William Sloman Oral History Interview

MARK CUNNINGHAM: Now you lived in Texas City at the time?

WILLIAM SLOMAN: I lived in Texas City; I was born and raised in Texas City, attended school in Texas City. I was really, I would say quite young to be thinking in these terms, but I was a member of the Marine Corps Reserves unit there in Texas City. But the way the war was going in Europe, it seemed to me obvious.

MC: And you were out of high school at this time, or after high school you got into the Reserves?

WS: Yes. It seemed to me that it was obvious that we would become involved in the war in Europe, never gave it a thought at the time. The way Hitler was murdering people, the way he would march into these smaller countries, that somebody had to stop him and the United States was the one that was going to have to do it. My thought was to go into the regular Marine Corps and get more training and be prepared to go to war, because that was what was going to happen.

MC: Yeah. Well was there -- I mean were a lot of guys that you went to high school with, were they thinking in these same terms at that time?

WS: To the best of my knowledge, no. One man, a friend of mine named Raymond Holt, he and I went together to Houston. Of course the recruiting office was crowded, but he and I were the only two that left Houston to go to Dallas. In Dallas, we went through the same examinations.

MC: When you went to the recruiting office in Houston they sent you to Dallas, is that what happened?

WS: Yes. I mean after going through the examinations, the physicals and what have you. They sent the two of us, and Raymond and I were the two that went on to Dallas. When we reached Dallas, the recruiting office was -- people were out in the hallways and it was crowded; there was a lot of people.

MC: Right, right. Now this was in 1939?

WS: October of 1939, October the 4th, I believe. But then eventually, there was four of us that left Dallas for San Diego, out of all of them that was up there.

MC: Approximately how many were there?

WS: Oh, I would say there was at least 60 people there, that was in the different offices and out in the hallways.

MC: Right. Trying to get in the Marine Corps though, right?

WS: Yeah. There were there to be volunteers. There was one man, he was four pounds overweight and he told us don’t worry, I’ll lose that four pounds in a day and I’ll catch

up with you. Well sure enough, he caught up. (Laughs) We got to San Diego and spent quite a long time, I don't know just how long, but a long time in the receiving barracks, waiting for them to get 63 men to make a platoon.

MC: Yeah, yeah. Well they would turn down a guy for just about anything back then. They were very picky weren't they?

WS: Yeah, apparently. I've always thought that since Raymond and I made it out of Houston and we both made it out of Dallas with just four of us going, that I believe my Reserve time probably had an influence. There was nothing else that was special about me, you know?

MC: When was the earliest time that you ever thought about joining the Marines? Had you thought about it back when you were in school? What attracted you to the Marines as opposed to the Army?

WS: Well, I thought I would do well in the Marine Corps Reserves a way long time before I was old enough to get in.

MC: When did you get in the Reserves, how old were you?

WS: I had to be about 15.

MC: Now was this an ROTC type program or just the Reserves?

WS: No, this was Reserves, something to do with the battalion headquarters out in Dallas. The company clerk was my English professor and he knew I was too young.

MC: So you had to lie about your age to get in?

WS: Yeah. The first sergeant was my neighbor and he knew that. I had a cousin in there that was a sergeant and he knew I was too young, but no they went ahead and accepted me anyway, and I made two encampments with the Reserves before going into the regulars.

MC: So they just kind of looked the other way and let you go ahead and join.

WS: They should know the company clerk had to know how old I was, because he was my English professor.

MC: Right, right. Well, what motivated you to want to be in the military though, I mean had your father been in or anybody in your family?

WS: Well, my father didn't make World War I, he was sort of in between. I got my exposure in the Marine Corps Reserves, and I had a lot of friends in the Reserves. I ran around with -- most of the boys that I'd run around with were a year or so or a couple years older than I was, and they were already in that Reserve unit, and that motivated me to get into the Reserves. And then of course --

MC: But you really thought you were going to be fighting a war. You didn't -- it wasn't just for the adventure of it or anything, you really believed that we were going to be in one.

WS: I was convinced that we would have to become involved in the war in Europe.

MC: Yeah.

WS: I'd never given a thought this would pass.

MC: Right.

WS: Didn't matter to us. A group of us that had worked scrap iron, you know they loaded that off of the gondolas with a magnet, a round magnet. Well, it was square cornered, the gondolas, and that round magnet couldn't get it all, and so somebody had to pile it up out in the middle, what they couldn't get. As well as there was another time we didn't have a ship. They'd unload it along the railroad track and then they'd have to load it back. Well, it was the same thing would occur; there would be scattered scrap iron.

MC: And this was in Texas City, right?

WS: Yeah. We worked 45 minutes an hour, and we'd make jokes about the fact that if we were shipping that to Japan, they was going to be shooting it back at us. I don't know that any of us really believed it. I always thought that the differences that we had with Japan could be resolved over a conference table, and I believe if it hadn't been for Hitler, they probably would have been.

MC: Well, you went to San Diego for basic training, right?

WS: Yes and well, they put us on a 24-day schedule with them. I don't believe there was over three platoons of us that went through on this so-called 24-day schedule. Normally, it was 12 to 16 weeks, and then of course they went back to the 12 to 16 weeks. Their theory, having adopted what was referred to as the new drill, the 13-man squad gets rid of the old 8-man squad, where you did squad right and squad left, it was a close order drill. Their theory being that the close order drill was going to be easier to learn with the new formation, than the old 8-man squad where you have a squad right and a squad left. Now oddly enough, we had already had the new drill in the Reserves. That they were just introducing in the regulars.

MC: So they rushed you through boot camp in 24 days.

WS: In 24 days. We were up at four o'clock in the morning, made our bunks up. Now that didn't mean you spread your blanket out, that means rolling your bedroll all the way to the head of your bed, and there's nothing exposed but the springs. You don't have a bed to sit on. And at 15 minutes to ten at night, you could make your bed down, taps was at ten o'clock, but then we rolled out at four o'clock every morning.

MC: That's a long day.

WS: After finishing boot camp, graduating from boot camp, there was a graduation exercise we had in those days, was a parade passing for the general, and then marches in the grounds and take a platoon picture, and then you were graduated.

MC: Who was the general, do you remember?

WS: (inaudible), I believe was the general at that time, if I'm not mistaken, was the commanding general of the Marine Corps base.

MC: Where did you go from San Diego?

WS: Well, there was a group of us that they sent back out to the rifle range still working, and we were out there two weeks, repairing -- well, some of it was just general cleanup. Some of it was repairing screens, replacing screens on the mess hall, replacing the screens on the barracks, in some instances, repairing and replacing the entire screen door. Then when we returned to the base, went in the 1st Defense Battalion in D Battery, privates. Lieutenant McAlister was the Reserve Officer, Second Lieutenant Reserve Officer.

MC: That was D Battery, right? D Battery?

WS: D as in diaper.

MC: D as in diaper, okay.

WS: He had been called up, they were calling Reserve officers up before they called all the Reserves, and he had been called in to active duty and joined the 1st Defense at the same time that I did.

MC: By this time this was what, early 1940?

WS: No, this would have been about -- this would have been in November, December.

MC: Of ’39?

WS: Thirty-nine. Lieutenant Rineberg was the commanding officer, I believe. Captain George Potter, who you probably have heard of, Major Potter.

MC: Yeah, Potter’s line.

WS: Was the group commander of the five of us. At the same time the 1st Defense was being formed on the West Coast, they formed the 3rd Defense on the East Coast.

MC: Was that intended to be departed in the Atlantic, or from where?

WS: Well, it ended up on Midway.

MC: Oh did it, okay, okay.

WS: It ended up on Midway and Lieutenant Rineberg transferred to the 3rd Defense Battalion. I believe he became -- he may have even got a promotion to Captain. I’m not certain, but he became the group, five-inch group commander of 3rd

Defense, when they went on out to Midway Island, to start fortifying it.

MC: How much training did you get when they assigned you to the five-inch battery, I mean as far as high artillery training?

WS: Well, the Sea School was part of the recruit depot, had a mock five-inch gun. It had the firing chamber, it was on lock, in the breach, and a barrel that was probably 30-foot long, and the bottom was hinged. So we could -- and we had some gunning projectiles, and we would then go in the sea, framed on this, as well as we did. Of course we could load it, throw the projectile in, put the bag of powder behind it, which was a bag of sand, they say powder. Go through the motion of closing the breach, firing it, and then dropping that bottom portion of the barrel and the projectile would fall on the ground, so we could reuse it. We trained oh, almost constantly it seems like, on that Sea School equipment before we finally got our guns. And then once we got our guns, we went out to Point Loma. Now these five-inch guns were the projectile and bag powder, that had been taken off of the cruisers and then brought us the guns on the cruiser.

MC: Now these were the actual guns that ended up on Wake, some of them?

WS: Yeah. And they were replacing them on the cruisers and battleships with fixed ammunition. They provided us with a 16-foot by 16-foot by 3-foot depth, wooden platform with a metal mounting plate in the center. Now, the wooden platform was made out of [formers wood?]. We'd dig a hole, get this platform down in there, tamp the dirt back around it, and then mount the gun in the center, on the mounting plate. The first time that we did this was out at Point Loma, there in San Diego, in California. It was a pretty good hill there and we had a long, long landing, and we got on the other side of the -- [interruption]. We got on the opposite side of that hill, just to fire that gun first. In fact, we fired -- we had set up two guns with targets, so we could have target practice, and we fired them both, with that long, long, long landing on the opposite side of the hill, to make sure they were going to stay in the ground, and sure enough they did. But we did everything with those guns that the ordinance manual said we couldn't do. The barracks that we ended up living in at that time was -- had been built and the building ops, actually it was just silt from the (inaudible) between North Island and the Marine Corps Base, so it was real sandy. Most of those parts of that gun were not to be exposed, except in a desperate involvement. We took it apart (inaudible). Of

course, I'm sure the reasoning behind it is that if we had to take one loose down there on the islands, why we can haul the thing off. We had to know that the thing was going to work.

MC: Yeah, yeah, right. Well, when you were training on these guns, had you been told where you were going to go at that time?

WS: No.

MC: Did you have any idea where you were going to go?

WS: Not the slightest idea. It wasn't until December of '40, around the last part of December, there began to be a little bit of scuttlebutt about us leaving the States. We left the States in February of '41, I guess, most of us on the *William P. Biddle*, a transport that they brought out of Norfolk, and this was its shakedown cruise.

MC: That was in February of '41?

WS: Yeah.

MC: Okay. And give me the name of the ship again.

WS: *William P. Biddle*, B-I-D-D-L-E.

MC: B-I-T-T-L-E?

FEMALE: Biddle.

MC: Biddle?

WS: Biddle, B-I-D-D-L-E. Actually, we began the loading, manual labor, loading.

MC: Did they tell you where you were going when you loaded up on the *Biddle*?

WS: Well, we got out in the bay water and they told us we were headed to Pearl Harbor. And we ran into rough water, and it was in rough water for four or five days.

MC: But you loaded the guns yourselves?

WS: We loaded all the provisions.

MC: All the provisions, okay.

WS: In other words, we did all the legwork, we did the manual work. When we got to Pearl Harbor we unloaded. We got settled in to stay there. Now we had quite a lot of target practice there at Point Loma, but then once we hit Pearl Harbor, the 1st Defense Battalion was never to be all together again. A thousand of us, there was about 970 officers and enlisted men. The first thing they did was send a group to Palmyra Island, which was going to be our responsibility. Then they sent a smaller group to Johnston Island, evidently the purpose to get the installations in. Then in the summer, they sent 300 of us to Midway, to relieve the 3rd Defense Battalion, who had been out there about seven months without any relief. That was good though, Midway, because the guns were already in place and all we had to do in the morning is go out and make sure the

thing is good and clean, and washed most of them, and by noon, our day was complete.

MC: So when did you get to Midway?

WS: In probably June, but that's simply a guess. I don't have anything to make a good reference point on that. But we did have guard duty. One of the guard posts, one of the essentials of the post was a shark watch, when American clippers would come in at the hotel there, if the passengers wanted to go swimming, essentially went with them, with his rifle.

MC: This is on Midway now, right?

WS: Yeah. Now they had -- the guns were installed on the platforms in the same fashion as I had mentioned earlier, but they had already poured permanent bases, concrete permanent bases for them, removed it. The cement had to cure for seven months before it could withstand the shock. Midway has two islands; Sand Island, which is a large island, and Eastern Island, which is right centered by the channel. Eastern Island is where the airway was. Now, I believe there was -- were some .50 caliber machineguns over there, rather .30 caliber. There were five-inches over on Eastern Island but it was primarily the airstrip. Midway was loaded with birds, gooney birds, morning birds, another post that you had to walk around the hotel, and it was a

little brush. And you'd walk up on one of those morning birds that's nesting on the ground in the sand, and you'd be right on it, boy it would let out a sound. It was the most wonderful sound but it would scare you to death, you know?

MC: Did they also have these types of birds on Hawaii?

WS: Didn't see a morning bird out there.

MC: They had the gooney birds though, right?

WS: Well, it had some gooney birds. We had everything else, but I don't recall ever coming across a morning bird. I want you to know that we jumped sky high when you walked over it.

MC: Why did they reassign you from Midway to Wake?

WS: Well, just to show you how things were going at Midway, out in east Midway. One evening, about four o'clock one afternoon, (inaudible), man was it packed with sea bags. There will be a cruiser by in the morning to get you and you're going to Wake Island. Well, there wasn't any packing to do because we were living out of the sea bags, living in tents, and living out of sea bags. About eight o'clock that night they passed the word, said you can unpack your sea bag, you're not going. The next morning there were two groups sitting out there in the channel and

we, and the whole battalion related to us, and we went back to Pearl Harbor.

MC: Oh, okay. Now when about was this?

WS: This was in August.

MC: In August, okay. So instead of going to Wake, you went back to Pearl Harbor.

WS: We went back to Pearl Harbor. Now at the same time, they sent a small group out to Wake, but they went by a different route.

MC: Now these were the -- this group you're talking about, that went to Wake in August of '41, that was the first one sent to Wake.

WS: Yeah. The first 20 guys. We got back to Pearl Harbor, of course we went out to the port town from there, on the coast down there, Hickam Field, it sort of runs up toward the (inaudible). We were in the process of target practice and one day about noon, took us back in and put us to work loading the USS *Castor*. In the meantime, there had been sort of a confusion. The 12 of us was going to Johnston Island. We were to go down a certain day and get booster shots, and whatever clothes we might want from the quartermaster, and we had a special pay requisition approved. We could go by the paymaster and draw some money, and we had liberty. Being there at roll call the

next morning, and we were headed to Johnston Island. Well, we went to sickbay, we got our shots. All of us went by the paymaster and drew some money. I don't know how many used it on clothes, you know? And we went on liberty and the next morning at roll call, it was all called off, you're not going there, you're not going to Johnston Island. Now that's twice that I was scheduled to go someplace and overnight, they changed it, or within hours. Well, as I say, we had a five-inch gun set up for a time, for target practice. They brought us in about midnight one day and we started loading the *Castor*, the USS *Castor*. We worked around the clock getting it loaded. There was no word about where we were going and we didn't get any word. Oh, we could store our footlockers and my laundry had just come back, and I just put my whole bundle of laundry in the footlocker. It was a footlocker that I had built, because we didn't have footlockers in Pearl Harbor. So I would have clean clothes when we go on liberty, you know when I got back, from wherever I was going.

They didn't tell us where we were headed until we got out of the harbor, and after we got out of the harbor, they told us that we were -- our destination was Wake Island. Now, we had a lot of short timers in that group, and they

didn’t have 30 days, some of them less than 30 days. They were of course with us, it was a mistake to have pure ensigns right back. My advice to them was have you ever heard about (inaudible) deans of the government. But we went by Johnston Island, dropped off a handful of men and supplies and then headed on to Wake. Now, we ran into stormy weather but in spite of that, they had put us on torpedo watch. Part of torpedo watch was theoretically, if you see a torpedo coming through the water, then you relay the information to the bridge, and the bridge can perhaps maneuver out of its way.

Well, I come off torpedo watch just sopping wet with the spray and the rain, and shaking my head and saying if I saw a torpedo, how can the bridge maneuver out of the way. The ship was out of order at least half the time. Finally the weather calmed down and we got inside of Wake Island, but then we sailed around Wake Island for four days, waiting for the groundswells to flatten out, until they felt comfortable in trying to unload us, as well as the equipment and supplies that we had. Now, every morning that ship came into the island and would get within sight of it, and we began making bets whether we were going to go in or not, or turn and go back out. Then it got to where

at noon on this day, we come in, but the groundswell was still too big. But we'd been through one heck of a storm.

MC: It was tough to get ashore on Wake under any conditions, as far as I understand.

WS: Yeah. Well, I went ashore on the first motor launch that went in, and those motor launches were 50-foot long. We hit that channel and all that water rushing out of the lagoon, and that current. We didn't have that much freeboard. I could lay my hand over and touch the water, and that old motor launch just slowed down almost to a stop. [talks to the dog] Now you lay right here and behave yourself. Well, at any rate, we got ashore and they handed me the jackhammer, and I stayed on that jackhammer for three days, digging corner posts for our tents. The first night, I slept out in the open, just opened my cot out and slept under the stars, which was real fine. But I haven't touched a jackhammer since. No really, I haven't had one in my hand. That time when we got through that coral that was an entirely different type of coral than what they had out on Midway.

MC: Yeah. Now you were cutting holes in the coral to do what?

WS: Put the corner posts for the tents.

MC: Oh, okay, all right.

WS: Of course, the contractors already had wooden platforms built for us. [talks to the dog] Hey, I told you to go behave yourself. Go. Go. Hey.

MC: How long have you had your dog?

WS: She's smart but she's stubborn. At any rate, the next day we got our tents up and the first thing that went in those tents was a case of .30 caliber ammunition. Now, I'd been in the Corps for slightly over two years, or two years, and I had never had access to live ammunition, unless I was on guard duty or at the rifle range, and here in that tent, we've got a whole case sitting right there.

MC: Well now, what month was this, that you reached Wake? Was this October?

WS: Well, it was about November the 1st, if I remember correctly.

MC: November 1st.

WS: That I went ashore. Now, the --

MC: So you got there after Devereux had already started cracking the whip and making those guys work 12 hours a day, right?

WS: Well, I went with -- I'm not sure to what level, I was not on the same ship. I'm not certain.

MC: Oh, really?

WS: Probably, I reckon, but we weren't out at the same time. Devereux was the early launch of the battalion. I have this book over there, written by Gavan Daws, have you ever read it?

MC: Written by who?

WS: *Prisoners of the Japanese*.

MC: No, I guess I haven't.

WS: He's an Australian historian and he's teaching in Honolulu.

MC: Oh, I see.

WS: He interviewed numerous POWs and then followed them from one camp to the next, and he happened to select two civilians from Wake. These were (inaudible). They told him that the Marines were always bitching and the Marines were not happy and dissatisfied, and they'd even nicknamed Major Devereux, "Just Plain Shit" Devereux. Well, Devereux's initials are JPS. He had had that nickname. If you read his initials, and the fact that he was a very strong disciplinarian. When I went in with the 1st Defense Battalion -- that was his nickname. He didn't get it on Wake.

MC: He didn't get it on Wake, okay.

WS: So, Wake Island had absolutely nothing to do with that nickname. As a matter of fact, Devereux was a lot more relaxed individual once we got to Wake.

MC: I want to jump ahead and ask you something before I forget it. I have read that there were people on the batteries, you know on December 11th, when the Japanese invasion fleet was repelled and everything, and you guys sunk the destroyer. I have read and heard that there were people in the gun crews that were really giving Devereux a hard time for not letting them open fire earlier than they did, and calling him a stubborn little bastard, or something like that you know.

WS: Well, let me tell you.

MC: Did you hear anything like that on your battery?

WS: The battery, L Battery, that sunk that destroyer, there was not one complaint from them.

MC: Yeah. Did you ever hear any references to any of the other -- guys on the other batteries complaining about him?

WS: No.

MC: Okay, all right.

WS: The L Battery was the one that got it.

MC: Yeah, yeah. I didn’t want to -- I don’t want to interrupt the sequence, but I just wanted to jump ahead and ask you that because I had encountered that statement someplace.

WS: Well, I had interrupted you this time, going into this about Devereux, but he was a much more relaxed individual. He didn’t insist on uniforms out there. We did work seven

days a work, we worked Thanksgiving Day, we worked on this thing. But we were told, once we got ashore, and when I say we were, this is what Kessler and McAlister told us, that we had been selected to go out there and get the gun emplacements in, that we had the experience and the knowledge.

MC: How many of you was he talking to?

WS: Huh?

MC: How many of you was he talking to?

WS: Oh, probably 20 of us or so, out of the five-inch group.

MC: And this was McAlister that told you?

WS: It was McAlister and Kessler.

MC: And Kessler.

WS: Both. There was a battalion in Pearl Harbor that was training, and as soon as we got the guns installed and the likes of this, that we would -- that battalion would come out and relieve us and we'd go back to Pearl Harbor, back to our battalion. Of course it is true that we had had the experience of setting the guns up, and I'm sure that that was also true of the 3-inch group and the .50 caliber people, that it was set up. Now they had a Marine Corps barracks that was under construction. As a matter of fact, it was completed, except for the toilet fixtures and the glass in the windows. I started to joke with people that

we'd never see the inside of those barracks, that when those barracks got finished, our release. Of course nobody ever got to see them. We worked feverishly to get the guns installed, get them calibrated, fire them, know that they were in operating condition. We had not made any preparations for foxholes or things of this nature.

MC: You spent all your time working on the gun emplacements, getting the guns situated, and didn't have time to dig any foxholes huh?

WS: Well, they would have come.

MC: Yeah, yeah, if you had had time.

WS: But I'll make this observation now too. Of all the training, and the (inaudible) training that we received, I have no recollection whatsoever, of any instructions as to what to do in the event of a bombing raid. It was all offensive; it wasn't what you do in… But that was the day that they hit Pearl Harbor, was the same day they hit us, and just because of being across the International Date Line, the date happens to be. But I was still in the mess hall, eating breakfast, when the alarm was sounding. I left the mess hall with a wrapped around a sausage and headed to the tent. When I got to the tent, Bill Raymond had already broke the ammunition open and I threw bandoliers across each shoulder and had my belt filled. I

got my hardhat on, got my pack, picked up my rifle. I went out of the tent and Marine Sergeant Bedell, Henry Bedell, was waving his arms and hollering, “It’s a fire call, it’s a fire call, get your buckets, get your buckets!” Well, I had a bucket to wash clothes in, it was like copper.

MC: Yeah.

WS: Yeah. What had happened is the music had become confused and was sounding the fire call. So I dashed back into my tent and throw my rifle and hardhat and what have you on the ground, and I pick up my bucket and get back out of the tent and Bedell was standing there waving his hands up and down, “No, no, no, get your rifle, get your rifle.” Well, I wish you could know Hank. He happened to have been the first man killed on the day of the 23rd. I ducked back in the tent and I get my rifle in one hand and my bucket in the other, and failed to pick up my hardhat.

MC: This is how you left your helmet behind.

WS: I stepped out there and asked him, “Hank, have you made up your damn mind yet?” And you can imagine the response; I got exactly the response that I expected to get. Well, I didn’t even go back in the tent, I just tossed the water bucket back in the tent and went on out to our battle stations and I never did leave. I didn’t have the opportunity the first night to get in there and the second

day the Japs hit Camp One and destroyed everything, so there wasn't any need for me to go back there. But here, I was going about this incident, we lost some people in the bombing, and I could have had their hardhat, if I'd have just had sense enough, been smart enough to have gotten it, gotten one of them and adjusted it to my head. I didn't have that presence of mind.

MC: Was it the next day that the Japs hit Camp One?

WS: I think it was the second day.

MC: The second day, okay.

WS: That's the best memory that I have of it.

MC: So you ah, you never got another hardhat the rest of the time, right?

WS: Well, I never did ask for one. But we got out there, and to get onto Wilkes, out through Heel Point, which L Battery manned the five-inch guns out there; you had to cross the channel on a ferry. And on the Saturday before this Monday, they had a dummy run and this man was supposed to have trucks available to us across the channel, and we would ride trucks on down to our battle stations. Well on Saturday, during the dummy run, they were sitting there, and we climbed aboard and went on to our battle stations. This was Monday morning and there's no trucks in sight, so we had to march down and a lieutenant put a call out on --

(break in audio)

MC: Now, Wilkes was separated from Wake Proper by a channel, right?

WS: Yes. Actually by two channels.

MC: By two channels. You had to take a ferry across, is that correct?

WS: You had to ferry across one channel and then what is normally referred to as the new channel, it was closer to our gun positions, but it was not yet completed. They had been digging it from the lagoon side. It was going to be a wider and deeper channel, to accommodate destroyers and so forth.

MC: Yeah, yeah, right.

WS: And it had not been cut through to the ocean. They left enough for trucks to come back and forth, to come on out, which played a point in the later aspect of the game. But nevertheless, we got the notifications and Lieutenant McAlister and Captain Platt told us that Pearl Harbor was under attack at that present time, by the Japanese.

MC: So until you got there, to your battle stations, you didn’t know that.

WS: We didn’t know that until we got to the battle stations. Some of the others may have known it but those of us in L Battery didn’t know, until we got to the battle stations, what the situation was. Lieutenant McAlister and a couple men, they started digging foxholes, so we’d have a little protection. I was not a range keeper, but my battle station was up on the range keeper stand, and the range keeper stand was a toolshed that I had built and put a flat roof on it, and used it so the range keeper could sit up there on top of it. I put a heavy roof on it, real heavy, doubled it up.

The vegetation that we had out there was quite heavy. It wasn’t tall but it was real heavy, the foliage was, and that. So I dug a foxhole that’s easy for me to get to from my battle station, and I’d dig in a little deeper and a little wider, and back under the brush, so to speak. Then later, Lieutenant (inaudible), his command tower, and he wanted his built, dug around, and he wanted it deep enough so that he could squat. He didn’t want to be laying down on the ground, he wanted to squat, so he could look up. Well, I had that booger finished, except for putting a row of sandbags around the top, and on purpose. If the sandbags weren’t on top, there’d be all that loose coral,

you know from the concussions dropping in there. We had a man by the name of Martin that was on watch. He had no radar, so he probably didn't know, so all we had were our eyes and ears. He was up on the command tower, on watch.

MC: What was his name again?

WS: Martin.

MC: M-A-R-T-I-N?

WS: Yeah. And he's sitting up there swinging his tape and he says, "They're bombing the airport, they're bombing the airport!" Well, I had heard the explosions but then that wasn't anything unusual, the civilians always dynamite. But at any rate, I step out in this trail that is wide enough for a jeep to go up and down, and I look up and there was airplanes with those big old red balls on them. Then I swear if I'd had had a baseball in my hand, I could have hit one. They seemed to be that low. Now, understand, I'd never been under fire before, but I didn't have sense enough to step back in that hole that I just stepped out of. I headed back to my own little foxhole that I had dug a little deeper and a little wider, and it was full when I got there. So somebody said there were a lot of coral boulders, anywhere from 18 inches in diameter, up to three or four feet, that I don't know where they came from but they were all over the island. I sought refuge on

the leeward side of one of those. But those planes were over Wilkes. They weren't dropping any bombs on Wilkes that day but they dropped their strafing. I ran down that trail, I could hear those machinegun bullets kicking up coral, and I thought dagnabbit, here I am, I stepped out of the hole, I look up and see the planes, but instead of stepping back, I go back to -- it's strange. And that was at 11:50, on the same day they hit Pearl Harbor. Of course they came in, in perfect formation. We didn't have any planes in the air; they were all sitting on the airstrip. There wasn't anything to break up their formation and they made a beautiful pattern. An American clipper had been in the night before and had taken off that morning, but then when it got the word, it came back, and it was sitting in the lagoon.

MC: But it wasn't damaged, right?

WS: It was not damaged. But then shortly after that bombing raid was over, they loaded the clipper with, I guess everybody they could think of to take. They didn't take the houseboys, those men were from Guam. I didn't see the clipper but I could hear it. It taxied up and down that lagoon at least a half a dozen times before it finally got off it, it was so heavily loaded.

MC: Yeah. Overloaded, yeah, yeah.

WS: But it got off. Then, of course we had our daily bombing raids.

MC: Was anybody hit on Wilkes that first -- during that first air raid?

WS: The first air raid, no, nobody, I don't think.

MC: Most of the casualties were over at the airfield, right?

WS: That's where most of the casualties, and over at Camp Two. To the best of my recollection, they didn't drop a bomb on Wilkes the first day. They spit a lot of machinegun bullets out on it, and they were, they were low enough to strafe. Thursday, I guess it was a Thursday; they worked Wilkes over pretty good. We had bullets hit on our guns, destroyed one of the guns and destroyed both the scopes. Killed Tokryman and Farrar, both sergeants. They were in foxholes out in the general area of the guns.

MC: Farrar and who?

WS: Huh?

MC: Farrar and who was the other one?

WS: Tokryman.

MC: Tokryman. They were both sergeants you said.

WS: Yeah.

MC: They were in a foxhole when they got hit?

WS: Well yes, they were -- that had foxholes down in the general area of the guns, because they were on the gun

crew. Now, I was -- I had been trained on gun crews. As a matter of fact, I was operating in the position, but I was just out of the strike zone at that particular time. That's why my battle station was on the range keeper stand.

MC: Now how far is this from the battery itself?

WS: Oh, it probably wasn't over 75 feet, a hundred. And then the command tower was probably another hundred feet.

MC: So, when they knocked the scopes out on the guns, was this a bomb that did that?

WS: Yeah. Concussion from the bombing.

MC: Now were Farrar and Tokryman, were they killed by a bomb?

WS: Yeah. From the concussion. Now we had only one scope to replace the two, so we replaced the trainer's scope. We had no pointers. The pointer's scope was the elevation. Of course I was giving them, -- feeding the elevations, the only way I could send it. But they also hit a building down on the new channel, which I would estimate was probably 125 yards, 140 yards at the most, from our position that had 3,000 cases of dynamite in it.

MC: Oh, wow.

WS: The contractors.

MC: They missed it by how far?

WS: Oh they didn't miss it.

MC: Oh, they hit it.

WS: They hit it.

MC: Oh my gosh.

WS: It was in a building that stood up a good three feet off the ground, but even with that, it still blew a pretty darn good sized crater in the whole thing.

MC: Three thousand cases of dynamite?

WS: Three thousand cases of dynamite. They were the -- everybody was using them, a lot of dynamite. Needless to say, now I was in my foxhole, my own little personal foxhole that I covered up with leaves and that explosion just pick me up and shook me up and down.

MC: I guess it shook the whole island probably didn't it?

WS: Well, I would imagine but I don't know. I know what it did over there. Then we had these three-inch guns that had no crew, they hit the ammunition and it went off all day long, well up into the night.

MC: Where was the ammunition stored?

WS: Up there by the, by the guns.

MC: It was just by the guns.

WS: Some of it was scattered, you know to keep it from all being blown up at one time.

MC: These were unmanned guns though, right?

WS: These were guns but there was no crew on them and there was no advantage to the five-inch, attempting to mount them,

because there's no height for those things. I don't know that a five-inch could have manned, but the five-inch couldn't do anything, the five-inch could. The five-inch guns, well you know they, they shoot at airplanes. If we'd had a height finder, we could have easily learned, in a very short time, how to operate it.

But without a height finder, you're just pumping into sky. Now I'm sure that as a result of that strafe across the area, hitting that trench, ammunition, getting that -- through the (inaudible), and I say, just virtually stripped the foliage. The reconnaissance photos told them that they had just really tore up Wilkes, Kuku Point, the lower tip.

MC: Now the five-inch battery you were on, was it on Kuku Point?

WS: Yeah. L Battery. That was the battery that was organized once we got to Wake. Now the only, the only reason that they called it L Battery, normally you had A, B, and C, the five-inch. But we had a C Battery, A and B was out there on Wake, but C Battery was on [Namur?]. So, I'm sure that's why they really had to give us a skeleton crew, is what we ended up with, and they called us a battery. Now, there were plenty of civilians outdoors at night and come morning you couldn't find them, with a few exceptions.

There were several who stayed with us, you know after bringing them out different times.

MC: What were they bringing them out there to do?

WS: To help us on our guns.

MC: Oh, I see. Now were these guys, these civilians, I mean did they volunteer for this or did they just come?

WS: I would assume that they did. I wasn't over on that side of the island. There was one little Dutchman, German, had a real bad German accent, a real deep German accent, [Fritz?], and Fritz (inaudible). But he was with us from the very first time they brought him out there, he stayed with us. I worried about him the last day and of course, I had to wonder what had happened to him. One day, when I'd finally gotten to the American hospital, he came in, and I called him over to my bunk and said Fritz, how did you manage to survive out there? He was right in the thick of everything, and he was. He said, "I had my pineapples," in order to handle that.

MC: Handle that, yeah.

WS: There were some civilians that did real good. Unfortunately, I don't know their names or I don't know that anybody knows their names.

MC: I've got the names of some of them.

WS: Fritz, all I know is Fritz. He was very small of statute, physical statute, had a real heavy German accent.

MC: What did he actually do out there?

WS: Any and everything. He helped on the guns, anything you asked for us to do, he'd do it. He was there the next morning, to help bring ammunition up to the guns. We had to ceasefire a couple of times, for lack of ammunition. We were firing them fast but were never able to get them up to the guns.

MC: Now is this, are you talking about on the 11th?

WS: Yeah.

MC: Yeah. Those shells weigh about 50 pounds apiece too right?

WS: Yeah.

MC: And they're not easy to handle.

WS: Well, they're probably harder to carry than they are to handle up there behind the guns. Now, on a lot of these guns, you have three men handling the projectile and three men handling the powder. The powder is in a steel canister, in pure silk bags, and the object of it being a pure silk bag is so that it will burn completely.

MC: How many rounds can you fire, I mean in a given period? How often can you fire?

WS: A crew that has worked together and they've got the rhythm; can probably get a round off every six seconds. I know

that sounds unbelievable, but if they're working together and you've got one man back here that picks the projectile up and starts it. He hands it to the man in the middle, and the man in the middle don't just stand there and take it from him. He moves as it's handed to him, and this is using the -- and he hands it to the man here, and that man don't hesitate either. He takes it from in front of this man and he can seat it. See, there are steel projectiles with a lead ring, and the lead is that seats it. Now you have a rammer that can seat it if the man at the breach fails to.

When you've got a good gunning crew, you don't have to worry about seating, because he's going to seat it. But once this number one man back here starts that, it never stops, the motion. If you ever stop the motion, you've got to start it again, and you don't have that momentum and you don't have that rhythm then. Now the same thing is happening over here with the men with the powder. They're facing -- the powder men and the projectile men are facing each other and the powder is coming up at the same time.

MC: What's the powder in?

WS: The powder is in a pure silk bag.

MC: A silk bag.

WS: It originates, it’s stored in a steel canister, and you yank that top off the canister and out comes the bag of powder. Oh, they’re about that long and about five inches in diameter. The go right in behind the projectile.

MC: Now, in this battery, you’ve got two five-inch guns, right?

WS: Yeah.

MC: And you’re saying that one of them can fire every six seconds, or both of them can fire every six seconds? In other words, every six seconds, each one of them can fire. Okay. And were they firing at about that rate of time when -- during that time when you hit the destroyer?

WS: Yes, I would say so, but we were in some pretty bad sustained.

MC: Were you doing fire control?

WS: I was standing up on the --

MC: So you were the guy who was actually directing the fire onto the ship.

WS: Well, I was -- I had what they had called a Ouija board, and they had the idea that I was (inaudible). You know? Then one morning back at Pearl Harbor, they handed me this chart. He says son, can you build a box with a row and a spool on either end, so that you can -- and put a pointer in the middle of this thing? And I said why sure. So I go to the cabinet shop, the naval shipyard, and get them to do

a little bit of the work for me, and then I just have to do some -- I have to do some centering, to have a spool on either end, and a pointer. In the cabinet shop, I got what was known in those days as [altuglas?], but it was heavy and thick. It was probably Plexiglas but it hadn't been called Plexiglas. It was right on the verge of being called Plexiglas, but it was about an eighth inch thick, or at least a 16th of an inch, and most of that other was around a 64th that the old cartons were made out of. But I would take the range from the range keeper, and then give the totals to McAlister, who would give me a correction based upon his estimate of where the last shell hit.

MC: Is this just more or less a visual estimate?

WS: Yeah. And I would make the correction on the chart and forward it on to the 9th, and they had the fire by instrument. So that was we're giving them the elevation. Now, Greg Urwin's book says that it was the third (inaudible) that sunk the destroyer, and my recollection of it here is then it was the second (inaudible). But I won't argue, the second or third. It was a very dramatic sinking. We undoubtedly hit their fuel and their ammunition, because the ship did just this; it parted in the middle and went down in two pieces. I was kind of amused when I was in Japan and Dr. Ozeki he drafted the

same description, see, he was in that first group, on how fast that ship had gone down. It was just amazing. Now, maybe this will come inside, Devereux was holding fire. At the side of the boats knew that the ship was out there before daylight, and then as daylight just begins to break, you can see the ships, and they kept coming closer, heading straight in. He says, “Hold the fire, hold the fire.” And we wound up, I want you to know, and that coiled spring that was compressed, if we turned it loose it would hit the moon.

But we were doing exactly what he said, we were holding our fire. And then when they turned roadside and opened fire, and then Devereux gave the command to open fire. Now, the -- from my vantage point, I saw a lot of the Japanese shells landing in the water out in front of us, in the ocean, and I saw some hit in the lagoon, but I never did see any hit on the island. Now I can’t say there wasn’t any that come on the island, but I never did see any. So they were definitely straddling us and doing it with artillery. When you did a straddle, you can move in, in on the party.

MC: They were hitting offshore though, the shells, the Japanese shells.

WS: There was a lot of them hitting offshore, and those muzzle blasts seemed like they were right in our face you know?

MC: Right. Well now, Johnson, when I was talking to him, he said -- and I understood him to say that this was during the December 11th thing, and of course he was on a machinegun. He said that the ships were close enough that you could actually see the men running around on the deck. Do you recall anything like that?

WS: No, sir, and I had a better vantage point than Johnson.

MC: Well I thought they were about 4,500 yards, right?

WS: About 4,500 yards, that's when we opened up, at 4,500 yards.

MC: Yeah, that's what I had heard.

WS: I don't think Johnson's eyes are that good.

MC: Yeah, yeah. Well, I don't know, he might have -- I remember him distinctly saying it. He might have been thinking about what happened on the 23rd, I don't know. I'm jumping around now and I don't really want to do this but let me jump ahead to the 23rd for just a second. The landing craft did reach Wilkes, I mean there were how many, two of them?

WS: I don't really know how many there were but yes, landing craft reached Wilkes.

MC: And they got ashore before you really realized they were there, right?

WS: Well, we knew they were out there.

MC: Right. They had already come in underneath the range of your big guns, I mean you couldn't train your big guns on them when they got too close to shore could you?

WS: Well, of course after daylight, when we would have had the opportunity they were, the landing crafts were too close; the landing crafts were already in.

MC: Right, right.

WS: They come in under the cover of darkness and rain. But we were alerted about two o'clock in the morning and what alerted us was some lights flashing in the opposite direction, where they're landing. I was all climbing up on the command tower with Lieutenant McAlister, observing them, and I said to him that I could see something that looks like muzzle flashes, you know the muzzle blasts, just having experienced this a few days before.

MC: Right. You climbed up on a what?

WS: On the command tower. This was a tower that oh, it was built sort of like a windmill frame, without a windmill on it. It had a platform on top of it for McAlister to be up there to observe. That's where it gets the name, the command tower, because the commanding officer, that was his

position. But it appeared as though there was a sea battle going on, and however, this turns out, it had been two cruisers -- Japanese cruisers that had been dispersed to that side of the island and was supposed to be shelling Wake Island, as a diversion, because they were landing from the opposite side. The two cruisers got out there and got lost and were shooting at each other.

MC: Now, you're pretty sure this is what happened, I mean…?

WS: Well, I had asked Dr. Ozeki what they were shooting at. There's no question that the two cruisers were dispatched to that side of the island for the purpose of shelling the opposite of the island, and the landing was done as a diversion. And they never did shell that side. I had asked Dr. Ozeki what they were shooting at and he said they were probably shooting at each other, he said, "You know that happens." Quite frankly, that's what it appeared to be from the lights flashing. Well they were creating a diversion but what they actually did was alert us. Then it was, well I don't know time wise, it's difficult for me to put an hour.

MC: Mm-hmm, yeah. Did you ever read a book by a guy named Duane Schultz?

WS: Yeah.

MC: You've seen that book? I may be wrong about this, but I think in that book, he implies that all those lights out at sea were never explained, you know? So, I mean maybe they weren't to him.

WS: They weren't when he wrote -- he was one of the first ones to come out with a book. I don't think I knew when Duane talked to me. I didn't know that part before.

MC: Because you hadn't talked to Dr. Ozeki, right?

WS: Well, I hadn't. First of all, we captured -- some of this information came from captured documents. The documents talked about Ozeki. He knew they had been dispersed over there as a diversion. But then I asked him what they were shooting at he said they're probably shooting at each other.

MC: Yeah, yeah, I could see how that might happen.

WS: Frankly, that's what it appeared to be. But then, I believe it was McKinstry, he thought he could hear motors.

MC: Yeah, I remember some reference to that.

WS: And asked permission to illuminate with the searchlights.

MC: Now, Lieutenant McAlister was in command of your battery, right?

WS: McAlister was in command of the L Battery, yes.

MC: And what was McKinstry?

WS: McKinstry was searchlights.

MC: He was a gunner. He was a gunner, I mean he was a gunner; he was a Marine Gunner, right?

WS: Yes.

MC: That was his rank.

WS: Well, now that's debatable. He had made Marine Gunner. He and Gunner Borth both had made Marine Gunner a short time before we left Pearl Harbor, but I am under the belief that McKinstry accepted a second lieutenant's commission just before the war started. Clarence is dead now, so there's no -- and I don't know that it makes a lot of difference.

MC: Well now Bart, was it Bart, was that his name?

WS: Borth. He was a Marine Gunner, he was our --

MC: Had he gotten a discharge or something, I mean was he supposed to be sent back to the States? I don't know where I encountered that reference, I can't remember right now.

WS: No, I don't think there was any.

MC: I think it was in Bayler's book, it just, it had a little notation by his name that said in parentheses, discharged. You know? But anyway, well, that's not important.

WS: I don't --

MC: The only reason I asked really, was he --

WS: He was -- Borth was our ordinance officer.

MC: You saw the movie, *Wake Island*, I guess, at some point in time didn't you?

WS: Yeah. Laughed myself all the way.

MC: But you know the guy, William Bendix played the guy that had been discharged, and he was supposed to get on the clipper and leave you know?

WS: Yeah.

MC: And I just wondered if there was any basis in fact to that.

WS: No. Just like the old dog that had a litter of puppies.

MC: Now what ever happened to that dog?

WS: He was never there.

MC: I know, but they never explained in the movie, what happened to her.

WS: She never was there.

MC: I'll accept that, I'm sure she wasn't.

WS: You know, the truth is stranger than fiction, but people won't pay money to go see that. They'll pay money to go see fiction.

MC: Yeah, that's right.

WS: Now, we had some men whose time was up, but they didn't discharge anybody out there. Like I said, on the way out there, we hadn't been there less than 30 days to do. And if they made a mistake, we were going to have to turn around and send us right back. Well they didn't, they didn't turn around and send them right back, they hung onto us.

MC: Well, they undoubtedly would have once the war started, they would have deferred all those discharges anyway, right?

WS: Well, they just held them, the government. Well, I think that I should have been out in ’43, but I didn’t get out until ’46. So that was the government. But they -- now, once the landing craft was discovered, then the machineguns went to work on it. Now, some of them were rubber rafts and some of them were steel though.

MC: But they were all in the nature of barges or rafts. There weren’t any transports that actually were grounded on Wilkes.

WS: No, they didn’t, like they did over on the main island.

MC: On Wake, yeah.

WS: But some of the .50 caliber boys swear that they ripped up a number of rubber rafts with their .50 caliber machineguns, which I’m sure they did. That never made it to shore. But then, of course we -- there wasn’t a lot of friendly fire, since the fighting was going on, we saw it for four days, right?

MC: Yeah, yeah.

WS: I’ll tell you what, those tracer bullets that the machine gunners were firing, they more of less, every one of them looks like it’s headed straight for you. This guy Jose

could tell you about the tracer bullets too, he didn't like them. Lieutenant McAlister sent a note to Bedell, to send two men with hand grenades, go down and try to toss them into those landing rafts that were coming in, and this was before daylight. But Bedell hung on to a PFC named Wheeler and just go with him, and Bedell got killed, Wheeler got wounded, but he never did -- when he came back and reported that Bedell had been killed, he didn't say anything about being wounded, he just went on with his flesh wounds. Daylight was beginning to break.

MC: Did you say Bedell was the first person, the first Marine killed on Wake?

WS: On Wilkes.

MC: On Wilkes I mean.

WS: He was probably the first one that was killed on Wake Island, on the 23rd.

MC: Do you recall, I mean can you describe where they were, I mean where he was when he was killed?

WS: Let me get some maps. Here's a book you might enjoy reading. *We Stole to Live*, by "Fingers" Brown. Turn that light on. Here's our two five-inch guns, here's the two channels. This is those three-inch guns. But that would have been right in this general area right here.

MC: Okay. Well now, was that where a lot of the Japanese came ashore?

WS: Yeah. Well, they came ashore all the way along there, from here on around.

MC: How far were you from that point?

WS: I was right up -- at that particular time, I was right up in by these three-inch guns, right next to the bank. Now there's -- you have to speak of the beach and the bank. The beach is a fairly narrow beach but the bank is some three to six-foot above the beach. If you understand what I'm saying.

MC: It rises above the beach.

WS: Yeah. That's -- we were along in here, near these three-inch guns. Now, they state that L Battery had been over on the lagoon, and I don't have any recollection of L Battery ever being on the lagoon side. There may have been a few of them over there. But at daybreak, there's a great big coral boulder on the beach and up close to the bank, and there was four or five Japs behind it, and they were meant to of course attacked from up here, from the island side. And Lieutenant McAlister told me to take a man named Bob Stevens and Gilley, and I've forgotten Gilley's first name; come down here on the beach and then come back on their flanks, which we did. With us down on the beach, they

couldn’t come around a lot, until they were sent down there to be sacrificed as a diversion.

I think it was during that time that they head up the center of the island, from down here on the point. Now, it wasn’t very long after we’d gotten on the beach, and we were firing from their flank, that the -- and don’t print this, but Bob Stevens, a redheaded boy, man he had nerves of steel. When you see those lips quiver, he was, he was all set. But this other boy, he consumed about as much of our time, trying to keep him settled down, as the Japs did. Now both of them were later killed. Gilley probably was killed because of his inability to fall back on his service, on his training. Now, Bob Stevens was the last man on Wilkes killed, and he was killed by the strafing. But we had only been down there for a very short time, and here again, that morning of time was not -- I just don’t have any time.

MC: Yeah, I can understand.

WS: We weren’t getting any fire return, so McAlister -- and this is the way that I remember it. Well, he’s got it written in a different fashion. As I remember it, McAlister says somebody, didn’t necessarily name anybody, “Somebody get on that rock and see what’s behind it.”

There was a Corporal Halstead, who says I'll brave it in there and says, "I've got it, lieutenant." And he was on the top of that rock. There was one Jap left alive and probably was already wounded. He fired one shell. Now, the first version that Greg had was that he entered his rifle, and I finally convinced Greg, coming back from Japan, and not to take anything away from Halstead, because Halstead was a hell of a good man. And I said Halstead was a hell of a good man he didn't --

(break in audio)

WS: But it was on my way back up to join the rest of L Battery, that I ran into this machinegun fire. I took refuge behind a coral boulder that was probably 15, 18 inches in diameter.

MC: And you still don't -- you're not sure whether it was friendly fire or not, right?

WS: Well, the only, the only vision I had in that respect, of course I didn't know that our machineguns were up there, they weren't earlier.

MC: They had moved them.

WS: But the only thing that I have to base that on is Bill Raymond, who is now dead, the guy (inaudible). I was

inside of him and I went on up and took my position alongside of him. He told me that it was our machineguns that had me pinned down. Now, when I told Johnny that, he said, “Oh, hell no.” Of course Johnson didn’t know that I had been on the beach and I was coming back up. But at any rate, whether it was friendly, whether it was our machineguns or what, I was pinned down with machineguns, and if I laid still, that they’d seek another target. And it turned out that once they sought another target, I’d be able to move forward, and that’s what happened. When they got tired at shooting of me and they found themselves another target, that gave me the opportunity to move on up and take my place on the line with the rest of my men. Now, by this time the Japs were all up there in the center of the island, pretty much around those trench gunners, with the exceptions of that one trench gunner closest to the shoreline.

Bill Raymond was on the right-hand side of that, firing from a kneeling position, and Gordon Marshall was on the opposite side, firing from a standing position. Bill Raymond had more protection, being on the right side. Marshall got killed later in this fighting. And then Gunner Sergeant Stowe were standing on the backside of the

gun. When I looked up, I hit the deck, right in line with my other men, and I felt in a slight depression, which afforded me some protection. I don't know if you've ever hunted quail or pheasant.

MC: Quail.

WS: And see how they can sit down. All they needed was just a little depression.

MC: Right, right.

WS: And they disappear. Now, I hadn't disappeared, but was laying there in a prone position; it made me a lot smaller target. Here again, the time element, I don't have the slightest idea. There were many, many targets and the targets were close together. That's something that amazed me, that they would bunch up together, and they jabbered back and forth. You could shoot at one and if you missed it you'd hit the other one, it's almost that bad.

But I laid there for quite some time, in the prone position, and there wasn't a bullet coming in close to me, as far as I could tell. There may have been some that were closer than I realized. The targets were getting fewer and I moved forward and to the right, that would give me a different angle, to get at them around these three-inch guns that they'd encased themselves in. As well as the fact that I might get close enough to use my hand grenades.

I couldn’t just go straight, I had to move to the right. If I’d have gone straight, the muzzle blast of my buddies would have been hitting me in the ear. But by moving to the right, it would get me out of that muzzle blast and in addition, it would get me in a different angle than what I had been in.

So I started forward, in the crouch position, which is what we’re always taught to do, don’t stand straight up, you make a smaller target. That bullet hit and well, it straightened me up, and then I fell forward. Now I don’t know whether I fell forward as a matter of instinct, hit flat, or if I was off balance. As I said, I was going in a crouch position and that straightened me up. Now if I’d come back, my balance might have carried me on forward or I may have done it just out of instinct. Now, I’ve got a live round in my rifle and I’ve asked myself this question a thousand times. After I hit the ground, I’m still conscious, I get that rifle up on my shoulder and I squeeze off that round that’s in that chamber. Now, the bullet just went through my head, but I was stubborn enough, or something enabled me to squeeze that round off that was in my chamber. We had a little Springfield, load hatch. I was able to operate the load and eject the cartridge and

then put a new cartridge in, but my left hand, I couldn't use my left arm. I tried, I just remember trying my best to pull it up with just one arm, which I hadn't done in the past, but I didn't have the strength. Then, I heard Gordon Marshall holler at McKinstry. McKinstry complained earlier in the morning about he wished he had a rifle instead of that .45 that he had. I heard Marshall holler at McKinstry, saying, "Hey Mac, you can have Sloman's rifle, he got hit."

MC: You actually heard him say that?

WS: I heard him say that and then I floated off into unconsciousness.

MC: Now who was this that yelled that?

WS: McKinstry. Gordon Marshall is the one that --

MC: Marshall, okay.

WS: He's the one that hollered at McKinstry. You can have Sloman's rifle, he got hit. And then I floated off into unconsciousness and missed the mopping up operation.

MC: Where exactly did the bullet strike you? Where did the bullet strike your head?

WS: It went in here and came out back here. For a long time, I had a great big scar on my scalp, but the naval surgeons, the naval surgeon did some work on me out at -- in San Diego, removing bone fragments and scar tissue, and one

thing or another. An infection followed and then the doctors saw this infection and they sent for my mother. But then after I was discharged, the wound started draining, and so I went on to Houston, with Dr. [James Greenwood Jr.?], who was a renowned neurosurgeon. He knew what the topic was and I told him I'd like for him to do it. I said I'd like him to do it if the VA will approve it. He says, well I'll give you the paperwork and I said well, tell me, what is it going to cost me if the VA don't pick it up and he said well, let's put it this way; it will cost you one hell of a lot less than it will cost the VA. So I went up to the VA to talk to the council and oh, we'll have to find you a bed, find out where there's a bed available. I said, but I don't want to go out to the East Coast or the West Coast or the Great Lakes or anyplace of that nature, I want to have it done right here in Houston, with Dr. [Greenwood?]. Oh, we can't do that; we'll find you a bed. I said let me talk to the medical director and they said well, you can talk to him but he'll tell you the same thing. So I went in to talk to the medical director I said I've been gone from home for a long time, I don't have any desire to leave again, and I'd like to have Dr. Greenwood do this.

MC: When was this?

WS: This was in 1946.

MC: Forty-six. But all during the time you were a POW, you were -- you still had that head wound that was giving you misery, right?

WS: I'll give you a little more information on the head wound. At any rate when he, this medical director said well, I'll see what I can do, well the next morning, when Dr. Greenwood phoned me and said we got a bed for you at this hospital. Well, he went in and got the bone fragments (inaudible), and then after I woke up, he said well, you had a lot of excess scalp. He said your scalp was real loose, so I cut all that scar out of your scalp and pulled it together, so all you'll have is a surgical scar. Now I don't have to worry about trying to comb over. I had a great big old scar. But he cut it all out.

MC: Well now, let me go back over it with you and make sure I understand. It hit you right here, above the right temple.

WS: Right here.

MC: And it came about what, a couple of inches to the rear or thereabouts?

WS: Right about here. Of course this is all filled in now, but there used to be a real big indentation in my skull. Of course they put a plate in it initially but had to take it out. But nature has filled that in to where you don't see

it and feel it like it used to be, but it’s right here is where…

MC: But this, this wound basically didn’t heal properly during all that time that you were --

WS: The wound healed. Now, my left side was paralyzed. And they, -- when I -- the last thing I’d heard was Marshall hollering to McKinstry. But the next thing that I heard was Bill Raymond hollering to the pharmacist’s mate, “Hey, Vaale, Sloman is still alive.” And I came to. Vaale came over and they put me on a stretcher and was going to haul me out of this stubble, where I was, and Captain Platt gave the word for everybody on a new channel that the Japs were coming down the middle of the island. And he was going to catch them in a crossfire, where they would have to -- there’s only one place for them to cross.

It turned out to be General Devereux, or Major General, so that it was the surrender. Well, a few Japs came along and took me off of the stretcher and they took it to start picking up their dead. Then I’m sitting there and all of a sudden you hear all this jabbering and all the rifles up on their shoulders, pointing at me, and it’s obvious they want me to come out. Lieutenant McAlister intervened and convinced them that I was wounded. So they let him come in

there too, with the two Japs, but all they let him do was take off my shirt and my trousers, because I had my pockets full of hand grenades. But then they got -- and then in this short time, all this jabbering, rifles put up to their shoulder, obviously telling me to come out and I can't. McAlister intervenes again and this time they let two civilians come in with the two Jap guards, and they picked me up and carried me up to this dragline alongside this little channel and laid me down right on the dead Japanese. The Japanese had already been gathering their dead and bringing them up to that particular point. When they marched off, marched the rest of them off to take them into the airstrip, they wouldn't let them bother me, they wouldn't let them take me out, and I lay out there something like -- my best estimate, for some four or five days. The day that I was conscious, I saw Captain Platt and Sergeant Hassig and the Japanese captain. The Japanese captain had his white uniform on.

MC: Now, during those four to five days, you just kind of drifted in and out of consciousness, and you'd wake up sometimes.

WS: I'd be aware that there was something going on around me but I wouldn't know what it was. There was activity. But this particular day, I was fully conscious and I saw them

and they went down the island, down on the beach, and I says well, I missed them, you know? Well, in a short time, here comes a Jap running at me, just in a red neck run. He had a hammer in his hand and I thought they send him out here to finish me off with that damn hammer. But he didn't, he came and he handed that hammer down towards me, gave me a motion and made me get a hold of it, and he pulled me up and when he did, Captain Platt saw him. So, now, Captain Platt was just this sort of man. He didn't say anything to the Jap captain; he just broke on a run and came to me. And as he got to me, we exchanged greetings, and then I said, "This is a hell of a way to spend Christmas Eve." Captain Platt said son, you'd done lost some time, Christmas has already come and gone. So that's -- the whole point is I don't know, it's an estimate, some four or five days.

But at any rate, Captain Platt and Sergeant Hassig carried me. All I had was -- apparently, the Japanese had given me a blanket. I didn't have any pants on, all I had was a sweatshirt. They carried me up to the channel and across the channel and put me in the back end of this little white panel truck that this Jap was driving and when he went past where the Americans were. Captain Platt called to his

attention and the Japanese captain turned to him and says, “We’re going to take this man to the Japanese hospital, they have better medical.” And I guess it hit him that --

MC: This was the Japanese captain that said that?

WS: Yeah. He spoke perfect English. I guess it struck him as to what he was saying and then he says what I really mean is they have more medical. So I ended up at the Japanese hospital that night. They made an attempt at feeding me but I couldn’t eat their seaweed and fruits and vegetables. I later learned to eat them but never did learn to like them. I learned to eat them but I couldn’t eat them that night. So the next morning, this doctor, Ozeki, comes to me and says, “I understand you don’t like our Japanese food.” I was smart enough not to say that I didn’t like it and I said, “Well, I just couldn’t eat last night.” And he says, I will attend to that, in his broken English. I saw him go out the door and it wasn’t but just a very short time until one of the American cooks come in to me. There he is and he says what do you want for breakfast, and I said, “What choice do I have?” And he says, “You can have anything you want.” He said that Japanese doctor is just over there and I have strict orders to cook anything that you would eat. So I asked for soft-boiled eggs, toast and coffee and the cook came back with soft boiled eggs, toast

and coffee and a bowl of cereal with a glass of milk, and I ate every bite of it. I don't know how but I ate every bite of it. Now, Dr. Ozeki never did treat me, you know. He may have changed my dressing one time, but that would have been the extent of his medical attention. But he let this cook come three times a day and cooked special food for me, and I'm confident that that's the only thing. See, we didn't have antibiotics as we know them.

These bones were embedded in my brain and the neurosurgeon or something, said your brain won't tolerate bone. It will tolerate metal but it won't tolerate bone, but mine did. So, I have to attribute it to the good food in those early days. Then, Dr. Shank, he was a Pan American Airways doctor, as well as the doctor for the contractors, would come every day about lunchtime and treated my -- the Navy doctor never did look at my wound. It turns out Dr. Shank was the one that was left there with us, to take care of us.

But I had a terrific headache and Dr. Shank says well, I don't have anything but aspirin to give you and aspirins won't touch it. He said, if I had narcotics, you'd be an addict by the time you got through, so what you have to do

is just learn to live with your headache, and that's what I did. That headache subsided so regular, that I never did -- I can't tell you when it quit, it was so regular. The doctors that I've seen, a lot of times say man, you must have a lot of physical therapy, and I say yeah, what I gave myself. But I was just, -- I'd stand up in the doorway and hold on with my right hand, and sometimes I'd have to get somebody to start this hand moving. Once I got it started, I could swing it back and forth, and I'd stand there and just swing it. Then, I would do the leg the same way, and just swing it like that, and the first thing you know, I was able to walk. I got more use back in my leg quicker than I did in my arm, and then after I got to where I could walk pretty well, Dr. Shank kept me on the chow detail, which meant I had to walk from the hospital over to the galley and back. What would happen, there'd be two of us patients go and one nurse. The nurse would have two good hands, you know and he could be in the middle. There would be of us and he'd be -- and then I'd be on the right-hand side, holding the right. But I found that the reason Dr. Shank kept me on that was to give me the exercise.

MC: Yeah, that was it.

WS: And then a little peculiar situation, we had two guards on the gate in the mornings, that alternated, and one of them

was a little short fellow. He never gave us any trouble whatsoever. Everybody had to go out single file, out of the gate. We'd be going out the same time that the civilians were. He's wave us by, you know, go on through. Now, his counterpart that was out every other day, was the one that we called whiskers, because he had about a dozen whiskers that was two inches long on his chin. We couldn't get out of that gate without him punishing us in some fashion, for something. To show you the difference in the two individual Japs. One morning that we went out, there was Hank, the nurse, Charles Tramposh and myself. When we got to the gate he says, Tramposh and at attention, alongside of the steps where he was standing. He told Hank he can go on to the galley. Well, in time, Dr. Shank sent two more patients to go to the galley and he wouldn't let them go, he sent them back. The other two nurses had to come. Now these were male nurses, understand.

So that meant all three of the male nurses had to bring chow back that morning. Well, when they were on their way back, and had already been by the gate and was taking it on to the hospital, but he had informed Hank, when he got the food down there, to come back. Well, his relief showed up and he stood there and waited. Hank didn't come back for a

bit. But then, they gave him orders and it was obvious what he was doing, and then they marched on off and they were by the corner of the building. Hank had gotten back down there by that time and he made him stand in between Tramposh and I. But he kept looking around the corner of the building, and by the time they got out of sight, he came down and stood in front of each one of us and he said, *ah-huh*, and he thumped me on the head, I guess his temper was on. And he stepped real smartly, to the next one, and he thumped him on the head, and the next one, and he dumped each one of us three on the head. That was the punishment that he dealt out. That's not what whiskers had told him to do that's for sure, but that's the difference in the two. Whiskers always had a kendo stick and oh, he'd love to hit you across the neck and the shoulder, across the buttocks, a little whack across your shins. Now just every camp had one of these ones, and every camp had those that were understanding.

MC: Yeah, yeah. You know, I talked to Godbold, you probably -- do you know him?

WS: Yeah.

MC: I've talked to him a couple of times. He lives in Dallas.

WS: Yeah.

MC: He was telling me that he got hit with a rifle butt a few times, but he said you know, there are stupid Japs just like there are stupid Americans, and you know they're not all that way.

WS: Well, some of us brought some of the punishment on ourselves. Now, as far as whiskers was concerned, that was a different story. We didn't bring that on ourselves. And then we had this old boy in Zentsuji that we called club fist, that wore steel plates on his heels, and he never let a day go by that he didn't get on somebody and just walk up to their shin and get rid of the hide off their shin. They didn't have to do anything. That was his need of the day and he did it. And there were others who were quite kind. Every camp differed, and I was in three different camps. The attitude on certain times, this would change from daylight to dark, in the same camp, and they certainly varied from one camp to the next. I suppose that every prisoner is going to have some stories and beaten down, without exaggeration, and there are horrible stories. Everything that the POWs experienced, I did not necessarily experience.

And by the same token, other POWs didn't have the same experiences that I had. Same with the doctors. Well, Dr.

Ozeki was a wonderful doctor. Now, the doctor we had at Zentsuji was an army doctor, and he was a sadistic scoundrel. I mean he -- you just couldn't believe they were of the same profession. And this Ofuna was a naval interrogation camp, nothing but Marines and sailors, Navy, and we went there. We had a lot of the men off to Houston; I guess the officers didn't survive over there. They kept us in cells, just any two of us together. My cellmate was Captain Jack Ryder or Lieutenant Jack Ryder, off of the *Perch*. Anyway, you weren't permitted to talk. When you'd go out, come out for exercise, you had to keep moving. You couldn't stand in a group of two or three, of course that would be communicating if you were. And they had exceptionally large guards that they brought them in out of Manchuria or someplace, because the Japanese don't get as big as they were. But they were there to intimidate. They told us that we had not yet been reported as prisoners of war, the Red Cross didn't know we were there.

MC: You guys that were wounded, you just more or less vanished over there didn't you?

WS: Well, most of us had recovered pretty much as well as we were going to.

MC: Right. But I mean as far as the folks at home were concerned, you just disappeared basically.

WS: Oh yeah, we hadn't been reported. They considered us, we were still fighting men, and therefore, they wouldn't be responsible for our lives while we were there. Then when they would take you in for interrogation and give you the same spiel. And we would know the answers to some of the questions; everybody would know when you're lying. One thing they would love to do and they tried their best to do, was to get you to denounce Roosevelt. Roosevelt was the whole problem. If it hadn't been for Roosevelt, the whole world would have been at peace. There's no way in the world that I was going to denounce Roosevelt. Of course another thing the public doesn't know is most of our senators and representatives don't know either, is that the Japanese, when they would have a child that was an American citizen by birth, they would go to the Japanese Embassy and registered with the Japanese Embassy, to be a Japanese citizen as well as an American citizen.

MC: Dual citizenship.

WS: Those barracks that we called the hospital, was civilian barracks out there on Wake, and they were building those two wings and the rest of them was connected, the two wings. The Japanese pilots had this one wing and we had the other one. Well, they petitioned this with one-by-sixes, but left a space about this wide in between each

one. So we were able to converse with them, the Japanese pilots and you'd be amazed at how many of them were born in America, educated in America, and they all had the same story, that when they just went back to Japan for a visit and they got caught and they wouldn't let them leave. Now this was true of all your interpreters. They had one interpreter at Zentsuji they called -- he was born and raised in Los Angeles, and in the street language, (inaudible). The other interpreter we had there had gone to Oxford. But they went back to Japan and then they wouldn't let them leave. Now how much truth there is to all of that.

MC: It's anybody's guess.

WS: And how many of the original pilots that started World War II out, were educated in America, born and raised here and educated, God only knows.

MC: That's really, that's something I had never heard before.

WS: No, and when the legislators up there decided to give each one of those Japanese $20,000 for their ancestors, because Roosevelt had moved them off the coast.

MC: Oh yeah, yeah, right.

WS: They didn't know that either. And do you know where the first checks went to? Tokyo.

FEMALE: (inaudible).

MC: No I didn’t. I don’t want to take up your whole evening. What I’d like to do is come back in the morning and go through some of this again, if that’s all right with you.

WS: That’s fine. There is a lot more. Maybe I ought to --

MC: Well, that’s okay, that’s my job, putting it back together into chronological order. I know we couldn’t possibly cover the whole thing if we talked until midnight tonight. We’d probably both be fresher in the morning, we can -- if we go back over some of the same ground, well it’s not going to bother me in the least. As a matter of fact, I’ll probably need to go back over some of the same things we’ve talked about.

WS: I’d be interested in knowing how this list, the ones you got off the Internet.

MC: Yeah, I’ll let you know. I didn’t bring the other list with me but when I get back to Dallas I’ll…

WS: And who published the other.

MC: Yeah. I don’t know that either, I’ll try to find out. I will -- I mean, I can get all these documents back to you if you need them back.

WS: Those are all copies.

MC: Okay, okay.

WS: Those are all copies.

MC: Well, what --

(break in audio)

WS: The building that we were in sat here, and then there was another building that the civilians were in. And down across here, within -- inside the barbed wire fence, there was a little dugout for cover. One morning, a taskforce came by and the first thing that the Japanese were always telling us, that we'd have plenty of warning. But one of the little biplanes, seaplanes, that the cruisers used in the battleships, that catapult. Spotter planes is really what they were. Was overhead and antiaircraft was busting all around them. And that was the first sign, that first notification that we had been involved in.

MC: How did those planes -- could those planes re-land on the ships?

WS: Well, the ship would turn, make a wide turn, and that would create a little slick, that was a little like the waves and groundswells and they were seaplanes.

MC: They were pontoon planes.

WS: Yeah, and they would land in that slick and then they'd be picked up by the ship. I headed for the dugout, along with everybody else, I was barefooted, didn't feel the pieces of coral, not one piece did I feel, when I was headed to the

dugout. Well, they bombarded us for quite a while. Every once in a while the shells would hit each other and then they'd start turning in, and that made one heck of a racket. So, when it was all over with, and I started back for the hospital, I couldn't walk on that coral, it was cutting my feet.

MC: But you didn't feel it when you were running for cover.

WS: Going to the dugout, I didn't feel the pieces of coral. (inaudible) come out and picked me up, just like a baby, and carried me back to the hospital. I remember that. I ran for that building and I didn't feel a piece of that coral, but I couldn't walk on it coming back, it was that sharp.

MC: And he picked you up and carried you all the way back right?

WS: Yeah, he just picked me up and carried me. Now, they had guns. They laid down a beautiful pattern on the runway, a bunch of armor piercings shells, star shells. The last one didn't really do a lot of damage; the coral wasn't hard enough to detonate those armor piercings.

MC: Right. Now this was in January of '42?

WS: In February.

MC: In February of '42. The U.S. starting writing like right after it fell basically. Yeah.

WS: I encountered some of the men and I can’t remember the ship’s name at the Shamrock Hilton Hotel in Houston that was there for a reunion that had been a part of that taskforce. I asked them well why in the world did you -- what were all those armored piercings and star shells and what have you? And he said, well we just had orders that whenever we was headed in, to go by Wake and unload anything we had. Actually, it was more of a harassment than anything else. They had orders, every time they went by Wake, just unload with it, when they were headed in. I believe that’s a real mix of emotions. You kind of want to cheer them on and hope at the same time, that they don’t land in your dugout.

MC: They don’t hit you. Yeah.

WS: Thinking that man, all they’d have to do is put one small [tank?] ashore and they could take that, but they didn’t do that. They just threw a bunch of shells in there and then went on their way.

MC: Right. Well I don’t suppose they had any idea that there were still American prisoners on the island then did they?

WS: I doubt that they did. And I don’t know that it would have kept them from shelling it anyway. But I don’t know. But they -- it plays a big part in a person’s life. Now a lot of my friends have apologized and apologized, for having

(inaudible) on Wilkes. But I tell them, that coral there was just as soft as it was on that runway. And perhaps even softer, because it hadn't been compacted like the runway. But then I said if I hadn't been left out there, I would have never met Dr. Ozeki. I wouldn't have had that good food that first -- that started my recovery.

And then the morning of the 12th of January is when the Nitta Maru took off, and we had been alerted, told what we could take and we weren't to take anything more. Of course I didn't have anything they said we could take, but I had my little pillowcase with one or two items I had to take. It was oh, about midday, all of the nurses but one had already went onboard the ship. The pharmacist's mates were still in the hospital waiting to assist us to get loaded and these two Japanese, and I'm assuming they were both admirals, based upon all the (inaudible) that was on their uniform and their cap. They came in the back door with Dr. Shank walking with them, and they walked the whole length of the hospital and then turned around and came back and stopped right at the foot of my bunk, and got into a heated conversation. When I say heated conversation, I learned later that anytime the two Japanese got into an argument, the one that talks the loudest is generally the one that

wins. So this is the way it went, and they got to a real high pitch and then all of a sudden total quietness, I mean you could hear a pin drop. And one of the Japanese officers turned to Dr. Shank, and I mean in perfect English, hardly any accent whatsoever and said to Dr. Shank, "Will not take the wounded and sick. I do not have the service for it." Now I'm assuming he was the one off the shop, based on what he said. So then the discussion was how many men could he have, how many nurses could he have, and we could have three. Well, there was only one civilian nurse still in the hospital, the others were all onboard the ship. Now, they wouldn't let in the pharmacist's mates, they had to go. So they was going along about ten o'clock or later that night, before we ever got the two nurses back off of the ship. So there was Dr. Shank and three nurses left there to tend to us.

MC: I want to go back just for a second, to the storm that you went through when you were on the *Biddle*, on the way to --

WS: What?

MC: You said there was a real bad storm.

WS: The *William P. Biddle*, was from San Diego to Pearl Harbor.

MC: Oh, okay. Did you also -- but that was the first time you had been aboard ship, is that right?

WS: Yeah, and that was the shakedown crews of the *W. P. Biddle*, it had just been brought out of Norfolk. World War I transport.

(break in audio)

MC: Now this was, you said this was the shakedown cruise for the ship; it had been (inaudible) since World War I.

WS: Yeah, then brought out. It was its first and it's -- got a crew with Reserves.

MC: Can you tell me a little bit more about this storm that you went through, I mean how long did it last?

WS: Oh, it lasted several days, I would say probably about four days, and most everybody on the ship was seasick. Now, I did not get seasick, but if I'd go down to the head, I couldn't stay but just a minute, because of all of the people down there throwing up, the stink and what have you. I'd have to get back up in the fresh air or I would have been sick. But I managed to make that trip without getting sick. The trip from Pearl Harbor, by Johnston Island, and from Johnston Island onto Wake, was on the USS *Castor*.

MC: Right. Is that C-A-S-T-E-R?

WS: T-O-R.

MC: T-O-R.

WS: It was a supply ship, it wasn’t a transport, it was a supply ship. Now we run into probably the worst storm on it, real bad weather, and that old boat, (inaudible).

MC: And none of this really bothered you, I mean none of the storms really upset you that much.

WS: Well, I didn’t ever get seasick.

MC: Was it scary?

WS: I would have enjoyed smoother weather.

MC: But it basically was just an unpleasant experience, not a particularly terrifying situation, or anything like that.

WS: Oh no. Oh no, I went to bed at night and slept. They had a couple days that they served us sandwiches because they couldn’t set the tables up. That’s what they do when you’re at sea and you run into rough weather. If it’s rough enough that they don’t set the tables up, they serve you sandwiches.

MC: Yeah, yeah, okay. Let’s see. Okay, well I think we can kind of -- I want to go back to December 11th, you know, the day the destroyer was sunk, and talk a little bit more about that. Can you describe how you felt when you saw that the ship had been hit and that it was going down? Were you terribly excited?

WS: Well, now understand that the battle wasn’t over when that ship went down. We still were engaged in ship to shore.

MC: Well now didn’t it -- was it Beddle that said something like what do you guys think this is a damn ballgame, you know, get back to work, or something like that? Do you remember that? I’ve read that several different places.

WS: Well you see now there again, he would have been on the gun crew.

MC: Yeah, he was right there on the gun and you were some distance away.

WS: I wasn’t in that range, so I wouldn’t have heard this. Now, there probably was a certain amount of jubilation, so to speak.

MC: Yeah. How many feet were you from the actual gun itself at this time?

WS: Oh, probably 50 or 60 feet. We were behind the gun. Seventy-five feet at the very most, but I think around 50 or 60, 75 at the very most.

MC: Okay. And can you kind of describe this structure that you were at, I mean what physically it consisted of.

WS: Well, I had built this toolshed and it was just a wooden frame. There was two-by-four studs and two-by-four plates, as you would build any shed, so to speak. And it was probably about eight foot by twelve foot, which didn’t give us a very large surface, but we didn’t need a large surface on the top. The roof was essentially flat. I don’t recall

exactly what tall I put on the roof but it was very little tall, trying to keep it level. But then, where the range keeper stood, we shimmed up under it to make it level. It didn't take very much shimming to have it level, because it was our intent for it to be where the range keeper would be going.

MC: Right. So it was important to keep the range keeper on a level surface.

WS: Yeah.

MC: Okay. Now you're going to have to excuse my ignorance here but what did the range keeper consist of, what did it look like?

WS: It looked like -- it stood up this high. It had a base, the base was heavy so it would stand, and then the instrument that sat on top was probably about 15 inches in diameter. And the range finder of course, sat away from us and it's what picked up the initial range.

MC: This instrument, it had dials and stuff on it?

WS: Yes. The man that operated it, he would enter the range from the range keeper, I mean from the range finder, which was a telescopic device. It was a long tubular device that had various mirrors and scopes on the side, and you looked out of each end to the greatest angle.

MC: But the range finder itself was not in the same building with the range keeper.

WS: No, it was sitting out on its own, it was mounted on its own. Away from the guns. Away from the guns but on about the same level, about the same line, in the same line of the guns. Then once the range keeper had the range from the range finder, then he would track the target.

MC: And that's what you were doing, right?

WS: No. I wasn't the range keeper. There was another man who operated the range keeper, and he tracked the target. But then I was taking the range off of the range keeper and Lieutenant McAlister was giving me corrections based upon what he saw. He could see where the projectiles were falling. I would make the correction on this chart, and there should be a name for it but I've forgotten what it was. I did know the name of it at one time. I think it was a conversion chart. And then I sent the range on to the guns.

MC: You sent McAlister's information on to the guy who would run --

WS: Well, after it had been converted. After I had entered his correction on this, based on the range it already had off the range keeper, and then the correction that McAlister said needed to be made, and then I would give them the

range in degrees. See, their instrument wasn't graduated in order to graduate it in degrees, so what this chart did, it converted range into degrees. And I hooked up my conversation with McAlister and the guns.

MC: Now, was McAlister in the gun emplacement himself?

WS: McAlister was on the command tower. With probably some, oh a good hundred feet behind the guns. The tower was probably 18 feet high, approximately. I built the tower for him and used 20-foot boards and buried them about two feet in the ground, so that was -- in other words, it was built pretty much like a windmill, but just made out of wood. Because they may have -- they (inaudible). I got quite a few assignments and I'll tell you about the story with that work, that wasn't include in the book, it's sort of an embarrassment to create for other people.

The day the [right?] was due in, was the last ship to come in. There had been a dock but the high water had washed the decking off. The pilings were still there and they weren't straight. Lieutenant Kessler was the commander officer of Battery B, but he was also (inaudible). So this particular morning, I was assigned to him. I had corporals and sergeants working under me, because we were getting to be an unbalanced unit. But I was given the assignment of

putting a deck on there, and they wanted it that day. They also wanted steps all the way up, the full length of the dock. I had asked for a (inaudible), and come along with some cable that will straighten the piling up. He said no, we didn't get to that expense. We got underway, I got the men started out with the decking and once they were lined up and putting the decking on, I got my saw and cut my steps, cut them for the full width. There wasn't lumber so that I could do the full width. Well, the time came where it appeared I was going to run out of lumber, which I was going to. So, I went to find Lieutenant Kessler. Now on that little island out there, nobody could find Lieutenant Kessler, so it's going to have to be done. He wants it done today, the lights are due in tomorrow. So I walked down to his office and asked the clerk for permission to see Major Devereux. Permission was granted and I go in to tell him my plight that I was going to run out of lumber and not be able to finish. So he told the clerk for a requisition for whatever lumber I needed. So I go to the clerk for what lumber I needed and I headed back down to the dock and by the time I get down there, the truck from the civilians was over there with my two-by-twelves.

We proceeded and we were just finishing up and had steps the full width, just like he indicated in the morning. He comes up in his jeep, slams on his brakes and skids, and he gets out and he's chewing me out pretty good. Why didn't I make the steps half as wide, and such. Lieutenant, you told me you wanted the steps the full width. I tried to find you this morning, trying to explain what you want to do. About that time now, Lieutenant McAlister, who is short, well-built but short, had no idea that he was anywhere close. He steps in between us and he had to look up, especially being that -- having stepped in behind us. And he says Mr. Kessler; this man was just on duty today, now you get off of him. He did the best he knew how to do, you should have been available. Lieutenant Kessler does an about face, got in the jeep, and I mean he's getting coral all over anything, from his wheels. This was the kind of man that McAlister was.

MC: Yeah. Well, what do you think Kessler's problem was there?

WS: Just not being able to find Lieutenant Kessler.

MC: But I mean why was he upset with you?

WS: Because, --

MC: I mean all you had done was what he told you to do, right?

WS: Well, yeah, but then at the same time, he was trying to do it within a certain dollar amount. I didn't know what the

dollar amount was. I don't have any idea what the dollar amount is. I guess probably he had been upset. He might have cussed me out a little bit because nobody had been able to find him. I don't know where he was, he wasn't off with some woman, because there wasn't any around.

MC: There weren't any women there.

WS: You know? But at that time, we had communications all the way around, but nobody could find him, he wasn't to be found. He might have gotten chewed out a little bit, for not being able to be found. I don't know what happened to him before he got to me but he wasn't happy. But then Lieutenant McAlister just stepped in. Mr. Kessler, this is my man, he's just on loan to you today. He did the best he knew how and you should have made yourself available. Boy, he just did an about face. Then the other story about him, was at the officers, one of the officers club. It wasn't anything elaborate, it was a tent, a small tent. Doug [Mabrey?], who was a lot better officer than I was, had an assignment, but I was asked to give him a hand. We had the deck built and then we were on to building a bar. Well, they wanted the end of the bar round. Now, we didn't have power tools, we were working with hand tools. Okay, we can make them round. So we're working away, we're just slaving away and Lieutenant Barnes, who was the officer in charge

of the club, he'd come in and he'd brag about what a nice job we were doing. I sure would like to buy you boys a beer, you know? But I just can't do it. He'd go out the front door and Major Potter would come in the back door. He'd go pick up a bottle of bourbon and some shot glasses and sit over at the bar and just have a shot. After Lieutenant Barnes was there, having (inaudible). And he says, well that was the difference in rank and I says yeah. That happened more than once, the timing.

MC: Well, you don't think I should include this in the book?

WS: Huh?

MC: You don't think I should include things like that in the book?

WS: I think it would be embarrassing. Barnes is dead now but he still has family, and Potter is dead but he still has a family.

MC: Right. Well, I can understand.

WS: Yeah. It's not anything that had any --

MC: What if I just didn't use names.

WS: It didn't have any effect on the war.

MC: No, but it -- little funny stories like that, I think will -- would help, you know, to kind of let people know what the atmosphere was there, you know? But I mean, I'll

respect your wishes. I won't use it at all if you -- but if I left the names out, do you think that might?

WS: Well, yeah I suppose, yeah. I wouldn't want to embarrass the general, because he's a retired general.

MC: Oh yeah, no, no.

WS: He is now deceased but he still has family.

MC: Sure, sure I understand.

WS: Lieutenant Barnes is now dead, but he still has a family.

MC: Right, sure, I understand. You have my word that I won't, you know, I won't use their names or anything that would embarrass them or their family.

WS: Are you all coffee drinkers?

MC: Yeah we are, but I think we've already had our quota this morning, yeah.

WS: I remember that so well, that day. The captain was just really upset, because I had gone down to the major and requisitioned more lumber. Lieutenant McAlister, I didn't even know he was in scope, you know, because -- but that's the kind of man McAlister was. He would stand up for his men.

MC: Let me go back with you, to the 11th again, and the destroyer. Can you remember what your first thought was when you saw that that ship had really been hit and was

going down, what went through your mind at that point? Were you surprised?

WS: What went through my mind was how fast it went down.

MC: Were you surprised?

WS: I was amazed, because understand, that thing just, from my point of view, and I had a real good view of it, it -- I could see it as it parted, watch this, that ship parted, made two pieces. It went down in a matter of seconds and it was completely out of sight. It broke in half and oh my God, there was no question that we had to have hit, probably both the ammunition and the fuel, because those five-inches didn't have that much power.

MC: Did you feel a sense of -- I mean what kind of emotions did you feel? Did you feel jubilation?

WS: Oh, I was elated. I was surprised that it had been that fast. I was just, well I'd been ready to get to shooting some more, staying with my business and getting -- well, this is what training does for you. Once they give us the order to fire, it was just routine. It's just like our playing field. I'm no psychologist or psychiatrist, matter of fact, I know very little psychology, but some of the training can be quite boring, the repetition, but I believe, considering what happens, that the repetition

stores that knowledge in your subconscious. And you don't have to stop to think; it just automatically comes out.

MC: Well where did you --

WS: When we were first under fire, you don't have anything but your training and your rifle.

MC: I guess it seemed like forever to you guys, while you were waiting to get the order.

WS: Oh, is that so. That that period was, -- that was nerve-racking. Those ships were coming closer and closer and closer and we were anxious to -- but I don't know anybody that's going to defy the order to hold fire. Now, I wanted to.

MC: Yeah, yeah. Where did you aim your shots after the destroyer went down?

WS: At another destroyer. And then if I'm not -- my recollections are correct, our next target, we damaged another destroyer, and then our next target was a transport.

MC: Did you also hit it?

WS: Yeah.

MC: And by that time, they were in full flight I guess, trying to get out of your range.

WS: Well, they were beginning to pull out and then we, we took a couple shots at a cruiser, but whether we were effective

with it or not I don’t know, there was a lot of cruisers. There was damage done to the cruisers. Now, these same men who made this venture, the same Japanese, they just had to go as far as Truk Island, which is only 750 miles. Then they came back, all of them.

MC: In the second raid. The same set of guys.

WS: Same set of guys came back.

MC: Well now did you think, I mean or did you feel that a landing was going to be made, or did you think that they were just bombarding the island or what? Were you pretty sure they were going to try to put some people on shore?

WS: I don’t know that that ever occurred. We were too busy.

MC: You didn’t think that far ahead.

WS: No. Of course, had they put any landing craft over, we would have had to have abandoned the guns, because we didn’t have a rifle company to support us. We would have had to have abandoned the guns, become a rifle company, just like we did on the 23rd.

MC: Right. Let me, before I forget. Now was Jack Hearn with you on this -- on Wilkes?

WS: No. Jack Hearn was on A Battery -- that would have been on Peacock Point.

MC: At Peacock Point, okay. I tried a couple times to call him at his new number in Kerrville and I never got an answer.

I had, at one time, thought that we might stop by in San Antonio and drive up to Kerrville on the way back to Dallas from here, but I decided it was too much to try to do in one trip. I'll try to catch him some time in the spring.

WS: He was at the reunion.

MC: Yeah, I know he was. I talked to him since then. I talked to him a couple times on the phone but since he moved from Boerne up to Kerrville, I haven't been able to get in touch with him. Okay, well now how long did this gun battle on the 11th, about how long did it last?

WS: Well, I don't know that I even owned a watch in those days. If I did, it would have been a Big Ben or a Waltham, 98-cent pocket watch. But I was in active engagement for a good 45 minutes. We ran out of ammunition twice and had to ceasefire and wait for it to be hauled up. We were firing faster than they were able to bring the ammunition up.

MC: Right. Well, what was the mood in the battery immediately after it became obvious that the Japs were withdrawing and you had basically won the dual?

WS: Oh, I've never given too much thought to that, but I do recall the fact that we watched the planes.

MC: The Wildcats.

WS: They'd go out, drop their bomb, back in and then back out.

Of course we, well we had something to do, there was always work to do. Now, we sat and watched and let me tell you at night, watching that horizon in the sky, there is all kinds of lights out there, oh and shooting stars and what have you, but there was all kinds of lights.

MC: And they can play tricks on your eyes I'm sure.

WS: Probably, yeah, and that was before the days of unidentified objects. They were there then. Now, as a result of standing those watches, and giving us sort of the one and watch, and then working in between, we were just exhausted.

MC: You didn't get much sleep.

WS: No. As a matter of fact, I went to sleep one day in my foxhole while the bombing was in progress.

MC: Well, you've got to be pretty sleep to go to sleep while they're dropping bombs on you.

WS: When I woke up it scared me to death, almost scared me to death, it was frightening, and I thought gosh, am I the only thing left? But you know what, after that, since we -- we didn't have anything to fight back with, when the airplanes were overhead bombing. When I'd hit my foxhole, I would take my nap. You're frozen, in the dark, what are you going to do? You've done everything you can when you hit that foxhole.

MC: At least the guys on the antiaircraft batteries could shoot back, but you guys couldn’t do anything except just hunker down and wait for the Japs to get through.

WS: Yeah. It would have been nice if we had a height finder so that we could use those three-inch guns that were sitting over there with nobody.

MC: Yeah. Were they ever used at all during the siege? Of course there were no -- you would have had to go man the guns yourselves.

WS: There was no crew. There was no crew and there was no height finder, so there was no use, a crew would have been useless without some height finder, because you’ve got your views on those three-inch guns on the antiaircraft that exploded at the elevation that the planes were flying from.

MC: So even if you had a crew, basically, you couldn’t have used the guns to any effect, right? I guess that’s the reason they --

WS: Unless they were in communications with one of the other gun batteries that had a height finder, was using theirs. That would have been the only way.

MC: Right, right. Well during that period then, from the 11th to the 23rd, you were just basically in that foxhole with not all that much to do or that you could do.

WS: Of course, we kept our equipment in good shape and we kept everything, to make sure we had it ready. There was something to do. From one bombing to another, there was always something.

MC: Well, Devereux, in his book, described that interval there between December 11th and December 23rd as a period when time stood still. Did it seem like that to you? Did time really drag for you then?

WS: Well, not really. We were -- we'd stand watch for an hour and then we were off an hour, it's what you call a running watch, because this was our only means of picking up the planes, by our ears and eyes. One man on the command tower and one man on the range keeper stood watch. You're watching the horizon and you're watching the sky. Now, there was always another foxhole to dig, to change positions, or something seemingly, in between, which didn't give you much opportunity to get rest.

MC: Well now, when you say you watched for an hour and then you were off for an hour, you don't mean 24 hours a day. You didn't get a chance to sleep much if you were just off for an hour then did you?

WS: That's exactly right. That's why I was able to go to sleep in my foxhole.

FEMALE SPEAKER: How many of you were watching?

WS: Well, we had a total there, in the five-inch crew, we probably didn't have over 18 men. Some of those were younger sergeants and they didn't stand watch. The gun sergeants, the gunner sergeants, exempt themselves from that sort of duty.

MC: But everybody else did stand watch. Now that would get to be pretty…

WS: There were some pretty boring days. Now, our rations consisted primarily of pork and beans out of a can, and salmon out of a can. We had field rations that you hear about, K-rations, the C-rations and what have you; they were developed after the war started. The field rations that were available when World War II started consisted of a candy bar, a chocolate bar, that had a tremendous amount of energy. They had a lot in them besides just chocolate and sugar. A hardtack, and the hardtack was in five-gallon tin containers, and they were pure tin, I mean they were (inaudible) by the time you got it open, and they wouldn't rust because they were pure tin. Now there's something that kind of grows on you. They're hard, they're about the same size as a cracker, but they're about this thick, and there they have potatoes, they had these potatoes in them, you had sugars and what have you, there was a lot of energy from just chewing on a hardtack.

And it might take you 30 minutes to eat one hardtack. As I say, they are hard. They brought out these cases and the men scattered them, so that they were loaded according to what line they were under, under the brush. We had these little can openers that were only about so big, to tear open your C-ration. We'd eat the pork and beans and the salmon right out of the can. At night, they gave everybody a warm meal, at least one hot meal a day, but I don't think that those of us on Wilkes ever got a hot meal. We might have gotten one meal once or twice. Sometimes it got over to us.

FEMALE: Did you ever have any (inaudible)?

WS: I don't recall any.

MC: Was there any shortage of fresh water?

WS: No, it was -- well, the um, standard.

MC: Yeah. I just wondered though, if the --

WS: We didn't have water daily; there wasn't any drinking water over there. As far as bathing, you would have to do it out on the beach mostly, in the lagoon. Now, you can't do much scrubbing in that salt water, you can't get soap to lather very much.

MC: Yeah. Okay, on the 23rd then, what was the first -- those flashes out at sea, was that the first indication you had that something was going on?

WS: Yeah. By that time, I had dug the foxhole by the battery that went up close to the range, because the bombers were getting closer. I had dug one down by the -- a short distance to the command tower. It was about two o'clock in the morning, I recall someone saying two o'clock in the morning, that we were asked to roll out and come up on the tower. Lieutenant McAlister and I was looking at them and we both pretty much agreed that it was muzzle blasts, must have been a sea battle. And then, then we picked up silhouettes and the sound of motors from the ocean side, and that's where they came in, from the ocean side.

MC: How long after you saw those flashes did the boats start coming in?

WS: Well, I can't, I can't give you a time. It would be simply a guess.

MC: An educated guess.

WS: Maybe 20 minutes, 30 minutes. In Greg's book, I know that he says the Japanese planes hit Wilkes Island at 2:45 p.m.

MC: P.M., that's not right.

WS: His intention -- he intended for it to be 2:45 a.m. Based upon that, it would be 45 minutes, but those were not my --

those 45 minutes were not my calculations. Where he got that? I didn't have a -- I don't think I owned a watch. One thing that (inaudible) was that he was amazed at the number of people. Here, we had hot and cold running water.

(break in audio)

MC: Well, I have a general grasp of what happened on Wilkes, you know, but it sounds like it was just a really, really confusing situation. Johnson talked about the Japs being back in the brush, which meant in essence, that they had gotten behind his machinegun emplacement. He talks about picking up the machineguns and moving them, you know, he and another guy would move them in alternate. One of them would move forward about 15 or 20 yards and then the other one would do the same. He talked about seeing the feet, you know the legs and feet of the Japanese through the brush. I guess, or I don't know whether this was before the sun came up, it probably was, and opening fire on them at that time and hearing a bunch of shouts, assuming that he had hit a bunch of them. But can you just give me an overview of how this thing shaped up and how you swept the Japs off the island?

WS: They state, in one of the books, they speak about how there were people on the lagoon side. Now, there may have been a few of them that were sent over to the lagoon just for precaution, but the majority of them slept on the main island. (inaudible).

MC: You guys basically --

WS: I don't really know how it happened, but I can tell you how it happened, I mean I can't tell you how it happened. We can look at this map. McKinstry, with his men, was down here along the lagoon channel. McAlister, with the majority of the five-inch group, was up here near one of these three-inch guns that was the nearest to the beach. Now, they -- and right out from that, was where the Japs came up there, they came up the beach and evidently landed. They were landing down here in the general area of the .50 calibers. The .50 calibers apparently had a good target. Now, there was a big boulder here that this group of Japs got behind and then McAlister told me to go, take these two men and come down on the beach and come back on their flank, which we did. Now, while we were doing this, they were a diversion, and I'm sure they were intended to be sacrificed, clearly it's a diversion. The Japs came up the middle of the island, and got back in here and embedded themselves around these three-inch guns. Now, when I -- as

I said, this mission accomplished down on the beach. I went back up and took my position in line with the rest of my five-inch crew, who were still, the majority of them were still right in here, attacking the ones that were embedded around those three-inch guns.

MC: Okay. There were no operational gun emplacements on Wilkes at this point, right? I mean, they had been basically given up, right, the positions had been given up?

WS: Here's our five-inch guns. We can't man them because we don't have a rifle company to support us. We had to become a rifle company. And we had no three-inch crew here. Now the machineguns were still in operation, they were still there. But we did not man the five-inch guns at all that morning, because first of all, there wasn't any targets until daylight, and by that time, we had to become a rifle company, because we had no rifle company to support us. So that we had to abandon them. And right in here, amongst these three-inch guns is where the majority of the fighting. There was quite a bit of it down here where the five-inch guns, this is where they made the landings. The five-inch, I mean the .50 calibers, they took a big toll on them. Just what route the Japs took to get into this position around those three-inch guns, I'm not certain.

Because I was -- I had been sent down here on the beach. I wasn't down there terribly long, but it didn't take them very long to -- because this is not a long distance.

MC: Right. There was basically nothing going on on this part of Wilkes.

WS: There wasn't anything down here, there wasn't any information, there wasn't anybody coming in there. It was all right in this immediate area here, some of it down here.

MC: Now, could you get, by land, you could get past this new channel and get down to the original channel?

WS: This road right here had not been cut through. The channel had been cut to that point, but they had left enough that the trucks could pass.

MC: But you could get through there on foot, right?

WS: Well, you could get through there on a truck.

MC: On a truck, okay.

WS: Yeah, as well as on foot. But the landing was here and there wasn't anybody down in this area. Nobody, they didn't have anybody, they didn't land anybody on the field. The men on the field never did get involved on the 23rd. On the Wake Proper and Wilkes is where the fighting was on the 23rd. Now, when the fighting was over with, when Bill Raymond came to me and hollered at Vaale that I was still

alive, we got them all off, there was only two prisoners and the rest of them were dead.

MC: If you had wanted, at this time, or if you had the time, to come maybe down here, in order to come to the relief of some of the guys on Wake, how would you have been able to get across the channel?

WS: You would have had to have come here and crossed the ferry.

MC: Was the ferry operational?

WS: Well, now, as far as I know it would have been. I don't know.

MC: What was the distance it covered?

WS: I don't know whether it was -- whether there was a sailor on there to operate it or not.

MC: Right. What was the distance across there?

WS: Oh, that channel was fairly narrow. It was not near as wide as this new one. I would say probably a hundred feet, 150 feet at the most. Well, it was wide enough where you could bring a barge in it. Barges are about 100-feet wide, most of them about that wide. That's all that was coming in the channel at that time, was just barges. The ships would lay off out here and unload on barges, and the barges were brought in. Then at night the ships would go out and sail around, come back in the morning and finish unloading. The Japanese used that same process, but at the time we

left there, there weren't any barges down there and these boats, and it wouldn't show up. So then they'd been down there the next morning and they wouldn't show up. Then they'd just forget about it. Then, the next time we went down, we were working to unload the ship and shore up, and then work on it that day. When it went back out at night, it wouldn't come back in the next day. Now, were you aware, was the United States aware of the fact that the Japanese had submarines operating off of the west coast, as early as October of 1941.

MC: Off the west coast of the mainland. No, well not really.

WS: They were also aware of the fact that there was submarines operating around Pearl Harbor, and there were two Japanese submarines operating around Wake Island.

MC: And they were both lost, as I understand it.

WS: Yeah, but this was as early as October.

MC: As early as October.

WS: So, the situation was a lot more grave than any of us was aware of. Now, I get the call one evening, that a group of us -- and I, I was just getting to know the others more than anything else, but there on that, they were wasting our time. The Japanese would never be interested in that.

MC: In Wake, yeah.

WS: And in the sand, I just draw a real rough sketch, you know, and put the Marshall Islands down here, and how close we were to the Marshall Islands. You could darn well be sure that if we break out -- of course by that time there was opportune, I mean there was a sense that we could go to war. That if war breaks out, you can be rest assured, we're going to be bombed by land-based planes from right down here. Now I think I was just playing devil's advocate than actually knowing, you know? But just the location, it was the nearest, it made sense. And they would -- and I think that perhaps the development, the armament of Wake Island, may have caused the Japs to move at the time they did. So that we need to do it before they get all of their armament there, don't let them develop it. But then -- [interruption; dog] Hey.

FEMALE: No, that's okay.

WS: Okay. You know to knock her down there.

FEMALE: It's no problem.

WS: Don't let her bother you.

FEMALE: No, I won't.

MC: Something popped into my mind and popped right back out again. Oh, it was -- Wake seems to me like it was such a tragic example of just being about a day late and a dollar short on getting prepared.

WS: Well, yes.

MC: And there just, there wasn’t enough men, there wasn’t enough equipment to go around, and they couldn’t get it out there fast enough.

WS: We didn’t have any radar out there. So those planes hadn’t been picked up that first day. All 12 of those Grumman fighter planes would have been in the air, and they would have broken up the formation. Of course once you break up the formation of a group of bombers, you’ve ruined their run. But we didn’t have enough people to adequately man. We had to depend on getting civilians that we might be able to use and we might not. We were -- we had the part, we had the installation and everything. Now, we had the guns installed, the five-inch guns. They were installed and they had been calibrated, and we knew that they were ready to go, but when we got that close hit on our five-inch guns on Wilkes, ruining two scopes on one gun, all we got out there is one extra scope. We can only replace one scope, we’ve got two damaged.

MC: Well, you didn’t even have enough rifles to go around, right?

WS: All of the Marines had rifles. This is something in the Marine Corps. When you enlist, you’re issued a rifle, and that’s your rifle as long as you’re in the Corps.

MC: Yeah. But some of the officers didn't have rifles, right?

WS: The officers are equipped with side arms. They had very few rifles for the civilians. The civilians had what spare rifles that we had or what spare arms that we had, to the civilians, and hopefully, there were occasionally ones that could use it. I'm not real sure that that was always the case. But then that's -- as I say, we were just too late.

MC: For example, --

WS: We had -- growing up back in those days; we had a lot of isolationists in Congress. And they fought some of this armament. And it's unfortunate that they did because of the situation as it developed.

MC: I've read someplace that they were trying to make bunkers for those planes, you know, to protect them from an air attack, and that they were only, really a few hours from having those things ready when the first Jap raid hit.

WS: Well, yeah, but see our planes had only been there four days.

MC: Yeah I know.

WS: And I think they came pretty much unannounced.

MC: Right. I can't remember where I read this but it said that Putnam, he was the --

WS: Putnam, yeah.

MC: That he put a priority on getting these revetments, is that what they called them?

WS: Yeah.

MC: Revetments built for the planes, but that they were just a few hours away from having them ready to put the planes in when what first attack came and caught them like sitting ducks.

WS: Yeah. Now there's been a lot of stories about our radar. The USS *Wright* came in eight days before the war started, and the story that came along with it was that it was loaded and it had only room for one more piece of equipment, and there were two pieces of equipment on the dock. One of them was a garbage truck and the other was our radar, and they elected to bring the radar, I mean they elected to bring the garbage truck. Now, a gentleman came to one of our reunions that was in 1st Defense Battalion, that told me that he was over at Hickam Field being trained for the radar, and that the reason the radar hadn't come was that he hadn't finished and we didn't have an operator for it. Well, I suppose there's some sort of logic for that. But then in Greg Urwin's book, I think it probably is the true story. The United States did not want that radar to fall into the hands of the Japanese. It was the latest in technology and they were concerned that if it was

set up there on Wake Island, it would fall into the hands of the Japanese. And I'm partially inclined to believe that that's the true reason we didn't have the radar.

MC: Now that, -- I also read someplace that that relief taskforce that was supposed to reinforce Wake, that they had a radar unit on the transport.

WS: They had a radar unit, they had more -- bringing us more planes, bringing us more ammunition, and bringing us more men.

MC: Let me go back and ask you something before it slips my mind. When we were looking at the map a while ago, I was thinking about this and I never did really follow through on it. If you could have gotten across -- now you had, I mean of course you had been wounded by this time, but there was still about 60, or a few less than 60, able bodied Marines on Wilkes. If they could have gotten across that channel to Wake, do you think that they could have pretty much done the same thing, or helped the other guys that were on Wake do the same thing there, that you had done on Wilkes, and that is basically overrun the whole Japanese invasion force?

WS: There was never, there's no impression whatsoever in my mind, that the Japanese that had come to shore, we would

have taken them. Now the big question mark is how many more would that admiral have sent in.

MC: How much of his available landing force do you think he had committed by this time?

WS: Oh, I think he had committed the majority of his landing force.

MC: That’s what I thought.

WS: But then they would have perhaps used the crew. Now, the men over on Peale Island were not involved in the fighting on Wilkes. Now they could drive across the bridge and get over there, but Dr. Ozeki told us that he was real glad to see that white flag, because he said they were pushing us back and we didn’t have any place but the ocean to go to. So, taking care of those that had landed was then, I think very well could have been tended to now, but lack of communication was a great big problem. Devereux and Cunningham were defending Wilkes. And then as I said, the crews on Peale was never put into action. So there’s no question that we could have taken care of those that had landed and possibly those that were yet to be landed. Now, the two aircraft areas that were participating in this, according to narratives, that were captured at the war, had participated in Pearl Harbor and were back up at the

Aleutian Island there when they were directed to come down to Wake.

MC: The Hiryu and the Soryu.

WS: And the admiral in charge of them first refused to, and then he told them that well, that he could only make one assault because of a fuel shortage. So, he was -- it's my opinion, based upon that, and this book from Rogers -- from Daws, that were captured, that the dive bombers and what have you, had just about done all they were able to do.

MC: I hadn't heard that before, that's interesting.

WS: Now, you've got historians that are divided. There's a group that says had that taskforce not been turned back, that the Battle of Midway would have never happened at all. And then there's the other side of it that says it would have been disastrous if they did. Now, if you take into consideration and think about the fact that what this old admiral was saying, is I've only got enough fuel for one assault, that had that taskforce continued, those two carriers that was laid on the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, might have been a way out. Admiral Kimmel, who was in charge of Pearl Harbor, the fleet, the one that had all the battleships sitting in the harbor, he's the one that organized the taskforce to come to Wake. By the time he did get that underway, Admiral Pye was sent out there to

relieve Admiral Kimmel. Admiral Pye was aware of the fact that he was only there temporarily, that he was there until Nimitz would come out, and that Nimitz was going to replace him.

MC: And he didn't want to risk losing a bunch more ships.

WS: So Pye is the one that turned the fleet back. Now, it's -- the reason they argue the point, because nobody really knows what the results would have been, but they had a little difficulty getting that passport in the end, and they had to wait for a carrier to come out of the Pacific, out of the Atlantic. To let it come down through the Panama Canal. Some help would have been really appreciated.

MC: Well, now Godbold told me that you know, I mean of course he was in command of all the forces on Peale, as I understand it. Of course he was contacted by Devereux and asked to bring as many men as he thought he could spare, to form up a defensive line there, late that morning, about 30 minutes before they decided to surrender, I think. They didn't actually get into any fighting as I understand it. Anyway, he told me that from his perspective, the Marines on Wake probably could have held out at least another two or three days beyond the time that Cunningham decided to surrender. Do you think that's a reasonable estimate?

WS: I'm confident. Now, Cunningham really didn't know what the hell was going on. Cunningham hadn't been out of his bunker and he had no communications. Devereux didn't know what was going on, because he was sitting in his bunker without communications, sitting by. He was trained as an artillery officer and that's the way they're trained. They're trained to sit in that command post and direct their fire and what have you, from there. He was sitting by a telephone with nobody on the other end of the telephone. I don't know if all of our communication lines were on top of the ground. They had initially tried burying them but the contractors would tear them up. The problem then was to leave them up on the top of the ground where the contractors can see them and they won't -- but then they were on the top of the ground when the Japs came in and they were the first things that went. I think that had all of the forces been put to use, those that were on the island, we would have taken care of the Japs, and how many more they had to send in, that is a big question mark. If we'd gotten those cleared out, it's a possibility that some of those five-inch guns could have been manned and caused those ships to pull further back. Of course they were sitting out there in good range.

MC: Yeah, well it's one of those things that I don't know if anybody can come up with a real definitive answer, but there's a lot of things there that lead you to wonder what might have happened, you know?

WS: Oh yeah. Well, we had already been involved in training as prisoners; it had been drilled into our heads. We also had been taught that the Japanese didn't take prisoners, and they didn't in time. Well, those of us that was out there on Wake, had never given any thought to the fact that we would surrender. We felt like we would either be there and die there or get some help.

MC: Right. Well, I mean I can understand why they were, with the Pacific fleet and the shape it was in right then, I can understand why they were nervous about the possibility of losing more ships, and especially a carrier. But I don't know, from all indications it seems to me that if the taskforce had come out and the U.S. taskforce had come on, that the Japanese might have withdrawn.

WS: Well, a real danger in it was if they continued on to Wake, is they would have been within the same bombing distance of the land-based planes, as Wake Island was. So though the carriers, the Japanese carriers, might have been running out of fuel and not been able to retaliate and defend themselves as well as they ordinarily would have, they

didn’t send that much bombers. They would have had planes that (inaudible), which we hadn’t had.

MC: Right. Where did you run across this information about the Japanese admiral saying that he didn’t have enough fuel but for one assault? Do you know where that information came from?

WS: It came out of a diary, his diary that was captured.

MC: Oh, I see, okay, okay. Has that been published anywhere?

WS: It’s in Greg Urwin’s book.

MC: It’s in Urwin’s book, okay. That’s part of it I haven’t gotten to yet.

WS: I think it’s in his book and it’s in some other book that I read. But then it would have been hey wait a minute, even the ship itself would have been running low on fuel and made the trip from Japan to Pearl Harbor, from Pearl Harbor back up the Aleutians, and then back down to Wake. But I think when he’s talking about that he only had enough fuel for one assault, was for the planes. Rather than the ship. But the ship itself would have been having to run pretty low, unless it had been refueled at sea. It may have been refueled at sea; it also could have taken on more aviation fuel.

MC: They didn’t have a lot of fuel to spare at that particular point did they?

WS: No. In spite of the fact that Japan put up -- Japan was really not prepared for the war. They were dependent upon capturing certain supply assets. Notice then, they didn't do much capturing. The supplies were not there in any quantities. But the Japanese nation as a whole was very primitive at that time. Like I told you, I had been there on the Gulf Coast, there was a lot of rice farmers, and the rice farmers, for a number of years, had been planting their rice in these huge fields, hundreds and thousands of acres that they'd plant. The Japanese have rice paddies and they plant their rice in cold grain, just like a tomato farmer plants his tomatoes, and then they transfer it by hand and they plant it in straight rows, just as straight as it can be, and spaced properly. And then even after it's flooded, they get in there and cultivate.

MC: By hand.

WS: Well, with -- well, for lack of any other word to use, oxen. Not what you would really call an oxen, they're kind of like old Jersey cows, they're not large. They're small cattle but they're used as an oxen will be used. Now, when you're that primitive in agriculture that says a lot about what the rest of the culture is. And in fact, Dr. Ozeki had very limited medical supplies. He didn't have near the medical supplies that he needed and so much of ours had

been destroyed, you know in the hospitals before that, so there was a shortage of medical supplies, and Japan didn't have a lot of them to spare. Now, this is just another aspect of the fact that they weren't really prepared for the kind of war they got into.

MC: I think they thought that if they gave the soft westerners a few swift kicks, that they'd get out of the Western Pacific and leave them alone, you know? I think that's what they were counting on.

WS: Well, they had allied with Hitler and Mussolini and I have no idea what Hitler had promised. I have some doubt as to whether he would have kept his promise had they been at [Nuremberg?]. I'm sure that he had a lot of influence on Japan coming into the war at the time, with the intent to keep the United States out of the European war. As I said, there's absolutely no doubt what they would promise the Japanese at [Nuremberg?]. As I say again, just as confident that whatever he promised them, he probably wouldn't have kept his promise.

MC: He wasn't too good at keeping his promises.

WS: No, he'd (inaudible).

MC: I'll tell you what I'd like to do. I want to -- Lana and I would be very pleased to take you to lunch if you'd like to go.

WS: I don’t want you to spend your money on me.

MC: No, no, it would really be our pleasure if you, you know if you would like to.

WS: Well, I eat lunch most every day.

MC: Well, we do too, and I thought that here in a few minutes, we could take a break and go get something to eat, and then come back, and I’d like to concentrate on, after lunch, just talking about from the time you were wounded, on through that period, you know, and up to the end of the war. So if you feel like we’ve overlooked anything that happened earlier, that maybe I need to know.

WS: Well, I know that all I can tell you about is what happened on Wilkes.

MC: Yeah, I know.

WS: The knowledge that I have of what happened on Wake and Peale, is secondhand. I can only take you up to the point where I was wounded.

MC: Yeah, yeah. Well, I want to spend some time going through that episode in detail with you, right before and up to the time you were wounded, and then immediately afterwards, because I’d like to get as much detail on that as you feel like you can give me.

WS: Well that’s real simple. Now, I can’t give you a time of how long I laid there in that prone position. I listened to plenty of targets.

MC: Right. Do you -- I mean, did you actually see any of the people that you hit, I mean could you tell that you had?

WS: Oh, I believe that I hit some but I can’t tell you that I killed them.

MC: About how many do you think you hit during this?

WS: Oh that, I don’t really know. That’s something that I didn’t -- wasn’t counting. I wasn’t keeping score.

MC: How many rounds do you think you fired from your rifle?

WS: Oh, well here again, I’ve never given any thought to how many rounds that I fired. It’s too far back maybe, to try to reconstruct that. I know I didn’t fire any rounds out of curiosity. As I said, when I got into that tent, I threw three bandoliers across this shoulder and three across this one. That weighted you down and then I had my belt full.

MC: How many hand grenades approximately, did you have on you at the time?

WS: Well, I had two in each shirt pocket and I don’t know just how many I had hanging on my belt, but I had some hanging on my belt. I didn’t know that I could get two in my shirt pocket.

MC: Two in each shirt pocket?

WS: Those were pretty good sized pockets on those old khaki shirts. The Japs hated those. That was, as far as I know, Lieutenant McAlister told me to load the hand grenades in the shirts. They had to go.

MC: Yeah, yeah.

WS: And that's all they've got to do to me, is get rid of my clothes that had everything in them.

MC: This was when they came back out there and found you, right?

WS: No, this was the morning they surrendered.

MC: Oh, okay.

WS: If you read Devereux's book, he makes mention of one of Platt's men being seriously wounded, the staff wouldn't let him tend to him? That was me.

MC: Yeah, I kind of thought it might have been. Okay, let me go back then and reconstruct the scene if I can. You're -- now you had, you and the other two guys had already cleaned out this little pocket of Japs behind the rock.

WS: This was independent. We didn't clean them out. We intended to do it.

MC: Yeah, okay.

WS: Because they were being fired at from the men up on the island. Now, when we got down on the beach and came in

from the flank, they couldn't come around that rock without being fired at from us. So that kept them in place so that they were probably all taken care of from the men up on the island.

MC: Right. But after they were all out of the way, then, then what happened next?

WS: Then we headed back up to take our place with our other Marines. Now, this is when I got pinned down behind a boulder of coral.

MC: And you were by yourself at this point, right?

WS: Yeah. Now, the other two men had come up from behind me. Stevens went over to my right, went over to the right, and I don't have the slightest idea of where Gilley was going. But then a machinegun blew on up. I'll shoot you in the rear.

MC: He was yelling this as?

WS: It went by my mind right quick, usually there's a target, he'd be shooting at me. Hey you, before you do that.

MC: He was yelling at you, right?

WS: Well, I thought possibly he was you know. Of course, he was back behind me, down towards the channel. But Barnes, he came out of the hospital when I was down there, and they picked me up and take me out to his wife, who gave me a good home cooked meal and I told him about this situation.

He says you know, I never thought you were going to get shot. He says no, I wasn't hollering at you. It was maybe that there was some other Marines, some of his Marines were going to bomb the crater that he was hollering at. He wasn't hollering at me. I said well, it sure sounded like you were and I'd made up my mind, what I was going to do.

MC: So, after the machineguns moved away.

WS: Then I moved onboard and got up online with the rest of my men in L Battery, and that's when I -- I wasn't necessarily looking for a depression but that's -- when I hit the ground, I happened to be in a kind of slight depression. It made me a smaller target. There was no way in the world for me to tell you how long I may have stayed there.

MC: Was this -- would this have been on the beach or would it have been in a bank above the beach?

WS: No, this was --

MC: Was it in a brushy area, was it in open area?

WS: Well, there was stubble. Bear in mind that all the vegetation, all the leaves had been knocked off of that.

MC: Oh yeah.

WS: To my left --

MC: How far were you from the water's edge approximately, any idea?

WS: Oh, the water's edge was probably 50 yards. The first three-inch gun, the three-inch gun closest to the beach, Bill Raymond was on the right-hand side of it, shooting from a kneeling position, and Gordon Marshall was on the opposite side of it, using it as a rest, and shooting from a standing position. Gunner Sergeant Stowe was standing right behind it, sort of directing the fire. I hit the ground to the right of it, directly out from Bill Raymond, where he was. I would have got online with that three-inch gun nearest the beach.

MC: So you were to Raymond's right.

WS: Yeah, I was to Bill Raymond's right, yeah.

MC: And you said you don't have any idea how long you stayed there.

WS: No.

MC: It seemed like a long time?

WS: Although, there's just no time of it involved. When you're getting shot at and you're shooting back.

MC: It was a constant -- you know, were you shooting pretty much as fast as you could aim and fire?

WS: It wasn't what I'd call rapid fire, but as soon as I'd fire a round, I would eject the line and put another one in the firing chamber and be prepared to shoot as soon as picked

me up a target. And as I said, there were quite a few targets right at that time.

MC: And you were, you were also --

WS: They came in and around the other three-inch guns.

MC: And you were also being shot at.

WS: Oh, absolutely.

MC: Could you hear bullets hitting around you?

WS: I could hear them whizzing by my ear.

MC: But you ah, you really don't have any idea where the bullet that hit your head came from, I mean?

WS: I know the general area that it came from, but I was moving forward when it --

MC: So you had gotten out of the depression that you were in.

WS: Yeah, I was beside it, in a standing position, so I was moving forward and to my right.

MC: Can you describe the first sensation, I mean when you first knew you were hit?

WS: Yeah. There was a great big flash of fiery like, and it felt like my head been stuck into an oven.

MC: That's a pretty good description.

WS: Well that's just what it felt like. Those bullets are pretty hot when they…

MC: Did the wound bleed a lot?

WS: No. It went out -- I told you, the bullet went out, it didn't knock me out, it stunned me. Then it straightened me up and then I fell forward again. Now, without consciously falling forward or if it was just because I was off balance, but I started to fall, and my head landed -- first of all, I fired that round that was in my chamber, and then I tried to put another round in there but I couldn't. By that time this arm wouldn't respond and I couldn't pick it up. And then, as I said, I just sort of floated off into unconsciousness and when I woke up, my head was laying across my arm and there was oh really, a pool of blood there on my sweatshirt, and right in the middle was a glob of brain matter that I first thought, my God my brains have been draining out. And then I said no, it couldn't be, you're still alive. However, Dr. Shank assured me that some of my brain did leak out.

MC: You actually may have seen some of your own brain tissue.

WS: Yeah. When I first saw it, that's what came to mind, my God my brains are leaking out. And then I rationalized no, it can't be my brains because I'm still alive. And then Dr. Shank says yeah, you lost some of your brain. The next thing that I knew was Bill Raymond leaning down alongside of me and hollering to Vaale, the corpsman, said, "Hey Vaale, Sloman is still alive," and then Vaale came over

with a stretcher and he put a bandage around my head, and they put me on the stretcher to carry me up to the aid station. Before they had gotten around to carrying me out, Captain Platt said we need everybody down at the channel, because a column of Japs was coming down on the island, and they were going to have to cross that channel at the water's edge, and he was going to catch them in a crossfire. But it turned out to be Major Devereux leading them with a white flag, and he gave me a glance.

MC: What went through your mind, I mean you could hear these guys talking. First, I think you told me yesterday, you heard this guy say tell McAlister that --

WS: Gordon Marshall hollered at McKinstry.

MC: McKinstry, okay, yeah, that --

WS: He went hey, you can have Sloman's rifle, he got his.

MC: Yeah, yeah. I mean you heard all this going on. What were you thinking about?

WS: Hell, I wasn't doing anything.

MC: Well, I mean did you feel any -- did you feel any impulse to yell hey, I'm not dead or anything like that?

WS: Well, I didn't have any further use for my rifle, I had already fired that round that was in there and then I canceled the --

MC: Clearly, you couldn't have used the rifle any more.

WS: I knew that I wasn't going to use the rifle. But then as I said, I just sort of floated into unconsciousness as he was saying that, but I did hear it. It was like two or three occasions, I thought that McKinstry was back out there on Wilkes, telling me that he was going to get help, to get me back into the hospital. But then when I would regain consciousness, I was just, oh my God, that's just a wild dream that I had, you know, he wasn't out here. Some of the other dreams that went through my mind, that I knew weren't possible, because they weren't at all, there was no way they could have been. But then, when I was talking to McKinstry, I found out that sure enough he had been out there. The Japs kept him on the move for about 24 hours.

MC: So he actually did come back there.

WS: He'd actually been out there and he said that --

FEMALE: Did you hear his voice?

WS: Well, I thought I had, you know? But then as I say, when I regained consciousness, full consciousness, I dismissed that as a bad dream, you know, that he hadn't been out there.

FEMALE: What were some of the other dreams you had?

WS: Oh, my mother showed up with old Dr. Danforth, the old doctor that had delivered me and took care of me all my life. Of course he was dead by that time, so that was an

impossibility. I just made the same association with McKinstry hadn't been back out there. He told me that the Japs would tell him that I was dead and if he didn't get to moving he was going to be.

MC: Well do you -- has it ever -- I mean, have you ever thought that maybe you were just kind of hovering between life and death at that point?

WS: Well, death never really -- I'm sure I was, but I don't have any recollections of giving any thought to it.

FEMALE: Were you the only one out there like that?

WS: Yeah, I believe.

FEMALE: You were the only one.

WS: First of all, they laid me down amongst a bunch of dead Japanese.

FEMALE: Dead Japanese, yeah.

WS: They had moved the Japanese.

MC: Who laid you among the dead Japs?

WS: Two civilians came in and picked me up and dropped me off. But anyhow, of course they laid me down there because that's where the Japs told them to lay me. See, they had let McKinstry, I mean they let McAlister come in there to me but all that he done was get my shirt off, they wanted those, because they stripped everybody. Especially, when I had those hand grenades, they stepped back, you know. But

I was very conscious of everything that was going on right at that time, but then I suppose as my brain swelled, I lost consciousness again. As I said, when Captain Platt came to me then, I told him, “It’s a hell of a way to spend Christmas Eve,” and he said, “Son, you lost some time, Christmas has already come and gone.” I really don’t know how long. We have guessed, at our best educated guess, somewhere between four and five days.

MC: Well, do you consider it more or less a miracle of some kind that you survived out there all that time, I mean with a wound like that?

WS: Well, I don’t know. I was telling you a little bit earlier, how faith worked. If I hadn’t been left out there, I would have never met Dr. Ozeki.

MC: Yeah, yeah, true.

WS: I wouldn’t have got all that good food that he had the kitchen provide for me.

MC: Yeah. Well, did you ever have -- I mean, any of the medical people that attended to you, did they ever describe to you in any way, how serious that wound was, or if it was something that might have killed somebody else, if it occurred in the same way?

WS: Not in that fashion. The neurosurgeon, the Navy surgeon, who was Naval Reserve, was from (inaudible) at the San

Diego Naval Hospital out at Balboa Park out there. Dr. J. Francis O'Brien, a neurologist, that was also with the Reserves. It seemed like the Navy had the best of the doctors. But then they both told me that I had these bone fragments embedded in my brain, and that the brain didn't tolerate bone. It would tolerate metal and things of this nature, but it wouldn't tolerate bone. He said however, nature has done a good job of encasing those bone fragments. He said we debated about it, that you're doing real well, and we're debating about whether to go in there and stir up infection. He said, but then you have another problem, that on the right side, an adhesion that I had on my brain, and he was concerned whether the adhesion should continue to grow and pull the brain, my brain out of socket, and then he said you would be in trouble. So they went ahead and did the surgery and did exactly what they suspected they might do, they stirred up an infection. Meningitis followed the infection. I got a hundred thousand units of penicillin every hour for nine days and that was before they started putting it in your arm intravenously, that was -- they had to have a muscle to inject it into, and they'd run out of room on my rear end and come down my thigh, and after nine days, they cut it

back to every three hours, and that lasted another couple of weeks.

FEMALE: When you got out of the prison camp, they just took you directly to the hospital?

WS: Well, we laid over in Japan there for a month before we got an export out of (inaudible) to Guam, and was in the field hospital there for ten days. They didn't do any treating or examining or anything in Guam, they just -- we just had a bunk.

FEMALE: Were you the only one injured?

WS: Huh?

FEMALE: Were you the only one injured by bullet fire?

WS: No. There was another man, a good friend of mine, that also had a head wound, but he had a helmet on. When that bullet went through the helmet it flattened it out and it looked like you could take an ice cream scoop and scoop the scalp out, but then will be -- well he didn't have the same problems that I had, it didn't penetrate the brain.

MC: Were you the most seriously wounded of the survivors there on Wake?

WS: Well, of those on Wilkes. One of the pilots named Webb, Henry G. Webb, his name, but we called him his nickname, "Spider," which is quite natural for anybody that's named Webb. He still has a bullet in his knee but he lost two

toes on one foot. He had two bullets that went through his stomach, through his abdomen. He had been on the morning patrol, but he was trying to get back to his plane to get in the air and the doctors had opened him up and examined him, and they told him, if you'd have had a sandwich, he would have got an intestine, but those two bullets that went through his abdomen, they didn't touch an organ at all. Didn't touch an intestine, because his stomach was empty.

MC: Was this machinegun fire that hit him?

WS: Yeah, from the airplanes.

FEMALE: He still has a bullet in his knee?

WS: He still has one in his knee, at least the last time that I talked with him. Spider and I communicated for oh, a good long time, but last -- well, his letters had gotten to the point, he had quit typing them and started handwriting them, and I'd have to read them four or five times to make sense out of them. What I didn't realize was that it was the onset of Alzheimer's. He's still alive but he's -- I can't communicate with him. His wife won't let me talk to him.

FEMALE: Where did you meet him?

WS: (overlapping). He stayed in the service long enough to qualify on some of the newer airplanes and then he went

into the Reserves to finish his retirement. He went to law school and practiced law in Washington, D.C. for 35 years. Now, Spider is a short fellow, a very small man. The first time I saw him was I ran into him oh, about 1980 I guess, in Detroit. When I walked into the lobby of the hotel, a couple men came over; a man back here wants to see you. He's been asking about you. I said well, let me just check in. No, he said he wants to see me right now. Well, I went back and it was Spider, and he grabbed me and hugged me and we exchanged our greetings and we stepped back and he says, "Damn, Slick, you've put on a pound or two." And I looked down at him and boy, if that's not the pot calling the kettle black, because he was as round as he was tall, and he's always been real slender, you know? He was as round as he was tall.

MC: How did you get the nickname Slick, by the way?

WS: Well, it had nothing to do with my character or my morals. Most of the people assumed that when I got to Zentsuji. Some of the contractors working over at the -- in the area around the Pan Am Hospital, found Dr. Shank's surgical tools, instruments, and a pair of hair clippers. They cleaned them up and brought them to Dr. Shank, and Dr. Shank cut my hair. Now, I had -- it was real matted, just… Well then he says now you can go get in the shower. So I

took a shower and got my head cleaned up, went back to lay down on my bunk and one of the nurses came and gave me a little bitty bottle of pomade, which reminded me of Vaseline with a little perfume in it, and he says, “Dr. Shank said that he thought you might need this.” About five minutes later Dr. Shank walked by and he didn’t even break his stride as he went by. He just said, “How are you doing, Slick?”

MC: Oh boy, so that’s how it happened.

WS: And that name, Slick, stuck with me and all of that group that I was there on Wake, when we got into Zentsuji, they were calling me Slick. And so the people at Zentsuji didn’t know anything but Slick. As a matter of fact, most of the time, if you called me by my name or said my name, nobody knows who you’re talking about. It was just over the fact that Dr. Shank had cut all my hair off.

MC: All right, that’s interesting. So, you never had a nickname before that, right?

WS: No. [Addresses the dog.] Come on, come up here. Come on.

MC: Have you got a good place that you like to eat?

WS: Well, about 95 percent of the restaurants here are Mexican.

MC: Yeah.

(break in audio)

MC: About the only other thing really, that I think we might talk a little bit more about, is how you rehabbed yourself, you know, just working on your own. We talked about it some yesterday.

WS: Well, I had no use of my left arm or leg, condition. But I was just standing at the end of the bunk, or in a doorframe, so that I could brace myself with my right one. Sometimes I'd have to get someone else to help me get my left hand started. Or if I could lean against the door, I could reach over here and start it myself. Once I got it started, I could keep it swinging. And I was down there for maybe 15 minutes, and just let my arm swing back and forth. Then I would do the same thing with my leg, that's put my weight on my right foot and get my left leg to swing. I worked at this for quite a while. Of course, I walked as much as I could walk, as much as the compound, the confines of the compound would permit me to walk. Then, once I got to getting around pretty well, Dr. Shank kept me on the chow detail, so twice a day, I had to walk all the way to the galley and back. I know, I'm quite confident, that the reason that he kept me there was because he wanted me to exercise. Now, once I got to Zentsuji, Dr. Van Peenan was able to keep me in camp on

light duty, helping the cooks chop vegetables and these sorts of things.

MC: Right, right.

WS: But I would continue to exercise my arm and my leg.

MC: How long, how many weeks or whatever passed, before you could get up and be mobile on your own?

WS: I would say probably in six weeks, I was able to walk, but I would drag my foot a lot. I would hang out just by the gate. My leg seemed to come back quicker than my arm, and then it reached a point where the improvement was so gradual, that you couldn't notice it from day to day or even from week to week. It just would seem like you'd discover one day you was able to do something that you hadn't been able to do.

MC: Right, right.

WS: And just how long that thing had taken is difficult to say, because you didn't realize that it was happening, it was so gradual. Kind of like my headache. Dr. Shank told me that aspirins wouldn't do it any good and if he gave me enough narcotics to do it any good, that I'd be an addict, so for me to get used to it. And this I did, and it diminished so gradually that I couldn't tell you the days that it would hurt, it was so gradual. I would say a good two years.

MC: Now, did they -- there was no real treatment given to your wound, other than just to keep it bandaged and to let it heal, right?

WS: That's correct. Now I'm told that they took maggots out of it, but I don't know that I ever saw the maggots. You couldn't see the wound, but I'm told that there were maggots. Of course, I'm also told that maggots had been used to help heal wounds, because they won't eat anything but dead flesh. Understand, that this was burnt pretty badly, that bullet was real hot, that's why my head felt like I had stuck it in an oven.

MC: Now, was this a rifle bullet or you think it was a machinegun bullet?

WS: No, it was a rifle bullet.

MC: It was a rifle bullet.

WS: Very definitely.

MC: Okay. You all left Wake, you said about May 1st of '42, right?

WS: Yeah. Here again, where faith comes in, Mark. We didn't have to go on the Nitta Maru, where they had them down in the hole of the ship.

MC: Right, right.

WS: We went on the Asama Maru, which is one of their premiere liners that they were using it as transport.

MC: How do you spell that? Asama Maru?

WS: Asama. A-S-A-M-A.

MC: S-O-M-A. M-A-R-U.

WS: Huh?

MC: S-O-M-A. M-A-R-U. Soma Maru.

WS: The Maru ship.

MC: Yeah, I know, right.

WS: There only were 20 of us, we weren't crowded. We were down in the swimming pool area, not in the pool itself, it had about 12 inches of water in it. We had straw mats on the floor, and one small 25-watt lamp hanging down the middle. But we had -- but we weren't crowded and we also had sanitary facilities that the other men didn't enjoy on the Nitta Maru. Missing something?

MC: Well, I thought of something and then it just went away, just you know instantly.

WS: Yeah, I can understand that.

MC: Before I could frame a question.

WS: I understand that.

MC: Oh, I know what it was. When was the first time that you had any contact with the outside world after you were taken to Japan?

WS: Well, explain that question. What do you mean by outside world?

MC: Well, I mean when you were contacted by somebody that might have been able to get word to your family or whatever, you know, that you were still alive.

WS: I was never contacted by anyone.

MC: Were you ever visited by a Red Cross representative?

WS: Red Cross representatives had been coming to the camp on occasions, but you have to understand, the Japanese made -- the Red Cross movements were approved by the Japanese. So the Japanese knew when they were coming to Zentsuji, so there would be a big clean up the damn camp, and then there would be possibly meat in the soup on the day that the Red Cross was there.

MC: Right, right.

WS: They were there several times, but I never had any personal contact with anyone of them.

MC: So, well, but you were not able to send or receive any sort of mail between yourself and your family?

WS: Well, when we -- after arriving in Zentsuji, I met a Commander Newman, that had been captured in Guam, he lived in Philadelphia, but his family lived in Texas City, I knew of his family. But, and I believe that he got a letter out before me, to his family, that I was there in the camp.

MC: I see. So, your parents knew that you were alive before you got home?

WS: Yeah. They would let us write a letter, but it was restricted to 125 words. We would write the letter out in hand, and then it would be typed up and we would sign it. This eliminated censoring by cutting out. I suppose that all told, that we got maybe four or five letters out during the time that I was in Zentsuji. I remember the time when they decided we could write a postcard of 25 words each month. Most all of us participated in that, but when the war was over, we found the majority of those postcards in a closet in the Japanese office. They had never left the camp.

MC: But you said that for many months, nobody really knew where you all were, once you got over there.

WS: Well, now, yes taken, it was, I think the fall of ’42 before my parents actually knew.

MC: How did they find out? Did you get a letter out to them in that time?

WS: Well, I think the government notified them. Once I left Ofuna, the Japanese reported me as being a prisoner of war.

MC: Oh, I see.

WS: You wee, when I arrived at Ofuna, they said that we had not been reported as prisoners of war, and that the Red Cross didn’t know we were there.

MC: Ofuna, is that O-F-U-N-A?

WS: That’s correct.

MC: And it was the first camp that you were taken to?

WS: Yes. A naval interrogation camp, and we were held in cells, not permitted to talk, even to our cell mate. The interrogators came from out of the camp. A little bit of everything. The first brigade that was on Midway. But they also dwelled on Roosevelt. There seemed to be a burning desire on their part to get somebody who would denounce Roosevelt. Of course, I wasn’t about to.

MC: How long did you stay at Ofuna?

WS: I was there only -- I was only there a couple of months.

FEMALE: Were you interrogated?

WS: Maybe a couple, three months at the most.

FEMALE: Did they interrogate you every day?

WS: No. The first time they interrogated me, it was right at lunchtime. The guards come around and of course the doors in the cells were open. The guard came around and put a little bowl of soup and rice down and then a guard approached from the opposite side of the door and got me by the arm and took me to his office. And of course, I thought it a coincidence that it was right at lunchtime. And of course, by the time I returned to my cell, the food had been picked back up, and my cellmate hadn’t eaten it, because he knew better. Not because of what I would do,

because of what the Japs would do. But it was quite odd. They sat me down at this desk and then the guard stood outside the door with his back against the wall. The two -- [dog barks] -- disappeared; they were going to have lunch. This desk was littered with papers from one end to the other, but laid very smoothly out on top of it was a map of Midway, a very detailed map of Midway. Much more detailed than I could ever produce. So when they came back in, oh I guess I was in there a good 30 minutes, waiting for them to return, and I convinced myself that that map was there for my benefit, because then when they told me that they knew the answers to some of the questions, so they wanted to know when I was lying.

MC: They knew you had been on Midway, right? So is this before the Battle of Midway?

WS: Yeah, it sure was. So, they asked me to draw a map of Midway. The island is between two islands, separated, they all are separated by the channel. Sand Island has most of the armament and the Pan Am Hotel and quarters for the Marines. Eastern Island was where the airstrip was. Well, (inaudible), to place the five-inch guns in the approximate area. Now, understanding that the five-inch guns had been installed out there on these platforms, with concrete, forms had been poured. And they were simply waiting for.

MC: You said those concrete forms took seven minutes to cure, so they could put the --

WS: Yeah. They would have been cured out and they would have been moved by that time.

MC: Right, right.

WS: Also, the war had been in progress some five or six months. So in my opinion, they certainly would have had reinforcements out there, you know within that length of time. So that I, I really didn't have any information that was of any real value, because they knew more about the island than I did, of course, in detail. But then I denied knowing where the machineguns were, the three-inch guns, the antiaircraft. I denied ever having been on Eastern Island, because I didn't want to get into the fact that that's where the airstrip was. But I was confident they knew what was there. They ended up telling me that they thought I was lying. They would -- they'd get away from Eastern Island, talk about the Yankees baseball team or some train or some movie star, and then all of a sudden, --

MC: Get back to that.

WS: They'd be back to Eastern Island and I have never been over there, so I don't know.

MC: These guys spoke perfect English?

WS: Huh?

MC: Did these guys speak perfect English?

WS: Oh, absolutely, no accent at all. And I said now look, when they thought I was lying. Understand that I was just a PFC, a private, I said. And the Japanese (inaudible) private out here to a particular battle station.

(break in audio)

MC: Tell me at what point that you've had -- that picture of Dr. Ozeki and his family.

WS: Where is that?

MC: That was in Greg's book too. Maybe he borrowed it and didn't give it back to you.

WS: Did I show you this one? That one there is McAlister.

MC: Right.

WS: They worried about me falling in the ward, knocking into the walls, I'd do that periodically.

MC: Oh yeah, this was made in '95, right?

WS: Yeah.

MC: Now, which one of these is Hiroko do you know?

WS: I don't know.

MC: You don't know?

WS: I would not know. This is Dr. Ozeki, this is his wife.

MC: That's probably her, that's probably here up there.

WS: This is his son, who is also a doctor. He's continued.

MC: Yeah. Well now would her name be Ozeki? I guess it was, wasn't it?

WS: Yeah. Unless she's gotten married.

MC: I don't know that she has.

WS: Well, his two granddaughters have been coming for the summers, to LSU.

MC: Yeah, I knew they had, someone told me that. Here you are again, right?

WS: That's a picture that was taken in prison camp.

MC: Oh, it was?

WS: Yeah. The Japanese took those pictures of the officers for identification purposes and then they sold them to us. Now this, "Fingers" Brown, he got his nickname of Fingers. He has real big hands; he was just a big overgrown kid when he went out. He had went to Ofuna and could have been there, our time could have overlapped. He and I were in the same room for oh, a good way, a long, long time. But I did not know that he had been at Ofuna and he didn't know that I had been to Ofuna, until he wrote this book. Now that's an easy reading book. Of course, he admits that since he had written a book, coming to some of the reunions, he's learned that there's a lot of things that went on in Zentsuji that he didn't know about.

MC: Well, do you suppose that this book -- was this book ever circulated or was it just?

WS: Well, now, it’s not available in a bookstore, it’s available through Fingers.

MC: Is he still living?

WS: Yeah.

MC: Oh, the guy I asked you about at lunch, the one that lives in Utah, that you said had an interesting, might have an interesting story.

WS: Oh. [Arty Stokes?].

MC: Arty Stokes, right.

WS: Yeah. Do you have a copy of our mailing list?

MC: No, but I can get his address from Frank Gross, I’m sure. As a matter of fact, I may even have it. He gave me a bunch of names of people that I haven’t had a chance to call yet. Okay now Fingers, he was -- was he on Wake?

WS: No.

MC: He was from somewhere else, right?

WS: He was a lineman, he was a member of a PBY crew, flying patrol out of the Aleutian Islands, and was shot down in that icy water up there. I think there was only three of them that survived.

MC: Do you have an address for him? This, Cape Girardeau, Missouri, but I don’t know.

WS: His most current address, he didn’t move in and out of the county, not change his name. If you’re thinking about ordering one from him, he gets $14.50 for them.

MC: Okay.

WS: That includes shipping. He would sit on a crate of oranges and talk to the guard and steal oranges out of that crate. That’s where he got the nickname of Fingers.

MC: Yeah, I will definitely get one of these. Well, you’re probably tired of this and I think I’ve about run out of questions. I’m sure I’ll think of others but you know, I can always call you and we can chat a little bit on the phone.

WS: Okay.

END OF AUDIO FILE