

William Maddux Oral History Interview

CHARLIE SIMMONS: This is Charlie Simmons. Today is the 14th of June, 2011. I am interviewing Mr. William Maddux. This interview is taking place with me in Fredericksburg, Texas. And Mr. Maddux is in Stillwater, Oklahoma. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War-Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. The purpose of this project is to collect, preserve and interpret stories of the lives and wartime experiences of World War II veterans. These materials will be made available for historical and other academic research by scholars and members of the interviewee's family. Mr. Maddux, would you agree to those terms?

WILLIAM MADDUX: Yes, I agree.

CS: Very good then. If you would, please, state your full name, your date of birth, your place of birth, and we'll just take it from there.

WM: All right, sir. My full name is William Grant Maddux, M-A-D-D-U-X. Born, August 15, 1924 in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

CS: Okay, in Fort Smith? And, did you grow up in Fort Smith? Was that your home?

WM: No. Soon as I was old enough to travel, my mother brought me back to Oklahoma. And I've lived here all my life.

CS: Very well then. Do you have any brothers and sisters?

WM: Yes. I have one -- had one sister who passed away about three months ago.

CS: Okay. And, what part of Oklahoma then were your parents living in when you were born?

WM: Way down in the southeast corner of Oklahoma in Le Flore County.

CS: Le Flore County.

WM: That's only about 50 miles from Fort Smith. And then Fort Smith was the nearest hospital. That's why I was born in Arkansas.

CS: I see. Now, what was your father's occupation?

WM: He was a registered pharmacist.

CS: Okay. And, did you grow up there in that area then?

WM: No, no. We only lived down there - I only lived down there, rather, about, oh, six years, I think. That's where my parents came from. That's where they lived and were married and everything and lived when I was born. Then we moved to Oklahoma City for, oh, I would guess six or seven years. Then we moved back down to the Kiamichi Mountain country for the five or six years I was telling you about. Then, we came to Stillwater, Oklahoma.

CS: Okay.

WM: When we lived in Oklahoma City, my father owned and operated three drugstores there in the city.

CS: Okay. And, where did you graduate from high school then?

WM: Here in Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1942.

CS: 1942? Okay. Do you remember where you were on December the 7th, in '41?

WM: Yes, yes. I was in high school here in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

CS: Okay.

WM: I remember the day that -- every student in the school was called into assembly in the senior high school auditorium so that we could listen to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's radio announcement about the "Pearl Harbor atrocity," are the words he used.

CS: Mm-hmm. That was his famous "day of infamy" speech then?

WM: That's right, that's right. We were all called in to assembly to hear that speech.

CS: Yeah. Where had -- do you recall the day before, on Sunday, if you had found out about it?

WM: Do what now?

CS: Do you recall on the day before, when it actually happened, was there any alert that you recall?

WM: No, no, none at all.

CS: Okay. So, you continued in high school then, right? You were a junior that year?

WM: Yes. I graduated in May of '42.

CS: In May of '42? Okay. And, what did you do after that?

WM: Well, I went to what was then Oklahoma A&M College. It's Oklahoma State University now. I went to summer school there until, I believe it was late November. And I dropped out of school and joined the US Navy.

CS: Okay. And so, you joined the Navy. And did you report immediately for boot camp?

WM: Oh yes, yes, dear Lord.

CS: And where did you go through boot camp?

WM: I went to boot camp in San Diego, California. By the way, the day I joined the US Navy was on December the 12th in Oklahoma City.

CS: December the 12th?

WM: Mm-hmm.

CS: So, do you want to tell us a little bit about your boot camp experience? What did you feel like? Your first time away from home?

WM: Oh, no. I'd been away from home times before that as far as that's concerned. The boot camp experience, in the first place, it took us three days' travel by train to get to San Diego to start boot camp. The boot camp itself

starts off with a bang. You strip off all your clothes, and you walk down the line. And they hand you a cardboard box to put your old clothes in so you can mail them home. And they issue you all your new wearing apparel. Then, usually before the day's over, the first thing the next day you'll get all your hair cut off. And that's your initiation into boot camp. From then on, it's all of your training and marching formations and learning semaphore and calisthenics -- many, many hours of calisthenics. They wanted to be sure we were in shape to run up the gangplank of the ship, I guess.

CS: Right, yeah. And, how long was your boot camp experience?

WM: Mine was -- let me think a minute. I believe, if I'm not mistaken, it was 90 days.

CS: 90 days? Okay. So, and then what happened at the end of boot camp then?

WM: End of boot camp, I was shipped to Port Hueneme, California for about three days and then, from Port Hueneme down to Treasure Island in San Francisco. And, I can't remember how long we were at Treasure Island.

CS: Now, were you just waiting for assignment at this time, or were you undergoing training?

WM: No, no, waiting for assignment going overseas.

CS: Oh, okay.

WM: Yep. I left San Diego on June the 30th of '43 or '44. No, wait a minute.

CS: Yeah, it would be June of...

WM: June of '43, June of '43.

CS: Okay. And then, so you're at Treasure Island, and you're waiting to get shipped out?

WM: Yeah. On July the 3rd I boarded the merchant marine ship the SS Island Mail. And we sailed from San Francisco at 2:00 that afternoon.

CS: Okay. Did you know where you were going?

WM: I had no idea, none whatsoever.

CS: Okay. And you hadn't had any specialized training? Had you applied for a -- and did they ask you about any schools that you wanted to go to?

WM: Well, they tried to put me into radio school. But it didn't take me long to figure out that I did not want to be a [dip dot girl?], so I didn't stay with them. Then, they assigned me to carpenter school, which I thoroughly enjoyed. But that was right before they decided it's time for me to ship out.

CS: Okay. So, when you shipped out you were not really -- you didn't have any kind of special rating then?

WM: No, no, just Seaman First Class.

CS: Seaman First Class?

WM: Uh-huh.

CS: Okay. Tell us about your experience at sea then. What was going on once you left San Francisco?

WM: When I left San Francisco?

CS: Yeah. You were out on the ocean for the first time, probably.

WM: Yeah, yeah. We sailed down the coast of California on July the 4th. And July the 5th, we docked in Port Hueneme -- H-U-E-N-E-M-E-- California. I never learned to pronounce that name. And while we were there, on about the 6th, we unloaded about 800 Seabees and all of their equipment onto this merchant marine ship. On July the 7th, we sailed from Port Hueneme, had no idea under the sun where we were going. On July the 4th, we docked at -- hang on just a minute here. Oh, we went to the Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides islands. And that's where we offloaded all the Seabees and their equipment. Evidently, that was a staging area for the Seabees at that time. Then, on July the 24th, we docked at Auckland, New Zealand. And that was after we had spent about 24 hours in Sydney, Australia, then back up to New Zealand. We had a 16-hour liberty granted to us while we were in New Zealand.

CS: So, in Auckland?

WM: Do what?

CS: You were in Auckland? You had...

WM: We were in Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand, yeah.

CS: Okay. And, how did the New Zealanders treat you on that leave?

WM: Oh, fine. They thought we Yanks were the greatest thing. The only thing with most of my shipmates -- I didn't drink beer, but my shipmates did. And the only thing wrong with that was they hadn't learned yet that people from the United States preferred ice-cold beer. Their beer is sitting there in a ceramic jug with a candle under it to keep it warm. Okay, 26th of July we sailed from Auckland. And on the 29th, we arrived in Noumea, New Caledonia.

CS: New Caledonia? And what was your impression when you pulled into New Caledonia?

WM: Oh, you don't really want to know.

CS: Especially, well, coming from a civilized place like Auckland, and all of a sudden you're in the tropical jungles, it's got to be a big change there.

WM: Uh-huh. Well, other than when we left Port Hueneme, we went by Pearl Harbor, which is fairly civilized. And then we went to this New Hebrides. That was my first view of the beautiful South Sea Islands, New Hebrides. And then we go down into Australia and New Zealand, then come back up to this second island I've ever seen called Noumea.

CS: Oh, okay. Now...

WM: So, I really wasn't very impressed.

CS: Were you able to go -- well, you're still just being -- are you just being hauled around on this merchant ship?

WM: Yeah, being hauled around. There were ten of us, ten sailors.

CS: And, did you know what your orders were cut for? Were you just...

WM: I had no idea under God's son where we were going or what we were being sent to do, never heard a word.

CS: Well, you're bouncing all over the Pacific. And it sounds like they lost your orders and just wouldn't let you leave the ship or something.

WM: Well, I guess the orders of that merchant marine ship was to unload their supplies in Sydney and Auckland before they delivered us where we were going.

CS: Okay. So, you're in New Caledonia on the 29th. And, then what? Where did you go?

WM: Well, I spent about four days there doing what I called prison labor. We were given 16-pound sledgehammers, swinging those sledgehammers all day breaking up boulders into rocks small enough that we could load them onto what they called a rock stretcher and carry them over the edge of the bluff and dump them down into a dump truck. Then

they would take them to the crusher and make gravel to gravel their roads. So, we spent four days slinging 16-pound sledgehammers. I thought, man oh man, I could have deserted the Navy a long time and not had it worse than this. But that was my introduction to New Caledonia.

Okay, on August the 3rd I finally boarded the USS Argonne there in the bay at Noumea, New Caledonia.

CS: Okay. And, how were you introduced to the Argonne? Were you ushered into the captain's quarters and given a little speech about how welcome you were? Or did you have some boatswain's mate come up to you?

WM: Do you really want to know?

CS: Well, yeah, that's what we're here for.

WM: They had a First Class Boatswain Mate that -- I can't remember how many of us went on board. Seemed like there was only about six or eight of us -- not very many. He welcomed us there at the main deck head of the gangplank, lined us up, took us down and showed us where our bunks were, showed us where the head was. He said, "That's all you need to know for right now. We've got to go help out on a work party." So, we spent about the next six hours helping to offload ammunition and load it into the locker there on the Argonne. That's the way I was introduced to the ship.

CS: Jesus, on a work party?

WM: Oh yeah, there's always a work party.

CS: That's pretty average, I think, isn't it?

WM: It sure is. And about two days later I was assigned to the 2nd division on the ship, which was back in the aft part of the ship. Being a -- I ended up being a Third Class Boatswain Mate, a Coxswain. But, being a regular deck ape, or deckhand, they called us, that's all you did was work up there topside on the deck. Now, you've got to understand, this Argonne, this ship, was -- I don't know how you'd describe it. It has been everything you can think of in the US Navy. But at this time it was a supply and repair ship. We very seldom went in to where a battle would be. But we went in right after the battle to help clean up the mess and repair the things that got beat up. This ship had, I would say, no less than 24 welders -- by that I mean people in machines doing welding -- day and night on something aboard that ship. We had a tremendous machine shop. We had a dental lab. They would actually make or repair false teeth, among anything else that needed to be done dental-wise for the personnel. We had the most powerful radio in the Pacific Ocean. We could send and receive radio messages clear around the world with that radio. We had a carpenter shop. We had a pattern maker

shop. And, one thing we had I don't think you'd find on any other ship in the Navy, we had a foundry, used the pattern maker to make the patterns to make the mold and melt the metal in the foundry and pour the parts they needed to rebuild the ship.

CS: Boy, that's -- I've never heard that before.

WM: Yep, we sure did. We had one. I know because I slept about 15 feet from the dad-gum exhaust stack that came up from that thing red-hot every day. That ship, the people on that ship, I believe, could build and repair anything you wanted to bring aboard. I don't care what it was. They could take care of it.

CS: That's pretty remarkable.

WM: It was the darnedest ship I ever saw. Not only that, we were the supply ship for many small craft. And, another thing -- we were one of the few ships out there that made our own fresh water. So, we supplied fresh water to them.

CS: So, you were supplying fresh water to the small craft that didn't have water-making capability?

WM: That's right, that's right. Or even the other ships, destroyers and so forth, didn't have the facility for making their fresh water.

CS: I didn't realize that. I'd never heard that. I'll be darned.

WM: Yep. Boy, it was one big deal. We were the one ship out there where you didn't have to take a salt water bath and use salt water soap and rub your skin off as well as the dirt.

CS: What was the condition of the ship when you came aboard? I looked up the Argonne. I think it was built in something like 1921. So, it was a pretty old ship.

WM: Yeah, I have the basic records of it here in my writing. We can look it up in a few minutes if you'd like to.

CS: Okay. Well, that's all right. I was just wondering, you know, what your...

WM: Let me tell you where the Argonne started. When they -- at the end of World War 1, or right before the end of the war, they laid the keel for a monstrous transport ship, the biggest transport ship that was ever built. It was to have twin screws, of all things. But anyhow, at the end of World War 1, naturally, that stopped the process of building this ship. So, they decided to take all the internal working parts -- the engines and the screws and this, that and the other -- and build two ships. As a result, the Argonne was one of the two ships that received the left-hand screw, which there's only two ships in the US Navy that ever had a left-hand screw.

CS: I'll be darned.

WM: That was one of the interesting things about that ship.
But, you know, the propeller blades on the screw of that
thing, each propeller blade was 16 feet tall.

CS: Wow.

WM: I know. I helped load and unload them and even had to help
install one of them once out there in the ocean.

CS: What was the length of the ship? Do you recall what the
length was?

WM: No, I really don't. I really don't. I cannot fathom. I
know one thing. We could tie up two destroyers bow to
stern alongside us.

CS: Yeah. Boy, that's a lot of ship.

WM: Well now, she was Admiral Halsey's flagship sitting in San
Diego Harbor for years before World War II started. It was
sitting there in the harbor all painted beautiful white,
wood handrails, wood decking. Every piece that we normally
would see with steel, at that time they were polished brass
with all the Turk's heads and the cockscomb windings on
them. Oh, it was something to be seen. It had all the
telephone and the telegraph cables laid out through the
harbor out to the ship. That was his flagship.

CS: Wow.

WM: I have seen two pictures of her. Evidently, that's where
she was because she was all painted white, looked like a --

I don't know how you'd describe it sitting out there in the middle of that bay.

CS: It must have looked like a hospital ship, almost, painted white.

WM: Oh yes, well, it did. Well now, her sister ship, the other ship that got the right-hand screw, was the Mercy, M-E-R-C-Y, the Mercy.

CS: Okay, so that was a hospital ship.

WM: She was a hospital ship. That was our sister ship.

CS: Wow. And now, Halsey wasn't on the [FO?] after the war started. Is that right?

WM: I don't think so. I don't think so.

CS: He would have transferred to one of the fast carriers or one of the warships that could keep up with those fast guys because...

WM: And, well, yeah. And the reason, one of the reasons they have listed that he left the Argonne, because it was not air conditioned. And there was no longer enough room on there for he and his staff. That was the two reasons given for his leaving. However, it doesn't say -- the report I have doesn't say anything about any ships or anything. He went to it. He says he transferred his base to Guadalcanal.

CS: Oh, okay. So, Guadalcanal, that would have had to be August -- what was it, August of '43, I think. What's that when they did Guadalcanal?

WM: Mm-hmm.

CS: So, yeah, I guess he was on it at the beginning of the war then.

WM: Yep. I think he was, although I have it here saying the crew that was on board at that time.

CS: Uh-huh. Well, it's an interesting ship then in and of itself.

WM: Oh, you go back and read the history of this ship and see all of the assignments that she went through back through the years, and that ship got around. It was in the Alaska waters for a long time doing research work up there. It was in the north Atlantic. It even had -- I don't remember if it was FDR or who it was. Some president came aboard and gave them a big award for their work that they were doing. I've got all this down on the history of it. But we don't have time to get into all that right now.

CS: Yeah. Okay now, we were talking about Admiral Halsey having been on board the Argonne. And, but he was -- of course, he was long gone by the time you got there. So, do you remember your captain's name?

WM: Lord -- Escott.

CS: Captain Escott?

WM: Captain T. H. Escott, if I remember -- Escott, I'm pretty sure.

CS: Okay. And, did you ever have occasion to have any conversations with him or get to know him? Or what was the general...

WM: On about two or three occasions. One time, one of my wonderful shipmates stole my wristwatch. And they caught him with it. And I had to go up to Captain's mast along with he and the master at arms and read the serial number of the watch that I had written down in a little black book to get my watch back. That was one time. And then, after that, a year or so after that I was made master at arms of the ship. We were two of us. I was one of the master at arms. And every evening it was my duty to go knock on his door and tell him it was movie time and take my flashlight and lead him down the ladder down to the deck where the movie -- where the officers sat to watch the movie. But, other than those short encounters, I never really had a conversation with the gentleman.

CS: Okay. Now, what had your -- so, you started off just as a -- as you called it, a deck ape, up there chipping paint and swabbing the decks.

WM: You believe it.

CS: How did your work progress up to the point where you became a master at arms?

WM: Well, all in between there I was a -- I had been promoted to Coxswain or Third Class Boatswain Mate. I spent most of my time running boats, one kind or another. At one time I was Coxswain of the officer's barge, I mean, officer's boat, which was -- there was two of them just alike. One of them was a captain's barge, and the other one was an officer's boat. And I ran the officer's boat, 35-foot motorboat, most of the time. But then a lot of the times I ran 30- and 50-foot motor launches that you hauled all the freight and stuff in.

CS: Okay. So, how did you progress into that?

WM: You're tested. You have to take a test for the promotion. There has to be an opening before they even give the test.

CS: Okay. You mean like a written test?

WM: Oh yeah, oh yeah, very detailed written test.

CS: And, how did you -- so, but you had never operated a small craft before, I would presume. There's not a whole lot of ship traffic in Stillwater.

WM: No, no, never had.

CS: But, you passed the written test and got the job?

WM: That's right, yeah. Of course, there's always some good hands there before you that were willing to take you up and show you the ropes.

CS: Yeah, okay. So then, how long were you a Coxswain then, about?

WM: Well, until I left the Navy. I was ready to take the test and go for second when we hit the Philippines and never did get to do it. See, you couldn't advance in rank until there was an opening aboard the ship. And we always had plenty of first and Second Class Boatswain's Mates, so there was never even any openings, and the test was never given. I think we were at Tillotson Bay. One of our Second Class Boatswains got transferred back to the States. So, that left an opening. And we were all preparing to take the exam to try to get to fill his spot. But I left before they even gave the exam.

CS: Well, let's get back. We're kind of skipping ahead, it sounds like. Some of my questions are leading you too far down the line here, I believe. But back to where you were describing the Argonne as a supply and repair and dental labs and machine shops and all that, did you mostly stay in one place? Talk to me a little bit about the period of time after you came aboard the Argonne. Were you at sea a

lot? Or were you mostly anchored in harbor and having other ships come to you?

WM: Oh my gosh. Here, hang on a minute here. Let me see if I can -- all right. I'm trying to catch up with us. Okay. On August the 7th, we sailed from Noumea, New Caledonia. And we went to Espiritu Santo and unloaded some servicemen. I don't remember what they were. Army -- I think it was Army -- I mean, the air force, if I remember correctly. Unloaded them at Espiritu Santo. And then, on August the 13th -- we left Espiritu the same we got there, on the 9th. On the 13th of August, we arrived at Guadalcanal. Now, let me tell you the story about that. We pulled by the east side of the island that evening at almost dusk, supposed to dock there at Guadalcanal. But we couldn't dock because the supply ship was still there offloading supplies. So, we had to sail 15 miles north and anchor in Purvis Bay in the Florida Islands. Now, the next morning, at 8:00, the crew always put the loudspeaker on Tokyo Rose every morning just to get some good laughs. At 8:00 the very next morning, Tokyo Rose comes on the air offering condolences to all family members and relatives and friends of the personnel who had been serving on the USS Argonne, because the night before they bombed it and destroyed it. Sure enough, they did. They bombed and destroyed that freighter

that was sitting where we were supposed to dock. Now you tell me how under God's sun did they know -- we didn't know. None of the people on the ship that I was around had any idea we were going to Guadalcanal in the first place. And they certainly didn't know we were supposed to dock there. But Tokyo Rose knew it. To me, that was always one of the most amazing things I ever heard all the time I was out there.

CS: Well, that's kind of scary about how much information they did have then.

WM: Sure, sure. They knew where we were going and what we were going to do. I really think -- I got to thinking later. I wondered if they didn't think maybe Admiral Nimitz was still on board the Argonne. I can't think of any other reason why they would single us out that way.

CS: Well, yeah. Why would they specially target basically a supply and repair ship?

WM: Yeah. The only thing I could ever come up with was that they may have thought that Nimitz was still on board.

CS: Yeah, or Halsey, you mean?

WM: I mean not Nimitz, Halsey. I'm using the wrong thing here.

CS: Well, that's one of those mysteries that you probably never will get resolved.

WM: I'll never know the answer. And I can't think of any other reason why that would happen.

CS: Well, did you then get back to Guadalcanal the next day?

WM: Yeah, in a roundabout way. On the night of August 15th, my birthday, we were sitting right across the bay off the -- 15 miles north there in Purvis Bay. And we sat there that night for quite a while watching the aerial dogfights over Guadalcanal. That was the way -- that was the fireworks for my celebration of my birthday.

CS: And, I'm sorry. How old were you on that birthday?

WM: I would have been 19.

CS: Nineteen?

WM: Nineteenth birthday.

CS: Watching the dogfights over Guadalcanal?

WM: That's right, that's right. You see one get blown out of sky, and of course you'd sit there and wonder, well, was that one of ours, or was that a Zero?

CS: Well, they had -- the Zeros were still giving them a lot of trouble back that early in the war because they...

WM: Oh my gosh yes, a lot of trouble, a lot of trouble. We didn't have anything that could match it that early.

CS: No. It took a while to get those Hellcats and those Corsairs out there.

WM: Mm-hmm, it sure did. It seemed like it took forever. I bet those guys in the air force thought they never would get anything that would equal the Zero. Don't kid yourself. That Zero wasn't really a well-made plane. But that little devil, it could scat. Not only could it scat. It could maneuver. It could just flat-out out-manuever our planes.

CS: Well, yeah. Well, the Japanese had that philosophy of being on the offensive. The American planes had a lot of armor and bulletproofing the gas tanks and things that weighed the plane down a lot and slowed it down. But, the Japanese didn't have that. But they could sure turn fast. Well, anyhow, so after your 19th birthday, what happens to the ship then?

WM: Well, another interesting thing, talking about being on Guadalcanal, I had to take a 50-foot motor launch loaded with supplies -- I think they were medical supplies. In fact, I know they were -- for the first Marines there on Guadalcanal. They were on our ship, and they had to be back over there. And I guess there still wasn't any place to dock or something. I don't know why. But anyhow, they loaded down my 50-foot motor launch. And I took a medical officer with me. And we crossed 15 miles of open ocean in a 50-foot motor launch to deliver those supplies back over

to Guadalcanal. That was quite a trip, I'll tell you. Anyhow, we spent the night over there after we got everything unloaded, slept in a tent there with the Marines, got up to come home the next morning. And, I'll tell you, I never saw anybody as seasick in my life as that officer was all the way back to the ship. I felt sorry for him.

CS: So, how long did you stay...

WM: Anyhow, that's about all that happened around there on those -- at that trip. On October the 19th, we sailed from Purvis Bay. And on November the 1st we arrived in Tillotson Cove in the Russell Islands.

CS: At the Russells?

WM: Mm-hmm, in the Russell Islands -- T-I-L-L-O-T-S-O-N, Tillotson Cove.

CS: Okay. And, what were you doing there?

WM: Repairing anything and everything that needed to be repaired. Hang on just a minute here. Let me check some of my notes and see. Oh, one thing we did there, we unloaded tons and tons of supplies to replenish not only our ship but all of them for the small craft in that area. One thing interesting that we noted, as we loaded all these cargo net after cargo net full of supplies off of barges and boats that pulled alongside, occasionally we would see

a GI green wood box, about three feet long and maybe eight by twelve or something like that, the other directions.

And it was stenciled on the outside "toy horse." You ever see or hear of one?

CS: No.

WM: Well, we learned that every one of those little boxes that said "toy horse" on it was loaded with money. They went to the payroll clerk. Yep, every "toy horse" was loaded with money.

CS: That's something that they probably wouldn't want to broadcast then.

WM: Oh, no. No, they didn't want anybody to know that. And there was not one guard present anytime that was being unloaded. That always amazed me. They really knew there wasn't anything going to happen out there in the middle of the ocean, I guess.

CS: Yeah. Well, if you stole anything you wouldn't have any place to hide it, I guess, on the ship very well.

WM: You couldn't even spend all your own paycheck unless you wanted to gamble it away.

CS: Yeah. Well, let's talk a little bit about that then. What's your typical day like on the -- let's say you're at Purvis Bay or Tillotson Cove in the anchorage there all day

long. And you've got -- what was the ship's complement?

How many men did you have aboard, about?

WM: I don't have any idea. I don't have any idea. It was crawling with men like an ant pile all the time.

CS: Well, you had some bunkmates, I suppose, in the compartment where your bunk was. Did you have a lot of guys that -- in your spare time, did you read a lot of books, write letters, gamble a lot? What was going on?

WM: No. There was a lot of gambling going on back in our area of the ship. It was down in what they called the boatswain's locker, four decks down, where they stored all the rope, or lines is what we called them in the Navy, and the different items along that line -- cable, serving material and all that equipment. But down in the boatswain locker, after about 9:00 in the evening, they would have a crap table and card games going on down there. If you wanted to get rid of your money, that'd help you along real quickly.

CS: What were the sleeping conditions like down there below? You're in the tropics. You've got no air conditioning on the ship.

WM: That's right -- a little bad. I was lucky enough I had a bunk up topside on the poop deck, back on the very back of the ship. The only thing wrong with where our bunks were,

we were within about eight or nine feet of that stack that came up out of the deck below from the foundry. If it had been running all day, that was a hot son of a gun.

CS: Did you have a breeze or anything then?

WM: Very little, very little. Usually, well, I'll tell you, it would get so hot out there on those steel decks that we would turn the saltwater fire hoses to wet the deck down, cool it off. And, of course, everybody walking around out there on that steamy steel deck would absolutely parboil their feet. So, most of our time late in the evenings was spent sitting out there in what coolness there was in the evening with no shoes or socks on, trying to put enough powder on and keep our feet dry in a condition we could even walk on them. And sometimes it got absolutely horrible. I've seen great big chunks of skin just practically fall off people's feet from that -- I mean, absolutely cooked.

CS: What was the uniform of the day there? Were you allowed to use skivvy shirts? Or did you have to wear a dungaree shirt or jacket?

WM: No, we could use a skivvy as long as it was dyed the same color as your dungaree pants, heavily dyed.

CS: Dungaree pants, of course, they had no shorts in the Navy, in the US Navy, anyhow.

WM: Oh, no. Oh, no, no, no, no, my gosh, no.

CS: Well now, the British did. You know, the British wore...

WM: Sure, I know. We used to have British ships tied alongside us. I know exactly what they had, running around in their pretty little white shorts and white shirts. "Go down to tea, mateys, down to tea." Twice a day they were whistled down for their tea break. They called tea "tie". Not only that, in the afternoon, that's when they got their portion of rum. Every one of them got a portion of rum every day.

CS: Well, that's a little bit more civilized than the US Navy as far as I'm concerned.

WM: I'll tell you what really irritated us was this lend-lease program that we had going. We would lend them Armour Star ham. And they would lease us New Zealand mutton. We ate a whole lot of mutton. And, if we had a chance, we'd cross over from our ship over to theirs to eat breakfast because they had Armour Star ham for breakfast. We never saw any.

CS: That's an odd story to trade back and forth. Well now, being British, they were probably more used to lamb than they were ham anyhow.

WM: Yeah, yeah. We would really laugh at this lend-lease program.

CS: Well now, when you were in Purvis Bay and Tillotson Cove, were these pretty large anchorages? Did you have a lot of other ships?

WM: They were pretty good-sized anchorages.

CS: And, would these be mostly supply ships or transports? Or are you talking about task forces with carriers and the big warships?

WM: No, no. Usually, well, there was a lot of the warships in there, in these bays, at times. I saw many there, yeah. Well, I've seen the Yorktown. I've seen the whole bunch of big carriers at one time or another. But a lot of them were the smaller carriers. I can't think of what they called them right now.

CS: The escort.

WM: Huh?

CS: The escort carriers, or jeep carriers is another word for it.

WM: Yeah. Then we had a lot of the old four-stack destroyers that had the four big smoke funnels -- four-stackers, they called them, World War I destroyers that we used at the beginning of the war out there. And then we had several of the new ones. We had what battleships were left after Pearl Harbor. I've seen all of them. I've seen the -- oh,

what were -- the Iowa, and what are the new ones they built?

CS: Well, some of the old ones came back, too, you know, that they were able to pull up off the bottom at Pearl and get back into shape.

WM: Yep. They even pulled the Oklahoma up. But it finally went down for the last time. A lot of our time out there in those places, well, we spent repairing or rebuilding anything that they brought along. I don't care what it was. We could repair or rebuild it, one of the two.

CS: So, it seems like you had a pretty large complement of the machinists and carpenters and welders and the people that had the work skills not just to run the ship. But you had the...

WM: Oh yeah. That's why I can't even begin to tell you how many men we had on that ship.

CS: And so, the ship's crew really only just ran the ship. You folks were never involved in any of the reconstruction or repair?

WM: Oh yeah, yeah. I've spent a many hour running the steam winch, raising or lowering steel plates over the side so they could weld them on to repair a ship, that kind of thing. Yep, many hours doing that part of it. As far as

the actual machinist work or welding or something like that, no, huh-uh.

CS: Yeah, but you were in a kind of a support role for those guys. So, it sounds like you stayed pretty busy then.

WM: Oh my gosh, always busy, always. I was just reading a note here. On November the 18th is when I passed the test and became a Coxswain.

CS: And that would have been while you were at Tillotson Cove then, right?

WM: Mm-hmm, yeah. Of course, December the 12th made one year in the Navy. December the 25th is another one of those good times away from home.

CS: Well, what was your -- what was Christmas like that year for you?

WM: Well, let me just go back and kind of scan a little bit here. I spent it aboard the ship, in Tillotson Cove, as you said a while ago. It was a holiday, which means we actually weren't supposed to have to work that day. We had a traditional dinner. It was good but not like good old home cooking by any means. We spent all day reading or playing cards or, you know, anything like that to relax a little while. I had received a cake in a package that my mom had sent from home. And, of course, it was sent several days before. But she packed it in -- it was a

coconut cake, but it was packed in popcorn to keep it from getting torn up and keep it dry. And what we laughed about that, it being a coconut cake, and I knew at that time during the war, she would have to save and save and save to get enough coconut stamps or whatever it took -- I don't know what they used back here -- to make one coconut cake. And there we were out there with millions of coconuts -- couldn't get rid of them. We even spent days over on the islands in work parties walking along behind dump trucks and throwing coconuts up into the dump trucks so they can go dump them in the ocean and keep the road clear enough you could drive. And here she spent all her time and money getting coconut to send me a cake. Of course, it was greatly appreciated. Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. And, no way could I write and tell her to please stop sending coconut cakes. That would just be cut out of my mail if I tried to.

CS: Well, sure. They wouldn't want her to know what part of the world you were in.

WM: No, no. It amazed me when I got home and she showed me some of my letters. I just cannot imagine why they cut them up the way they did, because I didn't say anything in there that you weren't supposed to say. They just cut those letters all to heck.

CS: Well, how often did you have mail call?

WM: About once every two to three weeks.

CS: Okay, well that's pretty good for that time in the war then.

WM: Yeah. We did real well on mail call. Can't complain a bit on that.

CS: Yeah. And you were able to get packages, too, then in the mail, not just letters?

WM: Oh yeah. We'd get packages and also boxes of toy horse, too. I never will forget that.

CS: So, did the men on the ship get quite a few packages from home with the...

WM: No, really they didn't. By the time my shipmates up there got through with mine, I didn't get much either. You almost had to go hide out someplace down in the bilges to open a package to get any of it because it'd be gone in five minutes. Oh, look, so-and-so's got a -- let's see, what did they call them, a box from home? Oh, care package from home. And, boy, five minutes later there wasn't anything left of it. All right now, you want to know what thing we did there at Tillotson Bay? Our most important work was converting PT boats from torpedo boat to gunboats. You know, a PT boat's made out of plywood entirely. Okay. Well, we'd have to take the torpedo tubes off and also the

30-caliber machine gun. That's the only gun they had on that dang thing. And we would mount twin 40-millimeter guns on the bow and 20-millimeter guns on the rear deck on each side. And then we would put two 50-caliber machine guns on those little boogers. And they were used when the Japanese would load up their landing parties in their landing boats, landing craft. These guys would come out of hiding with these PT boats and run in and out through there with their guns and just blow them out of the water like sitting ducks, having a ball with those PT boats.

CS: Now, this was -- was this at the same time that the Japanese were running their -- trying to resupply their troops or reinforce their troops in Guadalcanal? Was Guadalcanal still going on at this time?

WM: This is when we were at Tillotson Bay. It was right after we left that area.

CS: Okay. And how far away from Guadalcanal, about, was Tillotson Bay, do you know?

WM: Oh, Lord. I'd have to look on my map and see. I do not remember.

CS: Well, that's okay.

WM: I went so many places back and forth out there I can't remember.

CS: Yeah. Well, sure. Yeah, because I know that they were -- the Japanese tried to reinforce Guadalcanal right up until they gave up on it. And that was -- I think that was, like, in February or so of '44 before they finally pulled back.

WM: That's probably about right. Yep. Oh, by the way, I had the highlight of my boating career was the day that they allowed me to take one of these overhauled PT boats out by myself for a test run. Let me tell you what. If you've ever run a boat, that would be the thrill you'd be looking for. Those darn things had four eight-cylinder Packard engines, two inline on each screw. Now, I don't remember what their speed was. But I do know one thing. You could turn them on a dime. By putting one in reverse and one forward, you could spin that boat right around in its tracks. And you could skim the top of the water like nothing I've ever seen.

CS: Boy, I'll bet. Must have been quite a change from those supply boats you'd been running back and forth.

WM: Oh my gosh. 50-foot motor launch, you'd lumber along like a semi with half the cylinders going.

CS: Yeah. Well, yeah, well, the crews on those things really - they really seemed to love their boats, on the PT boat crews.

WM: They would pull into little docks they'd built on these islands and pull up about four PT boats on each side of one of these docks. And then they lived right there on the -- just off of the sandy beach in their tents. And that was their home. After I see the way some of our fellow Americans lived while they were over there, I decided I sure was happy I joined the Navy.

CS: Yeah. Well, were you able to go ashore at all? Well, you talked about shore parties there while you were picking up the coconuts off the road. So, you spent some time ashore at Tillitson Cove?

WM: Once in a while we'd have a work party, have to go over there and take care of something like that, yeah. And, about once every, oh, every other month, I'd say, they would have a liberty party. Our entire crew was divided into two ships -- Liberty 1 and Liberty 2. So, one of them would get to go one day, and maybe two days later the other crew would get to go. And, we would run two or three boatloads over to a beach someplace, furnish them with all the rotgut beer that they could drink, and let them rest and walk around on the island all day and then take them back to the ship. That was a liberty.

CS: Yeah. Would they let you go swimming there, too?

WM: Yeah. You could if you wanted to. But you wanted to be very careful because the coral reefs around those islands, even the broken-off coral back up in the sand on the beach, cut your feet like razor blades -- very, very sharp.

CS: Yeah. Well, there's some pretty dangerous creatures, too, a lot of -- you know, the scorpionfish and poisonous fish, sea snakes.

WM: Oh yeah. Well, they'd go swimming out there if they wanted to. The way we used to go swimming, we'd wait until after about sundown in the evening, when we were through with our day's work. And we'd go back to our part of the ship, which was the poop deck, the very rear of the ship, climb down into the boats that were tied up back there on the boom. And we'd go swimming out of those boats out there in that -- God only knows how deep the ocean was there. But it was plenty deep anyhow. Once in a while we'd have somebody brave enough to dive off of the lifeline of the ship down into it, but not very often.

CS: Did you have shark watches posted when you were out swimming?

WM: This is what I was fixing to tell you. When we'd get through swimming, after an hour or two, then we'd start shark fishing right where we'd been swimming. I never heard anybody being bothered by a shark, nobody. Most of

the sharks we caught were the great big hammerhead shark, got those -- looks like an airplane tail fin sticking out each side. And the eyes are way out on the end of them. And their mouths are way back underneath their heads, so they have to turn upside down and dive at whatever they're going to bite or swallow.

CS: Did you ever eat any shark?

WM: No, I never did eat any. We had some guys there on the ship. We had one or two cooks in particular who loved the shark liver. They didn't care about the meat or anything else. They just wanted the liver out of him.

CS: Well, I'll be darned.

WM: We'd have a lot of fun sitting around there up until midnight or so, shark fishing. But we cheated. We'd use monstrous treble hooks. When I say monsters I mean at least a foot across. And, we'd catch some of these smaller fish, cut their heads off and jam the bodies down on those hooks for bait and use a one-inch rope or line and put it around the drum of that steam winch. And if we caught one, we'd just winch him up with the steam winch. That would get him on board.

CS: And, how big would some of these hammerheads run?

WM: Oh, good Lord. Some of those dad-gum things were six to eight feet long -- I mean, big boogers. And to think you'd

been out there swimming with them -- but, like I said, I never heard of anybody being bothered by one.

CS: Yeah. Well, I would always be wondering if I was going to be the first one, though, I think.

WM: Uh-huh, yeah. It kind of makes you -- it slows you down wanting to jump in the water, I'll tell you for sure.

CS: Well, how long were you at Tillitson Cove then?

WM: Oh, lordy, let me see. Well, I don't remember when I said we got there now.

CS: You got there the 1st of November, I think. That's what I've got written down here.

WM: Okay. Hmm. Okay, 1944, March the 14th, we sailed from the Russell Islands. And, the same day, March 14th, we were back in Purvis Bay in the Florida Islands, 15 miles north of Guadalcanal. That's what I say. We went back and forth so much I can't keep up with it.

CS: Okay, so you couldn't be too far from Guadalcanal now, I guess.

WM: Oh, no. Got all the way up to the Philippines. Most of our time back there we spent repairing destroyers. Now you're not going to believe this unless somebody's told you before. But, you know, your destroyers would run escort duty for the supply ships and stuff. And they'd put a destroyer on either side of the convoy for submarine duty

and so forth. Well, these destroyers, at a given time, would speed up ahead of the convoy and criss-cross. And each of them would go down the opposite side of where they'd been running. Why, I'll never for the life of me understand. But they did. Now, the amazing part of it is, you would not believe how many times we had to repair these destroyers because in their criss-cross pattern they run into each other. That's unbelievable. That's the dang truth. They did all the time. It would tear the whole bow clear back to the #1 gun turret off of the one. And the other one, it'd put an ungodly gash in the side of the hull. So, we would take torches and cut the bad part off of the one ship and let it fall in the ocean, and then build a whole new false snub-nosed bow on there so they could get to the dry dock or get back to the States, wherever they were going to go. And then on the other one we'd have to put some ungodly patches on the side, keep them going.

CS: Well, that's pretty unusual, I would think, because a commanding officer would expect to get court-martialed for colliding with another ship.

WM: I bet you if I'd have written them down at the time I could have named at least 24 of them that have gotten court martialed, because I know there had to be at least 12 times

that we did that repair work to our ship, our own ships. Now, the bad part of all that that really bothered my crew, naturally when you have a collision that way, they lock down all the portals and hatches up to that part of the ship so it won't flood the entire ship. Anybody that's left up there, if they aren't already dead, they'll soon be drowned. It's that simple. Not only did we have to repair those ships, for some ungodly reason it was our job to go bring all the corpses out of the ships. I never understood that one. I've eaten many a meal in our mess hall when half of it was blocked off with the canvas drop cloths because the other side had tables that were laid out with a corpse on each one of them. It's things like that you don't want to remember. You may not even want to put that on tape, but so help me God, that's the truth.

CS: Well, that's part of the war, though. Those kinds of things happened, and that's what we want.

WM: Yeah, but people today, in this stage in the game, they don't -- they can't realize that. They don't want to realize it.

CS: Yep. That's pretty tragic, and not even killed in combat, killed by their -- basically, their own...

WM: This is right, exactly what would happen.

CS: Well, how long then were you back in the -- you were back at Purvis Bay? Then you got back there in March. And, what was your...

WM: Of '44. Man, we're getting there. We were going from '42 all the way into the very first month or second month of '44. Let's see what was next here. Oh, while we were there in Purvis Bay, about 2:00 every morning we would have a general quarters due to a visitor. I don't know whether you're going to leave this on tape or not, but anyhow, due to a visitor that everybody dubbed Piss Call Charlie because he woke us up about 2:00 every God-blessed morning. A little single-engine light plane with four 500-pound bombs -- at least we're guessing that's about the size of them -- would come flying up the middle of that bay. And about 500 feet he'd drop one of his bombs. We'd sit there on a moonlit night and watch them splash when they hit the bay. As far as I know he never did hit a ship or anything else. But, he'd get us up about 2:00 every God-blessed morning. It got quite interesting to sit there in that moonlight and watch those bombs come progressing up the middle of the bay toward where you're sitting.

CS: Well, you always kind of wonder, yeah, if the next one's going to have your name on it, I guess.

WM: Yep. Of course, there were no lights on the island installations or on any of the ships. We weren't allowed to fire a gun at him. But that would give our position away.

CS: Did you ever have any other kind of enemy air activity over the sites that you were in?

WM: Nope, nope. See, we really didn't get into the fight of the war very much. All of ours was spent taking care of the others that had been there and something went wrong in the process.

CS: So, well, what about - now, when all the fighting was going on out there in Ironbottom Sound, the Japanese fleet coming in and fighting the American fleet, you know, they had quite a few nighttime battles out there between the two navies.

WM: Oh yes, they did.

CS: Could you see the flashes at sea out there?

WM: I don't remember seeing any of that. I do know we spent a lot of time repairing ships what we could -- yep, a lot of time. See, we had -- there on my ship we had two big holds way down, five floors down, in that ship where we kept a tremendous supply of metal. We had sheets of metal on there that we hoisted aboard. And I'm just guessing they were larger -- I don't know how much larger, but they were

larger than a four-by-eight sheet. And some of them were an inch and a half thick. We had all kinds of metal down there that we would hoist out and the welders would use to patch and rebuild parts of our ships. I sat there many a night and watched them underwater welding. That's an interesting site, watch somebody weld down under the water in the ocean.

CS: Well, I hadn't even thought of that.

WM: Yeah. You can see the arc down there when they strike an arc. Well, then you can see the reflection on them and everything else they were doing. I sat there many a night with that piece of metal that they were welding onto the ship hanging from the hook on my winch.

CS: And these welders are in dive -- the old dive suits with the metal, with the brass or the bronze helmets?

WM: No, no. They had a dive suit all right. But they had -- well, I guess it would be about like that because we had the air compressors to get the fresh air down to them.

CS: Yeah, because they didn't have scuba then.

WM: Oh no, there wasn't anything such thing then, huh-uh.

CS: Yeah. Well now, that's an interesting observation. I'd never heard that, that they were actually operating on the ships underwater. I thought that -- I was under the

impression they always had to take them back to dry dock to be able to do something like that.

WM: No, we had to build the false valves on those ships so they could get to dry dock. See, a lot of time they'd be squished clear back underneath the #1 gun tubs on those destroyers. And we'd even have to cut the gun tubs off of them and let them fall down in the ocean before we could rebuild it enough they could get home. The ones on the sides, as long as the side wasn't into the engine room area where it would flood and put the ship out of commission, then they would block off that hole by closing all the hatches and the portholes. And then we would put patches on there and then pump the water out and send them home. It was quite an operation. It really was.

CS: It sounds like it. I think one of the things, too, it's hard to understand today because we're 60 years after the fact, was that the equipment that was available to do things like that with then was by today's standards pretty primitive compared to, you know, what might be available today. But, it didn't seem to bother anybody. We seemed to get the job done always, you know? So, it makes you realize that things weren't quite as primitive back then as we tend to think of it nowadays, I suppose.

WM: No, no, not by any means. Don't kid yourself. It was quite a sophisticated operation, all told.

CS: Yeah, well, it sounds like it.

WM: There was things that took place out there that I'd never heard of or dreamed of, I'll tell you for sure. But I would have never believed it if I hadn't seen it going on.

CS: Yeah.

WM: Okay, where were we?

CS: Well, we were...

WM: You've got me on an island, and I don't even remember what I'm on.

CS: Well, we were back in Purvis Bay. And you were watching the little one-lunger come over and drop bombs on you at night.

WM: Oh yeah, old Charlie. Okay, that was in May. I don't remember the date I gave you. Anyhow, May the 22nd of '44 we arrived in Pago Pago, American Samoa. I've never for the life of me figured why we went all the way over to Samoa. But anyhow, we were granted a 12-hour liberty while we were there. There wasn't a darn thing worth seeing in the first place. The only thing I ever saw there that dumbfounded me, at that time that was the home of people with elephantitis. Have you ever seen that, elephantitis?

CS: Yeah. I've seen photographs of people with it. They're pretty grotesque.

WM: Uh-huh. There was one young lady there that, from her waist up, she was a normal size. From her waist down, her buttocks were at least two axe handles abroad. And her legs, oh, I have no idea how big they were. She didn't walk. She tried to wobble, but she couldn't do much of that either. And then there was a man there that was that way. His whole body was that way. He wasn't fat. He was -- whatever that elephantitis is, why...

CS: Yeah. So, what did you do on your 12 hours of liberty on Samoa then?

WM: I didn't spend more than an hour or two ashore. I just came back to the ship. I didn't do anything. There wasn't anything there worth seeing. Of course, on the other end of the island -- this was American Samoa. On the other end of the island was a -- I believe, yeah, French Samoa, I believe it is. That island is divided into two owners.

CS: Okay. And after Samoa, what happened to the ship?

WM: Well, let me see. Well, we left Pago Pago, Samoa, on May the 24th. Where the heck did we go then? You have to give me a minute here to refresh my memory a little bit. All right, on June the 2nd we arrived at Majuro Atoll, M-A-J-U-

R-O. That's in the Marshall Islands. Of course, you're writing all this down on a map, aren't you?

CS: Yeah. Well, this'll be -- the people that'll be following this in the future will be able to follow it anyhow.

WM: I have put this on a map. And you ought to see that map. All the criss-crossing and back and forth, if you can follow it you've got me beat, and I drew it. Okay. While we were there at Majuro, the Argonne was assigned to service Squadron 10. And, she provided the vital communications services to the entire fleet at Majuro. That's why I told you earlier about having this great radio setup.

CS: Yeah. You said it's the most powerful shipboard radio, I think, in the Pacific?

WM: In the Pacific. You're right, you're right. Man, I'll tell you, they could talk to or receive a radio message from anybody around -- well, they said around the world. I don't know.

CS: Okay. So, that was the purpose of your duty there on that island then?

WM: Mm-hmm, yep.

CS: Okay. And how long did that go on?

WM: While we were there, late one night, my motorboat was called to make an emergency trip to the marine dock on the

island. And, of course, there were no lights on our ship or on the island. And the only lights I was allowed to have on my boat was the one in the compass box. If you hadn't already charted your course of how long to run in a certain direction on the compass and then what to change to and how long to run, you weren't going to get there because you dang sure couldn't see what it was. But anyhow, while we were on the way over there, or almost there, in fact, all of a sudden this dad-gum 35-foot motor launch I was running, the front of it reared way up in the air and slid sideways and went on off the other side. And, man, I tell you, I couldn't figure what under God's sun happened. But anyhow, we slowed down and went on into the dock. And, while we were there the motor mechanic dived down under the boat and checked the propeller to make sure it wasn't damaged or anything. He said it was all right. We could try to get home on it. And, we let this passenger off that we had to take in. But anyhow, after we got back to the ship in good shape, then the next morning we had the word was going around the bay that during the night one of the American submarines had been attacked by some unknown object there in the bay. I'll bet you I was running the only motorboat in US history that ever collided with one of our own submarines.

CS: Well, that's a pretty good story.

WM: But I guarantee you one thing. There wasn't a single one of us in the crew of three that ever said one word about it.

CS: Oh, I can imagine not, yeah.

WM: It was more fun listening to try to figure out what under God's sun had run over the back end of the stern of that submarine. I'm glad it was the stern, not the bow, because those cables up there would have cut us half in two. Oh, lordy, that's just another one of those interesting things that happened that weren't supposed to. Okay, on June the 9th we sailed from Majuro. And on June the 14th, we arrived in Kwajalein, Marshall Islands. Of course, you've heard of Kwajalein.

CS: Yeah, that was the atomic -- one of the atomic bomb tests.

WM: That's one of the no-longer-existing islands in the South Pacific because it was destroyed when the US tested one of the atomic bombs there. Of course, in the first place there wasn't anything there. It wasn't high enough out of the ocean to count to begin with. Okay, August the 15th, again, I spent my 20th birthday painting a boat there on the ship -- my motorboat, in fact. I remember that. And on August the 17th, there in Kwajalein, a C-47 took off from the airstrip there on the island. And some mechanic

had failed to remove the -- what do you call them? -- oh, the blocks from the air lungs and so forth, wing and tail parts, flaps. As a result, they couldn't guide -- they couldn't control the plane. And that plane crashed just off -- it made a big loop back around and up over part of the island and crashed into the coral reef just on the far side of it. I don't remember now how many men were on there. It seemed like there was 20-something men on that plane. Of course, nobody survived. About three or four of us boat crews spent the next two days over there riding around off that coral reef picking up body parts and throwing them in our boats. That's the nearest I ever came from stealing from a dead man. I picked up one forearm and a hand that had the most beautiful diamond ring on that finger that I ever saw. Boy, you will never know the temptation. But anyhow, I thought no, that will definitely help identify whoever that guy was. So, I left it.

CS: Well, let's hope the next guy down the line did the same thing.

WM: That's exactly what I've often thought. I wonder how far that hand got, because that was sure one big beautiful diamond ring. I just could not bring myself to take it. I'll tell you for sure.

CS: Well, I'm sure it would be on your conscience today if you had.

WM: Why, just like it is. It's on my conscience I wonder if it ever got where it should have gone. It sure is. I'll never forget it. Okay, on August the 22nd, we left Kwajalein. Where the heck did we go this time? On August the 25th we crossed the equator going south for the second time and got my tail busted again. On August the 30th we arrived at Manus in the Admiralty Islands.

CS: Manus?

WM: M-A-N-U-S, Manus, in the Admiralty Islands.

CS: Okay. And, what was happening at Manus?

WM: Well, Manus was the base for the operation to secure the Western Carolines. And, on board the Argonne was Captain S.B. Ogden, O-G-D-E-N, Ogden, who was in charge of that operation. And, he carried it out from aboard our ship.

CS: Okay. Now, was this a task force? Were you with an invasion fleet? Or, what was...

WM: Oh, no, no. I don't know where the fleet was itself. But he was doing all this with the -- he was providing the logistics support for all that the fleet was carrying out. But he was doing it there from the Argonne on our radio contact. I've got another item here, six-day item, of being assigned to another ship, an APA, running LCVPs and

taking the Marines into the beach landing. I'd rather just not even mention that if you don't mind.

CS: Okay.

WM: I put that one out of my mind, and I don't care to bring it back up.

CS: Okay.

WM: All I can say is I was lucky enough to dodge every bullet that came toward my boat. All right, on November the 10th, the Argonne was moored to berth buoy 14 in S-E-E-D-L-E-R harbor, Seedler Harbor. I'm sure you've heard of this one. The ammunition ship Mount Hood -- AE-11 was her number -- exploded. She was moored to berth buoy 380, which is only 100 yards off the port side of the Argonne.

CS: You were only 100 yards away from the Mount Hood?

WM: Oh yeah. You've heard of her?

CS: Oh, well sure, yeah. I know a guy that lost some people on his -- well, I've done interviews with two different men that were on ships there in the harbor. One guy was a half mile away. And they had two or three guys get killed on his ship.

WM: Uh-huh. Yeah, we were 100 yards away.

CS: It's a wonder the ship survived, then, from what I hear or heard about it.

WM: Well, it blew me overboard. Yeah, I was on the upper deck. and it blew me clear overboard. And I lit on a steel barge tied up alongside our ship. I think the barge is what hurt me more than anything.

CS: Well, were you -- you mean, you were blown off the ship onto the barge?

WM: Yeah, three stories below, and lit on a steel deck, a steel barge.

CS: Oh. What kind of injuries did you have?

WM: Nothing but some ungodly bruises.

CS: Well, you were...

WM: Yeah, I had to crawl under some boxes of goods down there to keep the shrapnel from killing me.

CS: Yeah. Well, that's what killed a lot of the people on the other ships was the falling debris.

WM: Yep. It says here we had large chunks of shrapnel falling all around. Someplace I noted told we had -- let me see if I can find it real quick -- told how many pieces of shrapnel we picked up off of our ship and so forth. Oh, there was 221 pieces of shrapnel ranging from 1 to 150 pounds totaling 1,300 pounds, recovered from the Argonne, on board the Argonne.

CS: Well, yeah, that was a pretty tragic thing.

WM: We had some minor/medium damage from it, from the -- got the searchlights, got the radio tower, the antennas, anything that was up like that, exposed. The steam and the freshwater lines, got them.

CS: Did you lose any crewmen?

WM: Well, that's what I'm getting down to. We had sent a ten-man work party over there that morning to help unload that ammunition. And, naturally we lost all of them. But one of them was a good friend from Henrietta, Oklahoma. And, back in about 19 -- let me think -- 47, I was traveling from Stillwater to Fort Smith, Arkansas, had to go through Henrietta or right by there on my way. So, I stopped by and looked up the parents of this guy and asked them if they had ever been told what happened to their son. They said all they ever were told by the US Navy, that he was missing in action. So, I told them the story. I said, "You don't -- I know it doesn't relieve your pain any. But at least you know that it was immediate. He didn't have any suffering whatsoever." They were very thankful that I'd stopped by and talked to them.

CS: Well, I can imagine, yeah.

WM: They didn't even -- first place, they didn't even know that he been over there on Mount Hood, didn't know a thing about it, never heard of it.

CS: Yeah, well there's a lot of things like that that were covered up during the war that didn't come out until later.

WM: Well, they had -- in reality, they had a lot of good reason to do that.

CS: Sure.

WM: But, my gosh, sometimes it just wasn't fair. That's all there is to it. It was not fair to do the public like that. All right now, let me see. Oh, two days after that explosion, we had a lookout on our ship that spotted a guy hanging onto a berth buoy about 600 yards aft -- or, I mean, astern -- of our ship. My crew and I went out there and pulled him off of that buoy and into the boat, took him back up to our doctors in sick bay. That poor guy, he'd look at you. He couldn't talk. You had no idea what was wrong with him because he couldn't say a word. You talk about shell shock. This was two days after the explosion. He'd been hanging onto that berth buoy back there. And we have no idea under God's sun how he got back there because that was -- Lord, I'd say that was at least four or five city blocks from where the Mount Hood was. It may have blown him that far as far as that's concerned.

CS: Yeah. Well, so you never found out...

WM: We transferred him on over to the -- over to the island, anyhow. Let me kind of scan a little bit here. All right.

There was another repair ship in the harbor there with us, the Mindanao -- M-I-N-D-A-N-A-O, Mindanao. Her number was AR-G3. And she received from very heavy damage. She was moored between that Argonne and the Mount Hood. So, I can understand why. She lost 23 of her crew and 74 wounded, had extensive physical damage. I don't know why I wrote all of this down, but anyhow it's here. All right, November the 21st, we finally sailed from the Admiralty Islands. Enough of that place, I'll tell you for sure.

CS: Yeah, I think, Bill, we might want to be speeding this up a little bit because we're running pretty long here. And, we don't want to stretch it out too long, I think.

WM: Okay. Where do you want to skip to?

CS: Well, you could maybe just abbreviate a little bit about once you left and rather than try to hit every -- it sounds like you went to so many different places. I mean, it makes a very interesting history. But it's going to run into quite a bit of length here, it sounds like. Maybe you could kind of move forward to where you were toward the end of the war and how you ended up getting back home and so forth.

WM: All right, all right. Let me just do some fast scanning here. November the 26th, we anchored in Cossol Roads, C-O-S-S-O-L Passage, in the Palau Islands. All right, scanning

on down. Let me see what I come up with next that might be of interest to you.

CS: Well, I think it would all be interesting except that we...

WM: You're probably running out of time.

CS: Yeah, we are kind of running a little bit long here.

WM: Okay, 1945, February the 3rd, I sailed from Peleliu Bay in the Palau Islands. Heck, we're clear up to 1945.

CS: Yeah. Well, we were into November of '44 there anyway where we were, I think.

WM: Yeah. Now we're into February of '45.

CS: Yeah, okay. So, we skipped a month or so there.

WM: All right. Here we go. February the 15th we arrived in Tacloban, Leyte Gulf, Philippines, Luzon Island.

CS: Okay.

WM: Going down the road now. There are several good stories there, but we don't have time to get into them.

CS: Well, I'll tell you what. You know, we could come back. As a matter of fact, why don't we do that? Why don't you let me set up another call with you, maybe, like, Thursday or Friday, and we can finish up? Because I really hate to skip over too much of this. But we're just, we're running a little short on my schedule here.

WM: Well, it depends on whether it's of interest or what you would find of interest.

CS: Well, yeah. Well, I think that the historians are going to find all this...

WM: There are some stories here that'll open your eyes. But on the other hand, not everybody wants to hear about them.

CS: Yeah. What the historians that are -- what we will do is we'll put up, for example, the Mount Hood episode, for example. We will have keywords in your history. And this will all be computerized. So, if they come in and they want to do a special on the explosion of the Mount Hood, you're, like I said, about the third guy that I've interviewed that was in the harbor that day. And each one of these interviews will have the Mount Hood keyed on it. So, this guy can just plug in the words "Mount Hood Explosion," and your description of that will come up along with all these other guys'. And so, that little piece of it, you know, he might not be interested so much in when you were down in Purvis Bay. But there will be segments of it that'll be of interest to these historians in future times. I mean, that's what our purpose is.

WM: By the way, were either one of these other guys, would they be any chance on a light cruiser anchored right directly ahead of the Mount Hood?

CS: No.

WM: There was a -- maybe they can tell you. There was a light cruiser anchored in the berth right directly ahead of the Mount Hood. And, the shells and stuff that were in that Mount Hood came out there like being fired out of a gun and virtually destroyed the back one-third of that light cruiser. I mean, absolutely demolished it. I don't remember the name of it, and I can't find anybody that does.

CS: No, one of them was on a ship that did small engine repair. And the other one was, I believe, on a supply ship. But anyhow, why don't we do that? Let me cut this off here, because I'd really love to come back and finish up. I mean, you're doing a real pretty job of describing the details of all the stuff that you've got here. So, we're just going to have to break it up.

WM: Now, let me ask you something else.

CS: Yes, sir.

WM: We can do that. I'm all for doing that. But, on the other hand, would it be of any assistance if I'd mail a copy of all this and you could give it to somebody else that wants it? It's all on my computer. It's all on my computer. All I've got to do is print it off.

CS: Well, we could do that. And, I think -- I can't give you a definitive answer because I think that we get material from

guys every once in a while. But we don't have any way to categorize it, to computerize it right now.

WM: I thought maybe you were talking about these historians. Some of them might.

CS: Yeah. But they would...

WM: I'm not reading you everything.

CS: If we had some of the -- well, I'll tell you what. What I think we could do -- let me back up a little bit. We would have to get somebody to go to read through this and then pull up those keywords there like the Mount Hood and Purvis Bay and Guadalcanal. And if we could get somebody to do that and then categorize that so it could be computerized and access it -- because the historians typically wouldn't come in and just start reading a random oral history by somebody. But we don't have that capability right now. But if we got your story, you know, in writing, then someday, somewhere down the road, we might be able to do that. So, I could take it. But I couldn't promise you that it's going to be used in a very -- you know, in a really useful way.

WM: I really don't mind at all. It's just if and when you ever think you could put it to good use for some of the historians or something, it's on my computer.

CS: Well, I'll tell you what. Why don't you go ahead and run off a copy of it, if you would then? You said it's, what, 40 pages or so?

WM: Thirty-something, yeah.

CS: Thirty-something? So, if you run off a copy, when we get back together here I could give you the address to send it to. And, what I could do is turn it over to our archivist because I have -- I've had a couple of guys that came in here for face-to-face interviews that brought material with them. And I turned it over to the archivist. And he said, well, they could put it away, you know, put it to the side and hope that someday we'll be able to have the facility, the money and the people, to be able to categorize this stuff properly.

WM: Do any of these people have an email? I'd send it by email and they could have it all there on their computer.

CS: You could email it down to us. You sure can. And, I do not know what the email is here. But I can have that for you, too, when we get back together.

WM: Yeah, that way you can print it off any time you wanted for whoever wants to see it.

CS: Exactly, yeah. I never -- yeah, you're exactly right. That's the smart way to do it. Okay. So, let's set up a

time here later in the week. I won't be able to do it tomorrow.

WM: Well, I won't either.

CS: And how about Thursday or Friday for you then?

WM: Well, we'll try, yeah.

CS: Okay.

WM: I always say, "No, let me check," because I have to go check my doctor appointments. It's gotten to the point we live on doctor appointments.

CS: Oh yeah.

WM: Let me ask you, where do you live?

CS: I live here in Fredericksburg.

WM: Do you?

CS: Yeah.

WM: Well, I'll tell you, I really was impressed with your city. It's very nice.

CS: We retired here eight years ago because we liked the town. And so, I started volunteering for the museum. And I spend a lot of my time down here.

WM: Where were you prior to that?

CS: Colorado.

WM: Where?

CS: Well, actually, Colorado Springs mostly. But, you know, I'm a native Texan, of Texas. And my folks are from kind

of your neck in the woods. I went to high school up in a little town called Alamo, Arkansas, right east of Fort Smith.

WM: I know exactly where it is.

CS: Yeah, it's where Highway 71 peels off to go to Fayetteville. But, my dad is from Caddo, down by Durant. And, I spent a lot of my childhood down in that part of the world.

WM: I know where that is. Well, see, that's a little farther south and back west from where I was in the Kiamichi Mountains.

CS: Yeah. Well, I went through that, through your home country here, I think, the year before last because I'm part Choctaw. And I went by the tribal headquarters there at (inaudible).

WM: That goes right along with me then.

CS: Oh really?

WM: Oh, yeah.

CS: Well, we'll have to talk about that when we get back together then.

WM: Yeah. In fact, all of my cousins are Choctaw, a lot more than I am.

CS: Oh, okay. Well, I'm not a whole lot. But my dad was one of the original Dawes Roll members. So, he was an original

enrollee. So, that just about means how old you are, I guess.

WM: Yeah. One of my uncles was the -- let me think now. His great-grandfather was the first governor of the Choctaws in Oklahoma. His picture hangs in the rotunda down in the state capitol.

CS: Oh, really?

WM: Wade. When the Choctaws left Mississippi and came to Oklahoma, their beloved chief wouldn't come with them, Chief LeFlore. He stayed in Mississippi with his cotton fields and his black slaves. He wouldn't come with the tribe.

(break in audio)

CS: This is Charlie Simmons. Today is the 20th of June, 2011. I am interviewing William Maddux. Mr. Maddux is in Stillwater, Oklahoma. And I am in Fredericksburg, Texas. This is the second of two interviews. In the previous interview we had discussed Mr. Maddux's history up until -- war history up until the 3rd of February 1945, where his ship had just entered Tacloban in the Leyte Gulf. And, if you're ready, Mr. Maddux, if you'd state your name again, just for the record, and we'll take it from there then.

WM: I am William Grant Maddux, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

CS: And, you are presently in the Leyte Gulf. So, tell us a little bit about your adventures there.

WM: In the Leyte Gulf?

CS: Yes, sir.

WM: All right, one or two stories. One of them, we had a -- a shipmate and I had an eight-hour liberty on Tacloban, in Tacloban. And while we were there, stumbling around through all the ruins and remains from the terrific shelling from our ships, we came across a young lady, I would guess about 30 years old, and her father, who I would guess around 55 or 60, somewhere in that neighborhood. They had -- before the war, they had run a photography studio there in Tacloban. During the war, when the Japanese were there, they buried all their fine cameras and lighting equipment back in the mountains, or hills, I would call them, there on the island. So, the Japanese never did find them. And she had a 15-by-15 US Army tent set up. They lived in one half of it. And the other half she had put up her cameras and lights in there to take pictures, portraits. We decided we'd have her take a portrait of the two of us, got the portrait all made. She said they'd be ready in two days. So, we went back. I think it was around four or five days because that's as soon as we could get back over there off the ship. Beautiful portraits -- I

still have it in my picture book today, nice portrait. And, she got all through. And my shipmate and I each gave her a \$20 bill for that portrait. This young lady I thought was going to cry her eyes out. She said that was the most money she had ever seen in her life and also the fact that that would be enough money for she and her father to survive on for at least one year. So, that made us really feel good. We went on into the village, and there were some people in there in as bad, if not worse, shape. One family, honestly, the whole family of about five or six kids, didn't look like they'd had a meal to eat for three months. So, we visited with them a little while and did the same thing. We left them some money. And they had a pig. Of course, over there at that time a pig was a prized possession. That was their food for the next eight months or so. And we informed them that money was for food for them and not for that God-blessed pig. The pig could eat their scraps. That was about all we did in the Philippines, Tacloban. I'm trying to remember here when we left over there. Just a minute. Let me see what I can find on my records real quick. Oh, by the way, I want to tell you something. These dates I'm giving you, from Noumea all the way for the rest of the time I was in the Navy, I guarantee you they are absolutely the correct dates

that hoisted anchor and every time we arrived someplace, because I coded them in a little black book. If the Navy ever caught me with it I'd still be hanging from a yardarm someplace.

CS: Yeah. Yeah, well, I guess I understand you weren't supposed to keep a diary or anything like that.

WM: Oh no, my God, no. that's what I -- basically, that's what I kept. All right, on June the 14th we sailed from the Leyte Gulf. And on June the 24th we arrived back at Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands. That was another one of the islands that -- it and Kwajalein were the two that the United States blew completely out of the ocean testing their atomic bombs.

CS: Yeah, so there's not much there anymore then, I guess.

WM: There's nothing there anymore. It's all gone. Okay, on July the 1st we sailed from Eniwetok. And, just a minute here. Let me see. Where the heck did I go on that one? July, let me -- just a minute. July the 3rd we sailed from Roi, Marshall Islands. And, July the 4th we arrived in Kwajalein, all right? On July the 6th we sailed from Kwajalein. And on July the 14th we arrived in Pearl Harbor. Nothing exciting happened in between there, just a lot of boat riding. Okay, July the 16th, we left Pearl Harbor. On July the 24th, we arrived in San Francisco Bay.

When we approached the San Francisco Bay that morning, the fog was too heavy for them to attempt to enter the bay. So, we set out in the open ocean until the fog lifted. And as the fog lifted that morning, I'll never forget it. At one point it appeared that the San Francisco Bay Bridge was suspending or holding up that fog cloud. It made quite a sight.

CS: Yeah. Well, that's a pretty site, too, coming in from the Pacific after you've been out there.

WM: Especially when you're coming home from out there after two years, yes, it was. Okay. And, after we left the ship there we were transported by bus to the Treasure Island Navy Base.

CS: Okay, so you didn't dock at Treasure Island then?

WM: No, no. We docked someplace out there in the bay. And then they transferred us over to Treasure Island by bus.

CS: Okay. It's probably Alameda. That's on the east coast of the bay there.

WM: Probably, mm-hmm. I just don't remember. I was too excited I'd forgotten where I was.

CS: Yeah, I can imagine.

WM: Oh. I don't think we got down there that on June the 27th I departed the USS Argonne and boarded the -- yeah, boarded

the USS Lander, L-A-N-D-E-R. That was number ADA-178 transport. And that was over still at Eniwetok.

CS: It was an ADA, A, D as in Delta then?

WM: Yeah. It's usually AP.

CS: Yeah, I know. It's AP or AK.

WM: Yeah. No, this was an AD. I always thought that was strange, too. Maybe I misread the dang thing. Anyhow...

CS: Well, no, I'll just have to look it up. The Navy has a whole lot of screwy designations like that.

WM: Yeah. I don't know what the difference was, but anyhow I have it listed as ADA-178 was her number. So, everything since then, June the 27th, I was on board the USS Lander.

CS: So, you're just a passenger at this time then?

WM: Oh, yeah.

CS: Okay. So, they're just -- you just got orders to ship back home, and somebody came in?

WM: I received orders to report to Treasure Island, San Francisco.

CS: Okay. So, they brought somebody in to replace you on the Argonne, and you're headed home?

WM: I guess. I never did see. I guess the replacement came in after we left. I think it was about something around 12, I don't remember, not very many of us that left at that point. Now, at -- when we got to the Roi Island in the

Marshalls on July the 2nd, we picked up about 20 more Navy men going to Treasure Island. So, altogether there was about 30 or 40 of us being sent back to the States. I often wondered if we'd live to see or hear such a day. All right, we got back in Frisco on July the 26th. I was granted a 16-hour liberty there in Frisco, back to see what the civilians looked like. July the 27th, I departed Treasure Island, San Francisco by bus for a 30-day leave in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

CS: Oh, I bet that sounded good.

WM: Oh, you will never know.

CS: There was a lot of catching up to do, I would imagine, with a lot of different things.

WM: Yeah. I got back home there on July the 29th, visited around, went back to see everybody you could think of. And I never will forget the day I stepped off of the bus down there, at the bus station here in Stillwater. After being out there in the Pacific for 24 months, the first words out of my dad's mouth when he met me at the bus station was, "My God, son, you're black as a" you know what. I never -- I thought, boy, isn't that something, the first words out of my dad's mouth? But I must have really been black. Anyhow, on August the 15th, my 21st birthday, we drove down -- my mom and my dad and my little sister and one of my

aunts drove down to Oklahoma City to celebrate with a birthday dinner. Finished the dinner. On the way home that afternoon, late afternoon, had the radio playing in the car. And that's when they broke into all the broadcasting stations and announced that Japan had signed - or had agreed to end the war, on my 21st birthday.

CS: Well, that's a pretty good way to celebrate your birthday.

WM: Oh man, you will never know what a happy birthday that was. I'll never -- there's no way you ever forget something like that, I'll tell you.

CS: Did you have any idea what your orders would have been once you got back out to Treasure? Were you going back to Treasure Island? Was that where your next duty station was?

WM: I had no idea. I hadn't received any orders or where I was to report back to. That was what always amazed me. They were blank. I told the folks I guess I can just stay home from now on. It didn't tell me where to go.

CS: Well, there you go. It's a good excuse for not going back.

WM: Anyhow, I did receive them about, oh, a week later. I received them in the mail. I was to report to Algiers, New Orleans. And on August the 25th, I departed for Algiers, got there on the 27th. How far do you want to go, all the rest of my Navy days?

CS: Well, I guess we're -- it looks like we're kind of winding down the World War II portion here. How much longer were you in the Navy?

WM: Yeah, I was in there until -- let's see. That was August. I was in there until January of '46.

CS: Okay. So, you had another...

WM: The rest of my time was spent in New Orleans running a tugboat up and down the Mississippi River for about three or four months. And then I was transferred to the -- dang, I can't even think of it now, but anyhow down in Norman, Oklahoma.

CS: At Norman?

WM: Mm-hmm.

CS: Okay.

WM: Yeah, I almost missed my transfer there because when we were running that tugboat on the Mississippi, we worked 24 hours, and we were off 48. So, my shipmates and I got us a room way up 20-something-hundred block on Canal Street. And we never even went to the base over at Algiers. Finally, one of the shipmates from over there at Algiers stopped by one morning and said, "Maddux, you'd better go to the base. You got a transfer notice in your mailbox." I went over there and checked that blamed thing. I had to leave out at 8:00 the next morning for Norman, Oklahoma.

CS: And then, so you were discharged at Norman?

WM: Yeah. That's where they shipped me to was the discharge station there at Norman. And I was there for the rest of that, what, November until January as a police, or a Master at Arms, they called them, of the base there.

CS: Yeah, and so what date were you officially out of the Navy then?

WM: I believe it was January the -- oh, Lord.

CS: Well, that's okay. I just...

WM: I think it was the 16th of January.

CS: Okay. 1946?

WM: Mm-hmm, yep. Yep.

CS: Okay. So, I imagine you were able to get home pretty frequently then during the time you were there at Norman?

WM: Oh, yes. Well, in the meantime my parents had moved back from Stillwater to Fort Smith, Arkansas. That's still only a four-hour drive, so that was all right.

CS: Well, that's quite a story. Do you think you about wrapped up, Bill? Or, you got anything else to add here before we...

WM: No, not necessarily. I know there's more of...

END OF AUDIO FILE