

William Lyon Oral History Interview

PETE JENSEN: This is Pete Jensen. The day is October 18, 2010. I'm interviewing William Lyons. This interview is taking place --

WILLIAM LYON: Lyon.

PJ: Lyon? Do I have Lyon? You're right, it's Lyon. You're right. I wrote it wrong.

WL: That's been (inaudible).

PJ: No, that's fine. As he just told me, I'm interviewing William Lyon. This interview is taking place in the Nimitz Hotel in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies, Archives from the National Museum of Pacific War, the Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to the site. Bill, if you'd like to tell us a little about where you were born.

WL: Vernon, Texas, 1917, September the 5th.

PJ: Who were your parents?

WL: My dad was Emmet Lyon and my mother was Helen Hamilton Lyon, naturally.

PJ: Do you have brothers and sisters?

WL: I have one brother and three sisters living.

PJ: Where did you go to school, Bill?

WL: Which one?

PJ: Start with maybe grade school through high school, if you went to college. Any education before the time you went in the service.

WL: I went to several different schools, lower grades. Started out in Chilicothe Texas. Then I went to school in Chilicothe, actually it was out in the country. Then I went to Oklahoma. I went there in the ninth grade -- eighth grade. Oklahoma and Texas was different, so I made two grades in one year and graduated from high school.

PJ: You graduated early, then?

WL: Yeah, and I failed one year.

PJ: Was that Jet, Oklahoma?

WL: I graduated from high school in Jet when I went to high school in Eagle Grove before that. We got Eagle Grove. I made two dollars a month for bringing in wood for the school.

PJ: Two dollars a month? Big bucks back then.

WL: It would be more than I had otherwise.

PJ: What year did you graduate from high school?

WL: Nineteen thirty-seven.

PJ: Did you go into the service right after high school?

WL: No. I was a cotton farmer. One year. I raised five acres of cotton. Sold it, took it to the gin, and they ginned it

for the seed, and I sold it for \$50. (inaudible) cotton picking town person. There wasn't no money (inaudible). My uncle, when cotton was high-priced, I went to Chilicothe with him and my grandfather took away my cotton. We went out back out to the farm in a wagon and he had \$50 and didn't even know he had it. There was quite a difference then. Him getting that. My uncle and his brother, he sold a bale of cotton and bought a Model T for it.

PJ: With one bale of cotton?

WL: One bale of cotton. Cars were cheap and cotton was high.

PJ: How long did you farm cotton then?

WL: One year.

PJ: What did you do then?

WL: I got into the CCC camp. I was the youngest First Sergeant in the United States. Nineteen.

PJ: That was civil conservation? CCC?

WL: Civilian Conservation Corps.

PJ: Did you build buildings? What did you do?

WL: I was a First Sergeant in the CC.

PJ: What duties did the people perform?

WL: Forestry. I think it's the one that I know of in Texas. The forestry, I would say, controlled the fires in the forest. They have towers. Still got towers. They don't use them anymore, but they've still got them. They've got

telephone lines and they had those towers pretty high and it's the only high place in there. They can site across to another one, and then they can pinpoint exactly where the fire is. They don't do that anymore, that I know of. They've got their walkie talkies.

PJ: How long were you in the CCC?

WL: I want to say, two years. It may have been a little longer.

BARNEY LYON: About 21, then?

WL: Right.

PJ: Is that when you went in the service, then? No, that still would have been pretty early. Well, you could have gone in the service, but that was before the War.

BL: He met my mother there outside a little town called Maydelle.

WL: He knows where that is.

BL: It needs to go on the record. The place is still there for people who want to visit it.

PJ: By the way, just so everybody who's transcribing this knows, this is one of William's sons, Barney. At times you'll hear a different voice and that's the other individual here.

WL: He's keeping me honest.

BL: The intelligent voice belongs to Barney Lyon.

PJ: You make sure he tells the same story every time?

WL: That's what he's here for.

BL: I've never heard it told the same time.

PJ: You were in the CCC for a couple of years. Then, what did you do?

WL: I was in construction work and I worked in the sawmill. Pretty good in the sawmill. It's hard work, but I can do it. Then here comes World War II. There's two Congressman. I don't know if they were Senators or Congressmen, but I was walking all the way up to Maydelle, which is a mile. Had these two -- I want to call them Senators. They might have been (inaudible). Anyhow, they was in the War and they started it. They asked me what I did. You want to hear some French.

BL: Don't matter. Doesn't bother me.

WL: Some of us and we were going to kick the shit out of them right now, and he wouldn't listen to me and he started it. Then it started picking up fast.

PJ: You joined after Pearl Harbor?

WL: Right. After Pearl Harbor. I volunteered. I volunteered, (inaudible) that means, like I said, I'm number 1406, file 336. The reason I say that, to volunteer, and I volunteered for the Army. I volunteered to go overseas. I

volunteered to come back. I volunteered to come home.

Then they weren't, but (inaudible).

PJ: You volunteered to come home, but they didn't go for that?

WL: No. I don't know what's the matter with them people.

Yeah, I know what's the matter with them. Yeah, I had plenty of points to come home, but I was in the Pacific which you know that and them points didn't mean nothing then. I came home when my hero, Harry Truman, my personal hero.

PJ: He was a hero because he dropped the bomb, right?

WL: That's right. If I hadn't met him, I wouldn't be sitting here telling you that.

PJ: You were actually in the Army then, but you were the Army Air Corps? Is that correct?

WL: It was Army Air Corps when I volunteered. It was the Army Air Force when I got out.

PJ: It was still Army. They didn't have a separate Air Force at that time.

WL: Yes, it was. It separate. When they changed it from Air Corps to AAF. The Army Air Force. I guess it was still Army.

PJ: You were a crew member on a B-24?

WL: I was. Yes, I was a crew member on a B-24. I was in there three-and-a-half years, and I can't tell you one thing that

I did. I'll tell you a bunch of things I did. To start off with, it was in a crew and Smyrna, Tennessee. It was a full engine training. I'm going to have to say, that B-24 is still the best airplane they've ever put in there. Not as fancy, but it's the toughest.

PJ: You were a mechanic?

WL: Then we called it an engineer, which it is. If anything goes wrong with the airplane, you tell them, "Well, hell. I don't know. We've got 10 hours of gas so we can fly around and see if you can find out." Mind you, we've got brand new Second Lieutenants learning to fly them full engines. That ain't always on there. They've got to follow. They did good teaching. Another thing, the airplane (inaudible) had these women.

PJ: When they landed?

WL: Yeah. When they were rookies. Of course, they teach them. Bring it down and they washed out of [Wincham?] because they didn't bring it, because they was afraid they'd get too close to the ground. That's when they didn't get scared.

PJ: You had to be pretty good at math and everything as an engineer on one of those planes, weren't you?

WL: Well, I don't know what [twodom?] is, if that answers your question. I still don't know what. It amazes me what I

have accomplished. My math is -- it just ain't there. I used to sawmill. Have you ever sawmilled or seen them sawmill?

PJ: I've seen them, but a long time ago.

WL: This was a long time ago. If he said rocks, that's what you're going to be carrying. Now mind you, they put a whole tree up on that thing. They got a sawyer who is the boss and he gave you the sign of what he wants. On that first slab, he was the one and you'd better not get it too thin and you'd better not get it too thick. I can do that and I'd flip it over.

Then, when you got it turned over twice, which end was (inaudible), depending on what they were going to cut it. It could be two-by-fours, two-by-sixes. (inaudible) He gave a sign. You got to know. Mind you, I don't know what [twodom?] -- I still don't know what [twodom?] is. I can manage to get it. You've got to know what that's going to be when you get it one inch over, but actually, it's seven-eighths because you've got to figure out how many one inches. Then you get down to two inches. Then you got to know how many two inches you got. You've got a gauge that shows you the numbers, but it don't tell you what's that, but I did that and I did it good.



PJ: I read somewhere where he scored 142 on the interest test, so don't let him kid you. He's smart.

WL: I'm not kidding you, but I don't know what [twodom?] is.

PJ: What is [twodom?]?

WL: All right. I'm going to tell you. This teacher was trying to teach this little kid multiplication. She asked him, "How much is two and five?" "I don't know." "How much is two and two?" He says, "I don't know. I don't even know what [twodom?] is." That's me. I don't even know.

PJ: I reading a little bit about stuff with the Air Force. They were called the Pineapple Air Force. Is that correct?

WL: I never did hear them called that, but probably did.

PJ: From what I read, was that their first duties when they were formed was to protect the Hawaiian Islands. They called them the Pineapple Air Force. I read somewhere, I think they were the oldest Air Force unit -- this is some of the Air Force. Where were you based at when you were in the Pacific?

WL: I started off with, we went to Hickam Field. I stayed there only a month or so, and then we went to the Big Island.

PJ: In Hawaii?

BL: Oahu?

WL: Oahu, no. That's where (inaudible). It's the Big Island, Hilo. Hilo was a town and it is Hawaii. That's what it is.

PJ: Yeah. It's part of Hawaii.

WL: We stayed there until they had (inaudible) when they were going down into the South Pacific. This was when the War actually started, as far as we were concerned. I don't mean we wasn't fighting and getting killed and all that. When we started kicking around.

PJ: Going on the offensive, rather than defensive.

WL: Right. We went to the Gilbert Islands, Makin in particular. I got my ears damaged somewhere along there. I'd have to get somebody to answer my name in roll call because all they had on their mind was putting you on limited service, and I didn't join the Army Air Force to ding the trains or wait on tables.

PJ: That's what limited duty is?

WL: That's absolutely what it is. We stayed on Makin, I'm going to say a year. It may not have been a year. Don't confuse me with dates.

PJ: I believe Makin was an atoll in the Pacific Islands. I think it was on Butaritari. Then he did some service on [Owajilan?]. Nobody ever mentions that. They just call it

Makin, which is the atoll, but he was on two different islands, at least.

WL: As far as we were concerned, we were in the second (inaudible). That's the second air support squadron. I ain't ever heard that it, since I've been out, 60 I did. What we did, we had a machine shop. Not just a big building, tents. We had supplies. We had people that knew what they were doing, and they'd gather up these damaged planes from anywhere in the Marshalls, particularly the Gilberts and (inaudible) in the first place, which they had a lot of damage. I had a Major Webster and a Captain [Kuhn?].

PJ: What were those names, again?

WL: Webster. Major Webster and Captain Kuhn. Major Webster was one of the few that got in the air over Pearl Harbor. He was a gentleman.

PJ: Could you tell us what the name of your outfit was, again?

WL: The second (inaudible). That's the initials for it.

PJ: Air support? Was that what they were?

WL: The second air support squadron. Anyhow, Major Webster and Captain Kuhn and Sergeant [Herd?], the sergeant was in charge of (inaudible). They went to (inaudible) and picked up a plane and come back to Makin. Makin's a little bitty old. (inaudible) says six miles long, but it was nearly

seven miles long and a half a mile wide at the widest space. I never did measure it. Anyhow, they missed the islands. For some reason, and I don't know if it was the instruments. It probably was. I don't think where they would go it rained all the time. We had lost them. You can't prove anything, you know what I'm saying? They ain't here no more. I don't think (inaudible).

PJ: They would go and get a lot of the parts from the old planes to use?

WL: They would bring them in just like you take your car for a wreck and estimate it. They'd say what it would take to get it airworthy. If it wasn't -- actually they wouldn't even fool with it to start with, if it wasn't repairable. They would bring it back and we had all the equipment. We had no fancy building, but we had tents and machinery and parts. We took a load a parts down there. Not this load, but we had a load of bombs, gasoline and parts.

I'm going to add in a little right here that, this was broad daylight and the Japanese were bombing every night and sometimes daytime. This was a torpedo plane and we said, "I don't know." We had a port there. It come right straight at me. I'm standing on the back end of that road

and I knew what it was going to do. He dropped that thing and it hit the water and it went straight at me.

I don't know if you believe in a guardian angel or not, but thanks to him, I'm here. That thing veered to the left and went right by that ship. It ran up on the beach. If it would have hit that thing, there would have been nothing left of it. Like I said, it was loaded with gasoline and bombs and aircraft parts.

PJ: This room would have been empty with two people.

BL: Yeah, and I got 16 grandkids, myself.

WL: Actually, I think it's the only reason I survived. The only reason. I'm (inaudible). I know you've heard this. There's no atheists in a foxhole.

PJ: That's what I understand.

WL: I believe that. They might have been when it started.

PJ: You were just on the ground all the time, right, as far as working on planes?

WL: After I left Tennessee I went to Alabama and I started off as a company clerk and I (inaudible). I know what [twodom?] was. Then this deal come up where they was shipping out and I volunteered. That's what I joined for. That's what they joined for. That's what my grandson is

in. We are military, ex-military, and I've still got two grandsons.

BL: Yeah. Got two boys in the Calvary. I notice they're selling Calvary hats to the Marines down there. My boys are not going to be sure about that.

PJ: The gentleman that runs that -- I should say runs. He's the head of the museum now. He was a Marine Commandant about two ago. In fact, he's a local Fredericksburg person. He has a board, let's put it that way. Yeah, a Marine. Those planes. I read where a lot of these B-24s, they had all kinds of nose iron on them, paintings of Betty Grable and things like that. Did you see some of those? Were those just?

WL: I saw one with a (inaudible). You know, you've seen a B-23. Have you been inside of one?

PJ: No. They had one out here at the Air Force.

WL: Particularly, one (inaudible) didn't know that the pilot's compartment, which you've got a pilot and a copilot and an engineer and gunners. In the front of it is a bombardier's compartment. When you (inaudible) there's one coming in to Makin Island. It flew in and it had that (inaudible). I know that they have hydraulics like they do now with the cables coming through there into the bombardier's compartment. Then, you see the wings and the tail. Them

there, you can sit just like there's a wall around you. That thing would (inaudible) and smooth across it. He flew that thing in. The bombardier didn't fly in. I know they've got a B-25 down there someplace. One of them come in and had a cable. They'd bring it up on a ship when they were bombing and wrap that cable around the left engine, and he flew that in. Of course, the engine wasn't working anymore.

PJ: Some good pilots or lucky pilots. One or the other.

WL: I think there was a whole lot of luck.

PJ: The Good Lord was with them, right?

WL: That's true.

PJ: Something else I was reading about was, the women; I heard there was a lot of women who flew those planes across. They weren't in combat, but they flew planes maybe to England or wherever. I was wondering if you ever seen any of them? The WASP. Was it WASP? Yeah, I think.

WL: I had a cousin. She was in the Navy, but she was a woman. They didn't call them WACs.

PJ: I'm not sure.

BL: They're called WAVES.

PJ: WAVES. That's right, yeah.

WL: I knew that. (inaudible) can't think of.

BL: You were wounded, or your ears were damaged in bombing raids?

WL: I'm pretty sure it was bombing. We were on a ship and we were coming down and they were having some five-inch target practice. They had a floating target. That's the only time I remember that it actually hurt my ears, and I wasn't right next to it. I sat close, but I'm not sure what it was. It didn't take me a good 60 years to get some hearing aids.

PJ: Sixty years.

BL: He finally got some through the VA. They helped with some hearing aids.

PJ: They wouldn't do it before, or he was too stubborn to go to it?

BL: That's it.

WL: It's the truth of the matter. I did not join the Army to get with the VA, which they've got a lot to offer. I'm convinced now that you ought to take advantage (inaudible). He asked me because he was the same way. You know what I told him? I said, I go to a veteran's office there. I also go to the VA Hospital and the clinic and all that stuff. His doctor, the one he goes to, was dropping the Agent Orange when he was over there. They told him to get everything he could and he asked me what I thought about



it. I turned 180 degrees. I told him to get anything. I don't know if he'd been with the VA real long or not, or (inaudible) or whatever. The VA were a bunch of rats. Absolutely.

PJ: All I know is that, we treat out military people, our veterans, we don't treat them very well.

BL: It's much better now than it was.

PJ: It is. Just like the story I hear now where, New York City, they're not getting the ballots out in time to vote. I'm saying, that's not a problem. You put those ballots on Air Force One and you fly them overnight. There's way to do it. That really upsets me that they would even consider not having the ballots over there for the people that are getting their ass shot at. That's just disgraceful.

BL: He was sent to a hospital in Hawaii for his ears. Then when he was discharged they offered him a 10% disability.

PJ: Twenty.

BL: Twenty percent. He wouldn't take it because he could still work. That's the kind of guys we have fighting the war, too. I still am confused about the Liscome Bay. Yes it was sunk and you were in the convoy? He was in the convoy when the Liscome Bay was sunk.

WL: I wasn't on the Liscome Bay. It was a converted aircraft carrier. Navy air. I never did see it. They had a

(inaudible) this thing. They'd be mistaken there right shortly before we went to the Gilberts, they sunk it. They sunk it. I don't know. It was friendly (inaudible).

PJ: I think three Japanese torpedoes hit it.

WL: I never (inaudible). They had us out there on a deck looking for a submarine (inaudible). They'd come up underneath you.

BL: How did you get on a ship? I thought you were an Army man, a pilot; or not a pilot.

WL: When they send a convoy and the infantry with Air Force armed, but we're Air Force. We're taking stuff down to repair. That's how I got on that. When they sent me back to Hawaii, you know what they wanted to do? Put me on limited service. That's dirty words and I didn't do it. I went to (inaudible) and it's an all detached service. You know what detached service is? You know what being left-footed is?

PJ: Being left-footed?

WL: You don't get along with nobody or nothing. You're a square peg in a round hole. When I went I was the First Sergeant out there, which I'll tell you something about (inaudible). Actually, they can't do it now, but if you were the First Sergeant then, if you can whip the First Sergeant you can have his job. Mind you, my angel was

watching out for me. Either that, or they didn't want the job, or both.

PJ: Nobody challenged you?

WL: Not unless I want a lesson to it. I used to have a motorcycle. That means I had one, too. (inaudible)

BL: I understand, I heard that you were also a sniper at one time.

WL: I never told anybody but him.

BL: I hadn't talked to him, but it came back.

WL: What do you think about if you're in a tree (inaudible) and shooting somebody in the head? (inaudible) it had to have been me and him, he would have got some of these other people.

BL: That's right.

WL: I wasn't an official sniper. It depends on what you call it. I didn't have an MOA or a [PDQ?] or whatever.

BL: We had MOS. I don't know what.

WL: What we were, we had (inaudible). I was Air Force, Air Corps. We had no training. None, but I was a crack shot (inaudible). I'm still a pretty good shot. I've got a steady finger. Major Webster, I would just say he was a captain then. Had us to make some (inaudible) He told us how ever many there was, 15 or something. Fires ten shots. I didn't need ten shots to hit that little old (inaudible)

right there they stacked them. He asked me, he says, "Where's the other five?" I said, "I didn't need ten shots," and I didn't.

There was another old country boy just like me. I was country as you could have been. He was from West Virginia or some of them hillbilly states, and he was a crack shot. He said he could shoot a bumblebee. I never did see it, but I kind of believe it. Anyhow, we were designated to (inaudible). That's what we did, not for the duration of the War, but the duration of that (inaudible). I've got to tell you, if they (inaudible) belonged to me, and that's not (inaudible), that's just how it was.

BL: You must have done a lot of hunting when you were younger, right?

WL: I raised up (inaudible) and done a lot of hunting since, but not anymore. If I was to kill a deer, I couldn't drag it out. Fact is, the last time I think I went hunting and my grandson did that. (inaudible). Didn't kill him. Just crippled him, but we got him. I ask him, Wade -- I said, "Wade, can you get that deer out to the pickup?" I said, "If you can't, you're going to have to drag both of us out." You're going to think I'm bragging, but I'm not. He

spent one day here. One day. He got three deer tags. Do you hunt deer?

BL: No, I don't. I'm all for it, but no, I do not hunt.

WL: (inaudible) He got three tags. He can kill one buck and two does, or whatever the deal is. Personally, I wouldn't ever shoot another buck, but I shoot them to eat. Bucks ain't fit to eat. My wife and a friend, she was a nurse in Houston, and she'd get three tags and I had three tags, so I'd kill six deer. (inaudible) and the reason people don't get them, they don't know what they're looking for. They'd absolutely be looking straight at one. (inaudible) there's one right over there. "Where? Where?" Shoot him.

PJ: When the torpedo missed your boat, what were you doing at the time? The timeframe?

WL: I was leaning on the bed. That's exactly what I was doing.

PJ: I mean, what was the mission? Were you just going there?

WL: No. We were in the ocean. There wasn't no fear.

PJ: Were you going back to Hawaii with parts?

WL: We hadn't got unloaded yet. We were just there, sitting there waiting for the infantry to clean us out.

PJ: Why were you at Gilbert Islands?

BL: It was Butaritari.

PJ: That's where they were waiting to unload.

WL: They had them gunners up on them (inaudible). They come whaling off of that thing. They had their earphones and microphone. They weren't jumping off of there. They had the (inaudible) there would have been nothing left of it. They even jumped in the water, they wouldn't have made it. Of course, they wasn't thinking too good. I know that.

BL: Did you see the pilot? Were you that close?

WL: Absolutely. If I'd a had a rifle, I'd a shot that son of a gun.

BL: Why didn't you have a rifle?

WL: I don't know. Actually, we was just in the process of unloading it.

BL: Do you remember what he looked like?

WL: I don't know. He was a human being.

BL: You went in after Pearl Harbor. You could have been one of those guys shooting at those planes in Pearl Harbor, right? The few guys that (inaudible).

WL: If I'd a been there and had a gun I would have been doing it, but I wasn't there.

BL: How long were you in altogether? You said, four-and-a-half years?

WL: Three-and-a-half years. I got out in '45 and I got in in '42.

BL: Earlier on you were talking about Truman. Tell me a little bit about -- I know that he's your hero.

WL: When Roosevelt died, he was Vice President. I thought that is the sorriest example for a President that I ever heard. I didn't just think it. I told everybody I could think of.

BL: You thought Truman was sorry at that time?

WL: Yeah. Then (inaudible) and I was back on Hawaii.

(inaudible) when our outfit come back from Makin. They stayed there for a year or more after I got in. I'd say a year. That would be close enough. They were going to Iwo Jima. That's where they were going. I had enough pull and I could go anywhere I wanted, because they couldn't keep me from it. When I got back with the outfit and I was going with them.

BL: How did you do that? You were supposed to be on limited duty.

WL: They never put me on limited duty. They wanted me. I wouldn't stand for it. No way. That's where we were going. That son of a gun dropped that bomb over there and I didn't get to go.

BL: (inaudible)

WL: (inaudible)

BL: You probably wouldn't have been here again.

WL: That's what I'm talking about.

BL: Saved a lot of lives, both Americans and Japanese.

PJ: Yeah. They estimated from 500,000 to a million casualties.

WL: Then (inaudible) them. The Enola Gay was the plane that dropped the first one. They wouldn't let them put it in the Smithsonian Institute. Absolutely would not, but they had enough uproar that it's in there now.

PJ: It was political.

WL: I can't understand this (inaudible). If they can get a soldier's head off and drag him through the streets, why can't you take a flame thrower and go (inaudible) run them sand niggers out of them caves?

PJ: I agree.

WL: I asked my grandson. I said, "What happened to the flame throwers?" We had them and used them. They work. You don't (inaudible). All the foxholes -- not a foxhole. Caves. It wasn't deep enough to make a foxhole, just (inaudible) they don't get them out. But it gets them in, and they're there forever. You can call them bulldozers (inaudible). Another thing, do you think they'll ever account for the POWs that are missing in action?

PJ: Do I think what?

WL: POWs, missing in action. Do you think they'll ever figure them out? Absolutely not. It's impossible. Because when I first seen it in the War, when you shot a Jap, what did



you do with him? I tell you what I do with them. I dug a hole (inaudible) and covered him up. The Japanese, now I don't know this personally, but I'm sure of it. The Japanese were a vicious type people. They were brainwashed. I say brainwashed. I know they were. Because when we were (inaudible) from Makin, P-39s. P-39s, yeah. They were obsolete. They tore the armor out of it so they could get (inaudible). That's what they had to start with. They had all the good stuff over on the European side, which I don't think that was too dumb. don't know. It might have been.

You could hear them on the radio (inaudible). If the pilot got hit, knocked out, if he could hit the island, he'd ride it in. If he could hit the water, a [PB-1?] would pick him up. I can't understand why today they do what they do. I'll tell you why, because they're a bunch of damn liars. That's what. They can tell them anything they want to. They laugh up their sleeve. You lying so-and-so. They're going to do that, and they don't.

You probably knew Jimmy Hoffa, the President of the Teamsters. A crook. I said then and I said, "Man, I would vote for him for President." I'll tell you why. If he

told you, "There ain't no use of you coming back here tomorrow because this place won't be here." There ain't no use of you going because it wouldn't be there. That (inaudible) sitting up there (inaudible).

PJ: What was the point about the pilot hitting the land or the water?

WL: If they hit the water, the [PV well?] would pick them up. More than nine times out of ten. If they hit the island, they automatically tortured.

PJ: When they were bombing [Owajilan?], if they hit that island, yeah.

WL: Any of them. The Japanese.

PJ: He'd rather hit the water and get picked up because if he hit the land the Japanese would get you.

WL: Yeah.

BL: By dad told me that he had made a decision he would never be captured because of what they did.

WL: I always figured that I'd maybe take a few with me, but they wasn't going to take me, and they didn't. (inaudible)

PJ: Guardian angel?

WL: Right. That don't happen only the War. It still happens.

PJ: Did you come close to getting captured at any time?

WL: I never come close to getting captured because I was not going to be captured.

PJ: You never got wounded, did you?

WL: Nothing happened to me. I'm tough. When he was a Second Lieutenant when the War started. Old Army. I don't know how many inspections. Probably a jillion. He's calling, "Give me ten men." Whatever his name was. When we was (inaudible). We was loading the ship. "Give me ten men." (inaudible) They didn't have tests. Old Army. When we went ashore, the first day we went ashore, one of the infantrymen, not a Marine, an infantryman. I've got a thing about this. He said not to go, and I didn't say don't go. He said it would be better if you didn't. I (inaudible) because we hadn't gotten cleaned up yet. They got a thing. Don't load your rifle. This don't apply to me. We didn't have them loaded. Let's just say, they didn't have them loaded. (inaudible).

PJ: Why would they not want you to have them loaded?

WL: Because they were stupid. Actually, I think they was afraid they'd shoot some of their own men.

BL: When we went to the museum, they said the 27th Infantry took Makin Island or Makin atoll. Daddy challenged that. Who did you say took the island?

WL: 174th Infantry. I'm not too sure. I might be a little -- I read a piece in the American Legion or one of those magazines on Makin Island which was the first (inaudible)

in print in over 60 years. They said that (inaudible) after Makin Island. He didn't. He wasn't there. He was in (inaudible) getting all (inaudible), but he was not on Makin. I was there. I know. I'm not too sure. In this case had the infantry was cleaning it up or something, but it wasn't the 174th. There's a possibility, not being in infantry, but I am a fan of the infantry. They may have changed the name of it from the 174th to the 25th, or whatever. I don't recall what they -- that could have been changed and it could be something else.

PJ: As far as you remember at the time, what unit took the island?

WL: Hundred and seventy-fourth infantry. It's branded in my brain.

PJ: That's something I'd like to research.

BL: I heard some cases where they talk about the Marines. In fact, I just interviewed somebody a few weeks ago. Something about, the Marines took this island. They said, "No. The Marines came in after when we were there." You don't know exactly.

WL: I know.

PJ: As far as my research, the Marines didn't take that.

BL: No, I know. (inaudible)

PJ: What I'm interested in is the unit. You were in what unit, the 7th Air Force?

WL: Seventh Air Force which takes in a lot of territory. Just like the 174th. I'm sure it takes in more than that. I don't know. We were listening to the ship's radio. Sitting out here and waiting to get on the island. The radio, we could hear it. It's from the States. It said, General Roosevelt and he was a Marine, either has taken or is taking. I forget now. I think he said they'd taken it. He wasn't in the cotton picking infantry.

PJ: You had B-24s, but you also had other fire planes in that, too, right?

WL: Worked on.

PJ: Worked on. P-51s?

WL: You trying to get me lying. I don't think they had them when I got there.

PJ: One time, I was reading about the 7th Air Force. They were talking about during the second War. They was late in the War, the P-51s.

WL: Might have been P-51s. Otherwise they had Corsair. It was a Navy plane and a good one.

PJ: Is that the one the wings would come up? Corsair?

BL: When you got there, they had the P-40 or P-39? What did they have?

WL: We had P-40s when we were at Makin Island.

PJ: Did they bring in the P-51s later while you were still there?

WL: We had a P-51 when I was there. They did get some, but I was gone. I was gone about a year before they came back. They did quite a bit in a year. They had the P-39s, which come in very shortly. They couldn't get up there (inaudible) in Japanese planes, so they stripped all the armor out of them and they got (inaudible).

PJ: When you joined back up with your group in Hawaii, and you were going to go to?

WL: Yeah. That's the place. (inaudible)

PJ: The bomb was dropped and you never ended up there, Iwo Jima? You were going to Iwo Jima, right?

WL: No. I was in the -- they knew where we were going. They come up and had (inaudible) and I managed to get back into it.

BL: Why would you go to Iwo Jima? Was that a jumping off place?

WL: What did you join the Army for?

BL: They had already taken Iwo Jima, I think.

WL: I know what I'm talking about then. Why did you join the Army? (inaudible)

PJ: They dropped the bomb and then, basically, did you get out of the service after they dropped the A bomb?

WL: Yeah. Right shortly after.

PJ: That's when you requested to get out.

WL: I'd requested it. Didn't do no good. (inaudible) I was sitting on that little old island. (inaudible)

BL: The War was over before you got out, right?

WL: Yeah.

BL: What kind of ship did you go home on?

WL: The SS Matsonia. First class passenger ship. Guess what they had me to do?

PJ: Clean latrines.

WL: I was waiting on the tables. We called them feather merchants. I never did (inaudible) feather merchant. (inaudible)

PJ: What were they called?

WL: Feather merchants.

PJ: Why feather?

WL: I don't know.

PJ: In your shadow box, you have a wounded duck, I think. What was that? You have some kind of pen about a wounded duck.

WL: Ruptured duck.

PJ: Ruptured duck. Sorry about that. Do you know about that? Ruptured duck. For good conduct?

WL: Yeah.

PJ: How did you get one of those?

WL: I don't know. I really don't. I wasn't all that bad, just kind of hard-headed.

PJ: You haven't changed much, have you?

WL: I don't think I have. It don't matter how hard then, they didn't do that for me. I've still got all mine. Anyhow, we were on this first class passenger ship and they didn't feed them first class passengers good. I wasn't used to (inaudible). Only good food I remember getting, I stole from the Navy. It's true.

PJ: That was worth the interview, wasn't it?

WL: They had me waiting tables on these feather merchants. Can you imagine? Coming back there and feeding me with feather merchants. They had big pitchers of tea on the table. "Fill it up." (inaudible) I said, "If you don't drink a goddamn thing, you can get up and fill it." This sergeant that was in charge of this detail. "Come go with me." Because he didn't want nobody tearing on it. I went down to the (inaudible). This one, they had anything you wanted. I had that little old apron on and I could go anywhere I wanted to on that ship, any time I wanted. Eat all that good stuff and take all that good stuff to my



buddies. It did me a favor. I wasn't able to take that kind of stuff.

BL: You on that ship. Where did you go, back to San Francisco or something like that?

WL: Went to San Francisco to be not separated, but physical exam. Whatever it takes. I went to San Antonio (inaudible).

Another story, I want to tell you about it. I picked up an M1 (inaudible) on Makin Island. Lost. (inaudible) I get out there on the (inaudible) all day long. (inaudible) I could run it home. That ain't what they said. They couldn't take (inaudible). I gave it to them. We got to San Francisco and we had on (inaudible). I don't know where they were using it. An empty (inaudible). I'd get rid of them every time we'd stop. I had two (inaudible) full and I was not going to come back loaded. When I got home they sent my footlocker. They sent everything I had, but I didn't have the Garand in there because I definitely could not take it.

PJ: The what?

BL: The M1 Garand.

WL: I could run anything, but I didn't.

BL: Now my son, his grandson, is looking for a World War II M1 Garand and he found one where they sell them in Alabama. The government does, so he's planning to go down there to get one. If my dad had brought that back, he would have saved my son a lot of money.

PJ: Yeah. That was inconsiderate, wasn't it?

BL: It was.

PJ: After you got out, what did you do after you got out of the service? You must have found a lady and got married.

WL: Yeah, I'll tell you about that in a minute. I was working for [JV Beard?] in Shreveport. A welder when I got in.

PJ: Was that a shipbuilder? Beard? What were they?

WL: Not a ship. It was a machine shop. Tank builder. When you got out, you'd back to work for whoever. I worked for them for a while, but I didn't see it again. (inaudible) rag bag. What are you doing here? I got this thing (inaudible) dirty drawers I got. I could have had anything with me, but I didn't know that. I was still kind of country (inaudible).

BL: You mentioned marriage. He got married before he went in the service and had three children. He had three children before he went in and he had three children when he got out.

WL: That's not quite true.

BL: Maybe I missed something.

WL: You missed one. I had two when I got in and then Delores was born when I was in Tennessee. I didn't join it for the goodies.

BL: You wanted to kick butt.

WL: Go over there and kick this stuff (inaudible) and go home. I did.

PJ: Several of the war people I've met, I think every one went over there, they just felt it was their duty and they did it. Just something they should do. That's all.

WL: That's exactly right. That's exactly what I thought of it. I told them in San Francisco they were going to give me 20% disability. I told them I don't want anything. I can make a living. I don't want anything. I still make a living, but the last place I worked for when I retired from it, actually, they bought Western Gillette. (inaudible) Roadway Express. You may know them. They used to be the biggest one next to UPS. They told me then, they said, "If we hadn't have bought you, he couldn't work for us now." I think they had no choice.

PJ: Did you work welding building ships before you went in?

WL: Yeah.

PJ: In New Orleans, maybe?

WL: Yeah.

PJ: Were those the Liberty ships?

WL: Yeah.

PJ: Did you go overseas on a Liberty ship?

WL: No. I think it was retired by then.

BL: Maybe you didn't want to go on one of these.

PJ: I was going to ask you because I heard that a bunch of them fell apart.

WL: I never heard of one falling apart.

BL: I think it was the ones you welded on. I'm not sure. He was a welder when he got out.

PJ: When you were overseas, did you get a lot of mail when you were overseas? Mail from your wife or friends and that sort of thing.

WL: I got more than she did. They didn't have much trouble with the mail.

PJ: Do you have any other questions or anything?

BL: No. I was trying to think of things he's told me and that pretty well covers it.

PJ: See if he tells the same thing twice.

WL: Yeah. He's repeating himself.

BL: The only thing that I can't get in my mind is the timetable for the Liscome Bay. That's the only thing I can't get in my mind.

WL: (inaudible) The ship was in Pearl Harbor. We were loading a ship and they would come down, and I don't know how many was in the convoy.

PJ: The Liscome Bay and your ship sailed from Pearl Harbor. Okay. I thought I had read somewhere where the Liscome Bay was in the Battle of Manila. I don't have the time table in my mind.

WL: (inaudible)

PJ: Maybe Jimmy Doolittle and his crowd.

WL: That ship named the Gilbert Islands. Then, I don't know if it was the Philippines, but it was pretty active, but that was the name of the ship was the Gilbert Island.

PJ: How long you been retired?

WL: A long time. I retired in '65 and I'm 93.

BL: Twenty-eight years. You're getting pretty good on the social security.

PJ: He's one of the ones that made them pay.

BL: My father-in-law and mother-in-law are both 95. My father-in-law retired from U.S. Steel at '65 and he's been getting a pension from U.S. Steel since he was 65, and he's now 95. That just makes up for the people that (inaudible).

PJ: Yeah, it works out. Yeah.

BL: I'm trying to get him to give me some of that extra, but he won't.

PJ: He won't?

WL: You think that's a good deal.

PJ: What's that?

WL: Social security.

PJ: I'm getting social security, but I think in the long run, they'd been better off if they'd just let me invest the money rather than putting it in the government. With my other investments with U.S. Steel, I've done a lot better than my social security.

WL: Yeah. You (inaudible) social security. They don't have to think entitlements. You're still in it?

PJ: Yeah.

WL: Your mother?

PJ: No. My mother passed away in '89, several years ago. My father actually passed away in '53.

WL: He got in the same time I did.

BL: He mentioned to you that he had worked for Beard. When he went in, his fellow workers made him a double-edged sharp sword with brass knuckles that he took with him and carried through World War II. He had his homemade, double-edged with brass knuckles, with the sheath and everything, that he carried over there.

PJ: Does he still have it?

BL: He has given it to his famous grandson who's in the military now. I had a son that went to Iraq and he was trying to get a knife he could take and they were hoping they could take a homemade knife. I don't think they let you do that now. They did then, and this thing, it will rip you up if you're not careful.

WL: (inaudible)

BL: For history, that's something interesting.

WL: (inaudible) makes a knife.

END OF AUDIO FILE