Interview with Gary Leib

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, October 5, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and today I have the honor to be with Gary Leib. Good afternoon, Gary.

Leib: Good afternoon, sir.

DePue: We are in Gary's home in Winchester, Illinois, and we're going to be talking about your experiences, Gary, during the Korean War. But fortunately for me, it's not an Army perspective; it's the Navy perspective, and I haven't had the opportunity to do too many of those. I know most of that discussion is going to focus on your experiences with the USS *Boxer*, which is an aircraft carrier. But let's start at the beginning of your life and tell me when and where you were born.

Leib: I was born November 19, 1929 in Winchester, Illinois, over here on Cherry Street, at home.

DePue: Kind of bad timing to be born, isn't it?

Leib: Right at the height of the big Depression, yeah, right after it got started.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about your family, how they ended up in Winchester in the first place.

Leib: Well, my parents, prior to my being born, were living in Donaldsonville, Louisiana, working with a cousin down there that had a plantation, and then they came back here, where I was born, to be around the rest of the family, my grandparents and whatever. I lived most of my life, or my younger life, with my grandmother and grandfather Evans and back and forth to my grandfather and grandmother Leib. Also I spent a lot of time with my mother's sister, her older sister, my aunt, which was very good to me, and my grandparents. After my grandfather retired, they spent a lot of time going to Arenzville, AH-renzville some people say, so I actually grew up in two communities, and most of my summers were spent in Arenzville, Illinois. Most of my winters and my school time was all right here in Winchester.

DePue: Okay, tell us a little bit about why you were going to a lot of different places while you were growing up.

Leib: Well, the Depression times was kind of ugly. It was hard on everybody. My dad didn't make a lot of money. He was a good electrician; he worked part-time as a mail carrier. Actually, when I was a little kid, before I remember, he was assistant manager of a local grocery store. And we moved from here to Auburn, Illinois, where he was an assistant manager there, or to be a manager, and unfortunately, the Kroger store there went down the drain. It closed, and he moved back here. And he had various different jobs, fantastic salaries of fifteen, twenty dollars a month or something like that—very small income. So finally, we moved back in full-time with my grandparents, Grandfather and Grandmother Evans.

DePue: On your mother's side.

Leib: On my mother's side, yes, on the Evans family.

DePue: What was your mother's maiden name, first name?

Leib: My mother's name was Helen, Helen Evans Leib. She had some other things on her name that she didn't like to use. I think her full name was Ethel Helen May, which she hated, so she just went by Helen. My father was named Carl, Carl Herbert; everybody called him Herb.

DePue: What was it like, then, growing up in central Illinois in the Depression? Do you remember much? You were pretty young.

Leib: I thought it was probably the greatest place in the world, to live in a small town, and it's the reason I came back here twenty-one years ago to retire here. It's a comforting thing to be in a small community and around people that you grew up with, even though this little town has changed quite a little bit. I do not know a lot of the younger people, because moving away from here and working away from here many, many years, I lost track of their children and their names, but a number of them are still here that I started first grade with or started kindergarten with. Then the same thing up in Arenzville, that group

up there. I spent so many summers up there and holidays and odd times that I have a lot of acquaintances from that area.

DePue: Was your mother working?

Leib: My mother went to work during the latter days of the Depression with what they called an NYA, National Youth Administration, and she moved up from there to what the welfare department called a visitor in the welfare department locally, Illinois Public Aid Commission. She stayed with it for thirty-some-odd years and moved on up to supervisor, travel staff, et cetera, and lived in different places around the state of Illinois.

DePue: Well, if you don't mind, were your parents married through all this time?

Leib: My parents were married until about '44 or '45, and they finally got divorced. Two very incompatible people.

DePue: But you were sixteen at the time, then, roughly.

Leib: I think about fourteen or fifteen, so maybe it was '43, '44, along in there somewhere.

DePue: Okay. Well, let's jump back a little bit. You were still pretty young, but 1941, December seventh, an important date in our history—do you remember Pearl Harbor?

Leib: Very distinctly, because I grew up in what you call a very patriotic family. My great-grandfather served in the Mexican War and in the Civil War. My uncle was a very well-known local hero in World War I, served in the Big Red One, the 1st Division, first to go to France, last to come back, and was in every major combat deal, and one of the fifteen survivors out of his original company. And of course wounded, gassed, all different things.

DePue: What was his name?

Leib: Jesse O. Evans, Jesse Odis Evans, Jesse O. Evans. He was well-known locally as the boy hero. Grandpa signed for him to go in when he was only sixteen years old. He spent his seventeenth birthday down on the border with Pershing when they was getting organized down there, where they were still chasing the Mexican bandits down there, and then they went right into France, the 1st Division, Big Red One.

DePue: Well, let's go back to Pearl Harbor, then.

Leib: Pearl Harbor was a terrible day, and I remember it very distinctly—because I guess I was twelve going on, or just turned thirteen—just a really significant thing. I grew up in the war years, and I was a great scavenger of scrap iron and aluminum and got real into the war effort, because that was the thing to

do. My grandfather ran a pool hall and saloon here in town. He was very well-known. He'd either spent his life as a saloonkeeper, pool-hall deal, or as a local police officer, and very well-known. Strange thing about it, he spent his life basically around taverns or in taverns and never drank.

DePue: You mentioned you remember Pearl Harbor very well, but is there a story connected with that for you?

Leib: Well, Pearl Harbor sticks in my mind real strong because my uncle, Arenzville's favorite nephew, was one of the first to get drafted. He was sent immediately to the Philippines, along with my father's best buddy that he run around with and went hunting all the time. Both of them ended up going right to the Philippines, and they were there when Pearl Harbor happened. Both of them were killed, and it left an indelible impression on my mind and of course, upset both families.

DePue: Does that mean they were in the National Guard before the war?

Leib: No, they were the first— they started drafting, if I remember correctly, in 1941, building up the peacetime.

DePue: Late 1940 they started the draft.

Leib: Nineteen forty. Well, they were the very first ones that got drafted, and they were both young guys. Unfortunately, they both died shortly after Pearl Harbor in the Bataan Death March and left a lasting impression on the whole family. Both families were affected, along with all the other guys. I've always admired the older fellows in the community and all these guys that were a few years older than me that was nice to me when I was a kid and took me pony rides or built model airplanes for me or something like [that]. All eventually ended up in the war where they were pilots or infantrymen. I've always been kind of attracted to the guys that's a little older than me, respected them, admired them, and a whole large group of them were killed during World War II. They were either shot down—one was flying a B-29 off of Saipan, I believe, and crashed and overloaded. Another one was shot down over Germany. They all had horrible experiences, and all those things came back to affect [us]. Then of course, the movies started building up about the war and all the different things, and my whole life was affected by that. The younger guys that were two years ahead of me in high school immediately went into the Navy, and they were guys I played football with and admired. All I wanted to be by the time I'd got to high school was a sailor. I wanted to go in the Navy. I wanted to wear a uniform like those guys, and I wanted to serve on one of the great carriers. I heard all the stories about the *Yorktown* and the *Franklin* and all the great battles—the Battle of Midway and all the different ones—and it affected me quite a little bit. Then when I wasn't old enough to go, actually, I conned my mother into it—she was going to sign the papers for

me to let me go about the time the war ended. So I graduated high school when I was seventeen years old, and the war had done ended in 1947.

DePue: Were you one of those who were paying really close attention to the war news?

Leib: Very much so. I mean, I followed it from a day-to-day. I read the *LIFE Magazine*, everything that happened, and I made up my mind. And of course, my Uncle Jess influenced me. One summer I spent in Cleveland, Ohio, when my mother went there, and I was around my Uncle Jess quite a little bit. [He] certainly influenced me that I didn't want to go into the Army. I did not want to be in the infantry. I'd heard all the bad things. I don't want to sleep in the mud, I don't want to be a gravel agitator; I wanted to be on a ship, I wanted to be a sailor. And that was my psychic at that time. But then the war was over when I got out of high school, so I did different things—kicked around the country here, there, and yonder, and I got a truck driver's license real early out of high school.

DePue: After high school?

Leib: No, before. I'm sorry. Let me go back. Before I got out of high school, when I was sixteen, they let us get a permanent what they referred to as chauffeur's license. I forget the name they call it now.

DePue: Class B or something like that.

Leib: Yeah, whatever.

DePue: Class C license.

Leib: Class A license, whatever. So I acquired one at an early age, had friends that had a truck and let me use their truck. I had to take it to Springfield and take the test and everything. I started driving the truck part-time in high school, and then right out of high school, I went full time as a truck driver.

DePue: Who were you driving the truck for?

Leib: I went up to Belvidere, Illinois, and drove for Green Giant. I drove into Illinois and Wisconsin in basically grain trucks hauling pea vines and then with corn season. After the season was over, then I decided to go down to Texas to work, and didn't like it down there with a group. Ended up in Arizona and got a job driving the truck for an oil company. The name of it was Continental Pipeline Company, and I drove one of their big old trucks. They came back to Oklahoma, and I stayed with them for a little while, in Oklahoma City, and I really did not care for working on a pipeline too well.

DePue: Was this after high school, then?

Leib: After high school. Yeah, that was about a year after high school.

DePue: When you were still in high school, what did you think you wanted to do with your life?

Leib: Well, unfortunately, I always thought like driving a truck, riding a motorcycle, all those things were the greatest things. I ended up with a motorcycle, and I drove trucks, and my mother discouraged me greatly. She believed in higher education and whatever and the better things in life. I had members of my family that had been doctors and different things, and she thought I should be bent towards that, but unfortunately I didn't see it that way.

DePue: Why were you so eager to get a job—you know, driving truck—when you're still in high school, especially the kind of truck driving you were doing was not what most kids are doing at that age?

Leib: (laughs) Well, yes and no. In this area of the country, in these small towns, it's probably one of the big things. If your family don't farm—and all the farm boys run tractors and trucks and whatever— naturally myself and some of my friends thought the same way. And actually, you take a small town like this, and probably the biggest, the largest economy here is truckers, a world of truck drivers around here, all the guys I grew up with. I was discouraged from that because there's really not any future in it, basically, and I ended up going back to Arizona, worked there for a while as a mechanic in a garage. I'd always worked in a garage, off and on, different times, and mechanical work. I went out to Los Angeles and worked for Douglas Aircraft, got a job out there. A friend of mine was going to UCLA, and he lived in a mobile home; I moved in with him and I worked at Douglas Aircraft. Then another friend of mine come up and he moved in with us, and he also got a job out at the airport. I stayed there until my nineteenth birthday was coming up in a few months, and I did not want to go to the U.S. Army.

DePue: At the time when there was a draft going on?

Leib: The draft was on, and it was an automatic procedure. When you were eighteen—I had registered when I was eighteen—and at nineteen, you were going to go. In fact, the lady, the head of the draft board in town here, did not care for my motorcycle riding and my escapades of my misguided youth, and she promised me faithfully that I would be in the Army shortly after my nineteenth birthday.

DePue: But you're out in California, I thought, at the time.

Leib: Well, I was in California, and I was afraid I was going to get sucked up in the draft. And of course I enjoyed California, I love California, and I got to go all around the LA basin and run around with the guys that I'd went to school with here that had moved out there. But I came back here in the summer of 1948 and enlisted in the Navy so I would not be drafted. I enlisted in July, and of

course they had a waiting list; the Navy was going through a lot of changes at that time, and they were real choosy and several of us went up, and only a couple of us qualified, and then we had to wait. I took a temporary job here in town painting houses and stuff until I got called in September.

DePue: Gary, it sounds like even before high school, but certainly that year or so after high school graduation, you're pretty restless. You're moving around quite a bit.

Leib: (laughs) Well, I got to see a lot of the world, and I got to see a lot of things. Like I say, I always had a mechanical bent, mechanically, and I drove my old Chevrolet all the way out there to California the long ways around, down by Houston, down by Texas City, because that's where we thought we'd work, down there, till we took a look at it, and on out to California.

DePue: I think I know the answer here, but at the time you actually enlisted in the Navy, did you have a girlfriend back home or were you attached in any way?

Leib: That's a strange thing. You know, I always ran with a group of—both sides of the streets, you might say. I run with the wild crowd, and I run with the good crowd. My family was one of the oldest families in this area, so I knew a lot of nice girls, fine girls, you know, whatever, and I always had a girlfriend here or a girlfriend there, you know, no problem. I just didn't want to get attached at that time. Some of my friends immediately got married out of high school, and I did not want to do that.

DePue: So you went into the Navy unattached.

Leib: Unattached when I joined the Navy.

DePue: What was your parents' reaction to joining the Navy?

Leib: Oh, I think my mother was delighted. (laughs) She thought that was a great thing, and my dad—

DePue: Because…?

Leib: My dad encouraged me because one of his friends tried to get him to go in the Navy back in the late '20s; he had a whole career in the Navy and got to retire as a chief petty officer. My dad's regretted that he didn't do that, and he thought that was a wonderful thing for me to do. And so I was very encouraged. And I went in for a career; that was my whole ambition.

DePue: Now, your mother wasn't too crazy, I assume, with you running all over the country doing truck driving and things like that, and you'd said that she had ambitions for you to be going to school. So why did she like the idea of going into the Navy?

Leib: Well, (laughs) I thought she figured they'd train me properly and get the discipline and things that I probably would need to set me in my life's course, but I had pretty well got that lined up. It seemed like I always was able to find my way around, always able to find a job. I knew how to dress to find a job, to go to check on things, and I was shocked at some people that say, "Well, I can't get a job." Hell, you can get a job anywhere. There's all kinds of jobs. Sometimes you don't take exactly what you want, but when you go for an interview, you dress properly, you have your fingernails clean, and you're clean-shaven and a clean shirt and dress nice and try to impress the people that you really want to work, and I never did have a problem. So jobs to me became very easy, you know. Maybe not the finest jobs in the world, but actually, I had a pretty fair job out at Douglas Aircraft. If I'd stayed there, it would have been all right, but I didn't want to go to the Army.

DePue: Well, we got you in the Navy, so tell us about your experience in boot camp. Where was it, and what was it like?

Leib: Boot camp was a very different experience. The discipline, the organization of the United States Navy is very precise, its tradition and whatever. But boot camp with the Navy or Marine Corps is basically, I guess, about as close to hell as you can get. I mean, they make it as miserable as they possibly can, and you've got to stand up to it. The big problem I had in boot camp, I was shocked at some of the kids that came in up there that couldn't do the very simple physical things. Hell, they couldn't even chin-up, they couldn't do push-ups, and that was required. I mean, I think they required you had to do ten pull-ups, ten chin-ups, and ten push-ups, and didn't amount to anything, but there was so many guys that came out of New Jersey and New York and places like that. The only one in the company that was from this area of the country was my buddy and my distant cousin, Fred, and rather than run around the country like me, he went to college over at Illinois College at Jacksonville for a year. And he had a little taste of the Marine Corps. He joined the Marine Corps Reserve and he was all hot for it, and I kept telling him he wasn't cut out for it because he wasn't the kind of guy who went out hunting with us. He hated to swim, he didn't care about guns, he didn't go hunting, he didn't go target practice or anything like that, but he joined the Marine Corps Reserve. They sent him to boot camp down at Parris Island, and he learned damn quick that he wasn't cut out to be a Marine officer. And just as soon as he come back, he joined the Navy with me and we went to boot camp together.

DePue: Where was boot camp?

Leib: Great Lakes [Naval Training Area]. Colder than hell during the wintertime.

DePue: Any particular instructors you remember or any incidents from boot camp?

Leib: Yeah, the first company I got in was really kind of a bunch of slugs, I thought, in a way. The commander of it, I didn't care for him much at all. I was in that company six or seven weeks and ended up with measles, and they put me in the hospital. My friend Fred, my buddy Fred, he managed to almost get himself pneumonia so he could get in the hospital too, so he could stay with me. And we both got transferred, dropped back, into another company. And this company was really organized. These were great, great people. The chief petty officer's name, I believe, was Brennan, and his assistant was—I forget what his name was—I got pictures of him—they called him Sinbad, Sinbad the sailor. He was a tough old first class boatswain mate.

But going into this company—if you've been in the military, when you drop from one area and you come in with your sea bag or your barracks bag or whatever and the whole new deal, I mean, it's just like you don't know any of these guys. I had an interesting experience there because after I checked in, this big Polish gentleman from out in Pennsylvania—I forget the name of the place, some town with a lot of coal mines and stuff—but anyhow, he informed me real quick that he kind of ran the company, and he was telling me what I was going to do and what I wasn't going to do and where I was going to sleep and what jobs he was going to assign me. And I said, "Hey, look, partner, are you one of the officers of the company?" I mean, they had junior petty officers. They appointed recruit petty officers, whatever, and when the chief and the first class wasn't there, you took your orders from them. "No," he said, "but I run the company." Big guy, big dude. And I said, "Well, you know, this is all well and good. I'm not going to do none of it. You can kiss my you-know-what, because I'm not going to shine your damn shoes, make your bed, nothing. It's not going to happen." And he said, "Well, you know, if you don't, I'm going to have to whip your butt." And I said, "Partner,"—and I'm not any real big guy, but I played football a couple years and I could take a lot of abuse—I said, "Okay, whatever you want." And we had one hell of a fight right there the first day I got in there. To be frankly honest, (laughs) he just damn near beat the hell out of me, you know, but I got some good licks in on him, too.

Finally I went to the bed that was assigned to me, and the next day, he said, "Well, you're going to conform now and you're going to do this." And I said, "Look, I told you before, this isn't going to happen. I don't take orders from you or no other SOB. I don't do it that way. It's just not going to happen." "Well, I'm going to have to whip your butt." I said, "Well, you might as well start, because you're going to have to do it every damn day the rest of the time I'm up here." So we went around and around again. Well, this time—you know, big guys sometimes, they got spots that hurt, too, you know, and I finally got some pretty good licks in on him, and he finally realized that it wasn't going to work with me.

He had all these guys buffaloed, 160 guys buffaloed, in this company, but he wasn't going to push me. So he started with Fred. Fred's a pacifist.

Fred don't believe in fighting. I said, "And you're not going to push. It's not going to work on me; it's not going to work on him, because if you mess with him or me either one, we're going to go after it." So finally—I mean, he was hurting a little bit, and man, I was hurting. I tell you, that guy could hit. I mean, my face was hurting, my back was hurting, and I hurt all over, you know.

So finally, about the third or fourth day, the time came, and he said, "Well, I guess we're going to have to have this again." He said, "Now, I'm going to take you back here" in the deal where we hung the clothes up. They had a room there, a dryer room they called it, and when you wash your clothes by hand and you hung your clothes up in there, because you got to go through all this hand-washing and your duty station, you have one part that you have to keep clean. I said, "Okay, well"—hell, they was all gathered around, and they're going to figure he's going to half-kill me. I said, "Well, you know, you can beat the hell out of me, but you can't kill me. That's against the law. There ain't no way." So I said, "You S of a B, you want after me, let's go." So we went in.

I only weighed about a hundred and fifty, sixty pounds, and this cat weighed like 220 or 230. He was a horse. I mean, he was a real horse. And we got in there, and he said, "Gary, I'm going to tell you something. You're one of these guys that I'm not going to be able to change his mind. Now, the rest of these guys are kind of wussies. I got them all to back down. But," he said, "you're not going to back down from me and I can't go on fighting with you every damn day the rest of the time we're in boot camp." And I said, "Well, that's what's going to happen." He said, "No, it's not going to happen. What's going to happen is you're going to be my buddy, and instead of you doing things for me, if you want any favors, I'll have things done for you." I said, "That's the best damned arrangement I ever heard. That's fine." The guy's name was Wasniski—very Polish name. I heard later on that he was the chief of police in Chicago. I don't know whatever happened to him.

About the same time, I said, "Now, I got a small problem." When they went out to march on the grinder, on the blacktop, my feet are as flat as can be. I have no arch. That's why I wear cowboy boots, because they got a good arch in them. Man, if I walk without supports and stuff in it, I couldn't walk after about a half a mile, especially marching. So anyhow, the first day I marched, my feet swelled, I couldn't get my shoes on. So somebody, they said, "Well, I'll tell you what. There's an opening for assistant company clerk." Another Polish guy—I'll have to stop and think what his name is—but he was a nice guy. But the rest of the guys kind of resented him, I think, because he got to sleep in a special little office and there was two bunks in there, and he said, "If you want to be my assistant company clerk…" I said, "Hey, I can't type. I dropped out of typing in high school. I'm not very good." Clerical response was my lowest deal on the test that they gave you, the General Classification Test. I scored way up here on it; I think it was the

twelfth-highest in the company, but I was just a little above average on math and stuff, because I was a lousy student in high school. I didn't spend much time in high school, actually; I was out as much as I could be. Anyhow, so I was company assistant, company clerk, and I carried a clipboard out when everybody went out and marched, and I checked the names off and whatever like that. I had it made the rest of the time in boot camp. And that's my boot camp experience.

Unfortunately, as things would happen, the first duty station Fred and I got sent to, Wasniski got sent to the same one, and we had one other go-around. We went to Alameda [Naval Air Station], and they didn't need us there, and they sent us to Seattle. He was a strange guy. He was a nice guy, he was just a bully. He liked to push people around. And we had another little altercation. He was one of these guys that, Man, you're his buddy who is going to come up and (hits something loudly) pat you on the back. My buddy, give you a big hug. I said, "Wasniski, you're going to kill me." I said, "Man, keep your daggone hands off of me." And he said, "Oh, just because you're my buddy and I like you and everything." But finally one day he just got me so bad, I don't know what it was, and he come up behind me and gave me a big squeeze that I thought he was breaking my arms. I mean, this guy was strong as an ox. I forget what I had in my hand. I had something in my hand that I was carrying, and I bashed him over the head with it, and it really shocked him, and he said, "Why did you do that?" I said, "I've told you and I've told you and I've told you, keep your damn hands off of me. You don't know your own strength, you know." And after that, he finally got the message. Later on when I got transferred to Whidbey Island, I don't know where he ended up at. You know, I lost track of him. He wanted to be my buddy; we were friends and everything, but I don't want people handling me.

DePue: What was your buddy's name, Fred, what was his last name?

Leib: Fred Evans. Earl Frederick Evans.

DePue: Relations?

Leib: Well, we're distant cousins. His father was an Evans, but there's two groups of Evans families here. One came up later from down south. Basically we're all related, but maybe like a fourth or fifth cousin. But we passed ourselves off as first cousins so we could stay together when we went in the Navy. That was the deal we made, and they let us stay together till he decided to go. When I ended up in Seattle, he decided he wanted to go to military school and I did not. I wanted to be regular U.S. Navy. He went to aviation electronic school in Memphis, and another reason he wanted to go because he had a lady friend here. He wanted to be able to come back up to Winchester every several weeks, you know. So he went to a twenty-six-week school at Memphis, which I later went, but much later.

DePue: Let's go through the progression of training that you went through in this first year or so you're in the Navy. We got you at Alameda, and apparently you weren't there very long.

Leib: Well, let me tell you how my mind runs. I try to keep aware of everything in my surroundings. Another thing I found out in boot camp, I hated to stand watches. That's a terrible thing, from 12:00 to 4:00 at night or 4:00 to 8:00 in the morning, standing out for no good at all, just for the training. I found out that they were wanting guys to sing in the Blue Jackets Choir, and if you practiced with the Blue Jackets Choir, you didn't have to stand watches because you had to go to practice a couple times a week. Then on Sunday morning you met and you sang, and you were on a radio station out of Chicago. So I sang in chorus in high school and a few times in a quartet or whatever, so I ran right down and tried out. Put me right in the Blue Jackets Choir. So that's another thing. My boot camp, between being an assistant company clerk the latter half of boot camp and being in a Blue Jackets choir, I basically had it made.

Better than that, the company that I was in, they could earn a flag for this and a flag for that, the best marching and buy the most war bonds and all the different things that you participate in. This company, they were up and coming. These guys were really organized. They could march and they could do everything. They ended up being what they call a hall of fame company. Company 395, I guess it was. I've got a picture of them in there with all the flags that they won, and they beat everybody in the whole system up there at Great Lakes. And along with that, when it came Christmastime, it wasn't time quite for us to graduate, but everybody got a seven-day leave. We got a fourteen-day leave. We got an extra seven-day leave because we were a hall of fame company, so I got to come home for fourteen days. Most everybody else—some of the other local guys was in the companies behind me that I ran across up there—only got seven days.

Then when I got back, we had just a few minor things to do, military deals that you go to meetings, you go to these things, and they explain about this, and you go to pictures. Another interesting thing was they were showing all the movies about this, about the different ships and all the different things and the prevention of VD . And guess who the star in the VD movie was? My cousin from right here in town, which was a actor out in Hollywood, and he was a backup for Alan Ladd on *Two Years Before the Mast* and a bunch of different ones, and wasn't no star, but he was a bit part actor. I'd seen him in a lot of different movies. When I was a kid, he hung around up at the local theater here all the time, and anyhow, he spent his life in Hollywood, and there he was, the actor. I thought. That's amazing; that's my cousin. But anyhow, that's just one of the little things I run across. Later on, before he died—he lived a fast life in Hollywood, and he'd been in the military—had a bad heart, got in the military, got kicked out, got back in again, got kicked out again because he was born with a heart murmur, and back to Hollywood.

Anyhow, he was Jerry Lewis's manager when he died, and he traveled all over with Jerry Lewis, which was a very fast life. Like his dad said one time, "My God, that's the craziest bunch of guys that there is in the world.That man, Jerry Lewis, is crazy all the time. He's not out of character; he's in character all the time." And he said, "That's a fast life they live," so he didn't live very long.

DePue: Well, we got to get you from Great Lakes—

Leib: Okay, now, boot camp, I went to Alameda. They sent us to Alameda, put us on a troop train, me and Fred, and I think Wasniski and several other guys. For some strange reason they made Fred an airman apprentice and made me a seaman apprentice. Well, we got out to Alameda, which is an air station, and everyone else was airman or airman apprentice, and I was a seaman apprentice. Well, then, Alameda, we were around there for two weeks; Alameda's a beautiful place. Oh, I thought, man, we're in paradise here. We got to go to Frisco on open leave and liberty. We were there about three weeks and they decided they're going to move us to Naval Air Station, Sand Point, Seattle; that is the most fantastic base in the United States. They put me in a squadron there; I think the squadron was one nine, I believe the name of it was. And I loved the duty there. It was a permanent base, all brick buildings, all accommodations. You didn't have to go out if the weather was rainy or whatever. You was all in one building, and you could go down to the gedunk stand or to the chow hall. You could go in a tunnel over next door at the swimming pool and everything.

DePue: Was that a training station or an assignment that you had there?

Leib: It was a permanent base on I think they call it Lake Washington in Seattle; they had a seaplane ramp, and they had all kinds of aircraft. The planes we had mostly were PBYs, PBMs, PB4Y-2s. The Navy uses what the Army calls the Liberator, only they got a single tail instead of a double tail. They use them for long search-and-rescue missions or whatever. I was there for about three or four months and during it, the Navy was in a constant change in '49 there.

This was in the spring of '49, and here it's my second duty station, and they moved us again. They said, you know, "What we need is guys up at Whidbey Island." Whidbey Island is north of Seattle. Actually, Whidbey Island comes all the way down almost to Seattle and goes all the way to the Canadian border, and you either go to it by ferry or you drive up and then come back across the Deception Pass Bridge and down on the island. It was an older base that had the old wooden buildings. They had a seaplane base on one part, and then they had a land plane place over here on the base I was on, the main side, and they had P2V squadrons that flew all over up into Alaska. Actually it was the Kodiak Squadron. You spent six months in Whidbey Island and six months in Kodiak.

DePue: What's a P2V?

Leib: P2V's what I think they called the Neptune. It's an air-sea rescue search vehicle.

DePue: Single engine?

Leib: Double, twin engine.

DePue: Twin engine. Does that mean that you're no longer a seaman at this time?

Leib: No, I was still seaman apprentice. So basically most of my duties was around the hangar there. I didn't work on the airplanes, get to do much with them. But when they put us to Whidbey Island, we found out the whole thing had changed. Here was a whole bunch of sailors, older guys that had reenlisted from WWII and younger guys, and they just had a swarm of us. They turned the one in Seattle over to the Navy Reserves. They were operating out of that base at the same time, and then later on, now it's a park, they say. But they had all these surplus bodies, and they put us in public works, so we improved the base. They rebuilt the sidewalks, they rebuilt the roads. It was a stinking work detail is all it was, all of us. And we went to work with our shovels and all that kind of stuff—it wasn't Navy stuff at all—and out to different places, out to where they stored the ammunition or where they trained guys to sit in the turrets and fire the guns, and all the different places we went out to clean up, to pick up and rebuild and do all this stuff. And actually, at the admiral's place, a big airstrip went right down over the Straits of San Juan de Fuca where the planes landed, and the admiral's place was right up here at the edge; they even went in and thinned out the trees in front of his house, Washington is, you know, a huge forest. There was this huge forest in front of the admiral's house, and they had us cut them down, take the trees down, cut the wood in small sizes, take it over to Oak Harbor, where the seaplane base was, and load it on a seaplane—I forget what they call those things—a seaplane tender—and hauled it down and distributed it among the admirals all down the west coast. They just didn't have anything else for us to do. Then they decided they'd just take all the trees out, and then they said, "Well, we're going to put it in grass?" and they said, "No, we'll plant corn out here." So they planted corn out there. The admiral wanted to look up and see the highway. His house sat about as far as that one across the street, and he could look up and see the highway. It was kind of strange.

DePue: You weren't getting any training there at all. So did you stay there at Whidbey Island very long?

Leib: Well, I did not. I found out that this deal about going to Kodiak did not interest me at all. Kodiak, Alaska, there's a big naval air station there, and they patrol all up in the Bering Sea and all that up there. I said, "What in the world is going on up there?" Said, "Well, they got the beer halls, and the main

entertainment where you can go bear hunting, you can go fishing, or you can sit in the beer hall and fight." I said, "Well, none of those really appeal to me." And I said, "How about the ladies?" "Well," they said, "the ladies are probably the ugliest women there in the world. They're called khuces(?); they're half-breed Indian, Eskimo, whatever, and they're few and far between, and they're all uglier than homemade sin." And that's when I read something on the bulletin board that said anybody that wants to change over to an aviation rate can change, so I ran right down and said, "You know, I'm more interested in aviation that I am being a seaman," and I changed to aviation rate.

Then I got in trouble. Run across another guy up there by the name of Degner. And Degner was another one of these big home-town football players from up in Storm Lake, Iowa, and he was a character, and he was a bully. They'd load us onto trucks, and he was pushing everybody around and him and I had a little problem. We got into a fight because I didn't like being pushed around, and I think that guy just liked to fight. He just flat liked to fight. He'd pick on guys and hope they would, and nobody would; I accommodated him. I don't know how many times he got in trouble because he would smart off or say something or whatever, and him and I would go after it.

So finally he got me in trouble when we were out in the woods, so they transferred us to a deal where we were in the gravel pit shoveling gravel, and he got me in trouble there with the petty officer. He smarted off something and threw a shovel of gravel at me and hit the petty officer in the face. He jerked both of us out of there and sent us down to personnel. Oh, my God, I'm going to get kicked out of the Navy, because being in several fights and stuff like that, and the Navy was cutting down. They wanted to get rid of people. They had more people than they need. Guys that would go AWOL, come back for a day or two, they'd warn them the first time; second time they'd give them a bad conduct discharge, and they were gone. I've seen these guys stand around that were career guys crying, begging, "Please, let me stay, let me stay." The Navy was their home. "No, we warned you the last time." I thought, Oh, boy, here we go. We're going to get kicked out. So they sent us down to the personnel office, and I thought, Oh my God, my mother's going to just have a fit. I had been in not quite a year. They said, "We're transferring you guys," and I said, "Where to?" and they said, "To the chow hall. You're going on permanent mess cooking duty, KP duty."

I went to the chow hall. And after two and a half months in the chow hall, you might say I started getting religion. I got to figuring out that you've got to get along with these people. So I did my thing. They started me off in the scullery—nastiest job there was in the life, you know. Guys shoved their nasty old trays in there, and you got to clean them off and you got to scrub them off and everything. And I did my thing. I got promoted to the chow line, dipping out chow. I don't know about the Army on their chow hall, but when

there's problems and fights and stuff, the chow hall is the place, because guys come through the chow line, you know, and they don't like this and get in a disagreement with the guys on KP duty, and they're liable to slop the gravy on something besides their potatoes and whatever. It was quite an interesting thing. They worked the heck out of you. I mean, you went to work. Got you up at five o'clock in the morning, and you had to eat before everybody else and get everything lined up to feed the people, and then you had to clean the mess up, and by the time you got the mess cleaned up, you got a break for about thirty minutes, and you could just lay your head on the table and go to sleep. You had to wear white uniforms and white aprons. Then you served the noon chow, and then you went through the same thing in the afternoon, clean everything all up again. The Navy wants everything spotless; everything's got to be just perfect. You got maybe an hour off. You could go back to the barracks for just a minute to do something, usually to put on clean whites and come back for evening chow, and you got off about 6:30 at night. It was a very interesting experience.

So anyhow… Then a deal came up that said, "Hey, we've got some guys, we've got a little air base out here at Quileute," way out on the peninsula of Washington. Way out on the farthest part of Washington, there's a bunch of Indian reservations out there, and there was a reserve station out there. Quileute. (laughs) Quileute Indian Reservation. There's Quileute and Quilemot whatever, if you look at a map on the farthest part of Washington, right out on the coast.

Leib: So I said, "Hey, I'll volunteer for that. Anything would be better than here." So I went out there for two or three weeks. Still working in the chow hall, but we had some old drunken cook out there, and just one guy, had a couple chief petty officers that lived in the officers' quarters there, had two nice homes there, and then they had this big airstrip, and basically all the rest of the guys did clean-up work. They keep cutting brush and stuff like that, and I was stuck in the chow hall. It worked out pretty good because we didn't have to work as hard, and there was just a few of us. I got to go on my first bear hunt and I got to go out fishing in one of them wild streams up there because, man, they flew us over—from Whidbey Island, when you fly over the Straits of San Juan de Fuca and you fly up over the—well, it's not the Cascade—what are them mountain range? It's a whole different world over there on the coast.

DePue: We can figure that out later.

Leib: I forget what the range—but anyhow, when you flew over in an old DC-3, you know, you're up and down and downdrafts and everything, I mean, really a bumpy ride. But anyhow, it was very interesting. Well, then the time came for the change to send a new group over, and went back to the chow hall. And I asked a guy, some of them, I said, "How"—you know, it was a guy I worked back in the garbage locker with, and I thought, Man, of all the nasty jobs, and all he did was handle garbage all day, and he'd check through and he'd pick

out all the knives and forks or anything that ended up in the garbage. These farmers would back up with these trucks, and he'd load their trucks. And he was making a killing. He was getting tips from the farmers to make sure the garbage was just right, and he loved his job. He'd been there for almost a year in the stinking garbage locker. You know. And I said, "How can you stay here a year?" And he said, "Oh, they can keep you on this as long as they want." I said, "What do you mean, as long as they want?" He said, "The rule is you can't do more than three months per year of enlistment." I said, "My God, you mean, I might have to spend—I'm on a three-year enlistment—I might spend another six months in here?" He said, "Very possible." But he said, "I volunteered, and I like my job."

Anyhow, I got to thinking about this, and this friend of Degner's—the one I was always in trouble with, and we were still having disagreements, and finally after the last fight, Degner decided he didn't want no more with me. I mean, we were going to be friends. He wasn't going to pick on me anymore. The last time he picked on me I really got him, and he ended up going back to the hospital. I thought I was going to get kicked out of the Navy again because I caught him off guard when he mouthed me, and I really nailed him and injured his eye. He had to go to the hospital. I thought, Man, he blows the whistle on me, I'm going to get kicked out of the Navy.

The master-at-arms in the chow hall was a guy from Carlinville, Illinois, second-class petty officer, and he said, "Gary, I hate to do you, seeing as you're from the same end of the country I am, but, partner," he said, "you've really screwed up this time. If he goes down there and he's got to tell them what happened to him, I've got to write a report on you and you're going to get court-martialed. I think your Navy days is over." Well, Degner come back to the chow hall about noon with his eye all swelling up and nothing happened. So after chow I went over to talk to the master-at-arms. He said, "You got a break." I said, "What do you mean, I got a break?" He said, "He would not admit that anybody smacked him. He said that he fell down, slipped on something in the chow hall, and fell down and hit his eye on the table." So he said, "You're home free." See, these things you learn as you go.

Then I learned that they was getting us ready to go to Kodiak. They said, "Well, in another couple of weeks you're going to Kodiak." I said, "Oh my God, I don't want to go to Kodiak." So I had changed over to airman apprentice. I always read the bulletin boards. I tried to keep track of everything going on. They had a draft going to Corpus Christi, and guys could volunteer for it and whatever, and so immediately I volunteered for it, but that didn't help too much to volunteer for it. So I knew a guy that knew a guy that worked in the personnel. You find out in the Navy, the personnel man is like the yeoman, but he knows what the officers set up. We're going to set this and set that, and he's got quite a control. He can take a name and put on that draft, and a commander or lieutenant commander or whatever comes along and says, "Okay, that's fine," and signed it. And man, I said, "You know, how

much would this cost me to get to go to Corpus Christi?" And he said, "Well, you know, if you'd grease my palm a little bit, I can get your name on that list." So that's the way we did it. I greased his palm with a few dollars, he got my name on the list, the officer signed me off, and they sent me to Corpus Christi.

DePue: Up to this point, Gary, you're just nothing but the model sailor in this whole process.

Leib: No, I was not a model. Really, it's amazing that I got through the first year, because I got such bad ratings because I am not a pacifist and I don't consider myself starting fights, but I do not let anybody push me around.

DePue: Well, let's get you to Corpus Christi then.

Leib: So I'm down at Corpus Christi, and they put me in a squadron down there, and I did real well. I made airman first. I got a job in the metal smith shop, and I got along with the petty officers. They started me out as a mechanic on the plane because I had mechanical training. I did not like working as a mechanic on an airplane because you're up on check stands, you're up about twenty feet high, and you're leaning over the engines. And I could do the work, but a little leery about to fall off one of them durn check stands, you know. You got to crawl over them **radial** engines and you got to safety wire everything on your push rods and all that stuff when you're working on them. So I told the chief, I said, "You know what? I've worked around painters and paint shops and stuff like that. This is not my thing." He said, "Well, I've got an opening in the metal shop." He said, "You can take care of **my paint department** in there." I said, "Well, it suits me fine," so that's where I ended up down there.

Corpus Christi is one strange place because it's pretty, but the town is two-thirds or three-fourths restriction to Caucasians, so many Mexican, and you're restricted out of the black neighborhood and you're restricted out of the Mexican neighborhoods, and that takes care of three fourths of the town. So no place you could go except right downtown. So anyhow, that's where I was at till my next adventure.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Okay, we're back at it again here. I wanted to ask you, you had mentioned when you were at Corpus Christi, there's lots of parts of town that were off-limits for you. This is also about the time in 1948 when Truman integrated the military.

Leib: That's correct.

DePue: So were you going through your basic training and all these other experiences with blacks?

Leib: We were all segregated until I got to Corpus Christi, and Mr. Truman, Harry Truman passed that rule, and a very strange thing, because they took the barracks and they moved blacks and the Mexican, Hispanics, in amongst us. It didn't bother me, you know. Of course, I live in a small town, there's no blacks around here, whatever, but I never had any problem getting along with blacks. I worked with Hispanics loading my truck up —there were Mexicans up at Belvidere the two summers I worked up there, summers and fall; I picked up a little of their language, and I got along fine with them. So they moved the nicest Hispanic guy in with me, slept right alongside me, and I got along fine with him, you know.

The Navy's always trying some experiment. They tried different foods they wanted us to eat. I remember they brought—I never ate a black-eyed pea in my life, I didn't even know what it was, and they served us all black-eyed peas because they were grown locally and people locally ate them. So they served them two or three meals. At the end (laughs) of the chow line, they'd have the garbage cans where you'd empty your tray out, and it'd be full of black-eyed peas all the way up to the top. (laughter) So these guys, nobody had ever seen them. And now I like them. Today I eat them, but I thought that was just—you know, it was like, yuck, what is this.

But I got along good with this fellow, and in fact, I went out to his house and met his family. Another thing about it, everywhere I went I had a car. We usually had some old beater, but I'd got back home between Whidbey Island and going to Corpus. I got travel time plus leave time, so I got to come home. I was here for about forty-something days. In fact, I had to take a job. I was running out of money. I took a job working out here on construction. I had a friend of mine that was putting up some grain bins and worked out there for him. I traded my old clunker that I had here at home, the old '37 Chevy, and I traded it for a hot rod '42 Ford, and that's what I took down to Corpus Christi with me. And so I got to go in the places—what were restricted area—in Corpus Christi, because I was with this Mexican dude, friend of mine, and got to go in some of their clubs, and I had some interesting experiences a couple, three times. I mean, they couldn't deny you if you could drive through the parts, but you wasn't supposed to participate in anything. But I went to some of the clubs and whatever when I was the only Caucasian in there. After about the second time I decided, really not a good idea. They got their way of life, and they go along with you, but when you start, you know, dancing with their girlfriends and whatever, they don't buy that too well. So I had some experiences that I thought, Well, let's, you know. I went to Mexico a couple times, down to Nuevo Laredo and took everything in down over there. Some of the guys went down there every weekend. I think I went down there once. I didn't care about going back again. But it was different. I had been to Mexico before, in Tijuana. No, I guess not. I guess that was the first time I went to Mexico, and it was a whole different lifestyle, you know.

DePue: Let's get you back under your military career, here. Where to after Corpus? You got there about November of 1949, I believe?

Leib: Well, I got my orders in September. By the time I got home on leave here—I got there in the latter part of October—and made it through and drove it, came back here for Christmas on leave, drove all the way back up here, twenty-eight hours. I got a bunch of guys, and we dropped them off all different places and went back down there. In the spring, working in the metal shop, I had a good job, and I had guys there with me that I had known from before. Everything was good, except they were talking about—I'm the one reading the bulletin board again—the schools, you know. I had turned down going to school before, and the more I got to thinking about it, Corpus Christi was all right, but really, I like Texas, but I'm kind of like the old Texan said, he's been all over Texas except Corpus Christi and some place in North Texas, and he said, "Who the hell would want to go either place?" That's kind of the way Corpus Christi was. It's different. We got to go to the South Texas State Fair, seamen guard down there at Kingsville, and it was interesting things. Got to see one of the King Ranch's daughter in her big Buick with her fancy cow-skinned upholstering and the big deals on the side for the rifles and all that stuff when they go out. My God, because that thing runs almost to the Mexican border, you know; it's a huge place.

Anyhow, I contacted my old buddy that got himself transferred down there too, the personnel man from Whidbey Island. And I said, "You know, going to school wouldn't be too bad." He said, "Well, you talk to your chief." I talked to the chief, and he said, "Yeah, we might as well. Go to school. We need—you can be a full-time metal smith, you know. Get the training, whatever." So he okayed it, the personnel man got me on the deal, and I was on my way to Memphis, going to aviation fundamental school.

Of course, by way of going there, I got to come by home again. I got travel time because I had the car, and I went to Memphis and went to aviation fundamentals. I met a bunch of nice guys down there, and it's a very good school. I got down there, missed the school I was supposed to start with. You know, they start them every two or three weeks. Well, I got there just too late to start the one. I was the first one there, and then all the other guys come in and got acquainted with them. While we were going to school, the guys I got to running around with from Philadelphia and the East Coast, they were all wanting to go to aviation boatswain mate school in Philadelphia because it was right near home. The other school out there was parachute rigger school—that was in New Jersey—and one other school was out in that area.

I had figured out by then I should have stayed—the metalsmith would have been much better in Memphis, but Memphis doesn't really—it was Millington, actually, north Memphis. I'm not too thrilled with Memphis, and I really didn't want to go to school down there. These guys kept talking about these other schools, so I put in choices, and we all put in choices the same

way. I think I put in aerographer, weatherman, first choice; parachute rigger, second choice; aviation boatswain mate, third choice. The Navy always look at that last one, they never look at the first two, so we all went to aviation boatswain mate school in Philadelphia: my buddy from Philly, my buddy from New York, and a couple of the guys from Pennsylvania.

DePue: Is that what you wanted, so you reversed the order to make sure you got what you wanted?

Leib: Correct. Well, I'd have been happy going to aerographer; that's a good thing to learn, and a parachute rigger—

DePue: What was the name again?

Leib: Aerographer. They called it aerographer. It's actually a weatherman. Weatherman school, parachute rigger school, and they were all up in that area, and aviation boatswain mate school, so I ended up an aviation boatswain mate. That was my first mistake, because that's what got me on the flight deck of a carrier. I could have learned a lot better trade. But I liked the school. My buddy from Philadelphia had saved his money that he'd won playing poker up in Alaska, and he brought himself a brand-new Buick, a brand-new Buick, and boy, we had a ball. I was going to bring my car out there, but I had a little disconnect down in Memphis, an accident, and a little transmission problem, and I had to leave it down there in the garage. I got a flight to go down there and get it one time, caught a hop down there, but the hop had to turn back because they had bad weather over West Virginia, so I didn't get to bring my car up there.

But anyhow, I loved Philadelphia. I really got in with a nice group. And the personnel man and yeoman there, named Daugherty and my buddy, Johnny Ricklewitz, they were both in different parts of [town]—John Ricklewitz lived out on Seventh Street, and Daugherty lived west from Darby, Lower Darby. We got going down to where he lived. Even John wasn't familiar with that area, because, you know, city guys, they live in their one part of town; well, this is a whole different deal to him. But we got acquainted with a group down there, and man, we had a good time. All their little restaurants and things had jukeboxes, and you could dance in the back, and high school girls and whatever. All the guys I run around were Catholic, and they never went to church but they were Catholic. All the Catholic churches had dances Friday and Saturday nights, and man, we'd go to one Friday night and one the next Saturday night, and we just had a ball. I mean, two or three sailors in there with all these little Irish girls and Polish girls. It was paradise.

DePue: Well, I would assume you got a little bit of training while you were there in boatswain mate school. Exactly what were you being taught how to do?

Leib: Aviation boatswain mate is not a complex trade. The thing you learn in Philadelphia was the basics, all the basics, of aviation boatswain mate, basic fundamentals. Firefighting is a big deal. We had to go through real extreme aircraft crash firefighting, ship firefighting—superbly trained in that. And all the book stuff was done at Philadelphia and all that. Then they transferred us down to Annapolis, to the Academy, the Severn River Command, and put us on the aircraft carrier USS *Block Island*, 106. I found out just a few years ago some famous things about the 106; I didn't know before that it was a Jeep carrier, CVE, and they had it tied up alongside the dock right across from the Academy. They had the planes there where they trained the midshipmen on. They would come over and learn how to fly, and they had the sailboats where they learned how to run them. They had the other type of boats that they learned for their training, and then they'd bring them on the *Block Island* and they'd eat with us. You know, not right at the same table, but they sat at their table. You went through West Point, you know how they sit there like that, like this, you know, and then they were allowed to cut their food, and they had to eat just like this. And we're sitting there thinking, Oh, boy. Man, them poor guys, you know. (laughter) I mean, we're just enjoying ourself, and they're whatever.[1]

But anyhow, we went through the flight deck training. We had all this schooling, and how to operate planes around on a flight deck, how to set them up on the catapults, how to move them around on the hangar deck, how the catapult system worked, all the ins and out of it, all the ins and out of the arresting gear system, all the ins and out of the gasoline system. All that's under aviation boatswain mate. Aviation boatswain mate is the biggest division on an aircraft carrier. They run the flight deck, the hangar deck, the gasoline system, the catapults, the arresting gear, the firefighting equipment, and so went through the whole thing. It was really very interesting.

The most interesting thing that happened to me there… Of course, John and I, we run back to Philadelphia a couple times in his Buick. It's a short run up through Baltimore, you know, and when you got a new Buick and run ninety mile an hour, you can go back up there for the weekend. But anyhow, while I was there, one day I decided I'd go cut across the Academy grounds. I just caught the ferry and rode over to the Academy, which is about as far as here, oh, up to the Catholic Church across the bay there. Walking across the campus, here are some of the cadets out there, running around the grinder, extra duty—two hours extra duty because they'd left a comma out or a period out or whatever—running around. I'm walking by there, and one of them calls my name. "Hey, Gary!" What in the hell? You know, I don't know any of these guys. And he gave me a signal and pointed over toward the shade

[1] First year Naval Academy midshipmen as well as West Point cadets had to sit as if at attention, and eat 'square' meals. With their heads up and their eyes fixed on the plate, they would take a morsel of food from the plate, raise their fork or spoon straight up, and then when the utensil was even with their mouth, move the food into their mouth. They would not be allowed to chew the food until their hands were back in their lap. Only after that morsel had been chewed and swallowed would the midshipman be allowed to start the process again.

tree. So he was running around, and here come another group running around, and another guy yelled, "Hey, Gary!" I thought, What the heck, you know. He points, so I go over to sit under the shade tree till they run off their extra duty.

DePue: Were you wearing whites at the time, maybe?

Leib: Yeah, I'm wearing whites, and they're wearing whites with their little blue deal around on their Donald Duck hat, on their Dixie Cup hat. Johnson that I went to boot camp with, he knew me, I knew him. We weren't great buddies or nothing, but he knew me because of all the problems I had in boot camp with Wasniski and the fact that I was assistant company clerk and everything, so everybody knew me. The other guy was named Robertson, and Robertson knew me from Whidbey Island; he'd told me one time that he was going to get to go to the Academy because his uncle was a commander in DC and he said he'd get to go to Academy. He had an old Ford, and he was a wheeler-dealer. He'd tape cigarettes under the frame of his Ford and run them to Canada and sell them because he could get four bucks a carton up there for them. He was paying eighty cents for a carton on the base and selling them up there for four bucks, and all of us would take two cartons with us—that was the limit to going across the thing. He had an enterprise. He was buying a whole great big box and taping them underneath his car, and he was making a ton of money. I thought, Boy, he'll make a great officer, won't he? He's a wheeler-dealer, you know.

DePue: (laughs) A little bit of black-market action there.

Leib: Yeah. He's a super black market. And he never got caught, apparently, you know. But everybody took two cartons because that was legal. Get your four bucks . Well, you could get you a motel room or hotel room for the whole weekend for that. Anyhow, so that was the most interesting experience there.

And then the bad experience was: Our classes were small. The Navy keeps them small. It's on-the-job training. The way my mind works, I like to work with my hands, and that's the way I can learn things. Reading is fine and sitting in classrooms is boring as hell, but when you actually do the work, then you really learn that way. Anyhow, so we did real well, and I decided I'm really going to work my tail off. I got a chance while I was at Philadelphia to go up for third-class petty officer. That was kind of a deal, too, because they had us all in line and they were interviewing us. We'd go in there, and the chief petty officer, he'd ask, "What do you think about the Navy?" and, What about this and what about that. I'm in line, and I wasn't due to go up for third class, but while I was—guy's coming out of the line said, "Oh, that damn chief in there, he asked this question and I told him I'm getting out of the daggone Navy." I thought, Man, I'm going to play this different, you know. So when I got in and he sat down to the interview, and he said, "What do you think about the Navy?" and he said, "Well, I came in as a career." That's the right thing to say. And he said, "Do you like it?" I said, "Well, I've had some

interesting experiences, but I…" He said, "Do you figure on staying in the Navy?" I said, "Yeah, I think I'm staying in the Navy. I'm from a small town, there's not much going on, and I think the Navy's a good career." He said, "That's the kind of guy I'm looking for." He picked up this guy's paper, all the stuff to go up for third-class petty officer, and he scratched his name out, the guy who gave him all the crap, and he put my name down there. He said, "You're the kind of guy that needs to be petty officer." "Thanks, chief." So, by golly, a week or so later I was taking a test for third-class petty officer—an ideal time, because I'm going through school. What better time could you be?

DePue: Well, I'm going to jump in here real quick, because I had to list out the Navy enlisted rates—not rank, rates. Of course, it's rank in the Army, and the Army equivalent I guess would be pay grade E-4, an equivalent in the Army of a corporal.

Leib: Well, at one time it was a buck sergeant, I believe, in the Army, and then they changed it to corporal.

DePue: E-4.

Leib: E-4 is the third-class petty officer. You go from seaman recruit to seaman apprentice, seaman—or airman, or fireman—to third-class petty officer, and then you're on your way, E-4, and then second-class is E-5.

DePue: So this would be the lowest of the petty officer rank.

Leib: The low man on the totem pole, yeah, but at least you're a petty officer, and, you know, you get more—everything in the Navy is tradition, respect, and whatever. Seniority and rate—not rank, rate—is everything.

DePue: Were you out there at the time of June 1950 when the Korean War started? Were you already headed out to Johnson City?

Leib: There's where the fly's in the ointment. I'm happy as a dead pig in the sunshine. I'm all set up, and I am really working, wanting to stay the head of the class here. Only small classes, eight or nine guys a class. I think we ended up with eight because one guy got hurt in an accident playing basketball on the hangar deck. He tripped on a thing and just messed up his leg real bad. But anyhow, so there's eight of us in our class, nine of us on the class before us, and I'm working my tail off because John and I want to go to Johnson City, Pennsylvania. We had our choice of duty stations, and it's according to how you qualified. So John and I, we qualified one and two in the class, and we got our choice of duty station—Johnson City, Pennsylvania. Never heard of it. I'd heard of it—that's where they had the big flood—but I'd never been there. Naval Air Station. That's where I wanted to go. Got my orders all cut to go there, and a strange, horrible thing happened: the Korean War started. The class that was ahead of us, they had their orders all cut; they were going here,

there, and yonder, and they came into them. Of course, we knew these guys. We all slept together. They're only two weeks ahead of us in school, but we all eat together, sleep together, and whatever. And they said, "Guys, we've got bad news for you. The Korean War started, and all you guys are assigned to the USS *Boxer*. They need flight deck, catapult guys, everything." *Zip*, they went to the USS *Boxer*.

DePue: Where was the *Boxer* at this time?

Leib: Well, the *Boxer* at that time was loading up at Alameda, I guess, getting ready to take a bunch of planes to Japan, at the first start of the war. The *Boxer* just came back from part of a world cruise; they'd been to China and all over. Getting into the *Boxer* is a whole different ballgame, you know, because it's a west coat showboat. *Boxer* and the *Antietam* were on the west coast carriers, and they're well-known; everybody from San Francisco and San Diego, they all knew who the *Boxer* and the *Antietam* was. Anyhow, those guys got sent there, and I thought, Well, boy, that's their hard luck, you know, really bad.

Anyhow, a week later, I'm all ready to go to Johnson City, Pennsylvania, and, *bang*, our orders come through: USS *Boxer*, all eight of us. So nine went in the class before us and eight went. But the fortunate thing about that was that when you go on a big ship, three thousand guys on there—seventeen hundred in the ship's company, and the air group's a little over thirteen hundred, there's better than three thousand—it's nice that you know somebody, that you've got friends that you go on there with. So that's where we went.

I got leave to go by home, and I had to bring my car here, which I didn't have the car there, but my dad had come to see me because he knew I was getting shipped to the *Boxer.* He drove out there, and he was not a big city person, and [by the] time he drove out there in his new Dodge convertible, he didn't want to drive back. So he had left it with me the last ten days I was out there, and I got orders to drive back and brought two other sailors that was in the class with me, one from Nebraska and one California, and they rode back as far as here with me and got on the bus from here and went on where they was going. I got a lot of use out of that convertible of his for that last two weeks. But I got to take him down to DC, and the Capitol building and all the different things. By that time, he was the mail carrier here at home, and he'd worked his way up where he was full-time mail carrier, which was his ambition all his life, what he wanted to do, but he didn't like that traffic out on that east coast. That did not do anything for him at all. So I put him on the train, and he come back here and I kept the car.

DePue: Did you drive the car out to California, or did you fly out there?

Leib: No, I left it here in town. He was checking it all over when I got here to make sure it was all [right]—it was a new Dodge, one of them little Wayfarer convertibles that came out. He was selling Dodges at that time, part-time.

DePue: Well, let's get you out to the USS *Boxer*, your first couple days on the *Boxer*. What was that like?

Leib: The USS *Boxer* was a lifetime of experience. I spent twenty-five months on the *Boxer*. Time I got to the *Boxer* to catch the *Boxer*, the *Boxer* had already left. The time I got to California and ended up in San Diego, it had left San Diego. And they flew me up from, I think Miramar, wherever it is, outside of San Diego, up to the other air field outside of San Francisco and took us down, and it had cleared out of there. It was making the famous speed run. The USS *Boxer* had the world record for quite some time, going both ways across the Pacific. They crossed the Pacific in eight days and I forget how many hours and came back in seven days and sixteen hours, which is basically flying across the ocean, because that baby would go.

DePue: Was this built right at the end of the Second World War?

Leib: The *Boxer* was commissioned in 1945, and she was on her way to Japan when the war ended. So her and the *Antietam* were basically brand-new carriers. They never took them out of commission. All the other carriers were out of commission, all the ones that you read about in the famous World War II battles and everything. I had went onto some of them—well, the only one I could get on—they were mothballed down at Philly, and I did get to go on the *Intrepid*. There were some guys working on it one day, and we went on the *Intrepid*, the one that's up at New York now, and looked at it, and it was one that they lost a bunch of guys on and was in some serious battles. But in the meantime, you know, the Navy had built the *Fruity Roo*, the *Filthy, Dirty, and Rusty*, as the guys referred to it, the *Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (DePue laughs) and the *Coral Sea* and the *Midway*. They all got nicknames for all of them, you know. Like the *Kearsarge*, they called it the *Queer Barge*, and the *Bon Homme Richard*, they called it the *Bonnie Dick*, but anyhow. I think the *Valley Forge* and the *Philippine Sea* and the *Princeton*, they must have still been operating too, because they were some of the first ones over to Korea. Anyhow, the *Boxer* made the speed run, and it was all in the news and all the thing, but the time we got there, the other guys had got on it, and our class missed it. They took us down to the pier at Alameda, and they had this huge flying boat. The Navy had three of them: the *Caroline Mars*, the *Marshall Mars*, the *Philippine Mars*. I forget what the other one… They had already lost one; they had three of them left, and they were the biggest airplane of their time, almost as big as that one of Howard Hughes, great big four-engine, JATO-assisted[2] to take them off. The most luxurious plane I've ever been on in my life. They lined us up, and they said, "If we've got any space, we're

[2] JATO: Jet Assisted Take-Off

going to put you guys on it." Well, eight of us stand there, and they only have room for four of us, and I was one of the four they put on there. The other four guys went back and caught a plane and went up around Alaska, and they caught the *Boxer* over in Japan. We were supposed to catch the *Boxer* in Pearl Harbor. Put us on the flying boat, take that baby off: get out there and kick in the JATO and take that baby off, and here's this big, luxurious plane that I got to ride to Pearl Harbor.

There wasn't enough seats for me. They [had] a stewardess or hostess, whatever you call them, just like any other plane. It's double-decker. They had sleeping bunks on one deck and seats on the other. So she took me up where they sleep, and she said, "Now, this is Captain So-and-so's bunk, and you sit on the bunk till he gets tired and he comes up, and then you go down and get his seat and he goes to bed." I said, "Fine." She said, "Don't go to sleep. Do not lay down. Sit on the bunk. Do not lay yourself down on the bunk all laid out for the captain." So I sit there like a gentleman, and about an hour or two, I started getting drowsy—you know, been running all over the country—and I just kind of keeled over, and boy, the next thing I knew, the hostess, stewardess, whatever it was, "Get up, get up," and she straightened up the pillow and everything, "Get your butt off of there, the captain's coming up." You know, straighten the bunk all up. She said, "I told you not to go to sleep." She's taking me down to his seat, and he's coming up to his bunk. And we go to Pearl Harbor.

We get to Pearl Harbor; the *Boxer* is not there, and the other three guys that's with me, so what are they going to do? They put us in the chow hall mess cooking. So we were in the chow hall, but we were only there a few days, and they said, "The *Boxer*'s back in the States now. She's took planes over, and she made this speed run, seven days and sixteen hours back"—which is still a record for a warship. The *Philippine Sea* later broke the other record going over, and the Navy said, "No more of this, because it's too hard on the ships." In fact, that's one of the reasons the *Boxer* had a little problem later, so we didn't get to finish our first tour over there. But anyhow, a few days later, they said, (claps) "Back to Alameda." So we had another flying boat, got on the other. So I got to ride on two of the big flying boats, and I don't remember which, the *Marshall Mars*, *Caroline Mars*, *Philippine Mars*, which one they were, but I got a picture over here of the boat and everything. So we got to fly back, and the *Boxer* was there at Alameda, and we got to go on the *Boxer*. Like old home week, here's all our buddies on there, and "Where in the heck have you guys been?" when they've been flying us here, there, and yonder, and whatever.

We come on, and part of them had got assigned here, and part of them got there, and to my misfortune—you know, in the Navy, You go here, you go there, *bang, bang, bang*—I got assigned to the flight deck. I would have much rather went to the catapults up front or the arresting gear. But thank God I didn't go to the gasoline system, because that's down in below. And thank

God I didn't go on the hangar deck; I didn't want to work with… But the flight deck is an adventure of a lifetime. The flight deck, when they bring guys on, even though I had just [come,] the third-class petty officer came on right behind me. The guys that had been on there, the plane directors and stuff had been on there, they knew their thing, and you're basically in training. You got to watch what they do, and in the meantime, you're going to be a plane-pusher. All the new guys come on out of boot camp, they're plane pushers. It takes eight guys to move an airplane. They pull them with the little tractors, hook them up, and guys learn different things. So they made me a crew leader, and I got these guys that's going to move the airplanes back and forth; I'm out there next to the director, and the director's telling us where to put them and when to hold the brakes and when to fold the wings and everything for the pilot, but we're moving them around. They take us out, and we're doing operations off of Pearl Harbor, and they're bringing these squadrons on, and some of these squadrons had never been on an aircraft carrier. I mean, they'd had their practice deals. You know, they practiced, set it up like an aircraft room. They never really landed on an aircraft carrier. I don't know how the Navy pilots did it. I mean, it's kind of like coming down and landing on a postage stamp, you know. The system, the way they do it, they come in with the tail hook, as you've seen in all the pictures, and they catch the tail hook, and the arresting gear runs out, the hydraulic ram runs out, and it comes to a stop. Then the hook-runners pull the wire off, and they run back out of the way, and the director moves the plane forward and tells him to fold the wings and all that stuff; the next director takes him and parks him up front. They dropped the barriers once he curves —if he catches the resting gear cable— but if he doesn't catch the resting gear cable, he'd just crash you into the barriers, which you've got to stop him somehow, because here's all the planes parked up front.

So anyhow, we're going through all this training, and there was a few crashes and whatever, routine. And then they say, "Now, we're going to have you out here on night ops, and we're going to show you how this night operation works. This is a whole different ballgame." We said, Well, hell, we've seen it all. They come in, they land, they catch the wire, they get them off the wire, they taxi them forward, they drop the barriers, and they park them. How simpler could it be? Then we get ready for launch, they hook the thing on the tractor and move them back, and then the kids, pushers, push them in the right position to get them all lined up. Nothing to it, you know, all simple geometry. So they said, "Now, the night ops, we're out here off of beautiful Hawaii, and here are these guys. Now, these planes that fly at night, we call them Hecklers. And they're Corsairs; instead of single super-charge, they're twin super-charge, and man, they're a monster. They can carry a bigger load, and they come in hot and fast, and we're going to show you what a night landing is like." They set us up there, got all the planes moved as far forward as they could and put as many of them down on the hangar deck as they could so there was hardly anything on the deck up there. They put a row of all the little Ford tractors, the little heavy-duty Ford tractors that they pull

around, pull the planes, and they lined them across the deck up on the other side of the barriers. And I said, "What's that for?" They said, "Well, if they come in and they don't catch the wire and they don't get into the arresting gear, then this is a last resort, crash them into the tractors." I said, "Aw, man," you know. They said, "Now, this is really serious stuff. What you've got to do, be very, very, very careful. You new guys, I want you to get up on the other side of the tractors, lay down on the other side of the tractors or sit down or squat down and watch through, because if one of them babies gets loose, he could come all the way up there, and you're dead." Okay.

Planes get up there, and they're coming in and get ready to land, all the lights are turned off on the ship, all of them, and the last minute, when the plane gets in what they call the landing pattern, he flips his lights on, ship flips their lights on, straight up, he comes in, (claps) *bam*, and lands, catches the wire, taxis forward, just like a daytime operation—nothing to it. So we're sitting saying, "The hell. These guys is great. Boy, they know how to land them planes coming in at night and everything. The plane's got his landing lights on, got his identification lights on and everything." Then the third plane comes in, and we're kind of halfway paying attention. And this sucker comes in, and he hits on the tail end of the ship, on the fantail, *bam*.

DePue: On the deck? Is this the deck of the ship?

Leib: He hits the ass in the deck. He don't even get up to the wire; he hits the ass in the deck. He lands too soon. Plane bursts apart. Plane's coming sideways like this, sliding down the deck, engine is broke completely loose, and here comes the engine with the propeller turning and fire going out of it, all the way down the damn deck, *bangety-bangety-bangety-bang*. Here's this great big engine coming down with the propeller turning, crashing, fire, smoke, everything coming out of it. That son of a bitch comes all the way down to them tractors, and we're on the other side of the tractors. I thought, That's the learning curve right there. I learned that you really, really have to pay attention all the time, because if you'd have been on the other side of the tractors or you'd have been somewhere out there on the deck—they don't allow anybody on that deck except the guys in the arresting gear. They do their thing, and then they drop their heads and everything's clear, because sometimes the pilots go off to the edge and crash. So I seen all kinds of crashes, but that was the scariest thing I ever seen in my life. That deck's 880 feet long, and we're up there about 600 feet from where he landed, and that engine came all the way down, *bangety-bangety-bangety-bang*, all the way down that deck. I've seen a lot of scary things in my life, but that thing made a believer out of me. The pilot didn't get hurt. The plane ended up in barriers, all spun around, torn all to heck, and the pilot, he's just riding it out like on a roller coaster. They get him out of there fine, they clean up the mess, they land the fourth one. But boy, we're watching. When that fourth one come in, we were watching.

But that was my first experience on a night landing, and then —you've seen pictures—I've seen a lot of them that come in [like] that. When the LSO gives them the signal, they better do exactly like he says it. If it's too high, they'd better come down; if he says too low, they better go up; and if he says cut that engine, they better land it right when he said it; and if he says wave them off, they better wave them off, because if they try to land it and he's waved them off or whatever, they don't go exactly by his signal, they're not going to make it. And man, they'll come in and hit that deck. Around airplanes, the torque curve pulls always to the port side, to the left. The torque of the engine pulls to the left, and them babies will go "*kabam"* and right over the side going full-blast; he's got that engine wound up. When he comes in, sees he's made a bad landing, he's got the throttle cracked wide open, so he's trying to get up, and sometimes he can bounce and get up, and other times the torque just pulls him right down and he goes right down in the water and he just keeps on going.

DePue: Now, this is all while you're training to learn the job of working on the deck crew, the flight director.

Leib: Flight deck training.

DePue: Were you guys out on sea? Was there the regular roll and the pitch of the ship when it was going on?

Leib: Yeah. Well, first, we did our training off the coast of California. Then we went out and did some more training off the coast of Pearl Harbor. Then we went right straight from Pearl Harbor to Yokasuka (Japan), took on supplies. No, wait a minute, no, we went from Pearl Harbor right to Sasebo and then to the Inchon (South Korea) landing, because there was sixty days I went without touching dry land.

DePue: Okay. During this time when you're doing all this training and you're trying to catch up to the *Boxer*, you catch up to the *Boxer*, you're going through all this training, this is when some pretty nasty stuff is happening in Korea. The Army is getting their butts kicked, to put it not-so-gently.

Leib: Run all the way down to Pusan.

DePue: Were you guys following that?

Leib: No, because here's the thing about it. When you're out there on the ship, you don't know what the hell's going on in the world. The only thing you get to see is the newspaper; *Stars & Stripes* is passed out, and you get to read a little bit about the Army. We were getting our butt whipped, we knew that, but that's all we knew. We didn't know anything else, you know. The other guys on the ship had been in Japan before, and they knew what it was like in Japan, but they hadn't been to Korea either. We had guys off all the famous ships of World War II. We had guys off the *Franklin*. My chief was off the *Saratoga*.

The *Franklin*, oh my God, all the great ships, the carriers of World War II. So some of them, they knew what hell was like; they'd seen kamikazes and all that kind of stuff, especially when they started calling in some of the Reserves. They started calling them Reserves in right away, guys that had inactive Reserve. Funny, they didn't call so many active Reserves in except pilots, but inactive Reserves, they just reached out and pulled guys in that thought, man, they were done with the military. My cousin got called back in, a whole bunch of them. Maybe two guys that had been in at the same time, one would get called back in; others didn't.

DePue: Yeah, let me just explain real quick the difference there. Back at that time, most people had either a six- or eight-year term, but most of that could be served either in active or inactive. Active means that you're kind of the classic, you're going one weekend a month, you're going to a couple weeks summer camp someplace, and that's the active, and you're assigned to a particular unit. Inactive, you're just on a piece of paper someplace. And they were calling those guys up.

Leib: But they did it so indiscriminately, what I don't understand. It's like anything else, if they need you and you rate, then you're going; if they don't particularly need your classification, your MOS or whatever, you're not going. I mean, they just pick… But all the pilots that came on and the guys that was attached to them Reserve squadrons, they were part of the group, like you say; they were on active duty, and they brought them on there. But it was a mixed bag, and it was very interesting because you know, being in the military, there's the regular Navy and the Reserves. I don't know about the Army, but they kind of look down their nose at them. I know when the California National Guard come over to Japan, they made fun of them. The regular Army guys practically laughed them off the streets, you know. But they did their thing just like anything else, and after a while, the Reserves and everybody was the same. They didn't know whether you was Reserve or regular; you just did your job.

DePue: What kind of aircraft did you have on the ship?

Leib: The first deal, we did not have jets. The *Boxer* had qualified for jets, but we had Corsairs and ADs: The AD Skyraider, AD-3, the latest Skyraider. AD-1, –2s, and –3s.

DePue: What's a Skyraider? Is that a bomber?

Leib: It's a bomber, AD —

DePue: A single-engine bomber?

Leib: —single-engine bomber, and also the one they use for the Guppy, the one the radar hangs below that flies over the whole deal, runs the radar deal, and the guy sits in the back of it. And they were the workhorse, them and the Corsairs.

DePue: Corsairs being a fighter.

Leib: Corsairs F4Us. The night-fighter Corsairs are the F4U-5Ns, they called them, F4U-5Ns. They were the hotrod Corsairs. But they're a real workhorse, and they were, really. It was an interesting experience. But the most interesting thing of all: We pulled into Sasebo, [Japan] and I had seen all the war pictures and everything of all the great fleets, the Ulithi or whatever it is where they have the big harbor. That's what Sasebo was. We pulled in there. There was other aircraft carriers. The *Missouri* was there, all kinds of troop carriers, all kinds of cruisers, the *Worcester* and the battleship *Iowa*, the battleship *Missouri*, the *New Jersey*—all these battleships and cruisers and aircraft carriers was all in this big harbor at Sasebo on the south end of Japan. I've never seen so many ships in my life. That was the beginning of the Task Force Seventy-Seven with the Seventh Fleet. And they were yelling at each other and everything. You know, these Army guys over here in this ship and the Marines over here were yelling back and forth. Nobody really knew what was going on. They knew something big was going on, but that was getting ready for the Inchon landing, and we anchored out—or no, I think we pulled up alongside a pier and took supplies on—but they did not let us off the ship. Nobody got off the ship. Most of them were all anchored out, just like this town full of houses, all out there together. Then they pulled us out for the deal for Inchon. Of course, we were way out. We were on close air support, so we have to be out. The carriers: they protect the heck out of them. I mean, they're sitting way out there with a battleship like the *Missouri* or the *Iowa* is in there with them, and the cruisers, the *Worcester* and *St. Paul* and all them are around them, the *Manchester*. Then the guard: the farther outside of them are the screeners, are all the destroyers, the *Blue* and the *Champlain* and all of them. So you're sitting right there in the middle. There would be a carrier here and a carrier here and a battleship up here, and a cruiser back here usually, and then the screen of all the way around.

DePue: Were there a couple other aircraft carriers in the Seventh, in the Task Force?

Leib: Yeah. I'm not really sure which ones was with us when we first went out there. I think it was the *Princeton*. But the main ones in the first part of the war were the *Princeton*, the *Philippine Sea*, and the *Valley Forge.* Before the Korean War ended, I mean, they brought practically all those CV-class carriers out. Man, they brought them all out.

DePue: And we should mention that the CV-class carrier, that's the fleet carrier, correct?

Leib: That's the big fleet carrier. The only ones bigger than that—that's the big straight-deck carriers—were the new ones, the *Roosevelt*, the *Coral Sea*, and the *Midway*, and none of them came over to the Korean War. They were in the Med. Usually they relieve each other; one would be in the Med, one would be down in the…

DePue: Indian Ocean, maybe?

Leib: Well, not Indian Ocean. Down south around Cuba, down in that area down there.

DePue: South Atlantic.

Leib: Yeah. And one of them usually in port. They rotated them around. It's the same way with the carriers. They rotate them the same as they rotated the battleship *Missouri* and the *Iowa* and the—the only three battleships they used during the Korean War are *Iowa*, *New Jersey*, and *Missouri*. And, of course, we didn't get to see the landing or anything like that. We got to see the cruisers firing in, and off in the distance, the destroyers firing in. We got to see the *Missouri*—my God, that *Missouri*, that *Iowa*, the *New Jersey*, when they'd fire them big old sixteen-inch guns, they could be from here to Springfield and it looks like a huge lighting storm. I mean, it's unreal. Maybe not Springfield, maybe Jacksonville—twenty miles. But they'd be fifteen, twenty miles away from us, and they'd just light up the whole sky. Just unreal, you know.

DePue: Did they tell you much about what was going on, on the ground with the Marine landing and the 7th Infantry landing and taking Seoul a few days later?

Leib: The only information you got was in the *Stars & Stripes*, and occasionally the captain would come on, on the loudspeaker and give us a little information about this or that or whatever.

DePue: Was there any concern at all about enemy aircraft or enemy ships, either one?

Leib: I thought it was basically the end of the world. You know, I thought this was going to be just like WWII. You know, we're going to be out here, and they're going to come after the carriers. And the Navy thought the same thing. They really thought they were going to get lambasted. They was always worried about the MiGs, and they claimed that submarines was out there all the time watching us, Russian submarines, and they had the mines that they run across now and then, and little ships would go in and blow the mines up and stuff. They were worried to death. We'd pick up a radio station out of Vladivostok or somewhere, and they would play beautiful late music and tell you that you're going to die the next day, you know, that you're on this ship or you're in this infantry division, you're in the 25th Infantry or whatever, and we know where you're at. We called her Moscow Molly. Some of the guys had these little radios, and we learned more from hearing her than what we heard from our… They would keep us a little bit informed on the plan of the day, would just give you a little bit of information. So, you know, you're just a little small cog in the wheel down there, and you're not supposed to know all that kind of stuff. But that gal was amazing to me because she would speak in perfect English. I don't know if she's from North Korea or Vladivostok or wherever.

DePue: Russian. You're talking about Vladivostok, right?

Leib: Vladivostok, yeah. But this old gal, she'd say, "Well, you know, you guys that are out here, General Motors is making millions of dollars, and General Electric is getting rich," and this one and this one, and name all the companies, "and you dumb bastards is out there" and whatever, "and tomorrow, the USS *Boxer*, we know where you're at," and she'd describe right where you're at, you know, and the *Philippine Sea*, and "You guys, tomorrow's going to be your last day on earth". Man, I mean, it was spooky. After Inchon, we turned around and came back around the peninsula and shortly thereafter made the landing at Wonsan, so that was when [General Douglas] MacArthur decided the deal to—you're going to cut them off from both directions, you know. But no, we didn't know. You were kind of in the dark.

That was on the first cruise over, and actually, when the ship made that big run across the Pacific, they damaged—those big old drive shafts on that thing, my God, they're yea big around, and reduction gears from your ship's engine, and goes through the series of bearings back to that great big props that you've got on the ship. One of the bearings went bad, and she could only run on three screws or three props, and so it got so it couldn't really get up enough speed to land planes, so they decided to take her back in Japan to dry docks and tried to repair it. That was in October. They couldn't get the job done, and they took it back out and run it again. Then they took it out of their drydock, and then they decided to take it back. So we came back to the States in November. I know it was just before my twenty-first birthday, so it was the early part of—

DePue: November 1950, then.

Leib: Yeah, November 1950, to go in the yards at Hunters Point to get redone. That's when we got all the credit for being the first big warship back and all that stuff and all the publicity and all the pictures, and oh, man, they made a big deal out of it.

DePue: Tell us—

Leib: About the time we come back, that was the beginning of the Frozen Chosin incident. That's when they trapped the Marines up there.

DePue: Yeah, that was right after Thanksgiving that the Chinese sprung that massive offensive on both sides of the peninsula, and the Marines, of course, cut in the east side.

Leib: We got to hear about that and everything, because when we get back in port, we got to hear some of the guys that were coming back—the casualties were starting to come back and everything—and hear how bad it was. My buddy from Arenzville got hit, got a grenade in the same foxhole with him—he

hadn't been on the line very long—and took a big chunk out of his leg. He went in Tokyo General. I guess that was in '51, and I didn't get to see him then. I didn't get to see him till I come home.

DePue: I wanted to talk to you a little bit more about Wonsan [North Korea] as well. That's not nearly as well known as the Inchon invasion. Of course, Inchon was this incredible victory that MacArthur had arranged for—nobody thought it was possible to go in Inchon because of the massive tides that they had at that time—and caught the North Koreans flat-footed. Of course the troops in the Pusan Perimeter broke out and moved pretty rapidly north. But the Wonsan is on the opposite side of the peninsula.

Leib: Yeah, way up here.

DePue: Pretty far north. Was that a pretty straightforward operation as well?

Leib: That was really scary because that's when we got to hearing this gal talking about all the stuff, and we came up in here—

DePue: No, that makes sense.

Leib: —because we were coming back—I mean, if I understand it, MacArthur, his idea was to try to trap them—and that's where the Chinese came in, right?

DePue: Yeah, well, that was about a month or so later. They dropped the Marines and I'm not sure—the 7th Division I think they dropped farther north on the east side of the peninsula, but that's one of the places where they put the Marines in.

Leib: Well, and the 7th is the one that lost their colors up there, wasn't it?

DePue: Well, they had a regiment that lost their colors, yeah.

Leib: We heard about that, but that was pretty scary when we was up in here, because they were reporting submarines out there, and you were supposed to watch for periscopes and all kinds of stuff.

DePue: This is in the Sea of Japan, right?

Leib: In the big Sea of Japan. And we never went back to the Yellow Sea I think one time after that. That was another task force that operated in the Yellow Sea. They kept the Task Force 77 up in this area here. The Marine task force that they were attached to, they were over here, and I forget what the name of their task force was, but they [had] some of the smaller carriers, some of the CVs and the CV-Ls, over there.

DePue: Yeah, I don't want to get too far ahead, because I'm going to have to do some more research and get ready. I'd wanted to stop today at the point where you

headed back to the States for that. But I do want to have you explain a little bit more about what a typical day of duty would be like during this timeframe when you first supported the Inchon landings and then over in Wonsan.

Leib: Well, the whole thing was kind of hectic because it was new to everybody, and you were working like around the clock. You was out there on the deck moving planes and doing stuff, and you didn't even get a chance to hardly get a meal. You got a meal and you kind of just dropped wherever you was at and rolled up your foul-weather jacket and catch a nap. Then they finally got it organized for us that it concerned, but we weren't running the ship; we were just running the air operations between day crews and night crews, and then it got kind of organized. We were the favored ones of the ship, much to the chagrin of the other members of the ship, because when it comes to chow line, you know, like the military, the chow lines run for miles. You know, some guys on some ships, transport ships, they'd get to eat and turn around and get back in the chow line for their next deal because they were so long. They weren't quite that long, but they needed us, so they'd run us right down, and an officer would take us right down to the front of the chow line, because we would eat and put us right back. It didn't make the guys too happy, you know, but that's the way it was. I mean, they had to keep us going. And we had a hard time. They was trying to keep the guys, their eyes open and keep alert, and finally we decided, What we need is a coffee mess up here. You couldn't go down and get a cup of coffee way down five decks below, so when we hit port, we checked with the officers and made the arrangements and bought us one of them big old coffeepots and made a little area where we could make coffee. The guys could run in, get a half a cup of coffee for a minute or get a quick drink of coffee and get back out.

DePue: Right on the flight deck there?

Leib: Yeah, right off the flight deck, a little space here right above repair eight was the last part there. Then there was one little compartment there, and I don't remember what they used it for before, but we put a deal where you could get seven or eight guys in there at a time. And of course, we used it; that was our gathering place from there on out. It worked out good, you know. I volunteered to make the first batch of coffee because I had done it in mess cooking, and the first time, I had to go haul hot water in a two-gallon bucket up several ladders, and then somehow we lined up something where we could heat the water up there, and then just put it right in. We could get all the coffee we wanted. They'd go down to the deal and get them big old five-gallon coffee cans. But it worked out real good because it gave the guys a break. It also gave us a place to kind of hang out that was ours. If you notice, all carriers, right on the flight deck, here's your big old crossed anchors and your deal on them, just like on my rate, and your wings on them, and that's the domain of the aviation boatswain mate. The last place on the island, on the deck level, is where all the equipment for the firefighting and all that, repair eight, and then there's spaces in between. We had one of the spaces in

between. The front one is flight deck control, and that's where they had the big schematic of the deck out there, and flight deck officers and air officers, where they make decisions about which plane goes here and which plane there got the little toy airplanes. They had another one down on the hangar deck for them guys, and we know this goes either down the elevator and this one goes back here, and this one over here is spare, and just moved them around, and you come in and say, "Now, this is where this goes, and this is where this goes, and take your crew out to here."

DePue: What I'd like to have you do for finishing today, then, is to paint me a picture, if you can, of what's going on for launching, and then let's talk about what goes on for landing, and especially your part and some of the other specific duties on that flight deck. Let's start with launching.

Leib: Well, the first part, of course, I had a plane-pusher crew, and we wore the blue shirts. You wear the one that identifies who you are: the yellow shirts are the directors, and you're right there at the beck and call before I became a director. The director finds out where the planes go and comes out and tells you where to put it. You get your crew lined up, and you got to keep charge or keep track of these eight or ten guys that you got working for you and teach them where to push the plane. You can't just grab one anywhere, and where to push on it. And this guy, you take a chock on this side, you take a chock on that side, and when we holler "Brakes" for the pilot to hit his brakes, and you throw the chocks under it, and you just work your routine that way.

DePue: They're coming up one at a time from the hangar deck?

Leib: (laughs) You know, that's a hard expression because it's, I want to say, a work in progress. It's choreographed like a dance deal. Some are coming up, some are going down, some are going off to one side to be a spare, some are going back in the back to go off on a flight the next day, some are getting lined up to go to catapults. It's all choreographed. It's a fine, fine point. And you got your part, and they got their part, and they got theirs. You all are the same division, but each guy has got his own deal. And when they're landing, some planes were designated ahead of time. They let the flight deck officer know this plane needs repairs, and he's going to drop down that elevator. As soon as he clears, he's going to elevator and swing around, one vector's(??) taking him over, and they're going to drop him down while the next plane is landing, and this one's going to go parked up front. It's all amazing, because they land those babies in less than—it's not a minute, it's in seconds. *Bang*, one right after another, you know. It's just unreal, like a perfect piece of machinery—until there's an accident. Then everything's held up, and then everything's cleaned up real quick, and [they] get the crash thing out and move the plane. If we're in a big hurry, they'll just kick him over the side, or else they drop him on the elevator, take him down to them guys down there. They're choreographed. They take care of this goes here, this one goes back to repair, this one goes up here. It's unreal.

DePue: Do accidents happen fairly often?

Leib: The carriers are killing machines. It's the most accident place in the world. There's every kind of accident. Guys get hit by the propellers, guys get hit by the planes, guys get run over by the tractors, guys fall down the elevator shafts, guys walk into sharp edges on things. You don't go a day without some kind of accident. Everybody has to be exactly choreographed all the time. You have to really keep your head on straight, and you have to have absolutely 100 percent reflexes. If you got a kid working for you, he has one accident or two, you got to get rid of him; he's got to go somewhere else. You move him to somewhere where he won't get hurt or he won't get somebody else hurt. And usually to what they call the compartment cleaners, down in the compartment, the guys that scrub and paint are guys that usually got hurt on the flight deck and they transfer them down there. Some guys are scared to death of planes. I mean, I've had guys that go out there, and you're getting ready to pull the chocks and the kid freezes. He just freezes. He can't move. You got to go back underneath there, get him and that chock loose and that plane so they can get that plane going, because everything has to go, just like that. All these things, you have to make sure that he don't come this way and walk into the prop; he's got to go back that way.

DePue: Back out to the side.

Leib: You constantly have to follow them, and you have to kind of yell at them sometimes and scream at them. I mean, you have to use some words that they understand. You know, like my mother told me one time, "The words that you use"—of course, vulgarity and whatever. But I said, "What you don't understand, you got to say some things that they understand." And when you're dealing with grown men with terrible kind of things like that, you have to holler, and you have to get what they know what the heck you're saying. She said, "Well, it means you got a horrible vocabulary. You're going to have to change your vocabulary." I said, "Well, the vocabulary I use, they understand what the hell I mean." When I tell them, you know, get your A-double-butt, whatever, move out, they have to do it. And they're yelling at you. The captain of the ship's up there in that second deck, the pilot's roofs, they're sitting there watching, criticizing the other pilots. The squadron commander is up there, and he's checking on these pilots if they make a bad landing or whatever, and he's given them a scorecard. The captain of the ship comes out there with the air officer. The air officer's up there screaming and yelling, "Get that plane here, get that thing there," and the flight deck officer is down there, "Yes, sir," you know, "Get this, get there." I mean, here's this guy up here, the air officer and the captain sometimes out there and everything, they're yelling and screaming, and boy, they want everything to go, *bang, bang, bang*. And there's a full commander up here, which would be the same as your rank, [but] a full commander is next to God. The captain's God; the admiral, I don't know what they are; they're way up there, and of course, once in a while you have an admiral on there. But the captain, he's

God, and him and the exec would be at least a full commander; captain is the same as a full colonel. You know, it's a big, big responsibility. The guys that work their way up, the officers, from little junior officers, you know, an ensign, he's way down, and then the lieutenant, and then the first lieutenant, and then the lieutenant commander, and *bing, bing, bing*, all the way down the line. But when they're trained, when you're up here, you're a lieutenant commander or commander, you really got to know your stuff. You may be an ensign down here. You better learn damn quick if you want to live, you know, to be lieutenant or whatever. And the same with enlisted men. If you want to survive on that flight deck—I've seen guys get horribly hurt. They got the elevators. When they blow the whistle, they put a safety guard, and eventually people will try to beat it. They'll try to catch it at the last minute, and man, them babies, when they drop, they go (makes whooshing sound) like that; they don't go down like this. They (makes whooshing sound). That safety barrier comes up, and I've seen guys flip trying to run to jump, and the time they catch it, it's all the way down at the bottom. I've seen them drive forklifts off. They're moving forklifts and turn around and not hear the horn—they blow the huge horn and everything—and just take that big old forklift and flip the whole thing down in there. All kinds of accidents.

DePue: How much dicier does it get when it's night operations?

Leib: That goes back to that first thing. The night operation is scary. You use the wands at night.

DePue: The wands?

Leib: You know, the electric wand type deal, direct, and you give the same signals , everything like you do otherwise. Those kids that were directors when I went on there had been on there for some time. Very few of them were petty officers—some of them wasn't even smart enough to pass the test—but they knew how to direct the airplanes and stuff like that. It was strange. For a while there, some of us petty officers was working for airmen, but they knew what they were doing. Of course, they eventually changed it all around; they either made them a petty officer or moved it around. They have to do that.

DePue: When you watch these old movies and ads and they're trying to sell you on the notion of going in the Navy and how exciting it is, you always see the guys out there on the flight deck with the paddles. Was that part of what your function was, or was that a different skill?

Leib: That's a landing signal officer, sits back there on the back thing with a couple of phone talkers and other pilots down there, and they got a little thing to jump off in, a little safety net underneath there. He's the guy that tells the plane whether he's high, low, off to one side, whether he can wave off, or whether he can land.

DePue: That guy's pretty powerful, too, is he not?

Leib: He has to be a very successful pilot and have to want that job. I mean, he has to be a very highly trained pilot to take that job. It's a huge responsibility. He has to be at least a full lieutenant.

DePue: Those are officers, and they're pilots?

Leib: They're officers. They're pilots, yeah. They probably had a choice of being a squadron commander or being that. And even our flight deck officer, he's a pilot. The air officer up there, he's an ex-pilot. They all had to have their wings or they ain't working out there on that deck. The only guys that's not officers is the guys that run the ship, you know, those guys. The quartermaster, I mean, that's in there with the captain. The captain of an aircraft carrier, he is a pilot. Every one I ran into was. And they were guys that landed on the *Langley* and the *Lexington*. Our captain had been the executive officer on the *Yorktown*. Now, the *Yorktown*, one of the more famous carriers, and one—the second *Yorktown*'s out at Charleston, but he—

DePue: Didn't the first *Yorktown* go down?

Leib: First *Yorktown* got sunk. First *Hornet* got sunk. First *Wasp* got sunk. Oh my God. You see, the Navy, to confuse the Japanese, they'd just turn around and name the next ship coming down the waves and give it the same name. They did that all during the war. There was two *Hornets*, two *Wasps*, two *Yorktowns*, two *Lexingtons*, and I think I missed another one in there somewhere. Even that carrier, that little CV, the *Block Island*, that was the second *Block Island*. The first *Block Island* got sunk by a German submarine.

DePue: Tell us about brown shoe, black shoe, what that means and the culture that that translated down to an aircraft carrier.

Leib: Well, black shoe's enlisted man, less than a chief petty officer. If you're a brown shoe, you're going to be an officer or a chief petty officer.

DePue: I thought the distinction was aviators versus the seaman.

Leib: Beg your pardon?

DePue: I thought the difference was that one worked aviation and one worked regular sea duty.

Leib: No, all officers are brown shoes, and all senior petty officers, from chief petty officer that wears the hard hat, or a warrant officer, are brown shoes, because they can wear blue uniforms or they can wear khakis, same as officers. Officers have got several different—they can wear whites, blue, or khakis. A khaki uniform for a senior enlisted man is his work uniform, and a senior officer, they work in khakis almost all the time. When they go on liberty,

they're in blues generally, and for an exceptional thing like a ball or some kind of fancy thing, then they're wearing their dress whites.

DePue: Was there any difference between the people who were working the flight deck who are working the aviation skills versus those who were working the more traditional seaman skills?

Leib: Yeah, because we're the—what would you say?—the prima donnas of the whole thing. The aviation department is the whole thing the carrier's built around. I was aviation department ship's company, which (included) aviation boatswain mates, the V-1 division, V-2, V-3, all aviation; they're the biggest departments on the ship. Then the deck rates, the seaman and all the deck rates, they're the guys that run the ship, the regular boatswain mates, gunner's mates, quartermasters, all that; and then the fireman or the guys, the snipes, the guys that run the engines, the machinist mates, the mechanics, all that. That's a whole different deal. They're not allowed on the flight deck. The only time they're on the hangar deck is when they're standing in the chow line or getting paid. Basically the flight deck's off limits to everybody except on some deal when there's no flight operations, they let some guys come up once in a while and take their shirt off for a few minutes or whatever. But they're not allowed on the flight deck or anywhere near the flight deck or any of the passageways to the flight deck during flight operations. Nobody but the aviation rates that work up there is allowed up that. That'd be besides the directors and the plane pushers and the officers and the mechanics, the plane captains and pilots theirself. Nobody else is allowed up there.

DePue: How much interaction did people like yourself have with the officers in the Navy?

Leib: Well, you get to be real close to the fliers because you work with them every day. Actually, I was real close to them, especially as you move up, as you get to be a director, because you're in there, and you get to kid around with them a little bit and everything. And they're young guys. I mean, by the time I was a director I was like twenty-one, twenty-two years old, and most of the pilots are twenty-one, twenty-two. They're basically just college boys, just, you know, whatever, except when they started bringing the Reserves in—that's the older guys—bringing the guys in left over from World War II, and that was the older, more experienced guys, you know.

DePue: You hear the stories. Paint me a picture, a profile, of your average pilot, a Navy pilot, the guys who are actually landing on those aircraft carriers.

Leib: They got to be the most gutsiest human beings and most articulate perfectionists that God put on this earth, because they have to be perfect. They have to be absolutely perfect. Thousands of guys go through aviation cadets; very few of them, a small percentage of them, ever get to be on a squadron that are going to fly off of a carrier. There's all kinds of squadrons. You know,

some of them may be in search and rescue, some may be in training command, but it's just the crème of the cream, or crème of the—what do you call it?

DePue: Crème de crème.

Leib: Crème de crème. It's going to be the guys that land on the carriers. And if he screws up a couple times, he ain't going to be on there; he's going to be sitting somewhere else. They're going to transfer him, get rid of him, or he's going to move down there to do some paperwork-type pencil-pusher. Like we had one full commander that crashed three airplanes in a row, two or three airplanes in a row, and that was it, his flying duties was over, done, finished. But the first plane he crashed when he moved to jets—and this guy's, you know, been in the Navy twenty years or so or whatever, and he crashed a jet on a bad landing because he stalled out, the second cruise, when we started using jets, because they have to come in at a faster landing speed, and he stalled and hit the deck, lost a million-dollar airplane. And then they restored him to flying duty, and he was a squadron commander, if I recall. I think his name was Dusty Rhodes . Called him "Dusty" because his last name was Rhodes . Nice guy.

He made a strafing run with a jet. Jets don't do very good on strafing, not on hillside countries like over in Korea, and I swear to God he brought that airplane back… He dropped down in one of them hollows I guess on the strafing run just like you do with a Corsair and tried to pull it up and took part of the trees with him. He landed that plane, and it looked like a brush pile coming in. I swear to God I never seen nothing like it. And they kept thinking he wouldn't make it, he wouldn't make it. He made it back to the ship, made a perfect landing, but the jet was totaled. I mean, it was dented, it had leaves sticking out, had brush sticking out of it. How in the hell the man flew the plane back, I don't know, but that was the end of his flying career. He brought half a tree back with him, seemed like. I mean, there was leaves and everything come off of it. But he totaled the plane. He absolutely totaled it. He tried to make a low pass like you do with the other, and it didn't come back up. They had to learn they didn't handle—the pilots told me the worst thing about the jet, you don't have any noise. You don't hear all that power. You give the rush, and there's nothing. You open up the throttle, and (makes gently swishing sound) you're going, and you don't hear nothing. Where you're used to in a Corsair or something, you pop that throttle, (makes roaring sound) you're off, you know. And said that was the hardest thing to get used to; they couldn't get used to it. I know a couple Navy pilots here in town, two twin brothers, one of them qualified for carrier landings during the tail end of the war; the other couldn't qualify. They both were Navy pilots, but it's kind of like that *Top Gun* movie; they have to really, really, really be… And when you compare the old Corsairs—as I think of it now, it's kind of like when I was a kid, the Model-T Fords and the Model-A Fords. I mean, old workhorses, and man, they're tough and they're rugged, and you know, but they got a blind spot on landing.

See, the American Navy wouldn't even use Corsairs until the latter part of World War II; they gave them to the British. The British used them, and then the Marines started using them, and the Navy never really used very many of them. They stayed with that F6, or used to be the F4, then, let's see, the Wildcat, and then they called the last one, the F6, the Hellcat. They were the popular planes in World War II, and the Corsair was kind of in the background. Then the Marines started using them.

Like my flight deck officer said, "Man, I want to tell you something." He said, "Gary, you can't imagine. When you come in with one of them Corsairs with them 350s in each wing, that's a strafing son of a bitch. Man, you never seen nothing like it in your life. I like the F6s and all of them, but, boy, that Corsair." He said, "The only thing, their blind spot when they come to land, with that gull wing and everything, but they handle and they perform, you know."

DePue: They're certainly a lot prettier, I think, than either the Wildcat or the Hellcat.

Leib: Yeah, and I didn't realize—you watch all the WWII movies, and you hardly ever see a Corsair, except the Marines had some, but it's all the Hellcats. Well, the Wildcats in the first part of the war were too slow, and then they brought the Hellcat out. The last one they brought at the tail end of the war, the Bearcat, the F8, they never used it much because it was too hot to handle. It had too much engine, too short of wings, and they had a hell of a time landing them on carriers. They come in too hot and too fast, and so they used them for training and everything, but they never really used them in any carrier warfare. They were just too hot.

DePue: Could the Corsairs fold their wings?

Leib: Yeah, The Corsair folds, the F6 drops hers back.

DePue: Okay, that's right.

Leib: The Corsairs fold, and the ADs fold theirs. But when I was at Seattle I used to watch some of them F8s come in and land, and then the first Blue Angels I ever went to, they used their F8 as their chase plane when they first come—they had F8s originally. Then they had one F8, and they called him *Beetle Bomb.* They used him for a chase plane, and they used all the jets… And them damned F8s got so much engine, they could take off from here to that wall and go straight up. As long as he could get that gear clean, they could land straight up. They gave all those demonstrations that way, and it was amazing.

DePue: You're talking about maybe fifteen, twenty feet.

Leib: Hardly any deck at all. I'd say somewhere between fifty and a hundred feet. If he could get them wheels off the ground, he could pull that baby and go, I mean just straight, absolutely straight up. Phenomenal.

DePue: Okay. This is probably a great place to stop today. It's been a lot of fun. We're going to pick this up again tomorrow and hear about going back to Korea and a few more incidents and finish up with that. So thank you very much, Gary.

Leib: All right, thank you.

(end of interview #1

Interview with Gary Leib

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Interview # 2: October 6, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Wednesday, October 6, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here again with Gary Leib. This is our second session, and again, we're in Winchester, in Gary's home. Now, Gary, it's going to be a long time before we get to these letters here. We've got a lot of territory to cover before that time.

Leib: Fine.

DePue: So when we left off yesterday, you had just gone back to the States. Actually, we ought to say, the USS *Boxer*, (laughs) which you were serving on, had gone back to the States because of this maintenance problem, and you discussed that it was because they had that very quick trip to deliver aircraft to Korea even before you joined up with the ship. So tell us a little bit about what happened, what you guys did when you arrived back in the States. First of all, where was the maintenance conducted?

Leib: The ship went into Hunters Point Navy Shipyard, and that's down south of San Francisco, down near where the ballpark's at now, you know, all the football games and everything's at. And it's quite an extensive yard. It was a very interesting thing. I, being a ship's driver, had a Navy driver's license. And being the ship's driver, I was one of the first ones off and out with the Jeeps and running errands back and forth to San Francisco and over to Oakland and whatever. To see a monster of a ship like that, which is a city within itself, go into drydock, it's just unreal. And the amazing thing about it, when they went to take it in to drydock or take it in alongside the pier to put it into drydock, they had a hard time maneuvering in there, a large ship; they got the boats alongside, the tugboats, to push it in. The captain of the ship, Captain Cameron Briggs, which later became admiral, was really a go-getter, and he took over the controls himself. He didn't like the way they took it in. He backed that big dude out into the channel, and I thought he was going to take the wharf and everything with him. I mean, he backed that baby out just like you'd back a car and give full throttle and, I mean, out he went and (claps) back in he went, and he sat that baby right up alongside the dock, and they threw the lines over, prepared to put her in the drydock. Amazing. I mean, (laughs) he just didn't like the way they were parking it. I told him one time later at a meeting, I said, "Man, you did a fantastic job on that ship." And he said, "I never really was very good. I was a good pilot and a good ship handler." He said, "I'm not the best car driver in the world,"—that was later on when I was driving him—"but I daggone sure know how to maneuver a ship."

DePue: I bet you didn't say, "Man, you sure knew how to drive that ship."

Leib: (laughs) No. Well, we'd had an incident later on about that where he wrecked one of our cars, which he wasn't supposed to be driving. I was supposed to be driving, and he took it on himself and had an accident with it. I was kind of kidding him about that—but this is years later, and we're not in the Navy. And we passed it off at that time.

DePue: How long was the ship in drydock, then?

Leib: We were in there for quite some time, I think probably six weeks or something like that. I'm not exactly sure on the time now. But they did a job on it, and most of the guys got to go home on leave. Being one of the newer ones on there, I didn't get to come home on leave until… The first group got to go home before Christmas, second group got to go home basically to get home by New Year's, supposedly.

DePue: And you were part of the second group?

Leib: And I was part of the newer group, so I got to come home then and go back, and it was still in drydock then and pretty well finished up. Then naturally we went out on maneuvers out to San Francisco and go out underneath the

Golden Gate, which I don't know how many times I've gone underneath the Golden Gate, but it's kind of an awesome experience. It sings to you when you go under. It's quite an emotional thing when you're coming back underneath there when you've been overseas. But anyhow, we went out and did maneuvers and ended up all the way down and eventually pulled into San Diego, but first we came back and took on supplies again after we did our maneuvers and qualifying pilots.

We went down to San Diego, and they did some more stuff down there, and then they were going back to San Francisco. They left the squadrons down in the San Diego area, were picking up new squadrons and making changes and whatever. A lot of the guys had their automobiles. A lot of the officers had their cars and stuff, and we loaded all the individuals' cars and put them on the flight deck and the hangar deck and took them back. My mind is slipping here a little bit; I don't remember where we took them. San Francisco to San Diego—we took them one way or the other, and we loaded probably several hundred cars on there. And, (laughs) again, being ship's driver, I had to be on the flight deck, and I was kind of parking the cars. Just us drivers that had Navy driver's license was allowed to park them. They'd lift them on, and we'd park them. But I thought it was pretty nice to be able to do that for them.

DePue: See, that's the kind of story that most of us folks who've never been in the Navy or never close to the Navy would have never imagined, but it makes sense, hearing you talk about it.

Leib: The Navy's an amazing organization. I've talked to some of the old chiefs and things. In the old days, you know, you went on a ship, you might spend your whole career on one ship. I remember one old chief petty officer telling me about when he went on the USS *Arizona* back towards the end of World War I. He stayed on it all the way till just before Pearl Harbor. He moved from a seaman apprentice all the way up to chief petty officer, and finally they had to transfer him off because they had too many guys moving up in rank. He got off like in 1940, and of course it was sunk in 1941.

DePue: How does San Francisco compare as a liberty port to a place like San Diego or up near Seattle?

Leib: Well, San Diego, there was just too many sailors, basically. I mean, the street was just full of white hats, here, there, and everywhere, and San Francisco and Seattle kind of absorbs them. You know, I mean there's enough places to go. And there are so many different facilities in San Diego; there's the destroyer squadrons and submarines, there's a little bit of everything down there.

DePue: Not to mention the Marines in town.

Leib: And the Marines and whatever. Everybody has their own bar. The Marines have the bars [where] they hang out, and then they break down just like the Navy does; the aviation guys go to one place and the ground pounders go to another. The destroyer sailors got this bar they hang around, and they don't want any carrier guys in there, and the carrier guys got the bars they go in, and the aviation group got their bars, and the deckhands do. It segregates itself. It's just like I found early on, if you're a sailor, you and your buddies, you don't go in some bar or someplace that's inhabited by a bunch of Marines. They don't want you in there, same as a bunch of a paratroopers or a bunch of Air Force guys. That's theirs. They don't want any different. So you hung around with your own. I think I sometimes thought like a pack of dogs; we hung around with our own group, you know. But Frisco's one of the most interesting places in the world. Seattle is. San Diego's a great place, nice weather and all that, but really not too much.

DePue: During the time you're back in the States, things in Korea got really, really dicey. This is during the Chosin Reservoir, during the—

Leib: Very bad.

DePue: —retreat on the western side, which the guys who were there ended up calling the "big bug-out" where the Army forces got pushed back and beaten up pretty severely, especially the 2nd Division. This time around, you're in a different environment than being on shipboard. Were you paying attention to what was going on?

Leib: Oh, yeah. Going home, I went up to Hamilton Air Base to catch a hop. I lined up with a Marine that was back from the Frozen Chosin, had been wounded in the Frozen Chosin, and he was getting the rehab leave, had been out of the hospital. He had a problem with his eyesight and whatever, and I kind of guided him. He just followed me around, because basically he was almost blind. I stayed with him on different hops to Albuquerque and Albuquerque to somewhere down in Louisiana, and finally at Louisiana we ended up hitchhiking, and then we ended up getting on a bus and got into Memphis. Then he went one way over to Ohio, and I came on up here. Kid by the name of Thomas. Nice guy, but he was really handicapped at the time. He was telling me about the Frozen Chosin and some of the problems that they had and whatever, because we left at the very beginning. Then when I went back, I caught shore patrol with Armed Service Police, and we had to deal with some of the guys that had came back on their first liberty, some of the Marines and whatever. It was kind of an awkward, uncomfortable situation, because they'd went through hell, and (laughs) you have to enforce the regulations, but you have to go easy and whatever, you know, because the guys that seen the bad times, they're hard to deal with. Combat veterans come back and they're all broke up and whatever. And we brought guys in. I seen what you call a master sergeant in the Marine Corps crying like a baby, pick him up in a bar, and have to take him in and put him in protective custody, because they don't

want him in there. They don't want Marines with ribbons all over that's—you know, he was reliving some of his experience. It's a sad, horrible thing.

DePue: Was there a sense that you had or maybe some of the other shipmates, that, Man, we were supposed to be over there. Except for this accident with the ship, we should have been there helping them out.

Leib: Yeah. Well, (laughs) it was shortly thereafter that we were there, because we went back—we were back in the early part of March, and this happened in November or December if I remember correctly—and this guy really was unreal. The Marines were still getting the heck beat out of them just like the one, and the Army, too, when the Chinese and everything come in. And when they changed the shore patrol arrangement, they didn't put two sailors out on shore patrol anymore; they put a sailor, an airman, and an Army dude, and all were senior petty officers or whatever, and they all carried, you know, armed. They did the same thing in San Francisco that they did in Hawaii and the same thing they did in Tokyo when I stood Armed Service Police there, because you don't know who you're going to deal with, you know. Sailors can deal with sailors a little better, and Air Force guys can deal with their people a little bit better, and then you're the backup. That's the way it worked out.

DePue: This is jumping just a little bit ahead, but General MacArthur took an awful lot of flak because of his promises that the war was going to be over by Christmas, that we're going to go all the way up to Yalu [River], and then having all of this turn sour, and by the time you were either heading back or right after you got back, Truman relieves him. You remember that?

Leib: Yes, sir. And MacArthur—of course, MacArthur is greatly admired by everybody—you know, the Navy, Army, Marines, the whole bit. The great thing about MacArthur: he understood the Oriental mind and their total mindset, and he did a fantastic job when he was running Japan. Actually he run it. He set up the whole thing, and he run it. We weren't allowed to bother, pick on, no—absolutely be kind and courteous to the Japanese, and they were the same way with us. It was almost hard to realize that they had been such a terrible enemy of us because they were so doggone good to us and so doggone nice to us. You know, I mean, they wouldn't steal your money. If you left your change on a bar or something that you bought, they'd run down the street to give you back every nickel of it. You know, they're very honest, outgoing people. But that was MacArthur's—he treated them fair, and whatever, and woe be to the person that mistreated one of them, because he just didn't allow it, you know.

Now, in Yokasuka , where we came in all the time, Yakuzka[3] Naval Base—some call it Yokasuka—which was the big base where they built their

[3] To the American ear, this sounds like the way the Japanese pronounce it.

great warship—golly, what's the name?—the *Yamato*.[4] That's where we tied up at, and that was a huge, huge shipyard. I mean, shipyard and the world's largest crane there where they could lift humongous ships out of the water, and it was all totally protected. The whole base is a series of small mountains with all kinds of caverns and caves that you could run two trucks into all the caves where they could just virtually run everything inside, and the same way with their air base up near Atazuke (Itazuke?). They had their hangars made where they could put hundreds of airplanes in there, and they could put thousands of guys; we could have bombed them till the end of the world with conventional bombing, and they could come right back out and rebuild everything because they were [protected.] But it was a whole new experience.…

DePue: So what did you and your buddies think about MacArthur getting canned?

Leib: Well, my personal feeling and most of us, we didn't really care of the idea. It seemed like MacArthur was the man, he was the leader, and it was kind of, you know… I don't know if we had any great discussions about it—well, I imagine we did have some—but everybody appreciated him and respected him. I know he was kind of a prima donna, but then again, they still respected him. You know, he had his way of doing things.

DePue: Okay. You get back to Korea in March of 1951, or maybe you stopped off at…Yokosuka?

Leib: Yokasuka. Yokasuka, and then there's Kawasaki and Yokohama and Tokyo; they're all *bang, bang, bang*, right up the bay there. When you pull into the harbor, you're just coming into the Tokyo Bay, and you look up and see Mount Fuji when you come in.

DePue: Okay. So this is in Tokyo Bay; this is on the eastern side of the island, southeastern side.

Leib: Yeah, Honshu.

DePue: Did you spend just a couple days there before going back to the Sea of Japan off of North Korea?

Leib: Every time we went into Yokasuka, it was usually an average of nine days to take on supplies and any minor repairs we had to do, and then immediately we'd head straight out to Korea and into the Sea of Japan and start our maneuvers. One ship always relieved another. There was always two carriers in port, usually, at Yokasuka, and at least two with us, sometimes three, and it was always one battle wagon, a couple of cruisers and usually about a dozen destroyers. They alternated the same way. The *Missouri*, the *New Jersey*, and

[4] Perhaps Leib means the *Yamamoto* named for the famous Japanese admiral of World War II.

the *Iowa* battleships alternated; the cruisers, *Worcester* and *St. Paul* and all of those, alternated in the same way.

DePue: This was still known as Task Force Seventy-Seven?

Leib: It's always Task Force Seventy-Seven. And eventually, before the Korean War was over, almost every CV-class carrier that was in the United States Navy, had a tour in Korea. The mainstays, the first ones was, of course, the *Boxer*, the *Princeton*, the *Philippine Sea*, and I'm missing one there; I can't think of the other. But anyhow, practically all of the carriers that were brought back in commission were over. Basically again, this goes like the Navy's way of thinking: every officer in the United States Navy wants the command of a carrier. That's the highest up you can be, and once you had your tour of a carrier—usually their tours lasted a year, year and a half—then maybe you moved on up into being admiral, whatever. You went from a flier, a pilot, to assistant squadron leader and then squadron leader and then air boss, and move right onto the line. That was your way to move through the ranks.

DePue: Did you have a new complement of aircraft when you came back over?

Leib: Yeah, brand new. We had the jets first time. We had the Panther jets.

DePue: The F9 Panther.

Leib: They had qualified the F9s on the *Boxer* before, but we hadn't operated with them, and we had to learn a totally different way to handle them, because the jets have to be catapulted off. They cannot get enough power to run up the deck and take off like the ADs or the Corsairs could, and we still had a large complement of ADs, the Skyraiders, because they were the workhorses, and the Corsairs are the workhorses that haul the napalm and the rockets and all that.

DePue: What was the Skyraider? What was its mission? Bomber?

Leib: Bomber. The Skyraider is basically a bomber. It could haul, I don't know, they said as much as B-17 during World War II. I don't know if that's possible or not, but you could really load them up with 500-pound bombs, and they had enough power they could get off the deck in four or five hundred feet.

DePue: Was it a single-engine aircraft?

Leib: Single-engine aircraft.

DePue: But a prop.

Leib: Prop. I don't know the horsepower, 4360 probably wasn't near which one they had, but it was a bigger engine Corsair.

DePue: Was it a little different dance for you guys working around those jets versus the props?

Leib: The jets was a whole different ballgame because we had to learn how to protect ourselves and our men because of getting burned. And, of course, you can even get sucked in a certain situation. You have to be very careful. Most of the pilots that were flying the jets hadn't a lot of hours in a jet; they had to learn a different technique on taking off, a different technique on landing, because they had to come in faster, and they couldn't slow down much like a prop job does when he comes in to land. They had to come in what you'd say "hot" because they would flame out. And we've had ones, seen them flame out, I mean, coming in for landing and they'd cut the throttle back and just, (claps) *bang*, right down in the water.

DePue: Were the F9s used for bombing missions or close air support?

Leib: They tried them for bombing missions. They weren't very effective. They haul a light load of bombs, and they weren't much good for strafing. Basically for what you said, CAP. They always flew over the whole task force for protection, to watching the MiGs, and they flew to basically a light load and to protect the Skyraiders and the Corsairs, basically what their mission was. They tried other missions with them.

DePue: Did Corsairs also go on CAP missions?

Leib: No, the Corsairs **would strictly use them** for close air support.

DePue: Okay, okay.

Leib: And they tried different things with the jets, but the jets were very hard to handle on the deck because you can't taxi them like you can an ordinary airplane. You have to have a guy on the front to guide the nose wheel with a big, long bar, and even if it's rudder power, guys pushing it to maneuver around, and then (claps) shoot them off on the cats. And actually, after we got used to them, you left them; they was sitting on the catapults all the time in case of an attack or something, and if there was any flying over above, then there's two more ready to go up and relieve them. So there was always several in a constant circle around the whole task force besides the ones that went off on the mission.

DePue: How real a threat were the MiGs?

Leib: Well, everybody was very weary of them, or leery or weary or whatever you want to call it, because so many things was going bad at that time, and the Chinese was overrunning everything.

DePue: I knew there was a lot of air-to-air combat over the Yalu River, over the northern border between China and North Korea, but were the MiGs occasionally attacking the surface ships as well?

Leib: Some of our planes were shot down by MiGs. Actually, the strange thing about it, they said a Skyraider shot down the first MiG that was shot down during the war. Now, I don't know if that's a fact or not, but they did say that.

DePue: Why was that strange?

Leib: Well, because the Air Force (laughs) with their, what is it, F-80 or whatever, they claimed that they had control—

DePue: F-80s and F-84s.

Leib: They did basically most of it.

DePue: Well, the Skyraider's not an air-to-air aircraft either, is it?

Leib: No, no, he wasn't, but if you got right lined up in his sights, you was a gone gosling because they had some pretty good armament on them, you know.

DePue: Were you ever in an occasion, or remember an occasion, where they attacked the *Boxer*, where a MiG attacked the *Boxer*?

Leib: No, we had to go to general quarters a number of times when they picked them up on the radar screen, but apparently when they would get close to the task force with all the guns and armament… When we'd have gunnery practice, you can't believe how much flak and stuff goes up in the air when you've got twelve destroyers, two cruisers, a battleship, and the carriers—all had all kinds of armament. I mean, every kind of a weapon you could think of—had 40-millimeter quads, they had five-inch cannons, four double fives and a single five in the front—I mean, on the port side forward and on the aft side rear.

DePue: When you say double fives, it's five-inch guns?

Leib: Five-inch guns.

DePue: Big gun.

Leib: Big guns. And they used the explosive-type shells that go up and make what they call the Black Roses, you know, where the shrapnel goes and everything. And then they had the twenty-millimeter mounts where the Marines mounted them, a bunch of small twenties where they get in and they shoot the double twenties out. They had two or three banks of them, and they finally took them off because they caused more problems than they did good because the guns

were not basically synchronized, where if they'd shoot at a target and come down, they might hit another ship out alongside.

DePue: Well, that's what I was thinking.

Leib: So they finally just took them all off.

DePue: Even the five-inch, all that flak in the air, that stuff's got to come down someplace, and I'm sure a lot of it came down right on top of the ship.

Leib: I don't know if any ever came down on the ship the way they were shooting that, and I've been out there when they did target practice and wherever, but they were all shooting away from—it looks like the whole sky is filled up, but it actually goes away from everybody. I'm not a gunner's mate. I've watched a lot of it. The amazing thing to me—I loved to watch them quad forties, like the Brits used during the war and everything.

DePue: *Pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-pop*?

Leib: Oh, my. Then when them five-inch guns went off—and we slept right below one of the five-inch turrets, and of course they're a mechanical marvel within theirself with the elevators for the ammunition comes up down below and everything—if they had gunnery practice and we were in our compartment, we'd have to batten down all the hatches. My gosh, the flame and smoke would come rolling right back in there. You know, they'll shoot flame out for fifteen, twenty feet, and it comes right down the side of the ship, you know, and you get the smoke and everything inside there. I don't know how anybody could live on the deck of a battleship when they fire them sixteens—my God, because they light up—it looks like the fire shoots out of them for a hundred feet ahead of them, you know, and it's just unreal.

DePue: I wanted to go ahead and read this first letter that I had highlighted, and Gary, just the part that I did have highlighted. We're a little out of sequence. This is April…

Leib: This jumps up to '52. This is on the last cruise.

DePue: You guys, even that far into the war, were worried about MiGs, so if you can read that for us.

Leib: Okay. "April 12, 1952, Korea. Dear Mother, Well, tomorrow is Easter Sunday, and for us it's supposed to be quite an event. We are going to have one of the biggest strikes we've ever had. They haven't put out any information as to what it's about, an invasion or what, but we know it's going to be big, and we will be deep in enemy territory. They figure that we might get jumped by commie airplanes, and we will know tomorrow. Anyhow, they'll be taking all kinds of precautions"—I can't read my own writing here—"and they brought in some more destroyers to support the task force,

and the ships will be all at general quarters and battle stations, in other words, from 5:30 in the morning till tomorrow night because of the danger of attack. Everything practically that can fly is going off in one big launch, the biggest one set-up I've ever seen, so it must really be something big. Everyone has a few minutes away, whether they attacked us or not, so we won't know till tomorrow." I think I meant a few minutes off there.

DePue: Okay. And how often were you writing home?

Leib: Well, (laughs) I had to write my mother probably once a week or whatever. We didn't have a day room like you do in the Army, Air Force type thing. We went down to mess decks, because you didn't have room in our compartment. When there's eighty-something guys sleeping in less room than I've got right here, or eighty-five people, you don't have a lot of room when you're stacked like sardines… So you go down to mess decks and write your letters on the mess table. When I was stationed at Corpus, I didn't write my mother as much as she thought I ought to, and so I got called in the chaplain's office and got reprimanded for that, so I thought it was easier to keep writing Mother (laughter) than be—DePue: To have her sic the chaplain on you, huh?

Leib: —than have her have the chaplain on my butt. But anyhow, that incident, too, that's the same that the book James Michener wrote about *The Bridges of Toko-Ri* when we were getting ready for that strike. And actually it was the power plants on the Yalu, and we were really, really way up. We were very close to the Russian border, way up in northern Korea, as far as they could go. And the amazing thing about it is the way they worked it out; the task force run up there, we launched the planes, and then, boy, everybody turned and headed back across the Sea of Japan back towards Japan. And then the planes had a longer range to come back to get back to the ship, and we lost a lot of planes.

In fact, one of the pilots that I knew real well was lost on that mission, among the several, and I inquired about him. Him and I used to sit around when they were getting ready to launch or lining up the planes, sit around and yak about California., He was going to buy him a new Mercury Monterey when he got out of the Navy. He was just a nice guy. And I asked one of the other pilots, "Why didn't he make it?" He said, "Well, he was a Skyraider pilot, like the rest of us, and when he went back down on his bombing run," he said, "a lot of guys got down and they pulled out early, you know, and dropped their bombs. He took his all the way." He took his a little bit further than he should, and he got down, and whether he got part of his own bomb blast or whether he got flak or whatever, "He took it right to them." We had decorated all the bombs and things up on the planes. The guys had wrote messages on them and all kinds of silly stuff that they do. But that was what his squadron-mate said about him, said he was gung-ho, and he wanted to make sure he hit his target, and he did everything but hand it to them.

DePue: Were there some of the aircraft that got banged up and that ended up having to ditch in the water?

Leib: Yeah, we lost a few. If they could get back to the ship and they couldn't get their landing gear down or something, you didn't like to crash-land them on the ship because too much danger of damaging the ship or one of the people that work up there, so they would land them in the water as close to the ship as they could get. If their wheels didn't come down, they try every which way in the world to get them down, and if they didn't, they'd just pancake them in the water, and a helicopter would be right out there kind of following them real close. And I'd seen them—they'd be there so fast that the pilot would just undo his safety harness and walk out on the wing and go right on up.

DePue: What was the helicopter, do you recall?

Leib: Hueys, I believe. I don't know what—

DePue: I don't think the Hueys were in the…

Leib: I forget what they call the darn things, but they're the ones that were so popular during the Korean War. And again, that goes back on the movie by *The Bridges of Toko-Ri*. They showed an example of what it was.

DePue: That was Mickey Rooney's part, wasn't it?

Leib: Mickey Rooney was the chief petty officer that flew the chopper, and he rescued William Holden. They basically did a wing walk there where he basically got out and walked on the wing. But if they're not right there, then they got to go in the water, and of course, I think pilots don't like to get their feet wet; they stay with that plane as long as possible. They didn't want to get sucked in when it goes down. But I don't know how many dozen aircraft I've seen that had to be ditched. And some of them didn't do too well, but some of them did fantastic, just like you'd skip a rock and come down.

DePue: Were you able in your position on the flight deck to go over to, what do you call it, the side, and watch the rescue?

Leib: Well, when you're on the flight deck, you're right there in front of God and everybody. You're seeing everything that goes on. You're watching how they carry alongside, you're watching the landings there. We sat alongside the one carrier—I have to stop to think what the name of it was—but we watched one of the jets come in and land, and took his bounce, took his own wave-off, and gave her full power and jumped over the barriers, but he didn't have enough power to clear, and he landed right amongst all the other jets up forward. The other ABs on that ship were gassing the planes up on the wings and putting the gas tanks, and oh my God, it was horrible. Just a big explosion, and see all these bodies going over the side. The name of the ship—it was a new one; it hadn't been out there too long. Right on the tip of my tongue here. I don't

think it was *Oriskany*. But we kind of watched them and judged them on their performance, and they kind of watched us, you know, and just the way they do things. That might have been the *Oriskany*.

DePue: What class of ship was that.

Leib: Well, it was a CV-class carrier, same as what we were. Oh, I know what it was. It was the *Essex*, CV-9. It was on the *Essex*. Anyhow, mostly in our task force, all we had was CV-class carriers, all the World War II carriers. We did not have any of the CV-Bs, the *Coral Sea*, the *Roosevelt*.

DePue: What was the last letter?

Leib: CV—I think they call it battle carrier, CV-Bs. That was the *Coral Sea*, the *Roosevelt*, and the *Midway*.

DePue: Were they larger, or just an older vintage?

Leib: They were larger, yeah. The newer ones were being made at the tail end of the war and got finished off maybe in the mid-fifties or whatever. And they were longer flight decks and wider and more powerful, and they were a different class of ships. There was a book one time they put out, *Jane's Ships*, and every ship of every nation in the world. One of our guys in the association I belonged to, the *Boxer* Association, took sections of that just on the aircraft carriers and got all this information, exactly how long the flight decks were of the different ships and how powerful the engines were and all that. Part of the CV-class carriers, they call them short-deck carriers because they were just a little bit shorter than the others, and the *Boxer* was a long deck, a full 880 feet. The others were just a little shy of—just a hair over 800, like 802 feet, something like that, and they called them short-deck carriers.

DePue: When you're out on one of these cruises or missions—I don't know what you would call it, what the Navy would call it—were you generally on a thirty-day rotation in the Sea of Japan?

Leib: Every thirty days just like clockwork. We had supply ships come out alongside of us approximately once every ten days, and we would take on armament, ammunition, and fuel, and foodstuffs, basic supplies. We'd be cruising along, and here would be the supply ships like *Cimarron* or the different ones alongside, and then on the other side there'd maybe be a destroyer, and he was taking fuel off of us. It's kind of an intricate operation. It would look like there would be four ships going together. We would be taking on supplies. If there were two carriers and a task force, one of them would be taking on supplies, and the other one would remain active where he could have planes fly off immediately. Then he'd be taking off supplies and we'd be on standby. But then again, with all the food for thirty-two hundred people and all the supplies and all the ammunition and everything, we'd be serviced, like I say, three or four times in that thirty-day period, and then we'd

have to go back in port for nine days to really take on a lot of stores. I don't know why it ended out nine days, but we went right up alongside the dock. Only one time we had to anchor out and wait a day or two to get in because there was too many ships in port at that time.

But it worked out good because that way on our ship we had what we call three-section liberty, so everybody don't have a pass overnight, you know. Everything over in Japan was Cinderella liberty; you had to be back on the ship at twelve o'clock. And if you had evening liberty and got off work at five o'clock or 4:30 or whatever, then you could go do what you want to do, go to the base, eat on the base, go get a haircut, go dancing, whatever, but you had to be back at ship at twelve o'clock. Even if it was a weekend, even if it was a holiday and you had the whole day, you still had to be back Cinderella time, you had to be back on that ship at twelve o'clock. And like I said on the operation, everything's choreographed right down to the fine line.

We had times when we were in that they let guys go on R&R, and so would go to climb Mount Fuji; give them three or four days, and some would go down. I went with a group down to Kobe and rode the trains all the way down there through all the tunnels and seeing the sites and everything down there. Some went to other mountain resorts and whatever. But again, there was only so many could go at a time. The liberty sections part of the time were three-section liberty and part of the time two-section liberty. They called them port and starboard section or port, starboard, and amidships, just according to what the situation was, how bad they needed you, whether they'd let two groups go at once or one group. You know, it was in a constant flux.

In the old Navy, if there's anything good about a combat situation, you do not have to dress for evening chow. If you're in the States or you're in port, you put your blue uniform on, what they call your undress blues—you don't have to put your neckerchief and all that—to go to your evening chow. But once you're on the way to a combat area or in a combat area, that all goes away; you can go in your dungarees and whatever; you go to eat and go back to your work station. But you got all this formality. The Navy and its formality will actually blow you away. We always had to carry four Jeeps, one Carryall, kind of a suburban.

DePue: Jeeps—you're talking about World War II-vintage?

Leib: World War II Jeeps, '48, '49, '50 model Jeep, four of them, and one Chevrolet Carryall and one admiral's car. We never carried a captain's car. We had to carry an admiral's barge and a captain's gig. That's the motor launches if you're anchored out that they go in. Now, regardless of whether you had an admiral on there or not, you had to have a car kept on there for the admiral if he ever had to come on that ship, and his barge, and you had the captain's gig. Then they had a bunch of motor whaleboats for the crew if you were tied out and had to go in and launch for liberty. Well, after the war started, they did

away with the enlisted men's boats, but they still kept the captain's gig and the admiral's barge, (DePue laughs) and the admiral's Plymouth sedan we had at that time. Then when we went in port, they unloaded the admiral's car, they unloaded the four Jeeps and the Carryall, we went out with them, and then whoever was a senior driver—which the last year I was a senior driver—I'd have to go in and check out a Plymouth—they would use all Plymouths at that time—for our captain and bring it down, or the captain's driver himself, his full-time driver, would go get it—one of us. I was the backup driver. It all goes by seniority again. In the seniority, it has to be a petty officer but you can't drive the admiral. The admiral has a Marine drive him, and hours and hours and days and days a Marine would be standing out there ready to drive an admiral that we never had. But he was there if we ever had an admiral. But the same way they'd put them motor launches over the side if we were tied out somewhere, or even if we weren't tied out sometimes, put them over, and the captain wanted to go somewhere, he'd get in his motor launch and go, and the admiral's sat right there ready to go. They had a full-time crew on it, an engineman and boatswain mates, and they kept them babies looking all nice with all the fancy work that they did with the—I was going to say filigree or whatever—all the fancy knots and things that they tie. It looks like lace.

It's the same when you do have an occasion that there are liberty boats for the rest of the crew: the officers go on first, the enlisted men go on last. Then when they come to the dock, the officers get off first and enlisted men get off last. It's all protocol, and it has to be exactly that way. It's the same like when you come aboard the ship, you always salute the color, the flag, and you request from the Officer of the Day "permission to come aboard." You go through the whole routine every time. And we'd have the Officer of the Day and the enlisted men and all the officers use the same gangway, except the admiral. He had his separate gangway, admiral that's not there. But if he ever was there (DePue laughs) he had his deal. The captain would use that deal sometimes, too, but usually he came down the gangway the same as everybody else.

DePue: You know, watching the old movies, you always see the shore patrol. Were the shore patrol people stationed in the port, or did the ship's complement provide some of those people as well?

Leib: Every ship provides its own, and then there's the guys that's from the local deals that have to provide—the squadrons I think have to provide one. And unfortunately again, the V-1 divisions, the air division, which is the biggest division on the ship, the aviation boatswain mates were the only ones that did shore patrol or were drivers. So my daily job in port, I'm out there with my vehicle, eight hours, and then if I don't have the duty and I'm relieved, I can go on liberty, and the duty driver comes on takes my place. But if I've got the duty, then I'm out there, even if I've been out there all day, I'm out there going to be driving at night or else I'm going to be on shore patrol. Or they changed the badges you still wore—one said SP, but you're in with the Armed

Services police, except in Yokosuka. Yakuzka or Yokosuka , whatever you want to call it, is strictly run by Marines because it's strictly a Navy port, and sailors are a little apprehensive about stopping other sailors or picking up other sailors, so the Marines run Yokosuka. They did all the military police there.

DePue: Okay. Talk to us a little bit about what Japan was like. This was only six, seven years after the end of the Second World War.

Leib: Five years, yeah, just barely five years.

DePue: When you first got there—five years—what was it like?

Leib: Well, there was still a lot of damage you could see from the war and everything, but it was the most interesting place. I'd like to go back to Japan sometime; it was the most interesting place I've ever been in my life. In Yokasuka and Yokohama and all the places, according to whether an air base or Navy or Army or what was there, man, the people really set up dance halls and things all over. They just grew like mushrooms, you know; they popped up. And even it got so enlisted men and officers that reenlisted in the Navy or the Army, Air Force, Marine, they went in partnership with some of the Japanese to build nightclubs—very successful—took their reenlistment bonuses and whatever. So we'd come in Yokosuka, and the first time we come in there, after the war had been over about five years, there was about two or three clubs besides the big enlisted men's club and the petty officers' club and the senior petty officers' club and the officers' club, and, of course, VOQ. Being an officer. I would tell you the expression enlisted men use for the words VOQ, but I don't want to hurt your feelings. (laughter) And of course I've spent a lot of trips back and forth to the VOQ and to the dances that they had for the officers and whatever. The only bad thing about being a Navy driver—they come out and get in your vehicle and say, "Take me to the VOQ." Well, you know where that's at. Fine. Or "Take me to here." Well, you may not know where that's at . Well, to a lieutenant or something, you might say, "Well, listen. I think I got an idea. Well, it's down here" or whatever, and you take him there. But when you drive the captain and he comes down and tells you "Take me so-and-so," you better figure out where he wants to go. It's kind of an awesome experience. You're supposed to know, (laughs) no matter if it's the first time you're driving him. But I made many trips to the VOQ and the mail and running different places, some of us out to some of the other areas. I enjoyed hauling—especially because I knew a lot of pilots. You're only supposed to drive a Jeep so fast, you know. They'd say, "Come on, kick this thing in the butt. Let's go. Let's move." Well, you get caught running over thirty-five, you're in trouble, and so you might budge a little bit, but they had their limits on everything. Of course, you ride on the wrong side of the road in Japan. Of course, in Hawaii, you ride just like we do here.

DePue: Well, you guys are out on the ship for thirty days, working very hard, seeing lots of things that you'd just as soon forget. The pilots are risking their lives every time they go up and every time they take off and land. A typical sailor, were they ready to party hard when they got to port?

Leib: The pilots are wild. They're like a motorcycle gang, you might say. Them guys do some wild things, and they don't have any fear. They're just unreal. I'm sure some of them do, but they're pranksters, too. They pull stuff on each other and things like that. For instance, we had one hot-rod pilot, and he'd burn his engine up on the Corsair, run it just wide open everywhere he went. These guys have got their own mind. When they'd come in and land the plane, they're supposed to go exactly by the director. You're supposed to tell them to come, and they're supposed to come at a normal speed. They're not supposed to give her full throttle and *vroom* down the deck. If they do, the air officer up there is screaming at you and you're telling him to slow down, and then they'll tell you quick afterwards that "That old boy up there is not flying that airplane, I'm flying that airplane, and I'm going to run it as fast and hard as I want to, you know." I mean, they're very that way.

But I seen them pull tricks on each other. The most amazing thing I ever seen: This one hot-rod pilot, like I said, he burned up his engine, so he didn't get to go on the mission the next day because they put a new engine in his aircraft, so they had him fly that aircraft that was getting an engine broke in with some other pilot and let the other pilot go in his place. So he had to fly over the task force, breaking this engine in, four hours, around and around and around in the upper landing pattern. When they come in to land, of course, they get in this pattern. They're starting up, and they keep coming down. The jets are always allowed to land first, so we get them up and out of the way, and then the prop jobs come in next. Well, he's up there around and around and around, bored to death, you know. We look out, and all the sudden he's doing rolls, (whistles). And all the guys on the decks looking, and naturally the air officer, he sees us looking, so he runs around on the back side, and he sees (makes noise) playing up there. So the next day, instead of going on a flight, they send him up again to break in another airplane and said, "This time, you just fly her around in circles—no acrobatics, no nothing." So he's up there flying around like a good boy. And after a while, four hours just riding around in a big circle, he was bored to death, and he wanted to come back aboard the ship. His bladder was pretty well full, and he didn't want to use the relief tube on his plane. You got a little relief tube with a ventura that you can urinate in and it blows out. He didn't particularly want to use it. Anyhow, he got down in the landing pattern, and they ignored him, they waved him off, because the jets hadn't came in yet. Well, the jet pilots got on the radio, and they're aware that he's wanting to land and he's got a bladder problem and he's wanting to go to the bathroom real bad. So he's in the pattern and they come in from the mission and they see him down in their pattern, and they (makes whooshing sound) go by him just like that. When they go by him, it just flips him over like this, you know. And he's using his

relief tube at that time. (DePue laughs) After the jets land, he comes in and lands. And he was a hot-rod. He was the California type. He wore his flight suit, boy, all tailored up and everything. He was wet from one end to another because he had peed all over himself, and he was one mad cat. That was the kind of thing that they did. That was the funniest thing I've ever seen in my life, see a mad pilot come in and the jet pilots had winged him, so to speak, and flipped him and made him pee on himself. (DePue laughs) But they're up to all kind of hijinks.

They were good to us directors because we had kind of the power—not the power of life and death on them or anything like that—but we had control of the planes, and they had to do exactly like we said. If they made a mistake and they come too fast and they cut too close to another airplane, it was always pilot error, because if we gave them brake signal and our deck officer was out there and had seen it and they chewed up the tail of another airplane, it wasn't our fault, it was the pilot's fault, and they were the one that suffered the consequences for it, you know. But I've only had one or two accidents that he wasn't paying real attention when I gave him the brake signal and he got the tail of the other one. If they were too reckless around the directors, the flight deck officer, a pilot himself, wasn't too proud to jump up on the wing and say, "Hey, you're trying to kill my men out here on the thing. You keep that damn thing—you go by what he's signaling you, or, you know, there's going to be consequences."

The first time I got hurt on there, **and of all** the accidents I've seen, that was on that deal that they were going up on the Yalu. Of course, all the pilots were jittery and jumpy, and when we were pulling planes out of the stack, I like to run on the port side. My buddy John, he liked the starboard side. So you get locked in. So I'm bringing the aircraft out, and as soon as I get him out, I get his wings unfolded and unlock his tail wheel, bring him out, get his wings folded. And this one Corsair pilot, when I brought him out and then I gave him to the next director that turns him to pull him into the position where he can go straight down the deck in control of the landing signal officer. Well, basically when we come out, they're all back here like this, and I pull him out, and then I turn him, and I hand him to this director up here, and he brings him into the takeoff pattern with the flight deck officer. Well, when he was in this position right here, I come back, walk back to his tail, and I'm standing right in front of this—well, it would be this airplane here because he came out of the middle—I'm standing right in front of this airplane, and I give the signal for him to unlock his tail wheel and for the kids to hold his brakes, I'm getting ready to pull his chock, and this guy right here—

DePue: The guy in front.

Leib: —gives a full-power turn-up Full-power turn-up, and checks his mags out. And you're not supposed to do it in that position. The only time you're supposed to check them is when you're back here in the stack or when you're

right ready to take off, and you want to give hand signals down to the flight deck officer that you're going to do it because there's men standing behind you. And if you ever stood behind a Corsair when he gave full-power turn-off… So I'm standing right here, and I go right into this prop behind me, I scrambled down and got below where the prop just went over the top of my head, down on my hands and knees, rolling across and under this one here, and right over the side of the ship. That was about the most scariest things I've ever had in my life. I think I got that wrong; it must have been this plane here towards the edge. But I was probably, oh, forty feet from the edge of the ship, and on the left-hand side of this plane, and I go right in towards that prop, and I thought, man, I'd had it. I went so close to it that I could feel that baby when I went underneath of it, and all the way over, and over the side. When I went over the side, the catwalks all down there, and they've got wire alongside of them, guide wire to hold onto, and that's where the guys that run the controls run the arresting gear line across there. And man, I went all the way down, headfirst down in through there and over the side, and these guys grabbed me by the legs and pulled me back up, or I'd have went right down in the ocean. The landing signal officer is just a few yards back behind there.

Several months before that, I had seen one of our petty officers get blown over the same, just a little bit further back, and he had went down and landed astraddle the five-inch cannon down there, which did not do much for his equipment. I mean, he was one sore, hurting dude for a while. And when they pulled me back out and got the corpsman and the doctor over there, they took me right down to the hospital. It wasn't scary, it was terrifying. I'm to this side of the prop, and you get so close to the props—I mean, there's props on both side of you, and you get so close, but you got to keep your hands up here. You can't put your hand out like this. You got to be real, real close when he's telling him to move.

DePue: So all the hand movements are right there next to your head.

Leib: Everything's handy. If you're out in an open space you can get them out farther, you know, but basically when you're in close, when they're parked in close, you're keeping them close to your head. You're starting, unlock the tail wheel and hold your brakes and pull the chocks out, and then you're starting to say, Okay, come forward, come forward, come forward, come forward, and when he clears, then you get him to lock his one brake so he can turn the aircraft. And I had just turned… But that was the most scariest thing I've ever did in my life.

When I got out of the hospital, I had a severely strained wrist and kind of bruised and banged around, and they put me on light duty for awhile. Then after that, two or three days later, I started having nightmares and all kinds of stuff. I had a reaction probably a day or two later, and they had me back down in the hospital and checking me all out, kept me down there a week, five or six days, and they were going to send me back to Tokyo, Tokyo General. It's

calm and quiet and everything down there. They did blood work on me, and the blood work was wrong, everything was wrong. In a few days, everything started coming around, and I went back to duty.

DePue: Well, this might be a good time to bring up another incident that you remember very well, and it's the accident. And I don't know if there's too much more that I need to introduce this. I'll turn it over to you, and you tell us roughly when this accident occurred—and I think you know very well when it occurred—and then as much detail as you can, talk about it.

Leib: You're talking about the fire?

DePue: Yes.

Leib: Okay. When I got hurt, that was on Easter Sunday, April the twelfth, I believe it was.

DePue: About the time you wrote that letter?

Leib: The day after I wrote my mom that letter. And then everything went cool, you know, rested a couple, three months, everything was fine. I recall my buddy that worked with me all the time was kidding me about getting scraped across the deck, and then he had the same thing happen to him, and he didn't think it was funny anymore. It scared him to death. Well, anyhow, so everything went cool, and we went through the different things and back in port and out. And him and I had it marked on our calendar how many more days we had to go, because we were both on our involuntary Truman year, year extension. The reason I had took the year extension—I thought about reenlisting in the Navy, but then I thought, Well, if I go for an extra year—I mean, I don't have any choice, I can volunteer or take it involuntarily. So I took it involuntarily to give me another year to think about it, and then if I enlist, I get more money, too, because I have another year in the Navy.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Gary and I took a very quick break, and we're back at it. We both visited the head; I think that's the proper jargon to use in the Navy.

Leib: That's right. Yeah, that's the deal.

DePue: I'll turn it over to you, Gary.

Leib: Okay, now, you want to cover on this deal on the tragedy and fire on the USS *Boxer*, on August 6, 1952. Okay. When this all happened, I had three weeks to go on my involuntary—backdoor draft, involuntary year. In the three weeks they had to let me off the ship, because they had to let you off thirty days early when you're overseas so you can get back to the States and get discharged. Anyhow, to explain how this accident happened, I'll give you a quick basic

idea how an aircraft carrier is designed. It's designed with the gas pumps or fueling stations are all up front for the aircraft. The jets of course use a fuel more like kerosene; the regular aircraft use basic gasoline. It's an intricate system of pumps and whatever, and they do the refueling on the forward part of the ship, on both sides, port and starboard side. The ship has two massive gas tanks, and hundreds of thousands, probably a half a million, gallons of fuel. And I forget how they divided that up now.

DePue: Was this aviation fuel?

Leib: Aviation fuel, very highly inflammable aviation fuel, and then when they put the jets on it, they had to make another arrangement for theirs, for the lower-grade fuel. But anyhow, they had these huge tanks, probably carry at least a half a million gallons of fuel besides hundreds of tons of ammunition. They're stored in one place, gasoline system in another, and here's this intricate system goes up.

But to protect the ship from fire, which is the biggest hazard because of all the fuel and everything that you carry on the ship, like on the hangar deck, there's what they call fire curtains. It's divided where there's automatic curtains in about four or five different sections that can be shut off. And then there's turrets like little small cannons that can blow—a deal just like on a fire truck that can put a flame out, this—what am I trying to say? This white—

DePue: Foam?

Leib: White foam deal.

DePue: Yeah, you can't use water on a…

Leib: Foam cannons. Then there's water cannons, and then there's an intricate sprinkler system. And if a fire starts, I mean, you could just flood the hangar deck, you can shut sections off, you've got foam, and you've got all kinds of regular fire hoses to fight the fire. Okay, here's the bad thing about it: napalm is very, very difficult to put out. Napalm is one of the most horrible weapons. They've tried to outlaw it, because it's a mixture of a soapy mixture in the gasoline, and when it hits, it explodes and goes all over, and it sticks to everything.

DePue: Jellified gas is how I've heard it.

Leib: Jellified gas. They put it in there, and they put them in the huge tanks and gel it. Well, the morning that we were ready for this launch, the planes were all loaded on the forward part of the flight deck so we could pull them back and get them ready for launch, and they were all loaded with ammunition, gasoline, everything. The ones on the hangar deck were already loaded. They had napalm, they had bombs on them, and they were all ready to come up the elevators, and we would launch them.

But first we had to bring in the night fighters, the Hecklers. They'd go out before dawn—the four high-powered Corsairs—to heckle the enemy troops, just to disrupt everything. We was up early in the morning, because the Hecklers were coming in. We had just landed the Hecklers, just got them landed, and had brought them forward, got them parked and got them in position, and we started pulling our planes back to get them in the launching position.

We got them all back and got them in the launching position, and about that time, down on the hangar deck, one of the planes on the aft end of the hangar deck, some electricians were working on it, and when an aircraft has the wings folded, military aircraft, or the wheels down, they are supposed to be unarmed. Machines can't go off, cannons can't go off. It's a safety factor. But somehow they were working on this plane, and static electricity or something set the machine gun off, fifty-caliber round, and it fired into the napalm tank of the plane in front of it, and that plane also had a five hundred–pound bomb on it—all the rest of them had rockets and bombs—and everything on it, and it caused a massive fireball explosion just immediately, just went for hundreds of feet each direction. And when this happened—of course, I wasn't down there to see that; I'm up here on the flight deck. All our planes was parked and ready to launch, and then all we know is there's this terrific explosion. I'm running forward to find out about which plane's landing; I'm going to go to flight deck control. As I'm running forward, this five hundred–pound bomb goes—we knew something was wrong. We knew something was terribly going on, a fire down on the hangar deck, but there hadn't been any explosion at that time. But the plane that had the bomb on it, they couldn't get it—they tried to keep it cooled down and whatever, but there was no way they could get to it because the fire was spreading so fast. When the sprinkler system came down, the napalm got on top of it, and then other napalm deal's loose, and it was just constant fire floating on top of the water. They couldn't get even close to do it.

Anyhow, we had got orders to move the planes all back forward, to get them out of the way. Well, the pilots were scrambling to come up to get in the planes to move them, and we were taxiing them forward as fast as we could, and even some of the plane captains, which, incidentally, know how to start an aircraft—a lot of times they'd start them for the pilot or whatever—and it got down to the point that they were taxiing the planes just like the pilot did, because the pilot was up on another part of the ship and wasn't aware what was going on or didn't get out there in time. So as we were taxiing them forward and I'm running back to get another plane, that daggone bomb went off, and it just brought the whole deck up like this. It knocked everybody up there off our feet, and of course, it killed the guys below us and guys within fifty, sixty feet. I didn't know it at the time; all I knew is just a huge explosion took me off my feet.

We got our planes all moved, and then this massive everything, smoke and fire and everything coming out, and everybody was going berserk. They had all the firefighting equipment out, and they were rushing it down and dropping the elevators down and trying to get the fire under control. It was just spreading like wildfire. And then the heat of the first bomb set the rockets off and set the machine guns off, everything going off by heat.

My division officer grabbed me and John Bowden and said, "There's some guys trapped down there and they're dying down there. We need somebody to go down to try to get them out because they can't get out on the hangar deck because of the explosions, and they're trapped in the fire." So they tried to send me down this one area, and I got down, went down about twenty feet, and just massive flame. And I came back up. I couldn't get down there.

DePue: Down a ladder?

Leib: Down the ladder, down there when they opened it. So they closed that off to keep that fire down in there and had me and John try to go down another way. There's a ladder going down from the island structure, they're going down to different decks like this, and they say, "Gary, you go down the forward one, and John, you go back to the other one, and then you meet down there," and he give me the big battle lanterns and the breathing equipment and all this stuff. And then the OBAs, I think we had like thirty minutes of air, and the gong went off after fifteen or twenty minutes. You were supposed to try to get back where you can breathe again because you're out of oxygen. Anyhow, we go down, and lo and behold, where John and I were supposed to meet, John wasn't there. John had been on the ship longer than I was, but in the confusion, when you can't see—the smoke was so thick, and hear this *bangety-bang*, ammunition going off and stuff out here in the flight deck, and we're right alongside the flight deck with a thing in between us.

DePue: The iron?

Leib: The bulkhead in between us there. And John's not there. So they said the guys was on the forward part of the hangar deck. So I went forward; they had a rope tied on me, a line tied on me, and they were easing it out, and I'm going on up here. I go out on the hangar deck; I just get out there about a foot or two, and hear all this ammunition going *bangety-bangety-bang*, you know, just like somebody shooting over your head.

So I scramble back in, and I guess I was down there fifteen, twenty minutes, and it seemed like I was down there for a week. Can't see nothing. Got this battle lantern, and you can't see that far in front of you. And I'm going back to where I came down—trying to find my way. You can't see any marks, you don't know what's here or what's there. I mean, you're just basically going blind. Just as I get going along there, I trip over somebody,

and I'm down there feeling around, and here's five guys down here with a floor vent, and their officer or chief petty officer, one, he's a brown shoe, had them to breathe; they had came out of one of the offices, and they were trapped. They couldn't get out on the hangar deck, they couldn't get up, they couldn't go down, and he had them down there where they were breathing at this vent. I tried to get control of them, and I shined the light on myself and say we'll take you back up, and trying to yell through this apparatus I had on. A little reluctant, but they finally got the idea. In the meantime, these guys is tugging on the line because my fifteen minutes is about up, or twenty minutes. And hell, they damn near pulled the oxygen breathing thing off of me. Well, we carried these big old knives and stuff with us all the time because if a plane was tied down and we had to launch it in a hurry, we just cut the lines. So I cut the line because they were pulling it off of me and I was going to die down there with these guys. Then I got these guys, got them kind of organized, get the first of them, and get them to wrap their arms around each other. And this is an impossible thing, basically, to do in the situation, because they don't want to. They can't see, their eyes are just matted, and they're hot and whatever. But I got them like a herd of cattle towards the ladder and then started pushing them up one at a time. Of course, they recognize when they're on a ladder, and I'm behind, shoving, and whoever the chief petty officer or officer, whatever he was, was at the front of them, and he's kind of leading this parade. We get up, and we find where the other ladder is, and we get up to the next deck, and then we get out on the flight deck. So here we come out with me pulling, dragging, kicking, yelling, screaming, hollering, like five blind mice. The first aid immediately comes over and takes care of them and washes their eyes out and gives them oxygen and all that stuff. I get my OBA unit off and get some air.

Boy, they're just thrilled to get these guys out, and the division officer says, "Gary, you know, that's great. Can you go down again?" I said, "Oh, hell"—you know, by this time, the adrenaline was flowing. I was thinking all this time down there while I was stumbling around in the dark, this song was running around in my head, some crazy old song about "Somebody's gotta do it, somebody's gotta be there." And I'm scared to death, but I'm hearing this song in my mind when I stumble across these guys. And I thought, Well, you know, so this worked. So I think, Well, yeah. So I go down again, on the other side, forward. Well, first he tries to get me to go down in this one compartment. I try to get down to that, and I can't get down to it. The fire's so hot and everything, I can't get to that. But he said, "Well, try the one forward." They gave me a new pack, new air, and they send me down. And there's nobody to go with me. Well, finally this buddy of mine that just died out in California, Boyd Farris—I didn't know who he was at the time—everything was so wild and so smoky and everything—and Boyd said, "I'll go with you." But he didn't have a mask on. He went with me, and we went down to an area of the ship I'd never been in before. It was an office space on the port side, and we had to go in, and you had to turn a hard right, and then you had to go down a passageway. Got down there, and there was four guys in

this office, must have been one of the air group—because I'd never been in that particular area before. They were inside there and they were dying .They had their door bogged down where nothing could get in, and they were actually cooking in there; they're scared to come out because the fire was all around them. You know, it's like standing in a skillet, and all the smoke and everything. It seeped through their compartment, through the ventilators and all that. And we're arguing with them, trying to, "Come on, come on, come on! You got to come out, you got to come out! I'll lead you out of here. Come on, get out!" And you're trying to scream through this mask, and of course you still can't see with all the smoke and everything. And poor old Boyd, he's back there—our knees are burning and our feet's burning and whatever. Finally I'm beating on the door and screaming at them, like a bunch of dumb bastards are going to die in there if you don't get out. So finally four of them, they opened the door, and they come out. Boyd said, "I'm gone. I'm dying myself." And out he goes, and I hold it, I shove them guys in front of me, and they follow him out. And by this time, Boyd can't see either. He's crawling on his hands and knees, and your hands is burning and everything else. I'm shoveling these (laughs) damn guys. I mean, you know, in a situation like that, you don't say, "Come on, baby, you got to do…" "Get your ass out of here. You got to go. Come on, we're getting out of here. We're all going to die in here." And I got those four guys out. So, you know, it was a good day.

I got up, and a pilot run over and said, "Do you need some oxygen?" I said, "Hell, no. I don't need nothing." The division officer and everybody seen me bringing these guys out, and Boyd, he drifted off into the group to get some oxygen or something, and I didn't even know who he was. The smoke was so thick—and I worked with the guy, I didn't even know who he was. I didn't know till a couple years ago. My brain got to thinking, "Maybe nobody went in there with me. Maybe that was an angel that went in with me." I didn't know. I kept thinking it was somebody I knew, but you know, in a situation like that… It was so scary. It's kind of like instead of going down the hall and going in the bathroom, you turn a hard left and then you turn another left and then you come back in. (laughs) When we got out, of course, the fire was still raging down below, and they were getting it under control. I didn't know how many guys had got killed or how many whatever at the time because I didn't get down there and get involved on the fire hoses. The guys did miraculous things. The compartment that I slept in for years until I got moved to another compartment because the Navy wanted to keep the petty officers separate from the enlisted men, but a couple months before, I'd been moved to another compartment. When I'd gotten back finally after the fire after better than four hours, I didn't lose any of my uniforms or my stuff got scorched and everything, but one of my dress uniforms I'd loaned to a buddy of mine in the old compartment where we slept just got incinerated. And the guys in that compartment that were caught up in there that was still asleep, that wasn't on duty, they had to go out the portholes. I didn't get to see this—they were lowering lines down to the portholes all on the side of the ship, and guys were going out through the portholes and grabbing the line, and they

were pulling them up on the flight deck. They got their hands burned from going out the porthole, and their knees was skinned up, and most everything in the old compartment was just—their clothes were just incinerated, and if they had a nice camera, it's gone. The Navy replaces uniforms and all that.

Anyhow, some of them got killed on the hangar deck where they immediately got hit by the explosion. Guys were mangled and torn up. Some of them got blown over the side. I think in reality they said they lost sixty-five guys over the side, and they got them all back but one. Some of them young kids that hadn't been on there too long, some crews that we worked with, they did things that was just borderline miraculous, unreal. They got onto one kid because he washed the guy's guts over the side because the bomb had tore him in half, and he said, "Hell, I had to do it because everybody was getting sick looking at it." A Marine had come out with one Marine holding onto him, and just as they'd come out of their compartment, the bomb went off and just cut the guy in half. And all they had was the arms and legs and head. And so this kid, the little kid from Arkansas, when they were trying to put the fire out and here are the guts and everybody getting sick, he just washed them over the side. They finally said, "Well, probably the best thing to do." They got them all back that went over the side except one guy. Only one guy drowned. The destroyers picked them up. They were scattered as far as here to Jacksonville behind us.

And that would be all right except the real bad, bad part of it is then we had to go and get in the compartments where we could not get to previously and bring the bodies out. That's the nightmare part of it. That part of it—I can't realize how horrible a human being can be disfigured and whatever—and of course, it's your job. You're supposed to do it. You go put them in the wire basket. You carry them out and you try not to look. But the distortions and the things were just… You know, that was a nightmare.

The worst thing about it is I brought out the guy I worked with every day. Every damn day we sit up there and talked and worked together, and the other two guys that worked with him. I knew all three of them, and I was joking after the fire—we had the bodies laying out there and blankets over the top of them—and I like an idiot turned around and said to my buddy, I said, "Well, where's so-and-so?" He said, "Hell, Gary, you just brought his body out. That's him under the blanket." I said, "Naw, naw, naw, naw, naw, naw." And he said, "No," and he lifted up the blanket. I just seen his foot, and I knew it was him, you know, because I knew the type of shoes—we wore special type shoes out on the flight deck anyway. And him and I were real close. The other guys I knew—we weren't real, real close, but I knew all of them.

I just tried to get that mental picture—they say it gets down—the VA, and the doctors say you got a little gland up here; I guess it's your cerebral cortex or whatever, called the amygdala. It's the one that makes you get

excited to protect yourself or whatever, but it's also one that locks in horrible memories or stuff, and it never gets out of your head, so the psychiatrists tell me. You know, I've been told that over the years, little bitty gland. I said, "Well, hell, why can't you just give it a shot of something to blow that crap out of my mind, because I never want to see those pictures again," you know. But for years I'd wake up in the night and be sweating like hell, and I'd see these faces

(pause in recording)

DePue: Gary and I took a little bit of a break here. These things that he was recalling are not necessarily easy things to talk about. As I sometimes say, they're just the kind of things that, Gary, you probably spent the bulk of your life trying to forget. I mean, you'd already talked about going to psychiatrists plenty of times. But I did want to read a couple things into the record, if you don't mind.

Leib: Okay.

DePue: This one is a letter you wrote to your mother August 9, 1952:

"This is the third letter I've tried to write since the fire. Don't hardly know what to say. It was a horrible thing. The fire started on the hangar deck in one of the planes, spread like a plague, exploded a five hundred–pound bomb in the hangar deck and set off the ammunition in about a dozen planes. It started about 6:25 in the morning. I had been up since 3:30. We were preparing to launch our second strike of the morning. It took four hours to get the fire under control. In fact, it seemed for a while that we would all be forced to abandon the ship.

"Nine were killed, thirty-seven injured, plus others very slightly injured. Sixty-seven men were forced either to jump overboard after being trapped by the fire or else were washed overboard, but all but one were picked up by destroyers and helicopters. My friend, Dr. Shropshire, was killed trying to get a couple of his corpsmen out of the fire. The corpsmen I knew also. They were nice guys, and the doctor was the finest officer I'd ever met in the Navy.

"I was on the flight deck when it started. The first thing we did were to get all the pilots to get all the planes started and taxied forward, as the fire started just after the middle of the ship. Then as fire spread, I donned a rescue breathing apparatus and went down after some guys I heard were trapped on a hangar deck by fire. I couldn't get to them as it was living hell, but I got an officer and three sailors up out of the second deck below hangar deck. I made some attempts to get some others out but couldn't get through to them. Several others tried and couldn't. Finally myself and another guy got through and got five of them out. Then on another trip below I found and brought out

two more sailors who were trapped. After changing the damned mask around, finally got a good one and went down to help on hoses, where you couldn't get without a mask. The next time after I got topside, the rough portside, going down and finding bodies and bringing them out—my friend the doctor and two corpsmen, the two other fellows, and later, two more.

It was one hell of a morning work, and I never want to go through that again. But we saved our ship, and I was fortunate enough to save seven lives and help save five others. Now they call me a hero. My division officer said today I have been recommended by quite a few for a medal. It's a nice feeling to have, but I don't care whether I get a medal someday for it or not. I'm very thankful I was lucky enough to get out alive myself and to be able to save others and very sorry I couldn't get or help out the others that were trapped. I never knew what horror was till last Wednesday. Maybe I aged a few years; at least I learned a lot. We've got a lot of guys with a lot of guts on here, that's for sure."

Now, to complete the record, you were put in for a medal. What was the medal you were initially put in for?

Leib: Well, that was a whole new experience. The division officer recommended me, and several others recommended me. I had to go into the officers' quarters in the **ward** room, and this correspondent **from** Edward R. Murrow was there, and he wanted to interview myself and the other guys one by one. He interviewed us, and my division officer spoke on my behalf, and they asked me questions and whatever, what they call a Board of Awards deal. And they told me that I would be getting the Silver Star or the Navy Cross. And I think—I don't know if I said seven—you read in that letter seven. I got credit for nine. I'd forgot about that. I'd forgot (laughs) about that other two guys that I got down, but I forget my mathematics here, whether it's… Anyhow, nine guys total that I got credit for. But anyhow, they said I was going to get the…you know. And I said, "Fine, wonderful, whatever." Then they took those pictures, like they've got other guys that did quite meritorious acts. I know one of the firemen; he carried guys up on his shoulders out of the fire rooms and up through the fire. I mean, they all did some fantastic things. Another guy saved some guys out in the water, held them together to keep from drowning because they weren't great swimmers, and all kinds of such acts as that. But it's all training, the training—thank God I got the training that I had and was able to work well with the people, you know.

As far as the medal was concerned, when I went down to personnel to say I was getting off the ship, and he said, "Well, now, you're supposed to have this presentation of this medal from Admiral…"

DePue: Clark. J.J. Clark.

Leib: Admiral J.J. Clark, Jocko Clark. And I said, "Partner, I got a chance to go home, and a guy said I might be able to get a flight, and I'm gone." He said, "Well, what'll you do to get the medal?" He said, "Regulations, they won't send it to you." And I said, "Well, if they don't send it to me, fine. If it comes into your office and you want to send it to me, send it to me." And that's the way it happened. He sent me a nice letter and said, "Your medal came in, and not supposed to do it this way, but I'm just mailing this commendation medal." And he did.

DePue: Here's the commendation medal. "Commander, Seventh Fleet, takes pleasure in commending aviation boatswain mate, third class, Gary E. Leib, U.S. Navy, for service set forth in the following." And here's the citation: "For heroic service during an explosion and resulting fire on board the USS *Boxer* on 6 August 1952 while that vessel was operating against enemy North Korean and Chinese Communist forces off the coast of North Korea. Following the explosion of an aircraft gasoline tank, fire spread throughout much of the hangar deck, aircraft burst into flame, and there were numerous explosions from area bombs and ammunition. The safety of the ship and its entire crew were seriously endangered. Leib displayed outstanding courage and aggressiveness in the rescue of a number of personnel trapped in fire- and smoke-filled compartments and passageways. Disregarding his own personal safety, he repeatedly entered the area of greatest danger in search of personnel trapped or overcome by flames and smoke. His quick thinking and unhesitating action in the face of grave danger were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. Signed, J.J. Clark, Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy, commanding Seventh Fleet."

Leib: A full-blooded Cherokee Indian. The only full-blooded Cherokee Indian or full-blooded Indian that ever went through the Naval Academy. I don't know if any went through West Point, but he did.

You know, my mathematics—they gave me credit for saving nine guys. You know, I forgot about the other two. Actually, I was running in my mind, adding it up. It was either nine—five one time, four another time, and I figured they gave the other guy credit for two, and then I found those last two. And that was strange, because I was by myself then, and they sent me way down below decks. The strangest thing—it was so smoky and so thick. I get down through this compartment which I've never been in before, and I'm wading in water almost to my knees. Sll the guys' shoes that's on the floor is just floating around, and everything's floating around, and here's two guys sound asleep—sound asleep—and did not even know anything was going on. They had got off of duty just prior to that, dead tired, and almost totally asphyxiated. I thought they were dead, and after I got them roused up, they thought they were dead. (laughs) I don't know how they kept from dying. If they'd have stayed there much longer, they would have died. Then they were coughing and hacking and whatever, but they were just dead to the world of sleep, side by side in their bunks like this, and their shoes had floated off,

(laughs) and they didn't have any shoes or nothing. "Just grab something, put on your feet, because the deck's hot as heck." So I helped, and we lined some shoes up for them. I think they had somebody else's shoes. It was so hot it was just burning through your things. But everything was floating around in there, and here's these two cats sound asleep. If they'd have stayed asleep a little bit longer, I'm afraid they would have died. But it's amazing that they had—but that was early in the fire, and I guess it was unreal, unreal.

DePue: Okay.

Leib: But you know, I've made one comment about this: I've never ate a bologna sandwich since in my life. I can't swallow it. It's a thing that sticks in my mind again. They came out about one o'clock—we hadn't had breakfast, we hadn't had nothing—and they started passing out bologna sandwiches. I tried to take a bite out of it, and of course I was filthy dirty and my lungs was full of smoke and my eyes was all blackened and everything, and my hands was filthy dirty. I took a bite and I just spit it out and threw the damn sandwich away.

My buddy out in California, he always tells my wife, or told her here a while back—he was talking to her on the phone, I was outside—he said, "Does Gary still wash his hands all the time?" They've diagnosed me as having OCD, obsessive compulsive disorder, because I've got in the habit of washing my hands, usually sometimes fifty times in the day. I'm just fanatical about doing it. You know, the kids around here, my friends used to call me Sanitary Gary because I washed my hands so much. And he said, "Hell, he's trying to wash the skin of them bodies of his friends he picked up. He can't get it off his hands." And June said, "You know, Red may be right about that." I said, "I don't know." But I still wash my hands a lot. I don't know, but I just got in the habit of it.

But anyhow, to put some beauty on this, if there's any beauty in the world, I had a friend of mine that worked over at the Navy hospital that promised me that if I got a chance to go home, that he'd get me a flight, that he knew a person that knew a person—you know how that goes in the military—owed him some favors. And boy, when I got off that ship, I had tears in my eyes because I loved those guys on there. They were some of the greatest and bravest and just some real great people. I had greater friendships with those shipmates of mine than anybody in this whole world, even as much so as the guys I run around with and went to high school with. When that cartoonist gave me that cartoon on the back of the ship, I really believe I was crying when I went off there. But I kept thinking, "I'm going to go home, I'm going to go home, I'm going to get the hell out of here." I had to sleep in the doggone tent because all the barracks was full, guys waiting for discharges and whatever. My friend Tussod came over and brought me some orders. He said, "Man, I got to put on your orders—there's a bus out there, jump on it, and it's going to Haneda, and get on that plane." And I got on that plane, went

out there, and it was all priority flights. I don't know how he worked it, but he had me on a priority flight. It was all guys going home that had served their time or had been wounded or emergency deals to go back home. Just about the time I start in the door, a full colonel come out with his aide and a couple others, and the pilot says, "I can't take you. I got no more room." He said, "Hey, bump somebody." He said, "Can't. These are priority. These guys—high priority. Colonel, you'll have to catch the next plane." And that don't happen very often in the military. The colonel and his aides went back.

We flew back by Wake [Island] and by Hawaii, and of course when we landed in Hawaii, they come out and give us the leis around our neck and everything. And we got a good meal at Hawaii; we didn't get much of a meal at Wake. We sat in the cargo of things. I got a picture of it: old cargo plane with the canvas things and everything. But I was so happy. Thirty-six hours on that damn cargo plane. Landed at Travis, and that's where the story I told you, when they landed there around midnight, when they said, "Come on, sailors, come over here and we'll feed you at the chow hall," and they asked—the cooks—"What would you like? What would you like to eat?" You know. "You mean we got a choice?" Said, "Yeah, what do you want? You want bacon and eggs? You want steak? You want hash browns? You want French fries? You want whatever?" Most fantastic meal I had in my life.

We ate, got on the bus, and got down to the barracks, rode all the way down Treasure Island. I walked in the barracks there, two or three o'clock in the morning, and just as I had my sea bag and I laid it down trying to find a bunk, some sailor come walking in, and he was singing, "Half as Much." I never forget that song because he had a beautiful voice. "Where in the world did you hear that song?" He said, "It's the latest thing on the jukebox. (sings) *If you love me half as much as I love you*…" And God, the guy had a fantastic voice, I thought. But that just stuck in my head. And that was it.

DePue: There are a couple other things that I'd like to ask you about, and you and I have talked quite a bit before this. I think this is important for the public to understand as well. You talked about—and I don't know when this occurred— getting replacements from a couple different USAR units and especially getting some replacement pilots, Reserve pilots.

Leib: Yeah.

DePue: When did that happen?

Leib: Well, we had the regular Navy pilots going over the first time in '50, but just as soon as the war started, apparently they mobilized squadrons, sent them through training, and when we went back in '51, we had several Reserve squadrons, one from Olathe, Kansas; one from Birmingham, Alabama; one from—what's the Navy air base outside of Chicago? Can't think of the name of it.

DePue: Great Lakes Naval Air Station?

Leib: No, it's…

DePue: Well, Fort Sheridan's up there.

Leib: No, no, no, this is the air base. My cousin Jimmy Leib was the commander of it at one time. I can't recall what it is, but it's out west of Chicago there somewhere.

DePue: I know where you're talking about. I can't recall it either now.

Leib: But anyhow, and several others, that basically they were more than half of them Reserves. Like the guys from Kansas, they called theirself the "Bitter Birds," They stayed in the Reserves because they wanted to fly and they wanted to get their time in and get the extra money, and they were going to college or they was lawyers or doctors or farmers or whatever, but it disrupted their whole life. Well, the pilots plus the enlisted men also that worked on the planes, the plane captains, and the guys that handled the ammunition and all different things. They took an awful lot of casualties. The one squadron, the one they called the Bitter Birds, from Olathe, Kansas, the squadron leader was shot down, and he parachuted out, but he didn't make it. His wingman got shot down, too, and they had a lot of losses. The pilots was good to us guys. They let us go down to the ready room, some of us directors, and we talked to them in flight deck control. We'd get to look at the films taken from the gun cameras on the strafing runs and stuff like that. You see it on TV all the time, on movies. Well, that's what they're taking with the gun cameras in the planes when they're strafing or whatever. They were fascinating, you know. But it was an interesting experience, a lifetime experience. Now, what else do you want to ask me?

DePue: Well, was there some friction between the regulars and the Reservists?

Leib: No, they joked around a lot, kidding each other around, but, you know, once you're aboard ship, the Reserves, the regulars, they all—I noticed the Army units over there, they kidded heck out of some of the Reserves from Oklahoma that come in, the National Guard, and California National Guard. "The California National Guard, they sent us over a bunch of you-know-what" and whatever, (laughs) but the Navy wasn't quite that way. In a day or two they melted right in, and you didn't know whether they had USN or USNR behind your name.

DePue: Okay. I wanted to go back and talk a little bit more about life in Japan, because we kind of got beyond this. You're there just a few years after the Second World War. These had to be some pretty desperate people that you're dealing with. And you talked about how respectful the Japanese were, but they were going through some pretty tough times, weren't they?

Leib: Yeah, to be candid about that, of course. Like I said, I had this one friend that worked at the hospital, the first-class petty officer from this area of the country that I went over to talk to, and he married a Japanese girl. A lot of guys did marry Japanese girls. The girls were, and the guys, the businessmen, were very respectful to us, we were respectful of them, and that goes back to what I said about MacArthur—that's the way he wanted it played out. And the amazing thing to me was—of course, you know, people are hungry. Your standards get lowered when you've got to live. You want to survive. It's just like the little Japanese workman. If you were smoking a cigarette and he'd seen your smoke get a little bit short, you'd see them gathering around you kind of like starlings out in the yard, because when you flipped that butt, they were going to scoop it up and tear out and get that tobacco because that was really precious to them, you know.

And the amazing thing about the ladies, the ladies were all very well-educated. I'm surprised at how many—actually, my English grammar is horrible, and they were more eloquent and correct in their language, in the way they spoke the English language, a lot of times, than we were,. I mean because we were talking slang and so on. Of course, some of the uneducated ones, you know, the little girls that come in the country, they were picking up some of our slang, and they kicked the words around. But I was respectful to them. There was a lot of interesting times. We had some great times. They had a great enlisted men's club there, and of course, all the people that worked there were Japanese. They treated me good. When I was in the hospital there, I thought they were just nice. In fact, my buddy from down here in southern Illinois, his wife was a nurse in the hospital. He married her, and they raised three girls. One of them's a professor down at Eastern University. The other two are married. But she was very well educated, you know.

And my buddy—the amazing thing about him, he'd been stationed at Guam. He was a Reservist that got called back in. He had learned to speak Guamanian because he had so many Guamanians working for him, which is very close to Japanese, and he picked right up on Japanese. He could speak Japanese just as well as he could speak English. It was amazing. When you'd go out to his house for dinner or something, go down the street, and somebody would say something, the conversation was just in Japanese, and the people he worked with—he'd just turn it off and on, you know, between Japanese and English.

But the ladies, the dance hall girls and all of them, they were just fantastic. The sailors loved it, because they opened all kinds of clubs and dime-a-dance type things and whatever. It was just a very interesting experience, and everything was so reasonable. I mean, the average sailor probably didn't clear twenty-five dollars a week, and petty officers, we might clear thirty or thirty-five dollars a week, but it was like we were millionaires, because everything was so reasonable. You could buy a pack of cigarettes, and it was like gold, you know. And we could go over and have a big steak at

the petty officers' club on the base and have a steak or frog legs just cooked to perfection, and a beer or two and only spend a couple dollars. We could go in and get a haircut by a Japanese lady barber, get a haircut and a shave and a massage, and our faces would be—from working on the flight deck, they'd get so many blackheads and whatever—and get a facial massage and everything for like a buck and a half, and tip them half a dollar. It would be just like tipping a guy today ten dollars. The last year I was over there, I did spend most my time around one lady that I met that was a very interesting personality, because she was one of the Hondas of the Honda family. Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki, Mazda, all those are big names in Japan. And whether she was directly—somehow she would probably have been related to whatever, but her parents were part of the civil government that worked for Japan after Japan occupied China, and she grew up in China, her and her brother did.

DePue: Was this in Manchuria or…?

Leib: I believe it was Shanghai—one of the major cities in China. But anyhow, she was telling me about it one time, and I said, "Well, you know, how did you get back to here?" And she said, "Well, after they rocked my mother and father to death and the other Japanese personalities that worked there. Then they put myself and my little brother and the people in their sixties, late sixties, on a train and sent us up to Manchuria and dumped us out. We had to walk down through Manchuria and Northern Korea"—which she said Chosin, northern Chosin—"and all the way down to the southern part of Korea, Pusan." Around 1946, I guess—they started this journey in '45, and it was '46 before they got back to Japan, '46 or '47. The Japanese government sent ships over. But she said only about half of them survived. I said, "How did you eat?" She said, "We begged. We ate grass, leaves, whatever."

And I said, "What do you mean by 'rocked'? How do you rock somebody to death?" And it's kind of like they say that they still do in some of the companies in Asia today, like they talked about here a while back they was going to rock that lady in Iran."

DePue: Stoning to death.

Leib: They stoned them to death. Said they just took all the Japanese civilians—and her dad was one of the high-ranking officials there—when the Japanese army went in, just like the American Army or anything else, they take over a city, they set up their own government, and they run the place. Well, he was one of the executives. They just lined them up, and all the Chinese, hundreds of them, pick up stones, and they just throw them and throw them until they're all dead. Would be a horrible experience. She didn't go into great detail on how many dozens, but apparently the way she talked, like they killed dozens of the Japanese officials, which they were very upset with them after the war.

But this gal was very well educated, spoke a little different dialect than they did in Japan. She had been at Sasebo, and then I guess she had a sailor boyfriend who had brought her up to Yokosuka area, and she was working as a dance hall hostess. She was just a really nice person. Her and her brother had some property in Japan. But it was nice to have the acquaintance of somebody that you could talk to, carry on an intelligent conversation, and whatever.

DePue: I would imagine for a kid from the central part of Illinois, it was hard to comprehend the kind of story she was telling you about. I mean, to really kind of wrap your brain around the kind of trauma that she had gone through at the end of the war.

Leib: I don't know. In my life, I've had so many life experiences and everything and lived so many places and lived around people that I'm a people person. I mean, I'm an observer of people. I like to know about them and whatever. And there was other different ones I met over there and talking about their experiences. The saddest part, I would see some of the Japanese veterans that had survived and had artificial legs made of tin like the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*, walking along with tin, metal legs. Different Japanese people that I talked to when I was in their home, telling their brother got killed on Iwo Jima or Guadalcanal or whatever. The amazing thing of all was there was hardly any men. There was no young men in Japan; the young men were all basically dead. The men that you seen were very young or very old—very few was in between. You didn't see no nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-one, twenty-three, -four, -five—you know, real old people in men or real young. And the women, all up from little bitty kids, cute little kids, up to little old ladies all bent over, been working out in the rice fields. So it was a very interesting contrast.

I like to be a people observer. I had a lot of fun. I got to go a lot of places. I got to go up to other different bases and see friends of mine from here. I went to Tachikawa. I went to another base where a kid in town here was stationed and another Air Force base. Then I went over to Atsugi to see my buddy that I was in the Navy with there that went aboard the *Boxer* with me, that later got transferred to Atsugi because after he came back from emergency leave, they needed him there; he was assistant fire chief there. And I learned a lot about Atsugi or whatever.

DePue: Did you see either Nagasaki or Hiroshima?

Leib: They gave us a choice of making a tour to Hiroshima, and also I had a chance to go climb Mount Fuji, and I declined both, because (laughs) that was quite a thing. Guys would come back with little things that they did where they went so far up Fuji, and guys that went to Hiroshima, but I didn't think I wanted to see that. I seen enough devastation, and I seen a lot of the people that had been in Hiro or—maybe they hadn't been to Hiroshima, but in all the firebombing.

Some people had horrible burn scars, you know, from the firebombing that we did in Japan. And, you know, you see what would have been a beautiful girl with half her face burned up. I seen enough of them. You know, I don't watch horror movies. That's not my thing. You know, some people glorify—they want to go see the worst, the worst, the worst. I don't.

DePue: Let's do a couple more loose ends here about service on the ship board especially. Was your ship, the USS *Boxer*, integrated?

Leib: Yeah.

DePue: Were there any incidents that occurred while you were there?

Leib: Well, some of the whites from the South were still pretty… I don't know what word you'd use. They still didn't like the idea of getting integrated, and they didn't care… But we had several black guys in our division that did their own thing, and we got along with them. The majority of the blacks in the Navy when I went in was usually like cooks or jobs like that—

DePue: Yeah, I know—

Leib: —and Filipinos, same way. But then after integration… We had a lot of Hispanic guys in my outfit. They were good workers. We got along fine with them. And a few blacks. We got along fine with them. One black guy particularly that slept near me, they gave him a hard time for a while. He was just a southern black from South Carolina, and he was the kind of guy that he would just get along; he never put up any front or whatever. And then we had another one that was from the East that if a white guy would say something to him and give him some kind of deal, he'd mouth him back. But the one, Harry, he was just the old southern black. He'd be all right, you'd talk to him aboard ship. But if you'd see him in town, he'd be with some other black sailors off another part of a ship, and you spoke to him, almost like you'd embarrass him. Because he didn't run with the white guys; he run with black guys, and you run with white guys. And you, "Hey, Harry, how you doing?" just kind of a cool… That was the way he was raised. He was from South Carolina or Georgia or somewhere, and that was his own thing.

DePue: How about the food? How was food on board ship?

Leib: Well, they fed us well, a good, balanced meal. The only thing amazing about the Navy is they got beans every Thursday. Every Thursday we had beans for evening chow. And, you know, we didn't have any great delicacies. One thing about the Navy, when I worked in the chow hall at Whidbey Island, the officer of the day has to go to the chow hall and check the food, and he gets the enlisted man's meal and he sits there and tastes it, takes a bite of this and a bite of that, more or less approve it, and that's fine. That's their way to check it. He usually takes a few bites and dumps it in the garbage and leaves. One particular officer come in, and man, he threw it in the garbage and he ate

everybody's tail out. He said they wouldn't feed that to a hog, you know. And they changed the diet real quick. He didn't like the food that they had. But most of them don't go that way.

The only bad thing when you're out at sea for a long time is, I can't stand dehydrated potatoes, powdered eggs. That's one of the first things you run out of. And when I'd got to breakfast, I always loved bacon, and they'd have bacon nice and crisp, and a guy that loved eggs and could eat them horrible-looking things they called eggs, I let him have my eggs, and I'd take his bacon, you know. And I didn't like powdered milk. They always set cans of Carnation out on each one of the tables for the guys that took it in their coffee. I didn't use it in my coffee, but I always grabbed one if I had cereal, and I poured it on my cereal. I ate Carnation and Pet milk on my cereal any time that I ever ate cereal in the Navy.

The food was balanced and it was adequate. It wasn't like the Air Force. I mean, that just blew me away. I'd been on Air Force bases before, and I thought, My gosh, they eat like kings. But it was good, it was stable and balanced. If we wanted extra food, we did have two soda fountains on that ship, and they was only open certain hours. Like if we'd get a break between flights, they'd let one or two guys go down and pick up a whole bunch of ice cream and root beer float or something like that and bring it up to the rest of us. We had to stay up there. But in the evening when it was open, then you could run in there and get you a candy bar or a pack of cigarettes for a nickel or whatever.

The only time I've ever really been thrown out of a place was because one time in San Diego and the ship was in there, we had beans for supper—No, I'm sorry. We did have beans for supper, but we had beans for breakfast every Thursday. I got my story wrong. Every Thursday we had beans for breakfast. Well, unfortunately we had beans for supper. Then a bunch of us went to the movie, (DePue laughs) and we were enjoying the movie very well, and it got a little gassy in there. There were four or five us and trying to outdo each other, (DePue laughs) and we cleared out the row behind us and the row behind that, and the manager come and cleared us out, you know. Got threw out of the movie; didn't get to see the rest of the movie, had too many complaints. But it got hilarious after a while. You know, I mean, you see people getting up and holding their noses and getting out of there. But my God. The gas attack or flatulence or whatever you want to call it got us thrown out of a theater.

DePue: One last question. Was there any entertainment? What was there to do on shipboard when you weren't working, when you weren't training?

Leib: There it is right there. There's the thing that kept body and soul, that kept us alive. Every Navy base I was on had a theater, and every theater had good, fairly first-run movies. Every base. Very reasonable. It didn't cost anything.

But if we weren't in a terrible combat situation, if there was any way possible where they had a darkened ship and we weren't flying, we had a movie.

DePue: On board ship.

Leib: On board ship. On the hangar deck. They had a crew set up the doggone deal. They had a projection booth up here, and we got to see first-run movies. When I came home from the Navy, I didn't get to go a movie for over a year because I'd seen all of them. We got a shot at them before anybody else seen them, and they were really great, you know. It's a good way for guys to relax. Of course, that didn't happen every night, but three or four nights a week, we got to see a first-run movie. Unfortunately, guys on the smaller ships don't get that privilege. Of course, like I say, we had ice cream on there, too. The deal was if somebody, one of the destroyers, does you a favor like pick up one of your sailors or rescue one of your pilots, you give them a couple gallons of ice cream, because they didn't have that luxury, you know.

I think being a tin-can sailor, being on a destroyer would be a good way, because after I went in the Coast Guard during the tail end of the Vietnam deal, I was on small boats. It's a real tight crew on there, you know, tight deal. But I knew a lot of tin-can sailors, friends of mine, went on them, and it would have been a small group. It would be just kind of like our V-1 division. We were really a tight group, you know.

DePue: Did you have any visits by any entertainers like Bob Hope or some of the other folks that were around?

Leib: I got a book I bought several years ago about Bob Hope. He came along and gave a deal over in Christmas 1951, before we came home—no, I'm sorry, 1950. We came home in November, so we came home about the time the Bob Hope troupe was making the deal around there, and so we didn't get to see Bob Hope. Now, I'm trying to get this straight in my head. It was either 1950, Christmas 1950, or 1951. But somebody contacted Bob Hope and said, "Hey, the guys on the USS *Boxer* didn't get to see your show when you was in Japan and in Korea." He came down Christmas Day; it must have been 1950. He had his big baby blue, light blue and dark blue Caddy[5] Coupe de Ville, and he parked it right out there. I'd been on a run, and I come back, and here's this Caddy sitting there. I said, "I wonder who's parking a Caddy up here where we're parking our Jeeps?" He said, "Bob Hope. He's putting on a show up there." And I said, "Oh, man, and we're out here at the Jeeps; we don't get to see it," you know. And he said, "Well, they got all this equipment, and they're sitting all those people with him, Jerry Colonna and all these people and some of these comedians with him."

[5] Caddy: slang term for a Cadillac automobile.

And anyhow, they got it all set up on the stage, and the officer of the day looked at us drivers down there—six of us—the captain's driver, Carryall driver, and four Jeep drivers, and we're looking like long-lost puppies down there. Everybody else is up there to see the Bob Hope show. He said, "Hell, come on up." And he said, "Okay, now, you guys go, and you stand at the back, and if I call you, you're going to have to go on a trip. You don't go down to sit down with the other guys; you sit at the back, but you get to see the show, too." They put the show on the flight deck, and we were within range where he could call over the loudspeaker and tell us to go back. But we got to see the whole show.

Old Bob was on the radio, not TV, at that time. He puts on a good show, and then as you've probably heard before, as soon as he gets off the air, he said, "Well, we're off the air now, guys. Now we're going to tell some jokes." (DePue laughs) And he gets pretty risqué, you know. And all the guys were delighted. Some of my buddies were right down there in the front row, you know.

Then I bought a book several years ago—the book is in there—and it said about the guys on the *Boxer* got left out, so old Bobby Hope made a special trip on Christmas Day, which was quite amazing that an entertainer would do that. But we just got missed, you know. Everybody else got to see him, and so he took care of us.

DePue: Okay. Now, Gary, what I'd like to have you do is spend two or three minutes and tell us what you did with your life after you came back from Korea. Is that possible? Just real quick thumbnail, and then we'll have some closing questions.

Leib: Well, I'm a retired insurance salesman. I started working here, there, and yonder when I came home. I worked on a farm for a while. I rode a tractor, trying to get my head straight. I went to school for a while. I dropped out of school. Went down south, to Mobile, for a job down there; had a good job down there in a paper mill. I acquired a late model, almost brand-new motorcycle, less than a year old. It was crazy riding around on that big Harley. Then I got into stock car racing and almost got killed. **Then** I went down south, down to Mobile, and the buddy I was in the Navy with on the *Boxer* with was going to get me a job. While I was waiting for the job, I was working a temporary job out at the International Paper Company; it worked out that they appreciated my work, and I ended up getting a good job down there.

Then I got involved in another bad car wreck and crippled up a little bit, had to miss a lot of time and couldn't really do everything that I should do to function properly on the job. I'd gotten married and I held onto the job for a while. But anyhow, I decided maybe I had better go back and get an education, so I came back up here and went to college. My grammar's so

terrible I didn't realize that I had—I didn't even know what dyslexia was till a psychologist friend of mine explained to me that that was one of my main problems. I just thought I was just damn poor in grammar, you know.

But anyhow, a guy sold me my health insurance policy, and I thought, Boy, he made his money awful easy. And he said, "Well, why don't you go to work for me?"—a guy that I knew from town here. So I did. I started selling health insurance, and I thought, "Man, this is cool. I get to be out in the fresh air." Because at that time I was going to school and working part time in a garage and working in another plant there in Macomb where I think they called it the porcelain plant, where the air was just full of dust and dirt and stuff all the time. So I started selling insurance. I quit once and took a job here in town as a parts salesman and then went back and spent the next thirty-some-odd years selling insurance. Went from a couple of minor companies to Mutual of Omaha for nine years, Franklin Life for seven years, and then I went with AFLAC twenty-one years.

DePue: You told us about some pretty tough things that you experienced while you were in the Navy. Did you have some struggles to kind of adjust back to normal life?

Leib: Life is a learning process and adjusting process. I had to adjust to living in different parts of the world, adjust to things. I had to overcome forms of dyslexia. When I went to sell insurance, I couldn't pronounce "appendectomy." I'd always say, "Had appendix removed." I couldn't pronounce the word "psychiatry." I couldn't pronounce the word "psychology," so I'd have to say it a hundred and so times. But I found a way to get around it. But I did well, I made a little bit of money. I fooled with race-cars again for a while. Then I moved down south and I started off cold out there not knowing anybody, and I ended up doing pretty good. I joined the Coast Guard Reserves to get a little extra money and get an experience back to be around ships again. I stayed there till in the '80s and then moved to Texas and sold insurance there for a while till I had enough time in to retire and took early retirement and took a job driving a bus in and out of DFW[6] airport. Took a job for a little while working for the city and then took a job driving a bus. I drove a bus for three years out there, came back here, and drove a small bus here three years and then fiddled around with some other jobs and decided, Hey, you know, it's time to hang it up, just live my own life.

DePue: Okay. We're going to ask a few wrap-up questions here for you.

Leib: I came back to town and I didn't think they had enough trees and stuff. I'm a tree-lover; I always plant trees everywhere I go. So I planted these trees here for the old one. I was the head of the park board, I planted them there, I

[6] DFW: Dallas – Fort Worth airport

planted them here and down at the school, and now we've got beautiful trees all over time.

DePue: Well, you lived a pretty active life here after coming back from Korea. Here's the first question I got for you in terms of wrapping up.

Leib: I volunteered to go to Vietnam, but they wouldn't take me; (DePue laughs) they thought I was too old. When I went back in the Reserves on active duty, I was forty-four years old.

DePue: Everybody knew what World War II was about. I'm not sure everybody knew what Korea was about. You went through quite a bit working on that ship. Do you think your sacrifices that were made during Korea were worth it?

Leib: I don't know. They call it the Forgotten War, I came home, I was really embarrassed to talk about it or anything because all the guys I knew older than me and all the local guys—and when I joined the Legion, the VFW and all that—were all World War II veterans, and some of them guys had really went through h–e–double-l. They had seen and done it. You know what I mean? They had been out in the jungles and hand-to-hand fighting and flying over Germany and stuff like that. So I just slid with the tide, you know. We didn't go into it. I never talked about the Korean War. And there were very few Korean War veterans. I was one of the very few around here.

So never talked about the war again till Vietnam come along. I was kind of hawkish on that when it first started, and then I got to thinking it's going to be like another Korea. It's going to be a no-win situation. It's going to take a lot of lives, tear up a lot of families and whatever. The French couldn't win over there, and we can't either. We couldn't win in Korea—it was a stalemate there. Even though I was on active duty. The thing that bothered me about that, they told me when I first started wearing the Coast Guard uniform, to ignore comments. Say one thing about the south, I was in Alabama then, lived in Mobile, and the people down there, it seems like every other person belongs to the Reserves or the National Guard. The guys I worked around and guys that worked for the Corps of Engineers, they also was in the National Guard when I worked down there for a building mechanic for a while. And they said if somebody calls you a name or spit on your uniform, just turn your head and go, ignore it. Nobody ever did, and I was just thankful they didn't, because I don't know how I could have lived with that. But I know the guys told me about coming in to San Francisco and New York and places like that, but it didn't happen.

DePue: This would have been during the Vietnam War you're talking about.

Leib: Yeah, coming back from the Vietnam War. But it never happened to me, even though they flew me out to school out in Virginia, the big Coast Guard base there. What's the name of? I can't even think of the name of it.

DePue: Norfolk?

Leib: No, just north of Norfolk and north of Fort Meyers, just north of there. Yorktown, Virginia. Big Coast Guard training base there, and they sent me there for schooling. They flew me there in a regular airplane with a military pass. But everybody was nice and respectful. I went to see my buddy in Philadelphia while I was there and flew back, and I never had any problems.

DePue: Does it bother you today or maybe the last twenty, thirty years, it seems like the Korean War is the Forgotten War, that the American public just kind of—you know, they make a fuss out of World War II veterans but they don't know the first thing about Korea?

Leib: No, I think the World War II veterans deserve everything that they get, the credits and everything. These flights that they take them to, their Honor Flights, I think they're wonderful. They can't do enough for some of them guys. I think it's just great. I always admired them. I had to admire these guys from my little home town, the ones that made it and the ones that didn't make it, and I seen how rough some of them had it when they came home to adjust and whatever. I think they deserve all the honors. And Vietnam: I felt bad about those guys because they didn't get treated right. People treated me nice when I came home. I mean, they treated me good, and they had dinners for me and whatever, and I was happy to get it blowed away, get out. When they asked me to say something, I just had a bunch of color slides. I put my color in the projector and showed them the color slides of Japan, and that was it. But this latest war has changed the whole thinking of America, and I think it's great that it's more respectable. They're honoring the guys that have been physically hurt—

DePue: You're talking about the war Iraq and Afghanistan?

Leib: the war in Iraq and Iran—and respect for the dead. It's gave a whole new meaning to the word "veteran," because people now—and other veterans have noticed the same thing—when you've got your cap on that said, "Korean veteran," I don't know how many dozen people has come up to me and thanked me for your service. Nobody ever did that back even five years ago. But since all this Iraq and Iran and all these—

DePue: Afghanistan.

Leib: —Afghanistan has gone on and people—it's touched the families again. I really feel deeply for these guys that had a tour, was in the Guard and got called up but had families and whatever. You know, the National Guard is getting called up many, many, many more times since this thing happened. They didn't get called that much in World War II, and they didn't get called that much in Korea or Vietnam. A few units did, but this one, almost every National Guard unit has gone, and they're all family guys. Most of them

belong because of the fellowship and the fact that they make a little extra money. And that's the whole thing. And a lot of them have been killed and crippled and whatever. The veteran's organization, the Veterans Administration, has gotten more organized, and they're doing more and better. Every day they get better on their service. It's been one of the great turnarounds that we've had in this country.

DePue: Gary, are you a different person today because you have that experience in the Navy?

Leib: Oh, yeah, and I think the Navy was the greatest experience of my life. It was the greatest learning experience. I learned more in the Navy than I did in high school; I learned more in the Navy than I did in three years of college; and all the schools that I've went through, about a dozen different schools for the insurance companies and whatever—I learned more in the United States Navy and especially the last twenty-five months on the USS *Boxer* than most people could comprehend in a lifetime. I had a lifetime worth of experience all compressed in—and I had a lot of experiences before that—but aboard that one ship, and those tours. I would do it again if I had to, but I don't think I'd really want to.

DePue: How did it change your outlook on life after that?

Leib: To be thankful for every day, thankful for every day. Like one of the guys told me twenty-one years ago at one of the things, he was still mad because he said, "We were supposed to get the Silver Star." He said, "You and I sat right there and they told us we were going to get the Silver Star or the Navy Cross, and we get the Commendation Medal, which is a bump or two down from that." You know, it's two or three points towards making a rate in the Navy because it adds to your score. "But," he said, "I stayed in for a couple, three more years, and it helped. but man, if I'd had the Silver Star or whatever, I'd have really moved up." They was interviewing some of us, and he was making a statement. And I said, "Hey, partner, Leave me out of this. I'm alive. I've had a whole lifetime, and a lot of them guys didn't. I'm so happy"—I mean, I would have rather had the bigger medal, but I got a lifetime, you know. I'm a survivor; I made it, and so many of them guys didn't. And all my friends that I run around with, I'm one of the few survivors, because either asbestos or some other problem has caused them problems. A lot of them died in their forties and their fifties. You know, you see all these things about lawsuits on asbestos and things, finally realizing what it was. But they were exposed to these things, and a lot of them just shortened their lifetime. So that pretty well winds it up. There comes my wife in, that sweet thing.

DePue: What is it about what you've gone through that you would think is important for the American public, for kids, to understand today?

Leib: I think they all ought to have these programs just like they have down here at the school every year. They invite us veterans down to wear our uniforms or not and explain to the kids, because some of their minds with their different things that they've got is so far away from it. Some of them should realize what their fathers and their grandfathers and whatever did. But again, it goes back to the point that most guys don't talk to their kids about these kinds of things. You know, I mean, you kind of touch it off, and that's about it.

It's five minutes after four, and you've got a long ways to ride.

DePue: Well, I'll ask you one more question.

Leib: Okay.

DePue: Any final comments, then?

Leib: No, I think we covered everything. I gave that little thing for my mom, and I left a thing sitting over there, a little piece of paper that's the reason that got me—that's one of the things that always sold me on the Navy, and the other one—

DePue: Is this one right here?

Leib: Is this one here. This is my life's philosophy.

DePue: Can you read that in for us?

Leib: From the "Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner." You know, when you're in school you think, Oh my gosh, that horrible long thing? But the part that really tells the story is not just "Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink." The point is, when he was talking to the wedding guest, he said, "He prayeth well who loveth well both man and bird and beast. He prayeth best who loveth best all things, both great and small, for the dear God who loveth us, he made and loveth all." That's my philosophy.

DePue: Gary, this has been a wonderful experience. You've helped us see, to envision what it's like to live on the ship, and not just the physical part of it, but the emotional attachment that you have with your buddies on the ship and try to understand it that way.

Leib: I still talk to my friends, as many as I can, that live, and when they have an illness or when I know that they're not going to make it and everything, I try to do one thing. I thank them for being my friend and my shipmate. And I did that to one of my buddies that was dying, and I thank every one of my friends that if I think I'm not going to hear from them or see them again, I thank them for being a shipmate and being a friend. I really, really, really mean it. I mean, if it wasn't for all those great guys, and you know about their life, their mother, their father, whatever, it's a great relationship.

DePue: I think that's the perfect way to end for today. Thank you very much, Gary.

Leib: Okay, that's good.

(end of interview #2)