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Interview With

HAROLD GENSLER

March 31, 2001

Place of Interview: Kerrville, Texas

Interviewer: William J. Alexander

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Oral History Collection

Harold Gensler

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Mr. Alexander: This tape is being done at the home of Harold Gensler at Rio Robles Park in Kerrville, Texas. This is March 31, 2001. I'm interviewing Mr. Gensler in order to obtain his experiences in the Pacific Theater during World War II. He served aboard the attack transport USS *Edgecombe* [APA-164]. This is being done for the University of North Texas.

Harold, I'm going to ask you when and where were you born.

Mr. Gensler: I was born on September 28, 1915, in Tarrytown, New York.

Mr. Alexander: Tarrytown, New York. Where is that? It is up north, isn't it?

Mr. Gensler: It is north of New York City.

Alexander: Were your mother and father immigrants?

Gensler: No, they were Americans.

Alexander: Where were they born?

Gensler: My mother was born in upstate New York, in Liberty, New York. My father was born in New York City.

Alexander: What are their names?

Gensler: My mother's maiden name was Louise Sheely.

Alexander: What was your father's name?

Gensler: His name was Roy Gensler.

Alexander: How about siblings? Did you have brothers and sisters?

Gensler: My mother and father broke up when I was about one-and-a-half years old, so I never really knew him. She remarried when I was about twelve. She married a man by the name of Eddie Hyde. They had a child, which is my half-sister. She is living today.

Alexander: What is her name?

Gensler: Her name is Adele. Her name would be Adele Hyde. She is married and lost her husband. She was Adele Valentine.

Alexander: That was her last name?

Gensler: Yes, when her husband died.

Alexander: Where does she live?

Gensler: She lives near Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.

Alexander: Did you go to school in Tarrytown?

Gensler: No. My grandmother and my grandfather raised me after my mother divorced. I went to Ossining, New York. That is where Sing Sing Prison is located. That is farther north.

Alexander: And that is where your grandparents lived?

Gensler: Right.

Alexander: What were their names?

Gensler: His name was Orin Sheeley. Her name was Lillian Sheeley.

Alexander: They were your mother's parents?

Gensler: Right. They were born in Liberty, New York, way upstate in the country, in the Catskills. I don't remember much about my early childhood. I remember things starting at about the age of three.

Alexander: What I would like to get to here is where you went to school.

Gensler: I went to school in Ossining and went

through high school and graduated.

Alexander: When was that?

Gensler: I graduated in 1935.

Alexander: Did you have any other cousins or anybody that you were living with, or was it just you?

Gensler: No, it was just my grandma, my grandfather, and myself.

Alexander: Not your mother? She wasn't with you?

Gensler: No. I didn't live with my mother, except for a total period of three years, my whole life.

Alexander: In 1935 we are in the Depression. You had just graduated from high school. Tell me what you did.

Gensler: I went to work for F.W. Woolworth's in Ossining. It was the first job I had. I caddied when I was in high school, in the summer. I went to work for F.W. Woolworth's, and I didn't stay there long because...I guess I can put this on tape. It is nothing dirty. I was a stock clerk. The boss of the stock department told me to carry up a big container of Kotex [sanitary

napkins] and put it on the counter for the ladies to sell. In those days, you didn't even say those words. I was so embarrassed that I refused to do it. He didn't fire me, but I had to do it. I did it, and then I quit (laughter). I didn't last long.

Alexander: That is interesting.

Gensler: I didn't like the job, anyway.

Alexander: Let me just point out something here. You make a very important point. We did have very strict rules of anything having to do with sex.

Gensler: You didn't say the word.

Alexander: No, that is absolutely right. It was very Victorian, as it was. As I remember, those [sanitary napkins] were wrapped in a brown paper wrapping without anything on it.

Gensler: It was just a box that said "Kotex."

Alexander: It didn't even say that, the ones I know of.

Gensler: I think it did. That is why I was afraid to take it up there (chuckle).

Alexander: Okay. It was a sign of the times. There is no doubt about it.

Gensler: That is right. I was raised by my grandparents, who were born in the 1800s, so they were very Victorian.

Alexander: After the job at Woolworth's, what happened to you? Is this still in 1935?

Gensler: Yes. Then I went caddying. It was 1937. My uncle had a friend who worked for the New York Central Railroad. That was my grandmother's son. He told me to go see him. He lived in Ossining--this man. He was retired, but I think he had a lot of influence with the railroad. I went to see him, and he made a call and told me to go down to New York City, at 466 Lexington Avenue, where the main railroad office was, and see the general manager. I forget his name. I went down, and I got a job as a mail clerk down on Barklay Street, New York City. It is way down toward The Battery, on the waterfront. My job was to pick up the mail at Lexington Avenue every morning and take it down to our office, which was an accounting office.

Alexander: You said you picked up the mail. What did

you pick it up with?

Gensler: I had a mailbag.

Alexander: You put it over your shoulder?

Gensler: You would just carry it in your hand. It wasn't that much. I had to commute from Ossining on a train. I had a pass from the railroad.

Alexander: Every day?

Gensler: Yes.

Alexander: How far would that be?

Gensler: It was about 100 miles a day. But I didn't want to live in New York City--I don't care about New York City--so I had to commute. I would get off the train at Grand Central Station and go right across town, and I was at the railroad office. So, it was handy. I stayed there until...

Alexander: I want to ask you something. When you finished the day, you got on the train and went back to Ossining?

Gensler: Yes, I caught the 5:03 express out of Grand Central, and I went home. I got home around 6:30 p.m.

Alexander: That is a pretty fast train.

Gensler: It was an express. The first stop was Ossining. I was lucky. Then I worked for the railroad, and I got promoted. I took a correspondence course from an outfit in Chicago--I can't think of the name of it--in traffic management. On the railroad--how that applied--I had to check freight rate bills that would come in the shipments. I would make sure the right rates were applied. Checking freight rates is what it was. That was my job.

Alexander: You are not doing the mail at this point?

Gensler: No, I left the mail department. They promoted me.

Alexander: That was a promotion.

Gensler: I worked there from 1937 until...I went in the service in 1943.

Alexander: So, you were with the railroad all through that time?

Gensler: Right. When the war started, I was working for the railroad.

Alexander: Where were you when the war started?

Gensler: I was working on 33rd Street. I moved up from Barklay Street to 33rd Street, on the

waterfront.

Alexander: This was Sunday now when the war started, right?

Gensler: It was a Sunday afternoon at 1:00 p.m.

Alexander: Where were you at the time?

Gensler: I took my grandparents...I was married at the time. I got married in 1937.

Alexander: To whom?

Gensler: I got married to a woman named Thelma Clary. That is an interesting part of my story, too, I'll tell you. During the Pearl Harbor attack, we were out riding. I forgot to finish that. I had my grandmother and grandfather and my wife. We were out riding. I had the radio on. They broke in and said that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. I didn't know where it was. You never really heard about Hawaii much in those days. Finally, they said it was in the Hawaiian Islands. It wasn't a state then, of course. It was a territory of the United States.

It went on all day and all night. We sat up half the night listening to the

reports come in. We didn't know what was going to happen. I expected to hear that they landed in California. We didn't have any defenses on the West Coast. I forget how many airplanes we had, but it was close to nothing.

Alexander: We were not ready for that.

Gensler: I remember them having war games in Louisiana, and they had the "Reds" and the "Blues." They were using wooden guns and hollering, "BANG!" That is the way they trained. We were stripped.

Of course, we were all concerned. The next day, Monday morning, I went to work. There was a big line of people in front of a building. It looked to me, almost, like a riot because they were all jostling around.

Alexander: When you got off the train?

Gensler: It was when I was walking across 33rd Street. They had the New York City Police out with their horses for crowd control. I found out later what it was. They were fighting to get in the service.

Alexander: Those were recruitment stations.

Gensler: Yes, they were fighting to get in.

Alexander: How many people do you think there might have been?

Gensler: I have no idea.

Alexander: They were all men?

Gensler: Yes, they were all men. There were probably a couple of hundred out in the street.

Another thing I saw on the train on the way down to New York City were guys in uniform. They had been in the Naval Reserve. I didn't even know it. They were friends of mine.

Alexander: You did not know that they were in the Reserve?

Gensler: No. They took two weeks training every year.

That is the way it started. Well, of course, we were all fired up. I thought "Well, I'll be going." I was classified as 1-A [physically fit for active military duty] at that time.

Alexander: When did you go in and sign up with the

Selective Service?

Gensler: I signed up when the first draft started.
[Editor's note: The Selective Service and Training Act was passed by Congress in September, 1940, and the first lottery was conducted the next month.]

Alexander: When they first pulled...

Gensler: They pulled my number, and I forget what it was.

Alexander: Was it during that time, or were you the number one number?

Gensler: I remember President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt pulling the number out, but I don't remember...it was the first batch, anyway.

Alexander: But that was the first batch, and you were in that?

Gensler: Yes.

Alexander: So, you had signed up. It was the Selective Service?

Gensler: Right.

Alexander: It doesn't sound right to me, but I think you are right.

Gensler: That is what it was. It was the Selective

Service.

Alexander: Okay. You had signed up, then, sometime before, because that was created in 1940, I think.

Gensler: Right.

Alexander: When they pulled out that capsule, it had your name on it. Is that right?

Gensler: No.

Alexander: Oh, I thought maybe it did.

Gensler: I wasn't the first one. I remember the man that had that. I think his number was 156 or something like that. I was just classified. I don't remember what it was. It had to be 1-A at the time...

Alexander: Oh, yes, I would think so.

Gensler: ...because we were all subject to the draft according to your number, I guess. I don't know how they did it. I forget. My first thought was: "I have got to get into this thing." In 1943, I was twenty-seven years old, so I was about twenty-five when the war started. I don't remember exactly when it was, but they declared that all railroad workers and people that worked in the auto

factories had a deferment.

Alexander: And the coal mines...

Gensler: We were automatically deferred, which meant you didn't go.

Alexander: That is right. You were more important in what you were doing than you would have been in the service.

Gensler: That is what they said.

Alexander: Well, at the time, if you stop and think about what we had to do to get ready to fight the Japs and the Germans...

Gensler: Right.

Alexander: ...we had to have people who knew how to run the railroads.

Gensler: That is right.

Alexander: So, it was a very important one.

Gensler: Well, that is when the trouble started. The year 1941 passed. I read about all these terrible things the Japanese were doing at Corregidor and all this. The worse it got, the more I had the "itch" [desire to join]. I had a sense of duty, I think. I felt, "Here I am twenty-five and healthy. I shouldn't be sitting down in this office

checking freight rates when I could be doing something for the war effort."

Alexander: Good for you.

Gensler: But my ex-wife was...

Alexander: She wasn't your ex-wife at the time.

Gensler: She was my wife. With the encouragement of her and her mother...when I mentioned that, she said, "Let somebody else go." In the meantime, we had had a child. The child was born in June, 1942.

Alexander: So, you are going through 1941, and now you are in June, 1942. Was the child a boy or girl?

Gensler: It was a little girl. Her name is Gail. Of course, they said, "Here is this child. You don't want to go and leave her," and all of this. But there were others leaving two or three children, but I don't think at that time they were drafting people with a lot of children.

Alexander: No, they weren't.

Gensler: Anyway, time went on, and at the end of 1942, I couldn't take it anymore because all of the young guys in the office were

going into the service. I was the youngest one left. There must have been about thirty people in the office.

Alexander: Let's stop and think about this a minute. They were working for the railroad, also.

Gensler: Yes, but some of them were drafted. It was according to what you did for the railroad.

Alexander: But in your case, it was a high-priority job because you were...

Gensler: I was moving freight and supplies.

Alexander: That makes sense.

Gensler: My job was classified as important.

Alexander: You were probably a C-Class.

Gensler: I imagine it was. I don't know. All of the young guys went, and I felt like...I can't explain it. I was ashamed to ride the train with my neighbors.

Alexander: Let me ask you this. If you are on the train and you got servicemen around you, what was your thinking?

Gensler: I was thinking that I ought to be in uniform.

Alexander: Well, did you think that that is what they thought?

Gensler: I don't know if they thought that or not. I was asked by some older people: "Have you been called up yet?" or "Do you want to be called?" That didn't bother me. It was what was in me. It worried me. It just ate at me.

Finally, I told my wife, "You know, I just have to go." She said, "Well, you can't go. They said you can't go." I went to the local draft board, which was only a block away from me. I told them I had a deferment. They knew what I had. They said, "We can't break this deferment. It's a government-ordered thing." That really "knocked me for a loop" [shocked me].

Alexander: So, what you are saying is that the government was keeping you there because you were in a very important job. So, what you are saying now is that you were frustrated.

Gensler: Right. I was frustrated. I went to the draft board. I can remember going on several occasions and asking if there was some way. Finally, the man told me, "The

only way we can accept you and let you enlist, if that's what you're talking about, it would have to be cleared by the railroad. They would have to clear you and say they could get along with out you." I said, "Well, I'm going to tell you what I do. You tell me if I'm needed. I sit at a desk. With every shipment of freight that comes in, there comes a waybill. My job is to look at the waybill and see the right rate is applied from the origin to New York or wherever it's going. If it's wrong, I have to correct it and make a correction on the charges." I said, "That's my job. That's all I do." He said, "That's all you do?" I said, "That's all I do."

Alexander: A woman--a gal--could do that easy enough.

Gensler: Yes. I said, "This is foolish. If I was working out on the railroad, on the tracks or routing trains or running a train or something, that's different because I know you're hauling freight for the East and West to go to the ports for the service guys for the war effort." He said, "The

only way you can get released is through the railroad." I said, "Well, can't you do something about it? I told you what I do, and I'm telling you the truth. You can check with Mr. George Alback, who is the vice-president in New York City. He'll know what I do. He can find out what I do." He said, "I don't know. Why don't you just stay home and feel lucky?" I said, "I don't feel lucky."

Alexander: You were dealing with people working in those draft boards who were citizens of the city that they were in. They were volunteers, for the most part, so they weren't really in a position to change your status.

Gensler: Right.

Alexander: So, that is what he was trying to tell you, wasn't it?

Gensler: Right. So, we all had to belong to the railroad union. We belonged to the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks. We had a union representative in our office, named Charlie Oakley. I went and talked to him.

I said, "Suppose I enlist in the service. What will happen?" He said, "Nothing will happen. But how are you going to go if you are deferred?" I said, "Well, I'm working on it." Well, to my surprise, I went over to the draft board about...well, I don't know when. This was over a long period of time.

Alexander: About when are we talking about?

Gensler: This was late in 1942. It might even have been in early 1943, but I don't remember. I went over. To my surprise, they said, "We've broken your deferment. We're going to put you in 1-A." I said, "How did you do that?" They said, "Just don't worry about it. You can enlist." So, the next day I went down to the office. Mr. Paltz was the boss.

Alexander: He was your boss at the railroad?

Gensler: I will never forget it. I walked into the office and said, "Mr. Paltz, I'm going to enlist. If I'm physically fit and can pass, I'm going into the Navy." He said, "You can't go into the Navy. You're

deferred." I said, "No, sir, I'm not. I'm in 1-A." He said, "Well, I know you're deferred." I said, "I'm in 1-A as of now." He said, "Well, if you go in the service, it's tantamount to quitting your job. It won't be here when you come back."

I went straight out to that union man, Charlie Oakley. I told him. He said, "Wait a minute!" He walked in the office and said, "Come with me." He said, "Mr. Paltz, I understand that you said that if Harold goes in the service and enlists, he's quit his job, so his job won't be here when he returns." He said, "That's right. He's deferred." Charlie said, "You have a right to say this, but you're dead wrong. His job will be here, and if his job carries a promotion, he'll get that when he comes back, if he comes back. His job will be here."

Alexander: That was not only the union's...

Gensler: That was the law.

Alexander: That was the law of the land at the time. That is right. They had no choice.

Gensler: He didn't know what he was talking about. Anyway, on the following Saturday, my grandmother, my grandfather, my wife, and my child took a ride over to White Plains, New York, where there was a Navy enlistment station. I went in to see the sailor who was in charge. I told him I wanted to enlist in the Navy. I sat down. He said, "How old are you?" I said, "I'm twenty-seven." He said, "Do you have any dependents?" I said, "Yes, I have got a wife and child." He said, "I'm sorry. At this time we're not taking married men with children." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, just at this time, the Navy says that at your age, and since you have a child, you don't have to go at this time. Maybe later on it will be different, but that's the rule as of now." I said, "Oh, man!" So, I didn't know what to do. I went home. I went back to work. I was mighty "blue" [depressed].

Alexander: Meaning you were really down?

Gensler: Yes. Of course, my wife was elated.

Alexander: Yes.

Gensler: My grandfather was behind me.

Alexander: Oh, was he?

Gensler: Yes. He said, "I'm proud of you." It went on for a while.

Alexander: You are still working at the railroad?

Gensler: Yes. Eddie Hyde, my stepfather, was like a father to me when I lived with him. He was a policeman in Ossining. He had a police friend that he worked with. He told him my plight. He said, "Well, I can tell you where he can go to get in without any problems. He can get in the SeaBees" [Navy Construction Battalions, or CBs]. The SeaBees had just been formed in Norfolk, Virginia.

Alexander: This is a construction battalion.

Gensler: Yes, it is a construction battalion. I said, "What are the SeaBees?" He said, "Well, I don't know. I think it's construction." I said, "Well, I don't know anything about construction." He said, "Well, talk to Waylon." That was the policeman. He said, "It's a brand-new

thing. At Wake Island, they had civilians who were killed defending that island. They fought along with the Marines. The labor people and the Navy got together, and they formed this SeaBees battalion." You were in the service. You were part of the Navy, but it was construction. If you had any experience in anything to do with construction...I don't care how old you were. They even took men who were forty-five and fifty years old.

Alexander: Because of their skills?

Gensler: Right. They started out with a rate. If you were a bulldozer operator, you started out as a chief petty officer or a first class petty officer. I said, "How do I get in there?" He said, "Go down to New York City. There's a recruiting station. This is brand-new." I went down to New York City. I got off work one day, and I went over to the office. They said, "Yes, we'll take you if you can pass the physical examination." I said, "Great! I'm ready to go." He said, "Well, you have to take the

physical." So, I went through the physical.

Alexander: We are somewhere in the middle of 1943?

Gensler: Yes, way up in the middle, by the summer, I guess it was. Maybe it was a little later, probably August or September. He said, "If you pass the physical, we'll take you." He said, "By the way, what do you do?" I said, "I work for the railroad now." He said, "Well, let me see. We can put your classification in supplies. We could call you a hatch checker. You would be checking freight going into the hatches. It would be a storekeeper rating." I didn't know what he was talking about when he mentioned a rating. Anyway, I passed the physical. My wife, of course, was a little upset.

Alexander: Well, you can't blame her.

Gensler: But she was living with my grandparents. She didn't pay any rent.

Alexander: No, but that is not the same thing.

Gensler: No.

Alexander: She didn't want to see her husband and the father of her baby go in harm's way.

Gensler: There were a lot of cases like that, though. It was a time of war. That is why you want to go. You want to defend them. She was real mad.

But, anyway, they gave me two weeks to clear up my affairs. They gave me a party down at the office, and I left. My wife refused to see me off on the train. She didn't want anything to do with it.

Alexander: That is too bad.

Gensler: My stepfather went down to the railroad. He was on duty. He said, "Goodbye." I went down, and they inducted me. It was funny. To me it reminded me of a cattle pen. I went in there, and there was a Marine, a soldier--they didn't have airmen at the time--and a Navy man. They were officers, sitting up at this table like judges. I had passed my physical and had gone all through that stuff. I had some papers. They said, "Go up to that desk." I went up there and put my papers up. They went through them, and they were looking at them. This Army man said, "Okay, we'll

take him." I said, "Wait a minute! Whoa! Wait a minute! What do you mean, you are going to take me?" I said, "I enlisted. I'm not a draftee! It's right on the paper there! I'm going in the SeaBees, in the Navy!" He said, "Oh, okay. You go over there." They had a cage with guys in it--a cage for every branch. It was just like a bunch a sheep.

Alexander: We were a bunch of sheep (laughter).

Gensler: I remember the physical, sitting down on the cold marble slab.

Anyway, I went over to that crowd. We got shipped out late in the afternoon and got on the train. We were on the Pennsylvania Railroad, I think. We were shipped down...

Alexander: With all these other guys who were SeaBees?

Gensler: Yes, we all went in a bunch. They put us on a train.

Alexander: At this particular point, you were sworn in, were you not?

Gensler: Oh, wait a minute! I skipped that. I'm sorry. When I was sworn in, after the

physical and after they accepted me, the Navy officer said, "Okay," and put a stamp on there. I had to go to an office. There was a commander in there. It was a large office. A bunch of us went in there, maybe four or five at a time. He said, "Raise your right hand and be sworn in." I was never a seaman. I was sworn in as a third class petty officer.

Alexander: That is interesting.

Gensler: All of us got a rating.

Alexander: You got a rating?

Gensler: Some of us got a second class rating. There were no seamen at all. I didn't realize what that meant. That was a big break.

Alexander: Yes, I'll say it was.

Gensler: Anyway, we got on the train. They shipped us down to Williamsburg, Virginia, to Camp Perry. We got there at night. Everything was confusing. It was a mess. We went in a big drill hall. It was much bigger than that Quonset hut--three times as big.

Alexander: And it was a Quonset hut.

Gensler: It was. They had bunks in there for recruits. They had this Navy guy, who got up on this stage-like platform. He told us about writing letters home and [this and that]. He said, "Tomorrow we'll give you shots. We'll get you uniforms." It was chaos. The next day we started getting our shots. We got our clothing.

Alexander: Did you personally have any reaction to those shots?

Gensler: I had a reaction to the shot for yellow fever. We walked in this room. I remember the medics were in there hitting you from both sides with needles. After getting that yellow fever shot, they told us to go out and exercise to work it through you. I remember two or three of us went out, and we got sick before we had gone a half-a-mile. I went into the library, which was on the base. I remember falling asleep on the table. I just slept. I woke up, finally. A lot of us were sick. We were not nauseated, but we just felt terrible. It passed off.

Alexander: About how long was it before you felt better?

Gensler: That evening I started feeling better. I could eat.

Alexander: So, it was a couple of hours?

Gensler: Yes. It affected most of us. Of course, it was a madhouse.

Alexander: When you say "it affected most of us," it was the...

Gensler: The yellow fever shot.

Alexander: It was the yellow fever shot that got all of you?

Gensler: It affected us more than any other shot for some reason. I remember one guy in front of me. They hit him with a needle, and it stuck in him. He fainted and fell on the floor...

Alexander: I have seen that happen.

Gensler: ...because that needle was left in him.

Alexander: I had a recruit that was ahead of me in the Navy. They popped him with the needle, and he went right down on the floor. He passed out. He got back up again pretty soon (chuckle).

Gensler: Of course, we were teased. We got our hair cut off. I remember this guy sitting in the barber chair ahead of me. He tried to bribe the sailor barber. He said, "Fifty cents." That was a lot of money then. He said, "Take it easy." The barber said, "Fifty cents?" He took the fifty cents, and he took the clippers and went all the way around. He made a big tuft of hair on the top. He said, "Fifty cents worth left." (laughter)

Alexander: So, he left some of the hair (laughter).

Gensler: Of course, he took it off. He had to. He gave the guy back his fifty cents. He didn't try that again.

Anyway, you know what it was--chaos. We were put in an old wooden barrack. You could see the dirt through the floor, through the cracks in the boards. It was put up overnight, I guess. I forget how many were in the barracks. A Marine was assigned to train us because the Marines and the SeaBees were very close together. They went into together sometimes. They

formed battalions. After we finished our boot camp, we went into a battalion.

Alexander: How long were in boot camp at Camp Perry?

Gensler: I went in and started in October, and I didn't get out of there until March.

Alexander: But you were out of boot camp before that?

Gensler: Yes.

Alexander: Was it eight or ten weeks?

Gensler: Yes. We were just sitting there doing nothing but chopping firewood.

Alexander: Well, you had close-order drill and that sort of thing.

Gensler: Yes, but even that stopped after we passed boot camp.

Alexander: Yes, at boot camp. That is what I was referring to. Boot camp usually lasted about ten weeks. But you stayed at Camp Perry?

Gensler: Right. We were doing nothing. We didn't know what was going on.

I remember that Marine. I can tell you one funny story. I smoked a pipe in those days. When you were drilling, he would holler, "The smoking lamp is lit!"

Well, by the time I got the pipe filled and lit, he would say, "The smoking lamp is out." I said, "Well, I can't smoke the pipe." So, I went to cigarettes. I couldn't stand them. Three days of that stuff, and that was enough. So, one of the guys who came from Arkansas says, "Why don't you 'chaw?'" He had an apple tobacco plug. So, I went and bought some at the ship's store. I was chewing tobacco. We were out drilling one day. I had a wad in my mouth, which was against the rules. I was a pivot man. I was a tall man in the squad. We went to make a left flank turn, and I took too wide of steps, and, of course, the line got wavy.

Alexander: Yes.

Gensler: That Marine screamed at me. He came up and hollered. He wanted to know where the hell I was going or something like that. I couldn't answer. I had a mouthful of juice. You know how they scream--right nose-to-nose. He screamed, "Do you hear me?" I said, "[makes spitting sound] Yes,

Sir!"

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Gensler: He said, "Oh!" He said, "Take your 'piece'..."

Alexander: That is your rifle.

Gensler: He said, "Take your 'piece' and run double time to the fence and back!" I looked over there and said, "Sergeant, I don't see the fence!" He said, "You'll see it when you get over the horizon!"

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Gensler: So, I ran over and back. I couldn't breathe, hardly, when I got back.

Alexander: I'm laughing because I can relate to it.

Gensler: I came back, and that ended the tobacco. I didn't chew anymore.

Alexander: It probably saved your life.

Gensler: It probably did (chuckle). So, I didn't do anything. The only time I smoked was when I was off at night, and I smoked my pipe. We had some funny experiences and some good times.

Anyway, after boot camp was over, we had the drill and the ceremonies. We went

back to the barracks, and all I remember doing was just sitting around. We drilled a little bit. We chopped wood for the stoves in the barracks. Of course, it was getting warmer then in February and March. It was starting to get warm a little bit.

Alexander: February and March. We are now in 1943.

Gensler: We are in Virginia.

Alexander: Yes. We are talking about 1943, aren't we?

Gensler: Yes. We hung around there. Then I was assigned to the early morning clean-up detail. We called it the "Dawn Patrol." There was about five of us. We had to clean the officers' offices.

But I have to go back some. We had been told that the last battalion had been formed. There were no more battalions going out. In the meantime, with Guadalcanal [Solomon Islands] and all these big battles going on...here I was missing it, sitting there, all of this time. I said to myself, "I have got to get out of this thing somehow." We were told that we were going to be replacements. As we were needed, we

would be sent over.

Well, nobody seemed to be moving, so I went up to the personnel office. There was a WAVE working in there. [Editor's note: The Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service, or WAVES, was the U.S. Navy's women's auxiliary arm during World War II.] There was a commander in charge. I said, "Sir, I would like to transfer." He said, "Transfer to what?" I said, "Into the Navy." He said, "You are in the Navy, son." I said, "I know. I don't want to stay here the rest of the war waiting to go overseas somewhere. I didn't join for this, Sir. I have missed a lot of this war. I feel guilty. That's why I'm here. I want to serve my country. I don't want to be here. I want to be where the action is. I'm not crazy." He said, "Well, you just have to..."

Alexander: He didn't have an answer for you.

Gensler: Yes. Well, do you know what I did? I asked another officer if I had a right to keep asking for a transfer. He said, "Oh,

yes." I went up about every other day to that same commander. One morning he said, "You again?" I said, "Sir, I have a right to ask for a transfer." He said, "Yes, and I have a right to deny it. Denied!" I was disgusted. I could have done better at the railroad.

One day we were doing the early morning clean-up. It was about 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning. This one office we went into had a big printout sheet of paper. It said, "Draftees." I thought it meant draftees coming in or something. But I looked on there. I forget the date. It said, "At 0800, we will report to the railroad station," which was inside the camp. It didn't say where or what, just "Draftees." I went down the list of names, and I saw: "Gensler, Harold, L." I said, "Holy smoke! I'm getting out of here!" A couple of guys that I worked with were the same way. They wanted to get out, too. Their names were on there.

Alexander: You thought you looked at a little bit of

heaven, didn't you?

Gensler: So, I didn't dare say anything because I was snooping. I said, "We'd better shut our mouths, or we'll be in trouble." We didn't say anything.

Finally, they got a notice put up on the bulletin board and made it official. We had to report at 0800 at the railroad station with all of our gear, ready to go.

Alexander: With that I want to stop because I want to change the tape.

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Alexander: We are back on the tape. You were at the platform waiting for the train.

Gensler: We didn't know where we were going. There were 200 of us lined up. They had the SeaBees band up there. They started playing "California, Here We Come."

Alexander: Oh, really?

Gensler: That was a clue.

Alexander: That was your clue.

Gensler: I didn't tell you before, but during the time I was at the camp, Walter Winchell was in the Reserve. He was an intelligence

officer. There was a spell there where we were dying like flies in Camp Perry. They called it "cat fever" [catarrhal fever, an inflammation of the mucous membranes, especially the nose and throat]. They were carrying them out on stretchers. I was lucky that I didn't get it. A lot of my buddies were real sick.

Alexander: I don't think "cat fever" killed a lot of people.

Gensler: They called it "cat fever." It was the flu.

Alexander: I don't think they died of it, did they?

Gensler: No, they died of the flu. The flu killed them. That is what it was. Winchell came down there undercover, I guess, somehow. He went back to New York and wrote his column and blasted Camp Perry for the conditions. The cold wind came up through the floor. It wasn't healthy. They made changes. Captain Weir was the commandant of the camp there. He was there for a reason. He once ran the destroyers aground off California. That was his job after

that.

Alexander: That was the last of his sea duty?

Gensler: Yes. Anyway, the food was excellent, but they improved it. I don't know how they improved it. You had so that much you could hardly eat it.

Alexander: It was that good?

Gensler: They had a band that played in the mess hall at every noontime for entertainment. Williamsburg was about four miles away, and it was a tiny town. It was swamped with sailors. If you wanted liberty, Richmond, Virginia, was the only place to go, but I never went there. Anyway, we got out to California. I expected I would be put on a ship.

Alexander: Do you know whereabouts in California?

Gensler: It was in Oakland.

Alexander: Was it at Shoemaker?

Gensler: No, it was the Naval Supply Depot in Oakland. I said San Francisco. Oakland is where we landed.

On our way out, I was appointed to Shore Patrol on watch one night. The train

stopped in Reno, Nevada, in the middle of the night.

Alexander: Wait a minute. I'm confused. You are on Shore Patrol? Where was this? Was this at Oakland?

Gensler: No, this was on the train before we got there.

Alexander: Okay.

Gensler: It was on the way out. You had to have someone on duty every night. We stopped in Reno. I ran across the street and got a donut and a cup of coffee because the train had stopped to take on water. It had a steam engine. I ran back just in time to get on the train. I was standing close to guys who were all sleeping. I was standing at the end of this car. Here comes this girl walking down the aisle. I couldn't believe my eyes.

Alexander: But you are the duty guy?

Gensler: Yes, I'm on Shore Patrol. She comes walking down toward me. She says, "Hi." I said, "What are you doing on this train?" She says, "I want a ride." I said, "You

want a ride? This is a troop train. This is a Navy train. Where did you get on?"

Alexander: That is what she had in mind (chuckle).

Gensler: Yes, I think she was a prostitute.

Alexander: Yes, probably.

Gensler: So, she said, "Do you guys need some entertainment?" I said, "You're in trouble." I knew where the officer was. I knew where to go. I went and woke up this lieutenant. I said, "Lieutenant, we have got a woman aboard." He said, "A woman?" I said, "I don't know how she got on. I went and got a cup of coffee. She must have slipped on the train, but she is here." He said, "Where is she?" I said, "She's two or three cars back. She can't get off." So, he jumped in his clothes and went up there. He questioned her. She just wanted to ply her trade, I guess. He said, "All right, you're getting off at the next stop." He got hold of the engineer or the conductor and told him to stop the train at the next stop and put her off, which they did.

I remember the next day going into Sacramento Valley. It was beautiful. There were olive trees. It was pretty. We got in to Oakland, and we were assigned to barracks. We were told to report to the main office somewhere, by name. Our names were on a bulletin board. I was assigned to this main office to Lieutenant Harrison.

Alexander: Now, this is a Navy lieutenant?

Gensler: Right. I was working nights at 12:00. I was down there that night...

Alexander: What were you doing?

Gensler: It got worse. Here was this big office, just like a civilian office, with what seemed to have about fifty electric typewriters in it.

Alexander: Electric?

Gensler: Yes. We had electric typewriters. It was the first one I ever saw in my life. The lieutenant gave us a talk. He said, "All right, what this is, we're typing up requisitions for battleships; we're typing up requisitions for supplies." I learned to type in school, but I didn't know that

they were so thorough. They checked everything in your background. I told a fib. I said, "I don't know how to type." The lieutenant said, "The records say that you do. You took a business course in typing."

I was stuck. I hated that electric typewriter because you didn't hit the key. You would just think about it, and--BAM!-- it would go. You would just touch it, and it would fire off. I would be constantly correcting. Boy, I'm telling you, I was so disgusted. I told the lieutenant, "Sir, I should have stayed home." I told him briefly what happened. I said, "Here I thought I was going to get into this thing. I'm a titless WAVE! I'm just disgusted with the whole thing!" He said, "Look, you have liberty every night. You've got it made." I said, "I don't have it made! I didn't come here for this! You probably think I'm a lunatic, but I'm not. That's just the way I feel about it." But there was nothing I could do. I don't know how

long I was there. This was in March when we left.

Alexander: March of 1943.

Gensler: Yes. It went on, and it was wintertime. I remember it was cold in San Francisco. I just don't know how long I was there. I do remember this: I kept bitching to the lieutenant, complaining. I got off one morning and went to get in my sack. There was a note on the bunk that read: "Report to Personnel at 0900." I had my breakfast and went over to the personnel office. This WAVE was there. She said, "You're being transferred to Astoria, Oregon, as of today. At noon you leave on the train. Go back and pack your duffel bag and get ready to go." So, that was all right with me. I was the only one.

Alexander: Just you?

Gensler: I went alone. I had my own orders. I went and packed up my stuff and left. I went to Astoria. I had to report to the Naval Air Station. They assigned me to a barrack. There was nothing in it.

Alexander: There was nobody else in the barrack?

Gensler: Nobody. There was nobody in that Quonset hut but me. I went back to the personnel office, and I asked the commander, "What is this, Sir? What am I doing here?" He said, "You have been assigned to the USS *Mellette* [APA-156], an amphibious ship." I said, "What is amphibious?" He said, "You carry the men into the beachheads." I said, "I'm not doing this alone, am I?" He said, "Well, you're one of the first here. The ship is still being built." It turned out he was wrong. The *Mellette* was gone. It was at sea. So, the ship that I was supposed to be on was the USS *Edgecombe* [APA-164]. They started to trickle in. Every day there were a few. Finally, we had the barrack full. Being that I was the first one there...the ship was up in Portland, Oregon, being constructed. They brought it down. Of course, it was empty. It didn't have any supplies or anything on it. They appointed me to go to San Diego and different places ahead of the ship with

requisitions. So, when the ship got there...

Alexander: It was ready on the dock.

Gensler: It was on dock on flats, or skids, and ready to go.

Alexander: You had a second class rating?

Gensler: I was still third class. There was a chief who was there. He was kind of mad because he didn't get that job. I was traveling on my own. I went to San Diego and got the stuff lined up there. Then I went back to San Francisco.

Alexander: Whereabouts in San Diego did you go?

Gensler: I went to the Naval Supply Depot. Then I had to go back to Oakland where I started out. I finally wound up in Seattle. I had the all of these supplies ahead of the ship.

Alexander: So, they went down to San Diego...

Gensler: ...and back to San Francisco, then went up to Seattle. I was in Seattle then. I was transferred up to Seattle from Astoria, Oregon. We waited for the ship. They filled it up with supplies in Seattle. I

think it was the last place. In the meantime...

Alexander: How many people were going to be on board?

Gensler: I don't know. I can't remember the crew numbers. There were 200 or 300. It was a small APA. An APA is an attack personnel ship. It wasn't too big. It carried people to about a mile off the beach. Then they had the LCVPs [Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel] coming off of there. Then they go to shore. We loaded up in Seattle.

In the meantime, when I came back from my trip down to San Diego and Oakland, I had a letter from my wife. I had told her that I was going to sea. I couldn't tell her much of anything. She said that she would rather collect the insurance--\$10,000--than have me come home.

Alexander: She said that in the letter?

Gensler: In the letter. I have still got the letter. That kind of upset me.

Alexander: Oh, no kidding [facetious comment]?

Gensler: I didn't know who to go to. I went to the commanding officer at the base and showed

him the letter. He said, "Well, son, go talk to the chaplain." I went and talked to the chaplain. He said, "Well, maybe it is because of the times, the nerves." I said, "Well, I don't understand." He said, "Do you think your wife might be having an affair or something?" I said, "I don't know. My grandparents haven't said anything to me." He said, "I'll tell you what. Do you have any leave?" I did have a week after I broke boot camp. They did give us a leave. I left that out. I said, "Yes, I have one week." He said, "I'm going to send you back home. How would two weeks do? Find out what is going on. Get settled."

Alexander: Chaplains were pretty good guys.

Gensler: Yes. They gave me money for train fare. This is interesting, too. They gave me train fare. I packed my duds and went to the station. There were hundreds of people there. In those days it was awful. Civilians would travel--wives. I went to the gate. I'm telling you, it was like a

riot, almost.

There was a guy standing at the gate before they opened it up and let people on the train. I got to talking to him. I said, "I worked for the railroad." He said, "You did?" I said, "Yes, New York Central. I still have my pass with me." I showed it to him. I wasn't looking for anything. I was just talking. He said, "When I open this gate, go."

Alexander: He is going to get you in there first.

Gensler: Right. So, I ran down and got a seat. I was one of the first ones on the train. This young lady came in and sat down. She wanted to sit next to the window. When the conductor came through...oh, the man told me, "When the conductor comes through, show him your railroad pass." I said, "It's for the New York Central." He said, "We don't care. You work for the railroad." So, the conductor came through. I showed him my pass. He didn't say anything. I got a free ride all the way back to New York.

Alexander: Did you get it going back?

Gensler: Going back was the same thing. Anyway, I went home. Like I said, my wife was living with my grandmother and grandfather. I had a daughter. The first thing she started telling me was how sad it was that all her neighbors' husbands were home working in the airplane factory in Tarrytown. General Motors had started making Navy planes there. She said our daughter had to say her daddy wasn't home, and the kids were "rubbing it in" [taunting] to her.

 I pulled this letter out. I said, "Here's why they sent me back. What is going on? Is there anything I should know?" She looked at it and said, "Yes, I wrote it." I said, "Did you mean what you said?" She said, "I wrote it."

 I said, "Okay, I want to tell you something. Since I have been in the Navy, when I have been out to California, I had all of these temptations." Two or three of us married men hung together. We made a little pact that we wouldn't be cheating on our wives. We would just go out and have a

good time. I was never a drinker, but I would take a drink. That was it. My mother was an alcoholic, and I was afraid of it. I said, "I don't owe you anything. If that's the way you feel, I don't owe you anything. I won't make you any promises." I said, "I hope I come home. But if not, take the \$10,000 and enjoy it." I left.

I went back to California after two days. I didn't want to stay there. I went back to Seattle and got a free ride. The chaplain wanted to know how I made out. I told him, "She said she meant it." He said, "Well, that's unfortunate." I said, "She hates me because I enlisted." She was going to get a divorce, she said. I said, "Well, the judge is going to throw you out on the street because you can't divorce me while I'm in the service. That is no excuse. You're crazy! They'll laugh at you."

Anyway, from there, we went to San Francisco. On New Year's Eve, 1943, we sailed.

Alexander: You left that day?

Gensler: We went down to San Diego and got degaussed.

Alexander: Explain what being degaussed is.

Gensler: It repels magnetic mines instead of pulling them in. The process is called "degaussing."

Alexander: Degaussing is what it is.

Gensler: Yes. We sailed. Well, we didn't know where we were going until we got out at sea and then the captain [Commander F. W. Wauchope] came on the speaker and said that we were going to New Guinea. That was a long way off. It took a long time to get there. It took weeks. It was hot. We got down to New Guinea.

Alexander: Did you cross the International Date Line?

Gensler: [Editor's note: The ensuing passage describes the traditional ceremony for sailors crossing the Equator for the first time. Those going through the initiation are called "pollywogs." Those who have previously crossed the Equator are called "shellbacks." The person presiding over

the ceremony is called "King Neptune."] I have to tell you about that. He said, "The dangerous waters have to be crossed, so remember that we are at war. The rule is that all of you 'pollywogs' are going to be initiated into the mysteries of the deep. You're going over the Equator." What were the others called, the ones who had been there? Anyway, they were in charge. The captain said, "The rule is, if you can take the ship over, the 'pollywogs,' before tomorrow morning, you won't have to go through this. When I say, 'take the ship over,' remember that we are at war. But that includes me. You have to take my command away from me and the first lieutenant and the executive officer, and then the ship is yours. You immediately release us, and you don't have to go through the ceremony."

We had a lieutenant who was an All-American football player. He organized us. He was a "pollywog." So, he got us together. We had a meeting up on the well

deck. They probably had a spy in there somewhere (chuckle). He said, "Here's the deal. Tonight, I'm going to get up. I'm on watch up in the wheelhouse. When you hear 'Geronimo!' get hold of every son-of-a-bitch that you can get hold of." He said, "We're going to lock 'em up in the mess hall. The officers are going for the captain and the rest of them." So, when he hollered "Geronimo!," away we went. We started down the side of the ship. We were met with high-pressure fire hoses.

Alexander: They were waiting for you, weren't they?

Gensler: And paddles...that ended the mutiny. We did get the first lieutenant and the executive officer, but that wasn't enough. The captain was locked in his cabin, I guess.

Alexander: Yes, he wasn't around (chuckle).

Gensler: It failed. The captain said, "Now you're really going to get it!"

Alexander: That is the whole idea.

Gensler: We had a guy aboard the ship who was a storekeeper. He was a "striker" [candidate

for a specialty rating]. His name was Joseph Starvaggi. He was Italian. He didn't speak good English. He was a shoemaker from Portland, Oregon. He would say, "I don't know why I'm here. I've paid my taxes. They put me in the Navy, and I pay my taxes." I said, "Joe, we all pay taxes. That has got nothing to do with your being drafted. There's a war on. Taxes have nothing to do with it. I pay taxes, too." That is all he could say. He was a nervous wreck.

We used to sit and watch the radar at night up on the deck before the sun went down. They had the surface and the air radar. We got wise to him. He would keep looking at that thing. It would stop, and he would look. So, we would sit there talking. I was next to one of my buddies. The thing would stop, and I'd say, "Hey, Starvaggi!" He'd say, "What's the matter?" I'd say, "The radar feels something. They might see something. Well, it's probably a submarine or something." Boy, he was up

hanging over the rail looking for that submarine. He was just scared to death.

So, the next day, we had a warrant officer, who was "Father Neptune." He sat up on a hatch in a chair with a crown and a trident. Below him was a row of officers in a path lying on their bellies. We had to walk on them...

Alexander: Across them?

Gensler: We had to walk on their backs to get up to "Father Neptune." They were "pollywogs."

Alexander: Oh, yes. That is right.

Gensler: We had to kiss his behind.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Gensler: He would turn around with his bare behind, and we had to kiss his bare behind. I don't remember what he said.

Then they sent us to the doctor. They laid us on the table. They pulled our pants down and slapped some pipe cement all over our pubic hairs. They put some awful-tasting stuff in your mouth. I think it was alum. Then they pronounced you fit (laughter).

Then you had to go get beat with paddles. You had to go...

Alexander: ...through the line.

Gensler: Yes. They would beat you on the rear end with a paddle. The last thing was that you had to walk the plank. They had a swimming pool made up of canvas. It was a big canvas thing. It was full of garbage water and hair cuttings from the barber. The plank was out over the water. They blindfolded you. They made you feel your way out.

Alexander: Until you fell off (chuckle).

Gensler: Until you fell off in that garbage. There were two guys standing in the garbage, and when you came up, they got hold of you by the back of the neck. They kept pushing you down until you hollered...I can't remember what you called the other men...not the "pollywogs." It was the "shellbacks." You had to holler, "Shellback! Shellback!" In other words, you surrendered. Well, you were choking to death. Then they would let you out.

They called the roll. Starvaggi was missing.

Alexander: Oh, was he?

Gensler: He was gone. They put on the PA system: "Joe Starvaggi! Report to the forward deck!" There was no Starvaggi. They said, "All of you guys in the S Division, go look for him." That was the storekeepers. We searched the ship and finally found him down below, hiding behind a great, big pipe vent. We pulled him out of there. They said, "Brother! You're really going to get it! You should never have done this! You're really going to get it! They're going to pound you!" He said, "I'm going to tell my congressman!" He was going to report it to somebody. We took him up. Boy! They bruised him (chuckle). His backside looked like it was purple. He was never right after that, I'll tell you. He was bitter.

We went down to Finschhafen [Papua, New Guinea]. That is where we landed in New Guinea.

Alexander: In Finschhafen.

Gensler: We tied up next to a British ship. Those guys had shorts and short-sleeved shirts on. We weren't allowed that. To prevent flash burns, we had to have on everything. We had to have our sleeves down and buttoned up.

Alexander: With dungarees.

Gensler: Right. It smelled so bad--the stench coming off that British ship. We were anchored and tied next to it.

Alexander: You are talking about the British ship.

Gensler: Yes. The captain cut us loose and said, "We're going to anchor out in the stream." There were rats on that thing. It was dirty. We stayed there, and we came to find out that we were not supposed to be there. They had sent us there by mistake.

Alexander: The orders sent you there.

Gensler: Yes.

Alexander: So, whoever cut the orders obviously...

Gensler: ...got it wrong. We weren't doing anything.

Alexander: How did we win the war (chuckle)?

Gensler: I don't know. So, we went to the Philippines. We got in on the tail-end on the...I don't know the dates. It was at the tail-end, because we had taken it.

Alexander: We had taken Luzon.

Gensler: It was when [General Douglas A.] MacArthur went back.

Alexander: So, actually where you are now, then, is in January or February of 1945?

Gensler: Yes. Anyway, we went up to Leyte and took on some supplies and different things. I stole a Jeep. I will tell you how and why I did it. I had to go from Leyte...they sent four of us down in a truck to a base south of Leyte, but I can't remember the name of it. It doesn't matter. I have seen it on the map. When I left, they did not put in the requisitions. We had no way to get back. We had to walk through the jungle in mud.

Alexander: You took the Jeep over?

Gensler: No, we got a ride down. A Navy driver was going that way. They didn't make arrangements for us to come back for some

reason. I guess they figured there would be some vehicle coming back. There were very few supplies.

Anyway, I started walking. The other guys said they were going to stay there. I said, "I'm going to walk." I didn't realize how far it was. I was in the mud, and I came across a small naval...I don't know what you call it. It was a big yard fenced in. The gate was open. There were a bunch of Navy Jeeps in there. I went in and turned the key and took one and drove it back to the ship. I borrowed it.

I left it on the dock, and I walked up on the ship. The officer-of-the-deck said, "Where did you get that?" I said, "I borrowed it down the road. I wasn't going to walk through that muck and that jungle. It'd take me all day." He didn't say anything. So, I went down below.

I heard the winch working up there. When I went up there, here comes a Jeep. The captain said, "Take it aboard." They welded some things so you could tie it

down. So, we had a Jeep (chuckle).

Alexander: You "borrowed" the Jeep (chuckle).

Gensler: But you were not supposed to have that stuff. We had inspectors who came aboard once in a while to check for those kinds of things.

Anyway, we went back and forth. We went to Ulithi [Caroline Islands]. We weren't carrying any troops.

Alexander: You went into Ulithi, which, of course, is a huge, huge bay.

Gensler: That is where the Japanese were putting the mines.

Alexander: At the entrance. That is where the 3rd/5th Fleet stayed at that time. [Editor's note: Admiral Chester W. Nimitz rotated command of the Pacific Fleet between Admirals William F. ("Bull") Halsey and Raymond A. Spruance. When Halsey was in command, the fleet was identified as the 3rd Fleet; when Spruance was in command, it was identified as the 5th Fleet.]

Gensler: Right. We went and got supplies there. We went to different places picking up

supplies, but we didn't carry any troops. We did carry some replacements.

Alexander: For where? Iwo Jima?

Gensler: No, from the Philippines to...I can't remember some of these little islands. Maybe it was Ulithi we carried them to. We didn't do anything. To me it was just running around and sitting around, which again made me think: "What am I here for?"

So, finally, we scared Starvaggi half to death. We took on supplies in Ulithi. I was looking down in the hold. They had him down three decks below, pulling the supplies out that we were lowering and pulling them back in the hold so we could put more stuff down. We had three brand-new GI cans [trash cans]. I said to "Cookie," a friend of mine, I said, "I'm going to drop this one down there on Starvaggi. I don't want to hit him. I'm going to wait until he gets out." So, I dropped the thing down, and it sounded like a bomb. Everyone on the bridge said, "What the hell was that?" All we heard was: "Air

raid!"

Alexander: From down there (chuckle)?

Gensler: Starvaggi came flying up topside. I don't know how he got up so fast. He came up on the deck with his eyes wide-open, with his life belt and his helmet. He was hollering, "Air raid!" (laughter)

Alexander: That poor sap.

Gensler: They finally put him off and sent him to Francis Letterman Hospital in San Francisco, for the "touched" [psychiatrically disordered]. I think we drove him crazy.

Alexander: You probably did.

Gensler: He was tickled to death. He was grinning from ear to ear when he got off that ship. He was going home. That is just a side thing.

Alexander: It is an important side thing. These things happen aboard ships as it did anywhere else in the Army or the Marines. So, we are in early 1945 at Ulithi. You didn't participate at all in the battle for Iwo Jima?

Gensler: No. I saw it. We went by it. It was the same with Guadalcanal. They were all gone by then.

Alexander: Well, Guadalcanal was two years before.

Gensler: They bypassed Truk [Caroline Islands, a major naval base developed by the Japanese].

Alexander: It might have already been taken, also. You are actually at this particular point... the only other place was the last landing. Of course, that was at Okinawa.

Gensler: Yes.

Alexander: You are about ready to get Okinawa. Where do you come from? Did you come from Ulithi--that is quite a long ways--or were you staging in the Philippines? Where were you?

Gensler: We were staged in the Philippines.

Alexander: That was Halsey's 3rd Fleet. Were you a part of that?

Gensler: I understood that we were under Admiral Spruance at the time. [Editor's note: The Edgcombe was a part of the 5th Amphibious Force for the Okinawa Campaign.]

Alexander: It was the 5th Fleet then.

Gensler: Right. But Admiral Halsey was there. He was the flag officer. He was on the USS *Missouri*.

Alexander: Yes, he was. But your group was with Spruance.

Gensler: Yes.

Alexander: That whole contingent was when it was under Halsey. It was the 3rd Fleet.

Gensler: It was a sub-division.

Alexander: Then under Spruance it was the 5th Fleet. Basically, you had both of them in one.

Gensler: Right.

Alexander: How long did it take you to get down to Okinawa?

Gensler: I don't know exactly. We ran into a storm. Of course, that delayed us. It seemed to me that it took just a few days. That is all I can say. I don't know how many days. I couldn't pinpoint it.

Alexander: You mentioned something off the record about "Tokyo Rose."

Gensler: "Tokyo Rose," as you know, would broadcast from Japan. She played the only decent

music we had. She played good American music. We listened to her all of the time. On the way she came on the air and said that we were on our way to Okinawa. I saw it in print. I didn't know how to pronounce it. I didn't know where it was. They didn't tell us it was near Japan. Well, we didn't think much of it. She told us that they would be waiting. [Editor's note: "Tokyo Rose" was the pseudonym of Iva Toguri d'Aquino, a Japanese-American who broadcast English-language programming to Allied troops in the Pacific Theater as part of Japanese propaganda. Sentenced to ten years' imprisonment after the war, she was pardoned by President Gerald Ford on his last day in office, January 19, 1977.] We sailed on.

One thing did happen on the way. Our ship broke down. We were in a convoy. The engines failed. We started to drift. The captain came on and told us that the engine had broken down, and men were working on it as fast as they could. He told us not to

be alarmed. There was a DE [destroyer escort]. He said, "If you look off the starboard side, you'll see our escort."

Alexander: That is a small ship.

Gensler: Right. They stayed and hung around until we got going again, maybe about two hours later. That was kind of touchy. We were afraid of submarines.

Alexander: You don't much care to be by yourself in that situation.

Gensler: We went on. Easter Sunday morning...of course, then we were told. We had Marine troops aboard the ship. The Marine officers had a talk with the Marines on the deck. They were all sitting on the deck, and he addressed them and told them that we were going into a very dangerous operation. The rumor, or story, was that the people would even be booby-trapped--the natives, the people.

Alexander: The Japanese people?

Gensler: The Japanese people, even the animals. They said, "Do not approach any of them." If they thought they were going to get hurt

or shot, they had to shoot. In other words, shoot everybody if they had to.

Alexander: How many landing barges did you have on your ship?

Gensler: I couldn't tell you the number.

Alexander: About how many?

Gensler: I don't know what those APAs carried. "APA" stood for "auxiliary personnel attack." We carried the small landing craft for personnel. I don't know, but maybe we had ten or twelve of them. That would be my guess. They rendezvoused off the ship and then went ashore.

Alexander: Then they went ashore from your ship?

Gensler: Right.

Alexander: In doing that, do you remember how many men would have been on each one of those landing craft?

Gensler: It looked like there was about twenty or thirty. They all huddled down in there. There were quite a few troops aboard. I was running the ship's store at the time. Boy, I had a line continually of guys buying stuff--troops.

Alexander: Buying cigarettes?

Gensler: Cigarettes and the last minute things. Anyway, he gave them a talk about what they were going to run into. We expected that it was going to be bad.

When we arrived at dawn on Easter morning, we didn't know at the time, but we were going on the other side of the island, we heard. "Scuttlebutt" [rumors] said that we were supposed to be on the other side. But the Japanese knew we were coming, so we fooled them. We went on the Naha, the capital, side. We went down past a couple of little islands. We didn't hear a shot. We had all of our guns ready for combat. There were no planes, nothing. We dropped anchor. I don't know how far off shore we were. It wasn't too far. The boats rendezvoused off all of their the APAs and went ashore. There wasn't a shot. We didn't hear or see anything. I thought, "This is going to be a picnic."

Alexander: According to what you were usually running into.

Gensler: Anyway, they went ashore, and all day long we were sending boats in. I don't know if they were supplies or what they were. I remember calling out: "Brown Beach!"

Alexander: You were on Brown Beach. [Editor's note: Brown Beach was the southernmost of the eight codenamed beach sectors attacked during the initial assault on Okinawa. It was assigned to the 383rd Regiment of the U.S. Army's 96th Infantry Division.]

Gensler: Yes, Brown Beach. The day went fine. The second day...

Alexander: You didn't have any Japanese aircraft or anything?

Gensler: Nothing. We did have a warning, and they put on a "Yellow" alert. We all had to cock our guns and be ready, but nothing happened.

Alexander: They "Yellow" alert means what?

Gensler: It is prior to the "Red" alert. That means: "They're here!"

Alexander: In other words, you are in the middle. You are anticipating.

Gensler: That is right. So, it was spooky. It was

too calm.

Alexander: Let me ask you something. The Marines are on the shore.

Gensler: They were on the beach.

Alexander: They were bivouacking and everything else.

Gensler: They were going inland. Finally, on the third or fourth day, all hell broke loose.

Alexander: There were two or three days before they ever started to...

Gensler: Before we could see or hear anything. Before it really got bad, we saw some Japanese army trucks come over a ridge in the back of Naha, the capital.

Alexander: Could you see Naha from where you were?

Gensler: Yes. I saw that they had a big radio tower. They shot that down and blew that up. This battleship *Missouri* [BB-63] was behind us, but I don't know how far. I wasn't facing the *Missouri*. I saw it back there, but I wasn't facing it. I was facing toward shore. All of a sudden, I felt this concussion.

Alexander: A tremendous "BOOM!"

Gensler: "BOOM!" It was the *Missouri* firing shells

onto the beach, we thought. But we didn't see any explosion on the beach. We saw it way up on the ridge. They were picking off those trucks. I don't know how in the world they ever did it. They were blowing the road up. They fired about ten shells, I guess. We could see them going in.

Alexander: Those are big shells. [Editor's note: The main batteries of the USS *Missouri* were 16-inch guns.]

Gensler: Yes. That was all the action for them. Then we saw the radio tower go down. They blew that up.

After that, "Tokyo Rose" went on the air and said that they were going to sink the fleet and the whole works down to the bottom of the bay. They wanted us to mutiny. That is what she was after. She got to telling stories about our wives at home running around. She was trying to break our morale. I remember Admiral Halsey got on the Armed Forces Radio and broadcast to Japan, somehow. He said, "My answer to [Japanese Emperor] Hirohito is:

'Go to Hell! We came here to stay!'" We stayed.

Alexander: He sure did.

Gensler: After the big raid, we pulled up anchor. First, we took on some wounded Marines. The ship was operational.

Alexander: Your ship?

Gensler: Yes. We took some wounded Marines aboard.

Alexander: So, they were getting some fire action?

Gensler: Right. We didn't take many of the wounded, but the Marines told us that these people were in caves on the island. They said they were hunkered down in caves. This one Marine told me it was going to be one hell of a fight. The people had dug in, even the citizens.

Well, the monkey...oh, I haven't told you about the monkey.

Alexander: No, I haven't heard about the monkey.

Gensler: After we left the Philippines, the ship stopped. I was down below one day, and I felt the ship tremble. It felt like it was slowing down or going in reverse or something. I went up on the topside. Out

on the water was a log or part of a tree. There was something moving on it. You couldn't tell what it was. The captain ordered a boat lowered. They went out and picked this little monkey off the log. It had been through a storm, evidently, and had been blown out to sea. He became our mascot. They made a little pair of trousers for him and called him "First Class Monkey" or some such thing. He would pull cigarettes out of your pocket and dump the tobacco on the deck. He didn't put them in his mouth; he just liked to watch them fall. He was on a chain, but he got loose and went up on the radar and started to ride the radar.

Alexander: He was going around and around?

Gensler: Yes. The captain said, "He has to go." So, when they lowered one Marine over in a basket, into a smaller boat, they put him ashore. I think it was at Saipan [Mariana Islands]. That is where we dropped him off on the way back. One of the sailors took the monkey and put him in the basket and

tied the chain. He said, "Here, buddy. Here's a pet for you." He lowered the Marine down, and he took it on the boat (chuckle). We never saw him again. The captain had a big heart to stop that ship.

Alexander: They didn't want to just toss him overboard.

Gensler: He didn't want him to get killed.

[Tape 2, Side 1]

Alexander: The monkey found a good home, apparently. Were you going toward Okinawa when you had the monkey, or was it later on?

Gensler: It must have been later on. I remember the incident. I remember it was right off the Philippines. We had a storm. I don't know if it was that big, bad storm or not--the typhoon. The water was calm, but there had been a storm. It went through the Philippines--the typhoon.

Alexander: Well, Okinawa got hit.

Gensler: That is right. It blew him out, I guess.

Alexander: We are going to talk about that in a little bit. At this particular point now, you had just said that some of the Marines that had

come back were wounded. You took wounded back then?

Gensler: We took some of them. We couldn't take many.

Alexander: If you did, what did you do with them?

Gensler: We dropped them off at Saipan--I know it was Saipan--on the way back to the States for repairs.

Alexander: Yes, but I'm just thinking about right now. When you first saw those Marines, it wasn't early on when you got them?

Gensler: No, this was in the aftermath of the air raids. The Japanese sent everything they had. They were wounded.

Alexander: Okay.

Gensler: They were some of the first wounded.

Alexander: Let me ask you this. You were still in the early stages. The *Missouri* had been pounding and had been pretty good at it.

Gensler: They were shooting behind us.

Alexander: I do know that it wasn't very long after they landed that the Japanese sent most of their...

Gensler: They sent their whole air fleet, I guess.

They said there were 300 planes.

Alexander: Did they have any surface ships there. I don't think they did.

Gensler: I didn't see any. We had so many ships there. As far as you could see, there were all kinds of ships. I never saw a Japanese vessel.

Alexander: Actually, they didn't have any battery shooting at you from the shore, so everything that was coming after you, then, were the kamikazes [Japanese suicide planes].

Gensler: That is right.

Alexander: They were something else.

Gensler: They would drop bombs indiscriminately, it seemed like. They were just dropping bombs anywhere. They wanted to hit something.

Alexander: Was this about the third day after you got there?

Gensler: I think it was the third or fourth day. I just don't remember. It was so long ago.

Alexander: I know, for example, the USS *Missouri* was hit, but not badly damaged. On the other hand, the [cruiser CA-35] USS *Indianapolis*

got her bow blown off. [Editor's note: On April 31, 1945, a bomb falling from a nearly-missing kamikaze struck near the stern, not the bow, of the *Indianapolis*, causing damage to its fuel tanks and propeller shafts.] I had a friend that was on board that ship at the time. Tell me about the kamikazes. Were they hitting everybody? Of course, we also had at that time the shell with the fuze that blew off before it hit the plane. It had a proximity fuze. We had that in operation.

Gensler: We had one 5-inch gun on the stern. I don't know what kind of shell it fired.

Alexander: A 5-inch.

Gensler: I don't know if it was a proximity or what it was.

Alexander: An awful lot of those planes were shot down with those.

Gensler: Yes, they came down like rain.

Alexander: But at the same time, a lot of them got through.

Gensler: One bounced off and hit our deck.

Alexander: Did it explode and go up in flames?

Gensler: It exploded.

Alexander: Were there any casualties?

Gensler: There were some. I do remember burying some at sea. [Editor's note: The *Edgecombe* suffered damage and casualties during its six-day stay off the coast of Okinawa, but there is no record of a *kamikaze* strike on the ship.]

Alexander: That is not much fun, but that is how we had to do it in World War II. How long were you in that battle situation? Do you recall?

Gensler: From the day it started--on Easter Sunday?

Alexander: Yes.

Gensler: I don't know. It was so confusing because we didn't sleep at night. We were up all night on our guns. The Japanese, they said, were sending these little, tiny...not submarines, but some sort of a vessel out and blowing up the ships. I didn't hear or see any of it, but they kept a small boat going around the ship all night long. The men had guns. Every once in a while, you would hear the gun pop. I think they were

shooting at debris or something. They were kind of edgy. I didn't see any ships blown up. "Scuttlebutt" was coming out that they were coming out with these suicide swimmers with some sort of explosive to attack our ships.

Alexander: They were probably coming off the shore.

Gensler: Yes. That is what the talk was, but I didn't see any.

Alexander: Kind of like what our SeaBees did later on. I don't recall exactly when they decided that they had secured Okinawa, but it was somewhere in the third or fourth week. [Editor's note: Determined and effective Japanese resistance on Okinawa continued until June 19, 1945.]

Gensler: The battle was still going when we left.

Alexander: Why did they pull you out? Do you know?

Gensler: I don't know.

Alexander: You weren't going to land any more people.

Gensler: We had to leave for repairs.

Alexander: That is right.

Gensler: We went back on our way to San Francisco. We had to go to San Francisco. We passed

Saipan. They dropped these Marines off.

Alexander: And the monkey (chuckle).

Gensler: And the monkey. He went with them--the poor little monkey. We left there, and, of course, we heard the news over the Armed Forces Radio that the land troops were getting it then. The Marines and soldiers really got into it. They had to go in those caves and burn the Japanese out. It was rough for them. They really had it bad.

That is one thing about the Navy. The captain used to say...I think he stole this saying from somebody because I read it someplace before. He said, "We can't make you fight, but we sure as hell can take you to where it's at."

Alexander: That is a pretty good way of putting it (chuckle).

Gensler: They really caught it. I felt sorry for those guys going ashore. They were seasick. They were vomiting and nervous.

Alexander: They were just kids.

Gensler: I felt like I was lucky.

Alexander: How long did it take you to get back to San Francisco? Did you have to have a tug or anything like that?

Gensler: No, we were on our own power. It is hard to say. We crossed so many times back and forth. If you figure, Japan is 8,000 miles, I think, from California.

Alexander: It is close to that, yes.

Gensler: You figure that we were making between fifteen and twenty knots an hour, so that is twenty-some-odd miles an hour.

Alexander: You left there sometime in April?

Gensler: Yes.

Alexander: And you got to San Francisco sometime in late April?

Gensler: It was toward the end of the month. It took a couple of weeks. It took us about four weeks to get to New Guinea.

Alexander: Oh, yes, it would.

Gensler: That was a long trip. That was the Southwest Pacific, when we were in New Guinea. By the way, before we talked about going over the equator.

Alexander: Yes.

Gensler: I had to go over the South China Sea and got the same thing.

Alexander: I didn't know they did that.

Gensler: I have got two of them. I have got two of those "pollywog"...I got the saying "Saigon again."

Alexander: I didn't realize that they did it in another sea.

Gensler: They sure did. I got it again in the South China Sea. In fact, I got a ribbon for being in the China Sea.

Alexander: Just because you floated through it?

Gensler: Just because we went through it. It was on the backside of the Philippines. We had to go through it again (chuckle). But it wasn't as bad.

Alexander: I'm sure it wasn't. By this time there had been too many things that happened. When you got to San Francisco, what did they do with the crew?

Gensler: Most of us got liberty when we went back like that. They kept a crew aboard just to keep the ship in operation, but we got liberty. I went back and saw some of my

old buddies at the Oakland Naval Supply Center, where I started. I saw some of the people I worked with. A lot of them were civilians. I was so glad I wasn't in there again banging on a typewriter.

Alexander: At least you had been where the action had been.

Gensler: Yes. But, you know, through this whole thing, I regretted one thing. It probably sounds crazy. I was sorry that I didn't get any more of it [battle action]. I felt like I was running around like a chicken with his head off. We were sailing [here and there] and not into anything.

Alexander: There were an awful lot of people that were in the same boat.

Gensler: I just felt, like: "Well, it wasn't my fault. I did my best to get in to start with." I didn't feel bad, but I felt like I wished that I had been in more action. Maybe it was a suicide thing. I don't know. (chuckle) I have always liked to live at the edge. I later went into the police department. That was war every day

for twenty-one years. It was the same thing, only you are not shooting the enemy every day.

Alexander: But you put your life on the line.

Gensler: You are in it every day.

Alexander: You sure are.

Gensler: I guess some people like that business. I know guys that actually loved the war. I think, when the war was over, there was a sort of a letdown for them.

Alexander: There were those who were let down. They didn't quite know what to do with themselves.

Gensler: I was in the middle of the Pacific when they came over the radio and said, "The war is over." I had a sinking feeling. I thought, "That is it."

Alexander: You were ready to keep going.

Gensler: I was. In fact, I entertained the thought of staying in the Navy, but I thought it was my duty to go home. I had a child. I wanted to make the best of things, or I would have stayed.

Alexander: When did you get out of the service?

Gensler: After Okinawa we got repaired. We went back, and they put us on the [Operation] MAGIC CARPET duty. I didn't know what that was.

Alexander: What is the MAGIC CARPET?

Gensler: The MAGIC CARPET was hauling troops back from Japan and taking troops in for the occupation.

Alexander: Was that on your ship?

Gensler: Yes. We took a whole load from California to the Philippines again. We offloaded them and picked up some soldiers and took them up to Aomori in northern Japan [on northern Honshu]. That was the MAGIC CARPET. It was the "magic carpet" to the guys who were being relieved, some of them.

Alexander: To come back.

Gensler: We were hauling troops to get to be discharged. I remember going into Aomori and seeing a lot Japanese citizens along the shoreline. I think that was the name of the city--Aomori. They were up on the roofs of these buildings. We were told that they were scared to death. I don't

know what they thought. They were told that the women would be raped and that they would be slaughtered.

Alexander: They had always been told that before.

Gensler: That is right. A whole fleet of us was in there. There was a whole bunch of ships. We went in and tied up to a dock. The Japanese finally came out of hiding and started to approach the ship. We off-loaded some rice and some food for them.

Alexander: I'm sure they needed food.

Gensler: I went ashore with two of my buddies. They made us carry "forty-fives" [.45-caliber semiautomatic pistols]. They told us not to get too friendly with the natives, the women especially. We were to stay away and just go ashore and go sightseeing. Three of us went. The place had been fire-bombed by our Air Force planes.

Alexander: The B-29s.

Gensler: There was an old man on a bicycle. I think he was with Western Union or something like that. He had a blue uniform on with sparks insignia, like lightning. I assumed that

is what he was. He was old.

Alexander: Like a telegraph...

Gensler: He could speak broken English. He approached us. He wanted to know if we wanted to look around. We said, "Yes." He walked along with his bicycle and showed us different parts of town. We went past a cemetery. Out in the street by the cemetery was a little figurine. I picked that up, and I have still got it. I don't know where it came from. Maybe from the cemetery.

Alexander: It could have been.

Gensler: We came to a hospital, or what was left of it. He said, "Bombed the hospital." I said, "My friend, let me tell you something. Do you understand me? Do you speak English?" He said, "Yes." I said, "You started it, and when war comes, civilians die. If you had been over bombing the United States, you would have dropping bombs on hospitals, schools, and everything else. So, let's forget that. The war is over." We shook hands.

Alexander: That was a good way to handle it.

Gensler: I said, "We don't want to come here to make fun of you or anything. We just want to look around. We want to see what did happen."

We didn't see a female anywhere, except one case of an old man carrying an old woman on his back, piggy-back. I asked him, "Where are the women?" He acted like he didn't know what I meant. I made a shape of a woman. He said, "Many kilometers." They sent them off. But we did see women on the roofs. They were probably old ladies.

We went back aboard ship. That is the only time I stepped foot on Japanese soil.

Alexander: Well, you got a chance to do that.

Gensler: Yes, I was glad to do that.

Alexander: Do you know about when that was?

Gensler: On the way back from California...oh, I had a girlfriend in Long Beach, California. We went from San Francisco to Long Beach, and I don't know what for. I have no idea. We just went there. I went ashore to see this

girl. We had been to Long Beach before we went overseas. She worked in a bank. It was about noontime. I went to the bank. She said, "I'll be off work about 3:00 p.m. Go over to the park [over there] and wait for me."

I sat in the park. I was reading the paper. This boy came down the street screaming something about an atom bomb: "Atom Bomb Drops On Japan! Extra!"

Alexander: That is where you were on August 15. [Editor's note: The first atomic bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945, on Hiroshima. The second was dropped two days later on Nagasaki.]

Gensler: I got the paper. There were screaming headlines: "Atomic Bomb Dropped On Hiroshima!" It was very brief. It said that with this terrible weapon that we had killed thousands. Boy, I couldn't believe it!

That night, we went out. I didn't drink. I would take a drink, but I'm not a drinker. She wanted to go to a bar. Maybe

I shouldn't tell this, but they can't get me now. When I went to her house, she said, "I have got a surprise for you." I said, "What is it?" She said, "I've got some civilian clothes. I want to see you in civilian clothes." I said, "I can't put civilian clothes on. This is wartime. They'd hang me."

She said, "We're not going anywhere." I went in the house. She had a pair of trousers laying out on the bed, and a shirt. I thought, "Well, I'll put it on. She wants to see me in civilian clothes. Okay." I put them on. We sat down and talked.

She said, "Let's go someplace and get a drink." She knew some bar. I said, "I don't drink, Jean. I'm not a drinker." She said, "Well, you can have one." I said, "Yes, but that's it. I'll have one. I won't drink no more." She said, "Well, we can get something to eat, too, maybe sandwiches." So, we went to the bar.

Alexander: You were in civilian clothes?

Gensler: Yes, I was in civilian clothes. I was a nervous wreck.

Alexander: I bet you were.

Gensler: I took my dog tag off and put it in my pocket. Here is this sailor sitting around, and they are talking about 4-Fs [men designated as physically unfit for active duty] and all this stuff. I said to her, "I better get out of here. I don't want to get mad. I don't want to hear it. If the Shore Patrol comes up to me, I'm in trouble." She said, "Okay."

But just before we left, I called the waiter over to get the bill. The bartender hollered, "Listen up, guys! Listen up!" Everybody got silent. He turned the radio way up. There was some guy talking. He kept repeating: "All of the crews from the following ships, return to your ships immediately! Right away!"

Alexander: And yours was one of them?

Gensler: I was listening. The USS *Edgecombe* was called. I said, "I gotta get out of here! I have to go back and get my clothes on."

We jumped in a taxi and went home to her place. I jumped into my uniform. I said, "I'm gone! I don't know what is going on, but I'm out!" I kissed her goodbye, and that was it. I never saw her again. I went down and got on the ship. I don't know how many they left, that never got on there.

Alexander: Because they didn't...

Gensler: They didn't hear. We sailed. Nobody knew what was going on. We didn't know what was happening. We thought some terrible thing happened. I thought it was some connection with that bomb.

I remember a couple of days out...maybe I'm getting ahead of myself. I remember being a couple of days out. They came over the radio and said, "The war is over!" That had to be Nagasaki. That was the last one. That is when I felt the letdown--immediately. I thought, "It's all over. What are we going to do?"

We had taken these soldiers up to Aomori. But my memory, at my age, is

messed up. It was after the war when we went on the MAGIC CARPET. I'm just relating where I was when it was over with. We went on to the Philippines. I don't remember what we did. It was not much of anything. We just hung around.

Then we got orders to go back to Pearl Harbor. This is where I'm all twisted up. You are going to have to insert this before this business of going to the bar and all of this stuff. Let me get my mind together about what happened.

Alexander: We don't have to do it in sequence.

Gensler: Before the war was over, before all of this happened, we went to Pearl Harbor from San Francisco. They sent about five or six APAs and some other ships to...I don't know which island it was. It was in the Hawaiian Islands. I just don't know. All I remember was that there was a beautiful beach that had dark sand on it.

Alexander: That would have been the big island.

Gensler: And mountains...

Alexander: That was the island of Hawaii.

Gensler: There were no houses or anything. We had Marines aboard. They started going ashore on the boats. They had practice runs back and forth all day long. We didn't know what was going on. We had no idea what it was. You would ask the officers, but they didn't know, they said. I thought, "What are we doing this for?" One of the "old salts" [experienced sailors] we had aboard ship, a boatswain's mate [or bosun's mate], told me this. He said, "We're getting ready for something. We're getting ready for something else." This had to be before the atom bomb.

Alexander: Yes, before the atom bombs.

Gensler: We were practicing. We were rehearsing for the invasion of Japan. That was the "scuttlebutt," and that is what it was. We spent three days doing this--practicing, rehearsing, rehearsing. We were lowering the boats and bringing them back.

All of a sudden, we brought all of the ships. They stopped this business, and they turned around and headed out

somewhere. The captain came on the radio. He said, "We have been ordered to Pearl Harbor. We are taking some empty brass back to the States." Empty brass, I didn't know what that meant, but it was shells, brass that they had accumulated. They were going to recycle it or something. We loaded the ship's hold with shells and went to San Francisco.

After that is when we went to Long Beach. The bomb was dropped. We were going out to somewhere. They called us out to sea. Then they announced the war was over. We put two-and-two together. We figured we were practicing for the invasion of Japan, but the war was over. They called the practice off. They called us in. They were getting ready. We were told afterwards--and I read afterwards--that we were rehearsing for the invasion of Japan. That was going to be our next trip.

Alexander: That was going to be in November.

Gensler: We would have been one of the first in there because we were the first group to

assemble and do this. We found that out rehearsing. We would have been in that one. I probably wouldn't have been sitting here.

Alexander: That is very possible. That would have been terrible.

Gensler: That would have been bad--a million casualties. This was so many years ago, and things come back to me.

Alexander: We don't have any problem with that. It is what it is you did at the particular time, like, going in at that late date and putting Marines ashore and taking them back and putting them in...

Gensler: It was confusing.

Alexander: That was also exactly what it was for. It was to get ready for the invasion of Japan. At this time when you got out, what was your rating?

Gensler: I was a storekeeper second class.

The last trip I took, we went back to the Philippines. We were on our way to the Philippines when the war was over. We did our thing up in Aomori. We went back to

the Philippines. I thought we were going to pick up another load at Aomori, but we didn't.

We got orders to go back to the States. Then it came out that if you had so many points, if you had a child, a wife, [this and that]...I forget how many it was. Maybe it was thirty, but I don't know. We were going back to be discharged. We were going to take the northern route. I didn't know what that was. I went up to the wheelhouse one day and asked one of my buddies: "What do they mean, the northern route?" He said, "Well, I'll show you on a globe. It is closer from the Philippines to San Francisco by going up toward the North Pole--that area, near Alaska."

Alexander: Going up through the strait. [Editor's note: The Bering Strait runs between Alaska and Siberia.]

Gensler: He said, "That is the circle route. It's shorter than going [this] way." I never realized that. We went up that way right off the Aleutian Islands and then went down

to San Francisco. It was cold. I could have frozen to death. I had been out in the heat for two years. Somebody stole my pea coat [a double-breasted heavy wool coat worn by sailors]. I was freezing. That was the last trip. We went in to San Francisco. I was told that, due to a shortage of storekeepers, I couldn't get out. This was in December or maybe November.

Alexander: This was in 1945.

Gensler: We would have to stay in until we were replaced. I didn't mind. I sailed around and made another trip back to the Philippines and back again.

When I got back to San Francisco, they had a replacement for me. They called me into the ship's office and told me that I was going to be sent back to New York State for a discharge. Also, my buddy, "Cookie," he was going back to Minneapolis. We were going together. They were going to send us back together. He was glad to get out. He had a rough deal being sent to Alaska. He

was promised shore duty, and he didn't get it. That was considered sea duty, in Alaska.

So, I bade him "goodbye" in Minneapolis and went on home. They sent me to Sampson, New York, for a discharge. Sampson is way up around Syracuse. It sounds strange to me. I knew there was a separation center somewhere near Ossining, which is way downstate. I got up there. I almost froze on the way back. I went through Wyoming. It was in the winter. The train broke down. It had a flat wheel. They put us off in a freight yard somewhere, and we had to walk into the depot. I thought I would freeze to death. I had no pea coat. We came on home. I had a pass. Remember I told you I had a pass?

Alexander: Yes.

Gensler: Listen to this. They sent me home first, to my home. They said, "You can go home, and then you report to Sampson in two weeks." When I got on the train to go to Sampson, I got on at the station in

Ossining. I didn't buy a ticket. I got on the train. The conductor came by and wanted my ticket. I pulled my wallet out and showed him my railroad pass. He said, "That ain't no good."

Alexander: Oh, you're kidding!

Gensler: I said, "What do you mean, it's no good?" He said, "That's no good. You're in the service." I said, "Let me tell you something. How long have you been with the railroad?" He said, "I don't know. Fifteen or twenty years." I said, "Don't you know all of the servicemen kept their passes? You weren't told? You haven't had any Navy men on here or Army men? Don't tell me that!" He said, "The war is over." I said, "All right, what do you want? Do you want some money?" He said, "Yes, you have to buy a ticket." I had money. I said, "Okay, I'm going to buy a ticket. I want you to write your name on a piece of paper. I want you to give it to me. I'm going to find out who you are. I'm going to see something because you are making a big

mistake, friend. I rode all the way from Seattle, Washington, to Ossining, New York, on a pass, on three different railroads. Now, I can't get on my own railroad. I'm going back to work when I get out of the Navy. I'm on my way to be discharged." He said he couldn't help that. I had to buy a ticket.

We got up to Sampson. They sent me to the barracks. They told me to report to the personnel officer first thing in the morning. I went up there. I was as brown as a black guy. I was sunburned and tan. The commander looked at my record and my papers and said, "Discharge. Where have you been, boy?" I said, "I was out in the Pacific. I'm freezing to death up here. I'm not used to the cold." He said, "Where were you out in the Pacific?" I said, "The Southwest Pacific. The last thing I was in was Okinawa." He said, "I've got a job for you while you're here. It'll take about a week or two." I said, "What is it?" He said, "You go up [this street]. You'll see

a big warehouse with a number on it. I'm going to give you a key. Inside the warehouse is an office. There is a radio; there's a cot, a chair, and magazines. The warehouse is empty. There is nothing in it but some flats or some skids. Your job is to keep anybody from putting anything in it."

Alexander: That was your job (chuckle)?

Gensler: I said, "I don't understand." He said, "You're in charge of the warehouse. Nobody, not even an admiral, can put anything in that warehouse. Nothing is to be stored. You're going to have four German war prisoners at your beck-and-call." I said, "For what?" He said, "To keep it clean. Every morning you go down and pick them up from the compound. It'll be the same four men. You'll take them up there and put them to work." I couldn't believe all of this. I went up there the next morning. I had to find my way down the compound to the prisoners' place.

Here came these four German prisoners.

They were not handcuffed or anything. I didn't have a gun. They talked in broken English. I said, "Come with me." We marched up the street and went in this warehouse and went in the office. I said, "I'm on my way to be discharged. I'll be here a week or two, but you guys are supposed to clean this place." One of them said, "It looks clean." I said, "Clean it anyway. Get a broom. There are some brooms out there--the big push brooms. Go down through the warehouse and push them. If there is no dirt, just keep pushing. Take a break about every half-hour. Come in here and sit down."

We got to be real good friends. One of them didn't want to go home. He said, "I got nothing there. My parents were killed." They all were willing to stay. I said, "You can't do that. You're going to have to go back to Germany and come through the right way. You just can't stay here." But I didn't have any trouble with them. In fact, they were better off. They were

getting movies every night and all of this stuff.

Alexander: They were getting better treatment than our guys were getting.

Gensler: That is right. I stayed there, and then they called me down to the office one day. They told me to report to the same commander who I had talked to before. He said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I'm supposed to be discharged." He said, "I know that, but you're way, way out of your territory. You live way downstate. You are supposed to be in Long Island at the separation center." I forget the name of the town. I said, "Sir, my orders were for here." He said, "I know that. I'm going to correct that. I'm going to put you on a train and send you down."

They sent me down to Long Island on a train with Navy money. I went to the separation center and stayed about a week. I finally got my "ruptured duck."
[Editor's note: In military slang, the "ruptured duck" was a brass pin with the

image of a standing American eagle. It was received upon official discharge from the service.]

I will never forget this chaplain. I can tell you on the tape what he said, and you will know what I'm talking about. He gave a speech and said, "You're going back to civilian life. It might be a little traumatic. You're used to the military life. The newspaper said we're all crazy and liable to 'fly off the handle' [go berserk] and kill people." That is what they did say, that we were all crazy.

Alexander: That is right.

Gensler: But he said, "You boys are all right. You don't have any problems. Go back to your jobs and your families. Remember one thing. When you sit down to your first meal with your family, when you want the salt, say, 'Please pass the salt.' You don't need to add anything, not the 'F' word." That word was... (chuckle)

Alexander: It was always there, wasn't it (chuckle)?

Gensler: SNAFU--"Situation Normal, All Fucked Up."

Do you remember that one?

Alexander: Yes.

Gensler: Did you see "Saving Private Ryan?" He couldn't figure out what FUBAR meant. [Editor's note: FUBAR was a common acronym for Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition.]

Alexander: It was a bad situation (chuckle).

Gensler: We all had to remember that.

Alexander: He didn't want you going home and letting your kids hear you.

Gensler: We had to go back to normal language. Anyway, I was discharged and went home. I told you about the discharge and the greeting I received, but I got back into civilian life without any problems. I tried to make a "go" of it with my wife because I figured it was my duty to try, anyway. I finally moved to Virginia to be near her people. I quit a good job with the railroad. It was a career, really. It got worse.

Alexander: With your wife?

Gensler: Yes. I couldn't take it anymore. I became a police officer.

Alexander: Whereabouts was that?

Gensler: That was in Norfolk, Virginia. I was forty years old when I went in the police department. They were short of policemen.

Alexander: You had been on the railroad all of that time?

Gensler: I was working with the railroad, including my service time, for about ten or twelve years. They gave me credit for being in the service. I was eligible for a pension. I didn't know about it until I retired from the police department in 1977.

Alexander: That is nice.

Gensler: I went down to the railroad pension office. There happened to be one in Norfolk. I never worked a job with Social Security benefits until I went to Norfolk. The police didn't have that. I worked for the city for two years before I was a policeman--in construction, building a water line from Suffolk, Virginia, to Norfolk for the drinking water. Anyway, I went down to the railroad office. The lady got on the computer with my Social Security

number. She said, "Yes, you are entitled to a pension." Just like that. I said, "How much?" She said, "It'll only be about \$200 a month." I said, "That's better than nothing."

Alexander: Yes.

Gensler: Then, when I left Virginia after I retired, we moved to North Carolina for six years. Then we moved to Texas. I was working down for HEB food markets.

Alexander: In San Antonio?

Gensler: No, we went to the Rio Grande Valley first. We lived in an RV [recreational vehicle]. Then we moved up here in an RV. Then we bought the house. I was working for HEB as a bagger. I had to do something.

This fellow that I worked with worked for the railroad, I got to talking to him. He said, "Are you going to get some pension?" I said, "I got a pension. It's \$200 a month." He said, "Well, why don't you go on Social Security?" I said, "I haven't worked enough. It was only a few years. I drove a Trailways bus for a

while." He said, "Go find out." I went down to the Social Security office. They said, "Yes, we'll pay you to go on Social Security, but you have to get five more quarters." So, I worked and got my quarters. I went from \$200 to about \$400 a month, I believe. But this is the best part. I have never stopped working. I was a manager here.

Alexander: In the park here.

Gensler: Then I spent twelve years up here.

Alexander: Up at the Methodist encampment?

Gensler: Yes. I started getting checks for \$300, \$400, and for \$500 from Social Security every year. I said, "What's going on?" There was no letter. I was afraid to spend it. We put it in the bank. We came to find out...they finally sent me a letter saying that due to my employment, they kept going back and catching me up and getting me more money.

Alexander: Because it is Social Security.

Gensler: Now, I'm getting over \$12,000 a year. I believe \$1,400 a month is the top, just

because I have been working.

Alexander: So, there you are.

Gensler: I'm glad that man told me about it.

Alexander: We are just about at the end of this tape, and I'm going to tell you that the University of North Texas is going to be very pleased to have your interview. Do you remember when you got out of the service? When you were discharged?

Gensler: I don't know. It wasn't in the wintertime. That is all I remember. It was in the spring.

Alexander: So, it was in 1946.

Gensler: They sent me back in February, so it had to be March or April. It had to be April when I was discharged because I was up in Sampson for a while. The weather was fairly decent when I came home.

Alexander: Thank you very much for this interview.

Gensler: Thank you.