Clyde Wardle– Life during WWII

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February 15, 2005

Box 8 Folder 32

Oral Interview conducted by Mitch Parks

Transcript copied by Jessica Rhodes March 2006

Brigham Young University – Idaho
Mitch Parks: So do you remember the time during Pearl Harbor-like what was going on?

Clyde Wardle: Yes, I was working for Lockheed aircraft in Burbank, California and it happened to be a Sunday when this, when they bombed Pearl Harbor, and then the next day at Lockheed they stopped everything about noon. That’s when the President Roosevelt told us that they were declaring war on Japan and Europe. And so they stopped everything, all the men working for Lockheed. We all stopped and listened to that report. We knew we were in war so, but I was at that time working—my assignment there was working on P-38s which was a pursuit plane they used, a twin-engine plane. And Lockheed also was building a Lone Star bomber at that time also. So that’s where I was when that happened.

MP: How old were you?

CW: I had probably just turned twenty years old.

MP: What kind of experience helped you the most during that time, as far as working for Lockheed?

CW: The experience I had there at that time we were putting the engines in those P-38s and I had a lot of experience working with engines. And then, of course, when it came time to enlist in the service at that time if you, when they told you you’d be 1A then you had to either enlist or be drafted. And one day I just came home and enlisted in the Air Core where I had experience with airplanes and I was able to…

MP: How was your military career different from your Lockheed career?

CW: Well, just about the opposite. In the service you have to do what they tell you to do and when you get in it’s a different life, completely. On KP you have to wash dishes or pots and pans, you were on there a certain time whether you’re privates or PFCs or corporals sometimes had to spend time over washing dishes and working in the mess hall. It’s a lot different. You had to wear the uniforms all the time and you had to make sure you salute officers or they’d stop and chew you out a little bit. It was kind of more regimented. My first three weeks they had us march. Now I don’t know why we had to learn how to march in the Air Core but we did anyway. And I wore out two pairs of shoes in three weeks time. So you can imagine how much we had to left-right and right-left, rear march and whatever. We had to do all those things.

MP: What was the most difficult part of that transition for you?

CW: Well you have to leave home and you have to leave your family. I had just been married about a month before I had to enlist in the service. So I had to leave a young lady home with her parents so I could go. No one knew where you were going and whenever we had to be transferred you couldn’t, she was there, I was in Salt Lake there at Fort Douglas. I couldn’t even tell her where I was going and when I was going. I couldn’t even tell her the night before; I couldn’t even go see her the night before. You’re
restricted. You have to say… you can’t leave the barracks. And so she was up there waiting for me to come down, but I couldn’t go up there. And I probably wasn’t a hundred yards from where she was. So I couldn’t go and say “Hey I’m gonna go tomorrow,” and whatever so… back then it took them a long time for them to get us from one place to another. We were three days just going from Salt Lake down to Phoenix to the air base there—to Luke Field Air Base.

MP: What was your image of world leaders during that time-what was your image of Hitler?

CW: Of Hitler-a lot of us didn’t know a lot about those things-we just didn’t know.

MP: Really!

CW: Those things were going on as young kids in high school you didn’t think too much of it. You learned about it as soon as you got in the military—you knew who the ones were that were leaders in the Japanese military. Of course then we learned about Hitler. They made sure we knew all about those things because they always showed us films.

MP: What did the military teach about Hitler?

CW: Just that he wasn’t a good man and he had no respect for life. He had a thing about Jewish people. We didn’t know till after the war the Jewish people killed. We had no idea and I don’t think anyone knows the true figure on that. I heard around six million people and those other countries where they were doing the same thing—gassing them and incinerator and whatever. I don’t think anybody knows.

MP: What did you learn about Mussolini?

CW: He was just the yes man to Hitler—he just did what he was told to do. He was just a little fish trying to get into a big pond. He came back to his country and they got him. And he had a lady friend and he didn’t ever get back to her or where he him was. They didn’t [want] anything to do with him for what he had done to their country.

MP: How did your military experience affect your point of view toward the Japanese?

CW: It was tough because they made you want to hate those people. The films they show, everything you saw—made you want to go out and do away with them. But it was hard for me when I came back and finished college and then started teaching school. Here I had two or three Japanese people in my class and it was hard for me to be careful not to say something about the Japanese. And I had grown up with Japanese people and played football with them and basketball and neighbor horse races and whatever. And so I had a different feeling toward them when I went in. The war changed a lot of those things.

MP: So the military tried to shape your beliefs in a certain way then?
CW: Well they did. Yeah they showed a lot of films-and of course then we learned about some of the things that happened over there in Batan and since then we’ve learned a lot more. How cruel they were and we’ve seen movies how they would shoot the solders on the long march-something that would make you pretty bitter.

MP: How did your religious beliefs and your personal convictions help you to deal with the harder times?

CW: Well I think your religious beliefs, at that time we had our garments and things that we wore and they said you could take them off. I chose to take them off because we were always in front of so many men changing our clothes and I didn’t want somebody to give me a bad time on those so I wore the old khaki underclothes.

MP: What was something that was harder for you to deal with being in the military? Was it more being away from home or the image toward other countries? What seemed to be a challenge for you?

CW: Well I think we were young enough where it wasn’t that serious. You like to be with your family and eventually my wife was able to come and spend some time with me so it was a lot better for me. And I had her with me so it was nice. I think when you’re younger it doesn’t bother you as much. We did things-we were able to get time to come home-twenty-four and forty-eight hour passes to go do things and to have a day or two off. So when I was alone we could go to different places and play ping pong with USO was quite a popular thing to do. We had people there to go to dances and different things. We had entertainment. When we’d go into town when I was stationed back in Epsilante, Michigan with the Ford plants. You could go to town, people would take you to dinner, they’d take you bowling. If you drank you could drink all the whiskey you wanted-they have it for you. I didn’t drink and I didn’t smoke but we were able to just go play ping pong. I loved to play ping pong so the USO had a lot of ping pong tables set up and you could go play. And you could dance there too if you wanted to.

MP: What kinds of things did you and your military buddies do to entertain yourselves when you had some down time?

CW: Well a lot of times we were working on airplanes but also there were times when they were out flying-we couldn’t work on them. We always had a football and we were out there playing a little touch pass. We had some guys that like to throw the ball, some of us nuts would go out and catch them. We’d do things like that and they had swimming pools so we could go swimming. They had one for the black people and one for the white fellows and you could swim any time you wanted. You could go over and get in the pool at midnight or whenever you wanted-it was always open.

MP: You mentioned the segregation between the black and the white soldiers. How did you feel about that where you’d been around them?
CW: Well I had never been around a lot of black people, however when I played ball for Blackfoot, Pocatello had a black man, an outstanding athlete and we played against them. But I hadn’t had a lot of connection with black. But in the military I didn’t think too much about it. In fact they used the black men because they had such rhythm of timing and they can really march. And they’d use them to march us, they’d have one come over. However, they were still separated from us, they had their own swimming pool, they slept in different places. I did find out those people like to cut each other a little bit and sometimes we’d get kicked out of bed at night to try and look for someone who’d just cut somebody else’s ear off or something. They like to use razors-the old type of shaving straight razor thing. It was a razor and kind of like a knife only it was a lot sharper. But I didn’t have any bitterness against them. I didn’t have that at all. Up here in the north you just didn’t have the feelings they had down in the south.

MP: Did you see any conflicts that that would cause, as far as your service was concerned, between black and the white soldiers?

CW: You know I didn’t ever see that too much; however, they had a black team. I was playing for a post team and they had a black team and I think we played them I think five times and they finally beat us the last time. But we played ball against them. I didn’t know much about the Mason-Dickson line until I got on the train in Detroit and was headed for Montgomery, Alabama and I found out then what they meant by the Mason-Dickson line. The black people were in the cars in the back-and a lot of those cars were open cars. And that’s back when they had the coal fired engines for the train. You could see the smoke going back. They were already black and you wondered how dirty they got with all that smoke. Then I realized a little bit more and I think one time in Phoenix the black boys kind of rebelled. They had to use military police and local police to get them out of the motel. They decided they weren’t going to go back to the base or something and they got guns. It was kind of a serious thing for a while. But I just didn’t have any bitterness, we didn’t have that. And yeah when you got down south and get with those southern boys they’re still fighting their revolutionary war. Because they still have the right thing to do. And I think you could probably still go down there and those feelings would still exist.

MP: How did seeing that rebellious feeling in them affect you and the people you served with?

CW: Well I don’t think we thought much about it. We didn’t understand. In Montgomery, Alabama the black people, they kind of made them walk our in the streets and it was unusual for us to see that. And a lot of time a black man you get killed in a bar and boy you didn’t hear much more about it, where if it had been a black person killing a white person then it’s a real serious thing. And then you know of understand the Ku Klux Klan thing. The way they had that was a vicious thing for those people.

MP: Being in the war and seeing the conflicts, with the Germans and the Japanese, how does that make you feel toward the Japanese and the Germans now?
CW: I haven’t as bad of feelings toward the Germans as I did the Japanese because I felt, I know the Germans were cruel, but I thought the Japanese people were vicious. Especially with the Batan march, when you see about that. We kind of had a worse feeling about them because of them bombing Pearl Harbor, and that was the thing that they made sure we didn’t forget about.

MP: Now you mentioned the Batan march a couple of times. What do you remember most about it?

CW: Well I was down in the Philippines. That’s where they had to surrender. MacArthur was sent back to Australia, and I’ve forgotten the leader now. But he was to stay and of course he was a prisoner of war, the other leader was left there. He became real thin. They didn’t kill him but they shot and killed a lot of fellows that weren’t able to make the march. They got exhausted and when they fell they didn’t bother with them and shot them. They were cruel—they were real cruel.

MP: Did that affect you in some of the same ways as Pearl Harbor did?

CW: Well you know a lot of these things, we didn’t know about a lot of things until after we got out of the military and got back home and started seeing what was going on that way.

MP: Did you ever feel like the military kept information from you, even though you were enlisted?

CW: Well you could still read the papers, and I don’t know how much control they had there. But I had no idea they were killing, I think that’s one of the problems now with our leadership. They don’t want this to ever happen again. They don’t want some nation to become strong and you realize now they’re having quite a time with North Korea saying they have the atomic bomb and they’re being a little arrogant. All they want to talk to is the United States and yet our President wants to have six different countries involved in this to work out a plan. He’s not going to work it out, that’s a sore spot—north sore.

MP: Talking about how the U.S. is trying to ally with other countries right now, how do you feel about the countries the U.S. was allied with in World War II?

CW: Well I’m really disappointed right now that France and Germany didn’t go along with the President. I know maybe he didn’t do the right thing and maybe he didn’t make the right decision but I think his thinking goes way back to what happened to Hitler and they don’t want that to ever happen. And we can’t police the world. But I can’t understand France because they’ve been liberated twice by the United States. And Germany, they finally got the wall down, these leaders finally got rid of the big wall and all the things that happened over there. It was a dreadful time for those people. East Germany and West Germany when the…those people now have their own government and they seem to be pretty good towards us. Especially with the Church—the Church is growing over there.
MP: How do you feel that Germany and France are failing to support the U.S.?

CW: I don’t understand that—I think they owe a lot of things to the United States. They could have never won that war. They could have been captured and France already was. They would have had England before long because they started getting those planes that would fly with out having a man controlling, and so they could fly those over certain places and bomb them. They would have had England before long. If the Unites States hadn’t have come in, England would have been under German control. If Germany hadn’t had too many fronts they’d have Russia too. It was just that close. They were trying on too many fronts, trying to get the world too fast. But they could have had that whole country over there. And I think that’s what’s in the minds of our leaders. They don’t want anybody to become that strong and of course the world probably doesn’t like the United States being as strong as it is. We can’t be any other way. And the bombs and they can’t get control. The way they can shoot those missiles so far from the different places. Big cities like New York and Detroit, Chicago and L.A., they can just wipe ‘em out.

MP: How do you think conflicts of WWII have most affected the conflicts that the world is having right now? You mentioned North Korea and Iraq and some of those places.

CW: I don’t know. I’m sure that they just go from past experiences they’ve had with other wars. They know that what happened and what can happen. And they know of the dictators—they finally got rid of one. I don’t know what they’re going to do with him. I know that if they let the pope over there…he wouldn’t last too long. But there’s some that are over there still bombing and killing everyday. I have no idea why, I can’t understand why you just kill people! Why do you kill children and people shopping in stores? What are they trying to do? They’re trying to send us a message. They want to come in there and take over. And that’s not the right thing. It should be a lesson to all the other countries. It should bring France and Germany around, and Russia also. This could happen to them. Maybe it’s happening to us because every time they keep us out of there. And I know we need to get out of Iraq, I hate to see those soldiers face danger every day. In our prayers we pray for our missionaries and we pray for those soldiers. And we know that just about every day there’s some of them, in smaller numbers than WWII, but still you’re sending those young men over there. It’s a death sentence almost to them.

MP: Looking at the conflict with Iraq, how would you parallel that to the times of the war with Vietnam? How do you think it’s similar to it?

CW: Well Vietnam, nobody supported the people over there. They never thought that should be a war and we were over there trying to help South Vietnam. It never was thought of as a war. The soldiers when they came home were treated as just nobody’s. But today the soldiers are rated pretty high and they’ve made sure that they give them the respect and support them. And they’re doing so much different than the soldiers that had to go to Vietnam.
MP: What do you think has caused the change to how they are treated now?

CW: Well I think it’s probably because the government had some influence there and people that had that experience before don’t want it to ever happen again. Especially a lot of those young men, they have families at home and they are pushing to make sure that never happens again. And there’s a lot of people who don’t believe in it right now. But I think that we can’t police the whole world, and I don’t like to see them get spread too thin. But I still think they’re doing the right thing if there’s a dictator that needs to be pulled down. They got the same thing in Iran that’s right above them, they’ve had troubles with them for a long time. And there’s been a lot of people from Iran and Iraq come to our schools. They’ve been educated here in the United States. I hope that those aren’t the ones that are running the country right now. But they could be.

MP: Now when people were being drafted to go into the war, what do you remember about that? Do you remember having any friends that got drafted?

CW: If you enlisted, sometimes you could choose your branch of service. Nobody wanted to be on the ground and have to do the clean up and mop up work. A lot of soldiers waited to be drafted and a lot of older fellows didn’t think they’d ever be drafted. They like the in-flows of 20, 21 because they’re physically fit and ready to go. When they got up into their thirties they were considered getting old. A man 34 years old was an old man. But then they had to draft those fellows and some of them had wives and children. I hope that draft doesn’t have to come again. I hope that people want to enlist but if we get too deep into things I’m sure they’ll have to do it again.

MP: How do you feel toward guys that dodged the draft when you enlisted?

CW: I don’t think any of us liked a draft-dodger. The only difference between a person who enlisted and one that was drafted was that the one who enlisted got to choose his branch of service. And the other thing I could remember was you could stand in line first and get your shots and your uniforms. After that you’re all treated the same anyway. You carry a different number. One starts with a 19 and the other with a 38. So they knew who enlisted and who was drafted.

MP: What advantages did you have, being a soldier who enlisted?

CW: You know I’m not sure I had any, really. I just think you were on your own when you got in there until you knew what to do and how to work. A lot of the young fellows from the farms knew how to get out there and work. They didn’t worry about doing the things they had to do. They were ready to take orders without any problems. I don’t think there was any preference. Probably the reason I didn’t get shipped overseas was that I ended up in tech inspecting. I was able to write down the things that were wrong with the airplanes and other mechanics would have to fix them. All I had to carry was a pencil and a pad with me. Usually when we’d have to shake down an airplane there would be three of us. Two would start at the front and engine and go right around the back and the fellow with the pad would write everything down they tell him and he’d check the front and
back cockpits. And there was about 33 of us in that tech inspection for Luke field. The war started getting toward the end so they started getting rid of some of the fellows and they never knew where they were going. My good friend was one of the first ones to go—Samuel H. Scott from Nowata County, Oklahoma. I remember him always telling me that. He and I worked together and became real good friends. He was taken in the first three guys—they’d take ‘em in threes and fives. There was 33 and it got down to I think there was 11 of us left. The captain of our squadron in our group that was working in tech inspection said I just can’t choose any more so we’re just gonna draw numbers out of a hat. The first three went to New Guinea, and I was in the next three numbers for training in B-24s. That’s how come I missed that thing, I got sent to work on B-29s. I was a crew chief on B-29s and had to get those things fired up and ready to go. My squadron was just ready to go overseas and I had put in for flight engineer. And so my squadron was shipped overseas we’d meet in Montgomery, Alabama. That’s how come I missed going overseas two times.

MP: How do you feel about those transfers? Do you feel that you were blessed in those transfers?

CW: Yeah I think I was. I made the right decision at the right time.

MP: Did you hear anything from your squadrons that were overseas? Did you hear anything about what happened to them?

CW: I’ve seen a lot of my friends since the war. We try to keep track. It’s pretty hard when they go overseas. But Samuel H. Scott came and spent some time with me. He was my real good friend and he’s had a really bad car accident somewhere so he wasn’t as healthy as when we’d last seen each other.

MP: What are some of your more fond memories of your military service?

CW: I don’t think it ever bothered me to be in there. I enjoyed it—you make food friends, you enjoy a lot of things. You have parties and that with different squadrons. There were all kinds of people in there. In fact there were two guys in our squadron that had played for the St. Louis Browns baseball team. Characters that could sing and dance and play ball. Gene Autry was in my squadron. Do you remember the name Gene Autry?

MP: I’ve heard his name before.

CW: He was a western cowboy. Leanna, that was her favorite cowboy. But he was in our squadron. He used to put on a musical program every Sunday in a little building they had there at Luke field. And he’d go back to L.A. quite a bit because he was still in the movies. But the commanding officer decided he needed to stand in line for payroll and you can imagine his payroll was quite a bit different. I was trying to think what he was. I think he was a staff sergeant. I can’t remember now, staff or tech., but they pretty well gave those fellows ranks like that. So he’d come and stand in line and visit with us. He was maybe 5’8” or maybe 9’.
MP: Looking back on the whole big picture, what did you learn most from being in the military at that time?

CW: Well I think you learn to take care of yourself. You know that when they come by to check your bed it had better be made right and it had better be real taught. When they flip a quarter on there it better bounce a little bit. You learn how to keep clean and keep yourself how you should be. And I think that carries over into your life. You just can’t stand the filth. They make sure you scrub the barracks and everything is kept clean. They make you keep yourself neat and your clothes better be neat. And you better be on the ball when an officer goes by you better salute him.