

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Nels F. Farmer

Date of Interview: June 11, 2007

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Telephone interview in progress.

Interviewer: Have to wait about 10 seconds. My name is Mark Cunningham. Today is June the 11th, 2007. I am interviewing Mr. Nels F. Farmer. This is a phone interview which I am recording. Mr. Farmer is aware that we are recording this and has given me permission to do so. This interview is in support of the Center for the Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of the historical information related to this site. And here we go. Okay, Mr. Farmer, we are recording and I want to start...get a little bit of information about your early life...this...basically...where were you born and when you were born?

Mr. Farmer: Okay, I was born in Wortham, Texas, Christmas Eve, 1924 in a tent. And I usually tell people I'm not no Indian either!

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: We're doing a little small oil boom and my dad worked in the oilfields there.

Interviewer: Who...what was his name?

Mr. Farmer: James William.

Interviewer: James William Farmer?

Mr. Farmer: And my mother was of Swedish decent and her grand...her parents came down a river from Sabine or Port Arthur...somewhere from Sweden...

Interviewer: And what was her name?

Mr. Farmer: Her name was Evelina Benchton (spelling ?)...or that's who her married name was. And his name was Nils...N-i-l-s Benchton...couldn't speak a word of English and they settled...

Interviewer: Now wait a minute...that was your grandparents?

Mr. Farmer: That was my grandparents.

Interviewer: Okay, what was your mother's name then?

Mr. Farmer: My mother's name was Signe...S-i-g-n-e. You know like Signe Hasso in the movies...used to be?

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Mr. Farmer: Same way...S-i-g-n-e, Signe...Signe Farmer.

Interviewer: And you grew up in Wortham, Texas. Now where is Wortham?

Mr. Farmer: I...like I said born on Christmas Eve and I stayed there till 1929. But while I was there, I can still remember...my dad worked most of time twelve hours a day, seven days a week. But...I...I remember going to the picture show on Saturday in Mexia, Texas where the latest gal was name (unintelligible)...what was her name...anyway...in a picture show there? Silent movies (unintelligible), buck jaws and...

Interviewer: What was the name of the town?

Mr. Farmer: Mexia...M-e-x-i-a.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And by coincidence, my brother, my daughter, twin daughter and husband live now in Teague which is 9 miles from Mexia. Of all the places that's where they moved to!

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And then we moved down to Palacios, Texas. And my mother's...liked Swed...Swedish community. My mother had lots of kinfolk there and she wanted to move down...he didn't, but she did. We stayed there on a dad-gum little ole farm which included picking cotton, corn...you name it...(unintelligible) tractor for awhile.

Interviewer: Now where were you and when did you enlist?

Mr. Farmer: Until March 11th in 1943.

Interviewer: And where were you?

Mr. Farmer: At Palac...in...at country...twelve miles from Palacios. That's between Palacios and Port Lavaca.

Interviewer: Okay, you got a been...you were...okay...so you were born '24...you...so you were 19 years old?

Mr. Farmer: Uh, I think...I thought I'd just turned 18.

Interviewer: 18?

Mr. Farmer: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Right out of...right out of high school?

Mr. Farmer: Right.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Farmer: I...I was either 18...you might be right there....Mark.

Interviewer: Yeah...now what...what influenced you to join the Navy?

Mr. Farmer: Well, excuse me...as a youngster; you know we lived a place that bordered the Carancahua Bay which goes into the Matagorda.

Interviewer: Can you spell Calacaway?

Mr. Farmer: C-a-r-a-n-c-a-h-u-a....supposedly the only cannibalistic Indians in the state of Texas. That I don't know...that's hearsay.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And I went...got a letter from Uncle Sam...and caught a bus...went to Bay City and caught a bus from Bay City along with other guys and we came up here to Houston and got on a train. Of course I had no idea where I was going and went to San Diego, California.

Interviewer: Okay, alright...so...and that's where you...in San Diego is where you took your boot camp?

Mr. Farmer: And...oh yeah...Camp Decatur.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: Took my boot camp training there and...

Interviewer: Tell me about that training...how was it?

Mr. Farmer: Well, when you're an old country boy, you know...like me...been no where...hardly and you get in a place like that...in amongst a bunch of guys...there's an awful nice bunch...a lot of them, but you also had your screwballs.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: And when you're out like I was...one morning about 2, 6 or something or other...four hours...I think...standing guard duty out on a...marching ground is a lonely, long ole night. But I have no particular complaints...there.

Interviewer: Now...now that was in San Diego...

Mr. Farmer: At Camp Decatur.

Interviewer: At Camp Decatur and you were there for...what...four or five weeks...six weeks?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, let's see, I think it was three months...I believe. And then I went from there...let's see...there's Camp Decatur; Camp Farragut...I can't think of that...the other camp they called it. It...it had joined the Marine base.

Interviewer: Okay, the...where were...what were you trained to do?

Mr. Farmer: Well, I chose...I didn't get my choice...my options were...I chose to be a cook...at...no first I chose to be a stenographer, a cook and...and a gunner's mate. Well, the first one, I...if I'd of gotten in it, I would have had excelled, I'm pretty sure in the Navy...that's no brag...because that's what I later did when I got out of service and I done very well. But the cook part and the mechanical, I was not mechanically inclined...I liked guns...but I'm not mechanically inclined.

Interviewer: Where did they put...I...I'm...what did they put you in then?

Mr. Farmer: They put me in the gunner's mate.

Interviewer: Okay, so to operate a gun on a ship?

Mr. Farmer: Right, and I went to school there I believe it...oh, I don't remember...two or three months and in the fall of...well it must have been a little longer than

that...in the fall of (unintelligible)...no, I...I'm wrong somewhere here.

Somewhere during that winter of '43 and '44...I got on a train and them old blues...you know...we wore...I still got them; they don't quite go around no more, but it was hotter than blazes when we had to wear them dad-gum things in San Diego in the summertime.

Interviewer: They were wool, weren't they?

Mr. Farmer: Wool...100%, I guess! Hot...gosh, I had to wear a T-shirt underneath it which I never wore a T-shirt in the summertime! But that old train...and the next morning I woke up...stepped out on a vestibule...I think that's what...vest...is that what...well, vestibule...it was snowing! Burning up one day and cold the next day!

Interviewer: Where were you?

Mr. Farmer: Northern California.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Mr. Farmer: Didn't know where I was going!

Interviewer: Okay, now wait a minute. I...I...there's one question I meant...I was going to ask you...a little bit ago and I...I forgot to, so I want to stop...I want to pick...I want to go back but I want to pick up with when you got to northern California in the cold. But where were you on Pearl...on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7th?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, that...I had an old single-barrel shotgun...see that was before I went in.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: And me and my...two other boys were walking in a pasture down there in the country...hunting quail...and I heard about Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: What'd you think about that?

Mr. Farmer: Well, the general consensus...is a thing in and around there amongst the oldest, "Oh, we're going to whip them before daylight...or before breakfast or after breakfast...or something like that!" (unintelligible)...nothing to that. (laughter). They misjudged a little, I believe!

Interviewer: Okay, you must have been what...about a junior in high school when that happened, right?

Mr. Farmer: Bout...about that, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah,

Mr. Farmer: I graduated in '42.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Farmer: So I just of been 19 when I went in then.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay, alright. Alright...now...now you're back...let's go back to California. You...okay, you're on your...now when you left southern California...ended up in northern California where you...that was a train trip, right?

Mr. Farmer: Right.

Interviewer: Was...was that...was that going to your first duty assignment?

Mr. Farmer: I guess you would call it that. I went to Puget Sound Navy yard in Sea...across the Sound from Seattle, Washington. You heard of Puget Sound?

Interviewer: Oh yeah, sure!

Mr. Farmer: And I stayed there...not too long...two...couple of months or something and they transferred me to...

Interviewer: What were you doing up there while you were there?

Mr. Farmer: Just...just odd jobs. I worked in a...not...not worked...was in offices...runner, messenger...and stood guard duty in a bank and on the base...and just whatever come along...that's all. I was just Seaman II; I never did go no further.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And then they transferred me...I got off...let's see...no, they transferred me to Farragut, Idaho.

Interviewer: Now what in the world's the Navy have in Farragut, Idaho?!

Mr. Farmer: Well, it was a little store there...you...you've heard of the place...have you?

Interviewer: Ah, Farragut, Idaho, I can't say that I have.

Mr. Farmer: It's close to Coeur D'Alene...Ondoray (spelling ?)...or something like that.

Interviewer: But what...what is it?

Mr. Farmer: Evident...*big* naval base!

Interviewer: Oh really?

Mr. Farmer: Both of...the...the story that I heard...well it probably wasn't true...that was Eleanor Roosevelt's choice...now this is big beautiful country...big lake...choice of a naval base. And she was in a big meeting with a bunch of Indians and I don't know what all...and they were having a meal...*you can chop this out if you like...*

Interviewer: No, no...I want to...

Mr. Farmer: Sir?

Interviewer: Keep going.

Mr. Farmer: And she's telling this Indian lady...said, "My goodness, this...this beef sure is tender! How'd it get so tender?" Well the Indian lady said, "chawed!" (laughter). You know they chewed the meat for their children.

Interviewer: Right, now tell me again...what was the name...what was the town name?

Mr. Farmer: The town closest to it...I'm going to estimate 20 miles...I don't remember...was Coeur D'Alene. Evidently...

Interviewer: C-o-r...

Mr. Farmer: D...oh, I believe it was u-e'l-e-n-e. I think it's quite a resort now. Its 60 miles south of Spokane, Washington.

Interviewer: Alright. Coeur D'Alene, Idaho...hold...okay.

Mr. Farmer: And lake is Pendo'reille (Pend Oreille Lake), I believe. I believe it was all a French settlement, Mark.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Farmer: Beautiful...beautiful, and now they've done a lot of mining across there.

Interviewer: Idaho is very much land-locked.

Mr. Farmer: Well, yes. But that's where the (unintelligible) was and it was a big one!

Interviewer: Okay, alright, so you're in Idaho and how long did you stay there?

Mr. Farmer: I'm going to guess...six to nine months at least...probably. I'm sure they didn't know what to do with me...I wasn't worth a hoot much of nothing.

Interviewer: What were you doing there? What was your duties?

Mr. Farmer: I went...they put me...I think it was first as a rifle range coach...on a rifle range, but...which was about 300 yards for a big long...whole companies could shoot at one time with those old Springfield 30-06s. I was...not that I was an expert marksman...I sure wasn't...I did enjoy coaching these guys...and giving lectures at night time on...the course...just...some of these companies before they fired...I don't really remember that part. And I did that for...let's say...approximately six months. Man, you talk about cold sometimes! Good gosh, almighty! Frigid cold! And...

Interviewer: Now were you living in barracks or what?

Mr. Farmer: And...ship's company barracks had...Petty Officer privileges which didn't amount to nothing but I had that anyway. And...let's see...the next...I went into Gunnery School as Assistant.

Interviewer: And where was that?

Mr. Farmer: At...at Idaho...Farragut, Idaho...as an assistant...helped more or less...a helper to a Gunnery Teacher...

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: An old Navy hand that was a teacher of the 40mms machine guns. I think that's about as far as we went....nothing no larger than that.

Interviewer: Did you...what...what was...what were your buddies like? Were they...were...did you make a whole bunch of buddies?

Mr. Farmer: I met...I met an awful lot of nice people, and 'course we had our rogues and I can still remember some of them son of a guns, you know! But most of the time I was around...I can't complain...I was around some pretty nice people.

Interviewer: Okay, now did you guys stay together throughout the war or did you just go your own separate ways?

Mr. Farmer: I left...there was about four or five of us come up from San Diego and went to Puget Sound and then over there together. And...let's see...you want any little incidents around...?

Interviewer: Sure.

Mr. Farmer: Okay, we...me and one of my buddies from Brownwood, Texas...name Cunningham...

Interviewer: Uh-oh, uh-oh!

Mr. Farmer: Stewart Cunningham.

Interviewer: That's trouble! (laughter)

Mr. Farmer: Oh, a nice little fellow. We went into liberty one night and we saw...we saw this pistol in a pawn shop or sporting goods store...32-20 Colt revolver. Oh man, we liked that you know. So we decided we'd flip to see who got it. I won! God amighty, I'll never forget this as long as I live. I put that thing...now I got to get it on the base. You rode a bus back to the base. That bus stopped about every time...but for a whiskey check! Check you...frisk you down for whiskey.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: Or beer or something. And I never was involved in those two. But anyway I had that gun on me and pulled up to that gate...you know... and, "Oh, my god!" Luckily...and now this part is confusing to me...oh, no, no, no...take that back...I got off of that bus right before it got to the gate...I had to!

Because I tried walking around that base at night time and very wooded, rocky area! And I couldn't find my way nowhere hardly...I've never...always been that way, but I came upon a couple of old men in a railroad house. Well they didn't know I had a gun on me, you know...and I talked to them a little bit and I think they'd told me where to go or something. And right off, I can't really remember how I got in that base! I had a buddy or two living...one in particular that was married...lived on a boat on that lake with his wife. That's where I was trying to get to...but I don't remember crawling over no fence. I must of went back and got on a bus and took my chance because I think that's what I did, but I didn't get caught...thank goodness!

Interviewer: Uh-huh, and did you keep the gun?

Mr. Farmer: Kept the gun; mailed it home. Kept it for years and then I sold it. I went up one night...me and this buddy that lived on the lake. He was a ex-forest ranger...and about two more and we climbed up that mountain. And I'll never forget because from Palacios, Texas I could go out and stand on the road at night time and say, "Yeah, Dad, they playing ball tonight, let's go." "Cause might of come a shower and...you know...no lights...we knew it rained in town...that's twelve miles...that's how flat it was down there! And...

Interviewer: That's down south...way down south, too, isn't it?

Mr. Farmer: Not too far, about 130 miles from here.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Farmer: On the other side of Bay City.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Farmer: Well, anyway, we started climbing up the side of this mountain...and believe you me...I ain't never climbed no mountain! And I was clutching and grabbing...and it seemed like to me we were going straight up! And I'd look back...you know...and my god it was straight down the rocks! (laughter) I'll never forget that!

Interviewer: Now what was...this...this...was this a mountain on the base?

Mr. Farmer: This mountain...no, no, this was just off the base where this boy lived on a boat.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Mr. Farmer: And we were going to go up on that mountain and look and what...and I just followed him. He was the main guy. And we went up the top of that mountain...and it was a big mountain and there was an ole forest ranger look-out tower...and it had a stove in it. It wasn't being used...we climbed up that thing...like to froze to death and smoked us to death and couldn't get back...we spent the night there and the next morning I looked out...you couldn't see over 75 or 100 feet at the most...of the ground...and everything else was a clouds.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: We was up in the clouds. Well that was just a little incident there and I can't really think of anyone other than...

Interviewer: Okay, now you're in a...you're...you're in Idaho now...you been there for nine months?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, probably about nine months.

Interviewer: Where'd you go from Idaho?

Mr. Farmer: So I left Idaho and again didn't know where we were going...went back to Puget Sound. We got on a small aircraft carrier...I don't remember the name of it and I went...didn't know where we were going naturally. We went to San Francisco – Treasure Island.

Interviewer: Okay, so you sailed down the coast?

Mr. Farmer: Sailed down the coast. Went under the bridge to Trea...Treasure Island, and I'll never forget...you've been there, I'm sure....that the...my gosh, there's Alcatraz!

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: And it just looked like it right off shore, you know, but it's not, I guess...too many sharks and stuff. And I stayed in Treasure Island with these same buddies...oh, about two weeks. And we watching the bulletin board...up come a bulletin...all their names on it...mine off of it...only one! Me and one ole boy just a little bitty bit and didn't really care for him...but that didn't matter. Totally alone! But it wasn't very long and then I got on a...USS Willard A. Holbrook.

Interviewer: And what was that?

Mr. Farmer: Well, it was a big ole troop ship, I...that's the best explanation I can give. I don't know what it was converted from something, but it was large.

Interviewer: The USS Willard A....?

Mr. Farmer: Holbrook...H-o-l-b-r-o-o-k.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: 28 (or 38?) hundred is what...what I heard...sailors; soldiers and I don't know what all on there...besides Merchant Marine. No fresh water shower. You ever take a bath in salt water?

Interviewer: No, but I can imagine...and I've been...

Mr. Farmer: It's almost impossible to run your fingers through your hair...it was so pathetic!

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: And the first shower that come...you never seen so many naked guys in your life on top of that boat trying to take a bath...me included!

Interviewer: Well...well now...they...they were giving the showers outside?

Mr. Farmer: No, rain showers!

Interviewer: Oh, oh, okay!

Mr. Farmer: And boy, we was in a hurry before it stopped, you know?!

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: I must be wrong in this assumption, but all the years I've told people and thought that I was on that blasted thing for 43 days and nights! By that...sounds awful long and I...but I always had in my mind...I don't know. The first place that we came to was...I think...on the very tip of New Guinea...Port Moresby. I hope...I hope that's right. We didn't...I don't really hardly remember that, but we didn't get off and I don't know...we just stayed and bathed maybe, I don't know.

Interviewer: That Port Morsley...is that M-o-r-s-l-e-y?

Mr. Farmer: I believe it's Morsby...Morsby...I'm not sure about that, Mark.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: We left there...

Interviewer: Now that...was that...that was just a stop enroute to somewhere?

Mr. Farmer: Correct.

Interviewer: You did...you didn't know where you were going?

Mr. Farmer: Oh no, had no idea.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: But there's one incident there that I'd like to tell...that I believe was very, very rare. That night...or one night...if we stayed more than one, I don't remember...all the officers were up on top...the mid section...I've even forgot what you call...what you call the mid section...where the cabins are?

Interviewer: I...I don't know, I'm not a sailor, Nels...superstructure?

Mr. Farmer: Ah, that's good enough. All the officers were there and people like me were solid underneath a stair...a stairway...I don't believe they called them stairways...but anyway, a stairway...daring anybody to come down that stairway...like a...what you call it...mutiny?

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: It went on for about an hour...just daring you to come down. For breakfast on that trip over there, I think due to such things as this...every morning I had an Atabrine tablet.

Interviewer: Spell that...what is that?

Mr. Farmer: A-t-a...I believe...b-r-i-n-e. It was a yellow tablet for malaria....(unintelligible) yellow as the yellow ribbons on a car sometimes you see and a bowl of something that looked like grits and had at each 40 or 50 weevils in it...that was breakfast...eat it or do without! And I saw them carry garbage can after garbage can of chicken and throw them overboard...I guess they'd let it spoil, you know.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: You walk by the officers quarters up there on the middle section of the superstructure there...whatever they call it, and all the officers sitting in there, you know, drinking that iced tea and eating a meal...and them black fellows then was...wore white little jackets and walking around, you know...waiting on them. And we had practically nothing to eat. At dinner time...I don't remember...didn't get no meal...I don't remember what that was. And at supertime...my lord that wasn't hardly fit to eat...it was terrible! That's the reason the guys, I think, raised all the hell! We left Port Morse...Moresby and went to Hollandia, New Guinea...you've heard of Hollandia? One of Rockefeller's son...

Interviewer: Okay, spell that.

Mr. Farmer: H-o-l-l-a-n-d-i-a, I believe...pretty sure.

Interviewer: H-o-l-l-a-n-d-i-a, alright.

Mr. Farmer: And that is what...as you know...New Guinea is one of the most...the wild...one of the wildest...and I think possibly one of the last places on earth that there's still cannibalism.

Interviewer: Now spell Guinea; is it G-u-i-n-e-a?

Mr. Farmer: Right. Loudest place you ever saw in your life! Well...

Interviewer: And where is that?

Mr. Farmer: That...that's just further up the coast. That's more towards the Philippines and all the islands. It's up just on the other end of New Guinea...on the side but up at the very top...Moresby is down at the...would be the first place you'd come to and then you'd just go right down the shore of New Guinea on up to the other end. You kind of picture what it looks like, I think. Well, real interesting...I had there just maybe kind of...

Interviewer: Okay, I've got the map here in front of me...I see it...Port Moresby...M-o-r-e-s-b-y, okay?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, okay.

Interviewer: Okay, now then...from there, where did you go?

Mr. Farmer: Hol...Hollandia.

Interviewer: Okay, Hollandia.

Mr. Farmer: Hollandia, I believe.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And that's where Rockefeller's son disappeared, if you remember. The wildest, loudest...man oh man, but anyway, a little tidbit and if you want to cut this out, feel free. I've always had to get up during the night...always. I got up during the night...and was a hill...an outhouse down at the hill...(unintelligible)...and I'd heard there was an old Chief laying awake...to catch you!

Interviewer: A what?

Mr. Farmer: Chief...naval chief.

Interviewer: Oh!

Mr. Farmer: That's all they had to do is catch you at night...and I...well, I'm going to take my chances. So I didn't walk all the way down that hill, I stopped right (unintelligible) and he was laying awake...catching them, and so that rascal hollered at me...I stopped, you know.

Interviewer: Yep.

Mr. Farmer: "How long you been here?" I told him. "Had you heard about this before?" "Yes, sir." (unintelligible), I said, "No, sir." "That'll be four hours, what's your name?" I told him. "Digging the hole...(unintelligible) hole tomorrow." "Okay." So report...(unintelligible), okay.

Interviewer: And what were you digging?

Mr. Farmer: Sir?

Interviewer: What was he telling you to dig?

Mr. Farmer: Dig a...a new toilet hole.

Interviewer: Oh, man!

Mr. Farmer: And I worked like hell and the guard says, "Hey, you don't have to work like that!" I says, "Well if I done wrong, I done wrong." First place I should of...I could of lied...give a little white lie and I wouldn't of had to done it, but that was the only dis...disciplinary action that I ever had in the Navy.

Interviewer: Okay, well that wasn't too bad, was it?

Mr. Farmer: No, but it sure hacked me!

Interviewer: That's not exactly a major offense.

Mr. Farmer: No, no. But I see these poor black guys, you know, they get (unintelligible)...the Navy's there. They got us all...one walking by one day...poor guy had on a pea coat...you seen those?

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Mr. Farmer: Yeah.

Interviewer: It's kind of warm for that...

Mr. Farmer: Hotter than blue blazes...I bet it was 110° and he was practically smiling from ear to ear...he was happy as heck...he just got him a brand new coat! And what in the hell he needed with a coat, I don't know...not in New Guinea, but he was happy!

Interviewer: Wow!

Mr. Farmer: Went to the picture show there on the side of a hill...bunch of logs stretched across there and hearsay was...one night a guy...I wasn't there...somebody hollered "snake!" and they all got scared and went coming down that hill and practically broke one boy's leg...I don't know if there was anything to that or not. But I had a friend that said he was there, too. Worked (unintelligible)...(cough)...excuse me. And he said, "(unintelligible) it hot up there...standing there talking?" One of them hollered, "Look out, look out! Look at that...look out!" Say here come a torpedo...sideways heading straight for them...not, you know, not direct at them...on an angle. Now that wasn't me there. And say it hit that ship and bounced off and kept on going! Said they were scared to death!

Interviewer: Okay, now where was that?

Mr. Farmer: Hollandia. Now that wasn't my ship...that's someone else...that was a friend of mine out of (unintelligible).

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Mr. Farmer: So I left Hollandia, New Guinea and went...I feel pretty sure...to Leyte Gulf. And I can't remember the name of the naval...pretty good size naval place there.

Interviewer: Subic Bay?

Mr. Farmer: Sir?

Interviewer: Subic Bay?

Mr. Farmer: No, it was...it was real close to Subic Bay.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And...that might have been the name of it...I don't know. Well I didn't stay there very long...oh a week or two weeks. Here again, the guys that I'd met...had one friend in particular was a beer truck driver for Al Capone - awful nice fellow. He just working like anybody else...making a living, you know. Steve Gatowski (spelling ?).

Interviewer: What was his name?

Mr. Farmer: Steve Gatowski or some kind of...

Interviewer: Polish.

Mr. Farmer: Polish or...

Interviewer: Polish or Russian.

Mr. Farmer: Uh-huh, an awful nice fellow.

Interviewer: And you're...now you're in Leyte Gulf?

Mr. Farmer: Correct.

Interviewer: Leyte...L-e-y-t-e?

Mr. Farmer: Correct.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Farmer: And they left...by golly, here I am here all by myself...again! Well I saw him somewhere else later on, I don't remember...or heard...I don't remember, but they got kamikazed...I believe it was on an LST...on the way...wherever they went and he got some shrapnel and paralyzed his left side of his mouth. Now that was...that was hearsay. One boy jumped overboard...drowned...committed suicide. And that's all I know about that. And then I left there and I don't remember what I was on, but I'm pretty sure it was an LST.

Interviewer: What's an LST?

Mr. Farmer: Landing...it's more or less a landing barge. It's...it's...

Interviewer: It's a small barge?

Mr. Farmer: No, no...pretty big. And not...not huge like a ship, but it was pretty good size and the front end of it opened down, you know...

Interviewer: So that's what they dropped...that's what they dropped the troops off on the beach, right?

Mr. Farmer: Uh, no...same principle, but much larger. Trucks and whatever tanks can go in here.

Interviewer: Ah, okay, yeah.

Mr. Farmer: Same...same principle.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And went to the Admiralty...Admiralty island...or islands, I don't know which.

Interviewer: And where are they?

Mr. Farmer: Uh, now that's just a little further...further on up...I...I couldn't really tell you. It...it wasn't much of an island, but it was real wooded and I just got...

Interviewer: Now what...what were your living conditions like on this...on these islands?

Mr. Farmer: Well you had (unintelligible) you know and...

Interviewer: Were you...were you in barracks or were you in tents or what?

Mr. Farmer: Well, I was...I been in tents...I've been in old store buildings...and I'm going to get to that a little bit...in just...just a minute. And...at...most of the time it was tents as...as I recall. But anyway right there in the Admiralty Islands was the first time that I saw a graveyard and I'm just estimating it must have been four or five hundred little white crosses, you know.

Interviewer: Okay, this was a military...?

Mr. Farmer: Correct.

Interviewer: This was a naval or...?

Mr. Farmer: Uh, that, I don't know...probably.

Interviewer: American troops?

Mr. Farmer: Right...correct. Very symmetrical or whatever you call it...then that's first graveyard that I saw. And I went swimming there in a little ole river deal and me and some other fellows...my god, there was some snakes in there...little

ole snakes and I've often wondered...my lord, you know there's some terrible poisonous snakes over in...a lot of that area...you see it on TV or (unintelligible). But I never thought too much about it...just went swimming, you know! I left the Admiralty Islands on an LST...pretty rough water! That blamed thing would bend...it just flop in the water! Not...not too much, you know, but it would bend in the middle.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: And landed in...let's see...let's see, I left Admiralty Islands...let's see, I don't think I'm skipping a place. Then I went to...didn't know where I was going...went to Ormac...O-r-m-a-c.

Interviewer: Alright.

Mr. Farmer: Ormac, Leyte. And it was supposed to been the third largest town in the Philippines, but I don't know where...if it was at...I don't know where it was at because it wasn't there...I didn't see it. (unintelligible) foundations and there I stayed in an old store building and had a mosquito net on my cot...believe you me, I put that mosquito net around me when I went in to sleep because that place had a lot of scorpions in it! And...you ever been bit by a scorpion?

Interviewer: No.

Mr. Farmer: Well, I haven't either, but they were down south Texas where I was at...

Interviewer: Yeah, they're...they're...well we don't have in Houston but out west there...they're...they're pretty bad.

Mr. Farmer: And some of them are deathly poison (unintelligible). But they one of the most poisonous things...they are. Only thing is these in our country don't have enough poison. And down at Edna, Texas where my parents live...last...you can find an old board laying there and turn it over and there's pretty much going to be a scorpion under there! But I was scared of those things! I stayed there and I never will forget one night they put me out on guard duty...around an old foundation on a moonlight night...gosh a mighty holding my little ole carbine, you know, about half scared to death because two or three days before I'd watched a doctor in a tent...(cough)...excuse me...operate on a Filipino boy that had been shot by a sniper and he was pulling them entrails up, you know, about four feet...poor boy died! Here I am staring out...brightest moonlight around this old foundation, you know...gosh!...scared plum to death! I didn't dare stand still in one spot! But I made that okay. And just before we got there...about a week...maybe two weeks...Midnight Charlie come over...that's what they called him...and dropped some *Daisy Cutters*. Daisy cutter was a little...have you ever heard of them?

Interviewer: Never heard of a Daisy Cutter.

Mr. Farmer: Little...little small...I never did really see one. Little small bomb...that hit the ground and bounced back up, so they said and full of razor blades, nuts, bolts, scrap, glass...I don't know what all, and some of those tents clearly showed it too!

Interviewer: Anybody get hurt?

Mr. Farmer: Oh yeah! A few guys got minor gashes, you know, from those things, but I don't think anyone got killed. (unintelligible) foxholes there at that place about all...a couple of times of week at least for Midnight Charlie. He never did drop nothing, thank goodness!

Interviewer: Now what...what were you doing? What was your...what was your duty assignment?

Mr. Farmer: Well, so far I was in just...picking up rocks on the street or (unintelligible), you know, dishwashing or whatever and there they assigned me to a PT boat. I was a starboard machine gunner – twin 50 calibers on PT-146.

Interviewer: Okay now...this was...where are you at this point...Admiralty?

Mr. Farmer: Ormoc, Leyte.

Interviewer: Oh, where is...I'm...I'm trying to find that.

Mr. Farmer: It...well...just...the best I can tell you is just to go on up there by the Philippines and it's right on the coast.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: We were tied up to a pier there.

Interviewer: Now what was the PT boat name again?

Mr. Farmer: 146.

Interviewer: PT-146. Okay.

Mr. Farmer: Squadron 12...(unintelligible) 12.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And we would go out on patrol, you know trying to cut off supplies.

Interviewer: Now were these night patrols or day...day patrols?

Mr. Farmer: We'd...as best I recall we'd leave kinda...beginning to get late one evening, so we get to our spot...I forget how...but...and we'd...I believe it was two nights we'd patrol and day time...I guess we patrolled, too, because...I think...well I'm sure we did it more than one night because the wind...pretty good waves. Two...two nights I think and then came back and in about three days we'd go out again, and man, you talk about rain! You don't know what rain is...people here don't like they get in the monsoon season over there! They couldn't...they wouldn't allow us below decks because, you know, the PT boat is wood.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: And they wouldn't allow us below decks; we'd lay on top deck on a little...

Interviewer: Why wouldn't they allow you below deck?

Mr. Farmer: Well, if...if we got hit, you see the...just figured it was too dangerous...we couldn't get out, you know...just...

Interviewer: I thought those things had crew cabins.

Mr. Farmer: Oh...they...we had cabins down below, yeah, bunks...but dur...during patrol they wouldn't let us go down there.

Interviewer: Right, but now you were living on the boat when it was in port?

Mr. Farmer: No. Yes, yes...I think it might...yes, I was, too.

Interviewer: So you were living in the quarters below but when you were on patrol you couldn't...you couldn't go down there?

Mr. Farmer: Correct...well at night time in particular it seems like.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: And I don't hardly remember day time.

Interviewer: Now tell me...how many crew members were on that boat?

Mr. Farmer: It varied anywhere from twelve to fifteen I'm going to say, but I think there's fourteen on line. Two...two motor mounts; two torpedo men...I'm pretty sure; cook; one quartermaster and...let's see one gunner's mate and then a helper...that's two and then an officer and he had either one or two officers under him...normally I think just one. I think our crew was a total of fourteen.

Interviewer: That's a pretty good size crew for a small boat like that.

Mr. Farmer: Well, you know...the old boat...and I still would like to know...of all...I wondered all these years when I get to thinking...see I live a lot in the past because I'm...you know...82 ½ and the way things have happened for me. I live a lot in the past and I've always wondered what boat I was on an Elco or a Hug...Huggins....Higgins. Higgins, I think, was made in New Orleans and I don't know if it was 78 foot or 80 foot...one or the other.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: And we had two...two turrets or port and starboard machine gun turrets; 50 calibers and a 37mm...a little off-center up on the bow and a 20mm pretty well center, I think...somewhere up in the bow and they had 40mm point and aft. And usually I believe seemed like we only carried two torpedoes. And...

Interviewer: Now did you say...what kind...what kind...or let me ask in another way...what kind of action did you see?

Mr. Farmer: Nothing! (laughter)

Interviewer: You were on patrol, right?

Mr. Farmer: Luckily, Mark, I was always behind.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And that wasn't my doing...that's just the way it come out. Now there at Ormoc, see I missed that about two weeks...those Daisy Cutters.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And we...we went in the foxholes, oh I guess I probably did that a dozen times, but luckily they never dropped nothing.

Interviewer: But now...when you went out at night, were you out all night?

Mr. Farmer: Oh yeah, oh yeah...(unintelligible)...patrolling. When we were out patrolling?

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: Oh yeah, we were out all night and I can't remember...like when daytime come...what we did in the daytime...but I'm pretty sure we stayed out two nights, 'cause we went a pretty good long ways. So those things could get up and scoot and you could...man, you could get somewhere in a hurry!

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: You could be 75 miles from there pretty quick!

Interviewer: Now tell me about your officers; what...what did you think of the officers on that boat?

Mr. Farmer: Robert Ellis which passed away...I phoned his daughter in Florida...oh two or three years ago now...he passed away in August of, oh, about '02 or '03. One of the nicest guys that I could of ever possibly been around. He was an

insurance man out of Syracuse, New York and he...he had (unintelligible) up there. And he...he was just...the officers that I had on a PT boat...one of them talked to me and I always wished I had his name and have wondered did I thank him. He talked with me for about 30 minutes one night trying to get me to go and take a test for Seaman First Class, and I thought that was awful nice of him to take the time and he thought that much of me. You know...I...I've always been a worker, Mark, no smart, but I work...loved to work. And they were terrific. I never had a...a smart-aleck or an officer that I didn't like aboard a PT boat.

Interviewer: Yeah, let me ask you one other thing. What was the food like on board?

(recording stopped)

Interviewer: ...got to run out here so we'll have some tape. Okay...

(end of Tape 1, side 1)

Mr. Farmer: Uh, I'm pretty sure it was a...what you call...what you call them airplane...what'd I call it?

Interviewer: Aircraft carrier?

Mr. Farmer: Aircraft carrier! And loathsome food; of course they had plenty and man, we had...boy oh boy, I mean we even got some ice cream! (laughter) But I couldn't complain about the food on a PT boat and I don't really remember what all we ate, but I have never had no complaints on that part. Now some bases were...were bad. And they had this...these old oxens, you know, you've seen them on TV or maybe you've seen them in real life, you know.

You know the gray-looking oxen that they'd use to pull plows with or something?

Interviewer: Yes, sure!

Mr. Farmer: We had some of that on base and I did not care for that at all! And I...I thought of a little thing there while I was on guard duty one night at the base in Ormoc that I did. If you want to hear it, I sure can tell it on myself but it's the truth.

Interviewer: Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Farmer: I'm standing guard duty...on a block...it really wasn't a block...you couldn't hardly tell it, but it was a block...there was roads, no concrete and bar ditches...you know...bar...a regular old ditch for water. On the other side of this block was an old Navy chief, the old...the old heavy-weight champions of the whole U.S. Navy and died in the wool alcoholic. I mean an alcoholic...ole tattoos all over him, you know. But I'm standing on the other side of this block doing guard duty. This Army...I call it a recon...I don't know what...that's right or not...more or less a passenger-looking vehicle...Army. I don't know where it come from...I don't remember seeing many soldiers or any soldiers around there, but here come this Army truck about 2 o'clock one morning. He pulled up right in front of me there on the road, "Stop!" He got out...got up on the fender and raised up the hood...now this is a pretty good size vehicle...this is terribly dumb...I shouldn't tell it but I will. (laughter) And naturally I'm lonely as hell...I walk out there twenty-five feet and say, "What's the matter, soldier?" "Oh, this thing...I think it's

flooding!” I said, “Hadn’t you got a light...flash?” “No, you got one?”

“No.” But I says, “I got a match!” Now you tell me what in the world was I doing with a big old...you know, one of them big old kitchen matches?

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: What was I doing with a kitchen match in my pocket...because I didn’t smoke?! “You want it?” “Yeah!” I handed him a match! Like a dummy...of course he was dumber than I was! He struck that match! That carburetor was flooding...what do you think happened?!

Interviewer: Holy mackerel!

Mr. Farmer: That flames was up in the air...looked like to me at least 20 feet. He caught fire, jumped off of that fender and started running and man, I won Hatchum (spelling ?) County track years ago...I could run pretty good, and boy, I let loose grabbing after him...and he headed for the ditch and grass and head in that ditch and started rolling...and I was right there with him...I don’t know whether I was on top of him...I don’t think so, I don’t remember that...to put that fire out...got it out!

Interviewer: Did he get...burned bad?

Mr. Farmer: No...walked him over to First Aid. Well first...after fire got out...and I could be a little off here...don’t matter...I ran around the corner to that old chief, you know. “What (unintelligible)?” ‘Cause I was excited, you know, I’d already said something. And I thought to myself, “God sakes, get out of here, he don’t even know what the hell is going...any idea what’s going...just leave.” So I did. I went back around to the truck...no fire! Just what was

excess, you know, on top of that carbonator. I did the same thing to my '57 Chevrolet here about twenty years ago! And just a little different matter...in a neighbor's garage. (laughter) But I was literally scared to death! I went...took him to the hospital...and his hand got burned a little. And I went to see him and he...he wasn't hurt bad at all. We talked a little and told him how sorry I was, "Really wasn't your fault," you know and all that, but man I...you can't imagine how scared I was. I could just see myself in a brig for about a year, you know! (laughter)

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And another little bitty old instance there...didn't amount to nothing but, I went swimming. I was raised up down...like I said...down here at Palacios on (unintelligible) on Matagorda Bay, and heck, you swimming...went swimming off the end of that pier. Well then I heard the story that they chased a big shark away...well that ended my swimming there! Didn't want no more of that!

Interviewer: Right. Okay now...now this time...now you're still on the PT boats?

Mr. Farmer: Right.

Interviewer: Okay, and...and how long were you on the PT boats?

Mr. Farmer: I'm going to just guess...best I can remember...somewhere between nine months and a year...probably closer to nine months.

Interviewer: And you were out patrolling...every two or three days?

Mr. Farmer: I think about every third day or something...we'd go out and patrol for two nights.

Interviewer: Now was the crew the same crew together the whole time?

Mr. Farmer: Same time...same...well we every once in a while we'd have a change on there.

Interviewer: But generally speaking, it was...?

Mr. Farmer: Generally speaking it was pretty much the same guys. And that reminded me of one thing. We had a boy...ole boy on there and I met him at...I didn't get acquainted with him...but I saw him over there on Leyte where I was at before I moved from there to...before I left Leyte Gulf. His name is Norman Fitch. And I didn't see it or do it, but some of the other guys told me said, "Yeah, you can get by ole Norman there and go moving...like the ships...the boat was rocking...and he'd get seasick...and the boat wasn't moving at all! I don't know or not. (laughter) But that's what they said. But ole Norman...had a pugilistic nose; he was sparing partner for Billy Conn. You ever hear of Billy Conn?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Farmer: One...supposedly best boxers of all time.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: And he got a little cocky and let Joe Lewis...he would of whipped Joe Lewis but he got cocky in the 13th round and got knocked out. But that was Norman Fitch...but he didn't stay there long. I don't know where he went or why or what, but had a wrestler aboard there...Vermillion (spelling ?)...and he didn't stay long. Had a Tennessee football player on there, Al Russas; he was kind

of a wise butt, but he was a brain. He...he read books all the time and he died here...I saw it in the PT boat manual that I get...about three years ago.

Interviewer: Alright, now...now how long...you were in the PT boats nine months...

Mr. Farmer: Let's say nine months.

Interviewer: Okay, where...where were you when the war ended?

Mr. Farmer: Well let me...let me go...let me make another little step here. One day we went out and throwed a barrel off and we go a little further and we throwed off two or three barrels...way out in the ocean.

Interviewer: Empties? Empties?

Mr. Farmer: Empties. Come back and I shot at them with my machine gun...well, now that might have been a different time. Anyway, we ran...I forget how many boats was there...six or eight or something...and we had a...not all at once, but seemed like to me two boats at a time went out there and made a tri...it got out there and then you turned and you wound up making a kind of a triangle...and come back...a race! Well we didn't know what the heck for, you know! Well we come in second. Well then we took off...a day or two we left...we didn't have any idea where we was going...we knew we was going to something. Well we went...I guess...ah no, I don't think...I was going to say Subic Bay...I'm not sure. We went to wherever Cebu City...further on up the Philippines to the second largest city in the Philippines...Cebu...C-e-b-u City...and of course we didn't know what for...but we soon found out. General Douglas MacArthur's tender or...I forget what they called it and then he had his personal boat on there and they

put it in the water and he got on it...and we escorted him to shore in Cebu City.

Interviewer: You actually saw the great General?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, the great General. I could make headlines all over the world! He come within say...10-12 feet of me.

Interviewer: Did he speak?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, no, no! He had...oh my god, you never saw so many Army vehicles with guns...everybody...I was in my turret of machine guns...and everybody and you never saw...

Interviewer: So you were on the boat?

Mr. Farmer: Right...tied up at a pier. No, I take that back. We got...we escorted him to shore and then tied up at the pier. An...anyway...he walked right in...right in front of us on the pier, you know, right by us.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: But he was guarded...golly! And I had my big moment of fame! (laughter)

Interviewer: Well, that's...that's...you know that's pretty good. I...now let me...back to these PT boats for a minute. You guys went out on patrol. Did you go with a group of boats? How...how did that work?

Mr. Farmer: I only recall going out...I only recall one boat at a time. There might have been two but I don't...I don't recall that other boat. I recall just one boat at a time. And we would just go slowly around...see...see there are lots of islands over in there. Go around these little ole islands and watching for...for the

Japanese ships...we'd see any Japanese barges taking food here and there, you know...such stuff as that.

Interviewer: Now did you...did you ever see any?

Mr. Farmer: Never saw a one. But my boat was in a few skirmishes but before I got on it.

Interviewer: Alright.

Mr. Farmer: I was always...behind. (laughter) Lucky, I guess...maybe, I don't know.

Interviewer: How...how...?

Mr. Farmer: I enjoyed it. We went one time on a little tour. Ellis must have had some drag...Lieutenant Ellis...Robert Ellis because man, heck, we'd take off and here we'd go. We went into a place one time there, Mark, it had a...I called it a lagoon, I guess it was...oh, two, three or four hundred feet wide and four or five hundred feet to the end of it, and the Filipinos were lined up there with pockets full of money. Man, I sold a bar of soap for a dollar and sold some blue jeans for nine dollars! Man, I was cleaning up! So everybody was.

Interviewer: Well, I guess they didn't really have anything, did they?

Mr. Farmer: They...I don't...they had the money but I guess no place to spend it.

Interviewer: Nothing to buy.

Mr. Farmer: And I sent my sister a hundred dollars over here...I never will forget that! And the uniform of the day...a lot of times were just...undershorts. And we'd ride the bow of that boat to kind of keep it flat, you know, and here we...here we would go. Well we left that place and we hadn't went long and I was riding the bow of that boat and looking down kind of and my god, I saw one of them big mano rays, you know, like killed the guy on

TV...(unintelligible)...only this one looked like he was at least 30 feet long. You know they get up to weigh about 3,000 pounds and about 3 foot thick...and oh, he was huge! I never will forget that. And...I got drunk one night there in Ormoc, Leyte. I never...I never no drinker...never was...still not. I do drink a beer once in a great while...when it's real hot mowing the yard or something. But I always thought I wanted to get drunk one time just to see if I knew what was going on, you know. So friend of mine from Mansfield, Ohio...and I've always intended to get a hold of this boat...PT Boat Association and because I've never seen his name nowhere; he was a real nice guy said, "Tex,"... most...most everybody (unintelligible)...like I was called me...if you were from Texas they called you Tex. "Tex, come go out with me tonight." (unintelligible) I don't...Clifford Cook, Mansfield, Ohio...I don't believe I want to." "Yeah, come on out." And I thought, "god dang it, I'm going to go out with him and I'm going to drink something and I might even get kind of drunk...just see how it feels." I went out with him and years ago the old Seven Up Bottling Company had a little ole brown bottle...that's way before your time. And I drank that thing...I don't know what it...I guess it was full...I don't know...but Filipino whiskey...which blinded some guys and I think even killed some guys. But I'll never forget as long as I live because I've got a terribly weak stomach of taking pills for it since 1966. I never could ride a Ferris wheel or anything. I don't know why I thought I ought to get on a...

Interviewer: Yeah, I was getting ready to ask you...how'd you keep from getting seasick?

Mr. Farmer: Well, see the old PT boat was just like a regular boat, you know, it get a little rough, but it wasn't that up and down like you went up about five stories on an elevator...and then drop it out from under you...that's the way the ships was in some...I had that coming back. But anyway I drank that rice whiskey and come back and I knew where I was at and what I was doing. But we'd just painted the deck of that PT boat and that old sand paint, you know, rough...so it wouldn't be slick...and I told one of them, "Get me over here to this torpedo and tie me to it!" And he did that...whoever it was...and the next day...god, I thought I was going to die! That night I thought I was going to die!

Interviewer: Did you get sick?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, and I was never one to throw up...but I was so sick it was unreal! And the next day...I'll never forget...Lieutenant Ellis, the guy...we...we were painting down below in the bilges of that thing...and can you imagine that being so sick you think you're up top...you don't have to do this today. And...of course I've always worked...done my job...he's a very considerate person. And I never will forget that...believe you me! I've...never...no more like that since! And last spot we were at was...I was talking about was Cebu City. And I left Cebu City and I went to Fleet Hospital 114, I believe it was...on Samar. 'Course went back to Ormoc but from there, you know, got my things and then we left...a bunch of us...I believe. And I think it was Samar Fleet Hospital 114.

Interviewer: And Samar...spell that.

Mr. Farmer: Still the Philippines.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: Well, of course I...

Interviewer: S-a-m-a-r?

Mr. Farmer: Correct. I like to swim, you know, so I went swimming out there several times...and this and that...and I'll get to that a little later. We were waiting more or...I didn't know it at the time, but to be sent home. And went to the picture show there one night...sitting on a log...my god, next thing you know...that...that log was a shaking to beat the dickens, you know! I never did sit on a log before when the whole ground...logs started shaking, did you?

Interviewer: Earthquake?

Mr. Farmer: Earthquake.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Farmer: (unintelligible)...go to your boats...go to your boats...go to go to wherever, you know! Man, I took off from there and got back on the PT boat. And I don't know whether it was that night or another night but I'd go back in the back of the PT boat...like I'd been to a picture show or something to tinkle. Or get up there at night I'd go back in PT boat...well this night I went back to the PT boat to tinkle. My god, I looked down and there was a...I guess I thought at the time it was an octopus...but I guess it was a squid, I don't know what it was. But it was close to three foot long...but it was wounded, you know. Good lord, look at this. So we got him up on the boat...I don't remember what happened to him, but he was almost dead, I think, or

something, you know. Well that ended my swimming on...on Samar. I didn't want no more swimming...period! (laughter) And at the time there...somewhere in that...that time, I was out at sea and while I was out at sea we were in a pretty good deal of a storm. It didn't...we wasn't in the center of it...nothing like that...but it was rough!

Interviewer: Now wait a minute...were you on the PT boat?

Mr. Farmer: On the PT boat. And our PT boat...we closed the hatches...we cut through one wave and water seemed like be almost knee deep from sloshing across there and then we'd go up over the next one. Man was I sick...gosh I was sick! We was having to take some Admiral somewhere.

Interviewer: Now this is on PT-146?

Mr. Farmer: Correct...that was the only one I was ever on.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And that's just a little small instant that I (unintelligible) there.

Interviewer: But that was...that was a...a...how long did that storm last?

Mr. Farmer: Just a short period of time.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: And I don't remember where we went...nothing. We came back but...I thought of another little tidbit...that...back...back up. We stopped when I was on a...I don't whether...it must have been an LST...at Biak, New Guinea. Have you heard of it...that?

Interviewer: Nope, afraid not.

Mr. Farmer: B-i-a-k. Well on that island...there was the 44th Bloody Butchers there...44th or 41st Bloody Butchers they called themselves.

Interviewer: And what are they?

Mr. Farmer: Soldiers...and they had beards and all that. On that island...it was caves...huge caves and it must have been as big as the one in New Mexico...what's the name of that one?

Interviewer: Carlsbad?

Mr. Farmer: Carlsbad...because under...down in those caves they had trucks and ammunition and troops and man, you name it. It was...it was...so I heard. I didn't go down in there.

Interviewer: Now what was the name of that place again?

Mr. Farmer: Biak...B-i-a-k.

Interviewer: Okay, I don't...I don't...

Mr. Farmer: New Guinea.

Interviewer: I don't know of it.

Mr. Farmer: And we was talking one of those 44 soldiers come up to where we was at...I guess they're on a barge...on that LST. Yeah, we'll go out every so often and hunting for the Japs...and we catch one...we take a bolt...put his hands behind him and drive that bolt through his hands...hold his hands together. I don't know how true that was or what.

Interviewer: Now were these soldiers or Marines or what?

Mr. Farmer: Just plain old soldiers...Army.

Interviewer: And what did they call them?

Mr. Farmer: They called themselves the Bloody Butchers.

Interviewer: The Bloody Butchers!

Mr. Farmer: How true that was...I don't know, but that's what he said. Oh, I'll think of something...afterwards but...I think that...and then I came at...well when...when...after taking the Admiral wherever...went back to Fleet Hospital 114 and then my name came up and I got aboard...I don't remember where...USS Edgecombe. My gosh that thing was going straight into the waves and I was on the very bow...and I bet it'd go up four or five stories high at least...seems like...and down it would come.

Interviewer: Now is Edgecombe spelled E-d-g-e-c-o-m-e?

Mr. Farmer: B.

Interviewer: B.

Mr. Farmer: That's the way I remember it, Mark.

Interviewer: Now it was a troop ship?

Mr. Farmer: It was some kind of a converted...I...I can't remember...I know what it was but I can't remember.

Interviewer: Now were you going home?

Mr. Farmer: Going home...well, I really didn't know...but I found out shortly.

Interviewer: Alright...but now...where...was...was the war over?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, the war was over.

Interviewer: When...when...where were you when the war was...when the war ended?

Mr. Farmer: Uh, well, now you talking about your Japanese war?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Farmer: Oh, oh, oh...I can't...I can't...I can't come up with that.

Interviewer: Alright, so...but...but you are on the USS Edgcombe...

Mr. Farmer: To come home.

Interviewer: And you're coming home. And this was when?

Mr. Farmer: I...I...well, I...I'll just...I'll get to that. I got on that USS Edgcombe and that thing...I like to died on it! My...my experience wasn't as bad as my brother-in-law...was telling me about his. But he was on a...or a friend of his...when he was on the Queen Mary. He said they were standing up at the tables eating and the tables were just narrow...long, you know, and you stood up...and this guy across from this other guy all of a sudden just kind of lurched forwards and urped in his tray!

Interviewer: Oooh!

Mr. Farmer: I just had to throw that in...that wasn't me...that was my brother-in-law's friend!

Interviewer: Yeah, now what...what happened on the Edgcombe though? How long did it take you to get home?

Mr. Farmer: Hitting all those waves...running into them...and then we got to going sideways! Or the waves hitting us sideways...and I'm up in the bow...

Interviewer: Are we in heavy seas or a bad storm?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, my god, heavy seas!

Interviewer: But was it a bad...a real bad storm?

Mr. Farmer: No, wasn't no storm...just heavy seas...I don't know why. But my lord, was I sick, you know! I was so lucky not to ever get stationed on a ship...'cause I

can't ride in a car now...with hardly nobody. And...I land...or stop...we go to...we don't know where we going...we go to Portland, Oregon. You ever been there?

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Mr. Farmer: Going up the Columbia River...they said...110 miles! You know that's a big river!

Interviewer: Oh, I know!

Mr. Farmer: And froze...January!

Interviewer: Froze to death...you were in summer uniform, right?

Mr. Farmer: Like to froze plum to death! They wouldn't let us go down below decks, I don't know why. But I'd shipped all my...when you weigh 132 or 3 pounds and you carrying a sea bag...you know what they look like full of clothes...and you trying to climb up the side of a ship...those big ole nets...and you carrying that seabag...that's one job! And if you (unintelligible), too.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: So I'd sent my pea coat home and a lot of heavier stuff home, so I didn't have nothing but...I guess my blue dungarees. I don't remember really what I had on. I don't ever remember wearing the whites...they wouldn't let us do that...I don't know why. But anyway, I like to froze to death! But a friend of mine had a...a little Eisenhower jacket...you ever hear of those?

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Farmer: Little Army Eisenhower jacket. He let me wear that. And we landed in Portland, Oregon and got off and stayed there about two weeks. I caught a train; I didn't know where I was going. Went down the Snake River...as I remember it...and beautiful, beautiful country and went to New Orleans!

Interviewer: How many days did that take you?

Mr. Farmer: From Portland to New Orleans?

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Mr. Farmer: I...I made two trips from Farragut...Farragut, Idaho down to Palacios and that took three days and two nights. So I...I would assume that that was pretty well about the same.

Interviewer: Now you didn't have sleeping accommodations on that train, did you?

Mr. Farmer: Oh, yeah...mostly!

Interviewer: Oh, you had a bunk?

Mr. Farmer: Most the time we had a bunk...but I can sleep...and that's a big fault of mine now...I could...riding that train from Farragut, Idaho home...on those vacations...there was an ole woman sitting in front of me...she was about 35, I guess...I thought she was old, you know. (laughter) When I was awake one time, she told me, "Young man, you can sleep more than any one person I've ever seen!" I'd just sit there and sleep on that old dirty train.

Interviewer: Okay, now you're on...you're on your way to New Orleans?

Mr. Farmer: On my way to New Orleans...landed in...well...I...I went over to Algiers, but...but anyway...let's see...

Interviewer: Now...

Mr. Farmer: I was on a train, sure...train...yeah...got off at the train station...and you can cut this part out if you want to...Mardi Gras! Why hell, what's Mardi Gras? Got off the train...walked through the station...stepped up on a curb and a black girl there (laughter), "Hey white boy, you want to go...*you know what.*" Man, I never heard nothing like that before! But I was there during Mardi Gras, you know.

Interviewer: Okay, now you're...are you close here to getting out of the Navy?

Mr. Farmer: Just a minute, Mark. I can't hear you.

Interviewer: Huh?

Mr. Farmer: I can't hear you.

Interviewer: Can you hear me now?

Mr. Farmer: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Farmer: I thought my battery was out...I've had battery problems. But anyway, I went on to the Mardi Gras a little, but not much because I didn't do no drinking. And man, I didn't want in all that...mess! And then they...they sent us over to Algiers...and let's see...then they sent...I stayed there about two weeks, I believe...and they sent me over here right close to home...right down here at Camp Wallace. (unintelligible)

Interviewer: Yes, you're the third person I've interviewed that...mustered out at Camp Wallace.

Mr. Farmer: Got out at Camp Wallace...had that...envelope. Man, oh, man, I was the happiest guy!

Interviewer: So you got...you got your discharge.

Mr. Farmer: Got my discharge.

Interviewer: Now I got to ask you...got to ask you something.

Mr. Farmer: Oh, anything.

Interviewer: Okay...what...how did all that experience...that three...you were in three years almost to the day, right?

Mr. Farmer: Right, got out March the 6th.

Interviewer: Okay, how did that affect you? I mean what...how did that affect you...when you look back on it today...how did that affect your life?

Mr. Farmer: Well, 'course when you're young, you have different thoughts and don't know this and don't know that...think you do, but you don't. And I...I didn't like it at all. But as I got older, I felt like well I done my duty, you know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Mr. Farmer: Whatever they told me to...

Interviewer: You told me...you told me a couple of times...

Mr. Farmer: Whatever they told me to do...I learned early in life...if you're not too lazy and try to stay reasonably clean and show a little interest in other people...you can get along pretty good.

Interviewer: That's right.

Mr. Farmer: And I have no regrets...I done...sometimes I think I wished I would have seen a little action...but then, you know, I might not be here, too!

Interviewer: That's right! I tell you what...you...you told me that...when we first started this tape that you didn't do nothing and I have to disagree with you, Nels.

Sounds to me like you had quite a...three year experience!

Mr. Farmer: Well...

Interviewer: I mean that nine months on that PT boat...that was...that was something else!

Mr. Farmer: The most adventuresome...part of my life was on that PT boat.

Interviewer: I'll bet it was!

Mr. Farmer: Oh man, I ate that up! I loved it!

Interviewer: Right. So you're out of the service now...and you told me...I think you told me you went to work for Shell.

Mr. Farmer: Well now, are you still taping?

Interviewer: Yeah, I'm taping for a little bit. I'm going to close it down here in just a minute because we got the war years but...but give me just a brief summary of what...what you did when you got out.

Mr. Farmer: Okay. Just a minute, Mark (coughing).

Interviewer: You need me to stop? You want me...you need something to drink?

(taping interrupted for a minute)

Mr. Farmer: ...but the other half...he gave me verbal abuse...all the time. I drove that tractor and worked on the farm there and..."I can't take no more of this!"

And so I left and come up to Houston. You still with me, aren't you?

Interviewer: Oh, I'm still here!

Mr. Farmer: And came up here to Houston and started to going to business school. I went...a little over a year...I guess about a year and half of business school.

And I wanted to be a stenographer...shorthand. I wanted to learn shorthand for some reason...I don't know where I picked it up or what. I wanted to do one of two things. You knew it was coming...stupid! Changed my mind...I always to be a stenographer or a professional prize fighter. And I had good qualifications for the boxing stuff...some of them, but not all of them. I didn't have much stamina and a very small face and jaws. I had to take after my little bitty 65 pound grandmother. And so I decided not to go into that. I had a little of it in the Navy and that's too rough and so on and so forth. So I went to bookkeeping...decided I'm going to try to be a CPA. And I want to take shorthand after I get through with bookkeeping...well I did that. And I did excellent in shorthand. If I'd of done shorthand in the Navy...which I didn't see very many guys...I only remember ever talking to one that knew shorthand...and I would of done well in it I think in the Navy. 'Course shorthand wouldn't of been all you would of you'd of been a feather merchant...you'd of done other things too, you know. But I think I would of progressed...and might have been a different deal if...if I had of gotten into that, but who knows...no regrets! But I got to work going to...got a job at a railroad doing shorthand...and promoted real quickly up to the Executive Department...worked at that and it was nerve racking to me. These old men that turn their heads and mumble and mumble and here you trying to get it...write it down, you know. And then I went to South Texas College of Law in...on Louisiana Street here in...let's see, you live in Houston, yeah!

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: You know where that's at...very good school. Well I wasn't smart enough...and I'll readily admit it because in high school...the little ole bitty high school...and everybody knew everybody...and I copied and cheated and all this and that and just got through, you know. They passed me more or less...that's one of the biggest mistakes that I've realized in life that I made! But it's...an old friend of mine would say, "Its done did," you know. But I worked at the railroad for about three years, I think, and then I could of been a travelling stenographer for one of the high officers, but I...I decided I didn't want that. So I went out here to Sinclair on...old Pasadena 225...old dirty looking plant, yeah, I'm sure you know which one I'm talking about. "We're not hiring, but I heard Shell is hiring" they said. So I go to Shell...and...I think downtown Houston by a fellow that was named Jesse Collins and they said once he heard you and interviewed you...your name and face...he never forgot you! And...excuse me (cough), and so I go out to Shell...well, I take a test there. It must have been awful easy on the test because they passed me. And I got on at Shell and I worked as...twenty-three years as an operator...which I really liked running these units. And I'm surprised at that whole ship channel hasn't blown up! You can't imagine...some of these guys running some of these dangerous units that don't know nothing...it...it...man, it's absorb!

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Farmer: And then I have a handicap daughter. She's 54...told you that already here at home. And my wife was working as an interior decorator at the Black

Carriage House...used to be on the freeway. You may of heard of Ed Zimmer (spelling ?) stores. She was doing pretty good and we were scrimping and saving as much as we could to take care of my handicap daughter when we got old, you know. We didn't have the facilities and so on and so forth back there then, but we do now and...wished...I'm telling you this as a little...I don't know why really, but we...I still got two old cars...my 57 Chevrolet. We raised three kids in diapers at one time. I traded my 60...my wife always wanted a convertible. When we first got married...moved into a house at Mason Park. "Want a convertible." And I finally gave in. We both had pretty good jobs and she was good, and you know, didn't have one in high school, so I bought a 50 model convertible. Well, didn't know it, but like a dummy, I traded in down at Ganado, Texas...in on this 57 4-door station wagon. Well, I still got it and it's pretty clean car. It's not a show car but it can very easily be a show car. And it's worth probably, oh, five, six seven thousand. But the old 50 model Chevrolet...and it didn't even have a heater in it when it was new.

Interviewer: Well, that would have been a gold mine.

Mr. Farmer: Sir?

Interviewer: That would have been a gold mine.

Mr. Farmer: Last count I had it was worth...it had 60,000 actual miles on it...had the acts...the same original top on it...and the last I heard about three or four years ago, it was worth \$45,000.

Interviewer: Okay...now how...how many years did you work for Shell?

Mr. Farmer: I started at Shell in...in...I believe it was April the 1st of 1951 and I retired...I believe...in May of '85.

Interviewer: Okay, so you had...you had a good run!

Mr. Farmer: I had a pretty good run.

Interviewer: I'm going to edit over a portion of the tape where Mr. Farmer divulged some personal information that should not appear on this tape. Test, test, test.

Mr. Farmer: Spent all my damn money on damn cars; I like cars. I drive ole '94 handicap van (unintelligible)...I don't know where or why do I need a car at 80...almost 83 years of age, you know, I don't need...setting out on the drive anyway. But made a lot of money thinking I was going to have to take care of, you know, my daughter...and it's \$2,700 a month up there at Willow River Farms for a handicapped child.

Interviewer: Right. Well, let me...let me...we can talk for a minute here. I want to go ahead and...and shut the tape down now. I think we got the gist of your military and...and we got a pretty good picture of Nels Farmer. And on behalf of the Museum, I do want to thank you for doing this and taking the time to do it with us. So, I'm going to shut the tape off now and then we can chat for a minute before we close it out.

(End of Interview, End of tape 1, side 2)

FINAL copy
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