

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
IRVING C. STROOP, JR.

JULY 30, 2009

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

PARQ

PRESERVE THE AREA'S RURAL QUALITIES

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #7

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Gore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

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MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

MT ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW #408

## **EDITORIAL NOTICE**

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The Gore Research Center also interviewed Mr. Strop for the Veterans History Project as part of the Middle Tennessee Oral History Project. That interview is MT 442.

## **ABSTRACT**

Irving Clifton Stroop, Jr. (April 18, 1925—January 17, 2013) was a native of Readyville, Tennessee. His family moved there from Halls Hill soon before his birth. His father, Irving Sr., owned and operated I. C. Stroop and Sons, a general merchandise store on Readyville Street a short distance from the Readyville Mill. His father died in 1936, leaving his mother with four children. She continued to operate the store into the early 1940s when it closed. Stroop blames the advent of the Model T Ford automobile for the store's failure, stating that it gave people the ability to go elsewhere to shop. In this interview, he discusses the store's operations, as best he could recall from the perspective of a boy before World War II. He recounts the names and other details of his brother and sisters and their early life as a family. He recollects the Readyville Mill as, among other things, the source of power before the coming of the Tennessee Valley Authority and rural electrification. In fact, the meat grinder in his family store was powered by the mill. He was friends with the family of L. H. Justice, the mill owner, and mentions going to school at Kittrell School and then Woodbury High School. After a hot day of farming, it was customary for the local boys to skinny dip behind the mill dam in the Stones River. After finishing high school in 1943, he was drafted, serving two years in the navy in the Pacific Theater of World War II. After the war, he accompanied several family members to Detroit in search of employment. Before too long he returned to Readyville and took two semesters of classes at nearby Middle Tennessee State College, where he learned to fly with Miller Lanier. It was in the years after the war that Stroop also learned heating and cooling, in which he was still working at the time of this interview.

## **PHOTO**



**Stroop while in the U.S. Navy in World War II**

(Gore Research Center photograph of Stroop family photo)

## **Sketch of Irving C. Stroop, Jr.**

The life of Irving Stroop, Jr., is indicative in many ways of life in rural Middle Tennessee in the mid-twentieth century. From a modest family, Stroop and his mother and siblings struggled through the Depression after the death of his father, proprietor of I. C. Stroop and Sons grocery store on Readyville Road. With two children in tow, his parents moved Readyville from nearby Halls Hill right before young Irving was born on April 18, 1925. Stroop Sr. had farming roots but saw better prospects for his family in the thriving community of Readyville. The family store was a modest general merchandise store where a person could buy crackers from a glass-topped barrel and fresh-baked bread delivered early each morning from Murfreesboro. There was no refrigeration other than the ice available from the ice house at the Readyville Mill nearby. Stroop reveals that Readyville had an ice plant before the much larger Murfreesboro did. He'd go with his father to the ice plant and collect shavings from the big ice saw outside, from which the boys would make unflavored snow cones. Also thanks to the mill, the town enjoyed some electric lights, and the Stroop store employed an electric meat grinder as early as 1932.

The store sold gasoline from a hand-powered pump. Stroop explains how he'd pump the gasoline by hand into a large glass cylinder on the top of the pump, where it was measured before gravity pulled it down the hose to the waiting vehicle. The family's model T Ford also depended on gravity to feed its carburetor; if it was running low on gas, the car would stall on a hill between Halls Hill and Readyville.

Stroop remembers no cash register at the store, only a pull-out cash drawer. His parents extended credit to the farmers and others in the community and collected so many eggs for payment that he could describe how the family packed up in the eggs in crates for shipment to urban markets nearby. As a teenager, Stroop worked on a local farm and refers to Readyville then as a "nudist camp," referring to the habit of the local boys to skinny dip after a hot day's work in the water held back in the Stones River by the mill dam.

Mr. Stroop's father passed away when young Irving was ten, but Mrs. Stroop struggled along. She had four children, although the older two, both girls, soon were old enough to start their own lives. Business at the store thinned out over the years and finally Mrs. Stroop closed it in 1942. Mr. Stroop blames the Model T for the loss of business. The ability for people to go to Murfreesboro to shop increased the competition.

Shortly after graduating from Woodbury High School in 1943, Stroop was drafted and served most of his time in the U.S. Navy stationed aboard the battleship USS *North Carolina* in the Pacific Theater of World War II. After the war he worked in machine shops and went to school on the GI Bill. During two quarters at Middle Tennessee State College, he learned to fly and tells stories about how he learned navigation techniques in flying to Muscle Shoals and back. His education landed him in the heat and cooling business, which is the way he spent the rest of his working years. But he still remembers his childhood in Readyville, before home cooling and when refrigeration was a big block of ice from the Readyville Mill.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH  
IRVING C. STROOP, JR.**

**PRESERVE THE AREA'S RURAL QUALITIES**

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW #7**

- WILLIAMS: This is an oral history interview with Irving C. Stoop. We're at his home in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on July 30, 2009, and the interviewer is Jim Williams from MTSU. This interview is for the Preserve the Area's Rural Qualities collection. So can you start by telling me where and when you were born?
- STROOP: I was born in Readyville, April the 18th, 1925. And lived there continuous until I went to service for World War II.
- WILLIAMS: Okay. What were your parents' names?
- STROOP: I was a junior. Irving Stoop and my mother was Fannie Bell Holmes. H-O-L-M-E-S.
- WILLIAMS: Did she spell her middle name with an *e* on the end or just like the thing you ring? Fannie Bell. Or was it all one word?
- STROOP: [Chuckles] All one word I guess. F-A-N-N-I-E B-E-L-L. I guess it was two words.
- WILLIAMS: Where did they come from? Had they grown up in Readyville?
- STROOP: My father grew up in Halls Hill . . . little community, a little distance from here. My mother grew up in Readyville. Her father was a, was a sort of like a council man for an area around there.
- WILLIAMS: What did that mean, "sort of like a council man"?
- STROOP: He was a politician.
- WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. How well did you know your grandparents?
- STROOP: Not, not, not too well. My grandparents on my father's side were all gone by the time I was probably twelve, fifteen. Grandparents on my mother's side was gone by the time I was twelve I guess.
- WILLIAMS: Did you have a lot of relatives around in Readyville? Cousins and . . .?
- STROOP: On my mother's side we had a few. Not a whole lot. Well, we had several on my mother's side. Not on my father's side.

WILLIAMS: So how many brothers and sisters did your father have?

STROOP: My father had two sisters and about four brothers, about three brothers, so it made about four. There was about six of the children.

WILLIAMS: So did you have a lot of cousins on that side? It would be the Stroops, right?

STROOP: Yeah, we had . . . one Homer had two boys—Robert and Dalton. Homer lived until he was about ninety-eight. He only passed away probably four or five years ago. His wife had been gone several years, but he lived by himself up till probably the last six months of his life. He took care of things. Homer had two and the other brother was Ridley. He had three boys. Howard lived up North. He had two children.

WILLIAMS: So that's the four boys.

STROOP: That's the four boys.

WILLIAMS: Irving, Homer, Ridley, and Howard?

STROOP: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: And then you had two aunts?

STROOP: Yeah. One of them married Ed Kerr and they run a grocery store at [chuckles] over at Halls Hill. They run a grocery store at Halls Hill. The other girl was . . . she married a "sportster" and moved off to Oklahoma and lived most of her life. He pretty soon was gone and she lived a bachelorette for the rest of her life.

WILLIAMS: And how many brothers and sisters did your mother have?

STROOP: She had one, she had a half-brother that was a doctor there in Readyville, who passed away when I was very young. She had . . . she had one that lived in Memphis and one lived in Abilene, Texas. I guess that gets her brothers and she only had one sister

WILLIAMS: How'd they get so spread out?

STROOP: Well, see this---we're talking about back . . . we're talking about back in the '25s and the '30s when the Depression hit and they were, I guess they was hunting grocery money.

WILLIAMS: Okay.

STROOP: My father, my father had a, my father was large. I knew he had a nickname of "Bear," and he passed away when I was ten so I don't have a lot of memory. And I thought it was because of his size that they called him "Bear," but he was the oldest in the family on a farm over there at

Halls Hill, and the wintertime they needed a little revenue come in from outside, so he was the oldest and he went, he went out west and collected monthly payments on cook stoves. Rhode Island Range cook stoves.

WILLIAMS: Oh!

STROOP: It was cold, it was cold out there so he bought him a bearskin coat. [chuckles] I didn't, I didn't learn that until a few years before my uncle passed away. I just thought it was because he was—

WILLIAMS: Big.

STROOP: Big. In my memory.

WILLIAMS: Well, other than that, what did, while you knew him, what did he do for a living? Your father.

STROOP: We run a, he run a grocery store in Readyville. A general merchandise store.

WILLIAMS: Did it have a name? The store?

STROOP: Yeah, it was I. C. Stroop and Sons. [chuckles] So I was in business at an early age.

WILLIAMS: Is that where the store is still now? Right next to the mill?

STROOP: No, the, the store was over on what you call Readyville Street now. There's a paved loop that comes off over there by the end of the bridge. It comes back around and hits 70 again. It was down there. The only remains you can see of that is a, is a little old house there that's part of one of them stores had been, been rolled back away from the road on some logs, turned around 180 degrees, took the end out of it—was put in with wooden pegs. Cut about twenty feet out of it and pushed the end back up. So the remains of that is still there where we, where we lived until after I got out of the service. There were two, there were two general merchandise stores there, fifteen foot apart, maybe. A brick bank building and a blacksmith shop right there back in the '20s and '30s.

WILLIAMS: Could that community support two stores?

STROOP: Oh, back then it could, yeah. That was, that was wagon, that was wagon time that people didn't go very far.

WILLIAMS: What was the other store called? The competition?

STROOP: Jettons, I think.

WILLIAMS: How is that—?

STROOP: Jettons. J-E-T-T-O-N-S. Since we're doing the spelling, we spell it the way we want to. [chuckles]

WILLIAMS: Well how long did your father have this, or your family, have this store?

STROOP: Well, my, my father passed away when I was ten in '39, '36. 1936. Left mother with four, four children. And we kept it, we kept it till I, till I went to service, and by then we had---the trade had got so slow that we had eaten it up.

WILLIAMS: And do you know how long it was in business before you were born? When you father started it?

STROOP: Well, my, not, not long because I was born in Readyville, but my sister above me was born in Halls Hill, so he hadn't had the store long before.

WILLIAMS: Do you know why your parents moved to Readyville from Halls Hill?

STROOP: I guess farm life wasn't going too good and probably he thought the grass looked greener to get the store business is my assumption.

WILLIAMS: Uh-huh. Did he buy an existing store or was this from scratch?

STROOP: From remembering the building, I'd say he probably bought an existing store.

WILLIAMS: So that wasn't too long before 1925. Is that what you're saying?

STROOP: Yeah, it was about '25 because that's the year I was born and he had moved to Readyville then.

WILLIAMS: And by about '42 or so, when the war was going, it died down and you all—did you sell it off or just close it?

STROOP: No, just closed it up. The T-model Ford started working on us. People could come to Murfreesboro and they had a bigger grocery store and endeavors.

WILLIAMS: Do you know how your parents met?

STROOP: No, not really. Not really I don't.

WILLIAMS: How would you describe your father? You said he was a big fellow, but what, what else about him?

STROOP: I don't, I don't remember a lot. I, some of the relatives talked to my wife when we got married. She didn't—we was out there in the country and she'd walk down to this lady and she talked like he gave my mother a hard life.

WILLIAMS: Do you know if he was respected in the community?

STROOP: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, we was church going and . . . you know a lot of things at home and a lot of outside are different.

WILLIAMS: So, the man—are you saying the man the public saw at the store could have been different than the husband at home?

STROOP: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, could have been.

WILLIAMS: So you owned the store. Was he involved in politics? Or anything else in the community?

STROOP: No, nothing, nothing but church.

WILLIAMS: And what church did you all go to?

STROOP: Went to New Hope Church of Christ up on 70 there, between there and Woodbury. And it's still, there's one still there. They finally, finally built them, finally built them a new building, oh, maybe fifteen years ago. Otherwise they was meeting in the old church that had been there for many years.

WILLIAMS: And how would you describe your mother?

STROOP: Kind. Loving. Almost perfect.

WILLIAMS: Was she a quiet person? Outgoing?

STROOP: She was a quiet person.

WILLIAMS: Did she have a sense of humor?

STROOP: Well, lowly. Not a great, not a great big one. She was pretty well business. Particularly after my father died and she had the burden on it.

WILLIAMS: At least when he was alive, who did the discipline in the family?

STROOP: Whichever one caught us first. [chuckles]

WILLIAMS: So they shared that job, huh?

STROOP: Yeah. The, the, the county, the county used to, the county nurses, health, health nurses used to come around and give inoculations and the house was right close to the store, but I was done long gone to the house hiding under a bed when they found me to go get mine. [chuckles]

WILLIAMS: What else did you do to deserve a whipping or however they punished you?

STROOP: Well, I don't know, we was kids I guess and done things that we wasn't

supposed to.

WILLIAMS: So you mentioned a sister and there's four of you all together? So can you tell me about your brothers and sisters?

STROOP: Well, we, we were very fortunate, all the four of us lived until the youngest one was eighty, and the older one passed away, the oldest sister passed away about six months ago at the age of eighty-six, eighty-seven.

WILLIAMS: What was her name?

STROOP: Frances.

WILLIAMS: And she married?

STROOP: She . . . she went North when the war broke out and up in the Detroit area and worked at the bomber plant or something defense and things. Then after the war, she and I and my brother-in-law, the oldest sister wasn't married at that time, decided we was gonna go up there and make our fortune and my oldest sister stayed for—worked for—she got a job for the state of Michigan at a, at a mental hospital, but she was a bookkeeper, accountant, took care of inventory in supplies coming in to run and feed the people. So she didn't, she didn't work in the medical end. But after she was there a while, she married one of the cooks over, for the hospital. So she . . . she was on up in the late twenties I guess when she got married.

WILLIAMS: What was her married name?

STROOP: Rentschler. R-E-N-T-S-C-H-L-I-E-R. A German name. Her, her husband, her husband's mother didn't speak much English and if she and her husband want to see his mother, she done all of her talking in German so my sister couldn't tell what her opinion was of her. [chuckles]

WILLIAMS: So she was the oldest.

STROOP: She was the oldest.

WILLIAMS: Who came next?

STROOP: Rachel. Well we had---they lost two, but that shouldn't probably come in this. Rachel was the next one of the four. She was about two and a half years younger.

WILLIAMS: And her married name?

STROOP: Elrod.

WILLIAMS: And did she stay in the area here?

STROOP: Nashville.

WILLIAMS: And then are you next?

STROOP: Then I'm next.

WILLIAMS: And then there is a younger . . .

STROOP: Younger brother of three years behind me.

WILLIAMS: And what's his name?

STROOP: Ernest.

WILLIAMS: And you said he died when he was eighty, is that right?

STROOP: No, no, he's still alive. I said, I said we all lived—

WILLIAMS: Oh. Okay. At least until you were eighty.

STROOP: Until all of us at the same time was eighty plus.

WILLIAMS: So three of you are still alive, or just you and your brother?

STROOP: No, three of us is still alive. I was the only one of four that kept our mate. The others lost their mate several years. The oldest sister come home and found her husband hanging in the garage one night when, when he'd, and the other sister's husband has been gone, fifteen, twenty years, and my brother's wife has been gone probably twelve.

WILLIAMS: Well, that's too bad. So Frances was born in Halls Hill?

STROOP: Yes.

WILLIAMS: You were born in Readyville, and the other two were . . .?

STROOP: Yes, Rachel was born in Halls Hill.

WILLIAMS: Oh, okay. So the two girls were in Halls Hill and the two boys in Readyville.

STROOP: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: How would you describe the store, just what it looked like in the building? How big it was and all of those things.

STROOP: Well, I'd say it was probably twenty, twenty-five foot wide and fifty, at least fifty foot long with . . . the shelving in it was yellow poplar, twelve by fourteen inch wide boards, no knots cause we used a lot of the lumber after the, after the store was tore down. We, we, we, we sold crackers out of a big box with a glass lid on it to keep the air out and all. We sold salted fish in barrels. The salt would preserve them. We didn't have any refrigeration. That was, that was before low people, low income people

had them. We did have an electric meat grinder in Readyville in 1932. Now, we got, we got our power from a generator at the mill. And they run, they run some poles of light bulbs, light bulbs was mainly all anybody had, and run them down, down to the end across the river, across, and then around Readyville Road.

WILLIAMS: Was that as long as you remember or do you remember when that happened? The lights coming in.

STROOP: The Readyville Mill lights was there as long as I can remember. Now Tennessee Power was the forerunner of TVA. We had lights, refrigerator at the house, washing machines when I was in high school. The power probably come through there when I was twelve, fifteen years old.

WILLIAMS: So was this the kind of store where the clerks pulled down everything for the customers or could they wander through and pick up what they needed?

STROOP: They could wander through and pick up what they needed.

WILLIAMS: So it was on shelves out in the open, not behind a counter or something?

STROOP: Yeah. Well some things was. Some things, some things was behind the counter.

WILLIAMS: Did you have one of those old-fashioned cash registers with the numbers that popped up?

STROOP: I guess they started out with a pull-out drawer. Yeah, I don't remember us ever having a cash register.

WILLIAMS: Did your parents keep accounts in a book? Did they extend credit to people? Or was it strictly cash?

STROOP: Oh, yeah. No, they, the farmers, the farmers run a year, run a year account.

WILLIAMS: Would they ever barter?

STROOP: I don't, I don't know . . . if you mean barter, they would bring eggs and things in to sell them, yeah. That would be bartered. We, we shipped, we shipped a lot of eggs. That was, that was one of the things people paid their groceries with. We made, we bought knocked down, knocked down wooden crates divided in the center and each side of that center there'd be a layer of three dozen eggs on each side of it, and then that would stack on up till, oh, two foot, two and a half foot tall.

WILLIAMS: So would that be layered with straw or did you have the things like now with the egg carton sort of things?

STROOP: I'm sure we didn't have them made like they are now, but they had to be something to keep them from breaking there.

WILLIAMS: Where would you ship them to?

STROOP: To big cities. [chuckles] I wasn't hardly in charge of that at that time.

WILLIAMS: I have to ask.

STROOP: Oh, yeah, I understand! I understand! No, but we'd ship them out.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. Where did your parents buy the groceries that they sold?

STROOP: There was two, there was two wholesale stores here in Murfreesboro. And they traveled.

WILLIAMS: So they would come out and . . .

STROOP: Yeah, the salesman would come by and take orders and then they would deliver.

WILLIAMS: Did your father or mother ever have to go any farther away than to Nashville or someplace to buy whatever fabrics or clothing that they might have been selling?

STROOP: No.

WILLIAMS: So it all came through the Murfreesboro distributors?

STROOP: Yeah, most all of them came through Murfreesboro distributors.

WILLIAMS: So they were selling groceries. Did they also have fabric and clothing?

STROOP: Well, not any, not any, well I guess they probably sold overalls. I'm sure they sold overalls and shirts and materials, materials to make clothing out of, but not any . . . I'd say the only assembled clothing would have been menswear, overall shirts.

WILLIAMS: Did that include shoes?

STROOP: I would say they sold some shoes.

WILLIAMS: Did you work at the store pretty much from the time you could?

STROOP: Yeah, if I wasn't at school or somewhere. In the summer after I got into high school, I hired out on the farm.

WILLIAMS: What would you do around the store?

STROOP: Oh, anything that I was old enough to handle. I had a—after I got to be a teenager I had a job up at five in the morning to meet the bread truck when

he come through.

WILLIAMS: And would that come from Murfreesboro?

STROOP: Yeah. It would be bread made in Murfreesboro. Sallie Ann I believe is what it was back then. When I was tall as a—my head was as tall as that door knob over there.

WILLIAMS: About three feet?

STROOP: I got caught between a door knob at the store building and the delivery truck bed, with bolts in the side like farm beds, and couldn't move till he moved that truck.

WILLIAMS: So you almost got your head crushed?

STROOP: I almost got my head crushed. Very close. It was the air in the tires and the width of the walk. He released his break to start it and it rolled back a little bit and I was behind him. Course, that was entertainment to me to go out there and take stuff off the back of the truck and carry it in and let the driver pick at me, you know, cause we was young kids.

WILLIAMS: Do you have an idea what a good week or a good month that the store would have brought in?

STROOP: No idea. Not a whole lot.

WILLIAMS: Do you have an idea what your parents made in the Depression years?

STROOP: No idea. It was slim. It was slim. Because after my father passed away, I remember us begging mother to buy us a radio and couldn't do it until so-and-so sold his corn, so it was tight.

WILLIAMS: How did your father die?

STROOP: We don't know. It was probably some kind of heart problem and it was way before they knew much about that.

WILLIAMS: Do you know how old he was when he passed away?

STROOP: He was forty-nine.

WILLIAMS: So he was born in 1880 or something.

STROOP: Yeah, something.

WILLIAMS: Was your mother about the same age as he?

STROOP: Yeah, pretty close.

MRS. STROOP: [in the background] Wasn't he forty-five when he died?

STROOP: Yeah, forty-nine.

MRS. STROOP: I thought he was forty-five.

STROOP: Okay.

MRS. STROOP: From what they told me. But it was in that year somewhere along.

WILLIAMS: The store, was it a brick building? You talked about a log building earlier.

STROOP: No, it was, it was I guess you call it weatherboard.

WILLIAMS: Glass on the front?

STROOP: Oh, no. [chuckles] Window. Window and a door. No, this was back before glass-front stores except in big cities. We had a, we did, we did sell gas but the gas pump didn't require any electricity. You had a big glass cylinder up high graduated in gallons, and it had a hand pump handle on the side and they'd tell you how many gallons they want and you work that handle back and forth until you put the gallons in the glass container above and then you stop pumping and took the nozzle over and let it all drain out.

WILLIAMS: Seems like that would be a good thing today. Sometimes I wonder if I'm getting what I paid for, right?

STROOP: Yeah, it measured it.

WILLIAMS: And I won't even ask you how cheap gas was.

STROOP: Probably twelve, thirteen cents.

WILLIAMS: Was it a particular kind of gas? Were there brand named stations then?

STROOP: I'm sure it was a brand named gas, but I don't know what it was.

WILLIAMS: Did your . . . did your parents . . . well you talked about wagons earlier, but did they have a car?

STROOP: Yeah, far back as I remember, my daddy had a T-model at first and we went to Halls Hill every Sunday evening to see his parents and at a little hill on the gravel road over there that you'll see . . . if the gas was too low coming up hill, the car wouldn't run because your gas tank, your gas tank was out in front of your windshield under the cover over your engine up high. Of course the gas run gravity into the carburetor and if you were nearly out of gas and you were going uphill, then your gas was run back from your pipe that would run down to your carburetor. And later, later, later, later we had, later we had a, had a Buick that after my dad got to where he couldn't drive, it sat in the barn shed. My mother couldn't drive. It sat in the barn shed and the river got up and ruined it. The river, the

river would get up and get across the bridge and across the pavement there to where you couldn't drive on the road across there at times.

WILLIAMS: Did it ever flood the mill?

STROOP: Yeah, it got up in the bottom floor of the mill and there's a house sitting there on the, on the road right where you turn to go into the mill and it'd get up in it every time and the people would stack their stuff up or something and still live there. Now they say . . . some of the people that live up there say that the river had never been up enough to get in the mill or in that house since the end of the dam washed out. I don't, I don't, I don't gather, once the river was filled up to the top of the dam, it looks like it would flow just as good as it would without it. Of course it had a little resistance there. The water above the dam would be, oh, back when we was teenagers we could, we could stand up at probably four and a half, five foot water that held above the dam.

WILLIAMS: Was that a local swimming hole or fishing hole?

STROOP: That was a nudist camp. [chuckles]

WILLIAMS: Well, I haven't heard this about Readyville.

STROOP: [chuckles] Oh, yeah, it was swimming hole. It was a, it was a, us boys, couldn't none of us afford bathing togs, so it was pretty well known what was going on, so there was a bunch of trees down on one side. A few girls would come sometimes, but they'd stop and blow the car horn.

WILLIAMS: Well, that was nice to have close by.

STROOP: Oh, yeah, that was—we worked farm in the summer. That's where we took our, where we washed off.

WILLIAMS: And you said your house was close to the store?

STROOP: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: Was it on the same lot or adjacent . . . to the store?

STROOP: It was close to the house. It was the closest house there. Yeah, it was close, it was . . . fifty, sixty feet, something.

WILLIAMS: And the store next door, was there anything really different about it?

STROOP: Just different owners.

WILLIAMS: So why would people go to that store instead of your store?

STROOP: Well, I guess it might have varied somewhat what we carried. When Purina Feed came out, my father signed on for that and carried that. I don't

know if the guy next door was into the feed business or not, but the general assesses [?], I guess, on the hardware line and . . . non-perishable foods.

WILLIAMS: Well, let's talk some more about the mill. Were you around the mill a lot?

STROOP: Yeah, the owner, the owner when I was a teenager, had sons and we played around the mill some.

WILLIAMS: Who was that?

STROOP: L. H. Justice.

WILLIAMS: And what were his sons?

STROOP: The younger one was more our age was named Paul. And he had two older ones, but they was . . . one of them was around there. One of them wasn't, the oldest one wasn't around there.

WILLIAMS: Did you like to go into the mill and watch the work?

STROOP: Yeah, yeah, we liked to go in there and see all the big belts running, running on the big pulleys going across the, across the building and see what, what was going on. They, they ground corn meal, they ground wheat for flour, and they come up with some, come up with some feeds that they ground and mixed.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever work at the mill?

STROOP: I worked one week cleaning sacks, getting ready for the wheat harvest. They had a large warehouse there where the farmers could bring their grains in there and I guess they would weigh them in and they'd store it there. And . . . So they worked through and emptied the sacks over a period of time. I remember he hired me one time to clean them sacks up for him and find the ones that had holes and stuff.

WILLIAMS: Where did the Justices live?

STROOP: They lived around on Readyville Street.

WILLIAMS: Did anyone ever live at the mill in those buildings to the side?

STROOP: No, you get back there at the mill, the building on the right side, right there was a granary. The next building up was an ice plant that frozen three hundred blocks, three hundred pound blocks of ice like modern-day ice plants do. We had an ice plant in Readyville before Murfreesboro had one because of the mill and generator.

WILLIAMS: Did that mean people had iceboxes at home?

STROOP: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And there was, did the mill sell the ice directly or did it, was it more of a wholesale?

STROOP: Oh, it was more directly.

WILLIAMS: Was there a delivery system?

STROOP: Yeah, there was a delivery, delivery system. We had, we had cards that had holes in them, a hundred—one, one, one hole would be a hundred pounds, another hole would be seventy-five, another would be fifty, another would be twenty-five. Whatever you want was what number you hung on the nail. But us kids like to, like for father to go to the ice plant and pick up a block because they had a big saw out there that sawed this ice into from three hundred pound block to hundreds, to fifties, to twenty-fives and it was, it was right on the edge of the drive in there and we liked to go there and get the shavings. So we had snow cones pretty early in life.

WILLIAMS: What did you put in them?

STROOP: Just ice. [chuckles] We didn't have any flavoring in them.

WILLIAMS: Didn't have any RC Cola or anything like that to put in there?

STROOP: Well, some people did. We didn't, I didn't drink very many—RC, RC was the main thing through there that I remember. Probably that and Coke.

WILLIAMS: Did you sell that at the store?

STROOP: No, we didn't.

WILLIAMS: Did you have, well let me think more about the mill. So there's the granary and then the ice house. And now there's a little house kind of up on the slope behind. Was that there?

STROOP: That wasn't part of the mill.

WILLIAMS: And where the filling station is now, was that a filling station?

STROOP: Where the grocery store is?

WILLIAMS: Uh-huh.

STROOP: That was a, that was a car repair shop there.

WILLIAMS: And the post office, was it where it is now?

STROOP: No, that hadn't been there forever. It was, it was back up sort of across from the mill. There was another grocery there. There was another store

there.

WILLIAMS: Had a lot of grocery stores in Readyville.

STROOP: Readyville was on the, Readyville was on the map back then. A lot of things going on. A lot of business, whatever it was.

WILLIAMS: Well, where did you go to school?

STROOP: I went to Kittrell ten years. Woodbury the last two. Rutherford and Cannon County runs down the road up there. One big house down there on the river, down across the road from the post office diagonally, the county line runs through the middle of the house.

WILLIAMS: It doesn't follow the river exactly?

STROOP: No, no, it doesn't follow the river.

WILLIAMS: Wonder if that complicates things on the taxes.

STROOP: Colonel Ready built that big house. That's where Readyville . . .

WILLIAMS: You talking about the brick.

STROOP: Yeah, the big two story brick down there.

WILLIAMS: Were there still any Readys around when you were growing up?

STROOP: Yeah, there's several people up there—well, no, most of them are Reeds. Most of them are Reeds. No, I don't remember any.

WILLIAMS: What about blacks in the area. Were there many?

STROOP: There was several families. They were . . . over behind the mill there was mainly where they lived. There was one family that lived back over away from that section, but most of them, most of them lived over there in a group.

WILLIAMS: Did you have much to do with them?

STROOP: Ah, the one that—after my father died, we didn't have any car or any way to go, just where I could walk. The one that lived back over there closer to us. Yeah, we played with the boys.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember the family's name?

STROOP: Bud Brandon. He has . . . he has a relative that is 102 year old that's a custodial at the Rutherford County Courthouse and still gets his drivers' license under the counter and drives his truck to work. [chuckles]

WILLIAMS: So they were related?

STROOP: They were related some. I . . . I knew for several years that one was over there and I kept planning to go, to go, to go and talk to him. And about a year and a half ago, I went over there one evening about the time he was coming to work, and talked to him a little while and I talked to him a little bit about the mill and that somebody'd bought it and was cleaning it up. I asked him if he'd like to go up there. Oh, yeah, he'd like to go. So I got his phone number and everything and told him that some Saturday, if I could find out when the guy would be up there and be open, I'd probably ask him if he'd like for me to pick him up and take him up there. "Oh yeah, we'd spend all day," he said. But a few days later I got to thinking about him being 101 at that time about the risk of him getting hurt and I decided I shouldn't do that. But he bought a house, the one that's 100 year old, he bought a house after he was right at 100 on a thirty-year note! [chuckles]

WILLIAMS: That's called optimism, right?

STROOP: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: On the bank's part especially, I guess. Did the black folks in the area come into the store?

STROOP: Yeah. Oh, yeah. There wasn't no, there wasn't no friction to amount to anything.

WILLIAMS: But you didn't go to the same school? Was there a . . .

STROOP: No, they . . . we didn't go to the same school. They had a school there somewhere.

WILLIAMS: What was Kittrell like from about 1930 to '40? Is that when you, yeah?

STROOP: Yeah I left, war broke out '41. I left Kittrell School in '39.

WILLIAMS: Did you graduate from high school in . . .

STROOP: In Woodbury.

WILLIAMS: In '41 then?

STROOP: Yeah. No in '43.

WILLIAMS: Forty-three, yeah.

STROOP: Right in the middle of the war.

WILLIAMS: What was Kittrell like? Was it a big school?

STROOP: It was a modern brick building.

WILLIAMS: Did it have separate grades?

STROOP: It would have two grades in a room. In the grammar, in the lower school. In the eighth down it would have two grades in a room.

WILLIAMS: One teacher with two grades?

STROOP: Yeah. It had a, it had a coal, it had a coal furnace of some kind down in the basement there, so it had . . . I don't remember having to have a pot-belly stove in each room or anything. I know, I know when I was in high school, they had to put a new heating system in and they had to do a lot of blasting under the building. We'd get some good breaks then. But we had a, we had a, had a water pump out back, that had a pipe on it that run down. It had about probably eight holes drilled in it and somebody had to pump and they could drink water coming up out of it.

WILLIAMS: Wow! Do you think you got a good education there?

STROOP: Well, it got me by. [chuckles] I don't, I don't, the kids today, the kids today are doing in second grade, in my opinion, what I was doing in fourth or fifth.

WILLIAMS: What were the subjects? What did you like to do?

STROOP: Well, I didn't, I didn't like, well I guess arithmetic was, would have been my lesser evil. Spelling, spelling if I'd had to pass spelling with a good grade, I'd never got out of school. That's where I made my low grades was in spelling.

WILLIAMS: Was there science and social studies?

STROOP: Yeah, we had a, we had a science teacher and we poured stuff together and made the smoke out the top of the glass. Yeah, we had a science department.

WILLIAMS: Art and music?

STROOP: Music would have been on a . . . a lady or somebody coming in the school building and giving private lessons and stuff.

WILLIAMS: How did you get to school?

STROOP: Well, you're supposed to walk through the snow barefooted over the hill, but we had, we had a homemade school bus that we rode.

WILLIAMS: Homemade?

STROOP: Yep. Yep, they had an old chassis and they built a wooden bed on it with a bench seat down each side and maybe one in the middle, and the sides had openings about two foot tall and had canvas curtains that rolled down over them in the wintertime. So they were drafty in the wintertime.

WILLIAMS: Were there social events or clubs or anything like that at school?

STROOP: No, they would have a play or, they would have a . . . what they called a “cakewalk” or something, and they’d have little, little, little primitive games they’d play and things to get together. There was a school above, grade school above Readyville there a little ways, that always had a picnic the Fourth of July that was pretty well made and they’d have ball games and climbing the greased pole and they’d have concessions and stuff.

WILLIAMS: Were there sports in school?

STROOP: Basketball. Kittrell’s basketball was . . .

WILLIAMS: So there was a gym?

STROOP: Yeah. Yeah there was a gym building down separate.

WILLIAMS: So would you have PE class or was the gym just for extra sports?

STROOP: Just for the ones that wanted to and was athletic enough at the game.

WILLIAMS: Was that boys and girls that played basketball?

STROOP: Yeah, it was separate, but yeah, they had teams for both.

WILLIAMS: Did you play?

STROOP: Nah, I wasn’t much, I wasn’t much at that. My sister above me and my brother both played basketball. I was sort of hampered on going anywhere for transportation. My sister made friend with the boys and they’d come haul her and my brother made friends with some boys and they’d come haul him. But I lost out, I lost out on my teenage growing up days of running around having fun.

WILLIAMS: Well, you mentioned after your father died you didn’t have a car. Is that because your mother didn’t—she never drove?

STROOP: No, she never drove.

WILLIAMS: So she was always dependent on someone?

STROOP: Yeah, we, after he died, her first cousin, they only had one child and they had a double-seated Chevrolet and they’d pick us up and take us to church every Sunday, so that put five of us in the back seat. [chuckles] But they would pick us up and take us to church.

WILLIAMS: Well, speaking of church, what was it like in the Church of Christ back then? Much different than today or similar?

STROOP: No, it’s similar. It hadn’t, well it’s, there’s groups of them that are drifting.

There's group of them that are drifting and wanting to, wanting to entice numbers.

WILLIAMS: Were there other churches to choose from in the area?

STROOP: Not, not right close. There was other churches around, over at Halls Hill over there, there was a Presbyterian I think and . . . I think there was a Baptist over there and . . . course back then we, the buildings was one big room and you cornered off to have classes. And of course you didn't have preaching every Sunday like we, like we do now and things.

WILLIAMS: So it wasn't big enough to have a full-time minister?

STROOP: No.

WILLIAMS: What would you do the Sundays when he wasn't there?

STROOP: Well, we'd have singing and classes.

WILLIAMS: Just a service without the preaching?

STROOP: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever go with friends to those other churches?

STROOP: No, I didn't.

WILLIAMS: Did you know any Catholics when you were growing up?

STROOP: No, I didn't.

WILLIAMS: So after Kittrell you went to Woodbury High School?

STROOP: Went up there two years, yeah.

WILLIAMS: Was it called Cannon County High School then? Or Woodbury?

STROOP: It's called Woodbury. My cousin told me they're starting woodworking up there.

WILLIAMS: Now?

STROOP: No, when I was in high school there. That was one reason they told me to change schools. He went to Woodbury.

WILLIAMS: So you could have stayed at Kittrell in the upper school?

STROOP: Yeah. Yeah. Well when I left Kittrell in my class it was down to like twenty, maybe. At the most. And Woodbury was, got up there, there was like eighty.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember any of your teachers at either of those schools?

STROOP: Well, in civics class that we took, we took what they called civics versus the girls taking home ec. The girls all had to take home ec back then. We had a young lady teacher that . . . Margaret something, we sort of give a rough time. [chuckles]

WILLIAMS: Were most of your teachers women?

STROOP: Most, most, mostly. Science teacher was a man and the principal was a man. Most of the other teachers were women.

WILLIAMS: Were your parents well educated?

STROOP: No. Minimum.

WILLIAMS: Did they think it was important for their children?

STROOP: To go through high school, yes. Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: So they encouraged, well your mother I guess would have been the . . .

STROOP: She said, "The bus will be here. Be out there." [chuckles]

WILLIAMS: Was it like now where parents were expected to go to conferences and meet with teachers and that sort of thing?

STROOP: Well, yeah, it was some. Yeah they had what they called PTA. Parent teachers. It was some.

WILLIAMS: How did you get to Woodbury for high school?

STROOP: I rode a different bus. [chuckles]

WILLIAMS: Was it a homemade bus or a real one?

STROOP: It may have been a real bus. An old one that somebody bought from a big town.

WILLIAMS: What was the high school building like back then?

STROOP: The one at Woodbury was a pretty good size, a brick building. They had football there. They had a football team and the basketball teams.

WILLIAMS: So other than that and the wood shop, what was different about it from Kittrell?

STROOP: Oh, not a lot. Not a lot.

WILLIAMS: Did you involve yourself in any clubs or after school activities?

STROOP: No, because I didn't have transportation.

WILLIAMS: You had to catch that bus.

STROOP: Yep.

WILLIAMS: Did you, were you able to go in on Friday nights and watch the football games? Things like that?

STROOP: No, not much. A few occasions I would go. I'd have to go out to the highway and catch a Greyhound bus. We had a Greyhound bus run through Readyville about every . . . when I was a . . . after the war, after the war, well, when I was in high school, I caught the bus a couple of, a few times, not many, and went up for a school activity. Back then, if you wanted to catch a bus, you just stand on the side of the road and flag your hand and he'd pull that thing over and pick you up and you'd pay for your ticket and move on.

WILLIAMS: How often did you get to Murfreesboro when you were growing up?

STROOP: Hardly ever.

WILLIAMS: Nashville?

STROOP: Never. [laughs]

WILLIAMS: Do you remember the first time you were in Nashville?

STROOP: No, I don't. Talking about the bigger cities, when I was about in the fifth or sixth grade, my mother's first cousin had a brother in Saint Louis and they was going to visit them for a few days, and they only had, they had one son there that was about a year something older than I am, and they asked me to go to Saint Louis with them on that trip. And they had escalators in Saint Louis and so I come back to school after Christmas, and they had show-and-tell and I'd tell them about that stairway that moved and they all thought I made all of this up.

WILLIAMS: Did you ride up there on a train?

STROOP: No, we went in the car.

WILLIAMS: Were there trains in that part of the county? Passenger trains?

STROOP: The train come through Murfreesboro.

WILLIAMS: But not between there and Woodbury or . . .?

STROOP: No, the track don't go there.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. So if you wanted to catch the train, you'd have to go to

Murfreesboro?

STROOP: Yeah. Yeah, you didn't flag him. [chuckles]

WILLIAMS: Well, I've heard people talk about trains from Christiana to Murfreesboro and . . .

STROOP: But the track goes through Christiana.

WILLIAMS: Yeah.

STROOP: The track leaving here goes through Christiana on up Tullahoma, Winchester, Cowan.

WILLIAMS: That's the NL and . . .

STROOP: Saint Louis.

WILLIAMS: Yeah, NL and SL? So were you aware . . . well, obviously you were aware of the Depression, but what did that mean in reality to your family?

STROOP: It meant tight times. Tight times. We went to the store there, a lot of our sandwiches was, a lot of our lunches we took to school I remember was bananas, sandwiches that was too ripe to sell.

WILLIAMS: Just mushy bananas on bread, that was it?

STROOP: Well, sliced banana and mayonnaise on bread, yeah. Yeah, it was tight.

WILLIAMS: I've never had one of those.

STROOP: You should try one.

WILLIAMS: Do you still eat . . .

STROOP: Sometimes I will. I haven't in a long time, but my wife, my wife will eat a banana without slicing rolled up in bread with mayonnaise for breakfast some mornings.

WILLIAMS: Were there other things that really hit home or affected you personally about the Depression or the New Deal? Did you, did any of those programs come to Readyville and help people?

STROOP: I remember we made, we made mattresses one day. That Readyville School up there, some kind of program come through there with materials and . . .

WILLIAMS: So was that to give a little work to people? Was that the idea?

STROOP: No, it was to have, to be able to have a new mattress.

WILLIAMS: So was that a cotton mattress?

STROOP: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: Did, now the streets in Readyville, the highway was paved I take it.

STROOP: Yeah. As far as, as far as I can remember it was. I don't know when it was paved, but we lived on gravel road and everybody that lived on the gravel road had to, was supposed to furnish a wagon and team and haul the gravel off the sandbar, up at the dam to keep the road graveled.

WILLIAMS: So the county didn't come in and do that?

STROOP: No, the county didn't do that. And I remember the, I remember the beds in the wagons they used, the flooring wasn't nailed down and if they could get the gravel off enough to turn the board up sideways, then they shoveled it down to the opening in the bed.

WILLIAMS: That's pretty smart.

STROOP: Now we had one, one thing that I thought was unique there in Readyville. We had a beef club. They'd take a beef and divide it into twelve sections which they would call a "share." Twelve shares. Now, a big family, they divided them shares down as small as a quarter, so if four people had a quarter of a share, that meant that they furnished one beef, but they had, they had meat for twelve weeks. Fresh meat for twelve weeks, and it rotated to all the different pieces or portions of the cow. It had its own little clubhouse there and butchering block and every Saturday there, in the certain time in the summer for twelve weeks there, they'd kill beef.

WILLIAMS: So they had their own building for that?

STROOP: Yeah, it was open air and wasn't fly-proof but . . .

WILLIAMS: Did you all have enough land to have stock like that?

STROOP: No, not at Readyville. We raised a few pigs, but my dad raised a few pigs, that's all.

WILLIAMS: Did he or your mother ever have farm land out . . .

STROOP: Before . My father was raised on a farm in Halls Hill. A fair little amount of land.

WILLIAMS: Were your parents—did they keep up with politics?

STROOP: No. My mother didn't. My father might have a little bit, but my mother wasn't interested or involved in that.

WILLIAMS: Would they . . . did you all take the newspaper?

STROOP: Yeah, we did. It was sort of a little amusing thing related to that. We took the *Banner* and the people across the road took the *Tennessean* and they had different comics, so about five o'clock Sunday evening, it could be them or it could be us, we'd grab the comics and go trade them.

WILLIAMS: What did your family think of Franklin Roosevelt?

STROOP: I don't have any idea at all. I was, I was in Honolulu in the service, and they announced that Roosevelt was over on an island over there that was going to make a speech. If we wanted to go we could go, but I was gonna have to put my good shoes on and I didn't go. [chuckles] He done, he done, he changed the country.

WILLIAMS: Would you be able to label your parents Democrats or Republicans?

STROOP: No. No idea. I was only ten, you know. My mother, my mother was nothing . . .

WILLIAMS: Did she even vote?

STROOP: I doubt it. I doubt if she did.

WILLIAMS: Did anybody you know go off to the CCC?

STROOP: Yeah. Yeah, I got a, I had a first cousin in Halls Hill that went off to the three Cs and he got to spinal meningitis or something somewhere and was sick a long time. But he lived a long time.

WILLIAMS: Was that something you ever thought about doing?

STROOP: No. No, when I got out of high school, of course the war, the war was going on and all that stuff was shut down.

WILLIAMS: Yeah.

STROOP: When World War II hit, we didn't build any new civilian automobiles for three years there.

WILLIAMS: How did you find out about Pearl Harbor?

STROOP: Oh, over the radio.

WILLIAMS: What was the reaction in the community?

STROOP: Well, I guess real disturbed. Anxious. Think we was into a war.

WILLIAMS: Did you know guys who volunteered and went off pretty quickly? Or did they wait?

STROOP: No, the majority . . . ninety percent was ready to go. I'd say ninety percent

of the people was ready. “It’s my job right now” is the way I felt about it. “I’m fixin’ to go.” I tried to volunteer for the air force, but they had some kind of a test they had to take. It had a lot of—best I remember it had a bunch of current events stuff on it that I didn’t know and I didn’t hardly make the grade and they told me to come back in a month and take it again if you wanted to. Well, before that month was over, Uncle had sent me my congratulations. “Congratulation, you have been selected to serve your country. Please report to Oglethorpe, Georgia, July the 5th.” So from April 18th to July 5th, that’s how long I was eighteen at home.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever have any thoughts of going to college right after high school?

STROOP: When I come home, I told myself, “Go to school. Go to school.” So I come down and talked to the veterans, they had a bunch of advisors and all they called them. I had, I had worked around a service station up there with my mother’s cousin’s husband, and helped him a little bit on working on cars and diesel was really, really new back then and I talked to, I inquired a little bit about trying to go to a diesel school and I remember the advisors saying that the only diesel around much was at tugboats over on the Mississippi, and the word they get, the old timers didn’t care too much for these young squirts that thought they knew what was going on. So I went out to, I went out to the college. They was supposed to have electrical course. In the summer I went to talk to them. They was supposed to have an electrical course in the fall semester. It started and they said, “You ought to go take preliminaries. If you ever go to work you won’t quit and go.” So I went, I went, I went out there. The summer quarter was busted up into two halves, but they had just started machine shop. That’s working with metal and lathe and they had wood working and welding and drafting. That’s where I, that’s where I settled down in, for two semesters. So I went to two in the summer and I went in the fall semester. They didn’t have the electrical class started but I took, I took machine shop, and I know wood working. Anything to stay out of the book stuff and I saw that I could go out and fly the plane on course so I went out and learned how to solo out there on the grass strip where the buildings are now and—

WILLIAMS: That was after the war?

STROOP: Yeah. And then—see I wasn’t old enough to go to college until after the war.

WILLIAMS: Right.

STROOP: And then I got discouraged and . . . my older sister and my brother-in-law of the other sister got to talking about going to Michigan up there where she had been during the war. So we went up there and my sister got her job working for the state, what I mentioned earlier, taking care of that

warehouse supplies, bookkeeping, and my brother-in-law went up there, me and him roomed together in a sleeping room and my sister had a sleeping room. And we was just making enough to pay room and board and stuff like that, so we didn't bring, we planned on bringing his wife and my mother, you know, all up there. We was gonna improve our living conditions, but it didn't work out too good. So my sister had a baby, so my brother-in-law come back.

My brother come up there during that time, and . . . he was going to stay and he come in, he come in one night and had a little belt with a pair of pliers and things on it and I said, "Well, what you do today?" "A red one and a blue one a red one and a blue one." Did you ever see the commentator on a starter or motor, the wires and the copper on the end and spaces between it where the bushes run? Well, he was putting them wires in them notch on that commentator. He lasted two weeks to get his paycheck and he came back home. When me and my brother-in-law was there, we had an old '41 Chevrolet. So we went up there, we moved, got room close to a house that was my sister knew the people from previous up there and, in fact, we couldn't park cars on the street we lived on, it was through street, a state route. So we parked the car down in front of his house. So I was working, he worked, a guy down there, worked days. I was able to get a job at the same place on the evening shift. My brother-in-law got a job on night shift. They got started about, getting up was, going home and him getting to work and that wasn't going to work this, I went and had another car key made. [chuckles] I told my friend down there, "In the morning, when you get ready to work," I said, "You take this key and that Chevrolet and go to work." And I said, "My brother-in-law can come home in it, and then I'll come to work in the evening and the car will be there when you get off from work." [chuckles] "So it will be at your house when you need to go to work and it will be at the work when you need to go home." So that worked good for a while, but I saw a paper ad for refrigeration school and I . . . it ticked me, "I wonder what makes that work?" The only connection I had was an old—we had a refrigerator at home by then, and it was a used one that some of our kinfolks give my mother, but it had a knocking noise and it had an electric motor and a belt and had a round dome with a shaft coming out with a pulley on it and it made a lot . . . pretty much noise. So I had gotten on days at that time, and so I read the paper for a few minutes at a time and would go back to work and I sort of just forgot about it and sometime later I saw another paper and it dawned on me. "I'll see if that still ad is in there" and it was, and I could get my tuition paid, the government would pay my tuition. The government would pay me a little living expense. It wasn't enough to float me up there, so I had to work nights in the automobile plant and go to this jip joint to school that these people was running, that the government was financing them. For six months, I took three months electricity and three months working on a household refrigerator and some old soda fountain

equipment stuff. So when I got, I worked nights and went to school there for six months and I was about sick up there eating out and I decided I had, had better go home. I had a job offer in Detroit, but I thought I better get out of here and go home.

WILLIAMS: Did you like Detroit?

STROOP: No. Not really. I was just there.

WILLIAMS: So is that how you got interested in heating and cooling?

STROOP: That's where I got started, yeah.

WILLIAMS: And have you done that ever since?

STROOP: Yeah, it was mostly, mostly what I did for two years was automatic washing machines. Wasn't much, wasn't much refrigeration around Murfreesboro and stuff. Some small stores that we worked at had meat cases and stuff, but most of my stuff was automatic washing machines and dryers and stuff. I was working on GI Bill where the government give me a little bit and we had a program at the man we was working for was supposed to pay me forty-seven cents an hour, I believe to start with and the government give me a little bit more that made me, I think it come up to thirty-five dollars a week to the first six months. At the end of two years, the government would drop me and he was supposed to be paying me fifty dollars a week and he wasn't giving me my last hump. He'd tell me after he'd give me a raise, he'd have to give the boys a raise and I tried telling him he wasn't giving me no raise. Well, I was young and pretty smart and it didn't suit me too good. So me and my cousin went in to self-serve launderette. He financed me when I went in to launderette up in Woodbury and thought I was going to hire me a woman to run it and I was gonna do service work and have a headquarters and somebody to answer my phone and all. Well, that didn't, Woodbury wasn't ready for that and I wound up having to wash all the clothes and dry them and all for what other people was getting for people to come in and drop their money in the slot and do. So I stayed with it five years and finally give my half away and got me a job doing refrigeration and that's what I have done ever since then.

WILLIAMS: Now along there somewhere did you meet your wife?

STROOP: Yeah, that . . . I believe it was Jacob in the Bible worked seven years for Rachel and he didn't get Rachel. She had an older sister that wasn't married and so Pop slipped this other in after dark in his bed and he was hooked to that one. And then he had to work seven more for Rachel and, I was thinking about that laundry one time and I thought, "Well, you know, I didn't work but five for mine." I went to the hospital with tonsillitis. She was a nurse.

WILLIAMS: So you fell in love with your nurse?

STROOP: Well, she chased me.

WILLIAMS: Oh!

STROOP: Yeah! [chuckles] Yeah, I went to the hospital with tonsillitis real bad. Run in out of that laundry and she had to pop them pants down off my hip and give me a shot of penicillin. I had mashed my class ring and had to cut it off once, so I didn't have a wedding—she done looked to see that I didn't have a wedding ring on. Didn't want to check the charts. It take her about six months to catch me. She kept showing up, you know. She kept showing up real regular. We've had an unusual relationship between . . .

WILLIAMS: How long have you been married?

STROOP: Either fifty-seven or fifty-eight, sixteenth of next month. We had, she had a problem with the kids. We had financial problems, but between me and her, it's been a good trip. I ain't never looked back.

WILLIAMS: I'm curious about the flying that you mentioned at the campus. Was that, was that Miller Lanier, was he there then?

STROOP: Yep, yep he taught me how to fly.

WILLIAMS: What was he like? I know his wife, but I never met him.

STROOP: He was—all I was around him was real nice. Yeah, he's the one that taught me to fly.

WILLIAMS: Why were you interested in flying?

STROOP: Oh man, any kid, any kid can get out there and learn to fly would be interested in flying, I would think. I went home, told my mother and my older sister was still at home then and "You ain't going to do that!" I said, "Well, I don't guess you'll be there when I get in the plane."

WILLIAMS: Have you flown much since then?

STROOP: No. I couldn't. I got my pilot license and joined the civil air patrol and got some free flying a little bit there, but not much.

WILLIAMS: Where would you all fly when you were learning? You'd take off from the campus, right?

STROOP: Yeah, the grass strip out there where some of them buildings are.

WILLIAMS: Was there a hang—there must have been a hanger.

STROOP: Aaaahhh, I don't think there was no hanger there. I think they tied them

down.

WILLIAMS: Would you go any place in particular?

STROOP: No, we'd just fly over the country. When we'd run a span of time, it was about the time we should be able to pass the exam. We flew to, we had to fly, see all we had was a compass and a land map and them little planes up there was susceptible to wind drift, so we had to fly a triangle to get wind directions, different positions on us to learn to correct, correct the compass headings to match the land. Once it left, got up and left off, if you was going . . . we had to fly to Muscle Shoals, Alabama, which is about a hundred air miles and we was instructed to take our land map and pick a spot, trees, railroads, roads, water, that we thought would take us about ten minutes to get there or something and look and see how much we missed it and then you cut your plane into the wind a little bit to offset that. So that was to test before we got a license, we flew to Muscle Shoals and come back, Pulaski and Lawrenceburg, somewhere a little country. A little airport about like Murfreesboro would be. Of course the, Miller flew down . . . Miller flew down there with me one day and I went back by myself the next day and we got down there, never had landed on black top. There was an old air field down there. Didn't know we was down. And I went back the next day and when I come back up to that little country airport, I knew they had a cross wind short runway. They got a thing out there the wind'll turn around. And I knew, I knew, I was looking real good while I was down there, there's a lot of trees on one end and power lines on the other end. Well, I come in and wanted to get above them trees and I wanted to get down so, if you, if you turn your nose down, you're going to pick up air speed. If you, if you . . . if you set it down, but cross your, turn your plane at an angle, it will slip in on them wings and you could lose altitude without picking up speed. Well, I went in, parked it over [?], put it in a split, straightened it back up, and I was flying Aeronca [?] with a stick in between my legs and the stick wouldn't come back enough to get the nose to come up and I thought, "I didn't drag no trees" and then I thought about my cushion. I jumped up, pulled the cushion back. I was within, I was within fifteen seconds of plowing the ground. I never did tell nobody. I went back the next day. [chuckles] I went back the next day.

WILLIAMS: That's why I haven't . . . I haven't tried to learn to fly.

STROOP: I went out there about a year, two years ago one day and I got to talking about . . . maybe it was when I turned seventy-five or something. Anyhow, I got to talking about it with my daughter. My daughter went and called them out there and paid them for an instructor to take me up for an hour, hoping that he'd loosen up with it and then let me have it, you know. I wanted to go out there and take off and land it. That's the, that's the skill. I didn't get the guy that she talked to, I got another one, and he . . . after we got up in the air he turned me loose, but he wouldn't let me . . . and he

kept bugging me, “Level your wings, level your wings” and stuff like that, you know. It didn’t amount to anything. I never did go back.

WILLIAMS: Was that the highlight of your times at the state college? Learning to fly?

STROOP: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: Was there anything else memorable about your classes or time there?

STROOP: The students, the freshmen, they used to take up on the square to initiate them. They told me they had to get down and push peanuts with their nose on a black top and stuff up there. Well, the day they was marching down uptown, me and Miller come across the gate in the plane just taking off. [chuckles] Then they reached up there—he was flying in the back seat and I was in the front one, that’s the way them was—and he reached up and touched me on the shoulder and said, “Stroop, you a freshman?” I said, I said, “I’m a second-quarter freshman.” Course I done been in the summer. He never did, he wasn’t gonna turn me in. He was getting paid to teach me. See there was a guy named, just happened to remember, a guy named Meriwether I believe, that taught flying out there. So Meriwether, I had to fly with Meriwether, I think it was his name. I had to fly with him one day for him to recommend me to take the test, because Miller give the test. But I had an edge there. I had a real edge there, because I wasn’t nervouse, see. I’d been flying with him all the time. But I had an edge there.

WILLIAMS: Were any of your industrial studies classes or teachers memorable?

STROOP: Well, the guy that taught drafting was sort of edgy. He used to make fun of old boys from over Lebanon. He’d take his drawings up there and he’d take them and turn them bottom-side up and the old boy’s name was Ford and he’d say, “Ford, do you have a chicken walk across this?” [chuckles] You drew your drawings with a pencil and then you had a, you had a metal thing that come down to a point and you put ink over in between them two points coming down and inked your drawing. So you could make a big mess out of it right quick.

WILLIAMS: So that was the chicken? The chicken feet?

STROOP: Yeah, he was so, he was so clumsy with his ink.

WILLIAMS: Did you participate in any of the activities on the campus?

STROOP: No. I went to school and went home. Them two quarters.

WILLIAMS: Did you date any of the cute girls while you were there?

STROOP: No. I was sort of slow getting started on.

WILLIAMS: So that, did you start that, well, I haven’t asked you when you got back

from the war.

STROOP: Well, they signed, they signed peace. We was, I put two years on the USS *North Carolina* battleship in the war zone. I put two years in war zone. When they signed peace, we was running the coast at Tokyo there, not knowing what was, if it was going to go smooth or not. The next, the landing party in Tokyo was made up off of the fleet and there was some off of my ship. In fact, I knew of one of the guys that went and they tried to get me to volunteer in his place and I remember telling, "If they tell me to go, it's okay. I'm not going to volunteer. Of course, if I volunteer and go over there and get hurt, I'll blame myself." So we stayed out that night. The next day we went in Tokyo harbor and dropped anchor. The next morning, we brought our crew back on ship. That evening at sundown, we left there. We was due for an overhaul, but we pulled out and left there that quick and went back to, we come back to Okinawa and picked up . . . we already had people sleeping on deck at night, didn't have bunks. But we come back to Okinawa and picked up a bunch of troops and from there we went to Honolulu and debarked them. We stayed there a couple of weeks. We left there, went to Panama Canal. That was one experience I was wanting to do. Went to the Panama Canal and spent a night on the other side. From there we went to Boston. We was the first big warship back to states. We stayed in Boston about . . . I guess about, in September, somewhere in September, they signed peace. We went into Boston is where we hit the states and stayed there a month, a month and half or something and then we moved the ship down to New York. Two days later I was on my way to Memphis. I was sending half of my pay, which wasn't much, home to my mother because she locked the store, what was left of it, up and was cooking at the Kittrell School. So . . . I got discharged December the 5<sup>th</sup>, I think, of '45.

WILLIAMS: Well you said you got that draft notice and were told to report to Oglethorpe?

STROOP: Mm-hmm.

WILLIAMS: And that was in July of '43.

STROOP: Yeah. July the 5th, '43.

WILLIAMS: And what did you do—how long were you at Oglethorpe?

STROOP: Two days.

WILLIAMS: And then where?

STROOP: San Diego.

WILLIAMS: On a train?

STROOP: On train. On a troop train and we had to stop, we could just travel so far that we had to get off on sidings so we didn't interfere with the rail that took us, I forget, it took us two or three days to get to California. But I think we had some kind of a, some kind of a swinging hammock or something that we could, didn't have to sleep in the chairs. That was the only trip I made on a train during that time cause I come back, they let us come back home after we got out of boot camp for a few days and then went back to San Diego and then they started to decide to where we was going to go.

WILLIAMS: So boot camp was in San Diego?

STROOP: Uh-huh.

WILLIAMS: And that was Camp . . . Fort . . . Camp. What's in San Diego?

STROOP: I don't know what was the name of the base.

WILLIAMS: Did you know then that you were going to be in the navy? Or was that—

STROOP: Yeah. Yeah, I knew when I left Ogleshorpe that I was going to be in the navy.

WILLIAMS: Was that your choice?

STROOP: Yeah. Yeah, my, my, my thought, my thought was, "I'm walking under that tree and that sniper sees me, there ain't nobody to help me. If I'm on that ship it's a group effort." Now them group efforts was miserable sometimes. A bunch of guys got to where the ships got sunk and stuff. But that was my, that was my thinking, is why I asked for the navy.

WILLIAMS: What'd you think of boot camp?

STROOP: [chuckles] It was pits! It was the pits!

WILLIAMS: Just like the movies? People yelling at you and all that stuff?

STROOP: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, the first day they put us out there, we was in California in July when I first got there, and we all had brand new white uniforms on and that sun was putting your eyes off shining off that guy in front of you.

WILLIAMS: Did you get in shape?

STROOP: I was just working the farm. I wasn't too far out physical shape.

WILLIAMS: And how long was boot camp?

STROOP: Three months, I believe.

WILLIAMS: So then you got a bit of leave and came back here?

STROOP: Come back for . . . well, we got two or three weeks. Of course it took a lot of it riding trains back and forth.

WILLIAMS: And then you, when did you get your orders for your next assignment?

STROOP: Well, after boot was over . . . it wasn't long they moved me up to San Pedro, which is right at Long Beach and put us on Terminal Island, which was an immigration prison at that time. They put us out there walking the beaches at night with a stick and a hat. [chuckles] Then in the daytime they'd send us somewhere to . . . to another base of something to work. Unload ship or do something and I wasn't there . . . less than six weeks. We had to bus there every night and every night they'd call off a few names that was going to be shipped out the next day. I guess we had liberty every other night while we was there. And one night, one night they called my name and two other guys' names and some way, I don't know how, but some way I knew they was straight out of the brig and I thought, "Boy, I'm in for it now." They took us down and put us on a merchant marine tanker as passengers and we get to go to chow in the morning and sat down, and the guy come around, "How do you want your eggs?" I thought, "Boy, maybe this navy's changed!" [chuckles] "Maybe this navy is changed!" I don't know, about a week or something getting to Hawaii. Those ships have a little superstructure in front and a little bit in the rear and the rest of it is low and once you get out there, a lot of the time water is running over that deck in between where you have to go from one end to the other and you have to go down below deck. So they had what they called a receiving station there at Honolulu and they put me on mess cook duty there. I don't know, a week or two weeks they assigned me to the *North Carolina*, which was in dry dock getting a hole patched from taking the torpedo at Guadalcanal.

WILLIAMS: And what kind of ship was it?

STROOP: It's a battleship. Big guns.

WILLIAMS: Same generation as the Missouri?

STROOP: No, it was the---the *Carolina*, the *Carolina* was the first new battleship they had built in twenty years. It was brand new in Brooklyn when they hit Pearl. Tokyo Rose nicknamed it the showboat. It was far ahead of everything else. She was propaganda radio.

WILLIAMS: Was it a nice ship?

STROOP: Yeah, it was brand new!

WILLIAMS: What did you do onboard?

STROOP: Well, I was a deck hand for a year. They had divisions that took care of certain functions of keeping the ship in shape. Then you had battle station positions. Your first six—they called them six deck divisions—took care of the decks outside, painting the superstructure and all and the gunneries. Well we all took care of all the guns. So I was in the fourth division, which took care of the forty millimeters. Maintained the forty millimeter guns plus manned them for battle. Part of, part of the, part of the division continued to take care of the deck and part of us had got in the gun crew kept the guns greased and oiled and everything.

WILLIAMS: Were the forty millimeters for anti-aircraft, close . . .

STROOP: Yeah. They was for planes.

WILLIAMS: So then there also would have been the big guns for shore firing or other—

STROOP: Yeah, the sixteen inch was for shelling shore and stuff and the five inch. . . the five inch guns were for both, anti-aircraft and shore shelling. Iwo Jima, we pulled in there and sat there all day shooting above the troops when they was landing with fives and sixteen inch all day there. The planes could drop a bomb and had to go back. We had nine guns there that could be reloaded in five or six minutes. Nine more of them was going across. Them projectiles weighed eighteen hundred pounds.

WILLIAMS: So what was the first action that you saw on the *Carolina*?

STROOP: We went in Marshall Islands and shelled ashore. Shelled a land base there . . . one night.

WILLIAMS: What was that like? I supposed you practiced before.

STROOP: No.

WILLIAMS: No? You never heard the guns before that?

STROOP: Yeah, I had heard the guns. When they left Hawaii . . . and it had been in dry dock and all, they go out, any time they go in port or go in dry dock or something, they go out for what they call a “shake down” before they leave out. So we went out and they had somewhere out there, somewhere that we’d go shell. They’d go and find them big guns and little guns and stuff. They had . . . there’s three of them sixteen-inch turrets, two forward and one on the stern and they had put a quad-forty millimeter on top of turret three when they was in Pearl Harbor. I was new kid on the block so I was ammunition passer on the new gun. Nobody had been on top of that thing when they fired it before. Not the old salts. So they built a shield around there and the forty millimeters, a rack four, four shells to a rack and I’d take four or six or something of them and fill a metal container, and they was stacked around inside, so we was all sitting on them, leaned

back against them shields, when the first time they fired it, it felt like you was sitting on a lard stand, somebody come up on the bottom with a hammer. [chuckles] So, we stayed up there for several, several, several rounds, but after that, after that, when them barrels went to quivering, we was like sheep. We could come off of it without getting court marshaled. If I'd left my gun on the side and walked across the ship somewhere and somebody saw me, I'd be in the brigs. I'd been sent home because it's, this is your job, it's a group, it's a group thing. And we had a division called . . . we had a division that had to do with maintaining some parts of the ship in operation and their, their, their battle station was to close so many water-tight hatches during battle and stay there. Every doorway was a metal door with clamps and levers and rubber gaskets on them. When that torpedo hit the side of that ship at Guadalcanal and made that big hole in it, they only lost three. They only had three guys that got killed when it hit or drowned, one. But it kept the water out of the rest of the ship.

WILLIAMS: Well, I'm sorry to say that I have ran out of tape and you haven't ran out stories, so I don't know what to do, but I'm going to have to quit. I'm sure you wanted to do something else today. Since you are a veteran, we will register your interview with the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. We participate with that, so I just wanted you to know that. You were in the navy. You were drafted, from July 5th, you said, to December 5th. So exactly two years and five months, is that what that amounts to?

STROOP: Yeah, about that.

## END OF INTERVIEW

[NOTE: Between the time of this interview and its final transcript, Mr. Stroop passed away. His obituary from the Murfreesboro *Daily News Journal* is appended to this transcript on the following page.]

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**Irving Clifton Stroop**

Irving Clifton Stroop

Irving Clifton Stroop, age 87, beloved husband and father, passed away on January 17, 2013.

He was born on April 18, 1925, son of the late Irving Clifton Stroop, Sr. and Fannie Belle Holmes Stroop. He was a native of Readyville, TN and co-owner of Advanced Commercial Refrigeration. Irving served in the United States Navy during World War II. He was a devout Christian and a member of the Minerva Drive Church of Christ.

Irving was preceded in death by his parents; wife of 58 years, Shirley Stroop; and sister, Irene Rentschler.

He is survived by his wife, Dorothy Stroop of Murfreesboro; sons, Terry (Twila) Stroop of Tullahoma, Edwin (Dianne) Stroop of Murfreesboro; daughter, Karen Barton of Tullahoma; brother, Ernest Stroop of Donelson, TN; sister, Rachel Elrod of Nashville, TN; 12 grandchildren, 27 great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren.

Church service will be held on Saturday, January 19, 2013 at 2 p.m., at Minerva Drive Church of Christ, with Ron Harper officiating. Burial will follow at Roselawn Memorial Gardens, with family and friends serving as Pallbearers.

Visitation will be held on Friday, January 18, 2013 from 4 p.m. until 8 p.m., at Jennings & Ayers Funeral Home, 820 South Church St., Murfreesboro, TN 37130; (615) 893-2422. Please leave condolences at [www.jenningsandayers.com](http://www.jenningsandayers.com)

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