

Larry Parker Oral History Interview

ED MELTZER: This is Ed Metzler and today is the 12th of June, 2010. I'm interviewing Mr. Larry W. Parker of the Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the center of Pacific War Studies archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission. And it's for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So let me start first by thanking you Larry for spending the time to share your World War II experiences with us and let me get it started by having you just introduce yourself, tell us when and where you were born, a little bit about your family and we'll take it from there.

LARRY PARKER: Yeah, I'm Larry W. Parker. I was born on a farm north of Crosbyton, Texas -- about five and a half miles north of Crosbyton in 1924, May 15th. And we lived on a little farm out there that supplied most of our food and our living. Dad did a lot of custom work. He had a grist mill in Crosbyton and ground a lot of cornmeal and wheat flour and ground also -- had another mill in the other end of the building where he ground cow feed and hog feed and all those kind of things. He had a pair of drive on scales at that time and he weight a lot of different things for

different people in that area because there wasn't very many drive on scales at that time.

EM: Now where was Crosbyton located?

LP: It's -- if know where Lubick is?

EM: I do.

LP: It's 36 miles east of Lubick, straight east of Lubick.

EM: Kind of headed back a little bit towards Abilene but --

LP: Yes.

EM: Big Spring and that area. I guess that's north of Big Spring.

LP: Yeah, it is.

EM: Now did you have brothers and sisters?

LP: I had three brothers. Jack was brother just younger. He was two years younger and then I have two more brothers that came along about 12 and 14 years later. So they were two sets of boys.

EM: Little babies then compared to you.

LP: Right.

EM: So you spent a lot of time working on the farm as you grew up?

LP: Right, we did a lot of hoeing and I drove a pair of old horses with a one row lister on it and I did a lot of cultivating with an old one row cultivator and you could

work all day and spit across what you'd done during the --
it was different than what they do today. So --

EM: And let's see -- times were tough back then on the farm.

LP: That's right.

EM: Even before the depression, farming was in trouble.

LP: That's one reason dad did a lot of custom work. He and his twin brother had a large combine, they did a lot of wheat cutting during the wheat harvest and he did a lot of plowing and had a two row binder that he bound feed with for people. You know, they did a lot of stacking in stack lots at that time. They'd haul the bundles in and stack them up in big stacks.

EM: So where did you go to high school?

LP: In Crosbyton. I went -- there was eleven grades in school at that time. I went seven years out at little Big Fork country school up north of Crosbyton and then my four years at high school were in Crosbyton.

EM: And so when did you graduate -- you were born in '24 so --

LP: Forty-one.

EM: Okay, so right before the war started, you were just out of high school. And when you graduated from high school, what did you do? Did you --

LP: Well, I went to government welding school and went to California and welded in ship yards. Welding the old Liberty ships.

EM: Before the war?

LP: Well, the war had started really -- December '41. So I went out there and welded in the shipyard and then --

EM: I guess that was pretty good pay and a pretty good job for a farm boy.

LP: It was. It was.

EM: And what was it like going to California? That must have been an adventure.

LP: That was quite an adventure. I went with another boy and his wife out there. And we just rented a little cottage out on Stenson Beach, out -- well, it's across the bay from San Francisco.

EM: So this is Bay Area. East Bay.

LP: Sausalito was the name of the town.

EM: Yeah, that's a pretty little town. Right there by the Golden Gate Bridge.

LP: Yes, and we come over Mt. Tamalpais going to work every day. And he got his call from the draft board to go back and they called him into the Army so I knew it wouldn't be long before they was calling me so I went with him back.

EM: Oh, you did?

LP: I did. I -- like I say -- was an old farm boy. I didn't want to stay out there by myself. I think my dad was a little bit -- you know, he thought I should have stayed out there. But sure enough, it wasn't long after -- it was in '43 that they called me in and --

EM: So did they -- did you get drafted? And drafted into the Army but the Army Air Corps.

LP: Well, when they drafted -- when I went into the induction center in Lawton, Oklahoma, they kind of ask us about our choices so my choice was the -- I wanted to be in the air force, I wanted to fly so they -- as guys come into the induction center -- why, they built up what they called a flight. And then they sent us to Oklahoma City to take aptitude tests. And after the ones pass the aptitude test, they kept them there at Lawton until they got enough to send to -- we went down to Wichita Falls for our basic training. Marching and handling guns and things like that.

EM: So this in '43?

LP: Yes.

EM: Okay, so is this summer of '43?

LP: Right. It was hot.

EM: I was going to say, Wichita Falls is one hot spot. Right down there in the valley, you know. So you remember that?

LP: Oh yeah.

EM: What was basic training like? Was it really tough for you?

LP: Well, a little bit but not bad. I know -- you'd be surprised how many guys during retreat in the evening standing at attention out in that hot sun and all would keel over. And they'd haul them off.

EM: Did you ever keel over?

LP: No, I never did keel over. I was kind of used to being out in those hot cotton patches and stuff.

EM: I was going to say, Texas farm boy generally doesn't faint in the heat.

LP: But -- after we got through with our basic training -- our cross country runs and all that kind of stuff -- why, they sent us down to A&M College station for some construction and metallurgy and maps and things like that for navigation, you know. And so we spent a semester down at Texas A&M and also while we were down there, they gave us ten hours of flight instruction. In a little interstate cadet.

EM: What's an interstate cadet?

LP: Well, it's just like those little old cub airplanes. It's -- two people, one behind the other one.

EM: I was going to say, it must be a two seater.

LP: Yeah, it was. It was a two seater. Just a small plane. One day my instructor and I were out flying and the old

engine started making a lot of noise and he said we'd better head back to the field. So we had no more than got headed back until -- boy, that thing made a lot of noise and the whole prop just comes to dead still.

EM: While you were still airborne?

LP: Yeah, we were about 3,000 feet at that time and -- so, he said, "Well, we are going to have to pick out a place to land." Of course that thing was kind of like a glider with an engine in it.

EM: Thank goodness.

LP: And so he picked out a field he thought would be the best to land in and we had to do our ass turns and lose our altitude and we come sailing over the road and the fence and then we could see the grass was about three feet tall and there's tree stumps.

EM: Oh no!

LP: Anyway, boy, he started kicking that rudder around and he got it down without hitting any of them.

EM: Really?

LP: He did. In fact, after we got landed, why another plane saw us go down and they circled around and hollered, wanted to know if everything was okay and it was. He told me to get my parachute and go to the road and so I had to hitch a ride back into College Station.

EM: So he stayed with the plane.

LP: He stayed with the plane.

EM: Was the plane damaged?

LP: Nope, in fact, they carried an engine out there and put in that plane out there in that pasture and flew it back.

EM: That was a different day wasn't it -- than today.

LP: It was.

EM: So what -- your eyes must have been as big as saucers there.

LP: Well, yeah. When we come across that road and saw what we was fixing to land in, they were. In fact, I got my feet away from the rudder pedals where he could have full control of it and I ducked down to give him all the vision.

EM: Because he's in the back right?

LP: He was behind me. Yes.

EM: So you are the first to hit a stump if you hit a stump. Well, you can say you are a real veteran of the air wars then, even before you went off.

LP: Yeah, we had forced landing before I really got into cadets you might say. But anyway, after we got through A&M we went down to San Antonio for our pre-flight training. Of course, we had all kinds of subjects down there and engines and navigation and --

EM: At this time, you don't know what your role is going to be. You don't know whether you are going to be a navigator, a pilot, a radioman -- what did you know?

LP: Well, I'm pretty sure I'm going to be a pilot. Right. So we spent the winter -- part of the winter -- at San Antonio and it come a big snow down there that year. It was --

EM: Unusual.

LP: Yes.

EM: So San Antonio must have been just full of military people during the war because it's a military town anyhow. Were you at Kelly Field?

LP: No.

EM: Randolph?

LP: We weren't at a field. In fact, to tell you the truth, I don't know really exactly what part of town we were in but it was a bunch of barracks -- it was probably close to one of the fields all right. But I think it would have probably been closer to Randolph than Kelly. But we went to school there and like I say, it was cold and snowy there for one part of it.

EM: So this is what? Winter of '43-'44.

LP: Right.

EM: Because you went in in '43 so this is the winter at the tail end of '43.

LP: I was there during Christmas. That's the first Christmas I ever missed --

EM: Home.

LP: Home. And so, of course, from there we went to Pine Bluff, Arkansas for primary flight training and --

EM: So what kind of aircraft are you training in then for primary flight training?

LP: Our aircraft was the PT19 and it was, I think Fairchild built -- probably several companies built them.

EM: Was it bi-wing or single-wing?

LP: Single-wing. Low wing plane. And it had the inverted ranger engine in it, 175 horse I believe engine. And it was pretty easy plane to fly, you know. And of course we did our solo there.

EM: So did you take naturally to flying an airplane or was it hard work for you?

LP: Well, no. Not really. I had built models and read about flying ever since I was this small boy and so to me it -- I guess you'd say kind of natural to fly like that. My first airplane flight that I ever took was in an old bi-wing Jenny at the Old Settler's reunion north of Crosbyton at the range out there. And I was just a small boy then and dad took us -- there was a guy out there with a plane, one

of those old planes. And that was the first flight I ever had in my life.

EM: And that was unusual back then -- to even see an airplane, let alone to have flown in one.

LP: One time when I was a boy out there in the pasture at home, there was a whole group of those biplanes came over our farm and they weren't 400 or 500 feet in the air. I suppose they were headed to Lubick; they were headed in that direction. And I remember that was quite a thrill for me to see so many airplanes in one bunch. The old orange colored planes.

EM: So after Pine Bluff, you did your solo, you passed with flying colors --

LP: Made it all right. Boy, of course that was still in part of -- well, as I remember, part of January into February so we had to wear those old heavy leather sheepskins because open cockpit planes and it pretty cool. And -- but we, like you say, we did our solos and then they shipped us to Independence, Kansas. And they used two planes up there. The old Vultee Vibrator they called it -- the B-13.

EM: I have heard about the Vultee Vibrator.

LP: And then we had a BT14 that we used for acrobatics. They used the 13 for navigation instrument training and the 14 for acrobatics. And while I was in Independence, my folks

came up to see me which was quite a deal for me and then another thing that happened while I was up there. The WASP, the women's air group, they flew a bunch of planes in and landed one evening and stayed overnight and took off the next morning.

EM: So they were probably flying what? New aircrafts in from the West Coast or something?

LP: No, they were flying -- it looked to me, might have been AT6s something like that. You know they did a lot of ferry work. And they put on a pretty good show for us taking off the next morning.

EM: Really? They were cocky, weren't they? Thought they were hot.

LP: Yep. Anyway, I always remember that, but now, to me, the instrument training -- I didn't know whether I was going to make it or not. But I did. Flying under that hood, you know.

EM: Flying under the hood. Tell me about that.

LP: Well, they pull the hood over you and all you can see is the instrument panel. You can't see out anywhere.

EM: While you're flying?

LP: While you're flying. Yes. And you have radio signals that you have to navigate by to bring you into the air strip.

We did a lot of training in Link trainers -- you know those were those little trainers in a building that --

EM: Okay. Kind of like a simulator.

LP: Simulator is right. So they started you out in that. And so she made a mistake and you spun in --

EM: At least you were on the ground when you did it.

LP: So you did your first training as far as the actual instrument training in that simulator and kind of got on to it before they ever took you up in a plane to really do it.

EM: So did you pass the first time or did you have redo the (inaudible)?

LP: Well, I passed all my check rides in flying and instruments too. So I made it on through. So that was the hardest part there at the Independence campus. They brought us down to Fredrick, Oklahoma for our advance flight training.

EM: Boy, you've been -- you're going all over the place, aren't you?

LP: Well, we covered quite a bit of territory, yes. There at Fredrick we were flying twin engine planes. In fact, when I went in at Laughton and they were asking us what we would like to fly, I put in for B-17 training -- is what I put in for. So they sent us down to Fredrick for twin engine -- multi-engine flying.

EM: Why did you chose the B-17?

LP: I don't know. I had just heard a lot about it and liked the looks of it. I thought it was pretty airplane and --

EM: Certainly had gotten famous by then because --

LP: Yeah, it seemed to be a safe airplane. I don't know, I just liked it. Of course we did a lot of country, cross country out of Fredrick, you know in different parts around. You know, I was amazed at no more crashes or anything that had while so many of young guys --

EM: Training.

LP: Training, you know. Around the airfield. I know the pattern there at Fredrick, sometimes we had to go clear down to Wichita Falls to get into the traffic pattern. And then sometimes they would stack us three deep above the airfield and the first group would land and then they'd bring the others down and land and so there were a lot of planes in the air. But anyway --

EM: So when you finish multi-engine advanced training -- do they give -- when do you get your wings?

LP: Yeah, okay. Just before we were to graduate -- in fact my folks were figuring on coming up to the graduation and all -- they picked out of 20 of us and put on a Pullman railroad car and sent us to Florida and we had started our B-17 training at [Brokerage Home?] Florida and that's when

we got our wings. We didn't get to graduate with the group.

EM: Yeah, but you were special. You've been picked out, so --

LP: We've been sent to Florida to get our B-17 training. And -
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EM: Boy, you are taking a tour of the United States just while you are training.

LP: Yeah.

EM: Amazing.

LP: We flew down, you know, all over that Caribbean down there. They had radar stations in those B-17 we was training in and there are training pilots and radar operators at the same time.

EM: Now when is the first time you actually saw a B-17, was it down there at [Brokerage Home]?

LP: I hadn't thought about that but I guess that was it.

EM: This is your dream machine and now you've finally got a chance to see it and to drive it.

LP: Yep.

EM: What was that like?

LP: Well, it was pretty exciting really. It really looked like a big airplane to me then.

EM: Compared to a Vultee Vibrator, it is.

LP: Yep, it looked like a large airplane and so that's where I spent my second Christmas from home, [Brokerage Home?] Florida.

EM: No snow there.

LP: Nope, no snow there. I remember walking out, we went -- I went -- what's that resort town out there close to Brokerage Home? I can't remember why I can't think of it.

EM: Well there's Fort Lauderdale and, oh well.

LP: Anyway, I walked out on the fishing pier there and there was a café out there and that's where I got my first shrimp salad was out there. And that's the best salad I ever had in my life.

EM: There is nothing like seafood salad, is there?

LP: Anyway, I got through training there.

EM: So do you remember your first flight up on a B-17, was it eventful or uneventful? What was it like?

LP: Well, I guess it was kind of uneventful. I remember we flew down over Lake Okeechobee and some of those islands. And just right after Christmas, they send us to Biloxi Mississippi.

EM: Boy you are getting around.

LP: And that's where they put our crew together. And so at that time they put me -- I was a co-pilot and then there

was a guy from -- that had already done his 25 missions over in the European theatre that was a pilot.

EM: Wow, he's a survivor, huh?

LP: And so they -- we got our gunners and a navigator and the whole crew together there at Biloxi Mississippi and started flying together. And that's first place we saw this boat we've been carrying.

EM: Tell me about that boat.

LP: That boat was 27 feet long and it was about eight feet wide. Had two gasoline engines in it. Had enough supplies in to last 10 guys about 30 days and it had fishing gear and some weather clothing, you know, in it. And it also had a jib and a sail that if they run out of gasoline, they could raise the mast and make a sailboat out of it.

EM: Now where was this boat? This was on the B-17, tell me about that.

LP: Yeah, it was fastened onto the bomb shackles. They fastened the bomb bay doors closed and then they made places for the cables to go up through to fasten to the bomb shackles and the boat had a rubber grommet around it that fit that B-17, that was air tight.

EM: Almost like a weather stripping or gasket or something.

LP: Right, just like a gasket. And it also had a door in the bomb bay door and the navigator, when we would drop a boat

-- before we dropped a boat, he would mark on a map where the location was and tell whoever got in the boat, what direction to head, so we would know where to look for them when we got a seaplane. See we also had a PBY seaplane in our group. So after -- if we dropped a boat for somebody, well, later on we could send a boat to pick them up.

EM: Right, so you crew is training together, learning to work together, in Biloxi. And did you go overseas from there?

LP: They sent us to Savannah, Georgia.

EM: I'm sorry, we are in Biloxi.

LP: Yeah, we are in Biloxi and they sent us to Savannah Georgia to pick up our new plane. That's where we got our first plane was Savannah Georgia and we flew to Amarillo the first night. Stayed there -- and I wanted to go by -- the farm wouldn't have been far off from where we --

EM: Yeah, that's in the neighborhood. And I sure wanted to go by there but we had strict instructions because we were going overseas and they didn't want any mishaps or anything so I spent that night in Amarillo and the next day we went to Sacramento and there, now at that time, our plane didn't have a boat on it so they put a big fuel tank in the bomb bay and we took off from Sacramento one night. Seemed like it was nine o'clock, and we landed in Honolulu at about noon. So we flew all night long and we took off with in

just a few minutes of each other but you know we didn't ever see one of those other planes until we started coming into Honolulu and we all landed within a few minutes.

There was eight of us that landed within a few minutes.

EM: You all got where you needed to be.

LP: And so we spent several days there. They took the fuel tank out, locked the bomb bay doors shut and that's where we picked our boat up -- was there at Honolulu. And we left there, we flew to Christmas Island which is south, kind of southwest as I remember. And what I remember about that island was all the coconut trees and the sand crabs. There's so many crabs, even in the operations office. They were just stacked up behind the door in the operations office.

EM: Really? My goodness. So that's quite an experience for a farm boy, to see all the coconut trees and sand crabs.

LP: Yeah, right.

EM: So what, did you stay in barracks while you were there?

LP: Yeah, little old -- I don't know, there may be some pictures in this of our crew at one of those places.

EM: So what do you think about your crew. What, have you got guys from all over the US? Tell me about your crew.

LP: Well, the old chairman was from Redding, California. He was the pilot that had been overseas.

EM: The survivor.

LP: Uh-huh. And then George was from Pennsylvania, the navigator. And they picked out navigator instructors, that had instructed navigation for our crews because of what we'd be doing, you know, in flying places we'd be flying. And then our crew chief, flight engineer, old [Stritcher?], he was from Tennessee, Willard Stritcher, he was from Tennessee. I guess now would be a good time to tell a little bit about him. He liked to eat. Just like later on when we was in the Philippines and those Filipinos would bring a fruit or watermelon or something by to sell to us, why he'd like to help but he'd never help pay for it. So one day he was out there and our ground crew hadn't caught up with us yet, so we had to kind of maintain our plane and all.

EM: This is when you are in the Philippines?

LP: Yeah.

EM: Did you go to the Philippines after the Christmas Island?

LP: Well, yeah. I'll go ahead and tell you about Willard and then I'll come back.

EM: Pick up. That's a good idea.

LP: Pick up at Christmas. We was out there one day and they come by and boy they had some beautiful watermelons. And so the guys just grabbed old Stritcher and pulled his pants

off, right there in the airplane and traded them for a watermelon. So he had to pay after all.

EM: Before he could do anything about it, he was pantless.

LP: He was. Yep. It's funny how things like that stick in your mind.

EM: That's absolutely right. How did Willard take that?

LP: Well, he's a good natured guy. Yeah, he took it all right. He got some of the watermelon.

EM: Now let's see, how many are in the crew then because you don't have all the gunners and all that other stuff?

LP: Yeah, we had a tail gunner. He was the guy that -- armament man. And [Vivich?] and old was, I think, from Louisiana. And the one of the waist gunners, Duffy. I've forgotten to tell you the truth. We had two guys from Louisiana and one of the waist gunners was from Louisiana and Vivich was from Louisiana and I don't know where Duffy was. And then the radio man. But we had a crew of nine, I guess it was. Willard, Scritchler, the flight engineer, he manned the twin turrets on top. And so we had full protection.

EM: So how well did you guys work together?

LP: Well, we never had a bit of trouble as well as I remember. We worked as a crew and worked fine.

EM: So they get to be your big buddies or did you --

LP: Well, you know, I -- that's one thing I tried to be is I tried to be a good buddy to them. Sometimes some of those high up officers didn't cater to that much but when I got a chance I was a buddy to them.

EM: So what was your rank at this point?

LP: I was First Lieutenant -- not a First Lieutenant, Second Lieutenant. In fact, my rank, First Lieutenant, I was told came through right at the time I left to come back home but we'll get to that later. We'll start up there at Christmas Island. We flew down from there to Canton Island, just reef almost as well as I remember it.

EM: Where is that?

LP: That's on the South West of Christmas, on back turning more towards the New Guinea Islands and stuff. Because when we spend a night at Canton --

EM: How do you spell that?

LP: C-A-N-T-O-N. As well as I remember.

EM: Just like it sounds.

LP: Yes. And spent the night there. And then the next day we flew into Finschhafen, New Guinea. And we hadn't loaded our guns or anything.

EM: Was it just a single aircraft or was there a group?

LP: There is a group of us. There is eight of us.

EM: Eight aircrafts.

LP: Eight B-17s.

EM: That's right. You mentioned that.

LP: And we flew into Finschhafen and that night a Japanese bomber bombed the place and there was a lot of --

EM: Even in '45?

LP: No, this is '44. The early part of '44. Yeah. No, it's early part of '45. Real early.

EM: Yeah, because you spent your second Christmas in the US and you went in in '43 so Christmas '43, Christmas '44. Now it's 45. I'm surprised the Japanese could still put a bomber up down there but --

LP: They did and he got a lot of men too that night that were camped out close to the airstrip.

EM: This is in New Guinea.

LP: New Guinea. Finschhafen, New Guinea. Anyway, needless to say, next morning, our aircraft was armed. So we left there and there were still some of those P40s down there at that time.

EM: Old Flying Tiger aircraft. Warhawks.

LP: And, well as I remember, that day we flew from New Guinea to Biak. I know we spent one night because that night we were watching a movie and the guys got to looking around and there was some Japs out in the bushes watching the movie with us.

EM: You are kidding.

LP: And you talk about a scramble now. You better not fall down; you get run over.

EM: So what happened?

LP: Nothing. I reckoned when we run, they run too. But it was the end of the movie was all I remember. But you know, there was Japs left on all them islands. Except -- now they told us when we got to Hiroshima that there wasn't a Jap left on that island but I'm not sure about that but -- anyway, we then from there we went to Tacloban, Leyte. And I know we landed -- had to land on steel mats at Tacloban. And my brother was -- one of my younger brothers was a missionary and he was over there several years ago but he said that there is a lot of those old steel mats that had been made fences out and gates and all kinds of things like that on it.

EM: When you don't have anything, you make do with what you can scrounge.

LP: Right. And from Leyte, we went up to --

EM: Did you stay at Leyte long or was it just a stopover?

LP: No, it was kind of a stopover. We did fly some out of there for a little while but not long. Then we went on up to I'm vague on this, I don't remember. There was -- Mandora?

LP: Yep, Mandora, yep. That's in the Philippines. And we stayed, we flew out of there a little while.

EM: Now when you are flying, what is your mission? What are you doing?

LP: We are like on bombing runs and stuff. We are hanging out just off of the coast while they are doing their bombing runs so if one of them gets hit and can make it to the water, well then we can drop them a boat. And then if we know there is somebody down, why -- we can do a search to find them.

EM: And when you were in Mandora and out of Leyte, did you ever have to drop a boat?

LP: Not there we didn't but an incident happened there on Mandora. It was pretty crowded the base where we were. And there were B-24 bombers and then our plane, B-17s, and one day one of those B-24s taxied and the end of his wingtip got the plastic bubble in the nose of our plane. And the guys painted the B-17 on the B-24. Needless to say, our ground crew guys -- they went up there and they told them old boys that if they didn't get that off of there they are going to saw it out.

EM: They going to cut it out.

LP: Cut it out, right. Anyway --

EM: Did they?

LP: They took it off, yeah. But that was kind of a --

EM: That's a good story. So I guess there is a little bit of friendly rivalry.

LP: Oh yeah. So from there we went up to Northern Luzon and then Lingayen Gulf.

EM: Lingayen Gulf, yep.

LP: And up there we were flying off of a grass field, you know. And we started making our flights up around -- it was Formosa at that time and I've been to China Sea.

EM: Taiwan now but Formosa then.

LP: They were bombing up around there, around Taipei. What's Taipei? I don't remember now what it was then. Might have been Taipei, I don't remember anything. The Japs had taken over a lot of parts of China and all those islands and stuff.

EM: Oh, yeah. They had occupied Formosa forever, back in the '30s or something.

LP: And so one day -- we could see the bombers working.

EM: Now were these 17s or 24s?

LP: The 24s was doing the bombing and so we decided we'd get a little closer. First thing we knew there was little black puffs puffing up around us. So we got back out where we were supposed to be.

EM: Back up a little bit.

LP: Yeah. But the first trip we ever made to Formosa from Luzon -- this old boy that was flying the plane, he'd been over the European theatre and all so he took us on a tour along the beach and the first thing we knew, we looking down at some pretty good size guns. So we got back out over the water back where we were supposed to be. Anyway, we flew out of the Lingayen Gulf there for quite a while, I know there was a time or two we come in there -- we come in the evening -- our missions were pretty long. You know, we'd leave out early in the morning and then hang around while they were doing their bombing runs and stuff like that before we'd come back in. And I remember us having to dodge water spouts coming back into our field there along that Lingayen Gulf there.

EM: And again, they've got you in barracks or are you in tents or where are they housing you?

LP: We are in tents.

EM: You are in tents. How are they feeding you during this time? I mean, is the food good? You're an officer so you're getting --

LP: Well, we are eating about what everyone else is. We are getting powdered eggs and powdered grapefruit juice to drink or coffee. That's where I kind of started learning to drink coffee. At home I never was allowed to drink

coffee. But you had to drink something, you know. It got us by. And we had K-rations and stuff like that.

EM: Did you ever get liberty and allowed to go into town or mix with the locals at all?

LP: Later on. But -- well, there at Lingayen Gulf we did -- I know one time an old boy and I took off and there is a little old village there. Pretty close. And I remember we went in to a little shop there in that village and this old Filipino woman looked like she was 100 years old but she had an old black cigar in her mouth. Surely handmade, you know.

EM: You should have gotten a photo of that.

LP: Should have but I didn't. Anyway and there was a little shop up the street that had ice cream and that's about the only two things I remember about that village except that one of the Douglass Dauntless had taken off and lost power one day and he landed right in the top of a schoolhouse there. And the plane flipped over and slid down the side but the engine rolled on out. They had a little gazebo built out in a little old park out there and the old engine rolled out up against that. But it didn't burn. And I don't know about the pilot or anything but --

EM: But they hadn't cleaned it up or --

LP: It was still there when we -- but it come a real hard rain and all. And I suppose that big rice patty out there but I know the mud was deep and our tents all fell down and the stakes pulled out. It was a big mess.

EM: Sounds miserable. What about mosquitos, insects, diseases?

LP: Well, yeah. We had to use our mosquito nets you know on our bunks and all.

EM: Did they make you take the Atabrine?

LP: Well yeah. We had all kinds of shots and stuff. But --

EM: Were there any Japanese still around in the area there because I know the Luzon is a big island and it took them a lot of mountains, it took them a long time to clean it out.

LP: We had more trouble with them just a little later on than what we did here at up in the Lingayen Gulf. See they still had Clark Field at that time and anyway when they are talking about the Filipinos coming through with stuff. This old boy had a chicken. So we thought, "Man, how good it be to roast that chicken?" We built us a little old spit and -- just out of -- I don't know what we had really but I remember we turned that old -- put that old chicken on there and we turned that chicken until it looked -- boy it looked good. And I'm telling you, you couldn't take a bite. That old chicken was so tough, must have been one of

their old fighting roosters or something but I don't know it was too tough to eat meat.

EM: Not a lot of white breast meat on that one, huh?

LP: No. You know, you took anything merely for entertainment. Like there is an old Filipino would come through there, right by our tents, with his caribou. Taking them to pasture I guess. And then he'd bring them back in the evening.

EM: This is like an old water buffalo type thing? Big animals.

LP: Yeah. Two of them got in a fight right there by our tent area. Well of course, the GIs -- we all just ringed up around that and that old Filipino, he was in there with his old bamboo pole trying to get them straightened out and pretty soon one of those old caribou took after him. And it's funny how that ring just opened up. That old man just run out through there with that old caribou chasing him.

EM: On his tail, huh?

LP: But, you know anything like that was entertaining to us.

EM: Well, yeah. Broke the monotony I guess.

LP: But I don't remember. We flew quite a few missions out of the Lingayen Gulf up around Formosa and up in the China Sea. We used to -- [rendezvous?] with a submarine up there in the China Sea and they always liked to rub it in a bit. They'd want to know what we'd had for dinner and probably

we didn't have anything except what we got out of a box or something. And they'd have to tell us about their steaks and ice cream and all that kind of stuff.

EM: Smart alecks. Now did you ever drop a boat at all when you were flying out of the Lingayen Gulf?

LP: Yes.

EM: Tell me about some of those.

LP: We found a pilot down -- out -- well it's off of Formosa and out west of there. And the sea was pretty rough. We dropped him a boat. I know when we first spotted him, we come over to him, looking down and he is hanging on to that -- he had a little old rubber raft. You know, those guys did. And he's hanging on to the bottom of it and it's standing on its edge. It was -- and he was just hanging on to it.

EM: Right.

LP: And so we dropped -- we of course swung around and we dropped those boats from 1,200 feet.

EM: Really?

LP: Yeah, and they were on three 48-foot parachutes.

EM: Okay, so they had parachutes.

LP: Yeah. And they went down nose first, sort of -- well at an angle, you know. And of course if it was real windy which it was that day, if that nose went in and it drag it over -

- it had self-righting chamber that seawater set off and that boat would turn back up. And then it had several rockets that would shoot lines out several different ways from that boat so -- something like 150 yards or something like that you know. With a line on it where the guys could grab it and pull their selves to the boat.

EM: That was pretty elaborate.

LP: Yeah, it was. It was. And it was made as a Higgins boat, made down there in New Orleans. That's where it was made.

EM: So it was wooden.

LP: Wooden, right. And anyway --

EM: So that's a pretty nice boat for one or two guys.

LP: Oh yeah, yeah. But you know, what's a life worth?

EM: You bet.

LP: So this submarine I was talking about come buy and picked him up. And well, later on we moved down to Clark Field after they captured Clark Field and the Japs -- when we moved down there and the officers picked out the place for us to set up our tent area and all -- there was a ridge back -- it seemed like to me it was back to the north and east to us. This ridge was. Just across a small little gully there. And I know one of the -- not our crew, but one of the others, one of the guys got shot laying right in his bunk. Those Japs would come up on that ridge and, you

know, you could be going to the mess hall. You didn't know when it was going to happen. They'd take a pot shot at you.

EM: So did they kill this guy?

LP: Yeah. Right there in his bunk. I remember one of our doctors was in the shower, had a little old shower deal out there that -- you know those ladies, they was good at bamboo weaving, bambooning stuff. And some of the guys even had them to weave them bamboo floor mats to go on their floor in their tent. I remember that doctor being in the shower -- being naked as a jaybird. But man he tried to help that kid out. But he couldn't. But -- see our tent area was just right next to the jungle. You might say.

EM: You were right on the edge there.

LP: Yeah. And I know the first thing we done -- they had us, was to dig us some foxholes before -- I think we did that even before we set our tents up. And that first night there, I got officer of the guard. And my ground crew sergeant was sergeant of the guard. And I was in the foxhole. You got in there after dark. I mean before dark and you didn't get out until after light the next morning. And those -- we had Filipino guerillas that were helping guard us and they just crawled out there in the grass. They'd come by about -- a little before dark and they

didn't get in any holes, they just crawled off in the grass and all where you couldn't --

EM: Like a snake?

LP: Yeah, we couldn't even see them again until next morning.

EM: But they'd give you early warning then if Japanese were sneaking through?

LP: Yeah. But one morning, there's a Jap, wounded Jap, sitting our flagpole, our flagpole deal where we had a flagpole. He'd got through and he was wounded and needing help. But he got through there some way or another. And them guerillas, they was dealing him misery. We had to take him away from him.

EM: Really?

LP: Yeah, they'd take sticks and poke in his wound and stuff and make him holler and all that kind of stuff.

EM: There was no love lost between the Filipinos and the Japanese.

LP: No, there wasn't.

EM: Because they had been pretty rough on the Japanese. You never thought that you were going to be a pilot that you were going to end up in a foxhole on guard duty, did you?

LP: No, I didn't. All alone in the middle of the night -- we had telephone communication between us. The old telephone just kind of rattled, it didn't really ring. And I

answered it and it's my sergeant down there and another one and he said -- there's a pretty moon out that night -- and he said, "We spotted a Jap." Just down in front of him a little ways there and he bumped into a bamboo pole and made some noise and that's when they spotted him. He stopped dead still, he's just standing there. He said, "This kid, he wants to take a shot at him." And I thought about it a little bit and I thought, "Well, that's going to cause a big commotion really." Because our tent area wasn't too far from there. But I decided, well, what the heck. And I said, "Go ahead." That kid took a pot shot at that old Jap, missed him and when he did, well that Jap started shooting back at us. And old Sergeant West, he was from Clovis, New Mexico. He was laughing. He said, "That kid keep me plumb out of his hole whenever that Jap started shooting."

EM: He took over the foxhole, huh? Well did they get the Japanese guy?

LP: No, we always figured he was just trying to get the mess tent or something but we never did see him again.

EM: So when you were at Clark Field, were you flying out daily or multiple missions a day, or what?

LP: Oh no. One mission. Because when we went out we stayed out as long as we could. I know a lot of times our old gas

gauges would be bumping on the bottom when we'd come back in.

EM: And did you have the big fuel tanks?

LP: No, just wing -- we didn't have anything in bomb bay because see that boat weighed almost 3,500 pounds.

EM: Oh, it's big as a car, heavy as a car.

LP: Yeah, it --

EM: So you had a cargo, it just wasn't bombs. You had a boat.

LP: Yeah, uh huh. Right. And so -- now you was asking about if we ever got to leave the base, you know. And for a few days. When we got down to Clark Field, they rented a big home from some Spanish people down in Manilla and they would send us down there for three or four days.

EM: A little of R&R?

LP: Yep. Boy, that Manilla was a tore up place.

EM: I've heard that.

LP: I've always wanted to see it after they rebuilt it and all. I know now it's a big, modern city. But boy, at that time it -- seeing old buildings with the hole side blown off of them and stuff still up there in the different rooms and stuff.

EM: Furniture and stuff up in the rooms. So how was your four day stint down at the hacienda down there?

LP: It was nice. We could roam around if we wanted to. There wasn't much to see but tore up stuff at that time but out in this residential district. And it was nice home and all and you felt safe. You know, you could lay down and sleep. I got more sleep in that plane than I did in my bunk for a long time. When we were moving -- well, in fact, the box stayed in our bomb bay. One side of it, all the time. If we moved from one base from another, all the guys would throw our stuff in this big old box so that when we settled at a base, we just kept some blankets in that box. Well, when we were going to the targeted area or back from the targeted area, a lot of the time old Richard and I would take turns going back in there and getting us a nap in that big old box. And of course -- where ever you could lay down like that and feel safe, well you could get some good sleep.

EM: Never thought about that. Getting more sleep on the airplane than you did on the ground just because you felt secure.

LP: Yeah, in fact, one day we had been up -- we'd been out a long time and -- I don't know, this day we had already dropped our boat and old Richard had gone back and was sleeping in that box, the flight engineer was setting up in the co-pilot seat. He's sitting up there with me. And I

got to seeing a little old spot over there on the water. And I kept looking at it and looking at it and had him looking at it, so I finally decided to go over and investigate a little bit. So we started getting closer and closer and I told the navigator about it, you know, and so we woke old Richard up and got him back up in the front and so when we got close enough was a B-29 down in the water and the crew was -- they were out in a -- they had about a 10 man, pretty good size life raft they was in. Well, of course, we had already dropped our boat.

EM: Yeah, you didn't have anything to offer, did you?

LP: No, except we found them.

EM: And could report them.

LP: And could report them. And that's what we did. And one of our PBYS come out, and I remember the old boy that was flying the PBY said -- you got those guys on board and trying to take off and about the time he'd get off he'd hit a swell and go back in. I don't know how many times he tried before he finally got that plane in the air.

EM: Because he had a real load.

LP: Well, he had everybody but the pilot and the copilot. They said when that plane hit the water, the pilot and the copilot both, chairs, seats and all went right out through the front of it. And of course they never saw them

anymore. But the plane was sitting out there on that water just as pretty as you please and it had been floating for a good while. In fact, when we started calling for them to come get the guys, some Navy guys in Corsairs showed up. We'd shot some rockets off, flares where they could see where we were. And so, man, they started using that B-29 for target practice. Make it sing.

EM: Why?

LP: I don't know unless they just didn't want the Japs --

EM: To get their hands on it maybe?

LP: To get their hands on it or something.

EM: Yeah, that makes sense.

LP: In fact, that day that submarine picked that guy up that we dropped the boat to off out there, they used it for target practice too. So they wouldn't get a hold of it.

EM: Yeah, so you had already dropped your boat earlier on that flight. And what had you dropped your boat to?

(inaudible) or what was it?

LP: No, it was -- I think that was probably the same day we dropped that boat to the guy that the submarine picked up. Anyway, from Clark Field, well, while we were at Clark Field, they picked our crew out. We flew down to Manilla and picked Vinegar Joe Stilwell. Do you know who he is?

EM: I know of him. I didn't know him personally. But tell me about Vinegar Joe. Now he was -- I can't remember the details of Vinegar Joe.

LP: Well on this particular deal he was going up to Okinawa when -- was it, the guy's name Buckner or Butler that got -
-

EM: Buckner.

LP: That got killed. He was replacing him.

EM: Okay.

LP: So we flew down to Clark Field and picked Vinegar Joe up and we flew him out to Okinawa. And I thought he was going to melt one of our waste guns out there back in the waste. Just playing with it, you know.

EM: Just shooting?

LP: Just shooting.

EM: Well, I guess when you are general you don't get to shoot much.

LP: I don't guess so.

EM: So he melted it almost?

LP: But he had his old -- well, I bet there is a picture in here of that. And anyway, he got pretty excited when we got up there pretty close and there was a flight of airplanes showed up. But they were our planes.

EM: Darn.

LP: But they didn't have a striped fixed up there at Okinawa, they were working on one.

EM: Okinawa was still in the middle of the battle, I guess.

LP: You'd probably remember that.

EM: Yeah, that's the big city, the largest city on the island.

LP: Well, they was working on a strip. Anyway, old Richard set that plane down in mud down there. We went down through there like that. Well, we had a hatch there in the plane, we could drop out of the bottom, you know. And we went around, opened the door for old Vinegar Joe to get out of the plane. The first thing he said was "Good landing, boys. Good landing."

EM: Did you talk to him at all?

LP: Well, I never did get just what you'd call to visit with him. You know. Or anything. But --

EM: Was he alone or was he with some other officers?

LP: He was alone at that time. Yeah. I know we spent -- we spent -- there's a jeep pulled up pretty quick. In fact, you know, I guess they was waiting on us to get there. And picked him up and that was the last time we saw him. But we spent that time in [Aton?] there, on Okinawa, for a place to stay. And, you know, to save my life I can't remember taking off from there the next day. But we did.

EM: You must have.

LP: Went back to our base there at Clark Field.

EM: That's a pretty long flight, isn't it? From Okinawa all the way back to Clark. Of course, you are a long range bomber so you could do it. Did you carry the boat when you were on that mission?

LP: Yeah.

EM: You landed with the boat?

LP: Oh yeah.

EM: Took off with the boat.

LP: Yeah. And anyway, later on then we went to Ie Shima. They had cleared the Japs off it and so our base was there on Ie Shima.

EM: Described what Ie Shima looked like.

LP: Well, nothing much but a --

EM: Was it rocky?

LP: Rocks. Right.

EM: But it's big enough to have a landing strip.

LP: Yeah, oh yeah. They had -- now our tent area was on the west side of Ie Shima and there was a cliff drop down to the water. And I don't know how many times this happened -- two or three times. Late in the evening when the sun was way down, Jap planes would fly in, right over our tent area. If you had a rock, you could have -- you just looked at them like I am looking at you right now. They'd be

looking at you on the ground. But they weren't interested in us, they were interested in the planes out there on the strip. That's what they were after.

EM: And did they attack them?

LP: I am sure they did. They never hit our plane. But I remember our commanding officer -- he had gotten some foot trouble, had been in a lot of damp weather and stuff you know and he was on crutches. We did have an air raid shelter built. And he was about half way down the steps one day when them Jap planes come over and one of guys made a head long dive. He just caught him, carried him back in the bunk with him.

EM: Oh really?

LP: But you could have hit them guys with a rock if you had known they were coming. But they come in from the West when the sun was --

EM: In the sun. Now so your flight of eight B-17 are up here on Ie Shima.

LP: And a lot of B-24s and other kinds of planes. You know. It's just a lot of planes.

EM: Now what are the B-24s doing? Are they going up to bomb the mainland? Are they bombing --

LP: Formosa and places like -- different places like that. I know when we was up at the Lingayen Gulf, a lot of the

Douglass dive bombers were bombing -- they'd just be gone for maybe 15 or 20 minutes and they'd be back after another load of bombs. I remember one day, one of them took off and I guess -- I don't know what happened -- but I'd always figured he thought he was flipping the landing gear up and he flipped the bomb -- he dropped his bombs over on the edge of the strip.

EM: That was a wakeup call wasn't it.

LP: Yeah. And while I was at Clark Field, somebody found a music instructor that lived over there, pretty close. And like -- one of our --

EM: A Filipino or --

LP: Yeah, Filipino. And so our guys, we'd load up in an old truck in the evening and drive over there. I didn't play a musical instrument myself but I loved to hear music. And they was two or three of our guys that were -- I know one of the gunners, he was a good harmonica player and old [Vivich?], he played -- he was our tail gunner -- he played two or three, several, instruments. But this guy had a lot of instruments because he was an instructor and he liked for the guys to come over there and just have a jam session. You know. I remember going over the several times to listen to the guys play. And that was one of the things you was asking about -- if we got to mingle with --

EM: Right, absolutely.

LP: But after we got up to Ie Shima, I felt pretty safe there. They told us there wasn't any Japs left on that island at all.

EM: But you were running a lot of missions and dropping boats I assume, or not?

LP: Well, I don't remember how many boats we dropped. We dropped several boats. But one time -- you know they had an emergency field way over in China where if a plane got in trouble and could make it up there then the underground could get the crews back out. A B-24 one day got in trouble and we went up there. Big river over there.

EM: There is the Yangtze River. And there's the Yellow River and there's several rivers.

LP: Yep. One of those big rivers -- we were going up. We flew in and we --

EM: This is China?

LP: And we was going to meet him and escort him back out if he had to ditch. Why, we could drop him the boat and stuff. We got way up in there and he got cold feet and turned around. He said he was going to try to find that base they had up there. So then we had to turn around and fly back out. And as far as I know there wasn't a shot fired at us while we was -- they said that old B-17 with that boat on

it looked a lot like one of the planes that the Japs or the Chinese one had and I can't imagine what it was but anyway, we flew up quite a ways up in that river and then after that guy turned around and headed the other way -- we turned around and headed back. But that -- you know -- you don't know what's going to happen on things like that.

EM: You never do.

LP: So, anyway, seemed like there was something else I was going to mention but --

EM: Now when you dropped boats to rescue when you were working off of Ie Shima, were a lot of these B-29s that got in trouble coming back from bombing Japan or not?

LP: Well, we didn't have any B-29s right there. They were stationed up north, farther out.

EM: Well yeah. Some of them were in Saipan and but I mean I was just wondering if when they were returning if they got in trouble -- if they had ditched or anything --

LP: That's the only one I know of that we had any dealings with.

EM: Oh, okay. So most of the times what are we talking about? Single pilots in a fighter plane?

LP: Yeah, right. Just like the day they dripped the H-bomb on Nagasaki. We dropped a boat to an old boy right there off the coast of Nagasaki. We didn't know what had happened

but there sure was a lot of smoke and dirt and all in the air at that time. And a lot of hollering going on over the radio and stuff. So he was a fighter pilot and we dropped the boat to him and we stayed until we saw him get in the boat, and then we took off because boy things was popping pretty good around there as far as we could tell on the radio and all. And we didn't want to get caught. So when we left, there we was leaving a wake on the water, we was low enough.

EM: You were that low? This is Nagasaki then? That was the second bomb. First one was on Hiroshima, so I guess you heard about the bomb by then.

LP: But we didn't know they had dropped another one on Nagasaki that day until we got back to base and, of course, then we knew. But another old boy -- now he's one of the guys that we kind of heard from. He tried to get the motor started on that boat and he couldn't get either one of them. Of course he was excited and all. And he was close enough, close enough in that he was drifting in by some big ships there at Nagasaki. And so he pulled out raincoat and pulled it over his head and got one of the fishing poles and as he drifted by, he acted like he was fishing. You know and drifted right by those big old ships.

EM: These were Japanese ships?

LP: Yep. Yeah. And so -- and this was getting pretty late in the day when we dropped him that boat and a little later in the evening he got one of the engines started, and so since he'd already drifted by them, well, he just putted right back by those -- see what would happen when we'd drop somebody a boat, the navigator would put on the map the location and tell them what direction to go where we would know where to look for them. And so four days after that one of our PBYS picked him and brought him back.

EM: So he did get back?

LP: Yeah. He said that fourth day before he was able to eat anything and keep it down.

EM: Really?

LP: Yeah. And his old hands was all skinned up from cranking on those engines.

EM: So when did you see him?

LP: Well, it was that fourth or fifth day after we had dropped that boat.

EM: So he came back to what, Ie Shima, where you were?

LP: Yeah, he come back with the PBY.

EM: And you got to talk to him.

LP: Yeah.

EM: Well at least you can see you are doing work that makes a difference. You are saving these guys.

LP: Yeah. And that was one thing I was always glad of. I was dropping something that saved lives instead of --

EM: Taking lives.

LP: Taking lives. Yeah. So it was about the first of the last part of November -- well, from Ie Shima, we went into Kyushu and --

EM: Oh really? After the war? After they surrender.

LP: Yeah, we went in, and right at the end of the war there was a B-25 that landed up at Oita. The next island up. And Oita was kind of a resort place. That's where volcano water come out of the beach and it was warm so it was kind of --

EM: Kind of a hot springs type thing, yeah.

LP: And that B-17 had landed -- I mean B-25 -- had landed on apron ramps there, some hangar buildings, and burned his tires off. So I was flying in some tires up there and some other guys went with me, just to be going, you know. And I got up there and found the field and there was guys out on the field -- Japs out on the field working. And I brought that old B-17 around and was fixing to land. And they had some little old bitty white flags. I hadn't even seen them until I was just about ready to set it down. I could see it looked like they were being marking off a direction for a strip so I wasn't lined up with that so I give it the gun

and then we went on around and then I lined up after I spotted them flags and I lined up and landed. And so we were going into lunch -- they was going to have a lunch for us while they got the tires out of that old B-17 for that 25 and -- so come back out and started to taxi back out and I'd run over a piece of shrapnel and punctured one of my tires. So we had to spend the night in a Japanese hotel up there in Oita.

EM: How do you spell Oita?

LP: O-I-T-O or something -- something like that. I don't know whether they still call it like that or not.

EM: So what was it like staying in a Japanese hotel?

LP: Well, you left your shoes at the door. Because them floors you could see your face in them, just about. And this room was a pretty good size room, and the table was about that tall. You sat on the floor to eat.

EM: So tables lay maybe 18 inches off the floor.

LP: I don't think it was even that. It might have been but anyway this little Japanese girl brought our meal to us -- I was trying to get her to eat with us and finally got her to take a plate with some food on it and she took that plate, she went over to the wall and kneeled down facing the wall to eat. And another old boy and I, we went over and we just gently picked her up and brought her back over

to the table and she did eat with us. But then when we got ready to go to bed, they just drew some -- well, it's paper curtains, made about four rooms out of this one room, and they threwed those thick quilt deals down on the floor.

EM: Almost like a duvet type thing, huh?

LP: And a pillow filled with rice hulls for your pillow. And that's what you slept on. And, well you had a comforter to pull up over you. A quilt or whatever you want to call it.

EM: So how was it sleeping?

LP: Well of course, I was young and I slept good. The next day, we was down on the street getting ready to go back out to the air field and there was a truckload of Jap soldiers come by the front of the hotel and we had an American flag hanging out there. And I remember one of them -- just opened like a dump truck or something. And another thing - - have you see those engines, like old oilfield engines. Engines like we got out there to show right now was setting up on the frame on the front of that truck and that's what was driving the truck. Yeah, and I remember when they went by, one of those soldiers tried to grab that flag and pull it down but he didn't get it done.

EM: Were they armed?

LP: I don't remember.

EM: I would be surprised if they were.

LP: I don't think so. But they had their uniforms on. And I know when we were there on Kyushu, some of our guys took a gun away from an old boy, a Japanese that they run into that had a gun. They took it away from him.

EM: How did the Japanese treat you guys? I mean, how did they act towards you?

LP: You know, when we first got over there, like, if you were going down a path or something, they'd get off to the side and bow down to you. You know. But they got over that pretty quick. We didn't have any trouble. Not much, anyway. I know one night, the barracks we were staying in had a little old ceramic switch out on a post and somebody took a hammer to it and put our lights out one night. But I remember the guys working at the kitchen and stuff, throwing scraps out the back door, and it would be kind of a fight between the ducks and the people as to who got the scraps.

EM: It was hard times.

LP: Yeah, it was. But they had a big -- I suppose it was about five feet across, a cement tank in a room off of the kitchen. And they filled that up with ice for us and one day I found a package of ice cream mix, I don't know where it come from, so I took a potato can -- powdered potatoes, one of those little square cans, about that big and about

so tall -- and I mixed that ice cream mix up. And I took that ice, some ice, I put that down in one of those old round garbage cans. And put ice and salt around it and I called one of those Japanese guys that was helping around there, over there, and I showed him what I wanted him to do. And he looked at me with a great big old smile, "Ice cream?"

EM: Oh, so he knew that word in English?

LP: He did. But he had the biggest old smile on his face you ever saw. That was funny to me. "Ice cream?"

EM: So I guess you shared some of that with him?

LP: Well, I don't remember for sure. Probably did, but anyway. I remember there being a field out close to us and seeing these Japanese women come out there with these little babies strapped to their backs and working that field. You know, any little old plot of land they could plant, they did. There wasn't much room between where the traffic was and where the fields started like there is over here. Another boy and I found a motorcycle in one of the hangars there one day, and it was a dead ringer for the motorcycle I had at home. And we looked it over real good and couldn't see any booby trap or anything. Tried to start it and it wouldn't start. And I told that old boy, I said, "I think I know what's wrong with it." Just from feeling the

feel of cranking on them. You know, you kick started them. So I took the side plate off and what they'd done is they'd took all the cams and turned them where the valves wouldn't work right and stuff, you know. So they had marks on them. All we had to do was line the marks back up. And that old thing fired off just as pretty as you'd please. We rode that old motorcycle all over that part of Japan.

EM: Really?

LP: Yep. And one day, was coming down a hill and it locked up on us. And so we throwed it out of gear and the engine was locked --

EM: Froze up, yeah.

LP: Yeah, so we was over close to the bay. I forgot now. Anyway, we found a piece of rope and got an old boy, one of the Navy guys to tow us back to our barracks.

EM: Because you were a fair distance away then?

LP: Yeah, we were a good little distance away. And so we were out there, we had a little old shed out there where we'd parked it. We were out there working on that and I forget now who it was come out there -- I think it was -- I think his name was Williams, come out there and said, "Larry, did you know your name come up on the list this morning to go home?" And I said, "No, I sure didn't." He said, "Well it is, it's just two hours until they are going to leave.

They are going to fly us up to Tokyo, Yokohama." So boy, I run in there and I started throwing stuff in my bags and he said, "What you can't take, I'll ship." And I was on that plane.

EM: So when was this now?

LP: This was about the last of November in '45. And they flew us over Nagasaki when they took us back so we could see what the H bomb had done. And of course that was quite a sight. What damage that one bomb could do. Anyway, they flew us to Yokohama and that was a lot further north.

EM: Yeah, that's up by Tokyo.

LP: Boy that first night in that barracks I froze. They just had a little potbellied stove in the middle of the barracks and then -- I was sleeping on one of those army bunks and it's just as cold on the bottom as it is on --

EM: On the top. Cold on both sides.

LP: Well the next day I got out and I found me some -- all these suits. A lot of people wear them just running.

EM: Something warm.

LP: And I got me some blankets together, and so the next night I slept pretty warm. Well, the third day they put us on an LCT, took us out to the Enterprise I believe it was. And oh boy, I run in the entry up there on the flight deck, let a net down in the bottom of that boat. We all threwed our

gear in there and they pulled the net up around our stuff and then we just got a hold of that net -- stuck our toes in it, you know.

EM: And load it up.

LP: Up we went and he swung us in on the hangar deck up there, on that big old aircraft carrier. And they had all the planes up on top and they were putting guys on the hangar deck. Myself, they put me down in the ship with some Navy pilots. Of course their bunks was on the side of the wall and I still had the old army cot that I slept on. And I remember the next morning, they had showed me where the galley was and I went down there and of course -- in the way we'd been you just picked up a tray and you took whatever they put on it. You know. And I went up to that galley and that old boy said, "What would you like to have?" Well, I didn't know what to say.

EM: You are not used to people asking you what you want.

LP: So he kind of told me what my choices where and I told him. He asked me how I wanted my eggs fixed. Of course that was the first fresh eggs I'd had in a long time.

EM: Yeah, that was a good meal.

LP: Yeah. And we started out. Think we left there the third day of December. And about two nights out, my old bunk says (skidding noise).

EM: Started swinging back and forth?

LP: Yeah, I was sitting on the floor, these old army cots. And it was just skidding on the floor. We had run into a storm out there. What was the sister ship to the Enterprise, do you remember?

EM: That was the Lexington.

LP: Something like that.

EM: Yeah, there was the Lexington, there was the Yorktown, I don't remember which one was the sister ship.

LP: I think it was maybe was the Lexington or something.

EM: I think the first Lexington. May have been the Saratoga, I'm not sure.

LP: I'm not sure but there were two of those big aircraft carriers and one would take the lead one day and one would lead the next day. But they had to get busy and get all them planes off of the top deck into the hangar deck to keep that thing from rolling over so far.

EM: Trying to get the weight down.

LP: And that was in the middle of the night. They had to get all the guys up there on that hangar deck. And then they just made their bunks down wherever they could around all of them planes in that hangar deck. Anyway, we come back and early one morning -- about three o'clock in the morning -- the news went through the ship that you could see the

coast of California. And boy, it wasn't long until that whole top deck was full of guy looking.

EM: How'd that feel to see --

LP: That was quite a thrill. And they sent a pilot boat out after it got daylight with a pilot -- harbor pilot on it. And he brought another boat -- they had a whole bunch -- of course, they had sailing clothes and a whole bunch of his girl helpers putting on a show for us.

EM: Girl helpers?

LP: Yeah. So we went, that was early in the morning. We went under the Golden Gate Bridge, went around and docked. And got off of the aircraft carrier and got on a ferry boat and went on up the river to Camp Stoneman. And it was dark again by the time we got to camp Stoneman. And so I stayed there for four or five days and then they put us on a train from there to El Paso. And we got into El Paso one evening pretty late and they put us in, you know, these wood up about four feet, and then this tent over that, you know? They put us in there and then they got us up at about four or five o'clock the next morning and started processing and then by noon I was out. They had tried to get me to stay in the end but I had had all of that that I wanted.

EM: You had had enough?

LP: Yep. I had lived in that old plane just about and so I had had enough. And so I said, "You know where I am if you need me." And anyway, I went into El Paso and got me a bus ticket. And I got home Christmas Eve morning 1945. Back to Crosbyton. And it happened to be one of the neighbor farmers in town that morning, early. And I rode back out with him and his place was just about a half a mile from our place.

EM: Now did your folks know you were coming?

LP: They knew I was on my way but they didn't know where I was. No, it was a surprise that I got in.

EM: How did it feel to be home?

LP: Well it felt pretty good, I'll tell you.

EM: I bet it did. You'd been through a lot. How do you feel about the Japanese after the war?

LP: I've never owned a Japanese car. I know they are good automobiles because a lot of people drive them, in fact my daughter drives one. But I just felt like we need to support our own people. That's just one aspect of it. As far as the Japanese people, they was doing the same thing we were, you know. I think they might have been drilled on how to be a little meaner than what we were because there were some pretty bad things they did. But I don't begrudge them. One day my brother-in-law was right here in this

museum and we are standing in front of a display of a Japanese uniform and all -- I've forgot now where it is, somewhere here -- and we are just talking. He'd been over there in the Philippines and all too. He was a little bit older than I was. And we are just talking between ourselves and I got a funny feeling. And I turned around and looked and there's a Japanese woman standing right behind us with her camcorder and she's recording everything we said. And that give me a funny feeling. But I think there is a lot of good Japanese people and so I don't have any grudges or anything.

EM: They were just misguided.

LP: Right.

EM: I guess that's the way I look at it.

LP: I think so. You know, those rulers of those different countries, just like old Hitler and some of them. It's just amazing to me what power they can have, you know, over people and all.

EM: Over a whole nation.

LP: Over a whole nation, yeah. Ends up being several nations.

EM: Ends up getting a lot of people killed, doesn't it?

LP: Sure does. Yep. And they did some pretty bad things.

EM: When you were in the Pacific did you write a lot of letters home? Did you get letters from home?

LP: Yes, yes. I tried to write pretty often and I would get -- I got packages from home. My mother used to bake things -- cakes and things like that -- and she had the old sealing machine that you seal in tin cans. And she would make candy and stuff and seal it in tin cans and send to me.

EM: You got them and they were in pretty good shape.

LP: And cakes. She would pop popcorn and put it all around the cake, you know, and use it for packing.

EM: And you can eat it.

LP: You better believe it. There wasn't any of it that went to waste. Like they say, you go to the PX over there and buy a bar of candy and at first if it had a bug you might just throw it away. Later on you just dug them out and went ahead and ate it. And then later on you just ate it.

EM: Called it protein.

LP: Yep.

EM: Do you feel like being in the war changed you as a person?

LP: Well, I think so. I think it made me a lot more sensitive or pay a lot more attention to what's going on and stuff than what I would have if I hadn't ever gone. I of course thought about it quite a bit and all and I've wondered a lot of times what direction I would have went if I hadn't been in the Army, what I would have done and stuff.

Anyway, talking about, I got home on Christmas Eve morning

of '45. Our community, Little Big Fork community out there, for 50 some odd years had been having -- on Christmas Eve night they'd have a committee of guys, they'd go down in what we'd call the canyon. It's a white river deal down there east of Lubick. And they'd cut little cedar trees and bring them up to the auditorium at the school house and build a Christmas tree that went all the way to the ceiling. They had a decorating committee that would decorate it. And my dad was always on the tree committee and he'd go among the people in the community and take up donations for the tree. Everybody got a sack, it had some nuts and candy and fruit in it. Everybody that come to the deal that night got a sack. And most of them would have the person's name on it. And I know dad's -- we've still got dad's little old notebook that he used to carry and you know a lot of those donations was like 25 cents or a dime. But then the night -- the night or two before the Christmas tree -- and they'd always have a little play to go along with it, that the kids put on. A lot of the families brought all the gifts over there for the kids and they always had a Santa Claus. I got in that morning and that night I was the Santa Claus.

EM: Didn't take them long to put you to work.

LP: No it didn't. And I met my wife there that night.

EM: That night?

LP: That night. A little cousin of mine that lived there said, "Larry, I've got somebody I want you to meet." And they had moved into the community after I had gone to the services and so she took me back in the auditorium there and introduced me to my wife.

EM: Isn't that something?

LP: We've been married -- this August it will be 64 years.

EM: Isn't that incredible? That's a long time. Do you think about the war years ever at night or anything like that? Or does it ever come back to you in any of your dreams?

LP: Yeah. It's something you never forget. I've forgotten a lot of the details you know. Just like that incidence when I was telling you I couldn't remember when we left Okinawa coming back to our base. There's been incidents like that where I can't imagine why I can't remember what happened but you know, I think sometimes maybe you are scared enough that you don't want to remember. Maybe something like that.

EM: Lock it out of your mind maybe.

LP: Yeah, and so --

EM: Have you ever gone to any reunions or anything like that?

LP: No, no I haven't.

EM: Or keep up with any of the old crew?

LP: Sergeant West that lived out at -- he was on the ground crew, he was a ground crew Sergeant. I kept up with him for a while.

EM: He's the guy from Clovis.

LP: Yeah.

EM: That's not too far away from where you live actually.

LP: Right. That wasn't very far. In fact, he had come by to see me a time or two after that. Because I lived there at Crosbyton and also at Little Field for a while and then we moved off down to Brown Wood and then we ended up at Granbury, and so I've thought about those guys quite a bit and wondered --

EM: Whatever happened to them.

LP: One of the guys that went through cadets with me -- he was also from Tennessee -- he was the guy who packed up what I couldn't carry when I come back and shipped it home to me. We corresponded a little bit and it ended. We just quit.

EM: Yeah. You have a life to live and you've got to go on and do it. Well, what else can we talk about while we've got you live here? We've covered a lot of land.

LP: Well. It was quite an experience; I'll just say that. And I don't know what I've -- I think I've covered most of --

EM: I just thought of something. You were looking at your photos earlier about the time that the Japanese flew the

Betty bombers to Ie Shima that were painted white with the cross on it.

LP: They had the big -- they were painted green with the big white cross on them.

EM: Tell me about that. You said you were there and they saw it.

LP: That morning they issued every one of us a new gas mask. They didn't know whether it was another trick for sure. But they did. They issued all of us a new gas mask and so their fighter planes flew them half way to Ie Shima and then our fighter planes picked them up and escorted them into Ie Shima.

EM: And these are Betty Bombers.

LP: They are Betty Bombers, two of them. And the guys, when they got out of those, some of those guys had their -- you remember those big -- those hats, those stove --

EM: Top hats.

LP: Top hats. Some of them, I mean, they were dressed to the hip. But they got out of the airplanes and lined up. And moved over to MacArthur's plane.

EM: Which was what?

LP: It was -- I don't remember -- it was big plane.

EM: Maybe a cargo plane of some sort.

LP: Well it was -- yeah, I don't remember just what kind of plane. But they marched and flew on down to Manilla. All we saw of those guys was when they left their planes and went to his planes and left.

EM: And what happened to the Japanese planes?

LP: Last time I saw them they were still there. Now they may have flew back, I don't know later on. But at one time -- and I don't know what --

EM: Let's look at some of these photos and --

LP: I know I had at one time, I had a picture of those guys as they were lined up.

EM: Is that what that is or not? We are looking at -- for the purposes of the recording, we are looking at photos that Larry has here.

LP: Well, yeah. I think that's part of them. I'm sure that's part of them. Right there. Now I don't see the guys with the tuxedos and top hats on there in that particular picture.

EM: Yeah, I didn't either.

LP: But that is, I'm sure that's part of the group that come on those Betty planes.

EM: Now this photo, here and here, is that Vinegar Joe?

LP: Yeah, it is.

EM: I thought so.

LP: That's him, and then MacArthur is right there.

EM: That's MacArthur too, on the left.

LP: Right there in front of him. And you know, one day --

EM: Now when did you take that photo? Or did you take it?

LP: I didn't take it. Well, let's say I'm standing -- I'm right there.

EM: Oh, that's you.

LP: I'm right there with that cap on me.

EM: Let me look. Okay.

LP: And here's old Sherman. He was from Redding, California. He's the guy that had done a tour over in Europe.

EM: And here is William Boyd Junior from Tennessee.

LP: Yeah, that's the guy that shipped my stuff home to me.

EM: Okay, he's the tall guy. And here's the picture of the Betty Bombers. I see two of them. I see jeeps all lined up around it. The Betty Bombers got the big red cross on the tail.

LP: Yeah, the white -- it's a white cross.

EM: Well I guess it's red. It's a black and white photo. Might have been blue or black, I don't know.

LP: It's -- I guess it was a big green cross. And the plane was painted solid white. Now this old boy right there, he's that tail gunner I was talking about. [Bivich?].

EM: Yeah. And here is a picture of the Bettys again and you are right, there is a big four engine -- looked like a transport aircraft in the background. That must have been MacArthur's plane.

LP: It is, that's the plane they went to and flew on down to Manilla.

EM: And then here is another picture of Stilwell and MacArthur. And are you in that picture?

LP: I'm around there somewhere.

EM: You're somewhere in the neighborhood.

LP: But I was going to tell you that when this was taking place -- I was -- there was another boy from Crosbyton. His -- I was in his shop one day and somehow or another this come up. And he says -- I said something about us picking Vinegar Joe up and carrying him up there. And he says, "Was you in that plane that picked him up?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "I was just standing off out there a little ways." I, of course, had no idea that anyone from home was anywhere near.

EM: No way of knowing. Well that is something. Well those are good photos and I think we'll pull a few of those and make some copies and why don't I go ahead and end the interview here Larry. And look, thank you for spending the time with us and sharing your experiences. I know for sure that

we've never interviewed a guy who flew a B-17 and dropped boats to survivors. This is the only one we've got in our collection and we've got 4,000 interviews, so this really does broaden our scope and it's not well known and when you go down to the Museum you are probably not going to see anything about your operation.

LP: I never have.

EM: But you were there and you were part of the team and I want to thank you for what you did for our country during the war.

LP: I'm glad to do it and I hope, you know, that it does give a little more history.

EM: It does.

END OF AUDIO FILE