

John Pierce Oral History Interview

ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler. Today is the 26th of March, 2012. I'm interviewing Mr. John Pierce, in Fredericksburg, Texas. And this interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So let me start, John, by thanking you for spending the time this afternoon to share your World War II experiences with us. And I'd like to start by having you just give us your full name, date and place of birth, and then we'll take it from there.

JOHN PIERCE: Okay. Well, I'm John Pierce. I was born in Carbon, Texas, in 1923.

EM: Where in Texas?

JP: Carbon.

EM: Carbon. Where is that?

JP: That's close to Eastland or Cisco. I mean, it's around the area. Really, it's northwest of us from here. And my dad was a schoolteacher. In fact, he was a superintendent of the schools. And I've moved all over the state because of that. I've lived in east Texas, west Texas...

EM: But always in Texas.

JP: Always been in Texas.

EM: We got to be clear about that.

JP: (laughter) Always been in Texas. The only time I spent out of Texas was when I was in the service.

EM: Yeah, when you went to someplace called the South Pacific -
-

JP: That's right.

EM: -- or the Pacific. Yeah. Now, did you have brothers and sisters?

JP: Yes, I had three brothers and two sisters. There were six of us in the family.

EM: Were you the oldest? The youngest?

JP: No, I was next to oldest. My oldest brother is deceased, and my youngest brother is deceased, so there's two boys and two girls are still left.

EM: Did your brothers serve in the military during the war?

JP: My older brother did, and my younger brother, he was too young for that, but he was in the -- during the time of the Korean War.

EM: That was at least as messy as World War II.

JP: Yeah.

EM: So -- and your mother, she stayed at home and took care of the kids, huh?

JP: Oh, yes. Uh-huh. And of course, my dad -- I went to four different high schools. (laughs)

EM: How long did you live in Carbon before you moved?

JP: Well, I just was really born -- my grandfather was a doctor, and my mother and dad were there at the time she gave birth, and so he delivered me there at his home there in Carbon. So that's -- several years later, I moved back to Carbon. My dad was superintendent of the schools there, for a while, there in Carbon, and I went to -- oh, junior high and -- from about the sixth grade through the eighth grade, ninth grade, or something like that.

EM: Yeah, what we call middle school now, but back then they called it junior high.

JP: Yeah, junior high. And was there -- I was there in Carbon when I finished junior high, I guess you'd call it.

EM: And where did you go to high school then?

JP: Well, I went to high school, the first year, in Leonard. Leonard. That's up close to Greenville, Texas. Do you know where Greenville...?

EM: Oh, yeah. That's up in -- north of Dallas, [isn't it?]

JP: North of Dallas. And I went first year there -- well, I went -- I finished the eighth and ninth grade there in Leonard, and my first year in high school. And then I moved to -- my dad was superintendent of the school there,

and he moved to a job in Wylie, Texas, which is north of Dallas. And that was my junior year. My senior year, I was in Gainesville, Texas. (laughs)

EM: You didn't hardly make friends before you moved.

JP: No, I sure didn't. And then I graduated from high school in Denton, Texas.

EM: My word. All up there kind of in the Dallas area, north of Dallas. Yeah, yeah.

JP: (laughs) Right. In that area.

EM: So if you were born in '23, that means in '41, you were 18 years old, so you must have been just coming out of high school.

JP: Yeah. Well, I was just out of high school, and the fact is, I was in the first registered for 19-year-olds. I registered when I was 19 year old to the draft.

EM: What is your day of birth? What day were you born?

JP: July 31st.

EM: Okay. So July 31st. So 19 -- so you graduated just before you were 19.

JP: Right.

EM: You registered the draft right then, in July.

JP: Well, I graduated in '42.

EM: Oh, you were still in high school.

JP: Yeah, I was still -- I graduated -- in 1942, I graduated from high school.

EM: Okay, so you were a senior when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

JP: Yeah. Mm-hmm, yeah. Actually, I was living with my brother. We had a boarding house there in Dallas, when Pearl Harbor, and I remember [it was?] Sunday morning, getting up and going down to the drugstore. I forgot now what -- I went down for something. And I heard it on the radio about Pearl Harbor, so I went back to the house, and we turned the radio on (laughs) and started listening to it then.

EM: What was everybody's reaction?

JP: Well, everybody's just stunned, you know. I told my brother. I told him, I said, "My gosh, they're having a" -- about Pearl Harbor, I said, "They've attacked in the Philippines there -- I mean, in Hawaii." So we turned the radio on and started listening to it.

EM: Yeah? And so you weren't -- at that point, you were already registered for the draft?

JP: Well, I registered, and I was working in a defense plant, a machinist. And as soon as they got word that I was -- (laughs) I was in a draft age, well, they let me go. (laughs)

EM: Oh, really? They figured you weren't long for this world, anyhow, huh?

JP: Well, I guess they did it so that they wouldn't have to hold a job for me when I came back. (laughs)

EM: Did they have to do -- they didn't have to do that.

JP: No, they didn't have to do it. But I went to work -- after that, I went to work for an aircraft company. All they did was make parts in a machine shop, so I was a machinist. I had gone to a machinist school in Dallas and learned the trade of a machinist. So I had good training.

EM: That training came in handy for the war.

JP: Luckily, when I was drafted, I was in an ordinance company. I was in a heavy maintenance ordinance company, the 284th Ordinance Company. And it was a heavy maintenance. We did mostly work on amphibious tanks.

EM: Well, now, you were drafted into the --

JP: Yes. Uh-huh.

EM: So where did you have to go to be --

JP: Well, I was in Houston, and so I went from Houston to San Antonio, then, to --

EM: Boot camp, or...?

JP: Well, not to boot camp, but to -- what's the base there?

EM: Fort Sam.

JP: Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. In fact, that's where I was also discharged from. But they --

EM: So what did they do to you there?

JP: Well, they formed a unit, and all it was, was just the ones just about 19 years old. They formed a company from Texas and Oklahoma. That was the first -- 104, I think, was -- I'm not for sure about the number of the company I was with at first. And I got my boot camp there. But I wasn't there very long, when they sent me to Aberdeen, Maryland, to a machinist school. Since I'd had machinist work, well, they gave me an advanced course in machine shop.

EM: Did they give you tests and stuff --

JP: Oh, yeah. With running the lathes, and milling machines, and operating the machines there.

EM: So off you went to Maryland.

JP: Yeah.

EM: What happened there?

JP: Well, there's where I got to see a little bit more of the United States (laughs) there, because we went to New York, and to Washington, and from there, I'd be on leave, and went up into there and saw some of the country up there.

EM: Yeah. So what was the training like there?

JP: Well, it was just the machine shop course. We had lathes, milling machines, and we did work on them. And since I'd

already had a course in it, well, this just advanced me some more on it.

EM: It wasn't anything new to you, though. You felt pretty familiar [around?]?

JP: Familiar with. Pretty well familiar with all of it. But we just had a lot of different exams and so forth that we had to take there.

EM: And now this is what? Early '42?

JP: Yeah.

EM: Are you up there during the winter?

JP: Oh, gosh, you know, I don't remember.

EM: Don't remember the weather. Then it probably wasn't winter. (laughs)

JP: I don't remember the weather being too bad. I don't think it was that cold. I don't remember it, but...

EM: Yeah, well, it was probably in the spring.

JP: Yeah. It can get pretty cold up there, but I don't remember, so it was bound to have been more in the summertime that I was there, because -- just like I was trying to remember when I was inducted, and I've got my discharge papers and stuff that shows when I was in, and that sort of thing.

EM: Yeah. So right after you completed your machinist training, what did they do with you then?

JP: Okay. I came back to the company I was with, and they transferred me and several others out to the 284th Ordinance Company. And so I went to --

EM: Where were they located?

JP: Well, they -- all of them that were in the company were from New Jersey. (laughs)

EM: Oh, boy. That was an eye-opener, wasn't it, for a Texas boy?

JP: I learned how to talk Yankee.

EM: (laughter) I mean, it is different.

JP: It is. Because when I came home, the first time I got the chance to come home after being with them, they said they couldn't hardly understand me.

EM: (laughter) I'll be darned. So where were they headquartered?

JP: Well, they were in Louisiana. That's where we had our basic training, there in Louisiana. And the fact is, both the ordinance companies were in Louisiana, and when I transferred into the 284th, well, we got our orders pretty soon after that to go to the Pacific theater. We left out there -- I can't remember dates on it, but I remember being there in California, and we went under the Golden Gate Bridge.

EM: So you went out from San Francisco.

JP: Went from San Francisco.

EM: So how did you get out to the West Coast?

JP: Well, by train, just -- they transported us by train. Just like it was. We went from trains, from Houston to San Antonio, and it took us almost 24 hours. We took sidetracks, and we did this. Fact is, we stopped at one little place. I don't know where it was. But we hadn't had anything to eat, and there's a little store there. We went in, and we bought everything (laughs) that he had to eat.

EM: You cleaned him out, did you?

JP: We cleaned him out.

EM: (laughter) Well, probably those trains, probably, didn't have priority --

JP: No, they didn't.

EM: -- over freight trains carrying military --

JP: They didn't. Yeah, we had sidetrack for everything.

EM: So then you went on out to the West Coast.

JP: Went to the West Coast, and wasn't there very long, until we left out of San Francisco.

EM: Now, how many guys in your company? I mean, was this...?

JP: Two hundred and some odd. I don't remember just exactly.

EM: And all the rest of them were from New Jersey.

JP: Yeah.

EM: Except for you.

JP: Well, there were six of us from Texas. (laughter) So we became Yankees pretty quick.

EM: (laughter) You converted over to the dark side.

JP: (laughter) Right. Yeah.

EM: So when did you know where you were going to be headed when you went (inaudible)?

JP: Well, we didn't really know until we got to San Francisco. And then we were there. We didn't have any kind of leave or anything. We were just kept there on camp until they put us on a train and took us down to a boat. And they took us by boat, then, to the transport ship, in there, in San Francisco. We were -- I don't know where it was, but we were up in the mountains, somewhere up in there.

EM: You were up in a camp up in the hills.

JP: Up in the hills from --

EM: In the coastal [great?] hills, yeah.

JP: Right. And then we joined then -- went to Hawaii. It was quite a trip on that first time I'd been onboard a ship.

(laughs)

EM: Did California look different to you, and different than what you expected? I mean...

JP: Well, no. It looked about the same, you know.

EM: Okay. All right, so no big surprises there.

JP: [Pretty well?] the same. Wasn't any big surprises. I was stationed in Hawaii, then, for about six months, right out of Honolulu.

EM: Well, now, on your first -- you mentioned your first ride on a ship on the ocean. Did you get seasick?

JP: Well, really didn't get seasick until we got close to Hawaii. When we got close to Hawaii, it just settled it out, and there was just swells. And I think every sailor onboard that ship got sick, too. (laughs) I mean, it was -- that's an unusual feeling on that. There's no waves. There's just swells up and down. And I think -- like I say, I think everybody got sick on that one.

EM: What were the conditions like on -- and this is what, like a troop ship?

JP: Yeah, it was a troop ship.

EM: I mean, were you crowded? I mean, was the food lousy? What was it like?

JP: Well, no, the food was pretty good. We had bunks, and I think they were about two or three deep on bunks, you know. And kind of a -- I guess you'd call the beds sort of like a hammock, you know. I remember getting into Hawaii. Well, we did dock right there at Pearl Harbor. Went in there at Pearl Harbor. And of course, being stationed out there, I went into Honolulu several times, so I went throughout

there to see where the ships had been that had been sunk,
and so forth.

EM: What did it look like?

JP: Well, they had gotten pretty much all of it cleared up, but
there were some of them that I guess are still there.

EM: Well, the *Arizona's* still there. It's a memorial.

JP: Yeah, there's memorials. But they had some pretty good
interesting information about which ships had been in
there, and which ones were sunk, and this sort of thing.

EM: What was Honolulu like?

JP: Well, it was pretty good, except it was full of servicemen.

EM: Yeah. Surprise, surprise.

JP: (laughter) No, we got a leave to go in, and that's all we
saw, was servicemen. (laughs)

EM: Yeah. Four deep at the bar, huh?

JP: Right. (laughter) Yeah.

EM: So roughly how long were you in the Hawaiian Islands before
you went on --

JP: Well, that was about six months.

EM: So what timeframe are we talking about now?

JP: Well, that's -- I guess it was about six months or so that
I was in the States, close to it. Or -- well, it was less
than six months that we were in the States at boot camp and
at basic training. And of course, I was given a corporal

rating, T-5 rating. It's a corporal's rating. I had to have that to go to school. So I got that. I was the first one in the company to do that. (laughs) Which was quite an experience. And they had a -- there at Aberdeen, they had a pretty good camp there, pretty good training camp. And of course, we -- it's a sort of funny thing that we got a bunch of Marines in there. We had a first sergeant that was pretty strict. We got a bunch of Marines come in, going there, said, "Boy, we're going to get him straightened out." They did. They got him off, and they got one that was tougher than he was.

EM: Oh, no. (laughter) Sometimes you've got to be careful. You can get yourself in deeper.

JP: Sure do get in deeper.

EM: Yeah, yeah. Well, now, when you were in Hawaii and in the time before, were you kind of sticking together with your Texas buddies, or were you making friends with -- I mean, how was that?

JP: Well, no. I just had to make friends with the ones in the company, because, like I say, there was about six of us that were from Texas, and before we had gone into the company, well, I really didn't know them. But I got -- stayed acquainted with them pretty well.

EM: So you got to know some of the "Joisey" guys, too.

JP: From New "Joisey."

EM: (laughter) Were they pretty nice? I mean...?

JP: Oh, yeah. They were. They were very good. They were real -- they made pretty -- well, I guess my best buddy was from Waukegan, Illinois.

EM: Oh, that's not New Jersey.

JP: No, but he was in the company, though. (laughter) How he got in there, I don't know. But anyway, he was, I remember, from Waukegan, because that's Jack Benny's -- (laughs).

EM: Now, I hadn't thought about that. So if we're talking about an ordinance company, now, what kind of skills do we have in that?

JP: Okay. We've got mechanics. We've got welders. We've got machinists. And we had trucks that had the milling machines in them, and trucks that had lathes in them, and drill presses in them, and stuff like that.

EM: So you were a mobile machine shop.

JP: We were a mobile machine shop. That's what we were. And when we landed, we got there in Hawaii, we set up there. We had tents there to live in and all. And I do remember one thing. It was through pretty much of the rainy season we were there. So I guess it must have been during the summertime.

EM: Yeah, I don't know which seasons are which.

JP: I don't know what season it is, but I remember it rained a awful lot.

EM: So you were there for about six months, and then they decided they needed you out closer to the front lines?

JP: Well, then they shipped our unit. We weren't really attached to any particular army. I don't know. We were attached to the Third Army; I know that, at one time. But when we went into -- we left there and went to the Philippines, the invasion of the Philippines.

EM: Now was this the big island?

JP: Well, no. Leyte.

EM: It was Leyte. Leyte's where they started, and they ended up on Luzon.

JP: Right. Yeah. I remember pretty well in Leyte, because we stayed out there -- it took us 43 days from Hawaii to Leyte Island, there. (laughs)

EM: Whoa, that's a long ride.

JP: That is a long time. And I'll tell you, I never got so many navy beans and ketchup in my life. (laughs)

EM: So that's not something you eat every day now, huh?

JP: That's something you don't. Well, I don't like ketchup, even now. I like the navy beans, but --

EM: Never got over that, huh?

JP: Never got over the ketchup taste.

EM: (laughter) So what are you doing on this -- so, you're in, what, another troop ship?

JP: Well, no, we're on an LST. And they had -- what it is, it's just -- the whole inside is just made up for -- that you can put trucks in there, and then they drop -- they have the front of it so it just drops down, and you just drive out of it on the beach. And of course, we were loaded the same way. And I remember we -- the night before we landed, all night long, they had the battleships out there, and they had the whole -- I think the whole Navy, because I'll tell you, there was -- I don't see how anything could've lived after --

EM: Lived through that.

JP: You know, it was all night long, that they shelled it. Next morning, well, they invaded it, by the amphibious tanks that went in and invaded. And then that afternoon, we went in, and our LSTs came in and docked.

EM: You came in right behind them.

JP: Right behind them. And the strange part about it was, I had the machine shop. I was a driver, and I had an assistant driver. And we were the second truck. We had a Jeep in front of us. Well, they dropped the ramp down in the water. Well, the Jeep went across, and I mean, I had a

heavy truck with some -- loaded with steel behind it, because I didn't -- was going to have to make [porch?], and there's not any place to get any steel or anything. So I had --

EM: You had to bring your own bar stock and everything else.

JP: The whole -- yeah. Got all the bar stock. And that was a heavy trailer, took.

EM: So what is this, just like an Army truck with two, four, s-
- eight wheeler? Eight wheels [in back?]?

JP: No, six. Well, it's called a six by six. They said six-wheel drive.

EM: So what was it, a Dodge, or -- do you remember?

JP: I don't remember.

EM: It doesn't matter, I guess.

JP: I don't remember what it was, what make it was. But I know that when I started off, like I say, I was the second one out. Well, I just put it in the low gear it had, and all-wheel drive, and I mean, when I went off that thing, I gunned it, went on through. The next one after me got stuck. Well, we didn't know that until we'd got quite a ways from the ship. And finally the lieutenant and his driver stopped in the Jeep. He said, "Well, there's nobody back behind us. We're going to have to wait for them." He's going to have to go back and check on them. Well, it

started getting dark. You know, it was in the afternoon, and it started getting a little dark before they got back out. And we were sitting there in the truck, and those guys out there in the foxholes said, "You'd better get yourself out of there and out of that truck, and get over here, and dig you a hole, and get in it." Said these snipers are shooting everywhere around here. So we did that. And here it was, we were out here all by ourself. Didn't know where we were going to go. (laughs) So I guess that was about as scary a point as I had. Didn't know where I was, or where I was going to go.

EM: And here you are, just a machinist. It's not like you're an infantryman or anything.

JP: Well, yeah. We didn't even have any rifles.

EM: You weren't even armed.

JP: No. We didn't have any arms. So we got out there, and -- we did have -- had our backpacks that had the shovels in it, and we got out there and dug us a couple of foxholes, and got in a foxhole. There were several --

EM: This was what, right on the beach area?

JP: Well, it was sort of on the beach area. It was a little off of it. But we didn't get very far from the beach along the whole road. But I know that there were some bullet holes in my truck (laughs) that I discovered a day or two

later. (laughs) So it was a good thing we got out of the trucks. That made it a little more scary.

EM: Yeah. Did they finally get the stuck truck?

JP: Oh, yeah. What had happened, they had a, what they call a 10-ton wrecker. And guess where it was? It was on the opposite end of the ship. They had to juggle the cars around, trucks around, to get that thing up there, to get this one unstuck. So that took quite a while to do it. And finally they came up. And it was after dark when they got there.

EM: Did you guys go in in the morning?

JP: No, we went in in the afternoon.

EM: They probably landed in the morning, and you came along --

JP: They landed in the morning, and in the afternoon, then, we landed our vehicles. No, when they said, oh, you'll be in an ordinance company. You'll be a long way from any kind of action.

EM: Right. (laughter) So you demonstrated your ability to dig a whole pretty quick.

JP: I did pretty fast. I learned how to dig a hole pretty fast.

EM: So how long before you were able to set up shop and start doing --

JP: Well, they got to us that night, and then we had to drive under blackout. You know, they have the blackout lights. And we drove -- they knew the area we were going to go to, so they led us on up out to the area where we were going to stay. Of course, we just stayed in the trucks that night. And they were about the safest place to be. Then the next morning, well, we started setting up camp.

EM: So it's just you and the --

JP: Assistant driver.

EM: Just the two of you --

JP: Just the two of us. And then whenever the rest of us [drove in behind?], the whole company joined us after that. And we were out there in the foxhole when they drove up. (laughs) Went looking for us, and we said, we're over here in the foxhole. (laughter) They said there's too many snipers around. And they did. Every once in awhile, they'd open up some fire.

EM: Zing, huh?

JP: Yeah.

EM: So did you ever see any of the Japanese at that point?

JP: No, I didn't see them, didn't see any of them. Just if one opened up and fired, it didn't take a little bit, and I mean, it just, brr-rat-a-tat-tat, brr-rat, brr-rat-tat-tat-tat. And they got them pretty quick. They located them.

The troops that were assault troops located the snipers pretty quick. Once they'd fire, they located them awfully fast.

EM: So what kind of food are you eating? Are you eating...?

JP: Well, K-rations, yeah. C-rations, K-rations. And then we got set up in camp, and of course, we had our kitchen, and we had our cooks and everything that was with them there.

EM: So is that inland now?

JP: Yeah. Well, actually, it wasn't very far off the shoreline. It wasn't very far off. And that -- the night, the first night -- that was the first night. The second night we were there, they had the big guns, brought them in, right next to us. One-oh-five howitzers.

EM: The big ones.

JP: Big ones. And I'm telling you, we didn't get any sleep at all.

EM: (laughter) It's tough to sleep through one of those going off, I bet.

JP: But you know, it was a strange thing. If they heard an anti-aircraft gun, we'd wake up, jump up right quick, and got to a foxhole. Because there's as much shrapnel comes out. [That's the?] AA, ack-ack guns, or anti-aircraft guns.

EM: Comes out of the sky, doesn't it?

JP: Yeah, it does.

EM: What goes up has to come down.

JP: It has to come down. We had a lot of our tents that had some pretty big holes in them, too, and mosquito netting. We had to have mosquito netting, because, oh, the mosquitoes were bad.

EM: So it was really tropical, then, huh?

JP: It was really tropical. Yeah.

EM: Did you get malaria or any of that?

JP: No, no. Don't know of anybody that got malaria.

EM: Did they make you take the pills ahead of time?

JP: I think so. I'm sure they did, because they gave us pills and stuff. Salt pills and other pills that they gave us. The bad part about it was, we got in an area that, right next to us -- we had our mess hall set up right there, and right next to us, they had bulldozed out, and put a lot of the Japanese -- dead Japanese in there. (laughs) So it was quite a stench. And there it was -- our mess hall was right next to it.

EM: I thought you were getting ready to tell me that's where they dug the latrine, but that's even worse.

JP: (laughs) Oh, yeah, it was. But they pretty well got them covered up, though. They just took a bulldozer and dug a big long trench, and then covered it over.

EM: That's what they call mass graves, I think.

JP: Yeah, that's it.

EM: Man, man. Well, now, how long were you on Leyte, do you remember?

JP: I was on until the invasion of Okinawa. We went from there to Okinawa.

EM: Yeah, because Leyte was in October of '44, as I remember.

JP: Oh, I guess that's about right.

EM: And Okinawa was June of '45.

JP: When?

EM: June of '45.

JP: Well, June of '45. Well, we made the landing there on Okinawa, too.

EM: Now, one of the things that happened in the Leyte invasion is they had a major naval battle right there off the coast.

JP: Oh, yeah. They did.

EM: The Battle of Leyte Gulf. And I know a lot of the Army guys that were on the island, they tell me what it was like listening to all that. Tell me about that.

JP: Oh, yeah. Well, it was just a lot of firing, a lot of -- of course, the thing is that they had the air power. If we saw any airplane, we knew it was Japanese. Fact is when we landed there on Leyte, they had a ship -- an LST had pulled in, one over from us. And they had just backed that thing

out, and before another one got in there, there was a suicide bomber, I guess, hit right in that spot that was left open.

EM: That was the beginning of the kamikaze, was just about then.

JP: Yeah. And it's a good thing the ship had left out. And it's a wonder one -- you know, very little bit to the right or to the left, he'd have got one of the other ships, but we were the second one over. It was -- and I saw a lot of that, the Japanese planes. We saw a lot of the planes that had crashed, suicide bombers that had come in.

EM: Really? And you saw that, what, on the land area?

JP: On the land area. After we'd gone in and we looked around some, we saw planes that were Japanese.

EM: So how much looking around did you get to do [while you were on Leyte?]?

JP: Well, after we'd been there for a while, well, we felt like it was pretty safe, so we got out and wandered around some. We just had to be careful, because they didn't have any -- didn't have any more snipers around, so it was pretty safe to be out.

EM: So what'd the place look like?

JP: Well, it was pretty well shot up, (laughs) I'll tell you that. And they'd shot from the caves. They had caves

there, and they had the artillery in these caves. Well, they just pulled them back into the caves when they started shelling them. Well, a lot of them never were hit, because they'd gotten back into the caves. And then whenever we saw some TBS that were on the aircraft carriers. They're patrol bombers, and they were sluggish. You know, pretty fast, but they were sluggish. And I remember watching -- standing up there watching them dogfight with these Japanese. (laughs) We were standing out there like it was a football game, cheering them.

EM: Cheering for the home team.

JP: (laughter) Right. We saw one case, there were three TBSs behind this one Jap Zero, one far out to the right and one to the left, and one right behind it. And they were moving up, you know. Well, this one out here on the left turned in toward him. And we could see it, you know. It was good and plain. And when he did, this Japanese Zero turned to the right. Well, that was a mistake that he shouldn't have done, because the one on the right got him. They just outsmarted him. They couldn't outmaneuver him, because those Japanese fighter planes were pretty fast.

EM: They were like little sports cars. They could go around corners --

JP: Yeah, they'd go real fast. Very maneuverable.

EM: [loudspeaker announcement] You're going to miss the domino bingo.

JP: No, it's all right.

EM: (laughter) That's okay?

JP: That's okay.

EM: Okay. (laughter) My gosh, if you were trying to take a nap, that would kind of wake you up, wouldn't it?

JP: It does. It keeps us awake.

EM: (laughter) Okay. So when did you actually getting around to doing what you went there for?

JP: Well, of course, within just a few days, we were able to run the machine shop trucks and start doing the repair work. Parts that they couldn't get, we had to make them. And so all this steel and iron and stuff that we had there came in pretty handy.

EM: Now, did you ever take the equipment off the trucks, or did they stay on --

JP: No. No, they stayed on the trucks.

EM: They stayed there. That was permanent.

JP: It stayed on the truck. Yeah. In fact, we had a -- after we got into Okinawa, we had a hurricane -- or, it wasn't a hurricane. It was --

EM: Typhoon.

JP: A typhoon, they call it. And that -- well, now, you talk about blowing. That did blow. Our tents were just leveled. So we got into these trucks, because they were pretty heavy, you know. And that's the only thing that saved us. I had a brother that was in the Seabees, and he was stationed on Okinawa, there, too. And he was in Quonset huts, and that leveled those Quonset huts out.

EM: It just removed them. (laughs)

JP: Boy, they just blew them to -- my brother said they had some caves that they got back up into to ride it out up in there. And that was quite amazing (inaudible) I was working in the shop one day, and my brother, my older brother, he was in the Seabees. I was working on a -- I don't remember -- a lathe or mill. And I looked outside, and there he come up. Well, he was about 50 pounds lighter than (laughs) he had been when I last saw him.

EM: Did he get sick, or was he just --

JP: No, no. It was just --

EM: It was just the rigors of being in the --

JP: Yeah. He was -- well, he worked at a shipyard there in Houston, and then when he got in the Seabees, they worked it off of him. (laughter) Anyway, when he came up, I was really surprised. Well, I was able to keep in contact with

my Dad. They lifted the censorship for a while, and we could tell them where we were.

EM: Oh, really? I never heard that they ever lifted --

JP: Yeah. Yeah, they did. After we'd been there in Okinawa for a while, well, they lifted the curfew [*sic*], and I told my dad that I was on Okinawa. I was able to tell him, because they said that the mail -- there wasn't any danger of it getting captured, or anything like that, because it, you know.

EM: It was a secure area.

JP: They had all that pretty secured.

EM: Now, let's come back to Leyte. Tell me -- you didn't actually work on the vehicles per se, yourself, but your ordinance company guys did.

JP: Well, yeah. Yeah.

EM: And you were generating the parts.

JP: I was making parts for them.

EM: So what kind of vehicles were they working on?

JP: Well, mostly these amphibious tanks.

EM: Tell me what an amphibious tank is.

JP: Okay. Well, they're --

EM: Is that what they called an alligator?

JP: Yeah, the landing craft carriers, I guess they'd call them. They're --

EM: Amphibious landing craft. LCTs, and...

JP: We had the amphibious as well as just the boats themselves that had the -- you know, the front dropped out, and the troops were in -- and the troops would go out through the front of them, just like we did out of the LST.

EM: Right, just on a smaller scale.

JP: Yeah. But we worked on just about anything and everything that had to be done. Fact is, we had some airplane parts we had to make. Yeah, they'd come in there. We had a major that came in there. He was one of the pilots. And he was flying a P-38. And he's telling about his experience with the P-38. He said -- when we saw him first come in, that was really something to see, because they're twin fuselage, and --

EM: Twin engine, twin fuselage.

JP: Yeah.

EM: They're tricky to fly, I hear.

JP: When we saw them coming in, we'd really do some cheering, because we knew that some of our men were going to be in there with planes. This major said that he was flying along. He said a couple of these Jap Zeros got after him. He said he got down, just dropped down, just over the top of the water, opened it wide open. He said they just ran off and left him. (laughter) So they were very fast. It

wasn't as maneuverable as the Japanese planes, but these Jap Zeros were pretty -- they were pretty -- well, I guess they were pretty fast, too, but they were very maneuverable.

EM: Right, right. They could turn on a dime.

JP: Oh, yeah. He was telling us about having to outrun these two (laughs) Jap Zeros [that got on him?].

EM: So the whole time you were there, you were on Leyte pretty much up until you went on to Okinawa.

JP: Right, yeah. Yeah.

EM: So were you busy? I mean, you had more work than you knew what to do, or...?

JP: Yeah, we kept pretty busy. Yeah, we kept pretty busy. And then we got a commanding officer, said we're not -- came in to inspect us. We hadn't been under too much of military before. He came in there and said, no. Said, you're going to have to change a lot of stuff. You've got to have sand down. Well, sand, we'd just scoop it up by the buckets. He said, you've got to have sand buckets out here in case of a fire, and...

EM: (laughs) When you've got the world's biggest sand bucket right there.

JP: (laughs) We had the biggest sand bucket you could see. And we really had to get strict then, for a while. And we

couldn't do a whole lot of work, because we (laughs) had so much to do for the --

EM: Going through the rigors --

JP: Rigmarole of the military.

EM: So what did you think about your commanding officers? Who was your immediate commander?

JP: Well, my immediate commander -- oh.

EM: Well, we don't need to remember his name, but...

JP: Oh, gosh. I can't -- Sullivan. But he was captain. And he was just one of the guys, you know. We'd make Kickapoo joy juice, called it. We'd take different kinds of fruit, make wine out of it, called it Kickapoo joy juice.

(laughs)

EM: So you guys had a little extra time on your hands.

JP: We had a little extra time. And Captain Sullivan always watched about it, too. He knew where every one of them was. He had to test them. (laughs) He had to make sure that they were all right.

EM: He was one of the boys, wasn't he?

JP: He was. And then some of them made them out of prunes that had the seeds in them, and they were making pure wood alcohol. So he caught that, and man, he poured it out. He said no, you don't use that. He said that would kill every one of you.

EM: You'd all go blind, and then you'd die.

JP: Go blind, and then you die. (laughter) But most of the times, we had pretty good fruit to make it out of, you know. We'd set it and let it ferment, tap it off. Some of them knew what they were doing. I didn't know what they were doing, (laughs) but some of them did.

EM: And so what, are you living in tents all this time?

JP: Yeah, we were living in tents. Yeah.

EM: That sounds like a miserable existence.

JP: Well, we had a wooden floor. They did put up wooden f-- well, now, I'll take it back. When we first were there, we didn't have wooden floors. We were just on the ground, bare ground. But the tents were pretty well anchored down, and we had cots to sleep on, and we had our mosquito netting that would drop down over the cots. We had to sleep under mosquito netting.

EM: So we've got mosquitoes. I guess we've got spiders. We got flies. We got leeches. We got...

JP: Oh, yeah. And when we dug our foxholes, we'd get something to cover to top of it, and fill on top of that, because of the shrapnel stuff coming out of the sky. It would just cut big holes in the tent. (laughs) So we got to where we were living -- and we had foxholes right there pretty close, where we could dive in.

EM: So what else happened to you while you were on Leyte, before we go on to Okinawa? Did you ever see any, you know, famous -- like, MacArthur ever come through?

JP: Oh, no. I did see Admiral Nimitz, but that was at the end of the war, and I was in Tokyo. We had gone to Tokyo to be shipped back. Then I saw -- in fact, I shook his hand. He came around and shook our hands.

EM: So what, were you on a ship at that point, or...?

JP: No, we were just -- we had gone by train from Okinawa to the main island -- well, no. No, no, no.

EM: No, you didn't go by train. You got on a boat somewhere along there.

JP: We got -- we landed in Japan, went to Fukuoka, Japan, from Okinawa. And from Fukuoka, Japan, we traveled by train all the way to Tokyo, because we went under the water. They had dug a tunnel under the water.

EM: Really? That sounds pretty advanced.

JP: Well, they had done it back when they carried it over their heads. They had to carry all the dirt and stuff out by hand. So they'd just [roll?] coming in and taking them out.

EM: So anyhow, you went to Tokyo, and so Nimitz did what? He came around...?

JP: Well, he was there. We were waiting on a troop ship. We'd been discharged. We had the some that had the most service. We were discharged, so we went to Tokyo to catch a troop ship out of Tokyo, and that's where we met Admiral Nimitz. And he came around, shook our hands. And he was on the same ship coming back over as we were.

EM: Oh, he was?

JP: Yeah.

EM: Was it just a troop ship, or...?

JP: Well, it was a troop ship, yeah.

EM: And he was on it?

JP: Yeah.

EM: Who would have thought, [the five?]?

JP: Yeah. Well, that's the only thing they had, you know.

EM: I mean, I would have thought he would've flown in an airplane or something.

JP: Well, no.

EM: I guess he's a good Navy man.

JP: He's a good Navy man.

EM: (laughter) But he was born right up the street here.

JP: Yeah, I know that. I've heard that. And as soon as we got back here to the States, I got discharged in Sam Houston. And while I was there at Sam Houston, they had a parade, downtown San Antonio. This was, I think, about a day or so

after Nimitz had got there. They gave a parade for him in San Antonio, for Nimitz, so I got to sit there and watch him go down the parade. (laughs)

EM: And you got to say, I shook that man's hand.

JP: He was -- well, he was just an ordinary guy over there. I mean, he was just an ordinary guy. He was a really good guy.

EM: Well, while we're talking about Japan, tell me what it looked like there, or what you saw.

JP: Well, we went in there when we got into Japan. We did go where they had dropped the bomb.

EM: So Hiroshima or Nagasaki, or one of the two, huh?

JP: Well, the last one dropped.

EM: Nagasaki.

JP: Nagasaki. We went through that area. And I mean, it was just completely --

EM: Wasteland, huh?

JP: Wasteland. And we rode by, went by it on train. And we did see that. But there wasn't -- it didn't look like there was anything.

EM: What about Tokyo? What did it look like?

JP: Well, Tokyo was all right. We never did -- they did some bombing, but I don't know if they -- I never did see where they did very much bombing. In Fukuoka, I saw, in the town

of Fukuoka there, they had done a lot of bombing there.

But we had a -- where the Japanese had had a arsenal, they had captured a Ford Motor Company assembly, and there wasn't one bomb dropped on that assembly, where those Fords were made, and they were using that to make war materials.

EM: So why do you figure they didn't bomb it?

JP: I don't know. I guess it's because it's owned by Ford.

EM: (laughter) Don't want to get Henry mad, do we?

JP: (laughter) Because they really did bomb Hiroshima -- I mean Fukuoka.

EM: Now, did you get exposed to any of the Japanese civilians?

JP: Yeah, there on Fukuoka, I met several. Fact is, I met one fellow who could speak English very well. He was in college there. And he took me and a couple of other fellows down to college with him. And we -- of course, we knew about as much on a lot of medical stuff as they did in the college, you know, with our penicillin and stuff like that, so we talked to him some on that, about having that, you know. And this Japanese boy invited us to his home, so we got to see. And they do have just small tables that you --

EM: Sat on your haunches, huh?

JP: -- sat on your haunches to eat, or to carry on to -- you just didn't have any chairs. It was fairly interesting to visit one of the homes.

EM: They didn't seem to be mad at us, or...?

JP: No, they weren't hostile at all. They were very friendly. Fact is, when we got into Japan, they were very friendly. I mean, they just did everything they could for us, just what they could.

EM: Now where did he learn to speak English so well?

JP: I don't know. He'd gone to the United States --

EM: If he'd gone to a school in the United States?

JP: To school in the United States, yeah.

EM: Before the war. Hmm.

JP: I think he'd gone to -- well, no, he didn't say where. I don't -- or he said it, and I don't remember where he said he went. But he went to a university and college in the United States. And he was -- I guess, I mean, he was sort of a well-to-do Japanese, because they had a real nice home.

EM: Yeah. He wasn't the lower middle class, yeah.

JP: No, uh-uh.

EM: So what do you think about the Japanese people?

JP: Well, the Japanese people, I think, as a whole, they're not bad, the civilians. But I'll tell you what, the army --

kind of like a fellow I worked with in Houston after the war, he'd been in a prisoner camp there in Japan, and he said, boy, they treated him awful. And they did. They treated the prisoners real bad.

EM: Yeah, I've definitely heard that.

JP: And he said that any living Jap -- the only good Jap is a dead Jap.

EM: Well, I could see he'd feel that way.

JP: (laughs) Because he just -- well, I mean, he went through a lot of pains.

EM: He was lucky to even get out.

JP: Yeah, he was really lucky.

EM: A lot of them didn't.

JP: A lot of them didn't. That's right.

EM: But you don't feel quite that strongly.

JP: No, I don't feel quite that strong.

EM: Did you at the time?

JP: Well, I guess, probably, at the time, I was pretty aggravated about it. And that was the troops that were -- and of course, they were just following orders. But there on Okinawa, they had a big cliff that dropped off into the ocean. And I don't know how many feet it was high. But we called it Suicide Cliff, because so many soldiers just went and jumped over this cliff, rather than being captured.

EM: What about civilians?

JP: Well, there wasn't too many civilians there. It's just the Japanese Army, or the service.

EM: So they did that rather than get taken prisoner.

JP: Oh, yeah. They didn't want to be taken prisoners. They knew what they did, what their soldiers did to the prisoners, and they didn't want to be taken as prisoner.

EM: So how did the landing go at Okinawa, compared to the one at Leyte?

JP: Well, it went a lot smoother. We didn't have as much -- I didn't have any problems going on there. It just -- we unloaded. Well, they did the shelling and so forth on Okinawa, and then we -- our landing craft carriers went in there, and we didn't have any trouble getting off on there. And we were right -- pretty well stayed on the shoreline when we set up camp there.

EM: So how soon after the first wave went in did you guys go in on Okinawa? Was it pretty quick, like Leyte, or...?

JP: Well, it -- they did it in the morning. I don't remember just exactly when they invaded there, but it was actually the next day before we went in there.

EM: Actually, they invaded on April 1, April Fools' Day.

JP: April Fools' Day. I think went in on the next day. But this wasn't like it was in Leyte. We were right behind them (laughs) when we went in there.

EM: Was there snipers and all that kind of stuff there, too?

JP: Well, there were still snipers, yeah. There were still some snipers around. But they were pretty well eliminated. We had a -- we were right next to an airstrip there on Okinawa, and we were -- oh, quite a ways from the one end of it, where our company was. And they had a -- we called them "Whistling Pete," because every evening, about the same time, they'd bring this big gun out in the hills up there, out of the cave, and shell. But they were zeroed in on the end of the runway. Well, heck, they just laid the runway the other way, (laughs) and let them go ahead and shoot at it.

EM: Shoot there all he wants.

JP: But after -- we could hear that thing coming over, and every evening, you could almost set your watch. First you'd hear "zhu-zhu-zhu-zhu-zhu, boom, boom." You know, two shots, [from where?] it landed and where it started from.

EM: So this is from what, from up in the hills?

JP: Yeah, up in the hills. And about the third day, they located them, and that was all she wrote. (laughs)

EM: Well, you know, the Okinawa campaign went a long time before they could secure the island. So were you in one spot the whole time, or --

JP: Well, yeah. We were in one spot the whole time.

EM: And were you making the same kinds of parts for the same kinds of vehicles?

JP: Well, whatever we had to make.

EM: More aircraft parts, or...?

JP: Well, anything that had to be made. Somebody couldn't find a part, well, they'd come to us to make it. And we usually could make it.

EM: Was the weather different than it was on Leyte?

JP: Well, no, not too much. It was -- I remember it raining a good bit there, too. And Leyte, it didn't seem like it rained as much.

EM: Probably has more to do with the season you were there.

JP: Probably the season was there.

EM: Now, what about kamikaze on Okinawa? Because they were a big problem on Okinawa.

JP: Well, they were. Yeah, they --

EM: Well, did you have any experiences regarding the kamikaze there?

JP: Well, no. We really didn't have any experience with them, because they -- they used a lot of them. We heard some of them explode, and could see them off in the distance.

EM: I think they targeted a lot of ships.

JP: Yeah, they did target a lot of ships.

EM: It sounds to me like Okinawa was a little bit smoother than Leyte for you guys. Am I guessing right?

JP: Well, it was for me, and for our crew, our company. But it was -- I don't know. Probably the assault people that went in the first wave or so, I don't know how it went with them.

EM: Well, I know they had a lot of problems when they were fighting for the interior, because Okinawa's a pretty sizable island.

JP: Yeah, it is.

EM: So it's got mountain ranges, and valleys, and so those were really rough, but --

JP: Right, it's pretty rough country.

EM: -- pretty fortunately, you weren't in the middle of that.

JP: No, we were just still on the shoreline. Fact is, we'd go somewhere. We had to go out along the beach to drive somewhere, because didn't have hardly any roads to go around.

EM: Now you had mentioned earlier two things. One, you mentioned a typhoon, and then you also mentioned being able to write home to your father. So let's talk about those two things. Let's go to the typhoon first. Tell me about that.

JP: Well, the typhoon was pretty rough, because, I mean, it -- of course, we were living in tents. It tore everything we had up. When we got in the big trucks, there was enough room for most all of us to get in the trucks for protection. And that's about the only thing that saved us. Because if we'd tried to ride it out in the tents, it would have been all she wrote, because it got pretty strong. And you could feel those trucks. They would rock. But they were heavy enough that it didn't blow them over.

EM: So what did it do to the aircraft there at the airfield? That must have been kind of tough.

JP: Well, I imagine it was. It's probably pretty bad there.

EM: And did you have advance warning that the storm was coming?

JP: No, we didn't. It started blowing, and then the word got around that it was a hurricane, or a typhoon. And so we all got to shelters as much as we could, because our open tents wouldn't have saved us, and neither would our foxholes, because it's so much water, it'd fill them up.

EM: They'd fill up with water, and you'd climb out, and then you're blown away.

JP: Blown away.

EM: (laughter) Well, now, be honest with me, John. Did you make some Kickapoo juice on Okinawa, or whatever you were c--

JP: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, we did.

EM: Oh, you did? Was the quality getting any better?

JP: Well, I think it had gotten a little better. They learned how to make it.

EM: (laughter) Practice makes perfect, huh?

JP: We called it Kickapoo joy juice.

EM: Joy juice. I missed the joy part.

JP: (laughter) That was the only thing that we got that had alcohol in it.

EM: Yeah. Well, I guess you could have some pretty nice parties on Kickapoo joy juice.

JP: Yeah, we did have.

EM: What about the USO, or any of the -- tell me about that.

JP: Oh, yeah. The USO, we got some -- the USO come in -- I don't remember now if it was Leyte or Okinawa. But the USO came in and gave us a lot of supplies, gave us a lot of cigarettes and stuff like that.

EM: Chewing gum, and Hershey bars --

JP: Chewing gum and candy, and that sort of thing.

EM: What about shows? Did Bob Hope and his crew ever come?

JP: Well, no. I saw Bob Hope in Hawaii, but I didn't see him
(laughs) after that.

EM: Oh, did you? You didn't get any closer than that, huh?

JP: (laughter) Yeah, I guess I didn't get any closer.

EM: Actually, you did, from what I understand.

JP: Yeah, he probably did, but we saw a good show there in
Hawaii.

EM: So what else did you do for entertainment, then, when you
were in Okinawa? Did you have movies or anything?

JP: Well, we had movies. Fact is, I ran a projector, and we
had a projector.

EM: So I should put on here, projectionist, huh?

JP: (laughter) Projectionist. But we got some pretty good
films, some of the later films. But so many of them were -
- they had been spliced or been broken, and this sort of
thing.

EM: Jumping all around.

JP: You get to going pretty good, and then all of a sudden,
it'd be broken. You'd have to rewind, start back over
again. (laughs) Yeah, we got some pretty good movies. So
I learned how to put on there the ones that were going to
leave. I don't know how many days I started, about 30 days

before. I said, 30 days we'll get to leave. The ones that were older -- troops were coming over and replacing us, so the older ones were going to leave in about 30 days, so I learned how to take a slide and put in there, "Just 30 days left." (laughter) Then 29 days left, 28 days left.

EM: So you were making modifications [to a movie?].

JP: Yeah. It didn't go over too good with the new fellows, though. (laughs)

EM: They weren't interested in how many days you had left. They were more interested in how many days they had left. My gosh. Well, now, so you were writing letters home on a regular basis?

JP: Yeah, yeah. I was writing letters home. And they -- like, my dad wrote, said that they weren't censored. I think his was censored. Maybe. I don't know. Because I'd see sometimes if something would be cut out of it. But he said mine weren't censored, after we got to Okinawa. I think they did before. When we were still in the Philippines, I think they censored some of it there.

EM: Well, now, did you have a girlfriend or anything like that back in the States?

JP: Well, yeah. I got a Dear John letter.

EM: Oh, did you? You were one of the famous Dear John letter recipients.

JP: (laughs) Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I got a Dear John letter. She got married while I was over there. (laughs)

EM: No kidding. Well, how did that make you feel?

JP: Well, that didn't make me feel too good. (laughs)

EM: No, that's a downer, isn't it? Yeah. So when did you know that the war was just about to be over?

JP: When they dropped that bomb. Because I had done a thesis when I was in high school about atomic energy and the bomb that they were making, and about what kind of power it had. And if it wasn't harnessed just right, it could be very destructive. And so I knew kind of what -- when they dropped that bomb, well, that was it. Well, the first bomb, they told them. You know, said, if you don't give up, there'll be another one. Well, they didn't believe it, so they dropped the second one. Once they dropped that second one that was it. We were getting all of our equipment when -- we were getting ready to invade Japan. All the troops on Okinawa were getting all ready for landing in Japan.

EM: That would have been a mess.

JP: Oh, it would have. There'd have been 10, 50 times more people killed.

EM: On both sides.

JP: Both sides. No telling how many would have been killed.

EM: So when you heard the bombs had been dropped, you knew it -
-

JP: Yeah, we knew it wasn't going to last very long.

EM: So did y'all have a little celebration or something [like that?]?

JP: Oh, yeah. Especially when the war was over with.

EM: Yeah. Tell me about that.

JP: (laughs) There was more shells shot up there, tracer bullets and stuff. It wasn't safe to be out there.

(laughter) You talk about a Four--

EM: The Kickapoo joy juice was flowing, huh?

JP: Yeah. You talk about Fourth of July. Now, that was -- all the fireworks they put on then, nothing compared to these. These were real stuff.

EM: And I guess that's when you knew, by golly, I'll probably make it back home in one piece.

JP: Yeah. (laughs) And so, if I lived through the celebration, I might make it.

EM: (laughter) Was there a certain sense of relief when the war was over in your mind?

JP: Oh, yeah. [All my?] mind. It was -- well, it was just really a -- no words can explain it, I don't guess.

EM: Well, try.

JP: Well, it just felt like the world was on your shoulders, and all of a sudden it just had been taken off, you know. That you just had about just all you could take, and then you're relieved of it.

EM: So your group was kind of getting a little war weary toward--

JP: We were getting a little bit war weary. We didn't have very many casualties. We had a few, but... The biggest one we had was, they were cooling some beer down with gasoline. I don't know --

EM: Pour gasoline on it, gasoline evaporates, and it gets cold.

JP: Somehow they got a fire. A fire started in it. And there was about four or five of them that were burnt pretty bad.

EM: Gasoline's so dangerous.

JP: That's too dangerous.

EM: And most people don't understand that.

JP: Oh, it is. It's too dangerous to do that. Oh, it gave off fumes that were good and cold. You could almost ice a beer up with it. (laughs)

EM: If you lived through it.

JP: (laughter) If you lived through it. Just --

EM: Wow. So you had beer on the island?

JP: Well, yeah, we did later on. Fact is, we -- while we were still -- before we got to Leyte Island, we were on some island, Marshall Islands or somewhere.

EM: What, just waiting to go in?

JP: To go in. There were -- all the ships were just gathering, you know, gathering up. They were gathering the forces all together to go in. And like I say, it took us 43 days, so that was a lot of time just getting all together. And anyway, we got a hold of some beer. We found a ship that had cold storage in it, and had beer in there. We went and got some of that, and took it to camp. Well, I was good buddies -- the guy who was the runner for the kitchen was a pretty good buddy of mine. We were pretty good pals. And he did the running to go different places to get foods, and get different things off of ships. So he and I went out there and got this beer off this ship that was just cold storage. And we brought several cans back with us. We didn't bring enough for the whole outfit, (laughs) but just enough we could have --

EM: You were looking out for old number one. (laughs)

JP: Right. Because there was no way we could get everybody a beer. So we went over to this island. There was a little island there, and we went over that, and then that hot sun -- we got out there and drank that beer. We had to cool it

in the ocean, and drink it, and got that sand all over us, and sunburned. Oh... We came back onboard ship...

EM: You were drunk, sunburned, and dirty.

JP: Yeah. (laughter) We came back onboard ship. Only thing they had to bathe in was salt water. (laughs) So we managed to get a couple of the sailors to get us a couple of -- a helmet full of fresh water, and rinse us off.

EM: So at least you could get the salt off afterwards.

JP: Get the salt off of us.

EM: Did you ever get any ice cream when you were over there?

JP: No, but we got -- one Thanksgiving, and I don't remember now where it was, but we had turkey.

EM: It was probably Leyte.

JP: This was frozen back in 1938. (laughs)

EM: How did you know?

JP: It had it marked on there, frozen in 1938.

EM: Six years old.

JP: How in the heck could they know that they were going to need that much turkey?

EM: Well, I don't think that they did know.

JP: They didn't. But we got this turkey, and they were frozen. We got them back. We had a -- boy, we had a Thanksgiving dinner that wouldn't quit.

EM: Really. I bet you remember as much as you do any Thanksgiving dinner.

JP: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, we sure had a good dinner. We had some good cooks, if they just had something to cook.

EM: Yeah. No, I'm sure of that.

JP: [Also?] we had so much powdered eggs and powdered milk, and stuff like that, that...

EM: Now were there troops from any of the other countries there, like the Brits and the Australians?

JP: No, I didn't see anybody.

EM: It was all American, as far --

JP: All Americans.

EM: At least in the area where you were.

JP: Where I was, it was all Americans.

EM: And what about women in the military?

JP: And we didn't see any women at all. No. It would've been a great joy. (laughs)

EM: Yeah, even just to see.

JP: Just to see them.

EM: All you had was your movies.

JP: Yeah. That's it.

EM: So tell me about how long you were in Japan postwar.

JP: Oh, it wasn't but just a few months, because we landed right after they had dropped the last bomb, within weeks after that.

EM: Because I think that it took them about 10 days to surrender, and...

JP: Yeah. Yeah, it did, because right after they surrendered, we went in. Because, like I say, we were already loaded and ready for an invasion. We had all of our equipment packed and ready. And of course, whenever they said the war was over with, well, we went ahead and went on in. Occupied forces went on into Japan anyway.

EM: Did you bring back any souvenirs from the war?

JP: Well, yeah, I did. I brought back a Japanese rifle, and a saber sword. And I had a Japanese hand grenade. And, oh, a few other little things that I was able to get.

EM: Did you hang on to all that stuff?

JP: Well, I did until I got home. Then I don't know what happened to them. Well, I had the Japanese saber and the rifle. I just wound up giving it to my nephew. He lives in Missouri. And he's pretty much of a --

EM: Gun nut?

JP: Yeah. And so I gave it to him so that he would -- he would know how to cherish it.

EM: Yeah, take care of it and keep track of it.

JP: It was in good shape. Fact is, I'd used it to kill a deer with.

EM: Really?

JP: Yeah.

EM: Went deer hunting with a Japanese rifle.

JP: (laughter) Went deer hunting with a Japanese rifle. It was made in Germany.

EM: Really? I've heard that story before.

JP: Yeah. It was made in Germany. Had on there, "Made in Germany." (laughs)

EM: I'll be darned. That's interesting.

JP: But it had a symbol of some kind that was ground off, but it did have "Made in Germany."

EM: They probably ground off the German insignia.

JP: Might have had.

EM: Either the Nazi cross, or, you know, there was also -- they had some other -- yeah.

JP: Something on there. But something had been ground off of it. But it was -- and I could buy ammunition for it. It was a -- I've forgotten now what caliber it was, but they had ammunition I could buy for it here in the States. Like I say, I got one deer. (laughs)

EM: Well, got something good out of it. So how long did the ride back to the States take?

JP: Oh, now, that took a good little while. Although they said we set a record coming back, because we had a tailwind. But we had -- one of the shafts to the propellers was bent a little bit, and it vibrated quite a bit. Every time you'd go over a big wave, well, it would, "choom-choom-choom-choom-choom-choom-choom." (laughs)

EM: Come out of the water and spin, and...

JP: Spin, and just vibrate the whole ship. But it was a regular troop ship.

EM: Probably an old Liberty ship of some sort, yeah. You and Nimitz, coming home on the ship.

JP: Come home on the same ship. (laughter) Of course, I don't think they recognized me like they did him. (laughs)

EM: Well, I doubt it. They didn't make as big a fuss over you?

JP: (laughter) Nope.

EM: So where did you go, into San Francisco or San Diego?

JP: No, went into Seattle. Then we caught a train from there to San Antonio.

EM: How did it feel to be back in the States?

JP: Oh, it felt great. It really felt great. I don't know. It just -- just unbelievable. Just to live through something like that, and to be able to be back in the United States, it was really something.

EM: Almost felt like kissing the ground.

JP: Oh, absolutely.

EM: So you rode, what, a troop train back down to San Antonio?

JP: Yeah, a troop train.

EM: So you knew you were going to get out shortly, then, at that point?

JP: Yeah. Oh, yeah. I knew as soon as I got back to San Antonio, because...

EM: Now, what was your ranking at that point?

JP: Well, I was finally made a sergeant. T-4, I think they'd call it. Technical sergeant. It wasn't like a tech sergeant, but it was a technical sergeant. I was a technical corporal, then a technical sergeant.

EM: So you left the military there in San Antonio, there at Fort Sam.

JP: Yeah. Well, I had had some problems, and I had hemorrhoids. They wanted to -- said, well, they could do them over there. I said, nope, I'm going home. I'm going to wait until I get home. They said it'd be better if I did, because they'd have better facilities. So when I got home, well, I went to Breckinridge Hospital and had that operation done. That was a pretty painful operation.

EM: That's what I understand.

JP: Yeah. Fact is, they had me AWOL for three days, and I was in the hospital there. (laughs)

EM: What, they just lost track of you, or...?

JP: I guess so. (laughs)

EM: Only the Army could do that, you know?

JP: Well, just like it was. I signed up for -- reenlisted in the reserves after I got out there in San Antonio. I reenlisted -- well, not reenlisted, but into the reserves for three years. Well, I never heard anything from it. They never did call me or never did talk to me anything about it.

EM: Send you a letter or anything.

JP: Anything. So after three years, I went down there and asked them. I said what the heck? I did get a -- I don't know if I got a notice or what, or I went down there after three years was up. And it's a good thing, because right after that was when the Korean War broke out, and I probably would have been called back to that if I'd stayed in the reserves.

EM: So you got out of the reserves at that point?

JP: So I got out at that point. And then guess where my papers were? In Juneau, Alaska.

EM: Oh my gosh. (laughter) They kind of went the wrong way, didn't they? They went north and you went south.

JP: I went south. We separated. (laughs)

EM: So do you keep up with any of your buddies after the war?

JP: No. No, I haven't. I haven't kept up with any of them.

EM: Was that intentional or just kind of the way it happened?

JP: Well, no, just the way it happened. Well, most all of them lived up there, up north, you know, in the New Jersey area. Most of my good buddies lived up there. The ones that were from Texas, I didn't know them too well. Fact is, one of them I knew, and I met him on a bus one night when I was going to University of Houston night school, up to night college. And I met him on the bus. He was going to school, too, there.

EM: So was that after the war?

JP: After the war, yeah.

EM: So was this on the GI Bill, you were going?

JP: Yeah.

EM: And you were working during the day and going to school at night?

JP: Yeah, working during the day and going to school at night.

EM: So you finally got a degree?

JP: No, I didn't wind up getting a degree, but I got in a couple, three years of -- I don't know why I didn't go ahead and get a degree. I should have, but...

EM: That's hindsight.

JP: Well, the thing is that I started going to school. I thought, well, my older brother was an engineer, a

mechanical engineer, and my younger -- well, brother just younger than I am -- was also an engineer. My older brother worked for Exxon, and my younger brother -- well, we worked for a while for (inaudible) Corporation there in Houston, but we worked at a place they called Cleco, which made pneumatic air equipment. It was from up north, I guess from Cleveland or somewhere. So he was working in the drafting room, and I was working in the shop. It was on automatic machinery. First I'd had to do with that. But we set up all these automatic machines. There was just a handful of us. We'd set up and run maybe a half a dozen of them off, shut it down, put all the equipment up. Then take on another job, work out all the tooling and stuff for it, put it up in the tool room with all the directions and everything. And then they -- when we got all finished with it, well, then they let all of us go that had been the toolmakers. And then by doing that, well, they had people that could set up, and they'd just have operators just running it.

EM: Yep. They got what they needed from you. So how do you think the war changed you and the way you look at things and think about things?

JP: Well, for one thing, I'd grown up more, I guess -- I wanted to take animal husbandry in college, and go to A&M or

somewhere, to where I could get a degree in agriculture. And that was what I was wanting to do when I got out of -- you know, when I went to college. Well, of course, that changed it all when I got the machinist -- I had a pretty good trade, so I just stayed with it.

EM: Yeah. You'd make too much money doing that compared to...

JP: Well, yeah.

EM: I mean, that's good income.

JP: It is good income. I had pretty good jobs.

EM: So you feel like it -- so what, did it change your interest, do you think, the war, or...?

JP: Well, I think it changed my interest there on that, because if I hadn't have had all the machine shop experience that I did, before the war, and then during the war. And after the war, well, I was still back into it, and it wasn't hard to get a job.

EM: But your outlook on life, and what --

JP: Well, my outlook on life, I kind of feel like, in a way, I was cheated out of three years, but -- I wouldn't want to back through the three years again, but I wouldn't take anything for the experience that I had. (laughs)

EM: That's right, that's right. It was a useful experience the first time, but just don't want to do it again.

JP: Don't want to go back. Don't want to do it again.

EM: Do you ever think about the war years, or dream about it, or...?

JP: Well, I have thought about it some. Well, I eat at a table. We've got a Navy man, Air Corps man, a Marine, and the Army, sitting at the table. (laughs) So we give all branches of the service pretty good representation.

EM: Now, are these guys here?

JP: Yeah.

EM: And they're World War II veterans?

JP: Yeah.

EM: I wonder if we've had a chance to interview any of those guys.

JP: Yeah, they were all -- well, they've tried to get -- [Benway?], they've tried to get him to give his experiences down there, and he won't do it.

EM: He doesn't want anything to do with that. Well, that's okay. That's his call.

JP: Yeah, they've tried. Well, he had a -- he'd been a Marine. He said he was always in on the first wave that went in.

EM: He's probably seen things he doesn't want to talk about.

JP: He doesn't want to talk about it.

EM: No, I understand.

JP: Yeah.

EM: Well, what else can we talk about, John? We've covered a lot of ground here.

JP: Covered a lot of territory, I guess.

EM: Yeah. I mean, we're talking an hour and a half so far.

JP: Oh my gosh, that long? (laughs)

EM: Well, sure. But I mean, it's been worth it. So what have we missed? What little secrets are you keeping?

JP: Oh, I don't know of anything that I've missed too much.

EM: I mean, I've heard an awful lot about Kickapoo joy juice. (laughter) I've heard about bullet holes in trucks. I've heard that one of the most dangerous things was the shrapnel falling out of the sky.

JP: (laughter) Yeah. Yeah, the anti-aircraft gun, that was the one we feared most.

EM: Well, then shall we shut it down, then?

JP: I guess so.

EM: Well, let me thank you for sharing your experiences.

JP: Well, it's [experiences?] to go back through to remember stuff like that. I haven't done that. Oh, I've done a little bit of it at times, but...

EM: With the guys, but --

JP: With the guys, but not gone over it with anybody, the whole story.

EM: Yeah. I think it's --

JP: Because I didn't know whether they'd want to hear any story from me. I wasn't a hero. (laughs)

EM: Well, everybody was part of the team.

JP: Well, that's right.

EM: And if you hadn't been there to make the parts to put that stuff back in the field, there could have been a lot of people killed otherwise.

JP: That's probably true.

EM: So you can't say you're not a hero.

JP: You can't say -- well, now, I guess --

EM: Now, you really can't do that.

JP: No, I couldn't, I guess. I was doing my job, my share.
(laughs)

EM: You did it, and you did your part, and anybody that didn't do their part, there was a problem.

JP: Oh, yeah.

EM: Because everybody had a part. So maybe that's just a good [entré?] for me to thank you again for what you did for our country during the war.

JP: Well, I appreciate that.

EM: We don't thank you guys enough.

JP: Well, it's...

EM: And have you, by any chance, had the opportunity to go see the World War II memorial up in Washington, DC?

JP: No, I have not.

EM: I've talked to some of the guys that, you know, they organized -- some of the areas, they organize trips for the guys to go out there.

JP: Oh, they do?

EM: I wish they had something like that going on here in the Fredericksburg area, but it took them way too long to get around to having that. [loudspeaker announcement] Just a note to the transcriber of this tape, you don't need to capture those announcements on the transcript. (laughter) Okay, well, I'll go ahead and shut it down.

END OF AUDIO FILE