

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Clinton Langstaff

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Interviewer: Mike Zambrano

- Mr. Zambrano: This is Mike Zambrano, and today I am interviewing Mr. Clinton Alvin Langstaff at his home here in Austin, Texas. 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. And hello! I always like to start with the most basic question. Where and when were you born?
- Mr. Langstaff: I was born in Englewood, California.
- Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay, so southern California.
- Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.
- Mr. Zambrano: I'm from northern California myself. Englewood.
- Mr. Langstaff: Englewood, California, September 5, 1925.
- Mr. Zambrano: September 5, 1925. So you just had a birthday last month.
- Mr. Langstaff: I did.
- Mr. Zambrano: Okay, well, happy birthday.
- Mr. Langstaff: Thank you.
- Mr. Zambrano: Did you have any brothers or sisters?
- Mr. Langstaff: We had two sisters.
- Mr. Zambrano: Okay.
- Mr. Langstaff: My older sister lives in Goleta, California, and my younger sister lives in Long Beach, California.
- Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay. Very nice. What were your parents' names?
- Mr. Langstaff: My dad's name was Clinton Ammon Langstaff, and my mother was Harriet Herring Langstaff.
- Mr. Zambrano: What did your father do for a living?

Mr. Langstaff: He was in the oil business. He was a drilling superintendent for one of the smaller oil companies out there in California.

Mr. Zambrano: I assume your mother was a housewife?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, she originally started as a teacher. She taught school for several years before she and dad got married.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. All right. Obviously, you grew up during the Depression. Can you tell me a little bit of how that was for you and your family?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, as a matter of fact, we had, I guess, a good living compared to a lot of the people. My dad, as I said, was in the oil business and had a good job, so we never suffered much. Didn't suffer at all; there was always food on the table and clothes on our backs, so it wasn't an issue for us growing up during the Depression.

Mr. Zambrano: I guess even during the Depression, we needed oil, gas.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah. I think oil was selling for about ten dollars a barrel.

Mr. Zambrano: Which would make it--how much would it be at the pump?

Mr. Langstaff: Oh, I don't know; it was in the teens. My first job was at a gas station, gas pump attendant, and the gas station had--I think I made 45 cents an hour.

Mr. Zambrano: It's interesting to see the contrast from today to back then.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah. I quit that job to go to work as a box boy at Safeway for 60 cents an hour.

Mr. Zambrano: Of course, Safeway is a grocery store in California.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Let's see, born in 1925; that means you were 18 about 1943, so--

Mr. Langstaff: Right.

Mr. Zambrano: --you're still in high school when the war starts.

Mr. Langstaff: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you stay in the Englewood area?

Mr. Langstaff: No, no. At that time we were living in Compton, California.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. Do you recall where you might have been when you heard that Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, we were--we attended a Methodist Church there in Compton, and because I had just gotten, or I had my driver's license. I ran out to the car because I was going to drive us home from church. See, I was 16 years old. That's the first thing you want to do is get behind the wheel.

Mr. Zambrano: True.

Mr. Langstaff: So I--when the church service was over, or Sunday School I guess it was, I was the first one at the car and I had the keys, so I turned on the radio and I heard the news that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you know what Pearl Harbor, where it even was?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, they told us.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Langstaff: Other than that, we probably, you know, I was aware of where Hawaii was, but it was all pretty new. And of course, it had been in the news that the Japanese were in a warlike mode at that time, so it wasn't all that surprising as to where the attack took place. In a sense, you know, it was within the Japanese sphere of influence, so to speak.

Mr. Zambrano: When other people around you started finding out, do you recall what the sense was?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, it was, you know, disbelief. Who was going to attack us? And why did they do it? Of course, there was quite a bit of information on the local radio, and then--that was a Sunday--and then the next day at school, they called a general assembly and we all heard President Roosevelt give his speech, you know, what was his famous line, a war of infamy.

Mr. Zambrano: A day of infamy?

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: When you do become of age to--well, were you enlisted or were you drafted??

Mr. Langstaff: Well, see when I was 15--that would have been in 1943, I was 17. All the guys had to sign up and get lined up for the draft. Of course, the draft indicated they could send you anywhere. They'd take you into the Army or put you in the Marines or in the Navy, wherever they wanted. So, if you wanted to have some choice in where you wound up in the service, it was, you know, it was a fait accompli; you knew you were going in the service. If you wanted to choose where you went, you had to enlist.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Langstaff: The Navy came out with a program about that time, and see I was in my first year of college, Compton J.C. It was a two-year, what they call today a community college. I was doing my freshman year in college, and the Navy came out with this V-12 program. Have you ever heard of that?

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah. It was--didn't you have to have a certain aptitude to join the program?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, the idea was that they were going to train, go ahead and send you to college, and you would eventually wind up in officer candidate school and be commissioned. My parents--see, I was 17--my parents said okay, if you want to go in the Navy you go in that V-12 Program, where they're going to send you to school for at least a year. So with their permission, I joined the Navy in the spring of 1943.

Mr. Zambrano: Spring of '43.

Mr. Langstaff: Incidentally, I've got a kind of a timeline here if you want to--

Mr. Zambrano: Sure!

Mr. Langstaff: --of my time in the service, just a thumbnail sketch of where I've been.

Mr. Zambrano: Can I keep this?

Mr. Langstaff: Sure.

Mr. Zambrano: So, you get sent to--from there are you directly sent to Carroll College?

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, in July, I was placed on active duty, and they sent us up to--a buddy of mine that was on the swimming team there at Compton College, he and I both signed up for this V-12 Program, and we signed up as pre-med. So they sent us to Carroll College in Helena, Montana. I spent a year there, and that was basically our basic training. At that college, we were called apprentice seamen.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. And what kind of things did you do?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, it was strictly a college--it happened to be a Catholic college, so most of the courses were run by, taught by priests, which was kind of a new experience for me.

Mr. Zambrano: Because you're a Methodist.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, although...well, yeah, I was. (Laughs). So eventually I wound up getting three semesters of credit. At 15 units a semester, I got three semesters worth of college. So it was essentially my, what would that be, my sophomore year plus a semester.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah. Go on.

Mr. Langstaff: Then at the end, by the time we'd been there a year, the Navy changed their mind, which they were prone to do, and decided that they weren't going to need that many doctors. Actually, out of our whole class, I think--at Carroll there were some 200 of us, but they were all split up into different majors. There were pre-meds; there were business majors, whatever, you know, the person had signed up for. That's what they taught there at Carroll. I think out of the group that had signed up as pre-med, only one of the fellows wound up going to med school.

Mr. Zambrano: Pre-med; so you at one point wanted to be a doctor?

Mr. Langstaff: At one point I did, yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: So, after that year, it says here that you went to Asbury Park.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, when we left Carroll, they sent us to Asbury Park, which was kind of a pre-midshipman school. We were there for roughly three months. Let's see, that was July, August, September; then in October or November, we were assigned to midshipman school. Now Dave Jump was the fellow that I signed, originally signed up with. The two of us went to Carroll College together, and we both went to Asbury Park, but he was assigned to Columbia Midshipman School and I was assigned to Northwestern Midshipman School in Chicago. So we split up at that time and I haven't--didn't see him since. The end of that story is that Dave was eventually commissioned at Columbia; when he got his commission there, and was assigned to the Indianapolis, and he went down with the Indianapolis.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh. Oh, that's sad. I've interviewed a few men from that ship. Why the two different Midshipman Schools?

Mr. Langstaff: Navy (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: So, after three months they sent you to Northwestern?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, there were--almost all the major colleges had a piece of the action on training us young sailors. I think you mentioned, too, that Mickey Norman, one of the other fellows who lives here, he had gone to Notre Dame Midshipman School.

Mr. Zambrano: Yes.

Mr. Langstaff: Of course, Dave had gone to Columbia, and I went to Northwestern. And there in California, several of the fellows I knew, I'm pretty sure went to USC to a Midshipman School there. So most of the major colleges were participating in these training programs. As a matter of fact, Carroll College was--the Navy saved their bacon (chuckles). That college was about to go under--

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Langstaff: --until the Navy program came along and they got a contract to train Navy personnel.

Mr. Zambrano: Now, at Northwestern, I assume it's all the normal staff is teaching the midshipman classes?

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah. There, it was all learning Navy protocol, you know, how to be an officer. Navigation, anything that pertained to what you should be doing when you were in the Navy.

Mr. Zambrano: Basically just showing you how to be an officer.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: How long were you at Northwestern?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, you know, they used to call us 90-day wonders. It was a three-month program, so I graduated there in January of '45. I think I got that on that poop sheet I gave you.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, January 18, 1945. In the three months, was that in both places, Asbury Park and Northwestern?

Mr. Langstaff: No, no. No, Asbury Park is in New Jersey and Northwestern is in Chicago.

Mr. Zambrano: So they sent you to Asbury Park, changed their mind, sent you to Chicago and you did your three months there?

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. So, you earn your commission in January of '45.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, and then from then I was assigned to another school situation in Miami, Florida. That was roughly a 90-day program as well, other training sessions. From there, I went to five weeks training at Key West, Florida for--they tagged me as an ASW officer, anti-submarine warfare. So I went down there, and we trained on a French submarine that had been--that came from the Free French. And then from there, I was--see, I was trying to think--after Key West, a buddy of mine and I flew a MATS transport up to Lexington, Kentucky, to visit one of his girlfriends. From there--the only reason I bring that up is because I was on the train from Lexington, Kentucky to Philadelphia when I learned that President Roosevelt had died. So that was April of '45. The

reason I was going to Philadelphia was that I'd been assigned to the USS Creed, which was a ship under construction in the Philadelphia Navy Yard. It was not yet finished, so they were still doing the finishing work on getting her in shape to go to sea.

Mr. Zambrano: Let me go back a little bit. When you're at the school, or this training in Miami, you have written here, Line Officers' School.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, in the Navy, there are two main--well I don't know if they're main--there are two departments. A line officer is one who's scheduled for duty on a ship. And there was the Supply Corps. Some of the fellows that were majoring in business wound up commissioned in the Supply Corps, where they took care of the business end of the Navy. But the line officers were those who were scheduled to run ships, know about guns and, you know, the regular Navy life, so to speak, as contrasted with the supply officer, who is more on the business end of the Navy.

Mr. Zambrano: So you didn't get to choose which one you were assigned?

Mr. Langstaff: No.

Mr. Zambrano: No, you didn't get to choose?

Mr. Langstaff: We didn't get to--it wasn't our choice. You just--here's what you're going to do.

Mr. Zambrano: And so you trained on a variety of weapons?

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, we had--we'd go to the rifle range. We got schooled on various anti-aircraft guns that would be aboard a ship: the 20-millimeters, the 40-millimeters, the five-inch guns on a destroyer, things of that type. Learning about how to work the big guns and how to shoot them and how to aim them. You know, just the mechanics of how you operate whatever's on a ship.

Mr. Zambrano: How long did you say you were there?

Mr. Langstaff: Roughly 90 days.

Mr. Zambrano: Ninety days, wow, that doesn't seem very long. What about things like navigation?

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, that's part of it, too. Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: What did you think of the training?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, what there was of it was good. Once you got on a ship, you learned a lot quickly (laughs), what you had to do. Most of the schooling was pretty well pointed toward what you were going to be doing on a ship.

Mr. Zambrano: And I guess it applied well to what you were doing.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. You said 90 days. So, the anti-submarine school. When you mentioned that and about the French sub, they're kind of interesting. Again, it sounded like you were assigned to be an anti-submarine war officer. What did you think about that?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, there isn't much you can do, you know. They say do this; you do this. You didn't have much choice. Of course, you didn't really know what you were getting into until you got into it. So you--unless you had had some experience prior, which none of us did, you didn't have much reason to reject what they were telling you. Even if you rejected it, they'd say shut up and do it (both laugh).

Mr. Zambrano: So, what kind of training was that for you?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, that involved--we'd go out on a small anti-sub boat. They were normally--oh, how to characterize an anti-sub boat--anyhow, they were smaller boats, not as big as a destroyer, but they had equipment aboard those boats that you would communicate with other ships and in concert, would track submarines by sonar. Most of the training I went through was learning how to interpret sonar impulses, the sounds that the pings made that you sent out. You'd send out a sound wave and it would echo off the submarine and you'd learn about the Doppler effect. If it was going away from

you, the return echo would be lower in pitch; if the sub were approaching you, it would be higher, and you had to differentiate between those two, which is pretty tricky.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Langstaff: Did you ever read any of--The Hunt for Red October?

Mr. Zambrano: Yes.

Mr. Langstaff: You probably know what I'm talking about, when they talk about sonar, trying to track a sub underwater like that.

Mr. Zambrano: It's been a while since I read the book, but yeah, I do remember a little bit about it. So if it's moving away, it would be lower, but if it's moving toward you it would be higher.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, the sound that came back to you.

Mr. Zambrano: Was this also a 90-day school?

Mr. Langstaff: That was a five-week program.

Mr. Zambrano: Five weeks!

Mr. Langstaff: Key West, Florida. We wore khakis down there, very similar to the pair of pants I've got on right now. I got used to keeping my change in my right-hand pocket. By the time I left Key West, I had changed to my left-hand pocket because the change had rotted out the bottom of my right-hand pocket. (Chuckles). It was so hot and humid. We had—Key West is a tropical climate, and we'd go to bed at night in the barracks in just our skivvies, and the only air conditioning you'd have would be a fan that you'd set alongside your bed that was wiggling back and forth. So that was our air conditioning.

Mr. Zambrano: How hot do you figure it was?

Mr. Langstaff: Oh, I don't know. How hot does it get in Key West? You know, the high nineties, very humid.

Mr. Zambrano: How did the training translate into application?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, I never really got a chance to use it, because by the time I got on the ship, the war was over.

Mr. Zambrano: That's right, and funny you would never get to use it, right?

Mr. Langstaff: Right.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. Now getting back to going out to the ship, where was it that you--it was Philadelphia, you said.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. Are you considered a plank owner?

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay. I thought so. When you see the ship, well actually, it was supposed to be a different type of ship, wasn't it?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, it had originally been laid down as a DE hull, a destroyer escort hull. I think it was 306 feet long. They converted it to a, what they called a high-speed troop transport. The idea was that-- I'll get ahead of myself a little bit here--we eventually learned that the ship had been scheduled for the invasion of Japan. The ship itself carried 200-plus troops. We had bunks for that many personnel and we also had four LCVPs. These were the landing craft, where the bow flops down and the troops haul off and wade through the beach to get ashore. So we were--and the ship would do a shaking, rattling 24 knots; that was the high speed.

Mr. Zambrano: You know, when I read about the LCVPs, I thought--well, I think troop transport's basic mission is just to transfer troops, but where exactly would the LCVPs come out of?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, they were arranged on davits, you know, lifted up just like a lifeboat.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Mr. Langstaff: So that they could be lowered into the water. We had a boat officer; he was in charge of those. It turned out he was--his name was Chris van Hollen. I never had a contact after we got out of the Navy, but eventually Chris wound up in the State Department service, and I heard later that he had wound up as the ambassador to Sri Lanka. (Both chuckle). And there is currently a Senator

from, I'm pretty sure it's the state of Maryland, who I'm nearly positive is his son. His name is Chris van Hollen, and that's where Chris was originally from. So anyhow, that's a little story about one of my shipmates.

Mr. Zambrano: Funny how you meet certain people and you see them, you know, after many years go off to something else.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah. What did you think of the ship when you first saw it?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, it was brand new. Of course, it was my first experience being on a ship, so everything was new and, being an officer on a ship was new. It was just part of the learning experience.

Mr. Zambrano: Before being assigned to the ship, did you have a particular preference?

Mr. Langstaff: I'm trying to think; I don't think we had much choice. You were just assigned, you know. You just went where they told you.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, I guess I mean, would you have preferred to have been assigned to a destroyer or a cruiser?

Mr. Langstaff: You could put in a request, yeah. Like Dave, I think that I told you about, I think he wanted to be on a battleship, but he wound up being on a cruiser. Other than putting in a request, I think, you know, you could check a box, what you wanted to do, something like that. If it happened to meet with their needs why, that's what you got to do. If it didn't, you went where they told you.

Mr. Zambrano: A high-speed transport. So, tell me a little a bit about your duties while you're with the ship. Since you're a plank member, you go through a lot of the things like shakedowns and (unclear).

Mr. Langstaff: Well, yeah. When the ship was eventually commissioned, we took her to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba on a shakedown cruise. That was my first experience being at sea on a ship, where you stood deck watches. Most of the officers, the senior officers, were--the captain and the exec had both been in the Navy some years, or

several years, by that time. The captain was a lieutenant commander at the time, and the exec was a full lieutenant.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you remember the captain's name?

Mr. Langstaff: The captain was Commander Cherry. He was an attorney from Richmond, Virginia.

Mr. Zambrano: And the executive officer?

Mr. Langstaff: Bill Cooper.

Mr. Zambrano: Bill Cooper.

Mr. Langstaff: I think he was from the Minneapolis-St. Paul area; I'm not sure. As I say, I didn't keep in touch with any of the fellows. With one exception, I didn't keep in touch with any of the fellows because they were scattered from heck to breakfast across the country. I was out in California when the war was over; you know, it just wasn't, you know, wasn't convenient or it just didn't happen that you kept up with these guys.

Mr. Zambrano: Of course, it's not like today where you can do Facebook or (unclear).

Mr. Langstaff: Right. You didn't have a phone you could pick up and say, "Hi, Joe. How're you doing? What's going on in Philadelphia today?"

Mr. Zambrano: Okay, so the ship gets commissioned on July 29, 1945. And as you said, it goes down to Guantanamo for a shakedown. What else can you tell me about getting the ship ready?

Mr. Langstaff: A long time ago (chuckles). Other than just the routine training you went through, of course, you had a whole brand new crew. We had--I forget; I think there were--I'm trying to think how many people we had--how much personnel we had aboard. I think there were 12 or 13 officers and at least 150 to 200 enlisted personnel.

Mr. Zambrano: Were you the only anti-submarine?

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: I assume that something like the sonarman would have been under you?

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah. Yeah, they were enlisted. I had an enlisted sonarman who was a second class, I think.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you have more than one?

Mr. Langstaff: No.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Mr. Langstaff: Not divulging any secrets about how big sonar was; it wasn't any bigger than this desk.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Langstaff: A very primitive type. It was about the size of a good-sized desktop computer. That's about all it was.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow! Was anyone else under you as the officer?

Mr. Langstaff: No, not specifically.

Mr. Zambrano: Was radar under you at all?

Mr. Langstaff: No.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Langstaff: That came under the communication officer; that was Nate Johnson. He was our communication officer, who happened to be an FBI agent before he got in the Navy.

Mr. Zambrano: (Laughs), really? There were some very interesting people aboard your ship. Oh, let me see; you mentioned the invasion of Japan earlier. What were your thoughts along those lines?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, in our local book club, we're just finishing reading "Killing the Rising Sun" by Bill O'Reilly. That's a very factual book in my estimation. It gives the pros and the cons of why Harry Truman dropped the bomb. Most of us on the ship were of the opinion that it probably saved our lives. The fact that he ended the war so abruptly; all the stories we heard were about how the Japs were so bound and determined never to surrender. The only way the war would ever end was if we invaded Japan and knocked off Hirohito.

So, of course, the atom bomb was about as big a news in and of itself, as the fact that it was dropped to help end the war.

Mr. Zambrano: I assume you were on the ship when you heard about the atom bomb?

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Mr. Zambrano: What did you think?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, I'm just trying to tell you what my attitude was. I was glad he dropped it; I think Harry Truman saved my life.

Mr. Zambrano: Again, you're probably on the ship when the war ended.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: How did you get the news?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, the radio, and then of course, we got news through Navy communications. It came direct to the ship.

Mr. Zambrano: I can only imagine the reaction on the ship.

Mr. Langstaff: Well, hurray! (Laughs). How soon can I get out of here? (Both laugh).

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. Okay, that's easy to believe (both laugh). Had you already--had the ship already gotten to Guantanamo Bay when--?

Mr. Langstaff: No. No, that happened after the war was over.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh. Okay.

Mr. Langstaff: See, I guess the idea was that--they just couldn't up and say everybody go home now. Several million guys in the service, the Army, the Navy and the Marines, you name it; if everybody wound up going home at once, that would have been chaos in and of itself. So they were releasing us gradually. The people with the shortest time in, and I was one with short time, in that sense of the word, were held over the longest just to help kind of phase out the whole operation.

Mr. Zambrano: You were--well obviously when you become an officer, you're an ensign, but did you leave the service as an ensign or as a lieutenant (junior grade)?

Mr. Langstaff: I left as an ensign, but I stayed in the reserves for several years. When I was eventually completely discharged, I was a j.g.

Mr. Zambrano: What year was that?

Mr. Langstaff: Pardon?

Mr. Zambrano: What year was that when you were finally discharged?

Mr. Langstaff: Did I note that on there? I'm not sure; it was several years later. See, I was still in the reserves during the Korean War, and there was quite a bit of talk about calling us back at that time, but I was married, and I had a family, but I had time so I wasn't called back for the Korean War. But it was during that time frame that I was eventually released, so it would've been the early '50s.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. You mentioned something here about an ROTC cruise out of Norfolk.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah. See, again, they were trying to keep us busy. They had to give us something to do (Mr. Zambrano laughs) while we were waiting to get out, and while they were trying to clean up everybody and get them out of the service and shut everything down. So we had, I think a contingent of a couple hundred young ROTC boys that we took on a cruise out off Cape Hatteras. We were stationed in Norfolk at the time. That was a training cruise for them. We took them out there and shot the guns and dropped depth charges and that sort of thing.

Mr. Zambrano: The ship had depth charges?

Mr. Langstaff: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Was it the Hedgehog type or was it just the normal?

Mr. Langstaff: We had both.

Mr. Zambrano: Really? Okay. There's something about "ship ordered to Green Cove Springs, Florida."

Mr. Langstaff: Well, that was--the final dénouement was when we were ordered to Green Cove Springs. The St. John's River is about as wide as the Mississippi. It's one of the few rivers in the country that runs

north. It comes out of central Florida and runs north and then hangs a right turn and goes out to the sea at Jacksonville. So we went up the St. John's River and it's a very broad area. Ours is one of the largest ships up there. Well, I don't think there was anything any bigger than our ship. We had destroyers and ships of our type, APDs, and then there were a lot of the LSTs, the landing craft. They were brought up there, and we just anchored out in the middle of the river and began decommissioning everything, wrapping all the guns in protective coatings, painting everything, making it serviceable at some future date.

Mr. Zambrano: So, painting, putting covers on?

Mr. Langstaff: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Zambrano: Where was the ship supposed to go from there, or was it going to stay there?

Mr. Langstaff: It was decommissioned there.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay. Oh, it makes me think of, there's a spot off California where they have a mothball fleet.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, that's it; it was a mothball fleet. That's exactly what it was. You had them up in San Francisco Bay area.

Mr. Zambrano: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Langstaff: Oddly enough, that ship was eventually towed down to Peru and cut up for scrap.

Mr. Zambrano: And it wasn't even that old.

Mr. Langstaff: No. It was brand new! (Laughs). That didn't happen until about, I think 1961, somewhere along in there. I don't know how long they kept it there at Green Cove Springs, but it eventually got towed out, towed down to South America and cut up for scrap.

Mr. Zambrano: I'm surprised that it wasn't used too long, as part of the Magic Carpet Program to bring soldiers back home. There was never any talk about that?

Mr. Langstaff: Who knows?

Mr. Zambrano: Huh. Wow! Okay. Question: what would you do in your spare time?

Mr. Langstaff: Go to the O Club. (Chuckles). No, when I got on leave; see, I was on the East coast and my family was all on the West coast. I had one trip home and that was about it. If I went on leave, why I'd go up to New York, or I took a trip up to Boston. You know, I did some sightseeing, that type of thing. Chris van Hollen on the ship, this fellow I was telling you about, the boat officer. He was quite an organizer, and we played basketball on the basketball courts on the beach. You know, we'd get games going, baseball, basketball, that type of normal activity.

Mr. Zambrano: Again, just partly to keep busy?

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: The food; I always have to ask about Navy food. What did you think of it?

Mr. Langstaff: Navy food I got; I was gaining weight on it (both laugh).

Mr. Zambrano: So, I'll take it that you liked it.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah, it was good. We had a chef--one of our stewards aboard was a great soup maker. That was a strange situation for me, too. I came from California, and we had very few negroes or blacks in our neighborhood, and so my experience living in the South was an eye opener to me. See, this was in the '40s, and segregation was wide open at the time.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, that's true.

Mr. Langstaff: One story I tell is about this one trip I took home. I flew back and we got grounded, so I eventually had to take a train as far as Atlanta, and then from Atlanta, I still had to get to Jacksonville. The only way down there was to get on a Greyhound bus. So I climb on--here I am in uniform with my suitcase--I climb on the bus and it's loaded with blacks. I saw a seat in the back, and I headed toward the back, which I normally would—I was ready to

sit down back there, and the driver was a white guy. He says, "Officer, you don't go back there. You sit on your suitcase behind my chair. Set your suitcase down back of my chair here. This is where you're going to ride until a seat up front opens up." So that was one of my--that was in 1946.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow, that's an interesting (unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Langstaff: The crew in the wardroom was all black. They served us our meals and cleaned our cabins. So that was my introduction to racism.

Mr. Zambrano: What else did you see going on? Because I mean, you're right; it's a very kind of weird time in our history. Did you witness any other things?

Mr. Langstaff: You mean in that vein?

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, as far as segregation and so forth.

Mr. Langstaff: Oh, well. This trip I told you, we went up to Lexington, Kentucky; Fritz's girlfriend was the daughter of a very rich man. They invited us to dinner out at their plantation, and when the door opened, we came up--well, they sent their station wagon to the hotel to pick us up; it was a brand new Chevy woodie. This is in 1945. People just didn't buy brand new Chevy station wagons at that time unless you had a little clout and a lot of money. So we pull up to the front door in this new station wagon and ring the doorbell. A colored maid opens the door and, "Welcome, Mr. Fritz. Welcome, Mr. Clint." (Chuckles). That was my first experience with being around servants, all black.

Mr. Zambrano: Right. Well, I mean, it's interesting; I've never experienced that, but yeah, it's kind of an extension from, I guess it's sort of an extension over from slavery.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Did it make you feel uneasy at all?

Mr. Langstaff: Oh, yeah, yeah. It was completely strange to me.

Mr. Zambrano: It was a friend that you went with to this dinner?

Mr. Langstaff: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: A shipmate.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: And it was his home?

Mr. Langstaff: No. It was his girlfriend's home.

Mr. Zambrano: His girlfriend's home, oh.

Mr. Langstaff: She was a very pretty girl. Juliette Combs was her name (chuckles). I lost touch with Fritz; never did find out if he and Juliette made a connection, a permanent connection (both laugh).

Mr. Zambrano: Well, we've got Google these days, so maybe you could find out. Let's see. I guess I've pretty much covered most of it. Do any other interesting stories or events pop out from your time?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, I mentioned that I didn't stay in touch with any of the crew. One of the fellows, one of my fellow officers, was a young fellow from New York City. His name was Howard Juster. After I had retired, as a matter of fact I think I was 70 years old at the time, I'd gone on a fishing trip with my son and his son. We'd gone on a trip up in the Sierras to go fishing. When I got home, my wife Bev said, "Hey, while you were gone, there's a fellow called here, and he said he used to know you. He wanted to talk to you." She said, "Well, he's not available now; he's out fishing with his kids." So he said, "Well, I'll call him back later." Well, two or three weeks later, this guy calls back, and he starts out, "Hello, Clint. You may or may not remember me." And I says, "Is this Howie Juster?" And he says, "Damn! How did you know?" I says, "Well, you're the only guy I ever knew with a New York accent." (Both laugh). But that was--and then eventually, we got back together. He was a retired architect by that time, and he was living in San Diego. So, we got together for dinner and struck up a friendship again and we eventually--I lived in Ventura at the time--

and we eventually followed our daughter down to San Diego and got reacquainted with Howie and his wife. Howie subsequently was out on the golf course and passed out with a heart attack.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, that's too bad.

Mr. Langstaff: So that didn't last long, but that's the only one of my shipmates or Navy comrades that I ever kept in touch with.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow. So, with the war over, what do you end up doing?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, I still had about two or three semesters of college to finish, so I went back to USC and graduated with a BS degree in advertising.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh! Okay. What did you do with it?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, eventually I wound up--was in sales work for quite a while, industrial-type sales, and then had a chance to buy a small trucking company up in Ventura and went up there and ran that for several years. I bought and sold two or three small businesses; wound up with a travel agency for the last 15 years.

Mr. Zambrano: Really? Wow, it's a lot of work to try to plan someone's travel.

Mr. Langstaff: Well, at that time, the kind of business we had, it was mostly air travel. We were selling airline tickets. That was our bread and butter.

Mr. Zambrano: Travel agency. My wife travels a lot, and I find that when she ever tries to go online to do all that travel, you've got to get it just right, and I really try to stay away from that sort of thing. (Mr. Langstaff laughs). When did you retire?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, let's see. Bev retired; she worked for the County of Ventura as a personnel analyst in the HR Department. I'm trying to think--the mid '80s--and I sold the agency in 1989.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, so it's been a while now.

Mr. Langstaff: Yeah. Yeah, I've been retired for what, 30 years.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you use the GI Bill to help pay for your education?

Mr. Langstaff: I did; I finished college on the GI Bill.

Mr. Zambrano: And was it enough--obviously, it was enough to pay for your schools and books, but anything else, like rent or anything?

Mr. Langstaff: You got \$65.00 a month. That was your stipend, plus they covered your tuition and books.

Mr. Zambrano: Did it seem--well, for the day, was that a lot, what was it, a little?

Mr. Langstaff: Well, of course, I was living at home at the time. I went back, you know, stayed with my parents, so I didn't have much expense in that respect. So it was fun money (both laugh). And \$65.00 a month, well you know, you had a lot of fun on 65 bucks.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah. It's always intriguing to me; I mean, something that costs, like gas. We were talking about gas earlier.

Mr. Langstaff: Gas, you know, at that time, it was probably 18 cents a gallon, something like that. Again, I went back to part-time work in a gas station, and was selling gas for 18 cents a gallon, something like that.

Mr. Zambrano: So what brought you to Texas?

Mr. Langstaff: Our daughter. She and her husband moved here a couple of years before we did. Murray's in the wind energy business, and there's quite a focus of that here in Texas. He wound up in a job here in Austin, and we have another son who is in the Denver area. He recently retired; he turns 69 next month, or this month. He'll be 69 on the 16th of November.

Mr. Zambrano: And you're 93?

Mr. Langstaff: Ninety-three.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh. Okay.

Mr. Langstaff: And we have another son, who lives in Paso Robles, California. So we'll go out there and spend--well, they're all coming here because we have our 70th Anniversary on the 20th of November.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow! Congratulations!

Mr. Langstaff: So most of the gang's going to show up here to pat us on the back and Hail Mary and all that stuff (Mr. Zambrano laughs). Then for

Christmas, we'll go out and spend some time with our son in California.

Mr. Zambrano: That sounds good. Well, unless you have anything you'd like to add, any stories or anything, that's all I've got.

Mr. Langstaff: No, I think we've pretty well covered it.

Mr. Zambrano: All right. Well, then, on behalf of myself and the Museum, thank you for your service--

Mr. Langstaff: Thank you.

Mr. Zambrano: --and your time.

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