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Newman Rebell

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

A Collaborative Project of the Regional Oral History Office,
The National Park Service, and the City of Richmond, California

Interviews conducted by
Jess Rigelhaupt
in 2008

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Interview #1: April 15, 2008

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Rigelhaupt: It's April 15, 2008. I'm in Berkeley, California doing an oral history interview with Newman Rebell. To start, if I could just have you say your full name and the year you were born.

01-00:00:18

Rebell: Okay, my name is Newman Rebell. I was born April 3, 1928.

Rigelhaupt: And where were you born?

01-00:00:25

Rebell: Oakland, California.

Rigelhaupt: Did you grow up in Oakland?

01-00:00:30

Rebell: I grew up in Berkeley. I was born in Oakland, but I was raised in Berkeley. My mother had me at Highland Hospital.

Rigelhaupt: And your family lived in Berkeley.

01-00:00:42

Rebell: Yeah.

Rigelhaupt: And could you describe the early years of your life and the neighborhood you grew up in?

01-00:00:51

Rebell: Well, let's see. I lived on 1639 Prince Street in Berkeley. And the neighborhood was rather—Oh, it was very diverse. We had Italians, we had blacks, we had Orientals. And it was just a very diverse neighborhood. It wasn't like, say, a ghetto, where there's one ethnicity and then another. I can remember George {Hollis?}, and he's Caucasian; I remember Portuguese. I'm trying to think. {Auntie Hills?}, he was {playing?}. Who else? Just a mixture of all nationalities. That's about it.

Rigelhaupt: And did you have a lot of extended family living near you?

01-00:01:41

Rebell: Yes, uh-huh. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We had aunts. My mother had five sisters, and she sent for each one of them when she came out here. And they all did the domestics, until World War II.

Rigelhaupt: You said your mom sent for her sisters.

01-00:02:00

Rebell: Yeah. Yeah, after she came out here.

Rigelhaupt: So could you describe how your mom came out here, and then where she was from?

01-00:02:07

Rebell: Well, they were from New Iberia, Louisiana. And I think, from what I can understand—I never did pursue this or anything—but I think there were some people that were building the oil refineries out in Richmond, and I think one of the engineers working out there—and my mother was a maid—I think they brought her out here. That’s how she came out here.

Rigelhaupt: Do you know what year your mom came out here?

01-00:02:34

Rebell: I sure don’t. I really don’t. I was born in 1928, so I guess it must’ve been before then. So that’s how she got here. And then when she was the first one to get here, then I think she sent for her sisters after that. And then her brother, I think he came out here on his own. He lived in Marysville and Stockton. So that’s about all I can tell you.

Rigelhaupt: Well, did your mother ever talk about her first impressions of the Bay Area? Was she—

01-00:03:08

Rebell: No, I never did question her about that.

Rigelhaupt: So she never talked about how it was different from Louisiana.

01-00:03:14

Rebell: No. Of course, back then, everything was segregated in the South. They only had one high school out here. That was Berkeley High. So you had to go there. The only thing I can remember is this. It was redlined. Like you couldn’t buy a home on the other side of University along Martin Luther King Way. It was redlined and had the 88 bus runs Martin Luther King Way. And we used to kid each other about that. If you went past University Avenue—there weren’t any blacks living across University Avenue—it would’ve caused the bus driver to come back and wake you up and say, “We’re on the other side of University. I know you don’t live over there.” But you were redlined in just certain areas. South Berkeley, that’s where all the blacks lived, down there. They had a few in West Berkeley. But at the time, we couldn’t buy homes on the other side of Martin Luther, which was Grove Street at that time. You couldn’t buy a home over there. And on the other side of University, you couldn’t buy a home there. But you all went to Berkeley High School, because there was only one high school.

Rigelhaupt: So from what you’ve described, it wasn’t just redlining, in the sense of where African Americans could buy homes; the bus driver knew that you might not belong, so to say—

01-00:04:40

Rebell:

[over Rigelhaupt] Now, that's if you happened to fall asleep on the bus, he'd wake you up; that was a joke we had, and he would. But most blacks were redlined. South Berkeley, North Oakland and West Oakland, that's where they—There was a few just very, very scattered. There weren't any blacks in San Leandro. Hayward—there weren't any blacks living out there. There was one lady I remember—I can't think of her name right now—she wanted to go to high school prom. And she was going to Castlemont. And they didn't have any African Americans going to prom. And she wanted to go to prom. But during that time, why, there wasn't much—there weren't mixed couples. So she finally found the fellow—he just passed away; I can't think of his name—to take her to the senior prom. And that was at Castlemont. And so that's about it. Mostly all the blacks during that time were right here in South Berkeley, or North Oakland or West Oakland. That's where we all lived. You just couldn't buy homes there. We used to make jokes about it.

Rigelhaupt:

So by the time you entered elementary school, the country was already in the Depression.

01-00:06:21

Rebell:

Yeah, the country really didn't come out of the Depression till World War II. I went to school right on the corner right there. What did they call it now? Longfellow. And then I went to Lincoln, up on Prince Street. I went there, and then I went to Longfellow. I went to both of those schools. I've got some pictures of my class—but I should've looked for those pictures—when I was eight, nine, ten, twelve years old. And most of those people are gone now. 1937, I think it was, they took a picture, a class picture. In fact, they had a reunion there about four or five years ago, of all the kids that went to school there. I wish I would've found that picture, but I don't know where—It's around here someplace.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, how do you remember the Depression when you were a young child?

01-00:07:20

Rebell:

Well, actually, the Depression didn't hit here as hard as it did in other places. Nobody seemed to want for anything. And then they had the WPA. They had that, and then the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] Camp, they had that. And they had a lot of other programs. But we always ate and everything, and I didn't know anything about the Depression. We never did seem to want for anything. But from what I can understand, the Depression didn't hit this Bay Area as hard as it did other places. I used to see a lot of guys huddled—There used to be a railroad track. Trains used to run through there. And you'd see a lot of guys would be hobos. [laughs] And then one thing I noticed, too, they used to have a lot of ministers used to stand on—mostly in Oakland—down by 14th and Broadway, used to stand on the corner and be preaching. Have the families with the guitar and singing and everything. Did you hear much about that?

Rigelhaupt: Could you say more?

01-00:08:22

Rebell:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. They used to have the street corner ministers. Especially down in Oakland. And they always used to ask for a donation. Used to put their hat down there. Sometimes they'd have the families out there, would be singing hymns and everything. I can remember that, coming up. And I remember they had just about, a movie theater on every corner. They had the {Loren?} Theater; that was up on Alcatraz. And then they had the Berkeley Theater, the {Fox Street?} Theater {inaudible} United Artists, a lot of movies. Of course, MGM and Columbia, they had a lot of—making independent films back in those days, too. They weren't very good, but there wasn't any TV. Everybody had a radio. And they played a lot of sports around here, too. All these different companies, they all had baseball teams. They had different tournaments that they used to play, and they used to play down here at the park. I remember Ben's Golden Glow and {SP?} Stores, and all the different big companies, they all had baseball teams and they had the different tournaments. They used to play in Lincoln Park, {Bushmont?} Park and all the different parks. You'd go on Sundays, those places would be packed with people. And every Thanksgiving, down here at San Pablo Park, they used to have football games. And you've heard of the Rose Bowl, the Cotton Bowl, the Sugar Bowl; they called it the Toilet Bowl. [laughs] Some guys had on helmets, some guys didn't have helmets; some guys had uniforms, some guys didn't. They played that game every year. Yeah, because {Lou Wild?} used to play in that. He's still living, uh-huh. And it was just blacks. They'd play Oakland. {Berkeley local?}. It was basically packed out there. And then the blacks used to have their own tennis tournaments. I don't know whether Fred {Griffin?} is living or not. He lives around the corner. Well, he's in his eighties now. And they used to have the tennis tournaments down there. And the blacks used to have their own golf tournaments, the guys that played golf. You couldn't do this other stuff with Caucasians. But they used to play each other in sports and everything, baseball. And they had the semipro league. Because Ernie Lombardi—used to live in that house down the street—he used to play with the Cincinnati Reds. He was a catcher for the Cincinnati Reds. He lived in that house down there. And I remember meeting Joe DiMaggio. You remember Joe DiMaggio. I remember meeting him one time, over in San Francisco. And there was a lot of bars around here, too. [laughs] Like if you go down San—you see all those places that have closed down, if you're ever passing down on San—you see a lot of—Well, they were all open at that time. So that's a lot about it, what I can remember, about coming up in those days.

Rigelhaupt: Well, when you were in elementary school, did you have a favorite subject?

01-00:11:35

Rebell:

When I got to junior high school, I kind of liked history a lot. But no, not really. I was a C student all the way. I was a C student all the way through school. And then one thing I can do, I remember when the war started, they

moved all the Japanese. And I remember {Lee and Joan Serimoto?}, who we went to school with. I know they all had to go out to—I think they went to Utah or Montana someplace. I remember when the buses came to pick them up, they were all getting on the buses. It was kind of pitiful. They had the soldiers there. They didn't need those soldiers there. There wasn't no reason. This general, I can't think of what his name was, that started all that. But they were just as loyal. But everybody had that scare when World War II started. And they were all A students. I remember they had had a Boy Scout troop. Oh, yeah, we had Boy Scout troops. All the churches had Boy Scout troops. Not so much the Girl Scouts, but the Boy Scouts. Troop 17, I remember belonging to that. And we used to go in the Berkeley Hills, we used to camp overnight out there.

Rigelhaupt: I'll come back to that. About this time, when you were elementary school age, what was a typical day like for your mother?

01-00:13:10

Rebell:

I was an only child, remember. My mother was a domestic. And she'd always cook breakfast for me in the morning. And I worked in the cafeteria. I used to help serve in the cafeteria. And basically, she went to work. My father worked at the post office in Oakland. That's where he worked at. And they both came home and—And then back in those days, you had a lot of these fraternal orders, like the Masons, the Elks and the Moose. And the Catholics, what did they have? What do they call that Catholic fraternal organization? It's the Eagles. The Eagles, you've heard of that. And they would have their meetings and they would have their different affairs. Because there was radio, there was no TV back in those days. And the Eastern Star. My mother belonged to the Eastern Star. And a lot of people went to church. McGee Avenue Baptist Church, they went there. But on weekends, they used to have dances and parties and things like that. Because I remember they would have them at the house, and they would say, "It's after eleven." Saturday night. "Don't forget, we've got to get up and go to church in the morning." They had churches and everything. So they had a lot of activities were going on. They had these different fraternal organizations. Like the American Legion, what I belonged to, I remember that was *real* big. It was real, real big. The Masons and the Elks and the Eagles, there always was something going on in these big halls, the Scottish Rite Auditorium. There was always a lot of social activity going on. But like I said, it wasn't—But they had radios, but that was about it. So there was a lot. A lot of things were going on during that time, that the people used to partake in.

Rigelhaupt: You said your mother worked as a domestic. Did she work with the same family you said brought her out from Louisiana?

01-00:15:05

Rebell:

No. I don't know. I just remember that part. I know {inaudible} {Tradeways?} out in El Cerrito. There's a store out there, there's a

{Tradeways?}. And I know she worked for them. Remember {Hicks?} Department Store used to be in Berkeley? She worked for that family. There was another family that she worked for. And that's before World War II. And World War II came, she went to Berkeley High, and she took up ship fitting. And she went and she worked in the shipyard during World War II. I remember that.

Rigelhaupt: Were your parents married when your mom moved out—

01-00:15:52

Rebell: No, my father was in World War I. He got discharged at the Presidio in San Francisco and he just stayed. He went to work for a General {Biddles?}. That's what he told me. In fact, I've got his discharge here, from World War I. And he worked for General {Biddles?}. And then he worked at—There used to be a hotel in Oakland. You remember the Hotel {Leamington?} in Oakland? It's on Franklin Street. You're probably too young. How old are you?

Rigelhaupt: Thirty-two.

01-00:16:22

Rebell: I didn't think you were that old! [laughs] Well, there was a hotel in Oakland called the Hotel {Leamington?}. It was on Franklin Street. They tore it down now. But he was a waiter there. He worked there as a waiter. That's where he married my mother. My mother told my father, never had any money. My father was always broke. And my father was from New Orleans, originally, but he was stationed at Fort {Huachuca?}. And during World War I, he went to the Philippines. He didn't go to France, and he went to the Philippines. And then when he got discharged, he just stayed here; he didn't go back to Louisiana. In fact, he only went back to Louisiana in 1937, when his brother died. They had a TB epidemic back there; he died in that. Then after that, he came back to Berkeley. And then when he retired, they moved to Sebastopol.

Rigelhaupt: Did your father ever say why he decided to stay in the Bay Area rather than go back to Louisiana?

01-00:17:25

Rebell: No, not really. I've got a picture of him in his uniform. But like I say, I just didn't. I thought it was going to be about World War—This stuff, I've got stuff down in the basement, I've got stuff here, I've got stuff there. I could've dug a lot of that stuff out. Because I know him and his buddies, a lot of times on Fridays, they just played poker. Of course, a lot of men do that now. The American Legion does that. See, if you would've had a poker party that night, when you came in, that place would've been packed. The guys would never want to come to meetings. They do a lot of that now, but I know that a lot of men used to get together and play blackjack and used to play poker. Because for a while, blacks couldn't go into those casinos up in Reno. For a long time, we couldn't go up there. So what had happened—now, I heard this; I don't

know how true it is—a bunch of the longshoremen chartered some buses, and they were going to go up to Reno, and they were going to go in the casinos. [laughs] And this is a rumor, this is what I heard. And I understand when they—They had *heard* about it. And so when they got up there, they could go in, nobody would say anything. But you could go in, but the thing was, you couldn't work in there. You could go there, but you couldn't work in there; they wouldn't hire you. So the NAACP kind of got behind that, so they started hiring. Then they started having—different entertainers were going up there. I don't know whether you've been to Vegas or not; the different entertainers. And that's when they started having entertainers. In fact, we had a band here, {Jerry Carter?}. We were in the military together. They had a little band, they were playing up to Reno. And they were coming back home, they had {an automobile accident?}, and they got killed. And the guy that was driving the car, he didn't die. And he went to sleep at the wheel.

Rigelhaupt: Well, to ask you about your family. So were all of your aunts already out here?

01-00:19:37

Rebell: No, my mother was the first one to come out. And she was the youngest of all of them.

Rigelhaupt: So if your mom was the youngest, some of her older sisters, did they already have kids when they moved out here?

01-00:19:51

Rebell: Now, let's see. My Aunt Ti—She didn't have any kids. She didn't have any kids. And {Melinda?}, my aunt, she didn't have any kids. But {Lily Mae?}, she had two girls and a boy. In fact, her son just passed away. In fact, all three of her kids are gone. And that was it. And she had had a brother [who] had one daughter. But he never did like to talk about it; it's kind of out of wedlock. And then {Boo?} didn't have any kids, and shot—But they stayed in Louisiana; they never did come out here. They stayed back there. But there're only two brothers. That was {Boo Lionel?} and {Newt?}. And {Newt?}, he had one daughter, from what I can understand. But I didn't know he had a daughter till my mother told me about it. In fact, she probably would've been older than I was. He lived in Marysville, and then he moved; then he lived in Stockton. He was a World War I veteran, too.

Rigelhaupt: Do you know what brought him to Marysville?

01-00:20:56

Rebell: I don't know. I knew he lived there, and then he moved to Stockton. Well, he worked in the shipyards during the war; then he went back. I think he lived in Marysville; then when the war [came], he came here and he worked in the shipyards. Then he went back to Stockton. I don't know, what did he—He worked for the navy in Stockton, that's what he was doing, he worked for them. That's what he did. I know, because I remember when he passed, he

said he didn't want nothing. Just said put him in the ground. Didn't want no church, no minister, no nothing. But knowing my family, mother and father, they had a little memorial service for him. So that's what I can remember about him. And I knew he was a ladies man, I know that. [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: Did your parents ever talk about how they met?

01-00:21:51

Rebell: At church, I think. And my father was Catholic. My mother was Baptist, my father was Catholic. He's from New Orleans; he was Catholic. The only thing, my father used to like to kid. He used to like to tell jokes. And he says, "The only way I could get some from your mother, I was going to have to marry her, Newman." That's what he said. My mother used to get on him about talking about stuff like that. [laughs] Yeah, I think that's where they met. And then he sang in the choir. That's before him and my mother got married. So that's about it. They stayed married for fifty-eight years. And they had their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary—I'll show you a picture. Can you take this off?

Rigelhaupt: Well, can I see the picture toward the end?

01-00:22:40

Rebell: Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Rigelhaupt: I'll remind you. Because I can move the camera, and then I can film it, too.

01-00:22:46

Rebell: Okay. Okay.

Rigelhaupt: Did you go to church as a kid?

01-00:22:50

Rebell: Yeah, yeah. All black kids at that time had to go to church when they were coming up, because that's where mostly all the social life was, in the church. I went to McGee's, right up there on Stuart and McGee, uh-huh. Yeah. They had the Boy Scout troops there, and everything else was there. We used to go to Sunday school and that. I didn't have to go to church. And we had BYPU at night. Mostly all black kids, when I was coming up, had to go to church. Because after you got older, well, a lot of them stopped going.

Rigelhaupt: And this was a Baptist church.

01-00:23:26

Rebell: Yes, right up there on McGee. It's still there, yeah, uh-huh. I knew all the ministers. In fact, I was baptized at that church. And then when I got married, then I went to my wife's church.

Rigelhaupt: What do you remember about some of the ministers from when you were a kid?

01-00:23:44

Rebell:

Let's see. I think the first was Reverend {Cartwright?}. And I was real small then. Then James {Wilson?}; me and his son went to—And then his wife passed and he remarried again. In fact, James, one of his daughters was one of the Raiderettes. And of course, that's just been years ago, when they first started having the cheerleaders, his daughter was one of the Raiderettes. And he moved to—Where did he move to? He moved to San Rafael and we kind of lost touch. And the next thing I heard, he had passed. Reverend {Wilson?}, then Reverend {Stuart?}. And who came after? I'm trying to think. Now, Reverend {inaudible}. Oh, I can't think of his name. Anyway, I remember Reverend {Cartwright?}, Reverend {Wilson?}, and then Reverend {Stuart?}. They all passed away. In fact, Reverend {Stuart?} is retired. He lives up there on Sacramento Street. I saw him about four or five months ago. His wife just passed here about a year or so ago. And I don't know what minister's up there now.

Rigelhaupt:

Were there social programs for kids and teenagers, as well?

01-00:25:02

Rebell:

No. Mostly everything, as far as I knew, was built around the church. And they used to have church leagues. The guys would play basketball and things like that. That's what the social was, no programs. Everything kind of derived around the church, for the kids. No, they didn't. Of course, what'd they call it? Relief. Welfare, what they call it now, they used to call it Relief back in those days. But nobody had a heck of a lot, but everybody got along well. And I don't remember ever going without a meal. Well, a lot of times I didn't get what I wanted. I used to go in the store—you probably did this—"Mom, I want that. Can you—" [laughs] And, "No, no, no, no. You forget about Mama and Papa—" Didn't have the money to get what you wanted. Well, you see that now, kids be wanting this and wanting that.

Rigelhaupt:

So you were about thirteen years old when Pearl Harbor was bombed.

01-00:26:14

Rebell:

1941, yeah, yeah. Rumors, rumors, rumors. [laughs] Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I was about thirteen, yeah. Yeah, yeah. I was going to Willard, yeah, uh-huh.

Rigelhaupt:

What do you remember about it?

01-00:26:28

Rebell:

I remember it was on the radio. Everybody was listening. And they had the extras out. They used to, years ago—I don't know if you ever heard about that—they used to have the papers used to come out, guys used to go up and down, "Extra, extra. Read all about it." And I remember that. And then the next week you went and they had the newsreels. Like I said, there wasn't any TV back in those days. I didn't think too much about it. Then they had the air raid wardens around here. And they had the district warden. And that's when they started the draft. And up in windows, they used to have the little stars up

in there. If you had a son or somebody was in service, you had one star; if you had two, they'd put two stars in there. And that's when the army started coming in here, I remember that. You know where 6th and Ashby is? There was an army camp there. And up on Shattuck and Carleton, there used to be an automobile dealership. There was an army camp there. And then you had the naval air station. And then you had the army base. And then Treasure Island. [laughs] And all those service teams, they had ball. They used to play at the park down there. All of them had baseball teams. Because I know DiMaggio and all, he played for the 8th Air Force. A lot of those Major League players and professionals, they played. That's one thing; in special service, that's mostly what they did was played ball. Uh-huh. And all the girls were crazy about the guys in uniform. [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: I've read that there was a sense that perhaps the Bay Area was in peril after Pearl Harbor was bombed, as the next stop—.

01-00:28:20

Rebell:

[over Rigelhaupt] Yeah. Well, there was a whole lot of people who thought about that, but there wasn't, there wasn't. There was nothing. There was a lot of rumors. Rumor, rumor, rumor, rumor. And a lot of guys used to get drunk and take a lot of stuff. And all the guys that were of age, I remember they were all going in the service. Some guys, my father was too old. Because he was in World War I. But all these guys were—And what I used to get upset about, me and the younger guys, that all the girls liked all the guys in uniform. And I remember we used to be in class, a lot of guys would be home on leave, they would come up to the school and talk to the teachers and everything. And "Here's so-and-so-and-so, he's in the navy. So-and-so who's in the Marine Corps." Of course, the service was segregated at that time, too. And a lot of guys were going overseas. And you know where the senior center is, up there on Ashby and Ellis Street, right across from—There's a senior center, South Berkeley Senior Center. There used to be a house right there. And I remember the {Sayshus?} family used to stay in that house. And Barry {Sayshus?} got killed over in Italy. Somebody said, "You know Barry?" He was a little older, maybe a year or two older than I was. "You hear about Barry?" "No." He said, "He got killed over in Italy, with the 92nd Division over there." And these are things that begin to kind of come to me now, I'd forgotten about. It's been so long ago.

Rigelhaupt: Well, what was it like being a teenager at the time of a world war?

01-00:29:53

Rebell:

Well, we went to school like we always did, and we saw all these people in uniform, all the young guys. And that's when work started picking up. That's when everybody was going to work in the shipyards. People were going to work at the army base, people were going to work at the naval supply, people work going to work at the naval air station, people were going to work in Vallejo, people were going to work at Treasure Island, people were going to

work in Pittsburg. Yeah, everybody had a job back then. And it was paying good money. That's why they were hiring all these kids. You had to be sixteen in order to get a job; but if you could do the work, they'd hire you anyway. The city {unemployed?}, that's when I went to work at the army base. I worked at the army base one year, and I worked at the naval supply for a summer. They would let us work there for the summer. And then I worked up at the Claremont Hotel. My mother made me quit that job because my schoolwork was getting behind. And when I went back to school, they were begging me to stay on there. But mostly, all the officers would go up to the Claremont Hotel. They would always go and have dinner. That's mostly what you saw up there were officers. And then they had that pre-naval academy up at Cal. A lot of those guys were taking pre-naval, the Reserve Officers Training Corps up there. They were in uniform. And if you were in uniform, you were king. And you'd see servicemen just all over the place. And I remember going to Treasure Island to a ballgame one time. My father took me over there. They had a team here; they went over there, played a team they had in Treasure Island. And all those guys were Major League ballplayers. They were in the service, and that's what they did. And that's what it was, being a teenager. Everybody was working. Everybody had a job. And there was a lot of prostitution down there on 7th Street. We used to kid each other about that. They had a burlesque show down there on 8th Street. And they didn't used to have buses on 8th Street, down around Castro Valley and all around. They've got homes out there now. A lot of that was agricultural out there. A lot of people used to go out there and work out there. You could go there on weekends and make you some money doing that.

Rigelhaupt: Well, staying with your job at the army base, how did you hear about the job? How did you get the job?

01-00:32:21

Rebell: You'd just go out there. Because they were hiring everybody. In fact, I thought that sometimes they had too many people working out there. Because a lot of money was floating around. And so I went out there and I made out an application. I had to go ahead and have my picture taken; they just called me to work. Those ones that wanted to work. And that's how I got out there. Then a year after that, I worked at naval supply. Oh, the naval air station. I worked in a warehouse out there. And I worked in the supply aspect of it, loading, unloading the boxcars and things like that. Because of all the supplies they were shipping. And I noticed the first time I went out there, there were all those Italian prisoners they had. On their sleeve, they had "Italy." And there was a big mess about one of the prisoners married some American woman that was working out there. There was a big thing in the paper about that. The whole Italian army surrendered in World War II. They got tired of fighting for Mussolini. Now, the Germans and the Japanese, that's another story.

Rigelhaupt: How old were you when you worked at the army base?

01-00:33:40

Rebell:

I had to be sixteen. Sixteen and seventeen, yeah. Yeah, you had to be at least sixteen. But a lot of these jobs, if you could do the work, they would hire you. They would hire you anyway, because a lot of these places were going begging for help because everybody was going to the shipyards and all these other places, where they paid more money. And of course, then after the war, all that started to shut down.

Rigelhaupt:

You said your mom worked in the shipyards.

01-00:34:07

Rebell:

Yeah, she worked at Kaiser, out in Richmond. She was a ship fitter, because I know she was talking to I think her sister or somebody on the phone. They started a class of ship fitting. "I'm going up there. I'm going to take up ship fitting." So she went. And she got a little certificate, and then she went to work out—I remember she used to have her pants on. Not too many women wore pants in those days, they mostly wore dresses. She used to have her overalls on, used to have her hair—she had long hair—used to have her hair tied up in a knot, a little helmet on her head. Used to fix her lunch and used to catch a bus going out there. Of course, my mother drove, too. She drove a car. Not too many women drove back in those days, because there wasn't no power steering. You had to go *rr-rr-rr*. Weren't a lot of women were driving back then. I remember that. My mother had overalls. Women, during that time, they didn't wear pants back then. That's when women started wearing pants. And used to take their hair, used to tie it up in a bandana. She used to put the helmet on top of the bandana. And she'd be going to work. And my father still had his job back then. They weren't paying hardly *nothing*. But he kept his job there, because he said, "There's going to be an end to this war." So he stayed. But right after World War II, a lot of the servicemen were coming back, and they were getting all the *jobs*! And all us guys were getting out of high school, we could get jobs, but they was giving them five and ten points. If you took a test, they would give you that much preference they had for jobs. And then a lot of them were going back to school, too, on the GI Bill. Mm-hm. Yeah, that's what it was, living around here during the war as a teen. Everybody had a job because the war was on. And you could go out and get a job most [laughs] anyplace. They'd hire you. Because like I say, everybody was working at the different military installations. Yeah, they had camps all over the place. I told you about 6th and Ashby, and then up there on Shattuck and Carleton. The military had that.

Rigelhaupt:

Whey you say the army camps, were those for soldiers who were just being drafted?

01-00:36:29

Rebell:

I really don't—I know they were there, and they were constantly coming and going. A lot of them were going overseas. They'd stay here for a while. Because Josh, he was overseas. He seen a lot of action over there. In fact, his ears are messed up. You ever heard of that Battle of {Truk?}, during World

War II, a big battle? I think he was in that battle. That's that big, big naval battle they had during World War II. I think he was in that. And he was stationed—I didn't know he was stationed {at that?} one time. He was stationed at the army base, because the quartermaster called. The service was segregated at that time. The black and the whites, we were all separated. The only time the service ever integrated, when they had—You heard of the Battle of the Bulge, didn't you? In World War II? That's when the Germans counterattacked, and they had all this—And they were trying to fill those lines up. They were taking everybody—cooks, everybody—and stick them in there, just stick them in the lines. And that's not when they integrated, but they put them in there. And after the battle was over, everybody went back to their separate units. A lot of guys will tell you stories about that. Archie probably could tell you a lot of that stuff. A few of those guys are living, because World War II veterans are down in the thousands today. And my war is next, comes along, because I'm eighty years old now. A lot of guys are in their eighties and nineties.

Rigelhaupt: Well, did you ever have conversations, or remember conversations about the fact that the military was segregated? Was there a sense that it was a difficult thing, to be fighting for freedom—

01-00:38:18

Rebell:

Yeah, yeah, uh-huh. Well, I don't know. Mostly, well, a lot of places, they had de facto segregation here. It wasn't like in the South, because they didn't have but one high school in Berkeley, and that was Berkeley High. The only high school you could go to was there. And the ones in Oakland, they didn't have separate for this and separate for that. Yeah, we talked about it among our selves, you know what I mean. But you got the same pay. And then a lot of the officers they had were white; they were in charge of the colored troops. Well, they had black officers, too, but mostly all your officers that were in charge were all white. All the non-commissioned officers were black. Because when I first went in the service, they were just beginning to—And one thing, if you want to hear this. One of the reasons why they integrated the service was after World War II, the government was downsizing. And they got some of the economic professors to go around and see how the government could save money in the military. And one of the recommendations that they made was to integrate the service, because keeping the service separate was costing the government a lot of money, to keep the blacks here and the whites separate like that. So that's when Truman signed that order. That was one of the recommendations that they made, that not having the service integrated was costing the government a whole lot of money. You had separate service clubs, separate NCOs, separate barracks, and that was costing the government a lot. So that's why, one of the reasons why they integrated. That was one of the recommendations that the professors had made, was that it was costing—They were trying to save money. That was one of the things that was costing extra money. And that's when they really started downsizing the service. Until that Korean War come up. Because a peacetime army, rank is low. It's low.

Rigelhaupt: Did you ever hear about the Double V campaign?

01-00:40:27

Rebell: Let's see, what was that? That was victory over there and victory at home. Not too much. They had a lot of that patriotic stuff. They had a lot of that prop— They had a lot of that stuff. Victory at—and victory at home.

Rigelhaupt: In an effort to end the segregated army and segregation throughout the US.

01-00:40:50

Rebell: Yeah, yeah. Well, a lot of that came with Martin. It was some, but like I say, it was before. And like I know Jimmy, Jimmy was in World War II, I know. He bought a home up in Montclair. And just how money talks, this guy wanted to sell the home up there. Jimmy had money. And Jimmy wanted the home, but I understand that people up there tried to buy the home to keep him from getting it. But this guy wanted to sell it right away; he was leaving the state. And so Jimmy had the money right there, so that's how he got up there. And then slowly, slowly, because I know down on East 14th Street—you remember Brian Copeland, the comedian? He was raised in San Leandro. And he said he walked down Bancroft Avenue, "Hey, hey look. Oakland's that way." And he talks about being raised up in that area, too. No, not too much. I don't know, some people were kind of satisfied the way things were. We had our own clubs, we had our own this and this, that. And nobody was threatened, none of that stuff. It's just the same way now. You see the kids, you were going to school, and everybody kind of had their own little groups they associated with. And so that's basically it. We all came up happy. And everybody had their own little thing. Now, sports and things, they played against one another. But you hardly ever saw a black person on a white team or a white guy on a black team. Once in a while you would see it, but basically, everything, we kind of played one another. Everybody got along. Of course, now, a lot of guys used to complain about the police used to pick on them and something like that. But I never had any experience with that. That's myself. A lot of guys say the cops used to beat the black guys up and take them down, put them in jail and say they resisted arrest. I never saw nothing like that, but I heard this is what happened. I don't know how true that was. And most of the black guys that applied for the police force, if they applied for it and passed the test, they'd *hire* them. I never did know any of them to ever get denied employment in those different—Because I know {Jewell Bennett?} and {Major MacAfee?}, a lot of guys were on the police force.

Rigelhaupt: What do you remember about lots of people moving to the Bay Area for jobs in the war industries?

01-00:43:26

Rebell: A lot, both blacks and whites—They were coming from the South. I know they had race riots in different places, but everybody seemed to get along pretty good around here. I never saw—I remember some of the kids that their parents brought them out here from the South were used to going to—kind of

felt a little bit funny here. Berkeley was always kind of liberal, anyway. I really can't recall *too* much happening. We used to kid about a lot of that stuff. We'd laugh about it; it was funny to a lot of us. And then Harry Bridges was here, too. He had the Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union. And a lot of these jobs were union jobs. We used to kid a lot about—They say, "You say Martin Luther King did a lot to liberate us," he says, "You got to thank Tojo, Hitler, and Harry Bridges." [laughs] Because if it wasn't for them, why, things might still be same. We used to kid like that among ourselves. And then most of these places around here were unionized. Because they had a cannery up here, Heinz cannery, up there on San Pablo and Ashby. There used to be a big cannery. And then they had one down in Emeryville on Powell Street. And a couple of them out in East Oakland. They had canneries out there. And all the black, white, all of them worked out there together. And some of them guys were even foremen out there. So there was a lot of work before. That's where everybody worked at before the war, in those canneries. And the train was running. Well, Southern Pacific ran down there in West Oakland. Chicago and Oakland was the big stop off. We had a lot of people were working down there for the railroad. And like I say, it was the Depression, but it didn't hit this area as bad as it did other parts of the country. And then you always had, down the valley, a lot of people moved down to Modesto, Merced, Stockton. My uncle stayed down there. There's a lot of harvesting down there; still is. Of course, it's mostly Mexicans down there now, but I remember a lot of blacks used to work down there. Because I remember {Homer Holloway?}, he moved down there. He got a farm down there. So a lot of them moved to Tracy.

01-00:46:57

Yeah, a lot of military around here. All up and down. Oh, the naval air station. A lot of guys would be drunk on the streets, the MPs and the shore patrol. In San Francisco—Oh, I used to love to go to San Francisco! Oh, you're talking about diversity; the international settlement over there. And I used to go to movies, and all the big bands used to come here, like Count Basie, Tommy Dorsey, and Duke [Ellington]. And they used to go to Paramount Theater, {the Fox, whole thing?}. We used to go down, they used to have their matinees. Oh! Fifteen cents. [laughs] Oh, that's one good thing. I loved to {catch?} {inaudible}. I had my little job, I used to go to San Francisco. I loved to walk down Market Street and go to the Golden Gate Theater. And oh, just so much. You could see all the {guards?}. Used to see the shore patrol walking the streets and the MPs. They would be all up and down in their Jeeps, picking up the drunks and AWOLs. [laughs] Oh, I wish you could've came. Oh, now, you're talking about fun! You didn't have to worry about nobody hitting you on the head or gangs or nothing like that. Everybody seemed to get along. Yeah, I used to love that. Used to catch the ferry over there sometimes on weekends. I used to love to go to San Francisco. Just so much diversity and everything over there. And you'd see, all up and down the street, the sailors, the soldiers, the Marines and everybody.

Rigelhaupt: With a lot of people moving to the Bay Area, I know a lot of people, especially white people, moved from Oklahoma and Arkansas. And they were called Okies and Akies. And those weren't necessarily terms of endearment.

01-00:47:42

Rebell: Yeah. We might've said that around us, you know what I mean. But you'd see them the next day, and they'd all be laughing and talking and going on. Everybody had their own little section of town, all the things that they did. Just like my next-door neighbor {Brown?}. {Brown?}, his father was from Oklahoma. He was born and raised in Richmond. And I don't remember—We did more fighting among, we did more cutting—just like now—black on black. A lot of that was the same thing way back then, too. No, I can't remember—I know some of the kids came out, we all went to school together. I can't remember—Might've been a little something here and there, but it wasn't nothing real big. And then we were pretty much segregated. Like you take now, we go to Merritt Bakery—We go down to Merritt Bakery once a month. And the guys there, the black guys there, were raised up around here. And like I say, we were all pals among us. {We got a white?} guy in the American Legion named {Larry Kahn?}. He lives in Lafayette. He went to Berkeley High. He says, "I went to school with you guys, but we never associated." I'm associated more with him now, with the American Legion, than I did when we were going to school! He said, "No, I never—" We all went to school together. He was born and raised in Berkeley, but we never, never did associate. They had their churches and we had ours. We had our ball teams, they had their ball teams. And we had that Live Oak—You know where Live Oak Park is up in Berkeley? Yeah, we used to have that Live Oak League up there. It was a summer league. Used to play basketball. They had their teams. I think Bill Russell played up there. Bill Russell. He's not too much, but he's a little younger than I am. Him and who else played there? Andy Wolfe played up at Cal. It was a summer league. We had our team, and they had their different teams up there. It was a lot of fun. We played outside. But the blacks had their teams and the white—But we all played against one another. But no, I never seen too much went along. Because we all had our own little groups. Just like I was talking to Larry, and I didn't know Larry went to Berkeley High till he was running for some office. He was putting his resume down there. He said, "Yeah, I went to Berkeley High." [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: Well, could you describe what Berkeley High was like when you were there?

01-00:50:34

Rebell: Well, actually, I went to University High, because I was living closer to there than I was to Berkeley High. Uh-huh. Well, that was the only high school they had in Berkeley. In Oakland, they had Tech, McClymond's, Castlemont, Oakland. Now, mostly, all the Orientals went to Oakland High School when I was going to school. Just like I was telling you about that girl out there. There was a black family out there, and she wanted to go to senior prom, and she couldn't go because she didn't have anybody to date her. You better *not* be

carrying somebody out of your race. So she finally found somebody to take her to her senior prom. And most of the black kids, they either went to University High, or they went to Tech or McClymond's. Oakland High School, most of your Orientals went to Oakland High school. And you had Fremont, it was all Caucasian. Then you had Castlemont, was all Caucasian. Then there was Roosevelt; they closed that high school down. There was Roosevelt High School, too. Mostly all the Italian guys at McClymond's was playing ball down there. I remember {Al Shure?} and some of those guys were playing for them. Everything kind of revolved around the church, all our social activities. And so there wasn't a lot of fighting and a whole lot of animosity with the people that came out here. At least I didn't see that. But now, maybe somebody else, you might talk to him, might tell you something different from what I did.

Rigelhaupt: Did you get a sense that things were getting overcrowded during the war?

01-00:52:17

Rebell: Everybody was renting out a room. [laughs] No, I didn't. I never noticed it. I knew you'd go up and down the street, you'd go up and down Broadway in Oakland, and on 7th Street, or you go to San Francisco, it was like that; it was mostly all you would see was servicemen. And then like I say, everybody was working. So my mother had a room rented out. A lot of people had rooming houses. A lot of these people were looking. Yeah, you could say there was a little overcrowding and there was a lack of housing. Because right after the war, they started doing a lot of building. A lot of people stayed here.

Rigelhaupt: Did you see that at school, too? Did school get more crowded?

01-00:53:11

Rebell: Yeah, they had big classes. Yeah, yeah, they had real big classes. I think it was one of the reasons why a lot of kids weren't learning. And that's the only one thing I dreaded about going to school, was the teacher asking you to get up and read out loud. That was my worst fear about going to school. And if you're an A student, that's OK. But you're about a C, like I was, a lot of times you're kind of afraid. Because I was an only child. A lot of these guys had older sisters and brothers, could kind of help them with their homework, too. That's the only thing I hated about going to school, was having to get up to recite or do something. But other kids—you know what I'm talking about, don't you—they'd be raising their hand. And I do remember about the gym class. The girls were just beginning to wear the little shorts back in those days. And guys, we'd be peeking over, "Look at so-and-so." [laughs] And stuff like that, you probably wouldn't even pay any attention to it now, but back then, it was a lot different. Geez, I sure wish I could've got some of those pictures to let you see them. I noticed that when I was graduated from Willard and there was no Oriental kids in that group picture at all. They'd all gone to the camps and everything.

Rigelhaupt: Did you guys, your classmates, did you talk about how you felt about the Japanese being evacuated?

01-00:54:36

Rebell: We didn't like it, because they were all our friends. We were all raised up around here together. And I'll tell you one thing about it, they all were A students, most of them. We didn't talk about it too much. We were sorry they were gone, but there was nothing we could do about it. Because I can remember when they were—I remember the buses would come, picking them up. They had all their belongings. Which I thought wasn't necessary, they had the MPs out there with rifles or they had the 45s or something out. That was unnecessary. It was just pitiful to see them getting all their belongings. We talked about it a little bit, but I can't remember too much. We weren't too much involved in politics or nothing like that during that time. I remember one thing. You remember Admiral Nimitz? You heard of Nimitz? His daughter went to school with us, I remember. Like I say, I never did associate with—They had their own things. And they ran the school like a government. They had monitors. Did you have that? They had monitors in the hall, made sure the kids didn't run or skip stairs. Did they have that, too, when you— [laughs] I thought they'd cut that out. And this guy said I skipped a stair. I didn't skip a stair. We had to go to student court. One guy was the judge and I had to stay an hour after school or something. Oh, I forgot what it was. Everybody was getting a ticket. Some guys didn't even bother about going.

Rigelhaupt: Where was University High?

01-00:56:15

Rebell: Martin Luther King Way. It's the North Oakland Senior Center place right there. Children's Hospital bought that building, I think. That was the last graduating class, 1946. And I graduated out of summer school, because I was either going to have to—they had an option. We could either go to school to make up, or we could go to Tech or we could go to McClymond's, because it was right in that area. And if you had to go out of your area, you could go, but you had to get a special permit from the district. In order for you to go to another school, you had to have a reason. And the reason why I didn't go to Berkeley High is because where I was living in Berkeley was right on the border with Oakland.

Rigelhaupt: We'll pause right there.

01-00:57:01

Rebell: Okay.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 04-15-2008.mp3

Rigelhaupt: I'm on tape number two with Newman Rebell. Just before we paused the tape to change the tape, you were saying why you went to University High rather than Berkeley High.

02-00:00:16

Rebell: Because I lived on the border of Oakland and Berkeley and it was closer to go there than it was to Berkeley High, so they gave me permission to go there because of that. You had to go to school in the district that you were. You could go to another district, but you had to have a reason to go. Because they had to go see the principal—I think Miss {Hutton?} was her name, was the principal. But she was a lady. You didn't see too many ladies in charge of anything at that time. So that's why I went to that. And they were closing the school. In fact, I think the year before that, they closed Roosevelt down. It was a high school. And then when I graduated, that was the last graduating class. And then during summer school, they had a lot that were getting their GED. Well, they didn't call it that then, the high school diploma. They went to school up there. And there was a few of us that were going to get our diplomas and weren't going to go to another half-year and graduate midterm, we could graduate that summer. We had enough credits. That's why I went to school there.

Rigelhaupt: You said that you and your friends thought that it was unnecessary for a lot of the Japanese American students to be evacuated.

02-00:01:38

Rebell: [over Rigelhaupt] Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. We couldn't understand why—no, they were teenagers. And we just didn't know why they were doing it. They were all our friends. We went to school together, we played ball together and everything, and we couldn't—But you went on to something else, once they left.

Rigelhaupt: What do you remember about your friends coming home from the internment centers?

02-00:02:09

Rebell: When they came home, I think a lot of them moved, because they took their homes and everything away from them. And I never saw them. I used to run across one every so often. I'd run across them, because a lot of the people hadn't moved in this area. I used to run—I'd go in the street or something like that. But we never did socialize—we went to school together. Like I say, a lot of times ball playing was a common denominator for going to dances and dating and stuff like that, and that's mostly what they did. But I used to run across them. Let's see, {Lee Serimoto?} and—Jesus, I'm trying to think of these guys. I'd run into them occasionally. A lot of them moved to El Cerrito, Albany and places like that. A lot of them moved out to Stockton, a lot of them moved away from this area when they came back. Like I say, those Oriental kids were very smart in school; a lot of them were going up to Cal, were going to be doctors, dentists and things like that. But I'd run into them

every once in a while on the street, or you'd see them at a movie or something. That's about all I can—The only thing I can really remember is when they were leaving here, and that was about it. And I remember asking my father about it, and he told me something; I forgot what he told me. But he read the paper, and was interested in other things, politics and things like that, that I wasn't too interested in.

Rigelhaupt: What did you decide to do when you were done with high school?

02-00:03:50

Rebell:

I don't know, just basically get a job, I guess. And like everybody else, get a job and raise a family. But I didn't, I was working. I worked up at the Claremont for a little while, then I worked for Mr.—What's that man's name? But sure, I worked. We used to clean houses. I was working for him. And then that Korean War came along, and they were drafting everybody. So they told me, he said, "Newman, you can enlist in the air force or you can go in the navy. But the only thing about it, now, you have to take a test to get in the air force, and you have to take a test to get in the navy. In the army, they just draft you." Because they were drafting a whole lot of people that couldn't read or write, and I didn't even know that. And so then when that war was on, I enlisted in the air force. Then after I got out of the service, I came back and I went to work over in San Francisco. Because I used to love San Francisco. In fact, I started to move over there. Just something about it over there that I like. It was very cosmopolitan. Were you young enough to remember—I'll tell you one of the places I worked, you might remember. You remember that Canadian Club sign? Used to be a sign, as you went across the bridge. Well, it's Hiram Walker. I worked there for a while. And then they moved out of town, and I worked for {Bissinger?} and Company. *They* moved. [laughs] Actually, these companies were beginning to move away from {me?}. The canneries started closing down. And then I worked for {Bissinger?} and Company, and then what other company? Safeway used to make their coffee over there. I worked for them. Then I said, "Shit, I'm going to get me a government job. I'm getting tired of getting these jobs and working all—then they're moving out of town." So that's when I went to work for the post office. I knew it was civil service, and I knew I could retire from there. But I'd get these jobs, but every time you turned around, the companies were—Maybe that could've been the first of outsourcing. I don't know. But all these companies were moving. And my wife was having the same problem, too, with companies moving back east or a lot of that stuff. But they were all moving. The canneries were closing down. And then General Motors, they had that out in Fremont, and Ford out there. A lot of guys were working out there. But I finally took the test for the post office, and I went to work there. But basically, when I got out of high school, I was going to go to work. My folks wanted me to go to college, but my grades weren't good enough to go to Cal. I was going to have to go to either Merritt or—but they didn't call it that—or go to one of the junior colleges, if you were going to go there. So I just went to work. I got a job. I was working for this fellow. He was a nice

guy and he was an herb doctor. He was going around making herbs. And then he had this cleaning business. And he got more off into the herb business than he was to cleaning. And he used to go on these jobs, he used to leave me doing those jobs. They finally sold the business. He said, "Newman," he says, "I'm selling my business." That was the cleaning business. Because {he was off and?} he had salesmen and everything working. "But now, this guy bought it. I'm going to recommend you. You're a good man and all that. You're working." And this guy called me up on the phone, he said, "I'm sorry, but I'm not going to be able to hire you. I've got to hire my—" His kids. He had kids, he was going to hire them. And I told my father about it, he said, "Oh, you'll find a job, don't worry." [laughs] He said, "Oh, don't worry about." Said, "This is life. Things like this happen." And that's when I started working these different jobs, until that war came along, until the Korean War came along one day. Because they were cleaning these streets out, they were drafting all these guys. And somebody was telling me, "But you could go in the air force or you could go in the navy, but you have to take a test." I think the Marine Corps, too, if I'm not too mistaken. The service was kind of integrated then. So I took the test for the—I passed it, but I didn't pass it by much. [laughs] I managed to get—And I did take typing in high school, when I was going to junior high. They didn't have the numbers on it, they were all blank. You remember that? The keys were blank. Yeah, when you took typing in school, they actually—See, you got the keys, they were all blank. All the keys were blank. So I took typing. So right after I got through with basic, they asked if anybody knows how to type. And that's the job that I did the whole time I was in the service. They had you {in general section?}. Basically, that's what I was going to do when I got out of high school, like most of the guys do—get out, get a job, maybe make a down payment on a home and start raising a family. That's what most everybody was doing. And then during that time, a lot of guys—The Merchant Marines was really going big, before they went under foreign registry. A lot of guys were shipping out back and forth. In fact, I was going to get my seaman papers. You could go in as fourth cook. That was dishwashing. Then they would train you, and then you could move on up the line. Because I always did like to cook, because I did more cooking than my wife. I always liked it. So that's one of the things I wanted to do, but they just told me, "You just have to go down to the Coast Guard and get your papers." And then you go to the union hall and get the ship, and you ship out as a fourth cook on those luxury liners or some of those freighters that were going back and forth. But you started out as a fourth cook, dishwasher, then you'd move on up. And then mostly blacks were in that Marine Cooks and Stewards union, that were doing that. And Billy, this guy I knew, his brother was a business agent for them. He said, "You go down and get your papers, come back. We'll find you a ship." But I just never did ship out. And then right after that, these ships was going under foreign registry, like Liberian registry. And then everything just started to change. If you wanted a ship, you had to go back out on the East Coast, to ship out there. So that's what it was when I got out of school. There was work here to do, if you just wanted to

work. Like it is now. Work's kind of hard to find now. And then they had a lot of construction work. A lot of guys were doing construction. A lot of that stuff was done manually, a lot of that stuff they had a machine be doing it. You could always get a job in construction. A lot of guys, blacks, were working in construction. And then different warehouses. And longshoremen, there were a lot of blacks. And then when they start taking a lot of extra guys in, a lot of the white longshoremen, a lot of their kids were getting to be accountants and lawyers, and in the professional fields. And {that's meanwhile?} a lot of blacks were on the waterfront, because a lot of the white kids just didn't want to do it. There was a lot of them over there, but that's when blacks started getting those jobs, because a lot of these {inaudible} kids were going to colleges, getting those other jobs. And that's when Harry Bridges was unionizing, everything was unionizing around. You young enough to remember that? Yeah. Yeah, you'd go there, you got a job out of the union hall all the time. You didn't have to go on the streets and look for a job. And of course, there was a lot of things wrong with that, too. [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: Well, you mentioned the Marine Cooks and Stewards and the ILWU, the longshoremen. Were there other unions that—

02-00:11:22

Rebell:

Oh, yeah, they had the Teamsters and the Mechanics. The guys at these dealerships. No blacks could get a job working at these dealerships as mechanics. Now, they would hire you to do the lube and oils. You could get a job doing that, or detailing the cars, like that; but you couldn't get in the union. Because my cousin's husband Cleveland, Cleveland was a good mechanic, but they wouldn't let him in the union. Because he used to fix everybody's car. That's what Cleveland did. Because I remember when I was a little small, we were going to—it was Marysville or Stockton, I think, or one of those places—and my father had an old Dodge. He told my father, "Go in the house and get a coat hanger." [laughs] And my father came out with that coat hanger. I don't know what the hell he did with that, but he got that car started. And about four or five cars, we used to go together. Used to come in front of the house, we'd all go there, fix our lunch and everything, we'd go to Stockton and Marysville, Modesto, places like that—just for an outing. And I'll tell you what they used to use for air conditioning. He used to get a bucket—I never forget this—and people used to tell him, "Go get a hot bucket, go get that hot ice now." He'd get three or four pieces of hot ice, and he used to put it in one of those potato sacks, and he used to put it in a bucket. And that was for the air conditioning. That's what they used for air conditioning back in those days. They have the hot ice, they put it in the bucket, and put the hot ice in a sack. And they used to keep the car cool like that. [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: Well, the two unions you mentioned, the Marine Cooks and Stewards and the Longshore Union, are both considered, certainly at the time, very progressive. Both racially, being very integrated—

02-00:13:11

Rebell: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, uh-huh.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember those unions being unique, or—

02-00:13:18

Rebell: Yeah. I belonged to ILWU. I belonged to Warehouseman's Union, Warehouse and the Longshoremen. It was Local 6 and it was Local 10. And then there was the Marine Cooks and Stewards. And also the Teamsters. All the women that worked in the canneries all belonged to the Teamsters Union. Because {Lady McCady?}, she just passed, and I think she still had burial insurance with the—she was eighty-nine—she had the burial insurance with the Teamsters Unions. See, all the counties were all the Teamsters Union. And then the trucks, the big rigs, they were all with the Teamsters—come to think of it, they were all white. And the only blacks that you would see were independent truckers that used to come out the valley. Now, you would see blacks driving those big rigs, but they were coming from out the harvest out there. Of course, the Mexicans are mostly doing that now. Because I know {inaudible}, he had his truck. He was an independent truck driver. He used to bring stuff from out the valley. But all around the area here, mostly all those truck drivers were Teamsters, and they were all white. And all UPS truck drivers were white. A lot of jobs that blacks had were making as much money, but some jobs at that time, they just couldn't get.

Rigelhaupt: When were you in Local 6?

02-00:14:39

Rebell: Right after the war, right after I got out of the service. And I wasn't working, I was looking for a job, and I went down to the union hall. And you remember {Woolman and Peck?}, they used to send a lot of their produce and stuff to these independent—That's when you had a lot of independent groceries at the time. They were on Embarcadero Street. I worked for them for a long time, till they moved to Oakland. And then when they moved to Oakland, a lot of these big supermarkets, a lot of these mom and pop operations were closing down. So their business, when they moved to Oakland—And they were just taking their employees that had a lot of seniority, so I got laid off. And that's when I went to work for Canadian Club. I went to work for them. And they finally moved everything back to Canada, and went to work for {Bissinger?} and Company. And they moved up to {Woodland?}. I didn't want to go there, so then I went to work for Safeway. Now, all this was Local 6. I worked for Edwards Coffee. You remember that Safeway coffee? I worked for them. And I never did like that job. They were out in San Francisco, too. In fact, I started to buy a home over there because I like San Francisco. And then after, when they closed their operation down, I said, "Hell, I'm going—" No, wait, one other job. What was the name of that place I worked at? They were right there by the bridge right there. What's the name of that company? I can't think of it. I worked for them for a little while, then they moved. That's when the union was beginning. And then Harry Bridges, they were trying to indict him. They

were after him. And then as a longshoreman, see, there was plenty of work. Because a lot of times they had too many gangs, well, longshoremen used to go to the union halls and get the guys out there to come and work on the docks, because there were too many ships in and they couldn't load them all. You could go over there. At night, you could go there. They'd have night gangs, and you could make extra money unloading the ships. Oh, you could make good money. And then one thing about a lot of those guys, a lot of them couldn't read and write. Because I remember a lot of times—and I didn't think too much about that sort of thing—you'd have to fill out the back of the slip. And a lot of guys would have you put their names and Social Security numbers, because they couldn't do it. And that's when I kind of realized that there was—Of course, a lot of that work was just labor-type jobs; you didn't have to know how to—Because they had checkers checking everything, just like at the army base. There were a lot of guys working out there that couldn't read and write, but they were just unloading. Just loading and unloading, where you don't have to know how to read. But you had checkers who always was checking a lot of that stuff that was coming on and going off. But I had no idea that there were that many people that were coming out here that were illiterate, that couldn't read and write. And when you took your drivers—they were given oral tests. They were given oral tests. You didn't have to—As long as you could read the road signs. The guy would ask you what so-and-so and so-and-so, you'd get your license. Now, whether they do that now, I don't know. But I know they used to do that years ago. Because I remember a couple of guys there that took an oral test. They would just ask you—You'd have to read stop, you'd have to know the road signs. And you probably could memorize those. But I was surprised at the amount of people that—And then when the dispatcher used to dispatch people. Some jobs you could go to, they didn't require you to read and write, but that's the first thing he said when they dispatched out was “Can you read and write?” Of course, that was years ago. But I don't know, do you see much of that these days? I don't think. But back then there was a lot of it. But a lot of people knew how to hide it. There was a lot of jobs you could get. You could work construction. A lot of the unloading and loading jobs didn't even require it—And those guys worked their ass off.

Rigelhaupt: Did you ever meet Roscoe Proctor?

02-00:18:54

Rebell: Who's he? I don't think I know.

Rigelhaupt: He was in Local 6. He was from Berkeley, and very politically active.

02-00:18:59

Rebell: I may have—There was a whole of them. There was him, and we had {Willy Urshrey?}. And I'm just trying to think, a lot of those guys. And Joe Williams, and there was a whole lot of them that were very active. Those are the ones that just come to mind now, but there was a whole lot of those

fellows that were very active in trying to make change and everything. {Willy?}, Joe Williams, and let's see, who were some of the other guys? And a lot of the shop stewards, they had different things that were very active with the union. Let's see, I'm trying to think of some of the others. And then they had business agents. I'm trying to think what this one black business agent they had. I can't think of that. Boy, whew! I remember him. Some of those guys, I remember them, but these are just ones that I can remember that were very active. What was that guy? I can't think of that guy's name to save my life. Because I remember we had a beef at one of the places, and I know he came out. He was a black guy. He was one of the business agents. I may, but it just doesn't ring a bell right now. But I do remember some of them.

Rigelhaupt: Well, going backwards a little bit to World War II, do you remember the effort by the NAACP and Joseph James, he was the president of the NAACP in San Francisco, in the effort to desegregate the Boilermakers Union in the shipyards. Because the Boilermakers Union had an auxiliary for African Americas.

02-00:20:34

Rebell: Yeah, I know they did, because they had a baseball team. The Boilermakers, I remember that baseball team. Now, I didn't know too much about that sort of thing at that particular time, because during the war I wasn't off into that much. My father and a lot of those other men, probably, but I wasn't too much off into that sort of thing. Only thing I remember about the Boilermakers, I knew they had a baseball team. And they had a good one, too, and I remember that. That's the only thing I can remember about the Boilermakers was their baseball team. That's the only thing I can tell you about that.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember any of the unions that worked with Civil Rights organizations, like the Civil Rights Congress?

02-00:21:17

Rebell: No, I don't. The only unions I know, like I say, were the Teamsters, and they were mostly the cannery workers. And ILWU. Because those other unions, they just wouldn't let you in. I know the Teamsters and then the Mechanics, they had their own union. But the only thing blacks could do was, like I say, do the lube and oil changes, rotate tires and stuff. But they couldn't do it. And the only thing Cleveland did, my cousin—

Rigelhaupt: I'll just pause it.

02-00:21:48

Rebell: Okay. [phone rings] Take this off of me. [audio file stops & re-starts]

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember the general strike in Oakland in 1946?

02-00:22:04

Rebell: I remember hearing something about it. I can't give you any information on that. No, I can't. I remember something, but I can't tell you anything about it.

Rigelhaupt: I know it started with department store workers. And I was curious if it had any impact on your life, being memorable or anything.

02-00:22:27

Rebell: No. No, no, I can't, because—No, I sure can't.

Rigelhaupt: What was it like learning about what was going on during World War II without television? In the sense that a lot of the information probably came from newspapers or newsreels. What was it like receiving information about the war, without television?

02-00:22:59

Rebell: Let's see. You had the radio. I remember Edward R. Murrow. I remember him. My father used to listen. But I just wasn't off into that too much. But like I say, you had the newspapers. When we went to the movies, it was always the newsreels would come on. And then there was a lot of people used to talk about different things. But one thing I did notice—and I was thinking about this this morning—you had to separate the fact from the fiction. That was one thing. Just like {Humphrey?}, when he got torpedoed out there in the Pacific. Guys would hear a lot of things. You have to separate the fact from the fiction, that was the main thing. I think they had two papers here in Oakland. They had the *Oakland Tribune* and the *Post Enquirer*. And the only thing that I read the *Post Enquirer* was good for, they had just the sensational stuff. Something like Britney Spears now. [laughs] Something like some guy getting robbed or shot, or somebody beating his wife. They were more or less off into that. And like as far as reading, they had these guys that used to write these columns. But I never did read anything like that, and I never kept up with any stuff like that. Now, I went to movies always on Saturday and Sunday; they'd always have the newsreel. And you always you get little spits here and there. And a lot of the stories, you had to depend on when the guys come back from World War II, what they told you. And like I was reading an article here about Dresden, when the allies bombed it during World War II. It said there was absolutely no reason for that. It said all the people they killed over there. It was always talking about what the bad guys, what the enemy was doing, but you never seen too much about what *we* were doing. Just like the Europeans were complaining about the American soldiers. They said, "They were overpaid, they were oversexed, and they were over here. I wish they'd go home." [laughs] That's right after the war, when they were occupying those different countries.

Rigelhaupt: I've never heard that phrase before. [phone rings]

02-00:25:21

Rebell:

You was asking me about how I was getting the news about the war. I was just saying it was either the papers or when you went to the movies—Because everybody went to movies in those days. You would get the newsreel. Let's see. Who was it? I think Paramount. Was it MGM that used to have the news—They used to come on and they would get—They had the newsreels from different battles that you had. Because sometimes you'd have a movie, the newsreel, and a comedy. Some shows would have two movies and the newsreel, and they'd always have a comedy, like Walt Disney, something. Donald Duck or Mickey Mouse or something. And sometimes they'd have a short like the Three Stooges or—Who else was it? Three Stooges, and who were the other? I'm just trying to think now. Because I've got some of those old movies here that I never did get a chance to see. And that's right, there was always a—there was a comedy short, the newsreel, and the main feature. And independent movies, they used to make. And the Berkeley Theater and the Fox UC—not the Fox UC, but United Artists and the Fox Oakland and Paramount, they would only show their movies, the ones that came out of their studio. You would have to go to the other movies to see the independent films that they had at that time. Of course, like I say, a lot of them weren't all that good. A lot of times you'd go to a show and they'd have one dubbed up in English. I used to go ask for my money back. They used to have the foreign films. And a lot of times you didn't know that they were going to be—They used to have the subtitles. You've seen those movies before, haven't you? Yeah, you know. And when you went there, you didn't know until you got there. So that's how I mostly knew it. But like I say, I wasn't off into a lot of that, so I was off into chasing skirts and playing ball and stuff like that, so I didn't keep up with the news—Some of it I did.

02-00:27:49

I'll tell you who I went to school with, too, around here, who went to—You remember Wiley Manuel? They named the courthouse after him. Well, he lived right around the corner, on Derby Street. Yeah, we went to school together. Wiley, every time you saw Wiley he was in a book. And his wife, {Ernestine?}, she's still around here someplace. Then when he went to service, during that call, when he went out he went back up to {Cal?}—That's when he got his law degree. Then he was a judge and everything. Yeah, I remember Wiley. Every time you saw Wiley, he had his head in a book.

Rigelhaupt:

Now, I know you were a teenager, so young. But in your memory, do you remember things that went well, as far as integrating all of the new people, both white and African American, but all the people moving to the Bay Area for the war industries? And the kind of things that caused overcrowding, either schools or city services—do you remember the things that went not so good or went pretty well?

02-00:29:06

Rebell:

Things seemed to go along pretty well. I can't remember anything going bad. Because mostly, like I say, back during those days, you didn't have a lot of

single moms back in those days. All the men had jobs and were working. And divorce and separations and people going on sex—You really didn't see that. And mostly all the men, they belonged to the Masons, the Elks or the American Legion. Or it seemed like all the men all belonged to some sort of fraternal organization or something. And all the kids, we all had mothers and fathers. And no, I didn't—And *none* of us, as far as I knew, ever went without a meal. And then all of us had little jobs and things like that. But everything seemed to go along. But the only thing was the de facto segregation. The blacks did their things, the whites did their things. And there was a little integration every once in a while. And interracial marriages—If you wanted to get married, you had to go to Washington State to get married. Have you ever been to Seattle? You ever see all the interracial couples you see out there? But if you were an interracial couple, you had to get married, you had to go to Washington. You couldn't get married. If you wanted to, if you were interracial—that's where you had to go to get married. But no, everything went along pretty well. My mother always had a job and my father was working. All these kids, when they got out of high school, there was plenty of work around here. So I can't remember—Now, *I* can't. *I* can't. The people I was running around with, we were all pretty much—I never heard anybody say they were starving, they didn't have anything to eat. It seemed like everybody was paying their bills on time, as far as I knew. Everything was pretty well. We'd get together. It'd be about between {four and twenty-four?}. We'd get together up at Merritt Bakery on the first Wednesday—no, the second Wednesday of the month. The ones can make it, now. We're all old men now. And they sit around and talk about different things. {Donald Meyers?} likes to talk, so you might want to drop by there some time. We get there around nine o'clock in the morning. We kid about different things, about who was going with who. And everybody had a job. You could always get a job. Jobs weren't too hard to find. And their mothers and fathers, everybody stayed together. There weren't single mothers bringing up kids. You didn't have that sort of thing back in those days. I hope I'm answering the question okay.

Rigelhaupt: Mostly, I'm just curious about those sorts of things, but also if the cities could keep up with all of the people moving to the Bay Area. Like Richmond grew from 20,000 to 100,000. How did the cities keep up with all the new people moving to the Bay Area?

02-00:32:17

Rebell:

Well, they didn't. Well, I'll tell you. With San Pablo and Richmond, I remember my father said Richmond didn't want to have nothing to do with it, and San Pablo didn't want to have nothing to do with it. And everything was going on out there. You had prostitution out there, you had gambling out there. And there was a {topless inn?} was out there. And it was a mess. I didn't go out there. But it was mess out there in Richmond. It was unincorporated. And Richmond didn't want to have anything to do with it, and San Pablo didn't want to have anything—And everything was going on out

there. You name it, it was going on in that North Richmond area out there. But I never did go out there. I know one thing, if you went out there, you got your ass whipped if you went out there. And none of us hardly ever went out there. Some guys would go out there sometimes. Because then they had a lot of clubs out there, a lot of gambling {inns?}. And Richmond acted like they didn't want to be bothered with it; neither did San Pablo. So there was a lot of mess with it. But I never did go out there. You'd have to talk to—I'm trying to think of somebody. Ed {Noble?} lived out there. I don't know whether Ed's still living or not. But I didn't know, but I heard about what went on out there. I don't have any first hand information on what went on out there. And the people that even lived out there, the kids that grew up out there had mothers and fathers. There wasn't too much of—like there is now. You've got these single moms and things like that, these kids growing up with no fathers. Bill Cosby talks about that all the time now.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember the explosion at Port Chicago?

02-00:33:59

Rebell: Yeah, yeah. I *heard* it. Yeah, yeah, I remember it. Yeah, I remember that explosion.

Rigelhaupt: What did you think happened?

02-00:34:09

Rebell: I thought it was an earthquake at first. I heard it, yeah. It was in Pittsburg. Josh might be able to tell you more about that than I can. Because I think, if I'm not mistaken, they had to go to school to learn how to load and unload that ammunition. And I think that's what he did, because he was in a couple of battles over there. He can tell you more about that than I can.

Rigelhaupt: Well, you were probably about sixteen when it happened—

02-00:34:38

Rebell: [over Rigelhaupt] Yeah, yeah sixteen, uh-huh.

Rigelhaupt: So first you thought it was an earthquake. And then you realized maybe it wasn't. What did you first think it was when you realized it wasn't an earthquake?

02-00:34:50

Rebell: I heard about it the next day. Somebody was saying they had a big explosion out at Pittsburg. But that's about it. Nobody didn't go into a big discussion about it. But I remember. Yeah, I heard it, a lot of people heard it.

Rigelhaupt: But there wasn't initially any fear that it might've been an attack, rather than an accident?

02-00:35:14

Rebell: Not that I know of, not that I know of, because we heard about it the next day. In the *Tribune* and the *Post Enquirer*, they sent photographers out there to take pictures.

Rigelhaupt: Well, you mentioned you were reading about some of the battles at Dresden in Germany. And I'm wondering what you remember about hearing about the atomic bombs being used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

02-00:35:41

Rebell: Yeah, I heard about that. I remember—was it Mr. Henry and my father—they were talking about that. These grownups were talking about it. And they were saying it wasn't necessary to drop those bombs—Josh will tell you, because he said he went to Japan and said those people were starving over there. And I remember them mentioning it. Like I say, I wasn't off into that sort of thing. I was more interested in chasing girls and playing ball than I was that sort of thing. But I remember they said it wasn't necessary. And Josh, I talked to him once, and he would say, "Those people are starving over there." Because after they would get through eating, and they would throw their scraps, to where those people were coming up, taking the scraps and eating them. And he said they were just about beaten. They were saying it was going to take two or three million casualties to invade Japan. But it wasn't. They were just about beaten anyway. I remember they were saying it wasn't necessary to drop those bombs on those people over there. They could've dropped them in the ocean someplace and got the same effect. I remember a little talk about that when the bombs were dropped. And then they dropped the next one. Nagasaki was the second one that they dropped that went on there. And then I remember there was a little talk about that. These were older people talking about they didn't think it was necessary. Then Josh, here about a year ago—See, we have this honor guard that we go down and do the {inaudible} for veterans, and we were talking about it. And a lot of these white guys, {when we go out?}, they're all conservative. We're friends. We're very good friends. They've been to the house and we've eaten together and things like that. We have banquets a couple of times a year. But they're arch conservatives. And Josh was saying I was there. He said it wasn't necessary to drop those bombs over there, because those people were starving to death over there. Just like the war in Iraq. I don't see no sense. That's just a war that never should've been fought. And I had to go Marines Memorial Building over here about two or three years ago. And that's strictly conservative. About the cemeteries. A guy from Washington was coming out, we had to go over there; he was making a speech over there. And about a month later, I got a picture of Bush. He wrote, "To Newman Rebell, from George W. Bush." He got a big picture of him, and my name on there, the letter. I got it around here someplace.

Rigelhaupt: Was there something about those weapons being new and so powerful that caught people's attention when you heard about it?

02-00:38:34

Rebell:

I remember when they dropped the bomb, and I remember watching the newsreel. Going to the newsreel, you could see that mushroom cloud coming up. I remember going to a show and seeing that. And then they had it in the paper. But I do remember my father and—Was it Mr. Henry? They were talking about it, and they were saying it wasn't necessary. They used to keep up with that stuff. And they said it wasn't necessary to drop those bombs. But Truman decided he wanted to do it. Uh-huh.

Rigelhaupt:

Do you remember any news about the firebombing of Tokyo?

02-00:39:10

Rebell:

I remember it a little later on. Newsreels. But like I say, I wasn't off too much into that sort of thing. Where they would bomb and then they would drop the incendiary bombs after that. And they would scatter stuff out. And then they would drop the fire bombs, I mean the incendiary bombs, after everything was burned up. No, I learned more about that after that. Because like I say, there wasn't TV back in those days, and mostly all your reporters were conservative anyway. So they were the bad, they were the evil, they were this, that and the other. They were the Japs or the Krauts. So no. But I do remember that. When I went to the air force, when I went in service, they were talking. Because I remember some of the pilots. I remember one—what was his name? He was talking about—he flew B-29s; he was my squadron commander at one time—how they used to drop the bombs. And then after that, then the other wave would come in. They would come in with the incendiary bombs and start all the fires and everything. He would talk about it. He's probably gone now. Because mostly all your squadron commanders were officers, were pilots.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, part of the reason I ask is that like you've said, perhaps some people thought that the amount of death that followed the atomic bombs made it unnecessary. But at the same time, I think it was almost 100,000 people that died in Tokyo with the firebombs. And I'm wondering, as you think backwards, was the perception different about so many people dying because one involved a new weapon and one involved more conventional weapons?

02-00:41:07

Rebell:

Yeah. Well, I'll give you my personal opinion, how I feel about it now. I think that during that time, they were showing all the atrocities. You'd go to newsreels, they were showing mostly about the Japanese when they were fighting China. Where they would come—you may have seen some of these movies—where they were taking guys out and they were shooting them, and they had the sticks on the back of it so they could pick them up later on. In fact, there's a documentary out now about that. The Japanese, they were inhuman, they were. And I think there was more animosity towards the Japanese than there was the Germans. Of course, you saw about the concentration camps, and all that liberation and everything after that. But there was more animosity about the Japanese than there were the Germans—They were the dirty Japs. And they had one singer, she was calling them

monkey men. And a lot of this stuff that's coming out now, after the war was over with, about the bombing of Dresden and all that—But they didn't mention prisoners over in Dresden. During the Battle of the Bulge, the Germans had captured 179 privates and PFCs. And they were over there picking up the bodies. And they had a Russian prisoner, they put him in a German uniform, and he was in charge of the American prisoners. You see, a lot of this is coming out now.

Rigelhaupt: Well, you mentioned the concentration camps. And I'm wondering, how did you hear about the holocaust and the concentration camps? Where did you get that—

02-00:42:47

Rebell: That was after the war was over with. Because we had one Jewish kid—I've got his picture here someplace—he was going to Willard. He spoke perfect English. He was talking a little bit about it. I remember one of the teachers in our history class. He got up, and was a very good speaker. I don't know what happened—I don't know what his name was. Somehow, his family had escaped from Germany and come over here, and he was going to school up there. And he got up and was talking a little bit about what was going on. But we were kids. Good Lord—Whatever happened to him? I can't even think of his name, it's been so long ago. Yeah, his family somehow had—And then Peter {Lewinsky?} was another one. I think he was from Italy. His family somehow got over here, he was going to school. A real fat guy. He had a bust line like a woman. Like a woman. I don't know where those guys are. They might be still living, as far as I know, but you lose track. Like I said, we all had our little groups. I remember the grownup people talking about that. But like I said, I wasn't off into that stuff. But after the war was over, you saw a lot of that stuff going on. And the older you get, the more you read. You're more in tune about that sort of thing. But at that particular time, most of us—with the exception of Wiley Manuel—Wiley lived right around there on Carleton Street. His father was a Pullman porter on the train. And his mother was a housewife; she stayed at home. He was an only child. Every time you see him, Wiley's in a book. [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: Well, staying with the concentration camps and the holocaust for a moment, was there a sense—again, as a teenager, so you were young—but that even afterwards, in trying to think back and getting this information for the first time, was it just almost unbelievable?

02-00:44:59

Rebell: I don't know what the reaction of a lot of people were. I just really don't. Just like I say, I was kind of off into other stuff. That stuff didn't—Like I say, they were rationing and all that. But we still weren't—They were supposed to have rationing here, and they had the stamps you had to get gas with. I think gas was—Well, I'll say, “Man, gas has gone up to seventy-seven cents. [laughs] What's the world coming to?” I remember that. And you could bootleg.

Bootleg. You could always get more stamps, but you had to pay a little extra money for them. I remember my father saying, “Man, gas is seventy-eight cents a gallon! What is the world coming to?” Yeah.

Rigelhaupt: Did that rationing ever cause hardships for your family?

02-00:45:56

Rebell: No. No, I can't remember that it did. But they were bootlegging a lot of stuff. Lot of stuff. People were getting—if they had too many, they were selling them to this person or that person.

Rigelhaupt: So one person might have too many stamps for butter, and would trade butter for sugar?

02-00:46:14

Rebell: Yeah, or they'd buy them from somebody. Everybody had money, everybody was working. And then all that produce was coming out the valley, too. And they was shipping all that. And the candies were going full blast. And they were shipping all that stuff over at army base and naval supply, all that stuff was going overseas.

Rigelhaupt: So when you were working at the naval supply and the army base, a lot of what you were packing up were stuff made in canneries here and other things made here, being shipped—

02-00:46:53

Rebell: Yeah, were shipped overseas. Because one of the warehouses, they had a big fire. That's when I got hired. And they asked me did I smoke. And I told them no. A lot of cigarettes. Cigarettes were in vogue back in those days. Everybody smoked. Even the people that didn't smoke smoked. [laughs] And they had a lot of cigarettes in that warehouse that burned. That's when I got hired. I was separating a lot of that stuff. I used to come home, used to stink of that smoke. And then they had the Italian prisoners were over there.

Rigelhaupt: The fire, you were saying. This was a big fire at the Oakland Army Base?

02-00:47:31

Rebell: Yeah, yeah, mm-hm. It was just a fire, it wasn't an explosion. And I think that warehouse that had caught on fire, I think it had mostly cigarettes in there.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember if the warehouse was rebuilt?

02-00:47:45

Rebell: No, no, I don't think. Did they ever rebuilt that? I don't think they ever rebuilt that warehouse. One thing I remember, on Fridays, they used to have a talent show. They had the big, big area, a picnic area out there, where the people used to eat their lunch. And they used to have talent shows. People used to sing, I remember, and used to have tap dancing. And some of them would get up there and read poetry. *Boo!* [laughs] I remember that. It was on Fridays, I

think about once a month. I only worked there a couple of months. They used to have the talent show. A lot of guys used to get up there and dance, a lot of guys would play instruments. I remember that. They had some guy was in charge of entertainment or something out there. Once a month, or once a week, I remember I used to go eat lunch. A lot of people used to go there, used to sing, and some people could dance. And some of them were pretty good. Yeah, I remember that.

Rigelhaupt: Was it people who worked there performing, or—

02-00:48:45

Rebell: Yeah, yeah.

Rigelhaupt: Also people in the service?

02-00:48:47

Rebell: No, it was people that worked there. They would go around—this guy used to go around and ask people did they have any kind of talent? Uh-huh. And then they would get up there. Some of them were terrible. And some of them would get there and dance, and guys would play instruments. Just during your lunch period.

Rigelhaupt: Yeah, I was going to say, you wrote out a couple things. Is there anything that you hadn't shared yet that you wanted—

02-00:49:17

Rebell: I thought that they had too many people working at those places. That was my take on it. Because a lot of times there wasn't nothing to do, but they'd come back to work the next day. And I told you about the fire in the quartermasters. They had a lot of black soldiers in the Quartermasters Corps. That's what Josh was in, I think, transportation. That's mostly what they did. And I told you about the talent show; I remember that. And nobody ever got laid off. Of course, we had to go back to school when the summer was over. But I always thought that a lot of those places, they had too many people working. And then a lot of the guys that were unloading and doing a lot of that work, they couldn't read and write. But they always had checkers. And then they were mostly all women. Mostly all the checkers were women. Because women were wearing dresses. You never saw a woman in pants. Have you ever seen pictures of the thirties and forties? And then when World War II come, all the women in the shipyards, they all were wearing the pants, and the bandanas around their head, and a steel helmet over the head.

Rigelhaupt: Well, you mentioned your mom went from the domestic work into the shipyard. Did she go back to doing domestic work after the war?

02-00:50:36

Rebell: [over Rigelhaupt] Yeah, yeah. I think she went back to the cannery and worked there for a while.

Rigelhaupt: So she *didn't* go back to domestic work after working in the shipyards?

02-00:50:45

Rebell: Yes, for a little while, for a little while. Then she worked in the canneries for a while. And then my mother worked someplace else. Then it was getting around about the fifties then. She came back. Because she went to Berkeley High. They had a class up there for different kind of work and the like. Like ship fitting and—There were classes you could take, they'd give you a certificate. I remember when she got her certificate, she'd go around showing it off. And then she went to work out at Kaiser Shipyard. And then a lot of women were getting those checker jobs, could read and write, were working at the naval supply, naval air station.

Rigelhaupt: Was there ever any conflict that came up, or tension, because men and women were working together and hadn't been previously?

02-00:51:33

Rebell: I can't remember. I can't remember. There used to be one gal around here. I think one of the foremen was hitting on her or something. I remember they were gossiping about it. Yeah, there was that. I can't think of that woman's name, but she was kind of young and had big old hips on her, big old. [laughs] And I think one of the foremen out there was trying to get a date with her. I know they were talking. Women. My mother was talking on the phone about it. Just gossip. I just kind of remember that.

Rigelhaupt: How do you remember hearing about World War II ending?

02-00:52:20

Rebell: It was in the paper. It was in the next day, World War II ended. And then about a month after that, after it ended, everything was just slowly beginning to—And then all the guys were coming home, they had the ruptured duck. Those things were popular. I was still going to high school. That was my last year in high school, {'46?}. You remember the ruptured duck the guys used to—pins they used to have on their lapel, called the ruptured duck, that's what they called it. And those are veterans. And they were wearing those all over the place. And they had the preference on all the jobs. The guys that had jobs were getting jobs when they come out. And then they had the five to ten point veterans. If you were wounded or something like that, you were ten point. If you take an exam, you automatically get ten points on the exam. And I remember Archie. Archie's still living. He's a quartermaster for {the building?}. He works down there now. He's the quartermaster, well, for the VFW. I remember he had a '41 Plymouth. He had his uniform on. And then the guys were coming home, getting out of uniform. And there weren't too many reenlisting. They were all getting out. Some of the guys that were kind of—they were going back in, reenlisting back in service. But most of them got discharged. Then the army base and the naval supply and all those, they were still going, still going strong right after the war was over, and a lot of guys were getting jobs there. I remember that.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember hearing about how the seniority system worked out at some of the shipyards, in the sense—

02-00:54:03

Rebell: I don't. I couldn't tell you. Because like I say, I was young at the time. And then Kaiser closed down the shipyards right after the war was over.

Rigelhaupt: Well, and Marin Ship—and then the Moore Shipyards dry dock—

02-00:54:17

Rebell: Yeah, the dry dock and also the one out in Richmond. That's where my mother worked, out there. It wasn't Moore—It was either Moore or Kaiser, I can't remember.

Rigelhaupt: But that African Americans were typically the last hired, and so as they closed down, they were the first fired, because—

02-00:54:34

Rebell: Kaiser was hiring everybody. Kaiser was hiring. And it wasn't no union job, he was hiring everybody. In fact, he was sending trains back south to bring people out here to work in these shipyards. And he was the first one to start the healthcare, where you didn't have to take a physical. And that's how he got started. He built the big bridge. I can remember when they were building it—I was a little kid. Ashby Avenue, there was traffic going up and down Ashy Avenue with a truckload of dirt to build it. That's a manmade island out there. Treasure Island, all that was manmade. Kaiser was there. You ever been to Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland?

Rigelhaupt: Off Piedmont Avenue?

02-00:55:15

Rebell: Yeah.

Rigelhaupt: Yes.

02-00:55:16

Rebell: You ought to go in that mausoleum. It's big. And that's where he's buried at. He's got a big, big thing there. {You just hate to} go in there {unless?} you're in the Kaiser. That's where he's buried at, out there. And he said he was born poor, he didn't have anything. And that's what killed his mother, they couldn't get any healthcare. That's the reason why he started that healthcare thing, you didn't have to take a physical; he let everybody join.⁴³ I think he started that. And everybody had healthcare. And I remember when they built Treasure Island, that was before World War II—Just a little bitty kid. We used to come down on Ashby Avenue as trucks were running up and down Ashby Avenue, twenty-four hours a day, bringing the dirt. And it come in under schedule. But see, for every guy was working, there's a hundred out there willing to take his job. [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: Well, as I look, those are largely the questions I have prepared. The way I like to end is to ask, one, is there anything that you would like to add? And two, is there anything I should've asked that I didn't?

02-00:56:27

Rebell: No, I can't think—Leave your phone number and I'll let you know. Maybe I can think of something. A lot of this stuff I had to think about because I had kind of forgot about.

Rigelhaupt: I'm going to pause, and then you mentioned a couple pictures, like a twenty-fifth anniversary. So I'll pause, and then maybe we can get a second of that on tape.

[End of Interview]