

ROBERT FARRELL ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

Interviewee: Robert Farrell
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ABSTRACT

Biography

Robert Farrell was born in 1933 in Rochester, New York. During World War II, Robert played war games and collected supplies for military use. As a child, he visited German prisoner of war camps in New York and knew a man who had survived the Bataan Death March. Robert went on to serve in the military from 1950 to 1958.

Summary

In this interview, Robert discusses his experiences of growing up in Western New York during World War II. He and his wife, Helen, reflect on wartime memories, including food from the era and having to black out their windows. Robert further explores discrimination against Japanese and Germans in the United States, and his lingering feelings about the war.

Keywords

New York, Florida, food, Japanese, German, Philippines, rationing, blackouts, prisoner of war camps, military

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STORY TRANSCRIPTS

Story 1: Suspicion of German Friend’s Family **[24:20 – 25:30]**

Oh, I remember a friend of mine, I can’t think of his first name—Radle [*phonetic*], *Deutschlander*—and his dad, Radle’s Butcher Market. And I remember, he had a good going business until people started glomming onto the fact that we have Germans here and they’re spies, *spione*. And his business started going down. John Radle was my friend’s name.

But he had two Doberman Pinschers in the butcher shop that sat behind the counter and whenever anybody came in, they would get up and look at them and stuff. And so, the word was [that] Radle was a real *Deutschlander*. He had those killer dogs like *The [Boys] from Brazil*, you know that movie? And so, everybody was suspicious of Radle’s father, but not John Radle, the guy that we hung out with.

HF: *Because you knew him.*

Yeah, we knew him. He was a big, husky German.

Story 2: Talking to a German POW **[10:05 – 11:19]**

Oh, I got another story. When I was little, they brought a bunch of German prisoners to a place called Cobbs Hill. And it was a huge camp, huge buildings. I don’t know what the buildings were before, but they were a prison camp for German prisoners. And my buddy and I used to go up there and walk around the barbed wire, and we met this one guy called Hans. He had a raven that he called Fritz. And the raven used to say “*Wie Geht’s?*” Which is German for, “Hello, how are you?” “*Wie Geht’s?*”

HF: *How goes it?*

Yeah. And we used to talk to Hans and have a good time. We found he was a pretty nice guy. He probably killed a lot of people. [*laughs*] But he was a nice guy.

I don’t know whatever happened to them. A few years after the war, they closed that camp down and got rid of them; sent them back to Germany or whatever. I do not know. But yeah, we had a lot of prisoners of war camps around New York State.

Story 3: Food During the War
[32:47 – 34:15]

HF: *Tell her about the horse meat.*

Oh, that was great stuff. The government had an all-white store, painted. Everything was white in and outside. It was set up for the poorer people and it served horse meat, sold horse meat. And that was great because a lot of families couldn't afford regular beef steaks or even a hamburger. So, you ate a lot of horse meat. And I used to eat a lot of dog biscuits.

HF: *[laughs] Well, Spam, too, was one of the products that came in.*

Oh, Spam was a life saver, not only in the military, but at home. *[laughs]* Yeah, Spam.

HF: *People learned to like to add chicory or Postum—*

Oh, Postum. It was a wheat coffee.

HF: *It was a coffee substitute. It was made from grain, I think.*

It was wheat.

HF: *Somebody said you can still can get it.*

VL: *Was it good?*

HF: *Not particularly, no.*

It was like many, many years ago when I used to have a beer once in a while, it was like getting used to beer. You did have to get used to it. But then, when you switched over, if you ever got a cup of coffee someplace, it was odd. You'd say, "Ugh, this is horrible, I want my Postum."
[laughter] Yeah, I wonder if they still do that.