

Gordon W Jones Oral History Interview

MARK CUNNINGHAM: OK, this is Mark Cunningham, and today is March the 14th, 2014. I am interviewing Mr. Gordon W. Jones. The interview is taking place in the Hilton Hotel in Clearlake, Texas. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Foundation and Research Center at the National Museum of the Pacific War for the Preservation of the Historical Information Related to World War II. First things first, Mr. Jones, may I call you Gordon?

GORDON JONES: Sure!

MC: First things first, Gordon, I want to thank you for your service to our country. And I also want to thank you for doing this interview with us.

GJ: You're quite welcome.

MC: And I'm going to start by asking you to give me your birthdate.

GJ: August 18th, 1926. I might mention one thing concerning this. I was born out of wedlock, and my mother was a nurse -- a student nurse -- and got pregnant by a married man. I was raised in the lower part of Mississippi, and they were kind of -- out of wedlock pregnancies were kind of kept in the closet. So, I was born in my grandmother's house, and

my grandmother raised me until I was almost 14 years old. And when I was picked up on census in 1932, my mother told them that I was born on August 18th, 1927. But the family Bible that were signed by the doctor shows that I was born in my grandmother's home in 1926. That's what I went in the service by. So, the discrepancy between my birth certificate and driver's license and what I just told you, I was explaining to you.

MC: OK, and where were you born?

GJ: In Silver Creek, Mississippi.

MC: Silver... where is that?

GJ: Silver Creek, Mississippi. It's about 30 miles east of Brookhaven, Mississippi, about 65 miles south of Jackson, Mississippi. So, it's in the south central part of the state.

MC: All right. My family comes -- my father's family comes from Jackson.

GJ: Oh yeah?

MC: Yeah, yeah. All right, what were you doing when the war broke out?

GJ: Well, I was riding my bicycle home from work and as an usher at a theatre in Washington, DC. That's after my mother married my stepfather and moved to Washington. I

moved up there with them, and I worked part-time in a theatre. I was riding my bicycle home, when I heard about the war breaking out.

MC: And now, you were still in high school at the time, right?

GJ: I was still in high school. I think I was either 13 or -- 14. Between 14 and 15. (inaudible) 14 and 15, yeah.

MC: Did you finish high school before you went in?

GJ: No, sir. I was in my junior year, and when you turn 17, you had to register, and be drafted. But if you went down and volunteered, you could pick your branch of the service. So my mother and stepfather took the family bible that my grandmother had which indicated that I was of legal age to (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

MC: But you were really a year younger, right?

GJ: Yes. So anyway --

MC: So you went in at 16.

GJ: Well I was almost 17 when I volunteered. I was 17 when they set their boot camp in... I'm trying to think of the name of it, but I can't remember it offhand. But anyway, we only four weeks of boot camp. They were getting ready to invade Normandy.

MC: So, what year -- when did you go in?

GJ: I went in right at the end -- I volunteered right at the end of '43. And I went in right after that. Bainbridge, Maryland -- I went to boot camp in Bainbridge, Maryland.

MC: OK, I was going to ask you that.

GJ: And when I were sent to Norfolk, Virginia after four weeks of boot camp, I volunteered for combat, but I was still only 17 years old. And my mother made such a fuss about it. I had volunteered to go on the Texas, because I heard that she was going to be on the invasion of Normandy. And they were in England at the time. They were, I wasn't. But I volunteered, and asked to be transferred to the battleship Texas, but my mother fought it so hard. Anyway, I didn't get go to [Sherrenberg?] on the invasion of Normandy. I had a step-brother from my step-father's side that was over there going -- and I wanted to be with him. But, anyways, to make a long story short, I had to wait until the Texas came back from Normandy, went through Brooklyn Navy Yard, then I boarded before it went to the Pacific.

MC: OK, now, what did you do up until the point you got to Texas - on the Texas.

GJ: I was driving the provost marshal around Norfolk Naval Base. And I was in --

MC: What's the provost marshal?

GJ: There was a group of guards, the provost marshal, that did the security on the base. And, I either had to patrol around the wade barracks or the NCO club. I had to carry a nightstick, and compounder board the size of a eight by ten, with all of your instructions on it. They had -- the guard group came up, you had to read-- recite the rules to him, and [it's what they stood?]. One time I was on duty on the NCO club, and this young lady run out of the NCO club, and this guy was chasing her, chief petty officer that was stationed there. And she was screaming and hollering, so I stopped her and I stopped him. And I'm 17 years old, and carrying a nightstick. And she said, "I don't want to with him." He said "Come on back to the club, I'll behave myself." She said, "No." So, I escorted her to the wade barracks.

MC: To the where?

GJ: To the wade barracks? And I could've probably had a [fist or cuff?] if their man if he decided that he didn't want to put up with a boot. You know, telling him he wasn't going to take his girlfriend back in the club. Anyway, I wound up driving the provost marshal around, and he would check all [barn?] sites. And I stayed there until the ship came

-- the Texas came out of Brooklyn Navy Yard. October --
October '44, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) went to
Norfolk, and started loading ammunition at the army
ammunition dock. I asked again to go -- to be transferred
aboard, and Captain Baker agreed it. Well, Baker wasn't on
there, I'm sorry. He didn't go on it until we got to
England. Anyway, the captain agreed to it, and I went on
as a seaman first class, deckhand.

MC: OK, now that--

GJ: October '44.

MC: OK, and they -- they sailed around for a little while as a
in -- on convoy duty?

GJ: Uh, yeah...

MC: You had a couple of trips across?

GJ: Well, now I think, by the time I went aboard, it was just
before they went through the canal and went to Hawaii. We
were in Hawaii for Christmas of '44.

MC: OK, all right, you're right.

GJ: And then we went on to combat at Iwo Jima. We were like 21
-- 20 days in Iwo Jima, and we loaded ammunition at
(inaudible) Kerama Retto. Anyway --

MC: Now, tell me about Iwo Jima. First off, back up a minute, when you to the Texas, what kind of a job were you assigned on the Texas?

GJ: I was Seaman Deckhand. I swabbed that wooden deck so many times (laughter), I could count the boards in it. And then my battle station was the number one 5S gun and the starboard air gun.

MC: OK, what did you do -- what did you do on that?

GJ: I carried the powder bags from the lift to the gun. The guy put the (inaudible) in, and I put the powder bag in, and they closed the [brace?] and --

MC: And fired the gun...

GJ: The fire crew --

MC: OK, was that an open gun? Or was it in a turret?

GJ: No, it was open gun. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) They had a opening in the outside wall. There were three guns in each [air castle?].

MC: So you were getting your ears blown out when those things went off?

GJ: Oh yeah. That's why I'm wearing earphones, now my hearing is very bad.

MC: Right.

GJ: But anyway, that's part of the game.

MC: So, you were -- you saw -- you were at the point unlike others who were in the turrets --

GJ: Right.

MC: You were at a point where you could see some of what was going on outside --

GJ: It was covered over. We were just had an opening, all 15-foot by 8-foot opening in the side of the air castle. Now, we were under a roof, but the power lift was off to our left. And I just go over there with the gloves and take the powder bags [garret?] to the gun.

MC: OK, now, what else do you remember about Iwo Jima?

GJ: Well, I remember we had a lot of strength. We were like 20, 19 to 20 days there in Iwo Jima. I was a young -- first time I'd ever been away from the states in my life, scared to death. First time I'd ever seen any kind of action. Then I wondered if I'd made a mistake volunteering. But, you grow up -- I grew up overnight, so they say...

MC: Right. Back up a minute, I wanted to ask you something about when you went onboard the ship. You'd been trying to get on for a while, you're onboard the ship. Was it what you expected?

GJ: Well, yes it was I expected. And the guys were a little standoffish at first, you know. They looked at me like I -- at 17 years old, well you see the -- I think I showed you. (laughter) (inaudible) I looked like a kid. I was still riding a bicycle when I went in the service.

MC: And these were battle [lanterns?] too?

GJ: And these old battle lanterns treated me like a boot. One day, my foul weather jacket disappeared. And I knew somebody had taken it, but I couldn't find out where it was at. And one day, when we had a lull in the action, this guy walked past me, and the name on the back of the foul weather jacket was blocked out with black paint. It had your name G. Jones, 7876095, your serial number below it on your back. Well this black paint covered all that up. And he walked in the sunlight, and when we walked in the sunlight, I could see G. Jones outlined in the black paint. So, I went and got the petty officer, and I said, "Sir, that man's got my jacket." The guy said, "Oh no, you don't know what you're talking about, this is my jacket." And I said, "He blocked the name out. If you take it and hold it direct in the sunlight, you'll see G. Jones and the serial number." And the chief took it and looked at it, he said, "Yes, it is your jacket." And he gave it to me and chewed

this guy out. He said maybe you want to press charges, and I said, "No sir." I didn't want to get the old so-and-so all on because I got one of my buddies in trouble, but anyway, I got my jacket back.

MC: Yeah. Did you get the paint off of it?

GJ: No, I had to stencil my name over top of the black paint.

MC: Yeah, OK. What was your -- when you first went on that ship -- what was your first -- what was your impression?

GJ: Well, I knew, like I said, that I was going to be a youngster in a bunch of old souls. But there were several other youngsters that went on the same time I did, and we were kind of in a group. You know, the younger class kind of stuck together, we didn't have nobody else to talk to. And we gradually worked through it, once we went into action--

MC: You proved yourself?

GJ: We were accepted.

MC: Yeah, you proved yourself?

GJ: Sorry?

MC: You proved yourself?

GJ: Yes, they figured out that if were stupid enough to volunteer, that they would accept us. But, it was a

learning experience. And like I said, I'd never been away from home, other than from Mississippi to Washington DC.

MC: Right. Now, how did you find the accommodations? Were you in a bunk? A lot of guys said that when they got on that ship they didn't have a place to sleep.

GJ: Yeah, the first -- some of the early ones had the string hammocks here and there. But I had a compartment, I had a bunk. They were one, two, three, four -- four above one another hanging on chains, with a little thick mattress on it. And I was the third one up, which was no problem -- I couldn't get in and out of it without someone boosting me up there. And I've been there, where my bunk was, I showed my --

MC: Oh, you --

GJ: On the ship, I took them to the last compartment I was in. I was in three different compartments. They asked me the other day, when we filled out the paperwork a few months ago, they asked me, "What was your locker number. What was your division number?" And I couldn't remember, because at the end of the war, I re-enlisted for an extra 2 years to get enough time to go to college. I was three more ships after that, the USS [Colongo?], the USS *Cadmus* and the USS *Mobile Island*.

MC: OK, I want to get to that, but first off, let's keep it in order. You got Iwo, battle of Iwo, now you're headed to Okinawa. Tell me about Okinawa.

GJ: Well, when we were in Okinawa, we wound up sleeping in battle stations quite a bit. We're like 51 days in battle stations.

MC: Right. That's what every-- (laughter)

GJ: We loaded ammunition at Ulithi in the Caroline Islands. Well, when we go down and reload ammunition, we get a short break between loading the ammunition off the barge onto the ship. Anyway, we get our mail. And we knew we were in for a tough time, and we didn't know we were that close to winning the war. We were ready to go to Japan, we figured we were going to. But anyway, we went down to load ammunition, and we got our mail. And I was engaged to a young lady in Washington DC. Stupid being engaged 17 years old, but that's what we decided on. Anyways, I got stack of letters like this, about six-inches tall with a string around them. And I decided -- I was sitting on the deck eating my lunch, and I decided I'd read the last letter first. So, I opened the last letter, and when I did, the engagement ring dropped out on the deck, and she said, "I'm sorry. I can't continue to wait. Sorry if I hurt your

feelings." And I'm sitting there with a couple of tears rolling down my cheek. Old chief petty officer walked by. He said, "Sailor, get off your butt, we've got ammunition to load, or a war to fight." I walked over to the rail, and threw the whole pack of letters over the side.

MC: (laughter) That's quite a story!

GJ: That's what they took (inaudible)

MC: She couldn't wait, huh?

GJ: No, and I often wondered what ever happened to her, but I never saw her after that --

MC: How old was she? You were 17 years old?

GJ: I was 18 then.

MC: OK, how old was she?

GJ: She was six-- 17. She was a year younger...

MC: Pretty young?

GJ: Well, it was really too young. But, a lot of guys did that because they wanted someone to write to, they wanted someone to write to them. And she usually wrote me one to three letters a week. So when I get mail, I -- 15 or 20 envelopes, you know?

MC: Wow.

GJ: And sometimes guys share them with the guys that didn't have no girlfriend, let them read, just to have something to look at. Anyways...

MC: OK, tell me about the camaraderie with the other guys.

GJ: Well, you become brothers. You're concerned for each other's feelings; you're concerned for each other's needs. I had two or three of the guys on the gun crew comfort me in my sorrow from the Dear John letter. And I knew other guys on the ship got Dear John letters, you know? It's kind of a heart breaking situation when you're out there trying to keep from getting killed. And all of a sudden, your life goes through a major change. It was probably for the better, you know. But at that time, you don't think that.

MC: No, you're 18 years old. You're a little bit more impressionable than that.

GJ: Yeah.

MC: OK, back to what's going on on Okinawa. You were there for 51 days; you must've seen a lot of stuff.

GJ: Yes, sir. There was bullets that'd come through -- now when straight to ship -- the Japanese planes went straight to ship, they'd be about 15 to 20 feet off the water coming in, straight in. And they would come through the openings,

where our gun barrels stuck out on the side. These shells were ripping straight through the openings, and bounce around in that air castle --

MC: And nobody got hit?

GJ: No sir. I didn't -- only saw one guy got hit. He got hit with a piece of shrapnel that was bouncing off that shell, and got hit in the shoulder.

MC: And you take any hits?

GJ: No sir. I didn't have any injury -- the only injury I got out of the whole thing was when we were loading ammunition, I was guiding the rope up, and I had my gloves on, and I wasn't paying attention, and my hand run through and broke that finger. It run through the pulley on the rope. And of course, we got it supervising, and got it stopped. Hollering, "Help! Hold off on the rope! My hand is up here going through the pulley!"

MC: That hurts!

GJ: That was the only injury I ever had. Of course, I now have ear damage, but that's not uncommon on the battleship.

MC: OK, what other experiences did you on Guam -- I mean, uh...

GJ: Iwo?

MC: On Okinawa? That stand out?

GJ: Oh, I do have one! We were loading ammunition, and here I am a 18 year old, and I know the guys said I looked like I was 14 or 15. And one of the guys on the crew, a pretty hefty sized guys, I'd say he was probably 170, 175 pounds. I was like 145. Anyway, we were waiting for an ammunition barge to drum alongside. And he got to sparring around with me. Well, I used to box in the boys' club, so I was sparring, open-hand slap sparring, you know? And he made one pass at me, and I hit him upside the nose, and his nose started bleeding. He went down below decks and got the boxing gloves, come up back wearing two sets of boxing gloves, and said, "Me and you are going to go two or three rounds." So we did, and he blacked my eye, but I blooded his nose again. My young brothers on the crew were all happy that I was hanging in. Come to find out that this guy was middle-weight boxing champion on the ship, and he was in the fleet boxing crew. Anyway, after the sparring was over, and I had the [gum bite?], the old chief petty officer come by and said to me. He said, "Son, if you want to join the boxing group, you should come see me. I'm the head--" He said, "You held your own. (laughter) You didn't do that much, but you held your own." Well, when after the war was over, we got back to the states, I'd see this guy

occasionally, and we'd speak to each other. We weren't great brothers, but --

MC: Still in the Navy?

GJ: Yes. When we came back to Newport News, we had our ships parked. And we were all at the country club at Newport News, having ourselves a party. And one of the guys at the table next to us was making some problems, and anyway, he said something to me, and I took offense to it, and he got up and wanted to fight. So here comes this guy out of the boxing crew that I'd had this tête-à-tête with, and he comes over and grabs this guy by the shirt. He said, "Listen! This kid went three innings with me and handled his own." He said, "If you should happen to be lucky enough to beat up on him, then you've got to take me on." And the guy walked off. (laughter) So...

MC: That's pretty good!

GJ: Yeah, it was.

MC: So, you're former sparring buddy --

GJ: Turned out to be my defender.

MC: Yeah, that's pretty good!

GJ: Yeah, yeah.

MC: So now, you were in Okinawa when the war ended, right?

GJ: Yes, and we thought we were going to Japan. We'd already made our minds up that we were going. Then they dropped the bomb, and Japan surrendered.

MC: What do you remember about that day?

GJ: Oh man, we were all cheering and hollering and beating each other on the back, and we were just so happy. But then we made three trips back and forth hauling troops back.

MC: Yeah, that's the convoy I was thinking about earlier --

GJ: Yeah, that's what you were thinking.

MC: Yeah, I just wanted to confirm...

GJ: That was the end of the war, we brought troops back from the Pacific.

MC: Did you make all those trips?

GJ: Yes, sir, I did. I made all those trips, we went back through the canal, and back to Norfolk Naval Base. I'm loading ammunition at the Army piers, and they went to Newport News Shipyard. And then that's when the crew had that party, and we all dispersed. Now, the ship was at Newport News from the end of '45 up until '48 before the state got it.

MC: Right. So that ended your duty on the Texas?

GJ: Yes, sir.

MC: When you got back to the States?

GJ: When we got back to the States, and they started discharging guys, I was naval reserve. And I knew I wasn't -- didn't have -- less than two years' active duty, and I wanted to go to college. So, when they came up, well the radio men picked up the message, they came down and told me, they going to ask you to re-enlist and offer you a special school. And he said, "The orders are already cut for you to go to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, Army Signal Corps School." So the chief come down and talk to me, "If you sign for four years, we'll give you this school." And I said, "Well, I don't want to sign for four years... I'd go two, but I don't want to go four." And I said, "I don't know if I'm ready to make the Navy my lifetime, or if I want to get out." So he said, "OK, we'll agree to two years at [Lynchmont?]. Well the school was nine months long.

MC: Well, that took care of almost half of it, right?

GJ: We were only two Navy personnel on a whole Army base, Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, outside Red Bank, New Jersey. Anyway, went up there to school, and like a month before I left school -- by then, I was right at third class petty officer -- and just a month before I was to leave Fort Monmouth and go back to the Navy, they sent 20-something

boots in there right out of boot camp to go switchboard school, to go to Guam, and I brought the Navy switchboard on Guam. And I was the only Navy man on base, so they put me in charge of these 21 students, boots! (laughter) And you talk about being under stress (laughter), time they keep me -- I had to go New York City one time, they picked up two of them, in their dungarees, in dungaree shirts in New York City. They'd gone up there for the weekend without their dress uniforms on.

MC: Wow!

GJ: I had to go up there and get them. But anyway, to make a long story short, when my time ended, they sent a chief petty officer, and his only job was to supervise these boots going through there. But we -- every time we marched to school, we had to go across the highway from the housing area to the school area. And when we would -- the two of us Navy guys were in the last row in the company C, and when we get ready to go across the road, the band would play Navy's Awa-- Anchors Away for the Navy guys. And you know, we got a big kick out of it. They played Anchors Away every day...

MC: All right, now you said you were on two more ships?

GJ: Oh, the three ships. After I got out of this school, I still had a year and a couple of months to go. So I installed teletype equipment on the USS Calungo (writing), that was a landing ship LSD.

MC: Calupsio? L-O-N

GJ: I-A-L.

MC: OK what else?

GJ: Then I installed teletype -- radio teletype equipment onboard the *Cadmus*, C-A-D-M-U-S... Which was a supply ship.

MC: -U-S. Wait, what is it?

GJ: C-A-D.

MC: C-A-D.

GJ: M-U-S.

MC: M-U-S.

GJ: *Cadmus*. Mona Island, M-O-N-A.

MC: (writing) Two words?

GJ: Yep. The last two of those were supply ships, and I installed -- back then, the Navy didn't have any teletype aboard ship. And me and actually one other guy who had been sent to the school, we installed -- it took us about three months per ship to install the equipment, get it checked out, turn it over to the people that were gonna operate it. I guess if I'd have stayed in, I'd have

probably wound up in pretty good shape, if I decided to make it a career. But I wanted to get out, so when my two years was up, I got out and I had enough time to go to college.

MC: When did you finally get out?

GJ: I got out in '47. The end of '47. I went in -- I re-enlisted the end of '45, for two years --

MC: So you had four years?

GJ: Well, my total time was three and a half years.

MC: Three and a half.

GJ: But a year and half was reserve, two years was regular Navy. And then when I decided to come out and go to college, which wound getting me the job I finally wound up with --

MC: I want to get into that in a minute, but looking back at those Navy years, how do you view those today?

GJ: Well, I'll tell you, I'm definitely in favor, if this country would take every graduating able-bodied high school student and require two years' military service, then give them their first two years paid for by the government, I think we'd be in a lot better shape. Now, I went through this with my oldest boy. I told him he wasn't ready to go to college when he got out of high school. He didn't know

what he wanted to do, what he wanted to be. And I said, "Son, go in the service, and if you don't want to make it a career, use the time you get to go to college, and get a degree." So he did. He went in the Air Force for two years, and the Navy offered him a scholarship to the University of Florida, if he would slip over to the Navy. And when he got out of four years at University of Florida, he was commissioned as an (inaudible). Now he's commissioned -- he retired as a full commander.

MC: Wow. OK now, where'd you go to college?

GJ: George Washington University in Washington DC. Then I took my last year of engineering out at the University of Maryland.

MC: I was going to ask you what your degree's in.

GJ: Engineering, Electrical Engineering. Electronics.

MC: All right, and what'd you do after that?

GJ: I went to work for Bell Systems as an engineer. And they found out what experiences I had, the security clearances I had, and they put me -- I had two government contracts I was responsible for. White House communications was my primary concern. Joint Chief of Staff's command post in the Pentagon, I installed the equipment in that. And those were the two government contracts I was responsible for.

MC: How long did you work for them?

GJ: I worked for them 32 years, but I worked with the White House for 23 years. The White House and Joint Chief's Staff command post. I was still working for them when I retired in '81.

MC: Now, give me that again. You worked for the White House?

GJ: Yes, I worked through five presidents in the White House. I handled the KYI Security [Bosch?] systems, I handled the air to ground radio systems.

MC: OK, so you were in the White House?

GJ: In the White House. I played touch football with John Kennedy. He was in at the [Mal Robertson's?] Korean war veterans. And the NBC camera truck was in the rose garden behind the White House. And we were hooking them up to the video camera and C9 guard post. The president walked out of the White House in a pair of khaki pants, and tennis shoes, and t-shirt. And he walked over to me and my helper, and he said, "I'd like to borrow you two guys for a little bit." And you don't say to the President, "What do you want?" We said, "Yes, sir". He walked by NBC's camera truck, and said, "I'd like to borrow four or five of you fellows." And they said, "Yes, sir." We followed them down the White House lawn. And he said, "We're going to

play a touch football game (laughter) against the radio and newspaper press people."

MC: That's a wonderful story!

GJ: "You guys are on my team!" So we played with him for about 45 minutes, then we walked on back up the guard post where we're walking, and my boss was standing there looking at his watch. He said, "Did you guys take a late lunch hour?" And I said, "No sir." He said, "Well you don't get paid to play touch football on company time." I said, "Take it up with the man coming up here in the khaki pants and t-shirt." He said, "That's the president." (laughter) I said, "Yeah, would you have me tell him call you when he asked us to play?" He said, "Nope." The next day, the front page of the Washington Post had a full-size picture of all of us playing touch football with the president --

MC: Have you got it in there?

GJ: No, sir. My ex-wife wouldn't give it to me.

MC: (laughter) OK.

GJ: In fact, when she destroyed it, some other stuff.

MC: So what? You worked through five presidents, you went in -

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GJ: I worked at the end of Truman's administration. I went through Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, and Nixon.

MC: Wow! (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) OK I want to look at that. Did you have personal contact with each of those guys?

GJ: Not so to speak. Kennedy, yes. Nixon, yes. Mr. Johnson, I know that he's a fellow Texan of yours, but Mr. Johnson was a very staunch man. I didn't even get allowed to take our picture of him. Kennedy... Right after Kennedy's inauguration, there was 11 inches of snow on the ground during his inauguration. I worked seven inaugurations, besides, you know, besides the five presidents. I worked seven inaugurations. There was 11 inches of snow on the ground, and there was told you all get out. And the women got tired of sitting in the revealer stand. So, we had to playback the video tapes the next day to the White House theatre wing, so that they could all watch the inaugural parade. Well, we were ready for them to watch the video tape, and we were standing outside the front porch of -- and the president walks out of the basement, Mr. Kennedy. And he said, "Are you fellas waiting for us to see the tapes?" And I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Have you had supper?" I said, "No sir, we'll eat when we get through." Well, he said, "We'll see you in the theatre." He walked back in the White House, and (inaudible) the family members

to the theatre wing, and we showed them the tape of the video of the parade.

MC: So you saw his whole family?

GJ: Oh yeah.

MC: So you saw Jackie and the kids?

GJ: In fact, the first time I talked to Jackie was before John was nominated. He was in California at the convention. We were doing the TV pickup from his house in Georgetown. And we had the day before the broadcast, we had our video truck out in the street, and they had brought our cable out of the manhole to feed the network video back to the network. And Mrs. Kennedy -- well, I heard a knock on the door, this was the night before, and Mrs. Kennedy was at the door of the video truck. And I opened the door, and I said, "Yes, ma'am, can I help you?" She said, "My housekeeper and I and the baby are going to bed. And it's Halloween night. Would you please try to deter the college kids from knocking on the door, and tell them we're going to bed?" And I said, "Yes, ma'am, we'll try to do our best." And she said, "There's coffee and cake on the patio. The butler will serve y'all whenever you're ready." So that was my conversation with Mrs. Kennedy. And of course at that time, (inaudible). Now they did a split-screen

interview with John in California and her in Georgetown.

They had the same backdrop, so when they put it on television, it looked like they were sitting together.

MC: Let me get something straight. You were actually working for Bell, right?

GJ: I worked for Bell.

MC: Assigned to the White House duty.

GJ: Yes, I had two contracts, like I said, that I was responsible for.

MC: (sigh) I think what you were trying to tell me early on about the importance of this is that without your Navy days, would this have happened?

GJ: Yes, this is what I used to give lectures to all DC students in high school. And I told them, you know it wouldn't hurt you to do two years in the service. And use it like I did --

MC: In other words, your years in service led you in --

GJ: Yes.

MC: That's your point.

GJ: Absolutely.

MC: OK, all right, I understand.

GJ: And the clearances I had, you know, that...

MC: I got to ask you one other thing about the Kennedy -- you were there when he was assassinated.

GJ: Yes, I did an interview with my local paper last -- a month or so ago, on Kennedy's assassination date. And they did an article called "Where were you when Kennedy was assassinated?"

MC: And you said, "at the white house."

GJ: And they come out and interviewed me. I had left and gone down to the Voice of America studio, which is an overseas broadcast station. And I was sitting there talking to a friend of mine, Joe Brown, right at the time the guy run in the studio and said, "The president has just been shot in Dallas." Well, I jumped in my (inaudible), and I drove back to my supply house. And my boss said, "Take your video truck, and head to Andrews Air Force Base. They're bringing the body back." Well we got on the highway going out to Andrews Air Force Base. Well, before that, there wasn't anybody else in the supply house, except the colored supply man. Now, he's not a technician. And I said, "I've got to have him. I've got to set this equipment up on the control tower to broadcast, we had microwave. And I had to set the microwave up on the control tower, and send it back to a microwave unit on Channel 9's roof. And I got to do

this by myself. And this is an eight- or nine-story control tower, and I said, I got to have him. And the boss turned around and said to the supply man, "Help him load, and go do anything you can do to help him." We got out to the base, and on the way out, there was already a crowd, knowing his body was coming back. Already the road was almost solid blocked, and our flight down on park patrolling. And I said, "We've got to get to the base. We've got to do the pick-up from breaker back--" and he said, "Follow me." And we took the video truck and hauled the buggy out to Andrews Air Force base, got to the control tower, got everything set up. I fired the microwave up, and I called the guy at the other end of Channel 9's tower. And I said, "Bud! I just got an active. We've got to pan it." Well, I'd done that pick up several times, and I knew, when you pan microwave, you pan horizontally, and watch your meter go up to max. Then you pan vertically, and watch it. And when you get maximum signal, you're lined up. So I said, "You got to pan the microwave." And he said, "Gordon, we're on the air with it." And I had set it close enough, and he had set it close enough. We had done it before. And I looked out the window, and they had just slid the big side door open on the plane. And Jackie

was standing there in her bloodied clothes. And they were getting ready to unload the casket. That's where I was -- then they did the--

MC: And now you're witness to history.

GJ: Sir?

MC: You're now witness to history.

GJ: Yes, sir, you're right. And I did the funeral at the Arlington Cemetery.

MC: OK now (sighing). This keeps sticking in my mind, your earlier comments about your relationship -- or your time in the Navy and how it lead to... But your security clearance that you had in the Navy, right?

GJ: My background...

MC: Your background. But, didn't I hear you say, that you had some type of pretty good security clearance?

GJ: Oh, they had to do a research -- they went down to Mississippi, once I -- I'm about to White House security clearance and Joint Chiefs of Staff command post security clearance. They went down to Mississippi and interviewed all those old farmers down there, where I grew up. And Uncle John Roberson, they asked him, they said, "Mr. Robinson, what kind of a young man was Gordon Jones?" Now, I got this back through the White House. They told one of

the security people was telling the President Eisenhower what they had said about me. They asked Uncle John Robertson, "What kind of a boy was he?" And he said, "Well, he was a pretty good boy. He never gave his grandmother any trouble. And he didn't get into too much trouble, and he was never got arrested, and he never did nothing but a little -- few fistfights." And they said, "Well, did he ever steal anything?" They said, "The only thing them bunch of kids were stealing were something they could eat. They steal watermelons, pears, and apples, and peaches. We had them on our own place, but they seem to taste better when you get them from somebody else's place." (laughter) Well anyway, the security man was telling President Eisenhower, and I happened to bump into him up in the galley, at 3:00 in the morning, the president come in in his housecoat. And I was installing equipment in the control center -- the communications center. And I was waiting for more equipment. And I went up and asked the cook, "Can you fix me a sandwich?" And he said, "Yeah." Well, I'm sitting there at the counter at 3:30 in the morning eating that sandwich, and here comes President Eisenhower in his housecoat and a White House policeman. Now once the president enters the White House, the White

House police take over. The Secret Service don't take over in the White House, the White House police do. So anyways, here's a White House policeman and President Eisenhower walk in, and I'm sitting there eating a sandwich. Probably at the White House (inaudible). And the president spoke to me, and the White House policeman, "Yes, Mr. President, when we did Mr. Jones' security clearance, they said he never got into any trouble except for stealing watermelons and pears and green apples. We might got to make the galley off limits to him." And the president chuckled about it...

MC: What were your impressions of him?

GJ: I liked Eisenhower. He was a good military man, and I thought he was a good president.

MC: All right, well, I could listen to this all day. You've got some really compelling stuff there. And I wanted to get into this, and we can't do much... (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

GJ: OK, I'll let you lead.

MC: Let me ask you one more question. Have you got anything you want to add that we haven't covered about your military time?

GJ: I sometimes wonder how my life had a been if I'd have stayed in. Because [damned?] another two years, they would've probably made me an instructor for a Navy school or (inaudible). They didn't have anybody else trying it (inaudible) except the one other guy who went in with me. Went with me, but I just wanted to go home and go to college and decide what I wanted to do with my life. And this is the one point I try to make to these ROTC kids when I give lectures to them. It gives you a chance to grow up and go into the military for a couple of years. And it gives you time to make up your mind what you want to do with your life, where you want to stay in the military, or make a career. And it gives you some training to fall back on. Because most kids when they go to college right out of high school aren't ready for college. They're ready for partying and good times.

MC: Right. Yeah, OK. Well, let me this conclude by once again, thanking you for your service for your country--

GJ: Well, thank you.

MC: And thank you, on behalf of the National Museum of the Pacific War for doing the interview with us.

GJ: Well, it's been an honor, sir.

MC: Thank you.