

Martin Weibel Oral History Interview

ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler. Today is the 11th of May, 2012. I'm in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the Nimitz Museum. And I'm interviewing Mr. Martin Weibel. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So let's start, Martin, by having you introduce yourself. Give us your full name, place and date of birth, and then a little about your family. And then we'll take it from there.

MARTIN WEIBEL: My name is Martin L. Weibel, Senior. I was born and raised in a small town in the state of Minnesota, by the name of Winsted, Minnesota, born 1 of 13 children. I had 8 brothers in service, besides me. So there was 9 of us boys in the service, at different times. Five of us were in World War II. One was in Korea. And one was called back for Vietnam.

EM: My goodness.

MW: We've had quite a good time. We've had a good life. We enjoyed serving the country as best we could.

EM: Now were you the youngest, oldest, in the middle, or...?

MW: I was the fourth, fourth in line.

EM: OK. (laughter) To the throne.

MW: See, there was three boys in the Army. And the rest of us were in the Navy.

EM: What was your date of birth, Martin?

MW: Four thirteen twenty-four.

EM: OK! So you're --

MW: Eighty-eight.

EM: -- by golly, you're eighty--

MW: Eighty-eight.

EM: -- 88. You just turned 88 here about a month ago, didn't you -- three weeks ago.

MW: April 13th.

EM: Yeah, yeah. And what did your dad do for a living?

MW: He was a building contractor. And he done a lot of storm repair work. And he done that for about almost 40 years.

EM: Mm! And your mother, she was busy having a family and raising [where it's too?]....

MW: Yeah.

EM: That would be a full-time job.

MW: Figure it was about 18 months between each one of us.

EM: Well, it was a regular pattern, anyhow. (laughter) So let's see. If you were born in '24, you... Did you go to high school or...?

MW: No. I finished eighth grade and then I run away from home.

EM: You ran away from home!

MW: At the age of 14.

EM: That's interesting. Where did you...?

MW: Rode the rails. We shocked grain in North Dakota, cut sugar beets in Montana.

EM: And who's "we"? Did you go with somebody?

MW: There was four of us.

EM: Oh. Four of you bad boys.

MW: Good boys!

EM: Good boys. (laughs)

MW: Yeah. And picked apples in Wenatchee Valley. And we just goofed off.

EM: Yeah? Yeah? I mean, rode the rails. This is what they make movies out of!

MW: Well, I wouldn't do it today.

EM: Well, no, no. It's too damn dangerous today. But...

MW: It's terrible! But we had a good time. We went back home, after a while. And I started working on farms and driving a truck, hauling gravel. And then I went to California, worked in the shipyards, and Mare Island. And that's when Uncle Sam said, "I would like your presence." And that was in June of '44. And, well, it was before June. I got my notice in April. And then I went to boot camp in Farragut, Idaho.

EM: April '44. So you were 20 years old.

MW: Just about.

EM: Because you were born in '24 in April. So they waited until you were 20.

MW: Yeah.

EM: It took that long --

MW: I was 20 years old.

EM: -- to catch up with you, probably.

MW: Yeah. Well, we tried to hide a lot.

EM: Well, you --

MW: We had fun.

EM: -- moved a lot, for one thing.

MW: Yeah. We had a lot of fun, though.

EM: Yeah?

MW: I'm not sorry for what we...

EM: No. No, you shouldn't be.

MW: No way.

EM: You shouldn't be.

MW: Because I figure experience is the best teacher.

EM: Yeah! So you got your little notice. "Greetings."

MW: Yes -- "and salutations, Uncle would like to have you..."

EM: Yeah? And so you were out in California, when that happened.

MW: Yeah. Then I went back home. And then I was home a week and then I went to Farragut, Idaho, for my boot camp. And I was only there, I think, four weeks -- and then went to California, to Treasure Island. And that's where we got picked for -- serve on the *Hadley*.

EM: OK. And you didn't know what you were going to get assigned to --

MW: No.

EM: -- or whether you were going to be aboard ship or on the land.

MW: I asked to be put into submarines. But the man said, behind the desk, "You do not have enough education to qualify."

EM: So they didn't like that --

MW: No.

EM: -- eighth grade thing.

MW: No. And so I said, "OK, then. Take whatever el--"

EM: I mean, it doesn't take a PhD to be a crewman on a submarine, I wouldn't think. But...

MW: Well, yeah.

EM: But that's OK. They get to call it. They're the bosses.

MW: But then I told them -- I said, "I'd like to be a boilerman, down in the bottom of the ship."

EM: Yeah?

MW: And he said, "Well, yeah, I guess we can fix that." That's how I got to be water tender aboard the *Hadley*.

EM: So you were a water tender, huh?

MW: Yeah. Water tender. When I retired -- or when I got through, was second class.

EM: Do the *Hadley* was DD-774. Right?

MW: Yes, sir.

EM: OK. And so had you been aboard ship at all, when you reported for duty on board?

MW: No. Rowboats, but never on a ship. Never bothered me, all the while. Never got seasick.

EM: Really!

MW: No.

EM: You were so fortunate, because I've heard some horrible seasick stories!

MW: Aw. Yeah. We had one boy aboard, they had to send him home, when we got to Pearl.

EM: Yeah. It was that bad. I mean, some people just never re--

MW: No.

EM: They can't function.

MW: No.

EM: Man!

MW: But he was... He had lost so much weight, in that time from here to Hawaii, that he couldn't hardly walk.

EM: Mm. So you boarded her at Treasure Island?

MW: Well, that's where the crew was selected and put into a group. And then we went to San Pedro.

EM: San Pedro.

MW: That's where we got on board the ship.

EM: And she was a relatively new ship, wasn't she?

MW: Brand new.

EM: That's right! So you're like a plank owner then, huh?

Isn't that what they call them, when you're a part of the original crew?

MW: I guess. I don't know. I've never paid much attention to it.

EM: There weren't any planks on her, anyhow. She was all steel, I suspect.

(laughter)

MW: Yeah. Not very b--strong. But it was a good ship, with...

EM: So what'd you think, first time you saw the old *Hadley* sitting there -- or the new *Hadley* sitting...?

MW: It was... We were all wondering if it was going to float or sink.

EM: Did you ever think, "What am I getting into here?"

MW: No -- never bothered me a bit. Because I figured, aboard there, it would be like a second home to me. And that's what it turned out to be.

EM: And it's not like you had an established home, anyhow. You were kind of a will o' the wisp, running arou--

MW: Yeah! I had more fun, just running around.

EM: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

MW: But that's how I got aboard there.

EM: OK. So tell me again what your assignment was aboard?

MW: Water tender.

EM: On the boilers.

MW: Yeah, on the boilers.

EM: Down in the hold.

MW: Down in the holds, boiler number one. We had four boilers, four...

EM: Four boilers! Wow.

MW: Two aft, two forward.

EM: OK. OK. And what was your combat station?

MW: Boiler number.

EM: Boilers are kind of important during combat.

MW: Yeah.

EM: (laughs)

MW: Everybody said, "Well, why down there?" I said, "You don't see it. You don't hear it. When it hits, it's gone."

EM: That's right. If you don't have it, you don't function.

MW: Right.

EM: That's right. It's like the heart of the ship.

MW: Yeah. Yeah.

EM: Really!

MW: It actually is the heart of the ship. Because without the steam, that ship couldn't go.

EM: She doesn't go. And most of the stuff on board doesn't work. I mean, everything from electricity to -- you know? So...

MW: Water.

EM: Water. Everything.

MW: Very important.

EM: Yeah. Bilge pumps, (laughter) you name it.

MW: Yup! We did a little of that -- but not much. I was very lucky.

EM: Yeah. When you went aboard, were you going in with guys that you knew and had been through boot camp with? Or was it just...?

MW: No.

EM: They were all strangers, to begin with.

MW: Were all strangers. But on Mare Island, I made friends with quite a few of... Because I was kind of like, "Let's go have some fun." But until Mare Island -- after Mare

Island -- I never seen any of them before. So. But it turned out to be one fine crew.

EM: Yeah. So she headed, what, to Pearl?

MW: Yeah. We went to Pearl, after shakedown. We went to Pearl.

EM: So you went through the shakedown with her.

MW: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

EM: Because she was that new!

MW: Yeah. We took off of the -- well, I don't know what they call them, where they build them. But we all went aboard, once it was down in the water. That's when we went aboard it. And that's where we started the shakedown cruise, to see that this worked, that didn't leak. I don't remember how long we had our shakedown. It wasn't too long. But then we had a skipper that was a submarine skipper first. But he couldn't handle a tin can.

EM: Well, they are different. (laughs)

MW: He hit the dock so hard that, actually, they thought that he would break the dock off. So then we got Captain Bernard J. Mullaney as a skipper -- the best skipper in the world.

EM: Really?

MW: Yes, sir.

EM: What was so good about him?

MW: He commanded his crew over and above the officers.
Actually, the officers were like second class to the rest of us.

EM: So he was a real common-crewman captain.

MW: Oh, yes, for the men, for the men. And when we got to Hawaii, the enlisted men got to go on liberty first, before the officers got to go.

EM: Wow!

MW: But we had a couple of the officers that were pretty smart. They'd change uniforms and go off the...

EM: Really! That seems so reverse from, you know, the standard. Of course, impersonating an officer'll get you...

MW: Yeah. We had a real good bunch of officers.

EM: Really.

MW: Yeah.

EM: So, let's see. Your officer that you reported to, which one was that?

MW: I'm not sure anymore.

EM: Well, [I mean?], engineering officer, probably.

MW: Yeah, it was an engineering officer. But I don't know his name, right offhand.

EM: That's all right. But he was a good guy?

MW: Yes. He treated everybody the same. Because you had a higher rate than me, you were no better than me. And you were no better than him. And the officer that's here with us now, I think he's the last one -- is a man that... I don't know how to explain it. He thought more of his men than he did of himself.

EM: That's important.

MW: He always put himself first, before the men, always. Mr. Doug Aiken. And right now I think he's the last officer that's left.

EM: So you went to Pearl and, what? Just took on ammunition and --

MW: And food.

EM: -- stores an--

MW: Yeah. Everything was restocked.

EM: So this is, what, late '44 now?

MW: It was December, I think, of '44. And then we started off as kind of like a babysitter for the ships going over to Leyte and Saipan. It was a lot of fun. We had a good time. But it was a very interesting lesson in how you get across the water.

EM: What was so interesting?

MW: Well, for some -- like me -- that was [nice?]. Well, even a (inaudible) ship [would go this way?]. And I never

thought -- they always went through the waves. They go over the waves, a lot of -- would... I learned a lot, in that short time.

EM: And did you have a watch station, at all?

MW: Yeah. Four on and four off -- [that?] boiler. That was my station all the time.

EM: Yeah! And so how many guys were down there in the boiler room? You must have had... Four boilers. And you got to babysit...

MW: Well, there was --

EM: There's two...

MW: -- see, there was two boilers in the forward and then two boil--s aft. And I'm just trying to think. I think there was probably five guys to a shift. But if they brought both boilers, then they added two more. But we usually run on just one boiler.

EM: Really!

MW: Because there was no hurry.

EM: That's right. Because you were probably escorting other ships and, you know --

MW: Yeah, carriers and troop ships.

EM: -- and just -- yeah. And they're good for 10 knots and you guys were good for 35, probably, or something like that.

MW: So it was an interesting life.

EM: But not a whole lot of shoot-'em-up, at this point, huh?

MW: No, no. We thought we might have sunk a submarine --

EM: Really!

MW: -- a Jap s-- but we're not sure. Because nothing ever came up from the bottom of the ocean. But... Then when we got to Saipan and were getting the fleet together for Okinawa, we just kind of -- back and forth, along the shore, checking it out, and for a big gun. Well, when they started a big gun, then, well, we just moved out a little bit, more or less like rangefinders -- what you actually were.

EM: Yeah, almost observer of the...

MW: Yeah. And...

EM: Now, this was where, in Okinawa or...?

MW: Yeah.

EM: OK.

MW: And then we got picked for picket duty.

EM: That's where things get interesting, huh?

MW: Yeah, yeah. But, of cour--

EM: Let's talk a little bit more about Okinawa, before we go to the picket du-- Was there anything before Okinawa, other than --

MW: No.

EM: -- pretty much being -- escort duties.

MW: Just escort duty, mostly. That's all. Or every now and then a smoke...

EM: Lay smoke for -- protec--?

MW: Yeah.

EM: Now did you ever have shore liberty, at any of these islands or ports or...?

MW: N-- well, no. We never got liberty.

EM: There's nothing to go to, I guess.

MW: No. Until we got hit. And then we got towed back to [Kerama Retto?] Bay. Then we got liberty.

EM: OK. Yeah. After you'd been through hell.

MW: Yeah.

EM: Yeah.

MW: It's...

EM: Yeah. So anyhow, let's... So you're headed up to Okinawa. And you're fairly close in and doing -- we're going to call it observation and range-finding --

MW: Right.

EM: -- for the guys with the big guns. And they're pounding it in anticipation of the invasion. So the invasion, had it happened yet?

MW: No, not yet.

EM: This is all preliminary. S--

MW: Preliminary, beforehand. And then they...

EM: So what's it like for 16-inch shell to come zinging over your head in...?

MW: Just like zzzing!

EM: It's amazing you can hear them. I would think they'd be breaking the sound barrier and you wouldn't hear a thing or something.

MW: But I learned... I didn't believe it -- that they said they could fire a gun 21 miles and hit the target. I said they were crazy. They proved me wrong.

EM: So they were really homing in pretty well, huh?

MW: And after we got up there, yeah, they were doing real good job of it.

EM: Now were you guys there when they actually started doing the landings at Okinawa?

MW: Yeah.

EM: So you could see the landing craft going in?

MW: Yeah. Yeah, we could.

EM: A--

MW: And that's when they... I don't know if it was Admiral Halsey that said we have to put the observations away from the island, to see anything coming in. And our old Irishman, he said, "That's my job. I like that."

EM: (laughs)

MW: So that's what we got. We got Station 15 in the pickup line. For a while, it was nice. But...

EM: Now, how far away from Okinawa was this? Kind of between Okinawa and Japan?

MW: Japan. Yeah.

EM: Because you're trying to pick up incoming --

MW: Airpl--

EM: -- aircraft, primarily, but anything else that --

MW: Or ships --

EM: -- might be coming. Yeah.

MW: -- whatever, [was?] headed for Okinawa, to be stopped. Or we could call it in or notify them that "This is coming this way. We don't know how many." But on May 10th, we were out there on general quarters. We shot one down, at -- I think it's 2210, a Japanese observation plane. We shot that down. And then it was the next day, after we secured from general quarters, on May 11th... We just got off general quarters and we got ordered back to general quarters. A armada of airplanes was on the way in. When they got closer, they figured there was 150. And there was just three of us ships, us, *Evans*, and *Aaron Ward*. And I think it was 8:20. I'm not sure of the time. But I think it was 8:20 in the morning and they started with the guns going.

EM: This is what? Antiaircraft, huh?

MW: Yeah.

EM: And these are all kamikazes, right?

MW: Yeah. And they come -- just like you set up a sitting duck. Shoot them down, another would be right in their place. But in an hour and 20 minutes, the *Hadley* shot down 23, took two suicide planes, two bombs. The *Evans* got knocked out early. They got 18. And the *Aaron Ward* was completely cleared topside, nothing left topside.

EM: Really!

MW: The only thing that was left was the bottom, boiler rooms, engine room. We got hit... I don't remember now the exact time. But was an hour and 40 minutes that we got... We set a record for any ship in the Navy in a single battle, to get that many airplanes.

EM: I tell you what. That's a huge number! How many was it, again?

MW: It was 23. But they figure there was 150 planes.

EM: But, I mean, your ship --

MW: We go--

EM: -- got credited for 23.

MW: Yeah.

EM: Now, what did it feel like? You're down in the boiler room all this time.

MW: Didn't bother me. Because you didn't see nothin'!

EM: But did you feel anything, when you got hit? Because...

MW: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

EM: What'd that...?

MW: So when we got a hit, we were standing on the top level, on those iron grates. And them grates come up.

EM: Whoa!

MW: But the one I was standing on went up, it come right back down where it belonged. Now, you can believe that if you want to. But it -- just right where it was...

EM: [Fit?] right back into its slot.

MW: Yeah.

EM: [Be damned?].

MW: But doesn't... The skipper hollered, "Abandon ship." We never heard it. Down there, we never heard it.

EM: So are the boilers all still in operation?

MW: They were. Except the two -- and the two aft ones were out, after...

EM: Lost the two aft ones. But your boiler's up front.

MW: Were fine. We kept them. But we closed them down, when they lost power to all the guns. We just... It said... When they said, "Abandon ship" -- ordered then -- you have to secure everything. Because if you don't and it goes down, then it'll blow up! But if [there's no?] fire...

EM: It just goes down. And you never heard the "Abandon ship."

MW: No.

EM: All you guys down in the boiler room didn't hear it.

MW: I never did.

EM: So you guys were busy doing what?

MW: Trying to get everything secured to get the hell out of there.

EM: Yeah?

MW: I was the second to last man out of the forward boiler room. First class was right behind me going up the ladder. And I shut... The main valve is on topside. And while I was shutting that, he was closing the hatch.

EM: You literally turned the lights out --

MW: That [did?].

EM: -- (laughs) on the way out, didn't you? Well, what happened then?

MW: Well, then everybody was trying to help take care of the fire that was burning.

EM: And that was where, on the aft part of the...?

MW: On the afterdeck, where that one plane hit and spread gasoline all over. And then everybody was there, trying to get rid of excess weight. Because the fantail was underwater. And the lighter you could make the ship --

EM: Better off you are.

MW: -- the better chance you had of surviving. But we did pretty good. We got the fire under control. And then the LS-- oh -- big landing craft came alongs--

EM: LST?

MW: -- yeah -- came alongside and was pumping water -- and also put water on the...

EM: So there was an LST out there, on picket duty, along with you guys?

MW: Yeah. But he was back off a ways. But they didn't seem to bother them. Tin cans, fair game.

EM: Yeah.

MW: So. Bec--

EM: I'm surprised they didn't go for bigger ships than even a tin can.

MW: Well, see, that was because the bigger ships were on the south side of the island. We were on the northwest si--

EM: Northwest. Yeah.

MW: -- between the island and Japan. But they were busy on this end trying to blow everything to pieces. Other than that...

EM: So how many hits did the *Hadley* take, that you know of?

MW: Three suicide planes and two bombs. That... But it didn't sink.

EM: So did you guys stay aboard, then?

MW: Yeah. Yeah. We stayed aboard.

EM: But you shut the boilers down. How were you able to pump the water out?

MW: That was from other ships.

EM: Other ships came in.

MW: Yeah. And then they were picking up the injured, to get them back up to the hospital ship, I guess. I don't know the full details on that. But it seemed like we lost a lot of guys, all of a sudden. So...

EM: Have you heard a number on how many guys were lost?

MW: Thirty-five were killed that day. And I don't remember how many were injured. There was quite a few injured. So... But then, the next day, then they sent the tug out, to tow us back to Kerama Retto Bay. And we were tied up there until they were going to redo something. And then they decide --

EM: Which bay was this?

MW: Kerama Retto. And then they decided, well, make it seaworthy, they'd have to plug that big hole. So then they put it in dry dock and welded steel plates over the big hole. And when they figured it was seaworthy, they took us off the dry dock, tied us up to the pier. I don't remember the pier. But it was [a short?] day after that that they decided to tow it back to the United States.

EM: Now what was it that towed you there, from where you were hit? Was that the LST that tow--?

MW: I think it was an LST. Then...

EM: Those LSTs --

MW: Yeah.

EM: -- come in useful, don't they?

MW: They were. They were a workhorse.

EM: Now what about the *Evans* and the *Ward*?

MW: The *Ward*, I don't know. The *Evans*, we were tied up alongside the *Evans* for a while, in Kerama Retto Bay.

EM: So they... OK.

MW: But the *Evans* came back to the States under her own power.

EM: Ah!

MW: Because they didn't get --

EM: As ba--

MW: -- bottom-side. They got hit topside. But we got that on the bottom and the top. So we were actually useless then. But then we got the tug.

EM: How close did she come to sinking, would you guess?

MW: If it hadn't been for the LST, I think it would have sunk, period.

EM: Yeah. Wow!

MW: But I don't remember any of the guys... Well, the captain, he went off. He went over the side. He abandoned ship. But I don't know how many more.

EM: So some abandoned ship. But then, when things stabilized, some of you were still aboard.

MW: Oh, yeah! Yeah. And those that were not hurt came back aboard right away -- and then tried to clean up as best --

EM: As best...

MW: -- we could, keep it up, hold...

EM: Did you fire the boilers back up?

MW: No, not until we got back to Kerama Retto Bay. And they had -- yeah, they had put the steel plating over...

EM: And that's when you started...

MW: That's when we started the boilers up again, so that we'd have power and water and eats.

EM: So how long did it take to get towed?

MW: Oh, boy.

EM: I mean, it was days, huh?

MW: Well, we went from Okinawa to Leyte, and got fuel and groceries and then started for Hawaii. And we -- I remember, was in Hawaii two days. And then they started from there and towed us back to Frisco. But I don't remember the dates.

EM: It was a long time, though. It was slow!

MW: Auh!

EM: Now, you were aboard the damaged ship the whole time?

MW: Yes.

EM: So what are you doing for food and...?

MW: Well, we had some food. But then, when we got to Kerama Retto Bay, we always... They got a little surplus that we could get from them, from the...

EM: But you weren't able to cook or anything, aboard ship, were you?

MW: No.

EM: Because you didn't have steam!

MW: No. We didn't have nothin' there, for a while.

EM: Yeah! I mean, you're cold...

MW: But we ate... I think it was an open café that we ate in, for almost a week, I think.

EM: I guess you had lots of cold sandwiches. (laughs)

MW: Yeah, we did -- coo-- and green beer.

EM: And what?

MW: Green beer.

EM: Tell me about the green beer.

MW: That's beer that's... I don't know how to explain it.

EM: Gone bad?

MW: It didn't have a real good taste to it.

EM: OK. Gone bad.

MW: To me, it wasn't aged. But we drank our share.

EM: So how did the beer get aboard? And you guys aren't supposed to have all that beer onboard.

MW: That's what we got off the ship at Okinawa. We got it on the shore. When we got off the ship, off of our duties roster, we'd go to shore. They'd have green beer there. I think they just had a supply ship that just brought in beer.

EM: A beer ship, huh? (laughter)

MW: But I think that's what it was. But then, when we got started, we got our own steam up, we had electricity, we had power. We could eat. To Leyte, we got more supplies, provisions. And then we started from Leyte to Hawaii. And then, in Hawaii, they got the... I think the tug had to have some little thing fixed. And as soon as it was down, they hooked us up and back to the States we came.

EM: And so Okinawa was pretty close to the end of the war.

MW: Yeah.

EM: By the time you got to the States, the war must have been over.

MW: Been over. See, we got hit in May and I think the war was over in June.

EM: No, the war was over in August/September. They signed the documents in early September. And they dropped the atomic

bombs in August. But, I mean, you know, you were on picket duty in May?

MW: Yeah.

EM: Because they invaded Okinawa on April the 1st. And they didn't secure the island until mid-June. So...

MW: It was a real relief when we heard it.

EM: Do you remember where you were, when you heard it? Were you...? You were aboard ship, though.

MW: Yeah. Yeah -- behind the tug.

EM: So (laughter) that's when the green beer came out again, huh?

MW: Yeah. "Drink while you can, boys."

EM: Yeah!

MW: But we had a good time, and an uneventful time coming back under tow, except it was so damn slow.

EM: Yeah. And you didn't have all the facilities that you normally would.

MW: No.

EM: Because you didn't have power...

MW: Not only that but our tow chain broke, after the typhoon. We went through the typhoon in '45.

EM: Well, tell me about that experience.

MW: Well, when the -- found out the typhoon was coming... The sea was getting rough. And the captain of the tug, they

had to put him in the bunk and strap him down, because he got so sick.

EM: Gee willikers!

MW: Bosun mate took over the tug. And instead of going with the wind, he went against it. So we went over this way. If we'd 'a' went in there...

EM: You don't want to be on the side! (laughs)

MW: Our ship, I'm not sure but I think the list was almost 60-degree.

EM: Whoa!

MW: But the only thing that saved us is the excess weight that was welded on to the starboard side. That made the ship come back. If it hadn't been for all that steel, I think we'd have been...

EM: Now, tell me about the excess weight that had been welded on. Was that the patch that you were talking about?

MW: Yeah. That's to cover -- the patch that was there. And they put a lot of steel on that side. And that made it more lopsided this way, so that, if it went over, it would come back. And I wasn't scared. During the typhoon... Was the day after, when the ocean was as smooth as a tabletop. And the towline broke.

EM: That's when you wouldn't think it would break.

MW: Yeah! But I think it broke because the tug's going this way and, all of a sudden, it levels out. I think there was a jerk there. And I think that's what broke... But the towline cable broke -- I think it was five times.

EM: Five times?

MW: The last time it broke, we were going under the Golden Gate Bridge.

EM: Oh, just as you were coming in.

MW: Under the Golden Gate Bridge.

EM: So during the typhoon, did you ever think, "My gosh. This may be it"? I mean...

MW: Not really. I don't know why. I never was really scared. And I just thought, "Well, that's part of it. It's got to go up. It's got to go come down. It's got to go up. It's got to come down." But it was afterwards, when you get to thinking about it. "My God, what would have happened to us?"

EM: Because they lost some tin cans in those typhoons, you know?

MW: What I was told, when we got back to the States -- that the US government lost 212 ships in that typhoon.

EM: Gee! That's a huge number! I guess they kind of kept that under wraps for a while.

MW: I think they counted the LSTs and everything, that was near the islands. I think that's what they did. But otherwise, it was a... That was the highlight of the trip.

EM: Wow! Now when you were aboard ship, did you ever get a chance to communicate back, you know, with letters and stuff to the mainland? And did you get letters and CARE packages and stuff?

MW: I never got a CARE package. And the skipper that we have, Captain Mullaney, told me one day... Because I never used to write... When I left home, that was me.

EM: Cut the cord.

MW: Yeah. And he threatened me. He said, "You write to your mother! And you tell her you're all right." And I said, "Well, she's had..." I think it was six boys in, at that time. I said, "She won't miss me." Oh, he said, "You will write a letter, as of today." And we got to Pearl Harbor. The mail went ahead of us.

EM: So the captain looked you in the eye and he said, "You will write..."

MW: He wanted every member to write to their family and tell them they were OK.

EM: And so you did.

MW: Oh, yeah -- short letter to Mother and Dad, that I was OK, I'd be home sometime later.

EM: Yeah. "Don't leave the light on, it may be a while."
(laughter)

MW: Be a while. At that rate, it'd be quite a while.

EM: Because you were really going slow. So did you have any close -- I'm going to use the term buddies, that you kind of hung around with and got to know fairly well, when you were aboard the *Hadley*?

MW: Yeah. Yeah, I did.

EM: Are these guys that were down in the boiler room with you or...?

MW: Yeah. That's... Well, I lost four real good friends in the after boiler room and engine room.

EM: Mm. So you boilermen kind of hung together a little bit an--

MW: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

EM: And that's where the ship took the hit. So there was quite a few of those guys that were killed.

MW: Yeah. All the guys in the after and fire room, I think they were all gone. And then, the after engine room, I think about half of them guys went. It...

EM: Now was the engine room behind the boilers, aft?

MW: The forward boilers were ahead of the engine room. And that's where the shaft... The right shaft was hooked to that. And the left shaft was hooked to the back, after.

EM: Oh, really? So you had one long shaft and one short shaft.

MW: A shorter shaft. But that bomb that went off bent that shaft.

EM: I bet! So another reason you couldn't go under your own power.

MW: No.

EM: What do you think about the Japanese, after all these years?

MW: To this day, if I can look them in the face, yeah. I do not trust them, when I turn my back. And I will never, never forgive them.

EM: I understand.

MW: I had a school chum that I went to school with up through the eighth grade -- and he went on to high school -- that was in on that Bataan death march. And I'll tell you...

EM: Did he survive?

MW: Yeah. Barely. When he went in, he probably weighed a hundred an-- when they started the death march, he probably weighed right around 180 pounds. When he got found, he was down to 70 pounds.

EM: That is literally skin and bone.

MW: That's all it is. And you better have your shoes on.

EM: Yeah. So he ended up in Japan, I guess.

MW: I think so. But it was probably ten years afterwards that I seen him. And he was a little bit better then.

EM: Never really...

MW: But if you drop that pen on a wood floor, he would jump that high.

EM: He'd jump four feet h--

MW: That's no lie.

EM: He was really --

MW: Scared.

EM: -- still wired, wasn't he?

MW: Yeah, what he went through.

EM: What about you? Did you ever think back, over the war was over, on all of the things that happened to you during the war?

MW: Yeah. Every now and then, we'd... I have a son that became real interested, as he grew up. And then him and I would sit down. And he'd say, "Well, Dad, now, what'd you do, this...? What did you do there?" He's the only one. The rest of them...

EM: Did you ever have nightmares or --

MW: No.

EM: -- wake up in the middle of the night --

MW: No.

EM: -- refighting --

MW: No.

EM: -- you know, picket duty or anything like that?

MW: Never did.

EM: Well, that's good.

MW: Yeah. Because a lot of the guys that you talk to, good God, the first couple years they were basket case! But I never was that way. I went to bed, I went to sleep. The hell with the rest of [it?]. (laughter)

EM: You had a job to do --

MW: Yeah.

EM: -- go to sleep!

MW: Yeah. Get rested up, so I could go to the next day. But afterwards, we started just getting together. The first one was in '75, that they said, "Well, we'll make every five years, get the reunion." After the first reunion, we got to thinking, "Well, five year-- that's too long. Too many guys could be gone." And so we made it down to three. Then one guy said, "Let's make it two." "OK." So we've been making... This was our 19th reunion. But from looking at the guys today, I think it's the last one.

EM: Well -- yeah, I mean, I can understand that. And it was a long time ago.

MW: Most of them... Well, there's two -- Tom is one of -- shipmates -- and I are the two youngest ones left. The

rest are all 90 or 92! We have one, I think he's 96 -- or 97?

EM: Well, you know, the math, you can't fool the math.

MW: No. No. So all in all, I enjoyed being in the Navy. I should have stayed in.

EM: Really?

MW: Mm-hmm. Because when I got back to the States, got to go home over Christmas... And I went back January 2nd, to another ship, the *Anderson*. And we just run up and down the coast -- until I got out -- just to have something to do.

EM: Patrolling.

MW: Just to have something to do, I guess. I don't know.

EM: When did you get out?

MW: June 6th.

EM: Forty-six.

MW: Yeah. I got married on the 26th.

EM: (laughs) And the rest is history, as they say.

MW: Yeah, the rest is history.

EM: What was the food like aboard the *Hadley*?

MW: I think the food was real good. We had a good bunch of cooks. I don't know why. But I never disliked a meal I had.

EM: Well, you may have been easy to please, perhaps.

MW: Well... You got food, you're going to eat. You don't eat, you're going to starve. (laughter) So...

EM: Pretty basic.

MW: But our skipper did not believe in powdered milk. If he could get fresh milk, we got fresh milk. But if you couldn't get fresh milk, when then you have to have powdered.

EM: Where could you get fresh milk?

MW: I don't know where they got it. But a lot of times, we had fresh milk.

EM: Really. Fresh milk and green beer -- (laughter) hopefully not at the same time.

MW: No, no, no, no. No, no. But we had good cooks, and, of course, good officers. That makes part of it.

EM: Yeah. Yeah. So if you'd stay in the Navy, why do you think that would have been the right thing?

MW: Because I could have went to Norfolk and went to school. And I would have came out as a 1-- The skipper of the *Anderson*, that I was on, he said, "If you reenlist for six years, I will see to it you go to school. You take the classes and do your study, you can come out a ensign."

EM: Wow!

MW: He said, "And if you do it right, in two years you can become a lieutenant." And I looked at him and I said, "I

don't think so. Because I don't like having you tell me when to go to bed, when to turn the lights off, and when to get up and turn them on." And he just kind of grinned and he said, "Well..."

EM: "You're just too independent a cuss." So how do you think having all of that combat experience and your experience in the Navy -- how do you think that changed you, as a person? I mean, I recogni--

MW: It made me realize life is what you make it. If you want to be happy and forget about all the wear and tear of the world, just take care of yourself. That's the way I've been ever since. I don't care what... If you [go and?] buy a Cadillac, I don't care. I can get by with a Model T. I'm fine. I don't need all that fancy stuff.

EM: So you're -- feel like maybe you were less materialistic and didn't --

MW: Right.

EM: -- have to be worried about what you had?

MW: Or didn't have.

EM: Or didn't have.

MW: Yeah.

EM: How did it feel, coming in under the Golden Gate Bridge, after all you'd been through?

MW: I just looked at the bridge and I thought, "Well, boy, what a load off of my mind now." And I've been happy ever since.

EM: That's important.

MW: It is.

EM: It really is. Because if you're unhappy, then you don't live to be in your eighties and your nineties. So...

MW: And not only that but your life is not as good or as happy as it should be, if you let things worry you. And like, the war -- something that had to be done. It got done. It's over with. So I think it made me, in one way, a better person.

EM: How's that?

MW: Because I have a tendency to watch out for people now. I have -- well, I had six little old ladies that I've taken care for a long, long time. And I just lost the -- well, in the last two years, I lost four. But it gave me the idea, to help them, it helps you.

EM: I understand that.

MW: I have a blind lady, right now, that -- she's having a hard time, with me gone. And I said, "Well, you've got people here to help you." "But that's not the same!"

EM: Well, it's nice to feel special, in some ways.

MW: Yeah, it does. And one that just died about two months ago, she said, "You're not my worker. You're more like a son to me." But there was only two years' difference in our age! But she was like me -- "I don't give a damn what that guy's got. It's what I got that counts." And I think, since then, it's been a good life.

EM: Mm. So when you think back on the experience aboard ship...? Now, there's always a few humorous things that happen and you kind of chuckle when you think about them in the middle of the night.

MW: Well, yeah.

EM: What comes to your mind as the couple of things that tickle you the most, when you think back on those days?

MW: Well, really, isn't much I -- tell you on that. Because I don't remember a lot of that stuff. And I don't dwell -- so it's gone. But, only thing I can remember, (laughs) that's kind of funny, in a way, we had a guy that had false teeth. And when the ship got hit, I don't know what happened or how but his false teeth fell out. So he dove over the side of the ship to try and catch them. Well, he never caught them.

EM: Well, I think they probably sank. (laughter) If they floated, I'd be worried about what they're -- maybe they

were wood or something. Isn't that something? So you had to fish him out of the water.

MW: No, he got ba-- We throwed a line over the side, so he could crawl back up. But that's the only thing I can really...

EM: Well, I guess those false teeth were important to...

MW: It were.

EM: Yeah! I mean, seriously.

MW: Yeah.

EM: I'll be danged.

MW: But other than that, I just don't...

EM: Did you ever speak to or have any communications with your captain, after the war was over?

MW: Yeah. I would say about 12 years afterwards, I seen Captain Bernard Mullaney in San Francisco, on the pier, on the wharf.

EM: Really! Just --

MW: Just walking down.

EM: -- chance meeting?

MW: Just walking down. Me and my first wife and three of my kids walking down. And here comes the captain this way. And he stopped and he looked at me. And he said, "You were on the *Hadley*." And I s-- "How in the heck do you know that?" He says, "I remember you on the *Hadley*."

EM: And he was right. Or...?

MW: I said, "Well, how do you remember all that?" But have come to find out he had a [photosac--phatic?] memory.

EM: That helps. (laughs)

MW: Yeah! I thought, "Gee!"

EM: Because, I mean, what was the crew on the *Hadley*, 300 guys?

MW: Two hundred and twenty-five, I think.

EM: Yeah! That's a lot of people to...

MW: On a ship only 376 feet long? That's almost a square foot for each one. (laughs)

EM: Yeah! Plenty of room! (laughs) Well, what else can we talk about, Martin, thinking back? I mean, this is a chance to get any of this down that comes to your mind?

MW: I really don't know. I think pretty much what I've told you is pretty much the way I've got it figured out. That's really good, for me.

EM: Well, do you see your experience on the *Hadley* as one of the high points of your life?

MW: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Because it teaches you, when you're out there, going to... You're 225 guys. It teaches you how to work together. If this guy don't work with you, that ain't going to work, over here. So everybody kind of worked together.

EM: A real team, huh?

MW: I think it was one of the best ships in the Navy.

EM: Well, it's important to feel that way. I bet it was.

Well, why don't we go ahead and close it down now? I want to thank you for spending the time, when you could have been eating that nice meal down there. We'll have to run down there and see if we can get something to eat.

MW: I ain't going to worry about it.

EM: (laughs) I like that attitude!

MW: I don't worry about that. Because I don't have to eat right now. I can wait and eat l--

EM: An--

MW: Because I want to walk around town. And I want to find the old restaurant that we ate at 12 years ago.

EM: Oh, really? Do you remember the name of it?

MW: No, I don't. But I know it was down this street someplace.

EM: Well, just about everything's down this street someplace.

So...

MW: But it was not too far and on the corner of the street.

EM: OK. OK.

MW: I think it was a German restaurant.

EM: Well, there's a lot of those around. It might have been Wheeler's, maybe. I don't know. Well, you'll find it.

MW: Oh, yeah!

EM: Well, let me go ahead and close it down. Let me... Thank you for your time. And thank you for what you did for our country during World War II. We still don't thank you guys enough.

MW: Well, I feel this way. It's something that had to be done. And at least I helped a little bit to change the country, make it safer. But I often wonder now if we went far enough. The way that society is today, they don't care about one another!

EM: Seems that way, doesn't it?

MW: Yes.

EM: Or at least less about one another than they used to. You know, that's because, I think, [they've?] never really been truly threatened like we were back in World War II. Everybody had to pull together. So I think that's what's different. OK! Well, I'm going to go ahead and shut it down. And I thank you for your time, Martin. We appreciate your sharing your experience.

MW: I'm glad I could help some little way.

END OF AUDIO FILE