

Arnie and Winnie Stenglein Oral History

World War II in Carver County Oral History Project

February 10, 2000

Interview with Arnie and Winnie Stenglein

Interviewed by Stacy Helmbrecht-Wilson

Stacy Helmbrecht-Wilson **SHW**
Arnie J. Stenglein **AJS**
Winnie Stenglein **WS**

SHW: Say your name and your birth date and the place you were born, and then we can get back to that.

AJS: Arnold Joseph Stenglein, March 17, 1920, Fletcher, Minnesota. I grew up in Minneapolis.

SHW: And Winifred Stenglein?

WS: I was born the 18th of June 1923, in Waconia.

SHW: And you were talking about enlisting in the marines in March of 1941?

AJS: I enlisted March 6, 1941, in the Marine Corps for four years. After I got out of boot camp I went to sea school. I got through sea school; then they put me on the USS *Oklahoma* battleship in San Diego. So they put me aboard that thing, and I went out to the Hawaiian Islands. When I got out there I was transferred over onto the USS *Nevada*. That's the ship I was assigned to here, but they gave me a ride out there on the *Oklahoma*. The *Oklahoma*, the *Arizona*, and the *Nevada* was Battleship Division Number 1. We met out there—the three of us ships—and we cruised around for a while. Suddenly we came into Pearl Harbor for a leave and a little liberty. They tied us up on the different docks. That was on Saturday. They were taking the main battery ammunition off and replacing it with fresh stuff. The officer on the deck said, "Get that thing out of here. We don't that parked here when you're down because somebody could throw a cigarette over there and blow us all up, or something else." Well, "or something else" did happen. Sunday morning the Japs came, but they took the barge out of there by then. But I was standing, looking aft when the flag was raised at 8 o'clock, when the machine gun fire started. We looked around, and sure, everybody started running for cover. You could see the airplanes with the red circle, Japanese symbol, and then they sounded General Quarters. I was right near the gun I was supposed to be on. The marines had a 5-inch surface gun that was their battle station. That was for other ships. And above us was the antiaircraft 5-inch guns. We didn't have much to fire at, but they said, "Whatever you can see up there, shoot." The B-25 and B-17 bombers were coming out of the United States, and they were coming in on certain degrees of the compass, like from zero to fifty or twenty. Anybody that came in at any other angle, they were considered enemy.

Well, when these B-17s and B-25s came in, they were running low on gas, and they came in any way they could, and of course, they got shot at. Nobody really knows if anybody hit any of them—not with our guns. Our guns just blow a hole right through them. But the anti-aircraft gun could give them some damage. That lasted for a couple hours. Finally, the officers' liberty ran all night. The enlisted men had to be in at midnight. The next noncommissioned officer on board ship got our ship—the *Nevada*—under way, to leave the harbor to get a little maneuvering space. By that time they had sunk the *Arizona*, they had sunk the *Oklahoma*, the *West Virginia*—about nine battleships were sunk in that hour and a half. Then we got under way, and the Jap planes came after us. They gave us two torpedoes that blew a hole in our bow, 19 x 40 feet. We were sinking, so the tower told us, "Don't go out anymore. Don't block the channel," because the ships were so big nobody else could go in or out. So they ran it ashore. That was Sunday yet, the 7th of December. The harbor was so shallow that when we sank, our main deck was still above a little water—45 feet deep, and they were dredging that harbor all the time to keep those bigger ships in. We sat on the bottom, but our deck was above water. So the marines stood guard on the ship. We figured the Japs were going to come back, sure as hell, because they had us. All our airplanes were gone, and all of our ships were gone except for the *Nevada*. We sat there from December 7th until about April, just waiting for the Japs to come because we thought sure they'd be back. Then they brought a patch over from the factory that fit this hole, 19 x 40 feet, but they had to blast some coral away to get the patch to fit. They started pumping the water out, and we floated. They put us into dry dock, and that was in May or June. They had her fixed up enough that we could come back to the states on our own power. So we went back to the Bremerton Navy Yard, and there they fooled around until September or October, and then they had to revamp the ship and this and that. Then I asked for a transfer off because I had my two years on the ship then. So they transferred me into the Bremerton Navy Yard, sergeant or guard of the main gate. I was there for a couple of months. They needed some men down in Camp Pendleton because they were starting a second Anti-Tank battalion. The First Marine Division was getting ready to invade Guadalcanal, and they needed some artillery protection. The Japs had some cheap tin cans for tanks, and we could do some damage to them, so they loaded us aboard a ship down there in New Zealand, and we were a floating reserve for the First Marine Division. They didn't need us, so we just went back and sat in New Zealand again for a while. I was there for about ten months, off and on, loading ships and backing up somebody. After that, they felt they had enough people there that they could handle pretty much anything. They had bigger guns—ours were small. So they sent me back to Noumea, New Caledonia, with a whole bunch of NCOs, which is a noncommissioned officer. We got quite a few of us when they sent us back to the United States because they were forming a Fifth Marine Division. They need the NCOs because all they were getting here was privates and from the street. We got into the Fifth Marine Division.

SHW: At this point, what was your rank? Were you a sergeant?

AJS: I was a sergeant then. We got bigger guns, 75mm howitzers. We practiced that for a while. Then they sent us to Iwo Jima. The Fifth Marine Division landed in Iwo Jima. On Suribachi, which was that hill there, the Japs were on top of that son-of-a-gun and they were shooting at us from below, and the front line was on the other side and they were shooting at us. They had to secure Suribachi because they were doing too much damage. So the 26th Marines finally went up there, and I was watching, and all of a sudden they were raising the flag. You know the picture that you see; we saw them raising the flag. Well, then we knew that we wouldn't get any more

fire from that side. So then we could turn our backs on them and go the other way. We were right close to the infantry that had 75mm; that wasn't a very big gun, but you shoot straight up. You don't shoot very far. Anyway, we were at Iwo Jima for about three weeks. Then the army moved in and took over. We just about had it secured then, our infantry did. Then they moved in and we moved out and went back into Pearl Harbor with the Fifth Marine Division, and we got some 155mm howitzers—bigger son-of-a-guns—and got loaded on board LSTs headed for Japan to occupy Japan. Before we got there—from Pearl Harbor to Japan is about seven or eight thousand miles; it takes a while to get there—and on the way they had dropped the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. So when we got that word, we sailed into Sasebo, Japan. It was a peaceful landing, and nobody bothered us at all. I was in there for about two weeks. Before I left for Japan, I had enough points to get out, but they wanted to keep me; the war was still on. So when we got to Japan, I stayed there for a couple weeks. Then they decided it looked like it was coming to the end, so they'd send me back to the states to be discharged. One of the questions here is, "What was the biggest adjustment from your civilian life?" It was obeying orders.

SHW: I had a couple other questions. Why did you decide to enlist in March?

AJS: You hear so much about Hitler, Poland, England, France—he was just raising hell over there, you know. Roosevelt, our president at that time, wanted to help, but he had to have the backing of the United States people to go to war. When I got out, I went up to Canada to two border towns, Emerson—I know it's up at the border—and Winnipeg to join the Canadian Air Force. They said, "You better go back because you're going to be in here before too long, and then you'll be for your country then." I said okay, so I went back, and when I got back there, sure shooting they took me in. I'm backing up a little bit, but now I'm catching up again. There are a bunch of questions about the different people in the war. They were all good guys, regular Americans. "What was the most difficult part of your service?" That was staying alive. When we got the orders we were going to Iwo Jima, the B-29s and the B-17s were bombing Tokyo from Guam and Saipan and different places, but they were all being shot down or crippled—they couldn't get back to Guam. So then they said you got to land on Iwo Jima. That was 700 miles away from Japan. They had fighter planes there, and if they had crippled bombers they could land on Iwo Jima. Well, they did. They came in crippled, and most of the time they came in so bad that they would stop at the end of the runway because they couldn't fly anymore. They would have landed in the sea someplace. That was one reason why they landed at Iwo Jima, because that was 700 miles away and they could send fighters over there to fight their fighters. And then of course when they found that they couldn't bomb Japan anymore because they were losing all their airplanes, then they dropped the atomic bombs, and that was the end of them. So we went over to Sasebo, and we sailed right into that place. We could see when we sailed into there that we'd have a hell of a time getting into there if there was a war on, because they had guns on the hillsides and stuff like that.

SHW: Why don't we talk about Iwo Jima a little more, if you don't mind. What is an amphibious landing under fire like?

AJS: Iwo Jima was the most populated island in the Pacific. There were about 10,000 Japanese and about 20,000 Americans on this eight square miles. They had borders and stuff. We came in with our LSTs and our guns, and they were shooting at us. We were bombing Iwo Jima for two

months before, but they had so many caves and stuff that they were just running into the caves when we started shooting at them. Anyway, on our way in we got a lot of mortar fire from them on land. We came in all right, but we had a hell of a time getting up that hill. The sand was so soft that our truck that pulled our gun had a hell of a time getting up there. Anyway, we got up there in position, and we stayed there for two or three weeks. Then the army came in.

SHW: Was it constant fighting for those two weeks? How long did it take?

AJS: Our artillery was trying to get all the island, and we were shooting our guns over our artillery, our front line, trying to get them to surrender. They did surrender when we dropped the bombs, you know. But there was no water on the island. They had to make it aboard ship, and then bring it to shore. When we got up that far, if you wanted a guy to come out of the cave and surrender, you'd say something like, "[Japanese words]," which means "water I will give you," and then they'd come out because they needed water bad. Anyway, when the army moved in they had their dogs with them and they ended it in pretty much of a hurry then. They just overran them. At Iwo Jima, they figured the Japs were going to start using gas because they were getting kind of nervous about losing the place. So they gave us all gas masks, but you can't hardly breathe through a gas mask. So we just said, "The hell with it. If we get gassed, we get gassed, and that's got to be it." It's still better than being shot or something like that. Anyway, we got out of Iwo Jima, and the food was bad over there on Iwo Jima for the two or three weeks that we were there. We were getting K-rations, and we were stealing food from the Seabees—that's our people. We stole powdered sugar, powdered eggs, powdered flour, and milk, and we'd make pancakes. We'd fry the pancakes on a shovel over a fire. It's the best food we ever had, the C or K rations.

SHW: Why did the Seabees have better food?

AJS: Golly, I tell you. They had dishes and tables to eat of off when they had meals! We had the old mess kit and you'd go sit in the corner or out in the woods someplace. Most of the time when you'd get up there and get your food, you'd turn right over and dump it in the garbage can because it ain't fit to eat. Then you're looking for something to eat. So you're ready to steal. As soon as I got out of the service, an uncle of mine said, "Look, you can go to work at the railroad there by Sears. It's a switchyard, and you can be an apprentice fireman." We'd go back and forth with an agent and they'd tell us when to throw the coal in. Then they sent us to Hutchinson overnight. We had to pay for our hotel there and our food. Then we came back to Sears Roebuck the next morning. That was no good for me, so I quit that and went to work for Interstate Power Company that owned this power company here. I started with them November 6, 1946. In 1972, NSP bought out Interstate. I was working in Minneapolis then. I had a crew assigned to me with Interstate Power Company, but the union said that I couldn't have it because I wasn't a senior man. Jim Votchel, the manager, said, "We're running this company. We own this company. We tell this guy what he can do." The union said, "No he can't." So they put me out of there and put a guy named Gores in my place. I thought that's enough of that crap, so I quit and went down to Minneapolis to work. I worked in Minneapolis on a crew down there for five years, driving back and forth every day. Then Minnetonka, Excelsior, a division, they said, "You can transfer out to a division now because we need people out there." When I got out to the division here, I worked for them for about a year or two. Then when they bought out Interstate, they said, "You can go to

Interstate and operate that outfit. You know enough about our company to tell them what we want." I said, "Sure, as long as the pay is more than I'm making now, I'll take it." So I think it was 1972 that I went out there, back out to Waconia again. They made me a district superintendent. Before I was all done I was the headman on this big area, about nine towns. My responsibility was, once we got word that there was some damage—trees or poles—I had to get crews out. I had three line crews and a tree crew. So it was up to me to get crews out whenever the trouble board in Minneapolis called and said they had people out of power. That lasted for about eight years. Then I thought I'd retire. In 1981 I retired from the company, from NSP. That's almost twenty years.

SHW: When did you all meet? Did you know each other back during the war or did you meet after the war?

WS: We knew each other before the war.

SHW: Were you married before the war?

WS: No. We were married in Bremerton Navy Yard.

AJS: Before I went to New Zealand, we were married.

WS: You came home on furlough, and then you went back to Bremerton Navy Yard, and then I came out. I had relatives out there who were working in the shipyards. I stayed with them, and Arnie was at the shipyard. When we knew he was going to be transferred down to New Zealand, we decided to get married. We were married out at Bremerton Navy Yard.

AJS: About a day or two later we went to New Zealand. It took us twenty-eight days to get there on a ship. That's a long ways down there—twenty-eight days.

SHW: I believe it. What was it like on board the troop ships?

AJS: I don't know. I got sicker than . . . You know, I was aboard a battleship for two years and never got sick a day in my life, but the day I got aboard that damn old transport, I was getting woozy here already, because it's dirty and it isn't neat and clean like a navy ship. Your group, like we had the 2nd Anti-Tank Battalion, we'd have meetings every day and discuss our status during the war in our 2nd Anti-Tank Battalion. That's about all. But I was in New Zealand for about ten months. But off and on we'd get called to load up on a ship and be floating reserve for some division someplace that they needed some help.

SHW: What did you do in New Zealand while you were waiting? Did they give you leave at all? Did you get to see any of New Zealand or Australia?

AJS: I never was in Australia. I never got any leave in New Zealand. We were helping unload ships. The United States was sending supplies to Australia and New Zealand, and we'd help unload ships. They kept us busy.

SHW: You were dating when Pearl Harbor happened.

AJS: No, I knew him when he left for the service.

SHW: But you weren't dating yet? You just knew each other?

WS: We were dating.

SHW: Were you writing to each other?

WS: Yes.

AJS: There were a couple of years that I would go to church in the morning here on Sunday, and I'd look where she was. So it was getting serious as far as I was concerned.

WS: But he took off.

AJS: I had to take off. I figured if I took off, absence makes the heart grow fonder, they say.

SHW: Well, it worked out.

WS: Fifty-seven years.

SHW: Oh, my goodness. With Pearl Harbor, how long did it take you to find out he was okay?

AJS: I didn't get leave until I got out of Pearl Harbor, back to the Bremerton Navy Yard.

WS: I'd say it was about two weeks before we got a letter from him that he was all right.

SHW: That must have been scary.

AJS: I got leave off of the guard duty and went back to Minnesota here for thirty days, and then I went back out again.

WS: Then I came out to Seattle. It was a full life.

AJS: It was like, I've been there, it was huge sections of "done that."

SHW: If you don't mind, could we talk about Pearl Harbor a little more. Did anyone think anything was going to happen?

AJS: We thought we knew later on that President Roosevelt and his chiefs knew that Japan was going to attack. First of all, our navy was keeping track of the Japanese carriers. It looked to them like they were heading south towards the Philippines, different places. So we weren't concerned about getting hit in Pearl Harbor. But then they lost the Japanese carriers because they were heading for us, for Hawaii. It was the roughest sea they could find because they came from

the north, but they made it all right. One hundred fifty airplanes attacked Pearl Harbor from those carriers.

SHW: What did you guys think? Did you think you were any danger that Saturday before it or did you think Japan would never attack?

AJS: The only danger we thought we had is if somebody blew up that damn barge full of ammunition. Otherwise, we had no idea that anybody was going to attack us there. Later on we found out that Roosevelt wanted to get into the war and help Britain out in the worst way, but he couldn't because he didn't have the backing of the country. When they lost the Japanese carriers, that's what kind of had them stumped, because where did they go? Did they go south like we thought they were, or where did they go? Well, they came north to Pearl Harbor and we didn't know that.

SHW: You said the officers were on leave for twenty-four hours. Were there any officers on board your ship?

AJS: Yes, there were some. The radar was brand new. They had a radar set up on Maui Island, and these guys saw about a hundred airplanes out there. They called down to headquarters and said, "Hey, we've got a big air force out there that we don't know who they are. They are unidentified." The guy said, "Well, don't worry about it. There are B-25s coming out of the United States," because they knew there was a war coming and they didn't know for sure when, but they were beefing up all over the country. So they said, "Don't worry about it. They're B-29s." But when they came in, they were short of gas and where were they going? We were told they would only come in on 58 degrees on the compass, so don't shoot at them. Like I say, they came in low on gas, so they came in any way they could.

SHW: When everyone realized it was the Japanese, was it just chaos initially? When everyone realized at Pearl Harbor that it was not the bombers coming in from America, it was the Japanese, what was that like? Was it just total chaos, or did everyone kind of respond in the way they had been trained?

AJS: When we finally got General Quarters, then everybody was shooting at something or other.

WS: That was the ship he was on.

AJS: That's a copy of the *USS Nevada*. My place for General Quarters was this gun right here. The marines had this gun and that gun, and this gun and that gun, and the navy had the rest of them. Well, then the navy also had the aircraft guns up here on top. We had some machine guns.

SHW: Did the machine gun do much against a fighter or a bomber?

AJS: No. The machine guns were old. Bullets were coming out end for end and in pretty bad shape. The ship was 560 feet long and 100 feet wide.

SHW: I didn't realize they were that big.

AJS: Oh, they were huge. And the carriers . . . Oh, my lord! They were maybe three times as big as a battleship. Oh, they were huge! You must have seen them on TV already where they've got so many airplanes on there, they cruise around on that deck. It's got to be big for doing that.

SHW: Did this still seem big when you were out at sea? Or did it start to feel small when you were out at sea?

AJS: There was plenty of room out there. There were, like I say, nine battleships. That's three divisions. They were cruising all around just trying to protect Pearl Harbor more than anything—from what, nobody knows, but that was their mission. They blew a hole this side over here 19 x 40 feet. And, of course, then she started sinking right away, and we didn't know what because I was way back here. That ship was so dang big you can't tell if it's a little bit rough, that thing is moving. They said, "Don't go out in the harbor because you're sinking, and we don't want you to block the harbor." So we run aground, and that where we stayed for six months or so before they got the thing . . . All the motors had to come out and get rebuilt because everything below deck here was wet. It took a while. Then they got back to Bremerton Navy Yard on their own power, but they had to tear the whole thing apart again and put a whole new picture of the ship. So it didn't look like this anymore.

SHW: When the Japanese planes were coming in and they were dropping bombs, did you see the other battleships getting hit and going down? Could you see what was going on, or was it just too . . .

AJS: No, there was just too much going on—loud noises, Boom! Like the *Arizona*, just blowing up completely. And smoke and fire . . . the water was burning because there was oil on the top of the water. Anybody that jumped in, they had to fight the dang fire down here in the water. So we stayed aboard. Like I say, we weren't sinking until we were told we were sinking. We didn't know it. But the other ships, like the *Arizona*, I don't think anybody there knew anything because they went down just like that. They dropped a couple bombs down the stack, and that blew up the whole boiler area, and the lights and everything else, and all the mechanical equipment went to pieces, and down she went.

WS: But there were some alive, weren't there, in the *Arizona*? You could hear the knocking.

AJS: The *Oklahoma*, that thing rolled over on her side and her belly was sticking up, and there were guys in there yet, and they were knocking on the walls trying to show these rescuers where they were so they could cut holes and go down and get them.

SHW: Oh, my gosh.

AJS: A week later they were still knocking on the walls waiting for somebody to come in and get them out. Every time things quieted down, you could hear these guys pounding on the ship. Boy, the welders and the cutters, they were cutting holes all over the ship. They'd have to go through several different compartments to get to the guys. So it took a while for them to get anybody out of there. A week or so is a long time stuck in a little room that you can't get out of.

SHW: What did the harbor look like at the end of the attack?

AJS: Oh, golly. I had some pictures of it that I took of it. Nothing but smoke and fire.

SHW: Did it look like there was anything left?

AJS: No, not a thing. There was so much smoke you couldn't hardly see any of the ships even. From Pearl Harbor, I know that a couple of the admirals or generals off of the harbor, they could look down and see the mess down there. You know, when the Japs got through attacking these ships and got us sunk, they went back to their ships to load up and come back and do some more, probably to the other part of the island. But the admiral that was in charge of the attack said, "No, we've served our mission; we've crippled them completely, and if we go back, they are liable to find our air carriers and we'll get sunk and none of us will get back." So they went home, but we thought they'd come back because they had us. We had no defense hardly at all.

WS: They probably didn't realize how much they did.

AJS: They didn't until they got back and looked at their photographs. The big admiral over in Japan said, "I think all we did was wake up a sleeping giant with an urge to retaliate." And that's just what they did.

SHW: How did you guys keep going on after seeing what happened at Pearl Harbor and what happened afterwards? How did you still go back and go on and go to New Zealand and go to Iwo Jima? It's got to be terrifying to see all that happening, and know you have to go back and do it again sometime.

AJS: I guess once you see Pearl Harbor, you see all the damage, it's just like when you get a tornado in this country here. You go and see that damage. You wonder, boy oh boy, that can happen. If you're here in the middle of that, you're dead too, you know. But it's about the same thing. It's something you have to take. Down south they had three or four tornadoes, didn't they in the spring? We thought, boy, if they're having them now, we'll have them. We used to get them.

SHW: Did all of these seem connected to your life before the war? Did everything going on seem connected to your life before the war or did it seem just so different it wasn't even remotely like what you lived before the war? That's a strange question.

AJS: I didn't understand it.

SHW: You went to high school before the war, and then you enlisted. But once the fighting started and it was so violent and so unlike anything before, how did you . . .

AJS: We were scared, yes. When we found out that the First Marine Division was having a hell of a time on Guadalcanal, and that we were all floating reserves and were supposed to go help

them out, we thought, Now we're going to get it. I don't know, death seemed so far away unless you're in the middle of it. If they're a thousand miles away on an island, it's pretty far away.

SHW: What made you decide to be a marine?

AJS: I don't know. Nobody was a marine before me in our family. I guess the marines were the only force that could be sent into a foreign country without an act of war. That's a good way to see the world, except when there's a war. So I joined the marines. It's a good outfit. The army was so tremendous—so big, so much they got by with. But the marines kept pretty close track of their guys.

SHW: Where did you get the tattoos?

AJS: These were in Los Angeles, and I guess this one up here was in Pearl Harbor, and this one was in New Zealand, the expeditionary force in New Zealand. That's all I got.

WS: You have them on your other arm.

SHW: Why don't we talk a little bit about you [Winifred]?

WS: There really isn't anything to say.

SHW: Well, you went out and got married? How did you find housing? I hear that was really hard.

WS: I was staying with my relatives until he was shipped to New Zealand.

AJS: Down to Camp Pendleton first, and then to New Zealand.

WS: Then I came back here and worked here at the Patriot office. That's about it.

SHW: Were you working in a job that you could have gotten before the war, or was it one of the jobs that opened up because the men were gone?

WS: In Seattle? I worked at Boeing, as a bucker.

SHW: What's a bucker?

AJS: It's the one that holds the rivet while the other one is . . .

WS: . . . riveting the wings together.

AJS: It takes two people.

WS: Then I worked at the shipyard as a filing clerk until you were transferred again.

AJS: Too bad I can't get that picture of the *Arizona*. Were you ever out to Pearl Harbor?

SHW: No, I haven't.

AJS: They got a monument out there above the *Oklahoma*, of the *Arizona*, and it shows the *Arizona*, the whole length of the thing under the water.

SHW: I've seen the pictures. It's amazing.

AJS: Yes, it's amazing.

SHW: There is a battleship in New York that I was on. It's a World War II one, but I don't know which one it was.

AJS: I don't know what New York would be. It couldn't be the *Missouri*.

SHW: I've been on one of the World War II era battleships when I was a little kid. I just remember how big it was. And the smell. It smells like metal all the time.

AJS: I don't know. Those three ships that I was on—the *Arizona*, *Oklahoma*, and *Nevada*—they were built in 1928 or '29. They're pretty old ships, but still able to . . . whatever. Their 14-inch guns, they were all in good shape yet. They don't fire them too often. But the *Nevada*, after it was rebuilt, I remember I went up to Alaska to Attu and Kiska. The Japanese had landed on those two islands up in Alaska. The *Nevada* went up there and blasted them out of there. Then it went to Desert Storm.

SHW: So it's still in commission. Wow.

AJS: Before that, I think every battleship we had blasted Iwo Jima for weeks and weeks and weeks, and airplanes bombed it and bombed it, and yet when we landed we had more opposition than we expected, because the Japs had protection. They were there for years and years, and they had underground channels and caves.

SHW: By landed, do you mean you actually had to jump in the water and run up the beach while they were shooting at you?

AJS: No, we had a truck that could float, and when it hit land you could turn the wheels and it would go up the shore.

SHW: Oh, wow.

AJS: It came off of an LST off a ramp, and it looks like it's going to sink before it floats, but it finally floats and they start the screw back there, and you go into the shore on the water, and as soon as you hit land you shift again and you shift the wheels in gear and you drive up onto the shore into your position.

SHW: That's amazing.

AJS: Yes, it is. And the gun was in pieces, so we helped unload that thing and set it into a hole we had dug. Then the car or truck took off and dropped our ammunition . . . [end of side 1]

AJS: "Battery one round." Infantry up ahead saw some Japanese come out to do something or other, so they had one battery, four guns give them a shot and scare them back into wherever they came from. Every once in a while they'd say, "Battery one round." Everybody jumps up, fires on, sits back down again. Then maybe in an hour or so, "Battery one round" just to harass them, you know.

SHW: You did that for three weeks?

AJS: Yes, right. It was four guns, four batteries, so we didn't get the same battery all the time. They'd say, "Battery A, one round," or something like that. The next time it might be Battery C or Battery D or whatever. It kept you alert; you didn't get much sleep because you're listening and sleeping at the same time, but you're waiting for that order, "Fire one round." Then these shells had five bags of powder in them of different sizes. The distances you wanted to shoot was determined by the number of bags you leave in the shell. So you pull this thing apart and they say, "Remove four or five." So you take four or five off and shove it together, and then you fire. It only goes so far, but if you have all five of them in there, you'd probably go five miles. If you only put one in there, there was one you could never get out; that's so it at least clears the barrel before it goes off, so it doesn't blow the barrel up.

SHW: That's a little too close for comfort.

AJS: Yes, that's a handy one. We make sure we leave one in there.

SHW: Do you ever actually end of firing one that only had one bag left?

AJS: Oh yes, we'd fire with only one. Maybe two hundred feet out it would go off, you know.

SHW: How loud is that?

AJS: Of course the bigger they are the worse it is. I can't hear too good, and one reason was that.

SHW: My grandma was in Poland during World War II, and she said that when the tanks came through the ground just shook.

AJS: Oh, yes, sure, it trembles. Oh, they're big guns. Those 155mm howitzers and the 14-inch guns will fire twenty-five miles, beyond the horizon. The only way they can know what they are shooting at is by radar. I was sitting on the ship having a soda when they had a practice maneuver for the big guns, and when one of them goes off you slide over the seat because it's such a jolt when one of those babies go off.

SHW: I bet.

AJS: Sure, there are three of them.

SHW: By the big ones, do you mean these ones?

AJS: These right here. They are 14-inch guns.

SHW: Oh, my gosh.

AJS: They'll turn around and raise right up. There are three airplanes on there [shows picture], and they go into Pearl Harbor every day when you're out in the sea, and they get the mail and then come back out. They get lifted up with these cranes and put back on the catapult.

SHW: About mail, if you guys first were dating before and then got married, did you ever get your letters censored with little things cut out?

AJS: Oh, yes. Some of them you couldn't even read. Stuff that I knew you shouldn't say, but I'd let them cut it out.

WS: There were some things that would go by.

AJS: But she never got any information.

WS: No. There were always little holes.

SHW: Did you know where he was or was that just not even something you could find out?

WS: No, we couldn't find that out. That was just so different than what it would be now. Now you know where they are.

SHW: Was there a long time in gaps between letters? I've talked to the guys in the army in Europe, and they said they'd sometimes go two months before they'd get a letter, and then they'd get ten. Did you have that?

WS: Yes.

AJS: It depends on where you are. If you're in the middle of a battle, you don't get any mail, and then if you move to another island, they'll have to try to follow you up, find out where you went. So it's possible that it's two months old, sure.

SHW: I can't imagine.

WS: But you were glad to get any letter.

AJS: That's right. The date didn't matter; it was just what was said.

SHW: Did you ever send any V-mails, the microfilmed ones, or was that something that just went to Europe?

WS: We sent just a couple of them.

AJS: What?

WS: Those little V-mails.

AJS: Oh, yes, we used them. We would put the ship in dry dock, and they'd pump all the water out of this big hole, and they'd change these screws, these propellers. These son-of-a-guns are high as a ceiling, and there were four of them there. They were changing the pitch a little bit to get a little more speed out of them, because they are pretty slow, pretty heavy. One time we were in Los Angeles and a movie camera on a little boat came by us, and we were camouflaged, and they were taking pictures of our ship. The officer on deck called the guard of the day and said, "We fixed your bayonets and got the rifles out and jumped into a boat. I want that film on that camera." These guys had a good fast speed ship, and we had a clumsy old navy ship, and they were out of the breakwater before we got under way. We couldn't get them. We could shoot at them, but you can't just kill a guy for something like that. There are shore patrol, and you can radio ahead and say, "When this ship pulls in, grab that camera and hold the people." There are ways to stop them without shooting them.

SHW: What were the 1940s like? Some of the things I've heard are that everyone felt like they were pulling together, that it was really a sense of teamwork even though it was really tough. What did the country feel like in the 1940s?

AJS: Let me see . . . the forties. I was probably working on a farm or something before I went in. The war was so far away in '41 yet. We knew that they wanted to get the United States to help England because Hitler was really bombing the hell out of them, and Poland. That's one of the reasons that inspired me, was to get in there and stop Hitler. We were over in Germany after the war, and he had a building in Nuremberg that he was going to control the world with, through radio and television and all kinds of things. At that time it was rented out for storage because he lost the war.

SHW: Was it at all weird to be in Minnesota with so many people with uncles and aunts and grandparents in Germany? I know a lot of people, especially around here, were only two or three generations removed from the immigrants. Was that at all strange for people, or did it just seem totally disconnected?

AJS: There were some Stengleins in Germany close to Nuremberg. I never went to see them or anything, but I heard that. The name was familiar to some people, and that was when we were in Nuremberg. That was Hitler's favorite town. He gave all his speeches there.

SHW: Did it seem like the Germans were the big enemy, or the Japanese?

AJS: We thought the Japanese were. Of course, over in Europe—I never got over there at all—that was bad. The Polish were good and the French were good, and Russian was on their side then, so I guess the biggest was actually was over there in Europe. We had a sad thing here. We had a chief that was an emperor, a god to the Japanese. Whatever he said went, no matter what he said. I guess over in Europe was the same way. Whatever Hitler said went, too, you know. But these guys would bow to their general, their headman, because he was a god. But that's over with.

SHW: Did either of you have any brothers who were also in the service?

AJS: I met my brother. He was the only guy I ever met from Waconia, and I was over in Hawaii. When these mail planes from the battleships went in to get the mail, he was at the airport at one time, and he come to ride on one. We were up on the lava flow up on Maui in camp, standing in line for food, and then he walks up, my brother Emmett. I said, "How the hell did you get here?" "I got here on the mail plane." That was free, you know.

WS: Emmett was in the Seabees.

AJS: He was in the Seabees. When I handed him the mess kit, he said, "What's this?" because they sat down at tables and ate on dishes.

WS: He said, "This is your dinner."

AJS: The stuff we got, as soon as you get it you go over and dump it in the garbage.

WS: And hope you get a box from home.

AJS: That's right, or if there's a store handy, you'd go in and buy something.

SHW: So Spam was a step up from what you were getting? I heard that Spam was kind of the most hated food in the army by the end.

WS: Spam.

AJS: Spam? Oh, yes. I love Spam today yet. We had it the other day. It's better than sausage with eggs.

SHW: Did you have any brothers in the service?

WS: I did have, but he is dead now. He was in the army. Donny--he was in India, Burma.

AJS: He was in the air force. They were flying for Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese.

WS: It was just a different world it seems like.

AJS: I tell you, I hear that the next war will be fought with sticks and stones because there will be nothing left that's any good. The atomic bombs will have everything else wiped out; they won't have anything but sticks and stones to fight the next war. That would be a good one.

WS: You'd enlist, right?

SHW: Not getting shot at would be a big plus. Well, thank you very much for agreeing to do the interview. Can you think of anything else you'd like to add?

AJS: No, I guess what I had in mind was just a review of all I did. I don't think I left anything out. I tell you, I'm losing my eyesight, I can't hear, I've got no oxygen in my lungs. [reads a question] "What was the strangest part of returning to civilian life?" Peaceful existence because all that other stuff just stopped. The food business and the shooting and all that kind of stuff. But we were sure that the Japs would come back. We thought absolutely that they wouldn't give that up. After these carriers left, they'd probably send some troop ships because they could have taken Honolulu. The first thing they did was bomb every airport and get every plane we had on the ground. Of course, our little planes, as soon as they hear a little bad news, they take off. They're no good for anything, you know.

SHW: I have one question about Boeing. What was Boeing like? Was it weird to be working with the men on the assembly line? Did they deal with the fact that you guys were there?

WS: Oh, yes. We weren't on an assembly line; we were on an airplane that we were putting the wings together. There was just one right after the other, there were so many. There were people from Waconia out there. You asked why he wanted to join the service. It was in the Depression. There was nothing here either. He had gotten out of school and he enlisted in the CCC camps [Civilian Conservation Corps]. You were sent out to Washington.

AJS: Camp Moran. I went through St. Jordan Junior High School through the ninth grade, and I went to North High then for the tenth grade, but I quit because my father left my mother with four kids in the eighth grade school. So she had a rough time keeping us alive, so my brother Emmett left first—he went out on a farm. The first chance I had when I was sixteen, then I left and went into this CCC camp. Every heard of them?

SHW: What did you do out there?

AJS: They had Moran State Park #1, and they were just building it, and it was brand new and they were making places for tourists to cook out in the country, and trails and stuff like that. Then they built a fire tower on top of that hill. I worked in the rock quarry getting the rocks ready for them to build it. I have pictures of that. From that tower you can see the whole bay.

SHW: Was the CCC camp at all fun, or was it just really hard work?

AJS: It wasn't really something that they were pressuring you for, but it was something that had to be done. I knew another guy who had the job for quite a while. The forester would see a dead tree, that wasn't too good looking, so he'd say, "Tomorrow you go over there and cut that tree

down. Just cut it down and get it out of sight, because it doesn't look good." Then we'd get on a road gang, and I was on a jackhammer. We'd drill holes. When they first built the road, they'd just cut down and made it flat. So this bank was straight up and down here, so on a curve you couldn't see around it. So they wanted to daylight the curves. So we'd get a jackhammer and drill way down on it, shallower and shallower and shallower, and maybe seven rows back. We'd load all those holes with dynamite and blow the whole thing over to the other side of the road.

SHW: You were only sixteen and they were letting you work with dynamite?

AJS: Oh, yes. You were men then. When the tough times were, everybody was a man because you had to do what a man would normally do, because there wasn't enough to work.

WS: You had to earn your keep.

AJS: But then we'd have fun, too. We had two lakes on the island and the logs, and we'd get on the logs and see who could knock the other guy off.

SHW: Oh, really? Did you ever win?

AJS: Oh, yes. I was pretty active. When I worked for the power company, I was one of the best linemen they had, and they told me that they'd like to have a few more like me.

WS: At the CCC camp, you got thirty-five dollars a month, and thirty dollars he sent home to his mother, and five dollars he saved.

AJS: Then I was smoking Bull Durham or something like that.

WS: You got your food.

AJS: Oh, yes. We got good food at the CCC camp. We had good living. They furnished us army uniforms, and there was a captain in charge of the thing. They'd take us to work in the morning out in the field and bring us back at night. Then you had to take a shower, change clothes, and get dressed in your best uniform, and watch the flag go up or down. Pretty much army.

SHW: Sounds like it was better than the marines, though, as far as the food goes.

WS: The food was better at the CCC camps than in the Marine Corps.

AJS: Oh, yes, sure, because they couldn't cook. Nowadays they've got a galley or kitchen that they feed a battalion or somebody with. Before, they threw a couple of cans of stuff at you. That's your meals. That's all you're going to get . . .

WS: So you take it.

AJS: It was bad before as far as the food goes. That one can, maybe you'd have a candy bar and a piece of cheese on a cracker or something like that, and that was about it. No coffee, water.

WS: How could you survive with no coffee?

AJS: Well, I managed.

SHW: I suppose when somebody's shooting at you, you don't need to worry about being alert.

AJS: Yes, they wanted a guy ready to do what he's told to do right now, no fooling around.

SHW: So were the spiffy uniforms any part of the appeal of the marines? I've heard they had the coolest ones.

AJS: We had the old army wool brown. Of course, out there it's cooler.

WS: But they were neat uniforms. Your uniform is up at the museum?

AJS: My dress uniform for marines, yes. I brought a Japanese rifle back, and I gave it to them up there, too. I don't know whether they got it or not.

SHW: We've got a whole display of rifles. I bet it's sitting there. In fact, your uniform is probably right on one of the racks. You should come up and see it.

AJS: Probably. I just was in there once since they rebuilt the thing to see Daniel Steinhagen, but I haven't had a look around.

WS: You think about your life that you lived, and you have good thoughts.

AJS: Oh, yes. I don't do a thing, but I can reminisce back to how things were. Everybody asks, "What do you do all this time?" Well, I sit back and think about what I did. Like I say, I've been there and done that.

WS: Just about everything.

AJS: That's right. With a few exceptions, I've done all I wanted to—a full life, I'll tell you that.

SHW: It looks like you've got adorable grandkids.

AJS: I was in there for four years and eight months. I only signed for four years, but the war wasn't over yet when my enlistment was up, so I had to stay for another eight months. But that was good. I can see nothing really wrong in what I did. I wasn't really scared or unhappy, because you get a whole group of men, and everybody's wise cracking about something or other, you know. Then when I worked for the power company, I was a district superintendent the last few years. All I had to do then was make sure that the crews got out to do their work. I went out ahead of time to look at a job that somebody drew up down in Excelsior to see what I really needed, and then I'd send a crew out the next morning to do it. So I had a pretty good job—

twenty-eight years. You don't have that any more. Guys can't keep a job for three years any more.

SHW: I can guarantee I won't make it twenty-eight years at one job.

AJS: I know my son works with computers, and son-of-a-gun, they send him to school every two weeks for more information. If something isn't working, they have to correct it. Now these hackers, they really got the thing screwed up, haven't they? They can control the whole damn military establishment.

SHW: I think we've covered most of my questions. It was a wonderful interview. Thank you so much for agreeing to talk to us.

[end of interview]