

**Oral History Interview of
Don Jones**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
June 10, 2015
Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Don Jones, who discusses his education, his time serving aboard a submarine during World War II, and his experiences as an educator.

Length of Interview: 03:18:13

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Keywords

World War II, military, submarines, Dunbar, civil rights, African-American history

David Marshall (DM):

The date is June 10, 2015.

Don Jones (DJ):

Sure is.

DM:

Yeah, June is passing us by, isn't it?

DJ:

Uh-huh.

DM:

And this is David Marshall interviewing Mr. Don Jones at Patterson Library in Lubbock, Texas. And we were talking last time—this is part two of the interview—and we were talking last time about you growing up out there in East Texas, and a situation happened in Carthage that you talked about quite a bit last time. Can you tell me—I know that pretty soon afterwards, you moved up to Muskogee.

DJ:

Well, that moved me to Muskogee.

DM:

Okay, can you talk about that?

DJ:

Well, at that time, it was a pretty well-known fact in our county, that you—black people just didn't physically defend against white people. And this was my case. I'd had a few exchanges, a little round of fisticuffs with a deputy sheriff. And, of course, we had—where we lived was in the southwest part of the county. And as far as race relations then, we were a cut above other parts of the county.

DM:

Is this Panola County, by the way?

DJ:

This is Panola County. Okay. And during this period, from the time I was arrested until we were released, which I guess, wasn't more than forty, forty-five minutes, at the most. Word got to my mom—how, I don't know. I have an idea that somebody called Clayton, which is about three miles from our place, and somebody ran out there and got Mama the word, and she—that just

happened to be, a friend of my sister was there, and she had a vehicle, and naturally, she was bringing Mama to see about us. Well, in the meantime—there was not enough time—well, I don't know—but in the meantime, I guess the person who got her the word got my ex-guardian the word, and he collected some reinforcements, and we met about—I guess three or four miles out of Carthage. I was on—we were on our way home, and of course, when we stopped—Mama pulled over and we stopped—the reinforcements stopped—got about four vehicles that was trailing Mama—how this all happened, I don't know, but I do know two—I know three, four people that was my ex-guardian, Bill Bryant, his nephew, and then that was the dentist in Slaton—I'm sorry, in Clayton—and a guy by the name of Wilkinson—that first name—and I don't know the people in the other vehicle.

DM:

Okay. They were there to support you?

DJ:

Yes. Yes. And they were armed. They were armed.

DM:

Okay. Tell me your ex-guardian's name, again.

DJ:

Bill Bryant. Matter of fact, he was like all of our guardians until we reached twenty-one. But then we got home, and Mom had—her brother was there with us, and of course, we had an idea that things may get a little out of hand come nighttime. So we were looking at what we had to defend ourselves. And I saw Mr. Bill—that's what we called him, Mr. Bill—came out, Mama went to the pickup, they talked a few minutes, he left, then Mama came and got me, said "You've got to pack your things." And of course, that didn't sit very well with me. But anyway, Mama prevailed, as she always did when she told you to do something. And it was in the fall, not too long, about a pickup came—and pickups then were not as large as they are now—and that thing had a bale of cotton on it. And it had a tailgate, just like they have now, but when it came, they opened that tailgate, and there was a big box in there with cotton. And I crawled in, crawled in that box and they closed the tailgate.

DM:

Cotton was over the box?

DJ:

Yes, I looked—from just a casual driving by, it looked just like a bale of cotton on a pickup. How all of that happened, I never questioned Mama; I just went with my thoughts.

DM:

That's got to be awfully hard, though, suddenly having to pack and move—no warning, no thought, no time to consider, you just have to do it.

DJ:

Right. Well, I did pretty well, I think, but I was not carried to town. The train was stopped between Longview—I guess Longview—out west of Longview—between Longview and its next stop.

DM:

Kilgore, maybe, or somewhere like that.

DJ:

More or less Gladewater, of course I don't think it went through Kilgore. How that happened, don't know, I was taken out, put on the train, when I got to Dallas, the conductor told me what to do, and I got on another train and went to Muskogee. And a guy that—a minister that ran revivals for church—a week-long revival—we were pretty close to him.

DM:

Now he's Presbyterian.

DJ:

He's Presbyterian. And he had a white minister friend—Presbyterian—and that's where I went when I was picked up, I went to this minister's home—it was just the minister and his wife.

DM:

To the white minister's home, okay.

DJ:

Yes, and I stayed in that house two weeks without going outside.

DM:

Had you ever met him before?

DJ:

No, not the white guy. But his name was Jennings; I'll never sure forget it. And I stayed there with them about six weeks. And after about two weeks, I could go out in the back, move around, and when the wife had to do some shopping or something in town, I would drive her. Then I got a letter from Mama with some money in it. She informed me that my trunk was on the way to Prairie View, and I'd best be there to pick it up. So I went from Muskogee to Prairie View,

picked up the trunk, and I don't know, I guess she had transacted all the business and got my class cards and started going to school.

DM:

Now about what year was this?

DJ:

This had to be '40 —1940. Maybe—

DM:

Before Pearl Harbor, you think?

DJ:

It was before Pearl Harbor, yes. And of course, I stayed there; I stayed in school. No. I'm not sure, because I came—went home for Christmas, didn't go to Carthage, though, and back to Prairie View, and then I was called—I left Prairie View in February. That must have been later than—that must have been—

DM:

After Pearl Harbor.

DJ:

It, well, no—

DM:

It was a long time ago, just take your time piecing it together.

DJ:

I'm confused here, because I remember I was in a boarding—yeah, it was after Pearl Harbor. Yeah, I'm getting—because I was in boarding school, and heard the declaration of war speech by Roosevelt.

DM:

So you went from Muskogee to a boarding school?

DJ:

No, I went from Muskogee to Prairie View. The boarding school had already happened.

DM:

I see.

DJ:

So it had to have been—because I was in boarding school the fall of '41, because Pearl Harbor was attacked December 7, 1941. And then, from there—

DM:

So Muskogee probably happened in '43, somewhere in there?

DJ:

No, Muskogee happened between—Muskogee happened before Pearl Harbor. No.

DM:

Boarding school happened.

DJ:

Yes. Yes. Muskogee happened—

DM:

Well you went in in '44, it seems like, is that right?

DJ:

Yeah, something—so Muskogee happened before boarding school—before Prairie View.

DM:

Before Prairie View, yes. Well, had you thought about going to Prairie View? This is Prairie View A&M?

DJ:

Yes.

DM:

Had you thought about going there before all this happened in Carthage?

DJ:

Yes.

DM:

Okay, you'd planned on going there.

DJ:

Yes, because Casey, the oldest boy, graduated Prairie View in '39, and of course, like I say,

didn't any of us graduate high school in Panola County. How Mama managed it, I don't know, but Prairie View had a high school, so he left home and went—last year—Prairie View High School, and then right into Prairie View. The girls—there was a junior college—Mary Allen in Crockett—the oldest girl was carried to Crockett for high school, and she wasn't going to stay unless they—her sister—so they both stayed and went to high school in Crockett. And then Albert Tracy, the fourth child, spent a year in Center Point Boarding School. Then Robert, the fifth child, spent a year in Center Point Boarding School. And then Don, the sixth child, went with the intentions of spending one year, but between—over the summer—they tacked on that twelfth grade.

DM:

That's right, you had mentioned that.

DJ:

So I stayed two years.

DM:

Well, when you went from Muskogee to Prairie View A&M, was that the high school part, or was that the college part?

DJ:

No, that was the college part, because I graduated from Center Point High School in Camp County—Pittsburg, Texas.

DM:

When you were living up there at Muskogee, were you worried that someone was going to find you up there? Was there a concern about that?

DJ:

A little bit, but it didn't really hit me until the second night at Muskogee. And the Reverend Jennings and his wife calmed me down, and then about ten the next day, the guy—the black minister—came over, and they visited with me.

DM:

Okay. Do you remember his name?

DJ:

I should. Nelson.

DM:

Nelson.

DJ:

They visited with me, and then each one of them prayed. And then I don't know where Mrs. Jennings was, but Reverend Jennings prayed, and then Reverend Nelson, and then Mrs. Jennings appeared, and she said "I want to pray for you, too." And I think her prayer hit me more—it did more right there to me, as far as feeling a little bit more secure—because she—you know, I mentioned about Mr. Bill's wife, Miss Froni, she was—Mrs. Jennings, she wasn't in the same game with Miss Froni, but she was pretty good, because she talked about having strength to defend if anything came up, you know, and I said "Hey, this lady's talking my language."

DM:

So you felt secure, at least, in their home.

DJ:

Yes. They would—she belonged to I guess a reading club or something, and while I was there, they met, and I heard Mrs. Jennings and Reverend Jennings discussing—and she said "It's scheduled here. It's going to be here, and if they bring anything here, I think I can take care of it," and I bet you that ol' sister could, too. Because after I became pretty comfortable, I would help clean and help with the laundry, you know, because I already knew how to do that stuff.

DM:

Did you get the indication that they had helped other people in a similar way?

DJ:

No.

DM:

Didn't talk about that, or—?

DJ:

No, but I got the impression that they had a lot to do with the race relations in Muskogee, because you could just feel, you know, and I didn't—I got the feeling that it was really, it was sincere, not for a name or anything. And it didn't have to be—my feeling—it didn't have to be something outstanding, just you know, little things happened, I had a feeling that they would speak up, you know.

DM:

Well it sure is nice to hear that among the bad people that are out there, there are good people out there, too, you know that there are good people there to help.

DJ:

Well, you see, if it wasn't for the good people out there—

DM:

You're talking about like the Jennings, who were willing to help out, yeah.

DJ:

And both of them prayed—well, all three prayed for me when I left there. Of course, a part of their prayer must not have gotten through the ceiling, because they prayed that I would apply myself and blah, blah, blah, and I didn't. I didn't want to be there. I was wearing glasses then, and every couple of weeks I'd break my glasses and write Mama, "I need some money," and she'd send me some money, and I'd go hook it to Houston—stay in Houston until, of course, I used up my money, then I'd go back to Prairie View.

DM:

Well what was Prairie View like? Was it difficult? Were there difficult teachers, or—?

DJ:

Well they were demanding. They were demanding, but not so that I couldn't have done much, much better, because this is wartime now, and beforehand, all guys that went to Prairie View, you took ROTC. That was required. All girls that went to Prairie View took home economics; that was required. You didn't have a choice in that. And you did it your freshman year, right off the bat. That was one course that was required. I'd get up and go to ROTC. I'd go to reveille, and when it was over, I'd go back and get into bed. The other guys would head out to breakfast; I'd head to my room and get into bed. I didn't do squat.

DM:

You know what, that sounds like a lot of college kids, especially their first year.

DJ:

Well, I just, I didn't want to be there. And since it was during wartime, they added another requirement. The guys—everybody had to take a vocation. The girls—we still—the guys still did ROTC. The girls did homemaking, and they also—you know, and they had auto mechanics, and I don't know, welding—and I took auto mechanics. Now, I'd get up and go to that. That was in the afternoon. I'd get up and go to that. Sometimes, I'd go to the cafeteria for the midday meal—for dinner—sometimes I wouldn't, I'd go to the auto mechanics was a three-hour course. It went

from one to four, and I'd go to that. I didn't miss that—that and ROTC. That stuff in between, if I felt like it I went; if I didn't, I didn't go.

DM:

Did you live in a dorm?

DJ:

Sure did.

DM:

Was the food pretty good?

DJ:

Well, yeah, to me, because I'm not a—Mama taught me "Eat what's put before you and try to enjoy it," well, I—yeah, I ate. But, see, this is why—I was in the dorm, didn't want to be there, and I was doing everything I could to get sent home, short of a major thing, you know, and the guy that—they had, I guess, dorm monitors. The person didn't live in the dorm, but if it got a little rowdy, he'd come in—and this guy was definitely a slow learner, because I lived upstairs—it was only two stories—and we watched for him every night, and if we saw him coming, we'd really get rambunctious. And that old fellow tumbled down those stairs more than one time.

We'd make all the noise upstairs, and he'd run—and we'd have our rope or wire, whatever ready, and then once he got upstairs, somebody popped the master switch, which was under the stairs. And he knew it up, and he was trying to get out, and he'd hit that rope or wire and tumble, you know. And he figured I was the ringleader. If not, I was in it, and when I went back to—after the war, when I went back to Prairie View to get enrolled in school, the other two brothers were already enrolled—uh-uh. He was the guy that you had to get by, and "Oops" is right. I made three attempts to get in, and 'Uh-uh.'

DM:

And that would have been G.I Billed, too.

DJ:

Yeah, but all the colleges you could do it, so—

DM:

Are you talking about when he was at the stairs, there was a rope or wire that you pulled tight?

DJ:

Well, we'd have that set up, only it wouldn't be across the stairway because he had to go up. As

soon as he'd get upstairs, somebody would—and he'd come back down and hit that wire—most of the time it was rope.

DM:

He found out that being a dorm monitor was a difficult job, huh?

DJ:

Whatever he was. But anyway, and after that, from that Prairie View, I went to—was examined in Houston, and was sent to the Navy.

DM:

Okay, so you were drafted out of Prairie View—you were at Prairie View and they drafted you.

DJ:

Forty-four of us went from Prairie View.

DM:

Forty-four of you?

DJ:

Yeah, to be—get our physical and blah, blah, blah. And we were—took our physical and was told you were in right then, and I was the only one out of the forty-four that they sent to the Navy.

DM:

Why was that? Did you request it, or did they just make a decision?

DJ:

They made a decision. They asked everybody else. They asked forty-three—it was Army, Navy, and all of them said Army, and got to me, Navy, man didn't even ask—and of course, I objected to it, and it was just like whistling in the wind, it didn't matter to anybody.

DM:

Did you ever figure out why they designated you for the Navy?

DJ:

I don't know. I couldn't—I've never been able to figure it out.

DM:

Did they gather y'all together at Prairie View—call you up or something?

DJ:

Yes, they called us—

DM:

Were you expecting it?

DJ:

No, because actually, I had a farming deferment, and I was the last son. At this time, three other brothers were already in service, and I was—I had a farming deferment, and also the last son, but I guess somehow or another that went by the wayside.

DM:

Robert was one of the brothers that was already in, because he's older, is that right?

DJ:

Yes, he's two years older than I am.

DM:

All right, then who were the others?

DJ:

Then Albert Tracy and Casey. And we went according—Casey's the oldest, and then Albert Tracy, Robert, and then Don.

DM:

Albatracey, is that what you're saying?

DJ:

Albert Tracy.

DM:

Albert Tracy, he went by both names. Albert Tracy.

DJ:

Yes, and of course Casey went first, then Albert Tracy, then Robert, and then I got—they just gave me the farming deferment because we would farm on the farm, so I got that. Plus the fact, you know, I was the last son, so—and I think that rule—I've never seen it in print—but I think that rule was the son maybe could go to the military, but would not ever go overseas, something like that. But anyway, it didn't hold me out, so—

DM:

Was it pretty immediate, then? You found out one day you were now in the Navy, and then they sent you on?

DJ:

Yes, right—mine happened—I don't know about the other people, but mine happened, you know, just bang, bang, bang.

DM:

So you went down to Houston—

DJ:

No, now, when they told me, I went home, and then back to Houston, and from Houston to Maryland.

DM:

Okay. Real quick?

DJ:

Yes. I think, probably in the amount of about two weeks all of this happened.

DM:

That's not the first time this has happened in your life, where all of the sudden everything changes, and you're living somewhere else.

DJ:

Yes. And I don't know why—God, I don't know how many—like a hundred and twenty-five guys, somewhere like that—and they had us all in an area, and the guy said “Where is Don Jones?” And I said “Here,” and he says “You have meal tickets and,” —and I said “Whoa,” —he said “You have the meal tickets and the responsibility of these guys.” I said “Wait a minute, people here all in the” —“You have the meal tickets,” he never—so I thought “Okay.”

DM:

This was in the Navy?

DJ:

Yes. No, this was at Houston before we—I had the meal tickets from Houston to Maryland. And there was a guy from a community that knew us. I didn't know him, but I knew his dad, but I didn't know him. And when we got to Maryland, by the time that we ate and got issued our stuff,

it was—and they showed us how, briefly to make up our sacks, out bed, it was time to go to bed. And the next morning, after breakfast, we mustered out, and the guy asked—I just happened to be in the—I thought I was getting in the back line, and I was until they turned us around; now I'm in the front line. And the guy asked if anybody in that group had any military experience. Well, heck no. Anybody had any ROTC experience? Heck no. I wasn't—and this guy that—from the community—he shoved me, and I stepped out. And he called me up and put me through—I guess it was a manual arm. And he said "Okay, you are the Assistant Drill Master," which, now, that was a break, because it was cold—this is in February—and they had—the drill guy had options. He had a drill stand, and I don't know who did it, but it was up—

DM:

A drill stand up about five feet or so?

DJ:

Yeah, a little bit more.

DM:

Six feet?

DJ:

Yeah. And they had a big barrel that it had fire in it, so he could stay warm. And it was about halfway between the drill space. So I could stand up there and stay—well, matter of fact, if they really stoked that thing, you'd shed some clothes, because that, you know—and that was an advantage.

DM:

Well what were you doing? You were supervising the drills?

DJ:

Well, I was teaching them to drill—taught them to drill.

DM:

Right. That was based upon your ROTC experience.

DJ:

Yes, and this guy knew it. I wasn't—you know, I'd been told by—"You don't volunteer for anything." And of course, basically the drill master would come out and get them going, and then he'd disappear. And of course, they knew, then, that they were supposed to, you know, follow my directions.

DM:

Did that come with a rank? I mean, did they give you a little bit more than—?

DJ:

No. But at Prairie View, you know, us black people, we always put a little extra in, and I had a little extra to throw in, and then when it came time to—how did we—did we stay nine weeks? I don't know. I can't remember. But anyway, the day of completion, they had all of the companies, they had a parade and all that good stuff, and they designated the best company.

DM:

Oh, now when you're saying "put in a little extra," you're talking about some extra moves into the drill?

DJ:

Yes. And we had two or three little sayings that we did at Prairie View, and I taught that. And of course, there was a—I guess, a—you know, I've even forgotten—there were six companies, and we were company four.

DM:

When you say "company," was it a company of about a hundred men? Was it that large, or—?

DJ:

Yes, it was—I believe it was about a hundred and fifty. I'm forgetting all that, too. But anyway, those guys just marched, stayed in regular formation, and to-the-rear march, you know, and all that. Well, shoot, I scattered mine out, all—my group—out all over the place, you know, and got them back together. And—

DM:

Did you get some recognition for that? That's quite an accomplishment.

DJ:

The company did. And of course, they got a little plaque, but it was presented to the drill master. But the guy let it be known that Seaman Third Class Don Jones had a lot—so—

DM:

Good, good. Now where were you in Maryland, by the way?

DJ:

Bainbridge, and you know, I don't know where—I've been back to Maryland any number of times. Next time I'm up there, I'm going to go see if I can find Bainbridge. But anyway, from

that we went home, spent nine days, went back to Maryland, and we had, I guess, two weeks before our basic training was up. They started talking about submarines. And the only way one—they let it be known right off the bat, the only way that you can get in there, you have to volunteer. And the guy talked about the advantages, and all I heard was “money,” because at that time, black people in the Navy could only be stewards and steward mates. That meant that they took care of the officers, you know, hand and foot—did everything—polished their brass, shined their shoes, the whole—fed, got their food, the whole ball of wax. Well—and you were not taught—I think we went to the rifle range one time. But a skill, like electrician, plumbing, welding—huh-huh.

DM:

Couldn't do that.

DJ:

Couldn't do that. And if you—if they saw that maybe you would make a good cook, they'd pull you and send you to culinary school, but that was it. Well, I didn't see myself cooking for a living, so it hit me, when it got to the money part, “This is you, fellow.”

DM:

Was it substantially more for a sub?

DJ:

Yes. Matter of fact, a seaman first class almost made as much money as a second lieutenant.

DM:

Really?

DJ:

Yeah, they paid like slot machines. So I chose that, and of course, Mama couldn't—“Boy, you got to be out of your crazy mind. Why [are] you going [to] do that? Tell me more about the submarine.” Of course, Mama knew, and she just—and then I told her, you know. “If I'm fortunate, and get out, get back home, I will not have a sellable skill. I won't know any more about a vocation, a sellable skill, as I know now. So I chose it for the money. And if I get back, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, I'll have all my limbs—maybe missing something up here, but I'll have—”

DM:

You'll have your limbs. Yes.

DJ:

And she says—

DM:

Better than infantry, in that regard.

DJ:

Yeah, yeah. You may be shot up, you know, and she said “Well, I’ll be praying for you.” So when we got—that was during the nine days’ leave—we got back to Maryland. They finalized—they gave you another crack, “You sure you want to do this?” When they kept saying “You sure you want to” —I got kind of—said “Well, I’m out here,” and I said “yes,” and then there were—I believe there were a hundred and twenty—like a hundred—there were over a hundred in our company, maybe a hundred twenty-five, I don’t know. But anyway, there were only two other guys out of our—that chose the—

DM:

Out of your company?

DJ:

Yes, and we were sent to New London, Connecticut, for sub training. And I saw those guys—I spent two nights with them. We got there in the afternoon, and I spent that night with them. Tomorrow, we went through some general stuff and I spent that night with them, and I didn’t see them anymore. So I don’t know what happened to them.

DM:

They were put on different submarines, then.

DJ:

Well, I guess they were put in a different training group, and I’ve forgotten how long we stayed in New London, but we went from New London to Mary Island, California.

DM:

Where?

DJ:

Mary Island, California—

DM:

Mary Island, okay¹.

¹ Mare Island Naval Shipyard, the first U.S. naval base established on the Pacific Ocean.

DJ:

And we stayed there three days, and we were put on a landing—LS-something—a big landing barge, and we went from there to Honolulu.

DM:

You sure were seeing the world.

DJ:

Yes.

DM:

Maybe not in the best possible way, but that was—that's interesting—all along the east coast, and then across to California, Hawaii—

DJ:

And something happened. We crossed the Salt Lake, and something happened, and we sat out there on that edge of that lake—well, part of the train was—but we sat out there a couple hours, and some of us ventured out into the Salt Lake.

DM:

Oh did you? Did you go out there and float?

DJ:

Yeah, now you actually—yeah. But anyway—

DM:

You really were seeing the country.

DJ:

But we went from California to Pearl Harbor, and this thing—it was a landing barge, and flat bottom, golly, it was rough.

DM:

Oh, how'd you do?

DJ:

I got sea-sicker than a puppy. Golly. And somebody—you know, nobody knew anything, and it was—and it took us seven, eight days to get across. I was so glad to see land. And I was seasick

the better part of four days before I—it didn't take me long to start getting seasick. And I didn't want food, and that was the thing that I should have been doing.

DM:

Oh, really?

DJ:

Yeah, keeping the stomach full, but I didn't.

DM:

But it didn't last the whole time, just took about four days to get used to it?

DJ:

Yeah.

DM:

Let's back up just a minute. What kind of training did y'all do in Connecticut? Did you train in a sub, or—?

DJ:

Yes. Well, in a simulator. And the thing—and all I can remember was they had a big tower there—that thing was probably a hundred ten, fifteen, twenty feet high. But the water was a hundred feet, and they used that to teach escape from the sub. It was—you'd go in this compartment, and they'd pressurize it, then you'd open the door and walk into the water. And then you ascended to the top.

DM:

Of the ladder?

DJ:

No, you had a rope, and that rope had knots on it that told you—every so often, you're supposed to hit a knot, if you were ascending at a safe rate.

DM:

Interesting. So you came into the water, then you went up the rope until you hit the surface.

DJ:

There were six of us—diving—experienced diving.

DM:

Okay. Had you ever—did you know how to swim when you went in?

DJ:

Yes.

DM:

Was there any problem with the water, salt water, and all of that, or did you adjust pretty quick?

DJ:

No, we didn't get into salt water. And of course, we had to go through this thing twice, because you had to do it, and if you got in trouble, there were valves every so, you know, certain distance, and if you got in trouble, and that ol' diver couldn't calm you down, he'd hit that thing, and that water would almost immediately—and you're head would—

DM:

Oh, it would suck out—

DJ:

Yeah, it would just drop—I guess he must have just like opened a floodgate, and it went to the next level, and then it automatically—I guess it closed itself. And we got about halfway up that thing—and he couldn't do anything to console—then we had to go back and start over.

DM:

This was all inside that tower, then. Okay.

DJ:

Yes, yes. You were inside the tower.

DM:

Okay, and it was as if—it was simulating if you were trying to get out of a sub that was flooding.

DJ:

Absolutely. See, in the sub, you can get to the conning tower, where the hatch is, and you could put so much pressure—equalize that pressure, and then you could open that hatch and go on. Close the hatch—next crew—and it would expel that water and then next crew—group.

DM:

This is an awfully different experience for a person, though, I mean it's tight quarters, it's being flooded with water—did you handle it pretty well?

DJ:

Well, yeah, it was kind of exciting for me. I was kind of like, “Whatever comes, you know, whatever’s going to happen is going to happen.” And of course, we made it. Then we had to go—I guess they did something to us before—I know they did something to us before, because they told us, “If you have ballpoint pens—fountain pens—if you have a fountain pen, make sure you don’t have it on you,” because they would do something to that—we were in a tank—I guess there were twelve of us in that tank—fourteen, because there were two experienced divers in that tank. And they, I guess, depressurized that thing, because our ears acted up, and—

DM:

So that would affect your fountain pen.

DJ:

Yeah, shoot, if you had that thing, he said it would crack that ink reservoir. And out of that—and I guess we went—I guess once we got out of the water, I guess we went into—because we went through that thing twice. But anyway, and I can’t recall how long we were in—we must have been there six weeks—must have been. But all I can remember was the—

DM:

Was that training in the tower.

DJ:

That’s all I can remember. I guess they were teaching us how to set tables for a seven-course meal, and how to—I don’t know, I just—I don’t remember anything but that.

DM:

It must have had a real impact on you, then, that thing, and it would.

DJ:

Yeah. And the polishing shoes and shining brass and making beds and getting coffee—that wasn’t my bag, so—but anyway.

DM:

Did they teach you anything about—either there in Connecticut, or anywhere along the way—did they teach you about surviving in a life raft, if you were you know, at sea.

DJ:

If they did, it escaped me. I was absent—I’m sure they did, but I don’t recall. The only thing I can recall was getting out of the sub, and you’re not going to have a rope, so make sure you

watch your ascending speed, because if you give up, you'll—you had to kind of fight, and if you give up, you'd pop up out of the ocean, and you're dead, because your lungs had collapsed. That's all I remember. I can't remember anything else about New London.

DM:

Now when did you go on a real submarine—not a simulator—but your first real submarine?

DJ:

It must have been in May.

DM:

Where would you have been then, in Honolulu?

DJ:

Yes. We went from—we got to Honolulu, and we went on a sub tender—a big surface craft that supplied the submarine, and from there to a submarine.

DM:

Did you get to see Honolulu at all, besides—I guess you were at Pearl Harbor, maybe.

DJ:

Yeah, we were at Pearl—yeah—after the war, because when we got to—I didn't stay—we got to—I think I spent two nights ashore, and then I went on that tender, and that thing went to sea. And it didn't dock anywhere, but it stayed out a good while, and I never went topside to see what was going on. But I'm sure that it was refit[ing] and resupplying submarines. And I can—the best I can recall, all of this activity took place at night, so I don't know—but it didn't, like, go to Guam or any of that place and anchor, dock, it was just out in the ocean somewhere.

DM:

Just out there, off of Hawaii, somewhere?

DJ:

Yeah. And we stayed, and of course, I guess, when it completed its mission—when it left, it knew how many subs and where, and all that stuff, and when it did that, then it came back to San Diego.

DM:

Pearl—

DJ:

Back to Pearl, yeah.

DM:

Now let me get the year right. You said “May,” was this ’44 or ’45? What year were you out there—?

DJ:

It had to be—this had to be ’45, because—

DM:

That was the last year of the war.

DJ:

Yeah, we were out on a sub, and was back in when the surrender occurred—the Japanese.

DM:

Well, how did they—when you first loaded onto that submarine—by the way, do you remember the number of it or anything?

DJ:

Yes.

DM:

What was it?

DJ:

USS Ronquil, SS-396.

DM:

R-O-N-Q-U-I-L, *Ronquil*. Right, okay, I have a little bit of information on that one. You must have told me that number earlier. It had seen a little action in 1944, and had sunk a couple of Japanese cargo ships in ’44, but I have here that in the spring—maybe into the summer of ’45, there were some attempts to find downed aviators.

DJ:

Yeah, that’s what we did.

DM:

Is that what you did? Okay. Do you remember—can you tell me a little bit about that?

DJ:

There was a little scrimmage with a couple of planes—Jap planes, they got them both—

DM:

Do you remember what kind of U.S. planes were shot down?

DJ:

No, these were—it was the enemy planes. We were scouting for the Americans, but these guys caught us topside and attacked us, and of course, we downed them. And one of the guys—that was the only casualty that I saw—one of the guys—they parachuted, we went to them. First guy—picked him up, and moved over to the second guy, and of course, that submarine, when it was loaded, you could—they had, I guess three feet stanchions that were basically gun mounts for fifty caliber and, I guess, twenty caliber, and they were used against the planes, plus that thing had two twin forties on it—forward and aft twin forties.

DM:

What's a twin forty?

DJ:

Well, it shoots—and it's two—it's twin, it has two valves.

DM:

So it's an anti-aircraft gun.

DJ:

Yeah, right.

DM:

Do you have to surface, and then take out those things and mount them, or are they mounted all the time up there?

DJ:

The five-incher, that thing—the *Ronquil* had, I'm going to say—boy, that's been—I believe it had two five-inch guns, and two twin forties. They were already—they were permanently mounted. The twenties and the fifties, you brought them up—you were a fifty gunner, so when you said "Surface," you grabbed your gun and up—and it sat in that—

DM:

In a stanchion?

DJ:

Yeah, that was also the lifeline was attached to those things. But when that sub was heavily loaded, you could hold that lifeline, and play in the water. It would catch that—

DM:

A lot of draft.

DJ:

Yeah. And the second guy, when we was helping him on—

DM:

The second Japanese—?

DJ:

Yeah, he stabbed the guy that was helping him. And that was his last on—we just backed off from him, and did—far enough away where the guys could depress the fifties, and they took care of him. The other guy, that we saved, you wouldn't think it, but he graduated from UCLA. He—

DM:

He had already, or he did later?

DJ:

He had already. Yeah, he spoke—he knew more about Los Angeles and the West Coast than most of us, because most of the guys on my sub was from the east coast. Matter of fact, they were all from the east coast except two—the executive officer was from Dallas, and Don—we were the only two that—they called us “Big Reb and Little” —we were the only two rebels on that thing, the rest of them were damn Yankees. And that guy, he knew all the—up the California coast, you know, and what happened—his graduation present was back to Japan to visit his grandfather, and while he was over there, they conscripted his rear end, “You here, you in.”

DM:

Well, so he was a pilot, was he—were they Zeros, those fighter pilots?

DJ:

Yeah.

DM:

There were two Japanese Zeros that—what were they, strafing the sub, firing at the sub?

DJ:

Yeah, I don't know. I'm below when they—and when they said “Battle stations,” “Whoa, what's going on?” And of course, I heard gunfire, and then it ceased, and then I went topside, and this is what it—no, I didn't see—but I was told that one of those guys must not have been a seasoned pilot, because a seasoned pilot never came in the ship broadside—never came in the ship—no, not broadside—the seasoned pilot always came in broadside; the non-seasoned pilot—this is the sub—he comes in—

DM:

Straight on?

DJ:

—straight on. And you—all the guns could be trained on him. A seasoned pilot came in broadside, and only the guns on that side could fire, and once he got so that he couldn't—his bullets would no longer—then he did a steep climb, he wouldn't expose himself, come way out and—to the other side's guns.

DM:

Okay, so both of these pilots seemed to be—

DJ:

One of them was not—

DM:

One of them was experienced, and one of them was not.

DJ:

And they got the unexperienced guy. Well, they got both of them, but they got him first. And of course, the one that we picked up—we had no brig, no jail, so we—he was housed in the forward torpedo room, that's where my rack—my bed was—and just kept him on a—put ankle chains on him and kept him on a short chain.

DM:

Do you remember his name, by any chance?

DJ:

No I don't.

DM:

His Japanese name, anyhow, I guess.

DJ:

And I could speak a little Japanese, but I don't know any of it now. You don't use it, you lose it. But that guy was, after a while—he was on that thing with us the better part of—over a month.

DM:

Were people pretty good toward him, or—?

DJ:

Yeah, he finally got out of those—that ankle thing, and he had the run of the boat. And he knew a lot about the boat, too, but he spoke better English than most of us, and knew more about Los Angeles and San Diego than any of us.

DM:

He could give you some travel tips?

DJ:

Yeah, because he finished—he had spent—I believe he said he had spent five—been in Los Angeles five years. He went back home one time, and then the people sent—his parents lived in California, and they sent him back to Japan for his graduation present. Then he got conscripted.

DM:

So they're—the parents—were living in California, they knew their son had been conscripted, I guess, and wondered what on Earth was happening to him. I guess he made it back to California?

DJ:

Yeah, he came back with us—well, that's not true. He stayed with us, and—because we just kind of meandered back to California, back to—we came back to San Diego, we just kind of meandered. And he was picked—he was taken off that—he spent, oh, the better part of a month with us, and then he disappeared when the attendant picked him up.

DM:

Were there other combat situations that you were in, or remember?

DJ:

Well, one, and of course, I don't know what's been going on—we were depth-charged, and of course, the—it was pretty severe, and we rigged—for a depth charge, you—we had some big, thick socks—

DM:

Socks.

DJ:

Yeah, you take your shoes off and put on those thick-soled socks, because you—if you were getting a pretty good charge, you know, anything—any noise, their sonar could pick it up, see, and that's what they would aim at.

DM:

I see, so you wore socks so they couldn't—through the click, click, click of the shoes—couldn't—

DJ:

Couldn't hear you—and you shut down all activity. That's when the cooks shut the galley down, otherwise, that thing was open twenty-four seven. But when he shut it down, you better get you three or four cups of coffee if you're a coffee drinker, because you didn't move around. The only people that did any moving around were the torpedo—the people in the forward torpedo room and the aft torpedo room.

DM:

Did that—did you know where that depth charge came from, whether a boat or a plane?

DJ:

No, those were sub—like destroyers or this kind of thing.

DM:

Uh-huh, a destroyer might have dropped it?

DJ:

Yeah, well, it was several of them.

DM:

Now you—do you know where this happened?

DJ:

No.

DM:

Okay. Out there in the Pacific, somewhere.

DJ:

Out there in the Pacific somewhere, and we, really, were just kind of looking for downed—and we were told—

DM:

Downed planes.

DJ:

Yeah, and we were told that this was going to be, you know, kind of an easy thing, that the Japanese Navy was just about kaput, and they were—we were misinformed.

DM:

You found out there were some destroyers out there. How many depth charges were dropped near—?

DJ:

Oh, God, I don't know.

DM:

Can you describe what happened?

DJ:

Well, it was—yeah, you felt it, and of course, all the submarines then basically, ninety percent of that thing is underwater all the time. The conning tower is above water, but the rest of the thing is underwater. The people moved around in the conning tower, and then the two torpedo—fore and aft torpedo—the rest of the people, you were quiet as a mouse. And it kept us down, and of course, all those submarines then recirculated air. Now there were some that had snorkels, but this was a late thing, because they talked about putting—after I left, they may have put a snorkel on the *Ronquil*. But this—the snorkel is an exhaust pipe, and when the water hit it, it automatically closed, see, and then [when] the wave was gone, it'd pop open again, see. And they could run—with the snorkel, you could run the diesel engine. Without it, you had to run on batteries. And I guess that—I never had experience with a snorkel. I just read and picked up stuff. But the thing was that they would take—they took some parts of the used space, and turned it into that snorkel, and that thing must have been inceptions where—I don't know how deep a sub could run with a snorkel, but we do know that they could run, submerged, on the diesel engine, because that snorkel allowed it to exhaust. And I guess it ran about—I don't believe that thing would be sixty feet—periscope depth was sixty feet, and you could pop that periscope up—be down sixty feet, and it would reach up there. But that snorkel had to be pretty deep.

DM:

Were you—you think you were down that sixty or so—do you remember how deep you were when the depth charges—

DJ:

Oh, no, we were—that thing, I believe, was rated for three-hundred-and-fifty- or four-hundred-feet safe, and we were below that. And of course, they—when they cut off the air purification system, because that dad-gum thing made noise, and boy, you—the louder you were, the closer the depth charge came, and if they got a good bearing on you, and you stayed at that depth, you bought the farm. And that thing—they cut that air off, and we stayed without air long enough—I don't know whether you've ever experienced a bad head cold, and you use a handkerchief, and when you put it—it'd be real slimy—your mucus—well, you go to touch the wall, it just—the air was terrible.

DM:

There's only so long you could survive in that kind of condition.

DJ:

Only so long, and I think, maybe, sometimes that maybe the captains' initial—"Well, if I can't hit him, I'll keep him down so long, until he either suffocates, or he has to surface, and when he does, I'll get him." Well, we were fortunate, like I say, I think I had a pretty good captain, and he said "I got enough of this stuff. If we going to go, let's go fighting."

DM:

So he—

DJ:

So he armed, and got all the torpedo tubes ready as quietly as we could, and of course, the depth charges got closer when they were arming the tubes, and that thing—if you were diving, at whatever angle you were diving at, you could reverse it, and you could come out of it.

DM:

Is that right?

DJ:

Yeah, you could back out [at] the same angle you were in. And of course, when you crash dive, you just almost—

DM:

Straight down?

DJ:

Yeah. And he would time—after we—I'm getting ahead of myself—but after we got back to San Diego, that thing went in dry dock, and when it came out, we had to go on the—you know, test

it, check it out, shakedown cruise. Well, we had to do two, because the first one, something happened, and we ran up on a sandbar and it took us—took them three days to get the dang thing off. But anyway, you could really—and after we found out it was okay, we went through practices, and boy, you could—underwater, you could get down two hundred feet in nothing flat.

DM:

Just going almost straight down.

DJ:

Yeah.

DM:

Golly, you must really have to hold on inside that thing.

DJ:

Yeah, when he'd say "Crash dive," or he would say "Getting ready to dive," he'd give angle. He wouldn't do it, I think, all the time, but if he's just going to do a normal submerge, he'd just say "Submerge, submerge," you know, but going that training—"We're going to do this one, it's going to be a thirty-six-degree descent," you know, so you need to grab something. But anyway—

DM:

Did y'all take some shots at those Japanese ships?

DJ:

Well, yeah. There were several out there, and we got one. And of course, they were about ready to go, too. I guess they must have been out of whatever, but we surfaced, and just luckily surfaced—when we came, the forward torpedo room was ready to fire, and got that one, and then you went down again. And of course, now they had turned the air purification system back on, because they knew pretty much, you know, but he maneuvered and never could get in position for another shot.

DM:

How many—did anyone estimate how many depth charges were dropped at that time?

DJ:

I don't know. No, I don't know it, but it was quite a few.

DM:

Do you hear an explosion, do you feel a shake?

DJ:

Yeah, you can feel it, you can feel it, you really can. And we were down long enough without air purification—they messed with us like sixteen, seventeen hours. The inside of that thing was—I guess you would call it asbestos, where those pipes—where there were not fittings, those—everything—and that stuff started flaking off. This is when I decided that there were no atheists—truly—you know, we had a kid, he was always yakking about, you know, “Where is your God? How do you know he’s there? Blah, blah, blah, blah,” and you know, and of course I understand—I didn’t experience this, but a lot of those guys prayed.

DM:

Yeah. Like they say, there are no atheists in foxholes.

DJ:

Yeah, and none in submarines, because that—when that stuff got to flaking, and that wall was getting—when you’d touch it, it was slick, I heard this mumbling, kind of listened to it, and “My Father, who art in Heaven,” –type thing, you know, and my first inclination, was “What are you doing, man?” But we were—you couldn’t talk, but I heard him. And once it was over with, I did approach him, and he said “Well, I guess you’re right. Man, I didn’t realize what I was saying.”

DM:

You come fact-to-face with your mortality, I guess.

DJ:

And I was lonely, I guess, twice, to my knowledge. I got a letter from mom that said that Robert—that I’m going to sea pretty—there’s only two of us left. I’m the baby, and he’s the new baby of the family. Mama wrote and told me Robert was home, you know, I guess furlough. And for about three hours, boy—

DM:

You wanted to be home.

DJ:

I wanted to be home. And I—

DM:

That’s understandable. What was—

DJ:

We were back in the States then, but—

DM:

Oh, okay, but you weren't released from the service yet.

DJ:

No, we were in San Diego, and during that attack, you know, when that stuff got real bad, I felt, you know, I was so depressed—lonely, you know, thinking about Mama. I wasn't thinking so much about me, but how Mom and Trudy—

DM:

How they would do if something happened to you?

DJ:

Yeah. I didn't think about Casey, Albert Tracy, Robert, or anybody, only mom, Trudy, Berth, and Sydney—only the females of the family. And my feelings were for them, you know, and that, I guess maybe thirty or forty minutes—and I had been practicing to myself what I would do, and I managed to kick that in—

DM:

You mean if something happened to the sub, what you would do?

DJ:

Yeah, and I knew that we were—if I had time to realize that we were going to be a fatality. And I thought this was it, and when I monitored my thoughts, then it was Mama, Bertha, Sydney, and Trudy—that was, you know. And that was pretty rough for a little while, you know, said "I can't handle this," so I kicked in what I had practiced to do. But we survived that, obviously, and the next thing I can remember, we were on our way to—back to the States. Didn't know when we left Pearl, where we were going, just—we just knew we were going to the States.

DM:

When you got back to Pearl—

DJ:

We didn't even know whether we were going to go on the east coast, back to New London, or where. But after so long a time, we knew we were going to San Diego.

DM:

Okay. Were you on the submarine when you heard that the war had ended?

DJ:

No. We were—no, we were back in Pearl when we got the word that the war ended.

DM:

Was there a big celebration?

DJ:

Oh, good grief. Yeah, we were back in Pearl.

DM:

What can you tell me about being at Pearl, and hearing about that, and what else you were able to do around Hawaii?

DJ:

I just—you know, it's just all—

DM:

Like a blur?

DJ:

Yes. I can't remember any particular—I know, noisy, people firing weapons, somebody, I understand—I don't know what battleship it was, but there was a battleship, I understand it fired the big guns, and it was a different attitude for several hours, you know. Of course, we didn't subscribe to military formality on the submarine, but I understand—there were some that did—and I understand that those subs, the subs—they were told "The war's over. Now, let's get back to normal," and they had to go back to the "Yes, sir," and saluting—all that. We didn't—I guess a couple of our people must have celebrated for several days, because they were drunk, and hell, they stayed drunk. And like I say, I had a—the whole shooting match were good people. We had very good officers.

DM:

Was there any talk—before the war ended, was there any talk that y'all might have to go up to Tokyo Bay and fight the Japanese up there, right off the main—right up at the Japanese island?

DJ:

Yeah, there were—a little bit, but us peons didn't get it. Now, I—chief of the boat was—I don't know how that guy—I don't know how he got all his scuttlebutt, but he got it, and he was the one that we got it from, you know.

DM:

He got what?

DJ:

He was the one that got that—the scuttlebutt about—

DM:

The scuttlebutt, okay.

DJ:

Yeah, there was talk, and he would tell us “You better enjoy it, man, because we get that word, you’re going to see the Rising Sun,” you know, and all that kind of stuff.

DM:

This chief—was he the captain of the submarine, or what—?

DJ:

No, he was—I guess he was like the highest sergeant in a platoon, or whatever. They had the officers—the warrant officers, officer, then the chief of the boat, see. If there were no officers around, you knew that if he said “Jump,” you jumped.

DM:

Do you remember his name?

DJ:

Only thing I can remember was his last name was Smith². And I should remember that, because he was a hellacious dice shooter. Oh, God, that guy. I didn’t—we didn’t go anywhere. I didn’t do anything, so we—when we were paid—and when we were ashore, we were paid every two weeks, and the paymaster would come in and put up the pay list, and you—didn’t put up names, put up social security numbers. And social security number, and then how much you had in the bank. And you could write a check for as little as five dollars, or all of what you had in the bank. So sometimes, I wouldn’t even go. I’d go because the captain made you go, because you were going to write a check for five bucks. Paymaster sat here, the captain sat here, and the pay—you get your money, and—“Okay”—and he’d take five dollars. So when pay time came, I’d go and write my five-dollar check and—because the captain was—so he’d leave me alone, you know, because you were going to pay, if you had to borrow it. And when we got back—this was from the time I got on until I got off—if we missed three paydays, then you write a check for fifteen dollars. If you wanted fifty dollars, you write a check for sixty-five, because he was going to get his fifteen.

² Two men named “Smith” served on the *USS Ronquil* during World War II. Ralph dela Smith, Jr. (Service No. 603 98 45) was a reservist, Seaman Second Class, and George James Smith, Jr. (Service No. 262 34 50)—the most likely candidate—was a Motor Machinist’s Mate, First Class.

DM:

Okay, so why were you giving him five dollars?

DJ:

It was for emergency. There was—before I went on the sub, a guy got an emergency, and didn't have funds to get home, so they had to collect funds. So he says "I'll know if Don Jones has an emergency. And when he comes by here, I don't have—all I need to know is how much it's going to cost you to get home and get back, and then I'll give you the money."

DM:

So he's keeping cash, just in case—

DJ:

Yeah, and he gets five bucks from everybody on there. Every payday, he got five bucks.

DM:

Uh-huh. Well I hope you got your money back at the end.

DJ:

Oh yeah, and then some.

DM:

What was the captain's name, do you remember?

DJ:

I believe it was—God—Hayes? Hanes³? You know, I've forgotten, and he was a good guy. And for three years, every time that thing would change ports, addresses, he'd let me know—"If you want to come back, let me know."

DM:

Now how—what was your role in the crew? Were you helping with the—were you doing the mess?

DJ:

Yes. That was it. I—I've forgotten it—but the dining room for the officers was right next to the forward torpedo room, and I had a little area—and I'm using me, because all—they were the same—had a little area between the wardroom—stateroom—wardroom, and the forward torpedo

³ Jones may be referring to Commander Frank E. Hayler, who assumed command in March 1946. After being commissioned in 1944, the USS Ronquil was captained by Henry S. Monroe (July 1944-Jan. 1945), Robert B. "Tex" Lander (Jan. 1945-Aug. 1945) and Romondt Budd (Aug. 1945-Mar. 1946).

room. That's where my little area was, you know, and we had a grill and a hot plate and a little half-refrigerator, you know, under the counter, and at my back—well, say I'm facing this way, the wardroom is here, and I had one of those pull-up—I could let down and have a little workroom here, and I walked out of there right back into the—and the captain—

DM:

You had a counter that you pulled up?

DJ:

Well, at the—where you enter in my little area, I could put that thing down and it would act as a—more space.

DM:

Right, right, like counter space.

DJ:

Yes, yes, yes, that's where I did all my writing and stuff. And go out, and then right back to your right, you'd go into the wardroom. And the captain ate at the end of the table down there. The executive officer ate up here next to me—there were three officers to the exec's right, and I believe two to his left, so there was—that's right, it's seven.

DM:

So you were with the officers' mess?

DJ:

Yes. I'd go back to the general mess and get the food—the cookie would have it ready, and I would bring it up, and then take it out of the big pots, just the regular—and then put it in the fine silver stuff.

DM:

Right, for the officers.

DJ:

Yeah, for the officers. And they had some of the finest silver, you know, they didn't—but anyway, and then right here—and there was—I kept—there was two coffee pot—I could reach through—there was a hole there, and I could reach through and get those coffee pots. And I had a—that was just a warmer out there, but I made the coffee in here and then took the pot, put it out there. And maybe this will give you some idea about the captain's whatever—about his—

DM:

Personality?

DJ:

Yeah, whatever. We had two ensigns on that thing, and they—one of them ate over here—was three—and he—if he was in, he always came around and came into that side by the exec, nobody went by the captain's chair. These three guys that ate over here—that's not right—the guy that ate next to the captain could come in there, but these two guys, they had to come in by the exec, see.

DM:

I see, by the exec—

DJ:

The executive officer. He ate up at the other end of the table, next to me.

DM:

Did you eat there, with the officers?

DJ:

Yeah, I ate up there, yeah. But I'd go back to the mess—the main mess hall—the cookie would have the officers food in individual pots, and I'd bring it up, and a lot of times I'd take a big ol' tray—and there's a story behind that, too—and when I got up there, then, I would take it out and put it in upgraded utensils.

DM:

Right, into the fine stuff.

DJ:

Yeah, the fine stuff. And then I'd take it out, raise my little flap, go out and come in, I'd already—when they came in, I would already have the first load—it would already be on the table. But if they ran out, they passed it—now it would come back—the empty would come back through the hole. But when I'd fill it, then I had to get up and come around and hand it to the executive officer. And it was just as easy, and the old man was—we called him “Old Man, Wheel” —

DM:

The executive officer?

DJ:

No, the captain. The executive officer was always “the Exec,” but we’d call the captain—to his face—“Hey, Wheel, mister—”

DM:

Wheel?

DJ:

Wheel, wheel, he was a (wheel sound). Yeah, “Head Honcho,” just whatever came to mind, indicating the top person. And he was sitting there one day, and I put that thing, came in, and he said “God,” —I want to say the exec was Will Banks, a Eubanks, I don’t know, but the commissary officer—my immediate guy—was named Eubanks, an ensign. Under another captain, he would have been hell on wheels. But anyway, I did this one day, and he said “Mr. Jones, why do you do that?”

DM:

Going around the table?

DJ:

No, just I’d fill the thing, and go out and back in and hand the container to—he said “Why do you do that?” I said “What?” “What you just did” “Now what did I do?” “You replenished the container, got up, walked around, and handed it to” —whatever his name was, Mr. Whatever-it-was, and his exact words—“Hell, it comes to you through the porthole, can’t you send it back through the porthole?” “Well I was told—” “I didn’t ask you what you were told, I asked you” —I said “Yes, it’ll go back through the porthole loaded,” he said “Well, I don’t want to see you doing that anymore.” And what really got me—two or three of those guys came in, got the coffee and went to their seats—their spots at the table. If they came in to drink coffee, they would always go to their spot, wherever they ate. I don’t know, there was two or three in there, and the captain was in there, and Eubanks came in, and I’m in my little cubby, my little area, and he said “Mr. Jones, I’d like a cup of coffee, please,” and the captain said “Mr. Jones, as you were.” That means stop. “As you were,” and he said—he used some few choice words—“I’m the captain. I get my coffee. You can get your” —he could sit and almost reach—he said “and you’re going to ask Mr. Jones—from now on, you get your coffee yourself, or you don’t drink coffee. You hear that, Mr. Jones?” “Yes, sir.”

DM:

So the captain was doing good for you?

DJ:

Oh, yeah.

DM:

He was cutting out some of this nonsense.

DJ:

Yeah, well, he just didn't—I mean, why an extra step, you know, now I've got to get up. If I'm—if my little flap is down, I've got to move it, get the coffee pot, come around, and—

DM:

All because someone wants some service.

DJ:

Right. And if I had fresh coffee—now that was one thing—they threw away a lot of stuff, but boy, I went through coffee like—because they didn't like any, you know, they all went on time, “Mr. Jones, how long [has] that coffee been out—that pot been on the” —“Oh, maybe an hour,” “Make a fresh cup.” And he told him, he said “He's got to get up,” —and sometimes I'd get the coffee pot off of the hot plate, the warmer, he could touch it without any effort coming in. Well, I kept a new coffee cup—they'd get up and leave their—but most of them got up, they—well, all of them, when the captain got through with the—he'd get up, he'd put his through the little porthole, put his cup where I didn't have to come around. So when he said that, he also added that amendment, “No cups will be left on the table. You put your own cups up.”

DM:

Good for him.

DJ:

I kept—

DM:

I wish you could remember his name, that captain. I know there was—early on, there was a Monroe, but that was early, I think. That was probably before you were—

DJ:

I want to say that man was a two-part name, I don't know. Wolforth? And I can't see why I'd forget his name.

DM:

Maybe if I can come across it sometime, associated with that sub, I'll run it past you and see if that sounds right.

DJ:

I should never forget his name, and that executive officer's name.

DM:

Well it's been a long time. A lot's happened since then.

DJ:

Now I can forget his—I don't see why—now, I know—of course, I could see forgetting the exec's name, because we seldom heard his name. He was always “Hey, Exec,” you know. And you know, if you know—you could bet the north forty, if somebody came in the door and was going to say something, they would address him as “Exec.”

DM:

But the captain, people would say “Captain So-and-so?”

DJ:

Well, yeah, or “Hey Wheel,” or “Hey Chief,” you know.

DM:

Well, he sounds like he was pretty informal, then, about that.

DJ:

Oh, very much so. Number one, it was just difficult to go through that military formality itself. Half of those—the chief went stooped over all the time because he was a big man, and people would say “They only take little people.” That may be so in peacetime, but that chief had to be six-four if he was—

DM:

Oh really?

DJ:

Yeah, he was a big man. He wasn't fat—big dude. And like I said, he could shoot those dice. And he used those big dice, not those little—and he had to bump his dice. He couldn't just—and he carried his green—his, what do you call it?

DM:

That you roll the dice on?

DJ:

Yeah. He carried—he had a roll of that stuff, about yay wide—

DM:

Green stuff?

DJ:

Yeah, that green stuff, and a two-by-four, about that—and he—a lot of people—like, you couldn't get to the sub's—couldn't—set up a table, and he'd put that two-by-four, and he had to bump his dice, and he would—and I don't see how he could control. I could see control if they stopped on their own, but he bumped those dice.

DM:

What do you mean, "bumped them?" He threw them until they hit something?

DJ:

Yeah, and he carried his, just in case a wall wasn't where you were going to gamble, it wasn't where you could hit—he carried his stuff with him.

DM:

His little green, where he threw his dice, and his two-by-four.

DJ:

Yes, and he'd have to leave the boat—our boat—to gamble, because uh-huh, they wouldn't gamble with him. He was just that good. I'll tell you what, he woke me up one night, oh, three-ish, and said "I need"—and they knew that I kept a little money—"Hey Jones, you got as much as fifty dollars on you?" "Sure have," "Let me have it," "You—why? And you wake me up to bug me about fifty bucks?" and I wasn't—I was his first—I wasn't letting him have it. He said "I'll make you a deal. I need fifty dollars. I feel I'm getting hot. I need"—

DM:

This is the exec?

DJ:

No, this is the chief of the boat.

DM:

Chief of the boat, okay.

DJ:

And he said "Make you a deal. You let me have the fifty, and I'll pay you back, I know I"—and I said "Man, if you're broke, and you've been losing all night, what makes you think"—"Give

me the fifty dollars.” So I gave him the fifty dollars. About eight o’clock, he came back, and said “Here’s your fifty,” gave me my fifty, and he said “Here is two hundred for the good luck it brought me.” And “Okay.” And he got in a hot game, and he liked to—he said “I like to have money to show. If you—this bet is you’re all in, you’re susceptible to stuff. I like to have money to show.” So I let him have some more money, and he won. And he said “I’ll make you a deal. You supply my—you stake me, and I’ll give you half of whatever I make.” Well, I jumped on that like chicken on a beetle, man. And I was sending so much money home until Mama got concerned, because black market was in vogue, then, and she said “Boy,” —

DM:

“What are you up to?”

DJ:

Yeah, “you—the war is over, and you’re going—don’t end up being sent to the pen for stuff,” you know, is what she was saying.

DM:

Don’t end up being what?

DJ:

Court-martialed and being sent to the pen. But I was—the chief would get ready to gamble, he’d come by, you know.

DM:

Well how did people treat—did everybody treat you good on the sub?

DJ:

Oh, yeah.

DM:

Were there people who discriminated against you, for example? Were there problems of black and white and that kind of thing?

DJ:

No, no, no. Now, I don’t know what went on in those guys’ minds. I can’t see your mind, but I can see your behavior, the results of your behavior. And you know, I told you what the captain did, and that set the stage for that, you know, because he emphasized the fact, “If you let it happen, and I find out about it, you’ve got a problem with me. You understand me, Mr. Jones?” “Yes sir.” “Do you understand, you let it happen, and I find that you don’t do anything about it, I find out about it, you’ve got a problem. Now you may get your—whipped a time or two, but he

was telling me, if somebody called me an “N,” knock the hell out of them. That’s what he was telling me. “If you see anything, let me know”—you know, like I happened to go back to the mess, and it’s a space, and you and several other guys at the table, and I’d go sit down and two or three would get up and move. I was supposed to report that.

DM:

So you felt like you could go to the captain if you had to, and tell him about these things.

DJ:

Yes. He told me, he said “If you don’t do anything about it, or you don’t tell me, you’ve got a problem.” Well, I didn’t have to get to the captain, because there would always be somebody around, “Jones,” or like “Hey, what’s wrong with the seat you were just in? I suspect you’d be doing yourself a favor if you go back to your”—it’d be guys like that, you know. And of course, the mover knew what they were talking about. And it would always be one of those guys that would rather throw knuckles than to eat that would speak up. Of course, I didn’t have that but a time or two. And I got where if the guy acted a little fidgety, I’d say “If you want to move, you better get my permission. And I can tell you right off the bat; I’m not going to give you my permission. You sit your”—you know, but I didn’t—no, no, no, it wasn’t enough—it wasn’t enough, that’s what I said. I don’t know what was in their minds, but I know how they treated me. That was—I just, you know, and I did have to watch myself for a while after I got separated, because I wasn’t used to—hey, white guy, he was just a guy. And I was used to, if you crossed me, and I felt like it, I’d give you a knuckle sandwich, you know. And I had to let—you know, watch myself, because like I say, when he got through with that ugliness, which he did on purpose, he created a black monster. And of course, the guys—hey—they knew it, you know. And I had some scraps, but it wasn’t a race thing. Like the last fight I had—I may have told you—a little guy from Utah, Arbisi⁴. The next day after the fight, my tongue was sore. That kid hit me everywhere I had meat. We stopped fighting, sit down and smoked a cigarette, get up and get after it again. And the captain—we were topside—and the captain came by, stepped over us, didn’t say a word, came back, “Hey Jones, kind of hard to turn him loose, isn’t it?” and finally, you know, we just—both of us quit. But that wasn’t—that had nothing to do—because the boy asked me for a cup of coffee. And I don’t recall exact words, but like “Hey, I don’t wait on the captain, I’m not your”—that kind of thing.

DM:

Well, do you think he was saying it because of race?

DJ:

No.

⁴ Frank Arbisi, Motor Machinist’s Mate, Second Class.

DM:

Okay, so it wasn't a race issue.

DJ:

I was near the coffeepot. It wouldn't have been any problem for me to turn around here and give him—no.

DM:

Were you the only black man on the submarine?

DJ:

Yeah. And I told him, I said "I don't like your attitude. If we were topside, I think I'd" —"Let's go." That the way it started. And of course, I was near the hatch, so I did it up, and when he got about this much of his body out of the hatch, I started whooping on him.

DM:

Sounds like you guys were rough-and-tumble.

DJ:

Well, I'll tell you what, you know, the captain—yeah—his attitude encouraged it. But you better make sure that you didn't have anything in your hands. That pencil, your glasses, this thing became a weapon, and now you had to face the captain—and he wasn't—he wouldn't be—"Well, captain, I fell against it, and my hand" —he was not sympathetic at all.

DM:

No weapons.

DJ:

No weapons. Nothing.

DM:

Otherwise, have at it.

DJ:

Otherwise, have at it. Don't come to me with your petty gripes. Work them out yourself. I don't have time for that. And there was always a fight going, because we wouldn't go a week without somebody bouncing knuckles off each other. But like I say, I had a very good—if I had to do it again, I would certainly want a crew at least—if I could get a crew at sixty percent of those guys, I'd be—they were super, all of them were super. Now, like I said, I think the captain's little dress-down of me set the stage, and I didn't realize what he was doing.

DM:

He let it be known—

DJ:

He let it be known that there would be none of this stuff, and I suspect—it was probably wasted—but I suspect he had done it with other blacks, and I was basically a refresher course, because—and this is why I would suspect that it wasn't the issue, because I suspect some of those guys had had a visit with the captain, see. And I suspect that he wasn't too—he probably put them in leg irons, because we didn't have a jail—but no—

DM:

People knew where they stood, where—

DJ:

And the officers—like I said—he said, “Matey, that goes for everybody, including me and the executive officer, which says you cut the ensigns and the peon officers no slack, either. Cut nobody any slack.”

DM:

Let me know if you think of his name. I'd like to put that down for the record sometime. That's an interesting guy.

DJ:

I wish I could think of—I can think of—actually, and I don't know the commissary officer's first name, but he was “Eubanks,” and I don't know the chief of the boat's first name, but his name was “Smith.” Arbisi, I can see him now—

DM:

Who?

DJ:

The guy that—we fought so long.

DM:

R—

DJ:

Arbisi.

DM:

Was his initial "R?"

DJ:

No, it—

DM:

Arbisi, oh.

DJ:

And I don't think that was his name, I think that was some—but that was what I got acquainted with him by, Arbisi.

DM:

Did he ever spell it out to where you could see it?

DJ:

I didn't even think about it, no.

DM:

I wonder if it was like an "R," a "B," and a "C?" Anyway—

DJ:

But anyway, I remember Arbisi. I remember—these were my backups—Max Thiele⁵, I remember him—

DM:

Max Fields?

DJ:

Thiele, Thiele, Max Thiele. Stinky—I can't remember Stinky's real name, and Rymsza—

DM:

Ramsey?

DJ:

Rymsza—I can't think of his first name⁶. Max Thiele was the big guy—didn't put anything

⁵ Quartermaster, Second Class.

⁶ Probably Frank Rymsza, Electrician's Mate, First Class.

liquid in his body but water and milk. He didn't drink beer, tea, punch, nothing. He put just plain water and milk—that's all the liquids he put in his body.

DM:

His last name was Thiele?

DJ:

Thiele, uh-huh.

DM:

Do you know how he spelled it?

DJ:

No.

DM:

Okay.

DJ:

But he was an Atlas, oh God, you know. Rymsza and Don were little puny people, and we walked to town in Pearl a lot, and it'd take us thirty or forty minutes, and it'd rain, we'd get wet, and we'd be dry by the time we got to town, you know. And if there was a puddle of water, he'd just grab a handful of our clothes and lift us over. He was a big—and I have seen—we have all—and we were scrappers. We didn't take kindly to service craft, Navy people—we didn't take kindly to anybody but bubbleheads—submarine people, you know. And—

DM:

Bubbleheads.

DJ:

Bubbleheads, uh-huh.

DM:

What did you call each other—did you ever hear submariners or submariners or was it just seamen, or—?

DJ:

No, we were just first and last name—basically last name. Now somebody other—we would hear “bubbleheads” from other submarines. I don't know what they called—because you know, I just don't remember. But we—and make it more personal—Don has started a scrap. And then

Rymsza and Stinky and Thiele—we'd—Don, Stinky, Thiele, and Rymsza, and then Don, Rymsza, and Stinky would sit back and watch ol' Thiele work. Yeah, that guy—oh, he was an Atlas. He was as strong as an ox—anything that needed exertion to lift or move, Thiele was the man. I saw him work over a John Brown crew of airmen. They were pretty close-knit, too.

DM:

What'd you call them, John Brown crew?

DJ:

Oh, that's a—

DM:

That's a saying?

DJ:

Yeah, and I don't know where—I've been doing it all my life, and all of my kids and grandkids, every so often, "Yeah, John Brown," you know—I say that, I guess that's my curse phrase. But anyway, he was all man—I mean strong as a bull.

DM:

What can you remember about Honolulu? Did you go to Diamond Head or anything like that?

DJ:

Yeah we did all these, but when we came back to—my—I guess my best time—all of it was good, but when we came back and the Ronquil went in dry dock, they moved all of the enlisted men from the chief on down on to a two-story houseboat.

DM:

Was this in Honolulu?

DJ:

No, this was in San Diego. Yeah, it went in dry dock. And the officers—this guy must've owned half of the island, because—owned the house, I don't know where he went, but they rented—or leased—a nine-bedroom house—nine bedroom, nine bath. And they were all skirt chasers, and I stayed—I had a bunk—a sack on the houseboat, but I had to still wait on them this way, so I ended up with a command car. And I used one of the nine bedrooms more than I did—I stayed in town more than I stayed on—but town then was nothing like—I was in Honolulu two years ago, and I couldn't recognize a thing.

DM:

In Honolulu or San Diego?

DJ:

No, Honolulu. But the command car was in San Diego.

DM:

Yeah, Honolulu's really grown, I guess.

DJ:

Yeah, I couldn't—you get three blocks from town, you were out in the boonies when I was there. And shoot, they got six- and seven-lane freeways, and oh God.

DM:

Were you back in San Diego when you were discharged? Were you there for quite some time?

DJ:

I was there a good—oh, I was there probably six or eight weeks. But I have—I've been to San Diego because I have a sister-in-law [that] lived there forever, see, so I've been to San Diego. But the—we had—I made one patrol on the *Ronquil*, and that was it. The rest of the time was spent in dock in Pearl Harbor, and in dry dock in San Diego. That's not right. Golly, that—no—that's not right. I spent little time in San Diego. The dry dock was in Pearl. Boy, I got all that screwed up.

DM:

Well that's all right. That was in '45, so a few years have passed.

DJ:

Yes. But anyway, there was an incident—I was not involved in this—I was too little, I couldn't stand any—Pearl was pretty primitive, and they had a—I guess a city police force of probably eight or ten people max, if that many. But I've forgotten this guy's name. But there was a guy on the boat, and we refer to the *Ronquil* as—a submarine—as “boats”—his brother was a detective somewhere on the west coast. And he was instrumental in sending like a gang—he testified, because he worked a case—

DM:

He sent a gang to prison?

DJ:

Yes, kind of like the mafia, or—

DM:

Like the mafia?

DJ:

Yes. And this—one of those guys had a brother that was on the—I'll call it "police force" in Honolulu. This—I can't think of—lost his name—but he and some other guys—this seaman—was in town, and this policeman had made the connection, and he and some of his henchmen worked that guy over until—and then threw him in jail. Well, they got him away from his buddies—they had a little altercation, but they—because they were policemen—the sub guys—*Ronquil* guys—were afraid of policemen, and the military police, so they didn't do a whole lot. They took this one guy and carried him off somewhere and wore him out and threw him in jail. And when they got back to the base, they reported it, and the captain sent somebody to verify, and he was bruised up pretty good. And he came back and reported to the captain, and the captain selected him a little crew.

DM:

He what?

DJ:

He selected him a little crew, and they went to town, and when they came back they had this—I can't even think of his—they had this guy with them. And I understand—now Thiele was one of the first ones he selected.

DM:

They brought back the policeman?

DJ:

No, they brought back the—no, the policeman probably went for medical treatment. That whole crew probably did, because Thiele said that they walked in that place and the captain didn't say a word, one, they just started to whomping up on people. And I think there were—I think he carried fourteen—I think there were fifteen of them. He said they whipped, John Brown, until they got tired, then got the keys and got the submariner and brought him back. And of course, he's—we were back in Pearl, and they put him—he stayed three days in the hospital. They beat him up pretty good. Of course, I don't know how long some of those guys stayed, because—

DM:

Sounds like the crews take care of each other, though.

DJ:

Yeah, yeah. That one did. Like I said, the old captain, he took care of his people. I had—no, I can't indict—I didn't like the—and I knew that those people were doing what was legal—but I didn't like the surface—the tender, at all, save that one officer. I had three that I took care of. Two of them, they were knuckleheads.

DM:

On the tender.

DJ:

Yes. This one guy, he was the reason that I got on the *Ronquil*. And I can't remember any of their names, but I polished those guys'—I didn't think they had that many meetings, but this morning, they wore one white—and I'd polish the brass—

DM:

The white uniforms?

DJ:

Yes. They'd come in in the afternoon and change—just get another, see. Then I had to polish that brass that they just got out of, and you couldn't tell that they wanted—I say they wanted—yeah, I believe they wanted to see me doing it. I think they had some of the old—you know—"I'm up here and you're down here" attitude, because they—like I say, one of them didn't take coffee, one of them didn't take cream, but I had to have all three of those containers on the tray. And this one guy, he just couldn't understand—well, he had some choice words for—you know—

DM:

Had some words for them?

DJ:

Yeah, but I don't—I'm sure he—he didn't say it, too, but when he was talking to me, he had some choice words. And he was the one that got—because he told me "I may change my mind. You lay out blues; I may decide to wear whites. I can dress myself, you don't have to do that," but those other two, I had to know their dress for tomorrow tonight, and I had to lay out—I mean from socks—and they had white shoes and black shoes—I had to put—they had—what do you call those things? Ottomans or whatever, that you could—I had to put those—and they had a shelf—you laid stuff—and I had to lay out the coat, the pants, the shirt, the tie, the shoes, and the socks.

DM:

They wanted someone to serve them.

DJ:

Well yeah. And I—they had one, and they used me, and oh God, that just—every time I had—and I did it every night.

DM:

So you think that other guy got you on the *Ronquil*?

DJ:

Yes—I don't think, I know he did.

DM:

To help you get away from that?

DJ:

Yes.

DM:

Maybe he knew what the captain was like on the *Ronquil*.

DJ:

He did. He knew him quite well. And he knew—he had read me, because he approached me—“That’s like taking bad medicine, isn’t it?” “What’re you talking about?” “Those guys, you know.” And of course, I was very cautious about what I said to him, because he may say that—what I said—and then I’m really—but I finally developed confidence in him, because—just, he mentioned it—if he saw me—and I wouldn’t do this until after nine o’clock. Every night, I would—you know I’m going to be up until after nine, because at nine o’clock, then, I’d go in and start doing this. And he—and I did it every night. Not one, but every night, seven nights out of the week I did this. And the only thing about it—I guess those guys had some—I don’t know, but I would take the—I didn’t shine shoes. It wasn’t because I wasn’t told; if they had told me, I’d shine shoes. But I’d take these guys’ shoes, they had four pairs of shoes, and I’d take a pair—if whatever they wore today, whenever they got out of them first thing in the—after I got them going for the day, then, I’d go take those shoes to the cobbler’s shop. That’s where they would—and I’d always take four pairs, two blacks and two whites. I never carried this other guy—and I can’t remember his name.

DM:

He took his own?

DJ:

He took his own—"Hell, my shoes don't need shining," or he'd do one of these numbers.

DM:

Wipe his shoe on his pants.

DJ:

Yeah. I had to get on him, said "Man, don't—you're white" —"Oh my shoes are clean" "Well why are you doing it?" "Force of habit." But he was a good guy—at least in my book, he was a good guy, because he didn't give me any problems. Mess with me—what—"I didn't ask you for a wake-up call." He'd ring—"I'll get up when I get ready." And "I can look in the closet and get my clothes," but I would always go in, I never—you know, I just wouldn't go do those two knuckleheads, and then go—I'd go in, and a lot of times, if the dress for the day was blues—you see, they had dress blues, dress whites, and then they had—when you said dungarees, they just wore—they had scrubby stuff, you know. But I would always put all of his stuff together—be on hangers, and I'd just move them together, you know. The first time I did that, he said "You're catching on, aren't you?" But he was—in my opinion, he was a good person. Those other two guys, I wouldn't give a dime for a dozen of them. Shoot no.

DM:

Well where—when were you discharged from the Navy? Was that in '46?

DJ:

Forty-five.

DM:

Forty-five, late in the year?

DJ:

Yeah, late in the year.

DM:

Where were you at the time, San Diego?

DJ:

I went from San Diego to—and I can't remember how I got to Norman, Oklahoma, but that's where I was separated from the Navy, was Norman, Oklahoma.

DM:

Had you been home at all since you had joined?

DJ:

No, I went home, when I—all of us, that was a set thing—when you finish basic training, you got nine days' leave, and I went home for the—

DM:

You mentioned that. You already knew you were going to be on a submarine at that time. Well here you come home, back to Long Branch, I guess. You've been all over the place. You've been in the Pacific during the war, and I mean, did you get quite a welcome when you came back?

DJ:

Oh yeah, because everybody was there. The whole clan was there—Mama, and I had a half-sister named Bertha, and she was married to Jake. They were all there, so Mama, Bertha and Jake, Sydney, Casey, Trudy, Albert Tracy, and Robert, they were all there.

DM:

Your brothers, were they all in Europe?

DJ:

Yes, yes, yes. All of them were in Europe. No, no, no, no, no, no, Robert, no, Casey was—Casey and Robert were in Europe. Albert Tracy and a brother-in-law were in the south Pacific.

DM:

In the south Pacific—but they were already home by the time that you got home?

DJ:

Yeah, they were already home, you know, by the time I got in.

DM:

I'll bet that was a wonderful day.

DJ:

Yeah, and they—we still kind of chuckle about it. After I got through embracing Mama, I went to Robert, you know, and they said "We thought you were going to do it in chronological order, that you were going to embrace Mama, then Bertha and Jake, and then Sydney, Casey, Trudy, Albert"—I got through turning Mama loose and went to Robert.

DM:

Now why's that, because you were close to Robert?

DJ:

I guess, because we—yeah—we were—

DM:

You're still close to Robert. I mean, you're going down to see him soon. That's great.

DJ:

I saw—no I didn't—no, I, yeah—

DM:

Were you in uniform when you came home?

DJ:

Yeah, because I didn't have any civvies, and all of our—for all of us, all of our stuff burned. I'm in the process of trying to get Robert's ribbons and stuff now.

DM:

Did your records burn? Do you have your military records?

DJ:

We had them, but they all burned.

DM:

They burned in that fire in Saint Louis in 1973, I'll bet.

DJ:

Now I don't know about that, but our house burned.

DM:

Oh, your house burned.

DJ:

Uh-huh, and this—one of the guys from Honor Flight, he's working on mine, and gave me—and I've gotten Robert's discharge, and I've got to give it to him. He thinks he can get all of those records. He said, you know, it may take a while.

DM:

Well a lot of records burned in Saint Louis in 1973. A lot of World War II's—a lot of World

War I records, too. But I think it was mostly Army. I don't know about—I think Navy did a little better.⁷

DJ:

Well, see, they were all in the Army at one time. Like I said, Mama had four sons and a son-in-law, and all of them were in combat zones at the same time.

DM:

Now tell me where they were. You said—Albert Tracy was in the south Pacific?

DJ:

Yeah, but—where was he? But Fred Lawrence, the son-in-law, was a cook, and he—all of those—his unit, they missed that bad march—they were never captured—

DM:

Bataan?

DJ:

Bataan, yeah, but see all of those areas, he went through. He had more combat—of course, he was a cook, but he was still considered a—than any of us.

DM:

He was in the Philippines, and all of that.

DJ:

He was in—yeah, all that stuff. He was the first one to go because he was the oldest—Fred Lawrence was in there a little better than five years. Then Casey was in a medical thing, and he was in Europe. Albert Tracy was with the MPs—Sicily? I used to know where he was, but he was in the south Pacific. Then Robert was in the field artillery, and he was in Europe. And I was in a submarine, and I was in the south Pacific.

DM:

Do you remember any specific locations in the south Pacific where you were, like South China Sea, or any islands that y'all went by?

⁷ The fire claimed 80% of the records of U.S. Army personnel discharged November 1, 1912, to January 1, 1960, and 75% of the records of U.S. Air Force personnel discharged September 25, 1947, to January 1, 1964, with names alphabetically after Hubbard, James E.

DJ:

No, we didn't know—and we didn't go to any—the only time—we left, and when we docked again, we were in Pearl.

DM:

So all you knew was you were out at sea.

DJ:

Yeah, I was at sea is all I knew.

DM:

Now what about Robert? Do you know where he was in Europe, or any battles he was associated with there? Did you ever hear—?

DJ:

I can't name those, but he had contact with Patton, and I just found out here, recently, that he was in Austria. I knew that he was in England, France, Germany, and then he told me he was in Austria. I didn't know that. But he was in the field artillery, and—

DM:

You know, if y'all come up with any records, we'd sure like to make a copy and stick them in the archives out there, so there will be a backup copy.

DJ:

But all of them—and all of the paraphernalia, you know, that soldiers—you pick up—all that stuff burned. I had a relatively expensive watch—I still do it every night, I'll take my watch—every night, I empty my pockets, everything out of my pockets, and I take my watch off. And I guess I've been doing that since I had stuff to put in my pockets, and in the excitement, I didn't get that watch on, and it—everything burned. But anyway, if there's any such thing as a good military experience, I had it. I didn't care about the early part of it, but since I was the assistant drill thing—master—I enjoyed that, because my feet started getting cold, I'd go stand over the barrel, you know. They had me speak out of a big—what do you call it—?

DM:

Megaphone.

DJ:

And the guy, he'd back me, you know, he'd go off and come back, "Having any problems?" "No." And every so often, he would remind the guys, you know, "I'm getting good reports, but keep in mind that when—whatever Mr. Jones tells you is what you're supposed to do." I had

some guys early on that resented, you know, they didn't so much mind marching en masse—and it was a hundred twenty-five—but when I started to put my stuff in, I had some resentment, “Why do we have to do this? This isn't called for.” “Yeah it is” “No it isn't” “Yes it is. If I call it, it's called for.” We got passed that, but I didn't—I guess the most hurtful thing that I experienced was that chat—that three or four minutes with the captain that next day. I went on that boat on a Sunday evening, this happened to me about—between ten and eleven Monday. And—

DM:

Now which case are you talking about?

DJ:

When I left the tender and went on the submarine—when the captain—

DM:

When he said—

DJ:

All these ugly things to me. And I don't suppose it would have been as effective if he had alerted me what was going to happen, but he didn't, see.

DM:

This is when he asked “Why are you going around like that, and—”

DJ:

No, this was when he called me out. He was in the passageway, he walked out of his wardroom, went to—he walked out, across, right into his stateroom, and he was standing in that passageway and called me, and I was up there in my little dungeon, “Mr. Jones, front and center.” And I went to him, and that's when he said all these ugly things to me, you know.

DM:

Now this was the submarine captain?

DJ:

Yes. And then, when he got through, this was when he said—took a step towards me, and said “Do you consider yourself a man?” and I said “Yes,” and he said “I don't mean a male, I mean a man.” And I said “Yes.” And that's when he punched me in the chest and said “If you're a man, you don't let anybody say to you what I've just said. That includes me and the executive officer.”

DM:

He was testing you.

DJ:

Yeah. I don't know what he was doing, but I'll tell you what, after—when he got through, I wanted to hug him. Yeah, because initially, when he got started, my thing was, you know—

DM:

You must've thought "Oh, boy, what kind of a captain is this?"

DJ:

Yeah, you know, and I thought about what the guy on the tender had said, he was such a straight guy. And my thing, "You just told me a lie; you're no better than those two knuckleheads that I didn't like, and blah, blah—and I got to put up with this. I can't swim, and certainly can't drink all this water back to land. And boy, this is going to be, you know" —and he said every imaginable thing he could that was derogative. And then, it looked like I was standing there for two or three hours, couldn't be more than three or four minutes max, if that long. And that's when he said, "You're a man, then you don't let anybody, including me and the executive officer—and we run this thing—say to you what I've said to you, and you don't do anything about it." And I kind of looked, I guess I gave him that "What do I do about it—

DM:

—when you're the captain?"

DJ:

Yeah. See, then he said—and I guess he saw that look—and he said "I mean if they say it to—and you don't knock them on their—and I find out about it, you're going to have a problem out of me. Now you may get your—whipped a time or two, but you'll let them know where you stand. You're as much man as anybody on—including me and the executive officer, and you don't take this off of anybody. If I say it to you, you better lay one on me."

DM:

That's a funny way for him to do that, though, to hit you with that without you knowing what he was up to.

DJ:

I didn't know a thing, I had no idea, and he was standing here, and I came out of my little—I didn't make a couple steps and I was right in front of him, and he got started on me.

DM:

Well I'm glad he turned out okay.

DJ:

Well he did. I can't even indict him for that. I applaud him for that, because I'm sure that he—that insulated me from a whole lot of other stuff. And he let it be known, you know, because that mic was open, and he let it be known, "If they say it to you, and you don't"—and he didn't say it—I got the feeling that he didn't mean "try to talk through it;" he meant "when they said it, hit them. Don't ask for any explanation, don't try to"—only thing is, the captain said, if you called me a nigger, hit you. And by God, I'd rather fight you than to fight the captain. I'm going to hit you.

DM:

So he was making it clear to everybody. That's good.

DJ:

Everybody. And when he said "If you don't, and I find out you turned and tucked your tail and walked off, and I find out, you're going to have a problem out of me," because I guess he knew if I took it off of you, here's somebody over here—

DM:

They're going to see it—

DJ:

Yeah, and I've been wanting to get on him, and I'm going to have problems. He said "I don't care who it is. If it's me or the—and they use that word on you, you hit them."

DM:

I'm glad he made it clear.

DJ:

Well he made it very clear. "You hit them, and if you don't, you're going to have a problem out of me."

DM:

Now how was the adjustment back? When you came back to Panola County, was it the same old—I assume it was the same old situation?

DJ:

Same old, same old.

DM:

Now, you'd been through a different situation, was it hard to come back?

DJ:

I would catch myself every now and then. But it wasn't that, because I could—I saw stuff at a distance that stuff hadn't changed. I hired a guy—and I can't even remember how much I paid him—but I hired a guy to drive me from—because when I got discharged, I was discharged—separated from the Navy, I'm done, like ten-ish in the morning, and it was like four-ish in the evening before I could get anything out of Norman to Dallas. And I didn't know what I could do from Dallas [to] home, so I hired a guy to take me from Norman to Dallas, and we hit it off well, because I—to the train station in Dallas, and I guess I was in Dallas fifteen minutes, at the most, and then I was on the train headed home. But no—but I saw some stuff in Dallas. I didn't see any stuff in Norman because I was still isolated. I was carried to where I was going to be separated, and once—and I was busy—and once, near the end of the separation, I inquired about transportation to Dallas, and I was told it would be four-ish before there was anything available, he said "But there are guys out here that you may can hire, and that guy right there, standing by that car, is pretty reliable. You may can get him, because they do this." And the guy—I think I gave him twenty dollars, I believe, to take me from—now that—and I—I don't know how far Norman is from Dallas, but I believe I gave him twenty dollars.

DM:

Pretty good ways.

DJ:

But anyway, he carried me to the train station. But I saw enough to know that—and Mama's survival training kicked in right away, so—

DM:

And what?

DJ:

You know, I said Mama's survival training, you know, she taught us as we were growing up how to survive this stuff.

DM:

Right. You did talk about that before, you sure did. Was there any difference in treatment towards you, now that you were a World War II veteran? You'd been in the war, was there any more respect towards you, or was it the same?

DJ:

In some cases, I thought it was worse. I thought—I could have been wrong—but I thought that the people were a little bit more oppressive, because “I want you to know that because you’ve been, that don’t give you any status with me.”

DM:

How terrible—how interesting.

DJ:

Yeah, of course, Miss Froni, when I visited with her—I’d visit with her in the store, and there were some people in there, and she let them know right off that you cut a little wider space—he’s been over there protecting us. But generally, no, but it didn’t create any problem for me, because I had been taught, but I didn’t go to Carthage. I was back home ten years before I went to Carthage.

DM:

Now, you moved to Lubbock in ’61, does that sound right?

DJ:

No, I moved to Levelland in ’54.

DM:

Oh, you did? Okay. Well, what caused you to move to Levelland? Why did you move out here?

DJ:

Okay. Our cousin—first cousin, female—saw me my early—second semester—we were on a quarter basis, but I’ll say second semester; it was actually second quarter—and she says “Have you sent out any resumes?” “Yeah.” She said “Well let me tell you something, don’t look for anything here. You’re not going to find” —I was looking for a teaching job—“you need to go west,” and she said “Go out [to] Midland-Odessa” —

DM:

Where were you at school, by the way?

DJ:

Bishop in Marshall—

DM:

Oh, Bishop, that’s right.

DJ:

Yeah. It was in Marshall, then, and later on moved to Dallas, and then it went defunct. But anyway, I didn't—I said "No, I can get a job," to myself, but it didn't work. I thought I had a job, but I had to pay for it, and I said "Uh-huh," and I thought about that—

DM:

What do you mean, you had to pay for it? You had a job, but you had to—

DJ:

Well, I had been told that I was hired—this small country school, in other words—it had been a pretty good-sized country school, and I was to be the principal, and about first, second week in August, I go to see what needs to be done, and there was quite a bit, and there were three trustees, and all three of them were between the school's site and Mama's, where I was staying. And I stopped by the first one, and told him, and he said "Yes, we can take care of that." It needed roof repair, weeds needed to be cut, and it needed painting. He said "Yeah, we can take care of that, but you need to stop by so-and-so-and-so." So I stopped by all of the trustees, and the last trustee, he told me to go to Brown Lumber Company, in Carthage, and tell them what needs to be done, and they'll take care of it. And that's where I found out—so I went on the same day, and told Brown, and all them, and they said "Yeah, we can do that. Yeah, we can take care of all of that." And then "How are you going to take care of it? How do you plan to do this?" "What?"

DM:

They were expecting you—?

DJ:

Okay, what the deal was—Brown Lumber Company did all of this, billed me, and gave them statements, and they send it in to Texas, and Texas—they send it in to Texas as a—

DM:

As a reimbursement?

DJ:

Yeah, and Texas—wherever—they sent them, and it was three hundred dollars. All of that came to a little better than three hundred dollars, so each one of the trustees got a hundred dollars apiece, and I paid Brown the three hundred dollars and something.

DM:

So the trustees are the ones that got the reimbursement off of it, then.

DJ:

Yes, yes. See, that's how you pay—just—I didn't go and give them a hundred dollars. I guess they would accept it—

DM:

Well, did the trustees give you the money when they received it—when they got their hundred dollars?

DJ:

No, that ended it, because I said “No, no,” I told Brown “No.” And he said “Well, that's the way we do it.” So I wasn't the only one, see.

DM:

Anyway, so much for that job.

DJ:

Yeah, because I think the job was only like nine or twelve hundred dollars for the whole eight months. We only—blacks only went eight months. So I think—“I'm going to give up almost a third—huh-uh. I worked too hard for this.” And then, I'd get a hot bite, and I guess the word got around, and then I—and then my in-laws were working in Paducah. They were insistent—and there was a young man that was Levelland that—he had transportation, and he was from Kilgore, they were from Pittsburgh, so I don't know how they got hooked up, but when he would go home, they would ride—he'd go by Paducah and pick them up. And he was the one that told my mama-in-law that there was a vacancy at Levelland because the guy died in April. So they made the year out that they were going, and she encouraged me to apply.

DM:

Now what kind of position—was it teaching?

DJ:

Just teaching—just straight classroom. And that's how I got to Levelland. But I stayed in Levelland three years, and the family was back in—I was living in Henderson then, and the family was back in Henderson. And I would go home this time, this month, and I would catch the same guy that—he was still there, so when we went home, I'd ride with him. And my wife would meet me in Pittsburg, and then the next month, she and the kids would drive out to Levelland—

DM:

So your wife was living Henderson, but you were out there teaching, coming back and forth.

DJ:

Yes, and she'd get out of school, four o'clock in the evening, and those—let's see—they were probably second and third grade, and the youngest kid wasn't even in school.

DM:

So was she teaching?

DJ:

Yeah, she was teaching.

DM:

She was teaching in Henderson.

DJ:

She was teaching in Henderson.

DM:

Oh, good, okay.

DJ:

And she'd load them in the car, boy, and head out to Levelland.

DM:

That's a long way.

DJ:

Yeah, that's a long way. And then the next month, I'd go with Earl Woods, so we saw each other once a month. And then, what happened?

DM:

You know, Levelland, after living in Panola County, and that area, Levelland is awfully different. Was that a hard transition for you?

DJ:

Oh yes. I drove—when I went out for the interview, Casey was in Dallas, so he went with me, and then I had—my wife had a favorite cousin in Fort Worth, and her husband—we became tight because I was a yard man at Bishop. He finished—he and his wife finished at Bishop. So I went by way of Fort Worth and got him, and I drove to Snyder, and I said—it was at night, and my interview was at eight o'clock in the morning—so I said “Y'all, one of you drive, and I'm going to get in the back seat and get me some—wake me up,” and they woke me up about halfway

around the gin. I got to know this later on, that's where—and I raised up out of that back seat and looked out, and all I could see was cotton, cotton, and more cotton, and telephone poles—not a tree in sight. And I said to my—I didn't tell them—I said to myself, "I'm going to make sure that they don't hire me. I'm going to make sure." And we got to Levelland, and on College Avenue—I don't know what that was named then, it wasn't College Avenue, because South Plains College hadn't been founded then. But it was a Sinclair station, and I changed—I told the guy I'd driven, and "I need some gas. I'll fill up if I can use"—"Help yourself. You don't have to buy any—just"—even the white people were different. It was just like I was in another world, I mean, "Mr. Jones," good Lord, you know, "I ain't—no—wait a minute, what's going"—but anyway, I was ready, and I was at the interview spot, oh, about 7:45 or so, and I went in the super's—he called—came in and called me, and we talked. I guess we talked fifteen, twenty—maybe—minutes, or maybe longer, and I was—he told me later—I was doing a good job of blowing that interview.

DM:

Of blowing the interview?

DJ:

Yeah, and he said "I have one more question"—and I remember this quite well, and I said "Yes, sir?" He said "What about discipline?" And I said—the man was named Marcom, O.W.

Marcom—I said "Mr. Marcom, I have not had one hour of formal instruction in discipline. I discipline my kids as Mama taught discipline to me. And she told us one time, made sure we understood what she wanted done. She made sure. And the next time around—she told us the first time how—so we could hear—the next time around, she told us so we could feel it. And this is the way I suspect I would behave in a classroom." He said "Well let me ask you a question. Here's a student that's being unruly, and you tell him to stop. What would you do?" I said "I'd make sure that they knew that I wanted them to stop." "What if they didn't stop?" Well, I finished in '51, it is now '54, and I had been doing common labor jobs. I was working at a place that worked about a hundred people, and I was the only person on that payroll—I was the only person there with a college degree, and my language got a little raunchy. Well, I didn't explain that to him, but that's what happened. And he said "Well, if they didn't stop, what would you do?" and I said "I'd whip his ass." And he said "What?" I said—and then I realized, "Oh, my God—"

DM:

—"I said that in an interview—job interview—"

DJ:

So he says—he said something else, but I'm still "Oh, my God." I wasn't thinking so much about the effect of that, but what if I tried to interview someplace else, and he knows about it—"You

don't want that guy," and he says "Well, I believe the interview is over. You'll hear from us" — this was a Tuesday, I believe, a Tuesday—"You'll hear from us by next week. The board will meet Thursday night." "Fine." So I go back to—come back to—took Casey back to Dallas, and I came back over to Fort Worth to spend some time—the rest of the week with my cousin. And I'm thinking about "I'll get home Monday—Sunday, even. They may—I'm not going to hear from them people." And my wife called me Friday—she called me Friday, I believe it was, Friday or Saturday—she called me Saturday, and said "You have a telegram here." I said "What? Did you open it?" and she said "No." I said "Well, open it and see what it says." And they'd sent a telegram to me telling me that I was hired, and I was to report to work that Monday. So I did some shuffling and got back out there. And after I got comfortable with O.W. —Mr. Marcom, he was down at the school one day, and we got to talking, and something came up, and I said "I have a question I want to ask you." He said "What was it?" and I told him, I said "I set out to blow that interview. What made you hire me?" and he said "Well, I'll tell you what, you were doing a good job of blowing it until I asked about discipline, and you told me" —and he used it—"you told me you'd whip that student's ass. That's why I hired you on." I said "You've got to be"—I thought that was the cream on the cake, you know, I didn't—he said "Yeah, you were blowing it, but that's what I hired you for."

DM:

That's good. O.W. Marcom, is that who you said—?

DJ:

That was his—that was the superintendent's name.

DM:

—superintendent's name—what school was that?

DJ:

That was Carver. That was before desegregation, so that was Carver High School in Levelland, and there were eight teachers there—the principal and seven teachers.

DM:

Okay, what did you teach out there?

DJ:

I taught a little bit of everything, but I started out teaching sixth grade, and some—let's see—and I taught some higher math. But I taught a little bit of everything.

DM:

Okay, how long were you out there at Levelland?

DJ:

Six years.

DM:

Then you went to Lubbock, I guess.

DJ:

Then I went to Slaton.

DM:

Slaton.

DJ:

Yes. That was a good experience—the guy—the principal and I—and I've been lucky. I counted it up the other day—but I've forgotten it—but I had one, two—Levelland principal, Slaton principal, and the principal at Slaton was my dad-in-law—and boy, that was an experience. And then Scott, and then Rice, and then Reed, and then Gipson, then Thomas, and then—I had eight principals, and all of them were good. I was lucky.

DM:

This was at Carver and Slaton—

DJ:

Okay, Carver was Levelland, Slaton was Evans—

DM:

Evans?

DJ:

Evans High School in Slaton. Then Dunbar, then Estacado—well, I guess I had ten—nine and then back to Dunbar. I guess I had ten.

DM:

Ten principals?

DJ:

Yeah, and all of them were good. And one of the principals, I was his counselor in high school. I was his counselor at Estacado. We had to have a meeting of the mind. And another guy I had—another principal I had worked with at Dunbar, we had to have a meeting of the mind, and the

other principal at Estacado dated my daughter, and we had to have a meeting of the mind. But other than that—and it didn't—I got along well. I had good experience at every place I worked.

DM:

Okay, did you do all of you teaching before integration?

DJ:

Yes, it was—I did it up, I went through the—

DM:

You went through that process.

DJ:

Yes, through that transition.

DM:

So when you were at Estacado, I guess—

DJ:

Yeah, that was the first integrated school that I worked at. Story behind that, too—they started messing with me—I was in special education—they started messing, and I had a—my supervisor was named Max Manley—good person—and old Max and I got to be pretty tight. And he started messing with me—

DM:

Max did, or someone—?

DJ:

Max did in October of my second year at Dunbar. He says “They’re going to have to have a special ed unit at Estacado, and you’re the guy to set it up, and get” —“Uh-huh.” I lived right across the street from Dunbar—“Huh-uh,” —

DM:

Yeah, you didn’t want to leave Dunbar—

DJ:

Huh-uh, and I’m trying to be professional and all with old Max, but he kept on, I said “Look, let me tell you something, man, I’m not moving. I can hear the first bell ring in my—I can be sitting at my kitchen table, and by the time that tardy bell rings I can be in my classroom. I don’t even have to put on a coat—a heavy coat—I don’t have to crank up a car. I’m not going anywhere.”

And this went on, went on, now we're in—this was in the fall of '66, and this went on '67, and in March of '67, on a Wednesday, about two o'clock—and the superintendent was Nat Williams, and assistant superintendent was Ishmael Hill, and he was the only person in the system, then, that had a—in Lubbock system—that had a PhD.

DM:

Ishma—

DJ:

Ishmael Hill.

DM:

How—do you know how you spell his last name—Hill?

DJ:

Hill—H-I-L-L.

DM:

Oh, H-I-L-L, okay. Ishmael Hill.

DJ:

Ishmael Hill, and could surely say "This is Ishmael Hill." He never said "Dr. Hill," he said, you know—so we didn't have telephones, then, in the classroom. A kid came and got me and said "Mr. Jones, you've got a phone call." I'd go down to the office and get the—I picked up the phone, and I said "This is Don Jones speaking," and he said "This is Ishmael Hill. Mr. Jones, I have a question." I said "Yes sir." We didn't get contracts, but we got letters of intent in February. You may not see a contract until November, but that—letter of intent, so he says "This is Ishmael Hill. May I ask you a question?" "Yes sir." He said "Do you plan to remain in the employment of Lubbock Independent School District for the school year '67-'68?" I said "I surely do. I have a letter of intent." He said "Well, you'll be at Estacado." It was just like that. And they had been, you know, and it was just like that. If you work, you will be at—well I'll be at Estacado, because I'm going to work. I need a job, you know. And that was a Wednesday, and we met at Estacado that Saturday for a short period. And I was the last spot that they had—to get the staff. And it made sense, because this is March, and people want to—and this is how I got to—well, I left Dunbar and went to Estacado.

DM:

You said you went back to Dunbar later, though?

DJ:

And then, I went back to Dunbar after—I retired in 1994, and in 1999 I went back to Dunbar, but I was part-time. There were two of us that made one. He would work three days one week, and I'd work two. Then I'd work three days and he'd—oh, that was nice. That was nice.

DM:

Now Dunbar—was this Dunbar High School?

DJ:

Uh-huh.

DM:

Didn't—it closed somewhere along the way, when did it—?

DJ:

Yeah, they—I don't remember exactly when it went—but it went to a junior high.

DM:

Junior high—right—okay.

DJ:

And then to—it is now a middle school. I think they have, maybe sixth, seventh, and eighth graders there now.

DM:

You know, I work for the Southwest Collection at Texas Tech? It's the archives, and about fifteen, sixteen years ago, we talked to a lot of people about Dunbar, and how it closed and all, and there was a lot of sadness about that, because they said it was such a nice community, everybody knew each other, and then it kind of pulled apart, so—

DJ:

It was.

DM:

Sounds like you have a soft spot in your heart for Dunbar, also.

DJ:

Oh, sure, because, see, all of my kids graduated from Dunbar, and like I say, I live right across the street from Dunbar, and I knew a lot of the teachers there, and it was really a hurtful for a lot of people. I didn't want to see it, you know—and it didn't—it hasn't done a whole lot for the

community. You know, I used to—years ago—I imagine they'd rather—if they had their rathers now, because I lived in Levelland, I commuted from Lubbock to Levelland one year, and I commuted five years, I was in Slaton five years, and I commuted every day. And I used to—my thing was, you know, I grew up with teachers living in the community where they worked, and there's something to be said for that. There is something to be—because, when I was at Dunbar, on the weekend, you know, I've seen guys that I had no contact with—like junior and seniors in regular classes—I've seen them duck from me, because they were smoking on Saturday or Sunday, you know. Or I've seen any number of—all kinds, because see, Estacado had three races—Anglos, Hispanics, and blacks, and I've seen people, male and female of all kinds, see me and duck. And that led me to believe that there is some advantage in a teacher being in that community. But, you know—

DM:

Yeah, that's what I'm saying. It was a tight-knit—close-knit community-type situation.

DJ:

And every street, then, was even tighter. At one time, Dunbar—Manhattan is one block. In other words, East 24th, you go past the Boys and Girls Club and then it elbows.

DM:

Okay, and that's Manhattan?

DJ:

That's where Manhattan started, and this is 26th down here, and this is Dunbar. And there were—I think I counted twenty-two kids at one time on Manhattan—

DM:

Living on Manhattan?

DJ:

Manhattan, and you were on your p's and q's if you went visiting, because even if you were out, anybody—adults saw you off of Manhattan, and you were messing up, you had a problem right then. And a double dip when you got home, see, but it's not that way now. But if those kids—I you were an instructor at Dunbar, and any Dunbar student, Saturday or Sunday, you saw doing wrong—if they saw you before you saw them, they split. Whatever it was they were doing, they—because I may not say anything to them, but I was going to tell your parents.

DM:

Right. So which was—would you call Dunbar the best school experience, or was there other schools—?

DJ:

No, I can't pick out a best. Now, when I tell people that I worked under my dad-in-law for five years, and that was a chore, you need to understand, until I found out what was going on, it was a chore. "You need to leave me alone, man, you let these other people"—but when I found out what was going on, and his wife alerted me, I don't know why I didn't pick it up just—but that was a good experience. I had no—I had the—I left Levelland because the principal and I got crossways—he got crossways, I didn't. And once I found out what was motivating him, then that didn't—I, maybe for about six weeks, I wouldn't have John Brown spit on him to keep him alive, it was just that—but when I found out what he was experiencing—"Hell, this man's better—if things changed, he's probably treating me better than I'd treat him," because if I had the pull that he had, he wouldn't be here, he'd be gone. And when I found out that the man—I was a threat to his livelihood—and he told me once, he told me what got me so—he told me in October, if they were hiring right now, they wouldn't hire me. And if I couldn't find a job immediately, paying what I—I would lose everything. His mom was in—somewhere in Arizona—Phoenix, I believe—so he was taking care of her, and he was buying a home there, and he was buying a home in Levelland.

DM:

I see.

DJ:

And I've got to have this salary, and if they—if Levelland was hiring today, they wouldn't hire me. If you'll stay, that gives me a chance to be rehired. I have a principalship job down in Olton, to stay in Levelland. That was in October. In March, he asked me to resign, and that didn't sit well, and he wouldn't tell me why. He did tell me—it was a clear day, and he told me "You have too much power with the students. If we went outside—it's clear—and you told them that it was going to rain, to them it was going to rain, and I couldn't change it." And I said "Until you do better, man, I'm not resigning. You'll just have to fire me." He said "If you'll resign, we can give you a recommendation. If we fire you, you get no recommendation." So I went to the schoolboard, and I had connections with the principal of the school board—oh, God, I'm losing names—oh, boy, he runs a funeral home over there—

DM:

The president of the schoolboard?

DJ:

Yeah, and he told me "You are hired. The principal's name is L.G. Griffin, the superintendent, O.W. Marcom, and this is something that O.W. and L.G. cooked up because you have been hired." And the secretary of the schoolboard was named Miss Dawn, and this was a Saturday morning, it had snowed a little, he called me—it was George Price—he has a—it's Price Funeral

Home, that was the president of the board. And he said “I want you to go by” —he called Miss Dawn—“and I’m going to tell her—she’ll let you see the book where you are hired.” And he insisted, and I went, and he told me “You will work next year at Levelland if you want to. But I would encourage you to start looking for something else, because they cooked this up. If they brought it to us” —they didn’t know anything about this. This is why he said “This is something that O.W. and L.G. cooked up, because if they brought it to us, it wouldn’t even get on the table, because you’re already hired for ’64-’65 school year, I guess. But you need to start looking, because they don’t have anything against you, now, and the reason I say that, because you never—but you don’t have to do anything big, but little things” —

DM:

When they’re set against you, they’re going to make something happen.

DJ:

Yes. “They’ll get something, and they’ll bring it to us, and all together be a big thing, and we’ll have to consider it. You start looking, but you are hired. Now, if you don’t want to come back, that’s your business, but you’re hired for ’61”—something like that. Well, I did. I didn’t have anything, so I went back, and of course, that was a pretty good year. It was just about six weeks in there where it was bad.

DM:

Okay, but most of your experience in education, was it okay? Did you—do you have any regrets about having gone that route, or did you like teaching—?

DJ:

I like teaching, and I have—but no—I started so say I have a regret that I didn’t go to Olton as the principal, but not really, because the principal is at a different level. And I think a counselor is at the optimum, because you can go either way. You can support the teachers—you can support the students, the teachers, or you can buck the principal and not be too afraid, you can buck the teachers and not be too afraid, you know, and I had good principals. Once, I got to—I went in at Dunbar, because I was told that—and when I got a notice that I was at Dunbar, it was on a Friday, then I went to work Monday. And the principal, I was told, that they had picked a person and presented that name to the principal about nine o’clock that morning—Friday morning—and he held out—“Huh-huh,” he just—“huh-uh, I want Mr. Jones. I want Mr. Jones. I’m new at this. You expect me to do a job, give me the people that I’m comfortable with, that I think can help me to” —and he held out until late that evening, and the personnel man called me, “You still interested in being employed by Lubbock?” “Yes.” “If we hired you, could you start school in September for certification?” “What kind of certification?” He told me, “Yeah, man, yeah,” and he said “Well, you go to work Monday.” So I started working that Monday, and then

because I was in special ed.—they work ten months. So I started two before and two after—and I started to work that Monday, and enrolled in Tech, and that was in '65.

DM:

You enrolled in Tech, and that was for certification, or were you working on a degree?

DJ:

It was for certification, and I got certified as a special ed person, and it was much—I did a—it was much like academic counseling, because they—what did they call us? Academic—well, whatever, counselor—and I worked there two years, set up the program, worked two years—well—I worked one year, and then started looking at—I got my certification, and then I started taking some courses, and to be honest with you, G.I. Bill, they would pay for it. So I said “Well, as long as this”—so I started taking some courses that I thought would lend to a degree—master’s degree—and I had secured a sabbatical, and I was going to Arizona for certification—counseling certification—and a guy that was teaching math—I guess he was the math department head—he was—he left and went to Tech and got his doctorate, and he somehow got hooked up with these guys that was doing this special counseling thing in Arizona, and they were going to do that same program here at Tech, but it was strictly for Hispanic men.

DM:

Oh, really? Huh.

DJ:

And they—I think they lined—it took in Dallas, back this way—it designated where the Hispanic guy had to be—where he had to be working. And George Smith was the guy that I worked with at Levelland—Estacado—and he knew—we got along well, and he knew my desires, what I wanted. Lubbock was going to let me leave, go get certified as a counselor, and I’d have a job when I got back, but I would be on my own as far as finances. And it was going to be a squeaker, and George found—

DM:

It was going to be a—?

DJ:

It was going to be tough, and George—matter of fact, I was probably going to have to sell—I had two cars—probably going to have to sell a vehicle to pull it off. George found out about the program, knew the people, and the program was set up at Tech, and somehow or another, they cut a little door, and let me in, and cut another—and I was the—there were twenty Hispanic guys, was supposed to be definitely, specifically for Hispanic people, but I got in, and a nun from Slaton got in.

DM:

One of the sisters from the Catholic school.

DJ:

Yeah, got it.

DM:

So you got your certification, your counselor certification?

DJ:

I got my counseling certification.

DM:

Got your master's there at Tech?

DJ:

I got my counseling certification, and then in doing that, one of the guys—boy, that was a—and there were two of them, team-taught—people learn more under those people with less stress than anything I've ever done. I mean, it was just—it was super, you know. And that nun had it, too, and I've forgotten her name. Well, she isn't here anymore. She's out in—last time I heard from her she was in Oregon or somewhere. But oh, God, that ol' gal. But one of the instructors said "Are you going to go ahead and get your masters now?" I said "No, I don't think so." And I don't know why, I guess they went down and looked at my transcript, and they came back and they said "You know, you—with your certification in special ed, you've got a lot of hours that would go. You need to work on that masters." And they hounded me and hounded me, and then I said "Okay." So I did extra hours—I didn't do a thesis—

DM:

You did the—probably thirty-six-hour deal.

DJ:

Exactly. I'm not a research person, and I knew that I would have problems, so they made sure, so—

DM:

Okay, what year was that you got your masters?

DJ:

I got my masters in 1970.

DM:

Okay, 1970.

DJ:

Nineteen-seventy.

DM:

And then you were still in education for a lot of years after that. What year did you retire?

DJ:

Ninety-four.

DM:

Ninety-four, huh, that's right.

DJ:

And I was at Estacado from '67, like Ishmael Hill said, "Then you will be working at Estacado." Boy, he didn't—he didn't ask me had I considered it, anyway, either Estacado or you don't work. And I teased him about it, because he retired in—he lived in Canyon, and I used to do a lot of church work, so I had a Saturday church conference in Canyon, and my wife worked with his wife, and I carried her, and she spent—and he had a little—I called him a gentleman farmer, because he had some acreage up there, out in the country, and he was running some cows—a few cows—so I carried Dorothy by, and she spent the time, and then I went back and did my church work, and then back out to get her. And—

DM:

Gave him some trouble about that, huh?

DJ:

Yeah, I asked him about that and he chuckled, he said "Well, you know, your name kept popping up, and every time I talked" —my principal at Dunbar was George Scott. Every time I talked to George Scott, he'd ask me, "You still got that" —and I know ol' George would hit me every now and then about it, and he said "We got lucky" —well, I got lucky. It was a good move for me, it really was.

DM:

Everything worked out, didn't it?

DJ:

Oh, yeah.

DM:

Now Dorothy's—what's her maiden name?

DJ:

Thomas.

DM:

What year did y'all get married?

DJ:

1947.

DM:

Forty-seven, okay. Uh-oh.

DJ:

You're glad I—we'll be married sixty-eight years next week.

DM:

Is that right?

DJ:

June 14, 1947. Yeah, that's—when you said that, yeah this is the tenth. I hadn't even thought about it.

DM:

Is she from Panola County?

DJ:

No, she's from Camp County. You know, I told you the boarding school? Well, their garden—where she grew up, her grandparents reared her, and their garden, that north yard touched the south campus of Center Point, where I went to high school.

DM:

Where?

DJ:

Center Point. That's where I went to high school. And that's where I met her.

DM:

That's Camp County?

DJ:

Camp County.

DM:

What other towns are in Camp County, I'm having a hard time placing where—?

DJ:

Pittsburg.

DM:

Pittsburg, oh yeah.

DJ:

Yeah, Pittsburg is the county seat.

DM:

I know Pittsburg well.

DJ:

Yeah, Pittsburg, then Gilmer, then Mount Pleasant—Gilmer on the south, Mount Pleasant on—yeah, see, I spent two years there, and we started dating, I guess, halfway through my second year. And I didn't know it, her and her little crew had a bet. I was dating a girl from—

DM:

A what?

DJ:

They had a bet that—they bet that she could start dating me. And at the same time, I guess she was considered kind of the—a queen—and at the same time, she didn't have a boyfriend, and hadn't had one, I don't guess, and the guys were betting, "Boy, I bet you couldn't" —because I was running through the little girls, boy, I was having a ball. It was "I bet you can't date Dorothy," and I said "The hell I can't."

DM:

She was kind of the "cream of the crop?"

DJ:

Yeah, she was one of those untouchables, you know, untouchables. So I—and where I was living, just—she lived on the west side of the street, and the dormitory was on the east side of the street, and she had an aunt that lived up the street, and she'd come strolling up the walk. I'd see her—she'd do that just about every evening, and I kind of—I'd watch her, you know, and I decided “That ol' gal thinks she's something special. Yeah, I'm going to date you just to” —and she was looking at me, “Yeah,” you know, because those—everybody in those dormitories—and I don't know how many, probably, all told, probably a hundred twenty-five or thirty boys and girls, because they—everybody in those dormitories, male and female, worked for the school. I didn't have to work. So, you know, I had time, and Mama said “No, Albert Tracy didn't work” —no, she said “Sydney didn't work, Casey didn't work, Trudy didn't work, Albert Tracy didn't work, Robert didn't work, you will not work.”

DM:

I remember you said she really put the funds into y'all's education.

DJ:

Yeah, and she said, you know, “Your requirements are grades. I will not accept anything below a ‘B.’”

DM:

But that gave you time to chase Dorothy around a little bit.

DJ:

Yeah, gave me time to chase Dorothy. And Casey had gone to—he was in the service, and he had a car, so when he went to the service, he left the car at home. I was on a farm—at that time—but I had a—Mama was farming, and I was the only one there. Everybody else was in college or in the service. So she worked out a deal with the principal. I'd go to school Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, I'd double up on assignments, and if I was on campus at the end of the day Wednesday, I took the car, so I would drive back home, to Panola County, and then I'd do farm work Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and if I got caught up, I'd get up—we'd go to church Sunday, come back and eat, and then I'd head back to Center Point. So I had a car, and Lord have mercy. I almost flubbed up, but Mama—the principal—well, she was really the superintendent, because it was an independent thing—Mama and Mrs. Cash—I don't know how they—because Mama didn't have a telephone.

DM:

Mrs. Cash was the superintendent?

DJ:

Yeah. She sent for me one day, and I drove for her, also, because she was all around, and she said “Uh-huh, where’re your car keys?” “What?” “Where are your car keys?” “In my pocket.” “Well, go get your car,” and she told me where to park it in her backyard, and “bring me the keys.” “Okay.” So they’d ground me for a few days, and then we figured out—I’d get me three or four guys, eleven or twelve o’clock, and we’d go over and push the car out in the street—and it was an old standard shift back then, it was a ’39 Chevrolet—and then we’d push the car and start it.

DM:

Pop the clutch—

DJ:

Yeah, pop the clutch, and to hotwire it, all you need to do—you could just reach under there and you had two wires—and we’d push the car and pop the clutch, and here we’d go.

DM:

Did she ever find out?

DJ:

No. And then we’d come back, we’d kill the car, and then we’d “Uh,” push the car, and you had an incline coming out, and an incline coming in, but once you got over that incline, it would kind of coast, and then I’d—yeah—

DM:

A young man will find a way.

DJ:

Oh yes. And because I had that car, that gave me a little run, so we ended up—and I didn’t know what she was doing, and she didn’t know—Dorothy didn’t know what I was doing, and I didn’t know what she was doing, until—we’d been dating a good while when it came out.

DM:

That you were interested in each other?

DJ:

Yeah, but because of a bet; see, the guys told me I couldn’t, and the gals told her she couldn’t.

DM:

How funny.

DJ:

So this is how we got started.

DM:

Well, congratulations on your sixty-eighth anniversary coming up, that's wonderful.

DJ:

Yeah, it'll be sixty-eight.

DM:

I've kept you a long time today. I hope I didn't take up too much of your schedule. I don't have any other questions; do you have anything you want to add?

DJ:

No, other than, you know, out of all of the—that military business, I guess, maybe Robert was the—out of the five of us, maybe he was in the most danger, because Albert Tracy was—I just—he was somewhere on an island as an MP⁸.

DM:

In the south Pacific?

DJ:

Yeah, in the south Pacific, and Casey was in Europe in the medics, and he was not a field guy. He was—

DM:

He was in a hospital?

DJ:

Yeah, but a field hospital. And Fred Lawrence was behind the lines—that's the brother-in-law, because he was the cook, so Robert saw—actually, he saw more combat than any of us—Fred Lawrence—they were there, but they were not actually—and we all got back. I don't understand how Mama survived it.

DM:

Don't you know, she worried.

DJ:

Oh, yeah, with four boys—four sons, and all of them in a combat zone.

⁸ Military police.

DM:

Were all your brothers there when you came back—?

DJ:

Oh yeah, well see I told you that they kind of was disappointed, because when I got through embracing Mama, I went to Robert, and they thought I was going to go Mama, Trudy—no, Mama, Bertha, Sydney—Mama, Bertha, Jake—which was the brother-in-law—then Sydney, Casey, Trudy, Albert Tracy, Robert. But I went Mama, Robert, you know, and I—

DM:

Do you remember what day that was, because it was a big day in your life, you know, and in your Mama's life. All of her family was back after the war—incredible.

DJ:

No. I know it was in June, maybe—it was before the tenth of July, because the tenth of July, I turned twenty-one, and I dropped—I was the last one that was under guardianship, see, so I know it was—and after so long a time—we had watermelons, and after so long a time, and I know it was either—it wasn't a Sunday, because Mama didn't do any—other than housework, cooking, we made the beds and she cooked on Sunday, you didn't do any outside, so it wasn't a Sunday. And I know she said "Okay, we need some watermelons."

DM:

Well, that was a big day. Whatever day it was, that was a big day for your family, and for you.

DJ:

And I know Jake and Bertha came in for that. They were in Gilmer, and they came—they were there—knew I was coming home, and they were—

DM:

Anything else you want to add?

DJ:

No, I guess I have yakked enough.

DM:

No, probably not, but we'll go ahead and turn it off.

End of recording