

**Veteran:** WILCOX, Lindsey Zeb  
**Service Branch:** NAVY  
**Interviewer:** Whatley, Jeff  
**Date of Interview:** May 1, 2004  
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Terry Moore  
**Highlights of Service:** **World War II; Water Tender 2<sup>nd</sup> Class; Served about the USS *Indianapolis*; Thorough description of its sinking and rescue of survivors**

Interviewer: Mr. Wilcox, are you aware that our conversation will be recorded and the tape and transcription will be placed in the Lee College library, and do I have your permission to do so?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Please state your full name.

Veteran: Lindsey Zeb Wilcox.

Interviewer: And what was your highest rank held while in service.

Veteran: Water Tender, 2<sup>nd</sup> Class.

Interviewer: And what is your current address?

Veteran: \_\_\_\_\_ Long Drive, Baytown, Texas

Interviewer: If you could, please tell me what company did you serve with?

Veteran: U.S. Navy, B Division.

Interviewer: And who was your commander at this time?

Veteran: Captain Charles McVay.

Interviewer: What was the date of your enlistment, and how old were you at the time?

Veteran: I was 17 years old in November of 1942.

Interviewer: Were you married or single at the time?

Veteran: Single.

Interviewer: How long was your length of service?

Veteran: I was 17 when I enlisted, and I was 21 when I got out. I was in the Regular Navy, on what they called a "Kiddie Cruise"...in at 17, out at 21.

Interviewer: Where did you enlist?

Veteran: At Lake Charles, Louisiana.

Interviewer: What was your occupation prior to enlistment?

Veteran: I was a machinist apprentice for the Missouri Pacific Railroad.

Interviewer: Did this help you when you enlisted?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: What were your reasons for joining the service?

Veteran: Then they were drafting. If you were 21 and still in high school, you've already got your enlistment notice. You were going. Some of 'em had already gone.

Interviewer: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Veteran: No I enlisted.

Interviewer: Basically because you knew that with the draft there was a high possibility.

Veteran: Right.

Interviewer: At the time, did you feel that the draft was necessary?

Veteran: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: And do you believe it was fair? Did it gather in an assortment of all individuals?

Veteran: I don't care to go into that?

Interviewer: OK. Has your opinion of the draft changed since then.

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Could you describe your initial reaction upon entering the service?

Veteran: There are the Missouri Pacific shop, we had four others that were taking apprenticeships. Of course we talked each week about going, and there was a total of five of us that enlisted in the Navy at the same time.

Interviewer: Where did you train?

Veteran: San Diego, California.

Interviewer: Were you trained for any special skills?

Veteran: Yes. I went to Treasure Island at San Francisco, and they sent us to a school on the mainland in San Francisco—the Samuel Gompers Tool and Die School. We had different things to pass. We'd go in the morning, and then we'd have training in the afternoon at Treasure Island.

Interviewer: Did this training help prepare you for your service?

Veteran: On the repair work, it did, but in the schools and machinist apprentice job, I was trained on lathes and shapers and stuff like that. When I went aboard ship they asked me if I wanted to go into the fire room, and I told 'em it didn't matter to me, because being on the railroad we fired boilers and stuff like that in steam engines, so I went in the fire room.

Interviewer: Could you describe any weapons that you were trained with?

Veteran: We did take rifle practice one time, and that was it.

Interviewer: Your opinions on the equipment and clothing that were issued to you. Do you feel that they were adequate?

Veteran: Yes, yes, yes. Actually, my complimentary sea bag with all the clothing in it with a blue jacket manual handbook was just \$147, and that's counting your hammock. {Laughter}

Interviewer: That's bargain basement prices.

Veteran: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was your equipment and clothing adequate for the climate and what you encountered while you were in the service?

Veteran: Yeah. We were the flagship of Admiral Spruance, and we had a uniform for the day, like shirtsleeves down, cuffs buttoned, and it was adequate.

Interviewer: What was your opinion of the leadership while you were in the service?

Veteran: It was very good.

Interviewer: Who in your opinion were the leaders? Was it the officers, non-commissioned officers, or the enlisted men?

Veteran: Being that we was the flagship, we were all disciplined to our jobs, and you really didn't think too much about that. You had a certain job to do, and you did it. If you did something wrong in the fire room, you ended up on mess cook for the duration, and it does happen every now and then.

Interviewer: Can you describe what forms of off-duty recreation were common?

Veteran: When we were in San Francisco, you could just go into Oakland, Sacramento and places like that. When you went to Hawaii, we always went to Honolulu. There's different places to go to there. I've been on a few of the islands that we have taken, and I think the whole time we had two beer parties.

Interviewer: Describe what you did to occupy your leisure time while you were onboard ship.

Veteran: You didn't have too much leisure time, because we had four fire rooms and it took seven persons on each four hour watch. When you would have watch and watch, you'd be on four, off four, on four, off four, and then if your watch fell where it was the meal time for the people on watch, you had to go down and relieve them, let them go eat and go back, and then an hour or two later you'd go down there and change the watch. Then if we went under combat duty or anything like that, like going to different islands, the most you could be off would be eight hours.

Interviewer: And you generally spent that time resting up.

Veteran: Well, there wasn't any air conditioning there, and I slept topside with my clothes on with my blanket and my shoes for my pillow. If you had the night watch, you would have to tell that person that had to wake you up where you were at.

Interviewer: What was your opinion of the medical care while you were in the service? Did you believe it was adequate?

Veteran: Aboard ship, I never had to go to sick bay—not even once. I did at Treasure Island. I missed the ship there, because my body was run down from going on liberty every night. When I missed the ship, I finally caught it in Alaska. They had dentists or whatever was necessary. If you needed to go into the dentist when we were in Hawaii, we'd go to the dentist on the base.

Interviewer: What was the majority of your pay used for during this time?

Veteran: Well, I had an allowance for my mother, and by the time they took that out of there I had \$17 left. It wasn't anything to brag about, but I didn't smoke, and I didn't chew. It was used for hygiene stuff, I guess.

Interviewer: Was alcohol consumption a problem, or did you notice it being a problem while you were in the service?

Veteran: No, alcohol wasn't a problem aboard ship, because they didn't have any. When you would go on liberty, they'd try to drink it all up in one day. No, that wasn't a problem. There wasn't any fights or anyone thrown in the brig for having too much, because nine times out of ten, like when we went to that beer party on the island, we had a guy from Chattanooga, Tennessee, and believe it or not, he had been in a chain gang. He was kind of a comedian, you know. We went on this island and they gave us three cans of beer, so we were all sittin' around singin' different songs and stuff like that, so when the time come to go back to the ship, we was walkin' along the dock, and he says, "You know, how would you like to play follow the leader?" I said, "Whatcha gonna do?" He says, "I really don't know now." All of a sudden, he started runnin,' and he just jumps off the end of the dock, and of course I jumped off the end of the dock, and eventually we had

several hundred in the water. {Laughter} So, we crawled back on the dock and got aboard the ship, and the officer of the deck could see that we were all wet. Of course, the chaplain always goes with us, and he just asked the chaplain, "Did ya'll have any problems." He said, "No, sir," and that's all there was. Everybody just had a good time. Of course, if you'd had your watch on, it wasn't runnin' any more. {Laughter}

Interviewer: While you were enlisted, did you notice if there was much gambling that occurred?

Veteran: Yeah, a lot of people spent their time playing poker and cribbage. Pinochle was a big thing then, but I never did gamble with pinochle. I have played it and we'd miss all three meals. {Laughter} It really gets involved. We did that in Samoa in the Philippines.

Interviewer: What was your initial reaction when you first found that you were being shipped overseas?

Veteran: Well, I really didn't get excited, because I was looking forward to it. I had an idea of what I was going to do. I didn't know I was going to go in the fire room, but I knew it would be something that was mechanical, and I was looking forward to it.

Interviewer: What was your original destination?

Veteran: I wish I could remember the island, but it was nothing but volcano ash, and to walk around on it, they had two, two-by-twelves nailed together, and that was the walkway. On this island, they had a landing field that was this corrugated iron that you can roll out, and we had the P38s and P51s, and some of them were on this island. On the P51s, if that's that right plane, there was some of the Flying Tigers from China in that bunch, and you could see Siberia if it wasn't too cloudy that day. I got off in Dutch Harbor in Alaska, and I stayed there maybe three or four weeks, and then I went to this island. Then the *Indianapolis* came in, and I went aboard ship. We scouted around the next day, and then we went back to the United States.

Interviewer: Please identify the ship on which you served.

Veteran: USS *Indianapolis*—a heavy cruiser. CA-35 was the number of it.

Interviewer: What was the morale like when you were aboard ship—upbeat, kind of subdued?

Veteran: Well, if you was a motor machinist or anything mechanical, you didn't associate with the people that was like gunnery and different things like that. And, too, I was on that ship at least three years, and I never went from one end to the other. I may have went halfway, because that's where I was at halfway. You just had you a few friends and that was it.

Interviewer: What effect did combat have on the morale? Did it bring people closer together?

Veteran: We were all close together when it came to going into combat. Aboard our ship, we had a PA system and the war going on over on the beaches, we could hear it play-by-play, just like listening to a baseball game.

Interviewer: During this time, did you hear or see any enemy propaganda being played over their airwaves?

Veteran: Tokyo Rose was on every night.

Interviewer: What was your reaction to this?

Veteran: You didn't have any reaction. You just laughed.

Interviewer: Basically, did it have the same effect throughout the crew?

Veteran: Yeah. That really didn't bother you, because nobody was shooting at you. Some of those islands, we would be anchored and there would be other ships, and the Japanese scouts in these little old Piper Cubs and would fly right next to the water, and you could see 'em, and they'd wave at you. You couldn't shoot 'em, because you'd hit another ship.

Interviewer: They had it pretty well figured out. {Laughter}

Veteran: Yeah!

Interviewer: While you were onboard, did you observe any newspaper or radio correspondents?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: What was your opinion of wartime civilian newspaper, magazine, or radio coverage of the war?

Veteran: Really, we didn't have any to read unless you would come back to Pearl Harbor or to the states. Then you would kind of look at it if your ship landed that day to see what they said about you, but we really didn't care. {END OF TAPE 1—  
SIDE A}

{SIDE B BEGINS}

Interviewer: Please describe any rumors you had heard about the atomic bomb before its use.

Veteran: General Tibbets, in the Enola Gay, was the person that dropped the first atomic bomb, and I asked General Tibbets maybe three years ago what was the best kept secret for the time he spent in the Air Force, and he said, "the atomic bomb," and I think so, too. Some of the bases that the Air Force was staying at over in the western part of the United States, they knew there was something big brewing and wanted a part of it, but General Tibbets was the person that was picking these men throughout the United States to help them take this bomb over there to drop it on Hiroshima.

Interviewer: What was your opinion in 1945 on the use of the atomic bomb? Do you think it was justified?

Veteran: Oh, I think it was justified. The navigation officer's name was Wright on the Enola Gay, and he's still living today, and so is General Tibbets. I have been to meetings where reunions were held, and the media asks him that question every time he goes. Does he feel bad about dropping the atomic bomb? He says, "No, we dropped two of 'em." {Laughter}

Interviewer: In your opinion, do think this by and large saved thousands of American lives?

Veteran: Yes. There have been articles written, and I have one, about what would have happened if we hadn't dropped the atomic bomb, and they figure we would have



lost right at two million of our soldiers trying to take Japan if we didn't have it. Besides all that, we lost a lot of people in typhoons over there. And, too, I think Japan is better off.

Interviewer: I know there have been several studies done as to the number of people that were killed with the bomb versus the number of people that would have been killed had Japan been invaded.

Veteran: Yeah. They would most likely been sleeping in rice patties.

Interviewer: What awards or decorations did you receive?

Veteran: I've got the Good Conduct and a few more over there, but the most meaningful one is the Purple Heart.

Interviewer: Describe the welcome home when you returned back to the United States.

Veteran: Well, I felt a little bad about mine, because when I went back to my hometown, my wife's first cousin was over there, and then riding the train back to Houston, I was wondering how they were gonna handle that. But my wife's first cousin was in this Bataan March, and so I figured he should have all the glory, because when they was willing to transfer us back from Samoa to the United States, we had air transportation, and we were knocked out of using the air for the people that was in the Bataan March, and it was a good swap-off.

Interviewer: If you could, please describe what you can about your experience when the *Indianapolis* was sunk. What you were doing at the time.

Veteran: Number 2 fire room was almost in the middle of the ship, and I was on the 8 to 12 afternoon watch, and I was relieved at 11:45pm. I went up to go to get some sleep, and I slept in the port hangar. As I laid down, there was a big explosion, and from the offices above the fire room there was a fire that came down both passageways—port and starboard—and it almost went all the way across the quarter deck. The ship must have been hit right at midnight. I had been out of the fire room maybe ten or fifteen minutes. With the port hangar there, there was a medical officer that was given first aid to one of the burn victims. I didn't have my life jacket with me, and I went back to my locker to get my life jacket. Then I

came back to topside, and maybe seventy-five percent of the ship was under water, and I stepped off of the port side of the eight inch gun turret into the starboard side of the water, and I swam over and got hold of a raft.

Interviewer: During the next few days that ensued, what were your thoughts and feelings about being rescued? I've read some of the articles saying that everybody thought that an SOS had been sent, and that everybody thought that within hours a rescue mission would be underway.

Veteran: Yeah, that was one of the things we were asked when we started to gather our group there. In our group, I was on a life raft by myself, and then the life raft drifted over to where there was two other life rafts and a floater net. That was one of the things that was discussed—if we had gotten off an SOS message. Of course, we didn't know because the ship went down so quick that there wasn't any way to communicate other than by mouth, and the time was limited for that. That was what we talked about the first night. They train you when you're going through boot camp to conserve your energy, because you're not going anywhere out in the middle of that ocean anyway that can help you, and don't drink the salt water, and those two things were really branded into my mind to where I never did drink any salt water and I conserved my energy.

Interviewer: Over the next several days, please describe things that were going on around you, what the group was doing, and what transpired?

Veteran: Well, we finally realized that we were scattered over about ten square miles, and there wasn't any motor lodges, just a few life rafts. The third thing is, you take care of the wounded first, so I got out of the life raft and into the water the whole time. On this floater net, individuals had enough room—they were about eighteen inches square—and a floater net floated about a foot and a half or two feet underwater, and that would hold everybody together during this time. The second day, it was still the talk about whether we'd gotten an SOS out, and there were a few airplanes that flew over, but at twenty and thirty thousand feet, they're not gonna see you. Of course you do a lot of praying, and there was always prayer groups. On the third day, some of them start to lose their mind drinking salt water, and what they would do is go under water, go down and come back,

and tell their buddy what all they had for chow in the chow hall, and they were completely out of their minds. But you can tell when an individual is losing his mind, because he will get to mumbling to himself, and if he is in the middle of this floater net, he eventually works his way to the outer edges of it, and when he gets to the outer edges, about the only thing you can do is put your arms around him and hope somebody will come for help. But eventually, he's gonna want to swim, and you just let him go because he's gonna fight you. When they swim off, you never see 'em again. And the sharks were there continuously. The morning of the fourth day, I had fallen asleep, and when I looked up there was two sharks about maybe seven or eight feet away from me, and there was about four feet between them. Being asleep and when I was pulled under, that's what woke me up. They was just checking me out to see if I was dead. A shark is very peculiar—you don't know what he's going to do. Anyway, I was talking to him and said, "Hey, if you don't bother me I won't bother you." I just happened to look between them, and I could see a head sticking out of the water—just one head, and I assumed that that was the group, because these swells were about four feet, and the only thing that sticks out of the water is your head. If you would just make a 360 degree circle, if those sharks had been to my left, I wouldn't be here making this interview today, but at the right time, the floater nets were right between those big sharks, so I swam right between 'em towards that head that I was looking at. As I did, they made a turn, too, and their tails drug the side of my leg, and I really hooked 'em up then. I swam maybe fifty feet or more, and I got back to the net. I felt like I could last seven days. Then a K-pod life raft was just good for three days. There was one doctor that said the way a person survives, you send a message to your brain that you're gonna be a survivor, and when you do that, you don't feel any pain or thirst or hunger. That's a true statement. I never did get hungry or thirsty or anything like that.

Interviewer: What day and time were you eventually seen?

Veteran: I'd say they spotted us about noon, and the way they spotted us was a Lieutenant Wilbur Gwynn, from California, was out flying with his crew testing some sonar equipment, and he had the sonar hanging out the back end of his plane, and as the old boy was rolling it in, it snapped off, and so he flew back to the base, and he

got more equipment for it. He was flying out to the same spot, and they tested it. It so happened when they started to roll it in on the cable, the cable hung up again, and he went back. As he was looking out the bomb bay doors, he could see an oil slick, and so he had his co-pilot to lower the altitude, and he came back over this oil slick, and he could see there was men in the water. That's when he sent out the call, and they showed up in the afternoon, and the ship showed up at night. I was picked up by the USS *Bassett* I'd say about four o'clock that morning.

Interviewer: After you were picked up, where were you taken?

Veteran: We went to Samoa.

Interviewer: And how long was your stay in Samoa?

Veteran: Admiral Nimitz sent some officers down to interview us, and we was there about two weeks, and then they flew us back to Guam.

Interviewer: How long did you remain in the service after the hostilities ended—after the atomic bomb?

Veteran: Well, I had the points to get out by then. They had a point system, and I think it was a hundred, but being I was in there for a 'Kiddie Cruise,' I had to wait for my twenty-first birthday, which was February 14<sup>th</sup>. I had my survivor's leave, and I was married then. I got married in May of that year. Then I was sent down to New Orleans, and I stayed there until February 14, 1946. And I'd like to put a little note on that. Five us went into the service there in '42, and we split up at the boot camp. There was two groups being discharged—my group and another group, and one of these guys was in that other group, and we rode the bus back home together. Small world.

Interviewer: That is amazing. What did you do after you were discharged?

Veteran: I went back and finished my apprenticeship with the railroad, and I finished it in 1948.

Interviewer: Did your military service help you find a job?

Veteran: Back then, the government protected your job. When you went in, you had a job when you got back. When you'd finish your apprenticeship, they'd lay you off on the railroad and tell you go to Todd's Shipyard down at Galveston, and if you could work for two weeks without gettin' fired, you could go back and get hired. {Laughter} It was tough!

Interviewer: Please describe the ease or the difficulty that you had readapting to civilian life after the service.

Veteran: We were kind of prepared for that before they sent us back to the United States from being sunk. We had to go and talk to a psychiatrist—in fact the whole group did—and I can remember a lot of the things he said. You didn't want a "condition red," because you'd take it out on your family, and that's what they were trying to get over to us. Don't take this out on your family, and it really worked. Out of all of those that went—of the 317—there was just one that didn't make it. {END OF TAPE 1—SIDE B}

{TAPE 2 BEGINS}

Interviewer: Before the war, what was the highest grade of schooling that you had completed, and where was it?

Veteran: It was at DeQuincy, Louisiana, and we just had eleven grades at the school, and then of course this apprenticeship at the railroad was four years. It took me eight to finish mine, because of the war. Then the railroad sent me to several schools. I went to diesel school at General Motors in LaGrange, Illinois, and I went through American Locomotive at Schenectady, New York, and different things like that.

Interviewer: Did you use the G.I. Bill for any schooling afterwards?

Veteran: Yes, I did use the G.I. Bill. In 1948, when I finished my apprenticeship, I went to Oklahoma A&I at Okmulgee, Oklahoma, and took a diesel engineering course. Then the railroad wasn't on forty-hour weeks, so they decided to go to a forty-hour week, and after I'd been up there about a year, the master mechanic said if I was gonna get a job on the railroad, now was the time. So I moved to Alexandria

to work for the Missouri Pacific Railroad, not knowing they were gonna strike two days after I got there. I was laid off, and I went down to Lafayette, Louisiana, to see one of the guys that I enlisted with. He was working for the Southern Pacific, and he said, "Why don't you get a job here?" So he went and talked to a supervisor, and the supervisor went and talked with the master mechanic, and then he called me in and interviewed me, and if I could pass a physical he'd hire me. He said that after the strike was over, I would leave, and I told him I wouldn't leave unless I got something better, so he said that was fine. So I worked there about four weeks as a qualified engine inspector for the Interstate Commerce, and then I guess in about four weeks they asked me to do a job in the machine shop. After I did this job, the next day they asked me if they put the job up for bid would I bid on it, and I told them I would. They put it up for bid, and I got the job working days and Saturday and Sunday off. One day I went home, and my wife said the Missouri Pacific had called, so I called back, and they asked me if I wanted a roundhouse foreman job in DeQuincy, and I said, "Yeah," so I went back to work for them.

Interviewer: What were your expectations of civilian life after you left the service regarding family, marriage, and your career afterwards?

Veteran: Really, they were short on items for married couples. Back in those days, they still had rationing. You couldn't get butter, bacon, and everything. Everybody charged their groceries. If it was your time, you may have two pounds of bacon to show up in your grocery bag {Laughter}, knowing that if you complained about it you wouldn't get any more. If you needed a washing machine, there wasn't any. You had to get in line for a list. We was expecting our first child, and we didn't have a washing machine, and one of the guys I kept tormenting so, he says, "If you get home and there's a washing machine sitting on the front porch, you would roll it in the house, wouldn't you?" I said, "I sure would," and sure enough, in about two weeks one was sittin' on the front porch. They was just hard to get. Of course, you didn't make too much. I guess I made ninety cents an hour, and you started out at fifty-nine. You got a half cent raise per six months. There wasn't two or three automobiles at each house, but you could

build a home under \$5,000, with the note \$50 a month. You can't get anything for that now.

Interviewer: Do you belong to any national or unit veteran associations, and if so, which ones are they?

Veteran: I don't belong to any. I used to belong to the Veterans of Foreign War, but when I moved to Baytown I just never did pick it back up. About the only other thing I belong to is church and the Lions Club. Of course, the Lions Club is national and there are a few veterans in it.

Interviewer: Who do you feel most comfortable discussing your experiences with and why?

Veteran: Of course, the reunions we had were memorial, and we started in 1965. It wasn't until *Jaws* came out, the first *Jaws*, and the old seaman is telling about the USS *Indianapolis* where a shark ate a sailor every five minutes, and if you figure it up, it will come out to about five minutes. But it was really hard, because we couldn't understand why they didn't come and look for us, and we still don't understand it today, because just like the investigation they had. We had Senator Warner over a military something group, which had a good investigation, but by the time the Senate, the House, and the Navy approved it bi-partisan, you still don't get anything out of it. To me, it was just a waste of time, and they did give us a little special ribbon for holding the record by speed from here to Honolulu, but with all of those ribbons they gave, they wanted us to address 'em and send 'em to all of the people that was on there. We may have found half of them. I don't know, and I think it's the same way today. There's gonna be so many questions not answered.

Interviewer: Obviously you've read several books and articles concerning your incidents. What's your opinion about them? Do you think they portray the incidents fairly accurately, or do they embellish on them somewhat?

Veteran: Actually, the books are all written by information that individuals have given 'em. There's some, like *The Devil's Voyage*, that's all fiction. It's just to sell. Most of 'em, though, had interviewed, and the way they had done that was to write different ones and you answered their questions. Of course, the only one I

ever answered was the first book that came out—*Abandon Ship* by Newcomb—and the only other is this one right here. Have you seen that? When we did that book, and only the 317 made it, some of the people put names on the accusations they made, and we went back and took those names out, because we know some of those persons grandkids, and we didn't want to embarrass anybody.

Interviewer: It was a tragic experience. There was no reason to do that.

Veteran: Oh, yes. Just like the commander, Hashimoto. He was the submarine commander that sunk our ship. We followed him through his whole life—of course he died last year. He has grandkids living in the states, and we know 'em, but families that lost their fathers and some of those wives, they haven't forgiven the Japanese yet. I was at a reunion in Indianapolis, and when the granddaughter of Hashimoto was introduced, I was going to meet her myself, and I looked over there and I saw a family I had known well and walked over there and sat down. We were having a conversation, and I asked them, "How do you feel about that?", and I could immediately see. They had lost their dad, and he was from Port Arthur.

Interviewer: World War II was a significant national experience. What, if anything, did this teach you about America or Americans and their resolve?

Veteran: Well, I'm glad we had President Truman. {Laughter} I sure am. When I got back, that was the first time I got to vote when he ran against Dewey. I was an apprentice boy then, and I was working on a draw cut shaper we were making for driving boxes, and this old machinist that was on there, we were talking about I'm votin' for my first time. He says, "Who you gonna vote for?" I said, "Well, I hadn't heard anything about Truman, because all they talk about on the radio is Dewey, and it looks like he's got it tied up." He said, "You're not going about this the right way. What you want to do is listen to both sides and figure what he's gonna do for you." I said, "I haven't done that." So I listened, and he never did ask me again for a good while, and I said later, "Well, I'm gonna vote for Truman," and he said, "That's a good judgment." But we are not the type of people today that we were then. I'll tell you, it's daylight and dark. Older people then didn't like changes. Now, I like changes. I can see that and I don't mind



trying something different, but I think we didn't hear too much about our country then, but we may have loved our country more then than we do today. I think sometimes folks will take part of your heritage away.

Interviewer: I would have to agree with that.

Veteran: Of course we're still fighting the Civil War, and I don't understand that one, but I think if you would look real close, it's going to be over money, but I just don't know.

Interviewer: I've got one final question, and that's your opinion about the draft. Throughout the world there are several countries that mandate military service. It's not an option. Do you believe, or do you foresee, the United States having to use this in the future, and do you believe if they did go to this that it would be beneficial for the United States?

Veteran: Well, I feel like we don't have people qualified that are going to Iraq and Afghanistan, but I feel like they have had the opportunity to go. If they are not trained right, they're gonna get killed. I think, like in Vietnam, I never have felt like we had our best fire power over there. We lost too many men. We were over there long enough. If we'd have dropped enough bombs, you couldn't even find Hanoi today. It's a different war they're fighting today—house-to-house combat, you're gonna have high casualties. When we fought the war, quite a few of them had killed their whole family and themselves before we got there. Of course, Iwo Jima was rough. We lost about 6,000 Marines there, but they were trained to shoot it out with the enemy, and you can't do that house-to-house. I feel sorry for some of those people, but you cannot beat 'em unless you just annihilate them. It's sad knowing people can't get along with each other.

Interviewer: Mr. Wilcox, on behalf of the Lee College history department, I'd like to thank you for your time. On behalf of America and myself, I appreciate your service. It will not be forgotten.

Veteran: I don't think it will be forgotten. I took my family to Disney in San Diego. *Jaws* was out, and so we made a Universal tour. They were pulling this wheeled wagon across this bridge with a pond, and all of a sudden it stopped. We were

sittin' there, and I felt like there was going to be gimmick there, and over on the far bank—maybe fifty yards—I could see a flip in the water, you know. Of course, old Jaws came up right in my window. When I got off, I told our guide, “You know, I was interviewed for *Jaws* July 30, 1945, and I failed my screen test.” She says, “What?” I says, “I thought you was older than that.” She couldn't ever put it together. {Laughter}

Interviewer: Like I said, I do appreciate your time.

Veteran: Oh, I enjoyed it. I've been to history classes out at Sterling three or four years ago. I went to Louisiana two years ago, and it was the last day before school let out for Thanksgiving. There was a bunch of veterans there, and they gave each one of us a room. As the classes would break, the class would come to your room. We started that morning at eight o'clock and finished at four o'clock. Of course we had an hour off for lunch. Then I've been to Wichita Falls I don't know how many times. We'd go to maybe three schools a day. And, too, we'd go out to the Air Force, and they have a school out there. It would surprise you how much those little kids knew about that. They could even recognize bugle calls and things like that. See, the bugler lives at Weatherford now, and we have another guy that lives in Comanche, Texas, and we'll kind of go together. We were the guest last year at the Navy's 228<sup>th</sup> birthday in Fort Worth. Boy we got the red carpet treatment. We really had a nice time. They paid for the room and to get us up there. The Navy Reserve was from seven different states, and every state that touches Texas. Big, big deal. The monument at Thomas Circle has two shipmates off of the USS *Indianapolis* on it. One is named Baker and the other is named White. Believe it or not, their names are almost side by side. They're that close. Of course, they have kinfolks around here.

{TAPE STOPPED—END OF INTERVIEW}