

Wally Elling Oral History

World War II in Carver County Oral History Project

May 17, 2000

Interviewer: Tom Garcia

Interview with Wally Elling

Interviewed by Tom Garcia

Interviewed on May 17, 2000

Tom Garcia
Wally Elling

TG
WE

TG: World War II Era in Carver County Oral History Project. The date is 5-17-2000 1:10 p.m. My name is Tom Garcia and my interviewee is Wally Elling. Wally, could you give us your full name, please?

WE: Wallace John Elling.

TG: When were you born, Wally?

WE: September 9, 1926.

TG: Where were you born?

WE: In Waconia.

TG: Did you grow up in Waconia?

WE: I grew up in Waconia, yes.

TG: You were living there in 1941?

WE: Yes, I was living there in 1941, '42, '43, and in '44 I went out to Detroit to join the navy, and I was on a list of enlistments that before I turned eighteen I came back to Minnesota and took a voluntary induction into the army, and then I met a marine sergeant, who turned around and got me to go into the navy, which I wanted to get into to begin with. So, I went into the navy. I went to Great Lakes Training Station in Chicago, and came home on a boot leave. I went to Camp Bradford, Virginia for LST training.

TG: LST is?

WE: Landing Ship Tank.

TG: The nickname for the LST . . .

WE: The nickname for the LST is Large Slow Target.

TG: You went to LST training at Camp . . . ?

WE: Bradford, out of Norfolk, Virginia.

TG: What was training like at the Great Lakes?

WE: Oh, fine. It was six weeks of training that they knocked down to four weeks—basic training, I mean. You had fire-fighting school, you had recognition school, you had different tests for what occupation that they would put you in for further education before you got shipped into a group. I had run the movie projectors at the theater before going into the service, while I was in high school. So when we got on the ship, I ran the projectors.

TG: How was that?

WE: It was an extra duty that a guy was supposed to get paid for, but they didn't pay.

TG: Was it a fun job, though, to run the movies?

WE: You had a room on the tank deck where you had to set up the screen, take it down, put the amplifiers out, set the projector up, get the film ready for the movie. They had one that had gone to school for it, and he wasn't very good, so they turned around and looked up in the records and found out that I did it. So that's what I got to do while we were on the ship along with being a helmsman on the LST. The helmsman is the one that steers the ship with the orders from the officer of the day that gave you the instructions to where you follow what compass point. Maybe I'm getting way ahead of myself, I don't really know.

TG: We can jump back and forth; it doesn't really matter. The questions don't have to go in order either. Who got to pick the movies?

WE: Usually the deck officer went along and picked them out, and I helped. We were only allowed so many movies. I guess the original one was six. When you're going from one point to the next point before you hit land again to where you could exchange them, those six movies got played over and over and over, unless somebody in the convoy was lucky enough to have different ones, to where you dropped your Higgins boat and went over and picked them up and exchanged while you were at sea. We weren't going very fast, and these Higgins boats could run circles around the LST.

TG: So it would just go from one boat to the next. Did you exchange other things sometimes besides movies, like a barter system? If you were low on supplies, you know somebody on another ship; let's see if he wants to give it to us.

WE: I tell you, I met my brother in Hawaii—he was in the Marine Corps—and then again in Guam, and then when we were going from Guam to Midway. The signalman came down and says, "There's somebody over on 537 that wanted to talk to you." The radio man made an exception to turn around and call that ship over, and here it was my brother. He wanted to

borrow ten dollars because the guys in the Marine Corps hadn't been paid for such a long time and they had a ship store where they could buy practically everything. And I never did get the ten dollars back.

TG: Let's go back to your Great Lakes training. That was six weeks in Chicago. Then you went to Camp Bradford.

WE: After coming home after boot leave, then I went from there right back down to Camp Bradford in Norfolk, Virginia.

TG: How long did they give you for boot leave?

WE: It was ten days.

TG: That's not very long.

WE: No.

TG: Do you remember the time you spent back in town here, and what that was like?

WE: There were classmates that I'd had that hadn't been in the service yet. Like I say, I was a year older than most of them, so they hadn't gone into the service. I had just turned eighteen. There were a couple of them that were very close friends; they passed on before I did. In fact, Leon Hucky and I had gone down when I came back from Detroit to join the navy or go for enlistment—in other words, register for the draft. We went down and had joined the marine corps, but we were on a waiting list, and this sergeant that I had seen that took us through our physical is the one that turned around and got me to go into the navy, because when I went through the induction of being a draftee, he was the one that turned around and said, "Do you want to go into the navy?" I said, "Certainly. That's what I wanted to get into." Leon Hucky, who we went down together, a week after I went into the navy he got called in and he went into the marine corps. We were friends and he's still living.

TG: Did you keep in touch with him?

WE: Oh, yes.

TG: While you were still in the service?

WE: No. Through my mother, and then his mother, to where not to worry. My mother wrote about where he was at or what he was doing. I mean, it was no locations where we were at. Just like mine, didn't know. Overseas address was just an APO number and that was it. [pause in tape] . . . and yesterday, too.

TG: Yes, that's what they said at the museum. Well, this is still running. That's weird. Were people pretty curious when you came back for your leave, the ten days? Wanted to know a lot about it?

WE: The teachers I'd had in school and that, they wished me luck and hoped everything turns out all right. Up until this time there was only two of them from Waconia that had been killed, and that was Vincent Uecker and Vojtisek. While I was home there was a friend of mine who was just a little bit older, Bobby Johnson, got killed. He was in basic training and he got killed on the rifle range. I don't know if he stood up when he wasn't supposed to or what, but anyhow. There was very few people from Waconia that were in the service that didn't come back in a body bag. They all made it on their own two feet, which was very fortunate.

TG: Did that make a pretty big impact when someone died, though?

WE: Well, I hadn't been in the service yet when we found out that Vincent Uecker, who was in the navy, had passed away. This Vojtisek, he was in combat. He was over in Germany where he got killed.

TG: I suppose word got around pretty fast when something like that happened.

WE: Oh, yeah. Small town—at that time there were about twelve or thirteen hundred people in Waconia. And nobody locked their doors. In fact, I still don't.

TG: A lot of people still don't.

WE: Then there was William Gringo. He was in the navy. He got killed, too.

TG: Did anyone try to talk you out of joining?

WE: No. My mother did, yeah. My brother went in before me. Well, he's fourteen months older than I am. He went into the marine corps.

TG: What was his name?

WE: Kenneth Jerome. As far as people I've met from town here, there was nine of them. It's a small world, in fact. Leon Yetzer I met in Massachusetts when we were waiting for our ship to be built. Milo Graff, who's dead now, he was in Newport News. That's right across the river from Norfolk, and I was just in Camp Bradford right out of Norfolk. Then Mike Dressen who I played football with in Waconia, who is now retired as the athletic director from Watertown High School, he went into the service just before I did. He was down at Great Lakes. Then I met him again down in Panama. When we were going through the [Panama] Canal, you had to sit and wait for all the ships to go through, and finally your turn to where you go through. That was two of them that I met while I was here. Like I say, I met my brother over in Hawaii, and then again in Guam. Arnie Stenglein . . . I think you took his oral history. I met his brother Emmett, who is dead, over in Guam. I met young Eddie Sicheneder in Guam. I met Bob Muck over in Guam who was in the Seabees. He was a warrant officer later on. And Desmond Muck, who was in the air force, I met over there. It was a small world as far as I was concerned. Every once in a while you'd see somebody from home, and you couldn't talk long enough.

TG: So did you know that all these persons were in the service yet?

WE: Oh, I knew they were in the service, but who knew where they were? And I'd run into them accidentally.

TG: That must have been a treat, I guess.

WE: While we were waiting to go through the [Panama] Canal. You couldn't go off the base, but you could go have a couple of beers which was practically green. You could go to a movie, and everything was free. So I'm sitting in the movie theater with a couple fellows from the ship, and somebody slaps me on the back of the head, and here it's Mike Dressen. We talked until three o'clock in the morning.

TG: I suppose.

WE: Old times about what we did, and who the girls were we went out with, and all this and that. Like long, lost brothers.

TG: Did that help with any homesickness?

WE: It gives you a morale lift to talk to somebody or even to see somebody even for a few minutes. Like this Milo Graff that I met in Newport News while I was at Camp Bradford, I found out through his dad, who had told my mother. My mother wrote and said he was over there, so I went over and saw him. He was in the army. He was a German translator for the German prisoners that were captured and put into the states here. He was also a barber, so he gave me free haircuts while I was there.

TG: That's pretty good.

WE: But then when we went to Boston to wait for our ship, which was being built—the crew was put together, but the ship hadn't been finished yet—I turned around and there was a warrant officer. While I was at Camp Bradford, for two sessions I took recognition school.

TG: What is that?

WE: That is distinguishing planes, whether they were American, British, French, or German or Russian or Italian. You had to know all of those. And I had the book here someplace. I tried looking for it, but where the wife put that stuff I don't know. It might have been thrown away by now.

TG: That would be an interesting book to take a look at.

WE: Oh, yes. The P-47, they called that a Thunderbolt. That was the army's main fighter. We had the P-38 in the navy, and the F4U Corsair. That was the gull-type wing. They still have a lot of those—I mean the old ones. When they come around with these air shows from Wisconsin, they have a lot of that. And the B-17s, B-19s.

TG: Were you able to use that recognition?

WE: Oh, yes. I have classes on the ship to the different ones. While I was in Boston there was a warrant officer there that was teaching the class. For two sessions I had recognition school. When they were flipping at a hundredth of a second, a thousandth of a second, you can't even blink that fast and it's gone. And on the tests, I'm getting 100 all the time. So he wanted he to stay there and teach his class so he could have it easier. But I says, "No, I was assigned to a ship." He tried talking me out of it. But as far as liberty towns, Boston was great. Norfolk, nah. It was too big of a navy town. So was Boston, but . . .

TG: What did you mean by liberty town? I'm not familiar with that.

WE: Liberty town on a tour, it's a good town to where when you get off the base and go into town and have a good time.

TG: The LST school and the recognition school, and I guess even your basic training, you said it was six weeks but it turned out to be four weeks—that's pretty intensive training.

WE: The LST training and the recognition school, that was not done at Great Lakes. That was not done in the four weeks.

TG: Right, in Virginia these two were.

WE: Both the LST training and the recognition school were in Norfolk in Camp Bradford. When we got to Boston, that's where we were sitting and waiting for our ship to be build, there I had brig duty. You'd turn around and take the prisoners down to the shipyards and had them pick up all the scraps and all that. They gave us liberty every other night, where you could go into town. They had a lot of people from the south that were up there building the ships. I shouldn't probably say this, but there were more times that we went out on a date and came back with more money than we went out with.

TG: No kidding.

WE: Because these people, mostly the girls, working in the ship yards and the different defense plants, they wanted to pay for everything. They would slip you the money, "Here, pay for this; pay for this." You go to a movie, they gave you the money for the movie.

TG: The girls did?

WE: Oh, sure. That's why I say it was a good liberty town, Boston.

TG: That's different. I've never heard of that.

WE: Never heard of that? Oh God, yeah.

TG: How did you meet girls?

WE: There were so many kids, I mean 17-, 18-, 19-, 20-, 21-, 22-year-old girls that came from the south, and making that kind of money that they did, they'd never seen that before. They wanted male companionship. So, "Hey, sailor, I'm going to have a house party. Want to come?" While I was in Boston, I turned around and met a fellow from . . . he was originally from Milwaukee. I don't know if I have a Midwestern accent or what, but it's different than the East Coast or the way out west. We went into this pub and he was the bartender. "A couple beers." Then he says, "You're from the Midwest, aren't you?" I says, "Yeah, Minnesota." He says, "Well, I'm from Milwaukee." Here he had married the owner's daughter and he inherited the pub. So all the time I was in Boston, I never paid for a beer.

TG: That's not bad. It's good to have connections. Let's go back to a couple questions that will be before you went into the service. You were in town in 1941. Were you at the theater then?

WE: No, at that time my folks had the boat landing down here where Moss has his marina. At that time it was called a boat landing. Now it's called a marina.

TG: Did they operate that, the landing and the marina?

WE: Yes. At that time, still back in '41, the island was going pretty well full blast where they used to turn around and serve chicken dinners over at the island. On a weekend, on a Sunday, they turned around and served up to fifteen hundred chicken dinners. The transportation at that time was still getting to the point where if you went twenty-five or thirty miles out of the cities, that was a trip.

TG: So then you would probably ferry people back and forth then.

WE: Yes. Well, I didn't. I was pretty young back in '41 because I first turned eighteen back in '44.

TG: So you must have been your first or second year of high school then?

WE: Yes.

TG: How and when did you become aware of what was going on in Europe and Asia?

WE: There were a lot of friends that were going into the service and getting drafted. My neighbor here, Tom Lahr—they call him Tom, but his name is Reuben Lahr; his wife was a school teacher at Southview Elementary.

TG: Would that be Grace?

WE: That would be Grace.

TG: I met Grace this summer.

WE: His older brother, Jerome, was drafted. I don't know what number it was, but he was one of the first ones that were drafted in Waconia. He's dead now, but he was a very good friend. This one leaves because he had to go into the service, and you're 15, 16, 17 years old, and most of the people that worked for my mom and dad at the boat landing were going into the service. The town started getting pretty thin as far as young guys were concerned. Like I say, there was a lot in Waconia that went into the service for the size town that it was.

TG: I guess for a person your age, and somebody else, maybe your older brother, maybe his friends leaving for the service, did that kind of make it desirable for you to want to join?

WE: My brother went into the marine corps not quite a year before I did. My uncle, my mother's sister's husband, was a captain in the army. He had ordnance down in Detroit. That's when I went down there to join the navy, because then you would be sent to Great Lakes. In Minneapolis, you usually got sent to Farragut, Idaho. I had a cousin that went into the navy—Jerome Lano from Chaska—that went to Farragut, and he being damp and all that he got a foot infection and he got discharged from the navy. Within a week later he was in the army.

TG: I believe that.

WE: I couldn't believe he could get a medical discharge from one branch of the service, and all of a sudden another branch of the service took you. He came back; he's fine. Like I say, there was very few from town here that actually got killed. We were all in that age group to where . . . most of them were a little bit older . . . Billy Gringo was about my age. Bobby Johnson was maybe a year or so before me, but they did make it.

TG: Do you remember the feelings you had of why you wanted to join the service?

WE: My brother liked it, according to what he wrote to my mother. And everything was fine. At that time you had a sense of patriotism that, hey, you were a slacker if you wanted to try to get out of it. It wasn't like the Vietnam War. I didn't believe in that at all. And I didn't believe in the Korean War. After World War II was over with, the United States shouldn't have gotten into any more conflicts. I don't believe in being like . . . Teddy Roosevelt says carry a big stick, but you don't have to go out and look for it; they're going to find you. At that time I don't think there was anybody that was trying to get out of the service. At least I didn't know of anybody.

TG: It kind of sounds to me like maybe patriotic-wise or maybe . . .

WE: A sense of patriotism. All your friends were going in that I knew, and hey, you wanted to go also. My mother just having the two boys, my brother and myself, she was sorry to see me leave and all this and that. Will Yetzer, he has Jerome; he has Stan; he has Leon; he had four brothers that were into the service, and he had been taking care of his family, his mother and sisters because their dad left them. I guess after having that big of a family he just couldn't live with his wife anymore. As far as being a hero without even seeing any action, I think Will Yetzer is one of the nicest people in Waconia. All those years he took care of his mother. Then while he got drafted, he turned around and hired somebody to run his business while he was in the service.

Fortunately, Mrs. Yetzer—Kate—had all her boys come home. Having all five boys in the service and all make it, that's quite an accomplishment.

TG: I would think so too.

WE: There were a couple of them in the coast guard, some in the army.

TG: That's fortunate. You mentioned that your mom did try to talk you out of it?

WE: No, she didn't like the idea of me going. She knew that my heart was set on joining. I tried to join the navy while I was seventeen yet. I was on a waiting list in Detroit. When I was going to be turning eighteen in a couple weeks, I was working at Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan, while I was in Detroit.

TG: While you were waiting.

WE: While I was waiting. My uncle, being in ordnance, he knew all the big shots in different plants down there that were on the war effort. He was telling me that the government had built this aircraft, Pratt-Whitney Engines, building them and testing them, that he could get me a job there. My application, being only seventeen at the time, he got me in there as an apprentice, but I was getting paid full wages and going to work with a white shirt and a tie, and sitting behind a board testing an airplane engine. I had an old sheet that I'd put the wrong number down and they sent it back. The government built the plant on his property because of the accessibility of all the material coming in on River Rouge, coming right into Detroit. They said it was costing too much money, so they turned it over to the Ford Company and they ran it, and that's who I was working for. When I came out of the service, I got a notification that I had a job waiting for me.

TG: That's nice.

WE: But it was in the crankshaft division and I didn't care too much for that. I didn't go back to Detroit. I stayed in Minnesota.

TG: How long were you at Detroit, then, between before your eighteenth birthday and . . .

WE: I think it was five months.

TG: What do you remember about December 7, 1941, of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

WE: Oh, man, the headlines were in the paper. At that time there was still the *Journal*, the *Star*, or the *Tribune*. They were all separate papers yet. There were three of them in Minneapolis that came out this way. The *Star*, which later became the *Star Journal*, came out on a Saturday night, with the comics and whatnot. The *Tribune* and the *Journal* came out on Sunday. A lot of people turned around and enlisted. I can't name all the names, but I know that right after . . . like Arnie was in the CCCs [Civilian Conservation Corps], and he joined the marine corps. His brother Emmett was in the Seabees. Like I say, I didn't know either one of them before, because they came from Mayer, which is just a small town west of Waconia here. I got to know Arnie after

when I was working at the creamery here in Waconia. That was years after I got out of the service. It boiled down to where I don't think anybody at that time . . . sure, a lot of them didn't want to be drafted because they had no choice. When you are drafted, you go where they send you. If you enlist, at least you have a chance to go into what you were doing before.

TG: How do you remember feeling when you saw those headlines in the paper? That's how you first found out, rather than radio?

WE: Oh, no. We were listening to where the British were taking a beating. The headlines for December 7, the next day Roosevelt got on the radio and he gave his famous speech.

TG: Do you remember listening to that?

WE: Oh, yes. Everybody was glued to the radio. There was no television around here at that time.

TG: You were listening to the radio up until that point, too, for news about what was happening?

WE: Oh, yes. That and the paper, but usually on the evening news where you heard the different war correspondents like . . . I can't think of his name offhand now. He gave the famous speech from London at the time London was being bombed by the Germans. When you get old, the mind goes.

TG: Do you remember the feelings that were brought up when you heard on the radio that Pearl Harbor was attacked or when you were listening to Roosevelt's speech?

WE: This is a farming community, and it's a German community, between German and Swedish out here toward Scandia. The southern part and the western part of Waconia you had the Swedish people talking better German than what the Germans did. Being a German community, there was a lot of them, like Louie Kuboch had property now where the elementary school and hospital and that . . . The west southern part of Waconia, the main part before you get down to Highway 5, was Louie Kuboch's farm. He was a very strong German. He had strong feelings to where the United States should not have gotten in a war against Germany. That was the fatherland. He had strong feelings for it. There was talk about shipping him back to Germany, and this and that, but when the United States got into the war after Pearl Harbor, his idea had changed a little bit as far as being he was an American.

TG: Personally, how did you feel when you heard those things over the radio, your immediate emotions?

WE: Like I say, my brother and I back in '41, we were still too young. He was fourteen months older than I was, so that he turned around and went into the marine corps a year before I did. I went in '44; he went in in '43. I got out in '46. I'm not quite in there quite two years. Uncle Sam sent me all over. I was out in the Atlantic on a shakedown cruise with the LST, and we came back and outfitted our LST after it was commissioned. We went through the [Panama] Canal

right over to Hawaii; from there over to Eniwetok; from there over to Marianas in Guam. It's through those travels that I met all the fellows that I was telling you about.

TG: The shakedown cruise is just to get ready for the real deal?

WE: The shakedown cruise is to find out if there's anything that's wrong with the ship. Then it would go in and they would repair it back in the shipyard. In fact, we had two torpedoes going; one coming out of Davidsville, Rhode Island, which was a submarine base. They were shooting out dummies, and we had to be going through that canal on Cape Cod. Instead of going all the way around the Cape, we went through this canal and ran into them. Then you're hitting Rhode Island. That ship went out and they weren't supposed to, but it went right underneath us. We had nothing on our ship; we were only drawing three or four feet of water, and those things are seven to ten feet down.

TG: What would have happened if that dummy would have hit the ship?

WE: Nothing, probably put a hole in us, but all your compartments are water tight. Up to I think it's five feet to where if we'd had no water in them yet. But you could put five feet of water to where you're going that much lower into the water level. When you're empty, as you're putting a load on, you pump that water out so that you're maintaining that much into the water.

TG: Let's go back to something you mentioned before that's pretty interesting. This was early in the war when the Japanese weren't involved. You mentioned the heavy German population in Carver County.

WE: In the Waconia area here. It was mostly German.

TG: Were there any anti-German feelings as the war was going on?

WE: A lot of people, like I say with this Louie Kubach, before the United States got into the war against Germany and Italy and Japan, being from Germany and speaking nothing but German at home . . . In fact, when I grew up I went to the Catholic school up here, and my mother turned around and got reprimanded by the teachers, or the nuns, many a time because they spoke German at home, and when I was asked a question in school and with my brother it was the same. The easiest language was German, and you would answer in German.

TG: So you knew German, or you probably still do.

WE: No, no, no. The nuns took us home—we lived right close by—and, "You speak English at home. This is an English-speaking school over there. It's not a German school."

TG: She was saying this to your family?

WE: She was saying this to my mother. The Sister brought us home and says, "They speak German at home, but you speak English to them so they can speak English over to an English-speaking school." Now they want you to speak a different language besides English.

TG: They certainly do. Was there any guilt that anybody felt, that you know of, if they were German?

WE: No, no. I don't think so. There were nobody that was heckled. Like the Peltzs out here, that's German. Louie Kubach was German. Wagner is German. The whole area was German, but hey, they didn't believe in what . . . You know, at that time, back in '41, nobody knew about what was going on over there, with the Jews being put into the oven and what have you. If we would have known, there would have been strong feelings of going in there a heck of a lot faster. I don't think that anybody was against, because like I say, the population was mostly German. There were strong feelings for the fatherland, as they called it, but they were still Americans to where they believed what the American was doing. After all, 15, 16, 17 years of age at that time, you didn't go up and ask, "You're German; what do you think about Hitler?" In fact, my son that lives over in Norwood, he didn't last year but the year before and the year before that, he's had German students stay at his house and go to school over at Central. When he took his vacation he went to Europe and visited those families. They are very good friends. This is twenty-five or thirty years later.

TG: Have you had a chance to listen to Roosevelt's speech since then?

WE: It's been on a couple times. In fact, I have a tape, "Victory at Sea," that I taped on Channel 2 I don't know how many years ago. In fact, I've got tapes in there to where I taped stuff . . . this one newscaster that's on with Ron Magers, on Channel 11, when she was with Don Shelby on Channel 4, so that's how many years ago—8, 9, 10, 11, 12 years ago?

TG: Does watching a program like that, especially like the speech when you have a defining moment where there is a lot of emotion involved, especially at the time that he gave it, does listening to that over again bring back some of those emotions?

WE: Oh, certainly.

TG: Can you tell me something about that?

WE: You feel a sense of patriotism by hearing it, saying, "Hey, let's go over there and get this thing over with." Going into war, if you've declared war . . . I think the timing on the Japanese, they wanted to but they didn't. They would have gave you, say . . . "We're going to go to war," and then go and bomb Pearl Harbor. I was not in the service at that time, but Arnie was, and he was in Hawaii when the bombing took place. But there are a lot of questions that they brought up on different discussions about . . . They couldn't get through to Hawaii because of the bombing and what have you. Or before the bombing took place that the Japanese actually turned back, didn't go in there for a second chance because they seen a flotilla of B-17s that were coming. They had no armament whatsoever. They were coming over empty. The first thing the Japanese did in Pearl Harbor was bomb all the airfields. The *New Jersey* was going out, and they bombed that. They beached the *New Jersey* so that they could keep that channel open. Otherwise, everything that was stuck in there couldn't get out. I don't know how long it took to get the *New Jersey* patched up to where they put it back into commission. Then, what was it . . . Two aircraft

carriers that were out at sea that weren't at Pearl Harbor, because that's what the Japanese wanted was the aircraft carriers. When that speech was given, the flow of patriotism flew, I think, through everybody. It was, "Hey, let's go and get it over with. We'll teach them," which they did. In fact, I worked with a fellow that was on Guadalcanal, and they had to throw lime over him. Bulldozers dug a hole and just put the Japanese in there, and turned around and threw lime on them because of the smell and covered them up. When I was in Guam back in early '45, there were still snipers up in caves up in the hills. Every once in a while you'd hear the bullet. At that distance, by the time that bullet got to you, it would probably hit you and fall away. But you'd hear the sound.

TG: We were just talking about your emotions when you went in. Those must have changed a little bit or been modified once you were in the service, once you were there.

WE: After you're in, you're "Why did I do this?" You're on a ship, you're out in the Pacific, and the only way you're going to go is if you drop down two miles and start walking. [end of side 1]

TG: I should probably tell you. I was in the military, too. I'm still in the Reserves, so some of these questions are very interesting to me because I can kind of relate to them a little bit, even though it's the Reserves and I joined a couple years ago.

WE: I have a grandson now. He's going to Drake University down in Iowa, and he was on a full scholarship and he got talked into joining the navy. So right now the navy is paying him \$2,000 a month while he's in school, and paying for his school. But then after he gets out of school, then the navy's got him for five years.

TG: Right, he has that obligation. There's always give and take.

WE: He'll either serve his time on an atomic submarine or atomic aircraft carrier. He already was told that. He's taking physics.

TG: I'd probably go for the aircraft carrier myself. I don't know . . . submarines probably wouldn't be the best place for me. I'd want to get out of there.

WE: Do you want to stop that [the recorder] for a second?

TG: Wally, we talked about what you did after you were trained for LST and recognition school at Camp Bradford in Norfolk. You went to Boston. Then you had that shakeup cruise in Chesapeake Bay, went through the Panama Canal to Guam, to the Marianas, then to Eniwetok, and then the Philippines.

WE: When we left the Hawaiian Islands, then to Eniwetok, then over to the Marianas, then Guam, and then up to Midway. In Midway we turned around and went over to the Philippines. We were scheduled to be the second wave to take the troops in that we had on the LST to go into Tokyo Bay when they dropped the bomb. We found out that was the second bomb before Japan actually surrendered. Like I told the students here the other year out at the high school, I was one of the very fortunate ones because who knows what going in on the beach, because the Japanese

did not want to surrender, but they did obey their emperor. They were very devoted people, and we went into Tokyo and took supplies up into northern Japan. I forget the name of the city, but we went ashore. We had to put on a sidearm, a 45, and go in groups, and we got stared down as though . . . If looks could kill, we would have been dead. They were very, very leery. They didn't want to believe that the war was over.

TG: Was that a scary feeling?

WE: Oh, you're damn right it was scary. The hair on the back of your neck stood out.

TG: I can believe that.

WE: But going from Guam, that's when I saw my brother in Guam, and he was in the same convoy, and he got dropped off in Okinawa. That's where they had that typhoon. We got the weather report, and we had to head out to open sea, the whole convoy. The hospital ship *Repose* was in the eye of it, and they rode the thing out until it died down once it hit land. That's when it did; it hit Okinawa and died down. Typhoons over there; hurricanes in the Atlantic.

TG: So you had to ride out the storm partially?

WE: Oh, yes. We had an LST in the convoy that broke in half.

TG: How was that, riding out a large storm like that?

WE: Hey, you're here and you're down here. You don't see nothing but a wall of water. And you'd come up again and all of a sudden you could see for miles. I mean, you are going up and down. That's the way it was when we came back on the *Breckinridge*. That was coming back from the Philippines. We took the northern route and we saw the Aleutian Islands, the lights in the evening, and the swells up and down. The Atlantic is more choppy. The Pacific is more of a calm; you look out and you see nothing but water, you look up and you can see for miles and miles away. That's the difference.

TG: How big were those swells that you were talking about?

WE: Oh, twenty or thirty feet high.

TG: Now you talked about you were the projectionist, I guess, throughout the trips.

WE: On the LST.

TG: And you were also the helmsman?

WE: Until I went into the engineering division. They had openings, and you could sign up. If you qualify, you turn around and go down there. I was one of them that was operating the diesel engines that produced electricity, the generators.

TG: Did you receive that training while you were already away from LST training back in Boston?

WE: Seeing that you were mechanically inclined, you turned around and . . . like the LST is like this. You have two main engines. Here are three small auxiliary engines. Here for starting you have a line of batteries that you charge up and keep charged so that you can start one of these up. One is always running. They are all diesel, GM—Gray Marine. The first ship it was on was *Superior*. But you have your own hatchways to get in and out the topside, because you are close to the bottom. The only thing you have underneath you is some void spaces, what they call the bilges. That's where all the leakage and everything else from these things drops down. If you had someone who has extra duty that did something wrong, they were the ones who had to go down and clean it up. I never had to do that, but I had to chip paint in the galley way. We had an acting bosun. He was first class. We didn't have the full chief. He was making a lace tablecloth out of sail twine with square knots. I got fascinated on that and though, Geez, that would be nice to do. To get started he gave me a spool of sail thread. I didn't know he had stolen it, but he gave it to me. We had a locker inspection as we were going, and they find that thing in my locker. I had ten hours extra duty captain's mast.

TG: Captain's mast?

WE: That's the lowest of them—you can have a court-martial or a captain's mast. A schoolteacher we had as a captain was a school superintendent. Hey, if they find something in your locker, you're guilty. There's no explanation of how you got it or who gave it to you. So you take the ten hours and you're chipping paint. Up to that point I was running the movies. I was supposed to get a dollar a movie, so that's seven dollars a week, thirty or thirty-one dollars a month extra because I was sending most of my money home to my mother. I said, "Well, that's easy enough," because I had a couple of guy that had captain's mast helping me set up the equipment—put up the screen, put the amplifiers out, put the projector out.

TG: Part of their punishment.

WE: That was their punishment. That was an hour and a half or two hours. Well, then they would sit and watch the movie and then they put the stuff away, so they got about three hours of credit for a two-hour movie. But I couldn't do that. I had to go up in the galley way and chip paint.

TG: Doesn't sound like too much fun.

WE: And that was teeing me off more or less, so when they came and now I can run the movies, I said, "No, I'm not running them anymore." Well, then they got had the fellow that had gone to school for to do it, and he was all thumbs. You only had one projector. You didn't have two of them to where you could slide over to this one and start that one. Like now, they only have the one projector, but they've got the whole film on one big reel. At that time, they came in twenty-minute cans. They finally says, "Why don't you?" I says, "One reason was I had to chip paint where these other guys were working off their extra duty sitting there and watching a movie for an hour and a half, then helping put the stuff away, and they get three hours of credit." I says,

"Besides, they were supposed to be paying me a dollar a movie and they never paid me anything." That was to come out of the profit of the ship stores. There was a laundry man that got paid. We didn't do any laundry. We just took it to him, he dumped it because everything had your name on it and you had your own little ties to where they tied the stuff up on your clothesline, and you'd just go there and look for it and you'd take your stuff down. You didn't take anybody else's because everybody had their name where it was visible. If your name was Olson and my name was Elling, I'm not going to walk around with pants with "Olson" on it. Anyhow, I says, "That's another reason." "You mean you're not getting paid?" The guy that operated the ship stores and the guy that was running the laundry got paid. This was every night for two and a half to three hours running the movie. That was the only entertainment besides playing cards and that, and when you run out of money you don't play cards any more. It boiled down to where they took up a collection when we got a payday. Then I got called up, because I sent the money home. They collected \$70. Not everybody gave, and I didn't want to take it. I says, "No, it was supposed to come out of ship's stores"—the profit. The guy that gave it to me was a big fellow from Texas, and he had a drawl and says, "Boy, if you take that out of your pocket once more and put it on the table, I'm going to knock you right across the room." And that's what I told the captain. He says, "You accepted money from the crew for doing something?" I says, "Yeah. I was promised by Mr. Alexander that I was going to get paid a dollar a movie. I thought, Geez, that's an extra thirty bucks a month at least that I could send home to my mother." How he found out about it, I took the seventy dollars and went up and had a money order to send it home. That's how he found out about it, because everything was censored. You might write a letter, and this is cut out, and this is cut out, so the letter my mother got didn't make a heck of a lot of sense, so you got to the point where you didn't write stuff. The one's coming in, they weren't censored. He found out that I had made a money order for seventy dollars and he was going to give me extra duty for that. I says, "I didn't want to take it out of my pocket the second or the third time, because he said he'd knock me across the room." His nickname was Blackie. I don't know what his real name was, but I know he was from Texas and he had a drawl that was just like Alexander. He was a chief gunner's mate before the war, but during the war he was offered a commission. He says, "I, like a damn fool, took it!" Anyhow, it boiled down to where I didn't get anything out of it, but I did run the movies after that. But I didn't get anything for it. The only thing I ever got for all the time I was on the ship was that seventy dollars that they collected. But, like I told them out at school here the other year, I was one of the fortunate ones, and I know it. Like my brother got caught when that typhoon hit, he lost everything. He was in one of the caves. The tents they had set up and all the equipment, that was blown away.

TG: So during the typhoon you were down in the engine room, the motor machinists mate?

WE: Motor machinists – MOMM, third class. If I would have stayed in longer I probably would be a chief by now and maybe even retired.

TG: What were the people on your ship like? You already told me about the big guy from Texas. What were some of the others like that you remember?

WE: There was a Charles Vasselnick. He was from Philadelphia. There is an eastern brogue, but more or less like a gangster. He says, "When I get out of the service, you know what I'm going to

have? The first thing I'm going to do is get myself a car that's going to have to have an engine in the center so that it can make the corners." He was a nice fellow. He was in the engine room, too. There was another one from Alabama. We called him Whitey. I don't remember his name anymore. He was in the group where when we went someplace he was tagging along. I was in touch with Charles Vasselnick for quite a few years after I got out of the service. He finally went to work as a postman in Flint, Michigan. Then I heard that he had died, so correspondence stopped.

TG: Were the guys that you were working the most with or buddy-buddies with, were they a lot different from the guys you had grown up with in Waconia?

WE: Oh, yeah. This fellow in Boston said, "You're from the Midwest, aren't you?" I told him, "Yeah, Minnesota." He was born and raised in Milwaukee. Milwaukeeans talk just a little bit different from the Minnesotans, you know. You can tell the dialect from each part of the country. When you go down south and . . . you know, the colored ones, practically every question . . . and my oldest son was teaching English . . . He went to Mankato and taught down at St. Peter . . . While he was a senior he was student teaching in different schools and what have you; then he was a professor's assistant where he was doing a class, and he had a grade . . . Well, you probably went through that.

TG: A little bit.

WE: He turned around and this very smart Negro, a girl this colored boy was dating, she had a very good mark, they studied together, and he got an "F," and he wanted to know why.

TG: That he got an "F"?

WE: He got an "F." "Take it over. The professor will do it, and probably give you a "D" or "D-", but when you are giving a speech or when you are talking, you don't say 'you know' after every question or every answer." He was so and so, you know. He was this, you know. No, I don't know. You have to tell me.

TG: How about the way your friends acted—differently than the people you were growing up with?

WE: Oh, yes. They had their own quirks, just like they thought some of the things I did were out of this world.

TG: Did you expect that going into the military?

WE: No, you thought, hey, United States, everybody is the same. But they're not. Even where my son lives out in Wyoming now in Lander, people out there have a different dialect. I go out there, and even the shorties like this were wearing a big cowboy hat and you come out there with a baseball cap or whatnot. He's from out of state; he's from out of state.

TG: Were there many colored people on the boat?

WE: No, we had two at that time. They didn't fight; they were stewards.

TG: What does that mean, if you are a steward?

WE: They were bus boys to the officers. They had no duties on the ship except to bring them their meals, take their dirty trays away, make their beds or bunks—whatever you want to call them. At that time, the navy was well segregated to where blacks were blacks. In the army they fought, they would have you. But in the navy, no. We had two colored boys on our ship.

TG: Did you have any interaction with them?

WE: Oh, yes. One was Melvin and Wayne or Duane, I forget which. They played the music on the ship. Have you ever heard this one song put out by Louie Prima, "Caledonia, Caledonia, what makes your big head so hard?" They would be playing that. Our deck officer, Mr. Alexander, went in and said, "That's enough of that." And he took the record and bust it in half. At that time that stuff was brittle as all heck. Those weren't the 33s and what have you. These were the short playing—I have some yet upstairs. They're collector's items now.

TG: I'm sure they would be. We have a few at the museum actually.

WE: They played that song. And they were little guys. Hell, they were shorter than me, and I'm only . . . When I went into the service I was 5'9½", but through the age all the bones got closer together and there's no cartilage in between—that's why I have a bad back and a dead knee. They got by with murder. The officers . . . "You take care of me; I'll take care of you." You're being served, your dirty dishes, your bunk is being made, your laundry is taken away. The officers had nothing like that. That's like my nephew was saying. He asked me, "Grandpa, how was the navy?" because he was thinking about joining at that time. I says, "Well, Derek, the navy now and what it was when I was in, that was during the war." There's a lot of them I came back with that were going out and they got put under some old navy personnel because the Reserves were going out, and they didn't go to the strict discipline that the old regulars had and that they grew up with. I had one chief in there that had seventeen years. He had three years to go for a twenty-year retirement. He left. He was on the *Breckinridge* coming back with us.

TG: Why did he leave?

WE: He couldn't take it.

TG: Because of . . .

WE: I don't know, personal reasons or what. That's just like my officer on that [LST]-1071, the first ship that I was on that we commissioned, my captain was a school principal.

TG: That's right; you mentioned that.

WE: He had three kids from his school in Orange, New Jersey that he had on our ship. When it came up, he went on there with two stripes—the seaman deuce. Apprentice seaman is one stripe—that's what you leave the Great Lakes with. After you leave Great Lakes, after you've had your training, they give you the second stripe because all it is is more or less a boost in pay. At that time it was maybe fifty dollars a month. No, it wasn't. It was twenty-seven dollars a month starting out, but it went up to fifty.

TG: That was pretty significant.

WE: Yeah. Now, you talk about your grandson getting two thousand dollars a month while he's in school for spending money, plus his education to be paid for.

TG: That's quite a bit different.

WE: Oh, tell me about it. But anyhow, it's his preference, either aircraft carrier or submarine.

TG: This is your grandson we're talking about?

WE: This is my grandson, yes. He prefers to go into the submarines. I have a list someplace of all the people that died on submarines. It's nothing compared to one big battle. And this is going from Civil War all the way through the present time. Some of them were when the nuclear submarine was lost in the Atlantic. Another one was hit by its own torpedo. Magnetically it came back to them.

TG: That's too bad.

WE: My son says, "Dad, don't show that to Pam." That's his wife. "She'll never let him go on a submarine."

TG: Back to the ship. I'm curious. Before you were on the ship, did you know any other black persons besides those two that were on your ship? Was that something that you knew was going to happen?

WE: No. Hey, there were blacks in the army. There were blacks in the air force and that. The ones in the air force couldn't fight in combat until they got a thing from Congress saying they are a fighting unit that should be allowed. It was a complete black unit in the air force. There was no mixed. But in the army, that was mixed. You had army personnel both white and black and yellow and what have you. But in the navy, they took them in the navy, but they were acting stewards, that's all they did.

TG: Tell me a little bit about, as a machinist's mate, what was a typical day like for you?

WE: You go stand watch—four hours on, four hours off. You took an eight-hour shift. You had two men on the watch; one did all the logging and checking the meters, and the other person was actually running and working on a piece of equipment that might be down to get it back into operation. That was four hours he was doing that, and the other four hours he was sitting there

doing the logging and what have you. It boiled down to where, even when I was a seaman, I was on the helm, and you have what they call the enunciators. They called "Full speed ahead," "Full back," "Full stop," and what have you. They'd run those things, and that shows up down in the engine room, and they correspond with a signal back that they got it. Like, if it was full speed ahead, all of a sudden the enunciator handles would move to full speed ahead to where you knew that they were going. You had four hours of steering the ship and you're looking at the gyroscope and you're going that heading, and then at a certain time they call down, "Change heading to [so and so]." Well, okay, you would do it. It would end up the whole convoy was going like this and like this, zig zagging for submarines and what have you, so they wouldn't be followed. A fellow that was supposed to stand four hours of the helm was, "I'm sick, I'm sick." And he'd be laying in there [moaning]. We had a radio man that was the same way. He could not take any rolling.

TG: Oh, seasick.

WE: On these LSTs, they pitched and rolled all the time. It's just like if you're out on the lake and a speedboat goes by and you're in a small boat and you're going . . . So I stood like eight hours of watch.

TG: And that would be, the ship is obviously running the whole twenty-four hours a day, so you're not waking up at a certain time in the morning, and you might have . . .

WE: See, you had eight hours of your personal time where you slept or what have you. And you had your lunches, your breakfast, dinner, and supper. When breakfast came around, the guy that was on the helm could go down and have breakfast and be back within a half hour so he could take over so the other guy. You're always sitting in their with the quarter-master who's doing the charting and what have you. In the back you had the radio man. It was like a small cupola. Here's your helm, here's the desk where the quarter-master sat, back here was officer's area where they charted out, and back in here was the radio man. This radio man that we had, that poor guy, on the watch that I was on, he would get the dry heaves when it got rough, you know. He got seasick as all heck.

TG: He must have been in pretty bad shape.

WE: And all we'd do was make a kick out of it. "Radio man!" And he didn't know where it was coming from because he had these pipes going to different compartments. You might have . . . here's the con, here's the radio man, here's officers whatcha-ma-call-it, so whoever you wanted to call, you just open that and . . .

TG: Instead of a radio like today it would be . . .

WE: "Radio man." He didn't know if it was coming from the con to take a message or send a message, and all he would do was go, "Ohhhhhh." [moaning] Then he'd run back there quick and he'd have a bucket and he'd try to heave. We were mean. Not everybody.

TG: Did you guys play some practical jokes every once in a while?

WE: Oh, yes. You had to in order to stay alive.

TG: To pass the boredom and whatnot?

WE: When you're stuck with a hundred-some guys for thirteen, fourteen, fifteen months, and it's two month or three months before you even hit land, tempers would flare once in a while. There was no fighting, it was just like, "The hell with you," and what have you, back and forth. It was natural. I think the roughest time my wife put up with was when I retired.

TG: Okay.

WE: "Go out and do something!"

TG: How important were letters to you then?

WE: Oh, mail call. Guys were aching and what have you, and when they didn't get anything it was very disappointing. I'd always have at least ten or twelve letters from my mother and the girlfriend that I had—with perfume. Even after all that time of being shipped; it might be a month or two months before you'd get the mail. She put it on too thick. In fact, she's not the one that I married.

TG: We'll have to get to that in just a bit here. I'm going to keep asking questions. Any particular stories that you remember that stand out from those trips? I know you shared the radio man story with me and other ones.

WE: Well, the time my brother calls me over and wants to borrow ten dollars, and this is on the way to where they dropped the Higgins boat in a convoy. I run over there and the first thing, "Got any money?"

TG: Never did get that money back, either. How about the liberty towns where you were in port there at some of those places?

WE: I was in Shanghai, that was nice. We toured the city. There the money was the yen. Like over in Japan, you didn't know what the hell the stuff was worth. We were riding around on a rickshaw for an hour and a half or two hours, and we gave the guy what we had. And oh, he got madder than hell that we didn't give him enough, and all this and that. We didn't smoke that much, but everybody was buying cigarettes out of ship stores, emptying the things. You'd sell them ashore. You paid fifty cents a pack—ten cents a piece or whatever. Ten of them in a pack . . . five cents a pack or whatever is what we paid for them. And we were selling them for twenty bucks!

TG: Wow. That's quite a profit there.

WE: This last ship I was on, the [LST]-1027, it was a corpsmen ship that would go ashore and pick up the wounded. They had nothing but doctors and corpsmen aboard. They had a lot of surprises when we got in. The doctors left and went home and what have you, and the corpsmen

got transferred all over the place. I was transferred from the [LST]-1071 to the [LST]-1027. They had a lot of ship stores. They had pills for gonorrhea and syphilis. When we hit Shanghai, "Hey, shall we get rid of this stuff? We're not going to use it." "Go ahead." The officer while we were on there, he was a better Joe. He wasn't like the schoolteacher. In fact, I can tell you an incident about that schoolteacher. I don't know if maybe that one I shouldn't. You should delete for twenty years because by that time he'll be dead and so will I. He had his fire axe thrown at him.

TG: Really? By another . . .

WE: This was coming on to Christmas. The ship's cooks could not throw anything away.

TG: Foodwise.

WE: Yes, foodwise. If there was ten cups of corn left, two pounds of peas or green beans or what have you, that was all creamed with hamburger and it was called Corn Willies. It's not Shit-on-a-Shingle, which is a creamed hamburger put on a piece of toast. This is what they served at a Christmas dinner. This was after the bomb had dropped. As far as we were concerned, it was peace time—everybody surrendered. He had ordered that. A chief gunner's mate was transferred onto that ship before I was transferred off of it. He said, "What slop is this?" "It's what the captain ordered. Clean out the refrigerators, put extra corn in, and that's his meal. He has Corn Willies. He says they served that in school and he was the superintendent." He says, "If that's the case, give me another tray of it." So he took the two trays, one on top of the other, and went into the captain and said, "Sir, did you order this?" "Yes, I ordered it. Why?" He says, "Do you not know navy regulations that any holiday is supposed to be served the meal of the day? Easter is supposed to be a ham; at Christmastime it's supposed to be a turkey or a ham; on New Year's it's supposed to be a ham. Do you not know that?" He says, "So if I do, what's the difference? I ordered that meal, and that's it." He said, "Well, sir, if that's the case, you can have both of these." He said, "I can put you up for captain's mast for disrespect." "No, sir, I did not disrespect you. I said 'Sir' every time. But if you want to put me up for captain's mast, that's your prerogative. But I tell you what, you can do it better than that. I would like this to come out in the open." By that he went out into the galley way, got the fire axe, broke the glass, took the fire axe and he threw it at him. I mean he wasn't aiming to hit him, but he threw it at him. He says, "Now, you can put me up for a court-martial, but when the court-martial comes around, you will find out why this was thrown at you (or towards you)." The next day, the old man flew home. He didn't take his ship back because he had a lot of stuff that he was . . . I mean, hey, when they get back it's going to be decommission, all the stuff that's there is going to be taken off. A good set of binoculars—kripe, you can see twenty or thirty miles in the ocean.

TG: Wow. That was pretty bold. So nothing ever came of that?

WE: No.

TG: That's a good one. He probably deserved part of that, I'd say. He was not really making everybody happy with that whole deal.

WE: I shouldn't have said it. He was older than I am; he's probably dead by now. But in a few years I'll be dead, too, so it won't make any difference.

TG: What do you think the most difficult part of your service was?

WE: Not being able to come home when you wanted to. I had my boot leave, and just before we got our ship in Boston, the scuttlebutt was that it was going to be another week before the ship was done, and then we'd be shipping out. He says, "The way it looks, we will be going into the Pacific." I tried to get home, and there wasn't enough money for the tickets and what have you, so I went and asked the Red Cross for some money alone. Impossible—they can't do it. Well, I can understand their point. I says, "I'll bring the money back. Just a loan for five or six days." But no. Then the money order came through from my mother, so I did get to go buy the tickets and I got to go home before I left. That was just for five days—two days traveling, two days traveling, I was home for a day and a half or two days and then gone. And then my mother cried. I said, "Mom, everything's going to be all right."

TG: It must have been tough to leave for that last time when it's leaving for good for a while. And you didn't get to come back until you were . . .

WE: Until I was coming back to be discharged. But then they had my records mixed up. They had some USNR and they had some papers in there USN.

TG: What is that?

WE: USNR is United States Naval Reserve. If you were Reserve, you were in there from zero point to zero point. They had some papers in there, USN, that said I was signed up for five years. Hey, no way did I sign up for five years! Some yeoman when they made up the papers got the wrong ones in the enlistment, which at that time was five years. The USNR is when the war was declared over, you were eligible for discharge.

TG: So you were in the Reserves then?

WE: I was in the Reserves, yes.

TG: You were in Japan after the bomb was dropped, and then you came . . .

WE: Then we went to northern Japan after that.

TG: And that's when, after that you were headed back home then?

WE: No. We went back to the Philippines. Oh, there's a good one! In the Philippines, I went to the naval base and we picked up 52,000 cases of beer to haul to Shanghai, China. All 52,000 cases of beer didn't make it.

TG: How come?

WE: The officers could not find it on the ship. I would say there was between three hundred and four hundred cases of beer that disappeared.

TG: Uh huh. All right.

WE: On the way, you can't drink. You can drink as long as they don't catch you. The ship's stores sold beer, but that was only when you were moored alongside or had dropped anchor to where you were standing still. Here they opened up the tank deck, which was where they stored the stuff; it was full. We drew water way down here to where . . . The first night out a group of fellows, and I wasn't one of the original ones—I got pulled into it after—but they had swiped, misplaced between three and four hundred cases of beer. Now, where on a ship that's only 325 feet long, where do you store it that nobody's going to find it? Three hundred cases—or even a hundred cases—is going to take up space, and they could not find it. I found it in a coffer dam.

TG: What's that?

WE: You have a fresh water tank here that holds fresh water, and here you have a tank here that held diesel fuel. In between here is what they call a coffer dam. There's a manhole on this side, because we had twin shaft alleys—this fed this prop and this fed this prop. Well, in-between here is where these tanks were. They have a manhole here and a manhole over here. They go in there for an inspection to see that there's no water leaking in.

TG: You don't want any water in diesel fuel obviously?

WE: And you don't want any diesel fuel going into the water. If you had a leak and your water level was down over here, you could have diesel fuel going into the water, and the same the other way. You'd have to go in there and check. The guy in ship's repair doing carpenter work and steel work and welding, and painting and what have you. They had a locker where all that stuff was stored, and a bucket of paint. They loosened up all the nuts on this manhole, which I think there are about twenty-four of them, and they stored the stuff in there, put the manhole back on, painted the nuts as though they were never disturbed. The stuff dried in an hour, so when they checked, hey, there was no disturbance there. They looked under the bilges and everything else. They had one heck of a time looking. Then they finally went to the chain locker where the chain gets reeled up or goes down into the area for your anchors, your bow anchors. It cranks it up. They just let the things drop, you know. When they reel them in, they'd go through a wench, and the excess chain goes back into this little room. So they even looked in there. When the officer was going back, he called and was saying his farewell, and he says, "You know, one thing I would like to know. I wouldn't do a thing to anybody that stepped forward because I would like to really know where the hell did you put it?"

TG: Did anybody let him know?

WE: Nobody let him know. Oh, God, no. You can't trust them. If somebody is listening, "I heard it. He admitted he stole it."

TG: So when did you guys get to actually drink the beer, then? After the rest of it was all shipped onto shore, or did you drink it during the whole deal?

WE: No. When we went to supply ships to pick up food that they put in the ship stores, we always had one that went down to the supply ship. He would put a mark on the corner. We took an extra case of sardines, took a case of powdered ice cream mix. Heck, we made our own refrigerator, or freezer, out of parts that we picked up at Eniwetok. That was a dumping thing for equipment.

TG: That's pretty common, though, isn't it, among the enlisted?

WE: You had to have extra, because some of the meals, like I say, this Mr. Scott that pushed out on his last ship on the [LST]-1027, they had a . . . [end of side 2]

WE: I go rambling on . . .

TG: This is the stuff we're trying to get. It's the ordinary or the everyday experiences, really, that we are looking for. I think people relate more to that.

WE: I know the kids out at the school there . . . Bob Muck, when he got finished with his presentation—I was one of the last—I says, "Mr. Muck over there gave a very good presentation and he had some very good experiences because he was on Guam on ship repair, where they run the ship in, and they can jack the thing up and he can do anything from the bottom on up. But he forget the most important thing of his experience." Bob's looking over at me, and I says, "He didn't say anything about meeting me over in Guam!"

TG: Oh, wow.

WE: Then we had an open discussion about . . . One guy was in the army and he was telling about his army experiences and that, and Bob told about his experiences. He left the states and he went straight over to Guam, and that's where he spent his time, in Guam. Me, I traveled all over. I was in the Pacific; I was in the Atlantic. The ribbons that I would have I could have the Atlantic theater, I could have the South Pacific, I could have the Asian. If you wear a ribbon that you weren't qualified for, you could be fined and court-martialed—that's when you're still in the service. It boiled down to where he gave a nice presentation, but I got a little levity because the kids are sitting there as quiet as a mouse. I think Don Van Eyll was past commander and he was the one that got the group. He was the one that called and asked if I would do it. I said, "Don, I was no . . . We got to fire at one Zeek." A majority of the planes from the Japanese were Zeeks; they weren't Zeroes.

TG: What's the difference between a Zeek and a Zero?

WE: There was very little difference.

TG: What do those planes do?

WE: They were fighter planes. Just like we had F4U Corsairs, which was the gull-type like the navy had, and the army had their main fighter called the Thunderbolt. The Lightning Bolt was the P-38. That was the twin fuselage deal. Whatcha-ma-call-it was here, then your wings, and you had your fuselage here and a fuselage here. The pilot was in the center.

TG: So you had to fire at a Zeek, then, one time?

WE: Yes.

TG: Tell me the circumstances around that.

WE: That was in the Marianas, a couple small islands that had an airfield on it that were being taken over.

TG: By the American forces?

WE: By the American forces. Most of them at that time right towards the end of the war, they were all suicidal. They don't give a darn if they come down at you and strafe you. They just run the whole plane right into your ship. That's why we fired at it, in order to get it before it got that close. On an LST you don't move very fast out of the way. You're just like a standing target out there. From the Hawaiian Islands going to Eniwetok, we had a torpedo go underneath us.

TG: Fired from a Japanese submarine?

WE: Yes.

TG: When did you first realize that a torpedo had been thrown at you?

WE: When the guy up on your lookout . . . You have a lookout on your bow and you also have one on the stern, because a lot of times they'll let you go by, and they'll sneak up behind you. The bow lookout says, "Torpedo," and it was coming in on an angle like, you're here going north, and this was coming in this way.

TG: So you knew exactly where it was coming from when he gave that.

WE: Oh, yes. You could see the wake.

TG: Really? You were up top, then, not down below?

WE: I was down below then. I heard about it.

TG: So you were in the engine area.

WE: Yes.

TG: Did you know while it was happening that it was coming?

WE: No, they told me later on that the torpedo was shot at us.

TG: What was that like after the fact?

WE: I'm glad it missed us!

TG: You had no idea when you were down there that one has passed below you.

WE: No. There was no General Quarters sounded or anything, you know. Torpedo starboard side! So they tried turning the ship fast, but like I say, at 13 knots, and this thing is traveling three times as fast as what you are traveling, by the time you see it . . .

TG: And it went underneath you guys because . . .

WE: . . . because we had dropped everything that we had; we were practically empty. On our sides they had welded some float compartments so you could make bridges in order to go across rivers and what have you.

TG: In the LST, or for other vehicles?

WE: For the tanks. You know, you drop them off and the navy would put them together, you know. They link to where it was actually a floating dock or bridge. We had those things welded on our sides, and that was a big container of nothing.

TG: So if you had been going inland with your full load . . .

WE: We would have been drawing a couple more feet of water. They might have hit us. Very seldom because even with a full compartment of equipment, and as flat as this thing was, it was just like putting a board in a tub of water and shoving it down. If you take your hand away, the thing pops right back up. But if you put a couple of cups of water on this thing to where there is extra weight, it'll go down into the water a ways, but not a heck of a lot.

TG: You had mentioned earlier that you had to shoot at a Japanese fighter aircraft. Tell me the situation there. What happened? What was going on?

WE: Everybody in the convoy was shooting at the poor thing. I don't know if we hit it or if somebody else hit it, but it did go down. In fact, while we were at Guam, these snipers from these caves up in the hills shot down a P-38. We seen that drop, and that was one of our planes. We weren't firing at it. These Japanese that were still up on the hills were. When I was in Guam, the war hadn't ended yet. They hadn't dropped the bomb. Like I say, we were scheduled to be the second wave to take equipment and supplies in in Tokyo Bay to drop them off, because that's what these ships did. They went in, they opened up their bow doors, they put the ramp down after they hit the beach to where the bottom was stopping you from going all the way in. You know how much cable you had on this reel in the back. You would drop your anchor seventy-five feet. It's a hundred feet to the shore. Your ship is three hundred feet long. You drop your

anchor, your bow doors were open, but your ramp was up yet. When the ship stopped, the ramp you let down, and then they drove this equipment or whatever was on there out. Then you put the wench on and wench yourself off the beach along with your two engines going full speed in reverse, so that you got the Sam heck out of there.

TG: Just drop them and go. For that second wave, that one you were going to be a part of, would there have been infantry troops on deck as well going with the equipment?

WE: Oh, yes.

TG: Did you have to make any of those types of landings?

WE: We had most of the equipment on our tank deck practically all the way. But you'd pick up troops. This was at Okinawa. There was a tank deck driver and his crew, and there were two tanks aboard, and then your infantry. These guys stayed behind the tanks as you go in. They'd pick off anything from the side, because the tanks were your main force of resistance or offense.

TG: Did you get to talk to any of those guys that were on your ship sometimes?

WE: No, they were pretty well tightened up. They kept to themselves and what have you. Sure, if they wanted anything . . . "Hey, got anything down at ship's store? Did they open it up?" The only time they opened it up was when we were docked, you know. They were friendly and all this and that, but you could see that, hey, they were going ashore and were going to stay there. You're going to back yourself back out of there and get the Sam Hill out. That's one of the reasons why I picked the navy. The army was fine. You got to see and go to a lot of places—personal things, you know. But in the navy you knew where you were going to sleep every night. It wasn't going to be in some foxhole or some ditch or in some vacant farm lot, you know, or a barn. You knew where you were going to be.

TG: How was your brother's time spent in the marines?

WE: That was the same way as the army. They dug foxholes and what have you. He slept in caves. When that typhoon went through, he was in a cave on Okinawa. We had just dropped that personnel and equipment off to where we were empty. We had to head out to sea because that thing was coming. We were on the outer edges of it. If we would have been in the thick of it, we probably would have been torn to shreds. The hospital ship *Repose* was in that convoy. The got caught into the eye. It was just nice and calm; there was no disturbance whatsoever. They just went to where it came back towards land and dissipated.

TG: So they just kind of followed it around in the eye. I guess that's a smart thing to do, really.

WE: Their ship went a heck of a lot faster. You should see the size of that. It looked like a small Queen Mary.

TG: The ship that you were on, the LST, have you seen any of the recent movies? "The Thin Red Line" was one about World War II.

WE: I have here "Saving Private Ryan."

TG: Were those the troop ships that were coming in on Normandy Beach? Is that the kind of ship you were in?

WE: Some of them were, but most of them they showed on there were the Higgins boats, the smaller ones where the whole ramp went down. There was no bow doors to open up or anything like that.

TG: So yours were similar but a lot larger than those?

WE: A lot larger. Those Higgins boats were all developed by the British. The British had LSTs before the United States did. We gave them fifty destroyers and they gave us the technology of building Higgins boats and the LSTs.

TG: When did you get out then? You went to the Philippines again after Japan, and then you were headed on your way home, then? You went back to where?

WE: San Francisco. From the Philippines, we took the northern route and went over and landed up in San Francisco.

TG: So you didn't have to go back through the Panama Canal on the way back.

WE: No. From there, a train across the desert, Death Valley, in a troop ship. It was an old coal burner outfit that you had to keep the windows shut or otherwise the black smoke would kill you—carbon monoxide. Hotter than heck. Then when I got to Fort Snelling, that's when they discovered some of my papers had USN on it instead of USNR. Most of them were USNR. So the yeoman down there says, "Get a three-day pass and go home, and have the lawyer make out the affidavit," because he was the one that signed for voluntary induction—not an enlistment. With the army you're drafted. Okay, you go into the army. You have thirty days to go home and settle all the personal matters—saying goodbye to your wife or getting married or what have you. This boiled down to where hey, I'd gone home, been home for a little bit, and Mother knew I was going into the service. Why lay around for another thirty days? Get in and get it over with. There is a difference between a voluntary induction and enlisting for four, five, six or ten years. So they had a couple of them that said USN, and most of the papers said USNR. He says, "We'll get this straightened out," and he typed it out. The lawyer put it in so many legal terms and what have you, "Hell," he says, "they're going to look at that and they are going to throw it in the shit can, and you're going to end up staying in for another three years." So he made it out, and that afternoon I found out I was discharged. They gave me that little duck to sew on my blouse.

TG: What is that then?

WE: A little ruptured duck. It's a little saying that you served and you are discharged.

TG: I don't think I've ever seen that before.

WE: Well, my kids wore my uniform out. My wife had everything packed away, all my navy stuff. All of a sudden, I'm seeing my youngest one wearing my cap, my hats and what have you. In fact, I've got a blouse downstairs that I came across . . . I probably should give that to the museum. Just a second . . . Oh, no, that's all right.

TG: We could do that right after. There are four or five other questions before this is through. What was your homecoming like to Waconia?

WE: Great. Mother ran the restaurant called the Cozy Corner. She was the only one in town. Every serviceman that came back, she gave him a free steak.

TG: Where was the Cozy Corner in town?

WE: It used to be the old post office, not the real old one where Eveslage is up there selling insurance, but down here on Main Street, kitty-corner from the bank where John has his appliance thing now. It's a brick building. At that time it was a wooden structure. Mrs. Mihelich wanted to have me write up about that corner, and I never did get around to it. Susie Hanson's husband had built that thing, and he was in the plumbing business with his brother-in-law, Matt Grausman. It started out that she rented the place out as a drug store to a couple brothers. It stood empty for a short time. Then August Graff had a liquor store in there. Then the liquor store moved onto Main Street on the north side of the street. I don't know what the heck they call it now, but at that time it was Irv's Bar, Milo's Bar, and what have you. My mother rented the place from Mrs. Hanson and started a restaurant there.

TG: Okay. The Cozy Corner. So she gave the new guys coming home . . .

WE: That's from the whole Carver County. If you proved that you were from Carver County, whether it was Chaska, Cologne, Mayer, Norwood, Young America, Victoria, Chanhassen, if you were in the service and you were discharged, and you showed up, if you came in there with your girlfriend, you paid for your girlfriend's steak, but you got yours for nothing.

TG: When did you first see your folks? When did you first see everybody?

WE: I had come home for three days to have this lawyer straighten out the thing, so I had a homecoming then. Then I went back, then I finally got discharged. In fact, while I was home for those three days, I'm a charter member of the VFW up here. That's how long ago. I'm the last one that signed the charter.

TG: Was there a party at home or kind of a get-together?

WE: A family get-together to where there were cousins and what have you from Chaska and some from St. Paul that came out, and "Glad to see you're home," and what have you. That was about it. Then I started working for my mother in the restaurant just to help out, not for pay, just for living at home for free, you know.

TG: What did you do for your first job after you got back besides when you were helping out with the restaurant?

WE: First I wanted to go back and finish school. Like I told you earlier, these kids were three, four, five years younger than I was, so I took the Equivalency Test and passed that, and then mother wanted me to go to college. I wish I would have. Mrs. Gilborn, who was running the theater, who I worked for before I went into the service while I was in high school, wanted to sell me the place for \$19,000. That was the theater, the business, and living quarters up on top. I talked to Mr. Peterson, I forget the first name, he was from Watertown, about getting a GI loan for it. "Oh, no, they're not doing that now yet." But I understood he didn't even try. They were doing it. They were getting GI loans for houses and everything else. She sold the business to Gabe Deluhery for \$23,000, four thousand dollars more than what she was asking from me.

TG: What was the name of the theater?

WE: It was the Waconia Theater. That was started up by a Lentz. And he sold it to a Redman. And Redman sold it Gilborn. And Gilborn turned around and sold it to Gabe Deluhery. I could have had money up the butt!

TG: What did you finally end of doing for your first job?

WE: My first job besides helping my mother out for nothing. I worked at Minneapolis Moline in the welding department.

TG: Did you live in Minneapolis?

WE: No, I lived here in Waconia. I transferred twenty-some miles to Hopkins every day. Then I was about two years over at Spring Park for Rigid. They made ironing boards and stepladders and what have you. That's shut down now. The kids ran that into the ground. The old man was pretty tight. Then I went to work here at the Creamery. I was working there for ten years as the maintenance. After that I worked at Abbott Northwestern Hospital. When I started there it was just Northwestern Hospital. But through the years, Abbott was close to the highway 94 interstate, and they had no room for expansion. You know, these doctors want a new piece of equipment, they have to get it. One of the first MRIs that was put in besides Golden Valley as a private hospital was down at Northwestern Hospital, or Abbott Northwestern. I was there until I retired.

TG: What do you think the hardest part, or the strangest part was returning to civilian life? After being in the navy for so long, and being in that totally different environment, what do you think the hardest part or most strange part was?

WE: I don't think it was that hard because I had a very stern mother. She was just like an officer. You'd say something, and you'd do it. I was good at taking orders. The freedom, more or less, you could do what you want. In the navy you are confined. You are here, you can't go any place, and that's it. I don't know, I didn't raise a lot of heck, or as some people would say, raise a lot of hell, but I wasn't exactly a perfect angel. There were a lot of things that I did because you couldn't do that you did do, like stay out late. You couldn't do this. When the mother says come

on down and help in the restaurant . . . I worked with a cook—a baker—a Mrs. Annie Schmitz. Her one son is still living—Emmett. He used to run a garage on the southeastern end of town where all the buses are stored. He was in the same building as Boschmit [Biersdorf] with his radiator shop. His mother was one hell of a good cook. Oh, man! And she could make pie out of this world. She taught me how to make pies. On one Saturday morning, I made fifty-three pies.

TG: Holy smokes. For selling to other people?

WE: In the restaurant. There was cherry, blueberry, apple, butterscotch, lemon, custard, pumpkin. The only thing that came out of the can was the pumpkin, the cherries and the blueberries. The rest of the stuff, the apples were peeled by hand, the lemon pie—she made a lemon pie . . . You might not like lemon pie, but I tell you the truth, that stuff would melt in your mouth. It's isn't a foggy lemon custard. It was clear-like. Really, Really good!

TG: Sounds pretty good.

WE: She was a good baker.

TG: I suppose you could probably make a pie or two.

WE: I still do. Very seldom. After my wife passed away, I was asked to join the funeral ushers because that's usually retirement. You can't have anybody that goes to work everyday. They're not available for ushering. On Sunday and Saturdays maybe they are. That's why the weekends I don't care for. There are thirteen or fourteen of us, and there are two of them that usher. Last year we had seventeen funerals. The year before we had twenty-three. Usually it's in the twenties. In fact, I served on a funeral this past week. Mrs. Brown was ninety-one years old. I didn't know her. It was a great aunt of George [Brown], I think it was. George Brown lives out here and is selling all that property along the lake.

TG: I'm not sure.

WE: He was an electrician himself. His dad used to have the Ford garage where Heidi is now. That collision outfit. I know a lot of history. I'm a buff from way back. I'm sorry that this Mrs. Mihelich . . . I'm not a lot for writing out in longhand and what have you, and I told her, "If I put it down on the tape and you have it recorded or transcribed, fine." "No, it would be better if it would be in your own hand." Well, like for two months out of the year I go out and visit the boy who plays football. This is his last year. In fact, he had taken instructions from the Viking coach, Gary Zauner.

TG: Okay, sure. Wow, that's pretty good.

WE: Gary Zahner came up to me; I was down there with him while he was instructing, and he said, "Go get cooled off now." He'd come up to me and Gary would say, "You know, that grandson of yours has got one hell of a good leg."

TG: Is he going to turn pro, do you think?

WE: If he has a good year, he might have a good chance at it.

TG: Wow.

WE: The first year, of extra points and field goals I don't think he missed three of them all year.

TG: That's really good.

WE: Last year the one down in Tennessee, fifty-some yards he made.

TG: That's a long boot.

WE: They heard it on ESPN, and one announcer said, "Man, where that landed, it landed in the stands, it could have been another ten yards."

TG: Geez, that is pretty good.

WE: Oh, yes. But he was missing the short ones. He was hooking them over to the left. These kids, you know, you can't tell them what they're doing wrong because they know everything. I told my son that. I said, "Remember how you were? Now you're finding out how smart the old man is." I'd gone out there and wired his house; I wired his garage; I wired his little house that he rents out in the back; I did the plumbing work for him while I'm out there. And going fishing every once in a while. I have a good time out there. What the hell, I'm retired now.

TG: Yes, you have to spend time for yourself.

WE: It's too bad my wife had to die. I was going to retire at sixty-two. Then I hurt my back at work, and for six, going on seven months before I says, "Go ahead, operate," because there's nobody in the state of Minnesota any worse than what the heck I am as far as being a chicken for being cut on. A month and a half ago they put a pacemaker in me here. I've seen more hospitals since I retired than I did when I went to work in one every day.

TG: That's a point I was going to ask you about. You said that while you were in the service, you had a sweetheart that you were writing back to, but she wasn't the one that you married. How did you meet your wife then?

WE: She was working for my mother in the restaurant.

TG: All right. Then you didn't know her before you left for the navy then?

WE: No. There's a good looking one—let's make a move on that one.

TG: And things worked out for you then, I suppose.

WE: She gave me three nice kids—two boys and a girl.

TG: How long were you dating your wife before you got married?

WE: It was a year and a half. It was [19]46. We got married in '47.

TG: What was her name?

WE: Elaine.

TG: How long had she worked for your mom before you met?

WE: She was working there during the summer vacation. She hadn't been working there very long.

TG: But she must have known about you, then, a little bit.

WE: Oh, yes. From my mother and pictures and what have you. She thought I was pretty cute at that time, too.

TG: That always helps. I have two more questions, and then you can add anything you want.

WE: I think I've been doing all the adding now.

TG: That's part of the interview—probably the best part actually, the ad lib. Looking back, what do you think the most negative aspect of your service was?

WE: Like I mentioned before, you are confined. You don't have the availability to do and go when you want. There were times where you actually cried because you couldn't get home because something had happened at home or what have you. Like my dad got hurt and you'd like to be around. Mother had gone fishing. Getting in and out of the boat, she hurt her leg. Just a month and a half before that she had a goiter operation—a snake goiter that was wrapped around her throat. My mother smoked, which she shouldn't have. But she smoked—well, I did too for years. She'd wake up in the morning and she would cough and try to get her breath. A friend of hers that she went to school with at Chaska is a nun down at St. Mary's at Rochester. She said, "Dolores, when you get back you tell your doctor you want this test." She found out she had a goiter. They operated, and she was on the operating table for over three hours. It was a snake goiter, just wrapped around her windpipe. Three months later, she's got diabetes so bad that the bump on her leg started turning black and blue. Here she had diabetes. Her blood was so thick it would hardly run. Now how the heck could that be? Like I test myself for my blood sugar. Last night before I went to bed, it was 91. Between 80 and 120 is fine, you know. 91—fine. I get up this morning, I take my pills, I get the paraphernalia out and I test myself—135. Now I hadn't eaten anything. The only thing I took was the pills—my vitamins and Zestril—and what the hell else. How could it be up to 135 when I went to bed last night and I'm not eating anything, I'm not doing anything and it was 91? Just look at my fingertips, all the little puncture marks. I goes to church, I had communion, I come home, and I had a bowl of oatmeal my son sent me—it's in that jar there. It's the whole oat; it isn't like your regular oatmeal. You can cook it for two hours

and it's still going to be a little crunchy like, which is good. My son sent it to me at Christmastime. Arnold Schwarzenegger eats this. It's a special whatcha-ma-call-it. Very expensive. Little thing like that, \$5.00. A big can like this, for kripe's sake is only a buck and a half of Quaker Oats. But I had that and Equal, which is no sugar, and milk. 228!

TG: No kidding? That's not good.

WE: From 135.

TG: Something's not right there.

WE: [Reading label] Expiration date: May 31, 2000. This just expired. Okay, what's the other question?

TG: I guess you had to be worried there for a while because you got the news . . .

WE: You can get home in an emergency leave if there is a death in the family. Well, this was not a death, it was operations.

TG: And you had to wait until you got the next letter to find out if your mom was okay then and everything went well.

WE: Hey, I'm overseas. They're not going to fly me back. I had one airplane ride while I was in the service, and that was going from Camp Bradford to Detroit. My aunt asked me to come up over a weekend. We took the ferry from Detroit over to Niagara Falls, and she fed me lobster. She said, "As long as you're in the navy, you should get used to that seafood." That was the first lobster I ever had. I had shrimp, I had crab and that, but I didn't have the lobster.

TG: It's pretty good stuff.

WE: Oh, God, yes.

TG: What do you think the most positive aspect of your service was?

WE: Uncle Sam gave me an education. He sent me all over heck, halfway around the world, which, when I got out of the service, I got a mustering out pay, and the state came along and gave you a hundred dollars for mustering out—that was a state bonus. But then, right after you got it, then they put a surtax on the money, so in five years you paid the money back.

TG: That happens with the military. They get you one way or another.

WE: Right now, they're giving it, but they haven't put a surtax on it to where you're paying it back. If you make three thousand dollars and all of a sudden you're paying 2% or 3% of that three thousand dollars, that's the full amount besides the tax you already paid. Three percent surtax on that amount of money, I say, in three years you've paid it back.

TG: How do you think that your experiences . . . You said that through the military you went to a lot of different places and had a lot of different experiences. How do you think that's helped you in your life?

WE: You know what other people are like. Over in Asia and even South America, I've heard words I wouldn't even want to repeat. Little kids pimping for their mothers and their sisters and what have you. That's just terrible. We have a standard of living in this country that's unbelievable to the rest of the world. We do. We can speak out. I've gone before the council up here and complained about different things. Nothing gets done, and they won't even give you an answer. I've called them gutless wonders that are sitting on the council. Can you imagine paying \$2.35 a month for a street light out on the corner where it used to come out of our tax rolls? Now we're paying an assessment of \$2.35 or \$2.36 cents a month. There's five houses on this side, and there are only four houses on that side because this house over here has 110 feet of property. The average is five on each side. So that's ten people, or ten households, that are paying that \$2.35 for one 150-watt bulb on the corner.

TG: It doesn't seem quite right.

WE: You're darn right it's not right! And when I asked Danny Steinhagen about that, he says, "We didn't know about that." I says, "Danny, I am on a fixed income. When I make out my taxes with my fixed income, I can tell you what I'm going to make next year, and the year after. It might be a few dollars more because my social security will go up a cent and a half or two cents on the dollar. But then they raise the Medicare up, so there goes that raise that a guy gets." Everybody's going, "Hey, you're getting a little bit more." Everything's going up. When I first retired, I had more money going into the bank than I have today, and my wife is gone, because it's costing more to live. When you make out your state income tax for property tax return, here's your income, or here's your taxes that you paid, and here's the amount of tax that you paid for your house. You go here and you go here and you get that line there. On your property tax, the first line is what you pay. Down here, where this is what your taxes are, are the assessments. This is what you actually pay, but that isn't the amount that goes on for your property return. I have been out here working and what have you, and people have gone and lived in these condos up here on the hill. One guy says he's moving back to Carolina. He says he can't afford this town.

TG: No kidding. That's too bad—it's unfortunate.

WE: He says taxes are just out of this world. The county went down; the state went down; the school district went down; but the city taxes went up. Now you take that extra \$2.35 every month, which is only \$26 or \$27 dollars a year more, but I told Danny, "You know, \$27 . . . it's an assessment that you don't take . . . When you go on that aisle here and that column here, and you come out, you add \$27 more, all of a sudden you're over here to where you get that money back. You get that \$27 back, so do you know what that means?" He says, "What?" I says, "That's \$54, isn't it?" Twenty-seven dollars I paid, twenty-seven dollars that I would have gotten back. "Well," he says, "it's too late now. They can't change it." So I went up before the council and I says, "Let me know if there's anything that can be done." Never heard a word. Never heard a word. Now, I'm an old one, and if I would be twenty years younger, I would be . . . I had my

brother sitting on the council one time, and I had a nephew that was on the council one time, and I know darn well that I was a heck of a lot smarter than either one of those as far as what goes on around the county. Because they didn't give a damn. Right now everyone that's up there, as far as I'm concerned, is whatever Eisenhower says, fine, okay. You have regular jobs. You aren't closely intact with what the heck is going on in town every day. When I bought this place, which is a long time ago, my taxes were \$90. It's one of the oldest, if not the oldest, building in Waconia.

TG: This house?

WE: This house. I am paying more on taxes for one month than what the heck I did for the whole year.

TG: I can believe that, sure.

WE: It's not like some to where you're paying two, three, four thousand dollars a year. If I was paying more than two thousand dollars, I would be moving out west. There's no state income tax. There's a sales tax, same as we have in Minnesota at 6.5%. They're running the whole state, which is not even 500,000 people in the whole dang state.

TG: In Wyoming.

WE: In Wyoming. But see, they get their water from the mountains; they don't have any soft water to worry about—everything is soft. Fishing is great—a lot better than this hole we've got out here. This used to be a very good lake. In fact, I can tell you, the one that had the jewelry shop up here—Weinzierl, Rueben—he gave it to his nephew or sold it to his nephew and his brothers. One ran the Red Owl store and then he was the head custodian at the high school, Edwin Weinzierl, and his brother, Francis, who died here just a year or so ago. When my folks had the boat landing, they could take you out, and the limit of bass was six per person. If you had three people in your party, they'd take them out and be back at the dock within the hour with eighteen bass.

TG: I believe that. I've seen pictures. I've been fishing [Lake] Waconia maybe four or five times—one bass, one sheephead.

WE: Ray Henke, lives over at the apartments by Wacholz down here, just at the end of the block across the street. He says, "Dick, you used to be able to go out and get the limit of sunfish, get the limit of bass, get a couple northerns, and be back within an hour or hour and a half after all that fishing. Now you go out there, if it isn't a speedboat that's going by you and making you go up and down, or these little ski boats that go whizzing by . . . Fishing on this lake, it's a hole out there, that's all it is." And who do we have to thank for that?

TG: Ourselves?

WE: Vick Haas who used to have the boat landing down here. People were saying they didn't have any place for sailboats and that. They couldn't rent one; there was no sense in buying one

because there wasn't a lake around where they could because Lake Calhoun only had so many mooring spots and that's all that they had. He put an article in the paper, and my God, they had mooring spots in front of this one, in front of that one over there. [end of side 3]

TG: That's all right, though. That's background information. Okay, I'm just going to reiterate what we were talking about. The last question—What was the most positive experience of your service, and you said because it gave you a sense of what other people live like. I'm not using your exact words, but I'm kind of summing it up.

WE: Different cultures and nationalities. Like the Chinese . . . We went ashore in Japan, and those people were so leery of the Americans. They figured we would come up to them and shoot them or cut their heads off or what have you. They didn't have the communications like we had radio and local dispatches where they came out with the news. Hey, right after Pearl Harbor happened, probably the Japanese didn't even hear about it for a month, you know, that they attacked the United States.

TG: So, what you're kind of telling me is that because of your experiences, it made you appreciate our standard of living in America and our freedoms much more than you were aware of.

WE: Oh, yes, yes.

TG: It gave you a greater sense of those things.

WE: You know, you thought all people were about the same. The way you're living, that's the way everybody is, but that's not true. That's not true at all. I mean, to this day, life in Africa . . . Years ago they made slaves out of Negroes and brought them over here. A lot of these tribes sold off their own people. They're no worse than the Americans were that brought them over here. Then what we did to the Japanese that were Japanese-Americans, locking them up in a compound because of their nationality. We were afraid of them. Now, government is paying them. They're giving the survivors or families of the people, and they should, even though it's my tax money that's going there. Talk about tax money . . . I'm not going to get onto that.

TG: Well, those are all the questions I have for you, Wally. If you have anything more to add about your military service, feel free to do so—anything that we didn't cover or anything that you want to elaborate on that you didn't get a chance to.

WE: At the time, there were times when you thought, The hell with the service, but you think back about it now . . . Like Arnie was saying here the other day, "I'm getting out old pictures of what I've done and where I was." He was in Australia and in different places than I was. I did get to cross the equator. I'm a shellback. We didn't have much of an initiation because there was only a couple of them on the ship that had been across. But if you have a group of them that had been across the equator, they saved up slop and everything else to where you go through that in order to . . .

TG: Did you say ""shellback"?"

WE: Shellback. That's when you go across the equator. I went across the International Date Line a couple times. One guy lost his birthday.

TG: It was his birthday, and then he went across.

WE: And the day was gone.

TG: Those are weird things. Well, thanks Wally; I appreciate the time you've given us here.

WE: Like I say, I talk too much.

TG: No, not at all. This is very good when somebody is willing to speak and will go on at length about some things. Sometimes interviews don't go that way.

WE: One of the biggest things as far as seeing all the places and what have you, and meeting the fellows I grew up with from my home town, not that I knew them personally at the time, but there was some, like Mike Dressen and Bob Muck and Desmond Muck and my brother, Milo Graff, that I knew personally back at home, all in different parts of the country that you see them. Like meeting my brother over in Hawaii. I knew he was there. I got to go ashore because we were ready to be shipped out at any time, but I got to go ashore to go pick up the movies. Well, the officer went with me. He said, "Go ahead, go see your brother."

TG: That's great.

WE: And here he was all packed, his seabag was ready to go. He was ready to be shipped out. That's why I got to see him again in Guam. He flew over there, and we went over by ship. By the time we got there, he's hollering at me from the back end of a truck, "Hey, Dick, got any money?" And I didn't get to see him until after we were in the convoy to where the signalman says, "Hey, do you know anybody on the ship over there? He's like to see you about some money." And I says, "That's my brother!" So then I conned the officer to dropping the boat and letting me go over there and change the movies. Otherwise, if I wouldn't have been running the movies, never would they turn around and say, "Yeah, sure, you go over and see your brother. Hell, that's fine."

TG: Right, right.

WE: They're not going to put a small boat at risk being there without any guns in case something came across.

TG: You got home before your brother, then?

WE: Oh, no. My brother got home before I did. The ship that I was on was a [LST]-1071. After the war, you go according to points. So many points for every month you were in the service. You got an extra half point for overseas duty. Well, I had overseas duty from three months after—actually four months because it took that long to build the ship. From there on in, as soon

as you get out three miles, you're getting overseas pay. It boiled down to where it was nice, but you weren't getting any XXX now. Now you'd find out that your grandson is getting \$2,200 a month and he's still in school.

TG: Things have changed a little bit, that's for sure.

WE: You talk about the experience, and at the time it was lousy because there were things you could not do, and what have you, and you're taking orders from, like I say, maybe they weren't all that bad, but we had a schoolteacher that . . . this guy threw a fire axe towards him. He says, "Now you can bring me up for court-martial. And my years in the service, and your years in the service, and I tell them what you have done, you won't last long." And he never did press charges. He flew home.

TG: He knew then.

WE: Like coming over . . . Hey, I'm a seaman deuce, and they had openings for three seamen first [class] on the ship. You can have so many of this, so many of this, so many of this. So there were openings because everybody came out of boot camp. You're an apprentice seaman with one stripe; you're a seaman deuce with two stripes; and a seaman first class with three strips. All it is a difference in pay. You're all doing the same kind of work, but they had posted for three seaman first [class]. And Alexander, who was a chief gunner's mate, he was our first officer. He was the one giving the test. And he knew these three kids that the old man had favored. The one I called "old man" is the captain of the ship.

TG: The schoolteacher?

WE: The schoolteacher.

TG: Were those his three students, then?

WE: Yes, he had those three kids. He knew them, and that's why there were only three. All right, there's five of us that took the test. His three students that he knew and two others—me and another fellow that were taking the test—and if you ask anybody in the service, the seaman first class test is the worst and hardest in the navy. You're going back to sailboats, and what have you, and rigging. They have all those questions, and you don't have that anymore except on the Constitution that they take out once every twenty years or twenty-five years. All these kids from Annapolis go on there for a week's training. The two of us passed; his three kids didn't.

TG: Really?

WE: The reason . . . Alexander come along, and you're writing, and a lot of them were multiple choice, a lot of them were written, and a lot of them were your description of different things and what have you. You'd have true or false, and he would say, "Are you sure Number 2 is what you mean to say?" So if you had "false," he would pick out, "Are you sure Number 2 is what you want to say?" Right away you would erase that and put "true" down if you had "false."

TG: Who was Alexander?

WE: He was the chief gunner's mate that was our deck officer. He was the one that was giving the test. Like I say, he was the chief gunner's mate before the war, and then during Pearl Harbor he was offered a commission, and he says, "I, like a damn fool, took it," because as an enlisted man he had more authority than being a lowly officer. In fact, when he got transferred off the ship to the [LST]-1027, same as I did, and Mr. Scott, who was the captain, the school principle, he came up and said, "Alec, I'm sorry to see you leave." Alec says, "You're what?" in a Texas drawl. He says, "I'm sorry to see you leave." "HmMMM, well, Sir, I tell you one thing, the navy isn't getting a cherry." "What do you mean?" He says, "I've been fucked before." See now, that was an old-timer; as an enlisted man he had enough points to go home, because that ship was scheduled to go back. The [LST]-1027 was staying over. But by the time we would have gotten back to the states, which would have been over a month, everybody on the ship would have had enough points. But he transferred everybody that did not have enough points at that time, except the ones that he wanted. Now his three kids that he had in school, they didn't get transferred off the ship. By the time the ship got back, those guys would have had enough points, which everybody would have.

TG: So he played favorites, then?

WE: Oh, yes. You can play favorites without seeming to play favorites, saying, "Well, I can't get rid of all the crew that's running the ship." But we did have a good time on the ship. I played with a Joe Lenowski. He was a white-haired Pollock from Milwaukee. One of the worst pinochle players you ever want to see.

TG: Not very good at it?

WE: No. But he loved to play. We'd play a nickel a point. You got a buck, you lost a game, you got another buck here, so that's fifteen cents you owe. We weren't big stakes gamblers and what have you, but it was the idea that you could sit and play cards for an hour and a half or two hours to pass the time.

TG: What else was there to do? Did you read?

WE: Oh, yes. They had a library. You could go check out a book and read.

TG: Did you do that at all, check out any books?

WE: Very few because I was running the movies. Besides, ten hours of chipping paint in the galley . . .

TG: What do you think was the most popular movie you ever showed on the ship? Do you remember one that stands out that everybody loved to see again and again? What about any women movie stars?

WE: A lot of them liked Hedy Lamarr. A lot of them liked Betty Grable. Then there was Carol Lombard. There were too many crazy about Joan Crawford, but I thought she was a good actress. Ginger Rogers, they liked her dancing with Fred Astaire in "Let's Dance," you know, when the shirt goes over their head and what have you, and you see everything down below.

TG: I suppose . . . not many women around.

WE: Hey, at that time, the way these women dress nowadays and what they have tied around their bottoms, my God, that would have been obscene.

TG: Yeah, for sure.

WE: Well, it is actually anyhow. It would have been then, and it should be right now. My daughter said, "My God, Dad, look at that! They've got to shave their hair around there; otherwise there's not enough material to cover it up!"

TG: Oh, man. They get a little out of hand these days with some of those fashions.

WE: What was it, last night, where's so and so? Oh, he's out with this girl, and the girl pulled up her watcha-ma-call-it and all she had was a string covering her rear end. He's out with so-and-so, and she lifted up . . . the one that is like this.

TG: Geez.

WE: Here's a little girl, twelve or thirteen years old.

TG: Good God, what they show on TV these days.

WE: Well, I guess our storm blew over.

TG: Yes, it did, didn't it? That wasn't too bad of a storm, actually. It looked a lot worse when it first started.

WE: I guess about the high points were meeting the fellows from town here. When you see someone that you grew up with, it makes the world of difference as far as your morale goes. You could be with somebody on the ship for a year or a year and a half, which I was, and you become buddies. There were three of them that I got close to, to where we chummed around. Oh, I didn't tell you about the kid that was over in China. He was a White Russian. When the Red Russians took over Russia, a lot of the migrated to China. They owned most of the businesses over there. There was a kid, Jimmy. The kid wasn't ten years old, spoke seven languages. He showed us where to get rid of the drugs that we took away from the ship that they said we could have. We took one jar in there. It was about a quart-size of pills. It was for sores and what have you. He gave us \$200 for it. Twenty dollars for a carton of cigarettes.

TG: That's a pretty good profit turnaround.

WE: Some guys would take the carton of cigarettes they had, take a block of wood and put some paper on it so it felt soft. They'd put the wax paper back on the carton, because everything was wrapped in wax, and seal it back up with an iron. Here they were selling a block of wood for twenty bucks!

TG: That's too bad.

WE: I never did that. I think I sold one carton of cigarettes. In Shanghai they had a servicemen's club. It was mostly navy that was there. You could order a steak for fifty cents. It was run by the Americans. It was a servicemen's club, run by Americans for Americans. Every once in a while you'd get a British navy man in there. They were very sorry to hear that Roosevelt had died because he says, "After the war," which he knew we were going to win after the Americans got in, "he could have been the ruler of the free world." They say that Roosevelt got us into the war to where things took place and what have you, but he didn't tell the Japanese to turn around and bomb us. He was sympathetic to the English and the French and what have you, and when Germany went into Poland, that's when France and England entered the war. Before, they were trying to appease them. Up to the one point, if Hitler would have stopped, he could have turned around to where all those small countries like Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and what have you, that all would have been Germany. No question about it, it would have been Germany, which was at one time, years back before World War I, that was all Germany, you know. That's where all those little countries were made. It's just like in Africa right now. In Africa you had South Africa. All of a sudden you've got 150 small countries in there that you never heard of before. Each little tribe made their own country. But, the German people, up to a point, thought he [Hitler] was the savior of the world. And he was. The Volkswagen came from Hitler. That's a good little car.

TG: It's a cute little car.

WE: My son's girlfriend's sister, a retired schoolteacher in Lander, Wyoming, and her husband was a schoolteacher—he's got another year that we was going to stay on, but they have two kids in school, one in college and the other one is in high school—she bought herself one. The first day she had it she bangs it up. Her husband says, "It's going to stay like that until you've got it paid for."

TG: Guess that'll teach you. That's too bad.

WE: She says, "The insurance will take care of it." He says, "We're not turning it in until you've got that car paid for." My son out there . . . He's got two kids; one is finished with college and the other one is in his last year.

[end of interview]