Interviewer: You do understand that this will be a part of the Lee College archives when we’re done?
Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Were you drafted, or did you join?
Veteran: Drafted.

Interviewer: And how did you feel about that?
Veteran: I was ready.

Interviewer: Were you excited?
Veteran: That’s what it took me to push me over the side. A number of things which are not worth mentioning but would cause one that age to kind of delay going off to get shot or to shoot somebody, but when the draft was initiated and executed, it just pushed a lot of us into what Tom Brokaw later on described as the World’s Greatest Generation. I would like to add a sentence to his book. He failed to mention our wives, and they’re the same generation. I think they deserve a great deal of credit, maybe not because of their military accomplishments, but because of the era in which they were raised. Little did I know that in October of 1942 that I would leave Liberty, Texas. At that time, I was an employee of Gulf States Utilities, and they were involved in the distribution of residential electricity as well as industrial services, but they also made ice, and there was an ice plant where their office was. I was hired on as an operator in an ice house to make ice—32-300 pound blocks per 24 hours. These were stored in vaults and then later on distributed locally as well as to Sour Lake and Dayton. I did this from
February of 1942 until October of 1942. I was inducted in Fort Sam Houston, Texas. A few days later, I was in Miami Beach, Florida, and a short while after that I was in Camp Crowder, Missouri, which is up near Joplin—the best Army camp that I was ever in. The most organized, neat and clean, and really first class. So we studied to become what they called ‘plotters.’ That ought to raise your antennae a little bit here in 2003, because there’s a lot of plotters around. At that time, radar was brand new. The British had captured some of it and brought it to America, and America and the English people refined this thing which sent out the beams that bounced back off of objects and gave them a location. They also had a thing called ‘identification frequency’—IFF, which meant that all the friendly aircraft and ships were equipped with the IFF thing, so when our radars picked up this target and they didn’t receive this IFF, that was listed as an enemy target. I’m kind of getting ahead of my story a little bit, because this, remember, was being done in Camp Crowder, Missouri, but at that time we had no earthly idea what we were doing. We were lead to believe that if we even mentioned radar, we would be executed, so you can believe that we were very, very cautious. We were an obedient group of soldiers, I promise you. We believed when they said they’d put us in the guard house, we believed every single word of it. We’d learned that from our parents. Anyway, we completed this course, and I think it lasted some six weeks, and we wound up then in Drewfield, Florida, which is outside of Tampa, near McDill Airbase in Florida. We were known as the 713 Signal Aircraft Warning Company. At that time, we were just part of a large military group with no particular assignment. We went on maneuvers out in the Everglades and learned about some things that we had not known before, such as slit trenches, obstacle courses, this type of thing. Then we finished probably six weeks later in this boondockle area, came back to Miami, and got on a troop train. All the windows were closed, there were no lights, and we were headed to the Northwest—no earthly idea where we were going.

Interviewer: Is that why the windows were blacked out—to keep ya’ll from knowing where you were going?

Veteran: This is very, very secretive stuff in World War II, because the ‘loose lips sink ships’ atmosphere had taken over the whole population. On the way from Miami,
we were told that our train would stop in Birmingham, Alabama, briefly, and if we so desired, we could designate one person to get off of this train from our car to do whatever he could do during this period of darkness out there, and we might ought to give him a little money. So we all contributed a little cash along the way, and as a matter of fact money didn’t seem near as important then as it does now. In a little while, this man came back and he had a large paper bag full of goodies, and he began to distribute them. In my particular case, I wound up with a flat bottle known as a pint. I happened to have an upper birth on this Pullman train, and hurriedly got in my birth and said, “Man, I’m just gonna enjoy what I’ve got here!” About that time, a soldier came rushing down through the car and he said, “My God, this is water!” I said, “That guy’s gotta be joking.” And sure enough, that guy had bought a large sack of bottled water. (Laughter) So, we spent considerable hours throwing these bottles at different objects along the railroad. Having gotten through all that, we got up to Billings, Montana, and at this point we went over the Continental Divide. Now remember, we had just come from Florida, and here is snow and ice knee deep. These steam engines are huge! They’ve got big snowplows in front of them, and we wondered what they were for, and soon found out, because we followed a river—it was a very scenic area—and we wound up at Camp Murray outside of Tacoma, Washington. At this time, there were tremendous trees in that area. We had a lot of spare time—we weren’t drilling or anything—and we weren’t necessarily infantry-type people. We were the early technicians, and we really didn’t have much ‘killer training.’ They had taught us a little karate and all that kind of stuff, how to pinch off heads with piano wires, and all that, but it was very, very remote that we might have to do that. We had a little time to spend while we were getting ready to ship out. We got all of our arctic equipment—good stuff. A thing called ‘bloocher(sic?) boots,’ for example. I’d never heard of them before or since, but they were rugged, rugged footwear. We got all this together, and when my pack was put together—that what we called a rucksack, it was harness that went around you—it went WAY up over your head. We trucked on down to the port and started getting on this ship, and one of the first somewhat humorous military things occurred because remember, we were very exuberant—‘cock of the walk’ type thing—and we’d had some experience with Marines down in Florida, and
they didn’t think much of us, and we didn’t think too much of them either, but we had never had a chance to express our opinion. So hundreds of us were on this ship, and down there on the dock was a bunch of these Marines in real close drill, and we disrupted their cadence—they couldn’t communicate. Well sir, when they got back on that ship they’re gonna have their revenge, because they are the guards. They actually fixed their bayonets, and as we would try to go one place, instead of giving us directions, they’d point it. A little while later, we were out somewhere close to the continental limits of the International Dateline, headed north, and the wind was really blowing—this was in June. So, these guys started to have calisthenics, and that’s a real big deal in the Marine Corp. They didn’t have shirts on or nothing—just their pants. So, all of us soldiers are watching a lot of this and thinking, “them dummies; them cock of the walk guys.” Finally they got down to taking their exercise, and the instructor says, “Take a deep breath.” Somewhere back here in the back, somebody said, “And blow it out your ass!” (Laughter) Well, from that moment on, all friendly relations were over. That chilled the whole operation. Anyway, we suffered through this, and if you haven’t ever been seasick or ever seen anybody seasick, you can’t imagine hundreds of people so seasick that they’re vomiting on each other. They’re lined up against the rail, and as this vomit up here blows back and hits this guy on the jaw, he don’t even bother to wipe it off. I mean, he’s ready to invade something, and he would jump on his mama to get off of that ship. I became so seasick that they took me in the hospital at Dutch Harbor, and absolutely nobody in my outfit knew where we were going. It was a big secret, you know. {Veteran shows student a map depicting area being described.} You see this right here? We’re headed now out to the Aleutian Islands, and somewhere in there is Adak, and we’re going to wind up here at a place called Shemya(?), Kiksa, and Attu. There’s a speck right there about at the International Dateline. You’re probably wondering why the United States would send a military group up there, but somewhere right about in here is a thing called Kuril Islands, which is the northernmost islands of Japan. If you’ll remember, according to your history the Japanese people left Japan, came up this way, invaded Kiska and Attu, and then they slipped on down here to Pearl Harbor, and bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7th. This is the world’s most turbulent weather that I know about, and
these people also live in that same area down in Japan, and they were able to navigate this during all that extreme weather, and that’s one of the reasons that they were able to be a total surprise to everybody at Pearl Harbor. But it’s also worth remembering that in 1812, the fathers of those admirals did the very same thing to the Russian navy in the Valadabostok(sic), I believe is the name of the place. First we landed at Shemya, which today is a tremendous airbase. It’s just a tiny little island out there that turned into an international landing spot for a lot of aircraft, as well as a lot of military stuff. We were sitting out there with our radar and picked up a Japanese taskforce coming in, and we were sure that they were going to attack Shemya, which was totally undefended except by us guys with those little short guns and no military training to speak of. They were going to Kiska to pick up the troops that had not been annihilated. See, the Americans took Attu back, and there were no prisoners. These guys were very dedicated soldiers, so when they lost that garrison there, they went and picked up those on Kiska, and that’s why they came right by us during one of the most severe storms that we can remember, and picked up those troops and took them back home. So we spent up there some thirty months doing nothing but logging these enemy unidentified flights. We had at least one bombing raid from what they called ‘betty bombers.’ This is a little bit of what we did while we were there. There was no radio to speak of at that time. We communicated by hand telephones, and we laid metallic wire from one point to the other point. We all had communication lines up on poles, or really it was 4x4 timbers, and then these dump trucks would come along with their bed raised up and tear it all down, and you’ve gotta go out and fix it. {Veteran showing photos to student.} This is a picture of the country, and this is where I learned to climb poles. This is in Camp Crowder, Missouri. This is the only tree on Attu, built by the engineers. It’s at a place called Little Falls Cemetery. When I arrived there, the battle was over and all the people were dead, and they had D-6 Caterpillars with what we called ‘athey trailers’ hooked behind it. They were going out into the boondocks picking up the corpses, and they brought them back stacked in their like cordwood—head up, head down—just however they could get the Japanese soldiers.
Interviewer: So there were Japanese soldiers that occupied the area?
Veteran: Oh, yes. That’s the only American soil that was captured during World War II, and there were some native there that had been abused, done away with, or something. I don’t remember exactly what it was. They had D-6 and D-8 Caterpillars with great big old blades on ‘em that just dug out a long trench, and they put all these bodies in there, and that was the end of the Japanese soldiers. Here’s a picture that we’re fishing in a little creek that you can’t even see, but it is filled with Dolly Varden trout. That would have been in the summertime, because you see that foliage there, and you see the difference between the wintertime here? It’s amazing how fast the weeds grew. Here’s a barge where we’re going out to an outpost to install certain facilities. I was in the headquarters company. Here’s a picture of what I call the ‘athey’ trailer. Here’s a Japanese flag. Here we are learning to ski. They finally took up the skis because so many of us got hurt. There was a long drawn-out thirty day deal when this war was going on, and this say, “Before the Nippon occupation, Chichigop Harbor was the home of the native Aleuts. During the occupation it served as the location of Japanese force headquarters. It was in this valley the Japs withdrew when pressure was exerted by the United States forces from north and south.” I visited this particular spot before the corpses were picked up, and there was a wooden platform—somewhat square and obviously a quarter—and there was a circle of dead Japanese soldiers. Their feet were all together, heads out this way, and they had all been shot in the head. It’s safe to assume that they all committed hari-kari. This was a big deal with them people. The tundra was of such a nature that we had to build walks so we could walk. This was a destroyed plane.

Interviewer: You had to have these walks like this during the winter?
Veteran: No, you couldn’t even find them in the winter. Did you ever hear the word ‘tundra’?

Interviewer: Uh-huh.
Veteran: The Aleutian Islands are all formed by volcanoes, and the immediate result of an eruption is solid rock when it cools. Time passes, debris and different things collect, plus the climate is such that it promotes the growth of a ‘mucky’ stuff
about that deep, and that’s known as tundra. It’s always wet or frozen. There ain’t no in-between. This is another memorable thing. We first were in tents, but later on were quartered in what they called Quonset huts. The Japanese people were completely and totally defeated, but they got together and decided they would crash all the American defenses and wind up on the beach and take over some 105 Howitzer guns down there. So they got together, and they came on their Kamikaze effort down through this hill, which was named in honor of the 50th Engineering regiment. They were bayoneting the people as they slept, and they went through that group of people, but there was enough people that woke up and got their guns together that they stopped all that jazz. They immortalized these little points after it was all over, you know. This is some of our foul-weather gear.

Interviewer: Was it cold all the time?
Veteran: No. It’s 24 hours of sunlight on June 22, and it’s 24 hours of darkness on December 22. It’s never below zero, and the snow I don’t know exactly how much, but we set poles twenty to thirty feet tall, and in the wintertime you couldn’t even see them. You’d just walk right on top of them. But there was always water trickling out of these little ravines and creeks, because of the warmth of the earth, because the volcanic thing is still very active there. I have a picture somewhere here of a group of us shoveling snow from off the top of our hut.

Interviewer: Is that how you got in and out of your hut—through the top?
Veteran: No, you see a hut had two doors. The outside door opened inside, and in that little alcove there was a shovel, so you took the shovel and got outside. But now that you mentioned that, there was a latrine that you had to go head first down a chute of ice, and when you got down there you wound up at the latrine.

(Laughter)

Interviewer: And how did you get back out?
Veteran: You know, oddly enough I don’t know. There probably was steps cut in it. There had to be a way. I like to tell this story about this guy right here. His name
was Gilbert Payne. He was an incorrigible person, and there I am associating with that guy. They brought all these people together, and he was in headquarter’s company, but they picked up a bunch of these outlaws at all the outposts and brought them to headquarters to ship them to the states. They’re just laughing and talking, and they’re so happy, and we’re still going to be on Attu with they leave. Well, when I got discharged, I got a letter from this guy, and he was in Burma. {Laughter} They never did let him get off this ship. They just took all them outlaws and shipped them over there. Now here is some real tough war duty right here. The USO people actually did a big effort to entertain all of the military people, and those ladies came to Attu along with some other people. I remember that when they were coming there was a group of P-40 fighter planes stationed on what we called X-I point, and our company was right up over them, and we could watch them. In an effort to put on some kind of display for that particular group of people, these P-40s took off as if they were scrambling to shoot down some enemy plane or something, and one of these guys just went over head down into the ocean. He never knew what happened.

Interviewer: He didn’t make it?
Veteran: No, he died. And there’s a string of fish we caught somewhere there.

Interviewer: Why do you string the fish?
Veteran: How are you going to carry them?

Interviewer: I guess that would be logical. My grandmother did it, too. I didn’t know why.
Veteran: Yeah, you couldn’t hold each individual fish, so you had to tie them all together. Now, this is Leonard Lemmings, and I told my wife stories about Leonard Lemmings, and if I have her permission, I will tell you this story. I can tell it, but I’m not sure it would be appropriate. There’s a little moral to it. Is it going to be recorded?

Interviewer: Yep. {Laughter} For all posterity.
Veteran: Well, if you remember, early on in this narrative I mentioned blootcher boots. Now you have to remember that in this hut, there’s ten men that live, sleep, eat,
joke, and carry on together. There are no secrets. Leonard was from Oklahoma, and we called him Simone-Simone (I think there’s a movie star by that name), and he was married. Not many of us were married, but he was. A big, handsome guy—stout as a bull. On this particular morning (that I so vividly remember), Leonard woke up. He had this pair of bloocher boots, which were tied together, and they weighed ten pounds. He held them about this high, and he dropped them—they came right back up. He said, “Damn, I wish I was home.”

{Laughter} This was about the second year. {Laughter} I told this so you’d get the picture. So, at this same time, Dear John letters were not very unusual, but this Mr. Sodeman(sic?), that was in the same hut, got a Dear John letter, and it absolutely broke his heart. Well, this affected all of us, and we didn’t have the slightest idea what we could do to help Mr. Sodeman, so some guy says, “Well, hell, that ain’t no problem. All of you guys give me your pictures. Give me all the pictures you’ve got.” And I wondered what he wanted with all these pictures. So, he got them all together, and he took them over to Mr. Sodeman, and he said, “You send every one of these to her, and tell her to pick out hers and send the rest of them back.” {Laughter} I thought that was just the tops!

Now, this is the reel that we kept our wire on that we had to pull out over those mountains and through those passes and things. That was called W-110B communications wire.

This is a stream, and every little ripple that you see in there is a fish. The salmon came in those streams along in late August, September, and October so thick that you could actually walk across those streams. We had to build fences across them, because they all go upstream and die, and that’s where we got our drinking water, so we had to fence them out of that thing.

This is another picture of our headquarters. And down here you can see the buildings. This is some of our tents when we got there in 1943.
Interviewer: I’ll bet you were freezing.

Veteran: I really don’t know how you get through all of that, but it’s not that bad, and we had unbelievable clothing. Now there’s an example of a tent versus the hut. This is a fox on top of our latrine, and they raised those foxes up there for fur.

Here’s Mr. Motes(sic?). Mr. Motes was a dedicated soldier, and he sincerely believed that the Japanese were gonna land right down there, and he was gonna kill them. All he had to do when they landed was just reach right up over his head and get his rifle. He had put a couple of hangers across there right over his nose. We really didn’t pay all that much attention to that, but some of this R&R was on and we gathered up some monstrous thing and got it up on top of that hut and began tumbling it down over the area in which Mr. Motes was sleeping, knowing full well that he would think the Japanese had just landed. And would you believe that that rifle jumped off of the wall and busted him right in the nose.

{Laughter} When Mr. Motes came out with his rifle, he was looking for blood—Japanese or otherwise. It didn’t make any difference, so we really had trouble finding a place to hide. But, somehow or another, Woodrow didn’t kill us, but he was wounded—I’ll say that. He didn’t get no Purple Heart for that. {Laughter}

Interviewer: Wounded by friendly fire—by your own gun. {Laughter}

Veteran: Friendly foolishness. I don’t know if anybody showed you a pair of dog tags.

Interviewer: My daddy has a set from being in the Navy.

Veteran: In the Army, [when you were killed] they took this and nailed it to your forehead, and they drove a nail in your jaw and sucked it up and it fitted in that notch in the bottom, so you’re sitting there with that dog tag fastened to you so they could always tell who you were. The other one went to some of the people involved in notifying your mama and your daddy.

Interviewer: Well, thank goodness you made it home with both of yours and not attached to you.

Veteran: We got a ribbon with a star. I think that’s Asiatic Pacific or something. These gold stripes denote six months of service out of the continental United States.
This is what became known as a “ruptured duck.” At discharge, you were given this to wear in your lapel of your coat so people would know you were honorably discharged.

Interviewer: What’s a ruptured duck?
Veteran: We called it that. I really can’t say why. It was just a slang word that somebody picked up. I had some Japanese bullets here I thought, but I don’t know where they are now. I don’t know if this would be of interest to you, but it’s a more sophisticated report. [Veteran begins reading]

‘January 24th, Japanese planes bombed scattered and bombed Amchitka whenever weather permitted. By February 18th, new fighter group was ready at Warhawks(sic?), and Lightnings (which are P-38s, the Japanese bombers) came over no more. The occupation of Amchitka, like the occupation of Adak five months before, let us still further increase the pressure on the Japanese at Attu and Kiska. Within two months our reconnaissance and bombing missions had forced the enemy to give up attempts to bring reinforcements and supplies to Attu and Kiska by surface vessels. Aerial photographs taken on January 19th have revealed the beginning of an enemy fighter strip south of Solomon Lagoon on Kiska. This strip and another strip began at about the same time at Attu where the targets were constantly attacked throughout the spring. As a result of these concert attacks and our success in keeping supply ships from bringing adequate machinery to the islands, the Japanese failed to finish either airfield.’

Actually, when I landed on Adak there were some B-24 bombers there, and would you believe that they were taking garbage out of the kitchen and dropping it along with bombs on Kiska? That’s how lackadasical wars get fought, you know.

This lists some of the bad weather conditions. It’s a poetry-type thing. I don’t know who wrote it.
That’s a reasonable picture of the volcanic activity. There were numerous small earthquakes from time to time, which makes one think of rumbling trucks passing by.

Have you interviewed many veterans?

Interviewer: You are my first. I have to do my Uncle Dick next.

Veteran: I’m a great booster of George Bush. People, including my parents and me, lament about all the terrible things that soldiers and sailors have to go through, but it’s written by more than one person—and I sincerely believe this having had the experiences I’ve had—take D-Day, for example, which is probably the biggest military invasion in history—certainly the most hazardous—and it’s written more than one time that not a single person would have left if they had a choice. These are some of the most memorable times of my life. The people you meet, the things you do, the stories you’re going to hear, the stories you’re going to tell. I’m not a bleeding heart. I don’t like to see anybody hurt or killed, and it’s gonna happen, but there’s a thing that develops in the military or any organization—for example, when there’s a group of men that are assigned to go to a certain place, the ones coming back look to their right and say, “Why, you sorry son of a bitch. I feel sorry for you. I’m the one coming back.” This is what makes things work.

This, I think, is our Christmas lunch at Camp Crowder, Missouri, in 1942.


Veteran: Now, that camp was absolutely good. We left there and went to Tampa, Florida, and all those barracks were built out of tar paper—dismal, dreary looking place, and that’s where they began to teach us to shoot a gun. Well, you have to remember every person who was raised in my area was born with a .22 rifle in his hand. They had a thing they called dry-fire. You’re laying out there behind a log, you’ve got a rifle that you know all about, and so they tell you to cock, and load, and fire. So you go through all this, and you finally get out to the rifle
range, and we’ve got a lot of guns going off a-booming, but you’ve got a lot of them getting ready. You’re all lined up out here behind this sandbag, and you’re just anxious to get it over with, so finally the man says, “Fire at will!” Somebody said, “Where’s that son of a bitch?” {Laughter} So, you had a pit group about a hundred yards down there, and these guys are behind a lot of dirt, and they’ve got a target with a bullseye. You take dead aim and make your mark, and then this guy in the pit has got to raise a flag and show you where you hit, because you’ve got to correct that windage and all that stuff. If you miss, they’ve got a thing they call {END OF SIDE A}

{SIDE B BEGINS} All of us guys that were handy with rifles, we could shoot pretty good, because we’d been killing squirrels from Day 1, so we would do our best to get that target the first time. This guy’s got to hold this thing up there with a stick to show you where you hit, and if you’re ready, you can hit that stick. {Laughter}

And I wore this patch on my left shoulder, I believe. The Signal Corps was a bastard outfit. They didn’t belong to nothing. Different members of the Signal Corps were with everybody, so you really didn’t have the same strong relationship that an infantry company does or people like that.

Here is where some people get their Purple Heart. I think if you look right there, that’s a fifty dollar bill, and of course we were all after that fifty dollar bill. I’m sitting over here, and if you’ll notice I’m not doing too well. This is a milk can that we made into a lamp, but this right here was the main thing we did. I mean that we played poker—night and day. That deck of cards would be that thick, and it went on twenty-four hours a day, because we really had a lot of spare time once everything got set up, and we weren’t being invaded, and we weren’t invading anybody. We were just dreaming about coming home. They did start teaching us Russian one time, and we wanted to know why, and they told us we were going to go to Russia. Well, every person went and took this class and just couldn’t wait to go to Russia, and then they’d say they needed people in the paratroopers. Everybody would go down and volunteer for the paratroopers.
Interviewer: Just please get me off of this place!
Veteran: Let’s move, let’s get out of here. Your father was in the Navy?

Interviewer: Yes sir.
Veteran: And he served, no doubt, in the South Pacific or was he in the Atlantic?

Interviewer: No, my father didn’t serve at all. I’m going to interview my Uncle Dick who was in the Army, I think. He served in Okinawa and then went to Japan. Were you married when you went in?
Veteran: No, Irma and I married in 1948. I had been home awhile and was quite a gay blade. I had money, I had a new car. I was working for Gulf State Utilities, and came back and spent most of my money buying some old used cars, and a guy told me to go down to the Chevrolet dealership, and they’ll get you a car. I couldn’t believe that, so I went down there and they put me on a list, and in no time at all they called me and said, “We’ve got your car.” I went down there, and they had the classiest Chevrolet built in 1947. It cost me $1,600, so I borrowed the money and bought that car, and business picked up. You talk about having a good time! I was earning sixty-eight cents an hour, working forty hours a week, hunting rabbits on the weekend, did a lot of courting around, and Irma and I started going together. We had known each other ever since we were born. She and I were both raised in Milam County about a stones throw from each other. We met in ’48, she was working at the telephone company, and I was working for the company. Both of us made thirty something dollars a week working for two major companies. We lived right over here not very far in a little rented house and lived there for a short while. Then we built a house out here in North Heights in 1948. We borrowed $2,000 and built a house. We moved it to Dayton and sold that house, and we’ve been building and selling houses ever since. We have three children, two grandchildren. All of our children have treated us very good. They’ve always been good kids, got educations, and all of them have jobs. Two of them are divorced. Wayne is the oldest—he’s a doctor of veterinary medicine and has a Ph.D. in animal pathology, and has some degrees other than that. He works for the University of Texas Medical Center up in San Antonio. Kay, the
middle daughter, lives in Montgomery and is a CPA. Our youngest daughter, Lisa, had a remarkable job with the telephone company, but didn’t like it and quit—went to France and became a chef. She is now starting her own business in Denver, Colorado, called A World of Food at Your Table. If you get the idea to have a super-duper thing, you call her and she plans the whole meal, delivers it, and everything.

Interviewer: Were you in the military when Pearl Harbor happened?
Veteran: No, I was standing up there on the street going to work at a drug store, making five dollars a week on December 7, 1941. In February of the next year, I went to work at Gulf State Utilities, and about a week after I went to work there I took the measles, and that company paid me every day until I got over those measles, and I said, “This has got to be a pretty good outfit,” so I stayed there for twenty-six years. In 1968 I quit and started my own business, and thanks to Irma, it worked. I sent my mother an allotment all the time I was in the service. I think I was making fifty dollars a month, and then I got to be a corporal and we got out of the continental United States, so I earned a little bit extra—probably sixty-five or seventy dollars. My parents divorced during that time.

Interviewer: And you were helping support your mother?
Veteran: I really wouldn’t put it that way. It was just a normal thing for children to do. When I worked here for five dollars a week, I gave my parents part of that money, so it’s not a way of deliberately classifying it as trying to support my mother. It was an obedient thing knowing what they needed.

I have a sister and a brother. My brother is dead. My sister is still very much alive. She has seven children.

Interviewer: How did you and your group view the enemy? Did you have a lot of fear being where you were?
Veteran: None whatsoever.
Interviewer: If there wasn’t fear, was there hatred or was there respect?
Veteran: My hatred was Pearl Harbor. Eventually you have to admire the dedication with which these people approached their job, because you couldn’t find one American in many that would deliberately commit suicide. There’s a certain amount of honor in admitting that you’re overcome, but them guys went down with the ship, and they’re the ones that started this terrorist thing, because they had the Kamikaze attitude a long time ago.

There was a woman called Tokyo Rose, and while we were on this ship going to Adak, she mentioned our company on the way to the Aleutian Islands, and she was in Japan. My brother’s name was George Alec Kornegay, so in an effort to try to tell my people where I was, I wrote him several letters and addressed them to George “T.” Carnegie. The next letter was George “T,” and the next letter was George “U.” See? The initials were A-T-T-U, but they never picked up on it. But you see, everything we sent was censored. If you noticed on the back of these pictures, they were passed by the censor.

Now here’s a reasonable smile. My mother was on a bus going somewhere and met another mother, and they were discussing the fact that they each had a son in the service. The first mother said something about her son was a colonel, and my mother said, “Well, I notice on my son’s address, is CPL,” and she thought that would be much different—Corporal…Colonel.

Interviewer: {Student begins reading an unidentified document} ‘…713th Signal Aircraft Warning Company in the Aleutian Islands for twenty-nine months. Installed, repaired and maintained permanent and temporary military telephone and telegraph wire systems, located sites for telephone and telegraph poles, strung wires, wired poles and…short circuits. Operated and maintained both telephones and switchboards, was familiar with standard operating rules and regulations governing wire communications…’

And that’s what you did when you got back. You were an electrician?

Veteran: Well, I turned into a lineman, who is somebody that does out and climbs high line poles with all these wires on them.
Interviewer: You did that here?
Veteran: Yes. In the service I learned to climb pole a little bit, so this company had a program whereby you had to take five years to become a top lineman—you had to be a grunt first. That’s one who digs holes and stuff like that. So they made me an apprentice lineman, and I worked at that for five years and became a top lineman in Liberty, so I asked to be transferred to Dayton as a serviceman in 1950. In those days, Gulf States was a servicing company, that is if you bought an appliance or anything used electricity, we would fix it so it would keep working. So I did that from 1950 to 1968, which is eighteen years, and during that time I established myself as a very responsible person in that community, and I’m going to use this as an illustration. At our office I was standing by the phone when it rang, and this lady said, “Is Mr. Kornegay there?”, and the secretary said, “Yeah.” So she gave me the phone and she said, “Mr. Kornegay, my house is on fire, and I’ve got a ladder, and I’ve got a bucket of water, and I want you to come down here and go up in the attic and put it out.” I said, “Call the Fire Department!” She said, “No, no, no, they’ll tear up my house. You come right on down here. I’ve got everything ready.” So I said, “I’m on my way.” And sure enough, when I got there her furnace had ignited some part of the rafter structure up in the roof, and there was the ladder and the scuttle hole was open, and she said, “Now, you go right on up there, and just sprinkle this water over there.” So I did, and I put the fire out. {Laughter} And so I’ve always thought if that didn’t signify as one who’s responsible, what would? But I had so many fun things in my life, that it’s sort of hard to say which would be the top, but I’ve thought that was one of them.

Interviewer: How did you hear about the dropping of the atomic bomb?
Veteran: I was in a Quonset hut on Attu on August the 5th. I had no earthly idea about an atomic bomb, and they said Japan’s been bombed by an atomic bomb, so it didn’t mean much to us. Some of the other guys seemed to be a lot smarter than I was, and they could elaborate on the atomic bomb, but you had to take a lot of that with a grain of salt, because I was the first one to say I didn’t know what they were talking about. These other guys were smarter than I was.
Interviewer: You’ve answered all my other questions, so you did good! Do you have any defining moments in your service?

Veteran: Coming home, I guess. I’m not sure I understand the word ‘defining.’ I assume it’s the peak of something. There were so many peaks and valleys that it would be kind of hard to single out one thing, but nothing takes the place of coming home. We were tired of what we were doing. We were just kind of victimized, I suppose. In a sense, we were real lucky that we were there, because you couldn’t even take a cold unless somebody came from the states, and if that person came from the states, everybody had a cold. We had to pay $40 a quart for whiskey they flew in by some of the airline pilots out of Alaska. I was sitting up there on a hill one day with a friend of mine, probably that guy with that shovel, and a C-47 came sailing over there and I said, “Looky there—that mail plane’s coming in for a landing!” He thought the wheels were something else.

Interviewer: How did you get your mail?

Veteran: Oh, my Lord have mercy. If you have anybody that you want to perk up, you write them a letter in the service. It’s just hard to say how important the mail call is. Irma and I were not corresponding at that time. My parents were practically the only people I corresponded with, but a lot of people, like Mr. Sodeman, had a lot of good mail to look forward to for awhile. Another thing I remember about Mr. Vince Patallio(sic?), a real New Yorker and knew a lot of things—somebody, somewhere came across some female underwear, and what did they do but put it under Mr. Patallio’s pillow. Well, that in itself is not really earthshaking, but somebody thought about putting some ketchup on it. Well, Vince came undone. He said, “That’s wrong—you spread disease that way.” {Laughter} Oh, my.

Interviewer: You guys were up there for much too long. {Laughter}

Veteran: The only riot I ever saw occurred over a chow line. We had been out on maneuvers and they said, “Line up here. There’s gonna be chow.” Well they put the chow over here, and all these people had to go over there. You didn’t break in the chow line. You got your place and you stayed there. If you went in front
of somebody, you’re liable to get your leg broken, because that was a sacred
place.

Maybe I should have some questions for you, or has this added to your
education?

Interviewer: I do believe it has.
Veteran: How old are you?

Interviewer: I’m 32.
Veteran: Children?

Interviewer: I have three boys.
Veteran: What are your aspirations? What are you going for at Lee College?

Interviewer: At Lee College I’m finishing my imaging degree. I finish this semester in
graphic arts, and will either go on to do interior design or ________ design.
Veteran: Where does your husband work?

Interviewer: He does computer science.
Veteran: Does he teach?

Interviewer: No. He just programs.
Veteran: What did your parents do?

Interviewer: My daddy worked for Dow Chemical before he retired, and my mother’s a school
teacher and still teaches.
Veteran: I never thought you’d be 32 years old with three children.

Interviewer: Had my first one when I was 21, and I quit school then to be a mommy, and so
now I’m back working on my education.
Veteran: There’s a lot of fun anytime you put that many Boy Scouts together. The older
the Boy Scouts, the more things that are going to happen. I was at Camp
Crowder, and I think it’s one of the few places that I ever left the post after dark, and as I came back the area was well lit. They had guard there, and these soldiers were jumping around because this guard was beating them on the legs down below the knees, and I thought ‘what in the world is going on?’ Come to find out they would tie whiskey bottles to their belt and suspend them down their leg inside their pants, and that’s how he would find them. They were just dancing around there, you know. {Laughter}

Interviewer: I’m not sure whether it was better to be without the whiskey or not.
Veteran: In Florida they taught us how to camouflage. We had an instructor and I happened to be in the same hut where he was, and sometime after he left camp to go to town, they picked up his bunk and put the whole thing up on the joist right over where it should have been. So he came in looking for his bunk, and somebody said, “It’s there. You just can’t see it. It’s camouflaged.” {Laughter}

Interviewer: I’m sure the camouflage came in real handy in all that snow.
Veteran: Well, believe it or not, all the gun emplacements are covered in a wire mesh with gunny sack strips in an effort to conceal it, but I imagine it still stood out pretty good in a snowstorm.

Emil Kurtai(sic?) and I were up on a hill with a pair of skis, and down the hill was an old burned out hut that had a stove and a bunch of old bunks left in there from that fire. On the other side of it was a road, and on the other side of that was a gulley, and we’re up probably a hundred feet above all of that. The snow was just a crust of ice—no loose snow—so Emil looked around there and said, “You know, I believe that I’m gonna ski down right by that hut. Do you think I’d miss that hut?” “Oh, yeah, you’d miss that hut.” Well sir, when he took off—and you’ve seen these caricatures of the Arkansas Razorback football team just going ninety miles an hour—well here goes Emil. He’s in that position—looks just like it. Well sir, he hits that hut just as straight, went right through all that debris, jumped that road, and landed in that ditch over there. Well, in no time at all they took up the skis. {Laughter} But he never moved one muscle once he started—zoom! I’m sure he was going a hundred miles an hour. {Laughter} Not a
scratch on him! That same guy, we were on this troop ship coming home, and there was bunch of construction workers on there, and they must have had a ton of money because they were playing a game called “Four-Five-Six.” I’m not familiar with it, but they were shooting dice. I’m up pretty high looking down in the hold of this ship, and all these guys are gathered around there, and just a pile of money sliding back and forth. Whoever won would go over there. So, Emil Kurtai lived in South Bend, Indiana, and he went down there and got in that game. He and I were bunking together side by side, and when he came back, he had $987. He says, “I’m gonna buy a new car when I get to South Bend, Indiana.” Well he sat there and counted it awhile, and he said, “You know, that might not be enough.” Well, you know the bottom line right now. He went back down there and lost the whole wad.

Now this is a ‘phenom.’ When we went overseas, I am safe in saying that ninety percent of all the people were really seasick. When we came home, we came the same route, and we threw garbage on each other, we did everything you could think of, and nobody got seasick—nobody. Another story that I think has stuck in my memory, on this troop ship was a long trough, long as from here to that wall, and there was two by fours on it. That was the latrine. They had water, I suppose, going right out to the ocean flowing through that thing. There was a man on every one. Somebody took a piece of paper and crumbled it up and set it on fire, and it went floating down through that thing, and you could always tell where it was. {Laughter} Cleaned the whole thing out, and nobody ever knew who did that. They were all too busy jumping off of that stool. {Laughter} And you think of all the horrible things of war?

Interviewer: This is when ya’ll were coming home?
Veteran: No, we were going overseas at that time. Of course, that was a regular troop ship and as we were going along somebody said, “What is that out there?” Somebody else said, “It looks like a bomb,” and it was a thing that looked like a wash pot floating in the water. We had a little escort thing ahead of us, and at that time they communicated with lights. They came back and began to circle around that thing, and finally they began to shoot it, and suddenly it was a terrible explosion,
so we narrowly missed that floating mine. It could have been American, because everybody floats them and they get loose sometimes. It doesn’t make much difference what kind it is if you get blown up. That happened outside of Seattle. We went up what they called the Inside Passage at Canada, out through Tacoma and Port Angeles—very pretty country. That would have been a real killer if we’d have gotten that. I don’t see how anybody would have survived in that water with that weather like it was. There was a lot of wind and cold rain, and it was dreary, dreary, dreary.

Interviewer: Was it like that when you came home, too?
Veteran: I don’t really know. The thing that impressed me the most about coming home was we got to Seattle Harbor in the dark, and the first thing that I remember seeing—and to this day I can visualize it—was a Socony Flying Horse…that Mobil gasoline red horse thing. I’ve never forgotten that, because it was the first thing I saw back out there somewhere. Matter of fact, there’s a man out here in south Liberty that got one, and I told him about my love of that thing, and so he took and made some plywood out of it and called me out there and offered to let me draw around it and make my own, but I never did. It’s not that big a deal anymore, but it was a sight to see then.

Interviewer: Grateful to see anything.
Veteran: Oh, my yes. We got on a troop train there and went to San Antonio. We weren’t there very long, and they gave us a discharge, and I got on a train and came to Liberty. I hired a taxi to take me out in the country where I thought my people lived, and she came to a house that I thought was the right house, and I told her to let me out, and it turned out I was about three miles from home. Walked on down the road in the middle of the night and walked in the house where my mother and them were living—no locks, no nothing.

Interviewer: I bet she was glad to see you.
Veteran: Yes, they were. They really were. We were not really a close family, because of the children, I’m the one that left first. I remember I had a friend of mine that was looking for me a job at Texas City. My daddy and I were setting out sweet
potatoes, whereby you take a potato vine and stick in the ground, and that’s called a potato slip. I’m dropping the slips, and he’s coming along and sticking them in the ground, and this boy came along and said, “I’ve got you a job.” I dropped them slips, and Pappa says, “Fritz, are you leaving?” I said, “Yes, sir, I’m gone.” {Laughter} And that’s how I left home.

Interviewer: How old were you?
Veteran: I must have been about 18 or 19, I guess. A little bit before that, my brother got married. You wouldn’t believe where we lived, because it was such an out of the way place. He had borrowed the landlord’s car to go marry this lady, and he and I were sleeping in the same room. My parents slept somewhat in the middle of the house, and then at night I heard all this laughing and talking. I recognized his voice and I heard this young lady, and then I heard my daddy say, “George, are you married?”, and he said, “Yes, sir,” and he said, “I’ll be g------d.” {Laughter}

Interviewer: I guess it was a surprise?
Veteran: I had to get up and go and sleep in a corner of the room that my parents were sleeping in, and the next day I took a pair of mules and hooked them to a wagon, and went over to an old house, took some boards down, brought them home, and cut across that corner, and left a little opening in the middle, and that was my room until I dropped them potato slips. So, I really wasn’t leaving a whole lot, but of course home is home. The incentive was there to go and do better. And mosquitoes were so bad in that house, I can still hear my daddy with a sheet or towel or something, and he’d be whipping it around. You see, slavery did not end until people like us got on that government thing where they helped farmers, because landlords made just as much use of us as they did any slave that ever lived. You farmed on what they called halves, or what they called thirds and fourths, and it was just really poor. Did you ever read *Tobacco Road, Grapes of Wrath*? We were in that same group, except we didn’t go to California—we stayed right here. So it’s kind of hard to convince me about hard times. I’ve been there and done that.

Interviewer: My father tells stories about going hungry.
Veteran: We never were hungry. My mother and father always had a garden, and we always had dogs and a .22 rifle, and there was always something to eat. It wasn’t varied, but it was there.

Interviewer: What are slit trenches?
Veteran: A slit trench is a toilet out in the woods. You’ve got an army of men out there, and you don’t have any bathroom facilities, so you dig a very narrow trench, and that’s where you use the bathroom. You just cover it up and you’re gone.

{TAPE STOPPED—END OF INTERVIEW}