

This is an interview with Norman H. Schoenly for *In the Age of Steel: Oral Histories from Bethlehem Pennsylvania*. The interview was conducted by Stephen R. Falken, Jr. on August 1, 1978 in Boyertown, Pennsylvania.

00:00:00 Falken: I'm interviewing Mr. Norman H. Schoenly, 14 North Monroe Street, Boyertown, Pa. 19512. The date is 1st of August, 1978 and my name's Steve Falken. Where were you born?

Schoenly: I was born in New Berlinville [Pennsylvania] on February 4th, 1900.

Falken: What was your father's name and your mother's name?

Schoenly: My father's name was George D. Schoenly, and my mother's name was Annie—Annie Schoenly.

Falken: What did your father do?

Schoenly: He was employed for the Reading Railroad¹ as Freight Agent of the Boyertown Railroad Station.

Falken: Is that the only job he ever did, or did he take others?

Schoenly: No. Later on he was appointed a Postmaster in Boyertown and after that he worked for the Boyertown Odd Fellows² as caretaker of their home, that is their lodge rooming home.

Falken: What did your mother do?

Schoenly: I don't know that she ever had any outside work except in the home.

Falken: So then she was a housewife.

Schoenly: Housewife.

Falken: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

¹ The Reading Company's predecessor, the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad, was established in 1833 to haul anthracite coal. Ultimately the company expanded into coal mining, iron production, canal and sea-going transportation and shipbuilding.

² Founded in 1819, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows is a fraternal organization dedicated to serving mankind.

Schoenly: I had one brother, Lawrence Schoenly, and an adopted sister.

Falken: Did your grandparents ever live with you?

Schoenly: After the Boyertown fire³, the Schoenly grandparents lived with us because when my mother was killed, they moved in with us. That's my Schoenly grandparents.

Falken: Do you remember your grandparents? Could you give me their names and their dates?

Schoenly: The Schoenly grandparents was Joseph H. Schoenly. He was born December 1, 1839 and died September 16, 1919. My grandmother, Emma Schoenly, she was born April 30, 1841 and died December 27, 1916⁴.

Falken: Do you remember anything about them, you know, your early childhood? Do you remember visiting your grandparents?

Schoenly: I remember visiting them. They lived in a little home outside of Boyertown. I remember visiting them there different times, but not too much about it anymore.

Falken: Did you walk out to them?

Schoenly: Oh yes. We walked.

Falken: You did a lot of walking then. What were the names of your other grandparents?

Schoenly: My mother's parents, my grandfather was Amos C. Haycock (Heacock)⁵. He was born March 6, 1844 and died May 16, 1914. My grandmother was Emeline P. Haycock (Heacock)⁶ and she was born April 1, 1846 and died April 27, 1936.⁷

³ On January 18, 1908 the Rhoads Opera House in Boyertown, Pennsylvania caught fire, killing 170 people. The fire inspired the passage of Pennsylvania's first fire safety law in 1909.

⁴ Joseph H. Schoenly and Emma R. Dearolf were married about 1861. They had the following children: George D. Schoenly, William D. Schoenly, Eva D. Schoenly, and Anna Schoenly.

⁵ Amos C. Heacock was the son of Lewis Heacock and Elizabeth Cassel.

⁶ Emeline Heacock, née Krause, was the daughter of Daniel C. Krause and Anna Pennypacker.

Falken: Do you remember visiting them or anything special about them?

Schoenly: Oh, I remember visiting them very well. They lived on a small farm which wasn't big enough for them to have hired people, so every summer when schools were closed, all the grandchildren went up in the farm to help pull weeds, pick stones and disagreeable work around the farm. I didn't like it at all, but we were there and we had to help them out. They had a nice home there. It was a log cabin and where I slept up and under the shingle roof was a lot of crevices. If you happened to be up in the winter anytime, we often got awake with snow in our beds.

Falken: Did they raise animals?

Schoenly: They just had a few cows. They had a couple horses to do the plowing and they had maybe three cows, some pigs and chickens, just a small farm.

Falken: Did you go visit them on Christmas or anything, Thanksgiving?

Schoenly: Thanksgiving we often did, but not when it was too cold or snowy because we had to walk, so we didn't get there too often. In fact, when I was on the farm, I walked from there, which is a couple miles; I walked from there to the Lutheran Sunday school to go to Sunday school and worked back again. That we did every Sunday.

00:04:41 Falken: Could you describe the neighborhoods where you lived as a boy?

Schoenly: Well, I was born back in New Berlinville, it was a frame building. As I remember, there was three houses built together, and we lived on the one end, and that was in the borough. It was just about two blocks from Boyertown.

Falken: Was there a lot of fields around was it fairly well built up?

Schoenly: Oh, no, New Berlinville was built up. That is, on one street, just one street.

Falken: Was the street paved?

⁷ Amos C. Heacock and Emeline Krause were married in Boyertown, Pennsylvania. They had the following children: Annie K. Heacock, Esther K. Heacock, and Harvey Heacock.

Schoenly: No, it was dirt—dirt street. Those days there were no paved streets.

Falken: You didn't always live in that one house, did you?

00:05:25 Schoenly: No, I lived there until I was six years old. Then my father, to go to school in Boyertown, if I'd of lived back there, I had to go several miles to go to school, so we moved to Boyertown on East Philadelphia Avenue. Moved there in 1906.

Falken: At both places, did you have any playmates to play with or were you basically by yourself?

Schoenly: There were children around. I'm sure of that. I don't just know who they were anymore. I couldn't say that, but I had a normal childhood life. I know when I moved to Boyertown was the first time we lived in this bigger home, and on our third floor they had rugs down. In those days they used to put tobacco stems on it to kill the worms and I attempted to chew some of it. I never tried it after that. I got so sick, I never tried it a second time.

Falken: At the second place where you lived on East Philadelphia Avenue, did you have paved streets then?

Schoenly: Not when we moved there. After we lived there a while, they paved the streets, and for the first time, they had a streetcar line from Pottstown [Pennsylvania] come into Boyertown. Around the same time, they paved the street and laid the car tracks for the Pottstown trolley car to come to Boyertown.

Falken: Did you have sidewalks?

Schoenly: Sidewalks we had. We had paved sidewalks, but no paved street.

Falken: And indoor facilities or were they still—

Schoenly: After we moved to Boyertown, we had our bathroom facilities there.

Falken: Another thing, did they have streetlights in Boyertown at that time?

Schoenly: Gaslights. They had gaslights at that time.

Falken: Would someone go around?

Schoenly: Someone went around. They had just a little step ladder. He'd push it full up against the post and he'd light the gaslight and it had a little buggy that he stood on the back of. It was a two-wheel cart with a horse, and he stood on the back of the step on the back. He put the ladder in the front and get in the back and go to the next streetlight, get the ladder out and light another light. He went all over town lighting. I don't know how many lights. I guess they couldn't have had as many as they have electric lights.

00:07:54 Falken: You said you came to Boyertown so you wouldn't have so far to go to school. What school did you go to in Boyertown?

Schoenly: I started school in the Washington school building on Washington Street, and I went there several years, several grades. Then I was sent up to the Lincoln School. But in the meantime, before that school was finished, I had to go in a little two-room school building. It had been originally a school and it was changed into a factory, and I guess it wasn't used anymore as a factory, so we used it just a short time as school until the two school, the Lincoln School, was build, was finished. Then I went to the Lincoln School. Then that got so full they sent me back to the Washington School again. Of course, there I finished my education in Boyertown because that's where I went as a high school student too.

Falken: This factory that was converted into a schoolhouse, what did they make there before they sent you there?

Schoenly: If I remember right, they used to make boxes. I think it was cigar boxes. It may have been paper boxes too. I don't know, but they made boxes. That I remember. It was a box factory.

Falken: You don't remember what year you started. You said you didn't go to kindergarten, right?

Schoenly: Well, I must have started school in 1906 when I moved to Boyertown.

Falken: Then you graduated from high school in—

Schoenly: 1917. Class of 1917.

Falken: How many were in your class at that time?

Schoenly: At that time, we had the largest class that ever graduated from high school, 33, and we had the largest class for several years. After that, there were about 4 classes that didn't even reach 33, but from then on, it skyrocketed. Today it's over 500, I guess.

Falken: Could you describe the Washington building? I know I went to school there, so it was in use quite a long time, but I understand it went through a lot of renovations by the time I went there.

Schoenly: Well, I don't think it changed too much. There were four classrooms down on the first floor, four rooms on the second floor, and what we called the submarine when I went to high school was a room down in the basement they fixed up for a laboratory and we had class down there. There was one room down in the basement.

Falken: You didn't have any inside plumbing, did you?

Schoenly: Oh, yes. It was very crude, but we had it.

Falken: That's something I didn't know. What about those fire safes or whatever they call them? I remember one of the teachers telling us that our old bathrooms used to be fire safes, that people would go in there in case of a fire. Do you remember those?

Schoenly: I don't know anything about that.

Falken: Okay. We'll have to ask her then. Did you go home to eat when you went to school or did you—

Schoenly: In grade school, I don't remember. I know I carried my lunch in times because it might have been the weather was bad, I'd take a sandwich or a hard boiled egg or something like that to school, but whether I went home when it was nice weather, I don't know. Maybe as a youngster I carried my lunch every day. I don't remember.

00:11:23 Falken: Did you have any jobs as a small boy while you were going to school?

Schoenly: Well, my first job was I carried papers for the old *Berks County Democrat*⁸ once a week and I got a whole dime to carry it once a week.

⁸ The *Berks County Democrat* was published from 1904-1930 in Boyertown, Pennsylvania.

Falken: Were the papers delivered to you or did you have to pick them up?

Schoenly: Oh no. We went to where the paper was printed and while it was coming off the press, those days they didn't have no automatic folders or anything, we kids would take the papers and put the sheets together, then fold them and eventually go out in the street. We worked hard for our dime.

Falken: What could you do with that dime? What could you buy, or did you save it?

Schoenly: Well, I'll tell you what I did. My father always taught me to save, so when I got my dime, I put a nickel in the bank and then I took the other nickel and went downtown and bought an ice cream soda which you could so for a nickel in those days.

Falken: And if you didn't buy an ice cream soda, what could you do? Did you buy other—

Schoenly: Nothing else. That's all I wanted, an ice cream soda. That was my nickel that I spend on a Saturday night.

Falken: Where did you spend the nickel for the ice cream soda?

Schoenly: There was an old drugstore. Claude Grave⁹ had a drug store and soda fountain and that's where we went.

Falken: You have any other jobs as a small boy other than delivering the *Democrat*?

Schoenly: I made one attempt at delivering the *Pottstown Blade*¹⁰ and taking prescriptions, subscriptions, not prescriptions, subscriptions, and for three days I was paid, and I don't remember what I got. I was paid to throw samples around the town. Then after that I was supposed to go from door-to-door to try to get subscriptions. I knocked at one door and asked if they were interested in a subscription. No, they weren't! That settled my salesman job. I didn't have the nerve to ask anybody else, so that was over.

Falken: Whatever happened to the *Pottstown Blade*?

⁹ Project staff were unable to identify this person.

¹⁰ The *Pottstown Blade* was published daily, except Sunday, from 1890-1949 in Pottstown, Pennsylvania.

Schoenly: I don't know. They didn't fold up just because I didn't sell any, but they didn't come to Boyertown, I guess.

00:13:37 Falken: Did you like going to school? I know most kids don't.

Schoenly: I guess I did. I guess I was human. Some subjects I didn't like. I got in trouble several times too, so I guess I was a normal kid.

Falken: Did you have recess periods?

Schoenly: Oh, yes. We had recess.

Falken: Did they have a ball field or sliding boards?

Schoenly: No. We had a field we'd play— We'd just run around the school building and played, maybe bat a ball around. No baseball field or anything like that, but we may have had see-saws. That, I believe they had. I believe we had that around. Nothing like slides or swings or anything like that, like you do today. Latin I wasn't too— In fact, that's the only subject you had. Later on, I took German which I done very well in German, but Latin— I took algebra and flunked the first year. I took Latin and flunked the first year, so I took algebra over and I passed that with flying colors, but Latin I never attempted a second year. I didn't want any more Latin.

Falken: But you say you liked German a lot. Can you still speak German?

Schoenly: Very, very little. I've gotten away from it. Ya, ya, that's all! (chuckles)

Falken: Did you do well in school? Were you a straight A student?

Schoenly: Oh, no. I was just an average student, just average.

Falken: Did they give report cards in those days?

Schoenly: We got a report card every month, I believe, if I remember right. We got graded by numbers, not by letters. There was no A or B; it was all it was 100 or 90 or 80 or whatnot. I think I run around the 80's generally. It was always passing marks.

Falken: That's pretty good. Did you have any problems in school, in some of the work besides algebra? You had problems, I know, with algebra, but you couldn't see the board.

Schoenly: Well, I had problems with my eyes. I was very, very near-sighted and I was ashamed to tell the teacher that I couldn't see it, so I'd try to have one of my fellow students sitting close to me or right in back of me write the question on a piece of paper, slip it to me when the teachers weren't looking. So generally, that's the reason I had poor marks for a while because I didn't get many of the questions answered, and after I got glasses, after they examined the school kids and they found out my eyes were bad and I got glasses, then my marks improved. From then on, I was doing fairly well.

Falken: But this was only in high school that they went around checking.

Schoenly: Yeah. It started in high school.

Falken: Did you have a favorite subject at all or a favorite teacher in high school?

Schoenly: I had a favorite teacher: Mrs. Leamare (sp?)¹¹. At the time, Ruth Rogers¹² was her name as a teacher, but Mrs. Leamare, she's still living today, and she was the best teacher I ever had. Of course, there was a Miss Brunner¹³, the art teacher. In school, art was my favorite subject and this teacher wanted me to go away to art school, but financially it wasn't possible to do it. So I didn't get to be in art school.

Falken: Did you ever think of going to college or was it just art school?

Schoenly: No. I wasn't interested, I wasn't interested in college.

Falken: Did your father ever talk to you about going to college?

Schoenly: We didn't have the money to do that, so it just wasn't talked about, and in those days, you couldn't borrow money like today, so that was out.

Falken: While you were going to high school, did you have any jobs working around town?

¹¹ Project staff were unable to identify this person.

¹² Project staff were unable to identify this person.

¹³ Project staff were unable to identify this person.

Schoenly: While I went to high school, I don't remember working anywhere except my last year I may have delivered special deliveries for the post office, my last year in high school, because my father was Postmaster¹⁴ there at that time and I delivered specials, because they only had one clerk, one regular clerk, besides the Postmaster in those days.

00:18:01 Falken: What did you do during your summer vacations then? You did have those, didn't you?

Schoenly: We had summer vacation, but I guess I done just like other kids. Kids didn't have a chance to get jobs those days like today, so I guess I just run around like most—

Falken: Do you remember what you did then? Anything stand out in your mind?

Schoenly: Oh, I remember the gang always used to get together and play ball. Where I lived there was a little empty lot and we'd play ball there.

Falken: Where was this now?

Schoenly: That was back on 5th Street. I moved back there in 1908.

Falken: And there was a lot behind it.

Schoenly: A lot behind it, up above. Well, there's houses there now, but used to be an old movie place, an open-air movie place. It was an empty lot. Oh, I forgot. That was a job I had. When they had this movie, the next day I'd go and clean up. If I found any money, that's mine, but I didn't get any money. I got the movies free, but I didn't get paid. (chuckles)

Falken: These were the silent movies then?

Schoenly: I guess they were.

Falken: If it was open-air, did they have an organ there to play the music or did they just show the movies?

¹⁴ A person in charge of an individual post office.

Schoenly: No. I don't think so. I don't remember that too much, but I know I forgot all about that.

00:19:19 Falken: That was pretty interesting. Okay, since I'm interested in the Opera House fire¹⁵ and I'd like to do some work on that. I know both you and your wife were affected by it. Do you remember when it happened?

Schoenly: It was January 13, 1908.

Falken: Do you remember the day by any chance?

Schoenly: No, I don't. I don't know the day.

Falken: What do you remember most vividly about the fire, anything in particular?

Schoenly: The first thing that I did, the first thing I remember is I know I was sitting in the front row. I don't remember much about going in, in fact, nothing, but I sat in the front row with another friend, another boy my age, and my father was in the play. My mother sat in the back seat with another one of her friends. So when this fire started by someone knocked a lamp— They had coal oil lamps around for foot lights and someone knocked one of those over and it started, it started a sort of a commotion and in that commotion, some gas, I've been told, some gas escaped from the machine that was throwing (inaudible) slides in connection with the play and that's what caused really the fire. My father, when it started, he come out and I crawled up over the piano with his help. We went down the back stairway. Then when we come out, I know flames were shooting out the windows already, so that is my vivid picture.

Falken: Could you sit any place when you got into the Opera House?

Schoenly: I don't know. I don't know whether they had special seats or how it was. I don't remember that.

Falken: And the reason you went to the Opera House was to see your father in the play?

Schoenly: Well, I belonged to the Lutheran church and they sold tickets in church and naturally everybody bought tickets and went. Of course, it only lasted one night. It was supposed to be three nights and the first night they had this happen.

¹⁵ On January 18, 1908 the Rhoads Opera House in Boyertown, Pennsylvania caught fire, killing 170 people. The fire inspired the of Pennsylvania's first fire safety law in 1909.

Falken: Was there only one church in Boyertown at that time?

Schoenly: Oh, no.

Falken: Do you remember, were there a lot more?

Schoenly: Well, there was three, I guess. The Lutheran, the Reformed. Back in those days it was Reformed and you had a Methodist and Evangelical, four.

Falken: Do you remember the name of the play by any chance, or just what it was about?

Schoenly: Well, it was something about England [it was a church-sponsored play entitled *The Scottish Reformation*]. The only reason I know that is from a program. I actually don't remember a thing about the play. In fact, I don't think much of the play had gone on. I don't believe much of it had been shown.

Falken: So you got out, right?

Schoenly: My father saw that I got out. Then we heard, now we were told that someone saw my mother out on the pavement and that she was concerned about me and went back and, of course, never got out and she was unidentified. We never— There were bodies that were unidentified, and she was among those.

Falken: Could I ask you, I know they had a lot of funerals in town then, did they hold a special funeral for her?

Schoenly: It was a combined service for the unidentified because, see, we couldn't have any funeral of our own, of course, the bodies were all unidentified. There were a group of them. But I don't know anything about that service either. I guess maybe I wasn't there. Maybe they didn't let me go because I was only seven years old then.

Falken: Do you remember how many people were unidentified?

Schoenly: No, I don't. I suppose from what I know or saw, oh well it's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, probably 35 or 40 unidentified.

Falken: Now how many people could—this was an opera house, right?

Schoenly: It was called an opera house, but it was used for a lot of purposes. They had all loose chairs and sometimes they'd take those out and have festivals, and I guess in those days you had the old kind of dances too, I suppose, but they could use it for all purposes. It was really an all-purpose room, but it had a stage and I guess then when they just had festivals, like ice cream festivals in those days, they had tables around, people would sit around and eat strawberries and ice cream and they had games, so then they'd take all the chairs away except where people might sit to listen.

Falken: Do you remember approximately how many people were there?

Schoenly: I have no idea. As a boy, I would not have had any idea.

Falken: From what I've heard, it's been around 400, but to me, it would seem, I know from looking at the spot where the opera house was, it looks like it would be awful cramped for about 400 people.

Schoenly: It would have been, I think. Four hundred was a lot, I think.

Falken: Was it just one big opera house or was there a store below the opera house?

Schoenly: No. A bank was on the first floor and a store, and the second floor was the opera house and then they had large rooms on the third floor. It was a three story and they had a large room that different groups rented back then different nights. They had lodge meetings.

Falken: Do you know what the cause was for so many fatalities in the opera house?

Schoenly: Well, they claim, and I guess that's the truth though, that two doors which swung in, so when, through the excitement, they piled up at this door and they couldn't open the door, and we heard that one of the doors was locked. That we heard, but I don't know.

Falken: How many escape routes were there, do you remember?

Schoenly: I don't know that. I couldn't tell. I don't know.

Falken: But one was locked.

Schoenly: That's what they reported, that one of the doors was locked and, of course, in the confusion, people fell and eventually it piled up at that door and nobody could get out then.

00:26:29 Falken: Well, thank you very much for that. Now going back chronologically, you said that possibly the last year of high school that you had a job working delivering Parcel Post.

Schoenly: No, just Special Delivery.

Falken: Special Delivery, there's a difference. What is the difference between Special Delivery and Parcel Post?

Schoenly: Well, Special Deliveries, that can be letters or packages. It's somebody paid a special fee. In fact, those days it was ten cents. Today you'd spend a couple dollars, but in those days, if you paid ten cents for Special Delivery, when that come here, it was delivered right away. We didn't have no cars at that time, so those special deliveries were delivered to the homes, but then the rest of the mail people had to go to the post office for.

Falken: How did you deliver the mail? Did you carry it or did you drive around?

Schoenly: Oh, for the Special Deliveries I walked or on a bike. I had a bike in those days too.

Falken: I think there is a Special Delivery stamp with a person riding a bike, isn't there?

Schoenly: Yeah.

00:27:34 Falken: You also started a stamp collection too. Did that start back here then? I know you had one.

Schoenly: I started collecting stamps when I went to school. Of course, I didn't get serious in it until I worked for the post office, after I'd started working there regular, after I come out of the Army and I started working regularly, then I collected seriously. Until I was through, I had every stamp the United States ever issued.

Falken: That's something. Do you by any chance remember what your first stamp was?

Schoenly: No, I don't. When I first collected stamps, I had an uncle who was in the Farmers Bank¹⁶. That was where this fire was, in the first floor. He was the cashier, so he'd let me come in and go through his wastebasket. That was the days when they had those, I don't remember, I can't say what the set was, but there was four stamps and I used to find some of those in his wastebasket. That's how long ago it was. It was that, I can't think what the stamps were. Anyway I've forgotten, but a set of four. That was the set that I remember at that time. But I'd go through his wastebasket and pick out stamps.

Falken: These were canceled stamps.

Schoenly: Oh yeah, canceled. Those days I didn't have any money to buy.

Falken: Right, uncanceled. Now how long was it after you graduated and when you went into the Army?

00:29:04 Schoenly: Well, I graduated in 1917 and I enlisted in (looking through papers) April 15, 1918. I was out of school just about a year.

Falken: Do you remember anything from that year's time, what you did, or did you travel any place?

Schoenly: No, no. I worked in the post office. Back in those days the Postmaster had to furnish all the help out of his salary. It wasn't like today, so when my father got to the post office, I got a job, but without pay. (chuckles) I worked without pay until they changed the class of the post office, and because I was an employee, a regular employee on the roll, I was automatically converted to Civil Service¹⁷.

Falken: And this was 1917-18 and they converted it to Civil Service.

Schoenly: Mm-hm.

Falken: That was something. When you worked without pay, did you live at home then?

Schoenly: I lived at home. Yeah, I lived at home and, of course, I saved my dad money or he had to pay somebody else. Then after they made it Civil Service, for one month I got paid by the government, but then I went in the Army, so I only got one month pay from the government.

¹⁶ Most likely the Farmers National Bank and Trust Company of Boyertown.

¹⁷ All appointive positions in the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of the government of the United States, except positions in the uniformed services.

Falken: Your brother didn't work in the post office, did he?

Schoenly: No. He wasn't around here. He worked for somebody in New Jersey and eventually he was a candy salesman for an outfit. In fact, he and a couple other fellows started a candy business. Now he wasn't in the firm. He was the first salesman.

00:30:50 Falken: I know you've given me everything that you had in the war practically. You gave me your uniform a couple years and just about everything, diaries and enlistment papers and discharge. Could you tell me why you enlisted in the Army?

Schoenly: Well, I enlisted because my brother was in the Army and all my friends had gone and I wanted to go too.

Falken: Where did you go to enlist? Could you enlist in Boyertown?

Schoenly: No. I went to Philadelphia. A group of us decided to go and I didn't have the nerve to tell my father about it. I was just hesitant and the time came to go and I hadn't told him, so I didn't get along, and I was so concerned about this that eventually, the same morning though, the same morning I skipped town and took a train and joined the other group and went to Philadelphia and enlisted.

Falken: What happened down in Philly? Did you get accepted as a group?

Schoenly: No. They examined each one and because of my eyes, I didn't pass, so they said, 'Well, I'm sorry, can't do anything for you.' I sat there on one of those old Army trunks and my head propped in my hands, and the fellow said, 'what's the matter with you?' I said, 'My buddies are going and I've got to go home.' Then he talked it over with another sergeant. I won't use the same language that he used to me, but he said, 'Oh heck, let him go.' So that's how I got in the Army because the guys were good natured and let me go, but he said, 'Be sure and get yourself and extra pair of glasses,' so I did.

Falken: Where'd you get the extra pair of glasses?

Schoenly: I must have got them from a regular doctor in Reading [Pennsylvania] because we had nobody in Boyertown at that time.

Falken: Did you come home then, or did you go straight there?

Schoenly: I was home for a week and then we left in a group from Philadelphia, about 100 of us, left from Philadelphia down to Camp Lee¹⁸. First we took a special train to Washington, and when we got there, we were too late for the train that was supposed to take us to Camp Lee, so I know my first glimpse of the Capitol of the United States was at night. I took a walk. We got there and I took a walk because the train wouldn't leave there until around two or three in the morning, so I took a walk around Washington. I saw the Capitol at night and the dome all lit up, so that was quite a sight for me because I never traveled when I was a youngster.

Falken: So this was your first really big trip.

Schoenly: First big trip. I had made trips to New Jersey when my brother worked down there. I felt quite proud because I was smaller then. I'd take the train in Pottstown and go to Philadelphia, and I knew enough to walk down Market Street to the ferry and I'd take the ferry across the Delaware and take a train in Camden [New Jersey] because I could see the sign where my brother was and I spent a couple vacations down there in Browns Mills, New Jersey.

Falken: Did you see the White House or did you just see the Capitol?

Schoenly: No. I didn't see— Just the Capitol is all I— Then I went and slept on one of the station benches.

Falken: Did you have your Army uniform then?

Schoenly: Oh, no. We just had our civilian outfit. We got down there early afternoon and they took us to a barracks and said they'd come for us. There we were, sitting on our suitcases. So finally someone came and gave us mess kits and we lined up for an evening meal and the first thing they put in my mess kit was peas, and I detested them. I never ate them at home. My mother would always make something else for me, but I ate the peas that night and I enjoyed them and I've been eating it ever since.

Falken: Did you like camp life anymore than at home, or would you rather have been home?

Schoenly: Well, it was too new and I wasn't there that long. We were only there five weeks until we left for France, but in the meantime, I didn't even—I wasn't in the Army long enough to know what was what, so I know when— I used to play a mandolin¹⁹, so I wanted to play. There was another boy who had an instrument, so we decided I was going out and buy a

¹⁸ At the onset of World War I Camp Lee was established in Virginia as a state mobilization camp and later a division training camp.

¹⁹ A string instrument in the lute family.

mandolin and I just walked out of camp and I walked back again and one day I was sitting playing and my commanding officer saw me and he was a friend of my father, so he said, 'Where'd you get the mandolin?' I said, 'Oh, I was out in Petersburg [Virginia] and bought it.' 'Where'd you get the pass?' I said, 'I didn't have any.' I said, 'I went out to get a mandolin.' He said, 'I sent word to your father to send your mandolin here.' So he did it. My father sent my regular mandolin down and I carried that all over France.

Falken: So then you had two mandolins?

Schoenly: No. I threw the one away. It was no good anyhow.

Falken: Oh, no good. What was the commanding officer's name?

Schoenly: Well, he was my local doctor, Dr. C.B. Dotrin (sp?).²⁰

Falken: So he took care of you.

Schoenly: Now don't say that! (chuckles) I went in to take care of myself, and as a friend of my father, he sort of tried to, he took an interest, but I had no special privileges. No special privileges.

Falken: That was somebody from home that you knew.

Schoenly: It was some— Well, there was 12 other guys in the outfit that I knew, friends of mine. Well, there was three of my buddies that I went with in the same outfit.

00:37:46 Falken: How soon did you go over to France? Was it right away?

Schoenly: Well, let's see. I enlisted April 15th and I served in France. (looking through papers) I'll soon tell you after I find it. I served in France from, I don't know, where is it? I thought it was on here, but I don't see it. I forget the dates now.

Falken: Well, it doesn't really matter. What kind of ship did you go on?

²⁰ Project staff were unable to identify this person.

Schoenly: I went across on an old German ship that was, it was in port when they declared war and, of course, naturally the government took them over and they made a troop ship out of it because it was pretty messy. Down in the hold where they used to carry cargo they made bunks. In fact, in the area from the deck, from what you call the deck to the ceiling in this compartment, they had five bunks, and when you were in, if someone was laying above you, their rear end was almost on your stomach. There wasn't much— See, it was canvas and it just gave. It was very close quarters. And, by the way, on the way over, we zigzagged. Submarines had been after us, but we didn't, they didn't get us, so but they zigzagged. It took us, I know it took us 13 days to cross the Atlantic, and that's a long time.

Falken: What was the name of the ship?

Schoenly: Mercury²¹. I don't know what the name was of this German ship but it was called the U.S.S. Mercury.

Falken: Do you have any special remembrances of the Mercury by any chance? What did you do on ship? How'd you keep busy?

Schoenly: Oh well, we couldn't do much but hang around, but I'd been told when I'd get to France I'd have to have my head clipped on a kind of cooties²², so I had the barber on the ship, I had my hair clipped and my commanding officer saw me and he said, 'You look like a darned old Jerry²³.' So he said, 'Go down the kitchen 'til they grow out.' So I worked in the kitchen going over. It wasn't too bad, but I was busy from then on from the kitchen.

Falken: You didn't get seasick, did you?

Schoenly: No. I didn't get seasick at all. When we first got on the boat, there was just a slight rise and fall at the dock and it made me feel a little funny. I thought I would get sick, but I didn't mind it.

Falken: What about your friends, did they get seasick?

Schoenly: I had one fellow who was sick from the time we left until we got over there, and coming home it was the same way, sick from the time we got on the boat. He was leaning over the rail all the time.

²¹ Originally built as the German passenger ship Barbarossa in 1896, this ship was seized by the United States and used as a troop transport until it was decommissioned in 1919.

²² Most likely head lice, tiny insects that live on the scalp and can be spread by close contact.

²³ A nickname given to Germans during World War I.

Falken: It's good he didn't join the Navy. You said it took 13 days to cross the Atlantic, so you arrived in France maybe about August or so. Does that sound about right?

Schoenly: Listen, April, May, it must have been before that.

Falken: Maybe the end of July?

Schoenly: Oh here. From May 25th we must have got over. I served in France May 25th to May 31st, May 25, 1918 to May 31, 1919.

Falken: I noticed on your discharge papers, your service record, that you didn't qualify with a rifle. Didn't they—

Schoenly: That is very interesting. We were medic and we never had a gun. We never trained. So finally after we were in the battle area, I don't mean where they were fighting, but in the rear where we had our hospital, we had to stand guard. So they gave us a big rifle to carry, an ammunition belt without any ammunition, a rifle without any ammunition in it, but we walked up and down at our post on guard without any ammunition around, but then we did carry a revolver in our belt and that was loaded, but we were never taught how to shoot it. I never shot a gun in the Army.

Falken: You left Norfolk, Virginia, right? Do you remember the port where you landed in France?

Schoenly: We landed at Bordeaux.

Falken: And did you stay in the port a while or did you go right away?

Schoenly: No. There was a camp near Bordeaux, Camp Genicart²⁴ they called it, so when we were there, we got a pass to go out into the City of Bordeaux. I remember that we walked the streets and well, getting off the boat we just had American money and walking on there'd be fruit stands that'd be selling oranges and things and when we want to buy some, you'd say, 'one franc²⁵, un franc,' and I'd give him a quarter because a franc looked like a quarter. I didn't realize that my quarter was worth a couple of those francs, so I got gypped every time I bought something, and of course, the French people didn't care about that. They were very tickled to get our American money. Eventually though, on that account, we were paid in French money, but at first, they took us over.

²⁴ The Bordeaux Embarkation Camp consisted of the Entrance Camp and the Permanent Camp, also known as Camp Genicart. Soldiers were received at the Entrance Camp and then transferred to the Permanent Camp to be prepared for embarkation to the United States.

²⁵ The French franc was the currency of France until the introduction of the Euro.

00:42:16 Falken: Then from this Camp Genicart, did you go to the front?

Schoenly: Well, from Camp Genicart, we were on a train. I don't remember how many days, but we went into the interior of France in the neighborhood, well, the town was (pause)— I don't remember that. If I had the map, but you have the map. I don't remember. We went to a small town in the training area, they called it. So there we got really our only training in first aid work, and we were in that place, I don't know just how long, and we drilled and drilled and practiced first aid, so we were in this town quite a while. Then eventually they did move us up closer to the front. My first taste of war was from Framerville²⁶. Framerville it's called and that's where I saw my first shells laying. It wasn't near us, a distance away, but I happened to be in a building that had, it was two stories and we were just high enough to look out over the rest of the (inaudible) and (inaudible) in the distance of field was shell, the German shells were dropping, so this looked like a ballgame to us. It was quite interesting to see. We'd try to picture where the next shell would land and fortunately none come close to us at that time. But later on one night, they were trying to get big naval guns that were in the rear of us, some distance in back of us, and they were aiming for those. One of the shells landed, must have been pretty close, because while I was in my bunk I heard the gravel and stuff, and I heard a zing and here, a piece of shell was laying on my blanket, my bed blanket. I went to pick it up and it was red hot, and I still have the piece here. Shell piece, shrapnel, it hit my bunk in Framerville, France some time between October 31st and November 11th. That's all I know about it.

Falken: So that's pretty close to the end of the war then.

Schoenly: Yep.

Falken: So you were lucky. What about the trenches over there? Did you have to stay a long time in the trenches?

Schoenly: The only time I was in the trenches was at Framerville. When they started shelling, they told us to go out in the dugout. See, they had trenches and these dugouts, and I think, I think they were actually originally built by the Germans. See, this was in German territory at one time. It was in the Verdun²⁷ area and the trenches were muddy, rats running around, now, not that many that they chewed us up or anything, but I had a nice dugout and we were chased out because that was for officers only. But I went back to my bunk later on again.

²⁶ Framerville-Rainecourt is a small village located in the Somme department and the Picardy region of France.

²⁷ Verdun is a small city located in the Meuse department and the Lorraine region of France. It was the location of a major battle in World War I that lasted 11 months.

00:45:08 Falken: Going back to your training, what were you actually during the war? Were you a combat medic? (recording interrupted)
Okay. We were talking about what you actually did during the war.

Schoenly: I was a part of the 317 Field Hospital Unit²⁸. We took care of patients as they brought them in from the field, and then we gave them first aid. That's all it was, first aid, and then from there on, they took them back to base hospitals, so actually, about all I'd done was carry litters. Now, I didn't, it's not that I always went out on the battlefield to pick them up, not that, but they'd bring them in as fast as they could and we had to pick them up and cart them through the village, all the litters, I mean. I remember one time, your shoulders got pretty sore carrying litters all the time. They'd strap them over our shoulders, and they were getting pretty sore. One night, there was a fellow, we brought him in and he had been gassed²⁹. I'd seen many more that were much seriously hurt than he was, but he had continuously got up, sat up in the litter. Then he let himself fall back, fall back, and oh, I pulled my shoulder. So finally I sat him down in the muddy street and I said, 'Now you either lay quiet or get up and walk.' I didn't want to be cruel, but he wasn't that badly hurt. The difference was one night I brought a man in, I helped, I mean, there was another man and I, we brought a man in, his whole chin was shot off. He still could talk a bit and we tried to be so (inaudible) and we laid him down in our tent, in the hospital tent. He said, 'Boys,' he said, 'you couldn't have treated me any nicer than my mother,' and I appreciated that. It made me feel good. But this other man, he didn't deserve extra good treatment because he wasn't very considerate. Sure, I guess he didn't feel too good either, but he wasn't that bad shape that he couldn't have used reason.

Falken: You said you were afraid of cooties, so you got your hair clipped. Were the cooties really all that bad as we hear?

Schoenly: The cooties were really something. Our evening pastime was we'd get a candle and one piece of clothing at a time, you'd run this candle along the seams of our clothing and we'd hear crack, crack, crack. They'd crack like as if they were, well, they were hard shells, and so as the candle went over them, they'd burst and crack and that's the way we'd kill them, but this was a daily event in the evening. They'd sit and take a candle and go over the seams of our— especially in our trousers. Those trouser seams were much thicker and there they nested good. Boy, they—

Falken: What color were the cooties? I've never seen one.

Schoenly: They were very tiny little white, little white things. Oh, just a little bigger than a pin head, but boy could they crack when the light from the candle hit them.

²⁸ Project staff were unable to identify this unit.

²⁹ Both the Allies and the Central Powers employed poison gasses such as chlorine, phosgene, and mustard gas during World War I.

Falken: You said you'd carry most of your wounded. Did they have other means to carry them? Could they be carried on trucks? Did you have trucks?

Schoenly: Well, sometimes they'd come in with a truck and lay them across, but they had ambulances. They just had little ambulances at that time where they could put four in. There were little Ford ambulances, and sometimes when it was at the height of the drives, when they were coming fast, they'd use the trucks and just lay the (pause), oh, you know what they carry them— I can't say the word.

Falken: Stretchers.

Schoenly: The stretchers, they'd just lay them across the body, and once in a while you'd pull one out that didn't make it.

Falken: Did you use wagons or were there any—

Schoenly: Oh, we had, we were supposed to have a motorized outfit but all we did have was four mules, a wagon that we had our kitchen equipment on and then a water cart. That was our motor outfit, so the rest we hiked.

00:49:30 Falken: What was a typical meal like in the Army? Did you have anything special for holidays?

Schoenly: Oh, we had, we had special things on holidays sometimes. I'm sure, I'm sure, I don't just remember it, but I'm sure I got, say, Thanksgiving maybe we had some turkey and chicken, but many times it was stew. I don't know what you call it, Mulligan Stew³⁰ I think. I don't remember that, but it was a lot of stew, a lot of beans. Those are my, those are what I remember mostly, and you could have all you wanted. We never felt short of food. You could go back for seconds. In fact, some times some of the fellows were a little greedy. They'd take their mess kit and dump it on the lid of the mess kit and go back for seconds before they even started.

Falken: Was it that good?

Schoenly: To me it was alright. I looked forward to finding the food. Sure, it wasn't anything fancy, but I enjoyed it.

Falken: Did you eat, say, better than the French civilians or did they eat better than you? Do you know?

³⁰ A stew usually including meat, potatoes, and vegetables.

Schoenly: I ate one meal with a French family and it was nothing elaborate, but it was more home, it was more home-like. I ate in their kitchen with the family. In fact, it was when we left this town, when we went into action, and they had a little—we called it a dog robber. I was doing work for an officer and this officer lived in these—and this family, in one of their rooms and they invited me to eat with them for my last meal there in that town.

Falken: Was this a farmhouse like that you went to?

Schoenly: It was in a little town, a little village. It was no farmhouse, but all those French villages were made to have, they had a barn connected to the house. Maybe they had some cattle in there. Even in a village, in that one place after the war, it was in a town, a regular little village, but where I lived there was a barn, all in one, the barn and the house (inaudible) was all in one, and that the way the French homes were at that time. They had, when we were there, I don't think they had too many cattle, but at one time I suppose they did, because that, it was just a one street town and they had fields where probably they had raised some food.

00:52:12 Falken: Did you have to take care of the mules? You said you were in a mobile outfit?

Schoenly: No. They had special fellows that took care of those.

Falken: Were they farm people?

Schoenly: No, they weren't farm, they just picked somebody. They would never pick me. My first experience in Camp Lee was taking horses out of big stables and tie them onto, they had a line stretched outside. Then we had to clean the stables. The first horse that I took out, I got a hold as far as the lead, as far as I could get away from him. As soon as he got outside the door, he opened his hind legs and out he would go, and the sergeant said, 'You're no good.' He said, 'What's the matter?' 'I'm afraid of horses,' I said. 'Well,' he said, 'then you clean out the stalls.'

Falken: Oh!

Schoenly: (chuckles) This is, this might be an interesting sideline to that. After we'd clean out the stalls, the fellow said, 'Now, if I were you, different stalls had some straw in them. Now, you sit there and when you see a horses tail to up, run for the shovel. That'll save you some cleaning up.' (chuckles)

Falken: Did it work?

Schoenly: It worked, if we got there in time. (chuckles)

00:53:18 Falken: I know you've been saving for a number of years some letters that you got from an acquaintance over there. Could you tell me about her?

Schoenly: After the war, we marched into a little village. In fact, we were there several months. When we marched in, a little girl about six years old, the cutest little thing you ever saw, especially when you're away from home, she had long blonde curls, but she was six years old and she come running out and grabbed my hand and called me 'trumpet.' Well, I couldn't understand this because I was never in the town, I never saw this youngster, and we, of course, went through and eventually she, well, she was left behind, and we were assigned billets³¹ and I had a swell, swell room with about four other guys. So then they had cootie inspection and I had cooties, so they took me out of that and put me in this other place, and it just happened to be the home in the barn where this little girl lived, so from then on, I lived nice. This little girl, all she wanted to do was be with me and she tried (inaudible) and the family was very nice too. They told us not to sit out in the barn, we should come in the kitchen where they served wine as we sat there or another man and I, we sat and we got milk, because we didn't drink. But this little girl, she'd sit in my lap and try to teach me French, but I could never learn French. All I could say was 'oui, oui' and talk with my hands. But I still hear from her. She a—now that's from 1918-19 [1919]and this is '78 [1978] and every year I still get a letter from her at Christmas, and today she's a grandmother, so that's quite a length of— And the bad part is I can't read a word she writes. I've got a whole pile of letters I thought maybe someday somebody's come in my home and could read French. I'd give them the whole pile to read to me, but I didn't, I was in the hospital a couple years ago and one of the girls could speak French and she was going to translate them for me but then I was discharged and I never heard. I still don't know what's in the letters.

00:55:28 Falken: I learned from your mess kit that you did some doodling on that. Was that a pastime of yours during the Army?

Schoenly: Oh, that was some after, I don't remember when I done it. It must have been after the war, but I sat with a pocketknife. I had a sharp pocketknife and you'd, I made those grooves. You just turn it like that. You keep twisting it to make the design. First of all, I drew a design on with pencil. I'm sure I did. Then I went over it with my pocketknife to cut into the lid. When we were discharged, I was supposed to turn my mess kit in, but I wanted that mess kit, so I stole another one and turned that one in. (chuckles) I stole one and turned that in and I managed to get mine home.

³¹ A place where a soldier is assigned to sleep.

Falken: How did you come about the idea? Did you see some other guys in your outfit working on their mess kits?

Schoenly: I don't know. I don't know, but I just—

Falken: I know here I have two rings that you gave me.

Schoenly: Well, French soldiers made those. I don't know anything about that.

Falken: But what were they from? They look aluminum.

Schoenly: It looks like aluminum. I don't know what it's from, but French soldiers made those. I don't know whether they sold them or how I got it. I don't know. Here you have a cross. This I picked up, I was in an old church that the roof was shot off and a lot of rubble and I walked in there and I found this cross, this crucifix laying with the rubble and I picked it up and brought it home, and there's a ticket I bought to go from Antilles, France to— I don't know that that is. I don't remember, but I bought this ticket and I got on the train and the conductor come around. I wanted to keep that ticket for a souvenir, so when he come around and asked for my tickets, I just held out my hands and made I didn't understand him and I kept that up until I got off the train. I still had the ticket, so he never got my ticket. I acted dummy. I knew what he wanted, but I wanted the ticket for a souvenir.

00:57:45 Falken: What unit, I know you said the 317th Field Hospital, but what division were you in?

Schoenly: We were in the Galloping Eightieth, Eightieth Division³². Even if that was, that was made up of the three states, Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Falken: But you enlisted. You weren't drafted.

Schoenly: No. I enlisted.

Falken: But the Eightieth, I guess, was supposed to be a draftee division.

³² The 80th Division was organized August, 1917 at Fort Lee, Virginia. It included soldiers from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Schoenly: That was a lot of enlistment, enlisted people.

Falken: What was your highest rank that you achieved during your Army days?

Schoenly: That is really something. I was a buck private³³ until I got off the boat coming home and I was finally made a first class private³⁴, something I should have been all along because I was doing first class private work as a first aid medic, but I never got promoted until I got off the boat. I had an opportunity while I was in France, on one of our hikes, we were, we spent a weekend in a town where they had a, what they called a post, the army post office, APO³⁵. I went into the post office because as a postal employee I was interested, so while there I mentioned at the window that I worked for the post office, so the man said, 'How about transferring?' I said, 'Oh no. I want to stay with my buddies.' So finally an officer came out and talked to me and asked me about transferring into the APO. I said, 'No, I want—' He said, 'I'll tell you what, you transfer and you'll be a sergeant in ten days.' I should have accepted, but I didn't. I thought we were going home immediately, and we didn't. If I had known that, I'd have taken that job. That would have been immediately a sergeant and work three days in a week. Oh, that would have been something.

Falken: Do you remember what you got paid as a private?

Schoenly: I got \$30 a month here and overseas we got, I think it was \$3 more, I think. It wasn't much more, around \$33 after we were overseas. And I suppose it's first class, as a first class private I made a couple more bucks, but only for a month.

00:59:57 Falken: So it really didn't pay being promoted that much. What about your voyage home. Oh, before that, were you in any way connected with the influenza epidemic right after the war?

Schoenly: We were up in, the further we got towards Germany was in Bolnay³⁶ (sp?) or Mits³⁷ (sp?), I forget. But anyhow, I got the flu one night, and the next day they were leaving for what we understood was our trip to go home. We were told we were going straight to New York on New Year's Day. So I got this influenza, so they wanted to send me to hospital and I didn't want to go. I wanted to stay with the gang. They said, 'Well, we'll put you on the truck.' See, they hiked for 13 days to

³³ Slang for an enlisted soldier at the lowest rank (Private).

³⁴ A promotion from the rank of Private.

³⁵ An Army Post Office (APO) is operated as an extension of the United States Postal Service for military personnel serving at overseas locations.

³⁶ Project staff were unable to identify this location.

³⁷ Project staff were unable to identify this location.

go back to Brest³⁸. I don't know how far we hiked, but it was 13 days and during that time they would put the packs for the fellows, their packs, on the trucks, and they they'd take them to where they'd be the first stop for that night, and I went with these trucks and I had to stay and guard of these packs until they got there. In the meantime, for my meals, I had a lot of bullion cubes, so when I got to places I'd make some hot water and make some bouillon cubes to eat until the evening when the outfit got there, then the cooks would make a meal. So that I done for 13 days. And the boys that had gone to the hospital, they had a swell time traveling all over France. They'd done like I did; they'd get on a train and they'd say they got on by mistake and they'd get off and come back again and go some other place. They were riding all over France and seeing things, and I stayed with the outfit and didn't get anywhere.

01:01:51 Falken: Did you ever see Paris while you were in France?

Schoenly: I went through Paris one night. I saw out, I went through one night and I looked out the boxcar door and saw it at night. That's all I saw of Paris.

Falken: Did you see the Eiffel Tower by any chance?

Schoenly: No. I didn't see much. I just saw what you could see in the dark. I only ever had one— No. I never had a pass at all. One weekend pass I had all the while I was in the Army.

Falken: Didn't they issue them that often?

Schoenly: After the war we were supposed to get a week at one of those summer resorts and they drew the names out of a hat, and my name was on a list, but the man in front of me went and the man in back of me went. I don't know why I was left out, but I never got away.

Falken: What did you do with your money? Did you keep it and bring it home or did you send it home?

01:02:57 Schoenly: Oh, I didn't, we didn't get that money. Oh, my 30 bucks. They took, I sent \$15 home, they took \$6 and some 90 cents out of it for insurance, so I had what was left, so that wasn't much. I had nothing left. In fact, I left France busted, and coming home on the Rotterdam³⁹ we had an orchestra of Army fellows and we'd play for the passengers. They liked our orchestra

³⁸ Brest is a city in the Brittany region of France.

³⁹ S.S. Rotterdam IV was launched in 1908 and operated by the Holland America Line.

better than the ship orchestra and every time we played they took an offering and we'd divide it among the players, so I landed in Hoboken with about \$50 in my pocket, but I left France busted.

Falken: What about the food on the Rotterdam?

Schoenly: It was good, but my last meal there was two bankers. They were rich guys and had a lot of money. They were spending a lot of money and entertaining women on the top deck. They were dancing and we'd play for them, and anyway, this is a side incident, after every time we played, these fellows invited to take us down the saloon, and we should order what we wanted. So the first time they made, oh, they made delicious lemonade on the boat. That's a joke. They made delicious lemonade, so I ordered lemonade. The fellow said, 'Oh no, that'll sour your stomach. I'll order for you.' So he ordered for me, which was liquor, and I didn't like it, so I passed mine on to—I had a couple of times I had to drink it because they were watching me and I couldn't pass it on to somebody else. But I'll tell you, I slept three decks below the main deck and it was a little hard to go down the steps. It was steel steps, down this narrow stairway, down to my lower bunk. Instead of having five bunks in a tier, there were two bunks, and they were real metal and they weren't close together either.

Falken: They didn't sag.

Schoenly: No.

Falken: Okay, that's good.

Schoenly: Some of the fellows had little staterooms with just two bunks in them, just real small, but the accommodations were good. But my last day on the ship these bankers invited us up to their stateroom and had the stewards provide a meal there, set up the tables and there was, first meal, I had my first taste of ice cream since I had left the U.S.

Falken: Didn't they have ice cream in France at all or you just weren't around it?

Schoenly: Well, I just never, I was never around to get it where they had it, I mean.

Falken: Where did you arrive? You said you docked at Hoboken [New Jersey].

Schoenly: We landed in Hoboken and then from there we took a train to Camp Dix⁴⁰ where I was discharged.

Falken: And from there where did you go?

Schoenly: There I came home to Boyertown.

Falken: You didn't stop off at Philly?

Schoenly: I stopped at Philadelphia to get rid of my hobbly old shoes because those were the only shoes I ever had and I didn't want to come home in those clumsy old things, so in the Army I had asked for size 9, or size 7 ½ and the fellow when I got my uniform gave me 9. I took them back and he said, 'Take them if that's what you got,' but I did get rid of my foot trouble, and when I got in Philadelphia, I went to a shoe store and bought a nice pair of 7 ½ shoes again, size 7 ½, until I got home, I had corns already and sore feet, so I went back to 9's from then on. I never went back to 7 ½ anymore.

Falken: That's something I forgot to ask you. Where did you get issued your clothing, down at Camp Lee?

Schoenly: In Camp Lee. We lined up, the whole gang, as we come in, they took the whole outfit and we lined up. One guy would be giving shirts and another guy something else.

Falken: Did you get your helmets there or did you get those in France?

Schoenly: Helmets I guess we got in France. I don't remember that. I don't think we got helmets down there.

Falken: Did you ever think of rejoining the Army?

Schoenly: Well, before we were discharged, we were given the opportunity to re-enlist and as bait they said they'd take us up in an airplane, but that wasn't enough bait for me. I wanted, had no more part of it. But during World War II, I had offered my services in the APO, but my age was against me. They didn't want me. (chuckles)

01:07:01 Falken: What kind of work did you do after the war?

⁴⁰ Camp Dix (now Fort Dix) was established in New Jersey in 1917 as a training camp and later served as an embarkation camp and a demobilization center during World War I.

Schoenly: I went back, after I was over in France, I had wrote a letter of resignation to the Post Office Department, and when I was over in France, I got a letter that they didn't accept it, but giving me a leave of absence, that when I returned, my job was waiting. So after a month at home, I went back to the post office. I served as clerk first. That's what I had been when I left. Then shortly after, we got city carriers and I transferred to carrier man in Boyertown. I was, me and another man were the first carriers that Boyertown ever had. They never had city delivery before, and I was one of two first carriers. I carried mail for 25 years then.

Falken: Was the mail delivered to the post office, or did you have to pick it up as your job?

Schoenly: No. The railroad, see, at that time we had rail service and the mail came by train and then a railroad employee would bring the mail to the post office and in those days they'd bring it up in a wheelbarrow or a two-wheeled cart. There wasn't that much mail. Of course, then it grew and they had to get a horse. They finally got a fellow with a horse and wagon brought the mail. Then eventually it went to truck. Of course, now today everything is truck.

01:08:24 Falken: When did you buy your first car? Do you remember around when, after the war or before the war?

Schoenly: No, after the war. I wasn't old enough before the war. I must have bought my first car about 1921. I was home a while. My father bought a car and he didn't tell me, though he told me that the garage man wanted to see me, so I walked down to the garage. I went in and told him 'My father said you wanted to see me.' He said, 'Just a minute.' He come out in a brand new Chevy touring car. He said, 'Kid, I want to go up country. I want to take you along.' So then he drove out of the garage and he showed me, 'Now here is high gear.' Got out in the street and he said, 'That's second gear. This is high gear.' And drove, he drove two blocks and then he stopped and he said, 'Now you try it.' So I got in and I've been driving a car ever since. That's the only training I ever had.

Falken: Did you teach your father at all?

Schoenly: No. Every time I took him out to learn, he had some excuse and I'd go back again, so eventually he said, eventually I bought the car from him because he wasn't using it and he was going to sell it, so I bought it. That was my first car, a Chevy.

Falken: Chevy—

Schoenly: Chevy touring car.

Falken: Do you know how much you paid for it by any chance?

Schoenly: Oh, I bought it, I know I bought a new one then. Oh, this was in a fire and then I bought my own, I bought a new one. I paid \$700 for a new Chevy touring car. I don't know what I paid for this one from my dad, but I paid \$700 for my first new car that I bought myself.

01:10:17 Falken: What did you do in town? You're working at the post office. Did you use the car for work at all? Did you drive to work or did you walk?

Schoenly: No. When I carried mail, the government didn't furnish anything to deliver Parcel Post (inaudible), so I used my car to deliver Parcel Post and the other carrier, because I furnished the car, he had to do the work. He delivered, he'd run in and out to the house taking parcels in, but I furnished the car and paid the gas and everything for a number of years, then eventually they had some money to pay somebody and they wanted to pay me but it wasn't enough. I didn't want it, so somebody else did take it.

Falken: This driving around town delivering the packages, that was before you became a letter carrier, right?

Schoenly: No. That was when I was a letter carrier. We had to deliver parcels too. We delivered everything. Yeah. We delivered everything.

01:11:16 Falken: What kind of social activities did you engage in in town when you came back from the war?

Schoenly: Oh, when I first came home, that's sort of interesting too. I never danced in my life, so when we left France, the people in the last town we were in, Laillé⁴¹ was the name of it, L-A-I-L-L-E, they had a party for us and they had a dance and I couldn't dance. So another boy and I, we stood outside this hall and looked in the windows. It was just one-story building where they were dancing and we stood outside and looked in, then we tried it together. The two of us, we tried to do what they were doing, but we never could get, we never got in to dance with the girls, the women. So when we come home, they had a party for us and this same boy, his sister and a friend of hers were at this dance, so he said, 'Now, let's go in

⁴¹ Laillé is a small village in the region of Brittany in France.

there.’ He said, ‘You ask my sister and I’ll ask the other girl. They don’t know we can’t dance. We’ll just go and ask them for a dance. So we did. But all the dancing experience I had was outside of that barracks. So we went in and we waited for a waltz which was the easiest thing to do, so we didn’t get along too bad.

So we spent, had a nice evening and now I decided I’m going to take dancing lessons. So over at Ringing Rocks⁴² there’s a man from Boyertown used to have a class once a week, so I went over for two weeks and he had a lot of, not a lot of girls, but he’d teach us. So the third week I went over, he said, ‘Norm, I can’t teach you anymore.’ I did pick it up very fast. So he pointed out a girl sitting on one of the benches and said, ‘Now you go and ask her for a dance.’ He said, ‘She never turns anybody down because she had to learn herself,’ he says. So I went over. Very politely I said, ‘May I have this next dance please,’ and she said, ‘No thank you,’ just like that. And I was so disgusted. That time I didn’t go in the car. I had gone on the trolley. I took the trolley and went home. I thought, I’ll never go to dance again. I thought, I’m not going to let only one girl spoil all my fun, so I went back and I found out that was part of the game, because when you dance, and you have to ask different people like that, not everybody’s going to dance. So he had that girl was sicced onto me so I’d get used to being turned down sometimes, but that was the only girl that ever turned me down. So I had a number of years a lot of fun, not too many years, until I met, until I went roller skating and I met my present wife.

Falken: Did you go by yourself to these dances? I know you told me—

Schoenly: No. They had a group and we’d go together as a group of boys and girls. We’d go together. We’d go to Pottstown or Ringing Rocks or something like that.

Falken: But your wife wasn’t in that group.

Schoenly: No. I didn’t know her that time. I didn’t meet her until we went roller skating.

Falken: That was the first time you ever saw her.

Schoenly: Well, no. I’d seen her in town but she was just a kid. (chuckles) I mean, she’s four years younger than I am, so when I was 19 she was only a kid. And, of course, she had other boyfriends too at the time. So when I just ran into her at roller skating she just happened to be free and I—

⁴² Ringing Rocks is a park that contains a large boulder field and is located in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Falken: Where was the roller skating rink again?

Schoenly: On the corner of Madison Street and Fourth Street, down here at the corner. There was an open lot and it was a, what you might call a movable one. They had the floor was in sections and it was just under a tent, but they had some good roller skating there. I had a lot of good times there.

Falken: Did you roller skate before you went there?

Schoenly: I don't believe it. I used to go ice skating a little bit, so I went down there roller skating, tried it and I liked it. I liked, I liked the roller skating with music. I was always fond of music with keeping time like that. Roller skating is really nice. You just swing along to the music and I enjoyed it. Really my wife was a good roller skater, so we got along really well roller skating. In fact, we roller skated together and it lasted for, well, now it's 53 years, and we're still roller skating together, but not on roller skates anymore.

01:15:37 Falken: When did you get married?

Schoenly: June 27, 1925.

Falken: Did you have a church wedding?

Schoenly: No. We were married in my wife's home. Her uncle was a minister, so he married us in her home.

Falken: Did you have a reception afterwards?

Schoenly: In the home. We just had a few friends. It was no big wedding. Neither of us— Well, money was scarce those days and my wife and her mother worked hard for everything they had and you didn't just go out, in those days, you didn't just spend money wildly. You didn't have it to spend.

Falken: What did you wife do when you got married? Did she work?

Schoenly: She used to work in the casket factory⁴³. She had a fairly good job in the casket factory. Then after we got married, she quit.

Falken: And her mother.

Schoenly: Her mother kept working. Her mother worked there too and she kept working there.

01:16:36 Falken: You didn't go out and buy a house, did you, after you got married?

Schoenly: No. I moved in where my wife and her mother lived. I moved in with them, of course, and her mother insisted that I take over the house and she would just board with us, so that's the way the arrangements were made. And then about two or three years later, we bought our present home.

Falken: Could you describe the house that you lived in with your wife?

Schoenly: Oh, it's, it was just a plain brick home, no bathroom facilities. We had a pipeless heater⁴⁴, no cement floor in the basement, and we had a big, this had an opening, like in the old homes where they used to have, keep their cook stove in like a, I don't know what they call it, they could close the doors in front to close it off. It was just like a big fireplace, that's what it reminded me of. It wasn't a modern home.

Falken: Did you keep anything in the cellar then if it didn't have a cement floor?

Schoenly: Oh, well, see, I remember we used to have something down there to keep things cool. It was cooler down there on the ground floor. And when we raised vegetables, we had a nice garden, we'd keep them down in the basement, the cellar, put them in ground, like celery and stuff, you put it in the ground and we'd pile up ground around it and we kept a lot of food like that. The only thing they had was a little ice box that they could keep milk and just a few little things like that. They couldn't store a lot of things.

Falken: Did you get on a honeymoon after you got married?

⁴³ The Boyertown Burial Casket Co. (later Boyertown Casket Co.) was located on N. Walnut Street in Boyertown, Pennsylvania. Once the second largest casket maker in the world, the company closed in 1988.

⁴⁴ A pipeless furnace is installed in a basement and delivers heated air through a large register in the dwelling's floor above the furnace.

Schoenly: (chuckles) My honeymoon, not much to talk about. None of us had money. Our honeymoon was spent in a bungalow not more than about six miles from Boyertown. It was along a creek. We could go swimming. It was out in the country.

01:18:32 Falken: Did you go swimming often before you went on your honeymoon?

Schoenly: Oh, we used to go, we went out sometimes. We'd go on the Perkiomen⁴⁵ or something like that. We didn't have, they didn't have swimming pools around. In those days you had to go in a creek and I'm no swimmer. I never learned to swim except on my back. I can swim all day on my back, but that's no fun. But because I had a bad experience when I was a kid. I went to visit my brother in New Jersey and we went in the water and it was near a dam breast and I didn't realize how slippery that was and I slipped down and I went down three times. My brother pulled me out and he got, so he said, 'Never, don't tell dad or he'll never let you come down anymore.' So from that time, I was scared. But then one day Colonel [Thomas L.] Rhoads⁴⁶ who had been at the head of the 80th Division Medical Division, I mean, the medical outfit, see, they have the whole medical, the sanitary thing, he and his boy— His boy and I were good friends, so one day he got a car and he took us up to Spring Ford and he made us dive in and I couldn't swim, but I didn't have the nerve not to try it because the other guys all did it. So I dived, I jumped in but boy I landed flat, almost knocked the wind out of me. But he taught me how to swim on my back and when I'd go in swimming, I couldn't swim front. I'd always go down. So as soon as I went down, I'd turn around and paddle on my back and float around.

Falken: Did your mother-in-law and your wife have a car?

Schoenly: No, no. They never had a car.

01:20:19 Falken: Did you have a telephone when you lived over there?

Schoenly: Not 'til we moved here.

Falken: Not 'til you moved here. So from when you were born until about 1929 you didn't have a telephone.

Schoenly: Never had a telephone. There weren't too many telephones in those days.

Falken: Did they have a switchboard in Boyertown?

⁴⁵ Perkiomen Creek is a tributary of the Schuylkill River located in Berks, Lehigh, and Montgomery counties in Pennsylvania.

⁴⁶ Thomas L. Rhoads was the Division Surgeon of the 80th Division. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for actions during World War I.

Schoenly: Oh, they had a little room with a switchboard maybe as big as two shelves of the bookcase. That was the switchboard.

Falken: That's not too big.

Schoenly: I know I'd been in one time I guess with mail or something, I don't know, but they had levers, you know, that you dial the operator and they'd give you the number. They'd give you the— You couldn't do like now, dial direct. You had to get the operator, then she plugged you in.

Falken: Did you have a radio when you married your wife?

Schoenly: I had a radio. It was a homemade one, my first one. I bought several of those after, I just don't remember what they were, but I had several radios I bought.

Falken: From places in town?

Schoenly: I bought them locally.

01:21:24 Falken: Do you remember your first day of carrying mail when you married your wife?

Schoenly: You bet I do! My first day carrying mail I transferred out of the post office to carry mail and the first day I carried mail they had electric bills for every house in Boyertown, practically everyone and I had about 12 or 14 cubby holes to sort all the mail from my whole, my half of the town, which when I quit there was around 600 stops. It wasn't quite that many, but usually around 500, and I had to sort all that mail in about 12 or 14 separations and I had a headache. Before I had worked a half an hour, I was wishing I was back as a clerk again. I was disgusted, but later on after we got our regular equipment and the cases were labeled and stuff and we got, actually we had no directory, we had nothing. We had to just go by what the—So eventually we got straightened out. I liked carrying mail.

Falken: You said you delivered electric bills. Was there a generating plant around here?

Schoenly: Back on Chestnut Street where the *Boyertown Times*⁴⁷ is. That's where they made the electric.

⁴⁷ The *Boyertown Times* was a weekly newspaper published at Boyertown, Pennsylvania between 1927-1972.

Falken: Was it big?

Schoenly: Well, that building, it's just where the *Boyertown Times* is on Chestnut Street. But see, they took out all of the motors and stuff from where they made the electric, but that's the building where they— That's the first electric company.

Falken: And Siesholtz⁴⁸ was right next to the electric company.

Schoenly: Yeah. That was there, but across the street, that was an open lot.

01:23:02 Falken: Did you belong to any organizations after you married your wife?

Schoenly: Oh, I belonged to organizations before I got married. I belonged to the POS of A [Patriotic Order Sons of America]⁴⁹ for 60 years. I belonged to the Odd Fellows [Independent Order of Odd Fellows] about 56. I belonged to the Legion [American Legion]⁵⁰ about, well, ever since they organized. I'm a charter member there, and I, I've had a continuous membership there about 50, say, 53 or 54, well, ever since 1919 when they organized.

01:23:37 Falken: Were you a member of, did the postal workers have a union then?

Schoenly: They had a union, but not like today. Our unions were respectable. They didn't make unreasonable demands and didn't go on strikes and stuff like that. In fact, they have a rule like that today, government (inaudible). When you join up, when you sign up for employment, you sign that you're not going to go on strike, but those things don't mean anything today.

Falken: But you were sort of like a trade guild almost. You were part of the American Federation of Laborers⁵¹, right?

Schoenly: Yeah. Just like today.

Falken: But they did merge the two.

⁴⁸ Siesholtz's is a lawn and garden center in Boyertown, Pennsylvania.

⁴⁹ The Patriotic Order Sons of America, organized in 1847, is a patriotic, fraternal society.

⁵⁰ The American Legion, organized in 1919, is a mutual-aid organization founded to serve veterans who served during a wartime period.

⁵¹ Founded in 1886, the American Federation of Labor was one of the first federations of labor unions in the United States. In 1955 it merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations to form the AFL-CIO.

Schoenly: Well, no, a lot of these are part of the Federation of Labor, but I was just with the letter carrier group.

Falken: So there was a difference there.

Schoenly: Well, they had different, they had clerks, a clerk's union too, which they did. The clerks had a union, the letter carriers had their own union, and it was Federation of Labor, but we didn't go on strike. We never thought of it. I didn't have to go on strike and lose a couple months' pay. You never make it up anyway.

01:24:51 Falken: You were also active in the Boy Scouts⁵² too, weren't you for a while?

Schoenly: I was active. I was Scoutmaster⁵³ for a number of years, and I was a Troop Committeeman⁵⁴ for a number of years, and I was a District Commissioner⁵⁵ for a time. Actually, I organized the only Boy Scout camp in this district in our, just for our boys and troops in like Olney [Pennsylvania] and Bechtelsville [Pennsylvania]. We had our own camp, and I was told we couldn't do it, that we weren't big enough, but we did it and we had a good camp. We gave the boys ten days of camping at half the cost that the regular scout camp would have cost them. They gave them the same benefits. We had instructors there to teach them different things in Scouting. We had first aid men. We had a good cook. We had furnished good meals. We had a good camp, and they finally admitted it. The scout leaders in the county made an inspection of our camp and they couldn't find anything wrong, but they were the ones who told us we couldn't do it, but we did it, and I got credit for it because at that time, I carried mail. I'd go to the grocery store and get our groceries for the next day during my lunch period. I'd run them back there and deliver it. The next day I'd go and order for the next day and I'd take it back again. Kept me running around, but I wanted to make that camp a success and I did. And it's the only time that they had a camp like that. There never was another one like that by the district. Now the was the regular scout camp, that they have every so often.

01:26:22 Falken: That I didn't know. I know you got married in 1925. Now I remember you broke your arm. When was that? Was that soon after?

⁵² Founded in 1919, the Boy Scouts of America operate programs for young people to develop responsible citizenship, character, and self-reliance.

⁵³ A Scoutmaster is a uniformed leader who supports the youth leaders of a Boy Scout troop.

⁵⁴ The Troop Committee supports the troop's leadership in executing troop programs.

⁵⁵ The District Commissioner supervises the efforts of Unit Commissioners, who support the operations of units (related packs, troops, teams, crews and ships) and act as a liaison between the unit and the district.

Schoenly: I got married in June and December I broke my arm. December I broke my arm and it wouldn't heal. So I had worked one month; the doctors thought it was alright, but it wasn't. I worked a month and I had to take off again, but altogether I didn't work for almost two years, and eventually I wound up in the University of Pennsylvania Hospital⁵⁶ in Philadelphia where they put plates in, and these plates just recently were taken out. The doctor who operated this last time told me, he said this was a medical history. He never saw any plates that were in this long, and it's surprising that I didn't have blood poisoning because they were all rusty. Some of the plate—one of the plates had completely disintegrated to nothing but rust and rusty screws in my arm, which they took all that out now, and that was just recent. But 50, 52 years those plates were in my arm, and he said he never saw anything like it. He said, 'It's medical history,' and he said, 'besides that, this is for the book of records.' I don't know if he's going to do anything about it or not.

Falken: You didn't work for two years. Did the post office give you employee's compensation during that time?

Schoenly: Oh. I got, it wasn't much, something like \$14 or \$15 a week because I was hurt while on duty. That's the only reason I got it.

Falken: How did you break your arm?

Schoenly: I was thrown off a Parcel Post truck. See, after, this was after they had someone else deliver, furnish the truck, and they had the truck and the driver. We just went along to deliver the packages, and I was thrown off. We hit a bump and it threw me off.

Falken: Then did you wife have to go to work during this time when you weren't working?

Schoenly: She got a job to sort of help out too while I wasn't working. She worked in a couple of stores.

Falken: What did you do? Did you have a lot of spare time?

01:28:55 Schoenly: I sure had spare time. That's where I learned to play the musical saw. I used to saw. I used to sit in the basement at home. That was down in that ground cellar. I didn't want anybody to hear me. A man next door, he had bought a special saw for it and he couldn't do it, so he said, he gave it to me to try it, and it worked good. But then afterwards the saw that I used

⁵⁶ The Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania was founded in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1874 and is the oldest university-owned teaching hospital in the United States.

was just a plain ordinary everyday saw. In fact, it was a carpenter saw bought by a man just to use for odd jobs, and he gave the saw to me because it worked so good. It had a good tune. It had a good steel in it.

01:29:28 Falken: You probably went back to work in 1927, the dates were around then.

Schoenly: Around then. Yeah.

Falken: So this is like two years before the stock market. Did you own any stock?

Schoenly: Nope.

Falken: Or did you lose any money?

Schoenly: I lost no money, lost no money during the stock market. I lost a couple of dollars, but I made bad investments, but not because of the Depression. It was just because my judgment wasn't good. I'm no stock dealer. I don't have anything to do with stock anymore.

Falken: Did you lose any money in the banks during the bank holidays?

Schoenly: No. The banks in Boyertown, we didn't lose any money. They were closed just like all banks had to close. No matter where you were, all of them had to close during that time, but our banks were in good shape. We never lost any money here.

Falken: You had your job though all during the Depression.

Schoenly: Oh, I worked straight through during the Depression, except when work was very scarce. When a lot of people were out of work, they said it wasn't fair that we had steady work, so they made us take three afternoons off a week without pay and then on top of that—recording interrupted) —so after we had the, took three afternoons off. On top of that, they gave us a ten percent cut, so I felt the Depression a little bit, but I still had work regularly at a reduced amount, but I still had my regular pays I got, but naturally it wasn't as much, but we made out.

Falken: Did your wife and your mother-in-law work during this time?

Schoenly: Well, my wife's mother, she worked for a number of years, and during this time, the only time my wife worked was during the Christmas holidays she helped out at the post office, and she did help at a store several times, but that was just, just a few times because she had a little experience there and in an emergency, they'd call on her to help out sometimes.

Falken: Boyertown is such— you didn't see bread lines on corners, did you?

Schoenly: Oh, no. We had nothing like that, nothing like that. Even there were very few people that were on relief. The churches maybe would take turkey or something to a family if maybe they couldn't afford something special, but nobody was really on relief.

Falken: So what visible signs of the Depression could you see in Boyertown? Were there any that you could remember?

Schoenly: In my experience, not more than, sure, work was reduced a little bit, but practically everybody had some of that. There were no lines of unemployed. Maybe most people had employment, but they, maybe they cut wages in that time too, but they had employment. You take like our big industries, the casket factory, this I can't vouch for, but it's just probably or possibly possible that perhaps maybe they worked for less money but kept on working, but they had work all the time, practically all the time.

Falken: What about the NRA Eagle⁵⁷, was that displayed in Boyertown at all that you remember?

Schoenly: That was given to industry, I guess.

Falken: Right, the stores (inaudible).

Schoenly: Well, the body works⁵⁸, I know they had one, and maybe the casket factory did too. I don't know. To me, I thought that was people all who done government work. Maybe I'm wrong, but the body works had it, but oh, that NRA⁵⁹, I know now what that is. That wasn't in effect very long. I don't think it worked out so well, so I don't believe it was very popular around here.

⁵⁷ The Blue Eagle poster was displayed by stores that supported the National Recovery Administration.

⁵⁸ Boyertown Auto Body Works, a successor to the Jeremiah Sweinhart carriage factory.

⁵⁹ The National Recovery Administration was a New Deal program established by Franklin D. Roosevelt to combat the Great Depression. It effectively fixed prices and wages, established production quotas and gave employees the right to organize and bargain collectively.

Falken: Could you see the blue eagles in participating stores, say, like Boyer Store⁶⁰?

Schoenly: There may have been, but I don't remember. I don't remember because—

Falken: Now the post office, I took note today coming home that it was built in 1937 during the Depression. Can you tell me something about how that came about?

Schoenly: Well, it was a political thing. They had money to spend and they spent it in Boyertown, put a new post office up. And, of course, at the time, the old post office was rather small and, of course, increased, maybe they added a few territories for the rural sections which made extra rural routes. Boyertown itself hadn't grown that much, but they added territory out in the country, so it meant they'd need a couple more (inaudible). In the old post office, they only had room for two cars, rural cars and two city cars. That's all the room they had, and probably they needed more money, more room. When we moved into the new post office, we had plenty of room, lots of room, didn't need it all, but it was a project that through that program the government had spending money in different communities. That's where we got our new post office.

Falken: I noticed in the new post office, the one that's there now, they have some statues and stuff hanging from the ceiling. Do you remember who made them?

Schoenly: It was a name that I couldn't remember, that some, it was a peculiar name. I don't know who it was, but it was one of those WPA⁶¹ jobs that, on that order.

Falken: Did he make the statues in the post office?

Schoenly: No. They were made somewhere else. He just put them up. He may have had a studio. He may have had that and he made them himself, but he just, they were all complete and then he put them up, and, of course, re-painted over them or something.

Falken: And he was paid for this?

Schoenly: Oh yes. This was a government job that he was paid for.

⁶⁰ Founded by Daniel Boyer in 1818, Boyer Store was located at 11 E. Philadelphia, Ave., Boyertown, Pennsylvania.

⁶¹ Created in 1935, the Works Progress Administration (later Works Projects Administration) was a New Deal program established by Franklin D. Roosevelt to employ unskilled workers to build public works projects.

Falken: Did he have like an unveiling ceremony at all in the post office?

Schoenly: No, nothing like that. We had a dedication of the old, of the post office, but I don't think they were there when they dedicated the post office.

Falken: Could you notice any slack in the mail during the Depression, less letters coming through?

Schoenly: No. Actually, this just kept growing gradually. When I first started up there, it wasn't that much mail, but naturally as the years went by, it kept increasing. I don't think the Depression had anything to do with it. It didn't decrease, it just, normal business activities and normal, a little growth and like companies started advertising which made more mail, so the mail actually grew all the time. The Depression made no difference as far as the mail that we had.

Falken: You owned a car during the Depression, right?

Schoenly: Yes.

Falken: Did you drive it much?

Schoenly: I delivered Parcel Post in it because the government didn't pay any money for it. They didn't pay us any money. They didn't even give us anything to deliver Parcel Post, so I used my car and as we only had two cars in Boyertown, the other car, I drove the car, loaded them in my touring car and the other carrier, he'd run the packages into the homes, but I didn't get paid for the car or for gas. I paid that out of my pocket. That was my contribution to the post office department.

Falken: You say you couldn't notice any pickup in mail or any great increase in mail. Could you notice when things began to get better during the Depression; was there any turning point in Boyertown?

Schoenly: I wouldn't say a turning point as far as I could see. My only experience was in the post office. I never worked for a private firm. Maybe if I had done that, maybe I could have noticed things, but the post office is, we always had work.

Falken: And you could always find stuff if you needed it.

Schoenly: Oh yeah, except that was rationed sometimes. We couldn't buy anything we wanted or as much as we wanted, but that was because of the rationing. Of course, I guess that was during the war, I guess, that rationing, wasn't it?

01:38:04 Falken: Right. What was a typical day like in the post office?

Schoenly: Well, I went to work 6 o'clock in the morning. I sorted mail until, well, it depended on the amount of mail, and sometimes the mail come in late, then we got out late, but I went in six o'clock. Maybe I got out on the street about quarter of nine, 9 o'clock, and then I had to get around until noon, if I could, and when I couldn't, I just started right in for my afternoon delivery. I didn't even get home for lunch. I just started right out. Usually I got finished maybe 3:30-4 o'clock, or I stayed in the evening. I got paid for eight hours, but I worked until the mail was done, until I was completely through delivering mail, no matter how many hours. Christmas I'd work from 5 o'clock in the morning until 12 o'clock at night, but that only meant 8 hours pay, so I wasn't in the big brackets.

Falken: Do you have any estimate how many houses you delivered mail to when you were a letter carrier?

Schoenly: Well, I know I had some 600 stops. Now, whether that—I would say there might have been around 1,100 or 1,200 homes or places where we delivered mail, let's put it that way. They weren't all private homes. Some were business places, stores and like that.

Falken: What experiences can you remember from carrying the mail around. You were a letter carrier for how many years?

Schoenly: Oh, about 25. I just (inaudible) I was a letter carrier from October 1, 1921 to September 1, 1945, that's almost 25.

Falken: That's a long time. Can I see that? What were some of your experiences as a letter carrier, unusual or routine?

Schoenly: Well, it was mostly routine. I had one incident. (chuckles) It's a rather funny one. I don't mind repeating it now. At the time I sort would have been embarrassed. But when we carried, I carried one section of town, in the afternoon, you didn't have so much mail, so sometimes maybe I'd walk a block between stops because we didn't have that many homes. I remember one afternoon I was walking along and I put mail at one end of a block and had no mail until the next, at the end of that same block. In my hand, I had the letters face-up naturally, and on top of it was a postcard and I just, naturally, I just, walking along that whole block and on the card, I won't mention any names, on the card it said, 'Having a nice time. I wish you were here,' but then you had a P.S., 'I don't mean you, mailman,' so that guy expected me to read it. So that

was— And today I'm kidded about it yet from the one that received that postcard. It was a young girl that received it then and, of course, today she's up, but she kids me about that every now and then.

Falken: You always hear about mailmen and dogs; they don't get along together. Did you get along with the dogs on your rounds?

Schoenly: I had one dog, two dogs, one dog bit me and that dog had been a friend of mine for a couple years. When I'd come down the street towards that home, this dog would come running around from the back, sit at the top of the front step and wait until I got there. Then I'd pet him, put the mail in the letter slot and come down and pet him again and he'd trot around the back of the house, and one day he bit me. So from that time on, I didn't touch the dog, but several times he acted as if he was trying to make up. I know one day particularly, I had something to deliver. I had to go into the home and I stood and waited for the party to bring, I suppose like a C.O.D.⁶² or something. I had to wait and this dog come and sat in front of me, looked up at me and finally put his paws up on my, at my stomach as if he was begging me to pet him, but I wouldn't touch it. And another time there was a police dog who never bothered me until one day I was up on the porch putting mail in the letter slot and I heard this growling and there was this police dog⁶³ coming up the steps slowly and I was scared to death, so I rang the bell next door and they chased him in, but from then on, that dog would lay for me. Eventually I'd be walking towards the corner, this party lived on a corner, and eventually this dog would be standing up at the corner and the closer I got to the house, he'd come walking towards me, so eventually I turned around and went back around another block to get to another section of the street. And pretty soon that dog learned that and he'd wait for me at the other corner. Finally, that whole corner didn't get mail. I notified the people that they had to keep the dog in because people aren't getting their mail, so it was quite a problem for a little while. One day the owner said, 'Well, you don't have to bother the dog. I shot him.' Something was the matter with him. He had some disease and he had to kill him. So I said, 'Well, I guess it was your pet and I guess you were sorry, but I'm glad he's not around anymore.'

Falken: Did you have to carry all your mail around in your postal bag, or did you have different spots where you could pick up?

Schoenly: We had, for a time we just put it, maybe we'd take a bundle. I might carry, well, maybe I'd carry it six, eight blocks, then I'd have a place where I'd store some, and at first, we never had any regular storage boxes. I'd just maybe put a pile on somebody's front porch, then when I got there, I'd pick it up. Later on we got storage boxes and I had three or four storage boxes where I could put mail. The trucks took the mail around and I'd pick it up when I got there. In the beginning through we didn't have any storage boxes, but I couldn't carry all the mail in one load.

⁶² C.O.D. or Cash on Delivery (now Collect on Delivery) is a service provided by the United States Postal Service to collect for postage, fees, or the cost of merchandise at the time of delivery.

⁶³ Usually a German Shepherd in this context.

Falken: It was too much. Okay. You eventually began to work in the office, right? Well, you became Assistant Postal—

Schoenly: I carried mail to September 1, 1945 and then I was promoted to Assistant Postmaster. I was the oldest employee and I had made a study of post office procedure and things like that, so the Postmaster promoted me to Assistant Postmaster and I served in that, as Assistant Postmaster to February 28, 1962.

01:45:06 Falken: I want to go back to the Depression for a minute. I know you had a radio during that time. Did you listen to Roosevelt's fireside chats⁶⁴ and did you listen to, say, the short-wave⁶⁵ broadcast from Germany?

Schoenly: I had no short-wave. I had no short-wave. I couldn't get that. I probably listened like most other people did. I don't remember, but I probably listened too.

Falken: What were your favorite programs back then in the Thirties [1930]?

Schoenly: I just, I don't remember what they were. Well, 'Amos And Andy'⁶⁶ was one of them.

Falken: I know that was one back then.

Schoenly: I remember that, but I don't remember the names of the— That, to me, was the most prominent at that time, 'Amos and Andy.'

Falken: Did you listen to Jack Benny⁶⁷, do you remember?

Schoenly: I may have, probably did, but I mean, other than, of course, he was on television then too. I just don't, I don't remember what those programs were. I do remember 'Amos and Andy.'

⁶⁴ Roosevelt spoke to the people of the United States 30 times between 1933-1944 via informal evening radio broadcasts that were known as fireside chats. All subsequent U.S. presidents have continued the tradition of informal radio broadcasts to the American people.

⁶⁵ The characteristics of shortwave radio frequencies make them capable of supporting broadcasting over long distances.

⁶⁶ Amos and Andy was a popular radio comedy series that aired from 1928-1956, at one point reaching an estimated 40 million listeners. The African-American characters in the series were performed by white actors.

⁶⁷ Born Benjamin Kubelsky, Jack Benny (1894-1974) was a popular American comedian who started in vaudeville and subsequently hosted his own radio and television programs.

Falken: There was 'Fibber McGee and Molly.'⁶⁸

Schoenly: That's right. I'm glad you suggested. I remember that now since you mentioned it, but I hadn't, I had forgotten.

Falken: Then the 'Lone Ranger,'⁶⁹ 'The Shadow,'⁷⁰ 'Green Hornet.'⁷¹

Schoenly: 'Shadow,' I remember that now since you mention it, and the 'Lone Ranger.'

Falken: Do you remember, were the shows half hour mainly or an hour?

Schoenly: I, that I don't know. That's, I've forgotten.

01:46:33 Falken: What about newspapers? Did you read the newspapers all the time to find out what was going on in the world?

Schoenly: Oh, I got a Pottstown paper all my life, pretty near not all my life, but I mean, ever since that time, we've been getting a Pottstown paper. I never got a Philadelphia paper, and that's where I got my news from this, the old *Pottstown News*, which later was changed to *Pottstown Mercury*, and of course, our local paper the *Berks County Democrat*, and later the *Boyertown Times*, which had mostly local news, but if something big happened, you'd see a little item in it too, even though we just got it once a week.

Falken: When Hitler was making his start for power over in Germany and eventually Czechoslovakia and Poland, did you ever think about the United States getting into another war? Did you feel it was coming, or did you think we were going to stay out of it because we were—

⁶⁸ Fibber McGee & Molly was a popular radio comedy series that aired from 1935-1959 and was once the top-rated radio program in America. The title roles were performed by the real-life husband and wife Jim and Marian Jordan.

⁶⁹ The Lone Ranger, first appearing on radio in 1933, portrayed a masked Texas Ranger who worked with his Native American companion Tonto to combat injustice in the Old West. The character appeared on radio and television, as well as in movies and comic books.

⁷⁰ The Shadow was a crime-fighting character that appeared in a wide variety of media including a radio drama that debuted in 1937.

⁷¹ The Green Hornet was a masked crime-fighting character that appeared in a wide variety of media including a radio drama that debuted in 1936.

Schoenly: I thought we'd stay out of it, but eventually I could see the handwriting. I was sure there where he was getting quite rambunctious and I figured sometime something would happen that would get us into it. I hate to say it, but I felt that's what was coming and it, of course, eventually did.

01:47:55 Falken: Talking about the war, I guess for most Americans it started on December 7th when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

Schoenly: I can still, I still remember the, I couldn't say, I couldn't say what they said, but I still remember it was quite a shock over the radio to hear it, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

Falken: Do you remember where you were and who you were with?

Schoenly: No. I don't.

Falken: You just remember the announcement.

Schoenly: I remember the announcement and everybody was quite shocked and worried. We actually were worried for a while, and finally we were in it and then, of course, we had to make the best of it, and hope for the best. It looked pretty, pretty skimpy for us for a long time because he was going over everything for a long time.

01:49:53 Falken: I know from the other tape you had said that you tried to get into the Army, the Army Post Office but you were turned down. Did you do anything in the way of civilian work around here?

Schoenly: Oh, I, when they had observation posts to check airplanes, air traffic and they had a small observation post about five miles or more out of Boyertown and I served there [Ground Observer Corps⁷²]. I'd be on at night. We'd be out all night. Every plane that flew we had to report it to Harrisburg, day or, this is 24 hours a day, but I was usually on at night. Sometimes we'd have those air raid alarms, rehearsals or practice, whatever they call it, and I served then. I had a couple blocks that I had to patrol to make sure all the lights were out and no lights showing anywhere, so that was my service during the war.

Falken: About your spotting job, how did you get there from Boyertown?

⁷² Established as a civil defense program during World War II, the Ground Observer Corps utilized 1.5 million civilian observers using naked eye and binocular searches to identify enemy aircraft.

Schoenly: Oh, I drove my—I met my cousin. He had, there was two of us on, so we'd go together. One time he'd take his car and I'd take my car another time.

Falken: This was in a building?

Schoenly: We had a little frame building, then it had a ladder up on the outside, and then it had a cupola or whatever you call it on top of the building and we'd sit up there where we could look all around. That was, oh, I know a couple times, and sometimes we had to patrol, we had to walk around the outside, stay outside. I know one winter it had snowed and they made a circular path and we criss-crossed it. We'd walk so we could change our direction. Sometimes it got rather monotonous, so we'd walk around in the snow and then we'd walk across that and then we'd cross the other line for maybe we served an hour at a time. Then we'd go back and somebody else would come out, and that's the way we done it.

Falken: What could you do there? Did you have coffee or did you play cards?

Schoenly: Oh, they had, they had coffee and played cards and, but one had to always be out. One always had to be on the job.

Falken: You said you took your car. Were you issued special gas rations?

Schoenly: No. We paid the bill ourself.

Falken: You paid the bill yourselves.

Schoenly: Understand, I, since I was an observer, I could get more gas. I was allowed to get more gas, but I had to pay it myself. The government didn't pay anything. And then, for a time, I was the official reporter. Every week in the *Boyertown Times*, we'd have a column about the observation post, little things that popped up during that time, and I had kept those records for a long time and eventually I threw them away. Maybe it'd be good to have them now.

Falken: How long did you stay out there? Do you remember when you joined?

Schoenly: I wouldn't know. You have the card yourself. That (inaudible) stuff might say something about it. I don't know.

Falken: Never saw an enemy plane though, that you know of.

Schoenly: Well, we never knew. Of course, see we reported every plane, and if it was anything suspicious— Now I know at one time they questioned us more about a certain plane. I imagine this plane hadn't given explicit direct—or instructions, and for a time, they had to check to make sure that it was alright, so sometimes they'd call us back, but we made all reports to Harrisburg [Pennsylvania]. That was our center for this area.

01:52:27 Falken: You were in Boyertown at that time, and if you didn't have the papers or radios, could you tell there was a war going on outside?

Schoenly: Well, sure you could tell because boys were being drafted and they were leaving for the service, so that—

Falken: Did they have an induction center⁷³ in Boyertown?

Schoenly: They had one in Boyertown.

Falken: Whereabouts was that?

Schoenly: That was in the old, that old bank building that they tore down back next to the post office. It was in the old bank building. That's where they, that's where they had the draft board rather. It was the draft board.

Falken: What about posters? Were there posters around town?

Schoenly: I guess at the post office, like they always do. The post office had big posters that the Army wants you and all that kind of stuff, but not around the town it wasn't. The Army always used post offices for their advertising.

Falken: What about the homes, could you tell people were serving in them?

Schoenly: Oh, some of them would have a service flag⁷⁴ in their window with maybe one star, two stars and some— There were a few casualties, but there weren't too many, so see some of them had a gold star. But there was quite a few of those service flags hanging in windows that it was somebody from the family that was in the service. I had a picture, maybe you have that too, of the honor roll. There was quite a few names on it, people.

⁷³ A location where people are processed for enlistment or induction into the military.

⁷⁴ The service flag was originally introduced during World War I as a way for families to indicate the status of family members in military service. A blue star indicated a member engaged in military service and a gold star indicated a family member that had died while in military service.

Falken: Where was that exactly?

Schoenly: This honor roll board was built, was put up down at the Friendship Firehouse⁷⁵, the old building. They had it there on the lawn, and eventually tore that away too. I have pictures of it. I guess you have too, I think.

Falken: And what, General Spaatz⁷⁶ was on it?

Schoenly: General Spaatz's picture.

Falken: Everyone in town—

Schoenly: Yeah.

Falken: —that served was on it. Did Posey go to work during the war?

Schoenly: No. She had enough work at home.

Falken: Do you remember any meatless Tuesdays? Did you have to go without meat for (inaudible)?

Schoenly: We had those, but I, that was, that wasn't important to me. I could easily do without that, so it didn't make any, it didn't make any difference to me, but we had to do without meat sometimes, certain days, and if we did, maybe we didn't have the stamps to buy it. See, we needed ration stamps and, of course, you had to buy according to what you had.

Falken: Do you remember where you got your ration books in town?

Schoenly: They had an office up at the casket factor. They had an office there where you got your books and stamps up there and your tokens. We used to get little tokens.

Falken: What did you do with the tokens?

⁷⁵ The Friendship Hook and Ladder Company of Boyertown (now Friendship Hook and Ladder Fire Co. #1) was founded in 1882.

⁷⁶ General Carl A. Spaatz (1891-1974), born in Boyertown, Pennsylvania, was appointed to the U.S. Military Academy in 1910. Spaatz was active in both world wars, ultimately advancing to commander of the Army Air Forces and was later appointed by President Truman as the first chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force.

Schoenly: Well, see, you used those like money. I mean, like stamps, but maybe I gave a stamp and it was worth more than what I used, so then I'd get some of these tokens back as change.

Falken: No black market at all in Boyertown as far as counterfeiting?

Schoenly: Oh, they had not counterfeiting, but, you know, they had places where some guy would say, 'Well, now here, you can get meat without stamps.' See, at that time, I know one particular place had a sale. This man advertised soup bones, but boy it had an awful lot of— See, you didn't need any stamps for soup bones, but this guy cut it so big and it had so much meat on it, you got a regular meal out of the soup bone.

Falken: What about sugar? Was that on the list?

Schoenly: That was on the list too. Yeah. You could only buy if you had stamps for it.

Falken: But some places you could get sugar without stamps?

Schoenly: You couldn't get it without stamps, but most of it was meats. They just cut different and added and put more meat on but they sold it as a soup bone, so I mean, that way we got more meat then.

Falken: Do you remember when the war in Germany and the war in Japan ended, not the exact dates, but do you remember what you did then?

Schoenly: I don't remember.

Falken: You didn't celebrate that you remember.

Schoenly: I didn't. I didn't. I know that because I don't, I don't know why. I had no reason. I don't know why, but I don't remember having any special celebration. I think we had, I think in town they paraded, if I remember right. I think they paraded and of course, maybe that was after— No. I guess that was— I don't know, but they did have parades in Boyertown.

01:57:09 Falken: What about President Roosevelt's stuff, do you remember that at all, how you felt?

Schoenly: Well, it was sort of a shock naturally because we started, he had been quite— Actually, you've got to give him credit for taking ahold and making up his mind to do things. Whether we were pleased with him later on, I don't know if I would remember. I'm not that much of a politician, but I'm sure for a while people were sort of wondering what would happen now, whether— Truman⁷⁷ came in then, didn't he?

Falken: Mm-hm.

Schoenly: Truman came in. I guess they were wondering whether he would take ahold and he sure did. I've got to give it to him. He took a hold and made things hum.

Falken: But you don't remember how you heard about his death. Was it over radio?

Schoenly: I suppose over the radio. I don't, I don't think there was much television at that time yet.

01:58:14 Falken: So just about the end of the war, World War II was over and you became Assistant Postmaster soon after that.

Schoenly: Well, September '45 [1945]. And I was Assistant Postmaster until February 28, 1962 when I retired.

Falken: What did you do as Assistant Postmaster?

Schoenly: Well, I'll tell you—

Falken: Did you sit down more than when you were a letter carrier?

Schoenly: I hope to tell you, I had a desk job then, but I had more responsibilities, which didn't go over so well with the employees. Some of them thought they should have had the— See, I come in off the street as a carrier and was promoted Assistant Postmaster ahead of some clerks, but I was the oldest employee and the Postmaster saw I was able to type and since I had made a study of some of the postal activities, the Postmaster felt that I could help him more than any of the rest, so I had the opportunity to come in as Assistant Postmaster and I took the job. At first I enjoyed it very much. I was put in charge of the carrier section, which was right up my alley. As a carrier, I knew something about it.

⁷⁷ Harry S. Truman (1884-1972) was the 33rd President of the United States (1945-1953).

My first job after I got in as Assistant Postmaster, I had to organize and set up a system for our Christmas mailings. At that time, maybe we had eight to ten cases to sort mail. We had to sort mail for, oh maybe over 100 post offices, so I had to set up a system and I, before I made an effort to do it, I went around to different post offices and got ideas. Some of them I liked, some of them, I didn't, and I had some of my own ideas. Eventually I got up a system and I had a mimeograph machine⁷⁸, so I mimeographed the cases as I made them up, so I made drawings of the cases rather, and separations on it, made mimeographed copies, and one day an inspector came around and asked me whether I was ready for Christmas, whether I had made my plans. I said I had, showed it to him and he looked it over, and he said, 'Do you have extra copies?' I said, 'Yes, I made some extra copies.' He said, 'Let me have some, a copy of each,' of everything I made. He said, 'I want to take them around the county to show them to other post offices. You have the best set up I saw here.' I was quite pleased with that. He congratulated me, but I didn't take full credit for it because I got some ideas from other post offices. But then this inspector said, 'Well, but,' he says, 'it's to your credit if you could pick out the good stuff and leave out the rest.' So he gave me credit for the arrangement and I had done that for several years, but after the system was working fine, the Postmaster took over and I was left out, and that's the way it worked as I— First of all, I got the jobs to learn something new and after I had worked it out, why the Postmaster took over except—(recording interrupted) —except for the estimates. We had to make estimates for a whole year, what we need in money for clerks, for carriers, Parcel Post delivery.

In those days, we had a special Parcel Post delivery. So I had to sit down and try to figure out how much money we'd need for a whole year in advance. Of course that job I never lost. I always had to do that, and it was rather difficult because you couldn't always make it, but then if you over, if you were, if you went over what you had estimated, you had to make an awful lot of explanation why, and generally, I could, I could make, I could prove to them I needed it and we got it, but if we saved any, they took that right away and we couldn't use it. If we saved anything, you couldn't use it for anything else. So that job I kept as long as I worked, and it was rather difficult. I had to bring my work home and work on it for maybe a week before I could send it in.

Falken: Where did you send it in to? Do you remember?

Schoenly: Philadelphia, I believe.

Falken: What other type jobs—you said you had this estimating job and then you worked the Christmas system. What other jobs did you do?

⁷⁸ A mimeograph machine produces copies by pressing ink onto paper through a stencil.

Schoenly: Well, I, generally I took, naturally I had to take care of the time cards⁷⁹. I helped in the records, in sending in reports. I had to make certain reports that I had to make out. It kept me busy and once, there were some times when someone was on vacation maybe occasionally I'd work on the windows⁸⁰. Maybe occasionally I'd sort mail and I'd help out wherever I could, but my main job was at the desk, and it was a lot of reports.

Falken: What about war bonds⁸¹?

Schoenly: Oh I, we had several industries who had this payroll savings plan and we got the job of making out the bonds. Sometimes I, maybe once a month I'd get 200-250 bonds to write, which I, that I done myself. I typed them all up, so I was kept busy. I never run out of work.

Falken: I've always wondered, how does the post office get stamps?

Schoenly: Well, generally the postmaster gets his big allotment from Washington and then I would buy from him. I had the big stuff. I kept— I mean, he had the big, the main stuff in the vault. Then I, I had a \$3,000 stamp stock and all the clerks would buy from me. That saved the Postmaster work. Instead of the clerks running to him for stamps, he'd sell me once a big lot and then the clerks would come as they needed them from me. Occasionally we had problems. I'd be sitting at my desk working, one of the clerks would come to me and say, 'I need 500 so-and-so,' and I was in the midst of doing something, so I'd give them the stamps and he'd forget to give me the money and then I'd be short, and maybe he'd be good. You'd sort of try to work it out like that, but—

Falken: Is that the method that's still used up there?

Schoenly: I don't know. I wouldn't know what they do today. Things have changed so much that I don't know, but I would assume the Postmaster don't do any more than he did before.

Falken: Did the Postmaster have to go down to Washington to pick the stamps up or they sent them to him?

⁷⁹ A card used to keep track of the hours an employee works. Hours may be written or entered by inserting the card in a time clock.

⁸⁰ Station where a postal employee conducts transactions with customers.

⁸¹ Debt securities issued by the United States government designed to fund the military in times of war.

Schoenly: Oh no. They were sent here. We'd get big stacks here. We'd get, oh, let's see, 10, 20, 30, maybe we'd get 20,000 of one kind or maybe more. They'd get them in big, big amounts, and then, of course, these special, these special stamps would come out. We'd get a supply of those in between. Those we didn't have to order for a time, but later on we had to do that too.

Falken: What kind of special stamps do you mean?

Schoenly: Well, these, you know what I mean, these special kind, you know—

Falken: Commemorative⁸²?

Schoenly: Commemorative! That's the word I'm trying to think of. I couldn't think of the word. And they had new, as the postage rates changed, why they'd come out with new stamps again, of course I know for the time we had, I know the day when we had two cent postage stamps out of town and one cent in town. They had different rates for out of town and in town. Those days are over.

Falken: You had a stamp collection, so you could really get all the stamps you wanted there. You had to pay for them, of course, but—

Schoenly: As they came out, I kept my collection up to date, but it got to be annoying because it didn't mean anything anymore. At one time I had to work to get these different stamps, but after I had every one of them, it was just a matter of going to the post office and buying them as they come out. That got to be too much of a problem, so I gave it up.

Falken: During the 1950s, did you see a greater prosperity than, say, during the war? Could you see the town spending more money by any chance?

Schoenly: Well, I guess that—

Falken: From your position?

⁸² Commemorative stamps are issued by postal services on a limited basis to commemorate places, things, events or people.

02:06:52 Schoenly: Not because of my position. When I got my tax bill, I knew it, because as wages went up, taxes went up, everything was going up. That just was a gradual increase and today my taxes have gone up ten times what I paid when I bought my home.

Falken: You bought your home you said in 1929. Did the taxes drop during the Depression?

Schoenly: Oh no.

Falken: No. Not at all?

Schoenly: No taxes dropped. They never dropped. Taxes never drop. Sure they tell you once in a while maybe this drops or that drops, but eventually, when you get the whole bill, it's all in the same and they have increased gradually. I have a record of each year, and they went up gradually every year, just like income tax. They tell you you're going to get a tax break but then they add something else to it.

Falken: How long did you pay income tax?⁸³ Was that brought out, say, during World War I or World War II?

Schoenly: I don't remember when I paid my first income tax. I still have all my bills down in the basement, but I don't remember when it was. I know my first, my first income tax that I had to pay, I didn't earn much and I didn't pay much, but I know my first income tax that I paid I didn't know how to figure it out, so I sent them a check for \$10 and I thought let them fix it out, so they sent me back my change. (chuckles) I mean, I got a check back for what I had overpaid, but I thought, let them work on it. That's the way I sent my first income tax in. In those days, if the government owed you five cents, you got five cents back. Those days are over too. Of course, if you're, if you owe them a certain amount, you're don't have to pay it either, but if you overpay, you don't get it back if it's under a dollar. I think it's that way.

02:08:54 Falken: Well, the 1950s, I guess the greatest thing that came out in the 1950s as far as entertainment in the home was the television. Do you remember your first television?

Schoenly: You bet I do! I was the only one in the post office that had no television and I was kidded a lot about it, but we didn't think we'd want it. We didn't think we'd like it. We had our radio and we enjoyed radio. So I was in a store one day and this local school teacher was telling me about the program that she saw on television. She said, 'Didn't you like it?' I said,

⁸³ The 16th Amendment gave the federal government the authority to assess a tax on individual and corporate income, which it did in 1913.

`Well, I don't have a television.' She looked at me and said, `What! You don't have a television,' as if she was shocked that I didn't have a television. I come home and I told my wife, `We're going out and buy a television. I'm tired of being the only one that don't have it.' So I bought one and, of course, we've been enjoying it ever since. I wouldn't want to be without it. In fact, my television today is going bad. I have to look for another one.

Falken: Your mother-in-law, she died in 1965, so during the Fifties [1950], she probably would have been in her seventies. Did she like television, or did she—

Schoenly: She'd watch certain programs too. Oh yeah. She watched it too, certain programs. Of course, they didn't have so much on like they do today. Today I'm almost fed up with some of them. Some of the programs I think are no good.

Falken: But she would watch the programs she liked.

Schoenly: She would watch. Yeah. It's good entertainment. I still wouldn't want to be without one, but I hate a bad picture and that's what my set is right now, a bad picture, so I want to get another one.

Falken: Do you remember the store that you bought it in?

Schoenly: Oh yes, that was down in Gilbertsville [Pennsylvania]. I forget the name, but I went down and looked at a television and he brought it up. It wasn't what I wanted but he brought one here, I used it for over a month before he got the one I wanted and then he took the one away and brought that one back and I had it for a number of years. Then that went bad, then I got the one down, I have down here now and now that went bad. But I don't remember when I, this one I forget even. Now this one I've had a number of years, but when I got the first one, I don't remember.

Falken: Would you go back to a black and white set?

Schoenly: Oh no. Well, I have a little portable black and white which is good enough for portable, but downstairs I want my color. Color makes the picture. But I'm satisfied with my little black and white here for, I watch the ball games here and I like it. It's good and clear.

02:11:41 Falken: Yeah, that's something too. Were you always a Phillies⁸⁴ fan or did you always follow baseball?

⁸⁴ The Philadelphia Phillies, established in 1883, are a professional baseball team that plays in Major League Baseball's National League.

Schoenly: Well, I followed baseball, but I followed the old Athletics⁸⁵ and, of course, they went out of business and I had to find another team, so now it's the Phillies. I'm for local, well, Philadelphia. I wouldn't root for the Yankees⁸⁶, not that I have anything against, but the Phillies or Athletics were my team. In fact, the first, one of the first World Series I went over to Pottstown, at the old *Pottstown News*⁸⁷ had a great big board in front of the building, electrically operated. If a man got a hit and got on first, a light went to first base. It was an electrical thing and I watched the last game, I believe it was, of the world series that the Phillies, the Athletics won and I still remember the pitcher, Earnshaw⁸⁸. He really trimmed them. But there I stood out in the street watching this electrical operated board.

02:12:48 Falken: Did you travel much, meaning during your life?

Schoenly: Well, I traveled more while I was in the Army. After I got married, due to circumstances, I made one trip through the New England states, my wife and I, and I went to the shore and spent about four days there and that was the extent of my traveling, except to Pittsburgh. I had a brother-in-law living in Pittsburgh and we went out there three or four times a year, but I didn't count that as vacation. We just went out to visit because it was my last brother and my mother-in-law, she liked to see her son out in Pittsburgh, that's the only time she got to see him. So we went back and forth maybe three or four times a year there, but I didn't count that. I had two, actually two vacations, the New England states and the shore.

Falken: Do you remember about when they were?

Schoenly: I wouldn't know. I know I went to the New England states and everything was fine. In those days you didn't have motels. We stopped at private homes where they rented rooms, and a funny part of it was my first night out I had left early in the morning. It was a terribly hot night and we couldn't sleep, so we got up and left around 3 o'clock in the morning. I got up around Lake George, New York, early afternoon, then we started finding a place to stay, and I saw a very nice place along Lake George. I thought, boy, that'd be swell to sit on the front porch and just watch the lake. I said to my wife, 'Let's go

⁸⁵ The Oakland Athletics, established in 1901 as the Philadelphia Athletics, are a professional baseball team that plays in Major League Baseball's American League.

⁸⁶ The New York Yankees, established in 1901 as the Baltimore Orioles, are a professional baseball team that plays in Major League Baseball's American League.

⁸⁷ Originally established as the *Pottstown Advertiser* in 1873, the newspaper had a number of different names, taking the name of *Pottstown Daily News* in 1913. The *Pottstown Mercury*, still published, purchased the paper in 1933.

⁸⁸ George Earnshaw (1900-1976) was a pitcher who played on Philadelphia Athletics teams that won 3 American League pennants and 2 World Series titles in 1929 and 1930.

in there.’ She said, ‘Oh no, let’s not go there.’ I didn’t know why, so I went further on. Then finally she went, ‘There’s a place.’ It didn’t look near as nice as the one I had picked out. I said, ‘Well, why do you pick this one?’ She said, ‘The wash that’s on the line is much cleaner.’ See, every place you got, they had sheets on the line and the wash looked better. After that she picked the places and we never had a bad spot. I enjoyed it and I never got, I never felt that I, anybody was out to do me wrong.

We never paid more than a dollar a night to sleep, and we’d eat at restaurants, so most of those places, they’d recommend a place in the town where we could get a meal. Until my last night out, I stopped up in the Pocono Mountains⁸⁹ at some, I don’t know what the community was anymore, and decided I was going to stay there for the night, but first of all we were going to stop and get an evening meal. So I saw a place that looked reasonable. I had to pick places that looked reasonable. So we went in the place and it was an old-fashioned front to the store, to the room. Then we opened the door and here was a colored man standing inside of the, with his towel with his arm and led us to a table and we got a menu and it was a terrible thing, the most expensive thing and the least food, and I got so mad I decided we’re going home and we drove home that night. But when we got home, my wife’s mother wasn’t expecting us, so we had to stand outside and yell until we got them awake. But that, our, that trip I enjoyed very much, but we never, they never had motels those times yet. Didn’t have anything like that.

Falken: Going to visit your brother-in-law out in Pittsburgh, did you travel the Pennsylvania Turnpike⁹⁰?

Schoenly: At first I’d go the William Penn Highway⁹¹ one time and the next time the Lincoln Highway.⁹² See, the turnpike wasn’t built, and the, I know one time that I went out, I had an old Essex and it started boiling, you know. Going over the mountains they’d have kids, they’d have a water trough over the mountains at certain spots and there’d be kids there with buckets because they knew just where your car started boiling. Then they’d change the water and you’d go up again, and one time I got to a place and my old Essex⁹³ was cooking away and there was nobody there, so I emptied a cracker box that we had for lunch, emptied the crackers and used the cracker box to put water in my radiator and change the oil. So

⁸⁹ The Poconos are a popular resort area in northeastern Pennsylvania.

⁹⁰ The Pennsylvania Turnpike, a toll highway system, opened in 1940 as the longest distance limited-access divided highway in the United States.

⁹¹ The William Penn Highway was an auto trail, an informal network of marked routes that existed in the United States and Canada in the early part of the 20th century. The Pennsylvania section was U.S. Route 22.

⁹² Built in 1913, the Lincoln Highway was the first road across the United States running from New York City to San Francisco. Much of the Lincoln Highway is now part of U.S. Route 30.

⁹³ The Essex was a brand of automobile produced by the Essex Motor Company from 1918–1922 and Hudson Motor Company from 1922 and 1932.

ordinarily we made out pretty well in our travels, but my old Essex, if I got in back of a truck, I stayed there until I was at the top of the mountain. I had, I couldn't pull ahead of them. I had no pull.

Falken: Did you like to drive?

Schoenly: Oh, I enjoyed driving. I liked it very much. I'd sooner say, I, when we went to Pittsburgh, I drove all the way. At that time, my wife didn't drive a car. In later years one time she drove, but then I guess the war come along and with gas rationing I didn't get out anymore then for a while, so she drove one time. She was a safe driver. I taught her and she drove the way I like it.

Falken: So you couldn't during the war get very far with your gas rationing.

Schoenly: I didn't get enough gas.

Falken: Could you, say, like go to Reading [Pennsylvania] from here?

Schoenly: Oh, for, I could make a certain trip, but it had to be necessary trips. I didn't have enough gas to go around driving around for pleasure. I didn't have that much gas. For my necessary things, I had enough gas, but nothing for pleasure.

Falken: But the trains you could ride any time if you had to.

Schoenly: Well, yes, but I don't know. Did we have train service then? I don't remember. See, the train service was eliminated in Boyertown long ago, quite a long time ago unless you'd want to go by— Well, in fact, for a while they hung a passenger coach at the end of the freight train, so that would come in, come in once and go out once. That's all the passenger service we had, hanging on the end of a freight train.

02:18:30 Falken: You retired when?

Schoenly: I retired in March the first, 1962.

Falken: And that was because of health reasons, right?

Schoenly: Well, in a way, it was. I had planned on working the post office 50 years, and one day my doctor, see, I'd had a heart attack, and my doctor one day asked me how long I had to work until I could retire and I told him, I said, 'I can retire now, but I want to work 50 years in the post office.' He said, 'How long do you have to go yet?' I said, 'three years.' He said, 'What do you want to do, try for 50 and not make it or get now and enjoy it.' So I retired. I figured he knew better than me what to do and I retired after I had 47 years, and I'm glad I did. I wouldn't be here anymore. The post office is a very hectic place to work these days.

Falken: What did you do when you retired to pass the time?

Schoenly: Oh, for a little while I, I thought I couldn't stand this nothing to do, so I, I was asked to help in a little grocery store during a lunch period when a lot of school kids were there, and I helped him out. All I did was watch kids. They, I was around the candy case. They had shelves of candy and all I had to do is stand there and take their money and watch that they didn't steal it. You had to be pretty careful. They'd try to sneak some in their pocket, so I, I was very, very watchful and they got, they gave me the name of Snoopy, the kids.

They knew I was watching because I caught a couple that they tried to get away with it and I caught them at it. And sometimes some of the older boys would sort of threaten you with their fists. And one day one of the boys pulled his fist back and I told him, I said, 'You pull it back one more inch and I'll sock you in the face,' and I called his bluff. I don't know what I'd of done if he would have called my bluff because my one arm had plates in it, which was fractured, so I couldn't have fought with my right hand and my left hand I couldn't have done that either, so I guess I'd of been landing on the floor. But then I gave it up. The kids were getting too smart. If I'd of worked one more year, I would have got Social Security⁹⁴, but I didn't care about that. Money isn't everything and it wasn't worth working another year there, not with those kids. They weren't respectful any more. They were out to get you if they could.

Falken: What about after you retired from that job? What did you do then?

Schoenly: Well, about all I do is help when I can around the house, which is limited. I'm not allowed to mow grass. I'm not allowed to shovel snow. I'm not allowed to do a lot of things account of my heart, but I like to walk. I take walks every day if the weather permits. Of course, then I had a heart attack since and I've had several eye operations since I haven't worked, so I've been in the hospital several times, but when I'm able, I'm out walking, and that's about my pastime, walking and meeting people on the street to talk to. In fact, just the other day I met a woman on the street. I carried her mail. That was

⁹⁴ On August 14, 1935, the Social Security Act established a system of old-age benefits for workers, benefits for victims of industrial accidents, unemployment insurance, aid for dependent mothers and children, the blind, and the physically handicapped

a good many years ago, and she talked about the good service I gave her and she inquired about my just having since I had my arm operation again. We talked quite a long time. She said, 'Boy, it was nice talking to the old mail carrier.' And then it just happened Barney Lefevre⁹⁵ (sp?) come along. She (?) said, 'Well, here are the two best mail carriers I ever had.' So it's a pleasure to talk to people and that they, that they think well of you, and it's surprising how many people on the street they know me from walking around. Some of them, they don't even know my name, I guess, because there's people I don't know their names but they're always very pleasant to talk—

So that's one of my pleasures. In fact, one time I was thoroughly fed up with snow and ice and I decided as soon as I retired, and that was from carrying mail, before I had a chance in the post office, I decided when I retired I was going to sell out and move to Florida. So one day on my route I met a man, why he stopped me, I don't know, I don't remember, probably to ask directions, but he mentioned he was from Florida and I told him, 'That's what I'm going to do. When I retire, I'm going to sell out and move to Florida.' The first thing he said, 'Think twice.' He said, 'I lived in Pottstown. As soon as I retired, I sold my home and bought a nice home in a residential area.' But he said, 'I couldn't afford retirement settlements, that's too expensive. But he said, 'I bought a nice home in a residential area, two nice young couples on either side of me. They're nice people, but they're young people. They're not like me. They're not old. They don't have the same ideas.' And he said, 'I was there one month and my wife got sick.' He said, 'Now if I'd of been in Pots—' She wasn't seriously sick, but she was in bed. He said, 'If I'd of been in Pottstown, my neighbors would have been over, can I sit with your wife while you go shopping,' or 'can we shop for you?' He said, 'As soon as I can sell my place in Florida, I'm coming back to Pottstown. He said, 'Don't forget, it's nice to be where you have friends. Stay there.' That's what I'm going to do. I have friends here that I can talk to every day, meet them on the street and talk with them, so that's my pleasure today, and I enjoy it very much. I'm lost when we have a rainy day and I can't take a walk. And I got myself a pedometer and I try to get five, four to five miles every day. One day I had six just walking around, walking around, not going anywhere. That's actually what it is.

02:24:34 Falken: I listened to the tape again and I thought of some questions that I'd forgotten to ask you, so I'd like, if you can, to answer them. What did your Grandfather Schoenly do?

Schoenly: At one time, he worked in they call it the Coaldale Foundry.⁹⁶ They made irons, as in the old fashioned irons that you put on the stove to iron. They had wooden handles so that you could take the handle and pick up an iron, then you put it on the stove and then you pick up another one. You could take the handle off, and he made the wooden handles. I remember that. He made the wooden handles. So that's, that's about all I remember he ever done. I don't—

⁹⁵ Project staff were unable to identify this person.

⁹⁶ Project staff were unable to identify this business.

Falken: And his wife was a housewife.

Schoenly: She was at home. They were old when I knew them, so—

Falken: Okay. In your house, this is a question that's often asked about who handled the discipline? Was it your father, your mother or both?

Schoenly: Well, see, my mother was gone when I was seven years old, so it was my father, basically my father, and of course, my grandparents after the fire⁹⁷, and my grandparents lived with us for awhile. I had to listen to my grandmother, but she wasn't very strict. I mean, but she'd tell me what to do and sometimes I'd do it, but maybe sometimes I sort of reneged, but I had, I was fairly good, I didn't, I wasn't too wild. I did have a cousin that she sort of kept house for us. My grandparents were too old, so this cousin lived with us for a number of years until my wife, until my father got married again.

Falken: Were your parents involved in outside activities, like the church or civic, social or trades (?)?

Schoenly: Well, in a fraternal— My father was interested in fraternal organizations. He was like an officer, secretary or something like that for a number of years, but outside of that I don't know of anything that I know of. There may have been just incidental things, but he was mostly fraternal organizations.

Falken: Do you remember any special experience with your father, you know, a funny time you had with him or going to a ball game or something that you could tell me about?

Schoenly: Well, the only thing I remember, see we, we didn't go to ball games. I know one day my father got a horse and wagon and he took me to Spring Forge⁹⁸ up near Earlville [Pennsylvania] fishing and I sat on the bank and that's where I caught my first fish, a little sunfish⁹⁹. That's the first fish I caught. In fact, I only ever caught two fish in my life. After I was, when I was going to school, a bunch of us went along the Swamp Creek¹⁰⁰ and I sat there trying to catch a fish and I got tired of it,

⁹⁷ On January 18, 1908 the Rhoads Opera House in Boyertown, Pennsylvania caught fire, killing 170 people. The fire inspired the passage of the passage of Pennsylvania's first fire safety law in 1909.

⁹⁸ Possibly a dam on Manatawny Creek in Berks County, Pennsylvania.

⁹⁹ A common freshwater fish, usually 10-20 centimeters in length.

¹⁰⁰ A tributary of Perkiomen Creek that flows through Berks and Montgomery counties in Pennsylvania.

so I stuck my rod in an embankment in a hole there. It was a muskrat hole¹⁰¹, I guess, or something, and I stuck my rod in there and went swimming and when I come back there was a fish hanging on, so that's two fish that I caught in my life. I'm not a fisherman, and I'm not a gunner. I went out in the picnic woods one day, took an air rifle trying to hit a mark and I couldn't even hit the target. I had to get almost up against it before I hit it, so I wasn't much in sports.

02:28:22 Falken: When you got sick, before we came up here to do this session, you told me of something about Jim O'Brien¹⁰². When you got sick at home, did you go to the hospital or did your parents take care of you and have a doctor in?

Schoenly: Oh, we just had a doctor. I was never in a hospital when I was, when I was a kid. We just had our own doctor come in. I don't remember that I was ever seriously sick that I know of. Chickenpox, Measles.

Falken: Did your mother have any home remedies or your father?

Schoenly: Well, I don't know whether they did. I had one. I just happened to have this experience just recently while I was in the hospital. Whenever I got the hiccups, I take a mouthful of water, hold my ears shut and swallow the water without breathing, maybe two or three of those swallows would cure my hiccups. So that happened in the hospital, so I was trying to just swallow water and hold my breath but that didn't stop it, so a nurse came in. I said, 'Nurse, will you hold my ears shut?' She said, 'Why?' I said, 'I have the hiccups.' 'Well, what'll that do?' I said, I said, 'Well, you just hold my ears shut and I'll take a swallow of water and I'll swallow it without breathing and that'll get rid of my hiccups.' So I had to do it twice and it was away, so the nurse said, 'My gosh, you learn something new every day!' So it just happened since that time I was listening to Jim O'Brien on Channel 3 and they gave a story about a man out in California who had the hiccups for a number of years. I don't imagine it was straight through, but intermittently he had this, and they couldn't cure it, so I wrote him a letter. I said, 'Now maybe,' I said to make it authentic, I said, 'this happened to me in the hospital. It happened before, but in the hospital, and I asked the nurse to hold my ears shut and she held my ears shut and I swallowed the water and held my breath and two swallows and my earache, or my hiccups was gone, and the nurse said, 'my gosh, you learn something new every day.' And I wrote that to him, Jim O'Brien, and I said, 'Now maybe you can pass that on to this man because it may give relief. Maybe not cure him, but it might give him relief.' So I didn't hear from him and I thought, well, I wonder if he passed that on. So today I got a letter from Jim O'Brien, 'Thanks for the good letter. Best wishes, Jim O'Brien,' but whether he passed that on, I don't know.

¹⁰¹ A semi-aquatic rodent native to North America.

¹⁰² Jim O'Brien (born James Oldham) was a weatherman, sports anchor, and anchor for WPVI television in Philadelphia.

02:30:34 Falken: Now Unc (sp?), if you could, could you remember what the log cabin that your grandparents Haycock lived in, just how many rooms?

Schoenly: I remember there was three rooms downstairs, a kitchen and then there was, I, they used it on special occasions just to eat but then there was a living room and that was only open over weekends, and maybe then if you didn't have, maybe just when they had company, but then this little room there had a table just like a dining room table, but nothing fancy, not in those days. We spent most of our time in the kitchen. Then upstairs there was I think two rooms on a regular level, and then when I was, when we'd go up there, the kids, at the end of one room there was a wood wall and it was like a doorway but no door. It was just an opening, and there was a ladder to go up in there. And we'd go up in there and that's where we slept.

Falken: In the house, were there family photos on the walls?

Schoenly: Oh, I'm sure they had some of their old— Now probably my grandparents had pictures of their parents. I think I remember something about those big framed pictures with gold frames, fancy frames hanging on the wall. It seems to me I remember. Since you mentioned it, I think I remember something like that.

Falken: Did your grandparents build this log cabin or was it there?

Schoenly: I don't think so. That I wouldn't know. I just know it was a log cabin and the outside between the logs it was plastered, but on the inside, see, on the inside maybe they had, maybe they had wood or board. I don't know, but then it had paper over that, so I couldn't—

(end of recording)