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Margaret Ahles: Civil Defense in New York During World War Two

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Student Interviewer's Name: Shaina Ahles

Interviewee Name: Margaret Ahles

Time and Location of Interview: The interview was conducted in one sessions on October 31, 2016 and lasted approximately and hour and 15 minutes. It was conducted over the phone with the interviewee residing in Mount Dora, FL and the interviewer residing in Collegedale, TN. Only the interviewer and interviewee were present.

About Margaret Ahles. Mrs. Margaret Ahles is 81 years old and spends her summers up in Watertown, New York and spends her winters in Mount Dora, Florida. Mrs. Ahles was a registered Nurse for most of her life until she retired. She married Lyle Ahles and had one child, David Ahles. They lived in Rome, New York until they moved to Syracuse, New York to be with their two grandchildren. Mrs. Ahles participated in the Civil Defense program during World War II. This interview covers the topics of Mrs. Ahles's life before the war, her time during Civil Defense, and the adjustment after the war and was conducted on October 31, 2016 over the phone while she resided in Mount Dora, FL.

Interviewer: Shaina Ahles (SA)

Interviewee: Margaret Ahles (MA)

SA: Hi Mrs. Ahles, as I told you about in the first interview we did, I will be recording this conversation to transcribe it into a document for a project in American History. I have your release form and once I have the transcription completed I will be uploading it to Southern Adventist University's website because they are collecting a data base of oral histories. Is that still alright with you?

MA: Oh yes, yes Shaina. That's perfectly fine.

SA: Then I will go ahead and start the interview. How old were you when war started?¹

MA: Oh, I was let's see... I was born in '35 and the war started in '41. I would have been, I would have been six years old. I was born in '35 and the war was from '41 to '45. I was six year old.

SA: Okay, and do you remember what life was like before the war started?

MA: Oooh yes (said exhaustively) everybody was kind of poor... It was the depression, it was the depression years. Yeah everyone was very poor, the depression years.

SA: Can you elaborate on that, what was an average day like?

MA: Oh we worked hard, everybody worked hard. We all had responsibilities. Uh, our situation was a little different because my dad had a heart attack when he was 40 or 39

¹ A bibliography is attached for further reading.

years old, can you imagine? My mother had to go to work to put food on the table, so as kids we, really there was four of us, and we really had to work hard. I remember in the winter, I remember this, we had to take sleighs and we had to go a couple miles through snow drifts and so forth to collect little coals of uh, coals of that was left on the rail road beds of the trains you know. We would put them on our sleigh and take them home and put them in the stove to keep warm. Because fuel was very scarce and we didn't have any money you know, so that's what we did I remember that. Working, working, working. We had a garden, everything we did was hand done even when my dad died. Before his heart attack, before he built the new house he was trying to build it all by hand all by himself this big two story house and when we were, when daddy first started building it we had to comb, go all over the area to pick up stones to put for the foundation you know concrete, you had to put stones in. Now you can go to the store and buy it but back then it was all done by hand, all done by us kids hand picking. Oh we knew what work was, I guess that's why we're workaholics I guess. But uh, there was during the war time, there was a rations, you couldn't get sugar. I remember the lady's couldn't get, there was no silk stockings available because there was rations you know what I mean? There was only so much sugar, just a couple pounds of sugar to last the month. And then I remember before the war I was working, uh, in civil defense which means I spotted air planes and we had to keep a record of the kind of the planes there was you know. You had to look up and tell what kind it was. That was another thing we had to do we had to log. We had to jot it down because they want to make, after Pearl Harbor, you want to make sure no planes were getting around you know. And uh oh yes we had to, all the kids and everybody, had to pick milk weed pods you know, to make the parachutes, you know the soft silkiness of the pods, we had to collect all that for the guys in the service. And uh also, tin foil. You know sometimes you had gum you know, the little foil around the gum? We saved every little tiny foil and kept putting it, we formed it into a ball and kept adding to it. You know adding to it and wrapping it around the ball. We made a nice big ball, we saved that. And uh, let's see what else. Everyone was war minded, well when the war was on I tell ya. And you see the women, when the guys were gone the women were stuck with work. They had the gardens and some women had to go to work to feed kids and uh families, that's why mine was so poor. There wasn't much food or anything available. It was bad times and of course the depression proceeded that and there was no money for anything. People couldn't have jobs, and there was nothing like there is today, there was no Medicare, if you didn't work you didn't eat period. But neighbors were there, everyone tried to help each other like when it comes to the farms when they were harvesting they all tried to get together to help each other. Now its every man for himself you know, it was quite different people worked together, they were more friendly and uh, you know.

SA: That's very interesting. A lot of that fell under my next question which was, what was life like during the war? But let me rephrase a little bit and ask, what was an average day like, can you run me through what you would do in an average day, especially during the- (to finish the question, especially during the war)

MA: Well it depends on the season of the year. All I can tell you, it started when I got up in the morning and we all had our chores, all four of us had our chores. We each had our own chores and that meant it could be depending on the season what our chores were. If it was winter time, see we didn't have electricity we didn't have any of those things. We didn't

have bath or toilets, the only thing we had was an outhouse. We use Montgomery ward catalogs for the tissue. Can you imagine it? So we started, it depends what the job was, if it was winter we all had jobs. One had to uh, get the water you know, we put the water in two containers one for drinking and cooking and the other for cleaning okay? And so whoever's time it was, we made a schedule among the kids, we had to go out and shovel. It was winter time and it was from about my house to your camp (about 200 ft) all that distance we had to shovel a path through the snow to pump the water, to even pump the water. And then we pump it and we had to pump two pails. We had a very deep well about 60 ft and then we would bring it in, you know. And then someone would try to get wood in the stove. We had various jobs and uh, we had to do this before we went to school and then we had to walk of course there was no school bus we had to walk to school a couple miles each way, in blizzards sometimes. School was never closed, oh no schools never closed because you know no school busses and then when we came home it was work again. I mean we spent most of the time working, we had some time to get a little recreation or play. That was we made our own toys we made our own games. I mean we didn't buy, we didn't have the money to buy those things. Even at Christmas we only got two little things like a pair of socks or something. There was no money for presents, we didn't have clothes. I had two dresses, one for school, and one dress for church and that's all I had. We didn't wear the stuff we wear like pants so uh, I have to wash, we didn't have a washing machine we had to wash them out by had you know? We had to wash them out by a scrub board, we had to heat our own water when we brought that water, that ice cold water out, we had to uh heat it up to do it. We had to make our own soap. We had to uh oh yes and we didn't take showers, there's no such things as showers we had a big bath tub and everybody took a bath in it, in the same water, we had to. I mean if you think about the time it takes to fill a big tub. There was light clothes we had to put the white cloths first and we graduated to the real dirty ones the dark cloths, like the washing machine. We didn't have different cycles or things like that. We had a cook stove and we had uh you know, we had to heat everything on it and as far as ironing we had no electric iron. We had to heat it on the stove and of course it was quite an ordeal. It was quite an ordeal to survive, to live. And of course we had, in the summer season, we had to plant and weed and plant and, weed, and weed. When it was harvest time... I have a big scar on my legs where I took the sickle, we had to cut the weeds and I cut my legs. I still got the scar. And then we had to can. We had no freezers, we had to can everything on the stove and uh you know how much time that takes. And when it comes to curtains on the windows we had, my mother had a frame and it was all on little nails to stretch it to dry in the sun. And storm windows on the house they didn't come like today. In the fall we had to climb real high latter's. We had to put the storm windows on and it took a long time to put one window on and we had a big house when daddy finally finished the big house. And it took so long, and then we had to take them back off in the spring. We had to wash them in between of course, we had to wash the windows. Of course my family was very meticulous, they always like to be clean you know? Daddy, well everyone was neat and clean we were all very meticulous and that took a long time to do. And finally there was lawn care and oh we had a big lawn but we had to mow, we had you know one of those little hand mowers. The push by hand, the little ones. But I don't know if you know anything about the little mowers. You know all the lawns have the dandelions stalks that grow, you know how that goes. Well a hand mower don't cut them, they don't. They would go right over them. They would cut the grass and then leave them

standing and Aunt Evelyn would be crazy, she would have to go to everyone and she would always have to try and get the roots. And let's see like I said we made our own toys, and our own game and when we made our own toys we use to carve. We use to have wood. We used to carve out of the wood you know with jack knives and of course we cut ourselves. Oh we had to feed the chickens we had to feed ... the cows then we had to clean up the cow's stuff, you know how the animals you have to clean up after them. It wasn't very fun for us because we had to pick, always had to pick berries. Out back there was a great big pond or lake you knows? But it was so tempting to go swimming, but we had to pick berries so we just had to be happy picking berries. Even on my birthday, July 20th, right in the middle of the raspberry harvest I had to go pick berries. But that's the way it was, those days we had to work and we never complained. I just remember sometimes when I was real young we lived out in the country and this is where I was born. We lived in a country setting and daddy built a garage, and we lived in the garage until he could build our new house. So we lived in a two story garage and you know it was tough, we had an attic and we each slept in there, all four of us had our own corner. We each had our own bed, and there was no lights. We had to have lights by kerosene lamps you heard of those? That's how we survived there. Uh, the fruit season we had plum trees, we had apple trees, oh in fact they came out and took a picture of my father! We had a great arbor of red, white, and blue grapes that were big. We made our own orange, I mean grape juice and uh we had a corn crib where we had a huge building where we put all our corn and then uh, we used to have popping corn and then uh, we kept the corn in there and it aired out.

SA: So you have outlines what life was like, what did the war change about that or was that pretty much-

MA: War affected everybody because there was a scarcity of food and man help. I mean every family suffered because it took the man power, it took the men away so the women did double duty. They not only had to take care of the farms, it was mostly country living, but she had to take care of the farm and her kids, and she had to go to work to put food on the table. I mean no work, no eat. I mean it really impacted every family you know?

SA: And is that what your mother did?

MA: Yes, it was interesting yes. She had to go to work. She had four kids when the war was on. She had four kids, and I was the youngest. I was six years old. There was no baby sitters or nothing, that wasn't thought of. Of course I had two older sisters, one was 7 years older, one was 8 years older. Of course my daddy didn't go into the service but he had a heart attack so he wasn't around to help so my mother worked and it changed our household. My two older sisters was in charge and I wasn't happy about that at the time. Because well you know I wasn't the best kid to take care of. I missed, I loved my mother and I wanted to be with her. And you know everybody's life was impacted, it was a hardship on everyone and it was more of a hardship on people who had medical problems you know? If they had a child, the food, there was a food shortage and a money shortage. But like I say, the women had to go to work. There couldn't be much industrialism or nothing because no one was, you see mostly men worked the factories, women stayed home. Women didn't work but the war changed that. The war changed that. The war put women in the work force and it's been increasing ever since. Now it's expected because then you

never heard of a woman working, they stayed home and took care of the kids. They never worked. I made my own cloths, there was no money to buy cloths and we used seed bags. We used to get the seed for the cows and we used to use the seed bags. How would you like to live then Shaina?

SA: I'm not sure I would have.

MA: Well, that was the way of it and we didn't know anything else. But you know we were all happier. We all helped each other and I will say the four of us, we got along splendid really. You know a lot of family's argue and stuff, but we never had any problems, all through adult hood and everything. And uh, my father was a very disciplinary. My mother was a kind sweet one you might say, gentle. While my father... My father had a sense of humor you know, he was okay. But anyway.

SA: I want to ask you a bit more about your time in the Civil Defense program. On May 20, 1941 President Franklin Roosevelt set up the Office of Civilian Defense, did you join as soon as it was set up or did you wait a while?

MA: Oh wait a minute, '41 uh I think uh okay I was born in '35 so that made me six years old, so I think it was later. I don't think I did it at six years old, I was a little older.

SA: Do you remember when you first joined?

MA: Oh dear...uh, okay uh, oh boy... Okay '41 so that would be four years, '41 to '45 so that would be four years... Probably I was uh... '41 that would be six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Oh dear I might have been... it was towards the.... Oh boy. I don't, I think it was a couple of years but it was towards the end of the war I think. It wasn't '41 or '42 it was more like maybe '43, '44, or '45. Probably, not before '43 I don't think.

SA: Okay, and how did you first learn about civil defense?

MA: Oh, I was uh, in the, let's see the girl scouts or 4H. It was one of those. I think it was the 4... It was the girl scouts or 4H, one of them. Yeah uh, we used to go to the houses and get people to vote or to take care of their kids while they would go out.

SA: So you did more than just watch planes? You did other stuff for them?

MA: Oh yes, for the government we tried to encourage people to vote and we would go offer our babysitting services. Just think Shaina, I started working early when I was, uh, 10 or 12 years old. I worked a whole week for 5 dollars, and I took care of a family of four with a baby. I cooked and cleaned and took care of the kids, can you imagine that?

SA: That's quite a task for a 10 year old. What caused you to join civil defense? You heard about it through girl scouts or 4H but-

MA: Oh yeah, I was all into doing things for my country you know. I collected the milk week pods and all that and when the airplane thing comes us I said I could do that you

know. It was interesting. You know years ago people were more into doing, helping people and doing things for their country. Now its, now they get out of it you know.

SA: There were lots of rolls in the civil defense, such as rescue, road repair, drivers, civilian defense auxiliary group, what was your position called? Or did you have a position?

MA: Well, I was a volunteer, for well, what I did was specifically was I spotted airplanes. Airplane spotter I guess what they called me, airplane spotter.

SA: And was there a certain reason you joined that group in the civil defense? Or was it because that sounded the most interesting?

MA: Well, if I remember, at my age there's a lot of things you can't do you know. And uh that was something I could do... I don't know. All I remember was doing it and I got a pin for doing it too.

SA: That actually leads into my next question, I know you got a pin, was there a specific symbol on the pin?

MA: Oh yeah, it's up to camp, it's in my box. Yeah it's got a CD on it, its blue, it's kind of patriotic. It's got a CD on it, and it's less than the size of a dime. And it was metal and uh, you know you got it after so many hours. I can't remember all those, they got so many hours in, and we got a pin for our services. And I do have it but it's up to camp.

SA: I'm just curious, you said the pin had a CD on it, did it have a blue circle with a white triangle as well?

MA: Yeah I think, it was blue and white and I think it had a little red. I remember blue and white, and it might have had a little red. Maybe it was a blue outside with a white inside with a red CD. I really can't... Shaina that was 70 years ago. But I remember seeing it, I know it was there. When I went through my things, I thought "oh there's my CD pin" you know.

SA: I would be interested in seeing it at some point when I come home. Did any of your family join civil defense?

MA: No, because they were all, no, because see, they were all about 7 or 8 years older than me you know and they were, no there wasn't anybody else. I was the baby of the family, the youngest.

SA: Did they not join because they had other responsibilities that they had to do? Whereas you didn't have quite as many responsibilities because you were younger?

MA: Yeah, they had uh, they had a lot of responsibility. We had a farm, we had to take care of too. My father had a heart attack and you know everybody was busy. And they didn't, nobody ever belonged to the boys scouts or girl scouts, or the uh, 4H. I was the only one in the family that did that.

SA: What caused you to join?

MA: Oh I liked to do things, and you know in the 4H I learned to cook and sew. Oh I liked to do all those things. I was very interested in adventure and interested in doing things. That was my desire.

SA: Did many of your friends join the civil defense?

MA: Uh, yeah there was a few of us in the, oh in the 4H. I think it was the 4H. I really think it was the 4... Yeah I'm pretty sure it was the 4H. And uh, yeah there was. The leader was uh, she was the one who presented it and yeah, there was not just me. There was a couple of us who did.

SA: And did they do the same thing you did?

MA: Yeah basically. The opportunity was for plane spotting, that was the position that was open at that time in our area and so we got together you know.

SA: And your area, you said it was London, New York correct?

MA: Yup it was London, New York. Yeah it was in London where we spotted that airplanes. That would be central New York. It would be near Rome. Rome is just a little town. Near the city of Rome and near the city of Oneida. Syracuse was a ways away. Between Rome and Oneida that will give you an idea. In central New York.

SA: In London, I know it's a smaller town, was there a limited amount of Civil Defense positions available there or was it still just as active as in a larger city?

MA: No I don't recall, it was a small town and all I know is the opportunity was... The cry comes out for airplane spotters and that's was the only thing I remember. If there was anything else I would have joined it probably. Because I joined anything available.

SA: Okay, now in my research I found the qualifications for the civil defense states for membership enrollment you need physical and mental aptitude, recognition of obligatory to study duties. Was there any sort of test you had to do in order to join?

MA: Uh, well if I remember, back to 4H you know we had to uh, well nothing was like it is today. The requirements... But we had to be in good standing, oh yeah. I was always good in school you know, I was always active and I always won first prize for everything. I won blue ribbons you know, and people who can get blue ribbons and prizes have to have mental and physical qualifications. But we didn't have to really take a physical exam. Not like today, or we didn't have to pass tests, that wasn't required. And we were recommended by our leader. It wasn't like it was a paper and we would go up there. It was our leader who was a nurse too, who was in charge of all that. She was very patriotic too and uh she recommended us you know, so we had someone who vouched for us and recommended us. There was no written test or physical exam.

SA: Okay, when you obviously got accepted into the civil defense, did you have to be sworn in or anything like that?

MA: Oh boy, I don't remember that. But I know, we had to be approved. Not everybody could just go. We had to be approved, and it was through our leader that knew it you know because I was always the president of the club, every year I was, can you imagine? Now I wasn't president of the girl scouts that was younger, but the 4H club I was president the whole time. And another thing, I had a victory garden during the war.

SA: That was actually going to be my next question, you did have a victory garden then?

MA: Oh yeah, I had a victory garden, and that was when I was in the 4H.

SA: And did you grow it for your house or for the community?

MA: I grew it, you know everyone was encouraged to grow their own food, and I got a plot of land that was all my own. I planted my own, took care of it and watered it and everything. It wasn't very big you know, it was a small one, but I did have a victory garden. In fact, they came out from 4H to check it out one time.

SA: Was your victory garden in town or was it on your own property?

MA: Oh no no, it was in the country, on our farm, on our land. I remember the victory garden.

SA: The produce that you grew did your family eat it or did-

MA: Oh yeah we ate it, it wasn't a huge one. The reason I say it wasn't huge was because we had a huge garden, and the question was why would I want a garden when we've got a huge one? And I had to work in the family garden too, you know, but it was encouraged for everyone. You know, 4H encouraged everyone to have their own garden. We had to weed and we had to you know, we had a huge garden. But I had my own personal garden I did, it was a smaller one. Because you know I couldn't use the family garden as a victory garden, I had my personal garden. Yeah I spaded it all up and everything.

SA: The civil defense system included bomb shelters, air raid warning systems, and distribution of information on emergency survival. Did you ever participate in drills for bomb shelters or air raid warnings? Was that issued in the town you were in?

MA: Oh yeah, I'm trying to think, now I was not involved in that. Uh but there was, there was shelters, there was food to keep things... Uh, it was just starting in you know. Of course when the war first started I was quite young but I grew up real fast. But uh, the main thing was my activity in 4H, and my volunteer for the civil defense, and the victory garden. And collecting all the tin foil and the stuff for the parachute for the soldiers. And uh, growing the victory garden.

SA: Today there is a Civil Defense Association Youth Corps, which helps train young people for disaster and leadership training. Was this something that happened during the war, or was this later on?

MA: That's more recent, we really didn't have... They never had all those preparations. After the war they had a lot of them, but at that time it was something new. America was never bombed, so a lot of things were never in place like that. But it couldn't go all at once because it took a while to accomplish these different programs. You know, it took a while to fine tune them and get it going and running. No I don't believe there was much bomb shelters and stuff. Why would you have a bomb shelter if you never in your life had been bombed you know? Boy, afterworlds that came in place as far as I can recall.

SA: I know there were female civil defense pilots, did you know any of them?

MA: Civil defense pilots, oh dear, no I didn't know anybody personally.

SA: Now going to your time when you were spotting the planes, I'm curious where you went. Was it a federal building, or was it a watch tower?

MA: Oh we had a little, uh, a little, how you explain it. A little house, it was only about, it was very small, they built it out of wood. They build a little structure and it wasn't very big maybe just enough for you to go in there they would have a stool or something you know but we did mostly outside looking but sometimes if it was raining they had a little place. It might not have been more than three foot square, it was just a small room. It was a building, a wooden building. It was built.

SA: Was it elevated at all, like above the tree line?

MA: Oh no no, it was on the ground, it was on the ground. And they built it for bad weather because we watched planes in all kinds of weather you know. So they build a little shelter for us and it kept us out of the sun. We would be there for hours you know?

SA: Did they have binoculars or a telescope for you to use?

MA: Hmm, boy I don't remember that. I used to have good eye sight but I remember, the planes didn't fly high like they do today, they were lower, you could see them easier. I can't remember if they had binoculars or not, hmm. All I remember was seeing the plane and writing them down. We might have, we might have oh I don't remember.

SA: Did you wear a uniform when you went to spot planes or your everyday clothes?

MA: No, I think we did. We wore our everyday clothes, but we had to sign in you know and sign out. And of course our names, not everyone could come. You had to be on the list you know. And everybody, we took turns in hours and so forth.

SA: How many hours did you stay, and did someone come and relieve you after?

MA: Oh boy, see we were scheduled, our leaders scheduled us. I worked from, I'm trying to think, it was a few hours, at least a few hours. It wasn't like 8 hours, it was just a few hours maybe, 2,3,4 hours something like that time. And certain days, we had a schedule so that there was coverage you know?

SA: When you're hours where up did someone come and relieve you?

MA: Oh yeah hopefully, yeah hopefully. We stayed till someone came you know. And uh, I know sometimes I had to stay a little longer. But I was always the early bird when I went I was always early.

SA: How long did you participate in the civil defense?

MA: Oh dear, I can't remember the years. I think, I know in '41 I did not do it in '41, and I don't think '42. '43 or '44. It wouldn't have been before '43 but '44 and '45 I definitely did it.

SA: And did you stop as soon as the war ended?

MA: Yeah, after the war came to a close, yeah. There was no need to continue when the war ended. Our job was done.

SA: When you were watching planes was it just you or where there other people with you?

MA: Oh no, we did it alone.

SA: What are your thoughts on Civil Defense, was it worth it?

MA: Well yeah, I thought it was. That's why I did it, I thought it was good. So you can get those enemy's when they come. Yes I thought it was good, and it was good experience for us kids. It gave us responsibility and it made us more patriotic you know. And uh, it was very beneficial. I kind of enjoyed it. I really kind of enjoyed it.

SA: Did you continue the victory garden after the war?

MA: Oh no, I didn't continue it because we had such a huge garden I had to work Shaina. I had to baby sit, I really didn't have time, because you had to water it and we had to do our own garden you know. I just did it because it was a big thing at the time, and 4H and everybody participated. Of course I wanted to participate. No, I didn't need a victory garden because my family had one, I didn't need one.

SA: That is all very interesting. I want to back up a bit and just ask about what life was like during the war. Where you afraid that you guys would potentially be bombed?

MA: Oh everybody! After Pearl Harbor, everybody was running scared everywhere. When they bombed Pearl Harbor that was the United States. And you don't, don't know if they will come. New Yorkers especially, if they come in that way, they wanted to target acute places, you know? Metropolitan area and NY city, you know, and all the banks. They had a

lot of stuff they could destroy and we were, of course we were upstate, not too far but for an air plane that's not too far out of bounds you know?

SA: When Pearl Harbor was bombed, what did you feel and what did you think?

MA: Well you see, I was six years old and uh, you know we had no television or nothing and we didn't know anything about it. We was very naive, we just knew it was bad. You almost felt fearful but when you're in the presence of you parents you know you're secure. If we was in the bombings or something we would be scared to death. But see we lived like normal because we weren't effected see. As far as a six year old I found my... I don't remember really being afraid I just remember my family was security and I felt as long as there was a family I would be safe, you know? I remember thinking what a terrible thing that people get killed, that was terrible. You know because we had, I hated, oh I hated killing or death like that. I had pet chickens and pet cows and then daddy would chop their heads off of the chicken, and that's why I was really a vegetarian, I couldn't stand it. I couldn't sit down at the table and eat my favorite cow Betty. And my chickens would just talk to me and oh yeah, I had a hard time with that and I... yeah okay.

SA: Did you know anybody who went to fight in the war?

MA: Oh yes! I did. Oh I knew a lot of people. Yes uh, my brother in-law, Evelyn's (Mrs. Ahles sister) husband, he was. Well the ones I knew are all dead except for one. Okay, because you know there's not many vets around anymore. But Uncle Wally, Evelyn's husband, he was in the Air Force and he was stationed, well he flew many bombing missions, what was called a bombardier. You know many of the guys wouldn't talk about their experience. But he was a bombardier. And he ran missions. And he wasn't really affected by the war. And another one was Uncle Carl, and he was in the army and he was affected by the army. He was in uh the South Pacific and he really had a bad attitude, he said the only good Jap was a dead one. He went hand to hand combat with them, can you imagine? And really after the war he had nightmares. Anybody who goes through and sees all that killing is affected, but after a while he was able to recover from it. But right before he died he started having nightmares and going through that combat again. It was really bad. He was on an island with the Japs. I also knew Alex, Alex was your grandfather's best friend. His wife Shirley, we were great friends, and still are! We call each other every day and she's been a big help on this memorial service. But you know your grandfather was in the army but he didn't fight, he was in during Vietnam but didn't go into combat. But anyways, you grandfather and Alex were best friends and uh, they talked all the time about his time and it was quite a story. Alex is 94, and he just had is 94th birthday and he's still sharp as a tack. He can still spell and name all the ships that he was on and everything. He entered the navy when he was 19 year old, he was in for 10 years. He loved serving his country. And uh, now he, oh he, I asked him why he left and he said I was in for 10 years and I was 29 when I got out. But the reason he left was because he had a family, and his wife did not want him in the Navy, he was never home. You know when you go out on the ship you would be out there for months and months. So he gave it up for her, you know he had a family and felt he needed to be there, so he got out of it. But during his 10 years he had, wow, what a time he had. My goodness.

SA: Wow it sounds like there are some great untold stories there. Jumping now to the end of the war, you told me what life was like during the war and how women went to work, but when all the men came back how did the US adjust to it?

MA: When the men came back it was kind of a sad situation because a lot of the men that went... It was carnage, this was killing, and it affected a lot of boys you know? Today they have therapy to help people but they, some of the people come back with no legs and no arms. The women still had to continue. Uh, it affected the families because some of them weren't, they were physiologically, almost destroyed, well not destroyed but psychologically affected. And physically they weren't able to work the farms or hold a job because they didn't have legs or arms. They didn't have the surgeries, they were minus limbs, and feet and hands you know. Everybody was happy they were home, and you see some of them were gone so long some of the women were, they had, they got other uh, husbands. They took on other people, other families, and it just, it kind of interrupted the happy home you know? And some of the guys over there got Dear John letters, you know? It was quite an adjustment. Well put it this way, it was very challenging to the families, and then think about the families where the fathers or husbands didn't come home. They had to bring up their own families. You see those years it was different. There was no Medicare or nothing, so what happened if there was kids, the oldest one didn't get an education, they went to work to earn money, as early as they could, some 7 or 8 years old. Whatever they could do, they went to work to help put food on the table. And the older ones took care of the younger ones. They went to work, they went to work that's how they did it. They depended on family. And old folks, they took care of them, they never put them, there was no such thing as a nursing homes. Yeah it was quite different then. Very different. And it was very sad. It was quite a challenge to every American family. We didn't have a lot of wealthy people then either, mostly people were poor. But it was the factories and industries that really started the pension you know? All the sewing machines and equipment and all the modern deceives. And of course, as that increased, as commercialism increased, you had to have people to manage them. That's why the women continued in the things, they had to support the families, what was left of them.

SA: I'm curious to know your thoughts if you think the US did right to wait to get into the war, or do you think they should have gone in sooner, and hopefully ended it sooner?

MA: Well, I don't want to really give you my thoughts. But I can tell you this, all I know was when we were in Texas, there was a Jewish woman who lived in Germany and was in a concentration camp. She was a very wealthy person and everything, and she told me many times, she said "oh the Americans should have come sooner, why didn't they come sooner?" that's all she kept saying to me. Because it would have avoided maybe some concentration camps. She said why didn't they come sooner, she was hoping the Americans would come sooner. And the Americans were loved years ago, there name isn't too good now, but America, they helped them and oh, they just, oh they just wanted the Americans you know? They couldn't understand why they didn't come sooner, and I would have probably the same opinion. Why didn't they come sooner but, uh, it was a terrible thing.

SA: Well thank you so much Mrs. Ahles for talking to me and sharing your story. Is there anything else you would like to add?

MA: Oh no, I think that's all. And least that I can think of. I hope this helped you on you project.

SA: Oh it did, thank you so much for talking with me.

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List of Original Questions

1. How old were you when the war started?
2. What was it like before the war started?
3. Did you have any immediate family who fought in the war?
4. What was life like during the war?
5. What type of shortages were there?
6. What role did you play in helping the war efforts?
7. Did anyone you know fight in the war?
8. How did their families react?
9. What was it like after the war ended and all the soldiers came back?
10. How did life change?
11. What are your thoughts on the war?
12. Do you think the US should have gotten involved?
13. Do you think they should have gotten involved sooner?
14. Did grandpa ever fight in a war?
15. On May 20, 1941 President Franklin Roosevelt set up the Office of Civilian Defense, did you join as soon as it was set up or did you wait a while?
16. How did you first learn about civil defense?
17. What caused you to join the civil defense?
18. There were lots of rolls in the civil defense, such as rescue, road repair, drivers, civilian defense auxiliary group, what was your position called?
19. What caused you to join the group you did?
20. Was there a special symbol on your pin which you received to show which group you were in?
21. The OCD symbol was a white triangle inside a blue circle, is that what your pin looks like?
22. Did any of your family join the civil defense?
23. If so what did they do?
24. Did you mother join?
25. Did many of your friends join?
26. The qualifications for the civil defense states for membership require enrollment, physical and mental aptitude, recognition of obligatory to study duties, was there any sort of test you had to do in order to join?
27. Today there is a Civil Defense Association Youth Corps, which helps train young people for disaster and leadership training, was this something that happened during the war or was this later on?
28. The civil defense system included bomb shelters, air raid warning systems, and distribution of information on emergency survival. Did you ever participate in drills for bomb shelters or air raid warnings? Was that issued in the town you were in?
29. From my research, it seems civil defense was a very important and widespread thing which pamphlets and articles in the newspaper, do you remember seeing any of those?
30. Something that was part of the civil defense was victory gardens, did you or your family ever participate in that?

HIST 155, Fall 2016 / Miss Shaina Ahles

31. Where did you go to look for planes? Was it a federal building?
32. There were female civil defense pilots, did you know any of them?
33. Did your community ever have to participate in black outs? Putting blackout curtains over the windows?
34. Did you ever wear a uniform when you were spotting planes?
35. How long did you participate in civil defense?
36. What are your thoughts on Civil Defense, was it worth it?