

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Waltr Gallagher

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Interview in progress.

Ed Metzler: This is Ed Metzler, and today is the 21st of July, 2022. I am interviewing Mr. Walt Gallagher in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

So, Walt, thank you for spending the time with us today to describe some of your experiences. We really appreciate it, and we know it was a long time ago.

Mr. Gallagher: (Chuckle).

Ed Metzler: But we're going to go back and we're going to talk about history a little bit. So, if you would, introduce yourself. Give us your full name and when and where you were born and we'll take it from there.

Mr. Gallagher: Thank you. My name is Walter Philip (sp?) Gallagher, and I was born October 29, 1926, in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Where, I'm not positive; I think it was in a hospital.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Gallagher: (Chuckles). Some ...

Ed Metzler: You don't remember for sure (laughter).

Mr. Gallagher: ... some people back then were born at home as well, but ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Now, so, you have brothers and sisters at ...

Mr. Gallagher: I ... I did have ... I had two brothers and two sisters; one is still alive, and the other three have passed ... passed on.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. And what'd your dad do for a living?

Mr. Gallagher: Well, it was ... it was during a period of pretty tough times. Some of the time, particularly in the '30s we're talking about Depression.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: And at times, he didn't have a job, but his experience was as ... as a chemist working for a paint company.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Gallagher: Mixing paints and other materials, and he chose to call ... call himself a chemist anyway when the census takers came by (laughter).

Ed Metzler: (Laughter). So, let's see, you went to high school in the area?

Mr. Gallagher: Went to high school in Elizabeth, and high school was an all-boys high school, Thomas Jefferson.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles).

Mr. Gallagher: It doesn't exist today; they have another high school in its place.

Ed Metzler: So, do you remember December the 7th, 1941? I think something happened that day.

Mr. Gallagher: Yes, I do remember December 7th. Of course, I didn't realize the ... the significance as ... as much either. There was a lot to learn.

Ed Metzler: So, you were only ...

Mr. Gallagher: Particularly where ... where was Pearl Harbor, and ...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Gallagher: And these places that the Japanese also attacked, and ... and Alaska and other places. So ...

Ed Metzler: So, things changed after December the 7th, so ... but you were still in high school, right?

Mr. Gallagher: Dec ... December 7th, 1941 I was uh, in ... in high school.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: Right.

Ed Metzler: So, when you got to be seventeen, you decided you wanted to go into the war, is that right?

Mr. Gallagher: Correct, and of course, we'd been reading and hearing about war for several ... quite a few years actually 'cause there was war going on the Orient between the Chinese and the Japanese and over in Europe as well. And I ... it ... I'm sure it

was just a matter of time before our country would be at war, too, but it was a ...
it was a kind ... it was pretty traumatic and shocking, you know ...

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mr. Gallagher: ... you know, knowing that we're going to be in it, and ...

Ed Metzler: So, were you still in high school when you decided to go into the Navy?

Mr. Gallagher: I was not in high school then; I had quit high school ...

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Gallagher: ... when I ... when I turned sixteen to go to work, help, help the family as well.
And ... but it was during that time, my sixteenth year, that I ... I was looking to
go into the military in some fashion. Initially, it was the possibility of going to
work on these supply ships sending war-needed supplies over to Europe and so
forth, talking about the Merchant Marines and so forth.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Gallagher: But I was still pretty young; I was a little too young and I looked even younger.

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Gallagher: (Chuckles). People didn't believe I was even sixteen.

Ed Metzler: So, you volunteered to go into the Navy when you were seventeen?

Mr. Gallagher: Well, actually, I was my birthday, and I ... I had to travel over to the next large
city, Newark, where the recruiting station was ...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Gallagher: ... for the ... for the Marine Corps. I went over to join the Marines.

Ed Metzler: Uh huh!

Mr. Gallagher: But it was at the end of the month, that was the last day that they were
recruiting. They had ... they had reached their quotas for the month, and I was
anxious to sign up. Gee, they told me that the Navy recruiting station was right
next door, and I really was, you know, that (pause) ...

Ed Metzler: So, you're ...

Mr. Gallagher: ... to be ... to be what I wanted to do. So, I just went to the next door, and that's
where I signed up for the Navy.

Ed Metzler: So, you're in the Navy now, huh?

Mr. Gallagher: Right.

Ed Metzler: As the song goes.

Mr. Gallagher: Well, two weeks later, I ... I was sworn in over in New York City.

Ed Metzler: So, did you have to get your parents to sign for you?

Mr. Gallagher: That's exactly right.

Ed Metzler: And were they happy to do that, or did you have to twist their arm?

Mr. Gallagher: No, they ... they knew I was intent, and ... and ... and they knew they had to give their permission anyway, so ... and ... but they had to do that before I could get sworn in.

Ed Metzler: So, where did you go for basic?

Mr. Gallagher: Went to Sampson up in New York State, and that ... that started in early November, and ... and it was a uh, about seven weeks I spent there. It was (unintelligible) I was reassigned and ... and given orders to report to my next phase of my Navy.

Ed Metzler: And what was that?

Mr. Gallagher: They just ... they assigned me to go to (unintelligible); originally they asked what my choices would be, where I wanted to go, and I didn't get my first choice which would have been as a uh, sub detector patrolling the ... the Atlantic Ocean. But they ... they gave me a pretty one, sent me to the ... an ATTC Memphis which was Navy Aviation Technical Training Center in Memphis, Tennessee.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Gallagher: Sent me to Aviation Ordnance School. And that ... and I started that in January and ... and that lasted up through early May when our class graduated, about a hundred.

Ed Metzler: So, that's May of 1944?

Mr. Gallagher: May of 1944.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Right. So, you're learning all about ordnance, huh?

Mr. Gallagher: Right. How to take care of shooting or at least, hoping that (laughter). But what I didn't ... I wouldn't shoot the propeller off the front of the (chuckles) ...

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mr. Gallagher: ... of the plane. I actually learned to shoot. Using a cam, you could shoot a bullet right through the blades of the ... of the plane as it ... as it rotated.

Ed Metzler: Okay. Get the sequence right.

Mr. Gallagher: Didn't have to do that.

Ed Metzler: So, you graduated then for Ordnance School?

Mr. Gallagher: Graduated in early May, and they ...

Ed Metzler: And what ... then what happened?

Mr. Gallagher: ... and they ... and they shipped me out going to the west coast for my next assignment which I didn't really know at the time what it was going to be. And ...

Ed Metzler: So, you didn't know which ship you were going to be assigned to?

Mr. Gallagher: Either a ship or land, air station ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Gallagher: ... whatsoever. And ... but we weren't there too ... some of us. There were ... there were a hundred, I think maybe, hundred ten or so graduates of that class that had boarded the train and ... and spent about three to four days traveling to the west coast.

Ed Metzler: That's a long run.

Mr. Gallagher: Just to San Diego.

Ed Metzler: Yeah (chuckles).

Mr. Gallagher: Went to the naval air station at San Diego, and in ... in the temporary ... temporary housing barracks. And it wasn't long ... it was about five days before somebody told me that my name was ... was on this list of people that were assigned to the [USS] Franklin which was tied up at a near ... at a nearby dock, had just come from the east coast, and finishing off with what they needed. The ship shipped out to the Pacific.

Ed Metzler: So, the ... so, the ship hadn't really gone out to the Pacific yet. She was still (unintelligible).

Mr. Gallagher: They ... they came from the east coast ...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Gallagher: ... through the canal up to San Diego, and they were supplying themselves with their ... what they needed to fill out their crew and whatever else they needed waiting to head out to Pearl Harbor which they did. I think it was the last day of May or the first day of June.

Ed Metzler: Right. So, what did you think when you first saw the Franklin?

Mr. Gallagher: Oh, my goodness, maybe how (chuckles) huge this ship is. And we ... oh, just a minute, of the ... of the class of a hundred, there were only eighteen of us that were assigned to the Franklin.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Gallagher: And we board ... we boarded about four o'clock, I think, on May 23, [19]44, and told to follow this gentleman after we saluted the office that ... of the deck and saluted the flag and so forth and followed this gentleman down to the uh, mess hall where we were going to spend our next ... first night (laughter).

Ed Metzler: That's a good place spend (chuckle).

Mr. Gallagher: They didn't have our bunks ...

Ed Metzler: Oh, they weren't ready?

Mr. Gallagher: ... and assignments and so forth, they weren't ready. They ... they had some more work to do to ... to get our ...

Ed Metzler: So, you finally got a bunk though?

Mr. Gallagher: Finally got ... finally got a bunch of the eighteen ... eighteen guys. I think they split us up in about three ... three ... three parties of six, and some of went to the area of ... where the ... where the ... the ordnance would take care of dive bombs, so, I was assigned to that section where we would be taking care of dive bombers, SB2Cs. And ...

Ed Metzler: So ...

Mr. Gallagher: Some of them went to take care of torpedo planes and the others went to take care of the fighters.

Ed Metzler: So, had you actually done any training, loading dive bombers at this point?

Mr. Gallagher: Not necessarily dive bombers, but we ... we had training on ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: ... on pushing the skid around and how to ... how to load a bomb into a bomb bay. And ...

Ed Metzler: So, off she sailed into the Pacific.

Mr. Gallagher: We got on the 23rd, and a week later we were ... we ... we departed for Pearl Harbor. I hope this is all coming through your (pause).

Ed Metzler: So, had you ever been at ... to sea before?

Mr. Gallagher: Well, not ... not so many miles, let's say maybe about three miles ...

Ed Metzler: Uhm, like ...

Mr. Gallagher: ... on an excursion boat or something like that.

Ed Metzler: Right, right. Did you get sea sick at all?

Mr. Gallagher: No, I didn't.

Ed Metzler: That's a good thing.

Mr. Gallagher: Well, it ... it was mostly because it such a large ship.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: You know, it would cut right through those ... those waves. But actually, the sailing was pretty ... the sailing was pretty smooth on the way to Pearl Harbor. It ... other ... at later times, it got pretty rough, but the ... that size ship could handle it pretty well.

Ed Metzler: So, here you are a seventeen-year-old kid.

Mr. Gallagher: Yeah, but I didn't feel seventeen.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckle).

Mr. Gallagher: I felt grown up and ...

Ed Metzler: You felt grown up.

Mr. Gallagher: ... and I was pretty strong, and ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: ... and I could take care of myself.

Ed Metzler: And you did! That's cool. So, to Pearl Harbor, and then from there, the ship went further ...

Mr. Gallagher: Well, they spent ... they spent a couple of weeks at Pearl (throat clearing). Actually ... so, other Navy aircraft could ... could have a place or a ship to practice landing on, and (throat clearing), and taking off from and so forth. Our

... our squadrons stayed on the island while these other squadrons had a place or a ship to practice with.

Ed Metzler: Hum!

Mr. Gallagher: After about two weeks, we headed out to the Marshall Islands, and Eniwetok.

Ed Metzler: So, what was the first action that the Franklin was when you went to the Marshalls?

Mr. Gallagher: Believe it or not (throat clearing), the first action was July the 4th. We went to celebrate July the 4th attacking Iwo Jima. This is a ... this is almost a ... well, it was (pause) oh, it feels like ... was almost a year before Iwo Jima was ever ... ever invaded.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: But this was July the 4th. They were ... they were invaded in March the next year.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, it was the next year before they actually invaded.

Mr. Gallagher: Right. This was ... this was all part of the Mari ... the beginning of the Marianas campaign.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So, I guess there was Guam and ... and ...

Mr. Gallagher: Saipan and Tinian and Guam, right.

Ed Metzler: So, you were actively then arming the dive bombers?

Mr. Gallagher: Correct.

Ed Metzler: During some of this action?

Mr. Gallagher: Correct.

Ed Metzler: Is this hard work? I mean, is exciting work? Tell me how you felt.

Mr. Gallagher: Well, sure it was exciting, you ... you know? These ... these pilots were ... you learn that these guys were heros in taking off ... taking off an aircraft carrier every day, if not on a scouting mission on ... on, at least for the dive bombers, they were ... they were out there to attack the enemy in one way ... one way or another.

Ed Metzler: So, which ... which aircraft was it that you were arming? The dive bomber was ...

Mr. Gallagher: The SB2C.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Gallagher: Right, Hell Divers.

Ed Metzler: And what do you remember from ... from those early sorties where you were doing ... do you do that up on the main deck or were you below deck and then it was up on the elevator to the main deck?

Mr. Gallagher: Yeah, I ... I didn't do very much on the hangar deck; it was mostly on the ... on the flight deck itself.

Ed Metzler: Up on top.

Mr. Gallagher: Main deck was the ... the hangar deck ...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Gallagher: ... is deck number one we were up above that. It was during the Marianas Campaign that I did suffer some injury loading bombs for ... I think we were probably going to attack Guam or ... or invade Guam, I think that followed Saipan, but I was helping out loading bombs into a torpedo plane, torpedo bomber. They not only carried torpedoes to sink ships, but they carried bombs, too, also to bomb the ... bomb ships as well or ... or the enemy on ... on land. And what I was doing was helping to put the bombs into the bomb bay of the ... of this TBM and one of the bomb racks would not block. The ... the bomb had little hooks like ... that would ... you could put into a bomb rack which would connect to the rack and ... and the cables that the pilot would release for the bombs to be released when ... when they were over a target, but you had to get them up into the bomb bay first. We had one up in the bomb bay, but the other rack, bomb rack, wouldn't lock. And myself and another (chuckle) and another ordnance were sitting on the ... on the one bomb that would go up and ... and stay locked to ... and ... and we were waiting there for some decision to be made whether we take the one down that was there or scratch ... scrub the flight. Just one, and ... but unfortunately, for me at least, uh, I ... I could see the people trying to make the decision huddled sort of together in front of the plane. I couldn't see their heads or faces because mine hadn't ... face was in the ... in the bomb bay.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mr. Gallagher: Okay. But one of those persons came over, ducked in and ... and looked at what the situation was and didn't think and pulled the manual release cable, and the bomb that was up there fell out.

Ed Metzler: Holy mackerel!

Mr. Gallagher: Then fortunately I wasn't squarely under the one that ... that was released; it hit me on the back, pretty much on the back of the head and drove me right out from under the plane, but I think the ... the fins from that bomb that released cut my Achilles. Okay, and I got, of course, I ... I didn't realize it was ... was cut, but I picked myself up off the deck and I was running around kind of cussing a little bit about somebody pulling that manual release. And when I realized it, my show was sloshing full of blood.

Ed Metzler: Wow!

Mr. Gallagher: And other realized that happened, too, and they hustled me down to sick bay. So, I spent the next three weeks in sick bay.

Ed Metzler: Three weeks.

Mr. Gallagher: But I ... fortunately had a good doctor down there in the hospital, Dr. George Fox (sp?), and he sewed me up what ... what could be sewed up, and I spent the next three weeks healing in the sick bay.

Ed Metzler: So, were you able to go back to your assignment then?

Mr. Gallagher: Yes, I ... I did, but I ... I used a cane (chuckles) to ... to walk ... help me walk around and so forth for several more weeks. So, a lot hadn't gone on ... on the ship. The ship continued to take on the enemy and give them heck ... hell.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles).

Mr. Gallagher: And however they could. But eventually, I came around and I got back to work sometime in August.

Ed Metzler: Okay. Okay. So, as I remember, the Franklin went on to Leyte for ... and participated in the Battle of Leyte Gulf in various ways.

Mr. Gallagher: Yeah. Before that they ... they uh, were down at Peleliu, too. Peleliu ... Palau islands.

Ed Metzler: Pele, yes, yeah, Palau, Peleliu, yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: And then, following that was the Philippines and ... and building up to the Battle of the Philippine Sea which was about the third week in ... in October, but we had ... had a lot of places between uh, Palau and ... and the Philippines, Formosa, even southern Okinawa and other islands as well (unintelligible) and ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, this ship got around!

Mr. Gallagher: It got around, it did.

Ed Metzler: Now, there was a kamikaze hit on the Franklin. I'm not talking about the big event that happened in '45, but even in ... in '44, wasn't there?

Mr. Gallagher: Yes, there was (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: Tell me about that.

Mr. Gallagher: That ... that was in latter part, well, in ... in October the Franklin was in ... the enemy attacked the ... the Franklin at three particular times in ... in October. The first one was, I think, we ... we were, well, I know, we were attacked by torpedo planes, and that was in the evening. It was still light out, it was probably about six o'clock or so in the evening the attack by Japanese Betty bomb ... Betty Bombers and they tried torpedoes. And the ... and the one I saw very clearly actually almost plowed into the ship, but it ... instead it skipped across the deck. It slid off, it's a very famous film, uh, showing the ... the ship, an enemy ship skidding off and bursting into flames and crashing into the ocean. It came from ... came from the portside across and crashed into the ocean on the starboard, and that was on October 13th, and on the 15th we got attacked by some dive bombers and one of them did clip the ship, deck-edge elevator, but the ... we took a count, there was two kamikazes hit; that was their mission, I'm sure. And at the time, I was up on a gun mount, twenty-millimeter, anti-aircraft mount, there to help. I wasn't behind a gun; I was there to kind of help the ... the gunner move ... move his mount which he scolded me for ... because I saw some of the kamikazes coming down, and he told me, "Don't hold ... don't be trying to, you know, push me around to aim at the ... I'll take care of it." So, I ... I released myself from that, and the kamikaze crashed into the deck before I fully ducked down because we were right up ... almost

level with the flight deck, and that's where the kamikaze crashed into the ship about ... we were on the portside, he crash in ... just deck side of ... of our island which, in footage, was probably about forty or fifty feet away from where I was.

Ed Metzler: You were close!

Mr. Gallagher: I was close, it was close, and ... and of course, there was fire that carried (unintelligible) Samar Island in the Philippines and a hundred ... a hundred miles off ... offshore. And ...

Ed Metzler: So, guys were killed, guys were hurt.

Mr. Gallagher: There were deaths unfortunately ... if there was a ... I think close to sixty casualties, and dead people that were in ready rooms in particular, and some down below because the kamikaze's bomb traveled down to the third deck, and I think it exploded on the way and killed ... killed sailors down below.

Ed Metzler: So, was the Franklin withdrawn from service and shipped back to be repaired?

Mr. Gallagher: The ... the ship ... the ship had to be sent back to the States. They thought, maybe at first, they could get it fixed ... fixed up at Pearl Harbor. And when we did get back, we were sent to Pearl Harbor, but when we got ... got there, they couldn't handle the damage that was done and sent us to Bremerton ... Bremerton, it's up in Seattle and Washington.

Ed Metzler: Washington, yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: So, that was ... we ... well, before that, we ... our captains were changed, too, because I think our captain was up ... pretty much ... his time.

Ed Metzler: Shoemaker (sp?), huh?

Mr. Gallagher: Shoe ... uh, Captain Shoemaker was a terrific ...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Gallagher: ... terrific captain.

Ed Metzler: He was a good guy, huh?

Mr. Gallagher: He was a good guy. And he was right in there when ... when we were attacked by the ... the torpedo planes and so forth. Understand, he was at the wheel steering that (unintelligible) steering that ship through ... through that action. But anyway, we got a change of command before we went back to the States, and we got a new captain, Captain Gehres.

Ed Metzler: He was a different kind of guy.

Mr. Gallagher: He ... he turned out to be a different kind of guy, yeah. I didn't have much contact with him (chuckles). I was only, at the time, I think I was still a seaman first.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Gallagher: And ...

Ed Metzler: Who was your officer?

Mr. Gallagher: Officer's name was George Stone, commander, and he was ... when I first got on the ship, he was lieutenant, and ... and ... but he was promoted to lieutenant commander. He was head of the V-5 (?) division which were only ordnance men. Also, V-5 included the guys that gassed the planes up.

Ed Metzler: So, the Franklin was repaired and upgraded, I suspect, and then she went back ...

Mr. Gallagher: She went back.

Ed Metzler: ... under a new commanding officer.

Mr. Gallagher: Commanding officer.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckle), what did you do while she was being repaired in Bremerton?

Mr. Gallagher: Well, for ... for the most part, when we got to Bremerton, half the crew was given ... sent home on leave, and I ... I think it was less than ... less than a month, but missed Christmas at home, but I was in the first group that ... did go on leave.

Ed Metzler: So, you got leave to go back home?

Mr. Gallagher: Right. And which was on the opposite side; it was on the Atlantic side.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, a long run, yeah ...

Mr. Gallagher: Right.

Ed Metzler: ... (chuckles) to get there!

Mr. Gallagher: Yeah, had to take a couple of different trains to get there, right. And then, of course, when we ... when I came back then the ... the ship was still being repaired, and would be, but the other half of the crew went home on leave. They got to be home at Christmas and ... and I spent Christmas with a family, a Seattle family, who had invited a couple of sailors to ...

Ed Metzler: That was nice!

Mr. Gallagher: ... to (unintelligible) Christmas dinner.

Ed Metzler: So, then she went back into action, and you did, too.

Mr. Gallagher: (Laughter), right. And understand they ... they took on some new crew and some of the ... of course, the whole air group was ... was replaced. We were initially with Air Group 13, but we were replaced by Air Group 5 which also uh, had fire planes and ... and dive bombers and torpedo planes. We ... we did have something different as well. As far as our fighter planes go, we had three Marine uh, air squadrons.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, the VM type, yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: That ... that flew ... that flew F4Us, the Corsairs.

Ed Metzler: Corsairs, right.

Mr. Gallagher: Right.

Ed Metzler: The big guys!

Mr. Gallagher: Terrific plane.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So, you're back to sea, and where does she go?

Mr. Gallagher: Well, let me think now. Well, we were sent up to uh, we were sent to start striking Japan, the home islands.

Ed Metzler: 'Cause this is getting to be into March of ... uh, February and March of '45.

Mr. Gallagher: Exactly! The ... Iwo Jima had been invaded ...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Gallagher: ... in early March, or actually February.

Ed Metzler: February, yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: But fight was still going on even when we went out there. But we were sent in a task group of a task ... a group of a ... that was part of a task force that went up to Japan to start bombing the enemy islands.

Ed Metzler: So, you're not so far away from the main islands then.

Mr. Gallagher: Well, we go pretty close, and ... and I wasn't captain in ... in, you know, the ... where we were going. People didn't say, "Hey, Walt, we're ... hang on, we're going ... going to Japan."

Ed Metzler: They didn't call you up and tell you exactly where they were going.

Mr. Gallagher: No, but we ...

Ed Metzler: (Chuckle).

Mr. Gallagher: ... we worked ourselves for about three days pushing bombs from end to the ship to the other it seemed, sending them up and loading planes. And ... and two days out from the ... from the islands, we started bombing. And it was on the third day that ... that the ship got hit by enemy.

Ed Metzler: This is the 19th of March.

Mr. Gallagher: Nineteen March.

Ed Metzler: Tell me ... tell me what happened.

Mr. Gallagher: Well, I was down in the mess hall, the ... the forward mess hall, the crew mess hall but that took care of mostly airmen, people that worked for the air department. They had two sections of ... of where to ... where the crew would have their meals, either forward of the galley or ... or to the rear of the galley. And I think the ... the rear ... the rear mess halls were much larger than the forward mess halls. But I was in the forward mess hall, and ... and this was ... this was sort of sending up the three days of ... of loading bombs and so forth with pretty ... pretty much without any rest, and we were pretty beat. And I took advantage of an ... of a cot that was in the mess hall, canvas cot. This ... this was the same mess hall that we spent ... I ... I spent my first night on the ship.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles).

Mr. Gallagher: I was sleeping in a hammock which didn't ... wasn't very successful, but the (chuckle) but the second night I slept on a ... on the deck rather than swing ... swinging in a hammock; it was pretty dangerous. But anyway, this ... this is ... this serious times now, we're pretty close to Japan, and I was heading for my bunk which had ... had been moved. After the ship had been repaired at Bremerton and so forth, I had a different place; I had a regular uh, crew's quarters, bunk and so forth, and I ... that's where I was heading. But I didn't go very far from where my work station I was in charge of ... of that elev ... the elevators on that deck, it was the third deck of the ship. And it was ... it was where the bombs would come up from ... from the magazines on one elevator and get moved over and put on another elevator either sent to the hangar deck or

all the way up to the flight deck where they would ... they would be put on the planes. And anyway, I had sent the other guys that were ... that were working that ... those elevators, told them to go hit the sack or whatever they wanted to do, and I would straighten up the place. And I ... once I did that, and I was heading for my ... my bunk, I saw this cot, and that's as far as I got. I got on that cot, and (slapping sound) I think before my head hit this ... the canvas, I was sleeping. And it was about a ... less than a half an hour later when the bombs dropped. And I was either on the deck from the concussion of the first explosion which ... which happened on the ... on the hangar deck, not too far directly above me, maybe ... maybe one compartment forward, but on the ... on the flight, I mean, on the hangar deck is where it exploded, and then I heard another bomb go off which was further aft of the ship ... which ... which caused a lot of the ships, uh, a lot of the planes that were loaded with bombs and ammunition and ,of course, all gassed up to start exploding and burning and so forth. And that also uh, filtered down into the hangar deck. The aft end of the hangar deck where there were already more planes already gassed up, some of them with bombs, with loaded bombs. And all of them, you know, this ... the aft end of the ship pretty much was blowing up and fires going all over, and all the way up to almost the forward end of the island and below. Fortunately, I was at the forward part of that, and it didn't breach me where I was on the third deck, didn't have to go too far on the third deck, if you went towards the rear of the ship to start running at the fires and so forth, but I was clear of that. And anyway, that's where I was when the bomb struck.

Ed Metzler: What'd you do?

Mr. Gallagher: What did I do? We still had live bombs near the elevators that I'd been operating, and they were fused up. And a good friend (pause) ... if ... if ... once ... once the bombing starting and so forth, he ... he was ... he was coming through the mess hall, saw me standing in the middle of this mess and compartment looking through and looking into the ... directly into the uh, officers wardroom mess halls where they were bringing in bodies that were ... looked like they were burnt to a crisp. Some might have been alive and a doctor

or whoever was directing them to put the person on this ... just put them on this table and ... and it was a triage of ... thing going on. But he was this friend of mine, (unintelligible), “Walt, you want to go up to the flight deck?” And I said, “No, I got to stay here and take care of these bombs. I can’t ... I can’t leave them fused up like this.” And so, he stayed with me and a couple of ordnance men came ... came by. We defused the bombs that were still there; it was about a half a dozen of them, and ... and took them out, you know, put ... put the plugs back in the ... in the bombs, put the ... put the fuses away in cans and so forth. When that was ... and I couldn’t do anything more with the bombs, just leave them on skids, made sure they were tied to the skids, but I couldn’t send them down below, I couldn’t take a chance. And it wasn’t any way ... the elevators weren’t operating anyway. So, we had to leave, and we went forward, and ... and took the ladders up that we could towards the Fo’c’sle and ... and on ... on the way, we ran into some sailors that were ... that were killed by concussion and stopped and looked at them and checked them out and ... to see if they were breathing which they weren’t and couldn’t do anything with them, we continued on to the Fo’c’sle which ... which had ... that were ... quite a number of people there. I didn’t have much clothing on since I’d been working down on the third deck for ... for so many days. I was like ... I think I just a t-shirt, both had a ... didn’t have ... didn’t have a ... a work shirt on; he ... I’m pretty sure I had shoes. Of course, I had trousers and I ... I’m pretty sure I had shoes, but my ... my friend whose name was Arthur Alameda (sp?) he found me a ... a life jacket, got me a life jacket and helmet. There were a supply of them up on the Fo’c’sle deck. And once I got those on, we did go up on the flight deck.

Ed Metzler: And what’d you see?

Mr. Gallagher: Well, I saw a lot of ship burning, exploding, parts ... parts of planes flying through the ... I mean, being sent through the air. So, one that just ... just traumatized, not traumatized me, I just had to stop and watch a ... a four-prop propeller going through like a boomerang out to the port just ... looked like it went out a half mile or so. And I was wondering (laughter) if it was going to ... to return like a boomerang to the ship, but it didn’t, of course. And then Father

O'Callahan (sp?) was coming and trying to get guys to come up and ... and handle some hoses and so forth which turned out to be kind of a lost cause. I didn't ... I didn't go with Father O'Callahan, but my friend, Ar ... Arthur did, I ... I stayed at that spot for just a little longer. But they ran into this (unintelligible) and it turned out the fire hoses were ... there was no water coming out of them anyway. But then the tiny tims starts zooming down the deck. Yeah, I thought we were being shelled by ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, those are the small rockets that ...

Mr. Gallagher: No, these were the big tiny tims, they were ...

Ed Metzler: Big ones.

Mr. Gallagher: They had eleven inch, you know, nose cones on them ...

Ed Metzler: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Gallagher: ... whatever you call projectiles. They were large, large rockets.

Ed Metzler: So, are there other ships coming to assist the Franklin at this point?

Mr. Gallagher: Well, there were some ships that tried ... tried to. There were some destroyers that were picking up sailors that were trapped on the ... I didn't see this happening, but I know it did happen. I've seen pictures of it. I did see some destroyers close by, and they ... they were ... they were picking up crew members that ... be they ... be they enlisted or officers. There were a lot of ... of members of the crew that were blow out into the ocean and so forth. And by this time, the ... the ship was coming to a ... a halt. It lost it's ... it lots it's power, too, and there was one ... one particular ship that was ... that came close by using their own hoses to try to hose down some of the fire and ... and so forth, but they ... they had to back off some also because there was some explosions and it was ... it was just too dangerous for them being so close. They could get ... who knows what was going to ... going to happen. There were still a lot of bombs on our ship (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: Some of them were ... were fused and armed on the ...

Mr. Gallagher: Well, I ... I think, well, there were ... there were the ones that were in the planes ...

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Gallagher: ... that were being blown up. And ... but I don't think that ... I don't think that there were uh, of course, I told you that we were u[forward of where a lot of the bomb ... a lot of the explosions an fire was going on, and they were defused, but there were bombs in the magazines. And it ... and it didn't, you know, it didn't take ... it didn't take ... they didn't need fuses.

Ed Metzler: No.

Mr. Gallagher: Now, if they ... if they got the heat or other explosions set them off, but there were plenty of bombs on ... onboard in the magazines.

Ed Metzler: So, did it look like the ship was going to go down?

Mr. Gallagher: Well, I ... I thought it was. I thought the ship is going to be sunk, I thought it was going to sink. I didn't see ... it was listing and wasn't really safe to run around on the deck, on the flight deck, leaning as it was. I mean, you could slip and who knows. But the [USS] Santa Fe, the ... the cruiser, that was ... that was using their hose to fight fire and so forth did come back. It did ... had ... it had separated from ... from us. We had initially ... link to them by lines which I ... I helped to ... to hold on to and hope that ... and they were transferring badly wounded and so forth on to the Santa Fe. Be ... before that, as well, there were some of the admirals ... the admiral for our task group was ... was onboard ship, and he took his staff with him, those that weren't killed, and they had a number of staff people that were killed as well. And Admiral Davidson ... but he had to take ... he had to take his flag and transfer it to another ... other ...

Ed Metzler: To a destroyer or something like that.

Mr. Gallagher: No, he went over to the ... the other carrier that ...

Ed Metzler: Oh, another carrier?

Mr. Gallagher: ... that was in our task group. But the San ... Santa Fe was the main one on ... the [USS] Pittsburgh was also there. It ... it eventually took the ship in tow.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: But I was ... I was transferred myself. We ... we got ... it wasn't an abandoned ship call, but orders were given out on ... on the flight deck that members of the air department that weren't trained to fight the fires and ... in a situation like that, they wanted to get them off the ship because there were, you know,

probably several hundred standing on the flight deck, just standing there, oh, maybe trying to keep the chill off 'cause it was pretty cold up there in March.

Ed Metzler: So, you were transferred to another ship?

Mr. Gallagher: So, eventually the ... the air ... the air department divisions V-1 through V-5 were transferred over to ... those that were ... were up there (unintelligible) in that ... that group were told to get over onto the Santa Fe.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Gallagher: And so, some of them got over there on ... I threw rope were ... I ... I, myself, when it came to V-5 division, (unintelligible) V-5 which were only ordnance men, and guys that pumped gas ... put gas in the planes and so forth, whoever was up there, that heard that command was given, by an officer, by his voice, saying, "All personnel from V-1," when he saw them, "move over to the ... to the Santa Fe. He would go through V-2, and finally he got to V-5, and I thought it was ... was the best orders that anybody (laughter) would ... was the best thing to do at the time.

Ed Metzler: Yep.

Mr. Gallagher: And I met the gentleman later on that ... that give ... gave those oral orders, and it was a fellow named Red Morgan, he was an officer, started off in the Navy, has a nice long naval history, got taught by pilots how to fly, became an officer, and ... but he was the guy that was shouting those ... those orders to ... to move over to the Santa Fe. And he ... he had got his orders from either the, well, they ... they came from ... the came from the captain, so, (unintelligible) or the air director.

Ed Metzler: So, they stabilized the ship and they towed her for a while.

Mr. Gallagher: But now, I was over on the Santa Fe.

Ed Metzler: Okay, so you're ...

Mr. Gallagher: Okay. Now, I was ...

Ed Metzler: ... you're not on her anymore.

Mr. Gallagher: No, I was ... eventually, I'm watching what's going on.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: And we're drifting apart, and we got a distance away, but we could see ... still see some smoke coming up and so forth. We ... we were ... I could see when they were ... when the ship was attacked again by a Japanese plane which fortunately, the one that I ... I saw crashed into the sea and ... and didn't ... didn't do any further damage. But I understand they shot ... shot one down as ... as well. But I was on the Santa Fe at that time.

Ed Metzler: Did you go back to ... to the Franklin?

Mr. Gallagher: I didn't ... I only went back ... when we reached Hawaii, I eventually got moved from the Santa Fe to the [USS] Oneida which was a ... an APA, and it took a lot of ... eight hundred and some ... some of ... of the crew back to Hawaii. And we saw the Franklin again back in Hawaii tied up, and we were given some time ... notice if we went aboard, we could go aboard, the gave us fifteen minutes to find our lockers ...

Ed Metzler: (Unintelligible), yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: ... and take our personal stuff out of the lockers if they ... if they still existed.

Ed Metzler: Is that what you did?

Mr. Gallagher: And that's what I did.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mr. Gallagher: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So, you left her at that point?

Mr. Gallagher: That's the last time I saw the Franklin, yeah.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I heard that later there was a fair amount of controversy with regard to the captain and whether people had been allowed to leave the ship, and desertion charges and all that. Were you aware of any of that?

Mr. Gallagher: Uh, initially, I was not. Initially, I was not.

Ed Metzler: Heard about it later, huh?

Mr. Gallagher: I heard about it later, uh huh. Well, heard about there in Hawaii that ... that the captain was charging some people that went over on ... it almost sounded like anybody that left the ship was going to be charged abandoning ...

Ed Metzler: Desertion.

Mr. Gallagher: ... desertion almost.

Ed Metzler: (Throat clearing).

Mr. Gallagher: But it turned out that I guess he was talking more ... he did ... there were people that weren't in the air department other than wounded that certainly should have been taken off that weren't part of the air department, they were part of the ship's crew that did go over onto the Santa Fe now. They ... they may have seen air department members going over there, and ... and ...

Ed Metzler: Read to.

Mr. Gallagher: ... read that into their brain that was anybody up here was going to eventually go over, but ...

Ed Metzler: So, you were separated from the ship at this point, and did you go back to the States or did you ...

Mr. Gallagher: No, I spent the next six months on the Hawaiian Islands. Initially, I spent a couple of weeks up at a place called Aiea which was a transient station for Navy/Marine personnel to ... to stay until they found other places to be assigned. It was a transient station, so spent a couple of weeks there before I was sent over to uh, with a group of guys over to Maui, you know? And ... but oh, I was there for about six months, and ... and it was a very pleasant time. And of course, it was shocking to hear that ... when I got over to Maui that our ... our president died, you know? I heard that. The first thing that ... that was ... (unintelligible) me, the intelligence, Naval Intelligence wants to know ...

Ed Metzler: What happened.

Mr. Gallagher: ... you know, what happened, what I did and ... and how come I was there and so forth (laughter). So, pretty much I'm telling ... telling that ... him, not quite in the same tone or because it was really part of an investigation. I think it was probably a routine thing to do anyway. But ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah, it was a major hit on a major ship, so ...

Mr. Gallagher: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... we're talking big deal here.

Mr. Gallagher: Right. But anyway, I had a real fun time in ... in Hawaii. Every week we had to ... we had to have some kind of recreation, steak fries or, you know, a case of beer.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles).

Mr. Gallagher: One week on ... one week on the station, they had a nice beach there, and ... and the next week we would take a ... take a ride to some other part of Maui, usually at a beachside. Didn't know it was ... didn't ... it wasn't always a beachside. They had a place called Twin Falls which was inland that you could go swimming and so forth, and ...

Ed Metzler: So, they were ...

Mr. Gallagher: ... places to cook up steaks and things.

Ed Metzler: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Gallagher: So, it was a rest ... rest and recreation period for me.

Ed Metzler: Right, right. What do you think about the Japanese after what you saw happening?

Mr. Gallagher: (Pause), the Japanese, of course, they were the enemy. We, you know, I didn't love any Japanese. I didn't ... yeah, but the whole time there were ... there were probably a lot of Japanese on Hawaii. I ... they were the enemy, you know?

Ed Metzler: So, at this point, you went in when you were seventeen.

Mr. Gallagher: Right.

Ed Metzler: So, you went through all of this when you were not even eighteen, or were you just eighteen?

Mr. Gallagher: Well, I ... I was eighteen.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: Because I turned eighteen in October of '44.

Ed Metzler: Right, right, right, so you were eighteen.

Mr. Gallagher: I ... I turned eighteen. We could ... we could ... we took that kamikaze on the 30th, my birthday was the 29th.

Ed Metzler: Oh, my goodness.

Mr. Gallagher: But it was actually the 28th back in the States.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, you were across the date line.

Mr. Gallagher: So ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: ... it was ... it was Admiral Halsey's birthday, by the way, October 30th, so ...

Ed Metzler: So, here you are eighteen, and you just went through hell; how did that change you as a person?

Mr. Gallagher: Well, uh, that's a long time ago, long time ago. Uh, I ... I had six months to ... on ... on the islands to recover, you know, rest and recreation, and ... and I ... I would ... I would probably get a little nervous if I heard an explosion, you know? But I ... I don't think it changed me; I think I grew up, I grew up some, I wasn't a kid.

Ed Metzler: (Unintelligible) change (chuckles).

Mr. Gallagher: So, that's true, that's true. And after ... after six months, uh, got our orders to depart, go back to the States, I was going to go on leave, and went back on, I forget the name of the ship now, I shouldn't. Was part of the ... it was ... it was a ... pre-war, was a passenger ship, part of the Hawaiian presidential lines or something.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mr. Gallagher: I forget the name of the ship, but it was a nice trip back, took about three ... three days or so to get back to the west coast, and got a train and ... and went to the east coast. And what I was doing finally, well, when my leave was coming up, I had to come back to the west coast for assignment which was not very bright of the Navy to spend all that time back and forth.

Ed Metzler: Shipping you back and forth.

Mr. Gallagher: (Chuckles). But the next six months I spent down in an auxiliary air field just below San Diego, just below Coronado, if ... if you're familiar with that area. It ... it was called uh, it was a naval ... it was a utility field, it's now call Imperial Beach. It got ... that ... and it got it's name several years after I ... I was there. But it was a beautiful place. Nice beach. I used to go to the beach there. Well, there weren't very many people on ... on an air station because the war was ... was over. And they probably didn't have more than two hundred people on the ... on the air station. And anytime I wasn't working, I could ... I had free gangway to go down to the ... walk down to the beach and pretty much had this beautiful beach all to myself at times.

Ed Metzler: So, was the war over at this point?

Mr. Gallagher: Yeah, the war is over now; we're talking about mid ... mid-October. I ... I left Hawaii, went to the west coast and ...

Ed Metzler: I understand.

Mr. Gallagher: ... and then to the east coast, and back to west coast, and it was ... it was ... (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: Do you ever have dreams about ...

Mr. Gallagher: Oh yeah. I ... I have plenty, still do.

Ed Metzler: Is that right?

Mr. Gallagher: Yeah, (unintelligible), yeah. Now, I ... I ... of the eighteen of us that went aboard ship together from ordnance school, ten of them were killed.

Ed Metzler: Wow.

Mr. Gallagher: You know? So, eight of the ... eight of us survived. You know, I dream about those guys, I still do.

Ed Metzler: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Gallagher: Not as much now as I used to, but I ... I know their names, I know every one that ... that lived or died.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Gallagher: And ...

Ed Metzler: I appreciate you spending the time with us.

Mr. Gallagher: Well, thank you for having me. Thank you.

Ed Metzler: Very moving.

Mr. Gallagher: Thank your museum, too, for having us.

Ed Metzler: It's our pleasure. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Gallagher: Thank you.

Other Person: Great, you ...

(end of interview)

FINAL copy

CD – #OH05098 – Mr. Walter Gallagher

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