

Interview with Clarence Senior

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, November 5, 2008. This is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today it's my honor to talk to Clarence Senior, who is a Korean War veteran. This is an interesting day to be doing this interview, Clarence, because yesterday of course, was election day, and Barack Obama won the election—

Senior: Big surprise.

DePue: —with quite a sizeable lead that he had in the process. Part of the reason that we wanted to talk to you, Clarence, is I haven't yet interviewed any Navy veterans from the Korean War period. I definitely want to be able to say that we have that perspective, and you provide us that. And you also provide us a perspective of a black man who was in the Navy during the first war in which the United States had an integrated service. That's certainly one of the things that we'll want to talk with you about a little bit. But, I always start at the beginning of the story, so when and where were you born?

Senior: Springfield, Illinois at St. John's Hospital in 1929. November 17, 1929.

DePue: Well you were a little young, but you didn't realize at the time that you came along two months after the stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression.

Senor: Knew absolutely nothing about that.

DePue: No one can blame you for that, either, I'm sure. Do you remember growing up during the Depression? Do you have any memories of that?

Senor: Yes, I do. I remember from about 1935 on up to about 1945, sitting on the curb, watching the men working on— oh, what was that called back there in those days?

DePue: I think you mentioned yesterday the Works Progress Administration.

Senor: Something like that, yeah. The WPA. I used to sit on a curb and watch them clean the ditches, put bricks in the street, and clean the curbs and everything. I'd just sit there and watch them and wondering what they were doing, and why they were doing it. I didn't know what it was all about at that time. Then, I remember, as a kid, we used to have bums, tramps, and hoboes come through the city of Springfield. I never will forget that. They'd ride the train from one city to the next city.

DePue: Where were you living at the time?

Senor: I was living at 1512 East Carpenter Street, then we moved out on South Nineteenth Street and lived there on 908 South Nineteenth Street for awhile. Then we moved next door to 912 South Nineteenth Street, and then we moved to 1929 East Kansas Street. I grew up there most of the time. That was after I was twelve years, but we moved over there when I was thirteen years old.

DePue: In those early years, the Depression, was your father able to keep his job?

Senor: Yeah. He worked for, I think it was Security Federal, cleaning buildings. Cleaning their buildings down at 518 East Monroe Street.

DePue: What was your father's name?

Senor: Alphonso Senor.

DePue: Okay. And how about your mother? What was her name?

Senor: Her name was Elizabeth May Sides, S-i-d-e-s.

DePue: S-i-d-e-s? Okay. Did she work during those years?

Senor: Yes, she did domestic work.

DePue: Okay. Did you have an understanding at the time that you were really poor, or were you just like everybody else that you knew?

Senor: All of us were poor together. Neither person knew how much the other one had, and the other one didn't have anything more than the other one did.

DePue: Did you have a big family growing up?

Senor: Well, there was my brother and I until I was twelve years old. Then my mother's sister died, and she left five kids younger than me. The oldest one was a year younger than me. And the youngest one was just a baby. Wasn't even a year old, I don't think.

DePue: And your mother took all of those kids?

Senor: She took all five of them in. She took in three girls and two boys.

DePue: Wow, that's a huge responsibility.

Senor: Very, very much so.

DePue: Anything else you remember growing up, especially before World War II, because I wanted to ask you some questions about that as well, but in the later years of the Depression that you recall?

Senor: Oh, I just remember going to school. One school to another. When we moved.

DePue: Let's get up to World War II, and specifically with the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. You would have been twelve at that time.

Senor: Yeah. I just turned twelve, November seventeenth. And that happened December 7, 1941.

DePue: Do you remember that day?

Senor: I do. I remember that because I was listening to the radio and I heard President Roosevelt make his famous speech. I just happened to be listening to the radio. Never will forget it.

DePue: How did the mood of the neighborhood and the community change after that? Did you have an appreciation for that?

Senor: Well, being a kid at that time, I never paid much attention to it. But, I know that the next year we started having blackouts; we'd have to put blankets up to the windows. And we didn't have any streetlights. We couldn't go outside whenever they called the blackout. I remember that.

DePue: Let's go back to those young years when you're growing up. Do you recall a time when you realized that you're different than most Americans? That your skin color was different?

Senor: No, I never really ran into it until I got into high school. I never paid any attention to it until I got into high school.

DePue: Was there something that happened in high school that made you aware of it?

Senor: Well, they kind of separated their selves from us. As the kids begin to get older. But there were some good people on either side. Going to certain things and doing certain things. It was a reflection that there was a difference.

DePue: But no particular incidents that really sticks with you?

Senor: Not outside of normal kid stuff.

DePue: And this was Feitshans High School?

Senor: Yeah, Feitshans High School.

DePue: Now, I know that 1941 was an important year for your family in a couple of other respects. Was it that year that your father abandoned the rest of the family?

Senor: Yup. Right in the end of December.

DePue: So your mother takes in five kids. Pearl Harbor happens. And then very shortly after that your dad takes off.

Senor: Well, Pearl Harbor happened before my mother took the kids in. Then, after Pearl Harbor, my aunt died, and she took all of the kids in.

DePue: Well, that was a heck of a month for the Senor family.

Senor: Yeah, it sure was.

DePue: Tell us a little bit more about what it was like during the Second World War. Do you recall some of the things that were going on in the community as part of the war effort?

Senor: Yeah. We went to church all of the time. Every Sunday. Then, after church, we'd go to the movies. Go to the one o'clock movie. We'd go to Sunday school first, and then after going to Sunday school we'd come home and then we'd go down to the one o'clock movie down at the Orpheum Theatre and other places. There were a few shows here in the city of Springfield that we could not go to. Like State Theatre, the Strand, and the Tivoli at one time, and the Senate. But we could go to the Lincoln Theatre, the Roxy Theatre, and the Orpheum.

DePue: Why couldn't you go to the other theaters?

Senor: They were prejudiced.

DePue: So it wasn't an official policy, but you got the message you didn't belong there?

Senor: Yeah. The Kerasotes ran it. And they were kind of—

DePue: The same Kerasotes than run every theater in town now?

Senor: Their family.

DePue: I'm curious. What movies did you like? What actors did you like when you were going to the movies?

Senor: Oh, I liked black cowboy shows at that time. That was a big feature, cowboy shows. Errol Flynn. John Wayne. And even Roy Rogers. And Gene Autry and all of those shows. We had a film right down the street here called The Southtown where we'd go every Saturday afternoon. Do the matinee Saturday afternoon matinee. It cost us ten cents to get in there.

DePue: Did you have some jobs during your junior high or high school years?

Senor: My years, yes, I did. I used to cut grass, clean out basements, because you know, if you had ashes down there, you know, coal...

DePue: Springfield was a coal town at that time.

Senor: Yeah. Took the ashes out. Took them in the back and down then. My brother and I, and one would be downstairs for a while and shovel the ashes up through the window, and the other one would load it up and fill a basket, and then he'd come up and we would carry it down to the alley and dump it and come back. And the other guy would go down and shovel it up. And carry it down to the alley, and dump it.

DePue: Okay. Well, that job you just described sounds like pretty dirty work.

Senor: It was. It really was. Hauling those ashes out of the basement. And we cut grass. And we'd go out to the rich side of town and rake leaves and do things like that. As I got older I started working downtown at the Roxy cleaner, who was run by the Xamis family.

DePue: The auto dealers now. The same family?

Senor: That's his grandson, you see. And great-grandson. I would work down there on Friday evening and Saturday and I'd shine shoes. I'd shine shoes with his son, Harry Xamis. And we would deliver clothes. He has a clothes-cleaner where the guys would come in and get their clothes pressed and everything, and we'd deliver them for him, you see. And I worked there quite a while.

DePue: During the war, were you paying attention to the news, what was going on in Europe and the Pacific?

Senor: Sort of-like. You'd read it. You'd get the headlines.

DePue: Did you have any relatives or close friends who were in the military?

Senor: I had an uncle that went in the Navy in 1943, I think it was; I'm not for sure. And my mom started to work out to the ordnance plant in Illiopolis. She started to work there in '43 and worked to clean up until the war ended. She worked the afternoon shift from three to eleven.

DePue: Was she on the plant floor itself?

Senor: Yeah. She worked somewhere out there. She worked with that gun powder. At night, she'd come home and her hands would be yellow from that black gun powder; it took years for that to go away.

DePue: Yeah, I was going to say, that from what I've heard that there is a lot of health concern because of that kind of work. How long was she working out there?

Senor: Two years.

DePue: I also heard you mention that you were in the Boy Scouts?

Senor: Yeah, I was. Mister Wilson was our troop leader. Mister Johnny Wilson. He rode a bicycle.

DePue: How far up did you get in the Boy Scouts?

Senor: I didn't get too far.

DePue: Was church an important thing for your family?

Senor: Yes, very much important. Always has been.

DePue: Where did the family go to church?

Senor: Saint John's AME Church.

DePue: And was that something that everybody just knew, that they had to go to church? That mom was going to get there?

Senor: No, my grandmother used to live with us years ago and she told us, "You go to church and then go to the movie, and if you don't go to church, then you don't go to the movie. If you're too sick to go to church, you're too sick to do anything else that day." She was tough. She was six foot tall and weighed 219 pounds.

DePue: And you didn't cross grandma, I take it.

Senor: No, no. I used to sit on her lap. She treated me real nice.

DePue: You were one of the older kids in the family, though, weren't you?

Senor: My brother was older than me, then me, and then the older kid from my aunt's family.

DePue: Did you have extra responsibilities when those five kids moved in?

Senor: We all had to work together to do certain things. Had chores to do.

DePue: Was the money you were making with these jobs your money to keep or did it go into the family coffers?

Senor: At a quarter an hour, you didn't make much money, you know.

DePue: Tell me a little bit more about your high school years, because I know you got involved in sports in a big way.

Senor: Oh, yeah. I went to high school. I always wanted to play sports. Track and football and basketball and anything, baseball. Anything to keep busy.

DePue: Why don't you describe yourself when you were in high school.

Senor: I was hard to get along with.

DePue: Physically, though.

Senor: I weighed anywhere from 125 to 140 pounds at different times.

DePue: How tall were you?

Senor: Five-seven.

DePue: Were you fast or quick?

Senor: Yeah. I could run.

DePue: Basketball, football, baseball, track?

Senor: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Which one of those sports did you really gravitate toward?

Senor: I liked them all. I gravitated to all of them. When they were in, I played it. We played in the sandlot, too. You've heard of the sandlot?

DePue: Oh, yeah.

Senor: Well, we didn't have anything else to do but play. We used to walk from 1929 East Kansas Street up to Iles Park three times a day sometimes. It depends on what was going on, what sport we were playing, like softball or hardball. Well, baseball, but we called it hardball.

Then we played out at Lanphier Park and then we'd play out at Lincoln Park. We'd have to ride the bus out to Lincoln Park. And ride the bus out to Lanphier Park, too. And then sometimes we'd walk home. Then we'd go out to the lake, Bridgeview Beach, and go swimming. We learned to swim out in Bridgeview Beach.¹

DePue: Was that Lake Springfield or before?

Senor: That was Lake Springfield. When we talk about the beach and it will be all Lake Springfield. That's the only thing we had in here.

DePue: Did you play varsity sports in high school?

Senor: Yeah, for a couple of years. Sometimes I wouldn't study so I wouldn't get to play.

DePue: Well, I want to go through each one of these sports and ask you what position you were playing. Football?

Senor: I played left half-back.

DePue: Okay, so you were running the ball.

Senor: And defensive back.

DePue: Okay. How about basketball?

Senor: I played guard usually.

DePue: Were you starting in these sports?

Senor: Off and on.

DePue: Okay. Track?

Senor: I'd run the 100 and high-jump. And on the relay team.

DePue: How about baseball?

Senor: I learned how to pitch. This guy up here taught me how to pitch.

¹ There were two beaches at that time at Lake Springfield; they were managed by City Water Light and Power. This was the beach for blacks before desegregation in the 1950's

DePue: You pointed out a picture on the wall here that caught my attention yesterday when I was here talking to you, Clarence, and it's Satchel Paige. Tell me how you met Satchel Paige.

Senor: Well, Dick Tate—his name is Richard Tate, really, but we call him Mr. Tate—he knew Satchel Paige² and all of the ball players. Most of the ball players had come through here with the Kansas City Monarchs. He was quite an athlete. He went to a Normal³ Illinois school out there and he graduated from up there, and they put his track shoes in the hall of fame up there in Normal, Illinois.

DePue: Now this is...

Senor: This is Illinois State now.

DePue: Is this Satchel Paige?

Senor: No, Tate. Dick Tate.

DePue: And he brought Satchel Paige and some other players in, or was it just Satchel?

Senor: They were born strong back there in those days, and he'd come through here, and he knew him personally.

DePue: And did you get a chance to actually meet Satchel?

Senor: Oh, yeah. Shook hands with him. That's the reason why we have that picture up there on the wall. He was kind of proud of our team and all of the guys in there. There are only five of us living now. But the rest of the guys are dead.

DePue: Did you play on a team against his team?

Senor: No. This was just the teams around here in the city of Springfield. We were the only black team in the league. The rest of the teams were white.

DePue: What year would this have been?

Senor: That was in 1946.

DePue: So, just a couple of years before he went pro.

Senor: Yeah.

DePue: He was pro, but before he went into the major leagues.

² Leroy "Satchel" Paige was the longtime Negro League star who eventually made his way in the majors. A right-hander, he is remembered as much for his witticisms as his extraordinary pitching talent and longevity.

³ Schools which were established especially to train teachers were known as Normal schools at that time. The reference here is to Illinois State Normal University in Normal, Illinois, which was later renamed Illinois State University with a broader curriculum.

- Senor: He played in the Negro Leagues before he went in the pro league. He went in 1948. Jackie Robinson⁴ went in in '47. Satchel Paige went in in '48 and played for Cleveland.
- DePue: You recall how many years he played with Cleveland? Because I know he was late in his career in that time?
- Senor: I can't recall.
- DePue: I think you also mentioned, Clarence, that you were a boxer? Tell me a little bit about your boxing career.
- Senor: A bunch of us in the neighborhood got together and we decided to go down to Number Five and learn how to box. And we went down there and Mr. Lockart took us in. He was a fire captain down at Number Five at 1310 East Adams, and he taught us how to box.
- DePue: So Number Five is Fire Station Number Five?
- Senor: Fire Station Number Five, that's where I worked at.
- DePue: What was your inspiration to go into boxing? You and the other kids?
- Senor: We just were sitting around one day and we decided that we'd go down and let Mr. Lockart teach us how to box. They used to have an auditorium down there at Seventh and Monroe Street and they used to have Saturday night boxing down there. It was run by a Catholic organization. Seventh and Monroe to Eighth and Monroe. We would go down there and watch them box at night. And so, we had some good boxers come out of here.
- DePue: Did you do any exhibition boxing yourself?
- Senor: No. Just around here and up in Bloomington and around. The first fight I had I had with a guy from the Navy and never will forget it. He hit me and made my nose bleed and it was all over after that.
- DePue: At least for that match.
- Senor: Yeah.
- DePue: What weight class were you boxing at?
- Senor: Probably about 125, 126, something like that.
- DePue: So, was boxing something you were better at than some of these other sports? Or did you prefer the other sports?

⁴ Robinson was the first to break the color barrier in the major leagues.

Senor: Well, when you put your mind to it you can do most anything.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that you were into sports more than academics in high school then?

Senor: Yeah, that'd be very fair.

DePue: Did you finish high school?

Senor: No, I quit high school, and fooled around there and did other things. And then I went back in 1968 when I was working over to the fire house and had nothing else to do. I studied for my GED, and I went over to Illinois College and took the test and got my GED.

DePue: Well, that's quite a ways ahead of our story here. So this would have been 1948 that you dropped out of high school?

Senor: Yeah.

DePue: What did your mother tell you at that time?

Senor: She didn't like it.

DePue: Do you remember anything specific she told you?

Senor: No. I really don't. But I know she didn't want me to quit.

DePue: What did you do?

Senor: I went to work for Pillsbury Mills and worked there for six years. I was working there when I went in the Navy. And then, when I got out of the Navy I went back to work for Pillsbury Mills.

DePue: Now, I thought you had mentioned that you had worked one other place.

Senor: Fiat Allis. I worked there during the summer.

DePue: What were you doing at Fiat Allis?

Senor: Nothing much. I just moved stuff.

DePue: Okay. How about Pillsbury?

Senor: I did the normal things, loading cars with 100-pound sacks and fifty-pound boxes.

DePue: Did you like your work at Pillsbury?

Senor: It was all right.

DePue: I assume you were working at Pillsbury then in June of 1950 when the Korean War started?

Senor: Right.

DePue: You grew up during the Second World War, so you understood what that means when the nation is at war. What crossed your mind when you heard about the North Koreans invading the South?

Senor: I guess about a week before I enlisted in the Navy, I got a letter from Uncle Sam, saying to report for duty somewhere else. But I just enlisted in the Navy.

DePue: Did you pay much attention to the Korean War before you got that letter?

Senor: Not that much.

DePue: And when did you get that letter?

Senor: It must have been in December 1950.

DePue: Nineteen fifty. Yeah, that's about the darkest moment of American military history in the last 100 years, I'd have to say. Because that was at the time of the Chosin Reservoir and what the Army soldiers called "The Big Bug-Out," when they were being whupped by the Chinese and forced back.

Senor: Pork Chop Hill and all those places.

DePue: Why did you join the Navy?

Senor: My uncle was in the Navy. My brother had been in the Navy. I thought I'd give it a try.

DePue: How much did it have to do with that it wasn't the Army?

Senor: Sort of liked that, too.

DePue: Did you have anything specific in mind when you joined the Navy? What you wanted to do there?

Senor: No, not really.

DePue: What was your mom's reaction at that time?

Senor: She didn't like it.

DePue: Did she like it better that it was the Navy than the Army?

Senor: Not really. I don't think it made much difference to her. She knew I was going to have to go sooner or later.

DePue: What was the term of your enlistment? Was it three years service?

Senor: Four years, I think it was.

DePue: Did you have a girlfriend at the time?

Senor: Yes, I did.

DePue: And what was her name?

Senor: Her name was Peggie Deloris Neal.

DePue: Peggie Deloris Neal. N-e-a-l?

Senor: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Had you been going together for a while?

Senor: Yeah.

DePue: How serious was it?

Senor: Very serious.

DePue: What did Peggie think about your joining the Navy?

Senor: Who knows what a woman thinks.

DePue: You weren't here. And you weren't asking that at the time.

Senor: No, no.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about going to basic training. Where you went and what it was like.

Senor: January 8, 1951. I was up on Rush Street. That's where the induction center was. And they took us in there.

DePue: In Chicago?

Senor: Yeah, in Chicago. They took us in there and they swore us in. They'd give you that quick examination, and they'd swear you in. Make for sure you're not color-blind and things like that. And then they send you out to the Great Lakes [Naval Training Station] And then you go out to the Great Lakes and you get one big old Quonset hut.

And they start giving you a physical examination. You have to stand in line, drop your pants, drop everything, and the other thing you got on is your T-shirt. And you know the drill from there. I don't have to tell you. You know the drill

from there. Very embarrassing. They go down the front of you, and then come up the back of you. And you have to break down like a shot gun. And then poor guys would come up here from Texas and things like that. They didn't have on T-Shirts. All they had on was a jacket and a shirt. It was very embarrassing. A lot of people don't even talk about it. Some guys won't even talk about it. But that's part of being examined by the Navy.

DePue: Would you describe your training then? What you got in basic training. Was it pretty tough?

Senor: It was all right. We were out there for twelve weeks. There was 120 guys, sixty below and sixty above, and I was the only black guy in the group at that time.

DePue: Out of 120?

Senor: Yeah, out of 120. And finally they brought another guy in there with me. His name was Leonard Locksley, from out in New Jersey. And the two of us went through there. Two of us out of 120.

DePue: Do you remember any incidents?

Senor: Oh yeah, there was incidents.

DePue: Any that you care to talk about at all?

Senor: Like some guys wouldn't take a shower. And one day they got together and threw this one guy in and showered him. Give him a shower. And he took a shower from them on. You know all about that.

DePue: Yeah, that's kind of one of those universal stories you hear about military service.

Senor: And then what was great was that when we'd go and get a shot, these guys, these big heroes, the men come at them with needle and they'd fall out. Some guys just couldn't take that needle. It was funny.

DePue: You think you got good training there at Great Lakes?

Senor: Oh, yeah. They give you good training.

DePue: What happened to you after that? Where did they post you?

Senor: After that, we took a train ride from Chicago to San Francisco. A five-day train ride. Troop train. And we wound up at Treasure Island. That was a receiving station. That was in the end of April, last week in April. We got to come home for five days and head back for San Francisco to catch the General Brewster, which was a transport ship. We left out of the harbor there, somewhere. I forget. Hunter's Point or something like that. I forget what it was. We got on there on I forget what day it was, but there was 14,000 of us on that troop ship. We was on

that troop ship for fourteen day, and stood up and ate every meal for fourteen days. Never did get to sit down.

DePue: Why weren't you sitting down?

Senor: There was too many people on there to sit down. They couldn't feed all of us at the same time like that. And then we hit a storm. We hit a hurricane. Miserable. Just miserable.

DePue: Almost everybody has stories about crossing the ocean. How was your stomach through the storm? Through the whole thing?

Senor: It was bad. It was upset. Going like this and up and down. Some of us could eat and some of us couldn't eat. That's the way it was. And we had just enough room to get into your bunk on that troop ship. Just enough so you could bend your knees. After that, you didn't have anything else. No more room.

DePue: Does that mean they were stacking the bunks five or six deep?

Senor: Yes, sir. They did.

DePue: During that trip did you have cause to wonder: Why the heck did I join the Navy?

Senor: You bet I did. Yes, sir. I sure did. I wondered why I did it. Is this going to be like this all of the time? I was in three hurricanes. I was in the one with the Brewster, and then two with my Leonard F. Mason DD852 ship.

DePue: Destroyer class.

Senor: Destroyer, yeah.

DePue: After a while, did you get your Navy stomach, so to speak?

Senor: No. Never did get it squared away. It was only 390 feet long, that DD was.

DePue: In other words, it bounces around.

Senor: Yes, sir, it sure did.

DePue: Where did you make landing then?

Senor: Well, we came in to Yokohama Harbor there in Japan. And then we went to Yokosuka, which was a naval base there. We stayed there about a week, then we took a twenty-nine-hour train ride to Sasebo and that's where I caught my ship at. That's where we operated out of. Sasebo.

DePue: Sasebo. I checked the map. That's way in the southern part of Japan on the western coast it looks like.

Senor: That's where we went.

DePue: Was that the port for the ships that you served on?

Senor: That's true.

DePue: What was the name of the ship again?

Senor: Leonard F. Mason DD852.

DePue: What does DD stand for?

Senor: Destroyer.

DePue: That was kind of the standard Navy jargon for any destroyer class vehicle?

Senor: Yeah. They had a DD and then a D. I was on a DD.

DePue: Do you know when the Leonard F. Mason was built? Was that a World War II vessel?

Senor: Yes, it was.

DePue: Describe the Leonard Mason if you could for us.

Senor: Describe it? It's been so long ago.

DePue: Do you know what the complement was, the crew?

Senor: It's been so long ago, I can't remember the complement? But there was, I'd say, around 300 sailors on there.

DePue: What were your duties on the ship?

Senor: I started out as a steward's mate and wound up being a Boatswain's [pronounced Bo'sun's] Mate.

DePue: Boatswain's mate?

Senor: Yeah.

DePue: What's a boatswain's mate?

Senor: That's the guy that works on the lines. Helps tie up the ship. And helps clean the ship. Scrape the paint and paint it. All that outside.

DePue: Where was your duty station?

Senor: One I had in the back. No, it was in the front. One of them was called a hot box. I don't remember which one it was. But it was just under the five-inch 38 guns in the front. And then I went downstairs in the bottom of the ship to another station. That was a GQ station. General quarters station.

DePue: What's the difference between battle stations and general quarters?

Senor: Same.

DePue: Oh, it is? Did you spend most of your time on the deck, then? On the outside?

Senor: Yeah.

DePue: Did you like that duty?

Senor: It was all right. I was twenty-one, twenty-two years old.

DePue: Just doing your time?

Senor: Just doing my time. Just passing the time of day, that's all.

DePue: What was the duty the destroyer had? I assume you were part of a large squadron or fleet.

Senor: We were with Division Thirty-Two, I think it was. We helped protect the aircraft carriers, the battle wagons, and the cruisers—light cruisers, heavy cruisers. We were always on the outside. You worked from the outside in to the cruisers, then the battleships, and then the aircraft carrier would always be in the middle.

DePue: How far were you from the coastline? In general. Any idea? Were you able to see the coast?

Senor: We were up in Wonsan Harbor. We were close enough that they could hit our ship with a rifle. You could hear it go ping, ping, ping. When we were patrolling the Wonsan Harbor and we'd get in that area, the captain would tell us, "All hands stay inside."

DePue: So Wonsan Harbor at the time is under the control of the North Koreans and Chinese?

Senor: On the land.

DePue: Were you in the harbor itself with the ship?

Senor: Yes, we were in the harbor itself. We patrolled it day and night. We run so far this way, so far this way, and back. Just like a square.

DePue: I think before the war Wonsan was something of an industrial area. Were the destroyers, the cruisers, and the battleships shelling Wonsan itself as well?

Senor: Yeah. They would. They'd fire at us. We'd fire back at them.

DePue: Were there any North Korean or Chinese ships that you encountered?

Senor: No. We encountered a few sampans. That's all.

DePue: You mean the little Chinese version which is sampans?

Senor: Yah.

DePue: You mentioned yesterday one incident with a sampan.

Senor: I think we were going north, and this sampan come out and it had this guy laying in a whatcha-call-it with his arm hanging down in the water.

DePue: Somebody who was dead?

Senor: Yeah, they were booby traps. And they'd come up alongside your ship. Try to get to your ship, so that if it hit your ship, it would explode. Blow a hole in your ship. That happened before, but it didn't happen on my ship. Because the captain told us to lay aft and move to the port side of the ship, or the starboard ship of the ship, whichever way it was. And to get away from the sampan that was coming at us. They'd take a long pole and push it away.

DePue: And so in that incident, it didn't explode?

Senor: No, it didn't explode.

DePue: What was the scariest thing that you encountered while you were on the destroyer doing that kind of duty?

Senor: When they fired a projectile—I guess it was a three-inch projectile—and it come hit on one side of our ship, hit on the other side of our ship, and then it hit cruiser, and blew a hole in the cruiser. Quite a few men got hurt at that time. But we were lucky; they didn't hit us.

DePue: This is a shore battery?

Senor: Yeah, shore battery.

DePue: That'd make me awfully nervous, I would think. Were you on deck at the time?

Senor: Yes. Scared to death. They talk about these kids going in to do these shootings that they have here. They don't know what it's like to them people shooting at you with them rifles, and then taking them three-inch shells shooting at you. No place to go. No place to hide. And we didn't have anybody come in and console us. We come back the next day and went right through it again. We did it for thirty-five days.

- DePue: It almost sounds like they were trying to get a response?
- Senor: They were. They weren't playing. They were firing. They were trying to hurt somebody, kill somebody.
- DePue: I mean that the American fleet was in there trying to entice the enemy to shoot at you.
- Senor: Yes. Draw their fire. They did.
- DePue: And then what would happen? Did they send in aircraft to hit those positions, or what?
- Senor: At times, yeah.
- DePue: It sounds also like they got absolutely no use out of Wonsan Harbor. It wasn't a functioning harbor as far as the Chinese or the North Koreans...
- Senor: No, we blocked it off with our ships and things like that.
- DePue: Are there any other incidents that happened? I think you mentioned there was an accident that occurred with your ship?
- Senor: I don't remember whether it was a battleship or the aircraft carrier. We were loading supplies from the supply ship to our ship, and the gyrocompass went out, and we went up under the ship, and then it pushed us away. We thought the ship was going to take us down, but it didn't. Scary. Very scary.
- DePue: Yeah, very scary.
- Senor: Nothing you can do when you see going towards that ship. And it goes down like this and then it pulled away. Why, I don't know.
- DePue: How severely was the ship damaged?
- Senor: It was damaged pretty bad. We'd been out to sea twenty-four days, I think it was. We'd been out to sea twenty-four days, and they sent us back to Sasebo. And then from Sasebo, we'd come back to the United States. We stopped in Hawaii.
- DePue: When was that? Do you recall?
- Senor: That was in August of '51.
- DePue: You got to Japan and Korea, what month?
- Senor: It was around May sometime? In '51.
- DePue: So you got a chance you didn't expect to come back to the United States. Did you get any leave at that time?

Senor: Yeah. We got back in the United States around November. Right after the end of October, we got back in the states here. Went in to Long Beach and they put us in dry docks so they could repair the ship. We stayed there about two weeks, maybe three weeks, and they repaired the ship.

DePue: What do sailors do while somebody's repairing the ship? Are you doing maintenance on the ship, as well?

Senor: Yes, you have to maintain the ship. You have to do your work.

DePue: Did you get to do things like paint the ship?

Senor: Yes.

DePue: Anything else that you recall?

Senor: You'd chip and paint. Chip and paint. That's what you did. After you tied up. And they'd take over after you get in there. They're in dry dock, and they let all of the water out after you get into there. And then they go to work on your ship.

DePue: That sounds like pretty hard work, too.

Senor: All of it is.

DePue: Did you get any leave during that time?

Senor: No, not then. I did after we got out of dry dock. We went up and down the coast of California. Went to different places. We'd come back to Long Beach and we'd go out again and come back to Long Beach. And we'd sit in a harbor somewhere. I got to come home when my wife's father got killed by an automobile accident. I got leave there. I come home, and that's when we got married.

DePue: What that December time-frame?

Senor: Yeah, end of December and first week in January. We got married on the second of January, 1952. And then, I think I was home about four days after that, because I left on a Saturday, going back to San Francisco.

DePue: Tell me what led to the decision to get married. Had you been writing back and forth for a long time about that?

Senor: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

DePue: The letters included discussions about that?

Senor: Sorta-like.

DePue: Well, you're not telling me much about this part, Clarence.

Senor: Well, things happen. So we got married. Got married the second of January, 1952 and I went back overseas. I was on my way back overseas and got in a jeep accident.

DePue: I want to back up a little bit because we're going to talk quite a bit about this jeep accident. But I wanted to talk about some more general things on ship and duty and while you were still over in the waters between Japan and Korea. I guess that's the North China Sea. Is that it?

Senor: Japanese Sea.

DePue: Yeah. Was sports still a big thing for you even on shipboard? Were there opportunities to do that?

Senor: Yeah. We had physical activities and things like that. And played a little sports, a little ball. And boxed a little. Do everything. To help entertain ourselves.

DePue: Was there anything that you especially enjoyed?

Senor: I kind of enjoyed it all. I enjoyed boxing, too. I participated.

DePue: I know that before the Korean War, African Americans had seen plenty of duty on shipboard, but it was almost always as stewards working in the mess section.

Senor: Right.

DePue: That was the tradition in the Navy at that time. Would it be fair to say it was something of an experiment to have an integrated service at the time? Let me put it to you this way, what was your thought about the integration of the navy?

Senor: All my life, I'd been integrated with people going to school here in the city of Springfield. When I went to school, there was maybe four blacks in a class, so I had no problem with integration. Some people did, but I didn't. The only thing black that I ever attended was church.

DePue: So you were in favor of the integration of the service that Harry S. Truman did in 1948?

Senor: Yeah.

DePue: How well was it working on the Leonard Mason?

Senor: It had its problems with some of the guys from the South.

DePue: Did most of the sailors on ship treat you well?

Senor: Oh, yeah. It's no different than anywhere else. Have you ever been around where there is two or three black guys and fifty white guys?

DePue: I'm sure I've had plenty of opportunities for that.

Senor: You know the problem then. Don't have to tell you. Don't have to ask you about it. You know there's a problem. There's some people that like you, and there's some people that don't like you. I don't care what you are. There's some people that can put up with you, and there's some people that can't put up with you.

DePue: Do you recall any specific incidents?

Senor: Oh, yeah. This one guy and I were getting our supplies to work one day, and this one guy from Alabama saw me in the line, and he walked up to the line and he pushed me out of the line. Pushed me down and said, "Down there in Alabama, we don't let no niggers get in front of us." So, I got up and I hit him. And I said, "Where I come from, I don't care what you say. I get to hold my own." I said more words than that but I'm keeping it kind of clean. So we went at it. And they broke us up. I never did have no more problem out of him.

DePue: Was this an incident with this sailor that had been building for a while?

Senor: I don't know. Just out of the clear blue sky he come at me and pushed me out of the line.

DePue: What happened after this scuffle, this fight that the two of you had?

Senor: Nothing. Nothing happened. We went on and we got our supplies and went on about our business.

DePue: So there was no punishment for either one of you?

Senor: They took us to the captain's mast. And the captain, he interviewed both of us.

DePue: Together, in the same room?

Senor: No. He talked to this guy and then he talked to me. This captain—well he was captain of the ship, but he was a Commander—he talked to me and he says, "Well, you know," he said, "You people have to expect this from these guys." And he went on. And I said, "But he didn't have no right to call me out of my name, you know." And he says, "Yeah, but you have to expect that." And I said, "Well, you son of a bitch, I don't need to." And he says, "You can't talk to me like that." And I said, "That's what I've been trying to tell you." And then he understood what I was saying. And he laughed. Turned red in the face. Because I caught him off-guard, see. And he understood so he said, "Oh, get on back to work."

DePue: Well that was kind of a gutsy thing for you to be pulling, wasn't it?

Senor: I'm strange.

DePue: I'm sure it was a spur of the moment thing.

Senor: Yeah, it was a spur of the moment thing. I was trying to get my point across to him, and I got it across to him.

DePue: Captain's mast, as you described it, that's from my perspective what we would call non-judicial punishment. But I've always understood that the captain of the ship is god on that ship. Do you think he treated you fairly in that respect?

Senor: Yeah, after I told him what I told him, he did. He said he understood what I was saying when I used that term to him.

DePue: What punishment did you end up getting, or did you?

Senor: Restricted to the ship. Both of us. We got two weeks restriction to the ship. You can't leave the ship. When it gets in dry dock, you cannot leave the ship. Only thing you can do is go to the movie in the mess hall and walk up and down the ship on each side. And stay on the ship.

DePue: Do you remember this captain's name?

Senor: No, I don't remember his name.

DePue: But you mentioned yesterday that you knew where he'd gotten his commission.

Senor: Yeah, he was a graduate of Annapolis, Maryland.

DePue: So a Naval Academy grad.

Senor: Yeah.

DePue: How about the other officers? Do you think they were working to make the integration work on ship?

Senor: I guess so. I never paid much attention to it. All I tried to do was do my job and stay out of people's way and try to get along with people until they pushed me. And then when they pushed me, we had a problem.

DePue: Anything else that sticks in your mind? Not necessarily of a racial nature, but just humorous incidents or anything else that happened on ship board?

Senor: There comes a time when you have to reload the ship with ammunition. Everybody has to work at that. I don't care who they are. Everybody has to work and take their share of it. Putting our projectiles on there. You know, the five-inch projectiles, three-inches. And then, put twenty millimeter things, anti-aircraft guns. We'd have to load them up. And everyone had to do it. It would be an all-day job. Start early in the morning and work until late in the afternoon. And then we'd have to load the ship with our food.

One time I remember, we were about to run out of food. It was on a Saturday. And we had chili. In 1951, these beans were in a gunny sack, and they were packed in 1949. It had a stamp on there, obviously. We got the beans out and the guy run them through the vats. You know, them cooking vats they had from the Army and the Navy. Same thing on a ship. He washed them and cleaned them and everything, and then he cooked our chili and mixed it together. And we also had a filler. Chili and rice and crackers.

We were sitting there eating. The captain ate with us that night and that afternoon. The captain brought up a spoonful and he seen us, and there was a cockroach in there. "This guy wants as much as me." And he just flipped him to the side. And he said: If you guys find a cockroach in there, you got to flip him to the side and keep on eating, because this is all we got. We don't have nothing else to eat. And they found them. And they flipped them to the side and ate them. Just like a bean. Looked like a big old red bean.

DePue: But this was a boiled cockroach, I would guess?

Senor: Yeah. This was a boiled cockroach.

DePue: Some people would call that protein. But not many.

Senor: But it happened. My wife don't even know about that. But it happened.

DePue: How would you describe the chow that you get on ship normally?

Senor: Pretty good. It was good. Could be expected. It's not no home cooking, now.

DePue: Before you had this accident in Wonsan and you'd been out here and continued your duty, had you given any thought to what you wanted to do at the end of your four years? Or were you too far away from that?

Senor: No, I knew what I wanted to be. I always wanted to be a fireman.

DePue: So you didn't intend to stay in the Navy?

Senor: No, no, no, no, no, no. I was just doing my duty, that's all.

DePue: Let's get you back to the time when they rehab the ship over in California and then you're heading back to combat zone after that.

Senor: We were heading back towards Korea. We were going to Japan first. We were going back to Sasebo, Japan. We were on our way back and we pulled in there at Hawaii at Pearl Harbor. And things happen.

DePue: And that's what I hope we're going to talk a little bit more about if you're willing to. What happened once you go to Hawaii?

Senior: We stayed a couple of days, I guess it was. One night—I forgot what I was doing. Five guys come at me. Accosted me. And said, “We’re going to whip your ass.” Because they didn’t like me for some reason. So they took me up on the deck, up under the five-inch guns, and told me, “You’re going to fight this guy. And you’re going to fight this guy.” So, I said, “Well, I don’t want to.” I said, “I hope you guys are playing me.” They said, “No, we don’t like you.” So, I said, “Okay.”

DePue: Did you have any idea why?

Senior: Nope. Had no idea why. No idea why. So they picked me out and I fought the first guy; his name was Vance. And I kind of whipped him up a little bit. Then they said, “Okay, you’re not done yet. You’re going to fight Sullivan.” I never will forget his name. So Sullivan and I went at it for a couple of rounds. And I got the best of him. He grabbed me and bear-hugged me and said he was going to throw me in the water, and I wrapped my legs around him, and my arms around his neck. And I said, “If I go in, you’re going with me.”

DePue: Was this boxing, or wrestling, or a combination of all of the above?

Senior: Anything. Anything went. But I was able to take care of myself. And when he did that, and I told him, “If you throw me in that water, you’re going to go with me. I’ll never let you go.” So he finally put me down and we finished. I finished him. That’s when I hurt my hand. So, they left me alone for a while.

I went on back to my bunk. I looked up, and here these guys are again, coming at me, and said, “Come on, we’re not done with you yet.” I said, “Okay.” So, as we went by the kitchen, I hollered at a kid named Romerio. I said, “Romerio, come here. I got a problem.” He says, “Okay. I’ll be right there.” So he went and backed me up. Then we had another thing. Then, I hurt my hand again, so they took me to hospital. We stopped and I went to the hospital.

DePue: During all of this incident, was nobody in command or in a leadership position aware of what was going on?

Senior: Nope. Nope nope nope.

DePue: I’m sure you’ve had reason to think about this a lot. What was it about you?

Senior: I don’t know. To this day, I don’t know. Maybe I was too high-strung for them.

DePue: Now you mentioned you were doing a lot of athletics on shipboard.

Senior: Yeah, we did a lot of things. We ran and did other things.

DePue: I’m speculating here myself, Clarence, so you have to bear with me, but from what you talked about in high school, you’d always been very good in sports, you always liked sports.

Senor: I always liked sports.

DePue: Were there a lot of other blacks on shipboard?

Senor: There were quite a few. Not a whole lot, but there were quite a few.

DePue: Do you know of any of the other blacks that got this kind of treatment?

Senor: No.

DePue: Were you a better athlete than some of these other guys?

Senor: I'd say so.

DePue: Were you more assertive than some of these other guys?

Senor: Yeah.

DePue: So maybe that was it?

Senor: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Who finally found out about this fight, you getting accosted by these characters?

Senor: Nobody.

DePue: Who took you in, though, on the shore?

Senor: I guess I reported to the petty officer of the day. And I think the officer in charge—the OD—Officer of the Day.

DePue: Now my Navy ranks is always bad. Petty officer would be a non-commissioned officer?

Senor: Yeah. OD would be a lieutenant, lieutenant-JG, or a captain, or anything.

DePue: One of the junior officers.

Senor: The guys that have charge of the duty that day.

DePue: And then once that occurred, you said they took you on shore to get you some treatment?

Senor: Yeah. They took me to the hospital. Took x-rays of my hand, and it just had a big bump on it. Turned me loose. We were on our way back to the ship. This guy was driving, and he was talking to me. He was going a little fast because it had been raining out. And I told him, "You better slow down before we turn." And over we went. I never got turned over. And the jeep did 360. Come right back on its tires. And when it turned me loose I was in the backseat. From the suicide seat to

the back seat, and the bar had come down and tore all this off. Tore all this, opened up here. Six and a half inch scar.

DePue: So you're talking and you're going over your head. So it sliced the top of your skull open?

Senior: Right down to the skull.

DePue: To the bone?

Senior: To the bone. Bled like I don't know what. I could feel the blood running down the side of my face and back of my head and everything. This guy looked at me. He said, "Oh, man, you're hurt. Oh, I'm sorry." I said, "Hey, man, get me back to the hospital." I took my blouse off and made a pack and put it down on there like that, which they taught us in the Boy Scouts.

When we got back to the hospital, the guy says, "How come you did that? What made you do that?" I said, "Well, we had a little bit of first aid in the Boy Scouts." He said, "That probably kept you from bleeding to death. You clotted up that blood and everything. You stopped it from running." So he sewed me up, and they took me up in the room.

The next morning, Captain Green come in there and he looked at me. He says, "Sailor, we got a problem. You're still bleeding up there in your wound and we're going to have to take all of the stitches out and re-sew it. You got forty-eight stitches in your head and I've got to remove them all." And he said, "Think you can stand it?" I said, "Well, I guess so. I don't have no choice." So he said, "That's a good fella. That's a good sailor." So, he took me in, and he took all of the stitches out. Well, first of all, he kind of gave me a shot of morphine and he took my hand and he raised it up and raised it up and raised it up four times. And when he let go of it the fourth time, it just slowly went down, and he said, "You're ready. Now, I can't put you completely out, but I'll fix it so you won't feel anything." So, he took all of the stitches out. And then he took lukewarm water and washed the blood clot out of there and things like that. Called it a hematoma. And he washed all of that out of there. Then he re-stitched it and then he put a turban on me. And he told me, he says, "You got a concussion. You got a bad concussion. Be careful when you get up because you're going to fall, or you're going to be unsteady." And he was right. He said, "Whenever you get ready to get out of the bed, you call for the corpsman or the nurse." They had both of them up there.

We had this girl, she was twenty-five years old. She was Mississippi, and she made life funny with her talking. She was very good. She took care of me for five days before she went on, before her day come to go off. And this corpsman was good to me. And every time I moved, I had to ring the bell and he'd have to come and help me move. I couldn't get out of the bed.

DePue: Had you had any other injuries, or was it strictly this head injury?

Senor: I was beat up. My back and everything. But it was the head. I was sore all over from bouncing around in that jeep. But the head injury.

DePue: When you initially got injured, how much pain were you in with this head injury?

Senor: Oh, quite a bit. I was dizzy. Dizzy for, I don't know, for four—February, March, April, and May—I was dizzy all that. And then they transferred me from Tripper Army Hospital to Mare Island in California in May.

DePue: The injury was in February?

Senor: Yeah.

DePue: And what was the name of the island again?

Senor: Mare Island.

DePue: Any idea how to spell that?

Senor: M-a-r something. Mare Island. It was a shipyard, like with a hospital in it. Then I stayed there from May, June, until about the end of July. Then they sent me to Oakland Naval Hospital. I was there from August until early September. This doctor called me into his office. He called me over the PA system and told me to go to the doctor's office. I went in there and the doctor says, "Well, we're going to discharge you. We can't do anything about the concussion that you have. You're no use to the Navy any more. So we're going to give you an honorable discharge and send you home."

And I asked him, "What am I supposed to do about this?" He says, "File a complaint with the Veteran's Administration when you get home." I did, and I went to the Veteran's Administration for two or three months, and then they give me the run-around, so I just quit bothering with them.

DePue: What kind of treatment were you getting? You spent from February until September, was it, when...

Senor: They'd take me in and they'd look at me and look in my eyes. Back then in those days they didn't know what to do with concussions.

DePue: But that was the extent of it?

Senor: That was the extent of it.

DePue: Were you taking any medication?

Senor: They gave me some. Pills.

DePue: Were they just figuring that, over time, this would heal itself.

- Senor: Yeah, they said it's going to take a while for it to heal.
- DePue: From what you described, I would think that, initially at least, that you had a lot of swelling on the brain.
- Senor: I did at one time. The doctor told me. I had a psychiatrist look at me and all that and everything. Oh, they gave me the treatment. Go in his office and he talked to me. He says, "Open your eyes wide." And I opened my eyes wide. And he said, "We don't know what to do with concussions."
- DePue: Really?
- Senor: Yeah. That's what they told me. I didn't know what he was talking about.
- DePue: Well, I guess I wasn't aware of that, because if anybody should have some experience with concussions, it would be the military, you would think.
- Senor: Yeah.
- DePue: Did you get any disability?
- Senor: Nope.
- DePue: Was that when they sent you home they were you thinking you'd file a claim and you'd get a certain percentage of disability?
- Senor: Yeah. That's what the doctor told me.
- DePue: Why wouldn't they have done that before you were released?
- Senor: I don't know. I have no idea. I was just twenty-two years old. You've got to understand that. I was just twenty-two years old.
- DePue: I don't mean to put you on the spot here, Clarence. Besides that part of it, how good do you think the treatment was that you got?
- Senor: Oh, it was fair. I was in the hospital with all of those guys that had their arms blown off and their legs blown off. And I felt good. I see them guys, they're missing part of their bodies and the only thing I got is a head wound. And a guy told me, "That's one of the worst things you can have." The psychiatrist told me that. He said, "Because we don't know what to do with it."
- DePue: What did you do with your life after you got back to Illinois?
- Senor: I went back to work for Pillsbury Mill. Come home to my wife and baby. And then we started having some more kids. But everything worked out all right.
- DePue: How many kids did you have once you were done with that?

- Senor: My wife had seven kids. So, we had seven kids. We had two girls, two boys, a girl, and two boys.
- DePue: I know you mentioned before that one of your dreams had always been that you were going to be a fireman.
- Senor: Yeah, I was a little boy. The firehouse was in the neighborhood and I'd seen the guys do this. I'd see the fire engines going up and down the street. One day my mother and I were walking in front of the fire house, and they got an alarm. We was right in the middle of it, and I grabbed hold of my momma's leg, and she couldn't move. And then this guy come out, and says, "All right, buddy. Don't be scared. Some day you might grow up to be a fireman." I never did forget that. I did, too. It was a good job.
- DePue: When did you land the firefighter job?
- Senor: May 8, 1963.
- DePue: Wow. You remember the specific date. Was it very competitive to get to be a fireman.
- Senor: Oh, yeah. Very competitive. Thought I brought that in here.
- DePue: Yeah, it might be in this...
- Senor: No, it's not there.
- DePue: Did you have to take a physical exam and a mental?
- Senor: You had to take a written test, and then they had the agility test. Then you had to go before the doctor, and everything.
- DePue: How long did you serve as a firefighter?
- Senor: Fifteen years. Approximately fifteen years.
- DePue: What led to the decision to go back and get your GED?
- Senor: My wife. She insisted that I do that. She said, "You're sitting over there. You're not doing anything. Take the books out and read them. And go back to school." So, I did.
- DePue: She wanted you to set an example for the kids?
- Senor: Yup. Yup, Yup, yup. That's what it was all about.
- DePue: Was she right?
- Senor: She was right.

DePue: And you got your GED when?

Senor: Nineteen sixty-eight.

DePue: Now, I know also, that you were in a fairly serious accident when you were on the firefighting scene.

Senor: Yup. One night we got an alarm around seven o'clock. Going on the west side of town, or downtown somewhere. We took out and went down Cook Street. We got to Fifth and Cook Street and this guy jumped the light, stop light, and hit the fire engine. He didn't see it coming. He hit in the right rear wheels and I was on the back end. And he threw me off. I was hurt. The last thing I remember was, I got knocked off the fire engine into a car and I remember hitting the car, and then that's all I remember. After that, next thing I knew, a policeman was telling me, "Clarence, lay down, you're hurt. You've been in an accident." It was a friend of mine that lived in the neighborhood where we lived.

I sat there and I said, "Who am I talking to?" I couldn't see. I couldn't see a thing. And he said, "This is Mike." I said, "Mike who?" He said, Mike Cummington, your old buddy." I said, "Oh, Mike, what are you doing here?" He said, "I got the call, and I knew you were working today, so I hurried up over here and I found you crawling down the street. You didn't even know where you were going." I had a big hole in my leg. I thought my leg was gone. And I couldn't feel anything else.

DePue: A big chunk of flesh had taken been out?

Senor: A great big hole in my leg.

DePue: Had you banged up in your head again as well?

Senor: Not too much. I had that helmet on. And it bent the helmet. The helmet took the blow because I turned it like that. I would show it to you but it's down in the basement. The helmet took the blow. It's the only thing that kept from getting my brains knocked out. So they took me to the hospital and I passed out a couple of times before I got there.

And when I come to, I was in the hospital, and this nurse had taken all of my clothes off of me except my shorts, my under shorts. He was pulling them off. I said, "No, you can't take them off. No." She said, "Listen buddy, I've seen them things before. You ain't got nothing new on me." All the guys that was in there with me laughed, and they said, "Oh, she got you, Clarence. She got you." And we laughed about that. But, they shot me up with that morphine and I felt pretty good. Then, the doctor come in and he said, "I'm going to have to cut your leg open on both sides. Go in there and tie them ligaments back, and then sew you up."

I was flat on my back for ten days. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't do a thing. I had that fire shock. That accident shock. Nerves were shot. Gone. Couldn't cry. Couldn't do nothing. I was hurting so bad; I just hurt all over. From the top of my feet to the bottom of my head, I just hurt, hurt, hurt. And the doctor told me, "We're going to take care of that. I'm going to give you a spinal block, and work on your leg, and then I'm going to give you some more morphine. When you want some morphine, you push the button and have the nurse give it to you. You're banged up pretty bad." So, I did. My wife was right there with me. They sent a police car out to get my wife and bring her to the hospital. And she come right there with me.

DePue: Now, when you first realized that you were hurt, you said you couldn't see?

Senor: Couldn't see a thing.

DePue: Did that scare you?

Senor: Oh, yeah. After I hit that car, I remember seeing a car. And after I hit that car, I couldn't see anything after that. I was knocked silly.

DePue: Was that the worst moment for you in this accident?

Senor: Up to that point. Scared to death. Couldn't cry. Couldn't holler. Couldn't do nothing. Just my body was gone, man. Couldn't feel my leg. I thought I tore it off.

DePue: Now this was, from what you told me, only the third year you were in the service as a firefighter?

Senor: I went on '63, '64, '65, '66, yeah.

DePue: And what month is '66 was this?

Senor: February.

DePue: February is not your month, Clarence.

Senor: Not my month. Fourteen years later.

DePue: Let's see, February of...

Senor: Fifty-two.

DePue: And then February of '66.

Senor: Yeah.

DePue: What were you thinking during February of 1980? That would have been fourteen years later after the second accident.

- Senor: I'm doing all right. I was working.
- DePue: So you weren't giving it any second thought that...
- Senor: No, I hadn't even thought of it after it happened. I think it happened on the same day, too. I'm not for sure. Sixteenth of February.
- DePue: Obviously you were able to recover completely?
- Senor: Yeah.
- DePue: And come back to work?
- Senor: Yeah. I worked ten years later. And then it got to me, nerves.
- DePue: So all of the injuries started...
- Senor: The nerves. The nerves.
- DePue: Did you enjoy your life as a firefighter?
- Senor: Oh, yeah. I enjoyed it. I really enjoyed it.
- DePue: What was it about firefighting that really got you going?
- Senor: I'd seen these guys sitting at the firehouse. When we went down there to fight, I'd see these guys sitting at the firehouse. Sitting around, playing cards, and doing other things. I asked this one guy, "Do you guys get paid for sleeping and eating?" And he said, "Yeah. Son, when you get old enough to, take the test." I said, "Okay." So I did; I took the test and I got on there.
- DePue: You remember any other fire you were at that was especially memorable?
- Senor: Yeah. We had a fire at Ninth and Washington Street. I was operating a rig—that's the engine—at Tenth and Washington Street at the railroad tracks. This fire started in a big building, and then it jumped into the next building. And then it jumped into the next building. Then we heard this crash, and the walls fell on six of our colleagues. One of them died instantly. The other five were taken to the hospital.

And we had to keep right on fighting that fire. Couldn't stop until we got it put out. And behold, the youngest guy got killed on the fire unit, covered up by that wall. You're talking about danger. You never know. You never know.

We had a fire one day down on Second and Madison Street. We went down there and we put the fire out. Or, at least we thought we put the fire out. We were on our way back to the firehouse, and before we could get back to the firehouse, the man called up and said, "You guys, they had another alarm back to the same spot." Well, somehow it got into the elevator shaft, and they didn't get the water

down into the elevator shaft, and we got back there. Four floors of fire went right up that elevator shaft. Right up the basement, first floor, second floor, third floor. We got in that oil and that grease. We were there until the next day. That was two o'clock in the afternoon. We were there all night long.

DePue: Well, fighting oil and grease fires is different from fighting wood, isn't it?

Senor: Yeah. It's all fire, though.

DePue: But again, looking back it, you enjoyed your life and firefighting?

Senor: Yeah. Do you want soda pop or water?

DePue: Water would be just fine.

Senor: Water, Peggie.

DePue: I think we're about getting towards the end here. But I always like to ask some more general questions. Did you have the opportunity to take advantage of any GI Bill benefits, or any other military benefits?

Senor: Oh, yeah. I went to printing school. I went down just recently, now. Back in 1960, I filed for the GI Bill for housing, because a guy told me to do that, so if I ever needed it that I could get it. So, just recently, last year—last year or this year?—we went down to the bank and applied for a GI loan for housing. The lady looked at it, and she called someone to check. She said, "You're eligible – because you filed."

It's always open. It's never closed. It's always open. So, my wife wants to buy another house. But, we'd have to get rid of this one first, because this one's paid for. We've had it paid for, for I don't know how long. And when the guy come in and told me about this house here, I couldn't believe what he said: "You don't know what you have here. Any house that was built before 1900 is special. Historical houses." This house was built in 1895.

DePue: And it was obviously very well built from what I can tell.

Senor: Yes. It is. Very well.

DePue: When did you move into this house?

Senor: Nineteen-sixty-four.

DePue: Was it at this location at that time? I know you mentioned that they had moved it a short distance.

Senor: They moved it 255 feet from that corner down there to this spot here.

DePue: It's probably worth mentioning the address that you're at right now.

Senor: 1420 South Sixteenth Street.

DePue: Have you kept up with any of your military buddies from the time you were in the service?

Senor: The guys I knew, I haven't heard anything from them. It's not intentional. It's just, when you go your way, everybody goes their way. I'm quite sure there's people you haven't heard from, too.

DePue: How about some of the veterans' organizations? Have you been involved with any of them?

Senor: I'm in American Legion Post 809.

DePue: How long have you been a member there?

Senor: I became a member there after I got out of the Navy. Then I dropped my membership, and then I joined back again. So I've been there over twenty years now.

DePue: Is that predominantly an African-American group?

Senor: Yes, it is.

DePue: Why do you think that's the case? During the war it's integrated, and afterwards we kind of segregate ourselves again to a certain extent.

Senor: That's a question I cannot answer you. I don't know why. Like anything. Like when you go to high school and you make friends. There are some guys that are continuous in your friends. When they see I got a friend that is a friend of mine, and when he sees me we talk and everything.

We have our high school reunion every year in September and I see a lot of the guys and talk to them. That's about the extent of it. But there's a couple of guys that I'm friendly with, and they're friendly with me. So, it's here, and it's there. You know what I'm talking about.

DePue: Do you think your time in the Korean War, and your short time in the Navy, was worth it?

Senor: Yeah.

DePue: Why do you say that? You didn't hesitate at all?

Senor: Taught me a few things that I didn't know existed.

DePue: Such as?

Senor: Being away from home. You have to make the right decision because they're your decisions to make. And you make some friends and some friends you don't make. No matter where you go, there's people that's going to like you and there's people that's not going to like you.

DePue: How do you think that experience changed you, or maybe, did it change you?

Senor: Made me pretty hard.

DePue: Hard in what way?

Senor: With people. Not trusting people. My wife says, "You don't like anybody, do you?" I said, "No. What I don't like is what people say and what people do."

DePue: Would you say then that you're quicker to judge people?

Senor: I don't try to judge them. They judge themselves.

DePue: What do you think about race relations; you lived quite a few of these things yourself. Seeing a lot of different things over the last forty, fifty years, where would you place American race relations today?

Senor: They've camouflaged it. They just upgraded it. It's still there. It will never go away.

DePue: It will never go away. So you don't think that this is something that can be changed?

Senor: It's not going to be changed. People are not going to let it change. There are people that are good. And there are some people that are not good.

DePue: Well, this is an especially important day in that respect. Again, Barack Obama was elected yesterday. You don't think that's going to change things? Or it's a sign of change?

Senor: Well, let me see. I've been voting since 1952. And after every election, the next day, I had to go up and go to work. That's the way all people have to do.

DePue: What advice would you give to future generations, then?

Senor: Be careful.

DePue: What advice do you give your kids?

Senor: I try to tell them the truth. And I try to tell them to watch people. Be careful who you associate with. If you find somebody doing something that you don't like, don't do it if you don't want to. Steer clear of certain things.

DePue: I've seen some pictures of your family. There seems to be a consistency in some of this. A lot of them have gone into the Navy. How did that happen?

Senor: That's just the way it was. My uncle, my brother, me, and three of my sons were all in the Navy.

DePue: Were you telling them that's the branch they should join?

Senor: I told them if they want to see part of the world to get into the Navy. It's a good thing.

DePue: Are you proud of your Navy service?

Senor: Oh, yeah?

DePue: Do you think what we were doing in Korea was the right thing to do?

Senor: I guess so, yeah.

DePue: Do you have feelings about Vietnam?

Senor: I don't know too much about Vietnam except what I read. Come on, you got another question you want to ask me.

DePue: About what's going on today?

Senor: I hate it. They sending them young kids over there and they're killing them. They're bringing home in them bags. That's pitiful. It's really pitiful. For nothing. All they're fighting for over there is a bucket of sand. It's pitiful that these kids are dying for nothing.

DePue: So you don't buy that the logic that we went there in the first place? Afghanistan, as well?

Senor: Yeah. The whole nut in a shell. The first thing is, they keep on talking about the surge. Well, you know what a surge is? It's something that happens to your car. You can't shut it off. We call it dieseling. They just upgraded it to surging.

How can you be winning something when there's no line to stop it? Like the forty-eighth parallel. Or the thirty-eighth parallel; over there in Korea they went to the thirty-eighth parallel and all of that. And they keep on saying, "We're winning the war." What are we winning?

DePue: Do you have a problem with the way the Korean War ended? Because it ended in a draw, basically, after all of that sacrifice?

Senor: Yeah. I have a problem with it. We lost all of those guys over there for nothing. Because of something somebody else did.

DePue: What would you like to say in conclusion at the end of the interview here?

Senior: What would you like to say in conclusion?

DePue: Yeah, how would you like to close off the interview?

Senior: Well, I'm glad you come by and asked me about all of those questions. I hope I give you some fair answers. And I hope people understand what I said.

DePue: Well, Clarence, I think you came across crystal clear. There's some important things here we've been talking about today. Things that need to be understood from your perspective as, this is your life. You lived these incidents. I don't know that a lot of kids today necessarily understand how things were or even are. So, it's a very important story and it needs to be told. I thank you very much for it. You've been most cooperative with me. Hopefully we can get this on the internet and can get your story out so people can understand it from your own terms.

Senior: Yes. And I'd like to say this. There are some good people out there in this world. And there are some people that are not so good. And I'll leave it at that.

DePue: Thank you, Clarence.

Senior: You're welcome.

(end of interview)