

Interviewee: Maurice Raether

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 24 May 2001

Location of interview: the Myking home in Cloquet, MN

Transcribed by: Kimberly Johnson, May 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, June 2002

Maurice “Maury” Raether was born on 10 July 1910 on a farm near Green Bay, Wisconsin, and for a number of years attended school in a nearby town. He lived and worked on the farm until 1928, when he left for Duluth, Minnesota, where he lived throughout the war years. Maury drove a milk wagon for a local dairy from 1928-37, then worked 14 years for the Duluth Transit Authority as a bus driver. Aged 31 and with three children when the war started, he wasn’t drafted to serve during the war.

Maury later went to work for a local railway, finally retiring from the Duluth-Winnipeg Railway in 1975. He married Signe (d. 2000) in 1935; they had four children, three of whom were born before the US entered the war in December 1941.

At the time of this interview, Maury Raether lived in a log house outside the small town of Esko, Minnesota, and kept busy with his garden and woodworking projects.

Maury passed away on 1 January 2008, aged 97.

In this interview, Maury provides insights on working, rationing of different consumer goods, wages and prices, and changes in Duluth during the war years.

Interview key:

S = Thomas Saylor

R = Maurice Raether

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

S: This is 24 May 2001, and I'm sitting in the Myking home in Cloquet, Minnesota, and I'm going to have a conversation with Maury Raether. First, Maury, thanks for being willing to speak with us.

First, by 1941, you were working and living in Duluth. (*displays front page of St. Paul Dispatch newspaper from 8 December 1941*) Here's the St. Paul paper from the 8th of December 1941, and that's the day the news about the attack on Pearl Harbor hit the newspapers. I'm wondering if you recall what you were doing when you first heard the news, on the radio or from someone else?

R: (*pauses three seconds*) I don't believe I remember.

S: Do you remember seeing the newspaper the next day?

R: We only had a weekly paper, and I believe it came out on Friday. I don't know what day this attack [on Pearl Harbor] was.

S: This is a paper for Monday. Now by 1941, you were living in Duluth already. You moved to Duluth in 1928, right?

R: That's right. I wasn't in Wisconsin anymore.

S: By that time, you were 31 years old.

R: I had it confused with the First World War. See, I was eight years old [when World War I ended].

S: Oh, you remember that too. By the time you were 31 here years old, you were driving a milk wagon in Duluth?

R: I was driving a bus. I started driving the bus in '37.

S: So you were a bus driver in 1941, and 31 years old. You'd been married for a number of years already by that time?

R: We were married in '35.

S: You had two or three kids by that time?

R: The third one was born Christmas Day of '40.

S: So you had three kids. Do you remember hearing the news on the radio about Pearl Harbor?

R: I really don't. I can't say I remember it. At the time, we placed a lot of importance on it at the time; everybody was conscious of it, you know. As of now, I just don't remember what I was doing, except driving that bus.

S: You recall other people placing some importance on the fact that we were now involved in the war with Japan.

R: Yes.

S: Can you recall, what kind of emotions were people showing? What were they feeling?

R: Did we declare war against Germany? Were we involved with Germany before we got involved with Japan?

S: No. We declared war on Japan.

R: First, and then Germany came in later?

S: Yes, just a few days later. So it was Japan right away. I've heard about people in Cloquet here, and how people in Cloquet were reacting. I was wondering if people in Duluth felt worried, or angry, or nervous? Do you recall how people, in the couple of days after that, how people began to think about all this?

R: Well, I know with Japan, the Japanese became very unpopular fast. We just didn't understand oriental people. We probably still don't; I know I don't.

S: When you started driving bus in '37, you had been driving buses for at least four years by the time the war started.

R: Yes.

S: In a larger sense, in what ways did your life change once the war came? We can start here with your job. You didn't switch jobs, but how much did your job change once the war came?

R: I was subject to draft. I realized I was in that age bracket. *(pauses three seconds)* For some reason, I needed a car. I was driving a [Ford] Model A; I bought that in '35, just before we got married. Actually, I drove that until '51, and in that time I went through four motors in that Model A. I think I drove that about 300,000 miles. I know I had one motor rebuilt in

the machine shop, and then I couldn't buy any more motors, so [after the war] I bought a government surplus jeep, and put that in the Model A. And I drove that a few years.

As I said now, I was subject to draft, and I had to make a decision about whether I was going to buy a car or not, depending on where I stood with the draft board. And guys told me, "Stay away from that draft board." And I did. I figured I had to ask somebody, and they told me, "Well, you could be called up in a month." In that much time, then they lowered the draft age, so then I was safe.

S: So there was the thought right at the beginning [of the war] that you might get called up.

R: It was very likely I would have been called up.

S: Did you think about volunteering?

R: Well, yes, *(laughs)* I was told that so long as you volunteered, you could make a choice. If you're drafted, you couldn't make a choice. I asked my brother-in-law, I said, "If you think I should volunteer, what do you think I should volunteer for?" He says, "Don't volunteer for anything, you damn fool!" *(laughs)* He was in the Navy.

S: You decided to wait then, and see if you were called. Did you ever get called to go for a physical, or to report to your draft board?

R: No, I didn't. I missed it by a month or something.

S: So you were close.

R: Yes, I was within a month.

S: On the job, now, as a bus driver, did your job change at all?

R: Well, it did in a way. *(pauses three seconds)* See, I started driving streetcars in '37; I drove a streetcar for two years. I am probably the last living one in Duluth as far as I know. But there was a trend to get rid of streetcars. The streetcar company was a shareholding outfit, you know, and they never made any money. They could make money in Minneapolis, but they couldn't make any money in Duluth, with the hills and the hard winter here. So they borrowed as much money as they could, and they bought a lot of small buses to get as many buses as they could for that certain amount of money. The smaller buses were only 21 passengers, so they were used on branch lines.

S: You started driving bus, then, before the war started.

R: Yes, in '37.

S: Now once the war started, did you find yourself working longer hours?

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R: Oh yes, longer hours. (*emphatically*) A lot of hours. There was a time there I worked... (*pauses three seconds*) They had runs [routes], you know, and I was of the younger generation, [while] the old streetcar men, they were a generation ahead of me. I came along later, and I was younger.

S: So you found yourself working more hours.

R: Oh yes. I worked (***) . I used to like to work evenings. The runs, they had up to ten hours in a run most days. And then they had these extras during mornings and evenings, during rush hour. They tacked those on to that run, you know. But it was open, and it fluctuated from day to day. And finally the foreman says... They were bothering everybody, every day, to do more work. I told him, I said, "If I pick that extra and you tie it on my run, will you be satisfied with that, and not bother me anymore?" He agreed to that. So I think I worked 16 hours a day there for a few years.

S: Was this because the bus company had trouble finding enough drivers?

R: Well, yes, there were more people working, you know, working in defense.

On the busses, we were just overloaded all the time during the war. Yes, right to the door. They used to shove one another in the door and they'd say, shut the door, and they'd shut the door and somebody would let out a little yelp because they pinched their butt in the door! (*both S and R laugh*)

S: So your bus was full?

R: Oh yes.

S: Now the drivers, were the drivers all men?

R: Yes, there were no women yet. Later on, after the war, we put some women on. During the war, it's a one-man operation. Before the war, it was a two-man operation—there was a motorman [driver] and a conductor. The women got on them during the first war [World War I], as conductors. When I came here in '28, there still were a few women working as conductors. Some of them married the motormen! (*laughs*)

S: The conductors, men conductors, were still around after the war started, but then the conductor position was done away with?

R: No, they had been eliminated before that.

S: So it was just a one-man operation. Did women work in any other positions, as mechanics or selling tickets?

R: I don't know if they worked as mechanics, but they did work in the shops. They did cleaning, you know, housekeeping, cleaning buses.

S: Did women appear doing more and different jobs during the war then they had before, do you recall?

R: Oh yes, they started doing everything, you know, during the war.

S: So there was an increase.

R: Oh, yes. They worked in defense plants as welders, and everything else. They did everything.

S: How about the ship yard in Duluth?

R: Same thing.

S: Women working at the shipyard, too?

R: Oh, yes.

S: Maury, did you drive the same bus route, or different routes?

R: I kind of liked to work a relief run, and I relieved different runs. I could work six different runs a week, and it wasn't so tiresome.

S: Change of scenery, or what?

R: You can get tired of putting up with the public, if you understand what I mean.

S: I do know what you mean. How about your pay packet during the war years? Did you find yourself earning more money? You were sure working more hours, it seemed.

R: No, they froze wages in industries. In '37, I started at the bus company at 53 or 54 cents an hour. And you had to put in ten days on the student car, that was a streetcar. I was scared to death of those darned streetcars, and the instructor kept me another two days, and that was alright with me because I was scared to death of that streetcar.

We'd ask for a dime raise. It was what they called a company union, and one year we took a half a cent an hour raise. *(pauses ten seconds)* It was 53 or 54 cents an hour when I started, and when I left there in October of '51, it was a \$1.39 an hour. We were froze at 75 cents per hour during the war, for six years.

S: So the wage freeze lasted after the war, too. Your wages weren't unfrozen until...

R: As I said, we were froze at 75 cents an hour, but during the war years the company gave us a \$6 a month bonus, or \$72 a year bonus.

S: You perceived that as a way of the company getting around the wage freeze?

R: Well, you know, a lot of fellows came to the bus company, and they'd go out on the student car, and as I said, they were paying 53 to 54 cents an hour and anywhere up to 75. That's what it was frozen at during the war. They could go to work in the steel plants for \$1.24 an hour, you know, so they didn't hang around the bus company very long.

S: So there were opportunities to earn a lot more money.

R: But if you left your industry, nobody else was supposed to hire you. But they did.

S: So they wanted to keep people at their jobs?

R: They wanted to keep you frozen on your job.

S: So not just your wages were frozen, but you were frozen in a way.

R: But fellows just quit, and somebody hired them. Everybody could use more help during the war.

S: So there were help wanted signs around?

R: Oh, yes.

S: Did you ever think about going and looking somewhere else for a job?

R: Oh, I suppose I did. One thing that kept you on the bus run, at the bus company, wages were low—we knew truck drivers were getting more than we were, and this and that, but there was always overtime. Transportation is very uncertain. It varies so much from day to day. There is always overtime.

S: So you knew you could find enough work?

R: Even when I left there [in 1951], we were working 46 hours a week. Well, that six hours of overtime paid nine hours, and that kept us on the job.

S: What about turnover? You mentioned that some guys left to work at other places. Did you notice an increase in the turnover, that is how fast people left the bus company?

R: Well, there was always a turnover. As a matter of fact, about the time my [seniority] number was 272, and that was probably when I started. And I think one time I had a number like 138, and when I left there it was 101 or something like that.

S: And the lower your number, the greater your seniority?

R: Yes.

S: So there was some turnover.

R: Yes, there was quite a bit of turnover.

S: Shifting the topic just a bit here. You just missed being in the US military, it sounds like, during the war.

R: Yes.

S: Did you have family members who were in the military?

R: A brother of my wife's was in there, (*pauses three seconds*) at Pearl Harbor. He was in the Navy, a six-year Navy man. He wasn't a draftee; he enlisted [for six years] just before the war. He was on shore when they bombed Pearl Harbor. The [Navy] Shore Patrol was patrolling the shore, like they patrolled the shore here in Duluth, and they patrolled the shipyards and everything. And the Shore Patrol, I don't know if they were driving a car or what, but he was walking on the street with another Navy man. They told him to get back to the boat. I don't know if they hauled him back to the docks or not, but he said... They must have given him a rifle. He said they were shooting at the Jap planes when they went over, [shooting at them] with rifles. And they say, as far as they know, he is the only one living in Minnesota that was on shore at the time of the bombing [on 7 December 1941].

S: That's interesting. He was in the Navy throughout the war then?

R: Yes. He must have been in six years.

S: Do you know on what kind of ship he served?

R: He was on a battleship. And I think he was on the [aircraft carrier] *Enterprise* one. I guess there's been about three *Enterprises* during the years. He went over the hill [deserted] once, and he was going to come home. He looked to his sister, my wife, and asked her to send him some money so he could get home. I guess they contacted him, and told him to turn himself in. He went back, but the skipper wouldn't take him back. He threw his luggage on the dock, and then they put him on an oil tanker. He was a gunner on an oil tanker. Well, you're a sitting duck there; the enemy would look for those oil tankers. They had no defense. He served on the oil tanker for a while, and he made a few trips up to Alaska with oil.

S: He got out of the military once the war ended?

R: Yes. My brother-in-law was a Dakota man. He was drafted, and he married a Duluth girl. He went to a camp out in Oregon for the Army. I think it was in an engineering outfit. The Japs were occupying one of the Aleutian Islands [off the west coast of Alaska]. They wanted to blast [the Japanese] out of there, but they got blasted by landing, and this fellow lost his life there. His name was Fred Rassit.

S: He was killed in the Aleutians.

R: My wife's brother looked for his grave. He looked at Dutch Harbor and Juneau [Alaska], but he couldn't find his grave. He doesn't know where he was buried.

S: He's one of those whose body was not sent back.

R: No.

S: Back to your employment during the war. You didn't switch jobs during the war, but you think you probably could have if you had wanted to.

R: I could have if I ever did want to. I kind of liked driving the bus, I guess. *(pauses three seconds)* After all, it wasn't a hard manual labor. You were half-way dressed up in a uniform all the time. I wasn't all greasy and sweaty, you know.

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S: Let me ask a few questions about Duluth. You moved to Duluth in 1928 and you lived there until 1967, almost forty years. Did you live in the same house all those years, or did you move around a bit?

R: I came here [to the Duluth area in 1928] and I went to work driving this milk truck. There was a family that had this dairy farm. I went to work for them, and I stayed there eight years. They lived out in the country, over the hill, on the outskirts.

S: You lived on the property there?

R: On a farm. We got married. Oh, we rented for a few years. You know, there was a labor shortage [likely referring to the unemployment of the Depression years]. They wanted my wife to help with... This family was milking 350 cows at one time, and running three barns, and they needed a cook for these men. We had one child, and another one on the way. My wife was experienced at cooking for crews, so we moved back to the farm and lived there.

S: Did you live in the city of Duluth for a while, too, then?

R: Yes. We moved to town and lived in central hillside for a couple of years. Then I inherited some money, and we bought a house up over the hill.

S: When was that?

R: That was in '39. We sold the farm in Wisconsin in '39, and got that place out on the outskirts of Duluth.

S: Did you live in that house for a while then?

R: We lived in that house from '39 till '67, when we moved to Esko.

S: I wanted to ask about life in your community. How did you see life in Duluth changing during the war years?

R: Well, it was busy. Everybody was working. *(pauses three seconds)* Duluth was built up then. They had railroads, and they had... As I said, I came from Wisconsin. Well, my dad and his family, the young men used to go to Michigan, and they logged off Michigan. Then they logged off Wisconsin, and they moved into Minnesota about 1900. So then you already had railroads and docks in Duluth.

S: So there was full employment in the city?

R: Duluth was busy then. We had some industry—we had the steel plant, and another couple industries. Those industries have all left. They've all gone South.

S: When you drove around the bus, or just living your daily life, what kind of changes, visual things, did you see? You mentioned your buses were full of people. Shops? Big stores, small stores, doing good business?

R: I think they must have had good business. It was partly an antique town; they had a bowery, you know, those lumberjacks. They'd work in these camps out in the woods, and come to town with a few hundred dollars in their pocket, and they'd bank it with the bartender. In a few days, they'd be broke. And they had a camp driver, he didn't belong to a company, he was independent. He'd haul these jacks back to the woods.

S: So you saw these lumberjacks around even in the 1940s there.

R: Oh yes. They were on the streets, and they were pan-handling, can you spare a dime, brother? In those days they'd take a dime, nowadays they don't even ask for a dime. I haven't had anybody panhandle me for a long time; they probably don't do it. Maybe it went out of style. But in those days it was every day, you know.

S: I want to show you one thing here. *(displays a war era poster)* This is a poster here about civilian defense. Do you remember posters like that, or things asking for volunteers? Things like air raid wardens?

R: I'm sure. My wife had some friends, and they were veterans of the First World War. He was in the Coast Guard here in Duluth; he was on a boat patrolling the harbor, here when we had the shipyards. She probably was a nurse, I'm not sure, but I know they were both veterans. My wife did housework for them for 50 years.

S: Were they involved as air raid wardens? Or what were they, these people that you just mentioned?

R: Well, if there was a raid, everybody was expected to drop whatever they were doing and do what you could. If they had authority there to order you around, you were supposed to try to be helpful. I think she was a nurse.

S: Did you have blackouts or air raid practice here in Duluth?

R: Oh yeah, yes we did. Not very far from where we lived, there in Esko, they had some kind of a warning. I would say it was probably three men that were working out in the steel plant in the western part of Duluth. They were going east on that Midway Road, and they struck that bridge over the Midway River. There was a kink in the road there. I think they all got killed. They were answering a call.

S: So there was a civilian defense authority set up, and people were involved.

R: Yes, they were.

S: Do you remember things at your place of work encouraging people to buy bonds?

R: Oh yes, buy bonds.

S: How were you involved in that?

R: I suppose I did. I think they probably had stamps. I know they did during the First World War. They had war saving stamps and liberty bonds, they called them.

S: Do you remember buying bonds through the bus company? Or buying bonds yourself?

R: I don't know if I did or not. I know my wife's father was involved in something like that.

S: With war bonds?

R: Yes.

S: There were campaigns to encourage people to buy bonds. Maury, another thing I wanted to ask about is life at home. By 1941, you've been married for six years and have three kids at home. So you and your wife were shopping for food and cooking on a regular basis at home.

R: That's right.

S: Rationing is one of those things that people came into contact with. I'm wondering what recollections you have about what kinds of things were rationed, and how that impacted you.

R: Butter and meat. I don't know of anything else being rationed, I think just butter and meat. Sugar, I suppose. *(pauses three seconds)* Gasoline, of course, was rationed.

S: You had a car. You had the Model A during the war.

R: Gasoline was rationed. And tires were rationed.

S: How did that work with the tires? If you needed tires, you just went in and bought them, right?

R: Well, you went to the [Rationing] Board. What did they call it... It wasn't called Board of Transportation... I don't know what it was called, but they were in charge. You went to them, and you asked for permission to buy tires.

S: So you had to get a written stamp of approval?

R: You had to have an order from them to go and buy tires. A fellow told me he was in a store, it was something like Sears & Roebuck or something, and there was a fellow in there who hadn't been able to buy any tires for some time. I don't know if this fellow had an important job or not. But anyway, he walked out with those tires, and they said he had quite an audience, you know, to see somebody go out with new tires.

S: Do you remember gas? What kind of stamps did you have for gas?

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R: A stamp, yes. There was a board that took care of that, the Office of Price Administration. We [workers] at the bus company, we only got about four gallons a week. We weren't rated as being very "essential" [to the war effort], but the fellow that was in charge of that at the bus company wasn't aggressive enough; he should have gotten more for us. Because they needed buses, too, because that's how people got to work.

S: So you think he could have got a better deal for you guys?

R: He wasn't aggressive enough. But what we used to do is, we'd walk to work. I walked two miles one way during the war. We'd save our gasoline, and then we'd pool it and go fishing.

S: So you could save your coupons up over time.

R: Yes.

S: You also said you remember sugar and butter and meat being rationed.

R: Certain things like meat. Liver, you know, that wasn't rationed. They didn't have a stamp for liver; the butcher would always give you a piece of liver. *(laughs)*

S: Do you remember people getting around the system in any way?

R: Well, yes. During the war, as I said, there was a shortage. Farming was rated high, "essential". My wife's father had this dairy. Well, he had his son in the Navy, and they had this other young man, Rassit [see above], that died up in Alaska. He was married to the boss's niece. A couple of fellows came there to work. Well, we called them draft dodgers, (***) from Chicago, and they had never milked a cow in their life. They were working our farm just to stay out of the service. They were draft dodgers.

S: And you knew that's what they were doing.

R: I thought about it. They knew the right people.

S: So your wife's father signed for them to be on the farm.

R: He must have, yes. I knew he had a couple of young men there. I didn't have anything against them, but they didn't belong on a farm by any means.

S: How did that make you feel?

R: Oh, it didn't bother me. I was always busy. I worked long hours, busy like I said, overloaded with those bus runs all the time. We over-inflated the tires, you know, because they'd last better in we over-inflated them.

S: Were they prone to blowouts more often then?

R: Usually on the bus we didn't have re-caps on the front.

S: Four tires on your buses?

R: There were duals on the back, so it would be six. I blew a couple of tires, but not by driving. You come to a stop, and you stand there for about one minute and the temperature goes up and the tire blows. I blew a couple standing still.

S: You got ration coupons for sugar, for butter and for meat you say. What if there just weren't enough coupons for the stuff you needed, or wanted?

R: I just don't know. I don't think that, I don't know of anybody that ever suffered a hardship. I think they all had enough to eat.

S: Could people, or did people, trade these coupons?

R: Oh, I suppose they did. I don't think they were signed. I think you could trade them or sell them if you wanted to.

S: So was that legal?

R: It wouldn't be legal, but nobody talked about it.

S: So people were doing it.

R: Out in [North] Dakota, on that Indian Reservation off that road that's out there. The Indians, they got butter, commodities, you know [from the government]. They didn't even want it; they'd rather have lard. So they sold the butter.

S: So they were getting the butter from the federal government?

R: That's right. I was out there, and kind of tempted to buy some from the Indians, but we never did. In North Dakota, Devil's Lake. We probably just didn't want to get involved. Or maybe the Indians, well, they're natives, and they didn't live too clean.

S: You mentioned earlier that your wages were frozen at 75 cents an hour?

R: I was driving the bus.

S: And you managed some overtime, a lot if you wanted it.

R: I don't know what year it was, probably it was there during the war, when I first started. I think it was '38 or '39. I bought the extra list for three years (*reference unclear*), catch as catch can, you know. That one year, I made \$31.05 [a month] and rent was \$35 [a month]. So I was a few dollars short. My wife, she could always get work, you know.

S: You mentioned she worked doing some housework.

R: Yes. She could always go up to the farm and help out up there and they could give her a couple pounds of butter, or a few quarts milk or something. We weren't going to starve.

S: At the same time, if you consider that your wages were frozen for the whole war period, would you consider your family financial situation to have improved over the war years, stayed about the same, or got worse?

R: Well, for one thing, even if you had more money, you couldn't buy anything, because they weren't manufacturing anything for civilian trade. Industry was pretty much shut down until after the war. Once the war was over, I bought a new furnace, put a new roof on the house, insulated the house, and put new siding on it. But you couldn't buy [those things] during the war. All the effort went for the war.

S: Even if people earned extra money, in other words, there wasn't much to spend it on.

R: No, you couldn't buy what you wanted to buy. That was called Office of War Production.

S: And they determined what got produced, and what not?

R: Yes.

S: So what do you think, during the war did your financial situation go up, stay the same, or decline?

R: Oh, it went up (*emphatically*), because there was an opportunity to work. Everybody could work during the war if they wanted to.

S: And it was that extra work that helped you do a little better.

R: Yes.

S: So it sounds like, that without much to spend it on, were people were banking their money, and waiting for when they could spend it?

R: Well, for instance, I inherited that farm and sold it in '29, and we bought a house.

S: You sold the house in '39 you said, right?

R: Spring of '39, yes, and we bought a house immediately. I think I paid about \$3200 for a five-room house. (*pauses three seconds*) I am sure that's what it was.

S: That was the house in Duluth in '39 that you bought. When you lived in Duluth, you, your wife, and the kids, were you a member of, or active in any church there?

R: In those days we belonged to a Methodist church.

S: That was in the city?

R: Yes. In west Duluth, I don't remember the name of it.

S: Did you attend, or were you active in the church during the war?

R: Oh yes. My wife was always very active in the church. Then we moved up to Piedmont, which is still in Duluth. And they had a Methodist church there, so we transferred to there. Because, you know, transportation was a problem during the war, with cars and tires and gasoline.

S: So that kind of thing helped you in the decision of which church to attend. You picked a local, neighborhood church because it wasn't far away?

R: That's right.

S: The churches you attended then, either of them, did the church, to your knowledge, sponsor any volunteer programs, things that helped in the war effort?

R: No, I don't remember any.

S: *(displays another war era poster)* Here's a poster for a scrap drive, waste paper and such. Did you see anything like that in your neighborhood or at your church that you remember?

R: There probably was, but I can't say I remember putting on any drives. Oh, yes, yes I did. Aluminum, they were collecting aluminum... cookware, kettles. *(pauses three seconds)* Something like that. I don't know if they were going to melt it down or... Yes, I remember them collecting that.

S: Were there any kind of Red Cross related activities at the church? Bandages, things like that?

R: Oh, I kind of think they did have things like that. *(pauses three seconds)* I know they had this (**), this USO. They put on parties, dances for young people. They must have collected some things there for the war effort.

S: Were those USO gatherings, or social gatherings, at your church or in your neighborhood?

R: Oh, I think the neighborhood. I don't think the churches that we belonged went in for that. I don't think so.

S: Think about attending church on Sunday, or during the week, or when you went. Did the message, what you heard from the pulpit, did that change at all?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* Well, you wonder. As I said, I'm of German descent, from out there in Wisconsin. So a lot of our people [Germans] were in the service, too. They were brother fighting brother, you know. We wondered about that. The preacher in your church is praying for an early victory, and the preacher in the other church is praying for an early victory. *(laughs)* I mean, where does it add up? I can't say I have much good to say for war, but what are you going to do? The Book says there's always been war, there always will be war. *(pauses three seconds)*

You know, just continuing, and it's beside the point. I will admit that the people there... See, my folks are what they call Low German, that's a mixture of about eight different dialects. Those people came to the north from Prussia, and they're military people up there.

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.

R: I learned to talk Low German the same time I learned to talk English, and my parents were still talking that Low German during the time of the First World War.

S: Did your parents come from Germany?

R: No. They were born in this country; my grandparents came from Prussia. I had a picture of Kaiser Wilhelm [German Emperor 1888 – 1918] in my bedroom. I wish I had it with me, just for a novelty. Put a nice frame on it.

S: And that was during the First World War, so there was obviously some...

R: And another thing, the Germans never had anything good to say for Great Britain. They blamed Great Britain for everything.

S: The Germans in Wisconsin?

R: Yeah. They called Great Britain “John Bull”. The United States was Uncle Sam and Great Britain was “John Bull”. They just blamed Great Britain for all the war, and anything else that was wrong.

S: The thing about World War II, of course, Germany was also our enemy. Did you feel any antagonism towards yourself—I mean, you have a German name, Raether.

R: I never approved of what Hitler did over there. I can’t understand how the world could forgive him for that, you understand what I mean? I don’t know if you can understand my attitude, but I’ve never forgiven them for that. After all, those Jews are people, too.

S: Did you detect any animosity from people on the job, or in Duluth because you were of German ancestry?

R: Oh, probably. Of course I tried not to promote it, you know. We were going over to Europe [on a trip after the war] and we had this Jewish doctor [here in Duluth], a very good doctor. Before it became (***), we realized he was our friend, too, a nice person. We were going to Europe, so I went to him to get the shots. He told me, I don’t know if he ever asked me outright if I was of German descent or not, but he knew German. Jews are smart people; you can’t take anything away from them. He said, “Could I give you some advice? When you go to Norway, it wouldn’t be a good idea to brag about the fact that you are of German descent. After all, Germany invaded and occupied Norway.” And I said, “I understand that.” Now, I don’t know it myself, but I’ve always been conscious of a German accent in my speech. I ask people, and they say no, but I’ve always been conscious of it—I think they take me for British, long thin face and the way I talk. That’s just my theory.

S: This is in the 1950s or 1960s that you took this trip?

R: Oh, somewhere in there, after the war, yes.

S: Let’s return to your life during the war years. If you could describe an average day for yourself during the war years, when you were driving a bus. Were you working shifts, or were you typically working the same time every day?

R: Oh, no, there was a lot of variety. I don't think it was ever the same. It changed. It changed from day to day. The ones that were bucking the extra, the ones who got the most work today, they got the least work tomorrow. They went to the bottom of the list. So that list would rotate.

S: So you kept the work spread around.

R: Yes.

S: How about your average day? What you packed for lunch, or how many hours you worked? How did everyday details change?

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R: Of course, during the war, we were just starting to go into eight-hour days. But they were ten and more during the war.

S: How about the stuff you packed for your lunch? Did you have a canteen?

R: Yes, we did.

S: Did you eat at the canteen usually for lunch?

R: No, I always carried lunch.

S: Did you eat in the bus, during stops?

R: Yes, at the end of the line. *(pauses five seconds)* I've got a little story. A little fellow used to get on the bus, happy little fellow. He was a Hungarian, and his name was (****), but his nickname was George. He'd get on the bus, "Hello mister! Thank you mister, thank you mister!" Happy little fellow. My younger son bought his house afterward, and my son said he was Russian, but I didn't tell him. Maybe he was Ukrainian, but I thought he was a Hungarian. He worked at the packing plant. Well, he'd come down the hill in the bus. Either he rode the bus down the hill, or he got a ride in a car. He'd get downtown and get on the bus going west to the packing plant, at 600 West Superior Street, with the transfer. He should have transferred from another bus, according to the transfer. I don't know where he got it from, and I didn't question him. They had a time limit on those transfers; they were just a privilege to transfer from one bus to another, if you continued going in the same general direction. Maybe he came down the hill on the transfer and got off the bus at 300 West [Superior Street], maybe he walked over to Sixth to get an eye-opener [alcoholic drink] before he went to work, for all I know. Always happy, you know.

This one day they called me in on my day off, and I caught a run on that line where this packing plant was. I get out there, and turn around, and I poured a half a cup of coffee and lit a cigarette. In those days everybody smoked. I was supposed to leave at 5:00. Well, normally we'd run up to three minutes late so you didn't miss anybody, but you didn't run late during rush hour, because you'd be carrying half of the next guy's load, you know. So I

was sitting there, and a man walked down the hill from the bus line there, with a transfer, and that was legal. And a woman got on the bus, and they were sitting back there looking at me, wondering when I was going to get in gear. I should have been leery. I started out, and thought, boy, have I got (**) now. I got down to where the packing plant was, and... Well, I made a stop before that, at a scrap yard, and there were a half dozen people standing there, and they pushed one another in the door. And I figured, that's it, stop if you can't get any more in the bus.

But then somebody rang the bell, and here's that guy that walked down from that other line, and he moved up to the door, and he knew I was going to be in trouble. So he could get out he moved up by the door. So I had to stop and open the door, and he slipped out, and that little George was there, and he pushed himself up on that seat over the wheel, and he had his lunch bucket on his lap. There was a half dozen people, and they were pushing one another in the door, and that guy says, "Shut the door!" I started up, and hit a drain pretty hard, but I had a good hold on the wheel. But George's lunch bucket rolled off his lap and hit the floor, and it came open, and out came the biggest liver I ever saw, and a couple feet of pork sausages. And everybody roared, because they thought he stole it. He slid down off his seat, got down on that filthy floor, and there were cinders and gravel and some snow there, and he stuffed that stuff back in that lunch bucket and climbed back on that seat. They were laughing, and he laughed right along with them. Happy little guy.

S: (*displays newspaper front page*) This is a front page of the Cloquet *Pine Knot*, from Friday, April 13, 1945. The main headline is that President Roosevelt has died, just the previous day, on April 12th. Do you remember hearing that news? How did that particular news make you feel?

R: That was a shock to me, yes.

S: What kind of emotions did you feel, if any, about that news?

R: He's always been a favorite of mine, Franklin D. I understand a lot of people didn't like him, but I've always liked him. You can't be in office and favor everybody. No way.

S: Had you voted for President Roosevelt?

R: Oh, yes. I've never voted Republican in my life. Coming from Wisconsin, the state of Wisconsin is a Republican state. All those farmers are Republican, even my father. Even if they hadn't gotten a nickel, they're still Republicans. That's the way they're brought up.

S: Well, now you're in Minnesota, so you don't have to do that, right?

R: No, I never voted Republican.

S: (*displays another newspaper front page*) This is the headline of the St. Paul *Dispatch* from Tuesday, August 14th, 1945, announcing V-J Day, the surrender of Japan. I was wondering how that news was received in Duluth, and how that made you feel?

R: You know, I really don't know. I couldn't tell you. The one thing I can kind of think of, in those days I used to go trout fishing, (****) he used to like his drinks, and I remember he realized it was going to be an armistice, and the liquor store wouldn't be open, so he bought a bottle and stashed for that day.

S: *(displays photographs)* These pictures are from the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* of August 15th, 1945. Those celebrations are in St. Paul. Was there anything planned, any celebrations in Duluth that you can remember?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* There was something here in Duluth, but I really can't remember what it was. I don't know if they closed some streets to vehicle traffic, Main Street, or if they took off some buses or put more on. I just don't remember. I know there were changes made for that day, there was something done about it. I remember, I was working.

S: Even on holidays, bus drivers have to work, don't they?

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R: I remember one Armistice Day after the war. *(relates story, unrelated to interview themes)*

S: In a large sense, when you think about the war years, how did the war change your life you think?

R: Change, there was always change taking place.

S: Do you think the war experience made this country a better place?

R: *(pauses three seconds)* Oh, I don't know, I suppose it did.

S: How would you describe your contribution to the US winning the Second World War?

R: I figured it was necessary; it had to be done, you know. You're in the war. After all, you don't want them coming over here. So far we've been fortunate that we haven't had a war on our soil.

S: How would describe your contribution to that war effort?

R: Well, I always worked. I did more than my share of the work, you know, driving a bus. I remember cashing in some war bonds, so I must have bought some...

S: At this point, I also want to ask if there's a comment, or anecdote, or a story that you wanted to add that I didn't ask.

R: I don't know off hand. We had our streetcars, and it was General Motors and the oil companies and the tire companies that got rid of streetcars. Of course, then we went into

cars, trucks, and airplanes. The bus company went into that war with... A lot of the transportation companies in the South, they had a lot of junk. But we had all new equipment in the North. We were better off than average in the North. I've always kind of disapproved of getting rid of all the transportation, and leaving just airplanes. I figured that if something like a war came along, if we couldn't move people during the Second World War, how are we going to move them now?

S: That's a good point. I'm going to turn the machine off, and thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW