

Jodie Wunneburger
US Navy: WWII and Korea
A Hero's Hero
May 18, 2011

Interviewer: Martha Herden
Videographer: Barney Cline

[Martha Herden reads poem]

So Many Soldiers
Living on the Street
Their Spirits Broken
With Defeat.

What Must They Think
When They Look Around
Eyes Passing By
Staring at the Ground

Does Anger Fill Them
When We Turn Away,
From the Debts We Owe
That Should Be Repaid ?

What If at That Moment,
Just Once, Instead
We Saluted in Honor,
Right Hand to Head?
To Let Them Know
They are Not Ghosts,
Thanking Them for Being Braver Than Most

If Everyone Would
Show Them Grace
We Just Might Find
Their Pain Erased.

For All the Heroes,
Still Fighting To Live
And For Heroes Like You
Who Continue to Give.

If You See Someone
Who Is Really Lost
Please Stop and Remember
What Our Freedom Cost.

Martha Herden [MH]: Good afternoon. We're sitting here today in the Blanco Pioneer Museum on May 18, 2011. It's about two o'clock in the afternoon, and it's a beautiful sunny day. If you notice that we're sitting in a sort of different part of the museum, we're in the military part of the museum; and today the Oral History Project will be conducting its first veteran's interview here at the museum. It is my honor to introduce Jodie Everett Wunneburger and his lovely wife, Nelda Gwendolyn Stubbs Wunneburger. And my name is Martha Herden, and I got the honor to sit here and talk to these two lovely people today.

MH: Jodie, when were you born, and where were you born?

Jodie Wunneburger [JW]: I was born November 18, 1923, in Bastrop County, Texas, and right close to the City of Paige.

MH: Paige—Did you live on a farm?

JW: Yes, I did.

MH: How big of a family did you come from?

JW: Big family—

MH: Well, how big is big?

JW: Ten of us—

MH: Ten—

JW: Five boys and five girls—

MH: Now that's a pretty good even number. How do you think that worked out?

JW: This is the way the Lord wanted it.

MH: The way the Lord wanted it. I kind of agree. Gwendolyn, I understand that's the name you like to go by, Gwendolyn? Where were you born at?

Gwendolyn Wunneburger [GW]: I was born in Dripping Springs in 1930.

MH: And how big of a family did you come from?

GW: Two brothers—

MH: Were you raised on a farm?

GW: Yes, farm and ranch—

MH: I think just about everybody in those days was raised on a farm and ranch.

GW: [nods] That's right.

MH: Jody, as you were growing up as a young boy, what did you do? What did you have fun doing? What was your average day like?

JW: We—'course like all kids—we played. 'Course, we didn't have toys and stuff like they do now. We played with—well we played marbles; and we went strolling in the woods, hunting, and—just a normal boy.

MH: What was an average work day like on the farm?

JW: From daylight to dark—

MH: Daylight to dark. Now when we say "daylight," are we talking about 9:00, 10:00; or are we talking six a.m.?

JW: Four to six a.m.

MH: Four to six a.m. What was one of the first things you needed to do when you got up as a job?

JW: Well, o' course, we had cows we had to go milk. That's one of the first things you had to do. And—well, then we'd get out our Ford motor. We'd go out to cotton patch and pick cotton. I wasn't very big, so I didn't pick a whole lot.

MH: Everybody I've talked to has said that picking cotton was just not a whole lot of fun.

JW: Just about it.

MH: Hurt your fingers?

JW: Back—[unintelligible]

MH: It hurt your back.

JW: Um-hm.

MH: But in those days, a family had to make a living, didn't they?

JW: Right.

MH: Jody, did you get to go to school?

JW: Yeah, I went through, through the sixth grade.

MH: And why did you stop?

JW: Well, I had work on the farm.

MH: Had to work on the farm.

JW: Yeah.

MH: Okay. What were your parents like?

JW: Well, just ol' hard-working people.

MH: What did your father instill in you that you think about working?

JW: Well, we knew we had to get out and work to make a living. And back there in the Depression, we all found people who raise pinto beans a lot in the field. So we'd go—they let us go and pick beans and stuff to eat.

MH: You know, it's been said people can live on pinto beans for quite a while.

JW: Yeah.

MH: It's not a bad meal.

JW: And corn bread—

MH: And corn bread—yes, sir.

JW: And we still eat 'em. [Laughs]

MH: Where did you go to school at?

JW: Well, the first one was the Mesquite School down in Paige—out of Paige. Then I went to Antioch not far out of Paige. Then I went to [Beau (?)]. Then we went to West Texas; and I went to school at Knott, Texas. That's between La Mesa and Big Spring.

MH: All right. And how did you find your way up toward the Blanco, Texas, area?

JW: Well—

MH: Your sweetheart—

JW: Yeah.

MH: Well, tell me about how you met.

JW: Well, I was going to work. I'd thawed out a chicken, and I had to go to work. So I—I knew the chicken was ruined, so I took it to took it up to the neighbors—we called her E. Nelsie—and—and I told her what happened, and I didn't want to ruin it, and I let her have it to cook. She said, "Well, I'll tell you what. I'm gonna invite a friend I know that I'd like you to meet." So she made me go in and meet Gwendy. So that's where it started.

MH: The rest of it is history.

JW: That's right.

MH: Do you have children?

JW: No.

MH: Okay.

JW: Three poodles—three poodles—

MH: Oh. Well, that's just as good. That's just as good. [JW laughs]

MH: What do you remember as to where you were at when you heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

JW: I was in the CCC.

MH: Can you explain that a little bit?

JW: Civilian Conservation Corps—

MH: And what were you doing?

JW: I was—we just working on farms, planted trees—everything for a farm. Roosevelt was starting all that.

MH: Gwendolyn, where were you at when you heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor that you can remember?

GW: I remember like it was yesterday.

MH: Okay.

GW: We was in Oak Hill at the Oak Hill School. And it was recess time, and we were out on the swings. And--they had three teachers in first grade—in the first room and then next in the middle room; that was where I was. My brother's in the first room, and I was in the next room, our oldest brother in the third room. The principal taught in there. And Mrs. Campbell was the lady's name, and she came walking out and said that-- "I

have something to tell you, children.” And o’ course, we all listened to see what it was. She said the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Well, we was just little bitty [gestures with hand to show small size] Where was Pearl Harbor and what was that?

MH: Right.

GW: Now that’s the attitude and our thoughts. We could care less, you know? We didn’t know. But I remember it like it was yesterday. Never will I forget.

MH: How did your families react to the news of Pearl Harbor being bombed?

JW: Well, I wasn’t—I wasn’t at home.

MH: You weren’t at home. Can you [gestures toward GW] have any memories of that?

GW: Oh yes, we—my folks began to get ready for the rations. You know, they rationed [unintelligible] and sugar and gasoline, and you had to have little booklets they’d send you. Mama’d fill out all your name and address, how many gallons per week you could use—all that. But the farmers and ranchers were lucky because they got more gasoline.

MH: Right.

GW: So we didn’t ever really suffer for lack o’ gasoline ‘cause we were bringing in food and stuff to sell and wool and mohair and wood and rocks and all that kind of stuff tryin’ to—mama and daddy tryin’ to make a living.

MH: Right. Now, Joe, had you already registered for the draft?

JW: Yes, I had.

MH: Okay. How long was that between the time that this all happened and you pretty well figured this was going to happen?

JW: Well, I was still in the CCC when I registered.

MH: Um-hm.

JW: They sent someone out. ‘Course I don’t remember that far back. They sent this person out and signed us up.

MH: Signed you up. Did you get your choice of which branch of the service you—

JW: I sure did. When I got out of the CCCs, I wanted to go in the navy, so I had my mother sign for me and everything. And I said, “Well, I just got out of the CCCs. I

wanna wait and let them draft me.” And--‘course they did. But it’s—it was pretty bad o’ course. We lived in Mason, Texas, at the time.

MH: And once you got that letter, how fast did you go into your training?

JW: Well, I actually I—when I was still in the CCC, they’d already started us marching.

MH: Was it a fair comment to say that the majority of young men knew this was where we were going to go?

JW: Oh, yeah. [nods] We knew it.

MH: No questioning just that was fact.

JW: That’s what we knew we was going anyway. ‘Cause I’d already started once to sign up.

MH: Joe, how did you feel about going to serve your country?

JW: I just thought it was my duty. I never—I never went and said I wouldn’t go. I just went over to Fort Sam Houston, and they—the day before that they’d taken everyone in the army. The day we were there, they gave us a choice. And then a marine come around and said, “I want you.” You know, one of these recruiters.

MH: Uh-huh.

JW: And a coast guard and a army. And I said, “I want the navy”—which I got.

MH: Now we have—we’re surrounded by a lot of uniforms in the room today. And could you point at what you think was pretty close to what your navy uniform might have looked like?

JW: Looked like that. [Gestures toward a uniform]

MH: That’s a handsome uniform.

JW: Uh-huh. I used to wear it—after I got out, I used to wear that [unintelligible] too.

MH: Really.

JW: Yeah.

MH: And the uniform you wore when you were on the boat, was it pretty much—

JW: --Dungarees —

MH: Dungarees, okay.

JW: Yeah. Yeah. And a blue, what do you call 'em, chambray shirt—

MH: How hard was basic training?

JW: It was, for me. I was a little small for my age, and it was pretty rough 'cause I had to do exercises. I had to build myself up so that I could swim in basic.

MH: Were you a good swimmer?

JW: I'd always swummed a little. In creeks and things—

MH: Right. And, if I'm not mistaken, you were at the age of seventeen when you went into the service. Is that correct?

JW: I's in the CCs.

MH: Okay. And then it was about—

JW: Eighteen months later—

M.H. Eighteen months later.

JW: Then I went in. I don't remember how many months it was. It wasn't very long. They grabbed me.

MH: So from basic training, where did you go from Fort Sam Houston?

JW: Well, we went from Fort Sam Houston up through Old Mexico into San Diego, and I went to boot camp there. And they started us out like all the boot camps are. And we done all this training, marching, and just about a little of everything.

MH: Learned how to shoot—

JW: Oh, yeah. Later on—

MH: Was it instilled in you that that gun, you needed to keep it clean? It was a very important weapon?

JW: Yeah, but I never did have to use it.

MH: You never had to use it.

JW: I did big guns on the ship.

MH: On the ship—uh-huh.

JW: I was a powder man. You get a big hand—bags of powder—and you give it to the guy that's loading the gun. And then—they already had the bullet itself in there. And

then they'd slide it in and fire it off and [unintelligible] on a five inch gun. Then when I was on the smaller boat—ship—we'd PC a patrol craft. I was eight months on the Solomon Islands on that Island of Bougainville. And we were in a boat through that—and—I decided that—well, we started out as pot washers.

MH: Now what is that?

JW: Washing pots and pans—

MH: Kitchen duty—

JW: Yeah. KP, we called it.

MH: KP, that's right.

JW: So, anyway, we—started out that. We got tired of that, so we—a couple other guys—we decided we wanted to be electricians. So we went to see, and they were glad to get us. And what we did then—we'd take—these—landing craft boats and run 'em up the beach and tie some of them up—swamp 'em. We'd take all the generators and starters and tear them all up, and then we'd take and boil them out in hot water. Then we'd take and clean the [unintelligible] up on them—clean 'em up good. And then they'd put some varnish on the wiring and everything to insulate it. Then they'd put 'em in the oven and bake 'em till they dried. So we [unintelligible] 'em.

MH: So nothing was wasted.

JW: Uh-huh.

MH: Everything was needed.

JW: At that time, yes.

MH: The primary area that you served in, I believe, was it the Pacific area?

JW: [Nods] South Pacific—

MH: Okay. So that would have been around the Philippine Islands?

JW: Philippines—like I said Guadalcanal, Bougainville.

MH: And there was a boat in particular that you were on, the USS *Crescent City*?

JW: *City*—yeah. APA 21—

MH: Well, I did a little homework on your boat. I called it your boat 'cause you were on it. I don't know how great of a picture this is.

JW: I got one.

MH: You have one. I'm going to show this to Barney [BC], and then we'll pull yours out. [shows picture to BC and camera] This is a very special boat, by the way.

JW: Yeah.

MH: This, the USS *Crescent*, is the only boat that's still not scrapped. It's still intact.

JW: That's right.

MH: From World War II—

JW: Uh-huh. They say that two or three times, it was set for scrap metal, but—

MH: Now, do you mind if I give you a little history about your boat?

JW: All right.

MH: And you tell me when I'm wrong.

JW: All right.

MH: Okay. Your boat, the USS *Crescent*, started in New Orleans; and it was named the *Delorleans*.

JW: It was huh?

MH: And during World War II, it was an average daily total of about thirteen people that could be found aboard the boat, the ship. And for the four years of World War II, the USS *Crescent* roughly carried 1,898,000 people during that period. The crew numbered about 500, had an average of 23 anti-aircraft guns. The length of the ship was 491 feet. The spread was 17 knots. The cargo capacity of the boat was 140,000 cubic feet. It carried about 2300 tons. How am I doing so far?

JW: Fine.

MH: This ship received ten Battle Stars and these awards during its World War II period: the Asiatic Pacific Theater Campaign Medal, the Philippine Liberation Campaign Medal, the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation, the World War II Victory Medal, the Navy Unit Commendation, the China Service Commendation, the Combat Service Commendation, the Navy Occupation Service, the American Campaign Commendation. The USS *Crescent City* is considered to have been a truly honored name in United States history. How do you feel about that?

JW: I knew it was pretty good.

MH: And why is that, Joe?

JW: Because it went all through the war without it gettin' scratched. And—we enjoyed our stay aboard it.

MH: Joe, I want to talk to you about when you would go into the islands; and I'm going to concentrate primarily, if you don't mind, on Leyte.

JW: Leyte.

MH: Leyte [an island in the Philippines]. Is that okay?

JW: Leyte. That's the way I pronounce—

MH: You're right. That's how someone else I know pronounced it. My understanding is that when your ship—it would carry the soldiers?

JW: Uh-huh.

MH: And the landing craft—[MH nods] The front would come down?

JW: Uh-huh.

MH: Out they would go?

JW: No.

MH: That's where you correct me.

JW: All right. Then the LSTs—

MH: LSTs—

JW: They're the ones that had the ramp down.

MH: Okay.

JW: And—now they have nets—they could go over the side—or gateways.

MH: Right. And my understanding is that when they went over the side on the nets that once the men got to the water that ammunition, things of that nature, was carried hand to hand. It's like a line was formed to carry stuff back and forth.

JW: No, they had nets. They'd set it down.

MH: They'd set it down like that. When this was happening, combat was going on, wasn't it?

JW: Oh, yeah.

MH: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

JW: Well, on Guadalcanal, we were—we were—stationed—anchored—and—there was another ship not too far from us. And they'd send—put those nets of shells and food and everything—

MH: Right.

JW: And set it in one of those—landing craft. And they'd run that to troops—send it to 'em where they could run it to the beach. They'd—unload the troops, and then they'd bring another with—supplies. They'd bring it, and then those people'd unload it. And then that ship—I mean that boat would go back to the ship and get another load.

MH: And this was primarily for the soldiers. They were the infantrymen that were going onto the ship.

JW: Yeah. And the personnel—the navy personnel which stayed there sometimes.

MH: Um-hm. What was it like to hear shells exploding all around you?

JW: Well, you got where it didn't bother you 'cause if you could hear em'—shells themselves—goin' over you. The ones you had to worry about is the ones you didn't hear.

MH: The ones you did not hear.

JW: Um-hm.

MH: And why is that?

JW: 'Cause that would've hit you.

MH: How did you learn the difference?

JW: I guess just experience.

MH: A question I hear asked of soldiers—here's one of my silly questions—did you pray every day?

JW: Well, the chaplain did that.

MH: Were there times you were scared more than others?

JW: Well, I don't guess—I was young—guess I really—one time I got really scared.

MH: What was that?

JW: I was on the ship and I was waiting on—landing craft to take me to shore. And I was sittin' there—didn't know what was gonna happen—and the waitin' gives you time to think.

MH: Gives you time to think.

JW: Uh-huh. And that was the only time I really, really got scared.

MH: What were you thinking?

JW: I was thinking. Well, I was thinking, What's going to happen? I'm here and I'm not doing anything. And so, we'd—go on, and then the next time. But we didn't have that trouble too much.

MH: The young men that were the soldiers going onto the beach, did you ever stop and think what they were getting ready to go through?

JW: Yes.

MH: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

JW: Well, it—course you'd—there's so many of 'em that—you didn't have time to think really because [laughs] you are—you're waitin' on what to do next.

MH: Um-hm.

JW: And you was pretty busy all the time. So, but, o' course, [unintelligible] crew—we had certain jobs to do. And some of them were run the landing craft. And I went to boot camp, and we—everybody had to learn—learn to operate one of those landing craft.

MH: Right.

JW: And oh, it was a rough go.

MH: Why was it a rough go, Joe?

JW: It just bein' a kid, I guess, not used to it.

MH: Right. And you feared for your life.

JW: Well, you know it really—you really didn't think about that. I never did.

MH: Um-hm. I've heard that when you are—this is something that is common that you've got to keep that thought out of your mind. To keep doing your job at hand—

JW: Oh, yeah.

MH: I'm gonna ask you a tough question.

JW: All right.

MH: I gather you saw a lot of young men pass away over there.

JW: Well, I'll tell you what, this was on a different ship, after I got off *Crescent City*.

MH: Uh-huh. What was the ship this was on then?

JW: It was PC 584.

MH: PC 584—

JW: [Nods] And—we was landing on Okinawa and—a ship, a destroyer--it went—they had mine sweepers go ahead and sweep those mines. And, well, this one destroyer, he had a bunch of—they had a bunch of top people on and it didn't wait—it went ahead of the mine sweeper, which it did. It hit a—it hit a mine, and it blew it half in two. Their powder magazine was in mid ship, and this was two stacks. And it blew halfway between those two stacks. And on one end, a guy was on the bow; and it threw him back on the stern and—he—I think he lived. But a bunch died still. And I was the ship's electrician, so they used flashlights for working on 'em 'cause they take 'em to the dyin' area, put 'em on tables, and that's where they operated on 'em—done what they had to do. And they was runnin' the light on batteries. So they sent me down to the electrician quarters to get some more batteries for flashlights. And as I was going and was coming back, I stepped on somebody—stepped right in his gut. And I just froze. I ran into somebody—his shipmate—said, "He's dead." That gives you a funny feeling 'cause you didn't know if he's dead or alive. So then I finally went on down with the batteries for the flashlights.

MH: But you kept going.

JW: Uh-huh. That's right—had to.

MH: Of the battles in the Pacific, what would you consider to have been the worst one--that you were around?

JW: Well, I think it was the first one I was on—was Bougainville.

MH: Bougainville, yes.

JW: We had a lot of scary things that went on over that. I went on a [unintelligible] and like I told you before, we took generators, starters, and everything, and cleaned 'em up. And one night, they put out black—that means the enemy's gonna land.

MH: Okay.

JW: We only had twenty-seven acres in the part we had the boat put.

MH: You only had twenty-seven acres?

JW: That's it.

MH: Wow!

JW: And so we got our guns and got in fox holes and waited. You could hear those shells coming over. They hit the mainland. They went over us.

MH: How long were you in that? You said you were in a fox hole, correct? [JW nods] How long were you there? How long do you think that was?

JW: Oh, maybe an hour—

MH: About an hour.

JW: 'Cause they—our ships' planes came in—sunk a bunch of 'em.

MH: I've heard the story that it was pretty important that you learned real quick to keep your head down.

JW: Yes.

MH: Way down—

JW: Yeah. You didn't look around too much.

MH: When you were out in the ocean, did you see some fierce storms?

JW: Well, we were just at the edge of a typhoon a couple of times.

MH: At the edge of a typhoon. What was that like?

JW: [Waves arm] Up and down—up and down—

MH: Uh-huh. I looked up a comment from another soldier who said that they thought it wasn't possible that the ship could roll any further over, but it did. But it still would come right back up and keep on going.

JW: --And I was, like I said, an electrician. And I—I had to climb up on the yard arms 'cause we had running lights up there.

MH: Now how high up was that?

JW: Oh, it wasn't too far. When the ship went over like this [gestures back and forth with arm], part time I'd be over the water here [points] part time, over here [gestures to opposite side].

MH: It's a silly question to ask you, Joe, but did you get seasick?

JW: Oh, yeah. That was when I first went aboard the USS *Crescent City*. I went out—and I was dumb, of course—I went out and I got seasick. [Laughs] And I didn't want to throw up on the deck, so I went and threw up over the side. And when I did, the wind was blowing, and it blew it right back in my face. [Smiles]

MH: Oh no, Joe.

JW: So you learn right quick then that you don't—

MH: So now do you get over the sea sickness pretty quickly?

JW: Oh, yeah--yeah. Then another time, I was—I was down below deck, and I was feeling bad, so had a restroom—now this was an old cruise ship.

MH: Cruise ship—uh-huh.

JW: And it had restrooms scattered around. So I went in that restroom, and I smelled where they'd thrown up. And it made me sick. [laughs] So anyway, you learned. You learned to take it.

MH: And I was gonna say, after a while you got over it.

JW: Oh yeah.

MH: And you never really had it again while you were out there on the ship?

JW: No, you learn to control it.

MH: How did you learn to control it?

JW: You just held your breath.

MH: I was gonna say would it be silly to say you kind of gutted it up?

JW: Yeah, something like that—

MH: Something like that. Okay. Joe, did you make friends with some of your navy personnel?

JW: Oh yeah.

MH: Can you tell us about some of them?

JW: Well--let me see. I went in with a guy from Austin, TX. We met in the chow line just before we shipped out. And he said he was from Austin, and I said I was from Bastrop. So he come and chiseled in line—we was in the chow line. He chiseled in in front of me. And we got to be—well, I'd met him before we left. But, anyway, we got to be pretty good friends. Gwendolyn even knew him.

MH: Do you remember his name?

JW: Gilbert Wallace.

MH: I'm sorry?

JW: Gilbert Wallace.

MH: Gilbert Wallace.

JW: Uh-huh. [Nods]

MH: My goodness, Joe, Gilbert Wallace.

JW: And I knew another guy from Mississippi.

MH: Yes, sir.

JW: Laurel, Mississippi—his name was G. D. Wellborn—didn't have a name, just initials.

MH: G. D. Wellborn—

JW: And we got to be good buddies. And when we got transferred from the *Santa Clara*, I mean the *Crescent City*, well—we both—he and I went to New Orleans, Louisiana. And this is something I shouldn't have done, but I did.

MH: What did you do?

JW: Well, I'd take off, and he mustered in for me; and he'd take off, and I muster him in. He went to Laurel, Mississippi. I went to Houston to see some of my kin folk. That's the worst thing I ever did.

MH: You think you're the only one that ever did that?

JW: No. [Laughs]

MH: I doubt—that is right. --How long do you think you served on the *Crescent City*?

JW: I think it was about eight months.

MH: About eight months—

JW: I think I went on in about May in 1943, and I think I served eight months. I tell you why we did that. We had heard stories—course you hear stories. But we were young—Gilbert and I and G. D. Wellborn—and they said--you had to serve so much time on one of the islands before you could get—come home. So we went and volunteered for the island duty, which was pretty nice. It rained a lot, and the island covered up with water, and sand crabs get in your fox holes. [laughs] That's where they was gonna try to invade us. But anyway—

MH: I heard a lot of people got malaria.

JW: Yes, but I didn't.

MH: You didn't.

JW: No.

MH: And how did your feet hold up?

JW: My feet were fine 'cause we were in a shop.

MH: Didn't have to get in the water that much.

JW: No.

MH: The other ships that you were on, about how long do you think you were on those?

JW: Well, I went from *Crescent City*—no Bougainville—I went from there to Guadalcanal for reassignment. That's when they assigned me on the PC. I was there about a couple three months.

MH: Uh-huh. And you were in World War II.

JW: Right.

MH: From beginning to end—you were there from the beginning to the end.

JW: No. I went in in '43.

MH: At '43—Came out in—

JW: In '45—

MH: In '45—okay. I'm gonna tell you a little bit more about the *Crescent*, and see what that picks up for you.

JW: All right.

MH: There's just so much about it. --As you said, it was considered to be a trip transport battle vessel. It served for numerous amphibious landings. And it was later used as an evac hospital. And I heard you talk about people being worked on there in a hospital setting on the boat. August 8, 1942, it was involved in the first landing of Guadalcanal; and in that one day, the USS *Crescent* destroyed four enemy bombers in one day. February of 1943, the ship was reclassified as an attack transport. Remember we talked about an APA 21.

JW: Yeah.

MH: July, September, and October of 1944, it landed troops in Guam, Palawan[?], and Leyte Islands. In 1945, it had the honor of bringing war weary soldiers home.

JW: Well, in between that while it was in Okinawa, it was used as a station for people to redo their—stay on it until they got their orders. And—and that's what it did while I was aboard it.

MH: Do you remember what the international radio call was for the *Crescent City*?

JW: No. I don't.

MH: It was November, Charlie, Delta, Oscar. With the initials N, C, D, O—each boat had a different international radio call.

JW: Uh-huh. But I—radio man would know about that.

MH: Okay. Now, Joe, when or how were the events that were happening to you when you realized it would be time to leave World War II—how'd that all end?

JW: Well, my time was up. I was—I was—when we left on April the 1, I mean, not April, July 1, 1945, I believe. And I got transferred back to the States. Well, I went—I went—first I was on a aircraft carrier, SS [unintelligible]--as commissioned crew. I stayed there about—I forget how long it was, but it was long enough. And they sent me to New Orleans—that was New Orleans, Louisiana. To the naval base there. And that's where, you know, Wellborn was [unintelligible]. And--we were—we were [unintelligible]; and we stayed on that for quite a while. And I had to stay over some more 'cause I was an electrician, and my rate had frozen so I had to wait until I had two more points.

MH: --Yes, the points were a big thing. I told you that I have a little bit of a surprise. And I think this is probably a pretty good time because we're going to be going into another part of your military service; but in my research, the *Crescent City* was used to take the infantry men to the islands, correct?

JW: Right.

MH: Okay. Do you remember me telling you that my father served in World War II?

JW: Yes.

MH: He was an infantryman.

JW: Yes.

MH: He was on your boat.

JW: Huh.

MH: When you just said the name, Gilbert Wallace, your friend? That was my father's boss.

JW: Huh.

GW: My goodness—

MH: Now what are the chances that we would meet and have that type of connection?

JW: I don't know. I don't even know if they were still alive. He left Austin and went up to Granite Shoal.

MH: Yes, sir. Yeah, I know all about him. You were doing something a while ago. You had your hands together, and you were doing this. [JW looks at MH hands] Weren't you?

JW: Uh-huh.

MH: Tell me about that.

JW: I don't know—just a habit.

MH: My father did it all the time. And I'd say, "Why are you doing that?" And he'd say, "Well, I'm going to go this way for a while, and then I'm going to go this way for a while." And I saw you doing that.

JW: I didn't even know it.

MH: And I was thinking about my daddy. But another girl here in Blanco that I'm good friends with—her father was also with the infantry. I talked to her last night, told her about you. And all I had to do was mention the name *Crescent City*, and she started hollering on the phone. And she said, "Please tell Joe that my father was also on his ship as an infantryman."

JW: Uh-huh. [nods] Yeah, we had lots of 'em.

MH: Small world, isn't it?

JW: Yes, it is.

MH: Joe, did you get letters from home while you were in the military?

JW: [Nods] Oh yes.

MH: From your parents?

JW: From my mother—course my dad didn't write too good. He shakes too. —My mother always wrote me, my grandmother. My father's mother was already passed away. But my mother's mother wrote me all the time. And--I had cousins that wrote me. I had quite a bit.

MH: How often would you get mail from home?

JW: Sposed to write 'em every week. So every time I'd write 'em, well, they'd send—now—I used to correspond with Gilbert Wallace's sister.

MH: Right. Is there something about your uniform and your family? Were they proud to see you in the uniform?

JW: Oh, yeah. Course when you just get out of the service, you don't wear it too much. And I never did wear it, so I told my mother go ahead and make a quilt out of it.

MH: Your mother made a quilt out of it.

JW: [Nods] Uh-huh. And I wish I would've kept it.

MH: I can understand that. How did you feel people treated you when you came home?

JW: I was treated real good.

MH: Did you see others that weren't?

JW: I knew about the Vietnam people.

MH: Okay, but not World War II—

JW: No, I don't think so.

MH: Why do you think that was that they were treated better from World War II than Vietnam?

JW: Well, I think what they felt like that—that wasn't any of our business being in that war. Think that was it.

MH: Joe, what's just one of your very best memories of being in the navy—one good memory you can come out with?

JW: Well, I remember when I signed up, and they sent me across Mexico for troop training. It was exciting then.

MH: Why?

JW: Well, you went through the mountains—over those mountains—and they had those railroad tracks on a real high deal [gestures to show height]. And o' course bein' a kid, I was afraid it was gonna turn [unintelligible] because everybody got on one side. [MH and JW laughs]

MH: Everybody would get to one side to keep the train from going over.

JW: No. That's what they're doin' is goin' on the wrong side.

MH: Oh, my gosh.

JW: [Laughs] I was young then, but I thought about that.

MH: What was one of your worst memories from the war?

JW: I guess that steppin' on that boy—I never did know—he was dead, so I never did know who it was. We took—our deck was covered with wounded and dead. And it was so dark. You couldn't have any lights, so you were tryin' to feel your way through bodies.

MH: And were there—it's fair to say that numerous soldiers were buried at sea?

JW: Oh, yeah.

MH: Can you tell us what that was like?

JW: Well, o' course everybody had to be dressed in their—I think we had to have our blues on. And—we'd all stand around where he's gonna be buried. And they had a board. And they had it on the ship's rail. And they'd have a sermon, you know a

service. And when it was time to go, they'd raise the back of that board up; and he just slid right out.

MH: Would this—is it something that would happen say once a week, every day?

JW: Oh, no, no. It was mostly from the destroyers we'd have to.

MH: Uh-huh. Why do you think that that one memory has stuck with you the most?

JW: Well, I'd never had that happen before. But I have found people dead since then. And it wasn't in the service. I found her mother. [gestures toward GW] And then a lady calls in California, and—they wanted me to go check on her ex-husband, who they hadn't heard from. So I did, and I went over there. And I went to the window of the person's house, and I hollered at him, and he answered me. So I didn't wanna go in the house by myself. So I got a neighbor—I knew him—and he and I went in together. We put him in the hospital. I don't remember how long he lasted, but he didn't last very long.

JW: He was one of those persons. He had his church things in the house in a corner. And he had a deal—had a little praying place in there. And he didn't live. He died right after that.

MH: --I've heard it said that the navy took boys and made 'em into men. [JW nods] How do you feel about that? Is that a good statement?

JW: It is.

MH: And why so?

JW: Because it made me one.

MH: You think so. [JW nods] How fast do you think it made you from a boy to a man?

JW: Not very long.

MH: And why is that?

JW: Because [laughs] you just—I just felt that—well it's all this action, you know. Course I guess I'm not very smart. It just took time like I told you. It's the only time I really got scared, but it's the waitin'.

MH: Uh-huh. Now, Joe, most men would've said, "Well, I think World War II was plenty." Would you agree with that?

JW: It wasn't for me.

MH: Now, you went to Korea.

JW: Yeah.

MH: Volunteered?

JW: Well, I was already in there.

MH: You were already in there. So you did get out of World War II, but you were not officially released from service.

JW: I was released.

MH: You were. [JW nods] And then they—were you drafted back in?

JW: No

MH: How'd that happen?

JW: Well—the [unintelligible] boy was goin' back in with me. And—he backed out. And I said, "Well, I already decided to go, and I was going on."

MH: How different do you think those two wars were?

JW: Well, it didn't have as many sneak attacks in Korea.

MH: Not as many sneak attacks in Korea. Okay.

JW: And—we went over from—from the United States to Japan. And we stationed there for six months.

MH: In Japan—what was that like?

JW: Well, we was on this ASR [auxiliary submarine rescue] submarine risk vessel, excuse me, and—USS *Sinclair*. And so we had a [unintelligible] for six months. We had to spend six months—in the meantime, I got a picture of a whale boat where we had—we had—this picture and—this submarine got grounded on a coral reef off of Japan. We was on a secret mission anyway.

MH: Secret mission—

JW: Uh-huh. Anyway, we was gone, and they radioed us the submarine was on the coral reef. And we had to go and get it off o' there. So they sent a line way out on that whale boat, and they hooked it on to it, and we pulled it off. He couldn't get off by himself.

MH: Really.

JW: [Nods] ASR was just like a big ol' tugboat.

MH: Like a tugboat—uh-huh.

JW: That's what we did. We had guard duty. We'd go around and patrol outside the water.

MH: What was your—what was the weather like in Korea?

JW: Well, it was—it really was so close to Japan. They really didn't have anything like they got now.

MH: Uh-huh. How do you mean?

JW: Like that thing that washed 'em all away—

MH: The tsunami—

JW: Yeah.

MH: Right. Didn't have any bad storms like that?

JW: No. [shakes his head]

MH: Lot o' rain?

JW: Well, pretty good rain—lot more than Bougainville.

MH: What was the worst thing you saw in Korea?

JW: Well, I didn't see too much 'cause we weren't right close—we were there; but we weren't in any war, I spose. They were on land.

MH: Can you tell me what freedom means to you?

JW: It means that I'm not—we're not got somebody over us. We can do what we want—we're sposed to be able to. And it means a lot to me. [nods]

MH: Well, Joe, it's because of you and a million more that have brought us that freedom. And when I first met you today, what did I do?

[They salute each other]

MH: We thank you, Joe.

JW: You're welcome.

MH: You are a treasure—a treasure—both of you.

Notes:

This interview was conducted and produced by the Oral History Committee of the Blanco County South Library District.

In spite of the best efforts of the Oral History Committee, some errors may be present in this transcription. Please refer to accompanying video for original source.

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