

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mrs. Rose Amarosa Dern
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Interview in progress.

Mike Zambrano: This is Mike Zambrano, and today I'm interviewing Mrs. Rose Amarosa Dern at her home in Georgetown, Texas. This interview is taking place, ah, I'm sorry, this interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War and Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information. Okay. So, my first question is always can you please tell me where and when you were born?

Mrs. Dern: Uh, New York City, 1921.

Mike Zambrano: And could you tell me a little bit about your parents, like what did your father do for a living and your mother?

Mrs. Dern: My mother stayed home and my father was a truck driver.

Ann: And didn't he work for the railroad?

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum, yes.

Ann: He did both, he was a truck driver and worked for the railroad?

Mrs. Dern: Well, the company was the railroad who owned the truck.

Ann: Oh okay.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. And your mother stayed home and ...

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Mike Zambrano: But did you have any brothers or sisters?

Mrs. Dern: I did, a brother and a sister.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, Oh, what were your parents' names, by the way?

Mrs. Dern: Uhm, Angelina Amarosa (sp?). Well, Albano (sp?) was her maiden name.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mrs. Dern: Do you want her ... her maiden name?

Mike Zambrano: No, that's okay.

Mrs. Dern: Okay. And my father was Patrick Amarosa.

Mike Zambrano: Uh, Italian descent?

Mrs. Dern: Yes!

Mike Zambrano: Ah, okay. Uhm, did you ... did you grow up in New York City?

Mrs. Dern: I did.

Mike Zambrano: And went to high school and graduated from there?

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: I don't think of it ... or it's been a while since I've interviewed anyone that was from a large city that lived through the Depression. Can ... can you tell me what it was for you and your family?

Mrs. Dern: Very hard. We were rationed a lot.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mrs. Dern: But we ...

Ann: (Unintelligible).

Mrs. Dern: ... we were satisfied, you know, we were taken care of.

Ann: (Laughter).

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter), we were taken care.

Mike Zambrano: You mean there was enough food on the table for everyone?

Mrs. Dern: Yes, yes.

Mike Zambrano: I assume you lived in an apartment?

Mrs. Dern: No, it was a duplex.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Ann: And now, did you live in ... actually, inside the city or wasn't it in the Bronx?

Mrs. Dern: Well, the Bronx is part of the city.

Ann: Okay.

Mrs. Dern: There are five boroughs in the ... in the city.

Ann: Okay, well I was telling it was Bronx, New York City; that makes a difference. I think when you hear New York City, you think of downtown Manhattan.

Mrs. Dern: That's right, many ... yes, many people do, they just think of Manhattan.

Ann: But you were actually ...

Mrs. Dern: Rather than the other.

Ann: ... in the Bronx, right?

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, alright. Thank you for clarifying that.

Mrs. Dern: Well, thank you, Ann (laughter).

Ann: (Laughter).

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, so, uh, let's see. I would guess that you graduated from high school maybe about 1939?

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Late '30s?

Mrs. Dern: Right. Wait a minute. Uh (chuckles) ...

Ann: Yeah.

Mrs. Dern: Wow.

Ann: It's hard, Mom, don't worry it; at a hundred, we're glad you can even think back then (unintelligible).

Mrs. Dern: '35 pops up ...

Ann: (Unintelligible).

Mrs. Dern: ... but I don't know whether I graduated from high school (unintelligible).

Mike Zambrano: Well, let me put it this way, uhm, what did you do after you graduated from high school?

Mrs. Dern: Went to work.

Mike Zambrano: And ... and what did you work at?

Ann: What did you do?

Mrs. Dern: Uh, at first, I worked for Western Union, then I worked for a ... a hotel, (unintelligible) Hotel.

Mike Zambrano: What did you do for Western Union?

Mrs. Dern: I was a telegram recorder; we took telegrams over the phone.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, okay. And what did you do at the hotel?

Mrs. Dern: Uh, I was a secretary.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. I suppose, by that point, you had already moved out of your parent's home?

Mrs. Dern: No, I lived with my parents.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mrs. Dern: I travelled (chuckles), work to my home ...

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mrs. Dern: ... every day.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm ...

Mrs. Dern: I wanted to be home.

Ann: Did you take the subway from the Bronx in?

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: Was it crowded all the time?

Mrs. Dern: Yes (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Were you ... where were you in the order of children? Were you middle, oldest, youngest?

Mrs. Dern: First.

Mike Zambrano: You were the oldest.

Mrs. Dern: Oldest, yes.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. What ... what were their names, if you don't mind?

Mrs. Dern: (Chuckles), Anthony Amarosa and Josephine (sp?) Amarosa.

Mike Zambrano: Josephine?

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Hum. Uhm, do you remember where you were when you had heard that ... that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor?

Mrs. Dern: Oh, (pause) I was working.

Ann: Were you at the hotel?

Mrs. Dern: Well, I was on lunch break.

Ann: Okay.

Mrs. Dern: I remember that. When it was announced.

Ann: And did you hear it over the radio or people talking or ...

Mrs. Dern: Uh, it was an announcement.

Mike Zambrano: An announcement? So, maybe something over the radio?

Mrs. Dern: Right, right.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Uhm, do you recall maybe with people around you (unintelligible)?

Mrs. Dern: Well, everyone just stopped and listened and was very surprised.

Mike Zambrano: When did you get the idea to go into the service?

Mrs. Dern: Oh, when I heard about the war (chuckles).

Ann: But you wanted to go in earlier, but Grandpa wouldn't let you.

Mrs. Dern: Well, I wasn't of age (laughter).

Ann: Right, you wanted to go in when you were eighteen, right?

Mrs. Dern: Right (chuckles).

Ann: So, that was right after you graduated from high school.

Mrs. Dern: Right (chuckles).

Ann: And Grandpa said no.

Mrs. Dern: (Chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Hum. And when ... when did you ... was it much longer after that that you enlisted?

Mrs. Dern: No, not much. When I was eighteen.

Mike Zambrano: When you were eighteen.

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. When did you chose the Navy?

Mrs. Dern: Oh, I've always lived near the water, and near the beach and uh, just inclined more towards the Navy.

Ann: Was one of the recruiters easier to get to? Did they have a recruiting station in the Bronx or some place?

Mrs. Dern: There was, but I ... I did it on my own. I mean ...

Ann: Uh hum.

Mrs. Dern: ... I responded, you know. They had that sign, "I need you!" (chuckles)

Ann: (Laughter).

Mrs. Dern: Remember the man pointing? (chuckles)

Mike Zambrano: I've seen those things.

Ann: Uh huh.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: So, you go down, you enlist. Did they take you right away or did you have to report ...

Mrs. Dern: Well, I waited because I wanted to go into communications; I waited a few months.

Mike Zambrano: Communications? Is that ... did that have anything to do with your Western Union job that influenced you?

Mrs. Dern: Uh, probably, I just was inclined towards that line of work.

Mike Zambrano: So, when you went back, I understand you did your basic training at Floyd Bennett Field?

Mrs. Dern: Well, no, the basic training was at Madison, Wisconsin.

Ann: For communications, but your actual training was at Floyd Bennett, right?

Mrs. Dern: My work in ... yes.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah.

Mrs. Dern: I worked at Floyd Bennett.

Ann: Oh, okay, I didn't understand that. So, you went from ... in ... when you enrolled, you went straight to Madison, Wisconsin?

Mrs. Dern: That was the training, yes.

Ann: Oh! Okay.

Mike Zambrano: And what kind of ... what kind of training do you recall?

Mrs. Dern: It was like indoctrination, and uh, some training for communications.

Mike Zambrano: That ... would do calisthenics or uh ...

Mrs. Dern: Yeah, we had ... uh hum. We had some exercises (chuckles) in the morning to limber us up.

Mike Zambrano: Uh, just to be clear, it's the WAVE that you go into, uh, Women ...

Mrs. Dern: Women's Auxiliary Voluntary Emergency Services.

Mike Zambrano: Yes, that's ... thank you.

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, so how much time do you think you spent in Madison?

Mrs. Dern: Uh, (pause) about six months, I think.

Ann: And you were actually on the campus of the University of Wisconsin perhaps, right?

Mrs. Dern: Yes, uh hum.

Ann: That's where your training took place.

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Ann: Right?

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. And from there you headed to Floyd Bennett, is that correct?

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Mike Zambrano: How did you get there, do you recall?

Mrs. Dern: Train.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Ann: Did you travel with your peers from the class or were you the only one on the train by yourself, do you remember?

Mrs. Dern: I think there might have been (pause), no, I think I was about the only one. But there were others when I got there.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mrs. Dern: You know, uh, enrolling at the same time.

Mike Zambrano: Right. So, you arrive at Floyd Bennett, and what do you do at Floyd Bennett?

Mrs. Dern: Communications.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, but did you continue at your training or ...

Mrs. Dern: No, went right to work.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Okay, well let me go back a little bit to Madison, Wisconsin again. Uhm, so that's where you actually do your training for communications?

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Mike Zambrano: And what ... what kind of training did you get?

Mrs. Dern: (Pause) well, that was the indoctrination, and uh ...

Ann: Did you study out of a book, did you have the machines, did you practice hands on anything? How ... what was your training? Like what did it entail?

Mrs. Dern: Gosh ...

Ann: How did they train you, I guess, is a good thing to say.

Mike Zambrano: Yes.

Ann: (Laughter).

Mrs. Dern: Well ...

Ann: Did you get up and go to class every day?

Mrs. Dern: Yes, I think so, uh hum.

Ann: Okay.

Mike Zambrano: Did you have ... I'm assuming training in Morse Code?

Mrs. Dern: Yes, uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Any other type of communications machines or (unintelligible)?

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum. Telegraphy; I was telegraphist first class.

Ann: Is there a difference between the Morse Code machines and the telegrapher machines or are they the same? Uh, we're putting you on the spot, not meaning to put you on the spot.

Mrs. Dern: No, no. Was there a difference between the Morse Code and the ...

Ann: The Morse Code was what ... what you trained on, right? They taught you that.

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Ann: They taught you to decipher that.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: Okay, and was that work done on a machine?

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Ann: And then you were called a telegrapher because you trained in Morse Code and you could read it and decipher it?

Mrs. Dern: Yes! Uh hum.

Ann: Okay. Well, we're trying to ...

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Ann: ... you say, "Yes," like we know it and we don't know. We're trying to understand, Mom.

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter), yeah.

Ann: You got to give us some information here.

Mrs. Dern: Okay (chuckles).

Ann: (Laughter), I'm like plying it out of her (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: What about operating radios? Did ... do you recall any training in that?

Mrs. Dern: Yes, uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Ann: Explain, Mother, rather than saying yes, you have to tell a little bit about what it was, that's why he's here. Okay?

Mrs. Dern: Okay (chuckles). Uh, I have to think back on the training for the radio. (Pause), it was a code and (pause) got to think of what I did.

Ann: That's okay.

Mike Zambrano: Did you ... were you ... I assume you must have been tested on ... on all of this, like the Morse Code, remembering it.

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Mike Zambrano: Or ... or ...

Mrs. Dern: Working with what I had to ... when I went to work, I had to know it.

Ann: Well, at school did they ... did you have to take exams and pass exams?

Mrs. Dern: I'm sure I did, uh hum. I hardly remember, but ...

Ann: Okay.

Mrs. Dern: ... it was a thorough training.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, so when you get to Floyd Bennett, what ... what is your job there?

Mrs. Dern: Uh, (pause) what did I do when I got to Floyd Bennett?

Mike Zambrano: Did you do any transcribing or maybe uh, did you work in a large office that was sending messages out?

Mrs. Dern: Yeah, I ... yeah, yes, uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Do you recall what kind of messages they were?

Mrs. Dern: No.

Mike Zambrano: Hum. What else do you remember about your work area? I mean, I ... I'm only assuming it was a large office, large group.

Mrs. Dern: Yes, uh hum.

Ann: Can you remember if there were lots of people in the room; were you working on the ... the Morse Code at the time with machines; do you remember anything like that?

Mrs. Dern: (Pause) ...

Ann: That's okay if ...

Mrs. Dern: I ... I think of ... I can think of the room, but I can't think of what I was doing (chuckles). But I did work (chuckles); I know I was put to work and that I did work there.

Mike Zambrano: Do you recall what rank you were at that point?

Mrs. Dern: Pardon me?

Mike Zambrano: Do you ... do you recall what rank you were at that point?

Mrs. Dern: Uh, well I ...

Ann: Before you went to Hawaii, you ... obtained your first class in Hawaii. What did ... what were you before that? You just ...

Mrs. Dern: Oh, you was seaman ... seaman first.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mrs. Dern: Seaman ... apprentice seaman.

Ann: Apprentice seaman.

Mike Zambrano: Oh.

Ann: Good remembering, Mom!

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter), no it isn't.

Mike Zambrano: How long do you think you were at Floyd Bennett?

Mrs. Dern: Oh, I was there a couple of years, about two years.

Mike Zambrano: About two years, okay. I assume you must have bunked with other WAVES?

Mrs. Dern: Well, no, I was ... got friendly with the ones that I'd worked with or ... we slept in Quonset huts ...

Mike Zambrano: Ah! Okay.

Mrs. Dern: ... you know? People near me, I got to know, but you usually went to work, and we had a hard uh, schedule.

Ann: You said you worked ten to twelve hours a day.

Mrs. Dern: Right. Well, it's not that, it's that the ... the schedule rotated around the clock, and I ... Floyd Bennett was near my home, so I went home very often.

Mike Zambrano: Oh.

Mrs. Dern: So, that sort of made me a loner.

Mike Zambrano: Ah, I think I know what you mean.

Mrs. Dern: (Chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: When I was in the service, I ... I lived close to home my first assignment and ...

Mrs. Dern: And the family wants you home.

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter), yeah, your ... your ... people that you associated with are ...

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Mike Zambrano: ... old friends rather than the ones that you're working with.

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Mike Zambrano: But ... did ... did you ... did you make any friends good or ... or acquaintances or ...

Mrs. Dern: Oh, I made friends at the time, right. But I didn't continue with them. I got married after.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mrs. Dern: So, you know, that sort of ... marriage and children keep you from (chuckles) being a social person.

Mike Zambrano: Right, especial ... I mean, today it's easier to keep up with people with Facebook and things like that that ... well, obviously, it wasn't ... that wasn't available back then.

Mrs. Dern: I was just going to say, we didn't have that, uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm ...

Ann: And you left New York when you got married and went to Virginia, right? Because ...

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Ann: ... he was a Marine, wasn't he?

Mrs. Dern: Dad was in the Marines, uh hum.

Ann: Right.

Mike Zambrano: So, when you say rotating schedule, there was some one always in the office working constantly?

Mrs. Dern: Absolutely, uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Did you have to work any night shifts?

Mrs. Dern: Yes! Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mrs. Dern: We all did.

Mike Zambrano: And were you working ten to twelve hours a day? How ... how was that?

Mrs. Dern: No.

Ann: Oh, I thought you did say that? No?

Mrs. Dern: Maybe I did, but ...

Ann: (Laughter).

Mrs. Dern: ... it ... it wasn't an obligation.

Mike Zambrano: Hum. Uhm, and why do you suppose it was important to ... to keep the office open all the time?

Mrs. Dern: Of communications during the war, uh hum, that was necessary.

Mike Zambrano: Hum. And ... and you don't recall what kind of communications they were? Orders ... what, you mean, orders going out or could be (unintelligible)?

Mrs. Dern: Well, we were in communication with the planes that went out for duty from the shore.

Ann: Now, was that when you were at Floyd Bennett or was that when you were in Hawaii?

Mrs. Dern: Both.

Ann: Both? Okay. So, that's what you did; you just told us what you did. You're good at this.

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter).

Ann: You just recalled, Mother. You were giving direct ... taking directions from the planes and that type of thing when you went to work.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Uh, okay. So, after Floyd Bennett, uh, (unintelligible) told me that you had gone to ... was it Maui?

Mrs. Dern: Hawaii.

Mike Zambrano: (Unintelligible).

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. How did you get there?

Mrs. Dern: Uh, a ship.

Mike Zambrano: I assume you ...

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: ... took a train out to California and then hopped on a ...

Mrs. Dern: Right, uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Do you remember how long it took to get to Hawaii?

Mrs. Dern: Days, uh hum.

Ann: It was a long time.

Mrs. Dern: Right (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: You're not telling me you got sea sick, are you?

Mrs. Dern: No.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Alright, so, well, you get to Hawaii. Do you remember exactly where you may have been stationed? Was it somewhere in Pearl Harbor?

Mrs. Dern: No, it wasn't Pearl Harbor. It was beyond that.

Ann: In Maui, you said you were on the south side, remember you told uhm, Linda that you were on the south side, and the book club, remember had a father who was ... and they ... they said you were on the south side of Maui and you told them about the base and everything out there?

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: South side of Maui, okay.

Ann: Right?

Mrs. Dern: Right. Her ... she was saying her father was an officer there.

Ann: Yes.

Mrs. Dern: But I know ... I didn't know him. I mean, I never met officers.

Ann: Okay.

Mike Zambrano: And just what was your job at ... at this base near Maui?

Mrs. Dern: (Pause) ...

Mike Zambrano: I think you mentioned something earlier about communicating with planes or ...

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Mike Zambrano: ... sending orders.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: So, it ... it sounds maybe like you would have used ... did you ... well, what ... what did you use to communicate with these planes?

Mrs. Dern: Radio.

Mike Zambrano: And were there a lot of radio operators that uhm, uh, where you were working?

Mrs. Dern: Not a lot, but there were enough.

Mike Zambrano: Was it associated to an airport or ... or an airstrip?

Mrs. Dern: (Pause) ... trying to remember. I went to work from my living quarters, so, and I walked from my living quarters to the work place.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mrs. Dern: It ... it was called the radio shack.

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Ann: And is that where you deciphered messages that were coming in in the Morse Code? So, you weren't on the radio the whole time, right?

Mrs. Dern: (Pause), well I was a telegrapher, telegrapher first class.

Ann: Okay. And what did you do as a telegrapher? You intercepted the messages coming through?

Mrs. Dern: I hardly remember. I'm so sorry.

Ann: Mom, you just told a whole group of ladies two weeks ago; come on think. I know you ... we're putting you on the spot 'cause I've never seen you be so ... so quiet, blank.

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter).

Mike Zambrano: (Unintelligible).

Ann: I'm sorry, but you ... you told them that the ... the messages came in, and you and a group of your co-workers would spend hours trying to decipher those codes. And then everybody together would get certain sections of the

messages to decipher and decode, and then you would spend hours putting the code together to give to your superiors. That's what you told them.

Mrs. Dern: Okay.

Ann: (Laughter).

Mrs. Dern: (Unintelligible).

Mike Zambrano: Well, were these messages ... were they secret, were they confidential?

Mrs. Dern: Yes. Yes, they certainly were confidential.

Ann: They ... she was ... they were locked in a room, plus when they had to go through security.

Mrs. Dern: Yeah, because ...

Ann: You told all that to those ladies.

Mrs. Dern: I had to get classified.

Ann: Clearance, right, uh huh.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: And then when you went to work every day ...

Mrs. Dern: Personal and confidential.

Mike Zambrano: And so, you decoded things. Uhm, do you recall what ... what type of material you were ... were you decoding?

Mrs. Dern: Well, it was classified because I had to get a clearance.

Ann: (Unintelligible) she told the ladies at the book club 'cause they had read Code Girls over on the other side of Sun City, and they invited her ... and they were asking her questions, and she said she couldn't tell anybody what ... what those messages were, that you would be discharged from the service immediately if you ... if you ...

Mrs. Dern: Oh, at the time, yeah.

Ann: ... told anybody because it was ...

Mrs. Dern: Person and classification, right.

Ann: ... classified information.

Mrs. Dern: Confidential.

Ann: Right.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. And you said you walked to the ... you ... you called it the radio shack?

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: So, you lived on base?

Mrs. Dern: Yeah, oh yes.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. What would you do in your spare time?

Mrs. Dern: I usually went home (laughter).

Ann: No, in Maui?

Mike Zambrano: (Unintelligible) in Maui.

Mrs. Dern: Oh, in Maui. Uh, we just ... sometimes we rested or we'd just go out for lunch or do something different.

Mike Zambrano: Did you ... did you do any sightseeing that you might recall?

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum. Sure.

Mike Zambrano: What else? Did you play cards, did you go to the beach, did you ...

Ann: Well, you must have done something 'cause you met Daddy there (laughter). So, you had to go somewhere (laughter).

Mrs. Dern: (Chuckles).

Ann: Right? You and your friends, what did you do there in your off time on the weekends?

Mrs. Dern: I said we went to lunch, we went out to lunch, we'd walk around, and we did a lot of resting, too (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Well, what's ... how do you recall Hawaii 'cause that's very different from New York. What struck you about it?

Mrs. Dern: Oh, of course, it was different. The language, of course, and uh, although most ... many of them spoke English.

Mike Zambrano: The weather?

Mrs. Dern: The weather was *very* nice (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: New York is it ... is it generally cold?

Mrs. Dern: Yes, uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: I think I've been there like (unintelligible).

Mrs. Dern: Right. It was quite a change.

Mike Zambrano: I can imagine.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum. Yes, New York is cold.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm ...

Ann: Did you walk on the beach ever?

Mrs. Dern: Oh, sure!

Ann: Well, that's what he wants to hear, Mom, and you're saying, oh sure.

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter), we went swimming and ...

Ann: Okay, you went swimming.

Mrs. Dern: ... enjoyed the beach, yes, it was wonderful.

Ann: There you go.

Mike Zambrano: I don't know, just ... just trying to get an idea of what it was you would have, I mean, everybody's got to have a little down time in Hawaii, it's such a beautiful place.

Mrs. Dern: It is.

Mike Zambrano: I'm curious how ... how you spent your time.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Did ... do ... do you like to read?

Mrs. Dern: I did; I've always been very avid reader, although my eyes are getting weaker as I get older.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum. Uhm, you had met your husband in Hawaii?

Mrs. Dern: Yes, uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: And ...

Mrs. Dern: He was a Marine. They were stationed at the naval station that I was stationed at.

Mike Zambrano: Huh, okay. I'm going to have to find out where this ... where this station was on the south side of Maui. I always thought that everything was centralized.

Ann: I was surprised, too ...

Mike Zambrano: To the Pearl Harbor area.

Ann: ... when this particular person had a father who really submersed and ... and he was a ... a pilot, and he really told stories after stories after stories, so

their family grew up with hundreds of stories about when he was in the war. And ... and so, she knew so much about where it was, and ... and that type of thing, so ...

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum, okay.

Ann: ... she ... she was ... I wouldn't have had any idea except for she said that, and then that triggered Mom's memory that it was on that side of the island.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, okay. How did you meet your husband?

Mrs. Dern: Oh, he was stationed at the same naval station that I was.

Mike Zambrano: And did ... did you meet him on the beach? Did you meet him at lunch or ...

Mrs. Dern: Uh, a mutual friend introduced us.

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Ann: Did you go to a dance? Did you double date at a restaurant, or ...

Mrs. Dern: No. We did double date, but this mutual friend knew me, knew us, knew us individually and introduced us.

Ann: And then what did you and Daddy do to meet? I mean, after the mutual friend introduced you two, how did you get to know each other? What kinds of activities did you do?

Mrs. Dern: Oh, we just went out to lunch and began see ... dating and usual ...

Mike Zambrano: Hum. What was his name? His first name?

Mrs. Dern: My ... uh, Robert.

Mike Zambrano: Robert, Robert Dern. (Pause), uhm, how long were you stationed in Hawaii?

Mrs. Dern: Uh, only about six months because the war ended. But you had to sign up for eighteen months to go overseas.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mrs. Dern: Which I did. But of course, when the war ended, we all went back home.

Ann: And did you the boat back, uh, ship back home or did they fly you back home?

Mrs. Dern: (Chuckles), a boat.

Ann: So, you went back ...

Mrs. Dern: A ship, a ship.

Ann: A ship. And what kinds of things ... do you remember anything that you did during ... when you were on the ship 'cause it had to have been at least, I mean, back then ...

Mrs. Dern: Oh yes.

Ann: ... back then, ten, fifteen days, what would you think?

Mrs. Dern: Oh, not quite. Not quite that long, Ann.

Ann: No?

Mike Zambrano: It's a little bit less.

Ann: Less:

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, yeah, what did you do? I mean, (unintelligible) on a ship, but ...

Ann: What'd you do on the ship for that time?

Mrs. Dern: Nothing much (laughter).

Ann: (Laughter).

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter), ate, slept, I read (chuckles).

Ann: So, like was it much different on the ship than it is right now (laughter).

Mrs. Dern: No, it wasn't (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: So, you make your way back to the States. I ... I think I read somewhere that you end at Quantico?

Mrs. Dern: When I married, yes. My ...

Mike Zambrano: Okay, alright.

Mrs. Dern: ... my husband was stationed at Quantico, and we used to live there.

Mike Zambrano: That's right.

Ann: And when you came back from Hawaii, did you go back to Floyd Bennett or did you ... were you discharged right away because you had been in Hawaii, and you came home and left the service or did you go back for a little while?

Mrs. Dern: No, I didn't go back. I was discharged.

Ann: At that?

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: From ... from Hawaii, okay.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, when you get back to the States, do you remember where you were discharged?

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum, New York.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, so you went back to New York, okay. Uhm ...

Mrs. Dern: We had to go back to where we enlisted.

Mike Zambrano: Do ... do you recall where you were when you heard that the atomic bomb had been dropped?

Mrs. Dern: No, that (pause) ... we were all in shock, but at the time, we ... we understood why because the Japanese were killing so many of our men, and I think President Truman, at the time, I believe he was President decided to drop the bomb.

Ann: Did you hear it on ... did you read it in the newspaper? Did you hear it from a friend?

Mrs. Dern: Uh uh.

Ann: Did Grandpa tell you who ...

Mrs. Dern: I don't ... don't (unintelligible).

Mike Zambrano: When you say you were shocked, why were you shocked?

Mrs. Dern: Because it was a horrible thing. So many people were ... even though they were our enemy, they certainly suffered disfigurement and it was horrible.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, were you still in the service when this happened?

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Do you think you were ... you may ... were you in Hawaii when you heard about it?

Mrs. Dern: When the bomb was dropped? Uh, where was I (pause). I can't recall.

Ann: When was the bomb actually dropped, I can't remember exactly the day.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, I believe it was the 6th and the ... either the 9th or ... or the 13th, but definitely the 6th.

Mrs. Dern: Okay.

Ann: But you weren't in Hawaii in Maui when they dropped the bomb, were you?

Mrs. Dern: Ann, I can't remember at the moment.

Ann: Uh huh.

Mrs. Dern: I have to really think about where I was when they dropped the bomb.

Mike Zambrano: But you ...

Ann: No, 'cause that was in '45, you were ... you had to have been there. Because you came back in the fall of '45 and were discharged, right?

Mrs. Dern: (Pause), it's hard to remember so long ago.

Mike Zambrano: I understand. No, for most veterans, they had to stay in for the duration of the war unless there was some special circumstance.

Ann: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: So, I would imagine ... I ... I would assume that you probably still in ... in Hawaii, and with the war coming to an end, they probably ... they'd start sending people home.

Mrs. Dern: Yeah, the WAVE ... the women had to wait till all the men went (chuckle), I remember that.

Ann: Oh! That's an interesting thing, hum!

Mike Zambrano: I read that some men were a ... a little bit, oh, what's the word, hard to say, they were somewhat upset when they saw some women personnel in the military because they knew that their jobs were going to be replaced (unintelligible).

Mrs. Dern: Absolutely! No, they didn't like to see us, right.

Mike Zambrano: No?

Mrs. Dern: No. 'Cause they knew that they would be going out to sea.

Mike Zambrano: (Unintelligible).

Ann: Now, one of the questions the ladies asked her was that was she ever mistreated or, you know, treated rudely.

Mrs. Dern: No.

Ann: Because ... and Mother said, "No," she never encountered any of that. It was when she came back to the United States after the war and tried to get a job that the employers were saying ... were rude to her saying, "No, even though you're more highly trained than the man, I have to hire the man."

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Ann: "I can't hire you," but she said none of the ... the servicemen were ever rude to ... to any of the WAVES that she knew.

Mrs. Dern: No.

Ann: So, that was really nice, you know, because I guess in the Army, it didn't ... a lot of the women there at this book club said that ... that they remember their parents saying it was the opposite (chuckles).

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Ann: So, this was good.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, let's see, you ... you go home to New York, you're discharged. I think oh, let me look at my notes, uhm, you married your husband in 1946?

Mrs. Dern: Probably (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Around there.

Ann: Don't look at me, Mother, (laughter), I don't know.

Mrs. Dern: (Chuckles).

Ann: Uh no, I ... I think it could have been 'cause she just was sent back home in '46, so it was probably '47.

Mrs. Dern: No, no, it wasn't '47.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, I ... I looked it up and found an old document that says ...

Ann: Oh!

Mike Zambrano: ... it's February 9th, 1946, so ...

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: Okay, so then it was '45 that she was discharged then?

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, yeah, probably latter '45 I would assume.

Ann: Probably.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: In the fall of '45 then. Okay, that makes sense, yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, and so, you get married and ... and your husband gets stationed in Quantico?

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Mike Zambrano: What was it like being there?

Mrs. Dern: Oh, it was ... it was okay. I ... I was near relatives. I had relatives in Richmond, Virginia.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mrs. Dern: So, it was nice.

Ann: (Unintelligible) how did the Army, I mean, the Marine base measure up to what the Navy base had been like, and that you had been on?

Mrs. Dern: (Chuckle). How did it measure up?

Ann: Right, uh huh.

Mrs. Dern: Well, at Quan ... Quantico was suitable.

Mike Zambrano: They were on base?

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: I ... I forgot to ask you, and ... and it's kind of an odd question (laughter). While you were in the Navy, what did you think about the food?

Mrs. Dern: (Chuckles), passable (laughter).

Ann: Passable (laughter).

Mrs. Dern: When you're hungry (laughter) ...

Ann: That's a good word to describe it, Mom (chuckles).

Mrs. Dern: ... you eat, right? It was the way they eat. We had these trays that they just put the food on (laughter).

Ann: Not the quality of it? Mother's always been a very healthy eater, so I'm sure that was a little bit different for you.

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter).

Ann: 'Cause I'm sure when you're mass-producing food like that, it's kind of hard to make it as healthy as you would like it to be.

Mrs. Dern: We ate it (laughter).

Ann: You ate it? (chuckle)

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Mike Zambrano: So, it was passable?

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: (Laughter).

Mike Zambrano: That's (unintelligible).

Ann: (Laughter).

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter).

Mike Zambrano: Okay. So, you ... you moved to Quantico and obviously you had children.

Mrs. Dern: Right, I got married and ...

Mike Zambrano: How ... how many children did you have altogether?

Mrs. Dern: Three.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. And I ... you stayed home for all three?

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Uhm, I understand that you got divorced later?

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, that must have been tough on a lot of locals 'cause ... do ... did you think you had to go back to work or go to work?

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: What did you do? What kind of job did you do?

Mrs. Dern: I had an office job.

Ann: That's where you really ran into the discrimination. Because she had three children to support and the employers, I remember the one thing she would tell people was I was so qualified, but the employer would tell me, and as a woman that was raised here in the time where I was very independent, it was hard for me to hear that an employer could say, "I'm sorry I can't hire you because I have to hire a male even though you're more qualified." I said that would be grounds for a huge lawsuit!

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: And ... but it wasn't back then, I'm afraid.

Mrs. Dern: No.

Ann: You know, that's what it was, so that to me was such an eye opener of what women in her area went through. They're highly trained, they did such technical work in the ... the service during the war, but they weren't respected ...

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Ann: ... when they came back.

Mrs. Dern: No.

Mike Zambrano: Right. That was a travesty. I mean ... it was all that.

Ann: Uh hum.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: I mean, somebody whether they were trained in technical areas, women were in office areas, but I guess it was different after the war ...

Ann: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: ... when they get out.

Ann: They just were not appreciated (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: You worked for the highway department for the State of Virginia, is that correct?

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: And what did you do for the highway department because I see you with them for what, thirty years?

Mrs. Dern: What did I (pause) ...

Ann: Mom, you were an executive secretary with Mr. Fink.

Mrs. Dern: Right, I was just going to say (chuckles).

Ann: Oh, okay, I thought you were trying to think ...

Mrs. Dern: Just thinking, right.

Ann: ... trying to think of what you did (laughter).

Mrs. Dern: Right, when you said Fink (laughter). I remembered.

Ann: She ran that department is what she did (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Did you work in the same department?

Mrs. Dern: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. And did you ... did you do any other ... were you in any other positions other than secretary?

Mrs. Dern: No.

Ann: You began as a basic secretary, and then you worked your way up as ... you went through there as you got more schooling, remember? You would take classes at night?

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: At college to improve yourself? And then that made you a ... a better secretary so that you would take a test and you moved up on the ranks of secretary and you ended after thirty years as an executive secretary to Mr. Fink.

Mrs. Dern: To Mr. Fink.

Mike Zambrano: Who was Mr. Fink?

Mrs. Dern: He was my boss.

Ann: Her boss.

Mike Zambrano: Oh.

Ann: They worked together.

Mike Zambrano: Mr. Fink (unintelligible).

Ann: And she was so dedicated to him that the engineers in the highway department were leveled as well as the secretaries. And if you were a secretary and your boss engineer, you couldn't go what, so high, according to what his level was.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: And Mother liked him so much even though she had much more training and could have gone (unintelligible).

Mrs. Dern: Right, right.

Ann: She wouldn't interview for a higher-level secretary position because she had such a good communication with him, and didn't want to rock the boat.

Mrs. Dern: That was ...

Ann: (Laughter).

Mrs. Dern: ... that was foolish (laughter).

Ann: That was foolish looking back on it ...

Mrs. Dern: Right now (chuckles).

Ann: ... but (unintelligible).

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter).

Ann: You know, she had been ... had such a hard time, and ... and the male employer kind of thing was so hard that when she finally found Mr. Fink and they got along together ...

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: ... and that communication was opened, she didn't want to rock that (unintelligible).

Mrs. Dern: He knew the children, too, yeah.

Ann: Yes. He was part of us ...

Mrs. Dern: He probably (chuckles) went out of his way 'cause he knew it would help him keep his secretary (laughter).

Ann: She ... she was so talented that there wasn't anything that (unintelligible).

Mrs. Dern: Oh, well thank you, Ann (laughter).

Ann: (Unintelligible).

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Ann: Yeah, no, and so he ... she made his job much, much easier, let's put it that way.

Mrs. Dern: It ... my ...

Mike Zambrano: Funny how it work ... uh, how things work out like that.

Ann: Yes. He was very appreciative of Mom in many ways (laughter). But anyway ...

Mike Zambrano: Do ... do you recall what year you retired?

Mrs. Dern: (Pause) that I retired? (Pause) ...

Ann: Gosh.

Mike Zambrano: I'm figuring maybe the mid-80s? Uhm, because you were divorced in '56 I think? And giving a few years there, two or three.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, add on another thirty years. Was it thirty or was it thirty-six (unintelligible)?

Ann: Yeah, it was thirty, but ...

Mrs. Dern: Thirty?! Hum!

Ann: Uh hum.

Mrs. Dern: I can't believe it was that long.

Ann: It would probably have been when you retired, Mom, but I ... I wouldn't ... uhm, it was ... it was definitely the 80s, maybe late '80s.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, I would think when ...

Ann: She ... she ... wait a minute; we could easily figure it out. She was seventy-two when she retired.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, so ...

Ann: And ...

Mrs. Dern: No, I was older.

Ann: Seventy-four?

Mrs. Dern: Seventy-four.

Mike Zambrano: Really?!

Ann: Seventy-four because she didn't take Social Security or anything; I remember, it was seventy-two or seventy-four. So, if it was seventy-four and you're a hundred ... this is a hundred and one, twenty-two.

Mike Zambrano: Twenty-two, it's ... it's ninety-five. Wow. It wasn't that long ago.

Ann: Right, yeah. It was in the early '90s, mid-'90s.

Mike Zambrano: Why did you stay on so long?

Mrs. Dern: Well, I built up my Social Security.

Ann: (Laughter).

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter).

Ann: That was one thing.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: And she had a good comfortable ...

Mrs. Dern: Right, uh huh.

Ann: ... new job, and it was healthy. That was the thing, and I had moved away. Bobby (sp?) was in ... Bobby wasn't in Virginia at the time, was he? Was he ...

Mrs. Dern: He was in service.

Ann: Yeah. And then my sister was in Indiana, so she just kept working; it was just what she did! Her father instilled in her that you don't give up, you just keep working and working and working.

Mrs. Dern: (Laughter).

Ann: And then the longer she worked, her Social Security was going to be better ...

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Ann: ... as ...

Mike Zambrano: Wow! That's wonderful!

Ann: Yeah, it was seventy-four when I ... uh, seventy-two or seventy-four.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, I mean, some people retire and they don't ... they really don't know what to do.

Ann: Right (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: I ... I guess I'd work for the city, and some folks come back for uh, they ... like part-time retiree ...

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: ... positions that ... for like twenty-nine hours a week. You know, they come in for like six hours a day and ...

Ann: Right.

Mike Zambrano: ... and they ... they like it; they're familiar with it. So, I imagine that had something to do with that.

Ann: Well, I remember the family had to do almost an intervention because when she finished, uhm, she lived near the V.A. Hospital, and she started taking her, you know, physicals and everything at the V.A. and know the people and they realized that she could do some volunteer work and could be very instrumental to them, and so she was, at one point, almost volunteering forty, forty-five hours a week!

Mrs. Dern: Yeah, I ... I mean ...

Mike Zambrano: (Unintelligible) ... (laughter).

Mrs. Dern: ... I'm working as (laughter).

Ann: And ... and the family went, "Whoa!" and we were trying to get her to visit us in the different places where we were 'cause I was in Maryland at the time, and she was going, "I can't; I'm obligated to the V.A. to do this and do that," and we're going, "Whoa, wait just a second, Mom! You're retired!"

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: And, "You're not acting like a retiree," but she gave so much time for two years to the V.A. Hospital and then to the church. Between the two of them, you were working sixty hours ...

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Ann: Sixty, seventy hours a week!

Mrs. Dern: Right, more (laughter).

Ann: Right! And so, we ... we kind of had to say, "You're ... you're going to have to stop all this; this is too much for you." But she did that for about three or four years after she retired.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, oh, three or four years?

Ann: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Ann: And then in the meantime, she was visiting my ... her grandson, my nephew in Houston. So, she'd spend some time in Virginia and some time in Houston, some time with me, and I was in Chicago at the time, and she'd come out and visit us. And ... and then, I guess, I don't know what made you decide all of a sudden you weren't going to stay in Virginia anymore, and she came to live with me in the late '90s.

Mike Zambrano: And how did you end up in Texas?

Ann: My children moved here. My son moved to Dallas and my daughter moved to Round Rock, and so when I retired, she was living with me in Naperville, Illinois, Mother was, and when I retired as a teacher, I wasn't going to stay in Chicago, believe me, with that weather, and so ...

Mike Zambrano: No.

Ann: ... it just made sense. They both had children and my grandchildren were here, so we just picked up and moved to ... to ... we moved to Terra Vista, rented there, and then when we realized we wanted Sun City for the activities and everything, we moved here three years ago.

Mike Zambrano: What ... what year did you get to Texas?

Ann: Uhm, 2016, June of 2016.

Mike Zambrano: Hum, okay. Are there any memories that really stand out for you while you were in the service? Any like special moments kind of thing – graduation probably from Communications School or ... or ...

Mrs. Dern: No, uh, it wasn't the graduation. I was taking care of a station in Maui; I was stationed there.

Ann: What do you mean, "taking care?"

Mrs. Dern: Well, I was working ... working there.

Ann: That was your most memorable time was when you were working at the station in Maui?

Mrs. Dern: Right. 'Cause I ...

Ann: That was what made you the happiest of your whole career in the Navy?

Mrs. Dern: Well (chuckles).

Ann: In the Navy? Or ...

Mrs. Dern: Not the happiest (chuckles).

Ann: Well, that's what he's asking you. What was the happiest time?

Mrs. Dern: Well, it was the memory (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Well, yeah, what do you remember of your ... your ...

Ann: What's a happy memory? No, right? Isn't that what you said?

Mike Zambrano: Oh, just any memory it could be. Uh, something ... something that stands out about your time there that you recall.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum (pause), well, (pause) I was in charge of that ... of ... of the station.

Ann: Was there one event that stays in your mind more prominent than ... than another event, not the generality, a specific.

Mrs. Dern: Uh, (pause) I always had to report to my superior when I was stationed ... stationed at this ... at Maui.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mrs. Dern: And I did.

Ann: Was he nice to you? Was he mean to you?

Mrs. Dern: She, it was a ... she was a she (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Oh, she, okay.

Ann: She ... she ... was she a friend of yours? Did she make you feel happy, did she ...

Mrs. Dern: (Chuckles), she wasn't a friend. She was just ... she was on the ship, and I was at the station and we communicated, and she'd say, "Is all well?" I said, "Yes, all's well."

Ann: Okay.

Mike Zambrano: Did you like your boss?

Mrs. Dern: Yeah, yes, uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: Hum. Is there anything I might not have asked or anything that you'd like to add?

Mrs. Dern: It was, as Ann said, was it happy? Yes, it was very memorable. I was ... I guess the word is proud to be serving.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Ann: Yeah, that's what you kept telling the ladies at the book club.

Mrs. Dern: Uh hum.

Ann: It ... you felt it was an honor to be there ...

Mrs. Dern: Right.

Ann: ... and to be part of that whole protection of the men at the war, and ... and ... and the ones that were at the sea, and the planes, you felt like that was a true gift that you had been given to help them.

Mrs. Dern: Right. Pardon me.

Mike Zambrano: Well ...

Mrs. Dern: Excuse me.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, that's okay. Uhm, I think that's ... that's pretty much it really. Uhm ...

Mrs. Dern: Well, thank you so much for interviewing me.

Mike Zambrano: Well ...

Mrs. Dern: I feel honored.

Ann: (Chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Well, thank you for allowing you into your home (unintelligible).

Ann: Wish she had more stories to tell you (laughter).

Mrs. Dern: (Chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: If ... if there was an occasion where you were called more and you wanted me to come back, I'm only thirty minutes away, so ...

Mrs. Dern: Okay.

Mike Zambrano: ... I'd be happy to do that. But I thank you for your service.

Mrs. Dern: Well, thank you so much for interviewing me.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, it's always an honor to interview a World War II veteran.

Mrs. Dern: (Chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: It was just ...

Mrs. Dern: Thank you.

Mike Zambrano: ... it was just such a different time, and ...

Ann: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: ... yeah, people ... it ... it's interesting that ... that so many people ... I think we had six million service men and women under arms by the end of the war.

Ann: Wow! I didn't realize that!

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum, yeah, it's quite a bit. A very patriotic time.

Ann: Yes, we need to reflect back and maybe switch our time back to some of that patriotic-ness, I think. I think our country is going in way too many directions. We need to unite back again, and ...

Mike Zambrano: Get something.

Ann: ... get some true spirit.

Mike Zambrano: Exactly.

Ann: But, that's just me.

(end of interview)

FINAL copy
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