

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Odd Aarstad

Date of Interview: November 4, 2018

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Interviewer: Mike Zambrano

Mr. Zambrano: This is Mike Zambrano and today is November 4, 2018, and I am interviewing Mr. Odd B. Aarstad at his home 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. Okay, sir, I always start off with the same question: can you please tell me where and when you were born?

Mr. Aarstad: December 16, 1926.

Mr. Zambrano: 1926. And where was that?

Mr. Aarstad: Staten Island, New York.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, so you're a New Yorker.

Mr. Aarstad: Yep.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Aarstad: Yes, both of them are deceased.

Mr. Zambrano: One of each?

Mr. Aarstad: Yes, I had a brother; he was the oldest. Then my sister, and then I'm the youngest.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay. All right. What were your parents' names?

Mr. Aarstad: My dad was Morton Jacob Aarstad.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. And your mother?

Mr. Aarstad: Her name was Elizabeth. I don't remember her middle name now.

Mr. Zambrano: That's okay.

Mr. Aarstad: Hanson.

Mr. Zambrano: Hanson?

Mr. Aarstad: She was a Hanson before she was married.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. What did your father do for a living?

Mr. Aarstad: My dad was a pastry baker.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, he baked pastries.

Mr. Aarstad: He had a Danish pastry bakery.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. I assume your mother was a housekeeper. Not a housekeeper, but a--

Mr. Aarstad: A housewife.

Mr. Zambrano: --housewife.

Mr. Aarstad: Yes.

Mr. Zambrano: All right. You know, I always have to ask, because you know, in 1926, you're growing up during the Depression. Can you tell me a little bit about how that affected your family?

Mr. Aarstad: Hmm?

Mr. Zambrano: Can you tell me a little bit of how--how did your family fare during the Depression?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, we had a house on Staten Island, and dad didn't want to lose it during the Depression, because he was laid off the job, you know. So we moved to Brooklyn, to an apartment house, and he was the superintendent of the apartment house. Then he opened up a bakery in Brooklyn.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, his own bakery?

Mr., Aarstad: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Mr. Aarstad: But they had to close it because people couldn't pay. So then he took a job as a custodian in the Baptist Temple, downtown Brooklyn which was a big Baptist church.

Mr. Zambrano: How long did he do that?

Mr. Aarstad: He did that for the rest of his life, until he retired.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah. But on the side, he was also a pastry baker. I mean, that was his trade from Norway.

Mr. Zambrano: I can only imagine--he probably baked a lot at home?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yes.

Mr. Zambrano: It sounds like you grew up in a delicious household. (Mr. Aarstad laughs).

Mr. Aarstad: Yes.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow! It sounds like your family did okay during the Depression.

Mr. Aarstad: Yes. We made out. My mother, for a while, while we were making this transition, she worked as a domestic in the borough president's residence in Brooklyn, when we moved to Brooklyn.

Mr. Zambrano: Sort of like a housekeeper?

Mr. Aarstad: Cleaning and, you know, whatever they needed. Helped them make meals. So she did that, but she was home every night, you know, and cooked supper for us.

Mr. Zambrano: I'm assuming you must have gone to high school in Brooklyn then?

Mr. Aarstad: Yes. I went to Brooklyn Technical High School--

Mr. Zambrano: Brooklyn Technical.

Mr. Aarstad: --which is an engineering school.

Mr. Zambrano: Do you know if it's still there?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah, but now it's co-ed (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, it used to be just boys?

Mr. Aarstad: Just boys. It was--ten percent of the boys in all the five boroughs could take a test. If you were in the ten percent of the school, you know, your marks, you could take the test. If you passed that test, you could go to Tech. Yeah, so we had two schools like that, Brooklyn Tech and Brooklyn Science--no, New York School of Science.

Mr. Zambrano: Was it still public?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yes. That was public.

Mr. Zambrano: All right. So, let's see. Do you remember where you were when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Aarstad: Yes, I was at home.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay. Were you just--did the radio just happen to be on?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, we were listening to the radio (laughs), and we were shocked.

Mr. Zambrano: So, if you were at home, let's say you went out later in the day. Do you recall a general sense or feeling of people that the Japanese had done that?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, there was a lot of outrage by people, you know. And of course, there was a lot of people that volunteered to go into the service. A lot of young men did at that time. The church that I went to in Brooklyn, we had 89 men that went into the service--

Mr. Zambrano: Really.

Mr. Aarstad: --for World War II. And we only lost one.

Mr. Zambrano: That's remarkable!

Mr. Aarstad: Second lieutenant, he was killed the second day in North Africa. He landed in Morocco and the second day he was at the front and a German sniper put a bullet right through his helmet; killed him instantly.

Mr. Zambrano: Was this somebody you and your family knew?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. He was from our church. He had just graduated from college, and he went to officers' school, and then they shipped him over to North Africa.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, it sounds like this was a pretty close-knit church community?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yes. Our church was a Scandinavian, mostly Norwegian, some Swedes, some Danish, and some Finnish, and one family from Iceland.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow, I imagine it would be very close-knit, since--

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah, because they were all immigrant families, and they were learning the English language. Most of them came over after

World War I, and into the '20s. They started the church in the '20s.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay. Wow! You know, your name, you know like we discussed before we started recording, Odd B, I mean it's very unique.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah. That's right.

Mr. Zambrano: Is Odd, could it be considered a common name back in Norway?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, it's a very popular name in Norway, but in Norway, Odd is male and female, like I had cousins that had the same name, basic name. I have Odd, because I'm a boy, but I have another cousin that was Odd-Finn, you know dash and then Finn. I had a cousin that was a girl; her name was Odd-veigh, v-e-i-g-h. So we had a lot of them.

Mr. Zambrano: Is there a dash in the Odd B.?

Mr. Aarstad: No, no. I just have the basic name.

Mr. Zambrano: And B., just for the record is spelled B-i--

Mr. Aarstad: Well, you know what B. is.

Mr. Zambrano: No, what is it?

Mr. Aarstad: B. is my maternal grandmother's side of the family, where she came from, on the West coast of Norway. The name Aarstad also comes from the West coast of Norway; that's where our family originally started, around Egersund and Stavanger, in Norway. The family name was Olesen when dad came to this country, but when he got his citizenship, there were so many Olesens (Mr. Zambrano laughs) that he dropped the Olesen and kept the state name.

Mr. Zambrano: Aarstad.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah. Either you took a state name, the state where you came from, or the name of the farm. A lot of the people named their farms, and some of them took that as names when they immigrated to the United States.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, just to be clear; let's say you father hadn't immigrated, what would his last name have been?

Mr. Aarstad: Olesen.

Mr. Zambrano: Olesen, so it was originally Olesen.

Mr. Aarstad: Olesen, O-l-e-s-e-n.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Mr. Aarstad: And really, what that means is son of Ole, O-l-e, son, s-e-n, son Ole. That's the old ancient Norwegian way of naming you. In other words, if my dad's name was Olesen, my name also would be Olesen. My sister would have been Ole's daughter; in other words, Ole daughter. In the old Norwegian that would be d-y-t-t-i-e-r, daughter. That would be Ole's daughter.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow (laughs)! That's a lot to remember.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, that's--Iceland still does that.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. When you turn 18, it seems that you decided to join the service.

Mr. Aarstad: Yes.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, from our discussion, you went into the Navy. Why did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, that's a tradition amongst Norwegians. Either you went, you worked on the farm, or if you had a job in the city, you know, or the other choice was, you went to sea as soon as you were confirmed at 14. That's when my dad went to--my dad sailed from 14 to 21; then he came ashore and took his apprenticeship in a bakery and became a Danish paster after five years.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow, okay. Well, that makes sense.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: We have to back up a little bit, because when we spoke and I asked you some preliminary questions, you said that before you enlisted,

you worked at the Walter Dorwin Teague Industrial Design on (unclear) Avenue?

Mr. Aarstad: Yes. Right.

Mr. Zambrano: You're still pretty young. How did you get that job?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, they had a program at that designer's that they took in boys that had engineering training. I applied for a job there in the summer, and I wanted to go on the drawing boards and be a draftsman, you know, and make drawings. But they said, no, we can't do that until you're 18 years of age. So I had to go into the model shop. We made models of all the things that they designed. It's in there that I learned how to make--fabricated laminated plastics.

Mr. Zambrano: Laminated plastics. For just anything or for a variety of things?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, we made them because of the intricate shapes that you couldn't machine, you know. For instance, I think one of the last projects that I worked on was a U.S. slicing machine that they use in the delicatessen or the meat store, to slice meat. U.S. Slicing.

Mr. Zambrano: (Unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Aarstad: So, that had a very unique design to it, you know. So we couldn't make that, we couldn't machine it to the shape that they had, you know. So, what we did was, we made a wooden model; shaped it in wood. Then we covered it with, what do you call it, sailcloth.

Mr. Zambrano: I think I know what you mean. It is some kind of cloth that you--is it almost like macrame, like doing macrame where you're putting paper on--no?

Mr. Aarstad: Just a minute, it'll come to me. Canvas, canvas.

Mr. Zambrano: Canvas.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah. We made it in layers of canvas, and we impregnated that with Weldwood glue, and then we would put it in a kiln and cook it for 50 minutes. When we took it out, it was a hard, laminated plastic, because the Weldwood glue would seep into the fibers of

the canvas and make a laminated, hard surface. That's what the Navy was looking for, for artificial legs and arms.

Mr. Zambrano: It seems to me that this Walter Dorwin Teague was really famous at the time as a designer?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. Yeah, he's the one that designed the locomotives, the motors on the locomotives for the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, and he did a lot of buildings, motors, you know, things. They had a lot of contracts: U.S. Slicing, Mobil Oil, you know they made all kinds of things that they designed, you know. But all they would do is, they would take a contract from a corporation and make their logo. They would design machinery for them, you know, or if they had a machine and they wanted to modernize it and make it more streamlined or something like that, they would do the industrial designing on it. So what we made in the shop was models of that, and they would paint them up, you know, and show them to the customer and if the customer liked them, they would buy the idea. Then they would have to pay for it, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: Makes sense.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: When you decide to go in the Navy; first, where was it that you enlisted?

Mr. Aarstad: I enlisted in Brooklyn on Schemerhorn Street.

Mr. Zambrano: Schemalong Street?

Mr. Aarstad: Schemerhorn. S-c-h-e-m-e-r-h-o-r-n.

Mr. Zambrano: Schemerhorn Street.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, downtown Brooklyn at the Navy Recruiting. That was in August.

Mr. Zambrano: August of '44?

Mr. Aarstad: '44.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. Did they take you right away or did you have to wait?

Mr. Aarstad: No, they called me in October and I actually left for boot camp in November.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. They called you in October, but you left in November. Where did you go in November?

Mr. Aarstad: Sampson Naval Training Station in Seneca Lake, or Watkins Glen, that was the area. It was on the Finger Lakes of New York.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, I've heard of it before. When you get there, what did you—did you take a train up there; did you drive?

Mr. Aarstad: Yes, took a train, the Lehigh Valley Railroad from Hoboken, New Jersey up to Seneca, New York, and then they picked us up and took us up to the camp, which was right on the lake, Lake Seneca.

Mr. Zambrano: Nice! So what did you do while you were there?

Mr. Aarstad: We did our basic training.

Mr. Zambrano: What is it--I mean because it's different from Army basic training?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, well, the Navy calls it boot camp.

Mr. Zambrano: And what did they teach you in boot camp?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, they taught us (chuckles) how to row a boat (laughs), sitting up on dry land.

Mr. Zambrano: Really? On dry land?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah, because I was there in the winter months. The lake was frozen over (laughs). We had a lot of snow up there; in fact, while I was in boot camp, they put us on a train one night at two o'clock in the morning, and sent us up to Buffalo, and we shoveled out the flatcars on the railroad so that they could load the tanks and tank destroyers onto the ships that were going up the St. Lawrence and over to England.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Aarstad: So we worked up there for 72 hours straight, and they never sent up the mess train with us, so we didn't have food to eat, so the Salvation Army came in and fed us morning, noon and night (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Wow, that was very nice of them to do that. I guess they appreciated your efforts.

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah (chuckles).

Mr. Zambrano: What else did you do in boot camp?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, we did a lot of calisthenics; we did rope climbing, you know, at the pool. You had to be able to maneuver in the water and be able to get up and climb up on a cargo net up on the stand like you were climbing up the side of a ship on a cargo net. We had rifle practice and small guns, you know, revolvers. And we did an awful lot of marching (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Ah, that was my next question; yeah, a lot of marching is usually it. How long do you think you were there for?

Mr. Aarstad: Ten weeks.

Mr. Zambrano: Ten weeks! I ask because, you know, some people say three weeks; some people say five. I'm always surprised at how much it varied.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah. Ten weeks, and some of the guys in our company hadn't hit their 18th birthday yet—

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Aarstad: --you know, so they had to stay over until they were 18 before they could ship out.

Mr. Zambrano: But you were already 18 when you--

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. When I finished boot camp, I went home for seven days.

Mr. Zambrano: Ooh, okay.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah. Then I reported to Bainbridge Naval Corpsman School in Bainbridge, Maryland.

Mr. Zambrano: Naval Corpsman School. How does that happen? Did you choose it; did you choose to be a corpsman?

Mr. Aarstad: Yes. I enlisted as a hospital corpsman.

Mr. Zambrano: So they let you choose that?

Mr. Aarstad: Yes, they did at that time, because I didn't want to bear arms.

Mr. Zambrano: And why didn't you want to bear arms?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, my mother--I was the only child, and she was very fearful. In fact, I passed all the tests to go to the Navy Air Corps, to the Army Air Corps. I passed all those tests, but my mother didn't want me to fly. My mother didn't want me to go into battle, you know. That's why I chose the Navy, to get aboard ship. I worked on being a hospital corpsman.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. How long are you at Bainbridge?

Mr. Aarstad: I was at Bainbridge eight weeks.

Mr. Zambrano: Eight weeks. Can you tell me a little bit about the training there?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, they were training us in all the procedures that you have to learn as a corpsman, and we had a book, a big heavy book like this, which was called a Hospital Corpsman's Manual, and we had to study that. They gave us tests on it; they took us into, you know, wards and into the--we were with doctors and nurses and that, to learn all the different procedures.

Mr. Zambrano: I guess--well, let me ask: how many corpsmen were there in your class?

Mr. Aarstad: In my company?

Mr. Zambrano: Yes.

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, at the school, wow!

Mr. Zambrano: Or in your company, in your immediate company, your class?

Mr. Aarstad: In my class, in my class I think there were 15 of us.

Mr. Zambrano: Fifteen, okay. That's not very big.

Mr. Aarstad: No. They didn't make them very big.

Mr. Zambrano: I imagine they wanted to make sure that you, that each sailor that they're teaching this to, that they would absorb it very well, considering what they're going to be doing.

Mr. Aarstad: At times, we had individual instructors, for instance, like in nursing procedures, you know. For instance, making of a hospital

bed and procedures that they had in the ward. We had individual instruction there with a nurse who supervised how we did it, you know. Then if we were in the lab, then we had a lab technician showing us the procedures that we have to follow in the lab, the different things that they used, you know, for rehabilitation, you know, of the person that had been in surgery. You had to follow certain procedures, so you had to learn how to handle that equipment that you used to help them, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay, all right.

Mr. Aarstad: When I was finished that, I went to Annapolis Naval Hospital.

Mr. Zambrano: Annapolis Naval Hospital. Would that be considered your first assignment?

Mr. Aarstad: That's right.

Mr. Zambrano: By this point, are you--what's your rank at this point?

Mr. Aarstad: When I was discharged?

Mr. Zambrano: When you're discharged, what rank were you?

Mr. Aarstad: Pharmacist's Mate Second Class. And then behind that, O.A.M. Orthopedic Appliance Mechanic.

Mr. Zambrano: When you get to Annapolis Naval Hospital, what do you do there?

Mr. Aarstad: Took care of the wounded that came back from the Pacific.

Mr. Zambrano: I'm guessing you probably saw a lot.

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah, we had a lot, because Hawaii was filled up; the West coast was filled up, so they would fly them all the way to Hawaii, to the West coast, then to the East coast and we would get them.

Mr. Zambrano: Was it just Navy personnel?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, WAVES, Lady Marines. We got a lot of the guys that were wounded on the islands of Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, Tarawa, and most of them, the first thing we had to do with them was disinfect them, because they brought a lot of stuff from the Pacific.

Mr. Zambrano: How did you do that?

Mr. Aarstad: We would wash them down (laughs), from the top of their head to the bottom of their soles. And we used chemicals also, because a lot of them had things sticking to their skin, you know, insects.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. If they had any casts or anything like that, we had to take them off and clean them out, and put brand new casts on, because most of them were infected with, you know, this little insect that eats skin--

Mr. Zambrano: Ooh. Okay.

Mr. Aarstad: --I forget the name of it now, but that was quite prevalent.

Mr. Zambrano: What were your shifts like, your working shifts? Was it eight hours a day, or how did that work?

Mr. Aarstad: Most of the time it was an eight-hour day, either during the day or at night. When we had, you know, a lot of guys coming in, the eight-hour shift was waived, you know, and you just had to work. Many times we worked and just slept for a few hours and started to work again. They fed us almost on the job, just so we could get the work done, get them cleaned up and ready for surgery or ready to be put in the bed, or be put under traction, or whatever was necessary for their recovery.

Mr. Zambrano: At this point, are you working with the artificial limbs at this point?

Mr. Aarstad: No. No, I stopped that after I got out of the service.

Mr. Zambrano: But at one point, you--aren't you doing that for the Navy, before the war ends?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. In Philadelphia in rehabilitation. I was put under special orders from the Pentagon--not the Pentagon, but the Navy Department in those days--in Washington. They were sealed orders and I had to turn them in to the Provost Marshal at Receiving in Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, Naval Shipyard and Station also. When he opened it up, he said, "Well, you're going

right up there to that small building that you see over there.” That was Rehabilitation, and that was the artificial leg shop.

Mr. Zambrano: Working at Annapolis, how did they ever find out that you had this previous experience?

Mr. Aarstad: I don't know. I don't know how the Navy found that out. I really don't. All of a sudden, you know, I got these sealed orders. When I reported to Philadelphia, I had asked for sea duty, so I thought I was going aboard a new cruiser that was coming out of the shipyard there. Then when he opened it up, he says, “No, you're going to Rehabilitation.” And I said to him, “What in the world am I going to Rehabilitation? I don't know anything about rehabilitation.” I says, “I was a corpsman in the hospital.” I says, “I never worked with rehabilitation.” So I says, “I know nothing about it.” He says, “Well, you must have had some kind of an experience.” I says, “Well, I don't know what kind of experience I have, because I was studying to be an engineer.” I said, “I worked for an industrial designer,” and I says, “That was nothing to do with rehabilitation.” And he says, “Well, the Navy must know something. Report over there.” So when I reported over there, my goodness, the guy knew exactly where I worked, what we did, that we made the laminated plastics; and he said to me, “This is what we're looking for.” So they used my expertise to make artificial legs and arms (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: What was the first artificial limb that you worked on?

Mr. Aarstad The first one I worked on was a below-the-knee, and then after that I worked on full leg, you know. One thing that we did was, Admiral Bull Halsey sent to us a French admiral who was escaping from Toulon in southern France in his submarine, to turn it over to the Free French government. Due to a mix-up in signals by the signalmen on the French submarine and the British corvette, the Frenchman gave the wrong signal and the British opened up on it

and blew the conning tower off, and the admiral was in it and he lost both his legs and part of his hips. So we made--Bull Halsey heard about it, so he had him sent over to our shop and we made a saddle for him to sit, for the bottom part of his body with straps over the shoulder and legs. We started with short legs, you know, like that, and just kept increasing them, and with two canes, until he got full height.

Mr. Zambrano: Until he got used to working with them, little by little, different heights, you get used to it, then you go to another height?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, that's what we had to do with him, because he had no balance. I mean, he had lost everything, so his brain could not tell him that he had to use his legs to have stability, you know. So what we had to do was put him in the saddle, almost. It was made out of leather, and soft on the inside, because he had lost part of his hips also. We did that and he stayed with us until he graduated, you know, from--of course, the big place was when we made him an ankle and a knee, you know. We just kept going, so he would get the feel, you know, of being able to stand on his own feet, you know. He had to learn; I mean he had to really learn all over again.

Mr. Zambrano: How long was he at the hospital?

Mr. Aarstad: He was with us; I think almost 13 months.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow! Okay. Do you remember his name?

Mr. Aarstad: No, that I have forgotten.

Mr. Zambrano: And where was it that the British corvette fired on the submarine?

Mr. Aarstad: Toulon, T-o-u-l-o-n, in southern France.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow! I was watching this old 1940s, actually it was a British-made like informational movie about artificial limbs. What occurred to me were two things: one, that each injury below the knee would be very different from if you've lost your whole leg--

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: --or if you lost part of your arm as opposed to the entire arm--

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: --I guess. It seemed to me that if you lost it below the knee, it was a little bit easier or quicker to--

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yes, providing that the stump healed well. A lot of guys with the below-the-knee amputations, some of them were chopped off by Japanese bayonets, and so it was rough. Some of them had to go through many operations and skin grafts, stuff like that, to fix their stump so that they could put pressure on it when they put it in a leg, you know. Of course, over the stump they wore a sock, you know, and then they'd put it in. On the inside of the leg, we put soft leather and cushion it as much as we can. Then you'd try and take out the high spots, you know, pressure spots. But that's done hit and miss, you know, until finally, the guy says, "Hey, that's good. I don't have any pain; I'm fine," you know. Some of them, because of the condition of their stump, it made it very hard, you know. They did a pretty good job in surgical; the doctors did a good job in putting back the stump and reconstructing it so that there was good skin, and not too close to the bone, you know, so that there was pressure, you know. The best leg--let me put it that way, to notice--a lot of people--some of these guys that had below-the-knee, you would never even know they had an artificial leg. They were so good, but it took practice, you know; how to walk on it, you know. A lot of them, you know, walked with canes, and some walked with crutches, in the beginning, but little by little, you know, they would discard them, and eventually, they would walk just with the artificial leg.

Mr. Zambrano: Right. I think in that film, a fellow who lost it above the knee, I saw the instructor--well, first off, he had the, I'm not sure what they're called; they're like parallel bars where you hold on each side.

Mr. Aarstad: That was their practice run (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah. And this guy, he's got the leg, and the instructor's motioning to him to kick out his leg to make it seem more natural, as if his knee is actually there making the motion. As he did it, I was surprised at how natural it looked, with just a few tweaks.

Mr. Aarstad: Well, you know, at the knee, that was a piece of willow wood.

Mr. Zambrano: Willow wood?

Mr. Aarstad: Willow wood. It had an axle that went through, and inside, in the front here, you had a plate with two rivets, and then you had a spring on an axle. Then you had a piece up here, in the upper leg in the back, that gave you the hinge. The trick was, you had to get your leg kicked out, because you didn't have any mechanism for bending, so you had to learn this, you know, to throw the leg out, come down on the heel, and then roll over on the heel on your foot.

Mr. Zambrano: On the film that I saw, he was talking about that, but he also was talking about--there was like some kind of little plate that you would move, and there was like a wheel inside with little notches. He said that you could adjust the—

Mr. Aarstad: Adjust the tension?

Mr. Zambrano: --tension.

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. See, some of that came after the war, even. But we had a mechanism that worked pretty well, providing the man could, you know, do the maneuvers that was required to make the knee work, you know. We hollowed out that willow wood so that it was only maybe a quarter of an inch thick. So it was light, and with the mechanism in it, a lot of them did very well with it. Others had a hard time with it. It took them much longer to learn how--the technique. You know, we had to work with them; we had to be very patient with them, you know. We would tell them this, and a guy'd come back and say, "Well, you told me it was no good!" (Laughs). Then we would go through it again with them

and show them. So it was good, because you had all different types of personalities, you know. Some grasped it right away; others had a hard time with it. If he was stubborn, you had a hard time with it, because you weren't following what people were trying to help you with, you know. So that was hard, but you know, we had to live through that. We had a civilian that was in the shop; he was a civil service worker, but he was too old for them to bring him in the service, you know. He was a federal civil service worker, and he came from the Hanger Company in Philadelphia, and of course, he had a lot of experience with artificial legs and arms. He was kind of the mastermind when it came to that because he had the experience. He was constantly preaching to everybody. "You gotta have patience; you gotta have care. You've got to empathize with them, you know, because they have a handicap." We didn't only have legs; we had brace makers for guys that had problems with their legs but hadn't lost them. We had brace makers that made braces, you know, for your leg, for your knees, for your ankles. We also made prosthetic parts, like where a fellow had his heel blown off. Of course, to stick your foot in a shoe without a heel has some balance problems, so we would make a special leather thing to put around and then put a sock over it, you know, and he would put that in the shoe. We had other guys that lost their toes, and when you lose, especially the big toe, you lose balance. You have a tendency to do this.

Mr. Zambrano:

Hmm! Okay.

Mr. Aarstad:

Yeah, when you step, now if you don't have a big toe, what happens is you go like this. Goes inboard, and so many times, we'd have to make a prosthetic toe and attach it to the foot and then they'd put it in the shoe.

Mr. Zambrano:

How would you attach it to the foot?

Mr. Aarstad:

Like a leather casing.

Mr. Zambrano: Would it slip onto the rest of the foot?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, it would slip onto the toe, to where the toe was, and it would be attached to the other toes, so that it wouldn't move, you know. We had a lot of them, especially with those guys that got wounded by the kamikaze planes. They would dive behind a gun turret or something like that, and the plane would fly into the side of the ship and the explosion would go down the gangway, and the guy would, you know, dive under a turret but his legs were sticking out and the shrapnel came down the line and sometimes took his toes off, sometimes his heel, sometimes part of his ankle, you know, things like that. So we had all different things of the foot that we worked on also.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Aarstad: To help; they were not amputees, but they were handicapped, or disabled, you know, to an extent. Most of it was ability to be able to stand up straight without tilting or falling to one side, because they were missing part of their foot, you know. So we made prosthetic things, and they had to be worn inside a shoe.

Mr. Zambrano: So, he could never wear like, sandals.

Mr. Aarstad: No.

Mr. Zambrano: Right, there's always going to have to be a shoe, or if he got up in the middle of the night, he was going to have to put his shoe on in order to maintain that balance. Wow!

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. Yeah, but you know, of course, in later years, they did a lot of plastic surgery to solve those problems, too. And you know, the whole industry, I've followed it, you know, through the years. They have gone to great extents. I mean those springs that the guys run on; I mean, we never even thought of that (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, that's pretty incredible,--

Mr. Aarstad: It is.

Mr. Zambrano --those curved kind of springs.

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah, and I mean, they can run! It's amazing how they can run! I mean, we had special times when our amputees did certain things, you know, like for fundraising for the war effort, you know. You'd be surprised how some of them, even in the prosthetics that we had at that time, some of the things that they could do, you know, like dance. Some guys could even do some calisthenics. (Laughs). It's amazing, you know, but now, of course, they do so much more. It's a whole new science today.

Mr. Zambrano: Going back to that film that I mentioned before, it's narrated by this woman who's working in her kitchen, who had lost her leg during the blitz, and she does touch on this couple that's dancing. She says, "See this couple?" and they seem to be dancing fine, and it turned out that he had lost both legs and the woman he was dancing with had lost one. They looked fine; they walked normal, and I was thinking that, you know, 1940s, that was pretty good.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, you would never know.

Mr. Aarstad: We even had a Marine Corps captain; he lost his arm here, to a grenade, you know. He was a guard on the Eagles, Philadelphia Eagles--

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Aarstad: --football team before he went in the service for World War II. Well, on the islands, he got a grenade blow up and took part of his arm. Well, we made him, you know, an arm. He went back to playing football.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: And it was just a--?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, he lost his arm about halfway.

Mr. Zambrano: Halfway between the elbow and the rest?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, so he had an artificial arm that fit, and it was below the elbow. I mean, he was a guard on the football team. I wouldn't have been around him if he tackled you because that artificial arm could do some harm (both laugh).

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, I can imagine.

Mr. Aarstad: But he did very well. We saw him many times. People never even thought that he had an artificial--

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Aarstad: --because what he did, he wore a glove on each hand when he had his officer's uniform on, and so I mean, he looked as natural as anybody else because you couldn't tell--

Mr. Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Aarstad: --which one was, where was the artificial arm?

Mr. Zambrano: Did you just specifically work on legs?

Mr. Aarstad: Both.

Mr. Zambrano: Both. Okay. You didn't do the entire design; you just--did you just work on the plastics involved?

Mr. Aarstad: No, I worked on the plastics; my specialty was the knee. I hollowed out those knees and then I fitted the plastic, you know, for the top or the bottom, you know. See, it was very simple when it was below the knee, but when you had the knee into it, you had to have the bucket up here, you know, so the top of the knee had a, oh I guess it's about almost two inches, and the plastic would sit over that, and then we would put small rivets in there. Of course, inside they were cushioned, so that they wouldn't--inside that was leather, you know, soft leather.

Mr. Zambrano: So it wouldn't chafe the skin, or--it would help with some of those rough spots?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. And then, many times with guys, they would come back two, three, four times and say, "You know, I got a little pain on this side. I think I got a pressure spot there." Well, we would take

it out and what we would do, we would take their stump and put a powdered chalk on it, you know, blue. Then we would stick the stump back in and we would look for the spots where it touched on the inside, and that was a high spot. So then we would carve out a little bit and give them relief, you know, and then patch it up again so that it was back to normal, you know, but relieved. Then they would try that, and sometimes you would do it two, three times before you really got it where it wasn't giving him any pressure at all, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: Right, right. Yeah, I know the dentists do that when they're trying to make sure that the teeth are hitting just right--

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: --they take a piece of, it's almost like Xerox, that black Xerox paper that we used years ago, and they put it in your mouth and ask you to bite down or kind of click-click-click--

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, to get the impression.

Mr. Zambrano: --Exactly, and they can tell where the teeth are hitting in the wrong spot. They go and they smooth it in, and they'll do it a couple of times. It sounds like the same thing, yeah.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, it's quite tricky. You've got to be very, very careful that you don't take too much, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: Right, right.

Mr. Aarstad: That was part of the fitting.

Mr. Zambrano: Were there ever any instances where it was really, really rough going with someone to try to get them fitted for an artificial limb?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. We had a couple of guys that were, well, what we called (chuckles) "psycho."

Mr. Zambrano: Psycho?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, because they had mental problems from their experience in the war, you know. That was hard to deal with because their temperament would, you know, go up and down. It was hard

(chuckles), you know. Sometimes, you know, if somebody just couldn't get along with a guy that was doing that, what we would do was switch them over to one of the other guys and try him, because maybe he had a better temperament to handle him. But most of the guys were pretty good being patient with the amputees, you know, because sometimes they could get very rambunctious. I mean, anybody crossed them, they wouldn't think twice to pick up a crutch and give you a swack with it (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Did that ever happen?

Mr. Aarstad; Oh, yeah. When the amputees used to go into south Philadelphia, you know, for what they called liberty, you know (chuckles), sometimes we had to go out with military police patrols to bring them back in again, because they'd get drunk and then they would take it out on people who sassed them or gave them a hard time, you know. So that was also a problem, but I mean, that was all part of the war effort, let me put it that way, because we had many things to cope with that were not normal, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: Right. I mean what could be more not normal than losing a limb. I mean--

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, no. And you know, of course some people take it very well, and others don't. It takes them a long time before they're able to cope with it, you know. But you have to be patient with them, you know, and try and, you know, move them along to the place where they can understand what's happened to them and "Now, I'm being rehabilitated," you know. That was a hard word for a lot of them.

Mr. Zambrano: I can imagine that they had a psychologist or psychiatrist on staff to also help them?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Was there any one case that it just never worked out?

Mr. Aarstad: I never ran across anyone that we lost, when it came to that. We did have some that were so bad psychologically that they never got limbs, you know. They ended up as bed patients, you know. What happened with them is most of them, we didn't keep them at Philadelphia because they sent them to Bethesda, the Naval Medical Center, because they had better facilities for handling their psychological problems, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: Losing a limb, I would think, would be I mean, enough psychological problem as is. I think if I lost a limb that I've had for my entire life, you know, it's so easy to pick something up or to touch something. Once that's gone, and the trauma of seeing what happens to it at the time of the injury, I can't imagine what that does to a person's mind.

Mr. Aarstad: Well, you'd be surprised how many of them woke up at night and tried to get out of bed, thinking that they had legs to step on.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow.

Mr. Aarstad: Some of those guys had to actually be strapped in at night, when they had that tendency, because yeah, they would just end up on the floor and injure themselves.

Mr. Zambrano: And again, natural, something they had done since they were a child.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, and the other thing is: every amputee has a very vivid memory that he's lost a limb. It comes back to them in so many different ways, you know. Like when he's going to do something that he's always done all his life with his leg, and then all of a sudden, he realizes, I can't do that. Well, that's very traumatic.

Mr. Zambrano: Right, right.

Mr. Aarstad: So you know, we heard all kinds of things, you know, (chuckles) from the guys. You know, they would dream about their missing limb, you know, and things like that, and they would tell you stories, oh my goodness! How they were trying to cope with it,

you know. But the funny thing is, after a while, healing came, you know, and they were able to move on past what was happening to them. But see, for them, it's something that they have to live with the rest of their life.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, that's true.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah. The hardest thing, I think, was the guys that had such bad injuries and they were sent back to the states, and they had to amputate. The guy knew he had his leg, but when that surgery was over, he didn't have it, you know. That was very, very traumatic; whereas the guy who had it blasted off, you know, by a grenade or land mine or something like that, he would react different to it.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, I mean I would think you do; you wake up and your leg is gone.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: As opposed to knowing that right on the battlefield, that my leg is gone. You have that time to, I guess kind of get used to the idea, if you ever get used to it.

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. Actually, we had to educate them to that.

Mr. Zambrano: How so?

Mr. Aarstad: You'd have to talk to them and tell them, you know, what to look for and what not to look for. If you wake up at night, make sure, you know, that you put your artificial leg on before you go to the bathroom, or stuff like that. You know, it was a learning process; they had to learn.

Mr. Zambrano: Would they have to take their leg off at night?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah, they always did, because once you're in bed, you know, it's no problem, but once you have to get out of bed, that's another thing.

Mr. Zambrano: Right. And again, you're reminded of the injury, the time to put it on. Huh. At times, let's say, sailors that were already accustomed to it and were walking around naturally, would they sometimes

come back to the hospital to help with those that were just getting used to the idea?

Mr. Aarstad: No, no.

Mr. Zambrano: No?

Mr. Aarstad: No, we didn't get much of that. Well, once a guy got his leg and could walk on it and use it properly, the only time they came back was when they needed fitting or they had a pressure spot, or they had problems with their stump. Of course, when that came, many times they had to go back into surgery.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, oh yeah. And you know, a lot of the guys in the Pacific, from the islands, had little black things, almost like cinders, from the beaches. Many times a bomb blast or a grenade blast and they would get it in the face, or they would get it in the arm, you know, you'd have these things just below your skin and they would come out; you'd have to pick them out, you know, and then cauterize them, clean them up you know. A lot of the guys--and guys even got that in their stumps, and many times in surgery, they didn't see it, because it was too deep, and it came out to the surface, and all of a sudden, the guy would have a pain. He says, "Every time I put my leg in my below-the-knee," he says, "I get pain!" So we said, "Oh, we better look at that." So we'd take his leg, look inside it to see if there's anything in there. Then we'd take his sock off and we'd look at the stump and examine the stump. Then we'd say, you know, "We don't see anything. You'd better have this X-rayed. They'd go up and have it X-rayed, and they'd find out they got some of this stuff coming to the surface; it's up near the surface. So it was giving him pain, because it was pressing against his stump, you know. Sometimes, you know, they had to have extra surgery, reinvent the stump to take pressure away from it, you know, to help them. Of course, a lot of the times, that was

done by surgery, and of course, you had to heal up, and once you heal up, then you can start to wear your leg again and hope that there was no pressure, you know. But if there was pressure, then you have to work on it.

Mr. Zambrano: It just occurred to me; all this is paid by the Navy. You come back even for adjustments, a year or two later, you're not paying anything, right? The individual?

Mr. Aarstad: No, no. They'd take care of them. I think today; I don't think the Navy has a program anymore like they did. I think now, they send you to a commercial artificial limb shop.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, probably, because there are a lot of companies now.

Mr. Aarstad: In Philadelphia, there's a big one, Hanger.

Mr. Zambrano: Hanger.

Mr. Aarstad: Hanger Company.

Mr. Zambrano: You mentioned a man that worked at Hanger that came down.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, he came into--the Navy hired him as a federal employee, because he was 47 or 48 years of age. So you know, his brother came in as a lieutenant. So he was our executive officer, and he was 38 ½ years of age, and he just made it because within a few months he was going to be 39 and they never took you after 39. In fact, in my boot company, I had a guy that came in that fouled up in the Navy when he was 17 years of age, when he first went in, in the first year, and he was put out on a bad conduct discharge. Well, during the war, you could come back in the Navy and if you served your time, they would erase the bad conduct discharge.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Aarstad: So he came, and we called him "Pop", because he was so old in comparison to the rest of us.

Mr. Zambrano: So he, too, was about 38 years old?

Mr. Aarstad: We were 16 and 17 and 18 years of age (laughs), and we lost a lot of guys from my boot company in Okinawa, in the landings on Okinawa.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow. As you're going to the different hospitals and all, I imagine you must have made some friends as you went along?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, other than the ones that were lost on Okinawa, do you ever keep in touch with any of these other gentlemen?

Mr. Aarstad: For years, I kept in touch with a couple of guys from the Midwest, but then as time went on, they moved on to other places, you know, and changed jobs and things, so I've lost track. I tried to find out about guys that I had gone to boot camp with, but most of those that I tried, that I knew their names and tried to find them, they were victims on Okinawa. They were killed on Okinawa.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow.

Mr. Aarstad: In fact, my bunk mate, the guy that slept above me, his mother wrote me a letter (unclear) lost her son. When he came into boot camp, he was a Catholic boy, and he had never read his Bible. So he said to me, when he saw me reading my Bible, he says, "Are you allowed to read your Bible?" He says, "I'm not." He says, "I'm not allowed to interpret it." He says, "I have to ask the priest." So I says, "Well," I says, "I don't know about that." I says, "But I read my Bible every day." So he says, "Well, can I read with you?" So we read the Bible together in boot camp. When he left to go to Virginia for amphibious training, I gave him a New Testament to keep in his pocket that we had, you know, in our dress uniform, up here. It had a shield on the front of it, and his mother wrote me a letter and told me that a machine gun bullet had hit that Bible, that New Testament, and splattered it. It didn't go through, but he got one in the shoulder. He got one in the heart; he got one in the stomach, and down here into the intestines, just

like this, you know. The machine gun just raked him right across like that, and he perished.

Mr. Zambrano: But not through the Bible.

Mr. Aarstad: He hadn't even reached his 19th birthday.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow. Do you remember his name?

Mr. Aarstad: (Chuckles). I've tried and tried to remember. I can't remember it, but I know it began with a "B", because I was "A" alphabetically and he was "B".

Mr. Zambrano: So I guess being "A", you were always first, or one of the first.

Mr. Aarstad; Mm-hmm. Yeah, with a double-A (Mr. Zambrano laughs), the only that ever beat me out was Aaron.

Mr. Zambrano: Really? (Laughs).

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, because I go A-a-r-s, and he went A-a-r-o, so he was ahead of me. (Laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: How long were you at Philadelphia?

Mr. Aarstad: I was in Philadelphia from, let's see now, oh boy. I would say it was May of '45 to October of '46.

Mr. Zambrano: And was it in October of '46 that you were discharged?

Mr. Aarstad: Right.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Aarstad: So I went right from Philadelphia to Lido Beach.

Mr. Zambrano: Lido Beach?

Mr. Aarstad: In Long Island. Lido Beach was the discharge center for the East coast, the Northeast coast. The Third Naval District, I think.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. How did you feel about the work you were doing in Philadelphia?

Mr. Aarstad: I felt very good about it. Yeah, I thought it was a good thing.

Mr. Zambrano: How many people did you--I mean it's a tough question, but how many people did you work with during that time there?

Mr. Aarstad: You mean how many people were in the shop that I worked with?

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, well, okay. How many people were in the shop that you worked with?

Mr. Aarstad: I think we were about 18, plus an executive officer and a yeoman, so that would probably be 20 people.

Mr. Zambrano: So 18, a yeoman and the--

Mr. Aarstad: One yeoman in the office that kept, you know, the records, and an executive officer, our lieutenant, who actually was an artificial leg man himself.

Mr. Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Aarstad: From the Hanger Company.

Mr. Zambrano: The executive?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, the naval executive. They brought him into the Navy and gave him a commission. His brother, who was older than him, came in as a civilian employee.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, he was the Hanger man you mentioned before. Okay.

Mr. Aarstad: But they both came from Hanger.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. During your time there, at Philadelphia, how many patients do you think that you worked with?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, wow. That's pretty hard to say. It must have been 800.

Mr. Zambrano: Eight hundred.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, about 7 or 800. And of course, it was not only Navy, you know. It was Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Navy WAVES, and Lady Marines.

Mr. Zambrano: You mentioned the WAVES and the Lady Marines before. Do you remember specifically, I mean, what were their injuries?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, they lost their limbs in automobile accidents here in the states.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Mr. Aarstad: They were not combat.

Mr. Zambrano: Did you get a chance to work with any of them?

Mr. Aarstad: No. They were handled strictly by our federal employee and the executive officer.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Hmm.

Mr. Aarstad: And you know, for good reasons, you know. They wanted to keep it as private as possible.

Mr. Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah. But those things happened. I mean, we were surprised; when we saw the roster sheet, that a WAVE was coming in for artificial legs, we said, "What?" Of course we found out that it was an automobile accident, but we took care of that, too. And we had a lot of guys from Atlantic City that used to come to our shop, asking if we would make a leg for them, guys that had lost their legs in the Air Force, United States Air Force (laughs). Their rehabilitation center was in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Mr. Zambrano: Why would they go to Philadelphia?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, they heard about, that our leg was the lightest in the services, and so they were wondering if we could make legs for them. But we couldn't; I mean we were--they had to stay within their own.

Mr. Zambrano: It was light because; I assume because of the people that were working there? Why was it lighter than the one the Army was using?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, it was because of the laminated plastic.

Mr. Zambrano: What was the Army using, if they weren't using the same thing?

Mr. Aarstad: They were using some kind of phenolic material that they were working with, and a lot of the early artificial legs were made with leather and wood. Of course, that made them much heavier.

Mr. Zambrano: Is there anything that I might have not asked you, that you'd like to add? I mean any experience, any memory of working there?

Mr. Aarstad: I have a lot of memories, but nothing (Mr. Zambrano laughs), you know; it was, let me put it this way, it was a job that I had to do, you know. I enjoyed working because I enjoyed woodworking, anyway, and I liked working with those plastics, because I had worked with that before, so I was familiar with that. Not that I had a lot of experience, but I got a lot of experience in the Navy with it (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, that's true, but what about your--the other sailors that you worked with, the other corpsmen. Did they have similar types of experience?

Mr. Aarstad: Most of the fellows that came to the shop, you mean?

Mr. Zambrano: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Mr. Aarstad: They came from all over the world. We had one guy that came to us from Australia. He had been stationed in Australia with the United States Navy. He had been a brace maker before he came in the service, and when they found out he was a brace maker, they brought him all the way from Australia to our shop. And then a young fellow came to us from Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, the children's hospital there. He was an apprentice brace maker there, and he came into the Navy and they picked him up and sent him over to the shop (chuckles). We had a guy who came down from Alaska; he'd been stationed up in Alaska. He had experience; he was a, oh what do you call, he worked for a company that made bolts and hinges and mobile things, you know, and so he did a lot of the T-bolts and the springs and stuff like that, that we had in the legs and in the foot. The foot was split so that when you walked, you could lift your foot, you know, right here, about there, you had a V-joint, and you had a piece of rubber in there.

Mr. Zambrano: Right where the toes would meet the foot, you mean?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, and that would give you the, you know, the movement of your foot, and that rubber, that little piece of rubber in there, would give you the shock absorber for it, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: The fellow from Australia, was he--did you say that he was in the Australian service?

Mr. Aarstad: No. He was stationed at a naval facility in the northern part of Australia, where the Navy would, you know, the submarines, and the minesweepers and that; that's where they would go for their repairs and for their, you know, when they came off a run and they would come back to restock the submarine before it went out on another, they would come in that northern part of Australia there, and

Mr. Zambrano: You mentioned an apprentice that came from--?

Mr. Aarstad: St. Elizabeth's Hospital.

Mr. Zambrano: St. Elizabeth's. Where was that at, St. Elizabeth's?

Mr. Aarstad: In Pennsylvania.

Mr. Zambrano: Pennsylvania. Hmm. What else? Let's see what I've got here.

Mr. Aarstad: My partner on the same bench that I was, was an older man that came from Bangor, Maine (chuckles).

Mr. Zambrano: Bangor, Maine. Do you remember his name?

Mr. Aarstad: Worcester.

Mr. Zambrano: Worcester.

Mr. Aarstad: W-o-r-c-h-e-s-t-e-r.

Mr. Zambrano: And what was his job in all this?

Mr. Aarstad: Same as mine.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Mr. Aarstad: He worked on knees, and he worked on fitting, and legs and arms. Yeah, we kind of had to be able to do just about anything, you know.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah. Wow. I guess, you know, too, the--going back to your high school that, I assume that that engineering background also helped in all this.

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah; it sure did.

Mr. Zambrano: It's almost like you were perfect for the part.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah (chuckles). Well, that's what the Navy said (laughs). And you know, you don't question them.

Mr. Zambrano: Yes, you're right.

Mr. Aarstad: When they say, "We have a job for you," you do it, period.

Mr. Zambrano: Well, they got it right, it seems.

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. I have to say one thing: I think the Navy, when it comes to their discipline, that was very good, because I mean, I was just a teenager, but I sure learned a lot of good discipline.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, military does teach you that.

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. You know, if you try and buck it (laughs), they can make it very rough for you (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, that's true. I've seen that happen. Do you remember where you were when you heard about the atomic bomb being dropped?

Mr. Aarstad: The atom bomb? Yeah. I was in Philadelphia; I was in Rehab there, artificial leg shop.

Mr. Zambrano: But you don't remember what you were doing or who you were with or anything like that?

Mr. Aarstad: Just working that day. The day that I remember is the V-J Day, because every one of us were up in central Philadelphia at the crossroads of Market Street in downtown Philadelphia. Of course, everybody was celebrating, you know. That was quite a day. I never was hugged and squeezed and hugged and kissed so many times in one day (both laugh) by people, I mean from little children to aged people, you know, because everybody was so happy, you know. Anybody that had a uniform on, boy I tell you, they really treated us good (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Well, I can imagine; it's what, three and a half years at war.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah!

Mr. Zambrano: Wow! So you get discharged in October of '46, you said?

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah. No, in August. August '46.

Mr. Zambrano: August of '46, okay. You said you got sent to Lido Beach?

Mr. Aarstad: Lido Beach, Long Island. That's in the borough of Queens.

Mr. Zambrano: Once you're discharged, where did you go? What did you do?

Mr. Aarstad: I went home to Brooklyn where my parents were living.

Mr. Zambrano: Not very far away, I would think. Right?

Mr. Aarstad: No (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: You know, it just occurred to me—

Mr. Aarstad: They gave me carfare (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: They gave you carfare and that was it.

Mr. Aarstad: To go on a subway and the bus (laughs).

Mr. Zambrano: Being in Philadelphia, would you go visit your parents a lot whenever you had leave?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. That's what I would do, because I could catch the Pennsylvania Railroad and take it right to Manhattan, and then take the subway home to Brooklyn, where my parents lived.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Aarstad: When I was stationed at Annapolis, two times, I flew home from a naval air station on the Chesapeake, up to Floyd Bennett Field.

Mr. Zambrano: Floyd Bennett Field.

Mr. Aarstad: You know, I had to go down there and put in my request and then when they had someone flying up for spare parts; generally one of the fliers would go up on a weekend, so he would get Friday, Saturday and Sunday up in New York, and then Monday morning, we flew back to the Chesapeake to get into Annapolis.

Mr. Zambrano: How far was that?

Mr. Aarstad: Well, by plane it was just about 50 minutes to an hour.

Mr. Zambrano: So, once you were out of the service, what did you do?

Mr. Aarstad Well, I went to work. I went back to my company, but they were phasing out, because all they had was, during the war, they had a lot of contracts with the government. It was an engineering company, and when I came back, they told me that the father, who was the main owner of the company, and his son; the father was retiring, and the son was going into industrial engineering. So they were phasing out the business. So what they did for me was, they gave me two months of pay--

Mr. Zambrano: Oh! Okay.

Mr. Aarstad: --and told me I could look for a job and I could take as much time off as I wanted to. So I was there on a Monday; I applied for a job, I got an interview for Friday. I was hired on Friday and started the following Monday. (Mr. Zambrano laughs). And I stayed with them for 41 ½ years.

Mr. Zambrano: What company was this?

Mr. Aarstad: The National Brake Company. They later merged with the Ellcon Company, E-l-l-c-o-n Company, and it became Ellcon National, Incorporated.

Mr. Zambrano: What did they make?

Mr. Aarstad: Railroad equipment.

Mr. Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Mr. Aarstad: All kinds of stuff for the railroads, from freight car equipment, engineer locomotives, gondolas and dump cars. We had the dumping system, you know, under the cars.

Mr. Zambrano: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah, and we made air brakes; we made hand brakes; we made the stainless steel trim inside the subway cars, stanchions, windows, doors.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow! (Laughs). You did it all!

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: So, for 41 years. So you must have retired in '87?

Mr. Aarstad: 1987, I retired. I worked in the engineering department, and I was a service engineer. In the engineering department, I was a draftsman, and later, I was a designer. Then I worked in the service engineering, and then I worked as a salesman, a sales representative, and then I was sales manager for the last--and I also served on the Board of Directors of the company for 25 years.

Mr. Zambrano: Really? So you worked your way up pretty much.

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Wow! Okay. The Board of Directors for Ellcon National.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: Okay. So, being retired since 1987, what--I mean that's almost 30 years. What have you done?

Mr. Aarstad: What have I done? (Chuckles).

Mr. Zambrano: Other than enjoy retirement. (Laughs).

Mr. Aarstad: Well, we--I retired on the 15th of March. On the 16th, we moved to Pennsylvania and lived near our daughter, in the next town to our daughter and son-in-law and their children, for 31 years. Then we sold our house and downsized, and my son-in-law and daughter took one of their properties and they built a house on there, and we rented that, up until we came down here in May, May 15 of this year, because my son-in-law injured his back and he couldn't do the--he had ten acres; he couldn't do his, use his tractor and his farm equipment, because he had animals. He had sheep and he had chickens and he had pigs, and he raised crops, soybean, and he raised corn, and he had a vegetable garden. With his back injury and the surgery that he had to have, the doctor told him that he had to be very careful; otherwise, he would be a cripple if that was injured again. So they moved to North Carolina to be near his son, so that if anything happened, he would have his wife close to the son and they would look after him, you know. So, then we said we would stay at the house and rent it, but then he said no. He

would--he had built a house and spent a little bit more money than they should've, so for him to sell it at that time was not a good idea. It had to come up in price before he sold it, so he hung onto it and moved to North Carolina. So then we moved here, because my son had moved here to help his grandson, who is pastoring a church here. My son had pastored for 44 years up in New York, one church. So he came down here and bought a house and was going to help his grandson--his son-in-law, who married his daughter. They met at a little bitty college in Pennsylvania. They had been here for seven years; he was pastoring in a church, and they went from youth pastor all the way to executive pastor, so he did very well. But he wanted to start his own church, and that's when my son decided to come down to help him do that. So our son called us and said, "What are you going to do, if Carolyn and Dave are selling their house, or keeping the house and moving to North Carolina, and you're not able to stay there and rent it, what are you going to do?" "Well, we're going to have to start looking around." And he says, "I want you to come down here, and we'll keep an eye on you, and we'll help you." So, we moved down here, and they put everything in this apartment for us before we came down. We flew down, and we were supposed to be here on the 15th, but we got stuck up on a terrible electrical storm in Philadelphia Airport. They wouldn't let us off the ground. We sat in the plane for seven hours!

Mr. Zambrano:

Really?

Mr. Aarstad:

Ohhhh.

Mr. Zambrano:

I hate when they do that.

Mr. Aarstad:

So we got here at 2:30 in the morning (chuckles). So we actually didn't come here until the 16th. (Laughs).

Mr. Zambrano:

But when you got here, everything was already set up?

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. They had already--the bed was made and everything. We just jumped into bed and went to sleep. (Both laugh). So we've been down here--and he drives because I don't have—

(Unidentified woman): I'm going.

Mr. Aarstad: Oh, yeah. She's going down--

Mr. Zambrano: We'll be finished in two minutes. Actually, those were all the questions. On behalf of the Museum and myself, I want to thank you for your service.

Mr. Aarstad: Thank you.

Mr. Zambrano: I've never quite heard a story like yours before. I've interviewed a lot of veterans.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah.

Mr. Zambrano: So, let me just wrap this up, and we have the form to sign, and that's it.

Mr. Aarstad: Yeah.

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