. What do you remember about the Dirty Thirties, the Dust Bowl?

Jake: That you couldn't see anything when it come rolling through. We had lots of rags at the doors and the windows. We walked around with wet washcloths a lot, so we could continue to breathe.

Interviewer: Over your mouth?

Jake: Yes. The house that my folks lived in was moved there when the town of Greensburg folded up. There'd been a tornado come through there, and they rebuilt part of it. There was no insulation in the house. There was just the siding and then the plaster on the inside. No boxing or nothing. Pretty open, so a lot of that dust and dirt come right on through. One time my older sister and I found a snake in a turkey nest. We went back to the house. Grandma Roenbaugh lived with us at that time. She grabbed a spade or a hoe, but by the time we got back out there the snake was gone. But she had to lead us back to the house, because the dust or the dirt came in and we couldn't see. Naturally, we caught hold of her hand and that's how we got back into the house. This was when it was really bad.

Interviewer: How far is Fellsburg from Greensburg?

Jake: 20 miles.

Interviewer: So they moved that house 20 miles? Through the sand?

Jake: I don't know how they got there, but they did. There were several houses. The house that Susie and I started living in and remodeled. It was moved there and just set on a stone or a block here and there. With no foundation under either one of the houses. Naturally, the varmints and everything would come round. I took and got metal in rolls and then nailed it to what was left of the house and put it around the outside of the house to keep the skunks out mainly. 'Cause there were times when they would get underneath the house. You know that creates a lot of smell. When our children were little, there were lots of days they sat in the corner. We had a card party there one night, and they started screaming, "The skunk's dead!" I told everybody to get everything they had, lipstick, shoes, anything, and get the hell out of the house. Not all of them wanted to believe me, and some of them had trouble getting out of the house. But that's just what happens when houses were moved in like that and no foundation put underneath them. But we had the same problem in both houses.

Interviewer: Do you remember the Depression at all? Or any effects at all? Again, you were a young person...

Jake: I don't know exactly what all we did without. You know, as a little kid you really don't know. But we made it. We did without this and that. Mom bought flour and stuff like that in sacks so she could make her skirts or aprons or whatever. She made a lot of the clothes that the girls wore. We

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 5

didn't hurt for anything. We were fortunate enough that our health stayed pretty good most of the time. So I guess that's the best I could answer that.

Interviewer: That was the advantage of living on a farm. You didn't go hungry.

Interviewer: That's right. Mom had her regular little deal. She'd go catch a chicken out there and wring its neck, scald it. She already the water to where she'd scald it, and we'd have something to eat. My dad couldn't work. He was dependent on somebody to do most all of the work. So consequently, I was not very old and I learned how to milk a cow. The reason he couldn't work was he had a double hernia. It had been operated on, when I don't know, but that made it a little tough in the sense that he couldn't ride a tractor either. He couldn't pick up anything.

Interviewer: Did he hire people or neighbors or...

Jake: He'd hire whoever he could. Or I did it. We always had hogs, so that...

Interviewer: How many acres did you farm?

Jake: Oh my goodness, I don't know. Seven or eight hundred I suppose. Maybe not that much, it might have been with the grass. I don't remember a whole lot. They put me on a '22 Caterpillar. If you know what a Caterpillar looks like, then you understand that you sit down in there. You have to climb up over to get in. They felt like I probably wouldn't fall out of there. I did that pretty young in life. I don't know how old I was. But I was driving a pickup at seven.

Interviewer: So you were doing the Caterpillar shortly thereafter?

Jake: I was driving the tractor part of the time.

Interviewer: You had to be the man of the house pretty early then.

Jake: Well, not necessarily that, but we usually...help was easy to get at that time. Everybody looked for a job.

Interviewer: Because of the Depression.

Jake: Yes.

Interviewer: Now, was the help live-in help? Or did they just...

Jake: Usually, we had another little house down the road a quarter mile. That's where they lived. I remember one day this guy and his wife. We had him picking corn. And she always rode with him, and one day she didn't ride with him. The next day she did, but she was carrying a baby. She stayed home that one day and had that baby and was back on that wagon riding with him the next day. I say, the next day, I might be off a day, maybe two days, but it wasn't any more than that. And it was...we picked the corn in cribs, we didn't have combines. We had a sheller of some sort. My dad did have a grinder that ground the cob and all. He fed the cattle that way.

Interviewer: Then you took the corn to Fellsburg?

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 6

Jake: No, he ground it all and fed it, right there at the place.

Interviewer: So he didn't sell any corn. How about the wheat?

Jake: Hauled it to the elevator, I guess at Fellsburg. Because it was all hauled in, at that time, by oh gosh, those old trucks didn't hold much.

Interviewer: Do you remember the train? The Nancy?

Jake: Oh yes, I was in the fourth grade when they took that track out of there and put that train... I rode it to Kinsley a time or two. I was going to school there at Fellsburg. They had a two room school and then the high school. The first six grades were in the two room school. I went there for four years, fifth and sixth. In the fourth grade, they moved it in the sixth grade. I don't know. I think it was then. They took the high school because they didn't want to buy busses. They didn't want to get...so they went to Trousdale, which was five miles east. And so, my first six years was in Fellsburg. Two years of it happened to be in the big school building. The first part of heated lunches was that you took a bowl with something in it and they'd put it in some hot water or something and that was the first I ever knew of a hot lunch.

Interviewer: So you took a bowl of soup...

Jake: Or something like that, yes, and that was early in the year. I walked to school a big part of the time because it was about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile across the country, a mile around the road. We were always first on and last off when I was in grade school. I went to Trousdale two years, seventh and eighth grade. Nine...

Interviewer: And that would have been the war years.

Jake: Yes. Let's see. Eight and nine and ten, I went to Centerview School for three years, which was five miles to the west of Fellsburg.

Interviewer: How did you get there?

Jake: They had a bus. And then I went back to Trousdale for ten, eleven and twelve. For whatever reason, the same reason today, lack of people, lack of money. Anytime after the sixth grade, I could have gone to Lewis. All those busses come into Fellsburg to pick up kids that were in that area.

Interviewer: Do you know why you chose not to go to Lewis?

Jake: Why yes, that was easy. I had friends that were going the other way and had relatives that lived at Trousdale. I didn't at Centerview. You'd just go where you were told to go. You either walked or, I never did ride a horse. I always walked. I was past that stage I guess.

Interviewer: Did you have horses on the farm?

Jake: Oh yes. And they worked them in my early years.

Interviewer: Pulling wagons or...?

Jake: Yes. That's what they were picking this corn with.

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 7

Interviewer: You would have been ten years old on December 7, 1941. Do you remember that day?

Jake: Yes. I was in Trousdale at a function where my grandmother lived. It was just something that happened. You know, why did it happen? We didn't know. With communication, we just knew it happened. You didn't have the television, you didn't have...there wasn't such a thing. We did have telephones.

Interviewer: Did you hear it on the radio or...?

Jake: I think so, yes. But we were over there for a family function or something.

Interviewer: It was a Sunday. Do you remember any conversation of the adults?

Jake: No, I was always outside playing. Were there members of your family, uncles or whatever, that were in the military?

Interviewer: My dad did not pass the physical. He couldn't pass the physical, and consequently, I enlisted. I would have been drafted, but I enlisted. And when I went to the service, he didn't know who would be doing the chores if somebody didn't show up. But anyway, did I have any aunts or uncles?

Interviewer: During WWII, was your family affected?

Jake: No, I don't think so. I had cousins; I had cousins that were in the service. I knew they were there and when they got home. All of that. You'd hear some of the stories they had to tell. I don't remember any of the stories.

Interviewer: Were they in the army?

Jake: Yes, let's see. Deloss and Thermon, Tom was never in the service. I think they were both in the army.

Interviewer: Do you know where they were deployed?

Jake: No, no, I don't remember.

Interviewer: So you don't remember if they were enlisted or if they were drafted or...

Jake: Well, I would say they were probably drafted. I enlisted because I didn't want to go into the regular army. The other thing is, when I went in, there was a man in the community named Emil Fisher that had got involved with the Coast Guard. I imagine he recruited like, I think I counted at one time, like 23 kids out of this county that went into the Coast Guard. It was alright with me, I thought it might be just as good or better than the army. Most of the ones that were getting enlisted at the time I went into the Coast Guard went right into the marines. Why I didn't want to go there, I can't answer that. Other than I did enlist and went into the United States Coast Guard for eight years, three years active duty. The other five years, they could have called me at any time. They didn't, thank goodness. While I was in the service, I got married.

Interviewer: Let's hold that thought, and stay with WWII for a minute. Then we'll come back to that. How about, do you remember people in the community that went into the service?

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 8

Jake: You know I really don't. I knew that they were there, and you know we had rationing at that time.

Interviewer: What was rationed?

Jake: Everything. Almost. You know, you'd have coupons to get gas. You had to have coupons to get tires if you could buy them. I would say, I think sugar was hard to get. You know, it was something that I wasn't the one doing it, I just lived with it. Some of the other things that happened along that line, you were...Shoes, sometimes you couldn't get shoes. I remember one time we took a trip. I must have been about a sophomore, maybe a junior. Probably a sophomore. We took a trip back to Ohio. We put off going for a couple weeks because we needed a couple tires for our car. Finally, Jack Molletor got them in, a man that lived in here in town, a friend of my dad's. When we got back to Ohio, which was either New Philadelphia or Dover, I don't remember, one or both of those towns. I was walking around town, and I walked into a tire store, and there were tires stacked up there. Looked like a mountain to me, they weren't. I said, "Would you sell one of them to me?" They said, "We'll sell them all to you." We couldn't get them, and we had to have a permit to get them here in Kansas. But they had plenty of them back there.

Interviewer: So Ohio had...

Jake: Now, maybe, for whatever reason, I don't know. I asked my dad about it and said, "Why don't we buy a couple tires?" He said, "We really don't need them, and we don't have the money to spend on them."

Interviewer: Had you gone to Ohio to see relatives?

Jake: Yes. And when I was, oh, damn, must have been a sophomore, maybe a junior, probably a sophomore. A second or third cousin from Ohio came floating through here in a Model A. He went clear to California and came back to here. His name was Bob Roenbaugh. He worked at different places around. He is still alive. He lives in the winter in Phoenix and the summer in Topeka. It was part of that family that we went back to see.

Interviewer: It was during the war that you did that. Would that have been unusual for people to travel during the war? Or ...

Jake: It probably was.

Interviewer: And you went by automobile rather than train. A lot of people traveled by train.

Jake: I think we went in a '41 Ford car. I'm pretty sure that's what we went in because my dad ended up giving it to me, later on. I suppose I was...I graduated in '49, so he must have given it to me in '49.

Interviewer: Did your family own the land by this time?

Jake: Yes, the part of it was part of this deal that the government...you know, they bought it actually from the government. Parts of it. I don't know, I can't remember exactly which piece. I could probably look it up. But no, my dad, other than his sisters, he had three sisters. We didn't do without anything. It was just like I told my kids growing up. Anything they wanted, they got it. They just had to wait to get it, and it was the same thing then. We didn't want very much. We didn't know about everything in the world. We didn't know what was going on very many miles away from home. We used to come to

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 9

the Old Settler's Picnic here in Kinsley as a kid growing up, and we always looked forward to that. We ended up in 4-H.

Interviewer: Do you know about how old you were when you started 4-H?

Jake: Oh gosh, probably, what was it, 19, 18, 17--14 or 15, I don't know. But it was something that a lot of the kids did, you know. You got to go and do a few things. We usually had livestock projects. The girls had...my older sister wasn't in it. Virginia was. They had sewing and various things, and food products. But the livestock deal, it was controlled by just a few people. What I mean by that is there was one or two people in this county that made damned sure their kids had the champion stuff. And the rest of us made up for competition. I remember one year there was a heifer that won the fat stock, fat steer, whatever fat calf. Then the next year there was a hundred and some fat steers. I usually had one or two. The last year I was in 4-H, I had a deferred fed project. And I helped a lot of kids--including my sisters, or, my younger sister (Doris wasn't there) get their calves ready to show. And a lot of them had two calves and I'd show one of them. Joe Lewis from Larned was the judge. And I got...he would pick out different ones for his showmanship contest. Which I think should still be that way, but anyway, changes are usually good. But the board would not let me show in that showmanship contest. They said that I didn't have a calf to show of my own. I had done more work than the majority of the rest of them; and you know I didn't ever get over that. I didn't ever, I didn't really dislike those guys, but I didn't forget them. I saw one of them, he lives in Nebraska, one time at the Lewis Café several years after that. I reached over and shook his hand and told him I was still mad at him. The thing about it was most all of us knew who was going to win the showmanship. It turned out to be my brother-in-law showed dairy cattle. And you couldn't beat him when it came to showmanship. You couldn't beat him in the county showmanship, he won all the time. And rightfully so, but there were some people in the community that went out and bought high-priced calves so that they could win. That's just some of the things that you learn by it. We ended doing somewhat the same, only they...like this one person, they'd have three or four calves that they were fattening out. One year, meat rationing was on. You could not...regardless of how fat your cattle was. They had a ceiling on beef. That was all that you could get for it, like 25 cents, I think it was, a pound. Or I don't know, 25 dollars a hundred. There were eight or ten of us that took our calves to the Wichita Fat Stock Show, and we got 50 cents a pound for our calves. I had two that year, and I sold Murray Morris and my dad one of them and charged them what the going price was. Which made that calf lose money. But the one I sold in Wichita made enough more that I broke even. But most 4-H projects don't make money.

Interviewer: Now would that have been during WWII or afterward? It was during rationing.

Jake: That would have been in ...I said meat being rationed. I don't know that meat was rationed. This was for live livestock. They had a...see I graduated in '49, so this would have been in '47 or '48. And the war was over when, in '45? So it would have been right after that. They used to have iron drives, where they sold like...our 4-H group went together and found all the iron we could and sold it and gave it to the Cause. There were a lot of people bought war bonds at the time, and the...

Interviewer: Did that stuff linger because of the Korean Conflict? Because that just ran right again.

Jake: I suppose it did, I don't know.

Interviewer: Was the iron drive during WWII?

Jake: Two. Or at the end of it. 'Cause I remember we were loading these trucks and one of the guys that had a truck that lived out in the community. He accused me of breaking out the back window of his

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 10

truck. I didn't do it. He didn't believe me, but I didn't do it. The little things like that, sometimes you remember. I don't know who threw what up there, but I wasn't the one that did it. Of course, I was the youngest one in my class, and I should have been held out another year. It's easy to say that. I was one year behind my older sister, and my younger sister was three years behind me. But they wanted to get me out of school so I could work quicker. That's what it amounted to.

Interviewer: But you didn't stay and graduate, your father...and your sisters graduated.

Jake: Oh yes, I did, and they both graduated from college. I went to college two years then went to the service.

Interviewer: What were you studying in college?

Jake: Girls.

Interviewer: What did you get credit for studying in college?

Jake: Oh, I just took a general course. I remember that I started at Kansas State University, and I was totally lost. I had a couple cousins that was going to Topeka at Washburn. I went to Kansas State one week and transferred to Washburn and went to school at Washburn instead of Kansas State. The dean of women enrolled me at Washburn. We became very good friends, and she said, "It says here that you don't need 'bone heading'" and I said, "I do." And she said, "Okay, I'll put you in my class." That was fine. And she asked me to stay in one day after class. Rosetta is setting over there and being awfully quiet, so I'm going to use her. She may get mad at me, but that's all right, she'll get over it. She said, "Do you know Rosetta Graff?" I don't remember this girl's name. I said, "Sure, I know who she is. What's the matter with her?" She said, "She's awful homesick. She needs to get more involved." And she wondered if somebody in our fraternity or me or somebody would... I said, "I'll look into it." I knew what this girl was doing. She was sneaking out most every night with somebody. It wasn't me. See. And so, finally I think she got caught. She asked me to stay in again. She says, "Why didn't you tell me?" And I said, "You didn't ask." So Rosetta got...I don't know whether she stayed in school or not. Now see, we got you involved in this too.

Interviewer: Better make it clear, that is a fictitious name.

Jake: That is a fictitious name. I don't remember where the girl was from. I never did take her out. But there were two or three of them. They had women's dormitories and they...

Interviewer: That was back when they had rules.

Jake: Yes. That's right. And they finally figured out when she was just too damned tired from being out partying every night. And this teacher, we became real friends. I went back and saw her when I got out of the service. That was a time when they had a lot of military people come back and they had a deal where they go to college on some kind of a basis.

Interviewer: The G.I. Bill?

Jake: She made comment that that was teaching in school really changed, is when they had the G.I. Bill and lots of more of those people. They were older, they weren't just out of high school and they had spent two or three years somewhere and come back to get an education. She said it made a...it was

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 11

where colleges...students and what you taught and the things that happened were a lot different. She expounded on that.

Interviewer: That would have been one of the big changes that the war brought on that you don't really...they educated a generation, but they were interested in education. They were serious about it.

Jake: That's right. They had places for them to live, they had dormitories for them to live in if they wanted to. Even at Washburn, that's a private school. Still is.

Interviewer: Going back just a little bit again. When you were in school during WWII, did you notice any changes that the war brought to your school? Did teachers or...

Jake: Yes and no, I suppose. They had as much trouble then, maybe more so than they do now, on getting quality teachers. I guess I called 'em "90 Day Wonders". We had a lot of military people that were officers and went to school to a certain school for 90 days and became an officer. We had teachers, I can't remember exactly what all. I called them, 90 Day Wonders because they had a certificate to teach as long as they kept going back to get more education. The really good teachers, they weren't to be had. I'm not going to say that the ones that we had at that time were any poorer or any worse, or any better. You can get an education wherever you're at if you pay attention and listen and not talk so damn much.

Interviewer: Did your teachers, wherever you were, wherever you went to school, did they live in the community?

Jake: Yes.

Interviewer: Did the school do anything to entice them to be there?

Jake: At Fellsburg, they had a place or two there in town where the teachers lived. At Centerville they did, well, they did at all of them, you know. There was one or teachers that we had that drove out from Kinsley; I can't even remember their names. I don't remember. That's when I quit learning.

Interviewer: I had another question, talking about 4-H and stuff. Did you have a state fair at that time?

Jake: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you show there?

Jake: I didn't. The only place I went was to the fat stock show in Wichita. If it had anything to do on weekends, if it had anything to do with after school, I didn't get involved in it. I had too many chores to do. I went to a basketball game late one night, second team basketball game over in Macksville, and I didn't call home and tell my folks. When I got home, I didn't think we'd win, but we did. I didn't get to play much. I didn't get in the house. There was an arm hanging outside the door with a bucket on the end of it. I went and milked the cow when I got home. So, it didn't...you know, all that didn't hurt me. Course, the old cow was anxious to get milked.

Interviewer: It hurt the cow! Now, you said you played on the team?

Jake: Yes. I got to play basketball some.

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 12

Interviewer: So chores were lighter in the winter?

Jake: The chores were there, it didn't matter. I told my dad one time, I said, "Pop, tell you what. I'd get to play if you would agree to take a group of the boys." They didn't go to ball games in busses. They went in individuals' cars. I said, "If you'd agree to take some of us to the basketball game sometime. I get to play." "Oh, you don't know what you're talking about." I said, "The hell I don't." So he did agree, and I did get to play. It was just like it is now, a little brown-nosing.

Interviewer: Well, your father was sitting there too.

Jake: But we all went in cars; they didn't take busses.

Interviewer: So who did you play? You played Macksville and...

Jake: Oh yes, we played Byers and Macksville, Haviland, Centerville, Coats. Oh, there in high school we played Pawnee Rock, Radium, have you heard of all those towns?

Interviewer: Okay, well then. Do you remember the end of the war? Anything specific about VE Day or VJ Day?

Jake: No, I can't even tell you where I was at. What year would that have been in? In '50?

Interviewer: '45.

Jake: '45...no.

Interviewer: The bombing of Hiroshima?

Jake: That was a big day.

Interviewer: So you remember that.

Jake: Yes, that was a big day. I'm not going to say it was wrong or right. It's easy to look back. It solved lots of problems. It created just as many as it solved.

Interviewer: Do you remember the guys coming home?

Jake: Well, yes and no. I just knew they did, but as far as any big celebration, I wasn't privy to it.

Interviewer: You said the community supported the guys with a metal drive, war bonds and of course by participating in rationing. Was there anything else you can remember?

Jake: Oh, we had a speed limit at that time. 35 miles an hour. 35 miles an hour, and when you went anywhere, why you know, you just planned...it just took longer. It took longer to get wherever you wanted to go. And like going to Wichita, I remember times we'd go one day and come back the next. The reason for that was that I had an aunt that lived in Wichita, and we had a place to stay. Had we had to have rented a room, we'd have come home. My dad very seldom ever went, you know, with Mom to Wichita if she was shopping for whatever.

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 13

Interviewer: So did you go on a train to Wichita?

Jake: No, we'd drive.

Interviewer: Did your mother drive?

Jake: Yes. She drove right up...oh, she was 93 when she died. I suppose she was still driving at 89 or 90. I don't know; she actually drove more than my dad did.

Interviewer: Do you remember if there were any war casualties from your area:

Jake: No. I really don't. I'm sure there probably were, I can't think of who it would have been. Not any real close friends or what have you or relatives that were.

Interviewer: When the war ended. What changes did you see in the family or in the area where you lived?

Jake: Well, it wasn't long until you could see some new cars. That was one of them. And the rationing stopped, at what point I don't really know. You know, we had coupons. People would trade coupons around for various things, you know, the rationing part. I'm sure that's how we got back to Ohio. We had somebody else's gas tickets. But you know, you didn't drive very fast, consequently, I'm not sure but what cars didn't do as good or better on gas mileage.

....
It is easy to think of different things at different times. If you would think of it, you would remember a whole lot more. I think I should know that, and probably do...

Interviewer: What interests a child, you had a different life than the adults.

Jake: That's true. And you know, my dad couldn't work, so consequently, I don't ever remember not having chores. No matter how old I was. I had a bunch of cousins that lived at Trousdale that they didn't have the same...they went to more shows, did more things. I just knew that I wasn't going to get to do it. I can remember one time when we were getting ready to move a hog trough. My dad was standing at the fence talking to somebody, and I couldn't move it. I had a stick or something trying to pry it with. And I looked up and asked him, I said, "God damn it, can't you help me?" And I think that's probably what I said, and he did. And it was three weeks before he got over it. He just couldn't do it. And I know now what he was, 'cause I can't do it today, I can't do anything. I can't walk very far.

Interviewer: That had to be frustrating for your father.

Jake: It was.

Interviewer: And your relationship with him?

Jake: It was good, very good. He drank a lot of whiskey, but he taught me a lot of things.

Interviewer: So overall, you had a lot of chores, but it was a good childhood.

Jake: Oh yes. And my sisters, I'd wave to them goodbye. They were always going somewhere with their friends. I was either on the tractor or doing something.

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 14

Interviewer: They had a lot lighter chores.

Jake: Oh...

Interviewer: Oh yes, they gathered eggs.

Jake: I don't know what their chores were; they were in the house.

Interviewer: They had women's...

Jake: Yeah, anyway...

Interviewer: I asked you before we got there; do you remember the air base at Pratt? I know there were bombing runs that they practiced...

Jake: I remember those airplanes coming and going, and I knew they were making practice runs somewhere or some how or another, either out of Pratt or Wichita. When you'd go to Pratt you had to go actually through a part of the edge of the base. You always wondered as a kid what was going on over there, you know. Same way with the airplanes. And I'm old enough to remember when the airplanes first started flying. And hey, you'd go look. You'd wonder who was on them, who was running them. And you still do the same thing today.

Interviewer: Did you learn to identify the planes?

Jake: No, well, big ones and little ones, you know, and the fighter planes. Once in a while they would come out of (I don't know where they came out of) it might have been Wichita. I don't think it was Pratt. I don't know where they came from. Every once in a while they'd be flying real low in formation. Most usually it would spook the cattle. Because here comes not only noise, but you'd see the silhouette, the shadow of the plane. And it comes and goes so fast that you don't know. That happened a lot, and they had different runs. Pretty soon you kind of got used to them. They had different runs to different places. I assumed they were dropping different bags of flour. I don't know what they was dropping. I know there was one over here south of town, and I've heard of another one or two. I don't remember where. It was just something that happened.

Rosetta: There was more than one bombing range in Edwards County?

Jake: This one. It seems to me like, Rosetta, that I want to say there was, but I can't tell you where it was at. I'd like to say it was up north here. Maybe it was in another county. I don't know. I know the one south, but probably ought to say there was just one because I can't tell you where the second one is.

Interviewer: Before we go on, we're going to talk about your experience after the war. WWII, do you think it affected you life? In what ways? Or the county? Overall or in general?

Jake: Well, it wasn't good. Nothing like that is good. But it affected my life? I'm sure it did, but exactly how or if it hurt me somehow, I don't know it. I was just young enough that I wasn't...I was at the tail end of all of it.

Interviewer: And yet you enlisted.

Jake: I went into the Korean deal.

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 15

Interviewer: So, did WWII affect that decision, or not?

Jake: No, I don't think so. When I was about to be enlisted, we had the draft at about that time. They were basically taking anybody if you were eligible. You know, if you could pass the physical. It was just something that you knew was going to happen. We had several instances of guys getting off for various reasons.

Interviewer: Could you have gotten a farm deferment at that time?

Jake: I'm sure I could have. My dad wouldn't talk about it. He didn't go...he would have been in WWI, probably. He didn't go because he couldn't pass the physical, and he felt like that, I think that he had a feeling that I went, in a sense, because he didn't. Or what have you, I don't exactly know how to put that, but he could have kept me home. In fact I know he could have. When I joined the service, I was in California. Oakland was where I guess I was at. There was a young man from here in Kinsley that was in the same company that I was. I did not know him. He was born and raised north of town, out of town a ways. After we got out of boot camp, we went to Long Beach, and then went to cook and baker school at Groton, Connecticut. And in the meantime, where was it? I told him I saw him someplace. I can't remember. He said he was getting out of the service. I says, "How, how are you getting out of the service?" He told me, and I thought it was wrong. And it was wrong. He wanted out so damned bad because his girlfriend was chasing somebody else, he thought. Maybe she was, maybe she wasn't. And his dad gave him half the farm, and all the cows. They got him out of the service because of that. I thought it was wrong. He went back to school afterwards and he taught school. He didn't stay on the farm, you know, it was just one of those things. And that's fine; that was his life. He had to live with it, I didn't. But he was from here at Kinsley.

Interviewer: Well, how did your dad continue farming without you?

Jake: He continued paying the bills.

Interviewer: Hired?

Jake: Yes. He had to hire it done. Very few people knew that. I don't know or remember how he come to have to have this hernia. It was a double hernia. He wore a belt every day, and I was told it was operated on once. Well, I don't know where. I know a couple of my uncles, when it kind of got to where if they went to Halstead, they were going to die. And I don't...

Interviewer: *(Susan Roenbaugh, spouse brought in some pictures.)* We're looking at pictures...I could scan that...that's he and his sisters...There we go, how old were you there?

Interviewer: How old were you there?

Jake: I don't know.

Interviewer: That oldest sister probably hasn't graduated yet. She is still in braids. Doris looks like she's about 14, so I'll bet...this might be about WWII.

Jake: That very easily could have been.

Interviewer: We'd like to scan that, or if you want to.

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 16

Jake: Well, you can just take the picture and do with it. Take the picture and bring it back.

Off mike discussion.... This one is Doris and Virginia. This would have been taken in '51.

Jake: Well, it was right after I went into the service. First of February. I think it was in February of '52, Suzy. The other was born in '53. '55. I was released in St. Louis.

Interviewer: Was there any motivation on your part to get away from the farm? Was that why...

Jake: No. If I hadn't had to farm to come back to, we'd ended up living in California. We had an aunt...Susie had an Aunt and Uncle in San Diego. We probably would have stayed there, but I had...well, you think about what you might have done, but I knew when I went in that I would come back. You know, it was just...when we got out of the service, naturally we were married, why, we didn't raise anything on the farm. We went through some dry years. I think I was home two or three years before we ever raised very much at all. It was just too dry.

Interviewer: Okay, so you enlisted and you were talking that there were a lot men that went into the Coast Guard. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Jake: I don't know what brought it all on. Emil, both of his boys were in the Coast Guard, Harold Allison, Bill Smith and several other ones. I said 23, but I might be a little, I'm probably too high on my numbers. That number stuck in my...of all the different people other that he helped get in. But at that time, we felt like probably it was...we enlisted for three years. We could have gone into the army for two. And it's kind of like anything else, I guess, whether you're in 4-H or whatever it is; you want to be part of something. I guess I wanted to be part of the Coast Guard because my friends were there. Carl Dean Wingfield was one, he's gone now. No he isn't; he still lives; he lives at Pratt. But he was ahead of me at school at Centerview. But as to exactly why else, I don't know. I guess I didn't want to go to the Marines. The Army might have been alright. I don't know what my thoughts were 100% at that time.

Interviewer: Was there any thought that the coast guard would keep you in the States?

Jake: No, not necessarily, other than what, I guess you would have to say that I stated that wrong. The Coast Guard was under the Treasury Department at that time. We were usually along the coast. They had places in Alaska and an office. I was discharged in St. Lewis.

Interviewer: What were your duties in the coast guard at this time? I know you were a cook, what...

Jake: Shoreline duties. We checked all the ships coming in, out of the harbor, out of Los Angeles Harbor, Long Beach. What's that? *(Susan brings in another picture.)*

Interviewer: She found another one.

Jake: They escorted the Navy a lot of times. I don't know what all the whole...but they were under the treasury department at the time I was in there. I don't know who they're under now, but they had 12 coast guard districts. I was in the 11th one. We were in and out of the harbor at Long Beach, Los Angeles Harbor. One night we went looking for a whale. It was supposedly in the harbor. He found his way back out, I guess.

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 17

Interviewer: So it was harbor safety...

Jake: And the last ship I was on was the Minnetonka, it was 225 feet long. It had a full complement of people. We dropped depth charges. We had the big guns, everything. I asked the gunner's mates when I got ready to get out of the service for some anti freeze. They used anti freeze for lubricant in those big guns. It was real slick, which it is, and it would keep them from freezing up.

Interviewer: So the depth charges would have been for enemy submarines.

Jake: Yes. And we chased...we went out in the harbor and played games with the Navy and did things like that. The last ship I was on, I was on the base in San Pedro for quite a while. There was three 83 footers, is what I was on for almost a year. That means it was 83 feet long and had a complement of about 13 and one officer. And the officer was a 90 day wonder, as I called him. And he told me I could get a rate change. What we were after was to get a better rate, and we could get a little bit more money naturally. I had to cook a duck, bake a pie...there was three things I had to do, which wasn't hard to do. We bought all our groceries on this small boat that I was on, small ship, I should say, at the grocery store, just like Jay's down there. It was called the Busy Bee Market, in San Pedro California. I would go in and order various things if we needed something to do something with, like we were allotted X number of dollars. And so, at the end of the month, we'd usually have a little extra money. Once in a while, we also had a dry goods box up in our place on the base, up on the dock. We kept it full of canned goods and stuff like that, in case we got into trouble. I would order cigarettes for the guys, I did not smoke. They'd charge it all off as something else. One of the guys on one of the other ships come on there one day and I was cooking, frying up, some rib eyes. And "Where in the world did you get that?" So "I got it at the same place you get your meat." Well, as it turned out, the butcher at the Busy Bee Market was from Newton, Kansas. And I got the center cut of everything. Which was great. We give a lot of liberty, and that way we had money. We could eat steaks when we wanted it. They did not like Oleo, but to save money, I would save the Oleo stickers, the packages they were wrapped in, I mean the butter ones. I would save them and I'd order Oleo when they weren't watching. Which means I could do it any time. We'd wrap the sticks of butter in Oleo. Hell, they didn't know the difference, but anyway. We ordered plywood now and then and would redo maybe the galley. I just stand in one place and put something on the stove, on the table and in the refrigerator. I was also the mess cook, and I did the washing up.

Interviewer: You were in the kitchen basically?

Jake: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you people coming in for KP or something like you see in the army?

Jake: No, no. On the base we did.

Interviewer: And you did three meals a day?

Jake: Yes. If we were at sea. And when we were tied up, I got almost every night at liberty. I'd do extra work, but I got paid for it, and we had some Hawaiians on the ship. They had different duties. Then they'd help you out, different ones would help you out. And on the big ship, they had took care of the officers. And they always played one card game. They were always playing this one game. And every now and then, one of them would take off and go to Reno. The rascals were pretty smart. They always bought a round trip ticket on a bus. And they usually came home on the bus with no money.

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 18

And they'd usually win, but they couldn't quit. You know, they played all the time; they couldn't quit. They would, this one got up to \$18,000, one of the guys that was there, said they had 18 to 20,000 dollars. And he came home on his ticket. Just part of the thing, now. But on the 83 footer, we had an ensign who was an officer. We had the chief boson's mate, and we had the chief engine man. The chief engine man was a real nice guy, and I went and visited with him one time and he made an excuse for his wife not being there. He said, "She's in church." I said, "That's alright." He said, "You know, every time we get transferred," and he was a long-time man, he was getting close to about retiring. He said, "Every time I get transferred, she goes to church, and here comes the priest." He says, "I just ask him, 'Do you want me to join your church because you want me to, or because I want to?'" You know, I haven't forgot that. Do you want me to have this interview because you want to or because I want to? Well anyway, I'm remembering some of those things. On the 83 footer, the ensign mate and the boson's mate got into it. And the ensign was stupid as far as I was concerned. He went to the dock and put them off. And the fight didn't last long. They both got transferred, and they were both good men. But he did it, and I suppose the right way. Only the engine man was a friend of mine. The other one was alright. This 83 footer had two Sterling Viking 600 hp motors, engines in them. They were gas engines. They sounded like diesels. They had two Model A Ford engines that run generators. That's how we generated electricity. One day we picked up a man up out in the ocean. His little boat had, well, he wasn't in the ocean; he was in the traffic way there inside the harbor. But he'd been out for a long time, and he made the statement, he said, "They told me that boat wouldn't sink." And he was holding on to it when we got him. And the guys that had been on the ship for a long time knew what to do with him. They wrapped him up in blankets and took him down to the engine room. That was the warmest place on the ship. And I asked him what he wanted, soup whatever, I'd give him anything he wanted. And you know, he didn't go into shock. Because he was too interested in watching those engines work and what they sounded like. It was the psychological thing that went along with it. Pretty soon he came up and come down and I give him whatever he wanted to eat. One day, we would go out and we would patrol the harbor. And we'd take turns. You'd go out for a week; then you'd be in for two or three weeks. And we knew that when we were due to go out, say noon Monday, today. Well, on the weekend, the army base took 29 boy scouts to Catalina Island. Then the storms come up, and they didn't think they could get back in that open boat. So we went and got them. We knew we was going to have to go, you know, too close to the army base was right there. And of course, the majority of them got sick. We had GI cans and stuff sitting around. They could go anywhere; they could come down in the galley, but they could not come into where we slept, the quarters. And we brought them back. One time we headed to Catalina Island, this one boson's mate was on duty, and he looked around here like this and he said, and I happened to be top side when he did it, for what reason I don't know why I was up there. He said, "You see that star right up there?" Yeah. He said, "Go right to that star. Steer that course." And pretty soon they come up with the course that was right where that star was. He knew where it was. It went right into a certain cove right in Catalina Island. You could see the island, you know, in and out of there. We never stayed there. We picked up a man; there was three of them, I think. They got into an open boat and headed to Catalina to decorate a bar. The red flag was flying; that means you don't go to sea. They went anyway, but they didn't get very far. And about, oh I don't know, two washed up on a beach not too long after that and finally the third one surfaced. The water was cold, and as long as it was cold, he didn't blow up. He stayed somewhat preserved. And finally the temperature and the currents changed, and he surfaced, and we had to go get him. That wasn't fun. And you could see where the fish had been eating on him a little bit. But you know, little things like that.

One time we were south of San Diego playing cops and robbers with the Navy, and all of a sudden, here come something up out of the water. And I thought, "What in the world was that?" And it was a submarine. There was always a submarine behind when they were having planes take off and landing. There was always a helicopter in front and behind usually in case something went wrong. And that submarine was back there and he surfaced. And it was kind of an eerie feeling when you saw that thing

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 19

come up out of the water. Anyway, just different things that happened. I remember one time when I was on the big ship, I thought, "I'm going to pre-boil all these French fries." You know what happened. So I went directly to the executive officer, who was right around the corner, and I told him what happened, and I said, "Do you want me to remake them? Do you want me to feed them mashed potatoes?" He said, "Feed them mashed potatoes." Of course, everybody wanted French fries, and they give me hell about it. I said, "The Exec's right in there, go ahead. Go right on; he knows already, I went to him first."

Interviewer: What was your reputation as a cook?

Jake: It was good. I like to eat. I like to eat, and I season things to suit me. It was, most all of it was, good food to start with. It was how it was handled. And the last four or five or six months I was on the big ship, I got to take care of the commissary goods. And that gave me every night and every weekend liberty. That's what you was after, or I was, I wasn't there for the long pull. And every now and then somebody would show up and say, "Roenbaugh, there's a petition." I says, "Thank you," and to up to the top side where the not the engine man, but the guys that control the ship and gunner's mate and what have you, and I says, "Have I ever failed to give you something when you wanted something extra to eat?" You know, every now and then, they'd get hungry, like everybody else. And maybe I wouldn't have what they'd have, but I give them a can of peaches or something, you know. And we'd get that stopped. And I didn't blame them. Some of those guys would murder that food something terrible. When I was on the base waitin' for the ship, I was off duty, but I had to be on the base. I was asleep, and the quarter-master come up and said, "Get up on board, you got to go to work." I told him to go to hell and rolled over. He said, "The officer of the day will be up here if you don't get up." I says, "What's the matter? And well, hell, get that man over there, he's the one that's in charge of the galley, not me." And they couldn't wake him up. He's drunk. He had taken hamburger, filled one of them big pans plumb full, like this, stuck it in the oven and went and passed out. The galley was on fire because of that; the meat was on fire. So I went down there and the officer came in. I said, "Sir, this is not my fault." And he said, "I know that." I said, "What do you want me to do? I've got to clean this up first, but what do you want me to feed these guys?" He said, "Feed them whatever is the easiest or whatever you can." I said, "Well, we got canned hams, we got, you know...for sandwiches and what have you." He says, "Whatever." I says, "You'll back me up?" "Yep," he says. And he did. The inside of that hamburger was still frozen.

Rosetta: I still want to know why you went to cooking school.

Jake: Because you got the best liberty.

Interviewer: Okay, let's back up just a minute. You went up to Washburn for a couple years. When did you meet Susie? Because you got married right after...

Jake: While I was at Washburn still. She was still in high school. Gerald Davis, and you probably don't remember him, I don't imagine, Davis had a restaurant over about where the senior citizens deal is now. He was in school at the same time. He turned out to be a lawyer and was a judge in California at one time, but anyway, probably, the first year I was there, I told him, I said, "Why don't you come home for Christmas? Why don't you get me a blind date with Mildred Fisher?" I says, "She can't act as crazy as she acts whenever I happen to be around." He said, "What if I can't get a date with her?" And I says, "Try Susie Etling." Well, she was going steady with somebody, but she always acted, God damn, crazy and silly. So he got me a blind date with Susie Etling. Now you know the rest of the story.

Interviewer: That was love at first sight?

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 20

Jake: Not quite. I had to figure out how to get her away from whoever she was going with. ... I went to cook and baker school in Groton, Connecticut and I came home and was on the base waiting for one of the ships to open up. I was on the 83 foot boat that I'd been on. I don't know when it was that my mom got burned real bad. Susie was seven or eight months pregnant with Bill. It was after we got back to California from Connecticut. And my mom got burned real bad and was in the hospital. I talked to my dad, and he says, "How can you get home? Can you come home?" I says, "No, the only way I can get off here is through the Red Cross. It wasn't the next day I was transferred. And I knew the guy that came and replaced me. I knew the guy that was replacing me for short term. You know, there were a lot of people that were thieves, you might as well say. And I was too in a sense. But anyway, when I went back, I went down to the ship the night before I had to report in, and they said, "You know you've been transferred?" And I says, "I knew it. I told my dad I would be." And I said, "Have you guys..." and they were upset with the cook they replaced me with. And I said, "Have you checked in the storeroom up..." And they just flew off that boat. He had taken everything out of that case. But I knew what he did. Let's see, I'm jumping around on you. When I was on the big ship, I got transferred to the *Minnetonka* right after that. Why, I had the opportunity to take the ship's truck and get the commissary goods. And I forget who, it doesn't matter who I was with, we went by this one bar. And he said, "Keep going." I says, "Why?" Well, one of the cooks had gone after commissary goods in another place, maybe I went after the mail, I don't remember, but he had stopped there and had owed a bar bill. He had stopped there and he had unloaded more cases of hams. There was six hams in a case, and I think there was 20 or 30 cases. And turkeys, and when he got back to the ship, I told him, "I know where you were at." And I says, "I'm not taking this hickey for you." He begged me not to turn him in. I says, "Alright, anytime I want something, you can never say no." So, when we got around to taking the inventory, we'd have to inventory the goods every now and then, he said, "Tell me how many we're short? How many cases of what we're short." And it was cold down there where that stuff was at, and the officer was there just writing stuff down, and he'd read out such and such and such and such, and I knew. I was writing them down too. I knew that they weren't there. But he got by with it, you know. But he paid his bill. There's little things like that happen. I watched my division officer leave one day with five pounds of coffee early one morning. You know, you're just stealing from yourself, but it did happen. It does happen. But I enjoyed my stay, when I was on...wherever I was at. I worked at trying to get the best liberty that I could. I was married and had a young one at home. When I was getting ready to go to sea one time on the *Minnetonka*, the officer of the day come on board and just was madder than all get out. He quarantined, I call it quarantined, that's not the right word for it, all the cooks to mess cooks. He wanted that grill to where he could see his face in it. And they went to scrubbing on it, it was the only thing they could do. They had a stone there. They cleaned it, and I was standing there top side and he come by. He said, "How come you're not down there helping them clean that thing up?" And I said I didn't do it. But sir, I'm going to tell you something. What you're doing is wrong." He said, "Why do you say that?" I said, "You can't cook anything on that thing like you want it." I said, "You can't put enough oil or grease on it to keep it from sticking to it." And I said, "What you're asking for is wrong, and I don't mean to make you mad by telling you that." But it wasn't long after that that he turned them loose. It was a punishment deal. I had duty that night anyway, but I still went ashore, because I jumped ship. Well, you know, we knew we were leaving the next...before too many days, and that night Susie was in Kansas. She had come home and she wasn't there at that time. But I still went somewhere, I don't know. Funny little things like that happened. The commanding officer, when I got on the *Minnetonka*, I was on there for a month, and he finally come in the galley. He asked me what my name was, five times in a row. He says, "You know, this galley is my pet peeve?" And I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "If I come down here and you're sitting on your butt and there's a pea over there in that corner, I'm going to put you on report. But if you're doing something, I'll never say anything." Well, that's the way I made it happen. And he was that way. And he'd love to go to sea, but he was sick for the first week. Oh, I'm talking too much.

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 21

Interviewer: I'm still trying to make the time for you here. You enlisted and then you got married?

Jake: Yes. I went to Oakland, California, and we got married between being there and I was transferred to Long Beach, California. And on my way, I got married and we went to... We got married at 8:00 in the morning, and we left for California at 10:00 in the morning.

Interviewer: What did her family think about all this? How did they feel about it?

Jake: I didn't ask them. I asked John (*Etling*) if it was all right if I could marry Susie, and he said...he asked a few questions and said yes, he guessed so. Well, Bob and Nancy (*Weidenheimer*) were already married and lived in Long Beach. But we...

Interviewer: Was Susie right out of high school?

Jake: No, she'd been one year at school, at Lawrence. And we dragged in there to Long Beach, California, and I reported in at the base. She went to look and find a place for us to live. We had a little apartment and had a pull down bed. About that long.

Interviewer: So your honeymoon was getting to California.

Jake: Yeah, the next day, basically the next day.

Interviewer: Where were you?

Jake: We were driving.

Interviewer: You drove.

Jake: Yep. That we did. That we did. But then, while I was at the base, we weren't there very long, and I suppose another reason I wanted to be a cook 'cause I knew Bob, and that was what he was going to do. I was just kind of a tag along, you know. We were a month behind Bob at school, and Bill Chadd and Carl Wingfield were back there at that same time. So you know, you kind of go where your buddies are.

Rosetta: When you were in the military, was there still segregation in the military?

Jake: No. We had a cook that was on the ship, (this thing clicked, if you want to check. It doesn't matter, do you want me to tell that story before, or wait?)

Rosetta: Wait until I...

Jake: We had a cook that, I don't know where he was at for the first month that I was on the big ship. I had heard about him, and...

Interviewer: Now on the big ship, how many cooks were there?

Jake: Oh, there was probably six. We worked 24 hours and off 24. Sometimes more or less, but anyway, come to find out him and the skipper of the ship had been in Alaska together. I don't duty in Alaska was very nice, but I don't know. I never did hear anything real bad or whatever, but undoubtedly, they had become friends. He would come aboard, go right to the old man, and go back

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 22

ashore. One day he came aboard and went right to the exec's office. The exec come in there and said, "You know what this man's saying?" I said, "Sir, I just know he exists. I've never talked to him. I don't know him." I says, "I don't know anything about him. Why would I want to do anything to help him? Tell me what it is he wants and I can..." He said, "If you'll stand his next watch," which was another 24 hours, why he'll stand my next three. I looked at the exec and says, "You know you can't do that, me be off the ship, without having to take leave." He said, "It'll be alright. I said, "Sir, I believe you. I don't know how to protect myself, other than I'll do it."

Well, while I was gone, the ship moved. You don't move a ship without the full complement. They called up and said, "The ship's moving, get your tail down here!" I put on my uniform while Susie was driving down the street. I went across the gangplank, and they said, "Keep your mouth shut. Put on your dungarees like you're working." As soon as the ship tied up in dry dock, I put my uniform on and left. But I was there at that time. This guy, we went down to the bottom of the ship. It was always wet down there, but we had some commissary goods stacked down there. He picked up, this cook that I hadn't seen. He picked up two boxes and almost passed out. So that tells you that he was hopped up on something, what I don't know. He went ashore. But after the deal where he stole all the stuff, I told him, "You know." And he'd go after pastries and all this stuff. And he was unloading that stuff everywhere. You know, I'm in charge of taking care of it, so I had to double check to make sure if there was ten pounds of cake there or five. You know, I wrote down what it said on the paper. Sometimes we were short. One day, he went by the house where we lived and left a bunch of stuff. I don't know. He was crazy. It's an awful thing to say, that there is that much stealing that went on, but I just happened to be in the middle of it. People like to eat. And I liked to eat, and I'd season stuff to suit myself, but I didn't blame the guys at all for getting a petition up to get me to go back to cooking. I said, "What do we do on this ship that we work so hard to get?" And they said, "Liberty." And I said, "I have every night and every weekend as long as we're tied up to the dock." And I said, "Don't ruin that for me." So that's a big part of... I got transferred off. The ship was going to sea. What we did, we'd go to sea about halfway between San Francisco, even though we were tied up in Long Beach, and we'd talk to all the airplanes going to Hawaii and back and forth. We'd give them a ditch course. We'd give them weather; we sent weather balloons every day. They'd send weather back. If they had plenty of time, the different guys would send messages back. They'd take and write down a bunch of stuff and send it to you. You know, I did it one time. Damn, I got ahead of myself. When I went to get off, the ship was supposed to leave. I was supposed to be released February 8th or something like that. I was gonna be gone, and they wouldn't transfer me off. They had the privilege to keep me and extend my enlistment. And that's what they were going to do. I told Wayne Weyrich, another guy from here, I knew of him, what was happening. He says, "I can take care of that." He was a yeoman or a secretary down at the base. So he wrote up a transfer, leave of transfer in route to the Coast Guard district in St. Louis. One letter to the ship's commander and one letter to the district commander and one letter to Washington D.C. You know, I got transferred. My release was laying (every morning, I got there before the exec did) it'd be there right on top of the list. He wasn't going to transfer me. So what happened after that, I don't know. I came home and went to St. Louis and got released from the service.

I had a few experiences over there in St. Louis. I'm sitting there in this one bar, and all of a sudden the police showed up and some guy went running by there. They grabbed him, and then they started looking for the gun he had. He'd reached underneath this car and put it right on top of the front tire. They knew where to look; they finally found it. I sat inside this bar and watched 'em. And when I got released, there was a friend there, I'd made a friend. I don't know, he run tugs up and down the river. I went through the train station running, and he'd already taken my bags to catch this one train to Kansas City. And I kept telling him, "I'll be there, but I'll get on the... I'll be there, I'll be there." And every officer in that place hollered at me and demanded I stop and quit running. And I just kept going. As the train was leaving, I stepped on the back of that train. So I wanted to go home. I wanted to come back to Kansas, back here. But, that's basically...

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 23

Interviewer: How would you sum up your experience in the Coast Guard? Was it a good experience?

Jake: Yes. It was good.

Interviewer: What did they do for you?

Jake: They made me realize how big this world is, for one thing. The other thing, Susie and I got to go and see and do, was, we didn't have much money. My pay was not very good. We got to go see and do things. That's what we did to entertain ourselves. We didn't go to shows, but we got to see and do things that we would have never ever had the privilege to do again. Having lived on both coasts. We went into Boston one time. We were around New London, back there. Susie was pregnant when I got transferred to school. They flew me back there one night. When I got on the airplane and in Los Angeles it was cold, cool. When I got off in New York, it was hot. I sewed the stripes on my white uniform so I could go ashore because it was just too hot to wear them. The experience I had back there, she came back, was great. When you look back at it, the things that, the places we went, the things we got to see and do. I met a lot of people. You learn a lot not only about yourself, but about other people. The base that we were on was an old Wrigley's Spearmint, not mansion, mansion yes, but it used to be something that they had. That's where the base was that they'd converted into the Coast Guard base. Once a month, we would get 1,800 lobsters on the base. And there wouldn't be a third of them eaten. We had fun fighting them. Some of them would get real mean. Then one day I spent baking and taking the meat out them so they could have lobster salad. Because of that, I don't really care for lobster anymore. But, you know, little things like that that happen.

Interviewer: Do you still cook?

Jake: No. When I got transferred off the base at New London, or whichever base it was, I had everything, my orders and everything. When it come to get paid, I couldn't get paid. And Susie had a friend that was going to Philadelphia. I asked him if we could follow him, you know, going through New York and what have you. And they kept calling for me to show up at the gate and I kept ignoring it. Finally, I went and told this guy, I says, "Hey, I'm leaving, and I don't have any money." He said, "You're not leaving." Then he looked around and said, "You are, aren't you?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "The only thing we got is 5's and 10's and 20's." And I says, "Anyway, just give me the money." And I run to the gate, and they were waiting. We took off, and I changed out of my uniform going down the street and followed him clear through to Philadelphia. Then we came on home and drove back to Long Beach. Lot of experiences, you know, like that. Not so much the people, but how the things worked. Why do things work the way they do. When you're told you gotta do this and you don't talk back. If you do, you make a few more rounds walking or running or whatever it is the penalty would be. They got more cigarette butts. You know, that's just some of the things that happened.

Interviewer: So, you were discharged immediately to Fellsburg, to the farm.

Jake: Yep. Once I, well, we lived in Kinsley at that time. We'd come back, we lived in Kinsley. And went right back to the farm, yes. We lived here in town, in an upstairs. You know where Ted and Delores Taylor lives? That place right across the street, or the apartment above it? That's where we lived. And then we moved to Trousdale in a basement apartment. In the meantime...

Interviewer: You had one child at this time or two?

Jake: One. While we were in Trousdale, my Uncle Anthony Jennings was a deaf-mute. He couldn't

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 24

talk. He couldn't hear. He married a deaf-mute. They lived in St. Joe, and that's where we ended up remaking that house out there (*on the farm outside of Fellsburg*). It was moved in from Greensburg, just like the other one. My father-in-law, John Etling, come out there and looked at that house and said, "Hell, this place isn't fit to live." Well, we were going to make it fit. So he had Clint Little come out there and he scribed boards in the kitchen, like 2 x 6's, in the middle there wouldn't be a board to come out like this to level it up. He took the door and he cut the bottom part off and the top part off, so it would work with the floor like that. Well, while we were living in that old house, they reevaluated this county. And this guy came in there and was looking at the house. He said, "This place ain't fit to live in!" And Susie just almost come unglued. And I said, "Be quiet! Be quiet!" And so, we all appealed it, and the guy that I had to talk to, he had never been out there. And I asked him, "Were you ever out there?" And he said, "No, I'm just reading what that man said." I said, "Let's start on 16, 26, 17. Tell me why you got that grain bin stuff on there." He said, "Well, it's there isn't it?" I said, "You know, you could put a cow in that grain bin and you couldn't keep her there. It hasn't been used for years." He says, "Let's just write it off." I knew right then it was a farce. It was gonna be, because anything, you know, I could prove anything from there on. And I said, "Hell, this is enough of this." And I got up and walked out and was grinning. Everybody wondered what I was grinning about when I walked out. It hurt me in a sense. I had to go back and meet with the commissioners. I had to meet with some yahoo; I won't give you his name because he didn't have a good name. The last time I went to meet with them, I took Terry Fuller with me, because they were really trying to hang it to me. They were out of line. And you know, you remember some of those things.

Interviewer: What was this about?

Jake: This was after, I don't know...Then they threw the whole thing out, the evaluation of the tax deal. When I got back and went to farming, my uncle had 680 acres. My dad, oh, I'll tell it. My dad and mom went back to St. Joe, Missouri. My Uncle Anthony had passed away. We had nothing in writing on farming this farm. While they were back there, they had taken my Aunt Mabel's, Anthony's wife was named Mabel, glasses away from her. And they wouldn't let her go get any more. I should have went to the dime store and took some with me. So when we got there, they'd give her some reading glasses to read just a little bit. My dad told us what to do. He was so mad, you can't believe it. Anyway, Susie, you talk about the pictures and things, and get her to talking about things in her house, and get her away from Aunt Mabel. And I handed Aunt Mabel this piece of paper. She knew what it was. She immediately figured...she wasn't a dummy, but anyway, she said, "Where do I sign?" She signed that and I stuck it back in my pocket. So they didn't know what that was. Well, the lawyer that had taken this deal over, he handled the ground in Florida, and no one knows whatever happened to it. He stole whatever was in the house and put her in a rest home. He was about to steal the farm. While we were there, some people from California showed up, part of her family. Of course, they were mad at us. They thought sure that we were the ones trying to get the farm. Well, they weren't there very long and they figured out what the problem was, and they took Aunt Mabel back to California with them. In the meantime, they got this lawyer and took him to court and got him disbarred for what he was doing. One day, that damn ground was blowing. I was getting ready to go stop it from blowing. I left the house, and I knew who went by. And I just quit. I went back to the house, and they said they thought I was going to go farm. I said, "There's no reason for me to do it. I don't know who's going to own this ground." I said, "They're appraising it today." Mr. Carlson, we had an appointment with him that night. And he said, "You and your folks are the ones that took care of Uncle Anthony." That's true. My mom cooked and washed his clothes, hauled him to the train. He rode the train back and forth. We had the opportunity to own that farm. He said, "We don't want very much money down. But we want to write a contract." Well, they had had it appraised, and it was appraised right. It wasn't over appraised at the time. I don't even remember for sure who it was, did it. They wanted \$10,000 dollars down. I said,

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 25

"Sir, I don't even have \$10, really." He said, "Well, see what you can do; see what you can do." Well, John and Margaret and my folks got the \$10,000, and we wrote up a contract. And then I put it all in what they then called a soil bank, which is a grass program like they have today. And I put enough of it in to make the payments. So I was sure I had money enough to make the payments. Well, you don't live very good or do very much on 129 acres of ground. That's all we had left. One day Susie was in the hospital, and she had had a miscarriage, she'd had several of them. John was born when we lived in Trousdale. I went in and he was mad and he (*John Etling*) got all over me. He said, "Why didn't you tell us that we were about to lose that farm?" I said, "What are you talking about?" He told me, and I says, "Ring up the telephone, call Bill Allison." I had made that payment, and he told John that I had. Well about that time, you know, all the mail went on the railroad. There was a bag of mail that was dropped or lost. Somewhere between here and California. That check was in that mail. They reissued it, canceled the payment on that check. So we got out of that storm, but we... you couldn't rent ground, you couldn't do anything. We made it on what cattle I had. I remember one time I was out there with a one-way, and one-waying down some pretty good looking wheat. Lloyd Miller was a friend of mine, Darrell Miller's dad, he stopped and come over and got on the tractor. He said, "Jake, you can't do this." I says, "I have to." He says, "Why?" and I says, "Well, I don't want to go to work for somebody this winter. And I won't have any feed if I don't plant this ground here to feed so I can have some cattle." And he just shook his head and got off, and I kept going. And we made it with the cattle. I made a lot of sale barns, but I bought and sold them all. You know, the ones we had. And at the same time, Emil Fisher came by. He wanted to talk me into going into the consistory. I'm a Blue Mason, belonged to the lodge. I says, "No, I won't do it." He says, "Take one of them heifers out there, that's about \$150." I said, "You know, if I take a critter up out of that pen and go to Wichita and the consistory, I can't do that." He says, "Why can't you?" I said, "Emil, we don't have a television set. If I'm going to take a heifer or a critter out of that pen, I'm going to buy something the whole family can benefit by." He never bothered me again. But you know, that's our first years out of the service. It worked, we're still here. I got a little money put away and I don't owe anybody. My dad owed everybody. My mom died, she had some money and didn't owe anybody, so we worked hard and made it work. Thanks to Susie. That's...she run tractor, she didn't ever run a combine...she helped work cattle, she did everything that come along. And I'd say that's telling you more than I thought I'd tell you.

There were some colored people that owned ground and lived over by Trousdale. They had a quarter of ground when they left here. I think they went to Pratt. I'm not sure, but they call it the colored quarter or the Negro quarter. Then the ones that was here...

Interviewer: What time period was that?

Jake: That would have been when I was in school.

Interviewer: So right before the war?

Jake: Then the other ones were here; they lived here in town, which I didn't know them. I didn't know who they were. If you talk about somebody, south of the river, some place south of the river, I can tell you.

Interviewer: Did you go to school with Negro children?

Jake: Not in high school, grade school or high school. Not until I went to college.

Interviewer: How about the Hispanic population? Did you know Hispanics in school?

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

Roenbaugh - 26

Jake: No. They all lived in Lewis. And that, those people are still here. The Castenadas, the Negretes, to me they've always been here. They're part of us, as I put it. The other ones I don't know, because I don't know where they came from. Not that it matters. There's a lot of good people wherever. In the military, we had one of my best friends was a colored guy. The one that helped me the most. One of the worst ones was a colored guy. This one I told you stole so much, he was white. But, you know, I didn't get involved in it until I was in the service. And there was never a time where there was a problem that I got involved in, as to I'd do what I had to do and stay away from the rest of it. If that answers your question on the colored people, but the people that owned this ground, I didn't never really know. You know, we had three communities down there, and...

Interviewer: What were they?

Jake: Centerview, Trousdale and Fellsburg.

Interviewer: Was there a church base in any of that? Was it ethnic? Was it German or English or?

Jake: I don't know. All three of them had churches. I can remember as a little kid running around Fellsburg. There was two old widow women there that smoked pipes, corn cob pipes. And you talk about staring at you. They'd look you down if they didn't want you around. So don't get in any trouble. One of them's name was Grandma Bratcher and the other one's name was Grandma Myers.

Interviewer: okay.

End of audio.

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas



Jacob Byron Roenbaugh

Jacob Roenbaugh interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas



Doris, Jacob Byron, and Virginia Roenbaugh c. 1942, Fellsburg, Kansas