

National Museum of the Pacific War

*Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas*

*Interview with Clarence ^{AND DELIA} Wood
U.S. Navy*

Interview with Clarence Wood

Interviewed by Steven Sebesta

This is Mr. Clarence Wood/~~and~~^{and accompanying him is his wife Delia}. I am interviewing him in Fredericksburg at the La Quinta. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife for the preservation of historical information related to this site. When did you enlist sir?

Mr. Wood: 1942 or '43

Mr. Sebesta: And you all said you met at a USO after he had been in for a while?
(Speaking to an unknown female with Mr. Wood. Presumably Mrs. Wood)

Mrs Wood:
Female: He was on a smaller ship for almost two years before he went the APA. He then got a thirty-day leave off that ship. Before he went into the APA that is when we met at the USO.

Mr.. Sebesta: Do you know what ships he was on before that?

Female: Yes. He was on the SC 1012.

Mr. Sebesta: And what had that ship been involved in, in the war?

Female: I think they referred to it as a sub chaser.

Mr. Sebesta: A sub chaser. So it moved around a lot, in other words?

Female: Yes

Mr. Sebesta: It was always moving around the Pacific?

Female: Yes.

Mr. Sebesta: I see. WOW. How interesting. Now during the war, where were you living?

Female:— I was living in Inglewood, California.

Mr. Sebesta: You said you worked at an armaments factory.

Female: Yes. I work at North American Aviation.

Mr. Sebesta: What was the principal product that was made?

Female: P-51s.

- Mr. Sebesta:** The P-51. My. I wish I could see that through your eyes.
- Female:** I could tell you I worked on main part. I part I worked on was the canopy and, of course, I, some of the interior, where we put relief tubes and things like that that we had to install for the pilots.
- Mr. Sebesta:** You said the canopy. What did you do with the canopy? Just install it?
- Female:** I drilled holes and riveted and install the metal parts. Yes
- Mr. Sebesta:** And later they popped the plastic in?
- Female:** You had to make all the frame for the plastic, or glass, or whatever it was, material that went in there. Plexiglas, I guess it was. We had to make all the framing and make it fit, so that they could install the portable go off. (?)
- Mr. Sebesta:** That was the top of line exciting airplane back then.
- Female:** Yes it was.
- Mr. Sebesta:** How long did you work there?
- Female:** Two years.
- Mr. Sebesta:** From when to when?
- Female:** I went to California in '24 and I worked until, well, I worked until where they quite building them till the war were over.
- Mr. Sebesta:** Now, was this one of those big, giant factories? You know like 70 acres or.....
- Female:** North American Aviation was (both talking).....
- Mr. Sebesta:**about 80 acres under the roof?
- Female:** At least.
- Mr. Sebesta:** So do you have memories of seeing the planes, just dozens and dozens of them, in line, r something like that?
- Female:** Of course, the runways, it was adjacent to the Los Angeles Airport and they use the runways to test these planes after they were built. When they came off the production line they had to be tested first.
- Mr. Sebesta:** I'll bet that was exciting, wasn't it?

- Female:** Yes. Very tiring to. Ten hours a day.
- Mr. Sebesta:** I was going to ask what type of shift did you work?
- Female:** I worked, mainly, days for most of that time, but I started in on graveyard.
- Mr. Sebesta:** So my understanding is the production never quit, it was twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.
- Female:** Twenty-four hours a day. I worked ten hours a day most of the time. Six days a week at forty-five cents an hour.
- Mr. Sebesta:** Was that a good wage in those days?
- Female:** Weell.....it was a government wage.
- Mr. Sebesta:** So that was all set by the government, right?
- Female:** Oh yeah.
- Mr. Sebesta:** Forty-five cents an hour. Now you had no children or anything like that?
- Female:** I had a girl
- Mr. Sebesta:** You had a girl back then?
- Female:** Yes.
- Mr. Sebesta:** Ok, so you had a little daughter to raise?
- Female:** I did. That's why I worked graveyard for quite a while. Then we went into days, when I finally found somebody who would care for her. Shortly thereafter is when I met him.
- Mr. Sebesta:** What an interesting story.
- Female:** And then I worked, after that, I worked six years on a machine shop and I was making the machine guns, that the metal carriers for the bullets, I can't even remember what they called them, but I was the welder then. I welded, they're put together on a per basis so that the bullets come in, like this, and the metal strips that I made. I worked six years there.
- Mr. Sebesta:** So you're a first rate welder, in other words.
- Female:** Sheet metal worker, I think they are called.

- Mr. Sebesta:** That's really rough stuff. I did that for a summer and it almost killed me.
- Female:** Well, I didn't do much of the metal cutting, but I did some of it.
- Mr. Sebesta:** My hands never hurt so bad in all my life. They were always nicked up. I had a hundred nicks in each hand.
- Female:** Welding, I probably still have some metal pieces in my hands.
- Mr. Sebesta:** Did anything interesting, did anybody famous come through there at any time when they were working, or.....
- Female:** You didn't really have time to notice. I was trying to think what, the most people that we were interested in seeing, was the pilots and the test pilots that came in there and tried out the material that we had finished and that was.....
- Mr. Sebesta:** That was a beautiful sight watching them take off and land, wasn't it??
- Female:** Yeah. And one after the other.
- Mr. Sebesta:** During your time...let me backtrack. How many P-51s did that plant turn out?
- Female:** Oh golly. I don't know.
- Mr. Sebesta:** 10,000?
- Female:** Probably, because we worked solid. They worked twenty-four hour a day working on them.
- Mr. Sebesta:** Do you know how many you worked on?
- Female:** We probably worked on two, or three, canopies a day and they were in pairs. We worked two people together, and if one was drilling, the other one was riveting and finishing up, going to get new parts and so on and so forth.
- Mr. Sebesta:** Would did Mr. Clarence do before he retired?
- Female:** He worked for United Airlines in the same field he was in, in the Navy. He was a radio operator. They were going into, I still have a copy of the surrender that he copied on the radio when the surrender of Japan....
- Mr. Sebesta:** Really? Did he rat (?) on the radio? That's amazing.

- Female:** Of course, most of it was in Morse code at that time. I still have the copy. I got it in the safe. I really ought to frame it, but I.....
- Mr. Sebesta:** Do you remember where you were, well, let me ask you this, do you remember where you were when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor?
- Female:** Yes. I was in West Virginia at the time.
- Mr. Sebesta:** You moved around a lot. What were you doing there?
- Female:** I was raised in West Virginia. I was born in Illinois and raised in West Virginia and then went to California when my daughter was a year old.
- Mr. Sebesta:** Did you think that was a big step at the time, going to California?
- Female:** Oh, you bet it was. I went from West Virginia to California, and buying my ticket on \$75.00. I bought the ticket and went three days, with a young baby.
- Mr. Sebesta:** You are a lady of extreme metal you know that?
- Female:** Well we had to, there had to be an awful lot of, ALL women had to do a lot of work.
- Mr. Sebesta:** So you left West Virginia, mommy and daddy, brothers and sisters, behind and split for California to get a job?
- Female:** I didn't have any brothers. Two sisters
- Mr. Sebesta:** And you and your parents. What did your dad do?
- Female:** He was in the same field as my husband. He was a sound engineer, electronics.
- Mr. Sebesta:** Well I've had a few ladies describe for me going to California and the trips and you know, it must have really been something. You didn't know a soul, right?
- Female:** No. You didn't have a berth on the train either. You sat up in the chair three days. It was no big deal. I was young.
- Mr. Sebesta:** You have an incredible memory for all of that. You have any recollections of the train ride over?
- Female:** The, everybody, there was no coach, no sleeper cars, or anything. It was all coach. Seats, everybody sat in seats. There was a lot of military, there was a

lot of women going into the field of airplane repair and so on and so forth, working, building tanks and everything else.

Mr. Sebesta: That's right. In submarines. I've met people that worked on B-17s and., of course, looking back on history now; we know how it all came out. But on that train ride over in 1942, you didn't know how it was going to come out.

Female: I didn't even know where I was going to live.

Mr. Sebesta: I know. Much less how the war was going to come out.

Female: Of course, I knew that it would be easy to get a job, but where were you going to live. I don't know. But I had to get away from my ex-husband. He was an abuser and that was it.

Mr. Sebesta: Well, you have a lot of guts.

Female: When you get scared, you have a lot of guts.

Mr. Sebesta: That's what gets you the guts, huh?

Female: Yeah. (laughs)

Mr. Sebesta: Fascinating story. I love those stories from the home front. Where were you when the war ended?

Female: I was in California. I heard that Japan had surrendered and I don't remember where it was, but I remember there was an awful lot of noise. Everybody was.....

Mr. Sebesta: Now did they, that very next day, did they quit making P-51s.....?

Female: No. You had to finish up what you were working on. As a matter of fact they remodeled and started making it into another commercial flying.....

Mr. Sebesta: The reason I asked that question is, Mrs. Wood, is that I interviewed a man who was Colonel Tibbets right hand man. Tibbets was commissioned by the government to put together the Atomic Bomb flights and this man that he met, that I interviewed, was ninety-one, was, kind of, the PR guy, the paperwork guy, you know, he was in charge of, they had about a thousand people working on it. They had six B-29s that were specially outfitted. They had to be redone to carry the Atomic bomb. There was a lot to do. He said he remembered, very vividly at 2:45 AM on Tinian, watching the Enola Gay take off and he said that on Tinian, they had been planning on the invasion of Japan and they were talking about a million casualties. On Tinian they were building a hospital that would hold 5,000 patients. He said the day after the

Atomic bomb was dropped, and Japan surrendered, they just stopped. Everybody just walked away from that hospital. You don't need a 5,000-bed hospital on a remote island. They are not going to want medical care there; they're going to go somewhere else. He said the work on it just stopped. I would like to know what happened to that half finished building.

Mrs. Wood: That would be interesting.

Mr. Sebesta: It may be long gone, but it may be still there. What's on Tinian? Nothing.

Mrs. Wood: Well, Clarence and his crew and the rest of the crew that was on that APA was over in most of those islands either on the sub chaser he was on, prior to, on the APA.

Mr. Sebesta: Yeah, the APA was always moving around.

Mrs. Wood: Well, they took troops over and they brought wounded back.

Mr. Sebesta: He told me they were in Japan once and, I think another gentleman told me they picked up POWs. Let's see, in Austin, (?), I know two, or three, POWs who were in Japan. One has died and one's still living. I used to work for him as a matter of fact. He was on a submarine, captured early 1942. Survived working in the coalmines and everything. Well listen folks, thank you all so much for talking time out of your vacation to come down and do this for us.

Mrs. Wood: Well we are on permanent vacation now. Clarence went through two ships and after he got off the sub chaser, shortly after he got off of that, that sub chaser was bombed and sank. It makes you wonder what fate has in store for you.

Mr. Sebesta: I interviewed a man who flew B-17s and the plane they flew was shot down three months after they left.

Mrs. Wood: This is probably about the same time that they lost the....when was the sub chaser bombed, you remember when they sunk it. I know it was how long after you got ff of it?

Mr. Wood: How long ago off of what?

Mrs. Wood: The first ship. I want to show you something.

Mr. Wood: The first ship. I got off of it in the South Pacific, I waited there for couple, or three months for transportation back to the States in sub chaser 1012 and it was used in the invasion of....we'd come in the day before the invasion and look the beach over and go in and anchor. The next day, the Marine

Commandant would come aboard with his staff and direct the landing from it, the sub chaser.

Mr. Sebesta: What did you want to show me?

Mrs. Wood: When I met Clarence at the USO, he went back to San Francisco after his leave and this is what I got in the mail from him sixty years ago. I think he was trying to tell me something.

Mr. Sebesta: I think he was trying to tell you something. For the tape purposes, I'm looking at a pendant that you would pin on yourself and the pin is lost to history. But you met at the USO and you all were separated for how long? Three months before the war ended, something like that?

Mrs. Wood: This is when I first met him. This is the only thirty-day leave that he had and when he went back to the ship.....

Mr. Sebesta: Yeah, but how long were au all separated after you met, is what I'd like to know.

Mrs. Wood: A year and a half.

Mr. Sebesta: So, Mr. Wood sent her a pendant back with a Navy boy and a heart that says, "Taken" and he is pointing to himself. How wonderful.

Mrs. Wood. That came in this box and I kept it and after the pin came of I kept it right in the box.

Mr. Sebesta: Don't you ever lose that.

Mrs. Wood: Oh no. That's put away.

Mr. Sebesta: Thank you all so much for coming folks.

Transcribed by: Robert Grinslade
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