

COBB COUNTY ORAL HISTORY SERIES

NO. 51

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD W. CROOP

CONDUCTED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

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Interview with Richard W. Croop
Conducted by Thomas A. Scott
Tuesday, 15 December 1998
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Mr. Croop worked for the Bell Aircraft Corporation in Buffalo and Marietta during World War II.

TS: Mr. Croop, tell me first of all what year you were born and where you were born.

RC: I was born in Alabama, New York. 1912.

TS: 1912.

RC: Alabama, New York, of all places.

TS: I saw an Alabama, New York, on the map recently, and I couldn't believe it. It is just a little bit north of Buffalo, I guess. It's hard to believe there is anything north of Buffalo, but particularly with a name like Alabama. Does anybody have any idea how it got named Alabama?

RC: No, I don't.

TS: Alabama, New York. Well, I guess it was just meant to be that you should come to the South.

RC: I love it down here.

TS: You went to work for Bell Aircraft in Buffalo?

RC: In Buffalo.

TS: Do you remember which year that was?

RC: Around 1939 or 40. On Elmwood Avenue.

TS: The Elmwood Avenue plant.

RC: Elmwood Avenue plant.

TS: Well, of course, that was the only plant there was at that time.

RC: Little tiny place they used to build radiators at. Heating radiators.

TS: Before Bell took over?

RC: Before Bell.

TS: Well, Bell was a very small company then, wasn't it?

RC: Very tiny. They didn't have much money, and they had a very hard time getting started.

TS: Now, there's a story about how you went to work at Bell. Didn't you meet Larry Bell before you went to work there?

RC: He loved racing. Larry Bell was a wonderful man. He was mechanically inclined, and we were racing at the civic stadium there in Buffalo. Through racing, we got to know Larry Bell. He was a wonderful man.

TS: What were you racing?

RC: Sprint cars. Midget sprint cars, yes.

TS: The midget sprint cars. Were these raced inside? Is that where —

RC: They were raced in the coliseum which used to be the water works. It held forty thousand people.

TS: How big was the track?

RC: Quarter of a mile.

TS: They had to be midget cars on a track like that. That's real small, isn't it?

RC: That's right. Engines you never hear of anymore. Used Model-A's, Stars, and so on.

TS: How did you get involved in midget car racing?

RC: I went to Miami in '39 or '38. They were racing down there, and I got involved in it. I had a chance to drive one, and I fell in love with it.

TS: Now, where was this?

RC: Miami, Florida.

TS: So, you learned to race down there?

RC: I learned to race down there. I went from there to Paterson, New Jersey. We raced there once every week. We raced five nights a week, but we moved very rapidly. We raced in Syracuse, Akron, Paterson, Freeport, Long Island, Bedford, Massachusetts. It was a wonderful life.

TS: Now, did you have to know about auto mechanics as well as racing or did you have a crew that did that?

RC: No. We did it all. We built our own cars ourselves out of rear end fenders. We'd make a tail out of welding two rear fenders together. Everything was homemade. We made our own wheels. Bought the rims for ninety cents.

TS: So, that's why Larry Bell was so interested--that mechanical ingenuity.

RC: That's right. He loved it. He came down in the pits once in a while. You'd think he was one of the crew the way he got his hands dirty and stuff like that. We got to know him very well. He was a wonderful man.

TS: Tell me a little bit about him. What was he like?

RC: He was a regular, common person. We didn't even know there was such a thing as Bell Aircraft. It used to be a radiator place. They built heating radiators. When the work came along, he sent word to us that any of us mechanics or race car drivers [who] wanted a job to come out. He'd be glad to interview us and give us a job.

TS: Right.

RC: He started us at a lot more money. Fifteen cents back then was a lot of money. I think he started us at sixty cents an hour. Everybody would work for thirty or thirty-five cents an hour.

- TS: Wow. Of course, this was the tail end of the Great Depression.
- RC: It certainly was. I've seen people die in the streets in Buffalo, New York.
- TS: Really? Was it particularly rough in Buffalo?
- RC: Terrible. It was terrible. They had gangsters. Everything was gangsters. They had a place called the "Big House." It was where the murder and coke business started. We lived next door to it. We didn't realize what a racketeer was at that time. But I've learned a lot since, sitting in front of that T.V. But everything was murder and robbery. Nobody had any money. We were all starving to death. You couldn't make ten or fifteen dollars a week. You couldn't buy a job. We were happy when we found out about Bell Aircraft. We went out there not knowing he even built airplanes. That's how much we knew about Bell. I think they only had about three or four hundred people – I could be wrong about that – employed at that time.
- TS: It certainly was a small work force at that time.
- RC: It sure was. We did everything from unpacking boxes and parts and engines and stuff like that and putting an aircraft together.
- TS: What was your title when you were at Bell?
- RC: I was what they call a lead man. I had several people [who] assisted me. We assembled everything. We built the airplane right on the line. We had an assembly line similar to Ford Motor Company. We interviewed a lot of people. Mrs. Roosevelt came through. A lot of the big shots came through. All the big shots after [Bell] got where he was well-known.
- TS: Describe the assembly line.
- RC: They had stations. Station 1 to Station 14, I think, was the last one. It was going out the door.
- TS: But, you were involved in just about every step of the process?
- RC: Well, from the day they unloaded an engine, we used to take them out of the barrels and crates.
- TS: Where did you get your engines from?

RC: Allison Engineering. They built engines. They shipped them in there pickled. They were what we call pickled. They were all full of oil and stuff. I didn't stay there long, but when we first started, we had to unpickel them--get the oil out and degrease them and that sort of thing -- and put them on the line. Allison is a big outfit. Allison Engineering.

TS: So, they provided the engines and you built everything else from scratch?

RC: We put all the components on the engine from scratch. In fact, we completely built the airplane.

TS: I guess, the plane that got Bell on the road was the Airacobra.

RC: P-29 and 39 and 63. Yes, that was a wonderful airplane. When they built the new plant out in Niagara Falls, I went out as a crew chief, because I had a lot of experience. I put a lot of parts in airplanes. I knew Chuck Yeager and all of them.

TS: Now, was Chuck Yeager there before the war?

RC: He was a test pilot.

TS: I know he was involved in those high speed planes in the late 40's and 50's. Was he there earlier than that?

RC: I think they got him from Ford Motor Company. He was a test pilot for a lot bigger outfit than Bell Aircraft was. He shook my hand once. I was a proud man.

TS: So, you worked first at the Elmwood plant and then at Niagara Falls at the plant there?

RC: We seen it built. We use to go out there. Niagara Falls is only twenty-two miles from Buffalo.

TS: I should have brought some pictures I took when I was up there. I took one picture at the end of the assembly line.

RC: I'd like to see it, but I've lost all connections. I don't go very often, but when I do go to Buffalo, I stop by. It brings back memories. They had a modification center right across from the airport. On the other side. My wife

worked there.

TC: Well, of course, that plant would be small compared to the [Bell plant] down here, but it's still a huge plant.

RC: It was a huge plant to us after Elmwood, which was a little Mickey Mouse hole in the wall. I admired Larry Bell for what he done, because he started with nothing you might say. He was a wonderful man. What I liked about Larry Bell, he was very personal. He always had time to say hello to you, even after he got to be a big man. We stayed at the Biltmore after we first came down here, and he'd always call up and have a few of us from Buffalo down and rehash things.

TS: You stayed at the Atlanta Biltmore?

RC: Yes, sir. That's where we stayed.

TS: Well, what year did you come to Marietta?

RC: Well, the plant wasn't even built. They had poured the floor. They were putting walls up, and they sent us to Wichita, Kansas, to go to school for six or eight months at the Boeing plant. They taught us what we should know -- the fundamentals of the B-29.

TS: Right, because the B-29 was a Boeing design.

RC: It was a Boeing.

TS: So, you went from Buffalo to Wichita?

RC: Well, we came down here first. The plant wasn't anywhere near ready or anything. They hadn't put the roof on or the walls up. It was just a skeleton.

TS: So, they sent you to Wichita for further training?

RC: Yes. We went to Wichita for about nine, ten months.

TS: Well, how big was the plant in Wichita? I've never seen it.

RC: It was kind of a rambly-shambly place. It wasn't anything like Lockheed was. The Bell Aircraft we had was fabulous. Wichita was several little buildings

grouped together.

TS: Wasn't the B-29 still in its design stage at that time?

RC: We didn't see one. We didn't see one. We saw them being made, but we didn't see the completed B-29 when we left there.

TS: But, they were making them?

RC: They were making them, yes.

TS: So, you actually got to see them being built as part of your training?

RC: That's what they taught us, yes. They had different stations. Briefed on the wing and surface controls. They didn't tell us so much about engines at that time, because engines were scarce, and they didn't have time to fool with them.

TS: So, this would be like 1943 maybe when you got back to Marietta?

RC: I believe it was late '42 or '43.

TS: Right about the time the plant was opening up?

RC: The plant was opening. We used to take our motorcycles in--a lot of us had bikes and [we took them] in the plant.

TS: So, you parked your motorcycles inside the building?

RC: Right inside the building.

TS: Were you married at this time?

RC: I was married with three children. After we got back [from Wichita] we stayed at the Biltmore for several weeks. Then we found rooming houses, because they put us on per diem. They took care of our families back in Buffalo.

TS: So, your rooming house was in Atlanta or in Marietta?

RC: Marietta.

TS: You remember where it was?

RC: On Dixie Street.

TS: East Dixie or West Dixie?

RC: East Dixie. I think it was 250 East Dixie. I got a room for rent for eight dollars a week. I can't believe that. With breakfast.

TS: I don't live very far from East Dixie. I live on Atlanta Street. Just right around the corner.

RC: I go by that house quite often, because that was the first place I stayed when I got to Marietta.

TS: Which side of the street is it on?

RC: It is the left hand side going towards Fairground. It's the last house.

TS: The last house? So, right across from Larry Bell Park?

RC: That's right. It's a big house.

TS: I know exactly which house you're talking about. It was a fraternity house for a while.

RC: That's right.

TS: That would be a nice house to stay in.

RC: Yes, a very nice house at the time. Everything wasn't as modern as it is today. It was a little rough. But, that was considered a very nice place at the time.

TS: When you say not as modern, of course, you didn't have air conditioner then.

RC: We didn't know what an air conditioner was back then.

TS: Did you have indoor plumbing?

RC: Yes, we had indoor plumbing.

TS: So, you had electricity and indoor plumbing?

RC: That's right.

TS: You didn't cook your own meals. You just had a room in the house.

RC: I just had a room.

TS: Who owned the house?

RC: Evelyn. I've forgotten her last name. She's still alive, I believe.

TS: And, so, she cooked the breakfast?

RC: She cooked breakfast. She rented all the rooms. There were several rooms in the house, and they were all rented.

TS: So, you were on your own for the other meals. Did you eat your lunch at the plant?

RC: We did. We had a little wagon. They hauled it in with a horse at first. Then they got some tractors. Little skids they called them. And that was our meal.

TS: This is before they had actually opened up the cafeterias at the plant?

RC: They didn't have any cafeterias at that time.

TS: Who is it that's bringing in the food?

RC: I never knew, sir. Some restaurant was making it. Catering service.

TS: What kind of food did they have?

RC: Simply southern food. A lot of people found it hard to get used to. Like I didn't know what grits were, but I loved them. I thought you put cream on them like cream of wheat. I got caught in a lot of traps like that. I loved it though.

TS: I guess collards and greens and things like that.

RC: Oh, I loved them. We loved them.

TS: So, they brought in southern vegetables and ham?

RC: That's right.

TS: So, you ate high-on-the-hog?

RC: Certainly did. I think I put on about twenty pounds.

TS: Do you have any recollection anymore about how much it would cost to buy a lunch like that?

RC: Oh, maybe a dollar.

TS: Did it? That much?

RC: We usually ended up at the hot dog stand, Varsity in Atlanta. Remember Flossy at the Varsity? They had a man who jump on the back and recite the menu. It was really cute. Flossy Mae they called him.

TS: Flossy Mae?

RC: Yes, he was a colored man.

TS: And so he jumps on your car and gives you the menu?

RC: He'd show you where to park and give you the menu.

TS: You know, the Bell Aircraft Plant hired mainly southerners to work in the plant. How did those of you from the north get along with those from Marietta?

RC: We got along great. We had a little problem with instruction. But, once you showed people how to do something, they'd do it right. I don't think we lost many airplanes because of poor workmanship.

TS: The people down here had never built anything like an airplane.

RC: Well, it was all strange. A lot of people didn't know what a drill or drill motor or rivet gun was. They'd never seen rivet guns.

TS: A rivet gun would be pretty specialized as far as they were concerned.

- RC: They weren't well read as far as that was concerned. They had no way to find out.
- TS: So, the people that came off the farms, they really couldn't read and write very well.
- RC: They had it very rough. We had several schools to teach them how to read and write. All they wanted to do was have a chance to learn. They wanted to learn.
- TS: These schools that you're talking about, were they in the plant?
- RC: They were in the plant. We had to have cashiers to sign their name. They would sign their name and put an "X." I think they started for about thirty cents
- TS: The cashiers paid them in cash.
- RC: The cashiers paid them in cash. Most of them didn't have bank accounts. They'd have trouble cashing their checks. Let's put it like that. They were not use to checks. Everybody dealt with cash down here at that time.
- TS: So they didn't get a pay check. They got a pay envelope with cash.
- RC: That's right. That's exactly right.
- TS: Would you say most of them were illiterate who were coming to work in the plant?
- RC: Yes. I felt sorry for them. It wasn't their fault. They had no schooling to speak o Most of them maybe second or third grade. They wouldn't sign their name. That's why we put an "X" on them. Then they cashed the check with the cashier. They very seldom took it out of the plant. They cashed it with the cashier, because I think government wanted checks. You don't know the government like I do.
- TS: So when you were teaching them how to do the jobs, you basically had to tell them how, instead of giving them an instruction manual.
- RC: We had to show them how to use drills, how to use rivet guns, and how to lay out. It was very hard for them to lay out rivet patterns, because we went in thousandths of inches, and it had to be exact. Most of this stuff was done by

the men from Bell Aircraft to begin with. We taught them eventually to program an outfit. Nice thing about it, if they didn't know, if they didn't get it the first time, they'd always come back and ask you. We didn't scrap much stuff due to mistakes, because they were not afraid to ask. They didn't want us to think they were dumb. It was just that they didn't have the knowledge in their background.

TS: The South just wasn't heavily industrialized.

RC: No, all you had in Atlanta was Sears and Rich's and a couple of department stores. It was a small town compared to today.

TS: Well, it's really a remarkable story that the plant could be as successful as it was. I don't believe there was ever a plane that crashed in testing or delivery.

RC: I never heard of the first one till they got in service. I never heard of the first one being lost. Like I say, it is amazing how most of the plant was built by local people. They learned very fast. They put up the walls. The people progressed real quick.

TS: You were telling me a little earlier about the time cards. Would you tell me that story again?

RC: We initiated the time card like they did in New York. They were supposed to punch in when they get there. Some people would punch in on Monday and keep it in their tool box until Friday and punch out. We had a lot of confusion, because they were supposed to punch it everyday. It's just one of those things.

TS: I guess that's the kind of a mistake you only make once.

RC: That's right. Punch it everyday. Once you told them, they done it.

TS: Was there any resentment, you think?

RC: There was a lot of resentment at first. We overcame it, , because here we are—a bunch of Yankees, as they called us, [who came] down here and told them what to do. But we were careful when we told them what to do. Not in a nasty way, but we told them in a friendly way. In fact, we told them we were showing them what to do. We weren't telling them what to do. They were not taking orders. They did not want to be ordered by a Yankee. We would show them what to do and how to do it, and at the end everybody was

grateful. They were all grateful, and they were glad of the money they were making. A lot of places couldn't afford [to compete with Bell's pay scale]. There were people working for ten to fifteen dollars a week, six days a week. There for a while, all the people in Atlanta--they were giving us a lot of static, because they were hiring them. That was big money to the people, and they were glad for it. They were very loyal, and the biggest part of our help was ladies and young girls.

It was remarkable what they done. Remarkable what the people learned, because they never heard of a rivet gun, drill motor, electric motor, milling machine, or lathe. It's all strange stuff to them, but they grasped it very quickly. Like I said, if we showed them once and they didn't get it, they weren't ashamed to ask us a second time. Which meant everything, because every piece of material meant a lot. It was hard to get material at that time. [We had airplanes] sitting there on the floor. We had no engines for them, and the P-40, Boeing 29s--there was a big demand for them, and I've seen maybe eight or ten airplanes just waiting for engines so long. Allison would not furnish the engines. It took a month after we got the engines to per-fab them, run them up, and check them up. It's wonderful what people done. I was fortunate. I got a good education. It was be compulsory in the North at that time. It should be compulsory. Everybody should be able to read or write. No disrespect to anyone. The people couldn't read and couldn't write. Their signature was usually an "X". Because we don't realize in the North. We didn't realize what the people had in the South. It was a wonderful experience.

TS: Well, let me ask you, did Larry Bell come down very much to Marietta?

RC: He'd be here, oh maybe, once a month. He always stayed at the Biltmore. We'd go down maybe one a month and have dinner with him or something like that.

TS: Really?

RC: He never forgot us, to my knowledge.

TS: So you're talking about all the people who once worked in Buffalo. He would invite them to come have dinner with him?

RC: That's right. There were only a few of us. But, it made us feel proud, because when he would come through the plant, he'd usually call us by our first name.

He'd say "Hello, Dick. Hello, Larry, Hello, Gerald.." That built respect for other people, because we knew the big wheel—we knew the man.

TS: Did you ever get to know any of the people like Jimmie Carmichael?

RC: Bill Carrington worked for me after Bell Aircraft closed. I knew him in Buffalo. In fact, we stayed together at the Ellis Hotel in Wichita when we stayed out there. He started the whole works. When [Jimmie Carmichael] ran for Governor I had a private aircraft. Me and Frankie Dosser flew circulars out of an airplane. We'd buzz a little town with "Vote for Jimmie Carmichael."

TS: You dropped circulars?

RC: We dropped circulars over the little towns. I never knew Jimmie Carmichael personally, but I met him once or twice.

TS: Okay, now tell me, who was Bill Carrington?

RC: He was the president. He was a big shot. He started his own works down there. In fact, he was the manager of something, I forgot.

TS: And, so, he was like factory manager?

RC: He was factory manager.

TS: Well, tell me about him. I don't know anything about him.

RC: Well, he was an inspector. Funny thing, he came up fast. He was a very brilliant man. When we came South, we didn't know who Bill Carrington was, lining the crew up. He picked out a lot of the men who came down here, because he was on the line working at Buffalo, New York, and he knew different operations that we did in Buffalo. Like George White, he was in charge of engineering. They all turned out to be big wheels. But, Bill Carrington was a wonderful guy. In fact, he worked for Lockheed after [Bell] closed. I went to work for Lockheed. I spent fifteen years with Lockheed. They got a lot of old Bell employees when Lockheed opened up. But, Bill he set up the whole works.

TS: You know, I did not know until I did an interview recently that Larry Bell was very disappointed when he did not get the plant back in the Korean War when

it went to Lockheed instead of Bell.

RC: Well, we all were. We all were. At times, Jimmie Carmichael swore we would never close the plant—but that's politics—some big shot in Washington. Larry Bell had plans on continuing it. He didn't want to give it up. But they closed on twenty-four-hour notice. They told us one day it would never close. We went in the next day and had our [pink] slips. That's politics. Jimmie Carmichael's family ran a little grocery store on Atlanta Road. I've been in that place, but except once or twice I never knew Jimmie Carmichael personally.

TS: Well, tell me about the closing of the plant. That must have been—

RC: It was terrible. It was terrible. I seen thousands and millions of dollars of tools sold for nothing.

TS: Was this right after Hiroshima? Right after they dropped the A Bomb?

RC: To my knowledge, it was right after they dropped the A Bomb.

TS: So just overnight you found you were out of a job?

RC: Exactly right. They told us one day we'll be there, not to make arrangements to leave. Very few people went back to Buffalo. They loved it down here.

TS: Of the original gang?

RC: Yes, the original gang. Few went back. About six or eight.

TS: So what was it down here that held them?

RC: Well, it was a new world for us. A new world. In the North everybody was after money at that time. They could take you to the cleaners, as they say. It was dog-eat-dog up there.

TS: So, you liked the fact that people were not so cold?

RC: Oh, they were wonderful. They took us into their heart. It may sound foolish, but many times I would be invited to somebody's house for dinner. Like I say, we weren't use to the way they were eating, but it was always chicken. It was always delicious chicken. Well, it was just because they liked us. In fact, they

had a lot of farm houses turned into restaurants. A lot of places things like that.

TS: You're talking about during the war itself that farm houses turned into to restaurants?

RC: During the war [when] it was hard to get a place. We didn't have restaurants like we do today. It was very hard to get a decent place. We use to eat at the Stonewall in Marietta, and all the policemen would come in.

TS: Stonewall. It's right next to the police department?

RC: At that time. Yes.

TS: Was the police department right on the square?

RC: It was on the square in part of [the old courthouse] right on the corner of Atlanta and Roswell. They tore it down and rebuilt it. It was a beautiful place.

TS: So, right next to the courthouse is the--

RC: --police department and beside that was Stonewall Café. Next to that was Goldstein's. [Philip Goldstein] is a big shot now, but, at that time, his daddy was a little man like the rest of us. It's very interesting because I've seen Marietta grow up. In fact, I think we had something like eighteen hundred people. Very small.

TS: It was a little more than that but it wasn't much.

RC: They had the horses and wagon. They had a policeman go around with a little dump cart picking up after the horses. See, Model T's Fords were galore. Old Model T's. Some had license plates old enough to vote.

TS: They didn't change their license plate?

RC: They didn't change their license plate. I don't know if they had driver's licenses back then.

TS: Now, did these wagons belong to farmers coming in?

RC: They were farmers coming in.

TS: Just around the square?

RC: Yes, we had a little produce market around the square. It was really nice.

TS: Was that on the north side of the square?

RC: It was on the northwest side.

TS: Right out in front of where Shillings [restaurant] is now?

RC: Yes. They had produce. You could get anything, vegetables, corn, and stuff like that. It was delicious, and it was fresh.

TS: Now, did your wife eventually move down here?

RC: Bell Aircraft furnished us with places. We had to pay rent, of course. But, they got me a brand new place on Page Street. 503 Page Street. It was a brand new house. They shipped us down, and we lived there, I guess, until I built the trailer park.

TS: That would be the North Marietta Parkway today?

RC: It's close to it. It's close to the Marietta Parkway.

TS: I was trying to think. I guess all those houses are gone now?

RC: No, there still there. I go by there.

TS: This would be west of Fairgrounds?

RC: Yes. It ends at Fairground, by the power plant there.

TS: Well, really, a lot of houses were built during World War II..

RC: They built a lot of them, but Bell had connections where they could get us places to stay. Most of them have been replaced now. They've got some beautiful homes now. But at the time, these were nice.

TS: Is this like a four room house?

RC: That's what it was. Little, tiny.

TS: Well, at least it was a house.

RC: A brand new house. Boy, were we proud. You lived in the North, you took what you could get.

TS: I guess your three children were in school at this time, weren't they?

RC: No, they were too young. They all started school [in Marietta].

TS: Well, what did you think about Marietta schools when they were going?

RC: Well, I could tell you a story that isn't nice to tell, but it's funny in some ways. We had a little about twelve-years old, and he gave the graduation address. Anyway, on the stage, he wet his pants. It's funny as the devil. He was scared to death. He wasn't use to addressing people like they are today. Mr. Osborne—he is very well-known. He came with a mop and mopped it up like nothing happened. I'll never forget that as long as I live. It was just funny at the time. The little boy was scared to death.

TS: Well, which school did your children go to?

RC: Osborne.

TS: This was after you were living in Fair Oaks?

RC: Yes, when the war ended I moved to Fair Oaks immediately.

TS: There's something that I really don't understand. Bell had over twenty-eight thousand workers here at the peak of production. Then, you all got laid off almost at the same time. Yet it doesn't seem like there was any great problem of unemployment around here.

RC: There wasn't. There wasn't. It seemed like everybody had money. I went into the trailer business. I got the trailer park. I don't know whether it was the boys getting out of service or what. Everybody had money. Everybody had money.

TS: So, there's no real unemployment?

RC: No, there's no unemployment.

TS: See, that's what I don't understand. It looks to me like when you lay off all those workers there should have been massive unemployment around here.

RC: Well, for many people, there were a lot of little industries started. Pre-fabricated homes—they hired maybe a hundred people. There were a lot of little business starting up. Refinishing furniture. Antique shops. There were a dozens of them, and there were a lot of antiques to be bought here at the time. People in the North didn't realize what it was. But, there were so many little industries, I don't think anybody went hungry. I really don't. If you wanted a job, they were plentiful. They were putting in [utility] lines and building highways. When the war ended, they let money loose for improvements.

TS: When you say putting in lines, you mean electrical lines?

RC: Electrical lines and that sort of thing.

TS: So, if you had an electrical background you could go to work for Georgia Power?

RC: And they learned that at Bell Aircraft. But they learned to read and write. There were a lot of books on anything. You could pick out any industry you wanted to and get a book on it. I don't know of anybody going hungry. There were plenty of jobs.

TS: Well, that's a remarkable story when you consider this generation coming through the Great Depression and then World War II.

RC: Like I say, when I came down here, the Mayor [of Buffalo] had a hotel they called the Hotel DeKink. They take bums in there. I've seen people outside starving to death. Now, this is the God's honest truth on Main Street. When we came down here, it seemed like a different world. They were all farming, but they all had plenty to eat. They were all working hard. People in the North didn't like to work too hard. You know that.

TS: Didn't like to work hard?

RC: Didn't like to work hard. No, I remember

TS: So, you're saying the depression was much worse in the North than in the South?

RC: Much worse. Much worse. There were people that went hungry. Don't misunderstand me, but I never seen the type of hunger like in the North.

TS: They had farms?

RC: They had farms.

TS: Now, you said a hotel

RC: Hotel DeKink. That was the name of it. Schwab was the Mayor.

TS: Schwab?

RC: Mayor Schwab. He owned the brewery operations. I lived right near it at one time. Let me say that there was no depression [in Marietta] to my knowledge. There might have been, but everybody seemed to want to work.

TS: Well, did people go back to the farms after Bell or did they stay in the city?

RC: A lot of them stayed in the city. A lot of them had bought homes. They had homes they wouldn't have had if it weren't for Bell Aircraft. They had a lot of homes. You could buy a home for maybe 4 to 5 percent interest. It was cheap. And back then, word of mouth was as good as signing a piece of paper. If you shook hands on a deal, it was like money in the bank. If I let you take ten dollars, and you couldn't pay, you'd come back and say I'll pay you next week. You weren't out to get people like they are today.

TS: When you were living over on Page Street, where did you buy your groceries?

RC: Well, they didn't have big stores. There was a little store on the corner. I think A&P was the biggest store around there.

TS: Now, where was the A&P?

RC: I believe it was on the square.

TS: So they're not really supermarkets, just grocery stores.

RC: Just grocery stores.

TS: And you were mentioning restaurants--not having very many. Other than the one on the square, which was the café, I guess people just ate at home.

RC: Biggest part of people ate at home. Prices went up so much, people weren't use to pay that price. Maybe a dime for a cup of coffee. But they had been producing there [own food]--farmers, you know. They gave me a lot of stuff. A lot of people stayed on their farms. We had a lot of people in Chattanooga come to work for Lockheed. They drove all the way down everyday. Everyday. Because there's big money for them.

TS: Well, tell me about your trailer park in Fair Oaks. You opened that right after the war?

RC: Well, this was in '46.

TS: The year after the war.

RC: Yes, the year after the war. Everybody was buying trailers. I made quite a lot of money buying and selling. You made a full 30 percent commission. I bought a trailer for two thousand dollars and sold it for three thousand. I got very wealthy at that time. It all got away from me, but, at the time, I was very happy. Then I'd sell a trailer, and they had no place to park it. So I built a park. I put all that in by hand. We had no permits. You didn't have to get a permit for anything. All the wiring I put in. Today, it's entirely different. Everything you do has to be approved. The sewer line, I'm not proud of it. We had no sewer. But I've seen Marietta and the whole county grow. Like this place here. When I bought this [property], it wasn't anything. Now there are houses all around me. Thousands of them.

TS: How long have you had this house out here on Hadaway Road?

RC: Seventeen years. I ran a park for fifty years, but it just got too much for me. But, I have had 150 trailers in there. My rent was three dollars a week with a three-amp fuse. We didn't have meters back then. A three-amp for an extra fifty cents a week. Extra fifty cents, you get a ten-amp fuse. Maybe with [another] fifty cents, you got a fifteen-amp fuse. We had no commodes. Everybody used a public bath house.

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