

Interviewer: "This interview is about, 'A Day in the Life of the War Effort;' World War II; Evansville, Indiana. The interview is being conducted with Paul F. Johnson Sr., Age 50, who has a wife Aldah Mae, three sons, and a daughter. He is presently employed as Stores Clerk for Alcoa. He has been a resident of Warrick County for nineteen years. The interviewer is his son, Jimmie Johnson."

Interviewer: "Now, Mr. Johnson, can you tell us a little bit about your life before going to work at Republic aviation?"

Mr. Johnson: "In . . . , a May of nineteen hundred and forty-four I was discharged from the service, with a medical discharge. After coming out of service, I went to California and worked in the Mohave Desert for about the length of a summer and into the fall at which time I returned to Evansville. At this time I started to work for Republic aviation somewhere in the year of nineteen and forty-five."

Interviewer: "Okay, where was Republic aviation located at . . . , in Evansville?"

Mr. Johnson: "Republic aviation was located on Highway forty-one North. It was where the present Whirlpool plant is at. There was a main building where the ~~air~~planes were assembled and erected and then just North of the main building there was two hangers which were used to tune-up the airplanes, to hang the motors on the fuselages, and to tune them up and get them ready for test flight."

Interviewer: "Uh, Mr. Johnson, did you work on the assembly

line or in the office building?"

Mr. Johnson: "My job at Republic aviation was back in what we called the 'dog corner,' this is after the planes had been all, completely been assembled on the assembly line and then as they came off the assembly line they came into the 'dog corner' for the final inspection of the planes. Here all the minor details that may have not been taken care of on the assembly line, here they were finished out--- the aileron for the air speed, and the windshields were cleaned, and any type of defect in the fuselage was . . . , this type of thing was taken care of here in the 'dog corner.' All the little minor defects that could have been . . . , that would have made the plane so that it wouldn't have been airworthy. These things were worked out, here, in the 'dog corner.' In this place the . . . , all of the, after the final inspection, all of the final inspection plates were bolted into place, all screwed into place, the inspection plates under the wings were all put into place. And the last thing that was performed here then was after the, this was all done, the aircraft and the insignia of the United States was sprayed onto the side of the plane. This was the final operation of the plane before it went to the hangers for, to be tuned up and to be made ready for test flight."

Interviewer: "Then this was your exact responsibility at aviation?"

Mr. Johnson: "This was our . . . , anything that had to be done in the final stage we were responsible for if it was

removing part of the skin, that was over the outside of the ribbing of the plane, if we had to remove the outside, part of the skin, which is the aluminum, the thin sheets of aluminum that were over the outside. This was called 'the skin,' and if we had to remove this why sometimes we would have what they called an 'oil can' in this aluminum. And this was when you'd pressed down on it, it would buckle back and forth. These type of things you couldn't have because in the air, your air speed would cause these 'oil cans' to work in and out, would cause a fatigue in the metal and therefore it would cause failure in the wings or in the body of the plane."

Interviewer: "What type of aircraft did Republic aviation put out?"

Mr. Johnson: "When I went to work for them at first they were putting out what was a P-47D. This had a . . . , this was strictly a fighter plane. It had a one, it had bombays, it had one set of bomb doors underneath the fuselage where they could drop one bomb. They could carry one bomb in the fuselage. And then the wings were equipped with a fifty caliber machine guns, and these planes were strictly fighter planes more for fighter planes for escort and this type of work that we first were building when I first went there. Then after a length of time we started making what was known as a P-47N. Now this was a plane that had rocket-carriers under each wing. These rocket-carriers were made so that, they could fly at the speeds and the release in in-field fighting and ground-fighting, and troop support and work like ^{that} was what they were for."

Interviewer: "Can you tell us a little bit about the construction of the aircraft? The radial engine which the P-47 was so popular for."

Mr. Johnson: "I don't remember what the horsepower on the radial engine was but I do know that it was a

Interviewer: "What exactly was the radial engine?"

Mr. Johnson: "The radial engine is an engine that your pistons are on a common crankshaft and they and the engine instead of your pistons being in in-line they are rather, they are formed around a circle which makes it a radial engine. And this was the difference between our planes and some of the planes that were made a . . . , between Republic aviation planes and some of the other planes that were made was in the fact that they had a radial engine and it turned up at a great speed, and it supported a bigger prop, and the power that the plane . . . , made it for maneuverable and faster than most of the planes that were in the air at that time as a fighter plane."

Interviewer: "What type of speeds was the P-47 capable of?"

Mr. Johnson: "You shot me down there. I don't remember . . . , it runs to my mind that they run around . . . , I think that their top speed was about five hundred then."

Interviewer: "About five hundred?"

Mr. Johnson: "They were very . . . , they were though very maneuverable, they were very strong in power diving, and work like this, this type of maneuvering. They were very good in fighting, in dog fighting as ~~it is~~ ^{was} known, did come out of World War One. They were good at this type of maneuverability. This type of plane was."

Interviewer: "Okay, being on the assembly line how many airplanes could Republic aviation put out--- in a week or in a day?"

Mr. Johnson: "Their assembly line was set up to, to the best of my recollection, the assembly line was set up to run nine planes per day in a ten hour shift. And, by moving . . . , starting of the line an hour before the people came in of the morning and pulling the incompletely planes off the line, we ran either ten or eleven planes per day off the assembly line. Now this . . . , this entailed completing planes off the assembly line. This was a moving assembly line just like your automotive manufacturers have in this day and age and at that time, where you have a moving chassis and you build it as the . . . , line moves along you build onto it. You put your wings on it, you put your fuselage on and everything goes in as it moves down the line."

Interviewer: "Were the planes actually tested there at aviation?"

Mr. Johnson: "They were actually flight tested there at Republic aviation. I don't remember how many test pilots they had but they had some good ones, I know this. They had some men that were real good test pilots. They had . . . , I think they lost one test pilot during the time that they were here. But they made thousands of planes here . . . , I know Evansville and besides being a primary assembly line they also reconditioned engines at this particular plant. The engine itself would be detached from the fuselage and crated and shipped back to

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Evansville and here the . . . , here the engines would have . . . , they would completely be rebuilt and built up again with new wiring, and pistons, and cylinder heads and whatever had to be put on them--- their cylinders, or pistons, or whatever had to be put in them to build them back up again. The motors were overhauled and recrated and shipped back to Italy and Germany and England wherever the . . . , wherever the need may be. They were interchangeable . . . , the engines on them are interchangeable . . . , they could . . . , they could pull the engine right off the front and drop another engine right on . . . , the fuselage not being damaged and just the motor out, they could drop a new or reconditioned engine on it and go right on ahead and use the same fuselage and plane again."

Interviewer: "How many airplanes were actually rolled out while you were there . . . , like did you witness . . . , like the momentous occasion when like something like two thousand were rolled out-- or something like this?"

Mr. Johnson: "Well, I don't remember just what the figure was. But I know that a . . . , everytime they rolled a . . . , everytime they rolled a thousand out or another thousand planes off the line there was quite a celebration at the plant because a they really . . . , this plant was really geared to production . . . , fast production geared. The parent company for a . . . , this came out of the . . . , Republic aviation's parent company is in Long Island, New York but due to the closeness, I think, probably of the plant being so close to the seaboard is probably why that the P-47 production was moved in . . . , in to the inner part of the United States in order to be

produced here."

Interviewer: "How many people would you say were on the payroll at Republic aviation?"

Mr. Johnson: "I have no idea . . . , there was thousands of them, I know this. There was thousands of them. In fact, they were just pretty near standing on one another in places. They was just really . . . , I don't know how may women and men worked there--- thousands of them."

Interviewer: "What type of hours did you work like at the height of the war or I mean did you work continuous hours?"

Mr. Johnson: "I worked . . . , I was one of them that went in to help pull the line around of the morning. And at that time I was working a fourteen hour day. We worked . . . , I went to work at six o'clock in the morning and I got off at eight o'clock at night or nine o'clock at night which would give us a half hour each, for each, each lunch. So actually we . . . , I actually worked a fourteen hour day."

Interviewer: "Were there continuous shifts--- like first, second, and third?"

Mr. Johnson: "No, there wasn't any . . . , we didn't work around the clock. No, there was nothing of this. In fact, I don't even know if they could have got enough personnel to have man it around the clock at that particular time."

Interviewer: "Was it mostly . . . , did you have quite a few women working in the plant since most of the men were in the war effort?"

Mr. Johnson: "Quite a few women."

Interviewer: "Quite a few women?"

Mr. Johnson: "Yes, the majority of the women on the

assembly lines. And then those that were there . . . , most of the men that there were either dischargees like myself or men that were classified in . . . , 4-f or weren't physically fit for service, older men and women that worked there. I have no idea how many thousands were there."

Interviewer: "Earlier in our interview you said that you worked in the 'dog corner,' how many people were employed like in this type of phase of the operation--- like in the 'dog corner' alone?"

Mr. Johnson: "There was only about five of us that worked back in the 'dog corner,' five or six of us. This was a job that a . . . , well, you had to be somewhat versatile to the different things that had to be done to the plane--- to be able to drive rivets, do the mechanical end, and do this type of work. You had to be able to do the different types of work that had to be done when it came into the 'dog corner.'"

Interviewer: "In closing, Mr. Johnson, is the plant much like it was then? Is the same building there or is it . . . ?

Mr. Johnson: "The main building is still there but I think both of the hangers are gone. I think the two hangers that set just North are--- their both gone. The big building is, a . . . , I would say . . . , I don't think there has been anything added to the main building where the plant . . . , where the assembly line proper was at but the two hangers where they serviced the planes and got them ready for test flighting . . . , for test flying I don't think that the . . . ,

I think that both the hangers are gone now. But the main building proper is just about the same as it was then. I don't think International Harvester that had it after Republic left here . . . , I don't think International Harvester added to it nor neither do I think Whirlpool . . . , I don't think Whirlpool has added to it . . . , I think it's the same building that was there when it was built in . . . , during World War Two in nineteen . . . , the plant was finished I think in . . . , I think the plant was finished in forty-two, is when the building proper was finished. I know it was a hurry up job on construction, I remember that much about it."

Interviewer: "In closing can you tell us about the role this airplane and probably the industry played in Evansville and also in the war effort?"

Mr. Johnson: "Well Evansville played quite a bit of . . . , part in the war effort. In the first place, what was Servel Incorporated at that time made the wings for the P-47's. They also made some of the tail sections that were added to the planes. The fuselage itself was built up out of . . . , was built at Republic aviation. But the tail sections and the wings and some of these other components of the plane were made at Servel. The other parts of the war effort of course was the landing barges that Evansville was noted for. The barge yard that was here or the shipyard that was here, it was known as where they made the landing craft, they made several . . . , I don't know how many hundreds of landing craft were made here at Evansville during the World War Two. The plant . . . , the shipyard itself bordered along riverside there from . . . , from Fulton well, from about Mead Johnson

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. . . , from the west end of Mead Johnson on ahead west down along the river was where the shipyard was at, it took in an area there . . . , I don't know . . . , it ran clear down to . . . , it ran from the corner of . . . , of where Mead Johnson is at it ran from there clear down to Fulton Avenue. So all along there was shipyard, all along there. Now they did . . . , they did I think work a . . . , a twenty-four hour shift if I'm not . . . , well I know they did . . . , they worked a twenty-four hour shift there at the . . . , at the shipyard. They worked around the clock. They worked three shifts because I knew . . . , I knew some of the men that worked there and they . . . , they worked around the . . . , they worked clear around the clock. But they had three shifts and they worked seven days a week. By the way Republic aviation even during the war didn't work a full crew on Sunday; they just worked a partial crew on Sunday."

Interviewer: "Okay, that's about it, just in closing I'd like to add a comment that the men and the people who participated in the war were probably very appreciative of the people like my father and others who participated in assembling the aircraft and making sure that they had everything supplied in the war effort. Thank-you Mr. Johnson."