

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Robert Jagers

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Interview in progress.

Larry Rabalais: This is Larry Rabalais; today is the 9th day of February, 2008; I'm interviewing Mr. Robert Jagers. This interview is taking...taking place here in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. And with that I'll turn it over, the microphone, over to Robert and let him begin a rough idea of your early childhood.

Mr. Jagers: My name is Robert Jagers; I was born in 1922 in Chicago. I moved to Grand Rapids when my father died; went to high school there and returned for college. I have my Master's, my degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Detroit; Master's Degree from Wayne State University.

Larry Rabalais: Did you have any brothers and sisters, Robert?

Mr. Jagers: I had one brother that was in the Army; he's younger than I am.

Larry Rabalais: In World War II he was?

Mr. Jagers: Yes sir.

Larry Rabalais: Did he survive the...war okay?

Mr. Jagers: He survived.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, very good. And your mother was at home during this period of time?

Mr. Jagers: Yes sir.

Larry Rabalais: And that was in the Michigan area?

Mr. Jagers: Yes sir.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, alright...so, you had gone to, I think, Aquinas College, or...

Mr. Jagers: Yes.

Larry Rabalais: ...right, briefly...

Mr. Jagers: Two years.

Larry Rabalais: ...right at the beginning of the war?

Mr. Jagers: Before the war, yes.

Larry Rabalais: Before the war. Where were you when you heard of Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Jagers: I was at home and my mother couldn't hear; she never heard my voice. I had the radio on and it was Sunday afternoon and I heard that Pearl Harbor...and when I heard Pearl Harbor I knew that I was going to be...

Larry Rabalais: Did you know where Pearl Harbor was? A lot of guys had no clue as to really where that was.

Mr. Jagers: I did not know where Pearl Harbor was at that time.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: Of course, within hours everybody knew where Pearl Harbor was.

Larry Rabalais: Was there a lot of emotion? You know, passion about all those dirty so and so's who did this.

Mr. Jagers: No, no, no...

Larry Rabalais: There was patriotic feelings then (unintelligible)?

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, we...we just took it and accepted it, and knew that we would be either drafted or joining...I enlisted...my brother was drafted. And I wanted the Navy because I felt that the...was cleaner living in the Navy than being in a foxhole.

Larry Rabalais: So that would have been '42?

Mr. Jagers: That would have been...I signed up in April of '42, but they permitted me to finish my term at school. So I was actually enlisted in the Navy in June of 1942.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, so that was pretty...pretty shortly after Pearl Harbor then...that...that spring after Pearl Harbor then, okay.

Mr. Jagers: I went to boot camp at Great Lakes.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: I went through Signalman and Quartermaster School there, and I signed up for submarine duty, but they didn't take me because they had enough to fulfill their quota.

Larry Rabalais: Did you do that because of the excitement of subs or the pay difference or...?

Mr. Jagers: Uh, the excitement mostly.

Larry Rabalais: Excitement mostly.

Mr. Jagers: I didn't know anything about the amphibious forces...

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: ...they put me on a train and shipped me to Solomons, Maryland and I then found I was in the Amphibious forces; went through training there; boarded a ship; took it to New York; sailed it from New York to Bermuda to Gibraltar.

Larry Rabalais: What type of a ship was that?

Mr. Jagers: LST.

Larry Rabalais: Oh an LST? Alright, that early in the war they already had some LSTs?

Mr. Jagers: Yes.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: This would have been...first time I was aboard an LST was in latter part of 1942.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, so the weather probably...well of course you were going south; it might not have been too bad.

Mr. Jagers: It wasn't...it wasn't too bad. When we...it was March by the time we got our own ship...

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: ...to sail it down to Bermuda.

Larry Rabalais: Because they were notorious, obviously as you stated in your book about their sea capabilities were quite a bit rolling and a lot of guys got sick on that.

Mr. Jagers: Oh yes, yes.

Larry Rabalais: Yeah.

Mr. Jagers: It took us thirty-six days to go from Bermuda to Gibraltar.

Larry Rabalais: Wow!

Mr. Jagers: And so...

Larry Rabalais: And the purpose for going that...was that to support the North African...in...invasions?

Mr. Jagers: We, no, we were there at the tail end of the North Africa...

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: We were there at the tail end of the invasion, but we were there for part of the action in North Africa.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: The action in North Africa finished on the 13th of May, 1943.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: At that time, I was in a British field hospital.

Larry Rabalais: Oh, for what?

Mr. Jagers: Appendicitis.

Larry Rabalais: Oh, Appendicitis! It hits anywhere and everywhere, okay.

Mr. Jagers: I...the doctor that operated on me left twelve inch scar, and my mother who was operated on and my wife who was operated on later...has a one inch scar for appendix. (laughter) And I blame it on the doctor's name; his name was Left-handed Colonel Butcher (sp?). (laughter) I...I had quite an experience after I left the hospital; I had...

Larry Rabalais: So this...the field hospital was in North Africa or was it in...?

Mr. Jagers: In North Africa.

Larry Rabalais: Yeah, because we were not in Italy yet, so (unintelligible)?

Mr. Jagers: No, no, no.

Larry Rabalais: No, okay.

Mr. Jagers: When I went to the hospital, the war was still going on in North Africa.

Larry Rabalais: Okay. Were there any evidence of German planes or any scares about German submarines on ya'lls way over there to...?

Mr. Jagers: There...we...of course you never know what's going on, but the destroyer escorts and the destroyers kept circling around...and every once in awhile they would be dropping depth charges, so we suspected that...there may have been some...submarine activity.

Larry Rabalais: Yeah, possibly, some contact.

Mr. Jagers: We didn't really see any problems; no submarines; no...

Larry Rabalais: Aircraft?

Mr. Jagers: ...foreign ship; no aircraft until we got to Africa.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: When I was in that British field hospital, the Stuka bomb...dive bombers...dive bombed the hospital every day.

Larry Rabalais: Oh is that right?!

Mr. Jagers: Yes.

Larry Rabalais: I didn't realize that. Let me do a quick voice check.

Mr. Jagers: And when I left the hospital, they put me on a train to Algiers and then I was supposed to get transportation from Algiers to Iran. I couldn't find the officer that could okay my papers because I had British papers, so I had to hitchhike from Algiers to Iran. And then at Iran they put me on board a ship that put me back on my own ship. And when I...

Larry Rabalais: You dressed in Navy uniform...you...(unintelligible)?

Mr. Jagers: I was in half British and half Navy uniform. (laughter) I just picked up twice as being...as AWOL.

Larry Rabalais: I could see that! Yeah, interesting. Okay, so...

Mr. Jagers: It was shortly after we were...I arrived back at my ship in Lake Biserte, North Africa...that I was wounded during a bombing raid. I was on duty and I...I...a piece of shrapnel cut my hand. Shortly after that we were preparing for the Invasion of Sicily. The day before the Invasion of Sicily, the...there was an FW-190 that flew over the convoy...was strafing and shooting at it...and as it came over our ship, we had a barrage balloon...and if he'd have gone straight, of course, it would have cut his wing off. When he banked from the barrage balloon, I jumped down from the bridge to the wing; pulled the chamber back on a fifty caliber; put a shell in the chamber and I'm leaning like I was taught in gunnery school, but our officers were so dumbfounded they never gave the order to fire.

Larry Rabalais: To fire. Now this was on an LST?

Mr. Jagers: Yes.

Larry Rabalais: Right. What...what type of weapons did ya'll have? They were mostly light weapons, I assume?

Mr. Jagers: Very light. We...we had that fifty caliber; twenty millimeters; forty millimeters.

Larry Rabalais: Oh you did have forties?!

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, we had twin forties on the bow...

Larry Rabalais: That was in the tub?

Mr. Jagers: In the tub.

Larry Rabalais: Alright.

Mr. Jagers: We had a three inch fifty...but later on it was turned to twin forties because the three inch fifty is really for an LST is useless. That was it!

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: I think we had...eight forty millimeters and, I don't know, ten or twelve twenty millimeters and two fifty millimeters.

Larry Rabalais: That's...that's better than I had thought that it would be. Okay, so now, the Invasion of Sicily is in progress or getting ready to start?

Mr. Jagers: We're getting ready. The night before this invasion we were in a terrible, terrible storm; we had over six hundred soldiers on board and every one of them was seasick.

Larry Rabalais: I read about that and...a number of LCIs, I think, sank in that storm.

Mr. Jagers: Yeah.

Larry Rabalais: I remember that.

Mr. Jagers: We...we did make the landing at Sicily. We were actually in too close, but we were told not to go in anymore and our Captain said he had to keep going. And I actually saw a German tank come up the side of the hill and a cruiser would fire two six inch rounds (*psst! sound*), the tank would go up in the air!

Larry Rabalais: Wow!

Mr. Jagers: And I saw three tanks blown up like that; they decided to go around.

Larry Rabalais: You got in there close enough to where you could actually see the tanks?

Mr. Jagers: We were in where we weren't supposed to be.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: When we woke...when dawn broke the next day, we knew we were going to have trouble with our bow anchor because we hadn't gone into the beach yet.

We'd unloaded our troops but hadn't gone into the beach.

Larry Rabalais: What's the methodology of approaching the beach with an LST? Obviously they...they drop the stern anchor some (unintelligible)...

Mr. Jagers: First they have to wait for the tide.

Larry Rabalais: Oh, okay.

Mr. Jagers: They'd go in about an hour after high tide.

Larry Rabalais: Its critical then?

Mr. Jagers: Oh yes, very critical! And then shifting of the water; the ballast in the tank...in...in the LST is very critical. They'd go in at flank speed; drop the anchor; open the doors and drop the ramp and then the tanks and the trucks go out. But because we were in too close, the Germans were able to fire at us with eighty-eights; they fired three eighty-eights to our left; three eighty-eights to our right and the Officer of the Deck says, "Cut that cable; get out of here." (Unintelligible) with acetylene torch and we moved to the left and when we moved to the left they dropped three shells.

Larry Rabalais: So did ya'll have a stern anchor out at this time?

Mr. Jagers: No.

Larry Rabalais: No?

Mr. Jagers: No, no. We...we hadn't dropped our anchor yet to...go into the beach.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: We were...we had our bow anchor in, but we were out deep enough that we weren't in shallow water yet. I have fragments of that eighty-eight at home.

Larry Rabalais: I...I read that in your book that some actually ended up on the deck; it was that close.

Mr. Jagers: Yeah. I have fragments from the air raid in Biserte; fragments from Sicily and fragments from two hundred and seventy-five millimeter cannon at Anzio.

Larry Rabalais: At Anzio! Okay, the big one, okay. Now, so this was the prep for the Sicily Invasion and this is the Sicily Invasion.

Mr. Jagers: Yeah.

Larry Rabalais: Now, you guys were carrying troops as you indicated...

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, we...with LCBPs we carried two hundred, first or second wave troops. We always carried at least six hundred...no two hundred...

Larry Rabalais: Two hundred.

Mr. Jagers: ...of first or second wave troops because we had six LCBPs. Most LSTs only carried two LCBPs; some carried four, but in our case, our particular ones had six.

Larry Rabalais: And so those (unintelligible) were used to launch those...

Mr. Jagers: Yes.

Larry Rabalais: ...and I've seen some LSTs that had these...larger, what, L...LCMs or whatever they called them?

Mr. Jagers: No, they're called CTs..., no LCTs.

Larry Rabalais: LCTs...that they slid off the side.

Mr. Jagers: Right, they would shift (unintelligible)...

Larry Rabalais: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, because we had six (unintelligible), we couldn't carry the LCT.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: But they would lock...anchor the LCT down on the top deck and they would shift the ballast; knock the blocks off and she would slide right of the side into the water.

Larry Rabalais: Wow, that must have been a good splash!

Mr. Jagers: If, if you'll give me my book I'll show you a picture of what...

Larry Rabalais: At this point we're utilizing his book which he has written that indicates that type of a launch, 'cause that was a fairly heavy little boat, that L...LCT.

Mr. Jagers: Yes.

Larry Rabalais: Carry...did it carry one tank generally or more?

Mr. Jagers: Uh, there were...so many different varieties of LCT...

Larry Rabalais: Right, right. Sometimes there's LS...LCMs that...

Mr. Jagers: LCMs are a little bit larger than the LCVPs.

Larry Rabalais: Larger, okay.

Mr. Jagers: Now here...here is four LCTs, and there's an LST.

Larry Rabalais: Oh I see; okay. Those are still fairly good sized vessels then.

Mr. Jagers: Now here a six LCTs being floated down the river. And this will show you an LCT being loaded on the top deck of an LST.

Larry Rabalais: So those are rather large!

Mr. Jagers: Yes, oh yeah.

Larry Rabalais: So you only had...what two of those on board usually?

Mr. Jagers: No, one.

Larry Rabalais: Just one, okay.

Mr. Jagers: One, one.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, so they're that large.

Mr. Jagers: Now here is an LCT and look at the size of that; there are four hundred and some men on there or...something, I think.

Larry Rabalais: My goodness! That's why there was only one on board an LST then?

Mr. Jagers: Well we never...no, you couldn't carry anything this big on an LST.

Larry Rabalais: No, okay, alright.

Mr. Jagers: But just to show you...that...there's...right there is three different sizes of LCTs.

Larry Rabalais: I see what you're saying, yeah. Okay now continuing into the Sicily operation itself, after ya'll broke away from your anchorage and ya'll pulled back further...

Mr. Jagers: We (unintelligible).

Larry Rabalais: ...the eighty-eights; okay what'd we do after that?

Mr. Jagers: Well we had to wait until the tide was right and hopefully that the beach was under control; then we would go in on flank speed; drop our rear anchor; open the doors and lower the ramp and the tanks would come out. Now we had a huge elevator that went from the top deck to the lower deck. Later models had a...a ramp that they could right from the top deck right out the bow doors. So we...then we had to wait for the next high tide because we...we'd go in an hour after high tide...that means that the water from high tide is coming up

underneath and the pull of the rear anchor...hopefully you'll get off the beach.
That isn't always the case.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, sometimes...

Mr. Jagers: We...(unintelligible) we weren't sure we were going to get off.

Larry Rabalais: Was it a sandy beach; was it a gradual sandy beach or not...so much so? Or was it more cobbly...pebbly?

Mr. Jagers: Uh, most of the beaches we went in were sandy. I...I think they were...picked these beaches for that reason. But you know, if you have a sand bar and you hit the sand bar...

Larry Rabalais: I see.

Mr. Jagers: ...then you may have water that's fifteen feet deep on the other side of the sand bar.

Larry Rabalais: On the other side of the sand bar. So it's an irregular situation depending on the currents and everything. So pulling off...sometimes it maybe the LST had to be towed off?

Mr. Jagers: Uh, I don't remember (loud buzzing noise in recording)...that was the 9th of September, 1943.

Larry Rabalais: Was that one more contested in...in your...in your opinion? I mean as far as the ships were concerned?

Mr. Jagers: Not as far as the ship was concerned.

Larry Rabalais: No.

Mr. Jagers: It was worse in as far as the soldiers going...

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: ...because at Salerno, the Germans buried themselves underground; they buried themselves in haystacks with tanks inside of houses and sheds and they let that first wave and second wave in and then they erupted and cut them off. It was...it was because of that that the change was made for (unintelligible) and which turned out to be a big mistake.

Larry Rabalais: Alright. Now the next thing would have been Anzio then for you?

Mr. Jagers: Salerno after Sicily.

Larry Rabalais: Right.

Mr. Jagers: Then after we captured Naples, then Naples became the port for us for loading.

Larry Rabalais: Alright.

Mr. Jagers: Actually it wasn't really Naples; it was the little island off of Naples that's called Nisida.

Larry Rabalais: Now the Germans had pretty much wrecked up the port of Naples...

Mr. Jagers: Yes.

Larry Rabalais: ...is...is what I understand.

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, yeah.

Larry Rabalais: Okay...

Mr. Jagers: So we...we were...we were operating off of this little island, Nisida which had a causeway to the...to the mainland. So for the Anzio Invasion, we loaded all of our supplies at this little island, Nisida.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, and it went on...is it up the coast then to Anzio?

Mr. Jagers: Yeah.

Larry Rabalais: ...from Naples?

Mr. Jagers: Right.

Larry Rabalais: That wasn't a very long, I don't think. It wasn't very far. The...were your landings there in daylight?

Mr. Jagers: Yes and no.

Larry Rabalais: At Anzio?

Mr. Jagers: It depends. At...at Naples, at Sicily there were in daylight; in Salerno they were in dark.

Larry Rabalais: Dark.

Mr. Jagers: At Anzio they were in dark.

Larry Rabalais: Oh, you were in dark then? That's right, because I remember then...didn't they shoot down some Americans planes accidentally...using...?

Mr. Jagers: I saw that happen.

Larry Rabalais: You did?

Mr. Jagers: I actually saw...they shot the...par...paratrooper planes down; the C-47s.

Larry Rabalais: That's horrible!

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, I actually saw that happen, and that was at Sicily.

Larry Rabalais: Right, they went into the sea a lot of them, and of course drowned.

Mr. Jagers: It was a...the night after a storm; everybody...almost everybody was seasick; it's the first combat for a lot of them. These are eighteen, nineteen year olds; somebody got trigger happy and started shooting and then everybody started shooting. And unfortunately...they call it friendly fire, but it's just as deadly as any other.

Larry Rabalais: As bad as the other. Okay now at Anzio there was a lot of shelling that occurred; shelling of the ships that were anchored there.

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, yes. The German's had two cannons; two hundred and seventy-five millimeter that they...

Larry Rabalais: That they goosed off or (unintelligible)?

Mr. Jagers: No, they...they called...the Gustav Line; they called them Anzio Annie and the Anzio Express.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, right.

Mr. Jagers: They had a spotter some place on the beach and we could only unload two LSTs at a time in the harbor; this is after the landing.

Larry Rabalais: Oh, ya'll actually pulled up to a...harbor key?

Mr. Jagers: Uh, a key yeah.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, key.

Mr. Jagers: But that's for the landing; no we landed on the beach for the invasion.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: Now my group of the convoy went past Anzio in daylight and what...with the idea that we were going to land at Rome. When dark came and we turned around and came back, and landed at Anzio. Anzio was probably one of the worst battles of the...

Larry Rabalais: Yes!

Mr. Jagers: ...of the European theater, and mostly because the generals made mistakes. What happened at Salerno they didn't want to happen at Anzio? If they'd have had enough nerve and guts to let the men go...some of the men actually

got to Rome and then they got cut off. There were seven hundred and fifty-seven Darby Rangers that were dropped off at Anzio; fifty-seven of them came back.

Larry Rabalais: Wow!

Mr. Jagers: If they had...followed up, they would have been able to save the Battle at Casino; they would have been able to cut off over fifty thousand German troops, but...Lucas...General Lucas didn't want to do that; he wanted to build up a beach head...

Larry Rabalais: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Jagers: ...no doubting and that gave separate kinds of reinforcements which he did (buzzing sound).

Larry Rabalais: (Unintelligible)...and stuff like that. So after shelling continued and I...weren't there some ammunition ships hit there...?

Mr. Jagers: Yes.

Larry Rabalais: ...while they were waiting on a number of...?

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, I was going to show you my book again.

Larry Rabalais: We're referring again to his book. (Loud buzzing sound of recording.)

Mr. Jagers: Here is a water spray from that two hundred and fifty-five mill cannon.

Larry Rabalais: Ohh, look out; it's huge! It looks like it's probably two hundred...feet or more up in the air...a water spout from a near miss on the large cannons firing from the Alban Hills that is in his book which is called Whales of World War II, ...(unintelligible) Jagers.

Mr. Jagers: There was a time when we were at a near miss from the cannon. And we were just ready getting ready to back out and this shell exploded close enough that I could pick up fragments off of the deck.

Larry Rabalais: Okay. Generally were ya'll transporting troops to the beach or supplies or both?

Mr. Jagers: Most of the time we carried things that could move on wheels.

Larry Rabalais: Oh okay.

Mr. Jagers: Jeeps, ambulances...

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: ...half-tracks; six by sixes; artillery parts; anti-aircraft parts, but mostly in the tank deck it would be tanks. We would carry six by sixes that were loaded with supplies; it could have been ammunition; it could have been material; it could have been fuel...any number of things.

Larry Rabalais: While you were at the beach landing or any one of those times that you...you were at the beach land, did you see any ships get hit?

Mr. Jagers: Yes, I saw the 525 sunk at Normandy. I've also seen other ships sunk but that was the only...

Larry Rabalais: What about at Anzio?

Mr. Jagers: I saw a ship sunk, but now I don't remember any LSTs.

Larry Rabalais: No, I don't mean LSTs; I mean (unintelligible), you know like ammo ship or something like that...(unintelligible)...get hit.

Mr. Jagers: Uh, we...

Larry Rabalais: Were ya'll harassed any by fighters...strafing...attempting to strafe ya'll?

Mr. Jagers: Oh yes, oh yes; many, many times.

Larry Rabalais: Alright.

Mr. Jagers: But with the barrage balloon, they can't come in and strafe very well because they can't come in low enough.

Larry Rabalais: Right, I understand. Okay, so the Anzio...you'd have to...was over...where were ya'll sent after that?

Mr. Jagers: We were sent back to Naples to load up. We made, I'm guessing, fifteen to twenty trips between Naples and Anzio.

Larry Rabalais: Oh my goodness, that many...yeah!

Mr. Jagers: And we would always bring back casualties or prisoners. The picture of my ship in the front there is...we're bringing back German prisoners from Anzio.

Larry Rabalais: So we were capturing a lot of German prisoners at that...that point?

Mr. Jagers: Yes.

Larry Rabalais: Okay. Now after the entire Anzio operation was the LST ever at any point sent back to the States for a refit or...or did ya'll continue on...?

Mr. Jagers: Ours wasn't, no.

Larry Rabalais: Yours was not.

Mr. Jagers: Because of that...Operation Tiger, and the fact they didn't have enough LSTs for the Invasion of Normandy which was Overlord, they called my ship and a number of LSTs out of Anzio; sailed down the Mediterranean through the Straits of Gibraltar up to Wales in England and I arrived in Wales about the, I'm guessing around the 1st or 5th of May, 1944.

Larry Rabalais: Right.

Mr. Jagers: And we moved from Wales, Swansea, Wales to Plymouth, England. We were at Plymouth, England, I'm guessing maybe three weeks before they pulled us out of there; shipped us to Falmouth; they loaded all the troops for Normandy Invasion on our ship at Falmouth.

Larry Rabalais: So you didn't have much time for a break. Actually from Anzio...it was constant...

Mr. Jagers: No, no.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: I...most the time I had was weekends; that's all. The only...never got any leave; never got any...weekend liberty was the most I ever had.

Larry Rabalais: Uh-hum; so they loaded with troops at Falmouth?

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, this was in...(unintelligible)

Larry Rabalais: And the wea...weather was horrible at that time; it was right before.

Mr. Jagers: Oh yes, yeah.

Larry Rabalais: Rainy and...

Mr. Jagers: Yep, yeah.

Larry Rabalais: ...and so forth.

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, and I...

Larry Rabalais: Ya'll were tied up at that point? Or were...?

Mr. Jagers: Yeah.

Larry Rabalais: ...loaded and tied up?

Mr. Jagers: Yeah.

Larry Rabalais: So the ship was not rocking that much there yet?

Mr. Jagers: No, no.

Larry Rabalais: Not yet!

Mr. Jagers: No.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, did ya'll go on a false run where you had to come back?

Mr. Jagers: No, no.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: Some ships did.

Larry Rabalais: Yes, I understand.

Mr. Jagers: ...but ours didn't, no, because we...the slower ships like the LCTs that actually made the crossing...the English Channel; they were much slower than the LST.

Larry Rabalais: Even slower than the LST?

Mr. Jagers: Yeah!

Larry Rabalais: Which is not exactly a speed demon.

Mr. Jagers: Well, you figure the LCDPs which is the Higgins boats...it took them two and half hours after they unloaded from the LSTs or the attack transports. Assumingly the AKA boats or the attack transport would carry twenty to thirty LCDPs, but not on [USS] Davis; they would be carried on the ship and they would have to be loaded over with a crane.

Larry Rabalais: But...they would load their people about six or eight miles off shore or something like that?

Mr. Jagers: At Normandy it was twelve miles.

Larry Rabalais: Oh twelve miles! So that would take them awhile to get to shore then?

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, yeah.

Larry Rabalais: Well those (unintelligible) must have been (unintelligible).

Mr. Jagers: Took two and a half hours to drop.

Larry Rabalais: They must have been good and seasick by then!

Mr. Jagers: Oh yeah, oh yeah!

Larry Rabalais: Okay, so ya'll took ya'll's load over to...you took your load over to Normandy...?

Mr. Jagers: To Utah Beach.

Larry Rabalais: Was that in the dark in the morning when they made that crossing?

Mr. Jagers: We...

Larry Rabalais: Arrived right at dawn, I assume.

Mr. Jagers: We had...we had a hundred miles to go...

Larry Rabalais: Right.

Mr. Jagers: ...and at eight miles an hour...that's twelve hours...

Larry Rabalais: Oh, so it took awhile, yeah.

Mr. Jagers: ...so we left in daylight. We arrived in Normandy, I'm guessing at five o'clock in the morning, and the Texas was out (unintelligible) off us and it fired it's shells right over us and we could hear them going over, so it was just like...

Larry Rabalais: A freight train...

Mr. Jagers: ...freight train going over us.

Larry Rabalais: That's what everybody says.

Mr. Jagers: Yeah.

Larry Rabalais: It was a very effective old bombardment ship from what I understand.

Mr. Jagers: Yeah. Then we...we unloaded...our...our troops for the LCDPs, and I think we had to wait until the 7th of June before we could go up to the beach. See the tides in Normandy are twenty-seven feet...

Larry Rabalais: That's what I understand, yeah.

Mr. Jagers: ...and when you hit the beach in Normandy and the tide goes out you are high and dry!

Larry Rabalais: Yeah, I saw a picture of that in your book.

Mr. Jagers: Yeah.

Larry Rabalais: There was an LST completely high and dry!

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, right. And fortunately for us there was not too many German aircraft...because you...you feel so helpless; just like a sitting duck. So we had to wait the twelve hours until the next tide before we have enough water under us and the anchor to pull us up. But in the meantime, at Normandy, after we unloaded all of our troops and our tanks and vehicles, we have to wait to have prisoners or casualties brought aboard. Then somebody finally worked out a system that you don't bring back both! One ship will bring back prisoners and another ship will bring back casualties and the extra medical people that they put on the prisoner ship then go to the medical ship. Well, it didn't work with us; we had six or eight extra corpsmen onboard. We had a thousand prisoners onboard, German prisoners.

Larry Rabalais: Oh my goodness, that many!

Mr. Jagers: We had a thousand of them in the tank deck.

Larry Rabalais: Ya'll were just bringing them back to England then?

Mr. Jagers: Yeah. I happened to be the signalman on watch and I took a message that says, "Be prepared to take casualties." I says, "We can't, I got a thousand prisoners." He says, "Too late, they're on their way."

Larry Rabalais: Oh my goodness!

Mr. Jagers: So we not only had a thousand prisoners, but we had two hundred and fifty paratroopers (unintelligible) casualties.

Larry Rabalais: So it was a massacre of...

Mr. Jagers: Some of them were pretty badly shot up.

Larry Rabalais: Yeah.

Mr. Jagers: I had an unusual job; I had to help guard the prisoners, so my schedule was four hours guarding prisoners; four hours standing watch and four hours helping the wounded.

Larry Rabalais: My goodness!

Mr. Jagers: Four hours guarding the prisoners; four hours standing watch and four hours guarding, uh...helping the wounded. I had some first aid treatment, so here...I knew how to take care of them. I'd give them morphine shots or I'd give them...uh, blood plasma or I'd change their dressing or I'd give them a smoke or whatever.

Larry Rabalais: So you didn't get much rest!

Mr. Jagers: It was almost five days...I think it was a hundred hours...hundred and eight hours or something like that from the time I slept until the time I got back to sleep.

Larry Rabalais: Oh my goodness!

Mr. Jagers: And I did get an award for the time I worked with the wounded.

Larry Rabalais: With the wounded.

Mr. Jagers: I had an unusual thing happen to me while I was guarding the prisoners. We drew a line on the deck, a yellow line, and they were told in German so they could understand not to cross that line. And that first night of guarding those prisoners I had one prisoner that kept coming across the line and getting bolder and bolder. Well, if they'd have charged us, we...we only had a rifle, but there was two men behind us on the gangway (buzzing noise, unintelligible words)...they couldn't get out the bow door because that was locked. But this one prisoner kept coming over the line and I'd take my rifle and push him back and he was getting real bold, and I says to my buddy, "What are we going to do about this? We can't...can't stand this; he's got to stand on the other side of the line." And I remembered something that they...I was told they were afraid of bayonets, so I took my bayonet off my sheath; stuck it on the end of the rifle and when he turned away from me over the line, I jabbed him in the butt! I...I don't know if I drew blood, but he knew he got...jabbed.

Larry Rabalais: Was that an M-1 or the old Springfield bolt-action rifle (unintelligible)?

Mr. Jagers: 03, yeah, yeah.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: Anyway, I never...he never bothered me again.

Larry Rabalais: Okay. So ya'll did this for some time at Normandy...

Mr. Jagers: We made...I don't remember exactly how many trips; somewhere between thirty and forty trips across the Channel.

Larry Rabalais: Oh my goodness!

Mr. Jagers: In fact, one time we landed...Patton's troops behind the line. We...this was a Saint-Michel, and we actually landed Patton and some of his troops. That wasn't on our ship, but he was on one of them...behind the lines.

Larry Rabalais: That's not too far from Cherbourg, I think, somewhere in that area.

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, it's passed Cherbourg; it's on the other side.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, so you were involved with the Normandy Invasion in that respect. From there did you get a break at all or did they send you somewhere else?

Mr. Jagers: No, no. Okay, after four invasions; five major battles, they, I guess, they decided our ship had enough, so they sent us up...sent us up to Rosene, Scotland and they brought a bunch of British officials onboard. We decommissioned the ship and turned it over to the British.

Larry Rabalais: Oh really?!

Mr. Jagers: Yeah.

Larry Rabalais: The 351?!

Mr. Jagers: Yeah.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: And I have the last battle flag from the ship...at home.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: They put me on a train; sent me to Liverpool in the middle of the night from the...right from the train; at Liverpool they put me aboard a troop transport; sent me across the Atlantic Ocean. In fact that was at Christmastime.

Larry Rabalais: Back home?!

Mr. Jagers: They sent me back to the States, yes.

Larry Rabalais: To the States.

Mr. Jagers: From...I did have a few days from...New York...

Larry Rabalais: So that would have about the time of the Battle of the Bulge...(unintelligible).

Mr. Jagers: Absolutely, absolutely, because we heard of the Battle of the Bulge while we were on this ship. It took me thirty-six days going from west to east; took me seven days going from east to west.

Larry Rabalais: East to west, okay. Did that feel pretty good to see that...ya'll come into New York?

Mr. Jagers: We came into New York.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: We arrived in...just off of...Statue of Liberty at dawn; we had probably six thousand men onboard.

Larry Rabalais: Was this a liner that ya'll were on?

Mr. Jagers: It was a...former liner, USS Washington.

Larry Rabalais: Oh, okay.

Mr. Jagers: But they changed the name of it for troop ship.

Larry Rabalais: That's a lot of guys!

Mr. Jagers: And one...we were also carrying our helmets and gas masks.

Larry Rabalais: So this is a mixture of Army and Navy...

Mr. Jagers: Yes.

Larry Rabalais: ...personnel, okay.

Mr. Jagers: Yes.

Larry Rabalais: Alright.

Mr. Jagers: And wounded also. He saw the Statue of Liberty and he threw his helmet and gas mask over the board...overboard, and I think it was followed by two hundred, I mean two thousand other helmets and gas masks including mine!

Larry Rabalais: Otherwise, he'd of gotten in trouble!

Mr. Jagers: Yeah.

Larry Rabalais: Yeah. Okay, so now...

Mr. Jagers: From...

Larry Rabalais: ...what happened from there?

Mr. Jagers: Well, I went home for a few days. Then I got orders to report to Great Lakes Training Station; they put me in charge of a company of boots and I was part of a training program...a trial and error program. You know during the war they took athletes; sent them to a special school to train the boots, recruits...

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: ...then in 1945, '44, uh, '45, when I came back they put me in charge of a company of boots; I had a hundred and thirty-seven men. And it was actually...they were trying to see who made the better teachers – sailors that had seen combat or these athletes that had been trained to teach them, and it proved that the sailors that had combat turned out to be better teachers.

Larry Rabalais: Probably more relevant what they were teaching.

Mr. Jagers: Uh, one peculiar thing...of course, a Company Commander has to teach his boots how to sing and march.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: And...well my company...I had one song that I taught them two versions. One was a risqué version and we were marching by the Company Commander's office one day and they...we were singing the song and my company switched to the risqué version. So the Company...the Commander, Lieutenant Commander, I guess it was, called me into his office and he says, "If you're going to do it, don't do it in front of my office." So...but anyway, I did graduate the company of boots; I had to take...I was waiting for orders...I had to take twenty sailors from Great Lakes to Lincoln, Nebraska 'cause there was ammunition dump there that they had to work at; took the train back, and when I came back I'm still waiting orders. And they'd brought in a recruit into the...by the name of Tommy Upton (sp?). Tommy Upton was the short stop and Bob Feller was the manager of the Great Lakes baseball team, and he heard that Tommy Upton was here. Well, Tommy being a recruit...he could not go from boot camp to baseball practice by himself, so I had to chaperone Tommy over to boot...over to baseball practice every day. I got tired of sitting around and I says to Bob Feller, I says, "Can I practice with the team?" He says, "Sure," he says, "what position?" I said, "Second base." Sometime later there was a team that came in from Kansas City to play the Great Lakes baseball team, and this man from the other team says to Bobby Feller, he says,

“I got one man short; have you got somebody want to play?” And Bob said, “What position?” Manager...other manager says, “Second base.” So he looks at me and he said, “Bob, you want to play second base for the other team?” I said, “Sure!” Well Feller pitched that day, and I got two hits off of Bobby Feller!

Larry Rabalais: Oh no!

Mr. Jagers: Yeah!

Larry Rabalais: Well, that’s something to brag about, that’s for sure!

Mr. Jagers: He gave me a baseball; he knew I had orders; I didn’t know it yet...gave me a baseball and I says, “Can you sign it?” He says, “No, I haven’t got time.” Fifty-five years later, Bob Feller was signing things in Detroit and I took that baseball and I got...fifty-five years later...and got him to sign it!

Larry Rabalais: Did he...did he remember the incident?

Mr. Jagers: Yeah.

Larry Rabalais: He did; well good for you! I read in your book that you had applied for the V-5 or V-12 program...

Mr. Jagers: Yeah, yeah.

Larry Rabalais: ...about that time.

Mr. Jagers: Right. That’s what my change of orders was. I was...V-5 would have been very nice because I would have gone to...college under the Navy...

Larry Rabalais: Right.

Mr. Jagers: ...but while I was in transit between Chicago and New York, they changed the V-5 to V-12 which is a completely different program.

Larry Rabalais: Now how is it different? I...I never have quite understood?

Mr. Jagers: Okay, V-5 you would take basically normal subjects with some naval science subjects.

Larry Rabalais: Okay.

Mr. Jagers: V-12 was all naval science with...except maybe a little math or science like that.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, I see.

Mr. Jagers: But...

Larry Rabalais: So it's purely naval oriented then?

Mr. Jagers: Right. You...you could usually take those credits and...and move to a college.

Larry Rabalais: I see.

Mr. Jagers: Uh, I was on the football team at Columbia; played under Lou Little and I developed blood poisoning in my foot from a blister from...and...when the war was over I was still at Columbia University in New York. I said, "What do I need to get my commission?" They says, "You have to commit for two and a half more years."

Larry Rabalais: So you were still in the service? You had not been discharged yet?

Mr. Jagers: I had not been discharged; I was still in the service. And they says, "Two and a half more years...and your four years that you've already spent in the Navy won't count for retirement," says, "Only the two and a half years you spend as an officer...or working towards and officer." I says, "No, I want to go to Engineering school; I want my discharge." So when the semester was over

they sent me to Great Lakes; I got my discharge from Great Lakes; I went back home to Grand Rapids; did odd jobs for six months; went to school at...I...I was...I got married then; went...went to University of Detroit; we moved to Detroit to go to school. Alright, the University of Detroit I got my Bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering; I was working at different places and I went to Wayne State University at night school to get my Master's degree also in Chemical Engineering. I worked as a Chemical Engineer Metallurgist for twenty-seven years for the Chrysler Corporation...

Larry Rabalais: In Detroit area...?

Mr. Jagers: ...retired in 1979.

Larry Rabalais: Wonderful! Well that is quite a career. Uh, your book details some of these items that you talked about in even detail. And for the record I'll go ahead and mention the book again which is available...will be available at our bookstore here. Will that be available yet at our bookstore or...?

Mr. Jagers: I'm trying to get it in.

Larry Rabalais: Okay, and it's by Mr. Robert Jagers and it is called Whales of World War II. The book is profusely illustrated with photographs, maps and sketches that progress through the entire landing craft type of ships and...and in small infantry boats and so forth and is highly recommended and made it part of this recording. And Robert, again, I can't thank you enough on behalf of the Museum here for taking the time and effort to do this for our permanent records, and we appreciate everything that you have done for our Museum.

Mr. Jagers: It is my pleasure. Thank you.

(end of interview)

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