

## Interview with Charles Sehe

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Interview # 1: April 14, 2015

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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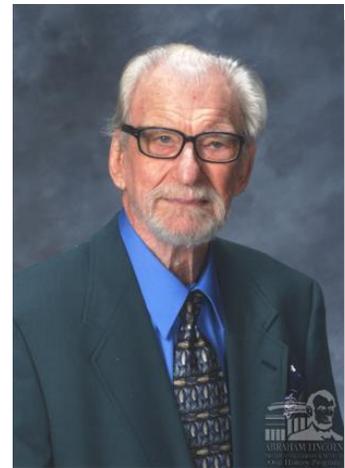
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DePue: Today is Tuesday, April 14, 2015. My name is Mark DePue, director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today, I'm in Mankato, Minnesota, and I'm going to be interviewing for the next probably two or three, maybe four, sessions, with Charles Sehe. Good morning, Charles.

Sehe: Good morning.

DePue: I've been looking forward to this one since December, when another person I interviewed, Gene Yeager, sent me an email that said, "Would you be interested in interviewing a gentleman who was at Pearl Harbor?" Then he listed all the other places you were at, with the *USS Nevada*, after that. He asked if I would be interested. Then, I think not too long after that, you and I had a conversation.



Charles Sehe

All it took was for me to find some way to convince the new governor of the State of Illinois to come to Minnesota to interview you. And I'm thrilled that he did that. As I always do, I like to get some background information, because you learn so much about people before they end up in these harrowing

experiences, like you had in the war. Enough of listening to me. Tell me when and where you were born, Charles.

Sehe: I was born in Geneva, Illinois, Kane County, February 26, 1923. Warren Harding was our president, and I think Len Small was governor, intended to be. I'm not certain, but I recall Len Small was the governor. What time period? Yes—

DePue: And what was your father's name?

Sehe: My father's name was John William Sehe, and his wife, my mother, Frances Burzyck Sehe. My mother was pure Polish. Father was a laborer at that time. He did construction. Mostly he worked in the foundry, and he made the molds for another company that was there, the Burgess-Norton, and they made piston pins.

DePue: Where is Geneva in relation to Chicago?

Sehe: It's thirty-seven miles west, almost due west, a few degrees below. If you go north, you run right into Wisconsin Dells. Now, this time period—I was born in twenty-three—and already, at that time, in the Chicago area, there was a certain individual, quite prominent, though he wasn't a patriotic individual. He was patriotic, but his business was a little shady, Al Capone. He doesn't like to be called Al Capon-é. That's what it is.

Anyway, the effect of Al Capone's business extended already into Geneva. They had the punch out cards that one can play on to win money. And they also took over the Nehi bottling works, Nehi Orange Crush, you know. Those bottles were white. But then, when Capone took over, they turned to an amber color.

My dad and my uncle, brother to my mother, they made home brew. My uncle, Anton Burzyck, he worked for Florsheim Shoe Company in Chicago. He made cut out patterns, top and the bottom, and did the stitching around them, on a machine. He explained that to mother. So, he came, and Dad would make home brew. And I was to put the tops on them. He told me that it's pop. My job was putting the tops on the pop.

DePue: How old were you at this time?

Sehe: Oh, about six, or—

DePue: This was before the Depression started?

Sehe: Yeah, it's sort of right in between. This was... See, I was eight, nine; that would be thirty-one, thirty-two, yeah.

- DePue: Did you know at that time your father was making home brew? This was during the prohibition. He wasn't supposed to be doing that.
- Sehe: No. They all made it. They could make the home brew, but they couldn't sell it.
- DePue: That's right; I forgot about that.
- Sehe: Yeah, and they put them in bottles. But they either put too much yeast in, or they put it in a warm place. During the night, it would go, pop, pop [makes popping sounds]. The tops would pop. Anyway— (DePue laughs)
- DePue: Before you get too much farther, it is pronounced Sāy-hē, right, S-e-h-e?
- Sehe: Yes. There's two ethnic groups that claim that word, Sehe. There's the Algonquin word; "sehe," means to watch out. What they meant by that is, watch out for Iroquois. Algonquians and Iroquois, [the French & Indian War] it's the British and the French conflict, again. And the other ethnic is German, "sehe," it means, "to see." So, I can use the word meaning "to interpret."
- DePue: Does that mean your father is German?
- Sehe: He's German, Irish, Indian.
- DePue: An interesting but not entirely unusual mixture for Americans by that time. What was the Indian tribe that he hailed from?
- Sehe: The Delaware in upper state New York, the Algonquin. They speak the Algonquin language.
- DePue: You mentioned before we started, your father was quite a bit older by the time you came along.
- Sehe: Yes. My father was fifty-three years old; he was born in 1870. And in the early 1900s... Well, actually, he ran away from home—that's what it was—when he was sixteen or seventeen or something like that. And he moved around, as they did those [days] because it was hardship on the family, even though it wasn't the so-called Depression. And then he got different jobs here and there. He was an itinerate worker.

Then he auditioned for a play. I don't know if it's auditioned, but he got the part as a cowboy. He knew how to train horses. For this reason, Dad's knowledge of horses came to ["Buffalo Bill"] Cody's attention. Oh, they had two horses that were sick in some area in upper New York. The horses were out there, and Dad went out there in a couple of days. I don't know what he did, but those horses got up and walked out. Cody "grabbed" him, signed him up. So he's assistant to the Indian agent who handled the horses.

See, Cody's a, he's a financial entrepreneur; that's what he was. He had the horses for the show, horses for labor. So, my father worked as a wrangler with a group in charge of the Indians, for whatever program they had. That's all I can remember. He [Sehe's father] had to sleep in the so-called horse cars with the rest of the Indians.

Then, Dad adopted my mother, who was an orphan on the Orphan Train, and raised her up.<sup>1</sup> And he... Well, she did the work for him. And then they moved to Wisconsin from New York for some reason; I don't know. Kilbourn was the name of the town. You can put that on. [referring to the recorder] Turn it. Is it on now?

DePue: It is. Do you want me to pause it?

Sehe: No, I wanted you to toss that adoption—

DePue: What was the name of the—

Sehe: Kilbourn.

DePue: Kilbourn?

Sehe: Wisconsin. You can edit this, can't you?

DePue: We can redact some things from it, yes.

Sehe: Yeah, that's good. All right, my father and mother thought a better life would be in Wisconsin because the lumber industry there was booming. So they went there, and they settled in the place called Kilbourn. And you can, at that time, apply for a homestead of 160 acres.

DePue: Yeah, I know what you're talking about.

Sehe: They were given a time period.

DePue: Sharecropping, well, not sharecropping, but —

Sehe: No, it's the government gives you 160 acres, and you had to live on it and show it to be productive for four years or so, five years, something like that.

DePue: Land grant, maybe.

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<sup>1</sup> The Orphan Train Movement was a supervised welfare program that transported orphaned and homeless children from crowded Eastern cities of the United States to foster homes located largely in rural areas of the Midwest. The orphan trains operated between 1854 and 1929, relocating about 200,000 orphaned, abandoned, abused, or homeless children. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orphan\\_Train](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orphan_Train))

Sehe: Everybody, as long as you stay there; that's what. You still have to pay taxes on it. So, by this time now, their family grew. There were five of us, five children of his second marriage. The oldest one, a daughter, was Irene, born 1918; the second oldest was another daughter, Frances, named after her mother, and then John Martin, my older brother, then me, and then there's... Okay, Irene; Fran; John Martin; Charles; Margaret, and then Bill, Billy, or William, Jr. Did I get six there?

DePue: Yep.

Sehe: Okay. There are six.

DePue: Tell me about your dad's personality. How would you describe your father's personality?

Sehe: Academically, educationally, he never got past third grade, could not read. He learned to sign his name on checks, you know, that's about all. My mother was learned. He took her out of school. She was fourth grade, fifth grade. But she could read and write. That helped him. He wasn't an adventurous individual. He wasn't motivated by anything for her, lazy, shiftless sort of thing.

He took jobs and then... Oh, that's right. He was also appointed a deputy sheriff, and he had a murder once, a murder in the neighborhood, within the county. They thought he could help out. He did solve it, because he could read tracks, (both laugh) signs of the presence of a person. Anyway, but they saw that. So, they made him a city night policeman. He just sat there and watched the jail. I don't know what they call it. He made rounds at different stations. He punched a time clock at each station. And then he worked in a foundry, as I mentioned.

DePue: How about your mother? Tell me a little bit more about her. Did she work while you were growing up?

Sehe: Well, yes. Mother worked as a house maid at Geneva Hotel, downtown. All of her family were adopted during Germany's takeover. You see, Poland and Germany with unrest, so her brother... She had two brothers. Anton Burzyck was in Chicago; Martin Burzyck Cornica [his adopted name] was adopted. This is important, Martin Burzyck, Bōor-zy-ck.

DePue: z-y-c-k?

Sehe: Yeah, Martin's adoptive parents were French-Canadian, Būrzyck. It's not Būrzesk; that's the Polish sound. He was adopted. And he was in the Navy in World War I. You're from Iowa. What's that Wisconsin [town's] name? Prairie du Chien was a river town on the Wisconsin/Iowa border. A Prairie du Chien family adopted him. And then he got restless; he went to Hollywood and worked in the Electronic Special Effects Department at 20th Century Fox.

Now, we go back to World War I, okay, with him. [In] 1918, the United States had battleships *Texas*, *Nevada* and *Oklahoma* over there. I think they patrolled the North Sea around Great Britain. The reason [was] that oil burners, like the *Nevada* and *Oklahoma* that burned oil, didn't have to stop. *Texas* was a coal burner, so they had to stop often at coal fueling stations along the coasts to refuel.

Martin Cornica was a wireless operator, smart son of a gun, I understand. I never met him, but I'll get to that. And he was the wireless Morse Code operator between Admiral Sims, who was admiral of the American force over there and the British Lord Admiral Jellicoe. You remember hearing that name? That guy got along. He was the, what do you call...the relay operator between conversations of the two admirals.

DePue: Liaison, or—

Sehe: Yeah, he was—

DePue: Radio operator?

Sehe: Yeah, he was a wireless [operator]. The messages [that] came in to the *Texas*, came through him first. Messages that go out to Jellicoe came through him. Anyway, I don't know what happened, but he ended up in Hollywood. He knew... We call it, "electronics" now, he knew electrical and all that stuff. He became involved with special effects and all that stuff. He had screen credits.

DePue: That would have been in the early days of Hollywood, even.

Sehe: Yeah. You know who Bill Tilden is?<sup>2</sup>

DePue: Yeah.

Sehe: He played tennis and beat Bill Tilden. He's an avid tennis player. Boy, you would have loved that son of a gun, carrot juice lined up, no meats. He was a vegetarian, smaller than I, but slenderer, a toothpick.

DePue: We got on this subject because we were talking about your mother. How would you describe her personality?

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<sup>2</sup> William Tatem Tilden II (February 10, 1893 – June 5, 1953), nicknamed "Big Bill," was an American male tennis player. He is often considered one of the greatest tennis players of all time. Tilden was the World No. 1 player for six years from 1920 through 1925. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill\\_Tilden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Tilden))

Sehe: She made certain that [emotionally] one person graduates from high school. Irene and Fran left, and they became domestic help. John was deceased. All of us had been sickened by a diphtherial infection. My mother says, “You’ve got to go to school.” So, anything that I needed, I got, books, clothing, etc. You wanted to go through school. My younger brother, unfortunately, the war changed him. He joined up, but he started drinking, and he got into Guam and all that. It’s a... Forget about it, just mention that he failed, couldn’t accept responsibility. I’m the only one that graduated from high school.



*Geneva, Illinois high school student Charles Sehe, as he appeared in his formal portrait. There were few employment opportunities for Sehe when he graduated, and he soon joined the Navy.*

All right, let’s go to the critical time. I was fourteen. My brother and I, we were together **all** the time. This doctor couldn’t figure out why I didn’t die! Later, I was told how. All the day and night we would go out together, scrounge wood for the stove in the kitchen. Well, we lived in this house, all that shit, got wood, coal, along the railroad. He was a weakling. He didn’t feel like eating anything. Finally, he got sick, and they couldn’t figure it out. He started coughing, and there was a gray, foul-smelling membrane. The bacterial feeds on the mucus of the throat. Actually, he strangled to death.

My older sister, Fran, and I, we didn’t know this disease. We’d take a little swab and clean his throat out every day. We should have reported this or something. My mother didn’t know either; we didn’t know what was going on with this. So, eventually, it was too late. He died. I started getting little symptoms of it. So, then my mother said... We called the doctor, Dr. Hetherton. He came there, “Holy shit,” he says. “You guys got diphtheria. They took a culture, and it was too late to save him. He just couldn’t breathe.

DePue: Diphtheria, you said, was what you both had?

Sehe: I got the vaccine, though. I was sick for two weeks. See, in him, it went way down into his throat. I had it up in here. But I went to the hospital, you know. They cleaned all that stuff out, and I got the vaccine.

DePue: But it sounds like your brother didn’t survive, then?

Sehe: No, he didn’t. He died, and we were quarantined. They had a sign that big, “Keep Out, Diphtheria.” And they came in, and they put him in a wooden box, sealed it tight, no funeral or anything. Out they went. That affected me and my mother a lot. Then, that afternoon, I went out to the hillside where my brother and I would sit, looking at the stars at night. See, usually my brother and I used to go sit and talk over what we were going to do. In 1933 and thirty-four

was the century of progress. He would hang around Anderson Garage; he used to work with cars.

DePue: That was the World's Fair in Chicago.

Sehe: Yeah, it was the "century of progress, they called it, 1933, thirty-four. Well, he got to know the manager of the auto sales, and John knew cars and all of that. And so, the guy invited him in, "Would you go?" He wanted someone to go with him. And the other guys couldn't. But he knew what a trip, Chicago, wow! Anyway, that's just... My brother got a commemorative medal out of all of this.

This is what I'm getting at, the damned family. See, when my mother died, Margaret was named executor of the estate. She and her husband took most of all. Irene took some, and my wife and I were miles away, in Minnesota. My wife and I came here. We're caught with empty heirlooms and all that stuff, all furniture was gone, nothing for us. My mother had owned one of those old kitchen cabinets, with a flour bin in up here and all that, a classic antique

DePue: A cabinet? Yeah.

Sehe: All that old stuff, you know. and a round table, oak. My third youngest sister, Margaret... Anyway, her husband was an asshole—he got kicked out of the Army—They took everything. I'll get back to the...

So, I went, and I grabbed some sandwiches and some other stuff. I went over where we all sit, and I just sat down there. I feel that time just passed. I got cold, so I sneaked back in the house, and I got a couple of jackets hanging in this closed space for work clothes, near the entry. I could get into the side door and get a jacket without them knowing it.

I said, "John, we're going to make it." He was soft, you know. He was good only with his hands. I was just starting to be a freshman then. I said, "John, you're going to graduate with me. I made my mind up. Whatever I do, you're going with me." I kept that promise through a high school diploma and B.A., M.S. and PhD degrees and think of him often.

When I was going to school, younger than my older siblings, my mother... Remember, I told you that she wanted me to go on as far as I was able. She did the work. My dad was actually lazy. She stoked the furnaces; she built the coal bin, carried out the clinkers and all that shit. We slept on a second floor, heated by only the stove in the kitchen. In the stairway, in the stairway door closed to the bathroom here and the kitchen over there. I would come down those steps, all dressed, ready for school, sit. I would not open that door until she came and called me to get up. She knew I would be sitting back there. That's what she wanted, for me to graduate. Somehow, my mother

knew that her son, Charles, would be the only one to succeed. This is what I don't understand, Mark.

I was born February, so I went to the first grade right away. You know, you have that time, anybody born in August got to wait until... So, in the first and second grade... I went to the second grade, Esther Schultz was her name. Oh, I can send you a list of some valentine cards from those in my class, if you want.

DePue: Eska? Eska Schultz?

Sehe: Esther Shultz. I've got a list of that, but I didn't think that was...

The next year—I can't think of what else—I'm supposed to go to the third grade. All right, in those schools, the Sixth Street School, it was a new one, just built a year before I entered. My oldest sister and them, they went to the union school. That was a school, but now it's a **mortuary**. Anyway, at the union school, the classes are double, in the same room. First and second grade were like this. They have movable chairs; they have fifteen, fifteen. That's the way it was. The same teacher would lecture, get the first graders going; give them an assignment. Then she'd walk over, cross over, give second grade an assignment, so forth, for the year.

September was time for me to go. I was supposed to go to third grade, so I go up to the next floor. There's the third grade and the fourth grade, yeah. I was supposed to go to third grade when I went up there, but all fifteen chairs were filled. This was on the third-grade side. In the fourth grade, there was two chairs open. So I come up and sat down in one (laughs), sat in there. Another guy come up, and he looked, and I said, "Come on, sit over here," because I thought, You're a buddy. So, we sat there. We started out in the fourth grade, not the third, which we skipped. You know what saved us, the two clowns (laughs)? They reviewed what they had in the third grade. We picked up on the review quickly, and I got it. Oh, I hoped to remain there.

DePue: This explains one of my curiosities. You got yourself advanced one grade level this way.

Sehe: Yeah. I graduated at seventeen. I should have been eighteen.

DePue: That's why the math wasn't working out right. Now I understand. (both laugh)

Sehe: I didn't either. But all the teachers helped... I didn't understand it. Each had a hand; they helped me all the way through. And fifth and sixth grade, Bertha Johnson, oh, she was a big... Oh, she was a... What do you call that, a person that's not married, maiden, you know. But she [was] a disciplinarian, boy. I wondered about her pay. In my class, she wore the same faded green dress that Irene saw four years earlier!

DePue: What I wanted to do here... First of all, before we get to the Depression, was your family religious? Did you grow up going to church?

Sehe: My mother made sure that I went. She was Catholic, but she never went to church. She's Polish, another Polish tradition. This was another example of where she wanted **someone to carry on the faith**. My brother, John, made his first communion. That's all, as far as he got. We have a picture of him, holding his communion card. I still miss John.

Anyway, I went there every Sunday. We had the nuns teach us. And I was the only Sehe in the class. An act of faith, an act of love, and all the prayers, I could tell them. See, this is one thing I didn't realize until I started writing; I could recall and keep up. My mother realized that. But they wouldn't let me be altar boy, because I wasn't from the right side of the track. I mean, she got her clothes from the second-hand store and so forth.

There was a small, Irish church, but there were no Irish there. Geneva is Swedish and Italian. Capone made certain that the Italians south of State Street would run the taverns and restaurants there, and the Swedes would run the north part city council and mayor.

DePue: Was there a State Street in Geneva, as well, because State Street in Chicago was one of the dividing lines in Chicago?

Sehe: We had a State Street dividing the ethnic groups. And every year, when I was small, or high school, junior high, the Swedish Council would come out with a proclamation, Swedish Days. They got a Swedish park, Good Temple Park, a carnival-like atmosphere. [We] had a blast, beer all over. Kids would get the drippies, what was left in the glasses. I wore a straw hat and white [and] black shoes, and all this stuff we got from the handouts. I looked like an adult, running around in a fourteen or fifteen-year-old body. This was fun.

DePue: It sounds to me like your mother had a lot of aspirations for you. For you, especially, more than the rest of your siblings.

Sehe: I think that's what it was; I firmly believe it. Somehow, she felt that I would be the one to—

DePue: Was there some rivalry between the rest of the kids or—

Sehe: No. Maybe between the sisters, but I didn't recognize it.

DePue: If I can, I want to make sure I understand and make sure that whoever encounters this understands. Your brother passed away in 1936, when you were fourteen years old?

Sehe: Yeah, he was sixteen.

DePue: He was sixteen? When you were talking, you were talking about wanting to take him spiritually with you through the rest of your journey through life. Is that—

Sehe: Yes.

DePue: And that had to be a powerful motivator as well.

Sehe: My mother's help did it all, helped. They knew that at the school, in high school, they knew what I was doing there. And here's how I made...not a mistake. I did the basics. Boy, I knew history. And I went back in, oh, 1918 or 1917, trouble with the World War I in Europe, and all that. So, that I know. Another is... I knew geography. I can tell you right now the geographical, the eastern coastal plains and sub-tropical, all the way back to California. That's still with me. My own children don't know. It irritates me that's what they don't. They still are the fullness of my knowledge.

Then, teachers had classes, electives. We had to take algebra. I struggled through that. But then it came to the electives. I was told I could take either geometry or art. Geometry, see, I couldn't handle algebra very well, and geometry, you're talking about spatial relationships; I couldn't do it. The irony here is that, during World War II, I had to know geometry and trig to fire a gun at an incoming plane.

So I took art. My years through that, several years... They didn't have a spare room, the artists. She [the instructor] had her own room. They had us together, all in our classroom. She'd bring in the cart with all the stuff for that particular assignment. First, she asked us to do advertising, write something, do something. I thought... Well, I used Lifebuoy soap a lot in that time. I'm designing a box to put it, you know, everything. I did that, and I put bubbles on their and rubbed Lifebuoy [brand] soap over it. She says, "No, you're not doing that. You're not attracting anybody." She says, "Symmetry, design and flow. Keep that in mind, Charles, symmetry, design and flow." Well, that didn't hit me until I gardened, see? I learned to garden. Then that came, without the encouragement.

This is the standard for improvising. It's already in that early report. The damned skateboards that they're farting around with around here, they're eighty, ninety, \$100...it depends on the style. We built a scooter, using eighteen-inch planks, two by two. [We] took some old skate wheels, got an orange crate box for the thing, put on tomato cans for reflectors, for the lights. Then another thing we did was the rubber guns. And they're easy to make. Get an old tire. It's in that report, newsletter. You can look up there. We had fights with that, and that's how I'd shoot a rubber band, carried the bullets and all that.

DePue: Bullets being what, nails, or something like that?

- Sehe: No, no, no. They were just rubber, inner tube, see?
- DePue: What were you using for bullets, though, just rocks?
- Sehe: No, the bullets were inner tube rings, the same as rubber bands. See, you put them on. It's just like you would do with rubber bands, see? Instead of them, we had a gun. And the trigger for that deal was the trigger finger. The clothespin half was the hammer. It's all in there. Did I give you one?
- DePue: Yeah, I did read about that.
- Sehe: Oh, yeah.
- DePue: So, obviously your family was not well off. What was your father doing, once the Depression hit?
- Sehe: Not much. He sat on the porch. He would say hello to any person who would pass by him.
- DePue: So, he lost his job?
- Sehe: He lost his job. And then, you see... Just find out how old he is. Eighteen seventy and the Depression was 1930, so—
- DePue: So he would have been fifty-nine or sixty when the Depression started.
- Sehe: Yeah. See, they're not going to hire him. They're going to hire some young... Oh, yeah, they did give me a high school job. You've heard of these youth programs that the city and the school had? The city had hired me.

This is the humorous part. They cleaned the streets. See, the damned Swedes wanted a clean street, same as the Dutch. We'd always sweep down State Street first! They started up on Eighth Street, and they asked us to go all the way down to the river, First Street, sweep the street. Halfway down is a tavern. The name eludes me right now; it pops in and out... Swenson's Tavern. But all that damned tobacco, snuff and whiskey. The police chief, the fire chief, the street foreman and the alderman, the mayor were all Swedes, most of them first generation. Well, some—what do you call them now—the real sons of Sweden. These workmen would stop at this tavern.

But the tavern's closed at 7:00 in the morning. And I was in the street crew. They said, "You wait here, Charles. You watch that nobody steals our brooms." (both laugh) They went around in the back, came in through the back, and they had breakfast. Then they come out. Oh, they all used a Swedish phrase that remains an enigma to me. Then, when they spit snuff, there was this famous Swedish word. You go, (sneezing sound), *twee fon boogala pork*. (DePue laughs) I still remember, whatever the hell that meant. But they came out without spit. I can't think of that guy's name...Pete Gobel, street foreman.

The store, meat store, was a regular, open meat cutter. They weren't a butcher. They called it Johnson and Daniels Meat Market. Sawdust [was] on the floor, a good smelling, clean floor smell. And then turkey day, Thanksgiving, they'd have live turkeys they'd auction off. I fed the turkeys. Everyday I'd come there and help them feed them. I thought I'd get one, but none!

DePue: Does that mean your family had turkey on Thanksgiving?

Sehe: We got a free pig.

DePue: A pig? A whole pig?

Sehe: Oh, I wish I did have...all right. You know what happened, Depression. Farmers, they marketed too much milk. Prices were very low. The government dumped the milk in the curbing, or they fed it to the hogs. The farmer finds out that the sow's got six or seven pigs. They can't afford it; they've got to feed them. So what they do, they come in at night and let them loose, at night. If you can catch one, you can take it home.

Oh, I have to give you this axiom that I have in my dictionary. It's got communism, capitalism, socialism, all the definitions, with the cows.

DePue: With cows?

Sehe: With them using cows to explain.

DePue: That would be interesting.

Sehe: Right. I'd find it, but I won't get it right. And what's Russian? They call it a—

DePue: What do they call a cow in Russia?

Sehe: No, the country—

DePue: Soviet Union?

Sehe: No, the... What's the... You got socialism, oh—

DePue: Communism?

Sehe: Communism. You start with two cows. Communists would come in, shoot you and take both cows. Socialism, they come in and let you feed one; they'll the milk, take other cow and, and sell it back to you.

DePue: Capitalism?

Sehe: Capitalism, you would sell one of the cows, and buy a bull. (DePue laughs) I have to show you that. There is just a lot of stuff in my brain. I get—

DePue: Well, one of the things that I read, in getting ready for this, is that your family, once the Depression hit, was actually on relief for a while?

Sehe: Yeah, there was—

DePue: Federal Emergency Relief Program?

Sehe: Yeah. We didn't call it welfare; we called it relief. There's a federal relief program, and you were allowed staple food items that were distributed once a month. Is that on there?

DePue: Yeah.

Sehe: These food items would be powdered milk; we'd have flour, salt, oleo and some fat, and oranges once in a while, but mostly grapefruit. Oranges didn't come until Christmastime or something like that. My mother was a good though; she knew how to bake, bake bread and so on. She would also get tips from her friend, Edward Heyn, the German baker, a refugee from WW II. Mother got day old rolls each week. She made certain that we were well fed, and I was well dressed.

DePue: You mentioned, though, that when you went to church, they weren't going to let you be an altar boy. So, was there a stigma that the family was on relief, like that?

Sehe: I think, it could be that. It's the manner of the dress too. I think that's what it is. And I think that my father and mother, they weren't in a social level of acceptance.

Before I forget, in any case, when we were younger, we played in the streets, street corner where I live, the houses, the family. There's a Norwegian family. They came over from Telemark [Norway]. Hitler changed a lot of this stuff, though. He [the neighbor] came over here, and he had four daughters, two twins, two sets of twins. And the younger one, Barbara Hansen, I liked her. I didn't know it, see, and we'd play a game. We'd play red dog on the street corner. What else? All these games, who's got the button, and pass it on to those in an enclosed circle. But anytime Barbara was there, I felt good. And then when she left, before... She had to be in by 9:00. Sometimes I did feel... The nights that you'd study for an exam, I don't know. Then, I was a senior; she was a junior. She was born leap year, 1924. I'm twenty-three, you see. I didn't ask her because I was embarrassed. She wanted me to ask her. She wouldn't go unless I asked her.

DePue: To the prom?

Sehe: To the prom. And I didn't go. I went and looked—it was in the auditorium—I looked in the basement windows, saw her dancing. Well, years later, after the war, I came back and paid my respect to Mrs. Hansen. She says, "Charles,

what's the matter with you?" She said, "You know, you almost got married." I said, "I didn't know." She says, "I know you didn't know that." We would have liked to have you. I just wasn't biologically able to sense Barbara's feelings toward me. Those pains remain within my inner self still. I was a naive lad and at the poverty level.

DePue: Well, sometimes, you know, life takes those interesting turns.

Sehe: Oh, sure. I wasn't ready, mentally.

DePue: And certainly in your life, you've had plenty of those turns, it sounds like.

Sehe: I always thought about it. She's the only one that I... Oh, you know.

DePue: I wanted to ask you—

Sehe: Oh, I didn't get back to the altar boy—

DePue: No. I wanted to ask you. One of the things I was reading about, you've written a lot about your life in the last newsletter and since you got out of the Navy. One of the things you talked about was the home that you had. Maybe this is earlier in your life, but it sounds like there was a period of time that that the house was very primitive.

Sehe: (laughs) Yes. Our first house was on River Street, and it was an old frame house, two-story. There was no central heating. We had kerosene lamps for lighting. And we had a four top black stove, they called them. It had four top lid openings.

DePue: A cook stove?

Sehe: Yeah. And this was in the kitchen. The heating of the other rooms was absolutely no heating. But we did have soapstone slabs for the bedrooms. In other words, we'd depended upon mother. It's always the mother, puts the stones on the stove to warm, wraps them in a towel, brings them upstairs to warm the bed for us. Because a lot of times, I'd rather just urinate than get down outside. I mean, that's how—

DePue: So, no indoor plumbing.

Sehe: No indoor. We had a two-seater. We did have the money for lime, so we just kept that on. During the hot, summer days, that aroma filled the air around our neighbor's house.

DePue: The lime would be to get rid of the stench? Is that what it was?

Sehe: And kill the germs too, yeah. But the neighbors had a rose garden next door. You couldn't tell it was rose garden (both laugh). Oh, Mrs. Rathertry, oh, hell,

she was an aristocratic, English woman. We all called her Mrs. Rathertry. She had what they called the Little Traveler shop. By little traveling items filled up her store. She traveled in all that stylish stuff. And you'd give a nominal fee for each item.

I bought a lot of those ring games; you've got to separate the rings and try to put them back together. It would be twenty cents; some things were a nickel, all that, a lot of Japanese imports. I didn't realize it at the time that these would eventually be antiques, Japanese fans and hats. Anyway, she owned our old house on her property.

Apparently, she and her husband wanted to be rid of that. She had a house up on the hill, near Geneva, across the river. She talked to my mother, says, "You can have the house up on the hill. You have to pay the taxes." Mother accepted. And I wanted to get rid of the old house too.

DePue: So, just because she didn't like the stench from next door, she gave your mom a house?

Sehe: She wanted to expand though, anyway. But you see, the reason it was so... We didn't have shades. They were torn black and green plastic sheets, and all that covered the windows. Well, my dad sits on the porch. One Fourth of July, he had what you call two inchers, fire crackers. See, then, back on the Fourth of July celebration, fireworks were cheap and no restrictions. We'd get cherry bombs. I mean, that was packed with a lot of powder. We used to go around and throw them in the water. Then you'd see the water. That's a whoosh! Well, my dad had these two inchers, like that. And he sat on the porch and light them and throw them out onto the lawn.

DePue: Just tossing them out in the yard?

Sehe: To toss them. But he tossed some right down there by the window, and he'd blow out the damned windows of the house and damaged the front door (both laugh). See, I wish... He's still a young... Anyway, the trade was made. Everybody rode in a rented truck with solid rubber tire wheels, no pneumatic stuff, up the hill. I watched my mother. She was walking across the State Street bridge, carrying our cat. See, I remember that. That's all I remember about moving. She was carrying the cat in her arms.

DePue: Cap, did you say or cat?

Sehe: Cat.

DePue: A cat.

Sehe: Meow, meow, a cat. Then, when we got into the newer house, I saw the overhead lights, and there's a pushbutton, black, white, black, white. My

oldest sister, Irene, kept pushing the buttons off and on. Mother looked inside the house. She worked outside; she knew right away what had to be done.

So, she set the thermostat. We had electric, and we had a stove, a furnace, with big ducts like octopus arms, going to each room. and a coal bin, cellar door, like, you know? So we started ordering coal. She bought the... She couldn't buy the anthracite coal, the hard. She bought cheap soft coal, all that smoke in the house. And my dad would forget to close the damper sometime. That's no good, that smoke.

DePue: Did you have indoor plumbing in that house?

Sehe: Yes.

DePue: This must have felt like you guys were living in luxury, to suddenly have a house with indoor plumbing and electricity.

Sehe: Oh, sure.

DePue: When did that happen? How old were you then?

Sehe: Let's see. Oh, it has to be... That's right. By the river, the first house, I had to go to the... Not the first grade, but...yeah, the first grade, there. And then I went back over. At that switch, it had to be in the new school, so I had to be over there in third and fourth grades. That would be 1923, twenty-seven?

DePue: What about 1930, thirty-one, that timeframe?

Sehe: Yeah, that's about it.

DePue: After the Depression, then?

Sehe: Yeah.

DePue: After the beginning of the Depression. I wanted to finish off this morning, before we do lunch, by talking a little bit about your high school years. Where did you go to high school?

Sehe: Geneva Community High School. You're getting bored with all this stuff.

DePue: No, I told you, I like to get plenty of background here.

Sehe: Geneva Community High School. They didn't have a bus service, and everybody walked. Some of those students had their parents drive them there. Alright, in the second house, we lived on Nebraska Street. That's nineteen and a half blocks to the high school. I had to go down the hill, cross the river to State Street and up the hill to the school, nineteen and a half blocks I got. Sometimes at lunchtime, I would come back. I would go from that school, run

home, get something to eat and go back, a damn waste of energy. Lunch was sugar sprinkled over a lard spread on bread.

DePue: Home was a mile away, right? More than a mile?

Sehe: I mean, it's just a waste of energy. See, I wasn't... Anyway, no kid would trade his bologna sandwich for one of mine.

DePue: You're still a skinny guy.

Sehe: Yeah. Let's see... And then, on the way I met a lot of people. No, you can't do this now because of state law involving hiring teenagers for work. Mrs. Rufus Bennett, that's important because it's the Bennett Milling Company was there. They ground flour, corn. Mother Hubbard is one of the products. Anyway, her husband had died. She always greeted me with treats on my paper route. And then I would go past the mill itself, and on the second or third floor would be my cousin, see, from my mother's step-daughter, the second marriage. And she, Margaret, Marge, would wave. Her hair [would be] all full of flour and dust. I'd go on, cross the river.

Sometimes I could walk across the dam, the damned thing had those two by twelve timbers all around, no flow of water over the dam, stink, you know? But later I know they redid it. I saw water rushing over it. Everybody comes out there, where River Fox flows

At the first corner of State Street is the village smith man's shop. He was the chief fireman, muscular, oh, that son of a gun, Cy Hendrickson, that was another Swede (laughs), Cy Hendrickson. I used to watch him. This made an impression on me, so I have to mention Cyrus Hendrickson. He was a blacksmith, shoed horses. I know how to shoe a horse, if I have to. He makes gadgets, just for the hell of it. I had a tin man before that damned movie, [*The Wizard of Oz*,] was even... Then I went up the hill, and passed the Italian owned Little Owl Tavern.<sup>3</sup> He'd wave. The place was influenced by Al Capone. Pete Gobel, he was the junk man and also the street foreman.

Now, see how we were going to a movie. I'm going to go back, it's still the same time period. [I'm] about eight or nine years old, before I went. In order to go to the movie, it cost ten cents, twenty-five cents for an adult. To make that ten cents, I had two options. I could go down to the river with a box, collect clams.

DePue: Collect what?

Sehe: Clams.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Wizard of Oz* is a 1939 American musical fantasy film, produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, in which the heroine, Dorothy, meets the Scarecrow, who wants a brain, the Tin Woodman, who desires a heart, and the Cowardly Lion, who needs courage. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Wizard\\_of\\_Oz\\_\(1939\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wizard_of_Oz_(1939_film)))

DePue: Oh, clams.

Sehe: Mussels, because the button industry used them clams. They punched, drilled holes in them to make buttons. Then, [in] the 1940s, they went to plastic. But you get one cent for each clam you'd find. But if you find one that has the blue—it depends on the species and color—you get a nice... [referring to recording device]. This industry's all gone. But, if you get one that's got a nice color blue, you get two cents for that, for that clam. Then we'd take them, sell them, and go to the movie.

If we can't, we'd go to the junk man. Iron scrap was ten cents to 100 pounds, but you had to get 100 pounds. He wouldn't settle for anything less. We got a wagon, and we'd wait, getting a little dark. Gobel helped. They closed the gate. We'd go around to the back of the junkyard, pick up a lot of the scrap there, and come around to the front the next day, see, and sell it to him. We'd get our money to go to the movie. We'd get fifty cents, which we divided up between five kids.

After a while, he says, "George, come here a minute. Charles"—he called me George—"Come on over here a minute. You see this here?" I said, "Yeah." "Where did you get that?" "Oh, we picked it up somewhere." He says, "Yeah, but see, that was in my backyard. You know what you guys are doing?" He says, "Don't get caught at it!" (DePue laughs) He didn't care. He gave us the money. Go to the movie, ten cents.

Another source of getting to a movie, I would take dollar bills from the movie's cashier and take the bills to Nelsur's News Store and get loose change for them. I'd bring it back to the cashier, and she would give me a free ticket for that evening's movie.

Then I had the paper route, when my brother died. That's an important thing. That was an important turning point, my life, because I learned to read more effectively. I learned the political sections of the paper. I had a route, hand delivery, thirty-three customers, and I got to know each one of those customers personally.

DePue: Was that back in the day when you had to go and collect the fees?

Sehe: No. The *Chicago Daily News*, that guy had to do it. He could get some kid; he'd get in a serious situation. They have a little something slip that they... It's like a coupon. I delivered the *Aurora Beacon News* and sent weekly notices to subscribers. Each customer had an account. But no, I didn't have to collect, fortunately. I tell you that because my wife finds out recently I can't handle money. I'll tell you that later. (DePue laughs)

DePue: I've got to ask you though, Charles, what kind of movies did you like to go to? I assume these were matinees you were going to.

Sehe: Yeah, oh, some of them. Now, my time period is 1930-1940. If they show any silent [silent movies], then it's a repeat, you know what I mean? But I did see Tom Mix's; they're funny.<sup>4</sup> But the only one that Tom Mix... I'll just [summarize it] briefly, so, you'll know. They robbed a stagecoach, the strongbox. What he did, he changed it, opened it, put something in there, and locked it. We didn't see what it was. Then the robbers came, and they held up the stage and blew off the lock, opened it up, and baloney sandwich. (both laugh) Must have struck a bullet. That's all I remember.

I saw Frederick March in *Les Misérables*, *Cimarron* with Richard Dix, the *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Charles Laughton. And there was Laurel & Hardy, Popeye and so on. That's all I remember. Anyway, 1931... Oh, the *Count of Monte Cristo*, Robert Coleman.

And there was a series; they had a Boy Scout series, a series of fourteen chapters. Flash Gordon was one, and what else? I don't know. I didn't care for those, because what they did...and the second time that you go in, you want to say they run chapter two. Then, as you get to three, they run half of chapter two again and show you. I didn't care for that. But Ken Maynard was the cowboy at that time. Buck Jones, he was the best. He [was] killed in that Coconut Grove fire.

DePue: But he was in another adventure. Was he Flash Gordon?

Sehe: No, he was west; he was a cowboy.

DePue: Buck Jones was?

Sehe: Yeah, he was burned to death, the stupid asses. They club had had inward door exits; all doors were this way, not the outward way, this way. Bodies just piled up at the door.

DePue: Oh, you mean at the door exits? Yeah.

Sehe: Coconut Grove, Boston, Mass.

DePue: The door exits, nowadays, it's by code. They have to open out. Let's go back some more about your high school time. You've already talked about delivering newspapers and how important that was. Your mom wanted you to go to high school. She—

Sehe: She wanted me to take over my brother's route; she wanted me to continue to learn responsibility. I never understood her determination to have me do the

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Edwin Mix (1880–1940) was an American film actor and the star of many early Western movies between 1909 and 1935. Mix appeared in 291 films, all but nine of which were silent movies. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom\\_Mix](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Mix))

things that others failed to do. I mean, it was understood that I would be going to high [school], but she wanted me to stay there.

DePue: And that was fine with you, it sounds like?

Sehe: As long as I didn't have to take math.

DePue: (laughs) Well, you graduated what year then? Was that 1940 that you graduated?

Sehe: Forty, June 9, 1940.

DePue: June of 1940. By that time, 1939, September of 1939 was when the Nazis invaded Poland. Were you paying attention to that? You said you were delivering newspapers.

Sehe: Oh, I knew, in... Don't worry about it. I mean, they're telling me. I said, "Yeah, there's a war started over there, like, World War I." "Oh, no, no, we're over here." See, this was the idea. "We're over here; they're over there. We're not worried about that." Just that was the general attitude.

DePue: Did you do any extracurricular things in high school?

Sehe: Yes, I was a football water boy. I couldn't make the team. Oh, I wanted to try football, and the coach, Nelson, he was a damned Swede. God, he had a whole Swedish team. I get that. Carl Nelson was his name. Carl Nelson, and he had a good team. I got an old helmet, but it would collapse. It isn't leather, but something like that, a suit that's too big for me. He asked me to run. I couldn't run very good. "I got just the job for you," he says. "You be the water boy." And by God, did that, that helped. All I had to do... We carried water in a milk bottle, you know, you had six bottles for cream, pint size, glass bottles.

DePue: Milk carton? Milk case?

Sehe: Wire, carry it in a wire basket.

DePue: Right.

Sehe: And the milkman would loan us all of them for a free pass to a game.

DePue: Right.

Sehe: I had water in it. I'd deliver the water in it. And he also gave me a box of white wafers. They were energy wafers. Every time we had a time out, I would go up, I'd have a towel and all that, and the towel's damp a little bit, and I'd go out there and watch them; they're talking. If they wanted them, I said, "These are your energy; you have to take one." Then I would take one

too and go back at the half and all that. But I got to go wherever the team went, see.

Now, in the northern Illinois, we belonged to the Little Seven Conference, Geneva, St. Charles, Batavia, Wheaton, Naperville. But Wheaton was growing, so was Naperville. So they moved out of the conference. Then it became the Big Seven. Finally, I don't know what they called it, the Western Ten, now. Anyway, I got to all these different places, and I got to travel a little bit, to all the league games!

DePue: Were you just too small to be playing football with the other guys? How big were you at the time?

Sehe: I didn't get much over five foot seven, 125 pounds. These guys were five nine, six foot, 150 pounds or some bigger. We had one guy that was, he was just like Albert Stark. He would start up. Man, that guy could play basketball, football, javelin, I mean all around, just like Jim Thorpe, you know, one in a million. Let's see... Oh, then I would mark the field with lime before the game. I'd get lime and a runner wheel and mark the field.

DePue: Mark it with chalk, then?

Sehe: Yeah.

DePue: At that time, you were in high school. What did you think you wanted to do with your life?

Sehe: Yes, Lillian. Lillian is my wife's name (DePue laughs). I don't know. She says, "Every damned place you been, you don't know." It's just... I didn't know. I know I had to keep going, but I didn't know where I was going.

DePue: If I can make an assumption here, these are tough times. Your family is poor; you're scraping around, making a few cents here and there. But it sounds like you were having a good time.

Sehe: I wasn't depressed. If I didn't have it, I could make it, or to hell...oh, forget it. If I can't, there's no sense of worrying about it. I didn't care. Oh, this brings us to... Let me see, I got to get... Hawley, H-a-w-l-e-y, Hawley tropical helmet? You know, the ones the African explorers wear, those pith helmets?

DePue: Yeah, yeah.

Sehe: P-i-t-h, pith helmet. That's important to remember. Another one, a guy, his father worked in a cosmetic room. There was a greasy... I can think of the name of it; it was a lotion...Italian balm. He worked in there, and they sell lipstick or cosmetic accessories. And they later made Ayds. I worked in the kitchen there. Ayds is A-y-d-s, is a reducing candy. I had my master's at that

time. I wanted something to do during the summer when I was on leave from Iowa, you know, summer?

DePue: Now, we're way ahead of the schedule here—

Sehe: Oh, I know, but I want to tell you.

DePue: Go ahead.

Sehe: They hired me in the Ayds machine. I was overly qualified in chemical knowledge, and their BA chemist didn't want me hired there. But now I know how they make Ayds; they put a bunch of minerals in caramel. Anyway, I gained weight! (both laugh) I was eating caramels every day. They could... Oh, that's jumping ahead. Okay, back in high school now... Where were we?

DePue: What you wanted to do with your life.

Sehe: Oh, I didn't know. I really didn't know.

DePue: You graduated in June of 1940?

Sehe: Um-hmm. Oh, then, I realized... See, the war in Europe was on. United States was mobilizing; I knew that.

DePue: Selective Service passed in September of 1940.

Sehe: Yeah, but the government also had the CC program.

DePue: CCC.

Sehe: Civilian Conservation Corps, that's important to remember, because that's a turning point, if I wanted it. They were hiring youths from high school—I'm not eighteen now—they go out into the forest and help reforest areas they would burn out old brush areas in the national parks. Yellowstone was one of the first; they built the cabins out there and all that, but Army style. They had drills. They had to conform to an Army way of living. But I didn't like this stuff. I've use "that stuff" a lot.

Then I thought, my uncle was in the Navy, World War I. He came back. Hell, that could be all right. And I said, "I'll join the Navy." But before I made that decision, the county nurse came. "Charles," she says, "You're old now; you're seventeen; you've got to leave." I mean, she was firm. They had to do this state law Regs or Relief Program trick.

DePue: She expected you to move out from the house?

Sehe: Ease the burden. Either you get a job or ship out.

DePue: This might be a good place for us to stop in the morning. We'll go ahead and get lunch, come back, and we'll start with you enlisting in the Navy. How does that sound?

Sehe: Yeah, let me talk to that. Anyway, she said, "You got to get out." And, okay. I'm getting tired.

DePue: That's why I think we might want to just take a break now and get you some water.

(end of transcript #1)

## Interview with Interviewee Charles Sehe

# VR2-A-L-2015-016.02

Interview # 2: April 14, 2015

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: This is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. We're on the afternoon of April 14, 2015. I'm back for my second session with Charles Sehe. This morning, we talked about your years growing up in Geneva, Illinois, during the Depression, some hard times, but it sounds like you had some fun anyway, growing up. We left this morning with you just about ready to enlist in the Navy. So, why don't you pick up the story there?

Sehe: Thank you. Yes, there were some enjoyable moments in my time. With the knowledge that was coming across... As I read in the local paper that I delivered that Europe was now at war with Germany, actually, the United States also started mobilizing. But they instituted a new program for the

young people. And this was called the Civilian Conservation Corps. They enticed the young men to enlist, and they'd be given free board, meals and even a bit of shopping money.

DePue: But when you talked about that this morning, it sounded like that it looked way too much like Army life to you.

Sehe: Yeah. I read in the paper that it was good for us; they started building parks and clearing forests. But they had the regiment of Army. One had to learn marching drills and so forth. And I just didn't feel comfortable with such an arrangement. Not that I disliked the Army, but I don't like marching, and I couldn't shoot a rifle accurately. I never shot anything other than a slingshot. And the Navy appealed to me. That I recall. My mother also mentioned that her brother, Martin Cornica, was in the Naval service in World War I. So, I thought, That's a good idea.

So, several of us of Geneva, we walked down to Aurora, Illinois, just ten miles south of us, to the Naval recruiting office. And there was about seven of us. I think almost fifteen or seventeen groups were already there. Oh, there was a guy...two from Geneva, one from St. Charles and one from Oswego and Elm...no, not Elmhurst, Elburn; that's it. They gathered us around, and he said, "Now, listen carefully, fellas. Once you sign up," he says, "You're part of government property, you have to follow the rules and so forth." And he said, "Last things first." He says, "Raise your hand if you are under eighteen." So, about four of us did. "You have to get your mother or parents' permission to"... So my mother gave it.

DePue: Reluctantly?

Sehe: She wanted to keep me home, because... I don't know. Somehow I feel that she thinks I would benefit the family more at home. But I did enlist, and I went to Great Lakes Naval Training Station, up in North Chicago, about ninety miles.

DePue: The thing that struck me is, you all went down and from what I had read, you enlisted on Thanksgiving Day?

Sehe: Yeah, November 26 was a Thursday, and Thanksgiving Day is always on the last Thursday.

DePue: But I'm just surprised that the recruiting station was open on Thanksgiving Day.

Sehe: Mark, they were open all day, (DePue laughs) Sunday if needed. Apparently, they had to have a quota. This is what I found out later. And if they meet the quota... But anyway, then they said, "You can go home; enjoy your meal; we'll have a bus ready for you coming back." So I went.

Being processed at Great Lakes, the first thing they said, "Now, you can send money home to help your parents. We call that 'allotment.'" That's the first time I ever heard of the word, "allotment." You sign a portion of your pay, and we'll show you how the percentage, whatever you earn. Twenty-one dollars a month was the initial pay for a recruit. So, I did; I signed that contract.

To speed up, in other words, go back up to the time of my discharge from the Navy, my mother returned all the money that I sent to her of those allotment payments, that I sent her. She sent back all the money. I had over \$400, something like that. She worked in the Burgess-Norton...piston pins. She packed piston pins for the war effort.

DePue: That was the thing. Even by 1940, the production was going up. The country was coming out of the Depression. There was lots of work to be had.

Sehe: It was just coming out, yes. It was still slow, slow for the economy, but not for war supplies. In other words, those industries that were already geared swiftly to change into a war protection specification, they got the money, grants. For example, Hawley Tropical pith helmets to steel helmets, Italian Balm lipstick casings to bullet casings and Burgess-Norton piston pins for cars to piston pins for tanks, trucks, etc.

DePue: Did you know your mother was saving this money for you?

Sehe: I did not know until I got it, until I came home.

DePue: That says a lot about your mother, doesn't it?

Sehe: I didn't tell her I was coming home. She knew that the war was over. I came back; I walked back from the train depot in Geneva. I just opened the door, and she was sitting in the kitchen. She looked, and she didn't say anything. Then she says, "Charles?" I says, "Yeah." "All's right?" She blurted that question loudly.

During the training that we had... There was twelve weeks at that time, eight to twelve. The initial thing was to get organized and have you think in military terms about what you're doing.

DePue: Wait a minute, not just military terms, Navy terms, I would guess.

Sehe: Well, this is it. And so, the first thing they send you through is to find out just what you can do and what you can't do. In other words, what are your qualifications, typist, medical, baker, etc.? How can you serve the Navy? I passed the English composition, and let's see, what else did I end up... Oh, the medical. That's the first thing. Before the written work, educational, they went through the medical. My eyesight's all right. I walked well. I had two scars, and they always ask if you have scars for identification, in case you're

dead. I have, now, over the age, you can't see it. Here it is. There's a one-inch scar across here.

DePue: Right on your wrist, close to your wrist.

Sehe: Right. My mother kept the buttermilk in the kitchen, up above the flour bin, and it's a little too high for me to reach, because she wanted to make sourdough. I reached up, and it fell and cut across here. In my younger years, you could very easily see. They could readily see it.

Then I have another scar, right here on the kneecap, across, a chip out of the kneecap, the patella. My brother, John, and I were cutting the kindling wood from the telephone poles that were in the back lot. The Illinois Bell Phone Company offered... Their yard was right across the field, and we knew that, so we went there. They would allow us to have the scrap. And he had an axe going like that. And for some pieces, I had to hold them. But the axe slipped, and it come across at this and took a nick out. So that's the two scars that identify me, in case they wanted it.

DePue: But they obviously figured out you were fit for duty, otherwise?

Sehe: And they took your weight, look in your teeth. I had several teeth, all molars, missing. And it was infected. This was before I went. I had to go back to the dentist. So he looked at it. I says, "Do you think I can still get in the Navy, even though I got this?" He says, "Hell, Charles, they'll take anybody." The war was on. That's just the way of his attitude. But then, [I] went to the rifle range, and they had the old 1903 rifle, bolt action—

DePue: Springfield rifle.

Sehe: I don't know. I didn't hit anything, because I wasn't ready. I didn't realize I wasn't steady enough. You're supposed to squeeze the trigger. I pulled on it. I didn't hit the paper target, though. I hit the board.

The swimming test came next. They give you Navy swimming trunks, oh man, they're made of itchy wool. It looks almost like a bikini now, with a trouser. So they had our group in there, and jeez, these guys... Most of them just dove in the water and out the other end. I didn't want to go in yet. I said, "How deep is it?" He says, "It doesn't matter." He says, "You just swim to the other side." I said, "But I can't swim." "Oh." He said, "Well, stay in this end, four feet." So I got eased down in there. Now he says, "You've got to go to the other side." And I said, "I don't know how!" He says, "Do something." I dog paddled across, but I was tired. But that helped.

Going back into 1944, at the island *Propriano Corsica*, off the coast, where the submarine net protected us, vanquished our fears. These guys would dive—I'm ahead of the time right now—these guys would dive off the highest place of the ship, into the water. I was on the blister shell, which

comes down around the ship to protect the steel armored arm, blisters that take the torpedo before it hits. So I get on it, and I get to the nets from here to about where your car is parked.

DePue: Oh, about 100 feet or so, it sounds like.

Sehe: It was a little longer. But I got to the net, all right. This was in the Mediterranean Sea. Now, salt water supports you a little bit, but you've got to keep floating like a plump man. And I said, "I'll go back." I hesitated, but I went back. I should have waited until I got the strength. I turned around to go back to the ship; I got about a third of the way there, and I knew I couldn't make it. I didn't want to struggle, so I yelled out for help. The closest guy was Richard Gugiani from Brooklyn, Richard Gugiani. I think New York, all the New York people swim around docks. He said, "Just be quiet, relax." Apparently, I didn't want to... He pulled me back to the blister, and I said, "Hell, that was my last swimming."

DePue: I'm wondering, if you didn't know how to swim... My guess is that you had never been on a big ship at the time you decided you wanted to join the Navy. Would that be right?

Sehe: I didn't really. I was thinking of a destroyer, really. They were fast, mean-looking things.

DePue: I guess I'm just struck that you chose the Navy, even though you didn't know how to swim and all.

Sehe: My guess is yes! Mark, again, I just didn't know!

DePue: And you've already explained why, but—

Sehe: My wife today, she says, "You really didn't know what you were doing." (DePue laughs) All through my period of sixty-two years that we were married, she says, "You still don't know. You don't even know how to balance the books." She was ill [for a] one-month period that required getting the bills. I can write the checks, but I forget to record their entry.

DePue: In your defense, Charles, at seventeen, what does any of us know of the world, right?

Sehe: Yeah.

DePue: We'll take you back to basic training, then. Sorry to interrupt you, there. Any other memories of basic? Do you remember your drill sergeants, anything like that?

Sehe: No. Here's another thing that bothered me. We marched in unison as a company. There's 120 people, 120 recruits. We marched from our barracks to

the mess hall. This was about Christmastime, about a week before Christmas; this would be forty-one.

DePue: You got there in 1940, November of forty.

Sehe: Yeah, Christmas of 1940, that's it. Because another shipmate of *Nevada* witnessed the same situation event that I did, though we didn't know that we were both together at that time. And now, I tell you, we were marching along, and there was a radio tower that rose about 300, 400 feet up. And there's someone climbing halfway up. We watched him. The petty officer in charge of our company said, "Halt." So we halted, and we watched it. [He climbed] halfway up and jumped. Now, this is December. This recruit, whom we didn't know, had parents who were killed in an auto accident, coming to visit him. (emotionally) The ground was frozen; he didn't even dent the ground.

So, I didn't feel like eating right then. I missed a meal, and I can't afford to miss any. (laughs) My wife knows I eat snacks. Let's see, what else? Then, this was about midway through my training. I was in company 120, and I caught a cold, a sore throat. They called it catarrh fever at that time, c-a-t-a-r-r-h, catarrh.<sup>5</sup> My throat was already sensitized by a previous illness.

DePue: The diphtheria from earlier in your life.

Sehe: And the doctor reckoned...he asked me. He said, "You've got an unusual membrane there. It looks like it's a..." He called it, he said, "eroded," or "it's not smooth." Anyway, he suspected... "We'll put you in and check it out." I thought, and he told my mother and dad, "We're just going to keep him for a while." So I missed graduation of that one company, 120, and I went to group 131, I think it was, at some weeks later.

DePue: I read earlier, that you started in company 122.

Sehe: That's it—

DePue: And you graduated in company 130. Does that sound right?

Sehe: That's right, yeah.

DePue: So, you didn't graduate with all the people you went through basic with.

Sehe: No. They graduated, and the entire company of 122 were assigned to the BB-39.

DePue: Is that the *Arizona*?

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<sup>5</sup>Catarrh fever is an old term that was used for the group of respiratory tract diseases including the common cold, influenza, and lobular and lobar pneumonia. (<https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/catarrhal+fever>)

Sehe: (quietly) Yeah. BB-39, *USS Arizona*. At graduation, now, they did the same thing. They issue you a clean mattress cover, never been used before. You leave the one at the barracks. You come into a large conference, like an auditorium, long table with chief petty officer and officers in the back, to make sure everything is done the way it should be. You bring this mattress cover up, and put it on the table. There's the two petty officers there; the chief petty officer stays in the back, to make sure they do it correctly. Then officers make sure the chief tells us... They stencil. They got a large stencil.

Our company now has 120 men. Half of 120 is sixty. The first half of that company that we had were assigned to *Arizona*, because they were filling quotas. They already knew war was going to be coming. They didn't know when, but they were increasing the ship's complements on all the ships. Half of our company went to the *Arizona*, and I was fifty-one, number fifty-one. That second half went to the *Nevada*. I was disappointed, because then the *Arizona* was a flagship. In other words, everything spic and span for the ship. But the *Pennsylvania* BB-38 actually was the admiral fleet ship. Let me get on. So I ended up on the *Nevada* when it went out to Pearl. Now, at that time, they followed Alfred Mahan's theory of surface warfare. Mahan's sea power is offensive, not defensive. All these dreadnoughts England put out, His Majesty's ship, [the] *Dreadnought*, iron clad in 1912 started the race.<sup>6</sup>

DePue: Yeah, the *HMS Dreadnought* was this revolutionary kind of battleship that was made early in the twentieth century by the British, and it changed everything in terms of what battleships were going to be like.

Sehe: It did. This was where the important ships were. Actually the *Monitor*, the *Merrimack* did it.<sup>7</sup> You see, the *Monitor* came out before that. So you couldn't... There wasn't any superstructure. But they had one revolutionary tactic that the *Merrimack* didn't have.

DePue: The armor plating? Oh, the turret that rotated?

Sehe: Yeah. And the *Merrimack* is... That's one point, then the other Britain... Their guns [were] fifteen-inch guns, most of them were eleven-inch guns.

Anyway, aside from that, I was assigned to the *Nevada*. And now, the service of warfare by this man dictated that when war is declared... Say we're adversaries; I declare war on you. So we sent all ships in a battle formation. You align all your ships together. They go out in battle-line formation.

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<sup>6</sup>A dreadnought is a type of battleship introduced in the early 20th century, larger and faster than its predecessors and equipped entirely with large-caliber guns. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreadnought>)

<sup>7</sup>The battle of the *Monitor* and the *Merrimack* in the American Civil War, a naval engagement at Hampton Roads, Virginia, a harbor at the mouth of the James River, is notable as history's first duel between ironclad warships and the beginning of a new era of naval warfare. (<https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-the-Monitor-and-Merrimack>)

Naval authorities just recently divided the fleet up, the Pacific fleet and the Atlantic fleet, into task forces. There were Battleship Division 1, Battleship Division 2, Battleship Division 3 and 4. Within each group, battleship had one carrier, aircraft carrier. And Battleship Division 4 didn't have any carriers. All right, one carrier, they had one cruiser assigned, destroyer, submarine. That was the unit; we were Battleship Division 1. *Oklahoma, Arizona, Nevada*, that's every ship. *Nevada*'s the only one that survived from the Pearl Harbor attack. Battleship 2, *Tennessee, Maryland* and all that, damaged. So that's how the Navy stood.

A year before the war, from 1944, we would go out for two weeks, one unit, Battleship Division 1. They would have a certain exercise to do. At that time, I was a searchlight operator. But before that, I was assigned to the Casemate guns, the five-inch, fifty-one cal. There were ten casemates, five on each side.

DePue: What does casemate mean?

Sehe: It's steel enclosure with an opening; the gun points outward. But then you got the steel here, the open view, you know, little port? You can't shoot anything that's up high, useless in an air attack.

DePue: So, the elevation was very limited in it.

Sehe: That is correct. And you can't shoot a plane that's in the air.

DePue: Doesn't the turret move, though?

Sehe: Yes, turrets move, but this is different. These are immovable casemates; these hold the five-inch guns. But the turrets were only the main fourteen-inch batteries.

DePue: So you're limited in Casemate movement, left and right and up and down, sounds like.

Sehe: Yeah, the four turrets, fourteen inch. We were five inch. Later, the *Nevada* replaced the casemates with movable twin gun turrets.

I wanted to be a baker. This is where the switch, another milepost. I enjoyed baking. In Geneva, while in high school, I watched the bakers that come to work at 9:00 in the evening. One man, Victor, he's an old German from all back. He would start up an oil-fired blow torch, and he had to pump up the pressure, get the oil pressure up. The oven was an open hearth, with fire bricks in there. It just fascinated me. Then he'll light it, and it goes [makes a sound] pffft. That'll shoot flames over the rocks, the bricks, the hearth, until they glow. Then you shut it down, and then they watch for the indoor temperature. He has the temperature gauge here. It goes in there, since, you see it. Comes back, it's the right temperature. So they'll be mixing the order.

The orders come down on a shopping, roll paper, a sheet of brown paper? It's just ripped off. The German, Edward Heyn, he would write down so many quarts of water, quarts of milk. That's all he had to do and tell them what he wanted out of them. So they knew, and I didn't know at that time, that the amount of liquid would tell the baker how many assorted items he could make. Or, if you had a special order, he would do it. And his special order, also, in holidays, he would roast or bake the turkeys or the hams, whatever, whoever would bring it. But that's irrelevant. But then, his bakers started; I watched them. I know the recipes, even today.

What I really wanted was a way to get permission to go to the front of the store. It's dark. You don't want to be walking around in the store in the dark, and a policeman come walking by. I says, "Can I get a roll?" The baker said, "Yeah, go get a roll." So I go up front to the store.

To me, that was, I mean, I enjoyed it. I copied the recipes. I learned now, and reflection back, and my wife realized that I was at a point of starvation. I ate to survive. I didn't know it. I didn't have any excess to work with. But I always waited until I got permission to get a roll.

When they made the cakes, they would put butter on the bottom, grease it, you know. They didn't use oil or oleo. Then they'd shake flour on it, which loosens the baked cake for removal from the pan. And then they'd bake it. That makes the cake come out easier. But there's always a thin layer of cake mix on there. And I would eat that, take it all. I mean, I don't know if you were allowed—

DePue: The cake crumbs off the bottom of the pans?

Sehe: You're damned right. You may think that's foolish, but to me that was just like eating cake, by dammit, coffee and cake.

DePue: I bet you the Navy never asked what you wanted to do, did they?

Sehe: Well, they tried, "What are you interested in?" I says, "I don't know." Today that's what my wife thinks. She thinks that all through life I still don't. She still doesn't know why I'd come up to see her—she's from Michigan, anyway—I went up four times without asking her to do anything. I just liked to talk to her! (both laugh)

Her dad was an old Coast Guard captain. He said, "What the hell's he coming here? What does he want?" And Lillian, my wife, "I don't know." And you know what her mother said? "Keep him coming." (DePue laughs)

DePue: Let's get you back to how you ended up... You were on the five-inch guns for surface action.

Sehe: All right. The gun captain says, “What do you do?” and says, “Well, let’s find out.” And then another guy was in an act, already prearranged. The guy, he’s walking by, and he dropped something, like he didn’t know it. The gun captain says, “Pick that up. What is it? What did he drop?” So, I went down with my left hand and picked it up. He said, “Are you left-handed?” I said, “Yeah, I write left-handed.” “Oh, good. We got a job for you.” I said, “Oh, good.”

They got a dummy machine to practice loading. It goes this way, and you got a fifty-five-pound, steel slug. That’s just how... You’re supposed to throw that into the little breech. Fifty-five pounds was too much. I kept dropping it, and he didn’t have steel shoes, steel toe tops on them. He just said, “We got another job for you.” He assigned me to the searchlight platform. The two weeks that we go out to sea, I had to go up to that damned searchlight at night. They call you up at night on maneuvers.

DePue: Where is the searchlight on the battleship? We’ve got a picture of the battleship here.

Sehe: Yeah, you’ve got... This is the *Oklahoma* wire cages during... That’s why we couldn’t go... All right. They put them on this side... This is of the old *Nevada* and the wire caged masts.



*Tripod masts replaced the USS Nevada’s cage (or lattice) masts, the type of observation masts that were common on major warships in the early 20th century.*

DePue: The tripod mast?

Sehe: Yeah, on the remodeled *Nevada* later, after Pearl Harbor, at the top, halfway up the main mast. The crow’s nest is on top, the searchlight platform beneath that.

DePue: How far off the deck would you be?

Sehe: I’d say about forty feet... actually almost sixty feet.

DePue: That’s a long way up. That was your battle station?

Sehe: Yeah. Now, I had to wear earphones, okay? I’m on one searchlight, and the other guy is on the port side. We get directions, “Thirty degrees right, forty-seven degrees elevation” and so forth from the bridge. There’s supposed to be an imaginary target out there, but they want us to find it and identify it. Shit, it’s cold up there. But we’re there. Anyway, did that for a while.

DePue: I don't want to get too far ahead of the story—

Sehe: But then—

DePue: You were assigned to the *USS Nevada*, but that was BB-36?

Sehe: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Where did you first link up with the *Nevada*?

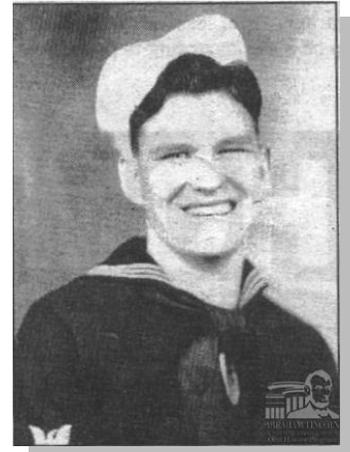
Sehe: Graduation, right from training, right from Great Lakes to Bremerton Navy Yard—

DePue: In Washington State?

Sehe: Yeah, in Washington State. From Seattle, we crossed the Kala'e Bay on a ferry. You got the bay; it begins with a "P," Puget Sound.

DePue: Yeah, Puget Sound.

Sehe: All right. Bremerton Navy Yard's here; Seattle's across the bay. Anyway, she was in dry dock. To increase their ship's speed, they removed the old torpedo tubes they used to have. They used to have four of them damned things. And they put in some new stuff. I don't know, degaussing cables for mine detection.<sup>8</sup> But we had to scrape the barnacles off. All the recruits worked, scraping that stuff, dust, you know? (DePue laughs)



*Charles Sehe in his formal uniform, circa 1942. Most of that year the USS Nevada was in dry dock at Bremerton, Washington, undergoing repairs and being up-gunned after it was heavily damaged at Pearl Harbor.*

DePue: This sounds like it's not a fun job at all. This is the kind of job you give brand new recruits because nobody else wants to do it.

Sehe: That's correct. We just come out, and they said we got to start from the bottom. Boy, we did. We go to the bottom of the hull, work upward, or we were up, then we come down on another side. They would inspect the work of each group of recruits, which one did best. Damn, them little barnacles; they're just like glue.

DePue: What did you use to scrape it off? Just big "putty knives," or something?

<sup>8</sup> Degaussing is a process in which systems of electrical cables are installed around the circumference of ship's hull, running from bow to stern on both sides. Degaussing, when correctly done, makes a ship "invisible" to the sensors of magnetic mines, but the ship remains visible to the human eye, radar, and underwater listening devices. (<http://navymuseum.co.nz/degaussing-ships/>)

Sehe: Oh, the tire iron blades were real sharp. They'd also use brushes with heavy wire bristles to clean surfaces.

DePue: Before you even did this, what's your impression when you first see this battleship?

Sehe: God, I'd never seen anything like that. I wasn't even near anything other than a canoe or a clam boat. That's what I did hunting clams, and no motorboat. I never was in a motorboat. A canoe I was, but god that thing was huge.

We spent three days on that hull, and then these officers would tell us where we got to clean it more. What recruits do, they scrape off all the barna[cles], clean it again. They found all kinds of weird animals on it, you know, echinoderms or starfish. Then the crew captain sprayed an oil on the surface, and that sort of keeps it all clean for a while.

These officers would come down below and inspect the bottom of the keel, like this. The older guys that were on duty at the bottom of dry dock. We were on a two foot by twelve-foot plank, sitting, pulling it along. Older sailors would chew Beech-Nut chewing tobacco to keep the dust [out]; they recommend that. So they tried that with me. I says, "I can't do that." "It'll keep the dust out." So I started chewing a little bit, and I swallowed some of that shit. But then the guy says, "Hey, do you know what I did?"—he'd been doing it for two days—he says, "Watch me, now." I didn't even know what happens. The Navy officers would walk, their white caps, and here one comes, [makes a spitting sound] boom. He didn't miss either. (both laugh) I have to say, there's some humorous [stuff].

Then the rumors started on the war in Europe. A lot of us had free time to go to Rope Yarn Sunday.<sup>9</sup> You sit around and shoot the bull, you know, keep up on your... wash clothing and so forth. Well, I was there. That's where I met James Robert Bingham, Seaman Second Class from Missouri. We got to know each other for a while. Then he says, "I'm getting married pretty soon, as soon as we get away." He says, "Will you be my best man?" I said, "Yeah, I'll do that."

And another guy says, "You know, this war is getting serious." And another guy said, "Yeah," he says, "I want to go home." Another one posed a good question. He says, "What the hell's going to happen when we sit here? Here we're tied up, tandem. You've got two ships, one outside, another inner, the *California* by itself. You have the "*Wee Vee*"—nickname for the *West Virginia*—outboard, together with [the] *Tennessee*, inboard, and the *Maryland* tied in tandem and the *Nevada* in dry dock at Pearl Harbor on December 7.

DePue: You got ahead of me again, here.

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<sup>9</sup> Regardless of what day it is, when the captain calls for Rope Yarn Sunday, it is a day of idleness from the usual daily chores of the ship. ([https://hornblower.fandom.com/wiki/Rope\\_Yarn\\_Sunday](https://hornblower.fandom.com/wiki/Rope_Yarn_Sunday))

- Sehe: Anyway, the ship was finally conditioned. We were all ready. So we set out for Hawaii, testing all circuits and machinery. It [was] one of those turbulent fall turnovers, spring and the fall—
- DePue: Changing of the seasons?
- Sehe: Yeah. I got seasick. Here's where they played jokes on the guys that were seasick. They'd say—they used the last name, mostly—they'd say, "Sehe, come on, let's go get something to eat." I says, "I don't feel like it." "Oh, hell, they got pork chops," you know. They say, "They've got a nice gravy to them." There's six of us who sickened. "They cook them in olive oil." Oh, shit. And the guy says, "Well..." But that's the only time I ever got sick. We arrived at Hawaii, and ever since then, I enjoyed it.
- DePue: Was that pretty typical?
- Sehe: First day out, yeah. But I loved it after that. I was a loner. Only when they're sitting—I'm way ahead now—I sit on the fantail of the ship.
- DePue: Let's get the ship again, here. The fantail is in the back, is it?
- Sehe: Yeah, way back. Well, it's the extreme end, back here, way on the end. The screws are down here, two of them. They turned, and I see frothing coming up. We go like this, three ways, like that. And I just dream. It's just mesmerizing, watching the foam appear and the ship's wake fade out beyond.
- DePue: Just watching the ship's wake?
- Sehe: Just watching. I says, "Where are we going? Who has been here at this time? Which way were they going?" Right there. And then at night, I'd go back. That's called... You ever seen the blush morning? Do you know what a blush morning is?
- DePue: Blush morning.
- Sehe: Blush. What you do though, you say of something; it's a blush. That's before the sunrise. All around it's just an even pinkish blue, oh, beautiful. Anyway, I watched that, and I watched the phosphorescent animals. I didn't know at the time what they were. That was my enjoyment, like lightening bugs, off and on, etc.
- DePue: Now, was this on your route to Hawaii the first time? That was your first experience doing those kinds of things?
- Sehe: No, I was sick all the way up during out trip from Seattle to Hawaii. (laughs) No, this is after [the] Aleutians.

- DePue: You must have felt pretty happy, once you finally got to Hawaii, after being seasick.
- Sehe: Oh, yeah. Jeez, I'm gaining weight; I feel good; I got a good place to sleep. I sent home money, \$21. Hey, I went from \$21 to \$36 a month. That's quite—
- DePue: Was that seaman second class by that time?
- Sehe: Yeah, seaman second class.
- DePue: Thirty-six dollars a month.
- Sehe: Yeah. And then seaman first class was \$54.
- DePue: Were you—
- Sehe: I tell you what... What the hell would I do with it! I had \$54 a month—
- DePue: A sailor could get himself in trouble in Hawaii with that kind of money.
- Sehe: A lot of them did.
- DePue: Was Pearl Harbor one of the choicest places to be in the Navy at the time?
- Sehe: I think so, yeah. They optioned for it, yeah.
- DePue: What was your impression, once you first got to Hawaii, of the islands?
- Sehe: Oh, yeah, it's about as tropical, sun, no winter, you know. And they had... Oh, they had movies, and a lot of geedunk places.<sup>10</sup>
- DePue: Geedunk?
- Sehe: Oh, ice cream parlor. They call it "fast food" now. To go ashore in Hawaii, I could do it, 1941, on one dollar. Come back. The ship's at harbor. You get on the launch, the Navy launch, the Liberty Launch, they called it. They dock at the landing, enlisted man's landing, get a bus; it costs twenty cents to go to Honolulu. What you've got left of a dollar, eighty cents, okay? Beer, ten cents; hamburger, fifteen cents; a movie is fifteen cents. Then [it was] twenty-five, forty cents, candy bar, nickel, Hershey candy bars; shit they're big.
- DePue: Bigger than they are today.
- Sehe: There the twenty-five cent ones. No, they must be \$1.50. They're bigger than a Baby Ruth regular bar, a full bar. Here, like this. This is about the same size,

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<sup>10</sup> A geedunk bar is the canteen or snack bar of a large vessel of the United States Navy. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gedunk\\_bar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gedunk_bar))

five cents. Baby Ruth, Butterfinger, Three Musketeers, **Three Musketeers**, vanilla, chocolate and strawberry, all five cents each.

DePue: Was there strawberry or marshmallow?

Sehe: Strawberry. But now they sell it, as just a chocolate piece. Going to the beach doesn't cost anything, but you got to wear shorts. (DePue laughs)

DePue: I would imagine you could find just about everything, but maybe there was a shortage of young girls around?

Sehe: Well, that didn't bother this sailor, here. Now, those older guys and the more experienced, they hit, like the Black Cat Café and Barnes and Dino's and all that. Truthfully, I didn't bother. But there's also a little section of Honolulu called "Hotel Street." You know, you get a room, but you have to pay five dollars. You can't stay overnight, you just—

DePue: Gee, I can't imagine what sailors would go there for, huh? (laughs)

Sehe: Oh, they... Anyway, that was it. And then the Pearl Harbor came.

DePue: Before you do that, though, I assume that you're out there for a few months with the *USS Nevada*, and you're not spending all of your time in port, right? You're going on these maneuvers, occasionally?

Sehe: Two weeks, we'd go out for two weeks. We'd come in and another battle division goes out. But while we're in port, we continued training.

DePue: Did you do some gunnery training, as well, when you were out in the ocean?

Sehe: Yeah, we did. But I... Those searchlights, they got me off of that. Anyway, there's two ways they did it. They have a tugboat, towing a target raft, and it had white thing, black, you know, a circle. Surface guns would fire at them. Another time, in the daytime, they'd have an airplane come out towing a sleeve, a white sleeve. And the anti-aircraft guns would fire at that. We had only eight anti-aircraft guns, four on each side.

DePue: Were they twenty-millimeter cannon?

Sehe: No, these were 551s, no, 525. Yes, five-inch AA shells.

DePue: What does that mean?

Sehe: The caliber, yeah, five-inch, 25 caliber.

DePue: So, smaller than twenty millimeter would be.

Sehe: Oh, no, no. These five inch.

DePue: Five inch?

Sehe: But they were slender. They were long, with powder in the shell itself. But their case, there's a casing in them. The main battery has a shell, and they got powder bags. They got to put four big powder bags to slam them. Those damned shells weighed... They're six foot... They're taller than I was, those shells. Of course, going, you know... They go on the ramp that's mechanized to lift them. But these other ones, they had the lifts first. But when there's five-inch surface gun, there's ten people. And wow, Mark, gun captain; first shell man, that's where the left hand—

DePue: That was the left-hand guy.

Sehe: First shell man. The captain opens the breech, steps back to right. The first shell man throws the shell into this breech, then moves back. The second shell man takes a shell from a third shell man and hands it to the second for the next round. Then the rammer rams the shell tight. First powder man puts the powder in the shell. He'd move the first powder and puts the powder in. And the captain slams the breech closed. They fire; it opens up and repeats.

So, time's important, depending on the ammunition train... The powder and shells that come from below—four decks below—they come up on a hoist, and then you have one, [a] fourth shell man here, he eventually gets it. It comes up into the room, the casemate. That's why they call it casemate. It comes up there, but it takes two men to bring it to the gun.

I couldn't do that, but they still let me be the—what do you call it—the first shell man for it. They said they're getting ready to fire, and I said, "No." I didn't want to go. They respected that. I didn't.

Well then, the tenth man, the tenth man is the water bucket man, in case of fire. And he says, "Hey, say, casemate eight needs some water. Here, Charles, I'll get you some. Sehe, take this bucket of water in to that casemate, and help them out. You don't have to stay here and watch us fire; you take it in over there." That was all prearranged. They do that with all the recruits. So, I pick it up, and I brought it into casemate. Then they slammed the hatch shut. I couldn't get out; I had to stay in there. "Fire," boom! Oh, jeez! Oh, that scared the shit... That's a crude way of getting a... But after that, it didn't bother me.

DePue: This is kind of a curious question, maybe, but up to this point in history, the battleship was what it was all about. Did you guys, at the time, have a sense that the future belonged to aircraft carriers?

Sehe: No, I didn't, but we had a couple of guys saw that, the guys that operated the old O2U Kingfisher seaplane. We had two on the catapult, scout planes. They're supposed to scout. They believed in air power over surface fire. No,

there was a lot of the younger people coming out of the academy. Of course, the Taranto Raid, the British torpedoed Italian war ships in the harbor.<sup>11</sup>

DePue: You're talking about the battle already, where that proved to be the winning—

Sehe: Well, yeah, they sank the Italian battleships or something. Anyway, the—

DePue: Let's get you to maybe the mid- to late-November timeframe. Was there a heightened sense of security? Were the sailors being told that there are negotiations going on with the Japanese; you need to be in a heightened sense of security?

Sehe: We were aware, but we weren't told anything. The enlisted men, anyway.

DePue: [Pause to reattach microphone] Make sure we're not losing the mike there. Go ahead.

Sehe: [For] the enlisted men, the only information is the handout from various levels, all the services. We know that something was going on. But we didn't know how intricate it had become and how critical it was. We knew that it was scuttlebutt, but we were told that, once war comes, we're prepared. We'll send out our battleships to meet their battleships. But aircraft carrier stayed behind the fire line.

DePue: Did anybody think that the war might actually come to Pearl Harbor? Or did you just figure it would be way out in the Western Pacific someplace?

Sehe: No, there's a misunderstanding. Peter Wren, the co-author of the book, he brought up an interesting point in the story [book], *Battle Born*. There's pronunciation, Manele Bay and Manila Bay. Now, Manele Bay is in Hawaii; Manila Bay is in the Philippines. There was suspicion that there would be an attack involving Manele Bay. See the similarity in pronunciation? That wasn't picked up. When it come in radio traffic—if you want to call it that—Manila, Philippines would first attack.

DePue: And I suspect that that's not the kind of information that a seaman second class is privy to anyway.

Sehe: No, we weren't. I wasn't getting privileged until they got to D-Day and Iwo Jima, because my buddy, Bill, was there, talking on the phone, between the captain and the... No, we didn't know that.

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<sup>11</sup> The Battle of Taranto (Taranto Raid) took place one night in November 1940 between British naval forces and Italian naval forces. The Royal Navy launched the first all-aircraft ship-to-ship naval attack in history. Its success augured the ascendancy of naval aviation over the big guns of battleships. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Taranto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Taranto))

DePue: All of this conversation is... To me it's always very important to get the background, to get the whole flow of the story and everything. But now we're coming to the gist of the story, in terms of Pearl Harbor. And what I want you to do, in talking about Pearl Harbor, Charles, is let's start with the evening before, even. If you're willing to discuss this now.

Sehe: Evening before?

DePue: I know that there was some discussion about going on liberty.

Sehe: Oh, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Now that brings [me] back—

DePue: And you're—

Sehe: See, this was Friday, now. During the pre-war period in the Navy, enlisted men were allowed to visit personnel whom they know, relatives and so [forth], on other ships. Now, the officers, of course, were doing that. I had a friend, a hometown friend, Charles Thompson. He lived in St. Charles, Illinois. He went in a year before I did. So, he was a seaman first class. He was a big shot, according to him. He reminded me, I'm only a seaman second [class] because I didn't make seaman first [class] until after the Aleutians campaign. So I went aboard Friday, and he said, "We'll go on liberty Saturday." He said, "If you can arrange, come on over; we'll go on Liberty. You can sleep over, and then you can go back." This was permitted, though it actually could be a breach of security.

DePue: Sleep over where? What ship did he serve on, then?

Sehe: *Arizona*. So, I said, "All right, Charles." I says, "This Charles says, 'Okay, Charles', and your Charles says, 'Yes, I do.'" We went back and forth. Then I said, "Cut that, what do you want?" He says, "Come on over, visit."

Meantime, during the day, I washed my clothes in a bucket. Enlisted men didn't have the privilege of the laundry services, except the chiefs, you know, the wheeler dealers. So, we had our own bucket, locked up in a special place that they'd allow us. But I washed the clothes, and then hung them in front of an air blower, an exhaust fan, a no-no. I wanted to dry them and get them down before the master arms crew come around. Well, I didn't get them dried enough, so I got caught.

The captain gave me three days' kitchen duty. But he said, "That will be Saturday." He said, "You don't have to go down now. We need you in the kitchen," the scullery, they called it. And he says, "You'll be lopping pots for a while." I said, "Yes, sir. What did you say?" He said, "You'll be lopping pots for a while." The chief, he says, "You'll be cleaning pots," lopping pots, they call it. (DePue laughs) I said, "Yes, sir." I learned to salute, too, a forty-five-degree angle of the arm.

Anyway, I went aboard Friday. I talked to him [his friend, Charles]. And then Sunday, I told him I couldn't come. He didn't make it Sunday. He was aboard the...among the casualties of the battleship *Arizona*.

DePue: That morning, then, were you actually down in the scullery, when the attack began?

Sehe: No, that was Saturday's duties. Thompson wanted me to go with him Saturday. I couldn't do it Saturday because I had to do the duty. And then for Sunday morning, but I couldn't go. So... Let's see if I can get this straight. Yeah, that's the one. I was down there Saturday. Well, Saturday, Thompson was on the ammunition supply ammo ship. It was a very critical time period. They were loading ammunition throughout the whole harbor that those ammunition ships came in, the *Vulcan*. They named them after violent incidents, *Vulcan*, you know. We were supposed to have one at 9:00 that morning.

Anyway, I had breakfast. At 7:00, I got breakfast. About 7:30, I went to the head. After the head, washed up, getting ready for meals, you know? Reveille's at 5:30. Incidentally, I still follow that rule. I have my coffee at 5:15, 5:30, irritation of the household, but I don't give a shit. I have twelve ounces, or three to four cups, of black, regular coffee.

Then the four or five of us in the head were sitting around, and all of a sudden, it jarred us, boom! And I said, "Oh that. They're practicing firing." In the harbor? There's shooting, we thought... Then I ran to my battle station. Oh my god, it was just unbelievable. I just said, "What the hell happened?"

DePue: Do you want to see the ship again?

Sehe: No. What have you got, there?

DePue: What I have here, I've got *The Attack on Pearl Harbor, an Illustrated History*. And here's Pearl Harbor itself, a schematic, with all of the different battleships. You want to pause for a second?

Sehe: No. I got one, better than that stuff.

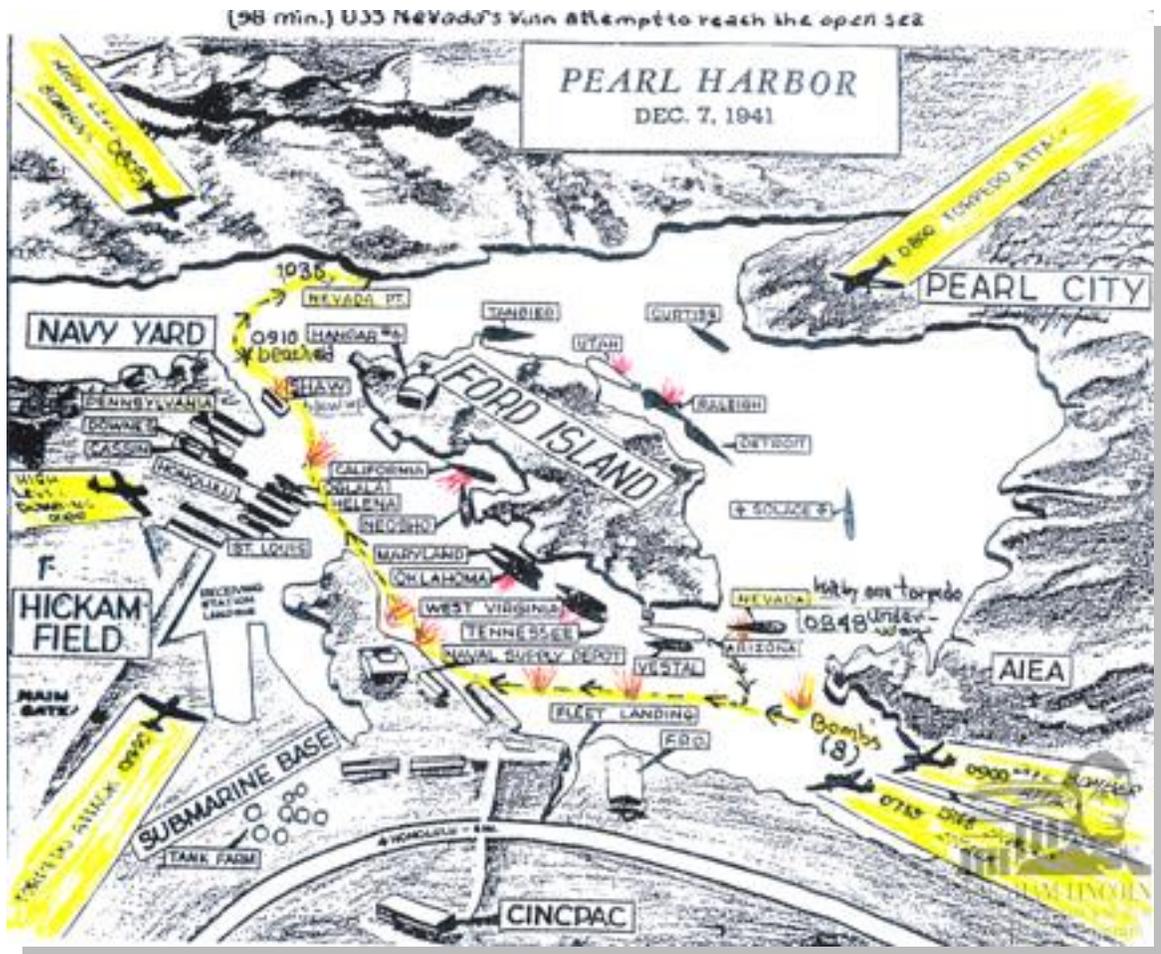
DePue: Better than this one?

Sehe: Yeah. I've got the actual photograph.

DePue: You talking about this? I don't know where that would be.

Sehe: Japanese photo.

DePue: This is one I can understand, though, Charles, I guess, because you can see where the *Nevada* is and all of the other. Why don't you tell us quickly what all was in the harbor at that time, and especially the battleships that are in the harbor.



A picture depicting the sequence of Japanese air attacks and the route the USS Nevada took during its vain 58-minute attempt to reach the open sea on December 7, 1941.

Sehe: Well, thank you. Yeah, I have a copy of a copy of the original Japanese photo of the harbor. And I can tell you, just by looking here... You look here, and I'll look at it upside down. There's the *Nevada*.

DePue: It's on the northeast corner, or the eastern corner of Ford Island, right?

Sehe: Yeah, it's at the end of Ford Island. Next to it is the *Arizona*, with a sun tent over the deck. And then the next one down there—you see this guy here? That's the *Vestal*.

DePue: *Vestal*, yeah. Was that the one that you were talking about before, or that was—

- Sehe: Yeah, that's another ammunition ship to serve us at 9:00 a.m. And then the *Arizona* then *Nevada*, then the *Oklahoma* and the *Maryland* and *Tennessee* are hooked up together. The *Oklahoma* got seven torpedoes and capsized; *Maryland* got about three or four bomb hits, below that steel deck. They hit that direct. Okay, then we go back on the East Loch—as they're called there—and you come to the... What's that, the *Nevada*?
- DePue: That is the *Neosho*.
- Sehe: The *Neosho*, that's a...yeah.
- DePue: *Neosho*.
- Sehe: A utility ship. The *California* was moored by itself, BB-39. And—
- DePue: I want to ask you about... There are a few ships on the opposite side of the island, and especially the *Utah*. That's always referred to as a "target ship." What does that mean?
- Sehe: That's an old battleship.
- DePue: Would it be towing targets, or would it be the target itself?
- Sehe: Well, they use it for bombing; they use it for bombing targets. It's all stripped. It's still operable, operated by steam engine. But it's flat. So they use that like a flat top.
- DePue: So basically, seeing if either bombers or dive bombers could—
- Sehe: Dive bombers they had. And they either use sand... They used colored sand. And because it was flat, from the air it looks like a flat top, carrier. That's how it got sunk. What you see most and all around here, are the PBYs [Patrol Bomber and Y being the code assigned to Consolidated Aircraft as its manufacturer], mariners.<sup>12</sup>
- DePue: Seaplanes?
- Sehe: Seaplanes, real big hull, like a pontoon hull. They use those for spotting. And that damned island was just loaded with gasoline.
- DePue: On the opposite side—on the mainland side, I guess you'd call it—I see there's also two huge oil tank farms.
- Sehe: Yeah.
- DePue: Which had to be another very juicy target.

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<sup>12</sup> PBYs are US Navy medium to heavy twin amphibious aircraft, used for maritime patrol, water bomber, and search and rescue. (<https://acronyms.thefreedictionary.com/PBY>)

Sehe: Yeah, it is. Alright, here's not only that, here's... And the other part here, this is where the cruisers are, most of them. Here it shows... This is the submarine pen, but the submarine base was right next to the tank farm.

Now, Mitsuo Fuchida, the naval commander of the command to fight, Fuchida, he wanted a third strike. He fought for it. But Nagumo, being cautious to the letter of his operation, says, "No, my duty is to protect the six carriers." They had six air carriers there.

DePue: Here's the other question I've got for you, and we're going to go into some of the more details of the actual fight here, pretty soon. But what ships were not in Pearl Harbor that morning?

Sehe: The *Saratoga* and the *Yorktown*. I think it was the *Yorktown* that was sending the supplies to Midway and Wake, Wake Island.

DePue: In other words, the aircraft carriers weren't there?

Sehe: None of them were there, not one. In fact, yeah, one was on duty—what you call it—maneuvers. The others were carrying supplies on the way to Wake. But admiral... I can't think of his name, one syllable, Kibbs, maybe?

DePue: Kimmitt?

Sehe: No, Kimmel, Admiral Husband Kimmel.

DePue: Smart?

Sehe: No. Before Kimmel. It's just one syllable... Admiral Stark, he recalled the fleet, because he felt there is a danger. From where, he didn't know, but he recalled—

DePue: Recalled it to the West Coast?

Sehe: Yeah, but Admiral Stark returned it to Pearl Harbor.

DePue: Were all of the battleships there that morning, pretty much? It sounds like it.

Sehe: Ironically or tragically, wherever you want to put it, it's the first time in two years since a July the 4th celebration that all battleships were in Pearl Harbor at the same time.

DePue: Wow.

Sehe: I mean, it's just a fluke. It just worked that way.

DePue: What—

- Sehe: See now, they hit Hickam Field, and they hit Wheeler Airfield. They hit all the air fields first. The Japanese got to keep the American aircraft down.
- DePue: Once you got to battle stations, that meant that you went up at your post with the searchlight in the mast. So, you have to have... Unfortunately, you have the best view of the attack in the harbor, perhaps.
- Sehe: Yes. You get in contact with Yeager. You just tell him keep his blabbermouth shut, chiding him for telling you. He's a blabbermouth. Yeah, I told him something like that. No, truthfully, unbelievable. I never fully understood the feeling, the shock of the attack. What the hell is happening? Who are they? Yeah.

Then I realized that... And now, in post-war days, and the reasons that I have and information that this attack has been one of the most elaborately planned and executed, one, two, three, four. They couldn't miss anything that got... None of the ships could have gotten out. They were coming from the south, going north. They're coming from the east, going west, and we were in the middle of the damned war, enemy planes all over the harbor.

- DePue: Did you see the torpedo that was dropped and hit the *USS Nevada*? Did you see that happen?
- Sehe: No, that was... I was in the head. I felt it. (laughs) No, the first... The torpedo hit when I was sitting in the enlisted man's head, just as I was going out, because the anti-aircraft were firing. So I was in between, going up. They were already firing when I went up to the searchlight platform. The Marines already knocked one down from the bird's nest. Then there was a second platform for the main mast. There was a Lewis machine gun portal that has to be set into position. But that sailor certainly got a piece of one plane that plunged into the channel.

The *Nevada* was fired upon by two torpedoes. The second one missed it, slammed into the mud alongside of it. That's been verified. And now, I want to go back to the correct pronunciation of the state for which the ship was named. It's *Neováda*, not *Néváda*.

- DePue: *Névada*?
- Sehe: *Névada*. The Japanese had it right. Have you seen this *Tora, Tora, Tora* film?<sup>13</sup> Watch closely—I missed it at first—hear *Névada*, then watch the Japanese movie twice on ship *Yamato*.<sup>14</sup> When they're in the admiral's room and they had the chart up there, the first ship that they mentioned, everybody

<sup>13</sup> *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (Japanese) is a 1970 Japanese-American biographical war drama film that dramatizes the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tora!\\_Tora!\\_Tora!](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tora!_Tora!_Tora!))

<sup>14</sup> *Yamato* was the lead ship of her class of battleships built for the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) shortly before World War II. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese\\_battleship\\_Yamato](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_battleship_Yamato))

missed because they didn't pronounce it the way the American... He says, "*Névada*." The guy says, "Two," so he makes two slashes. The two were directed toward the *Nevada*, but the second one missed. *Névada* is Indian, Shoshone for "snowcap," *Nevada*.

DePue: How did **you** pronounce it at the time?

Sehe: I was getting there. I knew there was something there, because I'm Indian, part Indian. I was told that it was *Neváda*. That was drilled into me; then I knew better.

DePue: What I'd like to have you do is, if you can, tell me a little more, from your battle station position, what you're observing in the battle itself.

Sehe: That's **seventy-four years** ago, you know. My memory's bad.

DePue: Now, one of the things you sent me—

Sehe: They—

DePue: Go ahead.

Sehe: No, go ahead. You want a better story? You can get a better, vivid, productive, stimulating story.

DePue: Oh, sitting at the bar, drinking a few? (laughs) In preparation for this, you sent me a lot of material. And apparently, you have written a lot about your experiences in the Navy. It looks to me like a lot of them were things written around Christmastime that you would send out to friends and relatives?

Sehe: Yes, that I did.

DePue: Why were you doing that?

Sehe: I was trying to free my mind, troubled as it was!

DePue: Get it out of your head?

Sehe: (emotionally) I was trying to make it easier for me to do things currently and not have the flashbacks. It's easier for me to write the material than to speak to someone related with this somehow traumatic—

DePue: Let me ask you this question then, Charles. I want to read into the record your description of that battle. Would you prefer that I read it, or would you like to read that?

Sehe: I know what's in there.

DePue: So, you're okay having me read it? Read it out loud?

Sehe: You want it on that (referring to the recorder), huh?

DePue: Yes.

Sehe: I'll interrupt you by agreeing with you with my nod, or put a question mark, and so forth. But I'll let you do that, if possible.

DePue: Let's take a brief pause here before we do that.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We took a little bit of a break to get some more water. This looks like something that you wrote fifty years afterwards. And you mentioned to me a couple of times, when we were chatting before, and you mentioned it just now also, that you seem to do better when you write these things down than talking about them. Here is one case in particular. I think this is proof of that statement. (starts reading) The *Nevada*, how did you just pronounce it?

Sehe: *Névada*.

DePue: [reading from Sehe's document] "The *Nevada*, with some of its boilers already lit on standby, got up enough steam pressure to get underway." And this is obviously after the attack has started, and the ship has already been hit.

Sehe: It's ten minutes in, ten minutes to get the boiler's pressure up.

DePue: I guess, before I go any farther, "with just a couple of boilers lit." Does that mean you've got enough power for electricity and things like that?

Sehe: Yeah. Ensign Taussig was on the night watch, but he somehow—you know what I mean, a person gets something—he had a sense. He just kept two boilers on watch. Now there's four in the *Nevada*. It takes two hours for all of those boilers to get revved up from cold temperatures—thick oil sludge, actually—to ship speed. So he had half of them already done. See what I mean?

DePue: What was his name again?

Sehe: Taussig. T-a-u-s-s-i-g.

DePue: Ensign, that's a pretty low-ranking commissioned officer.

Sehe: Well, yes, but not when his dad's in Washington, D.C., higher.

DePue: Oh. Was most of the ship's brass, though, on leave at the time?

Sehe: (laughs) All but one. The senior man left on watch was not a line officer (DePue laughs).

DePue: So they were all on shore duty.

Sehe: Yeah. The captain, the exec, the gunnery officer, the supply officer, they were all gone.

DePue: Let's start all over again, here. "The *Nevada*, with some of its boilers already lit on standby, got up enough steam pressure to get underway. As the ship slowly eased its way into the channel, passing the *Arizona*, a tremendous fiery explosion ripped the *Arizona* apart, showering the open deck crews of the *Nevada* with hot, searing, metallic debris, burning many of them to death. A dense, acrid, hot smoke passed overhead.

I watched a second wave of high-level dive bombers, now concentrating their efforts on the *Nevada*, as we slowly proceeded up the channel and heard cheers coming from crews of other ships, encouraging us onward. Although there were many near misses, indicated by numerous

waterspouts, numerous bombs made their mark on the *Nevada* and severely damaged the forecastle bridge and the boat deck area." In other words, it was during the time you were making the run that the ship was hit by several bombs?

Sehe: Eight.

DePue: Wow. "The *Nevada* was given orders to beach itself, so as to avoid blocking the channel to prevent other ships from entering or leaving. As the *Nevada* passed dry dock"—

Sehe: Ten ten, dry dock, yeah, holding ships for repair.



The USS Nevada in Pearl Harbor after it suffered both a torpedo and bomb hits on December 7, 1941. The ship was eventually beached rather than have it sunk in the channel leading out of the harbor. The searchlights, Sehe's battle station, are circled.

DePue: The destroyer, *Shaw*, moored nearby, blew up by a direct hit,” —I think they’re right over here, someplace. Yeah, there it is— “showering the decks of the *Nevada* with flaming, metallic fragments. We felt some of it. Our ship finally came to rest, assisted by two tugs at Wāipio Point.”

Sehe: (corrects pronunciation) Wāipēo’.

DePue: “Waipio Point. The *Nevada* now laid bow low aground, and all decks, except for the watertight compartments below the second level, were filled with floating debris and foul-smelling water, mixed with heavy sludge fuel oil. After most of the major fires were put out, we turned our attention to removing the wounded and dead, who were then transferred to motor launches, which came alongside.” Now, I did have—

Sehe: Is that—oh, good. Did I read that?

DePue: You wrote that.

Sehe: Gee!

DePue: Does that not sound right, or that’s just—

Sehe: You got me all... Okay. Oh, hell I wrote loosely.

DePue: Is that not how you remember it happening?

Sehe: That’s how it... Oh, we, yeah. What’s surprising to you, because of the boilers... What it normally, in peace time, it took two tugs to move one of those damned battleships out into the channel to start it, two tugs. We went out unassisted. That’s what amazes the people that were watching us. At the same time, they were dredging... They got to... See, each year they got to dredge the channel because the sedimentary material fills the channel floor. You know what I’m talking about, here?

DePue: Right.

Sehe: So, to do that, they got a siphon pipe. It goes down like this, across the channel, to the other side. They take all this, [makes a sucking sound]. It’s all over there. But it’s in the middle of the channel, where the open the pipe is, and it goes out. Do you understand? So this ship... Chief Sadberry, who was the navigator—he was an enlisted man, but chief, quartermaster, I think—he maneuvered around. And the harbor people say, “Don’t move. You can’t do it.”

So he says, “What?” He [one of the harbor people] says, “You can’t move it around the pipe.” So he moved it around the pipe, and then Sadberry asked them again—this was common talk that came, rumors— “What pipe [are] you talking about; we didn’t see any pipes.” We moved around it

carefully, whereas before, the ship would stop, and then the dredge people would pull the pipe away, then they'd go through. (laughs)

DePue: One of the things that struck me, reading about this—and I don't know why I should be surprised—the whole Pearl Harbor area was very low draft. It was not deep at all. And that's why you would have to have these areas dredged, I guess.

Sehe: That is correct. It's very...thirty-five to forty-five feet deep, forty-five at the deepest.

DePue: Which for a battleship isn't much, is it?

Sehe: We had thirty-eight draft.

DePue: Whoa!

Sehe: Get what I mean? And you know what? That saved our butts, the battleships. They sank **this** way. They didn't go out into the ocean and sink **that** way. The channel depth saved us.

DePue: Since they sank in shallow water—

Sehe: In shallow water, they were right there. And then, you mentioned the oil farms and the machine shops, they didn't do the third strike as Fuchida wanted. Everything is... So, December 8th, they started up the machine shops; they sent guys over at... The ships just lost two days of work. Do you understand what—

DePue: While the dry docks still working, all the oil was still there?

Sehe: Nothing. If—

DePue: I did want to ask you one other question here. I'm just trying to make sure I understand correctly. This is a map from the same book that I had before. Here is the *USS Nevada*. It gets under steam and heads out toward the open ocean. And once you got underway, here's the *USS Shaw*, and it says *Nevada* beached here. Then apparently it floated off and went across on the other side of this bay, and a tug actually made the final beaching pf *Nevada*.

Sehe: This is where we got the order from the yard, yard harbor, "Beach! You're blocking the channel!" Ships, if you sank right in the middle, these guys can't get out; nobody can get in and help. So we beached. This is the first beach. Then a tug, two tugs, came. What happened, we got flooded. We started getting water in the machinery. So they pulled it out again, and they went over to a place called Nevada Point.

DePue: Today, it is?

- Sehe: Yeah.
- DePue: Was that what was referred in here as—
- Sehe: Waipio.
- DePue: Waipio Point?
- Sehe: W-a-i-p-i-o, Waipio. Just like... [Are] you French?
- DePue: I have a French name. I'm one thirty-second French, so not much.
- Sehe: Oh, your mother... I mean, my wife, yeah.
- DePue: So that is correct. There were actually two beachings. And this one, where you finally rested, obviously looks like it was clear of being able to get out of the harbor itself.
- Sehe: Mm-hmm.
- DePue: Were you still under attack when you were in—
- Sehe: All the way. Watch where those flash red marks are. Count them.
- DePue: I'm going to include this one when we do the transcript as well. (see page 43) You've got red marks, and for the route that the *Nevada* is taking, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, the *USS Shaw* looks like it's the last place that you came under attack. Would that be right?
- Sehe: Yeah, um-hmm.
- DePue: But by the time you're beached, you've been hit several times, plus the torpedo, so you've got to be drawing lots of water at that time.
- Sehe: Yeah, bow down.
- DePue: Were there fires onboard ship...ten, fifteen?
- Sehe: Fourteen.
- DePue: Fourteen fires.
- Sehe: Poof, poof, poof, poof. All that stuff is hot molten metal, wires and all that [makes a swishing sound twice].
- DePue: If you've got an electrical fire, you can't spray water on that, can you?
- Sehe: You've got to do something. It's all tangled up in there. All right, but we've got these fourteen independent, separate fires. We go here, and you shut this

one down, and you go somewhere else. That damned stuff is still hot enough, and here's what happens. It reignites. That's what... Now, I was on the searchlight platform at this time, and the call came out, "Fire. All men not engaged in gun or gun ammunition handling, turn to for fires. So, I slid down. I don't remember coming down that thing, but it bruised, scrapped my skin.

DePue: Where in this process did that happen? Do you think it was when you were on route or once you'd already beached?

Sehe: It was on route, just before and while... No, it was coming. Somewhere it says... Look out for "fleet landing" on there, somewhere. Help is coming, tug boats.

DePue: I've got to believe—and this is going on for a couple of hours—this has all got to be a blur to you at the time; isn't it?

Sehe: (laughs) It still is a blur. I get pieces now and then. Oh, here we go. See how high up that searchlight is?

DePue: What emotions were going through you when you're experiencing this?

Sehe: You mean here, in this interview (laughs)?

DePue: No, that day.

Sehe: Oh, back then. That's seventy—

DePue: Or were you just reacting to the moment?

Sehe: I didn't react until later, I guess. It's just numb. I don't know. What do you think... You see something; you don't know what it is. I don't know.

DePue: Were you scared?

Sehe: Why don't you pick D-Day for me, because that's... I know all that. This stuff is a little hairy stuff to talk about, confusing.

DePue: Well, when—

Sehe: I have to get oriented. This is where I am careful of my writing. I talked to several people, and they said, "This is... You're doing well."

DePue: In other words, when you're writing it down, you want to get it right?

Sehe: That is correct. And my psychiatrist, the first psychiatrist—I wore out three of them, including Dr. Benjamin Lund, who had a tragic ladder fall that paralyzed his legs; he was the best—he was a major in the Army. He knew what I was doing. He didn't know exactly what my emotions were, but he could pretty well guess, more than anyone. He says, "You just have to... You

can't describe it." He says, "Do something. Write about it." That's how I got... I started the first paper... What I did, I put it all together, tried to put it all in one. [It] took a couple of sheets, and I got confused. I pounded on the table, and my oldest daughter—she teaches Spanish and art in high school—she says, "Dad, separate all that out. Don't get mad. Take each little segment." That's how... Notice they come in segments, now.

DePue: Do you remember when the *Arizona* went up? Do you remember that?

Sehe: That I do. I felt the heat. I saw it. Oh, I choked a little bit, because... I didn't see the *Arizona*. I saw it, you know, the day before. But I always have black smoke all around, coming this way, over our ship, like that. And those poor bastards who were in the front, we call the "anchor detail" —we're getting ready to get underway—they got killed. But I felt the heat from that. (weeping) I'm sorry, I forgot; what did you ask?

DePue: Do we need to take a break, Charles?

Sehe: What were we talking about?

DePue: We were talking about the *Arizona*. How about the *Shaw*... Where was the ship? Where were you when the *Shaw* went up? Were you close to that, as well?

Sehe: Yes, before we beached a few distances earlier—my eyesight is failing here, a loss of depth perception—They were on the left side. But the bomb was supposed to go to us. (yawns) I'm getting tired. I must have—

DePue: I have—

Sehe: What were we talking about?

DePue: I've got just a couple more questions, or we can call it a day, if you'd like.

Sehe: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Let me finish off with this question. I know this is very tough for you. Were you a changed man, after that day? Beforehand, you were still a young kid. You were, what, eighteen years old?

Sehe: Changed? I... What happened there... Well, we'll skip all that cleaning all the debris that's in there, all right. Then they had to reassign. Now, here's what happened immediately after the attack. All these ships were under-manned, many of them, due to the deaths and so forth. So, the highly rated individuals, say... Let's see, I was a seaman second. Well, let's say a third class, second class, first class petty officer, first class petty officer, he's experienced. He could be... He's transferred off it and so forth. And the other ships needed them. We had a lot of guys that were transferees. So then you had to

reorganize our ship's complement. They transferred me from Fifth Division, which is the Gunnery Division, to fire control, Sixth Division, which is up in the director. At least I didn't have to hold the damn shells again.

Anyway and unfortunately, all those guys that were in the...the Fifth Division, which had the five-inch surface gun fire, had the highest casualties. There's ten men in each unit; three casemates were destroyed. That's what, thirty men, right? We had seventy-some men killed. I remember that in Casemate 4, all were killed. Anyway, I was put in the Sixth Division, which was fire control. I have a muster book [at] home, I'll show you. Wait a minute (pause as Sehe searches). I think I gave it to you. I think it belongs... Do you have it? What do you have?

DePue: Everything you've given me is—

Sehe: No, I mean, what did you do with it? You got a special place for—

DePue: What we will do with all this material that you've given us?

Sehe: Yeah, for—

DePue: It will go into the archives, with your interview, unless you want it back.

Sehe: I just want... You see, my problem is family. Well, I get it; they're sentimental. I've been in a war, and they're going to want to know. But I'm thinking of the second and third generation. You know what I'm getting at? They're going to lose this World War II stuff. And so, I think, well, not that I trust Illinois, [Governor James R.] Thompson there in Chicago or [Chicago Mayor Richard J.] Daley. (laughs) I grew up with that stuff.

DePue: But Charles, the reason we do these interviews is so that these stories are preserved for future generations.

Sehe: Hey, whatever happened to [Governor Rob] Blagojevich?

DePue: Blagojevich?

Sehe: Yeah, Blagojevich.

DePue: Governor Blagojevich is in jail in Colorado right now.

Sehe: Well, how come Obama didn't get hooked up? You know, that guy is smart. Oh, that guy has got... He covered up; he never... No one ever knew where he was born. Okay, that's politics.

DePue: Let's call it a day, how about that? And we'll pick it up with the recovery operations, unless you want to finish with that part.

Sehe: No, unless there's some question on that.

DePue: I think this is probably a logical place for us to stop today. It's been a long day already. Thank you very much, Charles.

(end of transcript #2)

## Interview with Charles Sehe

# VR2-A-L-2015-016.03

Interview # 3: April 15, 2015

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, April 15, 2015. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This is my third session with Charles Sehe. Good morning, Charles.

Sehe: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: We are in your home in Mankato, April 15, Tax Day.

Sehe: Oh, gee. (laughs) I just mailed out to Uncle Sam, our—

DePue: Yeah, I had to do that right before I left to come up here. I don't think it's anybody's favorite thing to do. Yesterday was an important day for me. I got to hear your experiences, your stories, about growing up in Geneva, Illinois, getting into the Navy and, obviously, we finished off yesterday with Pearl Harbor. I know that that's not an easy thing for you to talk about. I'm sure there will be some things today, as well, but especially Pearl Harbor. I think that's where I'd kind of like to pick up today, put all of that behind us. But

you had to be a different person after that day. You were a very young lad when you joined the navy, and it wasn't more than about a year later that you experienced all of that.

Sehe: Yes. The aftermath of that sudden attack, I thought about it. I fully realized, at that time, that this is a real war; we're at war. And I see myself... I thought, my god, why me? The second day, that is the day after, of course, we were doing muster call, and they found out that most of the casualties aboard the battleship *Nevada* had been on the secondary gun crews. I'm glad that I was assigned as a searchlight operator. Many of these individuals I knew personally. That's what... I just couldn't believe it. Where do I go now? Then the realization came that we got to go ahead, no matter what it is. I was waiting for instructions [for what] to do, because I didn't know what to do.

The first thing, they told us to go throughout all known compartments for your division to search out and get wounded or dead. We were given shiny, unused buckets. We started out, hundreds assigned to several of the gun casemates. I entered some, and I couldn't believe what lay there. Now, for each gun position, there's usually ten persons involved. Then, within two of the case mates, all ten for that respective gun position, the gun was destroyed, and the casualties [were] 100 percent.

I was on the starboard side there. On the port side, the Marines had the last number ten-gun position. That gun entirely, ten Marines were killed. I came across pieces, sections if you will, portions of bodies, badly burned and blackened. You couldn't tell... I would look around; it was just like a roasted hog or something. I couldn't pick one up right away, but I had to. I felt, I knew I had to pick up... I wanted to be there. They told us, "Don't leave any fragment of human in the debris." I did that; I brought back my bucket, and then I went a second time. This time, toward the smokestack area.

Now, the smokestack area has to be serviced now and then for cleaning the flue. They didn't have that permanent steel housing around the smokestack. They had a cyclone fence arrangement. On the smokestack itself, there was a hatch that they can remove, unbolt, enter and clean it. I looked into it. It was just horror. I just couldn't believe it, but I couldn't speak. In a lot of situations, a person will say, "What the hell? What happened?" I couldn't do that, I just looked. There were pieces of human flesh stringing (emotional) through this cyclone fence, from that gun position. It's like picking off pieces from the clothesline.

Well, I got that done, and I went back to the... They had a central place where we could meet with our buckets. We left the buckets there, and they told us we should go to the starboard side, where there was a launch. These launches were coming along side now, and still there's fire of the oil that's on the surface of the harbor, from the *Arizona* and the *Oklahoma*. So

these launches had to go through that burning oil to pick up these pieces from the buckets.

Then I went back, and I sat down, and I rested. I don't know if I fell asleep, but I just sat there a while. Then they called us back, and then a launch came alongside for a relief party, not from our ship but from another ship for us. And some of us left. So, they took me off with some of my crew, and they got us food and a change of clothes and so forth. That was the end of the morning of the second day.

DePue: That would have been December eighth then.

Sehe: Yes, December eighth; it was a Monday morning, I know.

DePue: How long after the attack itself did all of the senior people on the crew end up being transferred to other ships?

Sehe: Immediately, they... All right, according to a time element, they thought it was about... It varies. Our ship was cleared by 10:35, of flames. Some areas were 10:20 and so forth. We realized, when the Japanese planes left at 10:30 or so, it was quiet. Now, they assumed, some assumed, that perhaps a landing is in schedule, but we didn't know that. So, our crews remained at the battle stations of the guns, the surface guns.

DePue: This would have been on the seventh still?

Sehe: This is still the afternoon of the seventh, and they weren't relieved until the next day. The ship was flooded, at that time. It was beached, bow down, and the water was up to the second deck level. In other words, everything below the second deck was under water.

DePue: Is the top deck the first deck? And the one below that is the second deck?

Sehe: Yes. They had orders from the harbor that we're not to move, once we were beached the second time. The first time we were beached, but we were half way in the channel. In order to prevent blocking, they told us to move. So tugs came out and changed our position. It got dark, we had no lights or anything, so they decided to abandon the ship.

Just momentarily that night, launches came along, and they took us to a Bloch Arena, B-l-o-c-h. Admiral Bloch was named that, Bloch. [The arena was named after Admiral Bloch.] This was... It's like an amphitheater. They had the boxing ring and wrestling ring in the center and these tiers were... We slept in the aisle between the tiers. They put out blankets for us, and we slept in the aisle, between the tiers, around like that. We got a change of clothes. We could shower, and I was hungry. ( laughs) I've been hungry ever since...still am. Anyway, a lot of these individuals weren't hungry, but I wanted something, any...

In the morning we went to the mess hall. This is where a lot of people, they wondered why and all these thoughts. They needed organization. Here was, in this large mess hall, crews of different ships, all mixed up. And they needed some organization. So, one guy, an officer I assume, he said, "Well, let's get this thing organized," over the speaker.

So, what they did, they called out for black paint and brushes. On the wall of this nice clean, alabaster wall, *U.S.S. Nevada*. They didn't put... They put *Nevada, California, Oklahoma*, all around. And they called for a muster. All crews had to go to the wall where their ship name was painted. That's how they learned to segregate. They were all mixed up.

Then a man came in, what rank, we don't know, but probably an admiral. He had stripes; he had two or three, then a two inch... probably an admiral. "We need volunteers," and he said, "Gentlemen, we are at war, and we need to fill the complement of any given ship with what is necessary for that ship to be combat ready."

A lot of the individuals there were highly rated seamen. I was a seaman, a second. There were third class, second, first class enlisted men, and some of them already having the feeling, the energy, to go out. They wanted to do something; they volunteered. You could select what you wanted, or they told you where to go. But you had the first choice of a cruiser or a destroyer. I didn't have any skills, so the *Nevada* kept me. They kept several of us, about 400 of us that volunteered. And then we went back to the ship, and we started our first muster call, which will be the crew for clean-up. I was part of that group, and there were about 400 of us.

DePue: What was the normal ship's complement?

Sehe: In peace time, it's almost 1,000, about 920, the records show. But since 1939, since September with Poland, Britain was mobilizing. We were also... The United States also was mobilizing. We went from 900 or so to about 1000. The enlisted man felt the change more than the officers.

In pre-war, we had tiers of three beds, and they fold up at night, I mean in the daytime. They put in another tier, so there were four. If you got 100 men or 200 men on one tier throughout the compartment and you add another 200; that brings it over 1,000 on the ship's roster. You don't pick up a bunk that you like, see. So my turn, I'm seaman second, I ended up on the **top** bunk of the four, by the speaker, (both laugh) the speaking cone. Oh, shit... Anyway, I was first to rise, and I sleep lightly. I always have, ever since that damn war. As soon as I'd hear the click of the speaker, I was awake, and everybody else was sleeping, I was always awake, and I still am now.

Today I never use an alarm clock. I get up at 5:10 or 5:30. Sometimes I'm a little tired, then I get up at 6:00. Then we would have reveille. We'll

muster three times a day. It's important, Mark. We muster aboard ship while we're cleaning, because then there's crews going off, workmen coming in and all. Then, we muster at noon and then at night, before we left the ship to go. And that time, the next day, Monday morning about... It was almost noon, a large group of officers, top ranked—and there's some civilian guys with them—they were determining—and I didn't recognize Nimitz at the time.<sup>15</sup> He must have been there—They were determining whether the *Nevada* was salvageable. Was it worth it to raze it? He said, "No, it's sunk; it's got a torpedo hole and eight bomb hits." Someone else, unknown, and the yard work [boss] spoke up. I want to use my phrase; I think that's what they said. I'll take the workman's viewpoint, "**Dammit, hell, we can fix that damn thing.**" Let's get it going." I think that's what convinced Nimitz.

Actually, we started cleaning up. The first thing we done, together as a crew, clean-up, throwing all the old stuff overboard, onto barges. These are wide, open barges, originally designed for garbage, and they go around each ship. They had wire, broken pieces of wooden frame and decks and a lot of stuff still warm.

Then selected people came aboard, specialized people, acetylene guys, welders, and cutters. They all worked on the top deck. No one went below, because of fouled air. A couple of individuals, earlier during this, went down below, and they became ill. So they hauled them out. That determined they better wait. So they brought in exhaust fans.

DePue: They got—

Sehe: They were ill. They didn't die, but there's poisonous fumes down there, dust and everything else, unknown. Anyway, that gave them the clue that they should put in the exhaust fans. Well, they spent three, four, almost a week, just cleaning the topside of the ship.

DePue: It sounds like they were almost stripping down the superstructure.

Sehe: No, they were cleaning up anything that's ripped up. But most of it was topside! You're right. The foremast; of course, the bridge, navigation bridge, that had been bombed; the boat deck, where were the anti-aircraft guns stood; the captain's cabin was demolished. So all this stuff was taken apart. Then, in order to get below, they had to drain out the water. In order to do that, they got to patch up the hole, the torpedo hole, from frame forty-two to fifty something.

DePue: This is no small hole.

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<sup>15</sup> Chester W. Nimitz, (born Feb. 24, 1885, Fredericksburg, Texas, U.S.—died Feb. 20, 1966, near San Francisco), commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet during World War II. One of the navy's foremost administrators and strategists, he commanded all land and sea forces in the central Pacific area. (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Chester-W-Nimitz>)

Sehe: This was... How do I say it... I have it in one of my...the size of it.

DePue: The dimensions of it? Yeah.

Sehe: A sizeable hole. What happened, they, the divers went down, and they measured it and then came back up. They made plates, shields like... They would say, one that they could handle, with a crane. They used a crane to move a section of it, and then they'd weld one on. In other words, they'd weld here. What I'm getting at, they have a large hole, and they weld a section of steel on the periphery of the hole, making it smaller, smaller, overlapping. Finally they put in the seal plate.

DePue: Were these underwater welds that they had to do?

Sehe: Yes, it was all underwater.

DePue: I knew that that could be done; it just amazes me though.

Sehe: I watched it, and all I see down there is a blue flame and bubbles in the water, wow! Anyway, it took them about two to three days to gradually close this off. And that one there, they called it the "\$1 million patch," affectionately called, because that's what it cost, \$1 million to plug up that hole.

Then they brought water pumps aboard, on the top deck, pumped out the water, and then they were ready. But it didn't rise. It was stuck in the mud. And so... My wife's calling. So they took a crane, and I can close my eyes today and hear the (makes a sucking sound). Up she comes. They pulled her out of that mud bank, and everybody started... We had a...just a yelling time, where we're alive. Then they must have had another feeling. Let's just see what's down there. We'll make another decision, if it's salvageable, because the machinery was...you know, everything is underwater. Interestingly enough, **nothing was damaged**. We got underway, ninety-eight minutes, tugs brought us to a Pearl Harbor dry-dock. That's one of the most memorable trips I ever had.

DePue: Ninety-eight minutes after they brought it up and—

Sehe: No, ninety-eight minutes from the time we left Fox Eight mooring site, until where we got sunk. Ninety-eight minutes during the attack, with eight bombs. That's what's up. (coughs) Seems a little better than yesterday. Anyway, then they made another evaluation of the condition of the ship. The machinists said, "All we got to do is clean it up a little bit, and it will be serviceable."

Now, you have to keep in mind the history of the ship. It's a turbine engine, two screws, two drive shafts and I forget the sy power; that's indicated in another article that I wrote up. So the speed wouldn't exceed twenty knots, almost twenty-one. The newer ships that were coming off the drawing board in forty-two, forth-three, like the *Wisconsin* and the *Dakota* and *Alabama*.

They had four screws, and the sy power of each one is twice that of the *Nevada*. They could go almost forty knots—

DePue: Whoa.

Sehe: They could catch up with a carrier, which has four screws. The carriers, they've got four screws; we've got two screws. The shaft's here; two over here. We couldn't do that. What could we do? We are designed to be a service warfare battleship. So they decided to use it as gunfire support to landings. Surface contact is what we were best suited for.

I'm going to advance a little bit here and go into D-Day, southern France, Iwo Jima and Okinawa, kind of thing. We were the best damn gunfire support crew that the Navy ever had, and Admiral Nimitz said so. I don't know, these guys [on the crew]... Some of them were from Minnesota, northern Wisconsin, all backwoods kids. Dammit, they hit the targets every time.

Now, during the clean-up, they decided to give us leave, to get rid of the crew so the working crews could come on and work without interference. We're given a ten-day leave. I took a train trip from Seattle, Washington to Geneva.

DePue: Wait a minute. You got from Hawaii to Bremerton, Washington, then somewhere in there.

Sehe: Oh, yeah.

DePue: And I believe you guys took off in April, late April for...

Sehe: Yeah, that's right; I skipped that. Then they sealed everything off, and they took a trial run. We sat there all day, just running the engine to see what, you know, if it's alright. Then they decided to move out, April 22. Now this is from December 8 to April 22. That would be January, February, March, April, four and a-half months. They raised it up, and now they decided... They didn't have the full repairs in Pearl Harbor.

Pearl Harbor was a relay station, actually, support for some minor repairs. In other words, this points out very nicely now, United States had a fleet in Pearl Harbor, but to service them, they've got to go through either Norfolk on the East Coast or Seattle on the West Coast.

DePue: When you say Seattle, you're talking about Bremerton, which is, I know, where the ship ended up. That's where the major dry docks were on the west coast?

Sehe: You know why? This is explained to you [and] to those that are not aware. Great Britain had Singapore, okay? The Dutch had the Dutch East Indies.

And... Who else is involved? But these, they didn't have any repair naval facilities in Singapore and—

DePue: The Dutch East Indies.

Sehe: Yeah. What I'm getting at, when the war started, to defend them, they didn't have any major defense battleships, as we did in Pearl Harbor, see. That's why Malaya, Burma and Philippines were easily taken.

DePue: I wanted to ask you about that, because you're still at Pearl Harbor. You and all of the other seamen are just trying to understand what the heck just happened to the United States. What just happened to you? And over those next few months, you're getting a steady stream of very bad news.

Sehe: Yes. When we got back to the States, in condition for our first assignment, to go to the Aleutian Islands, we were getting these bad reports. We heard that Singapore fell for the British and the Dutch East Indies. See, the Japanese were looking for materials for survival. Japan itself had very limited mineral sources. So, rubber, iron ore, rice, their staple diet, that's what they were looking for.

DePue: I know oil was one of the things they desperately needed, as well. Did you think, at that time, this is going to be a long war? We might not win this war? Did that ever cross your mind?

Sehe: No, actually, to be very candid, Mark, **I wanted to go home**. I was scared; I wasn't afraid. There's a difference. I was trained to do something. I was trained to be a gunner, and I was scared of them when they came. But I wasn't afraid. When the time comes, everyone, from the lowest rating seaman, did their jobs effectively, in the absence of officers. This is pointed out in one article, which I had written. Did you get the one on "Number Four Sledgehammer"?

DePue: Yeah, but I don't think I had a chance to read that one yet.

Sehe: "Number One Sledgehammer." *Nevada* gunnery crews was among the first of the Navel installations to fire. Of course, the air fields were already under attack, but battleship row wasn't yet. Japanese had to knock out the Air Force. And aboard our ship in Hawaii, on weekends, Saturday, liberty, mostly for the officers, non-restricted, they can go, along as somebody covers their duty time. Enlisted man's got to wait his turn.

So, aboard our ship the captain, Captain Scanlond, he was not aboard ship. The executive officer also left the ship; the gunnery officer also left the ship; the navigation officer left the ship; the supply officer left the ship; the hull, the commander who is in charge of the hull on the ship, in other words, this being also the wellbeing, he was **off** the ship. The only one left, the senior in the line officers, was an ensign, Ensign Thomas. Another officer came later,

Ensign Taussig, whose father was a... I don't believe what... He was a U.S. government official. I don't know if it was senator or...

Anyway, we only had that one person, and the one who took action was Ensign Taussig. He was a duty watch, officer of the deck. The officer of the deck, his command of activities, under the auspices of the commander and so forth, they were gone. So now he was number one, and he realized that this was war! He sounded the general quarters. And then the bugler was there. See, in peace time the bugler does all of the announcing over the phone, general quarters. It goes doot, doot, doot-doot, doot, doot, doot-doot, doot, doot, doot-doot and so forth in rapid, short, sharp, loud blasts. The guy, Ensign Taussig, was so scared, he couldn't get the notes out. So Ensign Taussig took his bugle and threw it away (laughs). And he [said,] "All hands, man your battle stations; all hands, man your battle stations! This is an attack!" That's the humor part of it. That's how it started.

These enlisted men went respectively to their battle stations. Some were half-dressed; they had their shorts on; they had no shoes, you know, just skivvy shirt and wearing shorts in the tropical, semi-tropical, place. This is why the burns, the deaths from fire burns originated.

DePue: Taking you back to the question, though... You said that you were ready to go home, which is perfectly understandable. That's a very human reaction to all of this. But were you otherwise confident that the United States could eventually prevail, could win this war, at that time?

Sehe: No, I didn't think so. I just couldn't figure out why the hell are they here? I didn't say it; I didn't have the slang vocabulary as the older ones. I just couldn't fathom what the hell they're doing here. And then, it's a real war when I saw them, when I went out with my bucket, and it's going to be a long one.

DePue: And by the time you got back to Bremerton, to Washington State, Guam, Wake Island, Malaya, Singapore, I think probably the Philippines had already collapsed by that time. I don't even know if we were in Guadalcanal. That was probably not happening yet.

Sehe: Not until November.

DePue: But also the Battle of Java Sea, where the U.S.S. *Houston* went down.

Sehe: Um-hmm.

DePue: This is just a steady stream of horrific news.

Sehe: We were given pep talks. I think of them now as pep talks. "Don't be discouraged; we can do this; we got the men coming in, and we can do it, we can; we're already building newer ships," because the concept of a battleship

as a main battle force is on the way out now. They showed that at Pearl Harbor.

Fortunately, the United States was in this transition period, between building battleships and the blueprints. They were open for modification, before they finalized anything. They learned from Pearl Harbor; they learned from German attacks on Poland, the tanks, the airplanes and so forth. They knew the mistakes or the advantages of what our adversaries were doing. That's in our favor. They were never ready in a set program of industrial production.

DePue: Did it make sense to you when you heard that the Franklin Roosevelt administration and the top military brass decided that the war in Europe was the top priority, that the Pacific would have to wait.

Sehe: Do I have to speak on that? (both laugh) Yes, we heard that. This is already done at the initial invasion of Poland by Germany. The Roosevelt administration and the army were in agreement that the real threat to the United States was from Europe, Germany. And any action against the Japanese empire would have to wait until production could increase enough so that they could divide the material coming off the lines equally.

Right now, everything, the priority is going to Europe. And Nimitz told them to take a flying... Nimitz was very upset about this, and he... Well, to me, this was above my level of knowledge at that time. So I didn't know, but I wonder!

DePue: Well, it was personal for you. It was personal for Nimitz.

Sehe: Yes. He came aboard after several days and decorated those that [were honored with the] Navy Cross and two Congressional Medal of Honors.

DePue: For, obviously, some very harrowing and worthy responses at that time. Let's take you back to what you were just about ready to tell me about when you went on that leave. Did you head back to Illinois?

Sehe: I did two things. I went back, and I took, I believe it was the Great Northern train. Got into Chicago, I got a little mixed up, because I wasn't never in there. I going to tell you that Chicago, it's a great central place to board a train. You can't go west without running through Chicago, unless you go southern Illinois, the belt. They have the Illinois Central; they got the Northwest; they got the Burlington.

So, I came in there, and I had to get off to Geneva. They had a little line they called Chicago, Aurora, Elgin Railroad. And this one, in Geneva, we had those rails in Geneva. And, [to] back up in time, one car—these are electric cars that run by themselves—one car would come up from Aurora; two cars would come from Elgin, pick up passengers along the way, and they

come into Geneva, meet on State Street; then they would go down State Street, couple up, and go out east to Wheaton. After Wheaton, they'd go into Glen Ellyn and so forth, and they'd hook up another car. By the time they'd get to Chicago, there's about eight cars on there. These are mostly commuter—

DePue: Commuter cars, you mean?

Sehe: That's what actually they were. They went bankrupt, just after the war for some reason, **mismanagement**. I got home though, and I walked from downtown to home. Nobody was there. My dad was out in the back somewhere. I walked in the kitchen; my mother was there. I didn't even say, "Hi." I was going to say, "Hi," but I didn't know how to say, "hi" (laughs). I was in uniform, and she turned around and said, "Oh, Charles." "Yeah." She hugged me a little bit, and I says, "I've got to leave." "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to Missouri." I said, "I got to see someone down there."

I stayed a while, and I figured out how to get down there. I think the Illinois Central went down south a little bit. I don't know what train it was, Southern Pacific or something. A spur went to Kansas City. I got to Liberty, Missouri. I wanted to see the parents of... (emotionally) I had a friend aboard ship, a shipmate, James, James Robert Bingham. We called him Junior. He hated that. He said, "Just call me Jim." (laughs) Anyway, James, his father had a farm next to Frank's parents' farm. So I went down to Liberty. Wow!

I asked directions to go out there, because I was supposed to be his best man. He was engaged to a nice girl in Liberty, Missouri. I knocked on the door, and the gentleman answered. I said, "I'm Charles Sehe from the battleship *Nevada*, and I come to see you about your son, James."

He said, "I'm sorry, sir, I have no son." I says, "James Robert Bingham, Junior?" "Sir, I have no son." (weeping) "I have no son," he said. He was very emotional. And I didn't realize why he said that. He was speaking the truth. He lost his son. So I didn't bother him. I went back. This segment of my entire military life remains a painful etching on my troubled mind and soul.

I returned home, went back to the ship, faithfully. I never thought of deserting, but some people did that. They got tired of this and off they went, but it doesn't pay to be a deserter. I still didn't know what I wanted to do. My wife says, "You still don't know."

DePue: And that point in your life, you didn't need to worry about you wanted to do. The Navy was going to tell you what they wanted you to do.

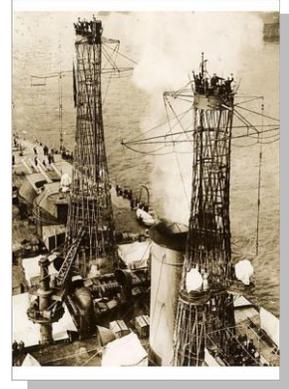
Sehe: I was satisfied with that. (DePue laughs) Anyway, I returned. They were changing the silhouette of that ship; I'd never believe it. We had two masts; originally, they were wire cage masts. These were—

DePue: The tripod masts that went up?

Sehe: Well, this was before that. You know, the Japanese game [toy], where you put your fingers in, and you can't get them out?

DePue: Yeah.

Sehe: Tall cones with a wire. You have, in that one book that that gal gave you, it shows the wire cages. They took those all down and replaced them with tripods. Now there's a reason for this, because in the old state, the wire's condition, the wind would rush through, and these things are... Hell, these were up sixty some feet. The vibration up here, like this—wire cages they call them—that affects the fire control mechanism, the ship's. You just see one picture of these to see what I'm talking about.



*The Nevada's original wire cage masts.*

DePue: Yeah, keep talking while I look.

Sehe: They replaced those with tripods. That allowed for more wind to go through freely.

DePue: This is the *Arizona*, and it's got the tripod in the back here. You don't want to see the *Arizona*, do you?

Sehe: No.

DePue: Keep going.

Sehe: The tripods allows for the wind to pass through, without buffeting the ship. But with the wire cages, they do.

DePue: Let's pause just for a couple of minutes until we find this.

Sehe: The *West Virginia* and the *Maryland* had those kind. You see the cage there?

DePue: Yes, I do.

Sehe: They call them cage masts. The wind goes through here like... This is a circle. It goes through this side, and then it hits this side and you get a little... And that affects your trying to get a fix on the target. So they took those out. Then they removed the cage masts—

DePue: And this is the *Nevada*.

Sehe: Yeah. This is where I was, up in here. This is the stern. Here's the searchlight platform. That being at both stations saved my butt.

DePue: Did the tripod masts survive once it got to Bremerton, or did they redo that as well?

Sehe: They redid the whole thing. They cut one half off. You can see the modern... To the Japanese it was a newer battleship. They didn't recognize it at all.

DePue: How about the guns? Did they change out the guns on the ship as well?

Sehe: They took out all the old casemate surface fire guns, except the turret guns, our main battery. See, they were not damaged.

DePue: The fourteen-inch guns?

Sehe: The fourteen-inch guns, they remained there. They took out all five-inch, fifty-one cal, and they put in eight twin gun mount, five-inch gun turrets, movable.

DePue: So now it's going to be able to move left and right and elevate much higher as well, right?

Sehe: Yeah. And the old one there indicated that you can't do that. The boat deck is up with the five-inch, twenty-five cal. anti-aircraft guns, the 525's. They were hand loaded. You got to go like this.

But now you got two five-inch, remote control, what we call a slew sight. The officer in charge could move his slew sight for a much faster response. And so, the lookouts would report... Let's say it's a sixty-five degree horizontal and elevation of forty. He can pinpoint that. And then the rangefinder operator, optically, can see the plane, and he'll be moving the dial. You've got to do it smoothly to obtain the incoming ranges of a plane; you can't jerk it. And every once in a while, when he gets this marker... Your head would be the airplane. Come over at night, and soon as I get mark away, tap. That catches the range and the angle degree of operation.

We had one guy; his name is Elmer Emory Hunt, EEI, Elmer Emory Hunt, 6th Division. We called him "Eagle Eye." The Navy considered him—unknown to many people—the best rangefinder operator. That guy had a natural sight. You know where he was from?

DePue: Probably a Kentucky kid or something like that.

Sehe: No, he hunted grouse, South Dakota (makes the sound of a gunshot), natural. I tried tracking a target and tapping down signals, but my movements were jerky.

DePue: Not only did he measure the range, but he knew how to lead as well; didn't he?

Sehe: You got to do that. A lot of guys, they get on the plane; that isn't it. You got to be over here, when that plane comes... He knew how to lead. He was a natural. He sent down information to the air plot gang that they sent to the guns, and they zapped every damn plane that came.

DePue: Did you get some other guns, like twenty-millimeter, anti-aircraft guns?

Sehe: We had, twenty-millimeter Oerlikon guns, ten at each side. We had eight twenty-millimeter twin-mounts. Oerlikon they call them, Oerlikon. That information is in another... You see, air defense is much more emphasized here than in the past, surface warfare idea.

DePue: Did they still have searchlights on this newly equipped ship?

Sehe: Frankly, I don't know. I can't give a damn now.

DePue: You must have gotten a new job then.

Sehe: Radar operator.

DePue: I think somebody else got that for you. The telephone was ringing in the background.

Did you get some new training for that as well?

Sehe: Yes, I was assigned to leave on October 28, 1942. The *Nevada* was still in Washington.

The *Nevada* left Adak, Alaska on June 7, 1943 and arrived in San Francisco, California on June 18. She took on new fuel, ammo, supplies, had a few repairs. A small group of seamen first class were selected for further training in gunnery and in the new radar school, located in Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay, near Oakland. You could see Alcatraz from it.

The island was the site of a previous Golden Gate Exhibition of California.<sup>16</sup> All buildings were built from sandstone, decorated in color.

Our classes had liberty to go to Oakland. All of the older *Nevada* crew went bar-hopping. I didn't; I was only twenty. I went to Oakland Theater and watched Chico Marx play some songs all of us knew from his movies.<sup>17</sup> I stood up and shouted, "Beer Barrel Polka!" He shouted, "Das a nice." He

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<sup>16</sup> The Golden Gate International Exposition (1939 and 1940) was held at San Francisco's Treasure Island, a World's Fair, celebrating, among other things, the city's two newly built bridges, the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, which opened in 1936 and the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_Gate\\_International\\_Exposition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Gate_International_Exposition))

<sup>17</sup> Leonard Joseph "Chico" Marx (March 22, 1887 – October 11, 1961) was an American comedian, musician, actor and film star. He was a member of the Marx Brothers, with Groucho Marx, Harpo Marx, and Zeppo Marx. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chico\\_Marx](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chico_Marx))

played, and all of the grown-ups knew it well. Man, what a time from war! I believe that those few moments with Chico Marx made all of us forget the war for a while.

Sehe: We got to Seattle, Washington. Then we went down to San Diego. There's where the rangefinder and the radar training station. That's when they had Treasure Island Exhibition, you know? The crew was given the privilege of going on Treasure Island. They had all these buildings built for that. You know what though? The old ones, they didn't go there. I went there and walked where all these guys went when the ship pulled in, the bars in San Francisco and Oakland.

DePue: I was going to use even more basic terms than the bars. I mean, visiting the oldest profession maybe.

Sehe: Well, I enjoyed watching this, all built out of sandstone. Anyway, our job was a new method of defense, which at that time the Japanese did not have. But you have to give the Japanese naval combat credit; they knew night fighting. They used stars for some reason; I don't know how. This is why the early battle at Java Sea on February 2, 1941 we were at a disadvantage. We lost a heavy cruiser, the *USS Houston*.

In San Diego, I went to the radar, and I learned... What do we call it? First, the bread basket, they called it, up against the screen, the FD model, model F, Britain.<sup>18</sup> This is for surfacing. Then, down here, each one had a little rocker arm that goes back and forth. We had four computer—director—stations for each gun turret. Each station had two guns a turret. My job was to watch on one vector of air space, watch this here. When training, we'd have an airplane go by, and it'd be a pip.<sup>19</sup> My range thing would go like this, see. And they purposely go like this—

DePue: Crossing.

Sehe: Crossing. Then, after a while... The beginner radar operator doesn't know the intensity of the pip, the brightness of it. There is a sensitivity that you must learn. You can tell who is the enemy, who's friendly.

DePue: So, you're looking at a screen that you're just seeing green flashes on the screen? Is that it?

Sehe: You got a line going this way and a line... Something comes in view of the radar screen out there; a pip comes up. This tells mainly what it is, friend or

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<sup>18</sup> BTL (Bell Telephone Laboratories) developed the FA, the first fire-control radar for the U.S. Navy; it improved this with the FC for use against surface targets and FD for directing anti-aircraft weapons. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radar\\_in\\_World\\_War\\_II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radar_in_World_War_II))

<sup>19</sup> A pip is a spot of light on a radar or sonar screen indicating the position of a detected object, such as an aircraft or a submarine. (<http://www.memidex.com/pip+radar-echo>)

foe; the code used here is FF. And we're supposed to go and fire. But you see, sometimes we fired at the guy that was towing the target. It scared him, "Get the hell off my ass."

DePue: Was there a radar station next to each one of the guns?

Sehe: Above.

DePue: Above the guns. In the masts?

Sehe: Yeah, there's a... Actually, aboard ship, you see. All right, we got four five-inch gun turrets on one side and four on the other side. This one radar here, up here, for these two, and the one over there for that turret. So, after a while, we learned to do that. Then we went to the Aleutians and found out it was needed.

DePue: Before we get to the Aleutians—we'll get there in just a second—I'm curious. You lost most of your senior crew after Pearl Harbor; they went to other ships. Did you get a new crew, the commanding officers and the senior petty officers?

Sehe: To give officers experiences in many tasks there was a rotation of duty policy for the officers, a two- or three-year stint. At Bremerton, Washington, we took on another almost 500. And I became **seaman first class**. (DePue laughs) I was an old dog. All the questions. "You were at Pearl Harbor?" That started, oh, god, I didn't realize. Through seventy years, I heard the same thing.

DePue: I'm sure there were a lot of very young seamen, but there had to be also a lot of petty officers and senior officers coming on board at the same time. Where were they coming from, from other ships or...?

Sehe: Other ships that wanted [a] change of duty. You see, you can get... If the pressure's not on them, they can choose what they wanted. But they choose the officers of a ship according to the talents.

DePue: Did you get some good officers and petty officers?

Sehe: I got two of them that I liked. One, he was the grandson of Admiral Sims.<sup>20</sup> I had him as my officer. He's the one that encouraged me to go to college. I liked him. Another one, we got one of those gung ho's. You know what they are?

DePue: Oh, yeah.

Sehe: He was a gunnery officer. I mean, god, a strict son of a... But he was good!

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<sup>20</sup> William Sowden Sims was an admiral in the United States Navy who fought during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to modernize the navy. During World War I he commanded all United States naval forces operating in Europe. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Sims](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Sims))

DePue: Was he an academy graduate?

Sehe: Yeah, Commander Robertson, USN. He went according to the rules. Before you load your gun, you make certain that the gun barrel is clean. Well, it's true. You don't want any of that damn burning powder silks.

Anyway, then we had another one become an exec, Yaeger, another guy, red hair, brilliant in the sun. He's in the book that I have. We called him "Red." I wrote it. I couldn't... I felt compelled to acknowledge him, so I wrote... "The best officer I ever met—I don't know if you have an article on that—Commander Howard A. Yaeger. He was well respected. A group of us also wanted to call him 'Red.'" And my friend, an enlisted man, was his talker, Bill Brinkley. Bill Brinkley, he says, "Well, Red, what do we got today?" And that damn Brinkley, he says, "Now listen, see, when you talk to them, you say, 'Sir.'" I mean, he was well respected.

Tragically, Admiral Yeager, as commandant of the 9th Naval District, Great Lakes Naval Training Station, IL, died in a tragic fire accident attempting to save his wife.<sup>21</sup>

Bill Brinkley was a yeoman and a radio operator. He was the intermission between any conversation from ship to shore, wherever it'd be. He was competent. You couldn't get anything out of him. He'd just smile. I always had coffee with him, and then, when he departed, "Well, I've got to go see what Red wants." (laughs) And he turns to me, and I'd said, "You mean Commander Yaeger?" And he'd say, "Yeah, that's Red." (DePue laughs)

DePue: We've gotten you to the Aleutians, and I think the operational name for this was Operation Land Crab. From what I understand, you departed for the Aleutians from the West Coast in April of forty-three. I'll let you pick it up from there.

Sehe: We didn't know where we were going... We thought we were going back to Hawaii and fight the Japanese. And then we left Seattle, went down to San Pedro, Long Beach area, then went up to San Clemente Island. That's the Navy exercise room. What do you call it?

DePue: They did maneuvers there?

Sehe: Firing, firing of the guns to see how they work. Then, of course, we got to go northward a little bit, and that's in line with Hawaii. So we went out, parallel to Hawaii. And all of a sudden, the damn ship started northward. It's getting cool. Then the whistle blows and says, "All division officers meet in the ward

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<sup>21</sup> In 1967, NTC Great Lakes suffered its' most tragic multi-life loss at any single incident in the installation's history when Rear Admiral Howard Yeager, Commander of the U.S. Navy 9th District, and two other Navy officers lost their lives. The Admiral's wife was critically injured in the fire and succumbed six days later. ([www.iafflocalf282.org/What's%20Happening%20February%202013.pdf](http://www.iafflocalf282.org/What's%20Happening%20February%202013.pdf))

room. All division officers meet in the ward room.” That meeting was the distribution of winter wear (both laugh). Anyway, to cut it short, we got out there, and the wind started going. The wave was choppy. See, in the central and southern Pacific, the waves are nice, gentle. Up there—

DePue: A lot of white caps?

Sehe: The Atlantic is very unpredictable. We found that out, too. We went up there, and then all of a sudden, we couldn't see anything. What the hell is all this stuff? Fog. We travelled for miles in fog. We found out we're going to the Aleutians. We didn't know where the Aleutians were. They just said Alaska. We're going [to] the outer chain of Alaska; that's what they told us. So I got the Navy blues, dress blues, and I got a jacket; I got a hood; I got gloves. We were assigned to assist the Marines on Attu, one of the Aleutians.

DePue: I've got a map of the Aleutians here. It's about as far away from the mainland as you can get. Attu is right here. It's just a tiny, little spot on the map.

Sehe: That is. That's where it is. Attu is here, and Kiska is down... Kiska... I'll get into that now.

Before we got off in the vicinity of Attu, one of the Aleutian chains, we were given a briefing of what's to be and what's happening. We're told that Japanese took over. They landed on Attu and Kiska in forty-two, and they sent up oceanographers and air... What do you call them?

DePue: Meteorologists?

Sehe: Meteorologists and oceanographers out there in the islands, and they're sending back information to Japanese central control on what the weather is out there. And, you see, this was unknown at this time. I can tell you right now, Mark, that they went up there, not just to sit there. They were planning for the Midway. I know this, see, because they had to know the sea routes.

We were told to assist the landing of Army and the Marines at that time. And the landing was scheduled for one day, but we got some fog, and no one could see anything. You can't land where you don't know where you're going. They said, “All right, all radar operators come into the central room.” So we went in there. And they said, “You've got a tremendous responsibility now; **we're blind**. It's up to you guys.”

He was giving me something to do, and I felt important. He says, “Keep alert; we've got to position our ships for bombardment. We can't do it today, so we postponed it, until we got... So, then the next day, finally a little break. Now, in the far western chain of Alaska, the Aleutians, it can rain one day, have sleet the same day and a heavy snow, and you can have a squall coming up, all within twenty-four hours. We had to situate ourselves. Even

with radar, I could see there's something on the island that's stationary. We didn't know what it was.

You know, sitting in that position, you remind me of Patton, George Patton. (DePue laughs)

DePue: Oh, my.

Sehe: The next day it lifted. We can see, some visibility. They used the rangefinder operator to start. They pinpointed where they knew they were now. Then, as the fog closed in, I took over. It was a little easier than with aircraft. Here's Attu; Japanese stay, and my gun went like this. [I] go back and make sure I get it right, "Fire."<sup>22</sup> Going to shore wasn't easy for those guys.

DePue: You're talking about American Army personnel?

Sehe: Army personnel were wearing World War I material, leather boots, shoes, and their weather gets freezing, subzero weather. I'm estimating, I think rather correctly, about one-eighth or one-sixth of the casualties at Attu [were from] trench foot, frostbite. That's mentioned in this article that I...

Anyway, from May through June... According to the naval experts Attu would take three days. It took a little more than a month. They didn't give up easily. And this was where we learned, the Japanese, banzai attack, all-out effort to eradicate the Americans and so forth.<sup>23</sup> That was our all-out effort at Attu.

DePue: You talked in one of these articles that you wrote about an attack where there was—maybe this is towards the end of that campaign—1,000 Japanese attacked in a banzai style attack and actually overrun a hospital.

Sehe: They overran the hospital. They killed everybody. They overran the hospital, overran the relief station, and finally the counter attack killed most of them.

DePue: Did you understand the Japanese mentality at that time?

Sehe: No, I learned that after Iwo Jima, because I read—in fact, post-war—I read the Kumiko Kuribayashi.<sup>24</sup> I admired the guy, the leader of Iwo Jima. He was a good technician. Anyway, that's... I didn't know it.

I've heard of Samurai code and all that, but I didn't know Samurai code... I thought that was past, medieval, really.<sup>25</sup> It still exists, you see. And

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<sup>22</sup> Miri radar deals in fleet management, vehicle tracking and security systems, the single tracking of a target's movements. (miriradar.com/)

<sup>23</sup> A banzai attack is a mass attack of troops, without concern for casualties, as practiced by the Japanese in World War II. (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/banzai-attack>)

<sup>24</sup> General Tadamichi Kuribayashi was a general in the Imperial Japanese Army, part-time writer. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tadamichi\\_Kuribayashi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tadamichi_Kuribayashi))

that's what prevented Japan, at that time—in my reading of their history—their unification. It's just like the tribal chieftains in Afghanistan. There's no central government there. They'll never get it, American politics. You've got drug lords, but no central government.

DePue: One of the other stories that you talked about when you were writing about the Aleutian Islands campaign was this request for help, "Can you help?"

Sehe: Yeah, there was an incident. I wasn't on duty at that time. I just got relieved, and I would have liked to have been the one that received the order. There was a night attack, and the Japanese were coming in, unfortunately. The Marine—whoever the officer was of that particular unit—he says, "We're being overrunned; can you help us? We can't see them." I said, "We'll do that." So, they sent out star shells, illuminated the whole damn island, not just a football field. Then *Nevada's* gunners started firing. They could see the Japanese scattering.

DePue: Was this Attu Island?

Sehe: Yeah. They wired back to the *Nevada*, gave their position, and they just lobbed shells in there. I wasn't there.

DePue: You mentioned it was ten-gun salvos. What's a salvo? Is that all of the guns on one side of the ship firing at the same time?

Sehe: Yes. Christ, they scare the shit out of you. You got three guns forward in the focsle [upper deck], three guns on the bottom, two, and that's ten. Each bottom turret has three guns and each top turret has two guns.

DePue: You're talking about fourteen-inch guns?

Sehe: Fourteen-inch guns. These shells are all six-foot-tall; they're over 800 pounds. And [in] the aft, you've got five. You got three on the bottom; that's twenty, isn't it? A full salvo means they all fire at the same time, but actually they don't. To ease the rocking, they alternate firing, first the forward guns, then the aft guns.

DePue: Kind of sequentially.

Sehe: Real fast, yeah. That one is fired, just as the other one has gone out. So, you don't get this rocking. And anyone standing out there better get the hell out of there. In fact, they send a warning signal, the horn (makes a deep horn sound)

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<sup>25</sup> The unwritten Samurai code of conduct, known as Bushido, held that the true warrior must hold loyalty, courage, veracity, compassion, and honor as important, above all else. An appreciation and respect of life was also imperative, as it added balance to the warrior character of the Samurai. (<https://acelebrationofwomen.org/2017/03/the-bushido-code-the-eight-virtues-of-the-samurai/>)

five times. That tells you, you better get your butt out from there. Get the hell off the top deck; they're going to fire.

DePue: That gives you an indication (laughs) of the power that those guns have, going off.

Sehe: Oh, man.

DePue: That had to be impressive to be anywhere close to that.

Sehe: Down below... See, we were up on top. Down below... Look, this would be a closed compartment, down below.

DePue: In the kitchen area.

Sehe: In the kitchen area, the galley. Anything that's loose is thrown up into the air, anything, pots and pans and all that. Some of these things, they're secure, but not everything. And any dust in the corners and all that stuff falls down. Asbestos, there's one source of later medical problems, asbestos fibers float down there. But I was topside. I got a slight case of asbestos sticking to my lungs, but the doctor says it's not, mesothelioma.<sup>26</sup> You just got to live with it. It attached to the outside; you know what I mean? It's not inside.

DePue: I would imagine it was while you were there or maybe en route back to Mare Island in San Francisco Bay that you guys got the news about the Battle of Midway. Do you remember getting the news about the Midway battle?

Sehe: Yeah. We got Coral Sea first. Coral Sea is in May four and fifth. Midway, I believe, is the seventh, actually. Yeah, we got that. We were confused. We realized for the first time that no battleship's involved; it's aircraft. It didn't make sense to us. Where the hell are the battleships? To me that was, because I was a battleship kid sailor. Then, when we learned that the *Lexington* was sunk, that didn't make good news.

DePue: At Coral Sea?

Sehe: Coral Sea. I have an acquaintance on there. Anyway, then, the story behind the two, their related, Nagumo, yeah, Admiral Nagumo. He was a brilliant tactician but not a strategist. He had some complicated plan. In other words, the important thing was to seize the Pacific areas, being Japan. In order to do that, first they eliminate Pearl Harbor; they did that successfully.

But now Midway stood in the way, you see. So they decided to do that. But in order to do that, they had to eliminate the threat of the United

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<sup>26</sup> Mesothelioma is an aggressive cancer that affects the lining of the lungs, heart, or abdomen. Caused by the inhalation of asbestos fibers, mesothelioma is often terminal. (<https://www.maacenter.org/mesothelioma/>)

States from Philippines. The Coral Sea is in the Philippines. That's the story there. We went in there with two carriers.

DePue: Into the Coral Sea?

Sehe: Yeah.

DePue: I think that's in Guadalcanal; isn't it, in the waters north of Guadalcanal?

Sehe: Yeah. To get you a picture here, Guadalcanal is here, down in [the] New Guinea area. Over here, you see the Coral Sea, and then out here is Midway. In order to get on Guadalcanal, the Americans got to eliminate the threat from the Coral Sea. And the Coral Sea was ideal for the objective of the Japanese to go to Australia, cut the American lines. If they can do that, they've got the whole damn southwest. Hey, I'm getting to be a—

DePue: I know your geography is excellent. But I guess the question I got for you in terms of Midway is, even though it's not a battleship fight, it's got to be pretty good news that, of the Japanese carriers that were involved with attacking Pearl Harbor, four of those are sunk at Midway.

Sehe: That made us feel good. You're correct on that, Mark, that when we got the final results of the Midway battle, with the sinking of the four large carriers that had participated in the Pearl Harbor thing had been sunk. There were two others, but they were sunk later. We got all six. That made us feel good.

DePue: I wanted to move to the Atlantic then. I know that after the Aleutian Islands, you guys headed back down to California for a while, but that sounded like it was strictly en route to then head to Panama into the Atlantic Ocean. Any significant stories about that? Apparently, you were heading towards that in July of forty-three. Do you remember going through the Panama Canal?

Sehe: The doctor does; I don't. (laughs)

DePue: The doctor does?

Sehe: No, I remember. That was fabulous. I never seen such an operation, Panama Canal, how they operated! I didn't realize the difference in sea levels. To shorten all this story up, we float and then drop it down and then go. But, while all this is happening, we are in bathing trunks. I sunbathed for four hours. We're only four degrees from the equator.

DePue: You're just north of the equator?

Sehe: Four degrees, yeah. Panama is about three and one-half or four degrees. And I felt nice and warm.

DePue: (laughs) Well, yeah, after the Aleutians, yeah.

Sehe: I had to report to sickbay, because I couldn't walk.

DePue: Sunburn?

Sehe: Well, a little bit. I had blisters on my back that big.

DePue: Oooh.

Sehe: Jelly. There were six of us. They told me to go to sick bay. The first thing that the doctor said to us... I think there were six of us. He took three of us at a time for the... You know what he said to us? "You stupid asses; you got blisters on your back, and you're going to pay for it." You see, in Navy times there were penalized for doing that. You were docked pay and also given assigned extra duty. They said, "This is your first offense, and you learn. You learn from your suffering, and we'll just let that go." Oh man.

DePue: And it was painful, I'm sure.

Sehe: Very painful. All he did there was puncture... He had the corpsman puncture and drain it. But that made it... It was very painful. I learned a lesson.

DePue: Well, this is July of forty-three. I mean, this is all leading up to the *Nevada's*, involvement with the *Utah*. But you've got a year before that. So what did you do for the next year, on the Atlantic Ocean?

Sehe: Let's see, we got through the Canal, went to Norfolk, Virginia and reconditioned the ship from the firing at the Aleutians. Every time we stopped between assignments, they check the guns and get that all out, re-provision, refuel and re-arm the ship.

Now, there is a Navy regulation with regard to ammunition. They are to return for replenishment of ammunition—main battery, fourteen-inch—when they are down to three rounds per gun. You understand? We got ten guns, ten Merrill, down to three for each. So, that we have in store, in case of necessity, sudden. That had to be adhered to.

Then, we got to Norfolk. We're given leave again, and this time I reversed. Pearl Harbor leave, I went home. At Norfolk, I went to Missouri. That makes sense, then, because I know I couldn't go down there and back in ten days. No, this one we got twenty days.

DePue: At Norfolk.

Sehe: Yeah, okay. Once I came back. The reconditioned *Nevada* went up to New York Harbor. Then on the way we went to Boston, and then we got our assignment. We were assigned convoy duty. Now a battleship assigned the convoy is unusual. Usually it's the destroyers or some other ships.

Now, you have to understand the geography of the Atlantic Ocean, United States, England and Germany. Germany can come out so far, up there, and attack anything that comes within the sphere of their aircraft and submarines and so forth. Convoys can only go so far, like Iceland and Newfoundland. Beyond that, they're in danger. So we were assigned to help them do that.

We didn't have sonar or anything, but we had destroyers following us, and they had sonar. We picked up these convoys. There were different numbers of ships avoiding us. Sometimes we had seven or eight; sometimes we had twenty ships. But to cut it short, we go from Boston to Belfast, back to New York. We go back to Belfast again, back to Boston. So I got to know the best places in Boston and New York, because I was on shore patrol. Then we went to Scotland, Greenock, which is near Glasgow, then back to Bangor, Ireland. That's where I got mixed up, because there is a Bangor, Washington, the state of Washington.

DePue: There's a Bangor, Maine, too.

Sehe: Yeah, see that's... For some reason, Boston was the best liberty.

DePue: One of the things that was very helpful for me in getting ready for this is you gave me a log of the *U.S.S. Nevada*, departed Pearl Harbor, arrived Bremerton, departed Bremerton, arrived Long Beach. And it goes all the way through, from post Pearl Harbor to the end of the war. It's a long list. One of the reasons it's long is because you had that—I don't know what it was—ten months or so, eleven months of convoy duty in the Atlantic, that you're going back and forth across the ocean. So everything you're talking about is all spelled out here.

Sehe: We were asked to form an opinion, informally, group discussions aboard ship, who gave the best protection for convoy trials? Who were our hosts in Ireland or Scotland or England? Away with England and so forth. You see, polite talk gets lost in England. So we says, "Well, in Boston, they got malt beer, very good; New York, they got the whiskey and night clubs; in Ireland, Guinness stout (DePue laughs); Scotland, they got the true Scotch whiskey. This is one of the aspects of war that I enjoyed, meeting people. I could take the whiskey cough.

DePue: You did get to see quite a bit of the world, in some bizarre circumstances, but you saw a lot of the world; didn't you?

Sehe: My disappointment at the Normandy invasion... You see, the soldiers did, but they had to fight. That's a little different story. We never went ashore.

DePue: I wanted to ask you a couple of questions, if I can, about battleships on convoy duty, because you were a slow ship, compared to the destroyers

certainly, that were moving faster. Were you about the same speed as these cargo ships, that you—

Sehe: You answered your own question, yes.

DePue: But aren't you... You just lost your mike here. I'll keep asking the question while we're hooking you up. Aren't you just a big fat target for submarines floating out there?

Sehe: Yes, we did have submarine scares, and we had good protection, because we had submarines, submarines armed with torpedoes.

DePue: Oh, you had U.S. submarines out there.

Sehe: Armed submarines, yeah. We had a few scares, but no attacks. We had a few air scares, too.

DePue: As you were going back and forth, there were a couple of times when you were in the United States for longer periods of time. Did you get a leave in either Boston or New York while you were there? I should say liberty, maybe.

Sehe: Only in terms of hours. You can go over and come back in eight hours. I mean, a day. You can have a twenty-four hour, a thirty-six or a seventy-two, which is three days. Depending on who you know and your section leader, if you're good friends, you can get a seventy-two. But you have to know where you're going.

I had the fortune in Boston at Avery Hotel, a meeting of the combo of musicians. So, I met them the first visit, and I said, "I'll be back." He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I don't know." I was smart enough to say, "I don't know where we're going." Come back, in Boston again, hit Avery, "Hey, it's good to see you again." He says, "Oh, my wife wants to meet you," a musician that played the clarinet. He said, "My wife wants to know... I told her about your experiences." She said, "I'd like to meet that old guy." I was twenty-three. (both laugh) He was in his twenties.

Anyway, I came back again. He lived in East Lynn, which is a suburb of Boston. He invited me over. I took a seventy-two your leave; I had to apply for it. She invited me, meals. She looks at me and says, "How old are you?" And I said, "Gee, I never, never can take count." I said, "Well," I says, "I remember I was born in twenty-three." "Oh, hell, you're only twenty years old." She got it right away. Anyway, it was nice meeting them, and they were hoping I would survive. She says, "It's a terrible war over there." He was, "Oh well, okay."

Then finally we left Boston and ended up in Belfast, Ireland. Then we went around the island to Weymouth, Southern England, by Southampton. This was the staging zone. You'll have to check it with what I got there. I

think it's Weymouth. Some had Plymouth and some, Weymouth. Depends upon the mark, the task group you were with. There's a eastern and the western task naval forces. Those for Omaha and those for Utah Beach, understand? Okay. That's the eastern and western forces. We were in the western force, Utah Beach, *Nevada*. The *Texas*, the *Arkansas* was in Omaha.

DePue: Now, here are the actual landings. Like you said, on the western part is the Utah Beach and then Omaha Beach on the eastern part. And, of course, the other three beaches, the British's two beaches, and the Canadians had a beach as well. So what is the battleship *Nevada* do during the D-Day landings?

Sehe: We came on in the Cotentin Peninsula, against a bay of the Seine [River] here, on the fifth, June 5, 1944.

DePue: It's kind of tiny print on that map. It's a good map otherwise.

Sehe: We were in between. The uppermost head is called the Cotentin Peninsula. Over here, in the bay, between what's the most likely place the Germans thought they would be, Omaha Beach. This is on the fifth. We're off shore. Then we were to give the opening salvo at 6:30 in the morning, scheduled for 6:30, June 6.

DePue: Your ship was the first to fire?

Sehe: Yes, it was. The dubious honor of opening of the whole damn... We had the admiral aboard, so what he wants, he gets.

DePue: Was that, in part, because you guys were at Pearl Harbor?

Sehe: Not necessarily. Because our gunnery office... That son of a bitch is proud! Commander Robertson, USN always trained us. He thought we were one of the sharpest ones, and he wanted the people to know that we were good.

DePue: How far off shore was the ship?

Sehe: At first, we were six or eight miles, I think. First anchor is actually twelve, then six to eight. Now, 2,000 yards is a mile, and we're about three or four miles out. Each ship was given a grid sector to fire. The battleships sat here; the cruisers had this part, and the backups later, the gunboats later.

We opened fire, but what has happened, see, we got in there, but the Germans knew we were there by 5:30. They were getting ready to fire, but they didn't fire yet. This came out later. As we were ready to fire, shells were coming over from the German side, eighty-eights. They had fifteen-inch and eleven-inch guns, battery, encased in concrete bunkers. *Nevada* went out, circled around and came back in again.

Then we opened fire at 6:30. We were given the grids. Fortunately, much of our accurate gunfire on German installation came from the French underground, resistance. They pinpointed for us the grid numbers for that particular emplacement. The Army then would radio back to my friend Brinkley, and he would tell the captain, Rhea. So my friend knew all this was going on, and that son of a gun wouldn't tell us. He was a good, closed mouthed seaman, until after the war. His father built a lighthouse on the East Coast.

DePue: Now all of this is happening after this whole area had been saturated by aerial bombardments, over and over again. And then you guys come along, where your... I assume that these fourteen-inch guns have got armor-piercing shells. Were you able to bust through those concrete bunkers?

Sehe: Some of them. There is evidence now, still remaining on the beaches of these bunkers, pit holes and shells, intact. They're tourist attractions now. Those guys inside, the thirteen or fourteen, whoever was in there, they got bounced around a lot, ear damage and concussion damage. Some of the bunkers were penetrated, but most of them were just pockmarked, chipped away. Rommel knew what they was doing?

DePue: Was the ship within five-inch gun range as well? Were the five-inch guns able to support the landings?

Sehe: Yes, later. You're right; it was a progressive change in yardage, going in. We went from six to eight miles, down to four, no more than four. But then, the five-inch has a ten-mile range. See, you need an overlap. You don't want a five-inch stopping right there; you want something to come over.

DePue: Sure.

Sehe: We got one in the five-inch. And then, along the beaches themselves, the forty millimeter, the Bofor 40 mm gun shoots a shell like that. They put four at a time in the breech slot. That's eight, see, four. The loader goes like this, clip of four; push down there, and it fires automatically.

DePue: Right on the top, into it.

Sehe: So all eight go out.

DePue: Where they go, "Bum, bum, bum, bum?" Your duty position sounds like it was inside. Were you able to watch at all what was going on?

Sehe: No, at this time I was outside on the opposite side, daytime, a twenty-millimeter gun.

DePue: What was it like, seeing that armada that was stretched out from horizon to horizon?

- Sehe: Holy shit, what a sight, thousands of ships! Look at the ships, a mass, ships all over the damn place, all sizes, big ones, small ones and all moving around. I was a stunned witness.
- DePue: That must have been an incredibly impressive sight.
- Sehe: That's something that I remember...dangerous too, because to see the mines... The mine layers went in first. What they do, they come in and sweep, then make a cork-screw turn; they go like this.
- DePue: The mine sweepers?
- Sehe: Yeah. They come in and come around and go like that. That way, they can clear the path. But these are floating mines; they got oyster mines; they call them oysters, on the bottom. They go like this.
- DePue: So the floating mines and oyster mines are two different types of mines?
- Sehe: Well, an oyster mine is a man-named mine. It floats, moving around like this, see. Some of them are anchored. The ones that are anchored were put in by Rommel, **millions** of those damn things. This is true, millions, all the way from Cherbourg to... What's the other, where the main landing was supposed to be...Omaha Beach. There were 2,000 casualties. The Allies almost wrote Omaha off as a failure. Now I lost my thought.
- DePue: We were talking about the mines, that there were mines stretched all the way through the Normandy coast, Belgium and the Netherland coast.
- Sehe: They were thick sea walls. We had several destroyers, and the British also had one sunk by a mine...the *USS Corry*. That's in one of my readings. We saw those explosions. She broke in half and just—
- DePue: That was a British ship?
- Sehe: No, that's a United States ship. Some British destroyers were, but the *Corry*... Just lift the book in half and come up, Mark, like this. I watched this; it came up, a mass of steam clouds. You couldn't see anything for about four or five seconds, and then, all of a sudden, nothing, couldn't see anything. The *HMS Osprey* [a British ship] also sunk at the beginning, as it was coming into grid position.
- DePue: Did you watch as the landing craft were approaching the beaches as well? Were you able to see that?
- Sehe: I saw them depart, but we were not in close enough to see what we were firing on. See, here's their procedure. They have a large landing craft, and the Higgins boats are dropped from the side of the LST [landing ship/tank], see

these? They drop on the Davie apparatus. They come down like this and drop in the water.

DePue: The Higgins boat is the one that everybody recognizes today.

Sehe: Yes. And they go out... They had a certain pattern. Everybody had a chance to check his equipment before they go to the beach. You check it before you leave the main ship to get on the small Higgins boat, but you check it again. So, what they do, they do the corkscrew. They go out here and go around this way, then to the beach. This interview of a few minutes gives the coxswain—pilot—time to think of how he is going to drown or get shot before landing.

DePue: While you're participating in this, you've been in the war now for two years. You've seen an awful lot of action already. Did you have an appreciation for the importance of that day?

Sehe: This is what I can say and believe it. I could really speak out. I looked at the massive array of this ships and equipment, and then it occurred to me, who the hell planned all of this? This is where the planning paid off! It must have been argumentative to me. I mean, you got the Army, the Navy, the meteorologists; you've got everybody in the conference table saying, "This is the layout I want. This is when I want to go." The Army and the Navy disagree. Army wanted to go in the nighttime; Navy said, "We can't do; we can't help you." They got to get a piece of the action. It all came out.

DePue: Does that mean you have an appreciation for the awesome decision that [General Dwight D.] Eisenhower had to make?<sup>27</sup>

Sehe: I think so. We'll get into the politics of his subordinates. I mean, now Nimitz and Admiral Stark, Navy, they're Anglophobia people, okay?

DePue: They don't like the British perspective.

Sehe: They didn't like that. That didn't bother them in Europe. But Eisenhower, you know, Eisenhower's, "We got to cooperate; we've got to assign the British too; we got to work as a unit."

Well, Patton... Yes, they had to be unified in order to get something done. This is important, I believe, myself. If you're going in there disorganized or disgruntled that you're not doing it my way, then it comes off as a failure. Then you say, "Well, you didn't listen to me." So they had to decide when, not necessarily where, but when and how to transport all these

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<sup>27</sup> Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower was an American army general and statesman who served as the 34th president of the United States from 1953 to 1961. During World War II, he became a five-star general in the United States Army and served as supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwight\\_D.\\_Eisenhower](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwight_D._Eisenhower))

men safely. That was a monumental decision that even Stalin gave him approval.<sup>28</sup>

DePue: Just a couple of more questions, then it's probably time for us to take a lunch break, because we've been at it for a long time. I know that it wasn't just Utah Beach, but a few days later you were supporting the combat, once it got up to the Port of Cherbourg itself. I think that would be a good place for us finish this morning.

Sehe: They thanked us.

DePue: You have ground troops now that you're supporting. Is that correct?

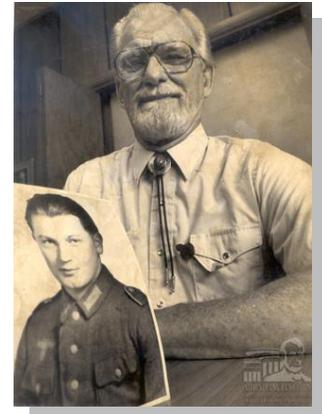
Sehe: Yeah. You see, the Ninth Infantry, VII Corps, Barton, they had to take Cherbourg and make the plunge inward.

DePue: You needed that port.

Sehe: We needed that port because any threat from Utah Beach here could be counter set by Germans at Cherbourg. They had the longer range. And I have to say, with amusement, it took Montgomery thirty-three days to breakout to take Caër (both laugh). Actually, he waited for the counter attack rather than pushing onward. He got it!

DePue: What I would like to have you do is just tell me about this. Basically, you traded shell fire with some British or some German guns on—

Sehe: Both, Sword Beach and Omaha Beach were troublesome due to delays in schedules.



*Charles holds a photo of Adam Taschor, a German soldier who was a crew member on an 88 mm gun that fired on the USS Nevada at Omaha Beach. The two met during a D-Day reunion ceremony, circa 2000's at Utah Beach.*

You brought to mind the exchange of shell fire between the fifteen-inch batteries of Cherbourg and the *Nevada's* fourteen-inch. This is where the *Nevada* got straddled twenty-seven times, believe it, twenty-seven shells coming over on the port side, some coming over on the starboard side, twenty-seven times, without even hitting our ship. German guns outranged *Nevada's* by five miles, 10,000 yards.

DePue: I would imagine, though, you see one of those rounds hit the water and explode, that will get your attention.

Sehe: Geysers of water. I got wet; my crew got wet.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Stalin, dictator of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) from 1929 to 1953, aligned with the United States and Britain in World War II (1939-1945) but afterward engaged in an increasingly tense relationship with the West known as the Cold War (1946-1991). After his death, the Soviets initiated a de-Stalinization process. (<https://www.history.com/topics/russia/joseph-stalin>)

Interestingly, the *Nevada* was a movable target, but we were firing at a fixed fortification. We had the distinct advantage of always knowing where our target was, but the Germans were firing at a moving target. Let's take a break.

DePue: Let's do that.

(end of transcript #3)

## Interview with Charles Sehe

# VR2-A-L-2015-016.04

Interview # 4: April 15, 2015

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: This is Mark DePue. We're in the afternoon now of April 15, 2015, and my fourth and last session here, Charles, with Charles Sehe who spent the entire World War II on the *U.S.S. Nevada*. I'm going to say Nevada a couple of more times here but—

Sehe: I've been trying to get people to pronounce it Névada, because the original of the naming of the state of Nevada was by the Shoshoni Indians, who called Nevada the snow-capped mountains. So the name Névada means snow-capped.

DePue: I think you've got a losing battle in most cases.

Sehe: The Americans traditionally undermine anything that's worth retaining as authentic.

DePue: Well, we've done a couple good things in our two hundred and some years of history, though, like we won World War II. We left off, talking about the D-day invasion, and very shortly after that the *Nevada* was supporting the Allied advance against Cherbourg. You'd already mentioned that the duel you had with some German shore guns. Did your guns from the *Nevada* actually take out those guns?

Sehe: Surprisingly now, we have fourteen-inch gun barrels. Now they have the effective range of about twelve miles. The German had fifteen-inch guns. Now for every inch increase in diameter of a rifle/gun barrel you increase the range about one to two miles. So they had a range of fourteen to fifteen miles, while we only had twelve. So we were out-ranged. But we were a moving target.

Now, in a battle between two moving targets, the decision is indecisable, because the maneuverability of one of two ships determines the outcome, exposure to the enemy. But the Germans had a fixed position. Their guns were fixed along the coastline of the Cotentin Peninsula. They had a range or degree of certain elevation, but they can't move them. We were moveable. So a moveable target, firing on a fixed position, has a slight advantage over a fixed gun, firing at a moveable target.

DePue: Well, I would agree with you in one respect, but I've always been impressed by naval gunfire, because you need to have a stable platform to fire, because every time you think you're adjusted on the target, next thing you know, you're moving. It's either pitch or latitude or longitude; you're moving all the time.

Sehe: That is correct. And the gunnery officer, Commander Robertson, has already instructed this axiom to the men of each turret, who have to understand that, because you got a pitch and a roll and the yawl, see?

DePue: See now, that's the correct terminology, pitch, roll and yawl. It's all coming back to you.

Sehe: Yeah, the hell it is. I'm trying to get out in my garden, Mark, damn it. You interrupt me, and I'm trying to plant my herb garden. (both laugh) Yes. So they learned, when it comes up horizontal to the target, they have to learn to fire just before that, or if they're up, they have to wait, or if they want, they can lob. It takes a good technician, and it takes a good trigonometric knowledge, person, to figure out when to fire. But somehow, unknown to me, this kid—I was only twenty-one at the time though—ignorant of trigonometry procedure.

They did hit, and they were excellent. Despite the straddling, the gunnery crews of turrets one, two and three silenced the guns, all along the Cotentin Peninsula. Now, the objective of overall of Eisenhower's army, the

Allied Army Forces, was to silence the guns at Cherbourg, [and] take over Cherbourg harbor facilities because we never had, at that time yet, a natural harbor. Cherbourg would be the first one on the French coast to be a natural harbor, Caen, at the other end of Sword Beach.

DePue: The northern side.

Sehe: On the eastern end of the France coast was Caen, so were Gold and Juno. And Montgomery said that he thinks they can take it in three days. The idea was, free Cherbourg, set up harbor facilities to bring in more supplies, and then bring together so that the eastern and western forces of the Utah beachhead and the Omaha beachhead would come together, and they can cut through France into the interior.

But it took a little longer with Cherbourg. And Caen took a step ahead a few, thirty-three days for Montgomery. He made four attempts. What stopped them was the elite Panzer group, the whole group.

We had Sherman tanks, "coffin boxes;" Germany had the Panzer, a little larger, housing the eighty-eight-millimeter anti [aircraft gun]. That's over a three-inch shell. Sherman tanks had a seventy-five, and the armor plate was thinner. American tanks are fueled by gasoline; Germans use diesel.

DePue: Gasoline burns much more quickly, doesn't it?

Sehe: It burns more quickly, and the Panzer eighty-eight gun outranged us. They could fire three, four, five miles before the Sherman can come in. That's irrelevant right now.

Anyway, we silenced the guns at Cherbourg. Our job as a gun fire support was finished, so we were ordered to move around the bay, down into the Gulf of Malo.

DePue: The Gulf of Saint-Malo?

Sehe: Yeah, the Gulf of Saint-Malo, a depression at the base of the peninsula of Cotentin.

DePue: I'm going to incorporate this map, so that is still on this map, just directly west and south of Cherbourg.

Sehe: The original intent of Eisenhower, the Allied Plan, was the Allied on the west end would meet the ones from the east end, from Caen, and them go through the pass.

DePue: On their way to Paris, then.

Sehe: But the 4th Infantry got to go through the hedge row country, and that's where they were to meet another army, the U.S. 29th Division, around Portugal, along the coast of Portugal. So the *Nevada* withdrew and went around... That told us we're going somewhere we've never been before.

DePue: Was this unknown to you guys, where you were going next?

Sehe: Listening man—on phone—didn't know. Some of them knew, the guys in the navigation room, the chart room.

DePue: Right.

Sehe: Soon as the navigator officer would reach in the chart room and pull out a chart for grid so-and-so, the enlisted men could take a peak and see what that chart is, and then that pipe started scuttlebutt.

DePue: Um-hmm. According to the ships log, where you were headed next was going to be Oran, Africa and eventually to support the landings in southern France. Is that right?

Sehe: That is correct, yeah. Can I go home now? Oh, I am home. (both laugh) Yes. And so we had a unique experience of going through the Straits of Gibraltar, which is English-held, defensively. Spain has been for many years trying to obtain ownership of it. They actually have voting plebiscites, but they voted. The British would bring in more illegal aliens and get the vote. That's another story, unknown to us. Passing through, but in order to get through the straits safely, we went through at nighttime, because the Germans in southern France, along here, would protect the Mediterranean.

At that time, the Mediterranean was dominated by German forces, naval forces and so forth, not by battleships, but gunboats. So we got through the straits alright, and we went over to Oran, which is in Algeria.

Now Algeria has problems too, before, because they were [a] French colony, and the Algerians wanted the independence. The Algerians were fighting the French. Anyway, they freed the French with Allied help, freed the Algerians. So Oran became an Allied-friendly port. Some went ashore, briefly, but they told them, "**Don't ever accept any drink** that the seal has been broken."

DePue: Did you get on shore during that?

Sehe: No, I didn't go ashore at all. I was content where I was at. I wanted to go home. I'd had it. (both chuckle) Anyway, in Oran the plans were the Allies wanted to plan a second front for the Allies to make the decision. They had to consider now should the second front be in Italy or in southern France? They thought, well, it should go logically to southern France, and that's what we were told. Once we got a holding in southern France and moving inward in

the Rhone Valley, then the forces that are coming to Italy can be safely launched. The first one was down here, in Toulon.

DePue: I was just looking; I think Toulon is right here; isn't it?

Sehe: Yeah. This whole project, now there are two units involved that we have got to have spotters, range finder operators. The entire one is called Anvil, like in a blacksmith shop, Anvil. We sent our own spotters from our ship that we had, several French speaking crewmen, not necessarily countrymen, but they're French speaking.

So they went ashore as the spotters. They were to report any German held installation back, giving a grid number. They can board ship with no... See, they've got similar grid sheets, those that don't understand it. They say, "There's a gun at H-37. On your map, you're at thirty-seven. Then you would train your guns on H-37. It's that simple.

Then they went up. The best way is to go up... This looks like Rhone valley here. Once they got started, they decided they're getting static from forces on the eastern edge of the southern France. And this is by Marseilles and Toulon. Here, [indicating a point on the map] it's in green somewhere. Marseilles-Toulon, the Germans used to reclaim the battleships, cruisers.

Now France, at that time, was split in Vichy France and German occupied France. Half of France was under French control, and the northern part was German. So there was some leeway in yielding to the Allies by French partisans... I mean the information. They understood where some of the guns were. There was a French battleship, *Strasbourg*. But it was sunk by the British earlier, when it was in harbor. But the Germans removed the guns.

You see, you have to keep in mind the mechanical ability of the German. They always pride themselves on being good toy makers. They can make good toy tanks; they can make toy everything. They pride themselves on being good machinists. They removed the battery of the *Strasbourg*, encased it in concrete. So we fired in that. And then we moved on to... I can't recall the specific name; I think it's Saint Tropez. No, Iles d'Hyeres. I call it the Chateau D'If, "old prison." I learned it as the Chateau D'If Island, in the movie of *Count of Monte Cristo*.

DePue: They've got Propriano?

Sehe: No, that's after; it comes right after Corsica.

DePue: I'm looking at the... I don't see it there. Here's where you land on the—

Sehe: Yeah, here it is, Bay of Tropez, in which are the Iles d'Hyeres.

DePue: Bay of Tropez, okay.

Sehe: Bay of Tropez has that island with the Chateau that was a prison on the top. Following that, once these batteries... This was a little easier than Cherbourg, because we had the backing of other ships.

Then we left southern France, the Mediterranean. We came into the center of Mediterranean, off the coast of Italy. There's an island called Corsica and Sardinia. They chose Corsica. That was neutral, neutralized for some reason. I mean... I don't know.

DePue: I don't have a map for that.

Sehe: We replenished some ammunition, food and so forth, and there was a time for relaxation. What they did to protect the ship, the harbor officials of Corsica government, they sent out a torpedo net, anti-torpedo net and encompassed the net around the entire ship, so that any strike, torpedo, would hit the wired net, which is very heavy. The cords were almost two inches in diameter. If a torpedo hit it, it would explode before it would get to the ship. That's the idea of it.

Then they had swimming call. They actually used the call. See, the Navy had, before they had a speaker system, they had a bugle to tell them what to do. So they had a swimming call, and the Navy has issued to every individual a pair of black, woolen shorts. The crew would go off and swim in them. I thought about it. I really didn't want to go, but I wanted to say that I was in the Mediterranean Sea. So I got dressed, and I sat on the blister. A blister is to protect the outer sheet on the steel hull of the ship, itself. If this torpedo hits the blister, that explodes. It absorbs the initial power struggle and into the ship's hull, the steel shell around the bottom of the ship.

I sat on that, and I looked at it. I looked out at the net, and I said, "I can do that, if I..." I had to admit, I still don't swim. I cannot swim, but I was determined to swim in the Mediterranean Sea. I looked around. Everybody, they were diving into the sea from different levels of this ship, some of them very high. So I dogpaddle out to the net. The net, I don't know, thirty, forty feet. And then I said, "Gee, I made it." I should have rested awhile, take a few minutes, hang on to the net.

I said, "I better go back." I turned around, let go of the net, and I started back. I got about one-third of the way toward the ship, and I knew I couldn't do it. I yelled, "Help, help." And in a little while, some dark-haired guy came. Then I recognized him as Dick, Richard Gugiarri from Brooklyn. He said, "Alright, just relax." He grabbed my shoulders around and then brought me back to the blister shelf.

DePue: That was the last time you decided to go swimming in the Mediterranean, I bet.

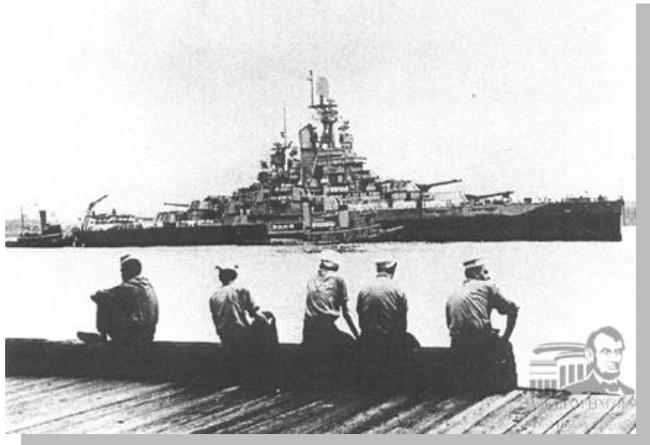
Sehe: He said, “Charles, you stupid guy.” He said, “You can’t swim.” “I know.” Then, from Corsica, the *Nevada* went out again. Then we went up to Taranto, Italy.

DePue: Well, from the looks of things, for the next fifteen days or so you’re going back and forth within the Mediterranean Sea.

Sehe: Oh, I’m glad you mentioned that. We stayed in the Propriano, Corsica area, and they gave liberty. *Nevada* didn’t have any launches or whaleboats, but the harbor had tugs. They agreed to bring the sailors to Propriano for a specified time of relaxation, then bring them back. So for three days, we’re doing this.

Now, I never went ashore. I never went ashore. I got on one of the tugs, and I stayed with that captain for three days. But I had to report each time, back and forth. This is the first time I had pizza! I didn’t know what the hell it was but... anchovy pizza; he was an anchovy fisherman. His wife was never at sea, but she baked Italian bread. No knives, you just tear it. And he had a can, a steel can, five gallons. He said, “That’s our drinking water.” “All right.” He said, “The water’s contaminated here, on the beach. You can’t eat it, you know, sanitary conditions. He was speaking broken Italian, and all I knew was “Capisce” and “Gracia,” Anyway, he says, “Okay, do you want some?” I said, “Yeah.” It was wine! (DePue laughs) It was wine, homemade wine, not denatured. It didn’t have any preservative, sodium nitrite, like American wines are. You can drink that. That’s why they never get drunk.

So three days I was eating pizza. I felt good. I had coffee. Why the hell go to ashore? “Luigi,” I said, “Gees, I hate to leave you.” He says, “You’re friend.” He says, “It’s nice to go America.” He says, “I have relatives in America, in Chicago.” And he says, “You greet them for me?” I says, “If I ever get back, I’ll do that.” He says, “Yea, they grow up. Didn’t you have a guy, some guy that’s a gāngster?” You mean Capone? No, no “Caponē.” You see, that’s the correct pronunciation. “Alfonso Caponē,” that’s what he said. Anyway, I said, “Yeah.” He gave me the address, and I sent off a card when I got back to... But three days, hey. By dammit, best three day pass I ever had!



“Five battle-weary *Nevada* shipmates, sitting on the dock, looking forward to Liberty in New York City.” The *USS Nevada* stopped in New York City on its way back from Europe in September 1944, before heading to Norfolk for repairs.

DePue: I would imagine just about everybody in Italy

and Sicily and—

Sehe: Had relatives—

DePue: They had relatives in America someplace. Where to, after the Mediterranean service?

Sehe: We went to New York. We were supposed to go Newport News. Is New York on there?

DePue: Yeah, from Oran to New York. That was September of 1944, when you got there.

Sehe: Alright now. Listen to this; it's very critical. September 1944 was one of the worst seasons of hurricanes in the Atlantic, typhoons in the Pacific. We were supposed to go to New York, I mean—

DePue: Norfolk?

Sehe: Norfolk. It was coming up from the Gulf, a hurricane, going towards Florida. So they diverted us to New York. Now, at the same time in the Pacific, [a] typhoon was raging, and Nimitz lost 400, no, 1,200 men, four destroyers.

DePue: Four destroyers were sunk during the typhoon?

Sehe: Now destroyers, they usually have about 300 to 350, anyway.

So, we got to New York, and already—now this is in August, you see—see, we're leaving and got in New York. Already the news of Normandy invasion, and for the first time, the *Nevada* was splashed on the screen, on papers, newspapers, the screen, "*USS Nevada* Led the invasion."



"Five thirsty shipmates" was how Charles captioned this photo. He's at left, with pipe, celebrating with other crewmembers of the *USS Nevada* in a New York City nightclub in September 1944.

We went ashore, and the New Yorkers down in the bars and all that, they always asked, "What's your ship?" "What's your ship?" I named it and nothing happened. They said, "What [ship] are you from?" I says, "I'm from the *Nevada* ship." "The battleship?" "Yeah." "Fellows, he's from the *Nevada*, free beer!" We had the run of the town. I didn't drink, but there were guys aboard ship, god, they were like fish. They had gills. That damn beer and wine was flowing. This is where that guy gave me a hotel, the Avery.

DePue: So you didn't have the beer, but you didn't mind Italian wine, it sounds like.

Sehe: Well, there was a unique... I never drank... But, you wouldn't believe it. It's not that strong. It was watered down a little bit. But that's what they do; the water is contaminated.

DePue: Yeah, for sanitary reasons.

Sehe: Yeah, you can get cholera and all of that shit. Okay, I can go home now?  
(DePue laughs)

DePue: What's the scuttlebutt when you're there in the New York area? It looks like, by the eighteenth, you guys were down in Norfolk again.

Sehe: Well, then they decided... They had to repair the guns in some way. You see, we had three days of constant gunfire. I'm speaking of the main batteries, the five-inch and the fourteen-inch. Those barrels, if you understand, the liners some of them were coming out; some were cracked and warped. They had to be replaced. And, where the hell are they going to find guns to fit the turrets of the *Nevada*? Fourteen-inch, all from *Pennsylvania*, *South Dakota*, *Wisconsin*, all sixteen-inch guns, no more fourteen-inch guns made. But there were a couple left over from Pearl Harbor. They took them off the *Oklahoma* and the *Arizona*. This is during the Pearl Harbor clean-up. They were already transferred to Norfolk, because that was the only place where they can replace the gun. Those damn guns... The rear ends of those guns are like this, huge!

DePue: Yeah, I'm thinking this is no small, easy operation to do.

Sehe: They had to be replaced, so they did that. The front two turrets, up here, are *Oklahoma*'s, replaced by *Oklahoma*. The one in the back here, two of them are *Arizona*. I have a diagram in there somewhere, showing that. But they replaced the worn *Nevada* batteries with fourteen-inch guns from both ships, because they're interchangeable, you see. Now the only one left that had fourteen-inch guns was the *Texas*. And this brings to mind a side story that's very amusing, going back to Normandy invasion.

The *Texas* is assigned to Omaha Beach, and during that time, the *Texas* got hit with a fifteen-inch, German shell. It couldn't have smacked *Texas* in a better place, fire control center, navigation, you know. So their whole system [for] firing the guns [was] out. (coughs) I need a—

DePue: You need some more water?

Sehe: Beer, a lot (laughs). *Texas* withdrew from Omaha Beach, and they came over in our sector. This is before we left southern France, you see. And so, what they did, we were short of shells going to southern France. We would have had to go back to England to pick up shells. Now we can get them from the *Texas*. See, for they can't use the fourteen-inch guns now. So *Texas* came

alongside. We moved out beyond the range of the German guns to exchange the shells and powder. Two battleships coming together is a feat in the Atlantic. So, as they come closer, some smart butt, obviously an enlisted man, got hold of the speaker zone, “All hands, turn to ammunition barge. *Texas* coming alongside. All hands, turn to ammunition barge. *Texas* coming alongside.” And the *Texas*, they picked that up right away. Holy shit, they were yelling epithets back and forth. The captains got on the intercom, between themselves and said, “We’ve got to stop this stuff.” They told us, “That’s fun,” but boy, the *Texas* crew, they were mad, but both captains laughed!

To transfer those heavy things, you can’t do it by hand. They do it with a crane and cargo nets. Shells go in, one at a time. They are placed in the cargo net. It goes go up, and then is set down. You have a crane, a secondary crane, to pick that up, damn thing’s aloft. We got that all on there. Then they transferred the five-inch shells. You already know the shells are four-point seven diameter that fit into a five-inch. Otherwise they get stuck. Some of them do. If they explode before they expand, they can’t. They get a breach block.

So they came up. It took a while. But the two captains, they say, the rumor [is] they got together; they had one ball, just laughing. Believe it, Mark. So, we left Norfolk now. Then we—

DePue: I think that was November 21 of 1944.

Sehe: Yeah. We came back from our twenty-day leave, then we went around and went through the canal again. There was one twenty-one-year-old sailor, he was smart. He had a sweater, (DePue laughs) or he kept his tee shirt on. It’s amazing through, the construction of that Canal Zone. (pause in recording)

DePue: We’re back at it again. You’re heading towards the Pacific, going through the Panama Canal, where we stopped off. Had you ever gone across the equator? (Sehe laughs) No?

Sehe: Oh, Christ. (laughs) Um-hum.

DePue: Never got a chance to do that.

Sehe: I’ve been up and down the Pacific, up in the sub-Arctic, come down to within two or three degrees of the equator.

DePue: For most people they say, “So what’s the big deal; he never crossed the equator.” But, for a sailor—

Sehe: You’ve got to be a shellback. That’s what they call them. I’m still a puppy, sea puppy.

DePue: Because there's quite the ceremony, I know, when you do that. Once you got through the Panama Canal, you headed up to California for a bit?

Sehe: San Francisco. Christmas.

DePue: Well, I would think that's a pretty good place to spend Christmas.

Sehe: Pretty darn good. I had a fifth given to me. I don't know... Well, let me put it this way. [I] went ashore, and over the speaker it says, "Go to the Bel Air Hotel." I can't think of the name of the event. It will come eventually, if I'm not thinking about it.

Mrs. Bob Hope was hostess, at her ballroom in the hotel, rented just for her event. She invited all veterans to come and enjoy an evening with her. I can't think of the hotel. It was Belmar or something like that. I think it's in the reading...yes, Belmar. And I thought, I'll go. I got to the entrance of the door, and they said, "What ship you on?" I said, "What do you want to know for? Hell, I..." I was starting to use language. "What the hell do you want to know for?" He said, "No, we're just separating the sheep from the goats." See, stateside are called the goats, and those in combat are the sheep. The hostess stressed to separate combat veterans from USA stateside sailors, but all were to have a relaxing time.

And like a dumbass, I say, "Who are the goats?" "That's what we're trying to find out." I said, "*Nevada*." "Are you a *Nevada* sailor?" "Here's one!" The greeting host's servicemen were over six feet tall, all three looked over 200 pounds.

Fifth, I think it was a full quart; it wasn't a fifth, it was a...(laughs) Hell, I didn't drink whiskey, never did. So, I'm drinking beer at the bar a little bit, and I got tired. I've got a blister on my foot. This is a blister, in the heel, because the shoes, they were... I limp a little bit. It's a good battle wound.

Anyway, I limp in. I sat down in the middle of the dance floor; they were dancing. "Who's that idiot out there, sitting there?" "Apparently, he's tired." I was really tired. I sat down and held onto my bottle. Pretty soon, "Is that you, Charles?" "Is that you, Charles?" My sister. She was dating a Army guy, a lieutenant or something like that. They were invited, see. "What are you doing on the floor?" "What are you doing with **that**?" I said, "They were given to me." That was funny.

Then I went back and applied for a forty-eight hour. That was only one meeting. I didn't go to the ball. I think it was at the Belmar. I don't know. So then Frances, "See if you can get a leave." She knew that stuff. I went back and I told my division officer, "I met my sister out here." He gave me forty-eight hours, my sister and...a first-generation Italian, Angela Emma, her apartment roommate. Anyway, I can't think of it. I'll know it later, who he

was. They went out during early war and got a job in the shipyards, not the shipyards, but the airplane division.

They worked, Angela and Emma, at Illinois Airplane Parts, which made cub planes. They worked there; they made guns. She dated this soldier, a Swede, Army guy. They invited me, the next day, to meet friends of theirs. I came back, and they gave me the address to find. It was easy. There's the PE, the Pacific Electric Line she ran up from Long Beach. Wait a minute. Oh, I got the town wrong. Look there. Is it San Francisco or Long Beach?

DePue: Let's take just a minute to find here. (pause) San Pedro, California.

Sehe: Yeah, that's Long Beach.

DePue: Long Beach.

Sehe: Okay. We pulled into San Pedro, Long Beach and went into Los Angeles area; that's it. That's where Bob Hope is, you see, not San Francisco. Anyway, Angela, that's her first name. I got a first name out of her, Emma. (aside) God, that damn tomato. They worked in one of the Boeing plants. So I visited them, and they took me a few places, beer, then a garden center or something like that. Then I went back to the ship. Then we pulled out of San Pedro, went up to San Francisco.

DePue: And it wasn't too much longer after that, looks like you were—

Sehe: Yeah, don't say it.

DePue: Ulithi atoll in the Carolinas.

Sehe: Ulithi. [corrects pronunciation]

DePue: Ulithi. That sounds like that was a re-supply. That's where—

Sehe: One of the biggest in the country. It was the largest natural base facility in the Pacific. Mark, Ulithi is an island; it's got coral like this, perfect harbor, cuts all the static, you know?

DePue: Breaks up the waves before they get into the harbor.

Sehe: They can repair anything, anything there. They found out later, it is. (coughs)

DePue: I wanted to have just a couple of general questions here, and then we'll move on to Iwo Jima. How was the food on the ship?

Sehe: Oh, that's the one thing I can say. I have to say it was good. I knew the baker, James. He was in our original 5th Division, and when the attack [came], he was a gunner. He was tall and slender, like I. He transferred over to the

supply; he ended up as a baker. They feed the ship on two sides, starboard and port, two separate galleys, all the way here. The starboard side crew members, mid-ship, they go to this one and the other... They can feed the entire ship in about two hours, one file through. They allow stragglers, if you want seconds. But, to be respectful, you wait for someone who hasn't eaten yet. You can tell when it's starting to thin out.

I was always hungry. You don't understand that; a lot of people don't. I was hungry since I was born; I was borderline starving to feed my body and to ask for something more that I could give it, until I got to the Navy. So I go up port side, go down and eat, then I go over to the starboard side and get in their line, first time, and go through. And now the port side is finishing up, so they can get seconds. I go back there, so I eat three times, a meal. I ended up pretty good shape. The cooks called me "Chow Hound Charlie." (DePue laughs)

DePue: And you're a thin guy today, Charles. Most everybody would be jealous, because you don't have any weight on you at all. How about mail? How often did the ship get mail? Was that very difficult?

Sehe: I didn't get any mail. I didn't tell them where I was at. I mean, like mail [from] home. I really don't... But I sent mail home. What they do, they take my letter and photograph it. It's called "V-mail."<sup>29</sup> I got a box somewhere; I could show it. In fact, if I could get permission from my wife to give me a couple to give to you to show how we talked... In archive that would work. See, they're very reluctant to give any of this stuff up.

DePue: Is that just that your family weren't letter writers. You talked about how very minimal education your parents had at the time.

Sehe: My mother couldn't read the small print. My daughter would have to read it.

DePue: Let's talk about Iwo Jima then. Apparently, the ship arrived in Iwo Jima, February 16th and was there for just about twenty days, twenty-plus days.

Sehe: We first arrived, [and] ships were given assignments. Now Iwo Jima is unique, the island itself. We were given assignments. We were shown the grid of the island. You have one of these, don't you?

DePue: We have a map of the western Pacific, and there's just a little dot in the map, because that is a tiny little island in the—

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<sup>29</sup> V, or Victory mail was a valuable tool for the military during World War II. The process, which originated in England, was the microfilming of specially designed letter sheets. Instead of using valuable cargo space to ship whole letters overseas, microfilmed copies were sent in their stead and then "blown up" at an overseas destination before being delivered to military personnel. (<https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibits/past/the-art-of-cards-and-letters/mail-call/v-mail.html>)

Sehe: It's shaped like a pork chop. At the base of the pork chop... Give me both, a paper and that one. No, that one. Leave it on that pad, so I can... something solid... There you go.

Iwo Jima is a volcanic island, as they are in the Pacific. And it's unique that it could be active, because the sands, the grounds, they're still warm. And some of them, they have steam holes, steam coming out from them. To jump ahead, after the landing, the Marines could cook their food on it. Under normal conditions, they could do that. So, bombardment ships were assigned a grid numbers, as we did with Europe.

DePue: Here's one of the things you had sent me, to include a little bit of the sand of Iwo Jima, which is that black volcanic sand that you're talking about.

Sehe: Um-hmm. The beach heads were on the western edge. Each U.S. Marine division, there's a 1st, the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th. The 3rd division, and the 4th, were in the reserve. Our sector involved the 5th division, Marine.

DePue: They landed on this side, Charles. They landed on the eastern, southeastern side.

Sehe: I had that right, yeah.

DePue: Because here is Mount Suribachi.

Sehe: Where's the green? Okay. Yeah, the eastern side, yeah. See, what happened, they determined later, during the fighting, that the upper part here had less resistance by the Japanese than down here in this part. So, the intent... See the idea, they wanted to get there by—

DePue: Here's the airstrip, right here.

Sehe: Yeah, Yontar Airstrip. That's where the 5th...the 6th were there. I just talked to a guy that you don't know, of course. The next town over here, North Mankato's trying to gobble up, 6th Division.

DePue: I've interviewed a gentleman who is with the Marine Division here—an intelligence officer—and landed, I think from the 5th Division, on the western side of the beach, Major General Keller Rockey.<sup>30</sup>

Sehe: Yeah, this Keller, I have a note from his son. Anyway, our support was to give them as much as they can. But you see, Lieutenant General Tadamishe Kuribayaschi, was no dummy. He was a smart tactician, Japanese general.

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<sup>30</sup> Keller Emrick Rockey was a highly decorated Lieutenant General in the United States Marine Corps, who commanded the Fifth Marine Division in the Battle of Iwo Jima during World War II and the Third Amphibious Corps during the occupation of North China following the war. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keller\\_E.\\_Rockey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keller_E._Rockey))

And he knew that you never stopped them from landing. They got the power; they got the support; they got the air power.

He says, “Why waste my men on trying to prevent them from reaching, which they ultimately will achieve, the beaches.” See, when he came there, the commander that the general was replacing put all his artillery down toward the beach to prevent the landing. He says, “You expose your artillery to air attacks.” This was essentially what I would say went between the two Japanese.

He brought his back in the hill. And before an invasion, he marked out all sectors, like this. See you have a cave emplacement here, A, and you have one over here, in B. He would go out and have one of his men go out to the distant rock, measure the distance between that rock and station A, the distance from that rock to station B, know the range. This crossfire overlap redetermined where the maximum range would be for each gun position.

So already, before the invasion even started, the Japanese knew where the range would be for each sector. In case they come in, they know how to set it for predetermined crossfire. That’s why they have this so-called “murderous crossfire.” They were able to cover the entire eastern beaches by crossfire. The Marines had to slug their way through.

DePue: I wondered, when you were going there, by this point in the war, Kamikazes was a reality; wasn’t it? Was that something that your officers were talking about?

Sehe: Not effectively. Kamikaze did first appear in the Philippine, the battle of the Philippine Sea. See, there were three seas out there, the Coral, Philippine and Bismarck Seas. That’s when they were—

DePue: Initially used?

Sehe: Used. You see, the Japanese knew they were losing ships. They were losing ships and men, seasoned men. See, the United States had no problem. They lose a ship; we’ll build two, you know what I mean? The U.S. didn’t worry about the ships. We can do it. The men, that’s sorrowful, but we can replace them.

But they [the Japanese] couldn’t replace [their ships]. They were training air pilots, using simulators. They used mechanical; they conserved all gasoline. So, he would cut down the odds of being against American forces, coming in. Let them come in. Hold fire till I tell you. Then the Marines got ashore. They got two waves in. The first wave went, nothing happened. [The] second wave got halfway to the first. [The] third wave started to come in; then the Japanese let loose. They had all that covered by fire. Where could the second wave go? It can’t go forward, it can’t go back. The first wave got slaughtered, a smart tactical move. The Japanese were mobile.

DePue: One of the things that I've read here, that you wrote. Let me get to it. There was, apparently, a request by the Marines that there be ten days of preparatory fire. Does that sound familiar, that there were actually three days of prep fires?

Sehe: Yeah.

DePue: If you don't mind, let—

Sehe: I know what you have. It's still a sore point with the living. The original plan was, we were to have, the Marines were, and General Schmidt, he wanted ten days' pre-invasion fire. Well, then there's this asshole from Philippines in charge of it.

General MacArthur is in charge of the South Pacific area. He wanted to invade the Philippines at the same time, to retake them. He says, "I promised them I shall return." So what happened, he asked for the older battleship support, more than what he had originally assigned, the *West Virginia*, the *Tennessee*, the *Pennsylvania*, see, all of these reclaimed ships, plus the new ones; he had the new ones out, too, *South Dakota*, *Wisconsin* and all that. He wanted the invasion to start on time.

Admiral Stark, in charge of naval operations, no. So this went on for a little while. Then the president got involved. Anyway, then Nimitz wanted to keep it at ten, but he was overruled. It ended up with a three-day bombardment, which shorted the number of ships. They were going to do a ten-day assignment in three days, with a reduced number of ships.

DePue: That answers one of my questions, because I wouldn't think that even a battleship would be able to carry more than three days' supply of fourteen-inch guns and five-inch ammo.

Sehe: That is correct. That's one thing they couldn't supply at Ulithi.<sup>31</sup> See, Ulithi, they could repair any damage on a ship, small caliber guns and that, but...

DePue: So there was a three-day instead of ten-day, and we've already talked about, the Japanese were well dug in, lots of tunnels and Mount Sirabachi, lots of tunnel systems, elaborate systems on the northern part of the island itself. Even that three-day, intensive bombardment most of them were still more than ready to take you guys on.

Sehe: They didn't do too much damage.

DePue: How far off the coastline was the *Nevada* from the Iwo Jima beaches? Were you a bit closer than you were in Normandy, four miles?

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<sup>31</sup> Ulithi is an atoll in the Caroline Islands of the western Pacific Ocean, about 103 miles east of Yap. It consists of 40 islets totaling 1.7 square mile. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulithi>)

Sehe: Um-hmm, yeah.

DePue: Do you remember; were you watching what was going on in the island, to see either of the flag raising ceremonies?

Sehe: I was lucky in a way. We were not at general quarters every day. When we first went there, for two days, general quarters, everybody stayed at their station. Then they went to recall Condition Two. Condition Two is when you get four hours on, four hours off, but the guns are maintained eight hours a day. Do you understand that? Four days for one, just for arbitrary, for 8:00 to 12:00, Section A gun crew, then 12:00 to 4:00, Section B gun crew. From 4:00 to 8:00, another gun crew. So four [hours] on, four off. That was consistent. I was on this 8:00 to 12:00.

About 10:20, 10:30 we were watching. It all depends if we had access to either the rangefinder or a pair of binoculars. If you don't have either, you couldn't see. I happened to be with the binoculars. The other guy was on the rangefinder. The guy in the rangefinder said, "Holy shit, a flag's going up!" So I got binoculars, and there it was, a real slender pole, and there are these guys. [reviewing a photo] This one here, he's from Minnesota, Charles Lindbergh, same name, same spelling, but not related. Here, see, his name is in here, Charles Lindbergh. He's up here. I went to his funeral, very nice. So that was the initial flag raising.

Then, see, I got off watch at 12:00 or 5:00, you know. What happens when you get off watch, you got to tell the other person what the hell you're doing there, during that watch. In other words, you come on to relieve me; I'm going off, so I am obliged to tell you, this is the situation; this is what's facing you. So I got off. During that time, the second flag was up that they ordered [as] a replacement.

DePue: And that's the one that is famous, because of the photograph.

Sehe: He got it accidentally. He admitted that, Rosenthal. He admitted it just happened it, and it went up and... I don't believe in that. I got—

DePue: It's the most famous picture taken during the Second World War. To be able to say you saw the first one going up is pretty special, I think, Charles.

Sehe: I told them, I don't see the end one.

DePue: Did the ship stay off and support the operation for the entire month that they fought for that island? It was close to a month, at least.

Sehe: Yes, they did move around, I remember. See now, that was February 23, my sister's birthday, February 23; mine is the twenty-sixth. No, then March came, the month of March.

Then halfway through March, almost to the end, we got a visit, March 27. Now listen to this. This is very interesting. March 27, at dawn's early light, which would be about 6:32 then, Western Pacific [time] is still a little dusk, you know, in the morning. See that's the time. The best time to attack is the morning. People are scared, "dawn's early light" or sleeping in.

Anyway, that morning, there were three planes approaching the *Nevada*, two on the port side, where I was, and one on the starboard side, heading for the bow straight. They wanted to get the controlling center, knock that out. They can do it. That plane was heading for the navigation bridge, where the captain is. We had these three coming in. Now, at first... See, I'm on the twenty-millimeter AA gun mount range about four to six miles effective, maybe six miles effective. Then the forties, they go out a couple of miles more. But then, the five-inch Bofors 40 mm quad can go almost sixteen miles or so.<sup>32</sup> You got it.

Anyway, they were coming in. This one came in almost to the bow. My friend, George Peters, a Marine, he's in the bow. He couldn't be anywhere else, right smack in the bow, in front of the anchor apparatus, that guy was. And that sucker was coming right for his nose, so to speak. He had a twenty millimeter, and he clipped off part of the wing. Now I didn't know this was going on, because I was on the port side. We had our own problems. We got together later.

That wing made it turn a little bit this way, and he was going out to sea. But that pilot, he managed somehow to turn it around, and he came back to the ship. He couldn't get to where he was going, so he hit the deck at backend, number three turret, right smack into the turret...blew up. [It] blew a hole in the middle as big as this kitchen, damaged the twenty mm and forty mm guns, sent a shock wave over to where my gun crew were at.

While that's going on, these two planes came in, coming in this way. We got ready to fire, but the five-inch knocked one down, and it came in then, fortunately. It hit the second one, just before it got in the range of the forty millimeter. So, we were okay now. This one here shouldn't have got in that far. See, his plane was low-flying, so he wasn't detected until he came in the visible range.

DePue: I was thinking, when you're describing this, if you're in an aircraft, a single engine aircraft, two or three miles out, you're just a tiny little spot in the sky; aren't you?

Sehe: It gets bigger, if you're looking at it. And it's not a friendly thing. It gets bigger and bigger and bigger; that's what I seen. But, on the other side, human error, fatal one, killed twelve men. [It] killed the entire Marine crew on the

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<sup>32</sup> The Bofors 40 mm gun, often referred to simply as the Bofors gun, is an anti-aircraft autocannon designed in the 1930s by the Swedish arms manufacturer AB Bofors. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bofors\\_40\\_mm\\_gun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bofors_40_mm_gun))

forty millimeter and two Marines on twenty millimeter, twelve. Human error. You know what the human error was? It was dusk, between dusk and sunrise. You got that... Remember I told you [about] that blush?

DePue: Yeah.

Sehe: The computer downstairs was still on radar switch, not rangefinder.

DePue: When you say computer, you're talking about a person, a person who is computing the data.

Sehe: In charge of the signal.

DePue: We're not talking about a machine.

Sehe: No, we're talking about a human. He should have switched over downstairs, below deck, the toggle, radar and rangefinder. So, the rangefinder operator up in the... I can't even think of the name—

DePue: In the tower?

Sehe: Not the tower, gun director.

DePue: In the radar center?

Sehe: No, it's the direct... He has in charge of the switches for our guns there. I'll get it. It's a common name, but... He would stop. See, the rangefinder, there is a button, I told you that. He taps it every time. Every time I get in your eyes, in range sight, I tap it, and that signal goes down. Well he was tapping it down the correct range, moving it all the time for that plane, but they weren't getting any signals, because he wasn't on the radar. He was on the rangefinder. He was sending down range finder, optical range signals. The radar switch was still **on** because of daylight, and the optical range switch was off. Do you know what I mean? They don't... Human errors never get you the promotion.

DePue: You said this was on March 27th. That was when you're off the coast of Okinawa?

Sehe: Approaching it, yeah. We were going to Okinawa for the invasion, April 1st, you see. So, only four days, maybe three days, we were in route to the islands. Can I go home now?

DePue: I think we're just about there, Charles. So you've been talking about going home since you came back from Pearl Harbor. (both laugh)

Sehe: Now you're getting the idea. (both laugh) I want to get home before it hits me. So many—

- DePue: It's kind of what James Jones wrote about when he wrote about his experience as a Marine, that there's this process that soldiers, who are going to be experiencing heavy combat, go through. At first, they just hope they can survive, and they go through this until they get to the point where they say, "I'm not going to survive. The only thing that's going to be a surprise is when it actually happens." That's a fact!
- Sehe: You get that fear. Actually, I was aware of it, or could have. But it didn't hit me; I was never afraid. I'm scared, but never afraid of something. My wife tells me, "You dumb dodo, someone's looking out for you."
- DePue: Did you ever get close to being injured or were injured, other than those blisters you got that one time?
- Sehe: The kamikaze.
- DePue: That one last attack you talked about? Concussion?
- Sehe: No visible injuries, but I felt the... There are some invisible injuries that are very difficult to diagnose. They may not show up until later, you know. And they leave no scars.
- DePue: Did the *Nevada* still stay in Okinawa waters and continue to support the landings, even after that one-gun turret was inoperable?
- Sehe: Yeah, we went back to Ulithi, like I said, and they repaired it. They made a temporary repair one day, and then they repaired the damage, but not the gun! It blew a hole. It killed a couple...right above the sleeping quarters, but everybody was at their battle station, so nobody covered that over. That turret was damaged. That ended our tour, but we were about done anyway.
- DePue: I asked you a couple of hours ago, in 1942, whether you were thinking that we could actually win the war. By this point in the war, was there any doubt in the mind that the United States would be triumphant?
- Sehe: I knew we were winning, judging from what the battles are that preceded our... Yeah, I think we would win, but it's going to be one damn long time. It's not over yet. And I had learned, just from reading of Guadalcanal invasions, Tarawa, Jaluit Atoll, Iwo Jima, they're not going to give up easily. We're going to have to fight for what we got. We're going to sacrifice a lot of men to accomplish that.
- DePue: It sounds like the ship didn't spend much time at Ulithi at all, just a couple of days, and they were back out on the water again.
- Sehe: Yes. They're ready. You get in a car accident, and you call your insurance man, get with it pretty soon, fix it up right away.

- DePue: I wanted to take you back, and I think you went back up to Okinawa to support that operation. But there was, apparently, an incident about the April 5th timeframe that you're a few miles off of the coastline, and you're taking shell fire from the shore.
- Sehe: An island, Ie Shima. See, Okinawa is not by itself. There are a lot of little volcanic islands, atolls around. See here; there's a lot of these little guys.
- DePue: Sure. And what I was reading here is that, at one point, there were twenty salvos fired at your ship.
- Sehe: We didn't know where the hell they were coming from. One fire came [from] that direction, another came [from] over here.
- DePue: So this isn't just one position they're firing at you from.
- Sehe: But they were the closest to us. Those shells, they were splashing around, and that alerted us. Then, by that time, three shells hit the decks. As I understand it, one hit the deck at such an angle that it... You know what a scupper is?
- DePue: A scupper?
- Sehe: Drainage from the water [that] come off, through the deck. It drops down like an eave, you know. It got in there, and it just slid across and deck and went out the other side. It cut an oil hose on the way out, that one. The second one came in at an angle, like this, and cut a slice through the deck. But the third one came right through one side, through the sleeping quarter, out the other, killed two and seriously injured one.
- DePue: Did it not explode?
- Sehe: It exploded after.
- DePue: After it emerged on the other side?
- Sehe: Yeah. Three people dead on that one. So we turned our guns on it. While that was happening, someone onboard ship reported the angle of the fire coming, so they knew where it was at.

Can I go home; I've been trying to get home for a long time. Uncle Sam said, "No, but pretty close; we're getting close to going home."

DePue: What I read here, in this article that you wrote for the newspaper, really surprised me. Maybe it was this incident that you found a piece of shrapnel, enemy shrapnel, that was still warm, that was laying on the deck.



*USS Nevada crewmen clear debris after being hit by Japanese shore batteries in April 1945, while the ship supported the Okinawa landings. The photo appeared in an article that Sehe wrote for the winter, 2015 edition of "WW II Quarterly." (Sehe is leaning on railing in the top right.)*

Sehe: Yeah, it was a five-inch shell fragment, the base of it. I think that it was still warm. This was a couple of hours after the attack. So I brought it up. I looked at it first, and then on the base, "Made in Maryland." Now there is an arsenal in Maryland. See, the shells, once they're made, before they're packed with explosive, the shell base, it comes through and they snap it, and so forth.

I brought it up to the bridge, and I said, "Here's something that I found." And they said, "Oh, okay," nonchalant, you know. I knew right away they must have got it from some damn American, Philippine—most likely the Philippines—intact. Yeah, that was surprising.

DePue: You've been fighting the Japanese for three years, by this time, more than that. Had you ever actually seen a live Japanese?

Sehe: That's right. The time that *Randolph* was hit. *Randolph* was a carrier, one of the newer ones. It's not as large as the *Lexington*. They got hit by several Pilipino deck planes. Some were carrying torpedoes; some were carrying bombs. But *Randolph* started burning. Then we heard the explosion. But, before that, I was on, oh, a Sky One—that's what we called them—officer in—

DePue: This was the duty position you were talking about before?

Sehe: Sky One, Sky Two. There's still another word that fit with that. It's not a computer; it's directors. I had my battle door open, you know, like that. And (makes a swishing sound) wind was whistling. I looked up, and just overhead was a twin-engine Japanese plane going in, just missed us, going over on top. I was two-thirds the way up. Our ship was still a little shape. It wasn't that good. They're looking for carriers like he...big stuff. That was the *Randolph*

over there. You hear “hmpfrac, hmpfrac,” two or three. That brought us a little closer to hell.

DePue: We got into that story, because I asked you about whether or not you’d actually seen a Japanese in person.

Sehe: Oh, right. Oh, yeah. No, that’s right; this was late. One came at us, a twin-engine plane. Now I remember what you want. It came over, but overshot. He was too high, so he ditched right above us, forward, into the ocean. The Marines went out armed, of course, and picked them up and brought them aboard, standing. Just before they brought them down to the brig, you know, I looked at them, skinny. They were short about five, five, so slender, burnt brown, bronzed by the sun, you know. They couldn’t have been more than twenty years old.

DePue: Did that change your opinion of the enemy you’d been fighting all these years?

Sehe: Well, I knew they were young. No, I’m a little different than some. I respected them. They were doing their duty, but the way they went about it, obligated to do it the way they were told to do, that’s what I objected. I respected the military soldier, the German, not the Nazi, but the German soldier.

DePue: This is probably about the time, also... There’s a lot going on at this period of time. April 12 would have been about the time you heard the news that FDR [President Franklin D. Roosevelt] passed away.

Sehe: That makes two periods of time that affected me emotionally. One, very ecstatic, I was really happy. Another, I was a little sad, because I knew I saw the man before. When we were in Bremerton, Washington, Navy Yard, President Roosevelt came through. He wanted to inspect some of the damage done by the Pearl Harbor attack.

At that time, there was only one U.S. battleship in there, and that was the *Nevada*, BB36. His motorcade came through, white hat. He waved, and we waved back. That’s about it. They didn’t go through like a snail, twenty-five, maybe thirty miles per hour. But we waved. That felt real good. I voted for him in the forty-four election, you know.

DePue: This would have been the only president you really remembered.

Sehe: Yeah, Truman, I didn’t care for.

DePue: I mean, before that time. I don’t know if you were old enough to remember Herbert Hoover as president.

Sehe: Oh, yeah. I don’t remember Harding though, Warren Harding. He was president when I was born. He died in August.

- DePue: Or Coolidge,
- Sehe: Coolidge, I remember.
- DePue: You've got a better memory than most, Charles.
- Sehe: Harding died when I was born, in twenty-three. No, I can retain, I remember a lot of things.
- DePue: But did that one hit you hard, when you heard the news that FDR had died on April 12, 1945?
- Sehe: Well, I said, that's going to be a power struggle, so what the hell. See, he was good because he was secretary of the Navy. That helped. He understood the Navy. That was his favorite. (observes) Somebody's coming in now. That was his favorite service, because of his yacht and so forth. (acknowledges his guest) Hello, James.
- DePue: We are just about done. We're getting through Okinawa here. It sounds like you were off the Okinawa for quite a while, as well. And you mentioned in one of these things that you wrote that, during that timeframe that you're there—
- Sehe: You didn't have to mention that.
- DePue: Well, that there were something like fifty or sixty alerts that were going on.
- Sehe: It was constant, really. You see, the Japanese had lost the offensive, actually. They didn't have surface ships, the carrier. They didn't have the seasoned men. They lost some of their best men in two battles, Coral Sea and Midway. As I told you earlier, United States would lose a plane, they'll give you three more.
- DePue: I know that by that time, kamikazes became almost a regular occasion, didn't it?
- Sehe: It was designed... One admiral had the idea to train pilots. They know they don't have the experience, but they can learn how to fly a plane and land it on a ship. The only instructions they got is how to maneuver, how to get on to the ship, how to do it, in case they get hit, and so forth. They learn this, so it's just a one-way trip. And fuel was in great demand. Very rarely did they have a full tank of gasoline. Potatoes, they boiled potatoes, synthetic fuels, that's what went on to make fuel.
- DePue: They didn't have to train these pilots how to land the aircraft.
- Sehe: Well, that's just to ease things over, and they were volunteers to go there, because, you see, the philosophy of the Japanese warrior, that Bushido code,

for the emperor.<sup>33</sup> He fights for the emperor, not for himself. They fight to die for the emperor; do you understand that? They're willing to die for... This little kid from Geneva, I'm fighting to save my butt. I want to live. I have a stronger will to live than he is willing to die for the emperor. So, if the odds are with me, I'm going to try to... Can I go home? When will they... In your itinerary do I have a time to go home?

DePue: (laughs) We're getting pretty close to that. What happens after Okinawa? You're into middle-April into May, May 8th. I think it's May 8, you hear about the news in Europe that the war in Europe is over.

Sehe: Yeah, this is June.

DePue: I don't know how quickly you got the word where you were at, but—

Sehe: No, we didn't get the word to well. We knew that it's going to take a while to mobilize, until they get over here. We felt that we still had a war here. That's what Nimitz says, "We still got a war here." It's an American war. They don't want the British coming over. Japanese started it here, and we'll finish it. That was his attitude.

Going back to the British, the French and the Americans alliance with Russia and so forth, Nimitz and Admiral Stark, this is an American war. We don't want anybody. The British wanted to help. But the reason I told you earlier, that the British declined help from Nimitz in the battle on the Java Sea, you see. There were two carriers, British carriers, off Burma that could be called closer to go, to help Nimitz out. They said, "No, we're going to keep them here." So Nimitz said—

DePue: Heck with you, huh?

Sehe: Never forgave them for that.

DePue: I saw that April 20th, the ship returns back to Pearl Harbor. Was that for repairs at Pearl?

Sehe: Repairs, now that was the base, because we were going to do something different. It's a base for ammunition, food, repair, recondition the guns, not taking them off, but recondition. We're going to Jaluit, Jaluit Atoll, J-a-l-u-in-t. This is in Eniwetok Island. Keep in mind the Carolinas is Tinian and Saipan. This one here, Eniwetok and Truk, Truk?

DePue: Um-hmm. These are all tiny little spots on the map, if you're looking at it.

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<sup>33</sup> The unwritten Samurai code of conduct, known as Bushido, held that the true warrior must hold that loyalty, courage, veracity, compassion, and honor as important, above all else. An appreciation and respect of life was also imperative, as it added balance to the warrior character of the Samurai.  
(<https://acelebrationofwomen.org/2017/03/the-bushido-code-the-eight-virtues-of-the-samurai/>)

Sehe: Very highly defensive. They didn't need them, but they had to neutralize them, so they bypass them. They hit Eniwetok first and then... I forgot the other one, but, Tarawa, that's it. They realized later they should never have gone in there. They found out they didn't need it; it wasn't military. Anyway, aside from that, they said, "Well, we've got to go back and make certain they don't sneak any submarine supplies to the Jaluit Islands. They had specific names, which I don't recall. It's called the Jaluit Atoll. So we came; we got within three, four miles of those guys. And we just blasted the hell out of them, silenced them.

DePue: It looks to me, though, that the ship was in Pearl Harbor from April 20 to June 11. Does that sound right?

Sehe: The Jaluit Atoll is in June. I was training. This is what, forty-four?

DePue: This is forty-five now.

Sehe: Oh, yeah, okay. This is where I went to Treasure Island, San Francisco, Fire Control School. See, they wanted to keep, not me, but they wanted to keep my experience. You know what I mean?

I already told you that I chose art over geometry. And I showed you the muster book. You got to have the ship's speed, the ship's direction, the air speed, the air's direction. I couldn't do that. Anyway, they sent me there in the hopes... This is what, June?

DePue: June of forty-five.

Sehe: Yeah. See, February forty-six is not too far off.

DePue: Yeah. We're getting where you're going to be able to go home pretty soon.

Sehe: You know what they're doing? They want to get me out of fire control. I could easily go to the fire control, the second class.

DePue: What was your rank by this time?

Sehe: Fire control man third [class]. All I did was check stations for twenty mm gun #38.

DePue: What would the equivalent be in the Army? Is that like an E-4?

Sehe: Four, that's an E-4. They, I have to tell you... Well, that comes later. I'm a captain, you know.

DePue: A Navy captain.

Sehe: Damn right, U.S. senatorial recognition.

DePue: An honorary Navy captain.

Sehe: I never pull that rank. (DePue laughs), but I think that is quite an honor. Anyway, Treasure Island, see, they had a lot of... What kind of a program did they have there? How old are you now, sixty-three?

DePue: How old am I?

Sehe: Yeah.

DePue: Sixty.

Sehe: Oh, shit. Fifty? You mean to tell me I'm forty-two years older than you? Oh, my god.

DePue: No, you're thirty-two years older. I'm sixty.

Sehe: Okay, Treasure Island, Fire Control School. I went through. They gave me a whole mechanical set. They made me do drawings and that. Hell, you know what I was thinking? I was thinking February, in June. Then he says, "You understand, you will work out some air problems and some surface problems." Okay, fine.

DePue: Are you with the *Nevada* then, when it heads back out from Pearl Harbor in mid-June, towards the western Pacific? Were you on board with them at that time? Yes?

Sehe: Wait a minute.

DePue: This is just a couple of—

Sehe: Did we leave Okinawa?

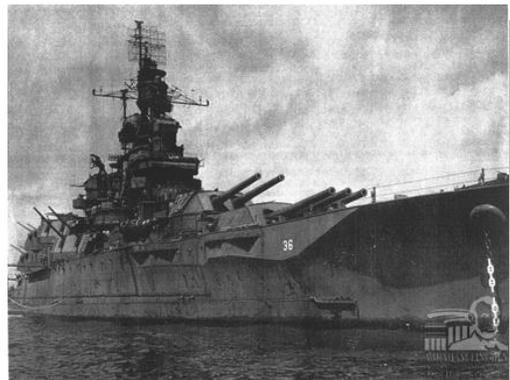
DePue: No, according to the duty log, they left from Ulitki. Where'd it go here—

Sehe: Now, wait. Find on the duty Okinawa, Philippines, Okinawa, Philippines, August the fourteenth now.

DePue: Buckner Bay.

Sehe: Yes.

DePue: To Leyte Gulf



*This is the USS Nevada (BB36) at anchor in Buckner Bay, Okinawa on August 15, 1945. "Battle weary, battle damaged, blistered paint coat, flaked, dirty ole gal, but we loved every section of her," wrote Sehe of his ship many decades later.*

Sehe: Alright.

DePue: To Buckner Bay to Pearl Harbor.

Sehe: No, I wasn't there then. I left B3 on July 31, 1945.

DePue: Yeah, that's after the war's over.

Sehe: Yeah. I went to Treasure Island, back to San Francisco. That's where that place is at. Now, see, we got an understanding, Mark?

DePue: Well, you're not on the *Nevada* at that time, then, when you're going to the school, or are you?

Sehe: We're being repaired.

DePue: In Hawaii.

Sehe: I was only a couple of weeks at school in San Francisco. I returned to the *Nevada* on July 1, 1943. Christmas vacation, you know. That's when, okay. Give me that thing. I didn't go to Pearl Harbor. In Okinawa, I got transferred to go stateside on July 31, 1945, the second time we went there. See now, [from] Okinawa we went to Philippines. We went back to Okinawa. That's when I got off.

DePue: You were discharged, it sounds like, even before the war is over in the Pacific. Is that right?

Sehe: Yes. I was being processed to be discharged, amid rumors of a cease firing. The cease fire mandate came from Nimitz on August 14, 1945. You aren't discharged until you get to your home base. For me, that was July 30, 1945.

DePue: That sounds right. Then let's—

Sehe: Can I go home now?

DePue: (laughs) You're just about ready to go home now. August 6, I got to get my dates right here. August 5, why are my dates all wrong here? I'm looking for the date that the first atomic bomb was dropped.

Sehe: August 6.

DePue: August 6—

Sehe: And the eighth

DePue: August 6 in Hiroshima and August 8.

Sehe: You see, I got off right after August 14, [as] soon as all cease fire, okay? That's when they started unloading the pre-Pearl Harbor, anybody before the war. They released all those guys. You understand? So, I had to be off that ship at least before August 17. And I didn't go to Pearl the last time. That's when they had homecoming. You know what I mean, open ship.

DePue: At Pearl Harbor, for the homecoming, is that what you're talking about? Or someplace else?

Sehe: No, after Pearl. Alright, at Okinawa I got off the ship, just say for a time, August 15, after the cease fire declaration. Then they used the ship as a ferry boat. The *Nevada* was loaded up with a lot of some crews, Army and that. They went to Pearl Harbor. At Pearl Harbor was a staging station for returning people to the states. So the *Nevada* again was filled to capacity, 2,000 or so sailors and soldiers and Marines, whoever they had. They called it the "carpet trip." From Pearl Harbor to Long Beach, San Pedro.

Then my sister went aboard, thinking I was aboard there. (laughs) She didn't see me, so she went aboard. They're very strict, see. They only allowed the visitors who had relatives. So they went aboard, and she gave her name. My brother is in the 6th Division, fire control man third class, twenty mm gun. "Oh, he's gone," you know. "Hey, are you Indian's sister?" They called me "Indian." It showed then, in my younger years. I looked like a... I don't know. That surprised her.

Anyway, "Come on, we'll show you. So they brought her. She got a tour of the ship! The rest of them were in a group. "This s is that; the leader of this and that, let's see the bulkhead." She got the tour. They said, "What is your name, Miss Sehe?" "Frances." "Frances, you thirsty?" She told me this later. But she was disappointed; she wanted to see me. They showed her where I slept.

DePue: Where were you at the time?

Sehe: I was going to Great Lakes Training Center, from Guam to the Philippines to San Francisco to Chicago.

DePue: Catching a train?

Sehe: Coach train, Navy section to Great Lakes.

DePue: Are you discharged by this time? That's going to happen at Great Lakes?

Sehe: You know why they did that? They could have discharged me anywhere. "Do you solemnly swear to uphold the Constitution of the United States and obey the laws of the..." None of that shit. I'd had enough. They wanted me to re-up. They said, "Well, we need you." The sales pitch was good. They said,

“You got the experience; we don’t have to re-train you, and you’ll get a new rating, just for enlisting, and the pay is good. What do you think?”

“I want to go home.” That was the last time I ever talked to naval personnel.

DePue: At least the Navy paid for your trip back to Illinois.

Sehe: Yeah. It surprises me, I can’t remember how I did it. No, I remember the places where I had been. I’ve been to Poland, Germany, three times, but I don’t remember how I got to any of those countries.

He said, the psychiatrist, see this is all during my time of “deadbeat,” in other words, my three months of bunkers. This family of mine, they gave up a down payment on a beautiful five room, single level house so that I could go traveling. I feel guilty about it.

DePue: That’s what I wanted to finish up with here, now that the war is over. Let me ask you this...I ask everybody this question. What did you think when you heard about our use of the atomic bomb to end the war?

Sehe: You want my honest opinion? They didn’t perfect it early enough.

DePue: If only it could have been used earlier to end the war?

Sehe: Um-hmm. Well, the general thing is to save American lives. To save American lives, you’ve got to sacrifice your enemy’s life. So, to me, I still respect the Japanese, the people. I employed one as technician at Stanford University, an expert lab assistant.

When I was at Stanford I was part of a research team, involving brain research and estradiol, radioactive materials. I learned how to work with radioactivity at Iowa. This [was] one of those little joy courses I took. The head of the project needed someone who could make radio autographs. And I was the only one at that time, in the fifties, the late fifties. So I went out...

Mistakenly, I walked in, and I don’t have any money. My wife, we didn’t have any to compete with the people. These guys were making twelve, almost \$20,000. I was making four [\$4,000] in Palo Alto. So, when a Minnesota job came up, I decided to leave and took three days ago.

I just burned all that we had, legally, took a toll. I accepted a job and started teaching at Mankato in September of sixty-seven. Then something triggered me, about February or so. So, February to late May, I went bonkers. I don’t remember anything.

DePue: What year would this be?

Sehe: Fifty-seven, I think. No, wait, no, sixty-eight. See, fifty-seven I got my Ph.D. degree. I went to Illinois, Champaign, to replace a professor. That would make it fifty-eight. That's right, and then I went to Cincinnati. That's three years. Then I went to California; no, [from] Cincinnati, I went to Naperville.

DePue: Are these teaching positions?

Sehe: Um-hmm.

DePue: I want to make sure I got this straight. I don't want to take any more time than we need to. But let me start with this. When you came home after the Second World War, for those first few months, did you struggle to adjust back to civilian life at that time?

Sehe: Yeah, I did. I hit the bars with the buddies. I didn't drink more than two twelve-ounce bottles of beer. But, it came back. My mother, she wasn't stupid at the time. She worked at Burgess-Norton and packed the piston pins into boxes. She made good money, so far as she was paid.

She had an extra room. She invited people to live. She had a couple of roomers. They left, and then a young guy came. He was farting around with my younger sister, you know. She got pregnant, so they got married. They lived there. We were in a three bedroom in this house. I came home, and where the hell am I going to live? So they gave up. They gave me her room, which was originally my sister's room in pre-war time. So they put her up and her husband up in the upstairs. We had an upstairs room.

I didn't like him when I first saw him. Back then, they had these carnival things visiting around and all that and so on. I was out drinking with a couple of the guys, and I came back. The door was locked. I had a key, and I opened it up. There's somebody back in my mother's bedroom. It was that so-called son-in-law. I said, "Get the hell out of here." He was looking for money or something he wanted. [I] didn't bother him.

Eventually then, they had a son, oh, a good kid. He liked me. In fact, I drove him somewhere... It hurt me to hear him say this. He says, "Uncle Charles, I wish you were my father." Anyway, they got divorced, and he left. He ended up in Aurora, bartending, you know. And he got involved in a fight with a bouncer. The bouncer was a female wrestler. She busted his hip, picked him up and threw him. That's the end of him. He left. Oh, I hated that son of a bitch.

DePue: Can you walk me through this series of getting your education, when you came back?

Sehe: Yeah. You had to get a job to survive. I mean, I had pay for a while, you know, retirement pay. And my mother, as I told earlier, she saved all that

allotment money. That surprised the hell out of me. She was determined that her six children would be successful in some job.

Then the first job... In Geneva they had an outfit called Geneva Kitchen. They had steel ware. It's actually sheet tin ware; it's not heavy steel, but it's still metal. They stamped the parts into shapes and so forth. My job was one of the earliest, lowest job—with a tack cloth, a sticky tack cloth to wipe the grease—was to wipe the metal parts, like this. They're on a conveyor, a set of drawers or shelves or whatever it is. They had to be done as they passed by me. I got tired of that, a couple of days of that, because it doesn't make sense. My mind wasn't geared to automation; it was geared to...

I want to tell you, see, I'm a proud son of a buck, a creative guy. I like thinking what to do. It cluttered my mind. Then the Campania Italian bond opened up in Geneva, borderline building between Batavia. It doesn't matter what the city production line was. I applied there. I had my masters. This was during the summer of fifty-seven. I was lining up a job.

DePue: Wait a minute. Where did you go to college? I lost that part.

Sehe: North Central College in Naperville, Illinois. That's already gone; we went there already.

DePue: I don't remember you talking about going to college, not on record.

Sehe: Oh, I know, you were leading up to it, and I jumped the story. I'm sorry. You are correct, Mark. I was in Geneva, running around, not doing anything. Oh wait, those jobs were before this education. I came out of the Brown Derby. We had one in Geneva, nice, little, real clean. I walked into the bar, and here was a guy that was on the *Detroit*. He was a sailor on the *Detroit*, a light cruiser in the Aleutians. I didn't know he was on there, but eventually, because he invited me to sit down and talk to him, talking Navy talk.

He has a wife, Pauline Flint, but her name is... Well, you see this Pauline Flint was in high school. He's not a native of Geneva; he came. But Pauline Flint was after this shy kid from Geneva, in high school, chasing him. Anyway, I went out; I wanted to leave. I excused myself, and I said, "Goodbye, Pauline and..." I forgot his name.

I got out the door, was walking on the street and, "Charles, Charles." See, everybody keeps calling me Charles, which is appropriate. I turned around, and my former high school teacher, history. He was athletic director. He wasn't participating in sports, but he understood the state rules and regulations of athletics. History, he taught me real good history; I knew that. He said, "What are you doing with yourself?" He said, "I saw you come out of the house of ill-repute." He says, "It's not of ill-repute?" I said, "I just went for refreshment." His comment was, "Would you like to refresh your brain?" And I said, "Huh?" But that comment started my brain cylinder spinning.

He said, “You’ve been through a lot; we know that. You’re just wandering around here. What are you going to do with yourself?” “I don’t know.” He said, “How about going to college?” I said, “College, I never thought of that. They wouldn’t let me in there.” He said, “Your grades are good. Now is your chance; you can do it. They’ve got a new bill out, called the GI Bill, Selective Service readjustment. He said, “Come on, you meet me here in about an hour, and I’ll take you over to Naperville, Illinois, North Central College.” At that time, Naperville was in the conference with Geneva, small number in population. He was a graduate of NCC [North Central College].

I went over there. He introduced me to the president, Hall. We sat there, and the president, he said... President Hall, H-a-l-l. He was about the third or fourth president. I mean, that’s how old the old guy was. He said, “You’ve got an unusual background. What are you going to do with it?” “I don’t know.” I think I was on a turntable, “I don’t know.” He said, “We offer... It’s a BA college.” He explained. I didn’t know the organization. I knew you graduated with a degree.

“So, what are you interested in?” “I don’t know.” “What do you feel comfortable with?” See, he’s good; he kept repeating. I said, “Well, I like animals.” “You do? You like plants?” And I said, “Yeah. In fact, I like plants. I like to go out and see the different trees.” “You want to know the difference between them?” He said, “You can do that; take Zoology and Botany.” I said, “I’ll go ahead.” He signed me up. This is the fall semester, 1946. “Charles, what’s your middle name?” “Theodore.” “What’s your Social Security number?” I said, “Three hundred, twenty-six, seventy-eight.”

DePue: That’s your service number; isn’t it? (laughs)

Sehe: He said, “Charles, no, no, that doesn’t make sense.” I said, “It’s 326... “Oh”, I said, “I know,” and I gave it to him. I got a computer up here, and nobody’s going... [Do you] know what I’m getting at? It’s a better computer. I can go from one period of time, way back, but it’s starting... The cognitive ability is diminishing, you understand? How old [long] can I keep this up?

DePue: So you got through college, and then you went to graduate school at the University of Iowa?

Sehe: Then, when I was in the masters [program]—summer I told you—that’s when I went to Campania Italian Balm. That’s when I asked for a job. They said the chemistry area wasn’t available, but I could have worked with the chemistry group. I was too qualified for a MS [Master of Science] degree.

DePue: I know you’ve spent most of your life teaching zoology and anatomy and—

Sehe: Endocrinology.

DePue: And endocrinology.

Sehe: And then, I had to teach the basic course, Comparative Vertebrate Anatomy, starting with fishes. In other words, the evolutionary tree, fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals and humans. This is all up here.

DePue: Just very quickly, because I know I'm wearing you out, what are the colleges that you taught at?

Sehe: First one that I went to was Cedar Rapids, no—

DePue: North Central.

Sehe: No, no, no, the gym place, near Iowa City, not Cedar Rapids?

DePue: Well, there's co-colleges, Mount Vernon with Cornell College.

Sehe: No. Damn it; I can't think of it.

DePue: We can fix that in the transcript, when you get there. I know you spent most of your career here at Mankato State University.

Sehe: Yeah, fifty some... Okay, Cedar Falls.

DePue: Cedar Falls. And you spent most of your career here in Mankato, teaching.

Sehe: Right, from Cedar Falls I went to Urbana.

DePue: University of Illinois.

Sehe: Yeah, professor on leave. When he came back, and then they had a verbal, argumental discussion revolution. They submitted a protest to the dean of the university, who had hired me. They said, "We have no place for you, though you're qualified." So they looked for a job for me, and they stuck firm. The only one available was the University of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Here I come; I'm a small time Geneva man, going in to a metropolis. I couldn't hack it. So then, I went back to North Central. The professor called me there, three years, to help out. I got tired of that, because they were trying to make me a United Methodist out of a Roman Catholic. (both laugh) My wife, oh, she didn't like that either. And the Father, Stinger, a stern German Catholic, he said, "What the hell are you doing over there?" I said, "It's a job. I get paid. They don't bother me. I have a family to support, five children."



*Professor Sehe lectures to an embryology class at Mankato State University in Mankato, Minnesota in May 1990.*

Then I got the idea, Argonne National Lab had summer scholarships open. Three years I went there. Each summer I learned the procedures. And it came in the...Tumisian, he was Turkish, and he was interested in grasshopper femurs. He had a whole bunch of slides of femurs. The question presented to him and others, does the grasshopper enlarge his femur by exercise, or is actual mitotic division going on in cells, because the muscle cell here that they use, they don't do that. So my job... He puts one, two, three, four slide boxes... I don't know if you're familiar, in the biology of slide box he carries. This segment of research really arose the curiosity in my mind, the natural curiosity of a boy.

He said, "All you got to do is find me something. You can take your time, there's no limit to how long you got to look in the binocular microscope." I said, "I can do that." I do that task easily, box after box.

He had two assistants, Rosemary Devine and Gretchen, anyway, just two females. One was a conservative, and the other was a liberal. They didn't make it easy. Rosemary was Catholic, and she says, "You know what you have to do?" I said, "Yeah." Well, she handles the paperwork coming in and out of his lab, you know, a secretary.

The other one is his assistant. She goes on trips. I mean, she's adventurous. She went to Africa once, one of those three summers. So she gives this to me. She moves her shoe and rubs my shoe like that, and she says, "You like that?" (laughs) I'm married. Jim was born in sixty-two. She says, "No, it's just a way of greeting there. I don't mean any disrespect to you." She said, "Over there when they want to get together, the woman comes up to the man..."

Anyway, she said, "You know how to make beer?" I said, "My dad and uncle do. I don't." She said, "I have a recipe for banana beer." I said, "Say that again." "Banana beer." She came out, and she wanted someone to help her brew it. (both laugh) Anyway, that is potent stuff. I showed her how to do it, but she had a friend. Is that still going? Oh, god. By dammit, Mark, those three summers were hilarious!

DePue: Well, I'm trying to get you to Mankato State.

Sehe: Not while I'm drinking banana beer.

DePue: We were talking about North Central College and Argonne National Laboratory. I guess you were working there.

Sehe: Argonne, three summers. One summer, using  $I_{131}$  radioactive  $I_2$  [radioactive iodine], I showed the entire veinage features of a maple leaf, just for fun. You have to use extreme caution working with those materials.

And then I went from North Central... They have a regional convention, you know, where everybody looks for a job, and all that stuff. I didn't tell my wife this; I didn't tell the professor either; this is all on my own. I look over there, and I said, "Jeez, I know." Naperville, I don't know, is changing. They got Shell Oil Company there, the headquarters, and they got National Biscuit Company, the offices. In three years, the population soared from 16,000 to 93,000.

I went to the meeting, and then I put my name down to the individual who is the monitor of the place. You go to the appropriate place, zoology, chemistry and so forth. So I put down, "I teach anatomy, human embryology, comparative vertebrate anatomy," and I put down "radio isotopic techniques—words I should have left off—and micro techniques." (aside) I can do that.

I get a call at North Central College for an interview. It says, you understand rat anatomy. You see, I worked with rats in Iowa parabiotic surgery. To me, just working with a grasshopper femur... See what's happening here? You didn't have to look far for a guy that understood grasshoppers, I raised them. This guy that's looking for a person in the anatomy of rats... I knew the brain and all that stuff. Anyway, he didn't say anything about radioisotopes though, see.

Then he said, "I'm from Stanford University." My eyes go (wow sound effect). "Research, this is not a teaching position. And I have to tell you that I work in the Psychiatry Department. What he was doing... The initial problem he had, working with rat brains, is determining how the sex hormones, estradiol and testosterone, affect different regions of the brain during development and how during sexual transformation from a unisex to either a male or a female.

I understood this because that pattern fit. But this was radio imaging, using radio auto-graphic techniques. His idea was take radioactive estradiol, inject the rat—these are fetal rats, newborn—into the female. Or a male rat, you would remove the testes and then inject the female estradiol, see if he can feminize. He knew, in a normal male rat and normal female—you're going to learn something here—the brain structure and so forth, responding to radioactive elements.

But then, in the male, he castrates them, gives them the female hormone, estradiol and gives them testosterone. Then they look for brain changes. He "fixes" the brain, chemically preserves it by embalming the brain. I could do that, but he... So my technique is to make the slide for him to see them. This is where the micro technique comes in. He told me, "You're an unusual one. I'm looking for an anatomist, and you're an anatomist. I'm looking for someone to make slides; you can do that. So you got all three,

you,” he said. I said, “It sounds good. Alright, I’ll go.” I didn’t even ask him about what the hell are the cost of a home out there.

Actually, he was very impressed with my military career, Pearl Harbor, D-Day. He was English; Stanford University had many foreign Ph.D. research men.

DePue: A little bit more than Illinois. How long were you in Stanford?

Sehe: Three years. He was on a grant.

DePue: Where after Stanford?

Sehe: Palo Alto, “Old Tree,” and San Jose near San Francisco Bay. Then back to the Midwest!

DePue: North Central?

Sehe: No, I come here.

DePue: Oh, Mankato.

Sehe: So, I’m getting home. Anyway, during Stanford, we didn’t realize the price of homes. Anyway, [we] moved there. At that time, we had four children. Jim was born in Naperville. He was the last one. So, here we took five children out to California, looking for a room. I mean a house for five children. Couldn’t find one. So we rented. Out there they got these rental... What do you call them?

DePue: Apartments, condos?

Sehe: Yes. It’s like a management... They run the whole shebang. (coughs) (water running). Oh, we lived in Sunnyvale. Sunnyvale is where the Navy had airships, blimps, you know?

DePue: Yeah.

Sehe: I saw the large housing for them. Man, they’re huge. Then we went to Santa Clara, where the housing is a little cheaper. We went shopping, when we got to a Mexican-American grocery store. I mean, [Mexican] run. It’s like Hyvee, but independent. I got to know them pretty well, and my wife did, too. They liked us, because we spoke “Midwest” to them, not aristocratic, “California snob.” They enjoyed that. We buy something; he throws in a little bit more, you know. We enjoyed his generosity!

Then Professor Raymond Clayton, a biochemist, said, “We’re going to give you an assistant.” Oh, I forgot to tell you, he was English, born in

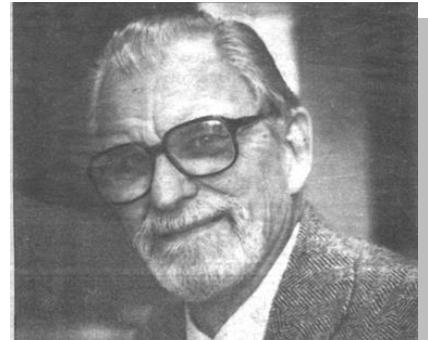
England, a biochemist. I don't know if you understand chemistry a little bit, but do you know what squalene is?

DePue: No.

Sehe: It's a solvent for steroids, comes from a squalus shark, shark oil. You know that butter and water don't mix. Now, all steroids are oil; [do you] agree with me on that?

DePue: I'm not going to argue with you on that.

Sehe: I mean, will you accept that? Okay. Conrad Bloch, he's a Nobel Prize winner, working with steroids. He was a student; this guy was smart. But he needed someone to help him. I could do that. He let me order everything I wanted. He says, "How do you do it?" He said, "What do you need?" I said, "I just close my eyes." I says, "I'm going to make a slide. You don't have anything here that it looks like I can use to make a slide."



*Professor Sehe as he appeared when the Mankato State University Reporter did a feature story on him, highlighting his thirty-seven years of teaching and his WW II and Pearl Harbor experiences.*

I closed my eyes. "I need a microtome." He says, "Okay." [Sehe] "I need series of jars, staining jars, maybe 24. I need some alcohol." He says, "What?" I said, "I need some alcohol." Then he understood. "I need some xylene." You know what xylene is? It's flammable; it's a byproduct of crude oil, xylene. Really, what we're doing here...when you kill the animal, you've got to put in a preservative, quickly to kill it, to keep it from... It's interesting. The bone solution, pick the gas and sodium and potassium nitrate. You mix those together; [do] you know what you get? Explosive. But you do this separately, it works. Mix it, and then add water to it. That will keep it from...

You kill your animal, remove the brain, put it very quickly into this preservative, or you can use formalin. Formalin is a little slower. You leave it in there for a couple of days. Some people use a vacuum; you shouldn't do that. It pulls the liquid into the tissue. You could ruin the tissue doing it. I do it the slow way, conservative.

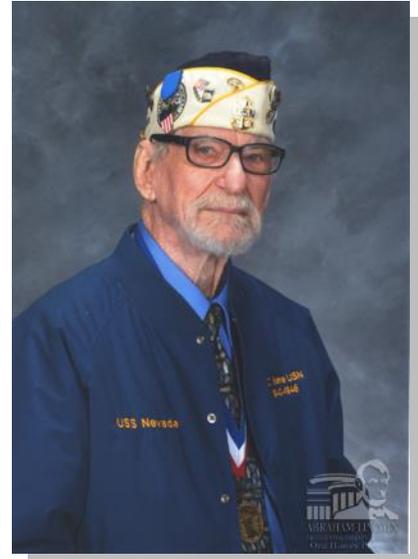
Anyway, you pick it up. Now you got to put it in paraffin to block it. What you do, you melt the paraffin, get that ready. You put the tissue... Here's the paraffin over here. The tissue is in the bowl of water. Then you get graded alcohol series, 20 percent, 50 percent, several hours, 75 percent, eighty-five, ninety-five, pure alcohol, xylene, because alcohol and paraffin

don't mix. Xylene and paraffin does. Now, you got paraffin block, with tissue embedded in it. This is how you make slides.

Then you put a microtome... You've got a very sharp blade, in micrometers, not millimeters, micrometers blade. You've got to know how to do that. I made glass, cut the tissue, paraffin, get it on a slide, and heat it so it sticks. Then you reverse the process. You go into the xylene, remove the paraffin. Then go down, ninety-five and so forth. It takes several hours. You don't want to rush it because it gets down into the water. Then you stain it; you can select the stain. You can stain for protein, stain for carbohydrate. Then you put a cover slip on, resin from the trees. That's it. I enjoyed it.

DePue: (laughs) Well, it's obvious, because of the level of detail you've been talking about this. But we need to get you back and just wrap up the interview, if you don't mind, Charles, because we've been talking for well over two hours now, close to two and one-half hours.

Let me ask you this. There were parts of this interview that were very hard for you to do, and you have written extensively about your experiences, and you've told me already that part of that was because that was a way to deal with a lot of these things. I guess my question is, why did you agree to do this interview?



*Charles Sehe in the early 2010s is proudly wearing a Pearl Harbor Survivor Association cap and jacket.*

Sehe: [I] really didn't want to. Wait a minute now...

DePue: But you didn't hesitate when I called you, and you've sent me a ton of material to do some research.

Sehe: Jaeger sent me a note, the guy from the State of Illinois. You see, what it is, it gets back to my political beliefs. He mentioned Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Now that was a shocker to me. Does he really mean that he's from there, or is there a collection of Lincoln's...and what does World War II got to do with Lincoln? He had his own war. This confused me.

DePue: There's our brochure, "Abraham Presidential Library Oral History Program." But, as I'm sure I mentioned to you, before it was that title it was the Illinois State Historical Library.

Sehe: Well, yeah, that I wouldn't have done. I had enough.

DePue: I'm sure glad you did do the interview, because it is going to be an important addition to our collection.

Sehe: Oh, hell it is. You must have had other Navy guys stupid enough to submit to an interview.

DePue: Hopefully, you aren't regretting now that you've done the interview.

Sehe: No, I'm not. I'm glad I met you. [Do] you still communicate with Jaeger?

DePue: I do. Not too often, but he sends me material every week.

Sehe: What does he do? Oh, he's your mole (DePue laughs). Oh, that's right; he is... [Are] all these individuals native born in Illinois?

DePue: They either live in Illinois now or they're born in Illinois, born and raised in Illinois, like yourself. I've got several of those. Most of them are born in Illinois and still live in Illinois. But I've got a mixture of just about everything.

Sehe: No, I did this because of Lincoln. I don't know. I knew where Springfield or [New] Salem, any of those places... [I] never had... Oh, hell.

DePue: What would you like to say as we wrap up, Charles? Any final comments for us?

Sehe: Not at this time. I'll use a cliché. I really don't, because I'm mixed. I don't want to say anything, but I want to give a great tribute. At the same time, I don't want to... Why did they choose me? Hell, they could have done somebody else. I'd rather not, unless I can write it.

DePue: I've seen what you've written, and you are an excellent writer. Charles, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity. It was well worth the trip up here, and we'll be in touch. I've got to send you all this material, and I'll probably be asking for a couple of things from you too.

Sehe: Mark, I actually enjoyed this because you have helped me unload a few things that's a little confusing to me, at that time and even today. This is not *Death Valley Days*.

You have asked me to reveal something that occurred over some seventy years ago, and it is difficult to remember some of the details, like a person... You started the strategy of it—I understood that—but the tactical approach of this problem is difficult for me to relay to you. But I think I got most of it out.

DePue: No, you've done an excellent job. Charles, thank you very much.

Sehe: Thank you, Mark.

(end of transcript #4)