

*National Museum of the Pacific War*

*Nimitz Education and Research Center*

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Interview with

**Mr. Frank C. Smith**

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**Interviewer: Ed Metzler**

Mr. Metzler: This is Ed Metzler, and today is March 12, 2014. I'm in Houston, Texas and I am interviewing Mr. Frank Chesley Smith, Junior. 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, Frank, let me thank you for allowing me to come into your home this morning and talk about some things that happened seventy-plus years ago, and I appreciate that. Let's get started by having you introduce yourself. Give us your full name, date and place of birth, and then we'll take it from there.

Mr. Smith: I'm Frank C.--Frank Chesley Smith, Junior. Born in Houston on the seventh of August, 1921, not far from where we're sitting. My mother and father had been in Houston just a year when I was born.

Mr. Metzler: So were you born in a hospital or at a home, at home, or what?

Mr. Smith: I was born in a hospital, a small hospital; I think it was called Methodist Hospital, near the present site of Trinity Church.

Mr. Metzler: So did you have brothers and sisters in your family, or were you the only child, or what?

Mr. Smith: I have one sister who is six years younger than I am, and lives just a few blocks from here.

Mr. Metzler: And tell me a little bit about your mother and father. What did your father do for a living?

Mr. Smith: He was a successful business executive who became president and then chairman of what was then called Houston Natural Gas Corporation. That later became Enron, a name that will live in infamy (chuckles).

Mr. Metzler: Yes, well we won't go there. (Laughs).

Mr. Smith: But while he ran it, it was a very fine company, and I was very fortunate. He took the job in the middle of the depression when we were wondering how we could make ends meet, and at least he and my mother were. I wasn't wondering much about it when I was twelve years old. But he joined the company as president and made a great success of it and I was able to go off to prep school (chuckles). Just a couple of years later in about 1936, we were doing pretty well and so I went off to school in Virginia, Episcopal High School.

Mr. Metzler: Was that the prep school you mentioned?

Mr. Smith: It was a prep school and we now have an Episcopal High School in Houston, which is no relation, so I always have to say I went to the one in Virginia. And then in 1939, I graduated from E.H.S. and entered Williams College in Massachusetts. And for all we know, I was one of the first people from Houston that ever went to Williams.

Mr. Metzler: They didn't even know what a Texan looked like up there, did they?

Mr. Smith: No, they didn't. It was a two-day train ride; you could either go the southern route through New Orleans or the northern route through St. Louis, but either way, it was a long way to Williamstown.

Mr. Metzler: So what were you, eighteen or so when you went in--went up there?

Mr. Smith: I started Williams when I was eighteen, that's right. I had my birthday in the summer of '39, in August, and in September I entered Williams.

Mr. Metzler: So Williams is a small, liberal, private liberal arts university--I guess they probably call it a college.

Mr. Smith: College, yes.

Mr. Metzler: And so, what were you studying, what was your interest?

Mr. Smith: My interest from my earliest childhood has been in aviation--flying. I think it was probably because Lindbergh crossed the

ocean when I was six years old, and I remember hearing his name as one of my earliest memories. Everybody was talking about “Lucky Lindy, and--

Mr. Metzler: That was roughly like going to the moon was in the 1970s, just to fly the Atlantic.

Mr. Smith: That’s right. And I grew up with a large map of Lindbergh’s flights hanging on the wall of my room. My son has it now. And it was sort of my ambition from childhood to make some lines on a map like that. And I did it. I was able to get my pilot’s license later in life--

Mr. Metzler: That was after college?

Mr. Smith: Many years after college, when I was forty years old, I got a pilot’s license. But the reason I went to Williams was because I wanted to go to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which was at that time, said to be the best college in the country for aeronautical engineering, and my father told me I had to go to some liberal arts school first. He would send me to MIT after I had gotten a liberal arts degree, which he thought was vitally important. And I talked to a man at MIT about this problem (chuckles), why I couldn’t start at MIT and he said, “Well, we have a solution for that. We have an arrangement here at MIT with five liberal arts colleges in New England. If you go three years to any one of those, then you can come to MIT for two

years and wind up with a degree from both schools, a BA and a BS.”

Mr. Metzler: That’s a good deal!

Mr. Smith: And it struck me as just the perfect deal and I came home and told my father about that, and he said, “That works for me, and which one of these five liberal arts colleges would you like to go to?” And I’d never heard of any of them, except that a few weeks previously, Life magazine had run a story; in those days Life magazine had a regular feature called “Life Goes To A Party,” and Life had gone to the Williams spring house parties. And I read that article and decided that was where I wanted to go to college. (Chuckles)

Mr. Metzler: Party school! That was what this was all about!

Mr. Smith: (Chuckling) Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time and I’ve never regretted it. That was where I learned to ski, and skiing like flying has been one of my major passions in life. I guess the third one was sailing and that’s another story. (Chuckles, Mr. Metzler laughs in background). But anyway, I did go to Williams--

Mr. Metzler: For three years--

Mr. Smith: And I may be anticipating your next question, but I was in my fraternity house at Williams on Sunday morning, December the seventh, 1941.

Mr. Metzler: Which fraternity were you in?

Mr. Smith: I was in a fraternity called Phi Sigma Kappa.

Mr. Metzler: So, you remember that Sunday morning.

Mr. Smith: I remember that Sunday morning vividly.

Mr. Metzler: What was the reaction of you and the others when you heard?

Mr. Smith: We were all wondering how quickly we could get into uniform and go fight those bad guys that--

Mr. Metzler: Dirty Japs--

Mr. Smith: Those dirty Japs--I think about half my class went down and volunteered the next day. I thought I ought to clear that with my father (chuckles) and he said, "I want you to go ahead and finish your education. You'll be more useful to the country after you got your engineering degree." And I said, "Well, in that connection, I want to change my plans a little bit. I've learned that there's a school out in California called Cal Tech that is doing some aeronautical engineering. This seems to be getting ahead of the competition and I've been in Massachusetts for three years, I'd like to go to Cal Tech.

Mr. Metzler: So you never actually went then to MIT at that time?

Mr. Smith: I never went to MIT except for a couple of weekends. I visited a friend over there and it's a great school.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, it is.

Mr. Smith: My career in business has been largely in electronics, and I would say that MIT is probably still number one in the world in electronics.

Mr. Metzler: I'd say so, yeah.

Mr. Smith: Although Stanford might not agree with that. Anyway, I feel very fortunate that I had the education that I did. Too bad I had not done (chuckles) more with it, but at the time, it was about as good an education as anybody could ask for. I was able to finish at Cal Tech in an accelerated program. I got my degree there in February of 1944, and immediately enlisted in the Navy. It was sort of the deal I'd made with the draft board, that they would give me a deferment to get my degree if I would join up as soon as possible afterward. Unfortunately, part of the deal had been that I would get a commission in the Navy. I would go to Officers' Candidate School and--as a college graduate and get a commission, presumably as an ensign, but it turned out that I couldn't pass the eye test. I was very nearsighted, had been very nearsighted all my life, and never could quite--they gave me a waiver down--normal requirement for a commission was twelve-twenty and they gave me a waiver down to eight-twenty, and the best I could do even after treatments and exercises and so forth was six-twenty. So (I) went ahead and joined the Navy as an enlisted man but I learned that a Commander Eddy had been

given the responsibility of training a new group of petty officers to be radio and radar technicians, to repair and operate, maintain the electronic equipment that was becoming so important in both naval warfare and in aviation. And the Navy gave me a crash course--I call it that--took a year starting in Michigan City, Indiana for three months, then three months, rather coincidentally and pleasantly, at the University of Houston here in town, and then three months down at Corpus Christi if you went the aviation route, which I wanted to, of course, at the Naval Training Station in Corpus Christi, and especially at Ward Island, where the present University of Corpus Christi is, I believe. The last three months were on a little island in the Pacific, and at the time it was so secret that I couldn't tell people where I was except that I was on an island in the Pacific. And my mailing address was Fleet Post Office, San Diego. What we weren't supposed to tell people was that our little island was just a few miles off the coast called San Clemente. It was a very secret base. We had our little airstrip there and we would fly patrols up and down the coast of California looking for submarines with very advanced radar equipment, and with countermeasures equipment which was so secret you couldn't mention it to anybody, but it was basically used to jam the enemy's radar.

Mr. Metzler: Of which they didn't have a lot. From what I remember, the Japanese radar was few and far between, wasn't it?

Mr. Smith: I can't remember the details about that, except that we never did see any Jap ships.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, by that late in the war you probably weren't going to see too much right there on the coast, I wouldn't think.

Mr. Smith: The Japanese electronic equipment was relatively primitive at the time, and as you know, I brought back a Japanese radio from Guam; it's now in your museum.

Mr. Metzler: Right. Well, let me ask you a question about--did you go to the traditional boot camp like everybody else?

Mr. Smith: I sure did!

Mr. Metzler: Where did you go to boot camp?

Mr. Smith: Great Lakes Naval Training Station, north of Chicago.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, on the great lake of Michigan.

Mr. Smith: At the great lake of Michigan, and thank goodness it was during the summer. I've been told that place gets cold in the winter.

Mr. Metzler: Cold and windy, I'm told (laughs)

Mr. Smith: (Chuckles) But I was just there for about three months, July, August, September, as I recall, and it really was very pleasant duty. And then when I got moved to the other side of Chicago, the beginning of radio school at the naval--what did they call that? There was a small naval base in Michigan City, Indiana,

and they had the best food that I enjoyed during the whole war. It was a real pleasure and weekends at Chicago and so forth, it was not bad duty at all. And that was where I learned to solder wires together and read schematic diagrams things like that.

Mr. Metzler: Tell the difference between a capacitor and a resistor, things like that (chuckles, both talking together)

Mr. Smith: That's exactly (unclear).

Mr. Metzler: With the little colored lines on them (chuckles).

Mr. Smith: Had to learn the color code and the mnemonic for remembering it which I will not repeat here (chuckles).

Mr. Metzler: Okay, I'm not going ask you to. I'll give you a break (laughs). Well now, you mentioned the food there. What were the living conditions like? Did they just have you on a bunk in a barracks or what?

Mr. Smith: Yes, yes. On a bunk in the barracks, with a dozen or so other guys, and at the time we were still classified as Apprentice Seaman, and then we went Seaman Second after we got out of Michigan City and Seaman First after we got out of the University of Houston. And (unclear) petty officer--

Mr. Metzler: But did you kind of stay together as a group or did you get all split up and different people at different locations?

Mr. Smith: A lot of us stayed together. I was just looking at a letter a few minutes ago from one of the guys that went all the way through

the Navy electronics course with me. And I made some good friends; we were sort of all in the same boat.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, so you stayed in contact with them after the war, at least some of them?

Mr. Smith: Some of them I've stayed in contact with for many years.

Mr. Metzler: Isn't that something?

Mr. Smith: I have to admit that right now, I can't remember a single one of them that's still living. (Chuckles)

Mr. Metzler: Well, it happens, you know. (Chuckles)

Mr. Smith: But I'm pretty old! (Chuckles)

Mr. Metzler: Well, yeah, we're all getting there. So how long were you at Michigan City, about three months?

Mr. Smith: Michigan City, each of these four places was a three-month tour.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, so you went to U of H after that?

Mr. Smith: Michigan City was, as I say, July, August, September, then October, November, December, at the University of Houston, down to Corpus Christi for January, February, March--

Mr. Metzler: And this was '44.

Mr. Smith: And we're now into '45. I just said January, February and March, that would be of '45. It's been a year now since I graduated from Cal Tech.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. Now at U of H, what kind of training were you getting at University of Houston?

Mr. Smith: One thing I remember particularly at the University of Houston was, we had to take mathematics, advanced algebra and elementary calculus, both of which I had had--much more advanced math than that at Williams and Cal Tech. I was one of the few college graduates in this class of electronics trainees, you might say, so I was lucky in that I had much more advanced mathematics training--

Mr. Metzler: You had the background to help you through all that.

Mr. Smith: --than they had. Our math teacher at the University of Houston was a man named Isaac Arnold, who had married the daughter of one of Houston's most prominent, distinguished, successful citizens, Mr. H.R. Cullen, whose name is--

Mr. Metzler: (Laughing) Hugh Roy--

Mr. Smith: Hugh Roy Cullen's name was all over Houston, of course.

Mr. Metzler: Absolutely, including the University of Houston.

Mr. Smith: At the University of Houston, that's right. Well, his son-in-law taught there, and--

Mr. Metzler: I'll be darned.

Mr. Smith: --and later became a close friend of mine. We were in the Kiwanis Club until his death, and I wrote his obituary for the club. But anyway, he was an excellent math teacher. He had graduated from Rensselaer himself, and he knew about Williams

College, probably one of the few people in Houston who did.

(Chuckles)

Mr. Metzler: Right up in the area.

Mr. Smith: But anyway, we learned basic radio technology at the U of H, and then radar in Corpus Christi, and as I mentioned, the secret countermeasures on San Clemente, that little island in the Pacific.

Mr. Metzler: Now, during this training period, were you married or were you a single man?

Mr. Smith: I was single until I was thirty years old.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, so you're free to go anywhere, do anything, didn't have to worry about family at that point?

Mr. Smith: Right.

Mr. Metzler: So, you finished up your training in Corpus Christi, is that correct?

Mr. Smith: Well, I finished the radar training in Corpus Christi, and was immediately transferred to San Clemente.

Mr. Metzler: Right, right.

Mr. Smith: And then I finished the complete course and got a--forget what they call it--you don't get a commission as a non-commissioned officer (chuckles). I got a certificate or whatever it is you get, a designation.

Mr. Metzler: Certificate of authenticity, huh? (Laughs)

Mr. Smith: Somewhere along there I got second class petty officer, which is as high as I ever got.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. Now I've got a space here that says "Primary Job Description," so I'm trying to get a feel for--we've talked radar, we've talked advanced electronics and--

Mr. Smith: As soon as I finished the advanced electronics, which included the countermeasures, and I should mention another device that was highly secret at the time called I-F-F, which stands for Identification Friend or Foe. And this was a little box full of vacuum tubes, roughly a cubic foot in size. One of its unusual features was that it contained a shotgun shell, which we, of course, knew about, but the hope was that if the enemy ever got hold of it, they would make the mistake of destroying it and perhaps themselves. We didn't want I-F-F gear to fall into enemy hands.

Mr. Metzler: So this would detonate if they tried to open it or something like that?

Mr. Smith: If they tried to open it and didn't know the secret, it would explode, and--

Mr. Metzler: Booby trap. (Chuckles)

Mr. Smith: Yeah, it was booby trapped. But I was sent first to Guam, and was on Guam for several months and then transferred to Saipan

and I didn't do much on Saipan except play bridge and wait for the points to accumulate--

Mr. Metzler: (Chuckling) Wait for something to happen.

Mr. Smith: --so I could be discharged. And then I was discharged-- honorably (chuckles) thank goodness.--at Ellington Field in the summer of 1946. I was in the Navy a little bit, as I recall, two years and one month or something like that.

Mr. Metzler: Right. That's about how long it took to get your points unless you were getting combat extra credits or something. Now when you were in Guam, well let's go back to San Clemente Island. Were you assigned to an outfit, an organization? What part of the Navy were you actually in when you were there? Was it a division of a--whatever?

Mr. Smith: I was basically just a trainee.

Mr. Metzler: You're still a trainee in San Clemente?

Mr. Smith: Oh, yes. San Clemente was where we were taught the secret stuff. We couldn't mention it to anybody in the correspondence or when we went on leave to San Diego or something, you couldn't tell them anything but San Clemente was countermeasures and I-F-F, and I-F-F was that box with the shotgun shell. And when the enemy--when a radar signal was received by an aircraft carrying I-F-F, the I-F-F sent back a signal that it was friendly, don't shoot. So we never shot down

one of our own planes, even though they, of course, made a radar target just like an enemy plane. But it was a special radar target that was recognizable, so we didn't shoot down our own planes.

Mr. Metzler: So, is that technology widely known now, or still being developed and is being utilized? Do you know?

Mr. Smith: I'm just not sure what is going on, but in view of the advances that have been made in the last fifty or so years, I'm sure they have something a whole lot smarter than what we had then.  
(Chuckles)

Mr. Metzler: So, after your training was over in San Clemente, you then went to Guam, is that correct?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I went from San Clemente, when I finished my training, I was sent home for a short leave of maybe a week, I think, and then back to San Diego and then on a ship that took me to Guam to help take care of the aircraft that were stationed on Guam. I remember now, and I had forgotten this, I hadn't thought about it in many years, but I was assigned to a unit on Guam called CASU F-12, and CASU was an abbreviation, acronym, for Carrier Aircraft Service Unit. And what happened was that, we were stationed on Guam, we lived in Quonset huts and our shops were basically Quonset huts and some aircraft hangars. But what happened was that a carrier with its complement of aircraft

would come into the harbor on Guam. It was called Apra Harbor, I remember, A-p-r-a Harbor, and carriers would come in there and we would go aboard the carriers and service the electronic equipment on the carrier, and all of that equipment was built with vacuum tubes and required a lot of service. It's amazing when I think about it, what we could do with vacuum tubes. We do it so easily now with transistors--

Mr. Metzler: Isn't that the truth?

Mr. Smith: --and transistors are so reliable. Vacuum tubes were fragile and relatively short-lived, and there was always something that needed to be serviced. The aircraft were primarily fighters. There were Vought Corsairs, there were Grumman Hellcats, and the Bearcat F-8 was just--I believe that's right--was just coming in. I remember seeing a couple of those, but lots of Vought Corsairs and Grumman Hellcats, and the torpedo bombers, TBFs and TBMs, like the one that President Bush flew. Those were the aircraft that we serviced.

Mr. Metzler: Now this was all carrier aircraft, as opposed to Navy land-based aircraft which, I guess there was some of that as well there on Guam, maybe not?

Mr. Smith: Well, there were--I suppose there were--yes, probably some long-range patrol bombers. I think the Navy had some of those. I never had anything to do with any of them. And the Navy also

had flying boats, Catalinas, and I did fly a few times in a Catalina in Corpus Christi, but not--I never saw one on Guam. I don't know they had them over there.

Mr. Metzler: Now, are there any of the aircraft carriers that came in that particularly stick in your mind as an experience different from the standard, or was it all pretty much the same, as you remember?

Mr. Smith: You know, it's funny, but I don't remember any particular carrier. I don't remember the names of them.

Mr. Metzler: Were they the small carriers, the big carriers, or both?

Mr. Smith: Primarily--I think once or twice we had big carriers, but mostly they were relatively small.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, the little escort carriers.

Mr. Smith: That's basically it. They were escort carriers.

Mr. Metzler: CVE's, they called them.

Mr. Smith: Right. And they had just a complement of these fighters, single-place.

Mr. Metzler: Right. What was Guam like?

Mr. Smith: Guam is a beautiful place. The climate is wonderful and what I probably remember more than anything else about that area was the beautiful beaches and the shells. And what little spare time we had, we'd go down to the beach and collect shells and kind of swim in that beautiful water.

Mr. Metzler: You could see the bottom, unlike Galveston Island (laughs).

Mr. Smith: Oh, absolutely! Absolutely. That water was just as clear as it is in the Bahamas, and it was just a beautiful, I remember it, green place with a wonderful climate. I suppose the climate was a lot like Hawaii. By the way, coming and going, I passed within sight of Hawaii, but I've never been there. We didn't get to stop--

Mr. Metzler: You didn't get to Pearl Harbor or down to Waikiki, huh?

Mr. Smith: We didn't get to stop, and I've never gotten there. Kind of always wanted to, and even talked about it last year, but we didn't get there.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, I'd like to go back there, too. I haven't been there for thirty--forty years. I'd like to go back and see the USS Missouri. It's tied up there, right next to the Arizona. And that would be fun, I think.

Mr. Smith: I would love to see that. I think the climate on Guam is probably like the climate in Hawaii, but I remember it as just being beautiful.

Mr. Metzler: Now, you didn't have mosquitoes, tropical insects, that kind of stuff on Guam, did you?

Mr. Smith: I don't remember anything about insects. I don't know. I just don't remember. My guess--

Mr. Metzler: Well, you probably would have remembered it if you'd gotten either ill, or had to sleep under mosquito netting, and all that other stuff like they did in some of the other venues.

Mr. Smith: Well, maybe so, but I grew up in Houston and I got pretty used to mosquitoes (unclear).

Mr. Metzler: But not malaria (laughs). Now what were your living conditions like there? Were you in another barracks with a whole bunch of other guys, kind of in the same boat with you?

Mr. Smith: Oh, yes, yes. We were all basically in the same boat, and about the same age, and similar, you know--

Mr. Metzler: Now you're a petty officer at this point?

Mr. Smith: I was a petty officer.

Mr. Metzler: So, you're a cut above just the enlisted guy. Do you have different housing? Are you mixed in with them, or what?

Mr. Smith: I don't remember specifically.

Mr. Metzler: Well, you're not a quote, full officer, you're kind of in between, I know.

Mr. Smith: All we ever wore, as I recall, were dungarees and tee shirts. Nobody ever wore any insignia. We were just, well, working hard and staying busy, and--

Mr. Metzler: Did you ever get bored?

Mr. Smith: --Not much to do. I know I probably spent an hour a day writing letters.

Mr. Metzler: Is that right?

Mr. Smith: The way to get letters, I learned, was to write them (chuckles).

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs) That's how that works!

Mr. Smith: That's how that worked, and I loved to get letters, so I wrote a lot of them, and I think--

Mr. Metzler: Did any of those survive the war, and the years, or not?

Mr. Smith: Oh, yes, I have letters right here. These are letters that were addressed to me. That was addressed to me at San Clemente, for instance.

Mr. Metzler: September '45. So the war is over here, at this point.

Mr. Smith: Right. I was on San Clemente when they dropped the atom bombs. Two of them.

Mr. Metzler: Now that was before or after--

Mr. Smith: That was August of--

Mr. Metzler: Forty-five.

Mr. Smith: Forty-five, yes.

Mr., Metzler: Were you on--let's see--but you were on San Clemente before you went to Guam.

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: So Guam was post-war or during the war?

Mr. Smith: The war had ended by the time I got to Guam.

Mr. Metzler: So, okay. All right. So you remember when they dropped the bombs, how you heard about those and--?

Mr. Smith: I don't remember specifically how we heard about them, but it was about the time of my birthday. I think it was kind of a nice birthday present, and I've often thought that if we hadn't dropped those bombs, I might very well have been involved in the invasion of Japan.

Mr. Metzler: You and everybody else.

Mr. Smith: (Chuckles) And I might--I'm sure the invasion of Japan would have been a costly--all those Pacific islands cost us a lot of casualties, and Japan would have been just that much worse. I'm so glad we never had to invade it. We just bombed it.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, I mean, if Okinawa was any insight as to what going into the big islands would have been like, it would have been horrible.

Mr. Smith: It would've--Okinawa, Tarawa and Iwo Jima.

Mr. Metzler: Mess.

Mr. Smith: They were--they were costly.

Mr. Metzler: Now, what was the food like on Guam? Did they feed you well?

Mr. Smith: Yeah, it was. Navy, I thought, always had pretty good food. We never had, what do they call it, rations. We never had K-rations or--

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, C-rations and K-rations. I mean, you had real cooked food.

Mr. Smith: We had cooked food, and lots of it. Lots of beans and lots of eggs, and good--

Mr. Metzler: Stuff on a shingle?

Mr. Smith: (Laughs) Lots of that and lots of some kind of, as I recall, it was a processed cheese that I kind of liked, and I've never seen it since. Well and of course, we had Spam.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, yeah, the ever-present Spam.

Mr. Smith: But that processed cheese was pretty good, and I don't know what ever happened to it. It just--it disappeared after the war, as far as I'm concerned. But the Navy food was always good, and at Michigan City, they took sort of special pride and you'd have thought you were at a first-class cafeteria.

Mr. Metzler: I guess it was--that's unusual (laughs). I will tell you, I've talked to a lot of veterans and usually the guys that seem happiest with the food are the ones that were on the really big combat ships, like the battleships. Fresh bread and all that kind of stuff.

Mr. Smith: The one story that I remember along those lines was that while I was in Corpus Christi, at one point, I was put on K-P. I forget exactly why, maybe it was a little disciplinary problem or something like that.

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs) You've somehow forgotten that, though.

Mr. Smith: Maybe I was late coming back from leave or something. But I found myself on K-P in Corpus Christi, and at one point, I was given several cans of asparagus and told to slice the asparagus in such a way that the tips were here and the stalks were here, and go can after can, and I said, "What is this, why are we doing this?" And the cook said, "The officers get the tips and enlisted men get the stalks." (Laughs)

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs) I thought maybe you were getting ready to tell me they got the shaft! But I think the difference is obvious!

Mr. Smith: No, but that's my only story about K-P.

Mr. Metzler: It does pay to be an officer, I'm told. At least you weren't doing the potato thing.

Mr. Smith: Right. I never had to sort potatoes. But, we may be getting a little off of the Navy now, and my next story has nothing to do with the Pacific war, except that a few years after the Pacific war ended, it looked like we might be getting into a war in Korea. And I remember very actively making up my mind that if I had to go to war again, I was going to go first class. I was going to be an officer. I didn't want to go through the war again as an enlisted man, and I looked around and I found that I could get a commission in the Texas National Guard, and if the Guard were mobilized, I would have to go to Korea, but I would go as an officer. So I did join the Guard, there was a unit of the Guard

called the X-L-I Corps Artillery, X-L-I, I think, means forty-first, Corps Artillery unit of the field artillery, and they needed a radar officer. And I heard about them and they heard about--well, I guess you could say I applied for the job. I had my Navy radar experience, and I applied for the job of radar officer of the X-L-I Corps Artillery, and got a commission as a second lieutenant. And after some training up at Fort Sill, Oklahoma in field artillery learning how to shoot cannon--they didn't call them cannons--

Mr. Metzler: Maybe howitzers, or--

Mr. Smith: They were howitzers, 105s and 155s. And you'd go, "Ready on right, and ready on the left, and ready on the firing line" and so forth. Then I got a commission as a first lieutenant.

Mr. Metzler: Did you actually go to Korea?

Mr. Smith: No, we were never mobilized, except for summer training. We went two weeks every summer, up to Fort Sill, for several years.

Mr. Metzler: Well now, I'm sitting here looking at this coconut on your coffee table, and I would like for you to tell me that story, Frank.

Mr. Smith: Well, they were plentiful on Guam, and some of the guys just had the idea of writing an address and mailing them back to the states. And I didn't have a particular girlfriend at the time that wanted a coconut, so I just--I addressed it to my mother.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. Why don't you read for us what's actually written on this coconut? It's about the size of a football.

Mr. Smith: Yeah, its--it's written on here. It says, From F.C. Smith, ART2C, that's aviation radio technician second class, something, it's hard to read some of this, Navy number nine three nine, care of Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California. To Mrs. Frank C. Smith, 1405 South Boulevard, Houston 6, Texas. And I mailed it, and she got it.

Mr. Metzler: With no charges for postage.

Mr. Smith: No charges for postage or anything like that. And--

Mr. Metzler: That is an interesting story.

Mr. Smith: --she kept it and gave it back to me when I--I guess when I got married or something--when I had a house of my own I could keep it in, and I've had it ever since. And if you think the Nimitz Museum would like to have it (chuckles) you're welcome to it.

Mr. Metzler: Well, the Admiral Nimitz Museum appreciates it and gladly accepts it, so we thank you for donating that to us. I can guarantee you we don't--I say guarantee; I'll double check it--I don't think we've got one like that, with the address and everything on it. Well, tell me, Frank, what did you think about the Japanese after--I recognize you didn't do any hand to hand combat with them, but I mean, you were part of a nation that was

committed to defeating them, and had a chance to think about the enemy. What did you think then, and what do you think now?

Mr. Smith: I thought then that they were very sneaky. I don't know of a better word than cowardly. They took advantage of the fact that we were worrying a lot about Germany and wondering if we were going to have to go to war in Europe, and we were not really thinking much about Japan and they stabbed us in the back. (Chuckles) And it made me so mad I was ready to do whatever it took to--

Mr. Metzler: You and everybody else.

Mr. Smith: --beat up the Japanese. They were not, to me, nice people, as I guess at the time I thought of them as being a race, and I just hated anybody that had slanty eyes and--

Mr. Metzler: What about now?

Mr. Smith: And now, I think that they are among the smartest, most industrious people in the world. I don't have any particular Japanese friends but I'd be perfectly willing to. If there were--if some of my neighbors here were Japanese, that'd be fine with me. The only ones I've ever known personally, like a couple of professors, had been just as nice and generally speaking, smarter than most other people. But I guess that's because they were professors.

Mr. Metzler: Well, that had something to do with it, probably. So do you feel like your service, your time in the service during and after the war, changed you as a person?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: How?

Mr. Smith: It just happened at a time in my life when I didn't know where I was going or what I was going to do, other than I hoped someday, someday, I could do something that involved flying. But the Navy sent me through that crash course in electronics, and when I got out of the Navy, I don't think I had any idea what I was going to do next. I came back to Houston and found out that Rice University--it was then Rice Institute--had chosen a man to succeed Dr. Lovett as president of Rice, and by coincidence his name was Houston (pronounced HOW-ston), but by coincidence he came from Cal Tech, where I had just been a few years before. Something prompted me to call him and tell him that I was glad he was in Houston and if there was anything I could do for him, (phone rings in background) I'd be glad to. It's my town. He said, "Why don't you come out here to Rice and let's have a visit?" And so I went out to Rice, (background noise) and he welcomed me into his office and said, "What are your plans?" And I said, "I don't have any plans." And he said, "Would you like to come to Rice, and do a little

more work in electrical engineering, for example? You had aeronautical engineering at Cal Tech, but would you like to pursue the electronics that you learned in the Navy?" And I said, "Well, as a matter of fact, I would." And he said, "There's just one requirement. You have to take my course." And I said, "Well, thank you." And so I took this course, took his daughters to some of the debut parties that were going on in Houston that fall and winter, and he was just a wonderful guy, one of the best teachers I ever had. He taught Physics 350, and I loved every minute of it, and took a couple of electrical engineering courses. And while I was at Rice, I got involved in a project that the Humble Company was working on, a new gravity meter, and when that year ended, the Humble Company offered me a job testing the gravity meter on their ships. They had four converted sub chasers that they were exploring the Gulf of Mexico--

Mr. Metzler: The gravity boats--

Mr. Smith: (Unclear) potential. Three seismograph and one gravity, and I was on the gravity boat and I learned a lot at the Humble Company and that led me to being in the electronics industry for the rest of my business career. It was a good experience.

Mr. Metzler: Well, what else can we talk about of your World War II experience? Have any things that, when you think back on those years, it just kind of makes you chuckle a little bit, like, you

know, something funny, pranks you might have played?  
Anything like that come to mind?

Mr. Smith: Not that I can think of right now.

Mr. Metzler: Sounds like you were pretty darned busy there on Guam.

Mr. Smith: Well, we were busy on Guam; and then when I went over to Saipan, there wasn't much going on there. I do remember playing endless games of bridge, and I sort of have always felt that I played enough bridge on Saipan to last me the rest of my life.

Mr. Metzler: You should have some master's points after all of that, I would think.

Mr. Smith: (Chuckles) I've never played since.

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs) Burns you out on it, I guess.

Mr. Smith: (Laughs) It burned me out, really.

Mr. Metzler: Now you reported, of course, to officers in every, you know, assignment that you had. What were your officers like?

Mr. Smith: I don't remember any of them. I never got to know any of them.

Mr. Metzler: What did the guys think about them? Were they good guys? Were they happy with their officers, don't particularly remember, or what?

Mr. Smith: I never had any particular contact with the officers. The head of the electronics maintenance facility was usually a chief petty officer, and I got along fine with the chiefs and the other petty

officers, and the guys who flew the airplanes were all commissioned officers. But they had their officers' club and--

Mr. Metzler: You never saw them, I bet (laughs).

Mr. Smith: --we absolutely did not have anything to do with them, and they didn't have anything to do with us. Never saw 'em.

Mr. Metzler: I'm looking back on my notes here. You had said you were ART2C, aircraft repair technician?

Mr. Smith: No, radio.

Mr. Metzler: Radio technician. I wanted to get that right, second class.

Mr. Smith: It was--well, the correct--

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, give me the--

Mr. Smith: The correct would be aviation radio technician, and sort of midway through my career--I was already an ART second class, which is what it says on that coconut--they changed the designation to AETM, which stood for aviation electronic technician's mate. It just seemed cumbersome to me, and I never really knew why, but except that they wanted to make it electronics instead of just radio.

Mr. Metzler: Right. Make it a little broader perhaps.

Mr. Smith: Make it broader; make it include radar and communications and countermeasures and I-F-F, all in electronics.

Mr. Metzler: Well, okay. It sounds like we've covered the war and a period after the war as well. I want to end the interview now, if that's okay, Frank, unless you've got some more sea stories for me.

Mr. Smith: I can't remember another sea story, a real sea story, but I do remember one little incident that occurred; you could call it a sea story, I guess. When I was stationed on San Clemente, my running buddy there was a guy from Texas City, Texas, down here on Galveston Bay. His name was Anacito Giusti, last name G-i-u-s-t-i. I think as a matter of fact, he'd grown up in Galveston.

Mr. Metzler: Sounds Italian.

Mr. Smith: It's an Italian name, and his nickname was Bum, B-u-m, he was called Bum Giusti. But he and I were on San Clemente together, and he had learned how to sail on Galveston Bay and I had sailed a few times on Galveston Bay. I didn't get a boat of my own until later, but I had sailed a few times. And they had a little sailboat as San Clemente that they let the enlisted men use when they had free time. And Bum and I were about the only guys there that had any interest in it, and one time we took that little sailboat, which I think was about eighteen feet long--a little sloop, and we sailed out into the Pacific Ocean and a fitting on the--one of the shrouds came loose. I think a cotter pin fell out

or something like that, and the mast fell overboard, fell just down, the mast just fell, like lying flat in the boat.

Mr. Metzler: It didn't depart from the boat but it was not--

Mr. Smith: It didn't depart. No, it was still attached to the boat and the sail and all that, but it--there we were, out in the Pacific Ocean, no land between us and Honolulu. (Chuckles).

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs) That's a long haul!

Mr. Smith: (Chuckles) And it began to get dark, and we didn't know what was going to happen. But sure enough, somebody back at the base realized that we were missing and they sent a boat out and found us.

Mr. Metzler: That's actually quite lucky for you (laughs).

Mr. Smith: That's the closest narrow escape I ever had during the war. For a few minutes there, I felt a little bit like that guy in a movie I saw recently, called "All Is Lost." They sent a boat out and found us, and brought us back.

Mr. Metzler: Well, at least they missed you. That's a good sign.

Mr. Smith: And then, Bum went to work for one of the chemical plants in Texas City. And I ran into him in, maybe it was probably twenty years later, in the sixties. I was in the electronic instrument business, and I went down to Texas City and tried to install some equipment down there, and there was Bum Giusti, running the (unclear) lab at this company

Mr. Metzler: What a coincidence.

Mr. Smith: And I saw him quite a lot after that in the sixties and seventies. I think he passed away, but anyway, I know I haven't seen him in this century. But he was a nice guy. All the people in the Navy were nice guys. I never met a person in the Navy that I didn't kind of like.

Mr. Metzler: So your naval experience was really a good one for you then?

Mr. Smith: Oh, gosh yes. I generally in life have found that people are nice if you're nice to them--

Mr. Metzler: Most people (chuckles).

Mr. Smith: I never had any serious enemies after I guess--in elementary school I remember getting mad at some guy and getting into a fist fight with him, but once I got into junior high school, from then on it's been very easy sailing. I like people--get along (chuckles).

Mr. Metzler: That's nice. Well, thank you for spending the time with us today. I want to thank you for what you did for our country during World War II. All of you veterans are special to us, and so I want to thank you for that.

Mr. Smith: I think it was good for me, by the way. I've said to my children that it's too bad you didn't have some military experience; you'd have been better off for it.

Mr. Metzler: I think it's good discipline.

Mr. Smith: Kids that, you know, the next generation after mine, as far as I'm concerned, missed out on a lot of (chuckles) things they might have learned if they'd been--had some military experience. It was good for all of us, and as you mentioned, the country was really united and we were all willing to give whatever it took and we were all working on the same team with the same goal.

Mr. Metzler: All on the same page.

Mr. Smith: And it hasn't been that way for the last--as far as I know--few years.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. Thank you, Frank. I appreciate it.

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