

**Oral History Interview of
Phil Crenshaw**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
July 16, 2015
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*World War II Veteran Interviews***

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Phil Crenshaw, who discusses his upbringing, his experiences as a World War II veteran, and his participation in the Honor Flight program.

Length of Interview: 01:39:17

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Keywords

World War II, rural Texas, American Southwest, Honor Flight, Christianity, Pacific Theatre

David Marshall (DM):

The date is July 16, 2015. This is David Marshall interviewing Phil Crenshaw at the Southwest Collections Texas Tech Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Crenshaw, if we could begin with your date of birth.

Phil Crenshaw (PC):

Maybe just make it—casual. Possibly just make it “Phil.”

DM:

Okay.

PC:

I was born in Kansas City, Missouri on September 13th, 1922. I was the oldest of two sons and I had a younger brother two years younger than I, and after my birth, my parents moved from Kansas City to Joplin, Missouri, and that's where I was raised. I was so naïve in those days, and of course, the word “television” wasn't even in the dictionary, you know. Everything was radio and they'd review the forecast too if it was rainy. I foolishly thought if it was raining in Joplin, Missouri, it was raining all over the country.

DM:

I've heard people say that before, so I think that's a common childhood perspective on things. So interesting.

PC:

Well, you'll notice that date of mine, 1922, was seven years before the Great Depression and the collapse of everything in 1929, when rich men jumped off the buildings to solve it by committing suicide because they didn't have anywhere to go. My daddy earned two dollars and fifty cents a week. Kept a couple of other part-time jobs to keep us abreast.

DM:

What kind of work did he do?

PC:

He was a printer. In Kansas City, he learned the rudiments of the printing trade, and in those days, they called that intern a “printer's devil,” so my dad was a printer's devil. When we moved to Joplin after various short time jobs, he hired on with Hargus Printing Company where he worked for about twenty years and Bill Hargus decided to retire and my dad bought the business and that's using the term loosely. He inherited an obligation to pay the Hargus Printing Company out, which he did finally own, and so the cost of structure in those days—as I say, my dad earned two dollars and fifty cents a week. Bread was ten cents a loaf. It was unsliced. There was not a

knife in Joplin, Missouri sharp enough—but when you try to slice that fresh, unsliced bread, it mashed it to about half its height. And when it came about that they really got a slicer—for years, we'd say, "Well, there's a great invention just like sliced bread". It was quite a thing. Hamburgers were five cents each. The unsliced bread was ten cents a loaf and everything accordingly was priced unbelievably then, so that's the area in which I grew up.

DM:

As you were growing up in the depression, did you feel a hardship or did you just accept this because you grew up that way?

PC:

My brother and I said we didn't even know we were poor. Course, there was no such thing as a washer and dryer. My mother labored over a scrub board and rinsed the clothes twice and hung them out on the line. Everybody had a clothesline in the backyard to dry them, and I worked with my mother and brother and we did the laundry together in a fashion like that. My daddy did not earn—own a car until after I came home from the war, and he rode a bicycle to work and to church and to everywhere, and bicycle was my only means of transportation through all the years and through high school. I had a basket on the front of it and I did a lot of the grocery buying including bringing home a half bushel of cantaloupes on the front end of that thing. I thought it was going to unbalance and lose them, but I didn't, and so, whatever the weather was, ice and sleet and rain in the winter time, we'd try to dress accordingly and I rode a bicycle to school about two and a half miles to high school. I didn't know any kind of other transportation other than bike.

DM:

Did they have a bus system? Any buses running at that time?

PC:

No. Street cars.

DM:

Street cars.

PC:

They had street cars and one came, oh within about five or six blocks of the house, but my parents couldn't afford for me to have street car transportation. The main thing I remember about a street car is that down where we would get on, the tracks curved and went uphill a little bit, and the boys with their devilment which they couldn't grease those rails, so the street car couldn't climb up or even with sand on the tracks. Part of the devilment of a high school kid, I guess.

DM:

Did you go to high school—all of your school's years in Joplin?

PC:

Yes. I graduated from Joplin Senior High School in the spring of 1940, and back in those days, ROTC [**Reserve Officers' Training Corps**] was very prominent and I was in ROTC, and also blasted away on a trombone, so I was in the ROTC military band, and we had an instructor by the name of T. Frank Colter. We all called him "Chief," and every year, there was a tristate music contest in Pittsburgh, Kansas, that involved the schools of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. They literally hated Joplin, Missouri because it took a pickup truck to bring our trophies home, because our instructors, including Chief Colter were so good and so thorough. Having nothing to do with the tristate music festival, Joplin had a Christmas parade to kick off the Christmas season. Well, ROTC military band had to lead that parade. I'll never forget the year when the temperature was ten degrees above zero and we were facing a north wind all the way down the parade. My trombone froze. All the piccolos and trumpets and everything froze except the snare drum.

DM:

The valve stuck.

PC:

Oh, yeah. [Laughs] So we did not utter a musical note, but the snare drums saved us I guess from ruin and we marched in that Christmas parade like usual. Temperature had nothing to do with it. It was time to come and go and we did it.

DM:

Well, you guys that were ROTC in high school, I know that you heard about the war going on in Europe after 1939, September 1939. Were you speculating as to whether you might end up in this war?

PC:

Never gave it a thought, David. After graduating in the spring of 1940, I enrolled in John Brown University, Siloam Springs, Arkansas, in the northwest corner. In the fall of 1940, started school, and of course, the war had started in Europe in 1939, but Pearl Harbor was not until 1941, and it was after Pearl Harbor that I enlisted in the reserves in 1942, and then I was called to active duty in February of 1943, so I was in service from 1943 to 1946.

DM:

Now 1942—did you know about when in 1942 you enlisted?

PC:

No, I don't.

DM:

Okay.

PC:

I really don't. I've got the dates that were—I expect.

DM:

By the way, did you ever get your service records? A lot of them were lost in a fire in St. Louis.

PC:

Yes. I have the original honorable discharge. It has quite a bit information on the back as well as the statement on the front and everything, so that is part of my record there, and of course I've got this uniform with some of the ribbons on there, and all the ribbons are identified on the back of the honorable discharge. As far that goes, I'm glad I got that, you know. Of course, everybody got a Good Conduct Ribbon, you know. Also, we went out for rifle range and I'm qualified as sharpshooter which I couldn't do today because I've got a change in my vision, but any connection with that, we would get up at four o'clock in the morning. It was cold in the desert in California, where I had taken sixteen weeks of basic training.

DM:

Where in California?

PC:

This was Casa Robles halfway between L.A. and Frisco [San Francisco].

DM:

Past—past “Erobols?”

PC:

Casa Robles. Camp Roberts. Camp Roberts at that time had the largest parade ground in America. It had been smooth enough thing to land a B-17 on that thing anywhere, and we had close order drills there. We had inspection every Saturday morning, and in the desert it got hot at noon, and some guys just fell face forward in the tarmac and laid there until the thing was over. It never did bother me that much, but I started to mention about going to the rifle range. We were dugout of our sacks at four o'clock in the morning. We were at the rifle range before the sun came up. We couldn't even see the targets at that time, and when they finally came up, then we could fire. If you missed—David, if you missed the target altogether, they waved a

white flag which they called “Maggie’s drawers,” and there were a lot of guys that got plenty of Maggie’s drawers in the process. With regard to the sixteen weeks of military basic training, typical of the desert is cold at night, hot in the daytime, of course. The crowning point of the sixteen weeks was the twenty-five mile forced hike with a sixty pound pack on your back in which we used the term ‘marched’ rather loosely. We shoveled, I guess. We marched for fifty minutes and rested for ten. Our feet got so sore, we just prayed we could last the fifty until we could rest the ten. As soon we stopped for the ten, because it was cold at night, we almost froze to death, and then we prayed that we could get going again so we didn’t freeze to death. [Laughs] So, it was a contradiction in that way.

DM:

Now, how many hours did that take? Do you recall?

PC:

Oh, seven or eight hours, and of course, they had jeeps along the way to pick up those who fell out and couldn’t finish the deal, you know. I was determined to do that which I did, but when we got back to the barracks, I don’t know what they may have told us we should’ve done, but we saw guys all over the place. It looked like the place had been gassed because they laid down on their bunks with a full sixty pound pack on the back, their helmet on, their glasses on, and went to sleep, and died on that bunk until maybe the evening time. [Laughs]

DM:

That is fatigue.

PC:

Of course, you’re never going to forget an experience like that.

DM:

Oh, golly, isn’t that something? Now, while you were there in basic training, were you getting any way news or were you completely insulated from that? Because this is 1943, right?

PC:

Yes. In that day, of course the movies are all black and white, but they would have the news on before the feature film was on, and Movietone News, I believe, is what they called it, and we would get updates on what Hitler was doing in Germany and that kind of thing because he had marched on Poland in September of 1939. That’s where the war really broke out. So we could catch some part of the news in that way if we got a chance to go to the movies.

DM:

Okay. You said you went to John Brown. John Brown is a denomination of a—

PC:

It's a Christian school.

DM:

It's a Christian school. Is it a particular denomination?

PC:

No, it's interdenominational.

DM:

Interdenominational, okay.

PC:

It was founded by, as you imagine, John Brown, and he wanted to found a Christian school, and he opened it up in a cornfield in Arkansas, and today, it's one of the very highest quality schools in America. Highly regarded. All kinds of funding, and it has really excelled through all those years.

DM:

What was your religious background?

PC:

My mom and daddy were Baptists, and brother and I accepted the Lord and were baptized, of course, in a Baptist church, and when we went to—when I went to John Brown University, they had what you would call an interdenominational chapel service every Friday, I think it was, and there was a Bible course every semester included in your curriculum. Many of the students were preparing to be preachers, and they went out to what they call “preacher points” on Sunday morning, and they'd go out to little communities in the rural area, and I had an interest in talking. I always did, and John Brown University had a five-thousand watt radio station on campus. Now back in those days, there were very few broadcast facilities and the signal would go a long ways, and we were on a low frequency for the five-thousand watts which was carried further, and we got mail. We had a mail map with appends all over the place, and we had heard from thirty-seven states and nine foreign countries.

DM:

Really?

PC:

The station went on air at four o'clock in the morning. I got up at 3:30 in the morning to help sign the radio station on the air at 4:00 a.m., and everyone at John Brown University worked four

hours a day as far as part of the room, board, and tuition was concerned, so I worked mine off early in the morning, then I could go to the classes later in the day.

DM:

Okay, and what was your broadcast? Was it a—

PC:

It was a mix of secular music. Of course, it had a lot of religious programs on it and they'd broadcasted the chapel service and those kinds. Also we had visitors who'd come with—to the campus, and of course, they were always covered on radio and like that, so it was a varied thing, and we had a pretty good—I guess there was—country music was not that broad a thing at that time I was there, but we had some country music and a lot of Christian gospel. Quartet music is kind of a thing.

DM:

Did you have live groups come in?

PC:

Yes.

DM:

Oh, okay.

PC:

Yes. We had live groups as well as—it'd be like Bill Gaither today. That kind of a thing, and there was a stamps quartet and the Blackwood Brothers quartet and they were very popular and well-known in those days. We had some of those groups come in and sing for us.

DM:

Okay. Well, I know I kind of went off in another direction from what we were talking about, but I wanted to establish—apparently, you were called to the ministry at some point, and I don't know if this happened before your military experience or after or during or—

PC:

I would have to say that was kind of a blended thing because it was just a part of my basic conviction and nature in my makeup, and it's to say they, of course, they had a lot of religious programs on the air, but as a major is concerned, electrical engineering would be the closest as it comes today. It was broadcast engineering. Now, I had to have a first-class engineer's license from the FCC [**Federal Communications Commission**], and I had to study for that test, and that was part of the curriculum in that broadcast engineering program. Course, this went with what I

was doing on radio, and it kind of made a composite—it gave me a pretty good base for broadcasting and talking and everything.

DM:

Okay. Now back to your basic training. In the course of this basic training, you were looking at the very strong possibility of going off to war, and I just wonder if there was any—were there any pacifist inclinations that caused any confusion in your mind or anything like that? Because it did with some people.

PC:

Yes. Not to any extent. When I look back on those days, it was kind of like 9/11 that united us for a few days, you know. When Hitler declared war, it just united people to an extent that there was hardly a dissident or an unbeliever. Now, they did find this Jewish couple, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, that were spies. They didn't even bother to take them by the courthouse. They took them out, stood them at the wall, and shot them right then, and the country was very united, and I've said many times that when America got into the war, they changed the Chevrolets into Sherman tanks and they changed the Pontiacs, I guess, into B-17's and everything was like that to the extent of course that—course, one of the icons at that time was a woman called "Rosie the Riveter." Well, Rosie was there with a bandana around her head and her sleeves rolled up, and she was putting aluminum aircraft carriers together, or the airplanes, you know, so everyone was united in spirit and we were not even I think aware of any kind of some diversity movement at all.

DM:

I think you're exactly right from a historian's perspective—what you'd hear as that was very much the case in World War II although in World War I, there was a little bit of a difference, so, okay. Let's go back to your basic training then. Can you remember about when you finished your sixteen weeks?

PC:

It was shortly after my enlistment in February of 19—well, in 1943 was when I went to active service, and course, the basic training included a lot of close order drill and taking a rifle apart and putting it back together. All those kinds of things, and at the end, after I had been called to active duty, I had left Camp Roberts, California, and was transferred to the northern branch of the University of Southern California at Davis, and went to single-course school. Single-course school was supposed to teach you how to copy the Morse code with the dits and the dahs at twenty-five words a minute. I thought that was going to be the end of me. I thought I would never learn to copy twenty-five words a minute, which I did, and of course, as it goes in the army, after I was deployed overseas, I never heard a dit or a dah the rest of my life. [Laughs]

DM:

Could you still recall some of that if you had to?

PC:

Oh, yes. Yes. I've got what they call a "bug" at home and I can still use that bug and I could copy at a slower speed of course, but you see, an 'E' was one dit, an 'I' was two, an 'S' was three, and an 'H' was four. Well, it went about [spoken trilling of Morse code]. Well, I tell you, it took me a while to figure out an 'I' for an 'S' for an 'H'.

DM:

I tell you what. You just—from the beginner's end, it looks like a long, long road.

PC:

Oh. Well, they kept after us, of course. It was a matter of drill and concentration and repetition, you know. Took us weeks to do it.

DM:

What about semaphore? Did they try to teach you semaphore?

PC:

No. That was the Navy. That was the Navy, but it didn't enter into anything we had to do with the single-course part, as far as the army was concerned.

DM:

Okay. Was it all using the telegraph type? [Tapping on table]

PC:

Yes.

DM:

And no blinking lights or any—that's Navy too, I suppose.

PC:

That's right. Right.

DM:

Okay. Well—

PC:

Now then—excuse me. The code that we used mostly was called a “key” and we used that key, but the thing that pressed it one way was the dits and the other way was the dah, the bug [trilling of code], you know, and that’s where we were supposed to be able to—it was easier to send code at a higher speed than it was to receive at a higher speed, so that’s the way that went.

DM:

That’s interesting. I think that’s kind of the way it is with foreign languages too—easier to speak it than to hear it.

PC:

Very definitely. It sure it.

DM:

And this went on for how long? This training in signal? In communications?

PC:

It must’ve been somewhere between four and six months, and of course, there’s a new rumor in the army every Monday morning when you get up, so we get through with our training in the signal course and pass that code speed, and we’d get on a troop train in California and we’d go all the way to New Jersey. Now, I want you to be impressed with the fact—you’d be surprised to know there was no air conditioning in those days. The windows were open, so the old chugging steam engine was blowing out all those—that coal and smoke, and we looked like Black Sambo when we got to New Jersey, you know.

DM:

How long would that trip take?

PC:

It took a couple of weeks, and of course, first thing we were supposed to do, they called it G.I.—your clothing, and you were supposed to boil everything on a big stove and see if you couldn’t get the soot out of it. We turned it tattletale gray. [Laughs] There was no such thing as bleach. We looked like Old Black Joe most of the time, you know, but the rest of the rumor was that we were getting ready to be taken from New Jersey to the shore. We were going to get on troop ships and go to Europe. Well, it was partially true. We got on the troop train and we went all the way back out to California. [Laughs] Never, didn’t even see the sign of that ship going to Europe, which I guess is all right.

DM:

Did you happen to go through Joplin?

PC:

No. No, I didn't. It's a wonder I didn't. Even we went through Canada, as a matter of fact.

DM:

Is that right? [Laughs]

PC:

That far north.

DM:

The great northern, I guess.

PC:

We deployed out of Seattle, and I tell people that's where I got my Navy sea legs because we went to sea on a little Merchant Marine thing that had ropes all over and piles all over the place, and I called that thing the "U.S.S. Bobbing Cork" because when we got out in the swells of the ocean and the bow went down like this and the rear end came out—the prop was out and it vibrated until you went back into the water, and I would never kindly look toward an apricot I don't believe again as long as I live.

DM:

Why is that?

PC:

We had apricots for breakfast and by noon they were all over the ship. [Laughs] Oh, my goodness, and you know what? Of course, you learn these things by doing it. I learned this by observation. When we got on the boat, they had that little thing turned into a troop carrier four bunks high. I got on the top bunk. All those below me contributing to the apricots, you know, when they went down to the deck, I didn't have to at least mess with that, but I will tell you, I made my contribution of the apricots and fed the fishes also and leaned over the side. Oh, what a mess that was.

DM:

How long did that last before you got a little accustomed to it?

PC:

Oh, it must've been up to forty-eight hours of thing like that, and we went out to Honolulu and we were stationed in Schofield Barracks¹ for a period time, very shortly, and then we did get on a

¹ Schofield Barracks is a United States Army installation located in Honolulu and O'ahu.

respectable troop ship for a ten-thousand mile trip to Okinawa, but there were so many men on that ship with our mess kit which we ate out of all the time, we ate the meal and then we had to dump it in the soap and then in the rinse like that. We could only get two meals a day going through that process because it took almost two hours to get to the food and two hours to clean our mess kit, and then it was almost time to go back for the other meal.

DM:

Good grief. So you stood in line?

PC:

Yeah. And we stood in line. I thought, you know, this is nonsense. I believe I'll volunteer for KP² [**kitchen Police or kitchen patrol**]. I volunteered for KP and didn't have to stand in line four hours a day or so, you know, and I learned to do two things real well, David. One of them was peel potatoes. You'd just be surprised how I could peel potatoes, and the other thing was they had eggs for breakfast. Had great big crates of eggs, and I crush those eggs two at a time over the plate. Throw those shells away, but nonetheless of course, you could graze on all the food that was being prepared, so I got to eat plenty of food without standing in line for it for many, many hours.

DM:

I guess it's better to peel potatoes than to stand in line.

PC:

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Didn't even mind.

DM:

Do you remember the names of those ships, the one coming out of Seattle then out of Honolulu?

PC:

I remember the one coming home. I have pictures of it. It's called the *Sea Owl*, so again, that was one of those things I deployed back this way from Korea and the rumors were about we wouldn't be on the ship or oh, this is leaving in the morning, and just everything. So, when I finally was ship bound, it was called the *Sea Owl*.

DM:

Okay. By the way, here, you grew up in Joplin, Missouri. Now you've worked in California and then then to the eastern sea board, then back to the Pacific, then all the way across the Pacific Ocean. Had you ever been anywhere before, out of Missouri, or—?

² KP duty is "kitchen police" or "kitchen patrol" work under the kitchen staff assigned to junior U.S. enlisted military personnel.

PC:

Nope. Not to speak of. I had been as—well, my parents had one couple that were real good friends. There's—I guess they've met before they moved to Joplin, Missouri. Name of friend, Bernice Smith, and they lived in Kansas City, and we could catch the train I want you to know that was a trip and a half. We were driving a hundred—or riding on a train a hundred and sixty-five miles, and I thought that was almost to the end of the earth, you know, so we made that trip several times.

DM:

It's kind of an intriguing thing to me because here are these young guys that grew up in the heartland of the US and now all of a sudden, they're seeing large sections of the United States and other parts of the world, and I wonder if it really—if you really thought about it at the time, like, “My goodness. Here I am in Honolulu. What on Earth?”

PC:

That's right. The same way. When we are off that troop train and were there in the Barton training area in New Jersey, we were close enough to New York City that us country hicks, boy I really thought that was coming, go in to New York City and stand look at those tall buildings, and of course, I had to go up the Empire State Building to say that I had done that, and see some of the other sites which was rather interesting, and of course, all those that had been gathered up for a basic training where I was, came from all over the place. Most of them were my age, coming through some part of college training, and they're a pretty sharp bunch, but some of them were from the hills of Tennessee where they could shoot a squirrel right off that limb, you know, and when they got to the driving range or the firing range, boy I'm telling you, they were really sharpshooters, but among those, I don't know how this man got caught up. He looked like he was old enough to almost be our grandfather. We called him “Pop Wesket.” Well, Pop went to the bar every night and he drunk himself into a pretty good stupor, so he'd feel good coming home before lights out. Sometimes, he didn't it make it by lights out, but Pop was on the bottom bunk where I was on the top bunk, and all these clowns and characters in there. They moved their footlockers out into the passageway where Pop couldn't get over them. He crawled over them on his hands and knees, and when he finally got to my bunk, “Crenshaw, I know you did this, you know”, and those clowns also short-sheeted his bed. Now, I know what it is to short-sheet a bed, but old Pop practically ripped those sheets right off the bed getting in, and he gave life to the party. Of course, our squadron leader had a little private box room of his own, and if we didn't behave ourselves right, we were in trouble, and he would get it. “Alright you guys, everybody out”, he says. “We're going to G.I. the barracks”. Three o'clock in the morning. Here comes the G.I. soap and the scrub buckets and the big brooms and all that kind of stuff, you know, and squeegee boards and we'd have to do that in the middle of the night and cut our sleep out of course. That was part of basic training.

DM:

Well, did he pretty much tolerate Pop?

PC:

Yeah, everybody did.

DM:

Even the squad leader?

PC:

Yeah. He got away with more than the rest of us put together would have.

DM:

Because he was older.

PC:

Yeah, and I really don't know how come he got caught in our bunch.

DM:

That'd be an interesting story, wouldn't it? [Laughs]

PC:

Right.

DM:

Well, let's go back to Honolulu. When you were there at Schofield Barracks, could you see any evidence of what had happened there two years earlier?

PC:

No. Not much. My college roommate was George Roundtree, and when I went the army, he went to the Navy and he became an ensign and was based in Honolulu, so we kept in touch, and George said he wanted to—he borrowed a four-by-four truck of some kind. He said he was going to show me Honolulu, you know, by night. Well, Diamond Head is one of the main places everybody—Waikiki Beach—he was going to show me everything, and we wound up in a parking lot of the University of Hawaii rather than anything else, so we didn't get to see too much, you know. The other thing I remember of course about—of being in Honolulu for just a few days was that we would go to where they were harvesting the pineapple and putting them in cans, and you could just drink yourself into a stupor on pineapple juice. I've always loved pineapple juice.

DM:

Was it Dole back then?

PC:

Yes, it was. Dole pineapple. Surely was, and it was an interesting thing. Just too see the arms that were out over several rows of the pineapples, and those people were cutting them off of there and putting them in a conveyor belt behind them and quite a process. They had it down to a pretty good nub at that time, you know.

DM:

Kind of a different world you found yourself in there, the volcanic hills and all.

PC:

Yeah, right. Right.

DM:

When did you leave out of Honolulu then? Do you know when you shipped out?

PC:

No, I don't. It would have been in the year in probably the tail end of 1943, I expect because I was deployed to Okinawa.

DM:

Oh, you went to Okinawa then?

PC:

Yeah. When I went to Okinawa, as my habit was, I went to church. Again, that's kind of using the term loosely. The church was a tent in a muddy field, but when I went to this service, I was so surprised that the chaplain just preached a gospel sermon and invited people to learn—to accept Jesus. Well, we had a lot in common. Of course, I had years of piano and organ at home and I had played the organ for chapel services stateside, both for protestant and catholic services, so when he learned that I had that kind of a background, he said he'd see if he couldn't get me transferred to him. Well, it was almost impossible to get transfers from one division to another in a battle zone, an active warzone, and he got the signature of two-star general and transferred me to him as his assistant. Now, his name was Venice L. Wunneburger.

DM:

Tell me again. Wunneburger?

PC:
Wunneburger.

DM:
How would you spell that?

PC:
W-u-n-n-e-b-u-r-g-e-r.

DM:
Okay.

PC:
Of course, the chaplain was a captain rank with double bars on his shoulders. He did not want anyone to call him "Captain". He did not want anyone to call him "Chaplain." He wanted them to call him "Brother." He called everybody "Brother." There was a two-star general that was exiting the tent back where he was greeting people, and Chaplain Wunneburger laid his arm on his hand—his hand on his arm, and to the two-star general, he said, "Brother, I'm sure glad you got to be with us today." "Chaplain, attention! Don't put a hand on me, and please don't call me 'Brother!'" "Well now, brother, I didn't mean anything by it. I just wanted you to know that we enjoyed having you in our service." I had only been married about two months when I went overseas, and I told the chaplain, I said, "You know, when I get home, I'm going to be the head of my house." "Well now, brother, that's alright. You can be the head if you want to, but you know, it's the neck that turns the head, and your wife is the neck," so he always had a droll thing for everything. I would regale him with some wild tale that I was good at, driving the jeep as we were going down a muddy road. I'd get to the end of that story and he says, "Well brother, I don't care how thin you slice it, it's still baloney". That was the way he generally wound up some story I told him.

DM:
It's still the what?

PC:
Baloney.

DM:
Oh, it's still baloney.

PC:
It's still baloney. [Laughs]

DM:

Well, this brings up another interesting thing. You were married two months before you deployed.

PC:

Yes. I try to admonish young men at a marriageable age today to be careful about women because they're very devious. I thought I came home on a furlough from New Jersey to plan my wedding with my bride. I went back a married man. There was—I was trapped, you know.

[Laughs] She graduated from John Brown University. She went to Baptist State Hospital in Little Rock to become a nurse, so she was a registered nurse. She was also a church organist for about twenty-five years, and I did have an expression that I don't know how many people agreed with. I said that, "My wife and I made a good combination where weddings were concerned and funerals because my wife could make a beautiful wedding and my organ playing was so sorry, at a funeral if they weren't crying when they came in, they were weeping when they went out.

[Laughs]

DM:

Give me her name if you don't mind.

PC:

Ruth.

DM:

Ruth, okay.

PC:

Ruth Treadwell Crenshaw. We were married sixty-six years. She passed away in 2010 of Parkinson's disease which is a declining disease, of course. Very little suffering, but just a lack of ability to be mobile or your memory goes away. It's just a declining process like that.

DM:

What was it like to be overseas then and be recently married? That must've worn on you at least to a degree.

PC:

It did. We relied on mail call. My mother was faithful. I still have quite a packet of letters from my wife. I still have quite a packet of letters from my mother. Very few—my daddy was too busy running the print shop, and his penmanship was not all that good, but of course, I treasured those, and when we got to Okinawa, he was just—after a tremendous typhoon had hit Okinawa, and a lot of the military headquarters and everything were in what we called Quonset huts. The

Quonset hut was a half-moon shape thing, pretty long like a cigar and those Quonset huts were flying through the air like the autumn leaves. Now, I didn't see that. That was before I got there, but Okinawa was a distributing point for mail all over the South Pacific, and it all blew away, and of course there was no way that was going to be recovered and the men were just devastated because there's no communication there for months that went on until they finally got things back under control.

DM:

Oh, my. Now, in typical circumstances, how often would you get mail? I mean, could you get it every week?

PC:

Probably once a week was the average.

DM:

And your outgoing mail. Was it heavily censored?

PC:

Yes. As a matter of fact, of course the chaplain's mail was not, and he wrote my mother a letter. Mother thought I was somewhere in the South Pacific, but she sure didn't know, and she about had a heart attack when the chaplain had written her a letter—said I was on Okinawa. [Laughs]

DM:

Ooh, yes.

PC:

Okinawa was the scene of the largest battle of World War II in the Pacific. Hundreds of thousands were lost, both of the Japanese and of the Americans, and so it was a very intense time, and I was there during part of that battle time. Now, the Japanese had brainwashed their military from the youth that they were to kill as many of the enemy as they could, and then commit *hara-kiri* [suicide] for the emperor, and it was a disgrace if they were captured. It was a disgrace for their family, and of course, they tried to resolve that by killing themselves. When I was attached then to Brother Wunneburger, he was not satisfied at all to just serve the army to which he was attached. He found their contingencies there of the marines and of the air force and he said, "Well, Brother, we've got to have services for them". Then he decided we should have them for the civilians and for the school teachers and for the school kids, and then lo and behold, he found that we had a prisoner of war camp for the Japanese. "Well, Brother, we've got to get to them some way, you know." So here I am on this trustee G.I. furnished hand typewriter which you threw the level back when you got to the end of the sentence, and under his dictation, we wrote letters to the American Bible Society, International Bible Society, the Catholics, the

Baptists, the Methodists, “Do you have any literature in the Japanese language? Do you have any brochures? Do you have any New Testaments? Do you have any Japanese bibles?” Well, communication was very sluggish and poor in those days. Generally, we did not get an answer. If we did, it was a courteous, “No, we don’t know and don’t have anything like that”. One day, there was a man who came up to the chaplain’s office which was a tent and said, “Sir, I’ve been sent by the commander of my vessel. Here’s the large cargo ship in the harbor”, and he said, “Before we left, someone brought the captain some boxes. It’s got religious literature there of some kind”, and he says, “Whenever you get to Okinawa, get hold of a Padre or somebody and give them those boxes”. Well, of course, I didn’t say earlier that we probably had six, maybe seven services every Sunday for all these various branches of the military and Chaplain Wunneburger was known all over the island. It was not a big island, about seventy miles long and twenty to thirty miles wide, but this man was directive, said, “We will see Chaplain Wunneburger.” You might be interested to know that the contents of those boxes had one-thousand Japanese New Testaments.

DM:

Is that right?

PC:

But then we had another problem. We had the New Testaments, but we didn’t have any way of communication. “Well Brother, we’ve got to find somebody who can translate between English and Japanese”. It turned out that there was an Okinawan school teacher who could translate, so we use—his name was Aoki.

DM:

Ah Oki?

PC:

Aoki.

DM:

Could you give me a spelling?

PC:

Aoki also had a problem. He stuttered very badly.

DM:

Give me a spelling on that if you know it.

PC:

A-o-k-i. I should have brought the New Testament, David. I've got one.

DM:

Oh, do you really?

PC:

Yeah. I say that I kind of misspoke when I tell people that we distributed a thousand. We distributed nine-hundred ninety-nine and I've got the one-thousandth for myself, and I have Aoki's signature in there both in Okinawan and in Japanese. Anyway, there were three different divisions there of people in Okinawa that Brother Wunneburger administered to. The Okinawans, the Japanese, and the Koreans, and those groups hated each other with a passion and if they could get within stone-throwing distance, the rocks would really fly, but when they came to one of these services, it was absolutely peace and quiet, never did graze a hair or any stones like that, so we were able to minister to them, and there was one Japanese hymn book that I treasured very much. I gave it to my son Randall because he was a musician and appreciated it, and at the top, it had the music for the song and a lot of them were the old time ones like "Sweet Hour of Prayer," "Amazing Grace," you know, and the bottom, it had the words in Japanese. So through various ones who copied, they would copy those songs off and we would sing the song in the religious services that Brother Wunneburger had for us. Now, my job of course was to play the field organ. The field organ, and there's one out at the Silent Wings Museum on display out there, it folds up out of a box. When you pull it up like that, here's the keyboard. Down at the bottom is a pair of pedals, and you pump those, and it sounded like an oversized accordion, made a pretty good sound, you know, and I played the organ for the services for these various groups and also for the Japanese prisoners of war.

DM:

How many keys would be on this organ? How big was this?

PC:

I'd probably play about three octaves and about thirty-six inches, something like that. Once, Aoki came to Brother Wunneburger and he said, "Sir, there's a Japanese prisoner here who has said that he has accepted Jesus as his savior and wants to be baptized. His name is Nuzaki, and Brother Wunneburger said, "Well, I'll go see the commandant of the prison," and we got permission to take Nuzaki out of the camp to the banks of the East China Sea. So here are the four of us, of course, the war couldn't have been fought without me driving that jeep, so I'm the jeep driver, Brother Wunneburger sitting by my side, and in the back are a pair of enemies, the Okinawan and the Japanese, and we go to the bank of the East China Sea, the three of them go out in the water where Brother Wunneburger baptizes Nuzaki. I've also got Nuzaki's signature both in Japanese and I don't know what the other language is for him, and when they came back

from shore, we used the old song that would go back to people several generations ago, "Oh, Happy Day that Fixed my Choice on Thee my Savior and my God." So I played the organ on the banks of the East China Sea while the baptismal service took place.

DM:

Great story.

PC:

Yeah.

DM:

Let me get Nuzaki's spelling.

PC:

N-u-z-a-k-i.

DM:

Okay. This will be transcribed, so it will be helpful to know these.

PC:

Okay, right. N-u-z-a-k-i.

DM:

N-u-z-a-k-i.

PC:

I. N-u-z-a-k-i.

DM:

Okay. Great, great story. So there were several services on Sundays. One was for civilians?

PC:

Yes.

DM:

This is when the people mostly spoke Japanese?

PC:

They were Okinawans and we used the translator of course quite often it was Aoki, but we could use anyone that could speak on that basis because that didn't require the Japanese, but it was so

muddy that we sometimes went back to our tents and changed clothes a second time because our G.I.'s just bogged down with globs of mud until we couldn't even hardly move.

DM:

Very wet climate anyhow.

PC:

Oh, it was so—the mud was so bottomless, I've got a picture of a jeep that was nosed down through the mud and it literally sunk out of sight and disappeared and the man struggled to get out of it and get to firm land. It was a mess.

DM:

So these services. There was a civilian service, but then you had services for different branches or did you have different denominational services?

PC:

Not denominational. We had for the contingency people for the Navy, and also for the marines, and as a matter of fact, Brother Wunneburger had a first nephew by the name of Henry who was in the marines and through him, we borrowed a vehicle so that we could into Naha and—Naha was the capital, it still is, of Okinawa, and after we had all the services on Sunday, Monday was our day off, so Brother Wunneburger borrows Henry and his four-by-four or something I think, and we go into Naha—souvenir hunting. Now, the highest point of Okinawa, still is, is a point called Shuri Castle, and that was where the island emperor lived, and of course, he was descended down through no telling how many deities of the past, you know, but when the Americans got through with that part of Okinawa, there was not a tree standing. Everything was splinters and rubble until you couldn't believe it, so I shuffled through some of that stuff and, oh David, I should have brought some of these things I guess, but of course you couldn't show it anyway. I mean, it wouldn't show up. I found a beautiful Oriental bowl about diameter I think of about eight inches and about three inches high, and I thought, "Oh, that is really beautiful". It's all in one piece. Not shattered at all.

DM:

A wooden bowl?

PC:

No, it was some kind of ceramic, and I'm sure it's hand-painted. Oh, that is really nice. I sure wish I could find the lid for that. I shuffled along after a while, and do—would you know where I found the lid? And I have the lid on that bowl. It sits on my Gately table at home. My prized memory of Okinawa. We did not know when we went to Naha that day that it was off-limits

because of the Japanese snipers who were still in the buildings, and it was only God's mercy I guess that saved us from getting killed.

DM:

So you could go right in and no checkpoints to stop you?

PC:

Nothing.

DM:

Wow.

PC:

Nothing. Now, the battle in Okinawa was the only place—I hope I'm still right on this—that the chaplain was not permitted—he was ordered to wear side arms, and he had a pistol on his hip. Well, he wasn't used to firing that thing, and all at once we were down here trying to get out of that four-by-four vehicle and went, "Ka-powey!" He had shot the running board. It's a wonder he hadn't shot his foot, so it was kind of a joke that we were safe as long as Brother Wunneburger had a pistol on his hip. [Laughs] But we did not know that we were in off-limits territory.

DM:

Did you witness any combat situations or see any shelling from—?

PC:

Yes. Yes, indeed. We were based at the base of an escarpment from which the Japanese had bulldozed out a runway for their planes, and so when we took over that island, we brought onboard from the air force the Chance Vought fighter plane that had been manufactured in Grand Prairie, Texas of all places and I lived there at a later time, and one morning just about daybreak, the Japanese decided they were going to land on that airstrip, Yontan airstrip³, and demolish all of our airplanes. They did a pretty good job because they'd landed on the airstrip, and when the Japanese soldiers got out, they had hand grenades and they put the hand grenades in the landing gear of the fighter planes and of course that disabled them for good. I think in addition to that, there was one plane load of Japanese on one of these transports that didn't overshoot the runway. He hit the escarpment and it blew that plane clear out of the sky, parts of bodies and everything was all over the place. We saw that the next day, but that had been a key area of our defense and offense with the air force, those planes, and that next day, we could only get seven planes into the air. It just practically destroyed—it was a very good tactic by the Japanese, short-term, but we saw that kind of thing.

³ Yontan Airfield is a former military airfield on Okinawa.

DM:

Did you see any kind of kamikaze activity? I mean, that was almost suicidal, it sounds like.

PC:

Yes. Yes, it was. Yeah, the kamikazes were hitting the cargo planes and the troop carrier types in the harbor like that.

DM:

Could you see the harbor?

PC:

Yes. I saw the harbor. As the enemy was driven south, the south end of Okinawa was very filled with crags and escarpments and caves, and of course one of the cruel inventions of World War II was the flamethrower and the Japanese were hidden back in those caves and of course came out to a screaming death, most of them, when the army had the flamethrowers after them, and of course we saw that, but many of them, out of honor to the Emperor, jumped off those escarpments into the sea, and it was always boiling and going, and it was quite a mess to see all that go on.

DM:

I know there were a lot of casualties, especially among the Japanese, but a lot among the American troops as well, but also civilians. I've heard there were high civilian casualties. Did you see any sign of that?

PC:

Yes. Well, one of the main places that the chaplain and I went was to the military tent hospitals that were filled with just, really, army cots full of men with all kinds of injuries and suffering and they had pretty good medical staff, you know, and this is where they tried to do what they could for the men there. I've said many times that I don't go out to preserve my life because most of the men that I trained with in basic training in California are buried in the South Pacific today. The most scared I ever was, David, was when Japan surrendered and they called that V-J Day, and those crazy Americans, shooting live ammunition off fifty-caliber machine guns, bullets and everything, and the sky was crisscross with more tracer ammunition than you've ever seen on the 4th of July, and I heard a bullet or two pass me real quickly, and I'll tell you what. I went and got into a foxhole while they were celebrating the end of the war which seemed like to me was starting all over again. Oh, mercy. [Laughs]

DM:

It makes you wonder if anyone did get caught in that.

PC:

Well, one fellow I know of in our area there, he got the heel of his boot shot off and I don't know whether it hurt his foot or not, but you know, everybody, "Ka-pow, ka-pow, ka-pow".

DM:

Good night. So you were on Okinawa on V-J Day?

PC:

Yes.

DM:

Okay.

PC:

Now at that time, that was when they were getting ready to make the final push to assault Japan with troops on the ground as we call it today, and one of the planes, the plane that's on display out at the Silent Wings Museum is a biplane, a two-engine plane, and they were cargo bringing all kinds of equipment in and armaments and everything, and they were landing and taking off around the clock like a DFW in New York City, you know.

DM:

Okinawa was the big stockpile spot for that anticipated invasion?

PC:

Yeah. Yep.

DM:

Did you ever hear any talk about either at that time or a little afterward talk about what it would require to take mainland Japan if the bombs had not been dropped?

PC:

To a very limited extent because we all lived in our own little world, you know. We were referring briefly to the honor flights. I had been to Washington several times and seen the statutes and everything, but I had not seen the bigger-than-life statue of raising the flag on Iwo Jima. Now Iwo Jima was a very small island directly north of Okinawa, and of course, most people would have no way of knowing that we lost more marines on the first day of trying to take Hiroshima than we lost on D-Day in Europe across the [English] Channel. There were better than six thousand marines lost, and of course, the highlight of that is when they raised the flag, five men who raised that flag, one of whom was not an American citizen, it was Ira Hayes and he was a Pima Indian. Now, I don't know if anybody knows to this day how he squirmed his way in

to being a marine, but he wanted to, so the five men raised the flag. Three of them were killed, they never left the island. Ira Hayes was one who survived. They brought him back to the States to do bond-raising to raise money for the war, and his memories were so horrible that he would drink himself into a stupor at night, and then they would prop him up during the day to do bond-raising, and he finally died a horrible alcoholic death from the experience of trying to live through that thing, but that statue is very impressive.

DM:

Right at Arlington Cemetery, the entrance.

PC:

Yeah. Right.

DM:

Which one is Ira Hayes, by the way? You know, there's one on the ground pulling the poll, then there are three pushing it up, and then the fifth one back there is reaching up toward the poll. Do you remember—

PC:

Yeah, they almost—never identified the fifth one, I think. I don't think they finally did. No, I don't know which one Ira Hayes is.

DM:

I'm sure someone has speculated on that, but—

PC:

To me, it's a very interesting statue.

DM:

Did you ever hear of a speculation about what it would take to take—what the cost would be to take mainland Japan?

PC:

No. Of course, everybody's got their own opinion, and in hindsight, it's twenty-twenty vision. I maintain if they had sent Japan a message that we're going to obliterate one of your uninhabited islands with an atomic bomb, I think they would have surrendered just as easily as they did by dropping those bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Of course, they didn't do that, but obviously, Japan was getting to the end of its extended empire, you know, the rising sun was going to shine over all those things from the Solomon Islands and the Philippines and everything, and of course, they started retracting with the crank up of the war, and I always think it was such a prophetic

thing, that I think it was Santayana who said, after they've dropped the bomb on Pearl Harbor, says "I think all we've managed to do is to wake a sleeping giant." And little did they know that America had the capacity to crank out a war that could waged both in Europe and the Far East at the same time.

DM:

And like you were mentioning earlier, total war effort. Men, women, you know, the entire economy transferred toward war. When you were on Okinawa, did you receive news of those atomic bomb drops? Was that news quickly out?

PC:

Very little detail about it. We heard about it, but there was very little detail.

DM:

What else can you tell me about your time in Okinawa that you haven't already mentioned? Oh, I did have a question for you about your particular service. You did the services on Sunday. Did you go visit—

PC:

The schools during the week.

DM:

—the schools, so you did some civilian work during the week. Did you go visit wounded men on a regular basis?

PC:

Oh, yes. Yes. There were several places where they had the field hospitals set up, and two of the chaplain's accommodations, he just worked from daylight to dark-thirty, and I was glad it was that way, you know. There was another denomination without mentioning what it was where the chaplain served, but after he heard a confession, they brought out the beer kegs and the cards and had a good time until the next Sunday. He just—boy, it wasn't chaplain Wunneburger. Matter of fact, I mentioned that the chaplain had his first nephew by the name of Henry. Well, I had a surprise one morning when Joe Edwards showed up at Brother Wunneburger's tent. My first cousin from ten-thousand miles away, here's ol' Joe.

DM:

It's a small world, huh?

PC:

It really is. It was really amazing.

DM:

That is incredible. Wow.

PC:

As far as other activity on Okinawa, because I was a chaplain's assistant, he had entailed quite a little bit of correspondents where, just like Joe who came up, I think I'm kind of a spiritual need, but they came to the chaplain because of the wife back home wasn't getting the paycheck from the government or they had a problem, you know, my wife's going to leave me or she already left me.

DM:

Chaplain was a cure-all, kind of. He took care of all things.

PC:

Yes, and so, some of what I did was under his direction, of course, dictation. We write letters back home to many sources or to some kind of an organization. It might help, or there was a problem like this that never seized, so he stayed busy with this kind of a thing, and then we travelled all over that island in muddy conditions. It was just—it was a slow go, you know. On one occasion, it didn't help the war effort much. I borrowed the jeep and got three other fellows and we decided we would go souvenir looking at the northern of the island. Well, we ran out of road and we ran into mud pass and we finally ran into the forest, decided we had to turn around and come back and learn to our shock later that there were a lot of Japanese snipers up there holding out to see if they could stay of getting captured. Well, it's a wonder again that we weren't shot out of that jeep, so—.

DM:

But again, you could wonder into these areas. They weren't really secured by checkpoints and this kind of thing.

PC:

That's right. Oh, that's right.

DM:

Wow.

PC:

Yeah, the thing was just totally open.

DM:

Was this before V-J Day?

PC:

Yes. Oh, yes.

DM:

Was there any kind of—were there any holdouts after V-J Day?

PC:

Yes, there was, of course they had stories about some of those Japanese that were found years later. They've been eating oak leaves or something I guess to stay alive. We didn't see any of those snipers. Thank goodness. I think they were fearful that they might be discovered and they were hiding out in silence of course, but we were up there just as big as dummies as you could be, you know.

DM:

Well, I'm glad just to see you here today.

PC:

Yeah, that's right. [Laughs]

DM:

Well, here's another question. Here you are a musician with an organ in tow and now that had to be a rarity on the island. Were you ever called in to do any secular kind of music?

PC:

Now it's strange that, David, you would mention that. All the Japanese prisoners wanted to have a talent show. [Laughs] That's using the term loosely. Part of the talent show was they got out the paper copies, how they kept them dry I don't even know. Copies of the hymns that Brother Wunneburger had used in the Christian services, and so they wanted to all get together and here they are, and of course, nationally, you've got to have an organ playing the accompaniment here, so I went home being able to say that overseas, I had played the organ for four thousand Japanese prisoners of war in a talent show on a small island named Okinawa. [Laughs]

DM:

Were they seeing this as a—did you say it was hymns?

PC:

Yeah. For their talent show.

DM:

Were they seeing this as a religious event or a secular event?

PC:

Secular. Oh, secular.

DM:

But it was the music they had. How interesting.

PC:

You know, it's really a shame in a way as I look back on it now. I don't even think there was a problem among the POWs because they were so humiliated, they were downcast, they looked at the ground, and they were just nobodies when the emperor said that "We are the generation that would rule the world," and they were very docile, but they were polite and they seemed to appreciate us being among them because I've read books recently, recently, where the Japanese cruelly tortured prisoners of war to death, and they didn't see that kind of treatment from the Americans where they were the victims, you know.

DM:

That's probably what they expected because it's probably what they were told.

PC:

Yes. Oh, yes. You dare not be captured. You'd just be tortured to death.

DM:

Anything else that you can tell me about Okinawa before we move on to Korea?

PC:

No.

DM:

Something might occur to you later. If it does, let me know. We'll record it.

PC:

Okay, okay. During that part of the war, we had all accumulated our military record on points from the day that we enlisted. Brother Wunneburger had more points than I did because he was in service earlier, so he was going to go home on points and keep me from being lost in the morass of whatever knowing that there were going to be troops transferred to Korea for occupation duty. This was before the Korean War. He made arrangements for me to be transferred to Korea. In making this transition, David, I think this is most interesting. Of course, a lot of people didn't like General MacArthur because he talked about "my army" and "my navy." Well, now, I'll tell you what. He was a brilliant general, and when it was time to occupy Korea, he felt that if he could go into the very middle and cut it in two, it would just, kind of like

the Mason-Dixon Line, and so the troop carriers in the boats went in to Korea at Incheon. Now, Incheon had the greatest rise and fall of the tide anywhere in the world. Some thirty feet from when it was high tide to low tide. As a matter of fact, the Japanese had two manned submarines that were stuck in the mud because they didn't get out before it went to low tide. As a matter of fact, I got on one of those—you know, I had an aversion to being a souvenir hunter, so I finally got out one of those two-manned Japanese subs and took the compass out of that and brought it clear home to me, and the compass floated in oil and it was quite a hunk of stuff, and I regret that now that I finally threw it away because it was leaking oil all over the house, but nonetheless, the Japanese had got stuck in those little two-manned subs, but we went into Incheon and the Japanese were fooled or misinformed. They thought it was a military maneuver. They didn't even think that this was the Americans going in on this island. Now, I might have some G.I.s, correct me on that, but—.

DM:

Give me a date on this. When did you end up over there?

PC:

It was 1945.

DM:

What month would it have been? After V-J. Yeah, okay.

PC:

Because of that, the American troops almost cut Korea in two before the Japanese woke up. See, the Japanese had to been on Korea for ten years, and it surprised the Japanese to the extent that General MacArthur got a brilliant victory there and it cut the time down, and the Japanese, because they had so—they were cruel to the Koreans and treated them worse than slaves and tortured them and everything, they collected everything of any value, among which was a Chinese silver dollar that was used on Korea that was larger than our American silver dollar. It had more silver in it, and I stood by a pile of them one time that was taller than I am, and so of course, looking to the souvenirs side of things, I had quite a bag full and I collected all these Chinese silver dollars and took them back to my quarters, and then we were given notice that “You will not take one of those out of Korea, and you'd better leave them here or you're in trouble.” Well, hindsight being what it is, I wanted to keep a few of them, and I threw them in the bottom of my duffle bag, and of course there was no such thing as a scanner on them or anything like that, and hindsight being what it is, I should've saved that whole bag in the bottom of my duffle bag, but Chinese silver dollars was only one thing. The Chinese—the American or anywhere—silver service that had a silver pitcher and the sugar and the cream were in and everything. They had melt—mashed those things down in a crushing deal and they were getting ready to melt those to get the silver out of them

DM

The Japanese were doing this.

PC:

The Japanese were doing this.

DM:

So they were confiscated. They were plundering Korea.

PC:

Oh, yeah. Very definitely.

DM:

How did the Koreans react to these American liberators? I guess they saw you as liberators.

PC:

Yes. They were glad to see us, because they knew they was taking the pressure off of their Japanese people that had been over there for ten years, treated very cruelly.

DM:

Did you go into—where did you land then?

PC:

Well, I landed in Seoul. Well, I went into Incheon, but I went into Seoul which is the capital, and of course having had years of broadcasting back in the states, I was assigned to the armed forces radio service in Seoul, AFRS [**Armed Forces Radio Service**] and I broadcast through that facility medium all the time that I was in Seoul, and also about that time, because the war had not devastated the island at that point—that wasn't the Korean War—the street cars were running, and again I'm using that term loosely. You could not have told it was a street car because they were hanging out the windows, they were on the cow catcher, they were on the roof of that thing, and how the motor would ever maneuver that thing down the street, and so I do not know, and of course there's no such thing as taking a collection or getting a tickets or anything, but the service is free for all those who can get on it.

DM:

By the way, when you went into this broadcasting armed services, were you still considered a chaplain's assistant at that time?

PC:

No.

DM:

This was a totally separate—

PC:

That's right. I was U.S. army, but I was not a chaplain's assistant anymore.

DM:

I got you. Okay.

PC:

One of the more unpleasant sides of thing was there was no such thing as a sewage system in Seoul, and they had what they called the honey carts, and the honey carts ran every morning and if you were a blind person, you would know when they went by, but—.

DM:

Were people dumping their chamber pots into the honey carts?

PC:

Yes, yes, oh, yes. That's where they collected everything. Where they took it, I don't know. Another factor about that was because they had treated the Koreans so cruelly, they were practically skin and bones anyway, and this was the cruel winter time when it was very cold, the thirty-eight parallel was just frostbite, and so they had big four-wheeled cars that were horse-drawn that collected the bodies that had frozen to death the night before. They had all been hidden—they had hidden themselves—anything to get out of the wind. Under the bridges and everything like that, so you can imagine what a scene that was with these street cars looking like they were covered with bumblebees or something, and the honey carts and the term "hearse" is not—you know, collecting all the dead bodies. It was really a sad scene.

DM:

Was starvation a problem?

PC:

Oh, tremendous. Yeah, they starved many of them to death.

DM:

Okay.

PC:

So anyway, I was with Armed Forces Radio Service until all the rumors finally came out to one when I was actually on board the *Sea Owl* going home, and as a last shot at the profession—I

guess—they had a public audio system and I was in a little booth with a microphone and a couple turntables playing the music for them on the way home, so that lasted all the way. Now, of course I was always full of chicanery (0:18:40.0) if possible. I wrote as many letters home as I could, and I told my friend, I said, “I’ve written some letters here. I want you to mail them one a day, and I hope I’m going to hit the States about the time that last one lands,” for my parents, and so when I called, I came back in through Seattle as a matter of fact, and when I came back in through Seattle and called home, Mother says, “You can’t be home!” She says, “I just got a letter from you today from Korea!” I says, “April Fools, Mother!” It worked. [Laughs] Now, the one thing that didn’t get home, I’ve—forgetting a long time ago, I had an M1 rifle. Oh, yes, he would ship it home for me. I haven’t seen it since. I haven’t seen it since, he promised.

DM:

Oh, I wonder where it is.

PC:

Probably hanging on somebody’s wall.

DM:

Probably so. Ends up at a gun show or something.

PC:

Yeah, that’s right.

DM:

Another question about Seoul. Was there any serious damage to the buildings or the town—the city itself from the Japanese occupation?

PC:

Yes.

DM:

Was there?

PC:

Yes. There was.

DM:

Okay.

PC:

As a matter of fact, almost the building next to where our broadcasting facilities were was a tall tower probably about—I would say it was about four or five stories high as far as elevation's concerned, and just out of curiosity, I asked if it was possible to get into that building. It was vacant, and I climbed all the stairs all the way to the top of that building so I could out and see it, and I don't know what it had been occupied for or anything like that, but I also climbed the Washington Monument stairs, five-hundred and fifty-five steps, just to say that I had done it, so that's kind of my nature to explore.

DM:

I'm afraid that's the way I am, too. [Laughs] My wife would always wait at the bottom. Yeah, right. Well, so poor Seoul. They didn't really have time to recover before the Korean War began.

PC:

No.

DM:

I know it was really devastated then.

PC:

As a matter of fact, David, with regard to our Honor Flight, the World War II veterans were favored because they were the oldest veterans to get them to Washington first, and of course, they were favored in the fact that this was a three day, two night trip, stayed at four-star hotels, had first class meals, and did not cost the veteran a thing, but as the attrition rate has increased, a World War II veteran is dying at the rate of every ninety seconds, and they say there will not be a World War II veteran alive by 2018, so we are now sorting through who will go on the Honor Flight from Lubbock on Thursday October 1st. Well, there's very few World War II veterans who will be on the flight because some of those who would be eligible to go, their health will not permit them, and of course as I say as they go free, the guardians who push wheelchairs and help with walkers and this kind of a thing, they pay. They pay sixteen-hundred dollars, but when we've taken all the World War II veterans who are available and able, then the next group are those from Korea, and so we're going to have quite a few of Korean veterans also. Possibly very, very few from Vietnam, but that's the way the scale's going to go.

DM:

Now you were saying "we." Are you going to go on this next one?

PC:

No. They've got a good policy and I agree with it. I went twice, and then they said, "Well, next time. let somebody else have that seat on the airplane", and so it's a mix. Of course, we've got a

Southwest flight, a 737, about a hundred and thirty-four seats, I believe. Some eighty-five or ninety will be veterans, and the rest will be guardians and medical people, and those administrating to getting the troops there and back.

DM:

Okay, but your experiences were good with Honor Flight?

PC:

Yes.

DM:

In 2012 and 2013. Is that right?

PC:

Yes. Uh-huh, and we've had a wonderful response. I say this many times with regard to my uniform. It's a magic thing that when I'm in that uniform, "Thank you for your services. We appreciate your service", and I'm glad to say, "You're so welcome. It's my privilege and my pleasure to have served," and people are appreciative of that today even with having a mixed outlook as far as our national scene is concerned today, but the veteran is still revered as he or she should be. As a matter of fact, the president of our local honor flight this year is Janis Vaughn who is a woman and retired lieutenant colonel in the air force and she just really looks so prim in that uniform. She is really a sweetheart and we just think the world of her, and of course, the veterans turn up for the July parade and when we have something going on at the Silent Wings Museum, they're right there. We have a—I believe a two-star general that lives in Lubbock. I can't recall his name at the moment, but we've got a lot of retired brass that's right in Lubbock.

DM:

I've interviewed some of them. I've got to get back out to Silent Wings and see this organ. I don't remember it. I missed it somehow, so I need to go ask about that.

PC:

Yeah. I think it's in a set-up where they show bunk—set of bunk beds and the—

DM:

I remember that.

PC:

Yeah. Hanging in the closet, you know, and I believe it's in that very same set up that they've got that organ. I have thought since I have a picture that was sent back. It was taken by the

Denver Post in 1945, and it showed the Japanese prisoners of war, showed Brother Wunneburger preaching to them, showed me seated at the organ, and recognizes that this is Phil Crenshaw technical—started at three from Joplin, Missouri.

DM:

Really? It was in what paper now?

PC:

Denver Post.

DM:

In the *Denver Post*.

PC:

In 1945.

DM:

Do you have a copy of it?

PC:

Oh, yes.

DM:

Ooh. I need to make a copy of your copy sometime to put here in the archives.

PC:

Okay. I'd be glad to show you some of the things that—the little things that—I feel pleased to have—had recognize is being this sole survivor as a chaplain's assistant which I have said is no credit of mine. The Lord had blessed me with real good health.

DM:

Very good health. You're age ninety-three?

PC:

Ninety-two.

DM:

Ninety-two now and doing very well, so.

PC:

Of course, I'm asked to speak at all kinds of events. Lion's Club is kind of a thing, you know, and churches and some of them say, "Phil, how old are you anyway," and I say, "Well, I'm ninety-two," and they say, "You don't look a day over ninety-one." [Laughs] And then they would ask me, "Well, Phil, how can you still get into your uniform seventy years later?" I says, "It's because of diet and my strict adherence to the five basic food groups: vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, butter pecan, and peanut brittle." [Laughs] Of course, Blue Bell let me down recently.

DM:

Oh, yes they have, haven't they?

PC:

And I've had bad Blue Bell withdrawal with symptoms.

DM:

Me too. Me too.

PC:

But I think I may be able to survive until they get it back.

DM:

We're holding on as best we can.

PC:

That's right. [Laughs]

DM:

Well, I'm glad that you're seeing appreciation for veterans wherever you go. You know, it just so happens that a generation comes along that carries that brunt of the load for lots of other generations, so I'm glad that there is that acknowledgement and that appreciation.

PC:

David, one of the things that's been a real—I'd say it's a blessing, with the Honor Flight fund—most men of course—not as sentimental as a woman and they don't open up much. Some have never opened up about their experiences at war, but they go on this Honor Flight fund, talk with other veterans and start talking. They even go home and open up to their families, says, "I never heard Dad talk like that before."

DM:

Wow, how nice. It's therapeutic.

PC:

Yes, it is. Very much so, and it's—well, most of the men who come back say that, "This was the experience of a lifetime". Matter of fact, one of the veterans passed away within three weeks after he got back, and Mike Travis said that, "Dad just lived for that Flight to get there and back." He made quite a contribution, a very heavy contribution to the Honor Flight fund in honor of his dad.

DM:

Oh, good. Okay.

PC:

Yeah, and this is another thing I would like to inject in your mention—everyone seems to be so responsive to this Honor Flight project to get the veterans in the air, and Channel 11 has been so instrumental because they have allotted one day which they call their twelve-hour telethon, and we are there before six o'clock in the morning for the first one that is going to be on the air until after the ten o'clock news at night, and they have raised more money in one day than any other fund project getting the funds together for the Flight, the Flights costing just about a quarter of a million dollars. Now, some were around two-hundred and twenty-five, thirty-five thousand dollars, something like that.

DM:

Well, I guess the prices are going up with everything else.

PC:

Yeah, they go up, and of course, the biggest tab I think—we need to write a check to Southwest Airlines for about eighty-thousand dollars. Well, that is a real chunk of our fundraising efforts, and the first around, I think we made a deposit of twenty-thousand, initially, then came up with the rest. This time around, I think this will be our fourth Honor Flight. We've already paid Southwest off, but even that is a matter of logistics. It's really interesting. Southwest is very cooperative with us, but it's kind of like a domino effect. Before they can give us a date, they have to check on when they're going to take the Red Raiders football team out to these games, and of course, it's anathema that they would ever have an empty plane running one way or the other, so they had to figure out when they could take the Red Raiders team out and get us there and back, and it's really a domino thing until they can finally say, "Okay, we've got it nailed down and for this trip, it's going to be October first, second, and third, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday", so until that thing is settled, then we don't know exactly when we can have this telethon of doing our thing with Channel 11 because everything is dependent on something else.

DM:

Who would ever think how complicated it could be?

PC:

It is. It is really a maze.

DM:

Well, I understand it goes smoothly when you get their people. It's very efficiently run. People get you where you need to be. Good, good. Now, I need to clarify one thing here. You said you just mentioned quickly there you were the sole surviving chaplain's assistant, but you're the sole surviving chaplain's assistant for all branches of the military service.

PC:

Yes.

DM:

Okay.

PC:

That was determined by the chief-of-chaplain's service in the Pentagon. Now, when I went the first time, 2012, there was one other survivor, but in the interim, before 2013, he passed away. I don't know where he was who he was, and so that's the reason for the designation. That they gave me that honor and they gave me some nice medallions that are very beautiful and—

DM:

Very good. I'd like to see and take some pictures of a couple of these things sometime if I could.

PC:

That's very dangerous that you should even suggest that, because I'll tell you what. I think I delayed the end of World War II getting everything home including a great, big footlocker. You would not believe what I've got in that footlocker. I've brought flags home from—the Japanese flags, the rising of the sun, special commercial flags, you know.

DM:

I love looking at that kind of things, so if you ever get the urge to show that to someone, give me a call.

PC:

Well, I did that at the Lubbock Club just this last week for this Christian Women's organization.

DM:

I should have been there. [Laughs]

PC:

You should have. Yeah, I'll be glad to see that you can make pictures or copies of some of those things.

DM:

That sounds good. Well, you have very well covered this topic and left me with few questions to ask, so—

PC:

Well, I'm glad because I think we've exhausted it pretty well.

DM:

Okay. I might have some questions that pop into my mind at 2 AM or who knows when, and you might think of something that needs to be added, so we can do that any time since you're a local.

PC:

I'd be glad to do that, David.

DM:

I have your number. You have mine.

PC:

Right. You know that I'm of the old, old school and I know that there are tablets and I know that there's Kindle and you can download two-thousand books at one time. I'm still so old-fashioned that I like to have a book in my hand and turn the pages and read that book, and I have gone to bed a time or two without reading, but I can read until midnight, and one time at two o'clock in the morning, I thought, "I've got to lay this thing aside and get some sleep because I've got to get up and go to work in the morning", you know.

DM:

Well, that's a good book you're reading that—if you're up at 2:00 a.m.

PC:

Oh, well, I will share this secret. Most people know anyway. Barnes and Noble has a sale book area. Mardel does also, and I have bought books there as little as one dollar a copy. Some of them three dollars a copy, and one time I want to go back and three more and two of them were priced at three dollars and one was five, and I say, "Well, how come the difference here?" They

said, “Well, that’s because we got them from different book brokers that were unloading what they wanted to get rid of and this was the package deal that we got from them,” so this is what I do, and one of the most interesting books that I—it’s—“Unsinkable” I believe is the name of the book, and it’s Abby Sunderland, the girl who wanted to go around the world in a boat, and she lasted twelve-thousand miles, Unsinkable, and it turned three-hundred and sixty degrees all over. Of course, it was in the water. She was saved because it was waterproof on the inside, but it broke the mast off. Well, without a mast, she couldn’t do anything more, and so they got her. She had been twelve-thousand miles as a sixteen-year-old little girl. An amazing story.

DM:

This was in the Indian Ocean I think.

PC:

Yeah, right, and—oh, I know. I almost didn’t pick that one up at the sale shelves in Mardel. It was one dollar. Boy, that’s the best dollar I ever spent in my life!

DM:

Enough to keep you up until 2:00 a.m. [Laughs]

PC:

Right. That’s right. I’ve got a waiting list of about four, five books now. Of course, I’ve got “American Sniper”. It was the story of Chris Kyle, and his widow Taya was here for the fundraiser in cooperation with the Trinity Christian schools and Chris Kyle Frog Foundation, and I was given the privilege of leading in prayer before Taya spoke, so I was at the honorary table. There were—Randy Neugebauer introduced her, and then I got a limited memorial edition of “American Sniper” with Taya’s signature on the inside. “Micah 6:8” is what it says.

DM:

And you have a picture with her.

PC:

Yeah. Yeah, right. So these are the experiences that come down to memories that are worth keeping, you know, and—

DM:

Okay. Anything else you want to add?

PC:

No. I can’t—I can’t think of anything.

DM:

We might think of something later, but I'll go ahead and turn this off.

PC:

Okay.

End of recording



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