

*National Museum of the Pacific War*

*Nimitz Education and Research Center*

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Interview with

**Mr. James Gillespie**

Date of Interview: March 14, 2019

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**Interviewers: Ed Metzler**

- Mr. Metzler: This is Ed Metzler and today is March 14, 2019. I am at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. James Gillespie. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So Jim, thank you for spending the time with us today, so that we can hear what your experiences were during World War II. I'd like to start by having you introduce yourself, if you would. Give us your full name, date of birth and place of birth, and we'll take it from there.
- Mr. Gillespie: My name is James Duke Gillespie. Everybody calls me Jim, and always has. I was born in Wellington, Texas, in 1926, and what else do you need?
- Mr. Metzler: Let's see, 1926. December, I think you said.
- Mr. Gillespie: December 20, 1926.
- Mr. Metzler: Twenty-second. So you're almost a Christmas baby, weren't you?
- Mr. Gillespie: Oh, yeah.
- Mr. Metzler: So now your birthday and Christmas have been basically the same time.
- Mr. Gillespie: Absolutely.
- Mr. Metzler: So, did you ever change it to where you could celebrate your birthday in June or something like that?
- Mr. Gillespie: To tell you something funny, my wife and I have the same birthday.

Mr. Metzler: Really?

Mr. Gillespie: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Year and day?

Mr. Gillespie: No.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, just--

Mr. Gillespie: The month and year; she is three years younger than I.

Mr. Metzler: That is a coincidence.

Mr. Gillespie: I gave up when I found that out.

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs). You said this is just meant to be! Okay, so were you born on a farm, in a town? Tell me a little more about that.

Mr. Gillespie: I was born in a small town. My daddy was a butcher; he owned a butcher shop. He was really a good butcher, and he made a living through the Depression that we went through in the '30s, on 12 dollars a week, sometimes 14 hours a day, but we made it through. We had no telephone, no car, no heater, no nothing.

Mr. Metzler: Those were different times, weren't they?

Mr. Gillespie: They were different times, but we made it through, because he was a hard worker and he provided food and shelter and everything we needed. I didn't know we were having a bad time.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. As far as you knew, everything was okay.

Mr. Gillespie: Everything was all right

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. Your mother, was she a quote, homemaker, end quote?

Mr. Gillespie: Yes. In those days there was very little mothers working outside the home.

Mr. Metzler: That's right.

Mr. Gillespie: She was the daughter of a cotton farmer around Wellington, and so when I was a little kid, she and I would go out and pick cotton during the fall, which I didn't like very well, because I thought when I was out of school, I was supposed to be out playing football somewhere.

Mr. Metzler: I think that's right!

Mr. Gillespie: Instead, I was out in the cotton patch pulling bolls.

Mr. Metzler: So, did you play football when you'd get a chance?

Mr. Gillespie: I was too little. I was too little in high school. I was too young. When I went to college, I went to a small college, and I played on the varsity basketball team. I was on the track team and a pole vaulter, and played baseball.

Mr. Metzler: Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Gillespie: Wellington, Texas.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me exactly where Wellington is?

Mr. Gillespie: It's in the panhandle, right in the southeast corner, between Childress and Shamrock, halfway, right on the Oklahoma border.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, okay. What about brothers and sisters?

Mr. Gillespie: When I was 15, my folks took in a girl into our home, and became a sister.

Mr. Metzler: So, an adoption type of a thing.

Mr. Gillespie: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. So if you were born in '26, then you were, and I think we were just discussing this, you were about 15, I guess, or you were coming up on 15 when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, yeah. I was 14, almost 15.

Mr. Metzler: Almost 15, right, right. So, tell me what you remember about that fateful day.

Mr. Gillespie: My cousin was a preacher in a small town near Wellington, and we were over there that day, went to his church that day. When church was over, we went back to his house, and heard it on the radio, heard about it on the radio.

Mr. Metzler: What was everybody's reaction?

Mr. Gillespie: I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. I lived up in the desert country up there. We had cotton, no lakes, no water except rain.

Mr. Metzler: You'd never seen that much water in your life!

Mr. Gillespie: That's right.

Mr. Metzler: I've heard that from a lot of veterans, that we didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was, or what it was. You're in high school, so how did your life change, and how did life in Wellington change then, after the war started, but before you left? Or did it change?

Mr. Gillespie: I don't notice, of course, I only went through it once, but it seemed normal to me. We were aware of the war, but when you're real young, you don't ever think you may be in it someday. A couple of my classmates who were a couple of years older than me did in the end, and were casualties, and it made it a little bit more, we got a little more sober about the thought as time went by, because we saw things happen to people we knew. It began to register on you that, if this lasts too long, you may be in it. Inside, you didn't believe it would.

Mr. Metzler: Your father was too old to have been in that, I guess.

Mr. Gillespie: He was too old, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: What about rationing and that kind of thing? They did that fairly quickly, I believe.

Mr. Gillespie: That didn't affect us a whole lot, because my dad could provide for us, you know, from the market, and what else we needed, we could get with the stamps that were available to us. So it really didn't impact our life that much, because we weren't living much above the poverty level to begin with. Most people were not.

Mr. Metzler: You didn't have a lot to lose.

Mr. Gillespie: We were normal, mid- just like anybody else. There were no rich people around us, no real poor. Well, there were a lot of poor people, cotton pickers during the season, you know, and things, but we felt--I always thought we were rich because we didn't lack for anything. We didn't have much, but we got along fine without it; but I didn't know the difference.

Mr. Metzler: Simple days.

Mr. Gillespie: I saw so many poor people during the Depression that had to get help from charities that would furnish them shoes, and food, and things like that. I never did go through that. I couldn't understand it, you know. I thought, you know, I thought, well, we must be rich. That's all I could figure.

Mr. Metzler: You had everything you felt like you needed, and didn't know any better.

Mr. Gillespie: We had everything we needed, and a lot of things we wanted.

Mr. Metzler: As you came up onto the age of 17, the war's, you know, going on, and now you can go, but only if you get somebody to sign. So, did you volunteer, did you end up getting drafted, how did you go into the military?

Mr. Gillespie: Well, I was in college when I was 17.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, that's right, because you got out of high school at a fairly young age.

Mr. Gillespie: In '43.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. So, where were you in college?

Mr. Gillespie: It was a college in Oklahoma City, right outside the outskirts. It was a church college at Bethany, Oklahoma. It's probably 1,000 students, maybe, or something like that. Inside, I never thought I really wanted to get into the war, because I didn't think it'd last that long. I went off to college, and when we'd hitchhike into Oklahoma City or something, people would say, "Why aren't you in the Army?" or something. I'd say, "Well, man, I'm only 16, or I'm only 17," you know, or something. But I knew that when my time came, at 18, I'd have to register for the draft. So I got a year and a half in before I was 18. At that time, the Navy, evidently, was full; didn't really need people. So, they wouldn't let you volunteer. Wait a minute; let's get this straight. Anyway, what it amounted to is that they put a cutoff. They said, "If you're from 18 on, you cannot join. It's not voluntary from there on." I didn't

want to get in the Army; I wanted to be in the Navy, so I knew that I wanted to be in before I became 18, and I did.

Mr. Metzler: Why were you wanting the Navy, rather than the Army?

Mr. Gillespie: When I was young, my thoughts were always flying planes, sailing boats, things like that.

Mr. Metzler: Sounds pretty exciting.

Mr. Gillespie: Living on the desert in the panhandle of Texas, that's hard to understand, why I would like, love water so much, but I did.

Mr. Metzler: Because you never got enough of it, I guess (laughs).

Mr. Gillespie: Never saw it, no swimming pools in town, not anything like that. We had swimming horse tanks. (Mr. Metzler laughs). But, I didn't know--I knew enough to know I did not want to be in the Army. I didn't want to crawl in the mud and sleep (unclear) and things like that. I always figured I'd have a place to sleep on a ship. I may have to swim sometime, but I'd rather take that chance, so I wanted to be in the Navy. I joined up, well, just before the deadline.

Mr. Metzler: Just before you became 18?

Mr. Gillespie: Eighteen.

Mr. Metzler: So, actually your parents had to sign for you, didn't they?

Mr. Gillespie: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: How did they feel about you going off to war?

Mr. Gillespie: Well, I don't know, but they didn't say much about it, but I think it really bothered my mother.

Mr. Metzler: Of course. All right, so you chose the Navy. Where did you actually go and sign up? You had to go, what, into Amarillo, or someplace?

Mr. Gillespie: No, I lived in Clovis, New Mexico at the time. During the war, my dad, working for 15 bucks a week or something like that, could get a better job somewhere else. So he went to Clovis, New Mexico, where he made a lot more money. We moved there in my senior

year, so I finished high school in Clovis instead of back in Wellington.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, okay. So, the money was better in Clovis. Was that because there was a big military site there?

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, they had a big military base there, but it's a bigger town to begin with, and we had relatives near there, and things like that.

Mr. Metzler: So it made sense.

Mr. Gillespie: So we wound up in New Mexico, and in Clovis, it was probably 10,000 then, they had a recruiting office, but all they were doing was grabbing people and getting their name on the books and sending them off, see. So they interviewed me and filled out the paperwork, and sent me up to Santa Fe, where I had physicals and stayed there two or three days. They were punching holes in me and everything.

Mr. Metzler: Probing you more than you wanted to be probed.

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah. And then, there was a couple of other guys there with me, from another part of the state. When that was over, they put us on a train and sent us to San Diego. Since I was a college man, I was in charge of that detail.

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs). Already an officer, huh?

Mr. Gillespie: That was the first one, yes. The next thought remembers riding the train for 24 hours a day for a couple of days until we got there. They met us at the train with a big open trailer truck, took everybody off of it, that was going out to the Naval Base. We stood up in it; as they drove us out there. As we went past the Navy Base when we got out there, they had big chain link fences that we drove along. People were over there hollering, "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry," all the way out there.

Mr. Metzler: Really?

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, yeah. They had a big deal out there. Every time you see somebody new, you'd tell them, "You'll be sorry!"



Mr. Metzler: Make you feel good (laughs).

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, yeah, get you broken in.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, I guess that's part of hazing, they'd call that, I guess. So, you hadn't actually been out of the high plains until you went to California, had you? This was a whole--

Mr. Gillespie: No, well from Texas to Oklahoma to go to college.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, that's true. So this is a whole new experience, to be on the West Coast.

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: Plus being in the military; plus not even being 18 yet.

Mr. Gillespie: No, no I wasn't, not yet. I had my birthday in boot camp, yes.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, so this is kind of a big disconnect for you, isn't it, in your life? I mean, this a huge adventure.

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, it is, but look at it backward. I was guided (unclear) got wet. Everywhere I went, I was guided. I didn't know that. I didn't know it 'til a few years ago. When I was in school, the courses I took just happened to fit this thing for an electronics career, and I didn't know it at the time. I was just taking it because I wanted to; I took a lot of physics and mathematics and things in college. When the recruiters, when the people in boot camp found out I had all of that, then when we got out of boot camp, they put me into a radar program because they knew I had a background that would favor being competent in that field.

Mr. Metzler: Did they do a lot of testing of you, you know, aptitude tests?

Mr. Gillespie: Well, they did a lot of, they did like you're doing with me, face-to-face stuff and then he'd try to figure out, when you get out of boot camp, which part of the Navy would you do the best in. He looked it all over and he said, "We think you ought to go to radar school."

Mr. Metzler: So you had an inherent interest in technology and electronics, so that's a good fit for you, then.

Mr. Gillespie: But the courses I took in college, I didn't know it at the time, but those were identical to what was needed for where they put me.

Mr. Metzler: Perfect fit. So they put you into radar school?

Mr. Gillespie: Yes, sir.

Mr. Metzler: The boot camp experience, was that physically hard for you? Did they run you ragged?

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, I loved it. I loved it.

Mr. Metzler: You loved it!

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: Because you were a bit athletic anyhow, with football and track.

Mr. Gillespie: At the time, I was quite athletic, and I loved it. I didn't even mind a 20-mile march. I went through all that then. I mean, it was hard, and I was tired and pooped out, but I was looking forward to it. I thought, that's going to be fun. Part of it was (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Now, some of the other guys, I bet, didn't enjoy it near as much as you did.

Mr. Gillespie: No, no.

Mr. Metzler: Did you establish any buddies when you were in boot camp?

Mr. Gillespie: No, I mostly have been a loner my whole life. I mean, I have friends and all that, but none that I'd cry on their shoulder and tell them my problems.

Mr. Metzler: You're not a neck-worker, then, huh?

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, I got a (unclear).

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, right. So off to radar school. Where was that?

Mr. Gillespie: On Point Loma, in San Diego. There's a long peninsula sticking out into the water, Point Loma, that the military had at the time. There's where we had the boot camp and all of that, and this was a special kind of a school. I don't know a lot about it, but it was a special thing. At the time I was there, there were only like, I don't know, maybe 15 or 20 people in it. It was not exactly; it was not a radar school to teach you how to operate a radar. That's part of it,

but then it was also, we had to maintain it in the field, because there's going to be no electro-mechanic, I mean electrical people, ratings, around to do the electronic work. We were supposed to be in a place where they had none of those, so I had to be a technician and the keeper of the equipment, to keep it up and fix it when it broke down. So we had several weeks of intensive schooling into the equipment, very little in operation, just in maintaining the equipment.

Mr. Metzler: Maintaining and repairing it; so you had to know exactly how it worked.

Mr. Gillespie: Well, yeah. We took copious notes; we took lots of notes of what we were learning, so that when we needed reference in the field, we'd have it. However, they would not let us take any of our notes out of school. We'd keep a notebook and keep it full, but they wouldn't let us take it with us. They said, "When you get where you're going, we'll send it to you." They were very sensitive about radar then; they didn't want a lot of knowledge like that spread out to the general public. So we felt like, you know, we were kind of a special kind of thing, because nobody much had anything to do with us. They wouldn't let us do what the other guys did. We were kept apart.

Mr. Metzler: How many guys were there in training with you? Was it a large group? Small group?

Mr. Gillespie: No, it was a pretty small group. I could guess 15 or 20.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, but it wasn't 100.

Mr. Gillespie: No, no. And it was on one special kind of radar, too. It was not over multiple units. It was just this one particular surface search, not air search, surface search radar, which that's a little bit unusual in that the Navy, most of them needed the air search much more than they did; relied more on it.

Mr. Metzler: But surface search, if you're in the Navy, would refer to water surface as opposed to terrain or anything like that.

Mr. Gillespie: Distance of a ground-based thing, not air.

Mr. Metzler: Right, right. Did they have a code name or a designation for the kind of radar system you had?

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, but I couldn't tell you what it is.

Mr. Metzler: Because, yeah, I did a little reading up on radar during World War II.

Mr. Gillespie: It was a small-type radar that was common on amphibious type ships, small ships, LCI down, below that. Below that, they'd have equipment as big as this room; ours was more like a TV, small radar. I think they called it S.O., I think; I'm not sure. Could be, could be S.O. with a number, like S.O. 2 or something like that, but I'm--that's been, what 75 years ago? (Laughs). I'm not sure about that.

Mr. Metzler: I wouldn't expect you to be able to quote all of that stuff, but how challenging did you find it, technically, to get your arms and mind around it?

Mr. Gillespie: I loved it!

Mr. Metzler: You ate it up.

Mr. Gillespie: I loved troubleshooting. I liked for them to mess it up and see if I could fix it. (Mr. Metzler laughs).

Mr. Metzler: So, you had some college education when you went in.

Mr. Gillespie: About a year and a half of college.

Mr. Metzler: What rank did you go in as? Were you just a seaman?

Mr. Gillespie: Seaman. Apprentice. I came out of boot came as what, first class seaman. I made radar third class not too far out of school. I made radar second class less than a year after that. That was pretty fast, because I was in a special unit. Maybe it wasn't special there, but in the Navy, it's kind of hard to get promotions that quickly.

Mr. Metzler: Roughly how long were you in this special radar training area. Was this like six months?

Mr. Gillespie: Two months, three months, four months, something like that. Well now, this was the classroom stuff. After that, I was in training the whole time. After that, we were training how to construct a steel tower, 80 feet tall, you know, and things like that, that we had to do. The units would have in it several radar technicians, a carpenter, an electrician, seamen to carry guns for guards (unclear), with an officer over this unit. It's a unit that stayed together, trained together, and went overseas together, and were supposed to go into combat together if it got that far.

Mr. Metzler: If it got that far. So this is a unit; did it have a designation, a number, radar unit 3044 or anything like that?

Mr. Gillespie: I'm not sure. It probably did, but I don't know what it was.

Mr. Metzler: Not something that you were really connected with, because basically, you felt like you were still in training. So, you went through several stages of training. Then—

Mr. Gillespie: They ran us up close to Los Angeles, and put us out near there, and had us train, you know, tracking ships and things like that, just to give us practice. That's before we were put on a ship and sent over.

Mr. Metzler: So roughly, what, let's see, 1944 then that you went.

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, '44. Spring of '44.

Mr. Metzler: Spring of '44. So you went to the Philippines, I understand. Is that right, or where did you go?

Mr. Gillespie: Wait a minute. Was it '44 or--? It was '45.

Mr. Metzler: It may have been '45.

Mr. Gillespie: '45, yes.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, early '45.

Mr. Gillespie: I went in in '44, and then this was, okay, this was '45. Now, what was your question?

Mr. Metzler: My question is, where did you go?

Mr. Gillespie: On ship?

Mr. Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gillespie: We went straight line to the Philippines.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Gillespie: We only had one submarine deal on the way, but it didn't come to anything, but we were all put out on the deck with our vests on, waiting for the worst.

Mr. Metzler: So this is a troop ship.

Mr. Gillespie: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Transport ship.

Mr. Gillespie: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Were there a bunch of other people on there along with your outfit?

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, boy yeah. We were crammed in there like sardines.

Mr. Metzler: So, how many in your group, then, or your unit?

Mr. Gillespie: I would say 15, a few more, maybe, than that. It was a unit that went everywhere together. It was meant to stay together.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, you had all the skills in that one group.

Mr. Gillespie: Every one of them had different skills.

Mr. Metzler: Everything from carpentry to technical and electronic repair.

Mr. Gillespie: And since this is a surface search radar, it was a little mystifying to us because it wasn't required on a ship. You go on a ship; they had a lot better radar than we had. So it wasn't for that. The only thing it could be for is for running you up on a beach somewhere and using it there. But if you ran us up on a beach, the convoy and everything that's taking that island, they've got better radar than you do, well they don't need our radar for that. So I never did figure out exactly what our mission was going to be. But it was kept separate, and they wouldn't tell us about it.

Mr. Metzler: So you went straight shot to the Philippines.

Mr. Gillespie: Went to the Philippines.

Mr. Metzler: And you said you had one potential close encounter with a submarine.

Mr. Gillespie: Kind of coincidentally, I read a lot of history, and the Indianapolis that was sunk, very close to the place that I was on that day when it happened. Now, that was a coincidence. But I just looked back and saw that as a coincidence. I thought, they did have some Japanese subs out in that area that we went through, that we did detect them as we went through, but nothing come of it.

Mr. Metzler: Well, that's good (laughs).

Mr. Gillespie: Thank you (chuckles).

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, right.

Mr. Gillespie: I can walk a lot further than I can swim (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, yeah. So they had you really crammed on board then, huh?

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, man, yes. I'd say in the whole, some places six feet deep in bunks, you know.

Mr. Metzler: Six layers of bunks.

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, and I was up toward the bow, sort of like this (Mr. Metzler laughs). And everybody around me got sick, threw up all over everything. I was never, ever seasick.

Mr. Metzler: I was going to ask you.

Mr. Gillespie: One time, I came close. We'd been down to the mess hall, and came out on deck, and some guy threw over the side, and the wind blew that back over us. I almost lost my cookies right there, but that's the closest I ever came.

Mr. Metzler: Well, you're blessed in that regard, because some guys got so sick, they actually had to pull them off.

Mr. Gillespie: We had one guy that was sick from the time he was on the ship until the time he got off. When we were on Corregidor later on, we had a raft out about 50 yards out in the water. We used to

swim out to it and sit on that raft. He just went out there and sat on that raft and got seasick. (Laughs).

Mr. Metzler: He really had a case.

Mr. Gillespie: He had it hard.

Mr. Metzler: He had a tender tummy, my goodness. So, where in the Philippines, then, did you land?

Mr. Gillespie: We landed at Subic Bay. They picked us off there, and put us into Manila, put us in an APD, I think they called it. That's an auxiliary hotel is what it amounts to. It's a big old barge thing with rooms in it, for personnel to stay in. They stuck us in there in the harbor for a couple of weeks while they was figuring out where for us to go. Then they took us from there, right directly to Corregidor. The island had been secured for some time.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, in fact, I think even the Philippines in total had been secured by then.

Mr. Gillespie: It was secured, but there was still a lot of, a lot still going on, I mean, out in the jungles. (Unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Metzler: Up in the mountains and stuff, yeah, yeah.

Mr. Gillespie: See, when the war was over, we took in lots of people. They brought a bunch of them out to Corregidor and built a big fence and put them in it when the war was over.

Mr. Metzler: So anyhow, so you went in at Subic Bay and you ended up at Manila. What were you doing while you were there? Doing more training?

Mr. Gillespie: In Manila?

Mr. Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gillespie: No, just waiting for assignment. We were there only maybe a week.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.



Mr. Gillespie: Wait, I take that back. They put me on shore patrol for a while there, while they were figuring out--before we went somewhere. So I was in shore patrol in Manila for a while.

Mr. Metzler: What did Manila look like, at that point?

Mr. Gillespie: It looked like this building would if you took it off and burned it and stomped it in the ground. Manila was rubble.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, and it was supposedly a beautiful city before the war.

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, oh yeah. One building was left there, but it was tilting and everything. It was called the--I forgot the name, wait--the Wilson Building. The Navy rented it; during the war they had military people, they kept them in there. So they kept us in there for a while, until they could send us somewhere else.

Mr. Metzler: You mentioned some Japanese prisoners; is that what I heard you say earlier?

Mr. Gillespie: When we were on Corregidor, after the war ended, they brought some prisoners out (unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Metzler: But we'll get to Corregidor in a minute then. So, that must have been your assignment. So while you were waiting for assignment, you got to do a little guard duty. That was interesting, wasn't it?

Mr. Gillespie: Ah, actually, it was just dragging drunk sailors outside and putting them in the pokey, a lot of that. They'd drink themselves stupid.

Mr. Metzler: Did you have much interaction with the Filipinos themselves?

Mr. Gillespie: Well, some, but not intimately. All the time we were there, we were around them and in with them and everything, so I used to talk so some of them a lot. One of them was a photographer, and he took me out and took my picture and everything. I had interchange with them but not to a big extent.

Mr. Metzler: What about other guys in your unit? Did you get pretty close to some of them?

Mr. Gillespie: I've been pretty much of a lone wolf my whole life. I have friends, but there weren't any I'd talk my blues to, none that I would tell my secrets to.

Mr. Metzler: Open up to.

Mr. Gillespie: No, no. I've always been pretty contained within myself.

Mr. Metzler: Right. But these guys were from all over the U.S., right?

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: I mean, you probably had guys from, you know, up north—

Mr. Gillespie: All they lived for was getting on liberty and going and getting drunk. I didn't do that; I'd get liberty and go down and look through the shops. I'd walk through the huts where people lived and see how they lived. It was very interesting to me.

Mr. Metzler: How did they live?

Mr. Gillespie: Hand to mouth. They would do anything; in fact, nearly all of the women would prostitute themselves to make a living.

Mr. Metzler: I know it was tough times there.

Mr. Gillespie: It was.

Mr. Metzler: I know the Japanese were not good to them either, when they were there.

Mr. Gillespie: No, they were not.

Mr. Metzler: What do you think about the Japanese, having had some interaction with them?

Mr. Gillespie: Just like everybody else, that's the enemy. If they shoot at you and I've got a gun, I'll shoot back. It's hard to rationalize why somebody would be as terribly ugly and bad and mean as they would do, when they would go into an island. They didn't hold your life worth a nickel. So many people, the Filipinos, were just so, oh just really taken advantage of, you know, and made slaves out of them. They had no use for them at all. They looked at us like we were big white gods over here; they really loved the American people.

Mr. Metzler: Really! When you finally did get assigned to a location, you went, you and your group went.

Mr. Gillespie: They had a place; it was already prepared. It was some Quonset huts that they had put on Corregidor, and they had a mess hall there, and they had a cadre of military people there, kind of, you know, overseeing it. It was at the base; it was down what they call bottomside, down by the tunnel. Corregidor is shaped like a tadpole, with a mountain on one end. It slopes down to the water down on the other end. Down on the lower end by the beach, there was an area they built these Quonset huts and stayed with them, lived there. Our radar was topside, up on the mountain. We had radar up there, so then we went up there and got some more training; we were in training there. There was a lighthouse up there, where incoming ships into the harbor passed through. You know, they had radio contact with the ships coming in, and seeing who they were and make sure which ones they were and all that. We had radar going there, for that, while we were training.

Mr. Metzler: So, the war is getting close to the end, but--

Mr. Gillespie: There was still a lot of guerilla work going on all around. They pushed them all up out of Manila; they were up in the top end of Luzon, which that's where we were, was up there about a mile across to--what was the name of that--where before the war, when all the prisoners were taken off Corregidor and they were taken over to Mariveles, on that island just across there; that's where there were still a lot of Japanese in the mountains up in there. The Army was still over in there trying to clean them out.

Mr. Metzler: Even while you were there training, huh?

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah. So we were a half-mile out away from the mainland, on Corregidor.

Mr. Metzler: So, they imprisoned some of the Japanese?

Mr. Gillespie: When the war ended, a lot of the Japanese would not give in; they didn't surrender, so they still had to clean them out. They'd bring them down and put them in wire cages on the island. I guess it's the only place they had to put that. They had a lot of prisoners of war there, while we were there.

Mr. Metzler: What did they look like?

Mr. Gillespie: They looked like, they were very ragged, but they looked just like all Japanese look, I guess. They didn't--there weren't no fat ones in there. Some of them were real surly; some of them were just as happy as they could be, glad the war was over.

Mr. Metzler: Did you have any interaction with them?

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, there was one there, had his belly cut open; a Marine had bayoneted him. He had a big old scar across there. He could talk English, and we talked to him some.

Mr. Metzler: He could talk English? That's unusual. So, what'd he have to say?

Mr. Gillespie: I couldn't tell you now. We just talked, chit-chat, nothing deep (laughs), no philosophy. No what did you do in the war or anything like that.

Mr. Metzler: Why did you attack Pearl Harbor, or any of that kind of thing.

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, you jerk (chuckles).

Mr. Metzler: Did you write letters home?

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: Did you get letters from home?

Mr. Gillespie: Yes, I did.

Mr. Metzler: Did you ever get any cookies or anything like that (laughs)?

Mr. Gillespie: I wasn't sure what they were when they got there (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: It was hard to recognize those chocolate chip cookies.

Mr. Gillespie: It was hard to tell whether it was chocolate pie or angel food cake, but it tasted good.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, you still ate it, huh?

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, we still ate it.

Mr. Metzler: Now, you mentioned your unit had a commanding officer. Was he a good guy?

Mr. Gillespie: Never see him, hardly ever. He stayed away from us all the time. He wasn't a get-together; I don't even remember his name.

Mr. Metzler: He wasn't a hands-on type of a leader then.

Mr. Gillespie: No, he was in charge of the unit.

Mr. Metzler: What was the food like during all of your training locations?

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, there were a few times we had to eat K-rations, but not often. I didn't mind eating them every once in a while, but see, that's one advantage of the Navy; usually you had a place to sleep and something to eat. That's why I didn't want to go in the Army.

Mr. Metzler: Mm-hmm. So that was a good choice.

Mr. Gillespie: I was satisfied with their; their (unclear) was fine. We didn't always have very good food sometime, because the type of food they sent out, would take two or three months to get to us, but we got a lot of macaroni and cheese and things like that.

Mr. Metzler: Powdered eggs, yeah.

Mr. Gillespie: Things that were not, not, you know, wouldn't go bad, but we gained weight over it. We didn't have no problem with it.

Mr. Metzler: Did you ever have fresh meat?

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, they had refrigerator ships that brought fresh meat, but it wasn't very often. Our standard meal on Sunday evening was bologna sandwiches and an orange or something like that, but there was nothing wrong with that.

Mr. Metzler: It's healthy, anyhow.

Mr. Gillespie: You get tired of it, but it's still good food. The Navy fed me, treated me awful well. I never, you know, I never wanted for anything that I needed.

Mr. Metzler: So, what do you think the ultimate goal was for your group, as far as what they were going to do with you guys? How were they going to use you?

Mr. Gillespie: It had to be something that would occur, not aboard ship. It had to be a land deal. The only thing you could see is that we were trained to go ashore, drive a truck off of the landing craft with the radar intact, drive it inland a ways, set it up, go into operation immediately, erect a tower and make it permanent where you get better coverage and everything. It was surface search. Now the ships that were in the line that were up there fighting the war and everything, there's no way in the world we could help them. They got better radar than we do; they wouldn't be coming asking us for anything. So the only thing I could surmise is, there was a reason that they needed some radar coverage at some remote location somewhere. That's all I know. We were trained to load this all onto landing craft, and we did. We got on landing craft; we landed it and run the truck up in our training. We learned how to do all of that. So, somewhere, on the mainland, probably--see, all the islands were already taken. There wasn't anything left except Japan. It had to be something to help the invasion of Japan in some way, and I have no idea what it was.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, but that's where everything was being aimed. I mean, until we knew how the war was going to end, was going to be an invasion.

Mr. Gillespie: Yes, yes, and by the fact that we had people to maintain our existence somewhere, along with the electronic people. We might be there a while; I mean, it wasn't, you know, a one-day deal. It had to be something permanent. But that's just me projecting what it could be; I couldn't come up with much other scenario.

Mr. Metzler: Do you remember when you first heard about the dropping of the atomic bombs?

Mr. Gillespie: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about that.

Mr. Gillespie: Well, of course, I couldn't understand it at the time. All I knew was an atom bomb had been dropped, and, you know, and everything that happened after that. We found out how big it really was and what it had really done. It's amazing, you know, to us to realize that something like that could do so much damage. But we were tickled to death personally.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, it was still news, even though you didn't necessarily understand it.

Mr. Gillespie: It really was. Because an invasion would have cost many, many lives. In fact, what they say now; I guess maybe it's they feel like saying it, but they say it saved lives to do that, because had we invaded Japan, you have a whole island of soldiers. Ain't nobody on that island that doesn't have a weapon, even if it's a club. None of the Japanese would surrender, so it would be a mass slaughter if we'd had to invade.

Mr. Metzler: On both sides.

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, yes. They told us later that they had estimated a million casualties for us.

Mr. Metzler: I've heard that.

Mr. Gillespie: So, I was happy that it ended the way it did.

Mr. Metzler: How do you get that information? People listening to radio, or somebody just--?

Mr. Gillespie: What information?

Mr. Metzler: The information on the atomic bomb and the war being over and all that.

Mr. Gillespie: Oh. All ships and stations and everything have little newspapers they put out for information for people and everything. It's just like a little, small town this big, and they gave us good information, showed pictures of the trials they were having in

Manila for these generals that they had caught and all that. So we knew pretty well what was going on; they kept us informed on all of that.

Mr. Metzler: Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose?

Mr. Gillespie: Not personally. I knew who she was, but I didn't hear her. I didn't spend any time around a radio, and radar don't pick up music. (Both laugh).

Mr. Metzler: That's true.

Mr. Gillespie: One thing I mentioned a while ago about, when we did get out where we were going, they mailed us our "brains" that we had written in school. We finally got that.

Mr. Metzler: So you did actually get all your notes and everything.

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, we finally got that, but they didn't want us mentioning who we were or anything, you know. Everything was supposed to be pretty quiet.

Mr. Metzler: When the Japanese surrendered, that must have been another time for a little celebration.

Mr. Gillespie: Yes, it was! It was (makes a sound), I made it!

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, that's when you knew, yeah.

Mr. Gillespie: But, I knew, hey, I just got over here. There are 3,000 people here gotta go, three million people here got to go home before I do. And sure enough it was. Wait around until April or May of the next year. The job of getting that many people home filled up ships for that long.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Gillespie: Finally, they got down to us; we got to go home.

Mr. Metzler: What did you do, just hang out and count the days, sitting there until you could get home?

Mr. Gillespie: Practically. It depended on what ship you were on, I guess. I was assigned to a ship that was a harbor-type ship. We'd done a little minesweeping and a little net tending and things like that, around.



It wasn't one of the seagoing vessels. So, we would be tied to probably, either anchored in a lagoon somewhere or tied up to a dock someplace. One place we were tied up to a dock and that night, the exhaust valve on the bottom of the ship that pumps bilge water out, occasionally. Bilge water would build up and they got pumps that would pump it out. During the night, that valve that opens up to pump it out got stuck open. (Chuckles) Water filled up engine room and the ship settled on the bottom right there tied to the dock. (Mr. Metzler laughs). So the last few months I was there, we didn't go anywhere. I was sitting in that ship, at Myaceni Island in Samar, because that water got into those electric motors. This ship was a diesel-electrical, so the water ruined all the turbines. It couldn't go anywhere, and they couldn't send us home, so we sat on that ship a while on.

Mr. Metzler: So, what did--did they assign your whole unit to that ship, or did they split you guys up?

Mr. Gillespie: No, this was--when we left Corregidor, they put us in Manila, and assigned us separate, piecemeal.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, piecemeal; one or two of you might go there.

Mr. Gillespie: Piecemeal, yeah, one on this ship, one going that way; wherever you were needed, therefore you went.

Mr. Metzler: But they were just basically storing you until they could get around to--

Mr. Gillespie: You know, they had to keep me going, until I could get me home. I knew it; I was the last one over there, so I ought to be the last one coming home. It turned out that way.

Mr. Metzler: How did you actually get home? I mean, did they put you on a transport, or fly you, or what?

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah, a transport ship. A little bigger and better one than the one we went over on, because they were using a lot of them. They discarded them after we didn't need them anymore, you know. It

was a better ship than the other one; took a little less time to get home because we weren't zig-zagging. We were--see how fast we could get from here to there.

Mr. Metzler: Did you stop at Pearl Harbor on the way home? It was a straight shot?

Mr. Gillespie: I went past Pearl Harbor twice and never stopped.

Mr. Metzler: Waved!

Mr. Gillespie: We went past there, went past Ulithi. (Unclear). We knew where it was; they told us where it was, but we never got off the ship.

Mr. Metzler: So how did it feel to roll back into the states after being out there, I don't know, coming up on two years, huh?

Mr. Gillespie: Yes. Well, I'm glad is all. I had a lot of fun. I enjoyed a lot of it, not fun really, but if you feel like you're doing something worthwhile, and the result was good, I'm ready to go home and I felt good about it, although I didn't do anything myself. I feel like I was a cog in the machine and this machine got (unclear), so I felt good about it.

Mr. Metzler: So, where did you put in, in the states? San Francisco?

Mr. Gillespie: We were brought into, under the bridge, into Oakland, Treasure Island. They let us off there.

Mr. Metzler: So you went under the Golden Gate.

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, yeah, twice.

Mr. Metzler: Now, you say twice, because is that where you--?

Mr. Gillespie: We went out once; coming back home.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, so you departed from the Bay area, not from San Diego.

Mr. Gillespie: Yes. See, when I was in San Diego going to school, they run us up to, I forgot the name of the old place, below Los Angeles, where we done some more training, and they brought us up a little further, on up near, just below San Francisco for a little bit. Then they ran us over to Treasure Island to get on a ship and go over.

Mr. Metzler: So this is like April of '46 then.

Mr. Gillespie: Yes, yes.

Mr. Metzler: What'd you do? Did you go back home?

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, yeah. Went back home, went to college. Went back to college, University of Oklahoma, that following spring.

Mr. Metzler: Did you pursue your electronics interest?

Mr. Gillespie: Well, I was pursuing an electrical engineering degree, so you take all your math and your physics and all that, and you're getting into circuits and all that. I already had a year of basic there at O. U. and I got into the first year of engineering, and that's what I did there was electrical engineering. But I went home during the summer, and I was a little bit tired of what I was doing. I heard on the radio that the weather bureau needs people; they're hiring; they need to hire people. I thought I'd work a little bit and then go back to college. So during the course of taking courses in college, I never did know why I took certain courses, but I had a little course in meteorology, just because I needed some math and some science, and I took it. That got me a job in the weather bureau, and I went into it, and worked a year or two. To be a professional meteorologist, you're supposed to have a degree. They were running short, so the Civil Service Commission said if you have at least two years of college, and you can prove that you've been doing some engineering work, we will certify you as a graduate engineer, and then you'll be out and be a meteorologist instead of a meteorological aide. So I became a meteorologist, that method. Now I make forecasts; I do a lot of pilot briefing and things like that. So then I got married, and we had to go a couple, three places, every time I'd move I'd get a promotion, get another promotion. Along in, what year would that have been, I guess '49--early '50s--two big airplanes full of people ran together over Grand Canyon, just two American (unclear, both speaking together), killed jillions of people. Congress got mad and they

gave the FAA a bunch of money and said we want you to stop all that stuff. So we got money crammed down the--CAA then--Civil Service--Civil Aeronautics--

Mr. Metzler: Civil Aeronautics Administration.

Mr. Gillespie: "Hey, we're hiring electronics people. You want to get a job?" Well, here I'm sitting as a GS-9 meteorologist in the weather bureau, and that guy over there is in the CAA and he's an 11 and so forth, so I said, "Hey, I've got experience in that." So they looked it over and said, "Okay, we'll take you, in grade." So I went in grade to the FAA, CAA at the time. The same thing happened there. We went through, and I worked a couple, three years in it, moved around and got promotions all the time. They had the same deal as the Civil Service did; gave us, like in the weather bureau, they needed engineers, so with the experience and the time, I could qualify as an engineer instead of a technician. I was a technician for several years, but then I got to be an engineer. Now, I could work around a lot, and I made a pretty good impression. They got me into the regional office in Fort Worth,. Now this unit I'm in has responsibility for all the navigational aids, the upkeep and installation of that, of the whole area, which is five states. So I was in there now, watching, making sure our equipment was up to snuff in all these five states and they were getting their training, and they were doing their work and everything. While I was doing that, the built DFW airport, huge airport, Dallas-Fort Worth. The called me in one day, the said, "We need an FAA Coordinator to go out there and make sure-- we've got three years to the date before that airport is going to be commissioned, and we've got \$15 million worth of equipment that has to go in there. But it has to go in depending on when you can get in. You can't get here because they're building a runway. He can't build a runway until he gets electricity. (Unclear). So I had

to coordinate out installations into DFW with 15 companies that are doing all kind of work, building and all of that. So, for two years we did that, two or three years, I guess, because when the time came, we commissioned on date, and of course, I got awards. From the time I got in the FAA, I got awards, you wouldn't believe! I don't even believe; stuff that to me, I was supposed to be doing, that they gave an award for it. Every time they gave me an award, I'd happen to get another job. It was amazing!

Mr. Metzler: Let me ask you about, when you came back from the Pacific, did you bring any memorabilia, you know, or stuff from your war experience?

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, well, yeah. I brought, you know, over there, the people, everybody was selling something. I got a little necklace for my sister, you know, things like that, but that's all.

Mr. Metzler: How do you feel that your war experience changed you as a person?

Mr. Gillespie: Well, I don't know if it changed me, but it sure kept me from changing.

Mr. Metzler: What do you mean by that?

Mr. Gillespie: I mean my--I was unique and I didn't care. I didn't know a single person there that didn't go on liberty and get drunk and have to be drug in and thrown in the bunk. I didn't do that. I didn't do that; I minded my own business, but any time I was in the Philippines I went to small villages, and I liked to see how they lived and things like that. I never had a buddy that I'd do things with. They'd always want me to go with them. "We're going to go to a pitch and bitch!" They're going to do this. Well, I didn't do that, so I tried to get all the knowledge of the Philippines that I could, because it was a different from our culture. I liked to get in with them and find out how they lived and everything. I wouldn't want to go back there now, because they're not living that way. They're trying to live like us, and I don't want to see that. They're having

problems with traffic and all that kind of stuff just like we are, so it's a different world. But then it was a native world, and it was really interesting to me to see that.

Mr. Metzler: Do you ever think about your war years, or dream about it or any of that?

Mr. Gillespie: No, I never had any times when I was really scared. I should have been a couple of times, but I just felt, looking back, I was lucky to get back without having to go through things that would change me psychologically. So many people had that on their minds, you know, and I didn't. I tried to keep a straight head while I was there, and it was--a lot of it was unpleasant, but it wasn't something that was going to change me.

Mr. Metzler: You mentioned a couple of times when you should have been scared. What were those times?

Mr. Gillespie: Well, if that ship that I was on was at sea when I was sitting on it and went under, I could have been a goner, see. But it wasn't; it was tied to the dock.

Mr. Metzler: Then there was the submarine possibility.

Mr. Gillespie: The submarine could have got me, and we had 10,000 guys on that boat, and half of them would probably have drowned. Another thing, everything over there was dangerous. The things that bite you (laughs), and I liked to get out in the jungle and see those different things, you know. But I was pretty careful, because I've seen lizards as long as from here to that wall and things like that.

Mr. Metzler: Five- and six-footers, huh?

Mr. Gillespie: So I gave them a wide berth. It was all interesting to me. It was interesting to me being on Corregidor and seeing the damage to the pre-war fortress that was there, with the huge guns laying the ground over here, a big mortar here just rusting out, you know, and big things like that. I knew what had happened in early days, and it was interesting to me to go there and see that. It meant a lot

more to me than by seeing there. We were through--crawling through them tunnels that were still there was scary as heck, but I just wanted to see what it looked like.

Mr. Metzler: So it was historical at that point, I mean Corregidor, because of when it had fallen and all of the difficulties there.

Mr. Gillespie: Oh, see it had been fire-bombed. I mean, when they took that land, the Japs went back into the caves, and they had to burn them out and everything. The smell on Corregidor was terrible for six months after that. We had huge bodies that they had to drag out and cover up. I've seen piles of--the Japanese wore tennis shoes with toes split like this. I've seen piles of them, just like (unclear) and bones over there and the smell was horrible, horrible. In these caves, there were still things they were trying to clean them up a little bit, and closing some of them off. It was awful; that was awful. One night, I was sleeping on a cot under a mosquito net, and I had a dream about me being in that cave, and it was caving in. I tore that mosquito net all to pieces.

Mr. Metzler: You went right through it, huh? (Laughs).

Mr. Gillespie: I went right through that thing. When I came home, I had two things that I brought home with me. Some of them were dreams like that, being in a tunnel with it caving in on you. The other was, when I was swimming one time over there, I got a fungus infection that gave a (unclear) across here, kind of a rash like, you know.

Mr. Metzler: On your skin?

Mr. Gillespie: They painted me with some kind of white paint or something, but that's all they could do. Every once in a while, for the first year that I was home, I'd get that rash break out on me again, but it's been gone for 60 years now. It's not there anymore.

Mr. Metzler: Did you have to take malaria pills, atabrine?

Mr. Gillespie: Atabrine.

Mr. Metzler: Did it turn you orange?

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah (both laugh).

Mr. Metzler: But you never got malaria, huh?

Mr. Gillespie: No. We had to take atabrine and salt pills. The only time I went to sick bay was one time I was swimming and I got into a, they call them a Portuguese man of war; you know what that is?

Mr. Metzler: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Gillespie: Jellyfish with a little (unclear, both speaking together). I got one of them wrapped around me here, and I mean, it punctured me good.

Mr. Metzler: Really?

Mr. Gillespie: So I had to--it hurt and sting like a, you know, about terrible. So, they treated that and it went away, but that's the only thing I ever got. They don't give Purple Hearts for that (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: No Purple Heart for your Portuguese man of war, huh?

Mr. Gillespie: No. I could never prove it anyway.

Mr. Metzler: What else can we talk about?

Mr. Gillespie: Not much.

Mr. Metzler: You about done?

Mr. Gillespie: I'm about done, and ready for lunch.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. Well, okay, we're a little bit over an hour, and very interesting. I appreciate your spending time.

Mr. Gillespie: Well, we covered a lot of years.

Mr. Metzler: We did. I appreciate your spending the time.

Mr. Gillespie: Some of those things I haven't thought of much, and so it's a little bit hazy on a lot of things now, but most things are just crystal clear. The way things looked; I still picture just like I always did.

Mr. Metzler: It's like you're almost there.

Mr. Gillespie: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gillespie: I wouldn't want to go back. I saw a picture here a while back. They've turned Corregidor into a paradise island. In the flats,



down where we had the Quonset huts by the beach, it's got little huts there and people go there and rent and surf and everything.

Mr. Metzler: Pay big money to live in a little hut.

Mr. Gillespie: I wouldn't want to see that.

Mr. Metzler: No, I agree with you. Well, thanks again for your time. Thanks for what you did for our country. We appreciate you.

Mr. Gillespie: I didn't do anything for the country.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, you did!

Mr. Gillespie: All for me (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: You were part of that cause.

Mr. Gillespie: The country done me well. I got through college; they paid for it. Got me a good job. I graduated; I mean (unclear). I told you I was over this unit of engineers. The regional office had engineers, controllers, supply, maintenance, everything, a big thing. Now instead of being a part of this maintenance engineering branch, I am the maintenance engineering branch chief. When I retired, I was maintenance engineering; any of the maintenance engineering of any of the electronic equipment in the five states, in (unclear), we had that responsibility of keeping them on the air with 100 per cent reliability and all that, and I made it all the way to there, and I was a little country boy out of Texas (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: And you got your education, the bulk of your education, too, through the GI Bill.

Mr. Gillespie: I was led through all these things. I needed that to get this, and I didn't know it until it happened. So, well, see, I didn't--what I'm saying is, what I did was amazing even to me, but I didn't deserve it.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, you did.

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