

**Eleanor Christopher
Narrator**

**Mike Gridley from
The Baldwinsville Messenger
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on
May 25, 2004
Baldwinsville Public Library
Baldwinsville, NY**

Introduction by Phil, off camera voice and Int #1

MG: Mike Gridley

E: Eleanor Christopher

Off camera voice: Tell us why we're here today Phil?

Phil: We're here to commemorate the greatest amphibious landing of history.

Off camera voice: Extraordinary. Tell them about what we're interviewing here today?

Phil: We're here to interview veterans of D-Day in the Normandy campaign.

Int #1: Hi. Good morning, today is twenty-fifth day of May, Nineteen-hundred-ninety-four, we're here today to talk to people that were alive fifty years ago and can reflect and give us an idea of what life was like in Baldwinsville when we had the largest amphibious battle ever fought in the world on June Sixth, Nineteen-Forty-Four to liberate Europe, and we have two groups of people to talk to today, those who are residents of Baldwinsville that are here and also D-Day veterans. I think we have four or five right in the area, five in the area and I think, four are coming down today and, we're going to interview those about the battle part of it and so forth, a reflection on that. First off, we have, uh, an historian, past historian, may be present historian of Van Buren. [Eleanor is sitting next to interviewer]

E: Past

Int #1.: Past, okay, and she's going to give us a good insight on what it was like, her late husband, Tony Christopher, is well known in this area and wrote articles for The Messenger for what about fifteen years?

E: Well, he wrote six hundred articles all together.

Int#1: Six hundred, and I imagine Mike Gridley's here today, read every one of them, too. At this point, I'm going to turn you over to Mike Gridley who's the editor of The Messenger will take care of the interview. Thank-you. Here you are.

MG: All set? Okay, why don't you start out by telling me where you were fifty years ago and what your situation was?

E: Well, we had an electric, my husband and I had an electric repair shop out on State Fair Boulevard. Uh, he started it in Nineteen-twenty-eight, so we'd been involved in Baldwinsville for quite a while. We had a very busy life when the war came along there was a lot of work to be done for manufacture and [] Morris machine, so we did a lot of work and that type of thing.

MG: Uh, do you mean...

E: They came in from Cato, Oswego, and all over in order to keep their businesses running and producing things needed at the war.

MG: Okay, what kind of, what were some of the specific things that you were producing and how often?

E: Well, we would be repairing motors for their machines or anything that broke down.

MG: Okay, because they had a shortage of...

E: Right.

MG: They couldn't get new materials and stuff they had, you had to come up with, uh, you had to fix the old stuff and keep them working, okay. Did you have family at that time?

E: Well, I had three children at that time, and oh, [cough] John, the second one in line, he remembers a lot about it, but he had to work today and couldn't come, but he remembers, he was six years old and he remembers a lot of little things that and mentioned it, gas rationing, was very important, you had to think about where you were driving. We happened to be able to have more gas because we had to deliver things so we didn't have problems like people who just went for joy riding.

MG: Right, how did you get a different ration than other people?

E: Because of business and we used it really for business.

MG: Uh huh, okay, now, was there anyone in your family that was involved, that was fighting in the war?

E: No, but they did call Tony, he was past the age that he was supposed to go, but they wanted him to go to England and there was some electrical work that they wanted him on, but the Morris's and places from Cato and all, they said let him stay here so that he can keep us running.

MG: Uh huh, okay. Were there other relatives that were in the war?

E: Well, it would be distant cousins.

MG: Uh huh. Did you get any letters or anything back?

E: Well, yes, people had written to us, uh, it's been a long time I've sort of forgotten the names. [Laughter].

MG: Uh huh. Other than the rationing how else did it affect your lives, that were involved in this?

E: Well, you didn't need much more than rationing to affect your life in anyway, uh, because of gas, and food, and butter, and all those types of things. In fact, I brought some rationing books along that my family had [shows books] and, so there's only three of them that this is...

MG: Now, how did these work?

E: Well, when you went to the store to buy something you would have to give them a stamp, one of your ration stamps, and uh, what was very interesting, and John was telling me about this, and, Mom, I always remember the teachers at school they used to uh, we had cows so we made our own butter, so we didn't have to have butter and we had bees and had honey, so at Christmas time instead of giving the teachers a gift, we'd send them butter and..

MG: Something they could really use?

E: Something like that and we said oh why couldn't you send [Hank] a cheese or something, nobody else brings butter. [Laughter].

MG: But they probably could really use it?

E: Oh, sure.

MG: Yeah, now what were some of the other things that were on the rations?

E: Oh, just about all, sugar, but we had bees so we had our own honey. We kept very busy. MG: So you used honey instead

E: We kept very busy. We tried to have things and...

MG: Uh huh, and as far as gas went you got?

E: Well, the gas was rationed to a certain extent to us, but as long as we had the business and we were delivering things. But, we did not misuse it, I know it has been misused, but we didn't.

MG: Now when did that start in the war?

E: During the whole war.

MG: It was through the whole war you were under rations?

E: Uh, I remember the day that uh ...that peace was declared. Peter Lawrence that lived down next door to us, young fellow, probably eight or nine years old and he came rushing up the road on his bicycle and got my son out, Jim out, and they rode around our yard holding flags and (laughter) [wooden] whistles.

MG: Uh huh, uh huh, any other memories of the actual day, D-Day?

E: Well, there were a lot of bells ringing and sirens going off and that type of thing. I think what probably during the war was the blackouts that were so...

MG: Uh, do you remember conversations that people were having then? What was the general feeling?

E: Well, people were very friendly and if you met you always had to ask about their children and their families and, uh, Baldwinsville was a very friendly place you knew everybody. I think. [Laughter]

MG: Were people, uh, was there any, uh, fear about what might happen?

E: Yes, yes, there was especially during the whole time. Yes, people were really afraid that they would be bombed and they built, some people did build shelters in their cellars so... have a place to go.

MG: Okay, any other memories that come to mind?

E: Uh, well, I think that's a great deal of it. I have quite a bit on the blackout that they had. Tony wrote quite a bit on the blackout and he told about whistles that were blown in town here and in National Cellulose, they had a whistle, and Morris Machine and uh, they'd blow it and then people would take refuge in doorways and that type of thing.

MG: Now, that was done as a drill to get people used to it? How often did that happen?

E: Well, I really don't remember. I couldn't say, but it was quite often.

MG: Uh huh, what did you do, where was your family when that happened?

E: Well, we lived outside of town so we'd just go in the shop in the back and...

MG: Uh huh, but, you had to find a safe place to go you had to...

E: Yes, yes, John remembers the blackout and I know he'd say I remember sitting by the window and opening the curtains to peek out, but we didn't have any lights in the house.

MG: And you were supposed to have all the lights out and be hidden away somewhere?

E: Right.

MG: Okay and when did they start doing those kind of drills, from the beginning of the war?

E: From the beginning.

MG: Okay, so people were pretty used to it by the time that this came around?

E: It wasn't a very happy time

MG: Yes.

E: We were worried about all the boys that were over there.

MG: Yes, anything else about the blackout there that would be interesting?

E: That would be interesting. Well, [begins reading] they worked a few hours at a time around the day and night, too, in different places and they were like, the late Franklin Wean, was the father of our village mayor, was the head of the local air watchers and ground wardens and his name can still be seen on the observer's identification cards, they had to carry cards, and air raid

alarms were sounded very often, and a loud, long toot, from the whistles of the National Cellulose Paper Mill, which is no longer here of course, and Morris Machine Works brought all the traffic to a standstill and people took refuge in doorways, in buildings, and basements. Lights were dimmed or extinguished.

MG: People would just get right out of their cars?

E: Yes and afterwards the whistle when the whistle blew again, it was all clear and then everybody came out.

MG: Now, the spotters were just civilians?

E: Civilians.

MG: Were trained in...

E: Well, yes, yes. I remember one Mr. King, this very prominent man he was the, I can't remember his first name, King.

MG: He was a spotter, air raid spotter...and they would basically take be on shifts?

E: They would be on shifts to watch.

MG: And you said earlier a few hours at a time, twenty-four hours a day they would be inside the...

E: Twenty-four hours a day.

MG: Did they have, was there a place where they would watch from, a tower or something?

E: Yes, they had a place, and maybe more than one place. but the place I remember was, uh, going out of town...on a hill, you know, where the Brewery is now, out there it was a ...

MG: They had a tower?

E: They had a tower type of thing out there that they watch for the planes.

MG: Okay, uh, I guess if there's anything else that you have that. We talked about a lot of things, the blackouts and...

E: Church bells ringing and.

MG: Okay, well, if there's any other ...

E: I think that's about all I can do for you.

MG: Okay, we can talk to the next person that we have here.

End of tape