

Winfred Chamberlain Oral History Interview

MARK CUNNINGHAM: This is Mark Cunningham, and today is the 16th of July, 2012. I'm interviewing Mr. Wink Chamberlain from his home in Houston, Texas -- I'm sorry, in Texas City, Texas. He lives at 1910 17th Avenue North. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education Research Center and Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So, Mr. Chamberlain, thank you for doing the interview with me. And, on behalf of the museum I want to offer their thanks as well. So, let's start right at the beginning. When were you born? When and where were you born?

WINFRED CHAMBERLAIN: I was born in Houston on March the 1st, 1921.

MC: Okay. So, that'll make you 91?

WC: I tell people that I'm XCI.

MC: What's that?

WC: XCI? You know your Latin or your Greek?

MC: Okay, yeah, XCI, gotcha. All right. And so, you're a native of Houston?

WC: Yes.

MC: And what were your parents' names?

WC: I'm a junior, so my daddy had the same name as I did. And my mother's name was Ethel.

MC: Now, did you grow up in the Houston area?

WC: Yeah. I grew up and went to school -- I was there all my life until 1950 when I moved down here to Texas City.

MC: Okay. And, when the war broke out on December 7th, where were you?

WC: I was home. It was a Sunday, and I was home from school --

MC: What school?

WC: -- at the time. I was going to Rice at the time. And I was home from school. First of all, all my (inaudible). My dad was killed in a refinery accident when I was nine years old. So, it was just me and my mother.

MC: You're the only child?

WC: Huh?

MC: You were the only child?

WC: Yeah. And, we rented out part of our house. And there was a couple that would rent there with us. And he was an engineer with Somastic Pipe Coating. And they had a yard out north of the SP railroad yards in northeast Houston. And he and I had gone out there to look at some of the work that was going on after lunch. And that's where we heard about Pearl Harbor.

MC: Okay. And, when did you go -- now, first off you're a US Navy veteran, right?

WC: Yeah.

MC: And when did you go into the service? And why did you go into the -- why did you pick the Navy?

WC: Well, first of all I've always been Navy-inclined, you know? I went aboard the USS Houston as a little kid. My uncle took me down when it made its inaugural tour and come to the turning base to turn around. I was raised, oh, maybe about four miles from the turning base. And as kids we used to ride our bicycles down there.

MC: Look at the ships coming in?

WC: Huh?

MC: Look at the ships coming in, right?

WC: Yeah. And, oh, one of the big attractions, in retrospect we could see now about the Japanese loading scrap iron. They shouted all back at us. But they loaded a heck of a lot of it in Houston. And on Sunday they would put on their costumes and their bamboo sticks.

MC: On the ships?

WC: Yeah. And they'd put on a show, you know? And we'd go watch that. We wasn't great for going on the ship. But, you know, it's just kids bicycling around and stuff.

MC: When did you go into the Navy?

WC: In August of '42.

MC: Okay, so you went in pretty quick.

WC: Huh?

MC: You went in pretty quick.

WC: Well, I didn't think it was pretty quick. I got back to school, and my roommate was pacing the deck, said in the war we're all going to be killed. And I tried to pacify him. But, first of all I left school at midterm there. And I took a quickie course out at the University of Houston in electrical wiring. And, then I wound up getting a job in Houston Shipbuilding. And I did the bridge deck wiring, general wiring on Liberty ships as a prelude to things. But then I knew that there was a good chance of being drafted. So, I quit that job, and I took a trip. My folks all come from Indian territory, northeast Oklahoma. And I still had an old aunt up there and some other friends. So, I took a trip up there less than a week off. I kind of got antsy and I come back because one of my concerns about getting in the Navy is the fact that I'm totally deaf in one ear. And so, anyway, I came back home, and Monday morning I went down to the post office. That's where the recruiting station was. The big old post office, I think, was on San Jacinto. And, so I went in and told them I wanted to sign up. And they said, you know, how

long? I said it's going to be a long war. Might as well sign up for six years, you know? And so they said, all right. So, they put me in a room. There was, oh, maybe 12, 15 or something like that, you know? They had a group of guys. And the doctors were giving us physicals and stuff. And, come noontime, the doctors went to lunch and left us all there with the corpsmen. And, I guess that I had said something. Anyway, he knew I had had some college. So, he says, "Come on. You ought to be in naval air." And he's going to take me down to naval air. And I said, hey. I didn't want to tell, so I said, "I have a little trouble hearing over earphones." And he said, "Well, I'll give you a test." Well, he takes me back in the room, and I guess I'm stopping up my ears. I don't remember. But that was probably the procedure. And he's calling numbers. And I'm really not a good ear stopper. So, I did hear something out of my no-good ear because I didn't have the other one stopped up good enough. Well, when the doctors came back, he evidently told them. But, because they about pulled my ear off looking at it, but you -- hey, it looks good. It just don't work. When the doctors were doing the hearing test and he's stopping up the ear, when he comes to me he says, "You already had yours." They pushed me aside. And so, I escaped there,

and I'm in the Navy, except I didn't weigh enough. So, they made me a reserve instead of regular.

MC: Okay, now where did you go to boot camp?

WC: Daygo, San Diego.

MC: San Diego? Okay. And that lasted how long?

WC: I don't know. It may have been five weeks or six weeks or something like that. It was cut short because of -- I don't know. I just remember that they called us out on the grinder one day, and they started calling off names for sea draft. Robinson is not a common name. They called Robinsons -- like, I never heard so many Robinsons in my life. They're calling all these guys for the sea draft.

MC: Now what's a sea draft?

WC: That's the guys going right to sea, not to school.

MC: Oh, okay. They're not going to finish boot camp? They're just going?

WC: No, boot camp, they declare boot camp over.

MC: Okay. Well, they obviously needed people quickly, right?

WC: Yeah. You know, you have to do something instead of dwelling around. I'm thinking this is probably -- I don't know. I could probably figure it out. But this is either maybe after Midway, or they lost a hell of a lot of people down there at the [Santiago?] Straits.

MC: Okay. Now, what happened to you after that? Where did you go?

WC: Well, I went to school. One thing I want to say, when I enlisted, you know, and they said, "When can you leave?" I said, "When am I going to leave," you know? They said, "You can leave any night. We've got a load going every night." So, I was smart. I knew it took two days to get to the West Coast. So, I said, "I'll leave Thursday." I figured I could get out there on the weekend, you know? And I thought that years later, here I am marching off to war, and my little old mother goes driving by. And, I'm sure it was very traumatic to her because here is her only child going off to war. And, I didn't have sense enough to realize that then. But, now it's too late to tell her, you know?

MC: She was here in Houston, right?

WC: Huh?

MC: She was here in Houston?

WC: Yeah. She stayed in Houston until she died.

MC: Right. Okay, now you said you went to some kind of school. What kind of school did you go to?

WC: Well, in boot camp they give you exams. And based on your exams, they interview for placement. I wanted to be a quartermaster. But they said that's closed rate. They

didn't have any room for quartermaster. Signalman works right up there with the quartermaster. I said, well, that sounds good. But that was closed, too. But they had sonar man. That was a great thing. According to them, when the sonar man made a contact, hey, you take it. You're in charge. So, that sounds good. So I said I'll take that. So, boot camp's over. I'm put in the transit area for guys that's going out to something. And I get word one evening you're leaving out the next day. So, I lash my hammock, get ready to go. And of course you take the normal half a dozen hours or so of waiting, you know? Eventually, they finally got some of us and took us from San Diego to the section base in San Pedro, California. I got there and asked the guys if this was sonar school. But, oh, they couldn't talk about it. It was super-secret. Anyway, the next day I found out it's what's called detection defense. Now, detection defense was controlling harbor entrance by two methods. One of them is a giant loop of wire out there, cable, that is hooked up to a very sensitive galvanometer. Anything crossing that cable will pull the earth's magnetic up and create an EMF that you can read with that galvanometer. And then, stationed all around out there was a bunch of sonobuoys. Now, most people have heard of sonobuoys nowadays because the way we spent money

in the military they see a Russian submarine, they'll drop one.

MC: Now, what are they?

WC: Sonobuoy, S-O-N-O. All it is, is a radio with a microphone on it. It drops down in the water to pick up sound. And at school we had to study sound, you know -- what an old reciprocating Liberty ship sounded like and what a submarine sounded, what a high-speed torpedo sounded like and all these sounds, and also how to read the chart. When something would cross that thing, this galvanometer had a recording system to it. And so, you've seen these charts like earthquakes, how they go up like that? Well, that's the same type of kind of thing you was getting with this galvanometer. And so, anyway, we finished that. We went in the first group of operators, operator class. They had some officers class before. But we were the first enlisted men in the operators class. And then they picked about -- I think there was four of us. I'm not sure. I know there was me and [Davey?]. And there was about four guys sent down from radar school in San Francisco. And these guys come in. They're first and second class radio technicians. Why the Navy sent them down to this little old school we had, Lord only knows. But anyway, they showed up. So, those four guys, they put us all in a maintenance class to

learn how to maintain all this equipment, which was really knowing how to maintain a radio receiver and repair the transmitters.

MC: Okay. Now you were still at San Diego at this time, right?

WC: No. This is San Pedro.

MC: San Pedro, California?

WC: Yeah.

MC: Okay.

WC: What is called a section base. I don't know. It may still be there. Back before the war it was an old Navy landing. The fleet used to anchor out there. And right by the thing was where all the water taxis came in.

MC: Okay. Now, how did you get in? I know that you're in the LCT group. How did you get into the LCT group? You're in sonar?

WC: No, I had to get to be an officer first. I haven't gotten there yet, see?

MC: Oh, okay. Well, how did you get to be an officer?

WC: Well, that's coming. Her, we get through with this class. Eventually they said, "Hey, you're shipping out." So I lash my hammock, get ready to go again. And, I don't go this time. Anyway, I hang around the section base. And then they put me out to Point Fermin. Point Fermin was a little city park right out on the point overlooking the

entrance to the harbor and all that sort of stuff. And they had set up a station out there. And there's an old lighthouse out there that I see on the internet had been restored. And I slept in that lighthouse. And we had a guy who was an electronics genius, if memory calls, from retirement. Mr. (inaudible) was -- he knew electronics like nobody. And he had a couple of chiefs up working on something up there in the top of the lighthouse. But they never let us go up there. And the Army was putting in their first fire control radar up in the hills. And they needed some expert advice. So, the Navy says, "Talk to Mr. (inaudible)." He said, "Fine, but I've got to put my technicians up there," which was us guys that had come from this school with nothing to do. I was supposed to be a maintenance man there at this point station.

MC: After you'd been trained to do sonar?

WC: Huh?

MC: After you'd been trained to do sonar? You were trained to do sonar, right?

WC: No, I never trained to do sonar. They sent to detection defense school. And so, anyhow, the Navy came out with what is called a V-12 program. I will say this. My station in Point Fermin was the greatest deal a guy could get in the service as far as I'm concerned. It was a

little city park that the Navy had taken over. It had a little restaurant that we took over as our mess hall. We had the lighthouse that we stayed in. And they built a station out there to hold the -- the galvanometer has to sit on a very stable foundation. So, that could -- it had to be a hole went through the floor and down and everything. So, anyway, the great thing was we was 48 on and 48 off that base. So, you was on for 48 hours, and 48 hours you go see the sights. And, somebody at that base had bought a 1928 Whippet Coupe for \$25, some sailor. When he shipped out, he sold it to some other sailor. And, eventually somewhere it become mine.

MC: And what was it?

WC: A 1928 Whippet Coupe. Whippet was a type of car, make of car, like Ford.

MC: How do you spell that?

WC: Huh? W-H-I-P-P-E-T.

MC: Whippet?

WC: Yeah.

MC: I'd never heard of it.

WC: Well, probably nobody else. Very few people have. Its name derived from the whippet animal, you know? And anyway, I had an aunt up in Los Angeles that I used to go visit and stuff. And, my uncle had gone into the Seabees.

And she didn't have a car. So, when I left I left her my Whippet. And after the war was over she visited me here and gave me my \$25. But anyway, back to the fact of the V-12. The Navy started what is called the V-12 program. What we thought is that the Navy's getting smart. They were going to take us old sea dogs and make officers out of us. Well, that was partially true. But anyway, Mr. (inaudible) told his yeoman to sign up anybody that was eligible. And so, Sam and I played on the basketball team together. And so, I often wonder what Sam had to say in my letter of recommendation because I had to go down to the section base and be interviewed by three commanders sitting at the end of the table. And I knew enough about reading the expressions. And when they looked at that letter it was awful powerful. So, I got notice that I was going...

MC: Officers candidate?

WC: Yeah. Well, first you had to go to college. The whole idea is they take you and give you a college education. And then you go to midshipman school. That was what the V-12 program was supposed to be. And, anyhow, I get orders. I'm going. And here comes the old question of hearing again, you know? I get orders to go to the section base to take a physical. So, I'm down in town one night, San Pedro, and I run into the old chief corpsman. I said,

"Doc, what's this physical?" He said, "Just standard thing." I said, "Well, I've got a little hearing problem." He says, "When are you coming?" I told him. He said, "Don't worry. I'll be there." We're in a little room to take our hearing test, and Doc comes in there and says, "You had your hearing test yet?" No. Stand down there. Face that-a-way. He started hollering at me. You could hear him clear off the pier down there. He turns around and tells the corpsman, says, "This man's hearing is 20/20. If you want me to do anything else, I'll be in the doctor's office." Now, he was the chief corpsman. And he and the doctor had served as corpsmen in World War I. And so, that was the end of my physical trials. So, off I go to St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa.

MC: Wow. Now, what year was this? Do you remember?

WC: Well, this was the next year. This was in '43, I guess. I went in in '42. This is '43.

MC: Yeah. You went to midshipman school. No, you went to college in Davenport, Iowa.

WC: No, I went to college in Davenport, Iowa.

MC: How long was that?

WC: For me it turned out to be one semester because they decided since I'd had other college they only gave me one semester. And then I'm ordered to Columbia University in

New York City. And so, off I go to Columbia University in New York City. And, some reason or other we were there -- I don't know how long you had to be in midshipman school before you was commissioned a midshipman.

MC: Was Columbia University -- that wasn't midshipman school, was it?

WC: Yeah.

MC: That was mid...

WC: They had midshipman school at Columbia. And of course they had them at the academy.

MC: Now, is midshipman school, is that what you would call today officers candidate school?

WC: Yeah. And so, anyway, I was there some period of time. And all of a sudden one Saturday at our general review, you know, where we're all marching and everything, I got sick. I was feeling like I was going to pass out. So, this officer sat me down, and I told him, you know, something's wrong. He unlaced my shoes. I don't know why, but he unlaced my shoes anyway and asked me if I could make it to sick bay. So, I made it to sick bay, and my boy and I was talking yesterday about medicine. And the Navy had what they call APC pills. We call them all-purpose capsules.

MC: What does APC really stand for, though?

WC: Well, they had two kinds -- aspirin, phenol and caffeine. That's what they had (inaudible), and aspirin and phenol and codeine, which was the high-powered one. Anyway, they gave me one of those things, and I was delirious that night. But the next day I guess somebody figured out I had a problem. So, they put me in a wire basket and hauled me out to St. Albans Naval Hospital on Long Island. And they flattened me in the bed there and punched me with a needle or something and announced that I had scarlet fever. And so, I always said I really did three things there. I got out in the least amount of time out of quarantine that you can be, which was more than anybody else. I agitated the hell out of the nurses with my cigar smoking -- I was a cigar smoker. And I learned to play cooncan, which was the game that these guys played.

MC: I'm scared to ask you what that was. What was cooncan?
Coon?

WC: Yeah. It was, I think, the black people's version of gin rummy before gin rummy ever came along. You know, it was a thing about that. It was an integrated hospital, you know, this thing. And there was a big old guy up there. And he had all kinds of sayings, you know, about cooncan, you know? It's politically incorrect today. But he'd sit up there and holler, "Cooncan, cooncan. Some coons can and

some coons can't," you know? And he had some other sayings which are a little more risqué that I won't repeat. But, there was another black boy across the -- we had a big room, and it was four cubicles in the four corners. And after lunch every day we had happy hour. You're supposed to take a nap. And he would watch. When the nurse got pretty relaxed up, he'd come clipping across. He and I would play cooncan all during happy hour. But anyhow, as I say I set a record of getting out of there. And, because I had fallen behind in my class, one of these days they shipped me off to Chicago. I think there was three other guys. I don't know what their situation was.

MC: To Great Lakes?

WC: No, this is right at Northwestern downtown.

MC: For more midshipman school?

WC: Yeah, there's a midshipman school there. And so, I arrived there. And the only -- me and two of my buddies distinguished ourselves by getting the first demerits that that school ever offered.

MC: What was that for?

WC: Reveille not properly turned out at.

MC: You didn't get up in time?

WC: Right. And, we had to do some hay-foot, straw-footing for a while as punishment. But, as the old captain said, you

know, we start in this program, you get so many they're going to kick you out. Anyhow, they interview you for what you want to do as an officer. And, somewhere along the lines, the original USS Houston got knocked off early in the war. The Japs sunk it out around Sumatra or someplace like that. Okay, they built a new one. And they said, "Hey, we're going to recruit the whole crew from Houston." So, I told this interviewing officer, I said, "You know, I'd like to be on the new cruiser Houston." And he said, "Well, you know, sometimes they pay attention to these things," so he put that down. And I graduated from midshipman school and get orders to gunnery school for large combat ships, and so, someplace in Carolina, along the coast there and stuff. Anyway, I arrived at this gunnery school. And they said, "Don't unpack. Amphibs has got the highest priority for people. And you're going to Solomons, Maryland.

MC: For what?

WC: For people.

MC: No, no, you said amphibs?

WC: Amphibs.

MC: What's that?

WC: Amphibious landing craft.

MC: Okay. That's your first introduction to the LCT?

WC: Yeah. They said I'd been drafted and I'm going. So, I'm off to Solomons, Maryland. And I go down there. And they said you could be a skipper of an LCT or an XO of an --

MC: Now, for the record, tell us what LCT stands for.

WC: Landing craft tank. It is specifically designed to carry three giant tanks onto the beach. That was how they got the name and everything.

MC: How long did the school take?

WC: I don't remember. But anyhow, there could be a skipper there or an XO on an LCI, which is landing craft infantry. And, if you was an XO you had to go to navigation school. And that was where you wonder what's going on. You say, hey, I just got out of midshipman school. I thought we'd been studying, you know? Well, the skippers are rusty. We can't sent the skippers without the XOs, you know? So, I said I will take the LCTs. And they said fine, you are the skipper of the 001. That's the first one.

MC: First LCT?

WC: Yeah. And they said your crew's waiting. Well, the way things happened, you had a number of these LCTs there. And you had the ship's company, the crew that lived onboard. And then you had training crews that lived in barracks. And they would come on. Each day in, they'd go out.

MC: All right, wait a minute now. Back up a minute. I'm confused. Did you actually live on the LCT?

WC: Yeah.

MC: Okay. So, that was a big enough ship it had quarters and everything? And how many...

WC: It's 120 feet long. The combat crew is two officers and twelve men.

MC: And you all lived on that thing?

WC: Yeah. We had the galley on there, a cook, and we had a head with a shower.

MC: I guess I didn't realize they were that big. I looked at the picture of them on the internet before I came over here. And I didn't -- where was all that? Was it down below the deck?

WC: No. If you look at one, here's the flap thing. And there's four sections back here. On the starboard side, the forward section was the officer's quarters. Now, you could put four in there, but that's...

MC: It had to be pretty small.

WC: Hey, everything was small. It wasn't built to be palacious, you know? The opposite side was where the 12 men slept. And they're in three-high bunks, four sections. And there's a locker that's about two and a half by two and a half or something. It'll hold your sea bag.

MC: All right. Now, how long did you train on that thing before you went overseas?

WC: I don't know. It wasn't very long because when I went down my crew was waiting because, you see, when they got skipper, then they moved aboard and they're the regular crew. The guys that are being trained, you give all the details to.

MC: Okay. Now what was your rank on this thing?

WC: I was an ensign.

MC: All right. And there were two other ensigns?

WC: No, there was nobody on there. I'm the only officer.

MC: You were the only officer with a crew of 12?

WC: Yeah, at this point. And we start training. And, because I don't know that I'm ever going to have another officer, I start teaching my quartermaster how to conn the ship.

MC: To what?

WC: How to drive it. With your conn, you're calling out the directions to the helmsman and the throttle man.

MC: All right. Now, you're training. When you left the States, now what did they do? They put these LCTs on a bigger ship?

WC: Yeah.

MC: And then you guys sailed along with it?

WC: Yeah.

MC: And then, where did you go?

WC: Well, when they decided our training was over with, they put four crews of us on the train to New Orleans. And we got the New Orleans and one of these things is LST -- that's landing ship tank -- shows up with our LCT sitting on the top of it, all right? So, we get aboard.

MC: That's 01?

WC: No, this is our new boat. This is the 696. The 001, that's a training thing. That rust bucket is still up there. The only distinguishing thing about it, you had three engines driving the thing. The last maneuver I made on the 001 was to keep that thing in the river until they could make room on one engine, until they could make room at the dock for me to finally get it into dock. So they said, okay, you guys get your gear and you go over. The 001 is what they call a Mark Five. Mark in the Navy means kind of stage or something, you know? And, the first 499 or 500 were Mark Fives. And then they come out with the Mark Six. Now, the 696 was a Mark Six. And, it was better because the Mark Fives only -- I don't think they had -- they only had one little cabin on it for -- the crew and the galley was all just essentially one thing. And they had one little cabin for the skipper. And so, the only thing I could remember that's significant about that is

this crew was so happy to have a skipper that they painted the quarters. And the guy that eventually became our group commander comes staggering aboard one morning (inaudible) and got his black shoes against the bulkhead and got white paint on them, which I always said made him hate me for the rest of the war. But anyway, we leave out of New Orleans, which incidentally I spent my last stateside night at Pat O'Brien's. And (inaudible) to the canal zone. And we went through some real rough weather, had one officer that never got out of his bunk. So, we got rid of him at the canal zone and got another officer who was an old Mustang. He was an ex-signalman. And he and I used to have a lot of fun. He'd get on the bow, and I'd get on the bridge. And we would talk semaphore with each other.

MC: Talk what?

WC: Semaphore.

MC: What's that?

WC: That's signal flags, the two flags. We didn't use flags. We just used the palms of our hands. And, it was kind of a way of giggling other people because I don't think the signalman was as good as we were at the stuff because I know. I would watch the signalman up there taking messages and stuff and never tell him, you know, what -- if they

missed something I wouldn't tell them. But I would tell them to get a repeat.

MC: All right. Now, tell me something. After you went through the canal, where did you go then?

WC: First landfall was Pago Pago.

MC: Never heard of it.

WC: P-A-G-O P-A-G-O.

MC: That was just an island or what?

WC: Yeah. It's a possession, Samoa and stuff. And from there -- well, we just went past there. And our first actually stopping was in Espiritu Santo.

MC: Where is that?

WC: Oh, that's...

MC: Philippines or...

WC: No, it's down below. You've got Australia. Up above Australia is, well...

MC: Where was the first place you actually saw action, where you landed tanks?

WC: I never landed a tank. You know, that was our designation. But basically what we did was laddering service. You had all these cargo ships come in and stuff. And they couldn't get to shore. There wasn't any docks. So, you put the stuff...

MC: Supplies on to take onto the islands?

WC: Yeah. We could carry 150 to 200 tons. And at that time most stuff off of ships got ashore. We actually got off of the LST in the Admiralty Islands which, if you're interested, they're about two degrees from the equator, the Admiralty Islands. And, of course, naturally it's not. And, see, every time we pulled up the hook it rained. It rained like mad until we could find our way to where we was going. And then it quit raining. And, we heard after we left there that they had a drought. It didn't rain for five days. But anyway, we worked around there for a while. I don't remember too much about what we did and stuff. I know the crew went ashore, and some of them didn't come back. And we were issued marine combat stuff. So, that's what we wore mostly, was just these --

MC: Helmets and khakis?

WC: -- green pants and shirts and jackets and those old rawhide shoes, which we carved up to make slippers out of. And anyhow, the rest of our group -- our group is about 12 ships.

MC: LCTs?

WC: Yeah. And so, 12 of them make up a group. And about three groups make up a flotilla. And, that's how the organization works. Anyway, this old group commander that got his shoes messed up, he finally shows up as our group

commander with the rest of the outfit. And so then we set sail for Hollandia, New Guinea.

MC: Now, you put the LCT -- not in that LCT, right? You didn't sail to New Guinea in the LCT, did you?

WC: No. We dumped it off in the Admiralty Islands. See, it was set on skids. And they turned the LST over, I think, about 17 degrees, and off we went into the water. And, of course, we had to get all the ways stuff off the bottom of us. But start, you, unlimbering our engines and our generators and start living, you know?

MC: So you went to New Guinea?

WC: Then we went to New Guinea.

MC: Now, was the fighting going on there?

WC: Not on the beaches. We never -- I never thought we ever got into much fighting, although eventually we got a fleet citation. But, in New Guinea, I'll show you what we did. They're getting ready for the Leyte invasion. About the first thing you do in an invasion is send the underwater demolition guys in. And they blow out obstacles. They're carrying on their back a little knapsack that has eight sticks of explosives. They're about two inches square and about a foot or so long, in this knapsack. Coming down out of the hills is this marine called Whitey who had seen plenty of action. He was kind of wild.

MC: What was his name?

WC: Whitey is what everybody called him. He was real blonde with a long mustache. But, they're bringing down all these sacks of explosives and put them on us. And then we take them out to the old four-stacker destroyer where the underwater demolition guys are and load past the mortar to get them loaded up ahead, you know? That's one of the examples of what we did. Another time we wound up -- well, see, these earlier LCIs, the landing craft, they had ladders on the side of them. When they hit the beach these ladders went out like that, and troops run out and run down the ladders. Took the ladders off, and on some of them they put a mortar on either side. Some of them they put a rack. I think it was about 13 racks for rockets. And then they were rocket mortar ships. What they did, they'd head for the beach. And at a certain point you'd turn loose your first set of rockets. You'd go so far, and your second set of rockets, forward, and a third set of rockets. With the mortars, you just need one mortar. They're just dropping the mortar in every so often. And they just make a road, two roads of explosives, right up the beach. Anyhow, we wound up loaded down with rockets and mortars for the rocket mortar ships. When you're loaded out like that, you're an ammunition ship. So, you're out in the

ammunition anchorage, which is not in calm water. It's out away from everything. This commander come aboard one day, and he said, "I know you T guys are better skippers than my LCI guys. And rather than them try and come out here and go alongside you and get stuck, would you come into our calm anchorage and let us get our stuff off?" And I said, "Hey, the only place we're going is to get something to eat." So he said, "I'll get you something to eat on every LCI." So, and away we went. Well, we go alongside the LCI. All their crew is busy taking off their stuff. I'm looking back, and two of my guys are on the fantail of this LCI who's got a whole bunch of tomatoes out there ripening. Two hands, bing-bing to two of my guys over on my side catching tomatoes. We got more food of different places. But this was one of our problems all the time was fresh food supplies. Anyhow, this is around New Guinea. And I can't remember what all we done there. I know at one time some high-ranking officer came aboard and asked me if I would do something. And I said I've got to, you know, have permission. He says, "Oh, we've got permission already." So, off I went. Later on, I get orders to report back to our anchorage and to report to the commodore of LCTs, South Pacific, with my log book. Anyhow, I finally, I went over to his flagship with my log book. And, to make a story

short, he and I decided they was a bunch of SOBs, the Navy, but we were pretty good guys. And somebody had (inaudible) some of his authority, you know? And, none of these ranks liked that very much, you know, particularly a commodore. You know what a commodore is, don't you?

MC: Pretty high up there, right?

WC: Yeah, he's above a captain. And actually, he's the first admiral stripe. And so, anyhow, we take off from there heading for Leyte. And, we eventually get to Leyte and participated there. The only time anybody in our group carried tanks was at that time at Leyte. And the skipper got killed with one of the tanks sliding into him. What he was doing up on the bow, I don't know. But when the tank took off it slid sideways and killed him.

MC: Wow. And this was the group skipper?

WC: This was the skipper of one of the LCTs in our group because they was certainly moaning and groaning about it, you know? In a way it's kind of ironic because the group commander, he wants to know when they're going to have the funeral so he can send the crew. Hey, in combat, they've got a station set up here. Here comes the guys through triage. If you're dead, there's the cemetery. They're buried, bang, you know?

MC: How long were you in Leyte?

WC: I don't know.

MC: Now, where did you end the war?

WC: Manila.

MC: So, you stayed in the Philippines then, huh?

WC: Yeah. Our next assignment was Japan. Oh, we stayed around and worked around Leyte. You know, it's all different kinds of things. I can remember laughing one time. There was an Army duck drowning out there. The weather was kind of bad. And some of these GIs were kind of sick. And I thought, you know, if I tried to go alongside those guys and accidentally hit them, down they're going. So, to rescue them I dropped my anchor and slid out the anchor slowly until we could get close enough the crew could throw a heaving line over to them and pull them over alongside. They could get on us. And, one of these poor guys -- of course, the crew is kidding them, you know? And this guy looked up and he says, "Well, you guys ain't never been in a foxhole." Anyway, we went from there. We really didn't do anything. I think we just went by Samar, more or less getting organized to go north.

MC: So, you were getting -- but did you end the war in Manila?

WC: Yeah.

MC: Okay. Were you all staging there to go to Japan?

WC: Yeah. Well, so we left Leyte and Samar and went to Subic Bay. And that's -- you may have heard a lot about Subic Bay. That's where the Navy turned into their big Pacific repair center until the Philippines won it back like a bunch of (inaudible). And, anyway, we got to Subic Bay. And the main thing I remember about there is I got orders to take the first contingent of the Seabees over to the area where they were going to build a sub base. And I got pretty well acquainted with them. Their first contingent, I think, was a couple of officers, maybe a half a dozen men, because they just set up a couple of tents, and they had a generator and a bunch of floodlights to floodlight out from their area. Their back is to the water. And, I learned something about the Seabees' mode of operation. They went in. The first thing they did was build their enlisted men's mess hall. The second thing they built was the officers' club. The third thing they built was the enlisted men's barracks. The fourth thing they built was the officers' barracks. When they got all their camp built, then they went to work on their project. And, however, I'd just haul the early guys in and watch them start to work. They had an old boy from Texas that was a heavy equipment operator that was -- he was really good.

He built a road up the side of the hills and flattened off the area where the enlisted men's club was going to be.

MC: Now, when did you get home? When did you finally get home after the war?

WC: In January.

MC: Did you get out of the Navy then?

WC: No.

MC: Oh, you were in for six years, right?

WC: No. I didn't weigh enough. So, no, when I got back to the States they said, you know, because of my points, they said you could get out right now, or you get 30 days' leave. I said, look, I'd been chiseled out of leave too many times. I want my 30 days' leave. But anyway, we was in from Subic Bay. Then we moved up into Manila. And, we had a group executive officer that was a great promoter. And, he actually promoted at the old ice house in Manila. And we got there. We stayed the rest of the war in Manila. We were there when MacArthur got there. And the only time I left Manila is I come back aboard one day and the boatswain told me that the exec had hit something out there. And they didn't think it did any damage. He'd looked all around. And one day the gunner's mate come over and wanted to get a case of beer, which was in the void tank under my bunk. And I said, okay, go ahead and take the cover off.

He took the cover off, and there's a big hole like that in the void tank.

MC: In the what?

WC: The void tank, V-O-I-D. That's what you call tanks with nothing in them. But we had stored our beer in one of them.

MC: Somebody swiped it?

WC: Huh?

MC: Somebody had swiped it?

WC: No, the exec had run over something and knocked a hole in the bottom. And so, I don't think the void tank was about five foot deep, maybe, or something like that, because I remember the gunner's mate stripping off his clothes and down there he went. And felt around with his feet to feel one. He passed out the other one. So, they got most of the beer out. But that's kind of a side of things.

MC: Right. So, when did you get out of the service?

WC: I come back to the States. I got my 30 days' leave. And then I reported in in New Orleans. And I don't know how long I stayed there before they sent me to Camp Wallace down here. Camp Wallace is what is now, I guess, Santa Fe, Santa Fe or Hitchcock, one. It was an Army camp during the war that they'd built during the war.

MC: Santa Fe, New Mexico?

WC: Huh?

MC: Santa Fe, New Mexico?

WC: No, Santa Fe, Texas, right down the road here.

MC: Oh, okay. I guess I didn't realize there was a Santa Fe, Texas, down here.

WC: Yeah. Right along on Highway 6. You come out of Galveston, and it's Hitchcock and Santa Fe and Alvin. And so, the Navy's policy was always you was mustered out as close to where you enlisted as they could get you. Anyway, they mustered me out there. But, you know, with our hole in the bottom and the bad struts we had to go to Subic Bay to go in dry dock to get ready for Japan. You know where they had the tsunami in Japan a few years ago, the big storm hit up there?

MC: Oh, yeah.

WC: Hey, that's about where I was going if the war had gone on. That was our assignment.

MC: Well, I think we've got a pretty good view of your military history here, okay? So, I'm going to go ahead and say just the tape down. And then we can chat for a minute and say thanks again for doing the interview with me. I appreciate it.

END OF AUDIO FILE