

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Educational and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with
Les Caffey
September 17, 2005

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Interviewed by Larry Rabalais

Today is September 17, 2005. My name is Larry Rabalais. We are here at Fredericksburg High School and we're doing interviews for the National Museum of the Pacific War, here in Fredericksburg, Texas. The purpose of these interviews is to put in the archives of the Texas Parks and Wildlife historical archives here at the Museum. Today we are interviewing Mr. Les Caffey, who is also a panelist here at the symposium, and he will be expanding on his stories during World War Two. The way we will start this, Mr. Caffey, would be to start, basically at the beginning, when you were born, where you went to school and go from that point on.

Mr. Caffey: I was born October 25, October 4, 1925 in a farmhouse about three miles out of Ballinger, Texas, so the doctor had to come out there and find me. When I was about a year old, we moved to McCulloch County, which is about ten miles north of Brady, which is about eighty miles from Fredericksburg. My mother, when we got out of the car, said, "Son. I hope you don't have to grow up here." But I did and enjoyed every moment of it. I went to school at Rochelle. I went to high school at Rochelle. Got out of school on May 17 and on June 6, 1944, I went onto the United States Navy as a volunteer. All my older brothers, brothers and friends, were going in and I felt the same obligation. I was inducted in the Navy on June 6, 1944 at eleven AM. That's when the big landing was made over in Europe and, from then on, we went wild. I went to San Diego, California for boot camp. Spent about eight weeks there. Had a two week leave, went back to San Diego and on August 31, 1944, I got aboard a troop ship headed for Pearl Harbor. I don't know how many were aboard the ship, but many of them had waited to get in the chow line before we pulled away from the docks that afternoon about 4:30 or 5:00, we had so many aboard we had to get in the chow line early. I looked over on a hatch next to me and there was one of my friends I grew up with, one of my best friends, and he was homesick and he was the only one on that ship. So we got to see each other. We had a big time. That night out, we hit a typhoon and my bunk was right against the chain locker in the front of that thing. I was up on the fifth bunk and, in a little bit, I heard a bunch of this upchucking going on. I got down and got my shoes and put them back up with me. Fortunately with nothing in them. My good buddy got seasick. He couldn't eat a thing. I would go to chow everyday, three times a day, bring him two pieces of bread and finally, about the fourth, or fifth day he was able to come topside a little bit.

Mr. Rabalais: Was this on a troop ship, or was this on a war ship?

Mr. Caffey: This was on a troop ship. A Marine ship, Merchant Marines, I believe.

Mr. Rabalais: So you weren't assigned to that ship?

Mr. Caffey: No. This was just to get me from San Diego to Pearl Harbor. We got to Pearl, which day, I don't remember, but we spent eleven days there at Camp Iea, I believe is the name of it. Played lots of football; had a good time. Slipped off and went down to the beach, now and then. We weren't supposed to leave, but everybody did. One day, while we were there, they were looking for some people to go on a work party. My buddy and I volunteered. We went over to a destroyer and was supposed to chip paint. We chipped paint for, I don't know, twelve, or fifteen minutes, and the chief comes over and says, "You boys getting tired and hungry?" "Well, certainly." He said, "Well come on and let me fix you something to eat." I said, "Well, what you got?" "Well, I've got whatever you want." I said, "How about a T-bone steak?" So he fixed it. First time I had had a T-bone steak since I had gone into the Navy. But, anyway, the work party was not a work party; it was, kind of, a fun party. After eleven days there, I got aboard another troop ship and had no idea where we were going. But, my buddy left the day before I did and, I don't know exactly where he went. Anyway, we went to the Admiralty Islands. The Equator splits the Admiralty Islands, so we didn't have any trouble staying warm. I got aboard the *USS Wichita, CA-45*, which is a heavy cruiser. Got aboard it on October 2, 1944. The next day, October 3, we pulled out, was at sea, and our gunners were having gunnery practice with the pontoon plane. We had four aboard the ship, and they were pulling socks and our gunners were shooting at those for gunnery practice.

Mr. Rabalais: Were you on the gun crew yourself?

Mr. Caffey: No, I was not. Let me back up a little. When I got on the ship, of course, they asked what position we wanted. I asked to go to the fire room. I had no idea why I wanted to, but they needed somebody there bad and it wasn't that I wanted to go, but they would have probably put me there whether I asked for it or not. I was assigned to number-two fire room there. Anyway, then, our second day out, the first day we were firing at that target. The next day we were firing at Jap planes. We were off Formosa, in the China Sea and we got into it a big, big hurry. Let me go back to number two fire room. In the fire room, as a fireman, I tended to the fireboxes. We had two fireboxes, two boilers in each fire room, that's four fire rooms. Eighteen burners at each fire box and, depending on how fast your was going, and how many burners you had to have, we furnished the ship with six hundred and fifty pounds of steam at all times and nothing happened aboard that ship until we got that steam going. It just kept everything going. So then, back to Formosa, we had only been there a few, short days; the *USS Houston* got sunk by Japanese torpedoes. The *Canberra* got hit and was totally disabled. Their crew abandoned ship. We took most of them aboard our ship. Then, we tied to it, and towed that rascal and, while we were in tow, for two days and nights, at two and a half knots full speed.....

Mr. Rabalais: Towing the *Canberra*?

Mr. Caffey: *Canberra*, that's correct. Macarthur went back to the Philippines and said, "I'm back. I need help." Well, we were with the Seventh Fleet, which is a carrier task force, and all the other ships took off. Here we are, towing the *Canberra* at two and half knots, full speed, for two days and nights. Finally, a tug came and got it and we cranked the old witch up full speed, doing thirty-two knots, and that's is as fast as it would go and it just vibrated, like everything. But we caught the remainder of the task force before they got to the Leyte Gulf. And we, of course, sat through all of that. As you'll remember, at Leyte Gulf, our carriers were, our carrier planes, were going out to meet the Japanese Fleet and that fleet was much farther out than they had anticipated. The planes started running out of gas before they came back. Well they got into the carriers and, that night, when they were coming in, the carriers turned their floodlights on the top deck so they wouldn't have to circle, they could just come in and land. Of course, your topside, and in the Pacific, during the war, you didn't crack them lights for anything. But we had to have the floodlights on. We sat up on top deck of the *Wichita* and watched them coming in. In a little bit, here come a Japanese plane and landed on it. Didn't slow things down. The pilot jumped out, they pushed it over the side and just kept going. Anyway, after Leyte Gulf was secured, in the meantime, while we were going full speed to get there, we lost two screws and my mother said, "Well, why two screws? Two screws shouldn't bother you." But a screw is a propeller that makes that ship go.

Mr. Rabalais: Were there three screws on that.....?

Mr. Caffey: Four. We had four. We lost two of them. So then, after Leyte Gulf was secured, we got assigned to go into Long Beach, California for repairs. Went into dry dock there for about three months and we got a fourteen day leave while we were there. When we got out of dry dock, we headed back to the South Pacific. Didn't know where we were going.

Mr. Rabalais: That was a long haul, all the way from California back again.

Mr. Caffey: Yes, sir. It was about seventeen, eighteen days. We would normally cruise at about seventeen, eighteen knots in normal cruising. But we got assigned to go to Okinawa. At that time, we had the Task Force Admiral aboard, and he wanted, obviously, to be the first ship that went into, what is now, Buckner Bay. So not knowing a whole lot about warfare, or being aboard ship, this was all totally new to this little farm boy. As we pulled in through, what is now, Buckner Bay, the water was just like glass. It was totally smooth and the only thing ahead of us was a mine sweep that was commanded by Commander L.G. Lacy, who is here today at our symposium

and I have had, oh, many, many good hours with him since we got here. He is a fine gentleman and he probably saved our lives by scooping up the mines as we went in.

Well, before we got totally into the Bay, I had to go to watch at twelve o'clock in the afternoon. Our watches were four hours each. We'd been on watch, maybe, thirty minutes to an hour and cruising along at a quarter speed, and we get a bell that rang and it said flank speed. So we cranked up to going flank speed, which is fast, as that dude would go. All of a sudden we get a flank speed astern. We knew something bad was going on. About that time, we hear on the PA, "Torpedo wake." Well, that didn't bother this old country boy to much, because if that torpedo had hit us, it would have been right where we were, right on the water line and we would have never known it and we wouldn't be here today. But, the good Lord had his hand on us. We turned into the torpedo. It went down our port side and missed us by about five feet.

Mr. Rabalais: You think that was from a sub, or from one of these.....?

Mr. Caffey: It was from a sub. Yes. They saw a periscope come up and then the torpedo wake. Then we called in some destroyers and within, less than an hour, they dropped several powder kegs and, in a little bit, we saw lots of oil and stuff come up. We got the sub.

After I got off watch, went to the shower and washed my clothes, went by the bunk a little then went topside and just reviewed actually what's happening. I was standing by this eight-inch gun turret and, all of a sudden, our 20mms and 40mms, everything starts firing again. I backed up to this gun turret and thought it was another torpedo and it's going to hit us. I backed up to it and held on tight as if it won't blow me off the deck when it hits us. After firing about thirty seconds, or a little longer, maybe....it just stopped, all of a sudden, and I heard one of the gunners say, "Well, didn't take long to get that buoy." They were just a little bit nervous and that solo buoy bouncing out there, thought it was another torpedo. But, I'm glad they were on the ball and ready to get things.

Mr. Rabalais: Well, there weren't any suicide attacks, at that point, in terms of airplanes....?

Mr. Caffey: That's the next thing that's coming up. We had been there, probably, a couple of days, real cloudy, heavy overcast. All of a sudden, right out of a cloud come a Kamikaze, right at us and, of course, while we were there, at all times, our gunners were on their guns, ready to fire. Our good gunners picked that dude off. The Kamikaze's bomb hit about fifty feet ahead of us. So we escaped another one that day. I thank God everyday for the good gunners that we had. We sat in Buckner Bay for eight days, bombarding and.....

Mr. Rabalais: This was before the actual assault.....?

Mr. Caffey: Before the assault, yes. About four days before landing. Eight days bombarding. The ship would take turnabouts firing and we would set up, top deck, and watch them. It was interesting to see our 8-inch guns fire. They had a tracer on every shell and you could see them as they go upward and what they hit, they would blow up. We used 5-inch guns also. Sometimes the 40s. The Battleship *Texas*, and several others, there were several cruisers. But, during these eight days there was, well, actually, during the entire Okinawa Campaign, the Japanese Kamikazes, there were 1,465 of us, that we either shot down, or made their mark to hit one of our ships out in the bay, or carrier task force. That was quite devastating. 1,465 of them in just a few days. The carriers, of course, were operating outside of Okinawa, normally about five to seven miles. We would go into GQ at night, whatever, most of the time at night. The Japanese planes would start circling and they would drop tin foil to jamb our radars and the.....

Mr. Rabalais: I didn't realize they were using that also.

Mr. Caffey: Oh, yes. They sure did. But our captain would stand up on the quarterdeck and tell us what's happening. We wore earphones at our battle stations and my battle station was at the gedunk stand. For you people who don't know what a gedunk is, that's ice cream. We figured how to get into that, so we had ice cream. (laughs) Had to pass up ammunition one time, but never-the-less, we'd set there and listen to the captain and he'd say, "Well, we got Japanese planes right miles out. Kamikazes six miles." And we'd say, "Come on in, you rascals. We want to get you." Finally, they would come in and we'd get them. We sat there for those eight days, bombarding and it was quite interesting to see what had happened. But then, on Easter Sunday morning, 1945, at 8:30 AM, all guns started firing and all hell broke loose. Our troops were landing. At that time, there were about 1,500 ships in the Okinawa area and all of the ships in the bay were firing to cover our troops, who were landing and they had very little resistance at the time, because the Japanese, of course, knew we were coming and they had hid back in the caves and were waiting for us. But, the next three months, we sat there, watched what was going on. I was up on top deck lots of times and just see our trucks over on the beach and. Whatever was happening; made me, kind of, homesick to get back home and get into one of those old trucks.

Mr. Rabalais: You all didn't have any more near misses in Buckner Bay?

Mr. Caffey: Yes, we did. While we were there, one evening, as we usually did when we were off watch later, we would set back on the fantail and play pinochle. We looked up and here come a "Betty", which is a twin engine Jap bomber, right on the water, heading right toward us, and that dude knew how to

break up a good pinochle game, let me tell you. It didn't take long to get up and, all you had to do was stand up and you'd get pushed down. We went down the ladder to the second deck and there was a five-inch gun just above that hatchway we went in and it had to be the loudest gun aboard ship, for some reason. It just made lots of noise. Just as we got down to second deck, that five incher fired. I said, "Oh, my goodness, we've been hit." But it wasn't. It was just that five-inch gun.

But, during this time, when the Betty was coming in, one of our sister ships was swinging a five-inch gun around to fire at him and fired a little too quick and hit our port, aft 40mm turret, killing one American and injuring several. So far as I know, at this time, that was the only casualty we had, as a result of Japanese, during the war. It was scary all along. We had them drop out of the clouds at other times and our gunners were still one the ball, always took care of things and saved us.

Lots of fighting going on, and we, aboard ship, we had a dry place to sleep, about every night. Sometimes we had three meals a day. I remember we went about three weeks with just, we'd get two peanut butter sandwiches, one in the morning and one in the afternoon and a cup of pea soup each time. But we got by on it. I still like peanut butter.

We stayed at Okinawa for those eighty-two days and when it was secured, we got a bad, a bad order to go tot the Philippines for three weeks of R&R. We loved that. Loved every minute of it. Got to go upon the beach. They would give us two cans of beer and two cokes. Well, I didn't drink beer, so I could trade one beer for two cokes. I always drank six cokes every time we would go over. Then after the three weeks, we would go back to Okinawa and on the day that the peace treaty was signed, we was sitting in Buckner Bay and here come another Kamikaze, right over the hill, right at us again. Well, of course, our gunners fired and cut it down. I don't know whether he didn't know the war was over, or he just didn't care, because they wanted to give their life for the Emperor and that's something. So, for eighty-two days, there was fierce fighting at Okinawa. 12,500 Americans were killed. 38,000 more were wounded, thirty-four American ships sunk, three hundred and sixty-eight were damaged. The Japanese lost a 107,539 people, 23,764 were sealed in caves, 10,755 were captured, 7,830 aircraft lost, sixteen ships sunk and 42,000 civilians were killed. Now, it is hard to understand why any war would be worth that. But, at least, it made America free and we are so glad to be America today.

About two days after the war was over, we got orders to go to Nagasaki, Japan and liberate prisoners. Of course, as you know, this is where the second, Atomic bomb hit and, to describe what it looked like there, we got on trucks and drove through Nagasaki, and it was like taking a hand full of crackers, crumbling them up and dropping them. That's what everything looked.....

Mr. Rabalais: Was Nagasaki a port city?

- Mr. Caffey:** Yes. It was a submarine base there.
- Mr. Rabalais:** So you all were not able to go into the harbor there?
- Mr. Caffey:** Yes. We docked right there, as far you could go. The only thing standing was round chimneys. They stood. But everything else was totally flattened.
- Mr. Rabalais:** Did you understand the concept of the Atomic bomb, at that point in time, or did you all just knew it was some kind of a mystery bomb that did a lot of damage? Were you scared of the Atomic radiation?
- Mr. Caffey:** We knew absolutely nothing about it. We didn't know what radiation was. Wasn't scared of it.
- Mr. Rabalais:** That's the answer I got from every guy that I have interviewed this morning.
- Mr. Caffey:** Well, you know, it could have been the eldest Japanese ladies. All of them wore mask going through the rubble, trying to find something of their own that had been lost. After fighting those rascals for so long and the number of people killed, that somehow or another, I felt sorry for those poor old ladies. I also found that, in Japan, about every third person we talked to spoke good English. I talked to one gentleman, he had spent thirty years in the American Navy, before the war, retired and moved back to Japan. He said, "You know, I've never missed getting a retirement check all through the war."
- Mr. Rabalais:** That's amazing. And he was Japanese?
- Mr. Caffey:** Yes. Japanese. Spoke good English, yeah. You know, that's America; does things right. After spending, oh, I don't know, quite a while at Nagasaki and liberating prisoners, this was a very, very sad day to see these prisoners coming in there, a good percentage there on stretchers, couldn't even raise their heads. Try to raise their head up and see what was going on. The first thing we did, got them into a shower, cleaned them up and gave them a haircut, powdered them down and give them a, I can't remember what kind of drink it was, but they thought this was the greatest thing in the world. Most of them were English, or Australians; they'd say, "Oh, you all have this drink in the States?" I said, "Yes. But we don't drink it." But, they loved it. We'd give them a sandwich and clothing.
- Mr. Rabalais:** You all had room on the cruiser for.....?
- Mr. Caffey:** No. Not for the prisoners. This was on the dock there. Also, a hospital ship had pulled up with us and they were taking all those prisoners aboard and treating them. Some of them were still in fairly good shape. They could walk and get around.

Mr. Rabalais: So you were on a shore party that was helping this?

Mr. Caffey: Yes. About the third, or fourth night we were there, about two o'clock in the morning, we hear this little, train coming in, blowing that little shrill whistle and it wasn't anything but the engine. There was two of these Americans that (talking over each other) got 'em a bottle of sake, got drunk and they caught that train. Of course, when the war was over, the Japanese had opened these prison camps and that was it, because they had no control over them.

Then, after leaving Nagasaki, we went just around the corner to Sasebo. Spent lots of time, anchored out in the bay there. Went over into the city of Sasebo, it wasn't torn up like Nagasaki, it was, we had bombed it a lot with our dive bombers, but no Atomic bomb. The thing there, that really impressed me, and made me about half mad to, was all the little, both boys and girls, in elementary school, had a big saber strapped to their side and just about dragged the ground. Everyone had trained, from the day they were born, to fight for the Emperor.

Mr. Rabalais: Did you see any hostilities from the natives, at that time, from the local population.....?

Mr. Caffey: Not really. Almost none. We went up into the residential areas, some five, or six of us in a group and they would, I don't know that I would say they invited us to come into their house, but we went in. We pulled our shoes off because, if you go in without with your shoes on, boy, they raise all kind of Cain. I don't know they were saying, but they wanted you to pull your shoes off. They had straw floors and they ate on the floor and, I'd say that they weren't hostile to us, but they didn't want us there.

Then after we left Sasebo, we went up to Tokyo Bay to pick up a bunch of Americans that were being discharged. But, in the meantime, while we were in Sasebo, most of our crew took dysentery. I was partnered, without illness. It didn't hit me until we left Tokyo Bay, headed back to the States; we were going to San Francisco. I weighed a hundred and thirty-five pounds, at that time. It took seventeen days from Tokyo Bay to Frisco and I lost seventeen pounds in seventeen days. Just for the record, aboard ship, the record for going to the head, in one day, was fifty-two times. But, I didn't make it quite that many. (laughs) The one that had to go is the one that counted. Anyway, we knew, when we got to San Francisco, we'd get a sixty-day leave. That's what scuttlebutt was, anyway.

Mr. Rabalais: Now the surrender had already occurred at this time?

Mr. Caffey: Yes. The surrender had occurred sometime before. Before we went to Nagasaki.

- Mr. Rabalais:** Probably early '46, maybe?
- Mr. Caffey:** No. It was in '45. In '45, uh huh. So we go to San Francisco, expecting to get a leave but, we did get a three-day pass; stayed there about, a little less than two weeks, and we got word we were going back out; going to Pearl Harbor and so two of my buddies and I decided, well, by the way, while we were, had all these people to be discharged coming from Tokyo Bay, we didn't have a whole lot of food to go around for everybody and, of course, I had dysentery and lost that seventeen pounds. So the night before, when we go on liberty in Frisco, the first thing we do, we got off the ship; it was about three thirty, we would go into town and eat a big steak. About eleven o'clock we'd eat another one, and about two, we'd get a sack of hamburgers and go to the ship.
- Mr. Rabalais:** You put some weight back on you.
- Mr. Caffey:** Yes. Because, that last night we were there, two of my buddies and I went into a grocery store and filled up big boxes with canned meats; Spam and what ever we could find because we didn't want to have to starve again. We got back aboard ship and headed out and up topside they had big piles of onions and potatoes covered up with tarps. They didn't have room to store them downstairs, so would go on watch in the fire room, at night. We would go up there and get a big bucket of potatoes, a big bucket of onions; we had a hotplate in the fire room, of course, for coffee, and we scrounge a gallon bucket and we'd open up that can of Spam and some potatoes and onions and we made stew. Everybody wanted to be on our watch. We ate good for a while.
We got to Pearl Harbor and got orders to go to Guam. I had a brother in the Air Force at Guam, so I wrote him a letter and told him we were going to be there. We pulled out of Pearl and headed for Guam and about two hours out, they changed us to Saipan. So we went to Saipan. My brother went down to the dock when we were supposed to dock at Guam and they told him, "No, they went to Saipan." So we just jumped in a plane and flew over there. We were there during Thanksgiving and he spent several days with us.....(talking over each other).
- Mr. Rabalais:** What were you all doing, this was after the war, so what were you all doing on assignment? Do you have any idea?
- Mr. Caffey:** I'd like to know. Of course, went to Saipan and had liberty there, because not much about Saipan; it's just another beat up island.
- Mr. Rabalais:** There wasn't a whole lot to do.
- Mr. Caffey:** No, there wasn't. But, we stayed there, I don't know, several days, cruised around a little bit, but we finally got orders to go to Philadelphia to

decommission the ship. We were glad to hear that. We went through the Panama Canal. Spent several days there. They let us stop and do our thing there. As I told you earlier, I didn't drink beer and, I guess the first evening we were there, there was thirteen of us went over into town, in a group. Well, the first stop was a bar. We walk in and somebody says, "Thirteen beers." And the other said, "No. Twelve beers and a coke." I said, "Make it thirteen beers." I had my first beer that night. We enjoyed several days and nights in Panama City. Then we pulled around and went around to Philadelphia; started decommissioning the old ship and, which was kind of a sad thing, but.....

- Mr. Rabalais:** Was that a pretty old ship, by that time. When had that been built? You have any idea?
- Mr. Caffey:** It had the bottle broke on it in 1932, I believe it was. It was the oldest cruiser in the fleet.
- Mr. Rabalais:** And the name of that was the *Wichita*?
- Mr. Caffey:** *USS Wichita, CA-45*. We think it was the best, because it got us through all of this stuff and.....
- Mr. Rabalais:** So all this time, you were on the *Wichita*?
- Mr. Caffey:** That's correct and I loved every minute of it, but I wanted to go home. So everybody was getting discharged on points when I got out.
- Mr. Rabalais:** Yeah. You needed eighty-something points to.....
- Mr. Caffey:** I don't remember. I got enough points to be discharged. The old division officer liked me and, in fact.....
- Mr. Rabalais:** What was your rank at that time?
- Mr. Caffey:** Water Tender third class, I made 398 out of a possible 400. My division officer saw me up on the top deck one day and said, "Caffey, I'm real proud of you. You made such a good grade on your test, if you'll come to my stateroom, I'll give your test paper back." I knew what that dude wanted to do. I got up there and he said, "Have a seat." He pulled out my test paper and started asking me those questions. He took it that I cheated. Of course, I just peeled off the answers. After about three, or four of them, he said, "That's fantastic." So when it come time to get discharged, he called me up to his stateroom again and he said, "You know, you're eligible to go up for second class now and you'll make second class. If you'll ship over to the regular Navy, you'll get an automatic raise and you'll be a first class, and,

I'll guarantee you chief in six months." I said, "Sir, that sounds absolutely fantastic. But if you will make me Admiral tomorrow, you'll have to follow me home, because I'm gone." Anyway, we got aboard a train and went to Camp Wallace, just south of Houston, got our discharge, took about five days of this.....

Mr. Rabalais: That's where you were discharged from, Camp Wallace? I remember that.

Mr. Caffey: Yes. That was the longest five days of my career, I guess. Finally, when we got our discharge, in a little chapel at one o'clock, I don't remember what day of the week it was, we got our discharge, I grabbed my sea bag and ran to the highway. Bummed a ride into Houston and four, or five of us finally chartered a car, forget what you call it, 'cause, you could get on a bus, or a plane, they were all too crowded. We drove to San Antonio that night. I had a brother in San Antonio and I got to his house about breakfast time. Had breakfast with him. He carried me out on the highway. I was going to thumb a ride into Brady. My parents lived twelve miles north of Brady. By the way, that was Saturday, at that time and I knew my folks would be there. They didn't have a telephone, they didn't know I was discharged and going to be there. I got to Brady....well, the first car that come along picked me up and went right into Brady and I got my sea bag an started to walk around the square and as I got around, my parents saw me.

Mr. Rabalais: Oh. They were there?

Mr. Caffey: Yes. This is a Saturday. See, country people went to town on Saturday. Anyway, that was, kind of, the end of my career. But, I got to back up a little bit. When we were, had pulled into Long Beach, for repairs, that was the seventeenth of January and I got a, a first leave, so I got on a train and got to Brownwood on the nineteenth of December, 1945 about one o'clock in the morning. Cold as could be. My parents didn't know I was coming, because there was no way we could let them know. Got off the train and caught me a cab out to Camp Bowie, at Brownwood, a huge Army Camp, and went out to the officer's gate, which was right at the edge of a hill and had them let me out there. There was a guard there; I bet it was two o'clock in the morning, that guard said, "Sailor, you trying to catch a ride?" I said, "Yeah, but nobody's going to pick me up this time of day." He said, "Yeah, I think they will." The first vehicle to come along, a fellow in a truck, the guard pulled, stepped out in the middle of the road, pulled his .45 out and waved it and the fellow stopped. He said, "This sailor needs a ride." The fellow said, "Yeah. Get in." (laughs)

Mr. Rabalais: Well things were a lot safer in those days.

Mr. Caffey: Right. I would attempt it now. That's, pretty well, my career in the United States Navy. I was in two years, one day and two hours. I got out.....

- Mr. Rabalais:** Did you ever regret it? Your service?
- Mr. Caffey:** Didn't regret a minute of it. I wouldn't take a million dollars for it and I would go through it again for a hundred million.
- Mr. Rabalais:** What an addition to the Museum records that's going to be. I'm amazed at the amount of detail that you have put together before this interview and I really appreciate that. The numbers that you had, for instance, collected; a lot of interviewees don't have any prior attempt at gathering information. That's the kind of information that academia's, and the historians use in their research. Which is where this will, by the way, end up. Of course, copies of this will be sent to you or editing and then you mail that back to us and we do a final draft. We put that, plus the recording itself, into our files. Again, Les, I want to thank you, on behalf of the Museum, for taking the time to do this on a busy day. OK?
- Mr. Caffey:** Let me add one more little thing to it. Three of my old buddies that were in fire rooms that I'm in contact with just about every week, by telephone, we do lots of taking; lots of reminiscing.
- Mr. Rabalais:** Were they on the *Wichita* also?
- Mr. Caffey:** Yes, they were in fire rooms also and I stood many watches with them. We had some good times and we had some bad. We never had any disagreements. We were all to good a buddies. But, Larry, thank you so much for your time. Thank the Admiral Nimitz Museum. I feel totally honored to be here.
- Mr. Rabalais:** Thank you so much, Les. Bye Bye.
- Mr. Caffey:** Bye.....(Tape ends)

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