

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT
Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Dean B. Lucas

Conducted by Deb Barrett

August 31, 2005

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library
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Part 1: Introduction:

This interview is being conducted on August 31, 2005, at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, IL. My name is Deb Barrett, and I'm speaking with Dean Lucas. Mr. Lucas was born on March 2, 1922, in Benton County, Indiana, and now lives in Willowbrook, IL. He is a retired pipe fitter who worked for several companies before going into business for himself, and he learned about the Veterans History Project through the Genealogy Club here at the Library. Mr. Lucas has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Here is his story.

Part 2: Entering the Military:

So, Dean, where were you living at the time you entered the service? What were you doing?

I was living in Evanston, and I was an apprentice pipe fitter. I made \$50 a week – more money than I ever saw in my life! And then I bought a car – it was one year old. It was a [Hudson] – they don't make it anymore. And then I, uh, it was one year old, and I paid \$400. A new one was \$500, but I didn't have the money.

So, I was single, and I think I had a good life. My mother and father I don't think they ever saw where I was because they were in love with themselves (laughs). That's the truth.

I can remember at that time I had a dog, the name was "Patsy," and she was my friend.

I'm not very good at remembering it all.

One time I was on a vacation, and I came home, and my mother said, "Your dog is sick. I don't think he's going to make it." I looked at her, and she looked at me. I took her to the vet, and I opened the door, and she died looking at me. It's the first time I knew what death was.

Of course, I'd get it in the service, too.

Right.

From then on I was working as a pipe fitter apprentice. I liked my job. It was not the same thing every day. I was working in warehouses, high rises, mansions, everything else. And one time we couldn't figure out how to put a gas pipe without doing the ceiling because it was plaster at that time. And I took direction from a five-year-old kid because he knew his house! (laughs) So, you never know what you're going to do from one day to the next day. Sometimes they told me to go out – I was a pipe fitter, but they told me to go out – but they also did some sheet metal. They sent men out to see – plaster used to be a thing on top of the heat ducts, and they'd plaster over it. So, anyway, I went down there, and I was tapping where it was and was just about to tell them. And some little kid came up and said, "What are you doing, mister?" And I said, "I'm hunting for a heating duct." And he says, "How did it get there?" (laughs) And pretty soon he disappeared

and three kids come asking me, “What color is it?” I don’t hear quacking. I was giving them the business. But I enjoyed the people I got acquainted with. I enjoyed everything.

But I worked in apartments – everything. I just enjoyed. ... I should have been an apprentice for five years. But they give me ... one year off [because I was in the service]. And I think I was making 99¢ - \$1. And I thought I had more money than I needed. ...

So how did you get from there into the service – did you get drafted, did you enlist?

No, I enlisted.

Why did you enlist?

I don’t know.

(laughs) You ask yourself that afterwards, huh? How old were you when you enlisted?

19. I think it was 19. My father said, “I know you are going to enlist anyway.” I said, “How do you know?” And he said, “Because you’re going to do it.” He was right.

So which branch did you enlist in?

The Army Air Corps.

Why did you pick the Army Air Corps?

I liked electricity, and I’ve always enjoyed the things I did. But electricity – I don’t know why I’m still alive! (laughs) But when I went there, they told me I would go to Wichita Falls for training and I could be a mechanic. But instead they had me doing batteries for the students that ... [were training] ...

We can get to that in a minute. Let’s talk a little bit about when you were inducted. Where were you inducted?

In Chicago, someplace.

Someplace in Chicago. Okay. What were your first days like after you were inducted?

I went to Rockford – I can’t think of the name of the camp now.

Was it Camp Grant or something?

Yeah. Camp Grant. And they told me the first day, “Pick up the cigarettes.” I said, “Huh?” They said they were kidding me. So, I thought – “I didn’t come out here to

pick up cigarettes.” Then they said the next day, “Who knows how to drive a truck?” And I thought – “There’s something wrong here.” So I didn’t do anything about it. And this guy said, “I can drive a truck.” They said, get that wheelbarrow and take that dirt from here to there.

(laughs) You were glad you didn’t say you could drive a truck!

And then they put me on freight cars – that were full of flour by the sack. This guy and I, I think we loaded so much flour we were getting silly. [Colonel came] into the freight car, and I looked at him, and ... he got ... covered with it.

You covered a colonel in flour? (laughs) That probably was not a good move!

He says, “What do you think you’re doing? Not you – somebody else.” He just turned around and left me alone, and I don’t know why.

Now, was this during your basic training?

No, that was later. I was there about ten days.

In Camp Grant?

Yeah.

And is Camp Grant where you had your basic training?

No.

Where did you go for that?

Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas.

Okay, so you went from Chicago down to Texas?

Yeah.

Okay. Tell me about your basic – your boot camp.

Well, they would kind of tell us how to march. ... I was in the Boy Scouts. And one of my Scout leader’s was a Captain in World War I, and he taught us how to march. So I didn’t have to learn anything, because I knew what was going on. And I always thank him, because people do about the same on all that stuff, and I knew what to do.

(laughs) So you did a lot of marching.

Yes. In fact, one time I think I put us on the tarmac on a Sunday, and stood at parade rest for President Roosevelt at that time, not the other one. We sat there doing it in about 85-90°. And then he comes by at 45 mph. I don't know why we're there!

(laughs) So tell me more about your boot camp. How long was your basic training?

I think maybe two weeks.

Two weeks? That was quick.

Well, they taught me how to do Morse code. Morse code was a good thing then.

They taught you Morse code in base camp?

Yeah. I don't remember it anymore. I can only say, "S-O-S."

What do you remember about your instructors in basic training?

They took me right away to a meeting that night where the electric was – where all the stuff was that was electric. So I didn't have a lot of basic training. That comes later. I think. I wasn't satisfied. And they wanted to know if I was only there maybe six months or more.

In Texas, still?

Yeah. And then I went to – I told you before.

To California?

No, no.

Camp Grant?

No. In Florida. It was nothing but a hotel. There was a swamp or something there and an airport. And they started me out there. And the first thing I saw was a six-foot rattle snake! It was right on the orderly room – they used to have a name for that.

The tarmac?

No. Where the people were and all that stuff. I can't think of it now. And then, there it is.

We also had our shower. There was that snake that has all kinds of round ribbons, and that was poisonous, too. And we had to kill it with a shoe.

So it sounds like that was pretty exciting.

It was. Then they didn't know what to do with us. So they gave me some quartermasters to do something about your shoes and shirts and all that stuff. And one day they had a bugle up there. So I started playing. And they said, "Can you play a bugle?" And I said, "Yes, I can do that." So suddenly I was the guy to wake them up in the morning with reveille, and for mess and all that stuff. And so I was in the – I don't know what it is now – but training people that for we call TV now, you can see ranges and all that stuff.

Oh, are you talking about radar?

Yeah. Radar. So I was pursued also, I was doing who and what at the orderly room – that's what I wanted to say, the orderly room. And pretty soon I was okay there.

...

What you are doing at the orderly ... [room] is, we had to have people KP and all that stuff, and so when it was bugle I did most of the time. And one time I was looking at who was coming in, and I was going out. Finally they got me into getting mechanic for airplanes. So I went to a hotel in Miami.

First of all, we had nothing to do. They put us in I thought it was gas masks and how to hold your breath. And also they gave us a gun and we had to guard the trucks and jeeps and all that stuff.

This is all in Miami?

Yes. Still in Miami. Because they didn't know what to do with us. And so I think I give some blood to a girl that wanted a permanent members were there that needed blood. And so I give her my blood. And pretty soon I was off into Wichita Falls. I can't think of the name of it. And then I was started on B25's. And we did everything.

This was as an airplane mechanic?

Yeah. And we started at everything – instruments, the brakes, the electric, the instruments, the how you do with the engines and all that stuff. I think I was there, maybe I'm wrong, I think about three months. It was very interesting.

And when we were there one guy acted up and threw his mattress out of the window on the ground. And nobody told who it was. So on Sunday we had a ten mile march. And it was kind of boring, so we said, "Let's step it up a little bit." And we had a new lieutenant. And he didn't know what to do because we stepped it up so much he was running.

(laughs) He thought he was going to wear you guys out, and you wore him out! So this is all part of the training you had.

Yeah.

It sounds like you did a lot of moving around the country getting your training.

Yeah. And when I got through with that, I had an 89 in my electric, so they sent me to Chanute Field to get electric training.

Here in Illinois.

Yeah. And also, being there I guess maybe two and a half months. And there was a railroad down to Chicago. So we could go out on Friday night until Monday morning at 5:00. So pretty soon I got – there was a two-story barracks, and I was underneath the steps. I found out I could sleep whether there were people going in or out anyway.

And sometime they come out there, and when we were not in school, we had KP or we had marching and all that stuff. And somebody said to me, “Anybody here know how to type?” I said, “I think I know somebody.” He says, “You know who he is?” I said, “I don’t know his name, but I’ll let you know.”

So I went to the orderly room and he said, “When do you want him? He wants to know why you want to do it. “You type.” And I said, “Yes.” I was very shrewd when I was in high school, I took typing. I won over 44 people, all girls. So, anyway, they let me out because I was doing typing. I don’t have anything to do for PT or anything else.

All you did was typing.

All typing. And then they said that they would let me go at 1:00 in the afternoon and you guys are getting out at 5:00. I was on Chicago hours.

(laughs) So it sounds like you did the typing, and you got out of a lot of unpleasant things.

Yes I did.

And it sounds like you also got to go out and have some relaxation, some weekend time, trips home.

Yeah. One time, I think, one of the guys I was very friendly with, I took him home. They told us to go to KP. They said him, my friend and myself, to go to the bakery. So we went there. They said there’s some magazines and funny papers – you can read them. Well, that was 4 AM o’clock, and it was 10:00 and nothing is done yet. I’m getting bored. He was, too. He said, “Well, go ahead and get your lunch.” This guy and I talked about it and said, “This is a good deal, isn’t it. We don’t do nothing.” So about 3:00 or 4:00, okay, [they said] we need you now. It was a baker that goes back and around and around. And each one has a shelf. And you can get about, I think it was 13 or 14 loaves each, and you have to work fast because it don’t stop. Anyway. We did that until midnight.

Wasn’t such a good deal anymore. (laughs)

When we come home to our barracks, we were going this way – (both laugh).

So how long were you in the States, when you were going and getting the training and doing these things.

18 months.

18 months in the States.

Yes. 18 months and then overseas.

Okay. When you went overseas, where did you go; where did you leave from?

They give us a week off at home, and then we had to report to, I think it was North Carolina, Goldsboro or something like that. So I went on the train.

Just a passenger train?

Yes. They give us tickets to get there. But I had to leave on Sunday so I could get there on Monday. And what happened, there was no train on Sunday. So, instead of that, they gave us another train to Atlanta, Georgia and then back to Goldsboro, North Carolina. And we were late maybe a half a day. And they didn't do anything. And then we had to – they didn't know what to do with us. I think they knew what they were going to do.

You mean they knew they were going to ship you out.

Right. But I was there about a month, maybe a month and a half.

Before they shipped you?

Yeah. And then they shipped me from North Carolina to Angel Island, next to that penitentiary in San Francisco.

Alcatraz.

Yeah. Alcatraz is closer to California than any Asian Island. You can't get out of there. It used to be for the Asians coming in. So there was a lot of Australians in there too.

So you went from North Carolina. And you had to go by train across to California, and then go to Angel Island?

Alcatraz and then Angel Island.

So you went to San Francisco and then continued from there.

Yeah. And then I said I broke my glasses. And they let me go into San Francisco. They give me two days pass. And so my sister and her husband – he was in the Navy – so we got together. Then I come back to get – the boat comes once in a while, so I had to wait until about 5:00 to get out there. And then, pretty soon, they put us on the liberty ship named “Howe.” And we were there, and it was just a plank.

It was just a troop ship, right?

Yeah. And we get out there. And they assigned me to the latrine.

(laughs) Lucky you!

And all at that time was boards. And had water coming in and out the ship on the other side. And you just sat there. That’s all. And one of the guys that was, I think, was sick this guy because some waves out of San Francisco are big ones. And so he was sick, and I thought – I’m not sure I want to be under him. And so, it seems they had two meals a day, and it seemed like it’s always sauerkraut. So I said to him, “Sweeten your sauerkraut so you don’t get seasick.” He said, “Yeah?” So he went there and he had sauerkraut, and he wasn’t sick. (laughs) And pretty soon he would say, “If you don’t have one you get sick.” He had about 26 there, back and forth. That’s when he had sauerkraut and he was okay.

So it was a 26 day long trip.

Yeah. Well, they go this way and then this way, back and forth.

It wasn’t a straight line.

It wasn’t a straight line. And we pulled some place, I don’t know where – one of the islands up there that I think the United States already had. And we crossed the equator, and they let us go there, because people – one of the, in the, I don’t know, one of the places, the other one is something. And if you did it before you’re something else, you know.

Right. It’s one of those traditions about crossing the equator.

And so pretty soon it comes back and forth, and they let us go. They had fire equipment. It was a nice day. It was about half way there.

But you don’t know where it was that you stopped.

Oh, no. That was after we crossed. Anyway. I never seen so smooth water in my life.

As on the equator?

Yeah. It was just smooth. I mean, it did that for about five or six days. There was hardly any waves at all.

Must have been a relief for your sick friend with the sauerkraut (laughs)!

(laughs) But anyway, the fish were ahead of us.

The dolphins?

No, not dolphins. About this long.

About a foot long or so?

Yeah. And then you're hungry most of the time.

So what was the food like on board? Besides sauerkraut, what else did you have?

I believe we had – I think that's all we had, I remember, I think. I think we got pancakes. And it was the same thing over, and over, and over. I know one time there was a seaman – he was on the tail of the ... [ship]. He was eating grapefruit. I says, "I'll give you a buck for that." He says, "Here." It was good.

Not a lot of fresh selection of fruits.

Then we got off in Port Moresby.

Which is where?

In New Guinea. Now I understand it's a town. It was nothing before this.

And what was the name of the place?

Port Moresby.

Port Moresby?

Yeah. And we had to climb ... [down] that net that people are going ... [down]. I mean you don't stop. I didn't know I could make it! Then we sat on the beach, I think about five hours. Then pretty soon people come out and said, and they have your name. And pretty soon you're not there. Pretty soon another one – no. And you got, and they take three or four people out each time, because that was an airport that may have been in New Guinea. ... And I was in 319th squadron, 90th heavy bomb group.

So they were picking you three or four at a time to go to these different groups.

Yeah. There was in each one had a chief. There was maybe 16 of us went down. But about 24 went each way, you know.

So you're sitting there about five hours, and they're gradually distributing you to these different groups.

And P38's, B25, AT20's, all that stuff, you know. So each one had to have something. You probably wouldn't see men again.

What were the living conditions like there? Were you in tents, were you in barracks?

We were in tents.

Okay. Tents with cots.

Yeah.

How many men were in a tent?

Maybe six or seven.

Six or seven in a tent? How many tents were there?

I don't know.

Was it like a small group, was it like a hundred tents?

Oh, probably between 75 and 100 – someplace in there.

Okay.

There was ants everywhere.

Ants?

Yeah. And when they go out, they're moving – don't go to 'em.

Were they like fire ants?

I don't know. Big ants. They were high, they had their stuff up maybe about four feet. And they march. Just leave them alone.

I think that was the first time I was there. We had, well, each, I was assigned to a plane. And I think it was "Sky Lady." And each one had a different engine to take. Because the B24 had four engines. I was on #3 engine when I told you that story.

Go ahead and tell us again.

Well, I was in changing something on one of the, I think it was a sparkplug. And it's, I think a 36 sparkplug for the engines. Each one had two sparkplugs. I was changing it. And somebody came up the ladder on the platform. I knew somebody else, but it didn't make any difference. And he said, "What are you doing soldier?" And I says, "I'm fixing the plane. Ask a dumb question you get a dumb answer." He was the four-star general of the [Fifth] Air Force. I thought I was going to get it, but I didn't.

(laughs) So you worked with a certain group of planes?

Just one plane. Each one had its own crew. And it takes four for each one to do it. We have to change the – every time they fly out we had to change the oil filter, and I think it was 36 gallons of oil in each engine. I mean it has its own container. It's about a barrell.

But one time I told the crew chief, "Did you see what I done?" He said, "No."

Okay, we ran out of tape when you were telling me about the oil.

I said, "The one I had, something I did wrong." He said, "What's wrong?" I said, "I put the oil spout. I put it back and it was curved on one corner." I don't know why it didn't leak. But he gave me up one side to the other for what I did, and what I shouldn't do and all that stuff.

(laughs) He made sure you didn't do it again.

So I thought maybe a month later, our ship – they call them a ship – about 2:00 in the morning they're getting ready for the crew. And so they give me another plane to give them a hand. So I come back, and our plane was still there. And I said, "What's wrong?" And he looked at me – I mean one of those looks. He said, "Don't tell me anything, I don't want to hear it." He forgot to put the thing on. We had 26 or 36 gallons [of oil] on the side of the plane – we had to get it all off.

So, how long were you in New Guinea?

I don't know.

Was it months?

Oh yeah. Months.

Less than a year?

Yeah. Less than a year. Because I know that I was the last – everybody went out to Biak; it's a little island north of New Guinea. And other people had left. And we were taking the last of the pieces we had into our plane. And it was so loaded, I said, "I think I

should stay here.” And this guy was a Master Sergeant. And he said, “Be with me. ... They can’t get you out at all.” [by an Act of congress] And he was a nice guy, no trouble at all. And he says, “Get in that plane.” I didn’t think it was going to get into the air, but we did.

(laughs) Now when you were in New Guinea, you were there for a long time. What did you do on your free time? What did you do for recreation?

What free time?

You didn’t have free time! Okay.

Sometimes they had ball games or something. But that was very few and far between.

So it was a very, very busy place.

Yeah. There were bombings every day. I can’t think of a time when we didn’t have a bombing.

Where were the bombers going?

From the west side to the east side, and out farther – they pound the airports that Japan had. And, in fact, one of those pictures I showed you.

You showed me a picture of a bombed plane.

And there was nothing on there at all. That was just ... south of ... Port Moresby. And when we got there, I was on a plane one time. I never saw so much stink in your life – dead Japanese. I think the Marines and the Army – you can’t understand what the hell you were seeing.

Just the amount of death and destruction.

Right. Everything was gone. So, anyway, then I went to Biak, and they said that other electrician – he wanted to be in the radar; they give it to him. And then I was in his place. And I was an electrician. And there was two of us to get 16 planes ready each day. This guy is a nice guy, but he was a drunk. And where he got it, I have no idea. But anyway, we did that. Then pretty soon he was sent home, finished his tour of duty.

Then they said I was going to be a Staff Sergeant, then. Because only so many people.

Right. You have to be a certain level to have more people reporting to you.

Yeah. And, so, another guy comes in, and he was a Staff Sergeant, so I didn’t do it. He didn’t know what he was doing at all. ... It was a, oh, what do you call it, get

more power, there's a name for it – you can get more speed out of it. And so he says, "Get this and go back where we have our stuff and put it back. I've got to have everything." He said, "I asked you to get this one." And I said, "We ain't gonna do it. It's not going to solve the problem." He says, "What do you mean?" I says, "It's not going to solve it." So he changed everything and it didn't work. And the crew chief said to me, "Dean, what's wrong with it?" I says, "There's nothing wrong with it. We can't get it up to speed." Well, the sand was so thick, that I said, "You've got a build-up in there.

It's clogging up.

"It's clogging up, and you're going to hear it bang." He says, "That's when you did it, and I didn't do it." I said, "Because I was a pipe fitter." And he turned to this guy and he said, "Don't work on my plane again. I want you out of here." And it's just a lot of people knew what they were doing and some didn't.

We got one guy, he went in his khaki's, not overalls. He come home, nothing on his shirt or anything. And he was a good mechanic.

But he never got dirty.

No. He was a crew chief, but I mean, I wonder because I can remember going to somebody's house to see the new recreation room at the time and I come up, I'm dirty.

(laughs) And how did this guy keep from getting dirty (laughs). So you were in Biak how long?

I don't know.

Okay. Where did you go from there?

Philippines.

Do you know which island – where in the Philippines?

Yeah. I'd have to see it. It was on the west side of, it's southwest out of Manila. It's another island. And that's when I think I was the only one, and I had 16 planes to take care of.

But you were doing the same job there.

Yeah.

But you were moving a little closer to Japan every time.

Yeah. So, anyway, they wanted all planes flying. I was on one of the planes, but I couldn't see. Well, we didn't have lights yet. So what I saw on this supercharger – that's what I wanted.

Oh, supercharger.

That supercharger, I saw cracks on it. Well, if not, that goes down so fast. It would get the guys inside. So, when they come in the daytime, I can see it running along. But I thought, I'm here to protect them. Oh. They told me I could get something. ... You'll never see civilization again (both laugh). So, you know, that's how important you were.

So, after Biak you went to the Philippines and you did the same work there. How long were you in the Philippines?

I don't know. Just 6 months.

Six months each?

Yeah. I think on Biak we went to where the Marines raised the flag.

On Iwo Jima?

Yeah. I don't know how many flights we had. Night, day, all the time. And, also, when I was there, our planes went out and then B29 was just coming in, and they wanted fuel, ... I said, "You can have it, ours, until they come in." They wanted fuel, that's all. They said, "Can I back in?" I said, "Sure, if you can." They have a reverse prop. I didn't know they had that.

So you were there when there was the battle at Iwo Jima, is what you're saying. And your planes were some of the planes that were providing support. What were you hearing about that at the time – were you getting any reports, did you hear anything?

No. A lot of people were killed. Most of my planes made it back.

A lot of lives were lost there.

A lot of my planes came back, but a lot of dead were ????. When you see a gap when they're coming back, everybody's counting.

When you see a gap in the plane formation. You know some of the planes didn't come back.

And it's hard to take. Even if you don't like 'em.

Whether you like the person or not, it was hard to take.

Yeah.

So, I imagine that would have been very stressful for everybody on the base.

They let me go for ten days in Manila.

For like a leave?

Yeah. And they had a little camp.

For R&R?

Yeah. And I think I was drunk every time. I'm not a drunker either.

But those were unusual circumstances, then.

I remember I was in a bar, and there it was run by ... [white] Russians. All girls. They were nice girls, I mean.

This was in Manila.

Yeah. And we finally met up another time and toured another bar room and this guy and I, I mean we were drunk. There were three of us, and we had to be off to the camp at Midnight. Well, it was 12:30.

Oops! (both laugh)

... Here comes a jeep and he said, "You want a ride?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "You know, you shouldn't be out there." I said, "Yes." He asks, "Are you on leave?" I said, "Yes." So he gave me a ride, two of them. And I looked at the driver – I wasn't that drunk. I saw the next guy was a four-star general.

You seemed to run into four-star generals a lot, didn't you! (both laugh) And not under the best circumstances!

He says, dropped us off at our camp, "You shouldn't be out." "I know," I said. I was sober right then! (both laugh) But he never said anything.

Sounds like he understood. So, how long were you in Manila, then?

I think ten days.

And then you went back? That was just R&R and you went back?

They gave us a plane for our return. It wasn't raining. We took off to go somewhere we were at, that time. I never seen so much rain in my life. We didn't get so much of ????. "What is that?" You could see a ring around it. It was a light or something.

Like a glow?

Yeah. And I thought, are we going to land or what? But we did. But it was very scary, you know. What I didn't tell you, was that when we were moving up from Biak to the Philippines, somebody had to be on the boat; somebody had to see what was going on. I think it was ... [five] of us. And we hit the hurricane – they call it something else.

A typhoon?

Yeah, a typhoon. And they had somebody, one of the Marines – no, the guys, the Coast Guard – there was 140 ships in that bunch, in there. And, also, I could see at least 98 to 100' next to us. And we had bombs in the ship. And they said that, oh, back and forth, there were wedges in it so they don't roll around. Well, the wedges come out. It wasn't set to go off, so you hear, clickity, click, pling. You finally get to sleep and you roll out of bed. And we did that for I think at least, it took us about ten days to get there.

And you said this was going from Biak to the Philippines.

Yeah. And there's nothing, there's no clang, clang, clang. I don't know. And I ask him, I says, "What is this roll over?" He says, "49 ½." I says, "What are you doing." He says, "49."

So you went from Biak to the Philippines. You were in the Philippines and you did the same thing. About six months, it sounds like. And you came home after that?

No, no.

Where did you go after that?

I was on my way to that southern island of Japan. I can't think of it.

Not Okinawa?

Okinawa. Yeah. And my shoulder went out.

Were you doing something, or was it just from stress or something?

I don't know. So, they let me on shore at the Navy – I can't think of it now; it's way up north. They gave me a cot, and they had my arm in a sling. And they give me, there was a lot of Philippines going to Manila on a truck. They let me off at the front door. That's where you read that.

So, this was you were going up to Okinawa, but you had the problem and you ended up back in the Philippines in the hospital?

And where the Navy's stationed. I don't know where it is now. It's not there anymore. And then they operated on me there. So I didn't go to Okinawa.

So they operated on you and you recovered there for a bit, or did they just send you home?

I was there for maybe six or seven days. And I thought my shoulder was going to pop. There were about 50 men in there for all kinds of things. And I thought they had raised my bed. It was so hot, they put, my hand was wet. They put ether down.

To cool?

Yeah. But before that, no, then on I was sitting up sleeping. I said, I think I could do this. You have to take the bed and put the thing off. And, I go I had my hand in it.

So you hurt your good hand. (laughs)

And everybody was mad at me. And then they guy that did that, he didn't operate it. He didn't know what he was doing. He sent me home saying I was okay. So I was in someplace, I had a ship, a hospital ship.

You had a hospital ship to go home.

And I don't know what the name was. It was a bedding hospital over there. And in San Francisco. And they turned me, a whole bunch of us, into one hospital in, for the Catholic hospital now next to Hines. And when I got there it was 2:00 in the morning. And I knew my mother and father had moved.

They moved while you were in the service.

Yeah. So I said to the girl. She said, "What's your home address." I said, "I don't know." (both laugh) I said, "You can get a hold of my mother and she'll tell me where I am." She said to the ward ... [aide], "Take this guy to the telephone." I'm not sure of the right ward. So, I found my brother and he told me where they live. I had to get them.

Were they still in Illinois?

Yeah. They tried to get rid me. (both laugh) So, then, I think I was there about five or six days, and they took me, let me go home, for a leave for a month. And I was there maybe ten days and I got ma laria then. Because I didn't have the pills anymore.

Then they put me to bed, put a sheet on me – I mean the rubber sheet – I think she said about Midnight.

This was at home?

No.

Still at the hospital.

My mother and my father brought me back. She said, put the rubber sheet on there. Well, about Midnight she leaned on the bed and water was rolling off me.

The water rolling. (both laugh)

Anyway, they let me go again after that, and they let me, I think maybe a week or month, maybe more – I'm not sure. Of course, then, my mother would feed me anything I wanted. And I was 124 pounds when I came home. When I came back they said they would have to weigh me in. They said, "This is not yours." I said, "Yes, it's mine. It's my number and everything else." He said, "Yeah, but you gained 40 pounds."

You gained 40 pounds! (laughs) Interesting. So, you were in the hospital. They took care of you – the malaria – any other problems?

Then they sent me to Ft. Sheridan. And I was there ten days.

And did they discharge you from there?

Yeah.

So you already kind of came home.

But didn't know it yet.

But didn't know it yet! What was it like when you were formally discharged? What did you do? Did you go to school? Did you go back to work?

I should have gone to school. But I moved so much that I went to 14 schools before I got to high school. And what I can remember, that I have that photographic memory. So that's helped me. But I didn't want, I had my sisters and my brother and my mother telling me what to do. And I don't want it anymore. I went to the Army, they tell me what to do (both laugh).

Everybody telling you what to do.

Right. I thought, I don't want to go to college. And I should have. Because I could have it free, you know, but I didn't. But I liked my job. I liked it very much.

So you went back to working as a pipe fitter.

Yeah.

Okay. Were there any people you met while you were in the service that you kept in touch with? Did you go to any reunions? Did you join any organizations?

I didn't go. Only two friends I had. One is dead and the other one I've seen him twice. I can't think of his name – John, it's someplace I know.

You met him in the Army?

Yeah. We were very good friends.

Do you still keep in touch?

Yeah. Until lately. I think either he's dead or something. Because I wrote to him and didn't get anything. But, also, when I was out on leave at the hospital, my father said one of his friends in World War I, he said, he wasn't with it. You know what. And he said, he didn't want to do anything. So, I was on leave from the hospital, he even had me working already.

No rest! (both laugh)

He said, "I don't want you doing nothing." So, I was working. I don't know why, yet.

Did you join any veterans' organizations?

I was in the VFW. I was very active in that until I got married. At that time I was thinking about going into business myself. We had two children, and one was only two weeks old. I said, "I'm going into business." And she said, "What!" But it was okay. She said, "You're still sick. I can't understand going into business with a two week old baby, and you're going to leave me." It was nice. But I wanted another child. I wanted a girl.

You had two boys?

Yeah. But she didn't want another one. She's a nurse. She knows enough to be dangerous.

(laughs) That's true of a lot of people in a lot of professions.

She can't see, she can't hear, hardly. We go into it all the time. So I just live with it. What she's think I said, I didn't say.

When you look back at your military experience, how did it affect your life – the way you look at things, the way you think about things?

I looked at it different.

How?

Well, a lot of people didn't know what we did. And like now in Iraq. They don't know what they're doing.

People think they know, but they don't.

They don't. Right. The girl that lost her son.

The one that's down in Texas?

Right. That's what they want. They don't realize that. You look at things different than before. And a lot of people didn't come out of war too good, Vietnam, too good. To me, most of the wars were started over churches. Now it's the politicians.

There's a high cost.

I look at it different. That's all I can tell you. And my wife says something, and I think, "Uh, huh." Because she doesn't know. She just doesn't know. It's something you never get over. My kids didn't want me, when I was sleeping, after work or something and it was time for supper, they didn't want to wake me up because I wasn't ready. Also, I didn't tell you something. When I think it was in New Guinea. We had those monitors.

Monitor lizards?

Yeah. Different kinds. One time I was sitting next to my plane. And I heard this sound, and I thought, what the hell was that. I didn't pay any attention. And one thing funny, I looked around and all I could see was a dinosaur. (both laugh) I had a gun. I ran to the next plane. And he was over six feet tall on his hind legs.

Kind of put a little scare into you, huh! (both laugh)

Oh yeah! And one time we were, you had to change the engine once in a while, and you changed oil at the same time. And we did it, and everybody said, so anyway, they asked, "Want to fly with us today?" I said, "Sure, why not." So, I'm working on another plane.

(Ms. Barrett) ????

Yeah. And I'm looking at it. And pretty soon the front of the plane. And I didn't think about it. And I went to sleep. The other one was running, too. There were two of them. Boy was I awake (both laugh). But when we come in to land, somebody didn't put a cotter pin into the third engine.

(Ms. Barrett) ?????

Into the carburetor. When not, they both worked at 60%. So the co-pilot said, "he cut the engine." And I was between him, and we had another pilot just come over, and he was checking him out too. So I cut the engine. But when we landed we went off the runway. And that (was tall) coon nine grass, it was maybe about 22' high. You don't know what's there.

Right.

And we had the landing gears down. Everything. And we're trying to take off. At full throttle. And anyway, we're over. And we're on coon nine grass. We're not really far from crashing. And it got over, the planes, people are walking on, they jumped off the wings. The plane was close to them. The plane, when we got up, because we had an old plane. The plane, I mean, A, B, C, D or something, and this is a C. And it don't have the umph it had. And finally we got the engine running the engine. And we landed. And I think I took at least 8 bushels out of the front wheel. ...

Wow.

It was inside the plane.

So your wartime experience really had an effect on the rest of your life, and the way you feel about things, the way you see things.

Yeah. But I'm still. My wife says, "I can't understand you. You're always ready to go something, or you know how to do it, or you're happy." I said, "Until I marry you."

(laughs) Very nice. Is there anything that we haven't covered in this interview that you'd like to say before we go off?

No, but if they ever go to, have a chance to go to Manila, they should see the Chinese cemetery. Beautiful.

I will keep that in mind. Well, thank you very much for sharing your story. And we'll go off record.