

World War II Oral History Transcript
Marvin Russell – Homefront

Myers 000	<p>My name is JoAnn Myers. Today is the 17th of May 2005. I'm interviewing for the first time Mr. Marvin Russell. This interview is taking place in the Burnet Library at 100 E. Washington St, Burnet, TX.</p> <p>Mr. Russell, thank you very much for taking the time to come in here and let us interview you about what you experienced during WWII. To start with I'd like to ask you when and where you were born</p>
Russell	I was born in Sourlake, TX, 29 May 1916.
Myers	What were your parents' names?
Russell	My parent's name was Dr. Paul S. Russell and my mother's name was Veva Russell.
Myers	Do you remember what her maiden name was?
Russell	Her maiden name was Via.
Myers	Did you have any brothers and sisters?
Russell	Yes I did, I had three brothers and one sister.
Myers	And their names?
Russell	Their names were Ellis Russell, Olin Russell, John Russell and Pauline Russell.
Myers	So three brothers and one sister?
Russell	Yes.
Myers	What were their ages? When were they born -- about?
Russell	My oldest brother Ellis was born in 1904; Olin 1907; John 1913; and Pauline was 1910.

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Myers	So you're the youngest?
Russell	I'm the youngest.
Myers	Where did you go to school?
Russell	I went to so many schools that it is unbelievable, but I finished school at the University of Houston, in Houston.
Myers	When did you graduate?
Russell	I'll have to think about that to. I think it was about 1939.
Myers 024	So you had just graduated when the war started? What was your major there at the University of Houston?
Russell	Petroleum Engineering.
Myers	That's why you went to the fuel thing.
Russell	Oh yeah, I got into mostly automotive later on.
Myers	Well, you told me earlier that you were not in the military because of your job. What was your job and where was it?
Russell	Well, my job started out in the refinery in Baytown, TX.
Ethel Corp	Later I decided to move to California with my family I wound up with Ethel Corporation, a subsidiary of Jersey Oil Company and General Motors at the time. I worked in the laboratory in San Bernardino, California.
Myers	So is that where you were when the war started?

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Russell	No, that isn't where I was when the war started.
Myers	OK, Where were you when Pearl Harbor started?
Russell	When Pearl Harbor happened, I was in Fort Worth, Texas, working on a big aircraft plant.
Pearl Harbor	I was doing an odd thing. I was in charge of all installation that went in the buildings. I had, uh, I think it was four different foremen and then crews in each one of the buildings and they made me general foreman over the installation work.
036	When Pearl Harbor came, I was there. Then I went back to Humble Oil Company in Baytown, in the laboratory on a special project, running super octane numbers, you might say, or performance numbers for aircraft. I was running the fuel for that sort of thing.
Humble Oil	I made a decision that I wanted to make a move so I left the company and went to California. I wound up with Ethel Corporation.
Myers	And that was during the war?
Russell	That was during the war.
Myers	So was that considered a war defense job of some kind?
Russell	Yes, we were in charge refereeing all fuels that went to the South Pacific. I was doing that type of work in the samples would come in of the fuel that went to the South Pacific and we would referee -- we okayed the fuel.
Over-seeing Fuels	
Myers	So this company was the Ethel Corporation that was in California during the war? Your job or your company's job was to actually sample each shipment of aviation or other fuel?
Russell	All fuels.

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Myers	All fuels that were in trucks and ships. That was a big job. Do you know how many people that were working there at that plant?
Russell	No, we had a research laboratory there and some of the people were involved in other parts of the thing and I was in the fuel testing end of it and I was fuel testing all of the things that come in. They would send samples from various locations and we would get them every morning and set them aside and during the day we would test these samples and give them an ok and if not reject them.
Myers	And then once you tested it the whole shipment would go out? Overseas?
Russell	Yes, it was bound to go out. Now, if we had a shipload of fuel and it didn't meet specifications they would add additives and different things to it and bring it up to specification that they needed.
Myers	So there was a way to fix it? If it didn't come up right?
Russell	There was a way to fix it. That's right. We did a lot of work out there figuring ways of fixing it for different kinds of engines. We had stationary engines out on our property, which was a twenty-four acre property and we would run these engines with different additives to see what would go and what would not go. And that required quite a bit of work of different people.
Myers	I can imagine. I had no idea any of that went on. You think how critical fuel is or was to all those missions over there -- everybody had to have fuel of one kind or another. I never even thought about somebody back here testing fuel. So you saved me some pictures of you when you were working in the laboratory. Here's one here where we are looking at a row of test tubes. Is that fuel that is in those test tubes? And you're getting samples down into a little glass?
Russell	Those samples then are tested to see if these fuels were ok.
Myers	So this is like the first step of the test? You put them in those test tubes then draw them out?

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Russell	It's one of the tests, this just happens to be one of the tests.
Myers	I see they're numbered -- these little vials are numbered. Is that the reference number of where it came from, so you can go back and say, well this one didn't meet something.
Russell	That's correct.
Myers	And then there had to be an analysis made of what it was lacking or what needed to be done to bring it up to specification.
Russell	That's correct.
Myers	That's really interesting. The second picture here you're in front of some kind of machine. Can you describe that machine for me?
Russell	<p>Well, the name of it is an Oct-testing machine. It's for running octane numbers on gasoline to see if it meets specifications. For instance, if this particular machine said it was supposed to be an 89 or 90 or whatever, we tested it to see that it come up to 90 or 89 or whatever it is.</p> <p>Even today they still, they automatically test fuel, but they still do that and you'll notice that on the pumps that you go to get premium grade or lower grade and so forth. That's what this machine does -- it tests it to make sure that it does meet those specifications.</p>
Myers	But this was a manual type machine you had to insert the fuel in there some place.
Russell	<p>Yes, we inserted the fuel right here in these bowls. We would run sample fuel against two other fuels that are known fuels to see that, how it measured out.</p> <p>That's quite an interesting thing I was in the early days. I was involved in helping to develop different research methods for this engine in my early days before WWII, when I worked for Humble Oil Company and Refinery in Baytown. We did a lot of research work to make different specifications for different engines and such as that.</p>

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Myers	That is really interesting. You must have had a very interesting job there.
Russell	It was very interesting.
Myers	Did you stay at Ethel during the whole course of the war?
Russell	I stayed with Ethel from 1943 to 1950.
Myers	So you stayed beyond the war?
Russell	Yeah, I stayed beyond the war, then I changed my job and moved in to Los Angeles out of San Bernardino and under-studied Chief Automotive Engineering job and later I took over that job as Chief Automotive Engineer for the Western Region, which included all of California, well the Western states, Hawaii and Alaska. That was my job later on. I stayed in Los Angeles until 1967 at which time my company wanted me to move to San Francisco and take care of all the Northwest country. So I stayed there until 1977 ten years in San Francisco area at which time I decided I wanted to retire.
Myers	It was about time to retire, wasn't it?
Russell	And I did retire in 1977.
Myers	Is that when you came to Texas?
Russell	No, I bought a motor home and had it fixed up for full time traveling and I traveled for six years full time all over the United States, Mexico and Canada everywhere we traveled all the time. Seeing all the country and seeing what it was all about and then we wound up deciding to settle here in Burnet, TX.
Myers	Well, that's really neat. What made you decide to come to Burnet?
Russell	Well, we just looked at the country and we were trying to decide where we wanted to settle down and wound up settling down here. Which we did.

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Myers	Well good, I'm glad you did. I do think it's a nice place to live. It's a really nice old town.
Russell	Yeah, it's quiet and the people are pretty well settled and of course places like Los Angeles are a mishmash of everything and so we decided we wanted to get into a quiet place for retirement.
Myers 144 Brothers	Right. Did any of your brothers serve in WWII?
Russell 147	Ah, they were involved in different projects in WWII, but none of them were soldiers. None of the three brothers, none of them did become soldiers. Now, my family, I had two boys that came up and one went in the Navy and the other one went in the, I don't know what it was, another part of the service anyway.
Myers	Ok, So you had two sons who went into the military service.
Russell	Yes
Myers	Later on. Your brothers had defense jobs?
Russell	Yes, they had defense jobs. I'll tell you two of them wound up being career Greyhound Bus drivers.
Myers	Is that right! Now that's interesting.
Russell	They would haul soldiers and every thing all over and they did different kind of jobs with Greyhound. They would be called out to take soldiers different places an such as that. So they were basically involved one way or another with the service, but not directly as a soldier.
Myers	Well, everybody had their part to play; I mean we needed people in all occupations helping the war effort.

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Russell	You're absolutely right.
Myers 184	What do you remember about the conditions at home? Where you worked the cities you lived in? Do you feel like there was a lot of patriotism every body working together? Did you see people against the war?
Russell	No, I think it was a very patriotic war. WWII was. In every way that I could see. In other words, we went through rationing and every thing else and we accepted that because we knew that we had certain shortages and such as that, so we did except the rations we were under at the time.
Myers	You didn't see any kind of general protest or bitterness or anything, because there wasn't enough gas here or there weren't enough tires and no new cars being made?
Russell	No, we accepted that, we accepted that and we did not see the type of thing that I see that goes on today. There's a lot of protesting going on today all over the country, all over the world I guess. We were very patriotic during WWII as I could see it and people accepted that.
Myers	So I guess people thought that this was a war that needed to be fought and they were willing to sacrifice?
Russell	That's right. They sure did. They knew that we had to win this war to be free and so we did.
Myers 184	Well, how do you think this differs from today's war in Iraq? Surely, this is a war that needs to be fought so we can be free -- because those terrorists were being trained over there. So how do you think this is different?
Russell	Well, It's entirely different. Of course, we had to go after people during WWII, we had to go after Hitler, because Hitler was a bad guy. And of course, in the Iraq war, we had a bad guy head of it and so it's different. But again, it's the same kind of thing – we've got bad people in the world that have to be straight-ened out.

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Myers	We have to do something about it.
Russell	We have to do something about it, we're involved in doing our part and we just need the other countries to get with us.
Myers	Yeah, some of the other countries need to get with us, that's for sure. What do you think of the protests that you hear now about today's war?
Russell	Well, It's hard to say, -- it's kind of a political thing I think. As I see it, politics plays a big part of our problems today, I think. We have liberal people and we have people that are not liberal, you know.
Myers	And you don't think that was true in the days of WWII?
Russell	No, It didn't seem to be. It seemed to be that our President Roosevelt at the time that the war started, and served four terms, people were behind him all the way and with Truman that took over behind him, they seemed to be more for him then there was people against him.
Myers	Well, I've heard recently stories that people are trying to make a case that Roosevelt knew that the Japanese were going to attack and he did nothing about it for his own political purpose. What do you think about that theory? Have you ever heard that before?
Russell	No, I really haven't, I don't know, I just think that things fell in as they come along, they just fell in line with, he did what he had to do at the time he had to do it.
Myers	So you don't think he had advance notice then that he knew that it was going to happen.
Russell	I don't think so. If he did I'm not aware of it.
Myers	I think there was even investigations at the time, during the war that he had advance notice of the attack.

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Russell	Of Pearl Harbor attack?
Myers	Right.
Russell	Well, that's hard to say, I don't know, I'm really not aware of that and I felt that probably he wasn't aware of it. If he was aware of it he would have done something about it, I think, because we just got caught unbeknownst. It just happened and it happened so rapidly that we didn't have time to really protect ourselves, you might say.
Myers 224	Well, being out there on the West coast, like you were, you must have heard or seen a lot of news about the displacement of the Japanese population out there on the west coast? Do you remember -- was that in the news?
Russell	Oh, yes, yes, that was in the news. The Japanese were gathered up and put away and I think a lot of it was uncalled for, but they were good American people that was put away and I don't think it really should have happened to all of them of course there might have been some bad guys in the bunch but they just took them all.
Myers	Well, did the newspapers or any organization do anything about it? Did they write it up and talk about it like news people do today about things?
Russell	Well, certainly they talked about it because the Japanese were pretty much in business with the rest of the people out there and they just took them out of the markets and different places that they worked and were earning a living and were good Americans. But, just because they were Japanese they were gathered up and they didn't take a chance of them being a radical.
Myers	So it was any body and everybody who was Japanese, didn't matter what business they were in or what there political leanings were, just that,
Russell	That's right, they didn't stand a chance.
Myers	And then when the war was over, they didn't get their property back, did they?

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Russell	Ah, I'm sure that a lot of them did not. No they really come out on the short end I would say of the thing before it was over with, they just lost out. It was bad business and you can't be proud of the American system in that particular phase because we took good honest American citizens and just didn't treat them properly.
Myers	Yeah, I remember reading about that and it just didn't really seem real that something like that would happen.
Russell	That's right
Myers	But, I guess you could think that we were doing every thing that we could as a nation to win and we didn't want to leave anything to chance.
Russell	That's right, we were doing everything we could to see that we wasn't going to have the door slammed behind us. You know, we were gathering up people that we thought wasn't behind the cause you know, at the time, I don't know it 's just one of those things.
Myers 259	Well, I'm looking at some more questions here to see if any of these pertain to you in a defense job. What was it like when ever you got news the war ended? Were there celebrations or did people do anything special in Los Angles or on the West coast when you received new that the war was ended?
Russell	Well, of course the regular thing that people think, -- boy we finally got through this one. That's the sort of thing that happened at that time. When the war was over the Mayor said, Well we finally won and that was it and we went about our duties and started straightening out the country, trying to get back to where we were.
Myers	Trying to get back to normal.
Russell	Get back to normal.

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Myers	Do you remember any particular talk or concern whenever you heard about the Atomic bomb being used?
Russell	<p>Well, of course that was an individual thinking as to what that was all about. We didn't really know a whole lot about it you know, didn't know what it was all about until it was over with and later.</p> <p>Then my oldest son who lives, of course here in Burnet presently, he was in the Navy and he went out and he saw them shoot the last Atomic bomb at the island that they wanted to blow up out there in the Pacific, he was on a ship who witnessed that, that last Atomic bomb that was shot off in this country.</p>
Myers	Wow, That would be something to see.
Russell	That was very interesting for him.
Myers	Yeah, but you don't think the general public at the time in 1945 really understood what happened at Hiroshima they just knew it was a big bomb and the war was over.
Russell	That was basically it. They just knew that it was a big bomb and it killed a lot of people and it caused the Japanese to decide, "We can't win this, so we might as well surrender or we're all going to be gone."
Myers	Well, that was the whole purpose of using it, I think.
Russell	Yes it was.
Myers	To save more American lives and ultimately save Japanese lives, 'cause they quit.
Russell	That's right, they quit at the right time, because if we'd put a bomb in Tokyo it would have been terrible. It was bad enough in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. That's right, we shot off two of them which we probably could have gotten by with shooting only one of them, but we shot two and made sure that they understood that it was time to quit. That's about it.

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Myers	Well, did you, would you think that WWII had any impact on your life?
Russell	Well, it's kind of hard to say, you know, when you're raising a family and living a normal life -- it's hard to say which way it would have gone if you hadn't of had it, you know. It's really basically hard to say. I just don't know.
Myers	Well, you had pretty much...
Russell	<p>I know I had a good life and I enjoyed it. I was offered a ninety day wonder of-ficers job where you go and take a fast course and then they wanted to send me to San Antonio to supervise overhauling airplane engineering and such as that, teaching. I turned that down. I had three children at the time and I thought that I'm just not going to pull out, until at this time, I refused that.</p> <p>Then later on almost at the end of the war since I registered in Baytown, TX for the draft, they tried to draft me while I was still doing a lot of personal work for the war effort out there. So they had to go to bat for me, from my job over to Washington, D. C. and they notified my draft office in Baytown, TX to put me in 3b until they told them to take me out, because they thought I was doing a better job than I would ever do if I was put in, other wise I would be a Buck Private.</p>
Myers	Well, you were doing an essential job there at that plant.
Russell	Boy, my family was a little worried about that.
Myers	I imagine, I imagine they were. Well, unless you have anything else to add I guess that's all the questions I have.
Russell General Patton	Well, the one thing I was going to add about, I guess the sampling of fuel out in Desert Center, we worked at, what was it, General -- I can't remember -- blood and guts -- Patton was working with our man and sampling fuels and setting up these tanks for the first run in Africa. And so they would bring the sample in and we would test them in the laboratory there. The samples that they would take out of Desert Center for these tanks that they were trying to get where they would run properly when they took them overseas to Africa and it worked out pretty good.

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Myers	So they wanted to make sure that the heat in the desert didn't do some thing to the gas?
Russell	That's right. There was a lot of work went on there.
Myers	That's really interesting. My Dad was in North Africa during the war. He was a truck driver, so he probably used some of the gas you tested!
Russell	I wouldn't doubt that. We -- I never got a chance to meet General Patton because I was in the laboratory doing the testing work. They would bring the samples in to San Bernardino from Desert Center and I would liked to have gone out and had a chance to meet him personally. But I never did get a chance to meet him personally.
Myers	But, you tested that gas, they took it from the desert where it was subjected to heat and all that stuff, then they shipped it out to Los Angeles.
Russell	They were in Blitz cans out there. They would lineup -- they fenced off an area -- and they put different fuels in Blitz cans throughout the area and they would sample them at routine intervals and bring them in and see when their fuel would go bad, you know, 'cause fuel has a tendency to deteriorate just like an egg does, you know, or anything else. We worked with them out in Desert Center.
Myers	That is really interesting.
Russell	I kind of felt a little bad that I didn't get a chance to go out and shake General Patton's hand. But he knew where the samples were going and that we were testing them in there at the time.
Myers	Just think of all those people that relied on good gas, good fuel.
Russell	Oh yeah, you bet, they brought people in from, technical people, from refineries all over the United States and oil company people they worked with us. We had kind of a center where they worked with us there, so it was pretty interesting.

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Myers	Yeah, you did have an incredible job. That was a lot of responsibility to know that your test could make the difference in a plane or in the tanks I guess, did the tanks use regular gas or diesel or what?
Russell	They used different fuels for different tanks and so they were mostly gasoline at the time. Of course, later on we got more into diesel then we did gasoline. We also run diesel samples there, too, run super-charge samples for airplanes and we run vehicle samples and we run diesel samples there at the laboratory.
Myers	Well, that's really great. Well, thanks for your time and the interest in the Oral History Program. What we are going to do is make a transcript of this and if you would like to have a copy of the transcript for yourself, we will give you a copy and as well as a copy of the tape.
Russell	I would appreciate that.
Myers	OK, and I'm going to make copies of these pictures and they'll be put in your file here and the file will be available to researchers later on.
Russell	OK, fine.
Myers	Ok, and thank you very much your service to our country.