

Interviewee: Edmond Broberg

Interviewer: Daniel Borkenhagen

Date of interview: 13 July 2002

Location: the Broberg home in Kerkhoven (Swift County), MN

Transcribed by: Daniel Borkenhagen, August 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, January 2003

Edmond Broberg was born on 21 April 1921 on a farm in rural Pillsbury Township, Swift County, Minnesota. One of five children, he attended a local country school during the early to mid-1930s, but did not attend high school. One of three boys, Edmond worked on the farm with his father. During the war years 1941-45, because he was the only healthy brother at home, Edmond received a deferment from military service.

Following the war Edmond got married (1946, wife Maybelle Ortenblatt) and moved to his own farm in Swift County. Edmond and Maybelle raised a family of six children, and lived and worked on the farm until 1983. At the time of this interview (July 2002) Edmond and Maybelle lived in the Swift County town of Kerkhoven.

In this interview, Edmund provides personal recollections of wartime price controls, shortages, rationing of certain goods, and farm life in general.

Interview key

E: Edmond Broberg

M: Maybelle Broberg (Edmond's wife)

D: Daniel Borkenhagen

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

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Side A. Counter begins at 000.

D: Today is the 13th of July, 2002. My name is Dan Borkenhagen and I'm sitting down with Edmond Broberg. Thank you very much for agreeing to do the interview, Edmond.

E: You're welcome.

D: If it's all right, I'm just going to start out with a little biographical information. After that we'll focus on the war years, is that okay?

E: Okay.

D: First, when and where were you born?

E: Born in Swift County and Pillsbury Township, on April 21, 1921.

D: And who were your parents?

E: Dana and Roy Broberg.

D: And did you live out in that area then for most of your childhood or did you move around?

E: Lived there all my life practically.

D: And went to high school around there?

E: Never did go to high school.

D: You didn't. When did your schooling end?

E: Went through grade school, that's all.

D: And then you started working on the farm?

E: Yeah. That's right on our farm. Our school was on our farm. It's right in the corner of our farm. A schoolhouse there.

D: So you didn't have to go so far then.

E: No. Half a mile.

D: So you started working on the farm pretty much the whole time. During the war years you would have been working on the farm as well?

E: I worked on the farm during then.

D: And you continued to work as a farmer until when?

E: Until I started for myself. I'm still going.

D: That's true, you were out bailing hay today weren't you?

E: Yeah cutting hay, and bailing hay.

D: When did you semi, officially retire then?

E: I still haven't. *(laughs)* I go out there pretty near every day. We moved off [the farm] in '83.

D: You moved off the farm in '83 and moved into town, and just continue to go out and help out?

E: Yeah.

D: As your wife Maybelle said, you were married shortly after the war. In 1946 I believe she said.

E: In 1946, on January 4.

D: And you had six children, was it?

E: Yeah.

D: How many grandchildren?

E: We have a lot of grandchildren. I think it's 24, or something like that.

Maybelle Broberg *(in next room)*: We have 22, and then two of Tom's kids, we consider them grandkids.

D: So you still keep busy with helping out on the farm. Do you have any other hobbies?

E: Not too much, pretty much just farming.

D: Ok, then I'm going to go back to the war years. And I always start off with the same question, because it's something that is a good way to start off, it's the beginning of everything, and most people have something to say about it. The 7th of December, 1941. Do you remember where you were or what you were doing when you heard the news?

E: Yeah. I remember we were over to Lloyd Carlson's. That was a guy that we knew

pretty well, I and my cousin. We were over there on a Sunday morning. They... We done our chores over there. He was in the [Twin] Cities. We went to church and we heard it when we got to church. The first thing we heard about when we got there. Everybody was all worked up about it.

D: What was your initial reaction when you heard the news?

E: I didn't like it too well, because the guy that was with me, my cousin, he was going to leave in January [1942] anyway. He'd already been drafted. So he left in January. My brother left in February.

D: Were you worried about military service yourself at all?

E: Well, was sort of in a way, but I got deferred usually. Farm work. Got pretty close one time to not getting deferred. But they only gave me two months. After that then the governor said they couldn't take no more farm boys. So then I got by.

D: So you were within a couple months of maybe heading into the service, but then the governor of Minnesota put his foot down and said, we need the guys out on the farms.

E: Yeah.

D: And you only had one brother that did go into the service, right?

E: Yeah.

D: Did you have any other brothers?

E: Yeah, I have one other brother. He's in the rest home now.

Maybelle Broberg (*in next room*): He's handicapped.

D: Okay, so he didn't have to worry about the service.

E: No, he didn't really have to worry.

D: What kind of emotional reaction do you remember when you heard the news? Do you remember being angry at all, or just shocked?

E: Just sort of worked up about it.

D: Do you remember what your parents felt? Or what the people around you were saying that day?

E: They all were pretty much emotional.

D: Did people talk about it being an immediate reaction of, okay we have to go to war? Or... what did people think they heard, Pearl Harbor?

E: They knew they had to go to war, because the president said they were going to

go.

D: Do you remember that speech at all?

E: No, not really.

D: What kind of ways in general, what kind of things jump out at you right away that you remember how your life changed after that day? Are there any things that stick out that you would say changed when the 7th of December passed by and the US entered into war?

E: I knew we had to work. Couldn't go too far away from home, I know that, because then they'd wonder what you were doing, if you were going around. So you didn't want to be in town too long.

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D: Sometimes before the war you would go to the Twin Cities a little bit more?

E: Not too much, but we used go to town some, more so than after the war started. Gasoline was rationed. Even had a speed limit, 40 miles per hour.

D: So you couldn't drive too far, because you didn't have much extra gas.

E: Yeah.

D: And you also didn't want to look like you weren't actually working on the farm or something?

E: Be pretty careful, so you weren't around too much, too late, in town.

D: Were you worried that somebody specific would see you, or just that people around the town would see you?

E: They'd sort of watch you.

D: Who was watching?

E: Oh, these people who were elected to, I'm sure. The draft board. The draft board did for sure.

D: So people who were from around the town, who were on the draft board.

E: It was people from right in town that were on the draft board.

D: So if you knew where they were, you avoided that place?

E: Yeah, pretty much.

D: Edmond, what kind of activities did you do during the war, outside of working on the farm? What kind of clubs or groups, or how did you spend your time with

friends, what kind of stuff did you do?

E: We used to have a lot of parties, years ago, that we went to. Mostly in our homes. We'd go out where they were, and have parties up here too. Ice cream socials, and things like that.

D: What kind of stuff would you do at those parties?

E: We had a good time.

D: You're not going to define it any better than that? *(laughter all)*

E: Yeah, we had a lot of fun.

Maybelle Broberg *(in next room)*: We had what they called games. Actually when it comes down to it, it was square dancing.

E: Sure.

D: But you couldn't call it dancing?

Maybelle Broberg *(in next room)*: No we couldn't call it dancing.

E: We never called it dancing.

Maybelle Broberg *(in next room)*: We didn't dance, we sang, our music.

E: It was a lot of fun. I'm sure we had more fun than you do now days. *(laughs)*

D: Did your family life change at all during the war? You sent a brother off and so you still had one other brother who was handicapped, and both your parents were around during the war?

E: My dad, yeah.

D: Did you have any sisters?

E: Yeah, two sisters.

D: What did they do during the war?

E: They were married to farmers, both of them.

D: So they were off your farm?

E: Yeah. I was only four years old when my mom died.

D: So she wasn't around during this time.

E: I hardly knew her, no.

D: It was just dad that ran the family?

E: And my aunt. She stayed with us.

D: That's right, I remember hearing that. Your aunt came and moved onto the farm and helped raise you guys, then.

E: Yeah.

D: You spent your whole life working as a farmer?

E: Pretty much, yeah. I worked out a little, helped other men on farms too.

D: So you have a lot of perspective on what farming was like during different eras. What was different about farming during World War II?

E: It's a big difference. Machinery was a lot smaller. Used horses at first.

D: During the beginning of the war you were still using horses?

E: We had some horses then, too. They still were (***) corner horses. Even when I started to farm. Then we exchanged the horse and used tractor afterwards.

D: Did the fact that the war began change things at all for you? Was it harder to get anything because of the war?

E: No, you couldn't get machinery. You'd have to put your name in, then they'd go and get your name. And then you'd probably get something. If you went to auction, if there was something people wanted, a special thing, they'd put your name in a hat and draw to pick who got to buy it.

D: I remember my grandpa [Ervin Borkenhagen] talking about that. He said they would allow people to bid up to a certain price, and at a certain price they put a ceiling on it.

E: That's all they'd allow.

D: He said that whoever wanted to would put their names in a hat, and draw for it.

E: Even if you'd give them more money, you couldn't buy it anyway.

D: So that was not just in his town [of Truman, MN], that was around here, too?

E: Yeah.

D: That's interesting to hear.

E: I remember my dad and I, he wanted a manure spreader on the farm. And we put our name in and we were lucky enough one of us got it, so he got it.

D: What was the process for...? You talk about putting your name in for new machinery, how would you get on these lists people talk about?

E: They'd put your name down, then you'd wait your turn. But after a while that turned like everything the government has anything to do with, it turned into they start a black market. So somebody would be around and if they'd have one, they would get a hold of someone and then you could buy from them and pay a lot more.

D: Was that pretty common do you think?

E: Common, yeah.

D: So a lot of guys paid extra money to try to get stuff through black market.

E: They did too. Money under the table.

D: Was it so common that you saw it on your farm, or you guys didn't get involved in that.

E: We never bought anything like that.

D: How did you guys feel about it then? You saw other people getting machinery when you guys had to wait.

E: We knew who it was, so we (***) with them. Those in the implement too, would kind of help you out if you knew them well. My cousin, he was in implement here and I wanted a plow, because I was just starting. He said, "I'll get you a plow." He did. But he never brought it there, he brought it right out there to the farm. He just brought it out there.

We got a tractor that way too once. We drove up to [a neighboring small town named] Sunburg and got that. And people looked as we went through town with that new tractor. And they looked. It was really fun.

D: Was there any resentment among people that some people were getting other stuff, or that people were paying money to get stuff by black market?

E: Yeah. Well, we expected that sort of thing. That's what happens.

D: So despite the fact that it wasn't fair, you just dealt with it and moved on?

E: That's about it.

D: What do you remember about farm prices during the war? Did things go up, were they kept the same, or what?

E: Farm prices were pegged at a certain price. You got so much, and hogs were fourteen twenty-five [\$14.25], and they stayed \$14.25 regardless of if it was a runt or big nice pig. Any pig would bring \$14.25.

D: So quality didn't even matter?

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E: Didn't make no matter what it was. A big lardy pig would sell the same as a runt.

D: What about with crops? Did they have pegged prices too?

E: They had, I think there it was a little different. But they weren't very high really.

D: Was it considered a fair price, or did you think you could have gotten more?

E: Oh, I think if they would have let [prices] go, they would have gotten more. Because as soon as they took it off of hogs and cattle, they would go up five dollars [\$5.00] a hundred.

D: Right after the war, things jumped way up after they took [price controls] off?

E: Yeah. That happened just when we started the first year [on our farm, 1946]. The first year I was farming. 'Cause we had hogs and I had little pigs, and I sold the sows. I sent them down to St. Paul and here it came over the radio, they went up \$5.00 a hundred, the day I got them down there.

D: Picked the right time to sell, it sounds like.

E: Yeah, you never knew what they would be. I was pretty lucky that time.

D: I know gas was rationed heavily during the war. How do you remember that working with farmers?

E: You had four gallons a week for an A card. And then the B card, those were like the family car. And a C, that was overall, for tractors and all that.

D: As far as tractors, were you given a limited amount, or was it unlimited?

E: You got stamps, and as long as you had enough stamps, you were okay.

D: Did you ever feel like you had a lack of stamps?

E: No, we got along pretty good. I drove the car with them.

D: So you were able to have enough stamps extra that some of those stamps for the tractor ended up getting some gas to your car too?

E: Oh, we got along. *(laughs)* But you had to watch your mileage too, you know? If you showed too many miles, then they knew you were driving too much.

D: Who would have noticed the mileage on your car?

E: If they checked the car, they would.

D: Did people ever get their cars checked?

E: I don't know.

D: But you had to be careful just in case.

E: Yeah.

D: People tend to notice things around small areas, I guess. Notice your car has been taking too many trips. "How's he been driving so much?"

E: 'Cause there was a trick there, too—you could get the speedometer off.

D: Take it back a few miles?

E: It won't hurt you. I only done that once or twice. *(more laughter)* But it worked, though.

Maybelle Broberg *(in next room)*: Edmond, now he's got that on tape!

E: They're not going to come after me 57 years later.

D: I promise they'll never know. *(both laugh)* Edmond, do you remember any other rations that would have affected you being on the farm at all?

Maybelle Broberg *(in next room)*: Sugar and coffee. Toothpaste and everything else.

D: Toothpaste?

E: It wasn't really rationed, but like toothpaste, if you wanted to buy a tube of toothpaste, you brought your old one in, you traded it in. You were supposed to save everything.

D: What did they do with the tube of toothpaste?

E: Recycle it. It was metal, it wasn't just plastic. Sugar was one thing that was rationed, too.

D: Were there any scrap drives or anything? Do you remember having scrap metal drives or anything like that?

E: Scrap iron, that was a pretty good price then. You could sell scrap iron. You could even sell horse hair, like manes and tails. I clipped it off, because we had horses. I brought it into (***) and sold it. I don't remember what it was he got. It was so much a pound.

D: What would they use the horse hair for?

E: I don't know, for clothes or something.

D: You didn't care as long as you got the money, right?

E: Yeah.

D: Are there any other things, other little pieces about the farm that you remember changing at all during the war?

E: We used to thresh [wheat] in (***) bundles. And after the war, we got combines.

D: After the war, you were able to get equipment easier, so you were able to get something like combines?

E: Right.

D: Edmond, do you remember life around you in your community changing at all as a result of the war? Did people seem closer together?

E: During the war, yeah, they were closer than before.

D: In what way?

E: Seemed like people were closer to each other than before the war years.

D: Do you remember any specific ways that showed?

E: Families came out to visit a lot. Did a lot more visiting then, too, with your neighbors.

D: So you could come in and talk with each other about what was going on?

E: Yeah.

D: Did you listen to the radio and try to keep up on the news?

E: We only had a radio, no TV.

D: Did you keep up on the news about what was going on during the war a lot?

E: No. I think we heard, in the letters we got, quite a bit too.

D: Who did you correspond with during the war?

E: My brother and cousin.

D: You had a cousin that was in the service too?

E: Two of them, at least two.

D: Do you remember where they were at all, or what branch of the service they were in?

E: Yeah. Lowell was in the medics. He was over in Italy and there. Bernie was in Germany, and all over—Northern Africa, France, Normandy. He was in quite a few places. He claimed he could have gone through Berlin before the Russians, but they wouldn't let him.

D: So what kind of information would they send you? I know they were limited in what they were able to tell.

E: If they did write something, it was crossed out anyway. Didn't go through.

D: So you just kind of got general information from them?

E: You'd try to ask them a question, and they'd try to answer it, but it wasn't very good.

D: All you'd get back was either stuff that was very vague or a lot of black places on the letter huh?

E: All wiped out.

D: How would you receive letters? Some people I knew got regular letters, and some people got what they called the V Mail. Do you remember getting that?

E: Yeah, V Mail.

D: That's what you got mostly, the type that was blown up from photographs?

E: Yeah.

D: Financially, Edmond, would you say you were better or worse off during the war?

E: During the war, I don't know much, because I was working for my dad. And I never had to maintain things. But I did start to buy some small calves, get a start.

Maybelle Broberg (*in next room*): I worked for the banks, so I knew what he had. (*laughter all*)

D: So you were starting to make an effort. Because the war kept prices down, did that make it easier for you to get started?

E: Yeah, I don't know. I had to help my dad, so I knew pretty much what to do. I used to decide a lot of things for him, or help. So I wasn't completely in the dark.

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Maybelle Broberg (*in next room*): He died the year we got married, in 1946. [Edmond] really had to get on his own.

E: And he said he wasn't right, he figured we'd make it. We'd been married five months when he died.

D: Then all of a sudden the full responsibility was on you, huh?

E: Yeah. My brother started the same time. He come home [from military service] in November [1945]. He didn't want to get married as early, so that's why we got married in January. He waited until April [1946].

D: He wanted to put it off, and so you took got married first?

E: Sure. He was older than I was, too.

D: Edmond, you went to church regularly during the war too, I'm assuming.

E: Yeah.

D: Did you notice anything change there?

E: We were always involved in church there. Singing all the time, weren't we?

D: Were there any changes in church there that you noticed during the war?

E: I suppose there was a difference.

D: Do you remember the pastor talking about it at all during his sermons?

E: He'd mention it some yeah. Some of the boys, he would have them come up. Especially my brother, he would always get up and talk when he got home.

D: When he came home on leave?

E: Yeah. He'd come up and talk about being gone.

D: What kinds of things would your brother talk about?

E: Tell where he was, but he couldn't tell too much. At least let us know he was okay.

D: How many times did he get home during the war, do you remember?

E: I think it was four. He was pretty lucky that way. He got transferred, then he'd get a furlough sometimes. He came home once when he wasn't really supposed to come home, but he had so many days, and he just took a chance and came. If he'd been called to come back, boy he'd have been nervous then. He was excited before he got going, so he got off. He didn't want to go late.

D: It seemed like a lot of guys kind of stretched what they were supposed to do during those furloughs to try to get home.

E: Yeah. His girlfriend was here, he was engaged.

D: So he wanted to get back to see her?

E: Oh yeah.

D: Edmond, do you have any memories of what an average day was like for you during the war?

E: Get up early and go out until sometimes about ten at night. Always got up about five o'clock in the morning, but then we were done at six or seven a lot of nights, too.

D: What were your nights spent doing?

E: Going down there, seeing [Maybelle] as much as I could.

Maybelle Broberg (*in next room*): We went to a lot of church activities.

E: Yeah, all the time.

D: What kind of church activities?

E: Sunday nights, we were always at church Sunday nights.

D: Church services were Sunday night?

E: Yeah, all the time.

D: Not Sunday morning?

E: Yeah, and in the evening, and then Wednesday night. I think it was Thursday night at that time.

D: So you went Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and then once during the week as well.

E: Yeah. Choir practice, had that a lot. Started that when I was about fifteen.

D: Still in it?

E: No, I quit that a few years ago now. Was in that more than fifty years.

D: I'm going to ask you about a few specific dates as well. On the 12th of April, 1945, President Roosevelt died. Do you remember when that happened?

E: Yeah, I remember when that happened. I was working around the place here [my dad's farm] and my aunt heard it over the radio. She thought it was a terrible thing.

D: So your aunt was affected by it.

E: A lot of people were.

D: Some people say they were moved to tears, that they were just really terribly upset. Do you remember seeing people feel like that?

E: Not quite, but pretty close.

D: Did it affect you personally at all?

E: Yeah, I thought it was bad.

D: It's kind of interesting to hear what people thought about Harry S. Truman.

E: Yeah, I knew who he was. He took over and it seemed to go okay, I guess.

D: I'm going to ask you about those last couple days in the war. V-E Day, the end of the war with Germany, was 8 May 1945. Do you remember when the war ended in Europe at all specifically?

E: No, nothing special.

D: Did your brother come home right after that, do you know?

E: At Thanksgiving time [1945].

D: Okay, so he was still in the service when the war ended. Then the 15th of August '45 was V-J Day, the end of the war with Japan. Do you remember the war finally being over? What was your reaction, and what was the reaction of those around you?

E: Everybody was glad.

D: Do you remember any specific things by any chance? Do you remember parties or celebrations?

E: Not really.

D: Just a lot of people talking and being excited that the war was finally over?

E: Yeah, they were glad.

D: All right. Then the last specific question I want to ask you about is, do you remember any feelings about the atomic bombs when they were dropped? Do you remember being happy that it seemed like the war was about to be over, do you remember any sadness?

E: I just remember it being done, there wasn't too much about it. It was just another thing that happened, no big thought.

End of Side A. Side B begins.

D: I am going to ask the last overall question which is: Do you think being alive during World War II changed you as a person, or changed the course of your life significantly, or do you think it would have been pretty much the same if you had lived in a different time as well?

E: I don't know if it changed my life too much, but it sure didn't hurt it. I think it gave us more respect for the soldiers and all them. It seemed like there was a difference than to today even. A lot of respect for soldiers years ago. More than now days I think.

D: If there's anything that you remember about those years that sticks out in your memory, or that's just kind of a funny story or just a nice memory of that time, you're welcome to share that now. If not, that's all right as well.

E: Can't remember anything special.

D: That's perfectly okay. I'd just like to thank you for your time, and for sitting down here to speak with me.

E: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW