

Thomas Jeter Oral History Interview

ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler. Today is February the 20th, 2010. I'm interviewing Mr. Tom Jeter, in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the Nimitz Museum. This interview is in support of the Center of 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. I want to start out, Tom, by thanking you for coming up here to share your story with us. And I'd like to kick it off --

THOMAS JETER: Thank you.

EM: -- by having you introduce yourself and tell us when and where you were born, and then we'll take it from there.

TJ: OK, well, my birth was in Richmond, Virginia. And we lived in Ashland, Virginia. And my obstetrician's name was M. Pierce Rucker. He was a friend of my grandfather, who was a doctor. And when he delivered me, he told my mother, "I've already picked his middle name." So she named me after her brother, who had recently died -- Tom. And that was my beginning. And...

EM: What was your date of birth?

TJ: My date of birth was April the 25th, 1925.

EM: OK. So, did you grow up there in Virginia, or...

TJ: We grew up in Ashland until I was about four. And then, my father had asthma. In those days, they really didn't know what to do for it, except to get you out of that environment, into another one. So we moved to Durham, North Carolina, in the late '20s. And my father -- I don't know what he did, but we moved close to my uncle down there, and that didn't pan out either. So we moved to a farm -- my grandfather's farm -- in Sutherland, Virginia. And we lived there for a year, while my mother became the office nurse for a local doctor -- Dr. [Robinson?].

EM: Did you have brothers and sisters?

TJ: I have one brother. His name is [Robert?]. He's older than I by 10 years. But he's also now deceased.

EM: So, when you grew up, up through your high-school years you were still there in Virginia?

TJ: We lived in Danville.

EM: In Danville, yeah.

TJ: Virginia. And I went to George Washington High School. I also went to Berkeley Elementary School. What else do you need to know?

EM: Well, that's enough for the schooling, I think. Let's see. So, if you were born in '25, that means you were 16 when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

TJ: That's sounds --

EM: Twenty-five to '41. So do you remember --

TJ: Yeah, that sounds about right.

EM: -- that day? That's always a red-letter day for most people.

TJ: Yeah, I was in the backyard, and my mother called me and said, "Come on. I want you to hear something on the radio." And, of course, it was all very loud with the bombing. And I didn't really know how to deal with that, not knowing anything about wars or terrorists or...

EM: Yeah, that was a different era, wasn't it?

TJ: It was a different era. And so, it didn't seem to concern me at that time. And I didn't even give a thought to the fact I might get drafted.

EM: Well, yeah, I guess at the age of 16 it seems kind of a long ways away anyhow -- the whole thing.

TJ: Mm-hmm, that's right.

EM: Although your brother was, you said, 10 years older than you?

TJ: Right.

EM: So he was 26, so --

TJ: Right.

EM: -- he probably was quite a bit more likely to be...

TJ: Well, he volunteered. He was in the Navy. He was a storekeeper, and had some college training. So he went in

as Storekeeper First Class, I think. So, I knew about that, and I had cousins that also were in the Navy.

EM: So tell me how things changed after Pearl Harbor -- just your surroundings, the way people talked and thought and acted.

TJ: Well, I really don't remember what they thought. As far as my life was concerned, it didn't change. I was a good high-school student, but not an honor student. My mother worked too hard. She worked even a half a day on Saturday. And --

EM: Well, that was not actually unusual back then.

TJ: No.

EM: I mean, Saturday was a work day (laughs) for half of them.

TJ: Well, there was a 12-hour day, rather than 8, which came on later. And she worked for a diagnostician, Dr. [E.B. Robertson?]. And he had recently come from school. So she worked that job, and my father -- because of his asthma -- worked at an insurance job, because they wanted him to be outside. He had formerly been a furniture-store owner in Richmond, Virginia. And then, when all of this began to bother him, he finally became an insurance salesman. I don't know whether it was day by day or week by week, but he used to go around during the Depression times, writing people insurance.

EM: Tough time to make a living, wasn't it, back then?

TJ: Well, I suppose it really was. But I didn't know it. I never had a day that I didn't get fed.

EM: Had clothing, could go to school.

TJ: I had clothing. Well, you know, families stuck together in those days better than they do today. So we enjoyed life, I guess you'd say.

EM: So tell me about how you came to be drafted, or how that happened, and when that happened.

TJ: Well, when I got to my 18th birthday, I was still in my junior year because, a couple of years before, they'd put in 12 grades. So I needed three rather insignificant subjects to me to graduate, and they just wouldn't give me the diploma. And part of that was because my mother was a single parent. My father had died. And she didn't know how to keep me out. Some of the more affluent parents knew to get their kids into the Navy V-12 Program. And they went right on from there to college and avoided the war altogether. But in my case, I was drafted, put on an old stake-body truck, and hauled to the induction center in Roanoke, Virginia. And they gave me tests. And because I scored high, I had a choice, where people who scored lower did not. So they asked me what service I wanted to be in. And because my relatives were all in the Navy, I naturally

said the Navy. So then, from there, I was sent by an old cattle train -- an old, rickety train packed full of people -- to Bainbridge, Maryland, where I began boot training.

EM: Well, at least that wasn't all the way across the United States. It's still in the neighborhood, kind of, anyway.

TJ: Well, it was. It was an area I never forgot. We talk about global warming today. Let me tell you, it was so cold when I went to Bainbridge that the Chesapeake Bay froze over. And they often laid a track to the other side on that ice.

EM: Yeah, really?

TJ: So we've been warming ever since then. It has nothing to do with what we hear, I don't think. Now, that --

EM: That's all right. We've all got opinions on that, and you're entitled to yours, as well. So it was darn cold that winter, huh?

TJ: It was.

EM: So this is going to be winter of '43, then?

TJ: Right. Well, I actually was sent a draft notice on my birthday. But they left me at home until about August. I don't remember the exact date. And then I was sent to boot camp up there.

EM: So what was the boot-camp experience like for you?

TJ: It was tough. Let me tell you, it was really tough. We had several guys that committed suicide because they couldn't take it.

EM: Really?

TJ: Yes.

EM: Couldn't take the pressure, or just the physical stress, or...

TJ: They hadn't been accustomed to that. But two guys -- I didn't know them -- in the next barracks to me tied sheets around their neck and jumped off the second-floor balcony. So to me, I guess I've always been tough, because I was raised in a family that had to be tough. I was in my own business from eight years old, repairing lamp cords on lamps to make a little money. And later, I watched all the radio repairmen repair radios, collected all the old parts, and found out why the radio didn't work. Parts were scarce. And so, what do you think I did? I started my own radio-repair business.

EM: Really? And when was this?

TJ: Eight or nine years old.

EM: Wow!

TJ: So I had money when the rest didn't.

EM: Yeah, but you'd earned it yourself, too. That's pretty impressive.

TJ: Just before coming into the Navy, all the technicians in these radio-repair shops got drafted.

EM: Of course.

TJ: So I got called by a Mr. [Jones?] -- Jones Radio Repair. And he said, "Will you come to work for me?"

EM: And how old were you at the time?

TJ: Oh, I was already 18. And so, I looked around his shop. Everything was loaded. The table models were all on shelves. The consoles were in the middle of the floor, and he said, "Can you fix these?" I said yes. He said, "I'll give you 50 cents" -- which was a lot of money -- "for every table model, and a dollar and a half for every console." And so, I just lined all the benches up, put heat lamps on them, because a lot of them were [intermittents?], and I knew that. And I knew how to repair the parts. We already owned them. Sometimes I unwound coils, found the little place, and repaired those. And before I left for the Navy, I had repaired every table-model radio in that place. (laughter)

EM: That's pretty impressive.

TJ: And then I had customers on the outside that would call me. They would say, "Will you come up to my house?" Some of it was just older people that needed company, that lived in exclusive areas of town. And so, I would go and this one

fellow used to call, and says, "Well, would you come up and look at my radio? It just doesn't seem to be working right." And I'd go up, and I'd say, "Well, I don't see a thing wrong with your radio. We'll do something." So I'd tweak up the IF cans a little bit. I never failed to get \$40. Now, let me tell you, \$40 --

EM: That's huge.

TJ: That was -- that was huge. And --

EM: Serious money.

TJ: And I began to play around with ham radio, all during that period. So, electronics was kind of my thing in those days.

EM: So when you finished boot camp, is that when they start deciding where to send you?

TJ: Well, they originally --

EM: Tell me how that worked.

TJ: -- wanted me...I scored high on all of my technical tests, so they wanted to make me a dive-bomber pilot.

EM: Makes sense.

TJ: And so... (laughter) No.

EM: You really use your brain, huh?

TJ: And so when they found out, even though I didn't wear glasses, I needed glasses, that was out. So they said, "Well, you're going to fire-control school." Now, I went

to see the chaplain. I said, "Chaplain, one thing I don't want to do is fight fires."

EM: No, no, it's not exactly fighting fires.

TJ: Well, the chaplain didn't know. He was new too. He says, "I'll see what I can do." (laughter) He came back and says, "No, they say you've got to go." And so, I went to fire-control school after the boot training, right there at the Naval Training Station in Bainbridge. And I scored high on that, and came out of it with a rank of Third Class Fire Controlman, which, briefly, I abdicated because there was...in those days, you had guys with families. So they came and said, "Look, if you'll put off getting your stripes until you get on a ship, then we'll be sure you get it, and we'll give it to this other guy because he needs the income." So I did that. And in a month, I was on the USS *New York*, anchored out in the bay there, Norfolk, Virginia. And I remember (laughs) very well. I had never taken a sea bag on a boat to ride out to a ship, to climb the ladder. And the ocean was going up and down. Here I was trying to get off on the little platform to climb up the ship's ladder. It was really a struggle.

EM: All this training, but they hadn't trained you for that, had they?

TJ: No, they didn't.

EM: So what's going through your mind as you're trying to reach up?

TJ: Well, I found that the boat and the little dock go up and down together, and so, as it came up, I just stepped off on the platform. You learn fast. (laughter)

EM: You don't have a choice, do you?

TJ: Right. So, that was my beginning with the USS *New York*.

EM: So what was your reaction to being assigned to a battleship? Was that good news for you, or how did you feel?

TJ: Oh, I don't know that I had any feelings. It was just I was doing what I was told to do. You know, that's the good part about service. You learn early to mature. I matured more in one year than I would have matured in five back in Danville. And my opinion is, every guy and gal today coming out of high school with that attitude ought to be in the military for 18 months up to two years, so they can get it all straight. Because it sure got me straight.

EM: Mm-hmm. So when you went aboard, what did you think the first time you saw her out there on the boat, headed up to her?

TJ: I thought she was a big ship. I mean, I had no feelings for a battleship or a destroyer or whatever. My cousins had all been on destroyers, so I guess I thought

(inaudible) I doing on this big battleship? But I think the lord has a plan for every man's life. And I didn't think that in those days. So as I got on, and they showed me a rack five decks down. I had enough room in that room in that rack to turn over. (laughter) I don't know whether you're ex-Navy or not.

EM: No, I'm not, but I've heard enough of those stories that I can imagine.

TJ: Oh, my. And I found myself in an elite division, because the Fire Control Division was an elite division. So I liked that. And I didn't like being a Junior Third Class Petty Officer. I always wanted more stripes, which I never got.

EM: Really?

TJ: By my own choice. But what did happen to me from that was, when I went up the first morning to do calisthenics, my commanding officer was my neighborhood friend.

EM: What a coincidence.

TJ: He was named [Russell Hill?]. His mother had been my English teacher. He was my brother's age. He didn't have an bars on him, because they didn't want the reflection off [them?]. So he gravitated towards me, and I did him, and we hugged. Well, you see, that scared me, after I found

out. Because there is jealousy and feelings among other guys when they think you're getting preferential treatment.

EM: They thought you had the inside track.

TJ: Right.

EM: Yeah.

TJ: So, having heard stories where people that weren't liked were thrown over the side, I just said, "Hey, you know, I don't need this rank. I don't need to go up the ladder." You know, every military person -- and I think you're an ex-military, aren't you?

EM: No.

TJ: Well, in the Navy, you have two things you have to fight for: one, your technical skills; and then, your military. And you take tests on both of them, and I scored high on all of them. And he always asked me, "Why don't you take your next rank?" And I said no, because of that incidence. So I stayed Third Class all of my Navy years. But there's an advantage to being a Senior Third Class Petty Officer.

EM: What are those?

TJ: Well, I got to assign all the working parties. (laughter)
And I didn't do them.

EM: So it did pay off then. OK.

TJ: Well, it paid off. And then, later, it probably paid off too, because being his friend...and he was a line officer,

standing on the bridge. He stood up there with the Captain, and so I got to be the telephone talker for the Captain. Every order the Captain gave, when my duty was on, I transferred over the sound-powered telephone system to whoever he wanted it to go to. And I got to know him very well. His name was Captain [Christian?]. And he liked me, and I liked him. He thought he was my father. He gave me lots of advice, and the way that started was, he had a radio that was broken. And, of course, Russell told him, "Tom will fix it." And he called me down to his wardroom, and said, "I've taken this down to the electronics shop. They can't fix it. Can you fix it?" I says, "Well, I think so." And in 30 minutes I had it fixed. So, from that day on, he used to give me all these little suggestions. He first criticized me for saying, "I think I can fix it." (inaudible) say, 'I can fix it.'" So, he became a father figure to me.

EM: Mm-hmm. And you had lost your father earlier, so this was probably good for you too.

TJ: It was. So, later, I became his orderly during my watch, along with my other responsibilities as a Fire Controlman. And so, later on down, as my story would go, you'll find that I had a crash boat and a coxswain to drive it. I had sidearms. I'd go get his orders.

EM: Let's go over to the fire-control role that you played, and what that involved, and how you executed that.

TJ: Well, basically, I was trained on all the fire-control computers and gyroscopes. And all of that had to be memorized, because it was highly classified. So the early fire-control systems for the small arms -- the 40-millimeters and things like that -- were all electromechanical. And my ship had been outfitted with the latest fire-control all-digital director before we left.

EM: So the old girl had really been upgraded --

TJ: Right.

EM: -- as far as --

TJ: Well, she had, but I didn't get to play with that. They brought on their own their own crew, it was so advanced.

EM: Really?

TJ: But they were in our group and, of course, by association, I learned something. But I worked on the electromechanical computers, the gyroscopes. The gyroscopes were attached. We were five decks down where our laboratory -- our plotting room, it was called. And we had a large XY plotter, probably five feet long and three feet wide. It plotted every move that ship made, and they all worked on these gyroscopes that were there, which was one of my responsibilities -- and others too; now, I'm not the only

guy in this -- to keep them working. And I knew everywhere we were, just by looking at that plotter. Every zigzag move we made was on that plotter. And I had my own little bench to do whatever repair, because I repaired anything -- electronics in our group, I got it to repair. The sound-powered telephones, anything, came across that bench, and I claimed it as my bench. And I had my own coffee pot, everything there.

EM: Now, that is important -- your own coffee pot.

TJ: (laughter) Sure. I had a five-gallon can of coffee just sitting there. I'd make it any time of night or day. We had our own sound system we bought -- the guys did -- with certain money. And so, it was a good experience.

EM: Now, how long after you joined the crew -- how long was she there before she headed out, and where did you go?

TJ: Well, let me get back to this a little bit. I also was assigned to the main-battery director -- that's the 14-inch-gun director -- where my CO, Russell Hill, was the main guy on the job. And my job was just to crank in some data whenever I was given the data to crank in to that director, and it directed all the 14-inch guns.

EM: Now, how do you crank in the data physically?

TJ: Just turn a little crank, and tell it -- the parallax data or whatever it was, was what I was told to crank in.

EM: Oh, OK. So you got the input, and then you physically...

TJ: That's right.

EM: So cranking in the data actually has a physical meaning in this particular case then?

TJ: Well, it had one guy that pointed the guy; another guy that elevated it; and my commanding officer sat in the middle with his large rangefinder scope, giving us range. We had, also, a radar for range. All this had to be cranked into the director, and then the guns tracked -- when you kicked them in, it would swing around and get on the target. So, I was in what they call secondary aft. That was the position. There was a main fire-control system on the tower, but we had, let's see, five guns. One was in the middle, which was unusual. But this being an old battleship, it had a turret in the middle between --

EM: So these are 14-inchers in the middle?

TJ: We had a 14-incher in the middle. Had a catapult on the top of it that (inaudible) our plans off, that spotted where the troops were. And then there was a foremast. They were all three-legged tripods. And sometimes I'd have to run up that foremast, which developed huge chest muscles, because I had to be ready to catch myself. And it was 100 feet tall. So, they were where I served outside, plus doing watch. You know, everybody serves watch, so

sometimes I served watch. Other times, I did other things. I don't know if you know this or not, but every enlisted man in the Navy gets to serve three months mess-cook duty. So, I had to be a mess cook for part of that time, bring the food down, for which I got a small remuneration. But when you've served your three months, then somebody else has to serve. Officers -- I don't know what they did in their wardrooms, but this is what I did. And, well, where do we go from here?

EM: Well, why were you going up the...

TJ: To stand watch.

EM: This is strictly a watch position. It wasn't anything --

TJ: It's just a watch position. No, you sat up there with your binoculars, and for about three hours, two hours, you were on watch. And then you were relieve, and another gang came on. But you had to watch out for German submarines in the Atlantic, and in the Pacific, submarines or anything else that was there, that might be harmful, or you wanted to know about.

EM: Mm-hmm. So where was your battle station?

TJ: Well, I was the secondary aft, that was right next to that middle turret. And underneath me was a potato locker.

EM: (laughs) Oh, yeah?

TJ: That was in the base part of my secondary aft.

EM: Well, no space goes wasted I guess, onboard.

TJ: No, it wasn't.

EM: So, after you'd joined the crew, where did the *New York* go?

TJ: We came up to Annapolis and took various groups, and trained them in gunnery. And some were crews that would be on destroyers, and I don't remember which ones. But the others were Annapolis graduates. We took at least two of those groups on training experiences to Trinidad. And, of course, along that route, in those days, there were German submarines. The Annapolis graduates did all the work. We were just to help, and told them what to do. They did all the deck work. They did everything.

EM: That's good.

TJ: So we spent time in Trinidad, and each time we returned picked up another group. And finally --

EM: So this is down off the north coast of South America, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TJ: That's right.

EM: Right, right.

TJ: It's just off the Amazon. I remember standing on the bridge, and our navigator, Commander [Adler?], came running in to the bridge and said, "What do you see out there?" And nobody said anything. I don't know whether he was

joking or not. He said, "According to my calculations, we are up in the middle of the Amazon." (laughter)

EM: Well, (inaudible) more to check those calculations (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TJ: But the thing was, the difference in the water as you approached the Amazon, it was a different color. So...

EM: Yeah, because of all the freshwater coming out.

TJ: Well, we had a day or so there every time went.

EM: And what about, do you actually have any skirmishes with U-boats?

TJ: We did. I don't... (phone rings) Wait a minute.

(break in audio)

EM: OK, so, we're rolling again. So, anyhow --

TJ: But it was a new experience for me, because I had never seen people of that demeanor, or that poor. And it kind of bothered me. I also saw very wealthy families who had mansions up in the hills.

EM: Mm-hmm. Now, this is down in --

TJ: Down in Trinidad.

EM: -- in Trinidad.

TJ: Yeah, you know, you don't know about that as just a kid living in Danville, Virginia.

EM: Not exactly high on your radar screen, I guess.

TJ: Well, and then I was surprised at -- I bought a mango. I didn't know what a mango was. And I didn't like the taste of it, so I threw it sort of in the gutter. And the kids all came along and scolded me. Oh, they grabbed that up and ate it like it was candy.

EM: Well, they were poor, I guess, and hungry.

TJ: Right. So, that was a new experience for me, mentally, not having known anybody like that. Of course, later, on in my Navy years, I got to know a lot of really poor people. Well, while we were a poor family by monetary standards, we certainly didn't live the kind of life that most of the world was living. And as Americans, we should be very proud of who we are, and how we got here.

EM: Yeah, and thankful, too.

TJ: Thankful, too.

EM: Yeah. So after the runs --

TJ: We came back and went into the Portsmouth Navy Yard and got all that new equipment put on our ship.

EM: Oh, OK. So when you first went on her, you didn't have all of the latest stuff?

TJ: No, we didn't. But we did convert our ammunition rooms into classrooms, and we had teachers that taught these various groups about what we were doing. And all along our trip after that, when we'd run into a crew on a destroyer

or on an LCI or something, and they'd been in (inaudible), they would salute us.

EM: Because...

TJ: Because of their training. So, it was really an honored position to be in.

EM: So this is still all in the Atlantic. I know the *New York* ultimately went to the Pacific theater.

TJ: We left from Portsmouth, after getting everything done. It was a lot done -- new radar gear, one of these bedspring radars were put up on the foremast. And I don't remember all the details by any means, but --

EM: "Bedspring radar"?

TJ: Well, yeah, they look like a big bedspring.

EM: Oh, OK.

TJ: They can search the ocean for other people. The interesting thing about that, we arrived in the Pacific, and suddenly our radar picked up a whole flotilla of unknown ships. And so, we said, "Japanese ships?" because Pearl Harbor had already happened long before that. And then, they found that it had skipped off of the E layer from a group of ships in the Atlantic, they figured.
(laughter) But it scared us.

EM: From a long ways away, those signals were. Yeah.

TJ: But we had excellent equipment. The crews were all well-trained.

EM: And so, you received a lot of training in using this state-of-the-art equipment.

TJ: Yeah, right.

EM: What was your reaction to that? This was pretty high-tech stuff.

TJ: Well, see, I already was aware of electronics, and I knew all the stuff about it. So I could see advancements coming. And it surprised me more than anything else, I guess, that somebody at that early stage of the war was already working on this advanced equipment. So it wasn't any bother to me. And I don't know that it necessarily impressed me other than, hey, I didn't know they were even working on this. But, you know, we were working on new ships, new aircraft carriers, before Pearl Harbor was ever there. And that was a blessing, believe me. And it did hurt me when I got to Pearl and saw all those sunken ships and the suffering that those guys did. The ships weren't raised when I got there. They were still almost smoking but, of course, it was several years later.

EM: Yeah, still a lot of physical damage obvious.

TJ: A lot of physical damage there. And from there, then we left to go to -- I guess; I didn't know -- Iwo Jima. But we --

EM: How long were you in the Pearl Harbor area? Just a few weeks, or...

TJ: Well, I don't really know. Everything seemed to be longer than it was, (laughter) because I was anxious to get on with it, see?

EM: Right.

TJ: But I got tired of being on Oahu. I felt like I just couldn't get off the stinking island. That's the only place I could go, and I went everywhere I could. I remember going up over the Pali Pass and looking at the beautiful sight on the east side of Hawaii where the ocean just fades into the sky. And I'm sort of a romantic at heart, so I loved all those scenes.

EM: (laughs) But after a while, I guess, you'd say (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TJ: Right.

EM: Now, were you in contact back with your family at home -- your mother -- writing letters?

TJ: Yes, all of our letters, as you already know, were screened by our officers. And if they didn't like something, they just cut it out with a razor blade. So, that was going on.

Once we got to sea, you had to wait until some ship arrived with the mail. And then, they transferred it over from a destroyer or something to the ship. So, sometimes I'd get a pack of 25 letters. (laughter) And yeah, I missed my family and my girlfriends. And, in fact, this girl that I'm married to, she was my girlfriend since the third grade.

EM: Wow!

TJ: And, yeah --

EM: You've been together a long time.

TJ: Well, no, we didn't. I married -- when I went to University of Richmond -- another girl.

EM: Oh, OK.

TJ: And she had married another guy, and I didn't even know it. And, just, you drift apart. She was really more like a sister, probably. We were all in the chorale group, and moving around, and paired off like that. But I've been knowing her ever since the third grade.

EM: (inaudible) goes back. Well, another question, then, before we get into Okinawa and what happened there: how was the food aboard? I've heard rumors that the food (phone rings) -- let's just ignore that. I've heard rumors that the food was excellent on battleships.

TJ: It was, on ours. It was what I would call excellent, for most of it. As we came home from Okinawa, it got pretty bad, because there wasn't any food left onboard. And I ate Spam for breakfast, dinner, and supper. (laughter) And the Captain came and says -- he ate in our chow line periodically, just to see what we were getting. And he said, "Aren't there any steaks onboard?" He said, "Well, yeah, the officers have steaks. Get them out." We had steak. But for the several days still remaining, we had to go back on Spam. I got so I hated Spam. (laughter)

EM: Well, you're not the only one. I think that's pretty universal, from what I can tell.

TJ: At any rate, it was all a part of it.

EM: Well, I'm intrigued by listening to you describe the meal: you said, "breakfast, dinner, and supper." That's a good, Southern way of explaining things. That's Virginia.

TJ: That's right, that's right.

EM: Now, we in Texas would say, "breakfast, lunch, and dinner." (laughs)

TJ: Well, that came on later. But, you know, back in Virginia, lunch -- as we call it now -- was probably one of our biggest meals among farmers. My grandfather was a tobacco farmer, and he also was a lumberman. But after you ate a big dinner, what did you do? You [flaked out?] on the

floor till two o'clock. Everybody rested, and then went back in the field and worked till sundown. (laughter)

EM: Different world, huh?

TJ: Well, it wasn't bad.

EM: You lived through it, though, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TJ: Well, the thing is, I didn't know it was bad.

EM: Well, it wasn't bad. (laughs) It was just hard, that's all.

TJ: That's all.

EM: Now, back to the *New York*. So, you finally got off of Oahu, and she headed west, I'm sure.

TJ: She headed west, and then when we were coming out of the port, it start vibrating. We had lost a blade off of one of the screws. So we had to leave the flotilla.

EM: So you went out in a fleet?

TJ: That's right. And they decided that we should stop at Eniwetok, and check that screw out. And Eniwetok had probably been won back from the Japanese, I don't know when, maybe a year before. But the trees were still just cut off, like somebody had taken a string trimmer and trimmed them off.

EM: Yeah, I think it was forty-- yeah, it was --

TJ: And the water was so clear that I could look down off the ship and see the Japanese equipment down there, and bodies.

EM: Really?

TJ: And, again, that was kind of a shock to me. The airport was landing, and planes were taking off from it. And I did put in this little folder a picture of that -- of the island itself. So you'll have that.

EM: Thank you.

TJ: We discovered that we couldn't do anything about the screw. So, they sent the rest of the...well, the rest of the fleet had gone on ahead of us towards Guam and Saipan. And here we come, straggling along later. The idea was to pick up stores at Guam, and go to Saipan, and do some practice training before hitting Iwo. So --

EM: Now, at this point, did you know that Iwo was in your future?

TJ: No, I didn't.

EM: Or it was all very --

TJ: No, all that came on later, see? But when we were at Saipan, they had a huge airport there, and I saw some of the new bombers landing and taking off, which really impressed me.

EM: The big B-29s?

TJ: That's right. So, when we left there, we did know we were going to Iwo, and we were going there to soften up the beach. And we were there. I don't know if I put that in the...I don't know how long we were there, but we were there at least two weeks before there was any landing. There were no hospital ships. We had 10 of the top surgeons on ours, and we were made the hospital ship until the others arrived. And being expendable -- that's my theory; they didn't say that -- we moved in real close to the beach.

EM: Ten surgeons aboard?

TJ: Well, 10 -- that's what I was told. I don't know them.

EM: Wow.

TJ: But we had excellent hospital facilities. They foresaw that something was needed during this softening-up period. We fired more rounds. We were on the east side, I guess you'd call it. And the beach that they would land on, or one of them, was before us. Mount Suribachi, where they finally hung the flag, was on my left. And there was a cliff kind of on the right that had a camouflaged 155-millimeter gun in it. But they were thoroughly dug in with tunnels all under this side of the island, and pillboxes. While we couldn't see them, we finally picked out one. It fired at us. And we walked it down with our gun and just

tore up everything we could in those tunnels. We thought we had it pretty well softened up. We could see their airport, which was along the top. A picture of it is in here too.

EM: Right, yeah, the airfield was right there behind the beaches, yeah.

TJ: Right, yeah. So finally --

EM: So were you fairly close in when you were doing this (inaudible)?

TJ: Yeah, we were maybe a thousand yards sometimes.

EM: Because you were expendable? (laughs)

TJ: Well, that's my theory. We were an old battleship, and suffering from a lost screw. And so --

EM: And old, crippled battleship. (laughter)

TJ: Old, crippled battleship. And here's the thing: the Lord protected us. They strafed our ship, particularly my battle station. Do you know what? I'd see the bullets walking up to the side and jumping right over my battle station, and walking off the other side. Now, who am I? I wasn't particularly religious. Or who were the other guys? It was truly the lord's protection. That's the only thing I can figure. But as it turned out, we softened everything we could, and we found that 155-millimeter gun in that camouflaged cave on the right. We blew it out of there, so

the muzzle was hanging down before we left there. And then, I read a *Life* magazine sometime later. They gave the credit to the Marines. They did not. The *New York* did that.

EM: Darn. (laughs)

TJ: But that really didn't make much difference. You know, the Marines did a tough job.

EM: Yes, they did.

TJ: Now, one thing they did have while we were there -- they had what we called in those days underwater-entanglements groups. They were really what we'd call today Navy SEALs. They came in to (inaudible) all the booby traps and underwater things, in preparation for the troops to land.

EM: Probably mines too, I would (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TJ: Mines, yeah, everything. In fact, we did several mines. We had a paravane and all that stuff to cut those mines loose. And then we'd shoot them and explode them. But these guys were there, and they were just slaughtered. These people were not dead, that we thought we'd killed. And so, they were just more (inaudible) shoot mortars at us. And these poor SEALs were really slaughtered. They start bringing them onboard. The LCIs and other little ships would go pick them up and bring them on. And Tom

Jeter was seriously shocked. Here they were lying on stretchers with their guts hanging out, their heads blown open, their arms shot up, a lot of shrapnel in their bodies everywhere. And the ones that I thought would die, lived. The ones that I thought might live, died. And one guy had a piece of shrapnel stuck right through his head.

EM: Oh, my gosh.

TJ: And I said there's no way that guy can live. One came with the back of his head blown open and his brains were laying out. I said that's guy's dead. I mean, here I am on my battle station. I could look right down on them bringing them on, see? And I just said there's no way these guys can survive. But almost the next day, the guys that had broken legs had had titanium pins driven down in their legs, and they were already reinforced with outside braces. They were talking around on those things. The guy that had his shrapnel in his (inaudible), they had repaired his jaw and put outside splints on his jaw. So he (inaudible) looking like kind of clenching his eyes. He wasn't very talkative, but I got to talk to him a little bit on the --

EM: Talk to who now?

TJ: This guy that had shrapnel through his [face?].

EM: Holy mackerel.

TJ: And just all kinds of things like that. I think they use them today, but they were really a new item in those days. They screwed pegs into your broken bones, and then put an outside rod -- several of them -- to hold these bones together in a way that you could get around on them.

EM: And they would go ahead and [knit?], and [steel].

TJ: And knit, that's right. Why I was interested in that, I don't know, except my grandfather was a doctor. And I had an early interest. And my mother was a nurse. But --

EM: I think it's a shock to most people today to realize how advanced some of the medical techniques --

TJ: It was. It really was.

EM: In fact, a lot of them were probably developed during World War II because of the war.

TJ: Right. And it hurt my soul to see guys come in and have to have multiple amputation of their legs and arms. Many of those guys did not live. And I would see them -- after they'd die, they'd bring up the mattresses where the sera had run out on the mattress, and threw it over the side. Now, what they did with the bodies, I don't know. I think they probably froze them and brought them back. I don't remember any funerals at Iwo.

EM: So there's no burials aboard ship then?

TJ: Well, I saw some, but not there. You know, we had quite a few burials. Just let them slide off the slide into the ocean. But not there. So, after Iwo --

EM: So how long did the *New York* stay in the area after the landings on Iwo? For quite a while, or...

TJ: We weren't there for the landings.

EM: Tell me about that.

TJ: As soon as the hospital ships arrived and all the landing craft had hit the beach, they sent us south to get our screw fixed. Now, we went way south to the New Hebrides islands. They had a floating dry dock on Manus Island, and it was just three degrees south of the equator. And it was so hot, and not having any air conditioning, I had heat rash every place you could have it.

EM: (laughs) And some places you didn't know you could have it, probably.

TJ: That's right, so it was a suffering time for me. One week, to put that blade on that screw, seemed like about one month. And then, we came back up to Leyte, which had been previously secured --

EM: Yeah, in '44, yeah.

TJ: -- but not secured. Being the Captain's orderly, by this time -- which was usually a Marine's job -- I got sent for his secret orders and the movies. And I had a little crash

boat assigned to me, and a coxswain, as I mentioned before, to drive it.

EM: Yeah, let's hear a little more about that, yeah.

TJ: Well, that old crash boat would skim along the water at 55 miles an hour. So here we were --

EM: Did it have an outboard?

TJ: Huh?

EM: Did it have an outboard motor?

TJ: Yeah, well, several, probably. [Who were?] meant to pick up our crashed spotting planes, if necessary.

EM: Right. Was it wood or...

TJ: Probably.

EM: Yeah, OK.

TJ: So, here I am skimming across the water, and I get to the dock.

EM: Now, are you the only guy on it, or is there a crew?

TJ: No, the coxswain -- coxswain as they call him. I wasn't allowed to drive it, but I was armed to the teeth (laughter) and more important than I was. And when I got off at the dock, there was a Jeep waiting for me. And the trees, again, were just bowed down. But all around me were whistling bullets, because even though the island had been so-called secured, the Japanese were still up there firing in those hills at anything they could. So I, quick,

scurried down to the headquarters there on Tacloban, and picked up the orders and a movie. And as I got off the boat, though, to get into that Jeep, there were signs all around -- which, again, I'd never seen before -- "Leave the Filipino women alone." They didn't say why, just that. Because they were all around. And so, when we got back to the ship, we had movies that night. And the next day we went to an R&R compound on the beach, and it had a high anchor fence and a barbed wire on top. That fence was at least 10 feet tall, and all around the outside... They had plenty of food, beer, Coke, anything you'd wanted, games to play, for us. But all around the fence stood all these Filipino girls and some men. And I say "Filipino"; I think the correct word is "Philippine". But they were offering all kinds of things for sale: necklaces made of shells, anything they could to make a little money. Plus the girls were offering sex through the fence. I never saw anybody get any, but it was there.

EM: That's amazing.

TJ: It is. And to think people live like that. But let me tell you, not having seen any...I hadn't been off of that ship, except to an island, for 22 months. And when I was down in Manus Island, the USO came to the officers and gave them a big show and everything, and the enlisted men got

nothing except from the Salvation Army. So, here, we went over to that R&R compound, and we were thoroughly entertained. I really pitied those poor girls, but they the prettiest girls I had ever seen after 22 months of not seeing any girls. And I didn't think there were beautiful women like that. But, you know, it was just because no contact.

EM: Right, absolutely.

TJ: So, we left there and went on back up to Okinawa.

EM: Now, how secure was the area where this R&R was occurring?

TJ: Very.

EM: So we didn't have the whistling bullets there, huh?

TJ: I guess I might have gotten used to them. No, I don't remember anybody getting hit or anything else. It was probably pretty secure or they wouldn't have had it there.

EM: Right. So what would they do? Send a part of the crew kind of in shifts, or was it a daytrip, or did you --

TJ: Well, we had 2,000 men onboard, so you couldn't send them all at one time. It would have loaded the compound (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

EM: (laughs) That could be a problem.

TJ: So I think we probably went in shifts.

EM: But it was a daytrip type of thing? You were back aboard -

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TJ: Oh, yeah, we were back aboard maybe in a few hours. But it was an interesting experience. And it was good to get off the ship.

EM: Because you really couldn't get off the ship when you were getting the screw repaired down in Manus.

TJ: No, absolutely not. The only thing I did down there was, before I left Hawaii I went over to the electronic-parts store and bought lots...I don't know why. I just bought up a lot of electronic equipment to make radios. In fact, I made myself one. You had to make what they call TRF radios, because all of the superheterodynes had a little local oscillator that could be picked up by the enemy. So you had to have a tuned-radio-frequency radio. So, knowing how to do that, when I got down to the dry dock, a lot of people wanted radios. Somebody told them, "Tom can make them." And so, I made quite a few tuned-radio-frequency radios, and sold them to the guys on that dry dock.

EM: You were a real entrepreneur back then.

TJ: Well, I don't know. I just never had any trouble making money.

EM: Yeah, and you had a skill, too, that was needed.

TJ: Oh, of course, all God-given, I'm sure. So...

EM: So after the R&R in Leyte, I take it Okinawa was next?

TJ: We went directly to Okinawa, and there we sat, off the -- was it Yontan Airport? Whatever it was. They fired everything they could at it (inaudible). They fired land-guided torpedoes, kamikazes. And I didn't have an anti-aircraft station, so a lot of nights I'd just sit up on my battle station and watch these few kamikazes that would get through our outer ring of ships come down. And their favorite target was our hospital ships, which PO-ed me a lot. They weren't supposed to, you know?

EM: Well, yeah, the Geneva Convention didn't get a lot of attention in Tokyo, I don't think.

TJ: No, but here we are, every day, firing and firing and firing. The Marines took the north half of the island, and the troops took the middle and southern half. And, finally, the Marines were turned loose as the war ended on the bottom, south end of the island. And every night we'd load ammunition and food out of three little islands off the coast called Keramo Retto. Today, they only (inaudible) call it Keramo. And the Marines just went in there and, cold turkey, took those islands. And we'd see people coming down -- Japanese -- naked. They looked like they were naked, to the shore, to give themselves up. But the trick was they had satchel charges on their backs. So as our group of Marines would go to take them, prisoners --

we already had quite a few -- they'd blow themselves up trying to kill our Marines. But our Marines, they were really aware of it. But sometimes they'd blow themselves up because their faith was different than ours, and that's what they were supposed to do, you see? But here I am. I had breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and we had midnight supper. And I was so tired a lot of times, because everybody loaded...I don't know if you know this or not. In the Navy, everybody loads ammunition and stores, including the officers.

EM: Didn't know that.

TJ: So we would all load and get ready for the next day. And here it is, midnight, and I'd go to sleep sitting up against the wall, having just had my meal. And this really wore on me. I was so tired, then the next day you'd go shoot up all your bullets --

EM: Now, did that happen in Iwo, as well?

TJ: No.

EM: So this was kind of new then, huh?

TJ: First time. First time. Every time our replacement ship would come, something would happen. They'd get kamikaze-d or something. So here we sat. The data says 75 days. I think it was 72 days. When I looked it up on the internet, it said we were there 75 days. So, it may have

been. But we finally got our replacement. (inaudible) point of us staying. We wore all the rifling out of our guns. We were unable to stabilize the bullets anymore. They [would lob over?]. And so, I (inaudible) where we left because our replacement came, but anyway, the war was at an end. The last firing I remember doing, the Marines called over. We fired wherever they told us. We were sitting off, looking at the south shore. And here were the Japanese in mass retreat to the south end of the island, I guess to regroup. They looked like ants to me. And they'd say --

EM: But you could see them from aboard ship?

TJ: I could. And so, we'd be told to fire, and we'd fire, and it would leave a hole in this retreating bunch of troops. The hole would move right along with it. I don't know how many we must have killed, but we killed lots of them because, at night, they would bury our troops in our graveyard, and there would be maybe 50 new little crosses every morning. This was even before this. And the Japanese bodies were just piled up, I guess because they wanted to get their dog tags or something. I don't know. There just wasn't probably enough people to bury them.

EM: That's right.

TJ: So they finally dug a big trench with a bulldozer, and pushed the bodies in it. Because I'm a mile out, and it was flies so bad that I had to get outside of my compound - - my little group. And the bodies stank a mile at sea. And they just pushed the dirt in on top of them finally. And I guess they must have lost more Japanese -- I don't know this; this is something you probably [want to?] look up -- in Okinawa than in any other battle perhaps. Maybe Iwo they lost as many. But I hated it. When I saw and knew those troops were dead, even though I couldn't see them, I just thank the lord that I wasn't there to see that slaughter.

EM: Well, Okinawa, of course, was the worst of them all. It was a much larger island with a lot more casualties, as well.

TJ: Right. So, we fired on both sides of that island. I guess we must have fired more rounds than any other ship in the Navy. I don't know that for sure, but it seems to me we must have.

EM: Well, if you wore out your riflings, you definitely put a few shells out.

TJ: Right. And then, like I was telling you before, as we returned to Hawaii we didn't have anything to eat except Spam. Our new guns were ready. We were going to install

them all. I guess they did install them all when we got there.

EM: They were probably thinking ahead to the invasion of the Japanese home islands.

TJ: Well, see, Iwo Jima was part of the Japanese mainland. I don't know whether --

EM: Okinawa.

TJ: Okinawa. Well, Iwo was probably, too. So, I just say, hey, going back to hit the mainland? I was really dreading that.

EM: I don't think anybody was looking forward to that.

TJ: And when the bomb was dropped -- woo, [praise the lord?].
(laughs)

EM: So you remember the day the bomb was dropped?

TJ: Oh, boy, do we.

EM: Was there a little bit of celebration?

TJ: I don't know that we celebrated, but we were all grateful. And then we'd begin to bring the troops home from there. We brought --

EM: I guess when you heard about the bomb, you figured at that point there probably wouldn't have to be an invasion, or
(inaudible)?

TJ: Oh, it was announced that there would be no invasion.

EM: Really?

TJ: When they surrendered, yeah. We were there quite a while getting those guns put in.

EM: Now, the *New York* didn't play the role of kind of unofficial hospital ship at Okinawa like she did at Iwo?

TJ: No, no, we had hospital ships there. Their favorite target were the hospital ships, like I mentioned a moment ago. The Japanese loved to hit our hospital ships, which was really sad. And not many of them go through. You know, we had a ring of aircraft carriers and destroyers and things on the outside perimeter, and they shot down as many of those people as they could.

EM: Yeah, and provided picket duty to let them know when they went by.

TJ: Right. While we were there, we were hit by a kamikaze.

EM: I had read that there was a pretty close call on the *New York*. What do you remember about that?

TJ: They laid down a smokescreen every time these suicide planes would come down. And that day I decided I was tired of looking at those kind of things. But the smoke boats would go around and lay down this heavy smoke so you couldn't see the little ships. But ours had masts that stuck out at the top. And as he approached us from the rear -- I've forgotten which kind of plan it was now -- but as he approached us -- it was a fighter plane -- he could

see what he thought was a modern battleship. He was not apparently instructed that we were there. But we had a tripod mast, a short one in the back called the main mast, and the foremast. Well, they stuck up. But as he approached us, they merged, and he thought were a modern battleship. And so, as he approached, he caught his right wing on one of those tripod legs, and it ripped it off, but turned him, so he was turned to go across. Now, he hit his left wing on our [plane on?] the catapult, which was in that middle turret.

EM: This is right in your neighborhood.

TJ: Right. And tore that wing off. The decks were awash with gasoline. Now, where's Tom? I didn't have an antiaircraft station, so at that time, I decided to stay five decks down in the plotting room. But I listened to it all on the speakers, and I was really concerned. They announced that the decks were awash with gasoline, and both of those wings were off of that thing onboard. And he went off the other side with his fuselage, and we recovered him out of the water with his --

EM: The pilot?

TJ: Yeah, we recovered him with his black death shrouds on, and brought him onboard. He was trained -- it turned out -- at some university here in the United States.

EM: You are kidding me!

TJ: And so, we picked him up, brought him onboard. And he said at the last minute he changed his mind, which was a lie. And now, what happened to him I don't know. But I'm sure he was taken prisoner and shipped someplace. But we went up after that, washed the decks. Well, the deckhands did, washed the decks down, cleaned the gasoline off the decks. And the only injury we got out of it was one Marine standing at a 20-millimeter gun on the side that he went off of got his arm broken. (laughter) And me -- I didn't get a chance of getting burned. I wasn't even up there. But I went up with my tin snips, and I've probably got his at home someplace. I cut out part of the meatball -- the red meatball -- out of the wing, and that was my souvenir. But everybody else did that too. So it was quite an experience.

EM: I guess so.

TJ: So, from there, we came home. And like I said --

EM: Eating your Spam with a smile.

TJ: Well, I never (inaudible) Spam since. (laughter)

EM: You don't get that for breakfast every weekend?

TJ: No, and, you know, I didn't talk about this stuff for years, because somebody that hadn't experienced war has no feeling for it. When I'd try to tell my mother, she said,

"Well, you know, we had it tough back here, too. We had rationing." And I just shut up.

EM: That's when you knew there was no use talking about it?

TJ: Just no way to identify with it. I knew she had it tough, in a different way. Then, I don't guess I even talked about it for 15 years at all. And still, until now, I haven't really put it all together. It's just not an experience you want to remember, particularly where people kill people.

EM: Well, no. It's not the thing you go back to and revel in, by any stretch.

TJ: No, and that's the reason I can't take these terrorists that hit our country. Today, 9/11, and all the politics. You know, when politics gets involved in military action, you're in bad trouble. And so, I really empathize with what's going on, and say how blessed we are to be the country we are, and have the ideals we have held to. And now see people trying to destroy our constitution and everything we stand for, wrapped up in politics -- I just...the wife can tell you. I really get PO-ed listening to all of this going on. But that's probably all of my story, except we did make two trips to Los Angeles. And I didn't write this in there, but it was interesting. We arrived in our ship --

EM: Well, I was going to ask you about arrival.

TJ: Oh, there were planes in the sky, "Welcome USS *New York*," with banner. I didn't write this in there.

EM: Really? So where did you come in? Long Beach, then, or...

TJ: Oh, at the Long Beach, but they called it... What was it called? Whatever the harbor is that we were in. I did hunt it up, and it's written in this little report. But as we came in, there was loudspeakers going, people singing, and...

EM: So they did this for every ship that came in (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

TJ: No, no, they didn't. They just did it for us. There was Dinah Shore on a back of a stake-body truck with a Los Angeles police band playing. And they gave us a wonderful greeting home. Joan Leslie finally showed up on the site, because she was engaged to one of our officers.

EM: Who was Joan Leslie?

TJ: She was a movie actor in those days.

EM: Well, I guess I don't remember her.

TJ: A cute little girl. And, oh, you're too young for that. (laughter) But, at any rate, it was there in that Long Beach --

EM: So why do you figure the *New York* got such -- I'm going to use the term -- special treatment?

TJ: I think it was primarily because of Joan Leslie and her --

EM: Connection with the...

TJ: Oh, they closed the Hollywood Canteen and gave us a special night there, and Chill Wills and Bette Davis and all those people were there.

EM: Oh, really? Tell me about that party. That must have been a good one.

TJ: Well, it was. We got to talk to them all. And, of course, they had plenty of food and entertainment, and everybody was trying to talk to everybody. And I was shy in those days. See, I'm not shy now. (laughter)

EM: We wouldn't have noticed.

TJ: But, at any rate, it was a good experience. And the same thing happened when we got to New York. The Stage Door Canteen up there gave us a big celebration when we arrived with the last load of troops.

EM: So, were you part of the magic carpet thing, bringing troops back from the...

TJ: Well, we made two or three trips to Los Angeles.

EM: OK, I didn't understand that.

TJ: Yeah. And I think they took off part of our crew. I happened to be part of it that remained on, but my brother was on Guam while we were there. And we were headed towards the canal on our last trip. And suddenly, here

comes a destroyer with our mail, and there stood my brother.

EM: You are kidding! Is it a small world or what?

TJ: He hadn't been hurt. But as we came into the canal, I said to the Captain, "My brother is on that tin can." And he let me get in my boat and go see him, (crying) which is still a treasure to me.

EM: I bet that felt good to see him, too.

TJ: It was. So, again, in Panama, I saw destitute people. We really don't know what destitute people are in this country. We hear a lot of complaints, but we don't. So I went to Cristóbol and Colón, both ends of that canal. Then we came on up to New York and anchored there. And we anchored, first, out in the bay, and then we anchored off of Jane Street. And I haven't put any of this in this documentation.

EM: That's fine. We're documenting it right now.

TJ: But I had a great time there. People were very nice. I got theater tickets to everything, go in free. I went to see everything going up there, and dated all the girls, mostly just to take them to eat. I had free tickets to eat, free tickets to the theaters. And, finally, they moved our ship. Now, the data I saw on the internet doesn't say this. We moved from New York Harbor to

Philadelphia Navy Yard, to be prepared for the Bikini Atoll test. And they begged me to say. They even offered me an appointment to Annapolis, which I rejected because I was the only Fire Controlman left that knew how to run all the equipment. And so, I just refused it all, and they made me guard German prisoners for, oh, probably two weeks -- this is in there -- in Norfolk, Virginia.

EM: Guard German prisoners?

TJ: That's right.

EM: What kind of an experience was that?

TJ: Well, I was a good shot, you know? The Navy never lets you give up your small-arms capacity. I had to train on that regularly. So I had a little submachine gun. And I had to go out every day and fire that thing, and I was a dead shot. So one of them came up to me and said, "What would you do if I run?" I said, "Try." (laughter)

EM: Now, this is a German?

TJ: German prisoner.

EM: He's speaking English?

TJ: Yes, a lot of them did. In the Philadelphia Navy Yard, the *Prinz Eugen* was parked right across the dock from us. It was a German prize cruiser that we --

EM: Well, of course.

TJ: -- had taken. And they were constantly working and getting that ship going, but it was a real sight to see their families from Philadelphia that come down and visit them on the dock. And they played all this German music too, while they did their painting and the chipping. It had three screws on that ship -- first one I'd ever seen, that prize ship.

EM: I didn't know that they had captured the *Prinz Eugen* and taken it to the States.

TJ: Well, I don't know whether they captured it or it was a surrender. I don't know which.

EM: I didn't think they had any capital ships left after (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TJ: Well, they had this one, and it was beauty. It was one of their advanced cruisers.

EM: Right, absolutely. I mean, she's famous.

TJ: Right. And, you know, my ship, before I got on it, was also in the North Africa campaign and all of that. But it was completely modernized after that. So, I cherished being on the *New York* because it had a lot of history.

EM: Did you get close to some of the other people onboard? I mean --

TJ: Oh, yeah. I had guys that liked me, and some didn't like me. (laughter)

EM: Well, that's probably true of everybody. Did you ever go to any of the reunions after?

TJ: Never was one.

EM: Really?

TJ: Never was one until this joint one with the USS *Texas*. And I do have a hat that says USS *New York* that I picked up over there, but they didn't invite me. I was there without invitation, so to speak. Just took my current wife by to see it. And it's something like [the old?] ship, but that ship, it had turbine engines, and mine had reciprocating engines, which probably saved our life many times. Because I remember torpedoes being fired at us off of Okinawa, and the Captain just ordered left engine right, and right engine left. And we just turned around, and the torpedo -- I sat there and watched it coming at us. And the torpedo just screamed on past us.

EM: And your thinking is that a ship like the *Texas* would (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TJ: Oh, no, you couldn't stop those turbines.

EM: So you were quite a bit more maneuverable, then --

TJ: That's right.

EM: -- because of the type of --

TJ: Type of engine.

EM: -- drive line you had.

TJ: Right. They had the more modern engine, no doubt about it. I don't know what our flank speed was. It was probably somewhere around 40, 45, 50 miles an hour. But theirs was probably a little bit more. But they learned a lot -- those two old ships, plus the *Wyoming* and some of the others that got sunk. And thank God for Roosevelt, who prepared ships before we even knew we were in the war.

EM: Well, he knew it was coming, I guess.

TJ: I guess. But, at any rate, that's probably my story.

EM: So how did it feel coming in, when you saw the coast of the US when you came back from the war?

TJ: I don't know that it...you see, I was at Hawaii. I considered that ours. And, essentially, Panama was ours.

EM: That's true. So it really wasn't --

TJ: Most of my shock was the way other people lived. And when I got down to Panama and found the girls on the street sitting out there with their little brothels on the left, selling their bodies, that shocked me. Now, you don't know these things because you weren't in the military.

EM: Well, I know, but I've heard about them.

TJ: But, you know, the thing is, a lot of women have no other way to earn a living, and I think it's terrible. I just think it's terrible. I'm glad to be living in a day, today, where women can equal men. And I don't like it when

I hear other faiths and religions put women down, like the Muslims. I don't like it a bit. I like to see women equal. God made them equal. Well, some people said, "Oh, no, they made woman for man. They made them out of his rib." Wrong. He made her to be your partner, not your sex object. So, I'm glad we're where we are today with that situation.

EM: After you came back from the war, you mentioned that you pretty much kind of kept it inside and didn't talk about it much. Did it ever bother you, like, at night, with sleeping, or...

TJ: No.

EM: Never woke up --

TJ: Some people, it did.

EM: I know it did some.

TJ: It never bothered me. I just was too busy. See, when I went to the University of Richmond after that -- I think I told you. I left my exiting point. Did I tell you that they wanted to...I had a cyst on my back, on my spine.

EM: No, you didn't tell me.

TJ: Which I got falling down a ladder on the ship, during our battle days. So I was entitled to a Purple Heart, see? And they said, "We're not going to let you out till we operate on that pilonidal cyst, because it was weeping.

That's right on the end of your spine. People have those. And I said, "No, I'm not going to do that. I'm going home." So they said, "OK, no Purple Heart." I said, "Fine, who cares?" And I went from there, being sort of a novice, and also having come through all this experience very bold, I went to the University of Richmond, which was a Baptist university there. And I went straight to see the dean and I said -- this was May -- I said, "I want to be in your university." I didn't ask him. (laughs) I said I want it.

EM: Well, you learned from (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TJ: "I want to be in your university in September." Oh, he laughed and carried on with me and said, "Well, Mr. Jeter, just fill out this paperwork and we'll take it under advisement." Well, in about three or four days I got a notice from him that I wasn't accepted. So --

LOU: He wasn't a high-school graduate.

TJ: But, see, I didn't have a high-school diploma. I was missing it. So, I went to see my pastor, who was my brother's age, and I had known him for a long. And I said, "Look, [L.D.?] -- look at this. They won't let me in their university." So he called his secretary in, and dictated to her a little simple message. Told them that I was an active young person in their church, and had been in World

War II. Do you want to [reconsider?] -- a rethinking of this decision? Now, that wasn't his exact words. Well, I got a telegram -- accepted. So, in the meantime, before I went, I decided to clear everything up. I'd go take that GED, and I [maxed?] it out, which had nothing to do with -- I was already accepted. So, I had 33 months of GI Bill time. My mother was too poor, and I had to make it. So, I went, summer and winter, for the next 24 months, and got degrees in physics, and minored in math. And since then, I haven't stopped going until, yeah, when my former wife died and I stopped right there. But I like to go to school. And I like not only science. I like literature. I, in those days, didn't really appreciate it. But when you think about a guy that, in 1801, Wordsworth wrote a poem that said getting and spending lays waste to all our power. People back then were just like now. Intimations of immortality. Now, Tom Jeter, now, has been through five childhoods. But back in my embers, I'm still a boy, and you're still a boy, and so is [Lou?]. He's getting there. He's bought himself a motor coach. (laughter) Now, I've got one. But, at any rate, we're all here for a purpose. And I've enjoyed it all. Did I ever get a PhD? No. You don't need one. A guy the other night at church said, "Hey, Tom. That guy doesn't even have a degree." I said,

"So what? The smartest physicist that ever lived -- the guy that found the Coriolis force -- didn't even a high-school diploma. So, you know, we ought not hold these worldly standards up. We should let a guy do what he can do, don't you think?"

EM: I agree.

TJ: I did finish all the course work and did all the research for two PhDs. But when it came to giving up my family to go spend time at the University of Virginia to get it, and stand those orals, I said that's not worth it. They paid me max money anyway on my job, where I worked in the research laboratory there at Aberdeen Proving Ground. What was I going to gain by it? Somebody to call me doctor? I don't want to be called doctor. I don't know how you feel about it, but (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

EM: There are a lot of other people who feel differently about that.

TJ: Well, I went to Japan and gave a talk at a big symposium over there, and all these Japanese friends that I had made since World War II, they made me a badge. And it said, "Dr. Thomas R. Jeter." I just called them. I said, "I'm not a doctor." They said, "I know, but the rest of the folks won't want to listen to you unless you've got that 'doctor.'" "

EM: Yeah, that's the truth. And the Germans are bad about that, too. (laughter)

TJ: See? So, it's baloney.

EM: Yeah. Which brings up a question: How do you feel about the Japanese people now, and how did you feel about them after the war was over -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

TJ: Well, when they sent me over there, I really objected to going and giving this talk. I said I just don't like people like that. But they had already been over here, and so, I knew some of them. And I met a guy named Dr. [Takiyama?], and he was a Christian. So, we went out to his house, and his wife showed our wives all of their [OBs?] and things that...they had one room that was all traditional Japanese. But I liked him. He was nice. He was a Christian. And so, I asked him, "How is it that you're a Christian?" He says, "Well, we lived on one of the northern islands, and nobody bothered us." So met a lot of people like that. But they gave me such honors that you won't even believe. The major thought I was a doctor, and he put me on this cruise ship all over Yokohama Harbor and everything. And I wasn't entitled to that, according to their standards. I got to live in a *ryokan* that overlooks the palace over there. So a lot of things have

come my way, and I've enjoyed them all. But I don't hold up worldly standards as being important. And so, that's where the war left me.

EM: Well, that's an interesting story, and I appreciate you giving us your personal insights. That helps make this richer than just shoot-them-up war stories. That's what we've been looking for, and (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TJ: Well, I appreciate you wanting them. And I hope it does somebody some good.

EM: Well, if nothing else, we've captured it, and we know how you guys (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TJ: I'm going to give --

EM: So that (inaudible) with your --

TJ: I'm going to give you this.

EM: That's good (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

TJ: It won't have some of the stuff I've told you, though.

EM: That's fine. That's fine. And one of the things I like to do when we close these tapes is thank you for what you did for our country during World War II. I want to make sure that --

TJ: You know, we don't have any other way.

EM: Well, we still don't do enough of that, and so I just want to thank you again.

TJ: I have a grandson that just got back from Iraq. He'd been over there a year. Now, he has post-traumatic stress disorder, which has almost cost him his life twice since he's been back. Because the military are not taking care of these guys. He was brought back and released when he should have been kept in and treated. Now, twice he's almost gotten killed. They gave him some psychiatric drugs where he was out with his friends in Richmond, on New Year's Eve two years ago. He drank one beer. And they told him no alcohol with this stuff, but he didn't listen. He drank one beer; drove 100 miles an hour; hit a sign out in front of a development; rolled the car over five times; threw him out because his seatbelt wasn't...they came along with the HMS unit, picked him up, and loaded him to take him to the morgue because they'd pronounced him dead. In the HMS unit, he, again, regained consciousness. Now, you'd think that would shake him up, but he went out to Fort Hood, which was his base, to get his belongings. So he was now out. Out there, he fell in a swimming pool. Again, they pronounced him dead, hauled him into Austin to the hospital. His mother was on a rush to get out there, driving from Richmond. And when she got about halfway, he calls and says, "Mom, I'm all right." Now, what's wrong with our military that we're not taking care of their guys?

Now, I should have come [over?] with this, with some post-traumatic stress. I probably did. My doctor says the reason I have had three bypasses and five stents is because, even though my folks live a long time, that does take its toll. Now, I don't know whether that's true or not. I know I'm still here and talking to you. Nothing wrong with brain. And I'm just going to go straight on forward.

EM: That's what you've got to do.

TJ: So, life is life. And will it always be? No. We're living in a very, very temporary world, and I tell my friends at church this. God [knew you?] before the beginning of time. And the scripture, all through it, says what is man that God is mindful? Now, I don't know. I have no idea. I don't know what I was before the beginning of time. But this, I do know. According to physics I learned if time ceased to exist -- and the Bible says it will -- guess what's going to happen to space? Space can't exist. It will just evaporate just like that. And we won't be existent anymore. We'll go back to that Big Bang, which I did take a course from the guy that discovered that.

EM: Really? How interesting.

TJ: Oak Ridge, the institute of nuclear science. He took his computer and rolled it all back into a dot, where God put in the energy. So, again, I've been blessed by having all of these side experiences. Most people never have them.

EM: That's true.

END OF AUDIO FILE