

**William P. Larkin**  
**Narrator**

**Tami Wiese**  
**Interviewer**

**August 19, 1980**  
**Graceville, Minnesota**

**TW:** Today I'm talking with Mr. Bill Larkin from Graceville, Minnesota. Mr. Larkin, have you lived around here all your life?

**WL:** Yes, I have.

**TW:** Where were you born?

**WL:** I was born about twelve miles southwest of here on a farm.

**TW:** What year was that?

**WL:** 1898. September.

**TW:** What nationality are you?

**WL:** Irish.

**TW:** Irish. And what did your parents do on the farm?

**WL:** They were farming and then they moved off and came to Graceville. He was appointed chief of police here. For years, he was.

**TW:** What year did you move off the farm then?

**WL:** 1899.

**TW:** Oh, you were just a year old then.

**WL:** Yes.

**TW:** I see. Did you go to school around here?

**WL:** Yes. I went to high school and St. Mary's Academy. Graduated in 1916.

**TW:** What did you do then after you graduated from high school?

**WL:** I started in the trucking business. We had the first Model Ts that came into Graceville. My brother and I, we got a couple Model Ts and we started trucking and we kept them quite a while. Added on in later years.

**TW:** Did you have private contracts?

**WL:** Oh, yes.

**TW:** Did you have any from the county?

**WL:** Yes. We had county work later on in years. In the 1930s. During the WPA days.

**TW:** And so during World War II this is what you were—a trucker?

**WL:** Yes.

**TW:** How old would you have been in 1941?

**WL:** I would have been forty-three.

**TW:** Forty-three?

**WL:** Yes.

**TW:** Do you remember what you were doing when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

**WL:** Yes. I was changing tires. Putting on a new set of tires on my truck up at the filling station in the afternoon.

**TW:** It came across the radio then?

**WL:** Yes. It was announced on the radio. I hadn't heard. I believe it was on a little earlier in the day than that, but I hadn't heard it. I hadn't been around a radio all day. That was the first time I heard it.

**TW:** How did that make you feel?

**WL:** Well, it was quite a shock, of course. We couldn't really realize it for a while, you know. It was—I think that's the way it affected most people. Around here anyway.

**TW:** Did you follow world events very much before World War II?

**WL:** Well, not too much.

**TW:** Not too much.

**WL:** No. I wouldn't say. Oh, I kept up on newspapers and headlines and a few articles.

**TW:** Did you ever go to the movies much?

**WL:** Not too much.

**TW:** Did they have any movie halls in Graceville then?

**WL:** Oh, yes. They always had a good movie house here. They had real good patronage.

**TW:** Did you travel much before the war started?

**WL:** No. Very little.

**TW:** Very little. What was your job like during the war then? With gas rationing and tire rationing?

**WL:** We had contracts with trucks with the county hauling gravel and roadwork and stuff. That was terminated on account of the gas situation. But we kept on hauling. We were hauling small building materials. We had three, four trucks going all the time. [Unclear] Different things. Mail. We had a contract with the government to haul the mail to and from the depot (the train). We had rationing of gas, but I had no trouble getting any slip things, coupons.

**TW:** Did you have a special book then? A special allotment of stamps because of your work?

**WL:** Oh, yes. I had a lot of stamps.

**TW:** Was it hard to get tires?

**WL:** You bet it was. Well, I didn't have any trouble. I was on emergency rating. What they called that. But other people couldn't get them. They called in some of the good tires, which was a big mistake. People turned them in, shipped them right in. Gave them away.

**TW:** Why did you feel it was a big mistake?

**WL:** Well, they couldn't get any tires then afterwards. They were plenty good. I saw tires in there that were almost new. But the government said, "No, you can't own them—any spare tires." They were allowed one spare to keep.

**TW:** Do you think the government used all the tires that were—?

**WL:** No. I was drafted in one of the drafts in 1943 and I was down there at Snelling and I had a chance to see along the railroad dump yards there. There were regular mountains of tires stacked out. Not only one stack but just like haystacks. Oh, terrific. All went to waste. I don't know what they were doing with them.

**TW:** Did people volunteer their scrap and their tires easily?

**WL:** Oh, yes. They didn't like it. No. Not easily. But they were very patriotic and they wanted to do all they could in the war effort. They went along with the government very well.

**TW:** How many scrap drives do you think they had around Graceville?

**WL:** How many what?

**TW:** Scrap drives.

**WL:** Oh, they had—they weren't very big but they had numerous ones. Every once in a while they'd have a scrap iron drive or something to that effect.

**TW:** Who was usually in charge of this?

**WL:** Well, it would be some local man. Merchant or some man that just started in buying scrap iron. Bought and drive. The farmers would haul it in.

**TW:** Did they advertise, like in the paper?

**WL:** Oh, yes. Yes. They always advertised. Put out handbills and different things.

**TW:** Were there a lot of people from Graceville that were drafted into the war?

**WL:** Oh, yes. At one time you couldn't find a young fellow here to help do anything. The draft ages. Practically all of them. Especially on that last drive. From the age I think it was twenty-five to thirty-five. No. Twenty-five to forty-five. I came in on that. And they even took them.

**TW:** What was your experience like being drafted at age—?

**WL:** At that age I think you've lost all your rah, rah, rah for the Army. And you kind of resent it a little bit. When you get middle age, practically, you wouldn't want to make Army life your life. But I went down when I was drafted and was turned down.

**TW:** Did a lot of people volunteer or did they wait to be drafted?

**WL:** Oh, yes. I would say there was almost one-third that were enlisted. They didn't wait for the draft.

**TW:** Did they go into the Army or the Navy or—?

**WL:** Well, at that time they had a little better choice here if they'd enlist ahead of the draft. They'd get a little choice. They could take you if you enlisted and get the choice. The Navy, of course. Pretty near all the Navy men did. But they lived in different lines in the Army. They could go into that.

**TW:** Were there many deferments?

**WL:** Oh, yes. There were a few. Outside of the ones that were refused on account of—there weren't many of them. It was mostly farm boys that wanted to keep on with their work. They had a 4H. What they called it. They didn't have to report to the service.

**TW:** Was there any resentment between the people that were volunteered or drafted and the people that were deferred?

**WL:** Well, there wasn't exactly resentment. They were in for a little battering, you know, about his kid isn't any better than mine, or something to that effect. There were some, yes. I wouldn't say it was very bad. It was just normal.

**TW:** Were there many killed over there?

**WL:** Oh, yes. We lost a lot of boys from this town and all around this vicinity here.

**TW:** Did any people leave Graceville for the bigger cities or even to go out west or out east to work in the factories?

**WL:** Yes, there were. Quite a number of them. They were people that were mostly married. Some of them weren't but they were a little past the draft age. And when they heard this was coming, the second draft of [ages] twenty-five to forty-five, there was quite a number of them that went. Jobs in the defense plants out west. Most of them went out there.

**TW:** Did many of them come back?

**WL:** Oh, yes. There were some of them came back. A lot of them stayed out there.

**TW:** A lot of them stayed out there?

**WL:** Oh, yes. The majority of them came back.

**TW:** I see. How did people feel about the Germans? You remember World War I and went through World War I. How did they feel about the Germans in World War II as compared to World War I?

**WL:** There was more enmity in World War I. Nobody liked the Kaiser. But it seemed they just took it for granted that—well, they weren't in love with Hitler by any means, but they took him all in stride. Wanted to get this over with. The war to end all wars. Supposed to be. So they were very patriotic around here.

**TW:** In World War I?

**WL:** In both I and II. They had no trouble with them.

**TW:** In World War I was there any painting of the German peoples' houses or anything like that?

**WL:** In a few different towns. There was nothing here.

**TW:** Nothing here.

**WL:** There were a few different towns around here. Localities. There was a little of that. Painted the posts yellow around his farm. A few little things. Some Kaiser up in effigy. But that didn't amount to much.

**TW:** But there was nothing like that during World War II?

**WL:** Oh, no. No. There was nothing at all.

**TW:** How did people feel about the Japanese? Especially after Pearl Harbor?

**WL:** Well, a lot of them took it pretty tough. They didn't like it when they expressed their ways about it. But we had one family here. Japanese family. He came here when he was a young fellow and he married a white lady here. A nice family. They were pretty well grown up at the time. He was a good honest fellow and he felt very bad about it. People didn't hold anything against him.

**TW:** Did he have to report to any of those camps?

**WL:** No, no. They let him go. He was pretty well along in age at the time.

**TW:** Oh, I see.

**WL:** Yes. He was just heartbroken about it. He didn't like it.

**TW:** Did you hear about the internment of the Japanese in the camps?

**WL:** Oh, yes. Once in a while a train would go through carrying these people to the camps. Up in North Dakota they had one. Different places up in out of the way Wisconsin. It all depends on why they'd pick them up.

**TW:** You knew then who was on the train? [That] these Japanese were on the train?

**WL:** I knew because I was right in around the depot all the time. Of course, they never let the news out that there was either a troop train or a refugee train of prisoners going through. But I would always get word of it through the agent. But we never mentioned it outside because there was always a chance for somebody tearing up the tracks. They were afraid. They took that precaution, see. They kept it secret. The only ones that knew it really were the railroad men.

**TW:** Do you think any of the townspeople or the country people would have done something like that?

**WL:** Oh, no. Not here. But there's always a fanatic someplace, you know.

**TW:** Were there any parades or rallies in Graceville?

**WL:** Oh, yes. I wouldn't say there was a parade, but there would be a little rally. Sewing bee, sewing bandages, stuff like that, you know. And they would get together—the women (ladies and girls), mostly. Knitting sweaters and different things.

**TW:** How often did they do that?

**WL:** Well, I really don't know. You'd just hear about it. Quite often though.

**TW:** Do you know who was in charge of that?

**WL:** No. They never really had someone in charge, that I know of.

**TW:** Did you have any war bond drives in Graceville?

**WL:** Oh, yes. They had those every time a different series would come out. They had a lot of them. Everybody responded. The ones that had any money. It's pretty hard times then. We were just coming off of the Depression and drought. And money wasn't too free. People didn't have—they had lost a lot of their farms and different things. The insurance company had pretty well cornered all the farms. People just couldn't make their payments. They were taken over.

**TW:** Who were in charge of the war bond drives?

**WL:** Mostly bankers. Always the bankers.

**TW:** Always bankers. How many banks did they have in town?

**WL:** They had two banks at the time. First National and First State. Or Graceville State, I guess.

**TW:** Were there any Victory Gardens?

**WL:** Oh ho! Were there ever! There were a lot of them.

**TW:** How many do you think there were?

**WL:** Well, now I know in Graceville here there were ninety-five at one time, because I had a man and a small tractor and he was plowing them up and he told me there were ninety-five Victory Gardens. Besides, the school had a big one, too. Two acres. That was kept up by the high school boys and the WPA [Works Progress Administration] men. They had extra help. And they had a good garden. They had a lot of produce.

**TW:** Where was this garden located?

**WL:** Right out north of town. Just a mile.

**TW:** From this bigger garden how was the stuff divided up or what did they do with the stuff?

**WL:** Everybody had a little. I really don't know what they did or how they started financially, but they had a big, pretty good harvest off of it. A lot of cabbage and potatoes and different things.

**TW:** Were there any canning classes and stuff in town?

**WL:** Oh, I think they had them at the school all right. Where they had the home economics.

**TW:** Were there a lot of women working?

**WL:** Yes. They had sewing projects. And really, that's when the women first started to work, outside of a few ladies with secretarial jobs. They went to work. Some of them even went out in the fields. It was shocking in those days. Shock all the grain by hand. A lot of the younger ladies, of course. Girls.

**TW:** What were the attitudes towards that?

**WL:** Just had to be done. So they went out and did it.

**TW:** I see. But there wasn't any like resentment or anything like that?

**WL:** Oh, no. No. No. No, there was nothing like that.

**TW:** We talked about rationing a little bit. Did people pretty much agree with the price controls or did they like them or did they just go along with them?

**WL:** They just went along with them. There was some food rationing. And of course, gasoline, tires. Whatever the government had a monopoly on, they had to go along with the rationing on it.

**TW:** Was there any bitterness towards this?

**WL:** Not a bit. They didn't like it, of course.

**TW:** Was there anything—did you hear of anything like a black market around here?

**WL:** No. Not here. Too small. Isn't enough people around for a black market. You've got to have a pretty good-sized population.

**TW:** Did many letters come back from the soldiers?

**WL:** Oh, yes. There were a lot of them.

**TW:** Did people share them?

**WL:** Yes, they did. Yes. Yes, they did. They had quite a time over some of those letters.

**TW:** What are the political views of the community? Is this a Democratic, Republican—?

**WL:** Democratic. Have a few Republicans working on us now but you can't help that.  
[Chuckles]

**TW:** How did people feel about FDR then?

**WL:** Franklin Roosevelt?

**TW:** Yes.

**WL:** Oh, they thought he was wonderful. He was, too. He took them right out of the doldrums. He got this WPA going and he got different jobs for everything. He had different projects. And he did all right.

**TW:** Were there any other political leaders that were well known?

**WL:** Around here?

**TW:** Yes.

**WL:** Oh, no. No. It was just the usual. Congressmen.

**TW:** How did people feel when FDR died?

**WL:** It was quite a shock to them. Yes, it was. Around here anyway. Right in this community.

**TW:** Was there any special service or anything?

**WL:** No. They didn't have anything that I know of.

**TW:** Were people interested in local government?

**WL:** Pretty well. As far as that goes.

**TW:** How did you feel about the war? Do you think it was run right?

**WL:** Oh, yes. The best they could. It's like any war. We'd be better off without it, of course. But once it's here, you've got to go along with it.

**TW:** I know something I wanted to ask you. Were there any men from the area that did not want to go to war or refused to go?

**WL:** Oh, yes. There were a lot of them didn't want to. Surely. But they were drafted anyway. I wouldn't say a lot of them, but there were some. Others wanted to go because they didn't have jobs and kind of felt, "What the hell, I might as well be doing that as playing around town." Jobs weren't very plentiful then.

**TW:** Did they have any companies or factories in town that people could get jobs at?

**WL:** No factories here. It's too small a town.

**TW:** What was the main occupation in town then?

**WL:** Well, just farming or laboring. Clerical work and clerks in stores and that's about all. Lumber yards, of course.

**TW:** I see. Would you say that people trusted the government?

**WL:** Oh, yes. I would say they did.

**TW:** They had a good attitude towards it?

**WL:** Yes.

**TW:** Do you remember what you were doing when the war ended in Germany? In Europe in the spring?

**WL:** I can remember well, when it—I was just in a routine. I don't know what I was really doing but I was right in town here. They had pretty good celebrations. Younger people especially got together. Different things.

**TW:** Did they celebrate in the homes or in the street or—?

**WL:** Right in the street mostly. They had demonstrations. Different ways.

**TW:** Did they have a band out there or did they just—?

**WL:** No. There wasn't any band. Pretty hard to get organized on anything like that unless it's planned ahead. There's just a bunch of youngsters get together.

**TW:** That was out in the street celebrating the end of the war?

**WL:** Yes.

**TW:** How about—what were you doing when you heard about the end of the war in Japan?

**WL:** Well, I can't recall that either. I was right here. We just couldn't realize it. They kept this atomic bomb pretty much a secret. Very few people even heard about it. And when that went off, my God! We couldn't realize it had destroyed all that number of people in the cities. It was quite a shock to everyone. But it had to come.

**TW:** Why do you feel it had to come?

**WL:** Well, it was really the only way of stopping it because it would have hung on and on. People would have—that far away and that distance. There were so many ports and so many islands they had to protect. It would have been a continuous war jumping from one place to the other and maybe hung on another year or two. And a lot of lives would have been lost. This way it was over quick. There were a lot of lives lost but they weren't the American soldiers anyway. They were innocent people, of course, the Japanese.

**TW:** Was that man, that Japanese man, still living in Graceville when they dropped the bomb?

**WL:** I think he could have been. I don't recall now. His family was still here. But nobody paid any attention. It was just routine, you know.

**TW:** Were there any celebrations then when that—?

**WL:** Oh, yes. Just the usual. Little street celebrations. Mostly youngsters, see. The older people were getting pretty much fed up on three or four years of it, you know. They were glad it was over, of course. That would be about it.

**TW:** How did people start to pick up their lives then after World War II?

**WL:** It's really hard to say. They just went along as best they could. Things seemed to brighten up a little and prices got a little better. There was more—a little building starting. Of course, the soldiers came back and they had the priority on lumber and building materials and whatever they wanted. They had a priority on it. So we just had to wait until the soldiers were filled out. So it went along all right though.

**TW:** Were there any celebrations when the soldiers came back?

**WL:** No, not too much. I suppose they all had a little private family [homecoming celebration].

**TW:** Did many soldiers come back?

**WL:** Oh, yes.

**TW:** Most of them or—?

**WL:** Yes, they all came back. Where some lost their lives and a lot of them were buried over there and they were brought back later on in the years. I think we have got them all back here now.

**TW:** Were there many that lost their lives from Graceville?

**WL:** Oh, yes. Quite a few. Quite a few of the boys.

**TW:** When the soldiers came back, did they find jobs easily?

**WL:** Pretty well. They seemed to pick up whatever—they were open and people were willing to hire them. Tried to give them a little better chance.

**TW:** When the war ended did you automatically go off of gas rationing and tire rationing?

**WL:** Oh, yes.

**TW:** Did it take you very long to get—?

**WL:** We sent in our coupons. No, it didn't take long to get accustomed to that.

**TW:** Did it take very long to get a new set of tires then after that or did you still have to wait a while?

**WL:** Oh, yes. It took quite a while. They didn't have them on the market. And I suppose they had to be made. It wasn't too long. You could get them.

**TW:** Well, do you have anything more to add?

**WL:** Really, I haven't. It's just that we took it routinely like you would every day. It was hard on some people. Very hard. Others seemed to get along better. That's the way it is in anything almost. No, I don't know if I've been any help. There hasn't been too much information, but what I had I was willing to give.

**TW:** Yes, this is very good. The people that took it hard, why do you think they took it hard?

**WL:** Oh, they were the worrying kind. There are always families like that. Nothing would—you wouldn't—really, they couldn't adjust their life very well. That's where they took it kind of hard.

**TW:** I would like to thank you for letting me interview you.

**WL:** If I've been any help to you, I certainly would be glad of that.

**TW:** Thank you very much.

**WL:** You're welcome.