



1996

World War II: On the Home Front - M. Francis Coulson Interview

Jenny Sonnenberg
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/ach>

 Part of the [European History Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Sonnenberg, Jenny (1996) "World War II: On the Home Front - M. Francis Coulson Interview," *Adams County History*: Vol. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/ach/vol2/iss1/6>

This open access article is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

World War II: On the Home Front - M. Francis Coulson Interview

Abstract

Americans love anniversaries. The fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War has afforded citizens an opportunity to remember with pride the great men and events of a war that saved the world from totalitarian tyranny. Happily, memories of World War II have not been restricted to recalling battlefield heroics or diplomatic intrigues. Across the United States, public libraries and local historical societies have commemorated the Home Front during the war years with exhibits that recapture the texture of life on farms, factories, in classrooms, and at home during what Studs Terkel has labeled "the Good War." These exhibits remind us what we know instinctively: that experiencing wartime is not simply the province of men and women in uniform. Anyone over the age of fifty-five has some vivid memories of America at war from 1941-1945. Millions of Americans who never put on a military uniform made their own contributions to the war effort. Their contributions mattered, and so do their memories.

At Gettysburg College, in recognition of this basic truth, students in Historical Methods courses have for several years been interviewing senior citizens about their wartime memories. Perhaps two dozen or more of these interviews were conducted with Adams countians, across a broad spectrum of experience. Among the interview subjects were farmers, housewives, nurses, schoolteachers, businessmen, college students, and seminarians. One subject, a conscientious objector, provided a most distinctive perspective on a war that mythology suggests was supported fervently by all Americans.

In fact, most Americans did enthusiastically support the war effort, as testimony from Adams Countians suggests. In the following interview, conducted by Gettysburg College student Jenny Sonnenberg with Francis Coulson, readers will learn some of the ways that average citizens were affected by the war and contributed to a remarkable home-front effort to support the boys overseas. A teacher in a one-room school in the county for much of the war, Mr. Coulson recounts his experiences with rationing and civil defense, and offers a persuasive picture of a populace that was willing to make sacrifices in order to help American soldiers bring the war to a quicker end. It is an important story, not because Francis Coulson's experiences were spectacular, much less unique, but rather, because they were commonplace. As the interview itself suggests, the war years marked a time when Americans had much less materially than they would in the boom times following the war. It was still a time of simple habits and old fashioned values. In bringing to life the experiences of these years and the habits of everyday life, oral histories like those Ms. Sonnenberg conducted with Francis Coulson make an important contribution to local history and can help spark other conversations with individuals who had their own distinctive experiences during the war years. What follows is an edited transcription of a taped interview that is available in its entirety at the Adams County Historical Society Library. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Adams County Historical Society, ACHS, Adams County, Pennsylvania History, World War II, Oral History, Veteran, Home Front

World War II: On the Home Front—

M. Francis Coulson Interviewed

by Jenny Sonnenberg

Introduction

Americans love anniversaries. The fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War has afforded citizens an opportunity to remember with pride the great men and events of a war that saved the world from totalitarian tyranny. Happily, memories of World War II have not been restricted to recalling battlefield heroics or diplomatic intrigues. Across the United States, public libraries and local historical societies have commemorated the Home Front during the war years with exhibits that recapture the texture of life on farms, factories, in classrooms, and at home during what Studs Terkel has labeled "the Good War." These exhibits remind us what we know instinctively: that experiencing wartime is not simply the province of men and women in uniform. Anyone over the age of fifty-five has some vivid memories of America at war from 1941-1945. Millions of Americans who never put on a military uniform made their own contributions to the war effort. Their contributions mattered, and so do their memories.

At Gettysburg College, in recognition of this basic truth, students in Historical Methods courses have for several years been interviewing senior citizens about their wartime memories. Perhaps two dozen or more of these interviews were conducted with Adams countians, across a broad spectrum of experience. Among the interview subjects were farmers, housewives, nurses, schoolteachers, businessmen, college students, and seminarians. One subject, a conscientious objector, provided a most distinctive perspective on a war that mythology suggests was supported fervently by all Americans.

In fact, most Americans did enthusiastically support the war effort, as testimony from Adams countians suggests. In the following interview, conducted by Gettysburg College student Jenny Sonnenberg with Francis Coulson, readers will learn some of the ways that average citizens were affected by the war and contributed to a remarkable home-front effort to support the boys overseas. A teacher in a one-room school in the county for much of the war, Mr. Coulson recounts his experiences with rationing and civil defense, and offers a persuasive picture of a populace that was willing to make sacrifices in order to help American soldiers bring the war to a quicker end. It is an important story, not because Francis

Coulson's experiences were spectacular, much less unique, but rather, because they were commonplace. As the interview itself suggests, the war years marked a time when Americans had much less materially than they would in the boom times following the war. It was still a time of simple habits and old fashioned values. In bringing to life the experiences of these years and the habits of everyday life, oral histories like those Ms. Sonnenberg conducted with Francis Coulson make an important contribution to local history and can help spark other conversations with individuals who had their own distinctive experiences during the war years. What follows is an edited transcription of a taped interview that is available in its entirety at the Adams County Historical Society Library.

—Michael J. Birkner*

(The following interview was conducted at M. Francis Coulson's home on 29 March 1995.)

Sonnenberg: How old were you when war broke out in 1939?

Coulson: I was 20 years old.

Sonnenberg: Were you living in Adams county at the time?

Coulson: I was living near York Springs, Adams county.

Sonnenberg: Were you married?

Coulson: No [smile], not at that time.

Sonnenberg: Did you go to college?

Coulson: I went to Shippensburg State Teachers College, and at that time I was teaching a one-room country school in 1939. I began teaching in 1938.

Sonnenberg: And how long did you teach there?

Coulson: In the one-room school—I taught for six years [pause] in the one-room country school. Then I went on to other education assignments.

Sonnenberg: Can you describe a little bit about your experiences teaching in the one-room schoolhouse?

Coulson: It was a very interesting assignment, to say the least. I, I had—I taught all grades, one through eight, and so I had students that were ages six to maybe sixteen or more, and I had all the subjects to teach. Of course, in addition to that, I needed to fire the furnace, and sweep the floor, and do all those things [smile]—

*Dr. Michael J. Birkner is a professor of history at Gettysburg College, where he is also chair of the Department of History.

Sonnenberg:—that must have been a very interesting experience—

Coulson:—teaching music, and all the accompanying subjects that you try to incorporate into the curriculum.

Sonnenberg: Was it just a school day that might go from 8:00 until 3:00?

Coulson: Our school day was 8:30 to 3:30, and we had a morning recess of 15 minutes. We had a noon period—everyone carried their lunch you know—and we ate our lunch, and we had an hour at noontime. And then in the afternoon, another 15-minute recess, but other than that. . . . And of course we, you know, just the one-room classroom, one room in the building, and if the weather was at all permissible, everybody went out for recess or played at noontime and so forth.

Sonnenberg: Were the parents of many of the children involved in the war effort, or were they serving overseas?

Coulson: Some of the students did have older brothers and sisters who had, you know, been drafted into the military forces. I had one student whose father was an officer in the military, and she had the opportunity to live in different places, which is typical for officers' children. And, of course, during the war, when he was involved in service, I guess overseas, when she attended the school I taught, she was living with her grandparents.

Sonnenberg: Do you think that the war affected the behavior or the attitudes of the children?

Coulson: I would say, yes, very much, in an indirect manner. Of course, not being subject to any attack in this part of the country, you know, they weren't conscious of the booming of canon or that sort of thing, BUT, there was rationing going on, and so their parents were very much conscious of the war effort from that standpoint. Certain foodstuffs, sugar particularly, wheat products, and so forth, were rationed. Automobiles were not being manufactured; automobile tires were rationed very closely, as is true with gasoline. And, of course, depending upon what one did, the gasoline ration allowance was pro-rated accordingly. You had maybe an A-card, or a B-card, or a C-card. Now, an A-card was someone who probably got the smallest amount of gasoline—

Sonnenberg:—an A card got the smallest amount of gasoline?

Coulson: That's right, pro-rated. And a C-card would be someone who needed to use their car in their livelihood, their work. And of course, driving was restricted. We were permitted, perhaps, to drive to church on Sunday, but if you went out sightseeing or to some place, you're driving on a Sunday afternoon, one could be, you know, pulled in.

Sonnenberg: Did you drive to school then?

Coulson: Oh yes, I commuted at that time from my home, which was just near York Springs, to where I was teaching.

Sonnenberg: Where was the school located?

Coulson: I really taught in three different schools, but for the most part, the school was located at Heidlersburg. It's a little village up the way, north of Gettysburg. And so, that was where most of my teaching took place—in the one-room school at Heidlersburg.

Sonnenberg: I guess you would say that rationing did affect your daily activities in the school then?

Coulson: Oh yes, oh yes.

Sonnenberg: So, did you teach patriotism in the school?

Coulson: Oh, that was always a part of it. We had a subject we called Civics, and it was part of the social studies program, of course—History, Geography, Civics—and naturally, we taught patriotism, and just the form that our government was organized in and all of those things.

Sonnenberg: Did you enjoy teaching all eight grades in one room?

Coulson: Oh yes [*laughs*], I did. It was quite challenging, and all that, but it was a typical type of school that was found in rural areas during the early periods of history here in Pennsylvania, or throughout the nation, for that matter.

Sonnenberg: Just before I leave that topic, how many students were in your class?

Coulson: The size of the school ranged from 19 students in all eight grades, to as high as 48 in one room. And, of course, in that one room, we had—it wasn't a large room—we had what is known as double-desks, and there could be two students sitting side-by-side on a desk. And you had the little shelf under the top of the desk—That's where they kept the books and all that.

Sonnenberg: That sound really interesting.

Coulson: And, of course, the typical school had the black board across the front of the room. The teacher's desk was up there, sort of like a little platform up there, and students would come forward from their desks to the front of the room when I was having a particular class that directly pertained to them. And when class was finished, they'd go back to their seats, and another group would come forward.

Sonnenberg: So, did you know many people working in the war industries?

Coulson: Oh yes, many, many people would work in the war effort, in the defense plants, in perhaps Harrisburg and York, and areas like that. And then, of course, too, beginning in about 1939 and 1940, there

were several military establishments created in the vicinity that drew employees from the area where we lived—for instance, the Mechanicsburg Naval Supply Depot. And there was a depot, ordinance plant in York, and the New Cumberland Army Depot, and also, the Middletown air depot. All of those were within range of people commuting to those places for working. And, of course, in Harrisburg you had steel mills and railroad yards, and different things of that sort.

Sonnenberg: So, were there any industries, say, in the Gettysburg area?

Coulson: Of course, the fruit processing plants at Biglerville and at Peach Glen and Gardners . . . because they were processing foodstuffs, they were considered a related defense operation too. And, of course, too, in some nearby towns, there were clothing factories, small plants, and shoe plants and shoe factories. There were quite a few shoe manufacturing plants in the Hanover, Littlestown, and other small town areas.

Sonnenberg: Did you have many friends who actually fought in the war?

Coulson: Of yes, many of them.

Sonnenberg: How did you feel to see them going overseas?

Coulson: Well, naturally, there was a great concern expressed because you knew the exposure they would have to the hazards and dangers of war. I did not personally get involved until very late in the war period. I was not drafted, really, until about 1946. So the war was pretty much over by the time I went into the service, and I was only in there a short time.

Sonnenberg: Were you sent overseas then?

Coulson: No, no, I wasn't. I didn't get overseas.

Sonnenberg: How did you feel to be drafted, though?

Coulson: *[laughs]* Well, I had a physical handicap that prevented my being drafted earlier, and of course, then, as the war continued—and remember draftees became very scarce—I guess they scraped the bottom of the barrel and I was taken.

Sonnenberg: Being on the home front, would you say there were any other ways your life was affected by the war besides rationing?

Coulson: Well, as a schoolteacher, the schoolteachers were recruited to volunteer their efforts and time to register the citizens for some of these draft situations. So, we were involved in that respect. At some points in time, even the schoolchildren themselves got involved by collecting such things as milkweed pods. Now, milkweed is a plant that grows wild in the fields and the fence rows. And this plant gets, as

it matures, a pod on it. Inside of that pod is something that is of the nature of little seeds, and then it's like a blossom in there. Some of those milkweed pods were used in the filling of life rafts and some of those kinds of things. But it was an opportunity to [help], and children would be encouraged to collect them. They brought them into the schools, and then, of course, the county superintendent of schools and others would collect those, and they were shipped off someplace to a factory where they would be used in manufacturing as substitutes for certain fibers that were used as insulation for lifejackets and some things like that. The children were likewise encouraged to collect tin cans and parts of rubber from tires, and the newspapers, items of that sort, that the children would collect and bring into the school.

Sonnenberg: So everyone was basically helping out?

Coulson: They had the same opportunity there, yes.

Sonnenberg: Were you influenced by advertisements and propaganda of the war effort? Were magazine and radio advertisements influential in forming peoples' opinions of the war?

Coulson: Well, of course, advertising was more or less encouraging people to cooperate with the war effort. Naturally, too, everyone was very much concerned, from the standpoint of the news broadcasts, of what was going on in one theater of operation or another—you know, whether it was the European theater or the Pacific area, or Southeast Asia, or wherever it might be—so naturally that had its effect, too.

Sonnenberg: Were people able to be updated on the war then, daily?

Coulson: Radio and newspaper, yes.

Sonnenberg: So, did you have a radio in your home?

Coulson: Yes, we had a radio in the home, and I had one in the car at that time too.

Sonnenberg: What were some of the more popular programs that you might have listened to on the radio?

Coulson: Of well, of course, everyone listened to Lowell Thomas in the news; Gabriel Heater was another news commentator that everyone would listen to the news from his broadcast. And of course, then, too, there were the typical songs of that era that were popular in the forties and all that. I would say this, however, that the children and the families in the rural areas of the country, particularly those families that lived on farms, they did not feel the pressures of the war effort quite so greatly because they had foodstuffs that they raised in their gardens and fields, and they had their poultry, you know; they had plenty of things to eat. They were not affected by the rationing of certain foods. The only thing that they were, you might say, affected by, from the

standpoint of rationing, might be sugar and some of those kinds of things. Sure, shoes were a scarcity, a scarce item. As I mentioned before, the rubber, the tires were, and gasoline . . . they couldn't travel too much, but they were, in that respect, in some respects, further removed from the war effort, those living in the country, you know, the children.

Sonnenberg: Did you ever listen to the Fireside Chats by Franklin Roosevelt?

Coulson: Oh yes, that was a very prominent part. Of course, that started earlier than during the war period. I mean, his assuming office in 1933, and he started his Fireside Chats at that time. Yes.

Sonnenberg: Looking back, do you think Roosevelt was a good leader?

Coulson: I think he was a good leader for that period of time. He stepped in and tackled some problems that existed during the Great Depression, which I think was the type of leadership needed for that period, yes.

Sonnenberg: At the time, did you think he was a good leader, or is it more looking back that you think this?

Coulson: *[laughs]* Well, I have to make a confession. My family, my parents, and I, too, have been staunch Republicans, and, of course, I doubt whether my father ever voted for Roosevelt, and I'm not sure whether I did myself. But, nevertheless, I still would agree that he and his administrative staff and so forth—it was the type of leadership that was necessary. I do feel that he reached a period of time in the later years of the war, that he was maybe not as effective because of the failing health which he was experiencing. But aside from that, I would still give him credit.

Sonnenberg: Do you remember where you were when you heard the news that Pearl Harbor had been attacked on December 7th, 1941?

Coulson: Very well. Going back to that one-room schoolhouse in which I was teaching . . . it was December, it was cold weather, and when we had cold weather, I had to fire the furnace, you know, so in order to have a building that would be warm on Monday morning. I would go to the school building on Sunday afternoon and build the fire because from Friday night 'til then, the fire would be burned out. I was out firing the stove, and it always took about two hours to build a fire and let it catch the coals—and then you bank it off and be ready for the next morning. So, on my way home, I stopped at a service station to get some gasoline, and they said Pearl Harbor was attacked, and that was the news—I would say, about four o'clock that day, Sunday afternoon *[laughs]*. Yes, I remember that.

Sonnenberg: How did you react when you heard the news?

Coulson: Well, I knew some young people, some men, who were actually

at Pearl Harbor at the time. And of course, they escaped, I mean from the initial bombing, but at that moment, knowing they were there and that Pearl Harbor was bombed, you either didn't know what the news or what you might hear about these people whom I knew rather closely. It was definitely a concern, always.

Sonnenberg: Did your views of the Japanese change, then, after Pearl Harbor?

Coulson: Well, I would have to confess that prior to Pearl Harbor, our associations with them and contacts with the Japanese were pretty much non-existent. And, of course, not knowing them, and from what you would hear of their type of warfare that they staged during the war, your opinion of them would be pretty negative. I mean, you would hear about the suicide type of warfare that they staged and all the suicide pilots. It was something in which they were indoctrinated. It was something that they had to do, you know, and they did it. So, recognizing, too, [that] the handicap of a different language was another factor, that made it a little difficult to have a great degree of respect for the Japanese.

Sonnenberg: What did you think of Hitler at the time?

Coulson: Well, he was a bad guy as far as we were concerned in that period.

Sonnenberg: Did you hear a lot about him?

Coulson: We would hear about him; we would read news accounts of him, yes; and again, it was not a favorable impression that one would get from reading that. The atrocities that we would hear about, that were being performed on the prisoners of war, and things like that, and the things done to Jews. . . .

Sonnenberg: So people were knowledgeable of that?

Coulson: You would read about it, yes; you would hear about it in news broadcasts and news accounts.

Sonnenberg: Do you think most Americans did support the war?

Coulson: Oh yes; yes, I do. It was an all-out effort, and I just have to say that even the people on the home front, they were very loyal because most of them had someone, a relative or a close friend or someone that was involved, and so they worked hard, they made sacrifices, and I think it was pretty much an all-out effort.

Sonnenberg: So basically everyone was affected by the war in some small way?

Coulson: That's right, that's right.

Sonnenberg: I would suppose that you were very supportive of the war?

Coulson: Oh yes, we did.

Sonnenberg: Now, did you meet your wife while you were teaching?

Coulson: No, I met her after the war was over. She, in fact, was very, very much involved in the war effort. She was a nurse, and she joined a hospital unit. She was a graduate of the School of Nursing at the University of Pennsylvania, and there was a unit formed pretty much of officers and nurses and all staff from that area, the University, plus some staff members from other hospitals, but it was a hospital unit. And they left Broad Street Station in 1941, whatever, and then she was over in Burma, and so she spent about two-and-a-half years in the China-Burma-India theater of war. No, I didn't meet her until after the war.

Sonnenberg: In what ways was Adams county affected or changed by the war effort?

Coulson: Well, . . . I will say this interesting line, which I might interject here. There were local civil defense organizations established throughout the rural areas, including Adams county. It was sort of like, you might call it, the home guard. In case something should occur, there were certain people that were organized to form volunteers. One thing that we did, we had an airplane-spotting network that functioned through Adams county. Individuals would take their turn, and there were what they call spotter stations established at different points. And you would go into your period of time, maybe three or four hours at a spot; and maybe once or more a week, an individual would accept a volunteer assignment. You would go there, and if an airplane flew over, you would go straight to the telephone. Each spotter station had a telephone, and you'd call a certain number, and reported the presence of that airplane. If it was at night, you'd try to judge in what direction it might be flying, and my volunteer period was mostly at night because I was working through the day, but if you were volunteering for daytime duty, then you would try to describe the plane—you know, was it one-motor or two-motors, or what have you. I mean, maybe you could identify what type of plane it was, whether it was a fighter plane or a passenger-type plane. We were given certain training in spotting planes and so forth. And then that information would be called to a certain spot, and in the event that a raid might have occurred, it was intended to be part of the defense effort, tracing the flight of the planes like that.

Sonnenberg: Did anyone ever spot anything suspicious?

Coulson: Well, I don't know if they did or not. Fortunately, I don't know that there were any planes that reached this far inland. And I guess there would have been some along the coast; there might have been

flights that were a little suspicious, but that was one thing that took place even this distance inland you might say.

Sonnenberg: Now, do you remember there being any race riots with the African-Americans in this area?

Coulson: No.

Sonnenberg: So you didn't really notice many minorities migrating North at that time?

Coulson: No, we didn't. In fact, we did not have . . . the only racial minorities that perhaps would be in existence in Adams county at that time would probably be a few that lived in Gettysburg. That was before the period when the Puerto Rican or the Spanish and the Black people would come into this area to harvest fruit. During the war period, the fruit workers were mostly our own local residents, mainly high-school students and so forth.

Sonnenberg: Really? Did they have to get out of school to do that?

Coulson: There were some times when the school might delay the opening in order that students could respond to the need for fruit pickers.

Sonnenberg: Did any of your students have to do that?

Coulson: No, not too many of those because I was teaching elementary school, but high school level . . . in the summertime, large numbers of local residents, both children and adults would pick cherries during the summer months, and pick other types of fruit, tomatoes, and peaches, and apples, and so forth.

Sonnenberg: Was the fruit that people were picking sent overseas?

Coulson: Well, it was for the most part packaged either as fresh fruit, or most of it was processed in the factories in Biglerville and Peach Glen and those areas, for canning and processing that way.

Sonnenberg: How did you feel when you heard the news that the United States had dropped the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima?

Coulson: Well, I think there was a certain degree of alarm, initially, but as one learned more and more about it, it seemed like the practical thing to do. It was horrible to hear about the number of lives that were lost and the degree of damage that was inflicted; however, in order to terminate the war, the loss of lives of American soldiers and others as well, and possibly the Japanese civilians as well, would have been far greater if the Japanese empire would have had to have been invaded and brought them to their knees by that means. So even as horrible as the atomic bomb sounded, and as it really was, I think that it was soon recognized that it was the humane and practical thing to do, because in the long run, there would have been many lives saved by doing it

that way. And that is still an open question of discussion. And only the people who remember and knew something about the war effort even today, do they appreciate the fact that it was the thing to do.

Sonnenberg: I think it's hard for those who lived through this, when many people probably look back and say that this was so terrible, but when you live through it, you can judge better.

Coulson: Yes, that's right. I mean it was something horrible to hear about and so forth at that time, but as you analyze the situation and hear more of the circumstances and the nature of the warfare that took place on the islands of the Pacific and the mainland of Southeast Asia and all that. . . . It was soon recognized that it was the thing to do.

Sonnenberg: Do you think most Americans were generally in favor of this action that was taken?

Coulson: Yes, I believe they were, after they recognized or knew the circumstances.

Sonnenberg: You didn't see many people protesting what happened?

Coulson: In those day, we seemed to have a different respect for leadership, and there was not the tendency for people to resort to demonstrations and the like to the degree that we seem to have today. I mean, we felt that it was a decision made by the government and the military leadership, and we accepted that. So I don't recall, I don't know that I could say I remember any of the demonstration, any form of demonstration for that matter.

Sonnenberg: Was it a relief for you knowing that the war was over?

Coulson: Oh yes, yes. Of course, V-J Day—I mean Victory Day in Europe, that was about June, I guess it was—and that was a signal for great celebration, and a lot of people did celebrate [*laughs*], and that was V-E Day. V-J Day, which was when Japan surrendered, was again a time for celebration and rejoicing. Everybody felt a great sigh of relief.

Sonnenberg: Were you still teaching in the one-room schoolhouse at the time that this was going on?

Coulson: I had taken a position as a teaching elementary school principal in Biglerville, and so from 1944 on, I was with the schools in Biglerville.

Sonnenberg: Do you think that the children were aware of the totality of all the things that were going on: in Japan, the bombing, and everything that was going on in Europe?

Coulson: I think they were because they heard about it on the radio, and their parents read about it in the paper. They heard the discussion of it at home. They probably had uncles and aunts, cousins and other relatives who were in the service, and so they were very much concerned about that.

Sonnenberg: So, your service to the war movement as a teacher was definitely an essential role to Adams county. Were you happier that you were able to serve more on the home front than having to be sent overseas?

Coulson: Well, I was very happy about it, yes [*laughs*]. I was willing to go, but I felt that there was a need for people here, too. I mean, teachers were very scarce. I was telling an incident here earlier today, as I say . . . I was with the schools in Biglerville then—many, many teachers were drafted into the service, and coaches—there was a period about 1944, when the coaches were drafted—they couldn't find a football coach for Biglerville High School, and the supervising principal [Leslie Stock] said, "I guess we're going to just have to discontinue our football program." And the then head coach at Gettysburg College, Henry Bream—"Hen" Bream whom everyone knew and probably still remembers—he coached basketball and baseball, too—he said, "Mr. Stock, . . . whatever you do, don't discontinue your football program in your high school." He said, "Before you do that, I will come and coach," and he did. For two years, Mr. Bream came out and coached that high school football team, and they had their schedules and so forth for that period. So, the schools were quite affected by the loss of a lot of staffing that, you know, were taken by the draft.

Sonnenberg: Just a sidenote, did Mr. Bream coach both schools, Gettysburg College and Biglerville High School?

Coulson: Gettysburg College had no football team during the war. He was teaching Physical Education classes and so forth on the campus . . . but, then, at the end of his college teaching day, he went out to Biglerville and trained the football team, and they played their games then on Saturdays or whatever.

Sonnenberg: So, if you had to say one thing that is your most impressive memory of the entire period of the war, or your teaching in the one-room schoolhouse . . . could you describe that?

Coulson: Well, I don't know how to summarize it in a few words.

Sonnenberg: Well, you can expand. You can say whatever you want [*smiles*].

Coulson: But it was . . . I appreciated the opportunity. Another little side issue in those days during the war—we were not permitted to use our school buses to take an athletic team away to another school for competition. And so, loyal people would volunteer their own vehicles and take these students to where they needed to go. One night, I was volunteering my services and my car to take some basketball players to meet a scheduled game near York—and, of course, as I say, tires

were rationed, gasoline was rationed, and I was using my precious gasoline and my precious tires—and on route, I had a tire blowout. So, of course, I resorted to the spare tire that I had, not knowing whether I would ever get another tire again. But, we got by. We got home that night. I had about five big, tall basketball players in the car, but we got help. But, we were glad to do those things. We volunteered our efforts. We never got any extra pay or the extra duties, you know, that we did beyond your schoolday and beyond your labor assignment.

Sonnenberg: It seems that you were very happy to do a lot of extra little things for the war effort.

Coulson: Oh yes, right.

Sonnenberg: Do you think your life would have been totally changed had the war never occurred? Do you think a lot of things would have been different?

Coulson: I don't know that it would have been too different. No.

Sonnenberg: Do you think you still would have taught in the one-room country school?

Coulson: Oh yes. I mean, after graduation from high school, I went to college, and that was my ambition—to be a teacher. And that's what I did.

Sonnenberg: I'd like to thank you for sharing your story with me today. It's really helped a lot, and I'm sure it will be useful for future generations to understand the lives of men and women on the home front during World War II.