

## Ben Wagner Oral History Interview

ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler, and today is the 26<sup>th</sup> of April, 2010. I'm interviewing Mr. Ben Wagner in Fredericksburg, 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. So let me kick it off by thanking you, Ben, for spending the time today to share your World War II experiences with us, and let's get it started by having you introduce yourself. Tell us when and where you were born, a little bit about your family, and we'll take it from there.

BEN WAGNER: Well, I appreciate your invitation here. This is an opportunity for me to do something I've always wanted to do, and starting I was born in San Antonio, Texas, on May the 16<sup>th</sup>, 1926, and when the war actually started I got Dad's permission to join. I wanted to join, get into the action with my friend, T.A. Geib, a childhood friend I had to mention here.

EM: Well now, what did your dad do for a living?

BW: My father was a building contractor, and he always talked about after the war was over, I'd go in business with him. I didn't accomplish that. I got into engineering, and --

EM: So what building? Commercial building?

BW: Well, I was an architectural engineer and with a degree in that, and I registered as an engineer, but I also wanted to add some architectural background for about seven years when I was living in Austin after I'd left the university -- I had gotten my degree from Texas University of Architecture.

EM: Now, that was after the war, right?

BW: And of course, that was after -- my first year was at Stanford, and then I moved to here, back to Texas, after the war and went to college here.

EM: You say you were born in San Antonio. Now, your mother, she ran the household as was typical back then, while your father worked as a contractor?

BW: Yeah, well my folks were divorced when I was fairly young. I went to about nine years old, eight or nine, and so I was raised by my dad and my [stepfather?], and of course my father had the greatest influence on me. He got me started in building, or helping work with the family business, which was contracting, and he encouraged me to stay in

that, and he was probably the stronger figure in my family for that reason.

EM: Now, did you have brothers and sisters?

BW: I had a sister, one sister, and she became a regular nurse. And in fact, I have to add this about my real mother. She became a WAC in the military, yes, and she stayed in for years, there. I'm sure she was gratified, because I was in the service and my sister was in -- before I was, she's four years older, and so she wanted to get into something meaningful too, and her choice, which I thought was very patriotic, was to join the WACs, even though it was for a short time, and her health was not too good at that time so that might have been curtailed somewhat.

EM: Did she go overseas?

BW: And she never went overseas. My stepbrother, by the way, who was a fighter pilot, flew spitfires and through the Mediterranean campaigns, and I was pretty close to him. He's retired out of the military and had an illustrious (inaudible) colored career, because he was able to get a regular army commission when he had entered the ranks as a PVC in the National Guard, and it worked up. He had a little bit of college, but he must have had a remarkable

career because they didn't let all of them become regular army, which he did, army (inaudible).

EM: So you went to high school and everything in San Antonio?

BW: Right.

EM: And what high school did you go to?

BW: I went to good old Brackenridge.

EM: Brackenridge? Oh, that's an old (inaudible) high school.

BW: Yes, and that name is famous in Texas anyway, Brackenridge; he was a famous man. But the school, which should be famous, because I've seen the list of veterans. It was sent me by one of my ex-groups. I was in the class of '44, of [exits?] from Brackenridge, and I received a list of those people who died in the war, and it was a significant list, and I recognized a lot of names of boys that --

EM: People you knew from high school.

BW: They made darn good soldiers, I tell you. They gave it all.

EM: Now, when did you graduate from high school? What year was it?

BW: I graduated in '44. With my parent's consent, I left a month or so early.

EM: So when the war started, you were a sophomore or something like that in high school, weren't you?

BW: Forty one, yeah, that's right, because '41 to '44 is three years, so I was probably just starting high school at that time.

EM: Do you remember that fateful day on December the 7<sup>th</sup>?

BW: I think we were out playing touch football in our front yard, when the announcement was made, and a buddy of mine down the street and I we were playing some football out there, and it was a day which I've always -- I'd been a history honors student high school. I got to plug my Brackenridge, and I loved history. I mean, Texas history to me was -- I lived there and those missions were within walking distance of my house, most of them, and they were fascinating to me, so they had a good course in Texas history. A good teacher, as well, and history was always something I liked to (inaudible), so I kept up the with the war because I was just keenly interested in that.

EM: So did you see a big change in everything after Pearl Harbor? I mean, peoples' attitudes, peoples' priorities?

BW: The world changed with war, is my attitude, and it's still changing so fast I can't -- it takes 24 hours. But our church tries to keep up with it. I was interviewed by the church not too long ago, kind of like this, and the world changed a lot. It's certainly not the same.

EM: So you stayed in high school and when you got almost of age, old enough to be able to go in, you mentioned earlier that you got some sort of early release --

BW: I went to my dad and said I wanted to join the paratroopers, and he looked and thought -- and, like I said, he was a very powerful influence in my life. And he said, "Well, I don't know." He said, "I tell you what." He knew this other boy was going to join with me, and so forth, and he said, "If you join the Navy, I'll sign it over. I'll sign for you. But not the paratroopers." No way. So, I didn't want to argue about that.

EM: Now tell me about your friend. What was his name, and --

BW: T.A. Geib.

EM: Spell it?

BW: TA, initials. Thomas Alfred. And his last name was Geib, "G-E-I-B." He's now a widower out living in [Maryland?] and I talked to him. He's one of the few people, unfortunately, that I'm able to keep tab of, because he called me about four years ago.

EM: Out of the blue, huh?

BW: Out of the blue, and I keep telling him things that we did, and he cannot remember. But I guess that's not unusual for 84 or 85 year old people.

EM: Well, that's true. Some earlier than that.

BW: He knows a lot of things, but a lot of the details -- we're real close, joined together, planned it together. We used to box at the Y in San Antonio.

EM: Was he the same age as you, or was he older?

BW: Very nearly. Maybe a few months younger.

EM: He was a few months younger. So he had to get his parents to sign off also.

BW: Very much so, and he had a stepfather who was pretty lenient, you know, went along with it, and so did his mother, and so he was quite happy to follow through. We got separated in boot camp in Wallace, Texas, which is where we were sent directly after our going through induction, but something happened in the induction. He tells me a different story every time I talk to him. He's a little bit senile, but I remember the truth first time he told me, so I have a lead on it. And so the first time, he joined, was going through induction. They run you like cattle through there. They shave your hair, throw the clothes at you.

EM: Put needles in both arms as you go through, yeah.

BW: So anyway, I wondered what happened to him because when I got to Wallace, Camp Wallace the boot camp, I couldn't find

T.A., and he had been behind me, going through that line back at induction. And what happened, this is the original story of his, was that they got his urinal test mixed up and it caused him to be thrown back several companies, which sounds very logical because one day he comes strolling over to my boot camp. I mean, my barracks at the boot camp, as they (inaudible) out there at Wallace, and we had a short visit and that was the last time I saw him, until you see that little picture I gave you, and that's where I met him when I was going on a [church?] party. I think it's Ulithi harbor, and his [tender?], which was a mine sweep by then, he'd gone to mine sweep school, was one of those tied up to that tender.

EM: And you had no idea he was on that ship, and he didn't -

BW: Well, as our wheel boat pulled up for the visit, I saw the number of his (inaudible) in tandem, all tied at the tender to the mothership. And (inaudible), said, "Well gosh, that's T.A." And that was an opportunity I couldn't turn down, so after the service I monkeyed on down. You had to cross these ships, but they're tied side to side, and I visited with him and then I finally got back to my ship at the end of the day. There was an air raid where [boogey?] came over, and I couldn't get a boat back because they



called general quarters, all shifts alert, and so by nightfall his skipper was a pretty ingenious fellow, he got me a boat that would take me back. And the only thing I got was a fairly light admonishment from my [chief?], because (inaudible). He had his dress (inaudible) on, he was waiting. I knew him personally. I was directly under him, in the number one engine room, so I figured if anybody'd give me a fair deal he would, and he did.

EM: Well now, so Camp Wallace. You went through boot camp there; you survived boot camp.

BW: I survived boot camp. I sure did.

EM: So where did they send you after that?

BW: The idea was to give us a lot of amphibious training, so I was put in charge of a squad in my boot company, and I guess, what is there, 40 men, or 50, and --

EM: Why did they pick you?

BW: Well, I had a little ROTC training in (inaudible), back in Brackenridge, and I think they knew I knew how to call signals and they knew that, because I was over some men, they were (inaudible). And to see them up there bouncing up and down at 50, I even had some reserve about too much rigors of that, because e--

EM: They were that old?

BW: Well, now I think they took them up to 45 or something, and these men had families, some of them did, and most of them were probably very young. Some very young, like me, and most of them were, but there were those that had families, and so I was filling in with those boots, and that Camp Wallace, and then they were sent -- the largest part of that training facility were put on a [true?] train and sent to Norfolk, Virginia. We went through the south, which was quite a trip for me because I'd never taken a train trip through the southern part, and it still looked like Civil War days, as far as some of those old buildings.

EM: Yeah, magnolia trees and white picket fences, and all that stuff.

BW: Everybody came out, I can remember, and they'd wave at you and the girls were very friendly, give you cookies and candies, I remember. Because this was a fairly long [troop?] train, you know.

EM: Yeah, it's a long trip.

BW: And everyone backed the war, of course, and it was quite a thing. And so, next location was of course Norfolk, the naval base which of course I had never seen before, either. After spending about a night there, a night or two nights, I recall, we stayed in the barracks and they called us out,

mustered us early that morning, and put us on a cattle truck. Or at least, most of my boot company was put on this cattle truck, which is a standard means of dispersing men on the base, and they went down the dock where I could see enormous carriers and huge ships that I'd never seen the likes of.

EM: That must have been impressive.

BW: It was awe-inspiring to me. You'd look up and you had to cock your head to see the top of these ships, and I had never seen anything like that in my life. And they kept going, and they stopped when they'd come to this ship that the story's about, the USS *Mount Hood*, and I can remember when the truck stopped there, some of the men said, (inaudible). Looking at that rather fearsomely. I mean, they were a little bit frightened, (inaudible).

EM: Because they knew what it was, huh?

BW: Oh, yeah. It had the number on it.

EM: It's your basic ammunition ship, huh?

BW: It was the lead ammunition ship of the United States. It was built commercially, but the Navy leased it and converted it. I guess that was standard practice, getting ships, and so they began calling off names in alphabetical order, and they went all the way to the Vs, starting with

A, and these fellows picked up their sea bag, went up the ramp to the hood, and --

EM: You knew these guys, a lot of these guys. You knew these guys, personally.

BW: Yeah, I'd gone through 13 weeks of boot training with all of them, and some of them are very close friends. I was on the boxing team and some other things there, and I knew them just from being in boot camp. So that lightened our group that was going down, so there was only about maybe 10 or 12 left, which was people starting with an initial V. Of course, I'm Wagner so I was one of the first to get off when they got to the ESS *Howard F. Clark*.

EM: Now, what was the Clark's DE number?

BW: D5-33.

EM: Five-three-three.

BW: Yeah, and the hood was A-11. AE-11, uh-huh. And so, then, of course, called off the names of those who were going to be on the Clark, which included myself, and I can remember there were two people left. They were assigned to a submarine, as I was told. Of course, that was the last of us [who on my truck?]. And they embarked on their ship after I'd already been assigned, with my [tin?] to the Clark.

EM: So the assignment to a ship was random. It was alphabetical. Nobody said, "Anybody want an ammunition ship?" Nobody said, "How about a DE?" Because everybody, I guess, would want to be on a battlegon or a carrier.

BW: Well, not me. I didn't want a huge ship. It's an entirely different discipline. You don't sloop, and the officers, they stay rather separate from you anyway, and your duties, and then your everyday chores or whatever that is. And I looked down and I thought, "Oh gosh, that's small compared to what I've been looking at going down that dock." But it was not real small. It was a 200 man crew, and it was over 200 feet long.

EM: This is the DE?

BW: Yeah, a typical DE which they made 500 of these ships during the war because England was losing the war due to submarine warfare, and we knew we were going to have to cope with [ammo?] more than our Allies had built. There were about 600 of them. Some the free French got [to understand?] too, as well as the British, so that suited me OK to get on that. I kind of looked over the crew and everything. I noticed they were very informal, dungarees and all, and you could tell -- and on a battleship, of

course, everybody stays in pretty formal manners with uniforms and so forth.

EM: It's almost like being in a big city when you're on the battleship.

BW: Yeah, Marines are watching over your -- making sure you do what you -- we didn't have that at all, and so we had good camaraderie among our [company?]. We stayed in Pearl. We had an accident, a relatively (inaudible). We rammed a carrier.

EM: Where did that happen?

BW: Training ship in the Hawaiian islands.

EM: OK, so this is after you got to the Hawaiian islands.

BW: Oh yeah. We went through the canal.

EM: How long were you in Norfolk with your new ship before she set sail? Was that pretty quick, or did you have a training period?

BW: Both of our ships left on about the 14<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> period, and that squares with what I read about it, too. So we left to get the (inaudible) together. The count I had was (inaudible) that the ammunition ship was already loaded with ammunition, and she was just fresh paint, first time she'd ever gone out on a mission.

EM: So she was a new ship.

BW: And the (inaudible), both.

EM: Both of them were brand new. I didn't realize that, OK.

BW: And we bowl up together, and of course as I told you I went to the [Hawaiian?] islands, and we were training with the aircraft carrier, *Saratoga*.

EM: Are they just the two ships, going to together, or are there other ships?

BW: Yeah, that's the way it goes in the Pearl, yeah. AT Pearl we were operating primarily as a training ship for the [Sara?]. We'd pick up their pilots in the event that they were in a state of emergency. In other words, missed the deck, or whatever, and to give escort service and stuff. There were submarines, you know.

EM: Which aircraft carrier are we talking about?

BW: The *Howard F. Clark*. No, I'm sorry, a CV3 *Saratoga*.

EM: *Saratoga*. Called her the *Sara*, well I figure --

BW: And we would have probably made the Leyte operation had it not been for that goof, or whatever you want to call it, because we did get some new officers after that, and we were ready to get into the war, by then, starting to end.

EM: Now, how did that happen, you running into the aircraft carriers?

BW: Well, what I know about that -- of course, I was in my bunk. It was a night which you might, therefore, say that there wasn't good visibility, and how I knew it was that all of a sudden there was a thud, might have sent a jolt through the ship. Me in my bunk, it woke me up I think, and everybody was getting out of bunk, getting their clothes on. Because general quarters was sounded at practically right away, and so that meant I had to be up on a 20 millimeter gun. That was my battle station, and so I did that as quick as I could, and all of a sudden the rumor kind of went around. The scuttlebutt, as you say in the Navy, the word around the boat were that (inaudible) still dark, was that we had rammed the *Sara*, and we couldn't see her, so it must have been a very dark night.

EM: No moon, huh?

BW: That's right. So we had to go back and go on dry dock for a month, and no one was hurt.

EM: No particular damage to either ship?

BW: Oh yeah. We had to get a new bow. And they made it right there in Pearl. They repaired us right there, so I thought we'd go back States now, but that didn't happen. They sent us to the war zone.

EM: You weren't getting off the hook that easy.



BW: That's right, and we were ready for something a little more exciting. I'd seen Pearl and I'd seen Hawaii, and it was a good place to visit but I didn't want to spend the war there. I wanted to see more action than that.

EM: So did it take a long time to repair her, or --

BW: It really didn't. Like I say, it must have happened -- got out of (inaudible) in August, I think, August, September. I think it must have been September or something like that that we rammed her, and by Christmas, that'd be November, December, we were headed toward the war zone with a new bow. And the *Sara*, didn't keep up with her but they'd fixed her up too, because I heard she was in some battles after that.

EM: That must not have done a lot of damage to a big ship like that.

BW: It put a large gap in her. See, we hit her broadside.

EM: You T-boned her, huh?

BW: Yeah. It was [one?] that we didn't [want?], so maybe it depreciated quite a shuffling of officers after that.

EM: So there was a fair change of personnel in the officer's ranks at that point?

BW: At the top. We were squadron leader. We had a commodore.

EM: On board?

BW: As well as another -- yeah. We were flagship of our unit.

EM: What unit was that?

BW: I don't remember which one it was, but we were flagship and the commodore was aboard and he and the skipper were very good friends. Until the accident, and then of course they reassigned those people.

EM: They were gone.

BW: Gone.

EM: So you got a new captain.

BW: Captain Miller was his name, because he was a real starchy guy. I mean, he was disciplined and he kind of turned things around a little bit.

EM: So he kind of shaped everybody up a little bit, huh?

BW: Yeah, yeah he did, and he made sure that we had a tight ship. Not that those other guys didn't, because what happened on our ramming, I guess, could have happened in any case, but we have radar and all that though. But a ramming in the Navy is not very unusual, I found out. Well, I read of numerous others. I've kind of done some reading on naval history, and of course it's unfortunate when it happened to my ship and our ship and then the *Hood*, because it meant we were, of course, (inaudible), because the aircraft carrier was always out there. I think she

zigzagged some, but we were always going zigzag because submarines. So, an event like that at night, you just make one mistake and I guess that's it.

EM: Now, so after you got the new bow, off to the war zone. And so what was your first port of call, or your first destination?

BW: I remember it was Christmas Day, and we had -- at sea -- going to the war zone, and the first port was, believe it or not, Manus Harbor which was where the *Hood* had blown up. We spent about one or two nights there because we could see they were getting the flotilla ready for the invasion of Luzon, and I think they were beginning to muster or to form that flotilla of ships for the Luzon landing at that time. Now, I didn't know anything about the explosion there, because I'm not sure. It was in November, November 10<sup>th</sup> that the *Hood* blew up, and we were there, gosh, right after Christmas.

EM: So you were there six weeks later.

BW: Yeah, about six weeks. And the fleet, when it went in there, was very modest. It was not loaded with ships, like you'd expect of a naval base. It was called [verlander?] or something, I forgot the name. The name of the harbor,

but it was really on the island of Manus and so people just called it Manus.

EM: Manus is a fairly small island?

BW: It is pretty small, and I'm sure [Copra Cove?] and things like that were the [chief occupation?].

EM: So there were native inhabitants, commercial operations there?

BW: I think it was there that some of the native came by, trying to sell -- they'd give you a beautiful little outrigger canoes that they'd hand-carved for a mattress cover. But I didn't want to trade my mattress cover; I only had one. But what we call fuzzy-wuzzies. I mean, they had big, bushy heads of hair, and their teeth was filed sharp.

EM: Teeth are filed sharp! Really?

BW: And they were in these outriggers as they came out to the ship to do some trading with us, and so I remember for the first time I saw some real native Polynesians.

EM: The real deal.

BW: They looked like they came out of the jungle someplace there, you know.

EM: Like on a movie set or something.

BW: Yeah, that's right. And so, Manus, that's about all I remembered of Manus. It wasn't impressive as huge naval base, because it wasn't a lot. You could just see jungles all around you on the shoreline, and so we went on to make up formation for the invasion of Luzon from there, and our destination was next Peleliu. We (inaudible) the Palau group of islands, was made up of three islands.

Babulthuap, Peleliu, and Angaur. And the Japanese still [in on the wheel?]. The (inaudible) was formed, this segment of islands that make anchors if you were in the middle anchors, and they half controlled entrance and out. Americans had already taken all of the islands except Angaur, and we'd watch the rains go up the (inaudible) because they were doing fishing, and the rains would make it difficult for them to get any.

EM: To feed themselves by fishing, yeah.

BW: Because at night, these people were active. They'd get on boats and try to board some of the ships, and we were supposed to double guard, or something like that, because they were still coming off. They still held the island of Babulthuap, probably the size of a forest, and the Navy just left them there as long as they could contain them. So they just told everybody to post a guard at night.

EM: I guess that was one of those islands that we just skipped, as we were working our way through.

BW: Some people, they wonder why we took it because it was a very vicious battle, Peleliu. I've talked to Marines that were on that island, and they said it was just terrible.

EM: Maybe it wasn't worth it.

BW: Yeah, well they thought so.

EM: That was kind of a last stop before the Philippines, wasn't it?

BW: Yeah. We were beginning to get that formation going, and so we didn't stay there too long and we embarked then with the fleet. We got together with the fleet. It was a very colorful combination. They had Australians, Dutch, English, and I'm not sure about English, but I've seen the Australian flag and Dutch. Some of them were World War I vintage craft. You know, not all of them. Some of them were pretty fast landing ships, from what I've been told, because we accompanied that convoy through the Philippines, which was an interesting voyage. At night, you would see thousands of lights, as you went through these islands. And the Philippines is nothing but a network of islands, and what that was, was natives were going on as though there was no war. They were out there fishing with the

lights on, with these little boats, and the lights  
(inaudible).

EM: Now, this was still Japanese held, the areas you were going  
by, or not?

BW: Well, (inaudible) certainly wasn't because that's the one  
we were going to attack. Leyte was pretty well secured,  
and they fought some wars on other islands. I think they  
had secured about half of them. Well, probably not quite,  
because Luzon was the biggest.

EM: And Luzon hadn't fallen yet.

BW: No, we had not made any landing yet. MacArthur returned  
first at Leyte and then the next big invasion was our fleet  
that made the landing. And he always said he'd come back,  
you know. Or came back officially, the big island. And  
they had other ships.

EM: Were you in that fleet then, when MacArthur --

BW: Yeah I was, but the way that did with our ship and a lot of  
the other escorts, they would pull those ships back so we  
couldn't see, but we were out there to defend all the subs  
and aircraft, and that's when they were starting to use  
suicide planes and it was going through that, our first  
aerial battle was (inaudible) Luzon, when we shot down two

and a possible third ship in a matter of minutes, three or four minutes.

EM: Now, you were on a 20-millimeter AA battery, right?

BW: Right.

EM: So tell me what it's like to shoot down enemy aircraft.

BW: Well, I never actually shot one down. I shot a lot of [mines?]. Unfortunately, at that battle I'm describing, the one where we invaded Luzon, I was on the port side right by the stack, and we had one stack under the (inaudible) and it's large. Two bowlers for it. And every time we'd have general quarters, I would be down in that engine room directly below, and of course I was directly under the [teeth?]. I was very much in charge of the engineering spaces, and so whenever they would have one, I would have to go up that vertical ladder to get out of there to get up on the gun, which was directly above, as it's one of the taller guns. Mounted high, and (inaudible), but unfortunately when the battle started, because the [TV?] said always, "Don't let those rascals get you," so I went up the ladder because he'd had a scary experience. He'd been through the Canal of Gibraltar and places like that, and he saw a lookout sleeping one day and there was a sub sitting out there, so he was wary, and he



was a really professional gentleman and all that. A great Navy man, whenever there was anything. To repair (inaudible), he was there doing it, playing a big part. So he'd always give me a pat on the back so I could still get up there. "Make sure you get on up." But when the battle came, unfortunately, they came in from the starboard side and here I was facing the port side. I could see the battle over there. They were shooting. The battleships were trying to blow them out of the sky, and all kinds of fighting going on, but I often thought, why'd they put those ships so far apart? But it's so the artillery and stuff don't bang into each other.

EM: You're going to end up shooting each other up. They put a real wall of lead up, didn't they? For those kamikazes.

BW: It was just a ring of escorts like ours around the fleet, and that serves well to knock down those Japanese planes because to use their torpedoes, they have to come -- they can't dive. They're not dive bombers.

EM: Right, they come in level.

BW: Yeah, and so as I say, we knocked down two and a possible third, but they were knocked down.

EM: Now, they weren't kamikaze, they were attack planes?

BW: They were [gills?] I believe, which carry torpedoes. They looked to me like those planes were laboring to maneuver. They've got a big torpedo; you can see it on them, and they're terrible torpedoes, and you can see them and they look like they were single engine, you know. The reason I saw one very close, our ship turned out of the line of escort and we veered I think, to the left, which is port, and I looked back, I saw a torpedo going by, and the plane, too. So I guess that plane apparently went on in, but it got a lot of shots fired at it and it probably got hit. Most of them were knocked down before they got into the fleet. We had these wildcat fighters that were launched off the baby carriers, and they were following them and we had to quit firing sometimes for fear of hitting them, because they would follow those Japanese planes and knock down all they could. Their job was to (inaudible) protect them, and so that was the end of that campaign, and I have to probably explain here that I was, at this point, I was in charge of the engineer store room, and (inaudible) import was to go over and get spare parts for our turbines and all our machinery we operated with. We were getting, at this time, to bring you up on the events, we were getting letters on our ship accruing from, say, I remember

in particular the head of a compliment of men, was (inaudible), over in my boot company, they went aboard. They were getting some letters from loved ones of these men that had been assigned to the *Hood*, and were not getting answers so they were writing us to let our men that were friends of theirs see if they had any information. We didn't, at first, but I was getting back to my job as a spare parts, in charge of the engineer room. I'd often go to other vessels to get these, and I made a habit of asking questions about this *Hood* and I remember one of them, in the *Ulithi*, and I asked one of the seamen that was one it, one of these vessels that had spare parts, and asking about the *Mount Hood*, and he looked at that and we were a little bit startled and said, "Well yeah, she blew up in Pearl Harbor." In Manus Harbor, excuse me.

EM: And you had found that out when your ship was in Manus Harbor, you found out about the *Hood*.

BW: Well no. I had no contact outside of our own ship, so I had no opportunity. In other words, I wasn't set out then for spare parts. We only spent one night there, and then it was just a short time. I think we were getting ready to move to Peleliu and then up. It was a big formation that was taking place, slowly. And so, I did get the word about

what had happened. This man, this seaman or this merchant man, I think it was Ulithi Harbor, told me that yeah, he knew that the *Mount Hood* had blown up, all hands lost, which was kind of a shock to me.

EM: That's the first time you knew about it?

BW: Yeah, and that had to be February or something like that. November was when it blew up, so November, December, January -- it had to be three months after it blew up, or something like that. The ship had a very short life, I think, if you figure the time it left Pearl to the time it blew up was only about three months.

EM: Yeah, she was practically brand new.

BW: She was practically brand new, and first real major cruise I think that it made, and it had blown up in Manus Harbor. And so, of course I told our guys from Louisiana and the others what had happened to those sailors that we'd just let off our transport over back in (inaudible), not too many months prior, and of course it was a sad story. They were going to [grieve?] (inaudible) about that.

EM: Did this contact, where you first heard about it, did he have any of the details? All he knew is that she had blown up in harbor, all hands lost?

BW: This informant that I met on -- yeah, that was the first -- nobody knew anything.

EM: Because it was quite secret, I guess.

BW: It must have been total secret, that's right, because nobody knew anything about it, that I knew of, before. Of course, once you're on a ship they don't let you off all the time, but I was just lucky enough to have that job and to ask the right questions, or I might have been waiting a lot longer to know what happened to those seamen. At any rate, we went ahead and finished the war. The *Clark* made that campaign -- my ship - and went on to make the landing at Iwo Jima, and we were there about a month. Then the last campaign I was participating in was the one at Okinawa. We made two trips up to Okinawa. We could only stay out about 30 days, then we had to go in for ammunition, food, fuel, you know, and clean the [bowlers?], always. It's ongoing.

EM: So your ship's role in most of these landings was almost like picket duty, kind of protecting the larger ships.

BW: Yeah.

EM: Watching for subs, and --

BW: We did not go in on landings, like a gunship, or rocket ships, or (inaudible). We were back, and sometimes we'd

escort -- like in Iwo Jima, there would be the hospital ship. They're all illuminated at night, and Iwo Jima was a different campaign for our ship because I can distinctly remember at night I'd come out of that engine room and I have a buddy by the name of Sawyer from Philadelphia. He was in the boiler room, I was engine room. We would go up topside to cool off. It's always hot down there. And we'd look at Iwo Jima and it was a very dramatic sight, because where we were out they would fight. We could see they were fighting all night, because the island was completely illuminated all night, if you can imagine.

EM: Star shells.

BW: So it was constant battle, and it was a battle. Chesty Miller, or whatever his name was, was in charge of those Marines, said they could take it in a couple of weeks. No way, no way. They were fighting there 30 days afterwards, and it was very tough because it would be a terrible place to have to -- you could land on the beaches, and in our church I met a pilot that got back. (inaudible) recently current story, and he was going with a girl in our church, and he had been to Iwo Jima. The Navy just sent him there on mission, just observation and so forth. He had samples of Iwo Jima sand and he gave me one, and it's something

you'd put in an hourglass. You can't dig a foxhole in it. So where do you go? There's no place to hide. So from what I heard --

EM: It's real steep.

BW: And I had a roommate that was shot through the arm, when I went to Texas. He was a Marine on a machine gun. He got caught going down a hill, and he got out of that campaign in a hurry, and it put him out of commission, there. It didn't break -- went through the fleshy part of his arm.

EM: He's lucky. Could you hear the ongoing battle? Or it was just a visual thing on the horizon?

BW: Very visual, very. That's what made it so dramatic. You'd see a whole island. We're used to islands; that's all we see out there, practically, but you'd look at it at night when you'd come out of that engine room and it was always the same thing. The whole island. Suribachi was the big -- where they had tunneled in, and artillery fired out, and we had battleships that just backed up to that mountain, firing point black, dueling back and forth. That went on all day. You could see that, too, but they were big ships. Battleships firing into a mountain. You can't miss that, so...it was full of Japs and they had their artillery on tracks so they could move it around. So, but at night it

was the most dramatic because you'd come out and you'd see an island eight miles long completely illuminated -- and it kind of had a golden look, I don't know why --

EM: Like a football field or something.

BW: Yeah, and of course the only ship -- there are escort ships -- and the *Mercy*, or one of those Navy hospital ships, was out there completely illuminated. Nobody's supposed to shoot at those.

EM: But did they?

BW: Never heard of it. Never heard of it. Because they probably took a few [Japs?] out there. Not all of them, but most of them were killed, but there were some that would be lucky enough to find a generous captor, or something.

EM: Now, did you experience any air raids or kamikazes, or did you fend off aircraft during the Iwo Jima campaign?

BW: On this trip? With that trip, Luzon, if you look at the map, is one of the top, big islands, so we had to steam through one of the passes. I don't know if it was [Surigai?] or -- and we went through the islands and saw all these natives in boats, and all that, saw more islands than I ever saw in my life. Little pieces made up just hundreds of them. And we went north, then. Well, that's



when the Japanese started throwing these air attacks at us. They had plenty of air fields, and they had knocked them all out. (inaudible) there was a carrier called the *Omanney Bay*. It was in that group, a baby, we call flat top, CV, and it was attacked by Japanese planes, and by the way, one of the pilots lived across the street from me and died about three years ago. His name was George Schaefer, and George told me this story himself, because what I saw was -- I could see more than he could see, I think. Our ship had to pull up to him because *Omanney Bay*, she was hit with what he said, I think, was a dive bomber that followed him back in. They had made a raid. I think they flew little wild cats off those, and he was coming in. He came in -- the sun was to their back, so it blinded the pilots. They couldn't see him, or maybe they weren't looking. But at any rate, they made their landing (inaudible), and that ship followed them in and somehow put a fatal wound by hitting the deck. She was sitting out there burning, and the Navy wanted to sink her. They don't like to leave her after you get the men off, and we were there long enough to see them having a last rights. They were firing guns and dropping off the dead, you know how they do at sea, and

this is all taking place rather rapidly because she was burning and we had to get the heck out of there.

EM: What was the name of the ship?

BW: The *Omanney Bay*. CVE. And we had to get out, get back to our unit in a hurry. So what they did, instead of staying there and putting a torpedo, like they had a destroyer that accompanied us, and it sank the *Omanney Bay*, after it burned a while. George told me there were a lot of survivors, so they didn't lose all their men, but he was kind of modest. All these guys are, talking about that. But I know they launched some dead off of it, and it wasn't our job to sink it, as it turned out. I didn't want the job of sinking an American ship, even if it was burning.

EM: Pretty tough to do, huh.

BW: So we had torpedoes; we could do it, but we went back and joined the formation, and that was pretty much described the type of action that we had. Going through that was the most -- it was hard for us to knock out all the air craft, because the Philippines is such a big place. They could build them, camouflage them, or whatever.

EM: Right, all kinds of little nooks and crannies where they could hole up and you wouldn't know they were there.

BW: In fact, my wife's stepfather was on Luzon when the Japanese took it, and he was very fortunate to get on the [tin can?] that got him out of that place.

EM: So he didn't end up in a prison camp?

BW: Yeah, and he kind of shook when he told that story, I heard it. Because I don't know if he ever talks -- there's one case I know where I talked to a survivor of that thing, and I was seeing him up in Texas. There was one guy that was a survivor, and it did something to their mentality at that [age?]. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Forever, yeah.

EM: So, during the Iwo Jima campaign, did you experience a lot of air craft attacking your ship, or not?

BW: We didn't, and I tell you, I think the reason why. Because I know they attacked, and it's just that they attacked -- oh, at Iwo Jima, yeah. I was getting that mixed up with Okinawa.

EM: Okinawa's next.

BW: No. We didn't experience a lot of that. I don't know, but maybe we were already starting that picket line. We put a picket line of just [chargers?] right above Okinawa, and it was because I think we knew we were going to take it next, and they didn't want too many reinforcements. They had

enough Japanese on that island, and so we captured that air strip. Not so awful long after we landed.

EM: Now, this is Okinawa or Iwo?

BW: This is back at Iwo, because they wanted to get those bombers on the base. They'd still shoot at them sometimes when they'd bring them in. But no, we saw no real action in Iwo or Okinawa, either one. By Okinawa, I'm sure we had a picket line which we weren't on, thank goodness.

EM: Yeah, because they really caught it up there on the picket line.

BW: They lost a lot. But they were dive bombing, and knocking out destroyers and other ships at that time. They had started, and (inaudible) scale by the time Okinawa came along.

EM: I think Okinawa, they lost more naval sailors and ships than any other conflict in the history of the US Navy.

BW: I think that's right.

EM: So I know it was rough, but fortunately not for you.

BW: How many destroyers -- and I could see them being towed in, and I went aboard with one of them, just out of curiosity. But where it hit, the kamikaze had hit just forward of the bridge and took and put a hole big enough for a pick-up

truck. Right down to the guts, the engine room and all that.

EM: Now, where did you see this ship? This was during the Okinawa campaign, they towed her in?

BW: Yeah, because we'd always come back to Ulithi and I think they were towing them back into Ulithi for repairs, because they tried to save those ships if they could. Of course, the *Franklin*, you remember, was one that took a lot of damage, but the destroyers in particular. We had a big loss of destroyers in Okinawa.

EM: Now, could you see the island of Okinawa like you could see Iwo Jima?

BW: No. Their size is not really comparable. Okinawa must be 200 miles, I'm guessing.

EM: Yeah, that's a huge island compared.

BW: Eight miles is not so terribly (inaudible), and we were out I'd say, what, three miles or something like that, at Iwo Jima. We can only stay out a month, and then we would have to go back in to get --

EM: And Ulithi was kind of where you were operating out of, from a supply standpoint?

BW: Practically all the time, except when I left the ship, now, which was in about July of '45. Then, we left from

Okinawa. But no, to Guam, excuse me. I'll get straight in a minute. Guam, because we didn't normally go into Guam. I think it might have been the second time we went in there, because I remember the first time we used the swimming facilities and stuff like that. It was still -- well, the beach, they just rope off the beach and let the Navy use it. But there were still some [ordinance?] laying around, because one of the sailors, I remember, picked up one of those torches. A pyrotechnic, you know, and the darn thing went off in his hand and he was human flesh, burning, and he had sense enough to run for the water, because it was on the beach. If it hadn't been that, I think he'd have died. But there's always some danger, going into places. The Japs still have men that came out of the jungles, just kind of like South Texas, that would not surrender.

EM: They hung on for years and years, on some of the islands.

BW: That's right. As I said, it was from Guam that I took the trip back to the States one day. The officer -- well, I was first interviewed by the skipper. You don't get an interview every day from a skipper. I crawled up on a whale boat. It was on the side of our ship. It was our life boat, really, and my job was to kick it over once a

day to make sure the engine was running and ready if we needed it. I remember, I crawled out on the outboard side of the boom, and you're not supposed to do that. That's one regulation -- and then somebody saw me. The (inaudible) said, "Come on up here. We want to talk to you." And when I went up there, of course, he's more serious. He wanted to interview me on going back to the States, and they gave me a very short interview but it was one I guess I'll never forget. He asked me about hobbies I had, which was raising (inaudible) pigeons, and would [work which job?] I was done, because I was always near construction. Things like that, just personal things.

EM: Why did they want to know about your hobbies?

BW: I wondered about that all these years. (laughter) I told him what my father had given me, 26 pigeons for my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, I believe, and by the time I left the Navy I had 200 birds.

EM: That's funny how that works. (laughter)

BW: It really is. I think maybe that's why he approved me, or something. He liked the story. But so, I heard nothing from him for a while. We went on at least one more tour, and we came in and one day I noticed the engineering officer was out there on the lifeline, and the side of the

ship where I usually came up out of the engine room, I think he was probably waiting for me, I guess. He called me over and said, "Well, pack your sea bag. You're going back tomorrow. Be ready to leave." So I barely had time to pass the word around with the crew.

EM: What were you going back for?

BW: The Navy was beginning a program where they would take candidates for officer from the ships, been in the action out there, and of course I had been on the ship out there for nearly a year, not quite. So they made their selection of, I guess, younger guys because that's what they wanted. My roommate at Stanford, which is where the Navy sent us eventually, he was about 30, and he was probably the oldest. Maybe he wasn't, but he looked like he was 30, but remember, I told you, as I said, they dropped the bomb before I got to Stanford, and a lot of them took discharges because they just wanted out of the service to get -- and I wasn't one of those. I was glad to get a year of college out there to kind of prep me or going back to Texas for engineering, I knew, and --

EM: So you were at Stanford for a year?

BW: Yeah, for one academic year, that's right. It was a quarter system they had.



EM: And you really didn't start until after the war was over, there.

BW: That's right. I was up in Coeur d'Alene. I came back from Guam, they gave us 10-day leave, me and some other sailors. Went to Yosemite, which is a beautiful place to spend some time, and then reported and [carted?] some orders up in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, which is a big prison for German war prisoners and had been used as a hospital -- it was being used as a hospital, but it had been used as a boot camp. But as I understand it, it was a failure as a boot camp because the epidemic of flu broke around. And they said Eleanor Roosevelt picked that out, (inaudible). But it was not a good place for a boot camp in the wintertime. Beautiful country. You been up there much?

EM: Yes, I have.

BW: It's rolling and beautiful and the deer -- we'd go on this base and these huge deer would come out and eat candy out of your hand. It was the most park-like base I'd seen up to that time.

EM: Better than most of them.

BW: Huh?

EM: Better than most of them, I guess.

BW: Yeah, better than most, a lot of your naval bases. They're not particularly --

EM: So you opted out, and decided you'd become a civilian again, is that correct?

BW: Well, at the end of one year, they gave us all a choice. We could take an exam for Annapolis or Quantico, if we wanted to, and it would probably have been a good time for me to take it if I was interested, but I always remembered what my dad said, that we were going to go into contracting business after the war. For that reason, even one of the officers was asking me -- staff officers there at Stanford -- "Why don't you consider the Navy?" He was just giving me some fatherly advice. "It's a good career." Apparently he liked it. It was Commander (inaudible) was his name, and he took kind of a personal interest, said, "Why don't you do that?" And I said, "Well, I already promised my dad I was going to go in business with him back in San Antonio," so I told him I probably would not take that choice and I didn't. I took a discharge out of Bakersville, California, which is about 100 or so miles from Stanford. Took a bus home, and that ended my Navy --

EM: The rest is history, huh?

BW: The rest is history.

EM: Well, I know you've got a particular interest in the *Mount Hood* and what happened to it, and I know you've looked into it quite a bit. I was just wondering if you might spend a few minutes here telling us what your research has shown you, told you about the ship. I think we understand why you were so interested in it.

BW: That's right. I think of those boys that were in the boot company with me that ended up on the *Mount Hood*, which was a good part of that boot company, and I'm trying to think. The question was about my --

EM: What do you know about what really happened to the *Mount Hood*?

BW: What always was intriguing to me is how it happened, and so I read on that. I've got some of this data here to read up to see what other people thought had happened, and the Navy did conduct an investigation, which accordingly said that they didn't think -- the conclusion of it, I'll give it to you first -- their investigation of that disaster did not indicate it was due to enemy action, even though one guy said he saw a Japanese mini-sub shoot at it. So, they went on and said the reason they didn't was because they knew that some of the ammunitions that were being handled were exceedingly sensitive, and they were loaded into five

compartments. Apparently they had that on their record. They were loading and unloading these five compartments that make up the *Mount Hood*, and they think that there was a type of bomb that was very dangerous. It was hydraulically activated, if you drop it in water, but the main thing that they state is that in handling, they think that they had been a little careless and bang, that thing had hit maybe a hatch when they were lowering the stuff into the cargo, and that triggered it.

EM: So just the shock, or the impact, of it.

BW: Yeah, because even on the gun I was on, a 20-millimeter, the tip would ignite, would explode, if it hit something. Of course, that gives it more destructive power, which is what they want. A lot of these artillery shells used by naval guns, like we had five-inch 38s, they had a proximity fuse and some of those things might have been activated or something. There were several types of ammunition that they thought was very sensitive, and they attribute the loss of it to one of those flukes somebody made. I know people I talked to -- the person I told you I talked to, went back to the States with him on this transport -- he said that there were nails in their shoes. No metal of any kind.

EM: No sparks, please.

BW: Because this naval report said there was powder laying around, and maybe some shell broke open. You can imagine, and he said there were a lot of loading ships around the perimeter of it, and one repair ship -- the ARG -- was [in and out?] and it had so much damage that it looked like it had been under siege, artillery, they got holes in it. See some pictures here I've got to show that. So there were a lot of things that could have happened that day, but it looks to me like handling -- when I think about it, the 20-millimeter shell would go off if you hit it too hard, and that's what I worked with on the gun. That's what we used.

EM: So you knew there was some danger from just impacts.

BW: Yeah, if you jar that stuff around. They said there was some smoking on the boats who were loading and unloading, the investigation showed, which'd be [horrors?]. You're not supposed to do that. It shouldn't come to that.

EM: So how many other ships were damaged or sunk from the explosion? Have you ever heard that?

BW: Well, I have. I mentioned the [*Midnight Owl*?] which is an ammunition ship that was converted from *Liberty* hull that they used. Then there's one DE that suffered some damage, and there were a scattered group of mine sweeps, wooden

mine sweeps, and they were tied in tandem, supposedly to save distance. Remember, like I told you, the fellow on whatever ship, I never found out the name or I can't remember, was tied up at what was considered a safe distance from the *Hood*. It had at least one man, he told me, killed. I know that, and it was just shrapnel falling on the deck. So, that man saw, I think the statistics I read on it show that there might have been as many injured, like on this *Midnight Owl*. It killed all the crew that was topside, and damaged a lot of them that were inside, below, to get to give you an idea of the tremendous force, destructiveness of that explosion. It was a terrible thing to happen, to think of a whole crew just getting knocked out so soon. They hadn't left Pearl Harbor -- I mean, they hadn't left Norfolk until November.

EM: Yeah, they were just a few months.

BW: Yeah, yeah. (inaudible) November 10<sup>th</sup> was when she blew up.

EM: Well, it's a terrible thing. Let me ask you just a couple more questions about your personal experience during the war. When you came back, did you feel like you were a totally different person from when you went out the war? Give us a self-assessment.

BW: I changed my attitude, or is that --

EM: Or if you did.

BW: Well, I think it made me appreciate life more. I mean, to think that, my god, there is a God up there. And you better keep believing it, because I'm reminded of the horror of the story, what can happen to people. For some reason, the *Clark* (inaudible) crew, including myself, escaped the war unscathed, practically. Yet so many people were cut down, like that group. They were catastrophically demo--

EM: Once they were there, and the next minute they weren't.

BW: Just that quick, and how something like that can happen is something that's never happened, but in war, anything can happen, I guess. It convinced me that I better appreciate every day I live, you know. Because those poor guys, when you think about it, here they were, a lot of them (inaudible), or a lot of them had [valuable?] family back home that were...and all those guys, they lost everything in a flash.

EM: How do you feel about the Japanese after having engaged in conflict with them?

BW: Well, I always remember this because there was one kid from New Mexico who went over and he said, "Well, my brother's been killed." He was in boot camp, and I think he was lost

in that, I think it was Garcia, and he was from New Mexico, and his brother had been killed. He really had a vengeance, and he talked about it in boot camp. To get over there and square the score; they'd killed his brother. I never took the war personally, but I did feel like they'd done us a great misdeed in the way they attacked the country. Of course, they say all is fair in love and war. Well, it may be fair but you don't have to like it, what they do, and I didn't, so I was quite content to stay over there and to see that it was finished. I didn't stay all the way, but I stayed as long as I could.

EM: You ever think about your experiences after the war? Like, waking up in the middle of the night?

BW: Oh, the horror of it? I was spared that. I could see ships getting sunk, I could see planes going down, and like *Omanney Bay*, I just saw her burning up out there. I never did, as far as actual combat, it was kind of at a distance. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Even Iwo Jima out there, with this terrible slaughter going on, but here it looks like a bright theatre lit up, and so I guess I was spared most of the real gore. I saw Japanese pilots as they're getting shot at, as they come out of their airplanes and stuff, but war is war. Some people took it personal, and



that's the way they fought it. But I was really glad -- I felt like the sooner we got over there and got the job done, the better we'd all be. When I went out there and saw the ships that we had accumulated, those fleets were enormous. We had a preponderance of superiority over the Japanese as far as aircraft, could control the sky, and through the Philippines we were gaining complete control of the sea. The other two battles, Leyte Gulf battle, which was where the Japanese lost a bunch of battleships and carriers and things like that, and that happened when I was still in Pearl Harbor, Leyte.

EM: Now, you got over there right after that had happened. That was in October.

BW: And we were looked like we were so all-powerful, I had a feeling that there's no way that we were going to be out here too long. Nobody knew they were going to drop a bomb.

EM: That was something that was a surprise. So was there a big celebration when the war was over? Where were you?

BW: Well, I was up in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

EM: You were up there in the north woods.

BW: Really up there, and it was still fall. It was August when I got back, and they signed the treaty in August, so I got back July. To go to Coeur d'Alene was an experience. It

was a really pretty place, and the Navy moved me around enough to where I was never really bored. I was kind of getting bored aboard the *Clark*, when I'd always take those tests to get to the next rank, and so when I left, I came in (inaudible) and that's the bomb, you know. And by the time I left -- [oh, my papers?] -- we got to San Francisco. I returned and it showed I had been given third class fireman, which is kind of like a buck sergeant in the army, I guess. It was still a little boring and I was glad to have a change of duty when I finally went home, and they sent me back to California.

EM: Were you able to stay in fairly close contact with your family when you were there in the South Pacific? I know it wasn't daily basis, but I mean, you were able to write letters home and get --

BW: Yeah, I wrote quite a few letters. My sister, and like I say, she married an air force lieutenant that flew B24s over there. So I wrote her quite a bit, and I also wrote my grandmother, who I was pretty close with and lived with a while, when my folks first got a divorce. San Antonio is where she lived, and her husband was a Spanish-American War veteran.

EM: Really?

BW: Yeah.

EM: One of Teddy's boys, huh?

BW: Yeah, and he's very proud of that.

EM: Well, because he did some recruiting in the San Antonio area for the Rough Riders, from what I understand.

BW: I think it's right there, where Roosevelt Park is? That was our neighborhood there, and we used to lay in that park. It was a nice place. You could play in the river which the river was still clear and clean. That park, Roosevelt Park, was what they called it, that's where he trained those Rough Riders, that's right.

EM: Well, what else can we talk about while we've got you on tape, as we say here? We've covered a lot of territory.

BW: I'm very glad I got here, number one. If I had waited much longer, I've seen so many of my friends passing away and I got thinking, well, if I'm going to ever do something I betters ay something now about the *Mount Hood* and especially the *Hood*, the way that it suffered such a terrible sacrifice.

EM: Yeah, and after such a short career, if you will, as a ship, too.

BW: Well, that's right. Three months isn't very long, and I understand she took shakedown. That's when they check the

ship out. We made two trips, at least two, to (inaudible) and then to -- I wasn't on it when those shakedowns were made, that's why I didn't catch it right away. [She was?] commissioned out of Boston Navy, went right out. First trip we knew that she had a problem on negotiating the channel. They did some damage to the hull, had to go check that out, and then there was another delay. I think they had a dock accident, so the ship had some hardships, I guess you'd say, before the war actually started, but it was in pretty good shape, as far as I was concerned, when I got on it. I was happy to serve, and the lady, I guess you'd say, was very good to me, and I tried to be grateful about that.

EM: And you came through unscathed, too, which is important.

BW: Well, that's right. Some of those guys came back, they were mentally disturbed and all that. I was never subjected to quite that much of the bad part of the war, is the way I think of it.

EM: Well, OK. Again, thanks for coming up here, sharing your story with us. We got it down now, and I think that's important and I think it's important, also, to take this opportunity to thank you for what you did for our country during the war. Still don't thank you guys enough, so I

wanted to get on the list of officially thanking you for what you did.

BW: Well, I'm a member of the Destroyer Escort Association. You probably may interview some of those people.

EM: Oh yeah, we've interviewed quite a few of the DE guys, and they're an interesting lot.

BW: Well, they got to see some action. They put them in there, like in Leyte, you know, there were DEs fighting battleships.

EM: And sunk right on the spot. *Samuel Roberts*, for example.

BW: Was that the one where -- yeah, that famous -- he was Cherokee Indian when he was skipper of it, and they claim the projectiles on those would go right through the tin can. They would not explode on impact.

EM: There wasn't enough armor there to trip the (inaudible) on the projectile. It just went right on through.

BW: I talked to one of my college roommates, from Texas, was on that one that -- he was on a destroyer, I believe.

EM: It may have been the *USS Johnston*. She was sunk, as well.

BW: Yeah, well, his ship was through that, and he said it was a real scare because he said the Japanese would follow them. They were tailing them, you know, and instead of cutting across to head them off, they would take the same turn they

took. I don't know why, I guess they thought maybe they would escape mines or something that way, whatever. It was a strange battle, of course. He went through a pretty scary situation and talked about it a lot, in my college days.

EM: OK, well let's end it there. Thanks again, Ben, I appreciate it.

BW: Well, glad to do it.

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