

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: John Kirwin
Current home town: Not given
Age: Not given

My uncle Jimmy recounted when my father, Robert, caught a train for New York on a Friday morning to ship out as a merchant seaman. He returned home by Sunday night, because the liberty ship had been torpedoed off the coast of New Jersey. After the rescue, the seamen were allowed to return home. Later, my father mentioned to his pastor at Holy Rosary that he was shipping for Naples. The priest suggested that he visit the church of St Januarius to see the relic on the annual feast day to prognosticate Mt Vesuvius's eruption. My father took leave to attend church, but upon arrival saw the streets were too crowded. He stopped at a tavern where he began a conversation with an American by the name of LaFollette from Wisconsin. He proposed to visit villages in the surrounding hills. My father accompanied him and saw villagers so impoverished that nuns at an orphanage were barefoot. When my father returned to the ship and mentioned this condition to the ship commander, the commander allowed the ship's provisions to be loaded onto a truck to distribute to the villagers. My father said that his ship was later provisioned after it left the harbor. On returning home, the pastor mentioned to my father that Mt Vesuvius had erupted later that year.



My father, Robert Kirwin, with my mother, Ruth, in their neighborhood near Franklin Park.

Uncle Jim graduated with a mechanical engineering degree from Ohio State in 1940. He was hired by Bendix in South Bend, Indiana, and reported in coveralls expecting to work on the production floor. The manager was surprised to see an engineer report in coveralls, since he would be evaluating carburation and fuel injection for advanced engine design. He was assigned to serve as a liaison to the Pratt and Whitney engine plant in Hartford, CT. He asked a young secretary in the front office to lunch across the street at a diner. As his assignment was coming to an end, the plant manager recommended that he should take her to dinner at a certain restaurant in town. After driving her home, he was followed and

pulled over by the town police. The police asked him to follow them back to the station, there he learned that the plant manager asked them pull the prank on him. When he went to talk with her parents about marrying their daughter, they asked that he take her back to their hometown in Ireland. He took Mary McCarthy home to Columbus to meet his family and she commented that they were a motley crew.

My Uncle Edward J. Kirwin earned an engineering degree before graduating from law school and opening a law practice. Before the war, he attended a rally with Charles Lindbergh for America First to keep the United States out of war. The draft board notified him of a civilian job reviewing contracts for procuring supplies, but he refused the offer. After Pearl Harbor, he received a draft notice to appear with a suitcase at the Columbus train depot. He was shipped to California for training in Air Corps engine maintenance and then to airbases in the Pacific theater. For four years, he maintained bomber engines and, on occasion, flew with crews on planes to which he had done maintenance. After discharge and arrival back home, he told my aunt that was the last time he would be leaving Columbus. He later opened his home to two Hungarian college students after the Soviet invasion in 1956 and also to a Cuban student after Fidel Castro's coup.