



Howard Randle

Civilian

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Eccles Broadcast Center, Salt Lake City, UT

Interviewer:
Rick Randle

THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Rick Randle: Tell us your name and spell it.

Howard Randle: My name is Howard Dale Randle.

Rick Randle: You were just a teenager when December 7th, 1941 happened in Salt Lake. Fill us in what it was like growing up and what your attitude was toward the war and what December 7th was like.

Howard Randle: I was 13 years old when the war started so leading up to the war I was a junior high school student and grew up with three brothers, no sisters and we lived various places. My dad had opened a small grocery store a couple of years before the war started. On December 7th I was selling Christmas trees on one of my dad's lots and I just sold a tree and the gentleman said, "Did you hear that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor?" I looked at him and I said, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" And he said, "Hawaii." I had heard of Hawaii but I'd never heard of Pearl Harbor so that was the day certainly when all of our lives started to change. I came home and listened to President Roosevelt give his day of infamy speech and called my friend on the phone and we talked about the war and we decided that we could beat those Japanese in about two weeks.

Rick Randle: So you thought it was going to take that long?

Howard Randle: No.

Rick Randle: Tell us about some of the experiences during those early days of the war and then what kind of sacrifices that had to be made by the public and so forth during the war.

Howard Randle: Being 13 years old I didn't make that many sacrifices myself but I started working at my dad's grocery store on about 3rd South and 8th East, Randle's Market, when I was about 14 years old the next year and that was pretty interesting

because rationing was in and we had a full market there; meat, groceries, and produce. Produce wasn't rationed but meat, milk, and canned goods were all certainly rationed. One of the interesting things there was trying to check people out of the store. We had one little adding machine that we would add the totals up and then at that time they had little tax tokens—aluminum tax tokens, so we had to figure the price, the ration books and the tax tokens and make change for them for each customer that...

Rick Randle: So they had to have a little ration stamp or something in order to buy meat or...?

Howard Randle: They had two ration books; I think there was a red one for meat and a blue one for canned goods.

Rick Randle: Do you remember what the quantities were?

Howard Randle: I don't really remember. I remember, speaking of sacrifices, I think the ones that had the biggest sacrifices were the older people. A little old lady, Mrs. Wilson used to come into our store. She was, I would say, between 80 and 90 years old and toddling around and she would come in and order a pound of butter and she lived alone but her ration book only called for a square of butter every two weeks I think. And she would come in every three days and ask for a pound of butter and I would patiently explain to her about the rationing system and she would nod her head and she would get it, and three days later she would be in and order a pound of butter. (laughs)

Finally after about a month of that, my dad finally said, "Just give her what she wants."

Rick Randle: Now did he have to account, with rationing cards, for the amount of stuff he was selling?

Howard Randle: He did.

Rick Randle: Someone would come around and check that to make sure he wasn't...

Howard Randle: Yes. When he bought wholesale groceries and meat he had to turn them in there—turn them into the wholesaler I believe. But there's always a little wiggle room in the system.

Rick Randle: Tell us about gas rationing.

Howard Randle: Gas rationing... if I remember they had three types of rationing stickers that you'd put on your car—A,B and C. "A" was the least amount of gas just for the general public running around, "B" I believe was for business owners and "C" I'm not sure. Maybe that was for war-plant workers--people who were actually on the job in the war plants. So I knew it wasn't much. I think the "A" rationing was maybe three or four gallons a week if I remember. I wasn't driving a car at that time so it didn't bother me that much, but I did hear people complaining about gas rationing all of the time.

Rick Randle: Do you remember any shortages of items?

Howard Randle: Oh ya. We didn't have a problem with the rationing. People understood the rationing. What we had problems with were the cokes. We were limited with the amount of cokes we could buy.

Rick Randle: Coca cola you mean?

Howard Randle: coca cola is what I'm talking about. We were limited with the amount of coca colas that we could buy so what we tried to do was keep them for our best customers. So we would limit them to one six-pack of coca cola and you would get people riding around to each little store in the area picking up as much coke as they could buy. My uncle almost got into a fistfight with this guy when he told him he would only sell him one six-pack of coke. He turned to him and said, "Well you're a Nazi" and walked out.

Rick Randle: I understand there was a shortage of nylons for women's stockings.

Howard Randle: Well I'm sure... I never could understand it but you'd go downtown and you would see two-block lines of women standing in line for that long to go in and buy a pair of nylons at the clothing store. I understand it now because I know women better than I did then.

Rick Randle: Well do you remember what they did to replace stockings where they use to actually paint their legs.

Howard Randle: Oh yes they did. They had some make-up that they would put on their legs and they would actually draw a little seam down the back of the leg.

Rick Randle: To make it look like a stocking?

Howard Randle: Yes... so that was one way they did that. In fact one woman I saw drew mesh stockings on her legs.

It was nylon and it had just been invented. Silk stockings people could not get. All the silk was going into the parachutes so you could not get silk stockings, but I do remember specifically that it was nylons. In my memory that's what I remember.

Rick Randle: And there was a shortage of rubber I think too.

Howard Randle: Oh there was a terrific shortage of rubber and the scrap drives... the young guys would go around and collect tires and metal for the scrap drives for the war effort and we'd go out and pick up any old tires and junk that we could find if we could get something to haul it in which wasn't very... we'd use a wheelbarrow sometimes.

Rick Randle: To collect any metal at all for the war effort?

Howard Randle: Any metal—aluminum or... there wasn't much aluminum around in those days though, there was junk.

Rick Randle: As I remember too didn't they have you collect grease or fat?

Howard Randle: Actually they did. The women kept their grease and fat and I'm not sure what they did with it. I guess they came around to pick it up, but that was part of it also. And of course we would spend a... for a dime you could get a savings stamp and the government was always pushing the savings bonds and savings stamps. They'd have the big rallies to buy the savings bonds and the kids would pay ten cents for a savings stamp and put it in a book and when they got the book full it would be worth a \$25 bond.

Rick Randle: And I think you had something like \$18.50 worth of stamps and if you kept it for five years...

Howard Randle: It was at least five, maybe ten years you would have got \$25.

Rick Randle: And you'd take a dime to school. What do you remember... in your school did they have air-raid drills and things like that during the war?

Howard Randle: I know they had blackouts at night sometimes. I don't remember air-raid drills in the schools. They might have had them. I'm not sure what we did, but I do remember some nights there would be a blackout night and you'd have to put up blackout curtains over the windows.

Rick Randle: And they had air-raid wardens?

Howard Randle: They had air-raid wardens who would come around and walk the block and if they could see any light, you'd be dinged.

Rick Randle: I remember I was in elementary school and they'd have these practice air-raid drills and we'd have to get down under our desks.

Howard Randle: Oh is that right?

Rick Randle: And it used to scare the heck out of me. One time they told us the Japanese were sending bombs over by balloon and to not pick up or touch anything.

Howard Randle: Well that was another scare that they did. They said that the Japanese were sending bombs by balloon and I guess they had actually found a couple in Utah so they put out warnings not to touch anything—fountain pens, whatever, it may be a booby-trap, that's correct.

Rick Randle: To a little kid it scared the heck out of me, I'll tell ya that. And of course one thing we didn't know was how close German submarines were off of our shores in 1942.

Howard Randle: Well there was no news concerning German submarines, but of course after the war we found out that there were plenty of them in the Caribbean and right off of the coast and in the gulf of Mexico. And also the Japanese actually bombed Oregon with an incendiary bomb.

Rick Randle: I read about that as well. As the war went on I now that you were old enough to go listen to newscasts. Were there any particular personalities or announcers that would deliver the news about the war?

Howard Randle: Oh I remember Ed Murrow. H. V. Kaltenborn. My dad would listen to them every night so you could hardly miss them. I didn't start reading the newspaper for news until after Pearl Harbor and then I started. Gabriel Heater was another newscaster.

Rick Randle: Well now as the war went on, do you remember what happened in Salt Lake on V.E. Day?

Howard Randle: You know I don't remember a whole lot about V.E. Day because we were looking forward to V.J. Day. We knew that when V.E. Day came... I mean it was a relief, but I don't think there was a huge celebration. The war was still going on and they were just going to move the servicemen in the Army and Navy to the Pacific to finish the war.

Rick Randle: So tell us what you were doing when V.J. Day came and a little about that.

Howard Randle: Well V.J. Day of course was something we'd looked forward to for four and a half years or whatever it was, and it seemed to keep dragging on and dragging on until the atomic bomb was dropped, and boy that was a huge surprise to everybody. My friends and I were a little familiar with bombs—we knew what a blockbuster bomb was. We had read about those being dropped and powerful enough to take out a whole city block and when we heard about the a-bomb being dropped it was just unbelievable and fantastic. I remember hearing about that and thinking, oh boy maybe this war is going to be shorter. And then they dropped the second one and the war was over just in a few days. It was unbelievable. And on V.J. Day I headed downtown because I knew there was going to be a crowd down there.

Rick Randle: So you were about 16 at the time?

Howard Randle: Ya I was 16 at the time and headed downtown and from 1st South clear down to 6th South on Main Street it was just packed with people and they were all smiling and joyous and greeting each other and the servicemen were kissing the girls. I was too young for that unfortunately. But you'd never witnessed anything like that before or since—or I haven't and I don't think this country has. It was just one huge glorious smile on everybody's face mixed with relief that that war was over.

Rick Randle: So the streets from 1st South to 6th South were packed?

Howard Randle: That's the way I remember it on Main Street.

Rick Randle: ...Main Street with people that were just as happy as they've ever been.

Howard Randle: Oh yes!

Rick Randle: Give us some more glimpses of that. When you got out into the street was it hard to get through or was it just everybody glad-handing everybody?

Howard Randle: It was just a total thrill to, you know, shaking everybody's hand and as I said the servicemen were kissing every girl they could find, total strangers. We saw the famous Life Magazine cover of the sailor kissing the girl. It was just like that all over the street.

Rick Randle: How long did it go on?

Howard Randle: Oh I don't know. It must have gone on all night. I didn't stay there all night but I'm sure it went on until early morning. But it was such a fantastic display of friendship and relief I guess you could say, a mixture.

Rick Randle: And I'm sure they've never had a celebration like that...

Howard Randle: ... we haven't had a V.J. Day for some time.

Rick Randle: ... it was such a trying time to have over.

Howard Randle: That's true. That war seemed to drag on forever and I guess it wasn't that long, but it seemed that long to me.

Rick Randle: Were there any fireworks or anything going on?

Howard Randle: I didn't see any fireworks, no. Fireworks were saved for the 24th of July.

Rick Randle: I remember us going out and beating pots and pans together.

Howard Randle: Oh ya... as much noise as you could make.

Rick Randle: ... on Lowell Avenue there. Well then how did your life change after the war?

Howard Randle: When I turned 16 even during the war I was able to find a used car to buy so the way I learned to drive (this might be a little interesting)... I had two brothers in the Navy during the war and one of them was home on leave. He said, "C'mon I'll take you for a ride in dad's car." So we went up... I was 15 at the time... went up on a lonely rode and he said, "I'll teach you to drive." So he showed me where the gears were. It was a stick shift. He gave me a lesson for about three minutes and said, "OK take over." So I took over and drove for another 15 or 20 minutes jerking the car this way and that way until you got the rhythm between the clutch and the gear-shift correct and so that was the total of my driving lessons. The next week working in the store my dad said, "Can you drive at all?" I said, "Ya, I can drive." He said, "Well, I've called this truck rental place down there. Go down and get the pickup truck, go get that load of chickens that I ordered and bring them back here." OK, so I hopped on the bus and went down to the rental truck agency and picked up the truck and I was really scared driving downtown for the first time. But after about a block or two I got the hang of it, and I've been driving ever since.

Rick Randle: So you're driving underage and your admitting to this misdemeanor right now then?

Howard Randle: I'm afraid. So I bought a car when I was 16 and I just lived my life from there on.

Rick Randle: You had two brothers in the Navy during WWII. Tell me what your mother was thinking?

Howard Randle: My mother was very worried about them all of the time. We would go to the movies... the way you got your news during that time was over the radio and in the newspaper, but the most exciting thing to do was to go to the movies and see... they always had a newsreel where they would show the week's news. They would show the soldiers and fighting men and the tanks rolling and the airplanes going and my mother would come out of there with tears in her eyes thinking of her two sons. The big problem was we didn't know where they were because they couldn't say where they were. When you wrote them letters you wrote to a post office box number, an NPO and the letters got to them, but when they came back they may have been censored by blacking out some of the words or whatever, so we had no idea where they were until after the war because they just couldn't talk about it. So that was a huge worry for my mother and dad I'm sure and for me, I wasn't all that worried. I thought that in a few years I'll be going in myself and when you're young like that you don't really worry yourself too much about it.

Rick Randle: I remember going down to the train station and putting uh... my older brother was married at the time and putting him on the train and him taking off and his wife crying and his mom crying and my younger brother, the next oldest went down on the train after that and the same thing happened. Mom would just sob all the way home. You could just imagine not knowing whether they were going to see those kids again and they were going to be going into harms way.

Howard Randle: Well Max, one of my brothers was only 17 when he went in the Navy. They had to sign for him and he went in right out of High School.

Rick Randle: My older brother Arnold was on a subchaser between Trinidad and Brazil searching for German submarines and they had one experience where a torpedo went directly under their boat and out the other side in the water. And the younger brother was a gunner and a radioman on a B-24 flying out of the Azores in North Africa.

Were you relieved about the atomic bomb... you were only 16 years old. The atomic bomb may have meant more to you at that point.

Howard Randle: It meant as much to me as it could that that war was over. My own personal situation—I would have gone in had I been old enough I suppose because servicemen were heroes and everybody loved a serviceman. I wasn't anxious to get into a war, but that didn't worry me as much or that didn't elate me as much as that war being over just generally.

Rick Randle: And then you served during the Korean War as part of the Navy.

Howard Randle: Yes. They started drafting again in 1948 and so rather than be drafted I went into the Navy like my brothers and while I was in the Navy the Korean war broke out and President Truman extended me another year. I was on a three-year hitch and he extended me to four years but I never got to Korea. I was on the East Coast the whole time.

Rick Randle: Well thank you very much Howard.