Explanation: Gale Reed is a former employer of mine. I used to move irrigation pipe for him when I was in junior high school and lived by him for a number of years. I knew Gale was alive during the War and felt he could give some beneficial insight into what life was like back then. To clear any confusion, I will refer to myself as “Int.” [IO] for interviewer and “GR” for Gale Reed.

IO: This is Ian Olsen, I’m here with a good friend, Gale Reed, in Ririe, Idaho and I’m doing an assignment for oral history for my History 300 class. We’re going to talk about WWII and Mr. Reed’s impressions about it. And we’ll start right now. Today is October the thirteenth, 2004. Brother Reed, feel free to share whatever you feel. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think back on the days of WWII? Well, first off let me ask, how old were you, if you don’t mind me asking?

GR: That’s getting kind of personal. (Laughs) I was probably 24. I went to college in ’41. No, I was 22 when the War started.

IO: So you were going to college at the time?

GR: I was going to Utah State and I didn’t go to war. I was drafted on the farm. We still had a lot of experiences about the War even though we were on the farm.

IO: So you didn’t serve in the military?

GR: Never did. George Lovell and I both got notices from our draft board at the same time that we had to come home and stay on the farm because our brothers were in the service. Somebody had to grow food for the guys that were over there.

IO: This is true. I remember, your brother Clare, he served in the War, right? Do you remember where he served?

GR: He served at the Guadalcanal, Guam and all those, he was a Marine. He was all up through that…oh clear up until the end of the War. He got in on a lot of terrible things. You ought to visit him. He’s got a book written on it.

IO: He’s kind of an author nowadays; doesn’t he have an autobiography too?

GR: I’ve got the book on that. I’ve got his life story about that whole thing.

IO: He’s kind of an author in his old age. Do you remember anything that stands out about his service in the military, anything he told you of significance?

GR: We were going to college at Utah State together. He graduated and joined the Marines and went back to Virginia for his training. Then he went immediately overseas. The War was going by then. As far as how life changed here, was dramatic. George and I and just a few others were the only young men around. And we were criticized horribly by lots of mothers for not being in the War ‘til we explained to them that somebody had
to feed those kids and that’s what the draft board said, that we didn’t have a choice. It put a whole lot of extra burden on us, here. All we heard was the ramifications of shortage of oil and gas and tires and all the equipment. All our farm equipment was a lot less. Clare wrote home lots of times about things that had happened. Well I’ll let you read that book and see some of them but its very dramatic. It’s terrible in fact, like war is and he got in on all of it. He was on one of the islands. I can’t remember which one, it was over there and a ship came in. This big hoopla went on and John F. Kennedy was on the ship and he was in the service at that time. He was in the Navy.

IO: John F. Kennedy that served as president in 1960, right around there?

GR: Yes, but he wasn’t president at that time, he was just in the service and he was a captain or something on that ship. They came in and he was famous because he was rich, you know.

IO: So he was just on the ship, he didn’t actually serve with your brother?

GR: No, they didn’t serve together, Clare was there with the Marines and Kennedy was in the Navy, but they came into the island that they were on. He got in on a lot of battles where they stormed the islands and then they’d take over and fight’em off and then go to another one.

IO: That must have been kind of traumatic for him.

GR: He had a kid that was called a runner to go from his tent to another and Clare was a captain in the Marines and had quite a responsibility. And this kid was about your size, just a young guy, and Clare had a message to send over to another one of the guys, and he just stepped outside the door and a mortar, a bomb hit him and Clare had this terrible assignment to gather up all the pieces of that kid and put them in a bag. That’s quite outstanding in his experiences, but he had a lot of ‘em that were almost that bad.

IO: That would be hard… Brother Reed, I like this question that I kind of started out with and I kind of got off because I wanted to see where you were coming from and how old you were when the War was going on and just to kind of get a perspective but, thinking back on WWII what’s the first thing that comes to your mind?

GR: Of course the worse thing was the attack on Pearl Harbor. That came on my mother and dad’s wedding anniversary and I had a cousin on a battleship, the Arizona. He was killed when the ship was sunk in Pearl Harbor. So we had quite a traumatic thing in our life when that happened and of course then everything else, the shock that went over the world from the attack. Up until that time, I remember every time we got a piece of scrap metal, they paid a real good price to get scrap metal and we’d sent it to Japan. The Japanese were buying up scrap metal. Nobody had figured out that they were going to bomb us with the metal we sent over to ‘em. There were thousands of tons of scrap metal sent to Japan and of course they went and turned it into bombs or whatever. No one had a suspicion of why they were doing it. But that went on for a couple years before the actual
attack. That’s always the first thing that comes to my mind about the War, when it started and how it started and how terrible it was to start that way.

IO: My next question I was going to ask you was, you didn’t serve in the military, you did have brothers that served, I know you weren’t on the front lines but you did plenty back home and you were mid-twenties, early twenties, you had a knowledge of what was happening in the world, something devastating, something traumatic, how did you and others you knew feel about Germany and Adolf Hitler? Did you realize at that time that it was primarily his doing, what were your thoughts?

GR: Oh yeah, my understanding, as near as I can remember is that yes he was a devil, everyone called him a devil and he was a terrible man. The first impulse everybody got that I remember was, at least about Adolf Hitler was, his sole purpose was to take over the world and that was his goal, to take over the world and it didn’t matter how many million people he killed to do it. That was his intent. Evidently that was the same intent of the Japanese people, to take over the world, that was their plan, at least take over the United States. So that rumbled through everybody’s minds and hearts all the time. For a while, you know it was just so scary because it looked like they might because the Japanese were making greater advances, the Germans were making greater advances. I had a brother-in-law over in Europe at that time and a cousin that was over there in dire danger when they could have been run over by Hitler and his gang but they finally turned the tide and went around and got back safe. Overall the people here did not sit back in complacency and take it. Everybody was concerned and going into factories to help build, do everything to push it that we would, the scare was that we were going to be taken over by those two countries, that that was what was going to happen. Course then we started winning and made people feel at ease. But for a long time everybody was worried. We worried here because we didn’t have enough gasoline for our tractors and diesel. We didn’t have enough equipment. You couldn’t buy equipment, or tractors or cars, and it just got real…it looked like we might have to go back to using horses again.

IO: Did you know any Germans or Japanese personally around the time of WWII?

GR: We got acquainted with quite a few Germans. We hired people to come and help us with our crops in the fall and we hired German prisoners, prisoners of war.

IO: They sent prisoners of war that were captured over there clear over here, is that right?

GR: Yes, and they had camps for them all over. We had these fields out here in sugar beets. We hired them through the county, the state or something. They brought them in and bought guards with them, American guards, boy they were armed to the hilt and we’d get about twenty of them, these guys and we’d go out and top sugar beets and haul ‘em. I was driving the truck and we weren’t supposed to get out of the truck, weren’t supposed to talk to them. I remember out here I’d stand and talk to those guys and they were just kids just like you…young, good-looking…just good kids, plum innocent, but was shoved into the service and we got really well acquainted with them. It just broke our heart to see what they were doing…they wanted to stay. These guards, one of them who tended the
field and they were supposed to get after us and bad as them if you got out to talk to them or visit with them or anything, but pretty soon they were doing the same thing we were.

IO: Even though it was on your ground and they were coming to help with your crops? Pretty strict.

GR: So we got to know them really well. I didn’t get acquainted with any Japanese.

IO: So did that soften your perspective on the German people as opposed to Adolf Hitler?

GR: Oh, immensely. When I saw what they were and talked to them. They were just farm kids just like us. They were put into the service against their will, they didn’t want to go into the war and they didn’t want the war any more than we did, but they were in it. I would have trusted any one of those kids to come into my house to stay. I’m guessing they were anywhere from twenty years old to thirty years old, all of them.

IO: What do you think the general feeling was about German people and Japanese people who perhaps didn’t have the same experience you had working with them?

GR: Well most of the people would get experiences like that felt the same way we did but there’s so many, many people that had a hatred for the Japanese people especially that all the Japanese people here that were citizens were put into a camp down by Burley, a great big camp they built put them in barracks to live there. Took them right out of their homes and for their own safety because our own people around them saw Japanese and they’d kill them just because they were Japanese.

IO: Do you remember specific incidences where a Japanese American citizen was killed?

GR: No, I can’t put any name on it but I know that…I helped take the barracks down that were out there and we saw lots of signs of what they had done. Do you remember Satch and Mickey Mckamie, does that ring a bell with you? They’re a Japanese family that lived in our ward. She was [a] member but he wasn’t, but they were very good friends. And they were shoved off into a place like that, and it just broke their heart. It was terrible. And their parents were put in…and they were all good people, but it was for their own safety because some people had that hatred because of the way the attack of Pearl Harbor came that they saw Japanese and had an opportunity…it would be too bad. The Germans…I never saw the hatred like that, or so bad because it wasn’t our people so much as that the Germans hurt it was other nations.

IO: Pearl Harbor really affected people I’m sure. What did you know about the treatment of the Jews for example, or other minorities, did you guys have a knowledge of the atrocities throughout WWII, or did that just surface after the war?

GR: No, I don’t remember much about that part.

IO: Was there any anti-Semitic propaganda in the media?
GR: Yes, you’d read about it in the papers. There’d be articles coming out in the papers, but I felt about newspapers then about as I do now. Just take them with a grain of salt.

IO: So you didn’t hear about the concentration camps in Germany or the Holocaust atrocities; you didn’t have any concrete knowledge about what was going on over there?

GR: No.

IO: What would you say was the general feelings towards Jews back in that day? I mean, we don’t have a lot of Jews in Idaho, not even now but people who practiced that religion, you know people you could recognize as Jewish. What would you say the general population in the United States felt towards Jews at the time?

GR: I think they didn’t have good feeling[s] about them. They’re another class of people. I’ve always heard that. I’ve never known any, hardly any. Delilah and I served a mission at the Temple Visitor’s Center and three Jewish people came in and they didn’t believe in Christ of God, especially Christ (I think he meant just Christ). They came in and went through the whole thing and then just walked out. That didn’t improve my feeling about them but I didn’t have any personal reason to not like them. But there was a feeling all over that they were another class of people. I shouldn’t say lower class but kind of.

IO: Maybe the way people perceived them.

GR: Yes.

IO: How did WWII affect your family life? You talked about your brother, what about your parents, or were there any other family members that served that stick out?

GR: Well, all of us had either really close friends or family members that got shot down in planes or in the ships or killed like Byron Mason was. The kid that lives down the road where Bruce Koon lives now was just a year older than me was shot down over Germany and he was killed. And then a kid by the name of David Ririe who lived in Ririe, he was shot down in Germany, but he was saved and he was in a prison camp for three years over there. When he came back we visited with him and…it wasn’t good but it wasn’t terrible. We had one cousin that was caught by the Japanese in the Death March, you ever heard about that, the Death March? This cousin was there, but he came back and he made it and he said, “Whatever you heard about it wasn’t nearly as bad as it was, it was worse than what you heard about it.” But he lived through it. But it was a Death March. He watched a lot of his buddies die. There’s quite a few Delila’s age more than mine that quit school when they were juniors and seniors and joined the service.

IO: Delilah’s younger than you are, so that would be like high school age kids?

GR: Yeah and that made it hard on the whole community when those kids left. It just drained our community. Of course everyone that left made a mark on somebody, because
you didn’t know if they were going to come back or not. And when they left the War was going full tilt.

IO: You mentioned before that the community or the mothers, perhaps because they had sons in the military, that you sensed some animosity from them, that they didn’t approve of you guys staying back here, how did you deal with that?

GR: We quit going to town. We’d be walking down the street and we’d have mothers stop and just really rail on us, because their son was over there and we were here walking around safe and sound. We didn’t spend much time in town.

IO: But the draft board said that you specifically had to stay back, that you could not go?

GR: Yeah, I didn’t even finish my second year of college. I got my letter from the draft board and they just said that I had thirty days to get home and tend to my affairs at school. I didn’t even get to finish that quarter, I had to pull out and get home. So I never got back to finish it yet, even. There were quite a few guys that did that same thing. George Lovell you know George, President Lovell, he was our bishop. George got that same letter I did and he mailed it home and people got after him just like they did me. And yet the few kids left, for example Delilah was going to school up at Ricks and there was two hundred or three hundred up there and there was two hundred and eighty of them that were girls and the rest were boys.

IO: What was the ratio?

GR: I’m guessing there was two hundred and something and there was about twelve boys. And that’s it. It sure was nice for us though…

IO: Yeah, I was going to say…

GR: You don’t need to record that (laughs).

IO: It always seems like there’s more girls up there than guys nowadays. Anything else you could say about the community, how it affected Ririe as a whole? I believe, I heard once, while growing up in high school here that Ririe used to be a big grain producer, like a lot of grain would come through here. Did you guys ship out quite a bit?

GR: At one time in history Ririe produced or handled more grain than any other city in the United States, but as far as the War affecting that…

IO: Was that before the War?

GR: Yeah that was, probably when I was a teeny kid.

IO: How would you say the War affected agriculture production, did it stagnate because of the loss of equipment and gasoline?
GR: Yeah, there’s no question about it. You couldn’t plant more than you could harvest and if you didn’t have enough equipment…but I don’t remember us getting hurt really, really bad, we just spent a lot more time and hard work to take care of our crops. We didn’t have sprinklers then so you know, everything was plain old dry farm ground that got about 15 bushels to the acre, all around here. When you put sprinklers on there it turned to gold. That came after that. As far as affecting the town, it didn’t minimize the town but it didn’t cause it to flourish any either.

IO: I was going to ask you also, along the same lines, you talked about women’s attitudes towards young men, what about women in general, how did their role change in this area, were there women out working? I mean you don’t have a lot of factories out in this area, nobody’s building ships here, but did it affect the women’s role in society?

GR: I don’t know how to answer that. I’m sure it did for the lack of men. Delilah and I were there. Of course she was too young then to be there but after the War she did all that without a war but…you know Arlen Grover. His sister and George Lovell’s wife, they ran combines and all that stuff up on the dry farms because of lack of men. They farmed up on Meadow Creek. I remember they did that and a lot of other women had to do the same things. There just weren’t enough men to do all the work.

IO: You talked a little about the Japanese and how people had a rough time with Pearl Harbor, but how did you feel about President Truman’s decision to drop the bomb at the end of the war?

GR: My opinion was…well I had a terrible feeling about the Japanese…in Japan. I still really appreciated those people that we knew here and they were great people so it didn’t change the opinion we had of any of the people we knew here even though it’s been proven that they were sending money to Japan even after the War had started. That’s why they put them in these concentration camps. They call it a concentration camp but it wasn’t. It was a camp to put these Japanese people in to save their lives from Americans. And they were all good people, most of them. But naturally we all had a terrible feeling about what Japan did and how they did it on Pearl Harbor. Of course we all had…we had a cousin from here in Ririe and he was real close to us and when they bombed him that kind of didn’t make me feel very good, and there were a lot of others that went down.

IO: How do you feel about President Truman’s decision to drop the bomb?

GR: You know we liked him, we kind of thought he did the right thing. I though that was…a lot of people hated him for doing that and the Japanese hated him for doing that. But you talk to a lot of Japanese since and they thought it was the right thing to do too because a million of them or whatever it was…there would have been more killed had he not dropped the bomb and there would have been more of ours killed too. So, that’s a tricky one. We all hated the war, just period. We all hated the fact that they did that. When they came on and dropped that bomb and everybody criticized the President, even then I can remember just as plain as day my dad and I talking about it and Dad said, “I
think he did the right thing.” Look how terrible it was and what it did to so many people and it shows all the suffering that went on over there but then… inch by inch we’d of gone over there and had the same thing that’s going on over in Iraq right now. We’d have been shooting at innocent people to get the people who caused the war. There was a wave that went clear through. The papers would come out about the terrible thing the President did and then the next paper would come out and say what a hero he’s been and it was mixed emotions among the people of America. But I think they finally recognized why it was a good thing. Killing that many people, that’s just not good, not in the Lord’s sight or anybody else’s but the necessity of it saved more lives than it killed. That question about how many people felt about him…I don’t ever remember having a feeling against it and neither did my family but I know families who thought they ought to tar and feather him or something.

IO: That’s understandable both ways, I guess. How do you think the War affected our relationship with the world? You look at the Cold War afterwards and with the whole atomic bomb and Russia, how do you think it affected us?

GR: There were so many nations that thought we were a murderous lot for doing that until they finally saw it. I think it caused an ill feeling. I guess you can put it like that among all the nations towards America because we dropped that atomic bomb. But after they saw the wisdom in it, how many people were saved they warmed up to us again. But there was a lot said in the world about us, but of course there’s a lot said about us right now over in Iraq and I think that’s the best thing for the world that could have happened to them. There’s many guys getting killed but old Saddam was killing them by the thousands, just lining them up and shooting them and that’s basically what was going on over there and Hitler too. Those feelings come when you start killing people, horrible feelings come. It just melts through the world, you talked about the Cold War and it’s a hard thing to get over. People don’t forgive very easy.

IO: How do you think WWII affected the Cold War specifically? Or do you think it had any influence?

GR: Oh, it had an affect on it. I don’t know how to answer that, Ian. The War was unnecessary, that’s a fact, it was unnecessary, and when something happens and it’s unnecessary and it kills people then the feeling boils up in everybody all over the world of animosity about the things you ought to do to get even. That’s what the Cold War did, was make people want to get even. People just dwell on getting even and getting revenge. Of course at that time it was supposed to be the war to end all wars, there was supposed to be peace and love ever after, after it ended, but it didn’t.

IO: Maybe it intensified it a little bit because of the atomic bomb. Just one more question for you Brother Reed and then you can say anything else you want to say…what would you say the main difference is, looking back locally for Ririe, before WWII and after WWII?
GR: I think there was a stimulus in Ririe after the War when people started coming home, there was a stimulus here and things started to move. We were kind of at a stand still, but I think I can remember things started rolling, of course by then you could get a new car and some new tires on your tractor and things like that and it just kind of was a stimulus for our town.

IO: Economically, socially?

GR: Yeah and I think it was for all the towns around, everywhere. I just feel like the fact that it was over, people started taking a deep breath again and moving forward, because it did bring the town to a standstill. First gasoline, then tires and then everything in the war effort brought our town to a standstill and then when the War was over it really started mushrooming, that’s the way I feel about it anyhow.

IO: So in that one particular sense the War was kind of a benefit, a stimulus to the economy and socially?

GR: Yeah.

IO: Good, is there anything else that you think would be important for anyone to know?

GR: I’d have you go and talk to Clare but he’d keep you there for six hours. He tells war stories and enhances them a bit but he’s quite a talker.

IO: Thanks, Brother Reed.