

ORAL MEMOIRS
OF
LUELLA DOW OSTROFSKY

An interview conducted on
December 21, 2015

Interviewer: Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai

Angelo State University
West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

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WONGSRICHANALAI: This is Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai, for the War Stories Project. Today is December 21st, 2015, and we are in Easton, Connecticut.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, you're welcome to pass on any of these questions I ask or answer them as you see fit.

OSTROFSKY: Okay.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What is your name?

OSTROFSKY: My name is Luella Dow Ostrofsky.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And where were you born, and where did you grow up?

OSTROFSKY: Dover-Foxcroft, Maine. That's where I was born. I grew up on a farm in Dover-Foxcroft, Maine.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What do you remember about the farm?

OSTROFSKY: Oh, it was a lot of fun. We had a river running around it. I had, I was the eighth of ten kids. We'd always, always busy, always something going on there. We never had anything, so we made our own fun. We'd have picnics down on the river bank, and we never had a car till my brothers got old enough to work and they had a car, my dad never had. He used to drive me once in a while to the high school in an old horse and a wagon. Some of the kids were rich enough to drive their own selves, and here I am jumping out of a wagon with an old horse pulling it. [*laughs*]

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, when was this?

OSTROFSKY: Huh?

WONGSRICHANALAI: When was this?

OSTROFSKY: I started high school in 1930, '31. 1930. September, I think. '30? '31, '32, '32, '33, yeah. Graduated in '34.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, had the Great Depression affected Dover-Foxcroft?

OSTROFSKY: It certainly did. There was no . . . nobody could find a job. There were no jobs. And any of the merchants couldn't afford to hire anybody, and my graduating class was the only class over these many years that didn't have a yearbook, because the principal said that the merchants can't afford to put an ad in it, and of course it takes money to put out a yearbook. We did one fifty years later. Yeah, we did. Quite a lot of things happened in that fifty years. So that's, So what's your question? [*laughs*]

WONGSRICHANALAI: What did you have on the farm? Cows, chickens?

OSTROFSKY: Yeah, my dad had dairy, yeah. We had big gardens and we had at least an acre planted in just beans, cause . . . and another acre of just potatoes, cause that was our main diet. Beans and potatoes. Baked beans, potatoes. Potatoes was . . . I don't . . . I don't think maybe a day went by that we didn't't have one meal with potatoes. And I guess it didn't hurt us, because we . . . everybody grew, lasted quite a while on the beans and potato. So, that's it. Other than that, we had chickens, of course, raised some for eating and had plenty of eggs for ourselves. We had during the depression, we had no money at all for fancy clothes or anything else, but we always had plenty to eat, cause my dad had these monstrous vegetable gardens. And my mother canned and pickled and made preserves and she probably had three or four hundred jars of stuff which kept us through the winter.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What were your parents' names?

OSTROFSKY: Huh?

WONGSRICHANALAI: What were your parents' names?

OSTROFSKY: My dad was Lewis and my mom was Lillian. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What was downtown Dover-Foxcroft like?

OSTROFSKY: Well, it was a small town. It was probably, what, six thousand people. Not right in the town, but in the . . . like, we were . . . We were out in the same town, but way out in the farming area. Oh, there was a nice theatre, a very good theatre, only the one. There was the high school. And on Main Street was all your . . . There was a department store, banks, grocery stores, hardware. What do you call them? No, not hardware . . . What do you call hardware stores? Hardware stores where you get all your tools. OK. It was a busy place. Outside of those few years of the depression. As I say, everything just stood still and as soon as Pearl Harbor was blasted off the face of the earth, the woolen mills began to churn, two woolen mills in the town. And they were, started making them woolen cloth for uniforms. And of course everybody was grabbing for a job. . . So anyways, after . . . Then they began to set up what do you call them? Induction stations there to . . . everybody got a number. I believe a song came out "They Drew My Number." You know? I don't know if you've ever heard it, but . . . I'm not going to sing it, so. [*laughs*] Anyways I think Uncle Shep was the first one to go, and then Uncle Stan went. He must have gone in about a year after Pearl Harbor. That was early February, 1943. I didn't't have a job and, of course, all jobs were grabbed when the woolen mills opened, so there was no opening there. So I wrote down to the state at Augusta saying that I'd like to get compensation or whatever they were doing at the time. And they wrote back and said no, they're not handing that out to anybody because there was . . . They need help in Connecticut. So, and there was going to be a representative from the Chance-Vaught Airplane Factory in Bangor, so I hopped on the bus and went to Bangor and was interviewed. That guy interviewed me and told me all about it. And in two days time I was on a train headed for Bridgeport. So, I . . . The whole city of Bridgeport was blacked out. The only light you could see was a puddle of light under the lamp lights, the

street lights. Cause they had the war on. You can't have city all bright, you know? Puddle of light under each one of the lamplights because they had a black thing over it. So, you only had one little puddle of light. When I got off that train, eight o'clock at night, everything was black. I had no idea where I was going. And I finally crawled into a . . . into a hotel. Got one room. Next morning I was out of there quick. And I had a great big suitcase because I thought I was going to stay for a while. So, I went back to the railroad station and you don't have to write this down. You can tell me to shut up when you want. I took my suitcase back to the railroad station, had it checked in, I said I can't be dragging that around. And then this city bus came along and it had the sign on it "Airport," and I said God, that's me, everything was working just in my favor. So, I got on that and went to the airport which is in Stratford. The Bridgeport Airport is in Stratford. I spent the whole day over there in the . . . Cause there was a lot of people coming in, getting jobs. The whole day there, you had a complete physical, they made sure you weren't a spy, or, I mean, the whole day. So, when I left there they said "Oh, just a minute, we've got to get you a room." So, they picked up the telephone and got me a lovely room on a residential piece of Bridgeport. So, I had a room, and the next day I went to work over at Chance-Vaught. Vaught-Sikorsky. Sikorsky is . . . Sikorsky had the helicopter built there at the same time. But then they got so big, they moved down to a bigger place. So then it became Chance-Vaught. Not that it matters, I guess at this point, I don't know what else. So, I was right there till the war ended and we worked ten hours a day. I was putting in . . . Saturday was an eight hour. And then, when the war ended, all of a sudden they decided they would, this company decided they would go down to Texas. They went to Waco, Texas, I think it was Waco. And I could have gone with them. I was called back in and I didn't know whether I wanted to go or not but then they gave me a second notice that my job was there if I wanted it. That time I'd met Milton and he said, "No, don't go." So, I didn't go. So, that was the end of that.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Let's go back a little bit.

OSTROFSKY: So I worked harder doing housework and taking care of kids than I did in the . . . But I was putting, I was putting one of the ribs together that went in the wing of the plane. And it was a big thing. I mean they said it was curved like this and by drilling holes I had to get it ready for the riveters. And this is another thing, Rosie the Riveter got all the credit and it was us other girls were putting it together. All they had to do was take out the pins that we'd put in. You know, you make holes and you put a certain pin in there to hold it together. When it gets in to the riveters, they take that pin out and shove a riveter in. Well, any dopey guy can do that, I thought. I was doing that, but it was big and if I'd drill, I'd have my arm over it like this with my little hand drills making holes. And they liked my work, I got very good compliments from the big, as a matter of fact one of the big bosses said "God, if you had another girl like Dow in here you could tell everybody else to go home." I was so happy to have a job after being brought up so poor and not having anything. That I kept right my shoulder to the wheel, you know? So to speak.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Was it very physical work?

OSTROFSKY: Huh?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Was it very physical? You had to . . .

OSTROFSKY: I was standing for hours. We were allowed fifteen minutes for a break during the forenoon and you had to say what time you wanted to go. So, the boss I guess looked over the thing and saw you gone if it wasn't happened to be your fifteen minutes and again in the afternoon. And then we had a half hour for lunch. But that wasn't given to us, we worked long enough, we went in at seven, come out at five-thirty.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How many people were working in the factory?

OSTROFSKY: Oh, God, we must have been two or three thousand people there. It was loaded. And vast. Big. Big. I was amazed.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And what was the . . . I mean what you did. What was that called? Was there a specific name, a title for what you did?

OSTROFSKY: I don't think so. I knew I was putting together a rib that went into the . . . Course there were other people making other ribs too I imagine probably all I wouldn't have any idea how many ribs would go into a plane. And that plane came down on a track of course. Anybody working on the, what do you call it, on the what do you call it? This, as that plane moved along whoever's doing something.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Assembly line?

OSTROFSKY: Yeah, whoever's working on it had to be sharp and do it before that moved on to the next one. And I was close to the end of the line. My department was. And when the whole plane was finished and they opened up the whole side of that building. Course these planes were little. They weren't like the B-12 and B something or others. They'd open up the whole side of the building and shove it out onto the tarmac and rev it up, get the gas in it or get something in it and rubbed it up and took it out. Sampled it. And away it went. And they say if it hadn't been for those Corsairs with the Japanese, we would've been in a heck of a pickle. It was quick, maneuverable, so.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Had you heard of them before they asked you to build them?

OSTROFSKY: Huh?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Had you heard of these planes before they asked you . . . to build them?

OSTROFSKY: They hadn't been in . . . They hadn't been making them very long. I don't know when they started building them there. But I wish I'd gone down in the beginning because it was . . . I enjoyed working there. Everybody was so busy, everybody got along, there was never any wrangling or anything like that. As a matter of fact, there was a man on each side of me, and I'm sure, doing the exactly same things I was, but he probably got half again as much money as I did. I don't know why they would figure that a woman putting out the same amount of products, you know what I mean? Same amount of work should get . . . get less. But that's what I know they

were doing at that time. But even then I was making sixty five dollars a week, which isn't a lot in today's, but it was a lot then. It was more than anybody ever made working in Dover-Foxcroft. Anybody from my family that was working there. Which I wasn't competing. I didn't mean I was competing, it was just one of those things I got. And then I got a bonus each month. I never missed time, but you got a percentage of your salary or whatever you made and I never missed time, so I'd get anywhere from forty to one hundred dollars for a bonus. This month, on a month. Which was a big help, so I was stashing money. I walked down Bridgeport street with my first check I got, and I said "Now, what bank am I going to?" and then I saw a sign "Farmers and Mechanics", and I said "That's mine, cause its farmers" so, and even to this day I've had Farmers and Mechanics bank account.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So they're a local bank?

OSTROFSKY: In Bridgeport. Easton doesn't have a bank. Easton doesn't have anything here. School, couple of schools. Post office. Firehouse. Little country store.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How many women, would you say, worked in that factory? I'm surprised that there were men working in the factory.

OSTROFSKY: Well, there were a lot of women. And course there were no younger men either, because if he's young enough, there was many that was inducted. Out of the department that I was even working in. And these were men who would be in way over the age that they wanted, I don't know what you'd call it. You know, in their late forties or fifties and probably sixties, there was some men there. So, they had to take in women. You didn't see very many black women.

WONGSRICHANALAI: There probably wasn't a large population of African Americans in Bridgeport at the time.

OSTROFSKY: I don't know what it was. In Bridgeport you had a lot of Europeans. A lot of Hungarians like my mother-in-law. And Slavic, Slovakian people like my husband was. Italians.

WONGSRICHANALAI: But it seems like the factory recruited from other areas of the country, or other areas of New England, at least.

OSTROFSKY: That would what?

WONGSRICHANALAI: The person who interviewed you in Bangor, the airplane factory. What was the name of that company?

OSTROFSKY: Chance-Vaught.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How do you spell that?

OSTROFSKY: C-H-A-N-C-E, that was the man's name, is Vaught. But when he was there with the helicopter business it was Vaught-Sikorsky. When Sikorsky moved out because they were so large, there wasn't room, you know they were getting bigger and bigger all the time they had to

move out of the building. And I was over at the airport that's where the . . . in the airport. That's where this was. And they had big hangars over there, matter of fact when I was still working there they had built a new big hangar. Gee. If I'd had, I don't know if I could find it. I won't bother with it now, but a few years ago they sent out invitations for people, they had some kind of big field day over there and I took a few pictures. If I knew exactly where they were I'd show you, show you the pictures. I'll dig them up and send them to you.

WONGSRICHANALAI: That's fine. What did you do in Bridgeport? Did you have fun?

OSTROFSKY: Every store closed before dark because you couldn't have a light in the window. You had to be . . . They were very careful. You had machine guns on the top of the building where I worked. Well, you saw some of the pictures there with a friend of mine. We used to walk downtown on a Sunday. We didn't work Sundays. We'd walk downtown which was probably a mile, oh maybe a mile. And we'd have our dinner, Sunday dinner, and then we might walk over to the beach and sit on the seawall. Just dangle our feet there, and enjoy the . . . There wasn't much to do. They had beautiful theaters in Bridgeport. They're trying to bring some of them back now. But they were beautiful big things. Had vaudeville shows and everything else in it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you remember seeing any of these shows?

OSTROFSKY: Oh yeah, we went to movies. Oh yeah. But that was blacked out too. If you got out of a movie and your street is blacked out, now which way do you go? Unless you're familiar. Every time I went anyplace I had in my mind "Now, this is a certain street, I must remember it when I come back." Oh, otherwise I wouldn't know where I was. Bridgeport was quite a big . . . As a matter of fact, it's the biggest city in Connecticut.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you remember any of your friends names? Where were they from?

OSTROFSKY: Yeah, I had this one particular gal, she lived up at the end of the street. Anybody that had a big house in a good area, they rented out the rooms. And I think at one time there were eight girls. I wouldn't share a room with another girl. I didn't want anybody in my bedroom, so I took a single bed. But I think there were eight girls in that building where I was down on Elmwood Avenue. Today on . . . on Elmwood Avenue they turned one of those big beautiful buildings into a house for women veterans who needed to get someplace. I mean needed shelter. So that was turned into that.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Going back a little bit. What did you want to do after you graduated from high school?

OSTROFSKY: I wanted a job and I didn't care what it was. I did housework for different ones. And do you know what I got for a week's wage? Three dollars. You lived in with a family. You're up, got the breakfast for everybody and you worked through until you went to bed at night after the dishrag was hung up. Three dollars a week we were getting.

WONGSRICHANALAI: This is in Dover-Foxcroft?

OSTROFSKY: This is in Dover. This is anyplace. During my high school year, I lived in town. Let's see. Ruth and I, my sister and I had a little room someplace during the week. But we'd scoot for home on a Friday afternoon when school was over. Back down to the farm. But now I've lost my thought. What was I saying? Oh, during my last year in high school, I used to babysit. I'd get twenty five cents for an evening to sit with a bunch of kids. Babysit. Today down here you could get twenty dollars an hour babysitting.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So sixty five dollars a week was a lot of money.

OSTROFSKY: Three dollars, but you could buy a good pair of leather shoes for a buck and a half. . . . My mother used to buy a can of salmon for twenty seven cents to make our sandwiches with. . . . My dad used to get . . . My dad used to sell cream instead of whole milk, only cream. Maybe he sold enough cream to get fifteen dollars a month. And then the town of Dover-Foxcroft says your kids shouldn't be walking to school during the cold weather and the snowy weather, which we did and didn't mind doing it at all. Then he'd have to bring them in the sleigh and the horse. So course kids coming in from other directions. So, all these guys that have these little busses, horse and buggy busses but a big box on the back of a sleigh and put blankets in there and you crawled in there and he'd take it to school. It was such a relief when spring vacation came that you could start walking back to school again. And I think my dad got fifteen dollars a month for that. Now that took care of his taxes and other things. I hate the word tax.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Was there a lot of election campaigning in 1940? Do you remember 1940?

OSTROFSKY: Oh, yeah. First time I voted was when I was twenty years old. You had to be twenty years old to vote. Now today I guess you can sixteen or seventeen, what is it?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Eighteen.

OSTROFSKY: Eighteen. I voted when Roosevelt went in for a second term, first time I was just twenty years old. And Maine and Vermont used to do their national election in September. Yeah, well the old slogan, "as goes Maine, so goes the nation." I don't know if you've ever heard that. But when Roosevelt went into the second term, everybody get back on the same level. So they've been doing it on November.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Was there a lot of support for Roosevelt in Dover-Foxcroft?

OSTROFSKY: I think so. I'm not sure some of the Republicans cared for him. Hoover . . . We had the depression when Hoover was there, which was no fault of Hoover. But everybody blamed him for the depression. Just the way things went. And Hoover was a very smart man and he did a very great deal for the country after he was no longer president. . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, what about the election of 1940? It was controversial for Roosevelt to run for a third term, as no one had done.

OSTROFSKY: Well, he ran for the fourth time.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And then the fourth time. Was there a lot of discussion?

OSTROFSKY: Well, when he went for the third time, when did he go in, in '40?

WONGSRICHANALAI: '40 was his third term.

OSTROFSKY: Well, I guess there was too much stirring in Europe already, so people didn't want to change horses in the middle of a stream. And as long as he had, knew what he thought he knew anyway what he was doing. And why he went in for the fourth term, because he was ailing, very much by that time. And of course he did die. But he died what, couple of months after he went in for the fourth term?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you remember any World War I veterans in Dover-Foxcroft?

OSTROFSKY: There was a lot of them. Lot of them at that time. World War II had been over, what, ten years?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Sure, but when you were growing up during the depression . . . If there were World War One veterans in the community.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah, they were getting a small pension. Very small, some of them. And some of them worked at the spool mill. Ruth worked during the spool mill. I worked there a little while making wooden spools, to put threads on. They had to be perfect, they were made out of white birch, hard as could be. And if they . . . Your pile of bag of things had a little bit of knick on it? No good. Then after the war they come out with these foam spools which you put them on your sewing machine and it pops up and down, it's so light it, you know what I mean? After the war, seemed like anything went. . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: What were you doing in December of 1941?

OSTROFSKY: On December 7th. Oh, in 1941? I think I was doing housework for somebody else. My valuable three dollars a week. And it was a Sunday afternoon and I'll never forget it. Always on Sunday afternoon or maybe the . . . all day Sunday, everybody congregated down at the home. Either dinner and they'd come down in the afternoon, the family was always together. And I can remember somebody flipping on the radio, you know there was no television at that time. Even though my kids want to know why my, why I went to bed early, they figured maybe daddy wouldn't let us watch television. So, anyway, that's where we were and somebody flipped on the radio and Roosevelt was just announcing that we had been bombed. By the Japanese. But I believe at the same time there was somebody from Japan into the president's office talking with, they were pulling wool over his eyes or else Roosevelt knew a lot more than . . . Some of us wondered maybe Roosevelt knew that was going to happen, but wanted it to happen so we'd have a right to get into the war and get over it, or do something. I don't know. At that particular time it's kind of a lot of politics. Back and forth. So whether, whether he knew it or whether he didn't, I don't know. It happened anyway.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, was there a lot of news about what was going on in Europe and in Asia in the newspapers?

OSTROFSKY: Yes there was and especially in the newspaper. I don't know that we got so much over the radio. But in the newspaper when my dad was following it along so closely. My dad knew everything that was going on. He read the newspapers from . . . And if you asked him any question on any country way over in Europe he could have told you what they were. My dad was smart, because he did an awful lot of reading. And he knew, and it worried him. Cause he had five sons and he figured what's going to happen, lose some of his sons, and this worried him I think. Although Stan was over in Germany for four years. Came back . . . When he came back I was home for . . . In August I was home for a vacation and at that time the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Was it? Was that it?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Both of them, yes.

OSTROFSKY: And ended it. So, that was the end of that.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So of the five sons, how many of them joined the armed forces?

OSTROFSKY: How many what?

WONGSRICHANALAI: How many of the sons joined? How many of your brothers joined the armed forces?

OSTROFSKY: Only Stan. The others were married, had kids. Stan didn't marry till he got to be fifty something years old, and I think he was thirty-six or thirty-seven-years-old. He was old to be drafted as a matter of fact. But he had no reason to get out of it, you know what I mean? He was single.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Is he an older brother?

OSTROFSKY: No, he was . . . He was the third brother down. Had three brothers older and two younger. But Lewis was only twelve-years-old at the time so, of course, he wasn't going. Ralph had several kids and of course the other two brothers had kids. And my oldest brother was running a farm, had the farm next door to our home place, and course they needed . . . They needed all the food stuff that they could get. If you were doing something that was essential to the cause then you were safe. But Stan went, come home. Saw a lot of country.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Which branch of the armed forces was he in?

OSTROFSKY: He was regular army. Regular army.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So he was over in Europe?

OSTROFSKY: He was in Germany for a long time. And Uncle Shep was over there too. Shep is my sister's husband. You probably know that. Yeah.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What's his full name?

OSTROFSKY: Shepardson. Alfonso. His name is Alfonso Shepardson.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And which branch was he in?

OSTROFSKY: Hmm?

WONGSRICHANALAI: And which branch of the armed forces was he in?

OSTROFSKY: Just the regular army. Yeah. He was stationed in Walla Walla, Washington when he first went in. Then he was shipped overseas.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How did your parents feel about Stan?

OSTROFSKY: Oh, they were so upset when he was drafted. Terribly upset. There were five boys. Now, I didn't . . . I think there were maybe forty kids from my graduating class, and five of the boys were inducted and five of them killed. When Pearl, when the Japs hit Pearl Harbor, there were two boys from Dover who were killed and they had just signed up to go in. They signed up themselves to join, and they were immediately sent out to Hawaii and then that bomb came and these two boys, they were brothers, Bart and Willard Merrill, their name was. They were killed in. And of course that upset the whole town. First two to go, and two from one whole family, so. They were kids going to school, high school when I was there. So, what were we doing? We were probably sitting around the heating stove and gabbing about Christmas on that particular Sunday.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And then, when you decided to work in the airplane factory, what did you parents think about you leaving?

OSTROFSKY: Well, when I came back from Bangor and met the representative there from Chance-Vaught, mother said to dad "Luella's going to Connecticut" and my dad said "no she isn't" and I said "No, I guess I am." I says, "there's work out there and I want to work." They never said another thing about it. So, that second day, the first whole day that I was there I called home, naturally. Said I had the job, I was beginning the next day. And I kept them very . . . a letter very close together to let them know what I was doing. And did it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Why did he not want you to go to Connecticut?

OSTROFSKY: Well my father would have liked it if all of us girls had stayed home and never married and that's . . . isn't that like a dad? I don't know how your dad felt about it. But you know, no man was ever good enough for us. We should all be right there under everybody's thumb. So that's that.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, one of your sisters was married to Shep, were they married at that point.

OSTROFSKY: Yes, he was, and they had just had this . . . Well, let's see. Peggy was born in November. Peggy told me she was, what? Seventy five? Yeah. She was very small, very small baby she had just been born. Now I think Stanley was inducted in the fall, late fall. Cause he went, he was, went in in '42, in late fall. And this following year in '43 when I, it was February. Came down here the fourth day of February '43.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What did the United States represent at that point? What did you think about the United States, and its role in the world?

OSTROFSKY: Well, I don't know if I was thinking very much about it, actually. There's a war on, you wished there wasn't. But it brought, it's a terrible thing to think about, but given everybody a chance to work. And things held pretty good for a few, several years after World War II. Housing built, and of course Milt, my husband was building houses in the late '40s and early '50s and it was great for him because the GIs were coming home and they wanted . . . He was building small houses, and they wanted a small house. They wanted to get married. But they wanted to begin with a small house, and maybe switch over better as time went on. But we lost an awful lot of boys, lost too many.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Were there any other people from Dover-Foxcroft who were killed in the war?

OSTROFSKY: Oh yeah, oh there was a lot of men. As I just said, there was five right out of my graduating class that were killed. And of course, there was a lot that came back too, I mean didn't get killed. Yeah, it was a big turn out. Like in the Civil War there was a lot of men from Dover in that Civil War.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, you said that there was the threat of attack in Bridgeport, that's why they had the lights off at night. Were there worries that there would be submarines?

OSTROFSKY: Oh, absolutely. They had submarines, German submarines right out here in the Long Island Sound. You don't like to haul up and say "Hey, Germans, come and here we are. Light like a Christmas tree, come and bomb us." Same thing happened on the coast of Maine. They found submarines in there too from Germany. They also found tracks where somebody, some German had come in there with a submarine and apparently let men off, and they found their tracks coming in off the water through the snow, that's why they knew somebody was there, but no tracks going back. So, they knew Maine was right. You know, you never know what's going to happen. And today you don't know what's going to happen. You got some kook in here that's going to walk in your door and say "Hey!" [*pop*]¹ It's scary.

WONGSRICHANALAI: You said that they had to make sure that you weren't a spy, or anything like that.

OSTROFSKY: Well I mean they did, they gave you a big test and you know.

¹ Ms. Ostrofsky gestured as if someone was firing a pistol.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What sort of test?

OSTROFSKY: Jeez, I don't remember. That was what, seventy two or three or four years ago. I know they gave me a physical. I thought that was pretty good, got a free physical. I don't remember what it was to tell you, actually. But I do know, at that time a lot of people weren't graduating from high school. They didn't stick with it, and because I'd filled my paper out that I'd had five years of, I mean four years of high school, they had told, said to me. I went to a training school. They said "if you'd go to a training school we could put you into a better position." They had some girls, it was such a big place they put these girls on a big tricycle with a thing to deliver blueprints wherever they needed in certain departments. But they had told me "we could put you in a better place" only because I had a, you know, four year thing. So they did, I thought standing at that bench and putting that stuff together was a whole lot, lot more fancy than riding around on a damn tricycle. Anybody could have done that. Anyway, you never know how things are gonna be. . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: How did you meet Milton?

OSTROFSKY: I met him . . . I was after the war and I said I didn't want to go to Texas with them. I got a job with a bead chain company in Bridgeport.

WONGSRICHANALAI: A what?

OSTROFSKY: A bead chain, you know? Those little beads on a . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: Sure.

OSTROFSKY: And I worked next door, we had ran our own machine, kept them oiled and all this kind of stuff. But when you got your machine working good you could sit. They had chairs for us to sit in and just keep watching your machine and make sure your things that dropping out in your barrel is okay. And she told me about him that he'd lost his wife and I stupidly said "Gee, that sounds like man . . ." He didn't drink. He was a hard worker. I said "Gee, that sounds like a man I ought to have." Didn't mean a thing by it, but the very next morning I knew she had probably seen him. He called me and said he'd like to meet me. And that was the end of that.

WONGSRICHANALAI: He lost his wife. He lost his first wife?

OSTROFSKY: She died, yeah. Thirty-six-years-old. They never did quite find out what the trouble was. She had some kind of a thing with her stomach. They'd give her medicine for something and it would bring on a terrible high temperature and they'd give her some temperature and it would do something else and that's . . . I guess in a matter of two or three weeks she was gone. She had a good job, she worked for the . . . She worked for the state. Let's see if I can think of that. Oh, I don't know she had a state job. Can't think of it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And he was from Bridgeport?

OSTROFSKY: Yeah, he was born in Bridgeport.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And what did he do during the war?

OSTROFSKY: What did he do?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Yeah.

OSTROFSKY: Well, he was stationed out at Oklahoma. In fact, what was it? Camp Gruber or something like that in Oklahoma for nine months. And then they had to let him go because he couldn't march. Every time they'd go out on a march, his body would get as stiff as a board for some reason, and they'd lay him beside the road and have somebody come out to pick him up later. He just couldn't march, there was something about, something in his back that, to walk, to walk for miles that couldn't take it. So he was, I have his, his mustering out papers there. He was a good soldier, he had very good marks on his papers that they gave him to get out with. No problem with him but he couldn't keep up with it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So how old was he at that point?

OSTROFSKY: He was almost forty. He was forty when I married him. I was thirty.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So after Oklahoma he came back to Bridgeport?

OSTROFSKY: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, his parents were down there. They ran a little mom and pop store if you know what that kind of a store is.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And what did he do after he returned to Bridgeport.

OSTROFSKY: Oh, he was carpenter. My husband was a carpenter. And he worked with a machine shop, big machine shop in Bridgeport. He was on the maintenance, as a carpenter. Meantime he would work full time in the machine shop, and the same time weekends and all day Sundays he'd work on his houses that he was building. That was his hobby. That was his whole life. He loved doing that, swinging that hammer. He was good, good. He built this house, all by himself outside of the walls being plastered and the plumbing and the electrical work. If you go down cellar and see the number of building cement blocks in my foundation you wonder how in the world he ever did it. It is. I was going to help him and those blocks were seventy five pounds a piece. I picked up about three and I don't think I got out of bed for two days.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did he have any siblings?

OSTROFSKY: Hm?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did he have any brothers or sisters?

OSTROFSKY: Oh yeah, he had two brothers. One older and one younger. I think his younger brother went in too. Was inducted. But he wasn't married at the time. Well, Milton was married but his wife was, had a good job so that was no problem there. She worked for the county

commission, she was a private secretary for the, now what did I just say? The county commissioner. She was a smart girl. How he ever picked up with me and I didn't know how, what the least idea what a typewriter was.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What was his younger brother's name?

OSTROFSKY: One was Simon, and the other was John.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you worry about Shep and Stan during the war years?

OSTROFSKY: Oh yeah, I was writing to them. I think the whole family was writing to both of them. And also to Shep too and I'd send things to other boys in the service. Some kids I knew were in there and they liked some kind of cheese so I'd wrap up a piece, good big block of cheese and mail it out and I was working so I had the money for the postage. It was nothing to what it is today. And at the time I had a little hobby of collecting little pitchers. You know, little pitchers. So my brother-in-law Shep, I'll show you something. He sent me from Germany, I should give it to one of his daughters. Should have given it to Peg. Peg and Rachel came down to Helen's. He sent me this from Germany, meant the world to me, to go with my pitcher collection. He was good. I liked him. Not in a sexual way, but he was a good smart man. Alice was lucky to have him.

WONGSRICHANALAI: That's beautiful.

OSTROFSKY: Isn't it lovely?

WONGSRICHANALAI: I'm going to take a picture of that. So, he bought that in Germany?

OSTROFSKY: Came from Germany. Yeah. So I was writing to them. Both Stan and Shep.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did they ever talk about their experiences in the army?

OSTROFSKY: No, I never heard Stan say anything at all. And I think he got medals but I don't know what he did with them. He just figured, well he was serving his country and he didn't need that kind of . . . You couldn't thank Stan for anything. He always could do so much for somebody else, but he was the type of person that don't do it for me. I don't need it. And I don't mean it in a stupid type of way, you know what I mean? There are people that just don't do it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Were you concerned that they would have to adjust back to the peacetime life?

OSTROFSKY: Of course, I was down here and when Stan came back, of course he stayed down home with my folks, and he stayed there because Lewis was young, still. What was Lewis? He must have been about sixteen. Lewis was about ready to graduate from high school I guess by the time Stan came back. Lewis was the youngest one. So Stan stayed with them till they both died. Then he had himself a little house built in Dover, right inside of Dover. You know where it was. And after a while Stan got married. I think he was in his fifties or something. He got

married. Married a girl who'd lost her husband. They were both great Grangers. You know what a grange is?

WONGSRICHANALAI: No.

OSTROFSKY: Grange is an organization for farmers.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, he became a farmer. He got involved in...

OSTROFSKY: No, he worked in a dye shop. Make where they were making dyes for coloring, and these dyes were especially sent down in South America where they dye their clothes such bright things. And he worked there until he retired. And he died at, he was ninety three.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What about Shep. What did he do after the war?

OSTROFSKY: He bought out a laundry. He and Alice ran a laundry. It was a good job. Amazing.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Hard work.

OSTROFSKY: A lot of work. Of course they had help. I mean they weren't doing the whole thing themselves. But it wasn't just for Dover. People from little towns all around had their laundries picked up each Monday morning and delivered some other day and probably might have delivered a clean one on a Monday and picked up the dirty ones to bring back, so. It was a good job for the two of them. Then on top of that, of course, Alice was doing secretary work. She worked for the state health office and she worked in the telephone office, can't remember where. And I was down here all the time, so I really didn't know what was going on, too well. I didn't know any of my nieces and nephews. They were all born after I come down here and. Couldn't tell you too much about them. Except the past few years have been going up to the reunion but then they're great great grandkids up there now and I wouldn't have any idea where they sprang from. Dull life.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, how often would you go up to visit Dover-Foxcroft.

OSTROFSKY: Well, when I was working I used to go up at Christmas time and I'd go up again maybe in August when I'd have my vacation, regular vacation. They would be the only times I'd go. But then after I got married, before we had kids, or before my kids were in school, we used to go up, oh, probably a couple of times out of the year. But then after my mom and dad died, that was a whole lot different. Seemed like there was, after dad died . . . Mother died first, and then after dad died seemed like there was just nothing there for a while. Of course I had my brothers and sisters there, but wasn't the same. . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you have any advice for families of men and women who are entering the service now?

OSTROFSKY: What? Say that?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you have any advice for the families of young men and women who are joining the service now? Your granddaughter is joining the service now.

OSTROFSKY: I don't know. I have a granddaughter and she's, I just worry about her now. Cause her father's been here to pick up after her. It didn't matter a darn what it was she had, she could sit here and drop a glass on the floor and walk over it and he'd come right in to pick it up. When they moved in with all that junk, I was making up a bed in there, she was going to sleep in Jeff's room. And I says "you come here Gillian, and I'll show you how to make a bed." Well, the way she makes a bed was just pull a blanket up over a thing. She says "Oh, I can't stop now, I gotta go pick up my boyfriend." That was that. That's . . . and I'm saying to myself "Kid, all you get in the navy or any other service you're gonna make your own bed and you're gonna make it right." And this is what worries me, she's never done anything like that. But why should I worry? She'll find out.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Is there anything else you'd like to add, any concluding remarks?

OSTROFSKY: Say it again?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you have any other notes or stories to add?

OSTROFSKY: God, I think I've shot off enough haven't I? All about myself.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well it's a lot of good information and we appreciate the time you've taken to spend with us. Thank you.

OSTROFSKY: I don't know what kind of a story you're gonna to make out of it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Thank you.