

**Oral History Interview of
Arlee Gowen**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
August 15, 2014
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*General Southwest Collection Interviews***

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library**

15th and Detroit | 806.742.3749 | <http://swco.ttu.edu>

Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by Arlee Gowen on August 15, 2014. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

This oral history transcript is protected by U.S. copyright law. By viewing this document, the researcher agrees to abide by the fair use standards of U.S. Copyright Law (1976) and its amendments. This interview may be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes only. Any reproduction or transmission of this protected item beyond fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the Southwest Collection. Please contact Southwest Collection Reference staff for further information.

Preferred Citation for this Document:

Gowen, Arlee Oral History Interview, August 15, 2014. Interview by David Marshall, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses almost 6000 oral history interviews dating back to the late 1940s. The historians who conduct these interviews seek to uncover the personal narratives of individuals living on the South Plains and beyond. These interviews should be considered a primary source document that does not implicate the final verified narrative of any event. These are recollections dependent upon an individual's memory and experiences. The views expressed in these interviews are those only of the people speaking and do not reflect the views of the Southwest Collection or Texas Tech University.

Technical Processing Information:

The Audio/Visual Department of the Southwest Collection is the curator of this ever-growing oral history collection and is in the process of digitizing all interviews. While all of our interviews will have an abbreviated abstract available online, we are continually transcribing and adding information for each interview. Audio recordings of these interviews can be listened to in the Reading Room of the Southwest Collection. Please contact our Reference Staff for policies and procedures. Family members may request digitized copies directly from Reference Staff.

Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

<http://swco.ttu.edu/Reference/policies.php>

Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 44.1kHz/ 24bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: David Marshall

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Paul Doran

Editor(s): Jason Rhode

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Arlee Gowen, who discusses his early life in Lamesa, his experiences as a Navy seaman in the Pacific theater during World War II, his life as a journalist, and his interest in genealogy.

Length of Interview: 01:57:44

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Growing up in Lamesa	5	00:00:30
Joining the Navy	8	00:19:00
After the war	13	00:38:00
Kite battles and childhood games	24	00:59:48
Journalism and airplanes	28	01:05:00
Naval training	36	01:17:00
The Pacific War after Iwo Jima	41	01:27:00
Parachute silk and courtship	47	01:35:36
Work in history and genealogy	51	01:44:11
Brandywine Crucible	53	01:50:00

Keywords

Lamesa, journalism, Navy, World War II, Dust Bowl, Pacific, genealogy, Japanese

David Marshall (DM):

The date is August 15, 2014, and this is David Marshall interviewing Mr. Arlee Gowen at his home in Lubbock, Texas. And could we just start with your full name, and date and place of birth, and I'll just leave that sitting right there.

Arlee Gowen (AG):

Okay. Arlee Claud Gowen. Born November 24, 1922.

DM:

Now that's Lamesa, right?

AG:

It's Lamesa, Texas. Austin County. The year 1922 wasn't really very auspicious, certainly not for the farmers. That year West Texas went eight-five days without rain. And that record stood for seventy-four years, until 2006, the year 2006 we went eight-nine days without rain. And so we know all about the Dust Bowl, and the troublesome twenties, the dirty thirties, and the disagreeable part of growing up in a dry, dusty country. I remember having my own tin dinner plate, a gift from my cousin, Guy Rotan. This dinner plate was embossed with the letters of the alphabet, and the numerals up to ten. And I was delighted to have that plate, and Guy Rotan predicted that "He will be a man of letters," and certainly we were. Southwest Collection came by earlier and picked up three four-drawer filing cabinets of correspondence, so certainly we had the letters to go with his prediction. We had three different presidents during my youth: Warren G. Harding, and Calvin Coolidge, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. I learned, probably in my second year in school, about crime and punishment. There was a fruit stand across the intersection from the Austin County Courthouse, and one day there was a big basket of apples. And I know exactly how Eve felt in the Garden of Eden; I just had to have a bite of one of those apples. And so while nobody was looking—at least I didn't think there were—I reached down and grabbed a big red apple, and before I got three steps, the proprietor was on top of me in a hurry. He knew every bad word in the dictionary and he used them all on me. And I was so scared I peed my pants, but needless to say, I've never stolen apples since then. And later in my school years, toward graduation, some of the seniors and I decided it would be a good idea to climb the water tower and to paint "Seniors '39" in big white letters. And after a boy scout meeting that night, we began to climb the tower, the legs of the tower, and just as we got to the top, fire marshal, who lived on the third floor of the city hall, sounded the siren. Now, normally you could hear that siren for thirty miles, but we were thirty feet from it, and we were petrified scared. And in the confusion, somebody knocked over the bucket of white paint, and it started down the leg that we were going to have to climb down on. We finally got to the bottom, got on our bicycles, and raced home. And I think Luther Standifer, the fire marshal, had the biggest laugh of his life right there at our expense. I remember a lot of things about growing up, particularly with my grandmother. She had come to join our household the week I was born, and

just always seemed to be there for me. She was famous for her blackberry cobblers—everybody knew that she would gather her blackberries from her own blackberry patch, and bake the best blackberry cobblers that you ever saw. My Uncle Emmitt was particularly interested—that was her brother-in-law—particularly interested in her blackberry cobblers, and he would come to our home for Sunday dinner quite often, and she would bake the blackberry cobblers especially for him. Well, he rushed through his meal that particular Sunday so he could get to send his blackberry cobbler, and she gave him a big helping, and as he tasted the blackberries, he says “Cindy, you put two cups of salt in this cobbler,” he said, “it’s two cups of sugar.” And she took a sip and she says “You’re right, I did.” She was so aggravated and so angry, that she walked through the kitchen door and flung that cobbler out in the yard. Well, the chickens all came running just as fast as they could, and started gobbling up the blackberry cobbler. For just a few minutes they all died, and so she was very careful after that to not get into the salt can, but get into the sugar can. She and I would draw straws occasionally to see who had to go out in the cold wind to whittle the popcorn when we were ready to have popcorn, popcorn balls. I remember when Collins Department Store installed a fluoroscope in the shoe department. We were all anxious to slip our feet in there and look through the X-ray portion. And I imagine those feet lit up after getting a big jar of Redkin’s [?] syrup, or—we raised our own vegetables, and our own meat, and that’s the way a farmer had to do to make it in those days. I remember when the pea crop developed, we canned peas, ate peas, and shelled peas—we had learned had to shell peas in a washing machine feeding the peas through a ringer, and the peas came out like bullets.

DM:

Pretty good.

AG:

I remember sitting on top of a packed ice cream freezer while my dad turned the crank, and having my rear end go numb before he finished the ice cream. I remember one time my cousin Dorman and I decided to pilfer some ready-rolled Chesterfields cigarettes from her father’s case, and while we were smoking those Chesterfields, he caught us, and he brought out a whole package of Chesterfields, rolled up the windows in the pickup where we were seated, and said “Smoke them all until they’re all gone.” And so we were no longer interested in Chesterfields. I remember chopping cotton in the summertime on the Sellers farm, for twenty cents an acre—that was the first money I ever earned. The most disagreeable parts of the job were the gnats that swarmed under your straw hat, and the fact that the water bucket was always at the other end of the field. I remember having a silver aluminum bicycle that I’d earned with my cotton chopping money, and we rode that thing all over Lamesa, and school, and the job—the big event at the high school in those days was when we played the Slaton Tigers in football. Now, Slaton was at one end of the Santa Fe railroad, and Lamesa was at the other end. And they always had a special train for the citizens who were coming to Lamesa, or going to Slaton. And invariably, after the game was over, there was a big fist fight, all the way from the football field to the depot. And we

had a song we sang about Slaton Tigers, to the tune of Barney Google—(sings) “Slaton Tigers are a bunch goofy guys. Slaton Tigers with the jellybean hats and ties. When Tornadoes came to play, Slaton Tigers ran away. Slaton Tigers are a bunch of goofy guys.”

DM:

Now we know the reason for the first fights, huh? That’s good.

AG:

I remember pulling bolls for a dollar a hundred, and thinking there must be a better way. I helped my dad dig a cellar under the house. Now normally, you’d do the cellar before you’d build the house, but we did it backwards. And he had a Fresno [scraper], do you know what a Fresno is?

DM:

Yes.

AG:

Okay, we had a Fresno that we scooped the dirt out from under the house, and I’d get Old Bill hooked up to the Fresno, and pull out a load of dirt and dump it, and back him up, back him up, back him up, and put the Fresno back under the house, until we finished that cellar. I remember sleeping out under the grape arbor in the summertime, and watching the stars through the grape leaves and the grapes. I remember sitting on a runaway horse one time, we were scratching cotton—now a lot of people don’t know about scratching cotton. They have invented, since those days, crust busters, and you used those machines to break the crusts when you get a hard rain, and it solidifies and will not allow the cotton sprout to come through the crust. We didn’t have the machine in those days, so we made our own scratcher. You’d take a fence post, drive it full of sixteen penny nails, cut the heads off, and hook it to a trace chain. And I was riding Old Bill with just a pair of hames, and the trace chain dragging the post, and breaking the crust. Well, Bill was kind of skittish to start with, and he saw, reflected in his eyes, a tin can way down the field, and he took off. And there I sat with just two hames pumping like pistons, and tried to stay on the horse. Then I decided maybe I should bail out, and I looked back, and I saw the fence post just flopping in the air with the nails in it, and I decided not to bail out. I said “When he gets to the highway, he will stop, because there’s a ditch about eight feet wide, and six feet deep”—he didn’t stop, he flew over that ditch, came down to his knees, and before I could scramble off of there, he was up on his feet and gone again. He ran all the way back home, and when he got to the horse-lot gate, he planted his feet and stopped, and I was sailing over his head out in the middle of the cow-lot. We graduated in 1939 with no white paint on the--

DM:

On the water tower?

AG:

Water tower, and came to Texas Tech. There were three cars on the campus that belonged to the students in 1939—didn't have any trouble finding a parking place. And I remember when I showed up with the reddest, slickest Ford Roadster that thirty-five hundred envious students ever saw. And I circled around the front of the Ad building.

DM:

Where'd you get that Roadster, do you remember where you got it?

AG:

Yeah, that was my cotton picking money.

DM:

Oh, wow, golly, you worked hard.

AG:

You bet. In 1941, several students and I planned a trip to Cocos Island. I had a map of the treasure that was buried on Cocos Island, and I convinced two California boys who had a sloop, that we could go to Cocos Island and dig up all that treasure. And they were all for it. I had written the Costa Rican government to receive permission to come; they wanted a slice of the treasure, I think it was thirty percent we had to give to them. And December 7th happened that year, and it was all off. We didn't get to go to Cocos Island.

DM:

Now how'd you come up with the map like that, do you remember how you got that map?

AG:

Yeah, I don't remember, but it was handed to me by an old timer, and he said "The treasure is in the mouth of a cave, and water normally is there at high tide, so you have to go in at low tide and dig it up."

DM:

Golly, that's interesting.

AG:

On October 25, 1942, the Navy had a parade down Broadway. The band was playing, the flag was waving, and I saw how those pretty girls looked at those dress white uniforms, and I said "That's for me." So I signed up on the spot, and—

DM:

This was down Broadway in Lubbock, huh?

AG:

Yeah. Now the Navy let me stay and finish my graduation. At that time I was working in the sports department of the *Avalanche-Journal*. Collier Parish was the sports editor, Joe Kelly was the assistant sports editor, and I was the low man on the totem pole. About three weeks later, Collier Parish got his call to the Navy, and Joe Kelly moved up, and I moved up. Three weeks after that, Joe Kelly got his call to the Navy, and at the venerable old age of nineteen, I was the sports editor for the *Avalanche-Journal*. Three weeks later I got my call, and they replaced me with a woman, I understand.

DM:

Well how did you like those days as sports editor, was it a busy time?

AG:

Oh my, yeah. We had a Teletype that brought most of the news, and especially all the sports news, and we'd just go and tear off a piece that we liked. And Tony Burrow [?], this German that was head of the composing room, and we sent our copy down to him. Marked up how to set it and so forth. If he didn't like it, he just tore it up. So we had to keep extra stuff coming down to Tony. My sea duty was aboard the USS *Randolph*, which was being built at the time I signed up. And when it was completed, we made a shakedown cruise to Trinidad, and I really enjoyed that part of it. Then shortly afterward, we traversed the—well, it was built in Virginia—and shortly after our shakedown cruise, we were on our way to join the Fifth Fleet in the Pacific. Now, we had to go through the Panama Canal. Our beam was ninety-five feet, the lock of the canal was ninety-six feet. You can imagine there's going to be some curvature to quarter-inch steel. And they hooked six locomotives to that ship, we threw rope fenders over the side, and pretty soon they were smoking, smoking, smoking as they rode around, but it dragged us all the way through. And we joined the fleet at Ulithi, and that was just an extinct volcano, which some natives were living on. And the first thing the sailors noticed was that the girls were going topless. And the chaplain noticed that too—he went to the captain and said “Could we draw some T-shirts for those naked girls?” And the captain thought that was a good idea. And the girls were delighted to have the T-shirts, they were just tickled to death. And the next morning, every one of them were dressed in a T-shirt with two round holes cut in the front. On another occasion, we were anchored at Ulithi, and a submarine came slithering up and parked beside us. Now everybody knows, I guess it's still, that the submariners were the Navy's bad boys. They would do things that the regular Navy normally wouldn't even consider doing. For instance, if they came into a depot, and needed some supplies, the quartermaster—spare parts and so forth—they would draw them. Then if they couldn't fill the order for everything, they would resort to cumshaw. Now “cumshaw” is a Chinese word that they adopted, it means if you see something

you need, you borrow it, or beg it, or purloin it—whatever you want, you get. And there was a petty officer in the conning tower; came alongside our ship, and he hailed the quarterdeck, and said “Ahoy on the quarterdeck,” and the officer of the deck responded, and he said “Would you trade twenty-five gallons of ice cream for a Jeep?” Now, the quartermaster on our deck said to the officer of the deck, “He’s fixing to pull a con on you, there’s no place you can park a Jeep on a submarine.” And the officer says “Well I’m aware that that would be a problem, but they need the ice cream.” So he went ahead and ordered a skid of twenty-five gallons of ice cream, and put it on a whip hoist and sent it over on the submarine deck. And in a little while, they went into the well deck and hooked up, and out comes a brand new Army Jeep. And they just took the hoist and set it down on our flight deck, and so you might have wondered “What’s an Army Jeep doing on a Navy flight deck?”, but we put it to work—we towed planes around, and they enjoyed the ice cream, we enjoyed the Jeep. There was another occasion when we were in Pearl Harbor, we had to make a trip to Kaneohe Naval Air Station on the opposite side of the island, and my drive requisitioned the Jeep, and we drove over, and on the way back, he said “Would you like some pineapple,” and I said, “Boy, I love pineapple.” He said “I’ve got a friend at a pineapple place here, so we’ll just go by and get us some pineapple.” So we went in and the guy says “This is going aboard the ship?” And he said “Yeah.” He said “Let me get you a load,” and he just filled that Jeep up to the brim with pineapple. We got back to the ship, and of course you can’t ride a vehicle up to the flight deck, you’ve got to walk up the ladder—and a lot of people think that’s a staircase—but in the Navy, it’s a ladder. You salute the quarterdeck, salute the officer of the deck, and request permission to come aboard. And by the time we got all that done, they had already set the Jeep on the flight deck, and when we got up there, there was not a single pineapple left, they were all purloined. The—it wasn’t a cruise I remember, aboard the ship—we were stationed in Leyte Gulf, a hundred and twenty degrees on the flight deck, and we got orders to go to Kikasoburo and destroy a ball bearing plant. Now Kikasoburo is the northernmost point of Japan, up where the hairy Ainu live, and almost to the Arctic Circle. So we had a sister ship, the *Ticonderoga*, to go with us. And we went up there, and from a hundred-and-twenty degrees to zero—we were all getting sick with the flu, the pneumonia—we lost our chief engineer, he died of pneumonia. And there weren’t any penicillin available in those days. We had to sweep snow off the flight deck to launch planes, and the chief engineer, we wrapped him in canvas, and slid him on a plank over among the icebergs. And a lot of people had to go to the sick bay. But we got the job done, and went back to the Philippines. There was one occasion there where the Japs outsmarted us. We were stationed between Kyushu and Okinawa. We had finished Iwo Jima—we landed nineteen thousand Marines there—ten thousand of them were killed. Boy, it was a mess. Then we had to go to Okinawa, and the Japanese were sending kamikazes over. We took one aboard, twin-engine Betty with a ten-thousand-pound armor-piercing bomb underslung. The plane stayed on the flight deck, the bomb went through the flight deck, the forecastle deck, the hangar deck like butter—now that’s four-inch reinforced steel—and it exploded in the mess hall, five decks below that. It really made a mess; took us out of commission. We had to go back to Pearl [Harbor] for repairs, had a hundred and thirty six casualties—bad.

DM:

Did you say something about you were talking to some guys when that happened, or--

AG:

Yeah, there's two I was facing, and they were struck—both of them I believe—struck by shrapnel or something, and I didn't get a scratch.

DM:

Golly. Were you up on the flight deck, or where were you at that time?

AG:

Hangar deck. At that time, that's where it came—the Japs had outsmarted us. They had this battleship—I think it was *Haruna*—came out with a squadron of destroyers, and light ships, and “Bull” Halsey was our admiral at that time, and he turned the fleet around and headed to meet them. Well, it was just a maneuver of feint, because as we got close enough to engage, they turned around and went back to Tokyo Bay. Well, he said “Let's just go in after them,” so they sent two carriers to Tokyo Bay, and found this *Haruna* anchored, and first they went in, just pulverized it, completely riddled the whole thing, and it wasn't seaworthy, but it was still there. And they sent recon in, and came back with a report says “Superficial damage; she's still riding high on the water.” Bull Halsey said “We're going after them again.” And so the second trip—in the meantime, they had drawn flat barges around the battleship and parked them—and you could actually get out and walk on that [inaudible] stuff, boy it was bad. Lost some planes, and sent the recon in, came back—“Superficial damage; she's still floating high in the water.” And the admiral said “Well, that's enough of that, we don't want to lose anymore.” And so after they dropped the bomb, the war was over, we were curious about that battleship. We went in, and what the Japs—it was sitting on the mud, on the bottom—what the Japs had done was during the night they had painted two draft lines, to make it look like it was floating high. And they really suckered us in on that one.

DM:

Oh, gosh. Did you ever see Halsey by any chance?

AG:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, and Admiral Nimitz. Admiral Nimitz had the Fifth Fleet, and Halsey had the Third Fleet. The Japs thought there were two fleets out there, but actually it was the same fleet, they just changed numbers when the admirals changed.

DM:

What was your impression of those two admirals?

AG:

I thought that Nimitz was very serious-minded, didn't take any extra risks. Bull Halsey, on the other hand, like his name implies, he was going in the middle of it. And we didn't have radar, and so he took us through two typhoons. Boy that was a scary experience.

DM:

I'll bet. Can you describe that, what was that like in a carrier?

AG:

Oh, well yeah I can, it was rivets popping on every connection, the hangar deck was flopping, and I was scared to death.

DM:

What kind of waves, what size from the waves--

AG:

Oh, they were two hundred feet high, because it took our radar off the top of the mast. The planes were sitting on the flight deck, we had them tied down with one-inch steel cable, and the props were just sitting out there windmilling.

DM:

Spinning huh, golly.

AG:

One got loose and went back over the bridge behind us, and into the water.

DM:

The wind caught it and just lifted it and it fell in the water huh?

AG:

Broke the one-inch cables.

DM:

Golly. What does it sound like when rivets start popping?

AG:

Well, don't be around them.

DM:

It's like shrapnel I guess, huh?

AG:

Yeah, yeah, that was a bad—we were about fifty miles off Tokyo Bay, and the command was given to disperse and turn. Now, that was a typhoon, you got to run with it on your port quarter, or head into it directly. Well it was behind us, port quarter, and the first ship to start to turn was the destroyer—he capsized. And now it had a low silhouette, we stick up two hundred feet high in the air. And the skipper was a good seaman though, he'd filled the tanks on the port side—let me see—emptied the tanks on the starboard side, and filled the ones on the port side—it was going into a turn like that. About halfway around that turn, it scooped us up like that, and then we came down, and scooped water on the hangar deck—sixty-five feet above the water, we got water on the hangar deck.

DM:

Phew, but you made that turn I guess?

AG:

It skipped, and hopped, and bounced around, and finally we were past the turn point, and he brought it around safely. Scary, but--

DM:

Amazing--

AG:

Safely.

DM:

Just amazing. I'm sorry to distract you from the notes there, but just that was really interesting.

AG:

Yeah. After the war was over, they decided that we should be part of the Magic Carpet, which was returning prisoners of war to Europe, and bringing back soldiers and nurses from Europe. And so they took the flight hangar deck—all the planes were off—and welded one thousand poles, or maybe two thousand poles, and swung hammocks, bunks, between them, five high. And our first load was five thousand Italian war prisoners. Invariably, the one of the top bunk got sick first, and it trickled down, and all of them were seasick. Every morning we'd have them out with fire hoses, washing the hangar deck down. But we got there, and while I was sitting in Naples Harbor, I decided I'd request a transfer. Now, the executive officer was already shorthanded, because the senior officers had their points in and they were leaving. And he was

left with just primarily inexperienced ensigns, and I showed him my request and it blew his top. He was so angry, but he could hardly refuse and so he stamped it, and signed it, and said “Get out of here.” And he said “You can carry that transfer request anyway you want to, but I’m not sending it through the channels.” So I got a case of scotch and a carton of nylons—you could get nylons in Italy, but you couldn’t get them in the United States—and there were thirteen levels to the Pentagon, and I took those papers every step up, and got rid of nylons and scotch all the way. And then when I got to the Pentagon, they said “Now you’ve got to have a request for your services in Naval Air Transport Service in Amarillo, Texas, where you want to go.” So I had to go back down to the change of command and get more endorsements. And Amarillo was short-handed, so they were glad to have me. Yeah.

DM:

When did you get into Amarillo, was that in '46, or '45?

AG:

'46. I had a thirty day leave, and I used it all to wrangle those transfers, and then when I got to Amarillo, I got another thirty day leave. And that’s when we were married. We lived at Pantex, because there was no place to live in Amarillo, was shorthanded—you couldn’t rent or buy a house anywhere. And so was there a few months, and I had my points, and so in Aug—let’s see—June 6, 1946, I was discharged. And got married—now, I found out that I had married an expensive wife, and so I was editor of a farm magazine we’d started, “Southwestern Crop and Stock,” but we didn’t have enough profit that I could draw much wages, so I had to do other things on the side. I helped start a loan company, and opened a wholesale electronics place—well, we built picture tubes—had a two-way radio shop, and repaired television, and—

DM:

Now that was in Lubbock, wasn’t it?

AG:

Yes, uh-huh.

DM:

What was the name of that shop?

AG:

Electros Incorporated. That’s short for “Electronics Services Supply.” And then we had two daughters, and they were—seems like two days later they were married, gone.

DM:

Now this is Bonnie and Connie, right?

AG:

Bonnie and Connie. Bonnie graduated from North Texas State, and Connie graduated from Texas Tech. And then med school at Houston. And then she got through high school in three years, got through college in three years, and got through med school in three years—and she was exhausted, of course. She asked for a residency in Honolulu, Queens Hospital, and she got it. And we went over to visit her, and she was actually in poverty, but she lived in a fifteen-story condo, beautiful place. And went to the beach every day, and she had a really good time there.

DM:

Is this the same trip when y'all went back to the Philippines? Didn't you visit the Philippines somewhere then?

AG:

Oh no, that was forty years later. We flew, we went back to a lot of the Philippines places we'd seen. I remembered the San Antonio prison—it's kind of the conclusion of the Philippines campaign. The Japanese had herded all the people who helped the Americans into the San Antonio prison, concrete floor. They just filled it with collaborators, and then they poured gasoline on the floor. Set it on fire. And you wonder why the Philippines hate the Japanese?

DM:

Oh, goodness.

AG:

Boy, it was bad. And we went there, and we went to Tacloban, we went to Manila of course.

DM:

This is you and your wife later on travelling through, seeing all of this.

AG:

Yeah; went to Corregidor—hovercraft. Yes it was really a nice trip.

DM:

Did you go in that tunnel, in the tunnel where the--

AG:

We went in where Battery B had been. And, of course, there was all the old rifle, it just blown to pieces; it exploded. The other batteries were intact, rusting, but intact. Went to Bataan, and saw a lot of interesting things there.

DM:

It sounds like a very good trip.

AG:

You may have some questions, I've covered--

DM:

Well, I do, I have a few, but you've really covered a lot. That was enjoyable—I'm wondering, is there a possibility I can get a copy of that, so I can get some of my spellings right? Maybe I'll borrow it and make a copy after--

AG:

No, you just keep it.

DM:

After the interview.

AG:

Just a carbon copy.

DM:

Oh is it, okay, well thank you.

AG:

I think these are numbered, you can--

DM:

Okay. Well let me just go back through and ask a few questions here and there, but that was a real good overview, and very interesting. And mostly things I had not heard, or read from some of your other materials. But let's go back real early to Lamesa—do you know how your parents came to live in Lamesa?

AG:

I do. I had an itchy-footed grandfather. And he pretty well controlled the family, and when he said "Let's all go to New Mexico and homestead a section of land," they said "Uh-huh," so they all went.

DM:

Okay, well where were they living at the time?

AG:

Throckmorton. My dad was an orphan, and he was raised primarily by an older sister. And they had lived in Throckmorton county, farming. So all the family moved to Cloudcroft, New Mexico. Now, the only industry there was a saw mill, and if you didn't work at the saw mill, you had to go to Roswell, work in a sheet rock plant or something like that. Anyway, it was very difficult to make a living, but they stayed it four years, got a deed to the property, immediately sold the section—my mother would sit under a pine tree up on the mountain and look back east to Texas, and she wanted desperately to go back to Texas. So, my grandfather got killed out there during that time. He had traded a pair of mules for lumber to build a house with that sawmill. And of course everybody was demanding lumber, and they kept putting him off on his bit of lumber, but they were using the mules. And finally he got tired of that, so he put on his six shooter, and went to the sawmill to get the lumber or the mules back. The sawmill owner saw him coming, he got his Winchester, and first shot took the handle off of his revolver, and the second shot got him in the abdomen. He died short afterwards, and they buried him at Weed—do you know where Weed is?

DM:

No I don't.

AG:

South of Cloudcroft. My mother had to work at the lodge at Cloudcroft, so they'd have something to eat. Really a hard time.

DM:

Oh, what was your grandfather's name, do you remember?

AG:

James Madison Cox.

DM:

And your mother's name?

AG:

My mother's name was Ora Ethel Cox.

DM:

Okay, okay.

AG:

And she was the oldest of the family.

DM:

So she worked in the lodge.

AG:

Yeah, until it caught fire and burned up. Her mother was visiting her, and she had a hard time getting my grandmother out of there, and it was on fire. So they were anxious to get back to Texas.

DM:

I imagine.

AG:

And fortunately, when the twenty-one days on the road coming back, had to herd the livestock, and it was slow and poky. Going out, they went out and covered the wagon of course, and they had a chicken coop on the rear, and the chickens would stay there during the daytime, and they'd let them out at night to eat. And when it got dark, they'd all come back and fly up and get in their roost, in the cage, to spend the night. That was the only home they knew. My brother was about three or four years old, and he fell off of the wagon seat, and the wagon ran over him. Loaded wagon with all the sections, and my mother just knew—she was driving the wagon—she knew that he was dead, but she went and picked him up, and he responded and lived. My grandmother would go ahead of the party, the wagon train, and at night, she'd raise the wagon tongue with a lantern on it, so they could find where to spend the night. She got there first; they were slow with the horses and cows.

DM:

You weren't born yet at this point were you?

AG:

No. They came back in a rainstorm, and my dad liked that—rain in West Texas is always welcome—so he picked out a place, twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents an acre he paid for that farm, a hundred and sixty acres. When that farm sold forty years after that, it sold for eleven hundred dollars per acre.

DM:

Good cotton land I guess?

AG:

We didn't own it, it was just at that time.

DM:

What was your dad's name?

AG:

Claud Franklin Gowen.

DM:

Okay. Well was this near Lamesa then, where he bought--

AG:

Seven miles east of Lamesa in the McCarty community.

DM:

Is that close to the Caprock there, is there—

AG:

No, Caprock was about a mile east of our farm. We joined the Dean's Ranch.

DM:

Okay, so seven miles out of Lamesa?

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

When you were going to school in Lamesa, were you living out on the farm, and having to come—

AG:

No, in 1929, Dad had got a job carrying the mail, and I started out too. And we built a house just outside the city limits in Lamesa. On the east side.

DM:

Okay. Did you ever hear the story of Lamesa being the place where the chicken fried steak was invented in?

AG:

(laughs) Yeah.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

DM:

Is that true or not?

AG:

I doubt it, but it was something they can hang their hat on.

DM:

It's a good story anyhow.

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Do you know how that story came about?

AG:

Well I think they did in 1911, and accidentally mixed up an order for fried chicken—anyway, he fried steak in this chicken batter.

DM:

Okay, someone liked it.

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Well okay, I had always heard that Lamesa claimed to be the place of origin.

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

So okay, maybe true, maybe not.

AG:

Maybe not.

DM:

Okay. Can you tell me about riding the go-devil?

AG:

Yeah, we had a pair of mules, obstreperous mules—They loved to walk in the furrow, rather than on top of the bed. And if you looked off, they were down on, tromping the cotton. And I hated those mules, because I couldn't control them. And I don't remember anything special about the go-devil.

DM:

Okay but didn't y'all ride on top of it, or did you just pull it?

AG:

Well it was a two-wheel vehicle. The mules pulled it, and you had to—kind of like a planter, just sat up there. And you would steer with your feet; if you saw a big, careless weed over there, you'd just push it, cut it.

DM:

Okay, worked pretty well, except for the mules?

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Well, what were some of the weeds that were really the big problem—was [it] mostly careless weed?

AG:

Careless weeds, and—

DM:

Do you remember blueweed?

AG:

Blueweed. We didn't have a lot of blueweeds in our farm. They were in Dawson County.

DM:

Okay. And now what about pigweed, is that something a little different?

AG:

I don't know anything about that one.

DM:

Okay. That's what they're talking about now, with this rain we've had recently; all the pigweed. But I don't know if it's the same as careless weed or what, the names change sometimes. But okay, so careless weed was the big problem?

AG:

Tumbleweeds.

DM:

Oh tumbleweed, okay.

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Did you have goatheads?

AG:

Lots of goatheads. I was going barefooted most of the time.

DM:

How about what we call stickers, those sandburs, did you have them back then too?

AG:

We did.

DM:

Plenty of things to have to chop.

AG:

Yep, yeah

DM:

But you decided you didn't want to chop cotton the rest of your life, huh?

AG:

Dad and I were hoeing, and the gnats were, and my hat—and I said, “Dad, this is a sorry way to make a living.” He says “Son, you're right. If you want to work in the shade, you get educated and get you an inside job,” which I couldn't wait to do.

DM:

Do you remember some of the bad sandstorms?

AG:

I do.

DM:

Okay, any in particular come to mind?

AG:

Yeah, one coming out of Lynn County. And normally our sandstorms nowadays, if they're sixty-five, seventy-five feet high, we think that's really bad. The ones I experienced during the Dust Bowl—you would look up, and it looks like it's a thousand feet high, maybe two thousand feet high. Like a wall was going to fall over on you---and black.

DM:

Coming in fast, or slow?

AG:

Slow. Well, it seemed to *be* slow. I guess it was pretty heavy winds to blow it.

DM:

Something that big, maybe it would appear slower than it really was. I don't know.

AG:

And we've heard, after those sandstorms, that they had dust settle in Dallas, and dust settle in Albuquerque; all over.

DM:

Did you ever hear of anybody suffocating—anyone or any animals—suffocating in one of those sandstorms?

AG:

I don't remember that.

DM:

Okay, it was mostly just a mess, huh?

AG:

Yeah, just disagreeable. Grit!

DM:

That would be hard to clean up afterward.

AG:

Oh, my. You've seen some pictures of the Dust Bowl?

DM:

We have pictures that Southwest Collection.

AG:

They're real.

DM:

Now, you mentioned in something that you right about when you were a Boy Scout—do you remember that troop number, by the way?

AG:

That was Troop 23. Leslie Pratt was our Scoutmaster. He was also the tax collector—city tax collector. Joe Spikes was the Scoutmaster of Troop 22.

DM:

Okay, both in Lamesa?

AG:

Both in Lamesa. Lots of competition. We had kite battles. Yep, and the object was to tear up the opposition's kites. And I built a kite with a vertical stick that went out of the kite, and became a spear.

DM:

Pretty good.

AG:

And I liked to get underneath of the opposition and yank the cord, and it would have to go up and puncture the—and we put powdered glass on our string, glued powdered glass—and we could go up to another kite string and cut it.

DM:

Golly, pretty smart.

AG:
And glass—

DM:
Pretty smart.

AG:
We had a special place out southwest of town where we did our kite tournaments.

DM:
Okay. Was this an annual event?

AG:
Yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

DM:
Okay, how interesting. Where would you camp?

AG:
Mullin's Ranch. Was off the breaks off the Caprock. And it had a stream of water, springs, and bluffs. And we'd have games at night, capture the flag, yeah.

DM:
We'd play that in Boy Scouts when I was in, we sure did.

AG:
Well, I imagine we on the playground at school, we had some games I never hear about anymore—one was "One and over", it was kind of that elongated--

DM:
Kind of like Red Rover, or something like that?

AG:
We had that. Annie Over.

DM:
Annie Over.

AG:

And we had “Apple Core, Baltimore, who’s your friend? Thaddeus McGillicuddy!” Poor old Thad would get ripe old cores from every direction.

DM:

Well when you were camping out there on the—what was it, the Mullins Ranch?

AG:

Mullins Ranch.

DM:

There was a lot of water then, I wonder if there’s still any water out there now?

AG:

I don’t know. We had a swimming hole on the ranch, wrapped around. The [inaudible] ranch wrapped around our farm, and we had a swimming hole, and permission to go on their ranch and swim anytime we wanted to.

DM:

Okay, now y’all went arrowhead hunting too I understand?

AG:

Lots of that.

DM:

Did you find a lot?

AG:

Oh my, yeah.

DM:

Oh, okay, was it all arrowheads, or did you find little scrapers, and spearheads and things like that?

AG:

Mostly arrowheads. I don’t remember finding any tools. But that was on our own farm. And then, of course, on the ranch.

DM:

Okay. It sounds like a pretty exciting childhood.

AG:
Yeah.

DM:
Growing up there at Lamesa. Oh, you also worked for the *Lamesa Reporter* a bit, didn't you?

AG:
I did, I was the printer's devil.

DM:
Now what is that?

AG:
Well, it's a weekly newspaper—there were two, the *Dawson County Courier*, and the *Lamesa Reporter*—and they were bitter rivals, lots of competition. We'd print the paper on Thursday night, and put it in the mail Friday morning. And sometimes we'd work all night long. Yeah, we'd have a press breakdown, or—and it was a double-revolutionary Whitlock press, and you had to hand feed it, four pages at a time—and that was a job. I learned to operate a linotype. And all this stuff is not with us anymore, the *Avalanche-Journal* has an old linotype sitting in their lobby, have you seen it?

DM:
No, I haven't.

AG:
Well it turned out hot metal sticks, a line at a time. That's why they called it a linotype.

DM:
Okay. Well by the time you became a journalist, you really knew the business from start to finish, sounds like?

AG:
Well I'd been in the back shop—of course, I fell in love with Louise Allen, journalism instructor. So I took every journalism class that she—(laughs)

DM:
Oh I see, okay, good. Well, your journalism skills really come out in your writing. It's obvious that you—

AG:

She was the wife of James G. Allen, the Dean of Men, in 1939, '40.

DM:

Okay. And your degree was in journalism wasn't it?

AG:

Yes.

DM:

Bachelor's degree in journalism.

AG:

Yes.

DM:

Okay, so you had this interest in newspapers early on, while you were still in high school?

AG:

Yeah, my twig was bent—

DM:

What's that?

AG:

My twig was bent.

DM:

Your twig was bent.

AG:

Yeah, towards the newspaper business.

DM:

Toward newspapers. Now, you entered the Navy later, and you were an aviator—did you have any interest in airplanes when you were a child?

AG:

Yeah, we—well, no, after the war, the prediction was there'd be an airplane in every garage.

DM:

Oh really?

AG:

And they built golf courses, and had hangars all the way around it. Everybody bought airplanes, if they could afford it. We bought a little Globe Swift, it was a miniature dive bomber.

DM:

A Gloat Swift—how would you spell that, Gloat--

AG:

Globe is--

DM:

Globe, G-l-o--

AG:

Swift.

DM:

G-l-o-b-e, Globe Swift, okay.

AG:

And it was built in Fort Worth. It had a lot of peculiarities, had a built-in yaw. Sometimes the aeromatic prop would hang in high pitch, and you need a mild to get off the ground. Last time that happened was in Tucumcari, New Mexico. We were visiting a ranch in connection with our magazine, and we used all their runway and a lot more getting that thing off. And we didn't come back home with it, we flew to Amarillo. Had a friend named Shelby Kritzer who owned Tradewind Airport, and she had the shop there. I told them to fix that aeromatic prop, or sell it. We caught the train, and rode the train from Amarillo to Lubbock.

DM:

Okay. Well that's the safer way, when you have a problem like that with your airplane.

AG:

Let that plane up there.

DM:

Well before the war, did you see planes flying around, did barnstormers come to Lamesa, or anything like that?

AG:

Oh yeah, we had one that lived there. His name Bat Batson; he was a World War I veteran, and he kept his Jenny plane, and on Saturday afternoons particularly, when he loved to get up and let that around Lamesa and do aerobatics. And then—let me think--

DM:

I want to make sure I have his name, Bat?

AG:

Bat Batson, B-a-t-s-o-n.

DM:

Okay, Batson.

AG:

That's all I remember, guess he had a given name.

DM:

Well, did you see him doing that and say "I want to do that one day"—did you have an interest back then in flying?

AG:

No, no, not that. I did work at Clint Breedlove Airport. You know John McCullough, perhaps.

DM:

I do.

AG:

He's resurrecting the whole thing out there. I worked out there gassing planes, and patching holes in the fabric. We had Taylorcraft out there.

DM:

Now Breedlove was a flight trainer, right? Was he involved contracting with the government to train pilots?

AG:

Yes.

DM:

Okay, what did that involve? I mean, did he provide planes and cadets flew them, or--

AG:

Yes. Normally, you had an instructor, and after so many hours, they'd try a solo. And, let's see, Harold Humphreys, you know Harold?

DM:

I don't know Harold.

AG:

He was one of the instructors.

DM:

What was Clint Breedlove like, did you have much dealing with him?

AG:

Very good—very good man. He was a member of our church. And he had a Camp Blue Haven. Which is still a church camp, out in New Mexico. And I believe his wife is also a pilot. If you're interested in the history of that thing, you'll have to talk to John. He's written a thesis on it.

DM:

Okay, alright, well that's interesting.

AG:

It's still out there.

DM:

Well, how much time did you spend at Breedlove?

AG:

Well, I was working out there when I got my call to the Navy, so it'd be '43. I guess five or six months.

DM:

Okay. Before you got into the Navy, you also worked at Wood Printing Company for a while?

AG:

Yes I did.

DM:

Can you tell me about that? Where was—

AG:

It was a commercial print shop. Billy Wood walked everywhere he went—of course it wasn't much of a town in those days—he could walk around the courthouse square and get printing business.

DM:

Was he located on the courthouse square, wood printing?

AG:

No, he was at 1012 Avenue J.

DM:

Okay. What kind of equipment did he have?

AG:

He had a Webendorfer offset press. For lithography.

DM:

Webendorfer?

AG:

Webendorfer, it's a German press. And then he had two or three automatic feed Kluges, K-l-u-g-e press. Virgil Williams was the shop foreman. And one day I applied a whole case of six-point type, he said "Well, that's all right, you can put it back together on your own time", which I did. (laughs) Oh, a whole case of six-point type.

DM:

Well, what was your main job there?

AG:

I operated the press, and I washed the presses, and ran errands—delivered printing packages.

DM:

This is while you were a student at Tech?

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay. Now did you work at Tech Press--

AG:

I did.

DM:

For a while too?

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

What was that like?

AG:

That was good, one of the instructors, for Breedlove, was superintendent of the shop at Tech press.

DM:

Oh, is that right? You remember his name?

AG:

Wilmot Eaton.

DM:

Wilm--

AG:

Wilmot Eaton.

DM:

Wilmott Eaton, that's E-a-t-o-n?

AG:

That's his last name.

DM:

Okay, Wilmot Eaton.

AG:
Yeah.

DM:
Okay, what was the Tech press like, they had their own equipment?

AG:
Oh yeah. Yeah we had a linotype, and a little faster newspaper press, which we printed the *Toreador* on. And when we did a lot of books for faculty members, and we had a big bindery, we bound books, mostly paperback.

DM:
You really did some interesting work while you were there at Tech—had already been at a newspaper office doing that kind of work, and now a book press.

AG:
Pay was ten cents an hour, yeah.

DM:
Still beats chopping cotton though. Okay, and then I also had a note that when you were training for the Navy, you were at UT Austin?

AG:
Yeah, for a short time, a cadet over there. I believe it was—let's see, a lieutenant in charge, two striper—I believe it was Bear Bryant—meanest man that walked the face of the earth. He says "Today, we're going to run relays. Do you know how we run relays? Well, we're going to do it a little different, you take this baton, and you run up *yonder*, on top of that stadium, and come back down, and hand it back to him, he'd run back up *yonder*—"

DM:
Up on top of the hill?

AG:
On the stadium. Yeah, and he said, "Just to make it fun, don't you run up them aisles, run on top of the bleachers." Boy, more skinned shins, broken kneecaps, yeah—he—we're going to play football. So as he goes out there, and instead of painting yard lines, he drove rebar in the ground every ten yards. One of the first plays around scrimmage, a guy fell on it, it went right through--

DM:
Good grief.

AG:

Yeah I think he had an embolysis, send him back.

DM:

Pretty dangerous then, oh golly. Was training long and hard, was it long days?

AG:

Yeah, lot of calisthenics. He toughened us up.

DM:

So this was mostly physical—this was kind of like boot camp it sounded like?

AG:

Exactly.

DM:

Okay, golly. And then you were at Great Lakes Naval Training Station? Did you get out on the lakes in vessels?

AG:

Yeah, we—it was cold—and I remember and we would walk down to the lake, pick up a captain's boat, about a dozen of us would pick that thing up and put it over our heads, and walk out and launch it—break the ice, throw us over, and row—

DM:

This is Lake Michigan I guess?

AG:

Cold.

DM:

Golly. Would you row out there—

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Were you sailing? Okay.

AG:
Row.

DM:
Rowing—well that's more physical training, isn't it? Goodness, y'all must have been pretty tough by the time you got through all this, rowing out there and—that's a pretty rough lake.

AG:
Well, fortunately, I didn't finish it. We had a company commander, and he'd given us all kinds of tests, and one test looked real easy to me, I didn't give it much thought. But we got the reports—

DM:
You want me to pause it a second, so you can—

AG:
(To wife) Yes hon?

DM:
Okay, so you were talking about right there on the Great Lakes, that naval training--

AG:
Yeah, and our company commander called me in. "Uh-oh, what have I done?" He said "I wanted to meet the man who had a hundred percent grade on his last test." It was just practical things, like: "If you come to a bend in a river, is the silt on the inside or the outside?" I'm not sure I knew the answer, but I got it right, whatever it was. And he said "I'm putting you on a list to go to Notre Dame." And so I got out of that, and went to Notre Dame.

DM:
Did you take some training there, or coursework there, or what did they have you do at Notre Dame?

AG:
I remember spherical navigation, and spherical trigonometry. Have you ever—

DM:
No.

AG:
Taken that course? Don't take it. (laughter) What you do is you imagine you're in the center of a

ball, and you see the stars projected out there. And the North Star's always here, so you've got to figure the right ascension and declination. And anyway, that was an interesting course.

DM:

Okay, well I was going to ask you if you had any celestial navigation, and that's what it would have been, okay, how interesting. Okay, and then you were commissioned an ensign there at Notre Dame, is that right?

AG:

That's right.

DM:

And then off to some post on the east coast I believe, before you were assigned to the *Randolph*?

AG:

Yeah, let's see, I had some sea-duty in between. It was a jeep aircraft carrier. I don't remember the name of it, and--

DM:

A what aircraft carrier?

AG:

"Jeep," that's what we called the little ones.

DM:

A jeep, a j-e-e-p, as in a—okay, a jeep aircraft carrier.

AG:

Yeah, we had a lot of these—Seventh Fleet had jeep carriers. And the faster, bigger, were the twelve *Essex*-type carriers.

DM:

Okay, was the *Randolph* one of these--

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Essex-type?

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

AG:

The *Bunker Hill*, the *Wasps*, the *Ticonderoga*.

DM:

Well that must have felt pretty good coming out of all this training and being on an aircraft carrier.

AG:

Yeah, yeah.

DM:

That's something, were you proud of that at the time?

AG:

No.

DM:

No? Was there any competition between the guys that were on a carrier and the guys that were on a destroyer, or something else—okay.

AG:

Okay. No, we operated together, a lot.

DM:

How many men would you think were on the *Randolph* when you—

AG:

Fifty-four hundred.

DM:

Fifty-four—that's a floating city.

AG:

Oh yes.

DM:

That's bigger than Lamesa was, isn't it?

AG:

Yeah. There's a lot of nerves on there, everything had to be done precisely, and at the right time,

it got on my nerves pretty heavy. I remember one night being the junior officer of my room, I had the top bunk, and wasn't any way to climb up, climb down, you just jumped off. And one night I had a nightmare, I guess it was—anyway, I jumped out of bed, and hit that steel deck, and it reverberated, and woke up—and my fellow—we had a J.G. and a Lieutenant Commander in my bunkroom, and they said “Are we at general quarters?” I said “I don't know, call the bridge.” They called the bridge, and said “Are we at general quarters?” “General quarters? Oh my God, [inaudible]”—fifty-four hundred men—yeah, and I went back to bed.

DM:

Fifty-four hundred minus one, huh?

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Oh, golly. Tell me about the time you were first—you've written that the day you stopped being a boy was the day you were catapulted off the flight deck, can you tell me about that?

AG:

Oh, now you better have your head back against the rest, because it's going back there pretty quick if you don't.

DM:

Golly. Was this a Curtiss Helldiver?

AG:

Curtiss Helldiver.

DM:

Okay. Were you mostly assigned to the ship, or did you fly a lot off of it?

AG:

I was attached to the squadron.

DM:

Okay. On some of these reconnaissance missions, and some of these attack missions, were you involved in that, or were you at the ship usually?

AG:

The Navy had a—those were the days you had a category called “observer.” And that was when

you record what you can see, and then you got the gun cameras with film. And you also sometimes have a handheld camera.

DM:

I see. Did you do any reconnaissance work?

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay. Do you remember some of the locations?

AG:

I told you about the Japanese battleship didn't I?

DM:

You did tell me about that, the aircraft carrier that was—was it an aircraft carrier or battleship—that went back to Tokyo Bay?

AG:

Battleship.

DM:

Oh okay, it was a battleship.

AG:

We followed it in.

DM:

The one where they repainted the draft lines?

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

You mentioned the kamikaze attack, do you remember where that took place? Was that at Ulithi?

AG:

Ulithi.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

DM:

That big explosion?

AG:

Yeah. There were twelve—let's see, Betty, I don't remember—there were twenty bombers, twelve of them left Tokyo and flew to Truk, T-r-u-k. That's a Japanese island in the South Seas. From there, they were able to fly to Ulithi. Ten of them had trouble. And only two left Truk to come to our anchorage. One of them, that wasn't very smart, circled the island of Somos, S-o-m-o-s. And it had an asphalt runway, and lights on each side. He mistook that think for a carrier. Yeah, he dived into the asphalt. The other one was a little smarter and he circled a time or two, and then he dived into our ship. Yeah that was a bad night, all happened after dark.

DM:

You wouldn't have known when it was coming in.

AG:

No.

DM:

You just knew when the explosion happened, I guess.

AG:

Yeah, we thought it was safe, we had taken that lagoon. There was the top of a volcano about thirty miles in diameter.

DM:

The crater formed the lagoon?

AG:

Yeah. And the natives lived there for many years. I was going to tell you—oh, we had machine ships, and we had hospital ships—I think I was told there were five hundred Navy ships in that lagoon at one time, before we were going to—that was after Iwo Jima. But that was a big mistake at Iwo Jima. The whole thing with lava, Mount Suribachi was just a big cone of lava, and we bombed and fired five inch shells into that thing, and the Japs just backed up in there, and never had any--

DM:

Didn't soften it up at all?

AG:

Not at all. They had figured where we were going to be landing. They had recorded the range, and the elevation, and so forth for putting shells on that particular spot. So, I mean, they slaughtered our Marines, as fast as we could put them on the ground.

DM:

At your battle stations, could you see any of this action going on, or were you hearing, or?

AG:

No, we didn't get that close. Now, the LSTs [Landing Ship, Tank], they were in the middle of it, and the LCIs—Landing Craft Infantry—were involved. All we knew was it was big, big trouble.

DM:

This kamikaze that hit you down at Ulithi—that's so far from Japan.

AG:

Well, he came from Truk.

DM:

Yeah, I didn't know they were operating way down there though. So, but were there other kamikazes that you had any trouble with? Did you take any other kamikazes?

AG:

Shot some down.

DM:

Shot some down, okay.

AG:

Yes. And we were positioned to intercept at—oh, what was that last battle—anyway--

DM:

Well, I think you wrote about this, or I heard about this somewhere that the *Randolph* was going to send a shore party to march through Tokyo--

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

On August 28th--

AG:
Yeah.

DM:
Can you tell me that story?

AG:
Well, I was elected for it, to march them down—what was that big street--

DM:
How many men would it have been?

AG:
Well, probably a couple, it would have been about eighty-five to ninety men. So we practice close-order drill on the flight deck. And then you got ready, and then they dropped the bomb. And boy howdy, I was sure glad that was--

DM:
That would have been awfully uncomfortable. I mean it could have cost an incident, couldn't it?
I mean you could have been under fire.

AG:
Yeah, there was tall buildings, you could have just sit up there.

DM:
Do you remember the name of the street that you were going to march down? If that comes to you later, I'd be curious to know, that way I can kind of figure out where that was in Tokyo.

AG:
Well, it wasn't close to the Emperor's Palace, we weren't going to touch that.

DM:
Do you remember kind of where you were anchored in Tokyo Bay?

AG:
We weren't.

DM:
Oh, you weren't anchored, okay. You were outside of Tokyo Bay at this time?

AG:

Yeah, we were about fifty miles out from Tokyo Bay when they dropped the bomb. We didn't know what was happening; all we knew was leave the area at flank speed, I think that was the command. And boy, we thought, "Well, it's an all-out kamikaze attack or something." Anyway, we got out of there, and—

DM:

Is flank speed as fast as you can go--

AG:

Yep.

DM:

By the way, okay.

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

How many knots was that?

AG:

Later that day, Harry Truman came on, and they'd patched him through the ship, and he told us about the atomic bomb. Well, nobody aboard the ship knew what an atomic bomb was, we'd never heard of it. And then we said "Seventy thousand casualties?" Oh boy, that was something big. We didn't know anything about it.

DM:

Did you start to speculate that the war would end soon when you heard that kind of news?

AG:

Oh yeah. In fact, I thought the first one—Hiroshima—was the end of it, but it wasn't. Had to go to Nagasaki, I think, the second one. And then that convinced the emperor.

DM:

Now the *Randolph* left before the surrender in Tokyo Bay—

AG:

We did.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

DM:

Right? You headed on back down toward Panama Canal, or?

AG:

Yeah. Went back through the Panama Canal, and up to Baltimore—that was our home port—and that's when they rigged the five thousand bunks.

DM:

Oh me. I can imagine getting seasick up on that top, because it seems like there'd be more sway up there on the top of those poles.

AG:

Actually on a carrier it's a pretty stable—

DM:

Pretty stable?

AG:

Platform. Yeah, it doesn't—unless you get in a storm, or a typhoon.

DM:

Did you ever have any seasick moments?

AG:

No. I had learned—I was told by the old chief, "Look at the horizon and you'll never get sick". So that's what I did.

DM:

Okay, now after all of this work going over to the Mediterranean and back, you'd seen the world pretty well, hadn't you? Been all over the Pacific, and now the Mediterranean—pretty good for a guy from Lamesa.

AG:

Yeah, went to Atlantic, Pacific, the Arctic, the Coral Sea, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, Gulf of Mexico.

DM:

Just about got the Seven Seas didn't you?

AG:
Quarter million miles.

DM:
That's pretty good travelling.

AG:
Navy miles.

DM:
Pretty good travelling. I bet when you were a kid in Lamesa, you never would have guessed you'd be travelling the globe like that?

AG:
No.

DM:
That's pretty exciting.

AG:
Yeah.

DM:
But you returned to Baltimore on—I've got the date here—October 27, 1945, does that sound right?

AG:
That's Navy day.

DM:
That's Navy day amidst a bunch of celebration from what I read somewhere.

AG:
There was a bridge there, I think—what river would that be--

DM:
Right there at Baltimore?

AG:
Wasn't James--

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

DM:

Okay, well you're up the Chesapeake Bay at Baltimore I guess, and so—I don't know.

AG:

Anyway, to celebrate, the whole squadron flew under the James River Bridge. Yeah, and Norman Harp, from Matador, flew under that bridge, came back, and sat down on the tarmac, and just sat there. Everybody else was out and closed the canopy and threw it around waiting for the transportation—he was still there. So we decided, well, maybe we better help him out, so went over and got his canopy open, and he had passed out. Yeah, and we called an ambulance, got him to the hospital. They did emergency appendectomy on him, after flying under the bridge.

DM:

I'm glad he got back.

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Golly, that's amazing that he landed okay, phew.

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Close call.

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Well I had a few other questions, and they were about—you mentioned you and your wife meeting, but can you tell us about your first date, and also the parachute?

AG:

Yeah. Well, she was married—you couldn't get silk for love or money after World War II, so she was married in my parachute, and had a seamstress make her a gown, and several other things—a lot of silk in the parachute, so she made several things. And our first date was to the Panhandle South Plains Fair. And I had explained to her on the way out that I'd spent all my money getting the car fixed, and we wouldn't be able to ride the Hammer, and the Ferris wheel, and things that

girls loved to do. And she said "That's fine," and we walked into the midway, and there was a carnie there with a hammer, and you hit that little peg, and it goes up and rings the bell. And she gave it a little love tap, and it went clear to the top, and rang a bell, and he gave her a kewpie doll, and she gave it to me. And he gave her the hammer again, and he saw a crowd gathering around watching that pretty girl swing that hammer. And everywhere we went, she won money. There's a thing you pitch a penny, and if it lands in a saucer, you get a quarter. Anyway, we went home with a lot more money than we came with.

DM:

That worked out great.

AG:

I said, "Maybe that's the one I'm looking for."

DM:

Luck follows her everywhere, huh? I also wanted to ask you about being in on the ground floor of the *Southwestern Crop and Stock*. You started from the beginning with that didn't you, or pretty close?

AG:

Yes. Yes, I was the organizer of it, uh-huh.

DM:

So you saw a need there, there was a need for that kind of journal, that kind of magazine?

AG:

Yeah, I thought so, we didn't have one in West Texas. We had *Farm & Ranch* in—Dallas?—somewhere—and *Progressive Farmer*, and maybe one or two of national reputation, but no local.

DM:

Okay, well you had all this printing experience, you had this publication experience—so I guess you brought that to bear here?

AG:

Yeah, we needed a press, wanted to have our own print shop. We went to San Antonio, and had an old fellow who wanted to sell a press, and we bought that, put it on a flatbed, and drove back nonstop. Now, it's only about six hours nowadays from San Antonio to Lubbock, but in those days it was eighteen hours. Our little old truck could do about thirty miles an hour. We hauled

that thing back and got a pressman in to help us set it up, get it to running. Then we had a linotype we bought; some small presses, and we were in business.

DM:

Well, sounds like it was well-equipped then.

AG:

Well, just the bare essentials.

DM:

Okay, how many staff did you have working for it?

AG:

Well we had the print shop foreman, pressman—we had a linotype operator, but he was doing a job thing, he set our type, and everybody else's in town.

DM:

Who wrote the articles?

AG:

I wrote a lot of them. There was one article which made quite a splash in those days. We had talked to an old engineer who said it was possible to divert the Colorado—what's the river that flows into the Mississippi above New Orleans?

DM:

Well you got the Red, and the Arkansas flow in—okay—

AG:

Way up high.

DM:

Oh, way up—well the Missouri--

AG:

Missouri, okay. He said "It's possible that you can divert the Missouri River across the plains, and irrigate Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas." And that sounded real good, because we didn't know how long the Ogallala would last. Now this is 1950, and we said "Boy, it's going to dry up just anytime."

DM:

Irrigation was just starting up then.

AG:

So we contacted George Mahon, he was our representative in Washington, and explained what we'd like to see happen with the Missouri River. He said "That would take the hazard off of the Mississippi if we diverted the Missouri at times—you wouldn't have to do it all the time—but have locks where you could turn it off, turn it on." And he liked the idea. So we were running articles in the magazine describing how this could be done. And he introduced this bill in Washington authorizing, or requesting, or directing the Army Corps of Engineers to find a channel to divert the Arkansas River to the Brazos River. And they came back and said "It's not feasible." And it was killed. Now, do you know how much damage the Mississippi does when it floods?

DM:

When it floods.

AG:

And the Missouri, when it floods? One big flood like that, would cost more than diverting this whole Missouri river. It's still available, still can be done.

DM:

That has to be an *interesting* series of articles, I'll have to look sometimes and see that. But y'all ran that, did you have somebody—so you were writing some of these articles, did you have somebody getting advertising?

AG:

Oh yeah.

DM:

Selling advertising space?

AG:

Yeah, yeah.

DM:

Okay, was that a full-time staff member?

AG:

Yeah. And I did a lot of that myself. Oh, it was a necessity.

DM:

Right, right.

AG:

Yeah.

DM:

Well I guess when you start one of these magazines, you end up doing a lot of work in different directions?

AG:

Yeah, on publication day I was in the bindery, operating a power cutter, trimmer.

DM:

Where was all this located by the way, *Southwest Crop*?

AG:

At the corner of Texas and 16th Street.

DM:

Texas and 16th, okay.

AG:

There's a print shop still in there I believe so.

DM:

Is it really? You know what it's called now?—Doesn't matter, I can drive by and take a look, but just curious.

AG:

Yeah there was a service station on the corner. And he closed that service station with our press room, and the offices were upstairs. In the Brian building. Daniel Brian was the owner.

DM:

Okay. Well one other thing I wanted to ask you about was some of your work and history in genealogy. Well you've worked with South Plains Genealogical Society--

AG:

Yes.

DM:

Pretty close, haven't you? And some work with the Gowen family research?

AG:

Yeah, we organized the Gowen Research Foundation. And some six hundred contributors, yeah.

DM:

That's a massive amount of genealogy, then.

AG:

Yeah. I— of course asked my family, grandmother and others, older people about it—they didn't know nothing. They didn't know about their grandparents. So I started digging it, and I have a letter from a lawyer that my grandmother's first cousin—way down in East Texas—John D. McCall.

DM:

John D. McCall?

AG:

His letter is in that group that went to the Southwest Collection. That was the start. He was very detailed, and he had done a little research on the family. And he gave me the benefit of that, and whetted my appetite.

DM:

Okay. How long have you been involved in that then?

AG:

Seventy-four years, yeah.

DM:

Okay, wow. Isn't it nice, with all the people who don't know anything about family history, you find one or two that do.

AG:

Oh yeah.

DM:

They can fill in a lot of gaps, can't they? Can you tell me about the Brandywine Crucible, and how you got involved with that?

AG:

That's a polite way of saying "melting pot." That's on the Cox side.

DM:

Cox being your maternal side, that's your mother's maiden name?

AG:

Did I tell you about my tenth-generation grandfather—

DM:

No.

AG:

Going to New Orleans?

DM:

I don't believe you told me that.

AG:

Okay, he lived in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania—Pittsburgh—and I think when he was about nineteen he got on a barge to take a load of hides to St. Louis. When he got to St. Louis—no market for hides. So he made a left turn and went down the Mississippi to New Orleans, and he had such a good time in New Orleans, that he signed up for a four-year in the Spanish Army. His commander officer was Lieutenant Colonel Bernardo de Gálvez, for whom Galveston is named. And part of their duties of this cavalry group was to plant the presidios and missionaries in Central Texas. They came through Lampasas County, which the Spanish Army had been into a long time, and established the Father Pedro—can't remember it—anyway, the planted a mission in Lampasas County. And as soon as the cavalry left, the Indians came in and wiped them out, killed Father Terrorors.

DM:

Terrorors.

AG:

T-e-r-r-o-r-o-s, Terrorors. Killed him, and they decided not to try to revive, but they went on down to—oh, my—Robert Whittle wrote a book about this—presidio—I can't think of the name of it now—anyway, they established this mission, and the Indians left them alone. They flourished for about a year, then they came in and wiped them out. Burned the presidio—maybe I'll think of it—anyway, I had a fellow who worked for me in an office here, he was a—what do you call them with the digging the—

DM:
Archaeologist?

AG:
He was an archaeologist. He finally got a doctorate, and he's teaching at college on the Rio Grande river, I can't think of the name of that. But anyway--

DM:
Pan-American maybe, or one of those?

AG:
Yeah.

DM:
Okay. Do you remember his name?

AG:
Yeah—oh my—

DM:
That's okay, it'll come to you in a minute maybe.

AG:
Yeah.

DM:
Now, did he get you involved in this then, he was mentioning all of the—oh, I was just wondering if he got you involved in Brandywine Crucible?

AG:
No. That was another story. Well, gee whiz—

DM:
But Brandywine Crucible is the Cox family?

AG:
Yeah. Yeah, that was our colony on Brandywine Creek. And, in fact, one of the battles of the Revolutionary War was fought on their property. But anyway, about a dozen families that were kind of cohesive, and they were Quakers. And we needed a name for the Cox organization, and

we had already learned that if you try to get a non-profit organization of one family name, they refused it.

DM:
Okay.

AG:
I tried to get it on the Gowens, and no way. So we took in the whole neighborhood, and there were several different—well about twelve families. And they accepted that. Brandywine Creek, and so we wanted an umbrella name, and I suggested Brandywine Crucible--

DM:
Okay, for melting pot.

AG:
And they accepted it.

DM:
Okay, and you've been working with that—when was that, that you started that?

AG:
That would be about '95.

DM:
Okay, and you still do work for that?

AG:
I was on the board until the last election, I asked to be relieved when I was ninety years old.

DM:
Okay, okay, but we're getting some of these records at the Southwest Collection I believe, is that right?

AG:
Yes, I—Joe Cox went to the University of Texas, and asked them if they would be a repository for our research and correspondence and so forth. They reluctantly said “Well, yeah,” but in the meantime, I had contact Southwest Collection, and Dr.—preceding the President, that'd be Dr.—

DM:
Was it Murrah, or was it—I don't know—Tydeman? But anyway--

AG:

Anyways, he said “Yes, we’d be glad to have it.” And boy, right quick, so we moved our starting batch of data to Southwest Collection. Later, that same year, Texas University said “Yes”—put some restrictions on it; on some kind of a basis they would accept it. So I think we made some copies of stuff here that we sent to Austin. Bill, William—his name was William.

DM:

Here? William Tydeman?

AG:

No. He was the head of the Southwest Collection. Oh well. He preceded these folks, so that was installed--

DM:

About what year was that?

AG:

About 1990—no, it’d have to be ’96 or ’97.

DM:

Yeah, William Tydeman came in in ’97, but that’s not it? Wasn’t Tai Kreidler, and wasn’t David Murrah—

AG:

No, Murrah was never head of the Southwest Collection.

DM:

Yeah, he was, but it’s been a little while, it’s been a while. Huh, I don’t know, but anyway, the Southwest Collection back then—

AG:

He had to run for his life, David Murrah did. Oh my.

DM:

Well that’s alright, that’ll come back--

AG:

T—oh, I had it on the tip of my tongue.

DM:

That's alright. But anyway, okay—

AG:

You said Tydeman?

DM:

Tydeman.

AG:

No, that's not it.

DM:

And it's not Kreidler?

AG:

No. William was his first name—Tydeman.

DM:

Tydeman.

AG:

Tydeman, T-y-d-e-m-a-n.

DM:

That's it, William Tydeman.

AG:

I finally thought of one.

DM:

William Tydeman, okay yeah he came in in '97—

AG:

Okay.

DM:

So he was the one that talked to you about that, okay. And we talked about the fact that maybe Paris Cox, who brought in the Quakers into Estacado Community, he was maybe part of this group also?

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

AG:

Yeah, he came from Indiana, and he was a Quaker. And he planted a, well, a colony I guess you'd say, at Estacado.

DM:

Estacado.

AG:

Yeah, and they had some bad years, no crops, 1887-8, somewhere in there. And his little daughter got bit by a rattlesnake and died. She's buried—she was the first burial in that cemetery. And he packed up and moved to Galveston, and started some kind of a colony down there.

DM:

Okay, well I know that there's a wealth of information in those records, and we're really happy to have them at the Southwest Collection. We appreciate your willingness to put them there in the archive where people can use them; thank you for that.

AG:

I've got another box of historical stuff.

DM:

We'll be ready for it.

AG:

You may take it, or you may have the boys come and pick it up, whichever.

DM:

We'll probably do that, we'll arrange it later on.

AG:

Okay.

DM:

And I have exhausted my questions here—do you know of anything we've missed? Have we done pretty well?

AG:

Yeah, I think you're going to make your appointment already.

DM:

I think so. Well if you don't mind, I'll go ahead and turn it off then.

AG:

Okay.

End of interview



© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library